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SALAD TRENDS • SWEET POTATOES • DRESSINGS & DIPS • LEAFY GREENS • WHOLESALE/RETAIL RELATIONSHIPS
CONSUMER PACKAGING • WEST MEXICO • SAN LUIS VALLEY POTATOES • NORTHERN PLAINS POTATOES • APPLES
MANGOS ON THE MENU • IMPORTED BERRIES • FLORAL BRANDING • ORGANICS IN FOODSERVICE • PECANS

PB GUIDEBOOK SERIES 

Traceability Solutions
starts on page 131

Floral Masters of Merchandising
starts on page 203

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producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT



**Independents
Carry On
The American
Dream**



Introducing the NEW Salad Guide from DOLE



Salad Guide

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The DOLE Salad Guide's easy-to-read Taste and Texture scales rate each DOLE salad to enable the customer to quickly find the type of flavor and level of crunch he or she wants. Each bag also features a "Pairs well with..." section, right below the scales. These helpful suggestions are unique to each blend and are created by our Dole Chefs, encouraging customers to spruce up their salads by sending them to parts of the produce section they never even imagined.

The new DOLE Salad Guide is transforming salad as we know it. With flavors that range from mild to bold and textures that take you from tender to crunchy, the possibilities and pairings are endless and the culinary inspiration is right there on the bag.

For more information on our new packaging or produce, please contact your Dole sales representative.

dole.com





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THIS MONTH'S WINNER:



Dave Rader
Purchasing Director
Aramark Corp.
Philadelphia, PA

Having been with Aramark for 40 years, Dave Rader has witnessed first-hand the tremendous growth of the produce industry, specifically, the role of foodservice. "I tell people I was in foodservice before it was foodservice," he quips. Aramark is a service management contracting company that oversees the foodservice operations of national clients, ranging from school and hospitals to stadiums and theme parks. In addition to the typical food products, "We provide everything from uniforms and apparel to mailroom management and cleaning services for our clients," Rader explains.

Rader has been reading *PRODUCE BUSINESS* for some time. "It's very useful as the changes in the industry are always very well highlighted. It's important to keep up with it because issues such as traceability, for example, are going to affect the entire industry in a number of ways."

As the winner of the *PRODUCE BUSINESS* quiz, Dave will receive a Cuisinart Ice Cream Maker.

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

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QUESTIONS FOR THE OCTOBER ISSUE

- 1) How many acres of California strawberries does Red Blossom grow ? _____
- 2) What is Trinity Fruit's booth number at the PMA? _____
- 3) What is the address of VIP Marketing Inc.? _____
- 4) What is Matt Middleton's email address at Marie's? _____
- 5) What is the Web site for SunFed? _____
- 6) Who will be appearing at the Avocados From Mexico booth during PMA? _____

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Salad Bars: The View From Here

One morning in late August, United States Representative Sam Farr of California's 17th Congressional District visited Salinas' Jesse G.

Sanchez Elementary School. Standing beside the school's salad bar, Congressman Farr chatted with students, staff, California Department of Education officials and local constituents about his goal that more schools have a salad bar.

On September 9th, Congressman Farr again found himself in the spotlight next to a salad bar, but this time in the middle of the historic Caucus Room of the Cannon House Office Building in Washington. This salad bar, overflowing with a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, was the centerpiece of the annual Fresh Festival on Capitol Hill and made a strong public statement about the United Fresh-led policy initiative to ensure every school in America has a salad bar. The salad bar in the Cannon Caucus Room served a special purpose: To show all members of Congress that salad bars are one of the simplest and most direct ways to increase student access to fresh fruits and vegetables. As members of Congress and their staffs enjoyed their salads, it became easy to realize how effective the salad bar can be as a tool to improve the school food environment, increase consumption of nutritious fresh fruits and vegetables and create more healthful eating habits and healthier kids.

After the event, United donated the salad bar from the Fresh Festival to Washington's Elsie Whitlow Stokes Public Charter School. Now, 320 elementary school students are enjoying fresh salad every school day.

It's a great start, but imagine the potential impact of a salad bar in each of the more than 100,000 schools in the United States. More than 30 million students in America would have ready access to fresh fruits and vegetables in their school lunch five days a

week. Consumption and healthy eating habits would increase exponentially as students across the country eat more fresh fruits and vegetables and schools become



Rep. Sam Farr (D-Calif.) and LaTisha Savoy of the District of Columbia Public Schools Office of Wellness and Nutrition Services enjoy the school salad bar at United's Fresh Festival on Capitol Hill, Sept. 9 in Washington.

the epicenters of a movement toward healthier American children.

But why does the salad bar work? It is no secret that kids crave independence in their decision-making. Salad bars are so popular with kids because they provide that sought-after independence by offering a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and empowering them to make fun and nutritious choices. Research has proven, time and time again, that when presented with the option of a salad bar in the cafeteria, kids will eat more fruits and vegetables. What's more, salad bars are one of the simplest and most direct ways to increase children's consumption of a broad range of fresh produce and instill a lifetime love of fruits and vegetables at an early age.

The benefits of a salad bar in every school are many from a business standpoint as well. When kids eat more produce, schools need to purchase more produce. So, expanding salad bars to every school cafeteria also creates the potential for real growth in fresh produce sales.

How do we get there from here? On a high-profile level, Congress and the Obama Administration have echoed the calls from parents and nutrition advocates for more healthful school meals, and are focused on increasing children's consumption of fruits and vegetables. It is expected that Rep. Farr will introduce legislation this fall encouraging a salad bar in every American school cafeteria. This legislation is a critical next step in the drive toward healthier kids. In a nation where children consume less than half of the recommended produce for good health, school salad bars provide a significant opportunity to improve children's eating habits and well-being.

Last month, more than 400 United members and friends gathered around the salad bar in the Cannon Caucus Room as part of three days of public policy discussions, then returned to their communities to spread the message, involve their colleagues and engage their counterparts. Energized and ready to take action, many offered to purchase salad bars for local schools that could not afford them. Contributing a salad bar to a local school is a tangible way to help that school serve more fresh produce and perhaps even become your customer.

All child nutrition programs will be reauthorized by Congress within the next six months. Now is the time to tell your members of Congress that this legislation needs to include a national school salad bar policy — a policy that directs USDA to promote school salad bars as an effective strategy to increase children's fruit and vegetable consumption. Talk to your school superintendent, school board or principal. Continuing the movement for a salad bar in every school on both the national and local levels is an effective way to support our work toward the attainable goal of increasing fruit and vegetable consumption among children.

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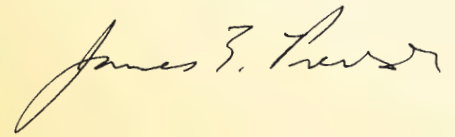
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A Moment Of Thanks

Last year when the produce industry gathered for the PMA Fresh Summit Convention in Orlando the world stood at a precipice: Would the economy collapse? Was a new Great Depression imminent? There was widespread and legitimate fear about the stability of our financial system.

A year has passed, the crisis was stabilized, the government changed, and although it would be foolish to say we are out of the woods yet – unemployment is high, smaller banks are failing regularly, there are risks hidden in commercial real estate loans and credit card receivables – still and all, there is palpable sense of relief, a sense that the end of the world is not near.

PRODUCE BUSINESS was founded at the PMA convention held in San Francisco back in 1985. The fact that the same entrepreneurial team that started the magazine runs it today has always struck me as an extraordinary advantage in the writing and editing of a magazine dedicated to an industry. After all, it means we have gone through the same challenges and see the same opportunities as the industry we are a part of.

Sweating out a payroll, seeking capital, having a bank pull a line of credit... these are integral parts of the entrepreneurial experience and they inform our coverage in a way that would be difficult to duplicate had we not had these experiences ourselves.

This year I learned to appreciate, in a way I had not before, the caliber of people I'm privileged to work with. Advertising is an easy thing to cut because the benefits accrue over long periods of time, whereas the expense is immediate. If you think the world is coming to an end, cutting advertising is a rational response. Yet the issue you hold in your hands is larger both in pages and in sales dollars than last year's issue. That is a formidable achievement in 2009 — almost unheard of in publishing — and with even greater growth at our sister publication, the online Perishable Pundit, it speaks exceptionally well of the world-class team that has coalesced around bringing you the information and insights, the intellectual and informational tools, to do your job or run your business better.

As CEO and editor-in-chief, I try to do my part, but the secret all CEOs learn as their organizations grow is that they can't do that much. I can allocate capital from project to project and I work hard to disseminate information from one part of the company to the other and, of course, I try to hire exceptional people of integrity, ability and commitment.

I endeavor to set a personal example of industry commitment plus demonstrate a personal commitment to being world class in my own writing. In the end, though, with all our modern management systems, with all the Peter Drucker books I've read, success or failure is in the hands of people who have to draw their motivation from the deep recesses of personal commitment to excellence.

The team has grown. Once it was just my old fraternity brother, Ken Whitacre, with whom I founded this journal. Now there are many others:

- Eric Nieman, our associate publisher, who has carried the PRODUCE BUSINESS banner into battle for decades, and Ellen Rosenthal, whose genuine love for her clients and the industry knows no bounds;
- Mira Slott and James Elmer, who have helped make the Perishable Pundit an international phenom;
- Bill Martin and Sandy Lee, whose decades in the industry have earned them a loyal following;
- Jennifer Kramer and Amy Shannon, two wordsmiths who bring youthful energy and perspectives to the magazine;
- Jennifer Jordan, who has taken to the industry like a fish to water, and

Melissa Miller, a "newbie" who has quickly brought organizational skills and personal integrity to bear that has helped us all;

- My long time executive assistant, Fran Gruskin, who I would trust with my right arm, and Jackie LoMonte, the quiet giant who gets us where we need to be and equips us with what we need;

- Diana Levine, who typeset the very first issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS and now brings an insistence on old-world values to our modern offices;

- Shaunn Alderman brings the beauty of flowers to our business magazine;

- Jackie Tucker, Freddy Pulido and Joanna Armstrong take blank pages and create great designs;

- Kelly Roskin gets the magazine mailed to the people who want it;

- Jason Kahan turns electrons into works of art;

- And, my wife, Debbie, who ensures we do it all without breaking any laws!

During a year when you couldn't open a newspaper without reading about another magazine declaring bankruptcy or shutting its doors, this team of professionals rose, en masse, and, rejecting all talk of decline, declared: "Not on my watch!" The result is the record-breaking issue before you and my deep and abiding respect, admiration and appreciation for the privilege of working with such winners.

Of course, even the best team couldn't do it alone and so on this 24th anniversary of the founding of PRODUCE BUSINESS, it is fitting to take a moment out to thank our advertisers, who have provided the crucial sustenance that lets us deliver the industry service we do.

And, of course, to thank you for reading. A magazine without readers is useless and dead, but your sharing of your time with us brings life to our words as they are transformed to ideas and actions to advance your work.

I try to take lessons from each year and I think I learned a big one over the past 12 months. It is that despairing is an emotion for those who have not come to fully appreciate the enormous capacity and creativity of the human spirit to overcome. The challenge in business is always to tap into that spirit, for in the face of such power there are no obstacles, only opportunities.

May we all be worthy of our opportunities.

This year I learned to appreciate, in a way I had not before, the caliber of people I'm privileged to work with.

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Celebrating 60 Years!

As many of you are reading this column at Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) 2009 Fresh Summit International Convention & Exposition, I'll extend my annual greeting: Welcome, welcome home to Fresh Summit.

The 2009 Fresh Summit marks a particularly noteworthy year, as the fruit and vegetable community gathers after a year spent largely under a cloud of the most difficult economic times in decades. Fortunately, most leading economic experts see this dark cloud beginning to lift, and the economic indicators appear to bear that out.

In my business travels and many conversations with industry leaders across the United States and all around the world, I listen to people share ideas that spur innovation. What I've sensed recently is the dawning of brighter days ahead. I've also been reminded how the community of fruit and vegetable industry members draws closer and proves even more important in times of crisis. It is this community that sets PMA's Fresh Summit apart from other fruit and vegetable conventions, making Fresh Summit as much about the trade of ideas, best practices and relationships as it is about the trade of fresh fruits and vegetables. The intangible value of insights and information shared there is today — and will be increasingly tomorrow — as critical as the products themselves.

As one of the largest international events solely dedicated to fruit, vegetables and floral, this year's Fresh Summit is expected to draw an estimated 17,000-plus attendees from more than 50 countries spanning the globe. The scope and energy of the Fresh Summit community is astounding. It's what makes being in Anaheim the best way to stay abreast of so many forces driving this business. So welcome home to the opportunities this convention offers, from business marketing and networking, to learning and professional development.

But there's yet another reason the 2009 Fresh Summit is particularly noteworthy. It's PMA's 60th Fresh Summit, and we're celebrating. But we aren't celebrating PMA. We're

celebrating you — our members. PMA members and volunteer leaders have helped make it the strong, responsive and growing organization it is today. Yes, I say *growing*. Because at this 60th Fresh Summit, PMA proudly announces the formation of the association's first international affiliate: PMA Australia-New Zealand. This affiliate exemplifies PMA's growth in direct response to member support, feedback and needs.

PMA A-NZ rises in reply to our Australia/New Zealand Country Council's request for a stronger and more structured PMA presence in the region. Simply put, the affiliate helps the association better serve its Australia and New Zealand members through enhanced resources and a formal structure. As I told the audience in May at our Fresh Connections conference in Sydney, our partnership is evolving into this next phase because there is no greater common interest for our industry than strengthening the global fresh fruit and vegetable supply chain and building better connections internationally.

PMA A-NZ is independently incorporated in Australia, and will serve the entire supply chain, from seed to store to table. The affiliate will be run by an elected board of directors of industry leaders from Australia and New Zealand, offering programs and services targeted for PMA members in those two countries. Thanks to input on a needs-assessment survey given by our members there, the affiliate's new board already has its main areas of focus, which include networking; global and domestic information and trends; and analysis and response to major issues pressing the industry such as scarce water resources, scarce talent, the impact of the global economic downturn and increasing supply chain costs. PMA truly is thinking globally and acting locally, whether in Australasia or in the United States, where our U.S. Fresh Connections events deliver the benefits of networking, information and business solutions close to home.

Speaking of building better international connection, the PERISHABLE PUNDIT deserves a bit of credit. It's wonderful to find his words



attracting an increasingly global readership. This expanded readership further connects the world's fruit and vegetable supply-chain, circulates more ideas and best practices and helps strengthen our industry's community. Let's also not forget that PRODUCE BUSINESS was launched at Fresh Summit more than two decades ago, and its growth has paralleled that of PMA's flagship gathering.

Regardless of where on the globe you live and do business, you can count on Fresh Summit as your home for a 60-year tradition of business marketing, networking, learning and professional development. As we've experienced challenges through this tough economy, Fresh Summit is a place to which we draw closer in crises. It's where ideas are discovered and developed, and it's a place where we lay the foundation for a community — a community here at PMA's Fresh Summit, and a community for our global businesses year-round. Welcome home to Fresh Summit, welcome home to all the support and opportunities this unique community offers during this week and throughout the year.



Combustion of Commerce

*There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.*

— Julius Caesar Act 4, scene 3, 218-224

This writer has traveled far and seen much and has found value in many things. It is, however, worth noting on the occasion of the 60th annual Produce Marketing Association Convention and Exposition or, as the marketing folks dubbed it some years ago, Fresh Summit, that there is nothing remotely like this event in the entire world.

If we could somehow place ourselves back at that first humble meeting of the Produce Prepackaging Association in New York City, we could imagine how improbable this month's assemblage in Anaheim would seem.

If we could stand in line with a young Bob Carey, PMA's first chief executive (and only employee) as he stood in the military recruitment office signing up for the reserves as PMA had no pension plan and he was uncertain how he would live in his old age — the enormity of this gathering would astound us.

Or if we could be flies on the wall at that meeting when PMA's board went hat-in-hand to another produce trade association and pleaded that they might merge, only to be rejected — how unlikely the conclave in Anaheim would have appeared.

For students of business, the growth of PMA is instructive, for it was not accidental. A specific strategy was drafted to align the association with key buying segments of the trade and then to capitalize on that buyer involvement with marketing and networking events, Fresh Summit being preeminent among them,

That strategy was framed a long time ago, and for a generation now, PMA has been working diligently to broaden its scope and

make sure members did not define the organization as just a long weekend in October.

Yet for all of PMA's efforts to diversify, it has been like running a race with a never-ending finish line, for the PMA Convention and Exhibition has been growing so consistently and so enormously that even extensive growth by PMA in other areas can barely keep up.

PMA's initial strategy to attract buyers tied in with the switch from rail to truck transport and the rise of self-supply by major supermarket chains, so an industry that had been accustomed to indirect relationships with buyers through wholesalers, brokers and auctions found itself on a wave of outreach to retailers — and PMA surfed it perfectly.

This created a critical mass at the annual convention and like some kind of super-powerful breeder-reactor, the mass itself became the attraction and the number of exhibitors and attendees grew ever larger.

Of course, there are other events and many find value in them. It is also true many even prefer less populated venues, but Fresh Summit is unique for the exact same reason that New York City, London, Tokyo or Shanghai are unique — because there is a stimulus in the diversity of attendees and activities that creates the milieu for creativity, for learning and, yes, for making a connection.

Events that are simply trade shows or events where there is no critical mass of hotel rooms encouraging hospitality suites, dinners and late night conversations at the bar may be useful for business, but they are far less congenial to the brainstorming and bonding crucial to business breakthroughs than a multi-faceted event such as Fresh Summit.

The fact that the Australian and New Zealand produce industries are looking to affiliate more closely with PMA is hardly surprising. Fresh Summit is the brightest light in the produce galaxy and just as a moth is drawn to the flame, so, too, are those distant outposts of western civilization — of what Winston Churchill called our brethren among the “English-Speaking Peoples” — drawn to the font of knowledge, the sparkle of energy

There is a stimulus in the diversity of attendees and activities that creates the milieu for creativity, for learning and, yes, for making a connection.

and the combustion of commerce that is Fresh Summit.

The details of the new PMA A-NZ are bound to get lots of attention, yet they are not as important as the connection dictated by common interests and good friendship.

The produce industry is not an easy business. Every day, practically every company has issues to deal with reflecting the perishability of the product and the role of Mother Nature in the often serendipitous conduct of the trade.

The Internet, Skype and remote conferencing have made the world and the industry smaller, but no amount of electrons buzzing around the planet can lubricate a sticky business moment like the experience of having met first-hand, having broken bread together, or the knowledge that you will see your business partner again at next year's event.

PRODUCE BUSINESS was launched at PMA back in 1985, the effort of hopeful entrepreneurs to find a tide to ride. Now, with the PERISHABLE PUNDIT, we send a beacon to the entrepreneurs and executives of the produce industry in every hamlet of America and every corner of every country across the globe: Come to America, come to Fresh Summit, for if there is a tide awaiting your ventures, your enterprise, your dreams, you shall find it rising here.



Advantage Shifts To Production

Word that C.H. Robinson has acquired Rosemont Farms and its sister company, Quality Logistics, could be easily seen as just another press release in the endless flow of acquisitions, mergers, spin-offs, etc., that constitute the bubbling cauldron of activity defining the produce industry.

Of course, in and of itself, such news would be inspiring. Andrew Schwartz, the third generation scion of a Brooklyn, NY, wholesaling family, quits the family business and seeks his fortune in Florida. He works a few places in the industry, does more than make a living, and with his friend, Frank Segui, and his father-in-law, Don Brodie, he launches Rosemont Farms to sell eastern vegetables. Before he hits 40 years of age, the company becomes not only a leader in the field, but a company that the NASDAQ-listed, Fortune 500 behemoth from Minnesota wants to own.

C.H. Robinson is unusual in the industry, as it has shown an uncanny ability to remake itself to stay in sync with where the industry is moving. When this author was a young buck cutting his eyeteeth on the business in the Hunts Point Market, C.H. Robinson had an office down the hall. It functioned as a broker, and the primary difference between C.H. Robinson and any other broker was simply that it had many offices around the country.

Yet in the ensuing decades, the produce operations of C.H. Robinson were transformed as it developed technology enabling it to serve as the “front-end” of a Wal-Mart supply chain that would forever transform the way produce procurement was done. With the development of the Corporate Procurement and Distribution Services (CPDS) Division, it built a model in produce where it did not own production — not unlike the model it developed in transportation where it is a leading, non-asset-based transportation company.

Yet industries evolve and the acquisition of Rosemont Farms, following up on its acquisition of FoodSource in 2005, is a clear sign the model is about to shift. Or perhaps swing is a better word, for the industry pendulum tends to move back and forth over generational periods to place primacy on production or on the buyer.

Back during those salad days this writer spent on Hunts Point, we functioned as an importer and exporter as well as a wholesaler. During most of that period, on our import deal especially, power in the industry went to the one who controlled the product.

We were among the first companies to import Dutch colored peppers. Supermarkets would call and beg for an allocation. My father pleaded with countless visitors to our offices to grow melons

in the Caribbean and Central America, for we could sell more than what we had. We put enormous efforts into securing Chilean supplies because, once again, we could sell all we could get.

We used to run networks of trucks from New York across the country, carrying Greek figs, Italian chestnuts, French Granny Smith apples, Belgian endive, Italian radicchio, plus many other items. The shocking thing is we used to sit with order cards on the desk for weeks as we had the orders, but we either didn't have product or we didn't have transport to get LTL shipments to the old Perry Meyers in Minnesota or Grant Hunt in California. The buyers complained, but they let us wait since they had no alternative.

Those days passed. Production rose in Chile and the Caribbean; transportation options proliferated. Soon, we were begging the

Chileans not to ship small plums and pleading with Caribbean melon producers to ensure perfect packing before they shipped. Oversupply was the word. Power in the industry shifted from the one that controlled the product to the one that controlled the purchase order.

It was in this environment that many firms thrived, none more so than C.H. Robinson, as somehow this giant, which didn't own a cucumber patch or an orange tree, took over whole categories for major retailers.

Yet, another change is now upon us and the pendulum of market power is moving back to the producer. So the acquisition of Rosemont Farms is best understood as a manifestation of C.H. Robinson's conviction that it needs to get closer to production. It needs to have the capacity to ensure it can always get product because, otherwise, having control of the PO won't mean much.

What is motivating this sea of change in the industry — this power shift? It is hard to say

but, perhaps, like Atlas holding up the world and then — in Ayn Rand's vision — shrugging, the producers of America's produce have been so beaten up by audits, food safety scares, traceability requirements and sustainability demands that they realize they can't do it alone anymore.

Perhaps our growers have simply realized they cannot carry all these burdens if they can't make a profit and so they are, increasingly, planting for pre-sold programs rather than speculating. But if they don't speculate, it means there will be no product around for buyers who are not on program, or what little product is available will cost a fortune.

C.H. Robinson is buying companies to gain more expertise in day-to-day produce procurement. It is upping the ante in the produce supply game. Others will also have to ante up, or many will fold. **pb**

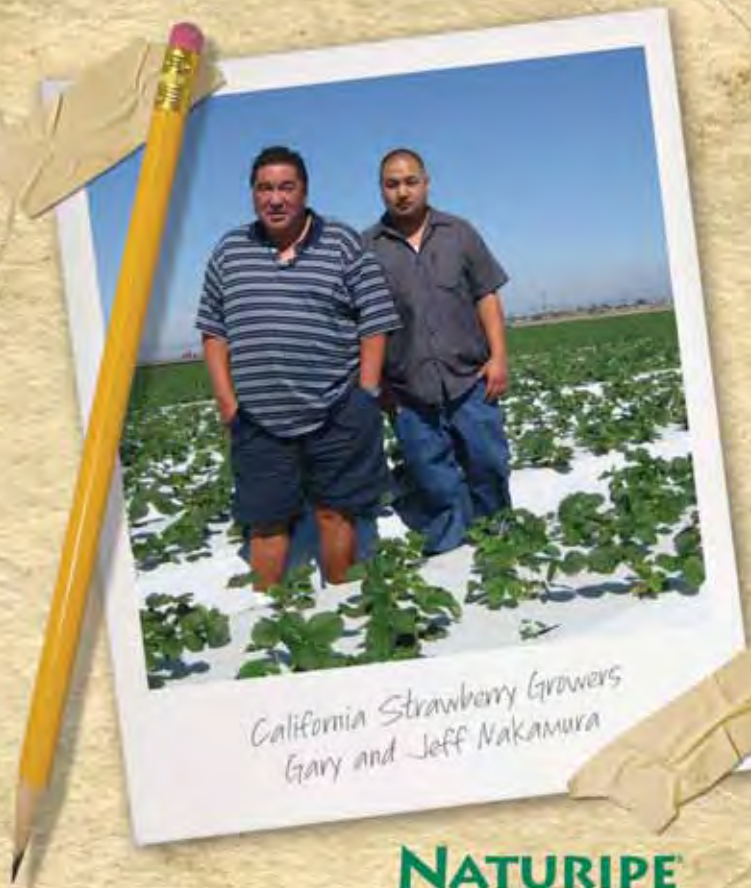
The acquisition of Rosemont Farms is best understood as a manifestation of C.H. Robinson's conviction that it needs to get closer to production.



Naturipe Farms' Locally Grown Program



Meet Gary Nakamura. Gary is a second-generation strawberry farmer in Oxnard, California. Gary's father, James, now in his 80s, started farming in 1952 with 20 acres. Today, Gary oversees about 420 acres and is bringing his son Jeff into the family business. At 23, Jeff is learning from his father that quality is of utmost importance. "I would rather farm for quality than volume," says Gary. We're proud to have the Nakamura family as part of our family of farmers.



California Strawberry Growers Gary and Jeff Nakamura

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sales@naturipefarms.com naturipefarms.com

Supporting Locally Grown PDS Programs at Retail with:

- * In-Store PDS and Posters
- * Events and Grower Visits
- * On-Pack Regional Logos



SUNTREAT PACKING & SHIPPING CO. LINDSAY, CA

Al Imbimbo was hired as vice president of sales. He spent the past five years working as director of sales for national accounts for Sunkist. Prior to Sunkist, he worked for Paramount Citrus as its director of sales for 11 years. He will focus on Suntreat's aggressive growth strategy, which emphasizes the introduction of new varieties and enhanced speciality citrus products.



MANN PACKING CO. INC. SALINAS, CA

Mark McHale was hired as the Eastern regional sales manager. He brings 22 years of experience in the food industry with national, branded consumer packaged good manufacturers. He most recently worked as Eastern regional business manager for Mariani Packing Company. He will be responsible for assisting with targeted business development projects.



SUNNY COVE CITRUS LLC ORANGE COVE, CA

Ron Wynn was hired as sales manager. He brings more than 34 years of experience, beginning as a USDA inspector and advancing into sales and management responsibilities. Previously employed by Sun World, Ballantine Produce and several others, he has a rich history in dealing with the trade, selling traditional produce items, new items and proprietary produce items.



WADA FARMS MARKETING GROUP LLC IDAHO FALLS, ID

Anthony Totta was hired as an industry consultant for the Dole Sweet Potatoes division. His duties will include building business relationships, providing sales support for participating retailers and ensuring a safe, reliable supply of premium quality Dole sweet potatoes for wholesale distributors and grocers nationwide.



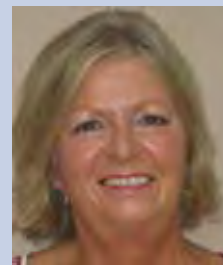
COMBS PRODUCE DALLAS, TEXAS

Tim Rogers was hired to work in procurement and sales. He most recently worked for Sunkist Growers. A second generation produce veteran, he has delivered valuable solutions to retail, foodservice, wholesale and transportation customers for more than two decades.



RIVERIDGE PRODUCE MARKETING INC. SPARTA, MI

Pam Schwallier was hired as a sales associate. She brings more than 30 years of experience in apple sales, and has been connected to the apple industry since she was a teenager.



Erick Taylor was hired to the freight sales team. For 15 years, he has serviced the transportation and logistics needs of his customers, spending the last five years managing his own trucking company. His skills in transportation management will be utilized in his new position.



Russ Kluting was hired to work in logistics and transportation. He previously worked for Dietrich Orchards in Conklin, MI.



NORTHERN PLAINS POTATO GROWERS ASSOCIATION EAST GRAND FORKS, MN

Chuck Gunnerson was named president. He has served as interim president since October, 2008, and possesses a vast knowledge of the potato industry. He previously served as past chairman of the Red River Valley Potato Growers Association, president of the National Potato Council and chairman of the Northern Crops Council



Sally Lutz was hired as plant manager of Riveridge Packing LLC, also known as Alpine Apple Haus packing facility, in Sparta. She brings more than 20 years of experience in packing Michigan apples.



DRISCOLL'S WATSONVILLE, CA

John Johnston was hired as director of blueberry business. He brings more than 20 years of experience in the consumer packaged goods industry. In his newly created position, he will be responsible for managing blueberries during every stage of production and distribution. He will evaluate and oversee product quality, packaging, pricing and distribution.



KERIAN MACHINES GRAFTON, ND

Kevin Cary was hired as an engineer and sales manager. He graduated in 2005 from Spokane, WA-based Gonzaga University in civil engineering. An Oregon native, he previously worked as an engineer for a company in Spokane.



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Reader Service # 141

ELECTRONIC DATA LOGGER

DeltaTRAK, Pleasanton, CA, launched FlashLink VU, an electronic data logger that features a large LCD display and downloads data via a USB adapter. The LCD panel shows when the logger is active, stopped or in DeltaTRAK's patented ShadowLog mode. Numerous trip statistics are available for viewing on the LCD display.



Reader Service No. 300

PICKLED RED PEPPERS

Tanimura & Antle, Salinas, CA, introduced Peri-Peri Peppadrops, cherry-sized red peppers that are pickled with Piri-Piri spice native to Africa by way of Portugal and Barbados. Planted in July, harvested in December and processed in San Miguel Allende, Mexico, Peri-Peri Peppadrops are packed in 16-ounce retail jars and 91.7-ounce foodservice pouches.



Reader Service No. 301

NEW PACKAGING DESIGN

Ocean Mist Farms, Castroville, CA, unveiled a comprehensive redesign of its packaging for all of its 20 vegetable commodities. The new design focuses on produce visibility, nutrition information and consistent graphic design. It also features a nutritional benefit message and custom nutrition panel for each commodity.



Reader Service No. 302

FORM-FILL SEAL MACHINE

WeighPack Systems Inc., Montreal, Quebec, Canada, developed VerTek 2400, a vertical form-fill seal machine for large bags. Ideal for bagging agricultural products, the VerTek 2400 creates pillow, gusset and carry-handle bags from roll stock film. It can seal either polyethylene or laminated films, and it handles 12- to 14-inch wide bags.



Reader Service No. 303

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BARD VALLEY OFFERS MEDJOOL DATES

Capture significant incremental holiday sales with Medjool Dates from Bard Valley, California. Medjool dates have as many powerful antioxidants as blueberries. Bard Valley Medjool Dates are packed in 8- and 12-ounce size tubs that can be merchandised upright or flat.



Reader Service No. 304

RPE EXPANDS PRODUCT LINE

Formerly known as Russet Potato Exchange, RPE, Bancroft, WI, has partnered with The Cranberry Network LLC to expand its Wisconsin-grown product line to include cranberries. Part of the company's new identity includes a new logo and tagline, "Responsible Farming. Innovative Solutions." RPE's cranberries are available now and throughout the winter holiday season.



Reader Service No. 305

TRAITECH OFFERS CALIFORNIA TRAYS

Traitech Industries Inc., Vaughan, Ontario, Canada, manufactures California Trays, a unique produce merchandising system made using food grade, low-density polyethylene with modifiers to give it the elasticity required for use in a refrigerated case. The company works with retailers to fit their specific needs for stock rotation, inventory, labor control and merchandising effectiveness.



Reader Service No. 306

FRIEDA'S LAUNCHES ONLINE TOOL FOR SPECIALTY PRODUCE

Frieda's Inc., Los Alamitos, CA, offers Retailers' Resource, a comprehensive online tool designed to make business more profitable, simple and successful. Accessible through Frieda's Web site, the tool provides information on seasonal opportunities, product assortment and availability, and marketing materials to help grow specialty produce business.



Reader Service No. 307

VILLAGE FARMS DEBUTS NEW WEB SITE

Village Farms, Eatontown, NJ, debuts its new Web site with an emphasis on environmental sustainability. It features updated product photographs and nutritional facts for each of its products, a consumer section focused on healthful, easy-to-prepare recipes, a consumer feedback forum and an area on detailing grower information.



Reader Service No. 308

MANN PACKING PARTNERS WITH MINUTE RICE

Mann Packing Company, Salinas, CA, teamed up with Minute Rice to promote healthful family cooking during the back-to-school season. The promotion includes a \$1 offer off any two Minute Rice products with the purchase of select packages of Mann's fresh-cut vegetables. The coupon was applied to 1 million Mann products.



Reader Service No. 309

DOMEX PARTICIPATES IN RELAY FOR LIFE

Domex Superfresh Growers, Yakima, WA, participated in the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life in Selah, WA, in an effort to raise awareness of the battle against cancer. A total of \$65,301 has been raised to date. Domex participants included employees from its compliance offices, sales team, marketing department, events and travel.



Reader Service No. 310

EUROFRESH REDESIGNS VEGGIE LABELS

Eurofresh Farms, Willcox, AZ, redesigned packaging labels for its fresh tomatoes and cucumbers to inform consumers about growing practices, care and handling tips. The Fresh Idea labels will also help retailers educate consumers about the best uses for each variety as well as care instructions, including best temperatures for storing their tomatoes.



Reader Service No. 311

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RED RIVER VALLEY POTATO SHIPPERS ASSIST CHARITY

Red River Valley potato shippers, along with the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association, East Grand Forks, MN, hope to raise \$250,000 to be donated to the National Breast Cancer Foundation. Fresh potatoes shipped from the Red River Valley of North Dakota and Minnesota will feature a pink ribbon tag in an effort to raise awareness about breast cancer.



Reader Service No. 312

CAIA Uses DIETICIANS TO COMMUNICATE NUTRITION BENEFITS

The Chilean Avocado Importers Association, Washington, D.C., is working with two registered dietitians, Cynthia Sass and David Grotto (right), who will act as spokespeople for the 2009-2010 season. The dietitians will assist CAIA in communicating the health benefits of Chilean avocados. CAIA is including their information in all programs, including merchandising efforts at retail, advertising and its new Web site.



Reader Service No. 314

ALL STATE PACKERS SWITCHES TO THE OCTALITE CARTON

All State Packers, Lodi, CA, switched to the Octalite carton, manufactured by Memphis, TN-based International Paper. The Octalite design solves some issues including supply reliability, safety concerns due to the added weight of the RPCs and process-related issues at the plant.



Reader Service No. 316

SIMCO NOW OFFERS POMEGRANATES

Simonian Fruit Co., Fowler, CA, is now offering early-season pomegranate varieties, such as Early Foothill and Early Wonderful. Seasonal treats, SIMCO pomegranates are available in a wide variety of packaging options, including bulk bins, club packs, euro trays and 2-layer tray packs. This year's crop contains large-sized, high-quality fruit with beautiful red coloring.



Reader Service No. 318

MOCON ESTABLISHES NEW IN-HOUSE PACKAGE TESTING LABS

Mocon Inc., Minneapolis, MN, established multiple in-house package testing laboratories that allow companies to test-drive instrumentation with their objectives before they purchase. The opportunity to "try before you buy" establishes that the instrument is the correct solution for a company's specific situation.



Reader Service No. 320

STEMILT KICKS OFF PEAR SEASON

Stemilt Growers Inc., Wenatchee, WA, kicked off pear season by announcing the harvest of consumer favorites, such as Bartlett and D'Anjou, as well as specialty varieties, such as Asian pears, to provide retailers with a big boost this fall. Nearly two-thirds of Asian pears are organically grown and all are fat-free, an excellent source of fiber and full of antioxidants.



Reader Service No. 322

CORRECTION

In our August issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, Sam Sleiman, co-owner of Accu-Label Inc., based in Leamington, Ontario, was misquoted. Accu-Label manufactures and provides the Orb-it G2 Print and Apply on Demand high-speed labelers. According to the company, now growers can print in real time on a blank fruit label, Julian date codes, GTIN numbers, date codes and any traceability information.

NMB OFFERS NEW TOOLS FOR RETAILERS

The National Mango Board, Orlando, FL, has expanded its collection of marketing materials available to retailers on its Web site. The range of new offerings includes consumer insights, sales trends data, handling and merchandising tips and updates to the Mango Marketing Toolkit, a graphics resource center.



Reader Service No. 313

CALIFORNIA GIANT SPONSORS CYCLING TEAM

California Giant Berry Farms, Watsonville, CA, has made multiple podium appearances for Cal Giant berries. Justin England (right), the newest champion at Cal Giant, won the 2009 U.S. Elite Criterium Championships in Downers Grove, IL. National coverage of this race and others resulted in high visibility for California Giant and its company-sponsored cycling team.



Reader Service No. 315

COASTLINE BECOMES EXCLUSIVE SHIPPER OF GREENETTES LABEL

Coastline Produce, Salinas, CA, is now the exclusive shipper of Greenettes label products, including green leaf, red leaf and romaine lettuce. Since 1964, Greenettes label has been known to be at the pinnacle of product quality. Coastline is a year-round shipper of more than 25 fresh vegetable commodities.



Reader Service No. 317

MACEY'S MARKET EARNS DOLE'S LARGEST BANANA DISPLAY TITLE

Macey's Market, Providence, UT, reclaimed the title of "World's Largest Banana Display" after successfully completing a Dole Banana display with more than 165,000 Dole bananas, exceeding 66,000 pounds of fruit. The record-breaking display took four hours to construct and featured Dole's Bobby Banana who greeted consumers.



Reader Service No. 319

HAB OFFERS DISTINCT RECIPES FOR ALL OCCASIONS

HAB, Irvine, CA, has established an array of recipes incorporating avocados on its Web site, along with the Foodservice Guide to Fresh Hass Avocados, offering a year's worth of menu suggestions. With back-to-school events, seasonal games and upcoming holidays, retailers can capitalize on fresh Hass avocados in a variety of applications.



Reader Service No. 321

'TOP CHEF MASTER' TO APPEAR AT APEAM BOOTH

The Avocado Producers and Exporting Packers Association of Michoacán, Los Angeles, announced that Rick Bayless, winner of Bravo's hit reality cooking show *Top Chef Masters*, will appear at the Avocados from Mexico booth on October 3 at the Produce Marketing Association's Fresh Summit in Anaheim, CA. At the booth, Bayless will host two cooking demonstrations and offer cooking tips.



Reader Service No. 323

CORRECTION

In our September issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, Jim Allen, president of the New York Apple Association, based in Fishers, NY, was misquoted. This year's crop of New York apples will meet or exceed the 5-year average of close to 30 million bushels. New York apples are available in the market place generally year-round.

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Wal-Mart's Marketside Deli Concept

From Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit
September 15, 2009



JIM PREVOR'S
PERISHABLE PUNDIT

Wal-Mart's test of a small format store, which we profiled both on January 18, 2008 (*Wal-Mart Takes on Tesco With 20,000-Square-Foot Stores*) and May 14, 2008 (*Will Wal-Mart's Energy Efficient/Hispanic Store Make A Real Contribution?*), has been problematic. Marketside never opened its fifth store in Phoenix and its California stores haven't opened either. There are many explanations, but one thing is for sure... the problem is not that the initial four stores are making too much money.

Of course, this was always just a toe-in-the-water for Wal-Mart; unlike Tesco, Wal-Mart was always clear it was doing a test, not a launch.

Big companies sometimes have a way of benefiting from new concept development other than building retail stores.

The readers of the Pundit represent an unusual group of well-traveled and astute observers of the industry; one prominent industry member, who is part of this Pundit Intelligence Network, sent one notice of the way Wal-Mart is leveraging its Marketside brand and experimenting in ready meals:

Perhaps this is more of an item for your DELI BUSINESS sister publication, BUT I wanted to pass along this update on Marketside!

Spending some time wandering around Dallas on a planned 12-hour layover, I went into the Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market on Coit Road in Richardson, Texas, and there was a flyer by the deli with Marketside's name on it. They had a small assortment of Take Out & Heat and cold deli items.

I asked the guy, "How long have you been doing the Marketside deal?"

He asked me, "How do you know about Marketside?"

"I'm from Phoenix and there's a couple of stores in town, but the whole store is Marketside, not just a section as you have here." Ok, I told a fib as I'm not from Phoenix, but it was in the cause of research!

The associate told me this was one of six stores in the Dallas-Fort Worth area that was doing a test of the items. I told him, "You gotta get one of the pizza ovens!" He said that all of the Wal-Mart stores were to have pizza ovens, but it would take a while.

It is an interesting experiment, but also somewhat quizzical. One reason Fresh & Easy has not done well is that its core differentiation — ready meals — has basically flopped. Wal-Mart has a better shot because the high volume of traffic provides a chance to sell enough volume to keep a wide assortment fresh. But, still, while some high-end operations do succeed, in mainstream America, there is just no indication



Wal-Mart is testing its Marketside deli concept within its Neighborhood Markets.

Americans want to buy fresh, ready meals — other than sandwiches, pizza and fried and rotisserie chicken — in supermarket-type venues.

The other question is why use a name nobody in Dallas has ever heard of like Marketside? What is the advantage? Publix uses its GreenWise brand on both a separate store concept, which we discussed on September 21, 2007 (*Publix GreenWise Market To Open For Business*) and on its natural and organic product in its regular stores. But Publix used GreenWise in its regular stores for years before launching the store concept, and GreenWise represents something distinct.

What does Marketside represent?



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APPLE MERCHANDISER OF THE YEAR

King Soopers

Presented by National Apple Month and PRODUCE BUSINESS

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

Innovative promotions... A commitment to offering customers the latest varieties... Abundant displays that are not only eye-catching, but also educational... These are just a few of the ways King Soopers excels in merchandising apples, an accomplishment that earned the Denver, CO-based retailer – and subsidiary of the Cincinnati, OH-headquartered Kroger Co. – the title of 2009 National Apple Month Merchandiser of the Year Award.

King Soopers prides itself in being an innovator in the retail market, especially when it comes to offering consumers the latest and greatest apple varieties.

Jeff Ryg, director of produce and floral, says, “Being first to market with new varieties is important for our guests. They enjoy visiting our stores and finding a delicious new variety. By offering our customers more variety and quality, we entice them back to the store time and time again and thereby create loyal customers.”

Red Prince, marketed by Sparta, MI-based Riveridge Produce Marketing, and Lady Alice, marketed by Yakima, WA-based Rainier Fruit Co., were two new apple varieties King Soopers exclusively sold in its region last season. The retailer puts considerable support behind a new variety’s introduction. “We work hard to offer samples for our guests to taste these new varieties,” says Ryg.

In addition, new apple varieties are showcased in a large display in the produce department’s primary position so it’s the first product consumers see as they enter. A 22- by 28-inch easel sign, made by the chain’s advertising department, stands next to the display informing consumers of the characteristics, flavor traits and suggested uses for the apple. The new apple is also featured in a large block ad in the chain’s sale circular and is a highlighted produce feature for that week.

Last year, King Soopers worked with supply partner, Riveridge Produce Marketing, to introduce the Red Prince apple. “They provided us with a 4- to 5-foot cardboard cutout of a Prince in a red costume to use near the

display,” describes Ryg. “It really caught the attention of our guests. The signage, along with a massive display and samples, really helped us sell this new variety.”

In general, Ryg notes, “We carry as many varieties as we can on the shelf, especially in the fall, and use color breaks to showcase our variety and quality. The fall is also when we’ll run ads on eight to 10 varieties at a time. Multi-variety ads are great because they offer our guests choices and something that appeals to every customer segment, so there’s always good movement.”

King Soopers always takes advantage of market buys. “Each year, the crop can present different opportunities and we take advantage of these on a regular basis,” asserts Ryg. “These give our guests a great apple at its flavor peak as well as a strong value.”

In the summer, Ryg notes, “Shelf space is at a premium because of all the summer commodities, so we tend to prioritize what varieties we’ll have

for sale. We will try to showcase new crop varieties from New Zealand during the summer to give our guests a great quality apple choice. Jazz, Braeburn and Pink Lady apples are just a few examples.”

In fall months, apples are presented near the front of the produce department

and get high visibility. In some stores, apples are displayed on 12- to 16-foot island display tables. In others, the fruit is merchandized in cherry-stained wooden bins. “We’re always evolving our merchandising,” says Ryg. “The wooden bins present the fruit better. They have better height, so our guests can really see the apple varieties and they create an impressive apple destination.”

King Soopers offers a full variety of organic apples merchandized in a separate display to prevent co-mingling.

When it comes to apple merchandising, Ryg maintains, “The best part of the job is figuring out what could be the next Gala or Honeycrisp and having fun with it at the same time.”

pb



Suzanne Wolter, marketing director for Rainier Fruit Co., Mark Zirkle, president of Rainier Fruit Co., Jeff Ryg, director of produce and floral for King Soopers and Kay Rentzel, director of National Apple Month.

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WATERMELON: Versatility, Value and Fun in the Fall!

The versatility and value of mouth-watering watermelon can last throughout the autumn season. With some creative and fun promotion and menu suggestions you can grow sales and provide a whole new Fall flavor for your customers.

Top quality watermelon is available 12 months out of the year from the U.S. and is especially plentiful from April through October. Watermelon production follows the sun so wherever your watermelons come from, it was summer there when they grew it and harvested it and the flavor of summer is an integral part of a watermelon no matter what time of year it is in the marketplace.

As summer turns to fall, it is still a great time to promote the taste, nutrition and fun of watermelon. And remember, its appeal applies to a wide customer base. Watermelon is enjoyed by people of all ages — adults and kids alike enjoy the sweet flavor and fun presentations, so be sure to merchandise and promote to a wide demographic. Here are some simple and entertaining ideas to help you help customers enjoy watermelon in the fall.

CARVE A WATERMELON

Retail produce departments can get really creative and attract customer attention with a 'Carve a Watermelon Jack O'Melon' promotion. This promotion gives your department the chance to really do something different and fun for the customers and is a great compliment to your traditional pumpkin sales. Some retailers may even want to encourage their own store's creativity by having a 'Carve a Jack O'Melon' Contest among employees or stores.

Providing recipes will help customers utilize the inside of the watermelon and give them additional value for their purchase. Suggestions such as tossing the watermelon in a blender with other fruits to make a delicious smoothie or adding watermelon chunks to a traditional salad with a splash of balsamic vinaigrette will tempt customers' appetites.



Picnic and cross-merchandising ideas can be found on our new blog called What About Watermelon, accessible at watermelon.org. What About Watermelon features watermelon recipes, news and facts — from why knocking on a watermelon to determine ripeness doesn't work to an inside look at life on a watermelon farm. Retailers, foodservice operators, and consumers will all find fascinating and useful information on this blog.

DON'T FORGET GAME TIME

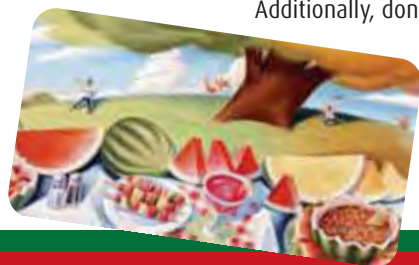
Football season means parties and entertaining. Watermelon is a fantastic party food from being part of a fruit platter to watermelon salsa. Help customers ramp up their party menu by providing menu ideas as well as fresh-cut options using watermelon. The rind can also be carved into a vessel or incorporated into a presentation.



ENCOURAGE FALL PICNICS

Cooler fall weather is a fantastic time to enjoy the great outdoors. Customers can enjoy watermelon on the menu whether they're hiking, biking, or at the family dinner table. Stores can give customers 'Fall Picnic' ideas and use the opportunity to promote watermelon while cross-merchandising other items.

Additionally, don't forget to mention how watermelon is a great re-hydrator, as well as tasty, for customers enjoying all the outdoor Fall activities.



SHOW ITS GREAT VALUE

In these tight economic times when consumers are looking for value, watermelon is a tremendous deal. Retailers and foodservice operators can promote the value proposition of this beneficial fruit by listing pricing on a per-pound or even per serving basis. Educating consumers on the real value will increase sales. On a per-pound basis, watermelon is the cheapest item in the produce section. Additionally, 70 percent of a watermelon is edible and 30 percent is comprised of the rind. For an average 20 pound watermelon priced at approximately \$6.00, 14 pounds is usable watermelon which equals approximately 28 cups at \$0.21 per cup. A whole 20 pound watermelon cut into 2 pound slices results in approximately \$0.60 per slice.



The National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) is based in Orlando, FL, and represents 1,500 growers, shippers and importers. Through research, communications and marketing initiatives, the NWPB is finding new ways to enhance market opportunities for farmers and promote the nutritional, culinary and convenience benefits of watermelon.



The National Watermelon Association (NWA) in Plant City, FL, has members in 30 states and Canada. The purpose of the Association is to promote the best interests of the Watermelon Industry from production to consumption. NWA is constantly seeking improvements in the growing, grading, handling, transportation, distribution and sale of watermelon.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MARKETING EXCELLENCE IN CALIFORNIA

Thank you very much for awarding the Network for a Healthy California Fruit & Veggie Fest the 2009 PRODUCE BUSINESS Marketing Excellence Award [in the August, 2009, issue]. We greatly value our partnership with the produce industry and this award is very much appreciated.



As you may know, one of the four pillars of the Network for a Healthy California is to increase fruit and vegetable consumption.

One of the key channels through which we increase fruit and vegetable consumption is through our retail channel. By working with thousands of grocery stores across California, the Network for a Healthy California's Retail Program aims to facilitate partnerships between neighborhood stores and community health agencies to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables among food stamp eligible Californians.

One of the Retail Program's signature events is the Fruit & Veggie Fest. We greatly value our retail partners and our produce industry partners. Thank you for recognizing this partnership that is so critical toward enhancing the health and well being of all Californians.

Sincerely,

Joe Prickitt, MS, RD
Director
Network for a Healthy California -- Bay
Area Region
San Jose, CA

WRITE US

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ON THE PHONE AGAIN

(Sung to the tune of "On the Road Again," written and performed by Willy Nelson)

BY CLEM RICHARDSON

On the phones again
Just can't wait to get on the phones again
Life I love is sellin' produce to my friends
Just can't wait to get on the phones again

On the phones again
Callin' places that I've never been
Sayin' things that I may never say again
I can't wait to get on the phones again

On the phones again
Like a band of brokers we go through the Blue Book
We're the best of friends
Insisting that the world keep turning our way... and our way
Is on the phones again
Just can't wait to get on the phones again

Interlude (take it boys)

On the phones again
Like a band of brokers we go through the Blue Book
We're the best of friends
Insisting that the world keep turning our
way... and our way

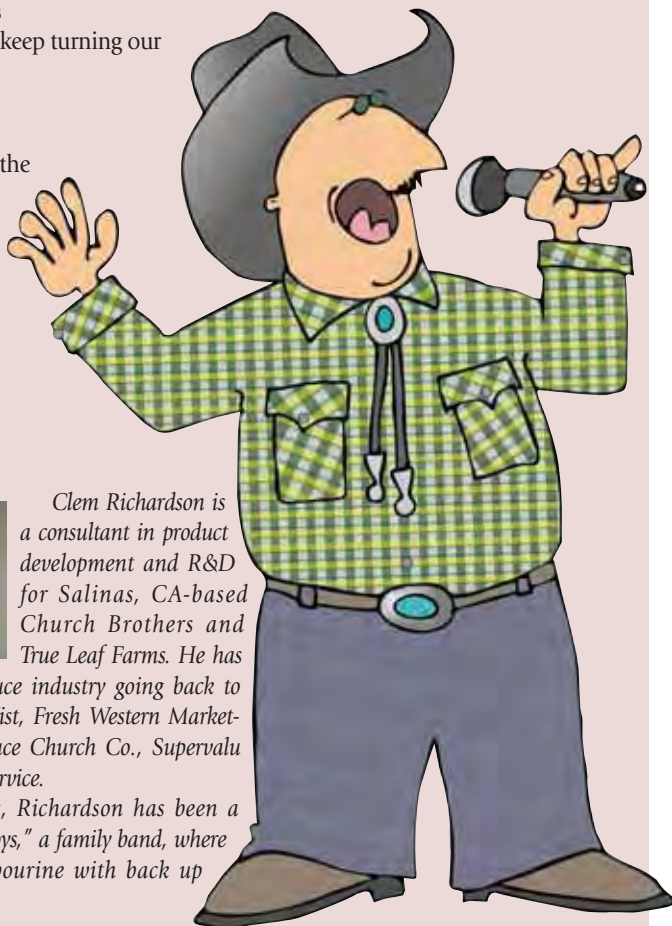
Is on the phones again
Just can't wait to get on the
phones again
I can't wait to get on
the phones again

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Clem Richardson is a consultant in product development and R&D for Salinas, CA-based Church Brothers and True Leaf Farms. He has vast experience in the produce industry going back to 1972, with stints at Fresh Kist, Fresh Western Marketing (now River Ranch), Bruce Church Co., Supervalu and California Perishables Service.

For the past eight years, Richardson has been a member of "The Flat Rock Boys," a family band, where he plays cowbell and tambourine with back up vocals.



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Are Any Lessons Learned From Ocean Spray Trial?

Although The Nolan Network's court victory doesn't resolve Robinson-Patman Anti-Trust issues, nor Jim Nolan's death, both loom large during the trial.

BY BILL MARTIN

It is a beautiful late Autumn afternoon in New England as Jim Nolan loads his custom-made set of golf clubs into the trunk of his car. He is excited about the prospect of getting in a round of golf before the sun sets. Nolan drives a few miles over to the Pine Hills Golf Club, during which time he remarks it may be his last time to play golf for a long time, considering his plans to sue Middleboro, MA-based Ocean Spray Cranberries Inc., his employer of 25 years. He is convinced the company violated the Robinson-Patman Act for allegedly providing favored pricing to one competitor over another after the huge cooperative publicly announced a price for the season for fresh fruit. Just as troubling to Nolan is what he perceives as moves by Ocean Spray management that are damaging the reputation of his wife, Theresa Nolan, and her sales and marketing company, The Nolan Network (TNN).

Nearly six years later — May 29th, 2009 — after the legal fight with the cooperative drags on after Nolan's death, Ocean Spray is found liable for unfair and deceptive business practices. Theresa Nolan has since been awarded over \$2.8 million in damages, legal fees and interest in the case. It took a minimum 11 of the 13 jurors to find Ocean Spray legally responsible for unfair and deceptive business practices.

In a prepared statement, John Isaf, Ocean Spray spokesperson, said, "We are happy the individuals [Richard O'Brien and James Lesser] in the claim were vindicated and the jury found they did nothing wrong. We are disappointed and perplexed on how the jury could still reach a verdict against Ocean Spray. We intend to appeal this decision. We are very confident we will prevail upon appeal."

Ocean Spray wastes little time in filing an appeal. Although O'Brien and Lesser are found not liable in the civil case, Theresa Nolan is appealing this verdict as well. The appeals process may take two years.

Jim Nolan and TNN reported to O'Brien, as well as Lesser, who eventually took over O'Brien's responsibilities relating to fresh fruit. Could O'Brien and Lesser be charged with Robinson-Patman Act anti-trust violations? In a recent phone conversation, a spokesperson at the U.S. Department of Justice said the alleged actions by Ocean Spray, Lesser and O'Brien are something in which the Federal Trade Commission will be "very interested." The FTC has not responded to inquiries by PRODUCE BUSINESS as of the publication's



Theresa and Jim Nolan

editorial deadline.

Although alleged anti-trust violations are never directly addressed in the case, the trial is showered with evidence contending Ocean Spray provided favorable pricing to Costco at the expense of Sam's Club, BJ's and others. It also alleges H.E. Butt (HEB) Grocery Co., of San Antonio, TX, received favorable pricing on fresh cranberries, as well as transportation costs, at the expense of competitors. [Editor's note: For more information about the anti-trust allegations and evidence presented at the trial, please see coverage in the May, 2007, issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS, as well as sister publication, JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT at www.perishablepundit.com/index.php?hot=oceanspray].

Looking back, this September afternoon in 2003 is in fact Nolan's last golf game, although he lives another four-and-a-half years. However, four-and-a-half years is not long enough for redemption in the civil case filed in December, 2003, and thus, consumes the rest of his life. Jim Nolan's ailing heart gives out on the evening of March 2, 2008.

Employed as Ocean's Spray's domestic and international fresh fruit sales manager, Nolan is widely praised for his effectiveness in representing Ocean Spray's interests and forthrightness in dealing

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with the trade. On that golf outing Nolan is not really focusing on his game, as he has not seen this writer in a quite a while and there is a great deal to discuss. It is ironic Nolan even belongs to such an exclusive country club (thanks to the insistence of Theresa), because his frugality is legendary in the produce industry, such as his early days at the *The Packer* when he chose to take New York public buses and subways from Manhattan to the Hunts Point Terminal Market, where he was known as a pioneer in developing and writing profiles of the market, as well as other produce terminals.

Yet one of the most public displays of being penny-pinching occurs later that day where Jim and Theresa reside, Plymouth, MA. Jim Nolan is not waiting for this writer at the house. Instead, he is grocery shopping at the local Shaw's Supermarket Inc. Ready to reap the rewards of diligently clipping coupons from the Sunday paper for months, on this occasion the self-described perfectionist even outdoes himself.

When Nolan finishes his marathon shopping excursion, it is quite an amazing scene at the checkout counter. He pulls out of his pockets large stacks of coupons, handing them to the stunned cashier. As the enormity of Nolan's feat begins to sink in, and the cashier methodically deducts the coupons from the total tab, you can hear the whispers growing in volume from the other shoppers. When the grocery bill is totaled, and the value of the coupons is deducted from the cost of the groceries, Nolan owes the supermarket a dollar and some change!

Fast forwarding to the present, for people who know Jim Nolan's frugal reputation, spending a few hundred thousand dollars on a lawsuit to fight Ocean Spray might seem out of character. But there are things he cherishes more than money, and that is his character, the reputation of his wife of nearly 32 years and that of The Nolan Network.

Even though Theresa Nolan, her company and late husband ultimately prevail in the lawsuit, it comes at a high price. Grant J. Hunt Co. of Oakland, CA, had been Ocean Spray's broker representative in Northern California for many years. The company president and a past chairman of the Produce Marketing Association, Hunt observes, "I am so proud of the jury that delivered justice to the memory of Jim Nolan, because everything he did concerning this entire lawsuit was for the good of Ocean Spray's growers. It was never about himself. It was never about money. I loved that guy. He was a tower of integrity. He always spoke the truth to power. He stood up to them."

Attorney Christopher Murray represent-

ed the Nolans in the lawsuit. He acknowledges that Theresa feels strongly the whole litigation process basically killed her husband. Murray knows it is difficult. "I knew Jim, and from the meetings with him on numerous occasions, his physical and, to a certain extent, his mental health, had been deteriorating because of the wear and tear of the pending trial — and more importantly because of what had occurred," he remarks.

A majority of counts from the plaintiff's complaint were dismissed, but Murray says what they were left with is significant — to deal with the backbone of the case between The Nolan Network and Ocean Spray: the unfair and deceptive business practices.

TNN lost a majority of its business after filing the lawsuit, including accounts with some of the industry's leading firms.

DEFENSE CLOSING ARGUMENTS

The closing arguments of the trial are held on May 29th, a cloudy, chilly day with a drizzling rain that is a prelude of things to come for Ocean Spray, backed by the huge Boston, MA, law firm of Todd & Weld, pitted against The Nolan Network and its one-person law office attorney Christopher Murray, who has brought in one outside attorney, Joe Phelan, for assistance.

Theresa testified that a separation agreement was thrust upon her husband in December of 2000, after he had tried unsuccessfully earlier in the year to keep Ocean Spray from offering Costco a deal without extending it to Costco's competitors. The Nolans allege this special pricing is a viola-

tion of Ocean Spray's own anti-trust policy compliance guide, which Jim had been required to read, sign and abide by in both "the letter and spirit of the law." (Possible penalties for not following this are termination, fines and jail time.)

That separation agreement will effectively result in the firing of Jim, silencing him and keeping either him or his heirs from filing a lawsuit against Ocean Spray. Jim refuses to sign it after a long exile at home where he is told to "think about it." Ocean Spray finally allows him to come back to work until the fall of 2001, when he retires at age 55 and takes over the sales management of Ocean Spray's fresh cranberry business through TNN.

In his closing arguments, attorney Kevin Peters stands before the jury defending his clients — Ocean Spray, O'Brien and Lesser. He asks the jury how Ocean Spray can have a relationship with The Nolan Network when Jim and Theresa Nolan refuse to meet with the company. He maintains Jim Nolan was later offered a contract from O'Brien in 2002, but refused to sign it. Peters maintains O'Brien convinced the Ocean Spray legal department to agree to another one-year contract, as had been done in the past.

Theresa Nolan says prior to the Costco ordeal, the TNN contract is simply "a mere list of what we would do and how much we would charge." She continues, "After the 2000 season, Ocean Spray tried to get us to sign a new document — a broker agreement — that would have silenced us with a confidentiality clause. In addition, that contract would have a 30-day termination policy that



The courthouse in Plymouth, MA, where the trial was held.

would have made it legal for Ocean Spray to send us packing with only a month's notice."

Theresa maintains TNN refused to sign the more restrictive broker agreement in 2001, and again in 2002, because it would keep "us from being able to defend ourselves." She adds, "In January of 2003, after our written report included a complaint about what was done for HEB and a reminder of what the Costco incident had cost Ocean Spray, we were told that TNN had to sign that agreement or not be hired."

Theresa then refers to a "smoking gun" email spawned by a TNN December, 2002, report, which proves Ocean Spray had no intention of hiring TNN back anyway. Peters attempts to make the point in the trial that the defendants tried to re-sign TNN, but the Nolans would not agree to the contract being offered.

Peters maintains Ocean Spray wanted to continue the relationship with the Nolans in 2003, including a confidentiality agreement in the contract, which he says is a common practice. O'Brien wanted a contract, but instead he was slapped with a lawsuit, Peters says.

In courtroom testimony, Ken Ryan, procurement manager for C&S in 2000, when

the Costco incident occurred, indicates how even minor price differences can damage a company's low price image and states Costco, due to the special price they received, retailed the two-pound bags of fresh cranberries at \$2.29, (only ten cents higher than BJ's delivered cost) while BJ's was forced to sell their berries at \$2.99 a bag.

One has to ask what the produce industry can learn from this episode.

Although year after year the Nolans were critical of Ocean Spray tactics, Peters acknowledged they continued to be hired because they did their job so well. He maintains Ocean Spray finally had to plan for the upcoming season and hired Vancouver, BC-based David Oppenheimer & Associates to replace TNN.

Theresa Nolan says running parallel to

the contract issue was the investigation launched by an April 1, 2003, email from Mike Dubuc, vice president of finance for Morse Bros. Inc., to the chairman of Ocean Spray's Board of Directors, asking them to look into what occurred with Costco and then HEB.

"After preparing a report on the incident at the request of Bob Rosbe, Ocean Spray's chairman, we were told by Chip Morse, an Ocean Spray grower-owner and former board member, that Lesser and O'Brien would be 'fired with cause' because of their part in the incidents," says Theresa Nolan.

Both O'Brien and Lesser insisted the Nolans sign the restrictive broker agreement even though TNN was not a broker. "Because we had been told by a grower-owner at Ocean Spray that Lesser and O'Brien would be terminated, we also believed TNN would be negotiating with someone else and we wouldn't have to sign that document. What we didn't know at the time was that there was a plan not to hire us back, which was indicated by an email that went up the chain of command with a copy of our December, 2002, report attached," Theresa Nolan says. "In the email, Stu Gallagher, senior vice president of international business, Ocean Spray's

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Reader Service # 4

legal counsel, Neil Bryson, O'Brien, Lesser and others discuss their intention to 'get rid of this guy,' referring to Nolan."

She further adds that during the trial, Peters maintains Ocean Spray was merely trying to standardize their contracts, and it had no malicious purpose in asking them to sign the restrictive broker agreement. Peters claims all food brokers doing business with Ocean Spray are required to sign the exact same document.

Theresa Nolan knows Grant Hunt had not been required to sign that contract. So to prove that all food brokers are not being asked to use the same document, her attorney, Christopher Murray, asks Lesser under oath if Grant Hunt had been required to sign the broker contract and Lesser says no. On redirect from Peters, Lesser says the reason Hunt had not been required to sign it is because he was a sub-contractor to TNN.

Nolan maintains that it is not true. Nolan states Grant Hunt had been a broker for Ocean Spray for many years, and while TNN often consulted with him, he was never a sub-contractor to TNN. Hunt contracted with Ocean Spray directly.

PLAINTIFF CLOSING ARGUMENTS

As in his opening arguments, Nolan's attorney Murray addresses the jury without notes and it certainly appears his words are coming from the heart. He tells the jury, "You don't get credibility somewhere; you get it by living. This case is largely about credibility and motivation."

Referring to Ocean Spray in general — and specifically O'Brien and Lesser — Murray says the motivation of the executives is anger, spite, fear, retaliation and revenge. Between 1999 and 2003, The Nolan Network made money for Ocean Spray and in one year alone the Nolans earned \$1.8 million. "Why would the Nolans want to upset the apple cart and jeopardize the business?" Murray asks. "They were reaching out desperately to try and fix problems. Instead, they were thwarted and blamed."

Using an Ocean Spray attorney's description from earlier in the trial, Murray says, "Jim and Theresa were the king and queen of the produce industry. They were respected in the business. Jim Nolan was so respected at Ocean Spray to avoid a conflict of interest, he is allowed to join The Nolan Network after retirement."

Murray points out over the years there were no strings attached to the TNN/Ocean Spray contract and certainly no confidentiality agreement. "Then, the Costco incident rears its ugly head." When it was revealed Costco got a better deal on fresh cranberries

OCEAN SPRAY IN LEGAL BATTLES WITH DECAS CRANBERRY AND POM WONDERFUL

Besides its legal wranglings with The Nolan Network, Ocean Spray Cranberries is involved in at least two other legal battles with companies in the produce industry, Decas Cranberry Sales Inc. of Carver, MA, plus a separate lawsuit with POM Wonderful LLC of Los Angeles, CA.

Ocean Spray filed a complaint in the U.S. District Court of Massachusetts against Decas in October, 2008, accusing Decas of violating the cooperative's patent for manufacturing sweetened dried cranberry products.

In a statement issued by Ocean Spray spokesperson, John Isaf, he maintains the cop has been issued a patent by the United States government. "We're obligated to protect and enforce... against those we believe may be violating the right, just as any other company with a patent routinely does." Decas repeatedly refuses to provide information or answer questions about its manufacturing process to allay suspicions of patent infringement, adds Isaf. "We will not be swayed from enforcing our patent rights and will vigorously defend these counter-claims."

Isaf's reference to a counter-claim makes reference to the one filed by Decas against Ocean Spray in June, 2009. In a press release dated June 24, by Decas Cranberry, the 75-year-old, family-owned company not only denies any infringement, but alleges Ocean Spray is using "unfair and deceptive business practices, improper interference in Decas'

business relationships, abuse of process and anticompetitive conduct in violation of the Sherman Act."

Continuing, the press release states Decas first began manufacturing its sweetened, dried cranberry product in 1999 and obtained a patent on it in 2002. Decas has had tremendous success with its product, which is marketed in direct competition with Ocean Spray's [own sweetened dried cranberries] product," the press release reads.

Jeff Carlson, Decas' CEO, claims "The time of Ocean Spray's patent infringement lawsuit is highly suspect, as it was made at a time when Decas was seeking outside investment to fuel future innovation and growth, and numerous cranberry growers were exploring the possibility of signing on with Decas."

In a lawsuit involving POM Wonderful versus Ocean Spray, POM accuses Ocean Spray of false and misleading advertising in marketing a juice product, claiming it has cranberry and pomegranate juice, when in fact it has apple and grape juice with little or no pomegranate juice. POM states apple and grape juice are not only less nutritious, but cheaper to produce than cranberry and pomegranate juice, resulting in Ocean Spray being able to sell its juice for less. The lawsuit is filed in U.S. District Court, Central District in California.

Ocean Spray has not responded to a request for comment on POM Wonderful's lawsuit at this issue's editorial deadline. **pb**

than BJ's, Nolan didn't make up things about anti-trust laws; the laws are in the Robinson-Patman Act, Murray says.

Concern over anti-trust is so important to Ocean Spray that its legal standards are "mirrored" in its own anti-trust guidelines. Murray says Ocean Spray tells its people that not only does the Act deal with fair pricing, but the company can be held liable for a lot of damages as well, plus individuals can face jail time if they break the law or Ocean Spray's policy.

Despite complaints by the Nolans to Ocean Spray about unfair pricing practices, O'Brien did nothing, Murray says. A couple of months later, Nolan was presented with a separation agreement stating he's going to be terminated and it has a confidentiality agreement. You are going to sign this document and shut up or you won't receive your

benefits, Murray argues.

O'Brien said earlier in the trial he did not know anything about a separation agreement and all he knows is Nolan stopped showing up for work. Nolan went home for a month refusing to sign the document. "Your boss sees you're not coming to work and he doesn't know what's going on?" Murray asks.

THE O'BRIEN, LESSER FACTOR

At the center of the allegations in TNN's original complaint are the business practices of O'Brien, in addition to Lesser. Lurking in the background throughout the trial and what plays heavily in the plaintiff's lawsuit are concerns Ocean Spray is in violation of anti-trust laws under the Robinson-Patman Act. In Murray's opening state-

ments at the trial on May 14th, he tells the jury they will see examples of violations of the Robinson-Patman Act, as well as Ocean Spray's violation of its own internal company policy regarding anti-trust, which reflects federal law.

Ken Ryan, in 2001, was procurement manager for C&S Wholesale Produce, of Hatfield, MA. He testifies at the trial that he was very upset with Ocean Spray when store checks revealed the co-op had given significant discounts to Costco, compared to the price on cranberries his customer, BJ's, received. After Ryan requested a meeting with Ocean Spray to correct the problem, Graham West, managing director of ingredients technology group — O'Brien's boss — and Neil Bryson, in-house attorney for Ocean Spray, were dispatched to C&S headquarters. At this time, Ryan was told to either kick over or reject cranberries received from Ocean Spray and take a discount from the invoice.

In a phone interview with this writer taken after the trial, Ryan — who now handles East Coast sales for Sun Pacific Marketing Cooperative Inc., headquartered in Los Angeles, CA, and is based in Hatfield, MA — said he did not think this was the right thing to do, because when there was a deduction

from a load of fruit, "It basically comes out of the grower pool. I know it's a co-op, and the growers all get paid based on what's being made, but to claim a quality issue did not set with me very well," he says.

Ryan adds he knows Ocean Spray is a grocery company for the most part and they are used to working on price lists. However, he emphasizes he is in the produce industry and if you want to quote one customer \$8 on peppers and quote \$9 to another customer, there is nothing wrong with that. Ryan says he has no problem with a published price list if you are paying the same price for the product as everyone else when the product arrives. You can put whatever retail price on it you want.

"But when it is a published price and you have the understanding that this price is what every customer is paying, then you proceed from there and decide how you want to market it. But when that is undermined, and you find out it is not the same price for everyone, it creates a credibility issue with Ocean Spray," Ryan continues. "We were upset about that. If it wasn't a published price list and Costco got a better price, then so be it, and maybe I didn't do my job in negotiating. However, when you have the understanding everyone's going to

pay that price, that's a problem."

Ryan is not sure what the trade can learn from this experience, but adds, "I've been in this business 30 years and I truly believe if you don't have your integrity, you're not going to last in this business." He points out produce is one of the few businesses left where millions of dollars a day are exchanged on a phone call or a handshake. "When you can't have that amount of trust with the person you're dealing with, it's hard to stay in the business."

TURNING POINT

Murray feels the turning point in the trial is the exceptional testimony of Theresa Nolan in explaining the produce industry and then describing all of the players so a jury of lay people could understand it. "Once she had done that and I saw the jury was playing pretty close attention, I thought we had a good chance of prevailing," he says. "There's testimony right off the bat that was really important and really well received."

In closing, Murray observes, "I'm ecstatic everything worked out for Theresa and I hope this gives her some type of closure and that she's able to get on with life, because I know this has been an incredible ordeal." **pb**

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Reader Service # 29

Independents Carry On The American Dream

With local produce, love for their community, a loyal customer base and a lack of corporate bureaucracy, independent stores find their niche and prove they have serious staying power.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS


In the shadow of downbeat economic news, layoffs, cancelled expansions and general negativity, many independent stores have continued to plug away day after day doing what they do best to serve their customers.

"I know independents are getting stronger," says Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner's Markets Inc., in West Lawn, PA, with 38 stores. "We're able to ride this economic downturn a bit better than larger food chains because we can react quicker and easier to the circumstances out there. If

we need to get our price points down and change our margin, we can do it starting tomorrow."

Carissa Mace, president of the Fresh Produce and Floral Council (FPFC), located in La Mirada, CA, reports, "In the Los Angeles marketplace, independents have become an increasingly important segment of the business. With their buying power in produce, they can rival some of the national chains in dollar volume to vendors."

John Vena, president of John Vena Inc., situated in the Philadelphia Regional Produce Market, in Philadelphia, PA, adds, "We have seen a measurable increase in the number of independent stores buying from our market — a trend we have followed for most



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of the last 10 years. We also see many smaller, long-established independents located in urban centers are growing within their trading areas and are buying and merchandising more aggressively. This is particularly true among the growing Hispanic and Indian communities in the greater Philadelphia area."

Growth of many independent stores has been low-key. Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Services Inc., located in Monrovia, CA, explains, "They usually don't get a lot of press, but when you get a list, you end up seeing the independents you thought had two stores actually have 10 or 15 stores. Right now, we probably have around 200 independent stores in the greater LA area."

"With independents, it's been gradual rather than sudden," agrees Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's Inc., headquartered in Los Alamitos, CA. "In every major city and in small towns over the years, you see an independent here and there. Suddenly, there seems to be a huge presence. When the big guys buy and merge, the smaller independents are buying the properties the big guys are getting rid of."

The American Dream

In many ways, independent stores are the epitome of the American dream — built by

people who started with nothing, rolled up their sleeves, worked hard and created a successful business. "This holds true whether you're talking about the Italian-American who started his business in the 1940s or the West African who only opened six months ago," says Vena.

"These operations contribute to the American dream because you can be an entrepreneur," adds Spezzano. "Many owners running these companies are immigrants born in another country. They came here, they

worked hard, they bought a small store and then grew it to two or three, or in some cases 50 or 100! Whether Mexican, Korean, Armenian or American, one thing they all have in common is they really work. Isn't that the American dream? You work your way up, and 10 years later, you own it."

"A lot of the independents out there started with nothing when they came to this country and they've been able to build the business," states Joseph Battaglia, produce director for Ridgewood, NY-based Western Beef, a 28-store operation. "It's amazing how you see people grow and prosper."

Many independents have contributed to the American dream and their communities for decades. "Our stores have been in business since 1948," says Jose Manzano, produce director for Dorothy Lane Market in Dayton, OH, an upscale grocer with three stores. "The same family built the business from just one store to three and still owns them to this day."

Redner's Stiles explains, "Thirty-five years ago, Mr. Redner left Grand Union and opened up two stores. He was able to grow with the community and his business became very successful. This parallels what is happening today as well."

"Independents are a win for everybody," exclaims Spezzano. "A win for the community, a win for the owners and a win for the produce industry."

Difficulty In Definition

The diversity making independent stores so successful and unique also contributes to the difficulty in defining them. The Arlington, VA-based Food Marketing Institute's (FMI) *Independent Operator Insights into Wholesaler Relations and Services* report, published in 2008, states, "Independent stores are often lumped into one category simply because of the number of stores operated. While not necessarily inaccurate, it's important to note independents make up the most varied group of

FOUR AREAS OF EXCELLENCE

According to Dr. Richard George, professor of food marketing at St. Joseph's University, in Philadelphia, PA, there are four areas in which an independent should excel:

- 1) No one should be closer to the customer: independents run the stores in the neighborhood.
- 2) No one should out-service them in terms of customer service.
- 3) No one should out-fresh them: they know the market; they know what's available.
- 4) No one should be quicker than them: they should be the quickest to respond.



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retail operations in terms of formats, size, specialties, locations, store design and clientele.”

“When you say ‘independent’ you’re covering broad territory,” warns Ed Odron with Ed Odron Produce Marketing and Consulting, headquartered in Stockton, CA. “Even the ethnic categories break down further. Asian breaks down into Vietnamese, Chinese, Philippine, etc. Latino stores can be Mexican, Salvadorian or Dominican. Then you have the inner-city Mom & Pop stores, as well as independents of small chain size anywhere from five to 200 stores. Each one addresses the business differently.”

“The independents we serve range from traditional supermarket formats in traditional suburban and urban areas to retailers carrying products geared to very specific ethnic customers from around the world who have settled in communities in our trading area,” Vena of John Vena explains. “Then, we have some independents referring to themselves as ‘international’ retailers, meaning they carry lines of products geared to the whole gamut of consumers. They don’t limit themselves to any ethnic area and are particularly good customers for our lines of specialty produce.”

In general, there is a sense of an indepen-



H Mart carries a wide selection of tofu products to appeal to the varied Asian population it serves.

dent having greater and more local control and ownership. “An independent store is a locally owned, private company serving the local community,” says Stiles. “We’re an independent even though we have 40 stores.”

According to the FMI study, ownership is a reflection of independent-status. Nearly all respondents in the study are family-owned (66 percent) or privately owned (27 percent) companies. While formats and target markets may vary greatly, the FMI report indicates close to 60 percent of respondents operate conventional supermarkets, 28 percent run limited assortment stores and 11 percent operate super/combo stores.

Identifying The Niche

Format and niche marketing may be an indicator of success for an independent. “There are some independent operators who are really customer-focused and have done well and others who are struggling,” says Dr. Richard George, professor of food marketing at St. Joseph’s University, in Philadelphia, PA, and author of the FMI report.

Paul Weitzel, managing partner at Willard Bishop Consulting Ltd., headquartered in Barrington, IL, suggests, “While we may be seeing a continual decline of smaller Mom & Pop stores, we are also seeing an increase in the number of ethnic run stores that really differentiate and provide a more defined shopper value equation, for example, unique produce and authentic brands.”

“We do see some growth in some non-ethnic perishable-oriented stores,” agrees Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting. “The upscale market is growing in Northern California, but this is very specific to geographic or demographic area. Conversely, upscale independents in Southern California are not seeing much growth. Where we do see growth is in the ‘other’ formats, such as Trader Joes or Fresh & Easy, as well as all the ethnic-oriented operations — stores that have defined their

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niche or market and are catering to it."

Finding a niche is a key element of success for an independent. "They're looking at creating stores fitting particular needs," says Dr. George. "We see all these new markets serving the ethnic communities. People recognize if you're an independent and can develop a concept fitting the needs of the market, the store is more focused and successful."

"The independents serve a niche," states Frieda's Caplan. "There are many now serving an ethnic niche and they're growing."

"You also have the niche independents who have built a business around the quality

"We are a neighborhood store. We serve our customers as individuals, person-to-person. We're always on the floor taking care of the customers and giving them good service."

- Sam Marrogy

University Food Center

or variety of a particular category, for example seafood," says Odron of Ed Odron Produce Marketing. "They're hanging in there against the big guys. Their challenge is the lack of room for growth or expansion. Many times a second outlet fails."

"The national chains are focused on the big middle and they miss the edges or segments of the market," adds Dr. George. "What independents want to provide is the differential advantage. 'How am I different and why is it better?' Focus on customers in order to learn how to provide a better, different experience for them."

However, having a targeted market doesn't mean stores are mono-focused. "Most of our stores have a large amount of Asian consumers, but some have up to 50 percent non-Asian consumers as well," reports David Shin of Lyndhurst, NJ-based H Mart Companies Inc., an operation that has grown from just one store in 1982 to the 40 stores the company currently operates.

"Our demographic includes Spanish, African American, Polish and of course, Anglo," says Battaglia of Western Beef. "We don't consider ourselves gourmet, but we have premium produce and choice meats. We're not exotic. This is why we appeal to a wide demographic. For example, in our Boca Raton, FL, store we can sell everything from

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broccoli rabe to plantains. It's a wide mix."

University Food Center in Detroit, MI, is a one-store operation serving a college area with a diverse population. Sam Marrogy, produce director, notes, "We are a neighborhood store. We serve our customers as individuals, person-to-person. We're always on the floor taking care of the customers and giving them good service. The store is very clean and the produce is very fresh."

"Independents are getting a lot of cross-over customers, especially with the economy," says Spezzano. "Most of these stores have full-time employees working to ensure the highest level of cleanliness and appeal. Also, they do high-volume in perishables so product looks

fresher, and it's priced competitively for the quality. As Anglo customers look for options, many are finding they like the independents."

Two Sides Of The Coin

Flexibility, reaction time and lower costs allow independents advantages specific to their business. "They have abilities to do some things the big chains don't and there is tremendous opportunity in that," says Dr. George of St. Joseph's University.

Consolidation and the flight of big chains from inner cities have left an opening for many rising independents. "The independents are moving into smaller strip malls that are being vacated by the larger chains," reports

Weitzel of Willard Bishop. "They often can get lower rent in space that has already been developed. It's an easy and relatively low cost of entry."

"When the chains leave the inner cities, often the independents will look for those sites," says Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting. "Generally, when the main store goes dark in a strip mall, the others go dark, too, so the landlord gives a discounted rent to the independent store because it keeps the entire shopping plaza viable."

Their ability to use non-union, or alternative union labor and lack of corporate bureaucracy also works in their favor. "Independents have several advantages when it comes to overhead," says Spezzano. "In general, overhead is lower and produce labor percent of sales is significantly less than a national chain. They also take a smaller margin on perishables and make up for it in volume. They have more flexibility to move to different sizes in product and many times, they'll move to where the value is."

Frieda's Caplan points out another advantage for independents. "These stores don't seem to have the infrastructure costs, overhead or be as highly leveraged as the average national chain," she explains. "They're not publically traded companies. Since they're

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beholden to their owners, rather than to Wall Street, they tend to be more long-range oriented in their performance goals. The independent has a lot more flexibility."

"We can change faster," adds Battaglia. "We can make price changes faster and bring in new items faster."

However, they face significant challenges as well, especially for those experiencing rapid growth. "As independents grow, they struggle to get more sophisticated in systems, management and organization," explains Spezzano. "To get IT properly funded takes money, but you have to spend it in order to grow. For many, the biggest hurdle is how they go from 20 to 50 stores and support the growth, for example, having programs to attract and maintain senior- and middle-management. All the things independents aren't good at, they need to get better at in order to grow their business at that level."

"The challenge some independents face is how they can gain vendor support if there is no scale or the necessary people and systems to accept support," says Weitzel. "This often means the independent has to go it alone, unless they are part of a co-op or association, such as IGA. Also, being able to see the latest new items and capitalize on growth from new items with a small merchandising staff can be

"If you have 20 good independent stores, it can be the equivalent in produce cases going through a vendor's system as selling to 80 Ralphs or Vons. Don't midjudge them for being too small because the volume they're doing is tremendous."

- Dick Spezzano
Spezzano Consulting Services Inc.

very tough."

"Financing is another big disadvantage for independents," Spezzano adds. "National chains have access to funds especially for expansion. Privately held independents tend to get a shorter lease from banks. Normally, expansion comes out of cash flow or what

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Dorothy Lane, based in Dayton, OH, has been in operation since 1948. The family-owned business now operates three stores.



loans they can get — so they expand slower than chains.”

Direct Customer Link

Perhaps the greatest banner an independent waves is the direct link to its customers. “If it’s an independent, then customers have a higher expectation of the store knowing them and their family needs,” explains St. Joseph’s University’s Dr. George. “They feel the store is

probably trying to do more and a better job because it’s not part of a conglomerate.”

“Because they are so locally based, they know their customers much better than those who buy out of national offices,” says FPFC’s Mace. “They court their communities by sponsoring local organizations such as kid’s soccer teams.”

“There’s a connection and relationship the independents establish,” agrees Odrón. “The

customers’ mission when they park their cars at a large chain is to get in and out as fast as they can, whereas the independents tend to nurture more of a relationship during the shopping experience.”

Since demographics of independents vary so much, one of their assets is their ability to cater to those differences. Redner’s Stiles explains, “Over our 40 stores we have very different demographics, some have a larger

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Western Beef caters to African American, Polish, Spanish and Anglo consumers.

Hispanic clientele, others are a high-end market. One of the strengths of an independent is being able to identify the differences in these demographics. It's our community and we can make the decisions on a local level we need to really service each individual community and react to what they want and need."

"Independents have to know their own marketplace," adds Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting. "Even within a 10-store chain, there may be 10 different communities. Store managers must understand the nuances between the communities and thus, how the store serves them. Most independents have become experts at this."

Serving specific needs through targeted products and services is the key. "We are able to better target and satisfy a customer base," says Shin of H Mart. "Independents are better able to meet the needs of the customer base with products and services."

"Independent stores know their neighborhoods well and can market to ethnic customers by mirroring their culture with foods and styles from their homeland," adds Bill Vogel, president of Tavilla Sales Co. of Los Angeles, based in Los Angeles, CA.

They are clearly filling a niche, especially for the Hispanic and Asian communities. "Shoppers often feel more comfortable in independent stores where stronger relationships are formed and there is a sense of community pride," says Weitzel of Willard Bishop.

"We try to sell what they want and not what we want to make them buy," distinguishes Western Beef's Battaglia. "We know the neighborhood, and if plantains are what they want, we're going to get it for them."

This customer knowledge translates into loyalty for many stores. "Independent stores tend to have a closer relationship with their customers," says Frieda's Caplan. "People like to buy from people who are like them, so as

independents are more like the neighborhood they serve, they will have more loyalty from their shoppers."

"Our customers tend to be loyal," reports Manzano with Dorothy Lane. "We're not

exempt from the current economy and we still have some challenges we're dealing with, but overall we haven't seen a significant change in our customer base. We have so many customers who started in the early days of our company and their subsequent generations are now shopping with us. It's all about the relationship we develop with our customers."

"Never lose sight of the customer," advises Dr. George of St. Joseph's University. "Focus on the front door, not the back door. Focus on the people coming in your store and how you can make their life easier and better. Most retailers can tell you to an X of a penny what they pay for tomatoes, but when you ask them what the value of a customer is, their eyes glaze over."

All About Value

Successful independents are very focused on the value equation — providing real value as far as produce quality for the money and service. "We have to offer a reasonable, good value to our customers," says Manzano. "It really is about value more than price. Shop-

PERIMETER FOCUS

Most independents lead heavily with perishable departments, especially produce. "Our industry is a big win in the whole independent movement," states Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Services Inc., based in Monrovia, CA. "Especially with Hispanic, Middle-Eastern and Russian independents, produce is extremely important. If you look at the makeup of the sales of those stores, they're produce- and meat-driven. Produce in a conventional chain is about 12 percent of total store sales and meat is about the same, maybe less. In the Hispanic and Middle-Eastern formats, produce is 20 to 25 percent and meat is 18 to 20 percent."

"Produce plays a huge role in the independent," agrees Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA. "They tend to have more flexibility in purchasing. Sometimes, they can make a better deal and get a better price because of it. If they're purchasing regionally, it's possible that they don't need the kind of shelf-life the larger chains that ship longer distances require. If they get a good deal on tomatoes, they're selling them next day."

"Produce is one of our main items," says David Shin of Lynhurst, NJ-based H Mart. "People come to our stores just for the fresh produce. We are able to bring a variety of produce items other big markets do not carry."

"Produce is a great opportunity for independents," adds Dr. Richard George, professor of food marketing at St. Joseph's University, in Philadelphia, PA. "Most people think brands are what they put on the shelf, but I tell stores, 'Think like a brand; act like a retailer.' They need to figure out how to use produce as a destination spot. What more can they be doing?"

According to a Food Marketing Institute report, "Independents identified produce and meat as the most important categories to remain competitive over the next five years... dairy and deli close out the top four."

Quality of perishables, as well as service in these areas, is crucial. "We focus on upscale products of high quality," reports Jose Manzano, produce director of Dorothy Lane Market, a 3-unit chain in Dayton, OH. "We set the standards in our area for what we call the upscale grocery store. We are a trend-setting store and we focus on healthy items, handling a lot of organics in all departments. We have the best bakery around and good quality perishables."

"Produce can definitely impact customer loyalty," says Paul Weitzel, managing partner at Willard Bishop Consulting Ltd., in Barrington, IL. "Many times, independents have an opportunity to do a better job procuring and merchandising local produce than the larger supermarkets. The large chains just dabble in this area and it's a big opportunity if done right. It's harder for larger, national chains to manage local produce given their centralized buying offices and proximity to the local market. Independents can get closer to the customer and react much more quickly. This should be a big opportunity for independents."

pb

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pers will be willing to pay a little extra if they feel the product is worth it and that it's what they want."

"Everybody recognizes the need for value, but value is not just low price," explains Dr. George. "It's taking care of the customers' needs. It's asking 'how do we help you?' There are opportunities, such as helping people resolve the What's-for-Dinner issue, and independents can respond to these needs more quickly and with more precision. They can really shine in being responsive to people and demonstrating a caring atmosphere."

"We listen to our customers and react to

what they want," says Redner's Stiles. "We know the value and products they're looking for and we can react and give it to them. For example, we don't put tons of money into advertising on radio or TV. Instead, we take that money and put it into cost of goods so we can give the customer the best price on quality items because we know that's what our customers value most."

Part of the value equation is being able to offer a great deal on short notice. "The independents can act quicker and offer better deals than chains who have to do planning further in advance," FPFC's Mace says. "They can



Many successful independent stores have been started by immigrants, who then make sure to hire employees that reflect each individual store's demographic.

offer good quality at a good price — what folks are looking for in this economy."

"Independents enjoy a lot of flexibility in matching their offering to the tastes of their clientele," adds Vena of John Vena. "They are well positioned to take advantage of the opportunity a full-service market such as The Philadelphia Regional Produce Market has to offer regarding pricing and selection."

"We provide a standard and competitive edge for the community," says Western Beef's Battaglia. "We try to compete and do better than the chains in quality and in value. We remember to take care of the customer and give them value. Many times, larger stores forget about this."

Some independents report seeing growth in their business during these tougher economic times because of the perceived value offered. Battaglia states, "I think now, with our business being up, people are looking for value and they know they can get value shopping at an independent."

"We're still seeing the same customers coming in," says Marrogy of University Foods. "Some customers don't want to make the trip to drive to a larger chain, so they're coming back to the neighborhood store."

"Going forward, independents should be looking to see what they can do to build the business and take advantage of their strengths," advises Dr. George.

"You can't be afraid of the large chains coming into your community," warns Stiles. "You have to stay true to who you are and do what got you to where you are now. It's all about service, quality and value. That's what has made many independents successful and

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given them longevity. Don't forget it when you face competition."

Relationships Wanted

Independents want relationships, services and good products when deciding with whom to do business. FMI's report identifies, "High service levels, a good private label program and low prices are the top attributes independents use to pick their primary wholesalers."

BENEFITS TO THE INDUSTRY

Independents contribute to providing overall stability and benefits to the produce industry. "It gives the industry an outlet for sizes and products you can't sell in a more conventional national chain supermarket," explains Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Services Inc., based in Monrovia, CA. "It helps the profitability of the crop overall."

"They provide a great outlet for smaller local growers," adds Ed Odrón of Odrón Produce Marketing and Consulting, headquartered in Stockton, CA. "They also provide a lot of volume and sales to local wholesalers as well. They're a big part of the economy for those local wholesalers, and a vibrant wholesale market is essential to the health of our industry in general."

Suppliers are encouraged to understand the true size and scope of potential produce business with independents. "Vendors should realize the power these independents have to move volume and how quickly they can turn it around," says Spezzano. "Many independents with only four or five stores have their own Distribution Center. If you have 20 good independent stores it can be the equivalent in produce cases going through a vendor's system as selling to 80 Ralphs or Vons. Don't midjudge them for being too small because the volume they're doing is tremendous."

"With an independent retailer you can make them a really aggressive offer because they can respond quicker," says Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's Inc., based in Los Alamitos, CA. points out. "A lot of people in the industry want to broaden their customer base, so what better way to balance your portfolio of clients than to have a mix of big and small. You'd be surprised how much produce an independent market can move, regardless of their size."

"Independents are here to stay," says Bill Vogel, president of Tavilla Sales Co. of Los Angeles. "They are driving significant traffic and marketers must stand up and pay attention. There is no more 'my way or the highway.'" **pb**

"Our produce supplier is very much aware of our focus and quality orientation," says Manzano. "It doesn't take much for them to know what we're all about. They're always helpful with sourcing the proper products, but they also come up with special prices and deals we can pass on to our customers."

The relationship is a key element for procurement. "Just be honest and take care of your customers in the same manner you want them to take care of you," advises Battaglia of Western Beef. "Try to give them the best quality at the right price and be consistent. If you're consistently good, your business will grow."

"For a company like ours, the direct, personal relationships we develop with our independent customers afford us the access we need to promote our products with each of these buyers," says Vena of John Vena. "Cus-

tomers service depends on helping customers solve problems. Our independents usually need help with ad planning, special pricing and delivery."

Understanding the needs of your particular independent customer can really help get the right sale to them. "Vendors must put someone in charge of these accounts that understand them and maybe it even means they must speak their language," suggests Spezzano. "Also, don't try to sell them sizes they don't use. Work with them to ensure what you're offering is what they can sell."

"Produce companies could be more active in trying to sell more variety and keep product as fresh as possible," says H Mart's Shin. "And, we all need to better understand the needs of the consumers to improve our produce business."



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Reader Service #46

Having patience and being pro-active in growing the relationship will reap numerous benefits. "We need to learn patience when dealing with independents," advises Vogel of Tavilla Sales Co. "As a customer, they might be telling us something we don't want to accept, but as a good vendor we need to learn and understand."

"If I were a vendor I'd be looking at how to help these stores educate the people who are putting the product out and who have interaction with customers," suggests St. Joseph's University' Dr. George. "Something like support for additional sampling and training in the department."

Vested In The Community

The business life of the independent store is interwoven with its community as the store

"Produce plays a huge role in the independent. They tend to have more flexibility in purchasing. Sometimes, they can make a better deal and get a better price because of it."

- Karen Caplan, Frieda's Inc.

provides multiple benefits the community may not get anywhere else. "Many urban neighborhoods have lost the services of any

kind of grocery or produce vendors," says Vena. "Independents, particularly those owned by recent immigrants, have stepped in to fill that gap. These entrepreneurs add to the economy of their neighborhoods by providing jobs for the local people and helping to attract other business and services.

"The best example of this in Philadelphia is long-time Philly Market customer, Cousins Supermarkets. After emigrating from the Middle East, the Cousins family opened four stores in primarily Hispanic neighborhoods not served by any retailers and have now been fixtures of the local economy for over 25 years."

The business independents bring can help revitalize a potentially downtrodden business area and help others achieve their American dream as well. Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting explains, "Instead of having a dark,

MUSHROOM SHOWCASE

CONTINUED ON PAGE 58 



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broken and blighted shopping strip, the independent revives the other stores around it. A good independent revives the other eight or 10 stores with a market as well. It helps the whole economy in the area."

"They often help anchor smaller and older strip malls," adds Willard Bishop's Weitzel. "This allows other smaller stores in the mall to capitalize on the foot traffic. It also gives certain demographic groups a feeling of being closer to home and a sense of community."

Another way independents benefit the community is by employing the people who live there. "Because they're in the middle of the community and have flexibility, they hire people who live in the neighborhood," says Spezzano. "Instead of having 60 to 70 employees like an average, national chain, they have 150 from the nearby community. It provides a lot of coveted jobs for the area."

For the independent, community involvement is a given — not an extra. "It's about being part of the community and not just being a business in the community," explains Redner's Stiles. "You're doing things for the community, such as charity events and donating to the local food bank and school. It's a two way street between the community and the store."

Marogy of University Foods reports, "We donate food or beverages for the baseball team and interact with local churches and schools. Our owner is very active in trying to help better the community."

Independents vary on the manner in which they are involved in the community. Dr. George explains, "One grocer ropes off a part of their parking lot and allows a school band to practice there. Another does blood pressure tests, while another will have local groomers

come in and give tips on pets. Many times we, at retail, think only about what we sell people, but instead we should be asking what the community needs that you have the ability to provide. There's no limit as to what one can do to be community focused. The key is to look at the community and find how you can partner with them."

"Although a lot of chains do this too, most of the independents are more in-tune to community sports like sponsoring little league or soccer," says Odron of Odron Produce Marketing and Consulting. "They partake in more community activities."

"People are very supportive of our stores because they're locally owned and started in their back yard," says Manzano of Dorothy Lane. "Shoppers like to know the owners worked hard and built it up to what it is today."

pb

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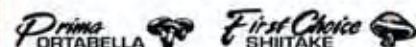
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FLORIDA'S WESTERN BEEF KNOWS THE NEIGHBORHOOD

A plethora of produce awaits consumers, now in Florida, too, at the fast expanding NY-based chain.

BY JENNIFER LESLIE KRAMER

Haitian mangos. White Yautia. Callaloo. Sugarcane. Breadfruit. Batata. This is not your grandmother's produce.

And yet, she would still feel at home within the Boca Raton, FL, outpost of Western Beef, which opened this past February — the chain's newest addition to its 26-and-strong locations throughout the New York area.

The company's first Florida location remains true to its successful, albeit old-fashioned merchandising

technique — stack 'em high and watch 'em fly. Hence, your grandmother's comfort level among the rutabagas and potatoes. The higher the better, in fact, according to Joe Battaglia, vice president of produce, who has spent his entire career with Western Beef and frequently travels to the newly opened store from his home base in New York. "When the produce is stacked like that, it's a can't-miss," he says. "It's high and powerful and can't be ignored. Is it labor intensive? Absolutely. But we see the results day-in and day-out."

In fact, when it comes to results, the Boca location



Western Beef's 5,000-square-foot produce department, in Boca Raton, FL, is responsible for a whopping 20 percent of the store's revenues.

is already the leader of the pack in produce sales. A whopping 20 percent of the store's revenues come from the 5,000 square-foot produce department, compared to other New York-based produce departments, which generate roughly 11 percent of store sales.

ANYTHING BUT AVERAGE

Much of the success of Western Beef can be attributed to the chain's decades-old merchandising philosophy, and while it might be old hat to New Yorkers, Floridians are not as familiar with this technique. Here in South Florida, consumers are accustomed to the plan-o-grammed produce displays at the local Publix or Albertsons. Walking into Western Beef is a new experience for many shoppers, and one they are clearly enjoying. "Customers really love the store," Battaglia admits; and the proof is in the pudding, or the produce, as it may be.

Visiting the store on a late Wednesday morning in June, it was surprisingly busy — near gridlock in the wide, sweeping aisles as consumers clamored for the latest offerings: 12-for-\$1 limes, nectarines at \$1.49-per-pound and bananas offered for 39-cents-per-pound. Not only does Western Beef offer a staggering selection, the chain is also serious about pricing.

The fact is, Western Beef flies under the radar of your typical chain store and is not a slave to produce plan-o-grams, so much so that all the produce fixtures are on wheels, providing maximum mobility and flexibility. While other stores generally have a set profit margin to meet, Western Beef gives authority to store managers and buyers to price as they see fit. "The fact that we are nimble — that we can change prices on a dime — that's a huge advantage," remarks Battaglia. "If we get a deal on something, you'll see that price change reflected immediately in-store. We want to pass on the savings to our customers as often as we can. We buy the right way. We sell the right way. Simple as that."

For now, the company's sole Florida location is in West Boca, an unincorporated area



of the city bordering Parkland. There, the demographic is noticeably different than other parts of the city. Wandering through the produce department, a mélange of languages catch your ear, as do the wide range of generations shopping the aisles. Consumers are mostly middle-class, be it Brazilian, Asian or Jamaican. Accordingly, the store makes an effort to provide for these consumers, whether it takes the form of sugarcane, Mexican yellow papaya or Costa Rican yucca. The chain's motto, "We know the neighborhood," rings true, and Battaglia asserts, "We want to cater to everyone. We're fortunate that we can merchandise everything here and it will sell."

PRODUCE FROM NEAR AND FAR

Western Beef's longstanding grower/shipper relations allow the chain to buy direct. While this might seem like a challenge for a 26-chain retailer, it works effectively and efficiently for the company, even for the lone



Florida location. Battaglia knows how lucky he is. "Our shippers continue to support us, even in South Florida, just as they always have," he says. "They send trucks right down to us. It allows us to take advantage of any good buys we might get in New York and bring it to our Florida customers."

When asked about a distribution center for the South Florida store, Battaglia remarks, "It doesn't really make sense unless you have at least five stores," but with executives planning another three Florida locations by the end of 2009, that might not be too far off.



The independent nature of Western Beef allows it to remain nimble, immediately dropping prices when produce buyers get a deal.



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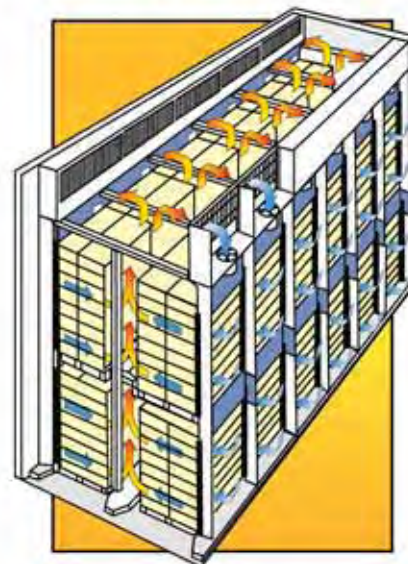
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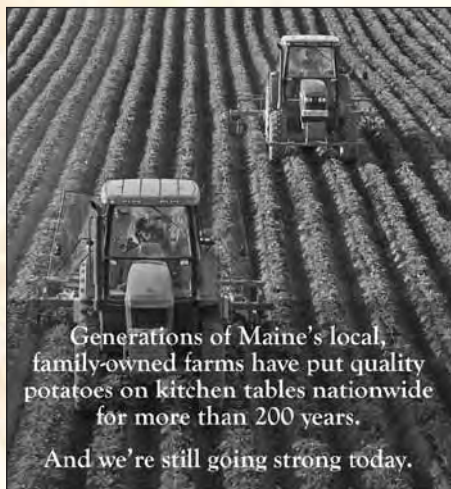
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Much of Western Beef's produce is sold in bulk, allowing customers to pick and choose exactly what they want.

Battaglia also takes advantage of the plethora of locally grown produce whenever possible, sourcing from Plant City, Homestead or the Redlands. During a June visit, Florida-grown green peppers, watermelon and squash were included among the many offerings. "When available, we buy citrus, tropicals and whatever else we can locally. We'll even truck it up to New York when it makes sense," he reports.

THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAILS

In addition to exotic offerings and jaw-dropping prices, Western Beef's produce department, which features a cartoon-art vegetable mural, goes above and beyond even the more typical merchandise. Sure, there's bagged salad, which is "becoming ever more popular," notes Battaglia, but there's also a 40-foot long greens case, offering everything from broccoli rabe and parsnips to fennel and arugula. What's more, all of these offerings are in bulk, allowing customers to pick and choose exactly what they need.

Overhead misters keep the produce fresh and clean, and conscientious workers — all 19 of them, an astounding number dedicated solely to the produce department — keep displays in tip-top shape, culling old product when necessary and refilling after high traffic times. The Boca Raton location is also the first to feature an iced salad bar, where fresh-cut fruit, salads, a variety of spices and dried fruit — also in bulk — are merchandised.

The name Western Beef certainly conjures up images of white-coated, gloved butchers, and fittingly so, since this is how the chain got its start in 1975, and what it continues to be known for today. The options don't end with

the nearly 600 available SKUs in the produce department. They extend to the chilly walk-in meat department, where the options are endless. Sure, there's beef tenderloin and veal scaloppini, but there's also chicken feet, necks and hearts, along with beef tongue and pigs' feet. Friendly butchers are on hand to trim fat, butterfly breasts or French a rack of lamb.

There's also a bakery, where nearly 90 percent of the breads, muffins, pies, cookies, cakes and other delectables are baked on premises daily, giving Publix — where the bakery is often hailed by locals as a favorite — yet another run for its money. One no longer wonders whether a small and nimble chain with a decades-old, traditional merchandising philosophy can survive. From what we've seen at Western Beef, the answer is a resounding yes.

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FESTIVAL FOODS LEADS WITH LOCALLY GROWN

Offering a vast array of locally grown produce, while innovatively maintaining its small neighborhood atmosphere, Festival Foods Stores has earned a great following in the Minneapolis-St. Paul region.

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

Operating nine outlets dispersed throughout the Twin Cities region, Festival Foods, headquartered in Vadnais, MN, designs each store to fit the demographics and ambiance of the surrounding neighborhood.

Rod Borden, director of produce for Festival Foods, emphasizes the produce department is the primary reason this independent chain maintains its loyal following. While locally grown produce has been important to customers here for years, today's

trend of gravitating toward produce that's been grown close to home makes it an even more critical component of the retail operation.

Adding even more personal attention to detail, the company assures its customers that their locally grown fruits and vegetables are as safe as the produce that is sourced from giant, corporate farms. This is due in part to the diligence of produce wholesaler H. Brooks & Co. LLC, based in New Brighton, MN, Borden stresses. Phillip Brooks, president, "is helping many of these farmers get third-party certified through the Food Alliance," Borden reports. The Midwest



Festival Foods offers both locally grown and organic produce.



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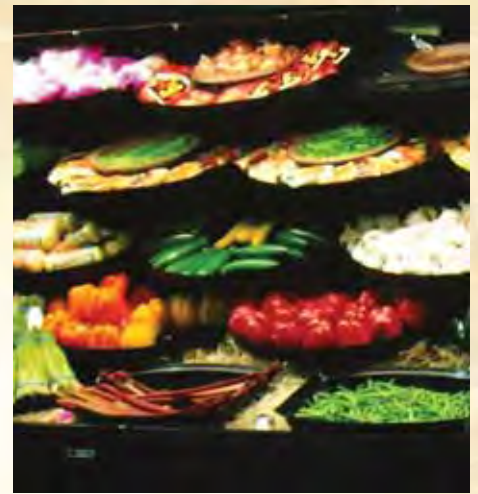
Pine Island, NY



Reader Service # 137



Rob Borden, director of produce, makes sure his staff orders merchandise daily.



Produce is displayed in a circular, European-style form.

Food Alliance (MFA) to which he refers is based in Minneapolis and is a division of the Portland, OR-based National Food Alliance.

Borden cites another reason locally grown produce is gaining momentum. "When you can attach a specific city or town to your product, it creates more excitement," he explains. "When consumers see familiar names on the produce, that can trigger fond memories of locations where they might have vacationed with their family."

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Walking into the Hugo, MN, Festival Foods store, it's nearly impossible not to be immediately drawn to the produce department, which is purposefully located near the main entrance. The attractive displays create impulse purchases, and the people in charge take extra care to make sure shoppers' senses are stirred. Moreover, Borden also makes certain that his produce staff in every outlet has plenty of experience to put to good use. "Most

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of our produce managers have 20-plus years of produce experience," he shares.

As a further guarantee of freshness and quality, Borden and his staff work closely with H. Brooks' Phil Brooks, who guides their purchases. Adapting to the European style of inventory distribution, "My guys order and bring in only what they need for that day. Brooks' just-in-time delivery reduces shrink and increases freshness."

Borden continues, "We're not the cheapest because we are all about quality. We have very specific things that we require in our fresh fruits and vegetables. For example, one of our California strawberry suppliers is Beach Street Farms. Fritz Koontz, the general manager, goes that extra mile and ensures he'll ship the best berries for our customers."

That commitment to quality has a trickle-down effect to each Festival Foods store. "We may be a smaller company, but we all have passion for produce."

"We provide only the best grocery products, including natural and organic alternatives. Seafood is flown in daily," Borden adds. "Festival specialists behind our counters prepare and cut meat and fish to our shoppers' exact specifications."

Each store's deli features one of at least 30 salads prepared daily. The store's Ann E. Lee's

Fried Chicken is one of the most popular choices. "You can enjoy Taste of Scandinavia products in our bakeries, made with the finest ingredients by bakers from around the world," says Borden. Festival's floral departments offer a wide array of fresh flowers, gifts and candles. Since 2002, the stores have welcomed customers with the aroma of fresh roasted coffee beans and tasty coffee drinks. Free wireless Internet access is available at some of the coffee shop locations.

Above and beyond all these other attractive draws, it still seems to be the produce department that keeps loyal customers coming back to Festival Foods. **pb**

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Independent Stores Keep Detroit Market Humming

Abandoned by national chain groceries, Metro Detroit citizens rely on independently owned operations to procure their produce.

BY KIMBERLY A. RINKER

With no major supermarket chains located within the Detroit city limits, it would seem that getting fresh produce into the hands of residents could be a problem. However, while many of the major outlets such as Safeway, Kroger, Costco and Whole Foods have steered clear of the Metro Detroit area, smaller, family-owned operations attract Detroit residents for their produce and other food needs.

Additionally, while Metro Detroit has recently suffered through the closing of more traditional grocery stores, such as Farmer Jacks in 2007, the city still boasts a fair number of specialty stores such as Bushes, Hillers and Trader Joes, in addition to the many family and neighborhood grocers.

As a key center of the U.S. economy, Metro Detroit has a total population of 4.4 million — the eleventh most populous area in the United States, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The region's nine-county area accounts for a total population of 5.4 million, with a workforce of some 2.6 million people.

Studies have shown that more than half of Detroit's residents are forced to travel double the distance to find a local grocery store, compared to fast food establishments or convenience stores, which are usually located much closer to home. Many lower-income families end up paying a higher price for produce in nearby convenience outlets, or skip fruits and vegetables entirely, opting instead to purchase cheaper, less healthful products, which in turn leads to poor food consumption habits. As a result,

Detroit boasts one of the highest obesity rates in the country.

LOCALS SPEAK OUT

"It seems like Detroit has more than one economy," expresses Nate Stone, chief operations officer for Ben B. Schwartz & Sons Inc., based in Detroit, MI. "In some cases, Detroit is trying to find its way and find a solid footing again. We have a new mayor, but even with a new boss in city hall, it still takes awhile for the culture to change. Our new administration has a lot of ideas, but they're still more ideas than actual plans."

"Our business has been great," adds Stone. "We get a lot of encouragement from neighborhoods outside the Detroit area, rather than from inside the city limits. It seems like people are still shopping and spending in those areas — maybe not as much as before — but they're still spending. I think there's a need for major supermarket

chains to operate within the city in order to allow for greater shopping accessibility and to provide more employment opportunities for Detroit citizens."

Brian Dubrinsky, produce buyer and manager for Detroit, MI-based E&L Supermercado, located in the southwestern edge of the city, says his family business, which caters to a mostly Hispanic audience, has been hit hard by the recent recession. "There are two things that have hurt us in the past few years," Dubrinsky reports. "First, we don't have as many Hispanics coming into the neighborhood as before and I think a lot of people are staying closer to home and shopping at convenience stores for some of their produce. Second, these convenience stores are really giving us a lot more competition, way more than before."

As Detroit's "Big Three" contingent of General Motors, Ford and Chrysler struggle through the recession ramifications, pro-



Photo courtesy of Ben B. Schwartz & Sons Inc.

duce sales continue to remain a vital and steady part of southeastern Michigan's economic base, as they have for more than 100 years. However, as the unemployment rate rose to 13.6 percent in April, 2009, with a median per-household income of \$29,526 and 26 percent of residents living below the poverty level — with 30 percent on food stamps — the future is still questionable for the Detroit economy. Moreover, these struggling families are hard-pressed to afford fresh produce, especially at the hiked up rates offered at local convenience stores, transforming what was, at one point, a sta-

ple of the local economy into a much sought-after luxury.

"To me, it seems like the worst of the fallout has occurred," Stone notes. "We still have a lot of little pockets throughout Detroit that are doing well. For instance, Mexican Town is a vibrant neighborhood with lots of shopping options."

PRODUCE FROM NEAR AND FAR

Located at the corners of Fort and Green Streets near the city's signature Ambassador Bridge is the Detroit Produce Terminal, the

heartbeat of the produce business in the Midwest for more than 80 years. Here, over 200 co-op wholesalers buy, sell and trade their stock amongst themselves, while local consumers pick up fresh, quality produce from around the globe, seven days a week, from 1 am until 11 am.

"Anything that's green in Detroit or the surrounding suburbs comes through the Detroit Produce Terminal," says Linda Rey, a spokesperson for Coosemans Detroit, based at the Detroit Terminal Produce Market. "Virtually all of the produce moving in and out of Michigan or into Canada comes through the Produce Terminal. Everybody buys from everybody else. We have various companies that are based here, receive their produce here and then ship it elsewhere. Trucks come in from all over the United States, Mexico and Canada." The companies at the market really run the gamut. "There are companies that work with distributors, specialties, smaller chains and independent grocery stores," adds Rey.

In addition to the Detroit Produce Terminal, the Detroit Eastern Market Corp. has a separate produce terminal. Individual companies can rent stalls within the mammoth warehouse to ply their wares. While it is a sizable produce terminal, it is only open on Saturdays, making access a bit limited.

According to Dan Libre of the Washington, D.C.-based USDA, while the Detroit Terminal Produce Market accounts for the majority of produce sales in Metro Detroit, fruits and vegetables are also moved via private contracts between farmers, wholesalers and retailers, which has a trickle down effect to consumers. "Sometimes, farmers will work a direct sale contract with a retailer or wholesaler, and skip shipping to the Detroit Produce Terminal," Libre offers. "Produce in Michigan is sold in a variety of ways. Many farmers throughout the state and in Metro Detroit simply set up independent produce stands on a seasonal basis in various neighborhoods, which provides Detroit consumers a number of options in regards to purchasing fresh produce."

Coosemans is one example of a produce company that distributes produce to a wide variety of sources. "We deal with a lot of the local markets, and also handle the bigger distributors who then sell to larger chains, such as Wal-Mart and Meijer, which have stores located just outside of Detroit's city limits," Rey notes. "We also have a lot of the independents, such as IGA and Save-A-Lot, that are here on a regular basis, as well as a large variety of neighborhood outlets that cater to a specific ethnic audience."

Eddie Isayev, president of Brooklyn, NY-based Eddie's Produce Express, supplies

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Reader Service # 206

Many lower-income families end up paying a higher price for produce in nearby convenience outlets, or skip fruits and vegetables entirely, opting instead to purchase cheaper, less healthful products, which in turn leads to poor food consumption habits. As a result, Detroit boasts one of the highest obesity rates in the country.

many of the larger outlets in the Metro Detroit area. "We funnel our big business through brokerages," explains Isayev. "We have produce coming in from Holland, Israel and Spain regularly. The items that come in are cyclical, and are typically whatever the public is demanding at the time. They could be specialty items or something as common as tomatoes."

Isayev admits he's feeling the economic crunch. "It's been a little tougher lately as people are just buying less than before. I think the smaller outlets are feeling the crunch more than the larger groceries."

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Schwartz & Sons' Stone emphasizes, "Metro Detroit needs to get over this current economic hurdle and concentrate on safe and secure shopping outlets that will encourage everyday people to own and operate stores within the city. That mindset then provides a service to the communities in the form of more jobs."

In August 2009, Grand Rapids, MI-based chain Meijer Inc. announced it would open a 192,000-square foot store in 2011, making it the only mainstream grocery retailer in Metro Detroit. Plans call for the superstore to begin building in May, 2010, at Eight Mile Road near the Michigan State Fair Grounds.

Traditionally, large supermarket chains, such as Meijer, target an auto-oriented populace in areas suitable for large retail space. Conversely, urban areas rarely offer convenient parking, with smaller overall store space options, which ultimately translates to less profits. Besides Meijer, all of the larger retail chains, such as Wal-Mart, have abandoned the Detroit inner-city markets.

In the end, however, it may likely just be the independent grocers and family businesses that weather the economic storm the best, as they have the flexibility to adapt more quickly than many of the larger retailers. "The produce industry has always been a stabilizing force within societies," assesses Stone. "There are many families involved and job opportunities are abundant in communities where a great deal of fresh produce is sold."

"We do anything we can to promote sales and to encourage repeat business," acknowledges E&L's Dubrinsky. "It depends on the

day and the time of year, but we try to capitalize on any holiday or festivity we can. But some people are just cutting back on the amount of produce and food they are buy-

ing for their families overall, and that's simply a result of an unsound economy."

"One of the best things the produce industry offers the Detroit neighborhoods is hope," observes Stone. "Hope for their future, especially those folks who are feeling less fortunate in these times."

"This is Detroit, and it isn't the first time this city has faced a financial crisis and it probably won't be the last," adds Dubrinsky. "When the auto industry returns, so will our industry. We might not come back as strong right away, but we always rebound." **pb**

Reader Service # 225

WAL-MART PRICING REPORT ROUND XIX

Raleigh Market Reveals Kroger's Loyalty Card Offers A Sophisticated Way To Compete With Wal-Mart



Loyalty card programs are becoming the weapon of choice that supermarkets are wielding to compete with Wal-Mart.

By Jim Prevor

The PRODUCE BUSINESS study we call the *Wal-Mart Pricing Report* has now been going on for more than five years. With this iteration, we have conducted 19 separate studies in 16 cities across the globe, from Connecticut to California, from Oregon to Florida.

We have learned a great deal, including how much of what we expected to be true was not. We began these studies with elaborate theories on how supermarkets might compete with Wal-Mart and, specifically, its Supercenter concept. We expect-

ed to find highly sophisticated pricing decisions. For example, we thought supermarkets might look to make margin on unbranded, fresh produce, but would be careful to be competitive on what were obviously the same product, such as branded, jarred produce, salad dressings or even well known brands of fresh produce.

Yet, for the most part, these elaborate theories were shown to be wrong. Pricing consistently seemed to be driven by internal metrics for margin and if the prices that resulted were not competitive, one of two things happened — either the store did

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fine because of geography or because it offered other values attractive to a clientele of sufficient size and spending ability, or the store simply closed.

There have been a few exceptions that have gone toe-to-toe with the Goliath supercenter. Specialized concepts, such as A&P's Food Basics, when it was operating in Detroit, MI, and Fiesta Mart, in Houston, TX, have given Wal-Mart a run for its money. Also, we have run into

This is a study solely of produce, so theoretically a chain could make a decision to be highly competitive with Wal-Mart on branded grocery items and then look to pick up margin in perishables.

occasional special situations, such as when we stumbled onto a price war in Salt Lake City, UT, a few years back.

By and large, however, mainstream supermarkets have not so much attempted to compete with Wal-Mart for its core lower income, paycheck-to-paycheck shoppers. They have, for the most part, simply decided to get out of the way.

We would add one caveat: In city after city, we are now seeing more and more that the loyalty card programs are becoming the weapon of choice supermarkets are wielding to compete with Wal-Mart. Many stores that are simply not competitive with Wal-Mart on the basis of published prices available to all shoppers are much more competitive when loyalty card discounts are applied.

This seems like a sophisticated use of loyalty cards — letting the chain pick up additional margin on occasional shoppers, perhaps those seeing the store as a convenience because it is on a frequently traveled route or near a hotel, etc., while offering the discounts necessary to

How They Stack Up Against Wal-Mart Supercenter

Region	Store	% over Wal-Mart	Store	% over Wal-Mart	Store	% over Wal-Mart
Connecticut-5/02	Super Stop & Shop	.23%	Shaws	.34%	Big Y	.36%
Salt Lake City-10/02	Harmon's	.2%	Smith's	.6%	Albertson's	.12%
South Florida-2/03	Super Target	.22%	Publix	.31%	Winn-Dixie	.52%
Dallas, Texas-10/03	Albertson's	.23%	Brookshires	.7%	Kroger	.19%
	Neighborhood Market	-1.2%	Tom Thumb	.27%		
Portland, OR-3/04	Albertson's	.30%	Fred Meyer	.22%	Haggen	.27%
	Safeway	.37%				
Phoenix, AZ-8/04	Albetson's	.22%	Bashas'	.25%	Fry's	.15%
	Safeway	.17%				
Palm Springs-10/04	Albertson's	.19%	Jensen's	.60%	Ralphs	.16%
	Vons	.20%				
Detroit, MI-1/05	A&P Food Basic	-17%	Farmer Jack	.24%	Kroger	.28%
	Meijer	.3%				
St. Louis, MO-5/05	Dierbergs	.22%	Schnucks	.14%		
Houston, TX-9/05	HEB	.15%	Kroger	.30%	Fiesta Mart	-0.3%
Atlanta, GA-11/05	Harry's	.18%	Ingles	.16%	Kroger	.25%
	Publix	.13%	Target	.3%		
Denver, CO-5/06	Albertsons	.16%	King Sooper	.21%	Safeway	.25%
Portland, OR-10/06	Albertsons	.32%	Fred Meyer	.21%	QFC	.54%
	Safeway	.30%				
Toronto Canada-7/07	A&P	.35%	Brunos	.28%	Loblaws	.13%
	Sobeys	.45%				
Kansas City, KS-10/07	Dillions	.20%	Hen House	.15%	Hy Vee	.18%
	Price Chopper	.13%				
Los Angeles-4/08	Fresh & Easy	.15%	Starters	.8%	Ralphs	.25%
	Vons	.14%				
Orlando, FL-10/08	Publix	.32%	Super Target	.22%	Whole Foods	.38%
	Winn Dixie	.28%				
Phoenix, AZ 4/09	Wal-Mart Marketside	.23%	Wal-Mart Neighborhood	.7%	Bashas	.30%
	Fresh & Easy	.32%	Fry's	.27%	Safeway	.37%
Raleigh, NC 9/09	Food Lion	.24%	Fresh Market	.31%	Harris Teeter	.35%
	Kroger	.21%	Super Target	.11%		





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Price Comparison — Raleigh, NC
 Prices Available To The General Public

Produce Item	How Sold	WalMart Supercenter	Food Lion	% Over Wal-Mart	Fresh Market	% Over Wal-Mart	Harris Teeter	% Over Wal-Mart
Apples — Granny Smith	Lb	\$1.57	\$1.99	26.75%	\$1.99	26.75%	\$1.99	26.75%
Apples — Red Delicious	Lb	\$1.37	\$1.99	45.26%	\$1.99	45.26%	\$1.79	30.66%
Apples — Fuji	Lb	\$1.57	\$1.99	26.75%	\$1.99	26.75%	\$1.99	26.75%
Avocados	Each	\$1.24	\$0.99	-20.16%	\$2.99	141.13%	\$2.49	100.81%
Bananas - Yellow	Lb	\$0.64	\$0.67	4.69%	\$0.69	7.81%	\$0.59	-7.81%
Blackberries	5.6oz Pkg	\$2.04	\$3.99	95.59%	\$2.16	5.88%	\$3.76	84.31%
Blueberries	1 Pint	\$3.96	\$3.99	0.76%	\$3.99	0.76%	\$4.99	26.01%
Broccoli Whole	Each	\$2.38	\$2.19	-7.98%	\$2.99	25.63%	\$2.49	4.62%
Cabbage - Green	Lb	\$0.64	\$0.69	7.81%	\$0.69	7.81%	\$0.47	-26.56%
Cantaloupe - Whole	Each	\$2.30	\$2.50	8.70%	\$2.50	8.70%	\$3.49	51.74%
Carrots — Regular	Pkge	\$0.88	\$1.19	35.23%	\$1.29	46.59%	\$0.99	12.50%
Carrots — Baby Bag	16oz	\$1.59	\$2.49	56.60%	\$2.00	25.79%	\$2.29	44.03%
Cauliflower	Each	\$2.66	\$3.29	23.68%	\$2.99	12.41%	\$2.99	12.41%
Celery	Each	\$1.46	\$1.89	29.45%	\$1.69	15.75%	\$2.29	56.85%
Coleslaw Bag	14oz	\$1.48	\$3.64	145.95%	\$1.99	34.46%	\$1.00	-32.43%
Cucumbers - Regular	Each	\$0.76	\$0.59	-22.37%	\$0.99	30.26%	\$0.99	30.26%
Dips — Other Tub	16oz	\$2.98	\$4.96	66.44%	\$4.64	55.70%	\$3.79	27.18%
Dressing — Marzetti	15oz	\$3.44	\$3.99	15.99%	\$4.35	26.45%	\$3.79	10.17%
Grapes — Green Seedless	Lb	\$1.78	\$1.99	11.80%	\$1.48	16.85%	\$1.20	-32.58%
Green Onions	Bunch	\$1.18	\$0.79	-33.05%	\$0.99	-16.10%	\$0.79	-33.05%
Honeydew - Whole	Each	\$2.50	\$3.99	59.60%	\$3.99	59.60%	\$4.99	99.60%
Lemons Bulk	Each	\$0.38	\$0.69	81.58%	\$0.79	107.89%	\$0.59	55.26%
Lettuce — Green Leaf	Each	\$1.58	\$1.59	0.63%	\$1.99	25.95%	\$1.99	25.95%
Lettuce — Iceberg Bulk	Each	\$1.28	\$1.59	24.22%	\$1.99	55.47%	\$1.39	8.59%
Lettuce — Red Leaf	Each	\$1.58	\$1.59	0.63%	\$1.99	25.95%	\$1.99	25.95%
Lettuce — Romaine Bulk	Each	\$1.58	\$1.59	0.63%	\$1.99	25.95%	\$2.29	44.94%
Limes Bulk	Each	\$0.25	\$0.20	-20.00%	\$0.50	100.00%	\$0.59	136.00%
Mangos	Each	\$0.98	\$0.99	1.02%	\$1.98	0.00%	\$1.49	52.04%
Mushrooms - White	Pkg: 8oz	\$1.49	\$2.29	53.69%	\$2.99	100.67%	\$2.50	67.79%
Nectarines	Lb	\$1.25	\$1.99	59.20%	\$2.49	99.20%	\$3.49	179.20%
Onions — Red	Lb	\$1.28	\$1.19	-7.03%	\$1.69	32.03%	\$1.69	32.03%
Onions — Yellow Bag	3lb	\$2.18	\$2.39	9.63%	\$2.99	37.16%	\$1.97	-9.63%
Pineapple	Each	\$3.93	\$2.99	-23.92%	\$4.99	26.97%	\$4.99	26.97%
Radishes	Bunch	\$0.88	\$1.39	57.95%	\$1.99	126.14%	\$1.69	92.05%
Raspberries	6oz Pkg	\$1.98	\$3.99	101.52%	\$3.99	101.52%	\$3.99	101.52%
Salad — Caesar Bag	8.9oz	\$3.88	\$3.99	2.84%	\$4.72	21.65%	\$4.29	10.57%
Spinach Bag	9oz	\$2.38	\$2.79	17.23%	\$2.70	13.45%	\$2.99	25.63%
Squash — Zucchini	Lb	\$1.50	\$1.89	26.00%	\$1.49	-0.67%	\$1.99	32.67%
Strawberries — 1# Pkg	Pkg	\$2.00	\$2.99	49.50%	\$3.99	99.50%	\$3.99	99.50%
Tomatoes — Grape	Pint	\$2.18	\$3.29	50.92%	\$2.99	37.16%	\$3.49	60.09%
Tomatoes — On the Vine	Lb	\$2.48	\$2.99	20.56%	\$3.99	60.89%	\$2.99	20.56%
Tomatoes — Plum/Roma	Lb	\$1.28	\$1.29	0.78%	\$1.69	32.03%	\$2.99	133.59%
Watermelon — Cut	Lb	\$3.25	\$2.99	-8.00%	\$3.10	-4.62%	\$2.99	-8.00%
MARKET BASKET PRICE		\$77.99	\$96.49	23.72%	\$102.40	31.30%	\$105.53	35.31%

attract a regular neighborhood clientele through the loyalty card program.

RALEIGH LOYALTY

This general finding — stores basic-

ly not competitive with Wal-Mart on produce pricing, but some chains doing significantly better when loyalty discounts are included — continues in Raleigh, NC, where we visited five retailers in addi-

tion to Wal-Mart. We checked prices on produce at Food Lion, Fresh Market, Harris Teeter, a Kroger store and a Super-Target.

Not surprisingly, the two retailers known to be upscale seem to step to their own drummer when it comes to produce pricing. Fresh Market comes in a full 31.3 percent over the prices at the Wal-Mart Supercenter and Harris Teeter follows right behind at 35.31 percent. Harris Teeter's loyalty card moderates this significantly, bringing its price level down to "only" 24 percent over Wal-Mart for loyalty card shoppers.

Considering the cost of transportation and the value of people's time, a 5 percent differential between a neighborhood supermarket and a typically more distant supercenter is easily justified by many consumers.

economical store, yet its move over the past few years to add service departments may have also transformed the company's position in the marketplace.

Target seems sort of lost — neither upscale, nor economy. It was always a challenge for Target to translate its “Cheap-Chic” branding to food, but now, if you have a Kroger loyalty card, at least in Raleigh, Target is not cheap at all.

Food Lion comes in with prices a full 23.72 percent over Wal-Mart, more than enough to motivate customers focused on price to switch stores. The Food Lion loyalty card doesn't make a significant dent in this differential since, even after the loyalty card discount, Food Lion's loyalty card customers are still paying 18.54 percent over Wal-Mart's prices.

This is a surprising result, so we might want to mention a caution on the interpretation of the results of this study. This is a study solely of produce, so theo-

retically, a chain could make a decision to be highly competitive with Wal-Mart on branded grocery items and then look to pick up margin in perishables. Whether that is the case with Food Lion or if its move into service departments has blunted its pricing edge will require further research.

Our two final competitors each have interesting twists to their performance in the study. One company's use of loyalty cards truly changes the dynamic in the market and that would be The Kroger Company. For a customer simply walking into the store without a loyalty card, Kroger is pricey. Even if its produce prices are less than the upscale chains, it still comes in at 21.31 percent over Wal-Mart's prices.

SuperTarget is a tad less expensive. If you were to look at its base prices without advertised specials, it comes in at 14.08 percent over Wal-Mart, but add in the dynamics of Target's advertised specials and the differential shrinks, and then it comes in at 11.26 percent over Wal-Mart on produce prices.

In contrast, the Kroger loyalty card earns its users far deeper discounts. Kroger uses its loyalty card program to come out only 5.62 percent over Wal-Mart for its loyalty card shoppers.

Considering the cost of transportation and the value of people's time, a 5 percent differential between a neighborhood supermarket and a typically more distant supercenter is easily justified by many consumers.

One reason Kroger has been successful in many markets where Wal-Mart is

Kroger	% Over Wal-Mart	Super Target	% Over Wal-Mart
\$1.73	10.19%	\$1.59	1.27%
\$1.08	-21.17%	\$1.49	8.76%
\$1.99	26.75%	\$1.49	-5.10%
\$1.99	60.48%	\$1.79	44.35%
\$0.49	-23.44%	\$0.58	-9.38%
\$3.99	95.59%	\$1.91	-6.37%
\$2.99	-24.49%	\$1.99	-49.75%
\$2.62	10.08%	\$2.29	-3.78%
\$0.67	4.69%	\$1.99	210.94%
\$1.50	-34.78%	\$1.99	-13.48%
\$0.92	4.55%	\$0.89	1.14%
\$1.79	12.58%	\$1.69	6.29%
\$2.99	12.41%	\$2.49	-6.39%
\$1.61	10.27%	\$1.49	2.05%
\$2.10	41.89%	\$1.69	14.19%
\$0.55	-27.63%	\$0.79	3.95%
\$4.96	66.44%	\$2.99	0.34%
\$3.99	15.99%	\$3.79	10.17%
\$1.98	11.24%	\$1.99	11.80%
\$0.65	-44.92%	\$0.60	-49.15%
\$3.00	20.00%	\$1.99	-20.40%
\$0.42	10.53%	\$0.33	-13.16%
\$1.49	-5.70%	\$1.99	25.95%
\$1.35	5.47%	\$0.99	-22.66%
\$1.49	-5.70%	\$1.99	25.95%
\$1.49	-5.70%	\$1.99	25.95%
\$0.19	-24.00%	\$0.33	32.00%
\$0.89	-9.18%	\$1.79	82.65%
\$1.96	31.54%	\$1.89	26.85%
\$1.69	35.20%	\$2.49	99.20%
\$1.49	16.41%	\$1.29	0.78%
\$2.25	3.21%	\$2.29	5.05%
\$4.99	26.97%	\$3.99	1.53%
\$1.69	92.05%	\$0.99	12.50%
\$3.99	101.52%	\$2.90	46.46%
\$3.00	-22.68%	\$3.99	2.84%
\$4.95	107.98%	\$3.87	62.61%
\$1.49	-0.67%	\$1.99	32.67%
\$2.20	10.00%	\$2.99	49.50%
\$6.40	193.58%	\$3.20	46.79%
\$2.62	5.65%	\$2.99	20.56%
\$2.99	133.59%	\$1.49	16.41%
\$1.99	-38.77%	\$3.49	7.38%
\$94.61	21.31%	\$86.77	11.26%

Though Fresh Market does not offer a loyalty card program, its use of advertised specials brought its market basket prices down to 31.3 percent over Wal-Mart. Without the specials it would have been a full 36.72 percent over Wal-Mart's prices.

The disconnect between Wal-Mart's prices and those of upscale venues such as Fresh Market and Harris Teeter may not surprise anyone, but other retailers in the community seem to perform in unexpected ways.

Food Lion, for example, the Delhaize-owned operation, has a reputation as an



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Reader Service # 82

Wal-Mart Supercenter vs 5 Chains Price Comparison — Raleigh, NC Prices Available To Loyalty Card Holders

Produce Item	How Sold	WalMart Supercenter	Food Lion	% Over Wal-Mart
Avocados	Each	\$1.24	\$0.99	-20.16%
Blueberries	1 Pint	\$3.96	\$3.99	0.76%
Broccoli Whole	Each	\$2.38	\$2.19	-7.98%
Cantaloupe - Whole	Each	\$2.30	\$2.50	8.70%
Carrots - Regular 1# Bag	Package	\$0.88	\$0.99	12.50%
Carrots — Baby Package	16oz	1.59	\$2.49	56.60%
Cauliflower	Each	\$2.66	\$3.29	23.68%
Coleslaw Bag	14oz	\$1.48	\$2.80	89.19%
Cucumbers - Regular	Each	\$0.76	\$0.59	-22.37%
Grapes - Green Seedless	Lb	\$1.78	\$1.99	11.80%
Honeydew - Whole	Each	\$2.50	\$3.99	59.60%
Limes Bulk	Each	\$0.25	\$0.10	-60.00%
Mangos	Each	\$0.98	\$0.99	1.02%
Mushrooms - White Pkg	8oz	\$1.49	\$1.99	33.56%
Nectarines	Lb	\$1.25	\$1.99	59.20%
Radishes	Bunch	\$0.88	\$1.39	57.95%
Raspberries Package	6oz	\$1.98	\$3.99	101.52%
Spinach Bag	9oz	\$2.38	\$2.49	4.62%
Strawberries - 1# Pkg	Package	\$2.00	\$2.99	49.50%
Tomatoes - Grape	Pint	\$2.18	\$2.69	23.39%
Tomatoes - On the Vine	Lb	\$2.48	\$1.29	-47.98%
Tomatoes - Plum/Roma	Lb	\$1.28	\$1.29	0.78%
Watermelon - Cut	Lb	\$3.25	\$2.99	-8.00%
*MARKET BASKET PRICE		\$77.99	\$92.45	18.54%

* Adjusted if all items in original market basket were purchased using Loyalty Cards

present is that Kroger uses its loyalty card program — highly influenced by Dunnhumby, the London, UK-based marketing, branding and research company — to offer regular customers prices almost on par with Wal-Mart, while picking up extra margin from less dedicated or simply less price-sensitive customers — customers unwilling, unable or indifferent to doing the simple things necessary to get and use a loyalty card.

LESSONS LEARNED

In a sense, what Raleigh teaches us is that Kroger, America's largest supermarket chain, really does stand alone. Everyone else in the market has either moved upscale or lacks the sophisticated technology to make loyalty cards a key profitability tool and, therefore, has to use blunt edges, such as high prices, to generate returns. Kroger, reaping the benefits of its relationship with Dunnhumby, can price with finesse.

Nobody gets all the business, so this leaves a lot of low hanging fruit for Wal-Mart to pick — customers of chains that are neither upscale enough to be serving a different clientele nor inexpensive enough to compete effectively with Wal-

Mart for that large group of price-motivated shoppers.

Yet, perhaps, Wal-Mart should not get too tranquil. Technology tends to spread, and if it works for Kroger, as it seems to be doing, surely others will, in time, acquire the same competence that Kroger has and become more facile with the use of loyalty card data.

Wal-Mart can hope that this takes awhile and folks at Delhaize may wonder if they can do it fast enough.

The other question mark raised by this study in Raleigh, NC, is what place does Target really have in the food business? It's a bit more upscale than Wal-Mart, but it is not Fresh Market or Harris Teeter by any means. Even with heavy use of advertised specials, SuperTarget allows itself to be outpriced by a supermarket chain such as Kroger, for regular shoppers who have loyalty cards. Target seems sort of lost — neither upscale, nor economy. It was always a challenge for Target to translate its "Cheap-Chic" branding to food, but now, if you have a Kroger loyalty card, at least in Raleigh, Target is not cheap at all.

Wal-Mart remains formidable, legitimately owning the low price positioning

	Harris Teeter	% Over Wal-Mart	Kroger	% Over Wal-Mart
	\$2.49	100.81%	\$1.50	20.97%
	\$3.99	0.76%	\$2.99	-24.49%
	\$1.50	-36.97%	\$1.50	-36.97%
	\$3.00	30.43%	\$1.50	-34.78%
	\$0.99	12.50%	\$0.92	4.55%
	\$1.79	12.58%	\$1.79	12.58%
	\$2.50	-6.02%	\$2.99	12.41%
	\$1.00	-32.43%	\$2.10	41.89%
	\$0.50	-34.21%	\$0.55	-27.63%
	\$1.00	-43.82%	\$1.39	-21.91%
	\$4.99	99.60%	\$2.50	0.00%
	\$0.59	136.00%	\$0.19	-24.00%
	\$1.49	52.04%	\$0.89	-9.18%
	\$2.50	67.79%	\$1.50	0.67%
	\$2.49	99.20%	\$1.69	35.20%
	\$1.69	92.05%	\$1.00	13.64%
	\$3.99	101.52%	\$2.99	51.01%
	\$2.99	25.63%	\$4.50	89.08%
	\$1.33	-33.50%	\$2.20	10.00%
	\$3.49	60.09%	\$2.40	10.09%
	\$1.99	-19.76%	\$2.62	5.65%
	\$2.99	133.59%	\$1.35	5.47%
	\$2.99	-8.00%	\$1.39	-57.23%
	\$96.71	24.00%	\$82.37	5.62%

in the market, though Kroger, with loyalty card customers, at least, is close enough to blunt defections. This time, though, we saw operational weakness at Wal-Mart, particularly a surprising number of out-of-stocks on the Wednesday afternoon we visited the store. Blackberries, honeydew melons, red leaf lettuce and bags of yellow onions and radishes all had places on the shelves, prices listed, but no produce.

Was it just this one store? Just this one day? Just one afternoon? Or is this a sign of more widespread operational difficulties? It doesn't help consumers to offer the lowest prices if one is out of stock on the items.

Future iterations of the *PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report* will reveal the degree to which out-of-stocks on produce are, in fact, a problem for Wal-Mart.

In the meantime, during a recession and time of high unemployment, Wal-Mart has the low price positioning that is winning consumers. Of course, tomorrow is another day and the *PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report* will move on to another city. **pb**

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Wholesalers Step Up Retail Marketing Efforts

In an effort to remain competitive, the role of wholesalers continues to evolve as they take on more than solely buying and selling.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

Wholesalers have always had to keep changing to be competitive. According to Larry Schembri, head of berry procurement and retail sales for S. Katzman Produce Inc., in the Bronx, NY, "Wholesalers used to control everything. Then, in the 1970s, retailers started going directly to the growers and the wholesalers got squeezed out. It was a general progression that was bound to happen."

"Today, wholesalers sell service," says Mike Maxwell, president of Procacci Brothers Sales

Corp., in Philadelphia, PA. This can include everything from providing branded programs to innovative retail merchandising programs.

BRANDED AND PRIVATE LABEL PRODUCE

The first brand of fresh vegetables in the United States was the Andy Boy label, according to Matthew D'Arrigo, vice president of D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York Inc., headquartered in the Bronx, NY. "It's recognized as a top quality label for broccoli, broccoli rabe and romaine lettuce that commands a premium price equivalent to a national



Photos courtesy of Coast Produce Co. Inc.

Coast Produce Co.'s Farmer Select program is an in-store marketing program designed to create a relationship between shoppers and the farmers who grow the produce they are purchasing.



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brand. We don't have to make much of an effort to get shelf space. We've got a pretty loyal retail following."

More recently, S. Katzman Produce launched its private Bloom Fresh label. The line includes vegetables such as French beans, snow peas, sugar snap peas and baby squash imported from Guatemala, and pomegranate arils grown and packed in India. Schembri says, "There's an old saying that you're only as good as your last delivery. That's even more important when you have your name on the box. Quality is a big

selling point."

Schembri knows there can be a cost savings between a wholesaler's private label and a national brand. "I won't pay more than a Del Monte, for example. But, Del Monte may have to spend more than I do because they might have to buy an entire boatload. Or, a brand such as Driscoll's, for example, should invest in varietal development. The little competitive advantages we get, combined with the volume we handle, can translate into a retailer being able to sell our labeled product at 2-for-\$5 rather than 2-

for-\$6.

Creativity is something a wholesaler can bring to the market through an exclusive brand. Mike Wise, vice president of operations for Louisville, KY-based Horton Fruit Co. Inc., explains, "We've tried to be innovative in the way we package produce and differentiate our Peak brand from national brands. We can also bring new ideas to the market faster and offer more flexibility when it's our own label. A good example of this is a caramel apple product that we make from scratch."

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**— Emily Fragoso
Coast Produce Co.**

Horton Fruit has divided the company into three distinct parts to better serve its customers. Its Peak brand and special products that require repacking and direct sourcing are handled through the company's packing "division," whereas its wholesale operation stands independently. Horton's sister company, Grow Farm, sources locally grown items through its own farms.

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Reader Service # 5

The company sells items such as curly leaf spinach, coleslaw, bell peppers, onions, locally grown cucumbers and squash, as well as caramel apples under its Peak label. "We've built loyalty to our brand and as such, these products are everyday items on supermarket shelves," states Wise. "Retailers

Close To Home

The locally grown trend is also finding its way into wholesalers' repertoire. Horton Fruit, through its sister company, Louisville, KY-based Grow Farms, works with state departments of agriculture and its farmers in Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio to source produce such as tomatoes, beans, cantaloupe, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, sweet corn, pumpkins, gourds, watermelon and squash. Mike Wise, vice president of operations, notes, "We work with HarvestMark to provide full traceability on all of our local Grow Farms produce. This offers our farmers a marketing advantage with retailers, and because we take care of it, the farmers can focus on what they do best – growing high-quality produce."

Merchandising support includes sticker-ing product with state logos such as Kentucky Proud, Pick Tennessee and Ohio Proud, and supporting retailers with ad, signage and POS materials, such as graphics of farms and farmers.

Coast Produce's Farmer Select is an in-store POS-based marketing program launched in August, 2008, designed to create a relationship between shoppers and the farmers who grow the produce they are buying. Emily Fragoso, marketing manager, notes, "The program focuses on one of our specific grower-partners' products or growing areas each month."

The program has seen a huge success. For example, over the last year, sales of Family Tree Farm's California-grown pluots have increased 79 percent, while sales of Sage Fruit's Washington-grown pears have risen by 125 percent.

Some in-store merchandising programs are as simple as setting up a demo. Larry Schembri, head of berry procurement and retail sales for S. Katzman Produce Inc. offers, "Last year, we worked with a retailer in New England and ran tests sampling out golden raspberries to customers when the product was at its peak flavor and lowest cost. The customers loved them and were more aware of the product because of this, and sales showed it."

pb

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Photo courtesy of Horton Fruit

Caramel apples are one of the many products offered by Horton Fruit's Peak Brand.



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Reader Service # 61

don't just call us for fill-ins, although we do service customers outside our normal base that call for product."

Wholesalers such as Miami, FL-based Coosemans Worldwide Inc. that cater to foodservice as well as retail and have multiple locations, can make high quality specialty produce available to retail accounts in many regions of the nation. Charlie Coiner, vice president of Rock Garden South, in Miami, FL, and a division of Coosemans Worldwide, asserts, "Produce destined for foodservice must be superlative. The retail market in Cleveland, OH, for example, may require only 100 pounds of French beans, but 500 pounds for foodservice. This gives a retailer the ability to buy this item from us thanks to the velocity and volume we sell to foodservice." Coosemans Worldwide ships under the Diam label.

Supplying small chains and independent supermarkets with nationally branded produce is a major part of the business for Bronx, NY-based wholesaler, Rubin Bros. Produce Corp., an exclusive distributor for Dole. Cary Ruben, vice president of sales, explains, "Because of our purchasing power and the sheer size of the New York and East Coast market, we're able to offer a premium

Forward Distributing

Some wholesalers have such strong relationships with their grower-partners they act as freight forwarders. Larry Schembri, head of berry procurement and retail sales for S. Katzman Produce Inc., located in the Bronx, NY, contends, "Moving product from point A to point B has a lot of steps in between. Logistics are our strength."

Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., in Philadelphia, PA, freight forwards for several national brands, reveals Mike Maxwell, president. "For example, since we're located near the port, we'll do cold storage for Chilean fruit. The retailer buys from the importer and we deliver."

Matthew D'Arrigo, vice president of D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York Inc., in the Bronx, NY, says, "We aren't a forward distributor in the strict sense, but very well could be. Our California company sells to the large chains direct from California. New York is a big market for small customers. The smaller chains that can't carry the inventory or handle the logistics from the West Coast buy direct from us. **pb**

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Reader Service # 24

product to our smaller retailers who are not able to buy direct. We can also extend them credit they may not be able to get by going direct," he says. "At the same time, we can cover shorts for the larger retailers who buy direct and help them stay in the brand. This has helped Dole achieve a good market share in the Northeast."

INNOVATIVE PACKAGING

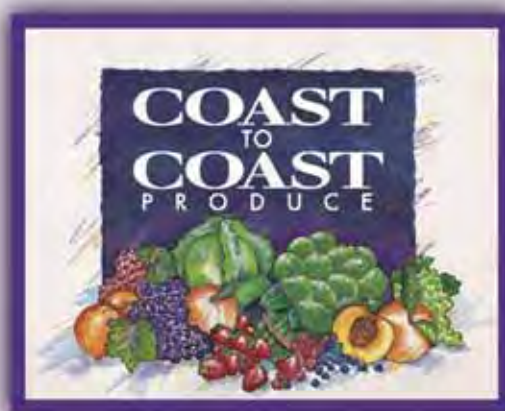
Many wholesalers custom-pack produce for their own brands as well as private retail labels. Procacci's Maxwell notes, "A shipper

might set up their day-shift line to run 5-pound bags of potatoes. They'll end up with 10 loads on the floor that they'll ship when orders come in. We bring in a railcar of potatoes, re-pack to order and send it right out. The retail customers here on the East Coast get the pack they want and a much fresher product."

Maxwell offers other examples. "We'll bring in a truck load of oranges from Florida and cull bruised or dented fruit before re-packing. It's really a premium product," he says. "As for corn, we'll ship a truckload up

"Retailers have come to rely on us for our knowledge. I've been to the fields in California and I'm on the phone with the guy standing in those fields every day. When I hear there's flowers on the strawberries, I know retailers better be ready for an ad in two to three weeks."

**— Larry Schembri
S. Katzman Produce Inc.**



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from Florida and husk and tray-pack it here. This means the retailer doesn't have to pay to haul husk, or tray-pack it in Florida and then haul it north. Fresh corn starts to decay as soon as it is cut."

Some wholesalers work closely with growers to source out produce with certain specifications and then custom-pack for their retail customers. For example, S. Katzman's Schembri shares, "We'll source watermelon with a specific Brix level, then sticker the product with words like 'peak flavor.' We do a lot of peak taste promotions. We'll also advise our retail customers when it's not good to promote something. For example, September isn't the best time for blackberries. They tend to have a pucker effect that can turn customers off and you don't want this. It is all about repeat purchases."

Coast Produce Co. Inc., headquartered in Los Angeles, CA, has gone one-step further and used packaging to create its August, 2008-launched snacking line. The line started with mini cucumbers and in April, 2009, expanded to include three varieties of snack-size tomatoes marketed as 'Tom Toms' — grape tomatoes, chocolate cherry and baby heirlooms. Products are packaged in 1-pint and 16-ounce clamshells with highly visible



Be Aware and Be Prepared

Congress has declared October “National Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness Month” in an effort to raise awareness about the nation’s leading cause of death. The resolution “calls upon the people of the U.S. to observe this month with appropriate programs and activities.”

Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) can happen to anyone at anytime. Louis Acompora was a healthy 14 year old boy who died from SCA. There are countless others who have suffered the same fate. We can make a difference in the fight against SCA. What can you do?

Know the signs and symptoms of a heart condition

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- Family history of heart disease
- Unusual shortness of breath
- Unusual fatigue/tiredness
- Family history of unexpected death during physical activity or during seizure, or any other unexplained sudden death of an otherwise healthy family member under age 50.

Consult a physician promptly if you or someone you know has one or more of the signs and or symptoms.

In the Event of SCA every minute counts

Know the Chain of Survival and become trained in CPR and the use of an AED

1. Early Recognition of Sudden Cardiac Arrest

- Collapsed and unresponsive
- Seizure like activity
- Gasping, gurgling, snoring or labored breathing noises

2. Early Access to 9-1-1

- Confirm unresponsiveness
- Call 9-1-1- and follow emergency dispatchers instructions
- Call any onsite Emergency responders

3. Early CPR

- Begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) immediately

4. Early Defibrillation

- Immediately retrieve and use an automated external defibrillator(AED) as soon as possible to restore the heart to its normal rhythm

5. Early Advance Care

- Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Responders begin advanced like support including additional resuscitative measures and transfer to a hospital.

THESE STEPS WILL SAVE A LIFE PLEASE TAKE THE TIME TO KNOW THEM AND LEARN CPR.

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Reader Service # 20



Chris Grizzaffe, president of the Produce Exchange of Atlanta, helps his customers source hard-to-find products, cluing them in to good deals along the way.

blue labels. The line is designed to position these vegetables as an impulse snack food rather than only an ingredient in cooking. Emily Fragoso, marketing manager, remarks, "We are always researching trends and today's consumers are looking for healthful snacking solutions."

Coast saw the opportunity to create this product line when they picked up a new customer that grows mini hothouse cucumbers and asked a long-term tomato grower to grow proprietary tomato varieties. "Retailers who have carried this line have reported more than a 15 percent increase in sales," reveals Fragoso. "That's huge for us."

RETAIL PROGRAMS

Wholesalers are creating easy ways for retailers to one-stop-stock hard-to-source produce and providing retail programs to merchandize these products in-store. Coast Produce, for example, has offered its Coast Caliente and Coast Asian marketing programs for the past seven years. These programs provide retail customers with Hispanic and Asian produce. Fragoso details, "We work with retailers, look at the demographics of their market and then offer suggestions on how to increase sales. This might be through demos, product mix or store schematics. We also provide targeted employee training. It's an individualized approach, not a cookie-cutter solution."

Procacci also offers assistance to its retail customers with ethnic merchandising. Maxwell discloses, "We have merchandising staff that will check stores and neighborhoods to see what is selling. If a bodega one block away from a store is selling plantains by the caseload and that retailer isn't stocking plantains, it's a missed opportunity. We offer direct-store delivery on over 750 items, everything from ethnic specialties to tropicals and organics."

In addition to Coast Caliente and Coast Asian, the company introduced its seven-item Coast Organic line, which includes red chard, beets, leeks and collard greens, at the beginning of 2009. "This evolved by looking at what organic customers want to know," explains Fragoso. "For example, there are tags on each item offering descriptive information for consumers and a bar code that assures retailers get the right ring."

Specialty produce, everything from fresh herbs and Key limes to mixed chiles and tomatoes on-the-vine, is a niche Coosemans fills. Coiner contends, "Due to the volume of specialty produce we bring into a market, retailers can order six of this, eight of that, two of another, rather than being required to purchase a full pallet or larger quantities."

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Photo courtesy of Rock Garden South

Rock Garden South, a Miami, FL-based division of Coosemans Worldwide, supplies specialty produce, such as herbs, to retailers.

with retail chains. These programs focus on Top 100-selling items, provide a weekly list of costs along with the retail markup and sell price per item at store level, thus taking the difficulty and risk out of embarking on a

specialty produce program.

SOURCING AND SUPPORT

Buying power, sheer number of products and a strategic geographic location are key advantages wholesalers bring to sourcing and supplying product to retail customers.

Chris Grizzaffe, president of the Produce Exchange of Atlanta Inc., in Forest Park, GA, says, "When a retailer can't find something, we can usually find it for them. We've got a tight relationship with growers in Florida Georgia, Michigan, Ohio and Tennessee. We can also work out the logistics for items we don't normally sell. For example, we do cucumbers and peppers, not tomatoes. But, we're willing to pick up and deliver tomatoes along with the cukes and peppers. Likewise, if they don't have a full order and know there's a good deal on something, we'll let them know about it. This is the way you make and build relationships."

Knowledge is an ingredient wholesalers offer retailers in terms of sourcing and ad support. Schembri maintains, "Many retailers hire guys right out of college with limited produce experience. The average wholesaler has 20 to 30 years of experience and is likely second or third generation in the business. Retailers have come to rely on us for

our knowledge. I've been to the fields in California and I'm on the phone with the guy standing in those fields every day. When I hear there's flowers on the strawberries, I know retailers better be ready for an ad in two to three weeks."

Schembri continues, "There's 25 million people within a 6- to 7-square-mile radius of us here in New York. This allows us to act like an accordion. When the market is heavy with product, our shoulders are broad and we can absorb it. When the market is short, for example, when blueberries were scarce from Argentina and going for \$80 for a 3.5-pound box, we sold it because we have high-end foodservice customers who are willing to pay."

Ad support for independent supermarkets is something Rubin Brothers offers. "We'll create ad programs for retailers as well as support ad programs from other companies," says Rubin. "This allows independent supermarkets to stay independent, yet be competitive with larger retailers."

In addition to help with financing, Proccacci's Maxwell adds, "We make sure the ads make money by letting independents know what price they need to advertise. It isn't like the old days when it was them against us. Today, it's a partnership." **pb**

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Reader Service # 221

How Packaging Helps Sell Produce To Consumers

Packaging offers visual appeal, convenience, value — even environmental responsibility — all of which can lead to more sales in the produce department.

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

From bags to clamshells to the most complex and intricate packaging, each has its advantages when it comes to consumer appeal.

“To many people, having a commodity in a package is just a neater look,” says Jim Scattini, vice president of sales and marketing for Sambrailo Packaging, based in Watsonville, CA. Scattini reports retailers have told him simply switching a commodity from bulk presentation to clamshells can lead to double the sales. The ability to grab a package and go may contribute to packaging’s appeal. “It evolved into that, either by design or accident,” he remarks. “That falls in line with the



Photo courtesy of Sealed Air's Cryovac Food Solutions



Most suppliers agree the ability to see inside the package is key.

kind of lifestyle we lead in the United States.”

It falls in line with trends in Europe, as well, where, “just about every item is packaged,” maintains Scattini. Although American retailers may not want to follow exactly in European stores’ footsteps, “It intrigues our retailers over here,” he notes.

“Packaging obviously has to protect produce through the logistics chain, but it needs to do more,” asserts Roy Ferguson, CEO of Chantler Packaging Inc., in Mississauga, ON, Canada, makers of Prime Pro modified atmosphere packaging (MAP) films. “It needs to ensure high-quality arrivals, keep the product free from contamination, drive impulse buying, be display-ready, provide cooking instructions and nutritional information and reduce store shrinkage, as well provide the consumer with a long shelf-life.”

AT FIRST GLANCE

“At Fox Packaging we believe that visual appeal is the determining factor when discussing the role packaging plays in produce sales,” says Aaron Fox,



Photos courtesy of PWP Industries

PWP's Dip-N-Go container has a lid that can be filled with dips and sauces.

vice president of McAllen, TX-based Fox Packaging, the makers of Fox Fresh Mesh Combo bags, which utilize breathable mesh on one side and poly film on the other. "When it comes down to it, especially when we buy food products, we buy what appeals to our senses."

"The visual effects on the container are very important," agrees Kurt Zuhlke, president and CEO of Kurt Zuhlke & Associates Inc., of Bangor, PA. "We help a lot of our customers with labeling, too."

That's important because, in addition to visual appeal, the package offers "the opportunity to put the information about the product on the package itself," says Scattini. "It provides the opportunity to put the marketing on the product. Whether it's a recipe on the bag or clamshell or really flashy graphics, people are attracted to that."

Even the shape of the container makes a

difference. "We put some of the different shapes in the supermarkets and see what people pick up," notes Zuhlke. One thing they have found is that "each market is different."

Clear packaging is the most popular choice, for obvious reasons. "It's a visual effect," asserts Zuhlke. "If it looks neat and clean and appealing, then they'll buy it. You have to have that clarity. Cloudy is not good because some people think you're trying to hide something."

"Consumers like to see 360 degrees around the product," agrees Sean Brady,


marketing director of ready meals for Sealed Air's Cryovac Food Solutions, in Elmwood Park, NJ. "The clear packaging accentuates the freshness of the product."

But completely clear packaging is not always the answer. "A mesh package that is color-coordinated to the item being packed will enhance the color of that product and help hide imperfections such as scarring," says Fox. "A clear plastic bag does nothing. In some instances, it actually takes away from a fruit or vegetable's natural coloring."

Most agree the ability to see inside the package is key. "By allowing the consumer


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Reader Service # 169

to see the product, it can help to promote impulse purchases," says Herb Knutson, director of marketing for Shelton, CT-based Inline Plastics Corp. "Pictures on the outside of a food package always look good, but consumers know that what is inside those packages rarely looks like the picture. Consumers want to see exactly what they are buying, and make sure they are getting their money's worth. Spend some time in the produce or fresh bakery area of a super-market and you will see many shoppers picking up clear plastic packages and looking through the bottom of the container at

the product. They are looking for bad fruit."

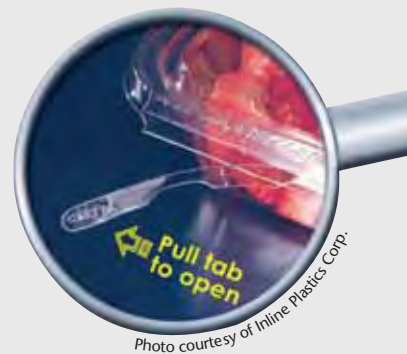
FUNCTION COUNTS

It's not enough for a package to be eye-catching, according to Zuhlke of Zuhlke & Associates. "It also has to be functional," he says. One highly functional item is the company's microwavable corn tray that allows the consumer to steam the pre-shucked corn in the package. "It's dishwasher-safe on the top rack and you can use it over again. It's very convenient," he says.

"When we looked at the produce market, one of the trends is convenience," says

Brady. One of Sealed Air's newest products is the Simple Steps package for produce — easy-open, self-venting microwavable packaging that offers a quick and effortless way to steam fresh vegetables in the microwave. "Consumers like it pre-cut and pre-washed. They like that they don't have to handle it much. Consumers are looking for something where they don't have to use a knife, some-

Increased Food Safety




Packaging decisions fall under another category that consumers care about: Food safety. "Whenever we do consumer research, 'tamper evidence' and 'tamper resistance' along with 'viewing the product' are always near the top of the list in importance to the consumer," says Herb Knutson, director of marketing for Shelton, CT-based Inline Plastics Corp., whose Safe-T-Fresh packaging won PMA's Impact Award in the Food Safety/Traceability and Supply Chain Efficiencies categories in 2008. "Just last week, we had a research group participant tell us how they watched a shopper open a container, sample the product, then close the container and walk away. That wouldn't happen with a Safe-T-Fresh container,"

"Our Safe-T-Fresh containers are very popular for cut-fruit and produce," explains Knutson. "Once the clamshell is closed, there is no way to open it without removing the hinge, which is a tear strip. This feature eliminates the need for shrink bands to keep the contents of the container secure. Shrink bands require extra time to apply, and must be run through a heat tunnel to shrink them onto the container. The less heat fresh fruit and vegetables are subjected to, the better it is for the shelf-life of the product. Bypassing the shrink band is more efficient for processors and in-store applications."


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“Consumers want to see exactly what they are buying, and make sure they are getting their money’s worth. Spend some time in the produce or fresh bakery area of a supermarket and you will see many shoppers picking up clear plastic packages and looking through the bottom of the container at the product.”

**— Herb Knutson
Inline Plastics Corp.**

president of product innovation at PWP.

Brady of Sealed Air maintains value, taste and convenience are the top three priorities for consumers. That means, despite convenience, once a package is priced too high, a top priority is lost. “They like to have the convenience of it, but they have to have the value, too” says Brady.

The price of the packaging itself is an important factor. “You can have the greatest package in the world, but if it's too expensive to pack, or you need a lot of capital investment in machinery, then it's just not

feasible,” says Fox of Fox Packaging, whose Combo bags are designed to run on equipment already existing in most facilities.

Many consumers are unaware that functional packaging adds an extra value beyond convenience when it extends the shelf-life of their produce. “Most people throw out about 30 percent of what they purchase,” says Brady. By using technology such as Cryovac's breathable films and packaging to help food stay fresher longer, less is wasted. That's good news for the retailer, as well, who in turn sees less shrink. “It's win-win

thing a 12-year-old can make without burning or cutting themselves.”

Some packaging even cuts down on the number of dishes that ends up in the sink. In the case of Simple Steps packaging, “You can serve it or eat right out of the container,” adds Brady. The company visited consumer's homes to see exactly what they do and found, “Convenience means a lot of different things to a lot of different people.”

For some, it's the ability to eat on the go. PWP Industries, headquartered in Vernon, CA, makes a Dip-N-Go container that won a PMA Impact Award for Produce Packaging for Food Safety and Functionality/Technology. “The Dip-N-Go looks like a standard straight-walled container with a lid, but there's a twist. The lid can be filled with a variety of dips and sauces and transformed into a dipping cup when opened and then snapped into the cup rim,” explains Natalie Kirschner, marketing manager.

“The Dip-N-Go package was created in direct response to the continued demand for more convenient packaging for on-the-go applications,” explains Terry Vovan, vice









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for everyone," he adds.

"I have been told that in Canada five to seven percent of all the produce sold by chain stores winds up in the dumpster, resulting in tens of millions of dollars lost per chain," adds Ferguson of Chantler Packaging. "If those numbers are correct, then it would result in the number being 10 times greater in the United States, based on population." *USA Today* reported that half of all household waste in the United States consists of produce, and it equals enough food to feed Canada.

"I can only assume that all will agree that our focus should be on curbing this massive amount of waste that results from inadequate packaging, as opposed to packaging reduction, which will aggravate the situation even more," Ferguson continues. "If grower/shipper/packers were to use more MAP packaging, such as Prime Pro, the slight cost increase would be more than offset by the savings due to produce not spoiling in the consumer's refrigerator. There is a very real need for extended shelf-life, proven by the fact that millions of consumer shelf-life



Photo courtesy of Inline Plastics Corp.

Inline's Safe-T-Fresh packaging won PMA's Impact Award in the Food Safety/Traceability and Supply Chain Efficiencies categories in 2008.

enhancement bags are being sold on TV, as well as in chain stores throughout the nation. The change to MAP packaging would result in a win-win for all the stakeholders, to say nothing of enhanced nutrition, portion packaging, improved safety and let's not forget traceability."

EARTH-FRIENDLY

A number of packaging companies are doing what they can to make their produce sustainable or otherwise environmentally friendly, and with good cause. A 2009 survey by Ipsos Marketing found that, when asked what food companies should be focusing on most, 21 percent suggested environmental packaging as a high priority.

"Being able to recycle, instead of sending packaging to the landfill sites, is very important for many consumers," explains Rebecca Kalis, president and CEO for Wenatchee, WA-based Keyes Packaging Group, a company that makes packaging from recyclable PETE, also called PET.

There are a number of recent innovations in this field. "PWP's new Tamper-Resistant Rectangular Line is revolutionizing the industry in combining the importance of food safety with an environmental package," says Kirschner of PWP. "It provides consumers the assurance the package has not been tampered with and the comfort of



Photo courtesy of Kurt Zuhlke & Associates

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Photo courtesy of Inline Plastics Corp

knowing the environment was considered in the design and manufacturing. PWP is the first food packaging thermo-former in North America to build an in-house, post-consumer recycling center. A second location is scheduled to open in the second quarter of 2010. An agreement with Coca-Cola Recycling provides a steady stream of much sought-after post-consumer resin. With every container made from a minimum of 25 percent FDA-approved, post-consumer recycled resin – PETE bottles – it helps divert bottles from ending up in the landfill. By making the containers from recycled materials, 91.6 percent less energy is used than by making them from virgin PETE material.”

Zuhlke & Associates also makes products that are recyclable and made from recycled materials. “We have more and more people asking us to make these items to meet their demand. We get telephone calls from the consumers themselves asking if we make this from recycled material,” says Zuhlke. Using recycled plastic costs no more than virgin plastic, he relates. While this was not always the case, because more consumers are recycling, “Now the recycled material has become more and more abundant,” says Zuhlke. “You’re going to see that continue to grow.”

Zuhlke & Associates and other companies, such as Inline and Sambrailo, use a mix of recycled PETE and virgin, recyclable PETE. “It’s 100 percent recyclable,” says

Scattini of Sambrailo. Sambrailo also encourages consumers to reuse items such as their Snap-Flap containers, for other purposes.

When PETE is recycled, “It’s really a win-win situation,” says Zuhlke. “For the next 20 years at least, I predict we’ll see more and more of these plastic containers being recycled. This is a good thing. It’s a good way to keep that material out of the waste flow. It just makes sense.”

Other companies are making plant-based packaging that easily decomposes. For example, Sealed Air’s Cryovac Solutions makes a compostable starch-based tray from corn. Other companies are branching out and using other types of plants to make their packaging.

“Consumers are starting to object to cer-

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"For the next 20 years at least, I predict we'll see more and more of these plastic containers being recycled. It's a good way to keep that material out of the waste flow.

**— Kurt Zuhlke
Kurt Zuhlke & Associates**

tain types of products made from food sources," notes Kalis of Keyes Packaging Group. "They feel the use of food sources to

make packaging competes with the need to supply food throughout the world. It does not make sense to many eco- and environ-

mentally sensitive consumers."

PWP makes its AgroResin packaging from renewable biomass fiber composite. "Once considered a waste product, incinerated and placed in a landfill, now agricultural biomass is made into packaging that returns to the earth after use through composting or biodegradation," explains Kirschner. "This is truly a win-win for the environment and the economy, since we are not using materials that have alternative uses, such as corn, palm or sugar cane."

But for most companies, as well as many consumers, recycling PETE is still the best way to go. "That's what we know right now," says Scattini of Sambraio. "This is what works best and that's the material that gets recycled." **pb**

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Reader Service #164

Dressings And Dips Continue To Add Flair To Produce

With something for everyone, including health-conscious or cash-strapped consumers, dressings and dips continue to bring innovation and value-added sales to the produce department.

BY SUZY LOONAM

The Chinese splashed soy sauce, the Babylonians slathered oil and vinegar and the Egyptians drizzled dressings seasoned with oriental herbs.

After 5,000 years of culinary history, refrigerated salad dressings and dips — scooped, spooned and poured — are among the year's hottest perishable commodities in the produce department.

While premium, refrigerated dressings and dips may seem unlikely profit leaders in this recession-worn economy, the diverse collection of creamy, rich, light, fruity, tart and tangy concoctions may go down in history as the perfect condiments to reported trends of food boredom, concern for chemicals in food, awareness of better foods for bet-

ter health and greater consideration of the added health claims of products consumers purchase.

CONSUMERS SEEK VALUE

According to an August, 2009, report released by Chicago, IL-based Information Resources Inc., sales of refrigerated salad dressings sales exceeded \$200 million, with an 8.5 percent unit sales growth in the 52 months prior to the report.

According to Randy Bartter, vice president of marketing and consumer services for Brea, CA-based Ventura Foods LLC, producers of Marie's Salad Dressings, "The recession has restored the importance of value with the consumer, but value means more than price," he says. "Being priced competitively is important, but it is critical that a product deliver value by exceeding the needs of consumers and helping consumers solve a real problem at a reasonable price."

Bartter emphasizes, "Marie's line of all-natural salad dressings helps consumers put great-tasting, homemade meals on the table. Whether prepared in salads, side-dishes or main-dishes, Marie's real ingredients and homemade recipes transform ordinary ingredients into extraordinary meals, making dining at home a fantastic alternative to going out to eat," he says. "As the recession continues to force most consumers to dine out less frequently, putting a great tasting meal on the table for their family becomes more important. Marie's is helping them do that easily and cost effectively."

Dan Dippel, produce director for Sheboygan, WI-based Piggly Wiggly Midwest LLC, agrees shoppers are spending less, but he says they are still buying the three big dressing brands offered in his stores. "We sell Marie's, Marzetti's and Bolthouse in the refrigerated case, and we generally place our dressings with our prepared salads," he reports. Dippel reveals Piggly Wiggly has no plans to expand the use of refrigerated cases in the chain's produce departments at this time, but he adds, "That depends on the market."



While product placement varies, dressings and dips are typically merchandised in the same case as bagged salads.

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*IRI 52 weeks ending 8-9-09. Combined Produce Dip & Dressing category #1 @ 44% share. Produce Crouton category combined #2 share @ 26%.

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At Bristol Farms, a 15-unit chain based in Carson, CA, Raul Gallegos, director of produce and floral, states, "We have our refrigerated dressings more in the value-added section." He also notes that sometimes, Bristol Farms' produce managers put dips and dressings in the same case as salads, but since customers use those products with other produce, too, product placement varies.

CONSUMER KNOWLEDGE

It seems clear that understanding consumer trends is key in developing successful products and retail sales programs. Doug Hawkins, president of Sandpoint, ID-based Litehouse Inc., a producer of dips, dressings, sauces and herbs, acknowledges consumer trends are driving what's happening in the produce department. "There is a huge trend in consumer knowledge," he says. "Consumers are more knowledgeable than ever about produce varieties and nutrition, and people are looking for something to appeal to them within their new knowledge of food, which is greatly increased."

"It's not just about fat anymore," Hawkins explains. "It's about Omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids versus trans fats — trans fats are bad, Omega-3s are good — and people are becoming more aware of the difference. Consumers are more conscious of the foods they put in their bodies. Organic, all-natural, probiotic — all those are a part of that tremendous consumer awareness trend."

Some retailers are counting on dips and dressings to enhance sales of other produce. Ventura Foods' Bartter contends, "Produce department buyers are looking for new and innovative products that will drive incremental sales and profits to their bottom lines. In most cases, that doesn't mean simply adding new flavors or sizes of salad dressing," he explains. "By meeting consumer needs effectively, a manufacturer delivers new products that are truly incremental in both sales and profits to the produce department."

Ventura Foods will put that principle into play this fall when they launch three new potato salad dressings: Classic, Dijon Herb and German Style. The new potato salad dressings will make it possible for consumers to make a delicious, quick-and-easy potato salad at a low cost. "Simply prepare potatoes, pour in the Marie's and serve," Bartter says. The result is more than just a fresh, healthful potato salad. If all goes as planned, Bartter expects Marie's new potato salad dressings to create new consumers, new usage occasions and a new produce category. "The new potato salad dressings link

the Marie's brand to the \$2 billion potato category and help our retail partners increase their market basket by linking a jar of Marie's with the sale of Red, Russet and Yukon Gold potatoes," he explains.

Though fresher ingredients and fewer chemicals may increase quality, they also reduce shelf-life, but Hawkins sees this as a benefit. "People are learning the difference between real food and processed products," he says. "They know milk, cheese and eggs can't sit on a shelf for a year. Our wholesome, refrigerated products will still last quite a while in the case or at home in the refrigerator, but they have a shelf-life — not a half-life."

To meet the diverse desires of today's smart shoppers, Litehouse produces dressings in six categories, though some dressings fall in more than one category: Blue Cheese, Ranch, Low-Fat or Lite, Vinaigrettes & Pourables, Specialty, Organic and Under-35-Calories.

Consumer trends are also reflected in the product lines at T. Marzetti Co., based in Columbus, OH. Carla Laylin, group marketing manager, reports, "We are seeing growth in light dressings as consumers embrace healthier lifestyles. Additionally, we are seeing growth in the Vinaigrettes & Pourables segment of the category."

MERCHANDISING TIPS

According to Litehouse's Hawkins, "The best way to merchandise refrigerated salad dressings and dips is to follow the Four Ps of Marketing: Packaging, Promotion, Placement and Product. Look at packaging. What does it say? What is this product? The label must communicate what the consumer is looking for and it must give them a reason to try it," he explains.

If the product is new, Hawkins suggests creativity in promotion. "You often have to entice shoppers to try a new product." As for placement, "The produce department is best because shoppers are already looking in that part of the store," he says. "And finally, the product must be good. Ultimately, that's the big one. If you don't have a good product, you will lose consumers instantly."

Ventura Foods' Bartter acknowledges the dressings and dips category is ripe for promotional creativity. "The best types of promotions ultimately help our consumers put a great-tasting meal or side dish on the table easily," he says. "For Marie's, that means trying to get consumers to pick up a jar or bottle with every produce purchase."

To drive sales effectively, Bartter advises less discounting and more help for busy, hungry shoppers who only need a little guidance. "For instance, by attaching a



Photo courtesy of Naturally Fresh Inc.

Naturally Fresh Foods released a new line of Fresh & Lite Vinaigrettes to appeal to health-conscious consumers.

recipe booklet and a coupon for our new Marie's Creamy Yogurt Dressings to every head of lettuce, we assist the consumer in creating new and interesting ways to use their produce in everyday meals," he says. Bartter adds effective use of cross-merchandising and point-of-sale materials "creates a strong linkage that delivers consumer benefit and helps increase sales and profits for our retail partners. We also create a link between fresh produce and the fresh, home-made taste of Marie's."

The same technique works for merchandising dips, asserts Castle. "Merchandising dips close to pre-cut and fresh vegetables supports the usage connection between the two products and drives sales," she says.

At Atlanta, GA-based Naturally Fresh Inc., another manufacturer of dip, sauces and dressings, marketing manager, David Federico, acknowledges the importance of cross-merchandising and point-of-sale material, but also points out a successful merchandising program, "must offer benefits or appeal to consumers for trial. And of course, the products must be good — products consumers enjoy and will purchase again."

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Dips, while often grouped with dressings, differ in history and in consumer uses. T. Marzetti Co. has a special dips division led by Irena Castle, senior marketing manager. "Ranch Veggie Dip is still hot and represents over 40 percent of all sales," she points out. "However, there is space for other flavors." Fittingly, Marzetti has created new dip varieties to fill the space. "We recently introduced Hummus Veggie Dip that responds to health and wellness trends and offers a new experience for dipping vegetables. The flavors introduced include Garden, Black Bean and Southwest Chipotle and were developed specifically to complement raw vegetables."

Castle emphasizes the dip market is different than the dressings market. "As most dips are used for entertaining purposes, con-



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Merchandising dips with fresh-cut produce drives sales of both categories.

sumers are looking for quality products and flavors that sound familiar, but interesting," she muses. "Many consumers are concerned with the health aspect of products they buy, so offering lighter alternatives is important."

Consumers are looking to refrigerated salad dressings and dips as "products with unique flavor profiles and/or health benefits," says Federico. "With more and more people eating at home, they are looking for new and different products to try." This summer, to help economy-motivated, health-conscious consumers get what they crave, Naturally Fresh Foods introduced a line of seven unique vinaigrettes and expanded existing product lines with its new Classic Balsamic Vinaigrette dressing and a Yogurt Ranch dressing.

Like other successful manufacturers, there's a little something for everyone in the

Naturally Fresh Foods' line of dressings, including two new lines being marketed as Naturally Fresh Fresh & Lite Vinaigrettes, in varieties including Chianti Red Wine Vinaigrette, Citrus Orange Poppy Vinaigrette, Mango Ginger Vinaigrette, White Balsamic with Citrus Vinaigrette, and Pomegranate Mixed Berry Vinaigrette.

The new Fresh & Lite Vinaigrette line is available in a tall, 12-oz. bottle, which stands out from the familiar Naturally Fresh Mason jar. "The varieties are unique to the refrigerated salad dressing category and can be used for multiple applications," according to the company's Web site.

Charles "Buzzy" Blyer, sales manager of Melbourne, FL-based Makoto Dressing Inc., concurs that consumers are looking for dressings with multiple applications, such as those that can be used as a dressing or a

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marinade. His company has developed a new, multi-use dressing and has added a new size to its line of dressings. "Our new, 8-oz. Orange-Ginger is being introduced to market and also a new, 16-oz family-size Ginger," he notes. Both dressings can be used as a dip, dressing or marinade.

While some trends indicate shoppers are looking for ways to add new flavors and excitement to traditional meals, Bristol Farms' Gallegos believes consumers are going back to basics. "A few years back, we were selling black bean dip and more gourmet-type dips in the produce department, but that didn't seem to catch on well," he admits. "So we brought back some of the basics — some of your regular dips — and they seem to be back in again." Looking ahead, Gallegos says there are no plans to allocate more space to refrigerated cases in the chain's produce departments, but adds, "We may be swapping out different products and giving consumers better options."

"Consumers are most conscious of the foods they put in their bodies. Organic, all-natural, probiotic — all those are a part of that tremendous consumer awareness trend."

**— Doug Hawkins
Litehouse Inc.**

In the refrigerated cases of today's produce department, alternatives are plentiful. There is a dressing or dip for every connoisseur, every nibbler, every health-nut and every bored, cash-strapped consumer in the timeless quest for new ways to add magic to a meal or zing to a salad. Changing options may be the one constant as trends in consumer tastes come and go, but it seems apparent that the once fledgling category of refrigerated dips and salad dressings will continue to expand, intriguing and enticing consumers for many years to come. **pb**





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Reader Service #120

Super-Premium Juices Squeeze Fruit Into Profits

Increased marketing and heightened consumer awareness drives high-end juice sales.

BY AMY SHANNON AND LIZ PARKS

Retailers are realizing the profit potential behind super-premium juices and are stocking up on these big-ticket products that require processors to squeeze the fruit and then flash-pasteurize it to lock in freshness.

Despite the economy's effect on consumer purchasing decisions, suppliers say demand for high-ticket, super-premium juices is picking up again, thanks to efforts to better educate consumers on these high-quality, good-tasting products. Much of this growth is fueled by renewed health initiatives to serve functional juices that are high in antioxidants and packed with nutrients.

"While price plays an important role in purchase decisions, many consumers will choose a juice drink based primarily on its perceived health benefits," according to Allyn Brown, president and owner of Connecticut Currant LLC, the bottler of black currant fruit grown by its sister division, Maple Lane Farms LLC, in Preston, CT. "It was a little sluggish in the early part of this year, but as people are finishing up their vacations, their buying habits are changing."



Produce departments have seen increasing numbers of SKUs devoted to super-premium juices.

Connecticut Currant has experienced growth through business in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic markets with customers such as Whole Foods Market, Stop & Shop, Giant Landover, Kroger, Penn Traffic, Market Basket, King Kullen, Price Chopper, Albert's Organics and Big Y.

"Consumers are still purchasing super-premium juices, but in some cases buying more when brands are on ad or shifting to larger sizes for a better value," explains Scott Stevens, vice president of marketing at Hero/WhiteWave, the Broomfield, CO-based maker of Fruit2Day, a line of super-premium juice. "Fruit2day is new this year and is benefiting from consumers trying it because of the innovative combination of juices and real fruit bits."

Wade Groetsch, president of Winter Haven, FL-based Blue Lake Citrus LLC, which markets Noble Juice, has seen sales of super-premium and premium juices drop in some markets, but emphasizes sales have begun to take off in the past couple of months. "It was going great until last summer," he admits. "We were seeing double-digit figures, then we saw a real nose-dive last summer and into fall. Retailers were consolidating their juice section and stocking up on lower priced, store-brand products."

Nonetheless, Groetsch reports, "We have seen a little bit of an upturn, in the past few months. Hopefully, we've seen the bottom. Consumers want to feel like they're treating themselves and get that same indulgent flavor at a reasonable price."

Sara Clow, brand manager for San Francisco, CA-based Pacific Organic Produce, one of the largest organic tree fruit marketers in the country, says, "We're seeing our numbers increase dramatically. Our largest distribution is along the coasts."

While consumers may not reach for an organic apple because of the price, notes Clow, they may reach for well-priced organic apple juice, which still gives them — and the organic apple growers — all the benefits of that organic apple. "We're an organic fruit company, so we want the consumer to have access to as many organic products as possible, but we created the beverages with the goal of being



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Greg Quinn, president of Staatsburg, NY-based The Currant Company LLC, which markets CurrantC black currant juices, remarks that while there is a natural worry consumers might trade down in hard times, he hasn't seen that happening yet. He believes the consumer desire to make healthful food and beverage choices is likely to continue to sustain the category's growth.

Stevens agrees, adding, "Busy, time-starved, health-conscious consumers continue to show their willingness to pay for healthful, convenient, high-quality foods and beverages. Fruit2day is one of those products for adults who want more fruit in their diet and have an on-the-go lifestyle."

For instance, he says, a 2-pack of Fruit2day retails for \$3.99, depending on location. "This is comparable to other super-premium juices, but the combination of fruits, such as like mangos, strawberries, bananas and berries – make these more expensive than regular juices.

BOUNTIFUL HEALTH BENEFITS

Many super-premium juice products are

packed with nutrients. They provide a variety of health benefits, support healthful immune systems, fight cardiovascular disease, contain anti-aging properties, boost energy and contribute to overall wellness.

"All of our drinks are flash-pasteurized," reports Arthur Beckerman, president of Bradford Tonic Inc., a Delray Beach, FL-based manufacturer of a line of all-natural, vegan, low- and no-fat Caribbean juices made with organic agave. "Our B-Sorrel drink is high in antioxidants and is a good source of vitamin C. Our B-Ginger drink is known as a digestive aid and stomach soother, and our B-Tonic drink, Irish Moss & Roots, is filled with ingredients with known benefits in the Caribbean for hundreds of years," he details.

When developing POS materials, demonstrations and other marketing techniques to boost super-premium juice sales, retailers should focus on educating consumers about these health benefits.

Zola, a San Francisco, CA-based maker of the bottled Açai juice, appeals to consumers' interest in health because the Açai berry has more antioxidants than any other edible fruit on the planet, including 60 percent more antioxidants than pomegranates and 500 percent more than blueberries. "Since



Fruit2Day is a new super-premium juice on the market.

Photo courtesy of Fruit2day

the inception of our company, we have been committed to bringing the health benefits of Açai and other Brazilian superfruits to U.S. consumers," explains Chris Cuvelier, founder and president. "We believe that pre-

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Reader Service # 196

Currant Trends

A growing number of super-premium juice manufacturers are now working with black currants, which are excellent sources of antioxidants, contain higher concentrations of vitamin C, potassium, iron, organic acids and phenolic compounds than most other fruits.

According to Preston, CT-based Connecticut Currant, black currants are touted by a number of foreign studies to boost memory and prevent Alzheimer's disease. The antioxidant value of black currants are one of the highest currently available, exceeding that of blueberries. Plus, black currants contain more vitamin C than citrus and double the potassium of bananas.

Growers were banned from producing this healthful fruit in North America for 100 years prior to its reestablishment in 2000, adds Allyn Brown, president and owner of Connecticut Currant LLC, explaining this is probably why many people are unfamiliar

with black currants.

"Black currants are well known in Europe, both for their flavor and health benefits," says Greg Quinn, president of Staatsburg, NY-based The Currant Company LLC. "We are just starting to get the word out in the United States." A recent study from Tufts University found that compounds in black currants help prevent the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

Another study, out of New Zealand, reported that drinking a normal dose of black currant juice after a strenuous workout created a 540 percent reduction in muscle spasm and cramping. There are additional studies out of Japan illustrating black currant consumption can improve vision. "They're one of the most healthful — if not the most healthful — fruit in the world," asserts Quinn.

Connecticut Currant promotes the fact that its super-premium, cold, packed-fresh

juices are made only from black currants grown on its own farm. "With traceability and accountability so important these days, we provide only juices with fruit grown from our own fields," says Brown. "From bush to bottle, we control the whole process." The 56-ounce bottle, introduced in the fourth quarter of 2008, keeps the same footprint as a 64-ounce bottle but, at the same time, "has a local farm look that differentiates us, and it also matches our 14-ounce single-serve," explains Brown. A screw cap, easier for consumers to use, replaces the old dairy snap-cap on both sizes.

Brown notes the company regularly promotes with retailers, offering temporary price reductions and two-for-one specials. "We understand that we have to entice people to try black currants," he admits. "Doing two-for-one promotions on our 14-ounce size encourages trial and induces people to buy our larger bottle." **pb**

vention is the key to optimal health and performance. With more than 68 percent of American adults currently taking dietary supplements, it was obvious to us that there is a need for a supplement that offers con-

sumers the best in both nutrition and taste."

A 2009 study from the University of Chicago, in Chicago, IL, found drinking eight ounces of grapefruit juice a day coupled with the cancer-fighting drug

rapamycin could, in some instance, give the drug a boost in fighting cancer. Rapamycin, which prevents cells from multiplying, but is normally less effective because enzymes in a person's intestine breaks them down,

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worked more effectively when study patients drank Florida grapefruit juice.

"According to the study, grape fruit juice contains chemicals that block the enzyme that diluted the cancer drug," explains John Martinelli, executive vice president for Natalie's Orchid Island Co. (OIJC), headquartered in Fort Pierce, FL. "The study stated the chemicals, called furanocoumarins, prevent rapamycin from being broken down, allowing cancer patients to absorb more of the cancer-fighting drug with minimal side effects."

In the study, traditional supermarket grapefruit juice without the essential chemicals didn't work with the cancer drug, adds Martinelli. "We have long touted the benefits of drinking fresh-squeezed grapefruit juice. This is just another example of the amazing properties of grapefruit juice."

OIJC uses citrus fruit that is squeezed, bottled and sent directly to market. "Nothing more, nothing less," explains Martinelli. "There are no additives — natural or unnatural — no additional flavor packs and no supplemental vitamins."

Orange and grapefruit juices have been found to have the highest nutrient density scores when compared to other juices, Martinelli adds. "Orange juice naturally contains more than 60 phytonutrients." These powerful organisms contain flavanoids or natural antioxidants, anti-cancer and anti-inflammatory agents. "Naringenin, a flavanoid found in grapefruit, has been found to trigger fat-burning mechanisms in the body, preventing many chronic diseases," he notes.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

As part of its sustainability initiatives, Pacific Organic packs its juices in bottles made of PET, a highly recyclable plastic, instead of glass. Clow notes PET is lighter and requires less energy to ship and produce than other non-recycled materials.

Committed to social responsibility, Project Zola was created to empower and improve the quality of life through creating shelter and a sustainable revenue stream for the indigenous people of the Amazon. Zola conducts sustainable harvests for its Açai berries, which use the trees as efficiently and gently as possible, ultimately protecting the trees of the Amazon.

In November, 2006, Sambazon, based in San Clemente, CA, was named a winner of the Secretary of State's Award for Corporate Excellence for helping create worldwide awareness and demand for the Açai fruit. Sambazon pioneered the first of its kind Fair Trade and Certified Organic supply chain of Açai, which benefits thousands of local families and protects the biodiversity of the Amazon Rainforest through the implementation of sustainable agriculture.

OIJC participates in a variety of socially responsible initiatives, including recycling fruit peel through sustainable farming practices and exploring conversion into alternative sources of energy, explains Lisa Rymer, director of education and public affairs for OIJC. "We are passionate about nutrition and keeping our fresh food source safe."

LOCATION, LOCATION

One of the differences between regular

"We understand that we have to entice people to try black currants," he admits. "Doing two-for-one promotions on our 14-ounce size encourages trial and induces people to buy our larger bottle."

**— Allyn Brown
Connecticut Currant LLC**

juices and high-ticket, super-premium, flash-pasteurized juices is that the latter, when pasteurized, are heated for a shorter amount of time and at a lower temperature than regular juices. Hot-packed juices, pasteurized at higher temperatures and for longer amounts of time, or exposed to multiple pasteurization procedures, have to add vitamins back into their formulas as vitamins and minerals, along with some degree of fresh taste, are typically lost in the hotter pasteurizing process.

Longer pasteurization gives the hot-packed juices, typically found in the dairy cases or in the center store sections of supermarkets, longer shelf-lives of a year or more. Super-premium juices, on the other hand, typically only last 60 to 90 days, but the shelf-life range can go higher and lower.

Purity's Organic Juice and Juice Drinks, as well as Purity Organic Functional Drinks, have a one-year shelf life, which means they can be merchandised dry, as well as in cold cases. Clow points out some chains, such as Safeway, merchandise Purity's organic juices in the produce case next to organic fruits. "It's a great way for the retailer to say 'we carry organic products,'" she says. "This remains truer than ever, as the economy tightens and makes it difficult for retailers to carry a wide variety of reasonably priced organic items."

Purity Organic Juices, which some produce managers merchandise on the dry rack near the fruit and in the produce department's cold case, have a one-year shelf life. "Sometimes chains, including Whole Foods, allocate dual merchandising space to Purity Organic beverages, putting them both in the



Many super-premium juice products are packed with nutrients.

What's New

Natalie's Orchid Island Juice Company, Fort Pierce, FL, recently launched Gourmet Pasteurized Pink Lemonade, a blend of its own lemon juice and natural ingredients, including grape juice. The new product can be served alone over ice, mixed with iced tea for an Arnold Palmer, or mixed with vodka for a Natalie's Goose cocktail.

The family-owned and -operated company used an extraction process to produce a lemon juice with less peel oil than many of its competitors, resulting in a robust lemon flavor without a bitter aftertaste. This process makes Natalie's Fresh Squeezed (unpasteurized) Lemon Juice highly desired by chefs and lemonade aficionados.

Sambazon, a San Clemente, CA-based global leader in organic Açai, announced the launch of two new organic Açai juices, Pomegranate Synergy and Rainforest Immunity. The two new juices will expand Sambazon's single-serve, organic Açai juice line for a complete offering of seven organic Açai juice flavors, perfect for an on-the-go, nutritious and delicious snack. The juices are now available in 10.5-ounce bottles for \$2.99 each and 32-ounce bottle for \$7.99 in both conventional and natural food stores nationwide.

Pomegranate Synergy is the first and only organic whole food Açai pomegranate

flavor on the market. Pairing two delicious flavors that are driving category growth, Pomegranate Synergy blends Açai and pomegranate with powerful antioxidants, healthy omegas, fiber and protein. Rainforest Immunity is a blend of organic whole food Açai with immunity-boosting passion-fruit, acerola and rose hips. This premium juice supports the immune system exceptionally with a serious dose of antioxidants and 800 percent vitamin C per bottle — five times the amount of orange juice.

Zola, a San Francisco, CA-based maker of the first bottled Açai juice and one of the fastest-growing brands of Açai juice, introduced Açai Daily Wellness Shot, a liquid dietary supplement. It provides a full dose of antioxidants through a unique blend of Açai and acerola. Unlike other Açai-based dietary supplements that contain up to 19 different fruits and an unknown level of ORAC, the Zola Daily Wellness Shot contains more than 85 percent Açai as well as acerola and 3,000 ORAC per ounce.

The new tagline, "Drink Zola. Live Better," describes the blending of the Brazilian superfruit nutrients and health benefits for the consumer. The new Açai Daily Wellness Shot joins Zola's successful line of Açai super-fruit juices and functional smoothies. In 2002, Zola produced the first bottled Açai juices on the market. **pb**

cold cases in the produce department, as well as with a variety of fruit when those fruits are being promoted," reveals Clow. "We hope to see big displays of our organic juice next to organic fruit that is being promoted and highlighted."

Putting super-premium juices in the produce department, a trend that has been escalating in recent years, gives supermarket operators an opportunity to sell higher ticket premium products with much longer shelf-lives than traditional produce, opening up incremental sales and profit opportunities. For consumers, the presentation makes shopping for premium juices easier, often creating more demand and lower prices.

MARKETING ESSENTIALS

Juice processors continue to roll out with new super-premium juices in an effort to meet the changing needs of consumers, and they're highlighting these new items with a variety of effective marketing techniques.

"Ultimately, it's a combination of promoting health and flavor," states Quinn of

The Currant Co., noting his company sells to retailers such as Whole Foods, Stop & Shop, Piggly Wiggly, Kroger and Ralph's. "We do a whole range of programs, including quarterly incentives and neck collars. We work very closely with retailers and we're expanding pretty aggressively."

To aid in the launch of its first product, Fruit2Day, Hero/WhiteWave is investing in various marketing programs to build consumer awareness and trial. "We have TV, print and online advertising; in-store and out-of-store sampling programs; and consumer buzz and word-of-mouth programs," according to Stevens. "It's all designed to make consumers aware that Fruit2day is a new way to eat fruit and you have to try it to understand the product uniqueness."

Blue Lake Citrus, which has a line of conventional, all-natural juices under its Pure Label, along with its Noble Organic line, which is focused on mainstream flavors such as orange and tangerine juice as well as lemonade, is now in the process of launching a line of fresh, gently pasteurized

juices called Noble Select. "These are processed fresh from the tree to the bottle," reports Groetsch. "We are squeezing the fruit and bottling it every day to order. It is the closest thing that you can get to fresh, unpasteurized juice."

Groetsch emphasizes that Noble Select was created to give consumers an alternative to premium-priced juices merchandised in the produce department. Packaged in a 64-ounce bottle similar to a 64-ounce milk bottle, Groetsch notes "It's a lower cost bottle and there is less plastic in it, but it boasts an aggressive price point more in line with the current market conditions. The flavors will be orange, grapefruit and tangerine with a suggested retail price between \$2.99 and \$3.99. Similar products currently sell for \$5.99 and \$6.99."

Blue Lake Citrus recently enhanced its natural product market positioning with the introduction of a sustainability message on the bottles and labels of its Noble line. Noble's plastic bottle and its labels are made from all-natural, renewable resources and are recyclable and biodegradable. "As far as we know, we are the only fresh juice vendor with a plastic bottle that is both biodegradable and made from renewable resources," asserts Groetsch. "We're working now on making the cap from renewable resources as well."

To make it easy for consumers to learn to look for fresh juice in the produce aisles as well as in dairy, Blue Lake Citrus advertises regularly in its retail customers' flyers and circulars, emphasizing its juice can be found in produce, "behind the tangerines," Groetsch says.

OIJC concentrates on educating consumers about the value of fresh-squeezed and gourmet-pasteurized products, notes Rymer. "We are empowering our customers to make healthy choices by providing important information on our product labels and on our Web site."

In September, 2007, Whole Foods Market, an Austin, TX-based chain, approved all three Bradford Tonic drinks for the Florida region. Today, Bradford Tonic is expanding its operations in many other regions of the country. "We believe in guerilla marketing, engaging brokers and giving out product information sheets to anyone who is interested," reports Beckerman.

Purity Organic offers retailers POS materials, including neck collars and signage explaining product benefits to communicate the products' affordable prices. "We offer aggressive price points and we do quite a bit of in-store demonstrations, because the most important thing is that it tastes great," reports Clow. **pb**

Nutrition And Education Are Keys To Leafy Greens Sales

Consumers are discovering the health benefits of leafy greens, but the question arises: Are retailers giving these nutritional powerhouses enough merchandising punch to help them generate top dollar?

BY KEN HODGE

While consumers are willing to give the leafy greens categories a try with familiar items such as spinach, cabbage and broccoli, traditional regional favorites such as collard, turnip and mustard greens, kale, endive, escarole and others are less well known to consumers in other areas.

Grocers already funnel walk-in traffic directly to the produce aisle and place leafy greens where consumers see them first. Nonetheless, Jan Berk, vice president of marketing and business development for San Miguel Produce Inc., of Oxnard, CA, says, "It's fairly rare to see leafy greens other than spinach promoted in most stores." Other greens suppliers agree there is still room for growth in this category.

MERCHANDISE BY EDUCATING

Ray Clark, executive director of the Leafy Greens Council, in St. Paul, MN, doesn't see the category languishing in most supermarkets. "The product is out there and it's inviting," he states. Still, the council aggressively promotes leafy greens with the help of the Cruciferous Crusaders, a group of cartoon dinosaurs used in lesson plans and on stickers, trading cards and other information to tout the nutritional value of leafy greens.

Clark reports school districts around the country use the council's lesson plans with crusaders such as Cabbagesaurus, to teach children about these items. The Baton Rouge-based Louisiana Department of Education is developing a lesson plan encouraging sixth graders to eat more leafy greens; the Rowan-Salisbury School System in Salisbury, NC, has taught lessons featuring fresh collards and cabbage for students to see and touch.

Tasting is important, too. "In-store demos have been very productive, especially in North Carolina, where stores sponsor cole slaw demos and provide recipes and brochures to consumers," notes Clark. "Otherwise, I think bins for cabbage are outstanding for St. Patrick's Day. I'd like to see them used more. For spinach, kale, collards, red-leaf and green-leaf lettuce, Romaine and turnip greens, I recommend notes posted above each item briefly explaining the nutritional value, as well as tear-off recipes."

Ashley Rawl, director of sales and marketing at Walter P. Rawl & Sons Inc., headquartered in Pelion, SC, agrees leafy greens are attracting new consumers, promising increased sales for retailers who merchandise them properly.

NEW CONSUMERS TRYING LEAFY GREENS

"The greens category is not what it used to be. It's getting more attention regarding health bene-



Photo courtesy of Walter P. Rawl & Sons Inc.

Packaged greens offer a no-hassle, no-mess option for busy consumers.

fits," Rawl elaborates. "New consumers are coming into this category, whether for traditional uses or for juicing and soups. It has changed a lot from just the traditional southern customer."

Specializing in collard, mustard and turnip greens and kale, Rawl says it is important to offer washed and packaged greens, as well as traditional bulk product. While some have suggested sales of bagged greens are cannibalizing bulk sales, he maintains each product serves a different type of consumer. "We've seen them complement each other and sales of both have improved," he reasons. "Bagged greens can be merchandised in the salad case or next to bulk greens. Different stores do it differently. I think it's exciting how new consumers are trying this category for the first time because they're interested in the health aspect. People definitely have inquisitive palates nowadays. They used to stay in their comfort zone, but now they want to try foods from all over and greens are something unique and different."

Berk concurs, "To date, packaged greens have not cannibalized bulk greens. They simply provide a no-hassle, no-mess, time-saving option. Our studies show consumers are buying leafy greens more often as a result of this convenience. Additionally, packaged greens are attractive to nontraditional greens consumers as a more user-friendly option."

Greens should be handled properly for best results, reminds Berk. "When correctly trimmed and crisped, they make an attractive display given the large leaves, the many shades of green and often colorful stalks when including chards," she explains. "Simple signage promoting the health value of dark, leafy greens and simple preparation and cooking tips help make them more consumer-friendly. Consumers are reading more about the health benefits and are beginning to try more varieties."

In Eden Prairie, MN, Bud Floyd, vice president of marketing for the sourcing division of C. H. Robinson Worldwide Inc., handler of Glory Foods brand packaged leafy greens, agrees the category is experiencing overall growth. "Even in these economic times, consumers are focused on nutrition and wellness," he says. "Leafy greens are kind of an unknown gem. They are beginning to emerge as a category with great nutritional and health benefits."

GROWING SALES

"We have seen a variety of our retail customers this year with overall category growth of 15 percent year-to-date," Floyd reports. "The majority of the increase has

come from bagged greens, while bulk is holding its own and not losing sales. Before we introduce a bagged green SKU into the assortment, we seek to understand a store's prospective clientele and target only stores with high-volume sales. Offering the right items at the right stores is key."

An important element in any merchandising scheme designed to maximize returns on leafy greens is consumer education that enlightens them not only about nutrition and health, but also about how to use them at mealtime, explains Floyd. "It's about communication. It's about education. It's about recipes. 'How do I use this product? Why is it good for me?'"

Floyd notes Glory Foods offers 1- and 2-

pound bags. "Two pounds looks like a lot of product, but when you get it home and cook it down, it's not as much as it appears to be. Part of good merchandising is giving consumers recipes and another part is simply making them aware that what they thought would feed 10 people is actually only going to feed four."

PROMOTE WITH RECIPES

Mark Luchak, vice president of produce and floral for five-store chain, Rice Epicure-an Markets, in Houston, TX, says his stores provide recipe centers where consumers find a variety of ways to use grocery items, including greens. He maintains recipes not only help sell greens, but other products,

"New consumers are coming into this category, whether for traditional uses or for juicing and soups. It has changed a lot from just the traditional southern customer."

**— Ashley Rawl
Walter P. Rawl & Sons Inc.**


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too, as ingredients in recipes or as complementary foods.

"Recipes also help with cross-merchandising other food items," Luchak reasons. "We do a lot of cross-merchandising with salad dressings, croutons, pine nuts, almonds, cranberries and other add-ons and extras. Salad Toppers have also added to the incremental sales of salads. We offer bagged greens, too. We merchandise them with the packaged salads. They're not a huge item for our customer base, but sales of these cooking greens do pick up in the winter."

At Meijer Inc., based in Grand Rapids, MI, educating consumers has become a major effort, according to Shari Steinbach, MS RD, healthy living manager for the chain. She says dietitians at supermarkets are a growing trend and the American Dietetic Association recently formed a practice group for the rapidly growing body of members who are supermarket dietitians.

"We have four Healthy Living dietitians covering our markets in the five states where we have stores," Steinbach explains. "The majority of our job is community outreach, promoting healthful living through events and the media. In the first quarter of this year, we did 80 events and 65 media spots. We focus on promoting healthful eat-



Bulk displays allows experienced consumers to pick their perfect mix of greens.

ing to children and increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables. That's where leafy greens fit in. I use Leafy Greens Council stickers that promote cabbage. Their message supports Meijer's 'Healthy Living' initiative." She points out Meijer's consumer outreach program can be summarized in three words: Easy, affordable and healthy.

DISTRIBUTE MATERIALS TO CONSUMERS

"So many companies have great materials, but don't have any way of getting them into the hands of consumers," Steinbach adds. "That's what we do. We get informa-

tive material directly to the consumers through our media outreach and events."

Tim Greene, of Hollar & Greene Produce Co. Inc., a cabbage supplier headquartered in Boone, NC, also makes sure his company focuses on consumer education. "All of our surveys indicate the top of the list for consumers is recipes. Our best answer for that is to individually shrink-wrapped cabbage with our brand and company information on the front and recipes and nutritional values on the back," he explains. "We change recipes twice annually for each item. Cross-merchandising simplifies recipes for consumers and also helps if you

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“Most promotions are simply price reductions. Nutritional signage that goes beyond vitamin content can be powerful, too. Many greens are high in antioxidants, and today, many consumers are buying food to address a specific ailment or concern, such as cancer.”

**— Don Goodwin
Golden Sun Marketing**

offer price concessions.”

Greene contends consumers are eating as much cabbage under current economic conditions as always, but they're more careful about how much they buy. “They don't buy two heads and eat one-and-a-half and throw the other half away any more,” he explains. “Instead, they just buy one head. They are more conservative now.”

Don Goodwin, president of Golden Sun Marketing of Minneapolis, MN, who gathers market information for Hollar & Greene,

agrees consumers continue their healthful eating habits even in less prosperous times. “I believe leafy greens continue to benefit from the many articles written about superfoods or healthful eating,” he asserts. “Certain items, such as spinach and red cabbage have had a lot of positive press about nutritional value. I always encourage retailers to focus on how consumers use the product. Most promotions are simply price reductions. Nutritional signage that goes beyond vitamin content can be power-

ful, too. Many greens are high in antioxidants, and today, many consumers are buying food to address a specific ailment or concern, such as cancer. Remind consumers of the great nutritional value of leafy greens.”

Keep recipes simple, Goodwin adds. “We try to build around younger consumers who want to prepare a good meal, but are a little less confident in the kitchen than maybe their mothers were. We are elementary in our approach to recipes we use.” **pb**

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Florida Fall Produce Gets Into Full Swing

When harvests finish in northern climates, Florida kicks into production with a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables that sell in state, out of state and around the world.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

“Retailers and restaurateurs alike should be excited about Florida’s potential this time of year, given the sheer number of high quality commodities available,” says Lisa Lochridge, director of public affairs for the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association (FFVA), based in Maitland, FL.

“Florida is the salad bowl of the nation,” Lochridge contends. “Vegetables such as tomatoes, bell peppers, cucumbers, snap beans, corn, squash, cabbage and eggplant are available by November. Citrus and strawberries also start their harvest in the fall.



Bell peppers ranked third in Florida’s fresh vegetable market value last year.

TOP CROPS


Fall production of fruits and vegetables begins in September. Tom O’Brien, president of C & D Fruit and Vegetable Co. Inc., in Bradenton, FL, says, “Here in Central Florida, we’ll get started at the end of September and go until the first frost, which can be anywhere between Thanksgiving and the second week in December. Georgia is finishing up by this time, although there is some overlap, and Mexico hasn’t started yet. The homegrown deal in the Northeast and Midwest can be a strong competitor if they’ve had an unseasonably warm October.”

Varieties for most commodities grown in Florida continue to improve year after year, reports Adam Lytch, grower development specialist for L & M Companies Inc., based in Raleigh, NC. “Whether it’s improvements in taste, quality, shelf-life or disease-resistance, we are constantly trialing new varieties in order to see if there is anything that will work in the marketplace. When we see varieties that we think will work, we expand our trials and gradually increase the acres in our plantings.”

The following highlights some of Florida’s main production during the fall [Editor’s note: Look for more information on Florida citrus in our *Citrus Merchandising Review* on page 178]:

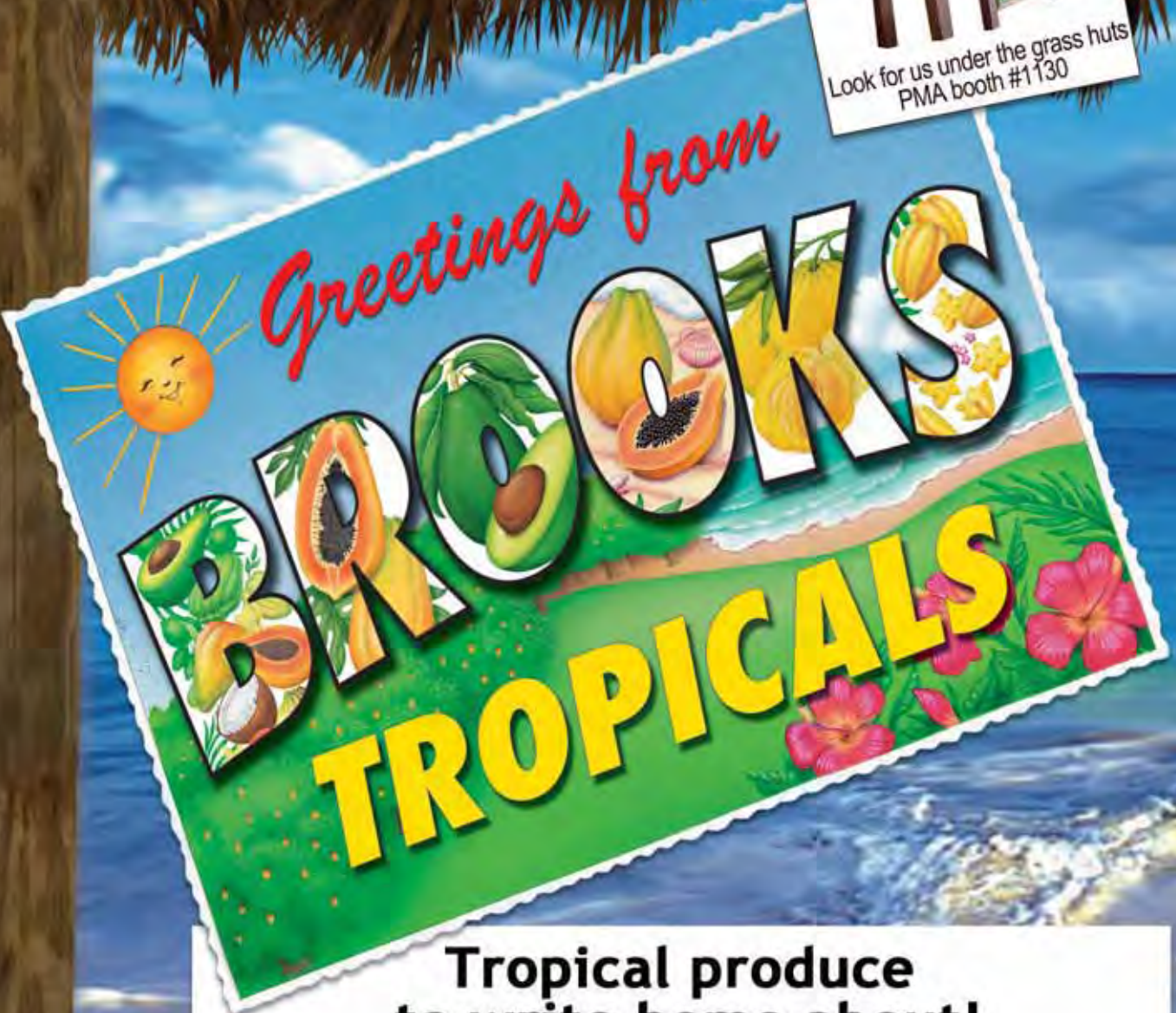
Tomatoes: Florida’s tomato harvest starts mid to late October, according to Rob Meade, director of grape tomato sales for East Coast Brokers & Packers Inc., headquartered in Plant City, FL. “By November, there’s good volume and excellent promotional opportunities. In this economy, consumers are sticking with the staples. For us, that’s Romas and grape tomatoes.”

Chuck Weisinger, president of Ft. Myers, FL-based Weis-Buy Farms Inc., notices more acreage devoted to grape tomatoes and less to cherry tomatoes. “Over the years, Florida has aggressively developed new varieties based on taste. Buyers are



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Florida's tomato industry will be looking closely at consumers over the next two years to develop better marketing tools.

looking for a tomato with a certain color, size and flavor."

Southern Specialties Inc., in Pompano Beach, FL, grows its Southern Select brand of heirloom tomatoes hydroponically in southern and central Florida and begins harvest out of the Homestead area in November. Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development, shares, "We pack these tomatoes in a 10-pound, single-layer, foam-lined box with a mix of three varieties that each offer a different color and flavor."

Strawberries: The state's strawberry crop is concentrated within about a 30-mile radius of Plant City. Gary Wishnatzki, president and CEO of Wishnatzki Farms, located in Plant City, FL, says, "We have a small volume of strawberries that begins in November. Early December is when supplies really start and promotable volumes are available from mid-December on."

A promotable volume of Florida strawberries for the Christmas holidays is due to new varieties that are early yielders, notes Sue Harrell, director of marketing for the Florida Strawberry Growers Association (FSGA), based in Plant City, FL. "The Festival variety dominates along with the Treasure. Other varieties, such as the Camino Real, come on in late December."

Christmas is without a doubt a good time to promote, agrees Wishnatzki. "Supplies out of California are at a low point, so we're in a good spot. Eastern retailers line up with us."

Snap Beans: Rosemont Farms Corp., in Boca Raton, FL, will bring value-added snap beans to market this season by partnering with Performance Packaging LLC, out of Pahokee, FL. Daniel Whittles, director of

marketing and product development, details the deal. "This new partnership will bring to market the first packaged, microwaveable, fresh-snipped green bean program where the product is actually grown and packed at source by the farm year-round. We believe that we can deliver superior value and a fresher product day in and day out to buyers

and consumers."

Sweet Corn: Sweet corn is a year-round item for Duda Farm Fresh Foods Inc., headquartered in Oviedo, FL, says marketing development manager, Nichole Towell. "Our Florida season is November 15th through the end of May."

Jason Stemm, spokesperson for the Fresh Supersweet Corn Council, Maitland, FL, reveals, "The crop is relatively light in the fall, compared to the spring. Florida harvested 765,743 crates in the last six weeks of 2008. Since sales at retail tend to be slower this time of year, it is important to make sure the corn is displayed in a refrigerated case. Retailers should offer consumers recipe ideas that go with the season. For example, add an ear of corn to an overwrap pack of mixed vegetables for making soups and stews."

Vegetables: Bell peppers, yellow squash, zucchini and eggplant are available from early November, says L & M's Lytch. "Cucumbers are harvested from early November through mid-January, and cabbage, greens and broccoli are harvested from mid-December."

Celery and celery hearts are year-round products for Duda, says Towell. "Organic celery from Florida is a new item this year and we are anticipating good demand." Duda also harvests radishes in Florida starting

Florida Produce Goes Creatively Into The Classroom This Fall

Florida's fresh fruit and vegetables are heading into classrooms this fall in a unique way. Middle school teachers, as well as youth activity coordinators who work with students ages 10 to 15, can enter the Xtreme Cuisine Chef Demo Contest and win a cooking session for 75 of their students with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' (FDOACS) executive chef and culinary ambassador, Justin Timineri.

Arlette Roberge, coordinator of the FDOACS' Tallahassee, FL-based Xtreme Cuisine program, reports, "The program started in 2005 over the concern about childhood obesity. Our chef went into the schools at first. Then, we decided a good way to really expand the program was to train the trainer, so we developed a curriculum for teachers. We thought a contest where schools could win a cooking demo with our chef would be an added incentive for teachers."

To enter, teachers must set up and conduct an Xtreme Cuisine class with at least

10 students in which the students prepare at least two Xtreme Cuisine recipes using at least six fresh produce items grown in Florida. The classes, which must be held between September 30 and December 31, 2009, must use the existing curriculum, which can be ordered online. Winners will be selected in the following categories: First, the first completed entry to be postmarked with accompanying documents; Great, the coordinator with the greatest number of participating students; and Smart, the class that demonstrates the most impressive knowledge gained from the lesson. Student essays, photos, quotes, drawings and other descriptions are encouraged.

Charles Bronson, commissioner of the Florida Department of Agriculture, says, "The nutritional information provided at the Xtreme Cuisine events helps students make healthy eating choices as they become adults. Learning the importance of good nutrition at a young age is the key to a healthy future."

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November 1st, Towell adds. "Promotional times include Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's."

Ethnic Specialties: There's a strong market for specialty vegetables in demand by Hispanic and Asian customers, says the FFVA's Lochridge. "This is growing for two reasons," she says. "First, there are large populations of these groups in our marketing area both in-state and in the Northeast. Second, consumers in general today are more willing to try new things."

Mary Ostlund, marketing director for Brooks Tropicals LLC, in Homestead, FL, notes, "During the fall, our SlimCado avocados are still in bountiful supplies. SlimCados are alternate year bearing fruit. This year, our volume is down 30 percent from what we forecasted earlier in the season. Nonetheless, volume is more than adequate for all the promotions we have planned with our customers." SlimCados, or green-skinned Florida avocados, are commercially grown in southern Miami-Dade County.

Boniato, also called a Cuban sweet potato, is another popular ethnic product. Miami, FL-based M & M Farm Inc. grows or buys the root from farmers in South Florida. Mark Vertrees, marketing director, states, "Boniato grows well here due to the soil con-

ditions. We're offering expanded packaging options for both retail and foodservice. For example, smaller sizes, rather than the standard 40-pound box will be available."

Southern Specialties offers a Florida-grown chile pepper program that spans from October to May. Eagle discloses, "The fact that they come from Florida is a selling point to some customers." The line includes jalapeno, Serrano and Cubanelle peppers in pack sizes that range from 1-pint clamshells to 5-pound boxes, as well as half-bushel boxes and a 10-pound variety pack where retailers or restaurateurs can choose the four varieties they desire. Eagle adds, "The chile category has been a good growth opportunity for us."

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The economic downturn, pest and disease challenges, land demand, water issues, labor, transportation and food safety all create challenges for Florida's farmers. The FFVA's Lochridge notes, "Most of our members are diversified into a variety of crops, especially within the vegetable category, and they do this to lessen the risk from the failure of any one crop." The economy is definitely a serious issue that keeps growers

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up at night, she adds. "The cost of fuel and fertilizer, for example, have risen two and three fold, and we're talking a thin margin to begin with."

Weis-Buy's Weisinger agrees and adds, "It costs about \$10,000 to \$12,000 to grow an acre of tomatoes. At the same time, in the fall, we're going in an unnatural direction, that is, from warm weather into cold with fewer daylight hours. This can affect volume, and as costs increase, growers need better production each year."

The economy, increased costs and the salmonella outbreak in 2007, in which Florida-grown tomatoes were wrongly implicated, have led to consolidation within the industry, Weisinger says. "Our job is to offer retailers promotions on a regular basis and show them the value in purchasing Florida-grown products."

"Florida's hot, humid climate means there is a new pest or disease every other month," says Lochridge. "Right now, we have a serious concern for our avocado crop. There's a fungus affecting the fruit and it has the potential to do what greening did to citrus." The fungus causes Laurel Wilt disease and it is carried by the Redbay Ambrosia beetle.

The demand for land has changed the



Florida's strawberry crop typically has good volume from Thanksgiving to Easter.

landscape of what is grown in Florida. Vertrees from M & M maintains, "More and more tropical fruit growers are importing products from the Caribbean, Central and South America. This is due to the high cost and increasing scarcity of land in southern Florida. We're right between Miami and the Everglades and there's only so much undeveloped, fertile land. As the population

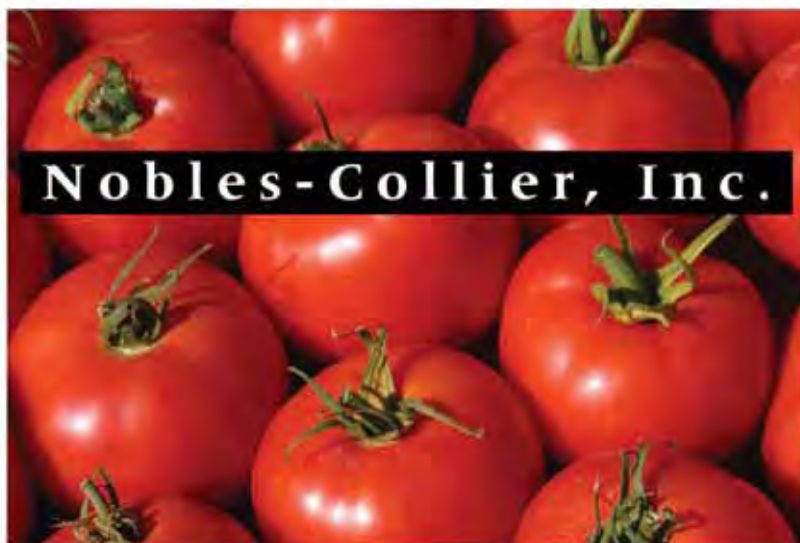
grows, agriculture is pushed north and this isn't as good for tropical production."

"Water availability for farming is a dramatic situation that has eased somewhat," says Lochridge of the FFVA. Tropical storms last summer and heavy rains in the spring have increased the water level in Lake Okeechobee from its record low last year.

Yet, C & D's O'Brien emphasizes, "Water will always be a concern, and agriculture gets blamed first when the level is low."

Labor is one issue that has improved in this economic downturn, expresses Lochridge. "We saw a pinch when the housing market was brisk. We're not seeing that shortage now. However, there are so many issues related to labor and any one poses a significant challenge. For example, the Obama Administration is talking about mandating E-Verify for all new hires." E-Verify is

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Reader Service # 211

Top Fall Vegetables

(Oct. - Dec., 2007-08 Crop Year)

CROP	FRESH MARKET VALUE
Tomatoes	\$221.50 million
Strawberries	\$53.47 million
Bell Peppers	\$46.24 million
Cucumbers	\$37.86 million
Snap Beans	\$24.45 million
Corn	\$17.71 million
Squash	\$15.91 million
Cabbage	\$1.66 million

Source: Florida Agricultural Statistics Service, Orlando, FL.



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currently a voluntary program. It's designed to help certify employees hired by companies are legally authorized to work in the United States.

Fast, efficient transportation is key to Florida shipping produce to many states, especially those east of the Mississippi, as well as Canada. O'Brien points out, "I can pick strawberries Monday morning, ship them Monday afternoon and they can be on a retailer's shelf in New York by Wednesday morning. We pick, pack and ship the same day and have trucks with teams to shorten the driving times."

Duda's Towell maintains, "Future trends will put a continued emphasis on consolidation of products for retailers and foodservice, meaning multiple products will be consolidated from different suppliers into one truck pick-up."

Weis-Buy's Weisinger concurs, adding, "Florida's Port Everglades is the gateway to the Caribbean and Central America. This means we can mix Florida-grown produce with imported products to load a full truck."

Towell also states there will be a continued emphasis on food safety.

"Traceability is huge," adds O'Brien. "It's

the catchphrase of 2009, along with sustainability. We can now trace each container of strawberries right back to the field where they were picked. This capability is in big demand by retailers. Regarding sustainability, we are also working on solar power this season, but the costs are huge."

MARKETING PROGRAMS

Grower/shippers, state commodity organizations and the Florida Department of Agriculture all offer programs to market the state's bounty. For example, Towell points out Duda "provides point-of-sale, point-of-purchase and shelf-cards to identify Florida-grown produce for regional retail chains."

Florida's growers also see the huge opportunity to promote and merchandise locally grown and regionally produced produce. According to L & M's Lytch, "We have focused a great deal of effort in organizing and facilitating locally grown programs for our customers in both the retail and foodservice sector."

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"Florida's Port Everglades is the gateway to the Caribbean and Central America. This means we can mix Florida-grown produce with imported products to load a full truck."

**— Chuck Weisinger
Weis-Buy Farms Inc.**

This season, the FSGA offers a new press kit that contains information about Florida strawberries, including nutrition facts, tips for selection, storage and handling. There's also a 24- by 36-inch backroom poster that offers merchandising tips. Additionally, a short video called *Jammer Saves the Farm*, which features an animated character that informs viewers about the Florida strawberry industry, will be released this month for use by schools and retailers. Harrell adds,

"We'll continue our promotional activities, such as appearances on TV morning news shows, that target the Northeast during the winter season."

The Florida Tomato Committee (FTC), based in Maitland, FL, has planned intensive market research beginning during the upcoming tomato season. According to Samantha Winters, director of education and promotion, "We've seen a great deal of change in our industry resulting from the salmonella scare and the downturn in the economy. Today's consumers are a different person than they were one to three years ago. So we'll be conducting intensive market research over the next two years and developing tools and best practices for marketing our product over the entire growing season," she continues. "This will enable us to revive the sales erosion of Florida tomatoes with existing retail customers and expand sales into new markets as well."

The Tallahassee, FL-based Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDOACS) will again activate its well tested Global Grid I, an ad incentive program that targets the fall season. Dan Sleep, the development representative supervisor for the FDOACS' division of marketing and development, says, "The idea is that a consumer is more likely to buy something if it's on ad. We require participating retailers who advertise Florida-grown products to use the Fresh From Florida logo."

Sleep continues, "In 2002, we started with 400 individual store ads which represented one chain going on ad with one commodity twice. In 2009, the number grew to nearly 104,000 store ads."

The FDOACS runs its Winter Circle campaign, which targets Florida retailers, at the same time as Global Grid. Both Winter Circle Phase I and Global Grid I run from November 1 through January 31. Last year's first phase of Winter Circle contributed an



Photo courtesy of Sweetbay

The Fresh from Florida logo is used in ads and other promotions that feature Florida-grown produce.



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additional 55,000 store ads. Sleep adds, “We also do secondary promotions with Winter Circle such as display contests, sampling events and working with Publix in the Apron’s program.”

RETAILERS & CHEFS SHOW-CASE FLORIDA PRODUCE

Florida-grown produce and floral products are a big deal at Publix Super Markets Inc., a Lakeland, FL-based chain. Some 66 produce items, ranging from hydroponic arugula to multiple varieties of greens, citrus, peppers and tomatoes, as well as floral

items, such as crotons and garden mums, are sold in-store just during the fall.

Maria Brous, director of media and community relations, remarks, “We have always supported the Florida grower. Our philosophy is to first look to our local growing areas for quality product that provides value to our customers. If a product is not available in Florida, we look across the Southeast, then throughout the United States. Only after we have exhausted resources within the country do we look internationally for the products our customers want.”

Publix uses the Fresh from Florida logo

in ads and other promotions that feature Florida-grown product. In addition, the chain works with the Florida Department of Citrus, the FSGA and the FTC on specific product promotions that showcase citrus, strawberries and tomatoes. Brous, adds, “We have worked very closely with the Florida Department of Agriculture for years and fully support their marketing programs. We also are participating in a pilot program with the state called, Fresh From Florida Kids’, which focuses on helping parents instill good eating habits in their infants and young children.”

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“Our philosophy is to first look to our local growing areas for quality product that provides value to our customers.”

**— Maria Brous
Publix Super Markets**

Local farmers’ markets are the chief source of fresh fruits and vegetables for Joshua Butler, executive chef at the Florida Governor’s Mansion in Tallahassee. “There’s a huge abundance of seasonal Florida produce available,” he says. “I’ll walk the market a couple of times each week and get what I need if I’m preparing family-sized portions. I love to shop first and get recipe ideas once I see what’s available. Or, if I have a big function, I’ll work directly with farmers to get the quantity I’ll need.”

Butler’s most popular recipes include: Tomato Bisque, made with Florida vine-ripe tomatoes; and Shrimp with Corn Custard and Mango Sauce that calls for state-grown sweet corn.

Educating chefs about the different seasons and availability of Florida-grown fruits and vegetables is the job of Justin Timineri, the FDOACS’ executive chef and culinary ambassador. “We offer available charts, weekly market bulletins, and a directory that lists producers that chefs can contact and source from. As a result, many chefs will use this as a marketing advantage and make Florida a part of their menu description, such as Florida tomatoes or Florida snap beans.”

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Interview with Ernesto Nardone, Chief Operating Officer, KPG Solutions

Q: How does one get started in planning and implementing a traceability program?

The first step is to designate a leader that not only will initiate the project but also maintain the system post-installation. This person should be willing to dedicate time to research the issues and present their findings to help make sure everyone is aware of the industry happenings. Next, the company should designate a team of subject matter experts (SME's) from different divisions in the company (i.e. farms and ranches, IT, packing, shipping, sales, accounting). The total team should consist of four to six people. A group any bigger will make it difficult to manage everyone's opinions and the natural tangents a group discussion can take.

This is not a trivial project. Thorough use of the traceability program necessitates utilizing a team of people from within the company to get all the right departments talking before systematic decisions are made and changes that could disrupt your business. A company like KPG would be involved with the overall team in order to help create a plan that fits your needs. This is not about technology; it's about the overall process. Any good system is a combination of business process and robust software and hardware. The company plan should address both of these topics. Once a plan is agreed upon, you can then apply the appropriate tools and technology to achieving your business goals.

Q: What should I be thinking about in choosing a provider?

One of the first things to research is how long a software provider has been in this specific marketplace. A lot of companies come and go, but you need to have someone who has withstood the test of time. You should make sure the company has extensive experience in your business, from both an employee and client standpoint. KPG hires people from within the industry so our team members can directly relate to customers' needs. Companies should also look at the total cost of ownership of the company's product offering spanning a minimum five year period. Also, look at the

customer support services after the product is installed. Some vendors don't have customer service at all and can leave a customer stranded. Finally, consider if they assign you a single point person throughout the entire relationship which can make questions or problems much easier to deal with.

Q: Can't I just do this myself with my current system and be compliant?

A company can absolutely implement a PTI compliant system in their business on their own. However, you have to keep in mind that the PTI requires electronic data transfer. GTIN's have to be transmitted somehow electronically according to the milestones. Even though you can perform this in-house, you can't dodge the need for technology. You can save yourself on consulting and implementation fees but it will require you to research on your own. With a small grower, this could be very easily handled. For larger operations this can be very challenging because of the variations in how you handle your business from others.

It is a big risk for people to take these initiatives and try to do it themselves. You always have to consider the negative impact is if it is not done properly. One of the major reasons you employ experts beyond your company is to manage risk. Here are three questions to ask yourself before making a final decision:

1. Are most of my business processes automated?
2. Do I print pallet tags on labels already?
3. Do I have an internal traceability program that allows for trace-back and trace-forward at the lot level? (It must be at the lot level.)

If the answer is "no" to any of these questions, it is highly recommended that you seek assistance from a professional and use additional technology.

Q: From your point of view, what are the essential considerations of equipment/hardware and software? What makes your company unique in its offering?

A: One of the main reasons there are

failures in this industry is because the software doesn't fit the customer's process. Our software is flexible enough to implement our customer's processes versus some competitors who try to modify the customer process to accommodate the software. We do not modify the customer's existing operation. As people consider hardware and software options, integration should also be kept top of mind. Our Food Safety Manager module and Enterprise Resource Planning system named KiSS™ (KPG integrated Software Suite) are totally integrated. This minimizes risks in order to provide a complete and safe business solution.

Q: In your opinion what are the critical steps in educating the industry about the next phase of traceability?

The one key thing we should convey to companies is that owners and C-level officers get involved in the food safety and traceability efforts of their organization. We cannot stress this enough! If a company gets sued or has their product recalled they may not make it back from this kind of a setback. The entire company is put in jeopardy if this issue is pushed aside as only a department manager's problem and not an enterprise concern.

The most critical step is first analyzing where a company is in terms of being able to do internal traceability and by developing at least a basic HACCP plan. The next step is to create an internal program that is able to address any deficiencies. Then they need to implement a continuous enhancement program to be ready as new rules form in the industry. This is very important for individual success as well as success of the entire industry.

When a whole industry is shut down because of a product recall BOTH culpable and innocent companies have to stop selling. And, the general public does not understand the difference and may stop eating the product altogether even if your company was not to blame. Bottom line: We're all in this together and implementing a better and more efficient traceability program is a critical aspect to your company's success and the success of our entire industry.

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Interview with John Carpenter, President

Q: How does one get started in planning and implementing a traceability program?

A: The basics of traceability involve labeling the incoming product with an identifying pallet tag or barcode, receiving the product with a scanner that records the product into inventory and then issuing out the inventory via the same tag or barcode. Within the barcode a company can embed pertinent information such as vendor, PO number, date received and country of origin (COOL). Reports can then be created which track where the product came from and in turn where it went.

Q: What are the business benefits for all parts of the supply chain?

A: The major benefit is to be in compliance with the new regulations regarding traceability and COOL. Other business benefits concern issues of costing, tracking product expiration dates and

product rejection/returns and recalls from suppliers.

Q: Can most grower/shippers plan and implement a program in house on their own, or is an outside vendor necessary?

A: Creating and implementing interfaces to databases is normally a fairly intricate process. An outside vendor can help facilitate this process by providing direction based on experience to help plan and implement the traceability program.

Q: What should I be thinking about in choosing a provider?

A: You should consider if the provider has the ability to meet current as well as future needs of the company regarding traceability. Can the software be modified when future requirements are unveiled?

Q: What does full case traceability really look like?

A: If this is the goal, then enough information needs to be on the case label itself to be able to query a database with that information and report on where that case came from and where it eventually ended up.

Q: From your point of view, what are the essential pieces of equipment/hardware and

what software should people consider, and how do your solutions fit into this?

A: Scanners, label printers and software are needed to make the connections between incoming and outgoing produce. Warehouse scanners help to speed up the process, by recording the information quickly into the warehouse database and also assigning it during order fulfillment. Warehouse scanners can add validations to make sure the right product is picked and will give the picker instantaneous feedback. Some available scanners include handheld, wrist/finger hands-free units, cordless, and wireless configurations.

One of our solutions/products, called Warehouse Management, is built on the existing Visual Produce inventory management system and delivers automation, productivity tracking and reduced reliance on printed pick tickets and inventory count sheets. Radio frequency hands-free scanners are incorporated into warehouse processes, enabling warehouse personnel to query the database from the warehouse floor rather than an office.


Worker productivity is tracked through a Work Queue Management process. All warehouse employees are assigned appropriate tasks that are pushed to the radio frequency devices in the warehouse. Resources are tracked and managed from within the program. These include trucks/trailers, loaders, routes, pickers, receivers and warehouses. Lot traceability allows the product manager to know where every pallet of product is located in the slotted warehouse, when it was put there and how many units remain on the pallet.

Q: What advice can you give grower/shippers as they choose one solution versus another?

A: As traceability and software needs change and develop, customizable software that can be modified to grow with your business becomes increasingly necessary in keeping up with ever-changing industry standards.

Q: In your opinion what are the critical steps in educating the industry about the next phase of traceability?

A: We believe it is vitally important to be able to assure the consumer that we know where our products came from. Otherwise we stand to lose the confidence that consumers have put in us and our produce. We need for the industry to embrace current traceability efforts and commit to implementing them. For many in the industry, this will involve computer and software upgrades and implementation of warehouse management systems. I don't see any affordable way to accomplish traceability with a manual tracking system. Computers can perform these functions easily and without errors. I believe automation is the only reasonable alternative.




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Fresh Berry Imports Help Build Year-Round Sales

With improved growing practices, new merchandising efforts and more efficient shipping from importers, year-round berries become a reality.

BY BARBARA ROBISON

The world of imported fresh berries in retail markets continues to grow.

"The fact that berries are now available year around boosts sales," says Julia Inestroza, marketing and merchandising manager for Gourmet Trading Co., based in Los Angeles, CA. "Customers become accustomed to seeing berries everyday and add them to the shopping list. Thus, berries move from just an impulse purchase to a planned one."

"Berries are a quality product that offers true value for consumers, which translates into profits for retailers," states Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development, for Pompano Beach, FL-based Southern Specialties Inc. "The health benefits, flavor and color, plus regular availability, make berries a desirable addition to regular family menus."

Gloria Chillon, director of marketing for Watsonville, CA-based Driscoll's, recognizes the importance of the imported berries crop. "Imported berries are essential to keeping berries top of mind with consumers and to fulfill the year-round berry demand," she remarks. "They also provide a great way for consumers to get their recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables for optimum health during the winter."

Total imported berry volumes and dollar sales have increased tremendously over the past five years. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Foreign Agriculture Service, based in Washington, D.C., fresh blueberry imports increased from 28,893 metric tons (MT) in 2004 to 51,981 MT in 2008. The dollar value of the imports jumped from \$91,262,018 in 2004 to \$240,573,414 in 2008. Major blueberry exporting countries were Argentina, Canada, Chile and Uruguay.

Fresh strawberry imports rose from 42,808 MT in 2004 to 64,867 MT in 2008. The dollar value of the imports rose from \$71,662,204 in 2004 to \$118,172,837 in 2008, according to USDA data. Major exporting countries were Canada, Mexico and New Zealand.

Raspberry, blackberry, mulberry and loganberry imports are included together in the USDA data, which shows the imports rising from 17,296 MT in 2004 to 41,997 MT in 2008. The dollar value increased from \$67,113,519 in 2004 to \$179,282,665 in 2008. The bulk of those figures are for raspberries and blackberries, with major imports coming from Argentina, Canada, Chile, Guatemala and Mexico.

SHIFTING SOURCES OF IMPORTS

Sunnyridge Farm Inc., based in Winter Haven, FL, expects to see similar volumes of berries from Chile and Argentina, but anticipates increased volumes from Mexico. "It has been a long time in the making," says Keith Mixon, president. "We have spent much time and energy researching varietal development, which has resulted in some of the best, most flavorful varieties. With continued demand, I believe Mexico will develop into an even bigger player for berry imports."

Patricio Robelleto Refusta, Gourmet Trading's Chilean country manager, reports, "Chile, Mexico and Argentina are the most important berry exporters, and Peru and Colombia could potentially become strong. However, the destination countries already have long-standing relationships with current suppliers, so it may be difficult for new countries to enter the market."

"Chile is exporting blueberries, blackberries, rasp-



Photo courtesy of Giannarra Bros. Fruit Co. Inc.

Chilean blueberries are among the imports that have given the berry category a year-round presence in stores.

Improving Import Quality

berries and some strawberries,” notes Tom Tjerandsen, marketing manager for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA), in Sonoma, CA. “Approximately 13 million boxes are imported into North America, and of that, 12 million are blueberries and about one million raspberries. Eight hundred thousand boxes arrive by air.”

Giumarra Bros. Fruit Co. Inc., located in Los Angeles, CA, imports berries from Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Mexico. The company maintains Uruguay is an excellent supply source, with timing similar to the Concordia region of Argentina. USDA data shows exported berries from Uruguay grew from zero in 2004 to approximately 568 MT, with a dollar value of \$4,279,186, in 2008.

“We see the next big opportunity for supply as Mexico,” reveals Bruce Turner, Giumarra’s director of berry division operations. Hundreds of acres of northern highbush blueberries have been planted in regions where blackberries have long been established, and these will help fill the gap as Chile winds down and before Florida and California get going. The Mexican berries will take advantage of established freight lines, riding with blackberries at a fairly low cost. We have been one of the leaders in establishing this new acreage in Mexico, farming it with several grower-partners, as well as on our own farms, in a joint venture with Vital Berry Marketing of Chile.”

Fresh strawberries are imported from New Zealand by Morro Bay, CA-based Vida Fresh Inc. “When the weather is bad in California — from November through January — we bring in the berries to provide our customers with consistent quality and excellent flavor,” states president, Andrew Walsh.

Dave Greco, produce merchandiser for Rosauers Supermarkets Inc., a 21-store chain based in Spokane, WA, acknowledges the need for imported berries, while also recognizing promotional limitations due to price. “When we can’t get California berries, we buy the imported berries so we have a continuous supply for our customers. We don’t do much in the way of promotion, however, due to the higher prices,” he says.

MERCHANDISING EFFORTS INCREASED

With top quality berries available 12 months of the year, retail merchandising and promotional efforts are key to increasing yearly sales. Berry suppliers are ready to help. Now that there is an almost seamless yearly supply of berries, grapes, nectarines, peaches and plums in retail markets, CFFA wanted to know which retailers were doing the best job of marketing the fresh fruit and why. “To uncover the high performing retail-

ers, using Nielsen Company’s data on all U.S. cities, we devised extensive research to determine the best category merchandising techniques for the fruits we market,” explains Tjerandsen. “A consistent list of high achievers was used, quantifying their efforts and leveraging the insights to improve sales of other retailers. The index was divided by summer and winter.”

Optimizing berry sales from January to April, it was found that high performing retailers outperformed the total United States by two times. Displaying multiple berries simultaneously and including strawberries in the promotional mix is recommended. Early season promotions equal best results, and blueberries and blackberries show higher promotional responses. Also, offering upsize berry containers, especially blueberries to 12 and 18 ounces and strawberries to 32 ounces, along with the smaller, traditional sizes, is recommended.

“The information we gathered helps answer questions, such as how much price reduction to offer, how often to promote and the best locations for promotions, explains

from Chile.”

All of the fruit from Winter Haven, FL-based Sunnyside Farm Inc., meets a minimum of GAP (Good Agriculture Practices) protocol. The company is proud of the progress made in the third year of a five-year program for ensuring all its import growers are GlobalGAP-certified. “Shipping containers continue to become more sophisticated with greater controlled environment, resulting in higher quality berry delivery,” reports Keith Mixon, president and CEO.

Giumarra Bros. Fruit Co. Inc., located in Los Angeles, CA, is able to trace every box of its berries to the exact grower, lot and date, with complete traceability for every country of origin. “We have a company-wide commitment to food safety and work with growers and customers to provide the services and expertise necessary,” says Walter Ram, director of food safety. Watsonville, CA-based Driscoll’s global food safety program, based upon FDA standards, is adhered to identically around the world. This adherence is verified with numerous internal and third-party audits. The program covers berry growing, handling and transportation, according to marketing director, Gloria Chillon. **pb**

CFFA’s Tjerandsen. “Retailers can see a map with indices on our Web site and compare their market. If both indices are down, they are not taking advantage of the high profit margins available for their stores.”

When the transition to imported berries begins, B & R Stores Inc., a Lincoln, NE-based chain with 18 locations, expands its displays. “We run weekly ads and feature one berry per week, rotating them on a weekly basis, says produce director, Randy Bohaty. “We cross-merchandise the berries with the traditional glazes, box mixes and other items, and offer our customers recipes. I would like to see more larger pack berries because we’ve had success with value pricing them in our stores.”

Giumarra suggests merchandising at least two SKUs at the same time to maximize sales. For Chilean berries, the company recommends carrying a 6-ounce and also a pint, or 18-ounce clamshell, for the blueberry “super-user.” “Our research shows you may miss out on sales if you do not offer both a small and larger berry pack,” states Turner. “Also, point-of-sale

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material should highlight the nutritional benefits of berries and their many uses."

Allocating the same produce space 12 months of the year to the "berry patch strategy" is an excellent sales tool, according to Dave Riggs, president, founder and CEO of Aptos, CA-based Quail Run Business Solutions, a business consulting firm that represents Driscoll's among its other clients. "The different berries may vary in the amount of designated space throughout the year, but the patch provides an opportunity to introduce customers to a variety of berries during any season," he explains. "Blackberries, as an example, are showing real growth as consumer exposure expands."

Jensen's Finest Foods, a Palm Springs, CA-based operation with nine stores, carries Chilean berries as a major part of their winter fruit offerings. "We target one or two berries per month with free-standing demonstrations," says Jim Madala, produce director. "Different berries, all washed and prepared with toothpicks, are offered to customers, who've responded with increased sales. We've cross-merchandised fresh raspberries with vanilla ice cream. We've also tied a red balloon to a traditional strawberry and short cake display in the produce department, suggesting the customer follow

the red balloon to the freezer area, where a second red balloon identifies the whipped topping. It was a popular idea."

Blueberry growers of Chile, Argentina and Uruguay contribute a small amount of check-off funds to the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC), based in Folsom, CA. The promotion, research and information order for U.S.-grown blueberries authorizes use of the special funds to help promote blueberries during the winter months.

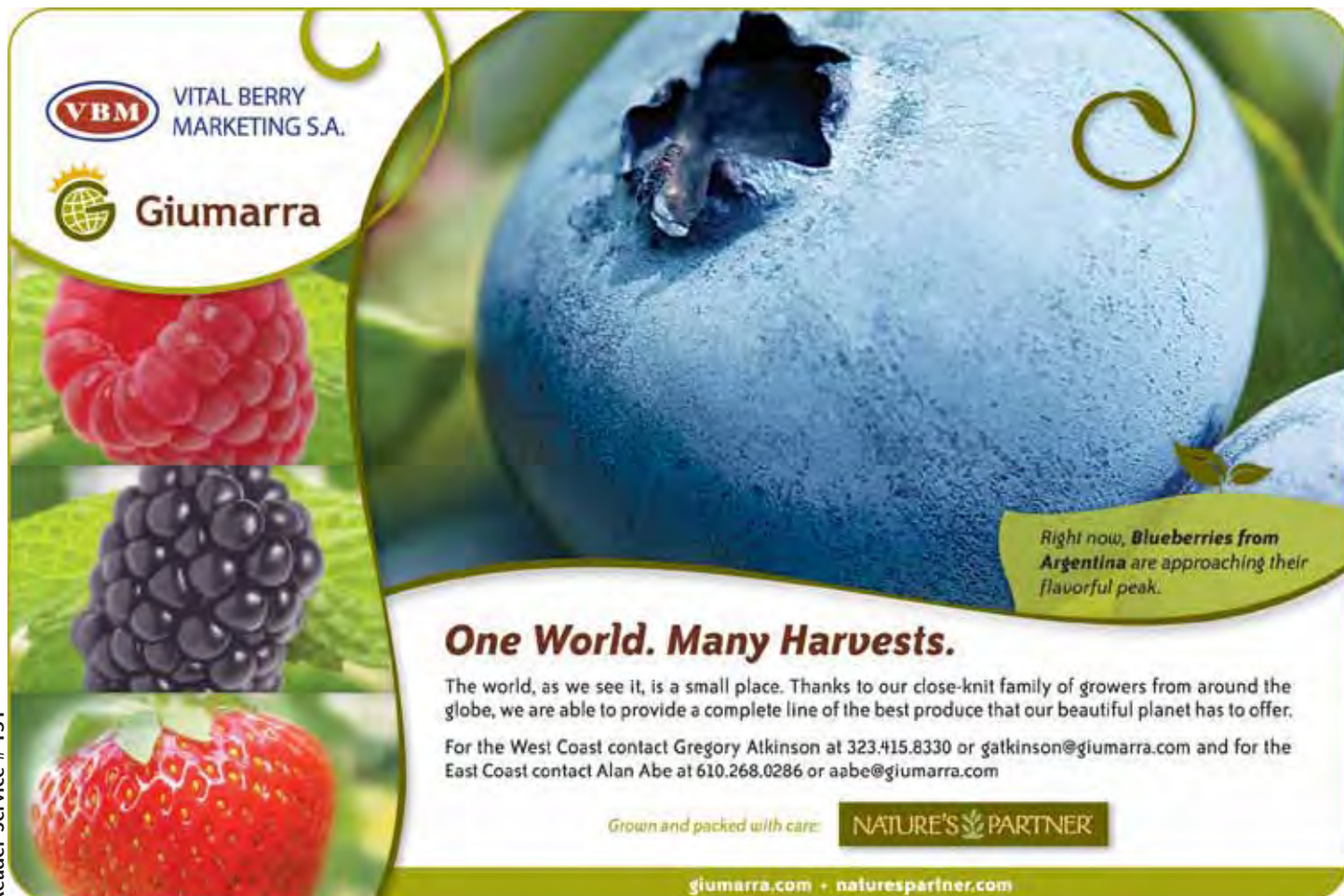
Two years ago, the South American blueberry growers voluntarily augmented the funds by \$100,000. It was deemed so successful the growers decided to do it again this year. In addition, this year the Chilean blueberry growers are voluntarily contributing an additional \$250,000 to the USHBC.

The Council promotes fresh blueberries year-around and has seen real increases in blueberry imports during the winter months. North American blueberry imports from Chile grew from 18.4 million pounds in 2004 to 61.9 million pounds in 2008; Argentine blueberry exports to North America grew from 2.4 million pounds in 2004 to 14.4 million pounds in 2008; North American blueberry imports from Uruguay increased from 300,000 pounds to 1.3 million pounds last year, according to Mark Vilata, executive director, USHBC.

International interest in blueberries has increased to such a degree the possible formation of an International Blueberry Organization (IBO) is being considered. A steering committee has been established to canvas the blueberry industry in regard to setting up such an organization. Countries expressing interest include: Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, New Zealand, South Africa, United States and Uruguay. **pb**

"We target one or two berries per month with free-standing demonstrations."

**— Jim Madala
Jensen's Finest Foods**



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West Mexican Produce Report

West Mexico is set to offer increasing quantity, quality and consistency this fall and winter.

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

West Mexico has long been a reliable source of quality produce for the American market. According to Alberto Maldonado, general manager of Apache Produce Imports LLC, based in Nogales, AZ, "Our deal has been here for many, many years and it's very consistent." He calls the facilities in this area "top-of-the-line."

As technologies improve, West Mexico is keeping up with the times. This fall and winter could be the regions' best season yet for quantity, quality and consistency.

MORE COVERED STRUCTURES, FEWER OPEN FIELDS

When it comes to produce, Froylan Gracia, agricultural counselor at the Washington, D.C.-based Mexican Embassy, notes, "Production in Mexico has been increasing substantially. Investments have been made in greenhouse and shadehouse growing."

As a result of the increased number of covered structures, "There is better quality product and better production coming out of the area," reports Nick Rendon, division manager of The Giumarra Companies, based in Los Angeles, CA, with an office in Rio Rico, AZ.

Unlike just a few years ago, "There's more shadehouse production than open-field," reveals Allison

Moore, communications director for the Nogales, AZ-based Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA).

"This has been a learning curve in Mexico, but growers are getting the hang of protected growing practices," says Willy Martinez, operations manager for Del Campo Supreme Inc., in Nogales, AZ. "Here at Del Campo, we were one of the pioneers in Mexico with greenhouses, starting with 2½ acres in 1995. From there, we have grown to more than 320 acres of 100 percent hydroponic greenhouses."

In fact, the land devoted to protected horticulture in Mexico increased from 7,900 acres in 2005 to 24,600 acres in 2008, according to AMHPAC (Asociación Mexicana de Horticultura Protegida), the Mexican association for companies that grow produce in greenhouses and other covered structures. The association is made up of 150 members who collectively produce 900,000 tons of bell and hot peppers, cucumbers, eggplants, tomatoes and specialty items per year. According to AMPHAC's estimates, theirs is only 35 percent of the total production under protected horticulture in Mexico.

The most popular covered growing structures in Mexico today are shadehouses. Unlike greenhouses, shadehouses are relatively low-tech and inexpensive. The materials used do not trap as much heat as glass would. "Where we grow in Mexico is very close to the tropics," explains Jerry Wagner, director of sales and marketing for Farmer's Best International LLC, in Rio Rico, AZ. The shadehouses can help growers control the climate inside, closing to protect plants from the sun, opening to allow more sun, increasing or decreasing the heat inside as needed. The structures also help control pests. "It decreases what we have to use in our spray programs," remarks Wagner.

"This also bodes well in the food safety arena as pathogens are easily controlled and/or eliminated," adds Veronica Kraushaar, president of Viva Global Marketing LLC, Nogales, AZ.

"Every year growers are becoming more conscious about their quality and strive to improve their product," says Jorge Quintero, Jr., managing member at Grower Alliance LLC, headquartered in Rio Rico, AZ. "As a result, more growers are delving into shadehouse/covered structure technology. Although



Photo courtesy of Del Campo Supreme Inc.

Tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers are among the items that benefit from shadehouse grown production.

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this creates higher harvesting costs, the benefits include shipping a better product, which can create better returns for the grower, as well as giving growers higher yields in their harvests."

Wagner clarifies this does not necessarily mean more produce is harvested. Instead, he reports, "You get a much higher increase in the Number One fruits, versus Number Twos and Number Threes."

Some shadehouse-grown items, such as tomatoes, are known for being more flavorful than field-grown. Charlie Thomas, a sales associate for Thomas Produce Sales Inc., brokers in Rio Rico, AZ, notes, "Some customers are tickled to death to get the shadehouse tomatoes because the quality is outstanding." Some of his foodservice customers, however, prefer firmer, less juicy, sometimes less flavorful tomatoes that often come from open fields because of how they will be used.

Al Harrison Distributors, located in Nogales, AZ, supplies summer melons and winter squash, which do not benefit from shadehouses or greenhouses, according to Brent Harrison, president. But that does not mean the technology used to grow them is not advancing. "We continue to do trials of new seed varieties," he explains, and some plants have recently been found to benefit

from grafting. "If there are new techniques for growing, our growers try them," he says.

Wagner points out that every year, companies like his gain more technology that allows them to have a better impact on the environment, something Farmer's Best has been especially proud of since the company's formation in the 1960s. "We do everything we can to be good stewards to the land," he asserts.

RESPONDING TO FOOD SAFETY CONCERNS

Growers in Mexico contend their produce is safe, and has been for a very long time. Many companies, such as Giumarra, maintain their produce is and has been some of the safest in the world for many years. "All of our growers have been certified by third-party food safety entities for years," notes Rendon. "We've been on the forefront of the food safety initiative by staying ahead of GTIN requirements."

"Del Campo has always been very proactive in terms of food safety standards and programs," says Martinez. "In fact, we are part of the FDA/Harvard Traceability group. As part of our continuing improvement program, we have been certified with SQF 1000 Level 3." Nonetheless, some consumers remain wary over the safety of West Mexi-

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Keeping Up With Demand

West Mexican growers are paying attention to consumer trends and acting accordingly. "In general, the trend is moving toward providing customers with more value-added products, including innovative packaging, such as retail-ready clamshells and enhanced product traceability," says Sandra Aguilar, marketing manager for Ciruli Brothers LLC, based in Rio Rico, AZ.

Jorge Quintero, Jr., managing member at Grower Alliance LLC, in Rio Rico, AZ, agrees. "Value-added and, specialty packaging and commodity specialization are trends that are becoming more popular, as it is driven by

consumer demand," he says.

When the winter growing season ends, expect to see more produce coming from the area even during the warmer months. "Perhaps one of the key trends we noticed over the past years is the year-round production," says Veronica Kraushaar, president of Nogales-AZ-based Viva Global Marketing LLC. "It used to be West Mexico was a winter-only deal. Now, with many retailers demanding consistent year-round supply, many growers have stepped up their own production, as well as sourcing from other areas to meet the challenge." **pb**

can produce.

"We want to make sure to give comfort to the consumer," says Jim DiMenna, president of Jem-D International Partners LP, based in Leamington, Ontario, Canada. "The media has been tough on Mexico with the cartels and problems that they have, so we want consumers to know that the product they get is safe."

The media frenzy surrounding food scares of the past few years has Mexican growers working hard to ensure that the world knows Mexico's food is safe. "Growers

are implementing food safety programs now more than ever due to consumers' high demand of knowing how safe the product is," says Grower Alliance's Quintero, whose growers are regularly subjected to third-party food safety audits. "They want to have the peace of mind in knowing the food they are eating is safe. Growers know that having a food safety program is no longer a premium — it is a necessity if they want to export their product."

In addition, "Most of the export companies comply with GAP [Good Agricultural

Practices] and have third-party audits," says Kraushaar of Viva Global Marketing. "You really cannot export successfully without those today. Several Mexico growers also certify their products through the Mexico Calidad Suprema [Mexico Supreme Quality] guidelines, which is a stringent, multi-step certification process that allows those who pass it to carry the MCS Seal of Excellence. Savvy exporters also implement sustainability and social responsibility programs. All enhance the safety equation."

There are government programs geared toward specific commodities. For example, the Mexican state of Sinaloa has its own safe tomato program. "They want all tomato growers to be certified to prevent problems like last year, when tomatoes were inappropriately identified as carrying salmonella," says Gracia of the Mexican Embassy. This is especially important to Mexican growers, he explains, since, "Mexico became the No. 1 exporter of tomatoes to the world two years ago, surpassing the Netherlands."

Associations are also doing what they can to ensure safety. For example, all 150 members of AMHPAC recently committed to be certified under the Safe Quality Food (SQF) Program of the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) within the next two years. Certification will cover safe growing practices,

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Breaking Ground On A Bigger, Better Port

Construction is set to begin in October for a redesigned Nogales port of entry, commonly known as Mariposa, after the government recently approved \$200 million to be used from the Recovery Act. The resulting port is expected to double the throughput capacity for inspection of both goods and people and will incorporate the latest in design and technology to create a state-of-the-art facility.

This is great news for West Mexican produce, as many hope it will end delays that keep trucks filled with fresh fruits and vegetables from waiting for hours, or even days, to cross the border from Mexico into Arizona. According to the Greater Nogales and Santa Cruz County Port Authority, Mariposa is Arizona's largest gateway for international trade, with close to 300,000 trucks, 450,000 pedestrians and over 1.2 million cars passing through each year. Arizona State University research forecasts this volume to double by 2025. Mariposa is also the largest entry point for fresh produce from Mexico, with over four billion pounds traveling through each year — nearly half of the fresh produce consumed in the United States during the winter months.

"The amazing part of the construction process is that it will double commercial truck processing during the actual build process, not just after," says Allison Moore, communications director for the Nogales, AZ-based Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA).

"The intended changes at the Nogales port are very important, not only for us, but for the industry," says Sandra Aguilar, marketing manager for Ciruli Brothers LLC, based in Rio Rico, AZ. "The current facilities were built to cross around 400 trucks per day, and in reality there are up to 1,500 trucks crossing daily during peak season times. The expansion should ease bottlenecks during heavy crossing periods, enabling trucks to be processed more rapidly. This, in turn, will help us get product out to our customers sooner and thus, to the end consumer, as well."

The redesigned port will reportedly have the capacity to handle between 3,500 and 4,000 trucks per day. "It's fantastic for us," says Harrison of Al Harrison Distributors, located in Nogales, AZ. "The new port is going to be great. We're going to get a faster

transit time. They're going to be able to inspect more thoroughly and quickly." Harrison estimates that with the shorter wait, trucks that previously needed two weeks for a single two-way trip will be able to make the same trip in just one week. That's especially important when the supply of trucks and drivers is short, as it often is, according to Harrison.

In addition to saving time and money, "This will obviously keep the product the freshest it can be by allowing it to arrive to our warehouse in a quicker timeframe," says Jorge Quintero of Grower Alliance LLC, headquartered in Rio Rico, AZ.

Newer, better technology will also speed inspections at the port. Moore notes the FPAA is meeting with FDA, "working on ways things could be even more efficient at the border crossing."

"This is something that will create a change in dynamism in the region," says Willy Martinez, operations manager for Del Campo Supreme Inc., in Nogales, AZ. "This is something that the industry here in Nogales has been pushing very hard." Finally, the plans are coming to fruition. **pb**

packaging and distribution. SQF certification audits are among the most rigorous in the food safety field, according to the FMI, and the only program to be recognized worldwide by the Global Food Safety Initiative for growing fresh produce. Gracia notes, "They're responding to the market's requests. This industry is doing it before food safety legislation is in place in the United States."

There is little doubt that the U.S. government will step in. "It's not regulated by the government, yet. It's not 'if' but 'when' at this point," says Harrison of Al Harrison. "It's a big issue and it's only going to grow."

Meanwhile, Thomas of Thomas Produce Sales reveals his foodservice customers are not yet asking for produce with any kind of food safety certification, "But I'm sure they will," he predicts.

To retailers, "Food Safety programs are becoming ever more important, especially in the wake of fresh product recalls," says Sandra Aguilar, marketing manager for Ciruli Brothers LLC, based in Rio Rico, AZ. "Retailers are not only responding to food safety issues, they are taking a proactive approach and requesting that their suppliers comply with minimum food safety criteria. Our facilities are certified by accredited third parties. We work with Primus Labs and Scientific Certification Systems to imple-

ment Good Manufacturing and Good Agricultural Practices starting at the field level. By working closely with our growers and packinghouses, we are able to better secure our supply chains and provide our customers with safe and wholesome products."

Other independent companies are doing what they can to ensure food safety as well. At Al Harrison, "We have contracts with our growers and they have to subscribe to our food safety standards," asserts Harrison. "We have third-party testers."

DiMenna shares Jem-D also uses third-party auditors and has a complete, integrated traceability program. "We're very proud to have complete traceability," he says.

More companies are well on their way to similar abilities to trace product. "We're bumping up our traceability program," says Harrison. The improved program will enable the company to trace an item to the field it was grown in, the day it was packed and who packed it.

According to Maldonado of Apache Produce, "Traceability is one of the things we made a point to demand from the growers, and we work very hard to obtain it."

At Del Campo, "Last year, we implemented a traceability system with Harvest Mark that is ahead of anything else in this area," says Martinez. "With this system, customers and consumers have the capability to go to a

Web site and get all the information on the tomatoes or bell peppers they are consuming."

Grower Alliance is on the traceability track, too. "Traceability is also being implanted with growers so there is the utmost control of knowing when, where and how the product was packed," Quintero reports.

Meanwhile, the FPAA is in discussion with the FDA about possible standardization of food safety requirements. "We want to make sure that everybody — no matter what country they're in — has the same standards to follow," says Moore. "We want everyone to play by the same rules."

But before the government can decide on standards, companies are hoping retailers will agree to some common guidelines. "Each retailer has standard questions they ask, along with different questions regarding what they're looking for," says Wagner of Farmer's Best. He believes that by agreeing on some common rules, retailers can make food safety guidelines easier for suppliers to follow.

"One thing that I would like to see is more standardization of food safety guidelines," agrees Harrison. "That would help tremendously." He acknowledges that among retailers, there's a movement heading in that direction. **pb**

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Reader Service # 183

RED RIVER VALLEY POTATOES Adequate Supply, Great Flavor



Photos courtesy of Northern Plains Potato Growers Association

Growers survive rain, dodge recession and continue to raise high quality potatoes praised for their beauty, texture and lengthy storage life.

BY KEN HODGE

Heavy rain in June didn't reduce harvest significantly. The economy hasn't seemed to dampen consumer demand; and Red River Valley potato growers are starting another season of shipping what they consider to be the nation's best-eating spuds to grocers, while spreading awareness of breast cancer and supporting ongoing research of the disease.

Three to six inches of rain in a single day on soil that was already quite saturated drowned out about 15 to 20 percent of Valley



potato plantings in late June, according to Ted Kreis, marketing director for the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association, based in East Grand Forks, MN. "The higher ground benefited from the rain and it looks like it might be more productive," he points out. "Last year, we shipped just under five million hundred-weight of potatoes and this year, we're looking at about 4.3 million."

Across the Red River in Grand Forks, ND, Paul Dolan, general manager of Associated Potato Growers Inc., a grow-

er cooperative with about 20 active growers/owners, says, "Yields aren't going to be as good as they were last year, but last year we had record yields. This year, we're probably going to be about 85 to 90 percent of normal. I think that is a manageable crop and we should be able to supply our customers amply."

"The soils, the climate, the temperature at harvest and the fact that 95 percent of our potatoes are dry-land, all make the potato have a much better flavor and a better texture. It keeps much better than an irrigated potato and we are able to store it longer without losing our red color, while other areas have problems with color fading."

— Paul Dolan
Associated Potato Growers Inc.

While summer weather hasn't been as warm as usual, potatoes respond better to cooler weather than crops such as soybeans, wheat, corn and dry, edible beans. That means size and quality are expected to be good, according to David Moquist, principal and manager of O. C. Schulz & Sons Inc., of Crystal, ND. "Heat units are way down from normal this year," he explains. "Harvest will be a week to 10 days later. The crop that came through looks good. We think it will be at least average."

THE COLOR RED

Average in volume, perhaps, but talk to just about anyone involved with Red River Valley potatoes and they'll tell you the color and flavor of their crop is outstanding thanks to the rich soil in which they're grown and the fact that growers do not irrigate their spuds.

"We can thank the soil," Moquist emphasizes. "The Red River Valley is a former glacial lakebed with dark, rich, organic soil.

Our potatoes develop very good color, and color, in general, sells red potatoes. Besides the color, our potatoes taste good, too."

According to geologists, the Red River Valley isn't really a valley at all. It is the relatively flat bed of ancient Lake Agassiz, formed as the glacial Laurentide ice sheet, which melted some 11,000 years ago. Rich alluvial soils were deposited as sediment over many years and, when the enormous lake drained about 9,500 years ago, it left a few "puddles" now known as the Great Lakes, Lake Winnipeg and other fresh water lakes.

"The Red River Valley has about 30 inches of loamy silt mud," explains Randall Boushey, president and CEO of A & L Potato Co. Inc., in East Grand Forks, MN. "With the loamy silt, we can develop a very nice quality red spud with higher solids, better flavor and creamier texture. It's just a winning package all put together. Because of that creamy texture, a little less sour cream and butter are needed to make it happen. The less you have to load up the potato, the healthier it gets for you."

In Hoople, ND, Cory Seim, sales manager of Northern Valley Growers LLC, agrees

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about the distinctive flavor of potatoes from the valley. "I've had many people traveling through from as far away as Washington state stop in and buy potatoes because they want them from the Red River Valley," he relates. "It's a pretty impressive difference that, if people ever tasted them side-by-side with other potatoes, they would notice. If we could ever get people to understand that you can bake a red potato, they would see there is definitely a difference between a red and a russet. Everybody thinks you boil ours and bake a russet."

Local buyers and retailers agree. There

is something special about the potatoes grown in the valley that's not really a valley.

GREAT ALL AROUND

"Retailers love Red River Valley potatoes," asserts Matthew Kugler, produce buyer at Russ Davis Wholesale Inc., in Wadena, MN. "Some of our stores have been buying potatoes from other areas because of transportation issues and the buyer told me they don't want any more of those potatoes. Red River Valley potatoes are excellent — that's why."

At Kessler's, an independent grocery



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store in Aberdeen, SD, Greg Tepy, produce manager, says most of his clientele are of German descent and 80 to 90 percent of the potatoes he sells are reds. "We buy from Russ Davis Wholesale and our consumers prefer more red potatoes than russets," he explains. "Most of them think the red potato has a better flavor than the russet. They are a great all-around potato with many uses. Our deli uses them for potato salad and you can certainly bake a red potato and it will turn out good."

In Grand Forks and East Grand Forks, red spuds from the Red River Valley are an even bigger attraction, according to Rick Hogan, produce supervisor for Hugo's Family Marketplace, an eight-store chain with locations in North Dakota and Minnesota.

It's no surprise that potatoes will most likely be on special at Hugo's during the Potato Bowl, a weeklong festival that celebrates the potato industry. "Companies give away 5- or 10-pound bags of potatoes as promotional items," Hogan adds. "There is a french fry feed sponsored by Simplot that is billed as the world's largest and is always attended by several thousand people. During that week, Hugo's also offers a potato bar at our stores; we encourage all eight of our stores to offer them. We sell baked potatoes for a dollar or a dollar-and-a-half with chili, cheese, butter, salsa and many other toppings."

THE ALLURE OF LOCAL

Offering local produce to consumers is an important part of Hugo's merchandising strategy, according to Hogan. "I think it's important that we buy as much local produce as we can," he insists. "Every chance

we have, we always use the Red River Valley logo from the potato growers association. We put it in all our ads and any promotions we do."

Hogan agrees with the sentiments of growers about the distinctive flavor of Red River Valley potatoes. "They have a great flavor — and that's not taking anything away from other states' potatoes," he reasons. "I live in the Red River Valley and I have a little more tendency toward working with local growers. We can usually get through the winter and early spring with our supply of potatoes from the Red River Valley and sometimes into the summer."

Bill Kruger, president and CEO of Kruger's Inc., a wholesale distributor in St. Paul, MN, says having approximately 10

months each year to market Red River Valley potatoes is an advantage for the industry. "As far as I'm concerned, Red River Valley potatoes are the best red potatoes out there," he muses. "I like other potatoes as well, but they have such short seasons. In the Red River Valley, we do 10 months of the year. They have always held up the best in storage."

Dolan of Associated Potato Growers attributes the long storage life of Red River Valley potatoes to a number of factors, many of which figure in the overall quality of the potato. "The soils, the climate, the

temperature at harvest and the fact that 95 percent of our potatoes are dry-land, all make the potato have a much better flavor and a better texture," he points out. "It keeps much better than an irrigated potato and we are able to store it longer without losing our red color, while other areas have problems with color fading as they store them. It makes the appearance definitely more attractive."

Even when Red River Valley potatoes aren't being sold close to home, excitement about the product is contagious. Growers and shippers in the Valley pack most of their

Making A Difference

This year, grower/shippers in the valley are adding a twist that not only supports a good cause, but also helps valley potatoes subtly stand out in the marketplace. Participating packers are sealing consumer bags with a special Kwik Lok tag equipped with a card printed with a pink ribbon. The back of the tag informs consumers they are supporting the National Breast Cancer Foundation and promoting breast cancer awareness with their purchase. The association is also providing point-of-purchase placards thanking consumers for supporting the foundation and ad slicks that read, "Your purchase of potatoes supports the National Breast Cancer Foundation."

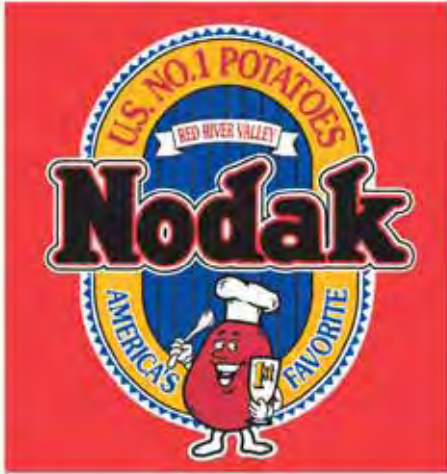
"We hope to generate a quarter of a million dollars in donations," says Randall Boushey, president and CEO of A & L Potato Co. Inc., in East Grand Forks, MN, who came up with the idea. "We offer point of sale advertising to raise money for a great cause — it doesn't get much simpler than that."

Steve Tweten, president of Buxton, ND-based NoKota Packers Inc., another participating shipper, adds, "We're proud of the opportunity to partner with the National Breast Cancer Foundation."

Nearly everyone has a friend or family member who has been affected by breast cancer, contends David Moquist, principal and manager of O. C. Schulz & Sons Inc., headquartered in Crystal, ND. "We just want to do our small part toward awareness and make a contribution toward a cure," he concludes. **pb**

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What's New In The Red River Valley

A & L Potato Co. Inc., East Grand Forks, MN: An existing 250,000 cwt potato storage has been purchased, according to president and CEO Randy Boushey. Remodeling of the unit includes replacing a flat roof with a new, pitched roof. Humidicells have been added to each of the structure's 16 bins. The project also includes addition of frequency dry fans, as well as a Techmark computerized control system. Through Internet access, numerous operations can be conducted remotely, ranging from opening and closing bin doors, temperature, humidity and fan speed adjustment, etc. Four computers manage various functions for the 16 bins.

Associated Potato Growers Inc., Grand Forks, ND: The Red River Valley's largest wash shed and shipper has a new barrel washer-polisher at its Grafton, ND facility. It features 16 brushes to polish potatoes and handles 500 to 600 cwt. per hour. Also at Grafton, APG has added an additional 60,000 cwt. of storage, giving the cooperative a total of nearly 1.3 million cwt. of storage for potatoes. A new racking system at the Grafton facility nearly doubles the storage capacity there, according to general manager Paul Dolan.

Kerian Machines Inc., Grafton, ND: While

the machine sizer manufacturer is located in the nation's largest red potato production area, the company sells sizing machines for many different produce commodities. General manager, James Kerian, says demand is increasing for not only various melon sizers, but to handle larger sized watermelons. There also are more requests for oversized sweet potato sizers, some of which are going to food processors.

NoKota Packers Inc., Buxton, ND: President Steve Tweten says the company has added a new Mayo Manufacturing polisher for its red potatoes. The machine performs additional cleaning of the product so the potatoes will "have a little extra shine."

O.C. Schulz & Sons Inc., Crystal, ND: The grower/packer/shipper may be known for its repacker customer base, but president Dave Moquist states a new consumer packaging machine has been added. "This will make us more responsive to our customer's needs," he relates. The new product will handle various consumer packs ranging from two to 20 pounds. For example, the machine will produce 50 five-pound packs per minute, or 300 bales per hour. It also features a check weigher and automatic baler. Schulz also had updated its storage controls for temperature,

humidity, etc. "The one we had was good, but this version represents a newer generation," Moquist says. Finally, for the first time in five years the company has grown a small amount of yellow flesh potatoes.

Spokely Farms, Nielsville, MN: President Lonnie Spokely has added a new carton-filler at its packing shed. Not only will the machine fill cartons faster, but it will also more accurately weigh the full containers.

Tri-Campbell Farms, Grafton, ND: A new supplemental irrigation system has been added for red potatoes, which usually are grown under dry-land farming conditions. However, president Tom Campbell doesn't foresee having irrigation for more than 20 percent of the company's Red River Valley red potato production. "We hope to get 50 to 100 cwt per-acre increase in production. The irrigation also is for quality reasons. Often, right before harvest, dry [dirt] clods can cause skinning and bruising of the potatoes," he says. Water for irrigation comes from snowmelt, which is maintained in a retention pond. On another front, Tri-Campbell has purchased a 120,000 cwt storage unit at Grafton. Finally, Tri-Campbell has added a 12-foot by 75-foot expansion to its Grafton packing facility. **pb**



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potatoes anonymously under private label for retail customers, but the word is still spreading about the eating quality of these unique products. "I'm seeing a trend as Red River Valley potatoes sell across more states," reports Kugler of Russ Davis. "The growers have put in more packing machines, and in the past four years they've been shipping further distances, especially to the East Coast and Florida."

PROGRESSIVE GROWERS

Dolan adds that growers in the Valley are progressive in their growing practices and in the technology they employ for planting, growing, harvesting and storing their crop each year. "We have a large investment in our storage facilities," he notes. "They are computerized and keep the climate at 95 percent humidity so they store well. That investment has been paying off for us. We can keep the product longer and in better condition. Growers in the Valley continue to do a lot of things to improve the quality of our potatoes. They improve their growing practices and update their equipment to handle the produce more gently."

Maintaining the attractive color of red potatoes is always a concern for anyone who stores them and Steve Tweten, president of NoKota Packers Inc., based in Bux-

ton, ND, says his company not only raises spuds with excellent color, but also plans to polish them this year to make them even more alluring to consumers who generally buy with their eyes. "We have some very nice spuds," Tweten says. "They are a deep, dark red with nice shape and appearance. We put in a new polisher this year that should really give a little extra shine to the potatoes. Few other places in the country can produce the color that we get and the shine will add to that."

Tri-Campbell Farms is another Valley operation that has invested heavily in technology to bring a better, safer and more environmentally friendly product to consumers, according to Tom Campbell, president of the Grafton, ND, growing and packing operation. In addition to a supplemental irrigation system to help ensure potato quality in dry years, Tom and brothers Greg and Bill have added a settling tank for treating wastewater from their potato washing process. "It allows us to recycle a lot of our wastewater," he explains. "It is also environmentally friendly and makes our operation more sustainable. We also added a new labeling system with software that enables us to trace every three- and five-pound bag of potatoes back to the field where it was grown." **pb**

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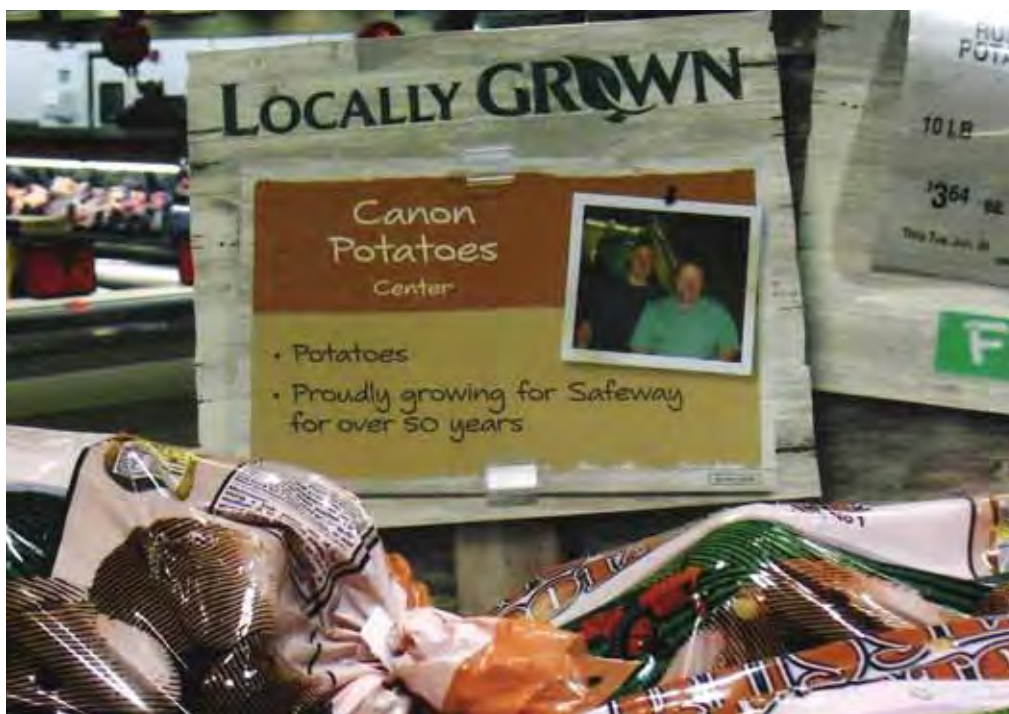
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Reader Service # 203

SAN LUIS VALLEY POTATOES

Offer Sustainability, Promotions And Freight Advantage



Due to its central location, fertile land and ideal growing conditions, the San Luis Valley potato could very well be crowned “King of Sustainability.”

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

“**W**e are more sustainable than any growing area,” emphasizes Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee (CPAC), in Monte Vista, CO. “Buying Colorado potatoes equals less food miles with our freight advantage and we have less pesticide need and fewer disease problems because of winter kill. We are justifiably proud of our state and of our unique region.”

The majestic, snow-dotted peaks of the Rocky Mountains surrounding the fertile San Luis Valley in southwestern Colorado provide a showcase of not only beautiful scenery, but ideal growing conditions for potatoes. “It is here at 7,600 feet elevation — in the highest and largest alpine valley in the world where commercial

crops are grown — that the potato flourishes,” Ehrlich continues.

This ideal combination of location, climate, soil and growing practices produces potatoes that are known for their superior color, shape and nutritional properties. With its high elevation and low temperatures, winter freezing helps naturally sterilize the ground, reducing pest and disease pressures, Ehrlich explains. Cool weather also contributes to a smoother-skinned potato.

As harvest and distribution gains momentum in early autumn throughout this Colorado region, buyers are welcoming the new crop. Aided by marketing assistance provided through CPAC, the appeal of Colorado potatoes is boosted and they continue to earn new enthusiasts.

Adding to the potatoes’ allure is the Valley’s centralized location,

which provides a natural freight advantage that is becoming more appealing as fuel prices continue to rise and the popularity of buying locally grown produce skyrockets. "While retailers strive to be more green, Colorado's freight advantage continues to be in our favor," Ehrlich explains. As consumers continue to tighten their belts while facing a questionable economic future, "they will be turning more to potatoes as a nutritional and versatile way to feed their families for pennies on the dollar."

The San Luis Valley's response to the spiraling popularity of specialty varieties are purple, red, and yellow-fleshed potatoes, which grow particularly well in Colorado.

David Tonso, president and CEO of Center, CO-based Canon Potato Co. Inc., concurs. "In times like these, when people are getting back to simplicity, there's nothing more basic than the value, nutrition and great taste of Colorado potatoes."

Added to those attributes are an often-overlooked factor — they are convenient. "Potatoes can be a great convenience food," notes Dwayne Weyers, co-owner of Aspen Produce LLC, based in Center, CO. "Simply bake or microwave them and then top them off with a creamy soup or chili, and you have a meal. Potatoes are still one of the best values in the produce department — in the entire grocery store, in fact."

"Potatoes are a good food source during tough economic times," touts Jim Knutzon, CEO of Monte Vista, CO-based Farm Fresh Direct LLC. "There is a direct correlation of announced recessions and more at-home consumption of potatoes. And when food prices are high — and they are predicted to continue to increase — potatoes are perceived as an even better value."

According to Ray Keegan of American Produce Co. LLC, a Denver, CO-based receiver that services retail and foodservice accounts, "Colorado potatoes are fresher;

they have more flavor and variety; and they are convenient and economical. They are the best answer for my customers."

"The future is bright for potatoes," remarks CPAC's Ehrlich. "And even brighter for potatoes from Colorado." Colorado ranks as the second largest fresh potato-producing state. Ehrlich points out that it is also the No. 2 state in organic, fresh potato production. Although the vast majority of the San Luis Valley spud volume is in Russets, Ehrlich maintains Colorado can grow any kind of potato people want. "With more than 60 varieties to choose

from, there is a Colorado potato to meet every specification," he states.

The San Luis Valley's response to the spiraling popularity of specialty varieties are purple, red, and yellow-fleshed potatoes, which grow particularly well in Colorado. The elongated, thin shape and colors of an assortment of fingerlings have captured the attention of both professional chefs and those amateur cooks who seek unique home-serving ideas for families and guests at dinner parties. This year's planted acreage is estimated at 56,000, reflecting about a 1 percent decrease from 2008,

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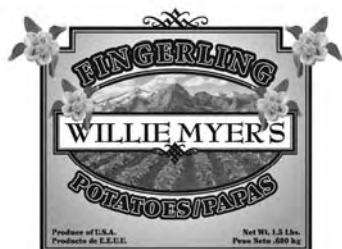
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Reader Service # 27

Reader Service # 28

according to Ehrlich. Growing conditions have been ideal, and most growers agree that prior to harvest, this year's fields were producing the best-looking crop they had seen in years.

PROMOTIONS FEATURE CATEGORY STRATEGIES

"Convenience without cutting corners is key," stresses Linda Weyers, administrator for CPAC. "With Colorado potatoes, we minimize the hassles of potato procurement by helping foodservice and retail buyers identify the best varieties to fit their needs. We take partnering seriously, but with just the right pinch of character to make promoting potatoes fun."

In cooperation with its shippers, CPAC offers marketing aides to retail and foodservice receivers. Although the committee has scaled back its promotion dollars considerably this season, Weyers encourages restaurant menu promotions and sampling sessions at retail in order to boost potato sales.

Research is validating the claim that new varieties help revitalize sales of traditional Russets when featured in retail displays.

CPAC also supports the national Produce For Kids program and participates in the Children's Miracle Network promotion with the Southwest division of Kroger. Another effort to reach younger consumers is through an educational event CPAC supports that is similar to the well-established Ag in the Classroom program. "We've had over 60 teachers from other parts of Colorado come here to learn about San Luis Valley agriculture," Ehrlich reports.

"The objective is to persuade — to get another bag of potatoes in consumer's shopping carts," says Farm Fresh's Knutzon. "Direct communication will be done with consumers while they are shopping in the attempt to alter their buying behaviors. We're working to manage consumers' buying habits, so we are putting something out in front of them to convince them to buy that extra bag of potatoes." Shopping cart

A New Organization Creates Demand

To stimulate demand, the majority of CPAC's 2009-10 promotional budget has been delegated to the marketing efforts of the newly formed Fresh Demand Working Group (FDWG), which was created by a group of shippers and industry representatives from all over United States that banded together over their concern about the declining demand of fresh potatoes, explains Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Colorado Potato Growers Administrative Committee (CPAC), located in Monte Vista, CA. The group originally organized through the Denver-based U.S. Potato Board.

"We feel it's critical to address the short-term demand issues looking at current trends and what the industry is projecting as supply for the 2009-10 crop year," notes Pat Goolsby, president of MountainKing, located in Houston, TX, and a member of the FDWG Tactics Committee. The Integer Group, a sales-promotion agency based in Lakewood, CO, has been selected to coordinate the marketing efforts, and several potato-growing regions throughout the United States have delegated budget dollars to fund the activities.

This season, the four test market regions include Buffalo, NY; Portland, OR; Jacksonville, FL; and St. Louis, MO. "The Integer Group will do the merchandising and intense marketing in these four regions to achieve measurable results of all increased sales during the promotion period," states Ehrlich. "We're all working to get more demand for

fresh potatoes."

Showing strong support for this group's activities is David Tonso, president and CEO of Center, CO-based Canon Potato Co., and also the vice chairman of CPAC's executive committee. "They are one of the groups effectively addressing increasing demand," he remarks. The work of the FDWG complements the United Potato Growers of America (UPGA), the national potato growers' cooperative.

"When consumers are in the store, it is the most appropriate time to remind them about potatoes," agrees Jed Ellithorpe, operations manager of Ellithorpe & Sons, which is the growing side of Aspen Produce, headquartered in Center, CO. "In a perfect world, we would have funding to merchandise and promote nationally, but we are beginning with the focus on these four markets. Retailers are interested in getting more customers into their stores to spend more grocery dollars," Ellithorpe continues. "Hopefully, this will educate the younger generations of consumers — who really haven't learned how to cook — that potatoes are a great value, especially during these economic times."

Ernie Myers, general manager of Mountain Valley Produce LLC, in Center, CO, also affirmed CPAC's decision to support the FDWG's activities. "Consumers need to be reminded that potatoes are still one of the greatest values in the produce department, and they need more education relating to their versatility," he remarks.

pb

advertising, persuasion through in-store floor-talkers and other avenues of merchandising will be utilized.

COLORADO POTATO MYSTIQUE DRAWS CROWDS

Those colorful skins serve more than just an aesthetic value. Colorado potatoes boasting colored skin or flesh are chock-full of nutritional value. "It is important to educate consumers regarding the superior nutritional attributes of certain Colorado potato varieties over others, especially those with colored skin or flesh," notes Weyers.

Results from ongoing research in the San Luis Valley grown region document the long-held belief of added health benefits of produce grown in Colorado. Since the San Luis Valley used to be a lake centuries ago, the resulting mineral soil can add nutrition to its produce, explains Weyers.

Fittingly, "Beautiful outside...beautiful inside," is the tag line CPAC uses as a part of its marketing push, shares Tonso. "Our motto, 'Quality at its Peak,' also applies to our commitment to enhancing the fresh potato category," he adds. A long-standing category workhorse, the potato now merits a creative marketing approach relevant to today's changing lifestyles.

Participation in major trade shows remains a priority for CPAC, and the San Luis Valley potato booth will be a part of the Colorado Pavilion at the Produce Marketing Association Fresh Summit in Anaheim, CA, October 2-5. Although CPAC has exhibited for many years, "We will have more independent shipper representation this year that also will be a part of the Colorado Pavilion," says Ehrlich.

Another foodservice initiative is the annual Colorado Chef's Tour, conducted in September. Executive chefs from the region are CPAC's guests on field tours during harvest at the Colorado State University potato research center and are treated to meals that spotlight Colorado potatoes in several courses.

FREIGHT ADVANTAGE AND GREEN BENEFITS

While the push is ongoing to educate consumers on the variety, convenience and nutritional value of Colorado potatoes, the state's natural freight advantage through its centralized location remains the top reason that attracts buyers. Pam Dunning, fresh potato buyer at Ideal Sales Inc., in Dallas, TX, points out, "Colorado potatoes can be delivered to our customers in one or two days, which makes them fresher and reduces shrink." He adds one-stop potato shopping through a single growing region

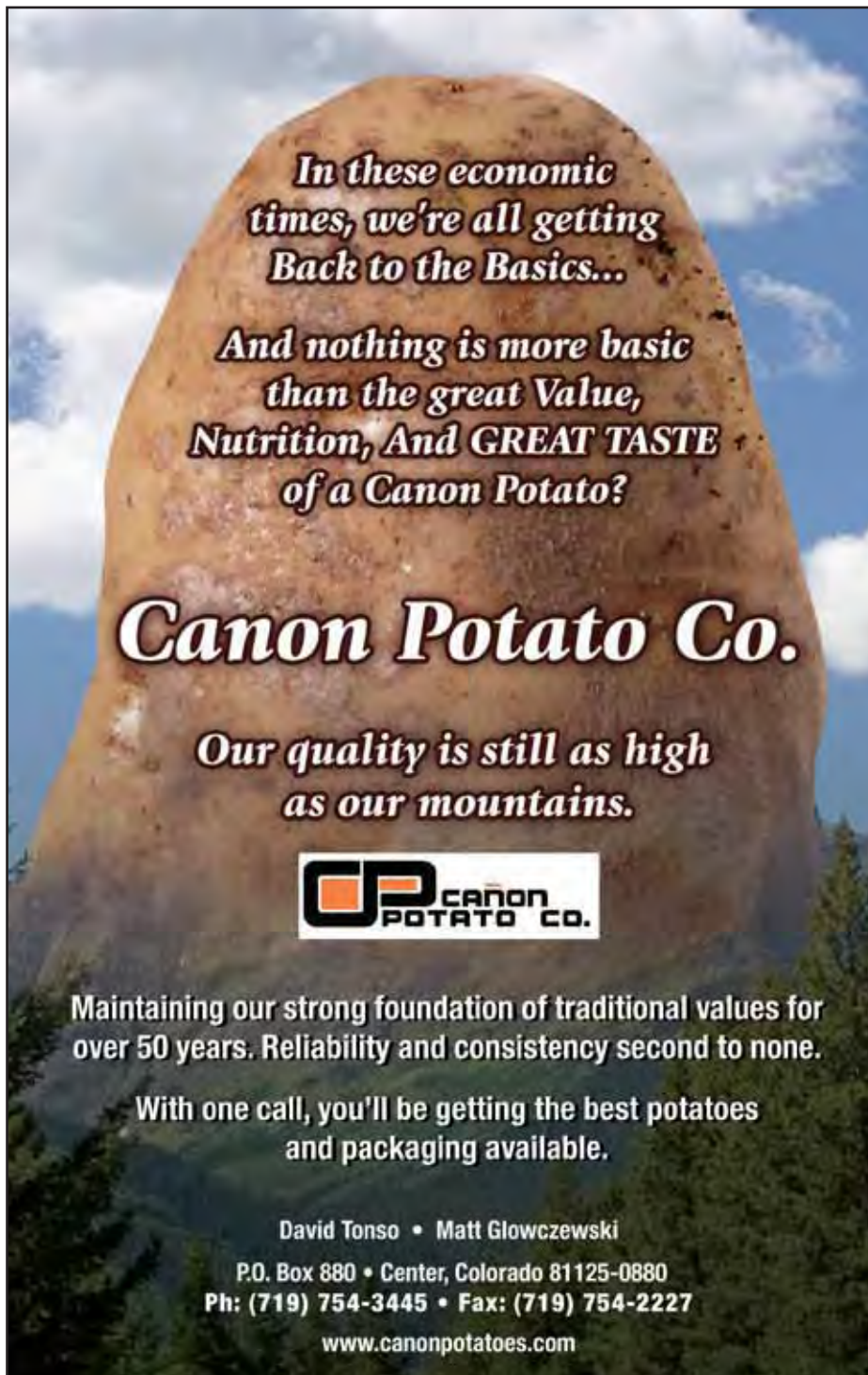
can be another way to save on freight costs.

The 800-mile trip from the San Luis Valley to the Dallas-Fort Worth delivery points "can sometimes even be done overnight," Dunning adds. "Ideal Sales services both retail and foodservice distributors."

"We not only have a freight advantage, but we provide more consistency of product," adds Michele Peterson, general manager of Monte Vista, CO-based Harvest Select, a subsidiary of Dallas-based Ideal Sales. "Because we consider it a top priority to have accurate packing and consistent siz-

ing, when a customer buys a specific size profile, what's in our package really fits what they ordered, without any odd-size potatoes in the pack. Our retail customers especially appreciate that."

"The freight advantage is the primary reason we buy potatoes from Colorado," emphasizes Warren Workman, vice president of produce for Minyard Food Stores Inc., a 30-store supermarket chain based in Coppell, TX. With locations centered in the Dallas-Fort Worth region, Minyard stores feature San Luis Valley potatoes because




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Reader Service # 96

What's New In The San Luis Valley?

Aspen Produce LLC, Center, CO: Two major transitions have occurred within the company during the past year. Ryan Haynie joined the company sales staff last fall. His previous sales experience was outside of the produce industry, according to co-owner, Dwayne Weyers.

Long-time and well known sales associate, Glenn Stewart, retired from his position at the sales desk in the spring.

Canon Potato Co. Inc., Center, CO: "We're installing some additional automation to help increase our efficiency," reports president and CEO, David Tonso. A new weigher and upgrades to the bailing system are among the additions. "We're trying to make it so we can get maximum efficiency out of our warehouse while still keeping the same number of people. During these tough economic times, we don't want jobs to be lost."

Tonso also emphasizes, "With a special focus on food safety and sanitation, we've made key upgrades in our warehouse. Now we are perfectly positioned to answer the constantly evolving needs of the potato industry."

Farm Fresh Direct LLC, Monte Vista, CO: The grower-owned sales and marketing organization plans to construct a mega-shed in the San Luis Valley, but the time frame for building is uncertain at this point, according to Jim Knutzon, CEO. The 350,000-square-foot packing facility will be able to handle a potato packing capacity of four to five million cwt. annually. "We're 90 percent designed and engineered on the project. We're just working on financing details," Knutzon reports.

Harvest Select, Monte Vista, CO: The wholly-owned subsidiary of Dallas, TX-based Ideal Sales Inc. is completing upgrades in response to customer demand for more specific and uniform sizing of potatoes. Michele Peterson, general manager, explains, "A lot of customers are asking for a narrower size profile on their potatoes, and we're making improvements in our packing process to answer that need."

Harvest Select is also working on developing a premium carton line. A new packing line for No. 2-grade potatoes is also in place this season. "We're looking into putting in more tanks to improve the wash process," Peterson adds.

Mountain Valley Produce LLC, Center, CO: Continuing to develop

the fingerling markets for its foodservice and retail receivers, the company has made great strides in its abilities to store and increase the shelf-life of these delicate specialty potatoes, notes Ernie Myers, general manager. "Because of our advanced temperature control capabilities, we've been able to experiment with quality improvements of our fingerlings in storage with great results," he reveals. "We were still shipping fingerlings in July and early August that we were able to keep from last fall's harvest."

In addition to the specialty potatoes, Mountain Valley is a major producer of Russets and yellow-fleshed potatoes, most of which are grown from its own seed stock.

The company's facility is HACCP-certified and follows Good Agricultural Practices, and the farm and packing shed are both Primus-certified as well.

Skyline Potato Company, Center, CO: General manager Randy Bache says he expects a continued rise in popularity of the 8-pound, poly bag option for retail customers. "We're competing with Top Ramen (noodles) and other low-budget products, and people have to feed their families," he emphasizes, adding, "We have to make sure the price of our fresh product doesn't go too high, or people will switch from fresh to canned or frozen."

The company holdings also include Purely Organic, a separate packing facility for its organic offerings. "We've got a great organic program that has taken 16 years to develop," Bache emphasizes. Because of the varying popularity of organics, "A lot of handlers jump in and then jump right back out," he remarks. "Nonetheless, we've had a consistent supply for our customers."

The company markets a portion of its organic volume through Food Source Inc., headquartered in Monterey, CA, using the Tomorrow's Organic label. "Concurrently, we sell our own Nature Fresh organic label, which is available in the 3-, 5-, and 50-pound containers, through Skyline," Bache adds. "We will also pack private labels for organics."

Worley & McCullough Inc., Monte Vista, CO: The shipping organization has reportedly broken its ties with Farm Fresh Direct LLC, in Monte Vista, CO. Farm Fresh had been coordinating sales and shipments for several years before company owners made the decision to handle their own sales and marketing this season. **pb**

they "are well-established in this market. Price is also very important to our customers," adds Workman. He remarks San Luis Valley potatoes have good delivery and consistent quality, and they maintain their freshness because of their close proximity to the Dallas-Ft. Worth market.

"The industry is realizing, with freight being what it is, that sales and distribution will become more regional," says Aspen Produce's Weyers. "It's a changing world, and we have to change with it."

ORGANICS STILL POPULAR

One way to enhance variety in produce departments is to offer organics, which are becoming an increasingly popular offering from San Luis Valley shippers. "Organics

are a very specialized market, and we've proven as a shipping organization that we can produce a quality product," emphasizes Center, CO-based Skyline Potato Co.'s general manager, Randy Bache. He hastens to add, however, that special attention must be given to the current economic trend, and it is critical to anticipate consumers' needs by offering the appropriate packaging. "One of the biggest dangers going into this season is people feeling over-confident about demand because the Colorado acreage is down. It's sometimes a very fine line when you market a crop," he notes.

Bache notes he plans to continue to encourage retailers to utilize more 8-pound packs and to promote them in advertising, with less emphasis on the more widely-

pushed 10-pound size. "That dollar or two less could make the difference on whether buying that bag of potatoes is the best way to stretch the family budget," he explains.

Multiply the inherent value of potatoes with the added bonus of being good for the environment and it's a bonanza for retailers and consumers alike. "People want to support locally grown products to help cut both fuel usage and costs," Bache notes.

"We've seen some increased interest with our local customer base," reports Canon Potato's Tonso.

"Colorado had always been a greener state," adds Myers of Mountain Valley Produce. "And we'd be interested in using alternative energy sources, as well." **pb**

With Dedicated Effort, Sweet Potato Sales Can Sizzle

Sweet potatoes have long been overshadowed by their paler cousins, but some people in the produce industry believe that may be changing soon.

BY JON VANZILE

A number of converging influences, including an aging population, new products, increased visibility in foodservice and an increased focus on health, may boost the sweet potato from a single-SKU item to a category of its own, according to growers and marketing gurus in the sweet potato business.

"I do see growth in the fresh sweet potato market," says René Simon, director of the Baton Rouge-based Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission (LSPC). "With the economy tight, people are realizing sweet potatoes' nutritional value. Plus, they are very easy to prepare."

BEYOND THE HOLIDAYS

The majority of sweet potatoes currently sold in

the United States are bulk jumbo or #1 sweet potatoes that are typically sold around the holidays, especially Thanksgiving and Christmas. More often than not, these big spuds are destined for sweet potato pies — a regional Southern classic — or sticky sweet potato casseroles.

However, this focus on holiday dishes and giant sweet potatoes has begun to shift in recent years as produce executives slowly expand sweet potato displays and customers' tastes change.

"Most energy for merchandising sweet potatoes goes into promotions during Thanksgiving and Christmas," maintains Anthony Totta, director of marketing and business development for Dole Sweet Potatoes at Wada Farms Marketing Group LLC, in Idaho Falls, ID. "Not enough energy goes into marketing them the rest of the year."

Until recently, there weren't many other options for marketing sweet potatoes. Today, however, new products and varieties are available that consumers might not know about. In addition to the large orange, bulk sweet potatoes, there are fingerling potatoes, bagged sweet potatoes, individually wrapped sweet potatoes for the microwave, petites, fresh-cut packages, and even a variety of colors beyond the ubiquitous orange.

"Sweet potatoes are just beginning to come into their own as far as being on the menus on a regular basis in homes," reports Sue Johnson-Langdon, executive director of the Benson-based North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission (NCSPC). "It has typically been thought of as a holiday food."

If these trends continue, it's possible that sweet potatoes will evolve from a single- or dual-SKU item into a category of their own. And of course, growers would be only too pleased with this outcome. "Dole is committed to growing the SKU into a category," Totta emphasizes. "We want to see it become a complete category with other packages and options. That's Dole's agenda."

"Sweet potatoes are something people need to



Individually wrapped, microwaveable sweet potatoes have been successful.

treat as a category," agrees Steve Phipps, owner of Market Fresh Produce LLC, in Nixa, MO. "It's not just an item."

This is an ambitious project, of course, and relies on both increased visibility and customer acceptance of sweet potatoes. But sweet potato marketers believe they have a good reason to be optimistic. According to ACNielsen scan data, sweet potato sales increased 3.8 percent last year alone, and some people in the sweet potato business believe sales could increase another 10 to 15 percent in the next five years.

CROSS-MERCHANDISING SWEET POTATOES

Beyond the basic display of bulk USDA #1 or Jumbo potatoes, there are multiple ways to increase overall sales in the sweet potato section. One simple strategy is to offer bagged potatoes during the holiday season, when shoppers need sweet potatoes for pies and casseroles. This is also the perfect time to add pecans and marshmallows to the display.

To a large degree, however, holiday sales of sweet potatoes are driven by the store's demographic. Stores in Southern states and those with large ethnic populations are more likely to sell bigger volume. The challenge, however, is to increase sales in the off-season, when most consumers aren't really thinking of sweet potatoes. One way to do this, according to Johnson-Langdon, is to use recipe cards, combined with cross-merchandising to get consumers thinking of sweet potatoes in a new way.

While the traditional sweet potato recipes — the pies and casseroles — can be complicated, there are many simple uses for sweet potatoes that consumers may not have considered. For example, sweet potatoes can be thickly sliced into wedges, coated lightly with olive oil and baked until soft, then sprinkled with salt. The resulting sweet potato steak fries are tasty, healthful and the perfect combination of savory and sweet. Additionally, sweet potatoes pair nicely with curry, rosemary, garlic and other flavors not usually associated with sweet potatoes. "Customers might not necessarily be looking for recipes, but suggestions," Langdon said. "People are using savory flavorings, so grocery stores can cross-merchandise with savory seasonings. That helps support sales."

HEALTH AND CONVENIENCE

In recent years, food science researchers have been promoting sweet potatoes as a so-called "super-food," along with blueberries, salmon and other nutrient-dense, healthful

foods. These discoveries have dovetailed with Americans' increasing interest in healthful, convenient foods.

"I think there's definitely room to increase demand," asserts Roy Hansen, sales manager of Dawson Farms LLC, based in Delhi, LA. "There are still a lot of people who haven't heard of sweet potatoes."

Unlike the white potato, which is sometimes considered an empty carbohydrate, rich orange sweet potatoes are loaded with phytonutrients, including beta carotene (vitamin A), vitamin B6, vitamin C and others.

To get this information to consumers, the industry is launching efforts, such as sponsored Web sites, and urging produce executives to single out sweet potatoes for their health benefits. "I would recommend including cards on a sweet potato display to tout their nutritional value," suggests Winifred Wood, co-owner of J. Roland Wood Farms Inc., in Benson, NC.

The sweet potato industry believes the health message is perfectly timed: the Baby

Boomer population of U.S. adults is rapidly approaching an average age of 60 years old. This huge group of adults is more health-conscious than previous generations and expected to dramatically change the way Americans age.

To truly appeal to new shoppers, the sweet potato needs one last element: convenience. Fairly or not, many people in the sweet potato business believe the product is hampered by the perception that it's slow-cooking. In fact, it does take up to 45 minutes to bake a single, large sweet potato. Coupled with the fact that the typical sweet potato is near 20 ounces, it's not a practical solution for time-strapped consumers or single people.

"Everybody's on a time crunch," notes George Wooten, owner and president of Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co., in Chadbourne, NC. "We've got to find fast recipes." Enter the smaller, microwaveable potato. Relatively new to the market, individually wrapped microwaveable sweet potatoes have taken a

Foodservice To The Rescue

Exponential growth in any produce category is rarely driven internally. Short of opening new markets, it's unlikely consumers will suddenly discover an underserved need for sweet potatoes without some kind of external motivation. According to experts, that will come from foodservice. Whenever a foodservice company adopts a produce item for a major push, the increased visibility trickles down into the consumer market — and the sweet potato seems as though it is on the brink of a major expansion.

In recent years, the sweet potato has gained increased visibility in restaurants around the country. Steakhouses have begun to offer baked sweet potatoes alongside their traditional baked white potato and leading chefs are using sweet potatoes in savory and unusual dishes — even including ice cream.

For example, during the 2009 season of Bravo TV's hit cooking reality show, *Top Chef*, one contestant made a sweet potato ice cream that won rave reviews from the judges. "Sweet potato ice cream is wonderful," agrees Winifred Wood, co-owner of J. Roland Wood Farms Inc., in Benson, NC. "In fact, we just served it at my grandson's birthday party and it was a hit. When it's enjoyed by children, that's a great thing."

One value-added product especially

looms large in the future of sweet potatoes: the sweet-potato French fry. Producers believe they have the capacity to drive the whole category by raising awareness of sweet potatoes. Moreover, sweet potato fries are relatively easy to make at home, so enterprising home cooks can make their own with a few simple ingredients.

"Foodservice is driving this," says Sue Johnson-Langdon, executive director of the Benson-based North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission (NCSPC). "The sweet potato French fry is a hot item, and it drives sales at home."

Outside of sweet potato fries, however, sweet potatoes are still waiting for their national foodservice push. "One missing element that has caused sweet potatoes to not be as explosive as they could is the lack of introduction by a major retailer, such as McDonald's," says Steve Phipps, owner of Market Fresh Produce LLC, in Nixa, MO. "After McDonald's introduced the apple dippers, they became a major force in the apple industry. I think sweet potatoes are poised for that kind of promotion."

All that's needed is the right recipe — and Phipps shares he's already seen one possible contender. He called them "sweet browns," or sweet potato hash browns served with butter and cinnamon. "They're outstanding," he adds.

pb



Photo courtesy Mann Packing Co. Inc.

Fresh-cut sweet potatoes are kid-friendly and quick-cooking.

page from the white potato playbook, which have been available individually wrapped for years. These smaller sweet potatoes can be cooked in eight minutes, producing a tasty, healthful meal. According to growers and marketers, this product has been extremely successful.

NEW COLORS, NEW PRODUCTS

New packaging alone won't transform the sweet potato into a category of its own. For that, there has to be a greater selection of products. This means sweet potatoes of different sizes and colors, in different packages and offered as value-added products.

"We've seen increased demand for a smaller profile product," explains Market Fresh's Phipps. "A 20-oz. potato is a big potato, and people don't want to waste food. But if a home cook buys four to six smaller potatoes, that goes a lot farther as a side."

Smaller potatoes also mean more sales. "I think you could have a uniform display, but also offer a value-pack so the grower could market the whole range of product," muses Wayne Garber, a partner in Garber Farms, located in Iota, LA. "A lot of chains are leaning toward a larger potato, but some consumers don't want that and would prefer several smaller potatoes."

Although still rare, fingerling sweet potatoes are even beginning to make inroads. In the past, fingerling sweet potatoes were simply left in the ground because they were too expensive to harvest. In recent years, however, growers have begun to pull and package them. While the market is still developing, there are high hopes that the fingerling sweet potato will catch on the same way the fingerling white potato did. "They've done a

great job in russet potatoes with fingerlings," declares Garber. "We're following along. It's creating an expanded market, not reducing sales in the existing market."

Wooten echoes this sentiment. "We've been working on fingerling sweet potatoes for six years, and we're beginning to see success in that category," he says.

Fresh-cut sweet potatoes can also be offered as a value-added product next to the snap peas and broccoli florets, according to Lorri Koster, vice president of marketing at Mann Packing Co. Inc., in Salinas, CA. "Fresh-cut sweet potatoes are kid-friendly

and easy to use. If you look at a whole sweet potato, it can take a long time to prepare."

Finally, in North Carolina and California, growers are doing extensive research into different colored sweet potatoes, including purple and even yellow. These products lack some of the nutritional punch of the orange sweet potato, but they are novel and have a unique flavor profile. Once again, however, the reach of these varieties is limited and the industry is still trying to figure out the best way to market them. "We offer a variety because we know there are different demographics," Wooten explains. **pb**

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Reader Service #25

10 Ways To Put More Crunch In Your Apple Sales

Rising new varieties, organic and locally grown options, as well as creative, seasonal merchandising make apples shine in any produce department.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

Apples are one of the core categories of the produce department. The appeal lies in the year-round availability of some varieties, paired with the seasonal excitement offered by newer varieties. Together, this adds up to a category that generated a sizable 6.6 percent of produce department dollar sales in 2008, according to Perishables Group FreshFacts.

"The apple category is strong year-round," says Mark Luchak, director of produce and floral at Rice Epicurean Markets, a 5-store chain based in Houston, TX. "For us, it ranks in sales contributions with other top categories, such as berries and melons."

1. STOCK CORE VARIETIES

Gala, Red Delicious, Fuji, Granny Smith and Golden Delicious were the top five dollar sales generators in the apple category for the 52 weeks ending June 27, 2009, according to Perishables Group FreshFacts. These five varieties collectively contributed 73 percent of the category's total dollar sales.

Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing for the Rainier Fruit Co., based in Selah, WA, reports, "Gala is the most popular variety across the United States and planted extensively in the Northwest."



Color breaks help consumers decipher the different apple varieties.



Gala's popularity is limited only by supply, adds Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Stemilt Growers Inc., headquartered in Wenatchee, WA.

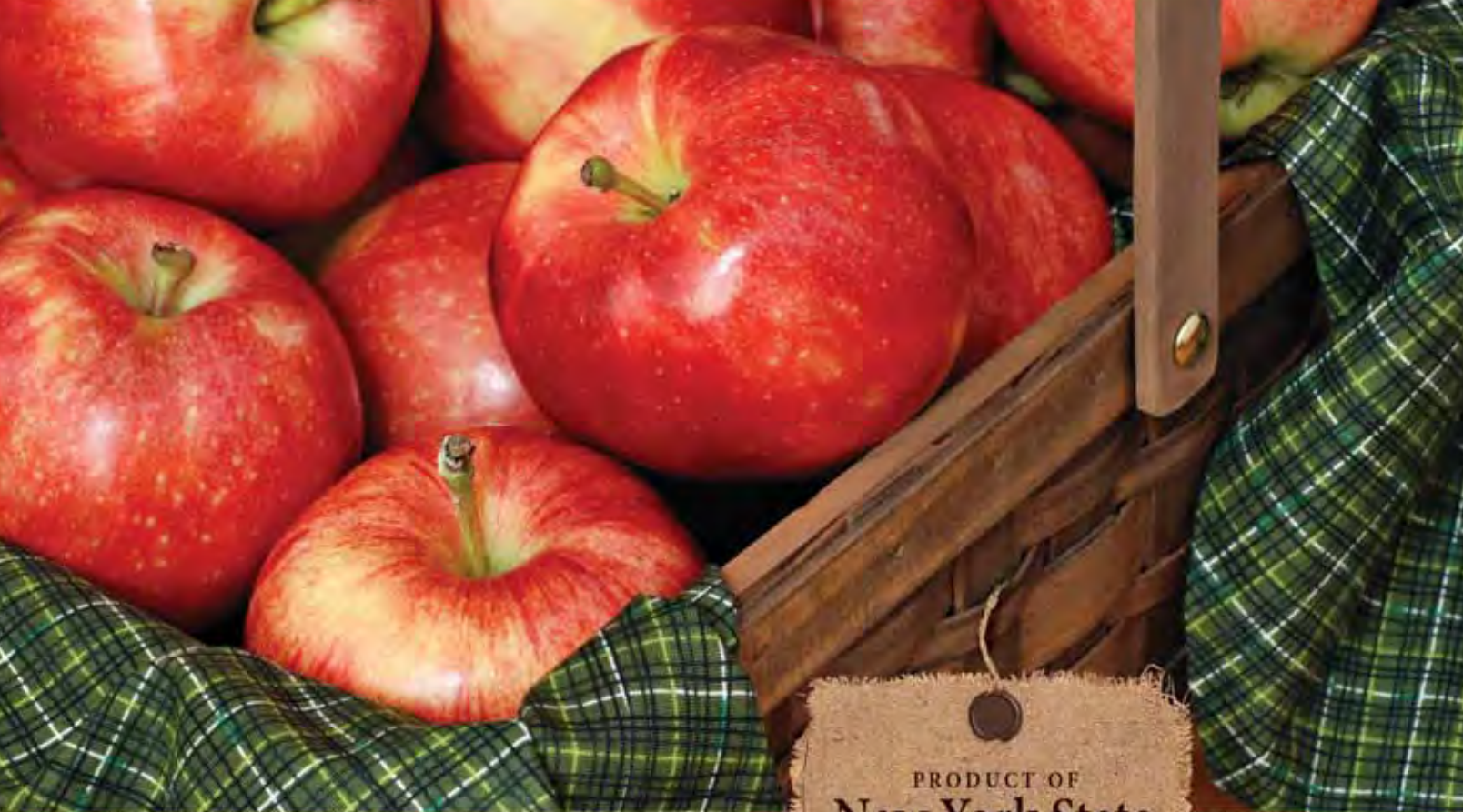
California harvested nearly 1 million boxes of Galas this season, nearly one-third

of the state's total apple crop. Alexander Ott, executive director of the Fresno, CA-based California Apple Commission (CAC), notes, "The increase in Gala production is coming from new plantings and grafting."

In the Midwest, Galas are also growing, both in popularity and size. Denise Donohue, executive director of the Michigan Apple Committee (MAC), located in DeWitt, MI, states, "Galas are on a growth trajectory in the state, including a new strain that tends to size larger."

Galas are favorites on the East Coast, too. "Numbers show Galas outsell Red Delicious with our customers," contends Sandy Cohen, president of Cohen Produce Marketing, in Aspers, PA.

Finally, in Canada, Peter Austin, Canadi-



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Insiders report displaying apples and pears together lifts apple sales by 2 percent and pear sales by 6 to 7 percent.

an sales director for B. C. Tree Fruits Limited, headquartered in Kelowna, BC, reveals, "Our most popular variety is the Royal Gala. Over the last five years, it has surpassed all other apple varieties by far."

Pepperl maintains there's still a big Red Delicious following in many areas. "People who've been raised with Reds tend to favor Reds," he says. "Fuji is another variety that's

arising as a major power. It started on the West Coast and is now selling in virtually all marketing areas. Meanwhile, Granny Smith demand is stable. It has a big following in the Northeast."

California is known for its bright green Grannys. Dan Spain, vice president of sales and marketing for Kingsburg Orchards, located in Kingsburg, CA, notes, "We're

working within the variety to get a red tint on our Granny Smiths. Consumers shop with their eyes and they like to see red on an apple."

According to Bob Mast, vice president of marketing for Columbia Marketing International Corp., (CMI) based in Wenatchee, WA, "Golden Delicious apples are slipping in sales in lieu of Galas and Fujis. We're starting to see a decline in Goldens as we did for the Red Delicious."

2. MAKE ROOM FOR VARIETALS

Rice Epicureans' Luchak shares, "Over the past few years, we've delved into more of what was known as the specialty apple varieties, as sales of Red Delicious have dropped in favor of Gala and Fuji, as well as Honeycrisp and Jazz."

Honeycrisp, McIntosh, Braeburn, Pink Lady and Jazz varieties rounded out the Top Ten dollar sales generators in the apple category for the 52-week period ending June 27, 2009, according to Perishables Group FreshFacts.

"Honeycrisp is the No. 1-selling variety in the Midwest in the fall and among the Top Three apples in the fall in other areas," details Stemilt's Pepperl.

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Honeycrisp showed a 39.5 percent gain in dollar sales from the 52-week period ending June 27, 2009, compared to the prior year, demonstrating the largest increase of any apple variety, according to Perishables Group FreshFacts. Demand continues to outpace supply, even with retail prices as high as \$2.99-per-pound.

Honeycrisp showed a 39.5 percent gain in dollar sales from the 52-week period ending June 27, 2009, compared to the year prior, the largest increase of any apple variety, according to Perishables Group FreshFacts.

As for supply, Fred Wescott, president of Wescott Agri Products Inc., based in Elgin, MN, believes, "Washington will be up 15 to 20 percent and the Midwest and East should be up an average of at least 20 percent."

Despite its popularity, Wescott admits, "The Honeycrisp is a difficult apple to grow. It is site-specific in its climate requirements, is prone to a number of diseases, can suffer quality issues, which means less packout per acre and it doesn't store. As growers, we'll continue to grow Honeycrisp, but only as long as the rate of return is significantly more than, for example, a Gala."

Lee Peters, vice president of sales and marketing for Fowler Bros. Inc., located in Wolcott, NY, says, "McIntosh is the No. 1 apple for us."

The McIntosh, as well as Empire varieties, ranked at the top of a survey sponsored by the Fishers, NY-based New York Apple Association (NYAA) that examined retail sales data between November, 2006 and October, 2008, in five Northeast and Mid-Atlantic markets. McIntosh was the No. 1-selling apple in Boston, while the Empire was among the most consistent sales gainers in all five markets surveyed. The McIntosh and Empire are the two largest volume apple varieties grown in New York.

"Braeburns are favored in the upper Midwest," says Chunk Sinks, president of sales

and marketing for Sage Fruit Co. LLC, based in Yakima, WA.

Gene Loudon, director of marketing for Dovex Marketing Co., located in Wenatchee, WA, adds, "Braeburns were once a bright star variety that has begun to fade."

The popularity of Pink Lady apples may soon be apparent in the sliced-apple market. A comprehensive sliced-apple consumer taste test showed the Pink Lady brand is preferred by 56 percent of adults and 69 percent of children, according to information released July 1, by Pink Lady America LLC, based in Yakima, WA. The taste test, con-

ducted by GMA Research Corporation earlier this year in four major U.S. markets, saw the Pink Lady brand up against a major national sliced-apple brand in a blind taste test. Alan Taylor, marketing director for Pink Lady America, says, "We'll use these results as ammunition in our upcoming push to increase the use of Pink Lady brand slices in supermarkets and foodservice."

Beyond the Top Ten varieties, MAC's Donohue admits, "Jonagolds are a sleeper hit variety for us. They are showing good growth over the past three to four years."

Cameo apples were most popular with

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18- to 34-year-olds, who represent more than 21 percent of apple purchasers, according to a 2008 study conducted on behalf of the Wenatchee, WA-based Cameo Apple Marketing Association (CAMA). Kevin Precht, marketing program director for CAMA, says, "This age demographic spends a lot of money on produce in general. Retailers can use this information to strategically build their category. What's more, research indicates Cameo apples appeal to Golden Delicious buyers who are searching for a new apple. It's a good way to trade these consumers up," he adds.

CMI's Mast says, "There are several new club and niche varieties that weren't there five years ago that are capturing a certain amount of category sales." One such variety is Ambrosia, a cross between Gala and Golden Delicious that is harvested the last week of September out of Washington. "We ran out of Ambrosias last season and still had demand. This year, we're projecting 200,000 cartons and shooting for 500,000 cartons over the next few years," he details.

Approximately 130,000 boxes of Piñata apples will be available this year, according to Stemilt's Pepperl. "Sensory panel work reveals this variety scored high by consumers. We'll use this as a selling tool."

Top 10 Apple Variety By Dollar Sales

VARIETY	PERCENT OF APPLE CATEGORY DOLLAR SALES
Gala	21.6
Red Delicious	16.9
Fuji	14.0
Granny Smith	12.7
Golden Delicious	7.8
Honeycrisp	5.1
McIntosh	5.0
Braeburn	4.3
Pink Lady	2.2
Jazz Apples	1.2

**Percent dollar sales for the 52-week period ending June 27, 2009. Perishables Group FreshFacts.*

Fowler Farms' Peters contends, "Zestar is an early season variety we think will replace the Paula Red."

3. OFFER ORGANIC

Organically grown apples are not yet mainstream, says Rice Epicurean's Luchak,

"Nonetheless, we offer them and they do sell well."

According to Perishables Group FreshFacts, organic apples represented 5.2 percent of category dollar sales during the 52-week period ending June 27, 2009.

Howard Nager, vice president of market-

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ing for Domex Superfresh Growers LLC, located in Yakima, WA, foresees this figure topping out at 10 percent in the next few years. "There are a finite number of organic consumers," he says.

Tom Papke, vice president of merchandising and business development for Yakima Fresh LLC, based in Yakima, WA, reports, "The trend for organics has slowed down a little due to the economy. However, organics are not going away."

"This year's Washington apple crop will peak at 80s and 88s, the most preferred size by consumers. This means ample opportunities for aggressively priced bulk promotions."

**— Loren Queen
Domex Superfresh
Growers LLC**

As for organic varieties in production, Dovex's Loudon says, "Last year, Washington State grew 1.6 million boxes of Galas. That was the largest category of organics grown in apples. The next biggest category was Fujis, of which Washington shipped 1.1 million boxes. Honeycrisp is still one of the most asked for organic apples. Last year, in Washington alone, we sold and shipped 150 loads. It is my belief that we will double and maybe triple that supply this year."

A big leap in production this year signals a continued narrowing of the price gap between organic and conventional, says Pepperl. "We're now seeing a 20- to 50-cents-per-pound difference between conventional and organic apples, averaging at 25-cents. It used to be \$1 or more. Organic apples aren't a luxury item anymore," he adds.

"However, there's still about a 40 percent difference in the price between conventional and organic Honeycrisp due to demand," points out Wescott of Wescott Orchards.

4. SIZE MATTERS

Typically, one assumes bigger is better.

"However, the economy is affecting this," asserts Rice Epicurean's Luchak. "For example, we'll now offer a small, medium and then jumbo size of the core or tonnage apple varieties."

"This year's Washington apple crop will peak at 80s and 88s, the most preferred size by consumers," reports Loren Queen, marketing and communications manager for Domex Superfresh Growers. "This means ample opportunities for aggressively priced bulk promotions."

Cohen Produce Marketing's Cohen adds, "Larger sized fruit also means opportunities

for 8- and 10-pound bags."

Papke doesn't believe in the bigger-is-better theory. "Size can denote quality for some consumers. I believe in a 2-size program for the top three or four varieties in targeted stores with upscale demographics."

Rainier Fruit's Wolter agrees. "Having a 2-size program allows the retailer to offer value to consumers. In these economic times, retailers need to communicate with their supplier to take advantage of special buys depending on what Mother Nature provides. Special buys can be month-long promotions, bags, bulk or totes."

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5. OFFER BAGS AND MORE

Bulk apples represented 77.5 percent of fresh-apple dollar sales for the 52 weeks ending June 27, 2009, according to Perishables Group FreshFacts.

Packaged apples have their customers. Jim Mertz, vice-chairman of Symms Fruit Ranch Inc., of Caldwell, ID, maintains, "In this economy, bags sell because they are perceived as a value."

Last fall, at Jungle Jim's International Market, a single specialty store in Fairfield, OH, Dave Brossart, general manager for produce and floral, reports, "We sold 2-pound bags of organic Red Delicious, Fuji, Gala and Braeburn apples at 2-for-\$5. Customers could mix and match them."

Dovex's Loudon contends, "The new economy will force more and creative packaging in bagged apples. By this, I mean smaller portion sizing, for example, from 2- to 3-pound bags for the purpose of better price points."

"Clamshell packs are a tough sell due to the higher cost of the packaging," explains CMI's Mast.

Tote bags are growing, says Cohen Produce Marketing's Cohen. "It offers a farmers' market look. Even at 99-cents-per-pound, a 5- to 6-pound tote represents a big ring."

From December through April, Sage Fruit will offer a new pop-up bin designed to showcase tote bags of apples. Sinks says, "Studies show that using totes to sell apples in the fall and spring can increase apple sales by up to 30 percent."

New this season too, CMI will offer an environmentally friendly, display-ready box in 2-, 4- and 6-count sizes to showcase and sell its premium Kiku apple. "The packaging is bright blue, which helps it stand out in a crowded category. That's important for a

new apple variety."

6. SET APPEALING DISPLAY

October through December is a ripe time for apples and it shows at Jungle Jim's. The specialty store's 60-foot long apple display, signed as its "Apple Orchard," is filled with over 30 varieties of locally and nationally sourced apples, according to Brossart. "We'll have everything from Red Delicious, Gala and Fuji to Stayman, Winesap, Jonagold, McIntosh, Melrose, Northern Spy, Ida Red, Rome Beauty, Cortland and Black Twig."

Each variety is displayed separately in its own 3-foot wide bin; signed as to name, flavor and usages; and line-priced during a pro-

Successfully Introduce New Apple Varieties

New apple varieties come to market each season. This poses a dilemma for retailers who want to offer customers the latest and greatest, while also maximizing sales in a minimum of shelf space. Successfully introducing a new variety depends first on identifying the target customer. Peter Austin, Canadian sales director for B. C. Tree Fruits Limited, based in Kelowna, BC, says, "The attributes of experimental consumers are that they are single or a couple with no kids, don't watch a lot of television, enjoy the outdoors, have a higher income, are learned, are looked at as trendsetters and lead a healthy, active lifestyle."

Chuck Sinks, president of sales and

marketing for the Sage Fruit Company, in Yakima, WA, acknowledges the power of sampling. "There's nothing like getting a slice of the apple in customers' mouths."

Promotion, price and placement are critical, notes Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Stemilt Growers Inc., headquartered in Wenatchee, WA. "You can't over-promote a new apple variety. Promotions force a customer to make a purchase decision. Also, give the apple a healthy display space. No one wants to buy from a display where there's only a handful of fruit," he explains. "Finally, sign the product. Let customers know what the apple is, what it tastes like and how to enjoy it. Give them a reason to buy."

pb

motional period that encourages customers to try new varieties.

Many produce departments are carrying a greater number of apple varieties on a year-round basis. For example, at Rice Epicurean Market, Luchak notes his displays vary with the season. "But on average, we'll have 15 to 20 varieties of apples, whereas in the past it was eight to 10."

The question today is not only how many, but what variety mix in particular, will produce optimal sales. Rainier Fruit's Wolter says, "We're hearing a lot more about SKU rationalization. Retailers are examining their apple category and reallocating space based on performance. For example, we worked with one retailer that carried a local and Washington Red Delicious in bulk, bagged and in bulk organic. Gala was the No. 1 apple in their market area and the Gala shelf-space was only one-third of the Red Delicious. Instead, we suggested maybe a bag local, bulk from Washington and perhaps one or the other as organic."

"SKU rationalization means taking an apple and giving it its best stage in a designated time frame," reasons Stemilt's Pepperl. "For example, build the category around core varieties such as Gala, Fuji, Red, Gold and Granny. Beyond this, it's decision time. Bring in Jonagold and Honeycrisp in the fall when these varieties are available and at peak. Then, replace them in January with Pink Lady or Piñata when these varieties are coming out of storage, or with a Cameo or Braeburn. Lay out the months. It's



Farm stand-style displays and tote bags encourage consumers to buy more than they typically would, leading to big rings at checkout.



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like a chess game.”

A great display starts with proper handling of the fruit at retail, says Kelly Ciceran, manager at Ontario Apple Growers (OAG), based in Vineland Station, Ontario. “Throughout the storage, packing and delivery chain, apples are kept in refrigerated conditions to ensure the best quality of fruit is provided. If possible, apples should also be displayed in refrigerated display cases in store. This will continue to keep the product at its best, ensuring less shrink for the retailer and premium quality for the consumer. It’s also very important for produce department employees to handle apples with care. It is easier to bruise an apple than it is to break an egg,” she adds.

CMI’s Mast notes, “One challenge is that retailers tend to put their value apples front-and-center and higher-priced niche varieties in a secondary location. This encourages customers to grab the value product and go, not stopping to look further. Instead, put the premium fruit in front. Customers will find value items.”

Similarly, Dovex’s Loudon says, “Organics have been relegated to the back of the store for years. However, we have retail customers who have increased their apples sales by moving organics to the front of the

produce aisle.”

Color breaks are key, says Rainier’s Wolter. “Most consumers can’t discern between the different striped varieties.”

At Rice Epicurean Market, Luchak reveals, “We group apples with other fruits such as pears and citrus to create eye-catching color breaks.”

Pepperl suggests, “Cross-merchandise both apples and pears in a display; it will increase sales of apples by 2 percent and pears by 6 to 7 percent.”

Bin displays are effective sales tools as well. New this season, Stemilt is offering a grower-centric bin that brings the orchard into the store. “It can hold two different varieties of tray-packed apples, bags or totes,” describes Pepperl.

Domex will also offer a similar type of bin display. Queen advises, “Use this as a waterfall display for bulk or bagged apples and pears. Or, set it near the check-out with poly or tote bags for impulse sales. Alternatively, use it in the wine or dairy section for cross-promotions.”

Ciceran recommends, “Encourage point-of-purchase with recipe cards and ‘best for’ guides and signage.”

According to Peters, Fowler Farms offers new POP signage for its top 15 varieties.

“These are 2-inch by 4-inch-wide varietal cards that describe flavor, usage tips, facts and where the apple was developed. They easily clip on the display.”

“Cross-merchandise both apples and pears in a display; it will increase sales of apples by 2 percent and pears by 6 to 7 percent.”

**— Roger Pepperl
Stemilt Growers Inc.**

7. GOOD HEALTH SELLS

Apples are among the top food source of antioxidants, purports Rainer’s Wolter. “Recent studies suggest they may help boost weight loss and reduce the risk of chronic



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According to the *2009 Food & Health Survey: Consumer Attitudes Toward Food, Nutrition, & Health*, conducted by the International Food Information Council, based in Washington, D.C., taste and price continue to have the greatest impact on American's decisions to buy food and beverages. "However, the importance of healthfulness ranks at 61 percent with Americans most apt to consume foods for their healthfulness."

To help retailers convey this message to consumers, Yakima Fresh offers its Fit For Life...Take a Healthy Bite retail POP apple promotion. Materials include high-graphic tote bags, varietal and display cards, consumer brochures, a double-sided floor display poster and versatile ad slick logos. Papke says, "January or February has worked excellently for those retailers that ran this promotion with us. After the winter holidays, most folks are ready to eat healthier in order to take off a few pounds."

Similarly, Stemilt has revived its Crunch Before Lunch promotion. This POP promotion, which comes with educational posters, bins and sign cards, is based on 2007-released research from Penn State University illustrates people who consumed an apple 15 minutes before lunch consumed



Jungle Jim's, in Fairfield, OH, is known for its 60-foot long apple display, which includes more than 30 varieties of locally and nationally sourced apples.

nearly 190 calories fewer compared to when they did not eat one. Pepperl suggests, "Tie Crunch Before Lunch into an apple-of-the-month promotion."

New this year, CMI will team with Leslie Sansone, founder of the Walk At Home fitness program, to promote Ambrosia apples. Mast reveals, "We'll offer a cross-promotion with Sansone's fitness video and shipper dis-

plays that hold five Euro cartons of Ambrosia apples from October to January."

8. CROSS-MERCHANDISE TO 'UP' THE RING

Boxes of apple crisp and tubs of caramel dip are included throughout the apple display at Jungle Jim's. Brossart states, "It's a good way to create a color break between

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Bagged apples sell well because consumers perceive them as a value.

varieties, convey usage ideas and gain an additional ring."

Cross-promotion is an integral element of National Apple Month (NAM), the annual generic apple promotion hosted September 1 to November 30 by the U.S. Apple Association, based in Vienna, VA. Promotion director, Kay Rentzel, says, "This year's display contest will tie in with Marzetti Caramel

Apple Dip, Smucker's Natural Peanut Butter and Jiff National Peanut Butter." Last year, Oregon Dairy Inc., in Lititz, PA, one of the retail winners, saw a lift of over 22 percent in apple sales, nearly 30 percent in caramel dip and 9 percent in peanut butter sales.

Another cross-merchandising idea is to offer "Make it Tonight" recipes. OAG's Ciceran suggests, "Provide consumers with the

recipe and shopping list for the ingredients. Where possible, include in the display all the ingredients needed for the recipe. We offer many recipes that use apples along with numerous other items from the produce aisle."

Recipes are the focal point of four seasonal cross promotions with Cameo apples offered by CAMA. The POP materials include a recipe tear-off pad and a 7-inch by 11-inch display card. Precht reports, "We've updated our fall Cameo Apple Pie recipe in a gourmet way that appeals to a broad consumer base."

9. PLAN ADS STRATEGICALLY

"Promote apples at least nine times per quarter and at least three times per month," recommends Rainier Fruit's Wolter. "Vary discount levels up to 50 percent when the fruit is on promotion. Within each ad, include mainline apples in every promotion, feature up to eight apple SKUs in the same ad and promote up to six varieties in the same ad," she details.

CMI's Mast suggests, "Cycle through the different apple varieties on ad throughout the year to spotlight the entire category."

Bag and bulk customers are two different shoppers. Stemilt's Pepperl knows retailers

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"Promote apples at least nine times per quarter and at least three times per month. Vary discount levels up to 50 percent when the fruit is on promotion. Within each ad, include mainline apples in every promotion, feature up to eight apple SKUs in the same ad and promote up to six varieties in the same ad."

**— Suzanne Wolter
Rainier Fruit**

must address them both. "In a bulk ad, have a liner, for example, on a 2- to 3-pound bag of apples," he advises.

Along the same lines, CMI's Mast encourages, "When promoting conventional apples, run a liner on organic apples and drop the price on both by the same amount, for example, 15 percent."

Promote apples year-round based on seasonal opportunities, says Domex's Nager. "For example, bagged apples at back-to-school time; Red, Gold and Grannys at

Thanksgiving and Christmas; Pink Lady for Valentine's Day; Grannys for St. Patrick's Day and Cameo for Mother's Day."

MAC is offering rebates to retailers who run ads on 5- and 8-pound bags of Michigan-grown Rome, Ida Red, Golden Delicious, Jonathan, Jonagold and Cortland apples from November 1 to December 24 as part of the Holiday Baking promotion. Donohue reports, "Focus group research says 60 percent of consumers bake once a year and this is between Thanksgiving and Christmas."

10. YEAR-ROUND PROMOTION

Promote apples year-round and in more ways than just price reductions. The domestic season kicks off with the July harvest of Galas in California. CAC's Ott reminds, "This is the time to promote new crop apples."

This fall, the NYAA will promote its new crop of apples. Jim Allen, president, says, "Our apples will be coming straight from the orchard, not from storage." The campaign includes newly designed POP promoting New Crop McIntosh, New Crop Empires and generic New Crop signs. Banners are also available, as well as display wrap and a poster highlighting New York apples, with a starburst stick-on that reads 'New Crop!'

Health is the hook of a fall Cameo apple promotion that hits home with a target consumer demographic. Precht shares, "In October and November we'll offer promotional signage that lets customers know that a percentage of Cameo apple sales will be donated to the Susan G. Komen foundation, an organization supporting breast cancer research. This past year, we saw an ad volume lift of nearly 80 percent, compared to a regular apple." Retailers that ran the ad for one to two weeks saw the most success. **pb**



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Nine Ways To Merchandise Citrus Year-Round

Keep your citrus display shining with these smart merchandising techniques.

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

To many consumers, citrus is a winter product, but there is no reason retailers should only push citrus during the cold months when these fruits have so much to offer year-round. “The big sell is on the taste and health benefits of citrus,” notes Kathy Hearl, marketing promotions manager for DNE World Fruit Sales, based in Fort Pierce, FL.

“When merchandising citrus, use the tools available to you,” advises Mark Luchak, vice president produce and floral operations for Rice Epicurean Markets, a five-store chain based in Houston, TX. “Pricing is important, but you do not always have to give it away.” With so many varieties available throughout the year, there are several ways to encourage sales.

1. MAKE IT VISUAL

Displays are key. “This is how you wow customers as they enter into your store,” says Luchak. “Displays should be attractive and abundant and in key locations in your department, but do not need to be concentrated just in the produce department. You should have a display in the lobby and in other key locations around the store or even, in some cases, outside the front door greeting your customers as they enter.”

“Citrus, historically, is an impulse purchase,” notes Al Finch, vice president of marketing for Diversified Citrus Marketing, headquartered in Lake Hamilton, FL. “People spend very few minutes in every department. Having a large end-cap display helps sell citrus,” he reveals.

“End-cap displays really move fruit,” agrees Marc Solomon, president of Fisher Capespan USA LLC, based in Gloucester City, NJ.



Citrus insiders know large end-cap displays help sell fruit.

While offering citrus in many locations throughout the store captures consumers, one distinct citrus area within the produce department is best, say suppliers. “It makes better sense to have a citrus location or a citrus extravaganza, rather than scattering them throughout the produce section,” suggests David Mixon, chief marketing officer for Vero Beach, FL-based Seald-Sweet International. In addition to visual appeal, the section allows consumers to see all of the items together and make a decision without needing to wander up and down the aisles.

Given more choices, some consumers will actually purchase more citrus when varieties are placed next to each other. For example, “Clementines are available in bags and they are a great complement to oranges,” says Solomon. “They are better suited to kids as they are smaller and easy to peel, so an orange display is complement-

ed by a Clementine display.”

“To leverage sales within a citrus section, create an inviting shopping environment, while grabbing the consumer’s attention with product information including healthy benefits, storage and usage,” recommends Hearl. Items in packaging that appeal to specific consumers, such as bags with cartoon characters that appeal to children, should also be included.

Nichole Towell, marketing development manager for Duda Farm Fresh Foods Inc., headquartered in Oviedo, FL, explains, “Providing recipe cards educates the consumer on how to utilize the product, and serving suggestions help with selling more as they inform or remind consumers about new and innovative ways to use the product in their everyday lives.”

“Build displays that include multiple citrus varieties in season that are well-orga-

Photo courtesy of DNE World Fruit Sales

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nized, eye-appealing — with signage — and contain cut pieces of fruit,” recommends Hearl. “Produce merchandisers should use the appropriate technique to sell the fruit based on the prior year’s crop attributes. If the external coloring is off that year, then cut the fruit to show the consumer the internal quality, color and juice.”

“Remember that eye appeal is buy appeal,” emphasizes Paula Fouчек, marketing director for Edinburg Citrus Association, based in Edinburg, TX. “Always have cut Texas Red Grapefruit on display. Just by doing this, sales can increase up to 10 percent. The beautiful dark red interior color of our grapefruit will attract consumers’ attention, but it’s their great taste that will bring them back for more. It will also show the consumer that surface marks are only superficial and don’t affect the interior quality at all.”

Just like Texas Red Grapefruit, Texas oranges may show some scarring on the skin. To convince consumers it’s what is inside that counts, “Cut, wrap and display our Texas oranges so consumers can see the interior quality of the fruit,” says Fouчек.

2. KEEP IT FRESH

The amount of citrus displayed in each store should reflect the importance of citrus fruit sales. “Citrus is an important category at retail, ranking eighth in the total produce department and fifth in overall fruit categories, above bananas,” reports Towell. “Oranges represent the largest portion of the citrus category share, followed by tangerines. Total citrus category dollar sales have been on the rise during the past three years, even though volume is slightly declining from year to year.”

While all this means citrus should be an important part of the produce department, Towell points out, more is not always better. “Allocating the proper amount of footage for your citrus is important to maintaining a fresh-looking citrus area,” she explains. “If a retailer has more fruit on display than can be sold in a few days, it is only a matter of time before shrink will begin to rise. Attaining repeat consumption from your loyal shoppers is priority Number One for any retailer. Determine how much fruit each store can sell within a 2- to 3-day window and plan the space allocation accordingly. Maintaining freshness in the produce aisle is of utmost importance in attracting and retaining loyal shoppers.”

Additionally, make sure that displays are properly cared for, recommends Fouчек. “Remove fruit if dehydrated, shriveled or flabby, and don’t forget to check the bagged fruit, too.”

3. OFFER SEVERAL PACKAGE SIZES

Depending on a store’s demographics, smaller packages may sell better than larger ones. “Know who your consumers are and what pack size they’re comfortable purchasing,” says Finch of Diversified Citrus.

Demographics make a difference. “For example, if you are in a college town or a true urban environment, then shopping for fresh fruits and vegetables is on an ‘as-needed’ basis,” notes Towell. “Consumers will go to the store on the corner and pick up what they need for the day. Larger walking cities market a lot of bulk citrus.”

With the economy still recovering, “We are seeing consumer trends of more frequent visits to the supermarkets with smaller pack purchases,” relates DNE’s Hearl. “Smaller bags also allow the retailers to target a more attractive price point.”

Many citrus items are increasingly available in smaller packages. “Traditionally, Clementines were sold in the five-pound carton, but they are now available in 2- and 3-pound bags to provide consumers more choices,” relates Solomon.

Whenever possible, offer both bulk and loose options. “Have bulk fruit for individual selection and bagged fruit for value,” suggests Fouчек. In addition, some packaging can make displays more eye-catching. As a result, “Bagged fruit can help lift sales up to 30 percent,” she adds.

4. INCLUDE VARIETY

“Carry multiple items to give consumers choices,” says Fisher Capespan’s Solomon. “For oranges, carry large fruit loose, smaller fruit for juicing and bags for greatest value.”

Mixon of Seald-Sweet recommends placing bagged citrus directly next to the same items that are displayed loose in order to let consumers make a decision on the spot.

When offering several varieties, it helps to let consumers know what the differences are between each item. “Juice oranges should be marketed more for what they are good for,” notes Duda’s Towell. “The average consumer does not know the difference between a juice orange and an eating orange, much the same way most consumers do not know the best apple to use when baking a pie. Providing reminders to consumers as to the difference between a juice orange and an eating orange will create repeat customers, as they will not buy the incorrect variety for the usage and then have a bad experience.”

Exactly which varieties are best for your store depends on your clientele. “Demographics play a large role in what a store is going to place on its shelves,” says Towell.

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A citrus destination allows consumers to see all of their options at once and encourages multiple buys.

"More mature communities will most likely buy more grapefruit than, say, a community that is more centered on young families and single people."

Towell also points out, "Kids have a lot of buying power with their parents. This has been the focus of branded citrus, which uses characters a child can identify with and is paired with something that tastes good and is easy to eat or put in a lunch box."

Ethnic groups play a major role, as well,

in the marketing of citrus. "A high Hispanic area will purchase the same items that a Caucasian market will, but the top-selling items will be more limes versus lemons," Towell continues. "Hispanic communities also prefer smaller oranges and, if unavailable, they will tend to opt for a tangerine over a larger orange. Asian markets prefer mandarins. But as the ethnic groups get deeper into generations, there is a tendency to lean away from these trends."

For some communities, regionally grown citrus is also an important factor. "The exceptional retailers know their customers and support regionally grown products as well as specialty items that are season," reports Towell. "Retailers that can achieve this are normally regional chains or have regional buying teams that support their national stores."

"Locally grown plays a part as long as the consumer is local or educated," Towell relates. "Local varieties bring back a childhood memory when they were told this is the freshest and best, so they believe that local will always be the freshest and the best citrus they can get. In large cities or tourist regions where many people are from different areas, it takes an educated consumer to go out of their way to purchase local citrus."

Carrying some branded citrus may also help boost sales. "Branded citrus is just starting to take off, with the exception of a few Sunkist items that have been heavily marketed the last couple of decades," says Towell. "Branded citrus is starting to make its way into the mainstream shopper."

5. KEEP IT SEASONAL

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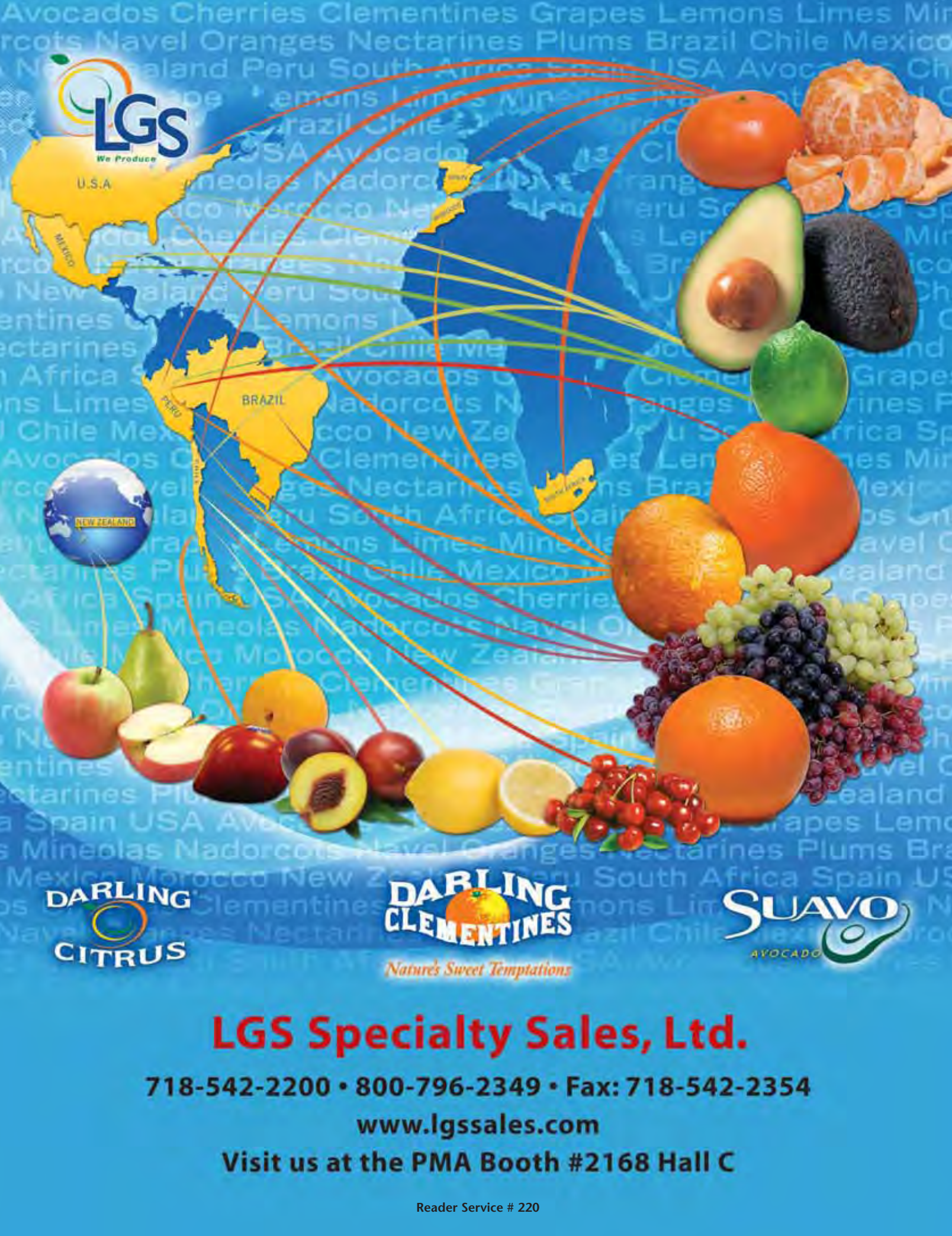
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Customers see value in bagged fruit.

gests Finch of Diversified Citrus. "If a variety is coming close to the end of its season, cut back ordering it during those last two or three weeks. Switching varieties so they are always available during their optimal times not only helps ensure your shoppers will get the best tasting fruit at the best price, it also makes the citrus aisle more interesting. It keeps it fresh for the consumer," he adds.

When a new item comes into season, an easy way to let shoppers know is by giving it plenty of space. That may mean increasing the overall space of citrus in the produce department. "If you're into summer citrus imports, when that program starts, increase the space," says Mixon of Seald-Sweet. When consumers see a large citrus display, it tells them, "Now's the time to look at this product," he elaborates.

At the same time, it helps to keep popular citrus items in the produce department throughout the year, when possible. "For example, it's good to have a navel slotted throughout the year," says Finch.

6. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HOLIDAYS

"People look forward to the seasons," remarks Finch. "The holidays are when people really think of citrus. Gift fruit is popular fall through January. Then, after the New Year, grapefruit is associated with weight loss and keeping those resolutions."

"Create colorful and festive citrus displays through the holiday season by displaying oranges, sunburst tangerines and grapefruit in bulk or holiday-themed boxes," suggests Hearl of DNE.

In addition to Christmas, other holidays can help citrus sales. Edinburg Citrus Association recommends offering its recipe for grapefruit crepes during Valentine's Day. The recipe uses pre-made crepes, strawberry glaze and fresh grapefruit, all of which

can be sold in the produce department.

"No matter what the occasion is — housewarming, birthday celebration, open house — citrus offers a healthy alternative to snacks and sweets," notes Finch.

Fouchek of the Edinburg Citrus Association recommends retailers encourage consumers to build their own holiday gift baskets using an item such as Texas oranges or Texas Red Grapefruit as the anchor. "Cross-merchandise with colorful baskets and other gift items," she says.

"Many Thanksgiving and Christmas recipes call for oranges, so be sure and display them prominently. Just seeing a large display gives a perceived value to the fruit," adds Fouchek.

7. CROSS-MERCHANDISE

There is no need to wait for a holiday to cross merchandise citrus with other items. "Build a cross-merchandising display in the produce department with an item that complements citrus, such as Ocean Spray juice," says Hearl of DNE. "Cross-promoting helps retailers move more fresh citrus."

Fouchek recommends including Texas Red Grapefruit in various salad promotions. "It adds to the nutritional value of the salad, not to mention increasing the interest," says Fouchek. "Since Texas Red Grapefruit does not need to be held below 50 degrees, a secondary display can be built right in front of the refrigerated salad rack. Throughout the year, Texas Red Grapefruit can also be merchandised with tropical, deciduous or stone fruit. It can be paired with any or all of the sweet berries in season. Promote these fruits as a salad item or a great parfait idea."

8. LET THEM TASTE IT

"With citrus seasons being year-round now, and so many different sources, demos are important to promote premium quality

fruit," says Luchak of Rice Epicurean. "Some customers are not sure of quality and flavor during normal off-seasons, so this helps."

"In-store demos are a great way to get people to try varieties they may not know as well," adds Solomon of Fisher Capespan. "Examples of items to demo would be Minneolas or Cara Cara Navels."

"When given the opportunity to taste our Texas Red Grapefruit, kids enjoy the sweetness and juiciness," says Fouchek of Edinburg Citrus. "Having sections available for tasting can create new customers from the smallest ones to adults who haven't tried our Texas Red Grapefruit in a while."

When it comes to juicy Texas oranges, "Offer wedges for sampling to show how sweet they are or samples of freshly squeezed juice," adds Fouchek. "Oranges are popular with families. Show parents the versatility of our oranges, and please the kids, too, by offering an orange ambrosia demo — sweet orange segments combined with coconut, mini marshmallows and a sprinkle of nuts."

9. KEEP THE ADS COMING

"Ads are a great way to increase volume on a particular variety," relates Finch of Diversified Citrus. "With the economy the way it is today, people are shopping ads more. Keep in mind, if a variety is featured highly in an ad, it needs a larger display,"

"Advertising citrus regularly will help boost citrus sales," claims Hearl. "Create awareness by designing themed ads, such as National Grapefruit Month, that promote the variety in season and the benefits of including fresh citrus into your daily diet. Consumers are looking for diversity and there are enough different citrus varieties to have a weekly citrus ad with a different item. To offer consumers a variety, promote multiple citrus items as the same time. Select one as your feature and the other as a sub-feature."

Giving recipes within an ad can turn an impulse sale into a planned purchase, according to Fouchek. "When possible, drop a simple recipe or Web site address into the ad," she suggests. "The cook in the family will be sure to write down every ingredient needed for the recipe and create more sales throughout the department. Remember, too, that our sweet fruit appeals to all ages. Families are buying more grapefruit for the kids, so suggesting simple, delicious and healthful recipes makes great sense. You are also reaching the busy moms, the working dads, the young professionals and the now-busy retirees. Suggesting quick and easy recipe ideas and then cross-merchandising the items just makes sense."

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Reader Service #139

More Chefs Are Adding Organics To Their Menu

Consistency in availability, along with shelf-life and cost concerns are just a few of the challenges organics present to the foodservice industry.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

Truffle Scented Organic Yukon Puree. Pan Roasted Organic Hon Shimenji Mushrooms. Organic Kabocha Squash Gratin. These are among the dishes that draw diners into Verona Restaurant, the signature eatery at the Sarasota, FL, Ritz-Carlton, known for its award-winning, regional, organic cuisine.

Greg Howe, chef de cuisine for Verona, which typically serves 2,000 to 3,000 meals a week, reports, "Organic is a key marketing focus for us, as is locally grown, the green angle and limiting our carbon footprint. People today have started to realize that what they do has an impact on the environment, especially on a local level."

Maureen Ryan, manager of media relations for the Washington, DC-based National Restaurant Association (NRA), says, "Many restaurants, from fine dining to quick-service, are using organic produce on their menus." According to the NRA's 2009 *What's Hot, What's Not* survey, organic produce ranked third out of 208 items as "hot" with more than 1,600 American Culinary Federation-member chefs from across the nation. Among the hottest produce items, organic produce ranked second, with locally grown produce coming in first.

The draw of organic produce for Akasha Richmond, chef/owner of the Akasha Restaurant, Bar & Bakery, a Culver City, CA-based eatery that serves 250 to 350 dinners a night, "is that it is picked at the right time, fully ripened and is very flavorful," she explains. "Plus, I'm not convinced that pesticides are good for you."

The trend of using organic produce in foodservice applications started in fine dining with specialty wholesalers, according to



Photos courtesy of Ritz-Carlton

Verona Restaurant, at the Sarasota, FL, Ritz-Carlton, focuses on organic dishes. Favorites include the Popcorn Bisque and Worden Farms Crispy Squash Blossoms.

Tonya Antle, vice president of organic sales for Earthbound Farm, in San Juan Bautista, CA. "But today, it has evolved to where we're seeing it in several different fast casual concepts. We're also seeing it in some non-commercial operations, especially colleges and universities."

The younger diner is indeed a potent demographic and perhaps an indicator of where the potential of organic fruits and vegetables on the menu lies in the future. According to the December 2008-released report, *How Gen Y Eats Culinary Trend Mapping Report*, from the San Francisco, CA-based Center for Culinary Development (CCD) and Packaged Facts, some 78 million millennial eaters show a Planet Saver trait that reveals itself as an interest in local and organic, Fair Trade and vegetarian/vegan options.

COSTS AND AVAILABILITY

NRA's Ryan maintains the biggest obsta-

cles to putting more organic produce on the menu is increased costs and availability.

Mitch Blumenthal, president and CEO of Global Organic/Specialty Source Inc., based in Sarasota, FL, agrees and adds, "This was an open door, which may now feel the hit of our current economic situation."

Scott Albert, produce manager for Nicholas & Co. Inc., a foodservice distributor, located in Salt Lake City, UT, contends, "Restaurateurs look for three things: food cost, a locally grown option and impactful flavor. If it's organic too, great, but it also has to fit the first three criteria."

On the other hand, Maureen Royal, director of sales for CF Fresh, headquartered in Sedro Woolley, WA, points out, "Pricing has become similar to conventional produce on some organic produce items, so this is becoming less of a deterrent. However, there is still a small premium on most items, particularly vegetables. Because of this, it is sometimes difficult to get a food-

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service customer to carry both a conventional produce item and an organic option on their menu, or to have them replaced completely with the organic."

As for availability, Simcha Weinstein, director of marketing for Albert's Organics Inc., headquartered in Bridgeport, NJ, reports, "Most chefs want to know they can count on availability if they start to use an organic item. They need consistency in availability once a dish or item makes its way onto the menu."

Confirming this fact is Howe of Verona Restaurant. "We write and change our menus two to three times a week based on season and availability," he shares. "Even then, if your menu says organic asparagus and you don't have it — and it is something customers can easily go pick up at the supermarket — they have no tolerance. However, if it is something such as just-picked baby kohlrabi and you explain that the storm that blew through last night damaged the crop, customers are more lenient, at least to some extent."

Whereas consistency is key, unexpected availability can present a unique opportunity. James Tracey, chef de cuisine at the 120-seat Craft Restaurant, in New York, NY, says,

"We got a call earlier today from a guy asking if we wanted the organic hearts of palm he had just overnighted from Hawaii. It'll absolutely be used as an ingredient in one of our nightly specials."

"Organic produce is often used as a sliding scale piece on the menu. For example, chefs might offer the 'organic seasonal vegetable of the day.'"

— Scott Albert
Nicholas & Co. Inc.

HIGHLIGHTING A MENU

There are creative ways to get the marketing benefits of indicating a menu offers

organic produce, while taking advantage of serendipity at the same time. Some chefs opt to make their menu descriptions more vague, reveals Dean Simon, president of Harvest Sensations LLC, based in Los Angeles, CA. "In order to accommodate weather or other supply disruptions, a restaurant menu might offer a 'certified farmer's market salad.'"

Albert of Nicholas & Co. agrees, adding, "Organic produce is often used as a sliding scale piece on the menu. For example, chefs might offer the 'organic seasonal vegetable of the day.'"

The No. 1 type of organic produce used at Verona Restaurant is baby lettuces. "For example, we'll use the organic romaine in our Caesar salads, organic iceberg on sandwiches, and a mix of eight to 10 different organic local lettuces in a mixed green or side salad," details Howe. "Typically we'll go through 15 to 20 cases of organic baby lettuces a week."

Simon confirms the popularity of organic greens, noting, "Fifteen years ago, the percent of certified organically grown baby lettuces was 10 to 20 percent of the market. Now it is 80 percent. Spring mix and spinach are two of the biggest. There's not a

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Photo courtesy of Melissa's/World Variety Produce Inc.

Organic Roasted Butternut Squash Ravioli is a popular fall dish.

lot of value in these items because of their volume, but what is picking up steam is organic tomatoes, stone fruit and apples," he adds. "Chefs would make a bigger marketing impact on their menus by offering something like an organic Heirloom tomato salad, or duck with organic peaches."

In addition to greens, Tim Ray, produce manager for the Commerce City, CO-based division of Shamrock Foods Co. Inc., points out organic Portobellos and Cremini mushrooms are among his most popular items. "Chefs can purchase these items at an affordable price and insert them into their menus where they are already serving the items, but with conventional produce," he points out.

Staples such as organic carrots, onions, broccoli, green beans and potatoes are becoming more of a draw for chefs, notes

Albert. "These items are sturdy, have a long shelf-life and an attractive price point compared to, for example, yellow wax beans that have half the supply, half the shelf-life and double the cost," he remarks. "Chefs will manipulate, create and then highlight a menu with these staple items. For example, they may serve organic mashed potatoes along with Kobe beef. They'll do this rather than strive for a 100 percent organic menu, which is difficult."

Ray concurs, adding, "Many of our customers will try to carry four or five items, just to be able to include the 'organic' label on the menu in different places. It's similar to Whole Foods, where the perception is that it's mostly organic, when in reality, there are many items from produce to dry goods that are non-organic," he notes.

As for fruit, CF Fresh's Royal says, "Sliced organic apples are an area of growth in the foodservice arena."

Gloria Chillon, director of marketing for Driscoll's, headquartered in Watsonville, CA, says, "Organic berries are generally not a high volume item in commercial foodservice, where they are typically used as an ingredient or garnish, or in the salad bar, buffet or bowl where no identification as organic fruit is visible. However, if the restaurant's customers are willing to pay premiums for organic or decides to frequent a restaurant based on organic offerings, this might lead a restaurant operator to feature organic berries."

SOURCING

Sourcing organic fruits and vegetables is synonymous with a walk to the Union Square Farmers' Market for Craft's Tracey. "We physically walk the market and buy what looks good," he says. "In the winter, when our local farmers hibernate, it's not as easy. Then, for example, we have a guy who

"Most chefs want to know they can count on availability if they start to use an organic item. They need consistency in availability once a dish or item makes its way onto the menu."

— **Simcha Weinstein**
Albert's Organics

overnights produce from the Santa Monica Farmer's Market. He drives it around and we get a look at it before we buy."

Farmers' markets, farm-to-fork and Slow Food events, are how Verona Restaurant's Howe meets the farmers from whom he'll ultimately source some of his organic produce. "Many of the people we buy from are grassroots producers and only grow one or two items," he points out. "Now, there's an independent distributor in the area that works as our pickup guy for all the different

"On average, once a chain has five or more restaurants, they'll move on to a distributor who will source and deliver from a wide variety of suppliers."

**— Larry Jacobs
Jacobs Farm/
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farmers with whom we do business. He bridges the critical transportation gap."

"On average, once a chain has five or more restaurants, they'll move on to a distributor who will source and deliver from a wide variety of suppliers," explains Larry Jacobs, president of Jacobs Farm/Del Cabo Inc., in Pescadero, CA.

Dan Holt, director of foodservice sales for Earthbound Farm, agrees and adds, "Restaurants are working through distributors and wholesalers, and organic produce is being more thoroughly integrated into this channel."

Nicholas & Co.'s Albert is sure to source what restaurant chefs want. "I don't show chefs a list and say 'here's what's available' and make them buy off the list. That's putting the cart before the horse. Instead, I ask them what they want and then do the sourcing. Quality and shelf-life are critical in produce in general, but even more so in organic, where shelf-life is typically shorter."

Quality concerns are why Akasha Restaurant's Richmond says she isn't crazy about fresh-cut produce. "I think that to cut something on Monday and ship it Tuesday, when I won't get it until Wednesday, well, that something is lost. The food suffers."

Weinstein of Albert's Organics reports,

"There's some certified organic fresh-cut companies and we are beginning to see more pop up. But at least for now, they are more popular for retailers than foodservice."

Harvest Sensation's Simon says, "We'll hand-peel organic baby carrots and Cipollini onions and shuck English peas for our customers. Value-added processing actually produces a lower carbon footprint in terms of freight savings by not having to transport parts of fruits and vegetables that will ultimately be trimmed as waste in the kitchen."

On the other hand, Shamrock's Ray says, "The perception is that processed is more

expensive. Once you incorporate organic into the picture, it just raises the price."

THE BOTTOM LINE

For foodservice distributors who want to provide and promote organic produce to their restaurant customers, Ray suggests, "Know what to expect, especially when it comes to quality. Typically, it's the high-end restaurants that want you to source organic, but they are also the most demanding when it comes to the quality and shelf-life of the product you send in. It's definitely a double-edged sword."

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Reader Service # 57

Packaged Salad Companies Look To Rejuvenate Category

Focus on showcasing organics category and building excitement around new products.

BY AMY SHANNON

Packaged salad products, particularly salad kits and organic items, are slowly but surely rebuilding a fan base among health-conscious consumers, despite the uncertain economy. "Saving money is a priority in these uncertain times, but it doesn't mean consumers are trading out of the category," explains Tonya Antle, vice president of organic sales for Earthbound Farm, based in San Juan Bautista, CA. "Only one in three plan to replace their organic purchases with less expensive alternative brands."

Still, Antle admits she's observed a "flat-to-declining" segment overall in kit sales, which represents 12.3 percent of total salad sales. "One of the reasons for this is the difficulty involved in hitting a flavor profile that the majority of consumers will want to buy routinely. "Add a dressing and it becomes even tougher to keep this segment relevant," she says.

Ronda Reed, vice president of marketing for Dole Fresh Vegetables Inc., a Monterey, CA-based division of Dole Food Co. Inc, admits, "This year has seen a decline since February as consumers pulled back on spending during the recession."

Consumers don't have the time to create labor-intensive salads and deal with the clean up that follows, states Joe Huston, vice president of salads and healthy snacking for Fresh Express Inc., a Salinas, CA-based salad producer and subsidiary of Chiquita Brands International Inc. "Consumers are more stressed than ever, and have less time, energy and money to shop."

"But, as consumers turn to retailers for their at-home dining needs, salad sales are benefiting," adds Ali Leon, director of corporate communications for Ready Pac Produce Inc., located in Irwindale, CA.

"Kits are important to the category as



Photo courtesy of Ready Pac Produce Inc.

New blends and varieties are always popping up in the packaged salads category.

they address a specific need," explains Reed, noting the category grew 2 percent in 2008, prior to this year's slight decline. She describes two different groups of consumers who buy packaged salad kits. The first group consists of consumers who "find the convenience of a chef-designed complete ingredient kit a valuable, time-saving experience." These consumers are typically time-starved, tend to have children in their household, and sometimes struggle to find the time necessary to create healthful, at-home meals for their families. "For them, kits are a great solution."

The second group is made up of consumers who use "kits as a base for their salad experience and then use their creativity and other ingredients to continue building their customized salad creation," offers Reed. "This consumer group is typically driven by creativity and inspiration with food preparation, and usually has the time to spend on it."

MIXED SALES

Today's shaky economy is affecting some packaged categories more than others. For instance, "Fresh-cut fruit is reporting declines, while packaged salad sales are flat compared to the prior year," notes Huston.

Still, "Caesar salad is the exception and continues to lead the way," reports Earthbound Farm's Antle.

Fresh Express is experiencing success with its crispy salads, such as Premium Romaine; complete salads, such as Caesar Supreme and Asian Supreme; certified organic salads, such as Organic Spring Mix and Baby Arugula; Baby Romaine and Baby Spinach salads and fresh, tasty meals-to-go, including its Gourmet Café line.

On-the-go consumers are responding positively to Fresh Express Complete Salads and Gourmet Café lines, states Huston. "They offer the complete answer for consumers who want to serve flavorful and impressive restaurant-style salads at home."

They deliver the full flavors and contrasting textures consumers are looking for when they are pressed for time and want a fresh and convenient toss-and-serve option."

According to data from ACNielsen, headquartered in New York, NY, tender-leaf salads, including spring mix and other baby greens, such as arugula, are the largest category in packaged salads. "This segment continues to be led by spring mix and spinach with arugula-based salads showing strong sales," reports Antle. "The most popular and biggest area of growth continues to be in tender leaf, and when it is an organic offering packed in clamshells, this triple success can be credited to the strength of our brand and innovation."

Earthbound Farm carries a vast selection of the popular greens in various pack styles to satisfy all formats of retail and foodservice. "While gourmet chefs were using mesclun for salads, spring mix wasn't well known in the United States back in the 1980s, and we played a big role in introducing it to the American grocery shopper," explains Antle.

Blends, garden and kits lead the category, according to Ready Pac's Leon. "Ready Pac Complete Salads kits are the ultimate in convenience, featuring our premium salads with delicious dressing and condiments."

Organic packaged salad kits are seeing some growth, notes Antle, "and there's still a lot of excitement around these items." Earthbound Farm has also seen a 30 percent increase in both of its dry kit offerings,

Organic Harvest Blend and Organic California Blend, reports Antle.

Ready Pac's Organic Caesar salad kit is doing well, too. "Organic as a whole is performing well," notes Leon.

"The most popular and biggest area of growth continues to be in tender leaf, and when it is an organic offering packed in clamshells, this triple success can be credited to the strength of our brand and innovation."

**— Tonya Antle
Earthbound Farm**

INNOVATIVE NEW PRODUCTS

Earthbound Farm's latest innovation is the introduction of washed heirloom lettuce leaves, a gathering of whole leaves of red and green heirloom lettuces. "They're perfect for salads, wraps and garnishes packed in a 7-ounce clamshell," states Antle. "We also continue to see tremendous success at retail with our Washed and Trimmed Romaine Heart Leaves. These crunchy and delicious whole, organic romaine leaves from the heart of the lettuce are pre-washed, trimmed and offered in both 9- and 12-ounce clamshells."

In September, Fresh Express launched a national campaign to promote its new Fancy Greens and Leafy Green Romaine mixes. The addition to its lineup of blends comes at the heel of Fresh Express' recent launch of Tender Ruby Reds and Sweet Tender Greens under its Gourmet Café Salads line. "We're featuring them in print and online advertising in *Weight Watchers* and *O* magazines," reports Huston. The national campaign will

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run through December and include full-page print ads with the tag line, "A Salad Experience So Uniquely Fresh, Other Salads Wilt In Its Presence."

Fancy Greens combines romaine, tango — a curled-leaf, crispy lettuce — carrots and radicchio for a "well-balanced flavorful salad," describes Fresh Express' Huston. "The tastes and textures were specially blended for the ultimate taste experience."

Fresh Express hopes to use the campaign to best communicate its ability to meet consumer demand for an extraordinary salad experience, whether it's with a flavorful

blend, a tasty meal-to-go or a complete salad. The campaign is also designed to enhance the image of retailers, notes Huston, "because, like our other campaigns and product launches, including those for new complete salads, it creates a natural point of differentiation in the produce aisle."

Weight Watchers plans to feature Fresh Express with ads and recipes on its Web site. The campaign will also include a multi-faceted public relations overlay with TV segments featuring nutritionist and author Elizabeth Somer, a featured ABC network radio news article, and a full-page, color editorial

set to appear in newspapers nationwide.

While Fancy Greens is the focal point of the ad campaign, Fresh Express wants to also communicate its unique position to deliver the taste, varieties, premium ingredients and flavors consumers are looking for through its entire line of taste-focused Tender Leaf Blends, Completes and Gourmet Café salads. "Our recently introduced Gourmet Café line is very popular," notes Huston. "It's basically a single-serve salad kit that offers fresh lettuces and select gourmet ingredients combined for maximum fresh taste." The line includes trend-focused varieties, such as Tuscan Pesto Chicken, Caribbean Chicken and Orchard Harvest salads along with classics, such as Waldorf Chicken, Chopped Turkey Chef and Chicken Caesar with Crostini.

Fresh Express' restaurant-style Complete Salads feature varieties such as Salsa! Ensalada Supreme and Asian Supreme, continuing as consumer favorites along with classics like Caesar Supreme and Caesar Lite. "Complete Salads also make a satisfying entrée with the simple addition of grilled meat, seafood or other protein," Huston reports. "Because salads offer consumers such a healthy base of fresh lettuces, they lend themselves well to experimentation with new flavors, combinations and premium ingredients."

MAXIMIZE MERCHANDISING EFFORTS

Today's consumers have increasingly sophisticated palates and continue to demand great taste and unique varieties above all.

"They're looking for value, and that can translate not only to convenience and price, but also freshness and quality," Dole's Reed says. "Consumers want to know that the prepackaged salad they are purchasing is the absolute freshest, as well as easy to use. That is why Dole recently introduced a clear, nothing-to-hide, open packaging design with easy-to-open technology that allows consumers to open the package with a simple pull."

Dole plans to build on its marketing successes with an unprecedented advertising and promotion campaign for its redesigned Dole Salads line, coupled with a breakthrough package redesign. Retailers can further excite consumers by helping announce these breakthrough changes by providing in-store support, advises Reed. "We're already seeing increased retailer interest in our marketing and consumer outreach programs, especially as they relate to the re-launch of Dole Salads."

Earthbound Farm's Antle has observed a



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growing number of retailers merchandising conventional complete salad kits in the deli section. “Consumers know to shop that area for prepared foods,” she points out.

Ready Pac’s Leon suggests retailers create a destination salad shelf set and continue using buy-one-get-one deals with POS at the shelf. “Plus, promote segments weekly with feature ads.”

In addition to broad-scale national print media, Fresh Express is helping to push sales by offering retailers beautiful in-store signage and other national retail elements to create consumer interest and add value around the brand.

“We are focusing our efforts in keeping innovations and promotions top of mind for our customers,” adds Antle. “This year, we’ve offered coupons, cross promotions and other promotional vehicles to help continue to spark sales in the category.”

More promotional activity, including buy-one-get-one-free deals and temporary price reductions, continue to drive consumption, Leon explains. “Ready Pac is looking toward vehicles to communicate the value associated with a kit. If the consumer were to buy all the components individually, the cost could be up to \$15.”

Consumers who used to dine out at restaurants are now turning to retail and

Dole Invigorates Category With Relaunch Of Dole Salads



Photos courtesy of Dole Fresh Vegetables Inc.

Dole’s new line of bagged salads includes an on-pack Salad Guide as well as a “real” Salad Guide — in the form of a spokesperson — as part of a multimedia campaign.

In an effort to revitalize consumer demand for packaged salads, Dole Fresh Vegetables Inc., a Monterey, CA-based division of Dole Food Company Inc., is gearing up for its October relaunch of Dole Salads. The new line of bagged salads is made up of 32 separate blends and nine salad kits that will hit supermarkets nationwide in November.

“It represents the most ambitious product launch in the history of Dole Fresh Vegetables,” explains Ronda Reed, vice president of marketing. “Our objective is to inspire consumers to broaden their salad horizons and experiment with new salad blends, and not just defer to their most popular choices.”

Reed points to research showing consumers are stuck in a salad rut, afraid to try new salad varieties or experiment with new blends in the kitchen. “This behavior limits the culinary experiences the consumer could have if they tried new products.”

To encourage consumers to spark their in-kitchen creativity, Dole completely redesigned the Dole Salads line with an on-pack Dole Salad Guide. Prominently featured on the front of each Dole Salads bag, these taste and texture scales provide a blend-specific rating of the taste and texture characteristics of every salad blend. “The

guide will help consumers more easily navigate through the sea of salads and encourage greater experimentation, trial and cooking creativity,” Reed adds.

The Dole Salads line offers everything from mild flavor and tender texture blends, such as Butter & Red Leaf and Leafy Romaine, to bold flavor and crunchy texture blends, such as Tender Garden and Seven Lettuces. “Certainly, some blends are more popular than others, but the whole point of the Dole Salads Guide is to inspire salad users to explore new blends,” Reed adds.

The new line also features a “pairs well with” tool, which suggests complementary produce items that can be paired with salad blends. “This feature helps customers break out of their hum-drum salad routines and encourages healthful meal-planning,” notes Reed. “It takes some of the risk out of trying new salad blends.”

Dole’s new Salad Guide is more than just a new label. The highlight of the campaign is the Dole Salad Guide spokesperson, described by the company’s recent press release as, “an all-knowing, all-caring salad sage and expert.” Dole’s guru of greens is the category’s first salad spokesperson and will be seen in national TV, print, digital and social media. **pb**

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looking for convenience. “They may not know how to cook, or maybe it’s because they don’t have the time,” Leon notes. “Providing ongoing education via on-shelf information and Web sites are some examples of

communicating the importance and benefit of convenience. Devote resources to educating consumers regarding the value associated with purchasing kits versus individual salad components.” **pb**



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Mangos On The Menu

Mangos are the No. 1 consumed fruit in the world, but they are just starting to emerge in a big way on U.S. restaurant menus.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

Fresh mangos produce an irresistible combination of flavors and textures that no other ingredient can provide, says Robert Okura, vice president of culinary development and corporate executive chef for The Cheesecake Factory, a national chain based in Calabasas Hills, CA. "Its brilliant color brings new life and excitement to just about any dish, and fresh mango is always perceived as a high quality ingredient that when used correctly, can add tremendous value to a menu. It certainly does all of this for us...and more."

WHAT CHEFS WANT

Sensory appeal is one reason why chefs like to use mangos, says Megan McKenna, marketing specialist for the National Mango Board (NMB), headquartered in Orlando, FL. "The texture, color, aroma and flavor all add to the mango's popularity," she explains. "It fits into many food trends. Plus, mangos are available year-round, so they can appear in regular menu items, as well as seasonal specials."

Mangos were once almost exclusively found in Hispanic and Asian cuisine restaurants, notes Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce Inc., in Los Angeles, CA. "Today, it's not uncommon to find them used in Continental and other ethnic cuisines."

A good example of this is BJ's Restaurants Inc., an 86-unit chain based in Huntington Beach, CA, that was founded on pizza and beer. Raymond Martin, vice president of culinary development and corporate executive chef, says, "Mangos have become a mainstay ingredient for us over the last several years. One of our newest menu items, Thai Shrimp Lettuce Wraps with Mango Salsa is a big hit."

Variety & Flavor: At Mangos, a single-unit, casual dining restaurant in Fort Laud-



Photo courtesy of National Mango Board

Mango Chicken Chop Salad was one of the many mango-based dishes the National Mango Board developed in conjunction with Sodexo Inc., which were served at approximately 2,200 of the company's locations.

erdale, FL, executive chef, Brian Wood, says, "We don't look for specific varieties of mangos, just excellent quality."

Allen Susser, a spokesman for the NMB and chef/owner of Chef Allen's, a fine dining restaurant in Aventura, FL, says, "There's a time of year you can be selective on variety and a time you can't as easily. For example, there are several varieties of mango available in the summer and you can choose according to the flavor and texture you need. In general, Keitt and Kent varieties have great flavor and aroma, are good used unripe or ripe, and are available throughout the year."

"One of the biggest trends is the excitement we're seeing in chefs over Indian mangos, such as the Alphonso, which have a surprising and complex flavor that hasn't been realized yet," says Dr. Richard Campbell, senior curator of tropical fruit at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, in Coral Gables, FL. "However, issues that are holding Indian

mangos back from use in foodservice is that they're irradiated, which sometimes can seemingly cook the fruit on the inside presenting quality issues, along with the cost to import them even by ship."

Susser agrees. "Indian mangos are available by special order, but, they're price prohibitive to stock on a routine basis and too costly for errors."

The best bet flavor-wise, according to Campbell, is the Kent variety. "It's an Indian, rather than Southeast Asian flavor type, yet it doesn't have a full-blown Indian flavor," he explains. "That's actually good. Most chefs shy away from super strong flavors. In fact, they want consistency. The Kent has a deep rich sweetness, without the baggage of intensity and complexity to overwhelm."

Susser contends, "In the future, I think we'll see a better understanding of mango varieties and there will be more ordering by variety in the future. After all, we order most other fruit by variety, a Rome or Fuji

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apple, for example.”

Ripeness: One of the most important attributes Mangos' Wood looks for in mangos is ripeness. "I can't wait for them to ripen," he says. "So I source them thorough a main-line foodservice distributor where I can get a consistent supply of ripe fruit. You can't do this at a local market."

The key to securing great mangos year-round at the level of ripeness needed for each preparation is the relationship with the supplier, says the NMB's McKenna.

Bill Vogel, president of Tavilla Sales Co. of Los Angeles, headquartered in Los Ange-

les, CA, says, "We have a couple of accounts that use mangos for foodservice; they want something that will be edible within a few days, but they won't take anything that is soft. We generally set out a pallet of fruit from the cooler to let it ripen naturally. Then we re-select for them grading any overripe or under-ripe fruit. They pay a premium for that box of fruit."

Form: Some chefs prefer to order whole mangos and cut them in-house, while others order the fruit in a fresh-cut form. Chef Allen's Susser explains, "It all depends on the volume and utility needed. If you need

1,000 pounds of diced mango on a regular basis, fresh-cut may be the way to go, although I think there is some loss of texture and flavor. We're a single-unit, 100-seat, fine dining restaurant, so we prefer to order mangos whole and cut them ourselves."

“We have a couple of accounts that use mangos for foodservice; they want something that will be edible within a few days, but they won't take anything that is soft. They pay a premium for that box of fruit.”

**— Bill Vogel
Tavilla Sales Co.**

Mangos were the focus of a summer promotion held at approximately 2,200 units of Gaithersburg, MD-headquartered Sodexo Inc.'s corporate, health care and dining service facilities. Chuck Hatfield, director of product development for the company, says, "We wanted to use fresh mangos. Therefore, we produced a 10-minute video recorded in our test kitchen that showed how to prepare fresh mangos according to the application required. For a salad, for example, it was how to peel, seed and cut the mango. This training video went out in a kit sent to each unit with materials about the six recipes we offered during the promotion."

McKenna says, "Once the mystery of the seed is understood, the cutting is really very easy. The most important thing is to train employees on the proper way to cut a mango to get the most yield. On the other hand, there are fresh fruit and vegetable processors that offer fresh mango peeled, sliced and ready to use to the foodservice industry."

According to the Mattson Fresh Mango Yield Study 2008, as commissioned by the NMB, yields from fresh mangos ranged from a high of 71.29 percent from a 12-count Ataulfo to 60.51 percent for a 12-count Tommy Atkins.

Mark Vertrees, marketing director for Miami, FL-based M & M Farm Inc., admits,



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"We don't sell many of our mangos to food-service. To be serious about it, they need to be fresh-cut by a processor. This is a complex and expensive process that most small produce companies can't afford due to all the health and food safety concerns. Those processors that are making mangos easiest to eat are the companies that are most successful in selling to foodservice."

Martin of BJ's Restaurants orders fresh mango halves sealed 6- to 8- count in a plastic bag. "From a chef's standpoint, consistency is right up there with quality," he remarks. "You've got to be able to execute a dish time and time again and in all of your locations to be successful. Having the mangos peeled and cut in half eliminates two areas where there could be inconsistencies. At the same time, having the halves, or 'cheeks,' allows us to use them in a variety of ways such as sliced, diced or pureed."

Fresh-cut, quick-frozen and juice pulp is how Fairchild Garden's Campbell believes Indian mangos will have the most success in U.S. foodservice operations. "This will provide a consistency of flavor and supply that can't currently be replicated with the fresh fruit," he contends.

USUAL AND UNUSUAL USES

Mary Ostlund, marketing director for Brooks Tropicals LLC, in Homestead, FL, notes, "Salsa has been a great entry point for mangos. North American palates have readily accepted mango salsas to top fish, chicken and chips."

Beyond this, Tony Merola, chef/owner of Merola Marketing Group Inc., in Middletown, NJ, says, "Chefs are hands-on. Food-service distributors should send their reps in with three or four mangos and encourage the chefs to experiment with them. Creative chefs will go beyond the salsas, sauces and salads and use mangos in a variety of ways."

Experimentation and education were the goal of an NMB-sponsored session last year with Chef Allen Susser and restaurant industry chefs such as BJ's Martin, The Cheesecake Factory's Okura and Sodexo's Hatfield. "It was wonderful to see how Susser uses mangos and to share some great dinners together," says Hatfield. "It really spurred innovation. We took these ideas back and incorporated them into dishes that were appropriate to us."

These dishes — promoted via table tents and point-of-sale posters at entrances to dining rooms and at point-of-ordering locations in cafeterias during the summer promotion — included Mango Shrimp Salad Croissant, Mango & Avocado Chicken Ciabatta, Tropical Fruit Salad, Mango Chicken Chop Salad, Grilled Fish Tacos and a Caribbean Jerk



Photo courtesy of Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden

The annual Mango Brunch at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden puts the fruit center stage.

Chicken Sandwich.

Luau Salad — grilled chicken breast layered with mixed greens, cucumbers, green onions, red and yellow peppers, green beans, carrots, mango and wontons — is a favorite at The Cheesecake Factory. Okura says, "It's at the top of its category in sales and I believe it's the mango that makes it so popular." The chain also uses mangos in other dishes, such as Jamaican Black Pepper Shrimp and Kalua Pork Pizza.

Thai Shrimp Lettuce Wraps are a big hit for BJ's. "We are currently testing Roasted Thai Salmon with Fresh Mango Salsa and also a Mango Martini," adds Martin.

At Mango's, Wood uses Mango Chutney to top a Baked Brie appetizer and a mango flavored mayonnaise to accent his Mango Grilled Chicken.

One of Chef Allen Susser's more interesting ways to use mangos is in a Curried Mussels and Green Mango Stew. Susser made this dish for this summer's 10th Annual Mango Brunch at Fairchild Gardens. Other dishes served at the brunch included Florida Rock Shrimp with Champagne Mango and Cucumber Terrine with Mango Walnut Popcorn by Chef Roly Cruz-Taura of The Biltmore, in Coral Gables, FL; Pickled Green Keitt Mango Salad with Jumbo Lump Crabmeat and Fresh Coconut by Chef Mark Militello of The Regent Bal Harbour, in Bal Harbour, FL; and a Mango and Coconut Tart by Chef Charles Froke of the The Four Seasons Miami, in Miami, FL.

What is the next big mango trend in food-service? NMB's McKenna answers, "Using mango hot or grilled, for example, in Grilled Mango, Chicken and Shrimp Skewers and Grilled Mango with Spicy Rum Glaze and Vanilla Ice Cream."

pb

Floral
**MASTERS OF
MERCHANDISING**



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Floral MASTERS OF MERCHANDISING

Today with greater interest and attention paid toward the bottom line, all businesses are taking a closer look at the basics. What is needed to sell more?

Retailers are asking what it will take to capture more consumers more often and wow them with home-enhancing floral department products.

A well presented floral department is similar to a party where the retailer is the welcoming host.

- Is the event consistently promoted so all guests know the party is happening?
- Are all of the elements in place?
- Is the lighting complementary to the scene?
- Are the products displayed in a manner which will invoke desire and consumption?
- Is signage appropriate, telling guests what they want to know about the treasures around them?

Enticing floral department guests with well presented, quality products that provide lasting impres-

sions after the purchase is an obtainable goal that will address retailers' bottom line concerns.

Combining promotion and education is the targeted approach taken by sponsors of this first *Floral Masters of Merchandising* supplement. From lighting to merchandising suggestions, to packaging and care-and-handling tips, this special insert offers valuable guidance to make the floral department more profitable.

As an added service to our retail readers, additional copies of this guide will be printed and made available. Please contact our publishing office for more information at 561-994-1118.

If you are a floral department vendor and would like to see your category included in the next *Floral Masters of Merchandising* supplement, contact E. Shaunn Alderman, Floral Department Marketing Strategist, PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine, 561-994-1118, SAlderman@phoenixmedianet.com.

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Bruce Brady, Director of Marketing and Business Development

bruce@farmerswest.com www.farmerswest.com



- From our farms, you receive a bouquet that's extraordinary, like a natural work of art. Farmers West/Pacific Bouquet solely makes bouquets in the Spiral Hand-Tied technique in the tradition of European florists. The spiraling technique creates a rounded bouquet that is not just visually appealing, but also easy to hold or to place in a vase without further arranging. Today, we continue this tradition, sharing a touch of Europe with your customers.
- Our European hand-tied spiral bouquets are characterized by their symmetrical, circular structure, created by layering flower stems diagonally around a central point. The bouquet is actually created in the designer's hand by turning the bouquet each time stems are added.
- The process begins with the selection of flowers - our bouquet specialists choose the freshest, most exquisite California blooms for their color, form and fragrance. We are able to grow and procure many varieties of flowers, meaning that the bouquets we offer will continually have a more outstanding assortment of interesting and unique flowers.





Blooming All Year Long

Dear Supermarket Floral Executive:

We hope you enjoy the pages of our first installment of Floral Masters of Merchandising and find valuable information from the “masters” to help you merchandise floral products to greater success.

Every issue of **PRODUCE BUSINESS** contains articles carefully selected to provide the retailer with the information needed to effectively market, merchandise, procure and manage the dynamics of the floral arena.

We have archived the past year’s Floral Department articles and posted them on our website – www.producebusiness.com – for easy retrieval. These articles cover the gamut of essential issues that affect your bottom line:

- Transportation
- Cold Chain Management
- Sustainability
- Labor Solutions
- Floral Branding, and much more...

In addition to reviewing our past articles, we hope you will participate in future articles and engage with the rest of the industry in a continuous roundtable of discussion. If you are going to be at the PMA Convention, we invite you to connect with Shaunn Alderman, our Floral Department Marketing Strategist, who will be on hand at our booth 2019. After the convention, she can be reached at our headquarters office at 561-994-1118 or through e-mail at SAlderman@phoenixmedianet.com.

Finally, we would like to thank you for your readership and continued interest in our floral coverage. Here at **PRODUCE BUSINESS**, we rededicate ourselves to helping you build, improve and expand your floral operation.

Sincerely,

Ken Whitacre
 Publisher/Editorial Director





SUNSHINE BOUQUET COMPANY

2019 NW 89th Place, Miami, FL 33172

Telephone: 800-652-5066

Contact: Karen Leggett, Sales & Marketing

Cell Phone: 508-395-5038 kleggett@sunshinebouquet.com



www.sunshinebouquet.com



POINT OF DIFFERENTIATION WITH SUNSHINE BOUQUET

- Our flowers are grown on our farms in Colombia, S.A.
- All of our bouquets offer construction that is hand-tied, making them easy for stores to merchandise in the refrigerated case or to upgrade into a profit making vase arrangement.
- They are 100% vase-ready for the consumer purchase, making them instantly successful in arranging them at home.
- Flowers are pre-cooled, treated with preservative and packed at our farms in Bogotá, S.A.
- Increased shelf life and lower shrink at Store level is a result of the proper post-harvest treatment, care and handling.
- Sunshine Bouquet Management team has well over 30 years experience and long standing expertise in selling flowers to the florists and the mass markets.
- Accessible Store Support POP, signage and marketing materials.
- Field Merchandising Personnel, available to support bouquet programs.
- Category Management expertise for category alignment, promotions and metrics.

MERCHANDISING 'HOW-TO' FOR A BOUQUET PROGRAM

- Create a visual 'wow factor' and high drama with flowers arranged in vertical ribbons by price point in your refrigerated case or fixture.
- Identify the optimum 5-6 Retail Price Points to carry as a foundation of your program year round. Build your promotions on alternate retail prices.
- Established display of the lowest retail to highest-Set up left to right in the case for ease of shopping and consumer selection.
- Integrate monochromatic color palettes and mixed bouquet price points within the program to add dramatic visual impact.
- Rely on us to make timely changes to the recipe colors so they are seasonally appropriate, while

maintaining the same retail price points and branded names.

- Always display a clear sign with name and price message over each item for ease of customer shopping. Signs sell product!

CARE AND HANDLING

Receive flowers from 36-38 degree F trucks into the Produce warehouse. Maintaining the cold chain extends shelf life.

At Store:

1. Immediately unpack cases and remove any external packaging from individual flowers.
2. Dry Pack – cut 1 inch to 1½ inches from bottom of bouquets with stem cutter. Hydrate in warm water for 3-4 hours before displaying. Wet Pack flowers are shipped with preservative, in water, no additional cutting needed.
3. Place in clean, disinfected buckets on sales floor for optimal shelf life.
4. Hold flowers at the base of the elastic, give it a twist to fluff and allow it to take water.
5. Change water in the buckets every other day to minimize bacteria build up.
6. Display a clear, attractive sign over each price point.



SIGNAGE AND POINT OF SALE MATERIALS

Sunshine Bouquet believes that while the flowers must be of outstanding quality, the consumer must also easily shop the display. The goal is always to sell

more flowers. Vertical merchandising in linear rows brings the customer into the department, but the retail signs actually sell product! The fresh Bouquet Category is the sales driver of your floral department and can account for 60-65% of your weekly sales.

CROSS MERCHANDISING OPPORTUNITIES

The ideal way to merchandise fresh flowers is by theme or season, or holiday. The easiest way is to develop promotional buzz in the store by creating merchandising ties with other departments and tie your bouquets with a theme or a contest for the stores.

- Ice Cream-Candy & Flowers- Cross Promotion-Summer Sweets Bouquets can be merchandised with Ice Cream and Popcorn and Candy Treats.
- Fall Harvest Promotion- An ideal tie in for the rich colors of fall bouquets, with Indoor and Hardy Mums, Pumpkins, Gourds, cornstalks and fall perennials. Design contests can be created for the best arrangement upgrade, or vase competition.
- Healthy Eating- 'Summer Eating Light'-features Juicy Fruits bouquets, a multitude of fresh summer berries, and balloons.

THE SUNSHINE BOUQUET "VALUE ADD"....

Retailers and Consumers are looking for the best value for their money, and that is what we aim to provide on all fronts.

For the retailer we have fresh product, backed by ideas, themes, merchandising, promotions and category management expertise.

Our bouquet programs allow the store the ease of ordering, and display. We provide merchandising support and outstanding care and handling guidelines, geared to lower shrink and increase sales.

For the consumer, there is always strong visual impact, excellent variety and choices that are seasonally correct, vase ready and great quality product that lasts.

Sunshine Bouquet fresh flower bouquets, direct from the farm to your store will always deliver that message of value and care.



BAERO NORTH AMERICA, INC.

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 Contact: Lee Rhoades lee.rhoades@baero.com
 www.baero.com



Beauty! Color! Freshness! These are the qualities that sell roses at Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, anniversaries and other important times of your customers' lives. And the same qualities that help you sell poinsettias during Christmas, tulips in the spring, lilies in the summer and mums in the fall. Beauty! Color! Freshness! They determine the very success of your floral department or store.

You have done everything possible to ensure your bouquets and arrangements offer the best in all three of these categories. You've found the perfect grower, arranged your department and displays with meticulous detail, and selected all those flowers that catch your customer's eye. You've done everything possible, right?

Look up! What do you know about your lighting? Really! What do you know about your lighting? Does it provide the quality of lighting that accentuates the exquisite textures of rose or tulip petals? Does it provide color rendering that will show off the reds, pinks, purples and a myriad of other colors that catch people's attention as they walk by on the way to produce or the deli? Does your lighting have UV

filters which lengthen your flowers' shelf life and protect your investment in those flowers? Or is it simply the same generic lighting the rest of the store has and you've ignored ever since you arrived? Did you even know lighting could do these things?

There is no other department more keyed to the visual senses than floral and that is why supermarket chains have placed it front and center at the store entrance... for the impulse buy. And that impulse buy depends again on beauty, color and freshness. It's been said that "A rose is a rose is a rose" but, no offense to Gertrude Stein, that couldn't be more wrong. And the difference is all about lighting. Quality lighting will unlock the true beauty of your floral displays, making red roses redder, poinsettias more scarlet, and even whites more brilliant. And the key word here is quality, not quantity.

If you are running a floral department you are most probably a gardener yourself. You appreciate how beautiful all your hard work looks during those first couple of hours after dawn and then again during the last rays of evening. These aren't the brightest hours of the day but there's no doubt these hours provide the highlight of every gardener's and floral photographer's day. And it's all about quality of light and color tone of light. During these magic hours the sun's angle creates a warmer, softer tone that provides every flower the absolute best presentation. Mother Nature's presentation is one every florist should strive to copy.

As you may, or may not know there are many different types of light sources available to supermarket chains. Your own chain may have many, if not all, already present in your own store. The most basic of these, and most likely the one present in your own department, is fluorescent lighting. Available in many shapes and sizes, the most common being the linear 4 foot tube, fluorescent lighting could be described as the high noon sun of lighting. In other words the direct opposite of the goal for which you should be striving. Due to their relative expense, store planners turn to fluorescents to make up for in quantity what they can't achieve in quality. However inexpensive, what are the true costs of

fluorescent lighting systems when you realize they provide poor product display, typically provide a flat light which washes out the most beautiful of flowers and almost universally provide no UV protection for your flowers? In other words, how many impulse buys might be lost and how much product wastage is created with this more traditional method which might save a few hundred up front but end up costing your department thousands in both lost opportunity and real inventory loss?

RECOMMENDED DISPLAY IDEAS

So what is the best lighting for your floral department? Well, first follow Quick Tip #3 so you can see for yourself what a difference each change makes to the appearance of your arrangement. But the answer is something you probably never expected and even more probably do not have anywhere in your store, high pressure sodium. But we're not talking about your Dad's high pressure sodium, the type you see lighting the streets at night. Companies such as BAERO lighting have revolutionized this existing technology by shrinking the lamp to the size of one's thumb and increasing the sodium pressure creating a new light source that truly mimics those golden morning rays mentioned before. BAERO's BFL lamp delivers startling reds and brilliant whites while offering clarity completely unmatched by either fluorescents or the new LEDs. In addition, both the BAERO lamp and the BAERO light fixture contain UV filters blocking virtually all harmful UV rays as well as heat from reaching your displays.

In order for your floral department to be unique, you must not only have out of the box promotional ideas as far as merchandising and marketing are concerned but also in regards to the overall atmosphere and feel of your department. Nothing makes a bigger difference in determining atmosphere than the type of lighting you choose to show off your floral arrangements. With all the effort and expense you've invested into your department, shouldn't you also take the time to educate yourself about lighting? You are not selling paper towels, canned peaches, or ice cream so shouldn't your lighting be different from Aisle 6?

OUT-OF-THE-BOX PROMOTIONAL IDEAS

1. Just like your Produce or Deli counterparts, offer a sample of single roses or other top sellers. People are even less likely to turn down a free flower and they will be drawn into your department.
2. Don't keep potted flowers grouped by kind. Intermingle azaleas with tulips, lilies with daisies creating more of a natural garden than static display.
3. Put a small but powerful display in another department on the other side of the store to make customers think more about floral gifts.

QUICK TIPS

1. Separate signage with different lighting color tone and increased brightness to draw extra attention to your message
2. Make sure your lighting system provides UV protection to keep your flowers their freshest
3. Give your floral displays a beauty test — carry them to different light sources to see the enormous difference between HID, fluorescent, LED, sunlight, etc.

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 salesohio@a-roo.com www.a-roo.com



A-ROO Company has been providing merchandising and packaging solutions to the horticulture and produce industries for more than 40 years. Known for continual introduction of innovative packaging products, A-ROO is the largest manufacturer and supplier of conical-shaped packaging in the Western Hemisphere.

CREATING A BETTER WORLD



A-ROO offers a broad variety of environmentally friendly materials. The company is committed to developing the newest materials available and continues its global search for the newest and best products. Minimizing the packaging footprint on the world is a company priority as well as promoting packaging recyclability. A-ROO also promotes the degradability of packaging used for consumer products such as paper and some types of plastics. Count on A-ROO for promotional information based around the natural and sustainable compounds used in manufacturing various products such as corn-based films and containers.

An "A-ROO Difference" comes from the commitment to finding ways of reducing our impact on the environment. Making and providing our packaging and reducing the impact that the packaging itself has on our earth has our highest regard and priority. An example of a measurable A-ROO Company distinction and difference – we are the only floral and produce film packaging company to be both a Co-Brand Licensed Partner of Cargill's Natureworks®/Ingeo® – innovators and producers of proprietary PLA resins, AND premier film maker Plastic Suppliers Inc. of Columbus, Ohio whose EarthFirst™ brand PLA films are made exclusively from Natureworks® – Ingeo® PLA resins. This unique dual co-branding agreement, along with our manufacturing location's close proximity to the film source, allows our customers to enjoy the very best possible pricing from the most experienced, long-standing producer of PLA film in the floral and produce industries. This enables our customers to better utilize the brand recognition of Natureworks®, Ingeo® and EarthFirst™.

The company's efforts are shared with retailers also interested in promoting the eco-friendly benefits of the products available within the store.



STANDARD PACKAGING COORDINATES FOR PLANTS AND FLOWERS

A-ROO Company offers standard proprietary decorative collections for coordinating plants and flowers. Retailers can offer their customers different cohesive looking packaging options that rotate on a regular basis through the use of these standard products. This rotation allows for growers and bouquet makers to keep low inventory levels and lower handling costs. Retaining a fresh look in the department will keep consumers coming back for more of the new product!

Stock collections offer the following coordinates, all of which are available in multiple sizes –

- Decorative plant sleeves
- Decorative Bouquet sleeves
- Decorative Plant Wraps
- Decorative Bouquet Wraps
- Handle Sleeves

The all new Petal Pouch™ Handle sleeve has revolutionized the way plants and flowers can be marketed at store level. Available in multiple colors, the Petal Pouch also offers retailers a stocking product that provides variety to the look of a department. This innovative sleeve turns every bouquet and plant into a gift and makes it easy for a consumer to purchase multiple items with the easy to hold handles.

The consumer appeal that is created through coordinated programs and departments draws the attention of shoppers into any floral department. EYE APPEAL CREATES BUY APPEAL. Gift giving opportunities are created through enhanced packaging. Don't allow the consumer to walk by the floral department to the candy aisle, have your department coordinated so that shoppers stop and buy floral products!





CUSTOMIZED SOLUTIONS FOR MERCHANDISING IN FLORAL DEPARTMENTS – A-ROO COMPANY'S CONCEPT SOLUTIONS™

A-ROO is a licensed partner of Nova® Photo Graphik, Austria whose specialized library of the world's best horticultural images contains more than 100,000 High-Resolution photographic images – Superior Images + Better Graphics = Winning Combination. Concept Solutions™ provides a turn-key approach to in-store packaging, taking a concept to completion. A-ROO offers State-of-the-Art Creative Services in their award winning Creative Department.

Retailers can choose from a wide range of in-store packaging items to assist the sale at store level. These could include from the standard and commonly used in-store consumer use sealed bottom sleeves on a rack to the more upscale consumer use Petal Pouch™ handle sleeves on a rack or brown kraft paper sleeves on a rack (as pictured). All of these choices that are available as stock standard items also are commonly produced on a custom basis also identify the store or chain logo so the consumer or person receiving a gift can easily remember where to make a repeat purchase.

The custom prints could include custom logos, slogans and images. Some of the items that will enhance any department and raise the level of perceived value by the consumer include –

- Sleeves & Bags
- Tags, Cards, Booklets and Labels
- Hanging and POP Signage
- Decorative Sheets & Rolls
- Decorative Pot Covers and Containers, and Plant Trays
- Delta™ arrangement Sleeves/bags



CROSS MERCHANDISING SOLUTIONS

How about some wine with the flowers...

A reason must be created for a consumer to purchase multiple items. Through signage, tags, coupons, promotions, etc., a floral department can create an opportunity for a consumer to purchase other items than just flowers, including a gift card, chocolate, wine, etc. An example of this would be to offer 50% off a bottle of wine with the purchase of this premium bouquet. Coupons and labels can be affixed right to the floral item with the information that will draw consumers to these other departments.

How about helping a charity...

Through departmental merchandising, the proper signs, coupons, tags and labels can provide opportunities to consumers, with a purchase of a floral item, to benefit a wide variety of charitable causes. Offer items where a percentage of the proceeds go toward helping children in need, those with cancer, heart disease research, etc. These promotions provide a way for consumers to not only make a purchase, but feel that they are assisting others in need.

How about promoting your own brand...

Most retailers have their own brand of products which include canned vegetables, deli items, bakery items, etc. Why not expand this to the floral department and develop your name even further so that you as a retailer are cross merchandising your own brand? Consumers will continue to purchase your brand if they see quality products in all areas of the store. Take the opportunity to continually promote this brand so that a consumer is just as comfortable purchasing a bouquet as they are a box of donuts.

A-ROO has operations in Ohio, Florida, Texas and California conveniently located to service retailers around the globe.



DOS GRINGOS - A CALIFORNIA FLOWER COMPANY

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info@dosgringos.net
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RANCH TO RETAIL

"Sunflowers are a high yield flower at all levels of the chain."

Sunflowers are earth friendly, field grown and low cost/high value morale boosters and mood brighteners. Home make-over magazines and other life-style publications often feature the relaxed and casual elegance of Sunflowers. The right flower for any occasion and interior setting. Your customers see them in settings away from your store, making for easy sell through.



OUT-OF-THE-BOX PROMOTIONAL IDEAS

Excite and WOW customers with value incentives to improve sales, using the "half pallet" shipper. We customize the mix per shipper box per season for immediate sell-through at store level. Shippers aren't just for melons any longer!

COLOR MARKETING

"Yellow is Happy!" Remember the "Smiley," that simple bright yellow circle with two dots? According to color psychology professionals, yellow is the most optimistic color in the spectrum and "at glance" will elevate the spirit. Otherwise known as the happy color, yellow Sunflowers bring a smile to most customer faces. Merchandising with primary color product draws immediate attention at store level.

DON'T FORGET SPECIALTY NOVELTY SUNFLOWERS

Expand your merchandise mix by adding different colors and shapes of Sunflowers. There is a Sunflower for every season, from light yellow in spring, deep yellow and orange in summer, to harvest bronze and orange in fall, to red over the holidays. Talk to your Dos Gringos [team](#) for the right mix for your department.

SUNFLOWERS ARE LIKE BANANAS

Not only do you need one a day, Sunflowers are harvested and shipped green, just like bananas and will grow in color as they move through the chain. Cold chain adherence will keep the buds closed longer while warmer temperatures open the petals faster. Dos Gringos harvests over 100,000 stems daily and ships according to your direction and depending on your customer base. For shipping purposes we have indicated three cut stages. Retail responds to open flowers best. Color is the #1 sales incentive!





BACKROOM RECEIVING AND PREPARATION PROCEDURES

Receive Sunflowers (and most others) directly into refrigerated warehouses. Optimal temperature between 36 to 40, with humidity levels similar to produce storage. Transport to the store on refrigerated trucks and do not leave on loading dock. Immediately place in cold storage until ready for display.

If Sunflowers are shipped “wet”, meaning they are shipped upright in a box containing a bucket with water, check the water level in the buckets. When merchandising Sunflowers in buckets, always have the water level at 9” or more. Sunflowers are heavy hydrators! When receiving Sunflowers “dry” and flat in a box, simply cut one inch of the bottom of each bunch with a sharp knife or pruners and place in flower food water immediately. Leave the flowers to hydrate for about an hour before selling.

DISPLAY CARE AND HANDLING

Keep Sunflowers cool for longer shelf life at store level. Keep display buckets full of flower food water at all times. Make sure your Sunflower display is always fully stocked. Remove damaged, wilted, and broken flowers from the display. Keep Sunflowers in their own buckets and display area for higher impact and sell through.

Consider merchandising Sunflowers with short stems in bubble bowls and other easy “pick-me-up” designs.

Cross merchandise. Sunflowers play well with others!

For more information on Sunflowers and other California flowers, please visit www.dosgringos.com



STAGE 1

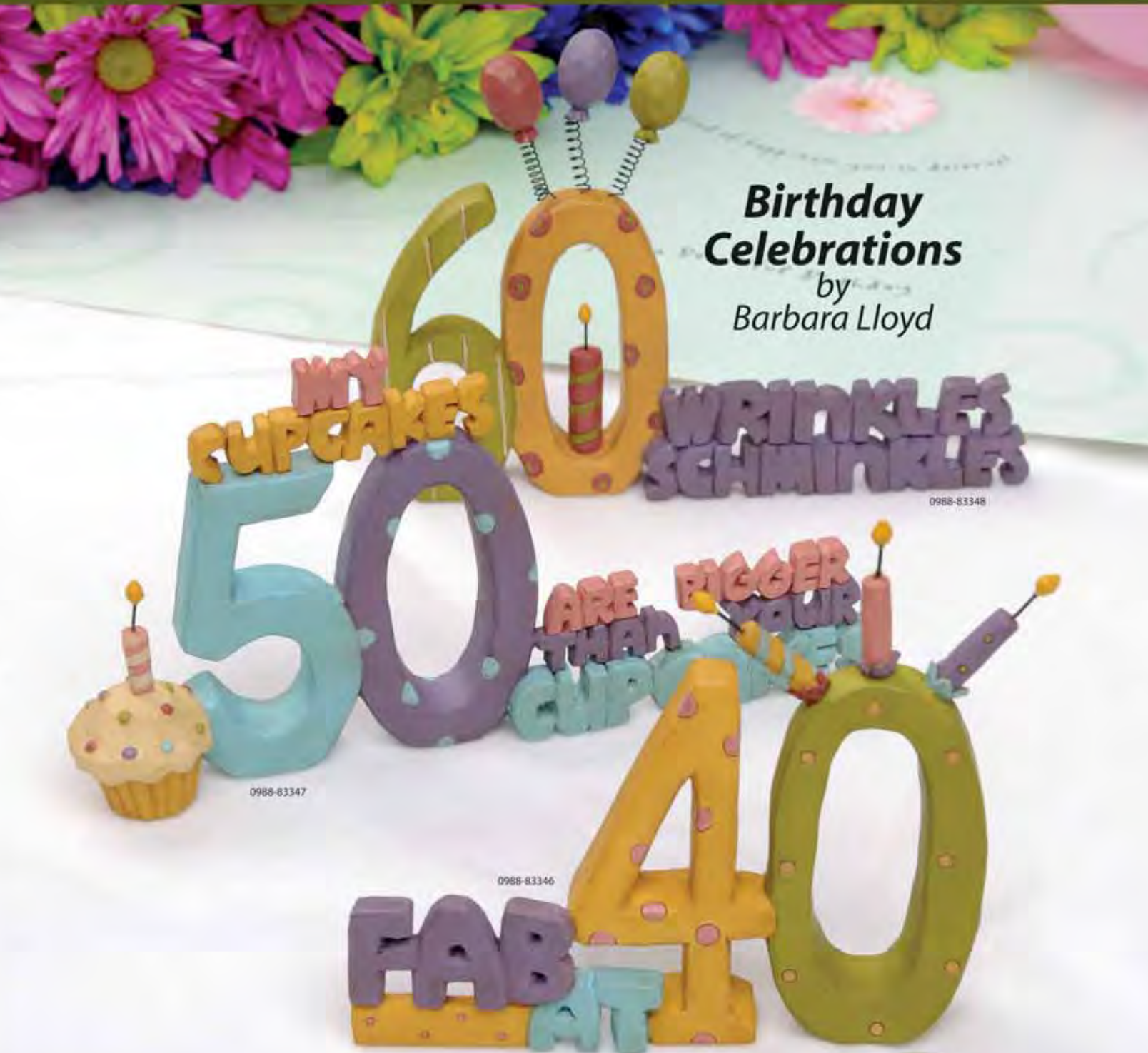


STAGE 2



STAGE 3





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TPIE DATES SET

Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association, (FNGLA) Orlando, FL, announces its Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition will be held January 14-16, 2010. TPIE is the trade event that offers everything foliage, floral and tropical. The event, featuring educational seminars and a major exhibition, will be held at the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale, FL.



Reader Service No. 330

2010 WFE SET FOR MARCH

HPP Worldwide, Amsterdam, Netherlands, announces the 2010 World Floral Expo will be held March 9-11 at the Double Tree Miami Mart Airport Hotel & Exhibition Center, Miami, FL. The worldwide floricultural showcase, designed for floral wholesale and mass market retail buyers, will feature exhibitors from around the world. Attendees may join the floral key note conference and tour four Miami-based floral companies.



Reader Service No. 331

VERIFLORA CERTIFIED

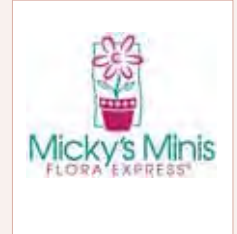
Green Valley Floral Inc., Salinas, CA, has achieved VeriFlora certification, the sustainability benchmark for potted plants and cut flowers sold in North America. The family-owned, wholesale nursery includes more than 16 acres of greenhouses in two locations and specializes in hydroponic roses, gerberas and lilies. The independent, third-party certification is conducted by Scientific Certification Systems (SCS), Emeryville, CA.



Reader Service No. 332

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION LAUNCHED

Micky's Minis Flora Express, Millstadt, IL, will launch its year-long 20th anniversary celebration in Anaheim, CA, at the PMA Fresh Summit exposition. The grower specializes in miniature plants including poinsettias, roses, violets, ivy, herbs and assorted foliage. Also known for innovative packaging, the company received the PMA 2008 Impact Award for packaging excellence.



Reader Service No. 333

NEW PRODUCTS

READY TO ROLL

Full Pot Farms/ FF Imports, Fort Lauderdale, FL, is promoting its ready-made package featuring cut Dendrobium and Mokara orchids. Grown in Thailand, the orchids are well protected in the clear tubes, which showcase the orchid stems and enable retailers to merchandise them as convenient grab-and-go gifts.



Reader Service No. 334

HOLIDAY UPGRADE

Potter Inc., Bryan, OH, introduces Elite Fabrico – glitzy gold fabric, layered cello and dramatic poinsettia accents as a classic Christmas upgrade. The holiday upgrade line features many options including hand-tied bows and corsage backings.



Reader Service No. 335

TABLETOP PYRAMID

Primescape Products, Buffalo Grove, IL, introduces a Prime Metal Deluxe pyramid-shaped metal planter for 6"-8" plants. Available in more than 40 colors, the corrosion-resistant container is made from 100 percent recycled aluminum, and is 100 percent recyclable. The metal stand is included. Overall height is 12 inches and they ship in one to two weeks.



Reader Service No. 336

SHOW YOUR SCHOOL SPIRIT

Carolina Fraser Fir Company, LLC, Mouth of Wilson, VA, adds patent-pending Collegiate Spirit Letters to its line of wreaths, greenery and Christmas trees. Customers can show their team spirit during the holidays by hanging the collegiate wreath-like Spirit Letters. The fresh cut Fraser Fir greens can be embellished with school-colored ribbons, bows or holiday picks.



Reader Service No. 337

PRE-FINISHED POTTED PLANTS

Nurserymen's Exchange Inc, Half Moon Bay, CA, is highlighting its pre-finished potted plant program. An ideal transition item from post holiday into spring, the program features popular fruits such as blueberries, raspberries and blackberries. Plants will continue to produce new leaves and flowers at retail store level. Shipped one plant per-pot, 6 pots-per-case.



Reader Service No. 338

READY FOR STORE LOGO

Eve's Garden Inc., Land O'Lakes, FL, is promoting its line of Holiday Lucky Bamboo arrangements. Each arrangement consists of five straight Lucky Bamboo stalks in a hand-painted, ceramic, gold-leaf container. Lucky Bamboo is the perfect plant for low-light situations – just add fresh water. Care-tag includes "To" and "From" for gift-giving and your store logo.



Reader Service No. 339

SAY IT ON SIGNS

Temkin International, Payson, UT, now offers coordinated merchandising sets created by the company's design team. The line includes signs, banners, displays, window-cling signage and floral picks. Low minimums make it easy to create a fabulous look for every season or occasion.



Reader Service No. 340

FEBRUARY BALLOONS

burton & BURTON, Bogart, GA, is now offering Valentine's Day balloons. Each balloon is an 18" foil and some designs will also be offered in a 9" pre-inflated size. The MSRP is \$2.99. The balloons coordinate with containers, plush and other items in the Valentine's line.



Reader Service No. 341

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

Do Branded Floral Products Increase Profitability?

Despite the uncertain future of branded floral products, companies continue to pursue branding initiatives.

BY JON VANZILE

If you think branding floral products is easy, just ask Chris Buss, president of TotalFloral LLC, in Homestead, FL. Buss and Total Floral are in the early stages of creating a brand known as TFBlossoms.

More than a simple package label, TFBlossoms is designed to be a total-immersion environment in the floral department, with unique packaging, branded hard goods and bags and merchandising elements.

"We created TFBlossoms to be a platform for retailers to introduce into retail environments, so from the consumer's point of view, all the items in the floral department are integrated," Buss explains. "Consumers will walk into a florist shop environment in a mass market."

According to Buss, the TFBlossoms con-



Private labels in the floral department enhance the consumer buying experience.

Where Heavyweights Wilt

If recent history is any guide, there are many obstacles standing in the way of branded floral products. In 1998, food giant Dole Food Co. Inc., based in Westlake Village, CA, moved into branded, cut flowers in a big way with the acquisition of Sunburst Farms Inc., of Miami, FL, one of the largest cut-flower importers into the United States. The same year, Dole also bought Finesse Farm LLC, in Loxahatchee, FL, which imported roses, and two other cut-flower importers. Seemingly overnight, Dole vaulted to the top of the flower business.

The idea was to leverage Dole's massive brand recognition into the first truly national

cut-flower brand. It had worked for Dole in the produce section, where the company's packaged salads and pre-cut lettuce had won awards and gained market acceptance.

But Dole's experience was rocky from the start. The company optimistically predicted \$200 million in first-year sales, but profitability was elusive. The division didn't achieve profitability until 2000, but continued to struggle both financially and with high-profile labor disputes in Latin America. Finally, after a decade in the business, Dole sold its fresh flowers unit and exited the fresh-cut flower business.

A year after Dole launched its flower

division, agricultural giant, Sunkist Growers Inc., located in Sherman Oaks, CA, entered into a five-year licensing agreement with Washington, D.C.-based U.S.A. Floral Products Inc., to launch Sunkist Premium Flowers. The Sunkist branded bouquets came with a 7-day vase life guarantee.

Again, however, the venture met with difficulty, and in 2009, USA Floral Products filed for bankruptcy protection. According to Chris Buss, president of Homestead, FL-based TotalFloral LLC, who watched the experiment with interest, Sunkist's royalty rate was too high and priced the bouquets out of the market.

pb

How To Do Branding Right

If huge consumer companies, such as Dole and Sunkist, can't make branding work in the floral space, is there any hope of carving out successful brands?

The answer to that, according to experts interviewed for this article, is yes. The trick is to approach the market with a superior, consistent product and keep costs in line.

Schubert Nursery Inc., located in Salinas, CA, has a recognized presence in the market for high-end topiaries. The key to Schubert's topiary, notes Clint Bishop, director of sales and marketing, is that it's slow-grown, with an unusual variety of plants. If Schubert was to expand its brand, Bishop explains, it would license — similar to Sunkist — but the company would also carefully regulate its growers to guarantee a consistent product. "The challenge would be to find growers to fill orders and supply the entire country," Bishop adds. "You may have dead spots in your coverage, but the growers would have to hit certain standards."

Other growers maintain their quality by controlling the greenhouses themselves. In

Gobles, MI, Dickerson's Greenhouse LLC, has been distributing Poinsettia Pete branded poinsettias throughout the Midwest for the past 30 years. "When somebody sees our product, they have an association with it," says Don Dickerson, systems engineer and partner. "It's quality. Our plants have proven themselves, and we've even had customers get our name from the tag and contact us and say that next time they're looking for a plant they'll look for our logo. That's always nice."

Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses Inc., based in Apopka, FL, only puts its Exotic Angel logo on plants that are grown in company-owned greenhouses. Thus, Engelmann's can guarantee that its plants meet certain quality standards.

Keeping costs in line means reduced consumer advertising and lower in-store marketing costs. Themed packaging, branded tags and point-of-purchase materials all cost extra — and if these costs can't be passed to the consumer, they'll have to be absorbed by either the floral department or

the grower.

Unlike Dole and Sunkist, which both sponsored large consumer advertising campaigns, most viable floral brands let the product speak for itself. The best advertising, after all, is word of mouth and actual consumer experience.

"We want our product to have higher perceived value," emphasizes Rick Vaughan, president of Vaughan Inc., in Sanford, FL. "They can get this through secondary use of the container, which we're pushing now, the shelf-life of the product, and the overall product design."

Ultimately, it seems unlikely that a national brand will soon broadly storm floral departments. The floral market is simply too fragmented and the margins are too thin to enable that kind of large-scale investment in a national program. But as many growers and private label supermarkets have shown, niche products and store brands can enhance the customer buying experience and thus help the image of the entire store. **pb**



Branded dish gardens can be displayed alone or with non-branded items.

cept dovetails with another trend in floral departments: outsourcing. Retailers are increasingly outsourcing elements of the floral department, from restocking to total category management. By bringing in TFBlossoms, a retailer could conceivably hand over the whole floral department.

But the concept isn't without its challenges, as Buss is quick to point out. Some of TotalFloral's clients have no interest in introducing a third-party label into their carefully crafted retail environment. After all, retailers such as Whole Foods aren't only selling groceries — they are also selling the Whole Foods experience.

Also, efforts like TFBlossoms are expensive. The signage needed to make it successful costs money, and margins are already notoriously tight in the floral department. As Buss says, "A brand is only useful if it drives sales. It's not what you buy it for; it's what you sell it for."

Although the marketing costs are built into TotalFloral's pricing, Buss says his company has worked hard to develop a rational pricing structure in today's floral market. So far, no large retailers have adopted the TFBlossoms concept in its entirety. But, as Buss points out, the concept is still very new, and it always takes time to make something new work. "TFBlossoms hasn't been around long enough to have the idea borne



There are a number of branded floral products within the potted plant category.

out,” Buss explains. “It’s not an easy task, but I haven’t seen anything to discourage me from not moving forward with it.”

FROM THE GROUND UP

With the exception of a few established brands, consumer branding in the floral department is virtually unknown. Existing brands are typically confined to care tags or product labels, as opposed to the intricate packaging and large point of purchase displays seen in other in-store departments.

But this may be changing as more companies seek to leverage the power of branding. In some ways, this mirrors the experi-

ence in the produce department, where consumer branding has become a larger issue in recent years. But the produce department is at least several years ahead of floral in terms of brand penetration.

That’s partly because the challenges in floral are unique, according to growers like Rick Vaughan, president of Vaughan Inc., based in Sanford, FL. The wholesale nursery is a leading seller of dish gardens. Although Vaughan dish gardens have been available in supermarket floral departments for more than 30 years, the company has only recently begun considering a consumer branding push. “It’s slow,” Vaughan admits. “We just brought in an in-house designer. She’s designed for Disney; she’s helped us refresh, redesign and create a packaging look.”

In addition to the new look, Vaughan is also rolling out a consumer Web site and has entered into a supplier deal with a major online retailer to supply specialty designs that are branded with that company’s logo.

But like many other floral companies, Vaughan isn’t following the traditional route to creating brand awareness. Typically, a company creates a product then supports it with consumer advertising and consumer awareness campaigns. In the floral business, this route has often led to disaster, so instead, companies do it the hard way: with time and quality products.

This was definitely the case with the Exotic Angel Plants brand of potted houseplants by Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses Inc., based in Apopka, FL. Exotic Angel is the oldest consumer brand in the houseplant business and is perhaps the most recognizable, if not only, brand of houseplant offered in supermarket floral centers. But even Engelmann’s doesn’t use consumer advertising to get the word out. “Our biggest

marketing vehicle is the sheer number of units we produce with our label on it,” reveals Bisser Georgiev, vice president of sales and marketing for Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses.

WHAT’S IN IT FOR YOU?

Behind all the effort being spent on branded floral products, there is an obvious question: How does it help your floral department? Is this really an improvement over the traditional way of doing business, with cut flowers in buckets and potted plants in anonymous, decorative pots?

There are only two compelling reasons for retailers to back branded products — they either accelerate inventory turnover, or they offer increased margins. In either case, it comes down to dollars and cents: does a branded product make the floral department more profitable? So far, there is little data to support the notion that branded floral products perform better for the bottom line. Even with Exotic Angel, which has decades of branding experience, Georgiev says, “I’m guessing our margins are higher because of a higher price point.”

Yet there seems little question that the industry is moving toward more branded products. In addition to grower initiatives, supermarkets themselves are quickly moving into private labeling, which Georgiev says is “going crazy.” But if the benefits are so difficult to prove, then what’s the mystique? Why are companies willing to spend hard-earned money on branding initiatives in the face of such uncertainty?

The answer might lay with what Buss calls the customer “value proposition.” A value proposition, according to Buss, means the brand delivers what it promises, consistently. Wal-Mart, for example, promises lower prices, as opposed to an upscale retail experience. And Wal-Mart consistently delivers, so consumers shopping at Wal-Mart know exactly what to expect.

With branded floral products, a value proposition means offering products that fit in seamlessly with the retailer’s overall marketing story.

“We designed TFBlossoms to fit retailers’ needs,” asserts Buss. “In Whole Foods, we would play up sustainability and offer organic roses. With another company that was value-focused, we might concentrate on price and offer a dozen roses for \$9.99.”

The idea is, by offering consistent, quality products that fit the store’s overall market position, the rest of the store will benefit. Although floral is generally a very small category, it has a large emotional impact — shoppers respond positively to a bright, beautiful floral display.

pb

There are only two compelling reasons for retailers to back branded products — they either accelerate inventory turnover, or they offer increased margins. In either case, it comes down to dollars and cents: does a branded product make the floral department more profitable?



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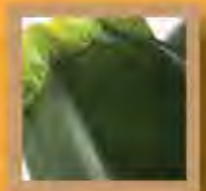


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Good Pecan Crop Predicted For "On" Year

Retailers can take advantage of holiday baking and health benefits to promote pecans in produce.

BY BARBARA ROBISON

Good news for retailers and pecan lovers everywhere: The new fall crop of pecans are experiencing an "on" year of an alternate-year bearing crop and the industry predicts good supplies. Although there are concerns that lack of rain, hurricanes and high winds may have some effect on the crop, insiders are expecting 300 to 330 million pounds of pecans, according to Brandon Harrell, sales manager for Harrell Pecan Co., based in Camilla, GA.

PECAN HEALTH BENEFITS HIGHLIGHTED

The new pecan crop will arrive just in time for the upcoming fall and winter holiday seasons. Baking has been a major use of pecans during that period, but things have been changing. "Newer research keeps pointing to ever increasing nutritional values for pecans, so a primary focus right now is on the health benefits the nut provides," states Bruce Caris, director of sales and marketing for Green Valley Pecan Co., located in Sahuarita, AZ.

"With greater recognition of pecan health benefits, produce departments offer our industry excellent sales potential," points out Buddy Adams, CEO for San Saba, TX-based San Saba Pecan. "More pecans are being eaten as snacks and consumer pecan usage in salads, as a topping for vegetables and with fresh fruits is increasing."

Dean Holmquist, director of produce and floral for Foodtown Supermarkets, a 65-store chain based in Avenel, New Jersey, reports, "Beginning in mid-October, when pecans are especially popular as a snack item, we put up bulk nut displays. Usually, bulk pecans are in our produce department and bagged pecans are offered in grocery. I am interest-



Photo courtesy of Renfro Pecan Co.

Shelled pecans are popular year-round, but a necessity during the holidays.

ed in knowing more about pecan health benefits and what is available for retailers to inform produce customers about them."

PECANS PERFECTLY FIT PRODUCE DEPARTMENT

"One of the chief benefits for displaying pecans in produce departments is the ability to have the product kept in a refrigerated display, while showcasing the idea that pecans are a fresh, healthful consumer product," says Richard Merritt, president of Merritt Pecan Co. Inc., in Weston, GA.

The National Pecan Shellers Association (NPSA), in Atlanta, GA, is an international trade association that conducts educational programs about pecans' health benefits, nutritional values and a variety of uses. One information piece it produces, *Perfect Performance with Pecans*, is very helpful to produce retailers. "Although it is described as 'A guide for using pecans in processed foods,'

the 4-page leaflet explains the variety of pecan products available, their usage, handling, storage and health benefits," reports Jon Krueger, communications specialist.

According to research published in the *Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry*, pecans rank the highest among all nuts and are among the top category of foods that contain the highest antioxidant capacity. Antioxidants have gained recognition as a dietary substance shown to delay aging and decrease the risk of cancer, heart disease and neurological diseases such as Alzheimer's.

An NPSA brochure reveals pecans contain more than 19 vitamins and minerals and contain no trans-saturated fat. A research review by the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* suggests that nuts such as pecans can aid in weight loss and health maintenance and may increase metabolic rates and enhance satiety.



Photo courtesy of Georgia Pecan Commission

Mike Patterson, director of produce and floral for Magruder's Grocery Stores, a seven-unit operation headquartered in Rockville, MD, states, "Our markets sell shelled pecans all year. During the holiday period, displays of whole pecans in the shells are popular, so beginning with Thanksgiving, we merchandise them together in the produce department with other nuts. I'm sure our customers would be interested in knowing more about the pecan's health benefits." Patterson knows the best way to get the message to his consumers is by working with produce retailers

on point-of-sale information.

CHANGES IN PECAN PACKAGING

"For years, the 16-ounce pecan bag has been the norm," says Harrell of Harrell Pecan Co.

"Now, consumers want a scaled back 8- or 12-ounce bag, especially in today's economy. This change has been hard for retailers to accept, but we believe it will increase their pecan sales."

Green Valley Pecan Company markets a 12-ounce zipper bag for produce, which can

The Atlanta, GA-based Georgia Pecan Commission, a program administered by the Georgia Department of Agriculture, financially supports research, education and promotion on the pecan's health benefits. "We are working to get the message out and that's why we like to see pecans in the produce department," explains chairman Charles M. "Buddy" Leger. "The nuts are more visible to shoppers and relate to so many produce items, especially during the fall and holiday period. Pecans provide a healthful snack when eaten alone, and are also delicious combined with sweet potatoes, fresh cranberries, pears, apples and salad greens."

Healthful eating suggestions for consumers include snacking on pecans rather than chips, as pecans are naturally sodium-free. The satiety factor can help when snacking on pecans rather than candy because people feel fuller longer. Pecan snacking also provides a source of protein for the growing number of those on vegetarian diets.

The Texas Pecan Growers Association, headquartered in Bryan, TX, a nonprofit educational association, has been promoting the health benefits of the pecan through its monthly magazine, a fall newsletter, recipe brochures, and its Web site, according to Cindy Wise, executive vice president.

"We are trying to promote pecans not only during the popular fall and holiday period, but year-round," states Paul Rich, vice president of sales for Durham Ellis Pecan Co. located in Comanche, TX. "Our company provides display shippers and believes there are excellent promotional opportunities for cross-merchandising in produce just as there have been successful baking promotions in grocery. We carry the lowest expiration date on our packages to assure our customers of the freshest products possible. This is especially important in produce, where freshness is key," he notes.

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Reader Service # 126

Food Safety Becomes Major Pecan Promotion

The Georgia Pecan Commission has teamed up with the National Turkey Federation in the launching of Washington, D.C.-based Partnership for Food Safety Education (PFSE) Holiday Success Kit 2009. PFSE and its network of more than 50 Be Food Safe food retailers are working together to launch the kit prior to the Thanksgiving holiday. Along with turkey information, the kit includes selection and storage recommendations for Georgia pecans. Holiday planning, food safety tips, holiday recipes, kids' games and family activities are also part of the package.

PFSE will promote the Holiday Success Kit with food retailers, suppliers, consumer groups and government public health partners. "This provides another excellent opportunity for produce retailers to emphasize the health and safety of pecans to their customers," states Ashley Lansdale, an account executive with Sahlman

Williams, a public relations firm, based in Tampa, FL, that represents the Georgia Pecan Commission.

"Retailers can download one set of the kit materials at no charge, just by registering their name on our Web site," reports Shelley Feist, PFSE's executive director. "Consumers will be able to download informational fliers this fall to help them observe the latest food safety instructions for their holiday meals. In addition to the National Turkey Federation and Georgia Pecan Commission being major sponsors, the Produce Marketing Association, American Egg Board and the Food Marketing Institute are supportive of the program."

The Georgia Pecan Growers Association, located in Tifton, GA, a nonprofit education and research organization, will also be incorporating the food safety information in its publications and at its annual industry show, according to Janice Deef, executive director. **pb**

be used with a variety of other nuts in effective end-cap displays.

"Salted pecan meats in one-pound cello bags are our most popular retail item," discloses John Renfroe, president of Renfroe Pecan Co., in Pensacola, FL. "However, it's easy to roast and lightly salt the pecans at home and many consumers enjoy preparing their own snacks. One nice thing about the new crop pecans for retailers is they keep well without refrigeration for 60 to 90 days, as long as they don't get overheated."

"We're offering shelled pecans in acetate containers that are air-tight, water-proof and tamper-resistant," says Merritt of Merritt Pecan Co. "There is good product visibility and stackability for produce displays."

Albert's Organics Inc., headquartered in Bridgeport, NJ, provides shelled, ready-to-eat pecans in 8.5-ounce containers year-round. During the holiday period, with snacking so popular, it offers 50-pound bags of in-shell pecans. "Because there are so few organic pecan growers, quite often not all of our pecans are organically grown," explains Simcha Weinstein, director of marketing. "Prices are so much higher than traditional pecans, in comparison with our other organic items, we find organic pecan sales are rather limited." **pb**



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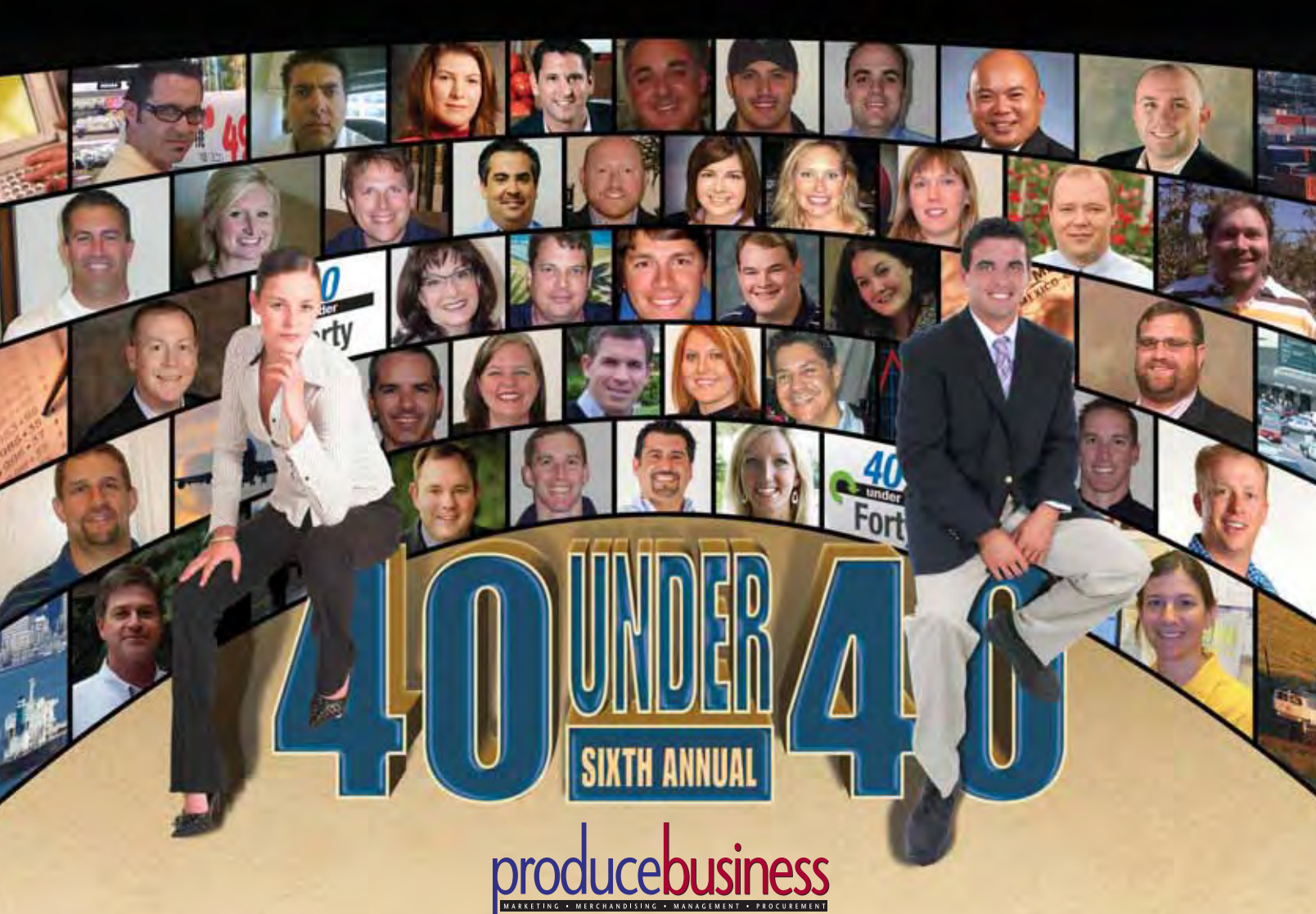
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Reader Service # 10



PRODUCE BUSINESS is accepting nominations for its Sixth Annual 40 Under Forty Project, which recognizes the produce industry's top young leaders.

Honorees will be selected based on their professional accomplishments, demonstrated leadership and industry/community contributions. To be eligible, nominees must be under the age of 40 as of January 1 (People born after January 1, 1970).

To nominate someone, please go to www.producebusiness.com and click on the 40 under Forty icon, or fill out this form by March 1, 2010, and fax back to 561-994-1610.

Once nominated, the candidate will receive forms from us to fill out asking for detailed information. A candidate only needs to be nominated one time. Multiple nominations will have no bearing on selection.

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For more information email: info@producebusiness.com

Green Shoots

By Jim Prevor

I
Who knew economists
could be so poetic?

Think of the imagery... brown sod,
once laid green in a more hopeful era.

Then laid low by tough times.

Now, though, the unrelenting expanse of brown
and broken is interrupted.

New growth forces its way through the detritus of
the past.

II
They say a stopped clock is still right twice a day.

I wonder if those economists really see the green
shoots?

Or do they just know that is the way to bet?

III
This is America after all.

"Remember, my son,"
Said old J.P.'s dad,

"Any man
who is a Bear
on the future
of this country
will go broke."

IV
We are always speaking
About the past
And don't even know it.

Mighty Wal-Mart, invincible
and strong.

Like Sears,
F.W. Woolworth,
The Great Atlantic & Pacific
Tea Company...

All gone or mere shadows.
But in their day,
They seemed like the pyramids —
Certain to stand
Forever.

V
In America,
What lives forever
Is the people.

Gathered from every corner of the globe.
They are always struggling
Against the detritus of the past —
Keeping shop, haggling with suppliers,
serving their kinsmen.
And they are always breaking through.

Green shoots.



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Research In Motion

For all those in the techie world, this isn't about BlackBerry wireless solutions. This is about ongoing consumer research to enhance both merchandising and operational programs.

For decades, Hannaford has had a research capability. In the late seventies and early eighties, it was primarily used to measure the consumers' pulse about the varying aspects of Hannaford stores and the competition throughout New England and upstate New York. It didn't matter what the size was of the community; nearly all communities were monitored at least once a year — larger markets more frequently. When there were special programs or new competition, the research was tailored accordingly.

These were not just nice reports, which sat on the shelf in someone's office. Both merchandising and operational heads were always anxious to review the latest data to be ready to address top management's questions and then evaluate which programs should continue and where revisions were necessary. This was similar to the full utilization of military intelligence. After all, retailing is equivalent to war. Competition is the enemy, the consumer — the spoils. Understand the consumer and the battle is half won. Then it's up to the implementation.

However, research can take many forms in addition to just asking questions about product, service and consumer activities and then evaluating the answers. Another method is to detail consumer movements and activity inside the store. In an effort to streamline operations and improve merchandising, observing customer movement, shopping and purchasing activity within the department is key.

It has been approximately ten years since Hannaford revised its store layout, putting the produce department immediately in front of customers as they enter the store and suddenly find themselves surrounded by fresh fruit and vegetables. Refrigerated cases were on the sides with dry tables in the between. To add a signature element, a tree was placed in the very center. From the outset, produce sales increased and favorable reports continued flowing in from customers.

At a time when supercenters and supermarkets were expanding, management recognized the need to find ways to streamline the offering. If the same amount of sales could be achieved in more compact space, the carbon footprint could be reduced, inventory turnover improved, shrinkage better controlled and labor more efficient. Concurrently, consumers would find their shopping experience more enjoyable. After all, nearly every survey shows customers dislike having to walk long distances when shopping for only several items, and grocery shopping is not a favorite past time.

For an extended period of time, shopper's actions were observed, including time spent in the department, movement patterns, purchases and how selections were made. All were noted and compiled into a book at least the size of a bestselling novel.

Produce director Will Wedge and his team analyzed the details. Research shows half of today's time-starved customers will shop the produce department in five minutes, regardless of its size. The challenge became creating a more efficient environment with minimal obstructions, effective adjacencies, easy traffic flow, maximum visibility and easy-to-read signage.

The signature tree was nice, but perhaps the image had outlived the purpose. After all, the tree did create a somewhat obstructed view and necessitated tables being set at angles with corners obstructing smooth traffic flow. Additionally, small islands of tables had limited product continuity and ability to tie in impulse offerings.

Making the department easier to shop, first the tree disappeared and tables were then set in a more linear format with enough room between them to allow for easy passage of two shopping carts. The depth of the tables was reduced, lowering the rear display height while lessening product quantities with the same front space allocation. As a result, consumers have easier product access and the ability to view more items a glance.

Incidentally, with less tonnage on display, shrinkage has declined dramatically. Rather than using the reduction to flow directly to the bottom line, the savings has been invested in more attractive pricing, which in turn generates increased sales, increased dollar profit and an improved value image.

Higher, multi-deck refrigerated cases are around the department perimeter. The increased height differential between tables and these cases again provides improved product visibility and gives the impression of being in the midst of glamorous fresh fruit and vegetables.

In the new 50,000-square-foot, Augusta, ME, store [Editor's note: See the September issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*: "Hannaford LEEDS The Way With First Platinum-Level-Certified Store"], the produce department space has been reduced by slightly less than ten percent, but appears more dynamic. These research-generated changes have also made it possible to have an equally effective offering in stores no larger than 35,000 square feet being built in smaller communities. In this day of sustainability, profitability and competitiveness, research in motion provides its worth to both retailers and consumers alike.

Retailing is equivalent to war. Competition is the enemy, the consumer — the spoils. Understand the consumer and the battle is half won. Then it's up to the implementation.



Dr. Hans Maurer, Chair International Federation for Produce Standards (IFPS) Headquartered in London, UK

A Voice For Global Issues

In Part I of II, Pundit investigator and special projects editor, Mira Slott, sits down with Dr. Hans Maurer, chair of the International Federation for Produce Standards, (IFPS) to examine the role the organization is playing in the international produce world. Check back in the November issue for the conclusion of this interview, where Dr. Maurer shares future plans for the IFPS.

Q: What sparked the formation of the IFPS?

A: IFPS has been around as a loose association of industry bodies since the early 1990s, when there was a realization that the allocation of PLU numbers was critical in terms of the facilitation of international trade since the East and West Coasts of the United States possess differing systems of communication. Other hemisphere countries have their own systems as well. In the early 90s, a number of farsighted industry members decided it was necessary to coordinate all that. The IFPS came out of the realization that beyond developing international standards for PLU numbers, other issues could be resolved through international industry standards.

In 2006, IFPS was formally incorporated. The realization there were issues bigger than PLU numbers also came about because of the fact that international organizations, such as PMA, Canadian PMA, Horticultural Australia, etc., were all examining their own standards in areas such as food safety, bio-security and others.

Q: How serious was the problem of multiple standards proliferating at this juncture?

A: Standards were developing in a combination of ways. Retailers would set their own standards; European retailers were developing the GAP program. In England, you suddenly had the British Retail Consortium (BRC) standards, which related to packhouses rather than growers. And, of course, national associations in produce, such as PMA, United Fresh New Zealand and other organizations, really want to make sure that the standards in place in our industry are robust and work, but also that they are cost-effective and don't get in the way of common sense.

For example, it would be great if a grower or packer who is supplying Tesco in the UK, Kroger in the United States and Woolworths in Australia would not have to be audited by three or four different companies have to agree to three or four different standards. That would go a long way toward assisting the global industry to, on one hand, deliver the consumers what they need, and on the other hand, to make sure compliance is managed at a minimum level.

Q: Could you further explain how negotiations work at the international level when you are representing such a diverse group of national interests?

A: A global body, such as GS1 or the World Bank, wants to

engage in dialog with organizations that are able to represent their members at the global level. We've been able to launch an application for grievance status with the World Health Organization. In order to do that, you need to be a global player. Now we have not been granted that status yet, however, because we have not been in existence formally for three years, which is the minimum time-frame for that. That will click over in October, 2009. But without having IFPS, the produce industry would just be talked about, rather than being able to observe and contribute.

Q: How does IFPS participate in the global decision-making process?

A: Let's say a company wants to engage on the topic of chemical registration verification of agricultural crops. "Can we talk to you?," they ask. All of a sudden, we are on the radar screen as a global association, and we are able to contribute to the discussion, and to intercede on whatever recommendation guidelines, standards and rules come out of the process.

Q: So you've just elevated the industry's power in the shaping of international standards and rules...

A: Correct. I'd say influence, not power. We've elevated the influence of the global produce trade on the topic of standards at the global level because we've got recognition as a global body.

Q: You are building an important foundation, but it sounds like you are still in the early stages of your mission

A: Yes, these are the early stages. The pure fact is that IFPS is a registered company with a registered office in the UK, and the office is managed by the British Retail Consortium. The secretary general of the federation is PMA, and the chair and vice chair are elected from the directors every two years. So anybody who is engaging with us from outside the produce industry, but has the ability to influence what's happening to the industry, immediately gets the message this is a truly international body.

Q: Are you finding some areas easier to push forward and others more challenging?

A: Of course. Take the PLU standards; we spent the first three years tidying up the PLU number application process. Now, when new PLUs are needed, the global industry understands in order to have a PLU number there is an application process.

We are also interested in traceability, and that is where we have been working with GS1 to ensure the recently traceability guide had our input. In a technical sense, we are also interested in the area of food safety and the way the expectations of consumers who have product delivered within the supply are being met.



NYET WORKING ANYONE?

Once upon a time, there was a leader named Joseph. “Uncle Joe” was a stern man who demanded absolute obedience from his subjects. The subjects were not allowed to accept anything, no matter how small, for their personal benefit. No unsupervised conversations were to take place.

Those who were discovered — or even suspected — were severely punished or even exiled. Uncle Joe was constantly reminding his subject of these rules. The obedient subject in the poster to the right being offered vodka has the correct response. Just say, “nyet.”

In our time and among our industry, there are many leaders called CEO or president or chairman. They are stern men and women who demand absolute adherence to policy. Employees are prohibited from receiving anything, no matter how small. Unsupervised contacts with vendors are not tolerated. Employees who are known — or even suspected — of inappropriate relations are severely reprimanded and even terminated. The employee policy manual reminds them, when a vendor offers to visit, travel or socialize in a non-work environment, they must always say, “No.”

Our industry has many fine events, both national and regional. The host organizations, wishing to offer ever more relevant events, solicit feedback. Attendees of successful events typically identify two benefits: education and networking. Who could be against learning? Who could be against professionals gathering to exchange ideas and viewpoints on common problems?

So would someone please explain to me why, if networking is such a great benefit, do so many companies have policies and practices that discourage — or even prohibit — the opportunities where said networking can take place?

We hear from managers that there is no time and no budget available for travel. Translation: A decision has been made that developing the knowledge and networks of professional is unimportant. We have a new generation of produce professionals who have never used a fruit knife, donned a store apron or walked a field. They were given a mouse pad and the files of the previous manager who was trained under the old system. The industry must get these young managers out and about.

My company has standing invitations to many retailers and wholesalers to visit the vineyards in California and Sonora and Chile. We ask them to join us for a discussion or a meal at industry events in Anaheim, Pleasanton, Nogales, Tampa, Carmel and Las Vegas. We offer to show them prototypes of products to give us feedback. We offer to go to their locations. We think that all work and no play makes for a dull industry, so meals, barbecues, sporting events, golf outings, cigar dinners, dove hunts and skeet shoots are sometimes included. Like good hosts, we pay for most — if not all



— of these expenses.

Like the Soviet citizen in the poster, most say, “No.” They are not allowed to say anything else and that is sad. Once in a while, we get a thoughtful soul who, on her own time and at her own expense, will come for a visit, learn something and meet some people. They make these visits with great discretion and at great risk, but the professional benefits are so large. Industry promotional groups can more openly provide these types of activities and we applaud efforts, but even they get many “Nyets,” — answers from the industry, citing policies they cannot accept travel or they cannot take the time off.

Gee, who made Joseph Stalin CEO? Our industry must change. We must say, “Yes” to networking. Let me give you my card... **pb**

John Pandol is in charge of special projects and Mexican sourcing for Pandol Brothers Co., Delano, CA.

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OCTOBER 2009

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Blossom Bucket		224	330-824-2551	330-824-2552
A & L Potato Company, Inc.	153	54	800-365-5784	218-773-1850
A&A Organic Marketing, Inc.		176	831-768-0300	831-685-0302
A-ROD Company LLC	210-211	216	440-238-8850	440-238-2212
Abbott & Cobb		194	800-345-7333	215-245-9043
Accu-Label, Inc.		117	519-727-0888	519-322-1036
Louis J. Accompra Foundation		91	800-223-8070	718-991-1599
Agrexco USA, Ltd.		50	718-481-8700	718-481-8710
Albert's Organics		189	800-899-5944	610-388-8418
Alpine Fresh		80	305-594-9117	305-594-8506
Altar Produce LLC		80	760-357-6762	760-357-8265
Andrews Brothers, Inc.		71	313-841-7400	313-841-0385
APEAM (Avocado Producers & Exporting Packers of Michoacan)	147	183		
Apio, Inc.		44	800-454-1355	805-343-6295
E. Armata, Inc.		87	800-223-8070	718-991-1599
Associated Potato Growers, Inc.		151	800-437-4685	701-746-5767
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.		100	201-807-9292	201-807-9596
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.		84	201-807-9292	201-807-9596
Babe Farms, Inc.		109	800-648-6772	805-922-3950
Baero North America, Inc.	208-209	30	314-692-2270	314-991-2640
Philip Balsamo Company		3	630-575-8000	630-575-8004
Bar Valley Medjool Date Growers		38	928-726-9091	928-726-9413
Basciano Foods, Inc.		56	610-268-3044	610-268-2194
Blue Book Services		111	630-668-3500	630-668-0303
Bonita Banana		75	718-816-9330	718-556-8457
Booth Ranches, LLC		179	559-626-7653	559-626-4818
Boskovich Farms, Inc.		49	805-487-2299	805-487-5189
Brooks Tropicals		121	800-327-4833	305-246-5827
Jack Brown Produce, Inc.		168	616-887-9568	616-887-9765
California Leafy Greens Marketing		31	916-441-1240	
California Tree Ripe		188	559-497-1020	559-497-1023
Califresh of California		50	559-875-1602	559-875-1608
Canadian Produce Marketing Association		33	613-226-4187	613-226-2984
Canon Potato Company, Inc.		157	719-754-3445	719-754-2227
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.		124	515-981-5111	515-981-4564
Carb-Americas, Inc.		80	954-706-0000	954-706-0775
Champ's Mushrooms		57	866-CHARMS1	604-607-0787
Chep USA Inc.		67	800-CHPE USA	407-422-4614
Chestnut Hill Farms		80	305-592-6969	305-436-8969
Chilean Avocado Importers Association		7	202-626-0560	
Chilean Fresh Fruit Association	INSERT	14	916-927-1217	916-927-1297
Christopher Ranch		101	408-847-1100	408-847-0581
Ciruli Brothers		141	520-281-9696	520-281-1473
Classic Salads, LLC		196	831-763-4520	831-763-1542
Classic Yam		162	209-394-8656	209-394-8714
Coast To Coast Produce Co.		90	877-836-6295	617-381-0067
Cohen Produce Marketing		168	800-633-6173	717-677-6120
Columbia Marketing International		171	509-663-1955	509-663-2231
Community Suffolk, Inc.		86	617-389-5200	617-389-6680
Compu-Tech, Inc.		166	509-884-1542	509-884-8982
Connecticut Currant		112	860-889-3766	860-887-3087
COPEXEU		137	54-11-4866-1135	54-11-4866-1135
Country Fresh Mushroom Co.		58	610-268-3043	610-268-0479
The Cranberry Network LLC		29	715-422-0410	715-422-0406
Crowley Maritime Corp.		37	800-CROWLEY	
Crystal Valley Foods		80	800-359-5631	305-592-9803
Curry & Company		139	503-393-6033	503-393-6085
Customized Brokers		231	305-471-8989	305-471-8988
Customized Brokers		80	305-471-8989	305-471-8988
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York		83	800-223-8080	718-960-0544
Dawson Farms		162	318-878-5806	318-878-2826
Del Monte Fresh Produce		232	800-950-3683	305-520-8495
DNE World Fruit Sales		185	800-327-6676	772-465-1181
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Domex Superfresh Growers		173	509-966-1814	509-966-3608
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dProduce Man Software		202	888-PRODMAN	650-712-9973
Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc.		109	866-792-DUDA	561-978-5705
Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc.		123	561-978-5714	561-978-5705
Earl Roy Produce		162	800-563-4560	318-563-4400
East Coast Brokers & Packers, Inc.		17	800-563-7751	866-869-3850
Eastern Propek LLC		185	858-881-3553	858-243-0154
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Edinburg Citrus Association		185	956-381-8520	956-383-2435
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Ethylene Control, Inc.		48	800-200-1909	559-896-3232
Eureka Specialties, Inc.		66	213-488-6470	213-488-6480
Eurofresh Farms, Ltd.		193	520-384-4621	520-384-4187
Famous Software LLC		65	800-444-8301	559-447-6334
Farm Pak Products, Inc.		162	800-367-2799	252-459-9020
Farmer's Best		145	520-281-1411	520-281-4163
Farmers' West Flowers & Bouquets Inc.		205	805-684-5531	805-684-1528
Joseph Fierman & Son, Inc.		85	718-893-1640	718-328-3738
First Fruit Marketing	167 & 169	83	509-853-4710	509-749-2210
Fisher Capespan		182	800-388-3074	514-737-3676
Florida Department of Agriculture		125	850-488-4303	850-922-0374
The Florida Tomato Committee		124	407-894-5071	407-899-4296
Fowler Farms	174-175	179	315-894-8068	315-894-8060
Fox Packaging		96	566-682-5176	566-682-5768
Fresh Partners AB		79	46-8-742-1215	46-8-742-6201
Fresh Produce Association of The Americas		210	520-287-2707	520-287-2948
Freska Produce International, LLC		142	805-650-1040	805-650-3550
Friedman & Broussard Produce, Inc.		162	800-671-9018	985-646-2302
Garber Farms		163	337-824-6328	337-824-2676
Garcia Farms Produce		163	209-394-8356	209-394-3413
Genpro Transportation Services, Inc.		92	800-243-6770	973-589-1877
Giorgio Fresh Co.		68	800-330-5711	610-429-3810
Giorgio Fresh Co.		57	800-330-5711	610-429-3810
The Giunarra Companies		138	323-415-8330	213-628-4878
Gourmet Specialty Imports LLC		101	610-345-1113	610-345-1116
Gourmet Trading Company		80	310-216-7575	310-216-7676
David E. Grimes Co.		100	831-637-1499	831-636-4660
Grower Alliance, LLC		144	520-761-1921	520-377-9189
A. Gurda Produce Farms		66	845-258-4422	845-258-4852
Ham Produce Co., Inc.		162	866-747-9200	252-747-9255
Harris Fresh LLC		80	559-894-1000	559-894-2100
Harvest Sensations		80	305-591-8173	305-591-8175
Herb Thyme Farms		68	831-476-9733	831-476-3710
Hess Brothers Fruit Co.		166	717-656-2631	717-656-4526
Honey Bear Tree Fruit Co.		176	800-551-6183	952-746-1316
Idaho Potato Commission		51	208-334-2350	208-334-2274
Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Promotion Committee		73	888-466-4667	208-722-6582
Inline Plastics Corp.		95	800-826-5567	203-924-0370

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International Hotel Motel & Restaurant Show	225	124	800-272-SHOW	
J & L Produce		128	561-422-8777	561-422-9778
Jacobs, Malcolm & Burt, Inc.		80	415-285-0400	415-824-4844
Johnston Farms		185	661-366-3201	661-366-6534
S.M. Jones & Co., Inc.		124	561-996-6662	561-996-1289
Kerian Machines, Inc.		153	800-551-5188	701-352-3776
Kern Ridge Growers, LLC		187	661-854-3156	661-854-2832
Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc.		81	717-597-2112	717-597-4096
KPG Solutions, Inc.		132	407-331-5151	407-331-5158
L&M Companies, Inc.		130	509-698-3881	509-698-3922
Lakeside Hot House Ltd.		66	519-322-1959	519-322-2964
Lakeside Organic Gardens		188	831-761-8797	831-728-1104
Tom Lange Co.		54	217-786-3300	217-786-2570
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.		183	800-796-2349	718-542-2354
Litheway Foods, Inc.		105	800-669-3169	206-263-7821
Allen Lund Company, Inc.		35	800-508-5863	818-883-5863
M&M Farms, Inc.		62	800-634-7898	305-233-0813
Maine Potato Board		62	207-769-5061	207-764-4148
Malena Produce, Inc.		142	520-281-1533	520-281-2156
Mann Packing Company, Inc.		11	800-894-8286	831-422-5171
Maple Lane Farms LLC		112	860-889-3766	860-887-3087
J. Marchini & Son / LeGrand		108	559-665-9710	559-665-9714
Marie's Salad Dressing		107	972-569-6813	214-351-4443
Market Source		181	866-906-8808	414-906-8809
Mazetti Company		103	614-846-2232	614-842-4186
Marstonardi Produce, Ltd.		45	519-326-1491	519-326-8799
Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc.		190	800-468-7111	323-588-7841
Miatech		202	800-339-5234	505-659-2204
Mission Produce, Inc.		81	888-549-3421	805-981-3660
MIXTEC Group		156	626-440-7077	626-440-1557
MJB Sales, Inc.		58	610-268-0444	610-268-0837
Monterey Mushrooms		58	593-374-1826	831-763-2300
Mooney Farms		200	530-899-2661	530-899-7476
Mountain Valley Produce, LLC		156	719-754-2139	719-754-3190
NW Farms		163	662-682-7961	662-682-7998
National Mango Board		199	877-MANGOS-1	407-629-7593
National Watermelon Promotion Board		26-27	407-657-0261	407-657-2213
Nature Berry Growers		15	831-722-5505	831-722-0251
New Jersey Department of Agriculture		15	609-292-2508	
New York Apple Association, Inc.		165	585-924-2171	585-924-1629
Niagara Fresh Fruit Co.		106	716-778-7631	716-778-8768
Nobles-Collier, Inc.		126	239-657-4401	239-657-4407
Nokota Packers, Inc.		149	701-847-2200	701-847-2109
Nonpareil Corp.		40-41	800-522-2223	208-785-3656
North Bay Produce		81	231-946-1941	231-946-1902
Northern Plains Potato Growers Association		150	218-773-3633	218-773-6227
Northern Valley Growers		153	701-894-6462	701-894-6462
Ocean Mist Farms		5	831-633-2492	831-633-4363
Omega Produce Company, Inc.		144	800-281-0410	520-281-0410
The Oppenheimer Group		79	888-321-6779	206-282-0533
P.E.I. Potato Board		78	902-892-6551	902-566-4914
Pacific Fruit, Inc.		75	415-673-5530	415-673-8457
Pacific Organic Produce		190	415-673-5535	415-673-5585
The Perishable Specialist, Inc.		81	305-477-9906	305-477-9975
Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association		81	610-284-0326	
Phillips Mushroom Farms		42	800-722-4818	
Pismo-Oceano Vegetable Exchange		108	805-489-5770	805-489-7058
PMA Foundation for Industry Talent		99	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
Jerry Porriello Produce		89	718-893-6000	718-893-0158
Potatoland Produce		25	800-767-6104	208-524-2420
Produce Exchange Co. of Atlanta, Inc.		86	800-480-4463	404-608-0401
Produce for Better Health Foundation		201	302-235-2329	302-235-5555
Produce Pro Software		79	630-395-0535	630-572-0390
Progressive Marketing Group		81	323-890-8100	323-890-8113
Walter P. Rawl & Sons, Inc.		118-119	803-894-1900	803-359-8850
Red Blossom Farms, Inc.		9	805-981-1839	805-693-0032
Rene Produce Distributors, Inc.		142	520-281-9206	520-281-2933
Riveridge Produce Marketing, Inc.		106	800-968-8833	616-887-6874
Royal Rose LLC		43	831-758-1987	831-758-6649
Sage Fruit Company		172	913-239-0060	913-239-0055
Sambazon		113	877-726-2296	949-498-8619
Samborlo Packaging		73	800-563-4466	831-724-1403
S. C. Schultz & Sons, Inc.		152	701-657-2152	701-657-2425
Ben & Schwartz & Sons, Inc.		70	613-841-8300	613-841-1283
Scott Farms, Inc.		163	913-284-4030	913-284-4872
Scott's Express, Inc.		152	800-437-5383	701-746-4615
Silver Creek Software		134	208-388-4555	208-322-5100
Skyline Potatoes		155	719-754-3484	719-754-2200
Southern Specialties		81	954-784-6000	954-784-5800
Spice World, Inc.		101	800-433-4979	407-857-7171
Spice World, Inc.		21	800-433-4979	407-857-7171
Spokely Farms		152	218-946-2825	218-946-2014
Stemilt Growers, Inc.		177	509-662-9667	509-663-2914

Blast from the Past

Spice World Inc., an Orlando-FL based garlic supplier has come a long way since founder Andy Caneza planted the company's first seeds in 1949. Still active in the business today at age 84, Caneza got his start packaging garlic in his mother's basement in New Orleans, LA.

In 1949, after completing his tour of duty in World War II, the 24-year-old was looking for ways to earn money while pursuing a journalism degree from Loyola University. "He noticed a man delivering small, packaged garlic in a local Mom and Pop store," explains Jane Abide Prue, Caneza's daughter, who also works for Spice World. "The owner of the store suggested he do it, too, and earn a little money."

While looking in the local New Orleans phone book, Caneza discovered thousands of Mom and Pop stores. "He borrowed \$10 from his future wife — my mother — to buy his first box of garlic," says Prue. "He packaged the garlic in small bags in his mother's basement," and began selling and delivering cloves out of his station wagon to more than 2,000 Mom and Pop stores.

Today, Spice World, which celebrates its 60th anniversary this year, is a fully integrated garlic supplier with nearly 200 employees. In addition to fresh garlic, the company also offers jarred, peeled and braided garlic cloves, along with specialty items such as shallots, ground ginger and chili strings, as well as a complete line of dried herbs and spices.

Prue reports, "We are California growers and have coast-to-coast distribution." In addition to the company's California operation, there is a processing plant in Florida, too, ensuring efficient distribution across the country. "Three generations of family are at work here to ensure our legacy remains as fresh as the products we deliver."



The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail info@producebusiness.com



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