

producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

25
YEARS
INITIATING
INDUSTRY
IMPROVEMENT



Going Global

Retailers find direct sourcing is fraught with challenges.

INSIDE:

THE PUNDIT LOOKS AT 'LOCAL' IDEOLOGY • IMPORTED ONIONS
CENTRAL AMERICAN IMPORTS • INDEPENDENT STORES
WINTER MERCHANDISING • JUICES • REGIONAL PROFILE: ATLANTA
MEXICAN AVOCADOS • CITRUS • BANANAS • PERUVIAN ASPARAGUS
HOLIDAY BAKING • BOUQUET SEASON
RISING STARS • 25 INNOVATIONS
NEW YORK FOOD SCENE



Bananas After Dark

Not just for
breakfast
anymore



DOLE Baked Banana S'mores

- **Line** toaster oven tray with nonstick aluminum foil. Preheat oven to 350° F.
- **Place ripe peeled bananas** on toaster tray.
- **Bake** for 10 minutes. Remove from oven; cut into 1-inch pieces.
- **Arrange** warm baked bananas on graham cracker squares. Place chocolate squares over baked bananas. Top with another cracker to make a sandwich.





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75 NEW YORK FOOD SCENE

Local produce is the talk of this foodie town, be it in a metro-urban supermarket, a new European hall concept or in an ultra-modern restaurant on the Upper West Side.

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THIS MONTH'S WINNER

Jeff Cady

Produce Buyer/Merchandiser, Tops Friendly Markets
 Buffalo, NY



Jeff Cady has been with Tops, a 132-chain Buffalo, NY-based retailer, since 1990. While that may seem like a long time, the neighborhood gem has been around for more than 40 years. During his tenure, he has been promoted a number of times. "I was hired as a produce manager, moved to a supervisor and then went corporate. I've been in my current position for a couple of years."

There's no doubt about it; Jeff loves what he does. "Produce is a great business to be

in, and Tops is a wonderful place to work," he says. "With produce, everything changes — the seasons, the unique products, all of it. Every day brings something new. Plus, I work with excellent people, both at the store level and within the community."

While Jeff hasn't been reading **PRODUCE BUSINESS** for too long, he loves the magazine. "I learn a lot of new things from reading it," he says. "Specifically, I find the fresh-cut fruit and packaged salads articles very helpful. I definitely want to keep reading it."

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 January issue of **PRODUCE BUSINESS**. The winner must agree to submit a color photo to be published in that issue.

WIN A TASSIMO SINGLE-SERVE COFFEE BREWER!

This one-touch, fully automatic single-serve coffee brewer eliminates the mess and frustration of making one cup of coffee, cappuccino or even hot chocolate. An LED user interface, height-adjustable cup stand and water-level indicator make it easier than ever before to brew the perfect hot beverage.



QUESTIONS FOR THE NOVEMBER ISSUE

- 1) What sweet treat is Dole promoting in conjunction with its Bananas After Dark campaign? _____
- 2) What is the address for Direct Source Marketing? _____
- 3) Name two sales associates at The Cranberry Network. _____
- 4) Washington Fruit & Produce Co. uses what national monument in its ad? _____
- 5) How many years as General Produce been in business? _____
- 6) Niagara Fresh Fruit Co. is a division of what company? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____
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Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
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Plus we cover top-level happenings in Retail and Foodservice that are of special interest to a perishable food executive at a supermarket or other retail chain and at a foodservice chain operation or foodservice distributor.





SMALL FARM EXEMPTION IN SENATE UNDERMINES PUBLIC HEALTH

By Robert Guenther
Senior Vice President
Public Policy
United Fresh Produce Association

When Congress returns for a lame duck session in November and December, they may consider legislation that would reform the food safety laws in this country. The U.S. House of Representatives has already passed its version of the bill and is awaiting action by the Senate on S. 510, the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act. There are a number of amendments that may be considered by the Senate to S. 510, but none more important than an amendment by Senator Tester of Montana that would exempt small farms and food processors from mandatory food safety requirements based on the size of their operations, to whom they sell food products and their geographic marketing area. Herein, an explanation of some of the aspects of this amendment and why it is not good public policy.

Will Food Products Sold At A Location That Is 400-Miles Or Less From Where It Was Grown (A Farm) Or Processed (A Facility) Be Considered "Local" Under The Tester Amendment?

The Tester Amendment is intended to eliminate needless federal regulation of small "local" producers and processors, but a distance of "400 miles" cannot be considered "local" under any reasonable definition. If the Tester Amendment is adopted in its current form, then Washingtonians would be able to buy unregulated food grown or processed as far south as South Carolina; as far west as Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio; and as far north as Toronto, New York, Vermont and New Hampshire.

The entire premise underlying the Tester Amendment is that when buying "local," the consumer has a close, personal relationship with the grower or processor and can contact him/her directly if there is a food-safety problem. It is hard to understand how that will be true for food sold by a grocery store or a restaurant that is 400 miles away and from the farm or facility that produced it.

Are businesses with incomes of \$500,000

per year considered "small?"

According to the Small Business Administration, in 2004, 83 percent of non-farm businesses (25 million of 30.7 million business filing taxes) reported gross receipts of \$500,000 or less to the Internal Revenue Service. Therefore, under the Tester Amendment, a majority of food-processing businesses would not have to comply with the preventive food safety measures mandated by S. 510.

According to the USDA Census of Agriculture, 94 percent of farms (2 million of 2.5 million farms) had income of less than \$500,000 in 2007; they accounted for one-fourth of all farm income. USDA considers a farm small if it has income of \$250,000 or less. Small farms, as defined by USDA, would still account for 90 percent of all farms, but only 15 percent of total farm sales.

Will growers exempt under the Tester Amendment be subject to state and local food safety standards?

The premise underlying the Tester Amendment is that growers exempt from federal law will be covered by comparable state and local safety standards. However, there are no mandatory, enforceable produce safety standards in any state except Florida (and the standard applies only to tomatoes). In fact, a 2010 report by the National Academy of Sciences highlighted major food borne disease surveillance inconsistencies across states and the lack of resources needed to protect consumers.

Does the Tester Amendment consider the risk of the food item when determining if a grower or processor is exempt from federal food safety requirements?

Tester's exemptions are based only on the size of the grower or processor and its geographic proximity to a qualified end-user. It does not take into consideration the health risk posed by the food item that is grown or processed. By contrast, many state "cottage food" laws and regulations exempt home

kitchens that produce only low-risk food items (such as baked goods and jams) from state food safety and licensing requirements.

Is the Tester Amendment bad for growers and processors who would be exempt?

A question remains as to whether insurers will allow retail establishments like restaurants and supermarkets to buy from small farmers/processors that are exempt from FDA regulations. Such sales pose a significant business risk. Moreover, as was the case with the spinach outbreak, the peanut outbreak and many others, consumers often steer clear of the tainted product entirely, no matter who the producer is. Thus, when a foodborne disease outbreak or major recall occurs, this often severely harms consumer confidence in that food, and hurts business for all producers of the product, not just sales by the producer of the tainted food.

Are foods grown or processed by small, local operations "safer" than those produced by larger entities?

A number of food safety outbreaks over the past several years have been related to small farms and operation including tomatoes, milk, organic leafy greens and peas. In addition, a 2006 study by the University of Minnesota compared conventional, certified organic and non-certified organic produce, finding no difference in the likelihood of contamination. It concluded that produce type, rather than farm type, is more likely to influence the prevalence of E. coli contamination.

The Tester Amendment is a complete reversal of the underpinnings of S. 510, which has been driven by risk- and science-based standards that would apply to the food sectors. In addition, there are a number of important provisions already included in the bill that will help alleviate pressure on small farms and food processors that are important to consider and are crucial to ensuring that this legislation is "scalable" in its application of federal standards throughout the food chain. **pb**

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RETURN TO NEW YORK

By James Prevor
President & Editor-in-Chief



I learned a great deal about the produce industry listening to my grandfather. Of course, I also learned a great deal from my father, but he was often working and busy. My grandfather, retired, could discourse: He had been a networker, an association person and an industry leader — a Mason and head of the Fruit Auction Buyers' Association for many years.

My grandfather's produce career was cut short by cancer. He had cancer of the larynx. The cancer itself didn't kill him, but he had to have a laryngectomy to remove his larynx, and since his voice was the primary tool with which he made a living, he could no longer do business.

When my grandfather fell ill, he moved to Tamarac, FL. On one trip to visit him, I accompanied him to a homeowners' association meeting where some issue was hotly debated. We sat silently, listened to the others and, in the end, my grandfather cast his vote. We walked home in the dark, without a star in the sky that night. All was quiet except for the occasional cricket, and my grandfather, for whom speaking was laborious, drew breath as he prepared to say something he thought worth the effort.

We stopped in the darkness and he said, "You know, years ago I would have given the speeches. I would have led that meeting. But they took my voice. Now I can't do it." I remember observing his demeanor and thinking he wasn't really sad. He was a practical man and had accepted his fate, but he spoke because he wanted me to know the values he approved of did not include sitting silently while the issues of the day were decided.

We continued to walk and I remember saying, "Grandpa, don't worry, one day I'll give the speeches for you." I'm not 100 percent sure what I meant, but the thought seemed to please him and we walked on.

It has been over half a century since my grandfather chaired the Fruit Auction Buyers' Association. Each year, the association held a gala in Manhattan, bringing in entertainment and a big orchestra. In its day, it was a grand produce event.

I write this as I prepare to leave for New York City, to return to the place my great-grandfather, Jacob Prevor, arrived at from Russia so many years ago and where he opened a produce wholesaling business in Brooklyn's now defunct Wallabout Market. I return to New York, where my grandfather, Harry Prevor, was a wholesaler and auction buyer in the old Washington Street Market. I return to New York where my father, Michael Prevor, was an original tenant in the Hunts Point Produce Market.

The visit to New York would normally be unremarkable; it is, after all, a trek I have made many times before. Yet I travel now to launch the inaugural edition of The New York Produce Show and Conference. Bringing it to fruition is, by far, the hardest thing I've ever done. Yet each step has been an inspiration.

We had the good sense to join hands at the beginning of the venture with the Eastern Produce Council. What a fortuitous choice that was. We owe a debt of gratitude to John McAleavey, executive director of the EPC; Dean Holmquist, director of produce and floral for Foodtown Supermarkets and president of the EPC; and Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for Kings Super Markets and chairman of the EPC conference committee. They were always my friends, but they turned out to be inspirational in their daily dedication to serving the trade and in doing the right thing.

Our PRODUCE BUSINESS team rose to the occasion in an amazing way. When Ken Whitacre and I hired Ellen Rosenthal, she was working in a shoe

store. It is elevating to see people become all they can be. Watching Ellen fight for this event — fight to make it extraordinary — has been a measure of her own extraordinary growth and accomplishment.

It is never a good idea to count one's chickens before they are hatched, and as I write this, no event has yet been held. But we stand convinced that we have cre-

ated something World Class. It is not only the sold-out trade show, nor the educational micro-sessions, nor the chef cooking demo, nor the many tours of the region. Neither the keynote retail panel, nor the networking opening reception explains it. It is a sense that there is a synergy here. It is a notion that in the biggest buying region in the country, in the capital of the world, there had long been a void and now it will be filled.

Sometimes when I visited my grandfather, we would sit by the pool and he would talk with the other retirees. Oddly enough, they didn't speak too much about their own lives; they would talk mostly about their children, and as my grandfather reported on the exploits of his sons, recounting their success in business and in life, he would beam.

My grandfather passed away many years ago, not long after we launched PRODUCE BUSINESS. I think he would be amazed at what we have created. If I am quiet, I can hear his voice, now restored to its pre-cancerous state, as he speaks proudly to his friends and points down to the different events going on in mid-town Manhattan at The New York Produce Show and Conference.

When I get up on stage at the keynote breakfast and prepare to moderate our all-star panel, I'm going to tip my microphone to my grandfather and tell him that, as promised on a starless night long ago, this one is for you Grandpa.

pb

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Reader Service # 2

TRANSITIONS

ACME MARKETS INC. MALVERN, PA

Jay Schneider was promoted to business development manager. Schneider began his 27-year career with Acme pushing carts at the store level and later managing the produce department. He held various other positions, such as imported field inspector and produce operations specialist. Most recently, he spent 10 years as produce category manager. His experience at Acme includes 23 years working with produce.



LOBUE CITRUS LINDSAY, CA

Rick Osterhues was hired as vice president of sales and marketing, a newly created position. His duties will include providing leadership on key sales and marketing initiatives. He brings nearly 20 years of experience in business-process improvement in the produce industry. He previously worked for Chiquita Brands International, The David Oppenheimer Group and Growers Express.



COOSEMANS WORLDWIDE INC. MIAMI, FL

Chick Goodman has joined the Coosemans Worldwide team as vice president of sales and marketing. He brings more than 20 years of national sales and marketing experience in the produce industry. He previously worked at HerbThyme Farms, Quail Mountain Herbs, Galaxy Nutritional Foods and Harmony Foods.



NSF INTERNATIONAL ANN ARBOR, MI

Donna Garren was appointed to president and general manager of NSF Davis Fresh. She will work closely with the NSF Davis Fresh team to verify safer, consistent produce practices utilizing NSF Davis Fresh's technical expertise. She brings more than 14 years of experience working in the food industry, most recently serving as vice president of Food Safety Programs for the Consumer Goods Forum.



NOKOTA PACKERS INC. BUXTON, ND

Mike Rerick has been hired as vice president of sales and marketing. He will be working with Steve Tweten in the sales department. He brings 12 years of sales experience that he gained from companies such as Xerox and Coca-Cola, and most recently, the fresh potato industry.



NATURIFE FARMS NAPLES, FL

Brian Jenny was appointed to the newly created position of director of East Coast business development. He will be responsible for leading the East Coast sales team, servicing the existing client base and developing new business opportunities in the retail, foodservice and wholesale channels. He previously worked for Monterey Mushrooms since 2002.



CRANBERRY INSTITUTE EAST WAREHAM, MA

Terry Humfeld was selected as the new executive director. He will be joining the institute this month, and stepping up as its new executive director on January 1, 2011. He will replace Jere Downing, who will retire at the end of 2010. Humfeld brings more than 26 years of professional experience with association management for horticulture and produce trade organizations.



STROCK & CO INC. CHELSEA, MA

Sheldon Borodkin was hired as a produce buyer/salesman. He will handle new commodities for the company and pursue opportunities to grow sales, particularly in the vegetable category. He has worked in the produce industry for 26 years, most recently as director of purchasing for a large foodservice distributor.



NEW PRODUCTS

CONVENIENT SALAD DRESSING PRODUCTS

Rising Sun Farms, Phoenix, OR, now offers its convenient Salad Energizer line in a larger 5.5-oz. size with a re-sealable lid. The company has also expanded its Oil Free Dressing line to include a new natural fig flavor. The full line of Rising Sun Farms Oil Free Salad Dressings & Marinades are cholesterol- and fat-free, low in carbohydrates, calories and sodium.

Reader Service Number 300



CONSUMER 5-LB. POTATO BAGS

Campbell Farms, formerly Tri-Campbell Farms of Grafton, ND, has introduced a new consumer 5-lb. bag for potatoes that is a combination of poly and netting that features a convenience handle. The netting allows great visibility for the product, while the poly emphasizes "red-baking potatoes." The backside includes potato-based recipes.

Reader Service Number 301



FRESH-CUT GREEN AND RED APPLE PACKS

Freshway Foods, Sidney, OH, has begun production of fresh-cut green and red apple packs under the Mott's label. The new line includes retail and club store packs as well as foodservice offerings. This past May, Freshway Foods finalized the partnership to become the Midwest processor for Mott's fresh-cut apple line and started production in June.

Reader Service Number 302



PURE COCONUT WATER

Bolthouse Farms, Bakersfield, CA, introduces its newest addition to its exotic Bom Dia product line: Coconut Splash Tropical Mango, pure coconut water from the tropics. Packed with electrolytes, including more potassium than a whole banana in each 15.2-oz. bottle, Coconut Splash is naturally low in fat and contains only 60 calories per bottle.

Reader Service Number 303



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

NEW PRODUCTS

HISPANIC-FOCUSED FRUIT LINE

JBJ Veg-Land, Fullerton, CA, now offers a complete Hispanic line of 9-oz. swirl fruit cups with a separate Chile packet. The Hispanic line consists of fresh-sliced coconut, cucumber wheels, chunk papaya, sliced sweet mango, pineapple and jicama. It also offers a complete line of Grill Mates for the barbeque.

Reader Service Number 304



SALAD KITS LAUNCHED

Fresh Express, Cincinnati, OH, a fully owned subsidiary of Chiquita Brands International Inc., has launched its new convenience-focused, value-added salad kits program. As consumers increasingly demand new and flavorful salad options, Fresh Express has launched a unique program to meet their needs for complete and delicious salad meals.

Reader Service Number 305



ANNOUNCEMENTS

CAIA TO HELP HOST TOSTITOS FIESTA BOWL

The Chilean Avocado Importers Association (CAIA), Aptos, CA, has again partnered with the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl, which will be played on January 1, 2011, in Glendale, AZ. This sponsorship opportunity gives CAIA on-premise visibility among hundreds of thousands of college football fans.

Reader Service Number 306



PFK KICKS OFF ANNUAL FALL CAMPAIGN

Produce for Kids, Orlando, FL, is partnering with four retailers, which represent more than 1,500 grocery stores in 20 states in the organization's annual Eat Smart for a Great Start fall campaign to benefit PBS KIDS. In September and October, participating fruit and vegetable growers nationwide made donations to PBS KIDS based on sales of fresh produce items at participating retail stores.

Reader Service Number 307



TURBANA CORP. CELEBRATES 40TH BIRTHDAY

Turbana Corp., Coral Gables, FL, is celebrating 40 years in business since opening its doors in 1970. A premier importer of premium bananas, exotic bananas and plantains in North America, Turbana most recently rolled out its new corporate and brand identities, and in 2010 launched a division of consumer packaged goods with its Turbana brand of plantain chips.

Reader Service Number 308



DEL MONTE SUPPORTS TEACHERS

Del Monte Fresh Produce N. America Inc., Coral Gables, FL, is launching a program to help support kindergarten through 12th-grade public school teachers across the United States, Canada and Central America, with cash to purchase school supplies and fresh fruit. The efforts are part of Teacher Monday: Cash for Classrooms, an integrated marketing campaign driven by an online contest in which consumers vote for their favorite teacher.

Reader Service Number 309



FARMER'S BEST PARTNERS ON TOMATO STUDY

Farmer's Best, Nogales, AZ, partnered with an East Coast research firm to conduct a study of principal grocery consumers in the United States. The study addressed the frequency of tomato purchase, type preferences, key attributes, usage and other selection criteria and served to support some retailers' current practices and beliefs, adding new angles to consider.

Reader Service Number 310



AMHPAC HOSTS TECHNICAL, BUSINESS-ORIENTED CONGRESS

AMHPAC, the Mexican Greenhouse Growers Association, in Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico, attracted more than 300 attendants from 20 Mexican states and five countries to its third annual Technical and Business Oriented Congress held in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. AMHPAC's current chairman of the board, Cesar Campaña, inaugurated the country's leading protected horticulture association.

Reader Service Number 311



OCEAN MIST FARMS AND SONY PARTNER ON DVD OFFER

Ocean Mist Farms, Castroville, CA, has partnered with Sony this fall to promote the release of the movie *Eat Pray Love* on DVD. The retail offer includes an Instant Redeemable Coupon for \$3-off the purchase of Sony's *Eat Pray Love* movie on DVD with the purchase of an Ocean Mist Farms artichoke.

Reader Service Number 312



MARIANI INTRODUCES NEW LINE OF SEASONED ALMONDS

Mariani Nut Co., Winters, CA, has introduced a new line of seasoned almonds to join the company's natural whole, sliced and slivered nuts in the fresh produce aisles. Honey Roasted, Wasabi & Soy and Roasted & Salt seasoned almonds are now available in convenient, resealable 6-oz. packages.

Reader Service Number 313



CHIQUITA UNVEILS WINNING CONSUMER-CREATED STICKER DESIGNS

Chiquita Brands International Inc., Cincinnati, OH, unveiled the 18 designs selected to adorn Chiquita bananas in U.S. grocery stores during the month of November. In June, Chiquita invited consumers to personalize their Chiquita experience as part of the Chiquita Banana Sticker Design Contest. More than 100,000 votes determined the winning 18 designs from a field of 50 finalists.

Reader Service Number 314



MANN PACKING LAUNCHES MULTIPLE CANADIAN PROMOTIONS

Mann Packing Co., Salinas, CA, is supporting its Canadian sales program this fall with multiple promotions, including 250,000 promotional booklets offering more than \$3.50 in savings that were applied to Mann's fresh-cut vegetable products shipped to Canadian markets. The booklets will feature a variety of offers and recipes from many Canadian partners.

Reader Service Number 315



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



**FIRST PRE-CUT PRODUCT —
PEELED GARLIC**

Wow — that is some milestone that [Jim Prevor and Ken Whitacre] are celebrating their 25-year anniversary of PRODUCE BUSINESS. Congratulations!

Arguably, the innovation of fresh-cut produce has done more to revolutionize the produce industry than any other single factor in the industry's last 25 years. Looking at the top-selling products in the produce department, fresh-cut lettuce, peeled carrots and fresh-cut fruit are three fresh-cut items helping drive sales in the department. In addition, foodservice sales are primarily driven by fresh-cut produce.

Before packaged salads, before baby carrots and before sliced apples, there was peeled garlic. I believe that peeled garlic was the first true pre-cut produce item sold nationally by a grower/packer/shipper in the United States. Don Christopher [partner in Christopher Ranch LLC] should be recognized for being the first ones to bring peeled garlic to market, and therefore the first pre-cut product in the industry.

It was just about 25 years ago that Don Christopher thought about introducing peeled garlic to the United States. It took a few years before it started to become widely accepted, and now it comprises about half of the fresh garlic sold in the United States, and virtually 100 percent of the foodservice business. It is sold in both retail and foodservice now.

I think the industry owes Don Christopher the recognition that he introduced the first national brand of pre-cut produce. As a fellow marketer of garlic, I truly appreciate what he has done to bring innovations like peeled garlic to market.

*Jim Provost
Managing Member
I Love Produce
West Grove, PA*

25 Years Of Tradition

Just wanted to say how much I enjoyed reading Jim Prevor's Special Note, comparing your 25 years with PRODUCE BUSINESS with the scene in *Fiddler on the Roof*. That film is probably my favorite and the scene a poignant one in the story.

All the best, and wishing you happiness and success in the next 25.

Tradition!

*Armand Lobato
Foodservice Promotion Director, West
Idaho Potato Commission
Eagle, ID*

Grandpa's Watching

We just received our 25th Anniversary edition of your PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine in the office, and while Chris Fleming had warned me that you mentioned Bob Sr.'s passing in an article, I still completely welled up as I read the last page. Grandpa's presence is still here, and I still look for his guidance on a daily basis. I continue to deeply miss him. I have no doubt in my mind that he is looking down smiling, and with that booming voice trying to tell [Jim Prevor] how proud [his] grandfather really is. Not only of where you have taken this magazine, but all the contributions you have made in our industry as well.

Congratulations on a wonderful 25 years! While Grandpa isn't here, you always have the support of the next 12 family members that are still working here in Chicago.

Best of luck!

*Lisa J. Strube
Director of Finance and Administration
Strube Celery and Vegetable Co.
Chicago, IL*

Forever Friends

I wanted to take a minute to let you know how much I enjoyed your 25th anniversary edition of the PRODUCE BUSINESS and to once again thank you for remembering and mentioning my Grandfather in the Blast From The Past article.

You have done so much for this family with your words and friendship and I am forever grateful for that.

Thank you again.

*Chris Fleming
Business Development
Strube Celery and Vegetable Co.
Chicago, IL*

40 Under Forty...And Proud

I wanted to thank you first and foremost for including me in this year's 40 Under Forty. Not only am I honored to be among such a distinguished group of professionals, but also you and your staff did an exceptional job of really making each of us feel special.



Throughout the conference, each time I saw someone from PRODUCE BUSINESS, they always introduced me to their group as one of the 40 Under Forty. At each point of the conference I was honored to be a member of the 40 Under Forty. You will see me proudly wearing my pin at next year's Fresh Summit.

*Kristen Reid
MIXTEC Group
Senior Recruiter
Pasadena, CA*



Letters to the Editor should be mailed to:
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THE RISING STAR RECEPTION



On Saturday night, October 16, at the PMA Fresh Summit in Orlando, FL, *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, in conjunction with sponsors, the MIXTEC Group and Ocean Mist Farms, hosted the sixth annual Rising Star Reception to celebrate this year's 40-Under-Forty* class.

In addition to the members of the Class of 2010, attendees included members of the classes of 2005-2009, as well as many movers and shakers of the produce industry. The students and faculty from U.S. and international colleges, who were participants of the Pack Family/PMA Career Pathways Fund, were also honored guests.

***40-Under-Forty**, an annual feature of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, honors the produce leaders of tomorrow, all of whom have been chosen by industry mentors for their industry and community accomplishments. Please see this year's winners by visiting www.producebusiness.com and clicking on our June 2010 issue. You can also nominate candidates for next year's class by clicking on the 40-under-Forty icon.



Editor-in-Chief, Jim Prevor, at podium, poses with some of this year's 40-Under-Forty recipients.

Photos courtesy of Dean Barnes



Bob Biesterfeld and Doud Prohaski, C.H. Robinson Company Worldwide



Jay Pack, The Pack Group



Bryan Silbermann, PMA



Bob Gray, The California Agricultural Leadership Foundation



Bryan Roberts, Save-A-Lot Food Stores



Gualberto Rodriguez, Caribbean Produce Exchange Inc.



Ronda Reed and Michelle Gonsalves, Dole Fresh Vegetables



Katy Blowers, Church Brothers Produce

THE RISING STAR RECEPTION



Felicity Robson, OneHarvest



Robert Schueller of Melissa's World Variety and Carol Bareuther of PRODUCE BUSINESS



Chris Nelson, Leonard Battj, Kristen Reid and Jerry Butt, MIXTEC Group



Alejandro Buvinic, Fernando Balari, Andrea Visconti and Tom Tjerandsen, Chilean Fresh Fruit Association



Ray DiRiggi and Ronda Reed, Dole Fresh Vegetables



Dale Huss, Afreen Malik, Jorge Suarez and Kori Tuggle, Ocean Mist Farms



Will Wedge, Nate Sprague, Wendy Ward and Mark Jewell, Delhaize America



Eric Viramontes and Jose Gaxiola, Mexican Greenhouse Growers' Association; Ines Masallach Armijo and Marco Albarran, Imalinx; Brianna and Brian Vertrees, Stemilt.



CarrieAnn Arias of Dole Fresh Vegetables, Stacey Larson of OneMediaGroup, LLC, Greg Corrigan of Raley's and Brent Scattini, Gold Coast Packing Inc.



Tom Infanti and Jesse Eppler, World Class Flowers



Jon Holder, Raley's

THE RISING STAR RECEPTION



Ken Whitacre of PRODUCE BUSINESS and Fernando Agular of Naturipe Farms



Douglas Hawkins and Doug Hawkins, Litehouse Inc.



Tracie Levin, M. Levin & Co. Inc.



Jimmy Matiasovich and Steve Janedis, Veg-Land (JBJ Distribution)



Wendell and Helen Christoff, Litehouse Inc.



Angela Paymard, N2N Global



Nathalie Fontanilla, Earthbound Farm



James Blowers, West Coast Distributing



Bret Sill, Billingsley Produce Sales



DJ Ludlum, Dave Ludlum Produce LLC



Katherine Kendrick and Marc Desalvo of St. Joseph's University; Tim Burleigh of Colorado Dept. of Agriculture and Jessica Martini of Texas A&M University



Allen Davis, Dole Fresh Vegetables



Susan and Wendell Hahn of Four Seasons Produce and Ancy Chaleunsouk of Sunrise Logistics Inc.



Andrew Bivens, Westlake Produce Co.



John Cameron, Desert Glory Ltd.



Andrew Schwartz, Rosemont Farms Corp.

Regaining Consumers' Hearts And Minds

BY BRYAN SILBERMANN, PRODUCE MARKETING ASSOCIATION, PRESIDENT & CEO

You're likely familiar with the phrase "share of stomach." I'd like you to consider a new one: "piece of mind."

Despite positive signs including budget-minded consumers who are now preparing more meals at home, and foodservice and government looking to promote wellness by encouraging healthier eating, overall consumption of fruits and vegetables has shown few signs of growth in recent years. I believe strongly that this is in part because we aren't telling our stories — of the integrity and values that go into producing and distributing our products — as individual companies, and collectively as an industry.

In focusing on how we get our products to market, we've lost something vitally important: connections with our consumers. Further, we've also allowed others to own our communications space, planting false perceptions in consumers' minds about fresh fruits and vegetables. In the process, consumers have been scared away from the very foods they should be eating more of.

The good news is that it is not too late to take our communications space back. To do so, we must do a better job of telling our stories, individually and collectively — and of better understanding today's new consumer, who buys not just *what* we do, but *why* and how we do it.

To help our members do that, Produce Marketing Association (PMA) recently commissioned two research projects: one to learn more about today's new consumers and their fresh produce behaviors and perceptions, and another to evaluate claims that fresh produce costs more than other food groups.

Consumers who are not increasing their fresh produce consumption most often cite cost as the primary barrier, according to new research conducted for us by The Hartman Group. And we've all seen or heard the claims in the media and from other influential sources, most recently from First Lady Michelle Obama. So PMA commissioned The Perishables Group to study national fresh produce prices. They found that, in fact, fresh produce is a bargain: the national aver-

Total U.S. - 52 Weeks Ending June 20, 2010
Top 20 Least Expensive Servings

Fruit Cost Per Serving		Vegetable Cost Per Serving	
1 Watermelon	\$0.14	1 Cabbage	\$0.08
2 Bananas	\$0.16	2 Potatoes	\$0.11
3 Apples	\$0.20	3 Lettuce/Salad	\$0.15
4 Pears	\$0.24	4 Eggplant	\$0.16
5 Pineapple	\$0.25	5 Prepared Cooking Greens	\$0.16
6 Peaches	\$0.27	6 Summer Squash	\$0.19
7 Oranges	\$0.29	7 Carrots	\$0.19
8 Tangerines	\$0.29	8 Tomatillo	\$0.20
9 Nectarines	\$0.30	9 Winter Squash	\$0.21
10 Prepared Papaya	\$0.32	10 Greens	\$0.22
11 Grapefruit	\$0.33	11 Root Vegetables	\$0.23
12 Grapes	\$0.34	12 Onions	\$0.25
13 Plums	\$0.37	13 Prepared Broccoli Slaw	\$0.26
14 Prepared Pears	\$0.39	14 Beans	\$0.26
15 Mango	\$0.40	15 Prepared Broccoli	\$0.27
16 Avocados	\$0.40	16 Cucumbers	\$0.28
17 Honeydew	\$0.43	17 Broccoli	\$0.29
18 Prepared Peaches	\$0.43	18 Celery	\$0.30
19 Prepared Oranges	\$0.44	19 Prepared Cabbage	\$0.31
20 Cherries	\$0.44	20 Brussel Sprouts	\$0.31
		33 Bell Peppers	\$0.47
		34 Tomatoes	\$0.49

CHART COURTESY OF PMA

age cost to get nine daily servings of fruits and vegetables is only \$2.18 — and just 88 cents for the bargain shopper who purchases the least expensive items. This value is consistent year-round, coast to coast.

Together, these studies present a wealth of information to integrate into our stories, and to tell the real story. These findings give our industry's producers fact-based tools to talk to consumers about the great value produce offers, and how you can help them affordably shop for and prepare meals that include your products. Meanwhile, retailers should communicate with shoppers that fresh produce is the new value menu, in addition to being healthful and delicious. Few items in the supermarket are available for the low cost of about \$0.25 per serving — and certainly, none are more healthful.

(PMA members can access these studies through the PMA.com online Research Center, which contains these and other research reports to help you interact with consumers to grow your business.)

We also now have a science-based tool to help bust another myth that is damaging

consumer confidence in our industry and the safety of our foods. A new PMA-supported campaign from the Alliance for Food and Farming is responding to Dirty Dozen-type myths with facts and science. For more information, tools for communicating with consumers, and to contact the alliance to support their work today, I encourage you to visit www.safefruitsandveggies.com.

These latest studies are evidence of the high price our industry is paying for having lost the hearts and minds of consumers over the years, while allowing others to perpetuate myths that keep consumers away from the nutritious foods they should be eating most.

The truths exposed by these research projects also remind us of the importance of authenticity and transparency in telling our stories. Consumers must know about our tireless efforts to deliver fresh produce with the utmost attention to safety, taste and affordability — every bite, every time. By telling our stories and achieving "piece of mind" in consumers' collective consciousness, they can have "peace of mind" to buy and enjoy more of our products — for their better health, and for ours.



For more than 60 years, the Produce Marketing Association has been the leading trade association representing nearly 3,000 companies from every segment of the global produce and floral supply chain.

Why The Disconnect In Price Perception Versus Reality?

BY JIM PREVOR, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PRODUCE BUSINESS

When consumers say things that aren't true — that produce is too expensive — good researchers don't dismiss those claims; they pause to wonder why those surveyed said that. And to a certain extent, that is what PMA did.

Since we know, thanks to the PMA research, that produce is quite affordable, why would consumers say otherwise? Could it be that this is a cover-up of sorts? Consumers know they should eat more produce, but they don't, so they want to blame some other factor. Affordability is a good choice because nobody will think ill of someone who doesn't buy an item because they can't afford it.

We would suggest, though, that consumers actually perceive fresh produce to be expensive because they throw out a great deal of it and that image of waste stays with them. Some of this may be due to factors the industry can potentially control. If consumers throw out fresh produce because they bite into an apple and find it mealy; bite into a peach and find it tasteless; or find a melon lacking in sweetness, concerted effort along the supply chain can help change this experience. However, this change will not come easily and may come only by increasing waste in the supply chain, and perhaps prices, as items will get rejected for not meeting epicurean standards.

However, one suspects that an awful lot of produce goes to waste simply because life is somewhat unpredictable. As a result, the produce purchased can go bad when dinner plans change because the kids' game goes into overtime or a parent has to work late at the office. Maybe Grandma and Grandpa stop by and offer to take everyone to dinner or a neighbor suggests a barbecue. This is a big problem for produce. Many people buy meat and immediately put most of it in the freezer. Bread from the bakery can go bad, but it is a much smaller department. Deli and, especially, prepared foods aren't commodities and ingredients in the way produce is and

thus, are not expected to be economical.

This all points to an industry need to focus on smaller items. That big head of lettuce may be very inexpensive, but one suspects that consumers who only eat half of it and throw out the rest feel they are being wasteful and, therefore, think the item is expensive.

Another possibility is that our very progressive industry, with lots of innovative fresh-cut items, has changed the very definition of fresh produce. Perhaps many consumers just won't consider buying a head of cabbage; maybe they will buy pre-shredded coleslaw or, maybe, they want it already prepared and so they buy it from the deli. Maybe even on commodities, consumer perception has changed. Mann Packing used to focus on commodity broccoli; now it sells a more upscale and trademarked Broccolini. Then, of course, the consumers might believe that only organic or only local is acceptable.

The point is that the industry is likely to benefit more from understanding the reality that consumers perceive they are living in than simply trying to persuade consumers that they are wrong.

When the industry steps up to tell its story, one question worth considering is this: To whom should we be talking? Bravo to PMA for supporting the Alliance for Food and Farming in efforts to respond to Dirty Dozen-type attacks. Yet this effort is probably not best thought of as an effort focused on consumers. It is too small an effort to reach many consumers, and the message is kind of complicated. The Dirty Dozen message, with its simple recommendation to purchase organic on certain items to minimize pesticides, is intuitive, even if meaningless.

What might be possible, though, is to "influence the influencers" — and this is important work. After all, when a self-proclaimed public interest group issues a press release, this does little damage. It is typically when media outlets start picking these

things up and running them as stories that the damage is done. So a focus on educating and informing those who make the decisions on what stories to run and those who write and report those stories is an important undertaking.

PMA has made a worthy contribution by funding important research. We hope the industry will read it with an open mind. There is no doubt that we have good stories to tell and that we have not always told them effectively. If we are honest with ourselves, though, we will also acknowledge

The industry is likely to benefit more from understanding the reality that consumers perceive they are living in than simply trying to persuade consumers that they are wrong.

that we could make our story stronger.

Too often, we sell products we know do not taste very good. Too often, we accept the display of that product under less-than-optimal conditions so we can boost sales in the very short term. Both retailers and shippers sell product before it is ripe to grab a fleeting "first" claim with consumers or to catch a fleeting high market. All of these practices and more are part of our industry and all help explain why consumption does not move.

Let us focus on telling our story and also focus on conducting ourselves in such a way that if the whole story was on the front page of *The New York Times*, we would all be proud to be associated with the tale.



School Districts Need To Be Certain They Are Improving Nutrition...Not Implementing Ideology

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 10.15.2010

In the New York City school district responsible for the education of Mrs. Pundit, a local news affiliate is focusing its attention on the school cafeteria. The story, *Sea Cliff N.Y. Parents Fight For Better School Nutrition*, puts forth:

The battle on the school lunch front is gaining momentum as unsatisfied parents and administrators band together to get processed foods and unhealthy snacks out of their school lunchrooms for good.

A particularly passionate committee of parents in Sea Cliff, NY, on Long Island is fighting to revamp their district's lunch menu, and they are getting results.

"There was always a nutrition committee, but it was weak," says Rieger [a concerned parent who was interviewed for the story]. Only one or two parents would come to the monthly meeting and offer up ideas on how to improve the school lunch, but they would be shot down and dismissed as too expensive, says Rieger.

The Sea Cliff Parent Community Association (their name for the PTA) decided to put out a sign-up sheet at "Back to School

Night" in September, 2009, and got 12 parents to form the Sea Cliff School Nutrition Committee. Rieger was asked to be the chair.

It sounds very exciting. Who could possibly be opposed? Yet very quickly the effort seems to lapse from nutrition to ideology:

A diverse group of parents including a pediatrician, a nutritionist and a yoga instructor makes up the committee.

"We long for a cafeteria that serves simple seasonal food, in an environment that fosters community. We want our children to understand the connection between the foods they eat and the farmers that produce the food," says Luisa Giugliano, a yoga instructor, parent and committee member.

The yearning for "simple seasonal food" might be strongly held and the desire to "foster community" may be sincere — but both have to do with a vision of society that has precious little to do with getting sustenance into the students and getting them off to math class. Even the educational pur-

pose of teaching young people about farmers and food production is only marginally related to the food in the cafeteria — after all, a farmer grows grapes, whether they come from New York, California or Chile.

All over the country, efforts such as this are gaining momentum. In many cases, they pander to a kind of anti-scientific sentiment and achieve things that are meaningless or even teach the children errantly. It happens so frequently, with so much the same effect, that one is reminded of Marx's critique of Hegel. Hegel taught that history repeats itself; Marx said Hegel forgot to add the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. Here is what these efforts seem to come to all too often:

One of the committee's missions is to involve the children and to teach them about wholesome, nutritious food. They held a healthy bake sale with treats containing no refined sugar and organic ingredients. It sold out. The \$140 raised will go toward improving nutrition education in the school.

Of course, the evidence that organic ingredients promote human health is scarce indeed, and the evidence that sweetening one's cake with honey or agave nectar or other "unrefined" sugars will make people live longer or be healthier is virtually non-existent.

There is a lot to educate about here. Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the California Avocado Commission, teaches a class in marketing communications at Cal Poly Pomona, and she invited the Pundit to guest lecture on the topic, "How to Arrive at an Informed Opinion." The lecture was well-received, and it would be very helpful for children to be taught a mode of thinking so when people start pushing ideologies, such as "seasonal eating," "non-refined sugars," etc., the children know how to ask pertinent questions.

That is actually a more important thing for a school to teach than propagandizing children with the currently trendy *weltanschauung* of the intelligentsia.



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Following the cover story from last month's 25th Anniversary Edition of PRODUCE BUSINESS, industry leaders continue to discuss innovations that shaped the produce industry.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

AS PRODUCE BUSINESS continues to explore the innovations affecting change in our industry over the past 25 years, we highlight five more from the original list of 25 innovations that were included in our October issue. The first five innovations discussed in the October issue were: **1. Communication Technology, 2. Consolidation, 3. Value-Added, 4. Club Stores and 5. Super-centers and Global Trade.** Of these next five innovations, several were not so much innovations in themselves, but rather issues that caused the industry to respond with innovation.

The areas of food safety and government regulation, for example, have pushed our industry to become pro-active innovators. "The past decade has witnessed how a vacuum in appropriate regulatory oversight of food safety — just as in banking, financial markets, mortgages and more — has resulted in the loss of consumer confidence in the safety of our products," says Bryan Silbermann, president and CEO of the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) in Newark, DE. "To restore that confidence, we've seen how essential it is to take action as an industry, and become innovators doing everything we can to show our commitment to food safety."

Other areas such as packaging and logistics have paved the way for increased and new opportunity in marketing products. "If it wasn't for innovative packaging, the value-added category and all of the berry category couldn't have grown as far and as much as they have," contends Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Service Inc., headquartered in Monrovia, CA. "Advances in logistics with better refrigeration, faster vessels and forward distribution facilities have put produce where the buyer and the customers are located quicker and fresher."

Herein, industry veterans further discuss the next five innovations affecting industry change in the past 25 years.

6: CATEGORY MANAGEMENT

The retail change in mentality to managing the produce department by category has certainly been a major factor in the

past 25 years of produce trade. "This has been both a good and bad area of influence," states Kevin Moffitt, president and CEO of the Milwaukie, OR-based Pear Bureau Northwest (PBN). "It has helped the retailer track inventory and even reduce their labor pool at the buying level, but has hurt some growers by adding costs. For example, costs of the PLU stickers are passed on to the grower. It has also reduced inventories at retail and caused some retailers to curtail carried items putting pressure on the important but less purchased category items or varieties. On the positive side, the UPC helps eliminate errors at checkout and provides more accurate sales data. In addition, it has the potential to provide much more information to the retailer and the consumer about the product."

"The move to category management definitely changed the buyer/seller relationship," says Dan Dempster, president of the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA), headquartered in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. "The use of UPCs and PLUs were major moves and are now followed by a focus on global standards in product identification, traceability and E-commerce."

Category management provided a new and more accurate way to manage variety and inventory. "In the late 1980s and early 1990s when the UPC/PLU system was established and embraced by the shipper and retail community it became possible to accurately track produce sales by SKU," reports Spezzano. "This encouraged the retailer to add variety with the confidence

that it would be properly recorded at the checkout area. It also allowed both the retailers and the shippers to now manage the various categories."

John Anderson, chairman, president & CEO of The Oppenheimer Group, based in Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada, adds, "Some of these new electronic category management and GPS technologies will allow the retailers to be better educated on, for instance, what their shrink is on the shelf and which products are making the highest return and that will have them changing quite rapidly from one product to another. This affects the life cycle of bringing new products."

7: FOOD SAFETY AND TRACEABILITY

Perhaps no issue has so affected the entire global produce industry as that of food safety. Over the past 25 years, the industry has suffered many incidents that spurred the entire chain to innovation in this area. "Food safety may not be an innovation in and of itself but it has re-shaped the industry," states Tom Stenzel, president of United Fresh Produce Association in Washington, D.C. "Remember when all anyone cared about was pesticides? At that time, the food industry tried to communicate that food borne illness was the main threat, not pesticides. Microbiological food safety came to dominate industry issues in the mid 1990s, with the start of good agricultural practices [GAPs] and exploded following the spinach issue in 2006. We're forever changed, both

"Some of these new electronic category management and GPS technologies will allow the retailers to be better educated on, for instance, what their shrink is on the shelf and which products are making the highest return and that will have them changing quite rapidly from one product to another."

— John Anderson, The Oppenheimer Group



“Food safety may not be an innovation in and of itself but it has re-shaped the industry.. We’re forever changed, both in consumer expectation, buyer and regulatory demands. Can we grow produce in nature risk-free? No, but we will spend hundreds of millions of dollars trying to do so. This is a phenomenon nobody could have imagined 25 years ago.”

— Tom Stenzel, *United Fresh Produce Association*



in consumer expectation, buyer and regulatory demands. Can we grow produce in nature risk-free? No, but we will spend hundreds of millions of dollars trying to do so. This is a phenomenon nobody could have imagined 25 years ago.”

Sanitation and safety issues have always been a part of the industry, especially at retail, even if not specifically identified as food safety. “We may not have used the phrase food safety 25 years ago, but clean stores and sanitation have always been important,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets Inc. “As prepared foods became available in the produce department and product was stored longer and shipped farther, the execution of excellent food safety practices became imperative. The industry has made incredible advances in the understanding of time, temperature and the control of elements that produce food borne illness.”

Indeed, food safety resulted in the creation of an entire new segment of the industry. “It has been a major job creator in the private and the public sectors,” says Dan Dempster of CPMA. “Dare I say that it probably created more jobs than were likely needed had we been able to tackle this in a more timely manner. This has also produced its own challenges as a multitude of solutions sprang up, a major issue for all, which continues today.”

The food safety issue segued into traceability demands. “From minimizing the impact of food borne illness outbreaks to identifying opportunities for supply chain efficiencies, produce traceability has begun to truly transform the business and has so much potential for doing so in the future,” says Lance Jungmeyer, president of Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA) in Nogales, AZ.

“Traceability and per-box tracking has been a significant industry influence,” adds

Pilar Charrada, import manager with Valley Fruit & Produce Co., based in Los Angeles, CA. “The chance to identify from which farm the fruit comes, where the fruit was packed, and other such details have significant impact.”

Implemented food safety and traceability procedures have added new elements to the way product is grown and shipped. “Traceability is integral to food safety and our production practices,” says Piet Smit, CEO of Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF) in Citrusdal, South Africa. “In our case, each orchard is identified by number. As fruit is harvested, that number is attached to bins where the fruit is placed when cut from trees. Bins maintain that number identity as the fruit transfers to pack houses for processing. When packed, each carton receives a production unit code (PUC) linked to bin numbers and packing dates,” he continues. “The PUC is printed directly onto the box, which then moves to a numbered pallet. Those electronic records are kept and available as needed at each point along the supply chain, enabling the fruit to be traced directly to the orchards of origin at any stage.”

8: GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT

While government has for centuries

held an oversight role of our industry, the past 25 years saw an explosion of intervention and reaction from multiple agencies on federal, state and local levels. “Government’s role in the past 25 years has clearly been impactful,” says John McClung, president and CEO of the Mission-based Texas Produce Association. “The catalogue of actions taken at the federal and/or state levels is enormous. Just consider the issues currently before the Administration and Congress, such as pending food safety laws and regulations, immigration reform, international trade agreements and disagreements, health system reform, environmental protection, and on and on. Individual issues submerge and resurface as time passes, but pressure from government is a constant, regardless of the party in power.”

This increasing intersection of government and the produce industry has pushed the industry to greater advocacy and proactive action. “We have seen some produce organizations evolve from a promotional orientation to strictly advocacy-based,” says Jungmeyer. “That is the case with the FPAA, which now focuses almost exclusively on dealing with legislative and regulatory bodies. Our members are seeing more bang for their buck when we emphasize hard results, such as how government can help improve commerce, than with soft results such as consumer marketing.”

9: CLAMSHELL PACKAGING

The development and implementation of clamshell packaging revolutionized the marketing and merchandising of a variety of produce categories, especially berries. “For the berry industry, nothing comes close to clamshell packaging as the most important innovation,” says Dave Riggs, president and CEO of Quail Run Business Solutions Inc., in Aptos, CA. “It transformed the berry category from a high-labor, low-margin, seasonal item to one of the most profitable, year-round items in the produce department. From loss leader to sales leader is a pretty big jump.”

“This has totally changed the berry busi-

“From minimizing the impact of food borne illness outbreaks to identifying opportunities for supply chain efficiencies, produce traceability has begun to truly transform the business.”

— Lance Jungmeyer, *Fresh Produce Association of the Americas*





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“Improvements in storage technology, refrigeration and logistics...allow suppliers to extend the season for many fruits, vegetables and roots and provide our customers products from around the world.”



— Maria Brous, Publix Super Markets Inc.

ness as more than 90 percent of berries are now packaged this way,” adds Spezzano. “This has taken the labor out of retail, reduced retail shrink and created a superior presentation of berries, thus increasing berry sales. It also created pack sizes that probably would not have been created with the previous packaging.”

“When you consider the wide usage of plastic clamshells, it sure has been a game-changer in the past 25 years,” agrees John Shelford, owner and president of Shelford Associates, based in Naples, FL.

The technology also allowed for the development of new products and presentations. “The advent of rigid clamshell packaging was a big leap forward in salad packaging, particularly for tender leaf salads, which are easily bruised,” explains Charles Sweat, CEO of Earthbound Farm, headquartered in San Juan Baustista, CA. “The clamshell helps protect those delicate leaves from bruising and offers a better product to the consumer — more product visibility and better quality product.”

Oppenheimer’s Anderson adds, “Some of the clamshell type packages were introduced in response to the need for convenience sought out by the busy consumer. The industry looked for more convenient ways to deliver fresh produce and subsequently fresh-cut produce, bagged salad and sliced fruit started to take a greater share of the shelf space.”

10: LOGISTICS EFFICIENCIES

Improved technology in logistics also helped pave the way for innovation in the industry and efficiencies along the entire supply chain. “We’ve become adept at

using technology in every aspect of the supply chain from production and processing to logistics and all the way through to the consumer,” says PMA’s Silbermann.

“Improvements in storage technology, refrigeration and logistics greatly improved the storage and transportation of product,” says Publix’s Brous. “These improvements allow suppliers to extend the season for many fruits, vegetables and roots and provide our customers products from around the world.”

Innovation in logistics and transportation have opened new doors of business and affected other industry innovations, like global trade. “Transportation technology has improved the speed and quality of commerce, as well as opened up new markets and product sources,” says CPMA’s Dempster.

According to Jungmeyer of FPA, “Companies have learned that in order to remain a viable supplier, you have to look at every aspect of the supply chain, including logistics, to retain enough bottom line results to stay in business. Companies not looking for logistical efficiencies will essentially be pushed to the side.”

Shippers have demanded and sought out logistics solutions to help improve business. “Our purpose is to facilitate logistical, promotional and sales support coordination of their products,” says Gerrit van der Merwe, chairman of WCCPF. “For example, in 2010 we entered into a new contract with a specialized reefer shipping company, Seatrade. This added flexibility in logistics operations with smaller reefer vessels resulted in a more regular and reliable supply of summer citrus to the U.S. market this season, which benefited importers, retailers and consumers.” **pb**



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Going Global

Retailers find direct sourcing is fraught with challenges.

BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ

As part of an expansive effort to reduce costs, improve speed to market, and present themselves as globally conscious organizations working closely with their off-shore suppliers, a number of large retailers have turned to direct sourcing — importing fresh produce directly from foreign countries.

From Wal-Mart's office in Chile to Tesco's buying arm in Asia, not to mention Socomo, Carrefour's sourcing divisions in Spain and Brazil, major retailers are taking bold steps toward building a comprehensive system of global procurement.

"Especially in the case of Wal-Mart, there is a push to go direct everywhere they can to drive out the middle-man as a way to have a lower margin and offer consumers a lower price," says Lance Jungmeyer, president of the Nogales, AZ-based Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA). "That is certainly a valid part of their business strategy."

The sheer size of these chains has given them the ability to consider such a bold undertaking, according to Bruce Peterson, president of Fayetteville, AR-based Peterson Insights Inc., and the former head of Wal-Mart's perishables operations. "Over the past five to 10 years, a number of major retailers has gotten larger than the industry could have ever imagined," he says. "You are talking about organizations procuring almost \$10 billion worth of fresh fruits and vegetables on an annual basis. They have a high degree of critical mass, so it's the belief of some of these retailers that they can save costs by taking what they would consider the middleman — the importer — out of the equation and dealing directly with growers."

MAKES SENSE IN THEORY

Avenel, NJ-based Foodtown Supermarkets prides itself on buying directly from growers as much as possible, according to Dean Holmquist, director of produce and floral. This philosophy applies to both domestically grown and imported produce. Holmquist maintains that going direct helps Foodtown procure the highest quality produce for its 66 independently owned grocery stores throughout New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. "When you establish a relationship [with a grower], there's a better connection in terms of availability — when product is really promotable — and it makes for delivering a better product to your customers," explains Holmquist. "[The growers] understand who we are and what we are looking for and it just makes more sense."

While direct sourcing initiatives may have stirred up a slew of conversations of late, the concept itself is nothing new. In the 1980s, a number of large retailers dabbled in direct importing, only to extricate themselves rather quickly when they discovered "the juice wasn't worth the squeeze," explains Peterson. This current wave of direct importing initiatives is merely "the current rendition," he says.

That's not to suggest direct importing isn't a valid business model. As retailers seek to cut costs, reduce prices and boost their corporate image, they are extending their global reach and seeking to build relationships with growers around the world. The promise of global sourcing is great, and retailers are increasingly looking to reap the benefits of going direct, albeit with hesitation when they begin to see exactly how complex the process of importing produce really can be.

"If a supermarket chain has the size, personnel and expertise to

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import products directly, and if they can source products in sufficient volume and quality from shippers, there can be greater control and savings by direct buying," says Nancy Tucker, vice president of global business development for the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), in Newark, DE. "But many chains can't or don't want to deal with the risks, regulations and procedures of importing products."

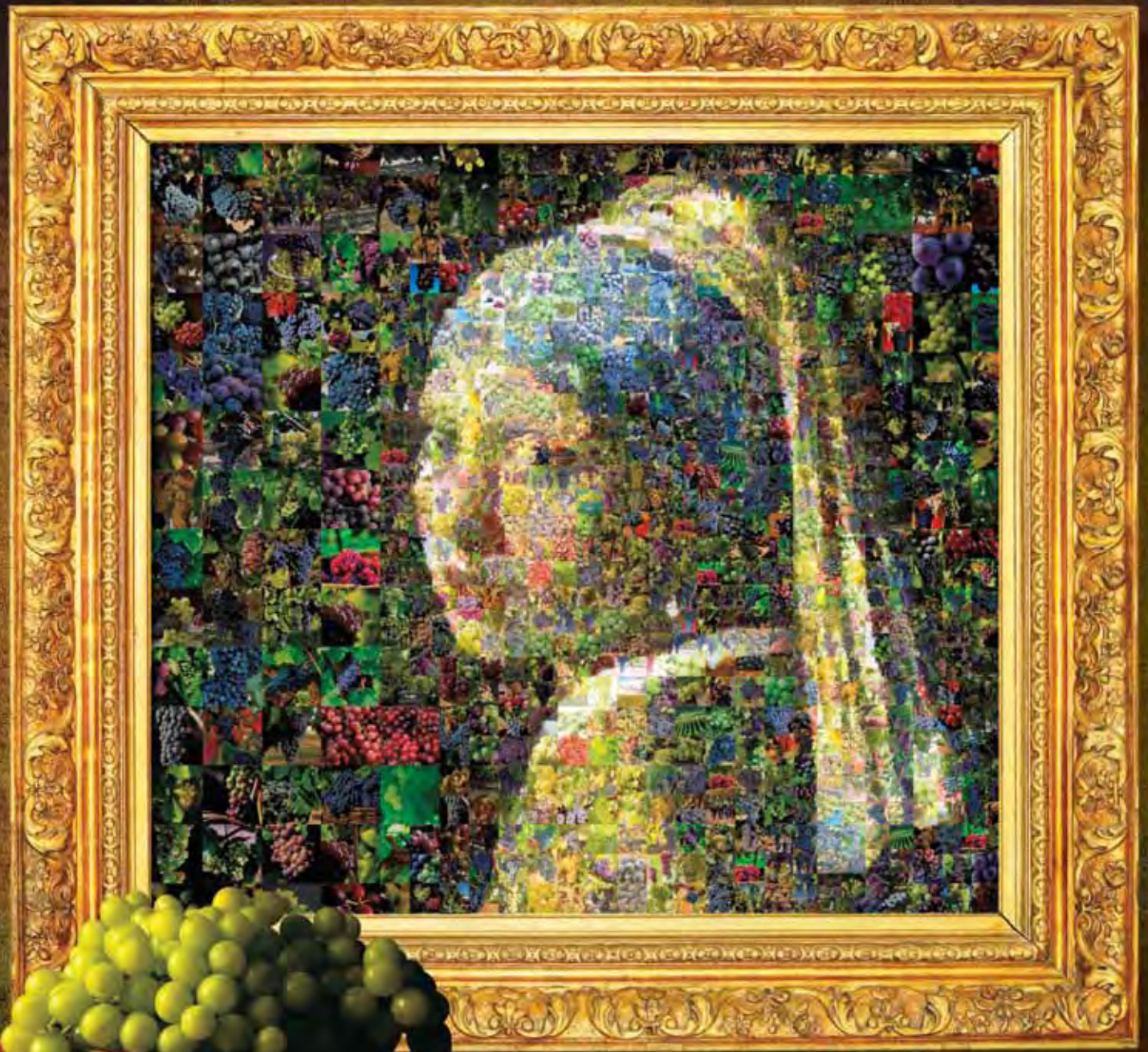
That hasn't stopped many of them from trying — with varying degrees of success. Of course, that depends on how you define success, points out Peterson of Peterson Insights. Wal-Mart, for example, went from an environment that was totally dependent on importers to one in which it sources much of its produce direct from growers around the world. Although Wal-Mart would not comment on its practices for this article, Peterson brands its efforts a success, though he's quick to add it hasn't come without a price. "Having any degree of success with that is, in fact, a success," he reasons. "From that standpoint, you could define it as a successful learning opportunity, although the tuition may be a little higher than they originally imagined."

Indeed, Wal-Mart and other retailers that have embarked on direct sourcing initiatives are finding themselves faced with a steep learning curve, Peterson notes, as they discover not only how difficult produce importing actually is, but also how much they've truly been relying on importers and distributors to provide services beyond simply moving product. "To import fresh fruits and vegetables into the United States is not an easy thing," he asserts. "It's a very complex undertaking, and it requires an awful lot of attention to detail."

U.S. retailers often find themselves looking to the U.K. for inspiration — where retailers commonly source produce directly — but FPAA's Jungmeyer contends U.K. retailers are at a distinct advantage when it comes to direct importing. Unfortunately, that advantage is not one U.S. retailers could ever hope to replicate. "The U.K. is an island," he explains. "It's small. Your product doesn't have to travel 3,000 miles to arrive at its final destination. That's a big factor."

It's also a matter of quality, adds Jungmeyer. Because U.K.-bound produce does not spend an extended period of time being jostled around in a truck, there is less risk of damage. What's more, there is no border for the product to cross, so suppliers do not have to deal with inspections related to pests, food safety, pesticides and drug smuggling.

"Moreover," Tucker says, "there are companies in the U.K. that serve as super category managers." Working in conjunction with supermarket chains, they investigate, source, audit, import, repack for private label and help develop consumer promotions. This has been standard operat-



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Although they may not be willing to admit it publicly for fear of scaring their stockholders, many U.S.-based retailers have found their direct sourcing initiatives to be less successful in practice than on paper, purports Jungmeyer. The reasons are many — from simple issues with currency exchange and tariff barriers to more complex challenges related to economies of scale, quality control and the grower/importer relationship.

STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS

Direct sourcing has proven problematic for many retailers because of organizational issues and deficits in their global sourcing infrastructure, says Peterson. Oftentimes, the global procurement organizations don't answer to the merchandising division or buying organization. Rather, they exist as separate entities answering to a different hierarchy. Unfortunately, coordinating that activity has proven far more challenging than they anticipated.

Peterson also cites a basic lack of sophistication — even ignorance — among those charged with making critical sourcing decisions. "It's often the case that some of the people that are running these areas may have a limited knowledge and understanding of the produce industry in general," he explains. "So they may not be asking the appropriate questions or setting the proper standards."

While retailers undertaking the feat of direct importing may end up reaping cost savings, they may find themselves with a lower quality product than their importer had been providing them. Or they may inadvertently put themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to their ability to reap the kinds of savings that direct importing was designed to achieve in the first place. "When retailers go direct and agree to contract pricing on the front end, they may end up not doing as well as someone who is buying on the open market," explains Jungmeyer. "If there's an oversupply, for example, they have less latitude in taking advantage of market fluctuations."

According to Marcos Scofield, a commercial associate at Mono Azul S.A., a member of COPEXEU in Rio Negro, Argentina, one of the primary issues his company has encountered when working directly with American retailers — including Wal-Mart — is that the chains seem to be constantly shuffling responsibilities around. Staff changes occur so frequently that there ends up being mass confusion with regard to who has been contacted or even what kinds of produce are being sourced from where. "They are just not well organized internally," he laments. "The people who came in four months ago don't even know that we quoted them last year, so they come in asking, 'Why aren't we working together?'"

With Wal-Mart, in particular, Scofield

says communication has been difficult, as those in charge of the chain's direct importing can't seem to make up their minds with regard to from where they want to source product. Last year, for example, Mono Azul tried to do business with Wal-Mart, but the company was told the chain was getting everything it needed from Chile, Scofield recounts. Four months later, Wal-Mart officials approached Mono Azul asking why they weren't receiving their product direct. "I don't know if they haven't found the correct way to make it work, but they haven't come on strong," he discloses. "They've started and then stopped, and whenever we try to talk to them, we're told it's another person's responsibility."

While it may be true that Wal-Mart has some work to do with regard to its current way of doing business, Peterson says he wouldn't bet against the retail giant, but he would bet that its structure will evolve over time.

IMPORTERS PROVIDE MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Many challenges arise as a result of retailers underestimating the value that importers/distributors bring to the relationship. Simply put, there's a general lack of appreciation for the myriad details that importers "make go away" for the retailer, says Peterson. It's highly likely that importers have done such a good job at making such challenges invisible that retailers simply don't realize they exist. As a result, they are all too willing to tackle the job of importing produce themselves, mistakenly believing it to be much easier than it is.

"Direct sourcing sounds fairly simple until you delve into what it really takes to bring safe, quality produce through the supply chain and into the retail environment," says John Anderson, chairman, president and CEO of The Oppenheimer Group, headquartered in Coquitlam, B.C., Canada. "There's a lot more to it than meets the eye."

Not only do importers bring product to U.S. shores, they also play a key role in ensuring that retailers have what they need, when they need it, and that it's at or above-par in terms of quality. What's more, they constantly have their fingers on the pulse of the industry, possessing key information with regard to the status of the harvest, fruit quality, shipping peaks and probable pricing, according to Tom Tjerandsen, managing director for North America for the Sonoma, CA-based Chilean Fresh Fruit Association, (CFFA). All too often, however, retailers fail to take into account just how much of a role these individuals play in the entire global sourcing equation.

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portation that preserves its condition and partnering with retailers on how to best market it," details Anderson. "Retailers have given it their best shot, but many are coming to realize that adding value to their business is more about partnering with companies that can deliver consistent supply, and control the supply chain."

Importers provide an array of important services and value that many chains would be hard-pressed to duplicate on their own. For starters, retailers don't help finance the growers, whereas most importers help finance the deals and pay for the ocean

freight and other expenses, points out Paul Marier, senior vice president of sales and marketing at Fisher Capespan U.S.A. LLC, in Gloucester City, NJ.

When embarking on a direct importing initiative, retailers often fail to recognize that importers rely on a network of growers to ensure that customers receive the right amount of produce for their operations. Unaware of this fact, they make the mistake of attempting to rely on just one grower. This kind of oversight can prove disastrous, as the day will inevitably come when that grower is not able to meet their

demand on their own. "Importers bring a trusted volume to the supermarket, often bringing in produce from three or four exporters," says Scofield of Mono Azul. "Retailers may not realize they have to go to more than one supplier until that supplier is unable to give them all their required volume and they are suddenly stranded without fruit one week."

Then there are issues of quality. An importer has the luxury of inspecting and sorting shipments before sending product along to retail customers. If some of the produce inside is not up to par, importers can send it on for other uses or claim it for insurance purposes. Retailers, however, are likely to end up eating the cost of problem lots, as their clientele will undoubtedly be dissatisfied, either because their favorite produce is out of stock or due to questionable quality. "When product comes to distributors here, they are able to go evaluate it and say, 'Okay, this is the No. 1 product, this is the No. 2 product,'" says Jungmeyer of the FPAA. "A retailer pretty much only wants the No. 1 product. When they are taking a direct load, they are taking the whole truckload, so they get the good and the bad."

PROCEEDING WITH CAUTION

Such issues are exactly why Eden Prairie, MN-based Supervalu Inc. has resisted the temptation to embark on a wide-scale direct buying initiative, according to spokesperson Michael Siemienas. With just a few exceptions, such as bananas and pineapple, the national chain uses importers to procure the produce it needs in order to meet consumer demand for year-round availability. Because Supervalu requires such high volume of high quality product, Siemienas says, importers have proven to be the way to go — at least for the time being — for the chain. "It's a quality control issue," says Siemienas. "The importers work with several different growers. They have people on the ground, continually monitoring the product. If someone has a bad crop, they have someone else to approach."

Similar concerns have kept Phoenix, AZ-based Sprouts Farmers Market from jumping on the direct sourcing bandwagon. Instead, the retailer works exclusively with brokers and intermediaries to bring in produce from countries such as Chile, Argentina, Holland, Guatemala and Mexico, according to Neil Cullen, produce buyer. Cullen has been down this road before, and has past experience with direct sourcing, buying berries directly from Argentina. While he admits that there is a "significant cost savings to be had" if everything goes right, he feels the potential for things to go wrong offsets the potential for good. "If everything goes right, fantastic, but you will inevitably have those instances when a container of berries gets left on the tarmac and

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— John Anderson, The Oppenheimer Group

nobody can find it for 12 hours and then all of a sudden, they find it and open it up and the berries are ready for a slushie,” he says. “It’s just a matter of the investment in time, as well as the logistical support you have to have to make it work properly.”

Even then, Cullen can’t say definitively that Sprouts will never turn to direct sourcing. Should the chain ever centralize its sourcing — a distinct possibility once it surpasses its goal of opening its 100th store by the end of 2013 — Cullen says direct importing may be in the cards. “If we want to go to another 100 stores, I would imagine that would be the right thing to do,” he says.

Direct sourcing may not be effective at all for small retailers who have no use for an entire truckload of produce, even if it were in tip-top condition upon arrival. They simply don’t have the same economies of scale to support such an effort. For those retailers, the traditional system of working with importers works well because it offers the ability to customize deliveries based on specific needs. Nogales, for example, serves “almost like a terminal market,” says FPAA’s Jungmeyer, because there is the ability to put together a mixed truckload of produce that will better serve a retailer’s needs. “If I want to put together a mixed load of grape

tomatoes, squash and cucumbers, my truck can go to two or three different warehouses to pick all that up,” he says. “In the end, you’ve got a load that’s going to serve your needs better.”

When the supply chain breaks down or fails to function as intended, retailers engaged in direct importing often have nowhere to turn, explains Peterson, as there’s no one to go to bat for them. That’s when they begin to appreciate the long-standing relationships that have kept the steady stream of imported produce running smoothly all these years. “They really underestimated the relationships between the import community and the growers — some of which go back very far,” says Peterson. “When you get into conflict-resolution and other issues surrounding the importing of fresh fruits and vegetables, the importers have long-established relationships with the grower and they can work through those issues, whereas there’s a general distrust of new entities entering the equation.”

In some cases, it’s a matter of trust, as retailers have a hard time trusting foreign growers to be honest and work with them to resolve any issues that may arise. In at least one instance, that distrust has prevented a burgeoning direct importing relationship from coming through to fruition. “There’s no question that Mexican shippers would like to

Not to toot ou



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The image shows a white paper sleeve for a carrot with the Tom Lange Co. logo. To the right, there are images of a bunch of yellow grapes and a strawberry. Further right, a blue banner with red text says "Happy Birthday".

be shipping directly to U.S. buyers, but the buyers want somebody on the American side to be held accountable if there are problems," remarks John McClung, president of the Mission-based Texas Produce Association. "Holding Mexican shippers accountable is seen as problematic."

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

If growers in Mexico and other countries get their way, and direct importing becomes more widespread, the impact on the produce industry would be far-reaching. CFFA's Tjerandsen says he would expect to see a great deal of consolidation in the importer arena, while Peterson wouldn't be surprised if the move toward direct sourcing affects the domestic produce industry as well. "It's really a big strategic shift because it starts to define not only the role of the supplier in the international arena, but in the domestic arena as well," says Peterson. "If all a supplier does is provide products, why do I need you?"

Last year, Wal-Mart announced its intention to expand direct importing of fresh produce through a network of procurement offices in South Africa, New Zealand, Brazil, Chile, and other producing countries. The system is built on the model of Wal-Mart's UK-based subsidiary Asda.

At the same time, the world's largest retailer has publicly stated that it will never be 100 percent reliant on direct importing.

Mono Azul's Scofield expects Wal-Mart and other large retailers to continue ramping up their direct importing, but he stresses the need for patience. "They wanted to go from nothing to 50, 60, 70, 80 percent very quickly," he asserts. "In the end, they will get there, but they need to understand that it's going to take them a few years and they need a team and a structure, not just a couple more people on the desk."

Jungmeyer doesn't think direct sourcing will ever reach 100 percent. In fact, he would be surprised if it even reached 50 percent of the volume — simply because many retailers are unable to achieve the kind of economy of scale necessary to achieve the desired ROI. And then there's the multitude of issues that retailers are either not qualified to handle or with which they simply don't want to be bothered. "In the end, retailers are retailers and growers are growers," he says. "The trend toward direct buying is going to continue, but I don't see it becoming the de-facto way of doing business."

Yet, as Wal-Mart continues venturing further into the world of direct sourcing, that alone ensures a continued focus on direct sourcing. After all, everything that

Wal-Mart does is put under the collective microscope of the retail community, where it is carefully analyzed and dissected. And there's little doubt that Wal-Mart's competitors are keeping a watchful eye on what the giant is up to, as they look to replicate such initiatives — and they will, says Peterson. If their budgets cannot afford it now, then sometime in the future, but it's no longer a matter of if, it's only about when. "The only thing that may delay that is the financial performance of the publicly held companies," he says. "If this becomes too much of a drain on resources that they can apply somewhere else, they may slow the growth down in the short-term. But this snowball is rolling down a hill and it's only going to get bigger over time." **pb**

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Ensuring consumers know sweet onions are available through the winter will increase rings.

Six No-Cry Ways To Sell More Imported Sweet Onions This Winter

South American production kicks off the season that wraps up in Mexico in April. **BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD**

The barbecue grills might be packed away and hearty vegetable soups substituted for salad greens on the supper table, but the cold winter weather hasn't deterred consumers' desire for sweet onions. In fact, there's now a seamless supply of sweets that retailers can merchandise right next to the red, yellow and white onions to maximize category sales.

Mike Maguire, director of produce for De Moulas Market Basket, a 62-store chain based in Tewksbury, MA, remarks, "Sweet onions have changed from a seasonal to year-round category and sales are strong both in summer and winter."

1. Winter Availability

"Consumers have learned that a sweet onion is a nice treat in the winter," shares Curtis DeBerry, owner of Progreso Produce Co., in Boerne, TX. "That's why sweet onions are the

fastest growing segment of the onion category." To support consumer demand, DeBerry details, "We import sweet onions from Peru October to December; from Chile December to February; and from Mexico February to April when the 1015s begin harvest in Texas."

Onion imports from Peru during the months of October, 2009, through March, 2010, represented 105.6 million pounds and \$16.5 million in sales, according to USDA/ERS statistics, or an increase of 41 percent in volume and 34 percent in dollars over the same time from the year prior.

Some companies start importing Peruvian sweet onions as early as August and continue through February. Ira Greenstein, president and owner of Direct Source Marketing, in Mount Kisco, NY, says, "The Pacific region of Ica, Peru, provides ideal growing conditions to produce a beautiful blond-skinned, flat Granex-type sweet onion."

Overall exports from Peru were down on the front end of the deal this year. Barry Rogers, president of the Sweet Onion Trading Co., in Melbourne, FL, says, "Peru was a bit short due to demand in other countries and the winter was cooler than normal, which affected yield."

"However," adds John Shuman, president of Shuman Produce Inc., in Reidsville, GA, "the crop out of Peru for the rest of the season looks on track with the previous year. The market eased with favorable pricing and promotable supplies by mid-October."

Marty Kramer, sales manager for the Northeast office of Keystone Fruit Marketing Inc., headquartered in Greencastle, PA, says, "We have ongoing research and development projects in a variety of other countries such as Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Ecuador, which have the right microclimates to grow a sweet onion and are areas of contingency primarily during the Peruvian season."

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Peak promotional volumes for imported Peruvian sweet onions, according to Kramer, “are from October 15 to January, right through the holidays.”

Matt Curry, president of Brooks, OR-based Curry & Co. Inc., says, “Our Chilean Patagonia Sweets are available from January through March. Like Peru, the hot days and cool nights in Chile are perfect conditions for us to grow our sweet onions from patented seeds specifically developed for the mineral-rich soils.”

Onion imports from Chile during the months of December, 2009, through March, 2010, represented 23.9 million pounds and \$6.7 million in sales, according to USDA/ERS statistics, or an increase of 56 percent in volume and 74 percent in dollars over the same time from the year prior.

The Chilean crop is scheduled to start around the “normal” time, says Curry. “We expect our first shipments in early January.”

Brian Kastick, president and CEO of Oso Sweet Onions, in Charleston, WV, notes, “Strong promotional volumes are available during the last two weeks of January and all of February.”

The United States imports onions from Mexico year-round. However, Chris Eddy, di-

“It is our job as responsible marketers to offer our retail partners the right onion at the right time from the right growing region. This helps us assure our partners that we’re delivering the onions they expect.”

— Matt Curry, Curry & Co. Inc.

rector of sales for Frontera Produce Ltd., located in Edinburg, TX, remarks, “The window we import sweet onions from the Tampico area is late February into March. This is the first sweet onion of the season that’s trucked, as opposed to shipped in, so there’s a cost savings.”

“In the future, we’re looking at opportunities in the higher elevations in Mexico to grow a sweet onion that harvests toward the end of the Peruvian season,” discloses Richard Pazderski, director of sales and marketing at Glenville, GA-based Bland Farms LLC.

Next February, Stockton, CA-based Onions Etc. Inc., will import sweet onions from Hawaii. “We sold a few last year and will bring in bigger shipments this season,” says owner and president, Derrell Kelso, Jr. “These primarily compete with the Oso Sweet deal, but

many customers want to buy American and this gives them the opportunity to do so.”

2. Seasonal Competition And Opportunities

Supplies of domestically grown sweet onions from states such as California, New Mexico, Nevada and New York are offering competition to imports. Curry & Co.’s Curry explains, “Domestic sweet onions were primarily a late spring through summer program. New varieties and expanded growing seasons are having an impact on the window of availability for imported onions.”

Oso Sweet onions, for example, are now available all year, says Kastick. “This means we not only grow our onions in Chile, but also now in Texas, California and New Mexico.”

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“Customers in this economy would rather pick up one or two onions as opposed to eight or nine. This is why the bagged sector hasn’t grown as fast as the 40-lb. boxes.”

— Curtis DeBerry, Progreso Produce Inc.

“Similarly,” says Sweet Onion Trading’s Rogers, “we are growing fine sweet onions in parts of California and Nevada, which are high-quality.”

In addition, Bland Farms imports sweet onions from Peru during the fall and also sources sweets during this time frame from New York, Idaho, Utah and Washington in order to fulfill consumer demand at an affordable price.

Domestic sweet onions are inexpensive compared to those from Peru, says Direct Source Marketing’s Greenstein. “Therefore, we plan to ship a conservative amount of Peruvian sweet onions into the United States this fall,” he reveals. “This will change in December when the domestic supply is exhausted. The problem is that some of these domestic sweet onions don’t meet a minimum pungency level,

so this is affecting our market.”

Progreso’s DeBerry adds, “There have been big strides in testing for pungency. However, it would take one large retailer to make it mandatory in order for a uniform pungency standard to exist and for this to be driven back to the ground.”

In the meantime, Curry emphasizes, “It is our job as responsible marketers to offer our retail partners the right onion at the right time from the right growing region. This helps us assure our partners that we’re delivering the onions they expect.”

3. Keep Sweets Front-And-Center

“Sales of sweet onions are so good,” says Market Basket’s Maguire, “that we’ll feature them on end-caps.”

Keystone’s Kramer says, “End-caps, stand-

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alones, value-added product offerings, multi-size strategies and consumer bagged displays offer consumers multiple buying options and ensure sales lift.”

It is important to put sweet onions in a prominent place in the produce department. Bland Farm’s Pazderski explains, “This is because many consumers think they are only available in the spring and summer and there can be a lot of missed opportunities for sales in the winter.”

“Secondary displays,” says Shuman Produce’s Shuman, “are very effective, especially in the weeks leading up to the winter holidays.”

An attractive sweet onion display starts at the packinghouse. DeBerry remarks, “Most offshore growing areas have cup-sizers that weigh each onion. This means we aren’t seeing as much scattered sizing as we have in the past. A display looks nicer when it’s built with uniformly sized onions.”

Jose Manzano, director of produce at Dorothy Lane Markets, a three-store chain based in Dayton, OH, says, “We display all of our onions together and we make sure there is good signage so that customers can easily select the type of onion they desire.”

Separation and identification are keys for imported sweet onions. Curry & Co.’s Curry advises, “Make sure your display clearly catches customers’ eye and that it is obvious that you have an imported sweet onion display. Retailers that make the most of their sweet onions might have point-of-sale material up, or offer both bagged and bulk sweet onions.”

Many importers offer a variety of POS. For example, Oso Sweet offers high-graphic banners and sign cards that can be customized to include a retail-specific message, recipe or health benefit. “The retail benefit of making sure customers know sweet onions are available in the winter are that sweet onions generate an increase in gross sales and net profits,” says Oso Sweet’s Kastick.

4. Bulk And Bagged Together Create Bigger Sales

Most imported sweet onions, especially the jumbo and colossal size, are sold in bulk, according to Progreso’s DeBerry. “Customers in this economy would rather pick up one or two onions as opposed to eight or nine,” he points out. “This is why the bagged sector hasn’t grown as fast as the 40-lb. boxes.”

Bagged product represents approximately 30 percent of sweet onion sales. However, Curry contends, “We have seen an increase in bagged sweet onions. This has helped sales by providing customers with a value item on sweet onions. It has also increased shelf space and given bulk and bagged sweet onions more opportunities to capture a consumer.”

Grower/shippers and importers are continually innovating packaging design to catch the consumer’s eye, provide useful information and boost retail sales. Shuman Produce’s Shuman, says, “Our 2-, 3-, 4- and 5-lb. bags feature high-graphic labels and information such as recipes, and during the fall, great recipes for making a holiday meal featuring sweet onions.”

On-pack recipes have made it easier for retailers to cross-merchandise, Shuman adds. “We believe that pairing our product with other items included in these recipes is a great way to increase sales of sweet onions.”

Onion’s Etc.’s Kelso agrees. “There are two ways to sell more sweet onions,” he declares. “One is to give the product away and retail it for a cheap price. The second is to give value to the consumer by teaching them new ways to use it.”

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This fall, Onion's Etc. is offering 2-lb. sweet onions from the Northwest and Peru in bags featuring a salad recipe that includes avocados, radishes and grapefruit. In addition to the recipe, a sticker on the front of each bag identifies the variety, where the onion was grown, a URL address that links to photos of the farm, farmer and to additional recipes, health facts and handling tips.

5. Cold Weather Merchandising

"The primary merchandising challenge in

the winter," according to Curry & Co.'s Curry, "is doubting that a strong import sweet onion program will drive sales. Customers are often driven by what they see, and retailers who continue to celebrate that they have sweet onions in the store will continue to see strong sales."

"Sweet onions are cross-merchandised with cucumbers and peppers in the summer at Market Basket," says Maguire, "and in the fall, we'll tie them in with the carrots and potatoes."

Robert Schueller, director of public rela-

tions for Melissa's/World Variety Produce Inc., headquartered in Los Angeles, CA, which distributes sweet onions from Peru, remarks, "Sweet onions work well in soups, stews, crock-pots and other cold-weather recipes. During the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, there's a huge potential to bring something new to traditional dishes from an ingredient that was once only seasonal."

"One of the most popular wintertime sweet onion recipes offered by Keystone Fruit Marketing," says Kramer, "is for Sweet Onion Bisque. It's simple and dynamic."

Sweet onions and football season go hand-in-hand, maintains Direct Source Marketing's Greenstein. "They are ideal for making fresh salsas and guacamole and in dishes like tacos."

Oso Sweet's Kastick agrees, "Super Bowl is a great time to promote Chilean sweet onions."

"In late February and early March, cross-promote imported sweet onions out of Mexico with steaks for grilling and play on an early spring theme," recommends Frontera's Eddy.

6. Go Beyond Price Promotions

"In the winter, as well as spring and summer, sweet onions are a regular part of our promotions," acknowledges Manzano of Dorothy Lane.

Sweet onions have remained a steady performer throughout these challenging economic times. "Still," says Curry, "it's important to maintain promotions and visibility of sweet onions, in everything from circulars to social media efforts, to make sure sweet onions are on customers' radar screens."

There's no longer a huge price gap between imported and domestic sweets, notes Progreso's DeBerry. "Imported sweets — at the most — are 50-cents per pound more expensive than regular yellow onions, and on average, this is closer to 20- to 30-cents."

Beyond price, themed promotions are an effective way to sell imported sweet onions. On the heels of a successful *Shrek* campaign this summer with Vidalia onions, both Shuman Produce and Bland Farms contributed to breast cancer awareness in October. Shuman supported Susan G. Komen for the Cure by adding promotional tags on pack to promote the sponsorship in which the company donated \$10,000. Bland Farms, which donated \$20,000 to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, marketed bagged sweet onions from Peru with pink-colored PLU stickers, logos and 40-box display boxes. "Sometimes," says Bland Farm's Pazderski, "it's more effective to put all your effort behind one big promotion than five little projects."

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Sugar snap peas and papayas are just two of the many products grown in Central America.

Central American Produce: Such Bounty, So Close

With winter almost here, look to Central America for high-quality fruits and vegetables unavailable from domestic sources. **BY MEREDITH AUERBACH**

The big picture from the 10,000-foot peaks of Central America shows a slow but steady growth of fresh fruit and vegetables over the past five years. After all, the countries of Central America, including Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Belize and Panama, offer ideal growing climates and micro climates, counter-seasonal products, plentiful land, good labor supply and easy accessibility to U.S. markets.

According to statistics from the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), whose Global Agricultural Trade System (GATS) tracks U.S. imports, traditional produce such as bananas and pineapple still dominate the fruit trade and continue to grow in value, up significantly in the same seven-month period of January through July, 2010, compared to the same period a year ago. Mangos are down, however, and papayas are up. Overall, fresh fruit imports from Central America have increased 19 percent during the period. Fresh melons have decreased in value across the region, but watermelons — especially in Guatemala and Nicaragua — have experienced explosive growth in the past year. Fresh

berries, although still relatively small, had big growth in value as well.

For fresh vegetables, the growth rate in regional value is about 5 percent. Looking at mainstream and emerging niche products, snow peas and sugar snap peas, Brussels sprouts, tomatoes, broccoli and cucumbers all grew in excess of 100 percent for the first seven months of this year over last year. The 2009 total for fresh fruits and vegetables imported into the United States from Central America topped \$1.6 billion.

Jay Bennett, produce procurement manager with the Plant City, FL division of Albertson's LLC, reveals, "We have a long list of produce items from the various countries of Central America: fruits such as berries, limes, mangos and pineapple; vegetables as typical as cucumbers, radishes, fresh herbs and snow peas; and more exotic choices including *boniata*, *calabaza* and *malanga* roots. In Florida, we have close ties to Central America, and our customers are very familiar with these items — we don't consider them exotics," he continues. "Central America allows us to offer them throughout the late fall and winter months,

giving us a year-round supply on most items."

Just glancing at television cooking programs, food magazines and recent cookbook releases show popular and trending cuisines feature the indigenous foods of Cuba, Costa Rica, Guatemala and other countries nestled around the junction between North and South America and the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea. Changes in populations and media habits drive food trends. It can become a point of differentiation for a retailer to stock these less familiar varieties, along with products key to authentic Caribbean cuisines.

The counter-seasonal nature of Central America means that tropical, subtropical and temperate climates are able to grow produce items on a year-round basis and act as a major source of supply, especially to the Eastern half of the United States during the winter months. Dan Sutton, director of produce procurement at Boise, ID-based Albertson's LLC, notes, "If the product in question can be purchased from a local or domestic grower, and if the quality is superior and the price is competitive, then we certainly buy it from domestic sources. Because seasonality can control quality as well as a por-



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“It typically costs less to ship by boat from Central America than by truck from California. Good logistic services and facilities are available; there’s strong U.S. government support; and it’s a tax-free environment. Land and labor are plentiful and the seasons fill in voids in domestic supplies.”

— Charlie Eagle, Southern Specialties Inc.

tion of the pricing equation, then the reasons for sourcing from Central America — or anywhere — are for us probably ranked as seasonality, quality, price.”

Dan McCullough, vice president of produce and floral at Ahold USA Inc., located in Carlisle, PA, follows a similar strategy, noting, “Customers prefer domestic product, but understand that for us to offer certain seasonal items such as bush berries, sugar snap peas, asparagus, melons or a number of other warm-weather items, Central America is a viable option. We consider our winter months through early spring to be the Central America season,” he continues. “Quality and cost are very important considerations, and Central America has a history of being right on both. It has become an important source for us.”

More Integrated Sourcing

“One of the biggest changes over the past few years is the consolidation of companies involved in Central America,” reveals Ken Kodish, melon team leader for Ayco Farms Inc., in Deerfield Beach FL. “You now find vertically integrated operations that can control the entire process from seed through all the agricultural practices, including food safety, packing and shipping. It started with the bigger commodities such as what we do with melons and personal-sized watermelons and is moving on to other areas. Working as a vertically integrated company in Central America, for example, we can pick melons at high Brix and pack and ship them within three days. The consumer gets a better piece of fruit that is ready to eat,” he concludes.

Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A. Inc. is another company with a decades-long history of growing fruits and vegetables in Central America from seed to store. “We grow and import bananas, honeydews, cantaloupes, watermelons, tomatoes, peppers, a tropical line and Del Monte Gold Extra Sweet pineapples from the region,” details Dionysios Christou, vice president of North American marketing

for the company, which is based in Coral Gables FL.

While U.S. markets are an easy — and expected — fit, Europe also beckons, sometimes offering a better currency trade. However, it is often larger companies that can more easily address the certification requirements that sophisticated European and U.S. markets demand.

Distance Counts

“We started growing and shipping primarily from Guatemala and Belize to the United States more than 20 years ago, originally because of the proximity to North America,” reports Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Southern Specialties Inc., headquartered in Pompano Beach, FL, “It typically costs less to ship by boat from Central America than by truck from California. Good logistic services and facilities are available; there’s strong U.S. government support; and

it’s a tax-free environment. Land and labor are plentiful and the seasons fill in voids in domestic supplies. In the 90s, our company worked to upgrade agricultural practices, food safety, worker safety and workforce training. We now ship product to Europe and South America as well as the United States.”

Marketing director, Mary Ostlund, of Homestead, FL-based Brooks Tropicals LLC, says, “What’s great about Central America is that it is, indeed, ‘central.’ For us, it’s right next door. We import from all the countries, but Belize, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and parts of Mexico are our main sources. Our primary products are tropicals: papaya, thin-skinned avocados and pineapples, which thrive in the great year-round growing climate.”

Specialties Build the Selection Portfolio

Beyond the traditional mainstay list of tropical items, specialty crops comprise a small but increasing role to importers and retailers seeking highly desirable and profitable niche selections.

Michael Parr, general manager of Team Produce International Inc., in Miami, FL, considers many of these specialty crops as bridge products because of their seasonal nature. “We’ve had great success with blackberries grown in Guatemala and Asian vegetables such as snow peas and sugar snaps from Honduras,” he shares. “There’s a real geographic advantage to Honduras and Guatemala compared to where we started in Chile. We’re also looking at opportunities in Brussels sprouts, broccoli and okra. We work with smaller farms that have grown to meet the world-class standards you have to have to be in this business.”

Southern Specialties has developed lines of value-added products and added a private label line. Eagle explains, “We see consumers as time-strapped, yet health-conscious. Our aim is to grow to the needs of the market, consumers that are looking for easy-to-prepare, virtually grab-and-go choices. That means microwave bags and well portioned packages. We’re even serving high-end restaurants with our Asian vegetable products. We call our premium line Southern Selects, which includes vegetables, blackberries, mangos, papayas and putaya — or dragon fruit.

As time goes on, vertically integrated companies put more energy and focus into seed varieties that are well suited to Central America’s varied climates areas and soils. Ayco Farms’ Kodish discloses, “We constantly seek new seed varieties with flavor, sugar, maturity and longer shelf-life attributes that will allow us to farm additional products and improve those we have now. Like other areas of the world, Cen-



Central American melons have experienced explosive growth in the past year.

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tral American agriculture is constantly evolving and improving.”

Nutrition Momentum

In addition to the thrust of cooking and food trends, renewed emphasis on healthful eating is a positive sign for importers of Central America’s fruit and vegetables crop. Retail stores can become the nexus of quality selection, education on new products and varieties and a commitment to help consumers make better food choices as they purchase fruits and vegetables for family meals. Del Monte’s Chris-

tou says, “With more consumers becoming aware of the benefits of incorporating fresh produce into their diets, the demands for year-round, premium quality produce are increasing.” Central America’s bounty helps meet those demands during winter months.

As Kodish says, “It’s all about information and how well you use it to help customers at all levels of the supply chain.” Providing fun ways to encourage shoppers to try less familiar fruits and vegetables from regions like Central America and increasing their produce purchases is a win-win situation for everyone.

PICK YOUR CLIMATE

Central America offers climate regions ranging from tropical to temperate, ideally suited to the needs of products as varied as snow peas and pineapples, blackberries and bananas, watermelons and papaya. Guatemala has become the top growing locale in the area because it includes tropical, subtropical and temperate growing regions. The variety of areas throughout the region means many crops can be grown year-round to fill windows of opportunity once domestic sources are finished for the year. “Pineapple and bananas can only grow in tropical climates such as those found in many Central American countries and are available all year long no matter the season,” explains Dionysios Christou, vice president of North American marketing for the Del Monte Fresh Produce N. A. Inc., in Coral Gables, FL. “In other areas of the region, mild dry winters mean we can grow melons during a time of year when domestic melons are not available.”

“Starting plants in greenhouses is a relatively recent development,” says Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Southern Specialties Inc., headquartered in Pompano Beach, FL. “This method leverages climate issues, speeds up the whole growth process and shaves up to a couple weeks off the growing time.”

“Greenhouse seedlings start for 10 to 14 days and then get planted under plastic tenting that protects the plants from disease or insects before removal when the plants flower,” details Ken Kodish, melon team leader for Ayco Farms Inc., in Deerfield Beach, FL.

Looking to the Future

Because the future looks so bright for Central America, established companies now have the option to think about the long-term future. Eagle sums it up. “Underlying everything we do is stewardship of the land with a focus on sustaining it for future crops and generations,” he asserts. “We are constantly thinking about the education of people; the support of our workforce; ensuring the quality of the water supply; keeping soils replenished and seeking crop varieties that allow proper rotation. These are the factors that will keep this agricultural system going in the future.”

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Mexican Avocados Fill The Void Left In Domestic Off Season

With a truly year-round crop, avocados from Mexico keep retail shelves full and consumers happy. **BY K.O. MORGAN**

Today's health conscious consumers are well aware of the many health benefits of avocados, and many are very specific in what they expect in taste and quality. Mexico's warm climate, rich volcanic soil and adequate amounts of rainfall combine perfectly to provide a fertile environment for retailers who want to meet customers' demands for avocados all year long.

"If you look at where Mexican avocados are grown and the climate there, it's a pretty perfect place to grow avocados," says Allison Moore, communications director for the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), in Nogales, AZ. "You don't have to worry about freezing temperatures and can store the avocado on the tree instead of storing it off the tree. This way, its great tasting flavor is allowed to develop."

"Mexican avocados can serve as a great choice for retailers on a seasonal or even on a year-round basis," remarks Doug Meyer, vice president of sales and marketing at West Pak Avocado Inc., based in Alvarado, CA. "Mexican avocados are the Hass variety, as are domestic avocados from California," he

continues. "The California supply is not available year-round, and typically is not distributed to the East Coast in great abundance during the season. So Mexican avocados can serve as a great choice for retailers on a seasonal or even on a year-round basis."

"The Hass avocado has become the gold standard in terms of flavor," adds Moore. "And Mexico is an important part of ensuring that Hass avocados are in the marketplace at all times, whereas California and Chile — the other big producers of Hass avocados — are not in production all the time because their climates are not conducive to year-round avocado growth. That said, Mexico, California and Chile are working together to ensure consumers that Hass avocados are available whenever they want, no matter what time of year."

Offering Mexican avocados to consumers doesn't necessarily mean competing with domestic avocados. "Because the seasons of various countries overlap or stagger, there are different ripening conditions that affect the taste of avocados," states William Tarleton, director of marketing and communications at

Oxnard, CA-based Mission Produce Inc. "For instance, right now California avocados are rich, creamy and buttery delicious because it is late in the season when avocados are at their peak. At this time of year, Mexico is early in the season so its avocados don't have the oil content yet and therefore are bland and watery. For that reason, a retailer doesn't want to put a lesser quality avocado on a shelf next to one that is excellent quality, which is why retailers don't want avocados from two different countries of origin on the shelf at the same time."

Rob Wedin, vice president of fresh sales at Calavo Growers Inc., headquartered in Santa Paula, CA, agrees. "It is not realistic to ask retailers to carry one source of avocados alongside another. Each avocado source plays an important role in the market."

"Mexican avocados get that really rich taste that people expect from avocados," remarks Moore of the FPAA. "So, it's important for retailers to stock them because consumers love and expect that flavor from their avocados."

"I don't know if it's necessary to carry Mexican and domestic avocados alongside each



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“We never offer two different products from two countries at the same time. When domestic avocados are in season, our customers will buy American. But Mexican avocados can provide consumers with product at other times of the year.”

— Nick Sprague, Hannaford Bros. Co.

other in the produce department, but rather in place of one another because the Mexican avocado season gets going when the California season is winding down,” explains Jill Kramm, buyer/inspector for Supervalu Inc., located in Eden Prairie, MN. “The California season is the summer, but once you start getting into late September and early October, it turns into the Mexican and Chilean avocado season with Mexico slightly ahead of Chile. The great thing about Mexican avocados is that it’s a year-round crop because the Mexican avocado has four flower blooms each year.”

“We never offer two different products from two countries at the same time,” states Nick Sprague, category manager of fruit at Hannaford Bros. Co., headquartered in Portland, ME. “When domestic avocados are in

season, our customers will buy American. But Mexican avocados can provide consumers with product at other times of the year.”

“Domestic avocados complement Mexican avocados’ year-round availability; therefore, it is not necessary for retailers to display both origins,” adds Emiliano Escobedo, marketing director for APEAM (Association of Producers and Exporters of Avocados from Mexico), based in Los Angeles, CA.

Overcoming Consumer Concerns

In recent years, food safety issues surrounding imports from other countries have given some customers pause about buying foreign products. Overcoming those fears can be a challenge for retailers, even during off seasons when domestic avocados are not avail-

able. “During the U.S. growing season, our particular consumers prefer buying American over another country,” admits Sprague. “But we’ll stock Mexican avocados when there are no U.S. avocados available.”

Moore believes consumers will buy Mexican avocados when they realize how great tasting they are. “Mexican avocados are more flavorful in comparison to those placed in storage, as many domestic avocados are,” she says. “In fact, when an avocado is ripened in storage rather than on the tree, it has proven time and time again that if the flavor is unsatisfactory to consumers, they will not buy it again.”

“Education is key in overcoming safety issues,” Escobedo asserts. “Retailers and customers need to be aware that after rigorous inspections by the USDA and SAGARPA in the packing facilities, every container of avocados from Mexico is sealed by a USDA inspector prior to traveling to the U.S. border — most of them entering through Texas. Only U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is allowed to break the seals in order to inspect them once they are in U.S. territory. After the CBP inspection, the load is sealed again until it arrives to the next destination, which could either be in Washington, D.C. or an in-out facility in Texas, where a Federal Inspector will break the seal and



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APEAM, MHAIA AND THE HASS AVOCADO BOARD

Retailers can get help in moving Mexican avocados off the shelves through a variety of resources. Association of Producers and Exporters of Avocados from Mexico (APEAM), the Mexican Hass Avocado Importers Association (MHAIA), and the Hass Avocado Board (HAB) all offer comprehensive promotional programs for retailers, including towers and bins, in-store displays and contests, consumer POS materials and circular and graphics.

“At West Pak Avocado, we work closely with these associations to bring our retail partners great programs aimed at generating more revenue for their avocado category and the produce department as a whole,” notes Doug Meyer, vice president of sales and marketing at West Pak Avocado Inc., in Alvarado, CA.

“MHAIA research reveals that shoppers will purchase more avocados when they are exposed to their health benefits, avocado photography, usage suggestions for salads, soups, sandwiches, burgers, etc., and a label on the avocado that tells shoppers it is ripe and ready to eat, because ripe avocados outsell other stages by a 2-to-1 margin,” claims Jacqueline Bohmer, marketing director for the MHAIA, which is in Coral Gables, FL.

“To help arm retailers with the tools they need, Avocados from Mexico offers the S.M.A.R.T. (Storing Merchandising Arranging Ripening Training) Kit to train produce managers about the latest in Best Practices for handling and merchandising avocados from Mexico,” adds Escobedo of APEAM.

“I think some retailers do a really good job in terms of saying flavor and quality guarantees, but sometimes produce people don’t have resources behind them to really know what to share with consumers,” says Allison Moore, communications director for the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), in Nogales, AZ. “That’s where programs such as those offered by the Hass Avocado Board help out.”

“The bottom line is that avocados originated in Mexico,” says Escobedo. “The combination of growing conditions and generations of expert cultivation produces a consistent quality, flavor, size and texture that have been perfected to be distinctly delicious. Plus, avocados from Mexico are handpicked from our groves and shipped to the U.S. market within three to four days, so they are always fresh, ripe, creamy and smooth. And that’s what customers wants!” **pb**

inspect the quality of the product once more. After they have certified that the quality of the fruit has met the required standards, only then will the product be released for distribution.”

Tarleton of Mission adds, “There have been tremendous strides over past 10 years in ensuring food safety and all importers have stringent food safety, rules to follow in order to bring imports into the U.S. Mexican exporters do everything they can to ensure food safety, something retailers need to educate customers about. In fact, retailers should also promote the fact that avocados have a hardy skin that protects them against pests and disease better than other fruits and vegetables.”

In fact, safety requirements begin in Mexico before any avocados even make it to the border. “A lot of steps happen to guarantee safety,” maintains FPAA’s Moore. “First of all, growers and importers are working with customs in Mexico who have their own safety, quality, growing and packaging requirements. Plus, many retailers have their own auditing systems or third-party auditors who visit the farms to ensure they are implementing safety practices.

Each truck that comes across the border is then inspected 100 percent of the time by the USDA. Then, at the border, there is a variety of inspection agencies that make sure no contraband is in with the avocados, that there are no errors on paperwork and that you are actually bringing in what you say you are,” Moore continues. “Add to this, a sample of avocados is cut open to make sure there are no fruit flies. The FDA also checks on whether a specific shipper or farm has a good or bad history.”

“Quality and food safety start at the groves with the growing and harvesting of Mexican avocados,” notes Meyer of West Pak. “Mexican avocados that are destined for the United States can only come from groves in the state of Michoacán that have been certified by both the Mexican and U.S. governments. The growing, harvesting and packing of the avocados are closely monitored. Once at the U.S. border, Mexican avocados must pass through both Mexican and U.S. Customs before being allowed to enter the country.”

“To ensure maximum quality, producers and packers of Avocados from Mexico adhere

to the toughest world-class standards for food safety,” contends APEAM’s Escobedo. “Our Dry Matter Standards Quality Program ensures all orchards and packing houses ship only the highest quality fruit. Executed by a third-party company, inspectors test fruit for dry matter content to make certain each orchard meets our requirements. In addition, Avocados from Mexico abide by standards that exceed international standards, including fruit coding and harvest data that can provide trace back to the farm in less than one hour; handpicked fruit that never touches the ground; leading-edge food safety technology; independently certified packers; and orchards that abide by strict guidelines for food safety, sanitary standards and product quality.”

In addition to all these precautions, there is also a mandatory quality inspection for avocados — a predetermined minimum standard, agreed upon by all U.S. growers, which must be met for avocados imported into the United States. Moore adds, “Once a company has invested that much time and money in a product, it would be foolish not to make sure it meets these standards. The growers and shippers really do see rigorous inspections as the culture of doing business.”

Optimizing Sales

How can retailers encourage customer confidence in avocados from Mexico? One way is through attractive displays. “Make sure you have consistently ripe displays,” advises Wedin of Calavo Growers. “And place those avocados near lemons and tomatoes, not in the cold rack,” he adds.

“Typical promotions for avocados include the Superbowl and Cinco de Mayo,” offers Moore.

“Retailers can create hype and increase sales by creating displays with ripe fruit that are eye-catching; by setting up secondary displays in highly trafficked areas; and by showcasing promotional cards and recipes that are ideal for the football season,” says Escobedo. “In addition, we suggest displaying avocados next to items they partner with in meals and recipes such as tomatoes, onions, lemons and limes. This reminds customers to purchase these items and provides a beautiful color contrast as well. And don’t forget the power of suggestion! Try displaying avocados with pre-cut vegetables and platters, as well as chips and beer.”

“At our stores, we promote Taco Night,” says Kramm of Supervalu. “Customers can tear off the recipes from a POS pad and avocados are one of the ingredients. We post this recipe pad where the avocados and tomatoes are displayed.” **pb**



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF WESTBORN MARKETS. PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF ASSOCIATED FOOD STORES.

Independent markets are in touch with their consumers and can easily cater to their desires.

The Rise Of Independents And The Resurgence Of The American Dream

Fresh produce sales climb as independent markets grow. **BY BARBARA ROBISON**

The Mom & Pop independent stores of yesterday have been transformed into the specialty and ethnic markets of today. Along with the changes have come growth, diversity and increased sales of fresh produce. Some of the markets have been in business for years, but whether upscale or price-oriented, images have changed with the times. Other markets are newer and many cater to particular ethnic groups, organic or natural food shoppers. Niche marketing has become the name of the game. The individual market stories may differ, but even those that started years ago began by owning a piece of the American dream.

“The independents seem to have a different culture,” points out Ed Odron, owner of Produce Marketing Consulting, based in Stockton, CA. “They pick the right neighborhoods and know their customers. They want them to feel welcome and happy, and have an enjoyable shopping experience. The employees are friendly and seem to enjoy their jobs. The

entire market is usually deeply involved in community activities.”

“Our customers have been shopping with us for years,” says Dino Mandarino, store and produce manager for Scott’s Corner Market, in Pound Ridge, NY. “We see them every week and when they don’t come in, it’s usually because they are on vacation.”

“The independents are really nimble,” adds Karen Caplan, president and CEO of Frieda’s Inc., headquartered in Los Alamitos, CA. “They react quickly to take advantage of short seasons or over-supplies. With corporate chains, there is a lot of paper work and sometimes buying decisions can take up to five weeks.”

Ethnic Independent Markets On The Rise

The ethnic markets have created excitement in many parts of the country. Some have been in the independent market business for years, created by demands from consumers in a strong ethnic neighborhood. Others have more

recently seen opportunities to service the ethnic communities they know well. They are often seeking the American dream of owning a business and supporting their family among friends in familiar neighborhoods.

One locale where ethnic markets have really taken hold is the greater Los Angeles area. “Most started out in the inner city when reasonable real estate became available as major chains closed non-performing markets,” points out Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Services Inc., located in Monrovia, CA. “Realtors were willing to offer good prices because they needed the foot traffic that food markets create in neighborhood areas. The center of Los Angeles has become saturated, and independent markets are now competing with each other, not just the major chains. Now, we are seeing movement into the outlying areas, and some markets are even ‘ground-up’ ones, where owners build their own buildings. We’ve been moving into phase two, with ethnic markets, especially Hispanic, oper-



PHOTO COURTESY OF WESTBORN MARKETS

ating five, even as many as 40 markets. Phase three is a crossover of customers. More non-ethnics are shopping in the markets, purchasing special produce and bakery items.”

Other urban areas throughout the country are also seeing a large growth of ethnic markets. They may not all have developed like those in Los Angeles, but they are increasing in numbers, size and diversity.

Associated Food Stores Inc., in Salt Lake City, UT, services hundreds of independently owned retail supermarkets and has seen a big rise in ethnic markets. “They are aggressive — finding existing space or building new buildings — but we’ve found there is an experience gap between the independents and the chains,” contends Leigh A. Vaughn, director of produce and floral. “We try to assist one particular ethnic group by producing a specialized Hispanic ad every week, and providing a professional Hispanic buyer. The markets want quality produce, but they are generally price-based, so we become more aggressive through pallet and volume pricing on staple items, or we are price-point oriented for the more unusual items.”

Not all areas of the country have experienced the growth of the independent markets. “We’ve had some changes, of course, but the local chain stores do such a good job in this market that we’ve not seen the tremendous growth of independents other areas talk about,” says Alan Siger, president of Consumers Produce Co. Inc. of Pittsburgh, a fresh produce distributor in Pittsburgh, PA.

Brendan Comito, chief operating officer with Norwalk, IA-based Capital City Fruit Co.

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“In Los Angeles, a major chain might do 10 to 12 percent of store sales in produce. Independent markets are doing up to 30 percent of store sales in produce. The impact of 40 independent stores’ sales in produce is equivalent to the volume done by 100 stores of a major chain.”

— Dick Spezzano, Spezzano Consulting Services Inc.

Inc., reports the major chains in his area have kept their real estate. “There are not many avenues for independents to come in here,” he says. “There are a few and they do a good job, but basically we don’t see the growth they have in Chicago and Indiana, for instance,” he adds.

Produce Wholesalers And Distributors See Volume Increases

One of the big pluses for produce wholesalers and distributors in markets with independent growth is produce volume. “In Los Angeles, a major chain might do 10 to 12 percent of store sales in produce,” estimates Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting Services. “Independent markets are doing up to 30 percent of store sales in produce. The impact of 40 independent stores’ sales in produce is equivalent to the volume done by 100 stores of a major chain.”

“We love what’s happening to our business,”

says William Vogel, president and CEO of Tavilla Sales Co. of Los Angeles, based in Los Angeles, CA. “It reminds me of the 70s when our market had primarily smaller regional chains. The ethnic markets require good quality, up-to-the-minute service, and a price-conscious attitude. They will often take smaller sizes and those sales are great for our Mexican growers who have entire crops to sell.” The company’s ethnic market customers use more tropical fruits per capita and they know the difference in the fruit varieties. For example, there is a lot of new interest in the *malanga*, a root vegetable related to the *taro*, he adds.

Samra Produce & Farms Inc., in Los Angeles, CA, has been servicing the Indian independent markets for about 20 years. “Today, there are 50 to 60 Indian markets in Los Angeles,” reveals president Harbhajan Singh. There are much bigger markets in San Francisco, New York, Toronto, Vancouver and Chicago.” The

company finds certain varieties of mangos, okra, Tinda squash, Indian eggplant, chiles and bitter melon are popular with its customers.

Ethnic Independents Go Their Own Way

A notable difference between the ethnic independents and the large chains is the methods they use to reach customers. “You don’t see many ads from ethnic markets,” says Odron of Produce Marketing & Consulting. “They have a lot of in-house flyers, and large signs in the markets draw attention to produce specials. They also depend on word of mouth, plus participation in local activities to draw in customers.”

“Many of them work through their local churches,” adds Spezzano. “If the priest or minister mentions the market as a church supporter, that can have a strong effect on bringing in shoppers.”

Labor is, of course, a major cost factor in operating any retail food market. Many of the ethnic markets hire family members or people in the neighborhood who speak the language and dress like the customers. “There’s often a big difference in wages because most of the markets are non-union,” reports Spezzano. “Fringe benefits are an added cost over and above wages in union contracts.”

The types of items the ethnic markets purchase are also different from the large chains. “Our ethnic customers purchase garbanzo beans in the shell, date varieties and melons in season,” says Caplan of Frieda’s. “The chains are more interested in the specialty items we carry.”

Odron points out that many of the ethnic markets operate under the radar. They are not big joiners of groups and don’t sit on boards of big organizations. The Fresh Produce & Floral Council (FPFC), in La Mirada, CA, which serves the produce industry in both Southern and Northern California, is aware of this and is establishing a task force to study how the FPFC can be of greater assistance to independent markets. The FPFC identified them as a growth section extremely important to the wholesalers and distributors in California. “We recognize the independent markets can’t usually take the time to attend our meetings and social events, yet they may not have access to market research data and other things FPFC provides to its members,” says president Carissa Mace. The annual Produce Expo has been a drawing card for the independents. “The event is free to market staffs and this year, we kept the exhibits open later to accommodate them. It was successful and we plan to do it again next year,” Mace adds.

Some markets are undergoing changes in the ethnic groups they service. Ten years ago,

Side Note

FLORAL CAN ADD TO INDEPENDENTS’ PROFITS

Associated Food Stores Inc., based in Salt Lake City, UT, provides another service for independents by conducting a floral training seminar, available to market staff members. The seminar

includes instructions in business management, image builders for floral, as well as guidelines on how to do arrangements. It is often overlooked, but floral can help an independent market build profits. **pb**

“The ethnic markets require good quality, up-to-the-minute service, and a price-conscious attitude. They will often take smaller sizes and those sales are great for our Mexican growers who have entire crops to sell.”

— William Vogel, Tavilla Sales Co.

the 20-year old Chan’s Market in Pasadena, CA, had a customer base that was almost 100 percent African American. “We sold 20 cases of greens a week, but today that has been cut almost in half, as a result of the economy and the fact that many of my current customers are seniors,” notes owner Peter Young Yoo. “The younger African Americans are moving out of the city and we are getting more Latino customers. I am buying a few different produce items and plan to slowly add more as my customer base changes.” From Korea, Yoo enjoys being the owner of a small neighborhood market where he knows his customers and what their preferences are.

They may not be strictly ethnic markets, but other markets are adding produce items to appeal to particular ethnic groups. “We’re trying to build our Asian section and I started carrying dragon fruit,” reports produce manager Tony Moore at Babbs Super Valu, in Spencer, IN. “Now, customers are even coming from Bloomington to buy our dragon fruit and other Asian produce items. We try to satisfy all our customers and like having more leeway to do our own buying and setting up our own displays. We can take a display down quickly if a good deal comes along we want to promote. Our customers love the locally grown produce in season.”

Organics And Locally Grown Place Prominently

Not all independents are ethnic-based. Many are upscale markets in affluent areas, or feature organic and natural foods. One such market is Sunset Food Mart Inc., in Highland Park, IL, which will soon open its fifth neighborhood market in January, 2011, after 73 years in business. “We believe that quality and service go hand-in-hand,” asserts produce and floral director Vince Mastromauro. “The market has a big variety of value-priced quality produce. We don’t bring in hot buys. We’ve been handling organics since the 1990s, working with Goodness Greeness, an organic distributor in Chicago. We use a lot of locally grown vegetables such as corn, squash and tomatoes. Every week in August we hold a

farmer’s market, which has been very successful.” For additional customer service, the mar-

ket provides two full-time employees at the scales to weigh produce for customers, which cuts waiting time when checking out.

Another upscale market that stocks many organics is Dorothy Lane Market, with three stores in the Dayton, OH, area. “About 10 percent of our produce sales is natural and organic and our department has been certified organic by a third-party,” reports José Manzano, produce director. “We also feature some locally grown produce in season, such as Ohio apples and winter squash.”

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Reader Service # 54

A strong Detroit produce terminal has helped Westborn Market, based in Berkley, MI, with three upscale markets, continue to be a leader in the fresh fruit and vegetable category, according to president Mark Anusbigian. "It's a wonderful advantage for us because we are in the terminal five days a week and can see, taste and smell the produce items rather than buying over the phone," he explains. "It helps us remain strong by keeping the quality our customers rely on." He admits that price is playing a bigger role than ever, even for an upscale

"We try to satisfy all our customers and like having more leeway to do our own buying and setting up our own displays. We can take a display down quickly if a good deal comes along we want to promote. Our customers love the locally grown produce in season."

— Tony Moore, Babbs Super Valu

market. "We are tightening our margins to try to remain competitive, but still maintain our quality and service."

Community Events Count

Westborn Market, originally a corner fruit stand, has developed into an international marketplace over the years. It is a big supporter of local farmers and local community activities. Anusbigian serves on the board of "Forgotten Harvest," a Detroit area mobile food rescue program. Every year, the market sponsors a Champagne Cruise in its parking lot, to benefit "Forgotten Harvest."

The upscale Scott's Corner Market ties in with a local car show, which pays tribute to the police, and works with the Lions Club on their Pumpkin Patch promotion. "The club plants pumpkins just 30 yards from our store and because they don't grow enough to meet the sales demand, we supply additional pumpkins needed and help them with their sale," says Mandarino. Locally grown produce items are promoted in the market and it is looking to handle more organic produce for customers.

"We try to feature locally and regionally grown produce as much as possible," says Koby Peterson, produce manager at Ed's IGA supermarket, based in Snowflake, AZ. "Our customers love the tomatoes we get from nearby Wilcox, Arizona."

Felicity IGA, a small rural market in Felicity, OH, is more a "bread-and-butter store," as co-owner Rose Reifenger describes it. "We offer some organics and specialty items, but the reception has not been good," she admits. "There isn't a lot of locally grown produce in our immediate area, so it's not economical for us to feature it. We do make our own salsa and fresh fruit cups, which are popular."

"We're seeing a dramatic increase in organic sales and currently carry 150 items," reports Vaughn of Associated Food Stores. "Our private label is Natural Directions, which is packaged by Western Family, a cooperative in Portland, Oregon."

pb

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Focusing on upcoming events, such as Super Bowl and the Chinese New Year, is a profitable way to merchandise the department.

Hot Strategies For Winter Merchandising

Bring in consumers from the cold with hot deals and displays in the produce department. **BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD**

The winter season doesn't necessitate a complete reset in the produce department such as the ones that happen at Memorial Day to meet summer or Labor Day to launch into fall. Yet, savvy retailers do have a clear focus of what they need to achieve in their produce department to catch the attention of shivering shoppers during these months.

Karen Caplan, president and CEO of Frieda's Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA, explains it this way: "Right after Halloween, there's a big holiday focus in the lead up to Christmas. Then comes January, and the mindset is on New Year's resolutions and healthful eating. This is a big time to promote fruits and vegetables and take advantage of all the counter-seasonal produce that's available right into spring such as grapes, nectarines and berries."

HANUKKAH: December 1-9, 2010

Known as The Festival of Lights and celebrated by those of the Jewish faith, Hanukkah is a joyful family-oriented holiday that lasts

eight days and eight nights with many customary dishes served. Robert Schueller, director of public relations at Melissa's/World Variety Produce Inc., in Los Angeles, CA, says, "Ingredients for traditional dishes include potatoes for latkes, onions, horseradish, leeks, wild rice, grains, spices, herbs and dried fruits."

CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR'S: December 25, 2010, January 1

"Christmas displays should be colorful and festive and filled with plenty of products," Schueller asserts. "Dried fruits and nuts for fruitcakes are always popular. Don't forget the fancy vegetables, too. Then for New Year's, offer a full variety of snack foods. Also, it's said that eating black-eyed peas brings prosperity in the year ahead," so be sure to have those in stock as well.

Fresh citrus offers customers a great way to balance holiday over-eating, says Paula Fouchek, marketing director for the Edinburg Citrus Association, in Edinburg, TX. "Retailers can tie into Christmas by cross-merchandising citrus with coffee cakes, muffins, croissants and

jellies for a breakfast theme. Also, promote juice oranges for holiday Mimosas by cross-merchandising bottles of champagne nearby."

Tradition is giving way to trendy when it comes to the Christmas meal, reports Caplan. "Consumers today are not afraid to try new ingredients. This means retailers have an opportunity to market less common items. For example, Brussels sprouts are popular now, as are fingerling potatoes."

Christmas is the ideal holiday to sell all varieties of potatoes, adds Randy Shell, vice president of marketing for RPE Inc., in Bancroft, WI. "I recommend a two-tier approach. For example, offer a 10-lb. bag or russets for the family dinner table and a 1½ to 2½ -lb. bag of fingerlings or specialty potatoes for those who are entertaining or having holiday parties."

Randy Boushey, president of A&L Potato Co. Inc., in East Grand Forks, MN, maintains, "Red A-size potatoes are becoming more and more popular for mashed potatoes."

"Beyond mashed potatoes, shoppers are looking for new ways to prepare potatoes," acknowledges Kendra Mills, marketing man-

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PUBLIX SHOWCASE WINTER CITRUS

Citrus, especially Florida citrus, is featured throughout the winter season at Publix Supermarkets, in Lakeland, FL. Maria Brous, director of media and community relations, says, "Florida citrus is prominently merchandised throughout the produce department as a seasonal callout to our customers. Citrus is one of those items that sells itself. However, point-of-purchase material is always a good source of additional information for our shoppers."

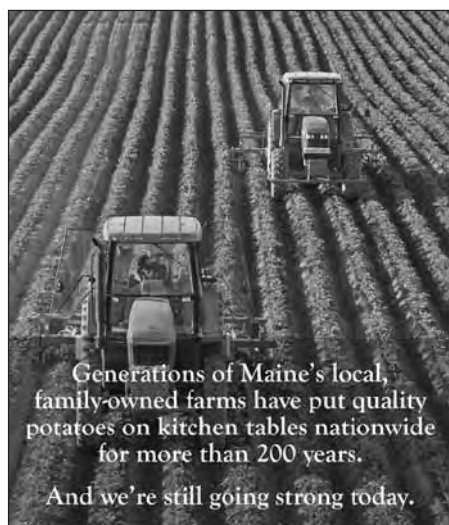
A sampling of the variety of citrus that Publix carries during the season includes grapefruit, tangerines, Navel oranges, juice oranges, Pummelos, Temple oranges, Tangelos and Kumquats. Brous says, "We frequently advertise a number of varieties throughout the citrus season, including in our At Season's Peak program, which is intended to remind customers of the seasonality of the fruits and growing seasons.



We've grown accustomed to year-around produce and often forget the true seasonality of produce items." **pb**

ager for the Prince Edward Island Potato Board, in Charlottetown, PEI, "For example, our two most popular recipes are for a Choco-

late PEI Potato Cake, where potatoes replace some of the oil, and Soda Bread that incorporates leftover mashed potatoes."



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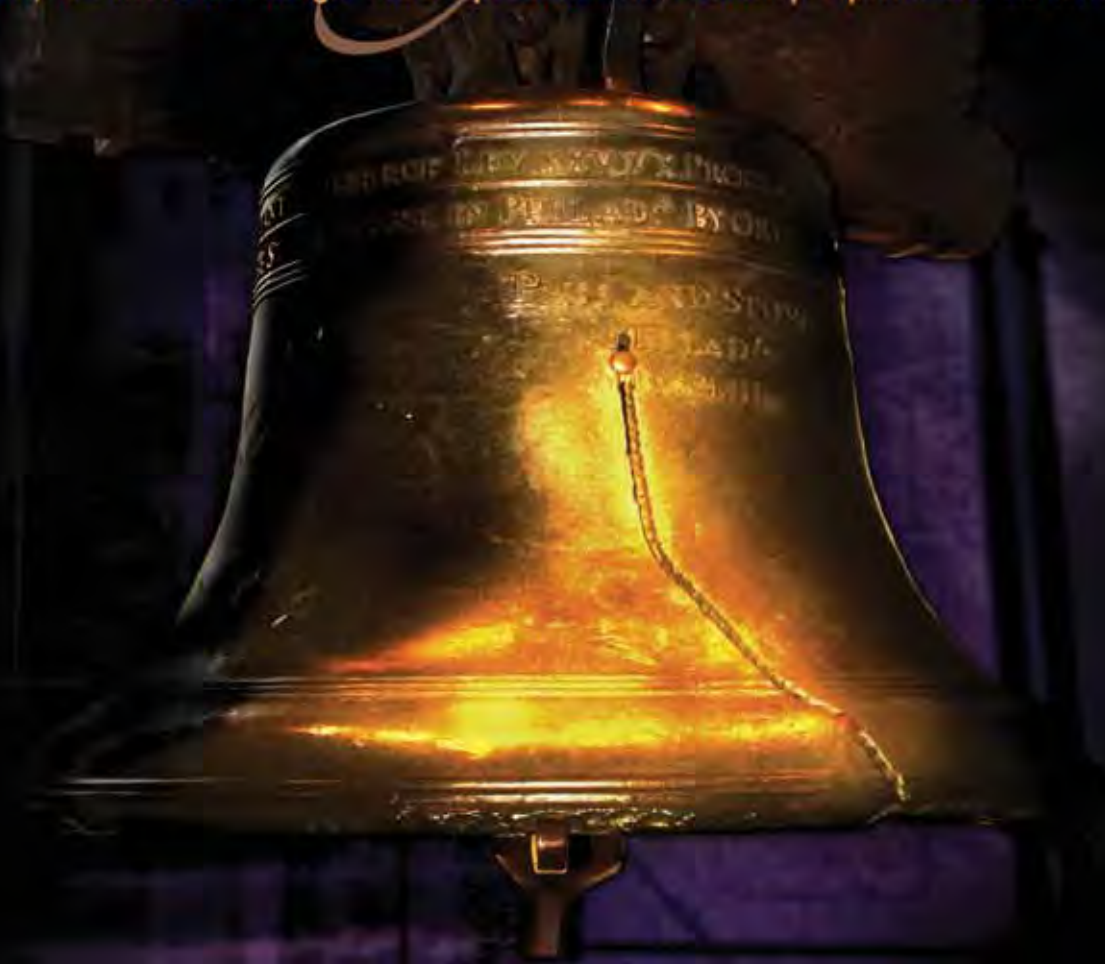
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SUMMER IN WINTER: January and February, 2011

The traditional window for the start of the Chilean fruit season is January, reports Tom Tjerandsen, the Sonoma, CA-based North American managing director for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA). "Some retailers want to be the first to promote Chilean fruit as soon as it comes in, while others wait for the peak of the harvest and then promote, and yet a third group waits until the last third of the season when all the competition has died down to promote. Each of these methods has compelling advantages and disadvantages."

According to Perishables Group data released in September for the CFFA, there are considerable market opportunities for Chilean fruit sales. For example, the per-capita expenditure for table grapes from May to November was \$4.81 compared to \$2.88 for December through April. Similarly, the per-capita expenditure for stone fruit during the domestic season is \$2.81 compared to \$0.37 for the Chilean season. Cherries, berries and avocados are also imported from Chile during the winter.

CHINESE NEW YEAR: February 3, 2011

This traditional Chinese celebration will welcome the year of the rabbit. Melissa's

Schueller advises, "Promote Asian produce such as ginger, daikon, baby bok choy, Napa cabbage, sugar snap peas, Korean pears, *oro blancos*, Buddha's hand citrus and value-added items such as eggroll wrappers and won-ton wrappers."

According to Frieda's Caplan, "Retailers who cater to their Chinese customers year-round will do the best selling to these customers for this holiday."

"Greens fall into two categories: comfort foods and health foods," details Jan Berk, vice president of marketing and business development for San Miguel Produce Inc., located in Oxnard, CA. "This applies not only to traditional Western/American leafy greens, but also Asian greens such as Bok Choy, *Gai Choy* (Chinese mustard greens), *Gai Lan* (Chinese Broc-

coli) and *Dau Miu* (Snow Pea shoots/tendrils)." This year, San Miguel Produce will offer instant redeemable coupons (IRCs) with recipes featuring traditional Asian Greens for Chinese New Year.

SUPER BOWL XLV: February 6, 2011

Nothing says snacking like Super Bowl. Phil Gruszka, vice president of marketing for Grimmway Farms, in Bakersfield, CA, says, "The strongest time of the year for baby carrot sales are from Thanksgiving to Super Bowl, all driven by the trend for healthier snacking. In the run up to game day, promote the 1-lb. baby carrots for 20- to 30-cents off the regular price, and then either promote carrot shreds, coins



Side Note

HOLIDAY PARTY TRAYS PROMOTED AT DE MOULAS MARKET BASKET

A selection of 10 to 12 different types of fruit-, vegetable- and nut-filled party trays were merchandised for shoppers at De Moulas Market Basket in the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Mike Maguire, director of produce for the 62-store chain based in Tewksbury, MA, says, "We make the trays in-store — small, medium and large sizes. It's a tradition we've done for the past 30 years."

Fruit trays will feature seasonal fruits such as apples and pears. The trays are made-to-order in the weeks leading up to Christmas. However, due to high demand, the store makes several ahead in the week leading up to Christmas and displays them at the entrance to the produce department. "The festive produce-filled trays are very popular for both holiday parties and gifts," says Maguire. **pb**

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“The strongest time of the year for baby carrot sales are from Thanksgiving to Super Bowl, all driven by the trend for healthier snacking. In the run up to game day, promote the 1-lb. baby carrots for 20-to 30-cents off the regular price, and then either promote carrot shreds, coins and chips for 10- to 20-cents off the regular price... in order to gain incremental sales.”

— Phil Gruszka, vice president of marketing for Grimmway Farms

and chips for 10- to 20-cents off the regular price or simply display these items next to the 1-lb. babies in order to gain incremental sales.”

Dick Thomas, Jr., vice president of sales for Potandon Produce LLC, in Idaho Falls, ID, recommends, “Promote potatoes for use in making potato skins.”

“In addition,” says Melissa’s Schueller, “cross-merchandise key limes next to beer, tomatoes with other salsa fixings and avocados for making guacamole.”

Avocados are a huge seller for Super Bowl. In 2010, 65.3 million pounds of avocados were sold for Super Bowl alone. Jan Delyser, vice president of marketing for the Irvine-based California Avocado Commission (CAC), says, “There’s more consistent volumes of avocados



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available year-round, and multiple sources in the early winter, so retailer can have confidence in promoting.”

The Chilean Avocado Importers Association (CAIA) offers a new bin this season under the theme Grab Some for the Game. Maggie Bezart, the Aptos, CA-based marketing director, says, “One side of the bin promotes our Avocado Lover’s Club and the other promotes tailgating usages for avocados. The bin allows retailers to customize their secondary displays.”

The CAIA also offers retailers a demo kit. Bezart says, “Demo avocados the week prior to Super Bowl to keep them in consumers’ minds. Although household penetration of avocados is 70 percent in the West, there is room to grow in other areas of the country. Household pene-

tration is only 36 percent in the South, 31 percent in the Midwest and 28 percent in the Northeast.”

Beyond guacamole, a 2009 Tracking Study by the Irvine, CA-based Hass Avocado Board (HAB) revealed that 73 percent of consumers use avocados as an ingredient in salads; 62 percent eat the fruit by itself; 58 percent use avocados on sandwiches; and 45 percent in appetizers other than guacamole. Combine this data published by Nielsen Homescan, which reported the avocado buying consumer spent \$39 per shopping occasion when avocados were not in the basket and spent \$66 when avocados were purchased, it’s clear the avocado-buying customer is a good one to entice in store.

VALENTINE’S DAY:

February 14, 2011

Offer customers the ingredients for a romantic meal. Melissa’s Schueller suggests, “Promote fresh fruits such as strawberries, papayas, baby pineapples and passion fruit.”

“In addition,” says Sage Fruit’s Sinks, “it is a good time to promote tote bags of Pink Lady apples.”

Alan Taylor, marketing director for Pink Lady America LLC, headquartered in Yakima, WA, says, “Wal-Mart stores have successfully promoted bagged Pink Lady apples for Valentine’s Day for the past five years.” Pink Lady America offers Valentine-theme poster designs that shippers can provide and customize for their retail partners. **pb**



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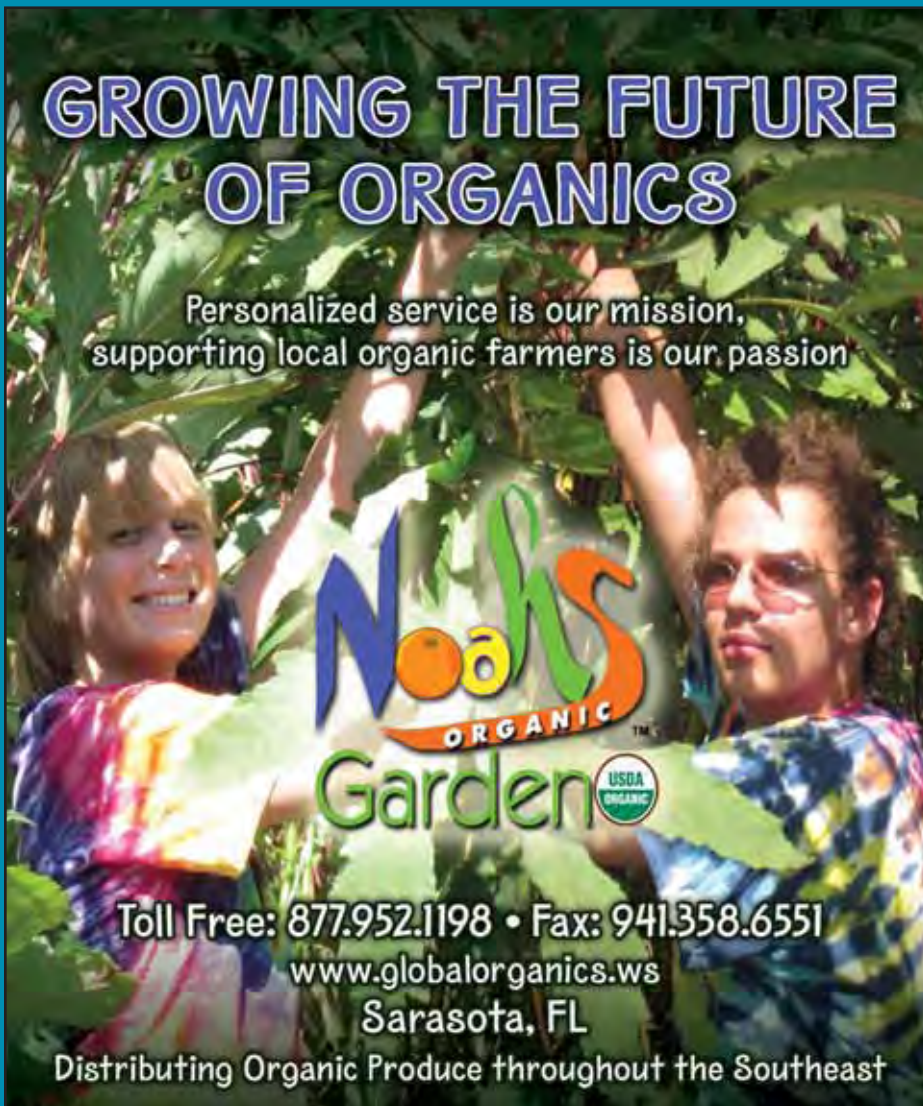
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Refrigerated space is at a premium for juices, thanks to the image boost they receive from being displayed in the produce department.

Juicing Up The Produce Department

The lure of healthful fresh juices leads consumers and competitors deeper into the produce department. **BY PAULA HENDRICKSON**

Ten years ago, finding bottled juice in the produce department was rare, but today it's common to find fresh orange, tangerine and pomegranate juices alongside the fresh fruits and vegetables. Viewed as a liquid form of produce, it makes sense that these juices wound up in produce instead of other refrigerated cases.

The connection between juice and produce isn't new. Long before bottled blends hit the shelves, some retailers made fresh juices on site. "We used to have great big machines to squeeze your own orange juice, grapefruit juice, carrot juice and apple juice," says Doug Riley, assistant vice president of produce operations for Hy-Vee Inc., headquartered in West Des Moines, IA. Riley says the trend began about 30 years ago and lasted until the mid-to-late '90s, when bottled fresh juices became more accessible. "That helped propel us into stocking some of the juices that came along, since our shoppers were accustomed to coming into Hy-Vee and buying fresh juices."

Orchid Island was one of the first fresh juice brands to hit the market two decades ago. "In

the beginning, we were the only juice allowed in the produce department," says Marygrace Sexton, CEO of Orchid Island Juice Co., in Fort Pierce, FL. "That was because they didn't allow anything in produce that had more than a 30-day shelf life." Because the company's fresh-squeezed orange and grapefruit juices have a 17-day shelf life, it made the cut.

Finding retailers that are able to properly handle fresh beverages was an initial roadblock. "Cold chain integrity didn't become really sophisticated until bagged salads came out in the late '90s," says John Martinelli, executive vice president of Orchid Island. "Before that, juice was normally found on an ice table in the middle of the produce aisle and usually had a three- to five-day shelf life."

Due to refrigerated shipping costs, many fresh juice companies start locally, like Noble Juice Co., which launched in 1996 and is now available in more than a dozen states from its home base in Winter Haven, FL. "The East Coast has been a really strong market for us, so now we're trying to find the right logistics to make it cost-effective to ship out West," says Lou

Rotell, national sales manager of Noble Juice. "With a fresh product, time is of the essence."

In 2002, POM Wonderful was perhaps the first brand to hit the national scene. "They did not offer it to the dairy departments because it was a produce item, and juice in produce departments evolved from there," says Mike Maguire, director of produce for DeMoulas Market Basket, a 65-store chain based in Tewksbury, MA. "With all the press about antioxidants, Açaí juices and blueberry juices, it became a natural fit."

"We don't view ourselves as a juice company," muses Matthew Tupper, president of POM Wonderful LLC, located in Los Angeles, CA. "We're pomegranate farmers. That's the fruit we grow and are most interested in. We wanted to offer the nutrition of this great produce item on a year-round basis, so it was very natural for us to be in produce."

Likewise, when produce giant Bolthouse Farms joined the fresh beverage market in 2003, it targeted produce departments. "Ultimately, we are not simply a marketing company, but a farming company that specializes



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“We don’t try to limit the number of varieties. We carry all the SKUs of any given company’s brand, then let the stores decide which ones to carry. Depending on space, they’ll carry as many as they can. But we do try to stay away from shelf-stable juices.”

— Doug Riley, Hy-Vee Inc.

in producing healthy snacks and beverages,” says Bryan Reese, chief marketing and innovation officer at Bolthouse Farms Inc., in Bakersfield, CA.

Limited Space, Limitless Competition

Increased consumer interest in antioxidant-rich beverages has spurred competition from small-to-mid-sized juice companies and large bottlers alike. With more brands battling for limited cooler space, suppliers vie for inclusion as retailers struggle to find room to stock more brands. “The biggest challenge is finding the space — especially refrigerated space, which is at a premium,” Hy-Vee’s Riley says. Some Hy-Vee stores include Health Markets, providing an additional outlet for fresh juices.

“We don’t try to limit the number of varieties,” Riley adds. “We carry all the SKUs of any given company’s brand, then let the stores decide which ones to carry. Depending on space, they’ll carry as many as they can. But we do try to stay away from shelf-stable juices.”

Market Basket carries five different juice lines, including Bolthouse, Odwalla, and POM Wonderful, and routinely test markets other brands, allowing consumer reaction to decide what the company restocks. “Before, we couldn’t even carry these juices,” Maguire says. The introduction of multi-deck cases has opened up a little more space. “We’ve now renovated most of our stores to multi-deck cases so they can handle juices they never had room for before.”

One advantage of apple cider, unlike other fresh beverages, is it doesn’t require refrigeration, which is helpful considering it often comes in gallon jugs. “A commodity like apple cider is usually stacked on the floor around October and November,” says Paul Kusche, vice president of marketing and innovation at Litehouse Inc., based in Sandpoint, ID. Since it doesn’t take cooler space away from year-round products, more stores can carry it.

Fresh juices may command premium prices, but they also benefit from the direct association with produce. POM Wonderful’s Tupper maintains all juices sold in the produce department should uphold the standards of freshness and nutrition inherent in the pro-

duce. “Many of the juices do live up to those standards, but unfortunately, that is not always the case,” he discloses.

“One of my complaints is when companies try to sell their juices in produce when it’s not actually fresh juice — it’s a hot pack product that has maybe a year-and-a-half shelf life and doesn’t have to be refrigerated,” complains Allyn Brown, owner of Connecticut Currant and Maple Lane Farms in Preston, CT. “Why waste valuable cooler space that should be saved for actual, refrigerated juices?”

Orchid Island’s Martinelli calls those shelf-stable products “industrial strength juices.” He says many such juices are eager to move into produce to bolster brand images. “What they recognized is it all has to do with marketing. They realized they could increase their margins with that fresh, nutritious perception.”

“We think the hurdle should be very high for quality, composition and nutrition of juices that are merchandised in produce, because after all, that’s the nutritious bounty of the store they’re sitting with,” Tupper says.

Promotional Opportunities

Suppliers agree that helping consumers distinguish between fresh and shelf-stable juices is crucial — and can be turned into a promotional opportunity. “You can go into the grocery store and see the word ‘fresh’ on some industrial strength juice jugs more times than you see it on our fresh-squeezed orange juice,” Martinelli says.

“They use terms like ‘Tastes like fresh-squeezed,’” Orchard Island’s Sexton says, adding, “Citrus juice is the last bastion of fresh-squeezed juice in America for inter-state commerce. You can make fresh-squeezed strawberry juice or whatever you choose and sell it at a juice stand or a stand-alone store, but for mass-distribution across state lines — by law — all juices other than citrus must be pasteurized.”

Flash pasteurization is the process companies like Orchard Island, Connecticut Currant, POM Wonderful, Noble, Litehouse and Bolthouse use. It’s far gentler than hot-pack processing and thus, used by many large commercial juice makers. In flash pasteuriza-



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Reader Service # 4

tion, juice is rapidly heated and then quickly cooled, which kills any harmful microorganisms without destroying the vitamins, enzymes or the overall freshness. Most flash-pasteurized beverages still require refrigeration; some, like Litehouse ciders, do not.

“The challenge is educating the consumer about what is pure, natural and fresh, and how indiscriminately some companies use those terms,” Sexton says.

Just as POM Wonderful initially had to educate consumers on the health benefits of pomegranate juice, Connecticut Currant, which launched five years ago, is spreading the word about the nutritional power of black currants, the main ingredient in its Currant Affairs line. “It’s easier now, but at first, no one knew what black currants were,” admits Brown.

According to Sexton, another way to educate consumers is to make shelf-life information more obvious so they’ll know if a product is five-days old or 128-days old. “I also really love the idea of a television, or some kind of educational information, in the produce department talking about the benefits of juice and what to look for on a label,” she says.

Litehouse cider labels clearly state which va-

“The challenge is educating the consumer about what is pure, natural and fresh, and how indiscriminately some companies use those terms.”

— Marygrace Sexton, Orchid Island Juice Co.

riety of apple is used to make that specific cider, and merchandising the cider with apples draws attention to both products. “We developed strategies to build a Gala display, work that down, replenish it, then replace it with another display for Honeycrisp,” Kusche says. “Then do the same thing to transition out of Honeycrisp to Fuji.” This gives retailers three separate promotional opportunities instead of one.

Connecticut Currant’s Brown maintains that retailers benefit from highlighting local products when possible. “Here in New England, we sell our product as the locally grown, locally bottled juice,” he says. “It’s helped us quite a bit. We’re a new type of juice from a local manufacturer, so most of the time consumers are willing to give us a try.”

While suppliers understand there isn’t enough space to accommodate a growing

number of premium juices, they emphasize that making additional space for fresh juices is worthwhile. “From the stores’ perspective, with shelf-stable product they’re looking at less shrink for the shelf space, but there’s still a value proposition with [fresh juices],” Noble’s Rotell says. “You tend to see consumers with more disposable income — the gourmet, trendy consumer who’s shopping the produce aisle — as opposed to someone looking for a lower-priced item like those frozen juice tubes you mix with water.”

“Adequate space is key,” agrees Bolthouse’s Reese. “This category thrives on innovation and flavor variety. Consumers expect to have many choices when it comes to flavors and their respective health benefits. If they can’t find what they’re looking for, they’ll look elsewhere to meet their needs.” **pb**



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The Atlanta State Farmers' Market spans 150 acres and more than 50 different kinds of businesses.

The Changing Face Of Atlanta's Produce Market

New languages and demographic groups mean new products and a shifting interest in consumer demands. **BY BOB JOHNSON**

Just south of the City of Atlanta, the sprawling 150-acre Atlanta State Farmers' Market shows the many faces of the metropolitan area's changing produce industry. One section of the market is devoted to more than 650 retail stalls, where residents can shop 364 days of the year for produce from the farms of Georgia and beyond. It is one of the largest direct marketing produce operations in the world, and one of the six sheds in this section of the market is reserved exclusively for Georgia-grown produce. "We have a special shed at the Atlanta market with the Georgia produce for the people who want to buy local," says Arty Schronce, director of public affairs for the Atlanta-based Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA). "Less of the produce at the market is sold to the local population than used to be."

Well over a million people come every year to shop at this retail section. But next to the retail section is another, larger section of the Atlanta Farmers' market devoted to wholesale produce operations that serve the entire South. The market is centrally located on Interstate

Highway 75, close to Highway 285 and just a couple miles from Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

"You've got more than 50 businesses here bringing in food from all over the country and all over the world," says Nickey Gregory, president and owner of Nickey Gregory Co. LLC, in Forest Park, GA. We ship up to 750 miles, and one or two of the companies ship farther than that. We are centrally located to the rest of the South. We have 150 acres of fresh produce with more than 50 different businesses of all kinds."

The Atlanta produce industry is at the hub of the Southeastern United States and serves markets throughout the region with produce from Georgia, the South, the rest of the United States and around the world. "If there is a single country sending in the most, it would be Mexico," says Matt Kulinski, director of markets at the GDA. "The market is close to the airport and many of the specialty wholesalers also get a lot of shipments from South America."

In recent decades, the role of Atlanta as the distribution center for regional produce has come to overshadow the role of this sprawling

market as a place where farmers and urban residents can meet and do business. "The market has two distinct parts — there is a retailer section and a wholesaler section," explains Kulinski. "When it was first built, the retailer section was the biggest, but now the wholesaler section is doing the most business and the retailer section is a small percentage of the total sales. Of the produce we keep records of, \$430 million came from outside Georgia, and \$31.6 million came from inside Georgia. We're probably importing more from outside the state than we were before," he guesses.

Those figures overstate the shift because they do not include produce brought in by the permanent market tenants, who tend to be from Georgia. Nonetheless, there has definitely been a change as the Atlanta State Farmers' Market has come to be surrounded by other industrial facilities, while the city's residents have moved to new developments on the other side of town. "The development of Atlanta has affected the market," maintains Kulinski. "The Farmers' Market is south of the city, in an area that has become less residential and more in-

THE LANGUAGES OF PRODUCE

In the modern Atlanta metropolitan area the language of produce is frequently Spanish ... or Thai, Hmong or Chinese. Waves of immigrants are reshaping Atlanta as large numbers of Hispanics and Asians are joining longer-term area residents. The food preferences of the new residents are having an impact and showing up alongside the collards, Vidalia onions and peaches. It's hard to miss Market stalls stocked with tomatillos, Bok Choy and hot peppers.

"The Hispanic community has made a big impact on the produce market," acknowledges Hubert Nall, owner and president of Forest Park, GA-based Hubert H. Nall Co. Inc., which was founded in 1925 by Nall's grandfather, Hubert H. Nall Sr. "I think it has also influenced the buying habits of the general population." Nall cited avocados, limes and onions among the produce items that have become more important around Atlanta because of the growing Hispanic community over the past decade and more.

"It's getting very ethnically diverse; there's a lot of Hispanics and Asians in the Atlanta area," agrees Andrew Scott, sales and procurement manager for General Produce Inc., in Forest Park, GA. "Atlanta is a melting pot, and more unique produce items are coming in." He contends the Asian influence has increased his firm's shipments of items such as

baby Bok Choy, snow peas, broccoli crowns and large green onions.

Nall has found the growing Asian community has increased demand for broccoli, citrus and onions. "We don't deal with a lot of the small specialty items, but I imagine they are increasing, too," he says.

The influence of the growing Asian and Hispanic populations is also reflected in shifts in the produce needs of foodservice institutions. "Asian-influenced menus utilize a lot of broccoli, Napa cabbages, ginger root, snow peas, peppers, mushrooms and lettuce, just to name a few," says Frank Reagan, category manager for seafood and produce at the Atlanta, GA-based division of U.S. Foodservice-Atlanta, GA. "In fact, many Asian restaurants are asking more and more for Asian-cut broccoli, a style that the removes as much of the stem as possible. Similarly, Hispanic restaurants often order a lot of avocados, jalapenos, tomatoes, shredded lettuce and peppers."

The influence of the immigrant populations on produce business in the Atlanta metropolitan area extends all the way to the most mainstream of institutions in the food system. "Even McDonald's has a breakfast burrito," points out Nickey Gregory, president and owner of Nickey Gregory Co. LLC, in Forest Park, GA. **pb**

duce retailers in the greater Atlanta area, according to Joel Robertson, president of The Produce Connection Inc., located in Alpharetta, GA. "The other chains all went out of business and went back to where they came from. Every grocery chain that went out of business seems to have followed the same pattern: raise prices, let people go and reduce service," he says.

Even as retail operations are consolidated in firms with headquarters far away from Atlanta, the local managers are still making most of the key decisions, adds Robertson.

For consumers, retailers and producers alike, price has become the overriding issue. "In the past two years, people have gotten more price-conscious. It hurts when the price gets too high, but when the price comes down, the stores are running ads and people are running to buy," explains Gregory of Nickey Gregory.

But business still goes on pretty much as usual when it comes to the mainstream marketing of common produce items. "We sell through the supermarkets and we're doing all right; we sell all we can buy," remarks Walter Hoch, president of Forest Park, GA-based Fidelity Fruit & Produce Co., who just turned over the family-owned business to his son David. "We sell bananas, pineapples and plantains from Dole, Chiquita and Del Monte."

Another mark of the recession is the growing number of restaurants and other foodservice operations looking to save on labor and equipment by purchasing processed produce that is ready to go. "What has been driving the market recently has been the fresh-cut or processed produce," contends Joe Lafiosca, re-

dustrial. Most of the residential growth has been on the north end of the city."

The market for the produce that comes through this hub is brisk, as evidenced by the growing demand for warehouse space. "I would say the market is still very strong," remarks Andrew Scott, sales and procurement manager for General Produce Inc., in Forest Park, GA. "We have four warehouses there — we deliver to 11 states — and there is a waiting list for warehouse space."

One source of growth at the market is new firms from many areas of the United States and the world who grow the produce desired by the area's expanding immigrant population. "With the growth of all the Hispanic companies in the past 10 years, the change has been dramatic in the population and the number of businesses," reports Gregory. "The Asian population has been growing, too, but not as fast."

Tightening Of The Belt

The recession has left its mark on Atlanta's produce industry in Atlanta in many ways, in-

cluding a substantial recent consolidation of the supermarket sector. Kroger, Publix and Wal-Mart have emerged as the dominant pro-



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More than one million people shop the retail section of the Atlanta Sate Farmers' Market looking for locally grown items such as peaches and strawberries.

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“What has been driving the market recently has been the fresh-cut or processed produce. We opened the only fresh-cut plant in the Atlanta area in 2002, and we’ve had more significant growth than ever during the past 18 months.”

— Joe Lafiosca, Freshpoint Atlanta Inc.

gional vice president for sales for Freshpoint Atlanta Inc., headquartered in Atlanta, GA. “We opened the only fresh-cut plant in the Atlanta area in 2002, and we’ve had more significant growth than ever during the past 18 months.”

The reason for this new trend is a matter of dollars and cents. “People are looking to cut labor,” says Lafiosca. “They would rather use our labor and have a finished product.”

The pre-cut produce not only saves on labor, it also eliminates the need to invest money and space in the expensive equipment that is needed to prepare fruits and vegetables efficiently. “Lettuce shredders aren’t only expensive, but they take up a lot of counter space,” emphasizes Frank Reagin of U.S. Foodservice. “By ordering pre-cut vegetables,

restaurants can avoid expensive investments in unnecessary appliances.”

Reagin, too, has noticed that cost-conscious restaurants are seeing fresh-cut produce as a way to economize. “Pre-cut vegetables can reduce work force costs by decreasing the number of employees needed to wash and process vegetables,” he discloses. “This affects a business in two ways; with fewer staff needed to wash and cut produce, you’ll be saving money on staff costs. Additionally, operators have the opportunity to shift part of their workforce to the restaurant floor to improve customer service. For operators, pre-cut vegetables offer several benefits to whole produce, and customers can rarely tell the difference. Given the restaurant industry’s current state, operators are

looking for ways to improve their bottom line without sacrificing quality.”

The move toward fresh-cut is also another part of the answer to the issue of food safety. “By eliminating the need to prepare vegetables, you effectively reduce the risk of contamination through utensils, cutlery, dishes and employee injury,” points out Reagin. “In addition to the time it takes to effectively prepare produce, the process often exposes clean fruits and vegetables to bacteria that may exist in your kitchen.”

Local Matters, But What Is Local?

Food safety is one of the issues driving the demand for locally grown produce in the Atlanta area, just like everywhere else in the country. “People are looking for locally grown produce because they believe it is safer and because it offers a relationship between consumer and farmers,” says Kent Wolfe, director of the Center for Agriculture and Economic Development at the University of Georgia, in Athens.

Buying local produce is undeniably a growing trend in the Atlanta area, but there are many layers to the definition of local. “In the past several years, community farmers’ markets have really picked up in Atlanta,” remarks Brandon Ashley, commodity specialist for the Macon-based Georgia Farm Bureau Co. “People are trying to buy local and they are looking for something to do on the weekend.” Ashley has noticed that these community farmers’ markets have become particularly prominent in the wealthier neighborhoods of Atlanta.

Another sign of the desire to buy local and get back in touch with the farm is the growing number of roadside farm stands just a few miles outside of metropolitan Atlanta. “The farmers I work with have roadside stands on the farm,” reports Ashley. “Those have really picked up and they are a great way to educate the public about farming through agritourism.”

Within a few miles of Atlanta you can find U-Pick strawberry farms, corn mazes or pumpkin patches. “It’s a good way to stay on your land and make a go of it,” Ashley says.

Many Atlanta consumers have joined the growing number of CSA (community supported agriculture) buying clubs, in which members sign up to buy a box of locally grown produce every week. “There are more and more buying co-ops springing up in the Southeast. Consumers have begun to organize many of the buying clubs. In the past two or three years, it has really taken off,” says Dee Dee Digby, president of Destiny Organics LLC, in Forest Park, GA.

Digby has found that the demand for organic produce, in stores or through buying co-

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“Buying local is becoming a lot more important, but it’s not always easy to say what local means, because it could be an hour or two or more from central Atlanta to the farms.”

— Hubert Nall, Hubert H. Nall Co. Inc.

ops, has remained strong through the recession. “I haven’t really seen the impact of the recession on organic produce near Atlanta at all,” remarks Digby. “It may have hurt some of the smaller stores in the resort areas, but not here in Atlanta.”

A growing number of Atlanta residents are also traveling 90 minutes north of the city to apple country, where they visit roadside stands with apples or fresh apple pies; or traveling 90 minutes south of the city to the Macon area where they find stands with Georgia peaches, fresh peach pie or peach ice cream. “Overall, these roadside stands have increased, and they are doing more agritourism,” reports Ashley. “A lot of these farms do a great job of educating the public about agriculture.”

The desire to buy local has also reached supermarkets in the Atlanta area. “At some of our workshops, retail buyers have come by and expressed their interest in local produce,” notes Wolfe of the University of Georgia. “There’s a lot of interest in buying Georgia-grown produce.”

However the definition of “local” can be a bit elusive. “Buying local is becoming a lot more important, but it’s not always easy to say what local means because it could be an hour or two or more from central Atlanta to the farms,” Nall of Hubert H. Nall says.

A relatively broad definition of local can embrace produce from throughout the entire region. “Buying local to reduce the carbon footprint became the thing to do about two years ago,” Freshpoint’s Lafiosca says. “A lot of people are looking for locally grown produce, which typically means grown in the state of Georgia or in any state that borders Georgia — Florida, Alabama, Tennessee and the Carolinas. There’s more and more focus on the locally grown produce when it is available.”

The approach some distributors are taking is to let the buyers see where the produce was grown and decide for themselves if it meets the definition of local. “The process of buying local produce isn’t an exact science,” admits Reagin. “For example, different suppliers have different rules as to what qualifies under the local category. One seller may have a distance limit where the produce can be grown, while for another seller, it may just have to be grown in the same state. At U.S. Foodservice, we try to provide a variety of options to our customers so they may make their own choices about buying local. That’s why we created a new feature on our online ordering system that allows our customers to view detailed product information, including the location of the grower or manufacturer and the distance from the supplier to the U.S. Foodservice distribution center.” **pb**

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New York City Food Scene

Local produce is the talk of this foodie town, be it in a metro-urban supermarket, a new European hall concept or in an ultra-modern restaurant on the Upper West Side. **BY THERESA BRAINE**



COURTNEY DUDLEY



While Manhattan is known around the world for its maze of one-way streets, this couldn't be farther from the truth when it comes to fresh fruits and vegetables. In the world according to produce, Manhattan is a two-way street. On the one hand, supermarkets from King Kullen to Whole Foods display photos and posters of the farmers and families who grow the local produce that overflow the aisles' bins during summer and fall. Growers are becoming the new rock stars.

On the other hand, so enamored is New York City by local produce that some chefs are converting themselves into farmers. Take Chef John Mooney, who grows almost all the produce for his new restaurant, Bell, Book & Candle, in a hydroponic garden atop the six-story Greenwich Village townhouse that houses his basement eatery. Mooney grows mint, chick peas, tomatoes, lettuce, strawberries and other fruits and vegetables that serve nearly all the restaurant's produce needs. Most of the produce is lowered by pulley down to the 80-seat restaurant, according to an August 2010 *Nightline* report on Bell & Candle. T

"The new celebrity chef is the farmer," declares Bob Fitzsimmons, president of Food

Authority, a produce supplier based just outside New York City in the suburb Oceanside, on Long Island.

Produce Popping Up

This rooftop-to-table concept, as the trend has been dubbed, is happening all over the city. The Gramercy Park Hotel's urban farmers — Chefs Nick Anderer and Dan Dilworth, along with Kevin Denton, who manages the hotel's Roof Top Club — repurpose everything from old stockpots to filing cabinets and floorboards for the infrastructure of their rooftop garden, according to CNN's *Eatocracy*. Growing their own allows them to cultivate rarer forms of produce, such as purple okra, as noted in CNN's August 2010 story.

Roberta, a hip Brooklyn pizza joint, uses toppings grown in its backyard.

In addition to restaurants growing their own food, on the other side of the coin are the rooftop gardens that sell their produce and/or run restaurants. *New York* magazine recently documented 14 such farms — one of them in the bed of a pickup truck — throughout the boroughs of Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx. Rooftop Farms in Greenpoint, which sells to Vesta Trattoria &

Wine Bar in Queens, and Anella, a *New York* magazine critic's pick in Brooklyn, are just two of them.

"I do believe that the public is really still pushing the envelope in terms of wanting fresher healthier choices, and because of that, the restaurants are listening," contends Fitzsimmons. "Fresh produce has found its way into many new areas of the menu, and we're always looking to increase and bolster those choices."

When it comes to restaurants, "the biggest growing trend has not been so much the variety of product this year, but the growing region," Fitzsimmons said. "That is, without a doubt, what people are on the phone talking about, as opposed to selection and variety." Both retail customers and restaurant diners almost don't care what produce they are eating as long as it was grown nearby. "That is absolutely what my customers were demanding from us this past year," he says. "Local is without a doubt the biggest trend in the industry, and has been, for the past year."

Joel Panagakos, executive vice president at J. King's Food Service Professionals Inc., in Holtsville, NY, notes Ben's Kosher Deli as an example. Its forté is fresh cole slaw, "and during the summer, they'll use nothing but locally grown cabbage for the cole slaw," he says. "It's superb, and five times a year, they know exactly what that taste profile is going to be."

At the other end of the spectrum, many hotels, especially the upscale ones — the likes of the Hilton, St. Regis or Sheraton — "use a lot of specialty items and focus on — especially for the past couple of years — the many local products that are available during the summer months from Long Island and the surrounding areas to complement their menu," Panagakos notes. "Those upscale venues trend to having perhaps three colors of asparagus on a plate — white, purple and green — to complement the appearance of the presentation."

Time Out magazine gives a tip of the hat to Barbarini Alimentari, in Manhattan's financial district, for its fresh produce.

Chef/produce maven Bill Telepan, presiding over his namesake restaurant, Telepan, raves about the greenmarket at Union Square, where he shops for his Upper West Side restaurant. "If you're a first-timer, you're gonna faint," he told the *New York* magazine food blog *Grubstreet*. "You're goin' down."

One thing that hasn't gone down is volume. Wherever it comes from, New York's



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Eataly Debuts In NYC

Celebrity chef Mario Batali's 50,000-square-foot Eataly, patterned after a European food hall, is a tourist Mecca, especially on the weekend. Chaotic and noisy, its restaurants — each dealing with a specific food group: meat, fish, and yes, fresh produce, too — are ringed with aisles and shoppers. Le Verdure, the produce restaurant, creates innovative dishes with fresh fruits and vegetables, and neighboring the tables is a single aisle of artfully arranged fruits and vegetables. In fact, it is so serious about its mission that the restaurant strictly serves vegetarian fare only.

Creative signage hawks the virtues of eating vegetables. "Bottom line: Mom was right. Vegetables are good for you," reads the first of the graphically pleasing "8 Rules" posted above the tables (pictured center right). Underneath the not-always-grammatically-correct English are smaller italicized versions of the rules in, of course, Italian. There are obvious statements such as, "When you buy them fresh, they are full of flavor," and "Vegetables can be prepared a thousand different ways," as well as tips on not overcooking your cooked vegetables or overdressing your raw ones.

"How can you not fall in love with something that tastes good and makes you look good?" reads Rule No. 8. Eataly's owner, Joe Bastianich, told Fox News that the hall averages 8,000 people daily, with up to 12,000

on a very busy day. "It's way beyond what we expected," he admitted.

Eataly is the brainchild of Italian entrepreneur, Oscar Farinetti, who started his concept in Turin, Italy, and brought together Bastianich along with chef/teacher/restaurateur/cooking show host, Lidia Bastianich — who happens to be Joe's mom — to work with Batali on the New York version.

In keeping with the locally grown trend, Le Verdure's other signage advertises "Good Growing" and notes broccoli from Maine, tomatoes from New Jersey and fingerling potatoes from New York. The menu ranges from staples such as grilled vegetables and eggplant Caponata, an Heirloom Tomato and Radish Salad and Sweet Corn Bruschetta with Roasted Garlic.

Though it's fun to check out, local folk say they wouldn't go out of their way for a \$9 soup. The prices are upscale, but the atmosphere remains casual. The creative fare includes innovative dishes such as a lasagna of green beans and pesto, topped with a sprinkling of pine nuts. There are also grilled and tempura vegetables, salads with fennel and other off-beat greens, and hearty soups.

A downside is that if you want coffee at the end of your meal, you must slog across the venue to the coffee bar. The best time to go may be weekdays between 3 and 5pm, when it's the least likely to be too crowded to enjoy.

pb



COURTNEY DUDLEY



COURTNEY DUDLEY

consumers are eating more and more fruits and vegetables, at least according to produce suppliers. "Our volume has without a doubt increased year after year, and growth has been something we've enjoyed even in the toughest of economies," reports Fitzsimmons. "We're definitely seeing more produce consumed out there and we're still seeing the trend being helpful to our growth," he continues, citing 15 percent annual growth in produce sales over the past few years. "So it's pretty significant."

Love For Locally Grown

Locally grown is taking over more and

more supermarket produce sections both inside and outside the city. Whole Foods in New York City uses pictures of the Geneseo, NY, farmer next to the cauliflower he grows, for instance, and King Kullen on Long Island displays posters of Schmitt family members and their farm where they grow and package salad mixes, among other goods.

The produce aisles of urban and suburban supermarkets alike have burst into bloom in recent years, featuring mounds of fresh fruits and vegetables, many cross-marketed with things like cheese and nuts. A preponderance of fresh-cut fruits and

veggies is also evident, an answer to consumers' need to eat healthfully on the go.

Fairway, the precursor to them all, has spread beyond its original Upper West Side location to various other locations throughout the city and its environs, and now includes a cafe, as does Whole Foods. The gourmet Dean & DeLuca — around for decades — caters to produce-loving consumers with a cafe and well-stocked produce section as well. There's also Union Market in Brooklyn, with locations in both Cobble Hill and Park Slope; Gourmet Garage, which started as a foodservice supplier in 1981 and has now opened its pro-



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Hunts Point Market Launches Rebranding Efforts

TV personality Tony Tantillo is part of multi-faceted campaign to “lift the veil” of the largest wholesale market in North America. **BY AMY SHANNON**

New York’s Hunts Point Produce Market is a vast and eclectic powerhouse of more than 45 fruit and vegetable wholesalers operating as a cohesive co-op for more than four decades. Nestled in the Bronx, just north of Manhattan’s Upper East Side and East Harlem, the market is home to the one of the world’s largest culturally diverse regions, and its revenues exceed \$2 billion annually — more than any other produce terminal market in the world.



Tony Tantillo

Open to the public for anyone wishing to purchase a box or more of produce, the Hunts Point Market provides the freshest produce to New York City’s supermarkets, green grocers, restaurants, institutions and other wholesalers up and down the Eastern Seaboard.

Today, the Hunts Point Produce Market is undergoing a series of rebranding and marketing efforts to create a more inviting image that will appeal to the more than 22 million people in the 50-mile stretch of neighborhoods surrounding the market.

“We want to make it more approachable,” explains Tony Tantillo, who is also known as “The Fresh Grocer,” and appears as host of several produce segments on CBS-Channel 2 and five other premiere TV markets throughout the United States. “As big as the Hunts Point Market is, it still seems a little bit closed in,” he says. “We want to lift the veil, so to speak.”

As part of the new campaign, Tantillo will serve as the new face of the Hunts Point Produce Market. “I’m excited to be the market’s spokesperson,” he notes. “I grew up in the [San Francisco] produce market. Produce is my life. It’s my love.” Captivated by the produce industry at a young age, Tantillo moved to San Francisco from Sicily when he was just five years old. There, he learned the ins and outs of the business while working with his father in the South San Francisco produce markets. He’s since built on that

knowledge and created a career out of relaying timely tips and advice to consumers on a variety of issues pertaining to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Tantillo’s 90-second television segments cover everything from preparation, production, selection, storage and important nutritional information, the consumer advocate says. He shows viewers how to determine when produce might be too costly, of poor quality or not at its peak of freshness.

Tantillo’s *Fresh Ideas* magazine is available in the produce departments in all Safeway, Vons, Dominick’s, Pavilions, Randall’s, Tom Thumb, Carr’s, Genuardi’s and Grocery Works supermarkets.

Enthusiastic about produce on camera and off, Tantillo has served as the greater San Francisco Bay Area’s Fresh Grocer since 1992. After moving to New York in 2000, Tantillo became the local food editor for CBS Channel 2 News, currently appearing in Tony’s *Dining Deals* segment every Sunday at 6:20 a.m. EST. He can also be seen on the Noon News when he offers fresh produce tips and new, appetizing recipes.

In New York, the Hunts Point Produce Market has begun sponsoring some of his produce segments in October and will continue to gain air time until fall 2011.

Beyond television, the Hunts Point Produce Market’s rebranding and marketing campaign will also utilize print, Web site and social media outlets in an effort to “reintroduce the best and largest” produce market to New York and the Tri-State Area. **pb**



“Upscale venues trend to having perhaps three colors of asparagus on a plate — white, purple and green — to complement the appearance of the presentation.”

— Joel Panagakos, J. King’s Food Service Professionals Inc.

duce-filled Soho warehouse to the public; and the Vinegar Factory’s Eli Zabar buys his vegetables directly from farmers in upstate

New York if he isn’t growing them in his rooftop greenhouse.

From Earth to Kitchen, a produce

delivery service, will bike your Union Square produce right to your door if you live in Manhattan. “Fresh-grown fresh-harvested, is just becoming more and more a way of life,” says Food Authority’s Fitzsimmons. This is in schools, government and even prisons, where “there are more and more fresh products being consumed than ever before. It’s just the healthier option.”

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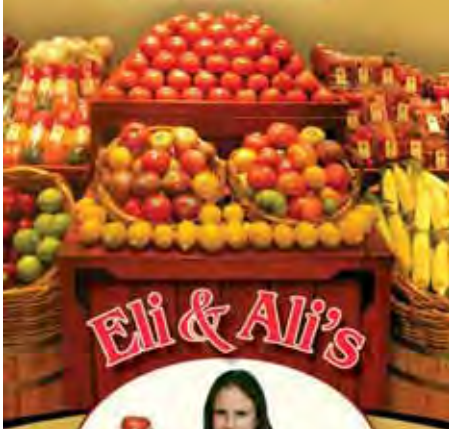
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Go Go Green Carts

The carts can be seen all over the city, from busy street corners to the sidewalks beneath elevated subway tracks. Some are sponsored by the likes of Home Depot and other retailers, according to the beach umbrella that inevitably shelters vendors from the sun. However, the main impetus behind them is New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), which established the Green Cart program in 2008 in an effort to combat a scarcity of fresh produce in some city neighborhoods.

Funded by a \$1.5 million grant from the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, the Green Cart Initiative provides micro-loans and technical assistance to Green Cart operators who must have a valid mobile food vending license and a permit for the cart. Operators also get help with branding, marketing and community outreach to attract customers. The initiative is part of a public-private effort to improve access to healthy foods through the creation of 1,000 new street vending permits.

"Green Cart vendors are independent businesses selling fresh, unprocessed fruits and vegetables in

New York City neighborhoods with the most limited access to fresh and nutritious foods," notes the program press release.

Support to vendors is provided by Karp Resources, which helps them identify suitable cart locations, provides entrepreneurship training, develops partnerships with community-based health and nutrition organizations and sources quality produce.

The number of grocery stores in New York City has dropped by a third over the past six years, reports Karp Resources, with the trend disproportionately affecting lower-income neighborhoods. By giving produce-poor neighborhoods access to fresh, healthful foods, the city hopes to make a dent in rates of such nutrition-related problems as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and obesity. **pb**



"The norm is no longer the norm.

What used to be a specialty is now a standard item, and what was standard is now almost nonexistent."

— Bob Fitzsimmons, Food Authority

A Changing Produce Landscape

Two other trends are influencing consumption as well. For one thing, what used to be considered gourmet is now commonplace. For another, an increase in the Latino population has supermarkets routinely stocked with staples of nations from the Caribbean to the tip of South America.

"The norm is no longer the norm. What used to be a specialty is now a standard item, and what was standard is now

almost nonexistent," explains Fitzsimmons. For instance, mesclun mix used to be a high-end specialty, "and now it's one of the biggest regularly traded items that's so marginal it's considered the low end of the spectrum in terms of what's used out there," Fitzsimmons says. "It has become the new iceberg."

When it comes to the growing Latino population, suburban produce aisles both in New Jersey and on Long Island are overflowing with goodies like yucca, papaya

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Desi Food Truck



The bright yellow Desi Food Truck, decorated Indian artisan-style with festively painted hubcaps and handcrafted metal overlays along the sides and front, looks like a mini school bus gone rogue. An answer to the ubiquitous Halal kiosks that have sprung up on the streets of New York City over the past few years, the truck, parked discreetly at 27th Street just off Fifth Avenue, serves

up Indian cuisine that includes a couple of vegetarian options.

Halal trucks, more common than Starbucks, sell mostly meat, and Desi does likewise, but with vegetable-based dishes such as tasty potato-stuffed kati rolls that complement chicken tikka masala, curried chicken, aloo masala and the lentil mix known as dal, all at affordable prices ranging from \$4 to \$8. **pb**

and mango. Indeed, most of the personnel and half the customers conduct their entire shopping trip in Spanish.

New York is the place where these

experiments happen, Fitzsimmons says. "I certainly feel like New York is the laboratory, and I do believe that here in the United States there's no doubt that New

York seems to be the trendiest and most cutting-edge city when it comes to having the renowned chefs that we have trying all different things." **pb**

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REACHING TO THE ROOFTOPS

Ben Flanner, head farmer at Brooklyn Grange, based in Long Island City, NY, talks to Mira Slott about his 40,000-square-foot organic rooftop farm and where the future of farming is heading.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIRA SLOTT





BEN FLANNER: URBAN FARMER

By Mira Slott

(Excerpted from Jim Pevor's Perishable Pundit, 10/20/10)



The 40,000-square-foot farm is made up of roughly 1.2 million pounds of soil and over 20,000 linear feet of green roofing material.

What inspired you to develop this innovative and expansive urban rooftop farm project? Spanning close to an acre, dozens of varieties of vegetables, fruits and herbs are growing and thriving from a rooftop with a breathtaking view of the Manhattan skyline in the background. Was there a notable moment, or a confluence of different circumstances that pushed you forward in your mission?

It was a strong interest in farming coupled with a desire to remain in the city, plus the pure practicality of the project. There are also so many community and environmental benefits, which continued to make the concept feel right.

What do you see as the greatest challenges?

The greatest challenges are sales and distribution. From the growing side, I'd say dealing with the wind is most difficult.

You seem to have experience in that regard. Recently, on a stormy day, you moved swiftly and purposefully to weatherproof the farm as the wind gusts picked up and the skies were about to burst with torrential rain. What are some of the biggest surprises you've discovered as you're developing this project?

Things grow great! Shishito peppers, Aji Dulce peppers, Ruby Streaks mustard greens. The total domination of flea beetles in July, and the ability of weed seeds to blow up six stories in only about seven days after the installation.

On a visit in October, your associate, Anastasia Cole, pointed out the unusual Italian Cucuzza squash that grows really long. Also in season at that time, spinach was back, wild arugula, carrots, French breakfast radishes, end-of-season tomato varieties, eggplant, sweet peppers, hot peppers, mixed lettuces and herbs including Thai basil, thyme and rosemary. There was also a purple tomatillo that tasted like a plum. What else could you tell us that might surprise people in the produce industry?

I think the produce industry might be surprised at how much volume we can grow, especially salad greens in the spring. There are hundreds of thousands of plants on the roof and we farm about nine months of the year. [The 40,000-square-foot farm is made up

of roughly 1.2 million pounds of soil and over 20,000 linear feet of green roofing material). We also pick everything the same day that we deliver to our chefs.

Tell us about your customers, and the types of potential customers that could benefit from your operation.

Our operation is split between our markets (direct to consumer) and restaurants/retail. Markets make up about 40 percent of our sales, while restaurants and retail establishments are about 60 percent. Chefs are very fun and exciting to deal with, however we struggle to keep up with the sales and service side, due to limited time and transport resources.

How unique is Brooklyn Grange? Are there other projects popping up like this in the region, and around the country?

It is one of a kind right now. No commercial operation of this scale exists currently. Hydroponics operations are being sized and considered.

One of your interns, Hayley Knafel, an environmental studies major at New York University, shared her perspective. She said she's uplifted by the opportunity, every time she looks out from Brooklyn Grange at all the other rooftops across the City landscape. Where do you see the most untapped potential for urban farming?

Roofs in very dense cities. It may not make as much sense in less dense cities with less expensive land near to the city centers.

Are there other related or unrelated projects that have sparked your interest?

Hydroponic projects. I'm interested in trying to curb hydro to make it more environmental, to produce more flavorful produce, and then I would be interested in testing it.

What do you envision five years from now for Brooklyn Grange and for urban farming in a broader realm?

I want to prove that this will be a viable commercial operation, and then help to improve our food system, while carrying out an enjoyable career doing something that I love, which is farming.



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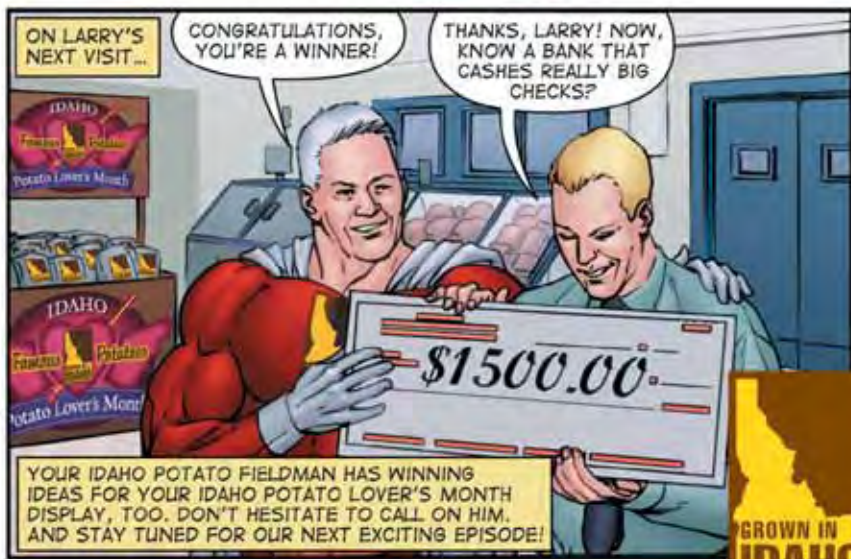
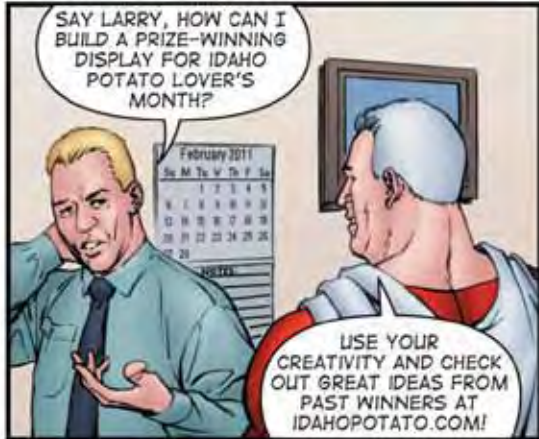
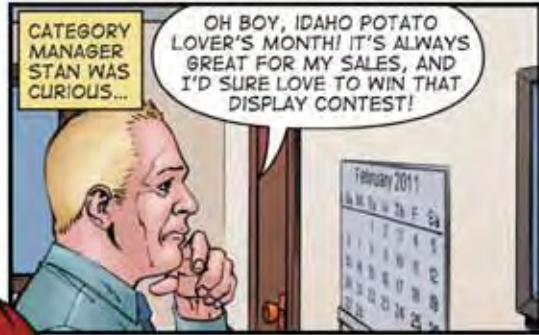


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BRONZE LEVEL





Six Ways To Merchandise Citrus Year-Round

With a little creativity and imagination, it's possible to leverage sales and generate repeat buyers year-round.

BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ
ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD



Displaying sliced overwrapped citrus shows consumers that even if the skin is slightly bruised, the flesh inside remains unharmed.

Not long ago, citrus was a seasonal affair. With the advent of imported produce, however, citrus is now a year-round commodity, although most retailers will agree that demand is still stronger in season from October to April than when Southern hemisphere product comes ashore during the summer months.

While there is a slight spike in merchandising and advertising come Back-to-School time, overall, retailers could stand to do more in the way of merchandising, particularly during the summer months. “There is not a lot of interesting merchandising going on during that time frame because retailers are basically putting the citrus off to the side and focusing on summer fruit, such as grapes, melons, berries and all the stone fruit — like peaches, plums, and nectarines,” contends Paul Marier, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Fisher Capespan U.S.A. LLC, headquartered in Gloucester City, NJ.

Citrus fruits from Florida, Texas and California are in a perfect position for promotion this winter. David Mixon, senior vice president

and chief marketing officer for Seald-Sweet International, in Vero Beach, FL, says, “Florida citrus, in general, is very good quality this year in terms of external appearance and internal eating quality.” The peak period for merchandising Florida grapefruit is January and February. He adds, “We offer high-graphic bins that have the National Heart Association’s Heart-Check symbol.”

Admittedly, there are some suppliers of domestic product who would prefer that retailers not aggressively merchandise citrus during the summer and fall. If supplies tighten up for a time, it creates some pent-up demand for the new crop, they reason. “Frankly, I’d rather not see them merchandise citrus in the summer and fall,” says Neil Galone, vice president of sales and marketing at Orange Cove, CA-based Booth Ranches LLC. “I’d rather see them merchandise some of their local stuff, so that when the California citrus starts back up again, consumers see it as a new crop and get excited about it.”

That said, Galone concedes that retailers must have citrus to offer to their customers during the summer. Even so, he says, people are

looking for more seasonal items, so it probably makes more sense from a retail standpoint to concentrate on those, rather than on imported citrus.

Follow these six tips for more effective citrus merchandising not only during the summer months, but year-round.

1. Adopt A Healthy Approach

It may sound deceptively simple, but a great deal of value can be gained by promoting the healthfulness of citrus. In an odd case of serendipity, “citrus season” hits at the same time as cold and flu season, when consumers seek products that will help them avoid or treat dreaded wintertime contagions. It’s debatable whether we will ever see a bin of oranges displayed next to TheraFlu or Tylenol, but there are still ways to remind consumers that citrus is loaded with immunity-boosting vitamin C, along with a healthy dose of folic acid and vitamin A.

Al Finch, vice president of sales and marketing for Florida Classic Growers Inc. (formerly Diversified Citrus Marketing), in Lake Hamilton, FL, remarks that he’s seen retailers

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Waterfall displays positioned at end-caps catch consumers' attention.

merchandising citrus specifically for cold and flu season and reflecting that connection in their ad circulars. More than that, however, he likes to see the health benefits of citrus reflected at the display itself. "Getting those messages out at the point of sale is crucial," says Finch. "Retailers are doing an excellent job identifying all the health benefits of citrus in their POS materials, in an effort to capture the health-conscious consumer."

"Promote the health aspects of fresh citrus for cold and flu season," suggests Paula Fouчек, marketing director at Edinburg Citrus Assoc., in Edinburg, TX. "In addition, build massive waterfall displays and secondary displays to catch consumers' attention; set out samples for demos; and cross-merchandise. For example, merchandise citrus with fresh spinach, sliced almonds, poppy seeds and raspberry vinaigrette along with a salad recipe."

Of course, it doesn't have to be cold and flu season to pitch all the healthful characteristics of citrus. Oranges, grapefruit, lemons and other forms of citrus are nutritious choices anytime of year. Last year, a group of Italian researchers found that people who eat a great deal of citrus have significantly reduced instances of several particularly deadly cancers, including esophageal, laryngeal, stomach and colorectal. Watch for opportunities to promote such news, and encourage customers to boost their own consumption of citrus for good health.

"There's a real emphasis on healthful eating and making better choices when picking a snack," says Paul Huckabay, western citrus sales manager at Oviedo, FL-based Duda Farm Fresh Foods Inc. "That's what's driving the increase in demand for items such as Mandarin oranges."

Such initiatives will also help counter health-related decreases in sales, such as that which hit the grapefruit industry due to nega-

tive interactions between grapefruit and cholesterol medications, according to Trent Bishop, sales manager at Lone Star Citrus Growers, in Mission, TX.

2. Go Big

Remember the old adage "Out of sight, out of mind?" Make that your mantra as you strive to keep citrus at the forefront of shoppers' minds, particularly during the summer months when stone fruit, berries and melons get the lion's share of the attention. Many produce sales are impulse-driven, so make sure consumers can't help but see the beautiful, succulent citrus you have available in your store.

"Large displays can create great selling opportunities," acknowledges Joe LoBue, managing partner at LoBue Bros. Inc., in Lindsay, CA. "A lot of items in fresh produce are driven by impulse purchases and consumers need to be reminded and inspired to purchase a variety of items, including fresh citrus."

Take advantage of peak supply times by staging a citrus extravaganza! Be creative and have fun with it. Try using a tropical theme and encourage produce staff to dress in tropical shirts. Fouчек suggests creating a "show-stopper," using waterfalls, end-caps or freestanding displays in the produce department. This kind of initiative can be especially appropriate during the cold winter months, when much of the country is plunged into the deep freeze and snow is on the ground.

Any time of year, consider building large end-cap displays — the larger, the better — to grab customers' attention as they shop your store. Many citrus-lovers anticipate the arrival of their favorite varieties, but without sufficient displays and signage, they may simply be unaware that a beloved item is available. "It's really important to let consumers know there is some-

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“If you have a customer that inquires about whether a fruit is ready or not, don’t hesitate to cut up a piece and let them try it and then sample the remaining pieces to other people that are walking through the produce department. That’s good merchandising.”

— Neil Galone, Booth Ranches LLC

thing new and different in the store and to make a to-do about it,” says Fouchek of Edinburg Citrus. “Excitement brings excitement. When you see a lot of activity going on in the produce department, it certainly catches your attention.”

New this season, the Bartow-based Florida Department of Citrus (FDOC), can provide retailers with 5x7-inch display cards, 3x5-inch brochures with product, nutrition information and recipes and 21x30-inch bin posters for fresh grapefruit. These same materials are also available for oranges and tangerines.

United Supermarkets LLC, a 37-unit chain based in Lubbock, TX, has found success using half-pallet displays of both Cara Cara oranges and Clementines, according to Tommy Wilkins, director of produce procurement. The chain also features year-round end-cap displays of navel oranges.

This season, there will be plenty of Cara Caras at market once again. Julie DeWolf, director of retail marketing for Sunkist Growers Inc., headquartered in Van Nuys, CA, reports, “This season marks the largest Cara Cara navel crop to date, up 20 percent from last year due to new acreage increasing in production. It’s perfect timing for Sunkist, as the company will introduce a Cara Cara bin with a customized header card that provides valuable information about the variety. In addition, Sunkist will embark on new ways of promoting citrus through different tie-ins, couponing, mobile marketing, free trials of specialty citrus and charity donation programs.”

Kathy Hearl, marketing promotions manager for Fort Pierce, FL-based DNE World Fruit Sales, warns retailers to be cautious when building displays to avoid damaging the fruit. Oranges and grapefruit can be piled high without much concern. However, specialty citrus, such as Clementines, should be displayed at a shallow depth to avoid having pressure from the fruit on the top damaging the fruit on the bottom.

It’s also important to keep actual sales potential in mind when building such massive displays. “An item such as a Pummelo does not warrant an end-cap display, but needs to be

somewhat prominent to trigger the purchase,” details Darrell Genthner, director of marketing and business development at Winter Haven, FL-based Noble Worldwide Florida Citrus Sales. “A wing or auxiliary-type display works well with new gourmet or trendy items.”

3. Keep It Fresh

No one is going to want to buy citrus that looks shabby, so make sure your displays are fresh and appealing at all times. Sales and quality go hand-in-hand, so carefully follow guidelines with regard to temperature requirements, and make sure your produce staff is knowledgeable about such matters to ensure the kind of quality display that drives sales. “Keeping the fruit special in the display is important,” says Fouchek. “You need to make sure they are being held at the correct temperatures, that the displays are rotated, and that if anything begins to look dull or shriveled, you remove them.”

Whereas oranges must be held at approximately 36 to 42°F, grapefruit needn’t be kept as cold, says Fouchek, so proceed accordingly to keep your store’s citrus in tip-top condition. If product begins to look less-than-fresh, don’t hesitate to cull it from the display. After all, it’s not going to sell and it will only reflect negatively on the rest of the citrus in the display and the produce department overall. “A good produce manager will make sure they keep the displays looking fresh,” says Booth Ranches’ Galone. “If that means taking something out that has started to deteriorate and throwing it away, that’s what you have to do.”

4. Offer Bagged And Bulk

While bagged citrus reigns supreme in many markets, it’s important to remember that some shoppers simply prefer bulk. Whether it’s a matter of selecting their own product one-by-one or the desire to achieve a steady stream of fresh produce by only buying a small amount at any given time, bulk citrus sales are brisk in certain areas.

At Phoenix, AZ-based Sprouts Farmers Market LLC, for example, bulk sales make up



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the vast majority of the chain's citrus sales, most likely because Sprouts' customer base consists primarily of people who make several shopping trips — rather than one massive cart-buster — each week. If there is an opportunity to offer pricing that's "much lower than typical retail," says Neil Cullen, produce buyer for store, the 54-unit chain will entertain selling bagged fruit. However, that is by far the exception, rather than the rule. "We are challenged with being able to successfully promote the bagged product, simply because the

bulk sales are what they are," he explains. "We don't look at it as a negative, but for us, it's that day-to-day shopper that seems to be our bread-and-butter customer."

Likewise, DNE's Hearl says certain ethnic groups prefer to buy "loose fruit," handling and picking out their own. Still, bagged sales remain steady for many retailers, particularly when it comes to the summertime, when imported citrus carries a higher ring than domestic wintertime product. Retailers may wish to shift to a greater percentage of bagged prod-

uct in order to provide a better price point. However, Hearl advises retailers should only promote bags during peak flavor periods in order to avoid turning off customers. "A lot of chains want to be first to market on a citrus item and sell a 5-lb. bag of early season fruit, but the customers are not pleased when the citrus does not live up to their taste expectations," says Hearl.

While some retailers may be concerned that bagged citrus may cannibalize bulk sales — or vice-versa — there's really no need, according to Galone. Such sales are incremental. That is, there are customers of each, and while some may go back and forth based on price or their own particular needs at the time, for the most part, it's a matter of choice.

"There are customers who like to touch each piece of fruit when they buy it and there are others who are looking for the value you can get when you pick up a bag," remarks Galone. "If you have a big display of bulk oranges, it's not going to take away from your bagged oranges or vice-versa."

5. Give A Taste Test

There's no better way to convince customers they are going to like your product than to offer them a taste. "You've got to tantalize the taste buds," asserts Edinburg's Fouчек. "Giving the consumer the chance to taste the product can make a huge difference in getting them excited enough to buy the product."

Sampling is important across all age groups, but particularly when it comes to children, says Duda's Huckabay. Although many suppliers have modified their package designs to be more appealing to children, there's still the enormous hurdle of overcoming a child's perception that something healthy simply can't taste good. That's where sampling comes in.

"Demos are always the best way to capture the consumer going through the produce department and to get children to try it," says Finch of Florida Classic Growers. "If we can get children eating citrus now, they will continue as they get older."

"There continues to be a growing demand for easy-to-peel citrus varieties like mandarins," points out DeWolf of Sunkist. "They have become a great way to get citrus into lunch boxes and are the perfect size snack for kids and adults alike."

Booth Ranches' Galone says he would like to see more retailers engaging in sampling activities. They can be through formal sampling events in the produce department or simply by giving curious customers the opportunity to sample a particularly flavorful batch of cit-

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(From left) Casey Bassett, Lucky Vena, Doug Turner, Lope Valdez
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rus. "If you have customers who inquire about whether a fruit is ready or not, don't hesitate to cut up a piece and let them try it and then sample the remaining pieces to other people who are walking through the produce department," explains Galone. "That's good merchandising."

Sprouts has a standing policy that any customer who wishes to taste a piece of produce can simply ask one of the produce staff. All are prepared with "knife-in-hand" to do on-the-spot sampling. According to Cullen, virtually

all of Sprouts' citrus sampling is in-house initiatives because "there have not been a lot of offers from shippers or growers to promote sampling of the citrus."

6. Get Aggressive

Nothing speaks louder to the consumer than a great value, particularly in these tough economic times. Fortunately, there are a number of approaches retailers can take to give customers a great value on citrus. When suppliers drop their prices, respond in kind. Consumers

are more likely to grab a bag of oranges or a few grapefruit when the price is right. Unfortunately, some retailers have failed to follow suit. "At certain times of the year when we are offering real aggressive pricing, we would like to see those prices passed on to the consumer to move the volume that we really need at that point in the year," says Lone Star's Bishop.

For those consumers who are already purchasing citrus, encourage multiple purchases. Motivate them to buy more than one bag by instituting multi-unit pricing. A well-placed sign reading, "\$2.99 or 2-for-\$5" goes a long way in encouraging shoppers to place an extra bag of oranges or grapefruit in their cart.

These days, consumers look for smaller packages — a 3-lb. rather than a 5-lb.-pound unit, for example. While the economy may be to blame in some instances, United Supermarket's Wilkins says it's often merely a matter of getting the price point low enough to convince the consumer to try something new.

"We've seen a lot of retailers move away from the 5-lb.-pound box of Clementines to a 3-lb. or even a 2-lb. bag," reports Finch of Florida Classic Growers.

Don't forget to include citrus in your weekly ad, even during the traditional "off-season" when consumers may be focused more on stone fruit and other summertime fare. DNE's Hearl advises retailers to have a weekly citrus item on ad along with a sub-feature and then mix it up: large sizes one week, small sizes the next, followed by bags.

"At the end of the day, it's all about advertising," says Marier of Fisher Capespan. "If they put it in the flyers and they put it in the right position in the store and the display is right, you're going to move merchandise."

While ads are important, Hearl says they are just one component in a wide-reaching strategy. If retailers hope to engage in a successful year-round merchandising effort, they must remember to approach the category from all possible angles, flex their creative muscle, and always be on the look-out for ways to get their customers to think citrus, regardless of what time of year it is.

"Retailers who promote citrus with weekly ads, colorful displays with an assortment of color, offer bags and engage in in-store sampling during peak flavor periods have successful programs and grow their citrus sales," remarks Hearl. "If they create an inviting shopping environment, while grabbing consumers' attention and providing them with product information, including healthful benefits, storage and usage, not only will they leverage sales, but they will generate repeat buyers." **pb**



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Eight Ways To Boost Banana Sales

Bananas are among the strongest produce performers and deserve retailers' attention with eye-catching displays, creative cross-merchandising and informative POS. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**



Organic bananas are becoming more prevalent, and are frequently merchandised alongside their conventional counterparts.

Bananas are definitely appealing. So much so that Wal-Mart, the world's largest public corporation with \$408.21 billion in sales in 2009, sold more of this fruit than any other single item last year, according to an August article in Bloomberg's *Businessweek*.

Beyond Wal-Mart, and looking solely at the traditional supermarket channel, bananas also fared well, contributing 6.2 percent of produce department sales in 2009, according to the Perishables Group, a Chicago, IL-based market research firm.

What's more, bananas have not only held their own, but gained in sales and volume, despite a downturn in the economy. According to *Fresh Facts on Retail* reports published between the third quarter of 2009 and second quarter of 2010, weekly per-store sales of bananas increased roughly \$1,000 — from just over \$2,400 to just over \$2,500 — weekly store volume increased steadily from 3,900 pounds to 4,260 pounds and the average retail remained constant at 59-cents per pound.

Mark Luchak, director of produce and floral at Rice Epicurean Markets, a five-store chain based in Houston, TX, reports, "Tonnage-wise, bananas are our No. 1 selling item.

I think the appeal to consumers is that they are easy to eat, come in their own package, are highly portable, healthful, a good value, versatile and everyone seems to like them."

1. Keep The Cavendish Coming, But Expand Varieties

According to Craig Stephen, vice president of finance and general manager at Chiquita Brands International Inc., in Cincinnati, OH, "The Cavendish variety represents well over 90 percent of sales in the banana category."

Sales of bananas are typically steady throughout the year. However, according to data from the Perishables Group, sales peaked during the first week of April and were lowest in late December to early January, during the 52-week period ending July 31, 2010. Also during this same time frame, the East led the way with \$3,180 per store per week, while the South was the lowest contributor, with \$1,836 per store per week.

Joe Palumbo, owner of Top Banana LLC, in the Bronx, NY, says, "There should be a steady supply of bananas available to meet demand, barring any hurricanes."

Filling in the rest of the banana category are specialty bananas, which include plantains as

well as baby, red, *burro*, green/*Guino* and *manzanos*. These varieties contributed 3 percent of banana category sales in the 52-weeks ending July 31, 2010, according to the Perishables Group. This was up 2.9 percent from the year prior. Peaks and valleys in specialty banana sales are similar to the Cavendish variety — these fruit post their highest contribution to the total banana category in the East at 4.45 percent compared to a low of 0.65 percent in the Central region of the United States.

"Plantains are everyday items for us," says Jose Manzano, director of produce at Dorothy Lane Markets, a three-store chain in Dayton, OH.

Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce Inc., in Los Angeles, CA, reports, "Plantains represent more than 70 percent of our specialty bananas sales. The next largest contributor is red bananas at 15 percent of sales."

Red bananas and *Niños*, or baby bananas, are sold at Rice Epicurean Markets. Luchak says, "They do okay. The great thing is that they don't take away from sales of the Cavendish; they add incremental sales."

Niños have increased in sales, acknowledges Paul Rosenblatt, vice president of Banana Distributors, in the Bronx, NY. "Years ago, we used



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What's New With Ripening Services?

"Today's customers are looking for bananas that are flavorful and ready-to-eat tonight or for tomorrow," says Karen-Ann Christenbery, general manager at American Ripener LLC, in Charlotte, NC. "Suppliers are responding to this demand by providing ripe bananas for their customers. Ripening programs have grown dramatically because of this. We have seen an increase in companies starting ripening programs as well as companies expanding their existing programs."

An external source of ethylene is needed to trigger ripening in bananas. Greg Akins, president and CEO of Catalytic Generators LLC, headquartered in Norfolk, VA, asserts, "This is critical for the regular Cavendish variety. Ethylene also benefits the ripening of specialty bananas such as plantains, red bananas and baby bananas as well. Ethylene is also approved for ripening organic bananas."

Banana ripening is done by retailers, wholesalers and importers. Bil Goldfield, communications manager for Dole Fresh Fruit Co., headquartered in Westlake Village, CA, says, "Most large retailers operate their own banana-ripening facility, which provides them maximum flexibility to supply their stores. We have noticed however, that many wholesalers and retailers have either outgrown the capacity of their ripening facilities or are considering replacing their antiquated ripening rooms. Either way, the decision to augment or replace existing facilities with state-of-the-art ripening rooms is costly and capital intensive."

Volume is a key decision point in a retailer determining whether it's beneficial to self-ripen, says David Byrne, vice president of sales for Thermal Technologies Inc., in Blythewood, SC. "Ripening makes sense on many levels such as quality control, shrink and costs. However, for the best return on investment, you should ripen at least three loads of bananas per week. That's because whether you ripen one load or three

loads, three ripening rooms are the bare minimum needed to assure proper scheduling and be able to provide the desired color stage of bananas for the retail display seven days a week."

"This minimum volume is why wholesalers in large cities have carved out a niche by ripening bananas for a number of independent retailers and small chains," explains Paul Rosenblatt, vice president of Banana Distributors, in the Bronx, NY.

Advancements in ripening bananas have come on the front-end and on the back-end in the retail back room. Goldfield says, "Ethylene Release Canister (ERC) Container Ripening reduces handling damage by ripening bananas in the same container in which they were originally packed, eliminating the steps of unloading the bananas from the container, loading into the ripening room, then unloading from the ripening room to a staging area. This method is a scalable solution suitable for ripening volume in excess of existing ripening capacity, for short- or long-term durations, or even to replace antiquated ripening equipment."

Bananas travel, on average, thousands of miles after harvest to their final point of sale. "Yet," says Byrne, "maintenance of an optimal temperature is often broken in the last 60 feet, or in a retailers' back room. Bananas do best at a temperature of 58°F, and many back rooms can range from much colder to much warmer than this."

Thermal Technologies introduced its PalletPro a few years ago, which maintains a single-pallet of ripe bananas at optimal temperature and humidity prior to the fruit's placement at display. The unit is also labor-saving, eliminating the need to uncap, cross-stack or sort through individual boxes. Byrne says, "Bananas are the No. 1 selling SKU in the produce department, so naturally, it should be a priority to handle them correctly." **pb**

to sell only 50 to 100 cases a week," he reflects. "Now, we sell all we can get our hands on. However, sales of the *Niños* are down in January, February and March. That's because they have a thin skin and don't do well in the bitter

cold as they chill easily."

Dionysios Christou, vice president of North American marketing at Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A. Inc., in Coral Gables, FL, says, "Consumers are becoming more aware of the

specialty banana varieties, especially in regions of the country where Hispanic and Caribbean communities are prevalent. Retailers can promote these bananas by using POS material that describes the origin, health benefits, nutritional information and the proper handling instructions. We also encourage retailers to use informational brochures, price cards and recipe cards to their full potential in order to attract and educate consumers."

2. Offer Organic

Conventionally and organically grown bananas both sell well at Dorothy Lane Markets, says Manzano. "On an 8-ft. table of bananas, we'll devote two to three feet to organic."

There continues to be strong consumer interest in organics, maintains Bil Goldfield, communications manager for Westlake Village, CA-based Dole Fresh Fruit Co. "These bananas are becoming more prevalent in the retail supermarkets. Syndicated data revealed that organic banana sales performed similarly to conventional bananas by and large over the past year, despite the difficult economic conditions that consumers faced."

Chiquita's Stephen foresees growth in the organic banana sub-category, as long as there is "available supply." He warns, "Fungus is a problem because bananas grow in moist tropical climates. However, I believe there is latent demand that hasn't been met secondary to supply. Organic bananas have the potential to represent 15 percent of the overall category."

3. Sell Ready-to-Eat Ripe Bananas

Bananas at two different stages of ripeness are offered to customers at Rice Epicurean Markets, says Luchak, "which take advantage of today's and tomorrow's sales. To accomplish this, we get delivery from our wholesaler five days a week."

Consumers are definitely color-driven, reveals David Byrne, vice president of sales for Thermal Technologies, in Blythewood, SC. "When it comes to buying bananas, yellow is the magic word, although there are outliers," he says.

Christou says, "The trend is to have the bananas be 60/40 or 70/30 ripe-to-green, but the primary objective is to ship bananas at a consistent color stage. Displaying color stage 2 and 5 will provide consumers with the choice to purchase the product ready to eat immediately or to have some ready for the next days; also, this practice allows there to be a good product rotation at store level. It is best, however, to have a larger variety at retail, as nothing can hurt a retailer's sales more than not



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Reader Service # 46



Expanding specialty varieties, such as baby bananas, plantains and red bananas, will peak consumer interest and lead to higher rings.

having color. For display purposes, the product should be separated by ripeness stage to facilitate different consumer choices.”

4. Fill A Niche With Bagged Product

“Bananas merchandised in random weight clusters are the norm in most of the country,” says Goldfield, “although random weight bagged bananas are still quite popular in the Northeast.”

Banana Distributor’s Rosenblatt, reports, “We sell 100 percent of our bananas bagged. However, this is unique to New York City.” Bagged bananas have been the preferential way of merchandising bananas in the New York market since the 1970s, Rosenblatt adds. “Retailers like the bags because consumers will buy the whole cluster and they are less likely to rip the clusters apart. Plus, it makes a neater display,” he says. “If we did away with the bags here, you’d have to retrain all the retail staff.”

“Outside of New York,” says Del Monte’s Christou, “some traditional grocery outlets will buy and merchandise bagged organic bananas.”

5. Build Appealing Displays

Bananas are displayed prominently in the front of the produce department at Rice Epicurean Markets. Luchak details, “The main display will average 12x12-ft. in some stores or a 6-ft. end-cap in others. We also have 4-ft. displays in the bakery/deli and another two to three cartons in a stand-alone display in the cereal aisle.”

“There are two schools of thought as to where to position banana displays,” discloses Bill Sheridan, vice president of sales and marketing for North America at Banacol Marketing Corp., in Coral Gables, FL. “Some retailers feel consumers already have bananas on their shopping list and therefore put the display in the back of the produce department to pull customers though, while others place their banana display front-and-center as an image builder.”

“The right size display is crucial,” says Chiquita’s Stephen. “You don’t want too big a display that doesn’t generate good turnover, or too small that you risk being out of stock or

constantly having to re-stock.”

“In addition,” says Dole’s Goldfield, “research has found that secondary displays positioned by the entrance of the store are very effective at increasing impulse sales in the evening when many consumers run in for a specific item or two.”

Some retailers display specialty bananas with Cavendish, while others merchandise these fruit in with tropicals such as pineapples or in the Hispanic section with items that also don’t require refrigeration such as chayote, yucca, jicama and chiles.

6. Market By Demographics

Successful retailers focus on addressing the preferences and tastes of consumers in their particular market, notes Del Monte’s Christou. “Retailers should understand their customer demographics in order to stock the banana varieties that are in demand in their region and showcase the products effectively,” he explains. “For example, it would benefit a retailer to promote plantains and manzanos in an area where there is a high concentration of consumers of Hispanic origin.”

Beyond this, there is a tremendous opportunity to market bananas to kids and seniors. Christou points out, “The colors, unique tastes and interesting sizes of specialty bananas like reds, *manzanos* and babies are appealing to kids and offer tremendous opportunities to increase consumption among younger consumers and adults who seek variety. Adults and seniors are more interested in nutritional facts, convenience and pricing, so it is important to include this information when communicating with these groups.”

7. Expand Customers’ Usage Horizons

“Nearly over-ripe bananas at Rice Epicurean Markets are taken to the bakery where they’re used to make banana bread,” says Luchak. “We’ll put a display of fresh bananas over in the bakery and sign the bread as made with our bananas.”

Del Monte’s Christou asserts, “By cross-merchandising, retailers can increase banana sales and sales of related products. Creative ideas for cross-merchandising include pairing bananas with ice cream, strawberries, cereal, salads, chocolate dips and peanut butter. Cross-merchandising ripe and green plantains with cheeses and other typical Hispanic foods like guacamole or rice and beans can also create additional sales opportunities.”

Chiquita’s Stephen recommends, “a secondary display in the pharmacy,” which can connect the dots between banana’s potassium content and their frequent prescription with some high blood pressure medications.

“The best way to increase sales of the most highly purchased item in the produce department,” says Dole’s Goldfield, “is to expand banana consumption in other day parts. Nighttime consumption and grilled dinner and dessert recipes represent the new frontier for bananas.” Dole recently launched its Go Bananas After Dark program to highlight bananas’ use in nighttime recipes. In the fourth quarter of 2010, emphasis will switch from backyard summer grilling to fall tailgating and baked recipes for the holidays.

8. Go Beyond Price Promotions

Bananas are price-promoted only three to four times a year at Dorothy Lane Markets, says Manzano. “We go with an everyday low price and don’t typically see an increase in volume when we put bananas on sale, so we don’t price promote them too often.”

“The best way to promote bananas,” says Chiquita’s Stephen, “is to cause a disruption at the display.” In September, Chiquita ran an Organic Harvest Month promotion that was announced to consumers via special blue stickers on each banana. The promotion included an online social media component where customers could vote for their favorite non-profit organization. Chiquita donated 10 percent of organic banana sales generated for the month to the chosen organization.

Employing the same promotional technique, the 18 winners of Chiquita’s Banana Sticker Design Contest will have their works of art displayed next to the company’s classic blue sticker on individual bananas during the month of November. “This kind of disruption at the display causes customers to stop, look, think and purchase,” says Stephen. **pb**

For more information on bananas, please go to www.producebusiness.com



Eight Simple Steps to Maximize Peruvian Asparagus Sales

Getting back to basics will help retailers build increased profits with Peruvian asparagus. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**



Asparagus benefits from being merchandised upright in water, along with complementary items such as lemons.

The explosion in growth and availability of Peruvian asparagus allows retailers more opportunity than ever to build consistent sales in this category. “From a dollar-ring perspective, Peruvian asparagus is great for sales and is a driver for many other products in the store,” says Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for Kings Super Markets, a 25-unit chain in Parsippany, NJ. “The increasing consistency of the product in both availability and quality has led to increased sales.”

“Fresh asparagus from Peru continues to gain popularity with retailers and consumers because of its increasing availability and consistently improving quality,” points out John-Campbell Barmmer, director of marketing at Chestnut Hill Farms, headquartered in Miami, FL. “These two factors make Peruvian fresh asparagus a natural for promotion at price levels that continue to contribute positively to the produce department’s profitability objectives.”

As consumers look for asparagus year-round, Peruvian product is a must-have for many retailers. “Our departments are about 99 percent organic, and asparagus tends to be one of the few conventional items we bring in, simply because our customers want it,” says Matt Landi, produce director for New Leaf Community Markets, a six-unit chain headquartered in Santa Cruz, CA. “This shows the importance of the product to our customers and our stores.”

According to USDA statistics, Peru now represents more than 55 percent of fresh asparagus imports. “Currently, Peru is the leading supplier of imported fresh asparagus to the U.S. market,” says Priscilla Lleras, coordinator for the Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association (PAIA). “Year after year, Peruvian asparagus has a proven record of yielding steady quality production. This is a huge benefit to the United States because it helps the market provide consistent, steady availability, which increases consumption.”

Despite its success in popularity, the per-

ishability of this delicate product continues to plague many retailers. By focusing on a few simple steps, retailers can be sure their Peruvian asparagus program thrives all winter long.

1) Be Careful In The Backroom

How asparagus is handled in receiving and backroom storage can greatly affect the quality of the product. “Asparagus must be kept cold to ensure the best quality,” says Julia Inestroza, marketing director for Gourmet Trading Company, headquartered in Los Angeles, CA. “Holding at 34°F is ideal.”

“Temperature is extremely important, so make sure the asparagus is kept at 34 to 36°F degrees,” agrees Gary Meadows, sales and marketing manager with Progressive Produce Corp., in Los Angeles, CA. “It is also extremely important to rotate all new shipments.”

In addition to cold-chain maintenance, retailers want to be on top of moving product out of storage as soon as possible and checking it for quality. “Product shouldn’t sit long in the backroom,” warns Kneeland of Kings.

“Retailers who have promoted both white and green asparagus at the same time have seen huge increases in sales — not just on the week of promotion, but also in the weeks following on white asparagus sales.”

— Julia Inestroza, Gourmet Trading Company

“Keeping it cold is crucial, as well as stacking it properly so the tips don’t get crushed. We’re also conscious to keep it away from dripping water or other harmful external factors.”

“If you have it any more than 24 hours, you want to think about trimming the bottoms,” suggests Landi. “You also must be on top of the tip rot that can sometimes happen and pull those out. It’s especially important in asparagus to be aware of any decay and cull it immediately.”

2) Give It Prominence

Asparagus is a product you want customers to easily see. “An important consideration for merchandising asparagus is to put it in a prominent place,” says Kneeland. “Build a big display and promote it.”

“Size of display is very important,” adds New Leaf’s Landi. “If you’re going to carry it, you want to give it some real estate.”

Moving displays and placing them in unique areas will also help keep the product foremost in customers’ minds. “Don’t hide it behind other products,” says Kneeland. “When we promote asparagus, we increase the size of the display and put it right at our front doors.”

“Location is crucial,” agrees Meadows. “Put displays where customers are going to most easily see them. Use water or wet pads and side stacks. Also, make sure the display is well kept and looks fresh.”

However, stores should be conscious of environmental factors affecting quality. “You have to be careful when you put the display together that it’s not under a heating duct,” points out Kneeland. “Or, if you’re putting it by the front door in cold climates, you also have to watch the temperature coming in from the outside.”

3) Display It Correctly

The space crunch many retail departments face often leads to unfavorable and damaging merchandising of asparagus. “The biggest mistake stores make is displaying the asparagus laying down,” says Gourmet Trading’s Inestroza. “It’s not only bad for the qual-

ity of the asparagus, but also the visual appeal of an upright bunch of asparagus.”

“Never display asparagus on its side,” agrees Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Southern Specialties in Pompano Beach, FL. “We suggest standing asparagus in a small amount of water. Let the consumer know to trim the ends before cooking.”

Asparagus definitely benefits from being displayed in water, but retailers must ensure any use of water is appropriately maintained. “Not keeping the asparagus hydrated or fresh is a big mistake,” says Meadows of Progressive Produce. “However, if you’re using water, the water needs to be changed daily. Fresh asparagus displays are very appealing and significantly increase impulse purchases.”

“This is retailer- and location-specific as some states have laws regulating this,” reports Inestroza. “However, if possible, the asparagus should be displayed in water that is changed frequently.”

4) Use Wet Rack With Care

While misting may provide hydration benefits, retailers should be cautioned about using it without strict oversight. “Misting asparagus can lead to premature tip decay,” explains Inestroza.

“Misting has advantages in the area of keeping the product hydrated,” acknowledges Meadows. “However, retailers who are misting must be sure to use very vigilant culling techniques. Otherwise, the misting will counteract their good intentions by leading to tip decay.”

Kings’ Kneeland reports, “We do sometimes put asparagus on the wet rack due to space constraints. But we’re always very careful about the quality and rotation, and we have designed some special stands to ensure the product is displayed correctly.”

Rotating and culling displays, no matter where they are, are crucial to sales. “Typically, the biggest mistake stores make is leaving aged stuff out there too long,” says Kneeland. “One bad bunch, or even a few tips in a display, can turn away customers.”

5) Cross-Merchandise With Creativity

Asparagus presents a wealth of cross-merchandising opportunity beyond the traditional hollandaise sauce. Link it to items both in produce and outside the department. “Meat and seafood are great with asparagus as a side dish so cross-merchandise in those departments,” says Meadows. “Asparagus merchandised with other vegetables, such as artichokes, makes for a great display.”

“Asparagus helps sell roasts, chicken and seafood,” asserts Kneeland. “We merchandise it all over the store with good results.”

Encourage store personnel to be creative in building cross-merchandising programs. “We love putting it in a grill display,” reports Landi of New Leaf. “We display it on an ice table near other items that are suggestive for grilling. We’ve also created a meal solution center with ice tables to combine different products together. We like to put it with artichokes. The shape distinction creates a nice look.”

“Great cross-merchandising items include parmesan cheese and balsamic vinegar,” says Eagle of Southern Specialties. “They pair well with asparagus.”

Suppliers are coming up with unique cross-promotions as well. “We are doing a cross-promotion with the DVD release of *Eat Pray Love*,” explains Gourmet Trading’s Inestroza. “Our tags for green asparagus, as well as our white asparagus wraps, will have a call-out for \$4 off the DVD by mail with the purchase of two pounds of Gourmet Trading asparagus. We are hoping this will increase sales at the retail level by encouraging the purchase of not just one pound of asparagus, but two. The timing of this promotion is November 25th through December 15th, which should help increase sales in the period between Thanksgiving and Christmas.”

6) Consider Variety

Adding variety through color options can help increase sales in some markets. “White and green asparagus promoted together and priced the same has been successful,” says Progressive’s Meadows.

“Promotion of green and white asparagus together can help drive sales,” adds Inestroza. “It takes little extra effort to include both in ads and on display, yet the potential for doubling sales is huge. Retailers who have promoted both white and green asparagus at the same time have seen huge increases in sales — not just on the week of promotion, but also in the weeks following on white asparagus sales.”

Retailers can also look at the growing num-

ber of value-added asparagus products such as packaged tips and steam-bags to add variety to the category. “The growth of creative packaging has contributed to increased shelf-space in many retail organizations,” says Barmmer of Bounty Fresh. “Consumer-friendly unit sizing and volume has enabled more consumers to purchase asparagus because a 1-lb. bunch is simply too much for many consumers to purchase at one time.”

However, success is variable as many stores still struggle with selling anything beyond the standard bunches. “We’re still at the stage in this market where colored asparagus and value-added are specialty items,” says New Leaf’s Landi. “We have our token cases, but it’s a tough sell.”

7) Make The Most Of Signs

Eye-catching informative signs can encourage purchases. “Signage can really contribute to product movement,” says Meadows. “Recipes can help give great ideas to consumers and increase impulse purchases. In-store announcements can also create extra sales.”

Signs should do an effective job of covering the basics, but also are a means to help consumers better understand the product. “We do basic signage, but when we advertise we make bigger signs,” says Kings’ Kneeland. “We like to tell a story about the grower, nutrient value or usages on our signs. You need to make the most of the 10 seconds you have customers near your display, and effective signage is a big part of that equation.”

“Since the product is well known, signage should be clear and cover the basics like price and country-of-origin,” says Landi. “Signage can help better educate consumers and make a connection with them. For example, we find it helpful when there is information relating to fair trade or a farmer profile.”

8) Tap Into Industry Expertise

Peruvian growers and their exporters are continually seeking ways to improve the business. “The growth opportunities for Peruvian fresh asparagus are very positive and we are committed to working with our grower and trade partners to increase consumption of Peruvian fresh asparagus,” says Barmmer.

“Southern Specialties is making investments in optimizing the handling of asparagus,” reports Eagle. “This includes things like additional hydro-coolers, forced air coolers and air scrubbers.”

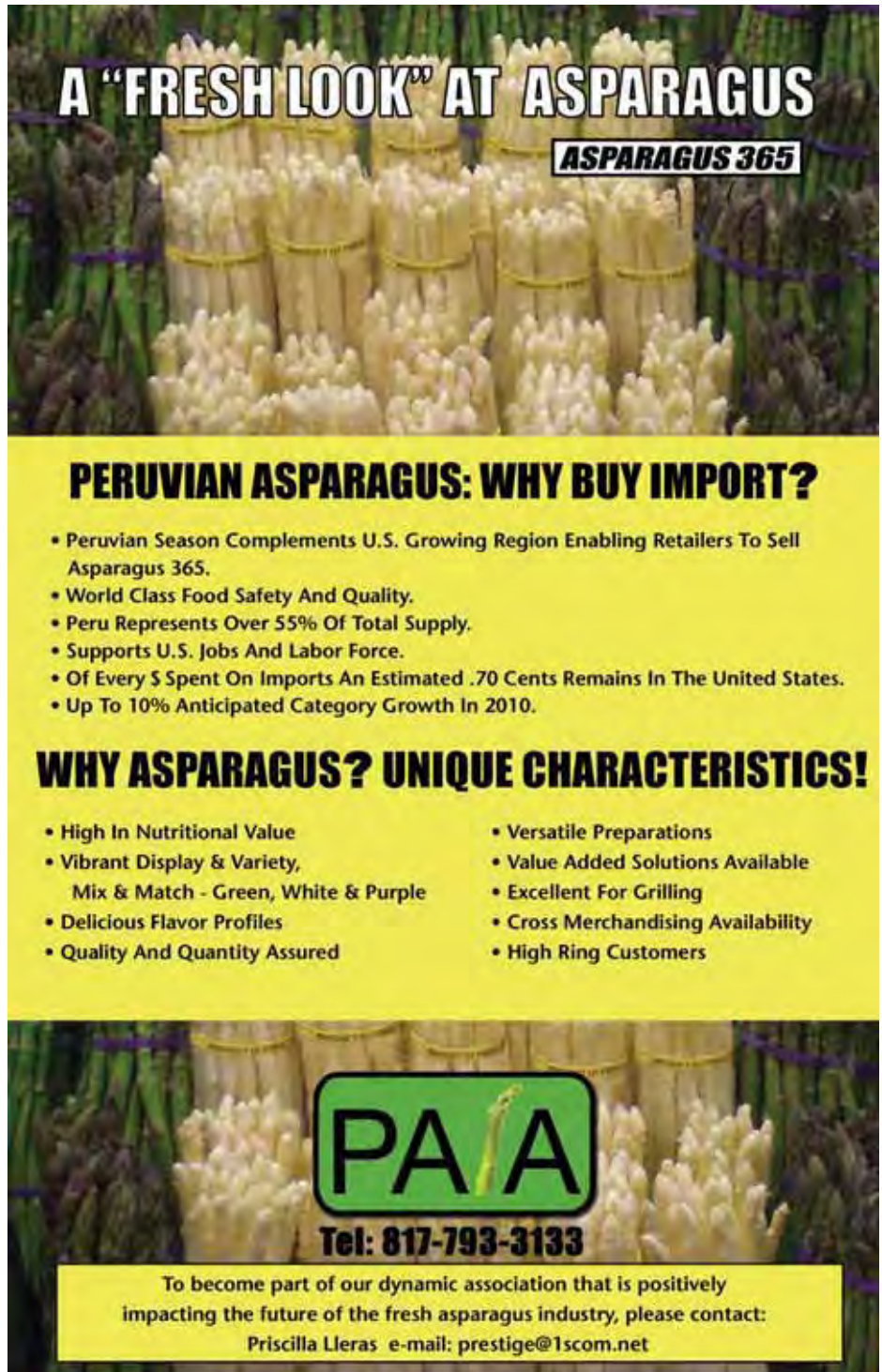
Importers are increasingly focused on greater efficiency in logistics. “There is a lot of USDA support in Peru to help with pest man-

agement issues, which eventually could help to reduce or eliminate fumigation,” reports Meadows of Progressive.

“Peruvian asparagus importers are working more closely with customs brokers specializing in the import clearance of fresh asparagus,” says Nelly Yunta, general manager for Customized Brokers, located in Miami, FL. “This closer relationship helps ensure that the product reaches store shelves as quickly as possible and at its peak of freshness. Speed, convenience and competitive pricing for these

import services are key and we’ve responded by offering importers a per-box-rate for asparagus, including customs entry, fumigation, local delivery, overtime and coordination. We want to streamline the overall import process and ensure that shipments are cleared with no delays.”

Retailers are encouraged to remember their own valuable contribution to expertise as well. “Educate the man on the floor,” suggests Eagle. “A trained produce professional is your best resource for promoting product.” **pb**



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Reader Service # 74

Holiday Baking With Dried Fruit And Nuts

Moving beyond the traditional holiday fruitcake, dried fruit and nuts find a promotable place among holiday ingredients. **BY JON VANZILE**



Calling maximum attention to dried fruit and nuts will lead to impulse purchases and higher rings.

Jack Harris, produce manager of Marvin's Food Saver, an independent retailer in Independence, KS, knows how to put together a holiday display of dried fruits and nuts. He's so good at it that he recently won an award for his display of peanuts from Nashville, NC-based Virginia-Carolina Peanut Promotions. "I used bulk peanuts," Harris remarks. "Bulk peanuts increase sales. It's the size of the bin that is so attractive." The display used POS material provided by Virginia-Carolina Peanut Promotions, but was customized by the local football team's colors and logo.

But Harris doesn't stop with peanuts during the holidays. All across the country, produce executives are gearing up for a traditional holiday spike in all dried fruit and nuts. Traditionally, dried fruits and nuts are used as baking ingredients for cookies and in religious holidays, but in recent years, the market has expanded to include health-conscious consumers and foodies. The key, say retailers and distributors, is to maximize sales through proper merchandising.

The Display

The heart of a successful holiday dried fruit

and nut season is the display. The idea is to call maximum attention to the dried fruits and nuts and offer other baking-related items, such as candies, flour, sugar and decorations. A complete display should include raisins, figs, dates, as well as a complete selection of nuts, apricots and dried cherries.

A good display will do more than help bakers find everything they need in one place. It will also help increase sales of others products because dried fruit and nuts are largely impulse purchases. Shoppers routinely buy dried fruit or nuts on the spur of the moment, in addition to those needed for baking ingredients.

"History has taught us that when dried fruit is merchandised, it really makes sense to use the market-basket approach," notes Joe Tamble, vice president of sales for Kingsburg-based Sun-Maid Growers of California. "Dried fruit is really an impulse purchase, and a consumer might not think of an apricot while they're looking for raisins until they get to the display."

The same can be said for other dried fruits. "Dates and figs are often used during the holidays," says Lorrie Cooper, manager of the Indio-based California Date Administrative Committee (CDAC). "You want to bundle

them so you can get as much bang for your buck as you can."

You can do this by offering suggestions and ideas right at the table, including tear-away recipes and pictures of baked goods using dried fruits or nuts. For example, Virginia-Carolina Peanut Promotions offers recipes for peanuts including sugar-coated peanuts or peanut brittle, and most large producers also offer recipe cards or sheets for their products.

At Marvin's Food Saver, Harris has used a similar display every year to bring customers to his produce department. He runs the display from the first week of November — just after the Halloween candy is pulled from the shelves — into December. "We lay the product boxes on a slant on a table, and I'll have them all together," he describes. "It makes a nice display. We've had them every year since we opened up, and I wait every year for the holiday nuts and candies. They start in November and carry us through because they average around five bucks a ring."

Other displays are more intricate. "The best table I ever saw included a banner that was strung straight from the ceiling to the center of the table," recalls Andrew Stillman, presi-

dent of Amport Foods in Minneapolis, MN. “Then, they decorated the banner with all sorts of holiday symbols. It caught the eye and said, ‘Holiday Baking Center.’ Stores used to do this, but they moved away from it. Now, however, they are moving back.”

Ideally, recipes offered at the baking table should include at least two ingredients from the table, Stillman advises, adding that many vendors are happy to supply recipe cards, so there’s no cost to the store.

Samples can also be used to increase sales. “Cornell did a study on 22 promotion techniques and sampling ranked third,” reports Betsy Owens, executive director of Virginia-Carolina Peanut Promotions. “The old saying, ‘No one can eat just one,’ is true.”

Advantages to Dried Fruits and Nuts

Retailers such as Harris love holiday baking displays because they are profit centers for the store. According to producers like Stillman, dried fruits and nuts are the most profitable single items in the produce department. They are labor-free once the shelves are stocked, and they boast much better margins than most produce.

When it comes to the specific SKUs within the category, raisins are by far the biggest seller, even during the holiday season. According to Sun-Maid’s Tamble, sales of the standard 24-oz. canister are especially strong through November and December. Nuts, too, are popular, as consumers tend to prefer walnuts, pecans and other nuts typically used in baked goods. Finally, the rest of the dried fruits — especially dates and figs — are popular.

In addition to marketing to bakers, the holiday season is a good excuse to put dried fruit and nuts in front of health-conscious consumers and raise their awareness of the health benefits. After all, dried fruit is loaded with nutrients and antioxidants. “Our figs have more fiber than prunes and more potassium than bananas,” reports Linda Cain, vice president of sales and marketing at Valley Fig Growers in Fresno, CA. “They are chock full of nutrients.”

The same can be said for dates — also loaded with potassium — and most other dried fruits, which deliver a nutritious punch in a small package. In fact, CDAC’s Cooper recommends placing chopped dates on the holiday table and reminding consumers they are an excellent sugar equivalent.

Beyond baking, many religions consume dried fruits as part of their holiday observation. This includes Muslims, who use dates during the Ramadan fast. Many Jewish tables are decorated with the traditional fruits and foods from Israel, which also include figs and dates.

“Both Jewish and Muslim holidays use dried fruit,” notes Shaleen Heffernan, sales manager at Mor USA in Green Brook, NJ. “Muslims have a month-long fast at Ramadan, where they fast daily from sunrise to sunset and break the fast with a date.”

Stretching the Holiday Season

Although the traditional holiday season from November to December generates the strongest sales, producers note that the spring holiday season, which includes Easter and

Passover, is developing into a mini-spike for sales. “During these months, fresh produce is limited,” points out Stillman, “so people are looking for additional tasty and nutritious items.”

Even beyond these dates, more and more produce departments are keeping a year-round display of dried fruits and nuts. After all, their nutritional and culinary benefits don’t end with the New Year, and most producers are reporting steadily increasing sales of dried fruits throughout the year. **pb**

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The Mother of All Bouquet Seasons

With 2011 offering a late Easter, floral bouquet companies encourage retailers to order early for spring holidays. **BY BOB JOHNSON**



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF FARMERS' WEST
 CENTER PHOTO COURTESY OF FIORRE FARMS LLC
 PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF FRESH BLOOMS

The accepted price for floral bouquets this year has dropped from \$14.99 to \$12.99 and even \$9.99, according to floral experts.

One of the busiest floral seasons in recent years will happen this spring when Mother's Day will be celebrated just two weeks after Easter. For floral department sales, the timing is opportune, but there are concerns about setting up POP materials in time and dealing with possible inventory shortages. Growers and bouquet distributors all agree that one thing retailers can and must do is place their orders as early as possible.

Although there is no hard rule about when to order, some retailers begin planning with their suppliers as early as a year in advance. "For our major customers, we work six to 12 months out on all holiday planning. Retailers generally survey their stores immediately after the holiday to gather order projections for the following year, providing the data for what sold and what did not at each price point and what the stores need, based on actual sales history. It helps if these surveys are done close to the holiday that has just passed," says Karen Leggett, sales and marketing services at Sunshine Bouquet Co., in Dayton, NJ.

Another way to help suppliers meet retail-

ers' needs in this challenging time is to give them a little flexibility in the mix of bouquets they deliver. "Pre-book early and give your suppliers some flexibility in the mix in the bouquets," advises Linda Giovanozzi, vice president of sales and product development at Farmers' West Flowers and Bouquets, based in Carpinteria, CA. She suggests getting orders in by January at the latest.

Declining production in Colombia could further complicate the issue of floral supply for two holidays so close together. "The exchange rate in Colombia has reached a point where it is killing the growers if they are exporting out," remarks Charlie Alvarez, director of sales and marketing at Fiorre Farms LLC, headquartered in Miami, FL. "A lot of farms in Colombia have either gone out of business or reduced their acreage. The supply is now diminishing and that's why the prices are going up."

The so-called crisis in supply could extend beyond Colombia to many of the other major flower producing areas of the world. "I'm getting reports from South America, Kenya, Switzerland, Holland and Japan that the supply is going to decrease," reveals Joseph Farrell,

president of World Flowers LLC, located in Doral, FL. "There is going to be a shortage fairly soon." He expects the shortage to hit as early as Valentine's Day.

The shortage could very well affect roses, which are a Mother's Day staple. "Carnations were cut back first, but roses are also tightening up a little bit," says Farrell. "For many years, there have been rumors there would be a flower shortage, and then it didn't happen. I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of people don't believe it this time. Nonetheless, I'm hearing from South America that there's a good 35 percent cutback in production."

The uncertainty of supply makes it even more essential for retailers to tell floral growers and distributors now what they will need in the spring. "I recommend a minimum of six months," advises Alvarez. "This allows the farm to plan to produce enough to cover their orders. It is really important for the retail market to plan in advance for their needs, especially since supply has reduced and there is less product available at the last minute."

This past summer, the largest retailers were already booking their floral orders for next

California Bloomin'

California flower growers are preparing for spring and they seem to have fewer uncertainties than South American growers. "People are familiar with the quality of the flowers coming out of California," recognizes Kasey Cronquist, CEO and ambassador of the California Cut Flower Commission, in Carpinteria, CA. "We are always introducing new varieties, because we try to stay ahead of the curve, and I am sure we will introduce new varieties again this spring."

The so-called crisis in South American flower production has — if anything — created new opportunities for cut flower growers in California. "There seem to be more openings for California-grown product," says Linda Giovanozzi, vice president for sales and product development at Farmers' West Flowers and Bouquets, based in Carpinteria, CA. "California production is consistent and increasing slightly. For us, there will not be a shortage; we will plan for that time of the year. We will set our plants to flush toward the end of April and the beginning of May."

"The California supply is strong," says David Clark, director of sales and marketing at Fallbrook, CA-based Kendall Farms, which also specializes in protea, sunflowers and eucalyptus. "I can really only speak for us, but every year we're increasing the amount of product that is available. We're one of the largest suppliers of pincushions, and the largest supplier of wax flowers in the country."

Kendall Farms is offering pre-booking pricing on select flowers until December 1st, in an effort to encourage buyers to submit their orders well before the spring holidays. "A lot of growers are not growing on spec as much as before because of the economy," explains Clark.

"Tulips are becoming the No. 2 SKU in the stores behind roses, and iris is running ahead of schedule," says Ginny Wyche, mass marketing and Internet sales manager at The Sun Valley Group, based in Arcata, CA. Sun Valley specializes in spring flowers, including tulips, iris, hyacinth and lilies.

"We source flowers out of California such as VeriFlora-certified sustainable lilies and irises," says Robert McLaughlin, CEO of Organic Bouquet/EcoFlowers.com, located in Maitland, FL.

Retailers who source their flowers largely out of California are less anxious than most about supply issues in spring. "I don't foresee any supply problems because we get 85 percent of our flowers from local growers in San Diego, Oxnard and Carpinteria," says Alice Hoesepian, floral marketing director for Bristol Farms, a chain of 13 California supermarkets, based in Carson, CA.

pb

spring. "We are working to pre-book our orders to ensure an adequate supply for our customers for both Easter and Mother's Day," says Mike Siemienas, national media representative for Supervalu Inc., based in Boise, ID. "We try to stay on top of that on a regular basis."

Something Old And Something New

There are strong traditions that still go a long way toward dictating what is appropriate for Easter and Mother's Day bouquets. "Pastels and greens tend to be popular for Easter," notes Giovanozzi. "Mother's Day is still very heavy with pink. We're seeing more people go to greens, but pink is still traditional."

Some of those traditions may help ease the supply crunch, as different gifts are traditional for the two holidays. "I'm not sure the closeness of the two holidays is going to be a concern," discloses Rene Quinn, vice president of

Sewell, NJ-based Fresh Blooms. "Easter has primarily been a plant-driven holiday, while Mother's Day is for bouquets."

The economy has created an atmosphere that will influence the flowers people buy next spring. "It's going to be bright colors because bright colors make people feel cheery," Quinn says. Most consumers are also going to be looking for bouquets at a lower price point than in the past. "People are going to be looking for color and value. The most common price used to be \$14.99; that has moved down to \$12.99 and even \$9.99," she adds.

There is, however, another group of consumers that continues to buck the mainstream by paying a little more as part of their investment in a sustainable lifestyle. "We have a heavy emphasis on organic flowers; organic roses will be a good item this year," predicts Robert McLaughlin, CEO of Organic Bou-

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quet/EcoFlowers.com, located in Maitland, FL. The market for organic and sustainably grown flowers is made up of consumers interested in lifestyles of health and sustainability, a relatively affluent group estimated at nearly 20 percent of the adult population. "They are more focused and less price-sensitive consumers. This group is still growing through the down economy," McLaughlin explains. Organic Bouquet has seen its online sales drop 7 percent this year, but that has been offset by a substantial increase in business-to-business sales through its EcoFlowers.com. "We ship to Whole Foods and to a number of natural food store chains with 5 to 25 stores," he adds.

Opportunity Blossoms

The crowded floral schedule coming in the spring of 2011 also brings an unusual opportunity. "We are excited that Easter is so late next year," declares Jon Strom, vice president for floral and lifestyle merchandising at Price Chopper Supermarkets, Schenectady, NY. "Having Easter in late April will bring a lot more outside business than if it were earlier." Strom sees

the possibility for a strong floral season next year including Palm Sunday, Passover, Easter, Administrative Professionals' Day, Cinco de Mayo and Mother's Day.

"It's going to be an amazing four weeks of floral sales," Strom continues. Strom is relatively calm about the supply issues because he has worked to build close relationships with his suppliers. "We call our suppliers trade partners," he states. "They come into our closed-door meetings. Many of them have been in every one of our 128 stores. They are our eyes and ears on merchandising and service. Our word as a floral buyer is reliable. We give our trade partners our orders early; we don't change our order at the last minute; and we pay quickly."

Another challenge in 2011 will be changing the POP displays in the short time between Easter and Mother's Day. "I think we'll have plenty of product," says Ginny Wyche, sales manager for mass marketing and Internet sales at The Sun Valley Group, headquartered in Arcata, CA. "There won't be a problem as long as retailers address the POP issues in the stores."

Planning the POP displays in advance could be as important in driving sales as securing floral inventory in advance. "We have an extensive line of POP materials. One of the key tasks for retailers to do is engage the consumer. People don't know a lot about flowers and that can be intimidating. We need to turn people into flower connoisseurs," Wyche explains.

This promotional effort is worth planning months before the holidays arrive. "We start planning our POP for Mother's Day and Easter and order our materials right after Valentine's Day," reveals Alice Hosepian, floral marketing director for Bristol Farms, a chain of 13 Carson, CA-based supermarkets. In addition to implementing the POP materials developed to enlighten consumers, retailers must be prepared for a labor crunch in the floral department. "The only problem I foresee is a lot of tired employees," she says. "It's hard to have enough employees available for so many floral holidays in such a short timeframe. For Mother's Day, we can borrow employees from other areas of the store; but for Easter the entire store will be busy." **pb**

FLORAL WATCH

TRANSITION



**RIVERDALE FARMS
MIAMI, FL**

Manny Fraga is the newest addition to the grower/distributor's Mass Market business unit. He previously worked in mass market sales for Great American Bouquet, Sunshine Bouquet and on the wholesale side with CFX. Fraga's most recent post in his 14-plus years in the industry was with Falcon Farms.

RSN 338

ANNOUNCEMENT



**2010 FLORAL MARKETER OF
THE YEAR**

The Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE, named Bill Byland the 2010 Floral Marketer of the Year during PMA's Fresh Summit International Convention and Exposition held in Orlando, FL, in October. Byland is business manager of Micky's Minis Flora Express, in St. Louis, MO. Presented since 1981, the award recognizes an outstanding floral professional who has served the mass-market floral industry with dedication and distinction.

RSN 339

NEW PRODUCTS



SHORT AND SWEET

The Sun Valley Group, Arcata, CA, introduces its line of Tabletop Bouquets featuring fresh California-grown flowers. Measuring approximately 8 inches tall, the Upscale Bouquet arrives in frosted glass cubes. The taller Tabletop Bouquet measures approximately 14 inches tall. These hand-tied bouquets are available with vases or can be matched with vases in retailers' existing inventory. These beauties are ideal for desktop décor and as hostess gifts.

RSN 340



FLORAFRUIT APPEAL

The USA Bouquet Co., Miami, FL, introduces the Florafruit program as part of the company's new mixed floral bouquet line. Featuring large, medium and small bouquets, the fruit-inspired line is ideal for cross-merchandising with items from the produce department. The Florafruit program includes Tropical Paradise, Orchard Delight, Citrus Punch and Very Berry (pictured above). Signage and POP material is offered with the Florafruit.

RSN 341

TRUST IS THE CORNERSTONE OF TRACEABILITY



The level of trust when dealing with used car salesmen, politicians, personal injury trial lawyers and financial advisors is relatively low in most of the public's perception. On the other end of the scale, the trust in the majority of the attributes of fresh fruit and vegetables is outstanding.

Then on September 14, 2006, public perception quickly turned into skepticism with the spinach recall as it seemingly took forever

to determine where the problem originated. Was it isolated or was it general? Was it at the point of production, processing, shipping, wholesale or retail handling? Enhanced by media, governmental politicians and an irate public, product historically recognized as good by nearly everyone was in the questioning crosshairs. Trust had disappeared.

The damage brought unintended consequences, destroying the incomes of innocent producers and workers just because there was no way to quickly isolate the cause. The question went from what do we do now, to how do we do it, to how to compensate for the cost, to how do we renew credibility with the consumer?

Changing attitudes comes slowly, and in the process, innovation and out-of-the-box thinking is needed for successful solutions. Initial reactions to PLU labeling, palletizing and clamshell packaging and handling were just a few that had met with comments from "it just won't work" to "the costs are unrecoverable." However, technological improvements, cost efficiencies and offsetting advantages brought about new ways of operating.

Soon, the Produce Traceability Initiative was born, headed by Kathy Green, former vice president of merchandising at Hannaford and currently president of Food Lion, completing a workable plan outline with timeline before the end of 2008.

Since then, slow and steady progress has been achieved as more and more companies from all segments of the distribution chain become involved. Unfortunately, there are those — perhaps rightfully — raising the question, "What will happen when reality sets in and buyers find non-PTI shippers offer product at a slightly lower cost?" A recent Southeast Produce Council conference workshop went a long way toward outlining offsetting benefits to the cost of implementing the program.

Perhaps the challenge is for receivers and grower/shippers working together to understand each other's needs for executing the program. Letters from retailers to vendors outlining the requirements to be met is not a substitute for face-to-face discussions. In addition to contact

with major shippers, it is equally necessary for retailers to meet with their smaller local growers to determine potential solutions.

Ultimately, PTI may play a major role in altering small producer distribution systems. Some may easily adapt individually to the program. Others may combine shipping programs or sell out to a major shipper who more efficiently implements the program.

However, myths still abound about the net costs of involvement with the program. Mark Shuman of Shuman Produce, a Georgia-based onion shipper outlined the requirements as they develop traceability at the shipper level. First, it must become a company culture with everyone buying into the program. Traceability is as good as the weakest link, requiring complete cooperation and commitment regardless of position. As with any new program, the learning curve includes a lot of trial and error. The system has developed accurate data labeling, improving turnover and the ability to supply receivers

according to their specification requirements. As a result, the system of traceability not only inspires a greater trust with business partners, but more consistent business helping to offset the cost of implementation. Trust becomes a business insurance policy.

Requirement changes nearly always spawn business opportunities for organizations with the expertise to provide efficient cost-

effective solutions and aid the implementation of programs needed by companies involved in traveling uncharted waters. Several are in the business of customizing traceability programs helping buyers and suppliers meet the compliance requirements both more quickly and cost effectively.

After Food Lion's initial involvement with the development of the PTI process, it is not surprising that on the retail side the company is well on its way to achieving a high degree of implementation. Already, Food Lion has GTINS for 80 percent of the volume as a result of emphasizing cooperative traceability with its suppliers.

To keep the program moving forward, the company has project teams concentrating on both procedural and technical elements with a total five-year budget in the seven-figure range. Sounds like a lot of money until cost savings generated by rotation, handling efficiencies, security and accountability are included. However, the bottom line comes from the rewards of consumer trust.

For the company's suppliers, nothing may be more important than the trust they will have from Food Lion management direction to their buyers which explicitly state, "no purchasing from sources without a traceability program." Any additional program cost is insignificant compared to the cornerstone gains from consumers' and suppliers' trust. **pb**

The system of traceability not only inspires a greater trust with business partners, but more consistent business helping to offset the cost of implementation. Trust becomes a business insurance policy.

By Dave Diver

Dave Diver is the former vice president of produce at Hannaford and a regular columnist for PRODUCE BUSINESS.

GLOBALGAP VERSION 4 HAS EUROPE AND U.S. MOVING CLOSER TOGETHER ON FARM CERTIFICATION



Close to 500 delegates from 60-plus countries gathered for GlobalGAP Summit 2010 at London's Hilton Metropole Hotel, this past October 7-8. The event provided a unique networking opportunity for all those involved in primary production and retailing, stimulated by 55 expert speakers covering key aspects of Good Agricultural Practice Implementation and their certification.

The Summit 2010 also marked a special milestone in GlobalGAP's history, being the organization's 10th global conference as well as the launch of the fourth version of its Integrated Farm Assurance Standard, after having reported to account for more than 100,000 certified producers in over 100 countries.

Changes In Version 4

Although often seen as a European standard, since the majority of imported fresh produce to Europe has to meet GlobalGAP requirements, with its fourth version, the organization has been addressing the risks that cursed the recent fresh produce food safety outbreaks in the United States. With specific updates, which have been

the result of a four-year consultation process, GlobalGAP hereby strengthens its position as the global harmonization platform for farm assurance and recommends itself to be the standard of choice also for imports into the United States.

All modifications and measures are aimed at increasing the integrity of the standard, thus enhancing transparency for producers, traders and retailers, and being more applicable to all types of production.

Irrigation

Water use has become an increasingly important issue in many countries. To reflect this concern, Version 4 now raises the level for the justification of the used irrigation method to a major requirement. In addition, the wording of some control points was revised. All the requirements concerning irrigation are now centralized in the Crops Base Module.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

IPM became more prominent in Version 3 and has gained considerable significance in Version 4. Efforts to underline the importance of this aspect of Good Agricultural Practice has led to obligatory compliance against a minimum of one activity in each of the areas of prevention, observation and monitoring and intervention, raising this to the level of a major

requirement. In addition, a guideline and toolbox was developed to provide the producer with more information on how to implement IPM, and is expected to help increase worldwide producer involvement in the practice of Integrated Pest Management.

Use Of Plant Protection Product (PPP)

The topic of PPP Residue Analysis has been under discussion for quite some time now. For this reason, a new approach has been adopted in Version 4. Rather than require sampling for residue analysis as a routine measure, it should be based on risk. This means that the producer is required to have a good understanding of the risks leading to the exceedance of Maximum Residue Levels. To this aim, a toolbox to facilitate a meaningful risk assessment is now available. If no samples are taken, the producer is required to justify the reasons for this based on his risk assessment. If samples are taken, the producer must follow the set

requirements. With this new approach, GlobalGAP has taken another step to improve food safety without putting unnecessary burden on the producer.

To cover all applications of chemicals to the products, a new control point has been introduced that requires records of all other substances, aside from fertilizer and plant protection products.

Changes in the Fruit and Vegetable Module include a new major requirement for a risk assessment for water used for spraying plant protection products. The aim is to reduce the risk of microbiological contamination.

Harvest

Following the principle adopted by other parts of the standard of first conducting a risk assessment, then establishing a procedure and finally training the workers according to this procedure, a documented hygiene procedure for the harvesting process has now been implemented.

Produce Handling

The use of ice for harvested produce was raised to a major requirement in order to acknowledge the potential danger. Short-term storage is now covered under field harvest. A new control point covers the requirement for potable water being used for post-harvest treatments.

All in all, the microbial risks predominantly addressed in the United States have found a full recognition in GlobalGAP's new version, while the original strengths in the areas of pesticide control and baseline sustainability have been maintained, following greater efficiency and integrity. Both worlds have moved closer now in farm assurance.

With its fourth version, the organization has been addressing the risks that cursed the recent fresh produce food safety outbreaks in the United States.

By Dr. Friedrich Luedeke

Crops & Training, GlobalGAP, Cologne, Germany

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Asociacion Mexicana de Horticultura Protegida A.C.	38	33		
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Botanical Interests	109	77	800-486-2647	303-464-6468
Brooks Tropicals	43	23	800-327-4833	305-246-5827
C&D Enterprizes	94	53	760-772-0535	760-772-9011
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	22	14	515-981-5111	515-981-4564
CF Fresh	24	68	360-855-3192	360-855-2430
Chilean Avocado Importers Association	29	19	202-626-0560	
Christopher Ranch	60	76	408-847-1100	408-847-0581
Concord Foods	28	58	508-580-1700	508-584-9425
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Deardorff Family Farms	63	79	805-200-5216	805-483-1286
Del Monte Fresh Produce	116	55	800-950-3683	305-520-8495
Direct Source Marketing	35	32	914-241-4434	914-241-4435
Dole Fresh Fruit Company	2	3	818-879-6600	818-879-6628
dProduce Man Software	26	10	888-PRODMAN	650-712-9973
Duda Family Farms	95	70	561-804-1477	561-753-6660
Earthbound Farm	62	59	888-624-1004	831-623-7886
East Coast Brokers & Packers, Inc.	115	56	800-557-7751	863-869-9850
Edinburg Citrus Association	92	24	956-383-6619	956-383-2435
Eli & Ali, LLC	82	67	866-354-2547	718-389-1514
Fresh Produce Association of The Americas	48	69	520-287-2707	520-287-2948
Freska Produce International, LLC	84	78	805-650-1040	805-650-3550
General Produce, Inc.	71	61	800-782-5833	404-361-1841
Global Organic Specialty Source, Inc.	63	42	877-952-1198	941-358-6551
Great Lakes International Trading, Inc.	22	82	231-947-2141	231-947-0628
Greenhouse Produce Company, LLC	82	38	888-492-1492	772-492-1592
Hunts Point Terminal Co-Op Assn.	19	39	718-542-2944	718-542-2971
Idaho Potato Commission	90	22	208-334-2350	208-334-2274

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Kern Ridge Growers, LLC	60	48	661-854-3156	661-854-2832
Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc.	36	72	717-597-2112	717-597-4096
Lakeside Organic Gardens	61	41	831-761-8797	831-728-1104
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J. Marchini & Son / LeGrand	62	43	559-665-9710	559-665-9714
Mayrsohn International Trading Co., Inc.	101	46	305-470-1444	305-470-1440
Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc.	63	47	800-468-7111	323-588-7841
MIXTEC Group	34	31	626-440-7077	626-440-1557
Mor USA	26	49	914-347-1611	914-347-1605
Mor USA	84	40	914-347-1611	914-347-1605
New Limeco LLC	101	80	305-258-1611	386-776-2662
New York Apple Association, Inc.	79	9	585-924-2171	585-924-1629
Niagara Fresh Fruit Co.	83	27	716-778-7631	716-778-8768
Nickey Gregory Company, LLC	73	60	404-366-7410	404-363-1169
Northern Plains Potato Growers Assn.	56	26	218-773-3633	218-773-6227
OsoSweet Onion Co.	37	73	304-545-6470	304-342-5022
Pennsylvania Apple Marketing Program	53	54	717-783-5418	717-783-4262
Peri & Sons Farms	34	11	775-463-4444	775-463-4028
Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association	105	74	610-284-0326	
Produce for Better Health Foundation	39	5	302-235-2329	302-235-5555
Produce Marketing Association	68	75	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
SAGARPA - Embassy of Mexico	46-47	36	202-728-1727	202-728-1728
Sunlight Intl. Sales/Jakov P Dulcich & Sons	25	57	661-792-6360	661-792-6529
Sweet Onion Trading Company	36	12	800-699-3727	321-674-2003
Thermal Technologies, Incorporated	99	63	808-4-MRPEEL	803-691-8010
A.J. Trucco, Inc.	27	51	718-893-3060	718-617-9884
United Fresh Produce Association	96	29	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
United Fresh Produce Association	74	30	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
Valley Fig Growers	107	62	925-463-7565	925-463-7456
Village Farms	54	45	877-777-7718	610-429-6222
Wada Farms Potatoes Inc.	34	81	888-BUY-WADA	208-785-0415
Washington Fruit & Produce	59	66	509-452-8529	509-457-6177

NOGALES, 1986



Kelley Larey



George Wise



Butch Denniston



Alberto Maldonado



Mr. & Mrs. George Uribe



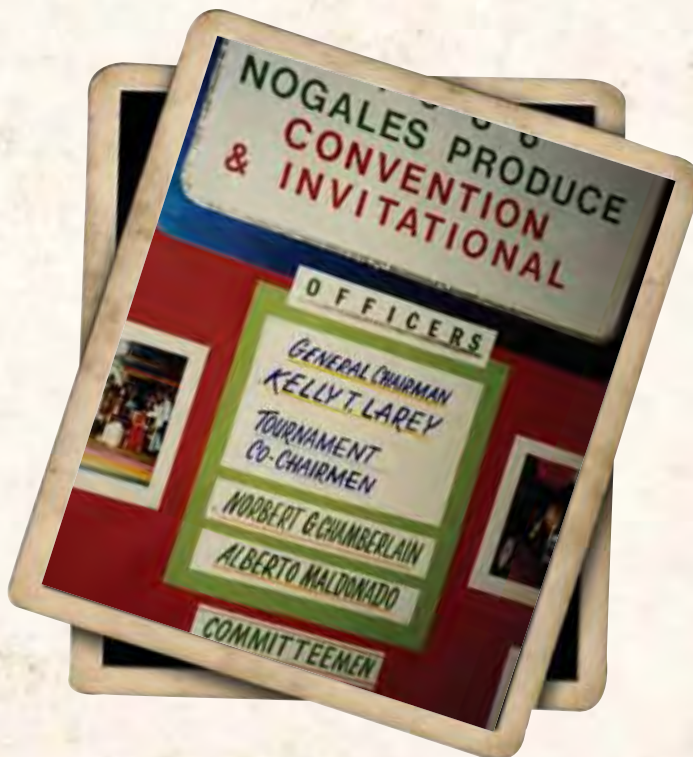
Ana Alicia and Hector Jaime



Mr. & Mrs. Jerry Grossman



Fernando Espinosa



In 1986, the West Mexico Vegetable Distributors Association (WMVDA) celebrated its annual convention in Nogales, AZ, with a party held in the warehouse of Thomas Produce Sales. According to Chuck Thomas, president/secretary/treasurer of the same company currently based in Rio Rico, AZ, the main event was a western-themed hoedown. Guests dressed as cowpokes and hay bales scat-

tered around the dance floor served as chairs.

The WMVDA was renamed in 1993 to the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), and it continues the tradition of gathering each year — with its 42nd Annual Produce Convention and Invitational Golf Tournament held this year in November at the Tubac Resort, in Tubac, AZ.

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE WITH TEACHER MONDAY

Teacher Monday Cash & Fruit for Classrooms

September 27, 2010 - December 1, 2010

This promotion is sure to attract crowds. As a destination within your produce department, the Del Monte Fresh Produce "Teacher Monday" promotion encourages consumers to Eat Healthy and Live Healthy.

"Teacher Monday" is an online contest where consumers vote for their favorite teacher and was created to support teachers and give them the tools they need to make eating healthy fun and educational in the classroom. Winning teachers in the U.S. and Canada will receive \$750 in cash to purchase school supplies and \$250 in Del Monte Fresh Produce fruit gift certificates for classroom snacks.



Over 30 million on-product stickers and tags on pineapples, bananas, fresh-cut fruits and vegetables, melons, grapes and tomatoes will alert shoppers to the promotion in-store, supported with channel strips, price cards, danglers and display signs. Del Monte Fresh Produce will also distribute \$25 gift certificate booklets for fresh fruits and vegetables to consumers in 40 major markets across the U.S. and Canada. Consumers will be notified about give-aways via Twitter, Facebook and radio promotions.

Go to www.fruits.com to learn more or contact your Del Monte Fresh Produce representative to participate and help support schools in your community.



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