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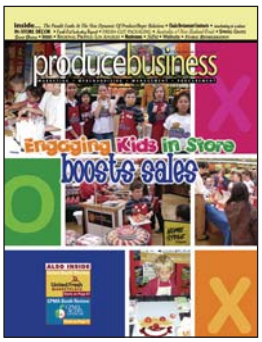

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PRODUCE QUIZ

THIS MONTH'S WINNER:

Conrad Kast
Owner
Kast Marketing
St. Charles, MO

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How To Win

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

Conrad Kast, owner of Kast Marketing, a produce brokerage specializing in Idaho potatoes, has been in the produce industry more than 50 years.

Before opening Kast Marketing in 1975, he served as a merchandising manager for several companies throughout the Midwest. Starting up his company wasn't easy, he confesses. "Would you believe it took me three months to make my first sale? You have to be dedicated in this business," he says. "All of my work is done over the phone. It's marvelous how you set up and develop customers. It's all so amazing."

A PRODUCE BUSINESS reader since its inception, Conrad reads the magazine to stay up-to-date on trends and developments. "It's very informative," he says. "It's nice to be on top of everything. It helps me know what I can expect out of the industry in the upcoming months."

As the winner of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Quiz, he wins a thermal carafe coffee maker.

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4) What is the e-mail address for FreshSense? _____

5) What is the toll-free number for the East Coast office of Westlake Produce? _____

6) What is the name of the racing car sponsored by Hass Avocados from Mexico? _____

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Reader Service # 3

SUBMITTED BY ROBERT GUENTHER, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT • UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

The U.S. Farm Bill

In *Setting The Stage For 2008* in the March issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS, we outlined some of the key policy issues that will be addressed by Congress and the Administration in 2008. During the next few months, we will take you inside each of these issues and develop some insight as to why the produce industry should care. This month, we will talk about the Farm Bill.

Since the 1930s, the Farm Bill has set the rules for how U.S. agriculture is regulated; in its evolution over the last 70-plus years, it now covers more than just farming practices. Today's Farm Bill, which costs American taxpayers around $45 billion per year, addresses conservation programs, helps set research priorities, develops programs to increase international market access and sets critical policies for federal nutrition programs. Sixty-six percent of the funding is allocated to food stamps and other nutrition programs.

In 2005, a coalition of fruit and vegetable organizations along with the wine, tree nut and nursery/landscape industries formed a specialty crop alliance. Historically, specialty crops have been a market-driven sector with little to no support or interference from government. We like it that way and believe responding to supply-and-demand market signals — rather than relying on government subsidies — is a better way to build a sustainable business.

Yet, our industry is facing challenges just as great as any other agriculture sector. With fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops accounting for almost 50 percent of farm crop value, we're bringing a new vision to U.S. agricultural policy in this year's Farm Bill debate. We believe it is time for the Farm Bill to invest in our sector of market-driven agriculture, not with subsidies or direct payments to farmers, but in helping our industry be more competitive. This way, we can better deliver fruits and vegetables to meet Americans' needs for improved health.

Two Farm Bill policy priorities demonstrate the unique way our sector is approaching farm policy. First, Congress appears poised to implement a new grant program to help states invest in the competitiveness of our industry. Our industry is tremendously diverse and states are much closer to knowing how to help their local growers. It's a modest program in Farm Bill terms — less than $100 million per year — but it's a targeted investment that will begin to change the landscape our industry faces. Look at some of the projects states have supported with past grant program appropriations:

With a modest but targeted stream of investment… we can begin a long-term effort to tackle challenges facing our industry.

- Florida developed educational tools to assist growers in following Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). Maine, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Oregon and North Carolina helped growers comply with food-safety practices.
- Wisconsin built a potato and vegetable storage facility specifically for research projects on preserving quality.
- California worked with the California School Nutrition Association to place salad bars in 40 schools.
- Tennessee developed a digital imaging system across 21 counties for specialty-crop producers to transmit pictures and get expert help in combating plant pests and diseases.
- Missouri placed wireless electronic benefits transfer (EBT) machines in 17 farmers' markets to assist food-stamp recipients in purchasing fresh produce.
- Michigan funded research and development on fresh-cut apple slices and worked with growers to create this new opportunity.

With a modest but targeted stream of investment promised in this new Farm Bill, we can begin a long-term effort to tackle challenges facing our industry, such as developing mechanization and labor-saving methods on farms and in packing; adoption of new handling technologies and transportation from farm to market; and the implementation of new quality-control procedures to deliver better-tasting, fresher fruits and vegetables to the public.

The second priority is to push agricultural policy for better alignment with public health policy. We all know the government public health goals for increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, but to meet the *2005 Dietary Guidelines*, average Americans would literally need to double their consumption of fruits and vegetables. Think about what that would mean for our industry and you can see the win-win opportunity. Our nation — and increasingly the world — is facing a childhood-obesity and health crisis leading to a future of chronic disease, diabetes and cancer for our kids. We believe farm policy should play a proper role in this fight.

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable School Snack Program, a pilot program in the 2002 Farm Bill, delivers a fruit or vegetable snack to elementary school classrooms each day. The program has been a success everywhere it has been introduced. Kids love the produce and try items they never tasted before.

The Senate proposed to expand this program to serve 4.5 million low-income elementary school kids in 5,000 schools nationwide. While that's just a start, it's a major commitment from agriculture to do our part. We strongly support the Senate's funding level as one of the most important steps to make sure the Farm Bill helps not only farmers but also all Americans.

With specialty crops representing almost 50 percent of farm crop value, and fruits and vegetables representing 50 percent of all foods Americans should consume daily, it is time for parity in federal agriculture policy. Congress and administrations to come will need to think about new kinds of policies — and that is why the produce industry should care about the Farm Bill.

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Reader Service # 69

By James Prevor
President & Editor-in-Chief

Straight Talk On Food Safety

When the spinach crisis of 2006 hit, the advice from all the PR experts was to stop talking about how safe our product is in statistical terms. To say that out of billions of servings of product X, only a few people had gotten sick or died over the last 10 years was not smart. Pointing out that eating produce was far safer than driving a car or flying in plane was counter-productive.

Instead, we kept repeating a mantra that even one illness was one illness too many and we would redouble our efforts again and again with the goal of eliminating the scourge of foodborne illness.

It was a strategy that worked. Spinach returned to the market and consumer perception of the safety of fresh produce has been gradually recovering ever since. Yet it may be possible that we were too clever — by half.

By focusing on what people wanted to hear, we encouraged unreasonable expectations and neglected an important job: Getting regulators and consumers to recognize the reality of field-grown crops.

Because the spinach crisis came about in the context of the packaged salad industry, we always had a backstop. Despite the fact that the primary communal response to the spinach crisis was the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement, which sets up metrics for growers, many of the most important responses to the crisis came at the processing plant — from new types of chlorine baths, to increased agitation, to source material and finished product testing.

Regulators and consumers need to know that our field-grown products are imperfect.

Despite all the onerous obligations imposed on growers of leafy greens, nobody is suggesting we just rinse them in water, dry them and put the greens in a bag. For all the efforts to produce clean product in the field, the assumption is that the product is going to be delivered to the plant imperfect and the role of the fresh-cut processing facility is to make sure it is clean and safe.

This is an appropriate role for what is basically a food-processing facility by another name. In fact, the recent issue regarding FDA allegations that salmonella contamination on cantaloupes from Agropecuria Montelibano in Honduras leads to the reasonable conclusion that food-safety standards in processing plants need to be made stricter.

There is little reason why a fresh-cut fruit processor should ever have to recall fruit just because it was made from melons that might have had salmonella on them. A better procedure would be for processors to assume that every melon has contaminants on its surface and to treat that as a critical control point. Perhaps they can wash them in a chlorine bath or dip each melon in boiling water for 30 seconds, among other treatments. The key is that the process should solve the problem.

Field-grown crops being sold to consumers are far more problematic an issue. Our top producers are now using such techniques that it seems unlikely we could have a major outbreak. Yet virtually everyone who is doing testing says they periodically discover small amounts of product that test positive for one pathogen or another.

Indeed, the pathogens seem often to be random — one positive and the box before and after are negative. Is it just one bird that contaminated the produce, an errant wind or raindrop? It is hard to know. What we do seem to find is that there is a certain low level of contamination that even rigorous good agricultural practices cannot prevent.

Generally, the incidence is so rare and the concentration so low that few people would be made sick by it, but lightning does strike and if it strikes a senior citizen, a pregnant mother, a young child, an AIDS sufferer, it can lead to serious illness or death.

We know that the FDA's practice of issuing an "Import Alert" or a "Consumer Advisory" — both of which function as a constructive recall — makes no sense. If we tested every cantaloupe in the country, perhaps we would find that one of every so many has some salmonella on it. Since this is true of every producer, even the best, to react to a positive test as if it were a great mystery that must be solved is rather silly.

To stop a shipper who has all certifications in order from shipping on this basis is likely to mean only that people will buy cantaloupes from a less safe producer. There is no reason to think it will help safeguard consumers.

The produce industry has to talk straight to the regulators and the American people. Field-grown crops are raised under the watchful eye of Mother Nature, with all the wonder and the vulnerability that goes with it. Because perfect safety is not to be expected, those with compromised immune systems need to be wary of eating these items in their fresh state as they do pose some risk, albeit a small one.

As an industry, we always want to communicate that we care and that we are constantly working hard to make our products even safer. But we also want to speak the truth: We grow crops in the dirt and these crops are exposed to flying and burrowing animals and all the elements.

Our products are delicious and good for you but they are part of nature and thus not like manufactured products, certain in uniformity and safety. Eating fresh produce brings one closer to the elements of life. Billions of people enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables every day, and when something does go wrong, most healthy people don't experience more than a stomachache.

This may not be the most perfect PR story, but it has the great advantage of actually being the truth. Consumers and regulators need to hear it. **pb**

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Reader Service # 72

Finding Our Way To Innovation

Automaker Henry Ford once said, "If I'd asked people what they wanted, they would have asked for a faster horse." Ford felt that consumers who don't have their heads in a particular market day in and day out have limited ability to anticipate the marketplace. Yet to think we can single-handedly understand consumers and create meaningful solutions to their everyday problems is just plain old-fashioned.

Today, dialogue drives discovery and marketplace innovation, and Produce Marketing Association (PMA) helps foster that dialogue — with the industry, with experts and with consumers. Today's consumers are much more complex than Ford's. With little patience for products and services that don't speak directly to them, they want a voice and a choice. After all, their breadth of choice is driven by a myriad of information sources as varied as the Food Network on TV and many Internet recipe sites suggesting new uses for staple produce items as well as easy ways to use exotics.

From Jan. 22-24, 2008, Opinion Dynamics Corporation conducted a national telephone survey for PMA of 1,000 primary-shopper consumers. To keep produce marketing on track with consumer insight, we examined a range of issues dealing with produce-department shopping habits.

In the supermarket, it is clear that choice rules. The ability to choose from an array of fruits and vegetables ranks as extremely important for 63 percent of respondents. We all know the bounty our industry produces. Case in point, PMA's *I Know Produce* fruit and vegetable database offers in-depth information for nearly 175 produce commodities and more than 2,800 varieties with continually updated content about the newest varieties and offerings.

Meanwhile, consumers are split on how they like to check out, once again indicating they like to have choice; a little over half (53 percent) of shoppers tell us they never use self-checkout, while another 47 percent of respondents use self-checkout most or all of the time.

When asked what they think would improve their produce department, not surprisingly, the consumers we surveyed place lower prices (aka the "faster horse") at the top of what would most ease their produce department frustrations. With only 8 percent saying their stores need a wider selection, it seems that we are offering consumers a good selection — though how they define a "good" selection constantly evolves.

Retailers should also be glad to know that 48 percent of shoppers can't suggest anything they'd change in the produce department; 62 percent say the department's organization makes sense. If department layout is going unnoticed and shoppers aren't slowed, then today's model seems to be working — for today, anyway.

The recent market entry of Fresh & Easy stores from Tesco, however, suggests that Tesco thinks it has a new insight into what consumers' want that others haven't yet met — or it suggests that consumers' interests may change if they grow to find the Tesco format appealing.

In reality, few consumers have time to evaluate the flow of their produce department. Set on their needs and not wanting to waste time, most shoppers know in advance what produce they are looking to buy, with 48 percent sticking to a predetermined shopping list and 14 percent shopping for a specific recipe.

This presents an opportunity for produce retailers to use the full arsenal of marketing tools at their disposal, such as store-special circulars, in-house magazines and Web sites, to influence those shopping lists. Conversely, 25 percent of the consumers surveyed report they are impulse buyers, who could then be encouraged to make more impulse produce purchases if influenced by informative displays and eye-appealing products. More impulse purchases spurred at point of sale means higher produce sales and profits.

One thing that can affect the likelihood and expenditure of produce shoppers is how produce is priced. When asked about their habits concerning weighing produce prior to purchasing, 44 percent responded they never weigh produce before arriving at the checkout line. This data point provokes the age-old debate about pricing produce by the piece or by the pound.

With little patience for products and services that don't speak directly to them, consumers want a voice and a choice.

Ford's weakness was that he himself lacked vision of all the possibilities. Ford also said of the revolutionary Model T, "The customer can have any color he wants so long as it's black." Advances today rarely are one-sided, and all voices are vital. Are you part of the dialogue?

Food-Safety Footnote: January's survey participants also told us their confidence in produce safety continues to increase, reaching the highest level since we began measuring in September 2006, a mean safety score of 5.0 on a scale of 7. We can't rest in our efforts by any means; the recent ground beef recall of 143 million pounds was a painful reminder of what's at stake.

PMA's food safety initiative first announced in October 2006 continues to march forward. On the research front of that initiative, we are pleased to welcome Bonnie Fernandez as new executive director of the Center for Produce Safety at University of California, Davis, partially funded by PMA. Her voice will be critical to the ongoing food-safety dialogue that is vital to the future of our industry.

A Blessing And A Curse

On Nov. 11, 1947, in a speech before the House of Commons, former Prime Minister Winston Churchill had this to say about democracy: "Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

In much the same vein, market research is deeply flawed. Henry Ford was correct; it is almost impossible to get consumers to request truly great advances.

During the age of the great transatlantic ships, if you had surveyed the passengers about how they hoped to see transatlantic travel develop, they would have spoken of faster ships, roomier cabins and more frequent crossings. If anyone had said in a focus group that he wanted to sit inside a giant aluminum bird that would fly him across the Atlantic in a few hours, he would have been ridiculed.

So surveys and focus groups, mall intercepts and other research techniques are unlikely to be the source of paradigm-shifting advances, just as they were not the source of Whole Foods, Wal-Mart and warehouse clubs, each of which sprung from the minds of brilliant entrepreneurs — John Mackey, Sam Walton and Sol Price.

Yet market research is all most of us have. A few people blessed by great insight will see what others do not and develop the concepts of tomorrow. Most of us will have to be satisfied with incremental improvements and, for that, marketing research does a bully job.

Still, it must be interpreted carefully. The most common mistake is thinking that what consumers say is most important provides an action agenda for a particular business. It is rarely so.

To be useful, we have to view consumer responses within the context of the business environment. When consumers list traits that are vital to them in selecting a place to shop, they almost always will say things such as price, cleanliness and variety.

The problem is that such information, precisely because it is so consistent among such a large majority for such a long time, has been internalized into the business. We just don't have many stores, and no large chains, that are successful but dirty, high-priced and with a poor assortment. Even saying it is kind of ridiculous.

Some chains may emphasize one element over another, so Aldi and Wal-Mart may highlight price, whereas Wegmans will highlight assortment. But in one way or another, these three values — price, cleanliness and assortment — are the ante that modern retailers pay to get in the game.

The trick is that the winning hand is likely to be played with cards valued by only a minority, often a small one. So once the price-cleanliness-assortment hurdle is breached and an adequate offer is made in these areas, the differential may be organic or kosher or halal; it may be taking coupons or a favorite credit card or offering gift baskets. In produce, consistently offering an assortment appropriate for particular ethnic groups very often can be the key to capturing the loyalty of a consumer segment.

Another problem with consumer research is that consumers may not know what actually motivates them. So when we get a report of sensible consumers being focused on price, we have to remember that someone out there bought all those pet rocks. Perhaps consumers think this is a sensible thing to say, but then the "treasure hunt" aspect at Costco or the Hawaiian-shirted staff at Trader Joe's distracts them. Many consumers think it self-indulgent to say they want to shop where they have fun doing so.

Here is another thing that complicates consumer research: What consumers think of things is dependent on how they are presented to them. Pampers failed its first three test markets. In part this is because the marketing campaign was focused on mother's convenience. A change of direction focusing on the comfort of babies led to an astoundingly successful product. We may learn from consumers that they value convenience, but that doesn't mean they want to be sold that way.

The most common mistake is thinking that what consumers say is most important provides an action agenda for a particular business.

Think about fresh-cuts… are they sold as a convenience or as a way to get a wide assortment of healthful produce items into the children? There may be many opportunities in switching emphasis. We've found similar issues in positioning product. A salad kit sold as complete can make some moms feel as if they are not doing their jobs in the kitchen. The same product promoted as a salad base, which consumers should complete by adding, say tomatoes and cucumber and onion, can attract a whole new clientele.

Henry Ford's comment about not offering colors was his way of trying to balance between consumer desires and operational efficiency. He made a mistake and lost Ford's lead in the automotive industry. That is why listening to consumers is vital. The key, though, is to listen shrewdly. To paraphrase Churchill, market research is the worst way of figuring out what consumers want, except for every other way we have ever tried.

Food-Safety Footnote: Bryan's column was written just before the news of the FDA "Import Alert" on certain cantaloupes from Honduras. It will be interesting, and nerve racking, to see how PMA's research finds consumer attitudes were affected by this "Alert" and subsequent recalls.

We welcome Bonnie Fernandez to the produce industry.

PRODUCE WATCH

TRANSITIONS

FAMILY TREE FARMS, REEDLEY, CA

Eric Wuhl was hired as director of research and development. He will oversee all activities at the company's new research and development center and participate in the development of a flavor matrix or a rating scale based on the preferences of real consumers. His background includes breeding plums and nectarines.

PRODUCE MARKETING ASSOCIATION, NEWARK, DE

Julia Stewart was hired as public relations director. She will work with staff and management to direct the association's integrated communications with members and others, serve as a media spokesperson and direct crisis prevention, mitigation and management activities. She brings 15 years of experience in the produce industry.

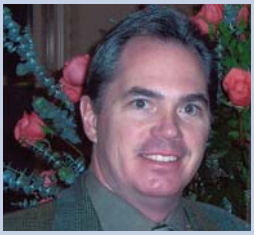
FOUR SEASONS PRODUCE, INC., EPHRATA, PA

Ronald Palermo was rehired as national sales manager. He previously spent three years as a sales representative for Four Seasons before joining Del Monte Fresh Produce as general manager and district sales manager. He brings more than 13 years of sales, marketing and operations experience to the business development team.

WESTERN PISTACHIO ASSOCIATION, FRESNO, CA

Richard Matoian is the new executive director. His duties include advancing the interests of the U.S. pistachio industry and solving challenges faced by U.S. pistachio growers. He spent the past five years as manager for the California Fig Advisory Board and previously served as president of the California Grape and Tree Fruit League.

SUN WORLD INTERNATIONAL, BAKERSFIELD, CA



Roger Griess was appointed vice president of North America business development and replenishment. He will be responsible for growing the company's core area of business and broadening product lines through mergers and acquisitions. He began his career with Sun World in 1997 as national account manager. He previously worked for Dole Foods.

A & A ORGANIC MARKETING, INC., WATSONVILLE, CA

Anthony Valenzuela was appointed sales manager. He will take over the company's sales team as its grower base expands. He brings over 15 years experience in the produce industry in business organization, leadership and product distribution. He previously worked for Epic Roots, LLC.

NEW PRODUCTS

New Harvest And New Century Offer Organic Coconuts

New Harvest Organics, Rio Rico, AZ, has teamed up with New Century Produce, Inc., Armstrong, BC, Canada, to become North America's first importer of organic young Thai Coconuts. Innovative organic cultivation and post-harvest treatments have resulted in chemical-free fruit bursting with flavor. They are shipping in 6-, 7- and 8-count packs.

Reader Service No. 300

Miatech Releases Eris Filter

Miatech, Inc., Clackamas, OR, launched Eris, an ethylene and bacteria transportation filter. Its purpose is to maintain a significantly higher level of quality for produce being transported and to reduce losses caused by product spoiling too early. The filter destroys airborne pathogens through an anti-microbial chemical applied to its surface.

Reader Service No. 301

Dole Adds Two New Salad Blends

Dole Fresh Vegetables, Inc., Monterey, CA, has introduced two new salad blends. Fresh Discoveries 7 Lettuces is a blend of romaine, red leaf, green leaf, butter lettuce, escarole, radiccio and endive. Fresh Discoveries Tender Garden is a blend of baby spinach, baby lettuces, carrots, baby greens and radicchio.

Reader Service No. 302

Sunsweet Offers Plum Juice

Sunsweet Growers, Inc., Yuba City, CA, introduces PlumSmart Light, a low-calorie version of the popular digestive-health beverage with three grams of fiber in each glass and only 11 grams of sugar. Similar to PlumSmart original, PlumSmart Light is made from crisp, all-natural plum juice containing fiber and nutrients.

Reader Service No. 303

Valley Fig Introduces Organic Figs

Valley Fig Growers, Fresno, CA, now offers Blue Ribbon Orchard Choice Organic Mission Figs. Certified organic by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and California Certified Organic Farmers, the organic Mission figs are available nationwide in bulk and convenient 7-ounce, resealable stay-fresh bags. They offer high-fiber content, nutrient-dense composition, portability and a sweet taste.

Reader Service No. 304

Melissa's Unveils Smoked Garlic

Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc., Los Angeles, CA, has launched a special variety of smoked garlic grown in France. Its pink skin is thin enough to take the smoke during the all-natural harvesting process. The garlic has a unique flavor and smoky aroma. Popular among French chefs, smoked garlic can be used in any recipe that calls for garlic.

Reader Service No. 305

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

Reader Service # 51

HerbThyme And Marvini Partner

HerbThyme Farms, Inc., Claremont, NH, has acquired Marvini Fresh Herbs, Inc., the packing and distribution division of Les Fines Herbes de Chez Nous, Inc., Saint-Mathieu-de-Beloeil, QC, Canada. The partnership will expand HerbThyme and allow it to provide fresh U.S. herbs to Canadians from Ontario to the Maritime Provinces.

Reader Service No. 306

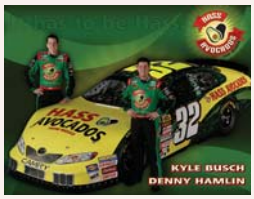
ProPacific Fresh Joins Markon

Markon Cooperative, Inc., Salinas, CA, had added a new member, ProPacific Fresh, a produce specialist based in Durham, CA. ProPacific is the first California member and first produce specialist to join the cooperative. The addition will help Markon improve service to its existing and prospective multi-unit account customers.

Reader Service No. 307

MHAIA Kicks Off NASCAR Sponsorship

Mexican Hass Avocados Importers Association (MHAIA), Fallston, MD, signed on for its third season of NASCAR sponsorship with the Braun Racing team. Kyle Busch and Denny Hamlin will share the driver's seat of the No. 32 Toyota HassCar in seven NASCAR nationwide series races this season.



Reader Service No. 308

Wisconsin Association Launches Web Site

The Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA), Antigo, WI, redesigned its interactive Web site with a user-friendly format that includes contest opportunities, areas for teachers and kids and an extensive recipe collection. The Web site will allow WPVGA to strengthen relationships with consumers, growers and industry professionals.

Reader Service No. 309

Vidalia Committee Announces Award Winners

The Vidalia Onion Committee, Vidalia, GA, announced its 2007 award recipients for Grower of the Year and Hall of Fame. Rodney "R.T." Stanley, Jr., was awarded the 2007 Grower of the Year and his father, the late Rodney Taylor Stanley, Sr., was posthumously inducted into the industry Hall of Fame. R.T. (left) is shown with Georgia Department of Agriculture Commissioner Tommy Irvin (right).

Reader Service No. 310

Fresh Link Tomato Created

Integrated Fresh Solutions, LLC (IFS), Dallas, TX, has formed Fresh Link Tomato, a Naples, FL-based marketer of fresh tomatoes to the wholesale, retail and foodservice segments of the produce industry. The company is a source-driven organization and markets entire and partial crops for numerous growers in Florida, California and Mexico.

Reader Service No. 311

Uncle Matt's Organics' Founder Earns Award

Matt McLean, CEO and founder of Uncle Matt's Organic, Clermont, FL, was awarded the *Orlando Sentinel*'s Culinary Cup, an inaugural Culinary Hall of Fame award recognizing those who have made significant contributions to how Central Florida eats, drinks and dines. He earned the award for his commitment to organic citrus growing.

Reader Service No. 312

NYAA And Marzetti Announce Display Contest

The New York Apple Association, Inc. (NYAA), Fishers, NY, teamed up with T. Marzetti Co., Columbus, OH, to organize its seventh annual defense commissary contest that encourages the creation of big displays of New York-grown apples. The grand prize is six free tickets and two nights' lodging for the 2008 PMA show in Orlando, FL.

Reader Service No. 313

Lakeside Produce Wins Award

Lakeside Produce Distribution, Inc., Westlake, OH, earned the No.1 Upstart Company rank among the 2007 Weatherhead 100 from the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western University, Cleveland, OH. The honor acknowledges and supports the fastest growing companies in Northeast Ohio during the previous year.

Reader Service No. 314

CAC Launches Logo Campaign

The California Avocado Commission (CAC), Irvine, CA, launched a campaign using advertising and publicity to educate foodservice operators about California avocado growers' strong tradition and dedication to producing fresh California avocados. Part of the campaign includes using a hallmark and logo, *Hand Grown in California*, to link the fruit to its origin.

Reader Service No. 315

HAB Highlights Avocados' Benefits

The Hass Avocado Board (HAB), Irvine, CA, encourages foodservice operators to capitalize on the benefits of fresh Hass avocados by expanding their menus during special promotions, particularly the Cinco de Mayo holiday. Operators can contact HAB to order a free copy of the *Foodservice Promotion Guide for Fresh Hass Avocados*.

Reader Service No. 316

New Harvest Offers New Packaging

New Harvest Organics, LLC, Patagonia, AZ, launched a 6-pack cello lime package for North American retailers. The package not only encourages increased lime movement, but it also helps retain the dark green color of the limes. The product is also packaged in a 1-pound bag, a 10-pound carton and a 38-pound carton.

Reader Service No. 317

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

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Summertime. It's all about healthy eating and wholesome fun.

And that's why, from May through August this summer, Sun World is proud to bring the two together — by partnering with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA — www.aza.org).

With the purchase of Sun World SUPERIOR SEEDLESS® grapes from your store, your customer can redeem their bag for a special offer at their neighborhood Zoo or Aquarium.

For further information on this Promotion, visit www.sun-world.com/SummerFun

SUN WORLD

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Reader Service # 6

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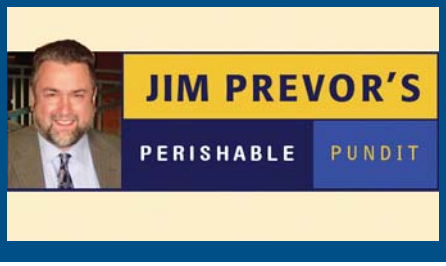
Just Say No: The New Dynamic Of Producer/Buyer Relations



From Jim Prevor's *Perishable Pundit*, Feb. 22, 2008

Events as far away as London and Salinas are pointing to a new development across a range of buyers. Buyers have so pressed their advantage that, increasingly, producers are just saying, "What is the point?"

After years of living with the fact that they would lose money on individual items as a way of selling other items at a profit, after years of scheming to get their foot in the door with a loss in the expectation of better years to come, after years of thinking they had no choice, now producers are recognizing they can't sell at a loss and make it up on volume. And if they have to walk away from business, big business especially, that is what they have to do.

International companies marketing products that can be sold around the world can walk away from a particular product line or client and stay in business. So the *Fresh Produce Journal* in London announced news in January that Del Monte walked away from the Asda banana business:

> *Del Monte is re-evaluating its position in the UK after "walking away" from Asda's banana business.*
>
> *UK md Peter Miller told FPJ: "We decided that it was no longer the right proposition for us to continue supplying Asda with bananas.*
>
> *"We walked away from the Asda tender because we didn't like the money, but we still have 80 per cent of their pineapple business, a significant and developing share of their melon business and a massive proportion of their fresh-cut fruit business."*

Asda has extricated itself from the global supply deal its parent company Wal-Mart had on bananas with Del Monte, and is now sourcing from Fyffes, Chiquita and International Produce.

Recent events, in London and Salinas, indicate the movement is growing well beyond the banana giants and includes buyers well beyond big retailers.

As Tanimura & Antle recently decided to no longer sell to processors, press reports played it as if Tanimura & Antle — after a quarter century of selling processors — suddenly decided to discriminate against them. A more accurate explanation is that Tanimura & Antle decided to charge what it feels its product is worth or, at least, what it needs to produce it. You can be sure if any processor with good credit wants to give Tanimura & Antle a contract to grow product at a price Tanimura & Antle finds appealing, the deal won't take long to do.

Since the food-safety initiatives of the post-spinach crisis era, growers who sell to processors consider themselves to be price-takers, not price-makers.

We received many letters pointing out the increased costs of food-safety standards, including this letter:

The sub-text of all the letters was processors were not going to pay any more even though these costs were all being thrown on growers.

Of course, pricing is ultimately a matter of supply and demand, and buyers can easily miscalculate their long-term interests.

It often pays to not maximize short-term profit. If a seller raises prices too high, you create a margin magnet to bring in competitors and give them space to undercut your position, while maintaining profitability. If you price closer to your cost, there is no wiggle room for a competitor to move in, leaving you to dominate your space. Most potential competitors will decide they have prettier fish to fry.

Put another way, if you use your market but don't abuse your market, you can often gain dominant share, make reasonable profits and sustain a business. If you abuse a market, someone else is bound to note those sky-high profits and move in to undercut you. These new competitors could be larger, better capitalized, and you could well lose everything.

The same principle applies on the buy side. If you are a dominant buyer and use your ability to provide consistent high-volume orders, you can gain access to a guaranteed supply from the best producers at a reasonable price.

If buyers push too hard, you wind up losing the best growers, those who have other options — people such as Tanimura & Antle. If a whole category is competing to drive all profit out of the supply sector, the best growers, who have other options, will give up on the business — as Tanimura & Antle did.

This rush to squeeze every cent of profit from the supply base is questionable. The outcome is predictable. Resources — land, labor, capital — dedicated to supplying this sector will find other uses. The remaining producers will find their hand eventually strengthened and wind up raising prices. Once resources have shifted in other directions, they come back slowly, if at all.

There are also industry-wide concerns — such as food safety. The industry still has an ingrained cultural problem regarding food safety that I call "no points for extra credit." While the reality of food safety is a continuum, you can always be more cautious, have bigger barriers, more traps, more testing, etc.

Few buyers purchase in this way. If they do anything at all, they set up a minimum standard. Perhaps they will require a particular certification.

Yet this can be problematic. When Costco had a bit of a problem with carrots up in Canada, we learned it was buying Mexican carrots processed by a relatively small player. We saw this as somewhat troubling:

> *With all the talk about problems in food safety, one wonders if food safety is really the top priority in procurement. Perhaps the Mexican grower of these carrots had [multiple] certifications. Perhaps not. Now anyone could have a problem and, in fact, we have no information that anyone has done anything wrong.*
>
> *Still, it is hard to believe Costco, the company pushing everyone in Salinas to test everything day and night, selected this roundabout pattern of having Mexican carrots*

JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT

Where the subject may be perishable but the insight isn't.

What is a Pundit?

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What is the Perishable Pundit?

Just ask our readers —

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"... bringing some common sense to the E. coli issue of late."

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"... teaching the industry quite a bit about the power of the internet."

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"... the most important journalism in the industry, and now we get them every day... you have become the 'voice' ..."

"Your analysis of the state of leadership in the produce industry past, present, and future is right on!"

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"... writing with heart and insight..."

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"... spreading your abundant common sense on a daily basis."

"... most refreshing."

"The Pundit does, in fact, incite reactions and cause good thinkers to think harder and longer on topics that are current and newsworthy."

Catch the Perishable Pundit every day. Go to *www.perishablepundit.com* click on the "Subscribe Today" button and receive a daily copy of Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit via e-mail.

Engaging Kids in Store boosts sales

Retailers are attracting young consumers to the produce department with entertaining activities and programs.

by carol bareuther, rd

Tomorrow's consumers are tagging along when their moms go food shopping — and they already wield an enormous amount of influence. Retailers are well aware of this phenomenon and have been capitalizing on ways to market directly to kids for years. Consumer packaged goods (CPG), with a more consistent product and far less dependence on Mother Nature than the produce industry, have led the way since the early days of television.

The produce department is relatively new to the game, but it is striving to catch up. The industry made its initial inroads by copying the CPG success using cartoon characters or colorful packaging to draw kids' attention. Today's produce departments, however, are utilizing specific programs, contests and other creative marketing tactics specifically designed to entice this profitable group into the department.

"We believe a single character or a single promotion may increase sales in the short term, but a broader strategy to have consistent messaging and compelling products will help increase category sales and sustain healthful food choices over the long run," explains Matthew Caito, CEO, Imagination Farms, LLC, Indianapolis, IN.

Drawing kids to fresh fruits and vegetables while educating them on nutritional benefits requires positioning products and promotions as hip, fun and essential. When asked how important it was for kids to view eating fruits and vegetables as an enjoyable experience, 63 percent of parents answered "very important" and 24 percent responded "somewhat important," according to the *2007 National Consumer's Survey* from Opinion Dynamics Corp., Cambridge, MA.

Supermarket retailers are now taking these findings to the next level by embarking on in-store programs that educate, entertain and encourage kids to make healthful food choices.

"This is critical because kids are a big influence over their mother's decisions," notes Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Stemilt Growers,

Photo courtesy of Produce for Kids

TREEHOUSE KIDS

Approved by kids, for kids.

A new way to connect with kids & moms.
A natural way to expand the category.

Children have their own standards for flavor and a unique perspective on the fruit eating experience. That's why FreshSense created the **Treehouse Kids** brand.

Every peach, plum, nectarine, pluot, grape, mandarin and cherry variety in the **Treehouse Kids** program has been selected by "professional kid researchers" – actual children who participate in our ongoing fruit research, and tell FreshSense which varieties are their favorites. It's a "win-win-win" proposition: kids eat more fruit, moms are pleased with the health benefits, and retailers enjoy higher sales and profits!

Additionally, the **Treehouse Kids** brand is backed by a complete merchandising system, kid-friendly graphics, eye-catching inline displays, info-packed POS cards, powerful free-standing displays and more!

FreshSense

Follow up for more information. Get the whole story on how Treehouse Kids can take fruit sales to new heights. Contact Freshsense: (866)-747-3673 or via email at info@freshsense.net.

Reader Service # 83

Inc., Wenatchee, WA. "Kids are also our future consumers. In 30 years, we're going to need consumers."

Helping shape kids' eating habits is part of the industry's duty to its future consumers, explains Pat Steider, president, Summeripe Worldwide, Inc., Dinuba, CA. "As a segment of an industry that grows, packs and markets a product that is naturally good for children, we must find ways to entice and educate kids and their parents to make better food or snack choices. If we, as industry leaders, can help influence or change the eating habits of children today, they will not only live a more productive and healthy life but will also become advocates for better health with the generation that follows them. It then comes full circle as our society grows together from tree to table."

Signature Store Tours

The idea of school kids touring the supermarket isn't new. What is novel is how some chains have customized this concept.

In March 2005, Price Chopper Supermarkets, based in Schenectady, NY, kicked off *Supermarket Sleuth: Kids Finding Clues for a Healthy Weight Supermarket Tour* for National Nutrition Month. More than 500 students have now taken the tour offered in select stores.

"We worked with a registered dietitian [RD] to design the tour," reports Maureen Murphy, consumer services manager. "She made it turnkey and assured the same messages were being taught by putting all the materials to conduct the tour into a binder. Today, all of our tours are led by RDs who work in the regions where we have stores."

Photo courtesy of Save Mart

Save Mart employees serve as SuperFriends to guide groups through the educational supermarket expedition.

Designed for students in grades 4 to 6, the interactive tour begins in the produce department and lasts 1 hour, 15 minutes. Murphy says, "In produce, we divide kids into groups and send them on a hunt to find something red, green or yellow and have them hold it up. This is how we stress the concept of variety and the importance of eating a rainbow of colors."

The tour winds through the entire supermarket, tracing a complete day's diet in a kid-centric clue-finding way. At the end, each student is sent back to school with a certificate of completion, a Super Sleuth packet of information and a fresh fruit or vegetable snack tray for their classroom. "This way, the teacher can review what the students have learned in an unhurried and festive way," Murphy notes.

Even the snack tray is instructive. "We reinforce the color concept," she notes. "The vegetable tray may have carrots, red and green peppers, broccoli, cauliflower and grape tomatoes. The fruit tray might offer pineapple, kiwi, strawberries, cantaloupe and grapes."

Save Mart Supermarkets, based in Modesto, CA, offers tours for schools, community organizations, service groups and clubs, explains Sharon Blakely, food and nutrition supervisor. "Over 100,000 kids have walked the aisle of our stores in a little over nine years. On average about 12,000 kids visit us each year," she explains.

Save Mart employees serve as SuperFriends to guide groups through the educational supermarket expedition. On each 45-minute tour, secondary students will tackle topics such as supermarket operations, consumer education, label reading, good eating habits and career possibilities. Younger students find themselves making Super Food Choices from Vitamin Alley, the Protein Palace, Dairy Den and the Great Grains Aisle.

According to Blakely, "Over half of the tour

Reader Service # 79

Photo courtesy of Save Mart

Save Mart launched its *SuperProduce Story Time* during summer 2007.

is spent in the produce department or Vitamin Alley. In produce, children are introduced to papayas, kiwis and plant parts. When children become familiar with foods, they are more apt to try them."

Retailers who would like to liven up a store tour "can book an appearance by a character like Bobby Banana," explains David Bright, marketing director for Dole Fresh Fruit Company, Westlake Village, CA. "We use costumed characters as well as coloring sheets, contests and nutrition programs to help retailers reach out to school children."

Albertson's, the Fullerton, CA-based chain owned by Supervalu, Inc., Eden Prairie, MN, recently launched its *Healthy Eaters* field trip program geared toward children in kindergarten through fourth grade. During the program, trained tour leaders focus on several important nutrition-related topics. Lessons include specifics on making healthful choices and reading labels as well as hands-on exercises relevant to understanding nutrients, fats and portion sizes.

In a press release, Pete Van Helden, president, Albertson's Retail West, explained: "As a retail grocer committed to being a leader in the area of health and nutrition, our company understands the long-term importance of providing tools and knowledge to enable our customers to make healthful life decisions. With the launch of Albertson's *Healthy Eaters* program, we are excited about the opportunity to make a significant difference in the health and wellness of the children in the communities we serve."

Produce Story Time

Save Mart launched its *SuperProduce Story Time* during summer 2007. This 30-minute activity, held on Thursdays in July and August, involves a store's SuperFriend employee reading selected children's books connected to food, nutrition or shopping to kids in preschool through third grade. The produce department activity was very popular and the chain continued it in October and November for its Fall Farmer's Market promotion.

"More than 2,000 kids have attended *SuperProduce Story Time*," Blakely reports. "At the conclusion of each book, children are offered a sample of produce related to the story. After reading *The Trouble with Cauliflower*, we had more than 25 kids try raw cauliflower. I actually ran out of cauliflower that story session."

Kids attending *SuperProduce Story Time* are offered incentives to eat more fruits and vegetables. During the activity, each child is given a sheet labeled *Sticking to Fruits and Vegetables*, which has a space to hold PLU stickers from produce they consume. Once children collect 25 stickers, they are given a piece of produce of their choice.

Kid's Club Card

Free-fruit cards are a big hit with kids who shop with their parents at Chicago, IL-based Jewel-Osco, a 184-store chain owned by Supervalu. "It's a business-size card geared towards kids five to 12 years old," says Kimberly A. Kirchherr, MS, RD, corporate dietitian. "It entitles the cardholder to one red delicious apple or one banana per visit. Kids like it because it's something they can keep and use. And they can swipe it themselves at the checkout."

The front of the card features a color picture of apples and bananas. The back of the card contains the *Fruits & Veggies — More Matters* logo and three easy ways kids can eat more produce each day. One of the tips, for example, suggests kids try whole fruits or dried fruit for a great take-along snack.

Kirchherr distributes the cards at health

Reader Service # 27

KID FRIENDLY CAUSE MARKETING

Marketing efforts aimed at social and other charitable causes are a hot trend. Known as cause marketing, these efforts tie a for-profit business and non-profit organization together for mutual benefit.

According to the *2006 Cone Millennial Cause Study*, published by Boston, MA-based Cone LLC, an agency that develops and executes corporate cause initiatives, 89 percent of Americans ages 13 to 25 would switch from one brand to another brand of a comparable product and price if the latter brand was associated with a good cause.

Marketing to children today means appealing to a mind-body connection, according to Rachel Geller, chief strategic officer at The Geppetto Group, a New York, NY-based youth marketing agency. "In the '60s, health was all about disease prevention and living longer. In the '80s, it shifted toward wellness. Today, marketing is all about appealing to the intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual."

Sunkist Growers, Inc., Sherman Oaks, CA, hosts a national cause-marketing promotion called *Take A Stand*. It empowers kids ages 7 to 12 to give back to their local community by raising money for a charity of their choice through an old-fashioned lemonade sale. In the last four years, Sunkist has sent out more than 14,000 stands to kids in the United States and Canada, along with recipe cards and juicer kits to help them get started. As a result, they've raised an estimated $1.5 million for various charities.

In 2007, 7-year-old Jacob Chivington, Bakersfield, CA, raised $658.08 for Kern County Animal Control.

Julie DeWolf, director of marketing and retail promotions, says, "We're targeting 10 to 15 retailers, representing 5,000 to 10,000 stores nationwide, in a joint effort to commit to a display program featuring Sunkist lemons and our two partners, Domino sugar and Rubbermaid pitchers. The effort also involves two weeks of ads featuring all three products.

"Many retailers organize pet charity projects as a means to raise funds," she continues. "Sunkist will match what a retailer raises up to $10,000 and donate it to a charity of their choice. The in-store stand display is an excellent way to let kids know about the program so they can get their own stands." **pb**

fairs, schools and community events. "It's a healthful take on our traditional free-cookie card from the bakery," she reports.

In-Store Cooking

Produce for Kids (PFK), Orlando, FL, pairs supermarket retailers with the produce industry to raise funds for local Children's Miracle Network hospitals. Last May, select Cincinnati, OH-based Kroger stores in Dallas and Houston, TX, teamed up with PFK to host cooking demonstrations featuring kid chefs.

Heidi McIntyre, PFK marketing director, explains, "These 2-hour events, held on a Friday evening and Saturday afternoon, were for kids by kids. Sixth-grade cooking enthusiasts fixed healthful, easy-to-prepare, fruit and vegetable snacks and sampled them in-store to their peers. They also distributed brochures with dietary information and healthful recipes."

At Wegmans Food Market, Inc., based in

Fowler Farms
Quality since 1858
150 Years
Our Apple Teezers®
are the perfect size for people with smaller appetites!

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Reader Service # 67

Photos on this page courtesy of Save Mart

Over 100,000 kids have walked the aisles of Save Mart stores since it began its outreach program for kids.

Rochester, NY, cub scouts and brownies can earn badges by participating in the store's *Veggie Patch* program, which costs $12 per child. "We brainstormed about effective ways to engage kids and realized partnering with organizations that already worked with kids makes sense," according to Nella Neeck, manager of fresh meal solutions. "The boy scouts and girl scouts were both very supportive and worked with us to design a program for their brownies and cub scouts, ages 6 to 8."

Before the kids cook, they receive a handwashing lesson. "We do the Glo Germ experiment," says Neeck. "The kids apply a harmless gel that glows under black light. They wash their hands, and put them under the light to see areas they missed — around fingernails, in between fingers and so on. It's fun and lets us reinforce the importance of starting to cook with clean hands."

Recipes kids learn how to make include spaghetti squash with sauce, and cheese and fruit parfaits layered with five different colors of fruit, vanilla yogurt and granola. They also take home a *Healthy Me* booklet of recipes with a tracking sheet for eating a rainbow of fruits and vegetables every day. "If kids make a dish themselves, they'll often try something they would ordinarily reject," Neeck notes. "It gives you the chance to steer them toward more healthful eating choices with more fruits and vegetables."

Food And Fitness

Each September, Schnucks, a 103-store chain based in St. Louis, MO, hosts its annual 2-month health and fitness education program featuring track-and-field Olympian, Jackie Joyner Kersee.

Mike O'Brien, vice president of produce, explains, "In the past, the program was centered on *5-A-Day*." Sponsored by nearly a dozen produce companies, the program includes a variety of POS materials and in-store danglers featuring Kersee tossing a big salad. Materials also include coloring sheets featuring line drawings of bananas, apples, eggplant, grapes, broccoli and pumpkin for kids to color. Brochures to target school-age kids, parents and teachers are also available. The brochures contain Joyner-Kersee's five steps to better fitness, fun facts about good nutrition and the More Matters fitness challenge — a 30-day fitness test.

The program wraps up with the Jackie Joyner-Kersee Frightfully Fun Kids' Run. Last year, more than 1,500 kids and adults ran the course. "We pass out fruit to the racers," O'Brien adds.

The Power Of Characters

Good to Grow! is a Supervalu corporate program. Jay Schneider, produce assistant sales manager for the eastern division of Malvern, PA-based Acme Markets, which is owned by Supervalu, explains "The program is designed to drive consumption of fruits and vegetables with kids of all ages. Key elements that make the program work include colorful POS signage kits with an array of different options, recipe and activity books and a Web site. The site features different characters from Discovery Channel's *Ready Set Learn!* television series along with more than 15 vendors that participate in the program. We promote their products during the length of the television program. We also have sampling and character events.

"Success is great. Customer feedback to the produce manager is that the program is very well received, along with bringing excitement and sales to the department," he continues.

Retailers who want to create their own kid-centered, character-oriented event can work with companies like Imagination Farms. "Any retailer can implement a Disney Garden program for kids ages 3 to 12 by creating a kids' destination. The destination can include multiple opportunities to engage kids. An everyday implementation solution can consist of high-graphic displays and POS materials that utilize the packaging itself as a sales tool. The POS can target moms and kids by providing additional graphics or messages that speak buyers' needs and emotions.

"Add multiple SKUs and promotional plans that allow for regular features in sales flyers or in-store marketing activities that may include sales events, display contests, special consumer events or other activities that give kids and families multiple opportunities to make multiple purchases across multiple categories," he continues.

Kid's Club

Produce plays a big role in *Kid's Club* activities at Lin's Marketplace, a 5-store chain based in Cedar City, UT, and part of the Salt Lake City, UT-based Associated Food Stores. "We meet on the third Saturday of each month and enjoy various activities," explains Sandie Divan, Kid's Club representative. "Last year, we organized a watermelon-eating contest. A large

number of kids and their parents came out for the fun. Kids love the produce department because we regularly sample different fruits and vegetables, especially items they are unfamiliar with. One of our kids wondered what a big brown beet tasted like. When I told her it was a jicama, she was amazed. She'd never heard of it. We let the kids taste the jicama and they loved it. It was something I had never tasted either, so this was a good item to try."

Lin's Kid's Club targets ages 3 to 13, but younger children and older siblings are urged to join in the fun. "We even have grandparents come to the activities to learn what they can do with their grandchildren," Divan adds.

Community Partnerships

Halloween is one of many holidays when retailers team up with the community for events that offer kids fruits and vegetables. Last year, Meijer, Inc., based in Grand Rapids, MI, teamed up with PFK to provide kids with a safe alternative to trick-or-treating and to educate them about the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables. Kids visited different sections of three select stores to receive candy, treats, giveaways and activity sheets with coupons, and to meet PBS kids characters. The in-store event also featured a costume contest for kids.

Last fall, the Pear Bureau Northwest, Milwaukie, OR, partnered with Radio Disney in 25 markets nationwide to promote its *Halloween PEARade*. "Radio Disney Halloween PEARade community events spotlight Halloween safety with a pear theme," explains Dennis James, director of marketing. "For example, *Always travel in PEARs*, *Ask your PEARents for permission*, *PrePEAR your route ahead of time*. The pear's sweet flavor profile and the healthful benefits of eating pears are compared and contrasted to that of the abundant candy that's available to kids during the Halloween season."

Retailers who want to offer a Halloween PEARade coloring contest can request POS materials and prizes. "Kids can pick up/drop off their coloring contest sheets at the store," James adds.

Partnering with local schools is a great way to get involved in the community. The Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH), based in Wilmington, DE, plans to kicks off its *Adopt-A-School Community Outreach Program* by featuring *Fruits & Veggies — More Matters* Creative Pockets Teaching Kits. "The teaching kits include a step-by-step training DVD and everything the teacher needs to get started," explains Elizabeth Pivonka, president and CEO.

The program targets kids ages 2 to 7. Teachers use an apron with pockets containing educational aids such as fruit and vegetable flashcards, stress balls, chalk, teaching cards, jump ropes and beanbag characters. Retailers can order kits and have them sent directly to the schools. Kits also include a letter identifying who made the donation. PBH is currently working with supermarket foundations to get the kits into classrooms. **pb**

Photo courtesy of Dole Fresh Fruit

Dole often provides costumed characters as well as coloring sheets, contests and nutrition programs to liven up store tours.

Reader Service # 109

Chain Restaurant Contracts: Negotiating Partnership

Chain restaurants, distributors and growers must consider more than just the bottom line when creating contracts; they must consider each other.

BY TRISHA J. WOOLDRIDGE

Contracts play a major role in a chain restaurants' ability to procure quality produce at a profitable price.

The best contract is a partnership between the chain and its suppliers ensuring produce of a specified quality at a price comfortable for both parties. A poor contract for a chain can mean it ends up with products that don't meet its quality expectations, a fixed price that is too high or even a food shortage. A poor contract for a supplier can mean it has to substitute product or charge a price that prohibits profit. When negotiating, all parties have to approach the table not thinking solely about price and profit but looking to create partnerships that will benefit everyone equally for the duration of the contract — and for many future contracts.

It is as advisable to rush into a contract as it is to rush into a marriage. For better or worse, restaurants and suppliers have to negotiate shortages caused by natural disasters, unexpected growth or stagnation, or just vastly different business perspectives. Also, as in marriage, some contracts simply don't work out and must be dissolved. One party may not be able to take care of the others' needs; expectations and capabilities can be miscommunicated. Sometimes the parties are incompatible in their vision and practice. While there are ways to "divorce" a contract partnership, it is better to be as thorough up front as possible.

Photo courtesy of Denny's, Inc.

"The more information you give your suppliers, the better they will be able to meet your needs — or possibly tell you, up front, that they cannot fulfill your needs — or make suggestions regarding other options, varieties, etc.," explains Gene Harris, senior purchasing manager for Spartanburg, SC-based Denny's, Inc.

Speaking from the distributing side, Jody Boline, sales manager for Kingston Companies, headquartered in Idaho Falls, ID, relates, "What we try to do is tailor the contract to the customer and to what the customer is looking for. We also tailor the contract to growers and shippers to fulfill [the customer's] needs. We have to tailor what the customer is looking for and the type of the commodity. It's a fun challenge."

Attention to detail and thoroughness are key to creating a contract that works for all parties. It's important for restaurants, distributors, growers and shippers to have a clear idea of what they want, what they need, what they can provide and what they are willing to be flexible with before beginning contract negotiations. Homework and due diligence are absolutely necessary.

"Educate yourself. I can't stress it enough — ask a lot of questions," recommends Janet Erickson, executive vice president of purchasing and quality assessment for Del Taco restaurants, based in Lake Forest, CA. Most suppliers are willing to educate potential buyers, she explains. Many are open to talking with potential buyers and will invite them to view their facility and learn about how they manage product.

"Take time to learn about the commodities," Erickson adds. Learning about the fruits and vegetables that will be under contract helps restaurants understand the capabilities and limitations that can occur in a contract, such as seasonal availability or special shipping requirements.

"We always try to do our homework first —

When Contracts Go Wrong

While the best way to have successful contracts is to cover all potential deal-breakers before signing a contract, such as including a thoroughly detailed Act of God or a *force majeure* (greater force) clause, parties should be prepared for cases of dissolution. This is where the marriage metaphor of a good contract ends; a business contract is not emotionally based nor is it necessarily founded on any level of fidelity. An ideal contract partnership, which includes repeat business for both parties, needs to recognize that each contract has a specific beginning and end, that businesses change leadership and vision, and that businesses dissolve.

The two most often mentioned issues of dispute concern interference with available supply or prices exceeding the contract's limits. These issues are frequently caused by, or cited as being caused by, an Act of God or a force majeure. Natural disasters, unexpected severe weather, blights, infestations and even political upheaval all fall under such a clause. A good grower/shipper should have several back-up regions in case something happens to the main supply region; in the case of a very specific region, such as Vidalia for sweet onions, there should be an option to substitute another sweet onion of similar price and quality.

Restaurant chain awareness of commodities and their growing regions goes a long way toward understanding and being prepared for grower/shipper issues. However, if the situation goes beyond the parameters and expectations of the contract to the extent it hurts business, then something must be done.

This something can include legal action. Each company will determine its action based on the advice of legal counsel. Outside of legal action, however, a few other remedies can, and often do, occur.

Dissolving the contract is clearly an option, and sometimes it's enough of an option. IPC's Fitzgerald explains, "Usually, if we take away our business, it's a bad enough punishment. If [a vendor] loses even one [Subway] distribution center — that could be upwards of 500 restaurants — they lose a significant piece of their business.

"If they miss a delivery, they still must deliver, and they must pay to rush it out to the franchises. Often, depending on how many deliveries are missed, it can be very expensive," she continues.

Erickson of Del Taco adds, "You can procure the product elsewhere and bill the increased cost back to the supplier."

Non-payment or unnecessary or unwarranted product rejections can be grounds for a grower/shipper to seek dissolution of the contract. Restaurants have the responsibility to pay for the product, according to Erickson notes. **pb**

before going into contract," says Jamey Higham, vice president of business development and foodservice, Potandon Produce, headquartered in Idaho Falls, ID. This includes credit checks, market reports, experience and past dealings.

"Ensure you have specified your needs clearly — volume, quality, grade, food safety requirements, pricing, pack size, shelf life, value-added — and in writing. In the case of value-added produce items, review production samples with your menu development team prior to entering into an agreement," Denny's Harris emphasizes.

The majority of items chain restaurants buy on contract are commodities, such as lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, potatoes, onions, peppers and carrots. However, what gets contracted varies based on the chain's needs.

Denny's most commonly contracts "processed or value-added produce items, such as salad mix, coleslaw, green leaf fillets and diced onions. We also contract a significant amount of our sliced mushrooms, tomatoes and some of our lemons."

Some chain restaurants contract for specialty items. Melissa's/ World Variety Produce, headquartered in Los Angeles, CA, offers contracts for herbs, which have a consistent year-round supply, and some specialty potatoes, notes Robert Schueller, director of public relations. Avocados, limes, salad mixes and leafy greens also are appropriate for contracts because of global sourcing. However, Melissa's has many items — such as ethnic foods, very specialized foods or foods with very few growers — that aren't contracted or are very difficult to contract. He believes contracts don't work on items with limited supply, demand, availability or premium pricing.

> **"Ensure you have specified your needs clearly — volume, quality, grade, food safety requirements, pricing, pack size, shelf life, value-added — and in writing."**
>
> **— Gene Harris**
> **Denny's**

Many chain restaurants contract with brands or growers they trust for quality and dependability. Mikel Weber, vice president of purchasing and distribution for Golden Corral, based in Raleigh, NC, says that since he has increased the number of Golden Corral's contracts, he can look at a shipment, see the labels he has specified and feel confident his quality expectations will be met.

FOOD SAFETY COMES FIRST

A primary reason for a contract is setting a price to protect from market fluctuations. However, price is not necessarily the most important factor. For many, the foremost issue is food safety.

Tina Fitzgerald, director of produce sustainability for Miami, FL-based Independent Purchasing Cooperative, Inc. (IPC), an independent franchisee-owned and operated purchasing cooperative of Subway Restaurants, based in Milford, CT, agrees. "Our motto is food safety first, price second. It's not all about the price. Food safety and quality come first — then we look at price."

Contracts that cover growing conditions are relatively new. An honest assessment of growing abilities, packing, shipping and cost to meet a client's request must be presented so that there is a solid foundation for negotiations.

Lack of quality can be grounds for contract problems and dissolutions. Fitzgerald elaborates, "Some contracts have been taken

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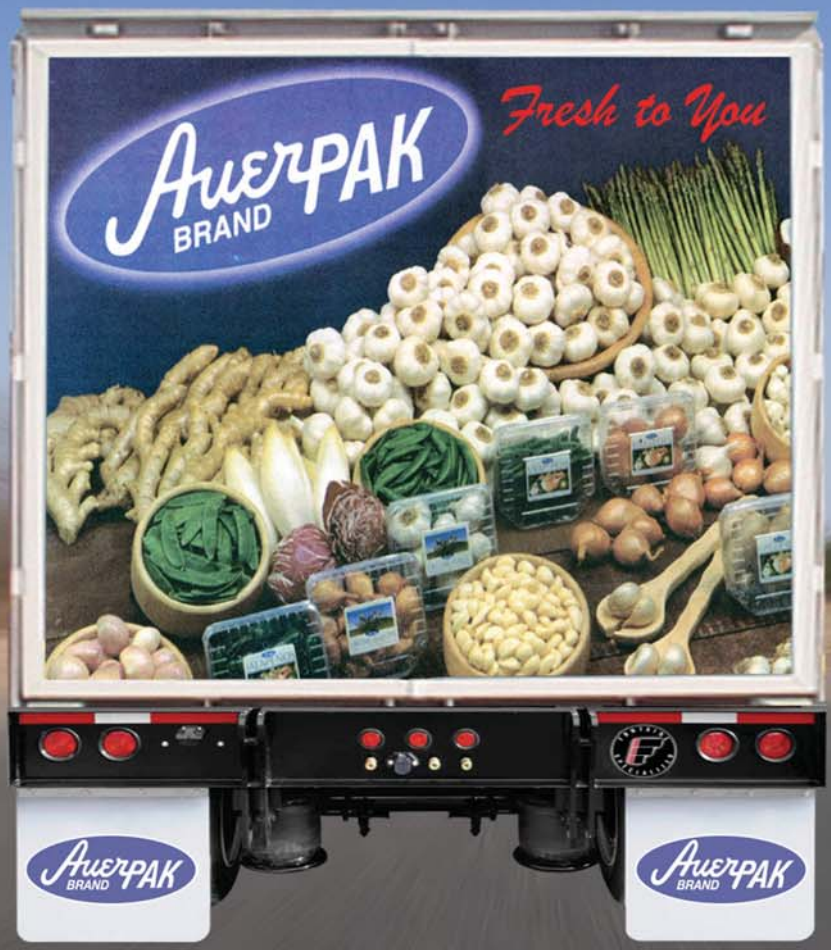

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Reader Service # 57

Penny A Pound Face-Off: Contracting For Social Justice?

With more and more chain restaurants following the chain of production back to the field, some might wonder if contracts will start addressing the treatment of workers as part of contracted growing practices. A growing number of consumers consider worker treatment in their purchasing decisions; witness the growth of Fair Trade products

This is the basis for the controversy surrounding "Penny a Pound," an initiative of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), Immokalee, FL, to pressure big-name fast-food chains to pay an extra penny per pound for tomatoes directly to the workers who pick them. While some organizations have agreed to the program, Burger King, Miami, FL, and Florida Tomato Growers Exchange (FTGE), Maitland, FL, which represents 90 percent of Florida tomato growers, resist the bargaining as "extortion" and argue CIW's claims do not represent the majority of workers.

Sustainability is a buzzword for both consumers and the produce industry right now, and Julia Perkins, CIW spokesperson, explains, "Sustainability doesn't mean just organic and good for the environment. The human beings who produce and pick [fruits and vegetables] need to be addressed."

CIW says immigrant tomato pickers have been paid the same wages since 1978, so their incomes are now below poverty levels. It proposes that those who "benefit the most" from the workers' low pay — fast-food chains — make up the difference. The logic is that an extra penny per pound is very little for a multi-billion dollar foodservice corporation but an awful lot to impoverished workers. Taco Bell, based in Irvine, CA, and McDonald's, based in Oak Brook, IL, have agreed to the demand; Taco Bell had been sending the extra money to Florida tomato growers to pay the workers as a bonus in addition to their weekly paycheck since 2005.

In 2007 FTGE began fining growers for passing this money to the field workers. FTGE and Burger King argue there are legal and business implications of fast-food companies paying money directly to workers who are not their employees. An article in *The Miami Herald* on Nov. 20, 2007, notes the growers wrote letters to fast-food chains expressing the belief that Penny a Pound agreements violate federal anti-trust laws.

According to Reggie Brown, FTGE executive vice president, workers get paid over $12 per hour — higher than the state minimum wage of $6.79 per hour. The work is seasonal and does not guarantee a 40-hour week. Workers who return every year are aware of these conditions and don't — or shouldn't — expect a seasonal position to supply a full year's wages. FTGE fully supports third-party audits on growing and packing by groups such Maitland, FL-based Socially Accountable Farm Employers (SAFE), which has thus far not validated CIW claims of poor working conditions.

The case is far from over. Burger King and FTGE resist pressure from CIW, citing its tactics as unethical and arguing the "Penny a Pound scheme" creates issues of questionable legality. Taco Bell and McDonald's still support the Penny a Pound agreements they've made and continue to put money aside in escrow accounts for the workers.

There looks to be a long road ahead to find a fair and reasonable resolution for workers, farmers, corporations and consumers. The question is, if McDonald's and Taco Bell come to the table for contracts, how much will Penny a Pound affect negotiations? Will working conditions and worker wages be issues on the table? **pb**

away for quality and service if Subway is disappointed in the quality and if we can't get the situation remedied."

MAINTAINING SUPPLY

Chain restaurants need dependable supplies so contracts should address supply options. If there is a weather disaster, for example, distributors and restaurants should have an agreed-upon plan for substitutions or alternative supplies.

"While price is very important," says Harris, "supply and quality are actually more important because if an item is on our menu, we must have it. Our guests expect it. Previously, when tomatoes, and most recently seedless red grapes, have been extremely expensive and hard to source, we have had them. This is due to our persistence and requirements, but it would not be possible without the great support we receive from the majority of our produce distributors."

Flexibility is also significant, Harris notes. "For example, during the recent shortage of seedless red grapes, we allowed our distributors to substitute black and/or green seedless grapes. These were in short supply also, but some of our distributors were able to fill in the gaps for days or weeks and keep us supplied with grapes."

"If you contract," cautions Boline of Kingston, "make sure you have good quality and good supply." He suggests seasonal agreements for some items. For example, a potato contract might run from the first of August to the end of July. Based on the number of acres planted, growers can develop a reasonable expectation of the season.

Reasonable projections may help supply negotiations, but natural disaster and/or unexpected weather conditions are always possible. Contracts must address the issue of supply alternatives. "You must have a backup plan," notes Schueller, "in case the main growing region has a problem."

"Acts of God" or natural disasters can become sore spots in contracting. Over the past decade, a surge of unexpected, devastating weather patterns have affected crops worldwide. On the other hand, some claim growers or suppliers are using Act of God excuses to raise prices; many of these arguments end up as lawsuits and broken contracts. The best defense is for all parties to understand the product being contracted so the impact of natural disasters is apparent.

"Our primary objectives are to work with Denny's suppliers to ensure product, quality and pricing, in that order," summarizes Harris. "Through contracts and negotiating with our suppliers, we focus on keeping our restaurants in supply and working through tight market conditions. We may make adjustments in the short-term — i.e., paying more — based on severe conditions over a 1- to 2-month period."

PARLAYING PRICE

For a restaurant chain to maintain high levels of quality and dependable supply, contract pricing requires flexibility. "The main benefit," says Higham of Potandon, "is that it keeps the price level for customers; they can then plan their costs and menus."

Once quality and supply concerns have been addressed, contract pricing takes center stage. Many contracts have a fixed price — Party A pays X price-per-unit to Party B for a

certain period of time. Other contracts have fixed operational costs, with room for fluctuation of price based on availability. If this case, there often is a "ceiling" and a "floor" to make sure all parties can afford to maintain the contract.

A fixed-price contract offers the buyer the protection of not having to worry about market highs. If a fixed rate is set for tomatoes and the price drops significantly when locally grown tomatoes flood the market, the restaurant still pays the higher price. If a weather disaster or supply issue causes the price to shoot up, the suppliers must still charge the fixed price. To make this kind of contract work, the fixed price needs to be based on the fair market average, taking into consideration how prices fluctuate, explains Kingston's Boline.

Del Taco's Erickson recommends a formula-based contract that allows fluctuation of a price based on a "formula" that reflects the market fluctuations of a product. Formula contracts allow product price to change with market fluctuations throughout the life of the contract. The formula is often unique to each product and each contract, based on observations and research done and agreed upon by the negotiating parties. It could be as simple as a client paying X percent of the existing market price or it could include other fixed variables, such as shipping, storage, handling and so on. In many formula contracts, a ceiling and a floor are imposed on the fluctuations. The restaurant may set the price to go no higher than Y and the supplier may respond by setting the price to go no lower than Z. "The only real negative, Erickson explains, "is you don't have price certainty. If you can put a floor and ceiling that you and your associates are comfortable with, it makes it easier."

Since large chains have more buying power than small chains, they can have more success negotiating contracts that meet their needs.

Golden Corral's Weber gives other examples of formula-based contracts. "Say you have a 'high cap' of $10. If the price goes up to $11, $12, $13, $14, you still pay $10. However, if the price gets up to $19, you might go up to $11. But, when you get to $18, you stop [going up] for good."

Another type of formula-based contract is the "mostly" market. If the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) says the price for Y product is between $12 and $14, but mostly $13, the client may base the price on the mostly market, with other variables fixed.

SIZE MATTERS

Since large chains have more buying power than small chains, they can have more success negotiating contracts that meet their needs. For example, if lettuce does not conform to the Subway Gold Standard Label, Subway could request lettuce that does meet its standards. If the price and volume of Subway's purchase were sufficient, the vendor might carry a specific brand and even make extra truck deliveries of the requested lettuce.

A small chain, however, may not have

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the clout to accomplish this. If a small chain wants to contract for a particular brand of lettuce but its supplier offers another brand, it can be a problem, according to Weber. The chain may not have the buying power to make it worthwhile for the vendor to carry the chain's preferred brand.

Moreover, most chain restaurants have outlets in many regions of the country and the ability to maintain a contract throughout the regions must be a consideration. "In more remote areas, it becomes harder," Weber elaborates. "In parts of North Dakota or Montana, there are not a lot of chain restaurants or produce houses, so it's harder to work with contracts. [Suppliers] have the buying power, so you go with [what they offer]."

An ideal contract partnership . . . needs to recognize that each contract has a specific beginning and end, that businesses change leadership and vision and that businesses dissolve.

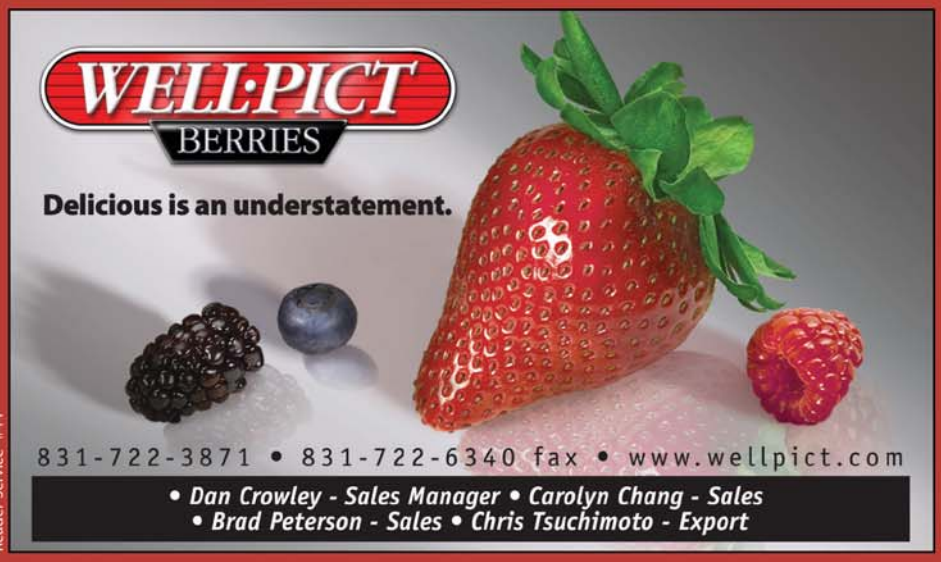
A larger chain also has far more negotiation power than a small chain when it comes to pricing. A regional chain might only be able to negotiate a fixed price contract with a vendor while a larger chain's contract may even include how many acres get planted for its product as well as its ability to assess the efficiency of the supply chain, explains IPC's Fitzgerald.

IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIP

Building a partnership is the bedrock of the contract negotiation. "When we started looking for contracts, we went across the country and looked for the best produce suppliers to partner with," notes IPC's Fitzgerald.

A partnership takes time to develop. Clear communication about expectations and capabilities must be established; all parties need to listen to one another and honestly assess their ability to meet the others' needs.

"In my experience, try not to be in a rush



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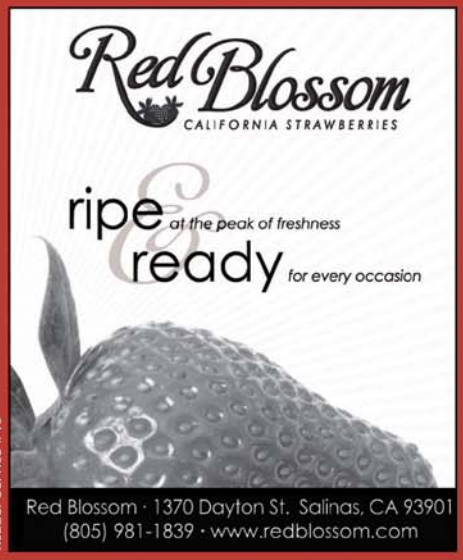

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to put together a contract," advises Erickson. "Talk to as many suppliers as you can. The more you can learn, the better you can make a contract benefit both of you — because you want the supplier to stay with you and to fulfill its side of the agreement and be a good supplier."

Reputation is very important, notes Boline of Kingston. A supplier with a good reputation can better service its clients because it has built up good industry relationships. If one grower or region is short, a supplier with a good reputation has a much better chance to fill the gaps. Even if a supplier ends up being unable to fill a short, a good relationship between it and the restaurant chain makes finding a satisfactory resolution easier. "We try to stay consistent in all areas. We are honest and open. If we feel there might be a problem, we tell [our clients] right away."

Clear communication about expectations and capabilities must be established; all parties need to listen to one another and honestly assess their ability to meet the others' needs.

Golden Corral's Weber notes that when his valued grower/shippers could not fill orders due to a force majeure, they have always helped find product from other places.

Fitzgerald shares a story about an IPC/grower contract. When Subway overestimated the product it would need, it shipped the overage to its restaurants in other countries.

A good contract will help grow the businesses on both sides of the contract. "The benefits are enormous for both parties. As we have grown, the vendors have grown," notes Fitzgerald. "There are national vendors that, when they started with us, were more regional."

"It's a balance that needs partnership where both sides are willing to work with each other, even as prices in the market go up and down," summarizes Don Odiorne, vice president of foodservice for the Idaho Potato Commission, Eagle, ID. **pb**

A New Perspective On Latino Marketing

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Understanding the differences in the U.S. Latino community and marketing specifically to those sub-groups can help retailers access customers they may be overlooking.

U.S. Hispanics represent a significant and growing market with a population numbering over 35 million, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Statistics from the Census Bureau and the Selig Center for Economic Growth, Athens, GA, show the Latino population controlled $653 billion in spending power in 2003 and is expected to reach over $1 trillion in 2008. Purchasing power for U.S. Hispanics is growing at triple the rate of the overall U.S. population.

Latinos represent an important customer group for supermarkets and especially for produce. "Hispanics tend to spend a larger portion of income on food," says Robert Schueller, director of public relations, Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc., Los Angeles, CA. "They spend $1,245 per year on dry grocery items versus $1,169 for the average non-Hispanic household. They also spend, on average, 40 percent more on fresh produce."

However, this large market can prove elusive to many retailers that are just beginning to understand the nuances of the Hispanic market, which consists of many different variables. Better understanding of the differences of the Latino sub-groups may make a difference in your bottom line. "Some things may work for the Latino group as a whole, but there are growing differences that can be translated into profits," reports Dick Spezzano, president, Spezzano Consulting Service, Monrovia, CA.

Photo courtesy of Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc.

Origin, education and income levels, and geography are important in determining differences among Latino sub-groups. "One important fact is understanding all Hispanics are not Mexicans," says Karen Caplan, president, Frieda's, Inc., Los Alamitos, CA. "Twenty years ago, people heard Hispanic and had one impression of all. Now we're digging deeper into the origin of different pockets of Latino consumers."

Tailoring stores to local customer needs will provide results. "Segmentation is key to developing solid, results-oriented marketing plans," reports Laura Sonderup, director for Hispanidad, a Denver, CO-based Hispanic team of marketing professionals. "Level of acculturation and language preference are important factors to consider."

"Often larger grocery chains become very cookie cutter," says John Flickinger, store director for Brown's Family ShopRite in East Norriton, PA. "Our owner, Jeff Brown, has 10 stores but each store is different. We definitely try to merchandise and market based on the demographics."

DO YOU KNOW YOUR LATINOS?

Understanding different habits and food preferences based on origin is crucial. "Country of origin can be a critical factor for success so it is important to understand what food items and brands resonate most effectively with the Hispanic consumers being served by a particular retailer," reports Sonderup. "For example, does your target audience prefer pinto or black beans? Beans represent a strong culinary tradition in the Hispanic culture, which encompasses every facet of life and evokes memories of traditional dishes, family and homeland."

"Know who they are," concurs Marion Tabard, marketing director, Turbana Corporation, Miami, FL. "Which countries do they originate from and what tastes and food habits do they have? All Hispanics are not alike."

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Reader Service #81

Each Latino origin has specific food preferences. Frieda's Caplan explains. "It's as obvious as California cuisine varying from down-home Southern cooking. When many people think of Hispanics, they think of chili peppers, so you might assume peppers are a No. 1 selling item. But if your principal customers are South American, they may not like chiles or spicy food. Likewise, root vegetables are principally Caribbean vegetables."

The term Latino applies to more than Hispanics. "Hispanics come from Spanish cultures whereas Latinos are from Latin-American and some Mediterranean cultures, for example, Brazilians," points out Veronica Kraushaar, president and CEO, Viva Marketing Strategies, LLC, Scottsdale, AZ. "It is important for retailers to really understand the specific profile of what they are terming Latino and market accordingly."

> **"It is important for retailers to really understand the specific profile of what they are terming Latino and market accordingly."**
>
> **— Veronica Kraushaar**
> **Viva Marketing**

Recognizing the differences in Latino customers will help better provide the right product mix. "It is extremely important for a store to understand where the majority of its Hispanic customers come from and what they look for," says Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting. "South Americans or Caribbeans are not going to be looking for tortillas or Mexican products. This takes some work."

"You need to know your local Hispanic market," concurs Melissa's Schueller. "Country of origin is important but region can be even more so. For example, a Mexican population could be from Puebla, Vera Cruz, Oaxaca or the Yucatan Peninsula. It's important to understand regional cuisine and culture if you want to make the most of the market. In general, Northern Mexican food is milder; as you travel south, you find spicier and hotter foods containing more chiles."

Stores with experience in the Latino market find success in promoting the right products. "In produce, we have a big variety of peppers and hot peppers since our customers are principally Mexican," states ShopRite's

Flickinger. "We sell jicama and an unbelievable amount of plum tomatoes and limes."

"I've spent a lot of time with our Mexican community finding out what they like," adds Flickinger. "I visit the small Latino stores and find out what they sell so we can have those items as well. We're also involved in their churches and participate in their festivals. It's a fun way to get to know the customers."

Your own produce personnel can be a valuable source of information. "You can find a lot out anecdotally by having your store people ask shoppers what they're looking for," says Frieda's Caplan. "Don't overlook the great information source you have right in your own produce departments."

"Ask them what they're looking for and provide those needs," adds David Merjimekyan, director of produce operations for Jon's Marketplace, a 14-store chain based in Los Angeles, CA. "We have a customer-service program where we go out on the floor and ask our shoppers about their shopping experience and if they found everything they need. We also have secret shoppers of different nationalities who go out and survey our stores and report back to us."

LATINOS IN SUBURBIA?

Many retailers may be surprised to find a growing Latino market in their suburban backyard. "More than half of U.S. Latinos now live in the suburbs," reports Hispanidad's Sonderup. "Many immigrants are skipping city centers and heading straight to jobs and housing in outlying areas. For example, North Carolina has never really been considered an Hispanic state, however, they experienced a 400 percent increase in the Hispanic population between 1990 and 2000. Retailers in places like Des Moines [IA], Little Rock [AR] and Boise [ID] need to have a better understanding of the changing demographics in order to stay competitive."

> **"Retailers in places like Des Moines [IA], Little Rock [AR] and Boise [ID] need to have a better understanding of the changing demographics in order to stay competitive."**
>
> **— Laura Sonderup**
> **Hispanidad**

The increase in more professional-level immigration as well as higher education levels achieved by children of traditional laborer immigrants is creating a higher income, more educated Hispanic consumer. "There is a growing legal immigration with more education and starting off at a higher level of career," states Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting. "We also see the children of the Mexican immigrant in California, as they start to make more money than their parents, migrating out to the suburbs."

"The two most significant and important demographic changes among Hispanics involve education and income, which have both changed significantly in a short period of time," says Scott Marden, director, marketing research, Vertis Communications, a Baltimore, MD-based procider of targeted advertising and marketing solutions to leading retail and consumer services companies. "In just the last few years, the number of U.S. Hispanics over the age of 18 with at least a college degree has increased approximately 8 percent. The number of Hispanics with household income greater than $40,000 has increased 11 percent."

These 'new' Hispanic consumers — a hybrid between the more traditional Latino

Reader Service # 73

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Reader Service # 34

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What's Most Important?

When marketing to the more traditional Latino consumer, several factors including price, quality and convenience are at the forefront. "Surveys show Hispanic shoppers want low prices, Hispanic products and courteous, friendly employees," states Robert Schueller, director of public relations, Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc., Los Angeles. "To successfully attract the Hispanic shopper, stores need to focus on freshness and have a consistent supply of core Hispanic products. They need to create a comfortable shopping environment and keep the cultural reference in all departments."

"A recent survey addressed Hispanics' retail preferences and found [Bentonville, AR-based] Wal-Mart is their top choice," reports Laura Sonderup, director for Hispanidad, headquartered in Denver, CO. "In fact, 37 percent of Hispanic respondents named Wal-Mart their favorite store. The most important factors they considered when naming their favorite stores included convenience, low prices and a wide range of merchandise not much different from the general market; however, the differences became more apparent when these consumers also mentioned a preference for employees who speak Spanish, products relevant to Hispanic consumers and Spanish-language signage!"

Stores are cautioned not to equate low price with poor quality produce. "Low price does not mean poor quality," warns Schueller. "These consumers want the best. In surveys, they rank fresh, high quality fruits and vegetables and a clean, neat store as extremely important."

"You want both bulk and packaged product and large selection but not a large variety," explains Dick Spezzano, president, Spezzano Consulting Service, Monrovia, CA. "You don't need 20 different kinds of tomatoes, but Latinos want to see a big display. Quality can mean smaller sizes and higher maturity. Hispanics shop mostly for today and not for next week."

Courteous and friendly treatment ranks high with Latino customers, who are known for their loyalty and propensity to talk about shopping experiences with friends. "Word-of-mouth is a critical component of effective Hispanic marketing," says Laura Sonderup, director for Hispanidad, Denver, CO. "According to a recent study conducted by Ipsos Loyalty [U.S., headquartered in Parsippany, NJ], retailers hoping to court Hispanic customers had better aim to delight Hispanic shoppers. Hispanics are 50 percent more likely to have stopped shopping at a particular store because of rude treatment by store employees and they are 79 percent more likely to think small neighborhood stores offer better treatment to customers than big stores."

Consistent product availability is also important. "In the United States, we have a habit of being very holiday-centric," explains Karen Caplan, president, Frieda's, Inc., Los Alamitos, CA. "When marketing to Latino clientele, you don't have to be so holiday-centric. Certain foods are popular with customers of certain origins and they want them on a regular basis. Customers need to know they can count on finding the product there. It's a way to build loyalty."

"These customers are driven more because they like the store rather than switching stores because of what's on ad," says Spezzano. "Stores with Hispanic customers in their community can build loyalty and an additional customer base." **pb**

and the mainstream American — are trying to live in both worlds. "They are a totally different customer," explains Spezzano. "You have to give them a hybrid store. You don't hide the Hispanic factor, but you don't blare it out either. English may be their first language and Spanish is second. You don't need to offer the same services as the inner city. The product mix will be different, for example more breads than tortillas, more upscale products, and some prepared Hispanic foods. You still have Hispanic products but they're not as big a part of the mix."

"With education levels increasing among Hispanics, information exchange becomes more fluid," adds Marden. "Smart marketers should utilize direct mail and catalogs to educate Hispanic consumers."

"The generation is changing and the market needs to be flexible and change with it," says Jon's Merjimekyan. "First generation is still coming, but now we're dealing more with second and third generation whose habits have changed."

ACCULTURATED OR NEWLY ARRIVED?

The level of acculturation may also be a contributing factor. "Length of time in the United States should be considered," suggests Hispanidad's Sonderup. "For example, a less acculturated Hispanic woman cooks from scratch since it is what she has always done. Cooking is also a vehicle for passing on traditions. A more acculturated woman, who is more likely to be working and familiar with the benefits of prepared foods, understands simplified food preparation allows her more time to focus on her family. Retailers need to understand the purchase behaviors of their targeted consumers, their attitudes and their beliefs to successfully market to Hispanics."

"The level of assimilation is where you find the biggest segmentation," agrees Viva's Kraushaar. "A new arrival shops differently from a Latino here for five years. Five years seems to be the point at which shopping behavior changes with Latinos. The new generation is typically well into the American culture. In one of our client studies, we found new arrivals go from first buying the items they know from home to then rejecting them in favor of American products, signaling their assimilation. As they get older or spend more time here, they then go back and forth between American and Hispanic items."

"Marketers must be sensitive to multiple levels of acculturation in the majority of Hispanic households," cautions Franklin Rios, vice president, multicultural and interactive sales with Vertis. "In many cases, there will be three generations in the home with multiple language proficiencies."

"The newer generation Latinos are a more typical American household," states Jon's Merjimekyan. "They're picking up packaged salads and other ready-to-go items. We're seeing slow growth in the category but there is growth as this consumer evolution occurs."

DO YOU HAVE THE VOLUME?

In produce, retailers must rethink volumes on items they already carry. "Welcome the consumer with large displays," states Schueller.

"Really interested retailers are not going to have an ethnic section," says Caplan. "If they want to maximize their sales, they are going to integrate the Latino products with like products. One of my supermarket clients has a nice size display of root vegetables and doesn't just stick them in the corner. The store has made the decision to have the product available and abundant. It looked around at its competitors and saw what it was missing — why its customers were shopping at the independent competitors."

Retailers can use Latino preference for fresh fruit as a draw. "Use fresh tropical fruit to attract Hispanic consumers," advises Turbana's Tabard. "In surveys, 97 percent of Latinos consider fresh, high quality fruits

and vegetables a deciding factor in choosing where to shop."

Increased volume may help balance pricing considerations. "The downside of operators in more traditional Hispanic environments is margin reduction on meat and produce, but the upside is they sell more volume," says Spezzano. "The other day 14 stores of one of our independent Latino-oriented chains put out 800 cases of blueberries."

ShopRite's Flickinger reports, "I'll sell 25 cases of plum tomatoes just on a Sunday. Sunday is a big day for our Latino community to come shopping. They go to church then come shopping."

More and more chains are doing a better job of providing what the Latino shopper needs. "There are some really good independents, both Hispanic and Asian, who are servicing the Hispanic consumers," explains Spezzano. "This includes KV Mart [based in Carson, CA], Northgate [González, LLC, based in Anaheim, CA], Gigante [USA, based in Santa Ana, CA], Superior [based in Santa Fe Springs, CA] and Jon's. They all vary by size and concept from small markets to super centers. [Lakeland, FL-based] Publix has come out with its Sabor stores in its attempt to provide more Hispanic-oriented stores in heavy Hispanic populated areas."

ENGLISH OR ESPAÑOL?

The United States is the fifth-largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world and Spanish is the second most spoken language in the country. An estimated 28 million people comfortably speak Spanish in the United States and it is the dominant language of the Hispanic market, as reported by Hispanic Marketing Group in Nashville, TN.

"Spanish language messages are important, but they need to be part of the recipe for successful Latino marketing and not the only ingredient," warns Rios of Vertis. "First and foremost, the marketing must be culturally relevant."

"We have dual language in our stores," reports Merjimekyan. "We need to let them know with their own native language what we're all about. Dual language advertising hits all the segments we're targeting."

Direct mail is gaining popularity. Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting explains, "Many inner-city independents have moved from newsprint to mailers. Mailers are a combination of both languages, but often English is the dominant language."

"Hispanics are more likely to bring a buying guide or other material when shopping," states Vertis' Marden. "This can be a tremendous help with language barriers so marketers should consider in-store materials and flyers as well as direct mail."

"We advertise in a local Spanish newspaper but ShopRite/Wakefern has a flyer in Spanish we put out in addition to our regular circular to assist the Hispanic customers with our specials," Flickinger reports.

Point-of-purchase language depends on the store's specific demographic. "At POP, we see a mix of language," says Spezzano. "Often English is dominant with Spanish secondary, but sometimes there is only Spanish. It depends greatly on the specific store demographic. In a suburban hybrid store, you'll see more English than Spanish at POP. Retailers don't want to alienate English-speaking Latinos and also must be sensitive to customers who are not Hispanic."

Viva's Kraushaar adds, "Store demographics and assimilation levels are key in making the decision to use or not use Spanish or even Spanglish, which you see in the U.S.-Mexican border cities and reflects the duality of the unique border culture."

"We have quite a number of bilingual associates in the store who speak fluent Spanish and English," states Flickinger. "It has helped quite a bit because many times when customers have limited English, they hesitate to ask for products or ask questions." **pb**

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Reader Service # 86

Delivering On Design

Today's produce departments require creative in-store décor to attract consumers and assist in sales.

BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ

With widespread media coverage of the nutritional benefits of fruits and vegetables, consumers are well aware they should be eating more produce.

Not only are they aware how much produce they should be eating each day, but also they are frequently able to recite the attributes of certain fruits and vegetables that were unknown to most just a few years ago.

Of course, knowledge and purchase habits don't always go hand-in-hand. For some consumers, produce couldn't be further from their minds when they walk into a store. Once their eyes start landing on juicy cuts of meat, salty bags of chips and decadent desserts, any lingering thoughts of produce typically drift away. Other consumers have a vague notion that they want to buy some fruit and vegetables, but they typically enter the store without a definitive preference. The challenge for retailers is grabbing consumers' attention when they are in the vicinity of the produce department.

"You only have a minute to capture the consumer," explains Steve Tursi, produce merchandise manager, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., headquartered in Bentonville, AR. "The question is how do you get them into your department and then maximize what you can get into that shopping cart."

Without a doubt, in-store décor — fixtures, equipment, lighting and signage — plays a huge role in garnering consumer attention. Not only does a well-designed, well-laid-out produce department draw consumers in to take a look at the selection, but it also goes a long way in communicating quality and value.

The produce department is often viewed as a microcosm of the store as a whole. That is, many customers base their overall impression of a store on what they see in the produce department, according to Herb Lewington, vice president of Canadian sales, marketing and creative, Storeimage Programs Inc., Brantford, ON, Canada. That's become even more the case since upscale, produce-oriented chains like Whole Foods, Inc., based in Austin, TX, and Fresh Market, Inc., based in Greensboro, NC, have taken the country by storm.

Fortunately, Lewington says, produce managers start out at an advantage due to the inherently appealing quality of the products they are charged with displaying. "Fruit and vegetables are fun — they are fresh and bright and have lots of great smells," he notes. "You have more there to capture the consumers' interest than you do in a lot of other sections of the store."

A growing number of retailers are placing produce displays near the front of the store, where they act as a kind of welcoming section, according to James Jungwirth, president and CEO, Jefferson State Forest Products, Hayfork, CA. In contrast, Jungwirth continues, he has also seen retailers position the produce department in the back in order for fruits and vegetables to end up in the top of the shopping cart, rather than the bottom. This prevents them from getting bruised or damaged.

Jungwirth clearly prefers the "welcoming" approach, primarily due to the impulse nature of produce shopping. "Being in the back of the store could make it much less likely that consumers were going to have an impulse buy because they had already spent 20 minutes in the store and their impulse buy was starting to wane by the time they made it back to the produce section," he explains.

Once consumers reach the produce department, the challenge becomes "turning a passive looker into an active buyer," according to George Hoffman, merchandise manager, Hubert Co., Harrison, OH. Numerous components come together to accomplish this task, including color, texture and lighting.

> **"My décor is going to be completely different than a warehouse store because people have different expectations in mind when they come to Kings."**
>
> **— Paul Kneeland**
> **King's Super Markets**

REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

At the store level, regional and chain décor differences are evident, explains Hoffman. In New York City, for example, metal displays reign supreme, while other locales prefer wooden bins. Demographics also play a big role because produce managers must pay heed to consumer preferences and expectations, particularly among today's upscale consumers.

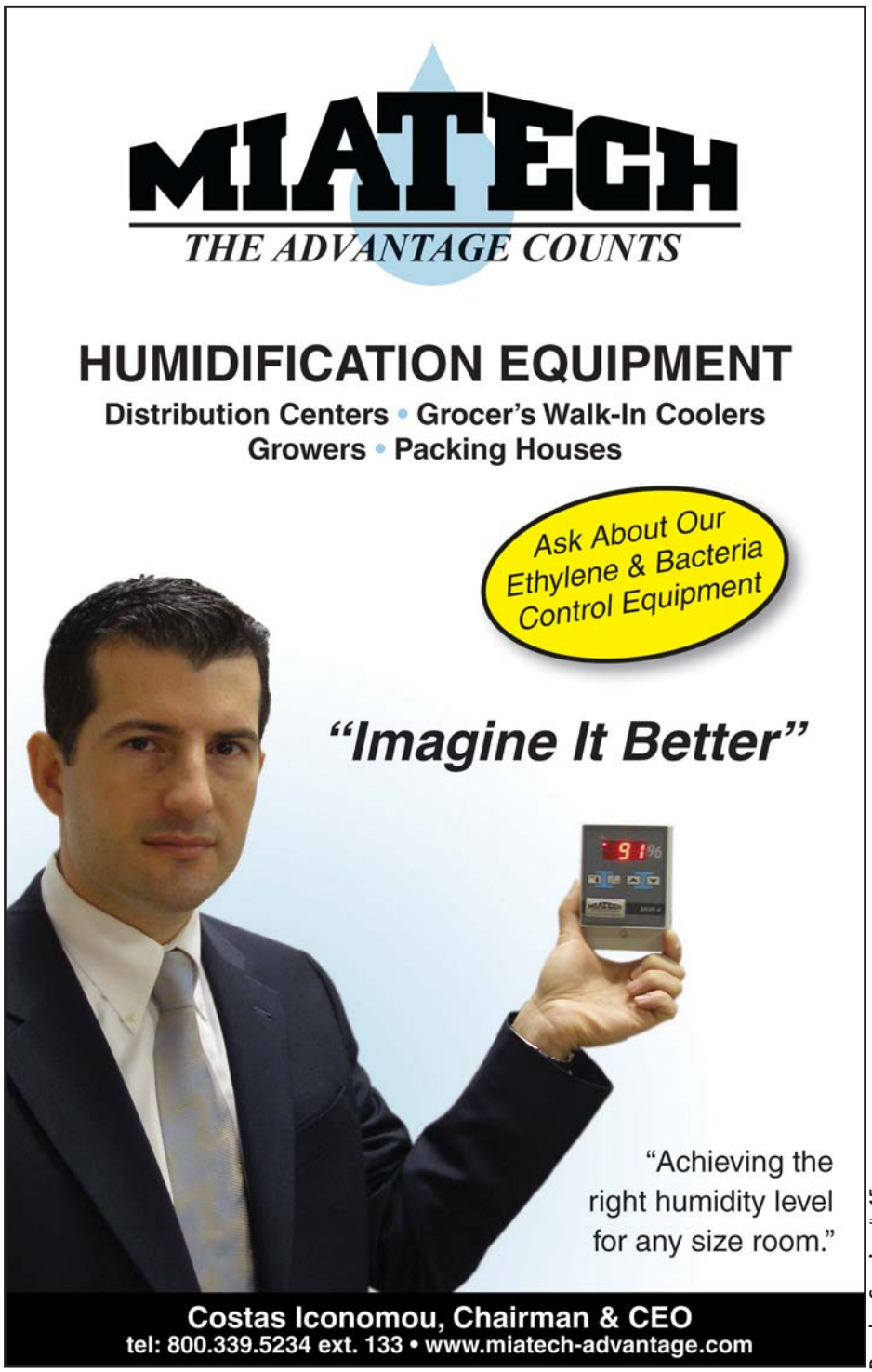
"The lighting and equipment should all be designed with your customer in mind," reports Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral, King's Super Markets, Inc., based Parsippany, NJ. "My décor is going to be completely different than a warehouse store because people have different expectations in mind when they come to Kings."

King's uses cherry wood stained fixtures to give the department a more gourmet look. This approach has become commonplace among high-end grocery stores. Wooden displays exude warmth, while maintaining the look of a country market, thus giving the impression of freshness and variety.

King's also uses spotlights to bring out the colors of the fruits and vegetables. "We'll put a basket of mangos in the middle of the grapefruit display in order to attract the customer over," according to Kneeland.

When it comes to the height of the equipment, Kneeland prefers to keep product at waist level or higher. "We start out around waist level and do higher displays in order to give a multi-dimensional look to the department. We want it to look like a mountainous produce department."

While a mountainous look may be



Reader Service # 45

Photo courtesy of Hannaford Bros.

Photo courtesy of Jefferson State

impressive to consumers entering a store, the challenge in maintaining such an appearance lies in what to do during the week, when sales drop and excess stock risks spoilage. Kneeland prefers not to have to take equipment off of the floor — an approach he calls, "a recipe for disaster." Instead, he finds ways of making the displays appear full, even when they are not.

"Typically, what we do is dummy out displays to make them have the appearance that there's a lot out there when there's really not as much," reports Kneeland. "It's still appealing, but you're not loading it up to the point where you have quality issues."

Craig Nickell, president of The Marco Company, Fort Worth, TX, cites a growing demand for flexible displays, such as fixtures with pullout drawers, pallets or produce extenders. "The fixture stays the same, but you have a lot of flexibility in terms of how you use it, so the department looks right," he explains.

Will Wedge, director of produce, Hannaford Brothers, based in Portland, ME, prefers his produce shoppers not see fixtures at all. "When a consumer walks into one of my produce departments, I want them to see the maximum amount of product variety and I want them to see colors," he explains. "I want them to be able to gaze their eyes in any direction and see nothing but product."

To accomplish this, Wedge "shrunk the middle and took up the sides," lowering table profiles by eight inches while using multi-decks on the sides to keep product at eye level. Wedge has also installed more refrigeration on the sales floor to keep product from spoiling during its storage season.

Other hot trends include more curved displays and more islands, according to Jefferson's Jungwirth. "We are seeing many more instances of using islands that can be shopped from all directions, either as a draw into the section or to celebrate an exotic or a locally grown or something that's in season."

This approach involves a certain amount of sacrifice because there must be an aisle all around the island. Still, Jungwirth says, more retailers are using islands in recognition of produce's aesthetic appeal.

Photo courtesy of Jefferson State

Retailers are clearly flexing their creative muscle, coming up with new and inventive ways to display produce.

PUMPING PRODUCE

Retailers are clearly flexing their creative muscle, coming up with new and inventive ways to display produce. These days, that resourcefulness is more crucial than ever, as the influx of organic and locally grown choices has resulted in a larger produce department for some stores. For others, it just means making do with existing space.

Just 10 years ago, King's had approximately 200 produce department SKUs. Today, that number is approaching 600. Rather than tripling the amount of square footage dedicated to produce, King's chose to merchandise vertically instead of horizontal-

Sign Language

Today's educated consumers expect more in the way of information than generations past. No longer is a sign sufficient if it merely states the name of the item and the price per pound. Consumers want to know where the product was grown, its health benefits and serving suggestions.

"Produce clerks can't be in the aisles 24 hours a day, so we need to be able to tell the customer what the product is, how much it is and a few tidbits of information," according to Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral, based in King's Super Markets, Inc., Parsippany, NJ. "It's really critical that you have signing that is clear, legible and ties in with the store's décor."

Steve Tursi, produce merchandise manager for Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., headquartered in Bentonville, AR, calls signage "another selling tool in the produce area." The chain uses signs to provide value-added information, such as recommended uses, nutritional value and ripeness indicators, to the consumers. In addition, Wal-Mart has been incorporating state department of agriculture logos on signage for locally grown produce.

Signage also can play a key role in selling pre-packaged produce. When produce is packaged, it interferes with the natural connection between consumer and product, notes Herb Lewington, vice president of Canadian sales, marketing and creative, Storeimage Programs, Inc., headquartered in Brantford, ON.

He recommends using signage that features a photo or drawing of what the product looks like out of the package. "On McIntosh apples, we developed a sign that said, 'Great Eatin' Out of Hand and Perfect for Pies and Candy Apples,'" according to Lewington. "You get them thinking about how they'll use the product once they return home with it." **pb**

ly. "We're going up," Kneeland explains.

Wal-Mart has taken a similar approach by driving "greater efficiencies in utilization," according to Tursi. On the wet rack, for example, the chain installed more multi-deck sections. It also installed an area of bin displays used for products traditionally shipped in bins and bulk presentations.

King's takes an integrated approach to organics by displaying them in the same equipment as conventional produce, but using signage to differentiate between them.

Having tried integration and destination approaches, Wal-Mart is now leaning toward integration, says Tursi. "If you want lettuce, here are all the lettuce offerings — be it conventional or organics."

The majority of Wal-Mart's organic products are packaged, which serves as a barrier to cross-contamination with conventional products. Pre-packaged produce has become standard fare, as a growing number of products are displayed and sold under wraps.

That trend doesn't sit at all well with Kneeland, who believes produce looks better when it's unpackaged. Typically, King's displays packaged produce facing the back of the department.

Wal-Mart takes a similar approach, using multi-deck displays and strategic placing. "You want to lead with some bulk product, so that when the customer first walks in, they get that fresh image," Tursi recommends. "Then, the side counters and the back of the department is where we put the packaged products." **pb**

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Reader Service # 104

Fresh-Cut Produce Enters New Value/Pricing Arena

With an ever-expanding category, processors and retailers must tackle the price-versus-value conundrum.

BY DUANE CRAIG

As fresh-cut produce covers more of the plate, retailers are faced with finding the right pricing and mix of offerings. Some suspect the challenge could hinge on a problem with the price-to-value relationship.

"If you get a great disparity between what is everyday retail versus the promotional retail, the consumer gets trained to buy on sale," explains Tony Freytag, director of marketing for Crunch Pak, LLC, Cashmere, WA. "Who's kidding whom here? In produce, if we have an item on sale today and we were selling it at the high price last week, then that higher price was inflated. There was no reality to that. The key to continuous movement is good value every day."

Ali Leon, director, fruit, vegetable and complete meals for Ready Pac Produce, Inc., Irwindale, CA, believes the pricing barrier has more to do with demographics. "In our studies, price is not a barrier for higher-income consumers. For the middle-to-lower income consumer, it is more of a barrier. Retailers have been very successful in partnering with us to craft sizes and blends that can reduce some of that cost and lower that retail price point to help drive trials and awareness among lower income consumers."

Ready Pac will take some of its more popular blends in the larger pack sizes and reduce the overall weight to help it come in at a lower price point, which helps convince the consumer to purchase. In fresh-cut fruits, the growth category in terms of size segment is in the small-pack size or single-serving size. The family and tray sizes are also growing in popularity. According to Leon, the midrange isn't growing as much.

Tonya Antle, vice president of organic sales for Earthbound Farms, San Juan Bautista, CA, sees the growth of organic tender-leaf fresh-cut offerings as evidence that consumers are typically more interested in quality than price. She does, however, see challenges relative to store space. "Shelf execution and shelf-space opportunities for the growth categories are always challenging for all of us," Antle notes. "If retailers want to grow the category, there needs to be more focus on that shelf space."

Antle believes supplying labor to make sure product is on the shelf and not in the back room is also key. "It's different when you have unrefrigerated market tables that you can get really well stocked early in the day, but because of the limited space in the refrigerated section, all it takes is a few of them gone to have the section look depleted."

"There are certain constraints in the retail marketplace right now because of space," explains Jerry Welcome, executive vice president of business development for United Fresh Produce Association, based in Washington, D.C. He believes retailers have done well with fresh-cut salads, but he's not sure they've invested the money to take that to the next level.

RETAIL PERSPECTIVES

Darvel Kirby, business director of produce for United Supermarkets, LLC, a 447-store chain based

Organics And Convenience

Phil Gruszka, vice president of marketing, based in Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA, explains products that used to be niche aren't anymore and those items along with organics have been growing at healthy rates. "So areas that in the last couple of years might have been considered to be niche are certainly not that and they are the ones driving the category from a total growth rate. It's niche no more, and people are looking for products that are more convenient and certainly looking for products that are healthful. Convenience is driving the growth rate in a lot of different categories, particularly carrots."

Ali Leon, director, fruit, vegetable and complete meals for Ready Pac Produce, Inc., headquartered in Irwindale, CA, also sees significant growth in organic fresh cuts. She says the fresh-cut salad category is experiencing greater consumer interest in offerings that include dressings and toppings because they deliver more of a fine-dining experience.

Statistics from January 2008 show a rise in consumer interest in organic fresh-cut salad offerings, reports Tonya Antle, vice president of organic sales for Earthbound Farms, headquartered in San Juan Bautista, CA. In a recent 4-week period, the dollar value of fresh-cut conventional salads grew 3.6 percent while organic fresh-cut salads grew 31 percent, she notes. The growth appears to be driven by the tender-leaf salad category, which includes spring mix, arugula, baby lettuces and spinach.

Fresh cuts continue to capture a growing following by offering healthful convenience. "We see consumers wanting to include more fresh foods in their diets and in their offerings for their families," explains Leon. "But what's happening is consumers are becoming fresh-stressed. They want fresh in their diets, but they don't have time. The supermarkets have an opportunity, here. Based on a recent study by the Food Marketing Institute [based in Washington, D.C.], 51 percent of shoppers are turning to the grocery store for a greater variety of fresh foods. So retailers have a great opportunity to share more fresh-cut produce options with their consumers."

"Convenience is a trend that has grown tremendously in the last few years and will continue to grow," notes Dionysios Christou, vice president marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce, N.A., Inc., based in Coral Gables, FL. "American consumers are choosing more convenience foods that are prepared outside the home. They are also being constantly encouraged to make more healthful food choices and increase the consumption of fresh produce."

Gruszka agrees, adding, "If you look at fresh cuts, I think that convenience will continue to drive a lot of the category. Products that you think are already very convenient, like baby carrots, keep getting more convenient." For instance, microwavable bags of carrots are one of the company's strongest products and have been growing by double digits for past couple of years. **pb**

in Lubbock, TX, hasn't noticed consumers shying away from fresh cuts because of price issues. He reports United's main emphasis is on food safety and it doesn't look to get lower cost into the product through anything that may compromise safety.

Many retailers are not seeing fresh-cut prices hindering sales — as long as quality is high. "It is definitely a category where we see phenomenal growth," according to Russ Mounce, senior buyer for Sam's Club, the 500-plus store chain headquartered in Bentonville, AR. "For us, it comes down to SKU discipline. We're going to carry only one or two of those. We can't have 10 different SKUs out there, so it's finding the best one, sticking to it and then delivering consistency. When we can do that, we've had a lot of success." He sees item mix within a particular offering and consistency from suppliers as critical factors.

Quality is an overriding factor. "The quality of the fruit you're putting into that pack is very important, especially in the winter months because the worse thing you can do is put a melon in there that's got a lower Brix while you're charging more for that product," he adds.

"Our retail prices are very fair and we've seen tremendous growth in the last year or two," explains Vince Mastromauro, produce director/floral director for Sunset Foods, Inc., a 4-store chain based in Highland Park, IL. "We do a lot of in-store specials on it, and it has really taken off."

Mastromauro says Sunset is selling 12-ounce packages of fresh-cut Gala, Granny and Fuji apples; 1-pound containers of cantaloupe, watermelon, honeydew and pineapple chunks as well as 1-pound medleys of these items; and 2-pound packages of pineapple and melon. The company also offers mixed vegetables for stir fry.

SPOTLIGHT ON BRANDS

"Right now, the retailer is just as happy to let the branded product use its own name and take the risk involved with that product," reports Welcome of United Fresh. "Still, as product popularity continues to grow, I think you'll begin to see retailers starting to take a little more of that responsibility on themselves. You'll see more stores trying to create their own branded product to bring that value to their customers and to bring that additional value to their own bottom lines. You're going to start to see some pressure on the branded products."

> **"You'll see more stores trying to create their own branded product to bring that value to their customers and to bring that additional value to their own bottom lines. You're going to start to see some pressure on the branded products."**
>
> **—Jerry Welcome**
> **United Fresh Produce Association**

Welcome sees the European fixation with store brands becoming more prominent in the United States over the next five years or

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so. "In the United States, brands are still king," he notes. "It's completely different in Europe where private label is king and where the store brand is the most important. I think that's going to change [in the United States] because fresh cut is such a value-added product and the margins are pretty good on them."

Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA, packages a lot of private label but supports its own brand with unique packaging and promotions, according to Phil Gruszka, vice president of marketing. Consumer desire for branded product is stronger in areas where brands promote and advertise, he notes.

"What we hear from consumers is that if companies are willing to put their brand on it, they have something to lose if it's not good," explains Samantha Cabaluna, director of communications for Earthbound. "In the organic world, the consumer wants to make a connection back to the farm." Consumers may trust a store brand, she adds, but they are not going to get the kind of in-depth knowledge on the product that they would from the farmer.

Ready Pac's Leon sees brands as a smaller part of the decision to buy, noting, "When it comes to fresh-cut produce, brand is not high in the consumer's mind at the point of purchase. It's actually at the lower end of the decision tree. The upper end for the consumer is more about appearance, occasion and freshness than it is about brand."

NICHES EXPAND FORWARD AND BACK

While niche and specialty items have been primed to support category growth, reinventing category workhorses is also delivering new customers. "I think you'll start to see more stir-fry and mixed vegetables products that are ready to eat in the bag, such as microwavable onions and cut potatoes," according to United Fresh's Welcome. "I think you may start to see more crossover of fresh vegetables into places such as the deli and meat counters. The key will be to present the customer with a complete ready-to-eat meal that is a fresh meal. So there will be opportunities for the fresh-cut industry to bring those types of products to the marketplace. While lettuce and carrots may very well be mature, I think there are still lots of opportunities. One of the big challenges for the fresh-cut industry is product innovation and bringing these new types of products to the marketplace."

Dionysios Christou, vice president marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce, N.A., Inc., Coral Gables, FL, suspects availability will also affect retailers as consumers demand an increase in variety and want to include more exotic fruits and vegetables to sate their culinary curiosity. He also says consumers are demanding year-round availability of their favorite fruits, such as pineapples, bananas, grapes and apples.

"If you go into most other retail formats, things are constantly being introduced," Crunch Pak's Freytag points out. "New is something we see all the time. At Crunch Pak, we don't just introduce new products in the fall or in the spring. Instead we try to do it continually."

Crunch Pak, however, makes an introduction only after it has enough evidence to assure the retailer that it isn't just an exercise in trading dollars of one item for dollars from a new item. "If all we're going to do is steal from other business, why do it?" Freytag asks. The company tests new items and looks for category gains of more than 20 percent before it moves forward with them. **pb**

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Produce for Better Health Foundation

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Produce for Better Health Foundation announces the Campaign for Children's Health

It's estimated that ⅓ of the children in the U.S. are overweight or obese – and the number continues to increase. It's a figure so alarming that scientists are beginning to recognize that today's children may be the first generation in history to actually have a shorter life-span than their parents!

Scientific literature continues to support the critical role that diet plays in healthy lifestyles and disease prevention.

Other organizations and campaigns are addressing key topics such as health insurance for children, increasing physical education requirements in schools and improving school nutrition programs. Produce for Better Health Foundation believes the missing link is a concerted effort to improve the diet of our nation's children through the consumption of fruits and vegetables.

The Campaign for Children's Health works to fill that gap.

Contributions to the campaign support several activities designed to make a real impact in the health of America's children. The consumer website that serves as a unique resource for moms and children has real-world tips to make consuming more fruits and vegetables easy; consumer research that provides relevant materials for moms and their children; and the development of educational materials that promote teacher-student and parent-child interaction to motivate families to increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables and lead healthier lifestyles.

You can get involved.

We need everyone's help to make this mission a reality. To learn more about how you can make a difference, contact:

Claudia Wenzing at
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Reader Service # 32

Innovative Packaging Wrapping Up Fresh-Cut Sales

Anti-fogging, microwavable and recyclable packaging are major trends shaping the industry's newest innovations.

BY DUANE CRAIG

Innovations in fresh-cut packaging continue to roll out and push the envelope on product improvement.

One of those innovations centers on keeping packaged foods fresher longer by controlling the moisture inside the package.

David Steele, president of ACC Coatings, LLC, a Middlesex, NJ-based manufacturer of anti-fog technologies for fresh cuts, reports the company has coatings specifically designed for salad bags and developed to provide long-term, anti-fog properties on a wide array of substrates. "Our goal was to provide something that has anti-fog properties in a way that's very easy to convert and print. You can apply the material in a continuous lane and heat-seal right through it. For the consumer, there is better visibility of the packaged product. It's nice and clear, and it looks fresher."

The coating works by taking up respired water vapor and causing it to wet out into a continuous sheet, he explains. This prevents moisture from forming drops and falling back down on the packaged product. The coating is currently in the testing stages for use on thermal-formable trays and lidding films. It can be used in microwavable packaging for fruits and vegetables as well as with polylactic acid (PLA) packaging.

Rich Eichfeld, vice president of business development for Plastic Suppliers, Inc., Columbus, OH-based makers of EarthFirst PLA films, says his company's products have natural anti-fog characteristics that can be enhanced by using such coatings. "Shelf appearance is wonderful with EarthFirst because of its clarity, anti-fog properties and natural stand-up property," he explains. "It's a very rigid film so the product stands up on its own."

Most fresh-cut packaging provides a well-rounded repertoire of enhancements. Jim Scattini, director of new business development at Sambrailo Packaging, headquartered in Watsonville, CA, points to his company's Snap Flap container as an option that provides a multitude of advantages, such as security, safety and freshness. "This innovative, 1-piece, dual-hinged, center-snap container was designed with packing efficiencies, retail appeal and consumer convenience in mind," he explains. "The Snap Flap can be filled, closed and labeled right on the conveyer line. When applied to the overlapping flaps, the label also serves as a tamper-evident safety seal and removes the need for a heat-sealed plastic band."

Packaging suppliers focus on keeping options open for processors even if they want only to package a minimal amount of a certain product. "Our most exciting project for 2008 is the design and creation of a custom machine that will fill, close and label the Snap Flap with leafy greens," reports Scattini. Set to be showcased in May at the 2008 United Fresh Produce Association exposition in Las Vegas, NV, the machine will require a relatively low capital expenditure and so will be attractive for low-volume use.

In the fresh-cut salad category, clamshells appear to be on an upward trend. In the past year, nearly 12 percent of the growth in the fresh-cut salad category happened in clamshells, reports Tonya Antle, vice president of organic sales for San Juan Bautista, CA-based Earthbound Farms, which pioneered the use of clamshells for salad offerings.

"One of the main things for fresh cuts is shelf-life extension and giving the consumer the longest shelf

Drive For Convenience Creates Variety

Convenience reigns and microwavable packaging continues gaining ground, states Roy Ferguson, CEO of Chantler Packaging, Inc., Mississauga, ON, Canada. Single-serve offerings are one way to address the demand for convenience.

Ed Ezbicki, national sales manager for agricultural products for Pactiv Corporation, City of Industry, CA, explains Pactiv's introduction of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) cups is offering a new convenience to consumers and potentially a new price point for retailers. The cups, which are packaged mostly with cut fruit and are available in 8- , 12- and 20-ounce sizes, are proving to make the impulse buying of fresh cuts more attractive. Ezbicki believes the cups may offer a new way to move customers in retail stores up to larger fresh-cut offering purchases.

"Packaging of fresh cuts can allow for tremendous marketing opportunities," points out Jim Scattini, director of new business development at Sambrailo Packaging, Watsonville, CA. "It answers to American lifestyles that demand quality, speed and convenience. While trade-offs manifest in the form of increased material and shipping costs, the sales reflect that the pros outweigh the cons."

Herb Knutson, director of marketing for Inline Plastics Corp., Shelton, CT, believes packaging variety is going to help drive category growth. Inline has introduced a round line of its Safe-T-Fresh containers in 8- through 32-ounce sizes. "They have the same great leak-resistant seal and do not require a shrink band to make them tamper-resistant or tamper-evident," he explains. "You simply close the clamshell and the product inside stays fresh and safe. With Safe-T-Fresh, you spare the fresh cuts from a trip through a heat tunnel to shrink a tamper-resistant seal on the package." These containers are made from recyclable PET.

"A lot people are looking for smaller serving sizes and individual sizes. I think these are the areas where you'll start to see some growth," explains Jerry Welcome, executive vice president for business development for United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, D.C. "You see it in Europe, but you don't see it in the United States because of price points. I think retailers are fighting to bring innovative packaging in because it costs more money. At the same time, the processor can't afford to absorb the cost of the packaging."

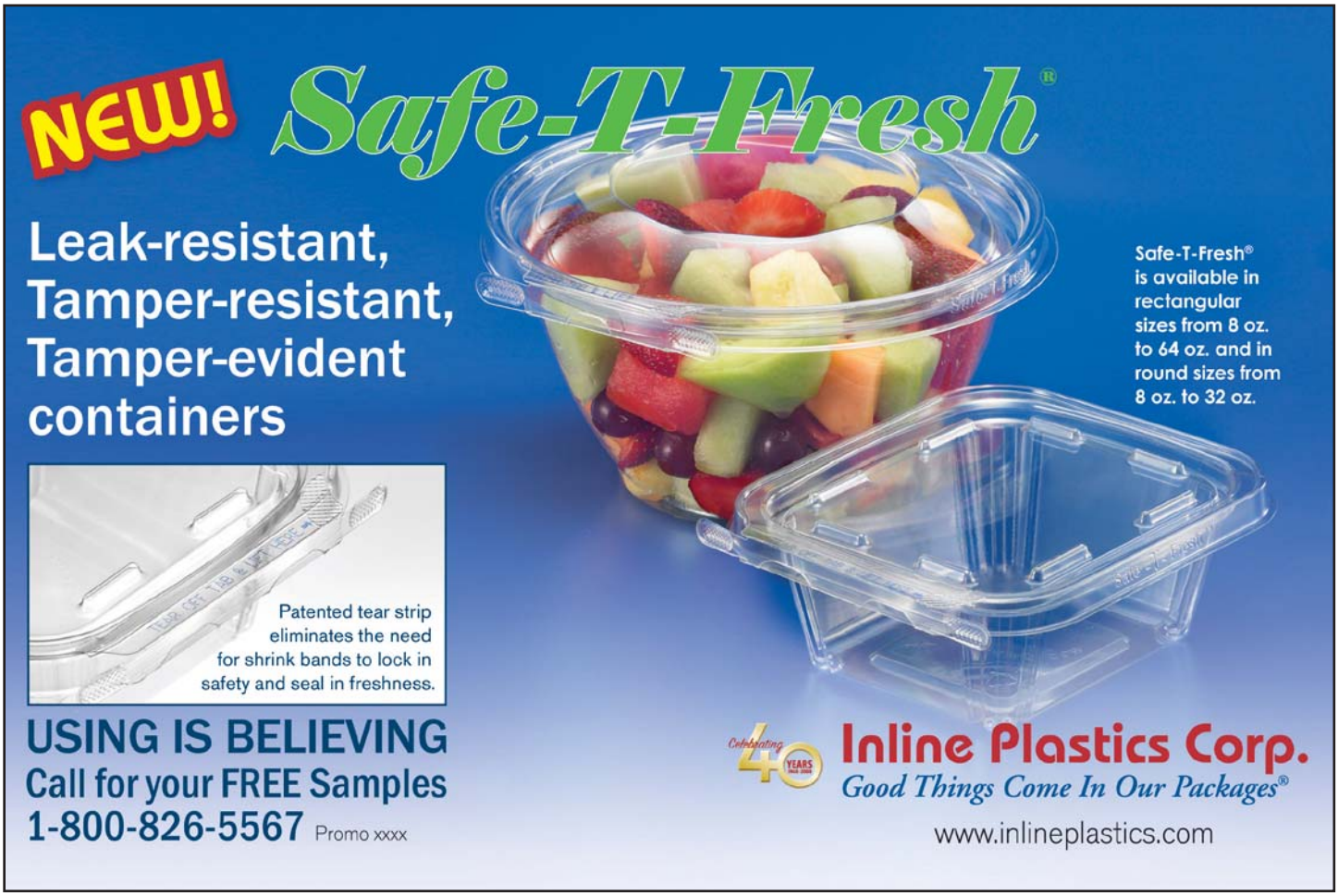
Welcome sees reclosable packaging in a grab-and-go format as extending the venue of fresh-cut sales to the convenience market and well beyond traditional retail outlets. **pb**

life possible so their investment in that particular product doesn't get thrown out several days later," notes Roy Ferguson, CEO of Chantler Packaging, Inc., Mississauga, ON, Canada. "If you give the consumer shelf life, you give them choice."

Chantler offers Prime Pro, a product that extends the shelf life of fresh fruits and vegetables by removing the ethylene gas, Ferguson adds. The product is being used for pears, zucchini, strawberries, cherries and other fruits and vegetables.

KEEPING THINGS GREEN

Kurt Zuhlke & Associates, Inc., based in



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Bangor, PA, receives numerous calls from consumers inquiring about its 100 percent recyclable packaging, according to Kurt Zuhlke, president and CEO. "All of our packaging is made of 100 percent recycled material and we use that material in all of our products," he notes. "The hundreds of million pounds of PVC we throw into the landfills every year is a total waste when it can be turned into other items. People have started to become aware of that and they see it as a value-added item."

Sambrailo's Scattini echoes the march toward green, "We must continue to make packaging improvements so they can handle the volatility of cut fruit and make them more viable for the retail shelf. The consumer must have confidence in its quality and safety. However, I do not think that we have determined cause and effect for our packaging actions and have not established uniform guidelines. For example, in the United States, is it better to have a 100 percent recyclable plastic or a vegetable-based compostable material? Is it not right to transport inputs long distances so consumers can have year-round product? I don't know the answers, but there are some players out there asking."

"A lot of this is being driven by the large chains that are requiring a cradle-to-grave approach to environmental greenness by looking for the most effective way to control recycling, shipping costs and everything else to minimize environmental impact," ACC's Steele explains. "Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and PLA are excellent ways to go because they are single-component plastics so they can be easily separated and put into whatever recycling stream they have to go into."

Eichfeld of Plastic Suppliers believes one advantage of the PLA films is its stable pricing. As a result of this stability, he is guaranteeing prices for a year in certain cases. A variety of agricultural products can be used to make PLA, he adds, so producers have options in terms of what they have to spend for raw material.

"From a material standpoint, people are looking at alternate materials to polystyrene," notes Mark Spencer, business manager, sustainability for Pactiv Corporation, headquartered in City of Industry, CA. "It seems as if PET has been making a lot of headway in the fresh-cut fruit applications, and I think one of the reasons for that is because of its recyclability and ability to handle refrigeration." Because of its recyclability and the relatively slower growth in its cost when compared to alternatives, he believes PET may offer some advantages for holding down retail prices of fresh cuts. **pb**

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Reader Service # 14

Move More Fresh Fruit From Down Under

Freshen up spring sales with imported treats from Australia and New Zealand during the lull in the same commodities grown domestically.

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

When American apple, pear and citrus seasons end, fruit from Australia and New Zealand is just getting started.

Offering New Zealand's high quality kiwifruit, for example, is just one way retailers can enhance their produce department.

Apricots also arrive each spring and serve as a major New Zealand staple. "The apricots are distinguished by their superior eating quality brought about by New Zealand's conscientious production practices," reports Karin Gardner, communications manager, The Oppenheimer Group, Vancouver, BC, Canada. "They are sold through March in single-layer flats and in 25- to 44-count sizes." Oppenheimer is a full-service produce marketer that has marketed New Zealand produce, such as kiwifruit, apricots, apples and pears, in North America since the 1950s.

"Enza apple and pear season begins as the apricots finish," Gardner notes. "The first arrivals to both U.S. coasts will include Royal Gala apples and Bosc, Comice and Taylor's Gold pears. Taylor's Gold will be of particular interest this year with growers reporting an excellent season and pears brimming with sweet, juicy flavor. New Zealand offers apples of every taste throughout the summer from the tart and traditional Granny Smith and Braeburn to the sweet Fuji and Pacific Rose. Retailers are eagerly anticipating more of the popular tangy-sweet Jazz apple — a cross between Braeburn and Royal Gala."

Photo courtesy of DNE World Fruit

While some storage apples, such as Red Delicious, maintain good quality months after harvest, other varieties are best sold in-season, according to Greg Reinauer, senior vice president, Amerifresh, Inc., Phoenix, AZ-based importers of New Zealand apples, including Royal Gala, Braeburn, Fuji, Granny Smith, Pink Lady and New Zealand Rose. "Our timing offsets the Washington storage season. Our summer is their fall," he explains.

Tom Richardson, general manager for Giumarra of Wenatchee in Wenatchee, WA, agrees, adding, "It's counter-seasonal. It comes into the market when our local production is winding down."

Depending on the variety, New Zealand apples are available from the end of March through August and possibly into October, depending on demand. "We bring in a new crop of fruit during a time when Washington is offering storage fruit," reports Reinauer. "Typically, Washington supplies of Royal Gala will run out during that time period. Some retailers will switch to new crop before storage runs out for quality issues. This year, Washington is peaking on large-size Granny Smith apples, so we'll bring in small-size Granny Smith apples to complement their crop."

New Zealand apples compete with South American apples, but Reinauer believes, New Zealand has the edge because "New Zealand has a very advanced horticulture industry, specifically with tree fruit. Climate and cultural practices create a high-quality product."

"New Zeland apple growers have been recognized as some of the best producers in the world," notes Richardson. "The growing conditions are some of the most unique in the world."

Citrus out of these countries is also a big item. "With respect to Australia, we are looking forward to bringing a wide range of preferred citrus items to

Marketing Kiwifruit

As consumers discover the great taste and high nutritional value of kiwifruit, sales are poised to grow at an unprecedented rate. "I've been involved with hundreds of kiwifruit demos, and there is one frequent remark from consumers. They've had inconsistent eating experiences with kiwifruit from other regions. When they try a kiwifruit that tastes as it should taste, they love it," explains Karen Brux, general manager, North America, Zespri International, Ltd., Auckland, New Zealand. "When consumers are able to purchase a consistently high-quality kiwifruit throughout the year, the kiwifruit category will explode."

Beyond highlighting kiwifruit's great taste, demos help familiarize consumers with gold kiwifruit. "When we sample both green and gold, gold kiwifruit often outsells green. The main reason retailers struggle with gold is because they don't market it. Simple things like signage and sampling can generate a huge sales boost," Brux tells us.

To differentiate between the green and gold kiwifruit, Brux recommends using a color break in the display. "For example, put plums, red apples or strawberries in between." She also recommends cross-merchandising kiwifruit in other departments. "For example, put a display in the cereal aisle or slice some green kiwifruit, known to be a natural meat tenderizer, and put it in the meat department." POS material such as spifes — Zespri's tool for cutting and scooping kiwifruit — brochures and pre-packs may also attract customers' attention.

Opinions on how to price kiwifruit vary. "We encourage pricing at two and three for $1," advises Karin Gardner, communications manager, The Oppenheimer Group, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

"It's a new way of approaching kiwifruit sales, but we've seen significant sales increases with retailers who have moved from selling by the piece to selling by weight," notes Brux. "It's all about consumer perception. One kiwifruit for 50¢ might seem expensive, but $2 per pound seems very reasonable, even though it works out to the same price per piece for a medium-sized fruit. With the majority of fruit being sold by weight, why not kiwifruit?" **pb**

Photo courtesy of The Oppenheimer Group

market beginning in July," explains Gardner. "Citrus is gaining popularity as apparent in the proliferation of boxed easy-peel satsumas and clementines we've seen emerge recently. We believe oranges are gaining ground at retail, especially when several options are displayed. Australian Daisy mandarins, Minneolas, Ellendales and navels will help keep the orange category invigorated through the summer months when domestic supplies are thin."

Australian citrus runs from July to mid-October. Though the volume of Australian citrus shipped to the United States has increased over the past few years, the numbers may drop slightly this year. "We expect it to be down about 10 percent from last year," states Stu Monaghan, sales manager, DNE World Fruit Sales, Ft. Pierce, FL-based marketers of Australian citrus to the United States. "They've had a draught over the past year and a half."

As with apples, citrus from Australia and New Zealand competes with South American citrus. "Australian citrus more than holds its own due to its high quality," notes Monaghan. "It is full flavor, high acid, high Brix and high color."

New Zealand kiwifruit is available May through November. "Zespri will be selling both conventional and organic green and gold kiwifruit in North America," reports Karen Brux, general manager, North America, Zespri International, Ltd., Auckland, New Zealand, the world's largest marketer of kiwifruit. "Zespri kiwifruit is one of New Zealand's key agricultural products and sales of Zespri green and gold kiwifruit comprised 41 percent of total horticulture exports for New Zealand in 2007."

> **Australian citrus more than holds its own due to its high quality. It is full flavor, high acid, high Brix and high color."**
>
> **— Stu Monaghan**
> **DNE World Fruit Sales**

Because kiwifruit continues to gain in popularity, more will be shipped from New Zealand this summer than ever before. "We will bring in significantly more volumes this year than we did this past year, and we will ship both varieties earlier than previous years," reports Brux.

While the apple and pear volumes have been fairly similar in recent years, Gardner has seen notable jumps in Oppenheimer's supply of kiwifruit since 2006. "This past year brought a 60 percent increase, and we're looking ahead to even more fruit in 2008, and an earlier start to the season," she explains. "The first New Zealand kiwifruit shipments arrive in mid-May."

"Zespri's volume to North America has been increasing year on year, with our sales of green kiwifruit having doubled over the past five years," Brux reports. "Gold sales are also rapidly expanding. In fact, when retailers promote gold kiwifruit, it often outsells green due to its mellow, tropical flavor and ready-to-eat properties."

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Reader Service # 33

popular or more frustrating. "It's the day and age of homeland security," notes Monaghan. "Customs and border patrol officers can be pulled away from inspecting at any time. We would like for there to be more personnel in place so we can ensure product gets there faster."

Despite delays, the quality of the fruit from Australia and New Zealand is still expected to be high, and marketers offer the promotions to back them up. "You've got a consistent, high-quality item backed up by a promotion program," Monaghan says of Australian citrus.

Photos courtesy of The Oppenheimer Group

When it comes to apples, "The Oppenheimer Group encourages multi-variety ads, large displays and taste demos, especially for the newer varieties like Pacific Rose and Jazz," states Gardner. "The fruit will also receive media and marketing support from the Jazz Apple Cycling Team, which is racing throughout North America this spring and summer, as well as special appearances by New Zealand's women's national beach volleyball team, which is sponsored by Enza. Retailers in select markets can take advantage of these campaigns through celebrity sampling appearances."

Zespri's Brux believes kiwifruit is poised to take off this summer. "They see category growth during our season because we not only have great fruit but also extensive, tailored marketing programs to support sales. We're committed to working with retailers to find the right marketing programs to generate repeat sales among their customers. In addition to tailored retail programs, we'll be expanding our retail road show in 2008."

"Zespri will once again bring a sampling road show to strategically selected markets and focus on retailers who serve the Asian communities," Gardner reports. "These chains have helped build market share in recent years, especially for the tropical-sweet Zespri gold kiwifruit."

In-store, retailers are finding many ways to boost sales of Australian and New Zealand fruit. New Zealand apples often compete with American summer fruit for shelf space, notes Amerifresh's Reinauer. "I would like to see retailers continue to offer the consumer variety." In turn, year-round availability of the many apple and pear varieties should help boost domestic sales during the fall.

Although the cost of transportation enters into pricing, fruit from these countries must be priced competitively, according to Monaghan. "The market dictates what we can get. Promotions should be as affordable as the retailer can make them and as often as possible." **pb**

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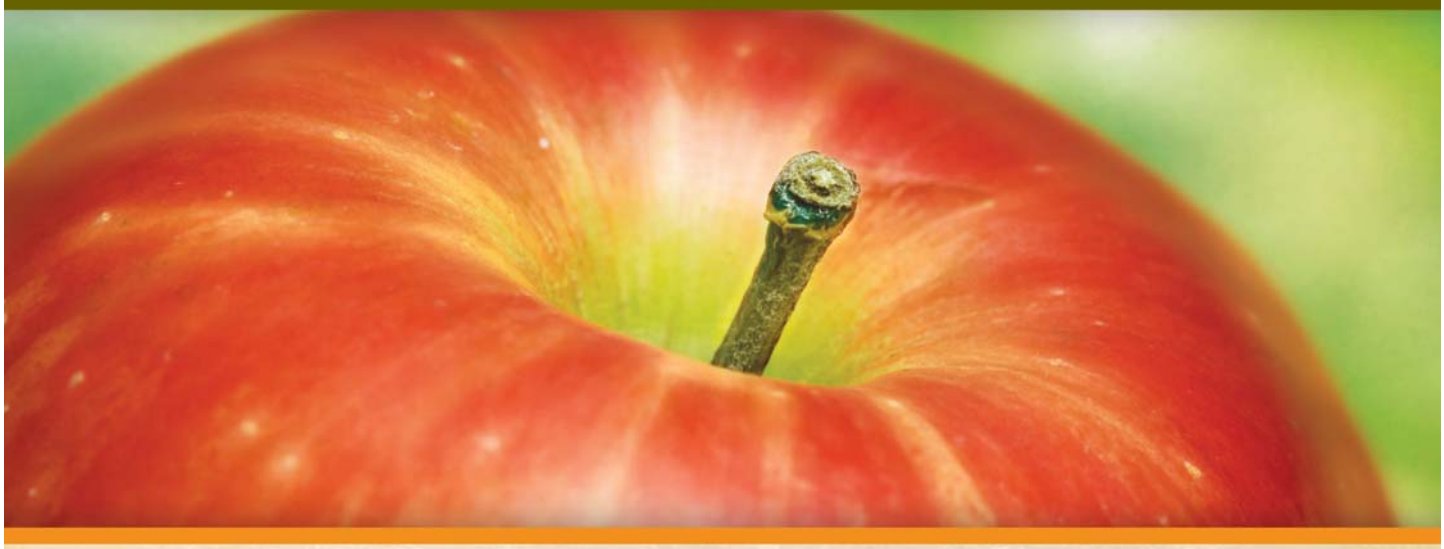

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Reader Service # 24

Making The Most Of Spring Grapes

Spring grapes present a fresh and exciting opportunity for retailers to capitalize on customers' enthusiasm for spring renewal and summer nostalgia.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Entering the market at a time when customers are tired of winter and looking forward to the flavorful tastes of summer, spring grapes offer retailers a chance to infuse some excitement into the department.

"Spring is a good time for grapes because it comes at a point when customers are already tired of winter and winter fruits like citrus and apples," states Alex Dvor, owner of A & N House of Produce, Inc., in Philadelphia, PA, a small but high-volume produce store. "Spring is when grapes become in style again."

"This deal kicks off the summer season," adds Steve DiGiusto, general manager and buyer with Fruit Center Marketplace, a 2-store operation based in Milton, MA. "There is just a lot more excitement this time of year."

The spring grape deal is defined by a short time frame with large volume from Mexico and California. "You're looking at between 17 million and 20 million boxes from Mexico and another 6 million to 9 million from the Coachella Valley in a 6- to 8-week time frame," states John Corsaro, senior vice president for Giumarra Bros. Fruit Co., Inc. in Los Angeles, CA.

Retailers tout the overlapping supply as a benefit. "The overlap between Mexico and California means you can get a better selection of grapes and costs," says Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for King's Super Markets, a 36-store-chain based in Parsippany, NJ. "The supply is favorable."

"We hope for proper weather, proper quantities and proper sugar contents so prices are favorable," relates DiGiusto. "The prices are especially favorable when the Mexican and early California production overlaps."

Most importantly, the deal gives retailers a completely new supply of fresh product. "Our season is not a storage season," says Jerry Havel, director of marketing and sales for Fresh Farms, a produce distribution company in Nogales, AZ. "We harvest very heavily over an 8-week season. Our grapes are freshly picked and then sold. We don't store our grapes and they are harvested for immediate sales. This gives the consumer a fresher product and the retailer a longer shelf life."

"It's all about timing and freshness," agrees John Forry, sales manager of Fruit Patch Sales, LLC in Dinuba, CA. "It all fits into a production window at a time when people are looking for fresh grapes."

DON'T JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS

Retailers are warned not to base decisions on very early predictions or field information. "If a retailer makes plans based on very early information, he's taking a bicycle down a steep hill," warns John Pandol, export sales with Pandol Bros., Inc. in Delano, CA. "He might make it but, more than likely, he will fall and skin his knee or break some bones. Estimates should be reliably made on St. Patrick's Day and again on income tax day."

That being said, producers feel this should be a favorable season. "At this point, I would say Mexico may be a little ahead due to weather," says Forry. "I

think California has passed our frost problems so it should not be an issue. Generally, if we can get through February, we are OK."

"It should be a normal promotional period," according to Fresh Farms' Havel. "We like to have our volume promotions begin around June 8 and carry through to the Fourth of July."

KNOW YOUR TIMING

It is important for retailers to know the timing of the spring grape deal and plan promotions accordingly. "One perception we are trying to correct is timing," explains Pandol of Pandol Bros. "Initially the promotion slogan was *May and June, Right on Tune*. This is catchy but incorrect. My desert grape deal is 20 percent May, 60 percent June and 20 percent July. Our working theme is *40 Days in the Desert* because 70 to 80 percent of the crop comes to market in the last few days of May, during June and for the first few days of July. Really, the season should be considered May 15 to July 15 at retail."

Sonora grapes normally start the season. "The spring Sonora grape deal beginning in May is typically the first," according to Veronica Kraushaar, president and CEO of Viva Marketing Strategies, LLC, a Scottsdale, AZ-based marketing agency with more than 25 years of experience in the fresh food industry, including producers, distributors and shippers of spring grapes. "It's a new crop after a long winter of Chilean fruit, so retailers are excited. Consumers also are craving the fresh taste of the new spring varieties, as they see the old crop does not look so good in the displays. Retailers may also not be aware Sonora grapes are available through July, so it is now a spring and summer deal."

"Stores should block in Sonora grapes May 15 to July 15," suggests Pandol. "The two weeks before and after this 8-week period are variable year to year. Target May 26 through July 5 for big ads."

Promoting seasonality will help build excitement and sales. "Grapes can be, but are not always, available 52 weeks a year," Pandol continues. "Pressure to monkey with harvest and improperly utilize cold storage leads to disorderly markets and dissatisfied customers. I am absolutely convinced part of the buy-local appeal is a call for seasonality. For many retailers the proper decision would be to take grapes off the shelf from April 15 to May 15."

> **"I usually source out the largest size available with the best sugar breaks. Our customers demand this high-quality product."**
>
> **— Paul Kneeland**
> **King's Super Markets**

PROMOTE QUALITY

Spring grapes give retailers the chance to really promote flavor and quality to their customers. "I usually source out the largest size available with the best sugar breaks," reports King's Kneeland. "Our customers demand this high-quality product. We try to not market as much on price and instead focus more on quality and taste. Many take the strategy to attract people with a great price on grapes, but we like to emphasize quality and build repeat business."

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Thinking About Packaging

For the short term, packaging on spring grapes is still fairly standard. "Packaging is mostly bags but we also do clamshells and bulk if we have a special request," says Jerry Havel, director of marketing and sales for Fresh Farms in Nogales, AZ. "We also pack for the export markets, both Europe and Asia. I don't see a big trend of new pack styles. Most prefer the bags and a much smaller percentage want the clamshells."

According to Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for King's Super Markets, based in Parsippany, NJ. "One trend has been to push the 2-pound clamshell but we at King's haven't found it particularly successful. The bags merchandise well and show the product well. Some customers feel the 2-pound is too much quantity and a little pricey. Consumers may have the perception clamshells cost more."

However, innovative retailers may use packaging to help differentiate their product and provide uniqueness to their offering. "Packaging is always important and in my experience change in packaging brings excitement and more attention to the product," notes Alex Dvor, owner of A & N House of Produce Inc. in Philadelphia, PA.

"The plastic bag is still the majority of packaging," says Steve DiGiusto, general manager and buyer, Fruit Center Marketplace, Milton, MA. "However, we're starting to see clamshells with small bunches of the three varieties or colors of grapes mixed together."

"Clamshells have made some inroads but poly bags are still the overwhelming pack type in terms of volume," notes John Corsaro, senior vice president for Giumarra Bros. Fruit Co., Inc. in Los Angeles, CA. "This will always remain in flux because every customer wants something unique. For example, those who are more environmentally focused may go back to open, naked packs to be different and unique. Chain stores are usually looking for ways to stay unique and different, so the pack types are always changing."

Production considerations affect packaging and cost. "The biggest factor, especially as it pertains to the Mexican crop, is how much extra time a pack takes as this is such a fast-paced harvest," shares Corsaro. "For example, bags may be quicker than a naked pack, and clams may be slower than both." **pb**

"Promoting value, or quality, is key to obtaining customer loyalty," agrees Kraushaar. "Just offering a low price does not take into account the possible inelasticity of price for this commodity, nor does it build long-lasting value for the retailer. Savvy chains promote the valued-added benefits, like nutrition and convenience of grapes, then price accordingly."

King's ads also reflect the quality of the product. "We do put them on ad, but we keep the premium grape so we don't have the cheap, cheap price," says Kneeland. "Our customers understand our grapes are more money because they're worth it. The advertising focus is more on quality and size than price.

"A retailer's biggest mistake is to buy bad-

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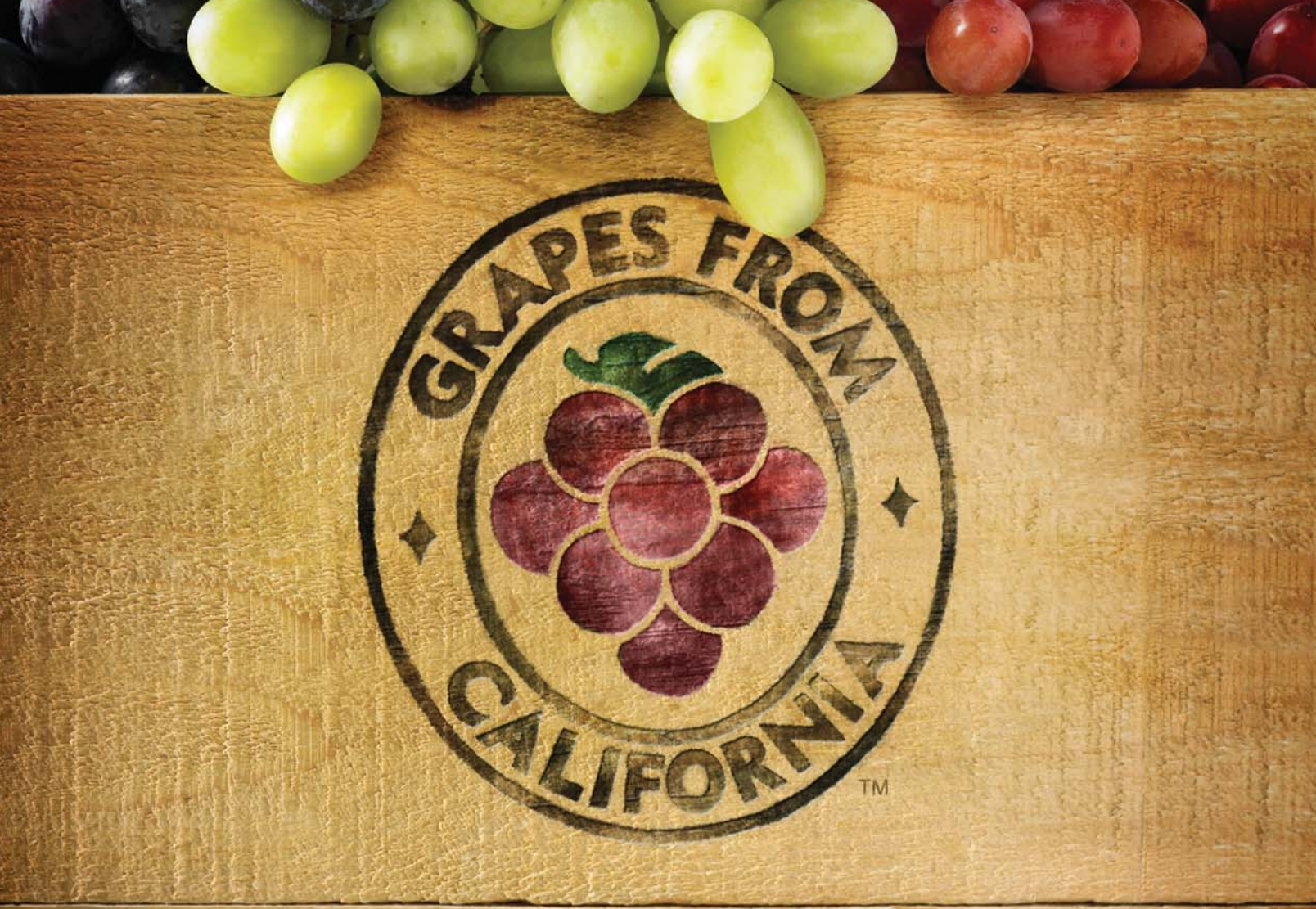

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Reader Service # 87

tasting product just for price," Kneeland warns. "The customer will be turned off by it. Grapes are a huge volume commodity and you don't want your customer turned off so you really have to be careful on the quality. You want repeat sales!"

HAVE CONFIDENCE

Retailers are urged to have confidence in the spring grape product, especially supply from Mexico. "Retailers have to have confidence in our quality from Mexico and feel we will have the volume to fill their promotional needs," says Havel. "At Fresh Farms, we have the perfect combination of very high premium quality with a large volume of production."

Viva's Kraushaar explains the stringent standards of the industry. "The Sonora grape industry is highly sophisticated and just about 100 percent of the producers are fully certified by the Mexico Calidad Suprema seal program," she says. "This is a government-private partnership with very rigid standards for safety and quality certification. The Sonora grape industry has been recognized and given awards by the Mexican government for this."

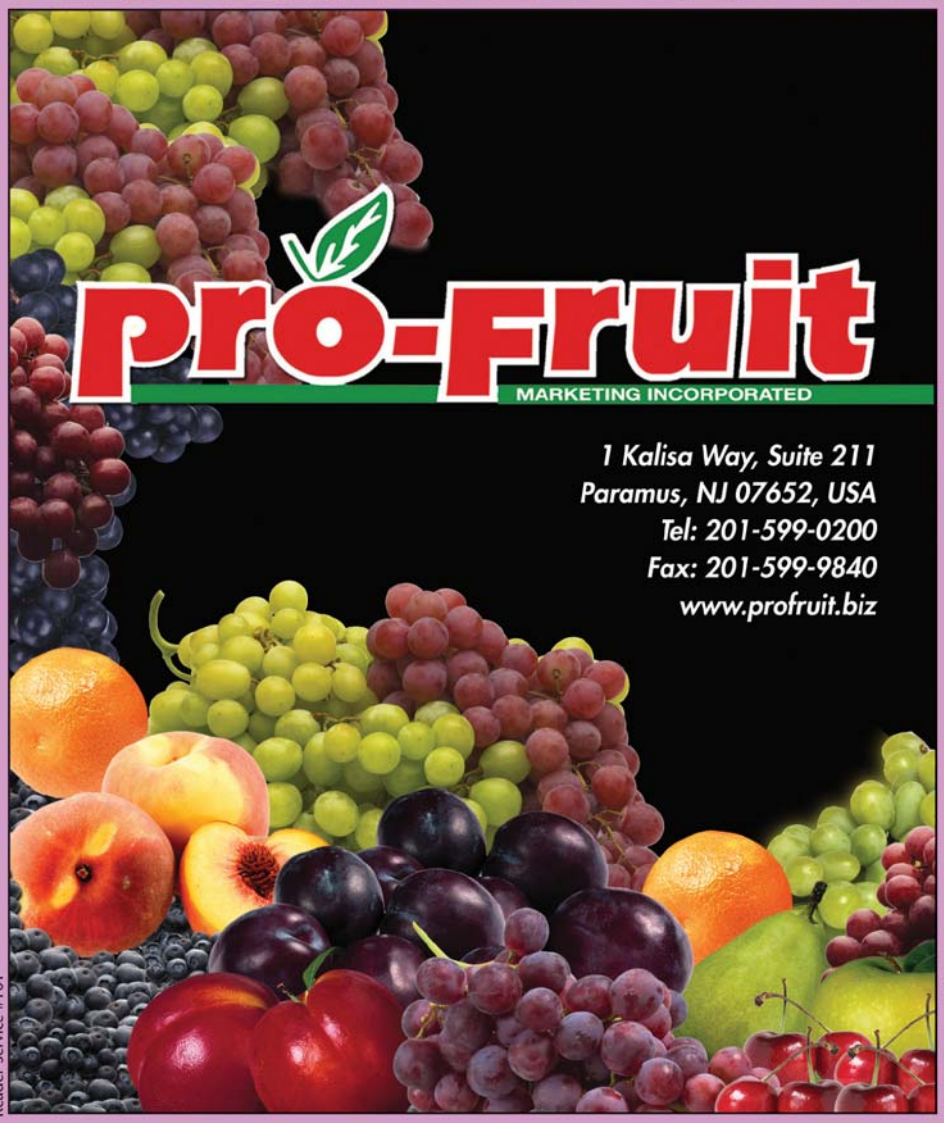
"Mexican produce is unfairly singled out for a negative food-safety image," says Pandol of Pandol Bros. "I've been at industry conferences where produce managers have expressed negative views about the safety of Mexican produce. I've suggested Mexico should put signs in the airports at Cancún, Cabo San Lucas, Cuernavaca and anywhere else tourists and American ex-pats go through with a message saying, 'Did you enjoy the food in Mexico? Do you know many Mexican products are available in the United States? Enjoy spring break all year!'"

WORK WITH VARIETY

The principal grape colors and varieties still remain top in the market with reds outselling whites. "Color-wise, the reds are the best sellers and it varies in variety depending on the time of the season," says King's Kneeland. "Reds should be a decent size, crunchy and sweet."

"The big three are green, red and black [all seedless] with red now overtaking the green seedless sales in our business," states Fruit Center's DiGiusto.

Newer varieties are slowly but surely gaining momentum. "Thompson and Flame are always popular but lately I have noticed



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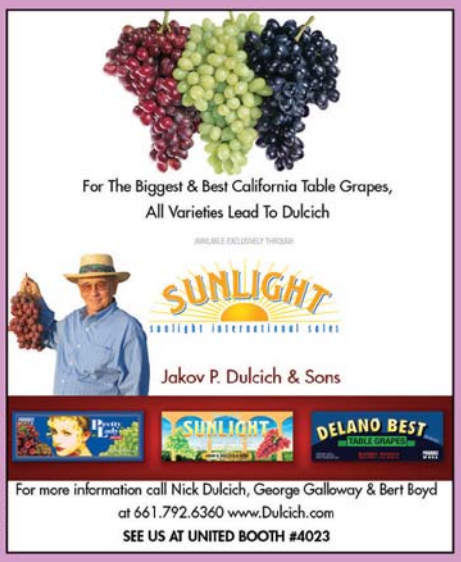

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Reader Service # 10

Displaying grapes prominently builds consumer awareness and increases sales.

good movements of black grapes, preferably seedless," reports A & N's Dvor.

"Black is becoming more popular," agrees Fruit Center's DiGiusto, "but the other newer varieties are slow movers."

The spring grape deal offers a diversity of product. "We grow all the varieties including Perlettes, Flame Seedless, Black Seedless, Red Globes and our largest volume variety the Sugraone," says Fresh Farms' Havel. "This season we will harvest some Summer Royal Black Seedless, which is a new variety for us."

"Perlettes, Flame Seedless, Sugraones, Red Globes and Black Seedless are the most prevalent," says Giumarra's Corsaro. "There are also some late Thompson Seedless as well. In some cases, growers are putting in newer varieties but the trend will most likely increase in the next five to 10 years. As old vineyards get pulled out, it's fairly likely new varieties will be planted in their place."

"Crimsons and Princess are being tried more and more," reports Fruit Patch's Forry.

Corsaro describes the timing of the different varieties, "Perlettes are early May to early June, Flame Seedless early May to late June, Sugraones late May to early July, Red Globes mid-June to early July, and Black Seedless early June to late June."

"We begin the season with Perlettes, followed by Flame Seedless, then the Sugraones and Black Seedless," reports Havel. "We end our season with Red Globes."

However, consumers may still not recognize differences in variety and retailers should be sensitive to this fact when merchandising. "It's hard to tell a variety on a red grape from a consumer standpoint but is a bit easier on the whites because people know Thompson Seedless and they can differentiate the Perlette," explains Kneeland. "Signage and pricing strategy is important."

"I see many varieties mixed at retail with the same price point," says Pandol of Pandol Bros. "Typical signage will just say White Seedless 4022/4997. Red and White Seedless are 90 percent of the deal."

DISPLAY PROMINENTLY

Retailers are reminded to aggressively merchandise spring grapes using display location, pricing and quality. "Pricing, location within the store, freshness and packaging are all important factors that retailers can use to boost sales of spring grapes," advises Dvor.

Proper displays are an important vehicle for increasing sales. "A visually pleasing display in the proper location goes a long way to increase sales," Fruit Center's DiGiusto advises. "Fill them frequently to keep them extremely fresh and provide descriptive signage with preferred pricing."

"Typically, when conditions are favorable and there is good quality supply, we expand them off the fruit walls and go on center-of-isle displays," reports King's Kneeland. "We move them toward the front of the department and customers are typically attracted to them. Cross-merchandising with cheese displays and displaying by the front register stimulates impulse sales. Don't forget to sample, sample, sample."

"We have found merchandising varieties together increases sales," suggests Viva's Kraushaar. "Setting up a box for tastings also helps, as then consumers won't be breaking into the bags. The third thing we are seeing gain more interest is nutritional information at point of sale."

Above all, don't forget to promote their freshness. "Logistics, timing and volumes as well as working with an experienced shipper are all important but the most critical piece this deal offers is a great opportunity to promote fresh grapes from late spring into early summer and build momentum and excitement for the summer deal," according to Corsaro. **pb**

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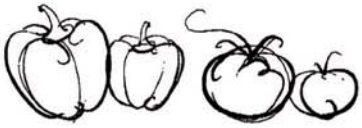

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United Booth Review

United Fresh MARKETPLACE

CPMA Booth Review

CPMA ACDFL CALGARY 2008

Starts on Page 71

83rd Annual Canadian Produce Marketing Association Convention and Trade Show

May 14 to 16, 2008 —Calgary, Alberta, Canada

UNITED FRESH MARKETPLACE BOOTH REVIEW

AISLE 4000

4001
MONTEREY MUSHROOMS, INC.
Watsonville, CA
Monterey now provides superior organic products to fit the lifestyle of today's consumers. Monterey's organic whites, organic baby bellas, organic portobellas and organic specialty mushrooms, including white and brown beech, maitake and king trumpet, will be on display in Las Vegas.

4013
MELISSA'S/WORLD VARIETY PRODUCE, INC.
Los Angeles, CA

We will be featuring our extensive lines of produce categories: organic, Latin, Asian, tropical fruits and value added. Newest product highlights include: Indian mangos, mangosteen, organic flax seeds, organic grinders, ready-to-eat chestnuts, and edamame hummus.

4023
SUNLIGHT INTERNATIONAL SALES, INC.
Delano, CA
Grower and shipper of premium California table grapes. J. Dulcich and Sons is a family farming operation located in the San Joaquin Valley. Its pristine vineyards are all in close proximity to its ultra modern cold storage facility in Delano. Pretty Lady grapes are marketed all over the world and found in many upscale retailers around the United States.

AISLE 4100

4113
CONWED
Minneapolis, MN

Introducing Vexar® Compostable Netting; the first commercially available netting certified to the ASTM D6400 standard. Netting delivers a high product to package ratio that supports increasingly popular sustainability efforts. Conwed can customize your produce packaging to strengthen your brand identity through differentiated bag designs to fully customized header labels.

4133
PURA VIDA FARMS
Scottsdale, AZ
Pura Vida Farms is committed to providing the highest quality products to retailers and foodservice operators throughout North America. We are experts at managing the entire supply chain with a primary focus on developing and implementing programs that unite consumers with our premium growers.

4142
CHOICE FOOD OF AMERICA, INC.
Nashville, TN

O'Charley's dressings — long-time restaurant favorites — are now available at retail in honey mustard, ranch, Southwest ranch, balsamic vinaigrette, blue cheese and other flavors. Stop by for information on O'Charley's at Home products.

AISLE 4200

4231
WATSON TRADING COMPANY
Hillsdale, MI
Complete fruit basket program setup. Come visit our booth and learn how easy it is to set up a profitable and unique fruit basket program for your stores. Create eye-catching displays that will add visual interest and excitement to your produce department with our line of display baskets.

4232
PRODUCE PRO
Oak Brook, IL
Produce Pro is a full-service software and solutions provider, serving all produce industry business types. Our comprehensive system is designed for distribution of perishables. Features include fully integrated accounting, inventory management, product traceability, comprehensive pricing, order entry, e-commerce, EDI, document imaging, business analysis, warehouse management and more.

4243
COOSEMANS WORLDWIDE, INC.
Miami, FL
Coosemans has three new eating well/eating fresh products. Salsa Fresca is a tomato-based salsa, Salsa Verde is a tomatillo-based salsa and Porto Tacos is a flavorful meat replacement (or addition to the traditional meat filling) for a host of Mexican-inspired dishes. This product fills a void for vegetarians, vegans and others.

4244
BASCIANI MUSHROOM FARMS
Avondale, PA

Chef Dominic Bartolini of Bartolini's Restaurant in Chicago will be serving six easy-to-prepare restaurant mushroom delicacies, using ready-to-go ingredients like our 4 Exotic Mushroom Mix of sliced shiitake, sliced portobella, sliced cremini and canary yellow oyster mushrooms. See our displays of innovative mushroom packaging for cost savings.

4248
NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Trenton, NJ
The New Jersey Department of Agriculture represents New Jersey's vast agricultural industry and uses the *Jersey Fresh* marketing and advertising program to showcase the 100 different varieties of fruits and vegetables grown in the Garden State.

United Fresh MARKETPLACE

United Fresh MARKETPLACE

BOOTH REVIEW

4252
CHRISTOPHER RANCH, LLC
Gilroy, CA
Christopher Ranch has been producing organic products since 1995, including fresh garlic, peeled garlic, elephant garlic, shallots, ginger, specialty onions and jarred items. We are the largest grower, packer, shipper of fresh *California Grown* garlic in the unite States, with 50 years experience in the produce industry..

4254
NATURIPE FARMS, LLC
Naples, FL

Naturipe® Farms is a grower and marketer of wholesome, good-for-you foods. It offers a full line of conventional, organic and premium berries, grown by the world's premier farmers, and marketed under the Naturipe Farms brand. Stop by to learn about our full range of products including the increasingly popular line of organic strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries and cranberries.

AISLE 4300

4301
NNZ, INC.
Lawrenceville, GA
NNZ, Inc. is now carrying a full line of biodegradable, compostable, sustainable, earth-friendly products. Our trays come in PLA, palm fiber, sugarcane, tapioca starch and bamboo. NNZ has both compostable and oxo-degradable films in shrink, cling and flow wrap formats.

4313
KEYSTONE FRUIT MARKETING, INC.
Greencastle, PA
The largest producer/marketer and only single-source grower, packer, and shipper of year-round of Certified Sweet® Onions. Year-round supplies of Walla Walla River, Vidalia®" and Mayan Sweet® sweet onions, plus hybrid red, white and yellow onions. Southern peaches, Eastern apples and asparagus. The highest standards in food safety and food security.

4317
FRESHSENSE
Parlier, CA
FreshSense is at the forefront of produce innovation, with new brand concepts, supplier partners and new ways of working together. We provide yearlong programs specifically designed to improve category performance with our retail partners — with nothing less than success being acceptable.

4359
AMERICAN PACKAGING CORP.
Rochester, NY
American Packaging introduces Ester-Steam® microwave-controlled steam cooking technology. The self-venting valve-based system can be used for pouch and lidding applications. It runs on standard heat seal equipment with no effect on production efficiency and no capital investment.

AISLE 4400

4401
WELL PICT
Watsonville, CA
We have expanded organic availability for proprietary strawberries, raspberries and blackberries. New packaging includes 12-ounce raspberry/blackberry clamshell and redesigned 4-pound strawberry pack. Our newest late-summer strawberry variety provides longer shelf life without sacrificing flavor.

4411
DEL MONTE FRESH PRODUCE N.A., INC.
Miami, FL
Fresh Del Monte offers retailers and foodservice operators an array of innovative solutions to address the changing tastes and lifestyle needs of today's consumers. Our extensive distribution network allows just-in-time deliveries of our premium quality fresh products to your doorstep.

4416
GILLS ONIONS, LLC
Oxnard, CA
Gills Onions will be featuring 8- and 10-ounce re-sealable retail packages of sliced and diced yellow and red onions. Check our new retail diced organic onions pack. If you're still peeling your own onions, it's a crying shame!

4433
KINGSBURG ORCHARDS
Kingsburg, CA
Kingsburg Orchards is the largest family-owned grower, packer and shipper of fresh fruit in California's fertile San Joaquin Valley. We have perfected the art of farming for flavor. Specializing in the most flavorful peaches, plums, nectarines, pluots, apple pears, apriums and apricots. Stop by the booth to learn more about the Flavor Farmers!

4442
NORTH BAY PRODUCE, INC.
Traverse City, MI
North Bay Produce is a globally operated, grower-owned marketing and distribution cooperative. North Bay Produce grows and distributes a continuous range of fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the year from U.S. and Latin American farms.

AISLE 4500

4501
SENSITECH
Beverly, MA
Time and temperature can make or break the quality of the produce you deliver. ISO-certified data collection devices, validated data management software, in-depth analytics and expert consulting services. For nearly two decades, global leaders in the food industry have relied on Sensitech to help ensure consistency, integrity and quality across their perishable supply chain.

4515
BABÉ FARMS
Santa Maria, CA
A premier grower/shipper on the central coast of California, Babé Farms will exhibit select items from its year-round harvest of over 30 varieties of baby lettuces and specialty greens, colorful root veggies and baby cauliflower for its foodservice and retail clients. Creative packaging for specialty vegetables, signature salad blends, and baby head lettuces will also be displayed.

4523
AGPAK
Gasport, NY
Ag-Pak supplies industry-leading produce packaging equipment — weighing, bagging, optical sorting, washing and polishing equipment from the world's best manufacturers, featuring Newtec. Our booth will feature a complete line of weighing and bagging systems and the revolutionary Newtec Celox RV12 optical potato grader — making automated defect grading a reality.

4537
DNE WORLD FRUIT SALES
Ft. Pierce, FL
DNE World Fruit Sales will showcase its full line of fresh summer citrus from Australia, South Africa, Chile, Mexico and Peru. Offering a delicious lineup of fresh quality navels, clementines, Minneolas, lemons, limes, Midknights and many other varieties. Let DNE help you grow your summer profits and work out a custom program for your needs.

4549
CALIFORNIA LEAFY GREENS MARKETING AGREEMENT
Sacramento, CA
In 2007, California farmers came together to raise the bar for food safety through creation of the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (LGMA). LGMA members are working collaboratively to protect public health by reducing potential sources of contamination in California-grown leafy greens.

4551
PAKSENSE
Boise, ID
PakSense temperature monitoring labels provide insight into what happens to perishable products during distribution. Lights indicate if temperature excursions have occurred and stored data can be downloaded. PakSense Labels promote better food quality and safety decisions, effectively extend quality assurance programs into distribution channels, and complete the quality control loop.

AISLE 4600

4601
INTERNATIONAL PAPER
Memphis, TN
International Paper is a global supplier of high-performance corrugated shipping containers for the produce industry. We manufacture reliable agricultural bulk bins for a variety of commodities, and are the source for the field-to-market display-ready DEFOR packaging system — The High Performance Packaging System for High Value Produce.

4604
BLUE BOOK SERVICES
Carol Stream, IL
Blue Book Services provides produce businesses worldwide with accurate credit ratings, timely marketing information and reliable trading assistance. Launching in Q2 of 2008, *Blue Book Online Services* is a new Web application. It will provide real time information, dynamic educational content, and enhanced marketing tools. Stop by for demo.

4613
CALIFORNIA GIANT, INC.
Watsonville, CA
California's premium strawberry grower just got sweeter. Introducing a full line of berries from California Giant Berry Farms. Our healthful and delicious blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries deliver the same quality and flavor standards we're known for. Satisfy your customers all year long with delicious and heart-healthy Cal Giant berries!

United Fresh MARKETPLACE

BOOTH REVIEW

4646
MISSION PRODUCE, INC.
Oxnard, CA
Mission's asparagus program is year-round with sourcing from Peru, Mexico and California.

4651
PERO VEGETABLE COMPANY, LLC
Delray Beach, FL
Pero Vegetable celebrates its centennial! 2008 marks 100 years of Pero Vegetable's impeccable standards and satisfaction in the fresh produce business. A leading grower, distributor and marketer of fresh vegetables and fruits, Pero has held steadfast to its commitment to fulfill customers' needs throughout its history.

AISLE 4700

4713
BARD VALLEY MEDJOOL DATE GROWERS ASSOCIATION
Bard, CA
Bard Valley Medjool Date Growers — growers and shippers of the world's finest Medjool dates. Unquestionably the Best!

4715
BEDFORD INDUSTRIES, INC.
Washington, MN
New Bedford ElastiTote™ attaches samples of a new product to an existing product. Options include adhesive backed tags, tags with 2 elastomer loops (one for the sample, one for the main product) or enclosed pouches. They can be custom printed with cross-promotion information, coupons or brand identity.

4717
DISCOVERY GARDEN'S
Oakdale, CA
Discovery Garden's continues to look for ways to entice the consumer with potato choices. It now offers two yellow varieties with rich, creamy textures: the Sierra Gold has a hearty skin similar to a russet, and its new Sierra Rose has a mahogany-red skin. Stop by for a sample.

4727
GREENLINE FOODS, INC.
Bowling Green, OH
GreenLine Foods is a premier producer of fresh, trimmed green beans, wax beans, and bean and carrot Sunshine Blend. We offer our products in 12-ounce microwavable bags for home consumers and 5-pound bags for foodservice. we have our own fleet of refrigerated trucks that deliver throughout the United States and Canada.

4733
SAN MIGUEL PRODUCE, INC.
Oxnard, CA
Ready-to-cook leafy greens have been a specialty of San Miguel Produce/Cut 'n Clean Greens for 12 years. Two new organic varieties. This third-generation farming company provides naturally fresh, packaged cooking greens year-round. Cooking greens are a powerhouse food of vitamins and minerals, growing in popularity.

4745
PRODUCE BUSINESS
Boca Raton, FL
Initiating industry improvement since 1985, Produce Business is the most widely distributed publication in the industry. Exclusively edited for buyers, it provides a montly dialogue of marketing, merchandising, management and procurement information that helps buyers accomplish the industry's *9-to-13-A-Day* goal.

4759
HINKLE PRODUCE
Cissna Park, IL
Targeting kids, the future shoppers of tomorrow, to help reduce obesity and help our children eat more healthfully and live longer through graphics. This is our mission statement and goal. Please stop at our booth and check out our complete line of *Peanuts* character graphic packaging.

AISLE 4800

4808
BEACH STREET FARMS
Watsonville, CA
Beach Street Farms, a premier grower/shipper of conventional and organic berries, is committed to providing the highest quality berries available. We grow in the heart of the California strawberry-growing regions of Northern and Southern California so our supplies are available almost year-round.

4823
C. H. ROBINSON WORLDWIDE, INC.
Eden Prairie, MN
We are one of the world's largest providers of supply-chain solutions and transportation services. We have over 100 years of experience in the produce industry, providing high-quality sourcing and logistics solutions for the best brands in the business, including Welch's, Mott's, Tropicana, and our new organic line, Our World™ Organics.

4826
MIXTEC GROUP, INC.
Pasadena, CA
Mixtec is the No. 1 executive search firm in fresh produce. Since 1984, we have provided exceptional executive recruitment, leadership consulting and human capital management services to the industry. Our philosophy is simple: The best person in the produce industry is currently working for some company. Why not yours?

4828
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND POTATO BOARD
Charlottetown, PEI
PEI Potato's Serving you…the taste of distinction, the assurance of quality! The unique, rich red soil of beautiful PEI produces a distinct taste that has created a demand around the world. Our growers offer russet, red, round white, yellow fleshed, blue, baby potatoes, fingerlings and organic.

4835
CHEP USA
Orlando, FL
CHEP is the global leader in pallet and container pooling services for many of the world's largest companies. With a combination of supply chain cost reduction, size, scale, superior technology and global reach, CHEP issues, collects, conditions and reissues more than 265 million pallets from a global network of service centers, helping manufacturers and growers transport their products .

4842
ALLIANCE RUBBER COMPANY
Hot Springs, AR
Alliance Rubber Company has 85 years of rubber-band manufacturing experience. Our bands are made fresh daily in the USA. Custom imprinted bands to brand and promote your produce. Stock PLU Bands to meet COOL requirements

AISLE 4900

4927
BASIC POLYMERS
Fresno, CA
Basic Polymers is committed to providing quality urethane, epoxy and MMA seamless flooring system materials. Safer, stronger and more durable flooring systems are essential today. Polymer-based flooring systems provide the most durable, chemical resistant flooring available. Basic Polymers has great people and great products that produce great results.

4949
SILLIKER
Homewood, IL
An integrated food-safety program is a powerful tool for safeguarding your product, maximizing bottom-line results and protecting brand value. Through our Food Safety & Technical Services Support offering, Silliker partners with fresh-cut and leafy greens growers, processors and retailers to develop and implement practical, cost-effective programs.

4959
CHARLIE'S MACHINE & SUPPLY, INC.
Boulder, CO
Visit our booth for your free catalog. Come for hands-on demonstration. Come peel, slice, dice, wedge, cut and dry — carrots to lettuce, apples to pineapple. Small volume to large volume. CMS provides equipment for all your fresh-cut food processing needs. Custom design & used equipment available.

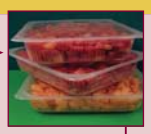
AISLE 5000

5008
SILVER CREEK SOFTWARE
Boise, ID
Visual Produce, an accounting program targeted for the fresh produce industry, offers unique capabilities to produce wholesalers, distributors, packers, brokers and grower settlements including customer menus, contract pricing, lot control, route accounting, Visual Internet, landed cost and much more.

5014
MICROBIAL-VAC SYSTEMS, INC.
Jerome, ID
Microbial-Vac Systems, Inc. presents the M-Vac System; the new wet-vacuum, surface pathogen collection unit enables more accurate location and identification of surface bio-agents. This sampler incorporates liquid-assisted microbial detachment and captures principles to more efficiently and accurately collect microorganisms from virtually any surface.

BOOTH REVIEW

5017
MAXWELL CHASE TECHNOLOGIES LLC
ATLANTA, GA



We are offering our patented absorbent trays in contact clear polypropylene. The new clear trays improve freshness and extend shelf life (10-14 days) for fruit and vegetables. The absorbent technology is incorporated safely and securely in the wells at the bottom of the trays and absorbs excess fluid from the produce. Available in 2.5-, 5- and 7-pound sizes.

5023
KEY TECHNOLOGY
WALLA WALLA, WA

Introducing Manta™, a state-of-the-art high-volume, high-performance sorter featuring a 2-meter-wide scan. Handling up to 60,000 pounds of processed vegetables or fruit per hour, Manta offers high resolution scanning to detect and remove the smallest defects and foreign material. In addition to processed vegetables and fruit, Manta is being developed for other industry applications.

5026
IEH LABORATORIES & CONSULTING GROUP
LAKE FOREST PARK, WA

Analytical services in microbiology and food chemistry and consultation on HACCP reassessment and validation, spoilage, food-borne illness epidemiology and crisis management. IEH offers 12-hour multiple-pathogen testing for grower inputs, raw materials and finished produce products. Dedicated on-site laboratories available. ISO/IEC 17025 accredited.

5030
REDLINE SOLUTIONS, INC.
SANTA CLARA, CA

RedLine offers agricultural data capture solutions for harvest, inventory and shipping, utilizing bar code and RFID. RedLineMobile™ for Famous v.6 uses mobile scanners for all product movements and validated shipping. HarvestPro™ is a mobile solution that identifies and tracks commodity from the field though key processes for unparallel traceability.

5051
SAMBRAILO PACKAGING
WATSONVILLE, CA

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

AISLE 5100

5127
ORKIN COMMERCIAL SERVICES
ATLANTA, GA

Orkin's Gold Medal Protection: Pest control for audited plants is a comprehensive Integrated pest management program specifically designed for the highly regulated food processing and packaging industries.

5149
THE HMC GROUP MARKETING, INC.
KINGSBURG, CA

HMC, a vertically integrated tree fruit and table grape company, expands its grape offering by going stemless. For years, HMC has provided the foodservice channel Lunch Bunch grapes and is expanding its year-round offering with stemless grapes. Providing a variety of packaging options and programs for processors, foodservice and retailers.

AISLE 5200

5201
HARPAK, INC.
SOUTH EASTON, MA

Harpak can supply primary and/or secondary packaging for fresh produce, including fruit cups, salads, sticks, diced or sliced. Complete line of packaging and filling equipment including tray sealers, piston fillers, pocket fillers, form/fill seal, RSC cartoning and wrap around, tray erecting, case packing, robotics and sleeving units.

5213
KES SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
KENNESAW, GA

AiroCide PPT photocatalytic air purifying technology improves food safety and quality assurance by killing airborne mold/fungi and bacteria as well as removing ethylene gas. AiroCide's patented NASA technology is chemical-free (no ozone is produced or used), NOP-compliant, maintenance friendly and energy efficient.

5227
MOTEK
BEVERLY HILLS, CA

Priya, the only Microsoft Windows®-based WMS, is the de facto standard in warehouses from 100,000 to 2,000,000 square feet. Easily accommodates changing business processes and customer requirements. Motek had the first WMS on Windows, WMS with real-time engineered labor standards and Windows-based WMS with voice recognition.

5248
BIRKO CORP.
HENDERSON, CO

Birko manufactures cleaners, sanitizers, process aids and specialized chemical delivery equipment for the produce processing industry. Your Birko representative is available to assist your plant personnel with any difficult cleaning or sanitation situation or with a complete sanitation audit. We solve tough problems.

AISLE 5300

5252
NATURESEAL
WESTPORT, CT

With NatureSeal® products, the natural taste, texture and color of cut produce can be maintained without the use of sulfites. Our precise vitamin/mineral blends keep cut produce fresh for up to 21 days. From fresh-cut to fresh-cut frozen formulations, NatureSeal has the perfect product for your needs, and if we don't we'll custom develop it for you.

AISLE 5300

5313
AUTOMATED PACKAGING SYSTEMS, INC.
STREETSBORO, OH

Operating at speeds up to 120 bags per minute, the FAS SPrint SidePouch™ Packaging System indexes multiple pre-opened bags along a 60-inch load area for one or more operators or infeeds. Washdown-ready, USDA accepted. Special bag features include reclosable zippers, flaps.

5323
BACKUS SORMAC
HORST, THE NETHERLANDS

The Sormac onion peeler USM-X100 has perfect peeling results, little waste, low energy consumption and a practical design, which makes the machine supremely easy and quick to clean. On the FreshTech a line set-up will be shown. Convince yourself and visit our booth.

5333
FORTRESS TECHNOLOGY, INC.
TORONTO, ON, CANADA

Fortress Technology Inc will be exhibiting its superior line of Phantom metal detectors at United Fresh. Phantom detectors are built rugged to withstand the harshest production environments with IP69K certification on stainless steel units. Fortress Technology will design the right system to meet your needs and protect your product integrity.

5337
FTNON USA, INC.
SALINAS, CA

FTNON's advanced flotation washing lines for fresh salads, vegetables and herbs. Innovative processes, specifically designed to ensure perfectly washed products. For large and small capacities; foreign material removal by fly-catchers with exchangeable screens; efficient cost effective processing. Even when the "used by date" is reached, the product is still beautifully fresh.

5345
MILLER-LEAMAN, INC.
DAYTONA BEACH, FL

Miller-Leaman's Ultra-Pure UF Membranes are designed to remove suspended particulate, bacteria, colloidal and high molecular-weight contaminants from source water. The Ultra-Pure provides high quality effluent water, removing all total suspended solids (TSS). The system produces output water turbidity of less than 0.4 NTU.

AISLE 5400

5408
ROCHESTER MIDLAND CORP.
ROCHESTER, NY

The award-winning leader in green chemical technology. Through the newest component of our BrandGuard Program, EnviroGuard, we are bringing green cleaning chemistry to the food production industry. The EnviroGuard program lets you to pick green chemical alternatives to solve food processing sanitation needs.

5454
DUPONT QUALICON
WILMINGTON, DE

Count on DuPont Qualicon for food-safety science and state-of-the-art technologies that help reduce risk for safer products and profitable growth. Our award-winning BAX® system detects pathogens in raw ingredients, finished products and environmental samples. For more information, including how to get Listeria results in eight hours, visit our booth.

CPMA Booth Review

CPMA ACDFL CALGARY 2008

83rd Annual Canadian Produce Marketing Association Convention and Trade Show

May 14 to 16, 2008 —Calgary, Alberta, Canada

CPMA BOOTH REVIEW

AISLE 001

1
MISSION PRODUCE
Oxnard, CA
Mission's asparagus program is year-round with sourcing from Peru, Mexico and California.

4
HERBTHYME FARMS/ MARVINI FRESH HERBS
Compton, CA
HerbThyme is America's largest herb grower and largest certified organic herb grower. Our extended-shelf-life packaging merchandises at room temperature and increases sales and cuts shrink. Servicing accounts coast to coast from California, New England, Montreal and Florida production facilities.

8
FRESH SENSE
Parlier, CA
FreshSense is at the forefront of produce innovation, with new brand concepts, new supplier partners and new ways of working together. We provide yearlong programs specifically designed to improve category performance with our retail partners — with nothing less than success being acceptable.

17
IT'S ALL GOOD FOODS, INC.
Richmond, BC, Canada
What do we mean by It's All Good? That It's All Good tastes great. Which is good. 'Cause its full of good-for-you stuff — healthful grains and nutritious vegetable ingredients. Quick and easy to prepare. When you eat It's All Good, you're doing something good by choosing renewable resources (like veggies!). Feels good already, doesn't it?

AISLE 100

112
T. MARZETTI
Columbus, OH
Marzetti is driving market growth with a 74 percent share. Three of every four dips sold are Marzetti. Our line of fruit and veggie dips consist of 11 varieties of veggie dips (all made with real sour cream), four varieties of fruit dips and two varieties of snack packs — caramel and ranch.

112
PRIORITY BRANDS
Markham, ON, Canada
Wholly Guacamole — No. 1 selling guacamole in the United States. Each package is made with two Hass Avocados, all-natural, no artificial ingredients, no additives and no trans fat. It's gluten free and kosher. Our Fresherized process is a new million dollar revolution. It's Fresherized, so it stays pure and delicious. Just Avocados, onions and spice!

124
INTERNATIONAL HERBS LTD
Imperial, CA
Committed to providing the highest quality herbs and specialty produce from around the world — and service to match! IHL is one of the largest suppliers of fresh herbs and specialty produce in North America. We will cater to all of your culinary needs year-round through our domestic farms and grower network.

AISLE 200

201
PEAK OF THE MARKET
Winnipeg, MB, Canada
Peak of the Market, one of Canada's premier grower-owned vegetable suppliers, has grown quality produce in Manitoba for 65 years. Crops produced include beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cooking onions, cucumbers, daikon, leeks, green onions, parsnips, potatoes, pumpkins, red onions, Spanish onions, squash and zucchini.

CPMA ACDFL CALGARY 2008

BOOTH REVIEW

207
DOMEX SUPERFRESH GROWERS
YAKIMA, WA
Domex Superfresh Growers is the leader in growing and marketing apples, pears, cherries, peaches, nectarines and apricots from the Northwest and the world. Visit our booth to learn how our integrity, intensity and experience can increase your profits and delight your customers.

213
GRIMMWAY FARMS
BAKERSFIELD, CA
Grimmway Farms is a grower/shipper of fresh and processed carrots, carrot juice concentrate and a full line of organic carrots, fruits and vegetables under the Cal-Organic label. Grimmway also grows and ships year-round supplies of potatoes and citrus.

A family of Growing companies.

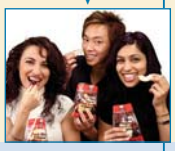
215
DUDA FARM FRESH FOODS, INC.
OVIEDO, FL
Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc. — a wholly-owned subsidiary of Duda — is a full-service grower, packer, shipper, marketer, importer and exporter of fresh fruits and vegetables, with production and shipping locations in California, Florida, Texas, Arizona, Georgia and Michigan and locations in six states and Mexico. The world's largest celery breeding program.

AISLE 300

307
CALIFORNIA STRAWBERRY COMMISSION
WATSONVILLE, CA
Over 35,000 acres of strawberries are grown in California, supplying 96 percent of the strawberries consumed in Canada. Shipments are focused when local strawberries are not available. Strawberries lead the way in the fastest growing produce category — berries.

308
SILVER CREEK SOFTWARE
BOISE, ID
Visual Produce, an accounting program targeted for the fresh produce industry, offers unique capabilities to produce wholesalers, distributors, packers, brokers and grower settlements including customer menus, contract pricing, lot control, route accounting, Visual Internet, landed cost and much more.

312
SUN RICH FRESH FOODS, INC.
RICHMOND, BC
Our mission is a fresh, safe and convenient experience, and conveniently we have a line of grab-and-go products that are taking North America by storm. These products include 2-ounce bags of sliced red and green apples, 2-ounce bags of grapes and a 4-ounce bag of mixed apples and grapes.



AISLE 400

406
PEAR BUREAU NORTHWEST
MILWAUKIE, OR
USA Pears, grown in Washington and Oregon, represent 84 percent of the U.S. fresh pear crop. With several varieties and nearly yearlong availability, USA Pears are a fresh, profitable choice for produce departments from fall to summer. Learn more about varieties, pre-conditioning programs and new merchandising opportunities.

417
BONIPAK PRODUCE CO.
SANTA MARIA, CA
Bonipak Produce is a multi-commodity grower, packer, shipper and processor of fresh vegetable products. We supply both the retail and foodservice industries with high quality and freshness, shipping year-round from California and Arizona.

419
WASHINGTON APPLE COMMISSION
WENATCHEE, WA
The Washington Apple Commission (WAC) is a grower-funded commodity commission responsible for the promotion of Washington state apples in targeted international markets. Activities include creating and implementing retail promotional programs, participating in trade shows, trade education, advertising/PR, market research and merchandising.

429
BEACHSIDE PRODUCE, LLC
GUADALUPE, CA
Beachside Produce is one of the leading producers and marketers of commodity packed broccoli in the United States. Beachside is a grower-owned sales and marketing company that has the exclusive marketing rights on the Lyon variety artichoke. Beachside also provides a full line of vegetable consolidation for its customer base.

AISLE 500

509
POM WONDERFUL
LOS ANGELES CA
PARAMOUNT CITRUS
DELANO, CA
PARAMOUNT FARMS
BAKERSFIELD, CA
POM Wonderful is the nation's largest pomegranate grower/shipper; Paramount Farms is the world's largest vertically-integrated pistachio and almond grower; Paramount Citrus is the world's largest fully integrated citrus grower.

514
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND POTATO BOARD
CHARLOTTETOWN, PEI
P.E.I. Potato's Serving you…the taste of distinction, the assurance of quality! The unique, rich red soil of beautiful PEI produces a distinct taste that has created a demand around the world. Our growers offer russet, red, round white, yellow-fleshed, blue, baby potatoes, fingerlings and organic.

515
MACKAY & HUGHES
TORONTO, ON, CANADA
MacKay & Hughes cherishes its ability to distinguish the products it sells from its competition. We have developed our own exclusive line of potatoes, including the Klondike Rose™ potato. In addition, we have partnered exclusively with Green Giant Fresh™ and bring its potatoes and onions into Canada.

521
SALYER AMERICAN FRESH FOODS, INC.
SALINAS, CA
A division of SK Foods Group and established in 1986 as a premium quality grower/shipper. Fully integrated, with access to the best growing regions in the world to ensure the highest quality field pack year-round from seed to harvest, Salyer American is a market leader in North America with a strong presence in Canada, Europe and the Pacific Rim.

527
COLUMBIA MARKETING INTERNATIONAL CORP.
WENATCHEE, WA
As one of Washington state's largest fruit shippers, CMI has fresh packed apples and pears ready to ship; exhibiting quality standards you've come to expect. You can count on CMI for an exceptional selection of the most popular varieties. Stop by to see CMI's line of conventional and organic fruit.

AISLE 600

600
B.C. TREE FRUITS LIMITED
KELOWNA, BC, CANADA
B.C. Tree Fruits markets a wide variety of fresh fruits under the B.C. brand label. We market conventional and organic apples, cherries, peaches, pears, apricots, nectarines, blueberries, table grapes and prune plums. Visit our booth and relax in our café located at the entrance to the trade show floor.

614
LITEHOUSE FOODS
SANDPOINT, ID
Litehouse is partnering with the Canadian retailers to drive category sales! Come to our booth to see what's new, to sample some delicious food and to see how Litehouse can help grow your produce department sales.

621
RED HAT CO-OP
REDCLIFF, ALBERTA
A grower/shipper located in southern Alberta, we grow our produce under the sunniest skies in Canada. Our 35 growers use this abundant sunlight to produce delicious greenhouse-grown produce including seedless cucumbers, mini-cucumbers, beefsteak tomatoes, tomatoes-on-the-vine, cocktail tomatoes and sweet bell peppers. 'Growing since 1966.'

701
THE OPPENHEIMER GROUP
COQUITLAM, BC, CANADA
Our quest to bring the finest fruits and vegetables to market began in 1858 and endures to this very day. But delivering the best — for 150 years and counting — takes more than just expert logistics. Our international network of growers assures that the season's best is always in season, any time of year.

CPMA ACDFL CALGARY 2008

BOOTH REVIEW

AISLE 700

707
DEL MONTE FRESH PRODUCE N.A., INC.
Miami, FL
Fresh Del Monte offers retailers, wholesalers and foodservice operators a range of fresh and fresh-cut products and innovative solutions to address the changing tastes and lifestyle needs of today's consumers. Our extensive distribution network allows just-in-time deliveries of our premium quality fresh products to your doorstep.

715
MANN PACKING CO., INC.
Salinas, CA
Mann's new One Step Steam! exclusive steam-in-bag technology will be on display as well as our award-winning Ready, Set, Steam products, healthful snacks on the go, party platters, Broccolini® and more! It's Fresh. It's Easy. It's Mann's!

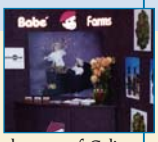
AISLE 800

801
SCOTIAN GOLD COOPERATIVE LTD.
Coldbrook, NS, Canada
Scotian Gold Cooperative has been located for over 50 years in the beautiful Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia. With over 50 growers, Scotian Gold markets over one-third of the total Nova Scotia apple crop. Scotian Gold is quickly becoming recognized for its premium Honeycrisp apples and crunchy apple slices.

814
TANIMURA AND ANTLE
Salinas, CA
For three generations, we have remained the industry leader in quality, innovation and grower, customer and employee relations. Today, as the largest independent lettuce grower and distributor in the United States, Tanimura & Antle farms over 60,000 acres and ships premium fresh produce throughout North America, Europe and Asia.

815
BC HOT HOUSE FOODS
Surrey, BC, Canada
BC Hot House Foods is a world leader in greenhouse-grown produce, delivering 35 years of greenhouse-produce knowledge and experience. Our full product line of greenhouse-grown tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers are available year-round. Stop by and see us.

823
BABÉ FARMS
Santa Maria, CA
A premier grower/shipper located on the central coast of California, Babé Farms will exhibit select items from its year-round harvest of over 30 varieties of baby lettuces and specialty greens, colorful root veggies and baby cauliflower for its foodservice and retail clients. Creative packaging for specialty vegetables, signature salad blends and baby head lettuces will also be displayed.



824
THE MARCO COMPANY
Ft. Worth, TX
Marco has specialized in designing and manufacturing grocery and produce fixtures for over two decades. Manufacturing capabilities include wood, laminate, metal, wire and plastic, making Marco one of the most vertically integrated providers in the industry. Domestic and international production allow for top-quality products at competitive prices.

AISLE 900

901
CHILEAN FRESH FRUIT ASSOCIATION
Sacramento, CA
At our booth you will see the many new programs and materials that are being introduced to help retailers and foodservice customers build their 2008/2009 Chilean fresh fruit business.

905
DNE WORLD FRUIT SALES
Ft. Pierce, FL
DNE will be showcasing its line of citrus from various regions. We will be highlighting Florida and California Valencias as well as promoting Mexican lemons and limes and Chilean clementines and navels. Let DNE help you grow your citrus profits by creating a custom program to meet your needs.

907
WELL-PICT, INC.
Salinas, CA
Well-Pict's premium berry programs continue to grow! In our organic line, we've expanded availability for our proprietary strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries. We've added new packaging options, including the 12-ounce raspberry/blackberry clamshell, and our newest late-summer strawberry variety provides longer shelf life without sacrificing flavor. Visit us to learn more!

914
RAINIER FRUIT COMPANY
Selah, WA
Rainier Fruit Company is dedicated to farming using principles of good stewardship. Our primary responsibility is to grow the finest quality apples, pears, cherries and blueberries, using the natural resources entrusted to us, without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same. Stop by to discuss our blueberry program.

915
SAN MIGUEL PRODUCE
Oxnard, CA
San Miguel Produce created special varieties of farm-fresh and ready-to-cook greens for Canada. As third generation farmers, the company created special processes and technologies to provide naturally fresh, packaged cooking greens. Cooking greens are a powerhouse food of vitamins and minerals, growing in popularity for their natural ability to fit into any diet or meal.

920
NATURESEAL
Westport, CT
NatureSeal® continues to be the pioneer of the fresh-cut produce industry. With today's vast line of NatureSeal products, the natural taste, texture and color of cut produce can be maintained without the use of sulfites. Our precise vitamin/mineral blends keep cut produce fresh for up to 21 days.

929
PRODUCE BUSINESS
Boca Raton, FL
Initiating industry improvement since 1985, Produce Business is the most widely distributed publication in the industry. Exclusively edited for buyers, it provides a montly dialogue of marketing, merchandising, management and procurement information that helps buyers accomplish the industry's *9-to-13-A-Day* goal.

AISLE 1000

1003
IDAHO-EASTERN OREGON ONIONS
Parma, ID
Idaho-E. Oregon Onions will present a booth like no other at this year's CPMA. In celebration of 50 years operating under Federal Marketing Order No. 958, this eye-catching booth will promote Spanish Sweets in a surprisingly fun way! Stop by and get in on the "action."

1005
PERO VEGETABLE COMPANY, LLC
Delray Beach, FL
Pero Vegetable celebrates its centennial! 2008 marks 100 years of Pero Vegetable's impeccable standards and satisfaction in the fresh produce business. A leading grower, distributor and marketer of fresh vegetables and fruits, Pero has held steadfast to its commitment to fulfill customers' needs throughout its history.

1007
DISPUTE RESOLUTION CORPORATION
Ottawa, ON, Canada
The DRC is a private PACA-like non-profit organization of produce and transportation companies trading in North America dedicated to providing fair, efficient, affordable and enforceable dispute resolution services. Members adhere to a common set of trading practices and mediation and arbitration procedures.

1009
ONTARIO PRODUCE MARKETING ASSOCIATION
Toronto, ON, Canada
OPMA promotes the consumption of fruit and vegetables throughout Ontario, the largest market in Canada! In addition to providing services available exclusively through OPMA (e.g., destination inspections and quality controller training), we promote eating more fresh produce through promotional items, media campaigns and consumer shows.

1015
LINSEY FOODS LTD.
Markham, ON
ET TU Salad Kits, made by Linsey Foods. Find everything in one kit to make bistro-style salads at home. Just add fresh lettuce! Family-size gable-top box and single-serve pouch, available in award-winning Caesar Original, Caesar Light, Caesar Vinaigrette and four other varieties. Also, ET TU Dessert Kits — like homemade!

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Reader Service # 110

Get Sweeter Returns On Sweet Onions

Proper labeling, quality product and consumer education go a long way in offsetting sweet onions' higher price points.

BY TRISHA WOOLDRIDGE

Sweet onions hold an ambiguous position between commodity and specialty, which can cause confusion for consumers and retailers, because they resemble, and are often placed next to, cooking or storage onions. Most importantly, if sweet onions contain too much pyruvic acid, they lose their sweetness, eroding the value of the higher price point.

If onions are not properly labeled, the distinctions between sweet onions and common onions can be blurred, creating confusion for a consumer who thought she was paying extra for a Walla Walla but instead purchased a Spanish or a storage onion.

Mislabeled sweet onions also pose problems at checkout. If they are improperly stickered, cashiers may ring them at the wrong price point. Properly labeled — and consistently sweet — sweet onions can build higher consumer loyalty to the product and fewer incorrect rings at the register.

"There's a significant price difference," explains Chaddy Robinson, promotions director for Carzalia Valley Produce, Inc., Columbus, NM. "The price difference is good if people are looking for sweet onions, but if they don't see the difference, it really hurts sales."

Sweet onions have been marketed in the United States for over a hundred years. The top contenders for oldest sweet onion are Vidalia and the Walla Walla. "Vidalias are the original sweet onion," declares Wendy Brannen, executive director, Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC), Vidalia, GA. "They are the pioneers of the sweet onion."

John Tumino, marketing director, Richter and Company, Inc., the Charlotte, NC-based exclusive sales agent for Stanley Farms, a Vidalia, GA-based grower, packer and shipper of Vidalia onions, agrees, adding, "The name has such a widespread recognition across the sweet onion category. Consumers have come to recognize them."

Attract consumers by showcasing sweet onions in bulk in waterfall displays.

According to the VOC Web site, "The Vidalia onion story began over 70 years ago" when a farmer named Mose Coleman discovered his onions were sweet rather than hot. It took some time for the onions to catch on, but by the 1940s they began appearing on retail shelves as "Vidalia onions."

Supporting the other top contender, Bryon Magnaghi, manager of sales, Walla Walla Gardeners Association, Walla, Walla, WA, reports, "The Walla Walla sweet onion has been the No. 1 sweet onion available during the summer for more than 100 years."

Kathy Fry, director of marketing for the Walla Walla Sweet Onion Marketing Committee, Walla Walla, WA, elaborates, "This year will be our 108th harvest. Our first official harvest was in 1900."

A-W Produce Company, based in Weslaco, TX, offers Texas sweet yellow onions, which are characterized by thin, light-colored skin and a sweet, mild flavor due to the high water and sugar content. "We have a globe type of onion," explains Chad Szutz, general manager. A-W's spring onions are red, white, or yellow in color and are shipped the last week of March through the first week of May.

With the growing popularity of sweet onions from both coasts, additional varieties were developed or imported. According to Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's, Inc., headquartered in Los Alamitos, CA, Frieda's brought the Maui onion to continental retailers. "We introduced it over 30 years ago. A consumer called in the late '70s and wanted to know where she could get the Maui onion." One of the people working for Frieda's called her to find out more about this

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Just A Taste Of Variety

VARIETY	REGION GROWN	REGIONAL NOTES	GENERALLY AVAILABLE	FLAVOR NOTES
Vidalia	Vidalia, GA	• 20 county region • Low sulfur soil • Requires a specific number of hours of sunlight per day	April - October	• Crisp texture • Juicy • Less than usual pungency
Walla Walla	Walla Walla, WA	• Indian term for many waters • Requires lots of water and low sulfur soil	June-September	• Very juicy • Mild • Fresh
Carzalia	Carzalia Valley, NM	• Requires low sulfur soil • Uses sub-surface drip irrigation	May-September	• Mild • Consistent low pungency • Sweet
OsoSweet	Foothills of the Andes, Chile	• Grown in volcanic soil • Uses mountain water • Requires warm days and cool nights	December-March	• Crisp, celery-like texture • Rich, savory flavor
Maui	Kula, Maui, HI	• Grown in volcanic soil • Grown by independent farmers • Requires tropical environment	Mostly year-round	• Sweet • No hint of bitter • Uniquely tropical
SpringSweet & Texas 1015	South Texas	• Grown under semi-tropical conditions • Grown in rich, fertile soil	March - June	• Mild • Juicy • Sweet
Sweet Imperial	Imperial Valley, CA	• Grown below sea level in rich loamy desert soil • Requires mild, dry winters and hot, dry summers	April - June	• High moisture content • High sugar content
Peruvian	Ica growing region, Peru	• Temperate climate • Desert terrain with vast underground fresh water supply • Less than 1-2" annual rainfall	September - February	• Mild • Juicy • Sweet

Sources include: www.sweetonionsource.com, www.blandfarms.com, www.onionsetc.com/html/availability.html, www.commserv.ucdavis.edu/CEImperial/overview.htm and www.plantanswers.tamu.edu/recipes/onion/sweettalk.html., www.livinginperu.com and John Shuman, Shuman Produce, Reidsville, GA

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onion and then found a way to bring it to the retail market.

OFFER SEVERAL VARIETIES

Consumers look for a wide selection of onions because of their varying flavors, explains Marty Kramer, sales manager, Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc., Greencastle, PA. "Different flavors are used in different applications or recipes. Bold and pungent onions are great when cooked in stews, soups, salsas and sauces. Sweet onions are very versatile. While they are great when cooked, they can be eaten and enjoyed raw in salads and sandwiches."

John Shuman, president and director of sales at Shuman Produce, Reidsville, GA, states the sweet onion category as a whole is growing tremendously as consumers discover the onions' wide array of uses. "Potatoes and onions are really the two major anchor items for the produce department, and the sweet onion category is quickly becoming the fastest growing, particularly because of the Vidalia sweet onion."

Shuman Produce offers more than just Vidalias under its RealSweet label; it specializes in year-round marketing and distribution of year-round quality sweet onions from Texas, Peru, Chile, Guatemala and Mexico.

With so many types of sweet onions available, it's important to know their distinctions so they can be marketed appropriately. Each onion has a flavor profile specific to its growing region, methods and seed variety. To mislabel or misrepresent a sweet onion variety would be similar to selling a Macoun apple as a McIntosh. If a consumer expects a certain flavor and gets a different one, it erodes consumer and product loyalty.

"It really confuses consumers and hurts the category," states Rodger Helwig, marketing director for OsoSweet Onions, San Francisco, CA. "There is only one Vidalia or Walla Walla or OsoSweet. They all come from a distinct place. A corollary is the wine business, where a true champagne only comes from the Champagne region of France — anywhere else, it's a sparkling wine."

Another issue is country of origin. Sweet onions are grown in the United States and overseas. If a Peruvian or a Chilean sweet onion is mislabeled as a Walla Walla or a Vidalia, it misrepresents the country of origin. "You're telling people it is grown in the United States when it is not," insists Darrell Kelso, president and CEO of Onions Etc., Inc., Stockton, CA. While it might be a pat on the back to Vidalia that the name has become synonymous with sweet onions, regardless of origin, "If you say it's Vidalia and it's not good, it lowers expectations and gives it a bad name."

Richter's Tumino warns, "You don't want to pile onions from Peru on top of a display of Vidalia onions and vice versa."

Keeping signage up-to-date throughout the overlapping season is important, advises Shuman. "For retailers, this is when working closely with shippers really pays off."

USE CORRECT LABELS

Mislabeling one type of sweet onion as another is bad enough, but it's even more disturbing to find onions that are not sweet labeled as such and then offered at the category's higher price point.

"The true worrisome trend is that many of the sweet onions being offered do not meet the lowest standard of certified sweetness [as determined by the Athens, GA-based University of Georgia's accepted testing methodology]," states Kurt Schweitzer, owner and vice-president, Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc.

"Right now, retailers are switching to the new spring crop and it's important consumers know what they are buying," explains A-W's Szutz. "They're going to be upset if they wanted to buy a sweet onion

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and they bring home a hot storage onion."

David Burrell of National Onion Labs, Inc., (NOH), Collins, GA, reports, "We tested 15,000 onions at retail stores and found 53 percent to be not mild. If consumers have less than a 50 percent chance of purchasing a sweet onion labeled as a sweet onion, that is a significant blow to the category and to consumer loyalty."

Some distributors are helping this issue through bagged programs. Onions Etc., for example, packages red Italian sweet and sweet yellow onions in a bag, distinguishing them as sweet and making them stand out on their own. The onions won't get lost in bulk bins of regular yellow or red cooking onions.

While packaging and POS materials can help stores differentiate sweet onions, sweet onions that don't live up to their name are a grower issue.

"Even in the most known and accepted sweet onion production areas, it is still not a given that because of the name they are necessarily sweet — worse, they could be pungent," explains Keystone's Schweitzer. "This is what we discovered years ago on our farms in Vidalia. Certain areas of our

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What Makes An Onion Sweet?

Onion variety, environment and the growing culture are components to making a sweet onion sweet.

David Burrell, president, National Onion Labs (NOL), Inc., Collins, GA, explains, "All onions have an interplay of mild and pungent, sweetness and bitter or off flavors. Mild or sweet onions have a low pungency and a high mild and sweet level with no bitter or off flavors."

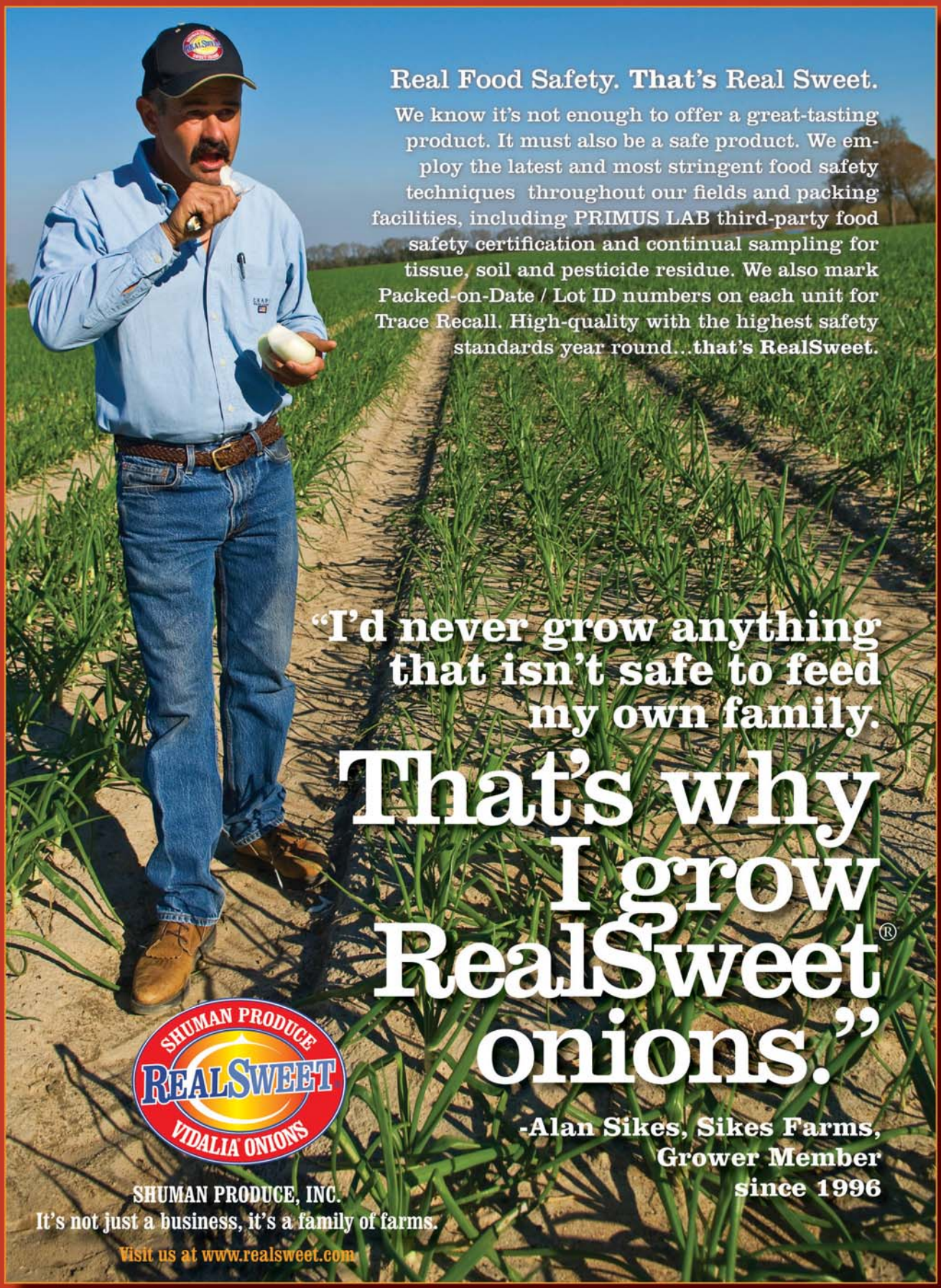
Sweet onions must have a low lachrymatory factor — which causes tears and burning — and a low level of pyruvic acid — which makes an onion hot.

Seed variety determines sweetness potential. Different varieties have been cultivated to match their environments. If Maui seeds are planted in Vidalia, the yield that would be neither a Vidalia nor a Maui onion. It may not even be sweet, because the variety was not meant to be grown in that particular environment.

"If you line up Carzalia, Texas 1015, Walla Walla and Vidalia onions, they will all look different," explains Chaddy Robinson of Carzalia Valley Produce, Inc., Columbus, NM. "They're all bred for different regions."

While most growing environments share some similarities, such as low sulfur levels in the soil, water or both, many distinctions give the particular varieties of onions their own characteristics. Volcanic soil gives Maui and OsoSweet onions their distinct flavors and textures. More dessert-like conditions contribute to the characteristics of Imperial sweets and Carzalias. In Vidalia, the growing environment must meet strict regulations, giving the onions their unique flavor. Other environmental factors include how much sunlight is available during development, and day and night temperatures.

Cultural practices include field selection and preparation, irrigation management and fertilizer usage. A goal of proper cultural practices is to reduce the stress of the onions as much as possible. Plant stress creates high levels of the chemicals that boost the lachrymatory factor, the onion's self-defense. A stressful life will create more of the stinging chemicals that cause tears because the onion thinks it needs to protect itself. **pb**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WALLA WALLA SWEET ONIONS
Since 1900

Reader Service # 108

The Vidalia Outlook

By Bill Martin

Ronny Collins, owner of Plantation Sweets, Cobbtown, GA, shares the views of many, if not most, Vidalia sweet onion growers that there is good quality crop coming, and he's keeping his fingers crossed that weather or something else doesn't adversely affect it. He says there are 20 percent fewer acres planted this season, plus one-half million bushels of storage have been added to the Vidalia deal this season.

"We are all looking for a good year. In other sweet onion areas, pricing has been depressed. We had a good year last year ,and I don't know if we could stand two good years in a row," he says with a chuckle. Collins has had a year-round sweet onion deal for "several years now" and notes it has allowed him to maintain his customer base.

John Shuman, president and director of sales, Shuman Produce, Inc., Reidsville, GA, agrees. He had already completed his imported sweet onion deals from Peru, Chile, and Guatemala. These are followed by Mexico, Texas and Vidalia.

Commenting on the Vidalia sweet onions starting in April, Shuman adds, "the retailers can expect good f.o.b. prices, with good promotional prices."

Bo Herndon, president of L.G. Herndon Farms, Inc., Lyons, GA, explains, "Our customers are definitely going to have to promote this sweet onion crop, starting around May 1. To sell onions, you've got to promote them to get the movement that is needed."

Herndon, who was recently re-elected as chairman of the Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC), Vidalia, GA, reports despite 12 to 15 inches of rain in February and March, the overall Vidalia crop is looking good and is sizing up well.

WHAT'S NEW IN VIDALIA?

Here are some of the Vidalia sweet onion deal changes that growers and shippers are making to improve quality, service and efficiency in their operations and better serve customers.

Bland Farms, LLC, Vidalia, GA: The nation's largest sweet onion operation acquired Oconee River Produce packing and controlled-atmosphere storage facilities, which have a capacity of 158,000 bushels. The facility was renamed Bland Farms, Mount Vernon Division. Another high-speed onion grader and another consumer bagging line have been added. In May, the loading dock areas will be completely refrigerated for the pre-cooling of onions. Bland's drying capacity has been expanded.

Karla Antunez was named food-safety director. She has a degree in agricultural science engineering from EARTH University in Limon, Costa Rica. She joins Sondiria Reynolds who was recently named marketing director, according to Michael Hively, CFO and general manager.

L.G. Herndon Jr. Farms, Inc., Lyons, GA: 85,000 bushels of new storage was recently added; the grower/shipper now has a total capacity of 200,000 bushels. More packing lines were added and reconfigured providing greater efficiency and production. Completing the upgrades are additional new graders and dryers, says Bo Herndon, president.

Ray Farms, Inc., Glennville, GA: Some adjustments were made in the company's drying operations, leading to less handling of product and more efficient operations, says principal Danny Ray.

Shuman Produce, Inc., Reidsville, GA: Significant packing-shed improvements were made at McClain Farms, Sikes Farms and Dry Branch Farms, Shuman's three growing operations, to better provide quality sweet onions. Improvements include additional bagging equipment, storage capacity, grading lines and other features resulting in less handling of product and next-day grading of sweet onions for the fresh market or storage. Total storage capacity is up to 500,000 cases. Shuman's suppliers now have the ability to dry and cure 50 to 60 truckloads of sweet onions per day. Shuman is marketing Vidalia sweet onions from 1,400 acres, up 10 percent from last season. "A lot of food-safety improvements have been made in the fields and at the packing level. We consider ourselves a leader in this area," says John Shuman, president and director of sales. **pb**

Sweet onion marketers say sweet onions displayed in bulk in waterfall displays are very effective.

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farms produced onions with better sweetness, better flavor and better shelf life. By working with the University of Georgia, we were able to identify and implement production practices that provided our customers with consistent, certified sweet onions — many times extra sweet."

Not all onions are certified, however, and there is no conformity unifying the different varieties and regions of sweet onions, notes Carzalia's Robinson. Some onions sold as sweet still have high levels of pyruvic acid. "When you say sweet, it must be sweet with a low pyruvic acid so you can make sure the customer is happy."

To ensure they are fulfilling the expectations of the sweet onion consumer, stores can choose onions that adhere to a certification program, such as the one offered by NOL or they can contact NOL to help with a retail-level certification program.

However, just tasting the sweet onions can go long way to satisfying consumers. "When seasons overlap, we cut them open and taste them, then offer the best for our sweets," explains Mark Jewell, fresh category manager for Hannaford Bros. Co., a Portland, ME-based chain with more than 150 stores.

SPRUCE UP SALES WITH DISPLAYS

Once a store has ensured its product can deliver on the sweetness factor, it's time to get consumers excited with displays and merchandising. "You have to find something to make onions interesting to customers," advises VOC's Brannen. "Onions are not necessarily the most exciting thing. For many people, the onion is just something they cook with. You need to find something to make it stand out."

"Create the impulse," recommends Jewell. "It's an impulse because it's not necessarily on the consumer's mind."

Joey Johnson of J & S Produce, Inc., Mount Vernon, GA, explains, "The demand is there. If we could get Vidalia onions to everyone who wanted them, there would be a shortage."

Setting sweet onions apart from regular cooking or storage onions is a good start

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along with clear signage and proper PLU stickers on every onion. Michael Hively, CEO and general manager, Bland Farms, LLC, Glennville, GA, points out that while it's easy to lose PLU stickers because of the onions' papery skins, making sure all onions are properly labeled helps ensure the proper ring at the cash register. "Stores have made great strides in the past few years on high PLU conformity."

Many onion distributors also offer eye-catching cartons, shippers, banners and POS material with their product. Having both a bag and bulk program also increases sales because it raises visibility and distinction for sweet onions, in addition to catering to the varying needs of customers.

Displaying sweet onions in bulk in waterfall displays work well, according to Richter's Tumino.

"We see some really great displays of all onions at various retailers throughout the country," Keystone's Kramer reports. "The best onion displays showcase a lot of variety. Feature bulk and consumer bag offerings. Large end-cap displays generate impulse sales. Communicate flavor and nutrition. [Use displays with] great signage, great color break, and always [keep them] full and fresh. The idea is to give the consumer what they are looking for."

There's no excuse for failing to deliver what consumers want in terms of sweet onion flavor, he adds. "The single biggest component in continuing to drive sweet onion sales is to constantly and consistently meet the customers' expectation in terms of flavor. Commitment to meeting this expectation will pay huge dividends in boosting sales. You have to know the onions that are being signed and offered as sweet onions will meet consumers' expectations."

Retailers should also increase visibility with more advertising. "Ad frequency is important," notes Hannaford's Jewell. "A lot of stores do a great job promoting during Vidalia season, then they forget. This year, we're making a commitment to increase ad frequency so people can see [sweet onions are available]. Use the flyer as part of consumer education: promote sweet onions, link to a recipe and suggest what to do with them."

Kelso of Onions Etc., suggests retailers "run ads together. Try vine-ripened tomatoes with red Italian sweets. Work ads like a shopping list."

PROMOTIONS AND CROSS-MERCHANDISING

Showcasing sweet onions through promotions and cross-merchandising attract consumers to the category. Since many sweet onions are available during the spring and summer, barbeques and picnics are common themes that work well.

"Make sure consumers know they're available all summer long," Richter's Tumino advises. "Vidalia onions are great for grilling [and can be eaten] raw or cooked."

Shuman of Shuman Produce agrees, adding, "You've got Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day. These are all big holidays for grilling outdoors. Most importantly, be sure to display sweet onions in a high-traffic area."

Showcasing sweet onions through promotions and cross-merchandising attract consumers to the category.

All sweet onions can be cross-merchandised with meats or in a summer grilling display. Other possibilities include displays for guacamole and summer entertaining matched with sweet red or white onions; summer salads with tomatoes and cucumbers; onion rings with batter packages; and salsa/Pico de Gallo with all the ingredients and chips. Winter onions, such as OsoSweets can be cross-merchandised with beef broth, cheese and bread for onion soup.

"Make a display of tropical produce," advises Frieda's Caplan. "Add Maui onions to a display of pineapple, papaya and bananas."

Retailers can cross-merchandise sweet onions with dressings and other condiments. Stanley Farms owns and operates Vidalia Valley, which offers a wide variety of relishes, dressings, salsas and sauces, notes Tumino. The products, made with Vidalia onions grown by Stanley Farms, can be displayed next to Vidalia onions.

"Cross-merchandising opportunities with sweet onions are endless," says Keystone's Kramer, who suggests displaying them with steaks, burgers, salads and slaws.

Another possibility is to have taste testing and demos. "Use a sweet onion and a storage onion," suggests Carzalia's Robinson. "Slice them to show the customer the difference."

"Store sampling is a great way to promote our onions. Keep in mind, you have to be certain you are presenting a truly sweet onion," adds Walla Walla Gardeners' Magnaghi. **pb**

Reader Service # 30

10 Ways To Sell More Tomatoes

Devote more display space and attention to maximize profits for this expanding commodity.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

American writer and humorist Lewis Grizzard once said, "It's difficult to think of anything but pleasant thoughts while eating a homegrown tomato." His sentiments are fueled by flavor — the main driver of tomato sales today.

In 2007, the tomato category represented 6.7 percent of produce department dollar sales, according to the Perishables Group, West Dundee, IL. Tomatoes outperform the produce department with a true margin of 37 percent, versus 17.7 percent for produce, reports the *2007 Grocery SuperStudy*, published by Willard Bishop Consulting, Barrington, IL. The profitable fruit also generate inventory turns of 58.9 per year, versus 52 turns per year for produce.

"Put the financial performance together with the fact that many retailers — over 40 percent — consider tomatoes a Top 3 showcase category that halos the entire department with a quality image," explains Jim Hertel, Willard Bishop managing partner. "The category is poised for ever greater success as the drive to differentiate continues."

Retailers, such as Randy Bohaty, produce director for B&R Stores, Inc., a 15-unit chain headquartered in Lincoln, NE, have set their sights on maximizing tomato sales. "We've decided to make tomatoes a significant category in our stores. We've moved the tomato display up in the department to a higher-traffic area and stocked a variety mix that gives us a point of distinction."

Better taste and a multitude of varieties enable tomatoes to be one of the strongest categories in the produce department.

1. FEATURE FIELD, VINE RIPE AND ROMAS

Field, vine-ripe and Roma tomatoes "are staples of the category that form the base of category sales," reports Mark Munger, vice president of marketing, Andrew & Williamson Sales Co., Inc., San Diego, CA. "Be sure to place them in a large display and sales will take care of themselves. "

According to the Perishables Group, field tomatoes represented an 18.8 percent share of category dollars in 2007, up 0.2 percent from 2006. This ranks field tomatoes the third largest contributor behind hothouse tomatoes on-the-vine (TOV) and cherry/grape tomatoes.

"Florida's round field-grown tomatoes are prized by foodservice operators and retailers alike for their size, shape, flavor, meatiness and overall great quality," notes Billy Heller, chief operating officer for Sunripe Tomato Growers, Ltd., Palmetto, FL. "Peak production is mid-April to May, so this is the best time to promote."

Field-grown tomatoes weren't always so coveted, reports Munger. "In the late 1980s, field tomatoes tasted like cardboard. If you took the temperature of the industry back then, it was in intensive care. Over the past decade, seed companies have discovered that their customer isn't just the grower; it's also the consumer. We work to bring seed companies and the voice of the consumer together in order for new field-grown varieties with maximum flavor to be bred. We also allow tomatoes to vine ripen to assure a full-flavored taste. After all, while consumers buy with their eyes, repeat purchases are based on taste."

Roma tomatoes represented a 13.4 percent share of category dollars in 2007, down 1.1 percent from 2006, according to the Perishables Group.

2. HIGHLIGHT HOTHOUSE GROWN

Hothouse TOVs are category leaders at Acme Markets, a 134-store chain based in Malvern, PA, and owned by Supervalu, headquartered in Eden Prairie, MN. "These are

Display The Right Amount

By Carol Bareuther, RD

Retailers must ride an interesting seesaw in order to reap top dollar from the tomato category. If they don't offer enough variety, they can lose incremental sales or even customers who decide to shop elsewhere. If retailers offer too many choices, they risk cannibalizing sales of one tomato type over another.

The choices are staggering today, says Mark Munger, vice president of marketing, Andrew & Williamson Sales Co., Inc., San Diego, CA. "I remember when we went from four main varieties to 10. That was a huge change. Now, we see retailers that carry as many as 47 SKUs throughout the year and as many as 15 to 20 SKUs minimum on display at any one time. This has been great for the industry."

Peter Kroner, director of business development, Eli & Ali's Love Tomatoes, Brooklyn, NY, adds, "I think we'll continue to see even more types of tomatoes. It might not be as rapidly as we've seen in recent years, but there's still room in the category."

Consumers are driving the desire for diversity. "Research conducted by the now defunct California Tomato Commission (CTC), a few years ago showed that Hispanic and non-Hispanic consumers differ in their buying habits," according to Munger. "For example, Hispanics tend to shop by price, know what they want and buy for a specific cooking purpose rather than impulse. They are loyal customers and buy in high volume. Non-Hispanics don't know what they want. Their purchases are impulse driven. Retailers want to serve both shoppers."

Dionysios Christou, vice president marketing, Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Inc., Coral Gables, FL, adds, "Depending on who the consumer target is, each tomato offers a unique quality that makes it the preferred choice for that specific consumer. Organic tomatoes are selected by health-conscious and environmentally concerned consumers, heirlooms are selected for their outstanding flavor and taste profile, field-grown tomatoes are versatile, flavorful and reasonably valued while hothouse are consistent for freshness and quality. Retailers should carry common varieties for volume and at least a couple of niche varieties for added value for their most discriminating customers."

Jay Schneider, produce assistant sales manager for the eastern division, Acme Markets, based in Malvern, PA, and owned by Supervalu, Eden Prairie, MN, has developed a way to find the most profitable balance. "At times, there can be too much to offer. However, when we look at the category and measure the shrink versus the sales on specific items along with display space, we can determine what items are right for our business." **pb**

one of our best-selling tomatoes," explains Jay Schneider, produce assistant sales manager for the eastern division.

"The TOV is our No. 1 seller and the primary anchor to our store's tomato displays," notes Ed Laster, produce specialist at Metropolitan Markets, a 5-store chain based in Seattle, WA.

Maureen Sheehan, senior director of marketing, BC Hot House Foods, Inc., Vancouver, BC, Canada, agrees, adding, "Consumers are looking for real tomato taste, as

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if they were grown in their own backyards. That's what makes TOVs so popular."

In addition to flavor, price propels the popularity of TOVs, notes B&R's Bohaty. "It used to be that hothouse tomatoes were a $1 per pound higher or more than field-grown tomatoes. Growing conditions over the past year have led to increased prices for field-grown tomatoes. In many cases, field-grown tomatoes sell for the same or slightly more than hothouse. Also, the consistent growing conditions and availability of the hothouse product have allowed us to offer consumers some real good deals and encouraged them to trade up on a regular basis."

Hothouse TOVs represented a 31.1 percent share of category dollars — or the largest contributor to the category — in 2007, according to the Perishables Group. In addition, hothouse beefsteak tomatoes represent an additional 12.5 percent share of category dollars.

The tomato category changed when hothouse varieties became more predominant, explains Andrew & Williamson's Munger. "TOVs, beefsteak and colored tomatoes added excitement to the category and helped expand consumers' preferences. They did this due to their beautiful appearance, enticing aroma and vivid colors."

In the future, explains Jay Colasanti, co-owner, Red Zoo Marketing, Ruthven, ON, Canada, "Fulfilling consumer demand for small, unique and flavorful tomatoes will continue as a trend. For example, we're producing just over 1 million cartons of Amorosa Baby Cocktail tomatoes packed in 1-pound clamshells and GrapeRoma tomatoes packed in 1-pint diamond-shaped clamshells. Newer Cocktail tomatoes will offer improved presentation, higher brix, better shelf life and consistent flavor that rival earlier initiators of this category. There are several varieties coming to the shelf, but the big market share attack will come from baby Romas."

> **"TOVs, beefsteak and colored tomatoes added excitement to the category and helped expand consumers' preferences. They did this due to their beautiful appearance, enticing aroma and vivid colors."**
>
> **— Mark Munger**
> **Andrew & Williamson Sales Co., Inc.**

Paul Mastronardi, executive vice president, Mastronardi Produce, Ltd., Kingsville, ON, Canada, agrees. "Flavor sells. Each year, we launch new varieties of tomatoes. Splendido was launched after Campari and is growing at a faster rate. In May, we'll launch Mimi Candy tomatoes. Theses tomatoes are so sweet, we added candy to the name."

3. MARKET GRAPE TOMATOES FOR SNACKING

In addition to TOVs, "Pint grape tomatoes are also category leaders," reports Acme's Schneider.

According to The Perishables Group, cherry/grape tomatoes represented a 23.6 percent share of category dollars and were the second largest contributor to the category in 2007. Additionally, cherry/grape toma-

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toes sales were up 2 percent from 2006.

"Grape tomatoes are still pushing the envelope in a good way in the category," explains Rob Meade, director of grape tomato sales, East Coast Packers, headquartered in Plant City, FL. "It's a strong item. Supply and demand are year-round. They're usually promoted as a snack from Super Bowl parties in the winter to Fourth of July barbecues in the summer. Cherry tomatoes are big in foodservice, but grape tomatoes have replaced cherries at retail."

Sunripe's Heller notes, "We'll be expanding our grape tomato program this spring due to strong demand from retail."

Yellow and orange grape and cherry tomatoes appeal to customers looking for that "something different," explains Peter Kroner, director of business development for Eli & Ali's Love Tomatoes, Brooklyn, NY. "Yellow tomatoes are lower in acid. They're fancy but not a category driver."

4. ADD HEIRLOOMS TO THE MIX

Metropolitan Markets features locally grown heirloom tomatoes in season. "We'll build a nice display, advertise them, cross-merchandise them and our chefs use them in recipes they prepare and sample to customers out of in-store kiosks," reports Laster.

Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc., Los Angeles, CA, states, "The popularity of heirloom tomatoes evolved out of the farmer's market concept. Over the past seven years, we've seen tremendous growth in commercial sales. Availability tends to be strongest during the summer months. Eighty percent of the crop peaks from June through October." The pink/red Brandywine is the most popular heirloom tomato, he adds.

Heirloom beefsteak-type tomatoes "are popular and come in several colors and stripes," according to Red Zoo's Colasanti.

"We'll be introducing our yellow marmande-type beefsteak tomato this season," announces Chris Cunnane, director of tomato sales, Procacci Bros. Sales Corp., Philadelphia, PA. "It's from the same seed family as our heirloom Uglyripe."

Kroner agrees, adding, "We offer regular-sized and mini heirloom tomatoes in a variety pack with six to 10 types. They're available in conventional and organic."

5. OFFER ORGANICS

Organic tomatoes rank within the top four organic categories each week at Acme Markets, reports Schneider. "They're a great item to promote. We definitely see sales of organic tomatoes growing."

"We've seen a 20 to 30 percent increase in sales of organic tomatoes this past year and the year before," Kroner explains. "As a result, we've expanded our line to include specialty packs of organic tomatoes such as beefsteak, cherry, grape, TOVs, petite Roma

> **"We'll build a nice display, advertise them, cross-merchandise them and our chefs use them in recipes they prepare and sample to customers out of in-store kiosks."**
>
> **— Ed Laster**
> **Metropolitan Markets**

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TOVs, Romas and heirlooms."

In the Midwest, "We don't sell that many organic tomatoes," reports B&R's Bohaty. "It's hard to get conventional shoppers to trade up, but we try."

Andrew & Williamson's Munger notes, "Organic is growing, but it's not huge. For example, we've grown organic Romas for two years now. Sales of organic tomatoes versus conventional tomatoes are still 1-to-4 due to the premium price for the organic."

6. DO NOT REFRIGERATE

It is very important not to refrigerate tomatoes, advises Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing, Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Inc., Coral Gables, FL. "Refrigeration will kill the flavor of tomatoes."

"Handle tomatoes like bananas," Eli & Ali's Kroner suggests. "That is, avoid storing them at a temperate colder than 55° F."

Upon arrival, verify that product temperature is in the suggested storage range of 55° to 70° F with humidity 85 to 95 percent, according to BC Hot House's Sheehan. "The tomatoes should have good color [but not overripe], shiny skin, firm flesh and good weight. Discard damaged or decayed product from cartons as it can have an effect on the quality of the rest of the tomatoes within the carton."

7. MAKE BULK AND PACKAGED AVAILABLE

About three out of four shoppers choose bulk tomatoes over packaged, reports Samantha Winters, director of education and promotion for the Florida Tomato Committee (FTC), Maitland, FL. "Consumers generally like to pick their produce themselves. They feel they are getting a value when purchasing bulk. However, for the convenience-oriented shopper, packaged produce will continue to be appealing."

Del Monte's Christou agrees, adding, "Bulk and packaged tomatoes are equally in demand. There's a need for both types due to diversity in variety, sizing and preferences."

Packaging depends on the type of tomato, reports Red Zoo's Colasanti. "Commodities or all larger tomatoes seem to merchandise best if open and not packaged. Unique, value added, new introductions, mixed colors — these all seem best in a package for shrink. Smaller fruit sizes also benefit from the convenience of a package."

"Packaging offers the benefit of protecting the product. If tomatoes are packaged, they are touched by fewer hands and less likely to be damaged when merchandised," BC Hot House's Sheehan notes,

"Clamshells offer excellent protection," adds Christou. "The latest trend in packaging is to look for green alternatives to plastic. More retailers and consumers are supporting environmentally friendly packaging."

"Net, poly bags and over-wrap are also popular tomato packaging materials," says Colasanti. "Paper seems to be becoming more used, especially if the product is organic."

8. CREATE A DISPLAY DESTINATION

The tomato category represents significant display space in many retail produce departments. "We have dedicated 8- to 12-foot displays and now we added a new vignette display," notes Acme's Schneider. "Sale items for the week get dedicated display space in addition to what we already have allocated."

"Our stores have anywhere from 8- to 16-feet allocated to tomatoes, depending on department size and season," B&R's Bohaty states. "We went from six to 10 to 12 SKUs, including field, grape, hothouse, heirloom and organic tomatoes."

"Eighty percent of our display space is dedicated to hothouse TOVs and 20 percent to other varieties," adds Metropolitan's Laster. "This represents where the sales come from."

Merchandise all tomato varieties in one area and post good signage for type, price

Keep Sun-Dried Close To Fresh

By Amy Shannon

One of the best ways to attract new consumers to sun-dried tomatoes is to display them near traditional fresh tomatoes. "The closer the better," states Bill Riley, vice president of sales and marketing, California Sun Dry Foods, a Danville, CA-based supplier of quality sun-dried food products. "It's the fresh tomatoes that initially attract them to the category and remind them to pick up sun-dried tomatoes."

Mary Mooney, general partner of Mooney Farms, Chico, CA, agrees, adding, "Though quite different than fresh tomatoes in almost every way except the shared name, consumers have come to look for sun-dried tomato product among the fresh tomatoes."

Riley urges retailers to avoid putting sun-dried tomatoes on a shelf adjacent to the produce department. "Tucking them far away next to the garlic is the worse place to put them. Unless they're also shopping for garlic or it's a planned purchase, chances are consumers are probably not going to discover them there."

Placing sun-dried tomatoes near their fresh tomatoes shouldn't take away from their fresh produce sales, according to Riley. "Fresh sales aren't going to be dented by your sun-dried sales."

California Sun's products include sun-dried tomato halves in oil, julienne-cut sun-dried tomatoes in oil, sun-dried tomato spread, sun-dried tomato salsa, sun-dried tomato salad dressing, sun-dried garlic, sun-dried tomato sun cups and sun-dried tomato pesto.

While the vast majority of sun-dried tomato products are merchandised in the produce department, Riley understands that not all retailers have a lot of space to devote to sun-dried tomatoes. "Some say I barely have enough room for my fresh tomatoes," he notes. He suggests retailers with limited space consider allocating space for sun-dried tomato products in the winter months, when fresh tomatoes aren't at their peak.

Mooney suggests cross-merchandising sun-dried tomatoes with salad or soup products. "This versatile treat works well for summer salads or winter soups. Italian Fest is a great time to cross-merchandise sun-dried tomatoes, basil, olive oil, eggplant and anything that would create an Italian favorite."

While the sun-dried category is still fairly small, according to Riley, interest is spreading. "The awareness about the produce continues to grow. We can only assume consumers are discovering sun-dried tomatoes through the foodservice industry, word of mouth and cooking shows and magazines." **pb**

and country of origin, recommends Red Zoo's Colasanti. "This way, consumers can think out their choice and not discard their first choice at the next display and destroy the merchandising."

Andrew & Williamson's Munger agrees, adding, "Research conducted a few years ago by the now defunct California Tomato Commission (CTC) showed a lift of 30 to 40 percent by merchandising tomatoes all together in a patch format. In setting a display, allocate the largest amount of space to

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field tomatoes and Romas. These are the staples of the category or base of the pyramid. The second tier up, which occupies a smaller space, is for varieties such as TOVs, large hothouse and vine-ripe beefsteaks. The third or top tier is for premium or gourmet tomatoes. These aren't volume movers, but they do generate large dollar sales. They should be at eye level where they grab consumers' attention and encourage impulse sales."

Beefsteak tomatoes "display well from waterfalls created from boxes stacked from the table or end cap right to the floor," notes Eli & Ali's Kroner. "Our boxes are display ready, which enhances the sale by decreasing labor.

"Retailers can build a display with heirloom and petit Romas in a conventional location and then have the same heirlooms, mini heirlooms and petite Roma in the organic section," he continues.

Melissa's Schueller contends heirloom tomatoes "should definitely get front-and-center stage in a 1- to 2-foot section."

With so many different varieties available, "Retailers can supply recipe cards that highlight the use of each variety to educate their customers and offer reasons to buy more than just one type of tomatoes," explains Del Monte's Christou.

BC Hot House's Sheehan advises, "To reduce cuts and bruising on TOVs, never merchandise bulk tomatoes more than two layers high. The use of single-layer display-ready cartons can minimize shatter. Also, never dump tomatoes on a display. Rotate tomato displays daily to keep the display looking fresh and vibrant."

9. CROSS-MERCHANDISE IN AND OUT OF PRODUCE

Cross-merchandising is a key to preventing cannibalization in the tomato category, according to B&R's Bohaty. "Incremental sales come from different usages for tomatoes — snacking, salads, burgers and sandwiches. We suggest these to customers with recipes or positioning tomatoes next to or near appropriate ingredients."

Within the produce department "have the end caps of the counters that are closest to the refrigerated salad offerings dedicated to tomatoes as these products initiate sales of one another and encourage a higher ring," Red Zoo's Colasanti recommends. "Salad offerings ideal to merchandise near tomatoes include seedless or baby cucumbers, lettuces, pre-packaged salads, bell peppers, mini sweet peppers and specialty salad dressings.

East Coast's Meade reports, "I'm surprised a salad company hasn't thought to price promote with grape tomatoes. We have the ability to put a label on a clamshell of grape tomatoes that says something such as, 'Pick up a salad and get $1 off a pint of grape tomatoes.'"

BC Hot House's Sheehan notes avocados, onions, garlic, shallots, celery and fresh or dried herbs also cross-merchandise well with tomatoes. "Since tomatoes do not require refrigeration, leverage the opportunity to create secondary merchandising locations within the store, such as the deli or pasta sections — fresh and dried pastas, cheeses and breads, especially flat breads that can be used to make fresh bruschetta,

Health Benefits Of Sun-Dried Tomatoes

By Amy Shannon

One of the best ways to move more sun-dried tomatoes is to promote their remarkable health benefits .

"Sun-dried tomatoes are packed with lycopene, a photochemical and proven antioxidant that fights free radicals in the body," explains Mary Mooney, general partner, Mooney Farms, Chico, CA. "Ounce per ounce, sun-dried tomatoes have 12 times the amount of lycopene of a raw tomato. This is because lycopene is increased when a tomato is processed."

According to a study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* in November 2007, lycopene from tomatoes may reduce the risk of colo-rectal, prostate and pre-menopausal breast cancers. Other recent studies show a diet rich in tomatoes also helps lower the risk of digestive disorders, heart disease and breast, lung and cervical cancer, Mooney adds.

Such findings have helped boost sales of Mooney Farms' sun-dried tomato products, including sun-dried tomato halves, julienne-cut sun-dried tomatoes in pure olive oil, sun-dried tomato pesto and sun-dried tomatoes packaged in a resealable pouch. "Since this discovery [of lycopene's health benefits], our sales and demand for product has soared."

"You almost can't afford not to eat sun-dried tomatoes," says Mooney, who suggests displaying health information with sun-dried tomato products. "Mooney Farms offers a rack to the produce department that holds a case of each product and keeps the tomato section organized and inviting." **pb**

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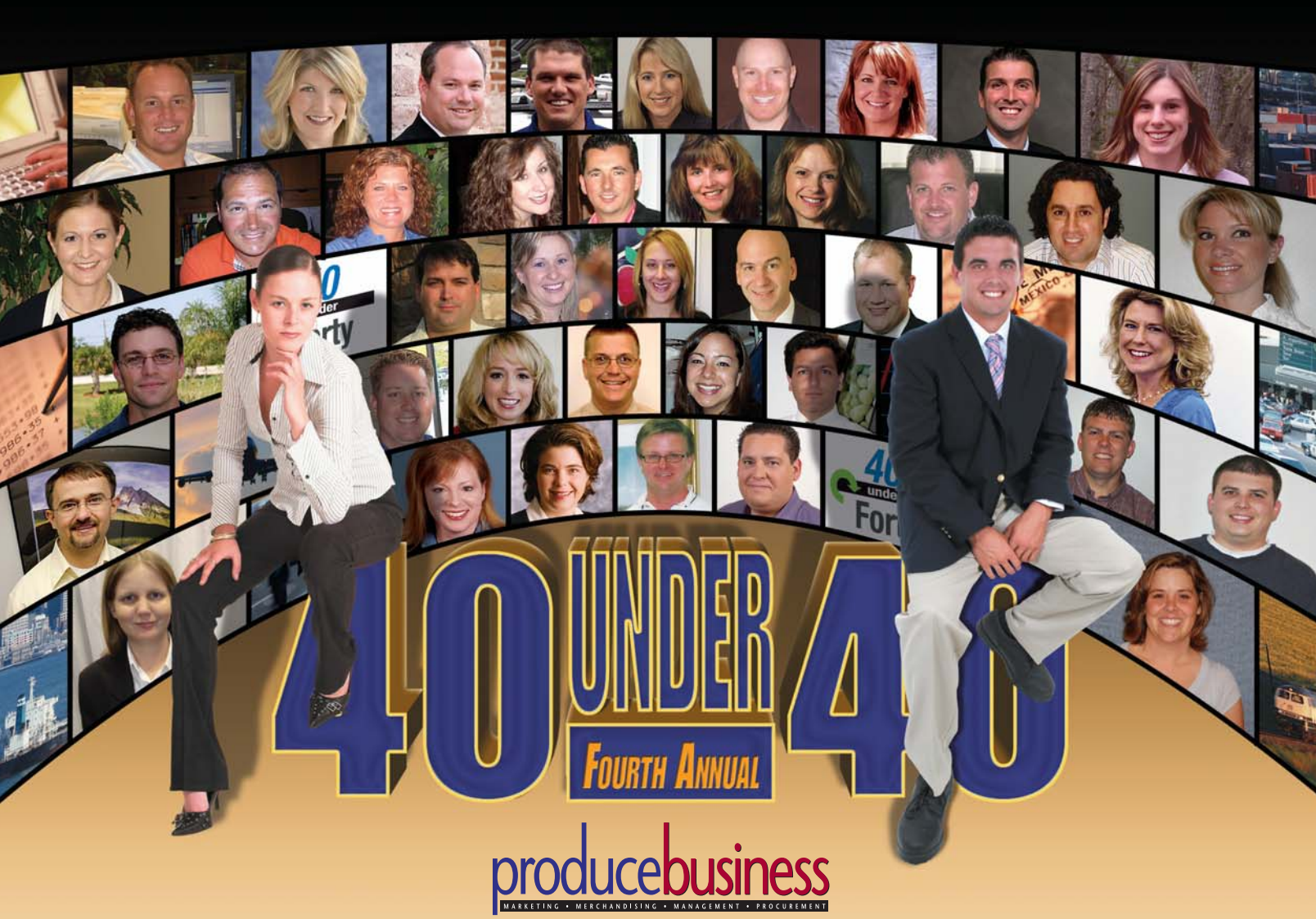

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cross-merchandise well with tomatoes."

Eli & Ali's Kroner suggests cross-merchandising tomatoes with fresh mozzarella, olive oil and fresh basil to provide an easy recipe solution for consumers.

Merchandise tomatoes in the meat department "along with skewers for shish kabobs," recommends Del Monte's Christou.

The FTC offers retailers a tri-fold brochure, *21 Quick Ideas for Salads, Sandwiches & Sides with the Great Taste of Fresh Florida Tomatoes*. "The brochure takes the guesswork out of planning easy, healthful meals the whole family can enjoy and helps to sell companion produce items too," according to Winters.

10. ADVERTISE AND PROMOTE OFTEN

"We try to promote at least one type of tomato every week, along with making tomatoes a hot cover feature within the quarter," Acme's Schneider notes. "Seasonality and availability on field-grown and hothouse tomatoes dictate how and when we go to market. Once we get into New Jersey or locally grown, we have dedicated displays with POS materials that incorporate the tomatoes."

Del Monte's Christou adds, "Tomatoes are promoted during most of the year, however, summer promotions and volume are highest and in most demand."

While Florida's tomato production peaks in April and May, Ed Beckman, president of the California Tomato Growers Association, Sacramento, CA, reports, "Our harvest begins in mid-to-late May, peaks in July and again in September and October. The harvest ends in December."

Retailers can prevent cannibalization of sales through creative advertising, reports Andrews & Williamson's Munger. "Romas are high volume and low value. If these are on ad, consumers may decide to fulfill all of their tomato needs by buying just this type. It's better to use everyday low pricing for tomatoes like Romas and then price promote higher-value TOVs, grapes and heirlooms to encourage trial and entice customers to buy these high-ring tomatoes more often."

Mastronardi Produce has had success promoting groupings of its specialty items at the same retail price. "For example, we'll run three varieties in the promotions — Campari, Splendido and Romana," says Mastronardi.

Any niche tomatoes will likely have periods of over-production that will help prompt extra savings and lower costs, explains Red Zoo's Colasanti. "Retailers can pass on these savings and attract a larger and more appreciative audience that may be more loyal and consistent in shopping their stores." **pb**

> **"We try to promote at least one type of tomato every week, along with making tomatoes a hot cover feature within the quarter. Seasonality and availability on field-grown and hothouse tomatoes dictate how and when we go to market."**
>
> **— Jay Schneider**
> **Acme Markets**

Reader Service # 80

Buyers Keep Coming Back

From organics to specialty products, this diverse market offers consumers every kind of produce under the Los Angeles sun.

By Lisa Socarras

Trish Duron and Jim Krouse
Eureka Specialties

Eddie (Butch) Gundry, Matt Beltran and Richard Flammino
Umina Bros.

Nancy Betancourt and Dan Lawton
Tavilla Sales Co. of Los Angeles

Sales and Buying
JBJ/Vegland

Marty Nunes, Coosemans Los Angeles and Joey Weiss, Northern Produce

Tom Fraker and Miki Hackney
Corporate Chefs, Melissa's

The Los Angeles Wholesale Market caters to a unique demographic blend, rich in the ethnic diversity that makes up both Los Angeles County and the entire nation. Nearly half — 47 percent — of the county's residents are Hispanic compared to 36 percent statewide, according to the 2006 U.S. Census. About 13 percent are Asian, slightly higher than the state's average of 12 percent.

Home to 27 percent of state residents, Los Angeles County was established in 1850 and consists of 34,520 square miles east to the Colorado River. The market serves as the hub of the Los Angeles food chain and must meet the needs of each population group.

"It's an evolutionary market," explains Alfonso Cano, assistant produce director of Northgate González LLC, a 24-store retail chain based in Anaheim, CA. "It has changed so much in the last 20 years. The demographic of the market is the demographic of the area — Asian, Latin, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern."

The market caters to this diverse group by offering a cornucopia of produce. "The Los Angeles Market offers the most variety of produce," reports Robert Schueller, public relations director of Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc., Los Angeles, CA. "I've been to Chicago, New York and other markets — California grows everything here. It's proven by seeing the variety."

"Los Angeles is unique in its population density," says Wes Liefer, president of United Produce Sales, Brea, CA. "There are thousands and thousands of people within a certain radius. The culture and population are diverse. There are numerous Hispanic independent stores growing and a handful of independent Asian markets. There is a Middle Eastern population. These contribute to opportunities. This has opened a lot of doors and opportunities to learn about their customers. Independents have the opportunity to cater to each market — that's a lot of people."

Being close to the growing fields is an asset for produce suppliers because they can keep an eye on produce availability for their customers.

Emily Fragoso, marketing manager, Coast Produce Co., Inc., Los Angeles, CA, relates, "Being close to the fields keeps us in touch with what's available. We can procure anything we need. We have growers here, as well as in Mexico, Asia, South America and New Zealand." Coast's ethnic lines — Coast Asia and Coast Caliente Hispanic — are big sellers and reflect demographic trends.

Being located in the heart of the market helps Coast better serve its customers. "We have researched demographics and are finding that there is an ever-increasing Hispanic population in each state," explains Fragoso. "This is important to us because of Hispanics' unique shopping characteristics. They are more likely to spend more money on big sellers like papaya and every type of chili pepper, such as habaneros and jalapeños."

Likewise, Coast has observed an increase in purchasing among the Asian population. "Asian is a huge part of our business," she notes. "It's the fastest growing population in the United States, depending on the area. Asians buy different types of eggplant, napa cabbage, bok choy, ginger and mushrooms."

Market research and ongoing customer service are also found at Coosemans L.A., Inc., Los Angeles, CA. "The market changes every day," states Alan Pollack, owner. "We are now seeing a large population of Hispanic, Asian and Middle Eastern customers. They are demanding products from their homelands and specialty items that we sell. It has also opened doors for us getting product in."

Change is always occurring in the market and adjusting to meet changes is important. "The new L.A. Market is comprised of many of the long ago wholesalers like Valley Fruit [& Produce Co., Los Angeles, CA]. Coosemans has been here since 1984. We've all adapted to market changes such as the influx of Hispanic and Korean and ethnic buyers," Pollack continues.

WHOLESALER FOCUS

Technology and retail consolidation have brought about a big change in the way produce is purchased, which is visible on the market. "A big change

Brianne Del Bene
Eureka Specialties

Shanna Spear
Eureka Specialties

Tony Padilla
Eureka Specialties

Elana Lejeune
Heath & Lejeune

Laurent Gabrielli
Heath & Lejeune

David Weinstein
Heath & Lejeune

Michael Iskra
Tavilla Sales Co. of Los Angeles

Philip Lopez
Tavilla Sales Co. of Los Angeles

Alex Dupre
JBJ/Vegland

we've noticed from 10 to 15 years ago is that not as many buyers walk the market as they did in the past," relates Raul Ramirez, owner of Ramirez Brothers, Los Angeles, CA. "Now more buying is done through the phone and the Internet. Most of the bigger stores like Albertson's [LLC, Boise, ID] and Kroger [Co., Cincinnati, OH] use iTrade over the Internet."

Mark Frazee, director of procurement at Coast, explains, "Centralized buying is now done by looking at a screen. Field buyers can follow growing areas by sitting at their desk. You can check products in Chile or South Africa by looking at the pictures on the screen."

While phones work wonders, some suggest walking the market is better. "Nowadays, you see ethnic stores walking the market and buying off the market," points out Bill Brooks, owner of Westlake Produce Co., Los Angeles, CA. "For our use, the market gives us a place to look at our produce and see what our competitors are bringing in."

Other companies also use the market to keep tabs on what is happening in the industry. "We use the market as eyes to the growing label," reports Frazee. "The major labels are always coming in here. Early lettuce doesn't always have the weight. The market is an open book to the growing areas. It's a great auxiliary. We pull from the LA market. If it's legal and it's around, you'll see it on the market."

In large companies, most purchasing is now done from a centralized buying office. "There was a local buyer on the LA market for Kroger, now its buyer is in Fresno," notes Ramirez of Ramirez Brothers. "The personal interaction is not there anymore. It's more and more common for produce departments to rely on buyers out of the area to purchase for them."

"It's a disadvantage when you can't see the buying," explains Brooks. "Centralized buying offices are not near here. It all has to be sent directly to the warehouses."

A down side of sending to a warehouse is the perishability of the product; produce is best when hand selected. "Produce is a ticking time bomb," Ramirez says. "In three days, you'll have a completely different product."

To continually monitor produce quality, Ramirez Brothers prides itself on having sales people positioned outside of the warehouse to see what is being loaded on the trucks. The warehouse is accessible to clients and a daily inventory is taken. It keeps track of availability with a close relationship with vendors.

Another way produce is screened is by visiting the growing fields to keep an eye on what is available. "I travel to look at product seasonally and to check out the product," Brooks elaborates. "I spend a fair amount of time in the western United States, including Arizona, Oregon, Idaho, Washington, Texas — all of the growing areas."

"A few years ago, we were in Mexico four to five months a year to make sure everything was done correctly," Ramirez explains. "We were training growers on how to meet U.S. standards so product could be sold nationally." This conscientiousness has paid off over the years and has helped Ramirez Brothers become the business it is today. "My father started in the business with a pickup truck buying from big companies and selling to Hispanic stores," he explains.

Today, Spanish is spoken throughout the market. "Chain stores have buyers who speak Spanish 50 percent of the time and English 50 percent — everyone who works in produce needs to speak both," according to Ramirez.

Consumers other than Hispanics and Asians are buying ethnic produce. "We've been in business for 46 years, and we've always been in the ethnic market. Today, more people are using Latin and Asian products to improve flavor and add nutrients," according to Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's, Inc., Los Alamitos, CA.

Retailers could benefit by trying new items in their produce departments, she suggests. "There are a lot of hoops to jump through to get a product added. One way a retailer could be more successful would be to be more nimble about trying new items."

RETAIL CONSOLIDATION

"There have been tons of changes in the Los Angeles Wholesale Market," says Liefer of United Produce. "In the '90s, there was a lot of consolidation. Chains bought from the terminal market in LA. In '98, people were predicting the wholesale market would go out of business and that buying would be done directly from farms. People then realized there is a need for brokers and distributors."

Caplan sees history repeating itself in the retail industry with the appearance of smaller stores along with the consolidation of larger stores — part of a cycle in the industry. "It's cyclical. I've seen a huge growth in small upstart chains that have appeared to come out of nowhere. Five to 10 years ago, there were Lucky's [based in Modesto, CA], Safeway [Inc., based in Pleasanton, CA] and Alpha Beta [based in Pomona, CA] that were swallowed up. The same thing is happening now. A Vaughan's in my neighborhood just closed, but a Sprouts [Farmers Market, LLC, based in Phoenix, AZ] just opened up down the street. There is a resurgence of smaller stores. It's really exciting. I'm flying my sales staff in next week. We're going on a bus and touring all the stores in southern California."

Sprouts has a disproportionately large produce section, along with a big vitamin and natural foods section, according to Caplan. She also has visited Fresh & Easy, the entry into the U.S. marketplace by Tesco, the successful U.K. retailer based in

ORGANIC AND SPECIALTY PRODUCE EXPANDING

Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc., Los Angeles, CA, ships to every state and sells many specialties, such as shallots, jicama, bok choy and Buddha's hand, which is given out during Chinese New Year for good luck.

At the Los Angeles market, demand for organics is growing. David Lake, president of MCL Distributing, Inc., Los Angeles, CA, reports, "We see trends toward more organic products in addition to specialty products, our area of expertise. What restaurateurs want in Los Angeles is consistent pricing, consistent product quality, shelf life, ease of preparation, product knowledge, product variety and new, cutting-edge product offers."

MCL/4-Earth is certified to handle organic produce by Quality Assurance International (QAI), based in San Diego, CA, and has been doing so since opening its new location in 1993. More than 30 percent of MCL's sales are organic.

Jimmy Matiasevich, sales manager of JBJ Distributing, Inc., Fullerton, CA, says the company has been instrumental in getting organic produce to the retail level. JBJ carries a full line of organic produce as well as a full line of conventional produce. **pb**

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Rick Lejeune
Heath & Lejeune

Bobby Van Ligten
United Produce Sales

Wes Liefer
United Produce Sales

Chestnut, Hertfordshire, England.

"All the major retailers flew out to see it," she adds. "I have mixed feelings. People think that Kroger is vulnerable, but I don't see it. What I see in retail in Southern California is a lot of focus on who your shopper is. For example, Northgate focuses a lot on the Hispanic customer. Sprouts focuses on people who want more healthful foods. Ralphs [based in Los Angeles, CA] focuses on having everything you need." She says there seems to be room for everyone.

Westlake's Brooks agrees. "As mergers came around and companies grew, it opened doors for smaller ones to open up, especially ethnic ones. There is room for smaller independents that buy off the market."

Retail consolidation requires additional industry effort. "Doing business is tougher because of consolidation," explains Richard Flamminio, president of Umina Brothers, Inc., Los Angeles, CA. "The cost is greater. You really have to perform for your customers and shippers."

This specialized service is carried out at Heath and Lejeune, Inc., Los Angeles, CA., as well. "Lejeune specializes in all the services that are too time consuming, too labor intensive for everybody else to do," reports David Weinstein, buying and sales manager. "That is why our customers depend on us. It's important to find out the full extent of what your customers want."

> **"AS MERGERS CAME AROUND AND COMPANIES GREW, IT OPENED DOORS FOR SMALLER ONES TO OPEN UP, ESPECIALLY ETHNIC ONES."**
>
> —BILL BROOKS
> WESTLAKE PRODUCE CO.

"Consolidation has made us a better company," says David Lake, president of MCL Distributing, Inc., Los Angeles, CA. "There are fewer buyers and so it has made us even more customer service driven. The market has demanded us to be experts in product consolidation and logistics."

Another result of consolidation is a desire to assist independent chains succeed. "We have to help independent stores meet their customer needs, lending them our expertise," explains Weinstein.

He adds education is part of the job for those in the produce industry. "We are dedicated to improving the lives of people and educating them

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about where non-local food comes from."

PACKAGING TRENDS

Retailers want continual improvements in packaging and the industry is working hard to keep up with demand, such as for pre-packed products. "An effect of consolidation is the desire for more pre-packaged products that are easier to merchandise at the local level," reports MCL's Lake. "We offer clamshell products, overwrapped trays, microwavable bagged vegetables, bagged citrus and a variety of other conveniently packed items."

Stores now want smaller bags or containers than in years past. "Supermarkets now want 1-pound bags of key limes," notes Ramirez of Ramirez Brothers. "Our volume shipped is the same. It's packed in smaller packages." The company uses repackable clamshell containers for its customers.

> **"AN EFFECT OF CONSOLIDATION IS THE DESIRE FOR MORE PRE-PACKAGED PRODUCTS THAT ARE EASIER TO MERCHANDISE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL."**
>
> — DAVID LAKE
> MCL DISTRIBUTING, INC.

"In the late '60s, supermarkets wanted large bulk packages," notes Westlake's Brooks. "Now the trend is for convenience packaging and smaller sizes — everything so the consumer can pick up and go."

According to Jimmy Matiasevich, sales manager of JBJ Distributing, Inc., Fullerton, CA, people want microwavable bags. "We have a full line of organic produce, in addition to our conventional line, such as French beans, Blue Lake beans, asparagus — all in microwavable bags."

Changes in packaging for convenience and for food safety issues will continue to take place, according to Brooks. "This industry is constantly changing and we'll have to stay up with it."

James Krouse, president of Eureka Specialties, Inc., Los Angeles, CA, explains the company's new Slide-Rite bags work great for herbs and are easier for the end user. Window boxes are also used for small more delicate items. "If you are going to do it, you might as well do it well," reports Krouse about his products.

This philosophy is the way he runs his business. His employees are treated well and it pays off in loyalty to the company. "Our goal is to give back to the employees for their hard work and effort," explains Krouse, who has an incentive plan in place that rewards hard work and effort.

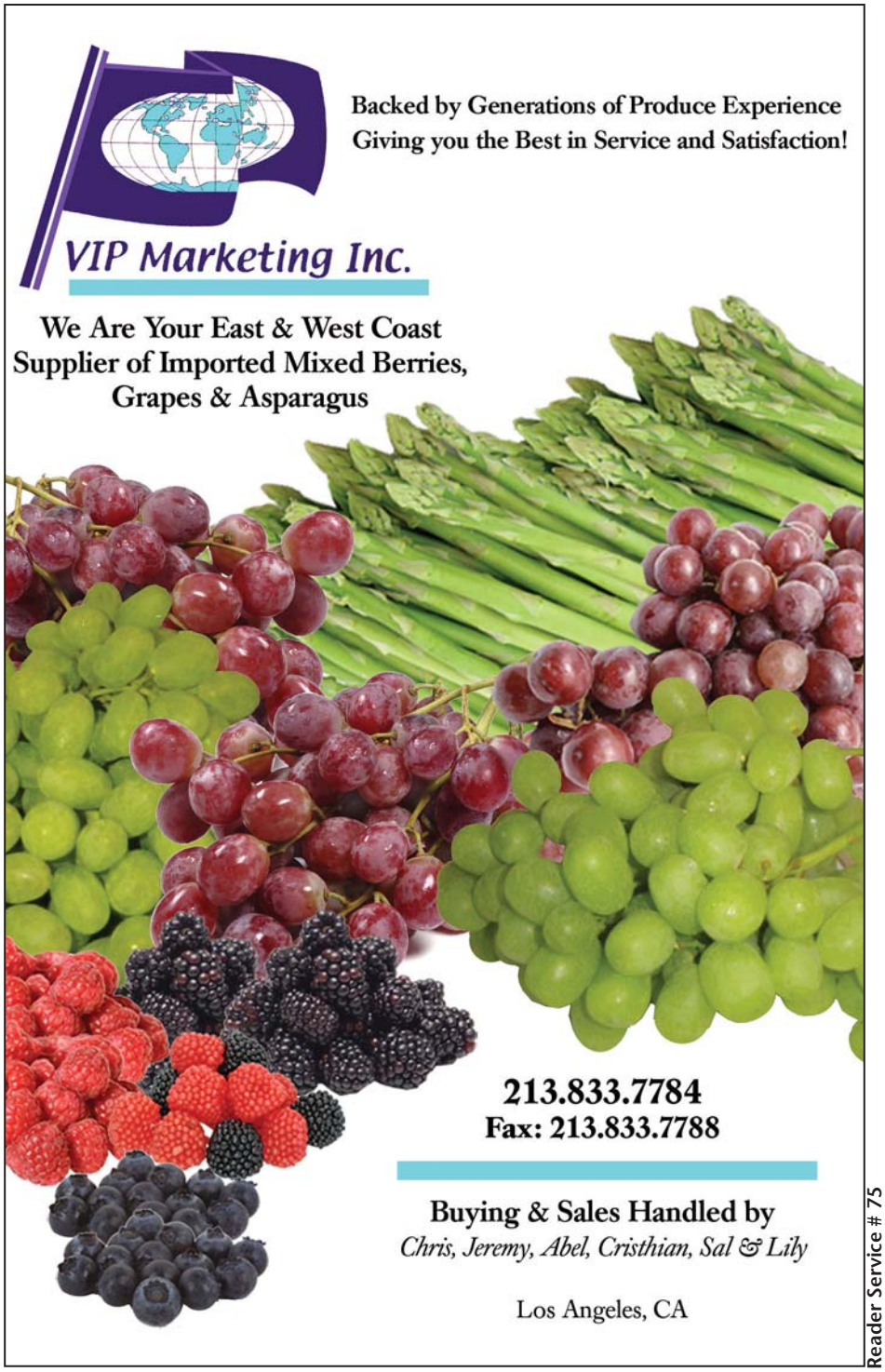
Eureka recently earned Steritech certification and soon plans to launch a Web site that will include a link to a live camera so customers can see the produce before they order. "Our customers will see exactly what they are getting," explains Krouse. "We currently e-mail pictures, but this will be even better. All they have to do is log on, take a look, place an order and it will be shipped to them."

FOOD SAFETY COMPLIANCE

Industry companies are striving for excellence in meeting food safety standards. "Frieda's has been third-party certified for 12 years," notes Kaplan. "We have always been a trendsetter."

"We follow a strict HACCP [Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point] Based Food Safety Program, which is audited regularly by Davis Fresh/NSF International [based in Ann Arbor, MI]," reports Lake. "We require all employees be trained in food-handling procedures. We have also implemented a state-of-the-art trace-back system in the unlikely need for a product recall."

Food safety is a big issue and the entire industry is working hard to ensure the safety of its prod-



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ucts. "We're pushing food safety big time," according to Eureka's Krouse. "We want to be a leader in the industry. The industry is demanding food safety. It's up to us to keep up and meet the demand. We are voluntarily inspected each month. We have upgraded all of our packing to overnight and we don't reuse boxes."

This concern with food safety is worldwide. "Many growers in Mexico are sophisticated," explains Pollack of Coosemans. "They're just behind us in food-safety issues. They are getting certified for organic. Lots of hard-earned money is being spent in Mexico to get certified."

In China, kosher foods are gaining popularity. "In China, more and more people are requesting kosher. They see it as a form of food safety," Pollack shares.

"Food safety programs are being demanded from us and our customers," he explains. "I see the benefit of having a food-safety program. It's like having a safety program on how you handle equipment. A food-safety program saves money and produces a safer, fresher product. We are taking steps toward HACCP to improve ourselves," Pollack says. "As a group, we are all working that way."

WORLDWIDE ACCESS

California produce growers are providing products to countries all over the world. "California has a huge agricultural base and we handle produce for all over the world," states Westlake's Brooks. "It's easier to source if it comes from California and it's less expensive."

California feeds a large portion of the world because of its location. "The majority of the produce sold in North America passes through or is in some way directed by buyers in Los Angeles," reports MCL's Lake. "We are uniquely suited for the produce industry. We have one of the largest ports in the world to receive international containers and one of the busiest international terminals, allowing products to be flown in from all over the world. We also offer more produce warehouse square footage than any other city, we have a consistent and reliable climate and we are close to the largest growing regions in the world. Every nationwide interstate ends here for ease of trucking."

"Produce can be harvested yesterday and here tomorrow," notes Coast's Frazee.

Freshness is part of why heirloom tomatoes are such a hit. "Our tomato line is growing," according to Pollack. "The heirloom tomatoes are now mainstream, not specialty. Some people request California produce for their tables because they think it is fresher."

Most companies bring in products from around the world to serve their customers. "Now is the season for Chilean fruit," notes Melissa's Schueller. "Our produce is regionally and locally grown, but we have some international items as well." **pb**

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Reader Service # 66

LOS ANGELES RETAIL PROFILE

Northgate González Market

Family-owned marketplace offers consumers a sense of old-fashioned service mixed with an array of top-quality produce.

By Lisa Socarras

Northgate González, LLC, an Anaheim, CA-based independent chain with 24 stores, returns consumers to the era of retail service but with contemporary purchasing options. "We are an old-fashioned produce department with guys on the floor all day long," explains Alfonso Cano, assistant produce director at Northgate's Buena Park store. "We don't like the produce guys to disappear."

Throughout the store, the consumer comes first and store employees take pride in caring for shoppers. "We still have people bagging groceries and taking out the bags," he reports . "We have a full-service meat department, too"

Cano has worked in the produce industry for 17 years. "I worked in the wholesale market and for Albertson's [LLC, based in Boise, ID]." He enjoys working at Northgate, in part because it has a definite small-town feeling.

"We are a neighborhood market," he notes. Each Northgate location caters to its own geographic area and strives to meet customer needs. Owned by the Miguel González family, Northgate was on track to open five more stores in March 2008. The family's 13 brothers and sisters work within the company, providing ownership and leadership.

A positive family attitude is carried over by the employees who take pride in serving their consumers. "We have a lot of long-term employees," Cano states. "There are a lot of opportunities for people to get promoted within our company since we are growing by purchasing more stores."

Labor can sometimes be a major issue at retail, but at Northgate, employees are valued and tend to stay. "Opening a new store is easy," Cano reports. "The hard part is to find more good people."

While retaining quality employees is an important asset to Northgate's success, it's the consumers who engage in word-of-mouth advertising and help Northgate stay on top in the retail arena. "We ask our customers what they need," explains Cano. "And our customers help us by buying our products and telling other people about our store."

Many of the locals shop at the Buena Park location, which continues to expand beyond the Hispanic base. "Ten years ago, 90 percent of our consumers were Hispanic," he explains. "Today, first-generation Spanish is 50 percent of our customers and the other half is a mixture of Chicano, Asian, Middle Eastern and Caucasian." To best meet the needs its Hispanic consumers, Northgate employees are bilingual.

Recently, Cano has observed an increase in Asian shoppers. "The Chinese are the new Spanish. The language is starting to take over in this area. The big three are Koreans, Vietnamese and Chinese. A lot of the products, such as cilantro and cabbage, are crossovers from Spanish."

Walking the market provides retailers with information they need to better serve its consumers. "Walking the market isn't just about buying," Cano notes. "It's about information, variety, seasonality and seeing what's there."

Seasonality is one tool Cano uses to organize the produce department. "We merchandise products and give them space depending on seasonality," he explains. Northgate has a basic produce department with wet products sold together and fruit with fruit. All types of chili peppers are displayed next to each other.

The value-added product line is being expanded, "a little more like Trader Joe's [Company, based in Monrovia, CA]," according to Cano. Northgate is now doing salad packs and party trays. However, the competition never dictates Northgate's business plan. "Service is what we focus on. We don't worry about what the other guy is doing. That's why we are where we are." **pb**

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Mushrooms On The Menu

Foodservice opportunities abound with this consumer favorite.

BY KIMBERLY RINKER

In the early 1990s, few restaurant chefs were familiar with oyster, shiitake and cremini mushrooms. Nearly two decades later, these once exotic items can be found throughout America's commercial kitchens. Today. mushrooms are one of the trendiest items in all types of foodservice venues.

Fresh and dried mushrooms enhance entrées, appetizers, salads and sides in sautéed, fried, grilled, roasted and raw forms. With their exotic flavors and unusual shapes, these exciting fungi dress up any plate and continue to evolve and enhance restaurant offerings.

Mushroom production has steadily risen throughout the past four decades, both domestically and globally. China is the leading producer of mushrooms in the world, followed by the United States in a distant second place, then Holland, France, Poland and Spain. China and the European countries produce 96 percent of the world's mushrooms, while the United States and Canada account for 2 percent.

In the United States, the mecca of mushroom production is in Pennsylvania — most notably in Kennett Square and the surrounding areas — with California a close second. Commercial cultivation of mushrooms began in North America in the early part of the 20th century, and with the advent of air conditioning, mushrooms are now available year-round.

The foodservice sector is a big fan of mushrooms — as evidenced by the fact that 79 percent of full-service restaurants and 62 percent of pizza restaurants use them. And, they use them in all forms — fresh (58 percent), canned (25 percent) and frozen (7 percent). Whole mushrooms are used most often (78 percent) in foodservice, while 38 percent use pre-cut and 4 percent use marinated mushrooms.

U.S. consumption of fresh mushrooms increases at about 1.9 percent annually, according to the Mushroom Council, San Jose, CA, and is expected to reach 3.21 pounds per person by 2012. Over 300 million pounds of fresh mushrooms are consumed annually in foodservice venues, according to Mushroom Council statistics. Mushrooms are most popular with consumers ordering pizza (75 percent) and steak (66 percent).

Photo courtesy of the Mushroom Council

Mushrooms are becoming increasingly popular on menus in all types of restaurants all over the country.

ANYTHING BUT ORDINARY

An October 2007 survey from Wheaton, IL-based Food Beat, Inc. of the 200 leading chain restaurants in the United States found 154 (77 percent) of the top chain eateries have mushrooms on their menus — a 14 percent increase in the past six years. Since 2001, menu offerings that include mushrooms are up over 26 percent — to 1,032, according to the survey.

Bart Minor, president of the Mushroom Council, says mainstay favorites such as whites and portobellos increased in popularity in 2007 and criminis reached new heights as well. "The criminis reached enough volume to be a distinct category," Minor notes. "Oyster mushrooms and shiitakes are also appearing on chain menus."

Kevin Donovan, sales, Phillips Mushroom Farms LP, Kennett Square, PA, contends mushrooms add variety and nutrition to restaurant plates. "The exotic names liven up the menu. The whites are still the most popular, while portobellos, criminis and shiitakes add an upgrade of flavor.

"With the latest trend for more protein on the plate, the shiitakes do a great job. We're seeing more and more mushrooms added on meat and chicken dishes, stressing their protein value," Donovan continues. "Often, they're included in a flavor sauce, as a standalone or as an ingredient in a topping."

According to Joe Salvo, president of Ponderosa Mushrooms, Port Coquitlam, BC, Canada, while white button continue to be the most popular mushrooms among food-

Popular Cultivated Mushrooms

Whites (*Agaricus bisporus*): Small-cap white mushrooms — are called buttons; large cap are jumbos. Sold fresh, canned and dried, they are the most popular of all mushrooms in restaurants.

Portobellos and criminis (*Agaricus bisporus*): Portobellos are the largest commercially grown mushroom. They have a rich, robust flavor and texture. Cremini (baby bellas) are a smaller version of the portobello and are tan to brown with a buttery flavor that is a bit more intense than a button mushroom.

Shiitake (*Lentinula edodes*): Shiitakes have been used in Asia for thousands of years as a food and for medicinal purposes. Also known as the golden oak, black forest and oakwood mushroom, it has firm yet slightly chewy texture. Known for its intense taste, it and is often used in soups or marinated and then grilled.

Oysters (*Pleurotus ostreatu*): Oyster mushrooms have a seafood-like texture and a pleasant taste and come in a wide array of sizes and colors. They are well known for their cardiovascular and cholesterol-controlling benefits.

Maitake (*Grifola frondosa*): Maitakes appear to be a gray flower of thick petals, which exude a raw, rich flavor suitable in soups, gravies and exotic dishes. They are well known in the medical field for their immune-enhancing properties.

Enoki (*Flammulina velutipes*): Enoki mushrooms are often found in salads, soups and traditional stir-fry dishes. They are tender in texture and have a sweet, mild taste **pb**

service operators, interest in wild mushrooms is on the rise. "I'm getting a lot more serious inquires from larger chains for usage of wild mushrooms — fresh chanterelles and the like," Salvo reveals. "Obviously, with the white tablecloth restaurants, wild mushrooms are an everyday menu item. However, I'm experiencing some sincere interest in expanding these specialty types to the chains.

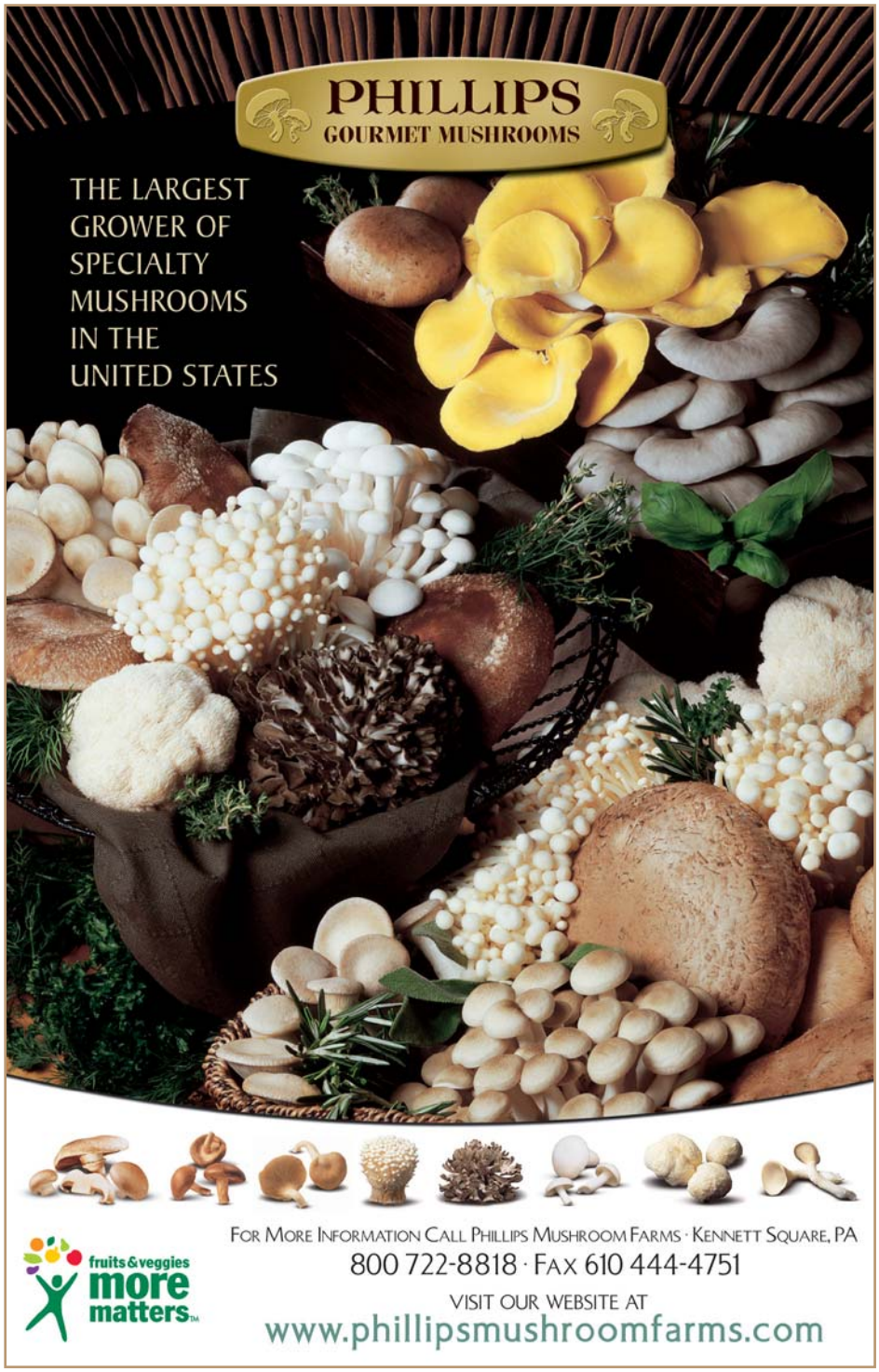
"Some chains offer a wild mushroom sauce or stew — a combination of three or four mushroom styles mixed in with oysters," he continues. "Since, I'm hyper-focused on mushrooms and how they're being used, I hear the term 'wild' being used loosely. Actually, what restaurant operators think of as wild is really a cultivated specialty mushroom."

PERFECT PARTNERS

With their earthy, fresh flavors, mushrooms of all types partner perfectly with nearly all other food categories. Mushrooms are most often part of the entrée (51 percent), often partnered with pastas, pizzas, steaks and on salads, says Minor of the Mushroom Council.

"It says a lot that virtually every burger chain in the country either has, or is working on, a mushroom burger of some kind — there's something about that combination that flat out works," Minor notes. "We've also seen a lot of growth in breakfast and are looking ahead to potential growth in appetizers and sides."

"Mushrooms are such a natural to use on pizza, and specialty mushrooms on a gourmet pizza are very popular," relates Ponderosa's Salvo. "Some of the higher-end



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pizza parlors use many types of specialty mushrooms on their gourmet pizzas.

Fred Recchiuti, head of marketing, Basciani Foods, Avondale, PA, agrees, saying "Hands down, the most popular utilization of mushrooms is on pizza. Last year, mushrooms overtook sausage as the second most popular topping behind pepperoni."

Since the cost of pepperoni and sausage is much higher than that of fresh mushrooms, pizza parlor operators will likely begin promoting their mushroom pizzas more aggressively, Recchiuti believes. He cites Louisville, KY-based Papa John's as a solid promoter of mushroom topping on its pizza. "Papa John's does a good job with their Papa Bella pizza, which uses sliced baby portobellos."

The Mushroom Council's Minor praises chef Eric Hara of David Burke & Donatella — a trendy American restaurant located in Manhattan's Upper East Side — for his innovative mushroom use. "Chef Hara makes handmade cavatelli and braised short ribs with mushrooms, mushroom chips and truffle mousse.

"In San Francisco, Chef Mohamed Aboghanem of Saha makes deep fried artichoke hearts stuffed with a mushroom medley and topped with a cilantro mint sauce."

Other examples of creative culinary inventions that use mushrooms include the Chimichilada at the Blue Adobe Grill in Scottsdale Mesa, AZ, a dish concocted by chefs Paul Bigelow and Jose Leyva. "This dish combines a chicken or shredded beef mini chimichanga and a portobello mushroom enchilada topped with an amaretto mushroom cream sauce," Minor observes. "You also have Chef Monica Pope of T'afia in Houston, [TX] who makes an ale-battered cremini mushrooms in sake-soy-lemon sauce.

"We know a ton of chefs who are great mushroom advocates," Minor adds. "The Mushroom Council is currently setting up a chef advisory panel, allowing us to work with chefs across the country to develop mushroom concepts, perfect the various techniques for cooking mushrooms and showcase mushrooms' culinary talents to the industry and consumers alike."

THE POPULAR PORTOBELLO

The portobello mushroom — now considered a mainstream menu item — continues to be a consumer favorite. A June 2007 Food Beat consumer research study found 43 percent of restaurant consumers have ordered a portobello burger — up from 39 percent in a 2006 survey. It also found 111 menu items that included portobellos in 2007 — versus 93 in 2006.

"The portobello has become an estab-

lished staple in American cuisine," Basciani's Recchiuti acknowledges. "When you can buy a beef tips and portobello frozen dinner, you know that the portobello has gone mainstream."

"Portobellos are definitely still a hot item and there's a lot of room for growth, too," stresses the Mushroom Council's Minor. "Portobellos represented 11 percent of chain mushroom mentions in 2007, and reported usage of portobellos was up 19 percent in a recent survey."

In the past two months, the chain restaurants Cosi, based in Deerfield, IL; Marie Callender's, based in Mission Viejo, CA; Tony Roma's, based in Dallas, TX; Carl's Jr., based in Carpinteria, CA; and Au Bon Pain, based in Boston, MA, have all added portobello offerings on their menus, Minor says.

"Portobellos are easy to add and are moderately priced," adds Phillips' Donovan. "They show up well on a plate and one that unites well with other items."

SUPER SANDWICHES

According to Food Beat, one-third of the leading 200 chain restaurants offer new sandwiches annually, and sandwiches are the leading entrée at breakfast and for dinners eaten in and away from home. Mushrooms in sandwich offerings increased by 9 percent from 2006 to 2007; they were found in traditional sandwiches between two slices of bread, as a burger dressing and in wraps and paninis.

In fact, 21 percent of all chain-restaurant mushroom menu items are sandwiches, according to the Mushroom Council. "A lot of those are coming in the wraps and roll-ups," notes Minor.

"More and more chefs are experimenting with mushrooms — not just fresh, but also dried and frozen — on sandwiches," according to Ponderosa's Salvo. "They're extremely popular on either open faced sandwiches or on a burger."

Examples found on some popular chain restaurant menus include Au Bon Pain's steakhouse panini that features roasted portobello mushrooms coupled with shaved steak, Swiss cheese, roasted peppers, onions and mayonnaise. Charlie Brown's Steakhouse, based in Mountainside, NJ, offers a chicken portobello wrap that combines portobellos with grilled chicken and romaine lettuce in a flour tortilla wrap.

Joe's Crab Shack, based in Houston, TX, serves a mushroom jack burger that includes a healthy offering of sautéed white buttons and Monterey jack cheese, while Louisville, KY-based Tumbleweed Southwest Grill features a similar offering with its Cheyenne steak sandwich, a mesquite-grilled sirloin smothered with mushrooms and cheese.

Donovan cites two chain giants — Dallas, TX-based Chili's and Maryville, TN-based Ruby Tuesday — as doing "a great job of showcasing mushrooms on their menus in this department. Chili's has a very nice portobello fajita, while Ruby Tuesday has a good portobello dish," he notes.

"Sautéed mushrooms are the No. 1 addition to our steak orders," says Chef Dave Ohlsen of Black Angus Steakhouse, an 82-restaurant chain, based in Los Altos, CA. "Mushrooms are easy to execute, improves the guest experience and delivers profit right to our bottom line."

THE WAY OF THE FUTURE

Recchiuti says wild and seasonal mushrooms — such as maitake (also called hen-of the-woods) — are the way of the future. "For the first time in culinary history, chefs have the power to utilize the maitake in year-round flagship menu items. They were previously available only seasonally from the wild but are now being grown year-round in sanitary conditions."

The maitake is the mushroom of the samurai, he explains. In ancient Japan, these warriors would feast on the maitake before

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Reader Service # 64

Top 10 Fast Casual Restaurants With Mushrooms On The Menu

1. **The Cheesecake Factory**, Calabasas Hill, CA; Examples: *Crispy Spicy Beef* — crispy fried steak slices with green beans, shiitakes, onions, carrots and sesame seeds in a sweet-spicy sauce; *Grilled Portobello on a Bun*.

2. **California Pizza Kitchen**, based in Los Angeles, CA; Examples: *Portobello Mushroom Ravioli* — rosemary ravioli filled with portobellos, herbs and cheese topped with imported Italian tomatoes, fresh basil and garlic or garlic-Parmesan cream sauce.

3. **Bakers Square**, based in Denver, CO; Examples: *Chicken Avocado Melt* — grilled chicken breast, Swiss cheese, sliced avocado, sautéed mushrooms and sour cream on grilled bread; *Garlic Mushroom Chicken* — two grilled chicken breasts smothered with sautéed mushrooms and onions in a creamy roasted garlic sauce.

4. **Dave & Buster's**, based in Dallas, TX; Examples: *Cajun Tilapia with Shrimp & Chardonnay Sauce* — lightly blackened tilapia fillets with sautéed garlic herb shrimp and mushrooms in a creamy Chardonnay wine sauce; *Gorgonzola Ribeye Steak* — a 12-ounce USDA Choice ribeye steak, garlic and herb seasoned, with melted Gorgonzola cheese, grilled mushrooms and onions.

5. **Johnny Carino's** operated by Fire Up Inc., based in Austin, TX; Examples: *Chicken Piccata* — chicken medallions sautéed with artichoke hearts, mushrooms and capers in a lemon basil cream sauce; *Penne Gorgonzola* — sliced chicken and mushrooms sautéed in garlic and tossed with penne pasta in a creamy Gorgonzola cheese sauce and garnished with fresh Roma tomatoes.

6. **Copeland's**, based in Metairie, LA; Examples: *Pasta Shrimp Copeland* — tender gulf shrimp sautéed with garlic, mushrooms and fresh herbs and served over angel hair pasta; *Stuffed Mushrooms* filled with homemade Louisiana crabmeat stuffing and served with tiger sauce.

7. **The Melting Pot**, based in Tampa, FL; Examples: White and portobello mushrooms are featured in the coq a vin cooking style, in the mushroom salad and paired with many meat entrées.

8. **The Keg Steakhouse & Bar**, based in Vancouver, BC; Examples: *Mushrooms Neptune* — wine simmered mushroom caps with crab and cream cheese; *Escargot* — escargot stuffed mushroom caps with garlic and herbs.

9. **La Madeleine**, based in Dallas, TX; Examples: *Wild Mushroom Fondue* — Button and wild mushrooms simmered in a white wine cream sauce with Parmesan cheese and served with roasted garlic crostini; *Mediterranean Pasta* — Portobellos, asparagus, tomatoes and Kalamata olives sautéed in olive oil, mixed with bowtie pasta, garnished with Parmesan cheese and diced tomatoes, and served with roasted garlic crostini.

10. **Maggiano's**, a division of Brinker International, based in Dallas, TX; Examples: *Shells with Roasted Vegetables* — a half order of shell pasta tossed with roasted zucchini, mushrooms, carrots, asparagus and oven-dried tomatoes in a tomato Parmesan broth with pesto; Stuffed Mushrooms — jumbo mushroom caps stuffed with spinach, topped with seasoned breadcrumbs served in a white wine sauce. **pb**

Reader Service # 16

going into battle, believing in its power to bestow virility. "Maitake means 'dancing mushroom' in Japanese. In the United States, the name, hen-of-the-woods, came about because the mass of mushrooms looks like fluffed up feathers. The stalks are often fused and can easily be peeled apart for cooking. The whole mushroom is delicious and there's no waste!" Basciani's Recchiuti explains.

Phillips' Donovan believes the mushroom's adaptability is its strongest quality. "Kennett Square is the mushroom capital of the United States, and every restaurant in the area specializes in some type of mushroom dish," he notes. "Mushroom soup is a menu mainstay and is available daily here. Mushrooms can be adapted and included in nearly all plates. That's their future."

"Foodservice and restaurants are the biggest growing sector of our business," Ponderosa's Salvo stresses. "The usage of mushrooms in these sectors is definitely on the rise. Making a good quality mushroom available to restaurant chefs on a consistent basis is the key. This is one of the biggest obstacles a chain is going to face — having good quality product on a consistent basis."

The hardy, adaptable, alluring mushroom is certain to be a hot item on restaurant plates and a favorite among consumers for many years to come. **pb**

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Reader Service # 11

Salsa Adds Zing To Foodservice

The foodservice industry is breaking away from traditional recipes to excite consumers' tastes for this spicy favorite.

BY SUZANNE SMITHER

Wild or mild, salsa is hot. No longer merely a dip for chips, America's No. 1 condiment is popping up on restaurant tables.

Innovative chefs are venturing beyond the basic blend of tomatoes, onions and chili peppers to experiment with a host of unexpected ingredients. Today's salsas offer flavors ranging from subtle to explosive, with a variety of textures from smooth purées to chunky preparations that stand on their own. Salsa can play a variety of roles to enliven a meal — saucy salad, unique side dish or piquant topping for meat or fish.

"As more consumers become foodies or food aficionados, they demand more exquisite and exotic plates from their favorite restaurants," explains Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing, Del Monte Fresh Produce, Inc., N.A., Coral Gables, FL. "Chefs, in turn, look for ingredients that will add spice and color to their dishes, and they find the solution with salsas."

Some foodservice operators are blending unusual ingredients with traditional tomatoes, while others are replacing tomatoes entirely, using another fruit or vegetable as the prime ingredient. The virtually unlimited variety of possible preparations is a boon to busy, cost-conscious operators. Whatever is freshest, least expensive or simply most interesting can be combined into a salsa to enhance any number of dishes on a restaurant menu.

Celery packs a punch when used as the No. 2 ingredient in salsa, according to Mary Duda, communications specialist, Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc., headquartered in Oviedo, FL. Oviedo Own Gourmet Salsa, "a shelf-stable product developed by Duda's new products department and produced by Duda Products, Inc.," is made from the company's own varieties of celery. Thicker than other salsas because it's "full of vegetables rather than water," it's available in mild, medium and hot. "Celery adds a healthful crunch and a fresh taste" to the tomato-based condiment and the new salsa has been well received in taste tests with potential customers," she adds.

Photo courtesy of the National Mango Board

Foodservice operators are expanding recipes to include more exotic ingredients.

"Salsas are very versatile — versatile enough to go beyond the tomato," reports Mary Ostlund, director of marketing, Brooks Tropicals, Homestead, FL. "We're redefining salsa." For a very subtle yet complex taste, she recommends replacing tomatoes with papayas. "Papayas add a certain taste that's more exotic and tropical. Their full body adds a certain texture and depth of taste, and yet goes extremely well and marinates very well with other ingredients, particularly limes."

While Brooks doesn't process its fruits and vegetables, Ostlund states, "We work closely with our customers to include tropicals whenever possible. You can become very ambitious and adventurous. Salsa is so easy to do, it's hard to go wrong."

According to Christou, Mexican- and Thai-inspired salsas, such as Pico de Gallo and mango, are big right now in restaurants that don't necessarily specialize in those types of cuisines.

BEYOND TOMATOES

For intriguing contrasts of flavor and texture, Ostlund suggests steamed artichokes with marmalade-thick papaya salsa and avocado salsa with bits of celery. "One more ingredient that makes a great salsa is star fruit," she explains, recalling a restaurant in Belize where the chef mixed star fruit, also known as carambola, with papayas, green peppers, vinegar and oil. This salsa with the consistency of salad dressing was served over grouper.

Watermelon is the surprise ingredient in a number of exciting salsa recipes developed by the National Watermelon Promotion Board, headquarterd in Orlando, FL, reports Gordon Hunt, marketing director. While most people think of it as a fruit, watermelon is actually a very healthful vegetable related to cucumber. Plus, it can easily take the place of tomato, the fruit that acts like a vegetable, he notes.

"You can switch out watermelon for tomatoes," Hunt explains. "It's red and juicy

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Salsa Recipes

Watermelon Strawberry Mint Salsa

This recipe, provided by the National Watermelon Promotion Board, Orlando, FL, was created by Chef Marty Blitz at Mise En Place in Tampa, FL.

1 cup diced watermelon (seeds removed)
¾ cup diced strawberries
¼ cup diced red onion
2 Tbs diced seeded jalapeno chile
2 Tbs olive oil
1 Tbs lime juice
1 tsp sugar

Gently stir together all ingredients in a bowl. Let stand for about one hour to blend flavors. Serves 4

Vidalia Onion Margarita Salsa Verde

This recipe, provided by the Vidalia Onion Committee, Vidalia, GA, is from Brian Stapleton, executive chef, The Carolina Crossroads Restaurant & Bar in Chapel Hill, NC.

10 small tomatillos, husks removed, washed and diced
2 cups diced Vidalia Onions
1 jalapeño, seeded and finely chopped
3 Tbs finely chopped cilantro
2 Tbs tequila
2 Tbs freshly squeezed lime juice
2 Tbs sugar, or to taste
1 tsp salt, or to taste
¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper

Combine all ingredients and season to taste, adding more sugar if too acidic. Refrigerate, covered, until ready to use. Makes approximately 4 cups.

Cinco de Mango Salsa

This recipe was provided by the National Mango Board, Orlando, FL.

3 large ripe mangos, peeled, pitted and diced
1 medium jalapeño pepper, stemmed, seeded, and minced
⅔ cup diced red bell pepper
⅓ cup diced red onion
2 Tbs chopped fresh cilantro
2 Tbs fresh lime juice
1 Tbs olive oil
½ tsp ground cumin
½ tsp kosher salt

Stir together all ingredients in a medium-sized bowl.

and there's no problem with acid" — a big plus for people who find tomatoes difficult to digest. For added eye appeal, he adds, watermelon salsa can be served in mini watermelon bowls.

Mangos make marvelous salsa, according to Wendy McManus, director of marketing, National Mango Board (NMB), Orlando, FL. "Adding mango takes salsa to a whole new level, ensuring salsa always stays fresh. Mango salsa is fantastic on a green salad, as a marinade, in a wrap, with fish, chicken and other meats, and it is always a great companion to a quesadilla," she points out. "We developed a new salsa last year for Cinco de Mayo, and we're working on a new one for 2008."

What's better, replacing tomatoes or blending mangoes with them? "It doesn't have to be an either-or question," McManus explains. "Mangos and tomatoes play nicely together in a salsa recipe, but if you want to do something unique with a tomato-free salsa recipe, mangos are the perfect solution. Mangos add a sweet tart flavor that complements other salsa ingredients without overpowering them. A fresh mango salsa adds a sophisticated touch to any event."

Along with watermelon and mango, pineapple has become more popular in salsas at the foodservice level, reports Christou. "Pineapple captures two of the greatest food trends: the desire to taste and experiment with more tropical fruits and the Mexican flavor trend that has consumers searching for vibrant and exotic flavors of the interior of Mexico."

Del Monte provides foodservice operators ready-made Pico de Gallo made with the freshest produce and ready to serve. It also offers restaurants Del Monte Gold Extra Sweet pineapples whole, in chunks, spears or any size chefs find easiest to use in salsa or other recipes. "Consumers love the sweet and spicy flavor that pineapples bring to salsas as well as the versatility of it," Christou explains. "Pineapple salsas can be used with chips or they can be served over fish, chicken, pork or even desserts."

"Salsa is not a true salsa without an onion in there," declares Wendy Brannen, executive director, Vidalia Onion Committee, Vidalia, GA. "The typical storage onion has long been a staple. Sweet onions can provide a different flavor and counter some of the heat you get with some of the new kinds of peppers being used. Vidalias give you that flavor boost but counteract some of that heat," she adds.

"We're starting to see a lot of different ingredients showing up in salsa, a proliferation in types of peppers used, like habanero and chipotle, and fruits like mango, pineapple and jicama," Brannen notes. "Vidalia onion salsa margarita uses nontraditional items like tomatillos, tequila, limes, Vidalia onions and sugar," she explains.

Photo courtesy of Brooks Tropicals

SAVINGS AND CONVENIENCE

"In foodservice, when there's a problem with the tomato crop due to hurricanes and such, you can use watermelon instead," Hunt says. "Watermelon is a very low-cost product," making it an excellent choice anytime, he notes.

A chef looking for salsa inspiration, says Brooks' Ostlund, can start by asking, "What flavor do I want to highlight? What's freshest today?" and go from there. "Think about it as a medley between different fruits and vegetables you use," she advises.

Justin Bedwell, director of marketing, Z&S Fresh, Inc., Fresno, CA, says his company is focusing on convenience with "a fresh kit we introduced this past year with all the salsa ingredients in one clamshell." The kit includes four tomatoes, three chili peppers, one onion and one lime, plus a seasoning packet featuring cilantro and "special herbs and spices."

While Z&S's salsa kit is currently limited to retail, Bedwell reports, "We are thinking about expanding it to a box of ingredients for use in a restaurant or hotel," where it could help chefs cut preparation time.

LINKING TO FOODSERVICE

Produce purveyors are taking several routes to promote the new salsas for foodservice. "We've talked with several restaurants" about the benefits of watermelon salsa, according to Hunt.

Increased promotional activity to consumers heightens their awareness so they are more likely to look for salsa on menus.

Test marketing for celery salsa is under way, according to Duda Farm's Duda. While the company's celery salsa is currently available exclusively at one gourmet market near Duda's headquarters in Oviedo, FL. "The foodservice area is also being pursued — first with large volume users like the military and national chains and then to the traditional foodservice outlets." **pb**

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Reader Service # 107

Merchandising Walnuts

Use these tips to keep up with the increasingly high demand for this popular nut.

BY BOB JOHNSON

More consumers are turning to nuts as a healthful snack option and walnuts are benefiting from the positive press all nuts are receiving. But as walnuts continue to attract consumers, growers are struggling to keep up with the demand, causing wholesale prices to jump.

"Prices have gone up 33 percent, but demand is still increasing," reports Mike Poindexter, sales manager, Poindexter Nut Company, a Selma, CA-based processor and shipper of walnuts and other nut varieties. "Demand has not fallen off at all."

The demand for walnuts has become so strong that in recent years of relatively short supply, there is little reason to promote walnuts. Retailers sell what they have and rising prices do not seem to have a great impact on sales. "Most produce departments like to work in the 30 percent markup realm," explains Bruce Hejl, president, Superior Brokerage, Inc., based in St. John, IN, but, he adds, some retailers use walnuts as a draw and expect a very small markup.

The walnut harvest is less than three months long, so it's important to keep the product at the end of the season looking and tasting fresh. "You want to treat it like fresh product," Hejl recommends. "It comes out of cold storage in California. When it comes out of cold storage, it is crunchy and crisp. You need to move it off the shelf in 30, 40, 45 or 50 days."

All nuts, including walnuts, have a longer shelf life than almost any other item in the produce department, but they are still a perishable commodity and must be treated that way. "We're looking at product that was harvested in September, October and November," advises Hejl.

The process for handling walnuts begins just hours after they are harvested. "The growers send their walnuts to a processor where they are dried out," notes Paul DeFranco, production manager for De Franco & Sons, Los Angeles, CA. "The product is already dry when it arrives at the store, so it shouldn't go rotten. Walnuts need to be kept in a cool, dry area."

Photos courtesy of Diamond Walnuts

Even rising prices have not affected the growing consumer demand for walnuts.

"The temperature and the humidity are most important for the care of walnuts," explains Jeff Prusak, buyer for Aurora Products, Inc., based in Stratford, CT. "Ideally you want them at 41° to 42° F and at 65 percent humidity, but that's not realistic on a retailer level."

Sunlight can also speed their loss of freshness. "Keep them cool, dry and out of direct sunlight," explains Poindexter of Poindexter Nut. "In cold storage, they can last 24 months, but when you buy them in June, it's already been a few months since they were harvested. At room temperature, they can last six months." The walnut harvest runs from September through early November in California — where virtually all the walnuts in the country are grown.

Jennifer Getz, assistant marketing director, California Walnut Board, Folsom, CA, agrees, adding, "Walnuts have a shelf life of up six months [in most retail displays] and up

to a year if stored in a freezer. We also recommend they are kept in a cool, dry place."

When merchandising walnuts already out of the shell, special care is critical. The Walnut Marketing Board, based in Sacramento, CA, recommends storing shelled walnuts in a sealed container in a cool place with low moisture and away from sunlight. Refrigerated storage is good, but for larger quantities, freezer storage is best.

All nuts, including walnuts, have a longer shelf life than almost any other item in the produce department, but they are still a perishable commodity and must be treated that way.

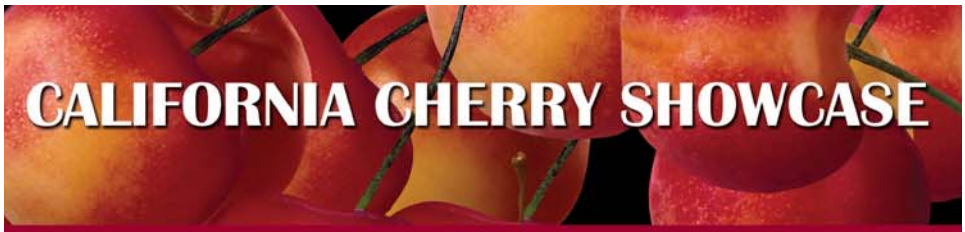
A MOST HEALTHFUL SNACK

The walnut industry has invested heavily in the scientific research showing the extraordinary health benefits of its product — and in spreading the word to consumers who are eager to eat healthful foods.

The result has been a substantial increase in demand for walnuts. "World demand has exploded, mostly driven by the health benefits of walnuts," according to Richard Sambado, domestic sales manager, Primavera Marketing, Inc., a Fresno, CA-based shipper best known for its cherries and apples, although it has shipped walnuts abroad for years. The in-shells are generally shipped in 50-pound sacks, the shelled pieces and halves in 25-pound bags and the pieces in 30-pound bags. The firm is expanding its walnut operation to include shipments to domestic retailers.

"Eating a handful of walnuts every day is one of the easiest ways you can improve your diet and your health," according to Kelda Kast, account executive for Torme Lauricella, a San Francisco, CA-based public relations company that works for the Walnut Marketing Board.

In 2004, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a qualified health claim for walnuts because of evidence that suggests they help prevent cardiovascular disease, reports Kast. Walnuts are the only nuts with a significant amount of omega-3 fatty acids. Many studies have concluded that omega-3s help reduce the risk for heart



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Will There Be Enough?

Walnuts have alternate heavy/light bearing years. This year will be a heavier bearing year, after last year's light crop, which was lighter than a normal light year due to the weather, and demand for walnuts is so strong that it could become tough to find them before the next harvest begins in September.

"There's a huge worldwide demand for walnuts," reports Paul DeFranco, production manager for De Franco & Sons, headquartered in Los Angeles, CA.

This year, retailers can expect to pay more for walnuts. "We're seeing a huge increase in the cost of product raw material because of the lack of product," according to Bruce Hejl, president, Superior Brokerage, Inc., based in St. John, IN. "It's over $4 a pound for the raw material."

"There are walnuts to be bought," states Richard Sambado, domestic sales manager, Primavera Marketing, Inc., based in Fresno, CA. "The supply will come close to making it."

Other suppliers are more skeptical about the supply this year. "Walnuts are hard to find," according to Jeff Prusak, buyer, based in Aurora Products, Inc., Stratford, CT. "Sales are very strong and they are insanely expensive."

Some suppliers believe the supply will run out before the next harvest. "There are not enough walnuts this year," explains reports Mike Poindexter, sales manager, Poindexter Nut Company, based in Selma, CA. "Prices are high and they are going to stay high."

If walnut supplies run short, it may be wise to keep the nut category alive in the produce department with other nuts. "Feature almonds," Poindexter suggests. "It allows you to feature nuts even though walnuts will be in short supply until the next harvest begins. There's no real reason to merchandise walnuts."

Retailers looking for alternatives in the nut category can also turn to pecans. "Pecans are going to be plentiful, but the demand for walnuts is going to drive the price of pecans up," explains Ron Williamson, sales manager, John B. Sanfilippo & Son, Inc., headquartered in Elgin, IL. "Consumers are willing to trade between walnuts and pecans. Pecans, walnuts and almonds turn about the same percentage."

There are no guarantees that the 2008 harvest will be strong enough to meet the demand, according to Poindexter. "We don't know how big the next harvest will be. I have no idea whether next year's harvest will be enough." **pb**

disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, obesity and clinical depression as well as improve fertility and bone health.

Experts believe that the growing awareness of walnuts' nutritional benefits has a lot to do with them assuming a more prominent role in the produce department's sales and profits. "Nuts in the produce department are very important," according to Ron Williamson, sales manage for John B. Sanfilippo & Son Inc., based in Elgin, IL. "When you look at packaged nut sales, in the past, produce was a very small share but that has changed significantly."

Only 5 or 10 percent of packaged nut sales used to be in the produce department, but in some stores that figure has reached 35 or 40 percent, adds Williamson. "That percentage has risen significantly in the past three years." Williamson says today's managers are much better at merchandising nuts than they were in the past "because they realize they are a profitable, high-impulse item. Walnuts account for around 35 to 40 percent of nut sales."

Shelled walnuts are graded according to quality, notes Primavera's Sambado. The light meat is considered to be the highest priced, premium grade. Next come the amber-colored nuts, followed by the combination of shades. The dark meat walnuts are considered to be the lowest of the grades.

When sampling or doing other in-store promotions, walnuts can be quickly and easily cooked to improve taste, explains Kast of Torme Lauricella. Bake walnuts in a single layer on a cookie sheet at 350° F for eight to 10 minutes, checking frequently, or microwave them in a single layer on a microwave-safe plate on medium-high for 5 to 6 minutes, stirring every 2 minutes. Walnuts can also be cooked in a skillet at medium-high heat for 3 to 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Once consumers try the cooked walnuts — and understand the easy preparation — sales should increase.

Promotions, POS materials, in-store sampling and consumer information on nutritional benefits are the keys to moving walnuts on a year-round basis. **pb**

Reader Service # 53

FLORAL WATCH

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tiny Roses Make Big Gifts

Fantasy Farms, LLC, Miami, FL, presents the love bunch — a gift for everyday occasions featuring 24 stems of its exclusive Serena Italian micro rose. The arrangement includes leather leaf fern and baby's breath in an elegant vase inside a charming gift bag. Packed in small cases of 12 units each, the love bunch can be displayed on shelves and is simple to hang using the bag handles.

Reader Service No. 316

A Rebirth Of Passion

The Sun Valley Group, Arcata, CA, introduces Renaissance Tulips — premium, color-filled tulip blooms presented in classic wrap. Grown in the United States and Veriflora Certified, the Renaissance Tulips have been called timeless beauty for the modern age. Tulip history dates back to the Turks as early as 1000 A.D. In the 1500s, tulips were brought into Europe and the great tulip love affair began.

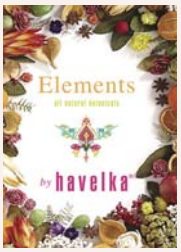
Reader Service No. 317

Eco-Friendly Pots

Pots Company, Miami, FL, introduces a new line of Eco Friendly Biodegradable Pots made of bamboo fiber, rice, wheat straw and corn stalk. They have a better texture than plastic pots, contemporary designs and elegant style and are available in a wide range of colors, shapes and sizes. Designed for indoor use, the biodegradable pots are watertight.

Reader Service No. 318

Botanical Beauties Forever



Judy Havelka Enterprises, Ltd., Fort Worth, TX, offers all-natural, dehydrated designer botanicals that last forever. Available fragranced and unfragranced, the botanical pieces can be purchased in bulk or retail packages. Custom designs are also available. All products are featured in the *Elements* catalog.

Reader Service No. 319

NEW PRODUCTS

A Pinch Of This

Schubert Nursery, Inc., Salinas, CA, now offers a Rustica 3-inch herb basket complete with three live herb plants, generally oregano, sage and thyme or rosemary. Three clay pots are placed in the weathered metal Rustica frame, making the herb basket an ideal gift for moms, dads, cooks and gardeners. The wholesale grower and designer of topiary ships six herb baskets per case.

Reader Service No. 320

Georgia Company Awarded

burton & BURTON, Athens, GA, a company with more than 250 employees, recently won the Georgia Family Business of the Year award in the large business category. Employing three generations of its family, the company is one of the largest suppliers of balloons and related gift items in the world. The Cox Family Enterprise Center of the Coles College of Business at Kennesaw State University will host a presentation ceremony in May.

Reader Service No. 321

Organic Recognition

Pharm Solutions, Inc., Salem, OR, announces seven of its pesticides have achieved U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Organic Program Certification. Rose Pharm, Veggie Pharm, Indoor Pharm, Flower Pharm, Fungus Pharm, Oil Pharm and Soap Pharm are the first and only pesticides to qualify as USDA Certified Organic. Developed by a family of organic growers, the Pharm Solutions line of patent-pending organic pesticides has been available since 2004.

Reader Service No. 322

Celebrating 20 Years

U. S. Greens Corp., Miami, FL, is celebrating its 20th anniversary. The worldwide grower and distributor of decorative floral greens and specialty cut flowers was opened in 1988 by the Fernandez family. Today, with more than 200 growing acres in Florida, the company has farms and partnerships all over the world, including in California, Washington, Oregon, North Carolina, Guatemala, South Africa, Israel and Italy.

Reader Service No. 323

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

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Maximizing Quality In The Floral Department

Refrigerated cases enhance displays and increase sales.

BY SUZY LOONAM

Superior shelf life and quality of floral products occur when optimum refrigeration conditions are diligently maintained. Keeping temperatures down and profits up always requires assessment of care, handling, space, and merchandising.

Sales and profits per floral department square foot are key, says John Patalita, division manager of Floratech, based in North Syracuse, NY. "Several leading retailers report a well-done floral department can be one of the most profitable uses of floor space in a store. One important element of floral success is the way in which flowers are displayed and a decision on the type of floral refrigeration to be used plays an essential role in merchandising."

"Refrigeration salespeople need to be the experts on what flowers need," relates Tom Lavagetto, president, Floral Consultant Group (FCG), Spokane, WA. "They need to show [retail] floral people the facts on what the floral refrigeration product does for them — weigh the cost of the fixture, the savings in shrink and the additional sales. The manufacturer needs to run the numbers for floral buyers. This is very, very important."

According to Marcy Britigan, president, MEI, LaGrange Park, IL, and Newark, DE-based Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) 2007 Floral Marketer of the Year, retailers should consider "operating performance of floral equipment — optimum temperatures, humidity, temperature differential, air velocity, merchandising options, and lighting. Lighting is extremely important because customers won't buy if they can't see the product."

Closed-door floral cases offer greater environmental controls, but open cases are perceived as more consumer-friendly.

OPEN OR CLOSED CASES?

Some retailers use closed floral cases for greater environmental and quality control, but Lavagetto says open-case coolers are more consumer-friendly, possibly selling two to one over closed cases. "You need them both," he explains. "Some flowers need to be enclosed, but bouquets sell better in open containers. People will touch flowers before they will open a cooler door."

According to Bill Carlson, vice president of sales and marketing, Börgen Systems, Des Moines, IA, "Some large retailers have reported no difference between open or closed door cases. In fact, most shoppers are not deterred by the doors on frozen food cases in stores and there is a feeling consumers are becoming more aware of saving energy. One large retailer told us customers are getting used to opening doors again."

The trade-off between open and closed cases is in sales, says Patalita. "Open-air cases encourage impulse purchasing, pure and simple! Customers can see, smell and touch flowers in an open cooler which increases their interest in purchasing flowers."

THE BIG PICTURE

Carlson urges retailers to think about the entire floral sales process to determine refrigeration needs. "They need to think about who their customers are and how or why they like to shop for flowers at their store. They need to understand how the floral department fits into the overall design and customer experience of the store. Next, they need to look at the type of flowers and arrangements they need to sell. The actual equipment must reflect the answers to these questions or the retailer is buying someone else's solutions and missing a great opportunity to make a department really profitable."

Lavagetto warns retailers not to be wowed by beauty or design, lamenting that some cases simply do not refrigerate proper-

Fight Shrink By Controlling Ethylene

Ethylene, the invisible, odorless gas emitted by cut flowers, potted plants and produce products, is used commercially for ripening post-harvest fruit. In the floral department, ethylene accelerates shrink.

To reduce its damage to floral products, Amy Adams, floral manager of Lee's Marketplace in Logan, UT, says, "We don't put our flowers in the produce department at all. We have a separate floral department and our own walk-in cooler. Floral should never share a cooler with produce — ever."

At Costco, based in Issaquah, WA, "Our buildings are generally 100,000 to 145,000 square feet," according to Kim Thomas, assistant general merchandise manager. "We keep our floral and produce as far apart as they can be. Our flowers are never stored with produce — our floral people know better."

Costco does not store much floral. "We have very little product stored in our building," reveals Thomas, who adds that with daily floral delivery, storing two to three days of floral product is not necessary. "That's why we set it up that way — out of concerns for ethylene."

Costco floral coolers have temperature but not humidity gauges. "That's one of the reasons we don't store product in the building — because the regulation of those two factors is so crucial to the product," she admits.

Terril Nell, chair and professor of floriculture, Environmental Horticulture Department, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, and author an article entitled, The roses are screaming. Is anyone listening?, admonishes retailers that keeping floral products cold will avoid the effects of ethylene. In some stores, he notes, "There isn't even a thermometer in the cooler!"

Nell recommends addressing the ethylene issue by buying flowers that the grower has pre-treated with ethylene-blocking material such as silver thiosulfate. "We've shown that about 75 percent of the cut roses sold in the United States are not being treated, and they absolutely should be," asserts Nell.

Sanitation is also crucial for fighting shrink in floral. It "is as important as cold in the life of flowers. People are not cleaning buckets properly and so floral products are put into a solution that is not clean. Some try to reuse the solution or dump it out and immediately add new solution without doing any kind of sanitizing of the bucket.

"I believe in keeping it simple. If floral people would concentrate on those things [temperature, pre-treatment and sanitation], we would double the life of those flowers," he asserts

For stores that may not have the luxury of selling pre-treated flowers, there are other ways to reduce the effects of ethylene on floral products. Dave Biswell, president and general manager of Ethylene Control Inc., based in Selma, CA, says his patented Power Pellets remove ethylene, extend the life of floral and kill molds, rots, bacteria and odors. The company offers scrubbers for large floral cold storage rooms, filters for floral walk-in coolers and sachets for reach-ins and for boxed floral in shipping and storage.

For larger applications, Matt Shawcross, vice president of business development for Miatech, based in Clackamas, OR, recommends a new product, Bio Turbo, which the company introduced last year. "It removes ethylene and airborne bacteria for larger warehouse applications."

Later this year, Miatech plans to introduce two smaller units with one to target retail. "This will allow us to bring affordable technology to the smaller walk-in coolers and the retail floor where produce and floral are displayed. More importantly, however, is achieving humidity of 90 percent or more in the larger coolers where floral is displayed," Shawcross adds.

CJS Ethylene Filters, Sanger, CA, also offers products to remove ethylene and extend floral shelf life, including sachets, filters and a filter system, which, when filled with a hundred of the company's special ethylene-blocking pellets, is large enough to treat 75,000 to 150,000 cubic feet of storage.

According to Claude Jessen, CJS owner and CEO, "The ethylene that can accumulate in a flower box during shipping can prevent roses from opening and can cause yellowing and leaf drop. I have customers in greenhouse-growing situations, who are shipping in boxes, and they find that using our 5-gram sachet in transport reduces ethylene levels and keeps flowers as fresh as possible. Stores use our filters in walk-in coolers for the same reason. Filters are sort of mop-up operation — it's just good housekeeping to use them." **pb**

ly. "Retailers need to know that the case operates at 34° to 35° F with 85 to 90 percent humidity. Of course, that's impossible to accomplish in open-air coolers."

MAINTAINING CORRECT LEVELS

If proper temperature and humidity can be maintained with a refurbished cooler, that "may be the way to start for a single-store operator or a small chain just getting started in a floral program," notes Börgen's Carlson. "However, the support issues are considerable just as in buying a used car. Was the case maintained properly by the previous owner? Is there hidden damage due to the removal, transport or reinstallation?"

"It is unwise for equipment buyers to make floral equipment purchases without consulting their floral buyers," FCG's Lavagetto advises. "The floral buyer will know the proper temperatures and humidity and how the product is best displayed. It's all about selling more flowers to more people consistently, and freshness is absolutely paramount."

For general storage temperatures, MEI's Britigan recommends 36° F and for tropical plants 45° F. She recommends a 95 percent optimum level of humidity with 80 percent being the minimum acceptable.

GREEN THINKING

To reduce energy consumption, equipment buyers might consider cases without lights. "Our open design allows supermarkets to light flowers using the store's lighting," relates Patalita of Floratech.

Lighting makes a big difference, says Carlson. "There is a lot of new technology available that requires less energy, however, it is still expensive compared to the current industry-standard florescent tubes. Flowers require a lot of light to show off their color, if you cut the light too much, it can have an impact on sales."

Regarding disposal, Carlson adds, "Environmentally, the major issue with removing a case is making sure of the proper handling of the refrigerant, which is normally done by the installer." **pb**

By Dave Diver

Adjusting Strategy To Changing Conditions

For decades, IBM was known for its mainframe computer, the primary product behind its rapid sales and profit growth. When the personal computer (PC) hit the market, so did an entirely different set of competitors, which slowed IBM's growth and eventually lead to the sale of its PC division to an Asian corporation. In the meantime, the company recognized that the knowledge it had gained from developing computing applications provided the capability to develop software programs. IBM became a leading business consultant, with that arm of the business providing the bulk of its consistent sales and profit growth.

Monsanto and DuPont, through acquisitions and adaptations of research skills, have become major players in the development of new plant seed varieties and new agricultural herbicides and pesticides, which now account for substantial portions of their operations.

In the produce industry during the late '80s, Driscoll's recognized that retail labor limitations were a major drawback to the growth of berry sales. Clamshell packaging gave it a step-up on the rest of the growing community, which was slow to adopt the innovation that helped change the retail mindset regarding strawberry displays and promotion. Instead of employing a strategy as solely a product provider, the approach allowed Driscoll's to grow sales by enabling retailers to more efficiently market berries to consumers.

Perhaps more has been written in recent years about Wal-Mart than any other retail company in the world. Given its size, this is not surprising. Most diagnoses of the company's growth rate changes have failed to recognize there is a natural business cycle when strategies are slow to respond to changing external forces.

The Wal-Mart strategic business model was tailored to achieve rapid growth of market penetration by providing product at prices substantially below those of others in the marketplace. Wal-Mart focused on small- to medium-sized communities in which smaller operators with low turnover depended on high margins. Its challenge was developing procurement, distribution and technological systems capable of providing low operational costs. The resulting reduced prices generated extremely high sales per square foot and, therefore, outstanding profitability. The strategy was simple — but the implementation was not.

Consumers recognized the value, and the image was created. The initial stages of the company's business cycle demonstrated a dynamic upward trend over several decades. However, in recent years, growth has slowed dramatically, plateauing — as most companies ultimately do.

Competitive activity in communities objecting to employee pay scales has been among the many reasons leading to the sales growth plateau. During those years of heady growth, employees receiving company stock saw the profit as part of their income. Now, with at best static stock-price appreciation, employees see hourly pay as their total income — and they see it with some dissatisfaction. Still, a significant portion of the population is interested in those low-paying jobs; at the beginning of 2008, more than 10,000 people applied for 400 jobs at the soon-to-open Wal-Mart Supercenter less than 10 miles from downtown Atlanta.

Families with incomes over $30,000 now account for approximately 10 percent more of the population than they did early in the Wal-Mart growth phenomenon, thereby curtailing the growth of the Wal-Mart shopper core and contributing to the relative plateau of same-store sales. Even with all of the strategic elements that were previously so successful, the sterile store atmosphere, low prices and often correspondingly low-grade products did not fulfill the wants of this economically upwardly mobile population segment.

The challenge for every organization is implementing a strategy that consistently recognizes and adjusts to evolving competitive and economic changes.

Until roughly one year ago, Wal-Mart maintained its long-term strategy while several more successful retailers with sound basic strategies — from expanding Publix to upscale Harris-Teeter — kept on the edge of changing conditions. Among their advances have been the expansion of ready-to-eat foods, nutritional classifications, multi-grades of private label on center-store shelves, organic foods with emphasis on produce, and cut fruit programs. In-store POP conveys an active message of change to the consumer.

Just as the big-box retailer's yearlong effort to expand and upgrade product lines started to yield some mixed results, the nation's overall economic growth was coming to a halt. Wal-Mart quickly shifted back to a more traditional low-priced message — *Save Money. Live Better.* Numerous price reductions on essentials appealed to cash-strapped consumers. Recognizing groceries drive traffic, Wal-Mart prominently advertised and displayed seasonal food items, particularly fresh fruit and vegetables, this past holiday season and thus helped reverse recent sales trends.

The challenge for every organization is implementing a strategy that consistently recognizes and adjusts to evolving competitive and economic changes, while focusing on the importance of the consumer psyche in the local and global marketplace. **pb**

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Reader Service # 112

Catherine Roty works for Centre Technique Interprofessionnel des Fruits et Légumes (CTIFL), Paris, France

Q & A With Catherine Roty

Q. First, tell us about the French government's vending machine project?

A. On Dec. 13, 2000, the French government announced it would launch a National Program on Nutrition and Health (PNNS) in 2001. Its overall aim is "to improve the health status of the [French] population by acting on one of the major decisive factors, namely nutrition."

In 2002, the French Ministry of Health charged APRIFEL [Agency for Research and Information on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables] with encouraging young people to eat fruits and vegetables. APRIFEL asked CTIFL [Centre Technique Interprofessionnel des Fruits et Légumes] to study the technical feasibility and to determine the fruits and vegetables to be sold in vending machines to students. Two secondary schools in Bergerac (Southwest France) were the basis for our trials throughout 2003.

Q. What kinds of machines were used?

A. The choice of material was imposed by the fragility of the fruits — vending machines using revolving stainless steel trays with same-level delivery (i.e., without dropping the fruits) and, of course, equipped with a cooling system.

Jean-Pierre Hasson of Rodaprim, a fruit and veg wholesaler in Rouen, lent us a FIFO (first in first out) machine. He had approximately 40 machines all over Rouen — town hall, hospital, swimming pool, schools etc. CTIFL bought a shopper vending machine.

Refilling and maintaining the machines were carried out by Arzenton, a wholesale firm in Bergerac from the Créno group [a group of fruit and vegetable wholesale companies] and a member of UNCGFL (French Fruit and Vegetable Wholesalers' Association). The aim was to define on a real-life basis the threshold of profitability for a wholesaler or retailer taking care of ordering, preparing, washing and delivering the products and to draw up a guide of good hygiene practices.

Q. What challenges did you face?

A. There is an average temperature difference of 2°C between the upper and lower trays of the machine. The upper trays should be dedicated to fruits requiring low temperatures, in our case strawberries, followed by fruits that release ethylene — apples, pears, apricots — and then fruits without distinct temperature requirements — clementines, prunes, dried apricots, table grapes. The lower trays are for fruits susceptible to low temperatures — tomatoes, cherries, bananas and kiwifruit.

The humidity regulation systems of the currently available vending machines are not sufficient to keep fresh fruits and vegetables from drying out. Throughout the trials, a plate filled with water was placed in the lower part of the machines, and the water level was checked each time the machine was restocked.

The fruits sold per piece were placed on small plates to keep them from being tossed around during rotation. For fruits very susceptible to dehydration, we used plastic punnets. Juicy products were supplied with a paper napkin. All fruits were washed, except the strawberries; a pictogram recommended washing them before eating.

Q. How was the program executed?

A. The vending machines were placed in a competitive environment. Both schools had vending machines offering hot and cold drinks, and sweet and salty snacks. The idea was to let the students make their own choices — not to impose the nutritional correctness.

The students declared they would try the machines at least once. If the offer were convincing, word of mouth would do the rest. Fruits and vegetables in vending machines suffer severe handicaps — taste uncertainty, lack of convenience, generic products hardly associated with a commercial environment. Among teenagers, one of the key factors to success for this concept is diversity.

Q. How much did the children pay for these items?

A. The prices were aligned with competing products and never exceeded 1 euro — a sort of psychological threshold beyond which the students considered the fresh products too expensive.

In the end, 82 percent of the students declared they had "bought more than once" from the fruit and veg vending machine; 60 percent said they had bought less from other vending machines, both drinks and snacks. That means the fruit and veg vending machines acquired a certain customer loyalty — mainly among girls.

Q. What's happening now with the program? Is this true that all vending machines are banned at schools in France?

A. Against a background of pandemic obesity and in order to avoid snacking among young consumers, a law in France specifies that "vending machines for drinks and food requiring payment and accessible to the pupils are prohibited in schools after September 1, 2005."

This law stopped the enthusiasm created by the project. It condemns a distribution method but hardly changes snacking habits. Now, students buy sweets through the student board or leave the school premises and stock up at the local bakery or sandwich shops, where, of course, fresh fruits are totally absent.

At the end of 2007, the French Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, in a wish to improve accessibility of fruits and vegetables — he should have said fresh fruits and vegetables since processed produce doesn't have the same constraints of storage, packaging or shelf life — requested two projects be carried out: a project of free distribution in primary schools and a new project involving vending machines with fresh fruits to be installed in agricultural (secondary) schools.

The primary-school children here are much younger than those that participated in our project, the products will be free, the distribution will take place in schools situated in less-favored areas, and the project will start in September 2008.

Q. What did you learn from the pilot program?

A. Minimally processed products would stand a better chance than their initial form —apple slices rather than a whole fruit, for instance. I'm afraid fresh fruit will never be a real alternative for sweets.

Excerpted from an interview by Mira Slott

INFORMATION SHOWCASE

APRIL 2008

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COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX
A&A Organic Marketing, Inc.	62	61	831-685-0303	831-685-0302
Albert's Organics	63	2	800-899-5944	610-388-8418
Apache Produce	91	84	520-281-2282	520-761-1829
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	27	57	888-AUERPAK	201-807-9596
Awe Sum Organics, Inc.	63	46	831-457-2244	831-457-2244
Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co.	46	68	800-845-6149	910-654-4734
Basciani Foods, Inc.	106	16	610-268-3044	610-268-2194
Bland Farms	79	85	800-VIDALIA	912-654-3532
Blue Book Services	119	112	630-668-3500	630-668-0303
C&S Wholesale Grocers, Inc.	39	86	860-627-2550	413-247-3978
California Table Grape Commission	59	87	559-447-8350	559-447-9184
Canadian Produce Marketing Association	114	53	613-226-4187	613-226-2984
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	86	1	515-981-5111	515-981-4564
Castle Rock Vineyards	60	5	661-721-8717	661-721-0419
CF Fresh	32	70	360-855-3192	360-855-2430
Christopher Ranch	62	56	408-847-1100	408-847-0581
Coastline Produce	50	14	831-755-1430	831-755-1429
Corona Marketing Co.	31	62	805-346-2114	805-346-8138
Curry & Company	77	41	800-929-1073	503-393-6085
Dole Fresh Fruit Company	2	111	818-879-6600	818-879-6628
dProduce Man Software	105	48	888-PRODMAN	650-712-9973
Earthbound Farm	66	54	888-624-1004	831-623-7886
East Coast Brokers & Packers, Inc.	123	63	800-557-7751	863-869-9850
Eureka Specialties, Inc.	98	20	213-488-6470	213-488-6480
Eurofresh Farms, Ltd.	88	40	520-384-4621	520-384-4187
Family Tree Farms	124	26	866-FLAVOR-1	559-595-7795
Family Tree Farms	21	27	866-FLAVOR-1	559-595-7795
Florida Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services	35	73	850-487-8908	850-488-7127
Flavour Pict	92	92	519-733-3663	519-733-9970
Fowler Farms	22	88	315-594-8068	315-594-8060
Fresh Farm Products, Inc.	56	89	229-924-4744	229-924-5556
Fresh Partners AB	29	113	46-8-742-1215	46-8-742-6201
Fresh Quest	34	4	954-946-9554	954-946-8760
Fresh Sense	19	83	866-747-3673	
George Foods	46	68	800-845-6149	910-654-4734
Giorgio Fresh Co.	105	64	800-330-5711	610-939-0296
The Giumarra Companies	58	23	520-281-1981	520-761-3889
The Giumarra Companies	54	24	509-663-4409	213-628-4878
Global Organic Specialty Source, Inc.	65	90	877-952-1198	941-358-6551
Gourmet's Finest	104	15	610-268-6910	610-268-2298
Greenhouse Produce Company, LLC	90	60	888-492-1492	772-492-1592
Grimmway Farms	13	51	661-845-9435	661-393-6458
Heath & Lejeune, Inc.	100	21	213-614-1909	213-614-6856
Hendrix Produce, Inc.	83	31	800-752-1551	912-685-4420
Herb Thyme Farms	63	25	831-476-9733	831-476-3710
L.G. Herndon Jr. Farms, Inc.	84	30	912-565-7640	912-565-7158
I Love Produce, LLC	64	74	610-869-4664	610-869-2711
Inline Plastics Corp.	49	91	800-826-5567	203-924-0370
International Herbs, Ltd.	63	35	604-576-2345	604-574-3689
J-D Marketing, Inc.	92	92	519-733-3663	519-733-9970
JBJ Distributing, Inc.	98	17	714-992-4920	714-992-0433
JBJ Distributing, Inc.	64	18	714-992-4920	714-992-0433
Kerian Machines, Inc.	90	71	800-551-5188	701-352-3776
Kern Ridge Growers, LLC	66	49	661-854-3156	661-854-2832
Kingdom Fresh Produce, Inc.	94	80	956-668-8988	956-668-8288
Lakeside Organic Gardens	65	93	831-761-8797	831-728-1104
Laurel Farmers' Auction Market	34	22	302-875-3147	
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.	74	110	800-796-2349	718-542-2354
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	9	72	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
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Mediterranean Pleasures	7	69	800-491-VITA	856-467-2638
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Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc.	100	97	800-468-7111	323-588-7841
Mexican Hass Avocado Importers' Assoc	36-37	34	410-877-3142	
Miatech	41	45	800-339-5234	503-659-2204
Misionero Vegetables	64	39	800-EAT-SALAD	831-424-0740
MIXTEC Group	22	67	626-440-7077	626-440-1557
Mooney Farms	89	98	530-899-2661	530-899-7746
Morada Produce Company	113	78	209-546-1816	209-546-1822
National Raisin Company	20	79	800-874-3776	559-834-1055
New Harvest Organics, LLC	65	58	520-281-0231	520-281-0237
Ostrom's	104	99	360-491-1410	360-438-2594
Pacific Organic Produce	65	100	415-673-5555	415-673-5585
Pandol Brothers, Inc.	57	55	661-725-3145	661-725-4741
Peri & Sons Farms	29	52	775-463-4444	775-463-4028
Phillips Mushroom Farms	103	50	800-722-8818	610-444-4751
Pismo-Oceano Vegetable Exchange	50	47	805-489-5770	805-489-7058
Plain Jane	91	84	520-281-2282	520-761-1829
Plantation Sweets	78	36	800-541-2272	912-684-4545
Primavera Marketing, Inc.	113	13	209-931-9420	209-931-9424
Pro-Fruit Marketing, Inc.	60	101	201-599-0200	201-599-9840
Produce for Better Health Foundation	47	32	302-235-2329	302-235-5555
The Produce Marketing Association	61	10	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
The Produce Marketing Association	107	11	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
Produce Pro, Inc.	46	42	630-395-0535	630-572-0390
PuraVida Farms	34	81	480-588-7012	714-686-9253
Ray Farms, Inc.	80	28	800-692-3093	912-654-9065
Red Blossom Farms, Inc.	30	43	805-981-1839	805-693-0032
Roberson Onion Co.	82	102	912-375-5760	912-375-3610
Shuman Produce, Inc.	81	29	912-557-4477	912-557-4478
South Tex Organics, L.C.	66	103	956-585-1040	956-581-1040
Sounteast Produce Council	43	104	813-633-5556	866-653-4479
Stemilt Growers, Inc.	113	38	509-662-9667	509-663-2914
Summeripe Worldwide	24	109	559-351-5321	559-591-0296
Sun World International	15	6	760-398-9430	760-398-9613
Sunlight International Sales, Inc.	60	105	661-792-6360	661-792-6529
Sunny Valley Organics	65	76	520-281-2213	520-281-1399
Sweet Onion Trading Company	76	106	800-699-3727	321-674-2003
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	5	3	800-772-4542	831-455-3915
Trinity Fruit Sales	113	8	559-433-3777	559-433-3790
Umina Bros., Inc.	100	66	805-488-6658	805-488-0976
Uncle Matt's Organic	66	7	866-626-4613	352-394-1003
United Fresh Produce Association	111	107	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
United Produce Sales	100	77	714-671-1501	714-671-1502
United Produce Sales	34	82	714-671-1501	714-671-1502
VIP Marketing, Inc.	99	75	213-833-7784	213-833-7788
Walla Walla Gardeners' Association, Inc.	82	108	509-525-7071	509-529-4170
Well-Pict Berries	30	44	831-722-3871	831-722-6340
West Coast Tomato, Inc.	86	59	941-722-4537	941-729-6778
West Lake Fresh	30	12	831-724-0644	831-724-0117
Westlake Produce Company	97	19	800-378-7848	863-401-3223
Z&S Distributing Co., Inc.	109	9	559-432-1777	559-432-2888
Zespri International	53	33	650-368-2870	650-745-1419

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Right now, and on through June 6, 2008, we're taking entries for the ***20th Annual Marketing Excellence Awards Program***, presented by **PRODUCE BUSINESS**. The awards recognize excellence in marketing in each of five categories: retailers, restaurants, wholesalers, shippers, and commodity organizations. Print, broadcast and other media are eligible to win.

To participate, send us the following:

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4. Promotion objectives.
5. Description of promotion.
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7. All support materials used in the promotion – such as POP, ads, posters, TV commercials.

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- Idaho Potato Commission
- Ocean Mist Farms
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P.O. Box 810425 • Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425

Deadline for entries is June 6, 2008

For additional information, call: **561-994-1118**, Ext. **101**

Blast from the Past

Life had a funny way of choosing a career path for Mitch Blumenthal, founder and president of Global Organic Specialty Source, Inc., and Blumenberry Farms, both based in Sarasota, FL.

In 1972, Mitch Blumenthal and his sister, Ronni Blumenthal, visited the Sturbridge Country Inn in Sturbridge, MA, on a family vacation to visit a family friend. Mitch, 7, and Ronni, 12, are pictured in this photo taken near the bed and breakfast's small farm. At the time, the siblings didn't know they'd one day own and operate a 10-acre organic farm and a wholesale distributor of organic produce.

"Never in a million years did I think we would be working together, much less in the farming industry," explains Mitch, who first became interested in agriculture when he and his wife bought a house on a large piece of land. "I thought, 'Why don't we try to eat off this?' and so I started experimenting with a lot of edible landscaping. That was my first introduction."

Today, Blumenberry Farms, which was founded in 1995, grows heirloom vegetables, blackberries and other unusual items for Global Organic customers. Mitch Blumenthal now serves as the president and Ronni Blumenthal serves as the vice president of development of Global Organics and Blumenberry Farms.

The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of PRODUCE BUSINESS. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, PRODUCE BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail ProduceBusiness@PhoenixMediaNet.com

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