

PERISHABLE PUNDIT: IMMIGRATION AND INDUSTRY COMMUNICATION
FARM PATCH MARKET • SALAD TRENDS • WHOLESALE MARKET REPORT • TIE-INS
SNACK ATTACK • RED RIVER VALLEY POTATOES • SAN LUIS POTATOES
FLORIDA FALL PRODUCE • PROFILE: LOS ANGELES • CALIFORNIA CITRUS
PRODUCE IN PIZZA • APPLES • CRANBERRIES • ROOT VEGETABLES • PECANS



# COMOSCO WAS CONTROLL OF THE STATE OF THE SEASON (Sample our "Sweet Thai" salad!)





OCTOBER 2019 • VOL. 35 • NO. 10 • \$9.90



# cover story

30

### PLANT FORWARD: WHAT'S POSSIBLE WITH PRODUCE

Fresh produce is perfectly poised as the ultimate, holistic plant-based food to champion the burgeoning movement.





# features

#### 48

#### ATTRACTION/SUSTAINABILITY TRADE-OFF SHIFTS FOR PRODUCE PACKAGING

Consumers demand solutions meeting environmental criteria.

#### 55

#### WHOLESALERS STAY PROACTIVE

Faced with adversity and change, produce wholesalers persevere in finding ways to continue serving the evolving needs of customers.

#### **76**

#### **TIE-INS OFFER PRODUCE SALES NUDGE**

Complementary items trigger impulse buys and double register rings.

#### **81**

# THE CHANGING FACE OF BERRY IMPORTS

Dollar and volume gains show astounding uptick in past 3 years.

### 88

#### **SNACK ATTACK**

Saying yes can help kids consume more fruits and vegetables.

#### **92**

# GROWERS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT RED RIVER VALLEY POTATOES

Good outlook for high quality crops of red and yellow potatoes from areas of North Dakota and Minnesota.

#### 99

#### SAN LUIS VALLEY POTATOES — GROWN AT HIGHER ELEVATIONS AND BATHED IN SUNSHINE

Good quality, reduced volume predicted as 2019 crop hits the market.

#### 102

# FLORIDA — THE USA'S FALL AND WINTER GARDEN

A plethora of the Sunshine State's fruits and vegetables find their way across America and beyond.

#### 123

#### CALIFORNIA CITRUS REIGNS SUPREME LED BY MANDARINS AND ORANGES

Specialty varieties quickly gain appeal.



# commentary

#### 18 THE FRUITS OF THOUGHT

Riding The Plant-Forward Wave — Four Hindrances To Overcome

#### **162** RETAIL PERSPECTIVE

Venue For Sharing Vision And Transparency

#### 163 WHOLESALE MARKET

Some Things Never Change, But There's Always More To Learn

#### **164** EUROPEAN MARKET

English Apples Poised To Grow

#### 165 PRODUCE ON THE MENU

Opportunities For America's Most Loved Vegetable

#### 166 VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

The Growth Of Plant-Based Meal Kits Is Win For Us All





# departments

#### **FOODSERVICE**

# 134 THE RISE IN PRODUCE-TOPPED PIZZA ON THE MENU

Could 'better for you foods' be the key to reversing declining sales?

# MERCHANDISING REVIEW 141 SEVEN WAYS TO MAKE APPLES SHINE

Keeping up with this ever-changing fruit category is paramount to your department's success.

# 150 CREATIVE CRANBERRY DISPLAYS CAN BEAR FRUIT

Effective merchandising targeted to Generation Y broadens audience.

# 154 DIGGING UP ROOT SALES DURING FALL, WINTER AND BEYOND

Retailers need to stay abreast of trends and communicate reasons for consumers to buy.

#### DRIED FRUITS & NUTS 159 PECANS: 'AMERICA'S ORIGINAL SUPERNUT'

U.S. indigenous nut on growth trajectory, boasting plenty of good-for-you properties.

# in this issue

- 6 OUIZ
- 8 WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE
- 10 FORWARD THINKING
- 12 JIM PREVOR'S SPECIAL NOTE
- 14 PRODUCE WATCH
- 20 RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES
- 21 COMMENTS AND ANALYSIS
- 169 INFORMATION SHOWCASE
- 170 BLAST FROM THE PAST

# special features

#### 22

# FROM THE PAGES OF PERISHABLEPUNDIT.COM

Pundit's Mailbag — Western Growers Responds to 'Preaching to the Choir'

#### 24

# ASCENDANT INDEPENDENT: THE FARM PATCH MARKET



Friendship, fun and careers mix at Central Texas produce institution.

#### 26

#### TREND TRACKER

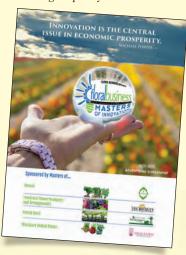
10 New Produce + Protein Products



# 107

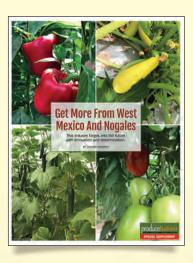
# FLORAL BUSINESS MASTERS OF INNOVATION ARE YOU READY FOR TOMORROW?

In business it's not enough to stay where you are when the world around you is moving so quickly.



#### 115 NOGALES: GET MORE FROM WEST MEXICO AND NOGALES

This industry forges into the future with innovation and determination.



# 127 LOS ANGELES PEOPLE AND PRODUCE

REFLECT ITS DIVERSITY

A city suited to supply fruits and vegetables from around the world.



#### 133

# FOODSERVICE PROFILE: TUSCAN SON: TRADITION WITH A TWIST

Italian farm-to-table spot shines close to Santa Monica beach.

#### 167

#### POEM BY JIM PREVOR

Ya Gotta Believe!



Hi there.

Wondering how to pronounce our brand name? You're not the only one. As our founder would say it, it's his last name after all... 'Fyffes' is pronounced just like 'life' or 'wife'. See? Deliciously simple.

FYFFES. EASY TO EAT, EASY TO PRONOUNCE.



#### produce quiz



THIS MONTH'S WINNER
JIM PANDOL
Owner/President
Jim Pandol & Company
Selma, CA

From the time he was 8-years old, there was never a question how Jim Pandol would make a living. "I am second-generation born American. As a child, I would ride my bike to the fields; I didn't want to sit home and watch TV," says Pandol, who grew up on the family farm in the picturesque San Joaquin Valley.

In college, Pandol majored in agricultural economics, which further prepared him for the challenges ahead. "After my freshman year, I was invited to start helping the sales staff (at Pandol Brothers). Back in the 8o's there were no cell phones, so the sales folks were tied to their desks.

"When they were busy, I would take the customers out to see the ranch because I knew the pack styles. I really learned the sales-end of the business that way," he says.

Within a few days of graduation, Pandol found himself on a freighter out of Fort Lauderdale, FL, heading to a banana planta-

tion in the Dominican Republic. Thus, began his life of adventure in the produce industry, when Pandol would spend an average of 9 months each year out of the country. "When I first got to the Dominican Republic, I didn't know a lot of Spanish," he says, adding, "But I learned quickly because if you couldn't speak Spanish, you didn't eat."

For the majority of his career, Pandol coordinated production and sales. "I knew the ins and outs of farms, packinghouses and sales," he says, adding, "So when I took over Pandol Brothers, I continued coordinating production and sales."

Pandol says the produce industry is most definitely for Type A personalities, and it's not for everyone. "You are dealing with perishables, and you have to move it, and you have to move it now," he says.

He has been a reader of Produce Business since its start. "Jim Prevor (Produce Business' editor) and I are about the same age, and I think we bonded early on. We were both the bosses' kids," he says. An avid reader, Pandol makes a point to read the *Blast From The Past*. "I see this as pleasure reading for me. There is always good information in there."

**How To Win!** To win the Produce Business Quiz, the first thing you must 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 2019 issue of Produce Business. The winner must agree to submit a color photo to be published in that issue.

#### WIN A TOP FLITE GOLF CLUB SET

This Top Flite XL 13-piece, graphite-shaft set includes a 46occ Ti composite driver, low-profile 3 wood and 4 and 5 hybrids. Wide-sole stainless steel irons feature perimeter weighting and a low center of gravity to allow for improved ball flight. Comes with lightweight stand bag and headcovers.

QUESTIONS FOR THE C	CTOBER ISSUE	
1) What company has recently introduced Bountiful Kits and will sample them in booth #3437 at		
the Fresh Summit in Ahahei	m, CA?	
2) Name the Colorado-based grower/shipper that contends, "You've Heard of Us?"		
3) What state produces enough fruits and vegetables that it has been hailed as the USA's Fall and Winter Garden?		
4) What Pennsylvania-based mushroom company says, "It's Not A Party Without" their product?		
5) "Where Legacies Are Born," is the motto of which company that also can boast 'six generations		
of family farms'?		
6) What are two of the fastest growing produce ingredients used as pizza toppers, according to		
Datassential's Pizza, the SNAP Profile?		
This issue was: $\ \square$ Personally addressed to me $\ \square$ Addressed to someone else		
Name	Position	
Company		
Address		
		ZIP
Phone	Email	

Photocopies of this form are acceptable.

Please send answers to: editor@producebusiness.com or copy and send via mail to: OCTOBER QUIZ PRODUCE BUSINESS • P.O. Box 810425 • Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425



October 2019 • VOL. 35 • NO. 10 • \$9.90

P.O. Box 810425 • Boca Raton • FL 33481-0425 Phone: 561-994-1118 • Fax: 561-994-1610 info@producebusiness.com

PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
James E. Prevor
JPrevor@phoenixmedianet.com

PUBLISHER/EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Ken Whitacre KWhitacre@phoenixmedianet.com

VP EDITORIAL Ellen Koteff EKoteff@phoenixmedianet.com

PRODUCEBUSINESSUK.com
EDITOR
Chris Burt
CBurt@phoenixmedianet.com

SPECIAL PROJECTS EDITOR
Mira Slott
MSlott@phoenixmedianet.com

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR
Diana Levine
DLevine@phoenixmedianet.com

PRODUCTION LEADER Jackie Tucker

PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT Freddy Pulido

EVENT COORDINATOR
Jackie LoMonte
JLoMonte@phoenixmedianet.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Carol M. Bareuther, Mindy Hermann,
Bob Johnson, Matt Ogg, Howard Riell,
Jodean Robbins

ADVERTISING Eric Nieman, Associate Publisher Niemaneric@aol.com

Steve Jacobs SJacobs@phoenixmedianet.com

Sandy Lee Sandypnews@aol.com

Doug Ohlemeier DOhlemeier@phoenixmedianet.com

Ellen Rosenthal ERosenthal@phoenixmedianet.com

DIRECTORY SHOWCASE MANAGER
Kimberley Crater
KCrater@phoenixmedianet.com

FLORAL DEPARTMENT MARKETING E. Shaunn Alderman SAlderman@phoenixmedianet.com

Send insertion orders, payments, press releases, photos, letters to the editor, etc., to Produce Business, P.O. Box 810425 Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425 PH: 561.994.1118 FAX: 561.994.1610

Produce Business is published by Phoenix Media Network, Inc., James E. Prevor, Chairman of the Board P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425. Entire contents © Copyright 2019 Phoenix Media Network, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A. Publication Agreement No. 40047928



# Keep the POM POMS in the berry cooler. And keep the extra profits wherever you like.



- POM POMs continued to dominate last California season, outselling all competition, combined, by more than 2X.<sup>1</sup>
- We are once again investing over \$2 million in marketing to help these ruby-red gems fly off your shelves.
- For maximum profits, stock both the single-serve and multi-serve SKUs in the berry cooler and healthy snacking section.
- The season starts in October, so call 877-328-7667.



© 2019 POM Wonderful LLC. All Rights Reserved. WONDERFUL, POM, POM WONDERFUL, POM POMS, POM POMS WONDERFUL, HALOS, and the accompanying logos are trademarks of POM Wonderful LLC or its affiliates. PA190607-08

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Source: IRI, Total US MULO, Arils Category Dollar Sales, 10/22/2018–2/17/2019.











# Applauding New Proposed Regulations For Truckers' 'Hours Of Service'



BY JOHN HOLLAY, SENIOR DIRECTOR PUBLIC POLICY, UNITED FRESH

n the fresh produce industry, nothing is more important than ensuring our customers receive product that is delivered in a safe and timely manner. When people think of the fresh produce they consume, they want to know two things — when was it harvested, and is it safe to eat?

Ensuring our produce is delivered in a timely manner requires a lot of moving parts. From the field where workers are picking the produce, to the employees delivering the product to the warehouse, to the packaging of the product, and ultimately, the fresh fruits and vegetables finding their way to your plate — speed and safety are paramount. Customers demand and rely on our industry to deliver them produce as soon as possible, fresh from the farm to the table. However, current regulations often make that process difficult.

Recently, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration released a proposed rule regarding the regulations that govern the "hours of service" in which truck drivers are able to operate. United Fresh strongly supports these new regulatory proposals, because they will help us achieve our goals of ensuring consumers get the freshest, safest product available. As anyone in the produce industry knows, delivering fresh produce isn't easy, particularly given the challenges involved in the transportation of fruits and vegetables.

Specifically, the new regulations seek to provide drivers the flexibility they need to deliver product in a timely manner without jeopardizing their safety. For anyone who has visited a distribution warehouse, you know that time is of the essence. Often times, drivers whose hours are limited wait extended periods in order to load their trucks before ever getting on the road. These delays cost time and money for both the drivers and the industry.



These new proposed regulations would help ensure drivers will have the flexibility they need to operate safely while enabling consumers to have access to the produce they want as soon as it leaves the field or the orchard.

Furthermore, these delays have the effect of compromising the freshness of the produce that is being delivered. No one — particularly the companies whose produce is being delivered — want drivers on the road who are not well rested. They also don't want arbitrary rules that prevent a driver who can see his delivery point on the horizon to be forced to stop before

completing his or her trip. These new regulations will help ensure consumers get fresher product, and drivers can move on to their next delivery as soon as possible.

Safety is No. 1 in our industry — the assurance that the produce we sell and you consume is something we take very seriously. Our commitment to safety also applies not just to the produce we sell, but also to the drivers who deliver our produce to the grocery store or the restaurant in which they are consumed. The revised hours of service regulations that have been proposed seek to achieve both. These new proposed regulations would help ensure drivers will have the flexibility they need to operate safely while enabling consumers to have access to the produce they want as soon as it leaves the field or the orchard. United Fresh looks forward to the finalization of these rules and the increased flexibility they will provide for our members, our drivers and our consumers.



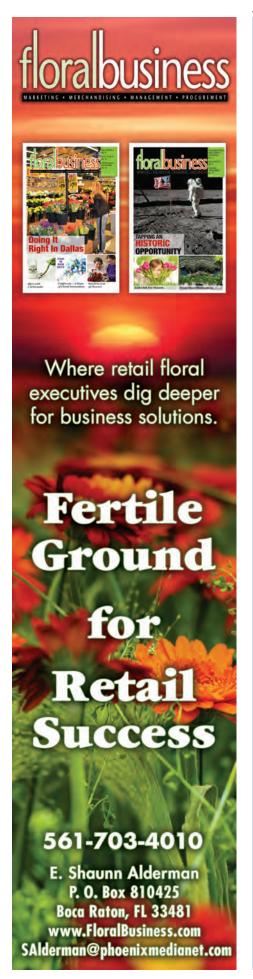
When your customers see the Jersey Fresh logo, they know they are getting superior fruits and vegetables from the Garden State. Jersey Fresh delivers the freshness, quality and flavor discerning consumers demand. And by promoting Jersey Fresh in store and on ad, you're letting them know that you are providing them with the best.

You can be sure if it's Jersey Fresh!









#### **OCTOBER 17-19**

#### PMA FRESH SUMMIT

Conference Venue: Anaheim Convention Center,

Anaheim, CA

**Conference Management:** Produce Marketing

Association, Newark, DE Phone: (302) 738-7100

Email: MemberServices@pma.com Website: pma.com/Events/FreshSummit

#### **OCTOBER 22-24**

#### FRUIT ATTRACTION

Conference Venue: Feria de Madrid, Spain Conference Management: IFEMA-FEPEX, Madrid

Phone: (34) 91 722 30 00 Email: fruitattraction@ifema.es Website: www.fruitattraction.com

#### **DECEMBER 10-13**

#### NEW YORK PRODUCE SHOW AND CONFERENCE

Conference Venue: Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, NY Conference Management: Phoenix Media Network,

Boca Raton, FL

Phone: (561) 994-1118 • Fax: (561) 994-1610

Email: info@nyproduceshow.com Website: nyproduceshow.com

#### **JANUARY 9-12, 2019**

# SOUTHEAST REGIONAL FRUIT & VEGETABLE CONFERENCE

Conference Venue: Savannah International Trade & Convention Center. Savannah. GA

Conference Management: Georgia Fruit & Vegetable

Growers Association, LaGrange, GA

Phone: (877) 994-3842 Email: registration@gfvga.org

Website: gfvga.org

#### **JANUARY 14-15**

#### POTATO EXPO

Conference Venue: The Mirage, Las Vegas, NV Conference Management: National Potato Council

Phone: (202) 682-9456

Email: questions@potato-expo.com Website: www.potato-expo.com

#### **JANUARY 14-16**

#### **WORLD OF HEALTHY FLAVORS**

Conference Venue: The Culinary Institute of America at

Copia, Napa, CA

 $\textbf{Conference Management:} \ \textbf{CIA} \ \textbf{at Copia}, \ \textbf{Napa}, \ \textbf{CA}$ 

Phone: (707) 967-2439

Email: shara.orem@culinary.edu Website: ciaprochef.com/wohf/

#### **JANUARY 19-21**

#### WINTER FANCY FOOD SHOW

**Conference Venue:** Moscone Center, San Francisco **Conference Management:** Specialty Food Association,

New York

Phone: (212) 482-6440 • Fax: (212) 482-6555

Website: fancyfoodshows.com

#### **JANUARY 22-24**

#### TROPICAL PLANT INDUSTRY EXPO (TPIE)

**Conference Venue:** Broward County Convention Center,

Fort Lauderdale, FL

**Conference Management:** The Florida Nursery, Growers

& Landscape Association, Orlando, FL

Phone: (407) 295-7994

Email: shaines@fngla.org or bdeal@fngla.org

Website: tpie.org

#### **JANUARY 24-27**

#### FMI MIDWINTER EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE

Conference Venue: JW Marriott Phoenix Desert Ridge,

Phoenix, AZ

**Conference Management:** Food Marketing Institute,

Arlington, VA

Phone: (202) 452-8444 Email: register@fmi.org

Website: fmi.org/midwinter-conference

#### **FEBRUARY 4-7**

#### FRUIT LOGISTICA

Conference Venue: Berlin ExpoCenter City, Berlin
Conference Management: Messe Berlin Gmbh, Berlin
Phone: 49(0)30/3038-0 ● Fax: +49(0)30/3038-2020

Email: fruitlogistica@messe-berlin.de Website: fruitlogistica.com

#### **FEBRUARY 5-7**

#### **HEALTHY KITCHENS, HEALTHY LIVES**

Conference Venue: Culinary Institute of America

Greystone, Napa, CA

Conference Management: Culinary Institute of America

Greystone, St. Helena, CA **Phone: (707) 967-2498** 

Email: caitlin.petrucelli@culinary.edu Website: healthykitchens.org

#### **GLOBAL CHERRY SUMMIT**

Conference Venue: Monticello Conference Center

Santiago, Chile

**APRIL 23** 

Conference Management: Yentzen Group

Boca Raton, FL

Phone: (56) 22 717 11 14 Email: gyentzen@yc.cl

Website: globalcherrysummit.com/en/

 $To \ submit\ events\ to\ our\ Forward\ Thinking\ calendar,\ please\ email\ info@producebusiness.com$ 





# Our Commitment To Deeper Industry Thought Leadership

To advance, our industry needs

more than facile answers.

his is the 34th anniversary of the launch of PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine. We unveiled the first issue at the PMA convention in San Francisco back in 1985. Since that time, we have committed to publishing a report each year to our readers on the progress of this enterprise.

The world of media has changed substantially since 1985, and we have changed with it. Who knew we would publish on the Internet, do live events around the world, publish in Chinese and Spanish, as well as in our native tongue?

There is no question technology provides many advantages. Produce industry executives used to be chained to their desks because of the risk inherent in dealing with a perishable commodity. They now travel freely, confident they can be reached on their cell phones to receive photos of distressed products, talk to people with video and do whatever is necessary to execute their jobs no matter where they are.

It is also true advancements such as social media have transformed the nature of relationships. When this author was a boy, if a friend moved away, the relationship would probably wither. Today, two distant

friends remain connected to each other's lives. They see where their friend is, what he or she is doing, and they communicate back and forth. They remain friends.

In business, long-distance relationships are deeper because one sees a broader spectrum of life — where your contact is vacationing, what his kids look like, that his mother died, that his aunt is in the hospital. You see your contact's favorite charity, when he takes his kid to visit colleges and so much you never would have known.

Some people, of course, resist this intimacy. They will accept a LinkedIn request but not a friend request on Facebook, trying to keep a separation between the personal and professional. We have not, however, found that to be typical in produce. Partly because it is still very much a family business, but also because declining a friend request is not a neutral act. Who wants to make enemies?

Of course, some stay off social media, and some have profiles but never post. The voyeurs of the social media world hope to learn what everyone is doing, but reveal nothing of themselves. It is one of those "too-clever-by-half" strategies, as relationships depend as much on giving as receiving ... on sharing as part of learning.

Still technology is a tool and can have positive or negative ramifications — depending on how it is used.

On sister publication, *PerishablePundit.com*, I have written about C-SPAN and how transparency can actually change what you are being transparent about. So, though the old legislative process might not have been pretty, putting it on TV transforms legislators into actors. It makes it very difficult for serious work to get done.

Think of the poor kids who live in the world where their friends are constantly posting pictures of the fantastic meals they are having, the incredible activities they are engaged in, checking in from all corners of the globe — this creates a lot of pressure.

There was a study done once of people's enjoyment following a visit to Disney World. When they interviewed families as they were leaving, the reviews were mixed. There were good times but also cranky children, tantrums and disagreements among the family. When the same families were interviewed a year later, their recollection of their trip was much more highly rated. Why? Because they had a year to look at pictures and video — and one typically doesn't take pictures of kids having tantrums. One takes photos of happy children meeting Mickey Mouse.

Ok, that is just a vacation memory, but kids today are bombarded with a false representation of life — where everyone is portraying endless streams of happiness. Then there is the judging. All day long, in everything they do, kids get measured with "Shares" and "Likes." Is it a surprise that The National Institute for Health points out that adolescent depression is on the rise?

It is a problem for business as well. Many companies find themselves subject to consumer criticism as alleged outrages spread on social media.

Consumers have also learned that by making complaints public, they can often get a quick response. Most airlines have whole departments dedicated

to consumers publicly tweeting about complaints of all sorts.

Society struggles because social media creates pressure for instantaneous responses. When *The New York Times* ran a piece a few weeks ago announcing a new sexual harassment complaint again Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, several Democratic candidates for president immediately called for his impeachment. Yet, shortly thereafter, it was revealed the woman, who was supposedly harassed, had no memory of the incident. But with the 24-hour news cycle, the ease of sending a tweet and the sense one has to respond instantaneously, it leads to many things said that are incorrect or regrettable.

We are lucky to share ideas in print, online and in person. But long after the Internet Age, Produce Business magazine continues to grow. Why is that? Well, we would say part of it is that the ability to think without the constraints that you have to Tweet in the next two seconds or someone will beat you to it actually produces deeper thoughts.

To advance, our industry needs more than facile answers; it needs comprehensive journalism, and we gather the opinions of more than a thousand industry experts every year. This type of journalism requires contemplation, and we spend countless hours understanding and amalgamating that expert input.

What we do here requires a commitment to doing the right thing, not just doing things right now. That has been our commitment for 34 years, and we promise more to come.

James 3. Trees



# NEW



DELICATE, PETITE SUCCULENT FLORETS WITH GREEN STEM SUPERIOR FLAVOR

ADDS TASTE AND TEXTURE TO ANY DISH

#### produce watch

#### TRANSITION



Sam Burleson

#### **BLAND FARMS**

Bland Farms of Glenville, GA, and Vidalia Brands has hired industry veteran **Sam Burleson** to lead sales and marketing for the Northeast region. Burleson will lead client-grower relations, while also continuing to help expand Bland's strategic retailer partnerships from

coast to coast. For more than 30 years, Burleson has been a top-producing, performance-driven sales and marketing executive pioneering business strategies that increase product awareness, market share, and profitability. "Sam has a great eye for new business opportunities and an exceptional ability to develop and maintain good retailer relationships," says **Delbert Bland**, president of Bland Farms.

#### TRANSITIONS

#### **CALIFORNIA GIANT BERRY**

**Tom Smith**, the director of foodservice at California Giant Berry Farms, Watsonville, CA, is taking on a new role as director of foodservice and organ-



Tom Smith

ics. In addition to leading the company's expansion in this important segment for the past three years, Smith has been serving as the sales liaison with the company's organic growers. Cal Giant also announced it has hired **Thomas Taggart** as senior director of operations. A 25-year produce industry veteran,

Taggart will play a vital role in the company's growth throughout North America, South America, and Mexico, and be responsible for quality systems, food safety, and innovation. Taggart will be working closely with Juana Ramirez, who was hired earlier this summer as the new director of supply chain management.

#### ANNOUNCEMENT



# AVOCADOS FROM PERU, NY JETS AND SHOPRITE BUILD RECORD GUAC BOWL

Avocados From Peru (AFP), Washington, DC, teamed up last month with the NFL's New York Jets and ShopRite to promote health and fitness with a unique series of events, including breaking the world record for the "largest bowl of guacamole" at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey. Weighing in at a record 9,090 pounds, the gargantuan bowl of guacamole was certified by representatives from the World Avocado Organization. "We are excited to celebrate the start of what is sure to be a successful season for the New York Jets," said Xavier Equihua, president and chief executive of the Peruvian Avocado Commission.

#### ANNOUNCEMENT



Jeff Huckaby and Stephen Censky

### GRIMMWAY FARMS GETS VISIT FROM U.S. AGRICULTURE DIGNITARIES

U.S. Department of Agriculture deputy secretary Stephen Censky, along with deputy press secretary Alec Varsamis and senior congressional advisor Veronica Wong, visited Grimmway Farms headquarters in Arvin, CA, during early September. The visit to Grimmway signified one of many listening sessions the deputy secretary is pursuing to learn more about key issues facing California farmers, such as immigration and water rights. Company president Jeff Huckaby met with Censky to discuss concerns regarding guest-worker programs, global trade and tariffs, and the impact water will have on farmers. Huckaby and Censky also toured local farmland and facilities, highlighting carrot processing technology and organic vegetable harvest operations. Grimmway leadership representative Brandon Grimm also met with Censky to discuss how the Food Safety Modernization Act and the new FDA audits are being implemented at Grimmway and Cal-Organic Farms facilities.

#### ANNOUNCEMENT

# SHUMAN FARMS UNVEILS NEW ORGANIC LINE PACKAGING AT SOUTHERN INNOVATIONS

Shuman Farms, the Reidsville, GA-based producer and shipper of Vidalia and Peruvian sweet onions, has changed the look, feel and sustainability of its organic packaging. The use of a different netting and thinner film and plastic in the new consumer bags will reduce packaging by 38%, while maintaining the structural integrity. "The revamp of our organic packaging is just the beginning of an overall initiative to



increase sustainability across all of our RealSweet brand products," said John Shuman, president. The goal of this new initiative is to reduce plastic usage, educate consumers on the recyclability of onion packaging and address shopper concerns about food waste in America.

#### **TRANSITIONS**

#### **NATIONAL MANGO BOARD**

Agriculture Secretary **Sonny Perdue** appointed six members to serve on the National Mango Board, Orlando FL. The appointees include two new members and four returning members. Appointees will serve three-year terms beginning Jan. 1, 2020. They include:

importers Dr. Richard J. Campbell (Homestead, FL), James S. Watson (Edinburg, TX), Marsela McGrane-Vogel of San Pedro, CA; foreign producers Eddy René Martinez Morán (Guatemala); Norberto Galvan Gonzalez (Chiapas, Mexico) and Joaquin Balarezo Valdez (Piura, Peru). "On behalf of the entire board, we congratulate and welcome the new board members," says Manuel Michel, executive director. I also want to thank two members who will be completing six years of service on the board, Chris Ciruli and Jiovani Guevara, for their strong leadership and commitment." The NMB also announced the hiring of Michele Hoard as new retail account manager for the West Coast region. She replaces Katie Manetti.

#### ANNOUNCEMENT

### RUBY ROBINSON REBRANDS TO BECOME 'THE RUBY COMPANY'

Chicago-based produce distribution and supply company Ruby Robinson has officially changed its name to 'The Ruby

Company.' Originally founded in 1966 and specializing in the sales and distribution of potatoes and onions,



Ruby Robinson has evolved to a full line supplier of nearly all fresh commodities servicing customers coast-to-coast. The rebranding included a top-to-bottom redesign of the company's website, logo, graphics, communications and general correspondence. "We took this opportunity to rethink not only our name but our entire brand," says **David Cohen**, president and chief executive. "We are proud to be ahead of the curve in a rapidly evolving industry. Our new brand identity as The Ruby Company will now exemplify just how far the business has come."

#### ANNOUNCEMENT

# CRUNCH PAK ROLLS OUT VALUE-ADDED FRESH PEARS TO RETAIL CUSTOMERS

Crunch Pak, the
Cashmere, WA-based
company known for
its sliced apples,
is now offering its
fresh sliced pears
to retail customers.
Available in a 7-oz.
package, the Opera
sweet sliced pears
are now available to
customers nation-



wide. The company first introduced its fresh-cut pear technology at United Fresh Produce Association show, where the product won the 2019 Innovation Award in the best fruit category. According to Megan Wade, product development and marketing manager, slicing pears was an original goal of Crunch Pak when the company started in 2000 but the technology didn't exist to get the quality and consistency consumers wanted.

Produce & Floral Watch are regular features of Produce Business. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a high resolution image to: Managing Editor, Produce Business, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425 or email us at info@producebusiness.com



# Nature's Juice Box

Drink it, Crack it, Eat it!







# 100% natural product

No added sugar, preservatives, or fungicides.



# Straw included

Just stick the straw through the hole in the label and sip.



# Easy to crack

Hit the empty shell with a spoon to get at the coconut meat inside.



Distributed by S Katzman Produce.

For more information, contact hamona@katzmanproduce.com.

#### produce watch

#### TRANSITIONS

#### **OPPY**



Oppy, Vancouver, BC, has promoted James Milne, Karin Gardner, Brett Libke and Garland Perkins to four newly created positions to help stimulate business growth and innovation. Milne has been promoted to senior vice president, categories and marketing and will formulate the high-level strategic direction of each of Oppy's

major product groups, including apples and pears, avocados, berries, citrus, field and greenhouse vegetables, grapes, tropicals and stone fruit. Gardner has been promoted to executive director of marketing, taking the reins from Milne and now leading the execution of Oppy's overall marketing strategy. Libke has been moved up to senior vice president of sales, North America, and Perkins has been promoted to senior manager of insights and innovation.

#### ANNOUNCEMENT

#### PEELZ GIVES FOWLER PACKING NEW MANDARIN BRAND



Fowler Packing Company, Fresno, CA, has launched a new California mandarin brand, Peelz, the first time the legacy company has brought a branded mandarin to market. Peelz will be sold in 1-, 2-, 3- and 5-pound pack configurations and will be available in November, when the California mandarin season begins.

Fowler Packing was part of the mandarin revolution and has represented significant volume in the category for nearly 20 years. It will now offer mandarins direct to retailers in the new Peelz label. The company has an energetic marketing launch campaign planned that focuses on product trial through targeted digital campaigns, demos, displays, and giveaways while supporting individual retailer's needs. In another announcement, Fowler has hired **Sean Nelsen** as vice president of sales and marketing.

#### ANNOUNCEMENT



John Offerdahl, former inside linebacker for the Miami Dolphins and Steven Bell, executive chef for Avocados From Mexico.

# AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO OPENS CONCESSION STANDS AT MIAMI'S HARD ROCK STADIUM

The Avocados From Mexico (AFM) brand has launched its new "avocado-centric" concessions at the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, FL, with the debut of "TACOS por fAVOr." From Avo Mojo Chicken Tacos and Avo Pork Carnitas Tacos to a sauce bar and fresh guacamole and chips, those dining at Hard Rock Stadium, which is home to the Miami Dolphins, University of Miami football, as well as Super Bowl LIV and a host of other events, can indulge in their avocado cravings at multiple "TACOS por fAVOr" locations. "We're thrilled to partner with Hard Rock Stadium to deliver fresh, innovative avocado menu items to fans at this incredible venue," says Alvaro Luque, AFM's president and chief executive.

Produce & Floral Watch are regular features of Produce Business. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a high resolution image to: Managing Editor, Produce Business, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425 or e-mail us at info@producebusiness.com



Cornell University's Future-Leaders-in-Produce Program at The New York Produce Show and Conference presented by PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine





















CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION: 212-426-2218 info@foundationalexcellence.com

www.foundationalexcellence.com



# **Dried Pomegranate Arils**









# 100% natural product

No added sugar or preservatives.



# Slow dried to preserve flavor

Our special drying process preserves the flavor and nutritional value better than the standard freeze drying method.



### Versatile

Enjoy them on their own, on yogurt, mixed into a salad, with cereal, dipped into chocolate, baked into dessert... the possibilities are endless!



#### fruits of thought



# Riding The Plant-Forward Wave — Four Hindrances To Overcome

The challenge is not to

think the zeitgeist of

the times will do the

job for us. We need

to innovate, to find

new products and new

ways to promote.

BY JIM PREVOR, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

he world is ablaze with people promoting plant-forward eating. From Bill Gates to TV chefs, from environmentalists to culinary schools, it's the next big thing. Not surprisingly, there is not a marketing mind in the produce industry not looking for a path to use this enthusiasm as a way to sell more fresh fruits and vegetables.

It will not be easy.

First, the way the plant-forward movement has developed actu-

ally functions as a nemesis to more produce usage. If you care deeply about CO2 emissions, or animal welfare, or believe your health requires it — and therefore commit yourself to not eating hamburger at your weekend barbeque — the fruit and vegetable default for a good 30 years has been to grill a nice portobello mushroom. In recent years, blended meat and mushroom combinations have offered consumers an opportunity to reduce beef consumption while not abstaining from beef.

The massive efforts to create meat substitutes, such as the Impossible Burger and Beyond Meat, typically involve little, if any, produce. These products are marketed specifically to

people who, for one reason or another, are interested in reducing their beef consumption. In the absence of meat substitutes, these same people would have to find alternatives, many of which are actual fruits and vegetables.

Now, if these meat substitutes turn out to be indistinguishable from beef, sure, many people might buy them with the thought they can help the environment, prevent cruelty to animals or reduce their calorie consumption — but none of this is likely to have any impact on fresh produce consumption.

Second, people outside the produce industry don't recognize there are, *de facto*, many different produce industries. There was a time when, say, domestic apple producers were the suppliers of not only fresh apples but also apple juice. Today, the price of apple juice concentrate makes it a financial loser for U.S. producers to sell into this market. They grow for the fresh market where prices are at a premium.

So, when you hear some clever person has found a way to increase the fruit or vegetable content by adding a powdered or liquefied produce item — again they may be doing something good for the world and even good for the individual. But, in most cases these items are likely to be produced, processed and imported by companies that are not part of the U.S. fresh produce industry.

The same goes for dried, canned, frozen, juice or shelf-stable items. They may increase produce consumption, which may have a positive impact in the world, but these items, whether sold in the produce department or not, are not part of the fresh produce industry as we know it.

And, by the way, some of these products get an advantage over fresh produce by not having to disclose country-of-origin. The law requires retailers notify their customers of the country-of-origin of muscle cuts of meat and ground lamb, chicken, goat, wild and farm-raised fish and shellfish, perishable agricultural commodities, peanuts, pecans, ginseng and macadamia nuts. Many of the new plant-forward items, though, are processed products. The mushrooms may be from China, but that fact

is not required to be included on the label of the packaged processed item.

Third, industry promotions have been obligated, due to internal industry politics, to treat all produce items as equal. So, whether the grapes are antiquated varieties that don't actually taste very good or the newest and most delicious hybrid, they all get to participate under the various industry umbrellas. We push to get produce into schools. To that end, we obviously should be offering something appealing to school children, say Cotton Candy grapes or Honeycrisp apples, in order to turn kids onto fresh produce.

Sadly, the decision of what to serve children is actually a function of the lowest bidder; as a result school foodservice programs typically get the cheapest produce available. In other words, what adults are unwilling to buy is served to the kids.

Think about it ... one reason we have to talk about animal cruelty, global warming and high fat content in the hopes of driving consumption is because the produce we serve to our most impressionable consumers is the worst we've got.

Fourth, produce marketing is somewhat dangerous because our products are not consistent. However, good or bad, the Impossible or Beyond Burgers always taste the same. That makes advertising more feasible and even profitable. What we can do, however, is offer a peach or tomato that is so delicious it brings one to tears. Conversely, we can offer one with no taste at all.

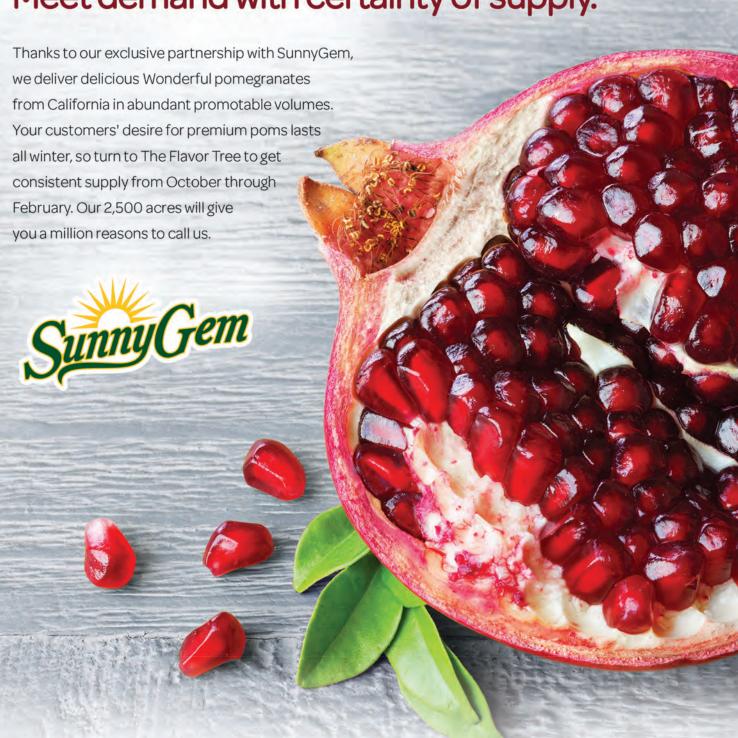
This makes the marketing of fresh produce difficult, because attracting consumers to a bad-tasting product can be a turn-off and dampen consumption long term.

The obstacles are formidable. Still, produce has many of the flavor, health, ethical and environmental attributes people seek today. This creates an incredible opportunity. The challenge is not to think the zeitgeist of the times will do the job for us. We need to innovate, to find new products and new ways to promote. We need to ride this tide, but we have

to recognize the bigger the wave, the more important it is to know how to ride it. **pb** 

James 3. Thereor

# Passion for California grown pomegranates runs high. Meet demand with certainty of supply.



The Flavor Tree Fruit Company, LLC Hanford, CA | ph: 559 584 8888 e-mail: sales@flavortreefruit.com





# Setting the (Salad) Bar High For Foodservice-At-Retail Success

BY RICK STEIN, VICE PRESIDENT, FRESH FOODS, FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE (FMI)

t's not really a toss-up: the salad bar, and all of its ready-to-toss ingredients, is a winner for foodservice-at-retail.

Like many people, I travel a lot for business. In addition to seeing a great deal of prepared foods areas as part of my store visits, I am a regular patron of salad bars during my trips. It's a way for me to eat healthy on the road and customize my salad. Which, by the way, is almost always crunchy and usually has some green and red peppers, onions, cucumbers, radishes, large croutons mixed with crumbled blue cheese and balsamic vinegar dressing.

Everyone has their own perfect salad, of course, with favorite ingredients that can be rotated on a whim or are a "must" every time they belly up to the salad bar. That's the beauty of the concept, and why salad bars are an integral part of foodservice-at-retail programs. They are the ultimate DIY, in that all of the elements are already prepared and ready to be personalized.

Physically, the salad bar is both a destination and anchor in the prepared foods area. On another level, salads help meet consumer demand for a greater diversity of foodservice offerings. The salad bar, teeming with an array of ingredients, represents a place with a wide variety of produce items to be added to a shopper's mix.

For one thing, retailers can add produce items grown locally and/or in season. We know from the 2019 Power of Produce report that more than half of shoppers are looking for an expanded local or seasonal assortment of produce.

In addition, a salad bar is a way to introduce new or unusual types of produce that are trending in culinary circles. Jackfruit, which became a big thing in foodie world, can add some color, zest and interest to a salad. The same might be said about trending items such as Swiss Chard or even kelp. Shoppers can try new things at the salad bar in the quantities of their choosing.

We know shoppers crave new ingredients: according to the new 2019 Power of Foodservice at Retail report from FMI, an overwhelming 88% of shoppers want to see more



new items and flavors in retail foodservice. While 31% want to see a rotation of flavors and items on a monthly basis, a good 28% want even greater levels of innovation and would be interested in items rotated on a weekly or possibly daily basis. Today's marinated artichokes can be tomorrow's grilled asparagus, and tomorrow's croutons can be Friday's Asiago crisps.

As part of foodservice-at-retail programs that also include hot food bars and graband-go deli items, salad bars have helped drive the overall success of deli-prepared areas, which are closing in at \$13 billion in annual sales, according to the analysis. The report confirms salad bars comprise more than a third (33.7 percent) of total prepared food sales, followed by sandwiches (21.4%), sushi, (10.4%), appetizers (6.3%) soup (5.1%) and complete meals (4.7 percent).

While it's a bit of "build it and they will come," the salad bar is more than a station for piling ingredients in a container. Grocery stores can deliver convenience — and connect with customers — beyond the easy-to-make salad by creating separate and speedy checkout areas for items in the deli-prepared/foodservice-at-retail section. While it isn't as personalized, premade salads, such as basic chopped, Caesar or garden varieties, can be offered and ordered online. These prepackaged salads,

created by the retailer or available from produce brands, are more of a complementary solution than a competitive item, at a time when grab-and-go, ready-to-eat foods are of interest to 68 percent of today's shoppers.

Finally, as retailers know well, talking to customers is an integral point of differentiation and provides key insights for ways to raise the bar on assortment, merchandising and service. That's true for the salad bar, too.

When I'm filling up at the salad bar during my business travels, I often strike up conversations with fellow shoppers, asking them in a causal way what they like about this particular shopping and eating experience. Their answers are almost always about taste, convenience and variety, illustrating the point that diverse selection of flavorful ingredients that can be paired in a unique and custom way is a strategy for success at salad bars and, for that matter, the whole deli-prepared area of a store.

For more information, visit www.FMI. org/FreshFoods or follow Rick on Twitter @ Ricks\_FreshFood



Rick Stein is vice president, fresh foods, for the Food Marketing Institute (FMI). Follow him @Ricks\_FreshFood. Visit www. FMI.org/FreshFoods, www.FMI.org/Store.

# Salad Bars Offer New Opportunity For Produce

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

he salad bar is a perplexing thing. First of all, it is rarely a produce item. Some stores make it a separate department, but most have it as part of the deli. Typically, this is driven by a sense that produce clerks, often selected because they can handle heavy cases, don't have the finesse required to staff a salad bar. Out in the restaurant world, salad bars have been disappearing for years. There was a moment when Wendy's had them in every restaurant. Steakhouses and pizza places all had them. Now they are diminished.

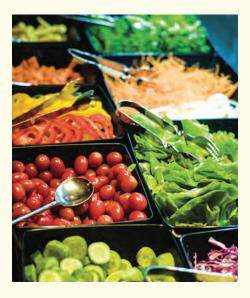
Even when salad bars are given away for free, as to many K-12 schools, they often don't last long. Tremendous labor and product costs, concerns over food safety, and, now, food waste and even fear of the flu being transmitted have led to salad bars being removed in cities such as Boston.

It may be true that "salad bars" comprise 33.7% of total prepared food sales in supermarkets, but that number has to represent a lot more than produce items. From tuna fish and hard-boiled eggs to full blown soup sections, olive and antipasto bars, wing bars ... all this and more sometimes get mixed up in these numbers.

Done well, though, the decline of salad bars can actually be a plus for the produce industry. Rafi Taherian, associate vice president of Yale Hospitality, found even super bright college students often select items from a salad bar in such a way they turn themselves off to salads. It turns out composing a salad is really not work for amateurs. A perfectly composed Greek salad, for example, balances color, textures and flavors. In abstract, one might not select Feta cheese, but, in the right context Feta adds a salty note that balances the dish. One might love raw cruciferous vegetables, but, eaten alone, one might also get a stomachache.

Yale removed its salad bars and replaced them with salads composed by professional chefs. Sales went up as satisfaction increased.

The deli and its prepared foods and foodservice components are now an important sales opportunity for produce suppliers. It was not long ago the preferred way for deli departments to "procure" produce was to wait for the



It would behoove some of the producers of the new fresh-cut and proprietary items to pour effort into ... ways to get these items integrated into today's growing retail foodservice arena.

night shift and then send the deli clerk into the produce cooler to steal whatever was needed.

Now that method has severe limitations. First, supermarket delis have large foodservice operations, so they use much more produce. Second, the sizes of consumer packages aren't desirable for full blown foodservice operations. They need to order special foodservice-size packages. Third, there are many items used in deli/foodservice that aren't even sold to consumers — say individual Romaine leaves for sandwich programs.

Produce shippers that are not conscious of how much produce is being sold direct to the

deli/prepared foods department by companies, such as Sysco, are missing an opportunity.

The general growth of prepared foods and retail foodservice operations speaks to the many changes in society. More women working, fewer people cooking, the transformation of cooking into something of a hobby, with a focus on celebrity chefs, increased affluence allowing people to pay for prepared foods... all this has led to a buildup on the retail/foodservice side

There has also been a change at retail with many traditional grocery items being purchased online, in warehouse clubs or supercenters or via discounters — this all leads to a greater focus at retail on prepared foods and the retail/ foodservice effort. And this creates an opportunity for sampling. Back in the heyday of the salad bar, Dick Spezzano, then vice president of produce at Vons, advised the pistachio industry to find a way to get pistachios on the salad bars at Sizzler steakhouse. He surmised this would be a great sampling program — and he was right.

Today, the sampling challenge is more complex. Leaving items out on a salad bar for consumers to discover themselves is an increasingly limited opportunity. But the booming prepared foods area remains a challenge to the produce industry — a challenge to find a way to integrate produce in new dishes and meal offerings.

Today's produce department is a font of innovation, with countless new products vying for limited space.

It would behoove some of the producers of the new fresh-cut and proprietary items to pour effort into not only their retail pack but into finding ways to get these items integrated into today's growing retail foodservice arena.

Getting these items integrated into food offerings curated by expert chefs will not only get consumers to sample these items but to do so in such a way that they will really like them. They will buy them in the deli and in the produce department, but this approach requires an integrated-sales approach few produce vendors are able to execute. But, now is the time to make such things happen.

#### **EXCERPTED FROM PERISHABLEPUNDIT 10.05.19**

# Pundit's Mailbag — Western Growers Responds to 'Preaching to the Choir'



JIM PREVOR EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ur piece, *Preaching To The Choir: Shouldn't The Industry Seek To Persuade Constituencies Who Have Other Priorities*, brought much feedback including this piece from an important industry leader:

In his July 25th Perishable Pundit column, Jim Prevor misses the mark in his analysis of the produce industry's approach to immigration reform, which he characterizes as unpersuasive.

In particular, Prevor is critical of the industry talking point that states Americans will not do the work that is required to grow and harvest our fresh fruits and vegetables, which is why we claim to need immigrant farm labor. He goes on to espouse the capitalist tenet that "if you can't attract labor, you change the job or the compensation so you can attract labor."

From Prevor's point of view, the solution to our labor shortage problems – and, consequently, our public policy challenges, because of those who oppose using foreign-born workers – is to mechanize, thereby limiting the need for laborers. He also goes on to assert that our industry has been slow to automate because of the availability of cheap labor.

On his first point, Prevor assumes that everything we do in fresh fruit and vegetable production can be mechanized, a notion that is not rooted [pun intended] in reality. Selecting fruits and vegetables for maturity and ripeness, while at the same time leaving the immature and unripe crops in the ground, is not the same as robotically assembling a car in a Detroit auto factory.

Still, the produce industry is investing heavily in agtech to reduce the need for manual labor. For example, Western Growers is investing millions of dollars to expedite agtech innovation, including through its Center for Innovation and Technology. But the fact is, it will take years and yet-to-be-invented technology for automation to become viable and ubiquitous for the majority of produce commodities.

Prevor's second faulty supposition is that by paying field laborers higher wages, produce farmers would attract domestic labor. The truth is, the hourly rate for most farm workers in California and Arizona is already well above the minimum wage, while many field workers can earn upwards of \$20 per hour or more on a piece rate basis. Still, Americans do not come.

Let's play along. Suppose we were to raise wages to \$25 or \$30 per hour? How many Americans would be willing to move to remote rural regions of California and Arizona – places like Firebaugh, Huron, Shafter, Blythe, El Centro and Yuma – for seasonal work? Location and seasonality are equally prohibitive barriers to attracting domestic workers to the farm.

The real point here is that by raising wages to some hypothetical level that would attract seasonal American labor, we would most assuredly price domestic produce farmers out of business. Our industry would quickly move to other countries with cheaper labor, effectively making our country dependent on imported food.

Tom Nassif President and CEO Western Growers Association Irvine, California

We appreciate Tom's thoughtful response. We know some of the WGA members were up in arms about this piece, and we value Tom's outreach efforts.

First of all, it is important that we recognize our writings are generally separated by the medium we choose. For example, we sometimes write in outside publications, such as the *Wall Street Journal*, to reach influencers. In writing in the Pundit (and reprinting in sister publication Produce Business), we write for the industry. In this case, we were not so much disagreeing with Tom as arguing that these industry points have simply failed to persuade those who disagree

with the industry position.

The problem, we would submit, is that the people who are personally invested in these types of issues are already supporting the kinds of policies the WGA advocates!

#### **'OUTSIDE' POINT OF VIEW**

Looking at this from the position of an industry outsider, let us imagine the internal dialogue of a hypothetical citizen who would hold the following positions on immigration and workers:

- 1) The US can certainly benefit from allowing in some immigrants.
- 2) However, we should limit the number of immigrants to ensure they can have time to acculturate and to encourage civic harmony. I am mindful that as David Frum wrote in *The Atlantic*: "In the 60 years from 1915 until 1975, nearly a human lifetime, the United States admitted fewer immigrants than arrived, legally and illegally, in the single decade of the 1990s."
- **3)** If we are going to limit the number of immigrants, we should select those who can contribute the most to the country. We should consider criteria such as this: Can they bring investment capital? Can they bring high levels of STEM education that can enable our industries to advance? Do they speak fluent English and are they thus able to assimilate more quickly?
- **4)** Because we are a democracy, ultimately our immigrants become citizens and so have an equal vote with me, so our immigrants need to be carefully selected. It is almost like choosing someone to be your partner in business.
- **5)** It is very important to make sure that immigrants do not strain public services, such as free medical care at hospitals.
- **6)** It is very important to make sure that immigrants do not cause undesirable social effects crime, public drunkenness, etc.
- 7) We need to make sure that any temporary worker programs are truly temporary. I want an ironclad assurance that these people will actually leave. For example, I worry that they might have a baby while in America and that the baby will be the basis for an immigration petition one day for the parents. We have laws that limit this for illegal immigrants, but people here under a guest-worker program would be here legally.
- **8)** We should be hesitant about introducing or continuing programs that create political pressure for more immigration. In other words, it may be true that a summer youth camp in North Dakota has trouble attracting workers, but, if that is true, and if we allow guest workers to be employed there, we will see people build more summer camps there and then lobby for special immigration programs. I don't want to encourage that.
- **9)** We need to be fair to those who took the legal road of applying for a Visa at the embassy in their home country. Those who illegally jumped the line should never be favored over those patiently waiting to go through the legal process.
- **10)** Illegal activity, such as entering the country illegally, or entering legally but failing to depart when legally required, must always have consequences. Otherwise the message we send is that whatever laws we make in the future, we are not serious. This will encourage illegal activity in the future.

The important thing is not whether this hypothetical person is correct or not in thinking of the issue this way. It is just to note that the industry, which understandably has different priorities, isn't addressing any of this hypothetical citizen's concerns. We are talking to the proverbial hand! Ensuring an "effective inflow of farmworkers" isn't on his list! That is on our list as an industry! Giving illegal workers "the opportunity to earn legal status" as long as the they don't commit additional crimes is simply not on this hypothetical citizen's list!

When we claim that the industry's arguments on immigration reform are "unpersuasive," this does not mean they are incorrect. Nor does it mean that this Pundit doesn't agree with these points. It simply means that they won't persuade people who have other priorities. This seems to us unarguable, since the industry has been lobbying for a Guest Worker program, without the various requirements of the existing H2A, for as long as this Pundit has been writing. Yet the industry has not been able to achieve this goal.

For the produce industry focused on production, this would be a reasonable solution. But to persuade others to come over to our side, we need to address *their* concerns, not *our* concerns.

Tom is, of course, correct that it is highly unlikely we will suddenly get lots of Americans to harvest produce. But this claim may not resonate with the intended audience as the industry might wish. Partly, the issue is that the claim, so simple to a producer's ears, translates differently to those who are anti-business and believe business people look to profiteer on their labor force. Remember that only 48% of the general population trusts business as an institution. So when the industry says Americans won't do these jobs, what many Americans hear is: "The industry is unwilling to improve conditions and pay to make these jobs appealing to Americans."

#### **SPEAKING OF WAGES**

Tom focuses on the robust hourly wage, but maybe that is not what will attract workers. Perhaps workers want 52-weeks-a-year guaranteed employment, and the industry has to create collaborative bodies to offer this. Perhaps they want to know they will still get paid if the weather is bad or they fall ill. Perhaps workers want health insurance, 401K plans, tuition reimbursement. Maybe with such a physically demanding job, they value paid vacation or shorter work weeks.

Despite the high hourly wage, the Bureau of Labor Statistics states that in 2018, the median pay for an agricultural worker in the US was \$24,620 per year – as opposed to a national median for all workers of \$38,640 per year.

A related issue is that producers are, of course, focused heavily on the economics of their business, and farm labor is a big expense. But the truth is that farmers receive only a small portion of what consumers pay for produce. Retailers, distributors, truckers ... the whole supply chain takes a share.

This opens the possibility that farmworkers could be paid much more, without dramatically increasing the cost of produce. In an article published in National Geographic, *Can We Afford to Pay U.S. Farmworkers More?* – it was reported that, "At current wages, farmworkers' annual share of each family's grocery bill is \$45 — less than 10 percent" and that "If farm worker wages go up by 47 percent, grocery bills would go up just \$21.15 a year, or \$1.76 a month."

Now, in fact, even enormous wage increases such as this probably would not attract many American citizens to the job of harvesting produce. In America, we have substantial welfare systems and a generally affluent population. Bolstered by public and private support, we do not have people starving to death who would take these jobs, even with a substantial increase in wages. Most likely, it would take even more expensive structural change – lots of paid vacation and whatnot to make people willing to accept these very difficult jobs.

As Tom points out, there is a big geography issue. Now none of these things are insurmountable. They are just very expensive. People who are paid enough will volunteer to live on oil platforms in the Arctic. Employers today often have to provide employee housing. This is true even in places, such as Aspen. Tanimura & Antle built such housing in Spreckels. The Casa Boronda project is another

example, with the Nunes, Hibino and Rodriguez families driving that project.

Which brings us to two points that Tom emphasizes: International competitiveness and automation. Tom's salient point is not that labor cannot be found, but that the price to acquire such labor, is too expensive. Even the *National Geographic* article sort of misses the point, because there is no mechanism for consumers to pay more to help our farm workers domestically. As Tom points out, quite correctly:

...by raising wages to some hypothetical level that would attract seasonal American labor, we would most assuredly price domestic produce farmers out of business. Our industry would quickly move to other countries with cheaper labor, effectively making our country dependent on imported food. This sounds portentous, but, again, it is not clear that this argument actually resonates with those who are not endorsing the ag trade's political positions.

Part of the problem is that the claim is overstated. The vast majority of US farming is highly mechanized grain production. These farms use few illegal aliens, indeed few immigrants at all. The other issue is that the percentage of US produce sales that are produced outside the US is already substantial. In March, 2018, the *New York Times* ran a piece titled, *Most of America's Fruit Is Now Imported. Is That a Bad Thing*? In that article, there was a telling line graph depicting four decades of vegetable imports rising from about 5% in 1975 to about 35% currently; fruit imports rose from about 22% in 1975 to nearly 50% today. It is hard to imagine that the citizenry is ready to man the ramparts to keep fruit imports from going from 50% of US sales to 70%.

#### **AUTOMATION SAVINGS**

When it comes to automation, we are, of course, well aware of the enormous difficulty of automating many aspects of produce planting and harvesting. Of course, it was not us claiming that there were big advances being made in this space. We were quoting Gary Wishnatzki of Wish Farms, who wrote about his robotic strawberry picker.

One of the issues is that when people think of mechanization of farming, they think of dramatic machines with spider-like arms that replace all humans on the field. More likely is incremental progress that will reduce the need for labor and shift the need for labor to higher caliber positions.

David Marguleas, CEO of Sun World International, mentioned to us that many procedures, such as harvesting grapes and putting them in wheelbarrows to be moved to the packing shed, hadn't changed in generations – but were changing now due to robotics.

The reality is that the automation of anything is related directly to the cost saved by automating that task. You can't judge what can be automated without also judging the cost of labor. If labor is \$15 an hour, and we only pay for the hours needed to harvest, the feasibility of automation is much lower than if we figure \$20 an hour and have to add in guaranteed 40-hour work-weeks, 52-week-a-year employment, medical, dental, housing, paid vacation, etc.

Yet none of this means the industry is wrong. There are tradeoffs in life, and it is perfectly appropriate for the industry to choose to bring concerns of the industry to the attention of voters, influencers, policy-makers and others. If, however, the industry wants to actually make something happen, it needs to take a different approach.

It is very easy for trade associations and industry spokespeople to say what the industry believes and wants to hear. What we need, though, is for industry leaders to coordinate efforts to test industry messaging to find out what arguments actually will sway voters. This is an investment and a long-term process. We need focus groups, mall intercepts, national and regional surveys.

As an industry, we already know what arguments make sense to us. We need to know what arguments will change the minds – and the votes – of those who oppose industry positions.

With his political background and connections, we can scarcely think of anyone more qualified than Tom Nassif to lead this effort!

# The Farm Patch Market

Friendship, fun and careers mix at Central Texas produce institution.

BY DOUG OHLEMEIER



large selection of fresh fruits and vegetables, a dedication to sourcing quality local and regional produce mixed with lifelong customer relationships are key ingredients in the success of The Farm Patch Market. For decades, the Bryan, TX, produce store has been a destination for shoppers in the Bryan-College Station, TX, area, and beyond.

Accounting for up to 80% of the central Texas store's sales, fresh produce is essential to the store's success. "Produce is our main item," says Mark Scarmardo, co-owner and a fourth-generation member of the Scarmardo family, which has farmed in Texas since the 1890s. "That's the girl that brought us to the dance. We always want to keep focused on that."

The Farm Patch has sold produce under 6,000 square feet for more than four decades. It also sells specialty foods, such as cheeses and gourmet items, runs a garden center and sells Christmas trees. The store attracts customers from as far as Houston (up to 100 miles away), who will make a day out of their shopping.

"As people have to drive to get to you, as you're not in their neighborhood, you better have something for them that's better than what they can get elsewhere," says Scarmardo. "That's the core of our business. If we had everything the other stores had, there would be no need for us being here. We have to pick up on those items. That's a key part of being in business today."

Tommie Atchison, a retired Bryan security worker, says, "I come here because everything is fresh. You find things here you can't find elsewhere." The store's loyal customers have been shopping for decades, including Ina Williams, of Normangee, TX, about 40 minutes northeast of Bryan.

Farm Patch sources many tree-ripened peaches, and in late summer, was transitioning from Texas peaches to Colorado peaches. "It's all about getting the product being picked fresh and getting it into your stand," says Scarmardo. "You have to know where to go and where to find it."

During the fall, The Farm Patch erects large displays of pumpkins and sweet corn and even plants corn behind the store. Fall customer events often feature a 1,000-pound pumpkin. "We try to make shopping as fun as possible for the customer," says Scarmardo. "We try to make it an experience."

In the fall, pecans, walnuts and Indian corn stalks become important. The store will move thousands of pounds of pecans in the fall, different from large grocery chains that don't push them, he says.

Competitive pricing is important. "You have to have the right price," says Scarmardo. "You have to have good merchandise to go with it." Tomatoes, particularly Tennessee tomatoes during the summer, are big sellers. Avocados and cream peas (that include purple hull beans, similar to black-eyed peas), see big demand.

The Farm Patch sources a variety of produce from throughout Texas and neighboring states, including Louisiana and Oklahoma. It enjoys strong relationships with many Southwest





growers and tries to buy as much from the region as possible.

"We go to each state and try to find things they have and items shoppers may not see elsewhere," says Scarmardo. "To get people in, you have to have a sweet peach, a homegrown tomato, those peas, fresh okra and the best plums."

Texas' local deal typically begins in May and finishes by July, with the fall deal bringing broccoli, cauliflower and leafy greens. Sweet potatoes from Louisiana and East Texas are popular. As many of the store's customers enjoy Louisiana creole foods, during the spring, the store has a crawfish promotion. Potatoes and onions and other produce, such as greens, are displayed.

In the summer, watermelon is sourced from Wiggins Farms in nearby Center, TX, as well as from the Red River Valley of Oklahoma and Texas, and the Texas panhandle. During peak season, almost every day The Farm Patch sends a truck to pick up what it needs to keep the large watermelon display fresh.

DiIorio Farms, a Hempstead, TX, family farming operation, also brings watermelons and tomatoes. Stahman Farms, in Waller, TX, is a large grower of sweet corn, peas and other vegetables. Scarmardo Foodservice, Inc., and Scarmardo Produce, Inc., the family's longtime produce wholesaling business, supplies produce not sourced locally and during the off-season.

An instrumental part of The Farm Patch's success is to keep up to date. Over time, the store adds new items. "You always have to keep changing and do something a little different," says Scarmardo. "You just can't sit there. If you're not moving forward, you're moving backwards." Over the years, driven by customer requests, the

store kept expanding.

The Farm Patch is in a middle-class neighborhood. Situated close to Texas A&M University campus, the area is between the upper and lower ends, he says. Because many university professors are from the Northeast, they're accustomed to the old markets where they grew up. "The younger ones teaching now come in and tell me they grew up going into these kinds of markets and the ones that are in their 50s and 60s tell you stories," says Scarmardo.

Fifth-generation family members manage the store and family wholesaling and farming operations. In the 1890s, Carlo Scarmardo, Mark Scarmardo's great grandfather, emigrated to the United States from Sicily when he was a teen. Like many Italian immigrants, after arriving in New Orleans, they headed west. A large group of Italians homesteaded in Central Texas' Brazos River bottoms. Carlo Scarmardo and his son and grandson farmed cotton. The family planted okra as a cash crop for Carl's sons during the summer.

In high school in the early 1970s, Mark Scarmardo drove overnights twice a week, hauling okra to produce markets in San Antonio and Houston. The family's farming operation sold produce to retailers and restaurants.

Seeing a need for fresh, quality produce in the Brazos Valley area, Mark Scarmardo and a partner he later bought out, started The Farm Patch in 1975. His father, Carl Scarmardo, joined a couple of years later. Two of Mark Scarmardo's brothers, David Scarmardo and Greg Scarmardo, also became involved and are store partners and partners in the wholesaling business. Mark Scarmardo's sons, Mark Jr., is a managing partner in retail while Karl Jr., is director of purchasing.

Scarmardo Foodservice began operations in the early 1970s. It services customers within 100 miles of Bryan and is a member of UniPro Foodservice, Inc., a large U.S. foodservice cooperative.

Mark Scarmardo learned the value of hard work from his father. "At a young age, I saw how he had to struggle and how he hustled the business," he says. "If you give kids money early in life, they don't know how to work hard." Carl Scarmardo died in 1978.

That determination is seen on the store floor. Customers are often surprised to see the store owner working on a Saturday. The business requires working part of Saturdays to give employees guidance and ensure they're prepared. "You have to be hands-on," says Scarmardo. "The customers appreciate you working to give them the best product you can. They like to see the owner and like to let the owner know they're spending money in your store."

Scarmando says The Farm Patch has been a springboard for numerous college students' careers.

"These college students are some of the best," says Scarmardo. "When they come to work for me, I tell them they will work here for three to four years and then get a job. If you do your work, I promise you will get the job." **pb** 

#### **FACT FILE:**

The Farm Patch 3519 S College Ave. Bryan, TX 77801 P: (979) 822-7209 Hours: Mon.-Sat. 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. www.thefarmpatch.com/

# TREND TRACKER



# 10 New Produce + Protein Products

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

he trend of pairing fresh produce with protein in new meal and snack products is one founded on both flavor and functional benefits. Produce processors are using premium ingredients in chef-inspired combinations to create the ultimate eating experience. And the addition of protein functions to turn salads from a side dish into a rib-sticking meal and simple fruits and veggies into satisfying snacks. The mix of nutrients and dietary fiber in fresh produce, plus the satiety provided by lean protein, also offers a health-promoting advantage. This is true whether the protein is from animals, such as poultry and cheese, or plant-based such as dried beans, nuts and seeds. These new products serve to pull shoppers into the produce department, capturing those who want something to eat now and those who want to stock up for a meal or snack later.

"Consumers are increasingly seeking fresh and wholesome snacks and meals," says Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce, headquartered in Coral Gables, FL. "Fresh-cut produce combined with protein is ideal for shoppers looking for healthier options. We see consumers are seeking out new flavor combinations and looking for opportunities to include more fresh fruits and veggies across all dayparts."

#### $oldsymbol{I}_{oldsymbol{\cdot}}$ BONDUELLE FRESH AMERICAS

# **BONDUELLE FRESH PICKED GOURMET ENTRÉE SALADS** *IRWINDALE, CA*

Consumers expect ready-to-eat salads to pack a protein punch that will sustain them throughout the day. These Gourmet Entrée Salads, introduced this spring and the first under this brand to launch in the United States, do this via six varieties available nationwide: *Caesar Salad with Grilled Chick*-

en, Spanish Inspired Chef Salad, Steak & Bleu Chopped Salad, Sonora Inspired Salad with Grilled Chicken, Spinach Salad with Grilled Chicken & Uncured Bacon and Apple Walnut Baby Greens Salad with Quinoa. Each averages 30% to 50% more ingredients (based on weight) compared to other leading single serve salads. Fresh Air Seal technology extends the shelf life of the salads without preservatives. Mer**chandising Tip:** Position in the produce section standing upright near other single serve products such as the company's Ready Pac-brand Bistro Bowls, and/or create a secondary display at the front of the store in the grab-and-go section.



### 2. CECE'S VEGGIE CO.

# **ORGANIC ZUCCHINI RAMEN** *AUSTIN, TX*

These Organic Zucchini Ramen products are formulated to satisfy consumer demand in three top trend areas: plant-based protein, veggie-centric grab-and-go meals and the ramen noodle craze in restaurants. The two SKUs are: Organic Zucchini Ramen with Chicken Broth & Organic Egg (11.75-ounce) and Organic Zucchini Ramen with Shiitake Mushroom Vegan Superfood Broth (10.85-ounce). Both pair culinary broth seasoning with a plentiful fresh-cut organic veggie base, featuring butternut squash, carrots, cauliflower and spiralized zucchini. The ramen

is packaged in a microwavable tray, ready to add water, heat and eat as a satisfying, low-carb meal. **Merchandising Tip**: Place in the value-added, fresh-cut veggie case in the produce department.



#### $oldsymbol{3}_{oldsymbol{ iny }}$ del monte fresh produce

# NOURISH BOWLS BREAKFAST DEL MONTE SNACKERS

CORAL GABLES, FL

It is consumers' desire for quick, convenient and healthful meals and snacks that has spurred two new products. First, under the Mann's brand, are two, breakfast-targeted extensions to the company's Nourish Bowls line. Both the *Fiesta Scramble* (kohlrabi, cauliflower, butternut squash, kale, chicken chorizo in Pico de Gallo and a Mexican cheese blend) and *Denver Scramble* (cauliflower, kale, broccoli, sweet potato, ham in bell pepper sauce and cheddar cheese topping) require the addition of two eggs and are microwave-ready in four minutes. The 9.5-oz. bowls are single-serve. **Merchandising Tip:** Cross-merchandise alongside eggs in the dairy aisle to drive sales.

Second, Del Monte Snackers are recently launched, 4-oz. packaged and ready-to-eat snacks ideal for school lunchboxes. Combinations include apples and almonds. **Merchandising Tip:**: Display in the refrigerated produce section next to other prepared, chilled-protein snacks.

#### 4. DOLE FOOD COMPANY

# **DOLE BOUNTIFUL KITS**WESTLAKE VILLAGE, CA

Inspired partly by the growth of the ready-to-eat (RTE) movement and home-delivered meal kits, this March 2019-launched line of new-style, chopped salad kits target flexitarian and paleo lifestyles with a mix of fresh produce, original dressings and an innovative Fresh Pouch packet of RTE plant-proteins. The result is a satisfying salad that eats like a meal. The four-item line includes: Sweet Thai (chopped iceberg, green leaf and carrots; edamame, black beans, red rice and sesame seeds; sweet Thai chili dressing); Lentil Cucumber (chopped green leaf, iceberg, radishes and red cabbage; marinated green, black and red lentils; cucumber vinaigrette); Fiesta Ranch (chopped green leaf, iceberg, red cabbage and carrots; black beans and red bell peppers; taco ranch dressing); and Triple Quinoa (chopped kale and carrots; red, white and black quinoa and chickpeas; lemon basil vinaigrette). Kits range from 8.4 oz. to 10 oz.



**Merchandising Tip:** Create a secondary display in the RTE meal section to capture consumers looking for healthy, last-minute meal solutions versus a more traditional packaged salad kit.

#### $oldsymbol{5}$ . FIVESTAR GOURMET FOODS

# **DELUXE LINE OF SIMPLY FRESH SALADS** *ONTARIO, CA*

Key points that differentiate this August-launched, six-item line of deluxe single-serve entrée salads are 25% more condiment toppings than similar products and a meal-satisfying average of 15

grams of protein — all around 300 calories. The six flavors, each packaged 8 oz. to 10 oz., are: Chicken Cobb, with a zesty Avocado Ranch Dressing; Greek Inspired Chicken Caesar with Lemon Caesar Dressing; Chicken Caesar Swith double Chicken and Creamy Caesar Dressing; Santa Fe Style with Chicken, Roasted Corn, Black Beans and Sun-Dried Tomato Chipotle Dressing; Chopped Wedge with Grilled Chicken, Natural Bacon and Creamy Ranch Dressing; and Gourmet Caprese with Fresh Mozzarella Cheese, Ripe Sweet Tomatoes and a Signature Balsamic Vinaigrette. Merchandising Tip: Offer multiple facings of many flavors in the salad set to encourage multi-purchases, and cross-merchandise in the department's grab-and-go section.



#### 6. FRESH EXPRESS

# CHOPPED & GOURMET KITS CHIQUITA BITES

SALINAS, CA

Kits, especially chopped and bowls, show strong growth and are primary drivers of the overall value-added salad category, according to data supplied by Fresh Express. In September, new products began shipment to retailers. These are the chopped kits of *Twisted Caesar* and Thai 'N' Cashews. The six-item line of Gourmet Kit Bowls are: *Grilled Chicken Caesar*, *Pearl Mozzarella Caprese, Buffalo Chicken, Chimichurri Grilled Chicken, Chef Salad* and *Parmesan Cheese Crisp*. Merchandising Tip: Sell with cut-fruit and on-trend beverages for a complete at home or on-the-go meal.

Fresh Express introduced its Chiquita-brand Apple Bites this summer. The five-item, single-serve line, which provides up to 7 grams of protein per serving, features the following combinations: apple wedges, Cheddar cheese and red grapes; apple wedges, Monterey Jack cheese, cranberries and cashews; apple wedges, Monterey Jack, cranberries and raisins; apple wedges, Cheddar cheese and crackers; and apple wedges, Cheddar cheese and pretzels. **Merchandising Tip**: Cross-merchandise with back-to-school products in the fall; position for healthy eating resolutions in January; and promote as portable summertime snacks.

#### 7. MISIONERO

# **BRUSSELS SPROUTS & GREEN BEANS SAUTÉ KITS** *MONTEREY, CA*

The fresh-cut produce plus protein pairing comes to side dishes via these two new products sold under the company's Green Wave Farms' brand. The 11.5-oz. *Brussels Sprouts Sauté Kit* provides oil, nitrate-free bacon and Parmesan cheese, while the 11-oz. *Green Beans Sauté Kit* includes cooking oil, sliced almonds and fried onions. Each is prepared in 15 minutes or less and serves three or more people. **Merchandising Tip:** Sell with other value-added vegetables or complete kits.



### 8. NATURIPE FARMS, LLC

#### **NATURIPE SNACKS**

NAPLES, FL

Fifty percent of consumers will pay more for healthier snacks, and 57% want their snacks on-the-go, according to data from Naturipe. The company's produce-plus-protein snack line targets both of these statistics. The four August-launched curated combinations are designed to satisfy any craving: Sweet & Crunchy (strawberries, blueberries, cinnamon almonds, white Cheddar cheese), Sweet & Zesty (strawberries, cracked black pepper cashews, aged Swiss cheese), Classic & Sharp (grapes, blueberries, roasted sea salt almonds, sharp Cheddar cheese) and Bold & Spicy (grapes, chili mango cashews, Pepper Jack cheese). Each is packed in a single-serve, 5.5-oz. tray. This product expands the Naturipe Snacks line, which also includes Naturipe Bites and Naturipe Snacks Fruit Cups. Merchandising Tip: Display in the produce department's grab-and-go section.



### $oldsymbol{9}$ . REICHEL FOODS

#### PRO2SNAX TO THE MAX

ROCHESTER, MN

This four-item line of protein-packed meals, made up of snack foods, was introduced as a line extension of the company's Pro2snax. Combinations include a mix of produce, such as sliced apples, baby carrots and dried cranberries, as well as proteins: turkey sausage bites, Cheddar cheese, hard-cooked egg, almonds and cashews. The four-compartment, single-serve, tray packs range in size from 6.5 oz. to 7.35-oz. **Merchandising Tip**: Display the product standing up so consumers can clearly see what's inside.



#### $oldsymbol{10}$ . Taylor farms

#### **CHOPPED KITS WITH GRILLED CHICKEN** SALINAS, CA

Seventy-nine percent of respondents deem a salad kit with grilled chicken more desirable than one without, according to proprietary research by Taylor Farms. Thus, the company recently launched three new SKUs to its successful line of Chopped Salad Kits, each with the addition of grilled chicken. The chicken, which comes from vegetarian diet-fed birds raised without antibiotics or hormones, is high-pressure pasteurized to ensure freshness. The new products, which serve up 8 to 9 grams of protein per serving, are: Caesar with Grilled Chicken (Romaine, cheese and garlic crouton crumble, shredded Parmesan, Caesar dressing),

Cheddar Ranch with Grilled Chicken (Romaine, green and red cabbage, kale, carrots, green onion, nitrate-free bacon, Cheddar cheese, ranch dressing); and Bacon & Blue with Grilled Chicken (Romaine, green and red cabbage, kale, carrots, green onion, nitrate-free bacon, blue cheese dressing). Merchan-

dising Tip: Display with other chopped salad kits.





**BY MIRA SLOTT** 

eemingly taken for granted in the overall plant-forward conversation, the fresh produce industry is missing its calling to re-capture the dialogue and remind consumers that fruits, vegetables and nuts are the "original" plants, naturally endowed to drive plant-based diet trends and shifting lifestyles.

Despite the natural association of produce as premier players, marketing dollars behind hamburger chains, venture capital food start-ups and media hype have recently propelled processed *faux* meats as the darlings of the movement.

In fact, engineered meat has entered the mainstream lexicon as evidenced by its arrival as fodder for Late Night television. Even Stephen Colbert of *The Late Show* recognizes fresh produce is getting upstaged. "Right now the biggest food trend in America is

plant-based burger alternatives, which used to be known as salad."

Plant-based alternatives that replicate meat in taste and texture, such as the Impossible Burger and Beyond Meat, are now going beyond fast food chains and are penetrating shelves at national mainstream retailers. Processed plant proteins containing soy, whole grains, dry beans, pea extract powders and other non-fresh ingredients are finding new space in grocery aisles, meat and dairy, frozen food sections and other refrigerated areas.

"If you think about it, the produce section is the original plantbased source, and yet it is still not getting enough credit or being considered, as attention shifts to processed plant-based alternatives," says Jason Osborn, director of marketing at The Wonderful Company, Los Angeles, CA.

Seizing this opportunity to supplant meat alternatives with

# of consumers think Idaho when they think potato

Remember that the next time you consider stocking a generic, non-branded potato. Because when it comes to potatoes, "Idaho" beats "I don't know."



produce as the main "plant" player may result in getting the industry closer to its long-established goal of increasing consumption to five servings a day.

#### PRODUCE IS THE HOLY GRAIL

"With all the things happening with the Impossible Burger and Beyond Meat, it's important we don't lose our identity, and we maintain our stronghold on our half of the plate... and we don't become complacent," says Lauren Scott, chief marketing officer, Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE.

"We should never walk away from our competitive advantage of health, but we can't just rely on that. We can't just say, 'we're part of the plant-forward wave,' and go sit in our lawn chair and relax. We have to play our own game, built on the industry's underlying foundation, rather than ride the coattails of the plant-based diet trend," she says.

If retailers want to harness the plant-forward movement's core, the produce department is the Holy Grail, according to Marianne Santo, category manager produce and floral at Wakefern Food Corp., the nation's largest retailer-owned cooperative, merchandising and distribution arm for ShopRite stores, headquartered in Keasbey, NJ. At Wakefern/ShopRite, the movement's path, imbued in educating and steering consumers to healthier eating choices, inevitably leads to fresh fruits and vegetables, she says.

Santo's colleague at Wakefern, Terry Murphy, group vice president of fresh, sees the plant-forward movement as an opportunity to break down walls between perishables departments. "This is really a shift in the lifestyle and life-stage needs of consumers looking to eat better, feed their family better and consume a more balanced, nutritious meal, when and where they want it," he says, warning the industry against boxing people into categories of either vegan, vegetarian or flexitarian.

"I'm responsible for all perishables, and we're seeing this movement in all departments, not just produce," says Murphy. "We strive to deliver plant-forward solutions in a differentiated way." He cites Wakefern's multi-faceted, chain-wide ShopRite dietitian program as "the true pathway to health between us and our customers.

"We consider our 150 registered dietitians in ShopRite stores our produce prophets," he says. "Our dietitians are really our secret agents."

That pathway links the plant-forward



Wakefern utilizes 150 registered dietitians in ShopRite stores to link the plant-forward movement to the produce department.

movement to the produce department, with cross-merchandised fresh fruit and vegetable choices in other perishable departments. "We help consumers to eat better and make better decisions, based on their individual dietary needs," says Desiree Olivero, manager of health and wellness at Wakefern.

#### **PERCEPTION PROBLEMS**

"Obviously, a plant-based diet should start with fruits and vegetables. But when consumers think plant-based diet, I don't think they necessarily think about the produce department," says Kerry Clifford, registered dietitian at Fresh Thyme Farmers Market, which is based in Downers Grove, IL and has 75 stores.

"We are targeting people on their health journey, whether they just got back from their doctor and learned they are prediabetic or have been on a plant-based diet for 30 years," says Clifford. "What's needed in this expanded plant-based movement is education. People see plant-based and think healthier, even if it's 200 calories more and processed into something we don't recognize," she says. "Let's go back to fresh fruits and vegetables."

Ashley Kibutha, registered dietitian manager at Coborn's, a 120-plus store chain, based in St. Cloud MN, agrees: "We can't just assume because Kraft macaroni and cheese is now made with cauliflower, it's also lower in sodium and has all those other factors that go along with a fruit or vegetable," she says. "We can eat all foods in moderation, but looking at the whole meal, we should have produce be the focus and emphasis."

Kibutha points out that some super trendy plant-based foods, such as cauliflower

pizza crust and cauliflower crackers, sound good, but they may not be very nutritious.

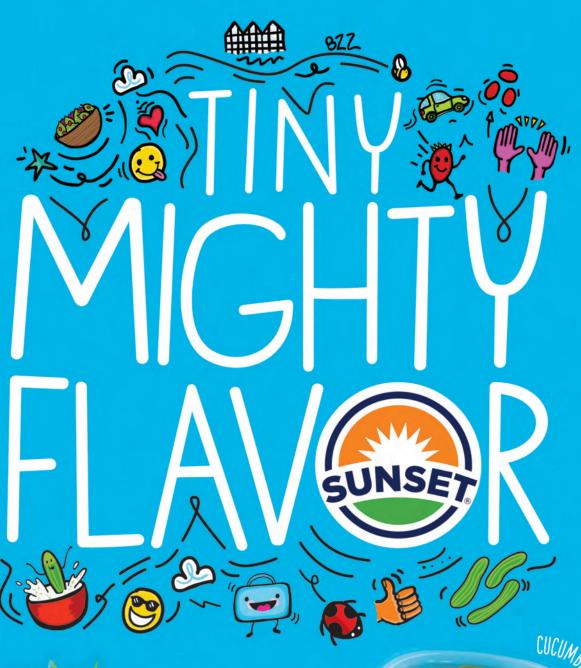
"Produce must be careful not to be displaced by plant-based products that craft better attribute claims, the way plant-based beverages have cut into organic milk sales," says John Pandol, director of special projects, Pandol Bros., Delano, CA. "Processed items seek to be placed in the produce section to co-opt the health halo of produce. There is marketing research consumers perceive an item as healthier if it's located among the fresh produce, which essentially it seeks to mimic. If you want a plant-based diet, eat plants."

Trying to maintain the purity of produce in the department, Kibutha cites the decision by Emily Coborn, vice president of operations, to take a team approach in sharing the chain's plant-forward strategies in fresh produce. "Emily's passion for healthy living gives us the visibility across the company that has truly been the foundation for what we do," says Kibutha.

"Partnerships between the Coborn's dietitians, fresh produce directors and merchandising teams are instrumental in coming up with plant-forward product endorsements and the integrated campaigns around them to align with quarterly goals," adds Kibutha. When dietitians promote and push a product in-store, online and through social media, product sales and related ingredients can skyrocket and generate a significant uptick in produce department traffic, she says.

#### PLANT-FORWARD DICHOTOMY

Arguably one of the most important allies in the industry's involvement of the plantforward movement is the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), St. Helena, CA. The CIA





SEE OUR MICRO LINE AT PMA, ANAHEIM BOOTH 4385









has been a leader in framing and accelerating the plant-forward movement, often collaborating with industry players to develop new concepts for menu development. This involves a comprehensive roadmap, combining scientific research, innovation and multi-faceted range of partnerships to address global health and sustainability imperatives.

"We're on the precipice of a transformative new food world, where more sustainable plant-based proteins, meaty produce alternatives, vegetables, legumes, fruits and nuts

penetrate North American eating patterns and palates, reinventing menus at mainstream restaurants and product options at conventional supermarket chains," says Greg Drescher, vice president, strategic initiatives and industry leadership.

"The concept of plant-forward is getting out in the consumer market, mixed in with plant-based, plant-rich terminology, so there is a narrative there, but language is a funny thing. What I'd say is fruits and vegetables are at the center of plant-forward conversa-

"Plant-forward does a better job of keeping plants in the discussion, versus plant-based as an ingredient, and how do I replace the meat on my plate?"

- Lauren Scott, Produce Marketing Association

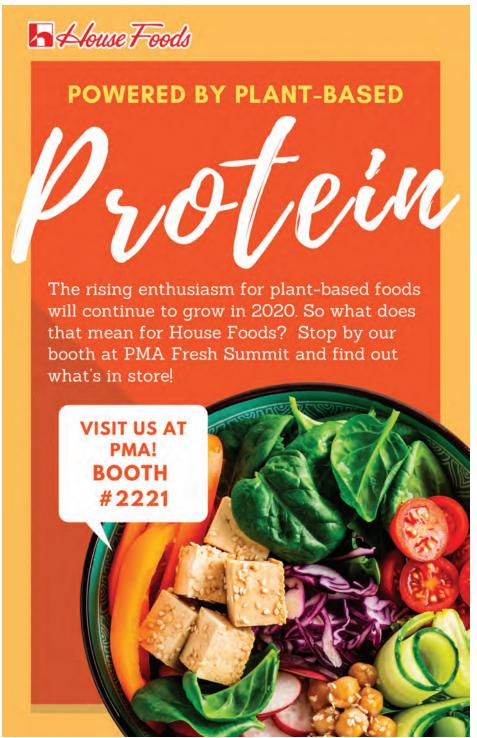
tions, but less at the center of meat-analog conversations, but that's just a subset of plant-forward," says Drescher.

Terminologies make a difference. PMA's Scott agrees: "Plant-forward does a better job of keeping plants in the discussion, versus plant-based as an ingredient, and how do I replace the meat on my plate? You could argue that's how people make the connection to the Impossible Burger. The scariest thing would be if people think, 'I had my Impossible Burger, so now I don't have to eat my half-plate of fruits and vegetables'."

Drescher calls it an unintended consequence. "The produce industry has to actively engage to leverage this opportunity," says Drescher. "This involves tremendous technical education and training to conquer the challenges of preparing fresh produce well. Unfortunately, to a certain extent, cooking hamburger or making a pizza is more forgiving," says Drescher.

The other area to look at is blends, or the 'protein flip' — as CIA has coined the concept of making meat a smaller portion of the plate. "Plant-based typically is equated with vegan and vegetarian trends and related to ingredients in a dish. We think the bigger opportunity is around a bigger tent, or flexitarian option, putting fruits and vegetables and other healthy plant-based ingredients at the center of the plate and diet, and animal-based proteins in a supporting role," he explains.

There's a dichotomy between the plant-forward trends and the hard facts. People aren't eating enough produce. According to a study published by the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), just one in ten adults meet the federal nutrition guidelines for daily produce consumption. The challenge as an industry is how to plug the hole. Ironically, more than half of U.S. consumers say they're trying to





# always in season

Visit Us at PMA Booth #179

Re Fig People



www.cataniaworldwide.com



eat more plant-based foods and beverages.

Taste remains a main obstacle to doing so, according to PMA research, explains Scott.

#### **REBRANDING OUR IDENTITY**

"We've undersold our flavor profile. The false notion that you make broccoli taste better by putting cheese on it creates and reinforces the underlying belief broccoli doesn't taste good," says Scott. "That's what we're fighting and fighting through."

The Have A Plant campaign, introduced

earlier this year by the Brentwood, MO-based Produce for Better Health Foundation, targets Millennials and Gen Z consumers to engage in the plant-forward movement through produce. "We know consumers make decisions based first on emotion," says Wendy Reinhardt Kapsak, president and CEO. "Behavioral research played a much more significant role in the creation of Have A Plant, integrating digital and social content and programming to reinforce the behavioral framework. Have A Plant moves away from

"I see the Impossible
Burger as a nicotine
patch for people trying
to quit meat. We need to
pull out all the stops and
use our imaginations."

- Walter Willett, Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health

finger-wagging and 'should' language that has been ineffective in encouraging produce consumption."

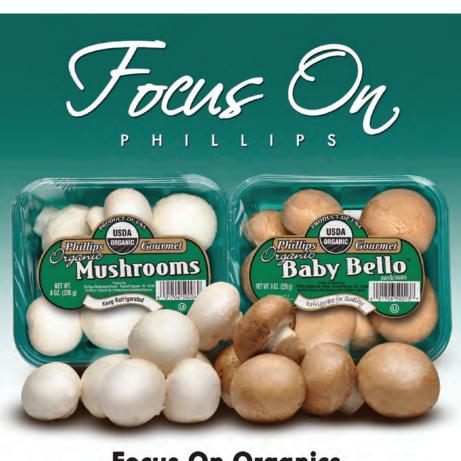
The Have a Plant campaign is very different from the traditional, More Matters and Five-A-Day campaigns as well as the dietary guidance Half Your Plate message, which are more prescriptive, says Kapsak.

Nearly 40 percent of U.S. adults are obese, according to the CDC, reflected in an alarming new U.S. Department of Defense study of rising obesity rates even in the military, epitomized in the Navy, where 22 percent of sailors qualify as obese, the *New York Times* reports. The Department of Defense is instituting plant-based, produce-centric dining options to tackle the problem.

Walter Willett, professor of epidemiology and nutrition at Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, bemoans an unfortunate reality that obesity numbers, which appeared to be trending downward, are on the rise again. "We're off the path. We can't sell a deprivation diet. It takes a reorientation, not to just have vegetarian options, but creative, delicious ones," he says.

"I see the Impossible Burger as a nicotine patch for people trying to quit meat. We need to pull out all the stops and use our imaginations." Healthy, sustainable food objectives must also weigh costs and benefits, according to Willett. "We don't want to widen the accessibility gap. We want everyone to benefit and not alienate people from the plant-forward movement. It's not just for the privileged," he says.

"The consumers already know produce is healthy. What they don't know is what to buy, how to store it, how to make it delicious and that it has protein," says Amy Myrdal Miller, Farmer's Daughter Consulting, Sacramento, CA. "What consumers want across the board is healthy, easy and affordable. That's the challenge and opportunity for retailers."





Whites, Portabella, Baby Bello™, Shiitake, Maitake, Beech, Royal Trumpet™ and Pom. Phillips Mushroom Farms offers a large variety of organic mushrooms.





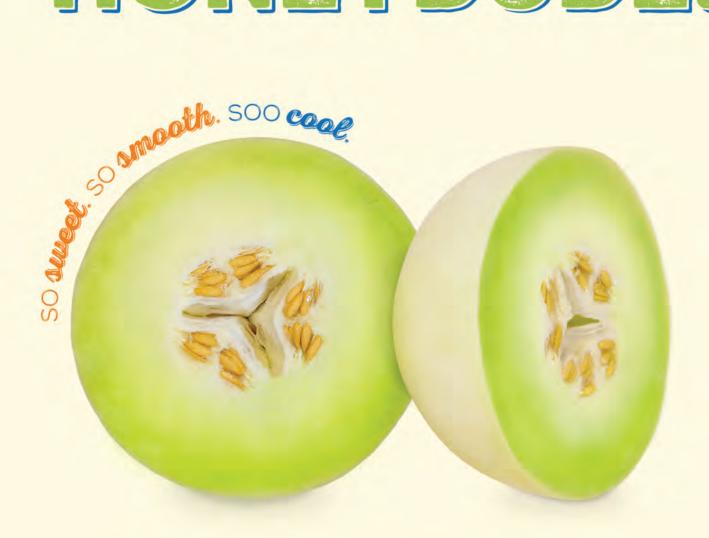




FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL PHILLIPS MUSHROOM FARMS \* KENNETT SQUARE, PA 800 722-8818 \* FAX 610 444-4751 WWW.PHILLIPSMUSHROOMFARMS.COM



## IT'S GOLLOBEA HONEYDUDE!



#### SOL'S EXCLUSIVE VARIETY

Better flavor, Less Netting and No Brown spotting for a honeydew that will have your shoppers saying,

"IT'S gotta BE A HONEYDUDE!"



#### **RECLAIMING RETAIL**

Produce for Better Health sees retailers as valuable partners in extending the *Have A Plant* message. It is teaming with supermarket chains through in-store promotions, utilization of the *Have A Plant* logo on private-label packaging and produce bags, leveraging of retail registered dietitian content and ongoing produce training for retail registered dietitians.

"We have several new *Have A Plant* retail projects in the works including in-store

signage and training for store produce staff. In 2019, we partnered with Fresh Thyme and Coborn's on in-store promotions. In 2020, we have new projects planned with Kroger, Hy-Vee, Wakefern, Schnuck Markets, Weis Markets and others," says PBH's Kapsak.

"We are the original plant," says Roger Pepperl, marketing director at Stemilt Growers, Wenatchee, WA. "By putting this simple, contemporary message on our produce, we don't have to turn it into something plant-based."





The "Have A Plant" campaign targets Millennials and Gen Z consumers to engage in the plant-forward movement through produce.

As an 18-year member of PBH, Pepperl was actively involved in redirecting messaging to *Have A Plant*, he says. "Since we do fruit, we received some initial concerns from industry traditionalists that *Have A Plant* was associated with vegetables and not inclusive enough, but younger generations instantly grab on to what we're trying to say."

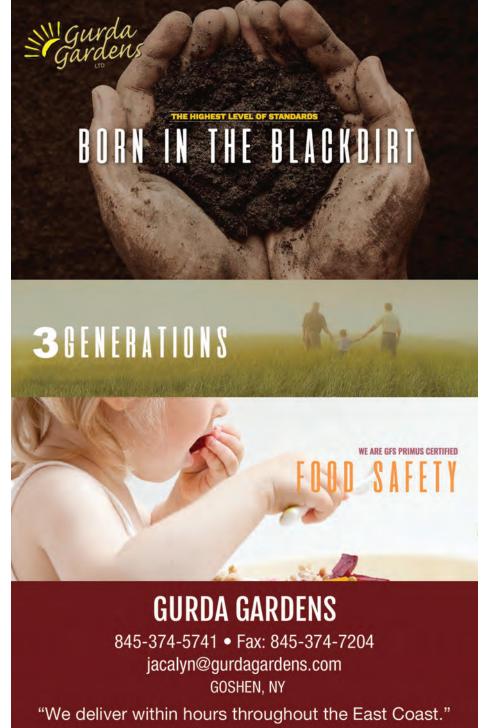
Stemilt is rolling out new retail packaging and display bins with the *Have A Plant* logo in 800-1,000 stores nationally. "I think you'll see quite a bit of *Have A Plant* merchandising going forward," says Pepperl.

#### **HEADWINDS AND TAILWINDS**

"In order to maximize the plant-forward movement, it is important retailers maintain focus on the promotion of produce and healthy snacking," says Wonderful's Osborn, who is also on the board of PBH. "Retailers are uniquely positioned to be the ultimate authority on what is offered to consumers; to educate and impact consumers' choices through signage, selection, engagement and merchandising.

The produce industry always faces challenges with Mother Nature and the supply chain. "We don't always have a tailwind like the processed players in the plant-forward movement," says Osborn.

One way to capture that tailwind is



## Welcome to THE FUTURE Ripening



BOOTH 3303
PMA Fresh Summit

## TarpLess<sup>®</sup>SX Fruit-centric Ripening™

Take your ripening operation to new heights with *TarpLess®SX*, the next generation *TarpLess®* ripening room with *Fruit-centric Ripening™* technology.

Experience new levels of efficiency, flexibility and control backed by the proven quality, reliability and unparalleled profit of the world's number one ripening room system.

Available Exclusively From:

Go Tarpl

## HERMAL TECHnologies

The Global Leader in Produce Ripening Room Design and Construction

www.GoTarpLess.com

through in-store POS signage with large, integrated-product displays, emphasizing the plant-based connection of its healthy brands portfolio, says Osborn. "We work closely with retailers to place our POS in strategic secondary locations of the store including checkout, lobby, deli, pharmacy and other areas where consumers can conveniently find healthy snack alternatives."

According to Kapsak at PBH, "Retail is just catching up to the fact that they can have a bigger win, looking at integrated

Better Break

SPICY POHODORO
Tally de Linguiste with Tomate Chipote Source

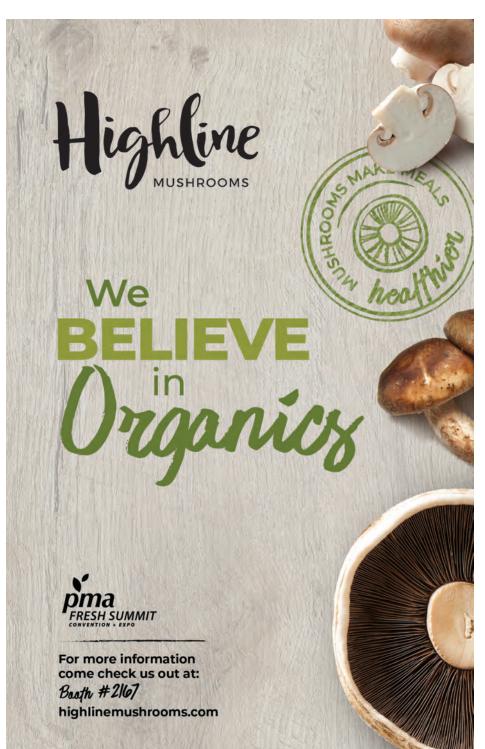
Terrest in a Sweet & Sourcy Care Parte

Terrest in a fresh & Toward Chipote Source

Terrest in a Sweet & Source Care Parte

Terrest in a fresh & Toward Chipote Source

Del Monte's Better Break line offers a "healthy and flavorful plant-based or vegetarian snack or meal in iust minutes."



shopper-based solutions, pairing commonly eaten foods, rather than isolated commodity thinking."

"Our industry needs to come together to shift perception of how consumers relate to produce as a whole," adds Osborn. "Our goal is for produce to be as relatable to individuals interested in adopting a plant-based diet and lifestyle, as it is for the everyday consumer, but we need to widen the conversation to address how consumers eat today in general."

According to the Nielsen *Total Food View* Report (June 2018), shoppers don't shop departments anymore; they shop needs. "The ability to realize product synergies across departments leaves room for innovation and cross-promotional opportunities," explains Osborn.

"The way in which the store presents itself is going to need to change. It's not just item and price," says Wakefern's Olivero.

#### **UPPING THE PRODUCE ANTE**

"For us, it's always been in our wheel-house with branding and marketing to encourage plant-based eating," says Bil Goldfield, director corporate communications at Westlake Village, CA-based Dole Food Company, and a vegan himself. "One-third of Americans consider themselves flexitarians, and the produce industry can take advantage of that for people who want less processed meal options, without the chemicals, binders and other agents. We're providing flexitarians with that fresh plant-based solution," says Goldfield.

"As plant-based diets become more prominent in households across the country, produce suppliers and retailers can focus their efforts on making produce the center of the meal or snack as opposed to just a side," says Dennis Christou, vice president marketing at Del Monte Fresh Produce, Coral Gables, FL. "After seeing so many Millennials citing busy schedules as a reason

#### A CLOSER LOOK AT COBORN'S PLANT-FORWARD STRATEGIES

"In our markets, we're in small town Minnesota for the most part, so it takes awhile for trends to get here," says Ashley Kibutha, supermarket registered dietitian manager at Coborn's, an employee-owned, 120-plus store chain, headquartered in St. Cloud, MN. "We tend to see more interest in plant-based diets in our metro areas, averaging around 80,000 people. But across our markets, we're seeing a lot of curiosity about plant-based," she says.

"Maybe it's not exactly that people are doing things plant-based yet, but they're interested and asking questions. At the end of the day, it means eating more fruits and vegetables so people are in a better mood and healthier and all those things [PBH's Have A Plant slogan] stands for," she says.

"We try to meet people where they are in the spectrum of plant-based eating," she says. "We want people to eat more than just meat and potatoes ... it's fine to have your potato, but why not add a nice fruit salsa on top of that pork chop."

Kibutha says Coborn's helps consumers take baby steps to get more produce in their diets because "we're a grocery store, where we can explain why produce is so important."

#### IN RETAILERS WE TRUST

U.S. consumers, in general, are looking to their supermarket to be a partner in their wellness journey, according to data from FMI, Hartman Group and other studies, notes Kibutha. "And as dietitians, we want to be that destination," says Kibutha.

"We need to emphasize the produce department is plant-forward," says Kibutha. "I did a video recipe with cauliflower steak. The next step is merchandising cauliflower in steak form in the produce department," she says.

"Another cool way we can drive people to the produce department is to have signs, 'Hey, I'm Plant-Based Too,' over with the apples, kale and mushrooms." In addition, Coborn's has Chop Shop stations in many of its locations, where consumers can bring their produce to get sliced, minced, and diced the way they'd like it.

they were not able to get more plant-based options into their diet, our team came up with the Better Break convenience line. It offers a healthy and flavorful plant-based or vegetarian snack or meal in just minutes," he says.

The line is marketed for "ultimate plant-forward snacking," with four grams of protein per serving. With the plant-based movement gaining traction, the opportunities for fresh produce are endless, Christou says, noting continued development of

convenient plant-based options as a solution for its core consumers.

"Our dressings are a catalyst in the plant-forward movement to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables," says Matt Middleton, vice president of sales at Ventura Foods/Marie's Dressings, based in Brea, CA. "We're working with retailers on cross merchandising our dressings to enhance the flavors of produce," he says, referencing new Market Reserve products that have a silk tofu base and are dairy-free.



#### **BEEFY STATS**

The produce industry may be smart to embrace omnivore lovers. Nielsen data shows sales of meat hit \$95 billion last year, compared to meat alternatives just shy of \$1 billion, and 98 percent of meat alternative buyers also purchase meat.

"The plant-based movement has become anti-meat," according to Wendy Reinhardt Kapsak, president and chief executive at the Produce For Better Health Foundation. "There's a significant opportunity for the produce industry to take the lead in the plant-forward movement and secure its rightful place on the plate," she says. "If the industry doesn't embrace *Have A Plant*, someone else will take a hold of that campaign. This is a do- or-die moment," she contends.

In a 2018 Gallop poll, less than five percent of Americans say they're vegetarian, and less than three percent say they are vegan. What you see is meat is still on the plate, even with plant-forward trends. According to Annette Maggi, retail account manager, PBH, in 2018, PBH kicked off Powerful Produce Pairings as a retail

PHOTO COURTESY OF FRESH THYME

Fresh Thyme cross-merchandises proteins with produce to offer a meal solution as well as bonus

promotion, and in the omni-channel digital space. For example, Jewel Osco, based in the Chicago area, did a promotion with California walnuts and Stemilt apples that featured sliced apples with Greek yogurt walnut dip. It included a cross-merchandising display of all ingredients, tearpads with copies of the recipe, a cooking class and in-store demo. PBH provided web content for a blog. Jewel Osco did a video on how to prepare the recipe, promoted through PBH social media and Jewel Osco. It resulted in a dramatic sales lift over the prior year, same-week period (Stemilt apples notched a 106 percent increase in sales, while California walnuts soared 160

percent), says Maggi. Fresh Thyme ran its first Produce Pairing program in May, in partnership with PBH. "We came up with the concept of using vegetables as vessels, using a potato, pepper or zucchini, etc., as your vessel and then building the meal from that," says Kerry Clifford. A large sign showed a stuffed potato as the vessel. One recipe was a walnut chorizo, using black beans as a way to have a plant-based chorizo for a very tasty meal. Another was a meat recipe with pork. Customers could pick up Fresh Thyme's free magazine with the recipes that coincided with the in-store displays carrying the necessary ingredients.

"We had about 87 million impressions through TV, email, web and in-store. It was really an integrated marketing approach," Clifford says.

Consumers don't eat most foods in isolation. "The fresh produce industry's biggest competition is not other forms of produce, it's the low-nutrient, dense foods out there stealing market share from fresh produce, that's the competition," says Kapsak. **pb** 



For your Fresh Cut Fruit and Vegetables shelf life retention requirements, we have all the freshness retainer products that you need:

O Plus BIO-3 
■ O Plus Ultra US/CAN 
■ O Plus BIO-8
O Plus Lettuce 
■ O Plus Ultra-7 
■ KK Plus 
■ CA-1

Our products have nature-based ingredients, are all sulfite and allergen free and available in organic and conventional style mixtures.

#### FOOD FRESHLY NORTH AMERICA, INC.

2 Robert Speck Parkway, Suite 750 Mississauga, ON L4Z 1H8 905-270-1723 • Fax: 905-756-1168 www.foodfreshly.com





"Plant-forward is not just about plantbased proteins. Plant-forward is the recognition that plants, *aka* fruits and vegetables, are the best prescription for health," he says.

and black beans.

Introducing tie-in items like dressings that help sell fruits and vegetables is not a new idea, but marketing items such as jackfruit products, for instance, that mimic meat's taste and texture, puts the produce department directly into the conversation with Beyond Meat or the Impossible Burger, explains Myrdal Miller of Farmer's Daughter Consulting.

"Our four most popular meatless items, all merchandised in the produce department, are steamed lentils, jackfruit, edamame and soyrizo," says Robert Schueller, director of public relations at Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Los Angeles. "People have been wild about Jackfruit for the past couple of years. The flavor is incredible, but the work required to break down the entire fruit can be daunting."

Melissa's Jackfruit Pods take the prep work out, without having to commit to the whole jackfruit. The company supplies customized signage to retailers for its meatless options and offers demos of meatless-option meal ideas with recipe cards, signage and ad pricing opportunities, says Schueller.

#### WHAT IS OLD IS NEW AGAIN

"Well, actually in the produce department, we've had tofu forever. We've had plant-based products that are made to be sausage-like or ground-beef like or hot dog like or bacon-like," says Wakefern's Murphy. "We are now in the process of changing

people's minds from an educational perspective. An old traditional produce merchant did not necessarily think about these products. There's a new consumer out there looking for this product, so we have to expand our efforts to educate suppliers as well."

"Vegetarians have been buying these plant-based products for a long time now," says Marc Goldman, produce director at Morton Williams, a New York supermarket chain. "We have the soy products with the produce, including tofu shitake noodles,

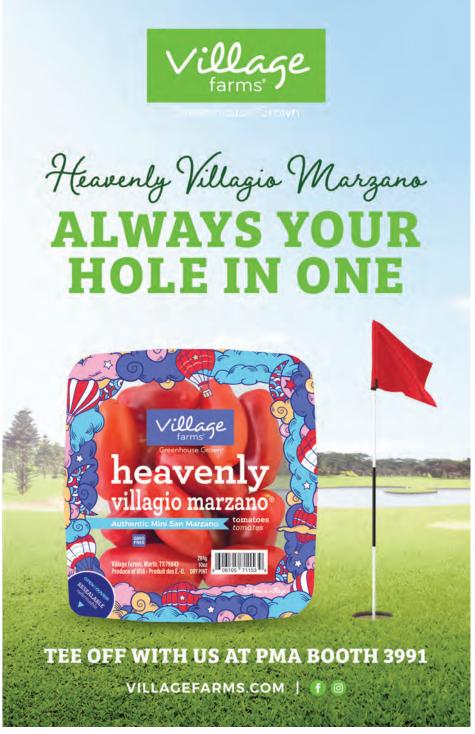






PHOTO COURTESY OF MELISSA'S AWORLD VARIETY PRODUCE

Jackfruit is known for its ability to mimic meat's taste and texture.

meatless crumbles, savory chicken replacement strips, veggie cheeseburgers and portabella burgers. I have portobello meatballs, beet and kale burgers and Tofurky. This is not new. In some stores these items work well; in others they don't sell," he says.

"We might be different because of space requirements in Manhattan, and maybe in suburban supermarkets, you'll see more. All you need is a neighborhood with customers interested in these products," he says. "What I see is companies re-branding to draw attention to the trend, but it's not something new," he says.

Fresh Thyme's Clifford has a similar view. "Refrigerated space is competitive, and every store is different. We definitely have jackfruit barbeque products near our vegan cheeses in refrigerated coolers just past dairy. In our produce section, we do have a cooler with fresh cauliflower steaks. We put our private label Fresh Thyme, Fresh Veggies sticker on them, as well as spiralized vegetables and other fresh convenience items."

#### IN PRODUCE, WHERE IT BELONGS

Some retailers are conflicted on where to merchandise newer plant-based, hybrid-type produce snack items. South Mill Mushrooms, 80-year-old mushroom growers, based in Kennett Square, PA, recently launched Shrooms, a variety of plant-based snacks made from their mushroom farms in Pennsylvania and British Columbia. Its Shrooms Splits are a hybrid of mushrooms and meat; Shrooms Bars are crispy mushrooms in different flavor profiles; and Shrooms Shiitake is a mushroom jerky.

At one Morton Williams store in Manhattan, new Shrooms snacks hang high



Shaw's merchandises South Mill Mushrooms' Shrooms, a variety of plant-based snacks, above the fresh mushrooms in the produce department.

on clip strips alongside packs of nuts, above the onions, garlic and potatoes, adjacent to the organic produce section.

Shaw's is also doing some dedicated racks with Shrooms snack varieties above the mushroom set in the produce department. "We do display shippers and independent off-shelf displays, which can be placed in the produce department, says David Eberwein, director of innovation and product development at South Mill. "At Big Y and Lowes, some displays include a power wing on the side of an endcap with dried fruits and nuts."

Changing retail-buyer mindsets on where to merchandise new plant-forward items can sometimes be a challenge. "One produce buyer thought we were a little early with this concept by assessing snack data," says Eberwein. "Sometimes plant-based products aren't part of the snack data, but we want to target the produce consumer. When you have so many mushroom-loving consumers shopping that department, it seems like it fits instead of trying to compete in the snack aisle."

Eberwein says he is seeing movement of meat-free proteins trend away from scientifically created clones that replicate the redness of meat; a transitioning from products developed in the laboratory to fresh produce products. "We stumbled into something at the right time for consumers looking for real foods, less processed plant-based items," says Eberwein.

"As a fresh industry, we tend to isolate ourselves a bit," says CarrieAnn Arias, vice president of marketing at Naturipe Farms, based in Estero, FL. "It's tough with the perishability, especially if you grow a product that can't be easily or completely processed into another form, or it has to be developed

and there's costly R&D behind it," says Arias.

"We as an industry have to push the envelope, being more exploratory and innovative in product development. Creating usage ideas is really the next stage of the plant-forward movement to bring more produce into consumers' lives," she says.

"The idea of *Have A Plant* is less about giving authoritarian doctrines on x number of servings, but being open to using fresh produce in fun, creative ways," says Arias. For example, in-store blueberry merchan-

dising display contests encourage unexpected recipes such as blueberry barbeque sauce. "We have to win on flavor and make it convenient and relevant for new generations. Consumers are now looking for more balance."

#### **FUTURE COURSE CORRECTIONS**

"Clearly, we need a course correction," says the CIA's Drescher. In 2050, we'll have 10 billion people on the planet to feed, and the status quo is unsustainable. A main



#### **EMERGING MARKET FOR PRODUCE SUPPLY**

A new market for supply may be emerging for produce companies to provide fresh produce to meat-alternative companies and form new partnerships. These products could ultimately be sold and merchandised in the produce department.

"Our research analysis shows U.S. retail sales of plant-based foods have grown 11 percent in the past year, bringing the total plant-based market value to \$4.5 billion," says Sabina Vyas, director, strategic partnerships at the San Francisco-based Plant Based Foods Association (PBFA).

The plant-based meat category alone is worth more than \$800 million, according to PBFA and  $\ensuremath{\mathsf{PBFA}}$ 

the Washington, DC-based Good Food Industry. The leading drivers of plant-based sales continue to be plant-based milks, plant-based dairy, such as cheese, yogurt and ice cream, and plant-based meats.

"We are currently identifying pilot sites for our The Power Plant station concept — mobile units with pre-made plant-based meals and snacks to go, healthy alternatives to counterparts that could include salad bowls, wraps and items like mushroom jerky," says Vyas.

"We're just getting our bearings for expansion and riding the plant-forward wave," says Michael Pan, founder of the Oregon-based namesake company that produces mushroom jerky. "We wanted to



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAN'S

solve a problem of finding healthy snacks that taste delicious and keep it simple with clean ingredients. If we can't pronounce it, we don't want it," he says of Pan's Mushroom Jerky, a 30-year-old family recipe.

"We'd like our store placement to be with fresh mushrooms in the produce department, but we're not there yet. We're trying to find mushroom-growing partners that can deliver on quality and price," he says.

"Our Power Plant stations are focused on institutions such as colleges and universities, and eventually the goal is to expand into hospitals, airports,

and retail," says Vyas. "It would be great to see our members' foods merchandised with fresh fruits and vegetables in the produce section, and exploring this strategy is one of our goals for the near future. These opportunities may include signage, limited time offers, shopper marketing campaigns and recipes showcasing plant-based alternatives paired with fresh produce."

Vyas says there are many opportunities for new partnerships between plant-based processors/manufacturers and the fresh produce industry. "The market is ripe for innovation of new products and branding that is inclusive *versus* tailoring messaging to only vegans and vegetarians," says Vyas."

pb





tenet of the plant-forward approach, says Drescher, is it extends beyond vegetarians and vegans to flexitarians or plant-rich omnivores to encourage broad adoption. He calls it "the protein-shift imperative. This is where there's traction, where we need to redouble efforts," asserts Drescher.

Gerry Ludwig, corporate consulting chef, Gordon Food Service, Grand Rapids, MI, urges suppliers to view proteins as their partners. Ludwig, who tracks nationwide restaurant trends via extensive, on-the-ground research, identifies a wave of produce-centric dishes infused with minimal animal proteins to enhance flavors. Innovative chefs are whipping up plant-based dishes meaty in both taste and texture, with or without meat, such as beet falafel or jackfruit barbeque.

Translating that plant-based innovation into K-12 schools is the next push to increase the availability and acceptance of healthy foods, according to Cathy Powers, owner of Akron, OH-based Culinary Nutrition Associates, and chair of the CIA Healthy Kids Collaborative, a national initiative to advance culinary-driven, healthy, flavorful foods for kids.

"K-12 students are much more inter-

#### "It's time for fresh produce companies to take the reins of the plant-based movement and own it."

- Jan England, England Marketing

ested in plant-forward cuisines than the adults that serve them would believe, "says Powers. "The foodservice industry needs to be better trained to prepare, season and serve produce. When things are done properly, students are adventurous," she says.

At the same time, the explosion of meat-alternative menu choices at fast casual and fast food chains are grabbing headlines, signaling an opening to reach a broader, mass-market customer base. Steering produce to the center of the plate in food-service continues to gain momentum.

Supermarkets elevating the produce department is tried-and-true, but the plant-forward movement creates a new twist. A retailer driving the plant-forward movement to the produce department is the

next step to take full advantage of this fastgrowing phenomenon.

Jan England, managing director of England Marketing, based in Cambridgeshire, UK, conducted exclusive research on rapidly shifting dietary habits, the rise of "reducetarianism" "flexetarianism" and plant-based eating and its impacts for the fresh produce industry. She implores retailers, foodservice operators and produce suppliers to capitalize on the myriad untapped opportunities.

"I don't think the fresh produce industry has completely stepped up to the plate. What we're seeing is a lot of companies like Beyond Meat penetrate the space with imitation-beef protein alternatives. Soy, wheat, and bean substitutes are well and good," she says, "but it's time for fresh produce companies to take the reins of the plant-based movement and own it.

"Most of the time, the major produce companies are competing quite hard with each other for market share and their bite of the cherry at each retailer. It would be good if people could come together and take advantage of the bigger [industry] picture," says England.

#### ENJOY THE FRUITS OF OUR LABOR!

#### **SWEET, JUICY & DELICIOUS TEXAS GRAPEFRUIT & ORANGES**



#### **EDINBURG CITRUS ASSOCIATION**

956.383.6619 WWW.TXCITRUS.COM



## Attraction/Sustainability Trade-off Shifting For Produce Packaging

#### Consumers demand solutions meeting environmental criteria.

#### BY MATT OGG

hile packaging innovations have lifted the fresh produce category by extending shelf life, aesthetics still play a key role in determining consumer appeal and ultimately sales.

Some guiding principles are universal. However.

Some guiding principles are universal. However, beauty is very much in the eye of the beholder in terms of what packaging styles will be attractive to different groups, and sustainability trends have thrown a monkey wrench in the works.

Consumers are increasingly demanding sustainable packaging, but while these solutions are still in their early phases of development, their application sometimes runs counter to conventional-packaging design wisdom.

Sara Lozano, marketing manager at Sambrailo Packaging in Watsonville, CA, says the approach in produce packaging has traditionally been to let the produce speak for itself. All the packaging needed to do was provide visibility with as close to a "360° view" as possible so consumers could inspect the product.

"But I think that dynamic is changing with the move to reduce plastic packaging in produce and also move to more sustainable options," says Lozano. "Now I think brand recognition, brand identity and storytelling have been more compelling for consumers to really finalize their purchase."

This is now the fourth season that Sambrailo has been selling its Ready Cycle packaging made from corrugated paper. In parallel, the company also sells plastic clamshells while retailers grapple with the divide between those consumers who are willing to pay for sustainability and those who



Sambrailo's Ready Cycle Packaging

"What we've noticed is more retailers and more growers are being asked by consumers to move toward sustainable packaging and present a sustainable packaging option in store," she says. "What's interesting is we're still seeing the plastic clamshells sometimes displayed either behind or right next to Ready Cycles.

"We're all still in this pilot-testing phase to see which markets, which retailers, which consumer segments are really demanding it," she says, adding the price point and visibility aspects are still very important for a lot of consumers.

The Ready Cycle packages have aqueous coatings that make them suitable for berries and tomatoes, although the company is yet to find a solution that is appropriate for fresh-cut or leafy greens due to the amount of water these products require, which damages the packaging itself.

Aaron Fox, executive vice president at Fox Packaging in McAllen,





20z, 40z, 60z, and 80z



Clearly, ip InlinePlastics



TX, uses his company's moves in sustainability as a good example of how packaging appeal trends are evolving.

Stand-up pouches have been a gamechanger for presenting fruits and vegetables attractively, and Fox is positive about the boost given by packaging innovations that now allow for adequate ventilation in these pouches, leading to better quality and visual appeal.

"Certain items like citrus — lemons, limes, those sorts of things — were being packed in pouch bags albeit with a sacrifice in shelf life because of the lack of ventilation," he says.

To make the most of this trend and the demand for sustainability, Fox Packaging has introduced its pouch '#4 Fox Eco Stand-Up.' The only issue is the material is high-density, meaning it is more difficult to get the transparency packaging companies usually want.

"In this situation, it's not about bumping up the style quotient," he says. "It's more about compromising for the sake of recyclability."

Fox says this approach to packaging puts more emphasis on print designs as far as aesthetics are concerned.

"If you take that crystal-clear factor out,

"Certain items like citrus — lemons, limes, those sorts of things — were being packed in pouch bags albeit with a sacrifice in shelf life because of the lack of ventilation."

— Aaron Fox, Fox Packaging

then they may want to replace it with some print, or you may want to just stress the recyclable aspect and hope that helps," he says.

Tony O'Driscoll, vice president at Sev-Rend Corp. in Collinsville, IL, says sustainability is the No. 1 issue in flexible packaging right now. He emphasizes 'how to recycle' messaging will be critical to the success of these efforts.

Cindy Blish, associate brand and communications manager at Inline Plastics Corp in Shelton, CT, says all her company's PET/ DPET plastic containers are 100% curbside recyclable with a "Recycle Me" message imprinted on every package to remind consumers.

"Inline continues to utilize new and emerging technologies that require less energy and less material in the production of our containers, but increase the clarity and quality of our products at the same time," she says.

#### **BRANDS AND MESSAGING**

While some are sacrificing the visibility of produce, pursuing recyclable plastics and hoping the message will generate appeal, O'Driscoll notes trends have actually been moving away from graphics.

"Right now the pendulum is definitely housed in the 'show me your produce' part of the world and to de-emphasize the graphics on the packaging," he says. "Just two years ago we were selling grape pouches that were probably 80 to 90% graphics, and today they're probably 20 to 25% graphic — they want to see the grapes."

Jeff Watkin, Sev-Rend's director of marketing, notes how mini potatoes have





#### Featuring "The Retailer™"

Litco's Engineered Molded Wood™ P.O.P. Base

DESIGNED FOR







Smooth hand jack entry

USDA Certified Biobased, Certified Sustainable and ISPM 15 Export Compliant

- Retail store safe no bottom boards, eliminates "foot trip points" Safe manual handling - sanitized, no nails, mold, and pests
- High resistant to lead-edge and corner display damage from pallet jacks
- ✓ Consistent size, weight and level deck surface

√ Surprisingly low cost

Priced in T/Ld. lots as low as: 20" x 24" quarter-size \$2.80; 24" x 40" half-size \$4.25; 48" x 40" full-size \$7.50

Do you want "Extreme Product Protection" at a surprisingly low cost? Contact Litco today for a quote and free sample 855-610-0104 or visit us at www.litco.com/pop

🕊 Founded in 1962, Litco has purposely built our good reputation on what we promise and what we deliver. 🥬 Gary Sharon, EVP

## "You know, you could wrap up tomatoes in beautiful Picasso prints, but it wouldn't be a very functional package, and it'd be a waste of a nice picture."

-Tony O' Driscoll, Sev-Rend

become more of a premium product in recent years with pouches delivering a "more mature look to them" highlighting both the product and its uses, while some pouches for sweet potatoes include steamer functions.

Blish says recent research shows consumers continue to look for safety and convenience, and clear packaging gives them instant reassurance the produce is fresh.

"Tamper-evident products remain a key criterion for many consumers to ensure the product they are buying is ultimately safe and secure from tampering," she says.

Meanwhile, top seals are also allowing produce marketers to find the right equilibrium between product visibility and marketing messages. Sara Lozano of Sambrailo Packaging notes the entire top seal surface area can be used as marketing and branding real estate.

"And then you have a tub that is

completely clear and transparent *versus*, for example, berry clamshells," she says. "What we see in salad is very different because they put branding, nutritional facts and recipes directly on the film on both the front and the back. So it varies definitely through commodities."

However, Blish of Inline says top-seal containers are really only effective for single-use servings where resealing of the package is not a consideration.

"They also lack the flexibility clamshell packages offer for enhanced merchandising opportunities, with the inability to securely stack and create attractive displays," she says. "With the increasing demand for safety and convenience, consumers continue to gravitate toward clamshells where the produce is perceived as fresher."

Sev-Rend's O'Driscoll says the main forces

driving packaging designs are retailers' private labels *versus* consumer brands, and different desired goals are at play depending on the product.

"Form follows function — how do you separate the aesthetics of something like this from the functionality?" he asks. "And at the end of the day the functionality is driving a lot of it — it certainly puts a corral around what you could do."

"You know, you could wrap up tomatoes in beautiful Picasso prints, but it wouldn't be a very functional package, and it'd be a waste of a nice picture," says Driscoll.

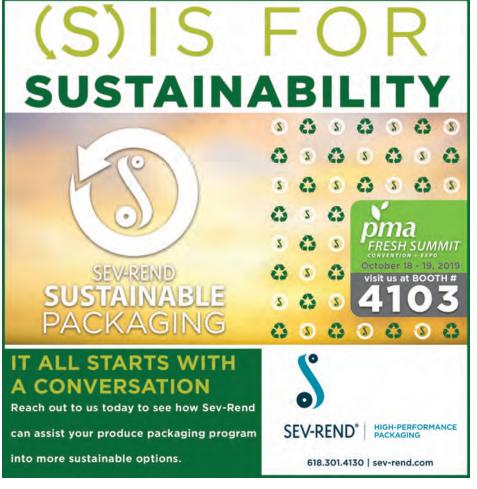
#### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The push for more sustainable packaging is nothing new for Eva Almenar, Ph.D, and an associate professor at Michigan State University's The School of Packaging.

In 2012 she co-authored a paper in the Journal *Appetite* titled "Influences of packaging attributes on consumer purchase decisions for fresh produce," which was also written with Georgios Koutsimanis, Kristen Getter, Bridget Beche and Janice Harte.

The researchers conducted a questionnaire and found containers made from bio-based





materials were highly appealing to consumers, while participants also said the type of packaging material affected food quality. The "extend the 'best by' date" was ranked as the top convenience feature.

Sambrailo's Lozano says for the time being bio-plastic materials are not available on a scale that would make them viable for her company yet.

But the types of material in use are changing in response to consumer demand. Almenar says this trend has brought about a greater use of films and more trays made from paper mold.

"This is a big change," she says. "We are starting to see a lot of paper trays with produce, and produce wrapped with film in order to reduce plastic content."

She clarifies not all consumers are interested in these new innovations with a sustainability focus, with more traditional consumers sticking to what they're used to.

"Sometimes it's difficult to change your mindset, so psychology plays a big role," she says.

Almenar says overall there are three broad ways of assessing consumer demographics and making packaging decisions accordingly: Age

"Kids may like the fruit or vegetable that you're selling because the package attracts them, and they will like the product even better. In that case what you want is to sell the package as the selling point, not the product."

— Eva Almenar, Michigan State University's The School of Packaging

group, gender and educational background.

"In the case of produce we are forced to show what we are selling and that is one general trend regardless of the country, because the consumer wants to see freshness," she says. "Of course colorful things attract everyone, but then you need to think about the generations.

"Kids may like the fruit or vegetable that you're selling because the package attracts them, and they will like the product even better," she says. "In that case what you want is to sell the package as the selling point, not the product."

At the other end of the spectrum, Almenar says older people look for two key things in produce packaging: easy opening and easy-to-read labels.

The packaging expert says educated people

are more likely to be open-minded when it comes to innovative new packaging, so that definitely needs to be taken into consideration by retailers.

In terms of gender, an interesting revelation came out of the 2018 paper, "Effects of sachet presence on consumer product perception and active packaging acceptability – a study of fresh-cut cantaloupe," published in the journal *LWT*– *Food Science and Technology* and co-authored by Almenar, Christopher T. Wilson and Janice Harte.

Almenar defines active packaging as something that interacts with a product in order to extend its shelf life, and this includes ethylene-absorbing sachets.

In last year's study, panelists expressed a willingness to pay for packages that extend the shelf life of fresh-cut cantaloupe, but



females and people more than 35 showed a preference for packages without the sachets. Males and people less than 35 didn't seem to mind so much.

Another way to consider packaging appeal is to note what can go wrong.

Fox of Fox Packaging says color is highly important, and as a rule of thumb you should never use green packaging with a white commodity.

"You don't want green packaging or a green label on a white onion, and usually that's because it makes the product almost have a green tinge, which you really don't want," says Fox. "So you try to use either a blue mesh, or white mesh that has a little blue in it or some blue in your labeling, to make the white crisper."

Jeff Watkin of Sev-Rend says other problems can arise when people are looking "too big picture" with their layout designs.

"You're limited to the equipment the packer is using, and that's another thing we run into quite a bit," says Watkin. "They set all this design work out to go on a film or a pouch, but then when it gets to the grower-packer side, the packer only has equipment for tags, so you've got to retrofit a design."

#### WHAT THE FUTURE MAY HOLD

Watkin says another trend to make packaging more appealing has been to use custom-colored netting instead of standard colors such as blue, red or yellow.

"I've got one specific mini potato grower that started utilizing a burlap-colored netting, and that gives the look of almost a burlap bag, which complements their packaging," he says. "They're not just thinking of netting as an add-on after the fact; they're thinking about how can we utilize the netting as a component to their brand."

This certainly adds a rustic effect, and another way this aesthetic can be achieved is by using point-of-purchase (POP) pallets as bases for the packaging that sits on top.

"The role of retail packaging is to get attention, inform about the product and compel the customer to purchase," says Gary Sharon, executive vice president of Vienna, OH-based Litco International, a company that produces engineered, molded-wood POPs. "When it comes to the POP base/pallet, we at Litco consider it to be a component of the package, or the display.

"The advantage is that it will not distract the eye away from the graphics on the display."

While farm-fresh and rustic themes work well for marketing to consumers, there is this

strange juxtaposition at the same time as packaging modernizes rapidly.

In addition to active packaging, Michigan State's Almenar touts the development of intelligent packaging, which not only interacts with the product but also its environment to communicate messages.

As an example, Almenar says this type of packaging can communicate how ripe a product is, and even detect if it's been above a certain temperature for too long, which could lead to a pathogen risk.

"That could be a color change or even a color in the barcode, so that, for instance, when you are scanning the package the code is not read, and then you already know that package cannot be sold," she says.

"The next packaging issue or challenge is going to be the Internet of Things (IoT), and because produce is the most challenging food product to package, I am looking forward to seeing how the new packages are going to look in order for fresh produce to be sold, to be safe."





### INITIATING INDUSTRY IMPROVEMENT



Since 1985

To get ahead in the produce business, you need to stay ahead of the produce business.

For subscription information, please go to • www.producebusiness.com or call us today at • 561-994-1118, Ext 109

produce business

P.O. Box 810425 • Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425

### **Wholesalers Stay Proactive**

Faced with adversity and change, produce wholesalers persevere in finding ways to continue serving the evolving needs of customers.







BY JODEAN ROBBINS

n 1913, when TJ Fleming's great-grandfather started Strube Celery & Vegetable Co. in Chicago, the wholesale market was the only option for most buyers. It remained the vital link for growers and retailers through much of the 20th century.

But Fleming, vice president and director of sales at Strube, points out times have changed in recent decades. "Now there are so many options for my customers," he says. "So we need to consider where our advantage or niche is."

Produce wholesalers were paramount to the success of supermarkets before mainliners took on produce, explains Bob Corey, ambassador/advisor for Corey Brothers in Charleston, WV. "The successful wholesaler



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN VENA

helped set ad plans, do seasonal resets and provide counseling and training of produce personnel," he says. "The ones who did this exceptionally well grew their business dramat-

As times change, so has the game plan espoused by wholesalers, yet a winning record must be set on solid fundamentals.

"A lot of wholesalers talk about not knowing where they fit in and how they're relevant, but in reality, a wholesaler's job is to get from Point A to Point B better than anybody else," says Daniel Corsaro, vice president of sales and marketing with Indianapolis Fruit Company in Indianapolis. "When you focus on that, you get back to what you do

Continued on page 58

#### ■ STRATEGIC MOVEMENT GIVES WHOLESALERS AN EDGE

As transportation and labor become more problematic and buyers look to mitigate risk and expense, wholesalers have developed a new playbook of services to meet customer needs, including cross-docking, forward distribution and other logistics services as well as ripening, repacking and serving as importer-of-record.

John Vena Inc. in Philadelphia continues to grow its operating service departments, JVI Ripening and JVI Repacking.

"The contract ripening and repack work we do outside our core JVI Wholesale business is indispensable to the success of those investments," says Emily Kohlhas, director of marketing at John Vena. "Next year, we'll continue to increase the amount of direct importing we do through a new subsidiary, JVI Imports. It really is essential that as a wholesaler you thoroughly vet and stand behind every grower you represent. We are only as great as our growers."

General Produce Co. in Sacramento, CA, offers cross-docking, forward distribution services, acts as importer-of-record for imports and repacks produce. "All this is becoming more commonplace, particularly as trucking challenges persist and the cost of distribution continues to rise," says Linda Luka, director of marketing and communications. "The more services we can offer in this arena helps build our partner-ships with customers."

Geography, product line and service are all areas of evolution for MC Produce in Montreal. "We distribute all across Canada," says Maria Cavazos, president. "We're also doing more packaging to provide more value-added, and we're adding more items to our lines."

TJ Fleming, vice president and director of sales at Strube Celery & Vegetable Co. in Chicago, reports a growing emphasis on cross-docking. "There is great cost associated with trucks especially if a truck sits for 6 to 7 hours," he says. "We have scheduled appointments for customers we serve every day, so we find more and more grower/shippers send us their



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN VENA INC

product to deliver to the final customer. This service is growing because we do it well, and it's easier for us to do than our shippers."

Business on both sides of the field drives new services, as evidenced by Indianapolis Fruit Company's growing logistics and cross-docking ventures. "There are multiple retailers across the country who have fantastic facilities, but their customers are asking them to carry twice the items now, which is complex," says Daniel Corsaro, vice president of sales and marketing. "They're asking us to manage some of their more challenging items."

Corsaro explains as larger retailers in the country put pressure on growers to offer delivered programs, it can be complex for growers to comply.

"Delivery for a grower can be cumbersome and expensive," he says. "We're making an effort to work with our grower partners to do 'last-mile' freight and storage because we're already in those areas. This allows our shippers to service their customers, and we continue to play an extremely relevant role in the supply chain."

The Four Seasons Family of Companies, Ephrata, PA, engages in cross-docking for retailers and grower-shippers, LTL freight service inbound and final-mile service through the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic.

"We also provide freight brokerage, cold storage, banana and avocado

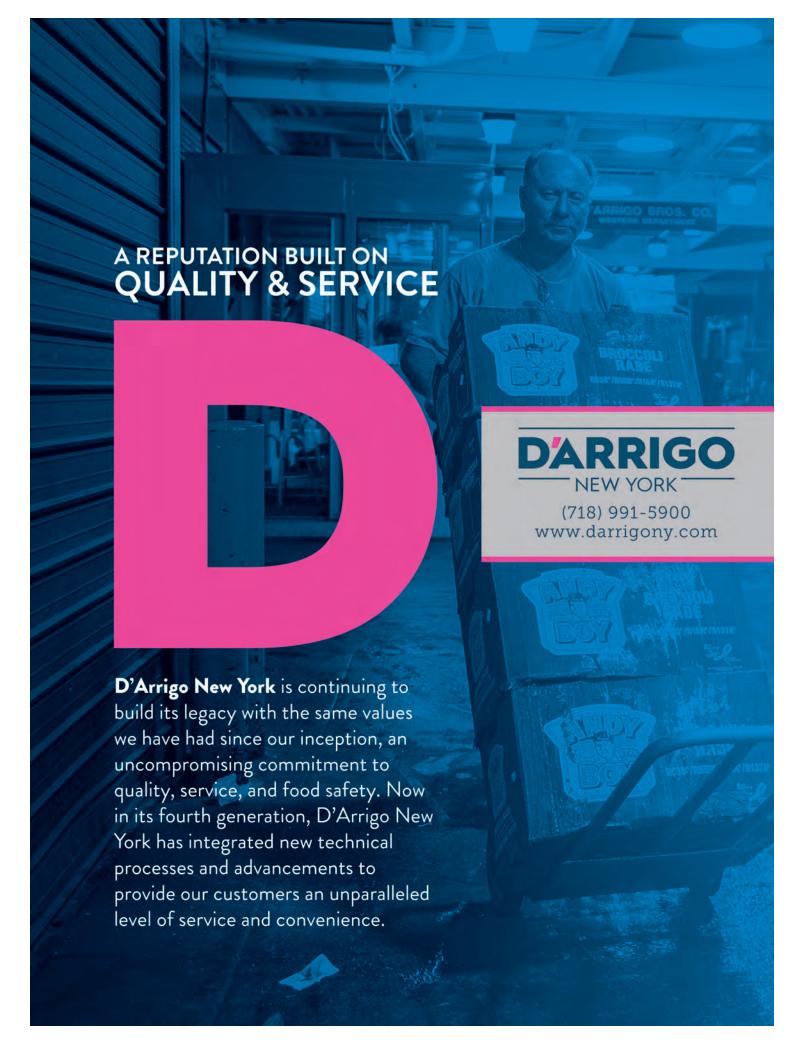
ripening, repack and bagging, and importing services," says Jonathan Steffy, vice president and general manager. "The demand has been so strong for this menu of services using our talents and assets that two well-established sister companies emerged a decade ago and are doing quite well."

Additional services focused on repack, fresh-cut and ripening continue to cater to targeted customer needs. "Wholesalers had invested in professional ripening rooms primarily used for bananas in the past, but with the growing popularity in Hass avocados, wholesalers are starting to get involved with large-scale avocado ripening programs," says Steffy.

Repacking and breakdown is a growing part of Strube's business because many stores don't want a 60-count cilantro, according to Fleming. "They'd rather take a fresher 30-count and replenish by coming back in," he says. "Our customers are more conscious of the amount of produce they buy at one time."

Nickey Gregory Company in Forest Park, GA, enjoys growth in processing/fresh-cut.

"We created Family Fresh Foods as our own in-house fresh-cut processor," says Andrew Scott, vice president of business development. "Our customers have a need for value-added products they can order one day, and we deliver the next."



#### Continued from page 55

well. Getting back to the basics is something we stress all the time — we have to do the blocking and tackling really well or else we can't score any touchdowns."

The days of simply supplying product to customers have faded away, says Butch Hill, general manager for Shasta Produce in South San Francisco, CA.

"Increasingly, customers are requiring not just product, but service associated with the product," he says. "We live in a service-

## "With all the increasing industry challenges, the importance of information flow is even more important — one more advantage a wholesaler brings into play."

- Stefanie Katzman, S. Katzman Produce

driven economy more than ever, and competition for the most inclusive service is fierce. We are constantly looking for ways to help our customers increase their bottom line.



According to Butch Hill of Shasta Produce, "Customers are requiring not just product, but service associated with the product."

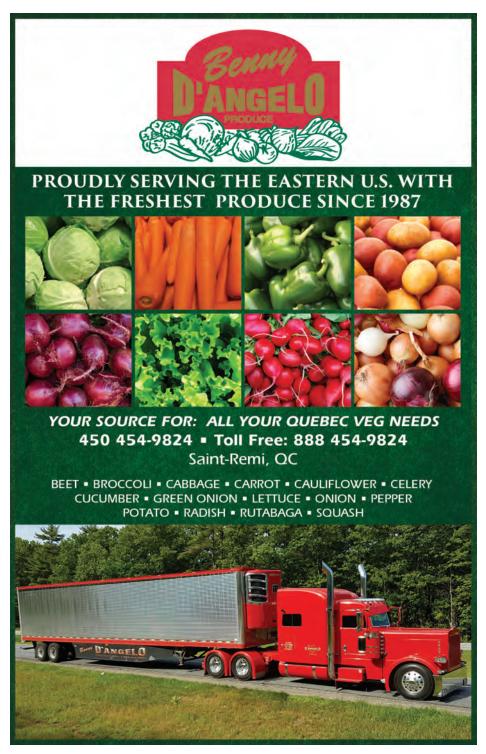
This includes making them aware of new items, reports for movement and profitability, merchandising and consulting along with ease-of-order placement, complete order fulfillment and on-time deliveries every time. These are both challenging and exciting times."

At their core, produce wholesalers exist to provide breadth of product variety, supply chain infrastructure and economies of scale that many buyers would not have on their own, explains Jonathan Steffy, vice president and general manager for Four Seasons Produce in Ephrata, PA. "What types of buyers those are and what they need from wholesalers has always had an element of change based on what's happening in the marketplace," he says.

#### WHOLESALE ADVANTAGES

As the wholesale role continues to evolve, marketplace changes make them more relevant.

"With new rules and regulations around transportation, the increase of smaller independent food stores and an increased desire for fresh fruits and vegetables on a regular basis, the need for wholesalers in the supply chain has become even more important," says Stefanie Katzman of S. Katzman Produce in the Bronx, NY. "With all the increasing industry challenges, the importance of infor-









Fax: 718-328-3738

247 - 248, 250 - 257, 271 Hunts Point M<u>arket • Bronx, NY 10474</u>





"We must know as much about each customer as they know about themselves. That's very exciting for us because we become a very integral part of their business."

- Daniel Corsaro, Indianapolis Fruit Company

mation flow is even more important — one more advantage a wholesaler brings into play."

Linda Luka, director of marketing and communications for General Produce Co. in Sacramento, CA, mentions food safety, product education, care and handling and transportation challenges as contributing to pressure in daily operations. "Food costs, profit margins and shrinking labor pools place more demand on retailers and foodservice operators," she says. "Our contribution is in understanding their needs and goals."

Wholesalers should forget they are just wholesalers and look for any and all oppor-

PHOTO COURTESY OF FOUR SEASONS PRODUCE



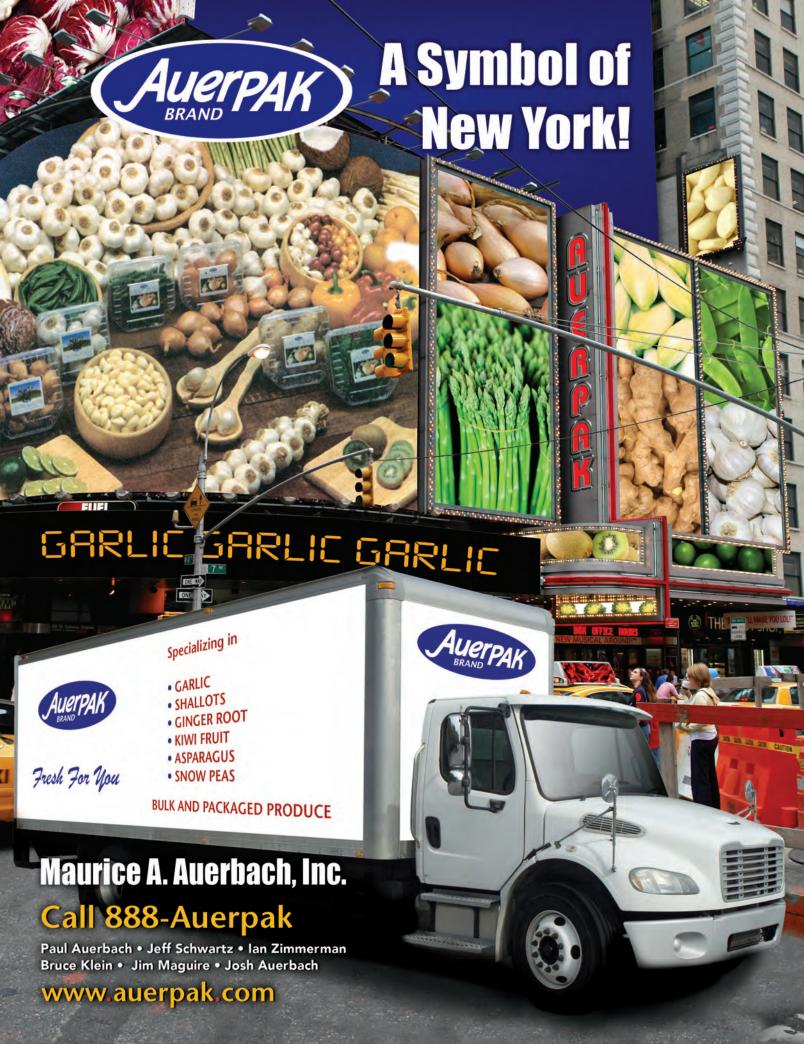
Four Seasons' involvement in The Great Artichoke Adventure event at Lexington Co-op Market in Buffalo, NY, helped the store sell three times or more as many artichokes going forward.

tunities to increase offerings and services, advises Hill. "They (wholesalers) should always be thinking outside the box and imagine themselves as a successful delivery service and not just produce," he says.

#### **AN INTEGRAL TEAM MEMBER**

Wholesalers were born to fill an essential role in the produce network. Katzman asserts wholesalers came about because not all growers or retailers were big enough to







Katzman's produce merchandiser works with New York Metro stores to consult and design displays of its products.

deal directly with each other, not all produce arrives exactly as planned, and not all production goes as planned.

"These are the three main issues wholesalers still resolve," she says. "Over time, the wholesaler has become so much more, but everything we do can all be brought back to customer service and bringing the customers what they need."

As business models have changed, whole-salers have changed with them.

"Fifty years ago, the model was, 'we're

going to handle a Red Delicious apple, and we're going to get the best price and sell it'," says Corsaro. "Now, every customer wants a different Red Delicious in a different way. It's about customizing every single customer's different supply chain and go-to-market strategy. We must know as much about each customer as they know about themselves. That's very exciting for us because we become a very integral part of their business."

"Local and regional customers can replenish from a wholesaler the same day or next morning. And, wholesalers are offering more services, such as processing, private label, cross docking and redistribution and logistics."

- Andrew Scott, Nickey Gregory Company



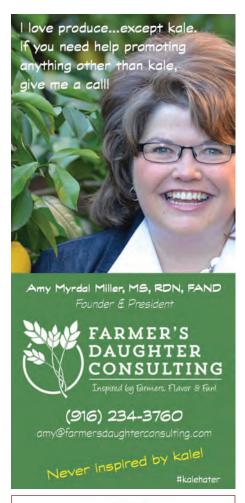
## 100YEARS PASSION



CourchesneLarose.com

T 514-525-6381 • Montréal, Québec, Canada







"Successful businesses seem to have pushed one way or the other toward a volume-driven model more focused on the grower or a service-focused model shifting closer to the customer."

- Emily Kohlas, John Vena Inc.

Wholesalers have become more of a strategic partner for foodservice and retail customers, concurs Andrew Scott, vice president of business development for Nickey Gregory Company in Forest Park, GA.

"We are that important step in the supply chain," he says. "Local and regional customers can replenish from a wholesaler the same day or next morning. And, wholesalers are offering more services, such as processing, private label, cross-docking and redistribution and logistics."

Corsaro explains the increasingly competitive retail environment drives the diversity of services demanded from wholesalers.

"As retailers continue to fight for market

PHOTO COURTESY OF GENERAL PRODUCE



As shrinking labor pools put more pressure on retailers to staff the produce section, wholesalers step in to provide merchandising assistance.



Well-kept, colorful displayed are advised by wholesalers and consumers alike.







Phone: 514 381-8679 • Fax: 514 381-9621 • gaetanbono@gaetanbono.com Montréal, Québec

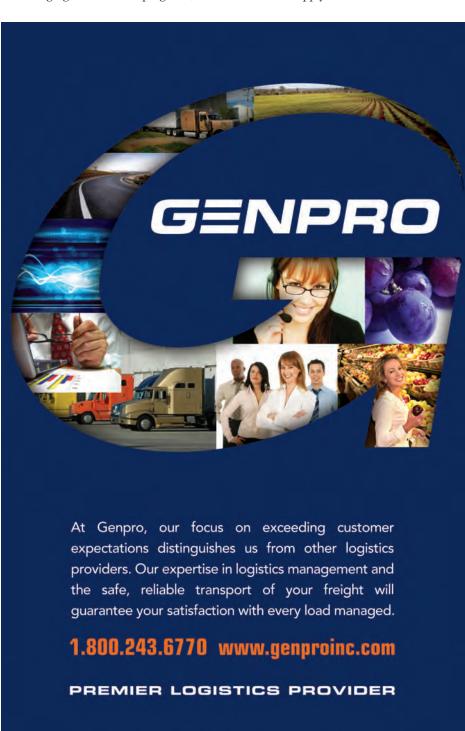
www.gaetanbono.com

## "Many other customers are looking for business partners to help them solve problems, achieve strategic goals and be more profitable — much different than having the lowest costs of goods."

- Jonathan Steffy, Four Seasons Produce

share through differentiation, retailers who have the same business model are asking us to help them be different," he says. "So, instead of managing four or six programs, we're

managing 12 or 18. It's so competitive in the retail space that it's created a need for wholesalers and distributors like us who can handle different supply chain models for retailers





Delivery is one of many services wholesalers provide to build business.

who can't handle it themselves."

Especially in today's information age with insight just a click away, customers expect more from all business they engage with, suggests Steffy of Four Seasons. "Some customers are simply interested in price, and that's all they value," he says. "But many other customers are looking for business partners to help them solve problems, achieve strategic goals and be more profitable — much different than having the lowest costs of goods. For the latter type of customer, aligning with the wholesaler is key."

The past few years have definitely seen some culling in the wholesale industry, reports Emily Kohlhas, director of marketing at John Vena Inc. (JVI) in Philadelphia. "Successful businesses seem to have pushed one way or the other toward a volume-driven model more focused on the grower or a service-focused model shifting closer to the customer," she says. "We've been able to hold ground somewhere in the middle because of our unique specialty product assortment, decades of relationships with growers, incredibly diverse customer base, and high-investment services that aren't approachable for most small- to mid-size firms."

Shasta's Hill says a complete universal system for procuring, storing, merchandising and selling products and services is the ultimate goal for wholesalers.



"We are seeing fewer independent markets these days, a real shame, because major chains are doing all of the innovating, and it is always proprietary," he says. "No one is really innovating for the mom-and-pop. There are innovations available, but they are fragmented and all over the place. The wholesaler of the future will have an entire suite of proven systems and services working together in a way that will allow smaller businesses to successfully compete with major players without each one having to figure it all out for themselves."

### "We provide an annual retail playbook for seasonal merchandising and ad planning."

- Linda Luka, General Produce Co.

#### **CRUCIAL TEAM SUPPORT**

Mounting constraints at retail have made marketing and merchandising support even more crucial.

"There has been a trend of some retailers



Wholesalers often work with retailers to develop opportunistic ad prices and promotions.

allocating less labor hours to the produce department," says Four Season's Steffy. "Stores tend to have less tenure in produce than in the past, and filling open positions has become trickier. To help retailers and other produce buyers with this labor pinch, many produce wholesalers have added or expanded services, including store-door-delivery, third-party logistics help, merchandising support, staff trainings, display building and display contests, ad writing and promotion support,

Katzman notes wholesalers act as an extension of both growers and retailers.

and stocking new convenience or packaged

product lines that replace or augment what

used to be cut or made in store."

"This is why these partnerships are so successful," she says. "We have customers we can reach out to that can react in the moment to adjust retail pricing to promote products, and we have customers that we can set up ad promotions with in advance for seasonal, holiday, special occasions and programs."

Merchandising and ad support is a crucial section of the wholesaler playbook. Indianapolis Fruit has been providing merchandising and planning services for two decades.

"We have more than 20 people in the markets we serve who act essentially as produce consultants," says Corsaro. "They are



# Celebrating years — Partners in Quality Since 1919

## JOHN VENA INC.

SPECIALTY PRODUCE

WHOLESALE
IMPORTING
RIPENING
REPACKING
LOGISTICS

www.johnvenaproduce.com Philadelphia, PA advantage."TJ Fleming, Strube

there to help get the retail department ready for the next morning or the next season and help customers understand how they can maneuver in competitive landscape."

Shasta Produce developed a marketing department responsible for carrying out ad



PHOTOS COURTESY OF COREY BROTHERS

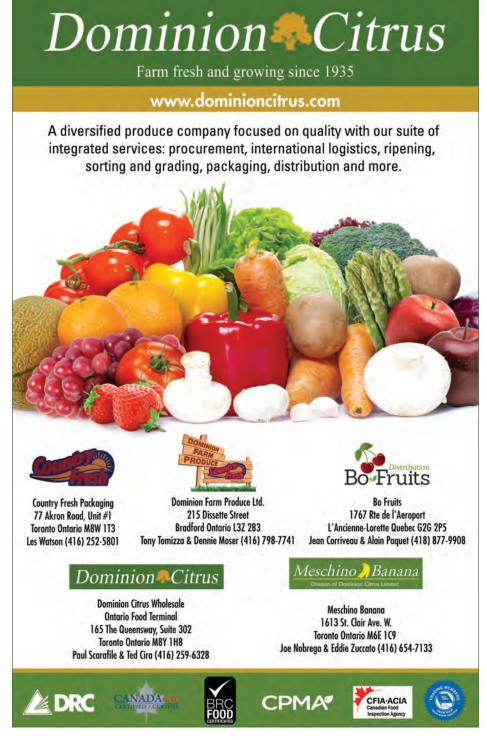


Corey Brothers' Local Farmers Market showcases its shippers' produce to the public.

campaigns for both shippers and customers. "They primarily use social media for the delivery of these services, and it has been a very successful addition to our service offerings," says Hill.

General Produce ensures its retail merchandisers have industry expertise in maximizing sales through thoughtful and visually impactful displays, according to Luka. "We provide an annual retail playbook for seasonal merchandising and ad planning," she says. "This gets customized for particular customers to work in tandem with their specific promotional calendar and in-store activities."

Four Seasons offers a broad variety of opportunities customized to meet specific retailer business models, including ad writing and quoting, off-invoice schedules for produce department value-added product lines,



## Imagine a future where doctors will prevent, treat and cure nutritionally









#### **■ FACILITATING THE LOCAL/ORGANIC HUDDLE**

Many wholesalers align themselves with local and organic growers, serving as a hub to help maintain and grow these programs. TJ Fleming of Strube Celery & Vegetable Co. points out during the local season, customers may send someone around to two or three farms and bypass the market completely, but there is a cost involved.

"You have to hire a driver, and you lose a guy for the day," he says. "Instead, they should take an account of what it costs them, what's the real value. The perceived value is there, but what's the real value. And, if there is an issue, can they go back to the farmer and get a credit? Probably not."

As an alternative, wholesalers offer coordination and planning for the local deal. Four Seasons, located in Lancaster County, PA's rich growing region, plans for product to be grown specifically for its customers at neighboring Amish and conservative Mennonite family farms.

"Such planning with regional growers throughout Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York is essential to our shared success in the late spring through fall," says Four Season's Jonathan Steffy.

Strube also enjoys strong local grower/shipper representation. "We have local farmers who grow exclusively for us," says Fleming. "We sit with them in the winter and plan the season, talking about what they can grow to give us both an advantage. For example, whether we can be the first ones in the season with gypsy peppers."

Georgia's Nickey Gregory aligns with local growers and is a big supporter of *Georgia Grown* and *Fresh from Florida*. General Produce's California location yields a great network of small and large local growers.

"We provide grower profiles for point of sale so customers can appreciate who's growing their local pears, persimmons and melons," says General Produce's Linda Luka. "These farmers participate with us to provide retail support when possible for outdoor farmers market events and product education and tastings."

Wholesalers also act as an organic distri-

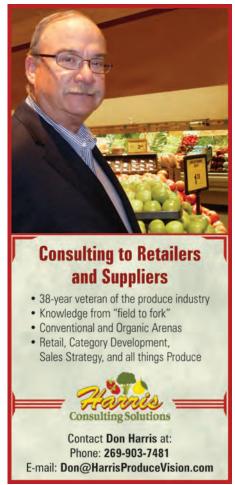
bution center for stores limited in buying organic directly.

"We have our own line of packaged, bagged and break-case organics," says Indianapolis Fruit's Daniel Corsaro. "This provides an opportunity to customers who want to sell organics but are shy about unknown customer demand. Our Garden Organic program allows them to minimize the exposure for shrink, damage and rotation. Our break-case program allows customers to carry more variety than they would if they had to buy full cases. Our packaged product allows for extended shelf life and easy merchandising. Customers love that it's all UPC, so they don't have to worry about a cashier ringing it up correctly."

Certified Organic represents about half of Four Seasons' sales volume, reports Steffy. "Natural foods retailers and other retailers with 100% organic produce departments benefit from our broad organic offerings.

"The organic program also helps Four Seasons support retailers who are self-distributed in conventional to grow or supplement emerging organic programs." **pb** 





## S. Katzman Produce Katzman Berry Corp.



# THE HOUSE THAT KATZMAN BUILT...

# ...CONTINUES TO GROW!



"As we have grown more international and more diversified, our foundation is still built on our strong relationships with our growers/shippers and our customers"

— Stephen Katzman



718-991-4700 www.KatzmanProduce.com www.BloomFreshProduce.com

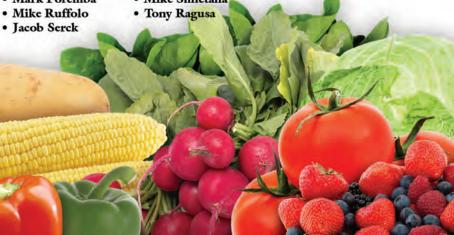
Deliveries made by our own fleet of refrigerated trucks and trailers

## JAB PRODUCE

Selling Top Quality Vegetables, Tomatoes and Berries From Growing Regions Across the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

#### SALES:

- · Steve Argires
- Mike Couwenhoven Linda Trovato · Mark Poremba
- Mike Ruffolo
- · Luis Arellano
- · Mike Smietana



CHICAGO INTL. PRODUCE MARKET 2404 S. Wolcott Ave. - Units 22 & 23 - Chicago, IL 60608 Tel (312) 226 7805 - Fax (312) 226 5154

300 Per and Distributor

**Quality Fruits** Vegetables



Let our strong relationships across Mexico, Ecuador, Brazil, Peru & Costa Rica, bring you the world's freshest tropicals year round.

#### **Maria Cavazos**

maria.cavazos@mcproduceinc.com www.mcproduceinc.com

4916 Fulton Street (H3W 1V4) • Montreal, QC Phone 514 739-5382 • FAX 514 739-9039







"They (wholesalers) should always be thinking outside the box and imagine themselves as a successful delivery service and not just produce."

- Butch Hill, Shasta Produce

PHOTO COURTESY OF S. KATZMAN PRODUCE



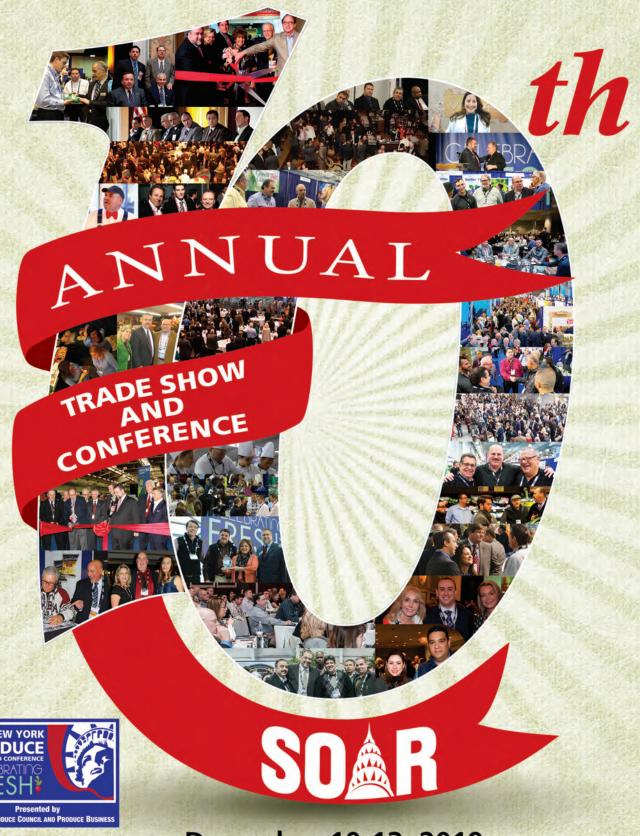
As part of its annual retail playbook for seasonal merchandising and ad planning, General Produce's merchandising team created fall displays at McClellan Commissary in McClellan Park, CA, to inspire customers.

letter from the produce buyer at a food co-op store in New England, recognizing the efforts of merchandising specialist Dominic Pelosi. "He helped their produce team achieve a 16% year-over-year sales growth in the produce department for the second quarter, along with a multi-thousands gross-margin boost," notes Steffv.

This June, Four Seasons senior merchandiser and natural stores coordinator, Brian Dey, crafted an event with Lexington Co-op Markets in Buffalo, NY, and Ocean Mist Farms. "The store branded a four-day artichoke bash as The Great Artichoke Adventure and included a 4,300-unit massive display of artichokes, give-a-ways and tie-ins with in-store foodservice," says Steffy. "The event generated a lot of excitement, and now the store sells three times or more as many fresh artichokes on a weekly basis than prior to the mega display."

### REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN

go to www.nyproduceshow.com



December 10-13, 2019

## TIE-INS OFFER PRODUCE SALES NUDGE

Complementary items trigger impulse buys and double register rings.

BY MATT OGG

onvenience is king. No matter how many recipe guides you distribute or YouTube videos you create to try and boost sales, the nearby placement of compatible non-fresh produce items can often be enough to trigger fruit and vegetable purchases.

Salad toppers, banana bread mixes, dipping chocolate, snack crisps, herb crystals, seasoning mixes; these are all options for nudging rings in the produce aisle, and there are countless more foods that can be utilized depending on a store's region and demographics.

Tie-ins are about selling an idea or an occasion to a consumer through the synthesis of products that intuitively pair well together.

"Building an easily visualized meal or side dish opportunity for consumers is always a win," says Paul Laubscher, director of marketing with Calbee North America, based in Fairfield, CA.

Laubscher — whose company is known for its Harvest Snaps snacks made from dried green peas, lentils and black beans — says the key to successful tie-ins is to find the point of consumer relevance, which can come from variety, usage occasion ideas or added value.

"Given the breadth and variety of fruit or vegetable options in the produce department, a tie-in promotion provides a special opportunity to help encourage consumers to feed themselves and their families in a nutritious way," he says. "For most accounts, Harvest Snaps are under the purview of the produce buyer, and we are happy for this consumer association, because our snack crisps are actually made from vegetables."

The Calbee executive explains the optimal amount of promotion space is dependent upon the account and what works at the store level.

"Harvest Snaps come in a display-ready 'knock out' case, with an interlocking design that gives our produce partners maximum flexibility," he says. "For specifically themed



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRULY GOOD FOOD:

promotions, a four-case integrated shipper provides an attractive focal point for consumers to engage with the limited-time value proposition."

Fresh Origins in San Marcos, CA is a company that skirts the line between fresh produce and tie-ins. On the one hand, it sells microgreens, shoots and edible flowers and on the other it sells colorful crystals made of herbs, flowers and fruit.

These products are shelf-stable and can last for six months. Owner David Sasuga says they are best merchandised in the fresh herb or fresh salad areas of the produce aisle.

"They would require about 12" to 20" depending on the number of flavors. We recommend four to five flavors," says Sasuga. "The vibrant colors make an attractive eye-catching addition to this area and can stimulate creativity for home cooks wanting to try new ideas.

"They are a delicious addition to fresh fruit," he says. "The Basil Crystals pair well with watermelon, strawberry and even jicama. The Rose Crystals are fantastic on white nectarine or honeydew."

#### **PROXIMITY MATTERS**

For a tie-in to be successful, it is not sufficient to just simply place it in the produce aisle but to do so strategically.

Chad Hartman, executive director of sales

and marketing at Charlotte, NC-based Truly Good Foods, recommends merchandising the complementary produce item right next to, above or under the tie-in product.

For Truly Good Foods, which sells a range of trail mixes, nuts and its flavored 'Dip & Devour' snacks for fruit, complementary items are often placed under the table of the tie-in.

"It will only grow sales if it is easy for the shopper to grab both at the same time," says Hartman. "For example, if a shopper wants to dip strawberries in chocolate, they will impulsively buy the chocolate if they are seeing it right by the product."

Hartman says bananas are also a great complement to flavored coating, such as chocolate, while nuts and dried fruit are a great complement to berries.

"Shoppers expect to see produce in a produce department, but as shoppers are looking more for convenience, it is good to allocate 10-15% of a produce department to complementary items," he explains.

Hartman notes temporary price reductions (TPRs), and sampling can also be incorporated into a produce merchandising tie-in strategy for an added boost.

"We have seen the best success with TPRs right on the shelf. Shoppers' eyes are drawn to TPR's, especially if it is part of a tie-in promotion," he says.

Samantha McCaul, marketing manager at



# GROWER DIRECT

SOURCING TRANSPARENCY FAMILY FARMS

PRODUCE OF THE USA



## 1-SOURCE SUPPLIER

FREF. \$

CASH



SPACE
(in warehouse slots)



TIME
(in dock bumps
& paperwork)

**VISIT US AT PMA | BOOTH #2129** 

Concord Foods in Brockton, MA, says some of her company's prime tie-in displays include: bananas with Chiquita banana bread mix; avocados with guacamole mix; apples with caramel dips and apple crisp mix; and potatoes with roasted potato season mix.

McCaul points to a few seasoning mixes that are getting a lot of interest at the moment.

"These are trendy recipes that are hot in a lot of restaurants today, such as Buffalo Cauliflower Seasoning Mix, Garlic Parmesan Sauce Mix for Veggie Noodles and Street Taco Seasoning Mix," she says. "These mixes help sell more cauliflower, zucchini noodles and peppers."

Calbee's Laubscher says the company stays open to consumer suggestions about how its dried veggie products can be used with other products in the supermarket, including as a baked dipper for hummus or adding them to salads for a bit of crunch.

#### **BEING CREATIVE**

Fresh Gourmet Company of Westlake, CA, is leveraging mixes for fruit or vegetable-based bread.

"Bananas are something I don't think people even have to put on the list," says Cassi Shindelblower, Fresh Gourmet's retail marketing director. "I think having the banana quick mix nearby helps consumers grab a bigger bundle of bananas because they don't have to worry about them going bad.

"We've extended our line beyond banana bread to items like berry crisp and peach crisp and zucchini bread, so throughout the course of the year as seasonal produce such as fresh berries really come into season, there are relevant cross-tie ideas for those things as well."

Shindelblower says these introductions have had positive feedback thus far, and she thinks it's because consumers don't see them there every day and because they're tied to highly seasonal items. This all comes back to staying creative and building excitement.

"Right-sizing and trying to make room for growth is certainly important, and we try to allocate the right amount of space to products that are well established and have a certain number of sales behind them," she says. "We also try to discontinue things we think aren't driving enough sales, and we try to come up with something more innovative.

"I think it's about bringing innovation to

## showcase herbs & specialties



Your Source For The Highest Quality Culinary Herbs And Specialty Produce For Over 25 Years.

Retail & Foodservice Packs Available

Consolidation Services Available Ship Via Air, Land & Express

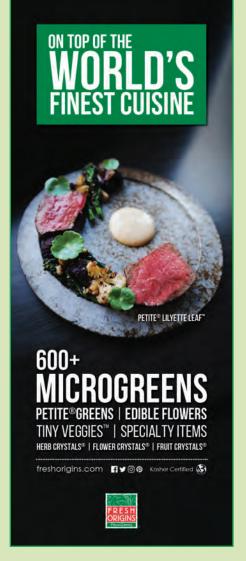
Jim Krouse, Trish Duron & Tony Padilla

**213.488.6470** www.eurekaspecialties.com





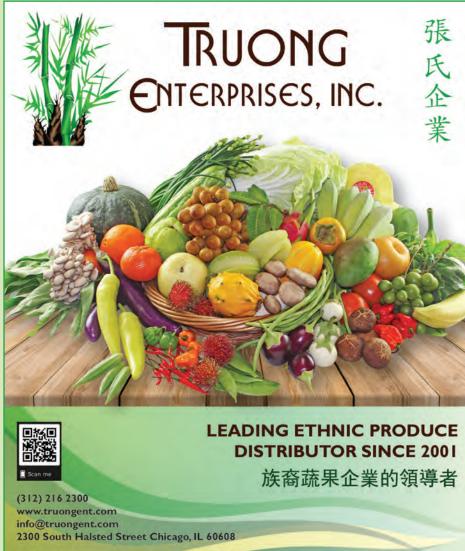
1219 Wholesale St. • Los Angeles, CA 90021

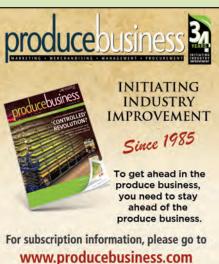


## herbs & specialties













## herbs & specialties





each of those ancillary categories, and not letting any of them get tired or dusty."

One of the stand-outs for Fresh Gourmet has traditionally been its crispy onions. The

company has also extended the dried onion concept into fried jalapeños, fried red peppers, crispy beets, crispy hatch chilies and crispy garlic. More recently it has also added its Grower Direct line of premium dried fruit, including figs, dates and sun-dried tomatoes.

But can offering so many products induce choice overload? Shindelblower says it's important to allocate a merchandising fixture that's proportionate to the opportunity of the category, and Fresh Gourmet brings value by bundling smaller categories together.

"So if we've got lemon juices and sun dried tomatoes and salad toppings, and we find the space for all of those on one rack, it allows retailers to have the flexibility to still show a good assortment of these things" she says. **pb** 

#### SALAD TOPPERS

Merchandising brings context to consumers and salad toppings are a great example of that, according to Cassi Shindelblower, retail marketing director of Westlake, CA-based Fresh Gourmet Company.

"I don't think the majority of shoppers are following a strict recipe when they build a salad," says Shindelblower. "When they come into the store at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, they're trying to think of what to make for dinner and trying to think of what components go together on a salad."

"That's why we try and create the tie-ins with Avocados from Mexico and NatureSweet tomatoes — they're intuitive things but we're just reminding consumers to put together the ingredients they already know and love."

She highlights the success of Avocados from Mexico's salad hub, which include tie-ins, recipes and a "gamification" area where you could play with different ingredients to build your own salad.

Other salad tie-ins selling well at Fresh Gourmet have been its Parmesan and Asiago cheese crisps.

"They're a really high-flavor great salad topping, and there are a lot of real intuitive pairings with the Parmesan on the Caesar salad, for example," she says. "They've got a about a year-long shelf life. Because they've been baked and they're crispy, they don't need to be refrigerated."

"It doubles as a snack in many cases — they're also delicious on things like baked potatoes."

David Sasuga, owner of Fresh Origins, San Marcos, CA, says herb, flower and fruit crystals are well suited for salads and other items in the fresh produce section.

"They are ideal salad toppers and add flavor, color and crunch," he says. "They can be sprinkled on a fruit and vegetable-based smoothie."

Paul Laubscher, director of marketing with Calbee North America, based in Fairfield, CA, says his team has received so much consumer enthusiasm for using Harvest Snaps' snack crisps on salads that they recently developed and are launching 'Salad Toppers Green Pea Crisps' in 2019.

"The early account acceptance, going into the autumn account call season, has been extremely positive, and consumers rave about having a glutenfree, vegetable-based alternative to croutons made with bread," says Laubscher.

"Harvest Snaps can play a key role in bringing several produce brands together to solve consumer needs and grow the department," he says. "An example of this was a joint salad promotion where five brands joined together to provide a salad meal solution consisting of lettuce, tomatoes, salad dressing, bratwurst and Harvest Snaps."



# THE CHANGING FACE OF BERRY IMPORTS

Dollar and volume gains show astounding uptick in past 3 years.

BY MATT OGG

he value of fresh berry imports in the United States surpassed bananas for the first time ever last year, edging tantalizingly close to the \$3 billion mark, according to New York-based UN Comtrade data.

To put this into perspective, almost one in every six dollars spent on imported fresh fruit was on berries, representing an increase of around 50% in just three years.

While an extra \$1 billion has been pumped into the deal in such a short space of time, volume has also risen 24 per cent to reach 596,698 metric tons (MT).

This represents an uptick in the price per pound of berries overall, but that is not coming from the segment leader, blueberries, which nonetheless continue to see volumes soar thanks to new plantings and extended seasons from Peru and Mexico.

Blueberry imports were worth more than raspberries and blackberries combined last year, and their volume had surged 35% in three years. This trend is likely to continue



with second-largest blueberry supplier, Peru, looking at a possible 20% lift in its crop in 2018-19.

Jose Antonio Gomez-Bazan, chief executive at Camposol Trading in Fort Lauderdale, FL, says two seasons ago the Peruvian blueberry crop was around 48,000MT. In the campaign that's now underway, he expects the figure will be just more than 100,000MT.

"Peru is extending its campaign a bit, but Camposol is especially seeing this business as a full-year business except for the months of local production in the United States, which supplies from August to March," he says. "We are also looking for production alternatives in other geographies that are closer to the market to try to produce varieties that have other attributes but don't cope with long journeys."

Lima, Peru-headquartered Camposol has transformed from its origins as an asparagus pioneer to a vertically integrated blueberry and avocado supplier with eight distribution centers in North America, as well as 17 in Europe and China.

"Retail customers can set up anticipated programs with us in such a way the volumes and prices of products sold can be scheduled well in advance," says Gomez-Bazan.

#### **CHILE LOOKS TO ORGANIC GROWTH**

Karen Brux, managing director for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA) in San Carlos, CA, notes the country's industry is certainly aware of the growing challenges in the U.S. market with exponential growth from

Peru and strong volumes from Mexico too.

"There is no longer any window of exclusivity for Chilean blueberries," she says. "In terms of fresh blueberries from South America, Chile dominated with 52% of fresh production in 2018-19, but Peru was at 38% and is continuing to grow."

Amidst this competitive backdrop, Chile is increasingly looking to organic blueberries as a point of difference with 12% of its supply now organic compared to 6% in 2013-14.

"We have a long history of working with retailers across the country to promote Chilean blueberries, and we're now extending that support to organic-specific promotions," says Brux, highlighting the vast majority of the volume is sent to North America.

Jason Fung, vice president of berry and greenhouse categories at Oppy in Vancouver, BC, Canada, agrees. "Berries are a differentiator in the produce section, and organics within that certainly help to set retailers apart and create a competitive advantage," he says.

The South American country also has the benefit its blueberries can be marketed as part of a broader Chilean fruit display with grapes and stone fruit, backed by the wide-ranging promotional efforts undertaken by *Fruits from Chile* branding, including demos, display contests, health and wellness events, Facebook live promotions and much more.

"If we can continue to provide consistently great tasting blueberries to the market and provide the trade with the support they need to push sales, we will remain competitive," asserts Brux.

Bil Goldfield, director of corporate communications at Dole Food Company in Westlake Village, CA, summarizes the dynamics at play in blueberry supplies to the U.S. market.

"Right now Argentina is the greatest example of a region that's being squeezed out, but don't forget to also include Chile as a region that is being slowly squeezed by both Peru and Mexico," he says. "Fumigation of Chilean blueberries has really been a deterrent in the U.S. market."

Chilean authorities and industry are now applying a systems approach in two regions affected by the European grapevine moth, which the fumigation protocol has been aimed to mitigate.

#### **ARGENTINA FOCUSES ON QUALITY**

Meanwhile, Argentina has not taken new competitive threats lying down. The country's blueberry industry is a prime example of how competition spurs innovation and adaptation.



 $Chile an \ blue berries \ dominated \ with \ 52\% \ of \ fresh \ production \ in \ 2018-19 \ compared \ to \ Peru, \ which \ accounted \ for \ 38\%.$ 

"Right now Argentina is the greatest example of a region that's being squeezed out, but don't forget to also include Chile as a region that is being slowly squeezed out by both Peru and Mexico."

- Bill Goldfield, Dole Food Company

"Argentina, following the strong eruption of volumes from Peru, which grows year on year and occupies the same trading window, has focused its commercial and promotional strategy with a big emphasis on quality and flavor," says Carla Ginobili, manager of the Argentinian Blueberry Committee (ABC).

Ginobili says the increased supply has sparked price falls, but Argentina has responded by shipping more fruit by sea freight from Buenos Aires and Chile in order to save on shipping costs.

In 2015-16, just 312MT of Argentina's U.S.-bound blueberry exports were shipped this way, but this past season the figure reached 3,792MT, or 41% of the total. The industry representative expects the share of sea-freight blueberries this season will hit 70%, while a Chinese market access deal will likely mean less fruit is sent to the United States.

"We are on a learning curve because not all the varieties planted have the capacity to travel via sea," says Ginobili, adding varietal conversions are happening with a focus on earlier cultivars and high-density farms.

In addition, the industry has been working with authorities to enable direct flights to markets from Tucuman, a major growing region in Argentina's northwest. Like Chile, Ginobili says Argentina is also growing its organic production, investing heavily in post-harvest techniques and automation.

From a marketing standpoint, the ABC also has the umbrella organization and brand — *Fruits from Argentina* — which was formed in early 2019.

The efforts of these different competitors appear to be paying dividends. Oppy's Fung observes a greater proportion of blueberry import growth has come in the winter months.

"I also think the quality of winter blueberries entering the market continues to improve year-on-year as growing practices get better and better from all parts of the world," he says. "International organizations like the International Blueberry Organization (IBO) certainly play a role in spreading these best practices throughout the globe."

### OTHER BERRIES HAVE SHARP GROWTH CURVE

Of the incremental \$1 billion that's been injected into U.S. berry imports since 2015, around \$451 million came from blueberries making it the biggest growth contributor to the berry category by far, UN Comtrade data shows.

But the incumbent berry import leader is being given a run for its money by the other three key types – blackberries, raspberries and strawberries. In three years, strawberry imports rose 47% to hit \$196 million in 2018, while blackberries and raspberries jumped 38% to \$316 million.



Farmed fresh since 1917<sup>™</sup>, Naturipe is extremely proud of our company's history. As a farmer-owned organization, we pride ourselves on consistently delivering fresh and value-added berries, and avocados to your table.



we are farmers



we are innovators



We provide berries & avocados year-round

Contact a Naturipe representative today! sales@naturipefarms.com

#### ■ NICHE OPPORTUNITIES FROM AFRICA

Regarding the possibility of an emerging Moroccan raspberry supply, a leading grower from the North African nation says the protocol still presents challenges.

"I think we will not see any fresh import of raspberries due to the drastic conditions imposed against the Mediterranean fruit fly (*Ceratitis capitata*)," says Nabil Belmkaddem, general manager of Larache, Morocco-based Cooperative BestBerry. "All fresh fruit imported from Morocco needs to go through a cooling protocol and/ or a fumigation at arrival, which makes it impossible for fresh raspberries to reach the consumer in good condition."

Another African country looking for berry market in the United States is South Africa, which shipped its first ever sea-freight shipment of blueberries to the country in November this past year.

"I am equally delighted as our customers are, to be able to harvest, apply a natural cold-sterilization process while at sea and then still be able to deliver to the consumer, six weeks from being harvested, a product that delivers the experience expected of an OZblu blueberry," said Roger Horak, who is the founder of Paarl, South Africa-based United Exports.

At press time, United Exports was yet to confirm whether similar trials would be taking place in 2019. **bp** 

With the exception of a miniscule fraction from Guatemala and Canada, practically all of this growth came from Mexico, which accounted for more than a third of the rise in blueberry imports as well.

"In the Western Hemisphere right now, we think Mexico is going to be the largest factor, in so far as it concerns all four berries," says Dole's Goldfield. "Proximity to market, the long window of the growing season and the excellent varietal lineups — all of these elements are conducive to successful berry programs."

Goldfield adds blueberries have continued to thrive and gain market share due to improved genetics and eating quality.

"However, the next few years could belong to blackberries as we work to improve those genetics as well," he says. "In blackberries, we are working toward developing new varieties to provide a better eating experience for the consumer and revolutionize the fall and winter retail experience."

Goldfield notes the new varieties are playing the largest role in the success of import deals, especially as they are now coming to maturity in raspberries and blueberries.

When asked about the import season timing, Goldfield explains blueberries run from weeks 35-13, strawberries from weeks 45-15, blackberries from weeks 38-22 and raspberries from weeks 34-22.

Oppy's Fung says exciting varieties are coming to market which deliver on the good experience driving the category.

"We see reasonably quick adoption of new varieties, particularly in growth markets from a sourcing standpoint," says Fung. "Global demand/new markets and the taste preferences within that matrix have certainly shifted the new plantings of new varieties.

"Growth of the overall category has also furthered exposure in all markets and created an incredibly innovative environment for us as an industry."

Fung points to Mexico's "incredible growth plans" across the four main berry crops, while Morocco has also recently been granted access to the U.S. market in raspberries.

"As a global marketer with ties across Asia and Europe, Oppy is uniquely positioned as global supply opportunities to the U.S. and Canadian markets present themselves," says Fung, whose company has brought Ocean Spray-labeled berries to the market-place. "I would also say promoting big packs throughout the category at the right time in the season has proven to be a competitive advantage for a number of our retail partners."

#### **VIEW FROM MEXICO**

Juan Jose Flores, director of Mexico's National Association of Berry Exporters (Aneberries), says blueberries are the fastest growing of the four berries with an annual rate of around 20%, followed by raspberries (15%), strawberries (10%) and blackberries (10%).

"They have grown exponentially," he says. "Speaking of raspberries and blackberries,



effectively Mexico became the No. 1 supplier for fresh fruit to the United States and has also been exporting a small percentage to the European Union."

He says the Tupi variety is what galvanized growth in blackberries, which are still the leading crop, although raspberries lead the way in terms of Aneberries' members.

Flores estimates there are around 44,000 hectares of berries planted in Mexico, which means supplies are set to increase in the coming years.

Michoacan accounts for around 90 percent of Mexico's blackberry production with more than 14,000 hectares, while the state's northwestern neighbor, Jalisco, is the leader in raspberries and blueberries with growth in blackberries too.

"Baja California is starting to grow both blackberries and raspberries, but Baja has been more of a specialist in strawberries," he says. "There has been significant growth over the past four years in the state of Sinaloa [in blueberries], and it's much closer to the border for the side of Nogales, AZ or the points of entry for California — Tijuana for example.

"For the points of entry in Texas, we are practically 14 hours from the border. In the next day, or two days at the most, it's in the hands of the consumer, so it's a very fresh product," he says, noting the fruit tends to pass through either Pharr, TX, or McAllen, TX.

To mitigate any potential negative impacts, Aneberries is pushing to diversify exports to regions such as the EU, Southeast Asia, China and the Middle East.

"We need to avoid crossing over with the volume that comes from Chile and Peru," he says. "In April there was an overlap of [blueberry] production volume from Peru and Chile in the United States together with Mexico's, and so, we saw sales that were much slower, and the prices were a bit lower."

The Aneberries representative estimates currently only 3.6 percent of Mexico's berry farms are organic-certified.



Because of our dedication to our farmers and the land on which we grow, California Giant Berry Farms is able to deliver the best quality berries from across the globe, when and where you need them.

See why our farmers and partners alike call us family by visiting calgiant.com/our-farmers.



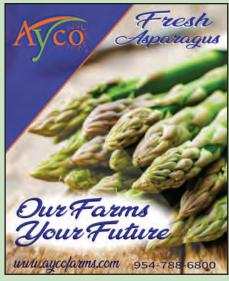
### **ASPARAGUS 365**

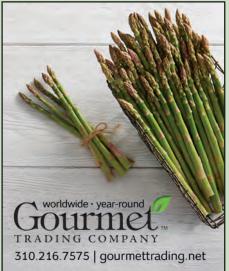
To become part of our dynamic association that is positively impacting the future of the fresh asparagus industry, please contact: Priscilla Lleras-Bush.

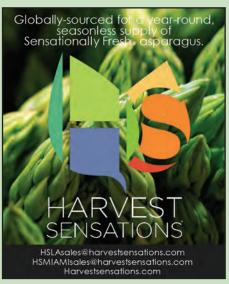
ALPINE FRESH • ALTAR PRODUCE • AYCO • CARB AMERICAS • CRYSTAL VALLEY • FARM DIRECT SUPPLIERS • GOURMET TRADING







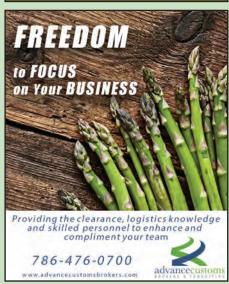












#### PAIA Keeping Asparagus On Retailers' Shelves 365!

To recieve a copy of the 2019 Fresh Asparagus Catagory Management/ Statistics And Trends Analysis please contact Priscilla Lleras-Bush

Email: priscillaprestige@outlook.com

Tel: 817-793-3133



COMPANY • HARVEST SENSATIONS • MAURICE A AUERBACH INC • PROGRESSIVE PRODUCE • SOUTHERN SPECIALTIES • SQUARE





www.crystalvalleyfoods.com



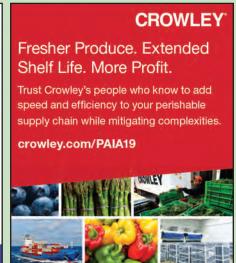








info@amerconsolidated.com | amerconsolidated.com





• ALPINE FRESH • ALTAR PRODUCE • AYCO • CARB AMERICAS • CRYSTAL VALLEY • FARM DIRECT SUPPLIERS • GOURMET TRADING

### **SNACK ATTACK**

Saying yes can help kids consume more fruits and vegetables.

BY MINDY HERMANN



he snack-worthiness of the produce department is better than ever. Growers and suppliers are producing smaller size fruits and vegetables that are easy to grab and go. Single-serve and snack-friendly packaging abounds. And the marriage between dips and produce reinforces the produce department as a snack destination. What is snackable produce? For the purposes of this article, snacks are defined as any fruit or vegetable that can be eaten out-of-hand and does not require cutting or utensils.

#### THE PERFECT FIT

Today's busy lifestyles demand products that are convenient and portable. Produce departments in ShopRite markets, a division of Wakefern in Edison, NJ, offer a large variety of items in ready-to-eat, snack-size packaging, such as baby carrots, apple slices and mini-cucumbers. As with many chains, a "take one" display greets children who are in the store with their parents. Additionally,

departments carry freeze-dried fruits and vegetables, as well as a large assortment of packaged nuts, to offer consumers the widest possible variety of fresh produce options.

Product revolution is noticeably strong in citrus, where the Clementine season is nearly year-round and growers continue to introduce new easy-peel varieties. "Kids love products that taste great, are easy to eat and fit perfectly in the palm of their hands, such as Wonderful Halos," says Adam Cooper, senior vice president, marketing, The Wonderful Company, Los Angeles. "We promote Halos as a solution to 'snack duty,' when parents are asked to provide snacks for their child's events."

NatureFresh Farms in Leamington, ON, is on a snackability mission, cultivating smaller and smaller versions of produce department staples. Kara Badder, NatureFresh marketing manager, is a fan of produce that can be washed and thrown in the refrigerator for easy accessibility. "Our Tomberry tomatoes are a great example. They are approximately the size of a small candy bar and fit perfectly into

a child's small hands. The pack also fits into a parent's purse or child's backpack."

#### **PACKAGING CALLS OUT**

"I can't say enough about how important packaging is when it comes to snackability," says Lisa Hansen, vice president, McDill Associates in Soquel, CA. "Several proprietary varieties have found their stride with kid-friendly benefits, messaging and marketing. For example, Duda Farm Fresh Foods' celery sticks are sweeter, crispier and less stringy, and they come in a snack pack with peanut butter. The Pure Flavor Mini Munchies line of tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers features kid-friendly packaging that is perfect for schools."

Other companies have jumped on the snack-package bandwagon. Mann Packing Co. in Salinas, CA, has expanded its snack trays to include kid-friendly items such as pretzels and cheese. HMC Farms in Kingsburg, CA, packages its grapes in 2-oz. snack bags, 100-calorie bags, or a 6-oz. cup holder





cup with snackability in mind. For its Cotton Candy grapes, Fresh Farms in Rio Rico, AZ, created an attractive bag with the phrase, "They really do taste like cotton candy" to appeal to kids and their parents.

#### **INTEGRATED STRATEGIES**

Debra Heverling MA, RD/LDN, corporate dietitian/nutritionist for C&S Wholesale Grocers, Inc. in Robesonia, PA, maximizes her reach using various media channels. "My kid-relevant and kid-friendly outreach can include information on the produce department's website page and print features in our magazine on snackable items."

Natalie Menza-Crowe, director of health and wellness at Wakefern's ShopRite, says, "We combine the expertise of our in-store dietitians with the reach of our social, digital and advertising divisions to find new and exciting ways to inspire our shoppers about the importance of consuming fruits and vegetables and the many benefits of having them for a snack. Still, one of the best ways to inspire and educate shoppers about the many advantages of enjoying fresh fruits and vegetables as snacks is to have our dietitians at the store level sharing ideas."

Grimmway Farms, headquartered in Bakersfield, CA, engages with a group of active brand ambassadors who promote health and wellness and the importance of fruits and vegetables for snacks and other eating occasions. 'Our Cal-O Creators,' as we call them, reach a vast audience on social media and help promote produce for snacking," says Lisa McNeece, vice president, foodservice and industrial sales.

Produce for Kids in Orlando, FL, recently began a podcast, "The Healthy Family Project," hosted by its director of marketing communications, Amanda Keefer. The podcast's first "Healthy Bite" segment features Setton Farms, a Commack, NY, grower and

distributor of pistachios, as a great snack option.

Halos filmed a video of YouTube celebrity Ryan, of Ryan's ToysReview, during his and his parents' first visit to Halos orchards. The video also appeared on the Ryan's Family Review YouTube channel, and together the videos garnered more than 4.5 million views.

"We show images on our media feeds of our team members and their kids snacking on healthy produce," says Badder, of Nature-Fresh. "We think showing examples of how our team members incorporate healthy snacks into their children's lives is a great way to inspire others. We also communicate this messaging through our blog content."

#### **MERCHANDISING MATTERS**

The Wonderful Company prides itself in creating in-store displays that are "fun, eye-catching and cart-stopping," says Cooper. "This season, we introduced a new fruit stand display as a companion to our Halos grove tree display to help secure secondary locations outside of the produce department." Wonderful Halos' bright packaging and stickers also help grab attention.

Marketing of Stemilt Lil Snappers apples leverages the company's small, snackable size. "Consumer surveys tell us that apples generally are eaten as a snack," says Brianna Shales, communications manager, Stemilt Growers, Wenatchee, WA. "Stemilt packs 9-12 apples in a 3-pound, grab-and-go bag that can sit in the refrigerator. They are very retailer-friendly, and our new, half-pallet display makes it easy for retailers to combine different varieties." Stemilt will be using its packaging to promote the new Have A Plant slogan adopted by the Produce for Better Health Foundation.

Naturipe Farms in Salinas, CA, designs the top seal of its snack cups and boxes to provide visibility and communicate freshness to consumers and retailers. Steven Ware, vice president of value-added fresh, says "Naturipe Snacks are innovative, easy and convenient for kids, as well as other snackers. In one portable package, we pair strawberries, blueberries and grapes with specialty cheese and seasoned whole nuts. Our line also includes several car-friendly fruit cups designed with a built-in spork. These combine health, convenience and snacking."

#### **PRODUCE PARTNERS**

Strategic partnerships help promote the produce department as a snackable destination. "Everyone wants into the produce department, so it's important to pick partners that make sense for the brand," notes Hansen.

"A recent study published in the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics reports pairing veggies with something a child already likes can be an effective way to get her/him to eat more vegetables," says Wendy Reinhardt Kapsak, MS, RDN, president and chief executive of the Produce for Better Health (PBH) Foundation in Brentwood, MO. The PBH's "Have A Plant" campaign suggests a variety of kid-friendly snacks, including broccoli florets with a tasty dip, or celery sticks filled with peanut butter.

Partnerships outside the store can be highly effective. Dole Food Company in Westlake, CA, stands out for its long history of nutrition collaboration with The Walt Disney Company. Favorite characters have been shown to influence food acceptance and behavior, including choosing fruits and vegetables, among children.

"A central part of our alliance with Disney is positioning Dole fruits and vegetables as the perfect, healthy, grab-and-go snack," explains Bil Goldfield, director of communications. "To accomplish this, we've been putting characters from the most iconic Disney, Pixar, Marvel and Star Wars films and properties on tens of millions of Dole bananas, pineapples, packaged salads and fresh vegetables. A 2019 social media contest gives fans of Dole, Disney and Disney's The Lion King the opportunity to share their favorite family traditions by posting on social media and using the appropriate hashtags.

"Halos teamed up with The Holderness Family, famous on YouTube for its 'Christmas Jammies' viral music videos," says Cooper. "The collaboration debuted an original song and music video, "Snack Panic Attack," to highlight Halos as the perfect time-saving, healthy snack to alleviate mom's snack-duty anxiety."

HMC Farms, Kingsburg, CA, is celebrating the 40th anniversary of its Grape Escape snack item. "Our Grape Escape bags are a perfect snack for kids," says Chelsea McClarty Ketelsen, sales and marketing. "This year we partnered with Nickelodeon to get kids even more excited about eating fresh fruit. Our kid-size snack bags of grapes will be available in both PAW Patrol and SpongeBob packaging at retail chains across the country just in time for back-to-school."

NatureFresh's Badder says, "We collaborate with many local dietitians, moms, industry organizations and retail partners to showcase the snackability of our produce. Collaboration with partners increases the engagement and reach of product promotions."

Produce for Kids actively partners with companies and retailers to promote fruits and vegetables in the snacks and meals of children. "We know families are busy with work, school, sports and more, so we work to understand the challenges that come with each time of year," says Keefer. "For instance, when spring sports kick off, we center much of our messaging around healthy snacks parents can take along or provide for the entire team.



We encourage our retail partners to position easily accessible options where parents can grab them quickly."

#### **TOP OF MIND**

"At the end of the day, we all want to offer samples of our fresh produce snacks and make meaningful connections at the same time," says McDill's Hansen, "People are craving experiences and authenticity, which lend beautifully to community efforts and socially responsible marketing programs. That's why the Cosmic Crisp campaign we're working on has a partnership with the Missoula (MT) Children's Theater. Both organizations have visions that align really

well to create an authentic and valuable touchpoint for our marketing efforts," she says.

"Mindfulness is where it's at when it comes to snacking, because it helps parents to make smart choices for their children," says Lori Taylor, founder, The Produce Moms, Indianapolis. "It's not nutrition until it is eaten, so provide and promote fresh produce as the first food choice for a snack," she adds.

"Studies show six in 10 kids are not eating enough fruit, and nine in 10 kids are not eating enough vegetables. So, let's make it fun to incorporate fruits and vegetables into snacks kids already love and enjoy," says PBH's Kapsak.





## GROWERS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT RED RIVER VALLEY POTATOES



rowers and shippers in the Red River Valley invite retail and foodservice buyers to compare their fresh potatoes to all others produced in any growing area of the United States — insisting they are unparalleled in color, texture and taste. A multitude of buyers appear to agree about the potatoes' superior quality — as they look forward to each season's crop.

The forecast for the 2019-2020 season is reported as excellent, with consistent volume from a crop with overall acreage down only

slightly from the past season. This is more good news for the buyers and consumers who eagerly anticipate the new crop as it gains momentum.

The Red River Valley is the nation's leading producer of red potatoes and is emerging as a leader in yellow potato production. With about 200 growers producing more than 40 million hundredweight (cwt.) per year, an estimated 17 percent goes to the fresh market.

The region is the third largest potato-producing area in the nation, according to the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association

(NPPGA), based in East Grand Forks, MN.

The colorful spuds reaching the fresh market are a result of the area's unique growing conditions. The Red River Valley is the bottom of what was once a massive glacial lake. As the huge glacier plowed over the land, it deposited a layer of silt, clay, sand and rock that transformed into the valley's rich black soil. This contributes to the brilliant hues of red potatoes, along with an increasing volume of yellow spud varieties. The texture and smoothness of these potatoes are added bonuses for consumers.



Bryan Miller is the CEO of Associated Potato Growers Inc., Grand Forks, ND



Greg Holtman, left, and Jeff Lazur are two of the sales staff at Associated Potato Growers Inc., Grand Forks, ND. Not pictured is T.J. Johnstone.



From left are Jackson Hall, Andy Moquist and T.J Hall of H&S FreshPak, Hoople, ND. H&S is a partner company with O.C Schulz & Sons and J.G. Hall & Sons.



James Kerian is president of Kerian Machines, Grafton, ND.



Dave and Andy Moquist of O.C. Schulz & Sons pose in the company offices.



Jackson Hall, left, and T.J Hall of J.G Hall & Sons, Hoople, ND.

Here in the Red River Valley, yellow potato production increased four-fold during the past 10 years. Overall, yellow volume now comprises about 20 percent of the total, up 4 percent from the past season, according to Ted Kreis, marketing and communications director for the NPPGA. "We can never lose sight of our identity as the nation's leader in red potato production, but we certainly need to let it be known we are a great source for yellow potatoes, too."

Dave Moquist, owner of O.C. Schulz & Sons, Crystal, ND, agrees. "We've increased our yellow plantings every year, and demand continues to be greater than our supply," he notes.

"We're always looking for that new yellow variety that will extend our storage season through the winter. Yellow varieties are more sensitive than reds, have thinner skin, and they don't take the stress as well with adverse weather conditions," says Moquist.

Yellow demand continues to increase for Associated Potato Growers Inc. (APGI), Grand Forks, ND, reportedly the largest-volume shipper in the Red River Valley. "Those who like to cook say they like the variety and versatility that yellow potatoes can add," says Bryan Miller, chief executive.

Consumers seem to want more all the time. "Consumer demand has increased every year," says Kreis. "Retailers are promoting them more," he adds.

In general, shippers in the region concur this year's red and yellow crops will produce good, promotable volume. Although the



Casey, left, and Caleb Folson of Folson Farms are fifth-generation growers in the Red River Valley.



Doug Kling is a new member of the Board of Directors at Black Gold Farms, Grand Forks, ND.

planted acreage is down slightly, "Farming practices have gotten better, so we get better yields," notes Mike Rerick, vice president of sales and marketing at NoKota Packers, Buxton, ND.

"We've had a drier year, but we'll still have an average-volume crop," notes T.J. Hall, sales manager at J.G. Hall & Sons, Hoople, ND.

Overall, Red River Valley potatoes still maintain the advantages of bright color, texture, and flavor, partly because the majority of the acreage is produced on dry land. "Our non-irrigated reds and yellows have higher solids than irrigated, so they are creamier and more full-flavored," notes Casey Folson of Folson Farms, East Grand Forks, MN. "I'm a firm believer there are no potatoes with better flavor and texture than those grown in the Red River Valley."

#### **ORGANICS, PACKAGING OPTIONS**

As demand for organically grown produce continued to capture attention, Associated *Continued on page 96* 



#### WHAT'S NEW IN THE RED RIVER VALLEY

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

ASSOCIATED POTATO GROWERS (APGI), Grand Forks, ND — Bryan Miller, chief executive officer, reports the largest fresh potato packer in the Red River Valley has a new plant manager at its Grand Forks location. Jared Berthold brings more than 20 years of experience in agriculture and mechanics to his new role.

Miller began his second season with APGI in August and has more than 20 years of farming and ranching experience. Before joining the company, he ran a manufacturing plant in Jamestown, ND for 15 years. He emphasizes APGI "provides a high-quality product, with timely delivery. We try to get every dollar out of a potato, and we operate as efficiently as possible."

Associated Potato Growers is a grower-owned cooperative, operating packing sheds in Grand Forks, Grafton and Draydon, ND.

BLACK GOLD FARMS, Grand Forks, ND - The company announces the appointment of

Doug Kling as a member of its board of directors. According to Black Gold's chief executive, Eric Halverson, Kling has a lifetime's worth of experience.

He is currently president and chief executive of Kling Strategic Partners LLC. His past work has included senior strategic leadership positions at Village Farms International, Cadbury Schweppes, Johanna Foods, Life Savers Inc. and other Fortune 500 consumer product companies.

"Working with Doug while serving on the United Fresh Board of Directors has really showed me he is not afraid to challenge the status quo or speak up," says Halverson. "This is exactly what we need as a family organization — someone to push us and help us make the difficult decisions."

"I met Eric and Leah (Halverson) through different industry organizations, which piqued my interest as to what they were doing as a family and as a progressive potato production operation," says Kling. H&S FRESHPAK, Hoople, ND — Building on a successful second year, H&S FreshPak begins its third season expecting expanded use of its upgraded rail siding, which is adjacent to the packing facility. "The rail spur will allow us to load more rail cars here and will be more cost-effective," explains T.J. Hall, co-manager of H&S.

Hall and Andy Moquist handle all sales for H&S FreshPak in addition to their management duties. H&S was opened two years ago when two well-established potato-growing and shipping operations, Hoople, ND-based J.G. Hall & Sons and Crystal, ND-based O.C. Schulz & Sons partnered and formed the new business.

The addition of an experienced packinghouse manager, Bob Sundvor, will also help increase efficiency at the wash plant, says Moquist. "Our demand has sometimes exceeded our supply," says Hall. "We have knowledgeable management in place that helps meet the needs of our increasing customer base."





#### FRUIT AND VEGETABLE

### KERIAN SIZER



**GENTLE:** Separates without damaging peaches, apples, mushrooms and fresh tomatoes

ACCURATE: Precisely grades grape tomatoes, cherries, nuts, and small berries, maintaining that accuracy for larger products including cantaloupes and pineapple

FAST: Thirteen standard models custom-designed to meet your needs sort from 1000 lb/hr to 100,000 lb/hr

**SIMPLE:** Effective but simple design provides a rugged, low cost, low maintenance machine at a high value to our customers. It can even be used in the field!

VERSATILE: Specialized rollers allow for the accurate sizing of round products (potatoes, onions, and citrus), long products (carrots, russets, and cucumbers), and irregular products (bell peppers, jalapenos, and garlic)



#### KERIAN MACHINES INC

1709 Hwy 81 S, PO Box 311 • Grafton ND 58237 701-352-0480 • Fax 701-352-3776 sales@kerian.com • www.kerian.com KERIAN MACHINES, Grafton, ND — President James Kerian reports the company is continuing to develop a sizer, "which sorts products by length in addition to diameter." Kerian introduced the sizer this past year and is planning a full rollout of this unique type of sorting machine that the market has not had before. "Our equipment, whether it sorts by diameter or length, or both, is less than one-tenth the cost of an optical sizer — but it is just as accurate and precise," he says.

Russet potatoes, sweet potatoes, cucumbers and zucchinis are examples of produce that are ideally suited to the machine. Kerian says the innovative sorter is more economical and more portable than any other sizing machine currently available.

Prior to the rollout of this new technology, "There had not been a mechanical way to do this type of sorting," he explains. "It would have had to be done by hand, which is labor-intensive; or with an optical sorting machine, which costs so much more."

The new design was created by Kerian and his sister, Mary.

"We have developed it and tested it, and we are looking forward to trying it in the packinghouses.

NOKOTA PACKERS Buxton, ND — The company will be commemorating a major milestone as well as completing a significant transition this season. In addition to celebrating its 40th anniversary in business, NoKota Packers' president will be retiring.

Steve Tweten, a widely known industry veteran through his involvement in produce activities nationwide, has been with NoKota since it opened its doors in 1979. He will step down as president at the end of the year. The transition began in 2017, when Carissa Olsen was promoted to chief operating officer. Her duties have been expanding as Tweten worked toward retirement.

The second major occurrence will be the celebration of NoKota Packers' 40th anniver-

The history of the company began when potato growers Malcom Tweten and brother-in-law Maurice Gjelsness decided to market their own crop. Together with their sons, Steve Tweten and Ron Gjelsness, NoKota Packers began to take shape.

During its first season in the fall of 1979, the company stored potatoes in a facility that was still unfinished, represented four local farming operations and shipped 220,000 hundredweight (cwt.) of potatoes with 18 employees.

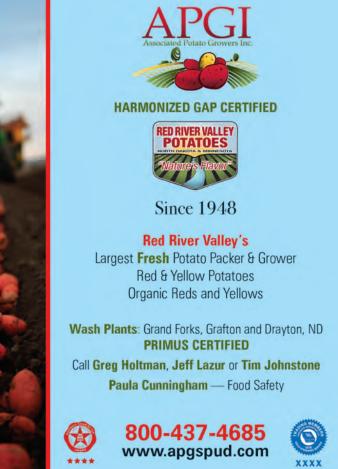
Today, the size of the packing facility is more than doubled, with the ability to ship more than 600,000 cwt. of potatoes annually. The staff consists of around 35 employees throughout the year. NoKota's packing labels include Buxton's Best, NoKota Pride and Roughrider.

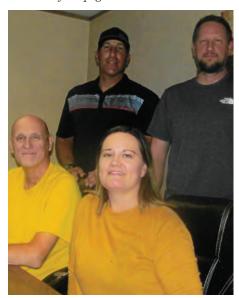
NORTHERN PLAINS POTATO GROWERS ASSOCIATION (NPPGA), East Grand Forks, MN — The association, which represents more than 200 growers in the Red River Valley of North Dakota and Minnesota, has for the first time sponsored two popular marathon events in the region. The NPPGA served potatoes to the more than 2,000 runners in the Grand Forks "Wild Hog Marathon" held during late September. This outreach helps consumers understand the message that, "Potatoes fuel performance," says Ted Kreis, marketing and communications director for the NPPGA.

NPPGA will debut a newly-designed trade show booth this fall. NPPGA will be exhibiting at the Produce Marketing Association's Fresh Summit in Anaheim, CA, and the New York Produce Show in New York City.









The sales and administrative staff at Nokota Packers Inc. in Buxton, ND include, from left, Steve Tweten, Mike Rerick, Carissa Olsen, and Steve Johnson.

Potato Growers added organic product last season. The only shipper in the Red River Valley to offer organic potatoes at this point, the co-op reports enough interest from buyers to warrant more plantings. One of its growers increased its organic acreage from 50 to 100 acres, which included some yellow plantings. "We're finding consumers who buy organics are very particular about quality," says Miller.

Buyers can also be assured these spuds will be offered in a wide variety of packaging

options from most shippers, which include brand-name and private labeling.

Aside from the traditional 3, 4, and 5-pound consumer bag offerings, Nokota Parkers markets part of its crop through San Francisco-based Fresh Solutions Network (FSN) LLC, which also offers a line of convenience, gourmet, and fresh-cut potato products.

"Steamables are becoming increasingly popular," says Carissa Olsen, chief operating officer of Nokota Packers. "They are the best microwavable packs on the market." She says FSN is completing a series of videos with the theme of "Growing Where It Matters." The videos include potato production "from planting to consumption," and will be available for viewing at the Produce Marketing Association's convention in Anaheim, CA.

Offering packaging options of all sizes, Associated Potato Growers maintains additional quality standards to help it stand apart from the competition. ASPI's food safety specialist Paula Cunningham emphasizes, "We are the only company in the valley that is now 100 percent Harmonized GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) Certified."

She explains all 15 of APGI's growers and its three wash plants have completed this intensive and expensive process, which ranks at the top of all food safety compliance certifications. "Stores, and consumers in general, want to have that traceability," she notes.

Standing apart from the competition can be more challenging when a new company



Donovan Johnson, left, Northern Plains Potato Growers president, is shown outside the headquarters office with Ted Kreis, NPPGA marketing and communications coordinator.

emerges among well-established packers with long histories.

Although Hoople, ND-based H&S FreshPak is only in its third season of operation, it can be likened to the long-time operators in the region because of its roots. "Both of our families have been in the business since the '50's," says H&S FreshPak's Hall. "We fit together very well. We are only selling our own product, without outside growers, so we can control more consistent quality."

Folson Farms maintains a similar philos-



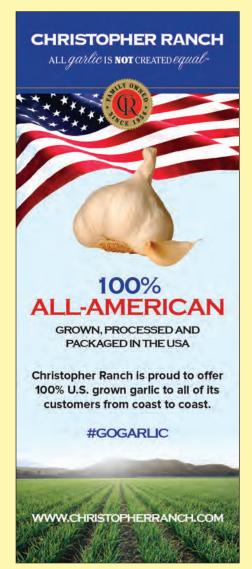
## showcase

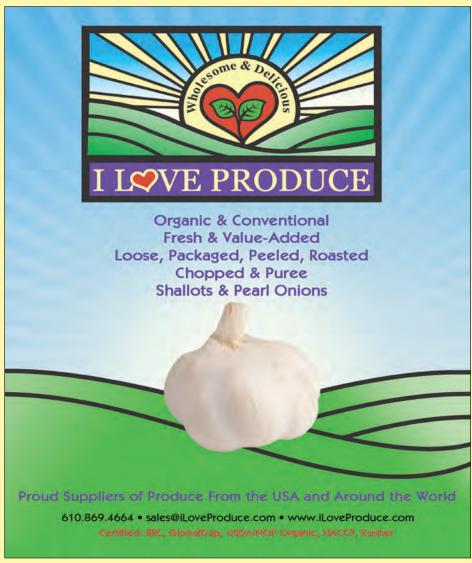




### showcase garlic











#### CELEBRATING POTATOES AND FOOTBALL

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

**Paul Dolan**, former general manager of Associated Potato Growers Inc. (APGI), who retired from his position this past December after 25 years of service, was honored as this year's Potato Bowl Parade's grand marshal.

APGI is the largest fresh shipping operation in the Red River Valley, with 15 fresh potato grower-shippers in the Red River Valley of North Dakota and Minnesota. The parade was one of the highlights of the 54th Annual Potato Bowl, celebrating football and potatoes in a mega-event held this year from Sept. 10-14 and culminating with a college football game between the University of North Dakota and Sam Houston State (TX).

Ted Kreis, director of marketing and communications for the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association (NPPGA), along with several area potato growers and shippers, has been involved on committees coordinating this event for a number of years. The weeklong event provided several festivities for football and potato lovers of all ages. This year's festivities were kicked off with Potato Bowl PLINKO at Hugo's retail store locations and continued with a golf tournament.

A potato chip giveaway and a baked potato bar at all Hugo's retail store locations, "The World's Largest Fresh Fry Feed," and fireworks were among the planned events at the University Park & Memorial Stadium. A French fry eating contest and a Potato Giveaway were also on the agenda.

Potato Bowl 1K and 2K races, along with an evening concert and street dance in Grand Forks highlighted the Sept. 13 events.

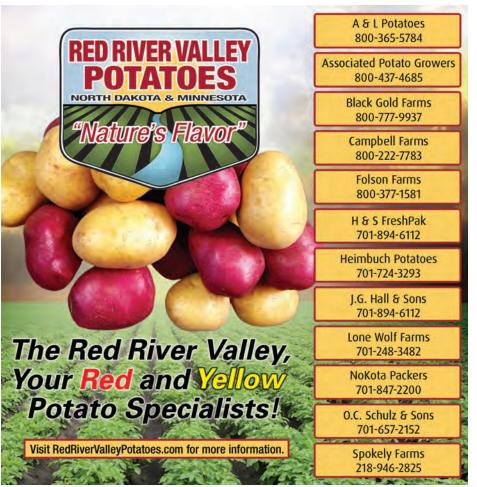
The final day of the extravaganza started with a pancake breakfast before the Potato Bowl Parade. Later, a mega-tailgating party preceded the 54th Annual Potato Bowl Football Game at the Alerus Center in Grand Forks.

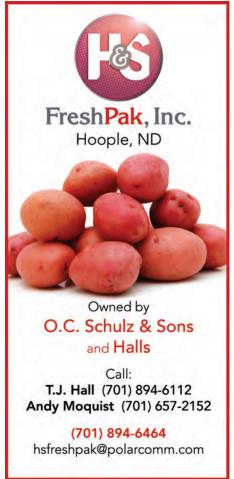
The first-ever Potato Bowl game was in 1966 and was billed as a battle between the two largest potato-growing regions in the United States — Idaho and the Red River Valley. Festivities surrounding the celebration of potatoes and football continued to increase, and the event grew more popular each year. Although UND is no longer always pitted against an Idaho college for the big game, the tradition of celebrating potatoes with football is alive and well.

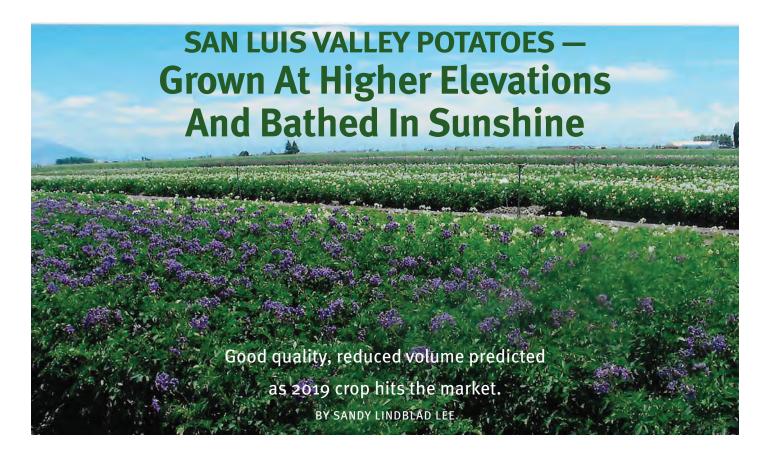
ophy. "We're a family-owned company that manages our potatoes from the seed all the way to the semi-trailer," says Folson. "We have great continuity between our farm and the wash plant. We pay more attention to detail — every step of the way."

"We try to be really consistent with the product that we're shipping," says O.C.

Schulz's Moquist. We realize we're working with a perishable commodity, but we don't want our customers to have any unexpected surprises."







he majestic Colorado Rocky Mountains provide a beautiful backdrop for some of the highest quality potatoes on the planet. The San Luis Valley in southwestern Colorado, the second-largest fresh potato-producing region in the United States, will not disappoint this year, as early volume has shown excellent quality. However, a reduced planted acreage is expected to produce a less abundant crop than last season.

Harvest and shipping were hitting full stride by early October from the 2019 planted

acreage, estimated to be down by nearly 3,500 acres from the previous season. About 48,600 acres were planted, down from about 52,000 acres in the past year, according to Linda Weyers, assistant director of the Monte Vista, CO-based Colorado Potato Administrative Committee (CPAC).

Reasons cited by growers for the reduction in potato acres vary, including the uncertainty of water availability and the conversion to alternative crops, including quinoa and hemp. The increase in hemp plantings is in response to the phenomenal rise in popularity of the CBD (cannabidiol) market.

At an elevation of 7,600 feet, Colorado's San Luis Valley is the highest and largest alpine valley in the world where commercial crops are grown, and it can boast more than 300 days of sunshine each year. Potatoes are planted in rich soil that contains unique mineral deposits, as the valley was once a lakebed in the ancient past. The altitude naturally decreases the likelihood of disease and pests, minimizing the need for pesticide use. This also makes the region more favorable for organic production.

This year, late season cold and moisture

Potatoes in full bloom in the San Luis Valley enhance the beauty of this region.





Archery is one of the many activities enjoyed at the annual San Luis Valley Potato Festival, held the second weekend in September.



Jessica Crowther is the marketing administrative assistant for the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee.



Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee, is pictured with Linda Weyers, assistant director.



Rick Ellithorpe and son Jed Ellithorpe are principals at Aspen Produce LLC.



Les Alderete is the general manager at Skyline Potato Co.



The staff at Farm Fresh Direct of America includes, from left, Derek Banhagel, Matt Glowczewski, Todd Mortenson, Veronica Trujillo, Cliff Shaw, Seth Gillespie, Jere Metz, and Kim Crowther. The company is celebrating its 20th Anniversary this season.

caused a slowdown in planting and crop growth, with much of the crop reported to be seven to 10 days behind. By the time harvest and packing hit full-stride, growers had predicted a steady, promotable crop, which should increase volume as shipping progresses. About 95 percent of the crop is shipped to fresh markets locally, nationally and internationally.

#### **ORGANIC PLANTINGS**

Several shippers agreed while organically grown potato acreage continues to comprise

a growing percentage of the total, the increase has leveled off a bit, according to Jim Ehrlich, executive director of CPAC. While CPAC does not have official data on organic acres, Ehrlich notes, "Colorado has an advantage because of reduced disease pressure and the lack of late blight that other areas face. All shippers here are trying to do at least some organics."

Skyline Potato Co., Center, CO, has been marketing organic potatoes for nearly 25 years and has developed a wide customer base and loyal following. "We are a full-service potato company, with a year-round supply of potatoes — both conventional and organic," says Les Alderete, Skyline's general manager. The company markets a portion of its organic volume through Robinson Fresh, Eden Prairie, MN, using the Tomorrow's Organic label. At the same time, the company sells its own Nature Fresh organic label through Skylin. "There's a big learning curve when you first get into organic growing, and not everyone will make it," asserts Alderete. "The market got saturated last season with so many shippers adding

Other shippers offering organics include RPE Colorado, in Monte Vista, Farm Fresh Direct LLC in Monte Vista, Aspen Produce LLC in Center, White Rock Specialties LLC in Mosca, Canon Potato LLC in Center, Monte Vista Potato Growers Coop and Hi-Land Potatoes in Monte Vista.

Whether organic or conventional, Russet varieties remain the primary potato shipped from this region. Overall, red potato production has increased slightly, but yellows have enjoyed an even greater jump, comprising more than 10



percent of production. Fingerlings and other specialty varieties account for about 3 percent, reports Ehrlich.

He hastens to add, however, that Colorado can grow any kind of potato that buyers or consumers desire. Pink-skinned potatoes, purple varieties and unusually shaped potatoes are getting the attention of a full range of end-users — from executive chefs to "foodies" — to creative home cooks seeking new, imaginative ideas.

### PACKAGING, BRANDING DRAW BUYER INTEREST

While private labeling continues to gain a greater market share, shippers in the San Luis Valley maintain recognition of their own brands and packaging quality are points that set them apart from their competition. Aspen Produce features a label, which also emphasizes its appealing Colorado location. "I think smaller name brands will continue to emerge, similar to micro-breweries, for example," says Jed Ellithorpe, operations manager. "We are a micro-shed. We're smaller but more special. We have found local branding does increase buying loyalty."

Rick Ellithorpe, co-owner of Aspen Produce, uses the company's carton as an example. "We take our Aspen logo very seriously. The Aspen box is a little heavier cardboard, so it doesn't move around as much on the pallet and is intact on arrival," he explains. "There are customers who call us first when they want the best quality cartons. We are also very careful about the accurate spud count within the cartons."

As quality demand increases, interest in a variety of packaging sizes mirrors that trend. Aspen Produce's Jed Ellithorpe points out an increase in popularity of smaller packaging, which some prefer more than the traditional, 10-pound option for Russets.

Skyline Potato's Alderete agrees, predicting potato-packaging options in the smaller sizes will continue to gain popularity. "We are flexible and do whatever we can to meet our customers' needs. We also have a good following in Mexico and do a lot of custom-packaging for customers there."

Mexico is a major market for Colorado potatoes, which is limited to the 26-kilometer buffer zone at the border. The efforts to expand shipments beyond that buffer zone have been tied up in the courts for several years because of lawsuits from the national potato-growing organization in Mexico.

Whether conventional or organic, in small consumer packs or in bulk, Colorado potatoes

remain favorites among buyers — both locally and regionally. Ray Keegan of Denver-based American Produce Co., services foodservice and retail accounts.

"Colorado potatoes are fresher, and they have more flavor and variety. They are also convenient and economical," he says.

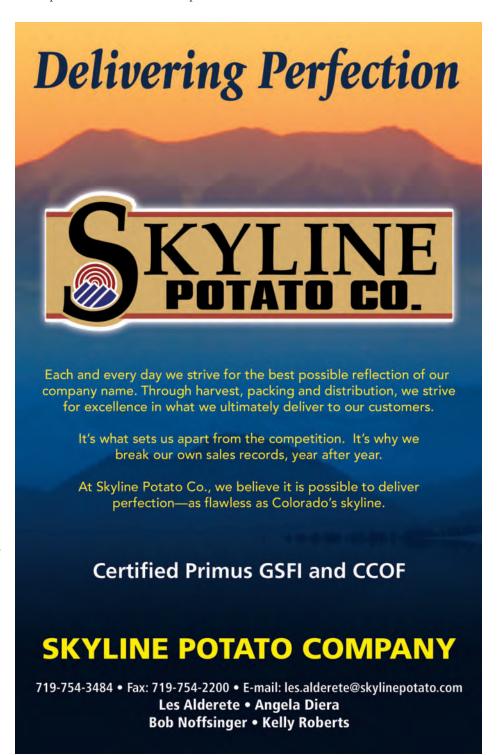
#### FREIGHT ADVANTAGE ADDS TO APPEAL

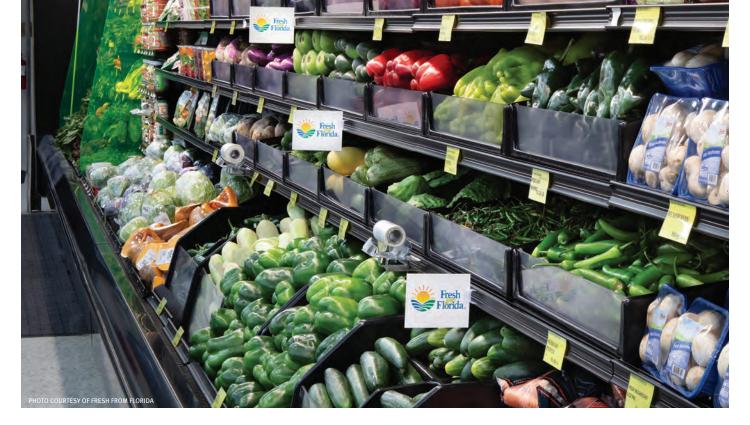
Domestically, the San Luis Valley's centralized location within the United States adds to the potatoes' attractiveness and provides a

natural freight advantage, making them more

One-stop potato shopping available through this single growing region can be another way to save on freight costs.

"Colorado potatoes can be delivered to our customers in one or two days, which makes them fresher and reduces shrink," says Jere Metz, salesman at Farm Fresh. Delivery can sometimes even be done overnight — to Dallas, for example."





# Florida — The USA's Fall And Winter Garden

A plethora of the Sunshine State's fruits and vegetables find their way across America and beyond.

BY MATT OGG

t a time of year when imports take it up a notch, Florida enters the fall and winter markets with gusto as the most local supplier of fresh produce on the U.S. East Coast across a wide array of fruits and vegetables.

From staples, such as grapefruit, oranges, tomatoes, snap peas, bell peppers, sweet corn and strawberries, to increasing supplies of leafy greens, Asian vegetables and easy-peeler citrus, Florida's produce has an edge thanks to its proximity and provenance.

"Florida produces the bulk of U.S. fresh commodities from November to early June, while most other states are dormant or have either just ended production or just started," says Mindy Lee, bureau chief at the Tallahassee-based Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS). "Florida producers ship all over the United States. However, most of our fresh product supported by our retail marketing campaigns focus on

areas east of the Mississippi and include 28 states and 64 retail partners representing more than 8,400 individual stores."

Lee says the sense of Florida producing the most locally grown items on the market starts to be keenly felt from January through May.

"For instance, Florida produces more than 40% of U.S. fresh snap beans on average from November to April. When we isolate that to just U.S. producers, Florida comprises 100% of the domestic snap beans from December to March with 73% in November and 96% in April," she says. "Many of our other commodities mirror this type of market share as well."

FDACS has promotions planned starting for late winter and spring commodities, including social media, digital ads on recipe websites, targeted online messaging, influencers, digital coupons, television ads and premier product placement in retail.

"When retailers place items on ad, sales can increase 50 to 300%. We coordinate this advertising to coincide with grocery cart advertising and store signage," says Lee. "Last year, a retail partnership promotion of sweet corn at a major grocery retailer showed a 98% increase in total corn volume sold during the date range of the promotion."

#### **DIVERSITY AND RELIABILITY**

Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Publix Super Markets in Lakeland, FL, says many of her retailers' customers consider Florida grown produce a must-have during the winter months.

"We also think our customers in the other six states we operate in prefer Florida grown versus the alternative locations this same time of year, which is typically out of the country," she says. "Our stores will receive comprehensive merchandising instructions as well as Florida/Local POP [point of purchase] material to help call out this product to our customers. Signage will also include grower information."

Brous says strawberries, tomatoes and row

## Choose Fresh from

Florida is one of the leading suppliers of seasonal produce that's just as distinct as the shape of the state.

From avocados to zucchini, we have 48,000 farms spread over 9.5 million acres of fertile land. So, whether you're looking for strawberries, grapefruit, sweet corn, bell peppers, blueberries, or most anything else under the sun, Fresh From Florida is always in season.





crops such as beans and squash are Publix's most significant Florida-grown products by sales.

"There is still a long list of Florida-grown products we support such as corn, Athena melons, citrus, peppers, cucumbers, potatoes, sprouts, peaches, juices, avocados, carambola, lychee fruit and bonito root," she says, although some of these like lychees and peaches are summer crops. "We have also seen a spike in interest for dragon fruit and green skin avocados, which are often promoted during their peak seasons."

According to the University of Florida, the state's avocado season runs from late May to January with a peak from June to September, and Eco Ripe of Medley, FL sources local dragon fruit from June to November.

"Dragon fruit and pitahaya production in South Florida appears to have matured to the point of having very good volume for retail," notes Lee.

In terms of tomatoes, Brous says the crop is thriving in Florida as many growers have transitioned their round tomato varieties to cultivars containing the "crimson" gene, giving them a deep red color.

Michael Schadler, executive vice president of the Orlando-based Florida Tomato Committee, says the acreage dedicated to the crop has halved to 30,000 acres since 1989, but the state remains the country's largest for fresh-market tomato production.

"We grow about one billion pounds of tomatoes every year," he says. "Approximately 70% of the crop is round tomatoes, with the balance consisting of Roma, grape, and cherry varieties.

"Florida is the only source of U.S. field-grown tomatoes from about November to Mav."

North Florida starts its harvest in late September, and Central Florida then begins in October, making way for the South Florida crop in December with a season that runs through April.

"For Central and South Florida, we are forecasting 26 million boxes (25-lb. equivalents) of round tomatoes," says Schadler.

Chuck Weisinger, chief executive of Weis-Buy Farms in Fort Myers, FL, says Florida growers have risen to the challenge of competition from Latin America and produced a flavorful tomato for the market.

"The new NAFTA tomato agreement has made it harder for foreign imports to come into the United States because of the increased demand for inspectors and tougher grading standards in Mexico," he says.

Weis-Buy itself is marketing a portion of its produce to Floridians with special dietary needs, with Weisinger emphasizing consumers are usually older and demand variety and quality in their fruits and vegetables.

"In addition we are now selling specialty items to the portion of our population that visits and has emigrated from Central and South America," he says. "They are used to the fruits and vegetables we once thought of as exotic and are now almost staples.

"Safety and flavor have always been a hall-mark of Florida produce with set standards for citrus with brix counts and grades restricted to US-ONE," he adds.

#### **LEVERAGING FESTIVITIES**

Around the same time in mid-October that Florida's grapefruit starts to be harvested, strawberry growers start planting, according to Sue Harrell, marketing director at the Florida Strawberry Growers Association.

"Florida strawberries will be in the marketplace with good numbers December-April," says Harrell, noting around 10,000 acres worth of the fruit is grown each winter. "Florida strawberries can be shipped to the Northeast markets the day they are harvested or the next morning. Our advantage is delivering the freshest possible product.

"If the weather has been good to us in February retailers can order long stem strawberries for the Valentine's push. Nothing says love like chocolate-dipped Florida strawberries," says Harrell.

Nick Wishnatzki, marketing project manager at Wish Farms in Plant City, FL, says the red and green colors of a strawberry are a natural fit for Christmas promotions.

"One method we've seen used effectively is tie-in merchandising and displayed recipe ideas," he says. "More than any other marketing tactic, sampling is far and away the best way to connect with consumers and promote Florida strawberries."

He says as much as people enjoy strawberries from other regions, many berry shoppers look forward to the next winter Florida strawberry season.

"Not only is there a feeling of pride that they are grown close to home, but these consumers are passionate and loyal to the region because they enjoy the texture and flavor profile," he says.

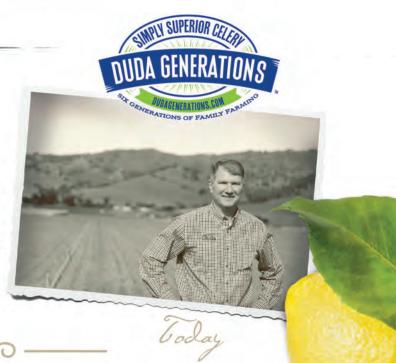
Wishnatzki notes the Sweet Sensation has been a fabulous strawberry variety for Florida as it is high yielding, looks good and has a great taste. Wish Farms is also releasing a new proprietary variety on a small scale with plans

# WHERE LEGACIES

Yesterday

Since Andrew Duda's first crop of celery was successfully sold in 1926, our family's commitment to farming has grown with each generation. Over the decades we've worked to adapt to the demands of the market, while staying true to our roots.

With a focus on innovating for the future, we lead the world in celery production and proprietary varieties. The Dandy® brand of citrus and vegetables is trusted worldwide. It is a legacy we are proud to keep growing.



Six Generations

of AMERICAN FAMILY FARMING

farm fresh foods













Visit us at PMA **Booth 1537** 

to ramp up in the 2020-21 season.

"Strawberries are a destination item in the produce department," he says. "When looking at consumer data and demand trends, we find consumers are purchasing strawberries on every visit to the grocery store, not just for special occasions.

"We like to think when the Florida strawberry season rolls around, it elevates all the other categories with it."

Wishnatzki's comments are echoed by Publix's Brous, who says by the last week of December Florida-grown strawberries are front and center of the retailer's merchandising program.

"We feature Florida-grown strawberries practically every week until early April," she says. "During peak times in the Florida season we will merchandise berries throughout the store."

#### ■ CITRUS VARIETIES TAKE OFF

Florida's citrus harvest kicks off in October, first with oranges early in the month followed by grapefruit in mid-October and tangerines in November.

"Peak season varies by variety. There are early, mid and late season varieties that allow the season to run through June," says Shelley Rossetter, assistant director of global marketing at the Florida Department of Citrus, based in Bartow. "We emphasize the health benefits of Florida Citrus in our promotions, though, many consumers are already well aware of them. We also tend to focus more on the Florida origin and what makes our citrus unique."

Sydney Allison, director of sales at IMG Citrus in Vero Beach, FL, says Florida citrus is differentiated by its thinner skin and juicier fruit, and its closeness to market is a plus for reducing transportation costs and appealing to consumers who care about cutting their carbon footprint.

"The appeal of the Sunshine State is without question for those northerners who dream of palm trees and sunny beaches in the midst of snowy cold winters," says Allison. "As a healthy winter fruit that is full of vitamin C, Florida citrus counters both the flu and the cold season, acting as an effective means to draw sales."

Rossetter also asserts taste is a big driver of sales for Florida citrus, known for its juicy oranges and sweet grape-fruit. However, since citrus greening was first confirmed in the state, there has been a drastic reduction in acreage.

"In 2002, Florida produced 230 million boxes of oranges. During the 2018-19 growing season, Florida produced 71.6 million of oranges," notes Rossetter. "Much of this decline is due to citrus greening."

Rossetter applauds the resilience of growers working aggressively to over-

come the disease, and Allison says her company is learning to live with it through new practices.

"We feel confident citrus will rebound and continue to be Florida's stellar crop," says Allison, adding the challenges have prompted the adoption of denser groves and more advanced irrigation and fertigation techniques.

Allison says the tremendous success of easy peelers has prompted growers in the state to develop and plant some seedless mandarin varieties, most notably Tangos and Bingos.

"These are new on the market, and we need to educate the consumers that although Bingos and Tangos are not as colored, they are a tasty, local source for easy peel, seedless mandarins," she says.

"One of the crops that continues to expand is cold hardy citrus, Satsuma mandarins in particular. North Florida and Panhandle growers are expanding acreage for this fall crop," notes Mindy Lee of the Florida Department of Ag.

IMG Citrus is also making a big push with the original Florida white grapefruit — an old variety with new opportunities which have traditionally been shipped to Japan.

"With the acquisition of a 4,000-acre grove this year that we renamed Happy Food, IMG Citrus has become Florida's prominent white-grapefruit grower, and we are wanting to reintroduce it to the U.S. market," says Allison. "We have started to talk to retailers about bringing white grapefruit back as a specialty item and the "premium tasting," "original" grapefruit."

She says these white grapefruit all come from mature Indian River groves yielding exceptionally sweet and flavorful fruit, and they typically have no competition from other citrus-growing areas.

#### PRODUCTS GAINING TRACTION

Nikki Hartman, marketing manager at B&W Quality Growers in Fellsmere, FL, says her company offers retailers a great deal of promotional support to familiarize consumers with the brand, which specializes in watercress, arugula, baby leaf kale and baby spinach.

Hartman suggests in-store demonstrations so consumers can trial these products. Her company works with chefs throughout the country to develop recipes that are delicious but also practical for home cooks.

"All of our leaves are available year-round, but fall and winter growing conditions in Florida are definitely the most ideal," she says. "Our leaves are incredibly delicate, so it becomes more challenging to grow in Florida throughout the summer months."

Josh Thompson, sales manager at C&B Farms in Clewiston, FL, says the company grows 40 items at its Florida farm with harvesting commencing in November and running through May.

"Our list of products consists of organic and conventional items. Beets, baby (Shanghai) bok choy, bok choy, green cabbage, red cabbage, celery, cilantro, dill, mint, Napa cabbage, parsley Italian, parsley Curly and radishes," says Thompson, adding the group also has a large range of items that are only grown organic.

Thompson also says QR codes have been added to C&B's retail labels to lead consumers to preparation instructions and virtual tours of the farm.

"We think our consumers should know where and from [whom their] food is coming from," he says. "Many buyers lean west for product to obtain safety and consistency in supply. C&B goes above and beyond to offer that level of on-time, in full delivery with the added perk of fresh product from your region," he says.

Lee of FDACS notes research also is being done on several items with commercial potential, including vanilla beans, artichokes and sweet potatoes.

"Asian vegetables such as bok choi, Napa and bitter melon are still gaining in popularity," she says. "Brussels sprouts have become popular and broccoli acreage is expanding as well as the length of the season."



### Sponsored by Masters of...

Bonsai





Fresh Cut Flower Bouquets and Arrangements





**Potted Basil** 





**Miniature Potted Plants** 







### FLORAL SUCCESS MATTERS

Recognizing the value of innovation, savvy retailers take the right steps to strengthen the store's mission by making Floral a must-experience department.

Profit-minded retailers know offering pretty flowers is only one step to pleasing customers. The goal to make in-store shopping experiences meaningful matters more every day as online purchasing swells. In their pursuit of this goal, floral buyers seek suppliers and growers that are innovative and understand the retailer's perspectives and challenges.

For this Masters of Innovation supplement, we sincerely thank the following sponsors for reaching out to floral buyers to assist them in selling more flowers and plants more often: Penang Nursery, The USA Bouquet Company, McGregor's Greens and Micky's Minis Flora Express. Retailers, please take

advantage of our offer to send you printed copies of this guide or a PDF of this supplement.

Through the 34 years of PRODUCE BUSINESS, readers have consistently received business solutions in original floral articles about marketing, merchandising, management and procurement. We reach floral buyers in print, online at FloralBusiness.com and on the floral channel of our PerishableNews.com. Continued interest in our floral coverage is greatly appreciated and we recognize reader interest as intentional pursuit of prosperity.

E. Shaunn Alderman Associate Publisher FLORAL BUSINESS

### producebusiness







FLORAL BUSINESS MASTERS OF INNOVATION is an advertising supplement in the October 2019 PRODUCE BUSINESS.

FLORAL BUSINESS is a quarterly magazine published in the March, June, September and December issues of PRODUCE BUSINESS. Readers are floral executives making buying decisions for supermarket, mass market and club store floral departments. The monthly circulation is 20,000, and online viewers can read current and back issues at www.FloralBusiness.com.

FLORAL BUSINESS and PRODUCE BUSINESS magazines are published by Phoenix Media Network, Inc., P. O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481; 561-703-4010 www.FloralBusiness.com







### **MASTER OF BONSAL**

### PENANG NURSERY INC.

### GROWING INNOVATIVE PLANT DÉCOR

Located in Apopka, Florida, the Indoor Foliage Capital of the World, Penang Nursery Inc. has been a grower and distributor of foliage plants and living décor gardens since 1981. Specializing in Bonsai, Penang also offers Air Plants, Cactus, Lucky Bamboo, Succulents, and Terrariums.

Our long-time Panda Garden® brand has helped retailers capture repeat customers interested in our easy-tomaintain table top gardens.



### **INNOVATIONS**

As growers, we like to think the plant makes the sale but wise floral buyers know containers are just as important as the plants. We travel the globe to source and procure appealing pots and special containers made of ceramic, clay, porcelain and glass.

SPOTLIGHT ON BONSAL

Bonsai bring a natural and peaceful feeling to any living space. Indoor bonsai are usually created from species of tropical and semitropical plants that tolerate indoor conditions. Penang Nursery specializes in the Ginseng Microcarpa, which is a ficus, and the money tree, also called Pachira. Optimal growing conditions include medium to high light in normal room temperatures. It's best to keep soil moderately moist, allowing the soil to dry on the surface before re-watering. These are easy-to-follow instructions for store teams and consumers.

EXTRA SERVICE OFFERED

Floral buyers can conveniently purchase bonsai and décor gardens for stores promoting corporate gift-giving. Penang Nursery offers floral buyers this business development service because retailers appreciate boosting floral sales by connecting with community enterprises. Because of the associated meditational value, Bonsai gardens are meaningful substantial gifts and are ideal rewards for a job well done. Yoga studios and wellness centers are likely customers.

Retailers seek consumer-friendly POP materials to help educate in-store customers. Penang Nursery offers these types of visual supports as well as digital content related to care and handling for use on retailers' websites. For retailers with Catering departments, we offer photos to promote our Bonsai gardens as wedding décor and as wedding gifts.

### PROMOTE BONSAI COMMUNITY

It's a social world so when floral buyers ask us for promotional ideas we like to encourage boosting the store's Bonsai Community by posting photos of Bonsai plants on Instagram and Pinterest. Similar to pet owners or pet "parents," many bonsai caretakers enjoy showing off their green thumb achievements.



### PENANG NURSERY INC.

4720 Plymouth Sorrento Rd.
Apopka, FL 32712
407-886-2322
www.penangnursery.com







### MASTER OF FRESH CUT FLOWER BOUQUETS AND ARRANGEMENTS

### THE USA BOUQUET COMPANY

### GLOBALLY SOURCED — AMERICAN MADE

As a leading national distributor of fresh cut flower bouquets and arrangements and a member of the Aalsmeer-based Dutch Flower Group Retail Division, The USA Bouquet Company sources more than 200 million stems annually. In addition to buying from flower farms in the United States, product is procured from several countries including Kenya, The Netherlands, Colombia, Ecuador and Guatemala. Mass market floral buyers recognize the offering of a global variety of products ensures the security of consistent supply at competitive prices.

USA Bouquet partners with Fair Trade Certified farms and participates in the Rainforest Alliance certification program. For retailers, this means you can assure your customers the flowers you offer from The USA Bouquet Company are grown in an environmentally friendly and socially responsible manner. We provide digital content and photos about social and ecological responsibility for retailers to use as educational material on their websites.



### **INNOVATIONS**

### NATIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Mass market floral buyers manage a series of momentous tasks when purchasing bouquets by the truckload – that's why we strive to accommodate the process and minimize the challenges. USA Bouquet has manufacturing and distribution facilities in Florida, Illinois, California, Georgia, New Jersey and Texas. Consolidated Fresh Solutions (CFS) provides manufacturing and logistical services from these six locations. This commitment in supporting geographically-positioned facilities is one of many ways we best serve floral buyers for supermarkets, mass markets and chain drug stores throughout the United States.

### LABOR SAVING SHIPPER DISPLAYS

Store level labor is often a challenge for many retailers. By listening to floral buyers and learning of their operational issues, USA Bouquet took action and created Ready-to-Display shippers that are attractive, convenient and require less floral department labor.

### **CUSTOMIZED PRODUCTS AND SERVICES**

To assist retailers in delighting customers, USA Bouquet offers a wide variety of everyday bouquet collections and seasonal products. With the trend of customization, retailers can dazzle customers with our Speaking Roses – embossed with popular sentiments or made-to-order with a company logo. More floral buyers are recognizing the value of offering our popular Wedding-In-A-Box program to in-store customers seeking to enhance their weddings or special events. The professionally-designed, pre-made bouquets,

boutonnieres, corsages and centerpieces are time and labor-savers for floral departments, and customers love to post photos on social media showing they bought their wedding flowers at your store.

### MARKETING WITH MEANINGFUL CAUSES

Acknowledging the trend of consumers supporting meaningful causes through their buying decisions, more retailers are choosing to connect with community members by offering bouquets supporting local, regional and national philanthropic efforts. USA Bouquet's Make A Difference One Petal At A Time bouquet program enables retailers to customize the store's bouquets in support of a favored local organization or national charity.

### A FLORAL SALUTE TO WOMEN

Globally observed March 8, International Women's Day (IWD) can be celebrated with flowers the entire month. Floral buyers recognize our IWD bouquets help their stores connect with customers in honoring and saluting women's achievements.

And back by popular demand, new for 2020, floral buyers are asking about our trendy Galentine bouquets.



### THE USA BOUQUET COMPANY

1500 NW 95th Ave., Miami, FL 33172 800-306-1071 • www.usabg.com







### October 17 – 19, 2019 Anaheim Convention Center Anaheim, CA





### Flowers of Happiness







### **MASTER OF FRESH BASIL**

### MCGREGOR'S GREENS

### A FRESH START

Following his 1984 graduation from the University of Delaware with a BS in Plant Science, Bruce Cobb, owner of McGregor's Greens, began growing lettuce in his first hydroponic greenhouse. Since then the company has expanded to include greenhouses in Shiloh, NJ and Mount Dora, FL. After 35 years, Mc-Gregor's Greens is recognized as a leader in hydroponic growing systems and specializes in potted basil in addition to selections of fresh herbs and specialty greens for supermarket chains and foodservice distributors.



### **INNOVATIONS**

In 1996, McGregor's Greens was approached by scientists at Rutgers University to develop methods of growing plants for use in pharmaceuticals. This project, which lasted until 2012, included designing computers and associated software for controlling the environment and feeding. Using protocol-driven methods has revolutionized the ability to grow flavorful culinary products. Grown on proprietary capillary mats where beneficial micro organisms thrive, the plants are bottom-watered to reduce disease pressure. For the past 20 years, McGregor's Greens has been at the forefront of computer-controlled greenhouse design and hydroponics.

### **FLAVOR AND QUALITY**

McGregor's Greens Sweet Basil is flavorful because it is grown under the Florida sunshine using innovative production methods in a controlled environment. Sold in a full-size standard pot allows the plant enough moisture to endure the rigors of the retail shelf. Packaged in a clear sleeve with minimal graphics consumers can see what they are buying. In addition to basil, micro greens and other potted herbs such as dill, sage, mint, parsley, oregano, rosemary, tarragon, thyme and marjoram are also available.

### **CUSTOMER FOCUSED**

McGregor's Greens prides itself on the ability to grow to specification and deliver on time. With a packaging and shipping center that will work with buyers to accommodate any special requirement doing business with McGregor's Greens is as sweet as our basil.



### MCGREGOR'S GREENS

2649 Britt Rd., Mount Dora, FL 32757 352-729-5867 www.mcgregorsgreens.com







### Our sweet basil will more than satisfy your customers.

- Bruce Cobb, Head Grower

- 100% Harmonized GAP Plus Audit.
- · Four-inch and six-inch potted fresh and flavorful basil.
- · Living greens and micro greens.
- · More than 30 years of experience in cutting-edge greenhouse growing.
- Packaging and shipping to your specifications.
- · Central Florida-located.



www.mcgregorsgreens.com



### **MASTER OF MINIATURE POTTED PLANTS**

MICKY'S MINIS FLORA EXPRESS®

# LARGEST SELECTION OF MINIATURE PLANT VARIETIES

Big ideas usually start small and that's the way it was for Micky's Minis Flora Express®. The original idea was to grow and sell miniature plants as novelty gift items. In January 1990 the St. Louis-based grower started shipping miniature potted plants nationally. Today, Mickv's Minis Flora Express is recognized for growing the largest selection of miniature potted plant varieties in the United States.

### **INNOVATIONS**

Retailers promoting yearround gift-giving with our minis are partial to merchandising our Roses, Kalanchoes, Mums, Ivv. Anthuriums and Lucky Bamboo because sell-through is reliable. Though mini in size our decorative herbs and trendy succulents are also big sellers. Floral buyers know the value of offering variety and keeping floral departments fresh and enticing with new colors and textures. From our seasonal offerings of two-inch Poinsettias and glitter-enhanced Blingsettias, to our colorful Cyclamen and blooming Orchids, we also provide supermarkets with Azaleas and Violets.

### ACCESSORIZING EXPERTS

Eye-catching containers, pots, over pots, balloon picks and accessories play a significant role in the success of our miniatures. Floral buyers recognize that consumers are visually drawn to our novelty containers such as the mini watering cans and ever-popular seasonal ceramics. Micky's Minis Floral Express® is the only company in the Floral/Greenhouse/Grower category to win the Excellence in Packaging — Impact Award from the Produce Marketing Association.

### CUSTOMIZATION SERVICES

Micky's Minis eagerly works with retailers on accessorizing miniature potted plants for community programs, promoting local causes and for significant catered events such as weddings and corporate parties. In October of 2010 Micky's Minis was recognized as being the Produce Marketing Association's Floral Marketer of the Year.

### MID-COUNTRY LOCATION

Safely shipping our miniature plants year round from our greenhouses in St. Louis has been happening since January 1990. Floral buyers know we are experts when it comes to Direct Store Delivery, but we also ship to distribution centers across the United States. Our mid-country location helps keep freight costs down and is convenient for scheduling quick deliveries.



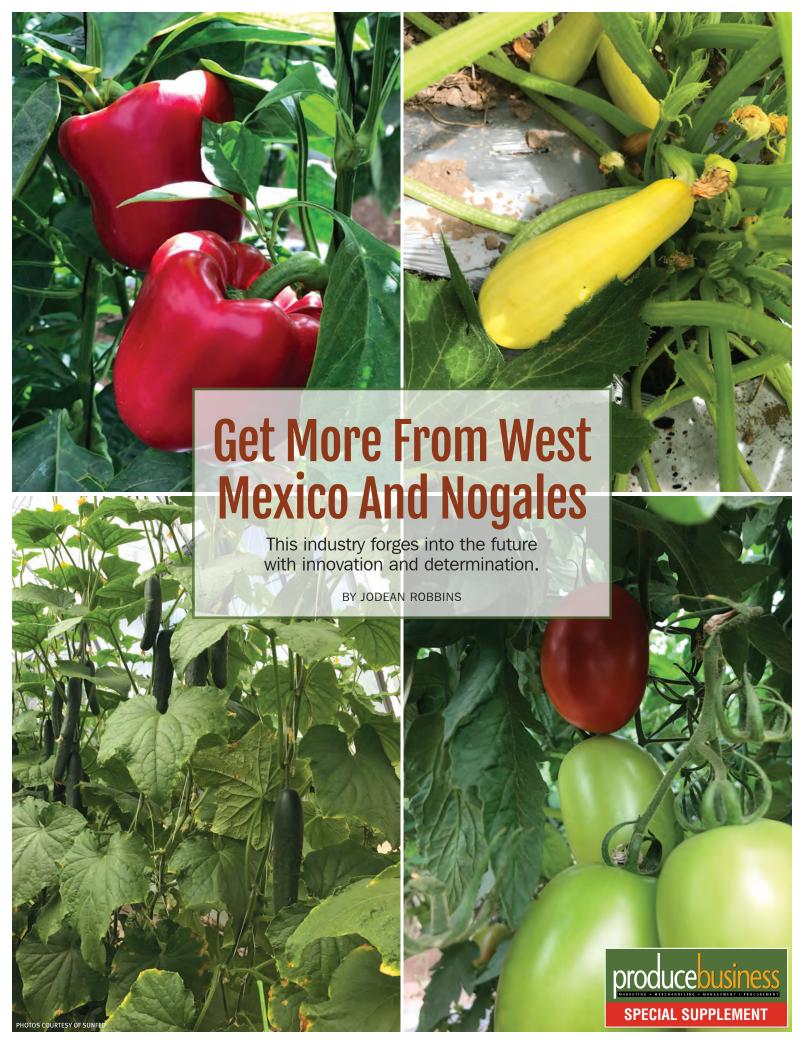
### MICKY'S MINIS FLORA EXPRESS®

12345 Eddie & Park Rd., St. Louis, MO 63127 800-753-6464

sales@mickysminis.com www.Mickysminis.org







exico is a powerhouse player when it comes to fruits and vegetables. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Agriculture show imports of 9,704,330 metric tons, which is a more than 100% increase over the past 10 years.

"Every single year, the West Mexico deal becomes more and more important in supplying consumers with consistent, high quality produce items, especially in the winter months," says Allison Moore, vice president at Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA) in Nogales, AZ. "The maturity of this industry means suppliers here are a foundational piece of any retailer's produce program."

West Mexico continues to be a source destination for excellent quality produce on an increasingly year-round basis, asserts Matt Mandel, vice president of operations for SunFed in Rio Rico, AZ.

"SunFed has ten months out of the

"Because of the concentration of U.S. warehouses in such close proximity to each other, Nogales is a logistical dream for buyers sourcing several items from various companies.

Allison Moore, Fresh Produce Association of the Americas

year covered via our West Mex deal alone," he says. "Though agriculture is growing throughout Mexico, Sonora and Sinaloa still represent a healthy majority of the ag exports to the United States."

The West Mexico-Nogales deal has become important over the past century due to its ability to give buyers an opportunity to pick up multiple items within a mere 5-mile radius, explains Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer at Ciruli Brothers in Rio Rico, AZ.

"Nogales has a lot of variety and availability year-round, and all pick-up points are close together, near a recently renovated port," he says. "No other port in the United States has this unique cluster benefit."

The West Mexico produce trade has long been synonymous with the Nogales industry. According to FPAA, Nogales handles 30% of the volume imported from Mexico. "U.S. importers and sellers are an integral part of the supply chain," says Moore.

"Because of the concentration of U.S. warehouses in such close proximity to each other, Nogales is a logistical dream for buyers sourcing several items from various companies. Trucks can make short work of picking up mixed loads for buyers," she says.

Nogales and the West Mexico industry boast more than a century of experience. "We've operated here for more than 100 years," says Jim Cathey, sales manager with Malena Produce in Rio Rico, AZ. "Obviously after 100 years, you expect to have learned how to do things a little better every year. So, when the retailers look at us, they have confidence they've made the right decision in choosing Nogales as the place to load."

Yet, companies in West Mexico and Nogales don't rest on their success but work to revolutionize and offer even more





# THE CONSUMER CONNECTION ANNUAL CONFERENCE

### April 13-16, 2020 | Scottsdale, Arizona

Unite with other produce industry thought leaders and top-tier influencers for consumer-driven collaboration at The Consumer Connection.

Engage in intimate high-caliber networking with the influential people that matter most.

Attain business-boosting insights that consider every player on the board.

Indulge in a daily produce-prominent culinary exploration that showcases what's next on America's menus.

PRODUCE FOR™

# Inspire. Influence. IGNITE. fruitsandveggies.org/ConsumerConnection

to U.S. consumers. "Mexico's growers continue to innovate and employ more technology as they look to improve yields, crop quality and reduce overall cost and water consumption," says Alejandro Madrigal, president of Covilli Brand Organics in Nogales, AZ.

### MORE PRODUCTION

One fundamental aspect of giving buyers more is geographic expansion. "The deal continues to move deeper into Mexico," says Ciruli. "We are pulling more items from Mexico than ever before and year-round."

Mayra Velazquez de León, president

and chief executive for Organics Unlimited in San Diego, reports a continued boom in demand for produce from numerous parts of Mexico, particularly the state of Colima. "The variety of climates and geographic location make Mexico an ideal source. especially for organic produce, for the neighboring United States," she says.

West Mexico is also expanding production in protected agriculture technologies. "The trend for protected ag companies from West Mexico is to expand production into other parts of Mexico," says Alfredo Diaz Belmontes, chief executive of AMHPAC (the Mexican protected ag growers association) in Culiacan, Sinaloa. "Demand for high quality produce at the highest food safety standards in the market is on the rise. Mexican protected agriculture continues to be the best choice to meet this demand."

Protected ag production is also developing more variety and flavor. "We are building more shade houses, more protected ag options, and consequently, we're coming up with better quality," says Cathey. "The focus is trending back toward higher flavor profile. You have to stand out because of the amount of competition. and Mexico continues to stand out."

According to Diaz Belmontes, protected agriculture has traditionally been used for three crops — tomatoes, cucumbers

and bell peppers but Mexican growers have great interest in expanding their business portfolio. "Buyers should be on the lookout for production PHOTO COURTESY OF CIRULI BROTHERS



of different crops that can be grown under protected schemes."

### RISING INTEREST IN ORGANIC AND SUSTAINABLE

Mexico makes organic and sustainable more affordable.

### BY JODEAN ROBBINS

In addition to the more conventional produce items, Mexico has become a leader in organic and sustainable options. "Organic and fair trade continue to lead the charge and interest in both continues to accelerate," says Alejandro Madrigal, president of Covilli Brand Organics in Nogales, AZ. "Interest in organic and fair trade within Mexico itself is gaining momentum. Organic continues to increase out of Mexico as demand from the U.S. marketplace continues to drive growth."

Increased production of both organic and sustainable produce comes at a time when the market is demanding more. "We're seeing stronger push from retailers for more food safety and social responsibility programs, which is good, but it also puts upward pressure on supply chain and production costs," says Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer at Ciruli Brothers in Rio Rico AZ.

Consumers want to know the who, what and where of the produce they're buying, relates Mayra Velazguez de León, president and chief executive for Organics Unlimited in San Diego, CA. "Demand continues to grow for organic produce that is fairly traded, supports small growers, is sustainably and ethically grown, and contributes to positive social change," she says.

Although these are areas the consumer, and hence, the retailer are

demanding. Carlos Bon, sales manager at Divine Flavor in Nogales, AZ, views it as less of a compliance focus and instead something broader. "We see it as responsbility toward our planet and our coworkers," he says.

Mexico has a significant backstory in organic, sustainable and socially responsible production. "Many growers have been doing right by their workers for a very long time and now have a way of proving or certifying the efforts," says Madrigal. "With an ever-increasing demand for transparent supply chains and ethical business dealings, I see fair trade getting even stronger traction."

Velazquez de León reports volume in organic produce from West Mexico is expanding to meet the demand of both distributers and retailers. "We also see increased interest in other tropical items such as plantains and coconuts," she says. "As retailers explore and expand produce options, this continues to help inform future plans for growers in this region."

Growers such as Divine Flavor continue to increase organic, sustainable, socially responsible production. "We are fully invested in our Better Grower Program which is based on our six pillars," says Bon. "These pillars comprise organic, social responsibility, sustainability, quality, traceability and food safety." pb

### **MORE VARIETY**

The variety of product coming in through Nogales from West Mexico continues to expand. Tomatoes led imports through Nogales at 1.09 billion pounds in 2018, according to USDA. Watermelon, cucumbers, squash and bell peppers remained at the top of the import volume list as well. "Overall, the traditional dry-veg items including cucumber and pepper are coming in just about 52 weeks per year," says Ciruli.

Rising volume stars include grapes, chili peppers and mangos, all posting more than 200 million pounds imported through Nogales in 2018, according to USDA. Mangos, in particular, enjoy continued growth in volume and seasonality with 245 million pounds imported in 2018.

Rod Diaz, marketing director for Diazteca in Rio Rico, AZ, reports the company grows 2,000 acres of mangos in the Sinaloa and Oaxaca states of Mexico. "We are harvesting and supplying mangos to the U.S. market from February through September each year," he says. "Overall export mango varieties are grown in the Western states of México: Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán, Colima, Nayarit and Sinaloa."

Cathey notes the growth in newer products — including specialty items such

### Add Sensational Flavor to the Produce Department

Divine Flavor's line-up of distinct products gives produce departments something exciting to offer consumers. Over the years, the company's dedicated food scientists and R&D experts have created iconic, great tasting products. Stores can add flavor and flair with these innovative and engaging items.



### **JELLY BERRIES**

Taking the market by storm this year are **Jelly Berries**, an innovative new grape with both taste and health benefits. This seedless, high-quality,



high-premium grape boasts a unique taste derived from ancient Concord varieties. "It has a sweet grape jelly flavor," says Carlos Bon, sales manager at Divine Flavor. "It's like a little ball of grape jelly when you bite it and is an excellent substitute for sugary snacks in kids' lunch."

Another plus of the **Jelly Berry** includes significant health benefit owing to its color. The dark purple signifies higher antioxidants than other grapes. It also has Vitamin K, which plays an essential role in preventing osteoporosis. The grape is organically and conventionally produced and available most of the year from December through March, May and June, and August through October.



### MAGNIFICO SWEET GRAPE TOMATOES

The perfect balance between acidity and sweetness, these grape tomatoes are juicy and crunchy with a



meaty texture. "Their unforgettable sweet taste is matched only by the extreme care and effort taken in growing them," says Bon. "We utilize a certified organic environment, where sustainability and innovation allow us to continuously strive toward optimum flavor."

The tomatoes are great as a snack or in salads, and they offer many health benefits. They are rich in lycopene, a known cancer-fighting agent, and abundant in Vitamins A and C, which help maintain healthy skin, good vision, a strong immune system and a healthy heart. Available in pint, clamshell or convenient top-seal bowl packs, these tomatoes come year-round from Divine Flavor's three farms in Baja California, Sinaloa and Jalisco. Mexico.



### TRIBELLI MINI PEPPERS

Colorful, bite-sized and nearly 100% edible, **Tribelli** mini peppers are delicious, natural, healthy and fun for consumers. These versatile peppers



are sustainably grown in greenhouses using a selection of varieties to guarantee the best quality, bite after bite. "Our professional growers care about each crop and harvest the peppers when they reach the peak of ripeness for an express packaging process," says Bon. "These mini peppers are available all yearlong in various packaging sizes, trays and boxes."

### **SPECIALTY GRAPES**

**Cotton Candy**, **Gummys** and **Wow Sweets** Green & Red specialty grapes add to Divine Flavor's innovative product line.



The **Cotton Candy** (Straw green) seedless offers a 100% cotton candy flavor experience in every bite. With the fun flavor captured in its name, this grape is a must-have for every consumer's table.





**Gummyberries** is every kid's favorite! With a gummy fruit flavor, this grape is a great replacement for sugary treats and snacks. Its shiny red color and fun bite-size make it extra appealing.





Perfectly ripened **Wow Sweets** Green & Red varieties are our farmer's favorites. "These represent a more personally selected grape at the best time when the vine provides prime flavor," says Bon.



### **Backed by Strong Commitment**

Formed in 2006, Divine Flavor is a family-built, grower-owned fresh produce distribution company based in Nogales, AZ. The company builds its foundation on three key pillars: social responsibility, transparency and innovation. "We believe taking good care of both our people and our environment helps grow better food and makes the world a better place to live in," says Bon.









For more information on Divine Flavor, please contact us:

### STUMBLING BLOCKS TO BUILDING BUSINESS

FPAA and its members remain stalwart in the fight for free trade.

### BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Despite the popularity and growth of major categories of products from Mexico, free trade remains a contentious and stubborn issue politically. "The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the negotiations that resulted in the USMCA (U.S. Mexico Canada Agreement) deal we have today did some positive things for trade," says Allison Moore, vice president for Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA) in Nogales, AZ.

The USMCA, a renegotiation of NAFTA by its member states, was formally agreed to on October 1, 2018. It has been signed by each country's president but not yet ratified by the legislatures. "All of the individual states and industry groups that joined in the renegotiation process have now joined in the push to get USMCA ratified by the U.S Congress," says Moore. "This means a lot of people have taken a good look at trade and the positive benefits in their regions."

Moore reports an awareness like never before on how working with trading partners in North America really strengthens the economy. "For example, the State of Arizona has a massive campaign in support of USMCA," she says. "Its website features a video from Arizona Governor Doug Ducey and also has detailed information on the USMCA's impact on the entire state. The push to pass the USMCA is really creating a strong framework to continue to educate the public about the importance of trade."

Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer at Ciruli Brothers in Rio Rico AZ, affirms his company supports the new trade agreement, and he would like to see it signed before the end of the year. "Like NAFTA, we hope the USMCA will last for years to come to keep promoting trade, so we can continue to grow nutritious, quality food for consumers," he says.

### A Drive To Move Forward

For more than a century, West Mexico growers and their Nogales counterparts have worked to diversify product offerings. "Since the beginning of this industry, our members have seen themselves as motivated to try new things, motivated to do

something better," says Moore. "From innovations in greenhouse technology to better tasting varieties to consumer-ready packaging, companies here understand we are in a constant state of improving."

Moore points out how FPAA members, as U.S. companies, work proactively through their association and individually. "They counter those that might refuse to change or innovate and instead try to prop up outdated business models," she says. "There is no room for complacency in this business. Ultimately, when we all do better, consumers benefit and so does our economy."

However, instability in trade matters makes the already complicated task of innovating even more challenging. "As one might imagine, farming is not an inexpensive endeavor, especially organic farming," says Alejandro Madrigal, president of Covilli Brand Organics in Nogales, AZ. "So, if policy arbitrarily changes, it's hard to adjust when the money is planted in the ground. The best thing buyers and growers alike can do is to make sure their supply chain and customer base is committed and transparent. It requires the buyer and grower to know each other and their customer base and be fully engaged, responsive and up-to-date with the daily changes in the political and economic landscape."

### Feeling Pressure

In addition to the delay in the USMCA ratification, the industry also has concerns about the effects of revisions to the Tomato Suspension Agreement. According to Moore, the Florida Tomato Exchange (FTE) continues to push the Department of Commerce to eliminate competition from U.S. companies importing tomatoes from Mexico. "Unfortunately, there are groups out there trying to limit buyers' ability to source the products they prefer," she says. "The agreement provisions they were pushing for limit buyer protections under the Perishable Agriculture Commodities Act, demand unnecessary border inspections on practically all shipments of tomatoes and attempt to drive all tomato sales through FTE-integrated repackers."

But the real problem may be less rooted in a border war and more of a product innovation question. "The real question is, 'how much harm does a Mexican greenhouse-grown tomato cause a U.S. gas green or field tomato?" says Jim Cathey, sales manager with Malena Produce in Rio Rico, AZ. "It doesn't directly, because they are different products, and it's a consumer decision to buy greenhouse-grown and not gas green or field grown. If growers aren't growing greenhouse product, they are losing market share because the consumer is choosing something different, not because Mexico is growing unfairly."

Moore gauges the FTE is attempting to prop up outdated-business models through trade actions instead of innovating and improving. "These kinds of precedents have consequences for the entire supply chain from sellers to buyers and consumers," she says. "Buyers, more than ever, need to make sure their elected officials know how much they rely on trade to provide the best selection and supply to consumers. They need to convey how important it is for their businesses and the people they serve as employees and customers."

As an industry we must be prepared and stay vigilant on trade issues, advises Cathey. "You can't ever get so comfortable to think tariffs won't happen, even if we think it's not plausible," he says. "In the end, there are also many people protesting this and trying to protect the consumer from getting hit with higher-priced tomatoes."

There are no winners when it comes to tariffs and trade, says Mayra Velazquez de León, president and chief executive for Organics Unlimited in San Diego. "Hopefully cooler heads will prevail since markets in both the United States and Mexico so heavily rely on one another for conducting business and, ultimately, for success," she says.

"Being prepared for a wide range of events is something produce companies do all the time — be it trade, weather, natural disasters or other possible scenarios. Pay attention, but don't be driven by fear."

### nogales imports







### Specializing in Vine-Ripe, Slicing, Roma & Sweet Grape Tomatoes

Sales: Jon Esformes, Jack Esformes, Joey Poklemba, Carlos Blanco, Rob Meade, Lyle Bagley, and Peter Sheffield

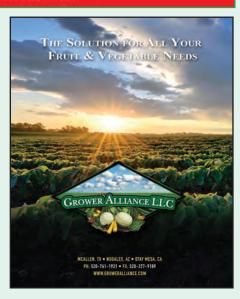
Palmetto Florida Sales: 941-722-0778 • Tracy California Sales Nogales Arizona Sales: 520-281-4927

### Pacific Tomato Growers

Grower • Shipper • Distributor

www.sunripecertified.com





as mini peppers. "They are becoming popular in the retail aisles because of the flavor profiles," he says. "Producers are changing the flavor profile and changing how product is packed and presented."

Citrus is another growing category from Mexico via Nogales. "Interesting changes in Mexico's exports include citrus items crossing through Nogales, such as lemons, limes and oranges," says Ciruli.

Covilli's Madrigal says Mexico's West Coast continues to show more investments

in citrus orchards. "Items include Persian limes, lemons and specialty citrus," he says.

USDA statistics reflect how growers and their marketers continue to explore items fitting the market — including Asian vegetables, bananas and tropical fruits as well as more packaging options. "We notice more demand for barcoded and scan-able items and packaging," says Ciruli. "Buyers demand convenience, and value-added packs are still trending."

As variety and seasonality continue to

PHOTO COURTESY OF MALENA

PHOTO COURTESY OF MALENA

evolve, SunFed's Mandel suggests there is much room for retailers and grower/shippers to work together to plan out ads and promotions based on the natural ebbs and flows of production.

"So much of the promotional activity I see is based on the old 'well, we ran XX during October last year' mentality," he says. "Both parties would benefit greatly from planning together to offer the best product, when it is most abundant, at the best possible price to consumers."

### MORE SUPPORT

The Nogales component of the West Mexico deal continues to add more value. "Nogales companies bring to the table their expertise of the U.S. marketplace landscape, including which potholes to avoid," says Madrigal. "They are strong advocates and a good example of cross-cultural and business cooperation."

The industry, along with state and local governments, remains on the proactive road of infrastructure and logistics improvements. "Our industry is investing in building new warehouses with better cold chain to maintain and sustain shelf-life," says Malena's Cathey. "The companies that are growing are the ones looking at major building. If you drive down I19 now, you see a bunch of new warehouses."

The FPAA, in conjunction with other local entities, continues to move forward on building cold inspection rooms at the Mariposa Port of Entry in Nogales. "This will better facilitate government inspections of highly sensitive items including berries and leafy vegetables," says Moore.

"The cold inspection facility will make it easier for more of that business to cross through Nogales to reach many West Coast markets with significant freight advantages because of our location," says Moore of the FPAA.







### CALIFORNIA CITRUS REIGNS SUPREME LED BY MANDARINS AND ORANGES

Specialty varieties quickly gain appeal.

BY GILL MCSHANE

or 170 years, fresh citrus has been a source of pride and income for the state of California, providing retailers with everything from Mandarins and oranges to lemons, limes, grapefruit and now a number of other citrus types. So, when it comes to predicting the next top sellers from California, leading grower-suppliers agree specialty citrus, or what the trade terms as 'pigmented citrus,' is continuing to rise in popularity.

### **EMERGING VARIETIES**

"Specialty varieties, such as sweet, seedless and low acidity Cara Cara navel oranges; and savory, rich blood oranges, are two emerging varieties," says Christina Ward, director of global brand marketing at Sunkist Growers in Valencia, CA. "Research shows once consumers taste these varieties, they love the unique flavor profiles and come back for more."

Alex Teague, chief operating officer and senior vice president of Santa Paula, CA-based Limoneira, agrees: "While small in volumes, such items as pink lemons or blood oranges continue to increase in consumer niches. Aside from having a different look, they have distinctive flavor profiles consumers find interesting."

Heirloom varieties are bringing interest to the citrus category, too, thanks to their seasonality and differentiation, according to Chris Cockle, senior director, imports and East Coast sales at Wonderful Citrus in Delano, CA.

Additionally, Pummelos and seedless lemons are helping to drive California citrus consumption, but Teague thinks the blood orange may be the most popular specialty variety, supported by increasing availability.

"Historically, [blood orange has] it's a very short season of two to three months, but with the Sanguinello variety and some later varieties we're starting to reach close to June. Then Southern Hemisphere blood oranges extend the season a bit longer, which is allowing consumers to become more accustomed to the flavor and availability."

Added to that, Cockle says mature lemon varieties are experiencing a resurgence, specifically seedless lemons. Wonderful Seedless Lemons will launch nationwide this October, Cockle says.

Ward at Sunkist says organic California citrus continues to see strong performance as well, experiencing "exceptional growth year over year," she notes.

### **CITRUS MAINSTAYS**

Nonetheless, in terms of volume, California mandarins, Navel and Valencia oranges, lemons and grapefruit continue to be the most popular varieties, with easy-peeler mandarins remaining the category leader.

"Fresh citrus has gained over the last 15 years as part of the per capita food consumed, led by mandarins," notes Limoneira's Teague. "However, Navels continue to be a big part of the state's fresh production and sales."

Charlie Gardner, merchant for citrus at Wegmans, a regional supermarket chain head-quartered in Rochester, NY, concurs: "Navels continue to be very popular, with mandarins and easy-peel options gaining popularity each year."

According to figures from Wonderful, mandarins make up 45% of the citrus category in California and will continue to grow as a result of new sub-varieties being introduced to extend the season. "Growth in Navel sub-varieties are keeping oranges as the second-largest variety of citrus at 24% share, says Cockle.

Indeed, Ward says California represents 80% of the year-round mandarin supply in the United States, and both production and acreage are increasing. Meanwhile, she says "pretty much all" California citrus varieties are rising in volume. "Consumer interest in citrus all year long continues to grow," she explains.

As for the varieties that present the most promise for extending California's citrus season, Teague says this is where pigmented citrus will come into its own. "Extending the pigmented window into spring and early summer looks to be the most promising, as illustrated by blood oranges and Cara Caras."

At the same time, Cockle predicts new early-season and mid-season mandarin varieties will also come into play.

### **MERCHANDISING CITRUS**

On the promotional front, since certain citrus types are purchased on impulse generally, Cockle advises placing large, eye-catching and branded point-of-sale (POS) displays in both the produce department and secondary locations, such as the check out, pharmacy or lobby.

High-graphic POS materials, such as cardboard farmers market stands or citrus trees, are a clear winner for Ryan Ellison, produce category manager at Abingdon, VA-based K-VA-T Food Stores, which owns around 130 Food City supermarkets in Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia.

"We work with vendors like Cuties or Halo, and their materials are so bright with blues and oranges that they really draw attention to the area," says Ellison. "Even if shoppers are not looking for California citrus, they can't get through the store without seeing it."

Long-term messaging works best for any commodity, but especially for citrus, according to Teague at Limoneira. "Consistent messages via packaging, as well as POS materials, over the long haul resonate with consumers," he explains.

Specialty varieties, in particular, require targeted communication, says Ward at Sunkist. "Specialty citrus is about education and experience for consumers," she points out. "Sunkist has a wide array of retail marketing programs, including sampling, digital coupons, high-graphic secondary display bins and in-store, point-of-sale materials that highlight flavor profiles, nutritional benefits and recipes to build awareness, drive trial and increase sales."

### **PROMOTE HEALTH**

Health certainly is a primary attribute for retailers to tap into when merchandising California citrus, thanks to their fiber and Vitamin C content. "The citrus category continues to be recognized by our customers as a great-tasting and nutrient-packed fruit option," explains Gardner at Wegmans. "The unique and powerful antioxidant health benefits are extremely important to our customers."

For K-VA-T, health is the big message when it comes to promoting produce in general. "We're trying to push healthier snacks, like a good piece of California citrus, instead of



a bag of chips," says Ellison. "It's about pushing how good they are for you, how they help to fight the flu, how they're high in Vitamin C and a good everyday snack."

Among the many healthful benefits to promote, Cockle from Wonderful says citrus in general is a natural flavor enhancer for food or drink. "There has been increased consumption of citrus-infused water, fresh citrus sauces and salad dressings, and substituting citrus for salt to reduce sodium intake," he says.

Sunkist already touts lemon juice as a 'S'alternative'— a substitute for salt — when flavoring meals. "With the average American consuming twice the recommended amount of sodium, and high sodium intake linked to high blood pressure, cancer and osteoporosis, increased use of lemons could play a major role in reducing Americans' dependence on the salt shaker," suggests Ward.

### **PROMOTIONAL POWER**

Thanks to their versatility, Cockle notes different citrus varieties can be promoted throughout the year, tied to traditional occasions and holidays. He recommends marketing lemons during Lent/Easter, Thanksgiving and throughout the Hanukkah/Christmas holiday season; and limes during Cinco de Mayo and the Super Bowl. "Mandarins market well during the November-December holiday season but also for any healthy snacking occasion," he adds.

When looking for ideas to customize citrus promotions to the fall and winter months, Teague at Limoneira suggests only minor differences are needed since citrus uses remain very similar. "We customize our message of great flavor and great health into slightly different formats for the fall and winter, but the message is the same," he explains. "As an example, that might be from using lemons for

fresh lemonade for great taste and health, to using fresh lemons in hot tea for great flavor and health in the winter."

Cross promotions are also key to expanding sales. "Citrus is great for all kinds of cross promotions within the produce department and outside the department that consumers can relate to, such as limes and avocados, grapefruit and bagged salad, lemons and limes with seafood and/or alcohol, and so on," suggests Wonderful's Cockle.

Sunkist offers secondary display options to promote citrus with seafood and liquor, while Limoneira currently is promoting lemons with avocados, given that one of the best delivery methods for a beneficial compound found in lemons is via a healthy fat, because it enables the body to store it longer.

Another merchandising strategy that works extremely well is building a display with a complete range of citrus, from loose Navels to bagged Clementines, according to Ellison from K-VA-T. "Whether they're looking for a single piece of fruit to take with them or a bag for the family, there's literally something for everyone," he says.

### **PACKAGING MATTERS**

As for packaging trends, operators agree pack sizes depend on the variety, as well as the shopper profile. Gardner at Wegmans suggests choice is the answer. "The most popular sizes and varieties of packaging for California citrus depends on the customers and their needs," he says. "Offering a variety of options solves this for each customer."

Overall, Cockle estimates more than half of all California citrus varieties are sold in bulk, except specialty citrus, where the preference is for smaller weights, such as 3-pound bags of Cara Cara navels and 2-pound bags of blood

And although bulk sales have been in decline, Teague expects it will pick up again in the coming years. "Across all varieties, approximately 65% is sold in the 40-pound bulk container, which has been on a downward trend over the past 25 years. As excess packaging continues to be a hot topic, we are expecting that to rise again slightly."

At retail, Teague says oranges continue to lead bulk sales (in 40-pound cartons), as well as various net bagging options, ranging from 2 pounds to 8 pounds. Cockle suggests for Navels, the 4-pound and 8-pound sizes are the most popular. Sunkist's Ward says the latest trend is smaller pack sizes, especially when it comes to Navel oranges.

California lemons are largely sold in bulk

## YOU CAN'T SPELL CITRUS WITHOUT US.

For years, we've been growing the very best citrus
California and Arizona has to offer. That means, highquality fruit, grown with even higher standards. At
Sunkist, we lovingly tend to over 40 varieties – and there's
something available for everyone all season long.





as well, and Teague says there is a growing percentage of 2-pound and 3-pound net bags as a second offering. Indeed, Ward says lemon volume continues to grow every year. "Bag [lemon] volume is driving the category, outpacing growth in bulk lemons, and representing more than 40% of volume last summer."

For red grapefruit, Cockle says the 5-pound and 8-pound packages are the most popular, while Ward notes Sunkist noticed a 52% increase in the 3-pound summer grapefruit bag option last summer.

Packaging that attracts children continues to be used largely for easy-peeler Mandarins, as well as easy-to-peel oranges. Nonetheless, Teague stresses more should be done. "The fact is that literally all of our citrus varieties are oriented to kids, and we need to continue to adapt all packaging offerings to be more kid-friendly."

### **CALIFORNIA COMPETITION**

When it comes to California's response to worldwide citrus competition, from the likes of Chile, Australia, South Africa, Spain, Morocco and Peru, Ward notes California growers are seeing larger overlaps of "California citrus pretty much sells itself. When it comes to the winter, 95% of our citrus comes out of California."

- Ryan Ellison, K-VA-T Food Stores

commodities, which is creating "more market volatility."

Nonetheless, California retains its point of difference. "You will not find a better-looking, better-eating piece of citrus," says Ellison from K-VA-T, who says the "outstanding quality" keeps shoppers coming back for more. "California citrus pretty much sells itself. When it comes to the winter, 95% of our citrus comes out of California."

Gardner at Wegmans says his shoppers certainly look forward to the California season, noting "flavor" is the No.1 reason for buying. "California citrus is synonymous with the start of the citrus seasonal calendar for our customers."

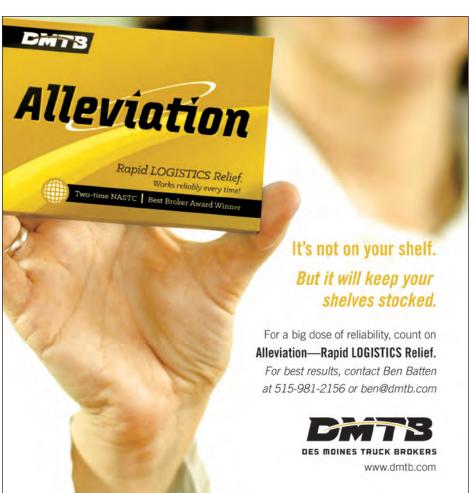
Ward points out, California citrus growers, such as Sunkist, can supply a fresher

product to the domestic market within days, as well as numerous varieties grown according to traditions and skills passed down from generation to generation.

"California citrus brings freshness, quality and a full portfolio of key varieties consumers know and love," says Wonderful's Cockle. "The summer [import] mandarin season is growing but remains about a quarter of the size of the California mandarin season. Imported fruit offers different mandarin subvarieties that are not popularly grown in the United States."

All things considered, Teague says there is "more than enough" room on the market for other country suppliers to maintain and continue to grow the citrus category. "All areas are needed as long as the supply is well planned and with excellent quality," he says. "When you are shipping any fruit long distances, consistency is usually the most difficult aspect to overcome."

Cockle agrees that the counter-seasonal supply is helpful for keeping consumer interest year-round. "However, it is important that quality is closely monitored, and there is a clean transition from Southern Hemisphere to California supply," he notes.





### Los Angeles: People And Produce Reflect Its Diversity

A CITY SUITED TO SUPPLY FRUITS AND VEGETABLES FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

by Bob Johnson

os Angeles mirrors the ethnic changes in our population and in the fruits and vegetables we eat — more than almost any other of our great cities.

Fifty years ago, 3 in 5 of the city's 2.8 million residents were non-Hispanic white, largely the descendants of agrarians from Oklahoma, Kansas or Western Pennsylvania seeking refuge from the Dust Bowl or from the consolidation that swallowed family farms a generation before.

Nearly 1 in 5 Los Angelinos in 1970 were African-American, the descendants of Southerners who came west seeking jobs during World War II and the Depression that preceded it.

Hispanics, largely from Mexico, were already 17% of the population five decades ago, and Asians, mostly from Japan, just 3.6%.

Then came the great transformation that made Los Angeles the nation's great polyglot.

Already by the 2010 U.S. Census, nearly half the city's residents identified as Latino or Hispanic, as globalization moved rural residents off the land in Mexico and Central America, much as it had Arkansas and Nebraska a generation or two before.

The door to the Pacific Rim swung wide open and the growth of Chinatown, Koreatown, Thai town, Filipino town, Little Bangladesh and Little Tokyo brought the Asian population to 11% and growing as of the last census.

The Anglo population dropped to little more than a quarter of the residents, as high costs made The City of Angels no place to retire, and enough African-Americans fled high housing costs to drop their population to less than 10% by 1970.

Even in recent years, the city has continued to change, and the changes bring challenges and opportunities that define the business of produce in Los Angeles.



 $Recent \ changes \ provide \ challenges \ and \ opportunities \ that \ define \ the \ business \ of \ produce \ in \ Los \ Angeles.$ 

The growing diversity of metropolitan Los Angeles has spawned the development of many neighborhood ethnic markets and produce wholesalers who keep them stocked with fruits and vegetables from back home.

"Recently I visited a Chinese venue that had pallets of 'moon cakes' and mesh bags of fresh lychees," says Bill Vogel, president and chief executive of Vision Produce Company, formerly called Tavilla Sales Co., of Los Angeles. "How do you fit that into an overlap? So, to overlap and serve a variety of ethnicities, one has to weave a carefully planned formula relating to a store-bystore neighborhood understanding. That is important because food is tantamount to a specific culture, and that group may be the focus of the store; we see some of these operations with heavy traffic."

### **DIVERSE MARKETS ABOUND**

The city is home to 38 Sprouts Farmers Markets and 19 Gelson's Markets, serving largely upscale, produce-savvy consumers. Trader Joe's Monrovia headquarters is barely more than 20 miles from City Hall.

Like most metro areas, the business of

produce in Los Angeles is dominated by a handful of large chains with distribution centers that allow the companies to largely bypass the wholesalers except in times of need.

"I have been in this business 32 years, and when I started, we had at least 20 different chain stores we could call on to get business," says Jesse Garcia, vice president of sales and managing partner at L.A. Produce Distributors, based in Los Angeles. "Then the big chains started buying the smaller ones, so today you basically have four or five chain stores. There are also the independents that do a tremendous volume because they are very aggressive on the pricing and on the weekly ads."

By last year, just four large retailers — Kroger, Costco, Safeway and Trader Joe's — accounted for more than half the retail produce sales to the nearly 4.5 million residents of the Los Angeles Metropolitan area.

The ranks of the top 30 supermarkets in the area include, alongside the familiar national corporate firms, the headquarters of the nation's largest Hispanic and Asian supermarket chains, Cardenas and Tawa, respectively; another Japanese chain with 11 stores in the area, Marukai; three additional Hispanic chains, El Super,

### **LOS ANGELES MARKET PROFILE**

Vallarta and Numero Uno: and Ukas, started by an Indian immigrant who came to the United States in search of a high-tech education who took a career turn to open 11 supermarkets, and stores serving too many other ethnic groups to list.

This emergence of independents and smallto-medium-sized chains has left its mark on Los Angeles produce: It has increased opportunities and competition among the wholesalers even in the face of consolidation among the major mainstream retailers.

"There's a lot more competition in produce," says Alan Pollack, general manager of Coosemans LA, Los Angeles. "There are the ethnic wholesalers, and a lot more farmers' markets are popping up."

Pollack has seen Coosemans L.A. adapt and evolve since the days in the late 1970s' when he helped immigrant Herman Von den Broeck start the company by flying Belgian endive into Los Angeles International Airport, loading it into the back of his Cadillac and delivering it to a route of high-end gourmet restaurants.

"Los Angeles has the largest Iranian population in the world outside of Iran," he says. 'They've been coming here for decades.



The wide overlap of ethnic markets brings opportunities for partnership with growers from around the world.

People are coming from South and Central America, Asia and the Middle East. It's getting more and more diverse. We're selling things like Persian cucumbers, different tomatoes and tropical fruits. It's always changing, and we're always adapting to the changes. We're young enough and small enough to be able to see what the market needs, and we're able to find growers who can supply it."

Los Angeles Produce Distributors has developed a network of growers from nearby

Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile, as well as Hawaii and California's Central Valley just up Highway 5.

The company brings a steady supply of avocados, melons, grapes, berries, tomatoes, citrus, mushrooms, papayas and other Hispanic, Asian and tropical specialties to its facility, which is located at the Los Angeles Wholesale Market.

"The market is way more diverse than it was a decade ago; the ethnic population of



### MADE OKRA GREAT AGAIN



Rooted in Specialty Produce





Other Specialties Available:

Drumstick (Moringa) · Tinda Squash · Gruvar Beans · Tindora (lvy Gourd) · Snake Gourd

**GROWERS/SHIPPERS OF DAAKS & IMPERIAL OKRA BRANDS** 

FRESNO, COACHELLA AND MEXICO

Sales handled by

Om Mediratta- cell: 213-453-0544 • Sam Thakker- cell: 917-691-5577 • Sunny Shukla- cell: 909-851-2781



DAAKS INTERNATIONAL. INC.



### LOS ANGELES PIONEERS GO NATIONAL

"The diversity of the market has expanded greatly and continues to do so," says Bill Vogel, president and chief executive of Vision Produce, Los Angeles. "An example of the diversification may be the product-specific growing of typical low-volume items, like Chinese long bean or an Indian vegetable line."

The diversity of people and produce in Los Angeles has made it home to pioneer wholesalers who introduced fruits and vegetables from both Latin America and Asia to consumers around the country.

"We are known for retail nationally, with limited sales to white tablecloth restaurants in Southern California and Las Vegas markets," says Robert Schueller, director of public relations at Melissa's/World Produce, Vernon, CA.

"The market is more diverse now; we probably have included more than 150 to 200 new items in a decade. We are a full provider of

everything ethnic," adds Schueller.

Joe and Sharon Hernandez started this business in a rented warehouse lunchroom, named it after their daughter, Melissa, and grew it to occupy 280,000 feet of office, cooler and warehouse space.

"The LA Market is a wonderful opportunity to find surplus opportunities especially from the Central Valley of California and from Mexico in particular. It is one of the biggest and most diverse," says Schueller. "With the ports, we have both air and water for receiving imports from around the world.

Frieda Kaplan introduced Chinese gooseberries, since renamed kiwifruit, to U.S. consumers in 1962, and her Southern California produce wholesale operation has been blazing trails with new and interesting produce ever since.

"We still see ethnic markets separated from each other," says Alex Berkley, director of sales

with Frieda's Specialty Produce, Los Alamitos, CA. 'That said, we think that with the Millennial and Gen Z generations being so interested in diverse cuisine, we will begin to see these ethnic markets overlap. Shoppers want convenience and a one-stop shop when grocery shopping, so it is up to the retailers to see who can do it best."

Frieda's sees itself as the source for supermarkets eager to offer curious and adventurous consumers new and exciting fruits and vegetables from the far corners of the world.

"We are lucky to live in a world where we can access seasonal fruit year-round," says Berkley. "The LA market is a melting pot, so items that were once unique and hard to find, like jackfruit, dragon fruit and tamarind, are available with many options.

"Now it's about finding the safest product with the best quality year-round at a great price.

That is what Frieda's is focused on."

pb

Los Angeles has changed tremendously," says Garcia of L.A. Produce Distributors.

"We have Middle Easterners, Mexicans, South Americans and Africans. I think it will keep changing, and we have to adapt to the different ethnic groups and provide them with the produce they need. There is an overlap of the ethnic markets; you see a wide variety of produce at all the retailers now," notes Garcia.

Many other Los Angeles produce wholesalers have built businesses by developing

Come visit our booth #4184 at PMA Fresh Summit for more information!



### **Vision Produce Company**

You know us for **Limes** and **Mangoes**, but *now* get to know us for:



Maridol Papaya



Jicama



Cactus Pad/Nopal (Whole, Cut & Diced)







# FRESHNESS CUARANTEED.

Celebrating 3 years at the L.A. Produce Wholesale Market





### **LOS ANGELES MARKET PROFILE**

networks of growers in nearby Mexico who regularly offer a range of specialty items.

"When we visit growers in Mexico, we find all kinds of small partnerships they have with ethnic end-users growing specific items for them," says Vogel.

"This is a far different model than mass production of main produce line items, and it may not be suitable for their business model; think direct sourcing, which we have been working on for 25 years," adds Vogel.

Although Vision Produce has a Latin specialty department that offers many different varieties of chili peppers, tomatillos, limes, papayas, jicamas, guavas, choyote squash and cactus leaves, the firm also offers many tropical and Asian items.

### **NEW OPPORTUNITIES**

The independent and small chain ethnic markets have opened important new opportunities for wholesalers.

"Our outlets have multiplied instead of being limited," says Vogel. "Watching this play out is extremely interesting in Southern California; there are many expert teams at retail honing their skills against a surge in ethnic, local retailing with some not so small any more. There is no simple answer to the types of markets to be served as each category has become diversified," says Vogel. "Take foodservice, for example — it's not just restaurant supply; it includes foodprep companies with target-specific venues, processers who use fresh for a myriad of market lanes, and packagers of value-added for a variety of end-users."

The business of produce in L.A. has shifted from a large number of chains that relied on wholesalers, to a smaller number of major retailers with their own distribution centers and network of grower-shippers, to a large number of independent retailers targeting one of the city's many ethnic groups.

"We primarily serve consumers through retailers and foodservice distributors; however, we are always looking to grow into other opportunities," says Berkley. "The possibilities are endless. If it isn't retail, it is meal kits, restaurants, online grocers and wholesalers."

The Los Angeles produce wholesale business is conveniently located to source fruits and vegetables from the Central Valley, Mexico and Central America, and ship it out to the major West Coast cities.

Los Angeles is also a hub for organic

produce. The farms of the Salinas Valley and the Central Valley combined to produce, according to USDA statistics, 10 times as much organic food as No. 2, Wisconsin.

"Another example of the diversity of the market is the continued developing demand in local and organic," says Vision Produce's Vogel.

Los Angeles serves a huge geographic population besides the Los Angeles area. "Distributors from San Diego to San Francisco, to Las Vegas and Phoenix load product here daily," says Vogel. "Outlying regional markets like Portland, Seattle, Western Canada, Salt Lake City, Denver and El Paso are also regular FOB customers."

With its opening to both Latin America and Asia, Los Angeles is an indispensable national hub for nationwide distribution of much of the world's produce.

"We remain a large FOB loading point for many items, often seasonal, but the whole-salers and distributors have acted to be year-round suppliers," says Vogel. "A good example is with fresh chilies — you can get all varieties including related specialty and peripheral items every week of the year; by ignoring the Los Angeles market, you might be missing important produce opportunities."





### Members benefit from:

- Discounted rates for the CPMA Convention and Trade Show
- Industry advocacy events
- Food safety tools
- Guidance on trade in Canada
- Industry-leading research and innovation projects
- Marketing and education resources

### Join the Canadian Produce Marketing Association today!

For more information contact:

Lyse McClelland, Manager,

Membership Development

(+1) 613-226-4187 x232

Imcclelland@cpma.ca

cpma.ca

### **Tuscan Son: Tradition With A Twist**

Italian farm-to-table spot shines close to Santa Monica Beach.

By Bob Johnson

uscan Son brings centuries of tradition to fast-casual dining in the trendy side of one of the nation's trendiest cities.

Chef and owner Massimo Ormani, himself a Tuscan son who spent half his life in his native Florence, Italy, before moving to Los Angeles, began his culinary education at home and in schools at age 14 before working at some of Italy's finest restaurants.

Ormani was sought after to take over the kitchen of a then new restaurant, Locanda Veneta, in Los Angeles.

While heading the kitchen at Locanda Veneta, consistently rated one of the top three Italian restaurants in Southern California, Massimo met his wife, Daniela, and together they opened their own restaurant, the award-winning Massimo in Beverly Hills in 2002, before moving on last year to the more casual Tuscan Son.

"We have a purveyor, but a lot of the produce is from farmers' markets," says Daniela Ormani. "We go to the Santa Monica and Culver City markets at least weekly. Massimo goes and looks at heirloom tomatoes and other produce; he looks at cost and what's out there."

The menu includes toasted ciabatta with crushed avocado, oven-roasted tomatoes and goat cheese, a Panini board, Tuscan soups, pasta di Massimo, Lavassa coffee and espresso, in-house baked breads and a selection of seasonal salads featuring ingredients from local fields.

"At Tuscan Son, we are completely local," says Ormani. "We live in the same neighborhood and participate and support our local schools, farmers markets, nonprofit organizations and nearby businesses. We offer our fresh baked goods and Italian coffee every Sunday at the (new Overland Farmers Market)."

Located less than six miles from Santa Monica Beach, the restaurant offers *Summer Picnic Baskets* packed with four-course meals







PHOTOS COURTESY OF TUSCAN SON

featuring foods steeped in traditional Italian cuisine.

Customers looking for salads can choose from among the Toscana Chopped, featuring Romaine hearts, organic grilled chicken, Kalamata olives, garbanzos and heirloom tomatoes; the LA Sun, with wild arugula, hearts of palm, Marcona almonds; or the Roman Caesar, with grilled chicken.

Center plate choices include Meatball Alessandro, featuring grass-fed beef meatballs, Pollo al Balsamico, with rosemary-roasted organic chicken breast or a grilled organic chicken breast; and Orto Pollo Panino, with grilled zucchini, avocado, wild arugula and Fontina on a baguette.

Choices for the two sides include ovenroasted broccoli, braised cauliflower, fagiolini with green beans sautéed with red onion, parsley and fresh tomato, and peperonata, the Italian ratatouille with eggplant, yellow and red pepper, onion and potatoes braised in light tomato sauce.

Order 24 hours in advance and be assured (this is West Los Angeles after all) that all dishes are served in compostable containers.

"We use corn straws and biodegradable packaging," says Daniela. "Our chicken is Mary's organic chicken. I think overall, people care. For the most part, people in this neighborhood care that the food is sourced locally. From the reviews, I would think they care about that."

After nearly a decade of racking up awards and winning loyal customers at their fine-dining, white tablecloth establishment in Beverly Hills, Massimo and Daniela wanted to make fine Italian cuisine available at a more

casual and affordable setting.

For Ormani, it was a passion. "Having trained and cooked in fine dining throughout my life at some of the most notable restaurants in Florence — to ultimately having my own namesake in Beverly Hills — I yearned to take my passion and experience and create a casual Italian, farm-to-table neighborhood spot where my friends, family and local food enthusiasts could enjoy my cooking at an accessible price," he says.

"The integration of rustic Tuscan fare in a fast-casual setting, combined with fresh locally sourced ingredients, is what makes our place so special."

Tuscan Son is not only more affordable than Beverly Hills' finest, but the experience is also more congenial.

"It's a different vibe; it's more fun," says Daniela. "We get a much younger customer. We also have a lot of young families who are glad to see their kids eating healthy. We're building different relationships with our customers. It's less formal and more relaxed. We live in the neighborhood, and people are excited to bring their friends in."

TUSCAN SON
10700 Santa Monica Blvd.
Suite 150
Los Angeles, CA 90025
310-321-4356
tuscansonla.com
Hours
Mon - Fri 8 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Sat 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Sun 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

# The Rise In Produce-Topped Pizza On The Menu



### Could 'better for you foods' be the key to reversing declining sales?

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

verybody likes pizza. In fact, this tomato-topped pie indexes a perfect 100 percent on consumer trial and affinity with a broad range of U.S. residents, according to Pizza, the SNAP Profile, published in 2018 by Chicago-based market research firm Datassential. More specifically, this includes men and women, Boomers to Gen Z in age, households with and without kids, those living in all areas, and equally among Caucasians, African-Americans, Hispanics and Asians.

Yet, pizza as percent of menu items is declining. In 2008, menu penetration reached 38.7% and a decade later was down to 34.1%, according to this same Datassential report.

In an era where the plant-forward movement is gaining popularity, it might be that a greater use of fresh fruits and vegetables as toppings will be the key to pizza regaining menu share. Consider that more than half (52%) of consumers have made

diet changes to include a greater amount of plant-based foods, according to a 2017 study by HealthFocus International, a health and nutrition-oriented market research firm headquartered in St. Petersburg, FL. What's more, even more consumers (57%) see this as a permanent dietary change.

"People always look to eat food that is better for them," says Bret Thorn, senior food and beverage editor for New York-headquartered foodservice trade publications, *Nation's Restaurant News* (NRN) and *Restaurant Hospitality* (RH). "Even for occasions that are indulgent, people justify this psychologically if fruits and vegetables are part of the meal because these foods are good for them."

Produce-topped pizzas are not a niche offering specific to vegetarian customers,

according to Kristie Waters, vice president of sales for PRO\*ACT, in Monterey, CA. "Instead, this appeals to people who have a taste for something outside of pepperoni and cheese and are looking for more culinary uniqueness in pizza."

### **INSPIRATION & EXAMPLES**

"Produce is the primary driver of innovation," says Brian Sullivan, executive chef and senior vice president of culinary innovation for California Pizza Kitchen (CPK), a Playa Vista, CA-headquartered chain with more than 250 restaurants.

The appeal for pizza topped with produce has always been there. However, what we expect to see are new, novel vegetables becoming more prominent and used as a



point of inspiration, according to Jackie Rodriguez, senior project manager for Datassential. "Pizza is ubiquitous as a format, and that is a point of comfort for consumers to explore more daring toppings while still having the safety net that is the format of a pizza."

Information from Datassential's Menu Adoption Cycle (MAC) tracks the way flavors or ingredients progress through the market, from inception to a point of ubiquity.

Some of the newest and typically most interesting ingredients are found at the Inception stage, such as fine dining, and in the adoption stage, for example trendy restaurants.

For pizza, inception items, which usually start as limited time offers (LTOs), consist of sweet potato, broccolini and cauliflower. Baby arugula, asparagus, figs, kale, avocado, potatoes and pears appear in the Adoption stage. Proliferation of produce ingredients atop pizza, seen in chain restaurants, include arugula, eggplant and green onions. The final stage, Ubiquity ingredients, is found everywhere throughout foodservice pizza offerings, include pineapple, garlic, cilantro, tomatoes, peppers and spinach.

**VEGETABLES:** Mushrooms and onions are also ubiquitous pizza-toppers.

Pizza is the No. 1 application for mushrooms at foodservice, according to Steve Solomon, foodservice director for The Mushroom Council, in Redwood City, CA. "Eighteen percent of all mushrooms grown in this country go to pizza, and 98.6% of all pizza restaurants have mushrooms on the menu."

That said, mushroom variety growth on pizza over four years shows porcinis up 17%, shiitakes up 23%, creminis up 57% and truffles up 84%, based on Datassential's *Mushroom Trends* report, published in January 2017.

A good example of this is the Wild Mushroom pizza, a regular menu item at CPK. The topping is shiitake, portobello and white mushrooms with slivered scallions, cracked black pepper, Romano, mozzarella and Parmesan cheeses with a finish of truffle oil.

The Wild Bunch, a combination of shiitake, cremini, portobello and yellow oyster mushrooms, available sliced in 5-pound, ready-to-use bags, "are one of our most popular foodservice products for pizzas," says Fred Recchiuti, general manager at Avondale, PA-based mushroom grower, Basciani Foods.

"Operators don't want to have to slice, so we do that for them in a food-safe environment. Beyond this, our biggest seller overall is the 10-pound sliced white. We have slicers throughout the country. That's because mushrooms make the ride better whole, and the flavor is better and fresher when sliced closer to the point of delivery."

At Phoenix-based Fired Pie, traditional yellow onions are joined by red onions on the menu. An example is the regional chain's Pesto Chicken Pizza, with pesto sauce, mozzarella, grilled chicken, tomato and red onion. To source a greater variety of ingre-

dients, co-owner Fred Morgan uses produce suppliers because, "They tend to have some of the freshest products and can get anything you need."

Nearly 80% of restaurants that serve pizza offer onions as a topping, according to Datassential's 2017 Menu Trends Onion Study.

"While fresh diced onion is the most common onion topping, many pizzas are also featuring caramelized onions, pickled onions, sautéed onions and even fried onions," says Mary Humann, publicist for the



### showcase peppers

GREENHOUSE GROWN





### foodservice profile ▶ pizza

National Onion Association, in Greeley, CO. "Datassential's menu study showed that items with caramelized onions sold for \$1.74 more on average and those with pickled onions \$2.75 more, on average, than dishes with no onion preparation mentioned. Thus, simple prepared onions can really add value to the pizza menu."

Some of the fastest growing produce ingredients used as pizza toppers include potatoes (up 27.8%) and arugula (up 30.6% in the past 4 years), according to Datassential's Pizza, the SNAP Profile, research.

As for potatoes, "I tend to see a lot of

yellows and reds on pizza because the firm texture of these varieties lend itself to a great mouthfeel and prominent contrast between the crust and the topping," says Chef RJ Harvey, global foodservice marketing manager for Potatoes USA, headquartered in Denver.

"Beyond this, I think the notion of luxury and indulgence is helping potatoes find a place on pizzas. An example is black truffle and potato with Pecorino Romano cheese. This is not only a stellar combination, but from a cost perspective it balances itself out. We are seeing this in college settings, such as Michigan State University, as well as in

### ■ SEVEN WAYS THE PRODUCE INDUSTRY CAN SELL MORE PRODUCE TO RESTAURANTS WITH PIZZA ON THE MENU

Foodservice chefs, produce professionals and industry experts tell how fruit and vegetable suppliers can help restaurant operators toss more fresh produce atop their pizzas.

- 1) Food Safety: "Ensure product safety at all cost," says Fred Morgan, co-owner of Fired Pie, a 20-unit pizzeria based in Phoenix.
- 2) Availability: A strong relationship with supply partners is key, says Brian Sullivan, executive chef and senior vice president of culinary innovation for California Pizza Kitchen (CPK), a Playa Vista, CA-headquartered chain with more than 250 restaurants. "Keep us advised in real-time of issues or concerns in the industry, especially when it comes to supply."
- **3)** Varieties: "The industry needs to continue to show there are more options for pizza topping beyond the go-to, white button mushrooms," says Steve Solomon, foodservice director for The Mushroom Council, in Redwood City, CA.
- 4) Specifications: "Operators can work directly with California avocado handlers/ suppliers to deliver specific stages of ripeness based on their unique flow of produce through an operation," suggests Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the Irvine, CA-headquartered California Avocado Commission.
- 5) Packaging: "Smaller pack sizes and case breaks are something we often request for freshness on more unusual or seasonal produce items. This fits well within our logistics, as we get deliveries six days a week to each of our 200-plus

restaurants in some 30 states," says CPK's Sullivan.

**6)** Fresh-Cut: Fresh is what's most sourced in term of produce, says Kristie Waters, vice president of sales for PRO\*ACT, in Monterey, CA. "But, with high demand to reduce labor costs and compensate for lack of skilled talent, many chefs and operators are looking to move to processed when it makes sense."

Maeve Webster, president of Menu Matters, an Arlington, VT-based independent foodservice consultancy agrees. "I think value-added options such as sliced, diced, chopped, etc., all help operators with limited back-of-house staff innovate more with fresh produce."

Fired Pie currently uses a processed pineapple product on its Hawaiian BBQ pizza, which is topped with BBQ sauce, Mozzarella cheese, Canadian bacon, cilantro and pineapple, says Morgan. "We'd like to use fresh and are looking for a company that can provide us with whole, yet peeled, pineapple. This form would be less dangerous, less chance of cuts and injuries," says Morgan.

**7) Shelf-Life:** Using fresh produce means constantly walking a fine line between freshness and food waste.

"I'd like to see suppliers come up with ways to protect the product or prevent over-ripening via packaging technology that manages gasses rather than adds artificial chemicals," says Dwayne Adams, vice president of culinary innovation for Sbarro, a 630-unit pizza chain based in Columbus, OH.



# IT'S NOT A PARTY WITHOUT





Giorgio Fresh Co. 347 June Avenue, Blandon, PA 19510 800.330.5711 | www.giorgiofresh.com

### foodservice profile ▶ pizza

restaurants such as Modern Market Eatery (30-unit farm-to-table themed fast casual headquartered in Denver, with their potato pizza with a white Truffle cream sauce."

According to CPK's Sullivan, "More unique items we've used as pizza toppers are arugula as well as carrots, fire roasted poblano, Japanese eggplant, broccolini, roasted corn and sundried tomato. These are items we use in other dishes on the menu too. Cross-utilization is key to freshness and preventing food waste."

Another good example is broccolini.

"We've offered a blanched broccolini-, chicken- and grape tomato-topped pizza as an LTO," says Fired Pie's Morgan. "To come up with trendy selections, we work



closely with a few chefs, who in turn work for distributors. They always bring in new products and ideas of ways to use them,"

Unique produce could make for a higher value menu item, according to Waters at PRO\*ACT. "This can lend to more profit when compared to some meats that are being utilized as pizza toppers."

FRUITS. One of the trendiest fruits topping pizza today is avocado. In fact, there are three trends driving the use of avocados on pizza, according to data supplied by the Irvine, CA-headquartered California Avocado Commission (CAC). The first is avocados' penetration on restaurant menus, with 50.8% of U.S. restaurants offering avocado or guacamole on menus. More



### showcase mushrooms

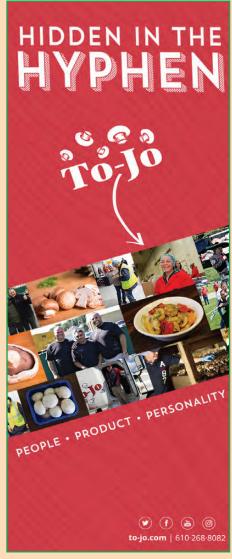




### mushrooms

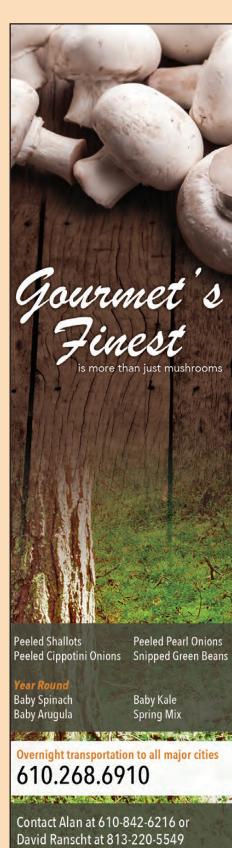












### foodservice profile ▶ pizza

specifically, avocado menu penetration in the pizza segment has seen a 155% increase over the past decade. Second is eating food with health benefits trend. Third is the plant-forward trend.

A good example is CPK's California Club Pizza. This features chicken, bacon, Mozzarella, arugula, tomato and sliced avocado as toppers.

"Eighty-two percent of foodservice operators who use avocados choose to purchase fresh," says Jan DeLyser, the CAC's vice president of marketing. "Fresh avocados are best for the pizza category. Slightly under-ripe avocados are often used to hold the fruit's shape while being cooked at high pizza-oven temperatures."

There's a rise in interest in sweet pizzas, says Waters, and in "simple toppings such as whipped Ricotta and fruit such as grilled peaches."

Although not often thought of in hot applications, watermelon is a fruit that can take heat well, says Megan McKenna, director of foodservice and marketing for the Winter Springs, FL-based National Watermelon Promotion Board. "In the past couple weeks, we have met with a couple pizza chains and discussed watermelon as a topping. The watermelon rind pickle piqued their interest. The pickle was done in a bread and butter pickle style, and they expressed interest in an Indian flavored pizza using the pickle."

The benefit of offering new items, even if they aren't big sellers, is driving traffic and press," says NRN and RH's Thorn. "Someone may come in store because of the advertised LTO. Even if they ultimately order their traditional favorite, it still got them in the door and the chain's name in the news."

Finally, consumers today have a greater access to inspirational dining moments locally and through social media, says Datassential's Rodriguez. "This has created a perfect space for growth in adventuresome eating, the continued growth of plant-based diets and flexitarian lifestyles. These lend themselves to being a driver to push consumers toward the growth in fruits and vegetables on top of pizza."





### Seven Ways To Make Apples Shine



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAGE

Keeping up with this ever-changing fruit category is paramount to your department's success.

BY BOB JOHNSON

or such a mature produce category, the apple industry continues to show a vibrant ability to innovate and change.

Growers are shifting to newly popular varieties, such as Honeycrisp. Breeders are working on even newer versions of the apple, and shippers are stepping up their games to deliver this more interesting and delectable fruit.

"New acreage continues to be added on, along with younger blocks of trees in the orchards coming into production this year," says Scott Swindeman, co-owner of Applewood Fresh Growers, Sparta, MI. "A second packing line will more than double our capacity."

As growers, breeders and shippers get

ready for dynamic change, here are seven factors for retailers to consider as they try to keep up.

### 1. GIVE APPLES THEIR DUE

They have been a mainstay in the produce department for so long, it is tempting to neglect apples and fail to give the Honeycrisp respect ... and space.

"Apples are between 5.5% and 8% of a produce department's sales," says Roger Pepperl, marketing director at Stemilt, Wenatchee, WA. "Make sure that display size, location and the right mix is in the stores every day. Support new varieties with multiple ads, and use the ad as an excuse to educate the customer."

The amount of space you can profitably devote to apples and the look of the display are worth discussing.

"The display depends on the size of the retailer and their shelf space," says Cynthia Haskins, president of the New York Apple Association, Fishers, N.Y. "If they have an 8-foot section, they will have a smaller display than if they have two 8-foot sections, or a patchwork of smaller displays. Large displays

always capture more attention."

Although the numerous varieties give apples a fairly long harvest window and they can be brought out of storage year-round, the optimal size of a display varies quite a bit on the season.

"Time of year is a major player in the decision," says Jeff Cady, director of produce and floral at Tops Friendly Markets, Williamsville, NY. "Fall is apple season as new-crop apples are harvested daily right here in upstate New York. Consumer buying patterns change, and summer-type fruits take a back seat to apples and other fall items."

The display is best laid out with an understanding of who is likely to buy apples, and how they travel through the store.

"I feel it is important that when the consumer comes in to buy, mainly mom, they are on a mission," says Don Roper, partner/owner and vice president of sales and marketing for Honeybear Brands, Elgin, MN. "Know their route through the store. They are busy with kids and schedules, so, to get them to slow down and learn about a new variety is very taxing on an extremely overloaded schedule."

### merchandising review ▶ apples



### 2. PAY ATTENTION TO A CHANGING LEADERBOARD

It is important to stay abreast of the new list of top apple varieties and to monitor the continuing emergence of new leaders.

"There is more change in the varietal offerings than at any time in history," says Brenda Briggs, vice president of sales and marketing, Rice Fruit Company, Gardners, PA. "For our growing region, CrimsonCrisp, Evercrisp and Ambrosia are part of new plantings, along with Honeycrisp, Gala and Pink Lady."

Honeycrisp has risen up the charts faster than any apple variety ever, and many of the new offerings are crosses with this new standard bearer.

"According to current Nielsen scan data, Honeycrisp and Gala sit at the top when it comes to volume and sales dollars, while Ambrosia, Envy and Jazz are the top-three branded varieties in the United States," says Danelle Huber, marketing specialist at CMI Orchards, Wenatchee, WA.

The only year-round supplier of Honeycrisp apples, Honeybear Brands, which harvested its first Chilean crop in January, still reports staggering growth of this star variety.

"Honeycrisp production continues to climb with overall domestic production estimated to be around 30% more than last year's crop," says Roper. "Most of the overall U.S. increase is occurring in Washington State, as our crop should be at least 35% to 40% more than last year, while the Midwest and Northeast production has been relatively stable, with a minor increase of 5% to 10%."

Sales figures may even underestimate the popularity of Honeycrisp, because growers are still catching up with the unprecedented increase in demand for this variety.

"Honeycrisp is the fastest-growing item and is hampered only by volume constraints in the orchard alone; as more are grown, they



will sell fast," says Pepperl. "Gala is super popular in the United States because of available volumes, and it's a well-known variety."

The supply of Honeycrisp, both conventional and organic, should increase again this year.

"I think there is a lot of young Honeycrisp acreage that will continue to increase production," says Matt Miles, account manager and organic program coordinator at Washington Fruit and Produce Co., Yakima, WA. "This year we will have 14 million boxes of conventional Honeycrisp and 2.5 million of organic."

### 3. NEWCOMERS ARE ON THE WAY

Other fruit and vegetable growers must turn green with envy when they hear the commotion over what seems like an endless parade of new apple varieties, which show a remarkable ability to create buzz for a familiar category.

"Customers are hungry for variety and want to try new and exciting flavors. Branded apples, such as Ambrosia, Kiku, Kanzi and Envy continue to move up the popularity scale with consumers," says Huber. "We've seen a shift away from the regional and core varieties toward the higher-flavored, branded ones."

One new variety coming out of Washington orchards could have cosmic significance.

"This year brings with it the release of Cosmic Crisp apples," notes Chuck Sinks, president, sales and marketing for Sage Fruit Company, Yakima, WA. "The initial commercial crop will have limited availability. However, the volume will continue to grow exponentially in the next five to 10 years. Cosmic Crisp will not be available for shipping until after Dec. 1."

Some industry insiders expect this new entry, a promising Honeycrisp cross, to make news in the next few years.

"Cosmic Crisp is the newest variety to hit our orchards and packing lines, and within



10 years will become one of our biggest items based on volume alone," asserts Pepperl at Stemilt. "Items such as Rave, SweeTango and Pinata are also super popular but with relatively low volumes of acres, which makes them more of a special item."

On the other side of the country, New York growers are also enjoying success with two new varieties.

"The volume of SnapDragon and Ruby Frost apples is growing, as the trees come into production and the growers plant more," says Haskins of the New York Apple Association. "We always have our favorites. We have a large following for McIntosh. New Yorkers love them, and new consumers try them and ask where they can get them. But SnapDragon and Ruby Frost are also gaining in popularity."

Not to be outdone, Midwestern apple leaders are also introducing their own varieties.

"The exceptionally sweet, beautiful ruby-red Kiku brand apples have earned a very loyal following," says Briggs of Rice Fruit Company. "Consumers are already asking when and where to find these meticulously curated apples grown by a select group of orchardists. Within the United States, Rice Fruit Company, CMI Orchards and Applewood Fresh Growers manage KIKU brand apples, and retailers can plan ahead for year-round availability with imports of this global brand."

SweeTango is another specialty coming out of the Midwest starting to make a name.

"Applewood Fresh Growers is the leader in managed varieties — SweeTango, Kiku, Kanzi, and Rave in the state of Michigan," says Brian Coates, vice president for sales at Applewood Fresh. "We expect a production increase of 20% over the past year for SweeTango."

Cohen Produce is working with an



















### **DELICIOUS MATERIALS TO PROMOTE APPLES**

Introducing a fresh variety of assets to promote apples from New York. Take your pick of striking photography, tasty recipes, gorgeous orchard videos, interviews with real growers, apple imagery, consumer salad challenge materials, how-to-prepare recipe videos, retail store display shippers, point-of-sale images, varietal guides with recipes, posters, national display contest resources, a dietitian toolkit and more!





# APPLES 2 APPLES

**Our Momentum is Growing &** 

### **From Grower to Grocery**

Set for Success from the Start!

1.5 million trees | 147 New York growers | 3.5 million of consumer impressions and growing.

Consumers love that SnapDragon and RubyFrost apples are non GMO and grown sustainably by family farmers.

Retailers love the returns!



snapdragonapple.com

### **JOIN THE MOVEMENT!**

Snapdragon DOUBLED SALES IN 2018! Don't miss out on the SNAP consumers demand! it's as Strong as Our Crunch!

## **The Best Tasting Apples**

**Natural Rainfall** Lots of rain makes super juicy apples.

**Cool Autumns** | Sunny days and cold fall nights are nature's perfect mix for the perfect brix, acid and gorgeous color.

Fertile Soil New York's rich glacial till (known as honeyoye) is ideal for apple orchards.



## **RUBYFROST DELIVERS!**

Amazing color and size right before the holidays right thru spring and early summer!



rubyfrostapple.com

## merchandising review ▶ apples

Eastern grower on a new proprietary variety — so, stay tuned.

This exciting parade of new apple varieties is beginning to turn former standard bearers into afterthoughts.

"There are fewer Red Delicious apples since they begin to wane," says Sandy Cohen, president of Cohen Produce Marketing, Hamburg, PA. "They are good for export but our consumers are more discriminating. They want more flavorful apples like Honeycrisp, Fuji and Gala."

But Red Delicious apples are not alone. There are other once-popular varieties that are still available but not terribly popular.

"We will see older varieties such as Braeburn, Jonagold, Cameo, Red Delicious and Golden Delicious all decline in planting," says Sinks. "In fact, a large number of trees is currently being cut down to make room for the newer varieties."

Many of the newer varieties are crosses intended to make Honeycrisp more amenable to storage after harvest, or easier to grow.

"The Honeycrisp's 'delicate cell structure' provides that crisp snap when it is cleaved from the apple, giving the customer an immediate sense of crisp and fresh," says Honeybear Brand's Roper. "A few apples out of the genetic pipeline from Honeycrisp that demonstrate these characteristics include Pazazz, Swee Tango, First Kiss, Juici, Cosmic Crisp and Evercrisp. At Honeybear, we have most recently commercialized two Honeycrisp crosses — RiverBelle and Pazazz. We are in the early stages of introducing First Kiss — (a University of Minnesota developed variety) — only grown in Minnesota, but to be distributed nationwide. This early harvest Honeycrisp cross will put a real kick into the start of apple season."

Retailers who want to incorporate these new varieties are advised to commit to a sustained merchandising campaign.

"Once you have that great variety, then the consumer has to be brought into the education and trial process with the variety," says Roper. "This is slow-going work — it does not happen overnight. For example, Honeycrisp is 27 years old this year. I think there are some real good new varieties out there — Envy is a good variety for the folks who like sweet apples; Pazazz is for the apple connoisseur — apple complexity of sweet and tart at its best. Opal does a nice job on the apple deck due to its 'color.' Sugar Bee will be another sweet apple option, and Cosmic Crisp will be successful because it is a strong yielding apple that will store well. Evercrisp has the sweet flavor profile and will be grown locally across the United States."

It is worth the time to pay attention to the new apple varieties — to ask suppliers for the latest information — and to thoughtfully develop a merchandising program.

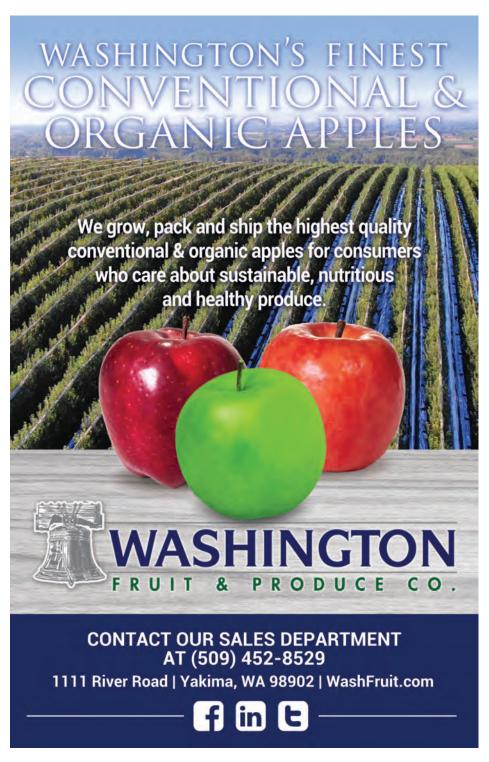
"Don't bring in new varieties for short in-and-outs," notes Pepperl. "They need to be there to support repeat sales if they are going to work."

## 4. ORGANIC STILL GROWING

Growers and shippers expect demand for organic apples to continue increasing at a healthy pace, and, fortunately, the supply of organic apples out of Washington is poised for a great leap forward this year.

"The organic sector continues to grow," says Miles of Washington Fruit and Produce. "We're going to see another increase this year. The projection is 18 million organic boxes, which is up from 14.2 million in the 2018 season."

The share of organic in the Honeycrisp variety is unusually high, according to Roper,



and growth of organic is even faster.

"Organic production of Honeycrisp is projected at about 2.5 million cases, which is a 35% increase over the past year and represents approximately 12% of the total Honeycrisp crop in the United States," says Roper.

Supply of organic apples should ease a little in 2019, and perhaps for the next few years as well.

"The organic growth operates in cycles because certification takes three years," explains Miles. "Going back to 2015-2016, the premium for organic was very high, and it encouraged a lot of growers. It is back down to a 30% to 40% margin FOB, which I consider about normal. The market at retail for organic continues to be very strong."

Retailers are advised to strongly consider organic heavy produce buyers.

"Organic shoppers feel ignored and will change shopping channels for someone who supports organic promotion," notes Pepperl. "Organic apples need more promotion. Remember the organic shopper is the best produce shopper in the store. Don't sell smaller packages or quantities of fruit to them."

#### 5. GET HELP FROM SUPPLIERS

The category is so complex and everevolving that retailers count on suppliers for a steady flow of information and help developing a merchandising program.

"Use local or regional signage, make available both bag and bulk fruit options," advises Antonia Mascari, vice president of marketing at Applewood Fresh Growers. "Utilize variety-specific point-of-sale cards to provide information to the consumer. Merchandise fruit based off the flavor profile from sweet to tart, and provide signage for the consumer so they know what variety fits their flavor preference.

"We have marketing efforts. We offer many programs to help customers propel their apple sales, and we will tailor them to fit their brand," says Mascari.

Experienced shippers can offer help arranging the different varieties for maximum visual impact.

"Color breaks that separate apples by their appearance should be exercised," advises Stemilt's Pepperl. "Even bi-color apples have different looks. Use Golden Delicious and Granny Smith as an obvious color break. Honeycrisp is a way different red color than a Gala or a Red Delicious. Build ads with multiple varieties."

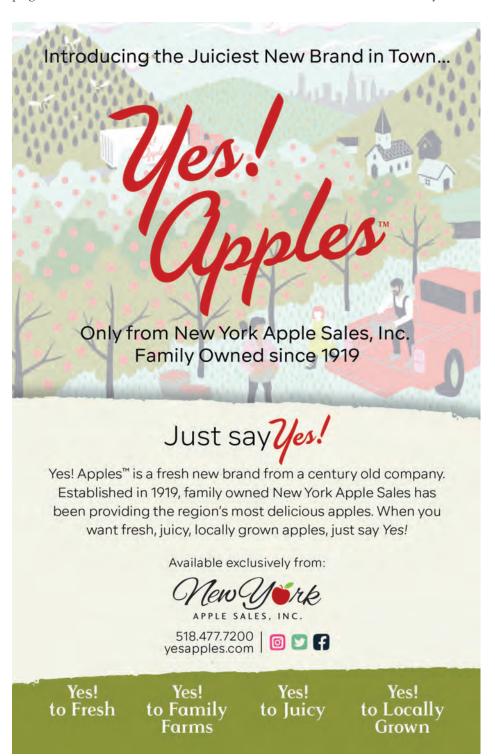
Some suppliers have developed merchandising programs targeting a particular demographic or time of the year. "From our American Dream program, which focuses on supporting veterans, military members and their families, to our Flavors of the World program, which offers retailers a fantastic platform for their customers to taste apples discovered in unique world origins (and that are now grown in Washington), CMI tries to keep the category fresh and exciting all year long," says Huber.

In addition to the shippers, some industry groups also offer help with merchandising programs.

"Last year, we launched our new logo, and we have a new poly bag, a new shipper and new point-of-sale material," says Haskins from the New York Apple Association.

Help from suppliers can be particularly important in developing a campaign to introduce consumers to one of the newer varieties.

"We have seen good success when we have our retail partners promote Pazazz or a new variety for an extended period of time, so there are the repeat impressions at the store. If the consumers don't see the variety when it



## merchandising review ▶ apples

is first promoted, they get another chance to experience the variety somewhere down the line," says Roper.

#### 6. 'LOCAL' SELLS

The importance of a buy-local apple program varies quite a bit depending on the region.

"The local movement is crucial, and at the center of our partnership with retailers," says Briggs of the Rice Fruit Company. "In the larger picture, production of food in close proximity to population centers could be considered a very important piece of sustainability and environmental responsibility."

Growers in places such as New York, Pennsylvania, or Michigan, however, rely quite a bit on the local appeal of their apples.

"We have a lot of folks on the West Coast," says Haskins. "The market is local, regional and national. Of course we are preferred in the Northeast."

Washington apples, however, travel well, and a local campaign might not matter as much as it does for some other apples.

"Apples from Washington are shipped all over the world," says Sinks. "In a way, consumers are really driving the fresh and locally grown marketing perspective. If they are from an area that has locally grown produce, they want to know they are purchasing products that are grown in their region — they're supporting the local economy."

#### 7. 2019 LOOKS LIKE A GOOD CROP

Although there will be regional differences, the overall national harvest, led by Washington, looks to be strong this year.

"So far, we have experienced a relatively mild summer, though we are seeing a rise in temperature for the month of August," says Sage Fruit's Sinks. "Due to our prolonged winter in the Pacific Northwest, harvest will be slightly later than last year, but only by a few days. The weather in the spring was ideal for promoting cell division, and the mild weather and cool nights of the summer have brought on good color of the fruit. Crop size will be a bit larger than last year. Overall, sizing looks to be good, with the exception of Galas.

"We think Galas will run extremely small this year. This year we will have a sizeable crop with exceptional quality and excellent marketing potential," adds Sinks.

The outlook is also strong for the harvest

coming out of Michigan.

"Overall the crop looks good — volume should be above last year," says Mascari of Applewood Fresh Growers. "Fruit sizing will be bigger on most varieties this year, and quality looks very nice. Honeycrisp is the one variety that looks to be down, not only in Michigan, but in the Eastern states, as well. It could be as much as 25% to 30% down from last year's numbers."

New York may be down a little from recent crops that set or approached record yields.

"We're down about 7% from the past year, but we should be around our five-year average," says Haskins at the New York Apple Association. "The crop is looking good. We've had good weather with some heat and some rain. It should be more than 31 million bushels."

Most of the increase in Washington will be varieties that are becoming more popular.

"The crop is much bigger in Washington this year," says Pepperl. "The gains are in Honeycrisp, Granny Smith, Rave, Cosmic Crisp and organic apples. These are all high-demand items, so, 'the large crop' stories are overblown, as the crop is filled in with items we're short on. This will be a good crop to sell."





**GROW SALES** 

## REDUCE BUSINESS RISK

## **RESOLVE DISPUTES**

## MARKET YOUR BUSINESS



RELY BLUE

The industry leader the produce supply chain turns to for real-time, reliable business information to achieve success.

Join the thousands that Rely on Blue, visit ProduceBlueBook.com or call 630 668-3500 today.



**Blue Book Services** 

# Creative Cranberry Displays Can Bear Fruit

Effective merchandising targeted to Generation Y broadens audience.

BY MATT OGG

s an Instagram-friendly item known for its bold tart flavor and versatility in recipes, horizons are expanding for fresh cranberries as marketers leverage the holiday season to build new usage occasions for one of America's few native fruits with commercial scale.

A 2016 survey commissioned by the Wareham, MA-based Cranberry Marketing Committee (CMC) found 69% of Millennials added cranberries to their meals.

To incentivize this percentage to grow, the CMC has 400 recipes available on its website, in addition to its health messaging and other marketing tools.

"In-store cooking demonstrations are an effective way to get shoppers to broaden their recipe ideas and show them how easy it is to incorporate cranberries into recipes," says Karen Cahill, CMC's communications and marketing specialist. "Demonstrating a cranberry cilantro salsa, for example, is an excellent way to get shoppers looking at cranberries differently," she says.

"Bold and intense flavors are becoming more popular, especially among younger demographics, and introducing cranberries into your dishes is a great way to achieve this flavor profile," notes Ben Johnson, president at Bridges Produce Inc. in Portland, OR.

Cahill says Millennials are more likely than other generations to add cranberries to smoothies or cocktails, while smoothie bowls are also growing in popularity.

"Sampling cranberries in smoothies is an ideal way for consumers to taste them in-store while also describing other ways to consume," says Janice Honigberg, owner of Sun Belle Inc.

"A prepared relish on crackers can also be a great way to taste cranberries' unique flavor."

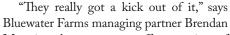
It may be too bold to say that tart is trendy, however cranberries are trending. For a fruit that has a short season of just a few months



in the fall, there are more than half a million posts for #cranberries on Instagram. That's more than #mangos, often described as the world's favorite fruit.

Some of these #cranberries posts are covers of songs from the 90s Irish rock band of the same name, but for the most part it's pictures of the fruit, smoothies, muffins, cakes and even the colorful and intriguing cranberry bogs — a unique and striking visual for production that not enough consumers know about.

Last year, Bluewater Farms of West Wareham, MA, invited social media influencers from the West Coast to wade into the



company's cranberry bog and shoot footage.

Bluewater Farms managing partner Brendan Moquin, whose company offers a variety of fresh cranberry packaging options and juices. "I mean we can't get enough influencers and different ways to show people cranberries can

"Why we created our company in 2016 was to shift away from cranberry as your 'grandmother's brand,' and how do we make this a year-round brand?"

In line with this trend, Sydney Fairchild, marketing, sustainability and compliance at Bridges Produce Inc., notes #cranberry sauce has just more than 100,000 posts on Instagram.



### **MERCHANDISING FRESH CRANBERRIES**

For a retailer, it would almost be foolish not to promote sales that leverage Thanksgiving associations with cranberries, but growers and marketers are busy building a new source of demand that could drive sales in the future.

How that fruit is presented to consumers at retail ultimately will determine the success of these efforts.

"Ensuring you have steady supply and



PHOTO COURTESY OF BLUEWATER FARMS

eye-catching displays in the produce department throughout the fall and early winter months, not just Thanksgiving week, is crucial to capturing this expanded demand and continuing to promote the growth of the category," says Fairchild. "Cranberries have historically been a Thanksgiving staple, but in recent years people's perceptions of this super-

fruit have gone beyond cranberry sauce and popcorn garlands."

The aim is to keep the fruit at the forefront of the consumer's mind. CarrieAnn Arias, vice president of marketing for Naturipe Farms of Salinas, CA, also highlights the importance of grabbing consumers' attention with attractive displays.

"Thanksgiving is a big holiday for fresh cranberries, and we provide promotional opportunities to retailers to help them continue the momentum with the holidays that follow," says Arias. "Naturipe can provide signage celebrating the peak of fresh cranberries to add to these displays.

"In addition, providing recipe cards in cranberry displays with the ingredients involved in the recipe nearby can also increase sales."

Cahill of the CMC says retailers can also display cranberries near other seasonal items, such as pumpkins and cornucopia, featuring them in rustic wooden crates to connect the fruit with the farms they come from.

"Displaying cranberries with other recipe ingredients for back-to-school snacks and lunches, Halloween treats, and Friendsgiving and Thanksgiving recipes is an effective way to inspire impulse sales," notes Cahill.

"It is prudent to do cross-merchandising displays such as providing an in-store or online roadmap for all ingredients needed for your special holiday dinner," says Sun Belle's Honigberg, whose company markets biodynamic organic cranberries under the Green Belle label, sourced from Nekoosa Family Farms in Nekoosa, WI.

Fairchild notes retailers can encourage consumers to pair cranberries with hard

squash, which is also at peak season during the fall. This idea is echoed by Mary-Beth Weiss, associate marketing manager at Decas Farms in Carver, CA.

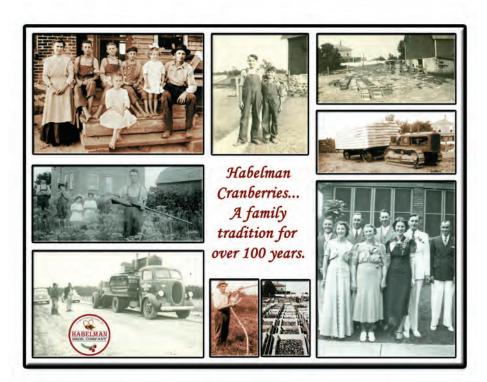
"Cranberries also merchandise well with other seasonal favorites like apples. Displays of cranberries and apples or squash really evoke the feelings of fall for consumers," says Weiss. "Something as simple as floating the berries in apple cider for shoppers to enjoy could be a great way to showcase the fruit."

Weiss also encourages consumers to 'Buy

2, Freeze 1' when it comes purchasing fresh cranberries in season.

"They can be frozen right in the bag they are purchased in," she says. "This makes it easy to enjoy the fruit in smoothies or popsicles come summer."

If cranberry consumption is to grow perhaps more important than cross merchandising with other fruits is cross promotion within the category — especially given that the majority of volume is turned into dried cranberries or concentrate.



## Available in 3 Convenient Pack styles



404 Daly Avenue ~ Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494 ~ Phone: 715-422-0410

## merchandising review ▶ cranberries

Even though dried cranberries can last longer than their fresh counterparts, Weiss notes dried cranberry sales also peak around Thanksgiving.

"Placing secondary floor displays of dried cranberries near coolers of fresh cranberries is a great idea for retailers to increase sales during the holidays," she says. "Keep cranberries cool and dry to keep them fresh."

Johnson of Bridges Produce agrees, emphasizing optimal storage is between 38 degrees to 40 degrees to keep the fruit firm and beautiful. Below that temperature, the cell walls will begin to collapse and impact the shelf life of the fruit.

Meanwhile, the Cranberry Marketing Committee has expanded fresh cranberries' footprint in-store, bridging into floral departments.

"Beyond food, fresh cranberries are a decorative secret weapon," says CMC's Cahill. "With their bright-hued reds and pearl-like shape, cranberries enhance table-scapes, brighten floral and candle arrangements, and bejewel wreaths and garlands.

#### **HEALTH AND HERITAGE**

In 2015, the committee trademarked U.S.



Retailers can utilize materials like these available from the Cranberry Marketing Committee on its website to assist consumers thinking about purchasing the fruit this fall. cranberries as "America's Original Superfruit," helping distinguish the product from the fruit grown elsewhere. This taps into the food's origin story, having been used by Native Americans as early as 1550 and first commercially cultivated in 1816.

This brand also harnesses the fact cranberries are a nutrient-rich food, and Cahill points retailers in the direction of the organizatiion's website, CranberryInstitute.org for more details.

"A serving of fresh or frozen cranberries contains 7 mg of vitamin C and 1.8 grams of fiber and provides polyphenols not commonly found in other fruits," notes Cahill. "Scientists have been exploring the relationship between cranberries and heart health, gut health, urinary tract health, as well as the cranberry's unique anti-adhesion properties."

Decas Farms' Benoit describes how his company is taking the health push a step further.

"We have partnered with a major retailer's pharmacy team to sample and reach out to consumers to share the health benefits of the cranberry," he says. "We've sampled our Organic and LeanCrans reduced-sugar dried cranberries that make a delicious stand-alone

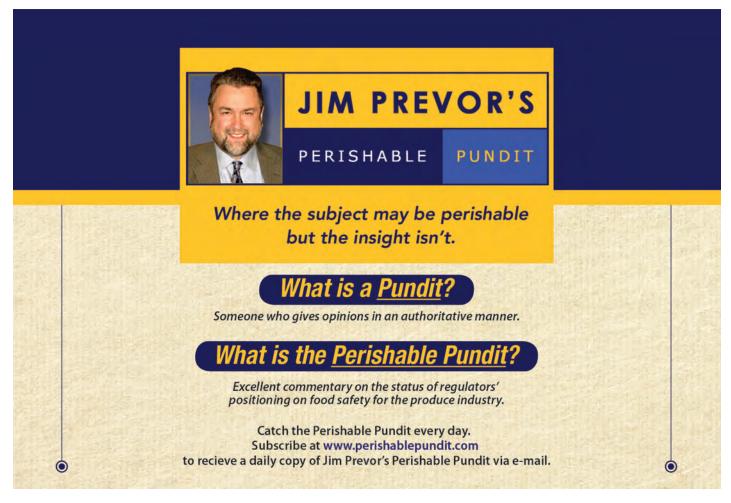


PHOTO COURTESY OF SUN BELLE



snack or trail mix ingredient, along with recipes for their use and information about health benefits.

"Consumers have responded well to these demonstrations and we've seen increased sales," says Benoit.

#### PRODUCTION TRENDS

The CMC has forecast cranberry production of 8.8 billion barrels this year, representing a 2% rise on the 2018 crop, which itself was a 6.7% lift on 2017.

Bob Wilson, managing member of the Cranberry Network LLC/Habelman Bros. Co., Wisconsin Rapids, WI, says it's important to remember only approximately 3% of cranberry production goes to the fresh market.

"With the high percentage of cranberry bed renovations — removing older varieties and replacing with high-yield hybrids — over the past 5 plus years, annual North American cranberry production should be on the rise," he says.

He notes most of this fruit has been for the production of sweetened-dried cranberries and cranberry juice concentrate, but some new varieties have been bred for early ripening, which helps fresh cranberry growers compete for Canadian Thanksgiving sales on Oct 14.

"Some of the new hybrids have been bred to last longer in cooler storage, helping us to extend through Christmas and beyond," he says. "Providing a less tart cranberry to produce buyers is also an industry objective.

Bridges Produce's Johnson says his group's organic cranberry-growing partners at Quebec-based Patience Fruit & Co. are now cultivating varieties that are ready for harvest at an earlier date.

"They were bred to allow good availably for Canadian Thanksgiving, which is the second Monday of October," he says. "We do not usually see these early varieties in the United States due to the high Canadian demand during that early shipping window."

Decas Farms' Weiss says, "We try to plant varieties that ripen at different times in order to ensure we can supply the freshest berries throughout the season."

Honigberg says, Nekoosa Family Farms, is ramping up production of its certified-biody-

namic organic cranberries, with volume set to be up 43% in 2019, followed by year-on-year growth of 33% in 2020, 25% in 2021 and 60% in 2022.

"We have found excellent demand for certified-biodynamic organic cranberries. Volumes have been short the last two seasons due to poor weather and pollination," she says. "We are planting more acres in order to supply the increasing demand for our certified-biodynamic, Wisconsin-grown organic cranberries."



United Fresh's fifth annual **BrandStorm™** is headed to the Austin, Texas for three days of inspiring general sessions, peer-to-peer discussions, focused break-out education, and endless networking.

"BrandStorm is a best-in-class produce marketing conference. As a produce marketer, I most enjoyed the networking, cooperative sharing and hearing about industry trends and challenges while learning from excellent speakers with other like-minded produce marketers. It was a refreshing experience. I highly recommend attending this conference."

Christine Linder
National Sales, Alsum Farms & Produce, Inc.



Learn to harness creative ideas, predict marketing successes and develop successful, measurable strategies at the multi-day event where you will meet, share, discuss and explore new developments and exciting advancements in marketing.



# Digging Up Root Sales During Fall, Winter And Beyond

Retailers need to stay abreast of trends and communicate reasons for consumers to buy.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

etting to the root of sales may not seem earth-shattering. Yet, these underground-growing veggies, everything from mainstream staples such as potatoes and carrots, to grandma's favorite rutabagas and turnips, and even ethnic favorites such as cassava and daikon, can collectively add green to the register.

This is true year-round — driven by celebrity chefs spotlighting the latest root recipes on food TV — as well as the 52-week availability of these hearty veggies. Root's register-ringing ability also ramps up in the winter, when these vegetables star as comfort ingredients on holiday menus, and when cold weather drives consumers to hearty, root-filled soups and stews. The trick to digging up added dollar sales is for retailers to stay on top of the trends in this often-unsung category, and translate this 'why buy' to shoppers.

"We have a year-round program on various root vegetables," says Blake Lee, director of produce procurement and merchandising for Bristol Farms, a 13-store chain based in Carson, CA. "As consumers become more aware of the benefits of food, we tend to see an increase of whatever seems to be trending at that moment. For example, horseradish seems to be gaining traction, as does celery root during the holidays. We've also ramped up displays on the various radish varieties to draw attention to the multitudes of color and appearances."

#### **LATEST ON THE GREATEST**

Potatoes, onions and carrots ranked among the Top 10 vegetable categories at retail in 2018, according to *FreshFacts on Retail, Year in Review*, by the Washington, DC-headquartered United Fresh Produce Association. More specifically, these three root vegetables represented about one-third (31.9 %) of the dollar sales generated by all 10 top veggie categories.

"Based on sales and velocity, potatoes,



PHOTO COURTESY OF DEAN BARNES

onions, carrots and sweet potatoes are the mainstream root vegetables of today," says Rachel Atkinson-Leach, category manager for RPE, Inc., in Bancroft, WI. In fact, "potatoes, onions and carrots make up 97% of root vegetable volume."

Earl McGrath, produce director for independent retailer Freshfields Farm, in Orlando, FL, which has a second location in Jacksonville, FL, says potatoes "are still king of the roots, in spite of the ever-changing plate of your average customer."

This fall, RPE will introduce an extension to its bite-sized potato line with Tasteful Selections Nibbles, the world's smallest gourmet potato.

Stokes Purple sweet potatoes are a seasonal favorite, according to Sadie Carpenter, marketing manager for Frieda's Specialty Produce, in Los Alamitos, CA. "These, as well as colorful carrots, are among our top-selling root vegetables for fall."

Colorful or rainbow-colored carrots are currently one of the biggest root vegetable trends, says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce, in Vernon, CA. "We've seen a 15% increase in sales over the past year, primarily for use on veggie trays and as a lunch snack."

Rainbow carrots are gaining popularity as consumers look for variety and visual appeal to Instagram, and organic and conventional baby carrots continue to be a favorite with consumers, according to Phil Kooy, chief customer officer for Bolthouse Farms, in Bakersfield, CA.

Interestingly, although carrots can be harvested in the summer and are available year-round, they reach peak sweetness in fall and winter as colder weather causes carrots to convert stored starches into sugars to keep the water in their cells from freezing. This makes carrots taste extra sweet, says Kooy.

### **INTEREST IN OLD STAPLES**

Colorful and specialty root veggies — including carrots, beets, radishes, Tokyo turnips, parsley root and celery root — were once specialty items served primarily at white tablecloth, high-end restaurants, says Matt Hiltner, marketing coordinator for Babé Farms, Inc., in Santa Maria, CA. "Now, as bloggers and influencers look to make food that is 'Instagrammable,' colorful and intriguing vegetables are gaining a surge of popularity and becoming more readily available at the retail level."

Beets are currently among the 'hottest' root vegetables, says Kevin Partida, manager of the vegetable department at Vision Produce Company, in Los Angeles. "Chefs use them a lot and like the variation in colors to light up plates visually and with taste."

Color is what makes the watermelon radish popular and led to a 21% increase in sales over the prior year at Melissa's/World Variety

## ■ EFFECTIVE MERCHANDISING HELPS BOOST SWEET POTATO SALES

BY DOUG OHLEMEIER

Sweet potatoes are becoming a bigger part of yearround root vegetable purchases.

Retailers have taken note of the product's growth. "Retailers are capitalizing on their popularity, especially in the last few years," says Jeff Axelberg, salesman with Vardaman, MS-based SMP Southeast/Edmondson Farms' Fair Bluff, NC, office. "I see more excitement about them every year."

Reminding shoppers of the different ways to prepare and enjoy sweet potatoes, including pairing with grilled steaks, burgers and French fries, helps encourage sales, says Steve Roberson, president of Roberson Produce, Hazlehurst, GA.

"Display items with sweet potatoes that complement and might encourage consumers to think of the different ways to prepare them," says Roberson. "They aren't just for Thanksgiving."

Kelly McIver, executive director of the North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission, based in Benson, NC, says demonstrations promote versatility. "There are so many ways to prepare sweet potatoes," she says. "It is important for retailers to track the movement of consumer demand. Sweet potatoes keep seeing a boost, much of it due to health messaging and recipe options."

Merchandising sweet potatoes with complementary items, including pecans, pie crust and sauces, helps boost sales across categories. "You're increasing the upsell and cash register ring for these other items," says Jeff Thomas, director of marketing at Lucama, NC-based Scott Farms, Inc.

"Our job is to help our retail partners increase the sales potential of the product. Not only our product, but we also want to highlight the other complementary products. The more we can do to help build the relationships between those products, the better we can enhance the mission of the sweet potato as well," says Thomas.

To persuade shoppers to use sweet potatoes instead of white potatoes with seafood boils, the Baton Rouge, LA-based

Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission recommends displays at seafood counters. "As consumption and versatility continue to increase, we need to think of ways to cross promote them as healthy alternatives," says Rene Simon, executive director.

Varying color can help increase sales, says Matt Garber, partner with Garber Farms, lota, LA. Stores should offer different color options, such as purple skinned. Providing access to recipes as well as maintaining clean displays also benefits sales.

"Calling the sweet potato a 'superfood' or 'the Orange Superfood' would help sales," notes Garber. "This helps keep excitement in the sweet potato category."

Proper displays are vital to keep sales brisk. "Retailers need to keep sweet potatoes in a prominent place and not consider them only as a seasonal vegetable, because they're definitely a year-round product," asserts Sylvia Clark, who is a member of the Mississippi Sweet Potato Council in Vardaman, MS. **pb** 

# always Fresh. Always available.

Add variety to your radish offering. For You\* Radishes, Radish MatchStixx, and Radish Chips are always available from Miedema: the only year round grower of cello radishes in the country. *Call today!* 



616.669.9420

www.miedemaproduce.com



## merchandising review ▶ root vegetables



912-375-5760

www.robersonproduce.com Hazlehurst GA & Mt Vernon GA



Produce, according to Schueller.

Kyle Paul Vilhauer, sales executive with Lakeside Organic Gardens, in Watsonville, CA, agrees. "There is a newfound interest in watermelon and black Spanish radishes. Chefs and consumers love the appealing colors when sliced open."

The French Violet Radish is a fairly new root item for Babe Farms.

"Similar to the classic French Breakfast Radish in look and shape, the striking, purple hue of the French Violet Radish is what sets it apart," says Hiltner.

Like beets, chefs have pushed the popularity of celery root and parsnips, according to Frieda's Carpenter, with these two roots now appearing on most fall/winter menus.

"We only carry parsnips a few months of the year, but we have significant interest with them in the cooler months," says Freshfields'

Celery root is mainly sold without tops and in 25-pound bags by Lakeside Organic Gardens. "But during the winter holiday season, we provide a special pack, 12-count root with tops for retail," says Marliese McWherter, creative marketing manager.

#### **SHOPPERS DIG LATIN ROOTS**

Yuca, which is the root of the cassava plant, and malanga, similar but different from taro, are the up-and-comers in the root vegetable segment, driven by their versatility and similarity to potatoes, according to RPE's Atkinson-Leach. This is because they can be used as an ingredient in everyday meals, as well as in many multicultural recipes.

"Yuca and malanga peak for us in winter months, especially around the holidays," says Freshfields' McGrath. "One informal promotion we do with our Latin root vegetables is to look across the entire marketplace and focus on one root each week that we think will present the best overall value for our customers.

"We will increase the display size by two







## PROTECT YOUR PRODUCE & FLORAL

STOP SPOILING YOUR PROFITS

Our Clean Air System used in Distribution Centers removes Ethylene Gas and prevents Mold, Rot, Bacteria and eliminates Odors.



OMRI FOR USE WITH ORGANIC PRODUCE

Customers include: Albertsons, Ingles, Save Mart, Smart & Final & Whole Foods and many more.

ethylenecontröl...

The leader in the industry since 1986 Selma, CA

Clean Air Systems - Sachets - Filters

Contact Us: 559-896-1909 • info@ethylenecontrol.com www.ethylenecontrol.com

## SHOWCASE

# national sweet potatoes





Creole Classic (Bulk)
Easy Sweets (Microwave)
Classic Sweets (Tray Pack)
Classic Steamers (Steamable)
Sweeten the Pot (Boil Ready)

- Any Size Between 2lb & 8lb Mesh Bags -

337-824-6328

Wayne Garber, Matt Garber, Tim Smith & Steve Darbonne

"America's Finest Yams" • "Aramatic Rice"

www.garberfarm.com -





QUALITY YAMS / SWEET POTATOES
They're good ... and good for yel"

Consumer Packs available Mesh Bags Available with High Graphic Recipe design In a high Graphic DRC Individual Microwaveable Shrinkwrap Bulk Cartons, 40lb - 25lb - 20lb and 10lb cartons

Contact Us! 209-394-8001

Larelle Miller – Sales Manager Imiller@quailhfarms.com

Angie Maciel - Sales

amaciel@quailhfarms.com





GROWER,
PACKER
&
SHIPPER





## **ORGANIC & CONVENTIONAL**

## SWEET POTATOES

ALL VARIETIES OF NEW CROP ARE AVAILABLE:

- · Asian/Japanese
- · Purple Sweet Potato
- · Garnet/Diane
- Jewel/Beauregard/Covington
- · Sweet/Bonita

**OUR LABELS:** 

- GOLD 'N HONEY
- · KOKUMA
- · CALIFORNIA GOLD
- · CALIFORNIA, SILVER
- · SUGAR DANDY
- DANDY JUMBO

**NEW LABEL!!!** 



When It Comes to Sweet Potatoes
We Have What You Need - When You Need It!









Contact us Today ....

Sales: (209) 394-7311 Fax: (209) 394-3940

Yagi Brothers Produce | 5614 N. Lincoln Blvd. | Livingston, CA. 95334

## merchandising review ▶ root vegetables

to three times and visually draw in customer interest. If we are successful with promoting in this way, we end up giving our customers good value on top-quality fresh produce."

Yuca and malanga blanca are the firstand second-most consumed root vegetables in Latin America, according to Jesse Capote, principal and executive vice president of J&C Tropicals, in Miami, which sources these and other tropical roots from South Florida, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Honduras.

"These items are consumed year-round, although they spike in sales in the winter," he

says.

"For one, most tropical root vegetables are consumed in soups and stews, so the colder weather has a big impact on demand. Second, everyone in America eats more during the holiday season. It's no different with all ethnicities. Cubans consume malanga blanca and boniato during holidays. Puerto Ricans consume malanga lila and Ñame blanco. Chinese consume large taro and Ñame blanco," says Capote.

Beyond these, Melissa's/World Variety Produce's Schueller says his company has seen "With potatoes and other roots, it's important to include some nice color breaks so that the section doesn't become a run-on sentence of browns and plastic bags."

- Earl McGrath, Freshfield Farms

7% and 8% increases on daikon and jicama, respectively, over the past year. Demand for both, he says, now reaches beyond solely an Asian and Hispanic customer demographic.

#### **APPETIZING LOOK SELLS**

Minimal seasonality makes root veggies ideal to feature year-round. However, November sees a 1.3 times spike in volume sales *versus* the category average, according to Nielsen data as provided by RPE. This makes the fall, as well as the colder months of the winter, an especially good time to maximize sales by building appetizing displays and offering delicious dish ideas.

"For consumers, the appearance of root vegetables in stores signals a change in season, the beginning of fall, start of the holiday season and the colder winter months," says Bolthouse Farms' Koov.

However, root vegetables aren't typically the most visually appealing section in a fresh produce department.

"With potatoes and other roots, it's important to include some nice color breaks so that the section doesn't become a run-on sentence of browns and plastic bags," says Freshfields' McGrath. "With proper time spent merchandising, however, you can actually have a root section with vibrant color. Carrots, radishes and beets with tops still on are some of my favorites, as they are a pop of vibrant color that can catch customer's attention. You really can have an impulse purchase even with a radish if it looks great."

Tie roots together with traditional usages. "Understand consumer recipe usage behavior, and cross-merchandise carrots with other key ingredients, like beef for stews or chicken for soup," says Bolthouse's Kooy. "For the Thanksgiving holidays, displaying carrots with other holiday ingredients — such as sweet potatoes, celery and pecans — makes it easier for consumers to gather all components for their meal at one place."





Gather with peers from across the fresh produce industry at the 2020 FreshStart Conference to work towards a common goal: to increase fresh produce access for kids and families.

Jump-start 2020 by learning how your business can grow opportunities to serve the next generation of consumers and their families.

Grow your business in a way that does good, at these 2020 FreshStart Conference events:





The *Growing Up Fresh* Golf Tournament gathers participants to hit the links to benefit kids!



The General Session and Workshops focus on connecting your business to new opportunities to reach kids and their families with fresh, healthy produce.



The *Bids for Kids* Silent and Live Auction helps ensure children and families everywhere have access to fresh fruits and vegetables through your generosity.



The **Annual Gala Dinner** celebrates United Fresh's Lifetime Achievement Award honoree.

REGISTER TODAY!
WWW.UNITEDFRESH.ORG

# Pecans: 'America's Original Supernut'

U.S. indigenous nut on growth trajectory, boasting plenty of good-for-you properties.

BY HOWARD RIELL

arketing and merchandising pecans effectively in the produce department can send sales soaring, especially around the holiday season.

These healthful, delicious and versatile nuts grab consumers' attention as both snacks and ingredients.

"Pecans are increasingly in the spotlight," notes Emma Garner, director of industry relations for the American Pecan Council in Fort Worth, TX. "Mintel's Global New Product Database has shown an increase in pecan products. From 2017 to 2018, there was a 402% growth in pecan flavors for ice cream products, a 16.7% increase of pecan adult beverages and a 17.6% increase of pecans inside dishes."

According to Jeff Smutny, director of marketing and regulatory affairs for the American Pecan Council, "Industry data and strategic planning are directing us to promote raw pecans to realize growth. Pecans have always been perceived as the dessert nut. Their superior flavor has always provided that little something that's extra special in treats.

"What's often lost is the fact pecans are an extremely nutritious snack that is high in anti-oxidants, fiber and good fats. They are hearthealthy, too," he says.

"They should be touted as 'America's Original Supernut,' the only major tree nut indigenous to the United States," says Daniel J. Zedan, vice president of the Navarro Pecan Co., Corsicana, TX, and a member of the board of directors of the American Pecan Council (APC). "They are richer in antioxidants than any other tree nut and packed with vitamins and minerals. They are the eighth-richest food when it comes to antioxidants.

"They are heart-healthy, have a great shelf life and can be used year-round, not just during the holidays and not just for pies. They are a great addition to all recipes, from salads to meats, vegetable dishes and desserts," he says.

Zedan notes by utilizing the work being







done by the American Pecan Council, pecans can be marketed as versatile, flavorful and healthy.

Consumption continues to increase as more and more shoppers become aware of their flavor, versatility and health benefits, the association says, particularly overseas where kernel consumption has increased in eight of the past 10 years.

According to the association, domestic consumption of pecan kernels has been on the increase for the past three years, up 8.6% over the same period a year ago. Overseas shipments have continued to increase over the past 10 years, up 20.9% over the same period a year ago.

With eight sizes of pieces and seven sizes of halves, there is a size for any application. "Unlike other nuts, pecans offer a wide-range of sizes to fit a myriad of applications," says Zedan. While Junior Mammoth Halves are the most popular half-size, many customers prefer the native smaller halves for their rich buttery flavor and higher oil content. As for pieces, medium and large pieces are preferred as ingredients in dairy, baking and confectionary applications. Smaller pieces are

preferred as toppings.

Oil-roasted, buttered and salted varieties are among the top sellers, especially in the dairy/ice cream arena. Praline, honey-coated and chocolate-coated are also popular in the snack and confectionary segments. More flavored pecans are appearing on the store shelves as well, particularly for snacking.

The Council, through the marketing firm of Weber Shandwick, based in New York City, has put together a number of sales materials, complete with recipes, for use at the retail level. Most highlight the fact pecans are not just for pies or the holidays, and tout their versatility, health benefits and unique flavor.

Retail is by far the largest sales segment. However, significant volumes of pecans are also sold into the snack, dairy, bakery and confectionary segments of the market. Unlike other nut competitors, pecan pieces are cheaper than pecan halves. Due to their versatility and variety of sizing options, pecan pieces are one of the best buys for consumers.

The holidays are, of course, the traditional peak sales time of the year, with approx-

## dried fruits & nuts ▶

imately 40% of all pecan sales occurring between September and December.

In fact, pecans are gaining momentum, says Zedan, due to the current worldwide supply situation. "Prices are the lowest they've been in years, making pecans not only a smart buy, but an economical one."

#### **NATURALLY HEALTHY**

Nothing sells in America these days like health.

"The best way to merchandise pecans is with

other natural, wholesome foods," explains Will McGehee, a partner in the Genuine Georgia Group in Fort Valley, GA. "This is, logically, the produce department. We are all trying to find ways to feed ourselves and our children healthy snacks, and the produce department is the perfect destination for that."

According to McGehee, "The word is getting out natural pecans are low in carbs, high in antioxidants and are a great source of healthy fats in our evolving diet. Pecans are literally a superfood that check so many boxes

we are trying to target within our diet." Sales in the nut category "are soaring, and growth in the pecan segment is exponential."

McGehee and his colleagues see 8-oz to 12-oz bags selling the best. "At these sizes, you are able to retail under a \$9.99 price point."

The versatility of pecans, says McGehee, is "really beginning to explode. Pecans aren't just for baking. Pecans are the perfect snack, and we have to appeal to the evolving palates of the consumer." Natural pecans, he says, will always be the leader in the category, "but you are seeing flavors becoming more and more popular, like Roasted/Salted, Cinnamon, Maple, Praline, Dark Chocolate, Roasted/Unsalted and Sweet/ Spicy. Pecan Nation, a Fort Valley, GA-based grower, will actually be launching Gingerbread coated pecans this fall. They are incredible."

Pecans sales will always spike during the holidays, predicts McGehee, as the consumers use pecans "in just about every recipe. Sprinkled in salads, topped on pies, chopped in casseroles — pecans and holiday cooking are synonymous. They make great gifts. They are perfect snacks."

Pecan pieces can be a time-saver for recipes that call for chopping pecans, he adds. "But more and more value-added products are evolving from the supernut. We are seeing sales increase for pecan flour, pecan milk, pecan oil and pecan butter."

McGehee recommends displaying pecans in a high-graphic shipper, which he says call out the health benefits and versatility. "Or cross merchandising them with seasonal foods that will inspire creativity in our diets: peach displays in the summer, apple displays in the fall, citrus displays during the winter and sweet potatoes any time of year." Pecans "can truly be an incremental sale if you give them the chance to be. Holiday pecan sales will always be strong, but the incremental opportunity lies in January through September."

McGehee advises retailers to merchandise in high-traffic, high-impulse areas. "This is the strategy that will allow pecans to be consumed as a snack instead of purchased as a baking ingredient. Retailers are capturing the grab-and-go nature of bagged pecans to increase consumption."

#### **NUTRITION TO THE FORE**

Kortney Chase, president of the San Saba Pecan Company in San Saba, TX, also recommends retailers showcase pecans' nutritional properties, and says she is starting to see healthier products available.

"We are hoping to create more need for pecan pieces in the wake of new products like milks, tortillas and snacks. Most recently,



## PECAN NATION

Introducing the full family of flavors of Pecan Nation - Natural, Roasted & Salted, Maple Crumbles, Cinnamon and our newest member of the family - Gingerbread. While Natural pecans are the snack for healthy, on-the-go shoppers, there's always room for flavorful indulgence. It all starts with the highest quality pecans focusing on four key varieties: Schley, Farley, Elliot, and Desirables. We are fifth-generation growers with 100-year old orchards that produce golden colored perfect pecans. A family of flavors shoppers will remember. We are The Pecan Nation!



### FEATURES

- · Packaging draws on American spirit
- · Highlights Antioxidant health benefits of pecans
- Year-round pulse promotions: Holiday, New Year/Health, Easter, July 4th
- 8 oz stand-up re-sealable pouch bag pack size allows for aggressive retail
- 12 bags per case, 220 cases per pallet
- Pre-packed 48 bags per shipper, 24 shippers per pallet

GENUINE GEORGIA

302 W CHURCH ST
FORT VALLEY, GA 31030
478.822.9210 • GENUINEGA.COM

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Will McGehee: will@genuinega.com
Duke Lane: duke@genuinega.com
Kent Hoots: kent@genuinega.com

there's been an increase in consumers requesting organic product."

Fancy Junior Mammoth Halves and Fancy Medium Pieces sell best, she notes.

Chase and her colleagues say retailers are increasingly marketing pecans as a snack, "not just a dessert." Value-added products, such as candies, are not showing executives as much of a boost in activity as they would like, says Chase.

The problem may well lie in consumers' interest in health. "We are guessing this is due to the amount of sugar content," she says.

Retailers generally do well with smaller packaging, says Chase. "So, they appear more affordable."

She urges stores to continue marketing pecans as a snack item. "In fact, snack companies, such as Kraft, remain the largest source of pecan consumption. So are big-box retailers like Sam's, Costco and Walmart."

Chase also confirms the holiday season is strongest for pecan sales. "Typically, 40% of our sales happen during the last three months."

#### SIMPLY HEALTHY

Alex Willson, chief operating officer for Sunnyland Farms in Albany, GA, a third-generation, family-owned business established in 1948, also has found success with pecans when their "truly great flavor and numerous health benefits" are emphasized at retail.

"Pecan consumption has continued to grow both domestically and internationally," explains Willson.

The move toward healthier choices has benefited the industry because of the pecans' high level of antioxidants, protein, and healthy fats.

The combination "quite literally makes pecans the perfect healthy snack that's not only tasty, but fills you up with protein, vitamins and minerals," says Willson. He likes to see retailers focus on "home-grown, simple ingredients, health benefits and history."

Willson and his fellow executives see consumption expanding outside of primarily sweet flavor profiles, which he terms "a huge trend, with an emphasis on the versatility toward savory recipes. You see consumers using them as flavorings for fish, coating on chicken,

"The so-called "simple food movement is pushing ideas toward fewer ingredients throughout our production. Currently in our marketing, we have included limited ingredient items such as our 'Simply Cinnamon' pecans, which have only five simple ingredients."

They have also seen "nice growth in flavored

pecans," says Willson, "but far and away, our raw pecan halves and simply toasted and salted remain our strongest sellers, most likely because of the continued focus on natural, healthy foods.

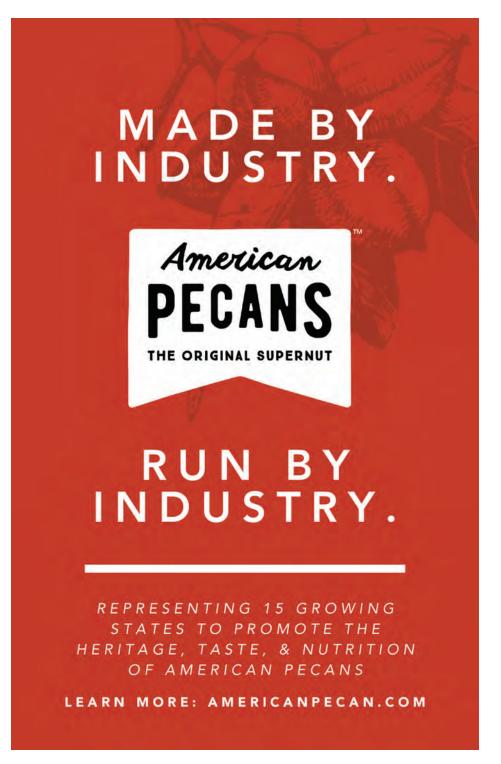
"Pecan meal is an excellent product for added flavor and additional nutrition for the price," suggests Willson. "You see many restaurant chefs using pieces in meals because of the value and added flavor profile."

Since pecans are harvested and fresh in the fall, says Willson, consumers "are hyper-aware of freshly-harvested pecans.

"Thanksgiving and the holidays also obviously push an increase in sales throughout Q4."

Smutny, of the American Pecan Council, agrees. "Pecans dominate the holiday season in share of voice. We own the nut category during November and December."

The snacking and health food industries remain the No. 1 users of pecans, says Willson. Like others, he expects the pecan industry "to only grow more as consumer awareness continues trending toward fresh, simple-healthy products." **pb** 



## retail perspective



# Venue For Sharing Vision And Transparency

BY DON HARRIS

s we prepare for the industry's largest gathering, an opportunity presents itself to take advantage of this large meeting of produce industry experts to improve your overall operation and gather additional information to take it to the next level. The PMA Fresh Summit in Anaheim, CA, offers the opportunity to have meaningful discussions with all segment representatives of the industry that affect your retail business. Engaging such discussions and

learning as much as possible in educational sessions and in trade-floor conversations could give you a clearer vision of what you need to do to upgrade your overall operation. These types of discussions involve sharing information, which leads to greater transparency throughout the supply chain. Generally speaking, upper retail management does not condone these types of information-sharing meetings because traditionally retail has been slow in recognizing the benefits of removing some of the "mystique" out of the retail operation and sharing it with other parts of the industry. This resistance by management further shows, "They just don't get it!"

Taking advantage of the opportunity to have face-to-face, relevant discussions with your partners is something that every operation should participate in. Make it a point to schedule enough time for meetings during the convention with your partners to discuss all meaningful aspects of their operation as well as yours. The key to success in these meetings is a willingness by all parties to share information (some of which may seem

to be proprietary) about their operation and any plans to improve the levels of performance and service to their partners.

In the past, these types of meetings have been one-sided with vendors and suppliers providing opportunities and sharing new procedures and strategies to assist the retailer's operation. On the flip side, retailers have always been reluctant to share many details with suppliers and vendors about their operation. The time has come for this reluctance to end. Instead, there should be open dialogue that shares details of a retailer's operation. This transparency will allow your partners to see what they can do, individually or collectively, to help improve the operation.

With technological advances occurring at such a rapid rate, there are no real "secrets" in the produce industry. With the industry embracing these technological advances, transparency is becoming

more and more prevalent throughout the supply chain. Anything previously considered 'secret,' 'innovative,' or 'company-specific' has a very short life today as imitation and duplication occurs at such a rapid rate these advantages are very short-lived. Hiding behind the secretive mask retailers have used for years no longer has any place in the modern marketplace. Posturing or citing 'company policy' that prohibits revealing the inner workings of retail operations to

your partners is an excuse to not engage in meaningful dialogue. In the 'old days,' we used to say: 'It is not necessary to explain retail to them. They wouldn't understand.' Everyone in today's supply chain is working toward the same end — providing consumers with the best quality, safest, cleanest and most cost-efficient supply of fresh produce possible.

Some progressive retailers have already adopted this approach and are reaping the benefits of a smoother running, streamlined and protected supply chain. By adopting this new strategy, the entire industry benefits.

Once this type of open communication is achieved, the path to innovation, growth and improved sales and profits for each member of the chain is realized. Each entity in the chain would work even harder to provide more information and services to drive their customers forward. This would lift the whole industry to a new level of expertise and execution.

It would behoove any retailer who wants to move his operation forward to arrange a series of these types of meetings with your

suppliers during the upcoming Fresh Summit exposition. If there's not enough time during PMA, make it a point to set up follow-up meetings after the convention. Given the history of retailers' participation in such discussions, this new approach would come as a pleasant surprise to your partners. It would likewise make their meeting with you far more important and vital to their company success.

If this becomes common practice, we will all become united in the goal of developing an industry with the strength to overcome the challenges of our ever-changing marketplace. **pb** 

Don Harris is a 41-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He worked in every aspect of the industry, from "field-to-fork" in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris is presently consulting. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com.

'company policy'
that prohibits
revealing the inner
workings of retail
operations to
your partners is
an excuse to not
engage in meaningful dialogue.

# Some Things Never Change, But There's Always More To Learn



**BY PAUL MANFRE** 

don't claim to know it all when it comes to produce, but after more than 40 years in this business, I have picked up a few things along the way. I am always searching for new opportunities to marry old school produce knowledge with new school technology and omni channel marketing.

Sometimes I read about new studies and new metrics, touted as "big news," and I think, 'did you need that new data report to tell you this?' I knew it just by observing. Many large retailers are now realizing what I have been saying for more than 20 years: "battles for supermarket supremacy will be fought in grocery, but the war will be won in fresh." They also are treating less plastic like it's a new idea. I come from a time when there was no plastic, and that's where we are headed again; you will be helping the environment and your displays, and profits will benefit from it. Produce looks better naked.

There is no doubt there are younger and smarter people in produce than I, and I wish to learn from you. But like a history lesson, the past can lead the way to the future. There were many tried-and-true buying and selling lessons of the past, and many are still relevant today. One of them is supply and demand.

One of the things I hear today, and this is not made up ...

DC: I need 77 boxes of tomatoes.

Me: There are 80 on a skid. I'll give you 80.

DC: I only need 77.

WHAT? If you are a real produce buyer, a computer is a tool to make you better, but it's not the answer. Things change daily, sometimes by the minute. Just because you sold 80 last week, last month or last year doesn't mean you need that today, tomorrow, next week, next month or in the next year.

Demand is the most important factor, and you can create it or increase it by smart pricing, improving your in-store displays and educating your staff. Produce is always evolving. Technology will bring us to better yields and products, but these must be priced and merchandised to the consumers to pick up the increased volume. I can assure you, if you don't change, you will lose this war. Look how many large retailers have come and gone. Supply and creating increased demand will increase sales and your profits.

There are no other items that are sold like fresh produce. When I had a brief stint on Wall Street, training brokers in sales, I told them these things:

All of you Harvard MBAs, I can put six produce guys in this office, and they will run circles around you. In produce, a half day is 12 hours, not 9 to 4. In produce, prices go up and down like in stocks, but while they go up and down, the product goes rotten. If you can sell and ensure physical delivery of a perishable commodity, then you can sell anything.

I always say, no matter what level you are in this business, the story is the same, only the volume is different: I need, I don't need, I have too many, I don't have enough. The list goes on, and you can

pull data from consumers to the largest grower/shipper and everyone in between, and the only thing that changes is the volume we are speaking about. 1 piece, 1 skid, 1 load, 1 field.

About 20 years ago someone came up with the idea to change this system that has worked so well for so long. I believe this person or group had no experience with produce, and if I had to point to a profession, I would say an accountant or a Harvard MBA. It probably went like this:

What do you mean prices change daily? What do you mean sometimes we have, and sometimes we can't get? What do you mean it's raining? Why does that matter?

At about the same time, some successful farmers sent their offspring off to college so they could improve their lives as well as the farms. Unfortunately, these two groups met at school and decided we should sell produce the same way they learned in class to sell widgets. They came up with contract or fixed pricing, forgetting what their elders taught them about rain, drought, crop failures, disease, cold and the daddy of them all ... demand.

Demand is the most important factor in the supply-and-demand equation. I explain it this way: If you had the only Honus Wagner baseball card and you paid \$1 million for it, what is it worth? It's only worth what the next buyer will pay. I have seen many markets over the years where supplies were so short that the market had to get hot, but it didn't. You know why? Demand was even less than short supplies.

Let me use this example. When supplies are very short, prices are generally very high. There are a certain set of customers that need the product no matter what the price. Foodservice that deals with restaurants are a good example — it's on the menu, so restaurants want and need the item. In the beginning of the cycle, retail, wholesale and foodservice grab all they can get in a short market. The prices at the store reflect the shortage in the way of much higher prices. Consumers back off this item and search for cheaper options. In turn, retail orders slow and demand drops. The market is still short until there is one box more available than the people who need it. And that's where the market stalls.

Now if we get an increase in supplies shortly thereafter, that's where you see a market crash. You know the ones that go from \$30 to \$4. You know why? Because large retail will not change their price. That's right ... they leave the retail the same instead of what any real produce man would do: adjust to the market or just get out, take a loss and get right back in at the lower prices. This is what is broken with our system and needs to change. The main driver of demand is the consumer, and large retail treats them like the enemy. The caveat: the consumer is the only thing keeping you from extinction.

Paul Manfre is general manager, purchasing, sales, and a supply-and-demand specialist for Top Katz LLC, an importer/shipper/grower that has offices in New York City, Nogales, AZ and McAllen, TX.

## european market



# **English Apples Poised To Grow**

BY SARAH CALCUTT

ublic relations... The language of reaching out to different parts of our consumer base.

The team at British Apples and Pears — the UK's marketing organization supporting the country's apple growers — never rests, and the campaign has for the past two years been focusing on the 'Goodness to Go' message — raising awareness of how great, packaging-free, healthy and portable our British apples are. Working with a

range of social media influencers (people with thousands of followers) the GrEAT British Apples message has been successfully placed in front of a new, broader audience, reintroducing the key message: #AnAppleaDay

Moving on from just focusing on the much-maligned Millennials and an older family-based demographic, the 'an apple a day' campaign is speaking to Generation X — those making decisions for their young family, setting

healthy eating habits for more than one lifetime. Also, part of the new focus is Generation Y, those who have the potential to reset longterm health habits and wellness expectations, those who eschew alcohol, possibly meat and dairy too, in pursuit of a long and healthy life.

These are the two audiences who campaign against packaging and waste. They want to move away from processed food, and they truly care about where their food comes from. This group of consumers is engaged in a social agenda along with a healthy one, so this is our crucial audience when it comes to growing demand for British top fruit.

Might our secret to success also lie in a trend for snacks that are less than 100 calories? Just think of the advantage apples have, with no plastic wrapping. Recent research has

shown the average Brit (and it is easy to suppose this is a western cultural norm) is consuming upward of 1,400 extra calories outside of mealtimes, per day, every day... That is a massive excess of intake.

What a challenge and opportunity for the produce industry, what a gift for the top fruit sector with a portable snack, hydrating, good-forgut health, and with a myriad of other benefits to wellness. Consumers could cut thousands of calories a week by just grabbing a couple of

apples to take with them each day. Just think of how much weight they could lose and what the benefit would be to the public health budget, such as how many sick days could be reduced by the reduction of obesity-related health issues.

The cultural change required is a big one. It does fit with the UK's sugar tax on soda and the UK government's stated aims for a future food policy. And now with the British Apple and Pear industry gear-

ing up to achieving 60% of the market by 2030 with year-round availability of domestic apples, the product will be there to achieve this.

As an industry, produce has never been very good in enthusing our consumers. We often are criticized for not being quite aware enough, never quite on message, never quite entertaining and for certainly not speaking the language of our key consumers. With so many com-

munication channels at our disposal, such fabulous-looking products and beautiful growing locations, the whole of produce, let alone top fruit, has perfect natural collateral for marketing. Partner that with proven health benefits, greater availability, great human-interest stories about those who are involved in the sector because it makes for good copy, and is easily communicated through social and print media.

We need to invest now, and we cannot be silent. It is time to make a noise in the right way and excite consumers, especially the ones who aren't our customers yet.

Perhaps, now it is time for us to be a little less bloke about our communication strategies and a little more woke?

pb



The English Apple and Pear industry is gearing up to achieving 60% of the market by 2030 with year-round availability.

PiP Ltd. is a business partnership and marketing agency offering tailored services to bring alive the unique personality of the client, business or product. Led by Sarah Calcutt, who has 25 years' experience throughout the fresh produce supply chain working both at the primary production level, through technical and marketing; she also now leads a grower group and works for a variety of industry businesses and organizations. In her spare time she chairs the National Fruit Show in the UK. It's all about them apples.

# **Opportunities For America's Most Loved Vegetable**

'I think the

biggest opportunity

for the potato is to

have it stripped of

the misperception

they are unhealthy

and boring, and

they are only good

mashed with lots of

cream and butter or

baked and

"loaded."'

- GREG MEEKER, HZPC



ata from foodservice research firm Datassential shows America's favorite vegetable is the potato. This is true across all generations, ethnic groups, regions of the country, and those with or without kids. The only group where there is a slight drop in affinity is Asian-Americans — where only 97% say they love potatoes. Have restaurants satisfied our demand for the wildly popular potato, or is there more opportunity on the menu?

I recently interviewed Greg Meeker, North American business

development director at HZPC, a potato breeding company based in the Netherlands that sells more than 50 varieties of seed potatoes to U.S. potato growers. Meeker is a professionally trained chef and former executive chef for Sysco. He used to spend time thinking about a wide variety of ingredients across the Sysco portfolio. Today, he's fully focused on potatoes.

AMM: One of the biggest trends in menu development today is plant-forward innovation, putting more focus on the use of plant-based foods and less emphasis on animal-based ingredients. What opportunities are there to focus on potatoes in plant-forward menu development?

GM: Chefs have limitless opportunities to introduce potatoes, with ethnic twists in plant-forward preparations like Kimchi fries, curried fried potato salad, potato lo mein and gyro hash. Potatoes are gluten-free and can also be used to make flat breads and pizza crusts.

AMM: Even though we love innovation on menus, we also love familiarity. It's comforting and reduces the risk of ordering something we won't like. Chefs across the country are giving us innovation, with comfort by using French fries and tater tots in exciting new ways. New variations on poutine and "tatchos" are appearing on bar menus in all types of restaurants, from dive bars to high-end steakhouses. What's the most exciting new menu item you've seen with potatoes the past few months?

GM: It's an Indian street food called Vada Pay, a potato dumpling infused with fragrant chilies and aromatic Indian spices rolled in garbanzo bean flour and fried until crispy. It's served inside a bread bun and accompanied by both sweet and savory chutney. I like mine somewhat spicy — with Major Grey mango chutney for the sweet and tomato chutney for the savory accompaniment. They are outrageously good. I'm told they're also called Bombay Burgers. Call it what you like; I call it amazing.

AMM: Fresh is the most commonly used menu descriptor on American menus. It's a powerful term that consumers associate with better-for-me attributes. What are the opportunities for potatoes to capitalize on "fresh" marketing? Is there room for more innovation and improvement in fresh-cut French fry programs?

GM: I think the biggest opportunity for the potato is to have it stripped of the misperception they are unhealthy and boring, and they are only good mashed with lots of cream and butter or baked and "loaded." The potato varieties that we develop have sensory traits that create wonderful eating experiences on their own. We have varieties that are buttery without added butter, allowing the potato to be the star of the show without a lot of extra work or added ingredi-

> ents. To me, this is the essence of 'fresh' - taking great ingredients and creating memorable flavor experiences, with as few ingredients as possible.

> In terms of fresh-cut fry programs, there is a huge opportunity for innovation and improvements. Many establishments try to implement a fresh-cut fry program but fail because the methods to achieve success sound easy but require both skill and proper potato selection. As we introduce and educate customers about varieties developed for optimal frying and minimal enzymatic discoloration, the task becomes less daunting and more

> on American menus? How are breeders helping chefs solve challenges and giving menu R&D leaders new inspiration for innovation?

> GM: The sky is the limit for potatoes on American menus. So many new methods and creative energy are being put into their preparation. Potatoes have the advantage of not being trendy, like

kale and Brussels sprouts; they are a staple whose versatility is only now being appreciated. They fit with many world cuisines and can be the main ingredient for any multi-course meal.

Chefs today are very fortunate to be working during a time where breeders are creating and adapting potato varieties that have unique colors, appealing sensory traits and are optimized for specific cooking methods. We chefs used to be limited to potatoes in just three colors (white, yellow, red), with limited cooking versatility (baking, boiling, frying). Chefs and scientists are now powerful partners in elevating the awesome, nutritious and versatile potato, which allows it to be a star on American menus. pb

prone to being successful. AMM: What do you see for the future of potatoes

Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RDN, FAND is a farmer's daughter from North Dakota, award-winning dietitian, culinary nutrition expert, and founder and president of Farmer's Daughter Consulting, Inc. She is the director of The Culinary Institute of America Healthy Menus R&D Collaborative and a consultant for the Produce for Better Health Foundation. You can learn more about her business at www.farmersdaughterconsulting.com, and you can follow her insights on food and flavor on social media @AmyMyrdalMiller

## voice of the industry



# The Growth Of Plant-Based Meal Kits Is Win For Us All

Astute produce marketers

can focus on the

consumer motivations

behind the growth of

home-delivered meal

kits — namely the desire

for healthy, increasingly

plant-based meals that

are tasty and legitimately

easy to prepare.

BY BIL GOLDFIELD

le are all familiar with the boom in meal kits — whether direct-to-consumer subscriptions or retail in-store. The meal kit trend is quickly becoming the plant-based meal kit trend as more providers (such as Blue Apron) are embracing meatless menus and others (such as Sakara Life and Hungryroot) are specializing in vegetarian and vegan dishes.

This is great news for national growers and the produce industry

as it builds new converts to a plant-based lifestyle and a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables. Since most of these home-delivered meal kits involve sophisticated, proven recipes, users are exposed to fresh fruits and vegetables in their most attractive light: ideally prepared and presented, and ultimately delicious.

This is great for consumers and our general population. As an industry committed to healthy living through produce, we should all applaud the fact fruits and vegetables are being delivered to the doorsteps of more Americans than ever before. For the first time in recent memory, the growth of plant-based eating is dominating the headlines — encouraging healthier eating and reversing poor diets. It is also seen as a market-

ing advantage and a significant opportunity for increased sales.

We've come a long way, indeed.

The momentum behind the plant-based meal kit trend is significant. Of the 14 top meal kit delivery services sampled by Allure magazine earlier this year, at least 10 are either exclusively committed to vegan or vegetarian customers or prominently feature a plant-based or flexitarian menu option. These range from those kit services that specialize in veganism to those that are supplementing traditional meat-based recipes with menus catering to vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free diners.

And the trend is not confined to North America. Selected by Allure as the best meal kit for vegans, Purple Carrot was acquired in May by Tokyo-based Oisix ra daichi Inc., while Germany's giant HelloFresh has found success with its plant-based menu alternative.

At the other end of the spectrum, Blue Apron, which helped create the meal kit delivery trend in 2012, announced in July it would add Beyond Meat products to its meal kits. The addition of Beyond products follows similar moves by chains such as Carl's Jr., KFC and T.G.I. Friday's and is part of a trend that will push the global market for plant-based meat substitutes to \$18.7 billion by 2023.

So, just what can fresh fruit and vegetable marketers learn from this trend?

First, acknowledge and be thankful that home-delivered meal kits are ultimately exposing more families and kids — our industry's future consumers — to new and different fruits and vegetables in their tastiest, most attractive and communal light. This has both significant future sales and health implications since the family that cooks together, stays together and is more likely to eat healthier.

The growing trend is also likely creating trial of more uncommon produce varieties included in many of the new meal kit offerings such as figs, bok choi and edamame.

Second, with some encouragement, the trend can inspire new

plant-based products, recipes and initiatives. We're seeing this at my own company. Motivated in part by the growth of the ready-to-eat (RTE) movement and home-delivered meals, we launched a line of completely plant-based RTE salad kits made with all-fresh ingredients in 2018. Key to the kits' early success has been the denser combination of plant-based protein that results in a more satiating salad that eats like a meal. In fact, some of the very same plantbased proteins featured on the ingredient lists of the most popular home-delivered meal kits - edamame, beans, lentils, bell peppers, rice, corn, quinoa and chickpeas — can be found in the best-selling meal kits.

Astute produce marketers can focus on the consumer motivations behind the growth of home-delivered meal kits — namely the desire for healthy, increasingly plant-based meals that are tasty and legitimately easy to prepare. As much as we all want to believe that consumers are singularly motivated by health and nutrition, we can't forget that convenience still rules the day for most produce consumers, especially parents with children living at home.

One of the ways we address this is through our significant focus on recipe development. As part of Dole's healthy-living collaboration with Disney's Frozen 2 (and in keeping with the "frozen" theme), we created a new line of plant-based, family-style breakfast, lunch and dinner recipes designed to be prepared in advance and frozen. These original recipes check the same plant-based nutrition and easy-preparation boxes as today's home-delivered meal kits. We supplement these family-style recipes with tips to help parents make healthy eating feel more fun, such as proclaiming Sundays as family meal-prep days, making food shopping a family affair and encouraging kids to prepare and pack their own school lunches.

At the end of the day, if we as an industry can get mom, dad and the kids to prepare, serve and enjoy a plant-based meal together, we've all won. Clearly, this is the ultimate reward for those of us who have dedicated the better part of our professional lives to getting Americans to eat their fruit and veggies — and to love doing it. **pb** 

Bil Goldfield is director of corporate communications at Dole Food Company in Westlake Village, CA.

Ya Gotta Believe!

"Water, water everywhere, Nor any drop to drink."

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

— By Samuel Coleridge

It feels as if we are in the poem Everything is "plant-forward" — Impossible...
Beyond...

...Belief. But when I was a boy, I was taught by the Mets That "Ya Gotta Believe!"

National League Champions of 1973.

If I close my eyes. Shea Stadium:

Tom Seaver, Yogi Berra, The Wall Ball, Tug McGraw

The three-word phrase that fueled the team's run to the NL championship: "Ya Gotta Believe!"

Is it faith that matters?

Or does belief change behavior?

If you don't believe, maybe you stop trying.

So, we gather in Anaheim Seeking a path Because we believe We have Something Great And we will find a way.

Because before there was any of this, We tended the earth, Watching things grow. And we learned that from love, Something incredible would grow.

Also from the Rime:

"He prayeth best, who loveth best All things both great and small; For the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all."

We do believe.







# SAVE THE DATE: FRESH SUMMIT 2020

October 15-17, 2020 Dallas, Texas USA

## information showcase

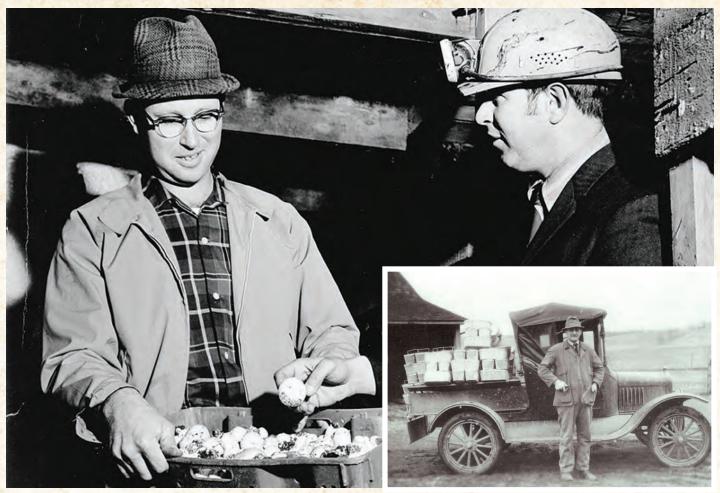
## OCTOBER 2019

Receive supplier information fast by using the Produce Business Information Showcase. Here's how:

Contact the advertiser directly via the website, email, or phone listed in the ad.

Adman Cate Canton  Alpine Feral	COMPANY	PAGE #	PHONE	WEBSITE	COMPANY		# PHONE	WEBSITE
Alamo Froncisca 122 - 951-995-2375 althonoproduc com playments for search of the product of the	Advance Customs	06	,					
April   Per								h
Alber Pontice								
American Cansolidation								
State   Stat		66 /60-	-35/-0/02	attarproduce.com				
American Pean Council. 161 83-y-916-2020		87		americanconsolidated com				
Aquadeu   155   167						31	200-334-2350.	Tuanopotato.com/retait
Agen Produce						ttee //1	888-466-4667.	usagnions.com
Associated Polation Coopers.   99, 800-4] x / 689,   1999   199								
Maurice A. Auerbach. 68   2018/07/9392   serraph.com   Maurice A. Auerbach. 88   2018/07/9392   serraph.com   Maurice A. Auerbach. 88   2018/07/9392   serraph.com   Maurice A. Auerbach. 88   2018/07/9392   serraph.com   Maurice A. Auerbach. 89   2018/07/9392   serraph.com   Maurice A. Auerbach. 2018/07/9392   ser								
Maurice A. Auerbach								
Avocados (1976)	Maurice A. Auerbach	86 201-	807-9292	auerpak.com				
From Mexico.  8.6 — 96/488-6600 — yyvolams. 8.7 — 96/488-6600 — yyvolams. 8.8 — 96/488-6600 — yy	Maurice A. Auerbach	96 201-	807-9292	auerpak.com				
Ayro Farms								
Babe Farms								
Balosia Farms								
Philip Balsamo.  64 6 95975-8000. philipbalsamo.com Bloom Feed. Poduce 8 6-96-945-9824. Bennydagelo. Com Bloom Feed. 17 718-9914-9700. Latinmaneolocic Com Bloom Feed. 19 80-924-9713. Latinmaneolocic Com Brook Topicals. 104 80-9274-9833. b-brookstropicals.com Brook Topicals. 104 80-9274-9833. b-brookstropicals.com Brook Topicals. 104 80-9274-9712. b-busn/dood.com Grook Feed. 19 97-98-929. Latinmaneolocic Com Brook Topicals. 104 80-9274-9712. b-busn/dood.com Grook Feed. 19 97-98-929. Latinmaneolocic Com Brook Topicals. 104 80-9274-9712. b-busn/dood.com Grook Feed. 19 97-98-929. Latinmaneolocic Com Marketing International. 120 451-926-9137. Capitalist/full Com International 19 97-925-929. Latinmaneolocic Com MATTEC Group. 51 8.88-541-0124. miktee.net Grand Standard S								
Benny DiAngelo Produce								
Bloom Fresh								
Blue Book Services 149								
Boncheff Greenhouses								
Brooks Topicals   10.4								
Buonal roods, Inc.   139								
California Giant Berry Farms . 85 83 + 275 + 2773 calgiant.com Michigan Apple Committee 148 80 - 456 - 2753 michigan apples.com Canada Garlic 97 888 - 367 / 766 881 679 / 766 811 620 / 767 620 / 767 620 / 767 620 / 767 620 / 767 620 / 767 620 / 767 620 / 767 620 / 767 620 / 767 620								
Canadia Forduce								
Marketing Name   132   613-226-4187								
MATEC Group.   51   818-54-0124   mixtec. mi		,,	J-111-4					
Capital (Liy Fruit. 6.4		132613-	-226-4187	cpma.ca				
Catania Worldwide. 35 , 559-728-8400 stellardistributing com Center for Growing Talent 1 (68) 302-738-7100 growing Talent 1 (68) 302-738-710 growing	Capital City Fruit	64 515	5-981-5111 .	capitalcityfruit.com				
Center for Growing Talent   168   302 738-7100   growing Talent   71   718-991-6050   mnproduce   mnproduce   mnstropher fanch   97   40-88 4p-71100   christopher fanch   90   40-88 4p-71100   mnstropher fanch   90   40-88 4p-71100   mns	CarbAmericas	87 954-	786-0000	carbamericas.com	Mother Earth	140	610-869-7211.	organicmushrooms.com
Christopher Ranch					Mr. Lucky	96	956-464-0600.	mrlucky.com.mx
Classic Vams	Center For Growing Talent	168 302	-738-7100	growingtalentbypma.org	Nathel & Nathel	71	718-991-6050 .	nnproduce.net
Cast I Produce								
Cohem Marketing International. 148. — 128—893-1000 — www.baloianfarms.com Courchesnes 16. — 54. 547-5799 — courchesnelarose. Courchesnes 16. — 54. 547-5799 — courchesnelarose. Courchesnelaros. Courch								
Courchesne Larose 6.3 147/54/2900 novo/rapplesales.com The Cranberry Network 11 / 715/42/2910 tuthecranberrynetwork.com Crunch Time Apple Growers 144/15 1/15-300-8322 crunchtime apple Growers (2014) 1/15-300-8323 crunchtime apple Growers (2014) 1/15-30								
The Cranberry Network. 151 715-422-0410 thecranberry network.com CrunchTime Apple Growers 144-149, 716-30-86522 cturchtime apples of rowers 144-149, 716-30-86522 cturchtime apples of CrunchTime Apples (CrunchTime Apples of CrunchTime Apples (CrunchTime Apples (Crunch								
CrunchTime Apple Growers 144-145								
Cystal Valley Foods								
Customized Brokers.   87, 305,471-8989						inc80	866-548-4644.	nortnsnoregreennouses.com
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York. 57800-223-8080. darrigony.com Del Fresco. 136519-733-6101. dellerescopure.com Del Fresco. 136519-733-6101. dellerescopure.com Del Monte Fresh Produce. 172800-950-3683. freshdemonte.com Del Grod Company, Inc. 2800-356-3111.							249 ==2 2622	radnatataes nat
Daaks International   129   213-612-3224   Penang Nursery   Down   Person								
Del Fresco				darrigony.com				
Del Monte Fresh Produce   172   800-950-3683   freshdelmonte.com   Divine Flavor   119   520-281-8328   divineflavor.com   Divine Flavor   120   561-860-200-2099   Divine Flavor   120   561-860-200-200-200-200-200-200-200-200-200-2				delfresconure.com				
Des Moines Truck Brokers   126   515-981-3215   divinell'avor.com   19   520-281-3225   divinell'avor.com   19   520-281-3225   divinell'avor.com   Dole Food Company, Inc.   2   800-356-3111   Dole.com   Dole Food Company, Inc.   2   800-364-377   Dole Food Company, Inc.   2   800-365-3111   Dole.com   Dole Food Company, Inc.   2   800-364-377   Dole Food Company, Inc.   2   800-365-3111   Dole.com   Dole Food Company, Inc.   2   800-364-377   Dole Food Company, Inc.   2   800-644-377   Dole Food Company, Inc.   2   800-644-379   Dole God Company, Inc.   2								
Divine Flavor 139 \$20-281-8328 divineflavor.com Dole Food Company, Inc. 2 80-556-5111 Dole.com Dominion Citrus Limited. 70 416-259-6328 dominion Citrus Citrus Association 41 416-251-2271 earthfreshiods.com Earth Fresh. 42 446-251-2271 earthfreshiods.com Elhylene Control 47 96-383-6619 txcitrus.com Elhylene Control 47 96-383-6619 txcitrus.com Elhylene Control 49 49-83-6619 txcitrus.com Elhylene Control 49 49-83-6199 txcitrus.com Elhylene Control 49 49-83-83-6199 49-8								
Dominion Citrus Limited   70	Divine Flavor	119 520-	281-8328	divineflavor.com				
Duda Family Farms								
Earth Fresh								
Edinburg Citrus Association 126 . 956-383-6619 txcitrus.com Edinburg Citrus Association 47 . 956-383-6619 txcitrus.com Qualifiarms.com Ethylene Control								
Edinburg Citrus Association								
Ethylene Control								
Eureka Specialties								
Farm Pak Products, Inc.								
Farm Products, Inc.  800-367-2799  101-234-3760  102-34-3760  103-80-338-3376  103-82-78-80-3306  103-80-338-3376  103-80-338-3376  104-104-105-105-105-105-105-105-105-105-105-105								
Farmer's Daughter Consulting								
Fern Trust Inc								
Fierman Produce Exchange								
The Flavor Tree Fruit Company   19   559-389-5845   flavortreefruit.com   Florida Department   of Agriculture   103   850-488-4303   freshfromflorida.com   Folson Farms   95   218-773-1201   folsomfarms.com   Folson Farms   95   218-773-1201   folsomfarms.com   Food Freshly North America   42   905-270-1723   foodfreshly.com   Fresh Farms   121   520-281-2030   molinagroup.com   Fresh Origins   135   760-736-4072   brightfresh.com   Fresh Origins   78   760-736-4072   brightfresh.com   Fresh Origins   78   760-736-4072   brightfresh.com   Fresh Produce Association   of The Americas   122   520-287-2707   freshfrommexico.com   Garbar Farms   157   337-824-6328   garberfarms.com   Genpro Transportation Services   66   800-243-6770   genproin.com   Genurne Georgia Group   160   813-610-3211   genuinega.com   Global M.J.L. Ltd   72   514-858-5566   globalmil.com   Gourmet's Finest   139   313-832-4640   gourmetsfinest.com   Grower Alliance, LLC   121   520-761-1921   groweralliance.com   Guars Mushrooms   139   610-869-2204   guansmushroom.com   Gurda Gardens, Ltd   38   800-475-4732   gurdagardens.com   Gurda Gardens, Ltd   38				Territa de de la companya de la comp				
Southern Specialties				flavortreefruit.com				
of Agriculture 103 850-488-4303 freshfromforida.com Folson Farms 95 218-773-1201 folsomfarms.com Folson Farms 95 218-773-1201 folsomfarms.com Stellar Distributing, Inc. 35 559-275-8400 stellardistributing.com Fresh From Sterilar Distributing, Inc. 35 559-275-8400 stellardistributing.com Fresh Frams. 121 520-281-2030 molinagroup.com Fresh Gourmet 77 888-958-6921 freshgourmet.ccom Fresh Origins 135 760-736-4072 brightfresh.com Fresh Origins 78 760-736-4072 brightfresh.com Fresh Produce Association of The Americas 5 305-529-1279 freshfrommexico.com Garber Farms. 157 337-824-6328 garberfarms.com Genpior Transportation Services 66 800-243-6770 genprior Transportation Services 68 801-2311 genuinega.com Gourmet Trading Company 86 310-216-7575 gourmettrading.net Gourmet Trading Company 86 310-216-7575 gourmetsfinest.com Guans Mushrooms 139 610-869-2204 guansmushroom.com Guard Gardens, Ltd. 38 800-475-4732 gurdagardens.com Gurda Gardens, Ltd. 39 505-2975-300 stellardistributing.com Stellar Distributing, Inc. 35 559-275-78400 stellardistributing.com Stells Distributing, Inc. 35 559-275-78400 sunkits; Growers, Inc. 125 818-986-4800 sunkits; Comporting Stellar Distributing, Inc. 35 559-275-78400 sunkits; Growers, Inc. 125 818-986-4800 sunkits;		, , 33,	3-7 3- 13					
Folson Farms		103850-	488-4303	freshfromflorida.com				
Food Freshly North America 42 905-270-1723								
Fresh Gourmet								
Fresh Origins	Fresh Farms	121 520-	281-2030	molinagroup.com	Sunset Produce LLC	33	509-832-2080.	sunsetgrown.com
Fresh Origins	Fresh Gourmet	77888-	958-6921	freshgourmet.ccom	Tambo Sur	86	954-943-1572.	tambosur.com
Fresh Produce Association of The Americas 122 520-287-2707 freshfrommexico.com   Fyffes North America 5 305-529-1279 fryffes.com   Gaetan Bono Inc 65 514-381-8677 gaetanbono.com   Garber Farms 157 337-824-6328 garberfarms.com   Genuine Georgia Group 160 813-610-3211 genuinega.com   Global M.J.L. Ltd 72 514-858-5566 globalmjl.com   Gourmet Trading Company 86 310-216-7575 gourmettrading.net   Gourmet's Finest 139 313-832-4640 gourmetsfinest.com   Guans Mushrooms 139 610-869-2204 guansmushroom.com   Gurda Gardens, Ltd 38 800-475-4732 gurdagardens.com   Gurda Gardens, Ltd 122 520-287-2707 freshfrommexico.com   Inited Fresh Produce Assn. 132 305-829-5577 unitedfresh.org   Inited Fresh Produce Assn. 132 305-829-5577 united Fresh Produce Assn. 132 305-829-5577 unitedFresh.org   Inited Fresh Produce Assn. 138 305-829-5577 unitedFresh.org   Inited Fresh Produce Assn. 132 305-829-5577 unitedFresh.org   Inited Fresh Produce Assn. 138 305-829-5577 unitedFresh.org   Inited Fresh Produce Assn. 132 305-829-529-5577 unitedFresh.org   Inited Fresh Produce Assn. 132 305-829-529-5577 unitedFresh.org   Inited Fresh Produce Assn. 132 305-829-529-577 unitedFresh.org   Inited Fresh								
of The Americas 122 520-287-2707 freshfrommexico.com	Fresh Origins	78 760-	-736-4072	brightfresh.com	To-Jo Fresh Mushrooms	139	610-268-8082.	to-jo.com
Fyffes North America 5 305-529-1279 fyffes.com Gaetan Bono Inc 65 514-381-8677 gaetan Bono Inc 669 215-336-0766 golon Inc 10-111 800-306-1071 gaetan Bono Inc 10-111 800-306-1071								
Gaetan Bono Inc								
Garber Farms								
Genpro Transportation Services .66 800-243-6770								
Genuine Georgia Group 160 813-610-3211 genuinega.com Villita Avocados 45 956-843-1118 agroexportavocados.com/villita Giorgio Fresh								
Giorgio Fresh								
Global M.J.L. Ltd								
Gourmet Trading Company								
Gourmet's Finest 139 313-832-4640 gourmetsfinest.com Wonderful Company 7 661-720-2500 wonderful.com J. Roland Wood Produce 156 919-894-2318 jrwoodfarms.com Yagi Bros Produce 157 209-394-7311 yagibros.com Gurda Gardens, Ltd. 38 800-475-4732 gurdagardens.com Kurt Zuhlke & Association 52 800-644-8729 producepackaging.com								
Grower Alliance, LLC								
Guans Mushrooms 139610-869-2204								
Gurda Gardens, Ltd								
					Earring & A330ClatiOII.	54	000 044-0/29.	p. oducepackagiiig.com

# The Stewardship Of Mother Earth



Above, James Yeatman proudly displays his mushrooms to a town official; at right, Charles C. Brosius, whose daughter Marjorie married Clarence P. Yeatman, also grew mushrooms only a few miles away from Mother Earth.

other Earth farm has been in operation for more than 95 years. Arthur P. Yeatman originally purchased the property, which is located in Landenberg, PA, in 1919. He used the property as a dairy operation, but

by 1921, the first two mushroom houses were built. These were followed by seven more before 1930, when the dairy business was discontinued. At the outset, the company sold its mushrooms to Mushroom Growers Cooperative. The Yeatmans were members of the Cooperative, which trademarked "Mother Earth" in all uses of mushrooms in 1940. In 1989, Clarence Yeatman would purchase the trademarked name from the Cooperative.

Now six generations later, Mother Earth Organic Mushrooms has hit a few celebratory milestones — 100 years as a company and 30 years of growing organically.

"A century farm is quite an accomplishment since it involves many generations," says Jerry Yeatman, co-owner. "As a family we are the only sixth generation mushroom grower in the country. To survive that long takes a great commitment to stewardship of the land and the heritage.

"We were the first commercial farm to be certified in the United States. We were also actively involved in establishing the standard since there was none to be certified."

The Yeatman family has been a leading pioneer in mushroom production for decades. James Yeatman, who is pictured above

is one of the industry's most respected pioneers. "Jim and Emily Rosen Brown, were instrumental in writing the very first mushroom standard for mushrooms," says Yeatman.

As a company, Mother Earth is staunchly dedicated to rigid food safety standards. "Food safety has been at the core of our business for many years. We are constantly striving to be better than the standard," says Meghan Klotzbach, vice president sales, marketing & operations and a fifth generation member of the Yeatman family. "We are Certified to GFSI standards at all levels of growing and packing," she says.

Today, co-owners Tim Hihn and Jerry Yeatman manage the company. Products include fresh organic varieties including white, crimini, portabella, royal trumpet and shiitake as well as a variety of dried organic mushrooms — white, portabella, baby bella and shiitake.

"Our favorite and fastest-growing mushroom is the crimini," says Yeatman. Sales of crimini and other exotic mushrooms continue to grow every year. Royal trumpet is also a special mushroom because of its texture, and because the entire mushroom can be used in so many recipes."

Still firmly rooted in bucolic Pennsylvania, there are tours of Mother Earth farm available on several Saturdays throughout the year. The company's website also includes detailed instructions on how to care for fresh and dried mushrooms.

SUBSCRIBE NOW!



The online source for fresh news and ideas for success in the Produce Department... and beyond!



Subscribe now for instant, daily or weekly e-mail updates. It's FREE!



## www.perishablenews.com

PerishableNews.com is an outlet for news about ALL the perishable categories typically featured in a retail store:

## PRODUCE, DAIRY, DELI, BAKERY, MEAT & POULTRY, SEAFOOD, FLORAL

Plus we cover top-level happenings in Retail and Foodservice that are of special interest to perishable food executives at a supermarket or other retail chain and at a foodservice chain operations or foodservice distributors.









FRESHDELMONTE.COM 1-800-950-3683 In Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Inc

©2019 Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Inc.