

# PB

PRODUCE BUSINESS  
INITIATING INDUSTRY IMPROVEMENT

## PEOPLE OF PURPOSE

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Bill Goldfield  
Mark Munger

## DRIED FRUITS & NUTS

Bulk vs.  
Packaged

## RISING RETAILER

Giant  
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## MARKETING

Organic Salad Blends  
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WHAT MAKES A GREAT  
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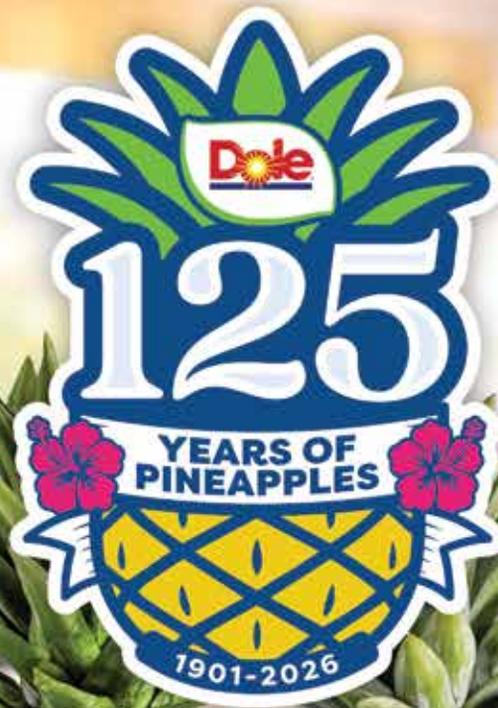
# WINNING THE NEXT GENERATION

How Millennials  
and Gen Z are  
reshaping produce.

PRODUCE BUSINESS 2026  
MARCH 2026  
MASTERS OF MERCHANDISING ISSUE



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Dole proudly celebrates 125 years of growing and sharing pineapples with the world. This anniversary is both a celebration of where we began and a look ahead to the future we're continuing to build together.

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 Dole Food Company

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**THIS MONTH'S WINNER**

**VALERIA CUENCA**  
Sales/Grower Relations  
LIV Produce  
Orange, CA

Valeria Cuenca didn't set out to build a career in produce — it found her. While managing a restaurant, she met the owner of LIV Produce, and through their conversations, she became interested in the produce industry.

Today, Cuenca manages organic citrus sales at LIV Produce, working closely with growers, retailers and wholesalers, creating strong programs that work for everyone in the supply chain.

"Produce moves fast, so no two days are the same," she says. "One day might be building a three-week citrus promotion; the next might be delete finding a home for extra volume that just came off the line. It's a balance of relationship-building, strategy, and quick decision-making."

Cuenca offers this advice for those entering the produce industry:

- 1. Build relationships first. Produce is a

relationship business. Trust and reliability matter just as much as price.

2. Learn the crop cycles and markets. Understanding seasonality, sizing, quality specs, and freight dynamics gives you a major advantage.

3. Move quickly, but think long-term. Markets change daily, but your reputation is built over years.

4. Stay close to operations. Knowing what's being harvested and packed helps you sell confidently and avoid surprises.

5. Be solution-oriented. There will always be challenges — weather, quality, logistics.

"The people who succeed are the ones who find solutions, not excuses," she says.

"The produce industry is fast-paced and sometimes unpredictable, but it's rewarding if you're proactive and relationship-driven."

She says PRODUCE BUSINESS keeps her connected to the bigger picture. "It highlights market trends, consumer behavior, and retail strategies, which are all important when you're working in sales."

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



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**WIN A \$200 AMAZON GIFT CARD**

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



**QUESTIONS FOR THE MARCH ISSUE**

- 1) How many companies are sponsors of this year's Master of Merchandising? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) "Make Okra Great Again" is the slogan for which company? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Which company says, "Meals Taste Better With Flavor You Can Trust"? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Which company says, "Celebrate Cinco De Mayo with Flavor"? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Which department of agriculture says, "That Little Logo...It's a Big Deal"? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) How many produce managers offer their advice in the article on "What Makes a Great Produce Manager?" \_\_\_\_\_

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

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**The Foundation for Fresh Produce is the solution for increasing fruit and vegetable consumption.**

# **GROWING A HEALTHIER WORLD**



**Learn about the mission**  
[freshproduce.com/foundation](https://freshproduce.com/foundation)



**TRANSITIONS**

**The Giumarra Companies**

The Giumarra Companies, Los Angeles, CA, has promoted **Sebastian Carmona** to vice president, international development, and **Kristina Lorusso** to vice president, retail partner services.

Carmona, a seasoned executive in the global agribusiness and supply chain sectors, joined The Giumarra Companies in 2021. He held prior leadership roles at CarSol Group, headquartered in Santiago, Chile, and Unifrutti Group, headquartered in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. In this newest role at Giumarra, he will be responsible for driving the company's international growth strategy across farming, sourcing, partnerships, and market expansion.

Lorusso joined The Giumarra Companies in 2015 with a strong grocery retail background, having previously worked in various buying and merchandising roles for Roundy's Supermarkets. As vice president, retail partner services, she will lead the company's business development strategy for fresh and services.



**Sebastian Carmona**



**Kristina Lorusso**

Beyond packaging recognition, ARIA Tomatoes also earned international acclaim for flavor, receiving a 2026 Superior Taste Award from the International Taste Institute.

**Produce Takes Center Stage Super Bowl Weekend**

As Super Bowl weekend took over San Francisco, You Fortified by Daryn



Mayer, a media, content, and experiential platform, brought produce and plant-based eating into the spotlight with a high-energy pre-game pop-up designed to drive trial and awareness among athletes, influencers, media and tastemakers.

Hosted at Joe Montana's Gold Bar Distillery, the event united leaders from the fresh produce and plant-based sectors with professional athletes, celebrities and media to showcase how better-for-you foods are winning at the intersection of performance, taste and lifestyle. Featured brands included Dandy Celery, from Duda Farm Fresh Foods, and Mushroom Squared.

Dandy Celery showcased the versatility of fresh celery with craveable creations — reframing celery from a simple vegetable into an elevated snacking and entertaining essential. Mushroom Squared showcased its mushroom square-shaped patties.

The event drew a standout guest list, including professional athletes and Super Bowl champions Jacoby Williams, Cozy Coleman, Dwight Howard, Bobby Taylor and Chandler Roman.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**EPC Selects 2026 Leadership Class**

The Eastern Produce Council (EPC) selected the following 18 produce professionals for its 2026 Leadership Class: Alec Arena, Frank Donio Inc.; Stacy Conway, C.A. Ferolie; Timothy Dunn, Katzman Distribution; Judy Fierman, Fierman Produce Exchange Inc.; Michael Hearn, Four Seasons Produce; Ryan Kelly, Baldor Specialty Foods;



Dylan Lang, Fowler Farms; Joycelyn Muise, F&S Fresh Foods; Veritza Ortiz, Four Seasons Produce; Paul Pascal, Sunny Valley Intl.; Meetkumar Patel, Wakefern Food Corp.; Natasha Phan, Mastronardi Produce; Dante Savanello, JOH;

Meghan Szymansky, Crispy Green; Scott Tepper, Fierman Produce Exchange Inc.; Jake Walters, John Vena Inc.; Ben Weir, Local Bounty; and Chris Zuhlke, ProducePackaging.com.

The 2026 program kicks off in March with a Rutgers University professional development seminar on coaching, team building, communication styles, and giving and receiving feedback.

**ARIA Tomatoes Earn Top Honors**

Windset Farms' ARIA Tomatoes Sweet Brilliance has been recognized with two honors at the PAC Global Awards, a program celebrating the world's top designers and innovators in packaging and beyond.



Judges praised ARIA Tomatoes' premium packaging design, noting how it reflects the exceptional quality of the tomatoes inside. Windset Farms, Delta, British Columbia, received the following distinctions: Brand Marketing: Specialty Fresh, Best in Class and Brand Marketing: New Brand, Food, Award of Distinction.

**Peru to Host 2027 IBO Summit**

The International Blueberry Organization (IBO) has selected Peru to host the next IBO Summit, scheduled to take place in November 2027.



The decision was confirmed following a formal selection process among IBO member countries, and reflects Peru's growing influence and relevance within the global blueberry sector.

The IBO Summit is the organization's flagship in-person event, bringing together growers, marketers, researchers, service providers, and industry leaders from across the world to exchange insights, address shared challenges, and shape the future direction of the blueberry category.

While the specific host city and technical program will be announced at a later stage, the summit is expected to combine conference sessions with field visits and regional activities, consistent with the IBO's emphasis on practical learning and open, intra-industry dialogue.

The 2027 IBO Summit in Peru is anticipated to attract more than 600 delegates from producing and consuming markets worldwide.

**Veg-Land/JB Distributing Achieves Sedex Supplier Plus Membership**

Veg-Land, Fullerton, CA, together with sales arm JB Distributing, has been awarded Sedex Supplier Plus membership. This recognition highlights the ongoing dedication to transparency, ethical

sourcing, and continuous improvement in building a better food supply chain.

Sedex Supplier Plus is a premium tier that sets leading suppliers apart by showcasing a verified commitment to responsible business practices. It provides priority visibility in the Sedex Supplier Directory, along with an official badge and certificate that demonstrate a focus on labor standards, health and safety, environmental stewardship and ethical operations.



**NEW PRODUCTS**

**Olivia's Organics Introduces Organic Greenhouse Varieties**

Olivia's Organics, Chelsea, MA, State Garden's organic brand, has launched its Olivia's Organics Greenhouse Grown product line. The announcement comes as Olivia's Organics celebrates its 20th anniversary, marking two decades of commitment to raising the bar for freshness and quality in organic greens.



The new organic greenhouse line represents a breakthrough for regional agriculture, delivering organic local farming in the Northeast every month of the year, without compromising flavor, integrity, or growing standards.

This new offering makes Olivia's Organics one of the first companies to provide greenhouse-grown products that are 100% organic. The new blends include Organic Green Leaf and Organic Red and Green Leaf products, complementing Olivia's Organics' full line of organic tender leaf salads and blends, butternut squash, celery and more.

The new blends are now available in all of Market Basket's 90 stores throughout Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine and Rhode Island; on FreshDirect serving Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut; Shaw's markets throughout Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont; and in all 20 Roche Brothers locations in Massachusetts.

**Grimmway Produce Has New Organic Bite-Size Potato Program**

Cal-Organic Farms, Bakersfield, CA, a brand within Grimmway Produce Group, unveiled its new Organic Bite-Size Potato Program, offering retailers and consumers a fresh, convenient addition to the organic potato category. Certified organic, the new bite-sized potato line delivers year-round availability, quality, and strong shopper appeal. Each item is packed in a mesh pillow pack, a style that showcases product freshness and enhances visibility on the shelf.



The new program includes six offerings, featuring gold, red, and medley bite-sized and fingerling potatoes, plus nibbles. With its range of varieties and versatile use across meal occasions, the line is designed to meet the needs of today's organic consumer while supporting category growth for retail partners.

# What ‘Local Food’ Really Means for Fresh Produce

BY REBECKAH ADCOCK

The phrase “local food” has become part of everyday vocabulary. It appears in consumer surveys, on retail marketing, and increasingly in policy conversations. But what does it really mean, and where does it fit in the broader mission to feed people affordably, sustainably, and at scale?

From my chair at the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA) and for our partners, the answer is nuanced, important and overdue. Consumer interest in local food is not a trend, and neither is the need for regional and global supply chains that keep fresh produce affordable and available year-round. To shape the future of food, we must examine what “local” can — and cannot — deliver.



## DEFINING ‘LOCAL’

One challenge is the definition of local foods. The 2008 Farm Bill defined “local” as food grown within 400 miles

or within the same state. States often default to their borders, while consumers interpret “local” more broadly by associating it with some combination of sustainable practices, small-scale farming, shorter supply chains, or fewer “food miles,” which is sometimes true, but deserves a deeper dive.

IFPA’s 2024 Produce Consumer Trends Tracker reinforces the strong positive perception of local food in the U.S. Nearly three out of four respondents say they are willing to pay a premium for produce labeled “locally grown,” and, if price were not a factor, local produce would be their most likely choice.

But, for many, price and access are very much a factor. Even so, without fully understanding sustainability terms, 81% report being likely to purchase items labeled “locally grown” if they can afford to do so. These insights highlight both the consumer trust in, and the economic opportunity of, local sourcing and access.

Without a shared definition and consumer understanding of what local means to the average consumer, however, it is difficult to measure impacts, design strategies, or communicate consistently about the opportunities and limitations of this part of the market. “Local” really can mean what the buyer wants, but it may never be a one-size-fits-all point of view.

## THE REALITY CHECK

A common misconception is that local food is inherently more sustainable or environmentally sensitive. Research from North Carolina State University Extension shows transportation accounts for only about 11% of agriculture’s greenhouse gas emissions, while production methods and processing carry far greater weight. On this topic alone, in some cases, large-scale shipping, trucking, and rail are more efficient than dozens of small local deliveries.

Similar lessons can be gleaned from other environmental considerations — commercial-scale resources, technology, and efficiencies can give smaller-scale production a run for its money.

That said, local sourcing can reduce food waste and align with consumer demand for sustainably labeled products. As IFPA research shows, over half of consumers consider growing methods and packaging when purchasing produce. That’s why innovative produce growers are implementing strategies that enhance efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and strengthen supply chains at every scale of operation.

## COMMUNITY VALUE

Local food shines at the community level. Farmers markets, CSAs, and urban gardens build trust and expand access to nutritious food through programs like SNAP matching. Research links local food access to higher fruit and vegetable intake and better student outcomes.

Many Americans also view “locally grown” produce as a trustworthy, premium choice that supports both their health and their community. For IFPA, these outcomes align with the produce sector’s mission to improve public health and nutrition through fresh produce and floral products. Just like other businesses, fresh sector investments in local programs deliver returns in brand reputation, consumer trust and workforce health.

Local food systems should complement broader supply chains.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Local food systems should complement broader supply chains. For fresh produce and floral sectors, that means:

- **Clarify expectations:** Educate policymakers and consumers about the opportunities for what local food can realistically deliver, and where and why broader systems remain essential.
- **Invest strategically:** Support local programs that give access to fresh foods and create measurable health, social, and economic benefits, including mental wellness through floral products.
- **Embrace variety:** Advocate for supply chain strategies that balance local, regional, and international sourcing to maximize resilience, affordability, and year-round availability.
- **Lead with transparency:** Share data and insights — e.g., IFPA’s Consumer Tracker — that help move conversations beyond slogans and anecdotes toward evidence-based realities and better options for consumers.

Like IFPA’s mission, the goal should be to connect healthy food and floral offerings in a resilient, nutritious, and enriching food system that improves lives worldwide. By making space for local initiatives and global networks, we strengthen supply chains and enhance human health.

For leaders in fresh produce, the call to action is about embracing nuance and consumer choice. By recognizing local food as an important piece of a larger puzzle, we can deliver on the promise of a resilient, affordable, and truly sustainable future.

*Rebeckah Adcock is vice president, U.S. Government Relations, with International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA), Washington.*

# The Power of Branding in Fresh Produce

BY BIL GOLDFIELD

I have spent nearly two decades watching the produce industry wrestle with a simple question: Does branding really matter in fresh fruits and vegetables? Many people in the business long believed it did not. If the product looked good and the price was right, that was good enough.

That mindset made sense in an era of commodity thinking — product, price and placement. Most consumers had only a vague awareness of who grew their food. Any label was more of a formality than a factor in a decision. They might have known the name, but they rarely had a relationship with it. The produce department carried a sense of anonymity other grocery categories did not.



That world has shifted. Shoppers want to know the company behind what they are buying and what it represents.

Branding has moved from a peripheral idea to a strategic advantage.

## TRUST AT THE POINT OF CHOICE

Watching shoppers, you can see how quickly they make decisions. In that moment, a recognizable name is a signal consistency. When someone picks up a branded pineapple or salad kit, they are choosing reliability and quality that remains consistent week after week and year after year. That trust is built over time through transparency, safety and integrity. Once earned, it cannot easily be undercut by price alone.

Though Mother Nature has a large influence on our products, brands must function the same way they do in every other aisle: to provide assurance. They tell consumers, “You have been here before, and it was good. You can rely on this again.”

Unbranded product competes on cost. Branded product competes on trust. That is a very different equation.

Early in the rise of social media, Dole invested in building a consumer community across channels. Reaching a vanity metric of more than a million followers was not the goal. The real value was the relationship it created, which proved useful when markets tightened or conditions became unpredictable. Sharing stories solidified our values with our consumers. Retailers benefited as well, because a strong brand can elevate the perception of the entire department.

## STANDING FOR SOMETHING CLEAR

A strong brand also allows you to show what you stand for. Consumers notice when a company supports causes or participates in cultural conversations. At Dole, our work with groups, such as No Kid Hungry, World Wildlife Fund, and fitness and wellness partners, helps people see our values in action. It builds a connection between purpose and purchase that feels real, not promotional.

Our collaboration with Disney shows how a clear message can move product from awareness to attachment. Using beloved charac-

ters to inspire healthier choices created a bridge between nutrition and family life. That is what great branding can do. It creates a connection that stays with people long after the display comes down.

## CARRYING THE STORY INTO THE STORE

Branding power is a partnership between supplier and retailer. Most people encounter produce brands well before they reach the department. They see social posts, recipes, sponsorships, influencers promoting healthy habits, or support for causes they care about. If the brand disappears the moment they walk into the store, all that work loses its impact. The continuity has to carry through. The packaging, the signage, and even the sticker plays a part in bringing the story to the shelf.

When the message outside the store and the identity inside the store match, the decision becomes easier for the shopper. They recognize the brand and understand what it stands for. That familiarity supports purchase even in a crowded environment.

## A PROMISE, NOT A LABEL

Branding, at its best, turns a commodity into a commitment. It signals the company is willing to attach its reputation to the product, saying, “We are proud of how this is grown, processed, and delivered. We are not hiding behind the label because we are the label!”

Health and wellness have become cultural priorities, and fresh produce sits at the center of that conversation. Sustainability, once a side note, is now a central purchase driver. Transparency and traceability are no longer perks; they are expectations. Branding helps us communicate purpose and articulate the values that already sit

at the core of what we do and cannot be copied by store labels or unbranded alternatives.

When a shopper sees a name they recognize, they assume accountability. They believe the company behind the product has invested in food safety, responsible sourcing and continuous improvement. They may not see every certification or initiative, but they feel the confidence that branding creates.

Younger consumers place less value on brand loyalty. They are cynical about being sold to, and they often lean toward value and store brands. Even so, they respond strongly to authenticity.

This is why I remain optimistic about the future of produce branding. Our industry has advantages. We grow products that promote health and align with the values people care about. The companies that communicate those values clearly and consistently, that blend authenticity with innovation, will shape industry growth.

At Dole, we have seen how a strong brand, built on quality, trust and transparency, can elevate an entire category and create long-term loyalty. This is not only our experience, but a path that many companies can take if they choose to invest in what their brand represents.

A name in this industry is more than a label. It is a promise. And that promise, once earned, is what brings consumers back again and again.

*William (Bill) Goldfield is director of global corporate communications and marketing at Dole Food Company.*

Unbranded  
product competes  
on cost. Branded  
product competes  
on trust.

# Beyond the Logo: Tools to Build Strong Produce Brands

BY MARK MUNGER

In today's marketing landscape, brand building has evolved into both an art and a science — one powered by technology, data and creativity. As an industry, we collectively invest tens of millions of dollars each year promoting our company brands, and it's paying off. From Avocados from Mexico's award-winning Super Bowl campaigns to Driscoll's Berry Mobile traveling the country spreading "berry love," fresh produce marketers are telling vibrant, emotional and memorable stories that connect with consumers in new ways.

The fresh produce industry, long known for its authenticity and vitality, now has more tools than ever to shape how consumers see, feel and experience our products.



## WHAT 'BRAND' REALLY MEANS

The word "brand" is often used casually, but its meaning runs much deeper than a logo, slogan or label. Experienced marketers understand that a brand represents the collective sum of every detail, interaction and emotion tied to a company or product.

An authentic brand is built on purpose and vision, carried through tone, storytelling and consumer experience. Every touchpoint — from a product's packaging to a company's social media presence — must reflect a consistent identity and intention. In this sense, brand building is not just about marketing; it's about creating trust and emotional connection that turn customers into advocates.

## THE RISING IMPORTANCE OF BRANDS

Looking ahead, brands in the fresh produce sector will only grow more relevant and valuable. We live in an age where information is instantaneous, and today's consumers are more informed — and more curious — than ever. They want to know where their food comes from, who grows it, and how it's handled. They seek authenticity, transparency, and alignment with their personal values.

To succeed in this environment, every decision we make must start with the consumer. Are we selecting varieties that deliver consistently great taste and visual appeal? Is our packaging both functional and beautiful, while clearly communicating information about the product? How does our packaging look on the shelf, and does it stand out in a competitive environment?

These are not small questions — because, ultimately, our branded products end up in millions of kitchens, influencing how families eat and how they perceive our industry.

## THE CHALLENGES OF BRANDING

Yet, branding fresh produce for consumers presents unique challenges. In many retail environments, a key element of consumer branding — choice — is limited. Shoppers often select from whatever the retailer's buyer has chosen, rather than choosing among multiple branded options.

Complicating matters, the quality, flavor and appearance of fresh produce can fluctuate due to seasonal changes or weather conditions. In many cases, retailers also require that value-added produce be sold under private-label brands, limiting growers' and marketers' ability to build and reinforce their own brand identities on the shelf.

As a result, most consumers have become conditioned to

purchase produce based on their visual appeal rather than brand loyalty. They pick what looks freshest, not necessarily what carries a recognizable brand name. Changing that behavior requires marketers to think differently and find creative ways to connect with consumers before and after the in-store experience.

## DIGITAL TOOLS TRANSFORMING BRANDING

The good news is marketers now have an unprecedented range of tools to help shape their messaging, strengthen their brands, and directly reach consumers. The rise of digital marketing and data analytics has revolutionized how we understand and engage with our audience.

Companies that embrace artificial intelligence (AI) are gaining a decisive competitive advantage. AI tools can analyze consumer trends, uncover emerging preferences, and help craft targeted, effective messaging. Platforms such as ChatGPT can assist in generating creative content ideas, optimizing copy for different audiences, and identifying the emotional tones that best resonate with specific consumer segments.

Social media has also become an indispensable platform for storytelling. Through engaging content, visual storytelling, and partnerships with social media influencers, brands can now directly reach consumers, bypassing traditional retail gatekeepers. Influencers bring authenticity and trust, amplifying brand messages to communities of loyal, engaged followers.

Retail data is another game-changer. By collaborating with supermarkets and leveraging shopper loyalty data, produce marketers can pinpoint buying habits and target shoppers with personalized offers, coupons, or educational content. Scan data, though still evolving in precision, continues to improve and provides valuable insights into regional preferences, national sales trends, and product performance.

In addition, organizations like the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA) are contributing critical industry intelligence, offering national and global consumer research that helps marketers align local strategies with broader market trends.

When combined, these tools create a powerful ecosystem that allows marketers to move beyond guesswork toward informed, strategic brand management.

## MEETING NEXTGEN EXPECTATIONS

The next generation of shoppers will demand even more from the fresh produce they buy. For them, beauty alone isn't enough. They expect bold flavor, convenience, nutrition, and authenticity — delivered through a seamless experience that bridges both physical and digital spaces. Whether in-store or online, these consumers want brands that reflect their lifestyles and values, offering not only quality products, but also meaningful connections and experiences.

The marketers who succeed in this new era will be those who harness data, technology and creativity in equal measure, viewing brand building not just as promotion, but as an ongoing relationship between the company and the consumer. With more powerful tools than ever before, our industry is poised to elevate the fresh produce brand story to new heights, inspiring trust, loyalty, and, most importantly, greater consumption of the products we grow and love.

*Mark Munger is vice president of marketing and business development for IPR Fresh, Nogales, AZ.*

**PB**

# Produce Offers Opportunities to Differentiate

BY RON SELDER

**D**riven by a growing focus on nutrition and wellness, shoppers are gravitating toward fresh offerings, including produce, floral, bakery, deli, specialty cheese, meat and seafood.

FMI's *The State of Fresh Foods 2025* report shows that 42% of sales in 2024 came from fresh offerings. NielsenIQ data shows fresh product sales are outpacing the rest of the store, up 3.7% year-over-year. In the fruits and vegetables section, 39% of consumers plan to

buy more produce, according to Provoke Insights.

As shoppers spend more time around the outside of the store, retailers are smart to start thinking of fresh, not as a department, but as a differentiator. Shoppers are demanding more from the perimeter — better taste, nutrition, convenience and transparency. Meeting those expectations can give retailers an edge.



Here are a few trends grocery retailers can focus on as we look at the year ahead:

## DELIVER ESSENTIAL VALUE

Consumers are relying on the fresh category more than ever. Organic and better-for-you options have been resilient, even amid economic pressures.

Value is about more than just being economical. It's about being "worth it" in the minds of shoppers. Retailers who make fresh feel special and easy, while delivering that value, can win.

## EXPAND SEASONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Seasonal assortments paired with thoughtful merchandising drive impulse purchases and set retailers apart from competitors. Fresh departments are particularly primed to create engaging offers around seasonal occasions.

With this approach in mind, it's important to look beyond the most popular and traditional seasonal promotions. Smaller holidays, sporting events, and weather-driven merchandising can help turn fresh departments into year-round seasonal traffic drivers outside of the holidays.

## CAPITALIZE ON CONVENIENCE

The assumption that perimeter departments lack convenience is changing. While meat, seafood and produce often involve additional prep and cooking, compared to frozen or center-aisle options, the perimeter is primed to promote convenience more than ever before.

According to FMI's *The Power of Foodservice at Retail 2025* report, "consumers are increasingly choosing deli-prepared foods in place of restaurant meals, with this share more than doubling from 12% in 2017 to 28% in 2025."

The report also found that more than half of shoppers combine deli-prepared options with items from their kitchen, creating

additional opportunities for fresh ingredients to find their way into at-home meals.

## EMPOWER PERSONAL HEALTH CHOICES

Today's shoppers are highly informed and intentional. They're focused on a range of wellness goals, from gut health and immunity to energy, stress and healthy aging. These trends are reinforced on social media, and consumers have more resources than ever to better understand the products they purchase and their impact on their overall health.

- Consumers still want occasional indulgence, but overall baskets are planned and purpose-driven.
- Ingredients with functional benefits, like ginger and turmeric, are trending.
- GLP-1 use is driving smaller pack sizes and portion control with continued emphasis on protein and fiber.

## STEPS RETAILERS CAN TAKE NOW

Grocery retailers have clear opportunities to prepare for the year ahead by taking practical actions that maximize value and build loyalty within the produce department and across the fresh perimeter.

- **Refresh planograms early.** Make sure nothing is missing or mislabeled. Prioritize local produce selections and lean into the narrative with signage and grower profiles. At the same time, make sure ready-to-eat produce and portion-controlled items have a chance to shine.
- **Stock top performers.** Berries remain a powerhouse, offering high value and dependable traffic. Citrus is gaining momentum, particularly standout offerings like sweeter varieties and seedless lemons.
- **Balance staples and trending items.** The goal should be for predictable products and special entries to complement each other, not compete. Consumers should be able to easily find lettuce, apples and bananas, while at the same time being drawn to seasonal, on-trend items.
- **Cross-merchandise meals and moments.** Retailers can unlock greater produce purchase opportunities by leading consumers to great mealtime combinations. Think: potatoes and steak, berries and charcuterie. Strategic placement and layout can help facilitate these moments that drive greater basket share and customer loyalty.
- **Leverage strategic partners.** Look to partners for assistance in developing a robust strategy and approach to differentiating in the produce section and around the entire perimeter of the store.

*Ron Selders is president of fresh at United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI), where he currently leads the company's strategy and performance across its deli, bakery, produce and meat departments — core perimeter categories that help retailers differentiate and grow. Selders brings decades of leadership experience from UNFI and Tony's Fine Foods, shaping how UNFI delivers fresh innovation and value to its customers today.*

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# FLORIDA CITRUS: THE TASTE CONSUMERS ARE LOOKING FOR IN THE PRODUCE AISLES

**FLORIDA ORANGES AND GRAPEFRUITS ARE IN PEAK SEASON**, with a priority that benefits retailers as much as producers: driving more fruit through the fresh market at prices that reflect production realities, and premium quality that consumers are willing to pay (WTP).

New research reinforces what Florida growers have long known. Strong consumer affinity for origin and flavor, combined with Florida's subtropical climate and sandy soils that produce high-sugar, high-juice fruit, creates meaningful differentiation for Florida Citrus at retail – advantages that imports and fruit from other U.S. growing regions cannot easily replicate.<sup>1</sup>

"For retailers, the implication is clear. Florida Citrus performs best when 'Florida' origin labels are showcased to consumers and are merchandised as a defining attribute," says Shannon Shepp, Executive Director, Florida Department of Citrus (FDOC), headquartered in Bartow, FL.

Florida Oranges are known for exceptional juice content and bright flavor, and Florida Citrus delivers high juice content and a balanced sweet-tart flavor, made possible by Florida's perfect citrus growing conditions. The skin of Florida Oranges and Grapefruit is also thinner than in other regions, contributing to higher juice yield and consistent eating quality.

Origin remains a powerful selling point for citrus. In a December 2025 FDOC shopper survey of more than 1,000 decision-makers in southern, eastern, and midwestern states, two-thirds (66%) say Florida is the state where the best-tasting oranges and grapefruit are grown. More than three-fourths (80%) recognize Florida Citrus branding, and frequent orange buyers pay close attention to where fruit is grown.<sup>2</sup> Prominent packaging cues like Florida Citrus logos on bagged fruit, shelf signage, and messaging highlighting Florida origin help turn awareness into sales.

Nearly two-thirds of core orange purchasers say origin adds value, with many WTP 30 cents per pound more for Florida-grown fruit. Shoppers show less resistance to citrus pricing than to pricing in other categories. In December 2025, food prices increased 3.1%, according to the Bureau

of Labor Statistics. Food-at-home prices rose 2.4%, while fresh citrus increased just 0.8%. Volume has largely held even as prices firmed, underscoring the importance of protecting prices through positioning rather than frequent promotions that compress margins.<sup>3</sup>

Consumers' health awareness can further strengthen WTP. Nearly half (43%) of citrus users say they are eating more citrus, citing immune benefits (50%), nutrition attributes (40%), eating healthier (40%), and weight loss (30%).<sup>4</sup> Florida Oranges and Grapefruit are rich in vitamin C, with one medium orange providing about 70% of the daily recommended value and half a grapefruit about 50%. Both fruits also have thiamine, fiber, potassium, and folate.

Merchandising also matters. One-third of fruit intake in the U.S. is in juice form, whether packaged or home-juiced.<sup>5</sup> Cross-merchandising fresh citrus with juicers, smoothie ingredients, or wellness displays reinforces everyday use and keeps fruit moving through the produce aisle.

For growers and retailers alike, the takeaway is straightforward: emphasizing Florida origin, quality, and health benefits, and merchandising Florida as a destination drives fresh movement.

Looking to promote or carry Florida Citrus in stores? Contact the FDOC to discuss elevating Florida Citrus in your produce aisles today: [findfloridacitrus@citrus.myflorida.com](mailto:findfloridacitrus@citrus.myflorida.com).

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<sup>1</sup> Florida Fresh Citrus Fruit: Prospects for the 25-26 Season and beyond. January 29, 2026. FDOC.

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FDOC OJ Tracker, UF Florida Agricultural Market Research Center  
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The Giant Company opened a new Allentown, PA, store in November 2025. The new store occupies about 68,000 square feet, with approximately 5,000 square feet of selling space for the produce department. *PHOTOS COURTESY THE GIANT COMPANY*

# Giant Store Enhances Shopper Experience

Retailer rejuvenates shopping with more room, a larger selection and global emphasis.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

**T**he Giant Company is celebrating the success of a new Allentown, PA, store that opened in November 2025. The new store, managed by 18-year grocery veteran Mike Ramos, is bigger and offers a wide product assortment.

“This store in the South Mall Shopping Center replaced our previous store on West Emmaus Avenue,” says Chris Keetch, director of produce and floral at The Giant Company, headquartered in Carlisle, PA, with nearly 200 stores under banners Giant, Martin’s, and Giant Heirloom Market.

“Exceeding the expectations of our loyal customers is at the forefront of everything we do, and it starts with accommodating changing grocery needs,” says Keetch. “This new store enhances the overall shopping experience for our customers, while continuing to showcase what we’re known for — delivering value, freshness and kindness.”

The store’s customer demographic is diverse. “Our shoppers include a large Hispanic Puerto Rican population, and we have a strong presence of Millennial families and Gen Z shoppers,”



The Allentown, PA, Giant Company’s produce team includes (L-R): Tim Lacey, Dave Roth, Phil Lichman and Jonathan Cindia.

says Keetch. “In general, customers shopping this location are price-conscious and prioritize produce, seeking a fresh, high-quality, broad assortment. Hispanic customers are especially interested in global items and flavors, including exotic, tropical fruits and root vegetables.”

The new location boasts Giant’s signature fresh departments expanded with wider product assortment across the store. “This includes a large, market-feel produce department with dedicated space for organics,” says Keetch.

The store has meat and seafood, a service deli, dairy, bakery, full-service floral, a large beer and wine area, and an in-store pharmacy. It also features a hot food bar with smoked and barbecue meats, pre-pack salad offerings in the deli, a specialty cheese case, and an in-store sushi chef.



Giant Company's new Allentown store is a "global flavors destination," highlighted by tropical fruits and root vegetables, reflecting the diverse community it serves.



In the spring and summer, stone fruit and melons take center stage in the produce department at the Allentown, PA, Giant Co. store.

## SETTING THE ATMOSPHERE

Giant considers produce one of its signature departments. "It's one of the most obvious ways we bring our mission of delivering value, freshness, and kindness to life," says Keetch. "Produce leads off the visit and sets the tone for the entire store and shopping experience. It is said if your produce department is fresh and properly merchandised, then the rest of the store will be, too."

The new store occupies about 68,000 square feet, with approximately 5,000 square feet of selling space for the produce department. "This is an expansion of 29% over our previous location," says Keetch. "We carry approximately 1,200 SKUs, including organic and cut-fruit, as well as the typical produce assortment."

In this new store, Giant took a stance on global flavors. "Our store customer base includes a high Hispanic population, who tend to buy more and better-quality global varieties," says Keetch. "A main floor display was built to showcase the global flavors, along with a front-facing end of plantains and green bananas."

This store also has a host of innovations. "Some examples include the upright, sustainable refrigerated cases with glass doors to help with carbon emissions and also to help maintain critical temperatures," says Keetch. "There is an avocado island instead of an end to bring them more predominantly into the customers' focus."

Produce is critical to store success. "This is a fresh, clean and new department, with experienced leadership to manage the depart-

ment and grow sales," says Keetch. "If this produce department thrives, the entire store will follow suit."

The massive department has a bright, open feel, with a variety of well-spaced island displays, making it easy for customers to shop. A 102-foot wet rack and a 62-foot sustainable refrigerated case with glass doors line the side. "Displays and proper merchandising create excitement in produce departments," says Keetch.

Keetch explains the department is set to meet customers where they are. "In the fall/winter, apples and citrus are at the forefront," he says. "In the spring/summer, stone fruit and melons take center stage."

## TEAMWORK AND EXPERTISE

Giant's team members are crucial to the new store and produce department. "In this store and all of our stores across the company, our team members are key to a successful produce department," says Keetch. "Our customers at the new store have seen many familiar team members from our West Emmaus Avenue store, as well as some new faces. Their training and knowledge, coupled with merchandising know-how, our compelling commercial plan, and great products from our supplier partners, define our signature produce department."

The store also credits collaboration between personnel for success. "Following the merchandising plans sent out and also open communication are where we set ourselves apart," says Keetch. "The category team gives the initial merchandising initiatives for the operations team to implement. When it just won't 'work' for operations, then a meet and fix is had with merchandising and operations."

Regular and assorted communication with shoppers is fundamental. "As far as promoting produce items, we use weekly circulars, social media, and multiple in-store display plans," says Keetch. "When an item is new or looking to re-invigorate, we use sampling and displays to help inform customers."

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## INSIDE THE STORE

**Giant**  
 South Mall Shopping Center  
 3300 Lehigh St.  
 Allentown, PA  
 Tel: 610-791-9644  
 Hours: 6 a.m.-10 p.m.  
 Seven days a week



For Millennials and Gen Z, convenience isn't a perk, it's a prerequisite. Snackable formats, smaller packs, ready-to-eat options and digitally friendly packaging are redefining how produce is purchased, consumed and merchandised. ADOBE STOCK PHOTO

# The Future Is Fresh: Winning The Next Generation

Millennials and Gen Z are reshaping produce buying habits.

BY MIKE DUFF

**T**he produce sector needs to look beyond the habits of Baby Boomers and Gen Xers because, even if they are doing so gradually, Millennials and Gen Zers are emerging as the future of the sector, and they have different behaviors, practices and habits.

"Millennials and Gen Z are different fundamentally and motivationally," says Jonna Parker, principal II, Fresh Foods Client Insights Group, at Circana, Chicago. "The headline in our *Future of Produce* study is that the overall volume in the dollar forecast is not as good as one might have expected."

According to Circana's analysis, the current sales growth outlook for Millennials and Gen Zers is only 2% in dollars and volume.

They are a more impulsive consumer, who may not even have a shopping list, may not be inclined to purchase meal components that take a long time to cook. That is a change in consumer shopping habits that affects produce purchasing, says Parker.

A compounding factor is how they are eating. "They're snacking more and sitting down to three squares almost never," says Parker. "They're also very social eaters, so they want to see and eat and brag to their friends in person and online about what's on their plate."

Changes are evident in how younger consumers look at what they eat and its effect on their well-being, says Ashley Sempowski, communications and media relations manager, International Fresh

Produce Association (IFPA), Washington, D.C., citing the organization's Consumer Trends Tracker and The Foundation for Fresh Produce consumer and behavior-change work.

"We know younger consumers, especially Gen Z, approach produce through a health-first lens, focusing on energy, gut health, skin health and overall wellness," says Sempowski.

"IFPA consumer data reinforces this: Gen Z is most likely to rate fruit and vegetable consumption as 'extremely or very important' to their health and is highly influenced by 'real fruit' and ingredient transparency claims."

## WHO'S WHO

Defining generations is not an exact science, but the following age cohorts are generally accepted:

<b>Baby Boomer</b>	<b>1946-1964</b>
<b>Gen X</b>	<b>1965-1980</b>
<b>Millennial</b>	<b>1981-1996</b>
<b>Gen Z</b>	<b>1997-2012</b>
<b>Generation Alpha</b>	<b>2012-</b>

## FRUITS VS. VEGGIES

Anne-Marie Roerink, produce retail consultant and president of 210 Analytics, San Antonio, TX, points out that Baby Boomers remain the majority produce shopper on a dollar basis, especially for vegetables. Gen Z represents only 2% of total spending. However, the Millennial contribution is much higher, at 29.5%.

Millennials over-index for fruit, but under-index in the vegetable case, she says, referencing Circana figures. Overall, Gen X spends almost as much on produce today as do Millennials, but Boomers still represent 34.2% of produce dollars.

## GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT

Food retailers are coming to grips with what Millennials and Gen

## WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **“Millennials and Gen Z are gearing up their fresh produce spend, but their fruit growth rate is much higher than their increased spending on vegetables. All this contributes to fruit having had a far better year.”**



Anne-Marie Roerink, 210 Analytics, San Antonio, TX

- **“Gen Z is most likely to rate fruit and vegetable consumption as ‘extremely or very important’ to their health and is highly influenced by ‘real fruit’ and ingredient transparency claims.”**

Ashley Sempowski, International Fresh Produce Association, Washington, D.C

- **“Your traditional, conventional supermarkets aren’t really doing a good job... If you really want to attract these generations, it’s about recipes, it’s about what you can do with it on social media.”**

Phil Lempert, Supermarket Guru, Santa Monica, CA



To win Gen Z and Millennials, retailers should reposition produce as a fresh food hub — cross-merchandising fruits and vegetables with dips and ready-to-enjoy pairings.

PRODUCE BUSINESS/MIKE DUFF PHOTO

Zers want. Allegiance Retail Services launched PrepPal, an AI-powered meal planning platform that converts weekly circular promotions into shoppable five-day meal plans that include integrated grocery lists.

Donna Zambo, executive vice president and chief information and marketing officer, says younger consumers were a prime target of the initiative.

In creating the platform, Allegiance addresses how Gen Z and Millennials tend to approach shopping and cooking. “The younger generation may not be as savvy at cooking meals or may not be doing the planning that takes place as you get older,” Zambo says, adding the app helps with the planning. “The meal plans are really what we call TikTok cooking. It’s just how you bring a meal together with just a few components.”

### GETTING REAL

Along with well-being, authenticity is a priority among younger consumers. Author, speaker and Supermarket Guru Phil Lempert, Santa Monica, CA, says the Millennial and Gen Z focus on authenticity and credibility has yet to generate a sufficient response in mainstream food retailing, even if supermarket operators such as Whole Foods, Sprouts and Fresh Market have enjoyed some success with younger consumers by addressing those considerations.

“Those retailers are really telling the story about where that produce is coming from, who the farmer is, what to do with it,” Lempert says. “But your traditional, conventional supermarkets aren’t really doing a good job.

“If you really want to attract these generations, it’s about recipes, it’s about what you can do with it on social media. It’s obviously about the health benefits of it.”

At the same time, he emphasizes that retailers must clearly communicate value.

“People always say fresh foods cost more. They don’t cost more. They really don’t,” he says. “So, if you put together recipes that are value-driven and you do demos with various produce items that are geared to what Gen Z and Millennials want, you’re going to have a huge success with your store.”

Gen Z and Millennial consumers do track together in many ways. In the latest FMI - The Food Industry Association *Power of Produce*

report, Gen Z and Millennials over-indexed for all fruit and vegetable snacking occasions, which FMI says signifies growth potential in produce.

Of the two generations, Millennials are the more established food shoppers, given their older ages (the oldest Millennials are 45 in 2026), and have established certain patterns.

“Millennials are far more adventurous and spontaneous in their food choices,” says Roerink. “They also lean more on time-saving solutions, whether a salad kit from the produce department or ready-to-microwave or air fry veggies.”

At the same time, Millennials take a different tack when it comes to meal discovery.

“Millennial meal inspiration is very different from Boomers, who heavily rely on routine meals and inspiration by friends and family,” she says, “Millennials are digitally inspired, from YouTube to Instagram and TikTok. Keeping track of the big trends and working them into cross-merchandising stations can be a great way to boost sales.”

### TARGETING THE MARKET

When it comes to produce, Gen Z and Millennial shoppers have a different mindset, says Cassie Howard, senior director of category management and marketing at Sunkist Growers, Valencia, CA.

“While health remains a primary motivator, discovery and engagement play a much larger role in what ultimately makes it into their baskets,” she says. “In a Sunkist-commissioned study, we found that younger generations tend to buy citrus for its health benefits, but citrus is not always top-of-mind during routine shopping trips. That insight reinforces the need for brands and retailers to find new ways to interact with and re-engage this audience.”

Concerns about authenticity, transparency, sustainability, and equity can prove more attractive to younger shoppers.

Kim Chackal, vice president of marketing and sales and co-owner of Equifruit, Montreal, Quebec, says these cohorts lead the way in organic fruit purchases, with four in 10 Gen Z shoppers buying organic bananas and a quarter of Millennials buying organic-only.

“While bananas remain North America’s favorite fruit across generations, we’re happy to see younger, more health- and sustainability-conscious consumers opting for fair trade and organic options like Equifruit Fairtrade organic bananas,” she says.

Younger consumers are mobile-first and digitally native, notes Cynthia Haskins, president and chief executive of the New York Apple Association (NYAA), Fishers, NY. They discover promotions largely on smartphones and through apps and social media.

“NYAA has seen genuine, cross-generational enthusiasm for digital coupons at retail, as they are both a powerful consumer-saving tool and a way for brands and retailers to track redemption and measure campaign performance,” says Haskins.

“Because of this shift, producers can no longer rely on ‘one-size-fits-all’ in-store signage or mailers. They must be present in apps, loyal-card platforms and social channels, and ensure promotions are easily scannable and redeemable on mobile devices.”

**THE SOCIAL FACTOR**

Equifruit relies on social media to reach younger consumers who are sympathetic to its messaging about fair trade and associated sustainable practices.

“Equifruit focuses its social media campaigns on TikTok and Instagram toward Gen Z and Millennials,” says Chackal. “These younger audiences will represent the majority of purchasing power in the next five years, and they are receptive to brands like Equifruit, which are authentic, women-owned, B Corp, and deliver disruptive messaging.”

Lavanya Setia, director of marketing, National Mango Board, Orlando, FL, agrees Gen Z and Millennials place greater importance on convenience, and values such as sustainability, ethical sourcing and authentic origin stories, “which build trust and justify purchase.”

They also shop for produce differently than older generations. She says while Gen X and Boomers tend to shop with lists, rely on familiarity, and prioritize price and shelf life, younger shoppers are more discovery-driven, digitally influenced and motivated by usage ideas rather than the item alone.

“For mangos, this means they are less likely to buy if they are unsure how to use, cut, or judge ripeness, and more likely to purchase



Snack-sized produce and trial-friendly packs are gaining traction as Millennials and Gen Z favor mini-meals, grab-and-go options and fresh items that fit seamlessly into fast-paced, snack-driven lifestyles. *PRODUCE BUSINESS/MIKE DUFF PHOTO*

when clear guidance is provided through simple signage, visual cues, or digital content like QR-linked videos.”

Setia says visually appealing displays, social-media-inspired language and use-based messaging resonate in a more powerful way than traditional price-led promotions. “As a result, mangos must be positioned not as an occasional or exotic fruit, but as an easy, everyday staple that feels approachable, versatile, and aligned with younger shoppers’ lifestyles and values.”

**DIFFERENT THINKING**

A difference between older and younger generations is that Millennials and Gen Zers grew up with different produce, such as avocados, and they have their own way of approaching the category.

## Life Stage Over Age: Not All Generation Members Are Alike

BY MIKE DUFF

We often look at society through the lens of a generation to describe groups of similarly aged people, but those born on the edges of each named generation may not fit the mold.

Market research demonstrates that younger Millennials and older Gen Zers have more in common, and demonstrate more closely aligned behavioral patterns, than older and younger counterparts, respectively, says Ashley Sempowski, communications and media relations manager, International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA), Arlington VA.

Younger Millennials and older GenZers are in that period in their late 20s and early 30s when they’re getting married and purchasing homes. In the meantime, the oldest Millennials may be considering trading up homes to accommodate growing families, while the youngest GenZers still haven’t completed their secondary education.

“Both IFPA and the foundation (The Foundation for Fresh Produce) caution against treating Millennials or Gen Z as monolithic groups,” Sempowski says. “Older Millennials, many of whom are now parents, are shaped by different economic and life-stage pressures and may prioritize affordability, bulk purchasing and

family needs. Younger Millennials and older Gen Z consumers tend to behave more similarly: digitally native, experimental and highly responsive to trends and social influence.”

As such, segmentation by age, life stage and digital behavior can be more predictive than looking at Gen Z and Millennials with a narrow focus on generation.

**GO DIGITAL**

Still, that doesn’t mean generational considerations are altogether off base. Sempowski says that among the reasons Millennials and Gen Zers both approach shopping differently than older generations is they both grew up digitally native.

“Gen Z and Millennials are far more digitally fluent than Gen X and Boomers when it comes to produce shopping,” she says. “They regularly use smartphones in-store for price comparisons, digital coupons and product research, with these behaviors reported by as many as 43% of Millennials and 26% of Gen Z in the U.S. compared with roughly 10% of Boomers.”

Social media and online recommendations play an outsized role, too, she adds, particularly for Gen Z, which shows the highest responsiveness to influencer and peer-driven discovery. “Produce brands and retailers must prioritize digital-first outreach, social engagement and seamless online-to-offline experiences to remain relevant.”



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“Younger shoppers are heavier avocado shoppers and place a strong emphasis on convenience, which has driven engagement with formats like bagged avocados,” says Jennifer Anazawa, senior director of trade and category development, Mission Produce, Oxnard, CA.

“Last year, Millennials and Gen Z spent over \$500 million on bagged avocados, reflecting a preference for products that support quick trips and easy decision-making.”

When it comes to younger shoppers, it’s not just what they eat, but also how.

“Gen Z and Millennial shoppers tend to shop with a stronger meal-occasion and solution mindset versus shopping strictly by department,” says Tara Murray, vice president of marketing at Rhome, TX-headquartered;Yo Quiero! “They’re looking for items that help them answer, ‘What can I eat right now?’ or ‘What can I make fast?’ rather than building meals ingredient by ingredient.”

Appealing to Gen Z and Millennial shoppers requires a change in positioning, she says, as the produce department isn’t simply an ingredient destination, but also “a fresh food hub for snacking, dipping, and quick meals. Cross-merchandising fresh produce with complementary fresh items, like guacamole, salsa, queso and bean dips helps meet younger shoppers where they are: thinking in terms of pairings, boards and snackable moments.”

Frieda’s was a pioneer in understanding that younger consumers were looking for new kinds of snacking items, and has been acting on that insight with fun products in convenient formulations.

“Younger shoppers have accelerated the shift toward snack-size and trial-friendly formats, particularly in specialty produce,” says Alex Jackson, vice president of sales and marketing, Frieda’s Branded Produce, Los Alamitos, CA. “Smaller packs lower the perceived risk and make experimentation feel accessible.

“Offering specialty items in smaller formats, such as two-packs of drinking coconuts, like our new Sillies Pop-Top Party Coconuts, 1-pound citrus pouches or small-format shallots, encourages trial and helps expand the category, rather than limit it. Grab-and-go and entrance displays work especially well for discovery.”

Produce retailers need to keep pace with how younger shoppers relate to stores.

“Gen Z and Millennials shop differently than older generations,” says Diana Salsa, vice president of marketing, Wonderful Pistachios, Los Angeles, CA. “They move fast, prioritize convenience and expect bold flavor. They want grab-and-go options that fit into busy, mobile lifestyles and they’re quick to trade up when something feels new or exciting.

“That’s why our Dill Pickle flavored Wonderful Pistachios launched in convenience stores first, where the 2.25-ounce format and bold taste immediately resonated and sold quickly to this audience.”

**CONVENIENCE FACTOR**

Millennial and Gen Z consumers are familiar with packaged salads, fresh cuts and other ready-to-serve or ready-to-eat items — convenience food has been part of their lives from the start. They are also more used to purchasing packaged products.

“The growth of curbside pickup and home delivery has made packaged produce and packaged fresh items more important, because they are easier to shop digitally and less prone to substitution issues,” says Murray.

“Younger shoppers have accelerated demand for snackable,



Younger shoppers are reshaping the produce aisle with digital-first habits, snack-driven eating patterns and a strong demand for convenience.

PRODUCE BUSINESS/MIKE DUFF PHOTO

ready-to-eat and grab-and-go formats,” she adds. “This same behavior is also driving growth in smaller produce packs and pre-cut fruits and vegetables, along with strong performance for fresh dips when they’re merchandised nearby.”

Brianna Shales, marketing director, Stemilt Growers, Wenatchee, WA, says convenience and flavor are two areas where these generations stand out. “They are often willing to pay extra for value-added products, or kits, that help save them time. Millennials, especially, are in peak years of busy lives, as most have kids now.”

Research conducted by the Foundation for Fresh Produce demonstrates “Gen Z and younger Millennials favor flexible eating patterns, such as snacking, mini-meals, and produce as meal replacements over traditional meal structures. IFPA data shows that Gen Z is the most likely generation to replace meals with snacks and to purchase value-added or ready-to-eat produce,” says Sempowski.

“Packaging has become important in produce to make selection convenient, not just for the pick-up and delivery segment, but also in-store,” says Shales.

Packaging can aid in meeting standards that are important to Millennial and Gen Z consumers. “They want authenticity and transparency about the product and the packaging,” says Steve Greenfield, director of sales and marketing, NNZ Inc., Lawrenceville, GA.

But, he adds, “there needs to be an emotional hook.” Whether it’s through a label that tells something relevant about a grower or a QR code that connects to a video presentation about recycled content, getting on the radar of younger consumers requires signaling that relates to their interests and passions. When that is accomplished, the shopper can spread the word about why a product is important or enticing.

“All it takes is one or several influencers to cause your product to go viral,” says Greenfield.

# What Makes a Great Produce Manager?

Five award-winning managers share their insights.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**B**ehind every well-stocked produce department is a produce manager. They forecast demand, buy and price fruits and vegetables, manage shrink, lead department teams, execute merchandising, and maintain food-safety standards — balancing perishability, profitability and presentation in a category where quality and availability change daily.

There are just over 10,000 produce managers in the U.S., according to Zippia, an online career platform based in San Mateo, CA. Each year, the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA), Newark, DE, selects 20 produce managers from across the U.S. as winners of the organization's Retail Produce Manager Awards of Excellence. *PRODUCE BUSINESS* asked five of these recipients the fundamental question: "What Makes A Great Produce Manager?"

## Mike Bawol Tops Friendly Markets Niagara Falls, NY

Starting as a part-time produce clerk in a low-volume store, Bawol climbed the ranks to full-time produce manager at a high-volume market, a position he's held now for 35 years. "I love it," says Bawol.



### 1. What makes a great produce manager?

Three qualities stand out. First are people skills — clear communication helps train employees, gain buy-in, and build a strong team. Second is merchandising. Creative, well-planned displays that match customer preferences influence buying behavior and increase sales. Third is profitability. Managing inventory, freshness, and stock levels through effective merchandising ensures the department performs well while contributing consistently to the store's overall results.

### 2. What is the biggest advantage of being a produce manager?

It's the experience and business knowledge I've gained over the years. I've seen the produce industry change and have consistently exceeded sales and profit goals. At times, I feel ready for the next level, such as a produce specialist role, where I could collaborate with other managers, share merchandising expertise, and help train and develop teams to improve overall performance.

### 3. What is the biggest challenge for a produce manager?

Today, it's help. You can't find good help, and produce is labor-intensive. A lot of people don't want to work. They realize what they've gotten into, it's too much for them, and we're back to square one. That means you're doing a lot of things yourself or with one other person, and it gets tiring. But you must plug along and work through the day's business.

## WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"The best display I look forward to building every year is a sweet potato waterfall at Thanksgiving. It is generally huge, with a pallet's worth of loose sweet potatoes that genuinely catch the eye of anyone walking by."**  
Ragan Brooks, KVAT Food Stores Inc. DBA Food City, Abingdon, VA
- **"Treat the department like your own business — think of every dollar spent or product thrown away as your money. You'll pay closer attention and manage differently and more effectively."**  
Ryan Vann, Harp's Food Stores, Mountain Home, AR

### 4. Describe one of the best displays you've built.

The display that stands out most was a large-scale watermelon presentation I built at another store. It combined whole and cut watermelon, yellow watermelon, minis, and both seeded and seedless varieties into one clean, summer-forward display that stopped traffic and earned a company first-place finish. That same approach has since led to wins with cherries, avocados, mandarins, pistachios, and citrus, as well as a national third place in the Idaho Potato Commission's Potato Lover's Month display contest.

### 5. What are your recommendations to others who want to become great produce managers?

You really have to have a knack for it. It's a lot of hard work. You've got to be creative, be a good communicator with your people, lead by example, and have your people follow your lead so you can get your job done the way you want it done.

## Ragan Brooks KVAT Food Stores Inc. DBA Food City Abingdon, VA

Raised in southwest Virginia and now based in East Tennessee, Brooks began working in grocery retail in high school and later earned a bachelor's degree from King University. After time in other roles, she accepted an opportunity to run a produce department. "This was the greatest decision I've ever made," says Brooks. "I was finally back home, where every day I was ready and excited to go to 'work.'" A produce manager for five years, she now leads a flagship store department.



### 1. What makes a great produce manager?

Leadership. Knowledge. Customer Service. I lead by example, working alongside my team every day and showing them that I'll do anything I ask of them. In produce, no one ever knows everything, and I value continuous learning — from industry peers and, at times, from customers. There's real satisfaction in answering

questions accurately, and I make that a priority. Customer service matters most. I've built strong, professional relationships with shoppers who regularly seek me out when they're in the store. That trust, connection, and consistency are key drivers of repeat business and long-term success.

**2. What is the biggest advantage of being a produce manager?**

Quality, selection, and working with locally grown produce from our area. Delivering exceptional quality without limiting selection keeps customers coming back. I've expanded organic offerings and driven sales increases of more than 100%. We work closely with local farmers in the area, and having these fresh produce items to sell from our own "backyard" definitely boosts customer satisfaction and is something they look forward to every year.

**3. What is the biggest challenge for a produce manager?**

Quality control is challenging since produce is already losing life by the time it's received. Controlling orders and knowing your customer base and what you sell is key. This can lead to increased sales, satisfaction and profit.

**4. Describe one of the best displays you've built.**

The best display I look forward to building every year is a sweet potato waterfall at Thanksgiving. It is generally huge, with a pallet's worth of loose sweet potatoes that genuinely catch the eye of anyone walking by.

**5. What are your recommendations to others who want to become great produce managers?**

Take pride in all you do, whether it be trimming fresh, wet sections or stocking apples. Customers shop with their eyes, and if you wouldn't purchase it, they won't either. Having a neat, clean, and well-stocked sales floor should always be a top priority.

**Tyler LaRue**  
Hy-Vee, Inc.  
De Pere, WI

LaRue began as a high school courtesy clerk before moving into the produce department over a de-



cade ago. He advanced from produce clerk to assistant manager, then he completed Hy-Vee's Department Manager Training and now serves as a produce manager. LaRue says he values customer engagement and merchandising, noting, "Seeing someone try a new product because of a display never gets old."

**1. What makes a great produce manager?**

It starts with customer service — greeting shoppers, offering quality product, and creating an experience through demos, recipes, and clean, inviting departments. Strong leadership is equally important, with clear expectations for service, product knowledge, and standards. Finally, effective merchandising matters. Building clean, well-signed, colorful displays — always including at least one "wow display" — helps capture attention and drive customer engagement.

**2. What is the biggest advantage of being a produce manager?**

Produce is the first department customers see, so I see it as my responsibility to set the tone for the store. To do that, I focus on strong customer service and creating a welcoming experience. I offer a "free fruit for kids" basket near the bananas to help families shop more easily.

**3. What is the biggest challenge for a produce manager?**

Training employees, since no one can run a produce department alone. I address this by working alongside my team and building trust. On weekends, I pair with part-time staff, often students, to connect and coach. I also stay involved in interviews and hands-on training, ensuring new hires understand expectations from the start.

**4. Describe one of the best displays you've built.**

One of my most memorable displays was an apple-themed contest at Hy-Vee. We placed a truck in the center of the department, styled as an apple truck with bushel baskets flowing from the bed. The display featured cider, pies, strudels, Fireball whiskey, and apple slicers, along with cider and apple tastings. Planned in detail with leadership, it was a full-store effort that generated strong customer excitement.

**5. What are your recommendations to others who want to become great produce managers?**

A new produce manager should talk with customers and truly listen. Customers share valuable insight into what they want to see in the department. It's also essential to maintain a clean, well-signed department and regularly check quality. As I remind my team, "inspect what you expect."

**Jonathan Peterson**  
Big Y Foods  
Southbridge, MA



Born and raised in Massachusetts, Peterson brings 13 years of experience across produce and floral, all with Big Y. He started in 2013 as a part-time stock clerk, advanced to a specialist, then to assistant manager, and became a produce manager three years ago. "Seasonality, merchandising, and daily customer interaction are what I enjoy most," he says.

**1. What makes a great produce manager?**

Success in produce management starts with multitasking. Each day brings new challenges that require quick decisions to drive sales, maintain fresh, inviting displays, and support the team running the department. Customer service is equally critical — answering questions and resolving concerns builds trust. Finally, product knowledge and leadership, including seasonality, trends, and availability, ensure a consistent, high-quality shopping experience.

**2. What is the biggest advantage of being a produce manager?**

The greatest advantage is retail experience. With 13 years of industry experience, I understand the business, deliver a fresh, high-quality product, and help develop a strong, capable team.

**3. What is the biggest challenge for a produce manager?**

The biggest challenge is adapting to changes and maintaining a positive attitude during difficult times, including delivery and staffing issues. The industry evolves, and at a retail level, we must do the same.

#### 4. Describe one of the best displays you've built.

One of the most memorable displays I've built was a stone fruit presentation for Summeripe to kick off the summer selling season. The display won a sales and merchandising contest and created an immediate WOW factor at the store entrance. Designed to be easy to shop and replenish in a smaller-footprint store, the win was a major success for the entire department.

#### 5. What are your recommendations to others who want to become great produce managers?

My advice for someone starting a career as a produce manager is to learn from experienced leaders and build a strong understanding of sales, products, and department operations. I was fortunate to be mentored by a produce manager with more than 40 years of experience, who shaped much of what I know today.

#### Ryan Vann Harp's Food Stores Mountain Home, AR



A husband and father of five, Vann's career began in food-service, managing a sandwich shop and later a café. That experience led him to produce as a manager trainee, despite having no background in grocery. Guided by a strong mentor, he became a produce manager within 18 months and now has nearly eight years of experience serving his team and community with fresh food. "What I enjoy most is the feeling of taking a messy, shopworn department and giving it fresh life again," he says.

#### 1. What makes a great produce manager?

Becoming an effective produce manager requires time, focus, and a commitment to doing the details right. The most critical skills include strong merchandising aligned with seasonality, consumer demand, and profitability, along with strong organizational skills. Monitoring sales, shrink, and movement data informs smarter ordering decisions. In-store discipline — FIFO rotation, clean prep areas, and a well-managed backroom — supports food safety, limits waste, and helps balance aggressive displays with realistic sales volume.

#### 2. What is the biggest advantage of being a produce manager?

I'd say ownership. Produce managers run a business within the store, making daily decisions on forecasting, merchandising, and team leadership that directly impact quality, sales and customer trust. That accountability creates pride in the department and influences where customers choose to shop, driving loyalty through consistent freshness, presentation and product quality.

#### 3. What is the biggest challenge for a produce manager?

Balancing freshness with profitability. Produce is highly perishable, yet customers expect top quality year-round. Success requires adapting quickly and planning for disruptions. Also, understanding display margins and maintaining a mix of high-demand and high-grossing items is essential. When strawberries were unavailable for an extended period, shifting focus to premium blackberries and jumbo blueberries helped offset lost sales and maintain department performance.

#### 4. Describe one of the best displays you've built.

One standout display was a summer Fourth of July peach promotion built to launch a new premium program. Using the red, white and blue packaging provided and patriotic décor, such as streamers and stars, the display created a bold focal point in the department. The large, festive presentation successfully supported the program launch and helped achieve a 4-5% distribution rate during the holiday week.

#### 5. What are your recommendations to others who want to become great produce managers?

Be patient when learning about the produce industry; it takes a full year to understand your department and customers. Ask questions, know your team's strengths, and place people where they can succeed while developing their skills. Leadership is essential. Most importantly, treat the department like your own business — think of every dollar spent or product thrown away as your money. You'll pay closer attention and manage differently and more effectively.

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Cinco de Mayo, celebrated May 5, has evolved into a major food-driven celebration, giving produce departments a timely opportunity to boost sales with vibrant displays of avocados, tomatoes, peppers and other guacamole and salsa staples. PHOTO COURTESY MELISSA'S/WORLD VARIETY PRODUCE

# Fresh Produce Knockout: Cinco de Mayo's Retail Punch

Promoting this Mexican food holiday can lift produce sales.

BY DOUG OHLEMEIER

With Cinco de Mayo now much bigger than a Mexican independence day celebration, promoting the holiday can help retail produce executives increase sales.

Celebrating the May 5 event is a way to honor Latin heritage. Produce departments can cater to their stores' Hispanic and non-Hispanic customers through constructing large displays calling attention to and reminding shoppers of the food holiday.

Though Cinco de Mayo isn't celebrated by everyone, promotions around the holiday are important because the event brings needed added retail produce sales following slower winter months.

"Cinco de Mayo is a great holiday for the produce department," says Marc Goldman, produce director for Morton Williams Supermarkets in Bronx, NY. "As for avocado sales, it's right up there with the Super Bowl and New Year's. It's a good holiday for guacamole and salsa, and also all the ingredients that go into making both. That usually adds up to a good week in business."

For the avocado industry, the holiday is pay dirt.

"Cinco de Mayo is the second largest avocado holiday/event," says Peter Shore, vice president of product management for Calavo Growers Inc., Santa Paula, CA. "Avocados play the center part in Cinco de Mayo promotions and accompany Mexican-themed celebrations. Calavo will have good supplies of avocados from Mexico and California during this promotional period."

Cinco de Mayo commemoration has expanded into a major celebration of Mexican culture and heritage, particularly through food and drink.

"Cinco de Mayo is one of the most important promotion windows for avocados in the U.S., with it consistently being one of the top avocado-selling occasions of the year, often ranking second or third, alongside the big game and Fourth of July," says Ken Melban, president of the California Avocado Commission (CAC), in Irvine, CA.

"From the CAC's perspective, Cinco is a key early-season catalyst that can help retailers build strong momentum for avocados, just as they are transitioning into California fruit, which is in a highly promotable window April through August," Melban adds. "For retailers, that makes Cinco de Mayo a natural occasion to highlight California avocados, build excitement in the department, and set the pace for continued summer promotions to drive repeat purchases of California avocados."

## MORE THAN AVOCADOS

When one thinks about the holiday, avocados immediately come to mind. However, other produce items, including mangos, toma-

# FUTURE FOCUS: WHY GROWER-MARKETER DIVINE FLAVOR IS SETTING ITS SIGHTS BEYOND SHORT-TERM SUCCESS

Divine Flavor is not just a brand, it's also a grower through its parent company Grupo Alta, which is seeking to partner with producers who understand the importance of quality, food safety, social responsibility. This is the key message that Alan Aguirre Camou, chief marketing officer at the Nogales, AZ-based grower-marketer, is seeking to convey to producers — particularly those south of the border — interested in working with the fast-expanding produce company.

Specializing in a range of primarily Mexico-grown products, including table grapes, tomatoes, melons, peppers, squash and cucumbers, Divine Flavor is known not just for its commitment to quality, but also for fostering a network of carefully curated grower-suppliers, covering Mexico, California, Peru and Chile. Through Grupo Alta, Divine Flavor organizes an annual Grower Summit, which gives the company the opportunity to communicate directly with allied producers, and ensure that shared standards and values are maintained.

"Divine Flavor is not just a produce distributor or a brand, but we're also growers through our parent company, so for us it's very important to partner with similar-minded growers who understand the importance of quality, food safety, social responsibility, organics and sustainability. We're looking for like-minded growers who fit that mold," Aguirre Camou explains.

"We're able to work with these growers, and plan from the market backward, not the other way around. We're not growing product and hoping to sell it. We're working very closely with our retail partners to make sure the fruits and vegetables that we produce have a home, which is strategic within the marketplace."

Aguirre Camou says Divine Flavor prides itself on being a reliable source of produce, and one which takes strategy to meet customer

demands in its yearly projections; something which is not always easy for a company that operates on the scale of Divine Flavor. As an example, he says Divine Flavor has to take care in how it spends its resources when it comes to commodities such as organic produce, especially in regions where organic cultivation is challenging.

The focus of Divine Flavor's production in conventional and organic is to be able to have 365-day availability across all its items, and for this reason, Aguirre Camou says the company doesn't just work closely with existing growers, but also strives to identify new grower-partners who are willing to invest in their production capabilities.

These efforts feed into Divine Flavor's focus on differentiating itself and the products it supplies by operating as a one-stop shop for quality fresh produce, covering its range of fruits and vegetables, including table grapes. "We are lucky to be able to work with people who have the skill and knowledge to know how growers work, and identify those who are willing to invest," says Aguirre Camou.

Much of this investment, according to Aguirre Camou, has been in developing innovations such as mini seedless peppers or cocktail cucumbers, which offers something new and eye-catching on U.S. retail shelves. "It's important to have these kinds of innovations, which allow us to differentiate Divine Flavor in the marketplace," he explains.

It's this investment that makes Divine Flavor's focus on the future important, and for this reason, it's vital to collaborate with producers who look beyond short-term goals. "There are a lot of growers in this business who want to see a first-year turnaround on profit, but we're looking for growers who see their relationship with Divine Flavor for the future, who see longevity in what they're doing in the partnership we're trying to create," he adds.



toes, sweet and hot peppers, limes, herbs and white onions, should be considered essential and can help boost sales. Other possibilities include pomegranate arils, oranges and pineapples.

“Properly merchandising for Cinco de Mayo is not simply about seasonal decoration — it is a high-impact commercial opportunity that can materially increase produce sales, trial, and shopper engagement when executed correctly,” says Lavanya Setia, director of marketing for the National Mango Board, Orlando, FL.

She says Cinco de Mayo “rewards retailers who plan earlier, build bold and cohesive displays, and merchandise solutions rather than single items.”

Key Cinco de Mayo commodities move well for wholesalers and suppliers, including Eden Prairie, MN’s Robinson Fresh.

“Cinco de Mayo is a high-traffic, high-basket-size moment driven by celebration foods, at-home entertaining, and strong consumer interest in authentic flavor experiences,” says Faron Smith, Robinson Fresh’s director of commercial enablement. “For C.H. Robinson, the holiday is a major demand accelerator for key commodities, particularly avocados, mangos and limes. In 2025, we saw sales of those three SKUs rise by almost 25%.”

Hispanics constitute 20% of the U.S. population, the second largest U.S. racial group. Between 2022 and 2023, the Hispanic population accounted for 71% of the overall U.S. population growth, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. From 2000 to 2024, U.S. Latino population almost doubled, jumping from 35 million to 68 million, according to the Pew Research Center.

**AVOCADO NATION**

“Avocados have become quite the powerhouse, and they are not done growing yet,” says Anne-Marie Roerink, a principal with the San Antonio, TX, 210 Analytics market research firm. “When looking across all 85,000 subcategories in the grocery store, avocados were among the top 10 items in absolute dollar growth in 2025.”

Avocados have experienced a 5% four-year Compound Annual Growth Rate, reinforcing an upward trajectory. Although Cinco is one of the lesser celebrated holidays, with only 21% celebrating, the timeframe possesses the second highest household penetration rate, with guacamole and avocados maintaining strong

association, according to statistics cited by Avocados From Mexico (AFM), based in Irving, TX.

“Avocados are among the top foods purchased at retail and when you look at the basket, it includes items for gatherings or fiestas, including chips, cheese, beef, tortillas, tomatoes, taco shells, onions and chiles,” says Stephanie Bazan, AFM’s senior vice president of commercial strategy and execution.

“This year presents a unique opportunity in that Cinco de Mayo falls on Taco Tuesday, representing an opportunity for avocados to be merchandised with complementary items, such as tortillas, taco shells, cheese

and meats, to create the perfect fiesta.”

Though tomatoes, peppers and specialty peppers aren’t as large sellers compared to the bigger Cinco de Mayo staples, they’re showing growth, according to Roerink.

Tomato growers see larger movements in demand several weeks before most major events and holidays, including Cinco de Mayo, says Jon Esformes, chief executive officer and operating partner of Pacific Tomato Growers Ltd., based in Palmetto, FL.

“Tomatoes are a big part of every holiday from the spring on,” he says. “Until we get into the fall, tomatoes play a big part in every holiday.”



Massive displays featuring raw ingredients including avocados, limes, garlic and tomatoes, as well as ready-to-eat guacamole and salsa are recommended.

"Cinco de Mayo is a strong sales opportunity for produce because it hits at the perfect time of year: Spring items are coming in, quality is improving, and shoppers are ready for brighter, seasonal eating," says Mike Roberts, director of produce operations, Harps Food Stores, Springdale, AR.

"It's also one of the first 'big display' moments heading into summer, so it's a great chance to sharpen merchandising habits that carry through Memorial Day, July Fourth and beyond," he says.

#### CROSS-MERCHANDISING RING

Constructing effective produce displays

## WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"Cinco de Mayo is no longer a short, tactical promotion, but a meaningful seasonal demand window that can drive incremental trips, larger baskets, and impulse purchases — especially in produce."**

Lavanya Setia, National Mango Board, Orlando, FL



- **"This year presents a unique opportunity in that Cinco de Mayo falls on Taco Tuesday."**

Stephanie Bazan, Avocados From Mexico, Irving, TX

can draw more consumers to the produce department and encourage them to place more than avocados, guacamole and alcohol into their shopping baskets.

"Seasonal holidays, like Cinco de Mayo,

are important occasions to drive volume, specifically for limes, as they are heavily featured in traditional recipes and beverages," says Zak Laffite, president of Wonderful Citrus, Delano, CA. "Retail

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produce executives can capitalize on Cinco de Mayo by positioning produce as an essential holiday item through sales, high-visibility displays, and bulk purchase options that encourage party planning. Festive signage, simple recipe ideas, and digital or loyalty marketing reinforces Wonderful seedless lemons and limes’

versatility, strengthening their connection to the celebration.”

Cinco de Mayo has evolved from a one-day celebration into a multi-week seasonal event for fresh foods that lifts sales of other related items, says Tara Murray, vice president of marketing for ¡Yo Quiero! Brands, a Rhome, TX-based dip maker.

“Execution is everything for Cinco de Mayo,” she says. “Today’s shoppers start planning earlier and are looking for a wider variety of flavors and formats, from traditional guacamole and salsa to bolder and more innovative options. Shoppers are actively looking for inspiration and solutions, not just individual items.

“The most successful retailers treat Cinco de Mayo as a destination in the produce department, featuring bold, easy-to-shop displays that group together ¡Yo Quiero! dips, fresh vegetables, chips, and complementary items, like meats and cheeses.”

She says when guacamole, salsa, queso and flavor-forward options like the company’s Creamy Jalapeño Ranch and Candied Jalapeño Dip are merchandised together, it makes the shopping decision “simple, and significantly increases basket ring.”

Cinco de Mayo promotions can help fuel sales because “you can encourage basket building across multiple produce commodity categories and store departments,” says Elizabeth Smart, sales executive for Divine Flavor, LLC, Nogales, AZ.

“There is stronger demand for fresh ingredients,” Smart adds. “Cinco de Mayo is a prime opportunity to provide abundant, high-quality supplies for our retail partners. We appreciate when retailers get creative with point-of-purchase displays around holidays, and we actively support those initiatives.”

Cinco de Mayo promotions help boost retail produce sales during the otherwise lackluster early months, says Sal Selletto, an industry observer and retired produce manager at Middletown, NJ’s Food Circus/Foodtown.

“If you put the items on center stage up front, you’ll get a nice, textured sales boost, much needed after the Christmas holiday season,” he says. “There are so many opportunities that you could actually make a front-end display of all the Cinco de Mayo items, tie them all together and get the grocery department involved.”

For Cinco de Mayo, a profitable produce department is one catering to important cultural holiday eating events, says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce in Vernon, CA.

“At Melissa’s, we have been promoting this event for over 30 years now, as it’s been a great way to market to Hispanic/Mexican and non-Hispanics in this Americanized holiday event year,” he says. “It’s a great opportunity to promote the culture and history of Mexican culture through food.” **PB**



Customers are looking for more services to bring value to their final product — services such as ripening, repacking, label support, or display support, as well as knowledge in storage and handling. PHOTO COURTESY JOHN VENA INC.

# Wholesaler Service: More For The Store

Essential partnering expands resources in a more efficient way.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Wholesaling fresh produce has progressed to more than selling boxes. Today's distributors position themselves as partners — expanding retailers' capabilities, smoothing supply disruptions, and delivering services that support sales as much as sourcing.

"We are an extension of our customers' buying team," explains Dominic Riggio, president of Riggio Distribution in Detroit, MI. "We are a conduit between growers, packers, suppliers and customers."

That role often shows itself most clearly when challenges arise. Rather than simply fulfilling orders, wholesalers step in to solve operational problems and maintain continuity.

"We solve problems," says Joel Fierman, president of Fierman Produce in Bronx, NY. "For example, when warehouses were closed or stuck during the January snowstorm, we still operated, delivering to and serving our customers."

Industry leaders say this shift reflects a broader redefinition of the wholesaler's purpose — from supplier to growth partner.

"The wholesaler's role is to be an active partner in the retailer's growth, not just a supplier," says Rick Feighery, president of Procacci Brothers in Philadelphia, PA. "Our merchandisers turn us into a solu-

## WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"We don't want to just sell product to the store; we want to help sell product out of the store."**

Rick Feighery, Procacci Brothers, Philadelphia, PA



- **"Our wholesalers really know their stuff. Their expertise about production trends and weather issues helps us know what's going on and ensures we get what we need."**

Nino Lambert, Lambert's Market, Westwood, MA

tion. We don't want to just sell product to the store; we want to help sell product out of the store."

For many retailers, particularly independents, that partnership is foundational. Without internal buying or distribution teams, they rely heavily on wholesalers.

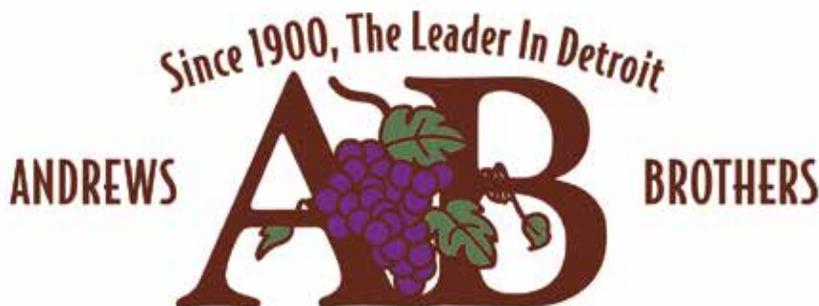
"Our wholesalers are everything for our business," says Nino Lambert, owner of Lambert's Market in Westwood, MA, which operates two stores and four garden centers. "We're built on produce, so it's crucial that our wholesalers help us have the freshest produce at the best price."

Support services have become a key differentiator in those relationships, helping both sides compete beyond simple cost comparisons.

"It's how wholesalers and retailers set themselves apart from the pack and develop a relationship beyond cost of goods sold," says Victor Savanello, vice president of



Wholesaler merchandisers play a crucial role in customer support, including in-store services. This photo shows the work of Katzman Distribution, Burlington, NJ, which partnered with Melissa's/World Variety Produce on a retail project that created a "wow factor" in the store. PHOTO COURTESY KATZMAN



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*Detroit Produce Terminal - Detroit, MI*



merchandising and business development at Katzman Distribution in Burlington, NJ.

As competition intensifies, access to outside expertise is increasingly essential. "We are the resources for them," says Gabriela D'Arrigo, vice president of marketing and communications at D'Arrigo New York in Bronx, NY.

For retailers lacking infrastructure to self-distribute, that support can span logistics, merchandising, and strategic planning.

"It's not just supplying produce, logistics and distribution, but also merchandising services," says Jonathan Steffy, vice president and general manager at Four Seasons Produce in Ephrata, PA. "Merchandising services help retailers excel through planning, promotion, display, training and execution."

Ultimately, wholesalers say customers are seeking a broader value package — operational, technical and promotional. "This includes services such as ripening, repacking, label support, or display support, as well as knowledge in storage and handling," says Casey Spencer, senior marketing coordinator at John Vena Inc. in Philadelphia, PA.

**A SUPPLY CHAIN OF SERVICE**

Today's wholesaler supports customers in every aspect, from sourcing to logistics to in-store support. "Every customer is different, with different needs," says Dominic Russo, general manager of Rocky Produce in Detroit, MI. "Part of wholesaling is backing the product with our service."

Russo says Rocky Produce gives customers the ammunition needed to move product. "We are experts at what's coming into season, what's promotable, and what's getting tight and finishing."

The majority of solutions offered by Willie Itule Produce, Phoenix, AZ, are the result of customers asking for support. "This includes everything from niche product lines and specialty kitchen supplies to assessments and menu planning," says Billy Itule, chief executive. "Support services are crucial."

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Ben B. Schwartz & Sons in Detroit, MI, services include commodity market experts working with retail customers to plan, and value-added services, bagging and repack. "We have agility to work on short lead times to source difficult-to-get produce," says Bill Loupée, chief operating officer. "We also provide logistics benefits, including



Ben B. Schwartz & Sons, Detroit, MI, introduced new mesh bags for citrus products, last year, after receiving requests from customers. PHOTO COURTESY BEN B. SCHWARTZ

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warehousing, operating as a direct importer, and partnering with local growers."

Information is a valuable commodity in service to customers, and Fierman says his company's broad scope gives it an advantage. "We see trends across the entire retail platform. Individuals only see what individual stores see."

J.E. Russell Produce in Toronto, Ontario, helps retailers share grower stories. "These little things take time and effort, but when there is an incremental sale or a delighted customer, it moves the needle," says Hutch Morton, senior vice president.

Communication is the secret sauce in any food-business relationship, agrees Frank Rossetti, president of Banks Square Market, DBA The Produce Connection in Wakefield, MA. "The best lessons we all learn quickly in produce include consistency over price, quality measured by freshness, and honesty and loyalty go a long way and are rarely forgotten."

Stores count on the invaluable interchange with their wholesalers, according to Lambert. "Our wholesalers really know their stuff," he says. "Their expertise about production trends and weather issues helps us know what's going on and ensures we get what we need."

## IN-STORE SUPPORT

Wholesaler merchandisers play a crucial role in customer support. "Our merchandisers are our eyes on the ground," says Proccacci's Feighery. "They provide the personal accountability and market intelligence that a digital transaction simply cannot replace."

According to Steffy, Four Seasons Produce's merchandising team supports select customer partners in the field with department setups, resets and remodels, staff trainings, and assortment and seasonality advice. They also help with display builds and special promotions, and margin, shrink, and sales improvement plans.

Katzman also provides support through a team of experienced field merchandisers. "We don't just help customers solve prob-

# Wholesalers Are An Invaluable Resource for Foodservice

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Wholesale services are just as important for foodservice customers as for retail.

"Foodservice needs great packaging, transparency and high-quality product," says Johnny Karrat, director of sales and operations at Capital City Produce in Troy, NY. "Wholesalers are going the extra mile to ensure end users get the best of all of these."

Wholesale foodservice distributors have changed course from simple bulk ingredient supply houses to more of a strategic partner, explains Frank Rossetti, president of Banks Square Market DBA The Produce Connection in Wakefield, MA.

"Operators see increased pressures from rent to payroll to cost of goods," he says. "Our role has evolved to understand their goals while helping them into sustainable solutions for produce, all while helping keep margins up without compromise to quality or consistency."

Foodservice groups need fast, convenient solutions, explains Bill Loupée, chief operating officer at Ben B. Schwartz & Sons in Detroit, MI. "Whether that's single-serve pre-cut fruit cups or branded and bagged commodities, services are a game-changer for saving them time and money."

"Wholesale distributors are a natural fit for this step of the process."

## ESSENTIAL EXPERTISE

Wholesale partners serve as a foodservice knowledge hub. "We have people with deep expertise at every step of the supply chain," says Billy Itule, chief executive at Willie Itule Produce in Phoenix, AZ. "Whether it's designing menus, conducting assessments, making industry connections, or sharing new best practices, we are a fantastic resource."

Rossetti suggests elevating diners' experience by keeping staff educated on where the food comes from. "Some of the best dining is when a server can walk through a specific ingredient," he says. "Talking about the farm it's grown on, or a fun story about the farmer, allows a diner to connect with the food they are there to enjoy. We do this with wine, why not the salad?"

Fresh-cut and prepackaged offerings help increase kitchen productivity by eliminating a step, says Itule.

## BROAD SUPPORT

Produce-specialized wholesalers provide a depth of foodservice support. "We go direct to restaurants daily with reduced packs and unique items," says Rick Feighery, president of Procacci Brothers in Philadelphia, PA. "Our service is defined by speed and deep industry understanding. Chefs need partners who

understand the pressure of a dinner rush."

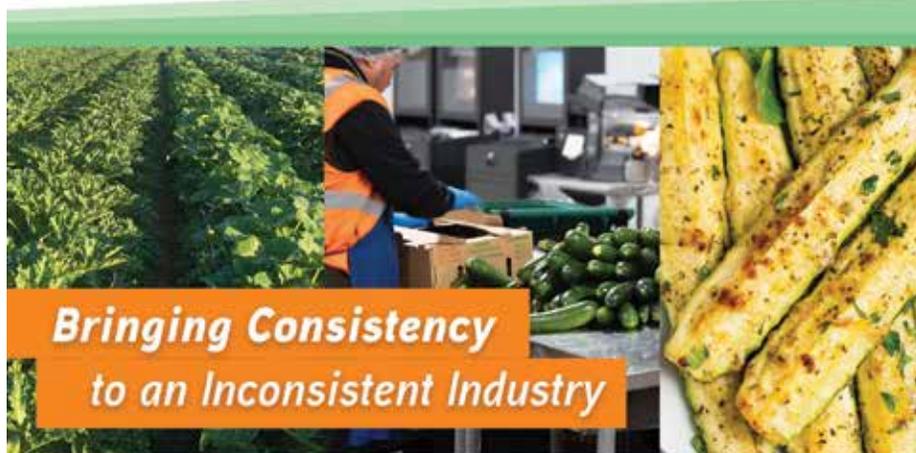
Wholesalers provide support to foodservice providers through packing and ripening services, says Casey Spencer, senior marketing coordinator at John Vena Inc. in Philadelphia, PA. "These help minimize margin waste and optimize specific items of the menu."

Nickey Gregory Company in Atlanta, GA, continues to expand foodservice offerings. "We help with LTL and full load logistics,

fresh-cut produce from Family Fresh Foods, and cross-docking, as well as inventory support," says Andrew Scott, vice president of sales and business development.

Under the FreshEdge umbrella, Indianapolis Fruit in Indianapolis, IN, piggybacks on sister companies and services customers multiple times a week. "This gives our customers flexibility in their ordering," says Tony Mitchell, president.

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lems; we also help educate their teams, including grower tours and field trips," says Savanello.

Having that support in the field is an advantage for stores. "A lot of what we do is one-on-one," says Tony Mitchell, president of Indianapolis Fruit (a FreshEdge company) in Indianapolis, IN. "We help train produce managers and the leads in their departments. Our reps help put a game

plan together on paper with the retailer for months at a time to get the retailer where they need to be."

D'Arrigo's store support includes creating a plan and schematic, sending a team to help reset the store, and teaching how to reset. "We look at how to set up the store to best suit customer needs and benefit sales, not just look pretty," says D'Arrigo.

Sales and buying teams from Nickey Greg-

ory Co., Atlanta, GA, visit stores, suggest ad items, and reset displays, as well as educate produce managers. "This helps our customers create more sales and strengthens our relationships," says Andrew Scott, vice president of sales and business development.

J.E. Russell works with supplier partners to offer merchandising support. "One example is supplying customers with display boxes from our bagged citrus program with

## Wholesaler Service Yields More Sales, More Success

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Innovative service by a wholesaler yields a variety of retailer success stories.

Recently, a Procacci Brothers merchandising team visited a small customer. "They realized the store had huge potential, but the layout wasn't optimized," says Rick Feighery, president of the Philadelphia-based business.

"Our merchandisers performed a full store reset — rearranging the flow, building new displays, and introducing new items. The results were immediate: The store's sales increased by 10%."

Likewise, Tony Mitchell, president of Indianapolis Fruit (a FreshEdge company), describes a successful Hatch chile promotion. "We put up an outdoor tent, brought in a roaster with displays built around it, and had folks from Melissa's to help out," he says. "Shoppers could smell the chiles roasting and buy chiles by the case, as well as 1-pound packages. It increased sales 20% for Hatch chiles that weekend."

Gabriela D'Arrigo, vice president of marketing and communications at D'Arrigo New York, relates the importance of seeing a customer in their own environment. "Through getting to know a customer better, we were able to help them with a reset, resulting in a 40% growth in sales in a week's time."

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Fowler Packing,” says Morton. “In another example, Fresh Express installed customized racking to a retailer to maximize display and minimize shrink.”

**THE RIGHT PRODUCT MIX**

In-store support also involves ensuring the right products. “We use the tools and knowledge we have to benefit our customers,” says Mitchell. “We run reports internally on larger accounts to know what they’re growing in and what they might be missing out on. We feed that data to our merchandisers in the field so they can discuss it with the customer.”

At Ben B., conversations are strategic, discussing longer-term how demand changes products. “As we learn more about how we can support our customers, we expand our own offerings,” says Loupée. “Last year, we introduced new mesh bags for citrus products after receiving requests.”

Four Seasons Produce experiments with some retailers on emerging items, such as a new variety, pack, or growing practices, says Steffy. “Giving new products a good chance with strategic display builds and promotion helps retailers get on the front end of new trends. After experimenting, it is all about the data at store level and across wholesaler volumes.”

**ADDING MORE VALUE**

Wholesale distribution is now about delivering products however retail and foodservice need them. “This can mean re-packing and bagging commodities in certain quantities, white labeling so brand-



A wholesaler does more than just supply produce, logistics and distribution, it often offers merchandising services. For example, Four Seasons Produce, Ephrata, PA, has a merchandising team that supports select customer partners with department setups and displays, like this Halos build; resets and remodels; staff trainings; and assortment and seasonality advice. PHOTO COURTESY FOUR SEASONS

ing is visible, or pre-cutting and packaging,” says Loupée.

Johnny Karrat, director of sales and operations at Capital City Produce in Troy, NY, explains retailers can take advantage of growing demand for fresh-cut by partnering with a local fresh-cut wholesaler. “We cut fresh and deliver the same day, so as not to sacrifice shelf life,” he says. “Our premier packaging extends shelf life without having to add preservatives or water.”

Rossetti of The Produce Connection agrees regional processors can help clients ensure the best product for their customers. “We can fine-tune and focus on details that the big volume processors can’t,” says Rossetti. “Consumers deserve to see value in their fresh-cut purchases. If shoppers discover just-purchased produce is already breaking down, it’s not a good look for the brand or the store.”

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# A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER



*Ken Whitacre*

Every once in a while, the opportunity presents itself to do well while also doing good. Such is the case with our annual Masters of Merchandising supplement. The industry owes a tip of the hat to the collection of industry leaders who elected to invest with us in a marketing vehicle that is both promotional and educational.

Each vendor worked hard to impart their expert wisdom on how to more effectively merchandise the category at hand. By sharing knowledge acquired while working with North America’s retailers, these stakeholders help retailers move more product and help the world by encouraging a more healthful diet.

Increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables is not only a matter of big industry initiatives, but consumption in general can only increase if sales of specific items increase. That means knowing how to build consumer trial and how to offer the most effective assortment; it means knowing how to market produce on a day-to-day basis and how to do some out-of-the-box promotions just to keep consumer interest high.

Retailers, please take the time to review this offering carefully. When did you last think about how to increase sales of

**Increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables is not only a matter of big industry initiatives, but consumption in general can only increase if sales of specific items increase.**

garlic? Or mangos? Or asparagus? Here is a chance to think of merchandising in a different way. When did you last really consider how to best sell bananas – was it when you were a produce department manager 10, 20 or 30 years ago? Here is an opportunity to revisit tactics with a different perspective.

Merchandising produce is everyone’s challenge, and in the produce industry, “The Times, They Are A-Changin’.” Retailers today are in a position to expect more support from producers, and intellectual capital is just about the most valuable support one can provide. So kudos to our Masters of Merchandising sponsors.

As an added service to our retail readers, we’re printing additional copies of this guide, so if you would like extra copies of the Masters of Merchandising 2026 supplement, fill out the form below, and scan/email or mail it to us. For the cost of shipping and handling, we’ll send you up to five supplements (first-come basis). If you require larger quantities for distribution to store-level personnel, call our offices at 561-994-1118.

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Continuing its 40-year mission to Initiate Industry Improvement, PRODUCE BUSINESS frequently challenges industry thought-leaders to help guide buyers on ways to increase produce consumption. This year, we have scheduled more than a dozen articles designed to assist retail and foodservice executives in being better buyers of fruits and vegetables.

### INCLUDED IN THIS YEAR-ROUND INITIATIVE WILL BE EXCLUSIVE ARTICLES ON THE FOLLOWING:

- ✓ Next-Generation Shoppers
- ✓ Private Label vs. Branded Produce
- ✓ Talent Mentorship/Career Development
- ✓ Contract Buying
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- ✓ Last-Mile Food Safety Management
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# ARTICHOKES OCEAN MIST FARMS

## EVOLVING TRENDS & PREFERENCES

Shoppers are increasingly seeking new fresh vegetable items that deliver convenience without compromising on quality or flavor. Artichokes—especially new Heartichokes—can drive incremental ring and delight shoppers.

## ARTICHOKE MERCHANDISING TO DRIVE SALES

- Display artichokes at 34°F
- Do not re-trim stems; this causes vital moisture loss
- Remove damaged outer petals before displaying
- Cross merchandise artichokes with complimentary items
- Build prominent displays to catch shoppers' attention
- Consumers like variety—use a mixture of artichoke packs and sizes
- Ensuring products look fresh and vibrant will make your display memorable
- Displays should always look plentiful; half-full displays translate as old products
- Once display is built, keep products rotated and stocked—remember FIFO!



## NEW HEARTICHOKES HELP INCREASE CONSUMPTION

Ocean Mist launched its first-to-market Heartichokes line in early 2026. Recognizing that artichokes can be labor-intensive to prepare—especially for busy people with limited time to get meals on the table—the company developed this convenient, versatile and delicious line of trimmed and quartered tender artichokes that are ready to cook right out of the package.



Often considered a special-occasion indulgence, artichokes are more approachable than ever with Heartichokes—quick to prepare, easy to enjoy, and perfect for any meal or occasion. With virtually no mess, prep or cleanup, Heartichokes are a game-changer for artichoke lovers, ready in as little as 15 minutes. Like their award-winning Roastables cousins, their versatility allows for a wide range of cooking methods, including sautéing, roasting, air frying—even grilling. Each package contains roughly five trimmed artichokes and is available in chef-crafted flavors including Lemon Butter and Savory Parm.

## A CENTURY OF FARMING EXCELLENCE

Founded in 1924 in Castroville, California, the “Artichoke Center of the World,” Ocean Mist Farms is a fourth-generation, family-owned and operated company and the largest grower-shipper of fresh artichokes in North America. CA growing regions provide year-round availability of their vast product line—including Gold Standard artichokes, 30+ vegetable commodities, popular value-added items, and exciting new innovations including **Roastables** and **Heartichokes** ready-to-cook kits which consumers are seeking.

## PEAK SEASON

Ocean Mist offers Gold Standard artichokes year-round, but traditional peak seasons are the Spring (March-May) and around holidays including Valentine’s, Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Retailers see a sharp increase in volume and sales lift during these periods.



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## PROVEN STEPS TO GROW ASPARAGUS SALES

Fresh asparagus holds huge profit power with significant ROI. A little investment in display and promotion can generate a big return. Consistent, high-quality supply from Peru supports retailers looking to increase asparagus sales and provide more for their shoppers:

### STEP 1: PLAN YEAR-ROUND PROMOTION

Stay visible. Visibility all year keeps asparagus on shopping lists. Maintain a seamless, high-quality program year-round and drive incremental sales by encouraging double purchases during key holidays such as Valentine's Day, summer BBQs, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

### STEP 2: MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO MISS

Eye-catching displays turn browsers into buyers. Multiple displays make it hard to miss. Use isle displays and

end-caps to draw particular attention to the product and pull shoppers toward the category.

### STEP 3: ENSURE QUALITY

Freshness sells! Fresh, vibrant asparagus drives confidence and repeat purchases. Spears should be bright, with closed, firm tips. Display tips-up with butt-ends cleanly cut and sufficiently hydrated. Regular

checks by store staff should keep displays crisp and inviting.

### STEP 4: LEAN INTO LIFESTYLE AND CONVENIENCE

One size doesn't fit all. Appeal to every household with a mix of sizes, packs, and colors. Using multiple colors - green, white and purple - will add interest and excitement. Include value-added, bagged or tray-packed fresh asparagus for quick convenience purchases.

### STEP 5: LEVERAGE HEALTH

Healthy choices drive bigger baskets. Simple health

messaging encourages shoppers to add asparagus to their cart. Asparagus contains a host of health benefits including: low in calories; naturally fat- and cholesterol-free; good source of potassium, vitamin A, & vitamin C; rich in rutin and folacin. And remember, short signage equals higher read rate.



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POWERED BY **ALBA**



# AVOCADOS FROM COLOMBIA

**A GUIDE FOR FRESH PRODUCE RETAILERS** Avocados are a high-velocity, high-impulse category with strong appeal across meals and snack time. Shoppers buy them for flavor, health benefits, and versatility—from guacamole and tacos to smoothies and toast. Retailers who make avocados easy to shop (and easy to eat) can lift unit sales, reduce shrink, and grow total basket.



## TOP DISPLAY TIPS



- **Lead with a “hero” set:** Build one primary, easy-to-find display near the department’s front edge, then support with 1–2 secondary displays for peak weeks and seasonal food moments (e.g., game day, Cinco de Mayo, summer grilling).
- **Retailer display contests:** Energize store teams—driving stronger execution, creativity, and incremental movement during key promotional windows.
- **Create abundance without bruising:** Use wide, tiered or pyramid-style builds that look full, while keeping stack height reasonable to prevent pressure damage.
- **Mix bulk and bags:** Offer bulk for shoppers who want to hand-pick ripeness and bags for speed, value, and families.
- **Use clear, simple signage:** Call out ripeness, price, and usage ideas (“Ready Today / Ready in 2–3 Days”). Keep messages short and photo-driven. (For example, use



Avocados From Colombia die-cuts or iron man signs to help add color and visibility.)

- **Add a quick-use callout:** A small “How to Ripen at Home” or “How to Cut an Avocado” tip can reduce shopper hesitation and improve satisfaction.

## RIPENESS AND ROTATION

- **Merchandise multiple ripeness stages:** Stock a balanced mix—firm fruit for later in the week, and ripe/ready-to-eat fruit for tonight.
- **Train teams on color and feel:** Use consistent handling language (firm, breaking, ripe) and simple touch guidelines to reduce inconsistency between shifts.
- **Rotate with purpose:** Front-face ripe fruit, replenish from the back, and pull soft/over-ripe fruit daily to protect the display and minimize waste.

## CARE, HANDLING, AND TEMPERATURE

- Handle gently end-to-end: Avoid overfilling, hard drops, or tight packing that can create pressure points and internal bruising.
- Keep the display environment stable: Aim for a comfortable sales-floor temperature that supports ripening and eating quality; align to your supplier program and store conditions (many programs target

## ORIGIN STORYTELLING

- **Leverage the Raised by Colombia Campaign:** Use the campaign to build awareness and reinforce purpose-driven messaging.
- **Showcase the People Behind the Fruit:** Partner with Avocados from Colombia to highlight the communities behind the fruit—building shopper connection and connection at shelf.



around 68–75°F).

- **Maintain daily:** Refresh displays, clean bins, and remove damaged fruit promptly to keep the set looking premium.

## BACKROOM/PREP

- **Inspect on arrival:** Check firmness, color, and overall condition so you can align fruit with your merchandising plan.
- **Store strategically:** Use cooler storage to slow ripening until needed, then stage fruit

to the floor based on demand.

- **Consider pre-ripened options:** Work with your supplier on pre-ripened inventory for high-velocity periods and to support a consistent “ready-to-eat” offering.

## CROSS MERCHANDISING AND PROMOTIONS

- **Build meal solutions:** Create a salsa station with tomatoes, onions, cilantro, and limes—or pair with tortilla chips for easy entertaining.
- **Spotlight breakfast and wellness:** Merchandise near bread, smoked salmon, eggs, or grab-and-go snack items to grow basket size.
- **Activate loyalty programs:** Use digital coupons, points multipliers, “buy more/save more” offers, and personalized app messaging to drive repeat purchase and increase basket size.



- **Use in-store activation:** Sampling (where allowed), recipe cards, and limited-time price features can encourage trial and add excitement.



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**LEARN MORE**

## RIPE FACTS ABOUT THE WORLD'S MOST-PURCHASED FRUIT

Sure, everyone knows about bananas, right? They're one of the world's most beloved fruits — and among the most-purchased items in grocery stores across North America.

They're also one of nature's most perfect foods: convenient, value-priced, full of nutrients, naturally sweet, just the right size for kids' lunches, and come in their own bio-degradable, easy-to-open packaging.

But that's only part of the story. You may be surprised to also learn the following about the ubiquitous yellow fruit.

- More than one-third of Americans rank bananas as a must-have purchase — more than any other fruit or vegetable and sixth among all supermarket items.
- It's a common misconception that bananas are primarily eaten only for breakfast. But just 51 percent of bananas are for breakfast at home, leaving nearly half eaten at other times of day.
- Bananas rank third as a sugar replacement in recipes and cooking behind honey and maple syrup but ahead of stevia, agave and monk fruit.
- 29% of your shoppers like eating bananas that are at least partially green. Half of all banana lovers want perfectly yellow fruit with no green or brown spots.
- More banana lovers are also discovering exotic new varieties beyond the Cavendish. Sales of Red Bananas, Plantains and other exotic varieties are growing year over year.



## TOP 8 TIPS FOR GROWING YOUR BANANA SALES

- 1. Inspire.** Offer unexpected usage ideas or recipe suggestions at POS to create an impulse to buy a few more fingers.
- 2. Sell at every stage.** Displaying multiple-color stages appeals to broader shopper usage preferences and demographics, and can increase purchase size.
- 3. Go beyond the Cavendish.** Stock DOLE® Red Bananas, Baby Bananas, Manzanos and Plantains to offer your shoppers variety — and more reasons to buy.
- 4. Tell shoppers a story.** Most shoppers are surprised to learn how many steps it takes to get those bananas from the farm to their store.
- 5. Stock organic.** More than ever, today's shoppers want to trade-up for organic so make sure to keep this option continually in-stock.
- 6. Think beyond the produce section.** Secondary displays near the cereal aisle, dairy section or check-out position bananas as an impulse purchase or snack option.
- 7. Make first impressions count.** Keep your displays full of bright, beautiful, unblemished DOLE® Bananas to keep your shoppers satisfied.
- 8. Tap the power of partnership.** Look for relationship or cause alliances between suppliers and partners that connect with your shoppers whether entertainment brands, national health, wellness and hunger-relief groups or complementary CPG brands to garner more in-store attention.

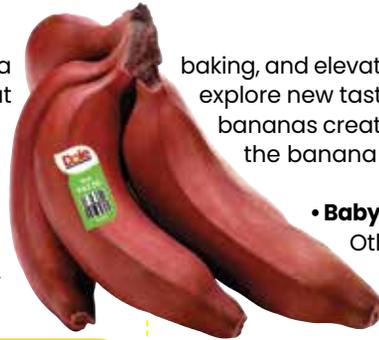


**DOLE FOOD COMPANY**  
 101 South Tryon Street  
 Charlotte, NC 28280  
 Dole.com

## BEYOND THE CAVENDISH: DISCOVER THE COLORFUL WORLD OF EXOTIC BANANAS

For decades, bananas have been a dependable staple in the produce aisle. But today's shoppers are looking for more than dependable. They want discovery. They want flavor. They want color. Dole's portfolio of exotic banana varieties delivers all three, giving retailers an easy way to energize the category and capture incremental sales.

• **Red Bananas Rule:** Leading the way in banana diversity are DOLE® Red Bananas, a standout that brings visual impact and a subtly sweet, berry-like flavor to the shelf. With their deep crimson peel and creamy texture, Reds offer consumers something unexpected yet approachable. They ripen to a soft, rich sweetness with hints of raspberry, making them ideal for snacking, smoothies,



baking, and elevated fruit displays. As shoppers continue to explore new tastes and Instagram-worthy produce, Red bananas create instant differentiation while reinforcing the banana set as dynamic, not static.

• **Baby Bananas, Burro Bananas and Manzanos:**

Other taste and texture experiences await discovery of new of taste and texture experiences. Baby bananas are petite, extra-sweet, and perfect for lunchboxes or premium snacking occasions. Manzanos, often called "apple bananas," bring a slightly tangy finish that appeals to adventurous eaters. Burro bananas offer a squared shape and lemony note that holds up beautifully in grilling and savory dishes.



• **Plantains:** A staple across Caribbean, Latin American, and African cuisines, plantains continue to gain traction as global flavors move further into mainstream North American kitchens.

Together, these varieties expand the category beyond a single SKU into a curated experience – encouraging trial, premium pricing opportunities and compelling secondary display options.

Dole's commitment to quality, responsible sourcing, and reliable supply ensures that retailers can introduce these specialty bananas with confidence. Because in today's produce department, growth doesn't always mean more of the same. It can mean adding a little color.



### HARNESS THE POWER OF MINECRAFT

Last year, Dole debuted a multiyear partnership with Minecraft, the world's most popular video game, to build healthier lifestyles through interactive play, education and fruit-fueled fun, block by block.

For 2026, the alliance enters an exciting new phase – and we're inviting our North American retailers to help us create even more excitement that increase banana appeal, consumption and sales. And this year we are inviting other fruits into the fold. We're already working with our partners to create compelling new displays and other activations that can transform the produce section into a destination for fun, health, creativity and increased sales!

*To bring the power of Minecraft into your store, contact your Dole sales rep.*



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# Beyond Cavendish



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

# Red Bananas

- Steady global growth driven by novelty and health-forward shoppers
- Differentiates your set and elevates the category
- Premium price point with strong shopper curiosity
- Encourages trial and trade-up behavior



**Bananas dominate produce, but differentiation drives growth. Expanding beyond Cavendish with premium and specialty varieties creates incremental revenue, builds basket value and positions your produce department as a destination.**

## STORYTELLING AT SHELF DRIVES CITRUS SUCCESS

Sunkist Growers continues to innovate at retail by combining premium citrus offerings with high-impact in-store storytelling. As a cooperative of multigenerational farmers, Sunkist brings unmatched authenticity to the produce department — and in 2026, that message is stronger than ever. With category growth in branded programs such as Cara Cara oranges and Sunkist Cali™ Mandarins, plus merchandising tools tailored to seasonal trends and shopper demand, Sunkist is helping retailers meet consumers where they are: seeking wellness, convenience, and story-led freshness.



### BEST MERCHANDISING TIPS

- Lead with lifestyle: Use signage to highlight citrus' role in snacking, immunity, and mood-boosting flavor — especially important to younger, health-conscious shoppers
- Build with story and stature: Layer bold bins with header cards that speak to flavor, origin, sustainability, and community impact
- Feature grower connection: The Grower Series bin and towers drives emotional engagement and reminds shoppers where their fruit comes from



- Think modular: Sunkist bins are designed for quick resets and secondary placements near wellness zones, checkout, or meal kit areas

### CATEGORY MANAGEMENT

Optimize pack mix and promotional cadence to meet seasonal demand and evolving shopper behavior. Branded programs such as Cara Cara and Mandarins continue to grow among Millennial and Gen Z consumers, with storytelling, convenience, and premium organics influencing assortment strategies.

- Branded lemon and specialty variety displays to boost seasonal trade-ups
- Grower Series bin and towers displays featuring the stories and portraits of Sunkist's family growers, creating a deeper emotional connection at point-of-sale
- Quarter bins are optimized for waterfall displays, great for high traffic placement and highlighting XL fruit
- Holiday Town™ 10-lb cartons for end-caps or grab-and-go citrus displays during key winter resets
- All bins are modular and built for in-store flexibility

### DISPLAY IDEAS

This year's display lineup features vibrant, color-forward bins designed to drive impulse and support variety differentiation across the citrus set. Retailers can choose from:

- "Snack with a Smile" Mandarin bins and NBCF Pink-Ribbon Cara Cara bins, both with header cards



**SUNKIST GROWERS**  
Headquarters:  
27770 Entertainment Drive  
Valencia, CA 91355  
Sunkist.com



SUNKIST CALI™ MANDARINS

# SEASONAL STAR

**78%**  
said Sunkist Cali™  
Mandarins were better  
than their current brand.

**92%**  
would recommend  
Sunkist Cali™  
Mandarins to a friend.

Stock up on the brand  
consumers prefer and drive  
mandarin category success.

Sunkist / Social Nature sampling - February 2025.  
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**Sunkist**  
FARMER OWNED SINCE 1893



A high-demand item in home cooking and the food industry, garlic promises even greater growth. The average American consumes close to two pounds a year and every garlic sale means the sale of additional items from produce and other areas of the store. Stores can capitalize on the garlic trend with focus on a few key areas:

**EFFECTIVE DISPLAYS**

- Make displays visible
- Bigger and nicer-looking heads of garlic on the shelf directly correlate to higher garlic sales; shoppers will purchase more if heads look especially attractive
- Build small secondary displays in other areas of the department and store
- Include a mix of whole bulbs, 5-bulb packaged garlic and jar garlic
- Include a few SKUs of organic



**CONVENIENCE AND VARIETY**

Shoppers want options! Offer a full range of garlic and complementary products including various processed and semi-processed forms, such as whole peeled garlic, diced garlic, and jarred products.

Quality garlic is available year-round with supplies from California, Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Spain and China. Maximize garlic sales by promoting a diversity of items including red garlic,

elephant garlic, peeled, packaged, braided and certified organic in addition to the standard bulk.

**SHOPPER COMMUNICATION**

- Call attention to the display with signage
- Highlight specialty items, such as elephant garlic, to spark consumer interest
- Promote health benefits:



Specialty garlic options spark shopper interest.

- fat-free, saturated fat-free, sodium-free, cholesterol-free
- Provide recipes and usage ideas

**PROMOTE THESE GARLIC ATTRIBUTES**

**Nutrient-dense flavor:** Garlic adds deep flavor to cooking while still providing essential nutrients and health benefits. Garlic is an easy, healthy way to give food great flavor.

**Versatility in cooking:** Garlic can be used from breakfast to dinner and throughout the day in any meal or snack. It can be sautéed, baked, roasted, or even eaten raw.

**Health benefits:** Garlic supports heart health and contains a host of essential nutrients including vitamin C, vitamin B6, manganese, and selenium. It is a healthy alternative to butter and seasonings.

**Decorative:** Braided garlic or loose garlic can be used to adorn holiday wreaths and other holiday decorations.



Attractively packaged and ready to be displayed, these bags can be custom packed.

**QUALITY FOCUS**

- Pay attention to the display; shoppers want quality.
- Keep it clean and dry; skins of garlic tend to shed with handling.
- Rotate frequently; fresh garlic sitting out for long periods will tend to dry out.
- Store garlic in a cool, well-ventilated place and keep dry.
- Do not mist garlic.

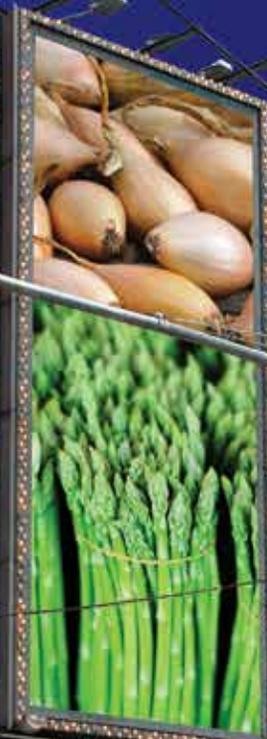
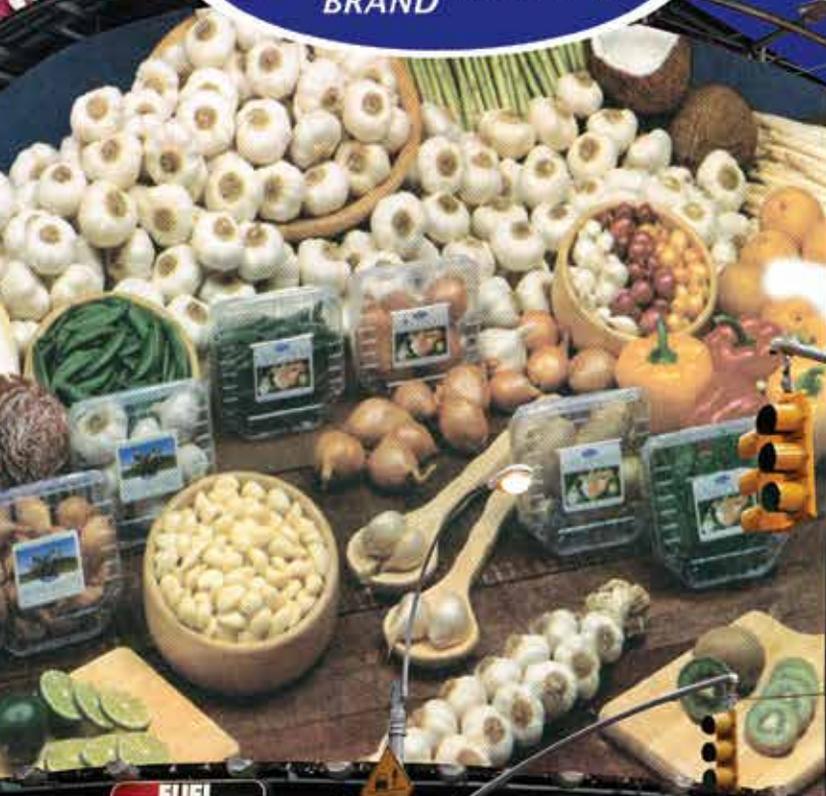


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Mangos continue to gain traction across U.S. produce departments, supported by expanding import volume and rising shopper familiarity. With dependable supply available year-round, retailers have the opportunity to drive display traffic and increase purchases with stronger mango sales.

Today's consumer expects flavor, convenience, and clear variety cues. When merchandised with intention, mangos deliver all three. Whether shoppers gravitate toward creamy and candy-flavored Champagne® mangos, large green-skinned slicing fruit, or ripe and ready-to-eat options, a well-built mango display encourages interest, a passion for something nutritious and great-tasting, and repeat purchases.



**Champagne Mangos: 4-Ct and 6-Ct Clams**

### UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S MANGO SHOPPER

Shoppers engage most when they can quickly identify their preferred flavor profile, size, and ripeness level.

- Offering a curated assortment—varietals, multiple sizes, bulk and packaged options—invites shoppers to mix, match, and explore.

- Providing fruit at different stages of ripeness also meets two core needs: “enjoy now” and “ripen at home.” This simple step reduces missed sales and foment customer satisfaction.

- Display-ready packaging further streamlines displays and improves presentation, with abundant, clean, and accessible arrangements that can also help educate consumers about the world's most popular fruit.

### YEAR-ROUND OPPORTUNITY

Available year-round, mangos are supported by steady import volume from Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, and other countries.

- Increased volume provides consistent promotional windows, even beyond traditional peaks.

- More supply deepens assortments, multi-price strategies, and stronger category positioning.

- Retailers have more resources (and supply) to build a quality mango culture that drives repeat purchases.



### MERCHANDISE INTENTIONALLY

- For more effective merchandising, build displays in high-traffic zones

- Build large and abundant displays that include bulk fruit, grab-bags, or display-ready box sale units

- Keep fruit accessible yet avoid excessive stacking which leads to damage and shrink

- Highlight varietal differences through signage or simple flavor descriptors

- Promote combinations or multiple-unit purchases by highlighting varieties, flavor, and size

- Do not mist or refrigerate mangos - follow supplier handling best practices

- Cross-merchandising remains one of the strongest levers for category growth

- Fresh-cut, seafood, poultry, meat, salsa kits, stone fruit, and even cocktail-friendly items all boost visibility and lift mango promotions

### FLAVOR STARTS IN THE FIELD

A quality mango program begins long before the fruit reaches the store. Ciruli Brothers follows nature-driven orchard practices—balanced pruning, natural bloom cycles, and careful harvest timing—to ensure fruit ripens fully on the tree. This results in consistently high brix, balanced acidity, and the fragrant, memorable flavor shoppers associate with a premium mango.

Uniform grading and display-ready packaging further ensures every box arrives market-ready, supporting strong sales and consumer satisfaction.

CIRULI BROTHERS™  
CHAMPAGNE®  
MANGO

*Sweeter  
by Nature*

...and nurtured  
to perfection!



We didn't create our favorite fruit. The right seed, soil, and climate did. But we make sure to pick, ship, and share them with the care that this silky smooth, deeply sweet superstar fruit deserves. Explore your golden opportunity to share Champagne® Mangos now: [ChampagneMango.com/Sweeter](https://ChampagneMango.com/Sweeter)

Look for our other  
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**REAL FOOD,  
SERVED FRESH.**

Fresh mushrooms continue to gain momentum as shoppers look for real ingredients that deliver big flavor, everyday versatility, and better-for-you meals. Mushrooms are a simple way to bring fresh, wholesome food to the table, perfect for today's shoppers who want meals that feel authentic, clean, and satisfying.

With rich umami flavor, strong cross-merchandising potential, and flexible usage across breakfast, lunch, dinner, and grilling, mushrooms help retailers inspire fresh meal ideas all year long. Giorgio makes it easy to position mushrooms as a fresh, craveable category destination that supports modern cooking and plant-forward lifestyles without sacrificing taste.



**RECOMMENDED DISPLAY IDEAS**

A successful mushroom program begins with ensuring the core varieties are always in stock, clearly displayed, and easy to shop. The strongest sets begin with dependable everyday staples and expand into premium and specialty varieties that encourage trade-up.

Core varieties to prioritize include:

- **White Mushrooms** (everyday cooking staple)
- **Baby Bella / Cremini Mushrooms** (strong flavor, meal versatility)
- **Portabella Mushrooms** (grilling and entrée occasions)
- **Shiitake Mushrooms** (stir-fry, soups, Asian-inspired dishes)
- **Oyster Mushrooms** (premium culinary appeal)

Secondary varieties such as Royal Trumpet, Maitake, and Beech mushrooms add visual interest and elevate the set for adventurous shoppers.



Marinated mushroom bowls



Sautéed mushroom and sundried tomato avocado toast

**MERCHANDISING TIPS**

Use clear signage or shelf tags to guide shoppers by use occasion—"Great for grilling," "Perfect for stir-fry," "Best for soups & sauces." This helps newer shoppers feel confident trying beyond basic white mushrooms.

To drive incremental sales, retailers can expand the set with convenient, on-trend solutions such as Savory Sauté Kits, bold seasoned Grill Packs, and appetizer-ready options like Stuffed

Jalapeños and Spicy Stuffed Mushrooms—all designed to meet shopper demand for flavor, heat, and convenience.

**CARE AND HANDLING**

Using Giorgio's CARE Program will maintain the best mushroom quality.

- **Cold:** the product to 34 degrees to provide maximum shelf life.
- **Avoid:** spray misters and over-stacking (three high maximum).
- **Rotate:** the product to keep the display case fresh.
- **Entice:** your customers by keeping the product attractive.

**CROSS MERCHANDISING OPPORTUNITIES**

Cross merchandising is one of the most effective ways to grow mushroom velocity and increase basket size. Place mushrooms near:

- steak, chicken, and burger displays
  - pasta, rice, and meal kits
  - onions, garlic, peppers, and herbs
  - grilling displays and seasonal vegetables
- Secondary displays near the meat department are especially effective when paired with flavorful, grill-ready options such as seasoned Grill Packs to encourage incremental purchases.

**SALES-DRIVING IDEA**

Build a "Meal Solutions" block within the mushroom set by grouping value-added items such as Grill Packs, Savory Sauté Kits, Stuffed Jalapeños, and Spicy Stuffed Mushrooms together to encourage trade-up and incremental basket rings.



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*Giorgio*  
America's Favorite Mushroom



# PERI & SONS FARMS

**AN EFFECTIVE ONION MERCHANDISING STRATEGY INCLUDES CREATING ATTRACTIVE AND INFORMATIVE DISPLAYS, FILLED WITH HIGH QUALITY, FLAVORFUL PRODUCE and cross-merchandising with complementary items for meal solutions.**



Include clean, accurate signage, including the variety, grower profile and locality to help inform and attract customers.

Consumers buy with the eye, so clean neat stacks of bright, colorful package varieties will get noticed and sell better.

Clean, decay-free onions should be placed, not dumped, with tops up and roots down in an abundant display that features more product than fixture.



**PREMIUM PRICED SEASONAL SWEET ONIONS, LIKE OUR SWEETIE SWEET™ WARRANT SPECIAL SIGNAGE AND PLACEMENT.**



**DISPLAY KITCHEN ESSENTIALS**

such as onion keepers, micro-cookers, knives and cutting boards in or near the onion display for impulse buys.

**INCLUDE ONIONS IN NUTRITION AND HEALTH PROMOTIONS,** highlighting their health benefits, and in seasonal, holiday, and special promotions.



**IF YOUR PRODUCE ISN'T FRESH AND FLAVORFUL, EVEN THE BEST MERCHANDISING PLANS WILL SUFFER.**

**LEARN MORE ABOUT PERI & SONS FARMS' FLAVOR ENHANCING STRATEGY**



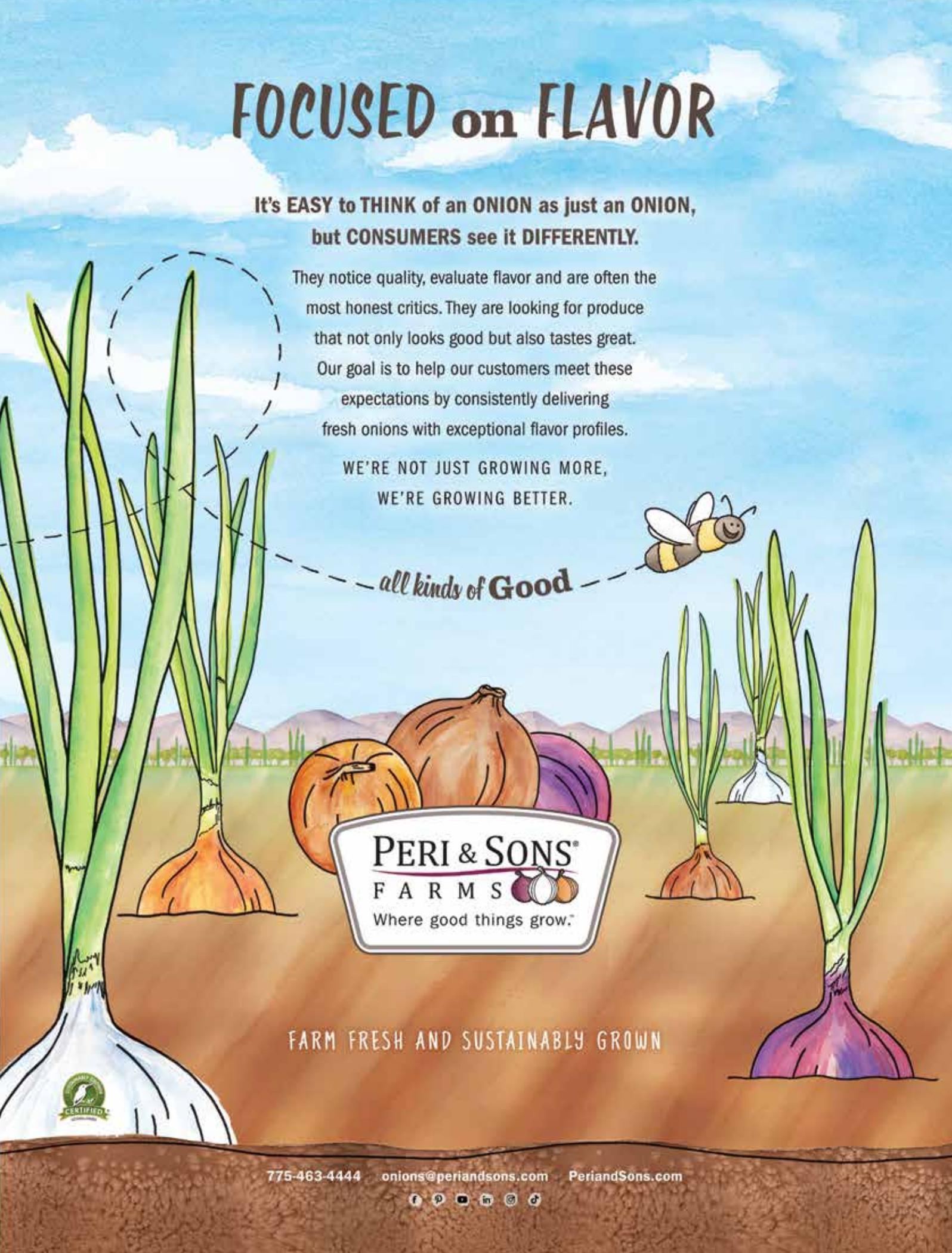
# FOCUSED on FLAVOR

It's **EASY** to **THINK** of an **ONION** as just an **ONION**,  
but **CONSUMERS** see it **DIFFERENTLY**.

They notice quality, evaluate flavor and are often the most honest critics. They are looking for produce that not only looks good but also tastes great. Our goal is to help our customers meet these expectations by consistently delivering fresh onions with exceptional flavor profiles.

**WE'RE NOT JUST GROWING MORE,  
WE'RE GROWING BETTER.**

*all kinds of Good*



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FARM FRESH AND SUSTAINABLY GROWN

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Pears offer a wide variety of flavor and exceptional eating that will delight many consumers. Not only do pears have numerous health benefits, they also offer a dynamic eating experience since they can be eaten fresh, in salads, cooked, or canned. Retailers can differentiate stores from their competitors based on the pears they offer.



**Build visible, color-block displays with signage**

### CREATE SALES-DRIVING DISPLAYS

- Treat pears as a seasonal category and merchandise close to apples for maximum velocity. Display in sight of apples or citrus depending on time of year.
- Pears should be part of a destination display in front with a four-foot display minimum.
- Organic and seasonal varieties can be promoted as in-and-out items either bulk or in bags.
- Use color breaks as well as bags (pears or apples) as breaks between varieties.
- Use suggestive selling with placement and cross-merchandising to inspire additional sales. Cross-merchandise with nuts and cheese/charcuterie focus.
- Breakfast is an additional promotion option for both kids and adults. Suggest

using with smoothies and in cereal or with yogurt.

### USE SIGNAGE TO SELL

- Utilize information on variety usage, locales or regions, grower stories, and how to pick a pear.
- Highlighting taste differences or nutritional benefits provide educational touchpoints on sales signs.
- Digital signs help minimize errors at retail.
- Large signs are most effective for promotions. Try for 11x17 or larger if possible.

### HANDLE WITH CARE

- The less handling, the better. Handle pears gently to reduce scuffs and marks on fruit.
- Pears ripen from inside out (like an avocado), so to check for ripeness, press lightly on the neck/top of the pear and when it yields to moderate

### APPEAL TO VALUED SHOPPERS

- Having an excellent pear program makes a retailer stand out in the marketplace.
- The pear shopper is a prized, loyal produce shopper. Courting pear shoppers by providing an attractive display, quality fruit, and superior eating experience will build repeat sales and loyalty.
- This fruit allows for increased sales opportunities if promoted and merchandised as key seasonal items.
- Bagged pears are a successful vehicle to move pears. Lil Snappers organic and conventional pears are a great promotional tool to drive sales in this category.

pressure, it's ready to eat. To accelerate ripening, place in a brown paper bag with a banana.

- Keeping a range of ripeness on the shelf will provide different timing options for customers. Ranges should include: Hard, Ripening, and Ripe.
- Rotate and cull each time a display is filled.
- Pears will hold pressure in cold temperatures including the home refrigerator. The ripening process kicks in at room temperature. For the best consumer eating experience, pears should be displayed at room temperature.
- Use conditioned pears and be consistent with labels to

ensure consistent handling, pressures, etc.

- Avoid storing pears near ethylene-producing fruits to prevent premature ripening.
- Verify quality once pears arrive at the store. Document any quality issues immediately and communicate these to growers.



**Add excitement to the department with seasonal promotions such as Happy Pears™**





THE BEST PEAR LOCALES IN THE WORLD.

# Choose Your Pear-fect Variety



Plan your pear season with Stemilt



## LIMES BUILT FOR VOLUME, DESIGNED FOR EVERYDAY USE

*A simple story about consistency, scale, and why limes never stop moving*

Every day, limes quietly find their way into grocery carts. Not because they carry the loudest signage or the deepest discounts, but because they are part of everyday cooking. Fish, avocados, drinks, tacos—limes always belong. In retail, that daily habit turns limes into a true volume category. At EV Produce, we don't treat limes as a seasonal opportunity. We treat them for what they are: a constant. A product that must be available week after week, in the right format, with consistent quality, and ready to move.

### WHY LIMES WORK AS A VOLUME CATEGORY

Limes don't appear for a few months and disappear the rest of the year. They sell steadily. Shoppers may not plan to buy them, but they expect to find them. That expectation is precisely what makes limes so reliable for retail: consistent rotation, predictable demand, and a strong connection to other fresh categories.

When limes are available and well presented, they simply do their job—supporting the performance of the entire produce department.



### WHERE LIMES PERFORM BEST IN-STORE

Limes don't need to take center stage. They perform best when they're easy to find and even easier to pick up. For this reason, most retailers place them within the citrus set, at hand level, and often near complementary items such as avocados.

When shoppers are already thinking about what they're going to cook, limes naturally become part of the decision. There's no need to push the sale.

### HANDLING THAT PROTECTS QUALITY

Behind every lime that looks good on the sales floor is proper handling. EV Produce recommends storing limes at an **optimal temperature of 45–48°F**, maintaining that range from the back-

room to the display.

These operational details make a meaningful difference: better appearance, longer shelf life, and reduced shrink.

### PACKAGING THAT ADAPTS TO HOW STORES OPERATE

Not all stores sell the same way, and lime programs shouldn't either. That's why EV Produce offers multiple packaging formats designed to meet different operational needs.

- Bulk options, such as 40lb and 10lb cartons, work

## LIMES EV PRODUCE

especially well in high-traffic stores and help streamline backroom operations.

- Packed formats, including 5lb and 2lb mesh bags, cater to convenience-driven shoppers and quick, grab-and-go purchases.

A flexible packaging program allows retailers to adjust their assortment without changing suppliers, keeping programs efficient and easy to manage.

### 52-WEEK AVAILABILITY

Limes are not an occasional item. Having 52-week availability, as offered by EV Produce, enables retailers to manage limes as a permanent category rather than a promotional one. For buyers, this translates into stable planning, fewer disruptions, and a dependable partner throughout the year.

### KEEP CONSISTENCY

Successful volume categories are not built on trends, but on consistency. With flexible packaging, clear handling guidelines, proven logistics, and year-round availability, EV Produce supports limes as a category retailers can rely on.

Limes may move quietly—but week after week, they keep the entire department moving.

### QUICK TIPS

- Limes sell best when the display looks full
- At room temperature, limes release more juice
- A touch of lime helps prevent cut fruit from oxidizing
- Consistency builds trust
- A reliable supplier simplifies the entire operation



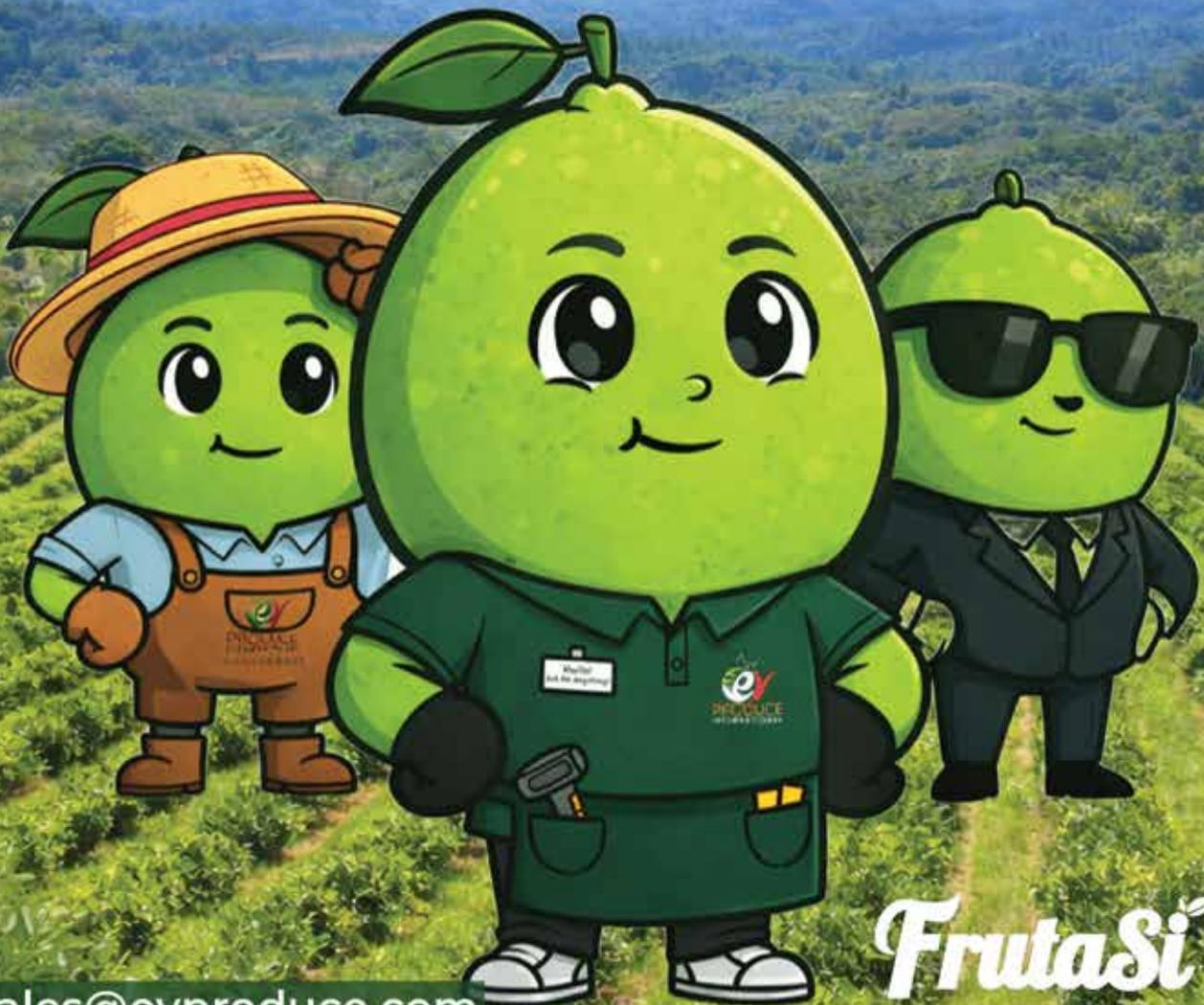
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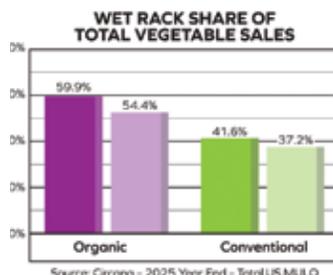
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**FrutaSi**  
Limes

The organic wet rack is the powerhouse destination for fresh organic produce sales. Data from Circana showed more than 50% of dollar and volume sales in 2025 spent by US retail shoppers on organic vegetables were selected from the wet rack. By comparison, sales of conventionally grown vegetables from the wet rack comprised roughly 42% of dollar sales and 37% volume sales of total conventional vegetable sales.



Retail sales from the organic wet rack were resilient last year with a 1% increase in dollar and volume sales, while conventional was flat. The retail average price per pound for items on the organic wet rack was flat in 2025 from the prior year, compared to pricing declines of -1% for total fresh vegetables. In 2024, organic produce penetration in total U.S. grew to 15.5%, up from 13.1% in



2013. Boost organic produce category growth by offering a wide variety of organic produce, investing in visually appealing shelf sets, and utilizing thoughtful merchandising strategies.

Mid-October through May is peak season at retail for the organic wet wall. Backyard gardens and local farmers' markets complement supply through the summer season. High volume periods are as follows:

- January begins the annual uptick in volume as consumers begin to think health and fitness
- Super Bowl, St. Patrick's Day, Easter, and Earth Day bring seasonal sales spikes in volume as households accommodate friends and family

- National Organic Harvest month in September is a time for retailers to connect with shoppers and help them discover the many benefits of fresh organic produce

- Thanksgiving sees the biggest spike in organic volume. Retailers should be well stocked across organic varieties to capture this opportunity

## ASSORTMENT

A well-rounded assortment balances core customers' favorites with specialty items that add interest and differentiation. Organic assortment should focus on these areas:

- *Growth Drivers:* Broccoli, Romaine, Kale, and Cilantro
- *Volume Builders:* Cauliflower, Green Onions, Red Radish, Beets, Carrots, and Cabbage
- *Differentiators:* Fennel, Herbs, Dandelion Greens, and Rainbow Chard
- *Assortment Enhancers:* Daikon Radish, Collard Greens, Baby Bok Choy, and Mustard Greens

## MERCHANDISING

Seventy percent of shoppers prefer retailers to display organic items in their own section.

- A variety of different vegetables and colors help create a sharp-looking wet rack

- Keep displays well-stocked and rotate product regularly

- Produce team members should be educated on the commodities displayed so they can educate consumers on usage and benefits

- Create visible product ID tags to highlight organic produce

## RETAIL EXECUTION

Retailers should develop a strategic promotion plan to capture high-volume weeks and year-round opportunities. Evaluate your shopper demographics to ensure the right product mix across stores. Implement signage that highlights organically grown produce.

Contact your Cal-Organic Farms sales representative for serving suggestions, recipes, and merchandising ideas to draw more shoppers to your organic vegetable set.

### Sources:

Circana, US MULO 52 Weeks ending December 31, 2025; Numerator; The Power of Produce 2021; IRI Advantage Annual Trends 2021 to 2017; Fresh Trends 2023; OTA Organic Market Report 2025.

## MESSAGING

- Organic vegetables should be displayed in their own section clearly labeled with signage and channel strips
- Use signage to tell shoppers about the farmers that grew the vegetables and provide nutritional information and ideas to prepare the items
- Communicate the sustainable practices and level of care required to produce organic vegetables
- Display signage featuring trusted farms to develop a connection between the shopper and the grower
- Provide shelf talkers with inspiring recipes and cross promotional offers
- QR codes to educate consumers



## CAL-ORGANIC FARMS

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# FROM THE PURPLE TAG TO CUTTING-EDGE CONVENIENCE



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Tomatoes are a staple offering in every fresh produce department thanks to their versatility and wide appeal. From bulk Beefsteak and Roma to specialty offerings, consumer demand remains high, with on-the-vine snacking tomatoes continuing to drive category growth year over year. Mastronardi Produce and its flagship SUNSET® brand continue to raise the standards for incredible flavor, innovation, and branding that stands out on shelf.

### DISPLAY TIPS

- Maximize impact by creating vibrant displays in high-traffic areas.
- Pair tomatoes with other items to make shopping by meal occasion simple and easy.
- Position specialty tomatoes such as Flavor Bombs® as snacks or snack pairings.
- Keep shelves and displays neatly stocked with fresh,



quality tomatoes to entice purchases, as bruising or other imperfections may deter shoppers.

- Use custom shipper bins to help tomato brands stand out in store and make it easy for consumers to find their favorite tomatoes.

### PROMOTIONAL TIPS

- Promote tomatoes during key seasonal and event moments, including spring and fall.
- Spring is a time of peak consumer demand for

fresh, flavorful tomatoes. Consumers are transitioning back to fresh produce after winter and looking for lighter, fresher meals and snacks. Outdoor cooking and easy meals are back, so focus on promoting tomatoes that make easy additions to outdoor cooking, sandwiches, and grilling occasions. Place displays near lettuce, burgers, or grilling sets, and cross-promote with basil, mozzarella, and BBQ items.



**Drive impulse purchases with snacking ideas**

and snack options remain important. Snacking tomatoes are perfect for lunch, while specialty tomatoes are a great addition to the comfort food rotation.

- Highlight through cross-merchandising and engaging displays. Positioning tomatoes near complementary items such as cheeses, dips, and charcuterie encourages consumers to think about snacking and entertaining, ultimately driving impulse purchases.

### MAXIMIZE TOMATO VARIETY

#### SUNSET® BOMBS® Tomatoes

The award-winning BOMBS® tomatoes on-the-vine have quickly become consumer favorites for their consistent quality, flavor, and freshness. Greenhouse grown and non-GMO, this bold lineup includes Flavor Bombs®, Sugar Bombs®, Bahama Bombs®, Lolli Bombs®, and Honey Bombs®.

#### SUNSET® Specialty Tomatoes

From beloved classics such as the Campari® brand tomato and Kumato®, to new favorites including the Secilia® tomato, these special tomatoes offer year-round reliability and exceptional flavor. Greenhouse grown and non-GMO.

#### SUNSET® Snacking Tomatoes

Each unique in flavor, shape, and color, the snacking line includes the popular Angel Sweet® variety, multi-colored Wild Wonders®, and Sprinkles® micro-tomatoes. Great for salads, apps, and snacking, there's a greenhouse grown, non-GMO snacking tomato for every occasion.



**Specialty tomatoes entice shoppers**

- Promote tomatoes in fall as easy lunch options for back-to-school and back to routine. As the weather cools, they're great additions to soups, sauces, and sheet-pan meals. Meals shift to comfort cooking while easy lunch

### CARE AND HANDLING

- Display tomatoes at room temperature. Refrigeration can alter tomato flavor and texture.
- Treat tomatoes with care to prevent bruising or other damage.



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Florida's proximity to Eastern markets makes delivering fresher produce with fewer transit days possible, meaning higher sell-through, better quality, and profitability for retailers.

PRODUCE BUSINESS/DOUG OHLEMEIER PHOTO

# Sunshine State Is Produce Dynamo

Florida's climate fortifies retail produce shelves during early spring.

BY DOUG OHLEMEIER

**F**ollowing long, dreary winters that leave consumers yearning for warmer sunny days, the Sunshine State makes its entrance into the world of fresh produce at the start of spring.

A distinctive climate of abundant sunshine, water and soil makes Florida a key retail spring fruit and vegetable supply source. Florida's growers can supply fresh produce earlier in the year than many other regions, affording many commodities earlier availability than from other regions.

"As the first state in season for strawberries, blueberries, sweet corn and watermelons, Florida is a leader in supplying fresh produce across the southeastern United States and beyond," says Susie McKinley, director of the Division of Marketing and Development for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), in Tallahassee, FL.

"This early-season advantage gives consumers access to high-quality produce throughout the year and allows retailers to promote fresh, domestic products in early spring.

"Florida produce is known for its great flavor and its unique

seasonal availability," McKinley adds. "By harvesting produce during the winter and spring months, Florida growers provide a reliable and diverse supply of fresh fruits and vegetables to retailers. Within a matter of days, Florida produce is picked, shipped, and on store shelves all along the East Coast."

## FIRST SIGN OF SPRING

An extended growing season makes the state one of the most important agricultural regions in the U.S. "Florida plays a major role in keeping our produce department strong during the winter-to-spring transition and is a meaningful part of our seasonal business," says Mike Roberts, vice president of produce operations, Harps Food Stores, Springdale, AR. "You simply can't beat a great Florida strawberry, and we have customers who look forward to them every year.

"We also see a lot of anticipation around spring Florida sweet corn, and Florida green beans are a dependable item for holiday meals when customers are focused on quality."

The arrival of Florida's spring produce signals the ending of the blah days of winter, says Jon Esformes, chief executive officer and operating partner of Pacific Tomato Growers Ltd., a Palmetto, FL, tomato grower.

"It's a wonderful bounty of longer days, bright sunshine and bright products. Whether it's squash, watermelon, cucumbers or tomatoes, this is American-grown fresh produce that we try to encourage our retailers and foodservice operators to really highlight



Fresh From Florida, a Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services marketing program, gives retailers a promotional edge, pairing in-store signage, advertising and digital support with consumer recognition to drive demand for Florida-grown produce during the peak spring season. PHOTO COURTESY FDACS

the fact that the country opens up in the spring," he says. "There's nothing like that first day of spring, where people say 'thank God, the winter's behind us.'"

Florida grows a large variety of fresh produce, including bell peppers, specialty peppers, eggplant, sweet corn, green beans, lettuce, potatoes, blueberries, strawberries, cantaloupe, oranges, tangerines and grapefruit.

"As spring unfolds across the United States, retailers look for dependable, high-quality produce that signals the start of warmer days and a shift in consumer buying habits," says Nichole Towell, senior director of marketing for Duda Farm Fresh Foods Inc., Oviedo, FL. "At the center of the seasonal transition is Florida sweet corn. Florida supplies the East Coast with sweet corn from November to May when other U.S. growing regions are too cold for sweet corn production."

### PRODUCE POWERHOUSE

A produce behemoth, Florida's 44,400 farms produce more than 300 commodities. In 2023, Florida ranked first in the U.S. in the value of production for sweet corn, watermelons, Valencia oranges, sugarcane and floriculture. The state is second in bell peppers, strawberries, field-grown tomatoes and non-Valencia oranges. Florida is third nationally in cabbage and grapefruit, according to FDACS.

Opening the first domestic window for the category, Florida growers harvest blueberries March through May, with the winter strawberry deal running through April, while watermelon ships April through July, with strong May and June volume. Sweet corn peaks March through May, with tomatoes, peppers, cabbage, cucumbers, eggplant, snap beans, potatoes, and leafy greens providing broad spring availability. Tropical fruits offer unique domestic flavors throughout the summer, as well.

"Outside of the leafy greens in Arizona, we are the only warm ground in the United States producing winter and early spring crop until it transitions north, so we are sort of the breadbasket, if you will, of the spring winter veg program," says Neil Mazal, purchasing

director for Lantana, FL-based East Coast Farms & Vegetables, which grows a variety of vegetables including hard squash. "California has some product coming out of the desert, but it's limited to a handful of items, and it's a lot of pepper and melons. But, we in Florida have a diverse product. We have diverse farming."

The sun helps shape produce variety.

"It's called the Sunshine State for a good reason: Florida's subtropical climate — with its warm temperatures, abundant rain and sandy soil — makes for ideal conditions to grow a diverse number of crops, but especially varieties of Florida citrus," says Shannon Shepp, executive director of the Florida Department of Citrus in Bartow, FL.

Through their crop availability, the state's growers prevent retailers from scrambling for product.

"Florida is one of the most important produce regions in the U.S. because it fills a critical supply window when most other growing regions aren't producing," says Elyse Lipman, chief executive officer of Lipman Family Farms, Immokalee, FL.

"Mild winters and plenty of sunshine keep the flow of fresh vegetables steady in winter and spring when fields and greenhouses elsewhere can't keep up. Florida's steady winter and spring production is a big reason why it's one of the nation's top vegetable states with a key role in the U.S. produce supply."

### NEIGHBORLY BENEFIT

Florida's proximity to major retailers' stores and distribution centers provides a hub for fresh fruits and vegetables for retailers in the Eastern, Midwestern, and Southern U.S. and other regions, supplying supermarkets with a competitive advantage, as well as ensuring faster deliveries and fresher products for customers.

"Florida produce is extremely important to Publix, as we have a strong commitment to supporting local growers," says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for the Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets. "Florida's spring fruits and vegetables are vital for Publix as they fill the gap between winter and summer harvests from other regions."

# That Little Logo... It's a Big Deal.



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Brous says items, such as tomatoes, strawberries, watermelon, bell peppers, cucumbers and sweet corn, are in high demand during spring. “Featuring Florida produce during this time helps drive traffic to stores and boosts overall produce department performance.”

“Florida is a critical part of the eastern U.S. fresh produce supply chain,” says Quentin Roe, president of Noble Worldwide Florida Citrus Sales, Winter Haven, FL. “Without Florida, the eastern U.S. would be forced to purchase all their winter and spring produce needs from other countries. Imagine a country that cannot feed itself. The United States needs Florida’s produce production for goodness and food security.”

The proximity aids cash-starved consumers during a tough economy. “In these times of higher costs, Florida’s proximity to major Eastern markets translates into savings and better performance at store level, which trickles down to the consumer,” says Nick Wishnatzki, public relations manager of Plant City, FL, berry grower and shipper Wish Farms.

“Shorter hauls mean lower delivered costs, enabling sharper retails and stronger margins. Faster transit also preserves freshness, reducing shrink and markdowns. The result is higher sell-through, better quality on arrival, quicker turns, and improved profitability for our retail partners.”

Vegetables from Florida ship fresher to stores, agrees Adam Lytch, regional manager for the Raleigh, NC-headquartered L&M Cos., with farming operations in Florida. “With fewer days on the road, there’s more freshness.”

“As a whole, we (Florida) are the late fall, winter and spring domestic vegetable capital,” Lytch says. “To fit those windows, production’s got to come out of Florida. With all the challenges on the import side, from the cost of ocean freight as well as freight from out West, I think it just puts that much more importance on the domestic part of production.”

Morton Williams Supermarkets, a 15-store metropolitan New York area chain based in Bronx, NY, relies on Florida spring produce.

“We depend on Florida product in the spring, especially before all the local deals start,” says Marc Goldman, produce director.

**BRAND RECOGNITION**

Florida produce can help retailers differentiate their stores. “Florida fruit isn’t a commodity anymore — it’s the result of intentional cultivation, premium taste goals, and modern grove management,” says Roe. “So, leading, quality-focused grocery chains often use Florida produce at the store perimeter to make a strong first impression and guide shoppers deeper into the store.”

Fresh From Florida, a FDACS marketing program, provides marketing muscle by encouraging retail supermarkets in 33 states and Washington, D.C., to promote Florida produce through advertising campaigns and trade support.

This spring, Fresh From Florida is running an advertising campaign, including TV, radio, podcasts, social media digital platforms and in-store promotions. To increase sales, FDACS encourages retailers to identify Florida produce in their weekly advertisements by featuring the “Fresh From Florida” logo alongside product images. Retailers also utilize displays, such as in-store signage and produce bins to promote Florida produce.

“Retailers sourcing Florida products benefit from faster deliveries that extend shelf life and support high-quality displays,” says FDACS’ McKinley. “These promotions bring greater aware-

**WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING**

- **“Florida produce is known for its great flavor and its unique seasonal availability. By harvesting produce during the winter and spring months, Florida growers provide a reliable and diverse supply of fresh fruits and vegetables to retailers.”**

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

- **“Without Florida, the Eastern U.S. would be forced to purchase all their winter and spring produce needs from other countries. Imagine a country that cannot feed itself. The United States needs Florida’s produce production for goodness and food security.”**

Quentin Roe, Noble Worldwide Florida Citrus Sales, Winter Haven, FL



- **“Whether it’s squash, watermelon, cucumbers or tomatoes, this is American-grown fresh produce that we try to encourage our retailers and foodservice operators to really highlight the fact that the country opens up in the spring. There’s nothing like that first day of spring, where people say ‘thank God, the winter’s behind us.’”**

Jon Esformes, Pacific Tomato Growers Ltd., Palmetto, FL

ness to our Florida growers, increasing their demand and sales. Leading retailers, such as Publix, The Fresh Market, The Winn-Dixie Company, ALDI, and Sprouts actively promote Florida produce through integrated campaigns that include in-store merchandising, weekly circulars and digital activations. Shoppers look for the ‘Fresh From Florida’ logo, and that recognition translates into real buying power.”

This year, Harps Food Stores partnered with Fresh from Florida. The chain of 87 stores in Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma plans to actively employ tools and promotional support to tell Florida’s story at store level.

“We’ve had a very positive experience promoting Florida spring produce, and we expect customers to respond well because Florida is a name they recognize and trust,” says Roberts. “People naturally think of sunshine and citrus when they hear ‘Florida,’ but there’s also a strong perception that Florida-grown produce is fresh, healthy and high quality — which helps the promotion connect quickly with shoppers.”

“Depending on their proximity to the source, many chains also market ‘locally grown’ or ‘Florida-grown’ to emphasize freshness and deep commitment to sourcing the best, while responsibly supporting local farmers,” says Noble’s Roe.

Publix highlights Florida produce through in-store signage, weekly ads and digital marketing campaigns.

“Publix’s ‘Fresh from Florida’ promotions help educate customers about seasonal availability and the benefits of buying local, resulting in increased customer awareness during the spring season,” says Brous.



Available only from April through August, Vidalia onions are grown exclusively in south Georgia's unique low-sulfur soils. They deliver a highly anticipated seasonal sales opportunity, giving retailers a powerful "first of the season" event.

PHOTO COURTESY SHUMAN FARMS

# Vidalias Spark Sweet Sales Surge

Limited-time availability and brand recognition make Vidalia onions a driver for retailers.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**T**oday, the produce world provides supermarket shoppers with a 365-day supply of fresh fruits and vegetables. Yet the industry still has some seasonal excitement up its sleeve: Vidalia sweet onions are one.

While sweet onions are now in the market year-round, Vidalias are available only from April to August. A registered trademark and legally defined by the Vidalia Onion Act of 1986, Vidalias are grown exclusively in a federally regulated 20-county region of southern Georgia where low-sulfur soils and climate produce a sweet, mild onion without the heat of other varieties.

And that Vidalia season is highly anticipated. "We still get the question from shoppers, 'When are Vidalia onions coming in?'" says Jeff Cady, vice president of produce and floral at Northeast Grocery, Inc., the Schenectady, NY-headquartered parent company of Market 32, Price Chopper and Tops Friendly Markets.

Cody says the anticipation is strongest among Gen X and Baby Boomers, as Millennials have grown up with sweet onions available year-round, "and I don't think that they know when the Vidalias begin or end. That said, the Vidalia Onion Committee does a great job marketing this onion."

## BY THE NUMBERS

- Last year, approximately 275 Georgia growers, nearly half of whom grow on 10 acres or less, planted 10,000 acres and harvested an estimated 125 million pounds of Vidalia onions.
- The crop's annual value is approximately \$150 million, representing about 40% of the total sweet onion market in the U.S.

Source: Georgia Department of Agriculture

## GEAR UP FOR VIDALIA SEASON

"Vidalia onions are the only vegetable with an official 'birthday,'" says Matthew Kulinski, deputy director of marketing for the Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA), in Atlanta, GA. "This is because they can't be sold until the annual pack date is set to ensure peak quality."

A panel appointed by the GDA meets in March to evaluate crop conditions and recommend the expected peak maturity. Based on that recommendation, the commissioner sets the official pack date, which has not been announced as of presstime.

"Historically, Vidalia onions are available from mid-April through August or early September, and we expect the 2026 season to follow a similar window," says Cliff Riner, vice president of ag production and grower relations for G&R Farms, in Glennville, GA.

In late January, John Shuman, president and chief executive officer of Shuman Farms, in Reidsville, GA, said their 2026 Vidalia crop was "coming along nicely."

A sunny, dry fall yielded exceptional seedling health on the plant beds, he explains, and that strong start triggered a great set during the transplant process, which resulted in a very good stand count. “We are pleased with the size, consistency, and health of the crop to date.”

Normal spring conditions “should translate to solid promotable volume and a good size range that works well for both retail and foodservice,” says Chelsea Page, director of marketing and compliance for the Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC), in Vidalia, GA.

Vidalias are distributed widely across the U.S., Canada, and select Caribbean markets, according to Troy Bland, chief executive officer of Bland Farms LLC, in Glennville, GA. “Consumption of Vidalia onions continues to grow, and they play an important role in lifting the overall onion category. It’s our hope to be able to make Vidalias the belle of the ball for six months of the year in the future.”

For wholesale buyers and supermarket retailers, Vidalia onions offer several key advantages, adds Steven Shuman, general manager and vice president of sales for G&R Farms, in Glennville, GA.

“The official pack date creates a natural seasonal launch that retailers can promote as a ‘first of the season’ event,” Shuman notes. “Their versatility allows them to be sold in bulk, bags, and secondary displays, supporting strong movement across multiple price points. Because consumers trust the Vidalia name, retailers often see repeat purchases and increased basket rings during the season.”

## WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **“Consumption of Vidalia onions continues to grow, and they play an important role in lifting the overall onion category. It’s our hope to be able to make Vidalias the belle of the ball for six months of the year in the future.”**



Troy Bland, Bland Farms LLC, Glennville, GA

- **“The official pack date creates a natural seasonal launch that retailers can promote as a ‘first of the season’ event.”**

Steven Shuman, G&R Farms, Glennville, GA

### ORGANICS — IN DEMAND

Organic Vidalia onions are more challenging to grow, says the VOC’s Page. Therefore they make up a relatively small portion of the overall crop, representing 3% to 5% of total acreage.

Demand for organic Vidalia onions remains steady and is largely driven by retail, according to Bland, who adds that approximately 6% of the grower’s crop is organic. “Shoppers who already seek organic

## Vidalias on the Menu: The Onion’s Versatility Appeals to Foodservice

For the fourth consecutive season, Shuman Farms is turning up the heat on foodservice by spotlighting Vidalia onions during its annual “Champagne of Onions” Restaurant Week in May.

The Reidsville, GA-based grower and marketer partners with a regional foodservice distributor to place Vidalia onions in the hands of leading Georgia chefs who feature the onions on limited-time menus built around the crop’s signature sweetness.

The promotion underscores how seamlessly Vidalia onions translate from the field to fine dining, giving operators a premium, seasonal ingredient that elevates everything from starters to center-of-the-plate entrées while generating consumer excitement during peak availability.

Murphy’s, which serves contemporary American comfort food in Atlanta’s Virginia-Highland neighborhood, has partnered with Shuman Farms on Restaurant Week for three years.

“Chef Matt McCarthy created two recurring fan favorites: Vidalia Onion Soup and a Vidalia Onion Flatbread,” says John Shuman, president and chief executive officer of Shuman Farms. “The flatbread is a fitting example of the Vidalia onion’s versatility. He uses Vidalias three diverse ways in one dish: fresh, blended into a spread, and infused into a honey that’s drizzled on top.”

The Vidalia’s versatility is central to its foodservice appeal.

“Their naturally sweet, mild flavor makes them easy to incorpo-



The signature Vidalia Onion Flatbread at Murphy’s in Atlanta, GA, showcases the onion three ways — fresh, blended into a spread and infused into honey — highlighting the versatility of Shuman Farms’ Vidalia onions during Atlanta Restaurant Week.

PHOTO COURTESY SHUMAN FARMS

rate across a wide range of dishes,” says Steven Shuman, general manager and vice president of sales for G&R Farms, in Glennville, GA.

Operators lean into classics such as caramelized toppings for burgers, French onion soup, and onion dip, while chefs are expanding usage into grilled onion steaks, relishes, jams, compound butters, infused honeys, pickled garnishes, and crispy toppings to layer flavor throughout a dish. Most recently, an extra creative use was in making French Onion Dip Danish, taking a nostalgic, savory flavor profile, and putting the sweet onions into a bakery item.

Seasonality requires advance planning. Vidalias are available only in spring and summer, and their higher moisture content compared to storage onions requires careful handling. Yet that defined window is also a strength.

“Vidalia onions are a great fit for foodservice, especially as a seasonal menu feature,” says

Chelsea Page, director of marketing and compliance for the Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC), in Vidalia, GA. “The biggest challenge is timing, but that’s also part of the appeal.”

Promotion strategies are straightforward.

“The simplest and most effective way for operators to promote Vidalia onions is to name them on the menu and position them as a limited-time feature,” says Page. “When servers and staff can talk about the sweetness and where it comes from, it resonates with guests.”

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produce respond well to Vidalias, and the organic option allows retailers to extend the season's appeal while meeting expectations for flavor and sweetness within the organic set."

At G&R Farms, about 10% of its on-ion production is currently organic, and that share continues to grow as demand increases.

"Organic onion production requires careful management and planning," says Shuman. "Still, demand is consistent and long-term, particularly from retailers seeking to offer both conventional and organic Vidalia options throughout the season."

**SELL MORE IN-STORE**

Eye-catching spillover displays of Vidalia onions are popular in season at Robért Fresh Market and Lakeview Grocery, an eight-store chain based in New Orleans, LA. "We'll build the display in a prime location," says Terry Esteve, produce and floral director.

"Because of the incredible recognition Vidalia onions have, this allows an opportu-

nity for retailers to capture additional sales if displayed properly and signed effectively," says Lisa Fetterhoff, director of operations and Vidalia commodity manager at Keystone Fruit Marketing, in Greencastle, PA, which offers Vidalias in 40-pound colossal and jumbo cartons, as well as all consumer bags.

G&R's Farms' Shuman suggests several effective cross-merchandising examples: a grilling display pairing Vidalia onions with ground beef, burger buns and condiments, supported by simple recipe ideas; a fresh meal solution set with Vidalias alongside tomatoes, cucumbers, avocados, and herbs for salads and salsas; or a comfort-food display featuring Vidalias with potatoes, broth, and cheese to inspire onion soups and roasted side dishes.

Shuman Farms offers its retailer partners a range of marketing resources, including social media toolkits, in-store signage, high-graphic display bins, merchandising tips for produce managers and merchandisers, and cross-promotional programs. These resources are designed to educate



Strategic merchandising — from bulk displays to cross-promotions with grilling, salad and soup ingredients — helps retailers maximize Vidalia onion season. *PRODUCE BUSINESS/AIMEE TENZEK PHOTO*

consumers about Vidalias' versatility and ease of use in everyday meals, as well as their unique flavor profile and origin story.

**TURN LIMITED TIME AVAILABILITY INTO ACTION**

Retailers gain support and resources to promote Vidalia onions from local growers, state-based, and marketing order-entrusted organizations.

"We use close collaboration between our sales and marketing teams to provide retailers with the support they need to push programs successfully," says Bland Farms' Bland. "This season, our marketing and promotional support includes a retail marketing toolkit with ready-to-use assets such as social content, digital ads, signage, and promotional messaging that retailers can deploy across their own channels."

The Georgia Grown program helps support the Vidalia season through public relations, seasonal storytelling, and promotions that highlight Georgia farmers and the start of spring cooking.

"This year's promotional theme centers on building seasonal excitement and showcasing the ultimate grilling combination: premium Certified Angus Beef paired with the unmistakable sweetness of Vidalia Sweet Onions. Together, we're promoting complete, flavor-forward meal solutions that inspire shoppers and elevate spring and summer menus," says the VOC's Page.

Through coordinated digital campaigns, recipe-driven storytelling, and seasonal marketing support, the collaboration is designed to increase visibility, encourage cross-merchandising, and drive larger basket rings during peak demand.

**PB**





Fluctuating freight rates, tightening capacity and ongoing labor challenges continue to reshape the produce transportation industry, as shippers and carriers work to keep fresh fruits and vegetables moving. ADOBE STOCK PHOTO

# Produce Transportation: Uncertain Miles Ahead

Tight capacity, labor strains and fraud impacting rates.

BY MIKE DUFF

**T**he produce transportation sector remains unsettled as broader economic pressures continue to influence the market. Freight rates are still adjusting, as the industry searches for a sustainable balance — one that keeps shipping costs manageable for produce companies while ensuring carriers can operate profitably.

Overall trucking activity in the United States increased slightly in December, according to the Washington, D.C.-based American Trucking Associations' (ATA) latest figures, but volumes remained low after significant declines in late summer/early autumn. Truck freight tonnage increased 0.4% after rising 0.2% in November, according to the ATA's advanced seasonally adjusted For-Hire Truck Tonnage Index.

"Despite two consecutive gains, tonnage remains at low levels as the freight metric contracted a total of 2.7% in September and October," says ATA Chief Economist Bob Costello.

"Soft manufacturing and construction activity are continuing to suppress freight levels, as they did for much of last year," Costello

reports. "For 2025 in total, tonnage rose just 0.1% over the 2024 average, although it was the first annual gain since 2022."

## OVERCAPACITY ENDING?

"However, truck freight tonnage in January was down 1.3% from the 2025 high point in August," Costello notes. "The trucking recovery story is more of a supply-side one with those motor carriers remaining benefiting from reduced overall capacity."

In the produce sector transportation, Fred Plotsky, president of Cool Runnings, Kenosha, WI, says business in general has been flat.

"We do a lot of business that we've always done," he says. "People are constantly trying to watch costs, but as we call around as a truck broker, the market has tightened. Carriers have gone out of business because the rates were low. They're still below cost, but carriers are demanding rates where they could make a living. The customers are paying it on a tight spot rate."

Plotsky says with more drivers available post-holiday, there has been pressure on rates, as carriers continue looking for a better payday.

Ben Batten of Allen Lund, La Cañada, CA, says the year started as is common, with bids coming in from shippers, so the company could get better and more accurate pricing than when hedging on 12-month bids.

The rapid purchasing of trucks that came during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent removal of those vehicles and drivers



Labor shortages — from long-haul to experienced drivers familiar with multi-stop produce loads — remain a challenge for transportation within the fresh produce industry.

PHOTO COURTESY JOHN VENA

from the scene when rates tumbled has processed through the market to some degree.

“We’ve been in the longest trough of overcapacity we’ve seen in a long time,” says Batten. “That happened in ’23 and ’24. I think we found the bottom a while back in ’25, and that started to creep back up, as far as capacity tightening up a little bit. Q4 of ’25 was the tightest of all quarters in ’25.”

He says typically, the first two weeks out of January were also tight across the country, due to the holidays and weather events. “Drivers, and a lot more foreign drivers, tend to want to take off around New Year’s. That takes capacity out of the market.”

#### **A CERTAIN UNCERTAINTY**

He says changes in how states are responding to developments with non-domicile commercial driver’s licenses are also having an effect. Some states are doing more enforcement of the associated rules, while others are not as strict.

“We’re expecting, probably, moderate increases in freight rates in ’26 compared to ’25,” says Batten.

Despite the ups and downs, an underlying issue remains: Drivers are not abundant.

“There’s been a driver shortage for so long,” says Batten. “If the market gets better, we’re going to see more drivers come into it like we did in ’21 and ’22. But if it stays tough to make money, it will be tough to get drivers. Carriers simply aren’t buying trucks and putting drivers in the seats, at least the small guys.”

Paul Kazan, president at Target Interstate Systems, Bronx, NY, says labor is a long-term problem within the produce transportation system. “When it comes to trucking and logistics in the produce business, we’ll be seeing a supply side issue, where now, demand is strong, but rates have come up because of lack of transportation.”

Kazan notes issues related to immigration enforcement and rules about English language fluency are having an effect, as some truckers are avoiding jobs that involve travel to border crossings or their vicinity, through which a lot of produce flows. In a similar vein, many truckers are avoiding states that are more strictly enforcing English-language fluency requirements. In both cases, driver availability and routing may be affected.

“A lot of trucks have come off the road,” says Plotsky. “So, that has led to higher pricing, but not from greater demand.”

What’s making things more difficult is that without a consistent pool of labor in produce transportation, the ability to find drivers with knowledge of how to handle produce loads, especially in multi-pickup runs, becomes more challenging.

Batten says that drivers refusing travel to certain regions can cause disruption.

“Florida is a good example of that,” he says. “Typically, Florida’s got a very busy season in the spring and early summer. Outside of that, capacity’s plentiful. There have been times, even this fall and winter, when it’s typically never a problem, when it’s tight down there for trucks. A lot of those drivers that are non-domiciled, I know, are avoiding states like Florida and Texas.”



Transportation is a market in cautious transition. The bottom line: Freight demand has steadied after pandemic-era swings, but excess capacity and softer consumer spending have kept rates under pressure. PHOTO COURTESY FRESH TEXAS

### AI ON THE SCENE

There is growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in transportation, a sector that has been able to make improvements in efficiency using technology. Still, the impact is limited at this time, although that's changing.

"Allen Lund Co. is fully embracing AI, but we're improving manual processes like inbound email traffic and scheduling appointments, things like that, to be more efficient," says Batten. "We believe, and I think a lot of people will agree with this, especially in produce, business is built on relationships. So, we don't want to lose that, but we do want to embrace AI, and that's been huge for the last year for us. We've spent a lot of time on that."

When it comes to AI, Plotsky says he is looking at AI for "lead generation on customers, carriers and just some helpful tips."

He maintains that, although AI can help make some processes more efficient, experience is critical in produce transportation, and technology can't replace a driver who understands what's important in moving fresh fruits and vegetables.

### CONFRONTING CRIME

Batten says one of the biggest developments over the past year or two has been a focus on carrier selection and qualification, especially in the face of fraud, as criminals find new ways to target the transportation sector.

"It's been a massive topic in the industry," says Batten. "They're getting very good at it. So, there have been some third-party companies that have come to market, and a lot of brokerages and carriers are working to verify that the carrier is actually who they say they are, and the truck is really where it's at, using more than just a driver's cell phone tracking. It's getting a lot deeper than that. We're getting more selective in the partners we move freight with."

Batten says technology and processes that help the transportation sector deal with fraud would be welcome, but technology alone isn't going to help address the challenge fraud creates. He would like to see better cooperation across the supply chain when dealing with criminals who are targeting the transportation sector.

## WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"Definitely, AI is running strong right now, and in transportation for sure!"**

Ben Batten, Allen Lund, La Cañada, CA

- **"People are constantly trying to watch costs, but as we call around as a truck broker, the market has tightened. Carriers have gone out of business because the rates were low!"**

Fred Plotsky, Cool Running's, Kenosha, WI

"If we're in contracts with a produce company in Nogales to take it wherever, we have to have better cooperation with that place in Nogales, that they're checking the credentials, this is the driver, this is the truck and trailer, then this is his license and all," he says. "If we can do that, we can cut down on a lot of fraud. The problem is, a lot of times we're talking with someone who's on a dock and working for minimum wage."

Unless workers are encouraged to help out, criminal activity, such as double brokering (the practice of passing loads to unauthorized carriers who will work for less money than the contract stipulates, with the fraudster pocketing the difference), is more likely.

"That's the missing link right now," says Batten.

### BASIC COSTS

When it comes to fuel, Batten anticipates some lower prices, but it's hard to say anything definitive given the political developments that affect the oil sector. Although lower, the cost is at a higher price than the company is getting on a fuel surcharge.

Plotsky says freight rates have remained a bit elevated lately, at the same time, fuel prices are down. That may help keep trucks on the road. "It's definitely helped the bottom line of carriers." **PB**



Organic salad blends and kits offer convenience, new flavors and sustainable packaging innovations that keep the category fresh.

PHOTO COURTESY NEW SEASONS MARKET

# Organic Salad Blends Offer Flavor Innovation, Wellness

Consumer demand for organic greens and meal-ready kits continues to climb.

BY K.O. MORGAN

**B**usy lifestyles combined with a desire to eat more healthily have seen an explosion in organic salad blend choices in the produce department. “Organic salad kits remain a bright spot in the category,” says Fabian Pereira, vice president marketing, innovation and international at Fresh Express Inc., Windermere, FL. “Industry data continues to show strong momentum, with kits representing the largest segment within value-added salads. In fact, salad kits are purchased by more than 67 million households, and trip frequency has increased over the past year as shoppers look for time-saving value.”

The popularity of organic salad blends is due to health-conscious consumers increasingly seeking convenience without compromise.

“They want clean-label products that support their wellness goals, while fitting into their busy lifestyles,” says Georgie Maddock, vice president of sales and marketing, Hippo Harvest, Pescadero, CA. “We find that our USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) organic certified, greenhouse-grown salads meet this demand by delivering ready-to-eat freshness with no washing required.”

“As more consumers turn to functional health and prioritize whole, healthy fresh foods, our fresh organic salad blends provide tremendous value,” says Jenny Panziera, director of product, organic salad, and Earthbound Farm Organic, the organic branch of Taylor Farms, Salinas, CA. “As a result, we are seeing an acceleration of growth in organic salad blend sales.”

Shoppers also want salads that taste good. “Salad kits continue to be popular choices, especially with customers seeking a higher level of convenience and restaurant-like taste,” says Chris Harris, director of produce and floral at New Seasons Market in Portland, OR. “New flavor combinations are fueling growth, but classics like Caesar are still the best sellers for us. Customers appear to be moving more toward lettuce-based kits, although chopped kits continue to sell consistently as well.”

## WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **“Organic shoppers are especially sensitive to visual freshness, so having clean shelves, tight rotations, and full facings make a disproportionate difference.”**

Fabian Pereira, Fresh Express, Inc., Windermere, FL

- **“We’ve seen consistently strong demand for two products in particular — spinach and arugula.”**

Kate Weiler Rose, Olivia’s Organics, Chelsea, MA

“Organic salad blends like spinach, romaine, arugula, and spring mix are our best sellers,” adds Maria Brous, director of communications at Publix, Lakeland, FL.

Pereira, of Fresh Express, says shoppers are gravitating toward “clean and simple” blends that have fewer ingredients, recognizable greens, and no “confusing or unfamiliar mixes.”

“There’s also a growing interest in ‘better-for-you’ blends that highlight power greens, like kale, spinach and arugula, as well as fiber-forward or baby leaf blends that offer texture and flavor without the extra prep.”

Pereira says January is typically the strongest period for organic salad blends and kits, as shoppers focus on healthier eating. “Spring and summer also perform well, thanks to grilling and entertaining occasions. Retailers should lean into wellness messaging early in the year, tie in the convenience of salad blends and kits with grilling during summer, and promote the convenience of blends and kits for school lunches.”

### KEEP THE TASTE BUDS POPPING

Organic salad blends and kits continue to show consistent growth as customers seek convenient, healthy and sustainable choices. Baby spinach and mixed greens consistently sell well, but spicier greens, like arugula and salad mixes with crunchier items, are growing in popularity thanks to consumer demand for variety.

“Trends and preferences ebb and flow in organic products. But we’ve seen consistently strong demand for two products in particular — spinach and arugula,” says Kate Weiler Rose, director of marketing, Olivia’s Organics, a brand of State Garden in Chelsea, MA.

“Spinach offers exceptional health benefits, so anyone looking to add nutrients to a smoothie or recipe is going to keep spinach in the fridge. Arugula is healthy, too, but offers that versatility people are looking for in greens. Its peppery flavor makes a great simple salad base, but it also goes well on sandwiches and in other recipes and can add a pop of color to any plate.”

“Spinach remains the primary driver in the organic salad blend category, due to its health benefits, flavor and versatility,” agrees Panziera. “Earthbound Farm recently expanded its spinach line to deliver a better consumer experience. Our chopped spinach, for example, offers an easy way for shoppers to enjoy organic spinach in any meal.”

According to Weiler Rose, consumer demand for salad kits and blends with crunch are increasingly a popular choice. “In salad kits, that can translate to a crunch add-in, such as croutons or sunflower seeds. But the need to add ingredients to satisfy that crunch craving is unnecessary when you have fresh, high-quality greens with crunchy texture.”

This demand for crunch led Misionero of Gonzales, CA, to introduce two new blends — Organic Crispy Green Harvest and



Whether merchandised with conventional options or in a dedicated organic set, signage and displays help organic salad blends stand out. *PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO*

Organic Crispy Green & Red Harvest. “These field-grown options deliver the fresh flavor and texture shoppers expect at a price that makes healthy eating accessible,” says Hana Mohsin, national sales manager. “The blends, designed for versatility across salads, sandwiches and bowls, provide dependable, everyday performance that supports repeat purchases.”

Maddock of Hippo Harvest says a barrier to trial and overall liking is bitterness. “Our organic greenhouse-grown products, such as our Crispy Leaf, have been a huge hit with families because of its fresh, mild flavor that kids enjoy, making it an easy way to introduce children to salad. We’re also watching the growing popularity of Butterleaf varieties with interest.”

According to Pereira of Fresh Express, flavor trends in salad kits stood out in 2025: Farmhouse Ranch, Cherry Bacon Cheddar and Truffle; and Mediterranean, Orange Sesame and Asian-style profiles. However, core staples, such as spinach and arugula, remain the most popular, despite new taste trends.

### PACKAGING THAT REFLECTS SUSTAINABILITY

Consumers increasingly demand packaging that is environmentally friendly. “New packaging innovations are emerging across the organic salad blend and salad kit categories, with strong emphasis on recyclability and sustainability,” explains Mohsin. “Many suppliers are transitioning to recyclable mono-material films, rPET trays, and lidding films designed to keep the entire package recyclable through curbside systems, while also extending shelf life.”

Earthbound Farm has been on a 40-plus-year journey delivering more sustainable and convenient packaging options. “We’ve introduced fiber-based trays for organic salad blends and kits that reduce plastic by more than 88%,” says Julio Silva, senior product manager, organic salads. “The feedback and sales performances from consumers have been fantastic.”

Olivia’s Organics is rolling out new items with a resealable top, which reduces plastic use by 25%. “There are also some interesting new developments with fiber trays, which we’re piloting and testing now,” adds Weiler Rose. “And we source all of our packaging from a local partner in Massachusetts, minimizing transportation miles and supporting our regional economy.”

### PUSHING ORGANIC SALAD BLENDS

Consumer confusion can hurt sales of organic salad blends and kits, as claims, such as “pesticide-free” or “grown indoors,” can be mistaken for organic, even though standards are often different.



Organic salad consumers demand packaging that is environmentally friendly, and companies are responding. Earthbound Farm, Salinas, CA, recently introduced fiber-based trays for organic salad blends and kits that reduce plastic by more than 88%. *PRODUCE BUSINESS/AIMEE TENZEK PHOTO*

“Certified Organic is the only designation that is federally regulated, audited and verified from seed to shelf,” says Weiler Rose. “Many greenhouse brands have contributed to this confusion by emphasizing what they don’t use, instead of whether they meet full organic certification requirements. Retailers play an important role here — clearly calling out certified organic products helps shoppers quickly identify what they’re looking for so that they can make informed choices with confidence.”

Making it easier for shoppers is imperative when pushing organic salad blends and kits. “It’s important for retailers and suppliers to work together to keep salads on top in consumers’ minds, helping health-conscious shoppers find what they’re looking for while introducing them to new brands and products that showcase how vibrant and modern the category has become,” says Maddock.

Marketing efforts that focus on meal solutions and education, while highlighting a “just add protein” positioning, and using QR codes or on-pack storytelling that communicates sourcing and farming practices, can also increase sales. “Testing limited-time flavors to spark interest or digital offers tied to retailer loyalty programs are also becoming ways to drive trial without eroding the organic premium,” adds Pereira of Fresh Express.

“Clear schematics, grouping items properly, and ensuring top sellers are well represented are critical to packaged salad merchandising,” says Harris of New Seasons Market. “Regular promotions in published advertisements, online and in-store, also drive interest in the category.”

Brous says Publix likes to advertise the salads with other complementary organic items, like tomatoes, avocados, onions and cucumbers.

Hippo Harvest has had success with in-store demonstrations. “Consumers are delighted to sample fresh salads, and it generates immediate trial and incremental purchases,” says Maddock. “Off-shelf features are another proven incremental revenue.”

**DISPLAYS THAT WORK**

How organic salad blends and kits are displayed can also push sales. “At Publix, organic and conventional salad blends are displayed side by side to give customers a destination area so they don’t have to search for them,” says Brous.

Olivia’s Organics’ Weiler Rose also believes shoppers appreciate the ability to compare conventional and organic salad blends when placed side by side. “Retailers can use signage to make it easy for consumers to make that comparison, understand the benefits of organic beyond what’s on the packages, and make purchases based on their individual needs.”

Pereira notes, however, other retailers see success when organics are treated as a destination — “clearly blocked, well signed, and easy to shop.”

New Seasons Market displays organic separate from conventional blends and kits “so customers can clearly understand their choices and feel confident they are getting what they want,” says Harris. “We also reset our salad category on a quarterly basis to take advantage of sales trends, introduce new items, and stay seasonally relevant, without creating disruption for our customers.”

Maddock agrees. “We see consumer expectation for separate organic sections, as dedicated shoppers know where to find their preferred products. However, co-location can work well for those retailers looking to encourage conventional buyers to trade up. This is where clear signage for organic identification is especially important.”

Pereira notes secondary placements can be effective, especially with meal-solution displays that pair organic salad blends with cooked proteins, deli items or salad toppers. “Above all, execution matters. Organic shoppers are especially sensitive to visual freshness, so having clean shelves, tight rotations, and full facings make a disproportionate difference.”



The Sooo Cali, a hot dog in a bun with California-grown avocado in season, plus tomato, fried onions, and a spicy basil aioli, is served at Dog Haus, a fast-casual hot dog concept founded in Pasadena, CA, with 50-plus locations. PHOTO COURTESY CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

# Produce is Transforming the QSR Menu

Healthier menus drive a new era of quick service restaurant dining.

BY STEVEN MAXWELL

**T**o most North American consumers, the concept of Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) within the foodservice segment signifies burgers, chicken or other hot protein foods bought at drive-throughs or ordered online. For an increasing number of people, however, this concept increasingly incorporates healthy-eating options, including those featuring fresh fruits and vegetables.

For retailers and producers alike, this phenomenon represents an opportunity to offer an alternative to ultra-processed products that are now associated with a growing number of health concerns.

Maeve Webster, president of Arlington, VT-based food industry consultancy Menu Matters, believes there are limitless possibilities to introduce new varieties of familiar produce to the QSR segment, spotlighting new colors, flavors and textures.

"I think this is particularly true with new varieties that enhance or expand on functional benefits or improved taste, texture, visual ap-

peal," she says. "QSRs can then leverage these unique new varieties in their innovation and messaging."

However, given mounting concern surrounding ultra-processed foods, seed oils, and unfamiliar ingredients, Menu Matters' vice president, Mike Kostyo, argues that what consumers seek most of all right now are options they can trust.

"Regardless of your own positions or feelings, at the end of the day, consumers just want food they can feel good about and trust, which is obviously an opportunity for produce," he says. "These are simple ingredients that consumers feel good about eating."

Kostyo believes there is a real opportunity for produce companies to work with QSRs to replace non-fresh ingredients and dishes with a trusted, fresh option. By carrying that messaging through to product launch, showcasing videos of farmers, and chefs preparing fresh fruits and vegetables, he says this option can really resonate with consumers.

## WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **“We’re seeing continued interest in innovation within the QSR segment. Operators are looking for ways to elevate traditional favorites with unique seasonings, formats, and loaded or shareable potato dishes.”**

Jamie Quinno Bowen, Idaho Potato Commission, Eagle, ID

- **“Right now, you have customers coming in, ordering from a kiosk, picking up food from a cubby, and sitting and watching TikTok on their phone while they eat. The food becomes almost secondary.”**

Mike Kostyo, Menu Matters, Arlington, VT

### A SEGMENT TO WATCH

According to Stephanie Bazan, senior vice president for commercial strategy & execution at Irving, TX-based Avocados From Mexico, Fast Casual is a segment to watch, with avocado penetration at 64%, equivalent to a 12% growth over the past 12 years.

Despite the upward trend, Bazan believes there is still room for further growth, highlighting the potential of products, such as guacamole and avocado toast. “Datassential projects a 42% increase in menu penetration for avocado toast over the next four years, proving just how much potential is out there,” she says.

To help operators explore these opportunities and overcome barriers — like the perception that avocados don’t belong on certain menus — the organization offers hands-on training and education through its free Avocado University program.

According to Terry Splane, vice president of marketing at the Irvine, CA-based California Avocado Commission (CAC), fast-casual and quick-serve restaurants are an essential growth engine for the California avocado category.

“They introduce millions of guests to avocado applications beyond guacamole and keep avocados top-of-mind with limited-time offers (LTOs) and menu rotations,” he says. “CAC’s marketing mix has long included customized foodservice programs alongside retail, reflecting the segment’s strategic importance, especially during spring-summer peak season when promotable volumes are highest.”

With a strong 2025 seasonal yield of approximately 325 million pounds, Splane says engagement with national and regional chains expanded in 2025 in step with the larger crop and extended promotable windows. A similar forecast of around 320 million pounds for 2026 is expected to continue the trend.

The CAC supports foodservice partners during the California avocado peak season (spring-summer) with targeted advertising, PR and in-store/menu activation, with a focus on local and sustainable practices in California across fast-casual/QSR digital channels.

### PRODUCE STRENGTHENING QSR

In a similar vein, Jamie Quinno Bowen, director of marketing for the Eagle, ID-headquartered Idaho Potato Commission, says QSR remains an important channel for Idaho potatoes, both fresh and processed. “Operators appreciate the quality, consistency, and performance that Idaho potatoes deliver across a range of menu applications,” she says.



Wonderful Citrus, Los Angeles, CA, introduced its Seedless Lemons in 2019. No pesky seeds or prep work means they can be easily integrated into dishes to add color and flavor, with no fat, cholesterol or sodium. PHOTO COURTESY WONDERFUL CO.

“We’re seeing continued interest in innovation within the QSR segment. Operators are looking for ways to elevate traditional favorites with unique seasonings, formats, and loaded or shareable potato dishes. There’s also growing momentum around menu storytelling, where highlighting Idaho potatoes helps operators emphasize quality and origin, something guests increasingly respond to.”

Another category experiencing growth within QSR is watermelons, according to Megan McKenna, senior director of marketing and foodservice at the National Watermelon Board in Winter Springs, FL.

McKenna says foodservice not only moves product, but positively influences retail purchase, quoting new menu research showing that 16.3% of operators feature watermelon on menus, up 30% from 2021. Specifically, within the QSR segment, McKenna says market penetration has risen from 8% in 2021 to 12% in 2025.

Much of that growth, she says, is happening in beverage and appetizer/salads, which she identifies as “a great opportunity for QSR to incorporate more watermelon.”

The benefits of the growth of produce in QSR are being reflected across the country. Susie McKinley, director of marketing and development at the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) in Tallahassee, FL, says the foodservice industry as a whole recorded an estimated \$602 million in cash receipts in 2024, with key products from the state, including tomatoes, cucumbers and cabbage.



As quick-service restaurants expand beyond traditional menus, fresh produce is emerging as a key growth driver, helping QSRs meet rising demand for healthier options.

PHOTO COURTESY MARKON

Over recent years, McKinley says, FDACS has responded to emerging opportunities for Florida growers to supply locally grown fresh produce to the foodservice industry by developing new initiatives and partnerships focused on driving sales of “Fresh From Florida” produce.

For the QSR segment in particular, these have included supporting producers at major foodservice shows, as well as launching a distributor pilot program promoting “Fresh From Florida” fruits and vegetables to major distributors, including Gordon Food Service, What Chefs Want and Performance Foodservice. Products to have benefited include strawberries, bell peppers, sweet corn, watermelon, squash and leafy greens, as well as tomatoes and cabbage.

Mushrooms are another item that has experienced considerable success in the segment, and indeed has become a focal point on many QSR menus. Citing the 2024 *Slice of the Union* report on the pizza industry, Cristie Mather, vice president of marketing at the Lee’s Summit, MO-headquartered Mushroom Council, says mushrooms are not only the most popular veggie pizza topping, but are second only to pepperoni as the most popular topping.

“Fresh mushrooms give pizza a premium, healthy boost along with their delicious umami flavor,” she says.

“Mushrooms have die-hard fans that enjoy them on menus ranging from quick service to fine dining, and that means that there are limitless opportunities to delight diners with mushrooms on the core menu or as LTOs to generate seasonal enthusiasm.”

As well as their widespread use by burger chains, which dominate QSR, Mather says mushrooms are a perfect fit for global cuisines, while they can also take center stage in plant-forward dishes.

“We are increasingly hearing from QSR R&D chefs who are explor-

ing ways to bring mushrooms, and more varieties of mushrooms, to their menus,” she adds. “We are excited about the innovation we’re seeing in QSR and look forward to seeing some new and innovative mushroom menu offerings in the future.”

### FOCUS ON QUALITY TO WIN

“For QSRs, it’s all about economics right now,” says Webster. “Consumers are hurting, particularly consumers at the lower end of the income scale. These are the consumers who make up the bulk of many QSR operators’ patron base.”

However, this challenge, she continues, is driving many QSRs to adopt price-based promotions which are only digging that hole deeper for them. “When these operators have no choice but to raise prices, which is coming sooner rather than later, they are going to find it will be even harder than it was a couple of years ago,” Menu Matters’ Webster adds.

Kostyo believes that in order to identify a “relentlessly consumer-focused value proposition” amid such challenges, operators need to be thinking beyond price and instead focus on simple, quality-driven menus.

He argues that operators need to work a little harder to ensure a restaurant doesn’t resemble a giant vending machine. “Right now, you have customers coming in, ordering from a kiosk, picking up food from a cubby, and sitting and watching TikTok on their phone while they eat,” Kostyo says. “The food becomes almost secondary.”

To place more emphasis on ingredients, he recommends showcasing any prep work done in an open kitchen environment, highlighting fresh ingredients prominently, and using them in signage and marketing. Such practices, Kostyo adds, will improve customer trust in what is going into the food.

PB



Bulk dried fruits and nuts attract value-driven and culinary-focused shoppers. Bulk typically works best for items that move quickly and can stay fresh.

PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO

# Bulk vs. Packaged Conundrum

How to get the most out of dried fruits and nuts in the produce department.

BY STEVEN MAXWELL

**F**rom peanuts and walnuts to dates and raisins, dried fruits and nuts are snacking favorites, offering a healthy alternative to processed products. But how can retailers take advantage of growing shopper interest in the category, and should they be focusing their attention on bulk or packaged sales?

While analyst estimates vary on the size of the market and its rate of growth, most agree that it is growing, although some segments are growing faster than others. According to Cognitive Market Research, the U.S. accounts for around 28% of the global dried fruit and nut market, citing almost \$15 billion of annual sales.

Others are more conservative in their estimates. Statista says the market is experiencing “negligible growth,” influenced by shifting consumer preferences, and competition from processed snacks.

One segment of the category that has shown strong resilience over the past 12 months is peanuts, according to Dena Malsom, vice president of marketing and communications at the Atlanta, GA-headquartered National Peanut Board. Peanuts as a stand-alone category reached \$1.2 billion with 1.5% growth, she says, outperforming the overall nuts category, which declined 0.1%.

“Peanuts are showing rising repeat purchases, loyalty and lead in volume of peanuts as America’s favorite nut, according to 2025 Nielsen Consumer NIQ data,” says Malsom. “In 2025, Americans consumed an average of 7.1 pounds of peanuts per capita. Looking ahead, the forecast for peanut consumption remains steady in 2026.”

## FINDING THE RIGHT MIX

Based in Orange, CT, Aurora Products is famed for supplying a wide range of natural and organic nuts, as well as dried fruit snack packs — a range that recently expanded to include seasoned dried fruit, including curry lime mango and pineapples, plus sugar-free, high-protein trail mixes.

Founder and President Stephanie Blackwell says when comparing margins as a vendor, it is clear retail packs make more money than bulk, given that they are a value-added item, even including packaging, promotions and brand identity in the price.

“Bulk bins are becoming less popular ever since COVID,” she says. “Many stores offer bulk, yet have pre-packed containers below the bulk bins that are packed in the store in order to offer the consumer a product that is protected from tampering.”

At the same time, Blackwell says single-serve packs in a bag or box are definitely a growing SKU.

Joseph Setton, executive vice president of Terra Bella, CA, Setton Farms Pistachio, sees less difference in shopper segments than shopper intent when it comes to bulk versus packaged pistachios.

“Bulk pistachios are generally going to be the items that move quickly and can stay fresh,” he explains. “Bulk shoppers are usually using kernels for culinary purposes or in-shell for the value. Consumers will reach for packaged pistachios and the wider variety of unique flavors offered on shelf.”

Diana Salsa, vice president of marketing for Wonderful Pistachios, Los Angeles, CA, also sees a clear distinction in how shoppers approach pistachios. While bulk buyers tend to be value-driven households, avid home cooks or even restaurants, packaged shoppers skew more toward convenience-led who rely on trusted brands for convenient, healthy snacks.

## WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **“Today’s consumers are snacking with purpose. They’re seeking convenient options to fuel their busy lifestyles that also offer functional benefits.”**  
Chris Fitzgerald, National Peanut Board, Atlanta, GA
- **“Bulk bins are becoming less popular ever since COVID. Many stores offer bulk, yet have pre-packed containers below the bulk bins that are packed in the store in order to offer the consumer a product that is protected from tampering.”**  
Stephanie Blackwell, Aurora Products, Orange, CT

“As snacking continues to supplement traditional meals, branded packaged pistachios are increasingly where the category’s growth and storytelling live and where we focus our sales and marketing strategies,” she says.

Tess Mercado, founder and president of Nutridge Farms in Palm Desert, CA, views bulk and packaged formats as serving distinctly different shopper mindsets.

While bulk attracts value-driven shoppers focused on price, larger households, and shoppers who enjoy customizing quantities, packaged appeals to time-pressed shoppers seeking convenience, parents packing lunches, and health-focused consumers who value clear labeling and portion guidance. Packaged, Mercado says, also resonates with premium snack shoppers looking for consistency, food safety assurance, and strong brand cues.

Another clear difference can be seen in margins. Although bulk can be an effective volume driver, Mercado says packaged offers stronger margin control, better shrink management, and greater opportunity for differentiation. It also delivers more stable profitability and clearer shopper communication, she adds.

### MERCHANDISING TIPS

For effective in-store merchandising, Blackwell recommends displaying dried fruits and nuts at eye level, “not below the bananas or apples where nobody can find them. Too many brands displayed in the store make it confusing to the consumer to find what they are looking for.”

For maximum impact, she also suggests displaying all nuts and all dried fruits together in the produce department instead of scattered throughout the store.

Looking beyond traditional bulk bins, Salsa says point-of-sale (POS) displays offer a powerful merchandising opportunity for driving nut sales. “Wonderful Pistachios POS displays are proven to drive 2x sales velocities compared to retailers who don’t use them,” she says. “These displays catch shoppers’ attention at key decision-making moments, creating an opportunity for an impulse purchase.”

To avoid visual distractions in the produce area, Setton Farms focuses on clean, sharp graphics, and health callouts to catch the consumer’s eye. To make the most of this, Setton suggests creating displays around holidays and events.

Mercado at Nutridge recommends merchandising strategies that emphasize education, usage inspiration, and multiple pack sizes, including both portion-controlled packs for impulse purchases and resealable multi-serve packs for pantry stocking. Display-ready packaging and secondary placements, such as small produce endcaps or



Packaged nuts appeal to convenience-minded shoppers with portion control, resealable formats, bold flavors, and clear nutrition messaging. *PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO*

tables, can further increase visibility and velocity, she says.

Malsom recommends capitalizing on high-impact seasonal moments, including the traditional surges in peanut sales that accompany the peak summer travel season, baseball games, and back-to-school shopping. “Brands and retailers who strategically leverage these windows with compelling promotions and prominent display placements can capture significant incremental sales,” she says.

At the same time, Malsom believes retailers can take advantage of peanuts’ “compelling sustainability narrative” as a zero-waste plant, which enriches soil, requires less water than tree nuts, and are predominantly family-farmed in the U.S. She suggests making use of signage to communicate these environmental benefits.

Dried fruits and nuts have plenty of cross-merchandising potential waiting to be realized. Setton recommends stocking pistachios close to beer and soda for convenient game-day purchases. Taking advantage of its use as an ingredient, he also advises placing pistachio kernels near fresh basil and Parmesan, as together they form the basis of fresh pesto.

Malsom suggests positioning peanuts near complementary items, like fresh produce for Asian-inspired dishes, salad ingredients, and other healthy snacking options. Similarly, Blackwell recommends placement in the cheese department to encourage complementary purchases.

Mercado, meanwhile, recommends cross-merchandising with salad ingredients, fresh cut fruit, and specialty cheese to further reinforce usage ideas and drive incremental sales.

### THE HEALTH ANGLE

While convenience has always been a large factor in snack nut purchases, Setton believes nutrition and health benefits are rapidly becoming just as important to consumers. Shoppers, he says, are looking for snacks that offer health benefits while also tasting great.

One such example are pistachios, which contain all nine essential amino acids the body cannot produce on its own, as well as antioxidants, and lutein for eye health. Setton suggests retailers use in-store signage to inform customers.

“Nutrition remains a primary entry point, particularly in produce departments where shoppers are already in a health-forward mindset,” says Mercado. “Clean, recognizable ingredients and perceived ‘better-for-you indulgence’ are especially compelling.”

At the same time, she says convenience continues to fuel growth, especially in resealable and single-serve formats.

Nutrition, convenience, and portion control are all central to how consumers make their purchasing decisions, according to Salsa at Wonderful Pistachios, who says shoppers are seeking quality, healthier snacks with nutritional value.

PB

# Value-Added Services Are Essential

BY JORDAN GRAINGER

**M**any changes are reshaping the fresh produce industry. Shopper expectations are higher, retailers are fighting for margin, foodservice groups demand consistency, and labor is hard to find. And all of this is happening as supply chains are under constant pressure to deliver faster, fresher, and more predictably than ever before.

In this environment, value-added services, like bagging, repackaging, pre-cutting and white labeling, aren't just extras; they're essential for helping retailers, foodservice operators and growers stay competitive. These capabilities are key for produce programs to succeed, and it's the wholesale distributor who is best positioned, and even expected, to provide them.



they've gone mainstream. Retailers can't ignore that shift, and foodservice operators can't afford prep-heavy workflows.

Value-added services ensure the product arrives ready for shelf or service, which, in turn, speeds up merchandising, improves presentation, and helps retailers and operators keep up with demand. But most importantly, it keeps them focused on what they do best — selling and serving, not processing.

## COMBATING LABOR CONSTRAINTS

Labor may be the most consistent pain point in today's produce supply chain, as stores and kitchens become increasingly short-staffed, and growers and packers stretch their resources. Every additional layer of work — from filling bags, to applying labels and repacking cases — adds time and cost.

This is where wholesale distributors play a critical role. Distributors operate at scale, with dedicated facilities, trained teams, and quality controls designed for high-volume handling. When these value-added services are absorbed by a distributor, it reduces the workload downstream, and helps customers maintain stability despite staffing challenges.

## SHRINK, SHELF LIFE, CONSISTENCY

Shrink has always been a reality in produce, but value-added ser-



vices help by supporting right-sized pack formats, better inventory rotation, and more standardized handling. Instead of store-level repacking, which can vary by location, customers get consistent packs every time.

In many cases, controlled processing and packaging at the distributor level also protects the quality of the produce with better cold chain integrity and less handling.

## BRANDING AND WHITE LABELING TAKE CENTER STAGE

Retailers need to stand out, especially when so many products can look the same. White labeling makes it possible to offer a consistent brand experience without building in-house packaging infrastructure.

Distributors who offer white labeling don't just supply produce; they help customers strengthen their brand presence, increase customer loyalty, and minimize costs through premium packaging and presentation.

## CRITICAL FOR DISTRIBUTOR PARTNERS

Wholesale distributors are no longer just a bridge between growers and customers; they're strategic partners. By offering value-added services, they deepen customer relationships, solve operational bottlenecks, offer consistency and customization at scale, and create value beyond commodity pricing.

Value-added services have become essential because the market demands speed, consistency and flexibility, and wholesale distributors are uniquely positioned to lead this shift. And in doing so, they help their customers stay competitive in a complex landscape.

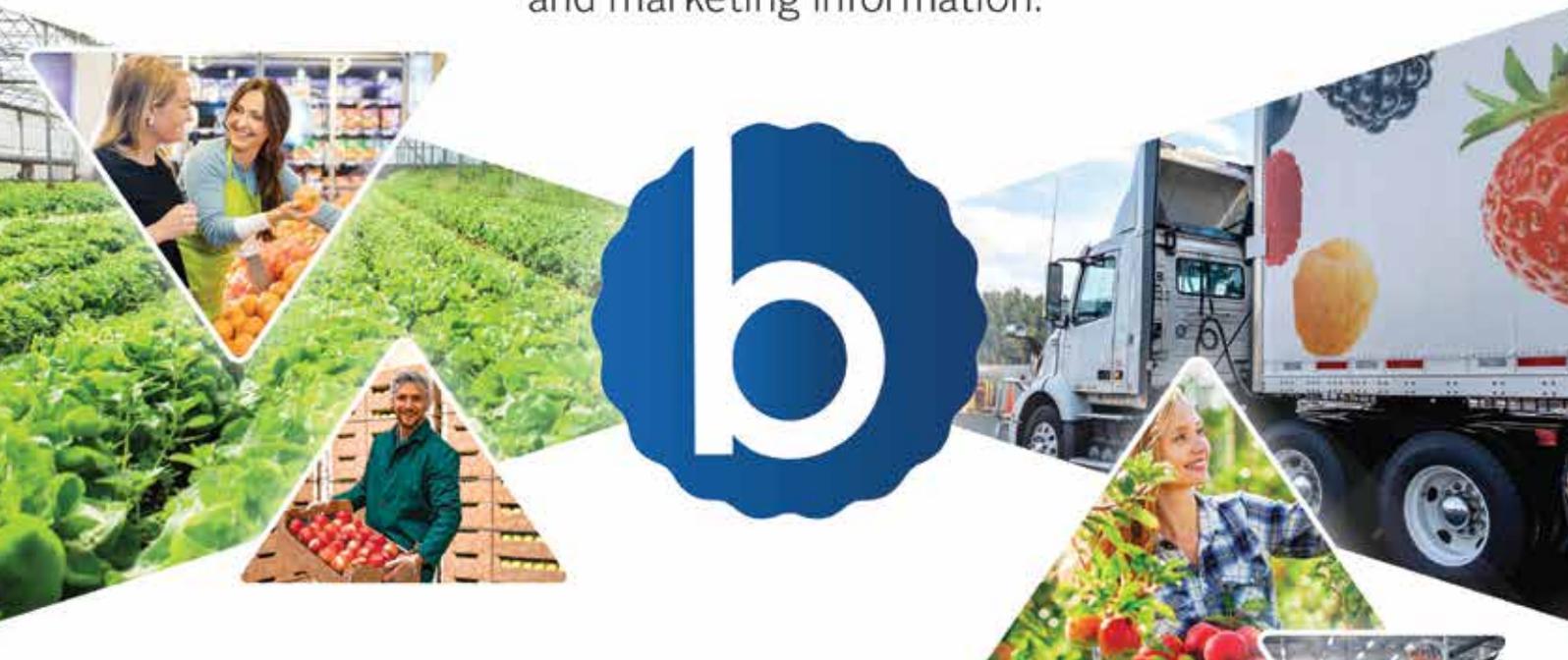
*Jordan Grainger is vice president of sales and business development at Ben B. Schwartz & Sons, Detroit, MI.*

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# Allergy-Friendly Apple Brand Wins Big at Germany's Fruit Logistica

Fresh produce business leaders from across the globe braved Germany's coldest winter in 15 years, Feb. 4-6, at Fruit Logistica. Despite freezing conditions that saw departing flights grounded, the show's 90,000 participants still found their way home after three days of innovation, networking and learning.

"We were so impressed with the way our trade visitors and exhibitors rose to last week's challenges, as fresh produce people so often do," says David Ruetz, senior vice president of Messe Berlin. "This is a resilient industry, one that knows how to handle challenging conditions and logistical hurdles. So it was no surprise that, despite the snow, everyone on the show floor remained focused, energetic and productive."

## INNOVATION AWARDS

For two decades, the Fruit Logistica Innovation Award (FLIA) has been recognizing outstanding innovations across the entire fruit and vegetable supply chain — from production to the point-of-sale.

The FLIA award recognizes outstanding innovations in two categories, fresh produce and technology. This year's winners include:

- Fresh produce winner: **POMPUR** — the world's first ECARF-certified, allergy-friendly apple brand — from ZIN (Züchtungsinitiative Niederelbe GmbH & Co. KG) in Germany.
- Technology winner: The **L50 DRONE** — Europe's first lidar-based agricultural spraying drone with a capacity of 50 liters — from ABZ Innovation Ltd. in Hungary.

## ADDITIONAL FINALISTS

Finalists in the FLIA's fresh produce category included:

**BOOMBITES Red Berry Grapes, BLOOM FRESH, United Kingdom.** BOOMBITES Red Berry Grapes combine the taste people love from table grapes with the properties that come with their unique red flesh inside. They are the result of over 10 years of natural breeding, crossing some of the world's best table grapes with red-fleshed wine grapes. BOOMBITES launched internationally in 2025.

**POPITS, Harmoniz LTD and Mastronardi Produce, Israel + Canada.** POPITS is the one-bite cucumber redefining healthy snacking. Tiny, yet powerful, at 4-5 centimeters, it's +1° Bx sweeter, extra crunchy, and perfectly uniform every time.

**Sapori | Finest Selection, Wim Peters Kwekerijen, Netherlands.** Sapori are a selection of premium mini cherry tomatoes. This 1.5-kilogram selection of mini cherry tomatoes in ivory, black and green is a culinary delight.

**Tribelli Seedless, Enza Zaden Beheer B.V., Netherlands.** Tribelli Seedless is a new generation of sweet mini conical peppers. No prep, no mess — ready to eat as a healthy snack. The peppers are available year-round.

Finalists in the FLIA's technology category included:

**AURA SC, Trapview Group, Slovenia.** AURA SC is a next-generation, fully automated pest monitoring and forecasting solution.



ZIN — Züchtungsinitiative Niederelbe GmbH & Co. KG, Germany, celebrates after winning the Fruit Logistica Innovation Award for POMPUR, the world's first ECARF-certified apple brand, enabling those with apple allergies to enjoy fresh apples for the first time. PHOTO COURTESY MESSE BERLIN

Using UV light attraction and an AI-triggered self-cleaning mechanism, it delivers continuous, real-time monitoring of multiple pest species. Integrated with the Trapview app, it transforms pest data into precise forecasts that reduce workload and labor costs, minimize insecticide use and enable smarter, more sustainable, high-yield food production.

**Compact packaging, Compack, Belgium.** Here, mushroom residues are transformed into circular cellulose packaging — made from material on which the mushrooms grew. They are plastic-free, PFAS-free, compostable, recyclable and PPWR-compatible. This solution replaces plastic and uses less paper than conventional fiber packaging.

**High-Speed Grafter above the cotyledons, TTA-ISO, Netherlands.** The High-Speed Grafter redefines what's possible in automated grafting, delivering precise cuts above the cotyledons. Powered by advanced vision, AI, and a carousel system, it ensures perfect alignment of scion and rootstock every time. This breakthrough sets a new standard for efficiency, hygiene, and labor savings in modern plant propagation by transforming one of horticulture's most delicate tasks into a seamless process.

**The Solar Solution for Light Loving Crops, Voltiris, Switzerland.** Voltiris, the Swiss greenhouse energy company, has developed solar-filtering modules that transmit full PAR light to support strong crop growth and high yields. Voltiris filters near-infrared (NIR) light and converts it into renewable electricity, delivering 435 kWp per hectare and generating up to 400 MWh per hectare per year. By removing excess heat, the solution keeps plants up to 5°C cooler in sunny periods. This reduces heat stress, improves fruit quality, and boosts overall greenhouse productivity.

# Spring: A Recipe for Delicious

BY M. JILL OVERDORF

**M**arch is the month the market starts flirting again. Light shifts. Days stretch. Meadowlarks call. Citrus still hangs on like a third encore, yet the first tender greens start to appear with that “blink, and you’ll miss it” energy.

The field is waking up, and if you’re building March menus, this is your moment to write with freshness — bright acids, crunch, snap, and a little bitterness that makes everything taste more alive.

Spring isn’t a single ingredient. It’s a posture. It’s an attitude of hope. It’s a menu that feels like it opened a window on that first warm day.



## BRIDGE SEASON THAT REWARDS

March is transitional — late-winter staples still matter, but spring is slipping love letters under the door. That’s exactly why it’s powerful. You can build menus that feel new without blowing up your supply chain or your prep schedule.

Think in three lanes:

**1) The winter heroes (still strong, still cost-smart):** Citrus, brassicas, roots, alliums — these are the workhorses that keep quality steady when weather has been moody, and labor has been tight.

**2) The spring signals (limited-time magic):** Asparagus, artichokes, petit pois, favas and ramps — these arrive like a soft launch. They’re exciting, but they’re also sensitive to timing, temperature swings, and harvest windows that can tighten fast.

**3) The tender greens (the real March flex):** Arugula, watercress, spinach, baby lettuces, chicories, herbs — this is where spring starts to taste like something.

And here’s the truth that should be written on every March menu: None of these delicious ingredients are guaranteed. Early spring can mean rain delays, wind events, uneven sizing, freight headaches, and shortages that make the menu plan feel like it’s playing defense.

While chefs chase first-of-season energy, growers are juggling the reality: unpredictable weather, rising input costs, labor pressures, pest and disease risk, water constraints, and the sheer gamble of planting into a season that might change its mind overnight. Distributors, meanwhile, are trying to keep product moving.

Spring is beautiful — but it’s not “easy.” It’s earned.

## INFLUENCE MARCH MENUS

This is where chefs win: small adjustments with big sensory payoff. It’s also where good operators show leadership.

### 1) Swap in seasonal top notes (and keep a backup plan)

Keep the core dish, change the lift — and have a second option.

- Roast carrots, then finish with citrus + chile + toasted seeds instead of honey-butter.
- Put grapefruit supremes into a salad that usually leans toward apple or dried fruit.
- Trade heavy sauces for herb pistou, lemony yogurt, salsa verde, or brown butter + citrus.

### 2) Build one spring anchor per daypart

Anchor items are your menu’s loudspeaker. They’re also where you can partner with your distributor instead of making them guess.

- **Breakfast/Brunch:** citrus ricotta toast, asparagus frittata, shaved radish + herb butter
- **Lunch:** chopped salad with chickpeas, herbs, crunchy veg, sharp vinaigrette
- **Dinner:** charred brassicas with romesco; artichoke + lemon pasta; protein + salsa verde + greens
- **Beverage/Dessert:** citrus shrub spritz, blood orange olive oil cake, grapefruit granita.

Ask one question that changes everything: “*What’s abundant, beautiful, and stable this week?*” That’s not just good menu planning — that’s a supply chain relationship.

### 3) Use whole-ingredient thinking to protect margin — and honor the work

March is the perfect month to go whole-plant and reduce waste without preaching about it. It also respects the fact that a lot went into getting that produce to the cutting board.

- **Carrot tops** → chimichurri / pesto
- **Beet greens** → sauté with garlic and lemon
- **Broccoli stems** → shaved slaw or quick brickles
- **Citrus peels** → oleo saccharum, candied garnish, infused syrup
- **Leek greens** → stock base, charred oil, crispy threads

When you use more of the ingredient, you’re not just protecting food cost, you’re honoring yield, labor, and the reality that growers don’t get paid extra because you tossed the best parts.

### 4) Put seasonality in the language — and nod to the field

Guests don’t need a lecture. They need a reason to care. But you can elevate the supply chain with a few words that build connection. Try: “first-of-season asparagus,” “market greens,” “citrus-forward,” “spring herb salad,” “charred brassicas + bright lemon.” If your operation has the touch, name a farm or a region when it’s appropriate. That’s not marketing fluff — it’s visibility. The field deserves visibility.

## FEELS LIKE A NEW CHAPTER

Spring is a promise, and March is the first page. It is time to sharpen your flavors, lighten your finishes, and let produce do what it does best: create color, texture, and freshness that no technique can fake. But it’s also time to remember that “fresh” is a team sport.

Write March menus with confidence and humility. Build in flexibility. Feature what’s thriving. Keep one eye on the forecast and the other on your relationships. Celebrate the wins: the first perfect bunch of asparagus, the citrus that still tastes like sunshine, the greens that arrive crisp and clean after a stormy week.

When the menu tastes like the season, it tells the guest something bigger than ingredients: We’re paying attention. We’re in a relationship with the market. We’re cooking with intention. And that — more than any trend — is what keeps produce unstoppable: flavor that’s alive, specific and unforgettable.

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

# Sun World Celebrating 50 Years of Growth, Expansion and Innovation

Sun World International, Bakersfield, CA, is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2026, marking a half-century of growth and transformation that has helped reshape the global fruit industry and set new standards for flavor, quality and commercialization.

Founded in 1976 as a California-based produce marketing firm, Sun World has evolved through multiple reinventions — emerging as a worldwide engine of genetics, licensing and brand development.

“Fifty years ago, Sun World was built on a bold idea — that better fruit could create better outcomes for growers, retailers and consumers,” says David Marguleas, executive chair of Sun World. “What began as an exploration of ‘what’s next’ for fruit has become a global force for innovation. Our evolution is a testament to the people, partners and growers who believed in what was possible and worked tirelessly to make it happen.”

Sun World’s legacy is defined by breakthroughs. From introducing the first seedless watermelon, to elevating stone fruit with more flavorful plums and peaches, to transforming the global table grape sector through seedless innovations and premium brands that redefined consumer expectations for flavor and consistency, the company has pushed the boundaries of what fruit can deliver.

Today, flagship grape brands, such as AutumnCrisp and Ruby Rush, continue that tradition.

The company has also expanded beyond grapes. Through strategic acquisitions, Sun World gained a citrus portfolio and the world’s largest private collection of mango genetics. Its global network now spans more than 4,000 licensed producers and marketers across 18 countries, with fruit available in leading retail chains worldwide.

While the anniversary celebrates Sun World’s past, Bernardo Calvo, chief executive, emphasized the next chapter may be the most ambitious yet.



Sun World’s 50th anniversary highlights the company’s evolution from a California-based produce company to a global leader in premium fruit genetics.

PHOTO COURTESY SUN WORLD

“Sun World is entering an era of innovation that our founders could only dream of,” Calvo says. “From AI-assisted breeding to deeper global trial networks, to partnerships that give us new reach and capability, we are positioned to deliver breakthroughs at a pace the industry has never seen. The opportunities ahead across our entire portfolio of fruit is extraordinary, and we’re just getting started.”

Throughout 2026, Sun World will commemorate its anniversary by honoring the people and partners who helped shape the business.

“Anniversaries remind us of where we began, but they matter most when they sharpen our focus on what comes next,” says Marguleas. “During our first 50 years, we established an extraordinary foundation. The next 50 will shape how we continue to advance the industry.” **PB**

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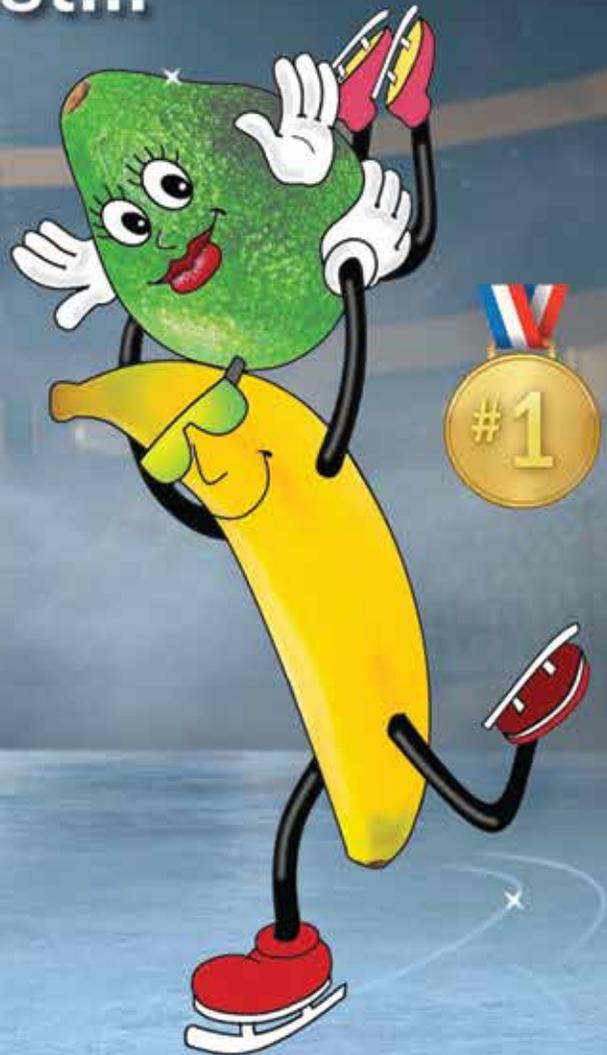
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