

PB

PRODUCE BUSINESS

INITIATING INDUSTRY IMPROVEMENT

PROCUREMENT

New York Apples
Michigan Apples
Wisconsin Potatoes
Idaho Potatoes
Peruvian Onions
Herbs

MARKETING

Organic Bananas

REGIONAL PROFILE

Philadelphia

RISING RETAILER

Iovine Brothers

NUTS

Pistachios

SEPTEMBER 2026
VOL. 42 | NO. 9 | \$9.90

REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

THE ROOTS OF RECOVERY

Growers, retailers and suppliers are embracing regenerative practices, which meet consumer demand and offer hope for a more sustainable future.

“CONSUMERS NEED CERTAINTY THAT
THE PRODUCE THEY PURCHASE

GENUINELY CONTRIBUTES TO
ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

RATHER THAN JUST SERVING
AS A MARKETING TREND.”

20TH ANNUAL SUSTAINABILITY ISSUE



ORGANIC

Learn
More!



High-Velocity Organic Option

Discover the Organic Advantage and learn how a high-velocity organic banana option can help meet shopper demand and drive category growth.

Contact us at DFFSales@dole.com

 Dole Fresh Fruit Company



COVER STORY

- 20 Roots of Recovery: Regenerative Agriculture Offers Hope**
Growers, retailers and suppliers are embracing regenerative practices.

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THIS MONTH'S WINNER

AVERY LEACH
GoldenSun Insights
Marketing Associate
Traverse City, MI

Although Avery Leach has only been in the produce industry for a little over a year, she offers this advice to anyone new to the industry: be curious and build relationships.

"The produce industry is incredibly connected, and there is always something new to learn," she says. "Take the time to ask questions, visit operations whenever possible, and get to know people throughout the supply chain. The relationships you build are so incredibly invaluable."

Leach is a marketing associate at GoldenSun Insights, where she manages client marketing initiatives and projects across the fresh produce industry. "My role blends project management, marketing strategy, content development and client support, so no two days look the same."

One of the biggest trends she's seeing is a greater expectation for marketing to do more than just build awareness. "Companies are thinking more strategically about how their marketing supports retailer relationships, communicates their point of difference, and ultimately drives business results."

At the same time, she says, storytelling and transparency continue to be important. "Consumers want to understand where their food comes from, how it is grown, and the people behind the products they purchase," she explains. "As a result, we're seeing greater investment in brand development, digital marketing, websites, social media, and content that communicates those stories authentically."

Outside of work, Leach enjoys spending time with family and friends, traveling, rock climbing at a local gym, hiking, camping and skiing.

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

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How To Win! To win the PRODUCE BUSINESS QUIZ, the first thing you must do is read through the articles and advertisements in the print or digital issue to find the answers. Fill in the blanks corresponding to the questions below, scan and send your answers to the address listed on the coupon. **If you wish to fill out the questions online, please go to: www.producebusiness.com/quiz.** The winner will be chosen by drawing from the responses received before the publication of our November 2026 issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS.

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QUESTIONS FOR THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

- 1) What is the URL address for FirstFruit's new website? _____
- 2) Which Produce Packaging company offers "High-Output Automated Solutions"? _____
- 3) "Sourcing from Where the Sun Shines Brightest" is the slogan for which Philadelphia wholesaler? _____
- 4) Which city and state the home base for Alsum Farms & Produce Inc.? _____
- 5) What is the fax number for TMK Produce? _____
- 6) Which nut is the "Driver of the Nut Category"? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____

Company _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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

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

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

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— SEPTEMBER IS —
**NATIONAL FRUITS
& VEGGIES MONTH**

— fruitsandveggies.org —

This September, the entire industry has a moment to rally around fruits and veggies—use this ready-to-go toolkit to help put produce at the center of every plate.



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**THE
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TRANSITIONS

Baloian Farms

Baloian Farms, Nogales, AZ, added **Alex Jimenez** as Mexico grower relations manager, strengthening the company's commitment to building lasting partnerships with growers and supporting year-round supply programs for customers across North America.

Jimenez will serve as the primary liaison between Baloian Farms and its grower partners throughout mainland Mexico and Baja California, overseeing grower relationships, production planning, contract programs, field visits, and seasonal transitions across the company's vegetable portfolio.

His career includes leadership roles with Permanent Agriculture, Campos Borquez, IFCO Systems, Pacific Coast Trading and Kroger.



Alex Jimenez

Grimmway Produce Group

Russell L. Hamlin, Ph.D., senior vice president of farming at Grimmway Produce Group (GPG), Bakersfield, CA, has been reappointed by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin to serve on the agency's Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Federal Advisory Committee (FRRCC).

Hamlin was first appointed to the FRRCC in November 2024 and has been named to the newest slate of appointees on the 21-member committee. The FRRCC provides independent policy advice and recommendations to the EPA Administrator on environmental issues affecting agriculture and rural communities, including water and air quality, pesticide management, conservation practices, and technological innovation.

He is a current member and former chair of the International Fresh Produce Association's (IFPA) Organics Committee, has chaired the California Fresh Carrot Advisory Board since 2021, and serves on the Industry Advisory Board of the Grimm Family Center for Organic Research and Education at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.



Russell L. Hamlin

Farm Direct Partners

Farm Direct Partners (FDP), Jupiter, FL, appointed **Grant Hill** senior director of business development. The appointment comes as FDP expands its core lime business and invests in the infrastructure, production and commercial leadership needed to launch year-round avocado, lemon and tropical produce programs.

Hill will lead strategic business development and help expand FDP's relationships with national and regional retail, club, foodservice and whole-



Grant Hill

sale customers. During his tenure with US Foods and Amerifresh, he held senior leadership roles across national sales, business development and sales operations.

The company is expanding its McAllen, TX, warehouse operations, while investing in farming and packing capabilities in Mexico and continuing its agricultural development in Colombia. Together, these investments will strengthen FDP's multi-origin supply platform, increasing available volumes from Mexico while further enhancing coordinated supply programs across Colombia and Peru.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

BLOOM FRESH Hosts 250+ Licensees and Partners from 17 Countries

BLOOM FRESH welcomed more than 250 licensees and industry partners from 17 countries Aug. 5 to Fruitworks | The BLOOM FRESH Discovery Center in California for its Global Open Day.

Bringing together the global table grape industry, the event provided a forum to exchange market insights, explore new varieties and experience the innovation shaping the future of the category.

A highlight was the Sweet Globe Experience, following the variety's journey from vine to shelf and exploring the factors behind its success, from breeding and technical expertise to consistent production and market acceptance.

Guests also looked at the company's breeding program with breeder Chris Owens, gaining insight into the research behind the next generation of table grape varieties and the attributes being developed to meet evolving industry needs.

Throughout the day, attendees explored commercial and new varieties in the field, while regional market insights provided perspectives on the trends, opportunities and challenges shaping the global category.

Healthy Family Project Unveils 2026 Back-to-School Family Playbook

Healthy Family Project, Reidsville, GA, is helping take the stress out of mealtimes with the launch of its 12th annual Back-to-School campaign. Centered around the theme "Real food. Real routines. Real life.," this year's campaign provides families with practical solutions.

Since launching the Back-to-School campaign in 2014, Healthy Family Project has donated more than \$232,000 to organizations that support families and provide nutrition education in schools.

This year's campaign is made possible through partnerships with Bee Sweet Citrus, Consalo



Family Farms, Nature Fresh Farms, Shuman Farms RealSweet Onions, SUNSET, and ¡Yo Quiero! Brands.

The campaign runs through Sept. 11 across Healthy Family Project's website, social media channels, email newsletters and media partnerships.

As part of the initiative, participating partners are donating \$12,000 to the International Fresh Produce Association Foundation for Fresh Produce, supporting programs that help children develop lifelong healthy eating habits through increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Since 2002, Healthy Family Project has donated more than \$8 million to charities benefiting children and families, and has helped provide more than 22 million meals through Feeding America.

Windset Farms Commences Planting At New 38-Acre Ultra-Lit Greenhouse

Windset Farms has started planting at its new 38-acre ultra-lit greenhouse in Delta, British Columbia,

marking another milestone in the company's continued investment in controlled-environment agriculture.

The new ultra-lit greenhouse increases Windset Farms' Delta operation to 130 acres, including 86 acres of ultra-lit greenhouse production, making it the largest lit vegetable greenhouse facility in Western North America. The additional capacity enhances Windset Farms' ability to provide customers with a year-round supply of greenhouse-grown vegetables.

With the addition of the new greenhouse, Windset Farms now owns and operates 298 acres of greenhouse production across Canada and the United States.

**CMI Pear Season Kickoff Presents New Crop Sales Opportunity**

CMI Orchards, Wenatchee, WA, expects an abundant supply of high-quality Bartlett, Bosc, Comice, Green and Red D'Anjou, Forelle, GEM, Seckel and Starkrimson pears.

Available only while supplies last, GEM pears continue to cause excitement in the category. Unlike traditional pears that challenge some consumers with narrow ripening windows, GEM pears deliver an excellent eating experience across multiple stages of ripeness.

CMI is also highlighting the benefits of nutrient-dense, fiber-rich pears. Through packaging, digital content, merchandising materials, and educational campaigns, CMI provides retailers with tools to communicate the nutritional benefits, versatility, and convenience pears offer modern consumers.



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Oppy Expands Happy Berry Brand Into Premium Blueberry Category

Oppy, Vancouver, British Columbia, is expanding its premium berry portfolio with the introduction of Happy Berry blueberries, bringing the consumer-recognized brand to a new segment with a premium conventional blueberry program from Peru.



First introduced on hydroponic strawberries, Oppy is now extending the label to blueberries. Packed in traditional pint and 18-ounce formats, Happy Berry blueberries provide retailers with a differentiated conventional offering designed to elevate the blueberry aisle.

Alongside Happy Berry blueberries, Oppy is growing its premium Hunkaberry jumbo blueberry program, adding Peruvian supply to complement its existing California season and creating greater continuity of premium jumbo fruit availability throughout the year.

Moonlight's Peppermint Peaches Take the Stage

Moonlight Companies, Reedley, CA, Peppermint Peaches are taking the stage as a sweet finale to the company's "Seven Months of Summer" program, giving retailers a sweet, colorful way to extend stone fruit season into early fall.



Peppermint Peaches get their name from their appearance: a bright reddish exterior surrounding crisp, white flesh.

Retailers can position Peppermint Peaches as a late-summer discovery, an early-fall snacking and baking option, or a colorful addition to seasonal displays. Their distinctive name and appearance also lend themselves to prominent signage, sampling, and storytelling.

Peppermint Peaches are expected to be available through Oct. 10.

Tierra Suelta Launches New Website and SunJoya Retail Brand

Tropical produce grower, packer, importer and shipper Tierra Suelta, Miami, FL, has launched a new website, giving retailers quick access to its extensive product portfolio and resources for building dependable, year-round tropical programs.



The launch also introduces SunJoya, Tierra Suelta's new retail brand for tropical fruits, roots, vegetables and specialty products available throughout North America.

SunJoya gives Tierra Suelta's full portfolio a distinctive consumer-facing identity, including four varieties of dragon fruit, Florida-grown mamey, star fruit, two varieties of guava, tropical roots, and a wide selection of specialty items.

Bako Sweet's Returning Game-Day Promotion Helps Retailers Win Big

Retailers can score big by stocking up on Bako Sweet, Bakersfield, CA, sweet potatoes.

The point-of-sale shippers turn retail aisles into a grab-and-go destination with football-themed packaging available in both organic and conventional options.

Now in its second year, Bako Sweet is kicking off its game-day promotion designed to capture shopper attention during the highest consumption season of the year. The promotion runs September through October.

Bako Sweet's game-day promotion features in-store displays designed with inspiration from America's 250th birthday. Promoted SKUs include four-pack trays; 3- and 5-pound mesh bags; and Single Sweets, wrapped in football-themed packaging, that are washed and ready to microwave.



Oppy and AC Foods Bring Australian-Grown Sumo Citrus to Canada

Oppy and AC Foods have teamed up to bring Australian-grown Sumo Citrus to Canadian retailers, expanding the availability of the premium citrus brand during the Northern Hemisphere's off-season. The first shipments arrived in late August.

Recognized by their distinctive top knot, Sumo Citrus is known for its sweet flavor, easy-to-peel rind and seedless eating experience.



FiveStar Gourmet Foods Announces \$55 Million Investment in Chicago

FiveStar Gourmet Foods, Rancho Cucamonga, CA, announced a \$55 million investment in a state-of-the-art production and distribution facility in Chicago, scheduled to open in Q1 2027.

The Chicago campus will become FiveStar's fifth production and distribution facility.

The new facility will feature advanced manufacturing technologies, world-class food safety systems, and highly automated production capabilities designed to support the next generation of fresh, ready-to-eat foods.



PAIA Celebrates 25 Years of Asparagus Leadership

On Sept. 5, 2026, the Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association (PAIA) commemorated 25 years of leadership, collabora-



tion, and service to the fresh asparagus industry.

The association was founded in September 2001, when a group of Peruvian asparagus importers convened to address urgent issues affecting the future of fresh Peruvian asparagus imports into North America. Recognizing the need for a unified industry voice, the group established a formal association open to all Peruvian asparagus importers.

Peru is the leading supplier of fresh asparagus to the United States from July through January, supporting year-end programs. Volumes typically increase during the September-October peak-supply window.

To celebrate this milestone, PAIA will host a Retail Display Contest in October, encouraging retailers to create displays featuring fresh asparagus from Peru.

Wonderful Halos and Blippi Team Up to Make Healthy Snacking More Fun

Wonderful Halos, Los Angeles, CA, has partnered with Blippi, one of the most popular live-action preschool brands in the world.

Launched in August, a national ad campaign, "Halos Save Lunch," follows Blippi on a mission to find the perfect lunchbox snack. After sorting through a lineup of less-than-ideal options, Blippi remembers the obvious choice — sweet, seedless, easy-to-peel Wonderful Halos.

This fall, Halos and Blippi will hit the road for a series of meet-and-greet experiences in select East Coast cities, where families can meet Blippi in person, snap photos, and enjoy Wonderful Halos together.

Bringing the partnership to life in stores, Blippi point-of-sale displays and life-sized Blippi standees can be found throughout produce departments nationwide. Available through December 2026, the displays are designed to create excitement and offer kids the chance to pose alongside their favorite explorer, Blippi.



NEW PRODUCT

Monterey Mushrooms Launches New Line of Stuffed Baby Bella Mushrooms

Monterey Mushrooms, Dallas, TX, is launching a line of stuffed baby bella mushrooms. Ready in as little as

8 minutes, the stuffed mushrooms are available in an 8.5-ounce package featuring four flavors: Garlic Parmesan, Spinach Artichoke, Everything Seasoning and Pepper Jack Jalapeño.

Monterey Mushrooms is now accepting orders for the new stuffed baby bella line. Retailers are encouraged to contact their sales representative for detailed information on pricing, promotional support, and merchandising schematics designed to optimize the fresh mushroom shelf set.



Strategies to Boost Impulse Buys

BY DAVID HAAF

Many food shoppers are carefully planning their store trips in an effort to boost efficiency and avoid unplanned spending at a time of inflation.

While these shoppers are often armed with lists, they are still open to impulse buying, especially in produce. This category appeals to emotions through color, smells and innovative displays. Add alluring promotions, and the groundwork is laid for driving impulse.



Food retailers that follow strategic merchandising and promotions approaches are more likely to achieve winning results.

KEY DATA POINTS ON PRODUCE BUYING

FMI's latest consumer research provides important findings to help spur impulse buying.

Nine in 10 shoppers end up purchasing fruits and/or vegetables they had not intended to buy because of in-store merchandising and promotional programs, including 48% who do so frequently, according to FMI's *The Power of Produce 2026*.

- Fifty-one percent of grocery shoppers say eye-catching produce displays are the best way to drive unplanned purchases, with seasonal items cited as the second most important driver.

- Thirty-four percent of consumers who decide on produce purchases in-store point to price as the dominant purchase driver.

- About six in 10 shoppers regularly check prices and promotions across two or more stores, and 78% check sales specials across items when shopping.

PROVEN STRATEGIES

The following are successful approaches for food retailers. Many of these strategies are cited in the FMI research.

- **Execution:** Strong in-store produce execution is key to winning impulse dollars and locking in planned purchases. Consistent produce quality, color breaks, well-maintained displays, and inspiring signage and recipes can trigger incremental sales.

- **Seasonality:** Use seasonality as a primary produce storytelling tool by highlighting seasonal crops through endcaps, specials and digital tie-ins. This includes items growing seasonally, as well as items popular during big produce holidays, such as avocados during the Super Bowl or cranberries at Thanksgiving.

- **Cross-merchandising:** Activate recipes and cross-merchandising that spotlight produce to convert inspiration into baskets, including tapping into viral social media trends. Cross-merchandising helps shoppers overcome decision fatigue and boosts units per trip.

- **Price Strategies:** Consider tiered assortments, with entry-price/value items for budget-sensitive shoppers and local/premium SKUs for shoppers with discretionary income.

- **Meal Bundling:** Add a produce item to a meal bundle as a powerful value strategy to accelerate consumption. Meal bundles are often discounted to spur shopper interest. Bundling with produce can have the advantage of introducing new items that lead to repeat buys.

THE POWER OF LOCAL AND CONVENIENCE

FMI's research finds local sourcing remains a powerful attribute for fresh produce, with 29% of shoppers rating it the top factor for which they are willing to pay extra.

Meanwhile, convenience is a strong selling point for core produce consumers, those who eat fresh fruits and vegetables nearly every day. As a prime example, the food industry can take advantage of the convenience offered by value-added produce.

OMNICHANNEL EFFORTS

Driving impulse buying for produce isn't just an in-store endeavor. Food retailers need to carry this across digital platforms to avoid missed opportunities. The fresh foods industry doesn't always give enough priority to the digital side. However, e-commerce shoppers need to see cross-merchandising, bundling, seasonality tie-ins and other in-store strategies.

Likewise, digital coupons for produce items can help raise awareness and drive impulse sales in stores and online. Next-Gen shoppers are especially experimental and often willing to try new items.

ENHANCE SHOPPER EXPERIENCE

I realize that impulse-buying strategies can have the impact of disrupting shoppers' careful list-making and planning. However, in the case of produce, I don't think shoppers will mind.

The merchandising and promotions strategies discussed here drive excitement and shopper experience. That represents a unique kind of value that puts produce in a special class. **PB**

David Haaf is vice president, fresh foods, at FMI — The Food Industry Association.

Nine in 10 shoppers end up purchasing fruits and/or vegetables they had not intended to buy because of in-store merchandising and promotional programs, including 48% who do so frequently.

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NEW YORK PRODUCE SHOW & CONFERENCE

2026 Agenda

PRESENTED BY PRODUCE BUSINESS & EASTERN PRODUCE COUNCIL

* Indicates invitation only events



DAY 1: WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 2

START	ENDS	EVENT	SITE
7 am	8 pm	Registration & Badge Pick-Up	Sheraton lobby desk
7:30 am	3 pm	Global Trade Symposium (Separate Fee Required) 	Sheraton NY Times Square Room TBA
8:30 am	3:30 pm	Foundational Excellence (Separate Fee Required) 	Sheraton NY Times Square Room TBA
9:30 am	5:30 pm	Shuttle to/from Javits Center	Sheraton lobby (53 rd St.)
10 am	5 pm	Exhibitor Badge Pick-Up	Jacobs Javits Center
10 am	5 pm	Exhibitor Booth Setup	Jacob Javits Center
5 pm	6 pm	Rising Star Reception*	Sheraton: Metropolitan Ballroom
6 pm	8 pm	Opening Cocktail Reception	Sheraton: Metropolitan Ballroom

DAY 2: THURSDAY DECEMBER 3

START	ENDS	EVENT	SITE
5:45 am	5:30 pm	Shuttle Bus to/from Javits Center	Sheraton lobby (53 rd St.)
7 am	5 pm	Registration & Badge Pickup	Javits Center: Concourse 1C
7 am	10 am	Exhibitor Booth Set-Up	Javits Center
8 am	9:50 am	Opening Keynote Breakfast	Javits Center: Special Events 1D
9:50 am	10 am	Ribbon Cutting/Trade Show Opens	Javits: Concourse: 1C
10 am	5 pm	Buyer-Connect Program	Javits: Hall 1C, back left
11 am	1 pm	Consumer Media Lunch*	Javits: Hall 1C, Room TBA
11 am	5 pm	Chef Demonstrations	Javits: Floor, Central Park
11 am	4 pm	Industry Insights Stage	Sheraton: Metropolitan Ballroom

DAY 3: FRIDAY DECEMBER 4

START	ENDS	EVENT	SITE
8 am	5:30 pm	Ideation Fresh Foodservice Forum* (Separate Fee Required) 	Sheraton lobby Bus leaves promptly at 8 am
8 am	5 pm	Industry Tours: Hunts Point Market Philadelphia Produce Market Manhattan Retail Tour (Stops TBA) (Separate Fee Required)	Sheraton lobby Bus leaves promptly at 8 am



IFPA GLOBAL PRODUCE & FLORAL SHOW

BOOTH REVIEW



Oct. 14-16, 2026
Orange County Convention Center
Orlando, FL

BOOTH #3733

ALLEN LUND COMPANY

La Cañada, CA

Allen Lund Company (ALC) is a 3PL, working with shippers, growers, and carriers across the nation to arrange the transport of dry, refrigerated and flatbed freight. Additionally, ALC has a logistics and software division, ALC Logistics, and an international division licensed as an OTI-NVOCC.



BOOTH #2589

BEACHSIDE PRODUCE, LLC

Guadalupe, CA

Located in Guadalupe, CA, Beachside Produce is a year-round grower/shipper of conventional vegetables. Stop by the booth to meet our team and see what we are bringing "From Our Family Farms ... to Your Family's Table."



BOOTH #1162

BEST BUY PRODUCE

Temple City, CA

Best Buy Produce is a trusted supplier of excellent quality fresh and peeled specialty alliums and ginger. We are dedicated to delivering exceptional produce, beautiful packaging, reliable and consistent service to customers throughout the industry. Meet our team and learn more about our selection and commitment to quality.



BOOTH #1100

BLUE RIVER LEGACY FARMS

Elizabethtown, NC

Blue River Legacy Farms is a fully integrated grower, packer, and shipper of conventional and organic blueberries for the fresh and frozen markets. Headquartered in Elizabethtown, NC, with farms in Florida, Georgia and North Carolina, we deliver premium, single-source blueberries with consistent quality, food safety and reliable supply.



BOOTH #1954

CHRISTOPHER RANCH

Gilroy, CA

As the nation's largest domestic fresh garlic grower/packer, Christopher Ranch is a family-owned agribusiness with a 70-year tradition of supplying the finest garlic products to retail, industrial, and foodservice customers. Proudly located in Gilroy, the "Garlic Capital of the World," Christopher Ranch ships over 100 million pounds of California heirloom garlic annually.



BOOTH #2821

CLEARLY CLEAN PRODUCTS

Frackville, PA

Clearly Clean is excited to exhibit at the Global Produce & Floral Show. Visit us to discover our latest sustainable packaging solutions, connect with our team, and learn how we're helping shape the future of produce packaging. We look forward to seeing you.



BOOTH #1516

CLEVELAND KITCHEN

Cleveland, OH

Cleveland Kitchen is redefining the fermented foods category with fresh, refrigerated krauts, kimchi, pickles and pickled vegetables. Discover America's No. 1 kimchi and sauerkraut brands, crafted for bold flavor, satisfying crunch and gut-friendly benefits.



BOOTH #2621

COPELAND

Boise, ID

Moving perishables through complex cold chains creates uncertainty and risk, but Copeland combines decades of global in-transit monitoring experience, proven technology, and connected data visibility to help producers make better business decisions that protect product quality, strengthen customer relationships, and improve cold chain performance. Visit Copeland at booth #2621.

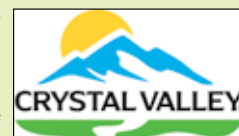


BOOTH #2457

CRYSTAL VALLEY FOODS

Miami, FL

Crystal Valley Foods is a leading grower, importer and distributor of premium produce and one of the largest U.S. asparagus importers. Our diverse portfolio includes specialty vegetables, berries, peppers, tropicals and Asian vegetables. Visit us at IFPA to explore our extensive product line and discover what's fresh from Crystal Valley.



BOOTH #2401

DAUMAR PACKAGING

Huntersville, NC

Need faster packing, dependable equipment, or packaging that gets your produce noticed? DAUMAR has the solution — from integrated weighing and bagging machinery to net bags, printed films, labels, and stand-up pouches. Tell us your challenge, and we'll help you package it better. DAUMAR — When Service Matters!



BOOTH #4055

DIRECT SOURCE MARKETING

Mount Kisco, NY

Direct Source Marketing is a grower-shipper delivering premium California table grapes, berries, and imported fruit programs. We combine quality-focused sourcing, in-house logistics, and 40 years of market expertise to provide dependable supply, exceptional service, and long-term value for retailers, wholesalers and foodservice partners.



BOOTH #1289

DOROT FARM

Melville, NY

Dorot Farm is a third-generation, family-owned produce company and the No. 1 carrot growers group. We supply premium jumbo and cello carrots to retailers, wholesalers, foodservice, processors, and fresh-cut companies worldwide. Visit us to discover our fresh, sweet, farm-to-table quality and global partnership opportunities.



IFPA GLOBAL PRODUCE & FLORAL SHOW

OCT. 14-16, 2026
ORANGE COUNTY CONVENTION CENTER, ORLANDO, FL

IFPA GLOBAL PRODUCE & FLORAL SHOW BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #371

FAMILY TREE FARMS

Reedley, CA

At Family Tree Farms, we've spent more than 25 years growing the world's most flavorful fruit. Every piece of fruit is grown, harvested, and selected for exceptional flavor and quality. Visit us to discover our premium blueberries, signature stone fruit, and the innovation behind every season.



BOOTH #4447

FedEx

Miami, FL

FedEx solutions for your flower shipments with a 48- to 72-hour delivery time. Take your business to the U.S. with the largest cargo airline in the world. At FedEx, we know your business and we have logistic solutions so your flowers arrive on time and with the freshness your customers deserve. Service available from Bogota, Medellin, Quito, Guayaquil and San Jose.



BOOTH #2121

FOX PACKAGING AND FOX SOLUTIONS

McAllen, TX

Fox Packaging and Fox Solutions cover the pack line at booth #2121. Fox Packaging makes flexible packaging that protects produce, showcases product health, and extends shelf life, including Fox Fresh Mesh. Fox Solutions supplies and supports weighers, baggers, and case packers from Newtec, Haith, Jasa, Kwik-Lok and C-Pack.



BOOTH #1705

FRESH

INNOVATIONS, LLC

Rhome, TX

Fresh Innovations, LLC/Yo Quiero! has a new line of Mexico-inspired dips that are full of authentic, bold flavors. As innovators in the category, Yo Quiero! continues to create delicious, on-trend dips that drive sales and create excitement on shelf.



BOOTH #771

G&R FARMS

Glennville, GA

Discover what sets G&R Farms apart. Our Vidalia and premium sweet onions deliver on shape, flavor and appearance. With generations of growing expertise, G&R Farms is the nation's oldest Vidalia grower and provides consistent quality and exceptional sweetness from field to shelf. "Grown with Passion, Served with Pride."



BOOTH #934

THE GARLIC COMPANY

Shafter, CA

Since 1980, The Garlic Company has been growing fresh garlic in California. We are a vertically integrated grower, processor, shipper supplying fresh whole bulb, peeled, diced, pureed, and jarred products to the industry. We look forward to seeing everyone at IFPA in Orlando, booth #934.



BOOTH #2987

GOODY PREMIUM CITRUS

Riverside, CA

Goody by Blue Banner Company: Rooted in tradition since 1950. Seventy-five years and growing, Goody serves the produce market as a seasoned grower, packer and shipper of the highest quality citrus products. Proudly family-owned and operated, Goody's competitive edge is world-class service, always.



BOOTH #4352

HOLLAND

GREENHOUSES INC.

Monroe Township, NJ

Where Dutch tradition meets American excellence. Holland Greenhouses Inc. grows premium tulips that travel fewer miles, arrive fresher and last longer. With direct-from-the-grower service, multiple weekly deliveries, and a passion for quality, we help businesses bring vibrant color and exceptional value to every bouquet.



BOOTH #1714

HOUSE FOODS HOLDING USA INC.

Garden Grove, CA

Discover House Foods, Franklin Farms & El Burrito at booth #1714. Inspired by our new line of Seasoned Seitan & Plant-Powered Meat, we're bringing a backyard barbecue-themed booth to Orlando. Taste new innovations including Royal Silken Tofu, meet our team and see how we're bringing fresh flavor to IFPA.



BOOTH #2460

JAC. VANDENBERG

Tarrytown, NY

Jac. Vandenberg, a fourth-generation, family-owned fresh produce importer, is now more than 120 years strong. This year, discover the expanded SUNRAYS citrus lineup — and follow the clues to something mysterious brewing at the booth. Think you can crack the case in record time? There's a prize, bragging rights, and fresh juice waiting for those who dare.



BOOTH #2314

JASA PACKAGING SOLUTIONS INC.

Denver, NC

Ready to rethink your packaging line? JASA turns complex packaging challenges into smart, high-performance solutions. From high-speed vertical bagging and sleeving to filling and end-of-line automation, our integrated systems help food packagers increase capacity, simplify changeovers, reduce labor, and embrace more sustainable packaging. One partner. Complete solutions. Proven, measurable results.



BOOTH #807

KAY BEE EXPORTS

Khopat, Thane West, Mumbai

Kay Bee Exports is India's largest fresh produce exporter, specializing in premium mangos, pomegranates, ginger, coconuts, and onions for North American markets. For nearly four decades, we've built long-term relationships by delivering quality produce, food safety, and reliable service.



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IFPA GLOBAL PRODUCE & FLORAL SHOW BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #4035

KIWA ASI

St. Louis, MO

Kiwa ASI (formerly ASI) is a leading food safety auditing company based in St. Louis, MO, providing farm-to-fork food safety solutions since the 1940s. We make certification easy by helping customers navigate high-pressure compliance processes with less friction and more transparency. Currently offering SQF, CanadaGAP, BRGS, FSSC22000, IFS, and other certifications.



BOOTH #1519

MARIANI NUT COMPANY

Winters, CA

Mariani Nut Company is one of the world's largest suppliers of premium almonds from California. This family-owned company has been growing and processing for over 50 years. A full range of packaging options are available for the retail environment along with attractive display options.



BOOTH #2071

THE NUNES COMPANY, INC.

Salinas, CA

The Nunes Company, Inc., headquartered in Salinas, CA, will exhibit at IFPA in the Grower-Shipper Pavilion. The company will highlight a selection of organic and conventional fresh vegetables from its Foxy and Foxy Organic brands.



BOOTH #887

OISHII

Jersey City, NJ

Oishii (meaning "delicious" in Japanese) is the innovative company behind the world's largest indoor vertical Smart Farm. On a mission to transform the agriculture industry through the power of smart farming, Oishii harmoniously marries nature with state-of-the-art technology to create the ideal elements for growing in-season produce all year-round.

Oishii

BOOTH #4132

PEELON

McAllen, TX

PeelON develops compostable packaging that extends the shelf life of fresh produce while replacing conventional plastic. Our technology helps growers, exporters, retailers, and foodservice companies reduce food waste, improve profitability and lower environmental impact. Operating globally, PeelON is commercializing sustainable packaging solutions for a more resilient and circular fresh produce supply chain.



BOOTH #830

PERI & SONS FARMS

Yerington, NV

Visit Peri & Sons Farms' booth #830. Avoid the headache and pitfalls of ordering through a web of suppliers and distribution channels. Our straight-line process saves you time and money. Red, White, Yellow, Sweet, Sweetie Sweet, Shallots, Cipollinis, and Garlic are offered year-round in both Premium and USDA Certified Organics.



BOOTH #601

PERO FAMILY FARMS

Delray Beach, FL

Pero Family Farms is a U.S. family-owned and operated farm headquartered in Delray Beach, FL, and has been providing fresh, healthy, safe, and nutritious vegetables year-round to families in North America for over 115 years. Pero has a commitment to sustainability, conservation, and innovation in farming practices.



BOOTH #4765

POTTER, INC.

Bryan, OH

Visit Potter, Inc. to explore our newest designs for the 2026-2027 season. From hand-tied bows and potted upgrades to gift baskets and corsages, Potter is your source for gift-ready, labor-efficient upgrades.



BOOTH #3336

PRODUCE BUSINESS

Boca Raton, FL

PRODUCE BUSINESS is a magazine for retail and foodservice buyers to garner information and insights on marketing, merchandising, management and procurement. The brand's 40-plus-year engagement with industry leaders worldwide is extended through its sister publication, PerishableNews.com, as well as through its world-class event, The New York Produce Show & Conference.



BOOTH #1923

PURE

PALM DATES

Bakersfield, CA

As a premium date provider, Pure Palm delivers the freshest organic and conventional dates at the peak of perfection. We are overwhelming shoppers with fantastic quality and taste while alleviating retailers' pain and increasing sales. Let Pure Palm help show you the way to dating success.



BOOTH #2061

RED JACKET ORCHARDS

Geneva, NY

Pure. Fresh. Delicious. Our naturally functional, cold-pressed juices and lemonades deliver the flavor, premium quality, and clean ingredients that today's consumers are seeking. Three generations of the Nicholson family have been freshly pressing juices and ciders in New York's Finger Lakes region for nearly 70 years.



BOOTH #3426

REDLINE

SOLUTIONS

Santa Clara, CA

RedLine Solutions has worked with packer-shippers, growers, and distributors of fresh produce for 25-plus years. We are featuring MyProduce software which integrates with ERPs and drives productivity while capturing FSMA 204 traceability data. Redline provides software, barcode hardware, and labeling needed for electronic data collection and FSMA 204 compliance.



IFPA GLOBAL PRODUCE & FLORAL SHOW

Oct. 14-16, 2026
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BOOTH #5343 **SECOND NATURE** **DESIGNS**

Rockton, Ontario

At Second Nature Designs, we celebrate the natural beauty of plants through expert drying and thoughtful craftsmanship. Our timeless botanical creations bring lasting joy and inspiration while fostering a deeper connection to nature. Every piece is designed to enhance living spaces and support a beautiful, sustainable, eco-friendly lifestyle.



BOOTH #1507 **SETTON** **FARMS**

Commack, NY

Visit Setton Farms to experience "America's Best Tasting Pistachios." Explore our full line of pistachios: in-shell and kernels, raw, roasted, seasoned, organic, dark chocolate, and premium snack blends, while discovering our newest debut — Hot Honey Seasoned Kernels.



BOOTH #2813 **SILo**

Fresno, CA

Silo builds supply chain software connecting produce operations from field to finance. Pet Tiger in the Cloud has launched, bringing 30-plus years of trusted timekeeping software to a modern platform, and uniting Silo and Pet Tiger is next! Visit us for a live demo, show discounts and beta details.

Silo



BOOTH #2065 **SNAPDRAGON APPLES**

Newark, NY

Visit SnapDragon apples for a tasting adventure unlike any other. Build your perfect bite by dipping fresh SnapDragon slices in selected dipping sauces, then explore a booth inspired by adventure with a surfboard, hammock and bike. Discover why this fast-growing premium apple is winning fans in all 50 states.



BOOTH #1259 **SOUTH CAROLINA** **DEPARTMENT OF** **AGRICULTURE** **Columbia, SC**

It's a matter of taste. From ripe fruits to nutritious vegetables, Certified SC farmers grow some of the freshest, tastiest produce around. Contact us for local sourcing, Certified SC Associate membership, Certified SC Retail Merchandise and more!



BOOTH #1613 **SUNNYFIELDS**

Miami, FL

SunnyFields has become one of the Southeast's most recognized garlic suppliers, providing premium fresh and peeled garlic and shallots nationwide. Visit our booth to experience our products, state-of-the-art peeling and packing technology, and dedication to quality. We look forward to connecting with you and sharing what makes SunnyFields different.



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WE PACK
WE CARE

BOOTH #863

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BOOTH #2025
THERMAL TECHNOLOGIES
Blythewood, SC

Thermal Technologies will be showcasing the latest in commercial ripening room technology including their exclusive, all-new RipeScan ripening room gas analyzer — the industry's most advanced dual-gas analyzer. Experts will be on hand to discuss your ripening needs and the full range of customizable solutions available to meet them.



BOOTH #2209
TIVE
Boston, MA

Tive is the global leader in supply chain and logistics visibility technology. More than 1,200 companies use Tive to monitor shipment location and condition in real time: to reduce excursions and delays and to decrease theft, damage and spoilage. Customers count on Tive because every shipment matters.



BOOTH #3922
TRUSTWELL
Beaverton, OR

Meet Trustwell to discover an all-in-one product suite built for the food industry. From supplier compliance and product specifications to quality management, traceability, recalls, formulation, and labeling, Trustwell helps distributors, retailers, and foodservice teams strengthen visibility, reduce risk, and respond faster from recipe to recall.



BOOTH #2417
ZGROUP
Miami Beach, FL

ZGROUP specializes in innovative modular refrigeration solutions, offering cutting-edge cold storage, pre-cooling and ripening technologies. With over 15 years of experience, we enhance food safety, reduce waste, and promote sustainability.



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In the early 1990s, Vinnie and Jimmy Iovine (left) opened Iovine Brothers Produce, which occupies 2,000 square feet of the 78,000-square-foot Reading Terminal Market, an indoor farmers market and food hall. *PRODUCE BUSINESS/LUCAS DUARTE PHOTOS*

100% Produce: Iovine Brothers

Iconic Philly retailer proves you don't need a lot of space for success.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Iovine Brothers Produce has been part of the historic Reading Terminal Market for over 35 years. Family-owned and operated, the produce-centric retailer occupies 2,000 square feet of the 78,000-square-foot Reading Terminal Market, an indoor farmers market and food hall.

In the early 1990s, Vinnie and Jimmy Iovine had the opportunity to operate within the Reading Terminal at a time when the terminal and the surrounding area were struggling.

"Despite the challenges and rough edges, we fell in love with the building and the opportunity to build our own business in this historic building," says Vinnie Iovine. "Today, we are an established cornerstone of the Reading Terminal and the neighborhood. We serve about 750,000 customers per year."

During the past three decades, Iovine's business has steadily increased and evolved due to the store's focus on customer needs.

"To grow and thrive in Philadelphia requires us to listen to our customers' requests," says Vinnie Iovine. "Over the years, our customers' interests have changed, and we change with them. If we listen to our customers, we will ultimately provide them with the experience that is most rewarding to them by selling what they want."

EVERYTHING PRODUCE

Unlike a supermarket that incorporates produce alongside meats, cheeses and grocery items, Iovine Brothers Produce is almost exclu-



Unlike a supermarket that incorporates produce alongside meats, cheeses and grocery items, Iovine Brothers Produce is almost exclusively produce, and produce accounts for almost 100% of sales.

sively produce, and produce accounts for almost 100% of sales.

"Our primary focus is to provide our customers with high-quality produce at affordable prices," says Vinnie Iovine. "We want our customers to know they can rely on us for everything produce."

"Over the years there have been some minor additions of nuts and dried fruits, as well as a line of homemade cold pressed juices, but overall we are focused on fresh fruit and vegetables," adds Butch Dougherty, director of operations.

The store reaches customers via social media posts as well as a monthly email newsletter.

"We also partner with the Reading Terminal Market on a variety of web and social media marketing," says Dougherty. "Of course, the



Iovine Brothers Produce boasts a wide array of over 450 items and spends over \$3.5 million annually on produce.

best marketing is word-of-mouth promotion. Our customers help us spread the word when they enjoy their experience with us. We also have a variety of rewards for our senior citizens, local university students and partner area businesses."

INSPIRING SHOPPERS

Iovine's merchandising MO is all about visual appeal.

"People shop with their eyes, so our produce displays are meant to catch our shoppers' attention," says Vinnie Iovine. "Our displays are fresh, full and abundant. Often, we are told that a customer only came in for one item and found themselves leaving with a full bag. That is great to hear. It means they pleasantly found inspiration and value displayed throughout our store."

The store uses an array of display tables, display table risers, local produce bins and retail display refrigerators.

"Everything is on wheels, and everything is capable of being moved and rearranged," says Dougherty. "We change displays daily to accommodate special sales, locally grown produce and seasonal items."

One side of the store houses two 8-foot refrigerated cases and a 6-foot door refrigerator, which showcases cut veg and fruits, spiral vegetables, ready-to-eat salads, juices, and other fresh prepped items.

Along the second side of the store sits three 6-foot refrigerated cases displaying vegetables, herbs and lettuce. The interior of the store is a master class of color blocking and utilizes the flexible merchandising displays to the max.

The offering boasts a wide array of over 450 items, including nuts, juice and beverages.

"We aim to carry everything needed for our customers' next snack or next recipe," says Vinnie Iovine. "Variety is always a plus."

"For years, interest was focused on organic and locally grown. Although those interests remain, ready-to-cook meal-

prepped items are quickly becoming a focus of many customers, as well as many staples again."

HANDS-ON SOURCING

To ensure freshness, the store sources produce daily. Both Jimmy and Vinnie Iovine personally shop the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market (PWPM) six days a week to select the produce.

"We love it there," says Jimmy Iovine.

"We have a lot of fun shopping there. Our relationships with most of the merchants go back to our origin. We rely on them to meet our needs."

Iovine spends over \$3.5 million annually on produce, and PWPM is the retailer's primary partner and source.

"Our main criteria when sourcing are quality and affordability," says Jimmy Iovine. "Sourcing produce from PWPM is essential because it gives us access to local, domestic and international produce, and because the people we deal with there understand what we need. We have built long-standing relationships with many of the families at the PWPM companies. It's rewarding to work with people you know and trust."

Once produce is in-house, the store takes strides to ensure it's handled well and emphasizes having highly trained, professional staff on the floor.

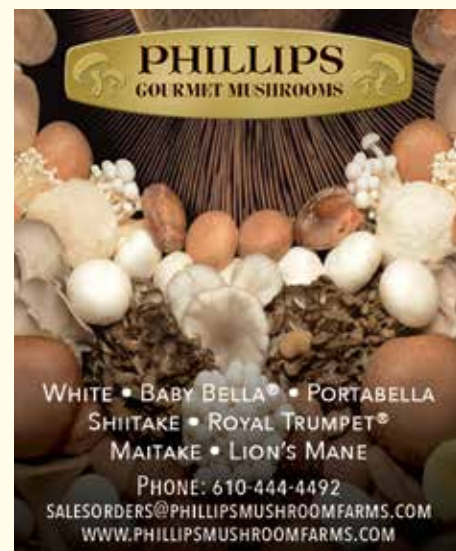
"Our managers and staff are very knowledgeable regarding our produce," says Dougherty. "Personal interactions between our staff and our customers are very important — just as important as the produce we sell." **PB**



INSIDE THE STORE

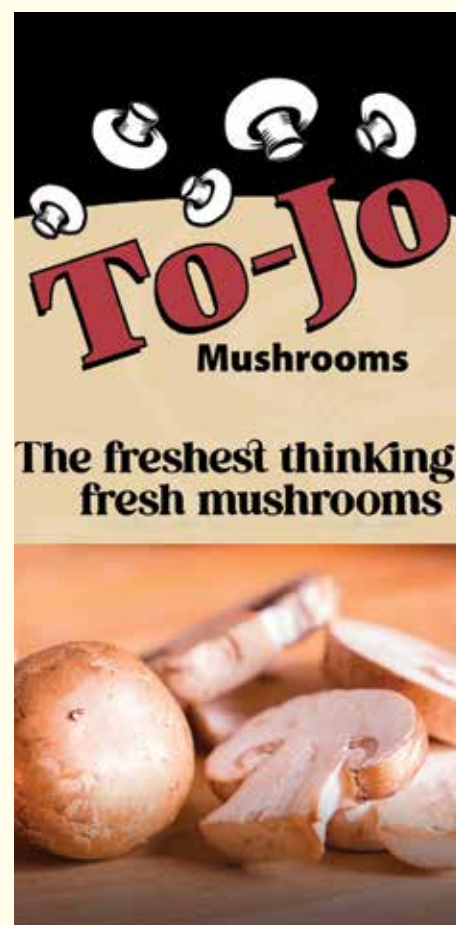
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Regenerative agriculture practices are helping growers rebuild soil health, reduce synthetic inputs and improve long-term resilience. At IMG Citrus, Vero Beach, FL, a decade-long transition has centered on composting, healthier soils and stronger trees while significantly reducing nitrogen fertilizer and herbicide use.

PHOTO COURTESY IMG CITRUS

Roots of Recovery: Regenerative Agriculture Offers Hope

Growers, retailers and suppliers are embracing regenerative practices.

BY STEVEN MAXWELL

From soil health to water conservation, regenerative agriculture is a concept that is rapidly moving from the fringes to the mainstream, as its practical benefits to strengthen crop resilience and support long-term sustainability become evident.

Although regenerative practices can vary by crop and region, they share a common goal: restoring natural resources while producing high-quality fruits and vegetables.

For Mexican avocado grower-exporter GLC Cerritos, regenerative agriculture has prompted a “fundamental evolution” in how it views ecosystems, marking a shift toward treating avocado orchards as living, self-sustaining systems.

“This transition has restructured our daily agronomic practices,” says the company’s

sustainability director, Armando Garcia Angulo. “Instead of managing symptoms with synthetic chemicals, we design preventative ecosystem balances.”

As an example, Garcia Angulo says GLC Cerritos now integrates native forest trees into its orchards and the surrounding land to recreate natural microclimates, enhance regional biodiversity, and establish continuous wildlife corridors.

“Integrating native trees restores local ecological functions and stabilizes surrounding soil structure,” he explains.

For Janis McIntosh, director of sustainability at Naturipe, Salinas, CA, regenerative agriculture is a “shining star.”

“The biggest change for our growers who are focused on regenerative farming has been looking at farming from the bot-



WHAT IS REGENERATIVE AG?

- Restores soil health by building organic matter, increasing biodiversity, and improving natural biology.
- Conserves natural resources through practices that improve water retention, reduce erosion, support pollinators, and enhance long-term ecosystem resilience.



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tom up instead of the top down — how they feed the soil, not the plant,” she explains. “Giving our growers the ability to make decisions in their fields has been a big part of this success.”

One such Naturipe grower is Diwan Munger of Delano, CA-based Munger Farms, who says rising input costs are leading producers to seek solutions that are readily available in nature.

MEASURABLE RESULTS

For many in the industry, the factor that makes regenerative agriculture so persuasive is its ability to deliver measurable results within a relatively short time.

An example is the concept of cover cropping, which McIntosh says has proven beneficial for many growers. “Whether it’s having something flowering all the time to feed pollinators above ground, or roots underground creating a mat of carbon that feeds microbiology, it all works together to support plants,” she says.

Although results often aren’t noticeable right away, Munger says benefits become apparent in plant health and fruit quality. “To measure results and make a difference, we have to pay close attention to all changes made and follow up constantly.”

Garcia Angulo says practices such as reincorporating orchard pruning waste directly into the soil creates a continuous biomass of organic mulch, which significantly boosts soil organic matter, sequestering carbon and retaining water.

Instead of relying on pesticides, GLC Cerritos uses biological control agents that release beneficial insects and entomopathogenic microorganisms to control pest populations naturally, reducing chemical dependency. To safeguard local bee populations and wild pollinators, the company also plants dedicated strips of native melliferous (nectar-rich) plants.

IMPORTANCE OF HEALTHY SOILS

Jana Fischback, sustainability coordinator at Wenatchee, WA-headquartered Stemilt Growers, says regenerative agriculture — in the form of healthy soils, efficient water use, biodiversity, and long-term orchard health — provides a useful framework to work toward, which has been a long been a priority for the company.

“For Stemilt, water management and soil stewardship have delivered tangible benefits,” she says. “Improving irrigation efficiency helps us use water more effectively while maintaining crop quality. When you improve soil health, you often see benefits like better water retention, less erosion, and stronger long-term productivity.”

Garcia Angulo says GLC Cerritos’ combination of adding biomass from pruning waste and minimizing chemical disruption works to feed the soil microbiome, in the process unlocking bound nutrients, improving soil structure, and increasing natural fertility.

Another beneficiary is water management, with organic matter acting like a sponge, maintaining biomass ground cover and improving soil structure. Through this, he says growers can increase soil water-retention capacity, reduce surface evaporation, minimize erosion on sloping terrain, and optimize irrigation efficiency.

Garcia Angulo says plants grown in living, biologically active soils become demonstrably more resilient, developing stronger root systems and enhanced systemic immunity. He says GLC Cerritos’ orchards have become “vastly more resilient” against climatic extremes — such as heat waves or sudden dry spells — and natural soil pathogens like *Phytophthora*.

“Regenerative farming improves soil health by adding carbon



Retailers can help accelerate regenerative agriculture by rewarding growers who adopt sustainable practices. Beyond setting sustainability standards and educating consumers, creating financial incentives for regenerative farming could drive wider adoption and strengthen the resilience of the food system.

PHOTO COURTESY GLC CERRITOS

back into the soil, both on top and below the surface,” says McIntosh at Naturipe. “Carbon is the key to all life. It’s the bond between our most valuable resources.”

Building healthy soil creates a buffer, helping growers manage through times when water or fertilizer is limited, while also storing more when there is excess. McIntosh says all of those benefits help make crops more resilient, supported by the diverse microbiology that’s built along the way.

Sunkist, a Valencia, CA-based cooperative numbering more than 1,000 citrus growers, makes extensive use of regenerative agriculture, according to Vice President Of Government Relations And Sustainability Elaine Trevino, with precision water management, integrated pest management and nutrient management tailored to the needs of each grove.

In particular, she says soil-moisture monitoring and efficient irrigation systems help growers make more informed water-management decisions, while targeted pest and nutrient programs support orchard health and fruit quality.

“Pollinator protection is another important priority, particularly during citrus bloom,” adds Trevino. “Practices may vary, but they share a focus on using resources thoughtfully while maintaining healthy, productive orchards.”

As a fourth-generation farming family, Michael Family Farms in Urbana, OH, has had regenerative agriculture at its core for decades, according to Kathy Michael Sponheim.

A long-time proponent of smart crop rotation and cover crops to improve soil health and defend against pests, Michael Family Farms uses precision nutrient placement and irrigation technology to give the plants “what they need when they need it,” and also minimize outside impact.

“Potatoes grow underground, so they are sensitive to soil health and water,” explains Michael Sponheim.

A CUMULATIVE EFFECT

So how does regenerative agriculture work in practice? A case in point could well be IMG Citrus in Vero Beach, FL, a company which had operated as a conventional citrus grower for decades before the spread of citrus greening across the state.

When the disease began impacting the health and yields of trees,

IMG realized it needed to start thinking differently about how it produced citrus, according to co-chief executive Tim Sallin.

"We quickly realized we needed to build soil biology and soil health to support the trees, and their immunity and nutrition," he recalls. "We understood we needed to stop poisoning the soils with herbicides and fertilizers, and rebuild soil health by increasing organic matter and biology."

Far from stopping "cold turkey," IMG has been on a journey for over a decade, Sallin says, learning, experimenting and changing how it grows citrus.

A keystone to this change has been composting. Beginning with 2 tons per acre, per year, IMG has now increased to 6-10 tons, which Sallin says has had an important cumulative effect.

"For some groves where we've been doing it for over five years, we're starting to see changes in the soil profile," he says. "We've actually found earthworms in groves. We have much better water retention, and you see visible responses in the trees."

IMG has also learned to measure the nitrogen contribution from the compost, which has allowed it to "significantly reduce" applications of synthetic nitrogen, while applications of glyphosate has been cut by more than 50%, switching to "less harmful chemistries."

"It's a holistic shift in how we think about farming that leads us to explore different approaches," adds Sallin. "I can't say we have solved the problem of citrus greening — we haven't — but we are probably helping trees be productive longer."

THE BROADER PICTURE

The conversation around regenerative agriculture doesn't just involve growers, but is increasingly bringing in all stakeholders across the industry.

One such company is Bayer CropScience, whose director of global sustainability, regenerative agriculture and smallholder farmers' strategy, Cristiane Lourenço, describes the concept as a key element in the effort to mitigate climate change.

"Regenerative agriculture is very important as a tool for growers to be resilient for what's coming and what's here," she explains.

To do this, Lourenço says Bayer CropScience is not only breeding climate-resistant seeds, but is also developing climate change modeling — looking at the climate where Bayer operates and starting to anticipate future conditions for growers.

"We're not only looking at what growers need today, because a tomato or pepper seed can take five or seven years to come to market, we are developing modeling tools that help breeders predict the climate in terms of water and soil conditions," Lourenço outlines. "We want to make sure seeds not only deliver on taste and flavor, but also deliver more resilience for growers."

An example cited by Lourenço is the Huntington sweet pepper, a variety bred by Bayer subsidiary Seminis to perform across a wide range of environmental conditions in India, including temperatures as low as 5°C and as high as 40°C. The variety, she says, demonstrates continuous flowering and fruit set across a broad range of temperatures, as well as tolerance to key diseases.

ROLE OF RETAILERS

For GLC Cerritos' Garcia Angulo, retailers play a fundamental role as catalysts for regenerative agriculture by transforming the dynamics of the value chain, shifting from basic compliance systems to effective communication and leadership commitment.

"By demanding sustainability targets and certifications from producers, retailers not only elevate the industry standard, but also raise awareness among end consumers," he says. "They serve as the strategic bridge to educate the market on how these practices

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"Healthy soils are the foundation of resilient farming systems."**

Jana Fischback, Stemilt Growers, Wenatchee, WA

- **"Consumers need certainty that the avocados they purchase genuinely contribute to ecosystem restoration rather than just serving as a marketing trend."**

Armando Garcia Angulo, GLC Cerritos, Oxnard, CA

- **"Clear signage with recognized certifications makes it easier to digest, and your staff can help bring that messaging to life by sharing the grower's story with shoppers."**

Janis McIntosh, Naturipe, Salinas, CA

restore ecosystems and ensure the long-term resilience of our food systems."

However, Garcia Angulo believes the greatest opportunity to scale this model lies in securing a direct economic differential for producers. "Currently, the risk and operational burden of the ecological transition fall almost exclusively on the grower. If retailers structure their purchasing frameworks to financially reward operations that implement regenerative practices over those that maintain conventional methods, it would trigger massive adoption."

Naturipe's McIntosh believes retailers play a significant role in creating demand for products grown using regenerative agriculture by harnessing increasing shopper curiosity about where their food comes from and how it's grown.

"Retailers place greater value on carrying products that meet those expectations, which encourages growers to continue investing in regenerative practices."

WILLINGNESS TO PAY MORE?

Although there is plenty of variation among shoppers and markets, Trevino at Sunkist believes simply applying a regenerative label is unlikely to command a premium. Instead, she argues that retailers and produce companies need to clearly communicate why responsible stewardship supports quality and long-term supply.

"For these practices to create lasting value, they need to be meaningful to consumers, workable for retailers and sustainable for growers," adds Trevino.

To avoid accusations of greenwashing, Garcia Angulo advises produce departments to establish credibility through third-party certifications. "Consumers need certainty that the avocados they purchase genuinely contribute to ecosystem restoration rather than just serving as a marketing trend."

By prominently displaying recognized sustainability seals, Garcia Angulo believes retailers can leverage verifications as a cornerstone of transparent corporate communication that demonstrates genuine commitment to the shopper.

He says retailers can build on that trust by deploying in-store visuals in the form of clear, engaging signage that connects the product to tangible benefits like living soils and enhanced biodiversity. This physical presence, Garcia Angulo continues, can be amplified by a social media campaign to educate the public on what regenerative agriculture represents, showcasing efforts like pollinator conservation and native reforestation.

As to whether such campaigns can translate to increased sales, Garcia Angulo believes there is a growing segment of conscious consumers willing to pay a premium for ethically and sustainably grown food. However, he concedes that price sensitivity remains real across the broader market.

McIntosh advocates “keeping it simple” by providing information about how food is grown and sourced.

Although Michael Sponheim hasn’t seen evidence that shoppers might be willing to pay more for potatoes grown using regenerative methods, she strongly advocates connecting consumers to agriculture in a world where most are far removed from it. To this end, Michael Family Farms packs include QR codes linking to a website giving details about the company’s sustainable farming methods.

THE EXPANSION CHALLENGE

McIntosh says a key challenge is “unwinding” practices that have been standard over decades in conventional agriculture. “It’s a huge undertaking, time and money, to truly understand your soil and for a farmer considering it, there’s a lot to think about and commit to,” she admits.

For Garcia Angulo, the produce industry still lacks a single, globally unified definition for “regenerative.” To tackle this, he advocates establishing clear, harmonized outcome metrics to prevent consumer confusion and ensure growers working on sustainable farming are properly recognized.

He admits the biological shift in soil health could take years. “During this window, growers may face learning curves or yield adjustments before full ecosystem balance is established.”

In a similar vein, Trevino says the absence of a universally understood definition is compounded by the fact that practices that may work for one crop, region or farming operation often don’t translate directly to another.

At the same time, she says growers have to balance environmental priorities with food safety, pest and disease pressures, water availability, labor and the economics of farming.

Although Trevino believes existing state and federal agricultural regulations can provide important foundation, she believes further progress will depend on broader collaboration between growers, researchers, retailers, trade organizations and government.

Stemilt’s Fischback agrees the lack of a universally accepted definition and set of outcomes remains a major challenge, and the practical reality that new practices take time, money, and good data. Growers, she says, have to balance those considerations with running a successful business.

“Ultimately, I think the industry’s greatest opportunity is to focus on measurable outcomes rather than terminology,” Fischback adds. “Growers have a long history of innovating and improving stewardship practices, and continuing to build on that foundation is what matters most.”

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Marketing executives report there is a shift in volume and popularity toward high-flavor apples such as Honeycrisp, which continues to increase in volume alongside its popularity.

PRODUCE BUSINESS PHOTO

Washington Apples Regain Momentum

New varieties and strong marketing are helping to expand the category.

BY LISA WHITE

With its ideal growing conditions for apples, Washington State is a prime provider of this popular fruit. The state's advanced techniques and strong marketing have given this segment even more momentum this year, despite challenges.

The 2026 Washington apple crop is expected to be 7% to 10% smaller than the previous year's harvest, according to the Wenatchee, WA-based Washington Apple Commission. While early-season frost and rising production costs squeezed margins, growers hope the reduced volume — following 2025's 132-million-box yield — will help sustain stronger market prices.

Growers report that overall fruit quality is shaping up well this season, according to Wenatchee, WA-based CMI Orchards. However, a hailstorm earlier this summer, combined with frost damage back in early spring, affected some blocks across the growing regions.

SEASON PREDICTIONS

Typically, the industry sends an estimated crop volume early in the season, but this year, USApple has made the decision to delay its industry-wide initial crop estimates until fruit has been harvested.

Despite the broader industry headwinds, CMI Orchards says it is well-positioned heading into the new season compared to last year.

While it remains early, CMI Orchards is not currently projecting

sizing to look meaningfully different from last year across the board.

"Cosmic Crisp volume will continue to stabilize in 2026 as orchards reach maturity and volume plateaus," says Kaci Komstadius, CMI's marketing manager. "This will allow retailers to better plan consistent promotional efforts with a reliable supply of this consumer favorite."

According to Aimee Bach, business development manager at FirstFruits Farms, based in Prescott, WA, the industry is entering the 2026-27 season from a relatively balanced position. Washington shipments through July 5 totaled approximately 107 million cartons, running ahead of last year's pace of 103.7 million cartons.

"Harvest is expected to begin roughly one week earlier than last season," she says. "Early orchard observations suggest strong fruit quality, and we anticipate improved pack outs compared to last season, though final volumes will depend on the overall crop size."

From a market standpoint, retailers can expect a consistent supply transition, as new-crop fruit started shipping in late July and August, says Bach.

"While Washington is positioned for a strong season, several eastern growing regions experienced challenges from spring freeze events," says Bach. "Many East Coast growers are reporting lighter crop sets and weather-related damage following April freezes."

Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing at Elgin, MN-based Honeybear Brands, says, for retailers, a smaller Washington crop coupled with reduced production in the East isn't necessarily a negative.



Consumer interest continues to broaden, with Cosmic Crisp and Pazazz gaining traction at retail. PHOTO COURTESY HONEYBEAR MARKETING

"After several seasons of abundant production, the industry is returning to a more balanced supply situation that should support healthier pricing and reduce some of the inventory pressures experienced over the past two years," he explains.

WHAT'S SELLING

Alongside old favorites, new Washington apple varieties are expanding the category.

"There has been a big shift in volume toward high-flavor apples like Cosmic Crisp, and Honeycrisp continues to increase in volume alongside its popularity," according to Brianna Shales, marketing director at Wenatchee, WA-based Stemilt Growers.

Stemilt's SweeTango fall apple performs well by bringing volume and velocity to the category while other apples are still being harvested.

"It's a great apple to promote in October in a big way," says Shales. "The growing conditions so far in Washington are paving the way for a great SweeTango crop."

Although Honeycrisp is the volume and dollar leader, Cosmic Crisp is making huge gains in the category with the volume available now and consumer pull.

"It is the No. 4 apple in the category and makes up 10% of apple sales now," says Shales. "Gala is No. 2, and Granny Smith is No. 3."

Next Big Thing, a growers' cooperative that represents 61 growers, is focused on marketing and expanding demand for SweeTango apples.

"We are going to have around the same-sized SweeTango crop as last year with a better size profile range, provided weather conditions remain favorable," says Jennifer L. Miller, executive director of Next Big Thing. "Our growers are optimistic about the season ahead."

Honeybear Brands continues to expand premium variety programs with Pazazz, as well as Cosmic Crisp, First Kiss and Honey-moon, a newer vibrant yellow variety with a smooth, sweet flavor.

Sinks confirms that Honeycrisp continues to be one of the strongest performers at retail, but consumer interest continues to broaden, with Cosmic Crisp and Pazazz gaining traction at retail.

Rather than constantly introducing new varieties, FirstFruits is focused on strengthening established programs that have already demonstrated strong consumer demand.

One example is Sweetie, which continues to be one of the first

SUCCESSFUL APPLE MERCHANDISING

Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing at Elgin, MN-based Honeybear Brands, says successful merchandising includes:

- High-impact branded display bins.
- Bold color breaks between apple varieties.
- Educational signage highlighting flavor profiles and texture.
- Sampling programs whenever possible.
- Digital recipes and QR codes for shopper engagement.
- Seasonal themes and cross-merchandising with caramel, cheese, baking ingredients and lunchbox items.

premium varieties available each new crop season.

"Opal apples have become a significant growth story and recently ranked the top-volume variety included in the Washington industry's 'Other Varieties' category," says Bach. "Cosmic Crisp has evolved from a new variety launch into a mainstream category driver. Its volume, consumer awareness and retail penetration now place it alongside many of the industry's traditional core varieties."

Bach agrees that Honeycrisp remains the category leader in sales and continues to command strong consumer loyalty. In addition, Gala, Granny Smith, Fuji and Cosmic Crisp also remain among important varieties for retailers nationwide.

However, some of the most notable growth is occurring within newer premium varieties.

"Over the latest 52-week period through June 2026, Cosmic Crisp sales increased approximately 37%, while Opal apples recorded a remarkable 57% increase in sales nationally," says Bach. "From a volume standpoint, Cosmic Crisp shipments increased 24% year-over-year, and Pink Lady grew 34%, reflecting continued consumer interest in high-flavor varieties that offer a differentiated eating experience."

PLAYBOOK TO MERCHANDISING

Both industry-wide and company-specific Washington apple initiatives are actively working to boost fresh apple consumption.

Eat More Apples is a new, industry-wide nonprofit coalition that is focused on increasing domestic apple consumption through advocacy, marketing and education. The campaign is supported by growers, packers and promotional partners across all U.S. apple growing regions and backed by corporate sponsors to fund national execution.

"CMI's merchandising tools, digital campaigns and educational programs are designed to make the journey easier and more engaging, connecting flavor-forward varieties with curious consumers," says Komstadius. "CMI's proprietary Flavogram merchandising simplifies variety navigation while encouraging trial and cross-purchase of newer apple varieties like SugarBee, Kiku, Kanzi and Envy."

To amplify in-store impact, CMI continues to invest in geotargeted digital advertising, data-driven promotions and strategic partnerships — allowing for online-to-store conversion. Targeted content, educational point-of-sale materials, and high-ROI sampling events drive in-store sales lifts.

For younger shoppers, CMI recently introduced licensed, kid-friendly apple bags featuring family-favorite characters. The rollout of Apple Crush — a campaign that helps shoppers discover their apple match through digital tools and in-store engagement — continues this fall.

The Rapid Growth of Organic Washington Apples

BY LISA WHITE

Organic apples continue to represent one of the fastest-growing premium segments within the category. Millennials and Gen Z consumers are driving this demand due to their focus on clean ingredients, wellness, sustainability and food transparency.

According to Aimee Bach, business development manager at FirstFruits Farms, based in Prescott, WA, organic apples remain a strong and growing segment, accounting for approximately 15% of her company's overall volume.

"That compares favorably to Washington State's organic production, which represents roughly 12% of total apple output," she says. "The price gap between conventional and organic apples narrowed significantly over the past decade, making organic options more accessible to a broader range of consumers."

Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing at Elgin, MN-based Honeybear Brands, says success in the



Granny Smith apples remain among important varieties for retailers nationwide.

PRODUCE BUSINESS/AIMEE TENZEK PHOTO

organic category comes from maintaining strong quality, minimizing out-of-stocks and merchandising organic apples with the same attention as conventional offerings.

"Retailers that merchandise organic and conventional apples together with clear signage often make it easier for shoppers to compare options and build larger category sales," he says.

Wenatchee, WA-based Stemilt

Growers has a long history of organic farming and continues to invest in more organics to keep up with consumer demand.

"Last year, we were undersupplied on organic apples and had a lot of pent-up demand," says Brianna Shales, Stemilt's marketing director. "We hope this year's crop allows for more promotions to continue growing this area of the apple category."

Stemilt offers packaged items like Lil Snappers kid-size fruit.

"Displays are critical to merchandising apples, and updating them frequently or helping to educate via signage is key in driving consumption with consumers," says Shales. "Rotating the featured variety and running multiple apples on ad at one time is a key way to elevate the entire category. In-and-out promotions on bags or specialty apples can also help drive volume in key periods."

Honeybear Brands continues to invest in consumer promotions and social media campaigns, retail-specific merchandising solutions, and eye-catching packaging.

Next Big Thing encourages retailers to stock SweeTango early and create sampling opportunities whenever possible.

"We are also enhancing our website and expanding our social media efforts," says Miller.

FirstFruits Farms' programs, such as Opal Smiles and Take a Bite Out of Hunger, help build emotional connections with shoppers while supporting meaningful causes, says Bach.

"At retail, our 'Smart. Simple. Delicious.' merchandising platform emphasizes straightforward health benefits, clean ingredients and transparency from orchard to store shelf. We continue to see strong engagement when educational messaging is paired with targeted promotions, digital offers and in-store merchandising support."

She adds that the most effective merchandising programs combine education, visibility and engagement.

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"Displays are critical to merchandising apples, and updating them frequently or helping to educate via signage is key in driving consumption with consumers."**

Brianna Shales, Stemilt Growers, Wenatchee, WA

- **"We continue to see strong engagement when educational messaging is paired with targeted promotions, digital offers and in-store merchandising support."**

Aimee Bach, FirstFruits Farms, Prescott, WA

"Consumer-friendly materials that explain flavor profiles, health benefits, usage occasions and seasonal availability consistently perform well," says Bach. "Flavor descriptors and seasonality charts help shoppers navigate the category and increase purchase confidence. The strongest results often come from pairing educational signage with digital promotions, loyalty offers or product sampling. In-store sampling remains one of the most powerful ways to drive trial and repeat purchases."

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The 2026-2027 season will be FirstFruits 3rd harvest season since acquiring Applewood Fresh Growers in Michigan, bringing together two world-class apple-growing regions under one unified FirstFruits family. With orchards in both Washington and Michigan, we're able to offer greater variety, extended seasonal availability, and a stronger, more resilient supply chain that helps retailers keep premium apples on shelves throughout the year.

We're also excited to launch our newly redesigned website, where visitors can explore everything FirstFruits has to offer—from our Washington orchards in the Pacific Northwest to our Michigan growing region in the Great Lakes. The new site showcases our expanded capabilities, diverse apple portfolio, and the people behind the fruit, making it easier than ever to discover how FirstFruits is delivering quality from two exceptional growing regions with one seamless supply. Check it out at www.firstfruits.com.

As we look ahead to the 2026-2027 Opal® apple season beginning this October, we're excited to introduce a fun new way for shoppers to engage with one of our most recognizable varieties. This season marks the launch of Opal® Smiles, an interactive PLU sticker collection and

rewards program designed to bring families back to the produce department again and again.

With Opal® Smiles, shoppers collect the PLU stickers from their Opal® apples and place them on a tracker sheet to unlock exclusive prizes as they reach new milestones. The program transforms every apple purchase into an opportunity for continued engagement, encouraging repeat purchases while creating a memorable, interactive experience for consumers of all ages.

For retailers, Opal® Smiles offers a fresh merchandising opportunity that goes beyond the display, helping generate excitement at shelf, increase shopper loyalty, and keep apples top of mind throughout the season. The beautifully bright yellow color break, combined with crispy, sweet, and naturally non-browning qualities that make Opal® apples a fan favorite, this promotional campaign is set to make the 2026-2027 season our most engaging yet. Learn more about the Opal® Smiles reward program at www.opalapples.com.

As always, we're excited to showcase at the IFPA Global Produce & Floral Show in October! Visit us at Booth #3977 to experience the FirstFruits difference firsthand. Discover innovative merchandising ideas, explore our expanded portfolio, and learn how our proven retail programs help drive shopper excitement, increase sales, and build lasting loyalty. We look forward to seeing friendly faces and exploring new partnerships to continue bringing exceptional flavor, dependable quality, and fresh opportunities to the produce aisle.

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Rising transportation costs, tighter refrigerated capacity and evolving regulations are prompting produce shippers and logistics providers to adapt with stronger planning, technology and flexible supply chain strategies. PHOTO COURTESY SF MARKET

Produce Transportation Faces Higher Costs, Tighter Capacity and Border Challenges

Driver shortages, rising fuel prices, tariffs and regulatory pressures are reshaping produce logistics.

BY MIKE DUFF

Tariffs, immigration actions, regulations and, of course, elevated fuel prices are complicating the produce sector's logistics. The produce transportation market isn't in disarray, but it is subject to pressures that affect availability and rates.

As summer began, Fred Plotsky of Cool Runnings, Kenosha, WI, suggested the produce transportation market was uneven. "Some markets are, I would say, completely out of line."

Driver shortages and reluctance to travel close to the Mexican border factor into rates. Years of inconsistent enforcement of visa and licensing requirements have put some operators in a gray area, with the result that they are refusing to go near areas where they might be subject to immigration actions.

Even for operators concerned just about other parts of the United States, rules on language fluency are keeping some experienced drivers off the road.

"Transportation is available today, but it's not quite as frictionless as it was a few years ago," says Jose Rossignoli, president of Robinson Fresh, Eden Prairie, MN. "As one of the world's largest produce suppliers, we're seeing that refrigerated freight capacity is significantly tighter than the broader truckload market due to a variety of factors, including fewer drivers and higher costs for fuel and equipment. This is particularly true in key produce-growing regions."

STEADY DEMAND

In the market as it exists today, making and updating plans requires greater attention.

"Pricing has stabilized since the sharp increase we experienced in the first six months of this year, driven by low supply of capacity, legislation and fuel costs," says Rossignoli. "As a result, food companies are engaging with their suppliers and logistics providers to reduce costs. We are advising our customers to plan earlier and secure capacity sooner than in prior years."

He also recommends produce shippers keep a closer eye on route guide compliance. "Are contracted carriers accepting the loads they committed to haul? Freight that moves to the spot market will cost 10 to 15% more."

St. Louis, MO-based Lange Logistics has transportation capacity available, even if it's becoming more challenging to source, says Ryan McCool, manager of sales, Chicago.

"Rates continue to trend upward, particularly when team drivers are required," he says. "Many of the carriers we work with have trucks sitting idle, as drivers have either been taken off the road, moved to higher-paying opportunities or exited the market altogether."

Looking ahead to the second half of the year, McCool expects continued rate pressure driven by fuel costs and the ongoing driver shortage. "While we haven't seen a significant increase in capacity, holiday demand could create additional upward pressure on rates."

In the course of the year, Lange has seen "an uptick in demand, although that's typical during periods of higher rate volatility. Overall, we believe transportation demand has remained relatively steady year over year," says McCool.

Scott Ginn, vice president of operations, Transervice Logistics, Lake Success, NY, says the produce transportation market is operating "adequately," however, "capacity is tight, rather than abundant."

"Most planned loads can still be covered with two to three days' notice, while short-notice, long-haul and multi-stop shipments face higher costs and greater service risk."

Ginn says the imbalance is being driven by limited refrigerated equipment, carrier exits, driver and operating-cost pressures, and

trucks being concentrated in major harvest regions.

"As a result, there is too little spare capacity in several key markets, especially California, South Texas, Georgia and the Pacific Northwest," he says. "Reefer spot rates have eased slightly from their early July seasonal peak, but they remain well above year-ago levels, and higher diesel costs are limiting the savings."

TIGHT CAPACITY IS REGIONAL

John Ryan, Boston office general manager for Allen Lund Co., La Cañada Flintridge, CA, says capacity is available in most areas, but at an elevated cost versus previous years.

"When demand spikes in seasonal growing areas, such as the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast, it puts a strain on already limited capacity," he says. "Based on our numbers, rates from California to Boston have dropped 12% since the Fourth of July push, but they remain 40% up over last July."

Ryan expects the decrease to be short-lived, and rates to increase as demand increases in the fall and into the beginning of 2027.

Less capacity makes it tougher to meet demand, which has been consistent with recent years.

"Overall, there is not enough capacity to meet seasonal demand that normally shifts regionally," Ryan says. "We have always seen spikes in demand, but with capacity being down, it magnifies the situation."

Jim Anderson, division vice president, Lily Transportation, Needham, MA, says that, as midsummer approached, produce transportation had been operating "at an adequate level per the USDA Specialty Crops National Truck Rate Report, with rates falling slightly in the past month as truck availability stabilized to more of an adequate level."

As the growing year progresses, Anderson expects to see more demand, "which may cause the truck availability to struggle to keep up."

He says this will create a more competitive environment and cause truck rates to increase, as suppliers are trying to move produce with shorter shelf life faster. "Year over year, the truck rates have increased substantially due to the rising costs of fuel, economic uncertainty, and driver shortages that are plaguing the entire industry."

In looking at the year as a whole, McCool says Lange Logistics has experienced fairly consistent demand.

"Periods of rate volatility have led to an increase in tender rejections, creating additional spot freight opportunities for brokers and smaller carriers, which is where we've seen an uptick in volume," he says. "Looking ahead to the holiday season, if demand increases as expected, we anticipate transportation costs will rise as available truck capacity works to keep pace with increased demand."

When compared to mid-2025, Transervice Logistics' Ginn says demand was essentially flat.

"The comparable 2025 total was 48,976 units, so current movement was only about 0.1% higher year over year," he says.

Allen Lund's Ryan anticipates rates to stay flat through the beginning of the fall, "but increase significantly through the beginning of 2027 due to typical holiday demand and religious holidays."

Recently, Ryan notes, produce demand has been fairly flat, "with the exception of strawberries coming on line early. This early arrival pulled demand forward, as buyers started making purchases sooner than usual."

Lily's Anderson advises that it's normal for produce transportation demand to rise in the summer, as California's growing season peaks largely because of the length



Ongoing discussions about the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, as well as continuing issues with Canada's digital customs platform, continue to present logistics challenges, especially for produce supply chains.

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Lily Transportation, Needham, MA, expects produce freight demand to strengthen through the remainder of the year, with rising fuel costs, driver shortages and seasonal shipping volumes continuing to put pressure on truck rates. PHOTO COURTESY LILY

of hauls associated with it, and this year is no exception.

"I'm expecting the demand to continually increase throughout the rest of the year."

Robinson Fresh's Rossignoli says he's seen tighter conditions in refrigerated transportation than in the overall truckload market this year, but demand for transportation in the produce sector has been relatively steady.

"We're seeing a shortage of transportation capacity across the board, due to fewer drivers and less equipment.

"But produce is not like other freight because it's seasonal and perishable. When crops are ready, they must move. For that reason, in a market that's already constrained, even modest shifts in local volumes can create outsized regional impacts."

BORDER-CROSSING ISSUES

Border-crossing issues associated with tariffs aren't significantly affecting all transportation providers, but difficulties exist due to levies and other considerations.

"On the cross-border side, tariffs, trade policy discussions and customs processes continue to create uncertainty," says Rossignoli. "Ongoing discussions about the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), as well as continuing issues with Canada's year-old digital customs platform, continue to present challenges, especially for produce supply chains that depend on speed and predictability at border crossings."

He says at the southern border, Mexico remains a critical source of fresh produce for U.S. consumers, making efficient border crossings essential.

"Even relatively minor delays can affect freshness and product value. For produce shippers, the best response is flexibility. This means having strong cross-border expertise, multiple routing options, and the ability to adapt quickly when conditions change."

Transervice Logistics' Ginn notes the USMCA remains in force, but the U.S. has declined to renew it as constituted previously. He says the new 50% tariffs on selected Canadian products, which were scheduled to start Aug. 19, apply to covered goods even when they otherwise qualify under USMCA.

"They are not described as a blanket fresh-fruit-and-vegetable tariff, but they can still disturb cross-border trailer balance, reduce backhaul opportunities and increase customs scrutiny."

For Mexico, the immediate concern is continued negotiation and product-specific duties rather than a new blanket produce tariff,

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"Produce is not like other freight because it's seasonal and perishable. When crops are ready, they must move. For that reason, in a market that's already constrained, even modest shifts in local volumes can create outsized regional impacts."**

Jose Rossignoli, Robinson Fresh, Eden Prairie, MN



- **"Many of the carriers we work with have trucks sitting idle as drivers have either been taken off the road, moved to higher-paying opportunities or exited the market altogether."**

Ryan McCool, Lange Logistics, St. Louis, MO

- **"Year over year, the truck rates have increased substantially due to the rising costs of fuel, economic uncertainty, and driver shortages that are plaguing the entire industry."**

Jim Anderson, Lily Transportation, Needham, MA

Ginn adds. "For example, most Mexican fresh tomatoes remain subject to a 17.09% antidumping duty. U.S./Mexico talks beginning July 21 include agriculture and customs procedures."

Macroeconomic factors haven't pressured transportation demand overall, Anderson says, "but we are seeing vendors and retailers moving more toward dedicated transportation systems instead of relying solely on load boards and brokers. This shift with retailers and vendors is allowing for a more stable price structure with more affordable final pricing for the end customer.

"With no sign in reduction of market spot rates, I would anticipate the migration to dedicated carriage will continue through year's end."

TECHNOLOGY IMPACTS

Although important, technology has to be balanced by maintaining a high level of customer service, Lange's McCool says, which requires the human touch. At the same time, it can help companies deal with some issues.

"Technology, particularly AI, is helping companies optimize workflows across areas, such as track and trace, capacity sourcing and data entry," he says. "At Lange Logistics, our goal is to implement AI where it helps optimize workflows while preserving the direct relationships we've developed. Highway, along with several other tools, is helping companies vet carriers and identify bad actors."

Technology has been improving produce transportation by boosting visibility, control and speed of decision-making, says Ginn. "While technology cannot eliminate driver or trailer shortages, it helps carriers and shippers use available capacity more efficiently and respond faster to changing volumes, fuel costs and market disruptions."

Allen Lund's Ryan says technology is constantly changing and improving the industry. "There is a lot more information readily available, which helps reduce spoilage, boost transparency, and speed up deliveries. Technology is shifting our industry from reactive to proactive."

Philadelphia Market Profile

Feeding a Dynamic Region: Working Together to Expand Access to Fresh Produce



Wholesale Fruits and Vegetable



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Philly Businesses Make It Personal

Philadelphia produce companies put in personalized effort to help customers achieve their goals.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Philadelphia's mix of chain retailers, independent grocers, specialty markets, restaurants and foodservice operators requires suppliers to be unusually flexible. Companies throughout the region say success depends less on offering a standard program and more on tailoring products, logistics and support to each customer's business.

That diversity is especially evident among the area's many independent retailers and foodservice operators. "We cater to each of these businesses in ways that meet their individual needs," says Tracie Levin, controller at M. Levin and Company, Philadelphia, PA.

Retailers serving discerning shoppers also depend on suppliers that can consistently source premium products. At Iovine Brothers Produce in Philadelphia, customers expect access to high-quality seasonal and specialty produce year-round, says Vinnie Iovine, co-owner of the independent retailer.

That emphasis on customization extends throughout the supply chain. Rick Feighery, president of Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., says there is no single formula for serving customers, whether they're major supermarket chains or neighborhood bodegas. "They all deserve specialized attention. It's our job to adapt to the ever-changing needs."

Casey Spencer, senior marketing coordinator at John Vena Inc. (JVI), agrees, noting that today's buyers expect a more personalized purchasing experience. "The rigid, one-size-fits-all structure no longer works."

The expectation goes beyond simply delivering produce. Suppliers increasingly provide business support ranging from merchandising and analytics to program development and product innovation, says Annmarie Barone, Procacci's director of floral sales. "We're finding customers are looking for more vendor-managed programs. They're asking what we can do to make it special for them."

Operational flexibility has become just as important as product selection. Jason Davis, director of sales for Baldor's Philadelphia region, says customer needs vary widely — from earlier deliveries and more frequent service to sourcing specialty items. "We spend a lot of time understanding what works best for each customer, because if we can make their day easier, they can spend more time focusing on their guests."

The daily mindset at Ryeco in Philadelphia is how they can better serve customers, explains Mike Reilly Jr., president. "We're always looking for better partnerships and alliances with shippers, trying new items to meet customer needs, moving deeper into cultural tastes, and looking at logistics efficiencies."

Ultimately, relationships have long been the foundation of this industry, but relationships alone aren't enough, says Phil Bartocci, general manager at Coosemans Philadelphia. "You need to provide top-quality product, dependable service, and go the extra mile for



Members of the TMK Produce team: John Nelli, Tom Kovacevich, Steve Buchanan, Michael Verchio Jr., Steve Riccelli, Devin Hunt, Peter Storey and Rye Manos.

PRODUCE BUSINESS/LUCAS DUARTE PHOTO

your customers. When you consistently check all those boxes, you build lasting partnerships."

ADVANCING LOGISTICS

The state-of-the-art Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market (PWPM) encompasses 686,000 square feet and 18 separate wholesale businesses, according to Mark Smith, PWPM general manager.

"Our facility, in its current location for 15 years now, lends itself to serving specific customer needs," he says. "It was designed for easy access, giving customers ample room to deliver or pick up, and our cold chain management provides the perfect temperature preferences for each business."

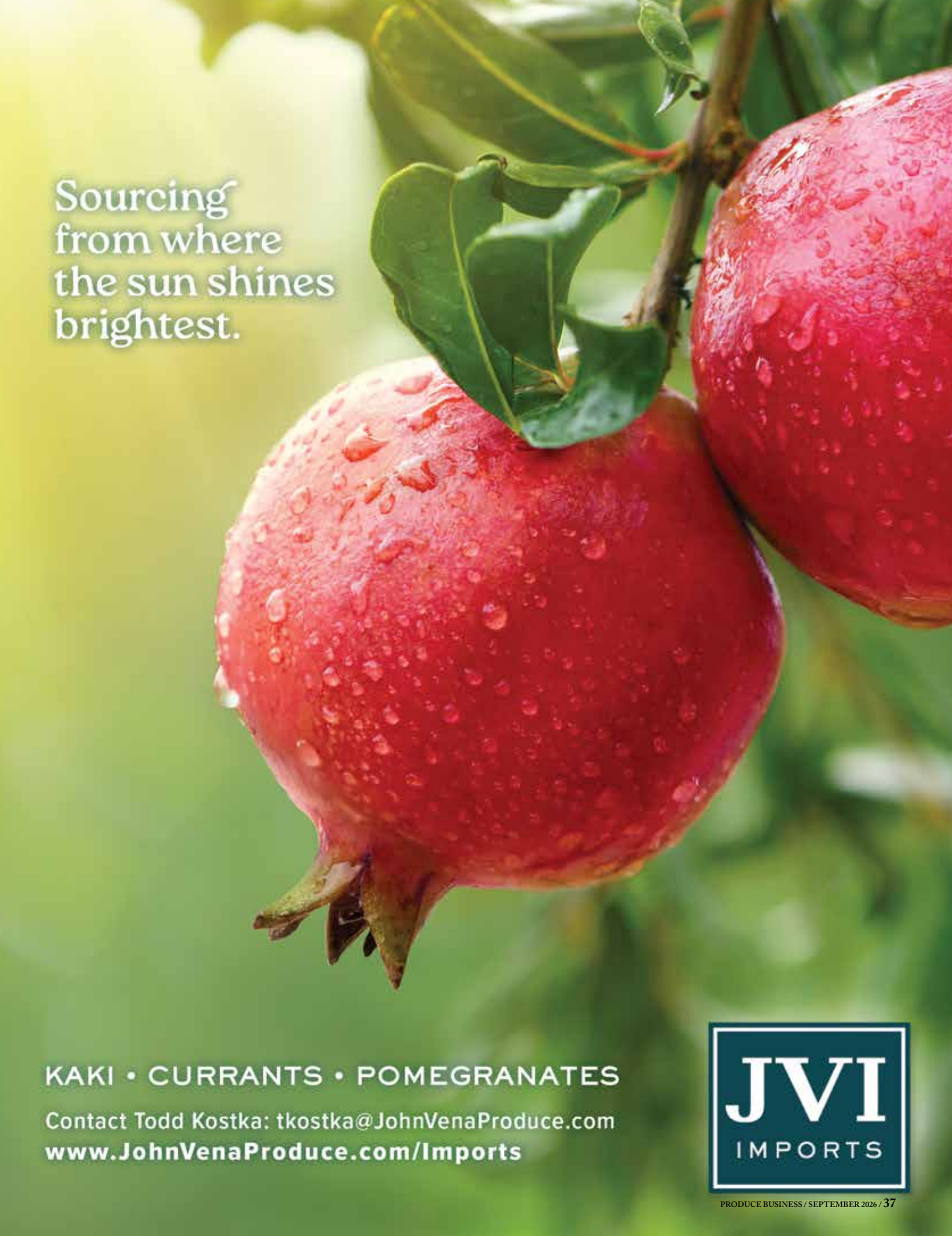
Philadelphia wholesalers serve customers consistently through efficient logistics, and a reliable supply means retailers keep popular items in stock and meet customer demand, says Mark Coté, produce supervisor at Redner's Markets in Reading, PA, with 44 stores.

"The wholesale market's convenient location and efficient distribution allow for quick restocking, helping maintain freshness, reduce delays, and offer customers the best selection and value throughout the year."

Lou Tarlini, owner of Lou's Farm Mart in Bensalem, PA, affirms the benefits of the PWPM facility. "Its cold chain maintenance means better quality product."

Logistics advances add to better service. JVI recently installed an effective, low-cost system that allows the company to schedule incoming loads and track and store receiving data for each load. This gives the sales team arrival information to better serve customers, and provides its buyers updates on product condition upon arrival, says Dan Vena, director of sales.

Frank Galindo, Procacci vice president of floral, notes the opportunity for customers looking for direct store delivery (DSD) instead of moving product through their warehouse. This year, a major chain in the Northeast asked Procacci to supply their outdoor spring trop-



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ical program, he explains. "Instead of going through their warehouses, we shipped directly to the stores."

Nardella in Philadelphia ensures the highest efficiency within the warehouse. "It's making sure my pickers and selectors know the right product gets to the right person at the right time," says Richard "RJ" Durante, co-owner. "You build a reputation, and that separates you from others."

Sunrise Logistics, a sister company of Four Seasons Produce in Ephrata, PA, keeps expanding services with freight and supply chain solutions, such as ripening rooms to pre-condition avocados, 32F receiving and cold storage space for berries, and a new HPP (high pressure processing) machine to extend shelf-life without heat pasteurization "for our growth in fresh pressed juices, health shot beverages, hummus and dips, and more," says Jon Steffy, vice president and general manager.

EXPANDING DELIVERY

Customizing can literally mean going the extra mile. "More and more customers are asking for delivery," says Levin. "We're working on expanding our delivery capabilities to meet their needs."

Every link in the produce supply chain is facing rising costs, according to Tom Kovacevich, president at TMK Produce in Philadelphia. "Scaling up our delivery fleet has enabled us to lower the marginal cost of delivery, which translates to better pricing for our customers."

F&S Fresh Foods' vertically integrated partnership with Pipco



Various John Vena Inc. product lines have resulted from customer demand, including tropicals, plantains, and Persian cucumbers. PHOTO COURTESY JVI

Transportation gives it an advantage in delivering fresh products, according to Jill Dankel, F&S marketing manager in Vineland, NJ.

"Because transportation is an integral part of our business, we have greater control over scheduling, route planning, and service levels, allowing us to respond faster to customer needs and maintain the highest standards of freshness from production to delivery," she says.

IN-STORE SUPPORT

A crucial aspect of personalized service includes store-level support.

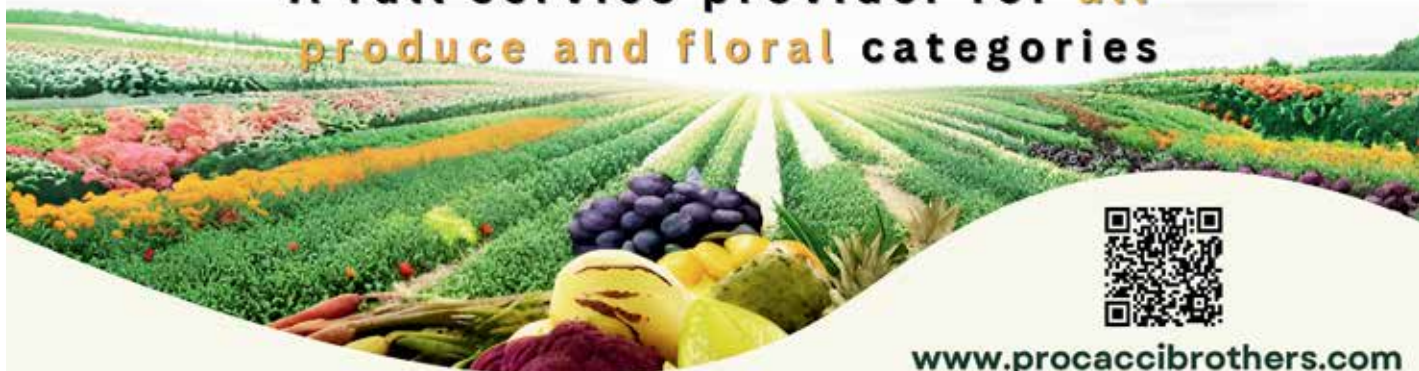
"Our merchandising team members are not just an extra set of hands in the store," says Procacci's Feighery. "It goes well beyond that. How do we help our retail partners be the best in class? How do we help them attract customers or give them tools so customers



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spend more time in the department rather than just grab-and-go? That can be physical layout, mix of products, or correct price compared to the competition.”

Through its merchandisers, Procacci helps retail customers understand how to optimally display items. “One of the most valuable parts of our service from our customers’ perspective is how we can show them where to put every single item to be more competitive.”

GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT

With evolving demographics and food trends, serving customers means greater product variety. “The popularity of ethnic produce has been on the rise for the past few decades in Philadelphia — it’s a strong growth category,” says Levin.

Various JVI product lines have resulted from customer demand, explains John Vena, president. “Many of our year-round programs developed from filling a seasonal gap for specific items and growing from there.”

Listening to customers adds value to JVI’s established programs for categories, such as tropicals, plantains and Persian cukes, according to Spencer. “What many may consider exotic could be common in other communities.”

INITIATING INNOVATION

Embracing technology is another aspect of catering to customers: digital invoicing streamlines billing, online ordering makes purchasing faster and more accurate, and truck tracking provides real-time delivery updates that help with scheduling, says Redner’s Coté. “Some suppliers offer inventory management tools and automated order confirmations, reducing errors and saving time. These innovations strengthen relationships, improve visibility throughout the supply chain, and allow us to serve customers more effectively.”

TMK is installing a state-of-the-art inventory tracking system by

Orbis Solutions. The RFID-based system will track the location of every pallet, and let order selectors more quickly assemble orders, says Kovacevich. “This increase in order selection efficiency will directly translate to lower the cost of order fulfillment, enabling us to maintain our competitive advantage in the marketplace.”

Procacci is implementing an ordering app that connects directly to its ERP system, making the ordering process easier and more efficient, says Beatriz Hernandez, customer service director. “One of our goals is to make things as simple as possible for our customers. If we can reduce paperwork and eliminate time spent dealing with invoices, that gives them more time to focus on their business.”

INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY

Four Seasons Produce is experimenting with technology that helps the business execute more efficiently. Current examples include an automated robotic battery change station for high-lifts and pallet-jacks to make change times 40% faster, AI analysis of truck temperature recorder device data for quicker research, and custom produce department plan-o-gram visuals that show images in a proposed space created with AI assistance, says Steffy.

Procacci is using an AI-based routing system for its merchandising team. “Companies have been using this type of technology for truck routes for years, but we’ve adapted it for store visits,” says Hernandez. “It helps our merchandisers plan the most efficient routes, avoid traffic when possible, and spend more time in stores rather than on the road.”

Beyond product innovation, F&S continuously evaluates new packaging, production processes, and technologies to improve efficiency and deliver greater value, says Dankel. It’s also exploring AI and advanced analytics to support smarter forecasting, inventory management, and operational decision-making, “helping us bring data-driven innovation to both our customers and consumers.” **PB**

Produce Beyond Traditional Outlets

Philadelphia’s produce sector works to increase access for all.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Philadelphia embraces diverse and competitive retail and restaurant sectors. The region enjoys a wide variety of large chain retailers, including Giant Foods, Wegmans, Acme, Walmart, Whole Foods, Target, Aldi, Costco and BJ’s, and also supports successful independent chains, including Redner’s, McCafrey’s, and a variety of strong ShopRite stores. Additionally, unique formats, such as Trader Joe’s, dollar stores, ethnic markets and mom and pops, populate the metro area.

“Philadelphia has everything from traditional supermarkets and regional grocery chains to club stores, convenience retailers, independent operators, and a thriving restaurant scene,” says Jill Dankel, marketing manager at F&S Fresh Foods in Vineland, NJ.

The region’s foodservice is equally diverse, encompassing everything from Michelin Star winners to cheesesteak joints.



Philabundance has roots in Philadelphia, PA, and now serves a nine-county area in Pennsylvania and New Jersey to deepen access to fresh fruits and vegetables. The organization works with both produce wholesalers and retail grocers to rescue the equivalent of two full truckloads of food per day. PHOTO COURTESY PHILABUNDANCE

“Philadelphia has one of the most exciting food scenes in the country,” says Jason Davis, director of sales, Philadelphia region, Baldor

Specialty Foods in Philadelphia, PA. "You have everything from neighborhood restaurants and family-owned businesses to award-winning chefs, sports venues, universities, hospitals and large retail chains."

EXPANDING ACCESS

Although Philadelphia boasts this wealth of retailers and restaurants, nearly 1 in 4 Philadelphians are food-insecure, according to City of Philadelphia statistics. A School District of Philadelphia survey reported 1 in 4 children in Philadelphia County experiences food insecurity, and 24% of district households face food hardship. In the wider spectrum of the Philly region, Feeding America estimates 10.8% of the population experiences food insecurity.

Philadelphia's two major food nonprofit organizations, Philabundance and Sharing Excess, work hand-in-hand with the produce industry. Both have a long and close relationship with the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market (PWPM), as well as the greater Philadelphia produce industry.

For merchants in the produce industry, collaboration with such food rescue organizations presents multiple advantages.

"PWPM has been able to supply people in our region with whole-some fruit and vegetables," says Mark Smith, general manager. "At the same time, we are reducing our waste costs and putting less food in the landfill. It's truly a win-win."

Philabundance has roots in Philadelphia and now serves a nine-county area in Pennsylvania and New Jersey to deepen access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Its retail rescue operation works with over 400 stores to redistribute produce the stores can't sell.

"Produce is the largest percentage of food we recover," says

Lauren Webb, chief food sourcing officer. "In the past year, almost 40% of all produce we provided to our neighbors was rescued from wholesalers and local grocery stores."

"We rescue the equivalent of two full truckloads of food a day, 365 days a year," says Webb.

In addition, Philabundance spends over \$2 million a year purchasing food from Pennsylvania businesses, with many of those dollars staying in the community.

SHARING THE EXCESS

Sharing Excess, founded in Philadelphia, is now a national food rescue nonprofit connecting surplus food from businesses to communities in need.

"Community organizations know how to serve their neighborhoods better than we do," says Victoria Wilson, co-founder and chief operating officer. "What they often lack is the time and funding to build relationships with food businesses, remain on call for donations, secure the right vehicle and coordinate transportation. We handle that background work so they can focus on getting food to people."

Sharing Excess creates options for delivery and pickup, shares information about what is available and tries to preserve as much choice as possible.

"We do not want to give an organization food that its community will not use, because that simply transfers the waste downstream," says Wilson. "Our goal is to provide fresh, healthy and culturally relevant food that people actually want, especially because many organizations already receive substantial amounts of shelf-stable food, but have far less access to fresh produce."

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Organic bananas should be prominently displayed and easy to find, with merchandising tailored to local demand and category performance to encourage trial among shoppers.

PRODUCE BUSINESS/SUSAN CROWELL PHOTO

Organic Bananas: Item Worth Watching

U.S. market valued at \$1.5 billion in 2025 and projected to reach \$2.5 billion by 2030.

BY STEVEN MAXWELL

Look back a decade or two, and organic bananas were barely a blip on the U.S. grocery retail radar. But over the past 10 — and especially five — years, the category has experienced rapid growth.

As in the words of Daniella Velazquez de Leon, general manager at San Diego, CA-based Organics Unlimited, it is rare to find a major retailer that does not offer them today.

According to the Organic Trade Association, U.S. organic banana sales increased 12.6% in 2025, surpassing \$1 billion, a sign, Velazquez de Leon says, that organic bananas are continuing a trajectory from a specialty purchase to a mainstream staple.

A family-run business, Organics Unlimited has been growing organic bananas since the 1970s, and Velazquez de Leon believes it can lay claim to being among the companies that helped establish the organic banana category in U.S. retail. Years later, she says demand remains strong, with sourcing from Mexico and Ecuador helping ensure reliable, year-round supply, even when weather or seasonal conditions tighten availability from one origin.

Bananas are an affordable and familiar entry point into organic, with year-round availability and appeal across all age groups, which Velazquez de Leon says drives growth. “Millennials and Gen Z are also among the fastest-growing organic buyer segments, and they

increasingly consider health and sustainability when choosing food.”

Today, bananas are the top seller in the organic fresh produce category in the U.S.

Jennie Coleman, president and co-owner of Equifruit in Montreal, Canada, says momentum is equally strong north of the border, with close to 500% volume growth in organic, fair trade bananas between 2020 and 2025, largely due to major chains transitioning their organic offerings to Fairtrade-certified organic.

“The last 12 months have been strong for Equifruit’s Fairtrade organic banana business,” she adds. “Our sales have been robust, and we are exceeding contracted volumes with our current customers.”

With an organic banana program dating back to 1998, Dole Food Company is arguably one of the pioneers in commercial organic bananas, although the company has been developing and sourcing organic bananas since the mid-1990s.

In that time, organic bananas have grown from a tiny, niche segment to one that represents a growing and vital part of the company’s business, says Dole’s Director of Corporate Communications Bill Goldfield. “Organic bananas are no longer a luxury; they’ve become as much a necessity to Dole as they are to our organic customers.”

According to Goldfield, Dole’s research shows consumer demand for organic bananas grew by almost 15% in 2025, in keeping with the sales growth the multinational saw for its organic bananas during the 12 months.

“It’s not surprising that organic bananas in the U.S. are growing fastest in those states where organic produce overall is increasing the fastest, which in the last few years included California, Washington, Pennsylvania, Texas and Oregon according to the USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture),” he adds.

Over at Del Monte Corporation, Senior Product Manager Gustavo

Controlling Retail Banana Quality from Region to Region, DC to DC, and Store to Store



Having high-quality, beautifully ripened bananas on display should be the goal of every retail produce department, according to Gary Campisi, former Senior Director of Quality Control for Produce, Floral, Meat, and Seafood at Walmart and Sam's Club and widely recognized as one of the industry's leading experts in commercial banana ripening. However, consistently delivering that level of quality across multiple distribution centers (DCs) and hundreds of stores every day remains a significant challenge.

The reasons are as varied as the banana supply chain itself, Campisi says. Unlike a mechanical process, banana ripening is a natural, biological process. So even minor variables - including transit time, time spent on the loading dock, warehouse conditions, handling practices, seasonal changes, or country of origin - can affect the condition of the fruit when it arrives at the DC. That's where commercial ripening rooms play a critical role.

An experienced ripener can evaluate the condition

of incoming fruit and adjust the ripening cycle as needed to achieve the desired color, quality, and shelf life. However, the industry is evolving in ways that make it increasingly difficult to have an experienced ripener on staff at every DC, leading to greater variations in banana quality from one facility to another, and ultimately from store to store.

Fortunately, new technologies are helping to address these challenges. Advanced barcode tracking systems now provide a detailed history of every pallet from packing to delivery. For retailers operating their own ripening rooms, this data offers valuable insight into the condition of the fruit from the moment it arrives.

Over time, using this information allows companies to develop standardized operating procedures (SOPs) based on how similar shipments have performed in the past. These SOPs can then be used to help create greater consistency in the ripening program across multiple DCs, resulting in more uniform banana quality at the store level.

Thermal Technologies, a global leader in commercial ripening room design and construction, is taking this concept even further with cloud-based technology that will soon allow ripening rooms across multiple DCs to be monitored and managed in real time from a central location. This capability is soon expected to give retailers enterprise-wide visibility into their ripening operations.

Combined with historical

shipment data, this should reduce the dependence on having highly experienced ripeners at every facility while improving consistency throughout the entire retail network. When paired with proven best practices such as longer ripening cycles, these technologies have the potential to significantly reduce banana quality variations from DC to DC and store to store.

THE NEXT EVOLUTION IS ALREADY UNDERWAY

Artificial intelligence is also advancing to the point where ripening rooms themselves may soon be able to adjust the ripening cycle based on the condition of the incoming fruit. Early versions of this technology have already been commercialized, with more sophisticated systems now being deployed.

Strella Biotech, for example, is testing its AI-powered ripening platform at the distribution centers of several leading retailers. Designed to independently monitor conditions inside any ripening room, Strella recently integrated its data platform to work with Thermal Technologies' *TarpLess*® ripening room, one of the industry's most advanced and widely used banana ripening systems.

Using AI, Strella continuously collects and analyzes data from every shipment, allowing the system to become increasingly accurate in determining what each load of bananas requires to achieve the desired ripening outcome. As this database continues to grow, AI - combined with other emerging

technologies - has the potential to automate many of the decisions traditionally made by experienced ripeners, Campisi says.

Thermal Tech is also contributing to this evolution with its new RipeScan optical gas analyzer. This advanced dual-gas analyzer uses cutting-edge optical sensors instead of traditional chemical sensors to monitor ethylene and carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels with exceptional accuracy, gassing and venting automatically based on room conditions to enable precision control over the ripening process.

Together, these innovations are moving the industry steadily closer toward a future in which commercial banana ripening is largely automated. In the meantime, Campisi still believes that the best way for retailers to maximize consistency from DC to DC and store to store is by operating their own banana ripening rooms.

Because even as automation continues to advance, the fundamentals remain unchanged. Quality, color, consistency, and shelf life will always be the key drivers of customer satisfaction, sales, and profitability. So investing in the most advanced ripening technology today not only ensures the best possible ripening results, says Campisi, but firmly positions retailers to take full advantage of the automated ripening systems of tomorrow.



Gary Campisi, former Senior Director of Quality Control for Produce, Floral, Meat, and Seafood at Walmart and Sam's Club

Gary Campisi can be reached at garycampisi@gmail.com

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Merchandising bananas at the right ripeness stage — bright yellow with a touch of green — encourages immediate purchases, as shoppers prefer fruit that's ready to enjoy within a day or two rather than waiting for it to ripen at home. PHOTO COURTESY EQUIFRUIT

Carranza says organic bananas currently account for approximately 10% of the company's total banana exports.

"While conventional bananas continue to represent the majority of the category, our organic business is growing at a double-digit rate, reflecting rising consumer demand and the continued expansion of organic offerings at retail," he says.

According to Carranza, the U.S. organic banana market was valued at \$1.5 billion in 2025 and is projected to reach \$2.5 billion by 2030. Consumption, he says, is particularly strong in the Northeast and Southeast, where shoppers have demonstrated a growing interest in organic produce.

Ivan Brown, Del Monte's senior director of marketing, sees organic bananas as a more accessible entry point into the broader organic produce category, one which he believes is being driven by a greater emphasis among Millennials and Gen Z on health, nutrition, ingredient transparency and how their food is produced.

"Organic bananas align naturally with those preferences while still offering the familiar benefits consumers expect from bananas: portability, year-round availability and broad appeal across age groups," he adds.

Based in Miami Beach, FL, Kapi Kapi Growers, which specializes in organic and conventional bananas, as well as pineapples, views organic bananas as a key driver of future growth, with plans to increase its U.S. market share and strengthen its organic presence.

But while sales might be on the rise, Kapi Kapi's director of business development, Mike Naftel, argues that there is an urgent need to increase the amount of organically certified plantations if this growth is to be sustained.

"If a grower today decided they wanted to convert a conventional banana plantation to organic, it would take a minimum three-year transition period, and that is if all things go according to plan," he cautions. "All this to say, if demand suddenly increased another 15-20%, there would not be enough supply to satisfy. As we stand today, growers are doing their part to keep up with current and coming demand."

SPACE TO SALES

When it comes to allotting space, Jamie Postell, vice president of sales at Chiquita North America, Dania, FL, recommends aligning

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"Retailers should ensure organic bananas are clearly merchandised and easy to find, and positioned to encourage discovery, as prominent placement can help drive trial among conventional banana shoppers and support crossover purchases."**

Jamie Postell, Chiquita North America, Dania, FL

- **"There's a direct correlation between space and sales. We always recommend to retailers that if you expand your display footprint, volumes will follow."**

Jennie Coleman, Equifruit, Montreal, Canada



- **"We need to move toward gradual pricing adjustments that reflect the true cost of banana production rather than treating bananas as a permanent loss leader."**

Daniella Velazquez de Leon, Organics Unlimited, San Diego, CA

organic bananas with local shopper demand and overall category performance, while ensuring organic shoppers can easily locate the product.

"Retailers should ensure organic bananas are clearly merchandised and easy to find, and positioned to encourage discovery, as prominent placement can help drive trial among conventional banana shoppers and support crossover purchases," he says.

Naftel recommends allocating 80-85% of shelf space to conventional bananas and 15-20% to organic bananas, a ratio which he says provides the best opportunity to maximize overall category sales while minimizing cannibalization.

Brown recommends a balanced merchandising approach that incorporates both primary and secondary display placements to maximize visibility, shopper engagement, and overall category performance.

"Front-of-department displays play an important role in capturing shopper attention, reinforcing perceptions of freshness, and encouraging impulse purchases at a high-traffic point in the store."

Brown adds that secondary placements throughout the store extend shopper reach, create additional purchase opportunities, and support incremental sales by connecting organic bananas with complementary shopping occasions.

Velazquez de Leon recommends establishing a clearly identified display area, which reflects organic bananas' share of overall banana sales. "In reality, organic bananas are sometimes limited to a small section even when sales justify more space, that can suppress potential sales."

Coleman at Equifruit agrees. "There's a direct correlation between space and sales. We always recommend to retailers that if you expand your display footprint, volumes will follow."

COLOR COORDINATION

Another key element to ensuring sales success with organic bananas is pitching ripeness at the right level. For Coleman, this level



According to the Organic Trade Association, U.S. organic banana sales increased 12.6% in 2025, surpassing \$1 billion — a sign that organic bananas are continuing a trajectory from a specialty purchase to a mainstream staple.

PRODUCE BUSINESS/AIMEE TENZEK PHOTO

is stage 4, typically featuring vibrant yellow with a hint of green.

Going greener may reduce shrinkage, but Coleman cautions such an approach can backfire with fewer purchases. “Shoppers aren’t interested in taking home a green banana and waiting a week to eat it,” she explains. “They want fruit that they can eat now or in the next couple of days.”

Velazquez de Leon advocates displaying bananas at stage 3-4, providing some color with a little green still visible. Doing this allows for a selling window while giving shoppers fruit they can eat over several days.

While most consumers still prefer yellow fruit, Goldfield says Dole’s own research shows a trend toward choosing greener, unripe fruit, which is especially pronounced among organic customers. “We know there is also a percentage of shoppers who purchase greener bananas to consume later when they ripen,” he explains. “This allows them the choice of color stages and maximizes the time they have to enjoy the fruit before it starts spotting.”

“Consistency in color and quality is one of the most important drivers of shopper satisfaction and repeat purchases,” says Postell at Chiquita. “While some retailers choose to merchandise a two-color program — offering fruit that is ready to enjoy now alongside fruit for later in the week — the most important consideration is delivering high-quality bananas with consistent color that meets shopper expectations.”

Based in Blythewood, SC, Thermal Technologies provides ripening rooms, which can ripen organic bananas to a consistent color stage on a daily basis.

The company’s Gary Campisi says most retailers look for three main considerations

when it comes to ripening all bananas, including organic bananas: consistency of color, reliability of ripening equipment, and ease of operation.

When it comes to color, Campisi cites studies which show that over 75% of consumers prefer to purchase bananas from stage 4 (75% yellow) to stage 6 (100% yellow). “The reality is that an accurate forecast and reliable ripening rooms is critical in achieving the right color delivering to each store on a daily basis.”

THE RIGHT PRICE

Velazquez de Leon says pricing differences between organic and conventional bananas are often minimal compared with other produce items, despite carrying a premium reflecting farming practices, certification costs, oversight and record-keeping.

Despite this, she says retail banana pricing has not kept pace with inflation nor the rising cost of production, leaving a business model that is not sustainable indefinitely. “It’s tough for retailers. No retailer wants to be the first to raise a highly visible price while competitors hold the 99-cent threshold.”

But the result, she says, is an “industry-wide stalemate,” which ignores rising costs across the board. “We need to move toward gradual pricing adjustments that reflect the true cost of banana production rather than treating bananas as a permanent loss leader.”

Coleman argues there is a pricing opportunity for organic bananas that many U.S. retailers are missing. Instead of maintaining a conservative 10-20% gap between conventional and organic, she says the example of some Canadian retailers shows a 60% premium can be supported. **PB**



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New York apples naturally align with today's wellness-focused shoppers, offering a fresh, portable snack packed with flavor, nutrition, and everyday appeal for healthy lifestyles.

PRODUCE BUSINESS/MIKE DUFF PHOTO

Retailers Can Increase New York Apple Sales By Highlighting Flavor

Merchandising, marketing and engagement strategies can keep New York apples top of mind.

BY MIKE DUFF

New York apples get a lot of help when it comes to consumer engagement, so produce executives and managers can connect to messaging and support to keep sales crisp.

Mike Servello, chief executive, Bargain Grocery, Utica, NY, says apples are always welcomed by his customers, with demand ramping up in-season. "We try to support New York State growers as much as we can."

Marketing "buy local" is a first step in generating consumer interest, says Mathew Blair, produce category business manager, Northeast Shared Services, Schenectady, NY, which supports operations at Tops, Price Chopper and Market 32 stores.

"We love to support all of our local suppliers, especially the ones that are very close to our store locations," he says. "Those are the farmers' names that customers recognize the most because they are from the community and gravitate to their products. In many instances, those products are delivered directly to the stores regularly to keep product fresh."

The banners also often put signage throughout the department recognizing the farmer who grew and supplied that specific item.

MARKETING RESOURCES

The New York Apple Association (NYAA) has a range of initiatives that retailers can access to entice consumers, such as traditional and social media, streaming services and digital newsletters. It also offers retail promotions, including point of sale, cross-merchandising, display contests, BOGO offers, digital coupons and ads, geo-targeting, special display units and orchard bins.

The organization takes a comprehensive approach to promoting New York fruit, reaching out to consumers directly and building the next generation of apple consumers, says grower Carrie Wafler, of Wafler Farms, Wolcott, NY, who also is a member of the NYAA board of directors.

"On the digital side, we've increased our social media presence and are working with influencers to reach younger audiences in a more authentic and organic way," says Wafler. "That's where younger consumers are, and we're meeting them there with content that connects apples to their lifestyle."

SHARE GROWERS' STORIES

She adds telling grower stories is critical to NYAA marketing efforts. "For the first time, we have growers filming weekly content directly

from their farms, walking consumers through how apples are grown, what the seasons look like, what farm life actually is," she says.

NYAA recently launched its Grower Content Program to give consumers a unique, behind-the-scenes look at life on New York apple farms. Through short-form video content, growers showcase the work that goes into producing New York apples, covering topics ranging from orchard management and seasonal activities to harvest preparations and everyday farm life, according to NYAA Chief Executive Susan Chekow Lusignan.

"The program connects consumers with the people behind their food, builds trust and celebrates the growers and communities that make New York's apple industry one of the largest and most respected in the country."

"Consumers increasingly want to know where their food comes from and who grew it, and this gives them a genuine, ongoing window into that world," Wafler stresses. "It's just the beginning of what we see as an important bridge between growers and consumers."

Retailers who establish a link with New York growers can make a connection with consumers who want to feel confident in the wholesomeness of their food, agrees Jessica Wells, executive director of Crunch Time Apple Growers, Newark, NY,

"Highlighting our growers helps create that personal connection and reinforces the authenticity of New York apples. It also strengthens the local story, which resonates strongly with shoppers in our core markets."

Next Big Thing Cooperative, Emmaus, PA, is the growers' cooperative responsible for marketing and commercializing the SweetTango apple. Executive Director Jennifer Miller says reference to growers is increasingly important as consumers become more concerned about food origins, as well as who produces it.

"Putting a face behind the product creates trust, authenticity

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"For the first time, we have growers filming weekly content directly from their farms, walking consumers through how apples are grown, what the seasons look like, what farm life actually is."**

Carrie Wafler, Wafler Farms, Wolcott, NY,
and New York Apple Association

- **"Putting a face behind the product creates trust, authenticity and emotional connection. New York's apple industry is made up of many multi-generational family farms, and their stories resonate with shoppers."**

Jennifer Miller, Next Big Thing Cooperative, Emmaus, PA

and emotional connection. New York's apple industry is made up of many multi-generational family farms, and their stories resonate with shoppers," she says. "Grower features, orchard photography videos, and behind-the-scenes content help consumers appreciate the care that goes into producing a premium apple."

She says marketing and merchandising should combine traditional retail promotions with digital engagement.

"Circulars and weekly ads continue to play an important role in driving awareness, particularly during peak apple season," says Miller, "but today's consumers are also heavily influenced by digital content, social media, and online shopping environments."

SweetTango maintains a robust consumer marketing strategy

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that includes everything from social media advertising and influencer partnerships to retail merchandising support, and sampling and experiential events.

"The objective is to create awareness before consumers even enter the store, then provide retailers with the tools necessary to convert that interest into a first purchase and then repeat purchase," says Miller.

Alisha Albinder, vice president, Hudson River Fruit, Milton, NY, says consumer outreach should focus clearly on core priorities.

"Sharing grower stories helps build trust,

authenticity, and emotional connection. As a fourth-generation, family-owned company, we believe highlighting the people behind the product helps consumers better understand the care, expertise, and commitment required to produce high-quality apples."

WHERE WELLNESS COUNTS

Although the connection to the land offers consumers a sense of well-being, nutrition and wellness are also major messages, Miller says.

"Many people are replacing traditional

meals with smaller snacks throughout the day, and apples are perfectly positioned for that behavior."

Crunch Time's Wells says effective marketing can generate demand in an apple category that has been relatively flat.

"Younger consumers, especially, are looking for products that fit into snackable lifestyles, and that's where premium apples, like SnapDragon, really shine," she says.

Crunch Time works with retailers to tailor programs in ways that attract shoppers, including point-of-sale materials highlighting flavor and usage, as well as secondary displays and promotional fixtures, co-branded campaigns and digital support, and training and information.

Hudson River Fruit marketing plans include supporting customers with point-of-sale materials, display bins, signage, digital assets, social media content, retailer-specific promotions and seasonal merchandising programs. "We also work closely with customers to develop variety-focused promotions that help differentiate the apple category and drive incremental sales," Albinder says.

Outreach also should include educational content that underscores important apple characteristics, she adds. As the variety mix continues to expand, helping consumers understand the differences between apples becomes increasingly important and can lead to higher overall category sales.

"Flavor descriptions, texture characteristics, recommended uses, storage tips and nutrition messaging help shoppers confidently select varieties that meet their preferences," says Albinder.

Yes! Apples developed a consumer marketing campaign, dubbed "Eat More Apples," to emphasize the case for apples, particularly the wellness case, at a time when consumers have embraced GLP-1s in the quest to maintain healthy weights.

"We work very carefully with our partners, either with our own brand Yes! Apples or with our partners' private label," says Kaari Stannard, president and owner of Yes! Apples, Glenmont, NY.

The team works to grow awareness of varieties and where to find them, via its social channels and through email. It also works closely with influencers to show the value and nutrition of eating an apple, and supports coupons and displays to grab consumers' attention at retail.

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Momentum in Michigan Apples

Stores can capitalize on the flavor, freshness and local appeal of Michigan apples.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Michigan is the second largest producer of apples in the United States, according to the Michigan Apple Committee (MAC) in Lansing, MI.

According to Diane Smith, executive director, in 2025, Michigan produced an estimated 30 million bushels of apples, and adds that with 17.6 million apple trees on 38,000 acres, apples are the largest and most valuable fruit crop in the state.

Michigan is critical to supply in the Midwest, South and Southwest, says Scott Morrison, general manager at Applewood Fresh Growers in Sparta, MI, providing regional fruit at competitive prices for most of the year. "Michigan apples can be found throughout the U.S., Canada and many other countries throughout the year."

Michigan apples make up a majority of the apple program at Save A Lot, based in St. Ann, MO, with 650 stores. "Save A Lot promotes Michigan apples throughout the year as the season allows," says Riley Hicks, produce category manager.

When Michigan apples are in season, they are the only apples handled at Hollywood Markets in Troy, MI, with three stores, according to Jeff Schultz, produce director.

"It is what our customers are looking for," he says. "We will aggressively promote as soon as the new crop starts, all the way through February or March, and heavier in September and October with some variety in every ad."

FLAVORFUL OPTIONS

Dedicated growers, ideal climate and nutrient-rich soil all contribute to the success of Michigan-grown apples.

"Our proximity to the Great Lakes allows for plenty of moisture and nutrient-rich soil," says Smith. "Good weather conditions in each season enhance both color and flavor of the fruit."

Partnerships with Michigan State University and other institutions also give Michigan growers access to research and innovative technology.

Flavor is one of Michigan's greatest advantages, says Trish Taylor, marketing manager for Riveridge Produce Marketing in Sparta, MI. "The Great Lakes region typically provides the precipitation needed to grow quality fruit, followed by the warmth and sunlight that help develop the apples' sugars and flavor," she explains. "Michigan-grown Honeycrisp, in particular, consistently earns strong marks for its exceptional flavor, color and crunch."

Michigan produces a variety of trending apples. "Honeycrisp, Gala, Fuji and Red Delicious are the most popular," says Smith. "EverCrisp and Ambrosia aren't necessarily new anymore, but continue to gain popularity."

Honeycrisp remains the most popular variety at North Bay Produce in Traverse City, MI, which supplies customers year-round,



The Michigan Apple Committee, Lansing, MI, focuses its efforts on increasing consumer demand for Michigan-grown apples through consumer marketing and education.

PHOTO COURTESY MAC

says Ken Korson, apple category manager. "Two varieties continuing to gain popularity are Pink Lady and EverCrisp, both of which are harvested later in the season and have developed strong consumer followings."

Shane Curtis, president of Jack Brown Produce in Sparta, MI, says Red Delicious and Fuji remain strong sellers, but there has been increased interest in Ambrosia, as well as Pink Lady.

At Jack Brown, which sells through Riveridge Produce, harvest begins in August, and Michigan apples are available well into the summer through controlled atmosphere storage.

Regional and unique varieties also have traction. "Consumers continue to shop regionally for local Michigan produce, including McIntosh and Jonagold," says Applewood Fresh Growers' Morrison. "We have seen an uptick in demand for club varieties, such as EverCrisp, Sweetango and Rave, which offer a high-flavor, premium eating experience."

WIDE REACH

The Michigan apple region offers location advantages to regional and national retailers, adds Morrison.

"Due to our central location, Michigan produce can get to its final destination in a quick and efficient manner, maximizing shelf life and quality for the end consumer," says Morrison.

North Bay's Korson notes only about 20% of Michigan-grown apples remain within the state. "Most of our apples are marketed throughout the Midwest, but we also export to destinations throughout South and Central America and as far away as India," he says. "We streamline distribution by offering major apple varieties 12 months a year, which reduces the need for retailers to source from other growing regions."

Retailers increasingly want fruit grown as close to their stores and customers as possible, explains Taylor. "This benefits freshness, freight efficiency and local storytelling." Riveridge apples are distributed throughout the Midwest, along the East Coast, south to Texas and Florida, and into international markets.

Quality is a crucial element of the supply chain. "Every apple that FirstFruits and Applewood ship out has the end consumer in mind," says Morrison. "We check quality at every step of the process to ensure an eating experience that will bring the customer back to shop for apples again."

DELIGHTING SHOPPERS

The best way to create in-store excitement with Michigan apples? "Build large, attention-grabbing displays, place them in high-traffic areas, and maintain them throughout the day so they always look fresh, full, and inviting to shoppers," says Korson. "The biggest factor is location, location, location. Displays positioned at the front of the produce department generate the most impact."

Save A Lot's Hicks recommends full, fresh displays with minimal gaps, as well as signage that highlights the variety and a few key characteristics.

"Also, cross-merchandise with items, such as caramel dip, peanut butter and pie crusts," he says.

The most effective displays must be fresh, eye-catching, and have great tie-ins, agrees Schultz of Hollywood Markets. "Price point is important, but not the most important," he says. "Fresh quality and flavorful produce will always be most important."

Offer a mix of familiar favorites and discovery varieties, suggests Taylor. "Honey-

crisp attracts attention, while varieties such as EverCrisp and Ambrosia give shoppers something new to try."

Applewood Fresh's Morrison says the most impactful way to increase apple sales remains simple: Let shoppers taste the product.

"Sampling consistently delivers results because it removes uncertainty from the purchase decision," he says. "When shoppers get the eating experience in-store, they are significantly more likely to purchase immediately and return for repeat purchases. We've also implemented this for online and e-commerce shoppers, offering single Sweetango apple sample boxes free with certain purchases."

SALES SUPPORT

A variety of promotional support comes through growers. For example, North Bay Produce offers promotional pricing programs, ad support, and hot-buy opportunities to help retailers maximize sales throughout the season, says Korson.

Riveridge works with retailers to customize promotions, develop content and bring new merchandising ideas to life. "Whether through in-store displays, digital campaigns, grower stories or seasonal promotions, the goal is to put more apples in shopping carts and encourage consumers to enjoy them at home and on the go," says Taylor.

Hollywood Markets receives most of its support through its supplier SpartanNash or directly from growers, according to Shultz.

"Mostly we use Belle Harvest, Riveridge and North Bay," he says. "The bins of handle bag Honeycrisp have become very popular. Super easy for the customer to grab a bag and go. It's a great ring for the retailer as well, being an average of five pounds per handle bag. We bring in multiple bins and display them across the outside front of the store."

Managed variety organizations also offer resources. "Applewood grows and sells several managed varieties that have become a significant growth driver within the apple category," says Morrison.

"Varieties such as EverCrisp, Sweetango and Rave have benefited from coordinated marketing support and strong retail promotion. Those investments, passed along to retailers, help generate trial. An omnichannel marketing ap-



proach with demo sampling, POS (point-of-sale) support, recipe content, and social media influence all support increasing sales at retail."

MAC focuses its efforts on increasing consumer demand for Michigan-grown apples through consumer marketing and education.

"Our target audience is very active on social media, therefore, we have built a robust online presence to engage with that audience," says Smith. "We educate consumers on numerous specific health benefits of eating apples through our registered dietitians who create content for our Healthy Living section of the website, as well as social media content, and we also participate in events and partnerships supporting our online messaging."

LOCAL APPEAL

Michigan apples are bolstered by demand for local and regional produce. "The local movement always gives us an early-season boost and helps drive sales," says Korson. "Consumers enjoy supporting local growers, and Michigan apples benefit from that strong local connection."

The local movement has a positive impact on sales and marketing for Michigan apples, agrees Hicks of Save A Lot. "Once the new crop starts, we see a stronger demand for apples by featuring local varieties with displays and signage," he says.

MAC's consumer research indicates consumers want to know where their apples come from. "They are seeking sustainable and environmentally friendly choices, and looking for great flavor," says Smith.

"Michiganders get excited about apple harvest each year, and flock to Michigan's farm markets, orchards and cider mills. They also seek out Michigan-grown apples in their grocery stores."

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"Build large, attention-grabbing displays, place them in high-traffic areas, and maintain them throughout the day so they always look fresh, full, and inviting to shoppers. The biggest factor is location, location, location. Displays positioned at the front of the produce department generate the most impact."**

Ken Korson, North Bay Produce,
Traverse City, MI



- **"Fall is our biggest time of year for consumer activity because apple season is simply part of the culture in Michigan."**

Diane Smith, Michigan Apple Committee, Lansing, MI

Retailers have been great partners in the local and regional promotion of growers and their produce, says Morrison. "Shoppers increasingly want food transparency, making Meet the Grower content a successful retail integrated marketing approach for us. Sharing photos, videos and stories from the orchard helps consumers understand where their food comes from and creates an emotional connection with the product."

Consumers want to buy local when they can, agrees Curtis of Jack Brown. "Using Michigan-grown messaging in marketing and on packaging helps shoppers quickly identify local apples." **PB**



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Wisconsin potato growers provide retailers with a dependable, year-round supply of potatoes in a variety of sizes, pack styles and varieties to meet consumer demand.

PHOTO COURTESY ALSUM FARMS

Wisconsin Potatoes Deliver Value

Retailers get a winning combination of quality, convenience to drive sales.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Wisconsin may be famous for cheese, but there's another staple growing beneath the surface. Potatoes are big business in the Badger State, where ideal growing conditions, diverse varieties, and a long-standing commitment to sustainability give retailers plenty to dig into.

"Potatoes have become more important of a category in these last five years since the pandemic," says Vince Mastromauro, director of produce operations for Sunset Foods, a five-store chain based in Highland Park, IL. "Russets are the top of the category, and we offer customers Wisconsin russets in 10-pound bags."

WHY WISCONSIN

Wisconsin ranks third in the nation in potato production, behind Idaho and Washington, harvesting 2.8 to 2.9 billion pounds annually in 2025, according to the State of Wisconsin's Department of

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- "[Wisconsin's location] allows for a quicker response to order needs and delivery, resulting in fresher product for distribution to customers in the Midwest and East Coast."

Christine Lindner, Alsum Farms & Produce, Friesland, WI

- "Value-added is trending, with smaller pack sizes of B- and C-size potatoes, to four-pack trays, and individually wrapped potatoes that are 10- to 14-ounces each."

Brian Lee, Okray Family Farms Corp., Plover, WI

- "Wisconsin has soil that is exceptionally good for potato production. It's loose and sandy, drains water quickly, and allows roots to grow deep."

Dana Rady, Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association, Antigo, WI

Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics, last updated May 11, 2026.

About two-thirds (63%) of the state's potato yield goes to processing channels and just over one-third (37%) goes to the fresh table-stock market. The 2026 crop may see shifts between fresh and processed markets, with Wisconsin's frozen potato production estimated to decline approximately 7%.

"Wisconsin has soil that is exceptionally good for potato production. It's loose and sandy, drains water quickly, and allows roots to grow deep," says Dana Rady, director of promotion, communication and consumer education for the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA), in Antigo, WI, a nonprofit organization that represents over 300 members and affiliates.

"Wisconsin's climate is also ideal for growing potatoes," says Rady. "The spring season is cool, the summers are warm, and the rainfall is plentiful. Cool summer nights also support a healthy potato crop. Wisconsin also sits atop massive, water-rich aquifers, so growers can irrigate when needed."

Wisconsin has a logistical advantage as it's located near the center of the nation. "This allows for a quicker response to order needs and delivery, resulting in fresher product for distribution to customers in the Midwest and East Coast," says Christine Lindner, marketing manager at Alsum Farms & Produce, in Friesland, WI.

Okray Family Farms Corp., in Plover, WI, has partnered with its customers, even in their own bags. "All of our Kwik locks have Wisconsin Potatoes printed on them," says Brian Lee, transportation and sales manager. "So anywhere we ship east of the Mississippi, consumers know there are Wisconsin potatoes in the bag."

SEASONAL FORECAST

As of mid-July, the Wisconsin potato crop was coming along nicely, says Lee. Early in the growing season, the state experienced rain, and the heat units were slow to appear. Once the heat units appeared, however, the rain became timelier, and the soil dried up quickly, causing some regions in the north to irrigate more frequently to ensure the crop was getting enough moisture. As a result, according to the WPVGA, the 2026 crop has been on time, with growers beginning early harvest at the end of July on reds, followed by yellows and then russets.

Last year, the Wisconsin crop was quite large due to high yields, says Rady, amid a challenging marketing year for all potato-producing states. "While Wisconsin saw good weather and high yields, so did other potato-producing states. This caused a surplus of supply, which created challenges at sales desks and led to many sales from the West occurring well below the cost of production."

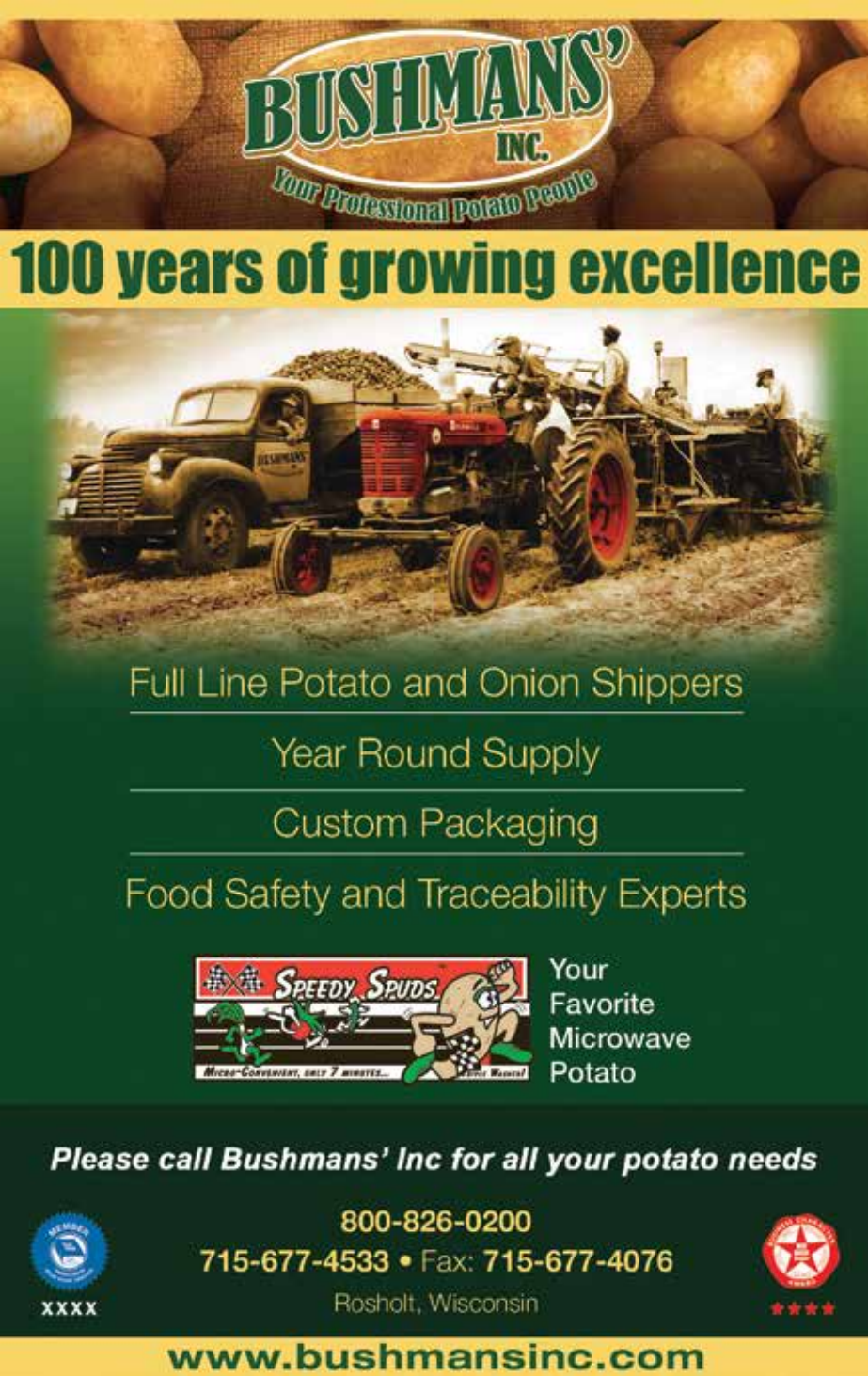
Rady says some western states are experiencing forest fires this year, as well as water-use limitations. "These factors,

in addition to the weather Mother Nature has in store for the remaining weeks of the growing season and harvest, will all play a role in the quality and volume of the 2026 crop."

A FULL CATEGORY

The state offers a year-round supply of russets, while yellows and reds finish up by January because of these varieties' storability.

"Wisconsin is particularly good at growing russets, such as Burbank, Gol-



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Alsum Farms & Produce, in Friesland, WI, partnered with Trig's grocery store for a two-week trial in early 2026, the Wisconsin potato industry's first retailer promotion of Healthy Grown-labeled potatoes since the program began in 1996. Trig's has committed to carrying the potatoes through February 2027.

PHOTO COURTESY WPVGA

Retailers Spotlight Wisconsin's Healthy Grown-Brand Potatoes

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Walk into a Trig's grocery store in Wisconsin's Northwoods, and shoppers can find something different in the potato display: 5-pound bags of Wisconsin Healthy Grown-brand russet, red and yellow potatoes.

Earlier this year, Alsum Farms & Produce, in Friesland, WI, partnered with the four-store chain, operated by the T.A. Solberg Company headquartered in Minocqua, WI, on a two-week trial, which was the Wisconsin potato industry's first retailer promotion of Healthy Grown-labeled potatoes since the program began in 1996.

The promotional opportunity went beyond stocking bags on shelves. Trig's has since committed to carrying the potatoes from August 2026 through February 2027, while available.

"Local is preferred by consumers desiring to know how and where their food is grown and produced for the best, freshest eating experience," says Christine Lindner, marketing manager at Alsum Farms & Produce. The company grows 2,700 acres of Wisconsin Healthy Grown Certified russet, red and yellow potatoes.

Wisconsin Healthy Grown traces its roots to the early 1990s, when

the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA), based in Antigo, WI, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison began exploring ways to advance conservation and sustainability in potato production. Partnerships with conservation organizations followed, leading to the Healthy Grown brand in 2002. Today, growers use practices designed to protect water, manage pests, restore ecosystems, and support native plants and wildlife.

The WPVGA's goal is to expand the brand's retail presence, and is working with retailers to place Healthy Grown-labeled bags of potatoes in stores, "following the success with this effort early this year," says Dana Rady, director of promotion, communication and consumer education.

The WPVGA also offers branded quarter-sized bins with information about Wisconsin's Healthy Grown program, and Healthy Grown Kwik Lok tags to communicate the Healthy Grown product on the bag, without requiring retail stores to add another SKU.

The WPVGA, Rady adds, also encourages retailers to share Wisconsin growers' sustainability efforts and multigenerational family-farm stories through in-store signage and online, while explaining the benefits of buying local.

drush, Silverton and Norkotahs," says Rady. The state also grows red varieties like Red Norland and Dark Red Norland and yellow/gold varieties like Yukon Gold, Oneida Gold, and Colomba, among others. And several Wisconsin farms supply The Little Potato Company in DeForest, WI, with petite-size potatoes.

"That said, there continue to be shifts between varieties planted and even between types. For example, some growers are reducing their red production while increasing the same amount in yellows."

B-size yellow and red potatoes are most popular, says Mike Carter, chief executive of Bushmans' Inc., in Rosholt, WI, "while there's not as much demand for the larger reds and yellows."

Organically grown potatoes are a small percentage of the overall market, however, it's yet another level of variety Wisconsin provides consumers.

Alsum Farms & Produce, for example, offers 3- and 5-pound bags and 50-pound cartons of organic russet, yellow and red potatoes.

"We have the capabilities to pack all of our potato varieties in packaging from 12 ounces up to 50-pound packs, and in poly, mesh, paper, or cartons," says Lindner.

The company continues to automate its packaging facilities, with a major renovation project completed this summer. This project includes adding new palletizing robots and RPC/DRC filling solutions.

"Value-added is trending, with smaller pack sizes of B- and C-size potatoes, to four-pack trays, and individually wrapped potatoes that are 10- to 14-ounces each," says Okray Family Farms' Lee. "We currently have three lines to do trays and individually wrapped potatoes."

"Challenges are finding the right niche, right price point, and timing with any new equipment needed to produce. If you can make all these stars align, it can be good for packers, retailers and consumers."

HOW TO SELL MORE

Consumers who want to know where their food comes from, how it's grown, and have the freshest experience prefer local, says Lindner. "One positive example of a promotion is where grower/shippers partner with retailers to highlight locally grown produce programs."

This partnership, Lindner adds, lets retailers tap into the local movement by connecting farmers and consumers through TV, radio, digital and social media,

in-store sampling and sales promotions. Social media can spotlight freshness, growers, sustainability practices, potato varieties, nutrition and recipes.

The WPVGA offers retailers posters, brochures, nutrition information, recipe tear pads, and other point-of-purchase (POP) materials on request. The organization will again work with the agricultural ambassador program, Alice in Dairyland, as well as continuing to work with registered dietitians, run digital marketing campaigns and messaging in key urban

areas, feature Wisconsin potatoes on an episode of *WI Foodie*, and continue to support the Wisconsin Healthy Grown Program.

The Wisconsin Spudmobile is also on the road to help educate consumers about Wisconsin potatoes and their significance in feeding families, says Rady. "Having the Spudmobile at various store locations is a valuable asset, as it allows visitors to see things from a grower's perspective. They learn the field to fork story and get to have fun in the process."

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"Idaho's Gold Rush" at Broulim's Fresh Foods in Rigby, ID, turned Idaho potatoes into a high-impact, shoppable display, earning Produce Manager Heather Hosey fifth place in the Idaho Potato Commission's Idaho Potato Lovers Month Display Contest.

PHOTO COURTESY BROULIM'S FRESH FOODS

Idaho Potatoes: A Recipe for Retail Growth

Strong brand recognition gives retailers opportunities to build potato sales.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Say "Idaho" in the produce department, and potatoes immediately come to mind. That kind of built-in brand recognition is a powerful sales tool, especially when shoppers are demanding more from every grocery dollar.

Nearly three-quarters of consumers say minimizing food waste (73%), shelf life (72%) and nutritional value for the money (71%) are important when grocery shopping, according to the Aug. 6, 2026, report, *Grocery Budgets are Reshaping America's Dinner Plates*, a survey of 2,000 U.S. adults conducted by Talker Research and commissioned by the Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), in Eagle, ID.

The survey also showed just how highly potato buyers value the ingredient. Eight in 10 rated potatoes as good or excellent for versatility across meal types (82%), helping feed a household on a budget (82%) and nutritional value (75%).

For retailers, the opportunity is to turn Idaho's name recognition into more rings at the register. Russets remain the cornerstone, but

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- "Idaho potatoes have built tremendous consumer trust over many decades. That brand recognition remains an important advantage at retail."
Eric Beck, Wada Farms Marketing Group LLC, Idaho Falls, ID
- "Idaho russet potatoes remain the cornerstone of the potato category and continue to be the variety most consumers associate with quality, versatility and value."
Ross Johnson, Idaho Potato Commission, Eagle, ID

reds, yellows, petites, fingerlings, organics, and value-added packs broaden the assortment. Add strong retailer merchandising and promotion, supported by the IPC, and there are even more reasons for shoppers to put Idaho potatoes in the cart.

WHY IDAHO

Idaho is synonymous with potatoes, supplying nearly one-third of the nation's production and reaching markets across the

country. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Idaho growers produced 138.4 million hundredweight of potatoes in 2025, valued at nearly \$1.1 billion. Approximately 40% of Idaho-grown potatoes were sold on the fresh market in 2025.

Idaho benefits from a unique combination of factors that are difficult to replicate elsewhere, says Eric Beck, director of marketing for Wada Farms Marketing Group LLC, in Idaho Falls, ID. For example, the state's volcanic soils, clean mountain water, warm summer days, and cool nights create an ideal environment for producing high-quality potatoes.

"The result is a potato that retailers and consumers recognize for its appearance, versatility, and eating quality."

Because of these natural attributes, "Idaho grows the best-tasting and most versatile potato, the famous Russet Burbank," says Ryan Bybee, sales manager at GPOD of Idaho, Shelley, ID.

SEASONAL FORECAST

The 2026 Idaho potato crop is shaping up differently than the past few seasons, says Ross Johnson, IPC's vice president of retail and international. He cites USDA acreage estimates that show Idaho growers planted approximately 300,000 acres, a 5% reduction from 315,000 acres in 2025, representing the largest acreage reduction of any potato-producing state.

"National potato acreage also declined this year, reflecting the challenging economics facing growers across the industry."

However, this decrease in planted acreage in Idaho, compared to last season, "should lead to a better market and better demand," says Bybee.

Beck expects Idaho's crop will be capable of meeting fresh, foodservice, and processing demand. "Idaho's combination of scale, infrastructure, grower expertise, and storage capability provides a unique ability to supply customers consistently throughout the year."

The reduction in Idaho acreage is largely a response to historically low farm returns, says Johnson. "While consumer demand for Idaho potatoes remains strong, many growers have experienced returns well below their cost of production for multiple seasons."

Maintaining high-quality standards is at the core of Potandon Produce's August announcement of its Potandon Grower Alliance. This initiative, led by Des Hague, chief executive officer and president of

the Idaho Falls, ID-headquartered exclusive marketer of Green Giant Fresh potatoes and onions, establishes an alliance of grower partners united by a shared commitment to quality, innovation and long-term growth. Idaho is a major source of the company's potatoes.

LOADS OF VARIETY

Idaho is best known for russets, but the state also continues to grow a broader portfolio, including reds, yellows, petites, fingerlings, organics and value-added packs.

"More retailers are recognizing that Idaho can support a full potato category, not just the traditional baker program," says Johnson.

Beck says he's also seeing increased demand for a broader mix of package sizes. "While traditional bags remain important, consumers are increasingly looking for options that fit varying household sizes and consumption patterns."

Value-added products continue to be an important growth area within the potato category because they align with consumers' desire for convenience, Beck adds.

"Products that reduce preparation time, simplify meal planning, or provide ready-to-cook solutions can help attract younger shoppers and busy families without replacing traditional potato offerings," he says.

"That said, we view value-added as a complement to — not a replacement for — the core potato category. Traditional potatoes remain a staple item for many households and continue to drive significant volume."

SELL MORE

The most successful potato departments begin with understanding what consumers are looking for, according to Johnson. Innovation and product diversification have an important place in the category, and some retailers place significant emphasis on smaller gourmet and specialty pack sizes, including 24-ounce offerings. These products certainly appeal to specific shoppers, but they shouldn't replace or overshadow the core russet business.

"Idaho russet potatoes remain the cornerstone of the potato category and continue to be the variety most consumers associate with quality, versatility and value. The highest-performing categories strike the right balance by offering innovation, while ensuring the foundational items that consumers come in expecting are well-mer-

The advertisement features the Grimmway Produce Group logo at the top, which includes a stylized green leaf icon. Below the logo, the text reads "GRIMMWAY PRODUCE GROUP™". The main headline is "YOUR YEAR-ROUND IDAHO® POTATO PARTNER". Below this, three bullet points with green checkmarks list: "Dependable Supply", "Complete Potato Portfolio", and "One Trusted Source". A call to action says "Plan your Idaho® potato program with us!". The bottom half of the ad shows a stack of Idaho potato products: a bag of Idaho Russet, a bag of Idaho Yellow, and a bag of Idaho Red. To the right of these bags is a clear plastic bag of Idaho Russet potatoes. The background of the product images is a scenic view of a potato field at sunset. At the very bottom, the website "GrimmwayProduceGroup.com" is displayed.

Idaho Potato Contest: Participation Equals Double-Digit Sales

Shoppers walking into Broulim's Fresh Foods in Rigby, ID, in February struck "Idaho's Gold Rush."

New to her position and eager to show what she could do with a high-impact, shoppable presentation, Produce Manager Heather Hosey built one of the winning displays for the Idaho Potato Commission's (IPC) Idaho Potato Lovers Month Display Contest.

Positioned in the store's front entryway for a month, Hosey's display put Idaho potatoes directly in shoppers' path. Bins of russets anchored on each side, while yellow "gold" potatoes streamed down the center in a waterfall effect. Large wooden spools held 5-pound bags of red and yellow potatoes, with 5-pound bags of russets and boxes of

Idahoan instant potatoes displayed up front. Bundles of faux dynamite and gold stars suspended overhead completed the Gold Rush theme.

"I learned that creative, shoppable displays are wonderful, but most importantly, fresh product and constant attention help with daily merchandising," says Hosey, who earned fifth place in the Large Store 10-plus register category.

That mix of creativity and attention to merchandising is what the Eagle, ID-headquartered IPC's annual contest encourages. More than 2,100 retailers across North America participated in the 2026 promotion. Every qualifying entrant received a prize, with three regional grand-prize winners selected at random. IPC awarded more than

\$150,000 in cash and prizes through the program annually.

There's a measurable sales lift, too. IPC research shows participating retailers average a 22% increase in potato sales. The increase comes from secondary displays without taking sales away from potatoes in their regular location.

These added potato purchases can mean a bigger basket overall as well.

"Our research shows the average potato shopper spends approximately \$99 per shopping trip, meaning every additional potato shopper represents increased sales opportunities throughout the store," says Ross Johnson, the IPC's vice president of retail and international.



Retailers should merchandise potatoes prominently, support promotions with recipe ideas and digital content, and leverage secondary displays where appropriate.

PHOTO COURTESY WADA FARMS

chandised, well-stocked and prominently displayed," he says.

One of the biggest opportunities is continuing to position potatoes as an affordable, nutritious, and highly versatile meal solution, adds Wada Farms' Beck.

"The challenge is that today's shopper has more meal choices than ever before," Beck says. "Potatoes must compete not only within produce, but across the entire store for consumer attention. We believe retailers can turn that challenge into an opportunity by merchandising potatoes as part of complete meal solutions."

Cross-merchandising with proteins, vegetables, seasonings, and convenience-oriented products helps inspire purchases and increase basket size, Beck adds. Digital engagement, recipe content, and targeted promotions can also help retailers connect with consumers looking for affordable meal inspiration.

The most successful promotions focus on driving category growth rather than simply lowering price. Holiday periods, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and grilling season, continue to provide excellent opportunities to feature potatoes. However, retailers often achieve stronger long-term results when promotions are tied to meal solutions, seasonal themes, or complementary products rather than relying solely on aggressive price reductions.

"We encourage retailers to merchandise potatoes prominently, support promotions with recipe ideas and digital content, and leverage secondary displays where appropriate. These strategies help drive volume while preserving category value throughout the supply chain," says Beck.

IPC's Johnson says retailers will be most successful by focusing less on simply expanding assortment and more on communicating value. "Consumers don't just want more choices; they want confidence that they're bringing home a product that delivers exceptional value, lasts longer in the pantry, and can be enjoyed in dozens of different ways."

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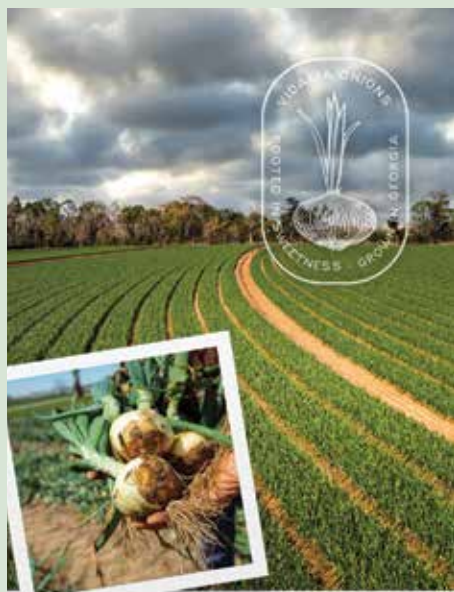
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Consistent placement, eye-catching secondary displays and educational signage help reinforce the availability of premium sweet onions year-round.

PRODUCE BUSINESS/DOUG OHLEMEIER PHOTOS

Peru Sweet Onions Provide Boost in the Fall and Winter

Retailers can continue strong sweet onion sales long after the summer season.

BY DOUG OHLEMEIER

Consumers can extend their enjoyment of sweet onions through the fall and winter, now that Peru sweet onions allow retailers to continue additional sales after the big summer push ends.

Peru sweet onions, which are a cousin to Vidalia and Texas sweet onions, offer supermarkets a less pungent onion contender that provides sales continuity, bridging summer and fall promotions.

"Peruvian sweet onions create consistency at the shelf, providing a similar look and flavor to the world-famous, highly versatile Vidalia sweet onion," says John Shuman, president and chief executive officer of Shuman Farms, Reidsville, GA. "This consistency helps to build consumer recognition and brand loyalty, driving sales year-round."

Sweet onions from Peru typically begin shipping in early September and continue through February, before Mexico and Texas production commences in the spring.

"As we move away from the domestic crops, Peru onions help us really give the customer what they're looking for," says Eric Mawer, produce director of Bronx, NY's Morton Williams. "When we pivot



Peruvian sweet onions pair naturally with many ingredients, making them ideal for cross-merchandising with produce, deli and meat. Their mild, sweet flavor enhances everything from burgers and salads to stir-fries, dips and caramelized dishes.

from the sweet onions that we grow domestically to the imports, it gives us flexibility all of the year for the consumer to have a mild sweet onion, and I feel the quality is there."

CONSISTENT MOVER

Peru keeps sweet onion sales moving.

"Peru is a big part of how we deliver year-round," says Troy Bland, owner of Bland Farms LLC, Glennville, GA. "Bite into a Peru onion and a Vidalia, and you can hardly tell the difference. They're two of the sweetest onions produced anywhere, and that consistency is what lets us get the same onion to our retailers every day of the year."

Peru provides retailers a reliable sweet onion offering that can bring high flavor to everyday meals, tailgate spreads, holiday gatherings and other social dining occasions.

"Onions are used to make every cuisine in the world," says Matthew Gideon, director of sales at Keystone Fruit Marketing, Greencastle, PA. "Our Peruvian Mayan Sweets are delicious raw, and fantastic when lightly cooked, grilled, or caramelized. They enhance the flavors of salsas, sandwiches, burgers, kabobs, relishes, and toppings. Their unique taste profile and versatility make them an ideal ingredient in various culinary creations. As long as people continue to eat, consumption will be strong."

Creative retailers can build recipes and assemble a combination of produce items for a promotion, advises Jeff Brechler, chief of sales and marketing for Little Bear Produce, Edinburg, TX.

"You go into Labor Day, and you kick off the tailgates and college football, then, the holidays of Thanksgiving and Christmas right through Easter. There are opportunities for each retailer to get creative."

MAINTAINING SALES

While it varies by retailer and region, Bland Farms has seen accounts where Peru sweets maintain 70% to 80% of the volume stores were doing during Vidalia season, says Sloan Lott, director of sales.

"Spring Vidalia season gets the headlines, but fall and winter are where you find out how strong your sweet onion program really is," he says. "The retailers who commit to it year-round outperform the ones who treat it as seasonal. That's not a placeholder; that's a real category contributor."

Peru sweet onions do well for Charlie's Produce, a Seattle, WA, wholesale produce company distributing to major retailers throughout the western U.S.

"Once the Walla Wallas are gone, the Mayan Sweets are the next best onion that comes in," says Jason Kazmirski, retail specialist. "When these come in, they really drive sales. They are a home run up here in Seattle."

Morton Williams displays Peruvian onions in a variety of methods, including

slant bins, Euro tables and power endcaps. Its large potato displays are complemented by sweet onions displayed in endcaps. The chain includes Peruvian sweet onions in weekly promotional displays.

"If we're promoting hothouse peppers, for example, how do we get another item in the basket?" asks Mawer. "We will complement them with a Peruvian sweet onion. We tend to tie in sweet onions, whether they're imported or domestic, with the tomato commodities. We always feel like the customers gravitate toward the onions,

so we do that often. For us, sweet onions could be a staple."

CONSISTENT MERCHANDISING

Merchandising Peru sweet onions during the fall and winter doesn't need to vary from promoting summer sweet onions.

"The approach shouldn't change much, and that's intentional," advises Lott. "Consistency in placement and signage reinforces to the shopper that high-quality sweet onions are always available. Change the source, not the experience."

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Offering both bulk and bagged Peruvian sweet onions gives shoppers flexibility, while promotions around holidays throughout the year help retailers maximize visibility and boost category sales.

He recommends retailers add secondary displays or use seasonal display bins to draw attention to premium sweet onions. Bland Farms also has a retail tool kit that lets retailers educate shoppers and also share elements across social media and in ads.

Like other sweet onions, Peruvian sweet onions can be sold in bulk or in bags.

Keystone's Gideon says customers have success in offering both bulk and consumer bags of sweet onions. "The usual promotional periods are around the winter holidays, but we have found that our retail partners also have success in promoting sweet onions around holidays all year long."

WINTER ANCHOR

Sweet onions' versatility gives retailers an anchor for produce department displays throughout the fall and winter, "whether it's with avocados and tomatoes for tailgating or alongside potatoes and carrots to inspire comforting meal solutions," says Shuman Farms' Shuman.

While most consumers prefer sweet onions over traditional yellow onions, Gideon recommends all onions, whether sweet, yellow, red and white, should be merchandised together, offering a choice for the shopper.

"During certain times of the year, secondary displays of sweet onions (loose and/or bags) are a great way to generate some additional impulse sales," he says. "Another thing is to be flexible on the onion size and bagged onion volume amount. Being flexible could provide spot opportunities for margin gains at the consumer level."

Peru sweet onions work well in retail promotions, says Charlie's Produce's Kazmirski.

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"Bite into a Peru onion and a Vidalia, and you can hardly tell the difference. They're two of the sweetest onions produced anywhere, and that consistency is what lets us get the same onion to our retailers every day of the year."**

Troy Bland, Bland Farms LLC, Glennville, GA

- **"As we move away from the domestic crops, Peru onions help us really give the customer what they're looking for."**

Eric Mawer, Morton Williams, Bronx, NY

- **"You go into Labor Day, and you kick off the tailgates and college football, then, the holidays of Thanksgiving and Christmas right through Easter. There are opportunities for each retailer to get creative."**

Jeff Brechler, Little Bear Produce, Edinburg, TX

"You can make a really nice display, and it will really pop for your customers as something new," he says. "The Mayans really stand out as a flat sweet onion. They are drivers. Peru really does a good job. They do incremental sales. When we're getting them in the winter-time, and they're hitting summer, it's fun."

NUMEROUS PAIRINGS

"From a merchandising standpoint, an onion is never going to be center plate," says Little Bear's Brechler. "It's always going to be complementary. So, its versatility lends itself to a lot of different things."

"The beauty of a wild onion is it still has an onion flavor, it just doesn't have the bite," Brechler adds, which makes them ideal for burgers, salads, stir-fries, sautés, or caramelized dips. "You can use them in a lot of things."

Morton Williams' Mawer likes to merchandise Peruvian sweet onions with meat. "We do a bunch with sweet onions any time of the year, but even with the Peruvians, we're slicing them, over-wrapping them and putting them near the steaks, even sausage in the winter," he says. "That's another item in the basket."

Gideon agrees cross-merchandising with meat products, such as burgers, sausages and steaks, creates enticing opportunities for consumers. "Similarly, cross-merchandising with tomatoes, peppers, salads, and squash in the produce department generates additional sales. With onions enjoying a high household penetration, consumers are constantly seeking new and creative ways to savor sweet onions."

While the tariffs imposed by the Trump Administration in 2025 haven't disrupted Peru onion supplies, they triggered headaches for handlers.

"Who's going to swallow the pill? Is it going to be solely square on our shoulders or will it be split?" says Brechler. "It's not our doing, and it's not the customers' doing. We need to figure out the best way to get through it and know it will change again. The biggest disruption was figuring out how to deal with something somebody else put in motion."



Clean displays, frequent rotation, and merchandising around meal occasions make fresh herbs feel approachable, while reinforcing freshness.

PHOTO COURTESY MELISSA'S

Focusing on Fresh Herbs

This high-impact category influences the perception of the produce department.

BY LISA WHITE

The fresh herbs category is quietly transforming from a convenience purchase into a strategic merchandising opportunity. Although it occupies relatively little space in the produce department, herbs help retailers reinforce freshness, inspire meal solutions and encourage shoppers to experiment with new flavors and cuisines.

That shift is reflected in stronger consumer demand. Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Los Angeles, CA, reports year-round demand for fresh herbs has grown 12%.

Todd Smith, senior category manager for produce at The Save Mart Cos. (TSMC), Modesto, CA, says shoppers are approaching the category with greater purpose.

"Fresh herbs have become a much more intentional purchase than they were even a few years ago."

Save Mart's stores reflect that evolution, with traditional fresh-cut herbs, organic offerings and living herbs available across Save Mart, Lucky California and FoodMaxx banners.

"One thing we've learned is customers aren't necessarily looking for more choices; they're looking for better choices," notes Smith. "If we can deliver freshness, quality and relevance, the category continues to grow naturally."

Despite their small footprint, fresh herbs play an outsized role in

GROUPING HERBS

Retailers should group herbs by use, rather than alphabetically. Categories can include:

- Everyday essentials
- Taco and global cooking
- Pasta and Mediterranean meals
- Grilling and roasting
- Cocktails and beverages
- Finishing herbs and microgreens

shaping shoppers' perception of produce quality and freshness, says Smith.

Social media has become today's recipe box.

"Customers are discovering new herbs, new flavors and new cooking techniques every day, and they're bringing that curiosity into the produce department," says Smith. "They start by trying one new herb, and that curiosity continues expanding the category."

WHAT DRIVES GROWTH?

Like all produce, the herbs category has to fit an area's demographic. TSMC adjusts its assortment and merchandising to reflect the communities it serves.

"Some herbs naturally align with specific cooking traditions," says Jorge Gomez, TSMC's senior category manager, vegetables. "Cilantro continues to perform especially well in many Hispanic communities,



Keeping herbs properly rotated, removing poor-quality product promptly, and maintaining freshness are critical in the produce department. *PHOTO COURTESY MELISSA'S*

while basil has become one of the category's most universal herbs because it works across so many different cuisines."

Fresh basil use is an example of how customer habits evolve.

"Years ago, many shoppers associated it primarily with Italian cooking," says Gomez. "Today, they're using it on sandwiches, pizzas, grilled vegetables, salads and fresh summer dishes. That broader usage has helped expand the category."

Jill Overdorf, interim marketing director for San Marcos, CA-based San Diego Farms LLC, parent company of Fresh Origins and Bright-Fresh, says behavior is more important than age.

"Confident cooks buy and use more herbs," she says. "Consistent quality and flavor ensure repeat purchases."

In addition to a clamshell program, New Seasons Markets has a robust bulk program that allows customers to grab as much or as little fresh herbs as needed.

"We see Millennials and younger going for fresh herbs," says Jeff Salchenberg, the retailer's program and category manager for produce. "New Seasons customers tend to be more adventurous in their cooking habits and are willing to try herbs from ethnically diverse recipes found online."

It helps retailers to know their customers and be open to new fresh herb items. For example, New Seasons Market recently added lime and curry leaves.

In addition to Millennials and Gen Z shoppers who enjoy cooking at home, health-conscious consumers are also driving growth.

"We also see strong demand among multicultural households where herbs are an everyday cooking staple rather than an occa-

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"By choosing herbs in the produce department, as opposed to the center aisles, they're demonstrating they're looking for peak freshness and flavor."**

Suzette Overgaag, North Shore Greenhouses, Thermal, CA

- **"Customers don't usually shop for herbs because they need herbs; they're shopping for the meal they're making that night. The more we merchandise around meal occasions, the more relevant the category becomes."**

Todd Smith, The Save Mart Cos., Modesto, CA

sional purchase," says Philipp Harlov, vice president of sales and marketing at Infinite Herbs, based in Doral, FL.

Heavy fresh herb buyers tend to be consumers who prioritize organic ingredients and are already engaged with food, spanning a large variety of demographics, says Suzette Overgaag, vice president/co-founder, North Shore Greenhouses, Thermal, CA.

"By choosing herbs in the produce department, as opposed to the center aisles, they're demonstrating they're looking for peak freshness and flavor," she says. "They cook often, care about details and see food as more than just fuel."

SEASONAL PUSHES

Although fresh herbs remain an everyday category, certain varieties become more relevant throughout the year. For example, Schueller at Melissa's sees an upsurge for fresh herbs in the fourth quarter by 20%.

Seasonality also creates opportunities to highlight specific herbs based on how customers are cooking. Salchenberg says rosemary, sage, and thyme dominate the fall and winter holidays, while basil is popular in summer.

As customers move into grilling season, tomato season or the holidays, different herbs become part of the meal solution. Rather than changing the category, seasonality changes the conversation, says Smith.

"Mint sees increased demand during the summer for beverages and entertaining," adds Infinite Herbs' Harlov. "Rosemary, sage, thyme and poultry blends peak during Thanksgiving and Christmas."

Although basil has strong demand throughout the summer when tomatoes are in season, he sees it becoming a year-round staple.

"Cilantro remains one of the most consistent herbs year-round due to its widespread use across many cuisines," says Harlov. "The key is inspiring consumers beyond holiday recipes."

In overcoming seasonality, it's not about convincing customers to buy more, but providing reasons to use them.

"When herbs are merchandised alongside meal solutions instead of standing alone, they naturally become part of the shopping trip throughout the year," says TSMC's Smith.

Seasonality will always influence individual varieties, but herbs as a category continues growing because customers are becoming more comfortable experimenting in the kitchen.

The Online Influence of Herbs

Online shopping has become another opportunity to build confidence in fresh herbs.

"Delivering quality through e-commerce is just as important as delivering it in-store because the customer's expectation doesn't change," says Todd Smith, senior category manager for produce at The Save Mart Cos. (TSMC), Modesto, CA.

"Consumers shopping online tend to purchase herbs when they're already buying ingredients for a specific recipe rather than browsing," says Philipp Harlov, vice president of sales and

marketing, Infinite Herbs, Doral, FL. "As meal planning and recipe integration continue improving across grocery platforms, we expect fresh herbs to continue growing in e-commerce."

Jill Overdorf, interim marketing director for San Marcos, CA-based San Diego Farms LLC, says online shopping can move product, but digital listings must do more work. "Customers cannot smell or inspect herbs online, so listings need strong photography, package size, flavor, storage guidance and clear usage ideas."

Social media also has spurred more sales for fresh herbs.

"Recipes shared through social media, cooking shows and digital creators introduce customers to new flavors and ingredients every day," Smith says. "That curiosity continues expanding the herb category because customers are willing to try something new without completely changing the meal. We've also seen customers ask for herbs they may never have considered before because they saw them used in a recipe online."

South San Francisco, CA-based Bay Area Herbs, Organics & Specialties provides approximately 22 culinary herb varieties, with most available year-round. "In the summer, we can localize purchases better, since we're less reliant on Mexico," says Michael Schutt, director of herb procurement.

PROMOTION WORKS

The good news is that seasonality is not a limitation. It informs a compelling merchandising calendar.

"Retailers sell more herbs when they treat them like meal inspiration, not garnish," says Overgaag at North Shore Greenhouses. "The biggest sales drivers are visibility, education and usage ideas."

The best way to move herbs into year-round sales is with powerful and strategic merchandising. "For example, we developed a potted mint shipper specifically for the Kentucky Derby," says Overgaag. "This not only increases basket rings for that event, but also adds a fresh twist to the famous Mint Julep."

QUALITY MAKES DIFFERENCE

Customers notice quality immediately, so execution has to be consistent every day. Frequent replenishment, proper handling and merchandising around how people cook are what separate a good herbs department from a great one.

"One thing we've learned is customers don't usually shop for herbs because they need herbs; they're shopping for the meal they're making that night," Smith says. "The more we merchandise around meal occasions, the more relevant the category becomes."

Herbs are one of the quickest categories where customers recognize quality. "If cilantro is crisp, basil looks vibrant, and parsley is fresh, customers have confidence in the department; if those expectations aren't met, they notice just as quickly," says Gomez.

TSMC's living herb program was introduced in response to customers seeking product that stays fresher longer.

"The appeal goes well beyond the organic shopper," says Gomez. "Customers may not come in asking specifically for a living herb, but after they take one home and experience the difference, they understand the value."

Depending on the type of fresh herb, the merchandising environment is crucial.

"Delicate herbs like dill can't withstand the rigors of being out of temperature," notes Schutt at Bay Area Herbs. "Although you need to

create a destination and everything in this segment needs to live in this space, stores can get away with herbs living in a cool case that doesn't get wet, is self-facing and not too cool."

In terms of storage, clamshell packaging works best, and temperature, airflow, handling and replenishment all affect quality.

"If herbs get wet, the leaf will turn dark black," says Melissa's Schueller. "All herbs should be refrigerated, except basil and root herbs."

MAKE A CONNECTION

Clean displays, frequent rotation and merchandising around meal occasions make the category feel approachable, while reinforcing freshness. "A full display isn't always the best display if freshness begins to suffer," says Smith at TSMC.

Whether it's grilling season, fresh tomato season or holiday entertaining, customers respond when herbs are connected to what they're already planning to cook. Smith recommends cross-merchandising with tomatoes, proteins, vegetables or meal ingredients.

Schueller encourages retailers to use point-of-sale customized signs with information on use, storage and nutrition, along with recipe links. "Many herbs look similar, so this helps to identify and differentiate them."

Secondary displays also create opportunities to introduce customers to herbs they may not normally purchase, or can highlight a holiday or season.

"Retailers can also use attractive branded displays, recipe cards and QR codes that link directly to meal ideas," says Bay Area Herbs' Schutt. "The easier it is for consumers to visualize how they'll use the herbs, the more likely they are to purchase them."

Salchenberg at New Seasons Markets warns produce departments not to offer too many versions of the same item.

"Merchandise herbs together in a block," he says. "Living herbs can be merchandised on an end of a table near tomatoes. During holidays, merchandise cooking herbs near the turkeys in the meat department or wherever customers are picking up their proteins."

Infinite Herbs' Harlov recommends retailers highlight herbs alongside seasonal meal solutions throughout the year, while also promoting quick weeknight recipes that rotate with the seasons.

Clear usage ideas, smaller package sizes, strong freshness, cross merchandising and simple recipes all help increase purchase and repeat use, San Diego Farms' Overdorf says.

PB

Pistachios: Driver of the Nut Category

This nut's versatility helps boost supermarket produce sales.

BY DOUG OHLEMEIER

A popular food for shoppers looking for a convenient, delicious, and healthy snack, pistachios are a premium snack that offers retailers flexibility of multiple shopper uses and rings.

No longer a specialty nut item, pistachios have become a driver of the nut and dried fruit category. The nut's versatility helps lead produce departments maintain strong nut sales.

"Pistachios are an impulse buy and a heck of a dollar ring," says Jason Kazmirski, retail specialist with Charlie's Produce, a Seattle, WA, wholesale produce retail distribution company. "They are another dollar driver for produce departments that seem to do well."

Pistachios have become an increasingly important driver of growth within the dried fruit and nut category, with innovation helping to bring new energy to the aisle, says Diana Salsa, vice president of marketing for The Wonderful Co., Delano, CA.

"Pistachios continue to play an important part of the retail landscape as consumers prioritize snacks that deliver both flavor and nutritional benefits," she says. "With demand for plant-based protein and better-for-you snacking continuing to grow, pistachios offer retailers a versatile item that appeals to a broad range of shoppers."

FLAVOR VARIETY

While roasted and salted pistachios remain the key category drivers for Bronx, NY's Morton Williams stores, other flavors, including dill pickle, barbecue and ranch, also sell well, says Eric Mawer, produce director.

"We're up in pistachios about 8% and a lot of it has to do with all the shelled variety flavors," he says. "We're starting to see a lot of incremental sales. The organizations and the growers continue to innovate, and we are reaping the rewards."

Pistachios are known as flexible nuts.

"Retailers are increasingly treating pistachios as more than a shelf item," says Christine Trageser, senior brand manager of Nichols Farms, Hanford, CA. "Their growth is being fueled by their versatility and the way consumers integrate them within their diets as a premium snack, a protein-forward option, a recipe ingredient, and even a flavor inspiration across categories. This flexibility gives retailers a strong reason to give pistachios meaningful space and visibility in the produce department."

PREMIUM SNACK

"Pistachios are a premium snack nut and rank near the top of the category in gross sales dollars," says Elizabeth Keenan, marketing manager of Keenan Farms, Kettleman City, CA.

And pistachios are a top seller when it comes to dollar sales, says Joseph Setton, executive vice president of Setton Farms, Terra Bella, CA. "They have been the driver of the nut/dried fruit category over the last 10 years and have been helping bring more attention and



Pistachios continue to gain traction as shoppers seek snacks that combine great taste with nutritional value. Their plant-based protein, versatility and broad appeal make them a strong choice for everyday snacking, entertaining and seasonal promotions.

PHOTO COURTESY WONDERFUL

WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

- **"We're up in pistachios about 8% and a lot of it has to do with all the shelled variety flavors."**
Eric Mawer, Morton Williams, Bronx, NY
- **"Pistachios have moved from being a niche item to a standout within the dried fruit and nut category."**
Christine Trageser, Nichols Farms, Hanford, CA

sales to the overall category. Demand continues to grow consistently for pistachios across all consumer demographics."

In produce, pistachios perform best when they are visible and easy to shop. Prepacked displays, quarter-pallet displays, and premium branded fixtures all work well.

"We are seeing more stand-alone displays in produce, seasonal endcaps, and checkout or impulse displays that make pistachios easier for shoppers to notice and add to their baskets," says Trageser. "As consumers continue to look for snacks that deliver protein, fiber, convenience, and premium flavor, pistachios are well positioned for stronger retail support."

Setton Farms offers displays loaded with a selection of top Stock-Keeping Units that can stand upright or be hung from other displays and shelving.

"We have seen that clean and cohesive displays work best, whether that is with one of Setton Farms pre-loaded displays or with creative decorations," says Setton. "Creating eye-catching displays

for an event or holiday will draw in consumers if they are not too cluttered.”

HIGH VISIBILITY

Keenan Farms has seen success with endcaps and retail displays throughout the produce section.

“Pistachios are often an impulse buy, so colorful high-visibility displays placed in produce and up front near the checkout areas are ideal,” says Paul Huckabay, vice president of sales. “Place displays front and center in high-traffic areas. Since pistachios tend to be an impulse buy, cross-merchandising them with other items works well.”

Pistachios are typically merchandised in high-traffic areas of the produce department where shoppers are already seeking fresh, nutritious and convenient snack options, says Wonderful’s Salsa.

“When merchandising snacks and entertaining items, it is important to merchandise by occasion,” she says. “Consumers often shop with a specific moment in mind, whether it is a gathering with friends and family, sports watching or on-the-go snacking. Displays should clearly communicate the role products can play in those moments and inspire consumers to discover new ways to enjoy them.”

Highly versatile, pistachios are easy to merchandise around seasonal eating habits, says Nichols Farms’ Trageser.

“In spring and summer, they work well as a grab-and-go road trip snack, a produce section tie-in, or an elevated salad topping,” she says. “In fall, retailers can lean into protein, fiber, lunchbox snacking, and after-school fuel. During the holidays, pistachios naturally align with entertaining, baking, and premium gifting.”

Shipper displays, cardboard boxes featuring cases of pistachios, help move product.

“The shippers get presence from people who maybe didn’t get over to that little cubbyhole where everyone seems to kind of hide those types of items, the dust collectors on some of those lower shelves,” says Charlie’s Produce’s Kazmirski. “But when you get shippers, you put them out there front and center, and you don’t necessarily have to have them in the produce department, either.”

PRODUCT PAIRINGS

Pistachios cross-merchandise well anywhere shoppers are building a snack, salad, board or recipe. In produce, that can mean pairing them with fresh fruit, packaged salads, dried fruit, cheeses, and seasonal entertaining items. They also work well near baking ingredients during the holidays,

alongside grab-and-go snacks sections throughout the year, as well as with beer and sodas, says Setton.

“They are the perfect snack while at the gym, school, work or on-the-go. They also work well in game day and tailgating promotions,” he says.

Keenan Farms recommends retailers build promotions around prime snacking occasions, such as holidays, sporting events and other social gatherings.

“Pistachio sales increase substantially during the Super Bowl, preceding the Fourth of July, and throughout the holiday season,” says Keenan. “It’s helpful to take advantage of these holidays with vibrant displays, especially near the checkout lines in stores.”

While Morton Williams typically merchandises pistachios in 4-foot sections displaying a combination of shelled and unshelled pistachios, vendor-supplied shipper displays are placed in store lobbies, vestibules and around the produce department.

“Our vendor partners have gotten really good with the displays,” Mawer says. “The customer can see five flavors versus the old days where we only had the one flavor on the stand. We’re definitely seeing some incremental sales from those.”

PB



Pistachios offer year-round merchandising opportunities, from grab-and-go snacks and salad toppers in spring and summer to protein-packed lunchbox additions, after-school snacks, holiday entertaining, baking and premium gifting in the fall and winter.

PHOTO COURTESY NICHOLS FARMS

A Tale of Two Farmers

By Maria DeSarbo

Tom Baggot and Willie Dellacamera both farm in Connecticut. That's nearly where the similarities end. Baggot works 1,200 acres across the state; Dellacamera works 145.

One built a business that ships trailer loads to Florida, the other a farm small enough to know every row by hand. What they share is a lifetime spent in the dirt — and, it turns out, a surprisingly similar diagnosis of what's squeezing them.

Ask Baggot what would be lost if his farm disappeared tomorrow, and he doesn't flinch. "Nothing about it matters," he says. "Someone will farm the land, and someone will hire the people. There is no loss to society at all."



Ask Dellacamera the same question, and the air in the room changes. He talks about a crisis moving in slower than anything the industry saw in the 1980s, one that will quietly take the small farmer down with it. Same state. Same industry. Two men who have spent their entire lives in the dirt, and two completely different verdicts on whether any of it matters once they're gone.

Baggot has farmed in Connecticut since he was 8, though "farming" undersells it — he passed the CPA exam in one sitting before deciding the ledger he really wanted to run was a field. His 1,200 acres come from leasing 45 farms across the state, planting roughly 300 of those acres twice a season: sweet corn, squash, tobacco, peppers, eggplant.

His trucks move product to chain stores within 150 miles, with a tenth traveling as far as Florida and Texas. His tractors drive themselves. His sprayers know, row by row, where they've already been, and shut off before they waste a drop.

At Cecarelli's in Northford, CT, Dellacamera represents the fourth generation of his family to work this land, and he's spent his life reshaping it to survive weather his ancestors never saw.

Every 36 inches, he tills an 8-inch gap and drops a seed there instead of turning over the whole row — a skip-row method that cuts runoff and holds soil together through storms that now dump 2 inches of rain an hour, something that rarely happened a generation ago.

He rotates 65 to 80 of his acres each year between cover crop and cash crop, a rhythm he calls regenerative agriculture, and sells the results through a CSA and farmstand on-site, plus wholesale relationships across New England. He runs three trucks himself and calls in outside distributors the rest of the time.

His technology is a weather station and whatever his iPhone can

manage. What he actually wants — soil-moisture sensors that could warn him a plant is stressed before he can see it — he can't afford.

Here's where the story gets interesting: Ask each man what's eating his margins, and despite the gap in their acreage, they arrive at almost the same complaint. Too much product, not enough return.

Baggot's version starts with crop insurance. He'd eliminate it entirely if he could, arguing it keeps inefficient growers in business who'd otherwise have folded — and every acre staying in production when it shouldn't is downward pressure on price. Take away the safety net, he argues, and domestic prices would more than double.

Dellacamera's version runs through the shipping lanes, not the insurance office. He watches cheap wholesale produce arrive from out of the country and out of state, flooding a market his farm can't compete in on price, and he doesn't hide who he blames — the regional wholesalers and distributors, the very buyers Baggot's trailers are built to serve.

Different culprits, possibly the same disease: too much supply chasing too few buyers, whether that surplus comes from a policy that keeps marginal acreage alive or a global market flooding it in from elsewhere. Worth sitting with rather than resolving — if they're both right, no single fix, farm bill or free market, solves it alone.

What the two men agree on, without hesitation, is that scale wins. Baggot is blunt about the mechanics: Freight economics punish small shipments, and a big buyer would rather deal with one grower who can fill a trailer than a dozen who can't.

Dellacamera doesn't argue the point — he almost envies it. At Baggot's scale, there's room to specialize: a marketing person, a food-safety person, a packing house of your

own. At his, there's just him. "The grower should just grow," he says, half-joking, and not joking at all.

Dellacamera leaves the harder line behind. He points to the recent cyclospora outbreak tied to large-scale lettuce operations as the cost of a supply chain too vast to trace — a contamination that size, he argues, couldn't happen on a farm like his own. If local growers disappear, he says, it won't be an accident; every buyer up the chain will have played a part.

Baggot, for his part, asks only for a fair look: "We try to grow a good crop, and we try to take care of our customers. Maybe they should give us a shot."

Two truths, both real at once, from two differently sized farms. One built big enough to reach Florida grocery shelves. The other small enough to trace every leaf back to its row.

The real question for everyone buying produce isn't which model wins — it's whether the industry will pay for what the smaller one protects, before there's no longer one left to compare it to. **PB**

Maria DeSarbo is the chief procurement officer for Produce One.

Same state. Same industry. Two men who have spent their entire lives in the dirt, and two completely different verdicts on whether any of it matters once they're gone.

UK Fruit Focus 2026 Panel: Government Policy Must Change to Unlock Growth

Industry leaders are calling for urgent action from government, retailers and growers to unlock the growth potential of U.K. horticulture, following a discussion at Fruit Focus 2026, July 8.

The discussion on the National Farmers Union (NFU) Fruit Forum stage was a key session during the event's 40th anniversary program, bringing together senior figures from across the sector to discuss the development of the first horticulture growth plan.

The Horticulture Expert Grower Group has been tasked by Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) to help develop the plan, working with the U.K. Fruit and Vegetable Coalition and the Environmental Horticulture Group to identify barriers to growth and profitability, examine how costs and returns are shared across the supply chain, and explore ways to increase productivity and grow domestic and export markets.

Speaking during the panel discussion, industry leaders said the sector has a major opportunity to shape future policy, but warned growth will only be possible if growers are given the confidence to invest.

Christine McDowell, NFU senior policy specialist, said the growth plan must focus on competitiveness rather than simply increasing production.

"In terms of growth, we don't necessarily mean growth being volume driven," she said. "From our perspective, it should be about ensuring competitiveness, with growth being a byproduct of competitive businesses."

The panel highlighted labor availability, planning, energy costs, water infrastructure, crop protection, retailer relationships, rising input costs and investment in automation as some of the most pressing issues.

"The reality is that our sector in the U.K. is uncompetitive primarily because of a list of government policies, and that has to be fixed," stressed Ali Capper, chair of British Apples and Pears.

"We've talked about access to labor and not knowing what visa numbers are for next year. But we've also got the most expensive labor in Europe. England and Wales no longer have a producer organization scheme, and yet the rest of Europe, Scotland and Northern Ireland do. That is a competitive disadvantage."

"This is a really exciting, entrepreneurial sector, but we can't do it when we get our hands tied behind our back by various government policies that make us uncompetitive."

LABOR

Labor remained one of the strongest themes in the discussion, with the panel warning that uncertainty around the Seasonal Worker visa scheme is undermining investment confidence.

Nick Marston, chair of British Berry Growers, said seasonal workers remain essential to horticulture. "Overseas workers form 98 or

99% of the harvest labor workforce in U.K. horticulture, certainly in the berry industry."

He said growers are working hard to explore automation, robotics, new varieties and different harvesting systems, but warned these will not replace people quickly. "Growers and the industry are working really hard on this, but that's a long-term project, and quite honestly it won't replace people entirely. It might replace half of them, if we're lucky, in maybe 10 or 15 or 20 years."

FRUIT AND VEGETABLE AID SCHEME

The panel also called for renewed support to replace the loss of the fruit and vegetable aid scheme.

"The words that we hear all the time are 'level playing field.' All the time," said John Walgate, chief executive of the British Growers Association, adding the previous scheme had provided important support for investment, collaboration and competitiveness.

"The fruit and vegetable aid scheme was not perfect. I think everybody would say it was not perfect, but it was great support. It worked really well, and we can't see the logic in losing it. Reform would have been the right thing, not to lose it."

Walgate warned that relatively small changes in support or cost can have a major impact on business viability. "Four percent might sound like a small figure, but it's huge. Two percent can be the difference between survival and failure," he said.

"We've got a massive growth opportunity. U.K. retailers want to buy British tomatoes and cucumbers."

— Simon Conway, British Tomato Growers Association and British Pepper & Cucumber Growers Association

ENERGY COSTS

Energy costs were also raised as a major barrier. Simon Conway, chair of the British Tomato Growers Association and British Pepper & Cucumber Growers Association, said the scale of investment required in modern glasshouse production means businesses need long-term confidence.

"I've had two business owners say to me, the U.K. is uninvestable for large-scale glasshouse unless you run as an island and build gas turbines and don't connect to the grid."

However, Conway also pointed to significant growth opportunities if the right conditions are created. "We are about 20% self-sufficient in tomatoes and cucumbers. We've got a massive growth opportunity. U.K. retailers want to buy British tomatoes and cucumbers."

The need for better coordination on research and innovation was another major theme, with speakers calling for grower-led research that focuses on practical solutions to commercial challenges. **PB**

Fruit Focus provides a one-stop shop where visitors can meet leading fruit-focused product and service providers, network with industry colleagues, earn BASIS and NRoSO points, and learn from seminars and technical content.

Science Must Move Faster Than Social Media

BY M. JILL OVERDORF

I have spent my career weaving my work and passion between the field and the kitchen. I have bought produce, cooked it, sold it, specified it, promoted it, walked fields with growers, stood in packing houses, worked with distributors and watched chefs turn raw ingredients into something people want to eat.



So, when a foodborne illness outbreak is linked to lettuce, berries, herbs, onions, peppers or another fresh fruit or vegetable, I pay attention.

I also brace myself. Not because the information should not be reported. It absolutely should. Not because the produce industry should be protected from scrutiny. It should not. I brace myself

because a highly specific public-health investigation can become a sweeping public conclusion in a matter of hours: Lettuce is unsafe. Berries are dangerous. Jalapeños or cilantro will make you unwell.

From all of this, a blanket decree emerges — “Don’t eat produce.” And that is where the problem begins.

The American food system is not perfect. No food system can be. Agriculture is biological, food is perishable, people are human, and zero risk does not exist. But the U.S. produce supply is supported by an extraordinarily sophisticated food safety system, and the fresh produce industry has invested heavily in making that system stronger.

Most consumers never see what sits behind the apple in a lunchbox or the bag of spinach in a refrigerator. They do not see growers monitoring agricultural water, packing houses maintaining sanitation programs, laboratories conducting tests, distributors tracking lots, retailers setting supplier requirements or food safety professionals spending entire careers studying risks most of us would rather never have to think about.

That infrastructure matters. So does the public infrastructure around it.

Food safety is not the responsibility of any one company, grower or agency. It is a chain of responsibility that includes farms, processors, distributors, retailers, restaurants, laboratories, universities, local and state health departments and federal agencies. When that system works, illnesses are detected, patterns emerge, investigators compare data, products are traced and, when necessary, recalls are issued.

A recall is alarming when it becomes a headline. Particularly when it is a poorly uninformed headline. But a recall can also mean the system worked.

We should always ask how contamination happened and how we prevent it from happening again. Accountability matters. Prevention matters even more.

But identifying a pathogen, narrowing it to a product or production window and removing that product from commerce is not evidence that the entire food supply has failed. It is evidence that surveillance and traceback are doing what they were designed to do.

The bigger challenge today is that science is methodical while social media is immediate. Epidemiology requires evidence. Social media requires content.

An outbreak investigation may involve patient interviews, laboratory analysis, purchase histories, distribution records, genomic sequencing and traceback across multiple companies or states. Early theories can change as evidence develops. Sometimes the initial assumption turns out to be wrong. That is how science works.

It is also exactly the kind of nuance that disappears online.

When social media becomes the primary source of information, a preliminary finding becomes a definitive accusation. By the time accurate information catches up, the damage may already be done.

And that damage extends well beyond perception. When consumers lose confidence in a commodity, growers and companies with no connection to an outbreak can lose sales, markets and crops. Restaurants remove ingredients. Retailers react. Buyers become cautious. Consumers change habits.

The economic impact can move through the supply chain faster than the pathogen itself.

That is why strong, credible government food safety agencies are not the adversary of agriculture. They are part of what protects it.

The produce industry should be among the strongest voices calling for well-staffed, adequately funded and scientifically credible agencies that can identify outbreaks quickly, manage traceback efficiently and communicate clearly about what is known, what is not yet known and what consumers should actually do.

That is not an argument for bureaucracy. It is an argument for capacity. We need experienced epidemiologists. We need laboratories. We need inspectors and investigators. We need coordinated data systems. We need state and federal agencies that can work together quickly and accurately without agenda. And increasingly, we need public communicators who can translate complicated investigations into information consumers can understand and trust.

Because if those systems weaken, information does not stop. The vacuum simply gets filled by someone else. Today that may be TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube or whatever headline travels fastest.

An algorithm cannot conduct traceback. A viral post cannot determine whether correlation is causation. An influencer cannot establish whether several illnesses in different states share a common source. We need institutions whose job is to do exactly that.

Whether you are a farmer, chef, distributor, retailer, parent or simply someone standing in a grocery store deciding what to put in your cart, you want the same thing: competent people following the evidence and telling you the truth as quickly and accurately as possible.

The next rumor certainly will not wait for the science. If we want consumers to trust the food on their tables, then accurate information must be treated as part of food safety itself.

Science may never move as fast as social media. But science has to be given every chance to catch up and tell the true story. **PB**

M. Jill Overdorf is founder and president of The Produce Ambassador, which provides strategic insight, brand development, and innovative solutions for the foodservice, produce, hospitality and culinary sectors.

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Alsum Farms & Produce, Inc.	57	920-348-5127	alsum.com
Altar Produce, LLC.....	26	760-357-6762	altarproduce.com
Ayco Farms, Inc.....	26	954-788-6800	aycofarms.com
Bolthouse Farms.....	76	661-366-7209	bolthousefresh.com
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Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	47	515-981-5111	capitalcityfruit.com
Carb Americas	26	954-786-0000	carbamericas.com
Crawford Packaging.....	16	226-235-4906	crawfordpackaging.com
Crystal Valley Foods.....	26	305-591-6567	crystalvalleyfoods.com
Dole Food Company, Inc.	2	704-213-3478	dole.com
Equifruit	47	416-716-6534	equifruit.com
EV Produce International, Inc.	15	956-215-8872	evproduce.com
Elevated Foods	25	908-334-2919	elevatedfoods.com
Farm Direct Supply LLC	26	561-910-4341	farmdirectsupply.com
Fierman Produce Exchange, Inc.....	24	718-893-1640	fiermanproduce.com
FirstFruits Marketing, LLC.....	31	509-853-4710	ffm-wa.com
Forrence Orchards	50	518-643-9527	goadironack.com/entries/forrence-orchards
Fresh Innovations, LLC. (Yo Quiero Brands)	16	817-674-9120	freshinnovationsllc.com
Fru-Veg Marketing, Inc.....	26	305-591-7766	fruveg.com
Gourmet Trading Company	26	310-350-5404	gourmettrading.net
Grimmway Produce Group	59	661-845-5229	grimmway.com
Harvest Sensations, LLC	26	305-907-3230	harvestsensations.com
Heartland Produce Co.	56	262-653-1000	heartlandproduce.com
International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA).....	75	302-738-7100	freshproduce.com
Jacobs Malcolm & Burt (JMB).....	26	209-367-0990	jmb-produce.com
John Vena Inc.....	37	215-336-0766	johnvenaproduce.com
Lange Companies.....	26, 33	217-786-3300	tomlange.com
M. Levin & Company, Inc.....	41	215-336-2900	mlevinco.com
Manfredi's Cold Storage.....	41	610-444-5832	manfredicoldstorage.com
Maurice A. Auerbach Inc.	26	201-807-9292	auerpak.com
MIXTEC Group.....	24	562-652-2299	mixtec.net
Multivac	21	816-801-3732	multivac.com
Niagara Fresh Fruit Co.	50	716-778-7631	niagarafreshfruit.com
North Bay Produce Co., Inc.....	52	231-946-1941	northbayproduce.com
Philabundance	42	215-339-0900	philabundance.org
Phillips Mushroom Farms LP	19	610-925-0520	phillipsmushroomfarms.com
Prime Time Sales, LLC.....	26	760-399-4166	primetimeproduce.com
Procacci.....	38	215-463-8000	procaccibrothers.com
Produce Blue Book	7	630-668-3500	bluebookservices.com
Riveridge Produce Marketing Inc.....	53	616-887-6873	riveridgeproduce.com
Setton International Foods, Inc.	69	631-543-8090	settonfarms.com
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SORMAC INC.....	61	567-200-8420	sormac-inc.com
Southern Specialties, Inc.	26	954-784-6500	southernspecialties.com
Square 1 Farms, LLC.....	26	561-614-2814	sq1farms.com
SweetTango (Next Best Thing Coop).....	49	866-716-3428	sweettango.com
T. M. Kovacevich - Philadelphia, Inc.	39	215-336-3160	tmkproduce.com
The Foundation for Fresh Produce.....	5	202-303-3435	freshproduce.com
The Perishable Specialist Inc.	26	305-477-9906	theperishablespecialist.com
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Dublin Farms Celebrates 150 Years of Potatoes

Dublin Farms, a fifth-generation potato farm on the north side of Mosquito Creek in Accomack County, VA, was honored July 8, at Bushwick Potato Commission's farm tour event, for its 150 years of agricultural excellence.

The Dublin name comes from the original 300-acre tract of land separated off a land grant from the King of England, which was bought by the Hickman family in 1889. The farm has been in the Hickman family ever since, and potatoes have been grown on some portion of that farm dating back to 1872.

Brothers Phil and David Hickman grew their first 200-acre potato crop in 1975. White potatoes were the only potatoes grown until 1992, when they began growing reds. In 1996, they grew their first yellow potatoes. Over time, they developed a reputation for having unparalleled quality and have built the Dublin Farms brand into one that is sought after by buyers up and down the East Coast.

Today, Phil and David's sons, Phillip, Matthew and Mark, grow 500 acres of red, white and yellow potatoes, with quality still being the standard.

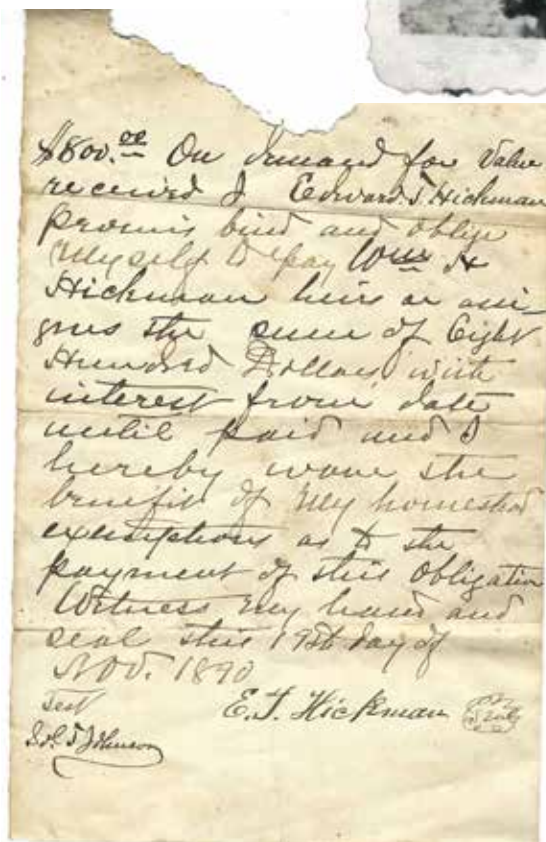
Mark Hickman, operations manager/sales, says relationships set Dublin apart from others through the years. "We have customers that have bought potatoes from three different generations of Hickmans. That type of longevity in this business is very rare today, but it is very important to us."

Mark Hickman says they also value relationships with their employees. "They work hard to make this operation run as smoothly as it does, and we make sure to let them know they are appreciated."



Pictured are Dublin Farms' E. Phillip Hickman (left), third generation, and John H. Hickman, second generation in 1952.

PHOTOS COURTESY DUBLIN FARMS



The original 1890 land sale agreement for the farm known as "Dublin."



The oldest copy in Dublin Farms' records showing the rental agreement for Ed Thomas Hickman to rent the farm known as "Dublin," dated Jan. 3, 1874.

He says over the next 10 years, they would like to see the packing operation grow. "This year was our first year operating on a new wash line and packing line. This year alone, our consumer pack volume has increased 150%. It has proven to be a good investment, and we want to expand on that."

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