

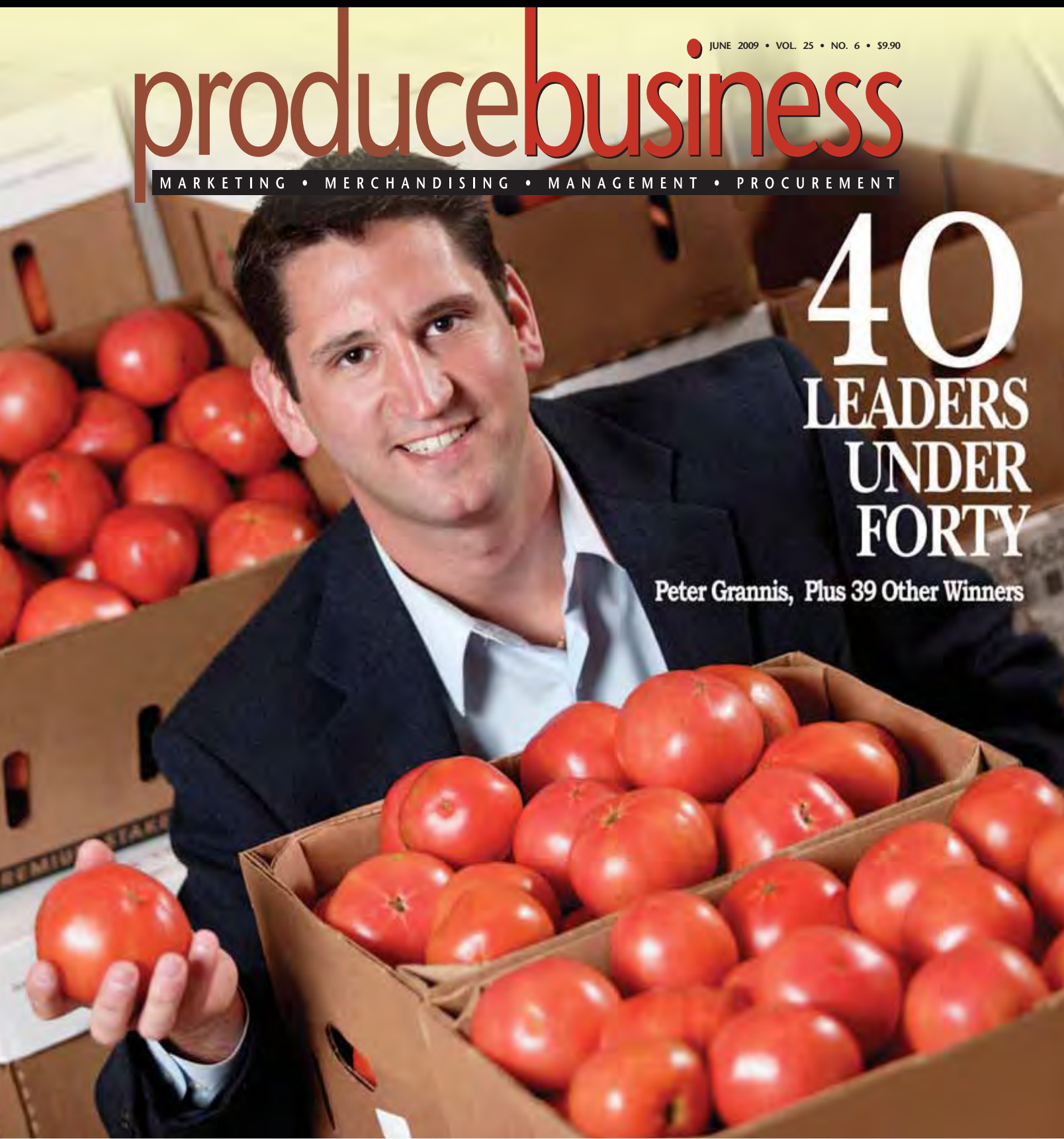
JUNE 2009 • VOL. 25 • NO. 6 • \$9.90

producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

40 LEADERS UNDER FORTY

Peter Grannis, Plus 39 Other Winners



INTRODUCING:
REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK: Phoenix Produce On Parade
STORE CHECK: Cincinnati Competition

The bag innovated salad. Now Dole's innovating the bag.

Introducing the new easy-open bag from Dole.



Dole is proud to introduce its new, innovative, pinch and pull, easy-open salad bag.

A simple pull, and customers can enjoy the fresh-tasting goodness of Dole's farm-fresh salads.

It's a direct response to one of the top complaints from consumers: Bagged salads are difficult to open.

We're sure your customers will enjoy this fresh, new feature. No scissors, no headaches, no struggle.

It's just one of the many ground-breaking innovations coming soon from Dole.

For more information about Dole's new packaging or produce,
please contact your Dole sales representative.

Dole.com





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The **Georgia Grown** program helps farmers and consumers share a bountiful harvest.



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THIS MONTH'S WINNER:

Bob Van Liew
Produce Director
Associated Wholesaler Inc.
Robesonia, PA

After 42 years in the produce industry, Bob Van Liew knows a good thing when he sees one. He's been reading PRODUCE BUSINESS since the beginning. "I rely on the publication for the yearly, review-type articles, such as the Top Ten Industry Trends. It helps tremendously," he remarks. "You're able to ask yourself, 'Are we doing this right? What can we do better?'"



SPONSORED BY

How To Win

To win the PRODUCE BUSINESS Quiz, the first thing you have to do is enter. The rules are simple: Read through the articles and advertisements in this issue to find the answers. Fill in the blanks corresponding to the questions below, and either cut along the dotted line or photocopy the page, and send your answers along with a business card or company letterhead to the address listed on the coupon. The winner will be chosen by drawing from the responses received before the publication of our August issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS. The winner must agree to submit a color photo to be published in that issue.

As produce director for Robesonia, PA-based Associated Wholesaler Inc., Van Liew deals with a host of independent retailers. "Basically, I help them plot and plan whatever they want to get into their stores. I've been with the company for 22 years and have seen us grow by leaps and bounds. We are now 12-fold what we used to be."

Van Liew enjoys the excitement of the unexpected within the produce industry. "Every day is different. We work with Mother Nature, and we can't control her. We have to learn to work around her."

As PRODUCE BUSINESS' quiz winner, Van Liew, an avid golfer, will receive a compact golf GPS system.

WIN A CUISINART TOASTER OVEN

Research shows this toaster oven broiler most accurately maintains interior temperatures, resulting in perfectly even cooked food. The oven accommodates a 12" pizza, has a non-stick coating for easy cleaning and automatic shutoff.



QUESTIONS FOR THE JUNE ISSUE

- 1) When is United Fresh's Washington Public Policy Conference? _____
- 2) What is the phone number for Layer Saver? _____
- 3) What variety of grapes is featured by Sun World now through August? _____
- 4) For how long has Bland Farms been in business? _____
- 5) Where is Jasmine Vineyards located? _____
- 6) How many days does Railex's delivery take? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____
 Company _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____ Fax _____

Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
JUNE QUIZ PRODUCE BUSINESS • P.O. Box 810425 • Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425

President & Editor-in-Chief • JAMES E. PREVOR
 JPrevor@phoenixmedianet.com

Publisher/Editorial Director • KEN WHITACRE
 KWhitacre@phoenixmedianet.com

Special Projects Editor • MIRA SLOTT
 MSlott@phoenixmedianet.com

Assistant Editor • AMY SHANNON
 AShannon@phoenixmedianet.com

Assistant Editor • JENNIFER LESLIE KRAMER
 JKramer@phoenixmedianet.com

Circulation Manager • KELLY ROSKIN
 KRoskin@phoenixmedianet.com

Executive Assistant • FRAN GRUSKIN
 FGruskin@phoenixmedianet.com

European Bureau Chief • ROBERT ZWARTKRUIS
 RZwartkruis@phoenixmedianet.com

Production Director • DIANA LEVINE
 DLevine@phoenixmedianet.com

Production Leader • JACKIE TUCKER

Production Department

FREDDY PULIDO
 JOANNA ARMSTRONG

Trade Show Coordinator • JACKIE LOMONTE
 JLoMonte@phoenixmedianet.com

Contributing Editors

MEREDITH AUERBACH, CAROL BAREUTHER, MIKE DUFF,
 JODEAN ROBBINS, BARBARA ROBISON, JON VANZILE,
 TRISHA WOOLDRIDGE

Advertising

ERIC NIEMAN, ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
 ENieman@phoenixmedianet.com

JENNIFER JORDAN
 JJordan@phoenixmedianet.com

SANDY LEE
 SLee@phoenixmedianet.com

BILL MARTIN
 Martinmedia45@peoplepc.com

ELLEN ROSENTHAL
 ERosenthal@phoenixmedianet.com

Floral Department Marketing

E. SHAUNN ALDERMAN
 SAlderman@phoenixmedianet.com

Marketing Solutions and Integrated Sales

JIM DELEGUARDIA
 JDeleguardia@phoenixmedianet.com

Send insertion orders, payments, press releases, photos, letters to the editor, etc., to:

PRODUCE BUSINESS
 P.O. Box 810425
 Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425
 Phone: 561-994-1118 Fax: 561-994-1610
 E-mail: ProduceBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com

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for a summer palate

Tanimura & Antle Artisan™ Red Onions and Artisan™ Lettuce serve up perfect summer sales.

Distinct and versatile, this pair complements all summer cooking favorites. Artisan Reds are mild in flavor, beautiful, fresh and flat out the best.* Artisan Lettuce adds variety, color, texture and flavor.**

Together they create a tasty sales sensation. Beautify your produce department. Call us today! 1.800.772.4542

* Key retailers saw a 290% increase over prior year's red onion sales.
** After home use, Artisan Lettuce consumers most often say they like the flavor, freshness and variety.





WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE

A report on the inside happenings of government.

SUBMITTED BY DAN VACHÉ, VICE PRESIDENT, SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT, UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOC. • UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOC.



Progress Made On Traceability Initiative

As the second quarter of 2009 draws to a close, we, as representatives of the industry's most ambitious self-regulation to date, take a step back and look at the fledgling success of the Produce Traceability Initiative and our collective progress to date in implementing the changes it recommends.

We have seen the first two of the PTI milestones pass with positive momentum. While this does not necessarily mean all of the industry stakeholders have achieved the objectives of obtaining the GS-1 company prefix and assigning a GTIN to all case configurations, all indications are that the industry is moving forward to meet the needs of external, whole-chain traceability.

There was sufficient activity and excitement surrounding the initiative that at April's United Fresh show, the launch of a Traceability Demonstration Center landed a direct hit for the industry. Retailers, wholesalers and other stakeholders with pressing questions were linked to the solutions providers with the answers to help each party continue driving for the eventual success of the PTI. The constant activity and participation at the Center showed an overriding excitement about the potential of the initiative, but more importantly, showed a willingness on the part of all industry stakeholders to communicate about concerns regarding the initiative's recommendations.

The PTI's milestones and the corresponding timetables for their implementation were not made trivially. Those responsible, including ourselves, our allied associations, and members of the Steering Committee, realize that coming into full compliance by 2012 will mean big changes for some companies. Business practices may change and established processes may require adjustment, but we also realize that the willingness to participate, discuss and ask ques-

The history of the produce industry indicates that when a need arises, the doers of our industry come together to achieve success through trial and error.

tions when concerns are raised has the potential to benefit us all.

We've seen working groups made up of cross-sections of the industry put in countless research hours to gain input, discuss and come to consensus to establish Best Practice recommendations.

We applaud the excellent communications between trading partners regarding the importance of reaching each milestone and establishing direct communication on the overall impact of the initiative.

We recognize the countless companies forming internal teams to address the impact of the PTI on each process involved in delivering quality, fresh produce.

We take note of an increasing number of webinars, meetings and other developmental tools hosted by solutions providers in order to aid the industry in determining the best paths to achieve success.

Finally, we acknowledge more and more solutions providers who put their stake in the initiative in the form of investments in a growing number of systems changes. This can only help to unite the industry under a common framework, and eventually lead to new levels of traceback productivity in the future, ensuring the continued health of the entire industry.

As we move toward the completion of Milestone 3, the sharing of GTIN information to buyers (to be completed by third quarter of 2009) this common involvement, participation and cooperation is more important than it has ever been. The activation and integration of all interest groups and stakeholders in the produce industry is critical for success. Looking further into the future, the completion of Milestones 4 and 5 (the display of human readable information on produce cases, and the encoding of that information in a barcode on the case) by the end of the third quarter next year will go a long way toward determining who has taken the recommendations of the PTI seriously, and who stood on the sidelines and consequently will be left to play catch-up.

After his coaching career had ended, legendary Green Bay Packer head coach, Vince Lombardi, told a crowd gathered to hear him speak, "It is time for us all to stand and cheer for the doer, the achiever – the one who recognizes the challenges and does something about it." The history of the produce industry indicates that when a need arises, the doers of our industry come together to achieve success through trial and error with positive outcomes.

These forward thinkers in the produce industry deserve credit in much the same fashion as Lombardi's doers. Faced with the challenge of whole-chain traceability, many in the industry have responded with action, in spite of the reticence over what challenges may exist.

We at United hope to carry this progress forward, addressing issues regarding the initiative through our member programs, education and outreach, including September's Washington Public Policy Conference. Through these community dialogues we hope to foster the continued cooperation needed to make the PTI and future initiatives a lasting success.

pb

Observations From Las Vegas: United Fresh Builds Momentum

From Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit, April 28, 2009



After several years in alliance with FMI and other trade shows, United Fresh held its first solo show in six years. Although the presence of all the other shows added size and variety, this iteration of the United convention had its own charms as it was more a true gathering of the produce family without all the folks from the other shows.

We confess we were asked for meetings by several large exhibitors who told us they were each spending well into the six figures to exhibit at United and couldn't justify the expense. They were hoping we might bring up to the industry the possibility of merging the associations or, at least, find a way to have only one national show.

We have dealt with the issue of a potential merger before, and we do think that the industry has wound up with an odd arrangement. PMA, with its very successful business model built around an extraordinarily successful show, generates a lot of money; then, from time to time, the Board of PMA allocates chunks of that money to industry causes, such as the PMA Education Foundation or the Center for Produce Safety.

It is a useful function, though many would fail to see the need for an intermediary to allocate these funds.

United, in contrast, has not had the same scale of resources available, but has carried the burden for a lot of the industry expenses for lobbying and government relations.

Although some have seen the obstacle to merger in individuals, particularly blaming the CEO's of the two associations, we have not found that to be true.

Over the years, including a time when United was the larger and more financially prosperous of the two associations, the real obstacle for a merger has been that many board members have great loyalty to their own association and, whichever association was doing well financially at the time, didn't see any particular need to merge.

So to the financially ascendant association — at one time United, more recently PMA — merger meant the other association closing up and transferring over the assets and programs.

There has never been a time in the industry when both associations needed money, and so both might have been amenable to sitting down with a blank sheet of paper and trying to build a new association model for the industry. We frankly doubt that this is the time for that either.

United has made great progress over the years in getting a larger share of its revenues from dues and from grants.

Our advice to those big shippers who were spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to exhibit was that they should stop exhibiting if it was not profitable for them. Sure, United likes having big flagship companies and will not want to lose those exhibitors. But these companies are giving United, say, \$20,000 in booth fees and then spending \$200,000 setting up booths, taking people to dinner, flying staff into town, etc. If they scale back the expenses they feel they are wasting and donate some of the savings to support the programs they value, we think United will understand. United has no interest in having members blow quarter-million-dollar bills without getting value.

For the moment, we thought most exhibitors were happy. There were several retailers who were there, and many Costco people attended to support Heather Shavey who was recognized at the 2009 Women in Produce event. On the Fresh Tech side, there seemed to be a lot of business conducted with

equipment and packaging on display. Others liked that they could make a big splash in a smaller pond.

In the long run, the show will either work or it won't. United has made great progress over the years in getting a larger share of its revenues from dues and from grants. There are many associations that survive without any shows. If the show one day doesn't make it and United can't raise enough elsewhere, well that is when a merger will happen.

For now, though, we have come to think of United as Daniel Webster thought of Dartmouth. He said "It is, Sir, as I have said, a small college. Yet there are those who love it."

So, United is the smaller of the national produce associations. Not everyone is a member and not everyone exhibits at its show. It is of little importance. Like Dartmouth, it has passionate defenders and, in the world of associations, love will outrank size every time.

www.perishablepundit.com



Generic Promotion Program Requires Due Diligence

At a recent meeting called to discuss the possibility of launching an industry-wide generic promotion program, the advocates for the program presented the case of what they characterized as a “highly successful” generic produce promotion program in Western Australia as an example of what could be accomplished with a similar program in the United States. A participant in the meeting spoke about how incredibly fantastic the results were from a generic program designed to boost the floral industry, while still another participant described a fantastic program for Washington State apples.

Now these three programs were wildly different and each had its own back story. Still and all, it is interesting to note that each one of these three programs is now defunct because the producers that were supposedly benefiting so greatly from the programs declined to fund the efforts.

It is possible the producers were short-sighted or mistaken. It is also possible that these businesspeople were perfectly rational and did not experience the lift in profitability that these boards promised.

There is confusion at the heart of this debate over a generic commodity promotion board with a mandatory assessment on the industry. The confusion is over what the purpose of such a board might be.

The effort is being spearheaded by the Produce for Better Health Foundation, the people who brought us 5-a-Day and, more recently, Fruits & Veggies More Matters, and this alone causes confusion.

This foundation is a non-profit entity. Its purpose is to create “better health,” not to increase the profitability of produce companies. So in this sense, any expenditure that results in an increase in produce consumption — which means better diets for Americans — is a win for the foundation.

But a generic promotion board is not a charity — one cannot donate to it and get a tax deduction. Its purpose is to help producers market themselves profitably via a collective effort that none could afford on their own. This means that not only must a generic promotion program increase demand, it must do so at a price that produces a return higher than that which the produce firms could have gotten by investing the money elsewhere.

This is a significantly more difficult hurdle to breach than simply selling more product, and it is one that the advocates for the plan have not even begun to establish.

The proposal is for a big program — \$150 million of industry funds over the next five years. Neither a company, nor an industry, should make such an investment without careful research and consideration.

Unfortunately, the proposal as it stands lacks independent

research on any of the important issues. If we are to even consider this proposal, we need to get professional input on questions such as these:

1) What are the expected consumption levels in the absence of this program?

2) How much advertising is necessary to boost demand sufficiently that it will entice additional product to be grown or imported so that consumption can rise?

3) What will be the lag time between the increase in demand and the availability of increased supply?

4) How will each commodity be affected by the increased advertising? Do all items respond equally? How does each item stand when it comes to acquiring increased supply?

5) How do the returns on such an investment compare with other options, including investing in commodity-specific generic promotions?

There are many obvious obstacles that explain why the produce industry does not have a program already:

A) Whereas a cow is a cow and a pig is a pig, produce is many different items. It is not obvious that all produce items can or should be promoted jointly. How can we ensure the money is spent fairly?

B) The Dairy Board spends about \$300 million a year. This proposal calls for the produce industry to raise \$30 million a year. Can we

actually change consumption habits with that kind of budget?

C) Many produce businesses are not really scalable. They may have a fixed amount of land or a fixed amount of siblings... in any case these enterprises, often family-owned, don't want to or cannot get bigger, so doubling sales for the industry does them nothing. They need higher prices, and it is not clear this program will produce such prices. Is it fair to “tax” these players so others can get the benefit?

D) Are we going to impose this program on growers without their consent? The proposal calls for “first handlers” to pay the assessment and have the vote, but many of these first handlers will bill the “tax” back to the growers. In effect, the growers will pay while others run the program. Is that right?

We should never close the door on big ideas, but, at the same time, we should never plunge into things without doing our due diligence. Right now we need more answers and that means more research before we can start building. Some of the advocates are impatient and are doing their own cause a disservice. If they would focus on building a strong foundation, rooted in solid research by objective parties, in time this industry would raise the roof all on its own.

We need more answers and that means more research before we can start building.

Investment Strategy



Mann's Sunny Shores®, the fresh-cut vegetable leader, is once again bringing proven, national promotions to the category. Our on-pack events generate redemption rates north of 15%.*

Now more than ever consumers are looking for value. Mann's Sunny Shores® has the marketing

muscle and industry experience to attract partners and execute deals your shoppers are looking for.

Power brands build powerful sales. Mann's Sunny Shores® brings them to the category. Growing your sales—investing in you.

*According to CMS on-pack offers generate an average to a 15% redemption rate.



Fresh Vegetables Made Easy.™

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UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION WASHINGTON, D.C.

Ray Gilmer was appointed to vice president of communications, where he will bring more than 20 years of combined experience in agricultural issues management, public relations and crisis management to United's senior management team. He previously led communications and public affairs at the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association.



DRISCOLL'S STRAWBERRY ASSOCIATES INC. WATSONVILLE, CA

Tim Youmans was promoted to vice president of sales. He will head sales for the retail, foodservice, export and wholesale channels. His goals will include achieving alignment between producing great berries and meeting the needs of Driscoll's marketing partners in the short and long term. He previously worked in technology and communication sales.



STEMILT GROWERS INC. WENATCHEE, WA

Tim Harrington was hired as merchandising manager for the East Coast. He has more than 29 years of experience working in the produce industry, including 21 years at Shaw's Supermarkets in various roles, such as quality assurance inspector and store manager. He will be responsible for developing new marketing programs.



RUSSET POTATO EXCHANGE BANCROFT, WI

Randy Shell was named vice president of marketing. He will be responsible for new business development, category programming and promotional planning. He brings 33 years of industry experience in retail and foodservice buying. He most recently served as senior buyer at Target, where he worked for 10 years, driving new supply-chain initiatives.



M&M FARMS INC. MIAMI, FL

Mark Vertrees' role as marketing director was expanded to include retail and foodservice business development. He will be responsible for helping sales representatives develop new tropical retail and foodservice business. Since joining M&M in April 2008, he has redesigned M&M's logo, attracted marketing exposure and expanded M&M's brand.



Mike Shamberg was hired to the sales staff at RPE's new satellite office in Chicago, IL. He has maintained a relationship with RPE for more than 30 years. He will be responsible for bringing in new assets that will help the new office quickly get up to speed and continue to deliver on its corporate initiatives for quality execution.

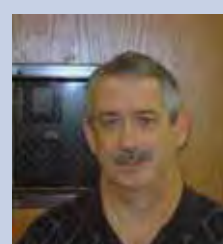


DULCINEA FARMS LLC LADERA RANCH, CA

Bill Spidell was hired as sales director. He brings more than 17 years of produce sales experience along with a proven track record of servicing and growing national accounts. He is a highly accomplished sales leader with an in-depth portfolio of creating value for any partnership.



John (Jay) Martini, Jr. was hired to the sales staff at RPE's new satellite office in Chicago, IL. His responsibilities will include expanding RPE's customer base. His experience working with products, such as tomatoes, will give RPE new areas of growth to explore.



Kevin Leap was hired as sales director. He brings more than 13 years of experience with selling premium specialties and value-added produce to national and regional accounts. He has a successful history of creating and selling branded programs by focusing on high-quality proprietary varieties and exceeding customer expectations.



EARTHBOUND FARM SAN JUAN BAUTISTA, CA

Steve Koran was hired as director of commodity sales. He will assist Earthbound in making progress in organic salads with its commodity programs. With more than 20 years of experience in produce industry, he has previously worked for Martori Farms and Tanimura & Antle.



NEW PRODUCTS

GOURMET FRESH BEANS

Southern Specialties, Pompano Beach, FL, introduced its Today's Gourmet French bean label. The upscale label provides consumers with fresh, easy and fast gourmet meal solutions that can be prepared at home. Today's Gourmet French beans are offered in 8-ounce and 1- and 2-pound, clear, microwavable bags.



Reader Service No. 300

BIO TURBO 1000 TECHNOLOGY

Miatech Inc., Clackamas, OR, launched Bio Turbo 1000, an Ethylene and airborne pathogen removal system designed for use in produce storage areas. The new 4-stage, patent-pending technology eliminates undesired ethylene and airborne bacteria, and it's engineered to enhance profit for produce distribution centers and cut packaging and storage.



Reader Service No. 301

Produce Watch is a regular feature of Produce Business. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a color photo, slide or transparency to: Managing Editor, PRODUCE BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail us at info@producebusiness.com

IRI PUTS VOLCANO BURST AT THE TOP

Dream Foods International LLC, Santa Monica, CA, announced recent statistics from the Information Resources Inc. that rank its Volcano Lemon and Lime Burst the No. 1 organic squeeze bottles in the nation. Dream Foods credits the flavor profile with creating very high brand loyalty to the product.



Reader Service No. 302

AWE SUM ORGANICS UNVEILS 2009 ZESPRI KIWIFRUIT

Awe Sum Organics Inc., Santa Cruz, CA, introduced the first arrivals for 2009 of its New Crop Organic Green and Gold Kiwifruit from ZESPRI New Zealand. The company will have continuous supply through October. Its freshly harvested kiwifruit are shipped to both coasts direct by water, which creates a very small transportation carbon footprint.



Reader Service No. 303

HEALTHFUL SMOOTHIES

Conford Foods Inc., Brockton, MA, introduces Sunkist Smart Smoothies, a line of ready-to-drink smoothies in banana and strawberry with pomegranate extract. Each pouch contains 3 8-ounce servings with a suggested retail price of \$1.29/pouch. These pouches are available to retailers in 18-pack cases or 108-pack floor shippers.



Reader Service No. 304

AVOCADO HUMMUS BLEND

Yucatan Foods, Los Angeles, CA, launched Cabo Fresh Avo-Hummus, a blend of 50 percent avocado and 50 percent classic hummus. Offered in a resealable, recyclable tub, Avo-Hummus is one of seven new Cabo Fresh lifestyle brand products, such as Authentic, Mild and Organic Guacamole, Mild and Medium Salsas and Cabo Fresh Bruschetta.



Reader Service No. 305

NEW PACKAGING FOR SIMPLY SINGLES

Mann Packing Co., Salinas, CA, introduced its new packaging for its highly successful Simply Singles whole leaf lettuce items in May at the 2009 Canadian Produce Marketing Association. Originally launched in 2000, the whole leaf lettuce line includes three varieties in a clamshell with a tamper-evident strip.



Reader Service No. 306

SUN WORLD REVAMPS IMAGE

Sun World International LLC, Bakersfield, CA, introduced a revitalized logo design that will appear on its packaging, signage, promotional materials and other places featuring the familiar Sun World brand. The refreshed logo builds on the company's legacy as one of the industry's innovative suppliers.



Reader Service No. 307

NEW BOARD FOR MEXICAN HASS AVOCADO IMPORTERS

The Mexican Hass Avocado Importers Association (MHAA), Irvine, CA, held its Board of Directors biennial elections at its bimonthly meeting in Irvine, CA. Incoming chairman Mike Brown (right) is joined by fellow officers David Ruiz Vega, Giovanni Cavaletto, Alfredo Rodriguez, J. Jesus Lopez Herrera, Ed Figueroa, Aureliano Pena Esparza and Doug Meyer.



Reader Service No. 308

SUNNYRIDGE PARTNERS WITH LEDUC BLUEBERRIES

SunnyRidge Farm, Winter Haven, FL, partnered with Leduc Blueberries LLC, Paw Paw, MI, to promote high-quality Michigan blueberries to their wide range of valued customers. The new partnership will be called BlueberryRidge LLC, and will pack under the SunnyRidge Farm label.



Reader Service No. 309

CONSULTING CONSORTIUM FORMED

A team of eight skilled produce industry professionals formed FreshXperts, a consulting group that addresses the business development, management, marketing, distribution and retail merchandising needs of produce companies, their distributors and retailers. Members of the consortium include Anthony Totta, Ron Pelger, Tony Merola, Mike Nicometo, John Shelford, Tim Vaux, Kenneth B. Hopps and Tony J. Totta.



Reader Service No. 310

SHOLL GROUP II LAUNCHES GREEN GIANT PATIO GRILLERS

The Sholl Group II Inc., the Eden Prairie, MN-based marketer of select Green Giant Fresh produce products, launched Green Giant Fresh Patio Grillers, the first national brand to offer full grill kits complete with fresh produce, chef-inspired sauces and a recyclable, no-mess grill tray. They're available in five flavors in the produce section.



Reader Service No. 311

GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY EFFORT LAUNCHED BY BAYER CROPSCIENCE AND UNITED FRESH

Bayer CropScience LP, a Research Triangle Park, NC-based U.S. subsidiary of Bayer CropScience AG, based in Monheim, Germany, presented United Fresh Produce Association Research and Education Foundation with a \$1.1 million endowment over the next four years to create the Center for Global Produce Sustainability.



Reader Service No. 312

CHILEAN BOX SUPPLIER TO EXPAND TO INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

Envases Impresos, a Santiago, Chile-based supplier of corrugated boxes for Chilean produce exporters, announced a new strategy to supply its corrugated carton products to international markets, including the United States and Mexico. Its strategy includes expanding its customer base and meeting with top importers to improve the transit of international fruit.



Reader Service No. 313

Produce Watch is a regular feature of Produce Business. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a color photo, slide or transparency to: Managing Editor, Produce Business, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail us at info@producebusiness.com




**FOODSERVICE
 CONFERENCE
 & EXPOSITION**
 PMA
 MONTEREY
 CALIFORNIA, USA
 JULY 24-26, 2009
 www.pma.com/foodservice

PMA FOODSERVICE CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION REVIEW

Booth #1 CHILEAN FRESH FRUIT Sonoma, CA

Year-round availability of a great number of fresh fruits has encouraged foodservice operators to confidently menu many of these items. We have availability charts, quality assurance information and a comprehensive brochure that suggests ways fresh fruit can be incorporated into segments.



Booth #2 CALIFORNIA ASPARAGUS COMMISSION Stockton, CA

Visit our booth to find out why California asparagus is a summer favorite! We have a new foodservice usage suggestion brochure and a printed selection of a few of the many foodservice favorite recipes that are found on our Web site.



Booth #6 PRODUCE PRO SOFTWARE Woodridge, IL

Produce Pro is a leading, full-service software solutions provider serving all temperature-controlled business types. We provide strategic consulting and a uniquely customized, fully integrated resource management and accounting system that supports and streamlines the Fresh Supply Chain Cycle. We are installed in 100 locations in the U.S and Canada and counting.



Booth #7 WAYNE E. BAILEY PRODUCE CO. Chadbourne, NC

Our company's goal is to satisfy the customer. We achieve that by supplying the most diverse offering of sweet potatoes, from sized potatoes to fingerlings to fresh-cut.



Booth #13 TANIMURA & ANTLE Salinas, CA

Discover Tanimura & Antle's long-standing commitment to quality, service and innovation. We continue to innovate new products, packaging and practices to provide premium fresh produce. Tanimura & Antle produces a full line of vegetables, including Artisan Lettuce, Living Lettuce, Artisan Red Onions, Iceberg, Romaine, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Broccoli, and Bell Peppers.



Booth #17 PRIMA BELLA PRODUCE INC. Tracy, CA

Prima Bella Produce announces Glori Ann Corn Coins perfect for appetizers or kid platters, as well as Glori Ann Handle Corn for amusement parks, zoos and fairs with built-in handle for on-the-go eating.



Booth #39 GILLS ONIONS LLC Oxnard, CA

Widely known as leaders in sustainability, we are excited about the unveiling of our Advanced Energy Recovery Project. After years of development, Gills Onions will be the first onion processing facility to produce ultra-clean energy on site from its own waste. Stop by to hear about our innovative conservation efforts and see our quality line of fresh-cut onions.



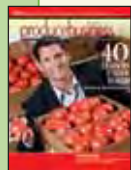
Booth #54 FRESHERIZED FOODS Fort Worth, TX

Fresherized Foods offers the freshest, highest quality avocado and guacamole products. Each package is all-natural with no preservatives and Fresherized — 100 percent safe and free of food pathogens. Always Ripe. Always Ready.



Booth #55 PRODUCE BUSINESS Boca Raton, FL

Initiating industry improvement since 1985, PRODUCE BUSINESS is the most widely distributed publication in the industry. Exclusively edited for buyers, it provides a monthly dialogue of marketing, merchandising, management and procurement information that helps buyers accomplish the industry's 9-to-13-A-Day goal.



Booth #56 IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION Eagle, ID

The Idaho Potato Commission will be handing our Fresh Shipper guides and potato variety posters. While Idaho is known mostly for its popular Russet Burbank variety, we also grow several other Russet varieties, including yellow flesh, fingerlings and red potatoes.



Booth #62 STEMILT GROWERS INC. Wenatchee, WA

Stemilt Growers is a leading tree fruit grower, packer and shipper based in Wenatchee, WA. Owned and operated by the Mathison family, Stemilt is the nation's leading shipper of sweet cherries and one of the largest suppliers of organic tree fruits.



Booth #64 ORCHID ISLAND JUICE CO. Ft. Pierce, FL

Natalie's Orchard Island Juice Company is family owned and operated and has been squeezing Florida-grown citrus for 20 years. The company produces fresh-squeezed, gourmet pasteurized and fresh frozen orange, grapefruit, tangerine, lemon and lime juices, as well as organic orange juice.



Booth #65 WEST PAK AVOCADO INC. Temecula, CA

West Pak specializes in sourcing, packing and marketing avocados from California, Mexico and Chile. We offer custom ripening programs and creative retail and foodservice promotional and merchandising support.



Booth #67 YOTTAMARK INC. Redwood City CA

HarvestMark, the fresh food traceability solution from YottaMark, is the industry's fastest growing traceability application. Over 250 million produce items are enabled with HarvestMark codes to speed response to suspected recall events and deliver on-demand product information throughout the supply chain, all the way to the consumer.



Booth #73 HERBTHYME FARMS INC. Compton, CA

HerbThyme Farms is America's largest fresh herb grower and packer shipping from regional facilities coast to coast. We deliver fresh from our USA farms to you.



Booth #83 DEL MONTE FRESH PRODUCE CO. Coral Gables, FL

Del Monte Fresh offers foodservice operators an array of innovative solutions to address the changing tastes and lifestyle needs of today's consumers. Our extensive distribution network allows just-in-time deliveries of our premium, quality and fresh products to your doorstep.



PMA FOODSERVICE CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION REVIEW

**Booth #203
COLORFUL HARVEST
Salinas, CA**

Colorful Harvest grows premium quality berries and exotic, colorful produce, including strawberries, bushberries, melons, rainbow crunch carrots, seasonal green beans, orange, purple and green cauliflower, sweet red corn and purple broccoli, with many packaging options for foodservice.



**Booth #204
SEALD-SWEET
INTERNATIONAL
Vero Beach, FL**

Seald-Sweet proudly celebrates a century of service to the produce industry, growing and shipping fresh citrus and other produce from the finest growing regions around the world.



**Booth #205
SAMBRAILO PACKAGING
Watsonville, CA**

Sambrailo Packaging is a third-generation, family-owned company that has served the produce and floral industries since 1923. With locations in California and Mexico, we have built our reputation on service and quality. Known for our design-to-distribution packaging innovations, Sambrailo truly does "whatever is best for the produce."



**Booth #209
HASS AVOCADO BOARD
Irvine, CA**

The Hass Avocado Board (HAB) was established in 2002. A 12-member Board administers the program. Over 20,000 producers and 100 importers from California, Chile, Mexico, New Zealand and the Dominion Republic are involved in HAB, which covers fresh, domestic and imported Hass avocados sold in the U.S. market.



**Booth #211
MISSION PRODUCE INC.
Oxnard, CA**

Mission Produce specializes in providing the foodservice industry the finest quality avocado, asparagus and high-pressure, processed avocado programs.



**Booth #212
BONIPAK PRODUCE CO.
Santa Maria, CA**

Bonipak Produce is a multi-commodity grower/packer/shipper/processor of fresh vegetable products. We supply both the retail and foodservice industries with high quality and freshness, shipping year-round from California and Arizona.



**Booth #218
STEINBECK
COUNTRY PRODUCE
Salinas, CA**

Stop by to see our beautiful line of colored cauliflower and our menu-enhancing baby iceberg lettuce. We also feature a full line of foodservice packs, and are looking forward to discussing your individual needs.



**Booth #222
SILVER CREEK SOFTWARE
Boise, ID**

Accounting solutions for produce distribution, processing, inventory, sales, purchasing, traceability and financial management software called Visual Produce. Windows-based for the produce industry.



**Booth #223
HOLLANDIA PRODUCE/
LIVE GOURMET
Carpinteria, CA**

Hollandia Produce, home of the award-winning Live Gourmet line of hydroponically grown living lettuce, cress and arugula, invites you to visit us to experience the difference freshness can make.



**Booth #226
FAMOUS SOFTWARE LLC
Fresno, CA**

Famous Software provides integrated accounting and management software. Visit us to learn about traceability, COOL, H-2A and B2B solutions your company can implement immediately. World-class training, support, programming and consulting are available.



**Booth #228
dPRODUCE MAN SOFTWARE
Half Moon Bay, CA**

dProduce Man software is the most up-to-date, integrated accounting software for the industry since 1980. Our program offers internet order placement, country of origin labeling (COOL), lot tracking, inventory control, growers accounting, routing, drop shipment, bar code/RFID, consignments and brokers module, just to name a few of its functions.



**Booth #230
ANDREW & WILLIAMSON
SALES CO. INC.
San Diego, CA**

Andrew & Williamson represents the Limited Edition brand. Find our vine-ripened tomatoes, pole cucumbers and our sweet strawberries. New this summer: organic California strawberries.



**Booth #234
PRODUCE CAREERS INC.
Arroyo Grande, CA**

Produce Careers is the food and produce industry's premier contingency search firm filling jobs with top talent. There are no upfront fees or retainers. We have 60 percent job search fulfillment with 75 percent of the candidates being non-job seekers.



**Booth #245
HMC - THE LUNCH BUNCH
Kingsburg, CA**

HMC Farms, grower and shipper of Lunch Bunch grapes — portioned by nature in two- to four-ounce servings — are ready to wash and serve. We also offer Grape Escape — two-ounce bags of grapes off the stem, washed and ready to eat — and Chelsea Farms tree fruit.



**Booth #254
MELISSA'S
Los Angeles, CA**

Known for its premium flavor variety produce, Melissa's will be showing off seasonal specialties, such as fresh Champagne and Muscato grapes, Sweet Dream peaches, Honey Royal nectarines, plumcots, lychees and more. Some of the newest items include year-round pomegranate arils and man-gosteen.



**Booth #257
CA LEAFY GREENS PRODUCTS
HANDLER MARKETING
AGREEMENT (LGMA)
Sacramento, CA**

LGMA members are working collaboratively to protect public health by reducing potential sources of contamination in California-grown leafy greens. LGMA-accepted food safety practices are verified through regular and random audits conducted by USDA-trained government inspectors.



Photos courtesy of PMA.COM

All Aboard The Sustainability Train

To paraphrase tennis great Arthur Ashe (among others) on the topic of success, sustainability is a journey, not a destination. Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) recent benchmark industry research on sustainability shows our members' sustainability journey is well underway, and they are making strides toward becoming more sustainable within the three Ps: planet, people and prosperity. The research also reveals there is uncertainty over how to effectively measure the return on investment of resources being allocated to making sustainable changes. But why is that?

Our industry clearly supports sustainability — no surprise there, given what we do for a living. Per our research, more than 89 percent of respondents — from small companies to large firms — agreed that it is a priority for their organizations, despite the worst financial crisis in decades. However, more than 65 percent weren't sure how to project the ROI of their efforts. Less than 30 percent of those surveyed could identify a projected break-even date for sustainability investments made during the past two to three years.

With the economy forcing industry members to sharpen their budget pencils, why aren't we better analyzing the results of our sustainability efforts? Perhaps, as a number of respondents told us, operating sustainably is "just the right thing to do," no matter the cost. Perhaps we think that sustainability's payoffs are intangible, or even contrary, to being profitable. On the other hand, there is good evidence that sustainability need not come at the expense of prosperity. Sustainability inherently strengthens businesses, and many ROI measurements already exist. This journey's mile markers just need to be more clearly placed.

If metrics are the issue, then there are plenty of examples to be found of substantial cost savings that are easily measurable. As one illustration from our own experience, consider PMA's transition to virtual computer servers. Instead of 18 physical servers each generating heat and consuming electricity, the same work is now handled by only three

servers. This change has resulted in a savings of \$94,000 in hardware costs and almost \$12,000 in annual energy costs — and we are reducing our carbon footprint in the process. PMA is already seeing its own sustainability ROI in reductions in such cost areas as energy, paper, waste disposal, facilities and transportation and logistics.

Further, respondents in PMA's sustainability research reported their sustainability plans were largely driven by customers. This suggests that customer retention could be an appropriate metric of sustainability. (Our research also exposed a "disconnect" between our members' motivations and consumers' motivations; consumers place high value on the "people" or social issues aspect of sustainability, while our survey respondents most highly ranked the "planet" or environmental aspects.)

At our recent PMA Board of Directors meeting, we reviewed and learned from an array of sustainability initiatives presented by four of our directors: Miles Reiter of Driscoll's, who looked at water shortages; Pablo Borquez of Campo Pablo Borquez, who focused on social factors; Rich Dachman of Sysco, who highlighted life-cycle assessment and distribution efficiency; and Mike Spinazola of Diversified Restaurant System, who gave us a "glimpse under the hood" of Subway's new ECO-Store. The discussion following these presentations made it clear that sustainability is less a trend and more a fundamental shift in the way most businesses are

now thinking about our planet, our people and our long-term prosperity.

Like many of our members, PMA is early on our sustainability journey, and we are finding there's much to learn — and many ways we can help. Within our industry, we are creating forums to share our discoveries, including this research and our new sustainability Web page found at <http://www.pma.com/issues/sustainability.com>. We encourage you to add your story to the dialogue we have started there. We are also blogging about sustainability on PMA's new government relations and public affairs blog, Field to Fork. You can sign up to receive updates on sustainability and other topics at <http://ffieldtofork.pma.com>.

Externally on our industry's behalf, PMA is also working to monitor other groups' efforts to establish sustainability standards that might impact our industry. We are participating to ensure the industry's perspective and special needs are considered. This includes our work with the Stewardship Index for Specialty Crops, a multi-stakeholder initiative to develop a system for measuring sustainable performance throughout the specialty-crop supply chain.

Sustainability is clearly an initiative that is here to stay. If you're in that 11 percent that doesn't consider sustainability a priority, it's time to get on board. If you're already down the path, then we hope you will join the conversation. We are looking forward to traveling this path with you.

There is good evidence that sustainability need not come at the expense of prosperity.



Search For Sustainability ROI Elusive

If you go to the United Kingdom, where sustainability has been a hot issue far longer than it has been in the United States, and you ask produce suppliers what sustainability means, they'll most likely laugh at you. They will explain that each big supermarket chain has its own program and that the key issue is simply conformance with whatever that customer wants.

In this sense, sustainability is just another burden, another requirement dictated by the buying community.

It is a shame that sustainability should come to be so uninspiring, but probably inevitable, as the need for customers is so overwhelmingly important that in order to win business, most vendors will gladly put aside such academic debates as to the correct definition of a term.

Besides, sustainability is by definition a good thing. Would anyone say, "No, I wish to do unsustainable things," and make any sense? So, very often the things that seem to be "no-brainers" in practicing sustainability are resisted for very good reasons.

It is satisfying to read about PMA's new servers and the energy they save. Yet another operation, perhaps without cash or credit to buy new servers, may stick with the old energy hogs because, until something changes, that is its way to stay in business or, put another way, to sustain its business. So passing judgments about others is a tricky wicket when it comes to sustainability, because the exact same action, taken by two different players, can have quite different results.

Defining sustainability is a double challenge. First, because sustainability traditionally involves three spheres — the social, the economic and the environmental — a definition is elusive because there is no obvious way to trade off between these responsibilities. If one company elects to invest money in, say, solar power, but doing so provides a lower return on capital than some other investment and thus, will lead to slower growth with fewer jobs produced, is that decision more or less sustainable than that of a company that made the opposite choice?

M easurement must take into account the tradeoffs from different spheres of sustainability.

What if one grower goes fallow every few years to save water, but that means lower production over a multi-year cycle so that it results in higher food costs for consumers? Is that more or less sustainable?

Just balancing — or choosing — between the three pillars of sustainability would make definitions difficult. Then, add to it that each organization has its own imperatives that change the balance between these items, and one sees the virtual impossibility — and the great danger — of "top down" sustainability being dictated by buyers.

I was with Bryan at the PMA Board Meeting and had the opportunity to hear the truly inspiring stories that he recounts in his column. Yet we would also submit that the stories show how any broad-based standard is bound to fail as each story grew out of a particular situation. To give two examples:

Pablo Borquez of Campo Pablo Borquez did, as Bryan indicated, focus on social factors. It was such an uplifting story of helping to raise up his employees and serve his community that one wanted to rush and give him a medal.

We realize that not every Mexican grower would think in such an ennobling fashion, so we wish to take nothing away from Pablo. Yet, surely, those decisions to emphasize the social sphere in that way grow out of the fact that he is a Mexican-based grower and the public support system is thin in Mexico.

In the United States, an equally kindhearted grower might take different actions

because in the United States, people are eligible for Medicaid, food stamps, subsidized housing, etc. If a community doesn't have clean water, a U.S. grower may be more inclined to call up the County Health Department than to do what Pablo did, which is bring clean water to the community on his own dime.

Miles Reiter of Driscoll's would be the first to acknowledge that he was speaking of the water problem in one particular valley, and what was the right course in that valley may not work elsewhere.

So although there are many metrics that can be used in sustainability, they are mostly useful on a self-assessment basis to judge how one is proceeding along the journey. If big buyers start to use these metrics as requirements — use less than X amount of water per pound of a particular produce item produced — useful tools will lose their nuance and the orders from buyers will neither take into account the tradeoffs from different spheres of sustainability nor the individualistic situation of each company and location.

The search for an ROI in sustainability is natural, but it implies a kind of alienation of sustainability from the rest of the business enterprise, which doesn't really make sense. Sustainability should be integrated with the efforts a business makes and its ROI flows through all those efforts as greater attention is paid to the broader, long-term implications of every decision.

Dole Veg Launches Easy-Open Salad Packaging

RONDA REED, MARKETING DIRECTOR FOR DOLE FRESH VEGETABLES, BASED IN MONTEREY, CA, DISCUSSES THE MARKETING EFFORTS BEHIND DOLE'S NEW, EASY-OPEN BAGGED SALAD VARIETIES.

BY MIRA SLOTT

PB: Tell us about your new, easy-open packaging, its evolution and how it fits into the overall marketing strategies of the company.

Reed: Over the past year and half we've done a tremendous amount of research, keenly studying the category and consumers, delving into their lifestyles, learning what frustrates and delights them to jumpstart the category.

We also did a lot of packaging research. The biggest complaint voiced by half of bagged salad customers surveyed was frustration at not being able to open the bag.

PB: In addressing logistical problems with opening the bag, how did you resolve the technological challenges associated with maintaining product freshness? Does the new packaging impact lettuce quality and shelf-life?

Reed: We've worked with our suppliers over the past year to implement this change. It's a complex technology issue because of the breathability factor and scientific characteristics of the film. Our team finally made a breakthrough to develop a new pinch-and-pull technology that allows one to easily and effortlessly open the bag. It doesn't impact shelf-life at all.

PB: How complicated is it to change over to the new bag? Is it a similar manufacturing process?

Reed: It took a lot of retooling in our factories to run the new line because it is a different type of bag. It has involved a large investment in equipment changes and process overall.

PB: Has Dole made the commitment to a full-scale launch? How many different products in the bagged salad category will house the new packaging?

Reed: We're now rolling the technology across all our lines in the packaged salad category, covering four plants!

PB: Wow! Could you provide some numbers for perspective? How many varieties are there? What is the scope of your production?

Reed: We have about 45 different types of bagged salad products. Right now, they're going to be rolled out starting with the



Ronda Reed, marketing director

blends and kits. We're still working on our classic iceberg-based salads, which have a different film and therefore, additional challenges to overcome.

PB: Do you envision this technological advancement could transform a mature category or at least drive a substantial lift in category sales?

Reed: It's a big problem when people can't open the packages. We followed consumers in their homes to observe them interacting with products and building salads. Watching them try to open the bag, some would pull and pull and then, the bag would explode sending lettuce flying everywhere. People would open the film

with their teeth, while others became aggravated as they searched for a pair of scissors. Clearly, this exercise identified a window of opportunity.

PB: Has the bagged salad category become staid? If so, what factors have come into play? Did you glean any answers through your consumer research?

Reed: The category has been declining very slightly over the past four years, which is not good. Consumers say they are eating more packaged salads by far — 55 percent of consumers think they are eating more bagged salads, 37 percent about the same, and 7 percent less often. That is coming from our September 2008 consumer attitudes and usage study, focusing on value-added products. It was conducted by a specialized, independent research company. Consumers only fantasize that they're eating a lot more salads in line with the trends toward nutrition and health.

However, if you look at IRI trends, excluding Wal-Mart and the Clubs, the bagged salad category was down 4 percent in 2006, flat in 2007, down 3 percent in 2008, and down 3 percent year-to-date. Someone needs to step in and turn this category around, and this is one of many initiatives at Dole.

PB: How does this packaging invention fit within Dole Fresh Vegetables' strategic goals, and in a broader sense, chairman David Murdoch's health and nutrition initiatives and company vision?

Reed: About a year ago, we brought in a whole new manage-



FOOD SAFETY. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. **NEED WE SAY MORE?**

There are all kinds of ideas for how to meet food safety objectives. Some are workable — others not so much. That's why, at this critical time, the produce industry must remain engaged in food safety discussions and work closely with federal policymakers to help craft meaningful and practical solutions.

The Washington Public Policy Conference is the produce industry's largest and most influential event of its kind. Whether you're a Capitol Hill veteran or a first timer, you owe it to your business and your industry to make your voice heard.

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Dole's rollout of its new packaging begins in July.

ment team, many with ConAgra Foods backgrounds and a welcomed consumer-centric mindset. The team is skilled in discovering what consumers really want. This has been lacking for quite some time; the category has been treated as a commodity for too long. We are trying to change our whole positioning to the consumer, almost like a re-launch of our brand. It's beyond a simple salad packaging change.

Overall, Dole promotes Mr. Murdoch's vision. We are definitely listening to what he has to say, and we're constantly working on ways to satisfy his vision. He wants people to eat healthy and everything we do reflects this goal. This means we must really connect with our consumers again and become a more meaningful partner in their lives.

PB: In this quest, how will you market and merchandise the new packaging? What types of customers are you targeting? Are you primarily looking to invigorate the disheartened heavy-user base, generate new bagged salad eaters and develop a few niches? What is the strategy?

Reed: Our marketing efforts stem from taking a good look at consumers and segmentation studies. In this way, we've identified the group we're going to be targeting the pinch-and-pull, easy-open concept. This group tends to be very creative and enjoys the interactive experience of building an imaginative salad by adding a variety of ingredients. The one thing they don't want to be is frustrated at the start of this process. Marketing efforts coming out later in the year focus on helping consumers play and create and have fun with this category.

PB: It is interesting that you describe the bagged salad consumer as a gourmand. I imagine a true food connoisseur as shying away from the prepackaged bags in favor of picking their own bunches of fresh, misted greens. I thought bagged salads catered more to harried mothers relishing in the convenience, or younger generations that never learned how to cook!

Reed: It depends on the segment. We find bagged salad customers are very sophisticated in what they do, pretty much almost gourmet. They do appreciate the convenience, but what drives

them are the blends they can't easily put together by themselves. They don't want to have to buy seven different lettuces. They view the lettuces as a base to start their creativity, rather than having to spend time buying all the lettuce varieties. They find the creative aspect more about the things they can add to the salad, such as crumbled blue cheese — the visual, the smell and the taste of it is the big deal.

PB: So there's excellent cross-merchandising potential in this scenario.

Reed: Yes. Our marketing strategy can also boost the rest of the produce department. When people buy a salad, they purchase mushrooms, carrots, croutons, dressing, etc. If we can stimulate people to increase frequency and tap into this creative drive, it will boost produce sales throughout the department.

PB: It's nice that you're injecting new life into the category. Could the economic downturn be impacting value-added items such as bagged salads?

Reed: As far as the economic decline, a lot of categories are down as people pull back. They are forced to make choices. Some things are just very important to consumers, and even when economic troubles arise, they will continue to buy certain items.

PB: Does that theory also apply to Dole's creative bagged salad customers?

Reed: People we are focused on are very committed to this category. It's not a penetration problem; percentage of households buying is not the issue. It's the frequency at which they are buying. People generally know when they open the bag they need to use it in the next few days. We are looking at ways to extend shelf life. At the same time, we must increase frequency of use.

Sixty percent of volume comes from people who buy the category every two weeks or more frequently. We have a huge number of heavy users; that is why only 23 percent of the people buy 60 percent of the salads, according to IRI Panel Data. When you have a hardcore consumer group, you want to alleviate the major problem they are having with your product — they can't get the silly bag open!

PB: When can your hardcore customers begin to get relief by way of your new products?

Reed: The first couple of varieties will be coming out in July and we'll start rolling out the rest of the line from there. We'll have everything out by third quarter of this year.

PB: Dole certainly has ambitious goals, but this sounds like an exciting time. Could you share your perspective on the changes that are taking place?

Reed: I've been at the company for 14 years, having spent time in all of the divisions. I started my career with packaged foods, did some foodservice work for a few years, then moved into the fresh fruit division, and now I'm in fresh vegetables. It's a fun time to be at Dole. I know everyone in the different divisions, and we are pulling everyone together to share in the same vision, bringing Mr. Murdoch's vision to life. I don't know of another company more positioned to help consumers make better choices and eat right, but make it fun and tasty.

PB: Will you be extrapolating this packaging concept to other product categories? What other projects do you have in the pipeline that could pique our readers' interest?

Reed: It's too early to discuss other projects underway, but I can assure you this packaging innovation is just the start of many exciting things to come.

pb



Winners of our fifth annual *40-Under-Forty* Awards Program should be truly honored because they were chosen by their fellow industry mentors. PRODUCE BUSINESS conducted an extensive, widespread search throughout the industry to elicit nominations for top young industry leaders under the age of 40. The search involved communication with thousands of executives, consultants, associations and universities.

This year's winners are exemplified by an outstanding array of community involvement. They have demonstrated an extremely high degree of giving back to the people and places that have helped them reach their current positions.

We had far more nominations than we could use. Individual candidates were contacted to highlight their key company, industry and community accomplishments, sharing meaningful examples of how they have been leaders in the industry, as well as their goals and aspirations.

If you were not chosen this year or if you nominated someone who was not selected, please understand that the process was highly competitive, and we encourage you to re-submit updated nominations for next year's competition. We encourage everyone to alert PRODUCE BUSINESS of well-deserving candidates and to help praise and support future produce movers and shakers as we look forward to honoring *40-Under-Forty* leaders in 2010.

PROFILES BY JODEAN ROBBINS



Chad Amaral, 35
Director Of Sales Development
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of CA
Salinas, CA

Amaral began working for D'Arrigo in the company's cooler, and through the years he has risen to his current position where he jointly runs the sales office and works to analyze all business dealings to ensure the most effective sales and

new customer decisions are being made. He is known as being an extremely hard worker and a pleasure to do business with. He volunteers his time six months out of the year to coach a local high school basketball team and gives back to younger children as assistant coach of a local Little League team.

Amaral is inspired by the opportunities the industry offers on a daily basis. "Every day is different from the prior, and as a result, a new set of challenges or opportunities must be addressed," he reveals. "I enjoy the challenges this constantly changing environment provides. It forces one to get out of a comfort zone of thought and activity and be a problem solver."

His future goal within the industry is to gain as much knowledge as he can. "If I can better understand the growing side, the procurement side and finally, the end user landscape, decisions I make or thought processes I develop will not be narrow in scope, but rather, done in a manner that takes all sides into consideration," he reports. "I believe all sides want to

know about the challenges or processes of the other, but there simply is not enough impetus. If all parties can better communicate, in the end, everyone can achieve success."

He notes the opportune aspect of the produce industry in being exposed to many different people of various backgrounds. "Besides the work ethic I learned during my upbringing, I am fortunate in that a lot of who I am today as a professional is a result of the people I have been exposed to at D'Arrigo over the last 11 years," he says. "It has been a blessing to have been able to work with the likes of Andy, Margaret and John D'Arrigo, Steve de Lorimier and Jim Mannassero. I believe I have some of the best sources to learn from on a daily basis."



Matt Amaral, 35
Sales/Product Development Manager
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of California
Salinas, CA

Amaral started in the produce industry in December 1996, with Fresh Express, where he worked in the New Product Development Group and assisted in developing business plans for new product launches. In November 2008, he moved to the Raw Product Procurement Group, where he was responsible for procuring commodities, which included romaine and iceberg. In June 2000, he became part of the sales team at D'Arrigo. With a diverse customer base, ranging from retailers to foodservice distributors to club stores,

he has obtained invaluable knowledge of the inner-workings of each business segment. In 2008, he was given additional responsibilities of developing new products and creating new, efficient processes for current business.

In his new position, he has successfully launched new items, such as Colossal Romaine Hearts and Romaine Baby SweetHearts. He has also introduced RPCs to the company and successfully implemented a Plastic Pallet program, which has assisted in greening the company. On an industry level, he was part of the group that formulated and introduced the Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) Program and is currently working on the Produce Traceability Initiative. In the community, he is an assistant coach for a high school basketball team.

Amaral enjoys that every day there is something new happening in the industry. "From a sales perspective, I am always trying to tap into what my customers' need and want," he says. "Being part of the COOL Program and now the Produce Traceability Initiative, I see the industry as a whole is heading into a new frontier. Unlike anytime in the past, technology and accountability are playing a huge role everyday in our industry. I am excited about being part of a group that is working on being able to move our industry forward and assisting in helping it solidify itself as one of the safest industries in the world."

Many different people have acted as mentors to Amaral during his career. "I am a person that sets out my goals and then looks at people who were successful in obtaining similar types of goals," he says. "I look at how they managed their career paths to achieve their goals. It always amazes me how many different paths people take. In looking at their career paths, I try to pick out certain aspects that I believe will assist me in obtaining my goals. I try to take a piece from many different successful people with the hopes that I will one day be as successful as they have been within the produce industry."



Erin Hanas Archey, 28
Economic Analyst
A. Duda & Sons Inc.
Oviedo, FL

Archey is known for her ability to look at situations from various perspectives and better relate to the parties involved. In her short career, she has stepped right into leadership positions. She began leadership involvement when she was

elected to the Seminole County Farm Bureau Board of Directors and soon expanded her participation when appointed to the Young Farmer and Rancher Leadership Committee. She is involved in Florida Farm Bureau's State Advisory Committees on Labor and Trade, charged with formulating policies voted on by Florida Farm Bureau's State Board of Directors.

Archey helps coordinate Duda's governmental affairs program and takes yearly trips to visit with state and federal delegations. "It amazes me that so many of them have the wrong perception of what we do as an industry," she notes. "When you take the time to educate them on our labor practices, our environmental stewardship programs and the great lengths we go to in order to provide safe and healthy products, you empower them to make better decisions on behalf of our industry."

She was appointed in 2007 to serve on the Board of Directors for Florida's Future Farmers of America Foundation (FFA). Her participation on this Board has been a true learning experience exposing her to the challenges of the future. "The young children of our country are moving away from agriculture, particularly production agriculture," she reports. "As an organization, we have to push to keep involvement levels high and our younger generations interested."

She graduated from the United Fresh Produce Association class 13 of the 2007-2008 Produce Industry Leadership Program. Beyond these organizations, she is also involved in her local community. At her church, she

co-founded a Young Adults bible study group and in April 2009, she was elected to St. Luke's Lutheran School's School Board for a three-year term.

Her inspiration comes from the simple fact that our products feed the world. "Our products are fundamental to health and essential to survival for every person on this planet," she says. "However, with this comes enormous responsibility to create a safer and more abundant food supply. Unfortunately, our industry has to overcome the misconceptions so prevalent within the general public surrounding our labor practices, the safety of our produce and our impact on the environment. The challenge is to educate the public to overcome these misconceptions."

"Our products are fundamental to health and essential to survival for every person on this planet. However, with this comes enormous responsibility to create a safer and more abundant food supply."

— Erin Hanas Archey
A. Duda & Sons Inc.

Her passion is her family's company, A. Duda & Sons, Inc. "Over the past 80 years, the company has evolved and diversified into an organization producing a number of food and beverage products in a number of states across the country," she notes. "Ever since I was a young girl, working summers at Duda, I've had a life-long goal to help lead and grow the company for future generations. Inherent in this is a strong desire to increase awareness and perpetuate the produce industry through continued involvement in various organizations, thereby keeping agriculture alive and thriving in this country."

She names Ferdinand Duda, Sr., her grandfather, as one of her greatest influences. "Although my grandfather passed away many years before I could work alongside him, he left a lasting impression on both the company and myself," she says. "Known for his genuine kindness and enduring faith in the Lord, Ferdinand led by example and knew the importance of teamwork. He was an innovative thinker who constantly looked into the future to find new ways to improve a process and to grow the organization, yet he also enjoyed getting his hands dirty. He was as much involved at church as he was at work. Ferdinand demanded a presence when he was in the room but it was not forced; he was a natural leader."



Michael Castagnetto, 32
Director of Operations
Foodsource, a C.H. Robinson Company
Eden Prairie, MN

Castagnetto started with Foodsource in 1998 as a buyer and joined the management team in 2001, becoming the director of operations in 2003. Since 1998, the company has grown from a startup to an established industry leader with operations in organics, procurement management for both retail and food-service customers, consolidation services, grower/shipper operations and transportation services within the C.H. Robinson produce division. Castagnetto developed, opened and currently manages the Nogales division, which began in September 2005, and has grown to a \$20 million dollar

sales organization within Foodsource. He took over management of the Foodsource Texas division in the spring of 2005 and managed the growth of the division from \$30 million in sales in 2005 to approximately \$50 million in sales in 2008. He currently co-manages the foodservice division at Foodsource with Joe Merenda. The two worked hand-in-hand in establishing the foodservice division as a major aspect of the company. Since the division was opened in 2003, it has grown to sales of over \$100 million in 2008.

For the past 10 years, Castagnetto has coached high school football in Salinas, CA. He is currently the chairperson for the Madonna Del Sasso Catholic School annual fundraising event, which raised over \$25,000 this year for the school and parish. He also coaches his daughter's youth basketball team and his son's youth sports league.

He is inspired and challenged by his work at Foodsource. "We are a company that is driven by an entrepreneurial spirit, allowing each person to pursue creative ideas and business concepts," he explains. "Within this environment, we are inspired and challenged on a daily basis to continue to expand the company, while at the same time pass this spirit on to our younger employees."

His future goals within the produce industry include the continued evolution of the company's role as a vertically integrated service partner to customers, while simultaneously identifying opportunities to pursue expansion into the global economy. "The produce industry operates on a global scale, with very few companies able to provide multiple levels of support and services at each level of the vertical transaction," he says. "Working at Foodsource, and as a part of C.H. Robinson, we have the opportunity to accomplish this, and I would like to operate at the front of this project."

His primary mentor through his 11 years in the industry has been Tom Minnich. "Tom's ability and strategy of identifying current trends and not only identifying how to utilize these trends to better service our customers, but also to identify where these trends will lead, has helped me broaden my thought processes, remain open to new concepts and strategies and pursue a work ethic that continues to drive opportunities at Foodsource."



Jeff Church, 37
Sales / Partner
Church Brothers LLC
Salinas, CA

While Church has accomplished many things individually, he is most proud of what his company has accomplished as a team. He was a key member in the startup and building of Church Brothers, which in four years has grown into a company with annual sales in excess of \$160 million. As a member of the executive team, he assisted in accomplishing this through working with each division of the company.

Church notes the value of working alongside his younger brother who heads field production. "I am especially proud of the work I have done with him that has helped to keep field ops and sales on the same page."

He enjoys coming to work and not being able to predict the future. "We constantly face factors that work against us," he notes. "We constantly have to manage unpredictable factors along with our customers' expectations, which include product quality, food safety, sustainability, value, transportation and consolidation. All the while, we need to make it look easy. In my opinion, it is critical for us to become as vertically integrated as possible. The more we can do and control ourselves, the better we can service the needs of our customers. Meeting or exceeding these requirements is what inspires me every day."

Church hopes to continue his involvement in the movement that teaches youth to make more healthful food choices. Church Brothers has partnered with Disney Garden to help promote this cause. "I know when I

bring sample packages home, my girls love the Disney characters and enjoy the eating experience," he reveals. "My older brother, Tim Church MD. PHD., has also given me a unique perspective on the health of America."

His dad, Tom, and uncle, Steve Church, are his mentors in the produce industry. "They have both worked in produce all of their lives and I feel fortunate to have been able to work under them since I was 15 years old," he says. "My dad has shown me how important it is to be innovative, creative and passionate in this business. My uncle Steve, on the other hand, has shown me how important it is to understand all sectors of our business and make them work together to accomplish team goals. And more importantly, both of them have demonstrated that taking care of customers and employees and making ethical decisions is the best way to run a successful, long-term business. Other mentors that come to mind are Clem Richardson from Church Brothers, Dave Peterson from Kingston and Mark Jewell from Club Chef."



Edgar "Eddie" Condes, 38
Regional Sales Manager
Eurofresh Farms
Wilcox, AZ

Of his nearly 17 years in the produce industry, Condes has spent almost 14 of them with Eurofresh. He broke into the produce industry as QA/QC for Safeway Stores' Nogales Produce Buying office in 1993. This experience laid the foundation for his produce career.

Upon his arrival at Eurofresh in October of 1995, the company had 20 acres of glass greenhouses, sales of almost \$5 million and a customer base primarily made up of wholesale accounts. After 14 years, Eurofresh now produces fruit in 318 acres of its greenhouses, markets fruit from an additional 500 acres, has sales in the range of \$170 million and boasts a customer base comprised almost exclusively of retail supermarket chains. Condes has helped transition the customer base from wholesale to retail direct and diversify the product line, as well as integrate a category management program for some of Eurofresh's key retail customers.

He has also helped drive strong retail sales of greenhouse products via category growth/category management programs, most notably tomatoes on the vine, which are now the number one subcategory within tomatoes across the country. He is a committee member of The United Way Border Shootout golf tournament for over 10 years running, the largest single contributor to the Santa Cruz County United Way. He is also a coach with the Santa Cruz County Storm Football League, which is a chapter of the American Youth Football League.

Condes discloses the most challenging and inspiring facet of the industry is bridging the gap between supply and retail. "For so many years, there has been a disconnect between the farmers and retailers whom we rely on to deliver our goods to the consumer," he says. "Now, more than ever before, direct relationships are being forged, allowing for improved flow of information from the farm, or in my case the greenhouse to retail sector. This dialogue is crucial to the continued success of the industry for many years to come."

Condes hopes to further educate himself on the challenges that retail partners are facing and how suppliers can help improve their business. "I want to look at things like continued migration of existing relationships from a buy-sell transactional position to a much more integrated one and where we contribute to each other's organizational issues via structured category management programs," he notes. "Long term goals would then be the creation of a platform where I could further develop the category management program with accounts both nationally and internationally. The continued success of our industry is contingent on improved communication and planning between growers and retailers."

He admits his mentors in the industry are numerous, but identifies three people who have played significant roles in his development as an individual. His first mentor is his mother, Paula Condes, currently on the sales desk at Rene Produce. "She educated me on the 'ins and outs' of sales in the produce industry," he says. "At the time, she was one of the first women on the sales desk in Nogales, when the entire industry was dominated by men. My father, Edgar Condes, currently on the sales desk at The Sykes Company, played an integral role as well. He instilled in me the mentality that the things you have to work hardest for are the things that are the most worthwhile."

His third mentor is his late father-in-law, Edward "Eddie" Stoller, a man with almost 50 years experience in the industry. "During our many conversations, he educated me on the evolution of our industry dating back to hand-stacked crates on rail cars from Mexico, which helped me put so much into perspective," he says. "During his tenure as president of what is now known as the Fresh Produce Association of Americas, he spent many days on Capitol Hill testifying in front of Congress on behalf of tomato growers in Mexico. His message was always strong: integrity is everything in this business, and the friendships you forge will last a lifetime."



Kasey Cronquist, 31
Executive Director Ambassador
California Cut Flower Commission (CCFC)
Sacramento, CA

Cronquist was the first to hold the position of Executive Director/Ambassador with the reorganized CCFC. In assuming the leadership role, his primary goal was to reach out to all of the state's growers, determine industry priorities and then

develop cutting edge programs to meet industry needs. He has worked diligently to rejuvenate grower involvement through personal outreach, modern communication and effective programming. He conducted a CCFC economic study to establish and highlight the economic impact of the Cut Flower Industry in California and held the first ever annual, statewide meetings for the Cut Flower Commission, inviting all 275 growers to regional meetings to highlight what the Commission is doing for them. He established an online California Cut Flower supplier database to help growers better connect with buyers and consumers.

He led the first delegation of California cut flower growers to Colombia and recently completed the reverse trip with Colombian growers in an effort to better understand each country's strength and opportunities within the floral industry. It was also an effort to identify where California and Colombian growers can work together to improve the future of the industry and increase flower consumption. Additionally, he organized the formation of the Commission's "New Model Development Task Force Committee," which is focused strictly on improving the industry's overall transportation system by reducing rural truck traffic, reducing less-than-trailerload shipments, centralizing the industry's shipping volume, reducing the industry's overall carbon footprint and reducing cube rates out of California for flowers.

Cronquist has worked closely with the Commission's marketing and promotion committee in an effort to develop a strategic, three-year plan for communicating on behalf of the California cut flower grower while branding California as America's best source for high quality cut flowers. He serves on the board of California Grown, an integral part of the Cut Flower industry branding and leading identifier for country of origin. Recently, he was appointed to the U.S. Chamber Institute's Board of Regents, a 4-year program that helps fellow executives become certified in association management.

He is a past chair and current online chair for the Carpinteria Relay for Life, a great opportunity to raise awareness and funds for Cancer research. He currently serves as a Katherine Harvey Fellow for the Santa Barbara

Foundation, a select group of young professionals that spend almost two years working together and participating with the Santa Barbara Foundation to learn more about community needs and philanthropic giving.

He states his future goal is to get consumers asking retailers for America's freshest and highest quality cut flowers. "I want them to ask for California Grown flowers," he says. "Through a highly strategic and focused campaign, as a Commission, I want to demonstrate the physical health and environmental sustainability benefits of California Grown flowers.

Cronquist's horticultural mentors include Dan Vordale of Oceanview Flowers, headquartered in Lompoc, CA, and Chris Zanabini of the California Grain and Feed Association in Sacramento, CA. "Dan's even-handed approach and fairness-first attitude for industry business has been an inspiring voice of reason both in the Commission's boardroom and as personal counsel," he says. "Chris has been a tremendous resource for me as a newcomer to Sacramento politics, California Agriculture policy and Commission Management."



David Cruz, 35
Marketing Development Manager
California Avocado Commission (CAC)
Irvine, CA

As of this June, Cruz will celebrate 18 years working with the CAC. During this time, he has worked his way from shipping clerk into the craftsman behind the commission's merchandising programs. He is described as passionate, dedicated and enthusiastic and is quick to acknowledge the great people and teams who have worked with him to achieve the things for which he is credited.

Cruz has been instrumental in the workings of the RipeScan program, formerly known as RipeMax, which began as a CAC program, but has now transitioned to the Hass Avocado Board. He is responsible for compiling the reports and data presented to retailers and has entirely managed this program for the past five years. He was also involved in the prep work for the Avocado Display Bins program, from creation, to print, to testing, to securing a vendor and all logistics in getting them distributed to retailers across the nation who ordered them. The bins were so popular last year that CAC is printing more for this year, and he has once again been involved in the entire process.

His inspiration comes from the people he works with and the respect he has for them, especially upper-management. "I have found that working with great people and seeing their commitment to our business just solidi-

"I have found that working with great people and seeing their commitment to our business just solidifies my passion and dedication obtained throughout the years."

— David Cruz
California Avocado Commission

fies my passion and dedication obtained throughout the years," he explains. "Seeing them in action and witnessing what they have accomplished truly inspires me. The challenges have come from management, knowing what I am capable of, testing me each year with increased respon-



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sibilities and providing me with opportunities to gain experience in areas I have not dealt with before.

He notes his biggest mentor is Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for CAC, with whom he's worked with over the past 10 years. "She has been a great person and an exceptional role model," he remarks. "She has always been there for me, whether it be giving me advice on work situations to even support on personal matters — anything that would help me become better at what I do. I have developed a great relationship with her and I try to learn as much as I can from her. She has been key to my development into the person that I am today and the main reason why I love what I do."

Other mentors include the leadership throughout the years at CAC, as well as Dave Howald, and Connie Stukenberg, retail marketing directors. "With them calling on retailers and all their years of produce experience, I have always looked up to them for any insight, answers, advice or support when needed," he says.



Sarah DePeters, 29
Produce Buyer
Wegman's Food Markets Inc.
Rochester, NY

As part of the Wegman's team, DePeters' greatest priority is striving to be the best at serving the needs of her customers. Her biggest accomplishment has been working to meet that goal day in and day out. Her main priority is to keep the days

of freshness down in the warehouse and to constantly be aware of what is shipping to the stores. She recently had the opportunity to serve as a member on a store opening team. "This is a great experience because it really is an exciting event at Wegman's and allows us to shine for our customers," she explains. "You really feel a sense a pride when the store opens for the first time and you know you were a part of that."

DePeters has also had the opportunity to lead Wegman's employees on trips to visit their partners in California. Her responsibilities include training new buyers, which presents a great opportunity for her to help develop future buyers and to pass on the high standards that her department strives to meet.

She is a member of the United Way Young leaders group and volunteers as a lacrosse coach in the summer for middle school girls. In the fall, she coaches at the varsity level at an area high school.

Some of DePeters most inspirational moments have come from the opportunities that she has had to travel to visit different business partners. "Having the chance to take trips to visit our partners really gave me an appreciation of the hard work that goes into getting produce to retail," she says. "Hearing our suppliers' stories, challenges and goals strengthens our partnerships and pushes me to work harder to represent Wegman's and our partners to the best of my ability. It is truly inspirational to walk a field with growers and begin to understand on a small level the work they put into their product. It reinforces my passion to provide quality produce to our customers."

She names one of her biggest challenges as trying to never disappoint customers or produce managers with service issues. "Often during the year we may not be able to get an item, or something may come into the warehouse of questionable quality that will cause us to cross an item for a day or two," she explains. "It is hard to deny the customer and our stores that item, but we know they will be even more disappointed if they get an item of lesser quality. The challenge is communicating to our stores and customers why something is not available because of seasonality or quality."

Her future goals include pursuing a career at Wegman's as a category merchant. "My daily routine encourages me and positions me at a close working relationship with the merchant," she notes. "Having had the opportunity to shadow them during their daily routines has definitely reaf-

firmed my interest in pursuing a career as a category merchant. Working on category plans, pricing, promotions and sourcing unique products for our customers is something I am looking forward to managing on a desk of my own.

Her biggest mentor is her father, Jack DePeters, senior vice president of store operations for Wegman's. He has been with the company for over 40 years. "Although he is not directly associated with produce, I have tried to take in as much as possible from him about customer service and the retail industry in general," she says. "In our produce office, I have a unique opportunity to work with a knowledgeable cast of category merchants and I would be remiss not to mention them as they have done so much to help develop my career. All of our produce merchants have decades of service with Wegman's and have spent time in the stores, as well as other areas of the company making them great resources with extensive backgrounds in Wegman's. They work hard to develop the younger members of the department and are always passionate about their work."



Jeff Fulton, 37
Director of Commodity Sales
Dole Fresh Vegetables Inc.
Monterey, CA

Fulton has 14 years with Dole Vegetable in various roles, including sales coordinator, district sales manager, product specialist and director of sales under his belt. He is a motivational leader in the office and is responsible for maintaining

the existing customer base, as well as new customer development. He is a Dale Carnegie graduate.

Fulton has sat on the Ag Against Hunger Board of Directors for five years, and spent the past two years as first vice president.

He is challenged by the day-to-day changes in the produce market. "We're dealing with the same items every day," he says. "Yet everyday brings new challenges and change. I am inspired by the dynamics of a fast-paced sales office."

Fulton wants to continue building lasting relationships and partnerships with the buying community and to provide safe, healthy products to the consumer.

He notes his mentors are too many to list. "So many people have helped me over the years," he says. "Anyone that can handle adversity and keep their cool is worthy of respect. Honesty and integrity are the most important traits, in my opinion."



Heather Gale, 39
CanadaGAP National Program Manager
Canadian Horticultural Council
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Gale has been integral in building an On-Farm Food Safety Program (OFFS) for Canadian producers from the ground up. She works alongside members of her industry association to represent their interests to government and has

developed a program to meet their needs. She is considered a champion for her cause and tirelessly seeks government funding for a program that will help Canadian producers meet global food safety standards. When the program began, Gale was the only staff member; today, she oversees a staff of six, along with several consultants.

Over the past five years, Gale has developed the OFFS into a national standard for the safe production, storage and packing of fresh produce. Eight commodity-specific manuals have been developed based on HACCP principles. She has also led the CHC through the process of Canadian Government Technical Reviews for recognition of the OFFS program. She developed and launched a certification program to allow for users of the

OFFS standard to become third-party certified to the national standard. Since the program launch in September 2008, over 250 producers/packers have been certified. In 2009, the OFFS program was re-branded as "CanadaGAP."

Her future goal is to complete the roll-out of the CanadaGAP program over the coming years. "I remain convinced there are cost effective ways to deliver a food safety program to the industry," she says. "There are ways to take costs out of the system, in terms of harmonizing approaches, using generic HACCP models and providing ready-made manuals, training materials and record-keeping templates to streamline and facilitate documentation and audit activities. I believe strongly in the quality of the product that our industry and expert team have developed. I feel energized by the opportunity to continue raising awareness about the solutions we can offer to an industry that increasingly faces market pressure in the area of food safety."

She acknowledges there are many special individuals in the industry who have encouraged, advised and supported her. Some specific mentors include Anne Fowlie, CPMA executive vice-president; Danny Dempster, president of CPMA; Jane Proctor, CPMA vice-president, policy and issue management; and Stephen Whitney, president of Dispute Resolution Corporation. "Anne's professionalism, guidance, engagement in the issues and commitment to advancing the interests of the produce sector have encouraged and inspired me," she says. "Danny has been a key supporter of the work we have done in On-Farm Food Safety. He has fostered and nurtured a strong linkage between all levels of the produce supply chain, both in Canada and the United States. Jane has served as liaison and sounding board on many occasions; she is extremely knowledgeable about the industry. Stephen has always been there with words of encouragement, sound advice and voluminous historical background on every imaginable topic related to the fresh produce industry."



Paula Gonzalez, 30
Director of Member Relations
Produce Marketing Association
Newark, DE

Gonzalez started working six years ago for PMA as international programs specialist managing the International Trade Conference and other international programs. Now as member relations' manager, she is responsible for member recruitment and retention activities and has helped PMA's member base grow, especially in the international arena. Some of her most notable accomplishments include supporting PMA's global growth through her management of the PMA Mexico Country Council, PMA's USDA-funded programs and global representatives. Her work has helped PMA's international member base grow by 25 percent over the past two years, which has, in turn, increased PMA's overall membership.

As the manager of the Mexico Country Council, Gonzalez works with industry members to help PMA provide solutions to the needs and issues that are crucial to the Mexican produce industry, learn more about the unique needs of members in the country and to ensure products, services and events are relevant to current and potential members. In managing programs funded through USDA Emerging Markets grants, she has conducted retail training needs research, worked to provide retail produce training seminars and networking and learning opportunities through reverse trade missions to connect U.S. exporters with buyers from Mexico and Central America.

By managing and closely working with PMA's global representatives in Australia/New Zealand, Chile/Peru and Mexico, Gonzalez learns more about the markets and members' needs and works with PMA staff to develop and enhance value to grow the membership base in each market.

The passion of the individuals and companies in the produce industry

is incredibly inspirational to her. "It makes me feel more positive about what I do to know I am working for such an enthusiastic industry," she says. "It is also inspiring to me to be working for an industry that encourages healthy eating and living habits."

The biggest challenge she faces is meeting the needs of PMA's very diverse membership. "As an international and vertically-integrated trade association, it can be difficult to decide which needs to address," she explains. "This challenge has taught me how to make well-informed business decisions."

Gonzalez enjoys working at PMA and hopes to continue to do so well into the future. "As I continue to grow at PMA, my hope is to build a stronger membership base worldwide so members of the industry can work together to improve trade relations and global supply chain efficiencies," she says.

Her industry mentors are her PMA colleagues Nancy Tucker and Julie Koch. "They have given me opportunities to grow professionally, and each has such a wealth of experience from which to learn," she says. "They have encouraged me to take on new challenges and responsibilities throughout my tenure at PMA. Their support in fostering my growth is evident in the growth of the programs I have managed over the past seven years."



Froylan Gracia, 36
Counselor for Agricultural Affairs
Embassy of Mexico
Washington, DC

Gracia has brought new energy to promoting Mexican exports of fresh fruits and vegetables through facilitating trade missions, trade show participation and marketing information. He has participated in the development and implementation of the export promotion strategy for agricultural exports from Mexico to the United States, resulting in the creation of the MexBest image, the direct buying program and Mexico Calidad Suprema brand, among other initiatives. He is responsible for trade facilitation, export promotion activities for agricultural products and conducting trade missions, seminars and trade show participation in support of export promotion for Mexican food products in the United States. During his work, he has implemented 25 trade and investment missions where 34 U.S. retailers established business relations with Mexican suppliers.

Gracia has contributed in value and supply chain development programs between Mexican producers and the retail sector in the United States. He is also responsible for analyzing trade and agricultural policy in the United States in order to identify areas that impact bilateral trade. Additionally, he conducts market research and market intelligence, as well as analyzing and monitoring agricultural trade with the United States. He is responsible for the Security and Partnership for Prosperity between the United States and Mexico regarding food market integration, harmonization of regulations to trade and project for rural development.

Before being posted in Washington, D.C., he was the agricultural trade negotiator for Mexico for free trade agreements (FTAs), successfully completing FTAs with Israel, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and the European Union.

He has been involved in charity work by bringing food to needy communities in Mexico and since his appointment to the *Washington Post*, has continued his support through monetary contributions.

He is inspired and motivated by seeing how the industry contributes to economic development in Mexico and how it impacts hundreds of thousands of families in Mexico and the United States. In the future, he hopes to achieve even further understanding of the economics of agriculture and its impact on poverty alleviation. "No economic growth can be achieved if the agricultural sector is not taken into account in the macroeconomic

policies," he says.

He credits his family, who were involved in the tomato business in Mexico for 40 years, as being his primary mentors.



Carroll C. Graham, 39
Director of Retail Programs
United States Potato Board (USPB)
Denver, CO

Graham has been directing the Category Management program of the Board for the past six years. Retailers, grower/shippers and trade publications have recognized the program as being helpful and effective. Aimed at consumers, the

program has increased sales, in both dollars and pounds, within the potato category. Through the program she has trained over 50 fresh shippers and over 100 retailers from as far away as Taiwan, Malaysia, China, Singapore and Korea. Partially due to the program's success she has been promoted twice during her tenure at USPB. She has been recognized on numerous occasions by retailers and state potato organizations for her category management and training programs.

Graham actively represents the Board at numerous state potato and national meetings including PMA and United Fresh.

Graham is both inspired and challenged by working with retailers and suppliers who have been in produce longer than her eight years. "Sometimes, they find it difficult to try new ideas and it inspires me to draw on my experiences from consumer packaged goods," she notes. "It challenges me when the people I work with think these ideas only apply to consumer packaged goods and companies with large marketing budgets. We can't continue to do things the way we've always done them and expect new and different results."

In the future, Graham wants to be part of a process that shapes a commodity into something no one thought it could be. "I want to work on a concept or idea that actually speaks to today's consumers in a new way with an old, cherished product they love," she explains.

Retailers and suppliers who have been willing to step out of the box and try new ideas inspire her. "Not everything we try will always bring success," she admits. "Success is achieved by learning a new way, which includes learning what works and what doesn't work. Change is difficult for everyone involved. It takes time to learn new ways of doing business and even more time to change the mindset from 'the way we've always done it.'"



Peter Grannis, 31
Produce Sales Manager
Maines Paper & Food Service Inc.
Conklin, NY

Grannis has been involved with the produce industry almost since the day he was born as part of the family-owned, seasonal, roadside stand operated by his father, Gary. In addition to his responsibilities at Maines, Grannis still works

at the stand during the summer and is part owner.

He manages all of the produce sales for Maines Paper & Food Service, the fifth largest foodservice distributor in the United States with sales in excess of \$2.6 billion in 2008. The company's produce portfolio includes QSRs (Quick Service Restaurants), such as Burger King and Wendy's, national chains such as Applebee's, Chili's and Olive Garden, program accounts (colleges, universities, hospitals, and regional chains), such as Cornell University and Roy Rogers, and street business of independently owned restaurants and resorts. In 2003, he and others created Maines Produce Express as a stand-alone produce company, which he now oversees. In just a few years, it has grown into a premier produce company in

upstate New York with expected sales of over \$40 million in 2009.

He sits on the Cornell University Local Foods Advisory Board to help find ways to increase the level of quality and safety of small, local farms and promote pride in support of local farmers. He is also responsible for training the company's sales department to enable them to add value to customers with their education and knowledge of the produce arena. This includes seminars on food safety, value-added products, quality assurance and the newest trends. He has been nominated for the Chairman's Exemplar Award at Maines for outstanding work performance.

One of his objectives is to use Maines' membership in the Markon Cooperative, a leader in the safety and sustainability industry, to bring to the company's 80-plus salespeople and thousands of customers information regarding the best practices in the industry to increase awareness of food safety in the produce industry. He is on committees for both the purchasing side of Markon, as well as the sales/marketing arm, which meet twice a year to share best practices and guide Markon's evolution as the premium brand in produce.

Grannis' passion and inspiration in the produce industry comes mostly from his upbringing. He is a fourth generation produce man, with his great-grandfather having emigrated from Italy in the early 1900's as a fruit peddler. "My father has been in the produce industry for most of his life and is as passionate about it as anybody I've ever met," he states. "Most of my uncles are involved in the industry as well, and my Mother grew up on a farm in North Dakota."

He would like to be considered a contributor to the overall success of the produce industry and an agent of change as some serious obstacles in the industry are faced in the future. "The ultimate goal of our team at Maines is to continue to grow our company into the premier produce distributor in the Northeast," he says. "I hope to someday be considered a contributor to the overall growth of the produce industry, specifically as it faces some great obstacles in the arena of food safety and traceability."

His greatest joy in the produce business is being able to work side-by-side with his father, Gary, his greatest influence in the produce industry at his family business Grannis Produce & Garden Center in his spare time. Influences such as Mike Schiano, Steve Hitchings and James Losier, as well as his father, keep him focused on never letting his passion for the industry wane, even on difficult days. "Every day, I get to learn from Jim Losier, our primary buyer of potatoes, onions, tomatoes and processed produce," he says. "Our senior buyer, Mike Schiano, is known throughout the northeast as the Godfather of Produce for his 45-plus years in the industry. Our director of produce, Steve Hitchings, has put the whole team together and grew up on a banana truck in England."



Kevin Hannigan, 39
Vice President
J & J Distributing Co.
Saint Paul, MN

Known for his passion and forward thinking, Hannigan has paved the way for organic marketing. He was the first in his marketplace to import from Holland and has been instrumental in establishing organic certification as a benchmark.

Under his motivation, J & J has led the way for years as the population of organics exploded. One of his greatest accomplishments has been the dramatic improvement in vendor-managed supply chain services. It is believed the company's vendor-managed service was the engine that pushed it to win Cub Foods prestigious Vendor of the Year award in 2005.

Hannigan gets fired up about produce of all kinds, but is particularly motivated by organic food, smart produce people, quality, flavor and product selection. "Being the very best at what we do for our customers is very important to me," he says.

In the future, Hannigan wants to assist in producing ongoing sustain-

able profits through quality supply chain management for his company, co-workers, clients and vendors. "That is what consumers deserve and it is our job," he says.

He credits everyone in the industry as being a mentor. "There is something new to learn every day," he says. "If you can listen, pick up and run with unique experiences, you will go a long way in produce — you just have to work your butt off."



Shawn Hartley, 34
Vice President/Owner
Utah Onions Inc.
Syracuse, UT

Hartley has demonstrated enormous ability in leading the dry onion industry. He, along with his two partners, Trent Hartley and Brad Dahl, purchased Utah Onions in 2005. At the age of 31, he took over development of new accounts in retail and wholesale, along with maintaining current

accounts, and has been responsible for developing their Sweet Onion program out of Prosser, WA. Since joining Utah Onions, Hartley has been on the leading edge of sales, production and distribution. His ability to lead in food safety, onion variety demands from retailers and quality assurance has set him apart in the industry. The company currently ships over 5,000 loads of all varieties of onions between August and April.

Growing up on his father's farm in Proser, WA, Hartley has continued the family's commitment to honesty, integrity and industry leadership. He is an active member of the National Onion Association (NOA) and is on the national promotional committee, along with being a board member of the Utah Onion Association (UOA). He also is an active member and leader in his faith.

He notes having faced the challenge of bridging the gap between the

"I am consistently challenged to uphold the expectations that are inherent in this business: to provide quality produce and continue feeding the world."

— Casey Kio
Seald-Sweet International

older generations of produce with the younger generation. "I have tried to find the delicate balance of taking the wisdom and tried-and-true practices of the older generation and combining it with the new, inventive, computerized and faster pace of today's society," he explains.

He mentions his cousin, Jerry Hartley, and his father, Brent Harley, as having been tremendous examples. "Jerry has taught me to make sure every customer feels like they are the most important," he says. "He has always tried to make the customer feel as if they were a part of his family and have a personal relationship with them, as well as a professional, working camaraderie. My father has taught me the importance of being honest, hard working and handling personal and business dealings with the highest integrity. His honest business and personal ethics have made him a respectable man you can trust. My ultimate goal in the produce

business would be to parallel the integrity and honesty of my father."



Shaleen Heffernan, 39
National Account Manager
Agrexco (USA) Ltd.
Jamaica, NY

Working with Agrexco (USA) Ltd. for almost three years, Heffernan joined the team specifically to sell dates across North America. At the time, she didn't know much about dates, but she knew how to sell and how to speak Arabic.

She dedicated herself to learn as much about dates from Israel, as well as the competition from California, Arizona and Mexico. By applying the differences and advantages she learned with her marketing and language capabilities, she sold \$1.14 million worth of dates in six months.

Heffernan has also helped educate her customer wholesalers and distributors on the origins, promotional opportunities and even recipes of dates, earning the nickname "Date girl." She has compiled 101 classes on various commodities for her buyers to help them better understand the key elements for maintaining and building sales and returning high profits.

She has been inspired by her customers and in learning how she can best serve them in this economic troublesome time, "even if that means creating my own economic stimulus package by putting my commodities on special. The commodities I currently handle offer nutritious, economic alternatives to my clients' customers. I've had to overcome the challenge of staying focused on the products I sell and learning how to best communicate their specific advantages to my customers."

Her future goals involve being able to successfully market and sell the five different commodities for which she's currently responsible. "I have started my own 'Lil Biblical Fruits program, which focuses on dates, pomegranate seeds, figs, apricots and olive oil," she says. "The dates will always be my first love, but I am learning more and more about the other commodities as well. I also have been learning a great deal about logistics. The more I learn, the easier it is for me to get my customers what they are looking for. It makes us all happy in the long run."

She names her colleague Robin Sporn and Ofri Dimentman, one of her bosses in Israel, as mentors. "Robin has been in this industry quite awhile, and as a woman, I truly respect and admire her ability to forge strong relationships in the industry, as well as having the gumption to just go out there and sell and be successful at it," she says. "I admire Ofri for his tenacity and his commitment to our growers, as well as each of us selling in the branches. He listens to each of our concerns and carefully communicates that to the growers and the packing houses to fulfill our supply-chain needs. He is a great boss and he has taught me much about this industry from a global perspective."



Casey Kio, 28
Wal-Mart Account Executive
Seald-Sweet International
Vero Beach, FL

Kio, a Penn State graduate with a degree in Business Logistics, originally filled the position of marketing analyst at Seald-Sweet in March 2006. She came to work with determination and desire to learn the produce business so she

could contribute to the success of the company. She has not only surpassed this goal, but has become an integral part of Seald-Sweet's culture, emerging as an excellent account executive as it relates to their large customers, such as Wal-Mart.

In August 2007, Kio was promoted to Wal-Mart Account Executive — a rare position for someone as young. In Seald-Sweet's 100 years of business,

there has never been an employee younger than 30 years old to hold such a title and position with its demanding responsibilities.

In 2007, the company opened offices in Swedesboro, NJ, and began a new venture for imported produce to be repacked and transported to its large retail customer base, allowing Seald-Sweet customers to have fresh produce year-round. Kio was instrumental in assisting in the setup of this new venture, given her education in the logistics arena. She showcased her leadership skills and applied logic regarding the processes and procedures for the new venture. To this day, she continues to monitor and assist when needed in the logistic aspect of the company.

Kio is involved with Seald-Sweet in the Fisher House campaign that supports wounded and fallen veterans, is a Big Sister under the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America and has been involved with a number of other charity events. Additionally, she attended the PMA Leadership Symposium this past January.

She is inspired and often amazed at the close-knit relationships that are fostered in the produce industry. "Through my experiences at the PMA Women's Leadership Seminar and Leadership Symposium, I have met amazing pillars of this great industry," she states. "I am consistently challenged to uphold the expectations that are inherent in this business: to provide quality produce and continue feeding the world. I am privileged to be a part of such a meaningful and important industry."

In the future, Kio would like to be more involved in the PMA Foundation for Industry Talent. "As a member of the younger generation in the produce business, I find it imperative to develop the leaders of the future," she adds. "Employee retention and increased education are necessary to promote the future of this industry. I would also like to attend the United Leadership Program to continue building my industry knowledge and development of business relationships and friendships."

Mayda Sotomayor-Kirk, CEO of Seald Sweet, is her most inspiring mentor in the produce industry. "Throughout her career, she has always been willing to take a risk and drive key business disciplines," she says. "Her knowledge and passion for the industry are enlightening. I have watched Mayda build relationships and garner rapport with customers and growers alike, never treating one with more priority than the other. She is both approachable and poised in her confidence."



Bob Kirch, 36
Executive Vice President
and Chief Operating Officer
Caito Foods Service Inc.
Indianapolis, IN

Kirch has stepped into a senior leadership role at Caito Foods driving the sales and procurement functions. He is highly respected by his customers and suppliers. Over the past 14 years he has worked in many aspects of the business including merchandising, procurement, marketing and business development. His perspective and passion for the business underscores his dedication to strengthening the partnerships Caito Foods has with its associates, customers and suppliers.

Incredibly involved in the community, Kirch is a football and baseball coach for the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO). He is a member of the United Leadership class 14, and is part of the Produce Marketing Association's IT council board. He also serves on the Produce Solution Conference task force.

Kirch is inspired by the entrepreneurial nature of Caito's customer base. "Their love for the business keeps me challenged and energized to provide value every day," he says.

In the future, Kirch wants to continue to find different platforms and channels for growth. "We have a unique culture with outstanding talent, being able to leverage our energy and talents will be priority number one,"

he says.

While many people in the industry have influenced him, he credits its four individuals who have shaped his career. He notes the unparalleled

"It is a business largely built on trust and integrity, where most transactions are often still done 'with a handshake.'"

— *Jerry Kraft*
Grant J. Hunt Co.

passion and love for the customer and his colleagues of Joe Himmelheber, Caito Foods director of merchandising. He has also gained insight and knowledge of the industry from Fred Caito, Caito Foods' president & CEO. Dan Braun, director of produce of Lofino Food Group in Dayton, OH, has affected Kirch with his knowledge of retailing and Ed Osowski, director of produce for Martin's Supermarkets in South Bend, IN, has helped with his innovative and electric go-to market strategies.



Jerry Kraft, Jr., 38
Director of Global Procurement
Grant J. Hunt Co.
Oakland, CA

Kraft started his career in the produce industry as a summer intern with Oppenheimer in 1991. In September 2008, he took a position with Grant J. Hunt Co. to open a branch office in Seattle, WA, and expand its

import business. He developed the company's winter cherry program and doubled its import apple program.

One of his most accomplished activities is the integral role he had in the marketing of new club apple varieties. A fairly new concept at the time, he was challenged with getting dozens of independent growers and packers, as well as the sales desk — all with different allegiances and levels of investment — to work as one to establish a brand. The success of the program enabled them to show the market that consumers consider value, or eating experience, more than price. He is a member of the Pacific Northwest Produce Association (PCPS) and a member of their Golf Committee Member, which benefits the Northwest Harvest food drive.

He is greatly inspired by the people-aspect of the produce business. "It is a business largely built on trust and integrity, where most transactions are often still done with a handshake," he says.

His ultimate challenge comes from the responsibility of knowing that growers have banked their crop and livelihood in his hands and abilities. "The result is the challenge to find a fair balance in the market so everyone can prosper," he says. "Retailers need product to sell and growers need places to sell their product."

In the future, he plans to continue expanding the company's grower base. He notes there are many people throughout his career who have been tutors, but names four he constantly goes to for advice: Wally Sinner of Legacy Farms, Los Angeles, CA; James Milne and Steve Woodyear-Smith of Oppenheimer, and Grant Hunt of Grant J. Hunt Company. "Wally has truly been my Produce 101 professor over the years and taught me the rules of produce as well as how to spot the opportunities," he explains. "James ignited my passion for the business. Steve showed me how to combine opportunities and passion to form a plan. Grant gave me the opportunity

to use all of my skills. Over the years, I've always admired how his company could accomplish so much, yet remain the small, family-based office it is. Grant has shown me that with integrity and passion anything is possible."



Jesus (Chuy) Loza, 39
Managing Partner
Freska Produce International LLC
Oxnard, CA

Loza started Freska Produce in 2003. Since then, the company has grown to sales of around \$55 million, distributing mangos from South America and Mexico in the United States. Freska has become one of the

largest American importers and distributors of mangos. Loza's parents worked for Limoneira Company, headquartered in Santa Paula, CA. He grew up on the citrus ranch and worked for the company during his adolescence.

Upon graduating from Cal Lutheran University in 1990, the executive vice president of Limoneira, Alfonso Guilan, recommended him to Mission Produce. Based on his experience at Mission Produce, Loza worked with several partners to start El Tropico, with a focus on mangos and other related products. Although the venture was not successful, he credits it with significantly adding to his knowledge of the industry. During the next five years, he worked for Fresh Directions International, developing its mango business, which was struggling at the time. Within five years, the company's mango product line grew from \$3 million to \$26 million.

In the future, he hopes to take advantage of other business opportunities while continuing to focus on mangos. "Our recently acquired storage processing plant in Oxnard has been a key acquisition and will complement our distribution points in Arizona, New Jersey and Texas," he says. "We are developing a significant presence in Asia, including Australia and New Zealand."

Loza contributes to local schools and churches as well as Little League baseball, the Police Activities League and various other non-profit functions locally.

He notes the privilege of having had the great opportunity to work alongside people like Steve Barnard of Mission Produce, as well as Kent Pidduck of Cal Pine Distributors, now deceased, both of whom were willing to provide counsel and encouragement.

He continues his relationship with Alfonso Guilan, now retired from Limoniera, but operates AG Consultants. "From him, I have learned operating a company based on sound business practices combined with treating growers, customers and employees with fairness and dignity is a formidable combination," he says. "Alfonso also encourages us to be active in our community by supporting youth clubs, food banks and similar non-profit groups."



Cristie Mather, 36
Communications Manager
Pear Bureau Northwest (PBN)
Milwaukie, OR

Mather has made an immediate impact in the industry, adding excitement to the programs for which she is responsible. Her innovative and novel contributions have made significant contributions,

including the management of the USA Pear brand, her creative foodservice program, Pear Panache, and the dramatic re-design and launch of the USA Pear Web site. In her first two years at PBN, she has successfully



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developed and implemented ongoing communications and PR initiatives targeted to consumers and trade, including retail and food-service.

She accomplished breaking out a menu category for fresh pear cocktails, forming partnerships with experts at Absolut and *Imbibe* magazine. With their support, she developed a complement of resources, including a print guide and online microsite, recipes and handling tips tailored to the needs of bartenders and beverage developers, ensuring a place for fresh pears in every part of a foodservice operation. Her innovative programs have been recognized with awards from PRODUCE BUSINESS (Marketing Excellence Award), the Public Relations Society of America (Spotlight Award for Ongoing Media Campaign, Merit Awards for Web site and Consumer Marketing) and regional and national awards from the National Agri Marketing Association.

Mather is involved with Oregon's Keeping Agriculture Viable Campaign, and in 2007 and 2008, she served as chairman of the volunteer committee that plans and produces the annual fundraising event that is the Campaign's main revenue source, a dinner and auction called Denim and Diamonds. She began serving a two-year term on the Agri-Business Council of Oregon's Board of Directors in 2008, and helped to establish the Board's fundraising committee in 2009. In 2007, she was honored with the Agri-Business Council's "President's Award" for her ongoing service on the Denim and Diamonds committee.

Her main source of inspiration is the hardworking pear growers of Oregon and Washington. "They work tirelessly year-round to provide the world with a safe, healthy and delicious fruit, and they are also instrumental to the success of our region's economy," she asserts. "The passion and commitment of this industry as a whole is remarkably inspiring. It is an honor to be a part of this important movement to make a difference in the health and wellness of communities across the globe, while ensuring the economic viability of farms of all types and sizes."

In the near future, Mather hopes to build PBN's Web 2.0 marketing plans by analyzing trends and technologies to develop a unique set of industry best practices for utilizing social media. "Thanks to the produce industry's efforts, as well as the recent work of influential foodie writers, filmmakers and activists, we have reached a 'tipping point' in awareness of the importance of agriculture and healthy eating," she says. "My goal is to do my part to help positively channel that momentum until it converts from a movement to a way of life."

Pear Bureau president, Kevin Moffitt, and Susan Renke Boyer at Food Marketing Resources have served as Mather's mentors. "Kevin leads by example, and I am fortunate to have him as a mentor," she remarks. "He is completely dedicated to the Pear Bureau's mission, and is a passionate

advocate for the produce industry. He is an outside-the-box thinker, and consistently challenges me to go above and beyond in the work that I do. Susan unselfishly took me under her wing and helped me understand the ins and outs of foodservice PR. She is incredibly talented, dedicated, generous and kind."



Drew McDonald, 38
Vice President National Quality Systems
Taylor Farms California Inc.
Salinas, CA

McDonald worked his way up from plant quality operations to overseeing Taylor's national program. He is the key technical contact with all of the company's customers and serves on a number of technical councils for various customers that represent some of the

most recognized and major brands around. He also sits on a number of industry and regulatory advisory boards, such as the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement technical board, the Center for Produce Safety research committee, the Association of Food and Drug Officials Model Code advisory group, the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) and the United Fresh technical council.

In 2007, he was awarded the McDonald's Benchmark Award for individual excellence, as well as the 2007 United Fresh Technical Award during the Global FreshTech Conference in Palm Springs, which honors an individual who has made significant technical contributions to the overall fresh produce industry in the areas of food safety, food quality, innovative technologies and overall industry image.

Developing programs to enhance and ensure the quality and food safety of such an important part of the human diet inspires McDonald. "The challenges of weather, fragile quality, ready-to-eat with no kill step, consumer expectation and extremely short shelf-life make for a very exciting day. One of the most rewarding parts of my experience has been working with the many growers and farmers all over the world," he remarks. "For our American farmers, as well as farmers worldwide, it is truly a vocation, and they are some of the most responsible, entrepreneurial and passionate people in the world. Produce has taken me around the world and I would not trade my experiences for anything else."

In the future, he plans on continuing to help develop meaningful produce food safety and quality programs. "I would like to increase my involvement in those activities. I tend to have a very practical, rational approach and I would like to keep the discussion as rational as possible."

He mentions Bruce Taylor as an inspiring leader and caring individual. "He has created a wonderful company and fantastic working environment that has allowed me to grow tremendously," he explains. "Other mentors would include Jim Brennan, who is a colleague and friend I have known for years, and Dr. Seth Goldsmith and Ron Midyett, who provided early influence and showed me how to solve issues — small and large. I would also have to include Sheila Lee of Dole who showed me the value of impeccable organization and follow-through."



Allison Harriet Moore, 33
Communications Director
Fresh Produce Association
of the Americas (FPAA)
Nogales, AZ

In her seven years with the FPAA, Moore has helped bring several important projects to fruition. When Moore first started, one of the FPAA's ongoing main objectives was to expand and improve the Mariposa Commercial Port of Entry in Nogales, AZ, which processes over 1,500 trucks a day in a facility

"It is an honor to be a part of this important movement to make a difference in the health and wellness of communities across the globe, while ensuring the economic viability of farms of all types and sizes."

— *Cristie Mather*
Pear Bureau Northwest

designed for 400. Joining with others to form the Greater Nogales and Santa Cruz County Port Authority, FPAA has now witnessed the Mariposa Port evolving from a pipedream to being called a "top priority" by the Department of Homeland Security. The group is hopeful that approximately \$200 million in funding for a complete renovation of the port will be specified in President Obama's Stimulus Package funding.

For many years, Moore has been responsible for taking writers, editors, and chefs on tours of farms in Mexico. "It is very rewarding when a food writer from *Southern Living*, *Better Homes and Gardens* or the American Dietetic Association or some other food/lifestyle organization or magazine comments on the sophistication level of the Mexican growers," she states.

She serves as part of the United Fresh Produce Association's (UFPA) Government Relations Council.

Moore is inspired by the fact that growers in Mexico go to great lengths to grow quality, wholesome fruits and vegetables. "They were innovative before innovative was cool," she says. "Seeing the level of commitment on so many farms to improve the lives of workers and their families is also pretty incredible. Where else in the world would you find such a concentration of schools, medical facilities, family housing, day care, adult education resources and other organizations designed to train, improve and educate those populations that have traditionally lived in the margins of society? The growers and distributors' dedication and innovation in the produce industry are truly what keeps me going to work every day."

Her future goals in the industry are to help steer people through all of the legislative changes to come in the next few years. "As we learned in the early stages of the development of regulations for the Bioterrorism Act of 2002, often regulators need a lot of help understanding our industry so they don't write regulations that have the opposite effect of what they are trying to achieve," Moore explains. "Making sure we end up with the most effective legislation, whether it's food safety legislation or something else,

is going to be a cooperative effort across the entire industry, requiring people to stop thinking of producers as American, Canadian, Mexican, etc... but to continue thinking of this industry as intricately linked, no matter what country or commodity group you are part of. If the boat sinks, we're all getting wet!"

Moore credits Lee Frankel with bringing her into the industry and adds Chris Ciruli and John Pandol as mentors. "Lee took a chance on a lowly grad student finishing a Masters in English/Creative Writing," she describes. "Lee thinks about three steps ahead of most other people and understands the motivations, fears and ideas that drive people to act the way they do. Chris was one of the first people to welcome me to the industry. He has taught me so many things about how to make decisions, how to be a superb host and how to be gracious, all important things for work and life. John has the right attitude. His boundless sense of adventure and curiosity are infectious. If you need to look at something in a new way, talk to John."



Brennon Neff, 37
National Sales Manager,
Diversified Products
Dole Fresh Fruit Co.
Westlake Village, CA

Neff helped bring Dole Tropical Gold Pineapple to market in the Western United States by developing key retail, foodservice, processing and wholesale accounts. Over the years, he has hired and trained several account managers to promote and sell Dole items including apples, avocados, cranberries, melons, mangos, papaya, Goji berries and rambutans. He has helped develop marketing programs focusing on the nutritional value of fresh produce items, as well as developing several customer-specific



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items and is helping transition Dole from a produce company to a wellness/nutrition company.

Neff has partnered with Dole customers and contributed to local events for The National Kidney Foundation, The Children's Hospital, The Children's Hunger Fund and Catholic Charities. He is a member of the Fresh Produce and Floral Council of Southern California.

Neff wants to remain with Dole and help lead the charge in increasing the nation's fresh produce consumption by educating consumers on the multiple health advantages related to eating a diet rich in fresh produce.

His mentors in the produce industry include Dole's vice president of tropical sales, Todd Camel, and Dole Fresh Fruit's North American president, Mike Cavallero. "They have both taught me the value of keeping things simple and developing strong industry relationships based on honesty and integrity," he says.



Justin Parnagian, 37
Sales Manager
Fowler Packing Co. Inc.
Fresno, CA

Growing up in the produce industry, Parnagian has had an opportunity to work in many different areas of the business. Beginning with his teenage years working in a fruit packing plant, he moved on to field operations following his graduation from college. Currently, he has been working in a sales capacity for a little over 10 years. Along with an experienced sales staff, he has been able to help grow annual sales at a rate of about 8 to 10 percent a year over the past eight years. This has occurred by adding additional growers to the supply base, as well as introducing new commodities to the product line, such as cherries and blueberries. He has also focused much of the company's efforts in developing season-long programs, which helps provide dependable sales volumes, as well as pricing resulting in consistent returns back to the grower. Additionally, his duties include overseeing a staff of 10 in the daily operations of account management on a national and international level, as well as co-coordinating all field and plant operations with the sales department.

Parnagian currently serves on the Executive Committee for the California Tree Fruit Agreement, as well as serving as chairman of its domestic marketing subcommittee. He also serves on the board of directors for the California Grape and Tree Fruit League and is a graduate of the United Fresh Leadership Program class 14.

As a third generation member in a family business, he is inspired by the opportunity to work with his family. "It has been said that a family business can be the best thing in the world or the worst thing in the world," he explains. "Luckily, I have a family that understands this philosophy and constantly works to address the issues that plague many family-owned and operated businesses. This is accomplished through communication and a lot of understanding."

Based on his firm understanding of the produce industry and its effect on the environment, his primary goal is to educate and practice cutting-edge sustainable farming practices. "This is no easy feat," he says. "With modified farming practices come an increased difficulty to supply consistent, flavorful produce. I would like to lead Fowler Packing, as well as the industry as a whole to new standards, while continuing to protect our valuable environment."

Parnagian credits much of who he is today to the growing up under his father and uncles. "I admire how they have grown the business without compromising who they are or what they believe in," he says. "They have always operated under the premise that reputations take a lifetime to build, but can be tarnished in a minute. This is especially true in the produce industry, where we are a relatively close-knit group, and name recognition can make or break a company. As a result, many of their business

decisions had less to do with the bottom line, and more about what is morally right. This is evident in the longevity of Fowler Packing Co. which was started by my grandfather 58 years ago, and hopefully, will continue to grow over the next 158 years!"



Kevin Partida, 38
Regional Sales Manager
Eurofresh Farms
Wilcox, AZ

Currently in the middle of his fourth year with Eurofresh Farms, Partida was promoted to regional sales manager last year. With his promotion, he was given the opportunity to manage an annual sales budget of more than \$20 million and oversee the company's West Coast sales from its Los Angeles office. During his previous employment with Dole, he was foodservice manager of the central division, where he managed programs and developed and maintained key accounts to increase banana volumes into the Central U.S. As district sales manager of tropical fruit (pineapples) for the Northwest, he managed close to \$4 million in annual sales in pineapple programs for major retailers, foodservice and wholesalers in the Northwest.

At Apio/Landec, Partida worked on modified atmosphere packaging (MAP) for bananas. For three years, he assisted in the development, testing and execution of the MAP technology that is now used nationwide by Chiquita. He traveled extensively to exotic places such as China, Colombia, Costa Rica and Ecuador to work first hand with operations, research and development teams.

His personal time is highly valued, as he notes he enjoys spending time with his family and what he considers his "biggest accomplishments" — his two boys.

In the near future, he hopes to attain the position of director of sales and marketing at Eurofresh. He would also like to participate in an industry leadership program, as well as continuing to mentor others. "Over the years, I have been able to hire or create internships to give college students exposure to produce," he says. "Some have materialized into full-time positions. I would like to continue this in the future because it is important for college students to be exposed to the industry and get an idea of what they may or may not like."

He names as mentors Mike Casazza, executive vice president of sales and marketing at Apio Inc., Ed Wagoner, director of corporate quality control at Safeway, and his father, Dr. Greg Partida, professor and avocado/citrus consultant from Cal Poly. "Mike invested a great deal of time in me," he says. "He really took me under his wing, guided me and helped me gain an understanding of how to read market conditions. Ed helped reinforce my values. As a sales person now, my word and integrity are the most important thing that I have to offer customers. Thanks to my father's character and strong work ethic, these values were instilled in me at an early age. This allows me to give 110 percent in all that I do and to always be proud of it."



Todd Penza, 28
Salesman
Pinto Bros. Inc.
Philadelphia, PA

Third generation produce man, Penza has helped bring his family's company into the technological age. He created and manages its Web site, has helped implement email and has better organized the daily printouts of products and prices. He also manages a new product line of specialty eggplants. He is involved in the committee for marketing the Philadelphia

Regional Produce Market where he is helping develop a new logo and distribute a marketing survey to customers. He has coached high school lacrosse for the past eight years, and is active in donating fruit and vegetables to organizations in the city year after year. He recently completed The United Fresh Produce Industry Leadership Program.

Trying to meet each of his customers' needs everyday is what makes him want to come to work. "We sell corner stores to chain stores and chefs to national foodservice companies," he reports. "The every day, new challenge of selling in an open market is what makes my job so much fun. I think in our current economic situation new customers are coming to the market and finding great value and service with us. When the Philly market moves to our new facility we'll be in an even better position to compete in the industry. We plan on changing how we run our daily operations and I plan on developing those changes."

In the future, he hopes to not only work with more customers, but also more shippers. "I want to develop a more complete product line by adding new commodities and varieties that make us unique among the other merchants in the Philly market," he says. "I think sustainable farming is the next big buzz word in the industry and I want to explore and promote those aspects of local farming to our customers, while growing my business around those values."

His mentors in the business are his father and his great uncle Pete. "My father is teaching me how to run a business and lead a company," he says. "My uncle Pete is teaching me the finer points of how to sell produce, along with all the old-school produce tricks that make you successful in the terminal market. Chris and Chuck Ciruli of Ciruli Bros. have also helped me learn and understand the business better by getting me involved in United Fresh and other trade organizations. They have helped me think about the produce industry in larger terms than just the Philly market."



Brian Rayfield, 40
VP Sales and
Marketing
J & J Produce Inc.
Loxahatchee, FL

When Rayfield joined J & J in 1993, the company's volume was close to

300,000 packages per year, of which 5 percent were sold out of state. Today — 16 years later — the company is a leading shipper on the East Coast, distributing vegetables daily to retail and foodservice accounts east of I-55 and beyond. Under Rayfield's direction, this year J & J will handle over 6 million packages, of which 50 percent will be grown on the company's farms or ones it exclusively represents. Rayfield has supervised and coordinated the efforts that have led to J & J importing products from five Central American countries and having year-round packing and distribution facilities in Florida, Georgia and Tennessee, with seasonal facilities in North Carolina and Michigan.

Rayfield has also personally been involved in organizing committees for the Southeast Produce Council and in filming two educational videos sponsored by the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP — a federally-funded program to fight obesity in children) in conjunction with Clemson University. These videos, called Lucy's Tasty Treasures, are currently viewed by thousands of elementary school children throughout the country educating them on where produce is grown, how to prepare it and why it is good for them.

His challenge and drive comes from the satisfaction he sees in creating positive results and actually making a difference in the lives of his employees and trading partners. "While many companies measure results by gross sales, margin or the bottom-line — all of which are important — I have achieved those numbers through developing relationships," Rayfield says.

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"Through training, education and encouragement, I have developed several of my sales staff into expert account managers. Through the same philosophy, I have taken discouraged growers and have showed them a path toward success, by proving the benefits of a quality pack, food safety compliance in the field and that all customers are not out to steal from a grower. Our customer relationships are built on the foundation of service, always keeping their best interest in mind and knowing we can earn more profit over the long run through customer satisfaction than through trying to make an extra buck today."

Rayfield hopes to create a seamless, 12-month-per-year supply chain of high quality vegetables that can be delivered on time, every day. "My goal is to replicate a West Coast style business model that makes our produce items available 12 months out of the year, with consistent quality, consistent pricing and daily availability at many regional East Coast distribution centers," he explains. "I want to leave a lasting legacy that J & J Produce made a difference in providing the highest quality, safest produce at a price that our customers, and ultimately the consumer, could afford."

He names Jim Erneston, owner of J & J Produce, and Keith Horder, a visionary industry consultant, as mentors. "Jimmy is a great Christian business man who has acted like a second father to me and gave me the opportunity to prove myself," he says. "Keith has opened my eyes on how to apply many of my great ideas, and turn them into action plans. He has been instrumental in helping our company transition from a small, family business to an organization that can compete at the national level."



George Rossi, 32
Director of Sales And
New Business Development
Farmington Fresh Sales LLC
Stockton, CA

Rossi is a prime example of a young entrepreneur using innovative marketing approaches and business prowess to create profit and growth within the produce industry. A graduate of Cal Polytechnic State University, Rossi

founded GeoFresh Marketing, a Lodi, CA-based marketing company that specializes in selling cherries, apples and a variety of other fresh fruit in 2001. He began working for Farmington Fresh through GeoFresh on a contract-selling basis, driving sales and building its customer base. In 2006, Rossi's success with Farmington led him to a full-time position as director of sales and new business development. In his first two years, Rossi more than tripled sales and introduced new commodities into Farmington's marketing mix.

His past experience includes stints working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a produce inspector, as well as in sales and logistics for C.H. Robinson Worldwide Inc. His passion for agriculture began at age 12 while pulling weeds in the vineyards outside of Lodi, CA. He continued to work in the vineyards throughout high school, which later helped fund his schooling at Cal Poly, where he was a member of Alpha Gamma Rho, a professional fraternity geared toward students pursuing careers in the agriculture industry.

He is most driven by the families that depend on his business for their livelihood. "Building customer relationships based on loyalty and trust is one of the first things that attracted me to this industry," he says. "This business is built on entrepreneurial spirit and I think that's something that has both driven and inspired me to push forward and be persistent, regardless of how many times I'm told no."

His future goals include continuing to expand Farmington's list of core commodities through new ideas, concepts and marketing techniques, as well as building Farmington's list of clientele through innovative business practices currently in development. "As a young entrepreneur, I consistently aim to produce innovative marketing approaches and channel my busi-

ness prowess to create profit, promise and growth within the produce industry," he remarks. "I hope to continue to pave the way for like-minded young professionals in the industry looking to go against the grain and develop a business strategy that's not only unique, but also very lucrative."

As an active member in the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) and the California Certified Organic Foundation (CCOF), he has learned the importance of networking, determination and persistence. "I try to look at successful people and companies, pinpoint the various steps they've taken to get where they are and then do my best to emulate them," he explains. "By taking a proactive approach and learning from those around me, I've met a variety of people who have served as mentors for me in many different ways."

"Produce is just a unique animal in and of itself. It is so real-time and dynamic that my team and I are constantly challenged to think and act on our feet to deliver superior performance."

— *Brian Schwartz*
Safeway Inc.



Brian Schwartz, 34
Director, Corporate Transportation
Safeway Inc.
Pleasanton, CA

Working from Phoenix, AZ, Schwartz supports the shipment and delivery of more than 70,000 produce shipments annually to Safeway divisions, which represents about \$1.5 billion in Safeway inventory and \$100 million in freight. He has participated in a collaborative

effort with the company's Corporate Produce Organization to develop and communicate a shared set of standardized loading and quality standards for product suppliers and freight vendors as part of its "Best In Class" quality initiative. He has also partnered with the Corporate Produce Organization on a "Best In Class" strawberry initiative for the Chicago market, where the group eliminated 24 hours of transit time combined with fresh-from-the-field loading in California to deliver world class freshness and quality to that market.

With the endorsement of the senior vice president of produce, Schwartz and his team have embarked on an effort to leverage freight to drive down the cost of goods in produce and invest those dollars back into pricing at the shelf for their customers. This effort began in December, 2008, and to date, the company is on pace to deliver over \$2 million in cost savings for the organization that will be invested back in better pricing for customers.

A transportation professional by trade, Schwartz and his team provide logistics support for all commodities and business units across the Safeway enterprise. However, the nature of the produce industry provides distinct

motivation and challenges. "Produce is just a unique animal in and of itself," he says. "It is so real-time and dynamic that my team and I are constantly challenged to think and act on our feet to deliver superior performance. Produce is such a key driver of our business and customer traffic, and many times, our ability to deliver world-class service at the lowest cost is literally the difference between us winning and losing on sales, profits etc. It is inspiring and exciting to be in a position to have that kind of impact on the bottom line."

He names Safeway's Duane Woods, Tom Nartker and Bill Motley as mentors. "Duane gave me my first opportunity to manage produce freight and gave me the freedom to learn, develop and improve," he says. "Tom is our VP of transportation and my boss. He has seen me through some challenging growing pains as they relate to our produce operation and has never wavered in his support of me, or his belief that I am the right person to lead. Bill was the director of produce when I first started in my position and not only taught me a lot of technical knowledge about produce, but was also a great champion of mine at a time when others in his sector did not always support me."



Stephanie Simek, 29
Marketing and
Communications Manager
National Watermelon
Promotion Board (NWPB)
Orlando, FL

Simek accomplishes a great deal with a relatively small budget and group of resources. An example of this tremendous efficiency is how in addition to her market-

ing duties, she has also taken on the role of in-house DVD production. In the past 12 months, she has created over 10 unique DVDs for various purposes, departments and companies. Mastery of this discipline has increased the NWPB outreach effectiveness, with value and versatility in the videos. The quality of messaging and speed in production time accentuated the benefits of the DVD productions. Moreover, each of these could cost upwards of \$10,000 to outsource, thus providing a \$100,000 value to the NWPB.

Last year at PMA Fresh Summit, she spearheaded the NWPB new booth design, which debuted on the show floor in Orlando. During the tradeshow, the NWPB hosted a watermelon industry reception and Simek raised 30 percent more sponsorship funds for this event over the previous year, which turned into a 200 percent increase in attendance.

She views her job as to be obsessed with watermelon — to live it, promote it and to think about it from an outsider's point of view. She explains, "The uniqueness of watermelon, its iconic American value and even its stereotype as a 'summertime treat' challenge me to think of it in new, contemporary ways to effectively market and promote its benefits. We use technology to the fullest at the NWPB, and we represent watermelon widely on the Web. As a young professional who uses the internet every day, I constantly think of how I prefer to receive marketing messages and what types of promotions or communications would appeal to me. The more challenges we have, the more we have to creatively conquer, which makes the watermelon industry an exciting sector!"

In the future, she views instilling active lifestyles and healthy eating habits in children and students as a paramount focus for the NWPB. "I would like to see school lunch menus providing fresh fruits and vegetables at every meal, which means improving the logistics of transportation, inventory and preparation from distribution centers to the cafeteria," she

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says. "There is a school district in South Florida that does a watermelon day competition among all its elementary schools, with events inside and outside from races to decorations to menus. I think that this level of integrating healthy eating and fun activities should be something that schools are doing everywhere. We should be getting more produce on the menu in the school cafeteria, and at reasonable costs."

Simek finds inspiration in people's attitudes and enthusiasm, as well as their accomplishments. "Jason Chennette from Faye Clack Communications in Mississauga, Ontario, has not just the imaginative smarts to see produce in a whole new light, but also a great sense of humor coupled with tremendous follow-through," she states. "I look forward to working with Faye Clack every year, not just because of the projects, but because of the people. My colleague, Gordon Hunt, has a long history in produce that includes extensive, international travel and merchandising activities, and his broad produce knowledge coupled with a good sense of humor motivate me to look at watermelon from an international point of view. Dr. Elizabeth Pivonka, from Produce for Better Health (PBH), easily incorporates family stories and anecdotes about her children into lectures and presentations, which portray a comfortable balance of work and family."



Gordon Smith, 30
Director of Marketing
California Tree Fruit Agreement
Reedley, CA

Smith's key accomplishments in his four years with the California Tree Fruit Agreement has been securing an additional 30 percent in Federal matching funds through the MAP program to promote California peaches, plums and nectarines abroad. Now \$2.2 million,

these funds have proved instrumental in developing exciting promotional programs throughout Asia, Mexico, Latin America and the United Kingdom. Also, he has worked closely with Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to gain market access to China for California plum growers. He is a valued source of information for many in the industry and fields numerous calls from trade and consumer press. He is a member of United's Leadership class 13. Smith is an avid golfer and fly-fisherman, and loves to travel.

The main inspiration behind his work to date has been the challenge of maintaining a robust and profitable growing community. "As the manager of international marketing programs for the industry, my number one priority is to create demand abroad for our growers," he explains. "Approximately 20 percent of our crop is exported, which means any box of fruit going to export is one not needing to be sold domestically. In an increasingly competitive retail marketplace, shelf space is only one factor in delivering adequate returns to growers. Labor and energy costs are driving the cost of production up at an alarming rate and it must be passed on through the marketing channel. Vibrant export markets are essential because they take pressure off the domestic market."

Smith wants to continue to work on the trade policy side of the business, specifically to open foreign markets to more U.S. fresh products. "The many non-tariff trade barriers existing around the world are counter-productive because they either prop up inefficient producers or deprive their own people of nutritious food options."

His mentors in the produce industry are Sheri Mierau, current president of the California Tree Fruit Agreement, and Blair Richardson, president/CEO of FreshSense in Parlier, CA. "Sheri has been instrumental in getting me to observe our industry in the context of the larger produce industry," he remarks. "She has a tremendous range of experiences and all of those skill sets are integral to leading the California stone fruit industry. Blair has an incredible ability to focus on the most critical issues of the day, while allowing the people around him to get the task done without inter-

ference. Some people may regard it as not micro-managing, but I prefer to describe it as trusting the people who work for you. This has been extremely important in developing my own management style."



Leonardo M. Tarriba, 37
General Manager
Farmer's Best International LLC.
Rio Rico, AZ

Indeed, Tarriba has a family legacy to maintain as the general manager of Farmer's Best. As the first cousin of the company owners, the extensive and well-known Tarriba clan of Culiacan, Mexico, he has always worked to earn a leadership position in their produce business,

even as he attended the renowned Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Mexico, and received a degree in Business Administration and Computer Sciences.

Tarriba's most recent ten years have been as a general manager at company headquarters in Nogales. He has been the leader in many company re-organization projects and has designed and implemented new quality control, food safety and warehouse logistics systems and departments. Yet perhaps what Tarriba is most proud of is his relationship with the company's growers. "Grower relations takes up quite a bit of my time now, but it is critical to our success," he says. "In the produce industry, there can often be distrust between growers and their distributors, which is why complete transparency and a hands-on philosophy are top ingredients to good grower relations. It is very important to a grower that someone from the family knows what is happening, cares about their business and helps them meet the challenges that arise."

Tarriba looks forward to the future when the company will have three full-service, year-round operations in the ports of San Diego and McAllen, in addition to Nogales. He envisions the growth of this grower-integrated company into a truly global concern, with varying sourcing to meet their customers' needs, while maintaining the strong customer-service and values culture for which the company is known.

Never one to admit he knows it all, the produce industry is a source of continuous challenges and problem-solving for Tarriba, and he has found inspiration from his immediate managers and co-workers. First, he cites Ivan Tarriba, president of the company, for his support and enthusiasm for grooming the younger executive to top leadership. In fact, he told him a few years ago that he wanted *his* job! Not a problem, he was told, providing some milestones were reached. To prepare himself for this eventuality, Tarriba is looking to obtain a Masters degree in Global Management, along with achieving other operational goals.

Another inspiring colleague has been director of sales and marketing, Jerry Wagner, whose friendship he also treasures. "I could never have done it without these two," he says. "The loyalty, respect and support I get from them are a driving force for me."



Karen M. Thomson, 35
Vice President Sales and Marketing
Thomson International Inc.
Bakersfield, CA

As a leader in Thomson International Inc., Thomson is challenged daily to inspire and lead others to perform to their highest potential. She has been instrumental in this family company by growing it from a strictly grower-based business to that of a sales

and marketing company. Through her leadership, the company now par-

ticipates in industry trade shows; markets itself through the Internet and trade publications and most recently developed a food safety program. She and her brother, Jack, have helped guide the company to completely change the product offerings in the past 10 years and introduce new items. With the company purchase of a bell pepper plant three years ago, Thomson was instrumental in getting the program off the ground. Onions, cabbage and watermelons have also been added to product offerings in recent years.

Thomson has been an active member of the Sandpiper's organization for the past four years, a 100 percent volunteer organization dedicated to serving the needs of the community through charitable and philanthropic programs. She served as the chair for the Employee Giving Committee for the 2007-2008 year and has served on the Philanthropy and Community Outreach Committees.

She was selected to the United Fresh Leadership class 11 in 2005-2006, and has participated in the Retail Solutions Conference, the Cornell University Food Industry Management Program and the United Fresh Congressional Conference. She is also a Farm Bureau liaison between the produce industry and local teachers and leads guided tours of local agriculture companies to elementary school teachers.

The challenge of domestic agriculture sustainability inspires her to continue in the produce industry. "Global market forces resulting in foreign countries exporting produce to the United States is creating one of the biggest challenges facing the U.S. produce industry," she notes. "As growers, we continue to focus our attention on crops that cannot be shipped or imported to the United States, therefore eliminating the competition with regards to lower foreign pricing."

As a woman in agribusiness, Thomson wants to serve as a role model for other women who come from agricultural backgrounds. "California family farmers are a dying breed and I want to continue in the 'fraternity' of family farms," she explains. "I respect and understand the importance of the government's role in produce and I look forward to further increasing my knowledge in this area."

She names Jeff Thomson, her dad, and Lyn Hughes with Sena Reider as mentors. "My dad is one of my longest industry mentors," she says. "As a child, my father was constantly teaching and encouraging me to work in all levels of our family business. Today, he is a constant source of advice and wise experience within the produce industry. Lyn inspires me by her constant hard work and her need to stay on top of recent industry happenings. She has carved the path for women in the produce industry by her leadership roles in the industry. She is one person who I can always go to when I am in need for professional direction or support."



Brian Thure, 35
Vice President of Processing and Distribution Operations
River Ranch Fresh Foods LLC.
Salinas, CA

Thure climbed the corporate ladder from a dock analyst to the vice president of processing and distribution in just four years. He is known for constantly challenging himself and

his peers to find better ways of doing things. During his time at River Ranch, he has improved many of the company's key operating metrics, as well as creating a great relationship with the Teamster's Union. He is responsible for managing the many aspects of the plant and dock operations including engineering, maintenance, accounting, production, raw/finished scheduling, purchasing, shipping, logistics, strategic planning, capital projects and material handling. He oversees over 550 employees, most of which are members of either the Teamsters (Plant-side) or the UFCW (Dock-side) unions.

In 2008, Thure successfully negotiated the latest plant Teamster two-

year contract and reduced overall packaging costs by \$2.5 million through the bid process in 2007. He was involved in several projects that led to overall cost savings from 2005 through 2007 of over \$4 million, which went directly to the bottom line. He is a graduate of the United Fresh Leadership class 14.

The same reason Thure loves his job is also the biggest challenge. "I enjoy the day-to-day firefights and the curve balls that constantly get thrown at you," he explains. "I can come to work with 10 tasks to accomplish that day and may not complete any of them because other, more important, challenges arise. There are so many moving pieces in our business and each day you are confronted with labor and union issues, maintaining high quality and food safety, raw material shortages and cost pressures, among many others. In order to succeed in our business you need to be well-rounded and enjoy the constant puzzle-solving involved in it."

In the future, Thure would like to get more involved on the legislative side. "We all face several hot buttons and working in a processing operation, nothing hits us harder than future immigration policy, food safety concerns and environmental reform," he notes. "We need to make sure our voice is heard, and by working in conjunction with law makers, we will hopefully be able to develop programs that are adequate for everybody."

Tom Church and Bob Jenkins are Thure's two biggest mentors in the industry. "Tom has been a visionary in this industry for years and is a great sounding board," he reasons. "I worked for Bob for five years while he was our CEO and president of River Ranch. Bob is not only a great people-person, but he is one of the smartest people I've ever met. Every day I was around him, I was learning new and better ways of conducting our business. He also gave me plenty of freedom to make the daily decisions and move on projects and ideas that affected the operation."



John J. Toner V., 31
Vice President, Convention and Industry Relations
United Fresh Produce Association
Washington, DC

Toner is known as being extremely committed to the industry and helping develop solutions through his work in Washington, as well as United Fresh programs. He has led

United's efforts to expand its annual show in Chicago and Las Vegas and developed the industry's own Food Safety Pavilion in conjunction with a produce show. He managed the successful co-location of IFPA's stand-alone convention with United's convention. He has increased attendance by key industry players at United Fresh events over the years and is responsible for United Fresh exhibits at Fruit Logistica. He is currently building virtualmarketplace.unitedfresh.org to be the online destination for information on produce industry companies.

He is active in community activities and serves as a regular volunteer at Miriam's Kitchen, an establishment that offers healthy, homemade meals and case management services to homeless men and women in the D.C. area. He is a leader of Phi Gamma Delta Graduate Chapter to help facilitate events in the DC area for networking and a member of the International Association of Exhibitions and Events Young Professionals committee. He volunteers for local Habitat for Humanity projects, is involved with Boy Scouts of America (Eagle Scout) and teaches sailing to under-privileged and disabled kids.

He is inspired by his 10 years at United Fresh working with exhibitors, members, sponsors and customers. "I virtually touch everyone in the fresh produce supply chain multiple times a year," he says. "What gets me up every morning? Dealing with the challenges of the business-to-business environment. No longer are we in the information brokering business, but in the information presentation business."

In the future, he looks forward to working with the next generation of

leaders and helping them grow their business smartly and efficiently. "United Fresh wants to be here to help our members navigate today's business challenges and put the resources into the hands of those who need them," he says. "One of our biggest challenges is disseminating information to those who need to make decisions and I look forward to helping with that process."

He names United Fresh's Tom Stenzel, PRODUCE BUSINESS' Ken Whitacre, Bill Schneider with Melissa's and wholesalers Tim Fleming and Matthew D'Arrigo as mentors. "The 25 produce managers who win the United Fresh Produce Manager's Award every year also influence me a great deal," he says. "I started in the retail industry at Safeway and I know how hard that work is, and how little the compensation is for the hours you put into the business. They drive our business and our industry's success every day with the ultimate buyer."



Shane Towne, 34
Marketing and New Business
Development Coordinator
Indianapolis Fruit Co. Inc.
Indianapolis, IN

Towne has been the guiding force behind several business developments for his company. Retail customers credit him with sharing a wealth of knowledge and providing invaluable assistance in completing marketing campaigns. Providing weekly information pieces, as well as developing a Kids Corner — a healthy destination for family snacking — are some of the valuable areas in which Towne has helped clients. He is responsible for roughly 80 percent of the outbound marketing and public relations as it relates to industry publications, organizations and agencies for the company.

Towne has dramatically affected the company's image as it relates to branding initiatives, educational programs and industry involvement. He has spent the past several years working intimately with ownership and other directors within the company to increase sales through marketing and sales initiatives, often sharing ideas and developing programs to accomplish this goal by looking at new and innovative ways of doing business outside the typical business model. He is a member of the Strategic Planning Team at Indianapolis Fruit, helping to design and guide the future of the company and to ultimately strengthen its market share within its distribution network.

His challenge and inspiration come from the volatility and opportunity of our industry. "The efforts of increasing fresh produce consumption in a time when childhood obesity is at an all-time high, and growing food and fuel costs in relation to a struggling economy are only a few issues that immediately come to mind," he says. "However, you only have to look at the Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH), PMA and United Fresh — to name only a few of organizations — to see groups that are passionately trying to make a healthy change in the eating habits and culture in the country, and ultimately the globe.

He would like to become more involved in the governmental aspects of the industry and build upon his areas of training in the agricultural, retail and distribution fields. "Another goal I have set for myself is to be president of Indianapolis Fruit Company and beyond," he shares. "More importantly though, my ultimate goal is to give back to the industry that has given me so much pride from the first farm market I managed at age 14 to my current success at Indianapolis Fruit Company."

As mentors, he mentions Bryan Silbermann from the PMA, Tom Stenzel from United Fresh, and Jim Prevor. He finds mentoring strength on a daily basis from his bosses Mike Mascari, president, and Dan Corsaro, executive vice president of sales and marketing. "Both Mike and Dan have instilled in me an internal drive to further educate myself in the industry,

make customers and their success my first priority and lead with integrity and honesty," he says. "They have made it possible for me to develop my personal and professional career while guiding me by example to be the best I can be."



Gary York, 39
Transportation Manager
C.H. Robinson Worldwide, Inc.
Eden Prairie, MN

York started C.H. Robinson's Monterey, CA, office from nothing in 2006 in order to implement a transportation project with Western Growers Association and its members. That pilot project has now grown to 150 shipper participants and nine trade associations, handling 45,000 shipments since inception with 35 employees now in four offices. York is credited as the driving force behind this effort.

He is also responsible for the development of sustainability initiatives focusing on reduction of the supply chain carbon footprint for grower/shippers. These reductions were accomplished in part by reduction of empty truck miles through improvement of LTL services and by greater use of intermodal transportation. He is responsible for the expansion of refrigerated intermodal service from California and introduction of this service in Idaho, which not only reduces the carbon footprint, but results in significant transportation cost savings. He has a 17-year career in produce transportation at C.H. Robinson Worldwide Inc., previously working in its New York and Philadelphia offices.

York participated in the Cornell University Food Industry Management Program in March 2009 and is a member of the Western Growers Transportation and Trade Practices Committee.

As for his future goals, he refers to the definition of sustainability of the United Nations Commission on Sustainability: meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. He explains, "I believe that the creation of an efficient, safe and sustainable supply chain from grower to consumer should be the legacy of my generation to the next. While I am very proud of the progress we have made thus far in reducing the produce industry carbon footprint, it is only the beginning. I know we can do far better and I intend to be at the forefront of that effort."

Bob Gray, CEO/president, Duda Farm Fresh Foods is one of York's mentors. "As chairman of the Board of Western Growers in 2008, Bob made sustainability a significant component of his Association leadership and challenged me to use the resources and technology of CHRW to impact the produce industry's transportation carbon footprint," he explains. "That process would not have begun without the counsel and friendship that Bob provided."

Matt McNerney, executive vice president of Western Growers Association and Laurence Stern, CEO with Stern Consulting are two other mentors that York credits with given him invaluable assistance and information.

Take Part In Selecting Next Year's Nominees!

40 Under Forty is an annual feature of PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine. If you would like to nominate a young leader for next year's edition, please visit www.producebusiness.com or fax your nomination to 561-994-1610. Next year's nominees must be under the age of 40 as of March 1, 2010 (born after March 1, 1970).



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Poised To Provide Produce To Eastern Populous

The Garden State offers retailers a wealth of flavorful produce all summer long and beyond.

BY AMY SHANNON

This time of year, New Jersey serves as one of the country's largest production powerhouses of fresh fruits and vegetables.

A legend in the blueberry business, producing 59 million pounds of blueberries annually, the Garden State is also known for its excellent supply of juicy peaches, rich beefsteak tomatoes and lush lettuce varieties.

"Historically, New Jersey has always had a reputation for producing exceptional crops, particularly with regard to tomatoes, blueberries, peaches and tomatoes, to name just a few," explains Chris Cunnane, national sales director for Santa Sweets Inc., a Plant City, FL-based grower and packer of Santa Sweets grape tomatoes with four distribution centers, including one in Cedarville, NJ. Santa Sweets is owned by Philadelphia, PA-based Procacci Bros. Sales Corp. "The Jersey Fresh logo is something consumers look for and associate with freshness, quality and flavor."

With more than 10,327 farms, New Jersey produce growers can meet the needs of East Coast retailers, foodservice operators and distributors for

months. According to many wholesalers and retailers, many of New Jersey's farmers are the best in the country, harvesting high quality product out of small acreage and short production periods. "Small farms make production easier to control and manage versus hundreds of acres," says Sharon Dauito-Baxter, a sales representative for J & D Produce Inc., an Edinburg, TX-based grower, formerly known as Dauito Produce, which has operates a branch in Vineland, NJ.

"Despite the high cost and various challenges of being a farmer in New Jersey, the most densely populated state in the nation, we are seeing that the many benefits associated with farming close to where people live is attracting more people to farming in the Garden State," notes Al Murray, assistant secretary of agriculture for the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), in Trenton, NJ. "In addition, New Jersey agriculture is becoming more diverse and specialized with higher value crops to meet the needs of our state and region."

New Jersey grows more than 100 different varieties of fruits, vegetables and herbs. According to NJDA, the state is among the country's Top 10 producers in volume of blueberries (second), bell peppers (fourth), peaches (fourth), cranberries (fourth), squash (seventh) and tomatoes (eighth).

ABUNDANCE OF BLUEBERRIES

Ranking second in the country's blueberry production, New Jersey generated a production value of \$82 million in 2008, states Lynne Richmond, NJDA public information officer. This number can be misleading, however, as many growers contend that blueberries grown for the fresh market are not accurately counted by the government. According to many growers, New Jersey actually leads the country in fresh-pack blueberries.

"New Jersey is the birthplace of cultivated blueberries," notes Art Galletta, president and co-owner of Atlantic Blueberry Co. Inc., a Hammonton, NJ-based grower that harvests fresh blueberries from mid-June to mid-August. "We are the leaders in



Many retailers take advantage of New Jersey's locally grown produce and feature it front-and-center using POS material provided by Jersey Fresh.

Photo courtesy of New Jersey Department of Agriculture



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fresh-market blueberries, providing the best fresh blueberries available."

When merchandising New Jersey-grown blueberries, retailers can win big by highlighting the health benefits of blueberries. According to a recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) study, blueberries ranked first in antioxidant activity in comparison to 40 other fresh fruits and vegetables. Antioxidants help neutralize harmful by-products of metabolism called "free radicals" that are associated with cancer and other age-related diseases.

The major variety of blueberry grown in

New Jersey is Blue Crop, followed by Duke. "We produce three main varieties: Duke, which is a large berry with a lot of eye appeal, along with Blue Crop and Elliots," reports Tim Wetherbee, sales manager with Diamond Blueberry Inc., headquartered in Hammonton, NJ.

GRADE-A GROWING CONDITIONS

New Jersey's soil and weather conditions create a favorable setting for growing an array of fruits and vegetables during the late spring to early fall period. "Blueberries are

native to New Jersey, so we do not have to amend the soils to get them to grow properly," notes Galletta. "The soil, rainfall and climate are perfect."

Sandy, acidic soil and high humidity produce crops with exceptional flavor profile and quality are prevalent in New Jersey, notes Santa Sweets' Cunnane. "The huge stands of cedar trees in the area contribute to the unique soil characteristics found in South Jersey. The longest days of the year with generally sunny days accelerate the timeline to harvest and often produces exceptional yields when compared to winter growing areas."

NJDA's Richmond agrees, pointing out that Jersey Fresh produce is quality graded

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Jersey Fresh Marketing Program Continues To Make An Impact

New Jersey growers are supported by several major trade organizations, including Jersey Fresh, a 25-year-old program aimed at providing funds to growers and retailers to promote New Jersey produce within the state, neighboring states, as well as Canada.

Created in 1983 to help growers inform consumers about the availability and variety of New Jersey produce, Jersey Fresh has boosted awareness among consumers and served as a benchmark for other states initiating their own state-grown agricultural marketing program.

Jersey Fresh has been at least a generation ahead of the trend to "buy local," stresses Chris Cunnane, national sales director of Santa Sweets Inc., in Plant City, FL. "Regionally, produce grown in New Jersey has always been the preference of consumers when available. It's a legitimate 'no-brainer' for buyers to procure Jersey Fresh produce when available."

Lynne Richmond, public information officer for New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), based in Trenton, NJ, says retailers can boost sales of New Jersey produce by highlighting it in sales circulars and using the Jersey Fresh logo on signage at retail. "They can talk about Jersey Fresh availability in their print and broadcast advertising, and they can use POS items in their stores to identify the Jersey Fresh items available," she adds. "Some stores have partnered with local farmers and actually display pictures of the farmers who provided the produce."

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Reader Service # 40

and, many times, third-party audited to ensure it is of the highest quality and handled with the best food-safety practices.

"The climatic conditions are ideal," concurs Wetherbee. "It's an excellent place for growing blueberries."

MODERN PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES

Atlantic Blueberry uses state-of-the-art precision agriculture, which employs GIS systems coupled with integrated crop and pest management, adds Galletta. "Our blueberries are pre-cooled before, climate con-

trolled during and post-cooled after packaging to provide the highest quality and longest shelf-life possible."

Cunnane describes Santa Sweets' growing practices as consisting of "plastic culture and drip irrigation to reduce water and fertilizer use."

J & D hydrocools and packs its own product versus having the farmer pack it, adds Dauito-Baxter.

"We're all New Jersey farmers looking for ways to operate more sustainably and reduce our impact on the environment while enhancing food safety," summarizes

Cunnane. "All of our production is both pre-cooled and post-cooled. Minutes after the product is picked, it enters the cold chain to begin the process of cooling pulp temperatures and then maintaining the proper temperatures throughout the process of production and distribution."

MARKETING LOCALLY GROWN

Nestled in the center of the metropolitan areas, New Jersey produce is an easy sell for retailers throughout the East Coast and Midwest. More consumers are demanding the freshest product available, and New Jersey growers are making it possible.

"We're accessible to most locations over night," explains Diamond's Wetherbee. "Logistically, we're in the middle of everything. We can source it overnight as opposed to four or five days."

Thomas Sheppard, president of Eastern Fresh Growers Inc., a Cedarville, NJ-based grower that produces mostly bell peppers this time of year, in addition to cucumbers, iceberg and romaine lettuce, summer squash and asparagus, also benefits from an advantageous location. "We're close to an enormous population center, so our produce gets to customers in local markets a lot faster than produce from competitors in California and the Midwest. It's also fresher when it arrives," he adds. "Plus, it's easier for retailers to restock."

J & D's Dauito-Baxter agrees. "The fact that we are so close to so many markets and can literally get there overnight makes our product very attractive and fresh tasting."

Atlantic's Galletta points to New Jersey's close proximity to New York, Boston and Washington, D.C., as a major win-win for retailers and consumers. "In the Northeast, buyers can order blueberries and have them

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"Blueberries are native to New Jersey, so we do not have to amend the soils to get them to grow properly. The soil, rainfall and climate are perfect."

— Art Galletta, Atlantic Blueberry Co. Inc.

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Photo courtesy of Procacci Bros.

Procacci Bros. and Santa Sweets are among the many suppliers utilizing the Jersey Fresh logo to encourage sales.

at their door in the morning. It's harvested today and on the shelf tomorrow. Environmental benefits include reduced transportation costs and open space in an otherwise densely populated area."

Food miles, or carbon footprint, has come into play as an additional advantage of buying New Jersey produce, states Santa Sweets' Cunnane.

"Locally grown has certainly become increasingly important — here, and throughout the country," reports Sheppard. "It cuts down on fossil fuels and allows for more profitable production."

NJDA's Jersey Fresh program works with retailers and growers to raise awareness about locally grown produce through various marketing campaign efforts. "Fresh, locally grown produce is something retailers can market in their advertisements, circulars and in their stores," notes NJDA's Richmond. "Many food chains advertise they carry Jersey Fresh produce. In-store, they have Jersey Fresh banners, bin wrap and price cards. Some even have "Jersey Fresh"

weeklong or daylong celebrations."

Retailers should also consider featuring locally grown New Jersey blueberries as much as possible to increase demand. "Cross-promotions are another way to stimulate demand," recommends Galletta. "Items such as whipped cream, pie crusts and other berries can be cross-promoted and achieve very good returns."

For buyers, J & D offers 1- to 3-month pricing as incentives to buy locally "and stay here even when other areas have started up," according to Dauito-Baxter.

Cunnane suggests promoting the various Jersey Fresh produce items in ads with radio and TV advertising. "This year, consumers are really looking for items they perceive as a value, so aggressive retails, buy-one-get-one-free specials and the 10-for-10 deals will help move more product."

It's imperative that retailers tell consumers they're getting Jersey Fresh produce. "The New Jersey Department of Agriculture's marketing division does an excellent job providing POP materials for in-store use," Cunnane adds.

New Jersey's Top Commodities

1. Blueberries — \$82 M
2. Bell Peppers — \$33 M
3. Tomatoes — \$26.6 M
4. Cranberries — \$25.4 M
5. Peaches — \$24 M
6. Sweet Corn — \$15.5 M
7. Cucumbers — \$13.1 M
8. Squash — \$12.5 M
9. Apples — \$11.3 M
10. Spinach — \$10.4 M

*Figures represent 2008 production value in millions.

Source: New Jersey Department of Agriculture

EMERGING TRENDS

New Jersey is seeing an increase in production of herbs, collard greens and Chinese cabbage, reports NJDA's Richmond. "We're also seeing more organic farms."

Other statewide agricultural trends taking shape include a notable rise in farming altogether. According to the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture, 10,327 farms operate in the state, up 4 percent since 2002 and the highest number of farms since 1965.

While New Jersey growers are receiving higher prices for their agricultural products, the costs of operating farms have also gone up. Since 2007, the value of the state's agricultural products sold has increased 32 percent to \$986.9 million, according to the census. Expenses, such as fuel, fertilizer and seed, have increased since 2002 to a total of \$835.2 million.

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Time For California And Baja Tomatoes

With stringent food safety standards and new, colorful varieties, tomatoes grown in the California and Baja, Mexico, regions will be priced to sell.

BY MIKE DUFF

California and Baja tomatoes should command better prices this year due to four very important factors.

Water issues, new growing practices, interest in local produce, and the recovery from last year's salmonella scare will come together this year to produce what could be an excellent pricing year for tomatoes grown in these regions.

The question of water issues arises in the Central Valley of California. There, some growers are reducing tomato acreage simply because they don't have access to the sufficient water supply needed to grow them.

The demand for local produce should have an impact as well. Both retailers and restaurateurs have seen locally grown produce command the interest of consumers, particularly where they support regional farming traditions. Of course, Califor-

nia's agriculture traditions are well established and attractive to many of the state's residents, who are leaders in establishing food trends.

However, local produce, while creating a market, is limiting demand beyond California as retailers turn to local growers to bolster their image with consumers concerned with environmental issues and their own agricultural traditions. To the extent that the California season overlaps with local seasons in established growing areas such as New Jersey, shippers from the West Coast could find their markets limited.

Yet, it is a lingering affect of the salmonella scare, when tomatoes were erroneously implicated, that is the looming X factor. Serrano peppers may have caused the problem, but tomatoes still could suffer, at least to a degree. "There is a stigma attached to the salmonella scare," reports Brian Carter, produce and floral buyer at Andronico's Market Inc., in Albany, CA, which operates eight gourmet supermarkets in the San Francisco area. He notes the concern wasn't only at his own store, but among distributors and other produce buyers. "Since the scare, the tomato category has really seemed to fall off. Since then, we have mostly only had tomatoes from Mexico, or the greenhouse from Canada, which just do not have the flavor of a field-grown tomato."

CALIFORNIA MEANS QUALITY

Andronico's anticipates the annual California tomato season and takes full advantage of all the opportunities associated with it. "We are very much looking forward to the California season, where we can promote locally and organically grown along with the flavorful, colorful heirlooms," Carter remarks. "I believe the tomato category can experience some well needed growth and restore consumer confidence."

Carter thinks the new crop of California tomatoes could help turn around negative trends. "The California tomatoes are the ones we are waiting



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for,” he reveals. “We feature tomatoes year-round, which makes it necessary to offer tomatoes grown in Mexico. There was a time when Baja tomatoes were considered one of the premier tomato varieties, but that was before the growth of greenhouse-grown, organics, the ever-growing, popular Heirlooms and the locally grown movement.”

For Spud, a Vancouver, Canada-based home delivery retailer, which has operations in Seattle, WA; Portland, OR; San Francisco and Los Angeles, CA; the safety of tomatoes hasn't been an issue. The company focuses on natural and organic items, and it seems as if consumers of those products are more confident in the folks who purvey their produce than conventional shoppers. Or at the very least, they are better informed. “I am not aware of any impacts on our tomato sales or concerns raised by our customers relative to the pepper salmonella scare,” reports David Van Seters, Spud founder, president and CEO.

While Andronico's and Spud are after the food devotee who seeks eating experience with less regard to price, Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market Inc., in El Segundo, CA, targets consumers who want quality, but scrutinize price more closely.

Fresh & Easy recently carried Baja tomatoes as a premium alternative, but has been emphasizing quality product at more affordable prices. For one thing, it has developed its 98-Cent Produce Pack as part of an ongoing strategy that focuses on providing low-cost shopping alternatives in the recession. “It's really about availability and our timing,” notes Fresh & Easy spokesperson, Brendan Wonnacott. “As things pop up, we want to make sure and bring in those items.

“I'm very optimistic on pricing this year, based on the fact that there will be a slight reduction in acreage out for California tomatoes.”

**— John Lupul
Ace Tomato Co. Inc.**

People are interested, too, as recently demonstrated with our 98-Cent Produce Pack. It adds a different element to what we offer. High quality and low prices are what we've seen across the board as a consumer priority with everything, particularly with fresh food. People are looking to save, but they don't like to compromise. That's always important, but it's a very big part of it now.”

Initial California tomato shipments, principally those moving before the Florida crop fizzles, should spell opportunity for Fresh & Easy, as it can work both to price and consumer affinity for locally grown product in the Golden State. “Overall, being located where we are, it makes sense to source locally whenever possible,” explains Wonnacott. “Seasonal availability plays a big role for us. The main thing is to stick with good

producers and make sure things remain as high quality as possible.”

With various factors taken into consideration, John Lupul, general manager of Ace Tomato Co. Inc., based in Manteca, CA, notes prices across the distribution system should improve this year for Golden State tomatoes. “I'm very optimistic on pricing this year, based on the fact that there will be a slight reduction in acreage out for California tomatoes,” he states. “We're looking forward to this season, and we expect pricing to be better than last season.

PRICING AND VARIETY FACTORS

Lupul discloses water issues that limit tomato supplies out of California will be a primary price support. “Water doesn't affect us. We're okay there, but there are other growers who are growing cannery tomatoes in what are currently water-restricted areas, and they have decided not to continue. Others who are not restricted are taking a little aside for the cannery market, so there are not as many for retail. It makes for an interesting deal,” he adds.

The price issue cuts two ways. Although water issues will buoy price, Tom Deardorff II, president of Oxnard, CA-based Deardorff Family Farms, explains distribution costs, such as fuel prices, are going down, which creates the opportunity to establish a price structure where profits can be made even as volumes are driven. The most effective thing is appropriate price that matches the quality of the product and is competitive,” he continues. “With freight rates coming down and some other price relief in the supply chain, I hope that some passes through to the consumer and helps us all move product. Especially in these economic times, it helps to get prices down to attract consumers within their budgets.”

Given the circumstance, though, Lupul believes savvy retailers can have a good California tomato season this year. “There is a big opportunity for the retail side to make an acceptable profit on field tomatoes by putting them in locations so consumers see them when they first come into the store, right in the first endcap of the tomato section,” he details.

In terms of varieties, Lupul reports that there isn't one type of tomato that dominates the others, as might have been the case before. Rather, growers are making choices relative to their growing conditions and specific preferences from a general category of seed. “They're all growing the long shelf-life varieties,” he reveals. “Everyone tweaks them, but pretty much everyone is selling the long shelf-life varieties.”



Andrew & Williamson Sales Co. Inc., based in San Diego, CA, is working with seed producers to provide new varieties that focus on flavor, rather than growing or distribution factors. According to Mark Munger, vice president of marketing, the company direct-ships retailers a significant part of the product it generates. Andrew & Williamson tomatoes emerge from Mexico, with about 60 percent coming from Baja. To drive that direct business, the company has become more consumer-focused. "Traditionally, seed breeders have looked at growers as their primary customers but, really, the primary customer is the consumer buying the tomato," Munger explains. "As an industry, we're not all on the same page when it comes to satisfying the customer."

Ace Tomato ships California tomatoes across North America, providing product for both foodservice and retail. Lupul expects a lift this year from California retailers who are pushing local products. "You're going to see an opportunity at retail with California tomatoes with the buy local flair. That seems to be what's exciting and new out there in the produce department. I think there is an opportunity this year for retail support of California tomatoes," he says.

However, there are two sides to the popularity of local produce. Joe Bernardi, owner of broker Bernardi & Associates Inc., in Nogales, AZ, notes some of the repackers he works with who have distributed to areas where local tomatoes have become more popular have seen markets dry up. "It really affects us in the summertime."

Caesar Muratore, sales manager for The Newman DiMari Co., based in Newman, CA, adds, "It affects you if you can't get distribution in the North and Northeast."

Another consideration is SKU proliferation. While retailers may be able to drive some margin through new segments, including the increasing number of tomatoes billed as heirlooms, the result may be less volume and a weaker performance in the end, particularly if consumers are disappointed with products that are supposed to be new and superior, but don't live up to the premium prices they command.

"SKU proliferation is not necessarily a bad thing," Munger notes. "There are a lot of good specialty tomatoes out there. But when somebody comes out with better flavor or a sweeter cherry tomato, they want to brand it with some new name. We have 10 or 12 fairly progressive companies out there that are sending out new varieties every year. And any new color wants to be put out there as heirloom. Why confuse consumers, who may face 20 or 25 SKUs?"

PACKAGING OPTIONS

Deardorff reports a major change he sees in the market for California tomatoes is the increase in use of retail packaging. This year, Deardorff Family Farms is experimenting with the addition of a club-sized, five-pound box for its retail business. When it consists of the right material, it can be a bonus for shippers and stores. "The more direct-to-retailer type of packaging exists in the marketplace, the more sustainable packaging for a ready-to-use product is something the retailer can put right on the shelf. The most growth we've had is in a single-layer, tray pack that goes straight out to retail vendors."

With labor costs up, packaged tomatoes make sense for retailers and can boost other elements of the distribution chain as well. "Retailers want to cut labor as much as possible, and it adds more value to what the repacker does. The retailer has fewer hands on the product and less shrink. It's a win-

win all around," Bernardi explains.

Packaging — once environmental concerns have been addressed — benefits retailers to the extent consumers see enough advantage that they'll pay for it, Munger notes. "It creates convenience. Consumers don't have to pick through a pile of tomatoes. It's good for food safety protection. We're seeing some innovation. The hothouse industry has been particularly innovative. The challenge is that it's an additional expense in a low-margin industry."

Some growers and distributors are looking to new production methods to create greater consistency and quality, again making tomatoes a more consumer-friendly product. According to Munger, "One of the big, macro trends is the shift away from in-field to protected growing. We've converted just about 100 percent over to the shade-house concept. It has become a superior way to grow product because you have a lot more control." **pb**

Putting Food Safety First

John Lupul, general manager of Manteca, CA-based Ace Tomato Co., doubts that any food safety concerns will arise as this year's California tomatoes begin to ship. However, he notes the industry out West is prepared to deal with concerns. California tomato growers have adopted food safety practices that go beyond those employed in many other produce industry sectors and will even provide signage for retailers that emphasizes the product's wholesomeness. "We're following the fresh standards in that we're testing water, we use a testing shed — we are fulfilling your basic GMP GAP requirements," he details. "That includes many internal things, too, such as standard practices, proper training, enclosing the facility with fencing so the property is completely secured, etc."

Tom Deardorff, president of Deardorff Family Farms, in Oxnard, CA, reveals his company is dealing with international, as well as local food safety practices because of its export business, but he thinks the larger issue is being addressed. "The California industry as a whole has been aggressive and is on the leading edge of the issue."

Additionally, Caesar Muratore, sales manager for The Newman DiMari Co., in Newman, CA, notes an increasing consumer interest in food grown in the most natural way possible has the potential to drive more

interest in field tomatoes, and some retailers still appreciate their qualities. "Wal-Mart still sources field tomatoes," he reveals. "People want things that are natural. There is going to be a continuing issue about food safety and the environment and how food is grown. With our field tomatoes, you have soil, water and air. How do you beat that?"

The western tomato business has learned from last year's food safety scare. Joe Bernardi, owner of Bernardi & Associates Inc., headquartered in Nogales, AZ, asserts, "I definitely think we'll be better able to deal with problems that arise. I'd also point out that it was never an issue for us last year, and that's the real problem. The tomato industry and the fresh produce industry as whole had things in place to do what needed to be done in case of a real emergency. I think the FDA and other agencies involved were not ready to deal with the emergency. It was not a problem within tomato industry. It was a really unfortunate situation."

Most importantly, Bernardi remarks retailers should have confidence in the products that are emerging from Baja and California. "The growing and packing practices out of Baja and California are of the utmost stringency. People would be amazed at the level of sophistication of the Baja growing practices. They're doing everything out there to have a safe supply." **pb**

Phoenix Produce On Parade

Be it Fresh & Easy, Fry's, Bashas', Safeway or any one of Wal-Mart's three retail operations, each Phoenix area store displays its varying priorities through unique merchandising and signage.

BY MIKE DUFF

Take a ride down Arizona's Baseline road, starting in the dense old suburbs near Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport ending at the edge of the desert, and you can review the state of American food retailing without touching another street.

Or, if you would rather navigate by retailer than road, you can take a tour that starts with Tesco's Fresh & Easy and ends with Wal-Mart's Marketside.

What becomes increasingly evident along the way is that food retailing is becoming an intense enterprise, with ideas building one off the other as competitors shrug and scramble for position. Clearly, some of the concepts on display on Baseline Road are destined for long use, while others will be gone quickly. Others will keep what works and alter what doesn't. Of the four Neighborhood Markets in the vicinity of Baseline Road, one is slated already for conversion into a new, Hispanic-oriented Wal-Mart store test concept to be named Supermercado de Wal-Mart. That's in the future, though. The present is interesting enough.



FRESH & EASY

Tesco continues to experiment with Fresh & Easy as it tries to figure out just what consumers in the United States want from an affordable, convenience food concept in general and, in particular, what they want from it in a recession that just happens to coincide with the concept's roll out. First, Tesco went for bare bones and hip. Then, it added some color by rolling out a new signage package to make the place more pleasant for middle-class shoppers. Now, it's focusing on bargains as a kind of up-market version of Aldi or Save-A-Lot, since consumers today are wary of spending in the current uncertain economy.

Produce is important in the current brand positioning, figuratively and literally. Right where the front entranceway of a Fresh &

Easy on Baseline Road adjoins the produce section, Tesco offers a 12-linear-foot 98-Cent Value Packs display with a like-sized product presentation under another sign, reading, "Extra Low Prices."

Fresh & Easy confronts customers with its value proposition immediately upon entering the store, then reinforces it by pointing out bargains in the cold case, including cut products, such as broccoli florets, on sale at \$1.98 for a 12-ounce bag. Additionally, Fresh & Easy offers a fresh-cut fruit presentation including wrapped watermelon quarters and tubs of mixed melon in chunks and slices, citrus salad and exotic fruit salad featuring pineapple and kiwi. It also provides bags of sliced apple.

Thus, Fresh & Easy is offering more than bargains; it is offering convenience as well. As many of those conveniences, including the broccoli florets and apple slices, are labeled Fresh & Easy, the company is making a particular statement about the store and what it means to make things easier for consumers.

Fresh & Easy also is attempting the food equivalent of what mass-market retailers try to do with fashion — staying on trends. Broccoli florets aren't any more cutting edge these days than Caesar salad, but they are the kind of product that many food-conscious, middle-class Americans have incorporated into their everyday eating. Fresh & Easy offers other products that might be regarded similarly, such as refrigerated dressings, including balsamic vinaigrette, creamy cilantro and, naturally enough, Caesar, all under its own label.

At the same time, Fresh & Easy seems to have deemphasized prepared food to some extent. It still has an assortment of pizzas and sandwiches prepared by the company at its central commissary, but the range seems more limited and certainly less gourmet-oriented than was originally the case. Thus, as it tweaks merchandising to grab a clientele that itself may be shifting its preferences in the recession, Fresh & Easy seems to be highlighting produce to underscore both the fresh and easy elements that the stores promise just by virtue of their names, with some bargains thrown in for good measure.

WAL-MART MARKETSIDE

Anyone who has encountered both the Tesco and Waitrose convenience stores in the United Kingdom might be tempted to look at Fresh & Easy and Wal-Mart Marketside as an American version of the across-the-pond rivalry.

Wal-Mart isn't quite Waitrose, even if both are designed to be more upscale in appearance than their Tesco competition. The food isn't as gourmet-oriented at Wal-Mart, but it's headed in that direction. Particularly in the deli section, which is the heart of the convenience-oriented operation, an earlier generation of basic, American dishes, such as macaroni and cheese, has been joined by grilled

asparagus and roasted red-skin potatoes. In yet another departure from Waitrose, the fancier food remains heavily value-oriented, and store signage emphasizes that shoppers can put together meals based on \$8 and \$6 family-sized entrees, which can be rounded out with \$6 and \$4 salads merchandised in the deli.

So produce is incorporated into the core takeout food operation, but as a department, it precedes it. In fact, as shoppers enter Marketside, piled produce table displays share the immediate space with a beverage presentation, with takeout food in the background, an obvious announcement of priorities to entering consumers.

The produce department does feature signage that announces price breaks, but that aspect of the merchandising isn't as aggressive as that found in Wal-Mart's nearby Neighborhood Market stores. Price and convenience seem of approximately equal weight, with 78-cent bags of Ready-Pak Garden Salad being featured as part of a three-day produce sale.

By Wal-Mart standards, the produce displays are petite, but the well-groomed sets of cantaloupes, pineapples and oranges piled on tables in the midst of the sales floor make the point that quality is as important as price. Labor commitment underscores



the regard for putting quality in front of consumers attractively. With smaller-size displays, an employee constantly makes the trip from the backroom to the sales floor freshening presentations. Thus, quality is certainly a critical consideration in Market-side store presentation as is, by extension, one-upping the more utilitarian merchandising at Fresh & Easy. The question is, will a Wal-Mart gourmet concept alienate consumers or intrigue them?

NEIGHBORHOOD MARKET

Nothing could be clearer in the merchandising at Neighborhood Market than Wal-Mart's desire to establish its grocery store

possible. For families on tight budgets, Supercenter deals, such as those found on the avocados, can be the difference between maintaining a basic lifestyle and forgoing the last of life's niceties. To underline the point, not all avocados that Wal-Mart offered were minis. It also provided more standard Hass avocados for 68 cents, but that only made the message clearer: Wal-Mart would do what it takes to provide its consumers with prices that supported their lifestyles at a critical moment.

FRY'S MARKETPLACE

Product at Kroger-owned Fry's bares the mark of Kroger's partnership with

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concept as the place for inexpensive, recession food shopping. At the entrance of the store, three bins of produce items made the announcement. One offered yellow onions at 88-cents-a-pound under a sign that declared, "Unbeatable Prices." The word Unbeatable was particularly emphasized. The next offered robust cucumbers at 38 cents each with signage reading, "Save Even More. Was 88 cents." Similarly, green bell peppers were proffered with the Save Even More signage, also declaring, "Was 88 cents."

Savings signs filled the produce section, which also helped definitively establish Neighborhood Market at the place for affordable, fresh food.

What's more, the Neighborhood Market produce offering was certainly as extensive as competing supermarkets, except in one regard: Neighborhood Market didn't mount the kind of extensive organic produce displays most of its supermarket competitors feature. Wal-Mart, though, never has tried to be all things to all people. It identifies a sweet spot where it can use its distribution expertise to drive volume through low prices. If dealing with supercenter parking lots, epic store expanses and bustling crowds isn't your thing, but bargains are, Wal-Mart offers you Neighborhood Market, quick and easy to navigate and providing many items to delight the frugal shopper.

WAL-MART SUPERCENTER

But just how was Wal-Mart generating the particular bargains it was providing so conspicuously at Neighborhood Market and thoroughly at a nearby Wal-Mart Supercenter? The answer was discovered in a conversation with a produce department employee. It seems as if Phoenix-area Wal-Marts had been given permission to do extra buying locally, as an over abundance of certain commodities provided an opportunity too ripe for the company to overlook.

In some cases, these were pretty much standard products. In others, they were items that might be hard to market, such as rather small avocados that might have been considered culls, except Wal-Mart Supercenter was offering them at 33 cents each — less than 10 cents an ounce. More typically sized avocados were a bit more expensive at Neighborhood Market, priced at a little more than 12 cents an ounce.

Clearly, Wal-Mart expects its most value-conscious consumer to shop its Supercenters and wants to impress. Sure, the four-ounce avocados at the Supercenter were close to half pit, but if you're used to having avocado in a salad, or guacamole with a meal, Wal-Mart was offering you the best deal you could get on the fruit that makes it



Dunnhumby USA, the American division of the British Dunnhumby research firm that helped Tesco build its powerful loyalty card program in the United Kingdom.

Kroger is doing its utmost to encourage customers to join its loyalty club and to use the associated bargain card at the checkout. Not only do the discounts promote loyalty directly, the information that Kroger gleans by linking buying patterns to individual club member helps the supermarket more precisely merchandise its stores. After all, having the right products in stock at the right time is another way to build customer appreciation and allegiance.

There is one wrinkle, though. While Kroger signage featuring club prices is sprinkled throughout the produce department, not all the club prices represent discounts. Sometimes the club price and the regular price are exactly the same. This didn't disturb a produce department employee who was asked about the practice. She noted the club prices that didn't reflect a discount just weren't on sale.

So, how does Kroger promote loyalty card use and not provide a discount? As opposed to many other food retailers that are eager to post the difference between the regular and loyalty program prices, Kroger just omits the non-club price from the display, one reason to find and question a produce department employee...although most customers won't bother, which certainly helps Kroger.

SAFeway

For Safeway, lifestyle is everything. Trendy is the focus and that's hard to miss in produce, given the major organic food presentation that occupies such a conspicuous place on the sales floor. Unlike many other mainstream food retailers, Safeway doesn't skimp on variety when it comes to organics, offering, for example, Fuji and Pink Lady in the organic apple category.

Safeway clearly wants to convince consumers they should shop its stores based on abundance, quality and the unique nature of

its produce proposition. Its own loyalty card program contributes something of a bargain element, although the depth of discounts offered — and there was always a discount as prices were posted for both club and non-club purchasing — varied from 10 percent on green beans to as much as 50 percent on Baby Bella mushrooms.

Still, except for the scope of the produce department, the presentation of Safeway's private labels revealed the most about its customer proposition. Two predominate brands in produce included O Organics and Eating Right, its healthy living brand. In many cases, Safeway's private label brands don't provide an alternative to national brands; they supplant them. Take packaged herbs, for example. Rather than a gourmet brand, such as Melissa's or a local, organic label, Safeway offers O Organics, as it does in tub baby spinach salad, when Earthbound Farms is typically the standard.

Safeway clearly thinks a lot of its private label proposition. The store offered Fresh Express Italian salad at \$2.99 in a 10-ounce package, on sale from \$3.29, but it also offered the equivalent, Eating Right private label salad, at identical pricing. The kicker was that the Eating Right salad was a little smaller in its nine-ounce package size.

BASHAS'

When you enter the produce department at Wal-Mart Supercenter or Safeway, you are struck by the scope of products offered and landscape occupied. Go to Fry's or Neighborhood Market, and the signage clamors for your attention. At Marketplace and Fresh & Easy, the produce displays are carefully crafted to convey the store's proposition in terms of value, convenience and novelty.

Bashas' is nice. Nice doesn't necessarily mean better, but it does translate to easy to shop, as in a presentation of a few dry tables and a well-organized wet rack. Stand at any spot in the produce department and you can take in the whole offering. No wandering to the back of floor displays trying to remember what items were hidden where. The store doesn't get too fancy, and only offered bunches of parsley on the wet rack, lacking the peg-board alternative some others carried, nor did it go heavy into organics. It was, however, one of the few stores that incorporated extra varieties among the most popular items, providing Ambrosia apples, for example. It also carried a more complete array of Hispanic items — including cilantro, jicama, papaya, mango and jalapeño and Serrano peppers — than most of its rivals did. After all, Bashas' is the community grocer for the Phoenix area and it evolves as the community does. **pb**

GEORGIA GROWN PRODUCE

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The Dean Of Georgia Agriculture

In his 41st year as Commissioner for the Georgia Department of Agriculture, Tommy Irvin, sits down with **PRODUCE BUSINESS** to discuss the international expansion and success of the **Georgia Grown** program.

BY KEN HODGE

PB: Could you share some of the significant highlights and accomplishments during your long tenure that have helped make a difference for agriculture in the state?

Irvin: We have had a very active department. We went through the peanut butter scare and handled that marvelously. We got a lot of evidence for the FDA to use. I'm very proud of what we did there.

We were the first state in union to eradicate the boll weevil. Cotton came back like gangbusters in the state of Georgia.

We started the **Georgia Grown** program about 10 years ago. It has been a highly recognized part of our marketing effort to make our products more visible. People feel better when they buy produce locally. It's fresher and it stays fresh and enjoyable longer than if it comes from a greater distance. I know we've helped the growers with this program.

I was the first commissioner in the United States to advocate doing business with Cuba. I am going to continue pursuing that goal of making our Georgia-grown produce available to the Cuban people. It's a market that is very near to us and very visible. The last administration saw adverse political ramifications in doing business with Cuba, but our current president is very serious about helping us sell to the Cuban people. Cuba is a country that needs our produce and we need the business.

PB: Do your efforts to promote Georgia Grown in overseas markets stand out among the top accomplishments? What are the latest developments in the international arena when it comes to exporting Georgia produce items?

Irvin: Exports have been a long-time focus. I certainly think our efforts have been successful.

In addition to Cuba [as mentioned above], I see China, India, and other areas as being good markets for our produce.

We've been in Japan for years and it has become a big part of the world market. Whenever we sell to overseas markets, we find our products are favorably received once we have an

opportunity to get into an area and really develop that market.

In China, we have a part-time office open and we are working diligently to develop that market, too. We are selling a lot of products to China, especially our chicken. We need the market and they need our product.

Our office in Brussels has been highly successful. Corry Dewitt travels around to see our partners in Europe and Asia. She attends food shows all the way to St. Petersburg. She goes to Saudi Arabia and Dubai. She is a busy lady. Her efforts are making a huge difference.

With the economy the way it is in the United States, we need to do everything we can to extend our markets for agricultural products. Agriculture can lead us out of the recession we're in right now. History shows if a recession turns around, agriculture always takes the lead.

PB: Many people would not immediately identify Georgia as a major producer of fresh produce, but your department has probably been among the most aggressive about promoting local produce. Why do you place such a priority on produce?

Irvin: Go back and think about it. Nobody had ever heard of the Vidalia onion years ago. Today, that's the vegetable of the century. It has been a great, great success. We're out looking for things that have potential. If they have potential, we get behind it and really push it and it will fulfill our expectations.

We're fortunate here. We have one of the largest farmers' markets in the United States. It is just growing by leaps and bounds. Every tenant we have down there wants more space. We have a building program for enlarging the warehouse and the cooler space in order for them to do more business. It just keeps growing. We have money in our budgets and we're spending about \$2 million a year in expansion for the farmers' market and to help the tenants on the market as they're promoting produce.

PB: Can you tell us specifically how you've

seen Georgia produce items, such as peaches, pecans and Vidalia onions, grow over the years? These items are now powerhouse commodities and they are associated with Georgia on a national level. How did that come to be?

Irvin: We sold a lot of pecans last year to China. We're number one or two in the United States in production of pecans. This was a great success in China. Our pecans sold at a good price. A lot of our growers told me they had some of the best returns they had had in years on that product.

We'll have peaches available in June. If you have a good product and you make it available, the public will sell the product for you. Advertising has been terrific for us. People go into supermarkets now and ask for our products because our advertising had done such a good job.

PB: Currently there are 12 commodity commissions in Georgia and soon to be 13. In addition to the newly established Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Commission, there is also a new Blueberry Commission. Soon, there will be an Ornamental Horticulture Commission. It seems growers are looking for every advantage they can find to help them control production costs and remain competitive. How do you see the Department of Agriculture expanding its role as growers establish these commissions for the good of their respective industries?

Irvin: We have one of the best commodity acts in the nation. It's really been a big help to these industries.

Blueberries have come on like gangbusters. We are increasing our production by leaps and bounds every year. One fellow told me he put 800 acres into blueberries. He said he had the land and he thought blueberries would be the best use for it.

I'm retiring after this term. I'm very anxious that whoever takes my place will be committed to building on what we've done to promote Georgia agriculture and make it better for the growers. If we help these commodities and promote them, it helps the whole agriculture community. **GA**

GEORGIA GROWN PRODUCE

Is Everybody's Business



The Georgia Grown program helps farmers and consumers share a bountiful harvest.

BY KEN HODGE

Produce in Georgia is all about pride. Growers are proud of the quality fruit, vegetables and nuts they produce, and consumers are increasingly looking for locally grown produce they can feel good about buying, eating and sharing with friends. In the background, the Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) is diligently playing the role of matchmaker, seeking to bring consumers, family farmers and marketers together and sharing the news that good things to eat grow in Georgia.

"Locally grown has become a buzz word in supermarkets and retail locations," notes Commissioner Tommy Irvin of the GDA. "American consumers want to know if the fresh fruits and vegetables they buy are produced locally."

One way consumers can be sure they are buying locally grown produce is by looking for the bright, colorful **Georgia Grown** logo on fruits, vegetables and nuts. Created by the GDA, the logo is provided to producers, marketers and retailers to help spread the word that the Peach State offers more than

just famously sweet peaches. The **Georgia Grown** logo has also become visible in other states on the East Coast and even in international export markets, such as Canada.

The **Georgia Grown** program got its start just after the turn of the century when federal funding became available to assist producers of certain crops. In 2001, President Bush signed the agricultural economic assistance package authorizing the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide \$159.4 million to states to help support activities that promote agriculture, giving priority to specialty crops. Georgia was allocated \$3.2 million. Those funds were used to create the **Georgia Grown** program to assist specialty crop initiatives around the state.

The first monies were applied to creating the attractive logo. Some of the funds were also used to establish a retail and consumer pilot program with 149 Kroger supermarkets. The program later included other chains throughout the state. Participating supermarkets featured a special **Georgia Grown**



PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Georgia farmers, and residents alike, are proud of the bounty of fresh fruit and vegetables grown within the state.

section in their produce departments that included recipes.

The **Georgia Grown** program also advertised seasonal, specialty crops, such as Christmas trees, Vidalia onions, ornamental horticultural crops, honey, watermelons and specialty and gourmet foods on television.

THE FLAVOR OF GEORGIA

"We have a really superior taste," asserts Musella, GA-based Robert Dickey II, president of Dickey Farms Inc. "Peaches are all we grow. Our close proximity to the markets allows us to harvest at the peak of ripeness. Our peaches are the first ones on the market. We don't store them. We have good varieties that are adapted to our growing conditions and climate here in the Southeast."

"The retailers have done an excellent job of promoting locally grown peaches in the last few years," says Dickey. "The retailers in the Southeast have returned to wanting Georgia peaches, especially here in Georgia. We're not shipping as far away as we once did. A bigger percentage of our peaches are staying in the Southeast."

Peaches have been grown in Georgia since 1571 when they were introduced along the coast from Florida, but sales associate, Duke Lane III, agrees the fruit he grows has changed since his grandfather harvested fresh peaches on the family farm near Fort Valley, GA, the present site of Lane Packing LLC.

"We've probably turned over 50 percent of our varieties in the last 10 to 15 years," Lane explains. "The Flavorich peach is a good-eating,

early peach with good size. There are also other varieties, such as Scarlet Prince and July Prince, but we're not so much looking for varieties to start early. We just want good-eating peaches. We don't want to sacrifice taste just to get into the market early."

Lane agrees Georgia peaches taste better because they're so close to consumer outlets in the Southeast and along the East Coast. Tree ripened peaches simply have more sugars and better flavor, and a shorter trip to market means they don't lose as much of that flavor on trucks or in storage. "We focus primarily in the Southeast,"

he adds. "We do a little business in the Northeast, but we like to take care of our own backyard."

Lane reports Georgia peaches could be a bumper crop this year if the weather continues to cooperate. With a good supply, consumers should be able to enjoy the fruit they want and growers will be able to catch up after some weather-related surprises over the past two years. "We're cautiously optimistic," he says. "We're satisfied with the support retailers give us in promoting Georgia peaches and there's even a stronger movement



Reader Service # 41



this year than in years past pushing local produce. We're excited about it because we have things in the right place to make the most of this year's crop."

Sweet corn is another Georgia crop that has benefited from hybridization. At L.G. Herndon, Jr. Farms Inc., headquartered in Lyons, GA, owner Bo Herndon does everything he can to preserve every ounce of that sweetness for consumers to enjoy when they bring it home. "When the retailer gets that corn, it's good and cold and we keep the cold chain so the retailer gets the best quality," Herndon points out. "You have to pick corn and get it cooled. It keeps the freshness in and it eats better. Retailers know that and that's why they buy a lot of sweet corn with us."

Quality sweet corn starts with the harvest, according to Herndon. He has his own "mule trains" for harvesting crews and all sweet corn is hand-picked, as opposed to machine picking. "We handpick everything," he asserts. "That makes the corn better and more tender. Come to Georgia in June. We've got some new varieties we're trying this year that are sugar-enhanced. It's really going to be good for our customers."

"I feel like a lot more people are cooking today," Herndon continues. "They're not eating out like they were. They're staying home and cooking more and I think that is going to be an

asset to us with the kind of vegetables we grow."

SWEET VIDALIAS ARE A HIT

Georgians are also proud of the widely known and popular Vidalia onion, according to Wendy Brannen, executive director of the Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC) in Vidalia, GA. The onions have built their own reputation, but the **Georgia Grown** program is important in the committee's ongoing efforts to tell consumers more about these uncommonly sweet onions.

"In today's climate, **Georgia Grown** is more important than ever," Brannen insists. "Consumers want to purchase from their home state and even in their backyard, so to speak. **Georgia Grown** is very important in our marketing of Vidalia onions. Because of my personal state pride, we also throw other Georgia commodities into our marketing programs, such as our Georgia peach and Vidalia onion salad. We have another recipe with Georgia pecans and Vidalias. It's just a bit of goodwill and respect for other Georgia commodities that helps us work together. The state of Georgia certainly helps us and there is a trickle-down effect because all their marketing messages help us."

Despite the name and fame of Vidalia onions, Brannen says many consumers still do not know the familiar sweet globes come from Georgia and any onion classified as a Vidalia must be grown in

Georgia Commissions Help Promote Georgia Grown

In addition to the efforts of the Atlanta-based Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) to promote Georgia-grown produce, most producers in the state have established commodity commissions to improve their crops and promote the products they raise. "Most of our products are in some way represented by a marketing order," says Charles Hall, executive director of the Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA), in LaGrange. "We have a multitude of commodities we represent here in Georgia. The specialty crops industry here is larger than a billion-dollar industry every year."

Georgia growers aren't prone to wait around for things to improve on their own, and late last year, they formed the Georgia Commodity Commission for Vegetables to finance research for nine vegetables grown in the state. Those items to be included in research projects are: beans, squash, cucumbers, tomatoes, sweet corn, leafy greens, cantaloupe, bell peppers and cabbage. The research projects to be funded by grower assessments will not focus on a single produce item, but seeks to simultaneously improve two or more of those on the list, according to Hall. One project, for example, will focus on controlling white fly in cucumbers and beans.

More recently, blueberry growers in Georgia created a commission that will support both crop research and promotional activities, according to Joe Cornelius, chairman of the new blueberry commission. "My original intent was to fund horticultural research," Cornelius explains. "Now I see more of the money going toward uses for blueberries and their health benefits along with promotion and public education about blueberries."

Currently, there are 12 commodity commissions funded by grower assessments that focus on such crops as peaches, peanuts and pecans, according to Marcia Crowley, agriculture manager for the GDA. A thirteenth commission is currently in the formative stages for ornamental horticulture. "They are all grower-funded commissions that are run the same way," Crowley explains. "The growers help themselves. It is really a good system."



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Reader Service # 64

“We are seeing a growing consumer demand for Georgia-grown produce. It’s a grassroots movement and the demand is really exploding. It started with a few progressive chefs and has moved to retailers and institutions, such as universities and hospitals.”

***— Dee Dee Digby
Destiny Organics***

a specific area of the state. “We’re the champagne of onions,” she proudly proclaims. “We are trying to disseminate that message that Vidalia onions can only be grown in Georgia. Right now we are communicating with the Georgia Department of Agriculture about a TV program that could work well for Vidalias and other Georgia commodities. All of us have worked with the commissioner’s office. Vidalias have always been one of Commissioner Irvin’s babies. We’ve had a symbiotic relationship with him and the **Georgia Grown** initiative for years.”

Brannen says retailers can look forward this year to a nationwide Vidalia onion campaign with the message, “If it says Vidalia, you know it’s the original, sweet onion only from Georgia.” She adds the committee will also carry out promotions this year pairing sweet Vidalias with New York apples and also with A & W Root Beer.

John Shuman, president of Shuman Produce Inc. of Reidsville, GA, echoes Brannen’s pride in the Vidalia onion, saying they sell themselves, but also get a lot of marketing support from Georgia’s produce industry. “Vidalia onions enjoy national attention in season and receive strong ad support during the spring and summer,” he reports. “Retailers enjoy brisk movement on Vidalia onions when advertised in May and June with favorable positioning, such as end caps or large displays built around Memorial Day and other events.”

CONNECTING LOCAL GROWERS AND BUYERS

Georgia’s Southeastern location and mild climate make the state ideally suited for locally grown programs.

One Atlanta produce distributor that is focusing on the concept of locally grown, sustainable fruits and vegetables for Georgia citizens is Destiny Organics LLC, a produce wholesaler located at the Atlanta State Farmers Market in Forest Park, GA. “We are seeing a growing consumer demand for Georgia-grown produce,” says Dee Dee Digby, founder, president and CEO of Destiny Organics. “It’s a grassroots movement and the demand is really exploding. It started with a few progressive chefs and has moved to retailers and institutions,

such as universities and hospitals. Destiny Organics is the vendor of choice for Emory University in its sustainability initiative, one of the most progres-

Georgia Grown Sells

The **Georgia Grown** program resulted in significant increases in sales of Georgia produce, claim suppliers who have taken advantage of using the logo. Many producers participated by putting the distinctive logo on their shipping containers, enhancing the feeling of pride in local produce that already existed in the state.

“Pretty much all the retailers in Georgia are participating in the **Georgia Grown** program, as far as using the logo as a promotion,” reports Adam Lytch, grower development specialist at Raleigh, NC-based L & M Companies Inc., a fully integrated, year-round supplier of fresh fruits and vegetables, which handles Georgia produce in season. “The Georgia Department of Agriculture has done a great job of getting out to the retailers and providing in-store materials. We work with several retailers and let them know when these products will become available. Several of them use **Georgia Grown** signage to promote the product on the shelf. It gives our products a boost.”

“I think the interesting thing about Georgia produce is that the items are available during two of the biggest holidays, Memorial Day and the Fourth of July,” Lytch continues. “Sweet corn, peaches, cantaloupes, watermelons, Vidalia onions and items for grilling are all available — everything that is in heavy demand during those two main holidays. Memorial Day kicks off the summer and retailers make a big push in the weeks leading up to the Fourth of July.”

Pride in **Georgia Grown** is everywhere. One example is the way the conversation often turns to flavor and sweetness when Georgia producers talk about their fruits and vegetables. Many local crops, including southern vegetables, are grown with flavor in mind, and growers proudly tout the

sive in the country.”

Located in Atlanta, Emory University defines sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations.”

The university’s vision requires 75 percent of the produce and other food products used in its hospitals and cafeterias will be local or sustainably grown by 2015. Highest priority will be given to establishing relationships with Georgia farmers, preferably those closest to the university.

Established in 2001, Destiny Organics has been a big supporter of all **Georgia Grown** events, according to Digby. “There is a lot of buzz about local and organic,” she reasons. “This is driving foodservice operators and retailers to look for these products. We’re lucky in Georgia — the mild climate makes it possible to grow almost all

sweetness of their items such as peaches, onions, carrots, blueberries, cantaloupes, watermelons and sweet corn.

Science backs them up, since soil testing has shown sandy soils typical of Georgia’s coastal plains are low in sulfur, a nutrient that contributes to pungency. In fact, some growers even add sulfur to make up the deficit for crops that need it, but the soil’s excellent drainage prevents excessive fertilizer buildup that can affect flavor, according to Jamie Brannen, vice president of Gerrald’s Vidalia Sweet Onions Inc., in Statesboro, GA.

“We grow Vidalia onions, watermelons and carrots,” Brannen reports. “We have wonderful onions and watermelons and our carrots have been a new crop for us. We absolutely feel they are sweeter because our soil leaches more than other soils. If you put chemicals in the soil, when it rains, they’re basically gone. It makes a sweeter-tasting carrot and we’re very proud of it.

“We grow wonderful onions, too,” Brannen continues. “We’ve been growing Vidalias since 1983. We grow, pack and ship all of our own products. We have a huge investment in packing sheds for the carrots. Everything has to be stainless steel, which is why carrots are a huge deal to get into financially.”

Growers in the state have also had plenty of help from plant breeders in producing flavorful fruits and vegetables. Consider Georgia’s nickname. It quickly becomes obvious to tourists in Atlanta that the many streets with the word “peach” in their names are simply an unabashed expression of pride for one of the state’s most high-profile crops. Today, the Peach State is actually third in the nation in peach acreage, but Georgia growers will always tell you their fruit has the best flavor.





year long. Crops from Georgia include everything from carrots to collards, snow peas to squash, pecans, melons, bok choy, turnips, lettuces and herbs.

"Buyers and consumers love the fact that so many good things are coming out of Georgia, especially when it comes to organics," Digby elaborates. "We are centrally located in the Southeast, which allows all of our neighboring states to take advantage of the fact that Georgia's produce is local. Our customers know the Georgia Grown label sells the produce. They're very

proactive about using it in their point-of-sale and other marketing material. We also support them by providing marketing materials."

Another wholesaler at the Atlanta farmers market that supports the Georgia Grown program is Atlanta-based General Produce Inc., where sales and procurement manager, Andrew Scott, says freshness is an important advantage to marketing Georgia fruits and vegetables in the East due to the state's proximity to eastern markets. "We deliver to 11 states overnight out of Atlanta with our own trucks," Scott emphasizes. "It's an advantage to be in Georgia. The growing areas are all

MCINTOSH APPLE & VIDALIA® ONION SLAW

Like most slaws, this one benefits from being made several hours in advance, which allows the flavors to meld and the texture of the cabbage to become tender.

2 medium carrots	1/4 cup ketchup
1 medium Vidalia® Onion	2 tablespoons lemon juice
4 cups thinly sliced red cabbage	1/2 teaspoon salt
2 large McIntosh Apples	1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2/3 cup light mayonnaise	1/2 cup finely chopped fresh parsley
2/3 cup light sour cream	

Coarsely grate the carrots and Vidalia Onion into a large bowl. Add the cabbage. Core and dice the apples; add to cabbage mixture. Mix together the mayonnaise, sour cream, ketchup, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Stir into the slaw, mixing well. Refrigerate slaw for at least one hour. Stir in parsley just before serving.

Nutrition information per serving - 146 calories, 2g protein, 22g carbohydrates, 2g saturated fat, 4g unsaturated fat, 2g fiber, 12mg cholesterol, and 400mg sodium.

Makes 8 servings



IMAGE COURTESY OF VIDALIA ONION COMMITTEE

This year, one of the Vidalia Onion Committee's promotion includes pairing the sweet onions with New York apples.

within 200 miles of us. We pick up all our own products. You've heard people talk about food miles. That's a big deal for us."

FRESH FROM THE FARM

"Our peaches are just 150 miles away, while California is 2,300 miles," Scott adds. "Our crop should be good this year. They are tree-ripened. It makes a difference in flavor when it gets to the consumer. I think our southern peaches are so much better than others on the market and we always try to support Georgia Grown. We go through about a load of peaches a day when they're really rocking. Tree ripened fruit is just better. They still have the peach fuzz on them. With peaches from more distant areas, you don't see the peach fuzz on them. We're also beginning to get Georgia-grown nectarines."

The same relationship between flavor and freshness is true for the flavorful Athena variety of cantaloupe grown in Georgia and other eastern states, according to Scott. "Cantaloupes are very popular," he points out. "We sell truckloads of bins. The Athena is more of a musk melon. They have excellent flavor. The advantage in getting them from Georgia is they are cut in the field one day and they are at our place the same night or the next morning. They're just in better shape because they aren't on the road so long and they don't travel as far."

Handling produce properly after pickup at the packinghouse is an important factor that goes hand-in-hand with rapid delivery, according to Scott. "We don't break the cold chain," he asserts. "We have a refrigerated receiving area we keep at 38° to 40° F.

General Produce handles pecans, collard greens, cucumbers, green beans, sweet corn, zucchini, okra, eggplant, bell peppers and, of course, Vidalia onions. "Vidalia onions have almost become a category by themselves," Scott reasons. "Cukes and green beans are big items, as well as sweet corn around the Fourth of July. We're starting to see some strawberries grown here, too.



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Reader Service # 4

“The Georgia Department of Agriculture promotes all the growers in South Georgia really well with the retailers. They distribute information that explains the seasons for all of our crops and when each variety will be available.”

*— Violet Corbett
South Georgia Produce Inc.*

Being a wholesaler, we buy a lot on speculation. We have to have the right price and the right quality. We had a good year last year and a good first quarter this year. You hear so much doom and gloom about the economy, but we're doing really well holding our own."

Michael Hively, general manager and chief financial officer of Vidalia onion producer, Bland Farms LLC, based in Glennville, GA, adds his enthusiasm for the **Georgia Grown** program and the growing demand for locally grown, sustainable fruits and vegetables.

CONTINUED GROWTH IN ORGANICS

"Retailers in the Southeast support **Georgia Grown** products very well," acknowledges Hively. "I know we get as much unity in the Southeast as there is any place, as far as supporting agriculture. With the economy the way it is, organics have slowed down their growth somewhat. They are a little higher in price for consumers than regular produce. But, with that said, organics are growing each year." He reports Bland Farms recently acquired an organic onion operation in Utah as part of its program to supply both conventional and organic onions to retailers year-round.

Georgia-grown fruits and vegetables are also part of a year-round program at Rosemont Farms Corp. of Boca Raton, FL, the exclusive sales and marketing firm for Lewis Taylor Farms of Tifton, GA. The firm supplies peppers, yellow and green squash, cucumbers, specialty/hot peppers, broccoli, eggplant, greens, cabbage and Athena melons to buyers. According to Daniel Whittles, director of marketing and product development for Rosemont, "Our Georgia-grown products are an important component of our year-long supply chain with most of these categories. It is always good to get consumers excited about locally grown product. The **Georgia Grown** program works especially well within the region, and some of our customers feature our growers and farms within their store advertising, as well as on television and in over-air promotions."

Whittles says specialty peppers continue to be a growth category for Rosemont Farms, and one that is expected to continue its upward sales

trend. However, specialty peppers are not sold in the same volumes as bell peppers or cucumbers.

"Our Athena melon program continues to see tremendous growth with an ever-expanding following," reports Whittles. "We have increased our acreage and continue to employ a best-in-its-class cooling and handling methodology for the entire East Coast. We are experimenting with some complementary varieties this year, which have even higher Brix and even better shelf life.

"Our customers are very excited about this

season," Whittles continues. "It is a benefit to retailers when they support locally grown produce. Transportation costs are lower and they will see better shelf life for most products. It is the ultimate win-win for growers, customers and consumers."



NEW CROPS ON THE SCENE

In the case of green beans, Georgia is simply a great place to grow them, asserts Taylor Neighbors, president and CEO of Magnolia Packing Inc., headquartered in Americus, GA. "We have excellent soil here in Georgia," he emphasizes. "That's why we came to Americus. We're on the northern end of the growing areas in Georgia, but we're south of the frost line. We have a longer growing season than Florida. Our soil conditions are ideal for green beans in this particular three- to four-county area. Peppers and other items are better suited to South Georgia, but Americus is in just the right place for beans."

"The **Georgia Grown** label helps," admits Neighbors. "I'm glad to have gotten on the bandwagon to do it. Georgia is a very viable place for growing vegetables. **Georgia Grown** works to our

Retailers Support Georgia Grown

Retail support for locally grown product has been key to the success of the **Georgia Grown** program, according to Kent Wolfe, marketing and finance specialist for the Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development (CAED), a unit of the University of Georgia's College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences with three different campuses, located in Athens, Griffin and Tifton.

"What we're seeing in Georgia is that a lot of people are looking for locally grown products," Wolfe asserts. "With concerns about food scares and carbon footprints, I think a lot of people are more concerned about what they're eating. There has also been a push to support local farmers. Some communities want to keep some green space around their neighborhoods and connect with farmers."

Wolfe adds Cincinnati, OH-based Kroger Co. and other food retailers continue to support the **Georgia Grown** program. He notes Wal-Mart now has a sustainable food program and wants to reduce the chain's carbon footprint, a measure of the impact human activities have on the environment according to the amount of greenhouse gases produced.

Locally grown produce is an important ingredient in the produce department at Kroger, according to Glynn Jenkins, director of commu-

nications and public relations for The Kroger Company's Atlanta Division. "Kroger Atlanta Division purchases produce from local growers to provide our customers with the freshest, most nutritious produce available in the Southeast," Jenkins explains. "Consumers also recognize that purchasing vegetables and fruits grown by local farmers has significant advantages, including helping the economy in the communities we serve and delivering produce to our stores much more quickly."

"Faster shipping means even fresher produce because the items are picked and packed at a more mature stage, which brings out the flavor of the product," Jenkins elaborates. "Locally grown food also means less fossil fuel burned during preparation and transport — and less energy needed to refrigerate during transportation, which promotes sustainability as well."

As the program at Wal-Mart indicates, sustainability is also a consideration in the **Georgia Grown** program, which includes organically grown produce items, as well as those grown more conventionally.


Part of the work Wolfe and the Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development have been doing is presenting workshops to help Georgia growers succeed in the direct marketing of their homegrown — and frequently organic — produce.



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advantage.”

Growers in Georgia are always quick to adopt the latest technology and growing practices and to embrace new crops.

Along with the squash, cucumbers, eggplant, sweet corn, cabbage and mixed vegetables they grow, green beans will be a new crop at South Georgia Produce Inc., in Lake Park, GA, near the Florida border, according to Violet Corbett, co-owner of the company. “By the fall season, we’ll be doing beans,” she says. “We’re putting in a bean line and we’ll be growing them on some land right here that has been previously used for peanuts, which will make a good rotation crop with beans.”

Corbett believes Georgia has become a prominent produce state due to the **Georgia Grown** program, which has resulted in excellent advertising for the state. “The rest of the country knows that we have high quality produce,” she explains. “The Georgia Department of Agriculture promotes all the growers in South Georgia really well with the retailers. They distribute information that explains the seasons for all of our crops and when each variety will be available. They hold tours and they work well with us trying to promote our produce. All of our boxes have the **Georgia Grown** label on them.”

Another relatively new crop for Georgia is broccoli, according to L & M Companies’ Lytch. Ordinarily associated with California, this vegetable is one of several growth items currently carried by the company. “Everybody knows about peaches, cantaloupes and watermelons from Georgia, but broccoli is a new item,” he asserts. “We’ve been growing broccoli in Georgia for six or seven years, and it is growing in popularity. There are many retailers with distribution centers in Georgia that have shown a great deal of interest and have been choosing Georgia broccoli, rather than sourcing it from California. It’s an item that is experiencing sales growth.”

CONSUMERS DEMAND BLUEBERRIES

Lytch echoes the enthusiasm about Georgia carrots, and also notes that blueberries are another growth item in Georgia’s repertoire.

Blueberry grower, Joe Cornelius of Manor, GA, agrees the blueberry deal is becoming exciting and producers are ramping up their acreage to meet growing consumer demand for the healthful item. “What’s going on in Georgia is going on all over the industry,” Cornelius explains. “There’s a chance we can double or triple our tonnage in the

next five years. We’ve already doubled it in the last five. We had a crop of about 20 million pounds five years ago and this year we’re expecting about 40 million pounds. This industry is all about the growers trying to get the consumer all the products we can at a reasonable cost and at the best quality.”

At L & M Companies, Lytch says the company is working to connect Georgia consumers with locally grown produce from their state. He notes the company arranges for local growers to make appearances in supermarkets with one or more of their homegrown products. “It is popular with consumers,” he remarks. “The farmers talk about their products and they can have several items on the shelf at the same time.”

Acquainting consumers with producers is something the LaGrange-based Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA) encour-



Both retailers and consumers within Georgia prefer Georgia-grown products when they are available.

ages members to do, according to Charles Hall, executive director. “We encourage growers to use the **Georgia Grown** brand on their products as promotional activities,” Hall says. “Consumers have said they are willing to pay a premium for locally grown produce. A study by the University of Georgia showed that premium was between 10 and 12 percent. There are a lot of retailers that do promotions with locally grown produce and we are sure we’ll see more of the locally grown concept used in the marketplace. The **Georgia Grown** reputation is a good one. Our quality is very good. Our growers are good. They put forth a great effort.”

GA

More GEORGIA GROWERS Adopt Food Safety Standards



Growers in Georgia are doing their best every year to produce flavorful and nutritious fruits and vegetables for consumers. They're also voluntarily adopting practices on their farms and in their packinghouses to make sure these products are safe for consumers.

As food safety incidents related to certain produce items have occurred in recent years, Georgia growers have embraced good agricultural practices (GAPs) to help avoid potential microbial hazards, says Beth Bland, food safety program coordinator for the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA), headquartered in LaGrange. "We have a regional food safety program we participate in called the Georgia Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Food Safety Program," she reports. "It is a very good third-party auditing program. It is a service, and GFVGA members can choose to participate."

The Georgia program has been established to verify that participating growers are using GAPs during production, packing and shipping of their produce. Participating growers are required to employ sanitary handling and packing methods, take precautions necessary for food security and implement environmentally safe practices. Additionally, they are required to use tested water in growing and packing fruits and vegetables and to be sure their work environment is safe and healthy for employees.

Currently, GAPs are not federally mandated, according to Bland. While Florida has mandated a food safety program in its tomato industry, Georgia growers are adopting safe production practices on their own. They continue to modify their program to stay abreast of and satisfy new scientific criteria as it develops. "The Georgia GAP program is changing on an as-needed basis," Bland adds. "Everything is science-based and we are constantly updating the audit process to keep up with new or up-to-date science."

Bland explains the auditing process in detail. "We have one auditing firm that does the audits," she notes. "That one firm is Primus-certified, GLOBALGAP-certified and Georgia GAP-certified. As an association, we can help any of our members establish a food safety program and prepare for any audit."

While the GFVGA program is voluntary, most retail and foodservice buyers are now requiring that their produce providers have some sort of certification in food safety, reports Bland. Third-party GAP certification offers a way for growers to let buyers know they employ appropriate food

safety practices on their farms. According to Bland, different buyers often require different types of audits, and that is creating challenges for growers who are selling to more than one buyer, especially when they all specify a different audit or third-party auditing firm. "The audits are good things, but the concern is that many growers have to pay for multiple audits in order to supply several customers," GFVGA's Bland explains. "It is a cost burden for growers. Even if you are larger producer, it may be difficult to absorb the cost of four or five different audits. The average cost is about \$1,400 and the growers are not being compensated, even in the slightest. It can be a bit of a problem, especially when buyers aren't giving producers any more for their produce after it has been audited and certified."

While the GFVGA program is voluntary for growers in the state, the organization continues to work with a variety of entities to spread the word about food safety

The Georgia GAP program also includes good manufacturing practices (GMPs). GAPs focus on safe production of fruits and vegetables in the field, while GMPs focus on proper food safety practices in the packinghouse. "I would estimate 20 percent of our farmers use the Georgia GAP program, but I would estimate probably 60 to 70 percent of Georgia producers have some sort of food safety program in place," reasons Bland. "They can go through USDA or many other organizations to set up and evaluate their programs. It does not have to be through us."

While the GFVGA program is voluntary for growers in the state, the organization continues to work with a variety of entities to spread the word about food safety to all growers and to foster a climate of good practices to ensure safe food for consumers. "We work closely with the Georgia Cooperative Extension Service, as well as those in other states, to train their extension officers in food safety and the implementation of food safety programs on the farm and in packing facilities," she adds. "We are approaching multiple groups and offering a lot of educational information, as well as doing a lot of one-on-one farm visits."

One Georgia Vidalia onion producer who recognizes the need for food safety practices to meet

the needs of retailers and foodservice operators is Bland Farms, headquartered in Glennville, GA. Michael Hively, general manager, says the large producer and packer tries to stay "ahead of the curve" by adopting and implementing adequate food safety measures before deadlines are reached. "Food safety and traceability are the biggest, most important things that are affecting us right now," Hively acknowledges. "We are focusing on our GS1 traceability standards this year. We're very up-to-date on all our food safety issues and we're focusing on traceability and making sure we have all our checks and balances in place with our entire program."

Hively says Bland Farms currently works with three third-party auditing firms for food safety certification that meets the needs of all buyers. He agrees there is a need for cooperation within the entire food industry to coordinate and standardize the requirements buyers dictate to ensure the safety of the foods they sell to consumers. A single, universal set of food safety standards would help streamline producers' efforts and even reduce their costs of certification. "I think it's a matter of providing a standard for who is certifying the certifiers," Hively reasons. "It should be just like the program for certifying public accountants. There is one standard in all 50 states. By standardizing and having all these certifiers come together, I think we can have a more unified certification program."

Thanks to the risks of food-borne pathogens, food safety practices are being adopted for virtually every produce item — even slick, shiny watermelons — and some standardization is already afoot to make food safety practices universally available and accessible for all. "We have to jump through all the hoops for the chains," says Charles M. "Buddy" Leger, secretary and treasurer of Leger & Son Inc., in Cordele, GA. "It's not a bad idea; it's a good idea. It helps you keep from having a problem, but if you have a problem, you can pinpoint it. We just started washing our watermelons in the last three or four years," he continues. "The rind is different on a watermelon. It wouldn't hold bacteria like a cantaloupe because the cantaloupe has a net on the rind. But it's good to wash watermelons. If you do, you know they won't carry any bacteria. You have to have your fields and your packinghouse certified."

As a further food safety precaution — and a service to consumers — Leger & Son launched a traceability program last year with HarvestMark, a web-based service that issues bar-coded labels for cartons and even individual melons making them easily traceable for buyers and consumers. **GA**

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Make Your Summer Merchandising Hot, Hot, Hot

Focus on holidays and traditions to promote summer's bounty.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Merchandising fresh fruits and vegetables in the supermarket's produce department can be a tough sell during the summer, but when done correctly, well worth the effort.

Farmer's markets and backyard gardens are compelling competition, while some consumers skip shopping altogether as they head off on family vacations. The trick to sizzling sales during this season of plenty is to offer customers a one-stop destination for everything from locally grown and in-season fruits and vegetables to fast-fixing and on-the-go solutions using summer holiday themes.

Produce supervisor, Jim Weber, uses this theory at Econo Foods, an independent 6-store chain based in Iron Mountain, WI. "There's an abundance of product during the summer that makes it easy to build big, colorful displays that really add excitement to the produce department. At the same time, you have to give customers the quality, flavor and price they expect and that goes with the territory of this season."

ditional first tastes of summer in Ohio is a fresh-sliced radish sandwich. A lot of chains in the region will put the 6-ounce cello bags or even the bunch radishes with tops on sale for Memorial Day. We start harvesting mid-May and run into September, but peak volumes are available from Fourth of July to Labor Day."

Vidalia onions, sweet corn, leafy greens, iceberg lettuce, and fresh-cut celery are abundant in early summer, says Nichole Towell, marketing development manager for Duda Farm Fresh Foods Inc., based in Oviedo, FL. "Provide recipes at point-of-purchase that drive consumption with new ways to use various fresh produce. Cross-merchandising is always a good way to promote the consumption of fresh produce. In addition, provide product demonstrations and samples of 'peak of season' items," she suggests. "Finally, back page advertisements within the chains' ad page, as well as 'buy one get one free' promotions will result in large dollar and volume lifts and positively impact the entire produce department."

Zucchini squash is abundant from May through July from Baloian Farms, in Fresno, CA. "We offer Extra Fancy, Long Fancy and Short Fancy pack styles," says Julie Baloian, who works in sales. "Most growers do not split up the 'long and short'

Freida's offers this patriotic, mixed bag of potatoes for Independence Day.



Photo courtesy of Frieda's

CELEBRATE THE FIRST DAY OF SUMMER: June 21

According to Loren Buurma, family owner of Buurma Farms Inc., in Willard, OH, "One of the tra-

fancy, but we feel there is an advantage to offer this for all of our customers."

Eggplant is also abundant from late May to September, and green bell peppers — Baloian Farm's main commodity — peaks in production from the Fresno area in June and July. Baloian reveals, "We place, pack, PLU-sticker and tissue-wrap our eggplant. It's a delicate commodity and we handle it with care."

Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA, knows one sure sign of summer is fresh melons. "We're looking forward to a fabulous melon season, especially being able to offer specialty melons such as Charentais," she declares. The company offers other specialty melons, such as the green-orange-fleshed Cotton Candy, the sugary-sweet, orange-fleshed Sweetie and the pale-fleshed Camouflage, named for its yellow and green striped skin.

Honeydews and cantaloupes start in June, says Rob O'Rourke, senior vice president of business development for RJO Produce Marketing, headquartered in Fresno, CA. "They peak in supply from mid-July through mid-September."

PROMOTE GRILLING PRODUCE: Father's Day, June 21

The third Sunday in June marks Father's Day. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2008, there were an estimated 64.3 million fathers. Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce Inc., in Los Angeles, CA, remarks, "This is the holiday everyone pictures Dad behind the grill."

Three out of four households own a grill, according to the National Barbecue Association (NBBQA), in Austin, TX. The NBBQA reports the most popular foods for the grill are hamburgers, steak, hot dogs and chicken breasts, while chicken parts, pork chops, ribs and sausages are also favorites.

Fresh vegetables and fruits are finding their way to the grill, too. Duda's Towell advises, "Cross-promote fresh vegetables with center-of-the-plate protein items found in the meat or deli counters with a grill or outdoor cooking theme."

Tree fruits, melons and pineapple are great on the grill, adds Schueller. "The heat caramelizes the fruit's natural sugars."

As for vegetables, Schueller continues, "Bell peppers, zucchini, summer squash, specialty onions, such as Maui, and variety potatoes, such as Dutch yellows, fingerlings and gemstones, also work well on the grill. So do artichokes. This is a trendy item now for the grill, but it still needs a lot of consumer education. End cap displays, promo-

tional ads and signage or POS that explains how artichokes are grilled are successful."

Another popular item synonymous with the grill is Portobello mushrooms, something retailers have seen over the years as a cue from foodservice. Joe Caldwell, vice president at Monterey Mushrooms Inc., in Watsonville, CA, notes, "It's important to maintain variety in summertime promotions. Sure, Portobellos are most popular for summer grilling, but our thick-cut Steak Mate mushrooms pair well on the grill with steaks, and sliced, white mushrooms are popular on salads. We've seen retailers that only push Ports in the summer see their total category go down. Remember that whites are 80 percent of category sales."

When advertising Portobello mushrooms, Caldwell advises, "Consider a bulk Portobello promotion. Sell by the 'each' and price at 99-cents. Bulk moves faster. Consumers have flexibility in selecting their mushrooms and the price point looks attractive."

INDEPENDENCE DAY: July 4

Parades, fireworks and especially backyard barbecues mark the celebration of Independence Day across the nation. Melissa's Schueller says, "This is another significant summer barbecue holiday. It is also a popular time for entertaining, picnicking and snacking, so items such as guacamole and salsa, variety melon, tree fruit, watermelon and grapes are wonderful options to merchandize and promote."

Many retailers feature an entertaining section within the produce department, discloses Frieda's Caplan. "This is an ideal spot for veggie and cut-fruit trays."

Mann Packing Co. Inc., based in Salinas, CA, offers its 18- and 40-ounce vegetable platters in summer holiday packaging that features a two-tone blue background with white shooting stars. The trays contain washed and ready-to-eat broccoli, carrots, sugar snap peas, celery and tomatoes with ranch dip.

In addition, Frieda's offers its Star Spangled Spuds, a mix of Purple Potatoes, Yukon Gold and Red Potatoes in patriotic, 2-pound mesh bags for the Fourth of July. There's an on-bag recipe for Star Spangled Spuds Potato Salad that calls for ingredients that can be cross-merchandized near the potatoes, such as green onions, sour cream, mayonnaise and blue cheese.

Strawberries and blueberries, along with whipped cream and pound cake, are cross-merchandising promotions that easily tie into this red-white-and-blue holiday. Jim Grabowski, marketing manager for Watsonville, CA-based Well-Pict Inc., maintains,

"July is a big volume time for strawberries and blueberries, as well as for blackberries. With strawberries, we like to encourage retailers to carry a full line of berries, which includes 1-, 2- and 4-pound clamshells."

In the summer, the berry category can be the department leader in sales and profits per-square-foot, says Gloria Chillon, director of marketing for Watsonville, CA-based Driscoll Strawberry Associates Inc. "A great strategy is to move the berry patch from the store to the home. Buy one get one free is a frequent promotional strategy. Try expanding that concept to multiple berry purchases — buy two raspberries and get a strawberry free. When customers try the idea of buying and using multiple berries in common situations — on cereal in the morning or with cottage cheese as a snack — they will continue to do so, even when not on promotion."

Chillon adds, "Since berries are the first new fruit of the year — a sign of springtime if you will — there is sometimes a tendency to feature the summer fruits and de-emphasize the berry category. Savvy retailers, though, will keep the berry patch in a strong display location virtually year-round and then drop in an ad feature every so often to keep things moving."

Watermelon is one of those fruits, though available year-round, that are synonymous with summer. In fact, says Gordon Hunt,

Jungle Jim's Labor Day

Locally grown produce is a big part of the Labor Day promotions at Jungle Jim's International Market, a single, specialty supermarket, in Fairfield, OH, where the produce department is 1-acre in size. For example, last year, Ohio-grown sweet corn was on sale 10-for-\$2. "We set up big trash cans with liners right by the display and let customers shuck their own," explains Dave Brassart, general manager for produce and floral. "About 75 percent of customers opt to do this. We sell strawberries the same way — pick your own. You get fewer complaints that way." Jungle Jim's offers tips to its customers on freezing fresh corn to encourage customers to stock up before seasonal supplies decline and prices increase.

Indiana-grown watermelons were also part of the store's Labor Day promotions last year, with cuts selling for 29-cents per pound. "We buy from several of the local Amish farmers and spec for flavor and sugar content, not price," says Brassart. "We'll set up some 30 bins with 22- to 24-pound watermelons and it flies out the door, especially if we sample it."

pb



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director of marketing for the Orlando, FL-based National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB), "July was designated by Congress in 2007 as National Watermelon Month." In honor of this designation, the NWPB is offering a display contest that will run across the United States and Canada during the month of July. Hunt explains, "To enter the contest, simply create an attention-getting display that promotes watermelon of any kind. Remember to include selection and storage tips for your customers, and even some versatility tips, such as watermelon recipes and carving ideas." The grand prize winner will win an expense-paid trip for two to the NWA Convention in 2010.

BOUNTY OF SUMMER FRUITS: July & August

Berries, tree fruits, grapes, melons and cherries are among the Top 10 dollar providers to the produce department during the summer, collectively contributing 26.9 percent of total produce sales, according to Perishables Group FreshFacts data.

The key to profitably merchandising summer fruits, says RJO's O'Rourke, "is offering consumers consistent high quality,

B&R Stores Celebrates Fourth Of July With Watermelon

Fourth of July means watermelon at B & R Stores Inc., an 18-unit chain headquartered in Lincoln, NE, and operated under the Super Saver and Russ's Market banners.

Randy Bohaty, produce director, explains, "We'll promote whole watermelon for a low price as well as offer mini melons, cuts like halves and quarters, and both yellow and orange flesh. It's 95 percent a seedless market, but we do carry some seeded for those who like the flavor and texture. We also carry a local, heirloom-type watermelon that has a uniform, deep green exterior without the familiar stripes. It has its niche following among our customers."

There are no excessive POS materials in the chain's holiday displays. "We believe in building big 'wow' displays, in the front of the store right as you walk in, and let the product sell itself," says Bohaty. **pb**

giving the fruit the right position and price, and signing it to sell. Sales will fall if you're missing any one of these." As for pricing, O'Rourke adds, "Sometimes, sacrificing mar-

gin percent for more margin dollars can improve your bottom line overall. Value is important — good quality for a fair price. Lower quality will run you into trouble."

Cherries are one of the last truly seasonal categories in the produce department. O'Rourke remarks, "Weather created a crop shortage last year, so there's a lot of focus on the 2009 crop."

Cherries are high demand fruit in the summer, however household penetration is low, says Loren Queen, marketing and communications manager for Domex Superfresh Growers, in Yakima, WA. "Just over 27 percent of people in the United States are purchasing cherries on an annual basis. This reveals the tremendous growth potential that cherries still have in the marketplace."

One of the biggest barriers to successful cherry sales is visibility. "It's critical to get cherries in front of consumers and let them know they are available," adds Queen. "You can do this with the use of signage, announcing, 'Cherries are here!' in a prominent spot in the department or even the front window of the store."

According to Perishables Group data as provided by Northwest Cherry Growers, based in Yakima, WA, stores with the best cherry sales maintain high traffic cherry dis-

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Reader Service # 48

Reader Service # 66

GROWING WATERMELON SALES With Unique Promotions

This year retailers and foodservice operators really have a chance to showcase the versatility and value of this mouth-watering product. With some unique promotion tools you can grow watermelon sales as well as provide a valuable service and fun experience for your customers.



VERSATILITY AND VALUE DRIVE SALES

Watermelon's versatility is astounding and it can be incorporated into a variety of products to be promoted to customers. Cross-merchandising opportunities and incremental sales of complementing items abound with this great fruit. Its versatility also applies to its customer base. Watermelon is enjoyed by people of all ages – adults and kids alike enjoy the sweet flavor and fun presentations, so be sure to merchandise and promote to a wide demographic.

In these tight economic times when consumers are looking for value, watermelon is a tremendous deal. Retailers and foodservice operators can promote the value proposition of this beneficial fruit by listing pricing on a per-pound or even per-serving basis. Educating consumers on the real value will increase sales.

On a per-pound basis, watermelon is the cheapest item in the produce section. Additionally, 70 percent of a watermelon is edible and 30 percent is comprised of the rind. For an average 20 pound watermelon priced at approximately \$6.00, 14 pounds is usable watermelon which equals approximately 28 cups at \$0.21 per cup. A whole 20 pound watermelon cut into 2 pound slices results in approximately \$0.60 per slice.

QUEENS BRING EXCITEMENT TO PROMOTIONS

More and more retailers are using the watermelon queens to create interest and educational opportunities in-store. The queens are trained in presenting watermelon's health benefits and value message to consumers and are available for in-store demonstrations year round where they create a lot of excitement and attract a wide variety of customers. This year's group of watermelon queens was treated to some special learning from two very special guests, Art Ginsburg, A.K.A. Mr. Food, and the 1999 Miss America Nicole Johnson.



The annual media training allows the queens to network and build excitement and energy for watermelon promotions throughout the country in the coming year. The training component includes conducting in-store demonstrations, food safety and serving watermelon at special events, a download session with Mr. Food, and an insightful view from Miss Johnson on how to make the most of being a representative and how to sincerely be your best for the watermelon industry.



RETAIL CONTEST CELEBRATES NATIONAL WATERMELON MONTH IN JULY

July is a great time to promote watermelon for summer barbecues, picnics or as an everyday snack for the kids. Retailers can capitalize on some exceptional recipes available for them to share with consumers. This is also a fantastic time to utilize an in-store Watermelon Queen promotion (see below, left).

In honor of National Watermelon Month, a continent-wide display contest will be run across the U.S. and Canada during the month of July. The object of this promotion is to increase watermelon sales and build consumer awareness of the health benefits and innovative usage of watermelon. The specific goal of the contest is to increase watermelon sales throughout the month of July. The contest is open to all retailers for displays done at anytime during the month of July. The contest is being promoted by the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) and the National Water-

melon Association (NWA), by state and regional watermelon associations and by retail merchandising representatives. Participants have a chance to win cash and a grand prize trip for two, including many second and third place regional cash prizes.

- To enter the National Watermelon Month Display Contest, simply create an attention-getting display that promotes watermelon of any kind!
- All retail produce departments are eligible in the U.S. and Canada
- Remember to include selection and storage tips for your customers, and even some versatility tips such as watermelon recipes and carving ideas
- Read and follow the contest rules regarding completion of the entry form, all at the retailer section of www.watermelon.org

NEW BLOG LAUNCHED - WhatAboutWatermelon.com

A new blog called What About Watermelon and accessible at watermelon.org, is part of an ongoing effort by the NWPB to help Americans fall in love with this juicy product all over again and offer culinary inspiration by portraying watermelon as an ingredient in everything from pancakes to pasta.

Updated two to three times each week, What About Watermelon will feature watermelon recipes, news and facts — from why knocking on a watermelon to determine ripeness doesn't work to an inside look at life on a watermelon farm. The blog will also host monthly polls, award watermelon-related prizes to comments chosen at random, and host a panel of watermelon experts, including a chef, a nutritionist, a farmer, and the National Watermelon Queen herself. Readers can e-mail questions to any panelist and receive personalized answers.

Chef Harry Schwartz serves as the blog's expert for all things cooking and kitchen related. Schwartz, or "Chef Harry" as he prefers to be called, is an author and national TV personality who began working with the NWPB in 2004 during its campaign to fight childhood obesity. Retailers, foodservice operators, and consumers will all find fascinating and useful information on this blog.

PACKING A NUTRITIONAL PUNCH

Not only is watermelon delicious, it also offers numerous health benefits. Low in fat and cholesterol-free, watermelon can be incorporated into healthy breakfast dishes and drinks or savory dishes — a big selling point for calorie and health conscious shoppers or diners. Watermelon is the ultimate hydrator and has a diverse nutritional profile, including high levels of the antioxidant lycopene, a source of the amino acid, citrulline, and is a good source of vitamins, C, B1, B6 and a source of vitamin A.



The National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) is based in Orlando, FL, and represents 1,500 growers, shippers and importers. Through research, communications and marketing initiatives, the NWPB is finding new ways to enhance market opportunities for farmers and promote the nutritional, culinary and convenience benefits of watermelon.



The National Watermelon Association (NWA) in Plant City, FL, has members in 30 states and Canada. The purpose of the Association is to promote the best interests of the Watermelon Industry from production to consumption. NWA is constantly seeking improvements in the growing, grading, handling, transportation, distribution and sale of watermelon.

watermelon.org

plays with at least 12-square feet of space.”

Also, Queen recommends, “Run five to six ads during the mid-June to mid-August cherry season to take full advantage of the profit potential cherries provide.” Research shows that retailers that run more ads dramatically increase their category contributions. For example, according to the Perishables Group, one to two ads increase category contributions by 2.8 percent, three to four ads by 3.6 percent and five to six ads by 5.1 percent.

July 11 — National Rainier Cherry Day — is an especially good time to promote these sweet, light-colored cherries. Queen suggests, “Display Rainiers side-by-side next to Bings to increase the chance for impulse sales. In addition, sample the fruit because some 70 percent of consumers aren’t famil-

“Just over 27 percent of people in the United States are purchasing cherries on an annual basis.”

**— Loren Queen
Domex
Superfresh Growers**

iar with Rainiers, and run front-page ads to announce their availability.”

Tree fruit that tastes good and is especially good for you is the mission of Cal Tree Ripe Ltd., in Fresno, CA. Mark Nakata, manager, explains, “Flavorful fruit brings customers back to the store. At the same time, nutrient-dense fruit offers customers a good value for their dollar.”

Using organic farming methods, the company has specifically cultivated yellow-flesh, low acid varieties of tree fruit that has Brix levels as high as 16, are firm enough to ship through the distribution system, are 40 to 60 percent more nutrient-dense than conventional fruit as reflected in the soluble solids content, and correspondingly, are very flavorful. Nakata notes, “A seal or sticker on the box will identify this fruit. We’re going to

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Reader Service #5

start test marketing this summer and are excited by the possibilities."

June kicks off the domestic grape season and there are opportunities for ads around holidays and summer entertaining, says Patty Boman, director of category management for Giumarra Bros. Fruit Co. Inc., headquartered in Reedley, CA. "Retailers often promote weekly and add interest by promoting by variety."

This is the second year of a new, global, California-based campaign for grapes that focuses on the state's heritage of growing the finest grapes in the world, says Jim Howard, director of communications for the California Table Grape Commission (CTGC), in Fresno, CA. "Magazine advertising, outdoor signage and a range of consumer education projects will be reminding consumers that grapes from California are available. These methods will also discuss the traditions of family farming, care and artistry of growing California grapes."

LABOR DAY: September 7

Some 154.5 million people are in the nation's labor force, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Many of them will have the day free to enjoy the fleeting moments of summer and observe this holi-



day. Melissa's Schueller asserts, "This is the final hurrah for barbecue season for much of the nation."

One hot barbecue item that peaks in volume during August and September is the Hatch chili, says Schueller. "They have a meaty flesh and medium heat. Roasted, they're great used in salads, soups, dips and sandwiches. Some retailers will roast chilis in-store and customers will buy 20 to 40 pounds at a time to freeze because this chili is available only for a six-week season." Central Market in Texas and Whole Foods in

New Mexico are among retailers that roast Hatch chilis in-store. In addition, last August, Central Market hosted a class in its cooking school about how to use Hatch chilies in desert making.

September is National Mushroom Month. As such, Monterey's Caldwell suggests, "Pair Portobellos or other mushrooms around a meal concept. In the past, we've offered small grills as promotional items to help make the connection in the display."

Labor Day also means "sweet corn is available," notes Buurma Farm's Buurma.

Brett Bergmann, vice president and general manager at Hugh H. Branch Inc., in Pahokee, FL, concurs. "We're marketing more and more of the varieties that are even sweeter than the super-sweet varieties we have seen in the past. They also tend to have a more tender, often smaller, kernel." He adds, "Keep corn cold and your consumers will experience sweeter enjoyment. Merchandise tray packs in your bulk displays. Strip them right down the middle of the bulk display." In many parts of the country, Labor Day also signals back-to-school. Duda's Towell reveals, "This season, we will launch a new, fresh-cut celery item that will fit perfectly in a lunchbox. It's a single serving 1.6-ounce package of celery sticks sold in bundle packs of four." **pb**

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Reader Service # 52



Cincinnati Competition

Consumers are winners in Cincinnati's supermarket standoff with supercenters.

BY DAVE DIVER

After many decades of being the overall dominant and most profitable supermarket retailer in its hometown of Cincinnati, OH, Kroger, the United States' largest, traditional supermarket retailer, found itself confronted by not one, but two supercenter retailers during the past 15 years.

In the 80s, Biggs, now owned by Eden Prairie, MN-based Super-Valu, attempted the low-priced, large-box concept with limited success. However, both Meijer and Wal-Mart, based in Grand Rapids, MI, and Bentonville, AR, respectively, made concentrated efforts to establish not only a foothold, but reach a significant presence in a market where Kroger had dominated all previous competitors.

The banks of the Ohio River became the concentrated battleground between the established successful food retailer and two growing supercenter operators with dramatically different merchandising philosophies.

The apparent strategy was to ring the city adjacent to the perimeter beltway, approximately 20 miles from downtown, with units encompassing approximately 200,000 square feet. Both Meijer and Wal-Mart now have ten units each in these locations.

According to a national shopper survey conducted between April 2007 and 2008, Wal-Mart and Meijer ranked near the top on price effectiveness with Kroger only average. On the other hand, Kroger and Meijer ranked average for perishables with Wal-Mart at the bottom of the scale of the 59 chains, according to nationwide responders to the Grocery Store Shopper Survey, conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center. Would my visit find the same relative produce positioning in this Midwest market?



THE MEIJER APPROACH

The primary area of my store visitations was on the north side of Cincinnati, mostly just beyond the I-275 beltway. Ironically, my first

stop in West Chester, OH, was at a Meijer store that I would later learn was the company's oldest store in the area, and supposedly near the top in area sales ranking.

Only several days prior to St. Patrick's Day, the Meijer weekly flyer appropriately captured one's attention with a front page of green vegetables, including cabbage for 10-cents-a-pound, asparagus at \$1.29-a-pound, broccoli at 5-bunches-for-\$5, head lettuce at 77-cents-each, plus apples and pears for 87-cents-per-pound.

As a twist, three smaller volume vegetables were advertised mix-and-match 10-for-\$10 with an 11th item free. Each of the items listed showed the amount saved per unit. To enhance these savings the Meijer ad states, "Higher standards, lower prices" and "Eat better, spend less." All are powerful statements immediately above the produce features.

Jumping ahead to Pre-Easter week, Meijer produce features included pineapple at \$1.99, a 10-pound bag of russet potatoes for \$1.99, asparagus at \$1.18-per-pound, artichokes at 4-for-\$5, one-pound strawberry packages at 3-for-\$5 and mangos offered at 2-for-\$1. Kroger's ad break a day later was led by 1-pound strawberries packages for \$1.99, celery at 58 cents-a-bunch, pineapple and cantaloupe for \$1.99, asparagus for \$1.99, sweet potatoes at 49-cents-a-pound, Texas sweet onions at 59-cents-per-pound, a 10-pound bag of russets for \$1.99 and 8-ounce packages of mushrooms at 2-for-\$3.

Entering the Meijer produce department, it is readily evident the display treatment adequately backs up the advertising presentation. More importantly, produce is displayed according to broad categories making it easy for consumers to navigate the department.



Dave Diver is the former vice president of produce at Hannaford and a regular columnist for PRODUCE BUSINESS.

Initially, the consumer is exposed to various island displays of fruit ranging in length from 16- to 32-feet. The most impressive island to my eyes was for vegetables near the rear of the department. One side was primarily devoted to bunch salad and cooking greens and the opposite side to an assortment of other vegetables. Cello-bagged lettuces and cello vegetables were displayed in refrigerated cases against the wall at the rear of the department. This was a distinct subtlety providing the important produce freshness image by presenting bulk prior to the consumer finding the packaged products. Only improved lighting in the department would have made the produce stand out even better.



BIGGS AND WHOLE FOODS

Although Biggs has lost its relative niche in the area since the arrival of Meijer and Wal-Mart Supercenters, it still provides value for the customer with some sharply priced features in a well-merchandised department. The store's pre-Easter features included \$1.99 asparagus, two 5-pound bags of Russet potatoes for \$5, Fresh Express salad blends at 2-for-\$5, 8-ounce packages of mushrooms at 3-for-\$5 and a lead ad featuring a 2-pound package of strawberries at \$3.99. An interesting, small-sized fruit, mass displayed in paper tote bags, was signed, "Smaller size, great value."

The Whole Foods unit was a remake of a former Wild Oats store and although the product presentation was adequate, it did not meet the standards one would expect for the chain. While there was no spoiled product, there were a number of items bordering on the stage of being overripe, unless consumed within 48 hours. Overall space for produce was compressed, making it impossible to have more than minimum allocation for each item.



WAL-MART'S SAVE MORE STRATEGY

Wal-Mart's special, pre-Easter flyer insert in many areas of the country featured only three items: asparagus for \$1.77-a-pound, strawberries for \$1.50-a-carton and pineapple for \$2.50, all top picks among consumers. In weeks when there is no produce advertising stores, rely on entry sign standards to draw attention to low-price basics, such as bananas for 48-cents-a-pound and head lettuce for 77-cents-each.

The Wal-Mart within a half mile of Kroger, in Mason, was typical of the presentation seen for years, complete with shallow, black trays filled uniformly to the top edge of the basket. There are pro and con arguments about the use of these black containers, but many consumers comment they do little to enhance product appearance. A recent addition of red-bannered price cards with a "Save More Unbeatable" heading provides an eye-catching message.

According to store personnel, the store displays what is shipped with poor communication flow between store and office. Four days prior to St. Patrick's Day, the cabbage retail was supposed to be 10-cents per pound, with allocation only sufficient for one tray, which was empty. No wonder the perceived produce volume was probably in the range of half of that of a nearby Kroger.

One of the newer Wal-Mart's near the beltway, over 10 miles west, had an entirely different produce department appearance, utilizing wooden, pallet-size bins and tables with sloping wooden structures holding the black tray inserts. After many years of copying a former Meijer layout, Wal-Mart has finally taken a mini-step toward enhancing the presentation of beautiful, fresh produce.

From clerk comments and direct observation, the Meijer store within a half-mile was achieving substantially more produce volume, and sales had improved since Wal-Mart opened. The greater product availability and better appearance at Meijer certainly contributed to the increased sales.



KROGER'S TECHNIQUE

For every competing supercenter in the suburban area, Kroger appears to have nearly five stores within a short driving distance of those locations. Although they vary in size and age, the produce departments take no backseat to their competitors.

Generally, Kroger had slightly larger fruit sizes and more hand-placed displays of items, such as apples. On the other hand, customers might get the impression variety might be slightly greater at Meijer because of overall department size. No consumer would find either store lacking, and Kroger boasts a policy of obtaining any unavailable item upon request.

Although most Kroger produce departments are located in the front corner of the store, the Mason facility had produce located in the right, rear corner. Inside the wall case, tables were at a 45-degree angle to traffic, enabling customers to easily view the entire department, with hand-stacked fruit being a highlight. Small-sized apples were being hand-packed into mesh bags adding to the variety. Stores in the division were also doing their own preparation and packaging of cut fruit, noting they were able to achieve a higher degree of freshness and improved consumer acceptance.

An interesting approach to selling cut roses was an offering of a dozen roses free of charge with the purchase of a dozen. Surprisingly, many consumers who purchased a dozen did not ask for their second, free dozen.

Over two years ago, Kroger opened a Kroger Marketplace unit midway between Cincinnati and downtown Dayton. The store was built to offer an expanded line of non-food items, but also has a larger front-of-store produce department with numerous island fixtures whose 4-foot, moveable sections can be modified in order to meet individual promotional demands and changing commodity space allocations.

With one of the largest volume produce departments in the area, sales have steadily increased during its existence due to the excellent presentation and over 400 SKUs, making the consumer prone to impulse purchases. On all accounts, it is a top produce operation with extremely helpful and knowledgeable associates.

WHAT IT ALL MEANS

Kroger, with its longtime dominant market penetration, continues to hold first place in sales volume in the market. Announcing its recent, year-end financial results, the company acknowledged increasing share of market in 36 of 42 metropolitan areas. Produce overall is playing an important role in this gain.

Meijer stores, given its overall high volume with excellent produce presentation and aggressive feature pricing, is equally as attractive to consumers willing to pass by a Kroger store while en route someplace else.

One wonders if during the recent rapid Wal-Mart Supercenter expansion, produce, although developing strong procurement and operational practices, wasn't just the beneficiary of overall corporate growth. Relative to competitors in the Cincinnati area, produce presentation places it in last position.

The bottom line is that shoppers in this area are exposed to fresh fruit and vegetable presentations contributing to increased benefits for themselves and the producers.

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Fresh Growth For Fresh-Cut Fruit?

How are current economic factors influencing sales of fresh-cut fruit?

BY MEREDITH AUERBACH

Cautious optimism is the tone of the day when it comes to prospects for continued success of fresh-cut fruit in supermarket product departments.

Processors and produce department executives report that fresh-cut fruit has largely avoided significant sales declines attributed to the recession. Additionally, the shape of the industry is changing as less product is made in-store beyond section cuts of melons. Large scale producers such as Sunkist, Ready Pac and Del Monte with national distribution and regional fresh-cut processors, such as F&S Produce, headquartered in Rosenhayne, NJ, bring procurement and technology expertise, economies of scale and the depth to manage food safety requirements and regulation to the table, making them able to dominate production.

Rick Harris, president of Watertowne, MA-based Sunkist Taylor LLC, a joint venture between Taylor Farms, headquartered in Salinas, CA, and Sunkist Growers Inc., based in Sherman Oaks, CA, says, "We started in school foodservice with fresh-cut apples and have expanded into retail as product and packaging have evolved. We now operate from two facilities, one in the East and one in the West. Our distribution is principally in East and West coast states, but is also moving throughout the Midwest and South. Harris continues, "Our production comes in five-pack clamshells with a colorful, eye-catching band for retail and 20-count cases ideal for school, convenience stores and health care facilities using apple slices, pineapple spears, orange wedges, red seedless grapes and an apple and grape combination."

Expressing the viewpoint of a regional processor, Sam Pipitone, Jr, owner of F & S Produce Co. Inc., in Rosenhayne, NJ, com-



According to suppliers, fresh-cut fruit has avoided recessionary sales declines.

ments, "We focus on the mid-Atlantic and Northeast quadrant of the country for our distribution so we can process and deliver in one day. We have our own brand, Garden Pure, for operators who prefer that; we offer private label for others and also offer what you could call a hybrid solution — 5-pound packages retailers can serve in their own containers from the deli or in produce. For us, a standard product list is simply the start of the conversation. Long-term relationships mean we really get to know what our customer's consumers want."

Sam Burlison, vice president of sales and marketing for F & S, adds, "Ironically, this recession has been good for our retail side. Perhaps people are not eating out as often or there are more first-time cooks who are accustomed to fresh fruit as an integral part of their regular eating patterns, but our sales are up."

Retailers state the case at store level

more cautiously. They find themselves debating which lines and sizes to carry and are pricing more conservatively. "We are not cutting back," says Jim Pohndorf, produce director of the 10-store P.W. Supermarkets Inc., headquartered in San Jose, CA, "We cut our own melon sections, which has expanded, and our major fresh-cut line is from Ready Pac. It's really a matter of looking at sales store-by-store to determine the impact on an individual basis."

Across the country, James Garrett, produce manager for one of the five Sloan's Signature Markets in Jackson, KY, comments wryly, "Around here, recession is hitting someone a good portion of the time. It's our job to bring value and service to our customers. We can sell products and our volume is holding. Most of our supplies come through Crosset, a Castellini Company, based in Independence, KY."

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fresh-cut fruit is Ready Pac Produce Inc., based in Irwindale, CA. Ali Leon, senior director of strategic business development, reports, "We have seen some decline in units and sales as a result of the economy. We are consolidating some packages and sizing to simplify the category and enhance visibility at store level. Currently, consumer penetration is about 20 percent. Compare that with an 80 percent penetration for packaged salads and the opportunity is clear," Leon continues.

"We distribute product from three facilities, so we can cover the country," Leon adds. "We are urging retailers to review the category store-by-store in an effort to maximize sales. Research indicates about 10 to 12 percent of fresh-cut fruit packs are consumed at work with more than 75 percent consumed at home. It's still an impulse purchase with great potential in carried meals. We also know more consumers are packing lunches for school and work, which favors fresh-cut fruit."

FRUIT QUALITY COUNTS

One of the most consistent fresh-cut fruits with the longest shelf life is apple slices. By no means do these characteristics make fresh-cut apple slices an easy project

to pull off successfully. Attention to detail at every step of the way is critical.

Tony Freytag, director of marketing and sales for Cashmere, WA-based Crunch Pak LLC, a subsidiary of the Wenatchee, WA-based Fresh Products Northwest LLC, firmly states, "Our efforts have to go clear back to the tree because ours is a year-round product, which means we use storage, fresh-

What Merchandising Works

Producers generally believe retailers are gradually moving to position cut fruit as a destination display, separate from other value-added items, such as packaged salads. It needs to be highly visible and in high traffic areas to catch the eye of grab-and-go shoppers, as well as those who can be attracted to larger items, such as fruit trays with dips or cheese.

Individual stores must define its best fresh-cut fruit consumer and merchandise appropriately. In urban markets with a

high population of young singles, convenience may be the driving motivation. Closer to the suburbs, where plenty of young families reside, messages built around healthy eating and affordable indulgence may be more to the point.

Looking at the examples set by the growth of pre-cut lettuce and salad kits offers plenty of opportunity and the chance to avoid old mistakes as a new generation of shoppers, menu planners and fiscally conscious consumers make their choices. **pb**

picked, imports and domestically grown apples. Varieties, flavor profiles, Brix levels and pressure all have to be exactly right to get a consistently flavorful, crisp, crunchy slice with a 21-day shelf life. That's a week to ten days longer than most cut fruit."

Pipitone at F & S notes that his company also believes basic, measurable metrics are the foundation of quality fruit that is flavor-

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“Research indicates about 10 to 12 percent of fresh-cut fruit packs are consumed at work with more than 75 percent consumed at home.”

— Ali Leon
Ready Pac

ful and appealing. “It has been grown, picked and packed in the best conditions to hold at shelf level. For our one-pound, re-sealable apple slices, we label the bag to use within 18 days. In an effort to keep things simple, we don’t mix apples with other fruits.”

Another major packer of apple slices, Sunkist’s Harris, concurs, “Apple slices were our first product. We now also combine apples with seedless, de-stemmed grapes to add variety. For us, the apple products, like our entire ‘fun fruit’ line, are targeted to ages 9 to 90, not just kids. It has to appeal to a broad demographic.”

All apple slice processors use an anti-browning, anti-oxidation rinse for apples before packaging. Crunch Pak primarily uses Gala, Pink Lady and Granny Smith as its varieties of choice.

Watermelons, cantaloupe, papaya, mango and pineapple bring a touch of the tropics to the fresh-cut category. Quality and ripeness remain key metrics. For fruits such as melons and berries that break down more quickly, Leon maintains, “Ten days from point of production is appropriate, but it puts more pressure on the producer and retailer alike. We have developed a proprietary processing technology that does not use preservatives. We depend on specifications, rigid, clear plastic PET containers, and about 80 percent of our production based on forward contracting and strong grower relationships.”

“SWEET SPOT” PRICING

Harris examines pricing by comparing fresh-cut fruit to the price range of salty snacks, which generally range from a promoted low per serving of 50¢ to just above \$1. The clamshell price of five to eight servings generally retails at \$3.99 to \$4.99. Harris reveals, “The sweet spot is probably

between 75¢ and \$1.00 per serving, a point at which the purchase becomes an impulse. Fresh-cut fruit is not a given purchase by any means, such as milk or bananas, which are virtually automatic. As processing methods and packaging improves, we believe cut fruit will continue to become more competitive with salty snacks.”

Leon of Ready Pac concurs, noting that an everyday price of \$2.99 to \$3.99 is supportive of impulse buying.

Because of costs and shelf life, some retailers are returning to in-store produc-

tion. Brett Reed, produce manager of the Windsor Heights, IA, Hy-Vee Inc. reports, “Our sales are still good, but we are doing more fresh-cut in-store.”

Julian Halgain, produce manager for Lowe’s Supermarket 82 in Lubbock, TX, says, “For now, we are cutting and wrapping melon sections here in the store and holding off on other fresh-cut fruit.”

CHOICE OF PACKAGING

For retail, most branded fruit processors choose clamshells when possible. Often,

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“Fresh-cut fruit is not a given purchase by any means, such as milk or bananas that are virtually automatic. As processing methods and packaging improves, we believe cut fruit will continue to become more competitive with salty snacks.”

**— Rick Harris
Sunkist Taylor LLC**

multiple, single-serve portions are packed in clamshells. It may seem like an excessive level of packaging, but Harris counters, “We need packaging that allows retailers to effec-

tively display fruit while protecting the product. At the same time, the package has to be visually appealing to the shopper, easy to open and able to be stored in the refriger-

ator. For many products, retailers get maximum sales results when the packages stand upright so the branding shows along with the color and freshness of the fruit.”

Other companies have developed custom molds that can be stacked or placed in displays so that both labels and content show. Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Coral Gables, FL-based Del Monte Fresh Produce, reports, “We have increased the use of sustainable packaging, such as PLA plastics made from corn. Our newest ventures employ a line called Safe-T-Fresh packaging, manufactured by Inline Plastics Corporation. It has a tamper-proof seal that also prevents leakage, while reducing the total amount of material used. In our tests, we saw shrink reduced at our national distri-

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bution and retail levels.”

Herb Knutson, director of marketing for Inline Plastics Corp. of Shelton, CT, discloses, “We’re relatively new to fresh-cut fruit, but the Safe-TFresh line has taken off and our sales are growing fast. The seal is a hinge strip that shows evidence of any tampering, but also allows the consumer to reseal the clamshell. The 16- and 32-fluid-ounce containers move best — actual volumes are 1 and 2 cups — and we also do a four-pound version for club stores. Most of our products are PET, which is recyclable. We’ve also found a niche with customers who sell from refrigerated vending machines in schools and workplaces and need a single-serving, leak-proof container.”

A totally different form of packaging



Photo courtesy of Sunkist

Sunkist Taylor’s product line has expanded from school foodservice to retail.



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technology comes from Maxwell Chase Technologies LLC, in Atlanta, GA. The company has developed a food-grade absorbent material that can be laminated into a pad or pocket, which absorbs the liquid purge that comes from cut surfaces of fresh produce.

Tom Gautreaux, national sales director for the company, states, “We started selling these materials for packaging of fresh-cut product for foodservice. The juices from cut product are what cause breakdown and are susceptible to bacteria growth. The pad can be placed in the bottom of a container or pouch and will draw off and hold the liquid. We’ve found better quality and longer shelf life when this technology is used. We have pads that can fit into bases or lids of PET cups and bowls that will provide a 12-day shelf life on cut fruit. It’s not the least expensive method, but if it improves shelf-life, the value is there.”

COLD CHAIN MAINTENANCE

Beyond the quality of the fruit, the packaging choice is the overarching view of all concerned about the importance of maintaining the cold chain from processing facility to the time the product leaves the store. Consistent cold temperature determines quality and shelf life more than any other factor and is a critical food safety issue. Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and state-of-the-art facilities are common to all major national and regional processors.

Sunkist’s Harris notes, “We focus on every step to ensure the consumer has a positive and safe eating experience. Increasingly, work is being done to better trace products back for both quality and safety reasons.” By nature, fresh-cut is hugely challenging with respect to total traceability. **pb**



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Grape Merchandising — Challenges & Opportunities

Promotions, pricing and variety are among seven keys to a successful grape season.

BY CAROL R. BAREUTHER RD

Price. Packaging preferences. Promotional strategies that span both summer and winter. These are just a few of the challenges facing retailers when it comes to merchandising fresh grapes. Yet, transforming these hurdles into profitable opportunities all but guarantee a sweet grape deal.

Ed Laster, produce specialist at Metropolitan Markets, an upscale six-store chain based in Seattle, WA, reports, "Grapes are a good year-round tonnage item for us."

Research provided by West Dundee, IL-based Perishables Group FreshFacts has shown grapes contributed 5.6 percent to total produce sales for the 52-week period ending February 2, 2009.

1. OFFER BEST-SELLERS AND UNDERDOGS

According to Laster, red grapes are most popular. "Green lags and black grapes struggle most of the time."

The Perishables Group data shows red grapes are, indeed, category leaders at 3 percent of total produce sales for the 52-week period ending February 2, 2009, followed by 2.2 percent for green/white grapes and 0.3 percent for black grapes.

Tom Wilson, grape manager for California and Chile for Giumarra Bros. Fruit Co. Inc., in Los Angeles, CA, says, "For us, red and green seedless grapes are the most popular with consumers."

However, Rick Eastes, vice president of sales and marketing for Fruit Patch Sales LLC, in Dinuba, CA, adds, "The pendulum of popularity is swinging to red grapes largely due to the influence of foodservice —



Research shows multiple-color displays yield greater sales than a single-color display.

more red grapes are used in restaurant meals than green; they have better shelf life; and there is less variance of color. However, this is not to say that green grapes are fading out."

The new, extra large Autumn King green, seedless grape has a bright future, says Nick Dulcich, president of Delano, CA-based Sunlight International Sales Inc. "It has excellent shelf appeal." Autumn Kings are designed to offer fresh product at a time when, traditionally, only storage Thompsons were available.

Another challenge for some green grapes is an amber or yellowish color that American consumers don't like, explains Josh Leichter, East Coast sales and grape category

director for The Oppenheimer Group, in Vancouver, B.C. "These are among the best-tasting grapes out there. Consumers in the United States have not embraced them yet, but through POS material and sampling, they might just discover their new favorite grape."

Currently, there is a focus on newer grape varieties, reports Eastes. "They deliver an even better taste experience, and it will be up to retailers to spread the word. For example, Princess are replacing mid-season Thompsons, while a number of commercial and proprietary green varieties, such as Autumn King, Luisco and Pristine, are increasingly squeezing in to take over the late season and later storage markets. With



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the exception of Red Globes, seeded grapes are virtually anathema in the 21st century, at least in North America.”

However, Veronica Kraushaar, president of Viva Marketing Strategies, in Nogales, AZ, who represents Mexico's Sonora grape growers, asserts, “We are seeing increasing demand for large, seeded black and red varieties for ethnic consumers.”

2. MARKET BY COLOR, VARIETY OR BOTH

Unlike the apple category where variety names are nearly shopping list items, consumers tend to buy grapes by color. Randy Bohaty, produce director for B & R Stores Inc., an 18-unit chain headquartered in Lincoln, NE, operating under the Super Saver and Russ' Market banners, agrees, “It's all about color.”

Leichter notes one advantage that merchandising by color presents. “It allows retailers some flexibility to move between varieties to suit their preferences.”

Yet, some retailers, namely Metropolitan Market, likes to promote specialty grape varieties by name. Laster details, “We'll promote the California late-season red by its name, Scarlotta Seedless, and consumers have begun to recognize the name and buy them repeatedly. We also promote Muscato grapes by name.”

Champagne grapes and Concord-like grapes are other specialty varieties often carried in the produce department, especially by retailers who make a point to offer their customers a wide variety. Giumarra's Wilson explains, “Consumers are attracted to specialty varieties packed in special packaging, such as clamshells, that tell the ‘variety story.’”

The tried-and-true method for enticing shoppers to try new varieties is to display them in bulk, in large sample boxes with a sign encouraging consumers to “Try one!” remarks Kraushaar. “This is especially relevant because when compared to other top fruit, such as bananas and apples, in our research, grapes won hands-down when it came to ‘most flavor.’”

3. OFFER THE RIGHT MIX ON DISPLAY

Retailers have the best sales results when offering a wide array of grapes, including red seedless, green seedless, red globes and black seedless, says Oppenheimer's Leichter. “We have also seen success in offering specialty varieties, such as Muscat and Ribiers — when available in the market — accompanied with POS or other consumer education material.”

Atomic Torosian, managing partner of

Fresno, CA-based Crown Jewels Marketing LLC, advises, “Offer organic grapes as well.”

The type and number of grape varieties displayed, “can mark a point of differentiation for a retailer,” states Gordon Robertson, vice president of sales and marketing for Sun World International LLC, headquartered

“The problem is that red, white/green and black grapes often get an equal size display space. But, they don't all sell in equal volume. Therefore, adjust the size of the display relative to the volume sold of a particular variety to maximize sales.”

**— John Pandol
Pandol Bros. Inc.**

in Bakersfield, CA.

According to the Fresno, CA-based California Table Grape Commission (CTGC), a mix of grape colors, sizes and varieties can add a dramatic look and provide customers with convenience while selecting grapes. Jim Howard, director of communications for the CTGC, reveals, “Research shows that multiple variety displays increase grape sales, so having more than one variety is a smart retail idea.”

As for space allocation, John Pandol, vice president of special projects for Pandol Bros. Inc., in Delano, CA, says, “The problem is that red, white/green and black grapes often get an equal size display space. But, they don't all sell in equal volume. Therefore, adjust the size of the display relative to the volume sold of a particular variety to maximize sales.”

The most effective grape displays, “are large, located near the front of the store, continuously faced so the fruit is always looking its best, with prominent product and price information,” details Leichter.

In addition, the CTGC recommends



Consumers often make purchasing decisions based on weekly promotions, and this year, there will be opportunities for late season deals on domestic grapes.

refrigerating grapes on display to increase the fruit's shelf-life and decrease shrink.

4. PACKAGING: BAGS VS. CLAMSHELLS

Pack styles are proliferating at a rapid rate, says Fruit Patch's Eastes. "There are the traditional PLU poly bags, 1.5-, 2-, 3-, 4- and 5-pound clamshells, and with new and varied requests for both COOL [Country of Origin Labeling] and traceability identification, packing grapes is becoming a very

complex business."

Bags are the most common type of grape packaging, notes Oppenheimer's Leichter. "The advantage is that they are both inexpensive and familiar to consumers. Unfortunately, they don't stack well, which can lead to crushing in some cases. They also don't do much in the way of extending the shelf life of grapes."

Sunlight International's Dulcich shares, "Stand-up bags with a flat bottom are being tested as a new packaging tool for grapes."

Bags have been the primary merchandising vehicle for grapes at B & R Stores. However, Bohaty reveals, "We're transitioning to clamshells. We think they present the product better. When grapes get sticky they can cloud the bag and hamper the presentation. Control of shatter [loose grapes] is also better in clamshells. Our big challenge is the higher cost of the clamshells, especially if our competitors don't move to them."

Leichter notes, "The jury is still out with respect to the value, because clamshells add a fair bit of cost to the overall product. They can be particularly appealing to consumers when they include more than one type of grape, especially for entertaining."

Justin Parnagian, sales manager at Fresno, CA-based Fowler Packing Co. Inc., says, "This year, we've started shed packing rather than field packing table grapes. Consolidating the product in one location allows us to offer tri-packs."

On the other side of the coin, Viva's Kraushaar notes, "Our recent research indicates consumers prefer smaller bags of one variety only, compared to clamshell packages or multiple varieties in one package."

Price point is why B & R Store's Bohaty will look to offer 1- and 2-pound clamshells of grapes, rather than the 3-pound and larger packs found at club stores.



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11239 Famoso-Porterville Hwy.
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 Fx (661) 792-6365
 email: jvine@jasminevineyards.com

Handling Shrink

Big displays are a hallmark of merchandising when a produce item hits its peak seasonal stride. While bigger is often better at eliciting impulse sales, these mega displays are typically unrefrigerated — a fact that can play havoc with produce quality if the sell-through isn't timely.

In 2007, the Fresno, CA-based California Table Grape Commission (CTGC) teamed up with the Plant Sciences Department at the University of California at Davis to answer retailers' burning question: How long can grapes remain on an unrefrigerated display and still maintain high quality?

Here are the answers:

- Bagged grapes can be displayed up to 24 hours without refrigeration before visible shrink occurs.
- Two- and four-pound clamshell packs of grapes will remain free of visible shrink on an unrefrigerated display for up to 48 hours. **pb**

Pandol Bros' Pandol states, "Interestingly enough, consumers will not purchase a 2-pound clamshell of grapes priced at \$4, but they will buy a 2-pound random weight bag of grapes priced at \$2-per-pound. It's the sticker shock, and that's why we're considering scaling our 2-pound clamshell back to 1 1/2 pounds."

5. PRICE TO SELL

Early indications point to a 2009 domestic season grape crop that may be equal or slightly larger than the 98.5 million boxes packed and shipped in 2008.

Eastes says, "Since an important percentage of these grapes move to export markets, such as the UK, Europe and heavily to Southeast Asia, currency and the overall global recession will have some effects."

A 45 percent tariff on fresh, California grapes exported to Mexico, which resulted from a dispute between Mexico and the U.S. dating back to 1994 when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, could hamper sales of U.S. grapes to Mexico, a key trading partner for this commodity, come late summer when Mexico's supplies finish up. Crown Jewels' Torosian reports, "Six million boxes, or 7 to 8 percent of last year's total California crop,

went to Mexico last year.

However, CTGC's Howard declares, "We're working hard to get this issue resolved in the next few months." If not, this could result in bargain prices at retail.

In general, Domenick Bianco, president and owner of Anthony Vineyards Inc., in Bakersfield, CA, explains, "Supply and demand determine grape pricing. Too much product will lead to less expensive grapes. If there's a shortage and the economy is in the doldrums, the price will go up."

Competitive pricing is something consumers may actively seek this summer, says Bohaty. "I don't think we'll see any major decrease in grape purchases due to the economy. But, consumers' purchase decisions may be guided by what type of grape is on sale that week and bounce from grape to grape as a result."

Retailers enjoyed a successful imported grape season by pricing the fruit attractively to move volume, reveals Oppenheimer's Leichter. "By offering grapes at a comfortable price point and featuring them prominently in ads and large displays, retailers should achieve sales lifts despite the tough economic times."

6. PLAN PROMOTIONS

Retail chains make decisions when to push grapes and when not to, says Jon Zaninovich, vice president of Jasmine Vineyards Inc., in Delano, CA. "But, they need to be open to opportunities to promote that might not be pre-scheduled. Even if they ran an ad the week before, they need to be ready anytime the volume is there."

As for varietal promotions, Leichter notes, "Retailers should continue to offer aggressive price points on green and red seedless with large displays. There are also opportunities to introduce red globes and black seedless to more consumers via promotional features. In-and-out promotional opportunities on clamshell packs are another chance to grab incremental sales at the retail level, which can lead to repeat sales once the item is back to its regular price."

Regarding promotional pricing, Brad Cantwell, vice president of North American sales for Dole Deciduous, based in Philadelphia, PA, explains, "Some retailers want to go on ad with red and green grapes at the same price, even when, for example, greens have an F.O.B. of \$12 and reds \$18. This means, in reality, they can promote the greens for 99-cents per pound and the reds at \$1.99 per pound, but instead, they promote both for \$1.49 per pound. As an importer, we like to see more aggressive pricing when the volume is there on a variety in order to keep fruit moving through

the system and maintain good quality, rather than having a back-up of inventory."

This year, and in the future, there will be increasing opportunities for late season promotions on domestic grapes. The season is extending later with good volumes into October, November and December all the way through to Christmas, remarks Sun World's Robertson. "This production bumps up to imports out of Chile. The advantage to the domestic crop is a fresher product."

Scott Boyajian, executive director of sales at Sunview Marketing International, in Delano, CA, concurs, adding, "There will be more and more late season, green seedless every year." He adds the key to promotional success "is to advertise early in the season and continue through late in the season."

7. PLAN SEASONAL STRATEGIES

Even though grapes are a year-round deal, "There are transition times, such as Chile to California and vice versa, where volume and quality aren't there," explains Metropolitan Market's Laster. This requires a conservative approach. For us, that means no promotions and a reduction in the size of displays during these transition times. This can actually be a merchandising advantage as we tout using in-store signage and ads when a new crop is here."

According to Perishables Group Fresh-Facts, grapes contributed a high of 5.7 percent to total produce department sales during the third and fourth quarters of 2008, while the first and second quarters represented percent dollar sales of 5.1 percent and 5 percent, respectively.

B & R Store's Bohaty adds, "Consumers realize grapes peak in supply in the summer and prices are lower, but we don't see a real surge in sales. We do tend to slightly decrease the size of grape displays in the winter, but it has more to do with an influx of apple varieties and citrus."

Grapes always compete with other fruits in the produce department. Fruit Patch's Eastes says, "Early season grapes compete with strawberries, cherries and blueberries as 'finger food'. Mid-season, the competition can be melons, stone fruit and even non-fruit items. Multiple varieties of apples are year-round and there is imported, seedless citrus in the form of mandarins and imported navels that crowd grape demand. The Chilean grapes, on the other hand, compete with winter items, such as oranges, the full range of citrus and very heavily with apples and bananas. Fortunately, research says that grape consumers tend to be large consumers and there is a certain year-round loyalty to the item." **pb**

Five Ways To Make Chili Pepper Sales Sizzle

Build on growing popularity and utilize creative merchandising techniques to heat up chili pepper sales.

BY AMY SHANNON

Brightly colored chili peppers provide plenty of eye candy, traffic and profit to the produce department. Once considered an ethnic item, chili peppers are becoming mainstream as more consumers look to recreate dishes they eat on vacation and see on television shows. An increased Latino and Asian presence has also resulted in more exposure to the cuisines of these immigrant populations.

Retailers are building on the chili pepper trend with a variety of merchandising and marketing opportunities. "Certainly, an increasingly diverse consumer base is helping introduce our consumers to new fruits and vegetables, including chili peppers," reports Kevin Weaver, vice president of produce merchandising for Marsh Supermarkets LLC, an Indianapolis, IN-based chain. "We recognized this trend a few years ago and have slowly and steadily been concentrating our efforts on growing the category."

"Chilis are a staple ingredient," notes Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce Inc., based in the Los Angeles, CA. "People are getting more into the novelty of heat in their recipes."

Ethnic produce and diverse world flavors, such as chili peppers, are rapidly gaining popularity, according to Karen Caplan, president and CEO of Frieda's Inc., headquartered in Los Alamitos, CA.

Emily Fragoso, marketing manager for Coast Produce Co. Inc., in Los Angeles, CA, agrees, adding, "The neat thing about chili peppers is that they lend themselves to different ethnic cuisines — Asian, Hispanic and beyond. Plus, fusion cuisine is so hot right now."



Merchandising a variety of peppers is key to driving sales volume.

Melissa's continues to build demand for chili peppers with its Melissa's and Don Enrique label in established Latino stores. Schueller points to a growing demand for chili peppers in non-Latino stores as well. "That's where the most growth potential is found."

Much of this new growth is due to the accessibility of culinary information via cooking and chef television shows, Web sites and online blogs, states Caplan. "Even magazines, such as *Bon Appétit* and *Saveur*, are appealing to home cooks by offering more simplified and budget-friendly meals."

Consumers are certainly shopping for more specialty chilis, reports Caplan. "Consumers are also turning to spices and chilis as a more healthful way to make food more flavorful — instead of adding salt and fat."

Kevin Maher, manager at Chelsea, MA-based Coosemans Boston Inc., estimates a 10 percent growth in chili peppers in the

past few years. Coosemans Boston markets a variety of chili peppers, including Anaheim, Pasilla, Serrano, Finger Hot, Habanero, Hungarian Hot, Caribe, Cherry Hot, Cubanelle, Jalapeño and Long Hots.

"One might even speculate that the economy has helped, as many consumers have altered their lifestyles to include more in-home prepared meals rather than dining out," notes Weaver. "As these families return to the kitchen, they want to recreate the dishes they have enjoyed in restaurants. Regardless of the reason, retailers are in the best position to enjoy the gains."

1. STOCK ALL VARIETIES

Marsh has been concentrating on taking the pepper category to the next level of merchandising for about a year now. "We currently offer more than 20 varieties of fresh and dried peppers in our Marketplace stores," reports Weaver. "Additionally, we

rotate through other varieties that might be considered more seasonal or that do not have year-round availability to keep the display fresh and changing."

Melissa's offers a full variety, working with fresh chilis, including Jalapeño, Serrano, Red Fresno, Pasilla, Anaheim, Yellow, Habanero, Cubanelle, Banana Wax, Cherry and Hungarian Wax, as well as dried chilis, such as Chipotle, New Mexican, Japone, De Arbol and California. "All fresh chilis are typically available year-round. However, Hatch chilis are extremely seasonal – August and September only."

In 2006, Coast introduced the Tremendo, a brand of chili peppers differentiated by its distinctively large size – four to five inches in length, compared to a typical Jalapeño of two to three inches in length. "The heat index of the Tremendo rivals the smaller varieties," notes Coast's Fragoso.

Frieda's Caplan notes more retailers are interested in stocking lesser-known chili varieties. "The bright array of colors and interesting flavors of the chili category bring a lot of visual appeal to produce departments. Plus, chilis are such a versatile ingredient, and the amazing varieties of fresh and dried chilis offer complex flavors that go beyond just heat.

How hot do you want it?
See how a wonderful world of chilis adds to your meals, variety that's the spice of life.

Heat Level	Chili Variety	Flavor & Use
2.5	Anaheim	• Sweet, mild flavor • Add to stew, salsa, soups or try stuffed. • Choose glossy, unbroken skin with well-attached caps.
0	Banana	• Mild and sweet. • Add raw to salads or try in soups, sauces or stews. • Choose bright colored, firm flesh.
10	Habanero	• In a word: HOT! • Hot sauce or hot salsa. • Choose shiny skin, and bright, firm flesh. <small>* The 10+ count measures heat index. Add to hot, not a mild of 10+.</small>
1	Hungarian Wax	• Slightly sweet, matures better. • Add to soups, salads, relishes, dips or pickle. • Choose bright colored, smooth skin.
5.5	Jalapeño	• Hot, vegetable flavor. • Add to stew, salsa, soups. Try pickled or stuffed. • Choose bright green, firm flesh.
3	Poblano	• Bell pepper like flavor. • Add to salsa, or soups. Use for Chile Relleno. • Choose smooth, unwrinkled skin. Darker color means richer flavor.
6.5	Red Fresno	• Hot with subtle sweetness. • Add to salsa, ceviches, bread batter. Try stuffed. • Choose brightly colored with firm flesh.
7	Serrano	• Hot, maturing to slightly sweet. • Use in table sauces, relishes, with vegetables or pickled. • Choose firm, heavy, smooth-skinned.
8	Thai	• Hot. 3X as potent as the Serrano. • Add to dips, soups, casseroles, meat and poultry dishes. • Choose firm flesh.
5	Yellow Hot "Caribe"	• Slightly sweet. • Usually pickled, but can be used in soups, casseroles, or salsa. • Choose bright color and smooth skin.

Photo courtesy of Coast Produce Co. Inc.

Marsh has had success with the sweet tooth pepper, or ancient sweet. The chili pepper variety is great for stuffing or right out of the package, reports Weaver. "We have featured this colorful package in the weekly circular with recipes, usage and handling information for our consumers."

Marsh's size allows it to work with many seasonal varieties to keep the display sharp and dynamic. "We really do not use the

length of the season as one of the criteria when we decide whether to add a variety," Weaver adds.

Caplan notes, "The increase of hothouse-grown chili imports from Holland has also helped make different chili varieties more available at different times of the year."

Mark Vertrees, marketing manager with Miami, FL-based M & M Farm Inc., reveals, "This year, we are experimenting with grow-

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ing the hybrid Scotch bonnet variety on approximately 10 acres in Florida. “We also grow Scotch Bonnets in the Dominican Republic and Trinidad.”

2. BUILD EYE-CATCHING DISPLAYS

Catching the attention of consumers through enticing displays is key to increasing impulse purchases. “Color breaks are important for merchandising,” notes Caplan.

Melissa’s Schueller advises merchandising chili peppers in both bulk and packaged merchandising. “Display chili peppers within their respective category — by the jicama, chayote, tomatillos, yuca root, cilantro and other fresh and dried Latin specialties.”

Part of Marsh’s overall strategy is to keep chili pepper displays fresh and changing. “The bright and vibrant colors of the peppers give our consumers a striking presentation and draws them to the show — that’s part of the excitement,” Weaver explains.

Chili peppers will last longer at retail if they are chilled, but not too cold, Caplan says, stressing that they should not be misted. “If chilis are displayed at room temperature, it is not unusual for them to ripen and turn from green to red. It just makes them have a slightly sweeter flavor.”

Separating chili peppers into baskets on a wet rack or piling them high on an end cap works well, suggests Coast’s Fragoso. “Dividing chili peppers into baskets allows for clear labeling of each variety, while a large display of one variety on an end cap can be successful in an area with a large Hispanic or Asian population.

Freida’s Caplan adds, “Chilis can be displayed near bell peppers to offer even more color, shapes and sizes, but they also provide a great color-break in Latin produce areas, or anywhere a splash of color is needed. Separate baskets make it easy to clearly label each variety.”

Marsh’s Weaver recommends merchandising all of the pepper varieties — both fresh and dried — together to make the display a destination within the department. “At Marsh, we’ve enjoyed success by using the natural attributes of the peppers as a starting point.

M & M’s Vertrees is a fan of bulk displays, noting they are most popular among Hispanic/Latino consumers. “We typically sell peppers in 8-pound boxes, and we’re working on a clamshell pack for chain stores,” he details.

3. USE SIGNAGE TO EDUCATE CONSUMERS

Display space for chili peppers has

Showcase Chili Peppers’ Health Benefits

Attract health-conscious consumers to chili pepper displays by using signage that highlights the super food’s health benefits. Chilis are proven to help reduce headaches, pain and related discomfort, burn body fat and fight nasal congestion, chronic sinus infections and even cancer.

“The heat in the peppers increases metabolism, and they also prevent cancer,” explains Emily Fragoso, marketing manager for Coast Produce Co., in Los Angeles, CA. “Chili peppers turn up the heat by being a natural thermogenic and increasing metabolism and generating heat.”

Robert Schueller, director of marketing

for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce Inc., based in Los Angeles, CA, says chilis have high levels of vitamin A and C.

Capsaicin, the natural-occurring chemical that makes chili peppers hot, helps reduce pain by affecting the brain’s main pain transmitter, explains Fragoso. Capsaicin is also beneficial in fighting cancer, according to studies from the National Cancer Institute, which shows the chemical acts as a natural inhibitor in the cancer process.

“Reducing high blood pressure and cholesterol, loaded with more vitamin C than an orange, and the potential to keep your feet warm in the winter are additional benefits of this super food,” adds Fragoso. **pb**

expanded in recent years, but many consumers still do not know how to differentiate one chili pepper from another. Signage is an effective way to personalize consumers’ shopping experience, communicate heat level, offer recipes and persuade hesitant consumers to try new varieties.

Marsh uses POS materials to help consumers identify and use items they might not have seen prior to their visit. These materials include signs, information cards and recipes. “Our team of certified produce managers receives item briefs each week in the form of a bulletin, and sampling is strongly encouraged when appropriate,” details Weaver. “We also provide a Guide to Fresh Peppers on our Web site.”

Caplan says the No. 1 one characteristic consumers want to know about chilis is the heat level of each variety. “Informational POS signage should include brief flavor profile descriptions with a chili heat ranking.” Frieda’s offers a Chili Meter chart for retailers who want to incorporate it into their displays to help educate consumers. Caplan also suggests arranging chilis into groups, such as mild, medium and hot, so consumers can discover similar chilis in their heat preference.

Melissa’s Schueller recommends retailers educate consumers about the various heat levels and how chili peppers can be used in everyday cooking, beyond traditional Latino dishes. Melissa’s offers retailers chili charts with heat scales, recipe cards and signage regarding handling and usage.

4. CROSS-MERCHANDISE COMPLEMENTARY ITEMS

Pairing bell peppers and chili peppers is

a natural choice when stocking displays. “They are a part of the same family, come in an array of colors and make for great partners both in meals and on the shelf,” notes Fragoso.

Retailers should also cross-merchandise chili peppers near other produce items, such as avocados, tomatoes, onions, garlic and cilantro, to help consumers easily gather the necessary ingredients for making guacamole and salsa.

Give consumers an incentive to make chili rellenos by placing Poblano peppers near cheese, advises Fragoso. “Grab Anaheim or banana peppers and link them to the meat department for a great recipe to make stuffed peppers. Spice up lemonade with Jalapeños or add some flare to the typical nacho fixings.”

5. CREATE THEMED PROMOTIONS

Holidays, seasons and other special events make the perfect opportunity to attract consumers and persuade them to buy chili peppers. Retailers should develop Latin-themed promotions centered around holidays, such as Cinco de Mayo and Mexican Independence Day (Sept. 16), to generate excitement among consumers, according to Schueller.

“The Super Bowl revs up excitement for teamwork and snack foods,” notes Fragoso. “Jalapeño poppers, spicy guacamole, Habanero salsa, nachos with Jalapeño slices and specialty drinks, such as the Flaming Jalapeño, are just a few ideas.”

Weaver agrees, stressing, “Don’t be afraid to promote. Not every variety will be a home run, but most games are won with base hits anyway.” **pb**

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Reader Service #32

Changing The Image Of Dried Plums

Seeking to shake up its reputation, prunes have reemerged as a hip, healthy snack.

BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ

Prunes have never carried a very positive connotation in American culture. Weathered, old women have frequently been referred to as “dried up old prunes,” and the fruit itself is most often thought of as a cure for constipation. Seeking to shake up its previous image, the dried fruit industry has been increasingly referring to the product as dried plums.

The goal was to reposition the fruit as a hip snack to be enjoyed by younger consumers, athletes and families. The California Prune Board even changed its name to the California Dried Plum Board (CDPB) to reflect this new approach. According to the Board’s Web site, research shows that the industry’s target audience, U.S. women aged 25 to 54, responded more favorably to the name dried plums. So has the strategy worked? Are consumers flocking to dried plums as industry leaders had hoped?

Opinions vary widely as to just how much the name change has helped improve dried plums’ fortunes. Sales of dried fruit are up for Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets Inc., but it’s hard to say if the name change or a rapidly growing 50+ population is responsible for the growth, according to Maria Brous, director of media and community relations. After all, Brous points out, “Dried plums are not typically considered a sexy or exotic fruit.”

Joe Tamble, vice president of sales for Sun-Maid Growers of California, based in Kingsburg, CA, says the name change has definitely helped, particularly when it comes to attracting younger consumers.

However, Mike Carter, senior category manager for Winn-Dixie Stores Inc., in Jacksonville, FL, says sales of dried plums

remain slow in his company’s stores. “It’s a niche thing, mainly among our elderly clientele — the snow birds who come down to Florida for the winter,” he explains. “For example, there are some health-conscious people who are buying them.”

Some manufacturers and retailers are concerned the name change may have accomplished little more than confusing consumers. “They are not sure what the product is,” says Carter.

To avoid confusion, Sunsweet Growers Inc., headquartered in Yuba City, CA, is careful to include both names — dried plums and pitted prunes — on its packaging, according to Jeff McLemore, product manager. “We have both names on there because we don’t want to confuse people. We certainly don’t want to be deceptive. That’s not going to help sales in any way.”

At Mariani Packing Co., in Vacaville, CA, marketing manager, Lisa Goshgarian, worries the industry is so busy targeting new consumers, it may alienate those it already has. “You always want to expand your consumer base, but too many times, people do it at the expense of the existing ones they have,” cautions Goshgarian. “It’s great to push the envelope and try to reach more people, but it’s important to know your consumers, know what they want and be realistic about it.”

While industry efforts to reposition the product may have drawn more attention to dried plums, Goshgarian questions how much such initiatives will help in attracting a younger consumer base. “It’s always great to take something and put a fresh spin on it from a marketing perspective,” she admits. “It’s good to make people sit up and take notice, but I don’t know if you are ever



Sunsweet’s new, individually wrapped, portion-controlled snacks, Ones, are only 60 calories each.

going to see young folks eating the product, regardless of what you call it.”

PLAYING UP THE POSITIVES

These days, dried fruit manufacturers

Photo courtesy of Sunsweet Growers Inc.

are determined to give consumers new options for eating dried plums. Sunsweet has unveiled a number of new products, including dark chocolate-coated plum bites dubbed PlumSweets; and a line of offerings — Cherry Essence, Orange Essence and Lemon Essence, which combine the sweet taste of dried plums with other fruit flavors. Sunsweet has also answered the call for portion control with the introduction of individually wrapped pitted prunes, dubbed, Ones. The company also unveiled 60-Calorie Packs. “People looking for portion control often find themselves turning to all those 100-calorie chips and cookie packs, which kind of defeats the purpose of cutting back,” notes McLemore. “We are trying to make people aware that this is a great snack with only 60 calories, and it’s all-natural.”

Mariani, meanwhile, has rolled out Bite-Size Pitted Dried Plums; Extra Large Dried Plums; Pitted Dried Plums Plus — fortified with essential vitamins and minerals — and Plum Support, enhanced with Glucosamine for joint support. “Joint health affects a third of all Americans, particularly Baby Boomers aged 45-plus who are getting older,” explains Goshgarian. “It’s a matter of listening to what’s happening out there and seeing how you can apply it to your product.”

In recent years, dried plums have received a great deal of positive publicity as a super fruit and a great source of antioxidants. The fruit received one of the most coveted honors earlier this year when dried plums were included in Oprah’s “Live Your Best Life” series on a list of six healthful, antioxidant foods as part of Oprah and Dr. Oz’s Ultimate Health Checklist.

Despite their lengthy shelf-life of 12 to 18 months, sales of dried plums are still largely seasonal, spiking during the winter months when usage in holiday baking peaks. In recent years, the category’s growing reputation as a healthy snack has helped boost sales during another key time: “We see huge spikes from New Year’s though April due to New Year’s resolutions to snack on more healthful items and make better dietary choices,” reports Sunsweet’s McLemore. “The key is sustaining that longer by taking advantage of the healthy lifestyle component and encouraging people to continue eating this way throughout the year.”

With household penetration at just 55 percent for the entire dried fruit category, manufacturers are hopeful that focusing on the healthful attributes of dried plums will help boost year-round sales among young and old alike. It’s not going to be easy, concedes Sun-Maid’s Tamble, stressing that it’s going to take a combined effort between

“When dried fruit is in the produce department, the rate of sale, the amount of merchandising and the creativity of the display vastly exceed that of grocery. We would prefer shifting the dried fruit category from center store into the produce department.”

**— Joe Tamble
Sun-Maid Growers of California**

retailers and manufacturers to make dried plums a hot commodity. “We must work together as manufacturers and retail partners to get the word out,” he says. “It may be as simple as saying, ‘Dried Fruit is a Health Food,’ but we’ve got to embark on an ongoing education process that will get the facts out about the benefits of eating dried fruit.”

PRODUCT PLACEMENT

From secondary displays, cross-merchandising and recipe cards to brochures, banners and coupon machines, Tamble says most retailers are open to manufacturers’ suggestions with regard to promoting dried plums. Among his recommendations are cross-promoting dried plums with complementary products. “Dried fruit is an item that doesn’t often sell just by itself,” he explains. “Many times, it’s part of what we call a market basket sale.”

Tamble cites some very successful dried fruit displays positioned near bagged salads or croutons. “They complement each other very well, and the rate of sale increases because dried fruit is an impulse category,” he reports.

Many retailers are inadvertently handicapping themselves by refusing to sell dried plums in the produce department, shelving them away in the grocery aisles instead. Currently, McLemore says three-fourths of dried plum merchandising takes place in grocery, a trend both he and his counterpart at Sun-Maid would like to see reversed.

“When dried fruit is in the produce department, the rate of sale, the amount of merchandising and the creativity of the display vastly exceed that of grocery,” discloses Tamble. “We would prefer shifting the dried fruit category from center store into the produce department.”

The debate over whether to sell dried fruit in produce or grocery is “always a bat-

tle that we have internally in the stores,” says Mariani’s Goshgarian. She believes that displaying dried plums in the produce department helps reinforce the message that it is a healthy product. After all, when consumers are looking for healthy products, the produce section is typically the first place they look. “The produce section is the most heavily trafficked area in a grocery store, and it’s all about fresh, good-for-you products,” continues Goshgarian. “For a product that has received such accolades as being considered a superfruit, this is a perfect opportunity to merchandise it within the fresh arena.”

Winn-Dixie has already taken this approach, merchandising dried plums alongside fresh produce. Carter describes some rather lavish initiatives designed to heighten the category’s presence. “In the past, we had a little display that was hidden at the side of a table,” he says. “Now, we’ve taken the approach that it must be displayed where consumers can see it and offered at a good price point, with POS to attract them to it.”

To that end, Winn-Dixie has built specially designed, four-plex displays, improved their signage and increased their stock. The chain has also taken to promoting dried plums more often than in years past. According to Carter, the result has been some notable sales spikes.

Such reports come as no surprise to Tamble, who takes a page from the Kevin Costner film “Field of Dreams” when describing his approach to merchandising dried plums. “The ongoing message that we need to get out to retailers is ‘If you display it, they will buy,’” says Tamble. “This category is impulse-driven. Displays work, and dried plums are a good complement to other, more perishable items within the produce department. It can be very financially rewarding to the retailers that actively participate in merchandising this category.” **pb**

FARMERS' WEST FLOWERS & BOUQUETS INC., CARPINTERIA, CA

Bruce Brady was hired as director of marketing and business development for the grower and shipper of California specialty fresh-cut flowers, greens and bouquets. Formerly with The Sun Valley Group, Brady has more than 20 years of experience in business management, development, sales and marketing.



SAKATA SEED AMERICA INC., MORGAN HILL, CA

Natalia Hamill has been appointed to the newly created retail category manager role on the ornamentals team. She is working with Sakata's distribution partners, growers and retailers to develop marketing programs. She brings experience in horticultural marketing including brand management and marketing strategy development for other global horticultural companies.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

FLOWER TRANSFER HANDLING SOLD

The Delaware Valley Floral Group (DVFG), Sewell, NJ, announces the sale of its Flower Transfer Handling division to Lynx Global Corporation, a privately owned logistics company belonging to the Centurion Cargo Group, Miami, FL. Lynx will remain within the Flower Transfer building under a lease from DVFG and will continue to provide services to DVFG and its customers.



Reader Service No. 320

FPFC Hosts SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EXPO

The Fresh Produce & Floral Council, La Mirada, CA, will host its 26th Annual Southern California Expo at the Disneyland Hotel, in Anaheim, July 14, 2009. The Expo will provide hands-on education, introduce new ideas and create dynamic interaction with an emphasis on retail, foodservice, produce and floral. Attendees will gather for a day of educational programming and an exposition of more than 170 companies.



Reader Service No. 321

FLORALIFE ACQUIRES CROWN RESEARCH FLORAL PRODUCTS

Crown Research & Chemical Corp., San Antonio, TX, has signed an agreement with Floralife Inc., Walterboro, SC, to manufacture, distribute and sell its products worldwide. These products are distributed and available for sale through Smithers-Oasis Companies to wholesale floral customers. Floralife Inc. is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Smithers-Oasis Company headquartered in Cuyahoga Falls, OH.



Reader Service No. 322

IGC SHOW TO SHINE IN CHICAGO

The Independent Garden Center Show, produced by *Garden Chic* and *Nursery Retailer* magazines, Clearwater, FL, will be held August 18-20 at Navy Pier, Chicago, IL. Now in its third year, the IGC Show serves the sourcing, buying, information and education needs of IGC buyers and executives from all over the country. As the world's largest trade show for independent garden centers, the event boasts 900+ booths and a 210,000 square-foot expo floor.



Reader Service No. 323

WFC SUMMIT SET FOR MALAYSIA

The World Flower Council, Scottsdale, AZ, will host its international summit August 30-September 2 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. WFC is an established organization dedicated to furthering the cause of world peace through the beauty of flowers and the sharing of knowledge among those who have chosen the floral industry as their profession.



Reader Service No. 324

TPIE DATES SET

Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA), Orlando, FL announces its Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition will be held January 14-16, 2010. TPIE is the trade event that offers everything foliage, floral and tropicals. The educational seminars and exhibition featuring approximately 500 booths will be held at the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale, FL.



Reader Service No. 325

NEW PRODUCTS

WATERTIGHT VASE READY TO WOW

Koen Pack USA, Miami, FL, introduces a Watertight Vase that arrives flat in a box of 200 and with the new design, snaps into place in two seconds. Just add water and flowers and it's ready for transport and display. Available in red, yellow, hot pink, green, orange and light pink, the Watertight Vase measures approximately 8"H x 4.75"W and is recyclable.



Reader Service No. 318

CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY SANTA

Blossom Bucket Inc., North Lawrence, OH, introduces its Santa with Believe Snowman figurine. The hand-painted, resin Christmas collectible measures 7"H x 6.5"L and is a Dan Dipaolo design.



Reader Service No. 319

Floral Watch is a regular feature of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a color photo, slide or transparency to: Managing Editor, *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail us at info@producebusiness.com

From Field To Vase

Part I of II: How maintaining the floral cold chain influences profits.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

As consumers become increasingly wary of spending their money in this economy, it is all the more important for retailers to offer products with a high value-perception. Perhaps no sector is more influenced by this than floral.

"Consumers are more careful than ever about where they are spending their precious discretionary budget," says Terry Johnson, president of Horticultural Marketing Resources, in Mission Viejo, CA. "This is why we need to do whatever it takes to deliver them value. In flowers, value means the freshest, longest lasting flowers possible. Freshness at the point of sale gets them to buy, and vase-life longevity at home gets them coming back for more."

"Effective cold chain management is increasingly important as today's customers look for greater value for their dollar," concurs Jon Strom, vice president of floral and lifestyle merchandising for Price Chopper Supermarkets, headquartered in Schenectady, NY. "If your customer experience is not superb, customers are not going to come back and buy more flowers."

In the floral industry, when the cold chain is not properly maintained the results include increased shrinkage, unhappy customers and decreased profits. "As the cold chain has a dramatic impact on the longevity of the flowers, the connection between consumer satisfaction and cold chain is critical albeit unseen to the end consumer," explains Bruce Brady, director of marketing and business development for Farmers' West Flowers & Bouquets Inc., headquartered in Carpinteria, CA.

Retailers who want to enjoy the benefits offered by higher quality, longer lasting flowers can take some simple steps to improving their management of the cold chain. "In-transit handling quality is critical to maintaining product integrity," adds Mark Mohr, manager product development and specialty sales for Continental Airlines



Photo courtesy of Continental Airlines Cargo

Continental Airlines Cargo is developing temperature-controlled handling equipment for perishables to protect against adverse ramp and warehouse conditions.

Cargo, based in Houston, TX. "One has to understand the end-to-end processes employed by the supplier and within your own organization."

ASK WHY

Understanding the implications of cold chain maintenance, whether good or bad, is where it all begins for retailers. "If you're not asking about it and not talking about it, your quality can be affected," says Strom.

The bottom line rests with the consumer. Joseph C. Farrell, president of World Flowers LLC, in Englewood, NJ, explains, "If the product does not meet their expectations, then they will not purchase again. Ultimately, we are dealing with a living product, and how it's treated will affect the customer's experience, which is the final judge on the quality of the handling."

"Increased consumer satisfaction, reduced shrinkage and improved sales and profits are all benefits from proper cold chain maintenance," details Johnson. "Improving the cool chain could substantial-

ly reduce the amount of flower shrinkage, estimated to be more than \$100 million dollars annually."

Temperature is the number one factor affecting the life of a cut flower, reports Elizabeth Darragh, director of food strategic marketing for Sensitech Inc., headquartered in Beverly, MA. "By keeping flowers close to an ideal temperature you can reduce the respiration rate of the plant, which leads to a longer shelf-life, better quality, less shrink and more profits. Higher temperatures accelerate water loss, disease growth and appearance of disorders."

Cold chain evaluation is critical in analyzing any supplier regardless of a retailer's size. "Determine the quality metrics important to your business and integrate those elements into a quality agreement tied to your purchasing contracts," recommends Mohr. "Quality agreements are the one element that can help to control your vendor's carrier selection."

"This could be a way for retailers to save money because they'll be throwing less

Reader Service # 61

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away," says Darragh. "They can demand prices that will net the profit if they're selling good quality."

BEGIN AT THE FARM

Just as retailers have evolved to understand the origin of flowers beyond Miami or New York, they must now view the cold chain as beginning at origin as well. "It is critical for those buying flowers to understand the grower's pre-cooling infrastructure," expresses Brady. "Do they use pre-coolers? Do they probe boxes to make sure the temperature has been reduced to appropriate temperatures of 34-36° F?"

"Retailers need to know the growing regions, handling practices and especially if roses have been pre-cooled," adds Ed Corvelo, category manager of produce/floral with Save Mart Supermarkets, headquartered in Modesto, CA.

"The most important elements are the post-harvest treatment and cooling right on the farm," reports Karen Leggett, director of sales and marketing services for Sunshine Bouquet Company, based in Coral Gables, FL. "It makes an enormous difference if the harvest and production is done in the field versus under cold conditions in a cooler or packing facility. The investment in labor, floral preservatives and ethylene blockers can be very expensive, but can add real value to the consumer satisfaction level and shelf-life of the flowers."

A buyer should examine every element of the supply chain. "Tour the origin farms, look in the coolers and watch the trucks being loaded," advises Continental's Mohr. "Observe the transfer of product onto connecting trucks, ships or aircraft. Every handling point in the system must operate in synchronicity to ensure quality handling."

"Nothing takes the place of visiting," agrees Stephen Armellini, senior vice president with Armellini Express Lines, based in Doral, FL. "Whether it be freight forwarder, warehouse or final transportation providers, each should be paying special attention to maintain the integrity of the cold chain."

Regardless of all the cold chain elements put in place, a breakdown could occur in one of many places. "Most of the farms have great handling, hydration and coolers, and handle the cold chain well," reports Price Chopper's Strom. "However, many times, it is the truck to the airport, the airplane trip or the tarmac in Miami presenting the greatest risk to the cold chain."

"From an airline perspective, the ramp and warehouses are the weakest link," adds Mohr. "Continental Airlines Cargo is developing specialized, temperature-controlled handling equipment for perishables to

ensure exposure to adverse ramp and warehouse conditions are minimized."

The entire distribution channel is important, from the farm all the way to the display at retail. Corvelo states, "Some quality issues will begin to show two to three days after a break in the cold chain. Depending where the flowers are in the logistics, cycle problems may be seen at the distribution center, the retail store or at home with the end user."

KNOW YOUR SUPPLIERS

While convincing lingo on Web sites may make a great first impression, the only way to really grasp what is happening in the cold chain is to know the people involved. "Retailers need to be sure they speak about cold chain management with their suppliers," remarks Strom. "If they're new to the business they need to learn about it themselves first. They should bring it up in every conversation, and visit the operation."

"To help judge the accuracy of a presentation, the buyer can conduct a background check on the prospective vendor," advises Corvelo of Save Mart. "Talk to others in the industry. We belong to a non-competitive share group across the country where these questions can be discussed."

"Reputation for excellence is earned and tested with every shipment," states World Flowers' Farrell. "Price and value are always tested in the market, but what cannot be compromised is flower handling. It is important to work with reputable companies that have standards and testing procedures in place to ensure the cold chain."

"It is best to work with a supplier who has relations with the best airlines and handlers," states Strom. "If a supplier won't tell you who they're working with, it may be a hint you probably shouldn't be doing business with them."

Most good mass marketers take a serious interest in the entire cold chain operation. Farrell explains, "For vendors to be approved, sample shipments are brought in and tested. If vendors do not pass, they will not be approved. Once the vendors have passed the test, you can rely on their proficiency in the freight movement, whether trucking, handling, airline, etc."

"Supermarkets should choose vendors in part by their commitment to the cool chain at their facilities, but also their willingness to insist their suppliers also follow the cool chain," recommends Horticultural Marketing Resources' Johnson. **pb**

[Part 2 of this article will explore temperature monitoring, communication and self-analysis. Watch for it in July.]



Food Safety Steps For Locally Grown Produce

Soon after taking over the reins as head of the Hannaford produce department, Will Wedge would focus on both procurement and merchandising of locally grown produce. By the summer of 2006, the program was well under way and continues to grow in importance every year since then.

Now with food safety and GAP programs gaining in importance among larger producers and interstate shippers, I asked Will to comment concerning how he and Hannaford are approaching locally grown produce, while addressing the issues that have been primarily a matter of faith by many retailers.

According to Wedge, locally grown is now called Close to Home at Hannaford and defined as grown or processed in the same state as which it is sold. For many retailers, the definition also includes product grown within a full day's travel by truck. In an area such as New England, this definition could include product grown as far away from Boston as with the radius from Buffalo, NY, to Washington, D.C.

Instead, Wedge and his Hannaford team have made a decision that is straightforward and easy for their customers to understand. Will explains the program for grower selection had consisted of "an onsite farm visit, which was required as part of the application process.

Product samples were also requested to inspect for quality compliance. We ask growers to consistently provide high quality produce and reliable service. Hannaford also looks to growers who can fill niches in our markets by supplying unique commodities desired by our consumers."

The weakest link in the chain for locally grown can often be the process at store level. Addressing this important area of the role played by retail personnel, Will notes, "One key factor that differentiates Hannaford from other retailers is our flexibility to offer direct store-door delivery to local growers. We give individual stores the autonomy to run the Close to Home business in whatever way that best meets their customer needs. Thus, retail personnel play a key role in our Close to Home program by developing relationships with local growers and knowing the right local produce to carry. They are also responsible for ensuring compliance with our strict quality standards and are a critical link to promoting their local produce and helping consumers better understand where their food is coming from and the manner in which they are supporting the local economy."

Regarding the importance of GAP programs for food safety,

Wedge maintains, "Good Agricultural Practices programs are one of the many tools available to promote food safety among suppliers. For each type of supplier it is important to consider which programs are most appropriate for the size and scope of these groups of growers. GAP is a good tool for small, local growers, while the globally recognized programs such as SQF 1000 and others are more appropriate for larger, national suppliers."

Wedge knows it can be challenging to encourage growers to become GAP-certified. "The process the Hannaford produce department follows has been discussing the possibilities of implementing

GAP requirements for the past couple of years," he reports. "Last year, we dedicated an associate to visit the farms of all 200-plus Hannaford growers throughout New England. This enabled us to enhance relationships with our growers by better understanding each grower's operation, their products and the unique opportunities and challenges they face on a day-to-day basis."

"Hannaford takes pride as a leader in delivering only the highest quality safest produce to its consumers. In February 2009, we announced our requirements that all Hannaford growers be GAP-certified before delivering the 2010 harvest to us," Wedge notes. "All growers are strongly encouraged to obtain their

certification this year to ensure they are well prepared. We've provided these growers with extensive lists of resources at the state level and online, as well as sponsoring training events this spring to help growers better understand GAP, audit requirements and ways it may affect operations," he continues.

The Hannaford Web site link to corporate responsibility provides the following for its consumers: "Look around a Hannaford Supermarket for a moment. Consider the farms and their fields and orchards, our suppliers and their factories, Hannaford Associates... you and your family. We are all connected. We are linked by a shared concern for our earth and a desire to care for the diverse bounty it provides.... We believe that corporate responsibility is our shared responsibility."

Add to these a person with the overall managerial and operational skills Will Wedge possesses and it's easy to recognize why Close to Home is a program worthy of investigation by those involved with the fresh fruit and vegetable industry.

It's one thing to talk the talk; it's another to walk the walk. Will and Hannaford are running the race as though it is a marathon, which, indeed, it is.

pb

Hannaford's Close to Home program is worthy of investigation.



New GLOBALGAP Protocols Will Have U.S. Stakeholder Input

An interview with Nigel Garbutt, Independent Chairman of GLOBALGAP, www.globalgap.org, headquartered in Cologne, Germany.

Q: How did GLOBALGAP originate? How has it evolved?

GLOBALGAP, formerly EurepGAP, was initiated by major European food retailers in 1997 as a response to a loss of consumer confidence following major food safety crises, such as Mad Cow disease and concerns about the use of pesticides on human health and the environment. Retailers believed they needed to complement the legislative controls and bring about a greater degree of transparency through the supply chain by introducing independent, third-party auditing of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP).

GLOBALGAP is not-for-profit and is run by the industry for the benefit of the industry. Retailers and producers have equal representation on the Board and Standard Setting Committee.

In 2007, EurepGAP became GLOBALGAP, which recognized how the initiative had transitioned from being EU-centered to becoming global in its outreach with more than 80 countries participating with more than 90,000 certificates granted.

Q: Could you define GLOBALGAP, describe its scope and highlight the key components?

As implicit in our name, the scope is focused on GAPs that have global applicability. The standards can be adapted to fit local priorities and circumstances. So you could say GLOBALGAP thinks global but acts local!

Q: How are the GLOBALGAP standards determined? Who is involved in the process?

GLOBALGAP retailers and producer members agree upon the standards. In addition, we reach out to a wide range of stakeholders so they can comment on proposals for changes. For example, in 2009 GLOBALGAP will travel to major cities worldwide to consult on the next version of protocols. We will be in Washington, DC, on October 29, 2009. This will be a great chance for U.S. stakeholders to have their say on the standard revision.

Q: Do standards change based on scientific advancements and lessons learned from food outbreaks and other phenomena? If so, how often and what is the criteria for change?

Yes, the standards are subject to continuous improvement... scientific advancements and how they relate to practices on the farm are considered as they arise.

The standards also are routinely reviewed every 3 years. The revision cycle allows for evaluation of new issues, review of existing practices and experience gained in implementation as well as allowing time for producers to adapt and improve practices.

Q: How much interest have you received from U.S. suppliers to be GLOBALGAP-certified? What does the process entail?

A number of U.S. producers are already certified by GLOBALGAP, particularly where they are exporting. Their experience is a positive one. They cite that the standard is practicable and that it brings about a more efficient management in production, as well as being a cost-effective program that is accepted by a large number of international retail and foodservice buyers. To become certified, producers simply contact any one of the approved certification bodies listed on our Web site.

Q: What distinguishes GLOBALGAP from other international food safety certifications?

GLOBALGAP is operated on a transparent basis — we are open and inclusive, and all our standards are published free of charge and in more than 20 languages — for the benefit of the industry. Experience has shown that it can be applied globally to large and small producers alike.

We have worked tirelessly to harmonize the requirements of GLOBALGAP retailer members. There are now 37 international retail chains that are members of GLOBALGAP, so this has simplified and reduced the burden on producers in terms of practices and audit costs. This wide acceptance and cost effectiveness is a major reason for choosing GLOBALGAP as a partner.

We work with National GAP schemes, such as ChinaGAP and MexicoGAP, and benchmark them to our program to level the playing field and bring confidence to GAP implementation worldwide.

Q: The British Retail Consortium (BRC) is mentioned frequently in the United States as another possible certification option. How does GLOBALGAP compare to BRC? Is there a lot of overlap and should suppliers sign up for both?

The BRC standard complements GLOBALGAP, as its scope is the post-farmgate facilities of large, mechanized packinghouses and food processing facilities where Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) are the main focus. For some larger producer/packer organizations, [using both] provides an ideal farm-to-fork solution.

Q: What are the advantages of becoming GLOBALGAP-certified? Does this allow for more aligned supply chain arrangements between suppliers and retailers? In the U.S. produce industry, it's not as clear-cut.

With recent food safety scares in the United States, the produce industry is facing similar problems that have been effectively tackled by GLOBALGAP. Another important factor is that retailing and production are becoming increasingly globalized and, as we know, with modern communications, trade and travel, these scares and problems do not respect national boundaries so we need to co-operate and work on a pre-competitive and global basis towards effective harmonized solutions.

pb



Exploring Value: What Does It Mean To You?

I recently spent three days at a Produce Solutions Conference sponsored by the Produce Marketing Association (PMA). During a lively conference, the speakers and attendees returned again and again to the word “value.” For some it meant quality; for others taste. Still, for others, the word “value” represented price. Our consumer panel spoke of organics and locally grown. Some mentioned price, while others thought of convenience.

As I listened to their discussion, I was reminded of my mentor, Nido Qubein, and his take on value. Qubein is the President of High Point University in High Point, North Carolina. He is not a produce expert; he is a business expert. He defines “value” in the most practical of business terms by asking: “Can you help me solve my problem today?”

If you can help me, you become of high value to me. If you cannot help me — or if you prove to be of little help — it won't matter if you are a nice person, manage a clean store, prove to be a reputable grower, an on-time shipper or a safety-conscious partner. If you can't help me with my problem, I'll probably end up looking elsewhere.

Think now of your customer or perhaps your customer's customer. On the retail level, consider how many of your shoppers crave fresh and tasty, how many sniff out the best deal and how, still, others desire the reassurance of safety and security.

Break it down again. What they really might want is a family meal or a sure-fire way to impress their new vegetarian girlfriend. Perhaps they want to introduce their family to a favorite taste from their childhood, entertain that special couple or earn “favorite mom” status by surprising the soccer team with a special snack. While we might try various methods to engage each person or group, guessing if this or that might work, what if we thought of ourselves as collaborators with our customers — working together in the process of problem solving? This is the heart of value.

Yes, they may trust us, but do they trust themselves to know what to do with passion fruit, eggplant or even how to fry pickles? Stop by your fish department and you'll enjoy a rare look at someone who understands the importance of how to help people. “How do I cook this?” “Will this be OK rare?” “Where is this from?” make up the every-day, every-customer questions the fish expert quickly

handles. The fish professional understands that the customer has a problem, a problem that can be solved. The fish is one thing. What to do with the fish is another.

This is called the “product of the product” for Qubein. While we shop for food, we do so for many reasons well beyond hunger and nourishment. We shop for social reasons — we know and like the produce manager; we shop for family reasons — we want our family to know and like us; we shop to experiment and to vary our diet — trying new recipes from the Food Channel; and we shop to save time — to get in and out quickly.

There may be as many of these reasons as there are customers. But when it comes to the meaning of value, we need to see ourselves as problem-solvers and problem-helpers first, rather than simply good guessers. When we use a problem-solver outlook, we gain a better and more useful insight into our customer's needs, wants and customs.

Once this is understood, you will enjoy a connection with the customer — with your customer — that will be difficult to break. Whole Foods makes a point of employing people who know their departments. Larger stores may not have the savvy personnel on hand at a moment's notice, but they can offer recipes, pictures and local testimonials, even from some of your friends and neighbors.

This can move well beyond retail. Think about your suppliers, no matter how big or small an organization they may be. Each has a

problem to solve, and sometimes that problem is you. How can you help them? Certainly, we can ask our customers the ultimate question: “Of all of those who serve you, who is the best and why?”

But what if we ask our suppliers the same question? “Of all of your customers, who is the best and why?” Those answers contain data we can put to good use. Beyond that, it is a priceless connection. How would you respond if someone asked you? How would that influence your opinion of them? What would you think of them later?

Whether we are shopping for our family, for Denny's, for Wal-Mart or for the United States Air Force, every one of us defines value based on a problem to solve. If we put those lenses on, we have a much better opportunity to be seen as a collaborator rather than a prognosticator.

pb

**What if we thought
of ourselves as
collaborators with
our customers —
working together in
the process of
problem solving?
This is the heart
of value.**

Kevin E. O'Connor, CSP is an author, executive coach, businessman and certified speaking professional.

You can contact him at: kevin@kevinoc.com or 847-208-8840

Blast from the Past

In the late 1800s, railroad baron, Henry Flagler, asked his cousin, Thomas Horace Hastings, to create a farm that would provide fresh vegetables for guests at his various hotels in the St. Augustine, FL, area. Hastings did just that, and in 1890, the farms serving Flagler's hotels were incorporated into the town of Hastings, FL.

Today, Hastings is known as the "Potato Capital of Florida," a moniker that is reflected in this 1920s photograph of a potato

packing establishment. Currently, St. John's County has 12,000 acres devoted solely to potato production between the months of January and June. Additionally, Hastings grows cabbage, onions, eggplant, the St. Augustine sweet onion and the Datil pepper, which is grown almost exclusively in St. John's County.

Many Hastings' farms have found success focusing exclusively on potatoes. For example, Sun Fresh Farms Inc. produces SunLite, the low-carb potato, which boasts 30 percent less carbohydrates and 25 percent less calories than the average potato. Another farming operation, Bulls-Hit Ranch & Farm, no longer produces beef cattle as the name suggests, but continues to grow 600 acres worth of red potatoes. The company's sales are handled through Hastings-based Southeast Farms Inc., which also specializes in potatoes.

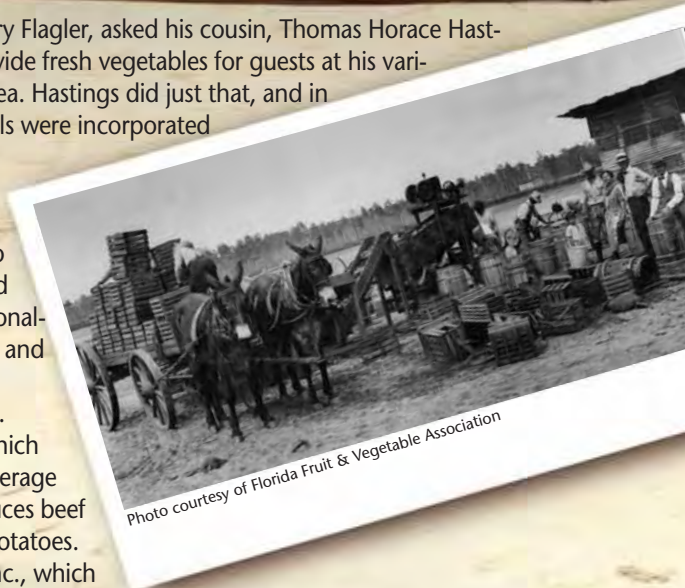


Photo courtesy of Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association

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The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail info@producebusiness.com

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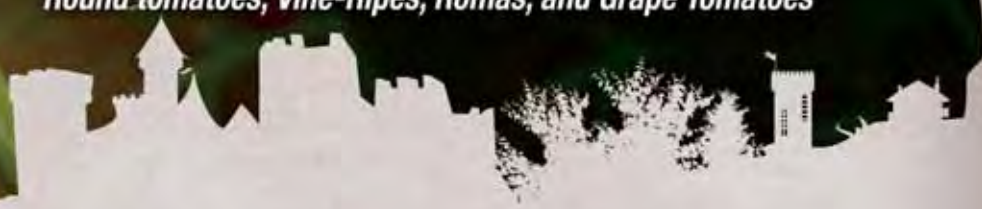
COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX
Abbott & Cobb	84	29	800-345-SEED	215-245-9043
Agrexco USA, Ltd.	35	23	718-481-8700	718-481-8710
Anthony Vineyards, Inc.	90	44	661-858-8300	661-858-8306
Basciani Foods, Inc.	96	38	610-268-3044	610-268-2194
Bland Farms	56	14	800-VIDALIA	912-654-3532
Blue Book Services	39	56	630-668-3500	630-668-0303
California Tree Ripe	70	26	559-497-0400	559-497-1023
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	70	12	515-981-5111	515-981-4564
Champ's Mushrooms	97	22	866-Champs1	604-607-0787
Classic Salads, LLC	29	6	831-763-4520	831-763-1542
William Consalo & Sons Farms, Inc.	42	36	856-691-3377	856-691-0164
Country Fresh Mushroom Co.	96	53	610-268-3043	610-268-0479
Crowley Maritime Corp.	108	7	800-CROWLEY	
R.H. Dietz & Sons, Inc.	85	34	773-268-6660	773-268-4211
Dole Fresh Fruit Company	69	59	818-879-6600	818-879-6628
Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.	2	39	800-333-5454	831-754-5243
dProduce Man Software	102	61	888-PRODMAN	650-712-9973
Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc.	82	51	866-792-DUDA	831-757-5078
East Coast Brokers & Packers, Inc.	107	16	800-557-7751	863-869-9850
Eastern Fresh Growers, Inc.	44	21	856-447-3563	856-447-4227
F & S Produce Co., Inc.	82	67	800-886-3316	856-453-0494
Family Tree Farms	75	5	866-FLAVOR-1	559-595-7795
Fresh Partners AB	90	54	46-8-742-1215	46-8-742-6201
Fresherized Foods	71	48	817-509-0626	817-509-0636
General Produce, Inc.	62	4	800-782-5833	404-361-1841
Giannini Packing Corp.	74	50	559-591-3758	559-591-5708
Giorgio Fresh Co.	96	60	800-330-5711	610-429-3810
Hardy Farms Peanuts	64	31	478-783-3044	478-783-0606
Grant J. Hunt Co.	70	68	509-575-8770	509-452-1769
Inline Plastics Corp.	83	1	800-826-5567	203-924-0370
Jasmine Vineyards, Inc.	91	28	661-792-2141	661-792-6365
L&M Companies, Inc.	59	41	509-698-3881	509-698-3922
Layer Saver, LLC	31	42	866-597-7287	866-597-7278
M&M Farms, Inc.	94	11	800-634-7898	305-233-0813
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	9	65	800-884-6266	831-422-5171

COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX
Miatech	53	10	800-339-5234	503-659-2204
MIXTEC Group	76	52	626-440-7077	626-440-1557
MJB Sales, Inc.	96	33	610-268-0444	610-268-0837
Monterey Mushrooms	97	27	573-374-1826	831-763-2300
National Watermelon Promotion Board	72-73	15	407-657-0261	407-657-2213
New Jersey Blueberry Industry Council	43	40	609-292-8853	609-984-2508
New Jersey Department of Agriculture	41	17	609-292-8853	609-292-2508
Ocean Mist Farms	23	72	831-633-2492	831-633-4363
Pandol Brothers, Inc.	74	9	661-725-3145	661-725-4741
Pappas & Company	8564	69	559-655-4277	559-655-4841
Paulk Vineyards	64	19	229-468-7873	229-468-7876
Produce Exchange Co. of Atlanta, Inc.	60	64	800-480-4463	404-608-0401
Produce for Better Health Foundation	47	55	302-235-2329	302-235-5555
The Produce Marketing Association	81	24	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
The Produce Marketing Association	86-87	25	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
Produce Pro Software	102	57	630-395-0535	630-572-0390
PuraVida Farms	85	13	480-588-7012	714-686-9253
R&R Flaim Next				
Generation Produce, LLC	46	46	609-381-5592	856-690-0373
Raillex, LLC	49	30	888-4RAILEX	518-356-3908
Ready Pac Produce, Inc.	35	71	800-800-4088	818-856-1657
Red Blossom Farms, Inc.	33	18	805-981-1839	805-693-0032
Shuman Produce, Inc.	66	3	912-557-4477	912-557-4478
Silver Creek Software	94	47	208-388-4555	208-322-3510
Stemilt Growers, Inc.	76	37	509-662-9667	509-663-2914
Sun Valley Orchards	45	50	856-769-5280	856-769-5213
Sun World International	89	35	760-398-9430	760-398-9613
Sun World International	74	49	760-398-9430	760-398-9613
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	5	62	800-772-4542	831-455-3915
To-Jo Fresh Mushrooms, Inc.	97	32	610-268-8082	610-268-8644
Torrey Farms, Inc.	76	45	585-757-9941	585-757-2528
Trinity Fruit Sales	75	43	559-433-3777	559-433-3790
United Fresh Produce Association	17	52	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
Unity Farms Corp.	71	66	305-245-1555	305-247-0240
Vineland Co-op Produce Auction, Inc.	46	20	856-691-0721	856-794-2301



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