inside... *The Pundit Looks At Salmonella Saintpaul Outbreak* • Back-To-School • **Tailgating Promotions**
Washington Apples • Green Packaging • *Gift Baskets* • Year-Round Onion Sales • *Merchandising Mushrooms* • *Raisin Sales*
California Pears • REGIONAL PROFILE: DETROIT • Potatoes On The Menu • FRESH-CUT CARROTS • Succulents And Cacti

AUG. 2008 • VOL. 24 • NO. 8 • $9.90

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PRODUCE QUIZ

THIS MONTH'S WINNER:

Loretta Smith
Produce Buyer
Orrell's Food Service, Inc.
Linwood, NC

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Loretta Smith, produce buyer, Orrell's Food Service, Inc., is new to foodservice, but she has more than 18 years of experience as a buyer for a hobby company. In 2007, she joined Orrell's, a broadline distributor, and worked briefly in accounts payable before becoming a buyer in January 2008.

"We supply a variety of restaurants within a 100-miles radius of our headquarters," Loretta reports. Her responsibilities include observing and recording prices, keeping inventory of Orrell's best sellers and conducting general purchasing duties. "Produce is just different because it changes daily," she explains. "It can't stay on the shelf too long."

A PRODUCE BUSINESS reader for seven months, Loretta uses the magazine to find out about new products and where they are coming from. It helps summarize "what the general public seems to be looking for," she notes. "I try to watch out for trends and keep our venders abreast, too."

As the winner of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Quiz, Loretta wins a portable hammock.

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

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2) What is the Web site address for American Cameo? _____

3) In what city is the Domex Superfresh Growers headquarters located? _____

4) Andrews Brothers has been "The Leader in Detroit" since what year? _____

5) What is the street address for Ben B. Schwarz & Sons, Inc.? _____

6) What is the slogan for The Sage Fruit Company? _____

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Reader Service # 2

SUBMITTED BY LORELEI DISOGRA, EDD, RD, VICE PRESIDENT, NUTRITION AND HEALTH • UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

School Fruit And Vegetable Snack Programs

Imagine three million elementary school children enjoying a fresh fruit or vegetable snack every day at school! Imagine them enjoying a wide variety of great tasting fresh fruits and vegetables, and sharing their excitement with their families. These children are our future and they will grow up liking and eating more fresh fruits and vegetables as a result of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program.

The 2007 Farm Bill provides $1.2 billion over 10 years for national expansion of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program. The funding starts on Oct. 1, 2008, and increases each year to reach $150 million annually by July 1, 2011. This funding will allow three million elementary school students in over 3,350 low-income schools across the country to receive a free fresh fruit or vegetable snack at school every day. Since 90 percent of the program funding must be used to buy fresh fruits and vegetables, this program is a win for the produce industry and for children. One of United Fresh Produce Association's top public policy priorities for the past three years has been national expansion of this highly effective program.

The program enjoys broad bi-partisan congressional support because it's so effective — students increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables and spend less money buying soda, chips and candy. The World Health Organization notes that school fruit and vegetable programs are an effective school-based strategy to reduce childhood obesity. Schools also report that once students start to try — and like — a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, they also start to eat more of them in school lunch.

Beginning with the 2008-09 school year, every state will receive a grant to implement this program in at least 25 schools. As the funding increases each year, more schools in each state will be included; states with larger populations will receive additional funds. For example, in three years, California will receive $10,216,344, Texas $6,865,893, New York $6,383,297, Florida $5,612,818, Michigan $4,057,505 and New Jersey $3,665,303. Think of all the fresh fruits and vegetables that will purchase and what a difference that will make in children's lives!

In Europe, the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG Agri) at the European Commission has just proposed funding at 90 million euros a year to expand "school fruit schemes" that provide free fruits and vegetables to school children in all 27 E.U. countries. Noting that "too many of our children eat far too little fruits and vegetables" and that fruits and vegetables are a crucial part of a preventive strategy to tackle obesity and chronic diseases, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Mariann Fischer Boel recently said, "Let's do something about it!" The E.U. funding to member countries becomes available for the 2009-10 school year and has the potential to provide five million students with daily fruit and vegetable snacks.

Our goal is to increase fresh fruits and vegetables in school meals and to see a salad bar in every school!

Europe's public health organizations and produce industry advocated this initiative, a first to align agriculture policy with public health policy. United Fresh Produce Association has had the honor of working with our European colleagues for the past 18 months on this initiative and participated in the School Fruit Scheme Briefing for the European Parliament in April 2007.

The snack programs in both the United States and European Union represent effective global strategies to increase children's fruit and vegetable consumption, and they serve as models for other intervention efforts, for the power of collaborations and for building political support. The snack program has put a spotlight on the importance of increasing access to fruits and vegetables in the environments where children go to school, live and play.

United Fresh Produce Association is committed to maintaining this spotlight on children and increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables as Congress turns to reauthorizing all child nutrition programs, including school lunch and breakfast, in 2009. Our goal is to increase fresh fruits and vegetables in school meals and to see a salad bar in every school! Once again, we will need the produce industry's active engagement. Together, we can drive public policy to increase children's fruit and vegetable consumption.

JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT

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THE FRUITS OF THOUGHT

By James Prevor
President & Editor-in-Chief

Food Safety Policies For Buyers

The recent *Salmonella Saintpaul* outbreak has led to much criticism of CDC and FDA — most with good cause — and we can hope that the attention brought to the matter leads to useful reform.

Of course, with reform or without, the produce industry would benefit by not having as many foodborne illness outbreaks. Five simple policies would advance the trade's food-safety effort substantially:

1. No exceptions to food-safety policies.

Most major retail and foodservice buyers now have a substantial list of food-safety policies detailing frequent-testing rules and requiring third-party audits. Yet, it is common for those same buyers to waive those requirements to meet the needs of another program, such as a locally grown or import program.

Food safety must come before these other issues. The key is for buyers to add a "no exception" covenant to these food-safety policies.

2. No non-certified supply sources.

Another bizarre feature of our buyer-driven food-safety systems is that buyers will go to elaborate lengths to check out suppliers before giving vendor numbers and then make no effort to ascertain that supplies actually come from facilities that had been so carefully vetted.

Basically, in produce, one can certify a company as to its insurance policy and up-to-date indemnifications, but only specific farms, packing sheds and processing facilities can actually be certified for food-safety purposes.

All too often, certified vendors buy product from uncertified sources — and that has to stop.

It is not that complicated — it means buyers have to set up specifications, such as GlobalGAP certification, and then tell all vendors they cannot procure product for that chain if it does not come from a GlobalGAP-certified farm.

As it is now, reputable producers have contracts to supply buyers, and if a weather problem causes a crop failure in their regular source of supply, they run to buy product from growers they may not know to cover their customers' needs or contractual obligations.

3. The quality assurance department must approve each supply source.

The produce department is held responsible for meeting sales, gross profit and contribution to overhead budgets at retail stores. This creates incentives other than food safety and, in fact, we often find that buyers subvert their company's food-safety systems. For example when companies without vendor numbers present attractive deals, many buyers will call established vendors and ask them to buy the product and resell it in exchange for a small brokerage.

The solution is to have a separate quality assurance department that must approve not only each vendor, but also each farm or facility. Larger buyers may elect to do their own inspections, others will use third-party audits, but the key is that no buyer should be authorized to buy — and no vendor should be paid for — product unless it comes from a facility and company that QA has signed off on.

4. Extra credit for extra food safety effort has to become commonplace.

Whatever a buying organization's food-safety requirements might be, the requirements function on the specification level. There is little possibility — and even less incentive — in most organizations for the transactional buyer to prefer a vendor that is more expensive but has exceeded those minimum requirements.

We have to break this culture by offering bonuses and awards to buyers who identify vendors with food-safety efforts that exceed corporate requirements and who give them business.

> **Food safety must come before other issues. The key is for buyers to add a "no exception" covenant to food-safety policies.**

5. We have to bring wholesalers into the loop.

It is all fine and dandy for top retailers and foodservice operators to have high food-safety standards. It also is fantastic for the big service wholesalers and foodservice distributors to have similar standards. We cannot, as an industry, allow a kind of "secondary" trade to operate through smaller local wholesalers, distributors and purveyors that operate without these rigorous standards.

Just as a retailer or foodservice operator can set a standard and require all vendors to be certified by some third-party auditor according to some specified standard, so can wholesalers.

In the old days, wholesalers functioned as a kind of marketing agent for producers. As such, they were obligated to take whatever they were given and try to sell it.

For the most part that day has passed. Wholesalers today buy product they expect will meet the needs of their customers.

They cannot continue to buy without a system for vetting suppliers. The obvious answer is third-party certification. So just as a retailer or foodservice operator will require that all the produce it buys be third-party audited to a set standard, wholesalers need to do the same.

So buyers who work with those wholesalers will have faith in the food-safety attributes of product they purchase.

There is no magic answer. Our science isn't perfect. FDA sometimes causes more harm than good, and growing produce outdoors poses inherent risk.

These five policies would go a long way, though, toward safeguarding consumers and protecting the industry by reducing the incidence of outbreaks. **pb**

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Reader Service # 63

Citizenship, Courage and Character

In 1910, former President Theodore Roosevelt delivered a famous commentary on citizenship, courage and character. Speaking on the duties of citizens, Roosevelt defined the standard by which he felt men should be judged, discounting bystanding critics and naysayers in favor of "the man who is actually in the arena" and who "spends himself in a worthy cause."

Today, our industry finds itself in the arena facing a serious food-safety crisis as federal agencies linked some tomatoes — and most recently some hot peppers — to a foodborne illness outbreak involving *Salmonella Saintpaul*. As of July 8, more than 1,000 people in 40 states and Canada had been sickened, including a cancer patient who died after contracting salmonellosis.

The victims span all ages, from less than one year old to 99. The actual toll is much, much higher; for every recorded illness, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates 38 unreported ones, bringing the actual count to about 40,000 victims. That is a staggering amount of human suffering, and all the signs point to fresh produce as the cause.

This outbreak may well be a breaking point for our key stakeholders, and it certainly presents a point of change for us all. Like Roosevelt's man in the arena, our industry has strived valiantly to ensure the safety of the foods we produce. Yet despite our enthusiasm and devotion to our craft, we continue to come up short in the eyes of those who matter the most to our future: our customers, regulators and legislators.

Our research indicates this outbreak has dealt yet another weakening blow to consumer confidence in our industry. Awareness of produce food-safety issues is nearly universal among the nationally projectable sample of 500 consumers we surveyed — with most volunteering the *Salmonella* outbreak specifically. Nearly two-thirds say they are avoiding all tomatoes, and a third of those avoiding red rounds and plums report they aren't substituting anything — a loss not just for the tomato category but for the entire produce department. Nearly half of all those surveyed say they will wait a few weeks to a few months before purchasing tomatoes again, during which time many growers' seasons will come and go. Meanwhile, consumer confidence in the overall safety of all fresh produce has fallen yet again.

At the same time, in the United States, federal legislators and regulators have taken note of this — yet another serious produce-related foodborne illness outbreak. It will be only a matter of time before legislation and/or regulations are proposed — and not just for tomatoes. While we have profound issues with this investigation, we must also agree that profound change is needed in our industry.

While we welcome the increased communications with industry that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and CDC have provided, we also disagree with aspects of their investigations and public communications. Produce Marketing Association (PMA) has worked through its daily agency contacts at the staff level, including FDA Food Safety Chief Dr. David Acheson, to ensure our industry's voice is heard and the agencies are mindful of the heavy toll this has taken on our industry. In addition, PMA and United Fresh Produce Association (UFPA) have twice requested a meeting with Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt to discuss necessary improvements.

Yet we cannot fault the agencies' commitment to protect public health because that is a commitment that our industry shares wholeheartedly. And frankly, we will have lost the right to lay blame if one of our foods did indeed cause yet another illness outbreak — the largest on record. Nor should we protest too loudly, because each of us knows a potential weak link somewhere in our supply chain that may have contributed to this or another such outbreak.

Simply put, it is time for our industry to do more to safeguard our foods and to protect the consumers who put their trust in us to provide safe, wholesome, delicious food — every bite, every time. Food safety is not just a plan on a shelf or passing an audit; it must become an intrinsic part of our culture, ingrained in our daily work, infused in every step we take from field to fork. As a result, we must redouble our efforts to gain mandatory food-safety regulations covering domestic and imported items so that everyone is on a level playing field and our consumers can have greater confidence in us and the fresh fruits and vegetables we supply them.

Simply put, it is time for our industry to do more to safeguard our foods and to protect the consumers who put their trust in us to provide safe, wholesome, delicious food — every bite, every time. Food safety is not just a plan on a shelf or passing an audit; it must become an intrinsic part of our culture.

Nearly 100 years after Roosevelt's commentary, our industry faces a turning point in our global citizenship. I know our industry has the courage and character that he envisioned to spend ourselves in this worthy cause, so that we and our customers can know victory.

The Strenuous Life

What did Theodore Roosevelt think was the kind of citizenry that would produce national greatness? He answered that in another speech, entitled *The Strenuous Life*, in which Roosevelt explained his position: "I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which comes, not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph."

Which leads us to these questions:

• Precisely how great can our citizens be if they cringe in horror at the infinitesimal risk of a pathogen on a tomato or jalapeño?

• Do we not have a public interest in ensuring that the citizenry is educated in such a manner they are able to evaluate risk?

Obviously, pathogens are bad and should be minimized or eliminated. If FDA knows of a specific producer who is pouring pathogen-laced produce into the system, it should stop that producer. But the issue is whether FDA ought to bankrupt hundreds or thousands of people by banning crops in the hope of obtaining infinitesimal benefits when FDA does not know the specific source of an outbreak.

If we have "come up short in the eyes of those who matter most to our future: our customers, regulators and legislators," we have to ask if our food-safety shortcomings are a result of failures in food safety or failures in honest communication.

Many of these issues first came to prominence in the 2006 spinach crisis. This was in some ways unfortunate as the issue there was bagged product being sold to consumers with a marketing promise that it was "ready to eat." Obviously, marketers who wish to make such promises take on special responsibilities.

However, a typical farmer who grows produce in the dirt has the items rained on in the field where they may also come into contact with animals and humans. The typical farmer is going to grow product that will sometimes have pathogens on it.

If we do not state this loudly and clearly at every opportunity, we are setting up the industry for unreasonable expectations. There is always in the produce supply a "base level" of pathogens.

That consumers panic upon our discovering a pathogen is not surprising, especially when public-health leadership runs around screaming "fire." But as Dr. Michael T. Osterholm, the distinguished public-health expert from Minnesota, has pointed out: "For every numerator, there is a denominator." For public-health authorities to induce panic rather than place things in perspective is simply reprehensible.

There may well be regulation of the produce industry, and we are fortunate that Bryan and PMA and other associations will work hard to make that regulation reasonable. But the meat industry already has regulation, and this is a banner year for *E. coli* 0157:H7. The poultry industry has regulation, and there is more *Salmonella* in chicken each year than there is in fresh produce each decade.

Regulation may make people feel "something is being done" — if the regulation is administered wisely, it may even help a bit. But regulation doesn't resolve the fundamental questions. One can always test water or soil more frequently, always put traps closer, always provide more training, etc.

In fresh produce, where we have no "kill step" such as pasteurization, food safety expenditures are a simple continuum, and a regulatory requirement to stop at some particular place on the continuum will not guarantee safety, even if universally followed.

I do not "fault the agencies' commitment to protect public health," but I balance it with the rights of consumers to live freely and of producers to produce their products. Public health is a value, but not the only value, and if the actions taken in the name of public health are down to the third and fourth decimal place in impact, moderation is reasonable to expect.

Risk is endemic in life. Walk outside and you might get hit by lightening; drive a car and you might have a crash; eat a rare hamburger and you might get *E. coli* 0157:H7; sample a raw milk cheese and suffer the risk of *Listeria*. But it is not the purpose of public-health authorities to make our lives risk-free.

We have to ask if our food-safety shortcomings are a result of failures in food safety or failures in honest communication.

Do we have flaws in our industry regarding food safety? Absolutely. The core problem is cultural. Buyers are too quick to abandon food-safety requirements to achieve other goals — say a "locally grown" or "winter import" program — and food-safety standards at buying organizations are "minimums." In addition, buyers have no incentive to pay extra to get product above that firm's required standard.

This cultural problem is very difficult to fix, but well worth the attempt.

The public-health authorities also contribute to the problem. Although irradiated hamburger can be purchased at retailers such as Wegmans, the proposal to allow irradiation for the purpose of killing pathogens has wallowed in FDA's in-basket for almost a decade. Put another way, the very serious food-safety problem of produce is not serious enough to prompt action on technology that could make a difference.

While we look to improve both our industry and public-health infrastructure, Bryan is right to remind us of Theodore Roosevelt. When we tell the population there might be some infinitesimal risk in consumption of a jalapeño, we can remind the citizenry that our national character depends on its having the intestinal fortitude to, in Theodore Roosevelt's words, "not shrink from danger."

PRODUCE WATCH

TRANSITIONS

EARTHBOUND FARM
SAN JUAN BAUTISTA, CA

Peyman Fatemi has joined the company as director of quality assurance. His responsibilities will include ensuring compliance with all food-safety and sanitation standards and overseeing facility quality assurance programs and staff. He brings more than five years of experience in industrial food safety.

ASSOCIATION OF PRODUCERS, PACKERS AND EXPORTERS OF AVOCADOS OF MICHOACÁN (APEAM)
LOS ANGELES, CA

Alejandro Alvarez del Toro was elected to serve a 2-year term as chairman. Five other board members and two members of the Board Oversight Committee were also elected. He was previously vice chairman of APEAM and served three terms as a member of the Mexican Hass Avocado Importers Association (MHAIA).

ORGANIC TRADE ASSOCIATION (OTA)
GREENFIELD, MA

Matt McLean, founder and CEO of Uncle Matt's Organic, Inc., Clermont, FL, was reelected as a board member for a 3-year term. He was also selected to represent the United States as vice president of OTA for a 1-year term. His responsibilities will include increasing awareness about organic living and organic products.

COAST PRODUCE COMPANY
LOS ANGELES, CA

Jason Bolin was hired as director of business development. He brings extensive grower-relations experience. His responsibilities will include participating in resource expansion, exploring new business possibilities, procuring row crops and exploring non-traditional business opportunities outside of Coast's customer base.

SUN WORLD INTERNATIONAL
BAKERSFIELD, CA

Johan Jooste was appointed vice president of international licensing. He previously worked as the general manager and vice president of Sun World's operations in South Africa. His duties will include building the licensed production of grapes and stone fruit and overseeing offices in South Africa, Chile, Europe, Australia and California.

Terry Bacon was promoted to director of product development. During the last four years, he has been a valuable contributor to the stone fruit breeding program, developing the framework for international licensees and designing a breeding database for Sun World varieties. His duties will include all activities related to this department.

Jason Higbee was hired as director of procurement. A graduate of California Lutheran University, he spent 12 years in a similar position at Bolthouse Farms. He will be responsible for inventory and supply-chain management, supplier contracts and the environmentally responsible procurement (ERP) system.

Kyle Sweeney was promoted to manager of the Arvin, CA-based operations. He comes from a farming background and holds a degree in agriculture business from Fresno State University. He will oversee farming operations for all Sun World products and will report to David Fenn, senior vice president of farming operations.

NEW PRODUCTS

Grab-And-Go Single-Serve Salads

Ready Pac Produce, Inc., Irwindale, CA, is expanding its grab-and-go segment with single-serve prepared salads in five flavors: Italian-Style Chopped, Cranberry Bleu Cheese, Teriyaki Tofu, Chicken Caesar and Field Greens. These ready-to-eat salads include dressing on the side and a spork. Each retails for $3.69 to $3.99.

Reader Service No. 300

Intense Roma Tomato

The Produce Exchange, Livermore, CA, has introduced Intense Roma, a new Roma tomato variety. Developed by Nunhems, a global specialist in vegetable seeds and sharing products, the new Roma has high density while maintaining a high-flavor profile. It was developed to be the ultimate slicing, dicing and cooking Roma.

Reader Service No. 301

Culinary Touch Salad Toppings

Fisher Nuts, Elgin, IL, offers a healthful, easy and tasty way to add nuts and a little fruit to salads or snacks with its Culinary Touch Salad Toppings. Available in three varieties, Cranberry Almond, Walnut Raisin and Slivered Almond, the toppings are packaged in 5- and 6-ounce stand-up, resealable bags with a salad recipe on the back panel.

Reader Service No. 302

Pixie Sweet Snacking Mini Peppers

Imagination Farms, LLC, Indianapolis, IN, has launched Pixie Sweet Snacking Mini Peppers from Frank's Distributing/Bionova Produce, Inc. Marketed under the Disney Garden label, the new product is available year-round. It is packaged in 1-pint clamshells and features the hallmark Tinkerbell packaging.

Reader Service No. 303

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Reader Service # 25

PRODUCE WATCH

NEW PRODUCTS

Magnetic Mist Bar Clips

Miatech, Inc., Clackamas, OR, announces the availability of magnetic clips that make it possible to attach its mist bars to produce cases without drilling screws into the case. Other benefits include easy removal when required. The magnetic clips have performed well during 6-month field tests.

Reader Service No. 304

Buffalo-Flavored Nuts

Tropical Foods, Charlotte, NC, introduces Buffalo Nuts, peanuts with a bold, spicy flavor borrowed straight from Buffalo wings. They encompass several popular food trends -- bold flavors, nutrition and on-the-go convenience. Buffalo Nuts are available in individual 6-ounce snack cups, 3-ounce snack-size bags and 14-ounce tubs.

Reader Service No. 305

ANNOUNCEMENTS

UF Students Win Agri-Marketing Project

A team from the University of Florida (UF), Gainesville, FL, won the National Agri-Marketing Association's (NAMA) competition with its produce-inspired marketing project for Disney Garden Masher Meals. Imagination Farms LLC, Indianapolis, IN, and Russet Potato Exchange (RPE), Bancroft, WI, sponsored the event.

Reader Service No. 306

CAC Pairs Avocados With Seafood

The California Avocado Commission (CAC), Irvine, CA, has posted an array of recipes that pair fresh California-grown avocados with seafood, including crab, shrimp, scallops, lobster, mahi mahi, halibut, rockfish and salmon, to its Web site. The vibrant color, rich texture and subtle flavors of avocados complement most seafood.

Reader Service No. 307

IPC Earns Top Ad Awards

The Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), Eagle, ID, has earned numerous awards and accolades among the best in the industry for its comic book-inspired ads launched in September 2007. Original artwork unique to the IPC depicted well-known comic book scenes incorporating Idaho Potato slogans, messaging and branding.

Reader Service No. 308

Frieda's Announces Contest Winners

Frieda's Specialty Produce, Los Alamitos, CA, announced the winners of its Cinco de Coco Sales Contest. Sergio Alonso, produce manager at González Northgate Market in Santa Ana, CA, won first place for being the top seller of Frieda's fresh-peeled whole coconuts between April 23 and May 7.

Reader Service No. 309

Chelan Fresh Marketing Offers New Trays

Chelan Fresh Marketing, Chelan, WA, now offers FlowFresh packs, molded plastic trays sealed with breathable, perforated wrap. These tamper-proof packs, which are easy to handle and display, create a controlled-moisture environment specially formulated for the respiration required of fresh cherries and other fruits.

Reader Service No. 310

Saviagrapes Introduces New Technology

Saviagrapes, Santiago, Chile, launched a shelf-life extender that allows retailers to extend the life of grapes between 30 to 50 days, depending on the variety, thus maintaining freshness and reducing shrink. Recognized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the product combines advanced technology with an environmentally friendly system.

Reader Service No. 311

Ayco Farms Makes 2008 *Inc.* Top Companies List

Ayco Farms, Inc., Pompano Beach, FL, is set to be published on the 2008 *Inc.* 5,000 list of the fastest-growing private companies in America. This achievement puts Ayco Farms among an elite group that over the years has included Microsoft, Timberland, Cold Stone Creamery, Go Daddy and Jamba Juice.

Reader Service No. 312

Season's First Shipment Of South African Citrus Arrives

This season's first sizable shipment of South African Summer Citrus was offloaded at the Port of Philadelphia on June 26. The shipment, which totaled 1,340 tons, consisted of clementines and navels. While final estimates are not yet available, the Western Cape Citrus Producers' Forum expects shipments to be lower than the original forecast of 45,000 tons.

Reader Service No. 313

Produce Groups Team Up For World Voyage

Produce For Kids (PFK), Orlando, FL; Shuman Produce, Inc., Cobbtown, GA; and Mastronardi Produce, Ltd., Kingsville, ON, Canada, have teamed up to support Zac Sunderland, a 16-year-old boy seeking to become the youngest person to circumnavigate the globe solo. The partnership is in an effort to bring attention to a message of healthful eating.

Reader Service No. 314

Aurora Introduces Label Design

Aurora Products, Inc., Stratford, CT, unveiled a new label design for its Aurora Natural brand product line. The label features a color-coded palette of vibrant earth-toned labels designed to help consumers distinguish between Aurora Natural's salted, unsalted and raw nuts, and to easily identify dried fruits, trail mixes and granolas on retailer shelves.

Reader Service No. 315

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

PAIA Expects Increased Imports

The Peruvian Asparagus Importers Association (PAIA), headquartered in Dallas, TX, reports that imports into the United States for the 2008/2009 season are forecasted to increase from 8 to 10 percent. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reported an approximate 2.2-million-pound increase from 2006 to 2007 of fresh market Peruvian asparagus imports for consumption in the United States.

Reader Service No. 316

New Broccoli And Cauliflower In Development

Apio, Inc., Guadalupe, CA, a subsidiary of Landec Corporation, Menlo Park, CA, and Seminis Vegetable Seeds, Inc., Oxnard, CA, a subsidiary of Monsanto Company, St. Louis, MO, have entered into a collaboration agreement to develop novel broccoli and cauliflower products for exclusive sale by Apio.

Reader Service No. 317

M&M Tropicals Launches Marketing Initiative

M&M Farms, Miami, FL, also known as Miami Tropicals, created a new logo and Web site as part of its marketing communications initiative to help build awareness of the brand. M&M plans to roll out several new print ads to tie in with the company's first-time exhibiting at the upcoming 2008 PMA Fresh Summit.

Reader Service No. 318

Fresh Pac International Opens New Facility

Fresh Pac International, Oceanside, CA, has completed a new warehouse facility in Otay Mesa, CA, near Mexico's Tijuana border crossing and the Brown Field Municipal Airport. The 35,000-square-foot building includes a 30,000-square-foot warehouse and 5,000-square-foot of office space.

Reader Service No. 319

VEI Launches Screening tool

Vista Enterprises, Inc. (VEI), Rio Vista, CA, introduces MoniTek, a screening tool for bacterial contamination, yeasts and mold that may be present on surfaces, and QuickAlert, which is used on the food product itself. They require no laboratory time or additional equipment and provide on-the-spot results in 20 minutes. Each contains enough supplies to conduct 50 tests.

Reader Service No. 320

Hollandia Introduces Cooking Videos

Hollandia Produce, Inc., Carpinteria, CA, launched two streaming videos with simple steps on how to use Live Gourmet watercress and butter lettuce to enhance cooking. Available on Hollandia's Web site, the videos serve as rich informational resources that answer many frequently asked questions about the hyrdroponically grown produce.

Reader Service No. 321

AgriWise Techology Adopted By Giumarra

AgriWise, Inc., San Ramon, CA, announces that The Giumarra Companies, Los Angeles, CA, will deploy AgriWise traceback technologies throughout its operations. The technology is designed to improve operating and financial performance of grower-based businesses.

Reader Service No. 322

Naturipe Research Leads To More Organic Production

Naturipe Farms, LLC, Salinas, CA, will continue to expand its acreage so it can provide better berries on a year-round basis. This move toward further expansion comes after a study from The Hartman Group found consumers are more inclined to seek out organic berries and other items grown closer to their natural state than conventional produce.

Reader Service No. 323

Mushroom Council Kicks Off Nutritional Promo

The Mushroom Council, San Jose, CA, has teamed with Weight Watchers' *Pick of the Season* campaign, a public health initiative spotlighting seasonal produce. The campaign allows retailers to take advantage of storewide promotional opportunities featuring fresh mushrooms tied in with a variety of other foods.

Reader Service No. 324

NMB Puts Mangos On Menus

The National Mango Board (NMB), Orlando, FL, is working with the foodservice industry to increase restaurant menu items with fresh mangos. Efforts include media, seminars, event sponsorships and creative chain-restaurant menu development. Chef Allen Susser will lead a 1-day mango seminar with a national chain restaurant.

Reader Service No. 325

Idaho-E. Oregon Onion Committee Hosts Celebrity Event

Idaho-E. Oregon Onion Committee, Parma, ID, hosted a visit from television celebrity chef Tyler Florence in Boise, ID. Florence's visit included a cooking demonstration with Spanish sweet onions and a 3-course meal. The event, which hosted 350 guests, was held in conjunction with the Idaho Food Bank's annual fund-raising event.

Reader Service No. 326

Stemilt Promotes Artisan Organics

Stemilt Growers, Inc., Wenatchee, WA, offers its Artisan Organics cherry program, providing retailers with a variety of packaging options and consumer-friendly promotions. Stemilt has introduced FloWrap packaging this year. Organic Rainier and dark sweet cherries are packed in 1-pound punnets and sealed with perforated FloWrap.

Reader Service No. 327

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Salmonella Saintpaul Outbreak — Frank Talk And Analysis

From Jim Prevor's *Perishable Pundit*, June 24, 2008

Dr. Michael Osterholm, Esteemed Authority on Public Health, Speaks Frankly About the FDA, the CDC and the Incompetent Management of the *Salmonella Saintpaul* Tomato Outbreak Investigation

Producing this *Perishable Pundit* is a lot of work and much of it is thankless. We try to give clear-headed assessments of issues and events and sometimes people would rather not have things discussed in such a straightforward manner. When things get tough, though, we can turn to many wonderful letters we have been sent to remind us of the important role we play.

We don't publish many of them, mostly because the Momma Pundit's admonition that one can break one's arm by patting oneself on the back still rings in the ears. But we are going to publish our very favorite letter right now. Back in November of 2007, when we were writing a great deal about the Food Safety Leadership Council, we received a most generous letter:

> *I've been following your comments on the WGA/Publix "word exchange." Please know how much I appreciate the honesty and wisdom you bring to this issue. Thank you. I wish we could make you the "benevolent dictator" of the industry. In the end, we all want a win/win/win situation. In that world, safe produce, scientific-based standards, a fair business model where everyone gets a reasonable return on their investment and last but not least, a satisfied consumer rules the day.*
>
> *Keep up the great work. Given the many different topics I deal with, I have lots of reading to do each day just to keep up . . . but I never miss your columns. I learn a lot from your common-sense wisdom.*
>
> *— Michael T. Osterholm, PhD, MPH, Director, Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, Professor at the School of Public Health, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN*

Neither Dr. Osterholm nor we here at the Pundit believe in dictatorships of any kind, benevolent or not, but if one writes as much as we do, one would like to hope that smart and knowledgeable people care what one has to say. One will search far to find a man smarter, more knowledgeable or held in higher esteem than Dr. Osterholm.

So when Dr. Osterholm contacted us to say that he wanted to speak out on the *Salmonella Saintpaul* Tomato Outbreak, we were honored.

Telling truth to authority is never easy; it requires courage, but it also requires knowledge and credibility if it is to be effective. Today we present an interview that is probably the single most important piece we've ever presented here at *The Perishable Pundit* — for, in the course of this interview, an esteemed expert on public health speaks out because he has observed in the way the FDA and CDC have handled the *Salmonella Saintpaul* Tomato Outbreak an affront to the enhancement of public health he has fought for his whole career.

We have mentioned Michael T. Osterholm, Ph.D. previously, in reference to his important work allocating money donated by Fresh Express to do research on food safety. Dr. Osterholm's expertise is, however, recognized around the world. He is director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP), associate director, National Center for Food Protection and Defense, and a professor in the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota. He has written papers published in numerous journals, including *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *Foreign Affairs* and *Nature*.

Dr. Osterholm has testified before Congressional committees and is the author of an important book, *Living Terrors: What America Needs to Know to Survive the Coming Bioterrorist Catastrophe*, that he wrote with John Schwartz. Dr. Osterholm is also a noted speaker and a member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences.

He also is a recipient of the Harvey W. Wiley Medal from the FDA, the Wade Hampton Frost Leadership Award from the American Public Health Association and five major research awards from the National institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Milken Institute relies on his expertise, and PBS turns to him as an authority. Even Oprah Winfrey calls on Dr. Osterholm, and all this is on top of 24 years in various roles at the Minnesota Department of Health, the last 15 of which he was state epidemiologist and chief of the acute disease epidemiology section.

Dr. Osterholm has done much work on produce, including writing smaller pieces such as *Lessons Learned Again: Cyclosporiasis and Raspberries*, which appeared in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, and an important investigation, published in *Epidemiology and Infection* entitled, *Outbreaks of Salmonellosis Associated with Eating Uncooked Tomatoes: Implications for Public Health*. Dr. Osterholm also has done important work with irradiation and food safety.

This is a substantial interview, but it is an important topic, not only to understand this particular outbreak but also to understand what we need to do to deal with food-safety outbreaks on fresh produce in the future.

We asked Mira Slott, Pundit investigator and special projects editor, to help find out Dr. Osterholm's perspective on the tomato outbreak:

Q: What is your assessment of the tomato outbreak and FDA's handling of the investigation?

A: One thing to help set the tone for this interview . . . Our group in Minnesota from 1975 to 1999 pioneered a lot of techniques used in outbreak investigations today. These techniques have led probes into many national outbreaks. We've been very involved in many national outbreak investigations, and I've published numerous reports analyzing the issues.

Q: Why is this outbreak investigation dragging on so long?

A: First of all, there is a common misunderstanding about how outbreaks get identified and evaluated in this country. Josiah Stamp, a famous British statistician, once said government statisticians are keen on amassing statistics. They add them, divide them, take the cube root and make wonderful diagrams. But you must never forget those statistics come from the village watchman and he puts down whatever he damn well pleases.

In the first instance, all infectious disease is local and only as good as

local surveillance. Fortunately, we've had states such as Minnesota, Oregon and Tennessee that have really been on the cutting edge of detecting outbreaks because of very good surveillance. Local and state surveillance only works when health laboratories are equipped with the capacity to quickly characterize the bacterial isolates from these patients.

Many states in the country do not have that kind of support. So you actually have cases either not getting reported to state and local departments or isolates not obtained, or they're not characterized or fingerprinted until months after the outbreak is already over.

Q: Is this what happened with the tomato outbreak investigation? In the case of a highly perishable product such as produce, couldn't the time lag alone be the nail in the coffin of an effective investigation to stop further illnesses?

A: An old case is categorized as two or three weeks ago in the produce world. Because outbreaks come out so quickly, you run into a phenomenon of many mini outbreaks. Perishable items are available 365 days a year, but on any one day where they're coming from is a very short-lived event, maybe a crop is harvesting from one particular field for a couple of weeks.

By the time we identify the food item, it's already through the system. The timing of the public health response is critical to prevent any additional cases from occurring. If you don't have a strong state and local health system, you're trying to close the barn door after the cow is already out. State health departments will continue to be a problem as long as they are poorly resourced.

Q: In this case particularly, where did the system break down? New Mexico seemed to be quite aggressive and much more forthcoming in releasing details of its investigation.

A: New Mexico did a great job in this outbreak. On the whole, Minnesota, Oregon and Tennessee have led the way. The problem is that many states are not geared up to respond. In this outbreak, scores of cases are six weeks old or so. In Texas, many of the "new" cases are not new at all. The Texas Public Health Department is finally catching up in the lab with isolate characterization. The state only has two labs for this kind of fingerprinting.

By nature it's slow. Imagine if every time you had a fire in the community, you had to purchase a truck, get it inspected and do an oil change. Right there you have a problem.

Q: How does information from state and local levels flow to and between the federal agencies?

A: The whole system is flawed. The relationship between FDA and CDC is strained; it's improved but still lacking. It's not clear who is really in charge. Authority is split up in a way that decisions get bogged down and you don't have anyone in command. You need that to effectively launch and oversee an outbreak investigation. We have people identified as being in charge. We need someone who understands outbreaks, not just manages them. In this case, it appears that instead of experienced professionals, Outbreak Investigation Class 101 was doing the control study.

Also the influx of information from state and local authorities to CDC and FDA at best is very rocky, often not timely, and often not complete.

> "A subsequent review by experts in food-bourne disease investigations would say this tomato outbreak investigation has bordered on incompetence."

Not getting isolate information for a case until weeks after the onset of the illness means it can't be included or it is not included.

Q: FDA and CDC continue to report "new" cases piling in week after week, calling the outbreak "ongoing" with the numbers of illnesses appearing to escalate over time. Are you saying these are actually old cases slogging their way through the system? And if so, isn't the manner in which FDA and CDC are releasing this information a gross misrepresentation of the state of the outbreak and current risk to the public?

A: This is a bit hard for me to address because I come from a public health world, 33 years now; the point being many of the people at the state and federal level are friends and colleagues. When I was at the Minnesota Department of Health, we pushed on these issues. I owe it to the public health of this country to come forward with my knowledge and put on the record the dysfunction occurring at the federal level. A subsequent review by experts in food-borne disease investigations would say this tomato outbreak investigation has bordered on incompetence.

Q: In what ways exactly?

A: First, it is not biologically plausible to have Mexico and Florida both at the source of this outbreak. It epitomizes the ineptitude of the investigation. FDA and CDC should have obtained tomato product consumption information from both outbreak cases and controls. They needed to conduct full-fledged tracebacks all the way back to the source not only of the sick cases but of the control group as well.

The epidemiology conducted to learn what product is associated with this outbreak by interviewing those sick and those not sick on what they were eating is a prerequisite but the epidemiology needed to go further. It was critical for the investigators to learn the locations of where both the cases and controls ate tomatoes and trace back from there.

When doing the traceback, you may come up with a few possibilities of where the tomatoes came from. If you collect data of the cases and controls over time, using the same methods to make the product association, you may find 85 percent of outbreak cases trace back to a certain field, grower or re-packer versus the control product. Then you begin to get a much better handle on where product came from.

Q: Why did the government forego this particular strategy?

A: FDA and CDC have not made this a priority. They will never find a silver bullet by just tracing back a product. They're looking for a cluster that matches up exactly with the one gun barrel. They're under the false impression that they're going to get a clean, clear-cut answer by finding the magic cluster. They need to do this case/control approach.

Q: Could you define these terms?

A: Cases are those ill with the specific strain identified with their food consumption. The control group is matched with age, similar characteristics and geographic location, the same neighborhood, for example. The cases might have a 10-fold chance of getting sick on tomatoes compared to the control group.

Q: Is this case/control approach more effective in some outbreaks than others?

A: In this outbreak identification for tomatoes, it needed to be approached differently than the spinach investigation. When looking at bagged lettuce or spinach, you have the advantage of a barcode with very good specific information that can take you back to a field. With a product like tomatoes or cantaloupe, you don't have a barcode, and product is further mixed and matched in packaging and repacking.

Tomatoes have a vibrant life cycle. A harvest today may go to a primary source today but a week later may go to secondary channel. In other tomato outbreaks I've studied, prime tomatoes were first shipped to key grocery stores, then, as the crop aged, they were shipped to different classes of trade. The same tomatoes, with the passage of time, can wind up in supermarket chains, restaurant chains, convenience stores, mom-and-pop restaurants, wholesalers, processors, etc. All the tomatoes, though, were harvested at the same time. If you don't understand that and try and trace back, the investigation can get very confused, which is clearly illustrated in this case.

Q: Didn't the original epidemiological investigation of New Mexico and Texas cases include a control group as well?

A: The case/control study initiated by New Mexico was important and did provide critical information. It used interviews comparing foods eaten by ill and well persons to identify consumption of raw tomatoes as the likely source of

Reader Service # 62

the illnesses. I believe New Mexico did try to do some traceback to the source but didn't have the information or authority to go all the way back to Mexico.

New Mexico should be applauded for what they did relative to what they could do. CDC supports the overall epidemiological investigation. I know for a fact, however, that the government did not trace back any product reported by the control group. We don't have a traceback to the source using the information from the control group. That was not done.

You would need to check with New Mexico to see if they did any further work with the control group on where they ate the tomatoes.

[Editor's Note: According to Deborah Busmeyer, spokesperson for the New Mexico Department of Health, "The purpose of the case control study was to identify a hypothesis of what the food source was, and from that we determined it was tomatoes. Then we looked at single-source exposure in the cases, and that's how we were able to trace back to particular stores. At that point, we went to talk with the stores about where they got their tomatoes. With Wal-Mart. it became more complicated because they had two sources, either Florida or Mexico. With Lowe's and Bashas, it was Mexico.

"With those two stores, we were able to go down the supply chain to determine the distributor. At that point it was really pointing to Mexico and we passed that information on to the FDA and CDC, but we really don't have the ability to go into Mexico. The case control was more to determine the product. I don't believe there was a traceback of the control group. New Mexico is realizing that the FDA is the lead in these kinds of issues. We're realizing inadequacies in the state system to provide those tasks. We got on top of this quickly, but we have limitations as well and that has been frustrating to us," she concluded.]

Q: You place much weight on the importance of the control group. Was this the ultimate undoing of the investigation?

A: FDA never talked about tracing back product from the control group. It was a near fatal flaw from the get-go, and if they don't change their approach, they will never find the source.

The second problem — all cases with tomatoes typically have lasted only about six weeks. Any growing region of the world pretty much exhausts the product in that time frame.

This is not like a factory where every day widgets go through it. When you harvest that entire area, it's done. Even if the product goes to a repacker, if the onset of illness started mid April, even by end of May it's pretty much the end of system.

Yet here we are almost to the end of June. There are all these old cases in the system and the Health Department has done little to correct this.

Look at the curve. Reporting that the most recent onset of illness is as late as June 11 is dramatically different than saying the outbreak is still going on. In the case of a tomato outbreak, you won't have an ongoing continued source of contamination that goes on and on and on. Even if you

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look at the spinach outbreak, it's not like the peanut butter outbreak, where leaking contaminated pipes would result in continued product contamination as long as that plant was producing without fixing the problem.

The FDA has done a very poor job of helping the public understand how outbreaks in the produce industry occur. No one can say with certainty when this tomato outbreak ended. But there is overwhelmingly strong evidence this outbreak peaked many weeks ago.

Look at the re-washing scenario. Product production shifts and moves to another part of the country. Look at past outbreaks. These outbreaks end on their own. They were over by the time we figured out what the problem was, if we figured out the problem at all.

If FDA and CDC took Mexico and Florida cases and worked the controls, I think this would have traced back to Mexico a long time ago. It was a flawed investigation. Why were some people getting sick and others not? They needed the control group to get to the answer.

The other problem is faulty analysis from mixing early and late cases. You may very well also be confusing the source of those tomatoes because tomatoes when first harvested may go to one area. For other buyers of the tomatoes, it may depend on the ripeness of where and when they're sold, and that hasn't been accounted for.

Q: A lot of this information on harvest cycles and distribution is readily available through produce industry executives. Isn't this Produce 101?

A: The final piece on this outbreak debacle: several of us have done a lot of work on outbreaks. We went to a wise group in the produce industry with no horse in the race. They looked at the patterns and they knew this market so well. This simple task of eliciting help from industry experts was not done by the investigators to any meaningful extent. We do very a poor job of bringing in the industry to help solve these outbreaks. What does this mean? That straightforward questioning didn't happen in a way that would have been most helpful.

Q: Doesn't this apply to the infamous FDA-approved source list? If the list was based on growing areas that were not in production at the time of the outbreak, wouldn't that just involve a phone call or two to the produce trade organizations?

A: Right from the get-go, it was unclear how FDA was coming up with that list; why certain states and countries made the list while others were excluded. If any place not producing in late-April/early-May is safe, why the confusion and piecemeal additions to the list day by day? It appeared there was no rhyme nor reason why a state or country was on the list. The logic was lacking. If FDA believed states and countries not in production at time of the outbreak were safe, they should have included all states and countries in that category.

On the other hand, if FDA has the view that a re-packer could be involved, which it now says it does, then it means FDA's list would have been invalid and in their view putting consumers at risk. Either way, it's not based in logic. Is it by dates of production, or is it not by dates of production because product could come through a re-packer?

There is a major issue with transparency. Why would you say something is or isn't involved? First, the formation of the FDA list is disingenuous. It was based on those that screamed the loudest, and from a public health standpoint, that's not right.

> "The simple task of eliciting help from industry experts was not done by the investigators to any meaningful extent. We do a very poor job of bringing in the industry to help solve these outbreaks."

Q: Do you have any steps to recommend at this juncture?

A: We need a serious examination of how this outbreak was handled from the first instance of illness. By the time tomatoes were identified, it was the end of May and the vast majority of product was through the food system already.

Another area that must be addressed is the poor job that's been done in defining the risk.

As *The Perishable Pundit* pointed out so aptly, in a 40-day period, the public consumed three billion servings of tomatoes. We need to provide a better perspective. I don't see anyone putting this in context. I've spent my career trying to understand and stop outbreaks, and I in no way want to minimize the dangers attached to an outbreak. This comes from a pioneer on getting outbreaks on the map. I gave a talk in 1988 that produce would face problems with outbreaks, and I was laughed off the stage.

The media has been just as guilty by not better defining the risk and through sensational and often inaccurate reporting has magnified the problem. Lou Dobbs, for example, doesn't have a clue what he's saying on this tomato outbreak and it doesn't lead to solutions that are helpful. The risk of getting *salmonella* from these tomatoes speaks to the safety of produce. What we don't read about is how many times we don't have outbreaks. Whatever the number of illnesses turns out to be in any outbreak — 400, 4,000, 14,000, 24,000 — that sounds terrible and it is not a good thing for anyone to be sick. But we're so fixated on the numerator we never talk about the denominators.

The take-home messages are that the foodborne investigation system is flawed. This outbreak was inherently flawed from the beginning. New Mexico deserves credit, but the lack of state and local lab capacity and data collection and integration at the federal level can bring the industry to its knees. We must clarify risk.

Timeliness is everything. We must question how many cases we could have prevented through our public health action as opposed to those old cases in the works after the warning went out. If we're four to six weeks into the outbreak, the cow is already out of the barn. For the FDA to then shut the barn door with all the authority of Public Health behind it, does it make any difference what we're doing in the name of food safety?

Q: Could you address industry concerns that no matter how diligent a company is in implementing the highest food-safety standards, when an outbreak occurs, it seems all companies are reduced to the lowest common denominator in the government's eyes?

A: We clearly hurt the industry. The way we have healthy measures is to have a healthy industry. Our job is to work with people. If the industry is heavily stressed financially, they'll have no option but to take shortcuts and cut corners. You want a viable, profitable industry that has the resources to invest in food safety. If every time we have an outbreak, the entire industry is implicated and takes a big hit, it doesn't do anything to help industry invest in food safety. The industry is still suffering on post outbreak debate and discussion. Again, my interest is not to protect the industry; but a financially strong industry is part of the way to get viable public health.

The industry also needs to be part of the solution. Of course, "March of the Killer Tomato" makes for great news media but doesn't help consumers. I've seen operators in the foodservice industry eliminate all tomatoes from the menus questioning the safety of the entire category when areas had been cleared. That is a cop-out. No tomato or any produce item can ever be 100 percent guaranteed safe. This is a time when retailers and foodservice operators should be going out of their way to support their suppliers.

Public Health would be faulted if the outbreak was still ongoing and it allowed contaminated product on the market. But what we can do is pinpoint the source a lot faster and stop the spigot there. Even if we don't understand how the contamination happened, at least you identify where it came from. We don't have that priority on speed and efficiency. I see the problem as a combination of lack of leadership and lack of understanding of how to work these outbreaks.

Q: Did you catch any of the FDA/CDC press briefings? The information relayed was often fraught with ambiguity. And reporters seemed to have a difficult time getting clarity.

A: A lot of people in the media are not experts

in health or produce industry matters. Their coverage is often sensational, incomplete and tends to miss the overall perspective.

I read transcripts of the press conferences and I believe the media did a poor job of holding FDA's feet to the fire. The level of questioning has been very soft. They need to provide the checks and balances. I was particularly saddened when I heard the traumatic news that Tim Russert had died. I've always been a fan of his. He asked the hard questions. No one should have a free pass. It's not about 'gotcha' either; it's just about trying to do the best job possible. We either take a political view or do nothing and go on to the next one.

I also wondered why the industry wasn't pounding away with its own questions.

Industry often takes a back seat. We all need to be held accountable for our actions.

This outbreak investigation has failed miserably. I've talked to many people about this in both state and federal agencies. There should be a call for a formal investigation on what happened and why. I really believe this outbreak is virtually over. The point is not to go back and punish people. The point is to learn so this doesn't happen again. Outbreak investigations are not just to prevent cases during that time but into the future.

Q: Due to the nature of produce outbreaks, some industry executives think likening the goal of finding the exact source of an outbreak to the Holy Grail is over-glorified. It is not only unlikely in most cases but also unlikely to be the true salvation to fixing food-safety problems in our industry. Do you have examples through your work where discovering the source of the problem led to corrective actions alleviating future outbreaks?

A: A large *salmonella* outbreak in ice cream centered on a home-delivery system in Minnesota. It turned out the trucks were hauling back raw egg to the plant and then contaminating the pasteurized ice cream. *Listeria* in ballpark franks in the 1990s was traced back to an environment where *Listeria* was dripping from ceilings and creating condensation. Another outbreak investigation in the beef industry found a new process in meatpacking resulted in people eating thyroid glands mixed into hamburger, and people developing this horrible thyroid disease. Neck trimming is now banned.

Q: Do you have any examples related to produce outbreaks?

A: No, unfortunately. There are inherent risks with fresh raw produce; this is a risky business with the interface with nature. When FDA can't find the smoking gun in an outbreak, it tries to find logical things to fix. But, of course, those fixes centered on the particular outbreak would need to be applied across the board if they are logical and based on science.

Clearly one of the options for the produce industry at this point is irradiation. Look at what's been done with pasteurizing almonds. A lot of work needs to be done in this area. But in the end it's a very important food-safety solution for the produce industry

The whole reason I'm heading up the Fresh Express research mission is to find out what we can learn to take back to the production area to make a difference in food safety. I'm not speaking for Fresh Express here, but I use this example only to make a point as it relates to food safety in this industry. Here's a company that in 25 years has never been implicated in an outbreak and has a very high percentage of the market. Negative data is a powerful tool. We get these high-visibility outbreak investigations that result in limited public health and safety but take up a lot of our time and get a lot of publicity.

The FDA and CDC folks already know I'm going public with these views and they have to get their ship turned around. I can walk into the mouth of the lion and say what I say because I worked there. Being out there to speak the truth on these issues isn't always the easiest thing to do, but when public safety is at risk there is no alternative.

> "A lot of people in the media are not experts in health or produce industry matters. Their coverage is often sensational, incomplete and tends to miss the overall perspective."

We are most appreciative of Dr. Osterholm's willingness to discuss these matters in a frank and open way. We will never do better if everyone who really understands the issue is unwilling to speak, so all who want to enhance public health in America owe a debt to Dr. Osterholm.

As we read the interview, we can draw a few key points (made bold for emphasis):

1) Local and state surveillance only works when health laboratories are equipped with the capacity to quickly characterize the bacterial isolates from these patients. For many states in the country, they do not have that kind of support.

The focus on FDA and CDC can be excessive. The prerequisite to effective dealing with food safety is on the state level. We need to look at benchmarking all the state labs and initiating a coalition to bring the bottom up to world-class standards.

2) …on any one day, where they're coming from is a very short-lived event, maybe a crop is harvesting from one particular field for a couple of weeks. By the time we identify the food item, it's already through the system.

We have to break FDA from its superhero mentality. If it can protect public health, more power to it. But you don't bankrupt an industry, have poor people throw away healthful food, just to say you've done something. Today is the 24th of June, the outbreak started in early April — there cannot be an "ongoing" outbreak on a national scale. The FDA should say so.

3) State health departments will continue to be a problem as long as they are poorly resourced... The Texas Public Health Department is finally catching up in the lab with isolate characterization. The state only has two labs for this kind of fingerprinting.

What Dr. Osterholm does not say, but is the logical implication of his comments, is CDC needs to use these opportunities when the public is listening to point out the problems at the state laboratories. Instead of blandly explaining that Texas is turning up month-old cases, CDC should clearly and specifically state that Texas has inadequate lab capacity and this whole thing would go much faster — and we might actually be able to act while it helps someone — if the states would adequately invest in public health.

4) The relationship between FDA and CDC is strained; it's improved but still lacking. It's not clear who is really in charge. Authority is split up in a way that decisions get bogged down and you don't have anyone in command. You need that to effectively launch and oversee an outbreak investigation.

I'm not sure who's in charge. We have people identified as being in charge. We need someone who understands outbreaks, not just manages them. In this case it appears that instead of experienced professionals, Outbreak Investigation Class 101 was doing the control study.

We need people to be in charge so we can hold them accountable for their decisions. This whole structure has to be reassessed. How can we make sure one person is in charge and he or she is really an expert? One wonders how many people involved in this decision-making process were actually familiar with the role of case/control traceback in prior salmonella/tomato investigations?

5) Also the influx of information from state and local authorities to CDC and FDA at best is very rocky, often not timely, and often not complete. Not getting isolate information for a case until weeks after the onset of the illness means it can't be included or it is not included.

Time is of the essence. All the explanations of why it takes so long are nice — but even better would be a focus on how we can speed the communication process up.

6) I owe it to the public health of this country to come forward with my knowledge and put on the record the dysfunction occurring at the federal level. A subsequent review by experts in food-borne disease investigations would say this tomato outbreak

investigation has bordered on incompetence.

A powerful position by a powerful man. The industry has been sitting, watching and thinking, and feeling this looks disorganized, not thought-out, incompetent. Now we have a world-class expert say it is true: The Emperor Has No Clothes. We need a very careful review of this outbreak by experts in food-borne disease investigation to make sure this will not happen again.

7) They needed to conduct full-fledged tracebacks all the way back to the source not only of the sick cases but of the control group as well…It was critical for the investigators to learn the locations of where both the cases and controls ate tomatoes and trace back from there.

When doing the traceback, you may come up with a few possibilities of where the tomatoes came from. If you collect data over time of the cases and controls, using the same methods to make the product association, you may find 85 percent of outbreak cases trace back to a certain field or grower, or re-packer versus the control product. Then you begin to get a much better handle on where product came from…

FDA never talked about tracing back product from the control group. It was a near fatal flaw from the get-go, and if they don't change their approach they will never find the source.

This is it — a flawed investigative approach. When a reporter brought up the issue of tracing the control group, Dr. David Acheson, MD, FDA's associate commissioner for foods, found the idea "intriguing" and said FDA doesn't do that. Well why not?

We keep thinking FDA is holding back important information. It is increasingly becoming clear they are not holding back much; they don't have much -the whole thing is like the wizard of Oz. There is nothing behind the curtain.

8) The FDA has done a very poor job of helping the public understand how outbreaks in the produce industry occur. No one can say with certainty when this tomato outbreak ended. But there is overwhelmingly strong evidence this outbreak peaked many weeks ago.

It is a rare opportunity, a "teaching moment," when the public is paying real attention to FDA and CDC announcements. So it is an excellent time to speak clearly, honestly and explain the situation.

One can imagine the words: "Because tomatoes rarely grow in the same place for more than six weeks, by the time we learn about these things with our current speed of data collection and analysis, these outbreaks are typically over." Instead of educating the people, FDA confuses the people with endless repetition about things being "ongoing."

9) These outbreaks end on their own. They were over by the time we figured out what the problem was, if we figured out the problem at all.

This is straight talk. But FDA and CDC seem unwilling to explain this to consumers.

10) We went to a wise group in the produce industry with no horse in the race. They looked at the patterns and they knew this market so well. This simple task of eliciting help from industry experts was not done by the investigators to any meaningful extent. We do a very poor job of bringing in the industry to solve these outbreaks. What does this mean? That straightforward questioning didn't happen in a way that would have been most helpful.

Traceback is fine — but it doesn't have to start from a point of total ignorance. The first thing in a produce outbreak: You get together with some industry experts. We may need to be more *ad hoc* to avoid conflicts of interest — but let FDA call us; we'll get them a panel of five industry experts with no conflict of interest in an hour. We need to kill this "not invented here syndrome" that seems to permeate these investigations.

> "We need a very careful review of this outbreak by experts in food-borne disease investigation to make sure this will not happen again."

11) First, the formation of the FDA list is disingenuous. It was based on those that screamed the loudest, and from a public health standpoint that's not right.

This is what we have been pointing out — FDA shouldn't sit passively waiting for people to complain to make up a list of areas "not associated" with the outbreak. It is a recipe for corruption and a perversion of what a public-health pronouncement should mean.

12) Another area that must be addressed is the poor job that's been done in defining the risk. As* The Perishable Pundit *pointed out so aptly, in a 40-day period, the public consumed three billion servings of tomatoes. We need to provide a better perspective. I don't see anyone putting this in context.

Yes, a suspicious mind would see an FDA intentionally trying to avoid making things clear — lest they should be seen as ridiculous. What does the FDA believe the risk is if consumers were to eat a tomato from the "forbidden zone" — and how does that compare to the risk of getting hit by lightning, getting in a car accident or a plane accident? If consumers stop eating tomatoes and switch to, say, hamburger, are their odds of food-borne illness increased or decreased? If they dump their tomatoes and make an extra trip to the store to get new ones, how does the risk of driving compare to the risk of eating the tomatoes?

Surely, FDA and CDC should put everything in context. What is the risk they are trying to help prevent?

13) The industry also needs to be part of the solution…I've seen operators in the foodservice industry eliminate all tomatoes from the menus questioning the safety of the entire category when areas had been cleared. That is a cop-out. No tomato or any produce item can ever be 100 percent guaranteed safe. This is a time when retailers and food service operators should be going out of their way to support their suppliers.

Yes, this is an industry problem and requires an industry solution. We have to support the supply side if the supply side is going to be here to provide product.

14) I also wondered why the industry wasn't pounding away with its own questions. Industry often takes a back seat, in some ways like the Stockholm Syndrome.

Yes, as Alan Siger of Consumers Produce brought up in a letter, the industry needs a more effective way of calling a spade a spade. The associations are trying but the complexity of their relationships seems to make it very difficult for them to come out and say that an investigation is being conducted in an incompetent manner. Just as the government needs a post-crisis analysis of its actions, so does the industry. We have to be able to stand up and speak out.

15) There should be a call for a formal investigation on what happened and why. I really believe this outbreak is virtually over. The point is not to go back and punish people. The point is to learn so this doesn't happen again. Outbreak investigations are not just to prevent cases during that time but into the future.

The industry should insist on this — not just a meeting with FDA but a formal investigation by food-safety, public health and epidemiological experts with a published report. We have to get things on the record.

16) Clearly one of the options for the produce industry at this point is irradiation.

Everyone wants a kill step, and we've run pieces about irradiation regarding possibilities for spinach, tomatoes and many other items. Once again, though, we think this requires leadership from the public-health community. Why can't FDA and CDC use these opportunities to point out consumers could be safeguarded through the use of these technologies? We've heard no mention that the tomatoes in question can be consumed safely by consumers if they are irradiated — why not? Maybe some farmers would have selected to irradiate crop rather than dump it.

Public-health authorities have to speak up and speak honestly about the state labs, about the context of risk, the nature of produce outbreaks, the role of irradiation. Instead, we get silence and so things don't get better.

The industry, the American consumer and all who love truth owe Dr. Osterholm a debt of gratitude. Because he has been willing to speak out, there is the possibility things may get better. That is quite a gift. **www.pershablepundit.com**

20TH ANNUAL MARKETING EXCELLENCE AWARDS

PHOTO: Among the award-winning produce campaigns, Pear Bureau Northwest approached the beverage industry with its "Liquid PEARfection" contest.

From cheeky pop-art advertisements to extraordinary recipes for in-store samplings, these entries took the power of persuasion and ran with it.

The 20 winners of the 20th Annual Marketing Excellence Awards represent an elite group of innovators who are revolutionizing the way the produce industry connects products to both the trade and consumers.

Although all of the winners share a common goal of increased sales and awareness, they each offer unique approaches to achieving that goal. One targeted the beverage sector of the foodservice industry while another aimed at reaching college students at university dining halls. Themes touched on various issues, including the environment, health and well-being, cause marketing and marketing to kids. They made us look at a head of iceberg lettuce in a whole new light and captured our attention with contests and sweepstakes.

PRODUCE BUSINESS is pleased to recognize these marketing trailblazers, listed in alphabetical order, for their service to the produce industry and beyond.

— Amy Shannon

2008 Winners

California Giant Berry Farms • Colemans Food Centre • Colorful Harvest, LLC • Columbia Marketing International Corp. and Rainier Fruit Company • Del Monte Fresh Produce, North America, Inc. • Fresh Quest, Inc. • FreshSense, Inc. Gourmet Trading Company • Idaho Potato Commission • Mann Packing Company, Inc. • New York Apple Association, Inc., and T. Marzetti Company • Ocean Mist Farms
Pear Bureau Northwest • Sage Fruit Company
Stemilt Growers, Inc. • Sunrise Growers, Inc.
Tanimura & Antle, Inc. • The Oppenheimer Group and American Diabetes Association
University of Massachusetts Amherst and the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council
Virginia-Carolinas Peanut Promotions

PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDARS

For information about entering the 2009 PRODUCE BUSINESS Marketing Excellence Award competition, please visit www.producebusiness.com
Deadline for 2009 entries is June 5, 2009.

California Giant Berry Farms
Watsonville, CA

The Sweetest Match Sweepstakes

Objective: To promote California Giant Berry Farm's strawberries during peak season using an exciting program that reaches the trade and consumers.

Description: The Sweetest Match sweepstakes teamed up California Giant Berry Farms with the Tennis Channel for a unique, high-impact national co-branding promotion that coincided with the network's coverage of Wimbledon, one of the world's most prestigious tennis tournaments. The grand-prize winner received an all-expenses paid trip to Wimbledon 2009, including a EuroStar train ride to spend a day in Paris, France. Runner-up prizes included gym equipment from Bowflex. The program included promotional labels on California Giant strawberries, a trade advertisement, POS materials and a promotional Web site for consumers to enter the sweepstakes.

Results: During its first week, the sweepstakes Web site drew more than 20,000 consumer entries. Trade publications heavily covered the promotion and retailer response was positive.

Colemans Food Centre
Corner Brook, NF, Canada

Kids Eat Smart Promotion

Objective: To teach kids that breakfast is an essential part of a healthful lifestyle and familiarize families with the Colemans Food Centre grocery stores.

Description: Volunteers and students served nutritional breakfasts, including fruits and vegetables, to low-income kids who arrive early to schools in Newfoundland. According to a national survey, these students have the poorest eating habits in Canada. Registered dietitians visited the schools to facilitate interactive discussions with the kids. Each child received a Frootie Tootie Club Card, entitling him or her to a free piece of fruit when visiting a Colemans store. Stores adopted Kids Eat Smart Day with games and food sampling, and they placed signs, such as A is for Apple, throughout the stores.

Results: Approximately 100 schools have registered and over $30,000 has been raised in support during the three years since the Kids Eat Smart Foundation (KES) began.

Colorful Harvest, LLC
Salinas, CA

Colorful Harvest's Green Giant Fresh Strawberries Build A Better Breakfast Promotion

Objective: To increase strawberry sales during the peak production time.

Description: Colorful Harvest strategically placed selected cereals next to the strawberry displays with generous tie-ins offering $1 off a 1-pound container of Green Giant Fresh strawberries with the purchase of Cheerios, Fiber One or Total cereal. The campaign stressed that the combination of the whole-grain cereals and fresh strawberries is a healthful breakfast with little preparation. The promotion also incorporated slogans, such as "Create the Berry Best Breakfast."

Results: From June 2007 to June 2008, massive cross-merchandising opportunities were available and sales increased 15 to 20 percent.

For The Biggest & Best In California Table Grapes,
All Varieties Lead To Dulcich

AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY THROUGH

SUNLIGHT
sunlight international sales
Premium California Table Grapes

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Reader Service # 27

Columbia Marketing International Corp. (CMI) and Rainier Fruit Company

Wenatchee, WA, and Yakima, WA

Grapple Box Display Unit

Objective: To increase consumption and awareness of Grapples — Washington Extra Fancy Gala or Fuji apples treated to have a grape flavor.

Description: The newest Grapple display unit targeted kids with its array of colors and interesting art while attracting parents to the healthful benefits listed on the boxes. The grape-flavored specialty apples were displayed in 3-dimensional cartons that explained how the nutritional snacks were made. Promotional materials boasted the product's unique characteristics, "Crunches like an apple, tastes like a grape."

Results: Grapple sales using the new unit exceeded CMI's expectations and goals. Grapple experienced an overall sales increase of nearly 73 percent.

Del Monte Fresh Produce, North America, Inc.

Coral Gables, FL

Eat Healthy, Live Healthy Campaign

Objective: To inspire and inform consumers how to lead a more healthful lifestyle and introduce Del Monte fruits and vegetables to their daily life.

Description: Del Monte recognized consumers need assistance in selecting healthful foods and organized a plan to give them innovative ways to obtain the five daily servings of fruits and vegetables, a goal that 80 percent of Americans miss, according to the Produce For Better Health Foundation (PBH), Wilmington, DE. *Eat Healthy, Live Healthy* was a 3-part campaign with three distinct contests.

The Fresh Grill Thrill Sweepstakes provided new, imaginative solutions to incorporating fruits and vegetables into ordinary diets. The grand-prize winner received a 4-burner Char-Broil TEC Series Grill, valued at $999 and the first-place winner received a 3-burner Char-Broil TEC Series Grill. The remaining winners each won a gift certificate to GrillLovers.com: second place, $400 gift certificate; third place, $300; fourth place, $200; and fifth place $100.

The Spa Getaway contest took place between January and February 2008. The grand prize was a weekend for two at Lake Austin Spa Resort in Austin, TX. Three first-place winners received a Lake Austin Spa Resort gift bag, five second-place winners received a cookbook, 10 third-place winners a candle, 20 fourth-place winners a year's supply of Del Monte Fresh bananas and 25 winners a pineapple slicer. Del Monte encouraged participation using in-store displays, pineapple tags and banana stickers. Twenty-four winners received a year's supply of Del Monte Fresh bananas.

The Best Smoothie Ever Sweepstakes utilized Del Monte's new Web site to post delicious recipes for smoothies on-the-go and to encourage home use of its fresh fruit. The grand prize was a die-cast Juice Fountain Elite, a blender and a stick blender. Five first-place winners received a die-cast Juice Fountain Elite, 10 second-place winners a blender, 15 third-place winners a stick blender, 20 fourth-place winners a year's supply of Del Monte Fresh bananas and 25 fifth-place winners a pineapple slicer.

Results: The Fresh Grill Thrill Sweepstakes created excitement about eating healthfully and provoked impulse buys of Del Monte produce and promotional tagged products. Multiple media outlets nationwide featured the sweepstakes and Fresh Grill Thrill recipes. Media coverage reached more than 500,000 people through distribution and a collective audience of at least 1.5 million. Del Monte's Web site received 3,342,458 hits during the Spa Getaway entry time frame. The Best Smoothie Ever Sweepstakes received 29,302 unique entries. The contest also garnered three television placements in three key markets and other media in 10 markets, allowing Del Monte to establish long-term relationships with multiple retailers and trade outlets.

Fresh Quest, Inc.
Pompano Beach, FL

New-Generation Cantaloupe Promotion

Objective: To introduce its new-generation cantaloupe variety, the Harper, to the industry.

Description: The promotion included posters and ads featuring the sweetness of its new-generation melons by photographing one on a lollipop stick and another wrapped like a piece of candy. Other flyers boast of the reliability of the Harper cantaloupe. The promotion also incorporated information boasting the melon's long shelf life and guaranteed high-sugar content.

Results: Fresh Quest achieved a major sales increase and improved recognition of the new variety melon worldwide.

FreshSense, Inc.
Parlier, CA

Ripe 'N Ready Summertime Dreams

Objective: To increase sales of Ripe 'N Ready peaches, plums, nectarines and pluots from Chile during the winter time.

Description: Conducted at Shaw's and Star Market, both owned by East Bridgewater, MA-based Supermarket, Inc., the Summertime Dreams contest encouraged produce managers to contribute inventive product promotions, outstanding displays and full-product availability at store level. FreshSense created custom POS materials, including a set of 11X7 cards for use in the displays. Grand-prize winners received a $200 Shaw's gift card, first-place winners a $100 Shaw's gift card and second-place winners a $50 Shaw's gift card based on their store format. Prizes were awarded to the stores that achieved the highest percentage increase of stone fruit sales (in dollars) versus the same period the previous year.

Results: Stores experienced a 46 percent increase in average sales; winning stores increased average sales by 296 percent. The contest bettered the presentation of Ripe 'N Ready imported fruit through dynamic displays that reminded consumers the fruit is available during the winter.

Reader Service # 43

Gourmet Trading Company
Los Angeles, CA

California Blueberry and SuperBlue Promotion

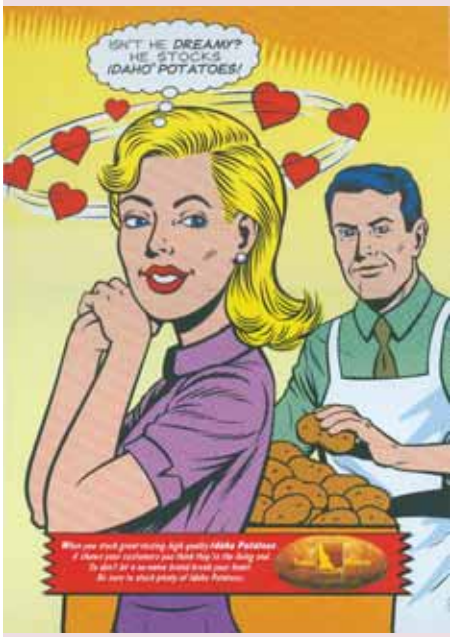
Objective: To alert consumers in advance of the 2008 California Blueberry Season.

Description: By altering the labels and using the *CA GROWN* logo exclusively, Gourmet Trading Company helped the trade promote its products to consumers interested in locally grown products. A trade show booth at Fruit Logistica in Berlin, Germany, in February 2008 showcased SuperBlue blueberries and showed trade show attendees where they are grown. Retail and foodservice buyers and chefs received elegant recipe cards with blueberry recipes, such as Blueberry Martini and Berry Pavlova. Gourmet Trading shipped individual samples of Superblues to its customer base, allowing potential customers to sample the product.

Results: Trade publications and Web sites published stories about Gourmet Trading's California-grown blueberries. Interest from existing and new retail customers increased while Web traffic tripled during the promotion.

Idaho Potato Commission (IPC)
Eagle, ID

Comic Book Trade Marketing Campaign



Objective: Reinforce Idaho potatoes' reputation as America's highest quality and No. 1-selling potato.

Description: IPC hired well-known comic book artists to draw advertisements for this year's campaign in an effort to grasp the attention of retailers and distributors. The Comic Book Campaign's colorful, full-page ads were featured in various trade publications. IPC transformed several ads, such as the one featuring an illustrated 1950s-era female commenting, "Isn't he dreamy? He stocks Idaho Potatoes!" into customized posters and distributed them to retail customers. Modified versions of the comic book ads were also made into ceramic coasters and shipped to customers across the country.

Results: The Comic Book Campaign earned several awards for its individual elements and as a whole from the National Agri-Marketing Association (NAMA), Overland Park, KS. IPC also earned tremendous recognition thanks to the campaign's distinctive approach and humor.

Mann Packing Company, Inc.
Salinas, CA

Broccolini Celebrates A Milestone Birthday

Objective: To celebrate the 10th anniversary of Broccolini, Mann's brand of baby broccoli, and to generate awareness of Broccolini among food enthusiasts, writers and editors.

Description: Mann featured its Broccolini, a cross between broccoli and Chinese kale, at the Pebble Beach Food & Wine event in California, where attendees sampled food prepared by celebrity chefs and a total of 300 wines from more than 200 different wineries. Chef Craig Von Foerster prepared pork marinated in ginger soy sauce with Broccolini. The product was also featured in a farm stand along with product from two other fruit and vegetable grower/shippers in a tribute to Monterey County agriculture. Mann distributed recipe cards and product information and discussed growing seasons. Guests had the opportunity to interact with chefs and ask industry professionals questions regarding preparation methods and product applications.

Results: The event produced valuable exposure to leading culinary professionals from around the world and subsequent name association with the Pebble Beach Food & Wine event.

We've really topped ourselves this time!

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Reader Service # 18

New York Apple Association (NYAA), Inc., and T. Marzetti Company

Fishers, NY, and Columbus, OH

Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA), New York Apple and T. Marzetti Display Contest

Objective: To encourage commissaries to build large displays of New York State apples with T. Marzetti caramel-apple dip and apple crisp.

Description: Bisek and Company, the broker for T. Marzetti products at DeCA, conducted apple demonstrations. Some contest participants used bin wraps provided by NYAA along with nutrition-themed POS cards and *A-Z History of NY Apples* posters while some used original and handcrafted signage to decorate their displays. Six winning displays will receive full registration to the 2008 PMA show in Orlando, FL, along with two-night hotel accommodations.

Results: The contest opened up new territory for New York Apples. Many of the 61 entries reported sales increases over 30 percent in bagged apples. The contest also received coverage from independent news sources geared toward produce companies.

Ocean Mist Farms

Castroville, CA

Chili and 'Chokes Promotion with Raley's

Objective: To increase trial and drive sales by educating consumers about new uses for fresh artichokes and to differentiate Sacramento, CA-based Raley's Supermarkets, from its competition.

Description: Ocean Mist and Adrienne Bilske, a registered dietitian and local Salinas Valley television personality, collaborated to create a fresh artichoke recipe that could be made on site and sampled in the produce department. Bilske decided to use artichoke leaves to scoop chili instead of tortilla chips. Two Ocean Mist representatives made the Chili and 'Chokes recipe and served it to Raley's shoppers. The chili's aroma attracted consumers to sample the recipe and purchase artichokes. The representatives also passed out recipe cards to consumers who enjoyed the in-store demonstration.

Result: Raley's sold more than 150 cases of Ocean Mist artichokes during two promotional weekends. Ocean Mist Farms distributed 700 recipe cards and served 1,200 people. The demos positioned artichokes as tasty and healthful treats.

Reader Service # 51

Reader Service # 44

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Pear Bureau Northwest (PBN)
Milwaukie, OR

Liquid PEARfection

Objective: To gain exposure for USA Pears, inspire mixologists to use pears in cocktails and develop a collection of fresh pear cocktail recipes for ongoing marketing and communication programs.

Description: PBN partnered with Stockholm, Sweden based Absolut as it released Absolut Pear vodka and participated in pear-themed launch parties throughout the country with celebrity hosts, such as Carmen Electra. The events featured USA Pears in everything from cocktails and glass garnishes to décor. PBN joined forces with *Imbibe Magazine* to commence Liquid PEARfection with a nationwide cocktail contest. The grand-prize winner was awarded $1,000 in cash.

Results: The Liquid PEARfection contest appeared in two issues of *Imbibe Magazine*'s e-newsletter and publisher blogs. PBN received entries from 150 participants and inspired professional and amateur mixologists to continue mixing cocktails with USA Pears. *The Bartender's Guide to Pear Cocktails* included multiple entries and the contest made approximately 1.5 million impressions with the help of various media outlets.

Sage Fruit Company
Yakima, WA

Kasey Kahne/Sonya Apple Sale And Produce Managers Contest

Objective: To boost customer awareness of the newest apple additions to Sage Fruit's Sonya apple family and increase general sales and distribution of apples sold in the greater Phoenix, AZ, outlets of Boise, ID-based Albertsons, LLC.

Description: Sage aimed to entice NASCAR fans in the Phoenix area to purchase Sonya apples. Albertsons' produce managers built creative displays featuring racecar driver Kasey Kahne and his support of Sage Fruit and Sonya apples. After displays were judged in multiple categories, winners received Apple iPod nanos, Sage jackets, golf shirts and Kasey Kahne racing hats.

Results: The Kasey Kahn stand-ups and logos helped to sell 32,000 pounds of 100-size Sonya apples and a collective 21,400 bags of Kasey Kahn Granny Smith, Gala and Red Delicious apples. The apple category showed major double-digit increases over the same period the previous year.

Stemilt Growers, Inc.
Wenatchee, WA

Summer Grower Promotion

Objective: To educate consumers and give them a better understanding of Stemilt's Artisan Naturals peaches and cherries.

Description: The Summer Grower Promotion emphasized Artisan Naturals Program fruit, which is in the process of becoming certified organic. Posters and cards included photographs and brief histories of the growers and their families. The materials connected consumers with the products they purchase and gave them a better understanding of where Stemilt fruit comes from and how it is grown. The posters and cards included Stemilt Artisan Naturals logos to help consumer recognize the transitional fruit.

Results: The promotion attracted participants from 1,690 stores in six chains. The statement behind the transitional peaches and cherries helped consumers connect with Stemilt products.

Sunrise Growers, Inc.
Anaheim, CA

Show Us Your Strawberry Smiles Promotion

Objective: To encourage retailers to provide additional space for strawberry merchandising, boost strawberry sales, increase tie-in partners' products and promote traffic to Sunrise Growers' Web site.

Description: To associate strawberries with good memories, Sunrise asked consumers to imagine a moment when strawberries had made them smile, then illustrate that experience and write a 100-word essay about their experience. One grand-prize winner won $5,000 in cash and three first-place winners won $100. Many contestants entered online, attracting attention to Sunrise's Web site. The promotion also included $1-off coupons for Breyers' Ice Cream with purchase of strawberries and special displays featuring Sunrise strawberries and partner products, including Omaha, NE-based ConAgra Foods' Reddi-wip for fruit and Columbus, OH-based T. Marzetti Company's Cream Cheese Fruit Dip.

Results: More than 550 consumers participated in the contest, traffic to the Sunrise Web site tripled during the promotion and the strawberry merchandising area in participating stores expanded by an average of four feet.

Tanimura & Antle, Inc.
Salinas, CA

Get A Head In The Game Promotion

Objective: To associate Tanimura & Antle iceberg lettuce with the excitement of the football season and tempt football fans into using Tanimura & Antle products for appetizing game-day recipes.

Description: The *Get A Head In The Game* promotion encouraged retailers to customize displays of Tanimura & Antle iceberg lettuce with elements of their local teams. Tear-off pads of game-day recipes, such as Touchdown Taco Cups and Sloppy Joe Footballs, and large headlines, such as *Add Iceberg Lettuce To Your Starting Lineup*, incorporated football jargon. The festive banners urged consumers to visit Tanimura & Antle's Web site for more recipes and the retailers' customized exhibits helped relate the product to local shoppers.

Results: Three retail chains participated in the promotion. One retailer reported a sell-through increase of 265 percent during the promotional week and another experienced a sales increase of 600 percent with help from additional grocery-department tie-ins.

The Oppenheimer Group and American Diabetes Association
Coquitlam, BC, Canada and Alexandria, VA

Join Us In The Fight Campaign

Objective: To raise awareness of appropriate serving sizes and encourage diabetes patients to eat daily servings of fruits and vegetables.

Description: Packaging of Linda Gold pineapple, Divemex greenhouse vegetables and OriginO greenhouse peppers, tomatoes and cucumbers encouraged consumers to join the battle against diabetes. The produce bore the *Join The Fight* campaign logo and diabetes-friendly information, such as serving sizes and recipes. Oppenheimer and the Association developed an inventive wheel describing the serving size of various fruits, which they distributed to people with diabetes at American Diabetes Association Expos across the country. Oppenheimer representatives provided samples of fruits and vegetables at the Association's Tour de Cure affair in Seattle, WA, and Los Angeles, CA.

Results: At the Tour de Cure affair, participants cycled more than 400 collective miles and the event collected more than $5,000. The campaign brought attention to the importance of fruits and vegetables to diabetes management and was featured on *Evening Magazine*, a television program local to Seattle.

University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass Amherst) and the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC)

Amherst, MA and Folsom, CA

Blueberry Week

Objective: To create excitement and variety in campus dining, educate students on the health aspects of blueberries and raise customer counts at UMass Amherst dining commons.

Description: All dining commons participated in Blueberry Week from Feb. 23-29, 2008. UMass Amherst teamed up with USHBC to host the event. Chefs featured a different item, such as blueberry scones or blueberry sausage breakfast cake, each evening at the Blueberry Booths, open from 5:00 to 9:00 PM. Chefs and dietitians were available to educate students on the health benefits of blueberries.

Results: Blueberry Week received a 2008 Ivy Award from *Restaurants and Institutions* magazine. Chefs used 800 pints of fresh blueberries and 660 pounds of frozen berries during the event. Customer counts increased from 8.0 to 8.3, and chefs added 10 new recipes that incorporate blueberries to the dinning menu.

Virginia-Carolina Peanut Promotions

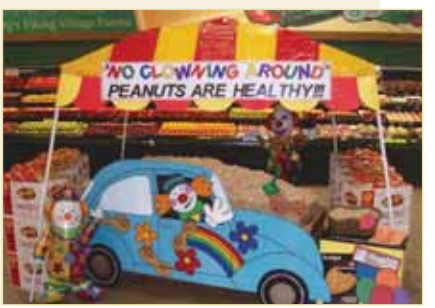
Nashville, NC

National Grocery Store In-shell Peanut Display Contest

Objective: To increase January sales of in-shell peanuts in produce departments nationwide.

Description: Virginia-Carolina Peanut Promotions offered retailers more than $14,000 in cash and prizes for themed displays to attract consumers and remind them of the nutritional benefits of peanuts. Some focused on the approved Food and Drug Administration (FDA) verbiage for nut benefits. One participant built a life-size wagon with a banner that read, *Jump on Board the Peanut Wagon and Ride it to Better Health*. Attention-grabbing displays with texture, movement and sports references presented successful reminders to buy peanuts.

Results: Approximately 400 stores participated in the contest. During the promotion, some retailers reported double and up to quadruple sales over non-promotion periods.



Reader Service # 36

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Reader Service # 96

Earn An A+ For Lunch-Box Merchandising

Back-to-school offers retailers an opportunity to boost produce sales.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Back-to-school is synonymous with buying new clothes, school supplies and lunchbox fixings.

According to proprietary research conducted on behalf of Indianapolis, IN-based Imagination Farms, "Parents ranked freshness, affordability and healthfulness as the key attributes of importance for snacks either for at home or for school," says director of marketing Melinda Goodman.

1. HIGHLIGHT WHOLE FRUITS & VEGGIES

Fruit is a favorite lunch-box item. "Bananas are consistently a favorite item for the lunch box," notes David Bright, director of marketing for Dole Fresh Fruit, Westlake Village, CA. "They are tasty, nutritious and very convenient. They set the standard for lunch-box fare, down to the state-of-the-art biodegradable packaging."

Apples are iconic back-to-school items, notes Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Stemilt Growers, Inc., Wenatchee, WA. "Kids like apples because they're sweet and crunchy. Smaller sizes are perfect single servings. Totes are popular, especially when retailers supply the totes and let moms and kids fill their own from the display."

Terry Braithwaite, director of marketing for Chelan Fresh, Chelan, WA, adds, "Galas hit the market in good supply for back-to-school, followed by Fuji. These red varieties are more popular with kids than the tart green Granny Smith. We pack a 113 size or smaller in 3- and 5-pound poly bags under the Disney Garden label."

Grapple-brand grape-flavored apples are growing in popularity, relates Suzanne Wolter, director marketing for the Rainier Fruit Company, Selah, WA. "We hear from moms that Grapple apples make it easier for them to get their children to eat fresh apples."

Red Bartlett and Star Crimson pears "harvest out of the Northwest in early fall and are ideal for lunches," according to Dennis James, director of marketing for the Pear Bureau Northwest (PBN), Milwaukie, OR.

Michelle Deleissegues, marketing director for Red Blossom Sales, Inc., Oxnard, CA, notes, "Strawberries are a fun, flavorful and low-fat way to boost lunch-box and snack nutrition. Strong volumes are shipping out of Salinas in August and into September."

California Valencia oranges are in season during back-to-school time, says Claire Smith, public relations manager for Sunkist Growers, Inc., Sherman Oaks, CA. "This year's crop is peaking at size 113, so they'll be plenty of bagged product for value pricing and promotion. The 4-pound bag is most popular."

This season, FreshSense, Parlier, CA, launched its Treehouse Kids brand, "a line of peaches, plums, nectarines, apricots, cherries and citrus that, simply said, are approved by kids for kids," stresses CEO Blair Richardson. "We found many kids are 'finicky' because their palates aren't fully developed. Through taste panels with moms and kids, we discovered which fruits kids prefer — and why. In August and September, we'll offer, for example, Sunfire and Campfire varieties of peaches and a white nectarine called Daydream."

Whole fruits and vegetables offer an economic advantage over their fresh-cut counterparts and this can be important during tight economic times. "Moms may opt to buy a whole stalk of celery, for example, or couple of sweet red and yellow bell peppers and cut them up themselves for lunches," believes Rick Antle, CEO, Tanimura & Antle, Salinas, CA. "Retailers can capitalize on this idea by merchandising sandwich- or snack-size plastic bags near the vegetable display."

2. OFFER FRESH-CUTS

Some Moms will still opt for the convenience of fresh-cuts. Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Inc., Coral Gables, FL, notes, "Pre-packaged, fresh-cut fruits and vegetables have gained popularity because they satisfy children's desire for finger foods. Recent studies show 63

percent of children ages 6-14 ask their parents for foods that they have a good time eating and are easy to share with friends."

Fresh-cut apples are popular with kids, according to Tony Freytag, director of marketing for Crunch Pak, based in Cashmere, WA. "Our Disney-branded clamshell pack includes five individual 2.8-ounce bags of sliced apples, which are the perfect size for lunch boxes."

Stemilt is also launching a new product for back-to-school. "Our 2-pound non-flavored sliced apple brings value-added convenience with the economy of a larger pack size. It's designed to retail for $4.99. Moms can take out slices for lunches," notes Pepperl.

"One-pound bags of baby carrots are our No. 1 seller," claims Phil Gruzka, vice president of marketing for Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA. "However, in August and September we see sales increase for our 4-pack of 3-ounce bags of baby carrots banded together, 10 2-ounce bags in a bag, and 3-pack baby carrots with low-fat ranch dip."

Customers like the single-portion pack, relates Samantha Cabaluna, director of communications for Earthbound Farm/Natural Selection Foods, San Juan Bautista, CA. "In our hectic lives, it makes getting a lunch together easier and we're more likely to prepare healthful lunches if it's an easy task. Our Carrot Dippers, snack box raisins, snack pack carrots and apple slices all provide this single-serve convenience."

The addition of dips may increase the appeal of fresh produce to kids. Doug Hawkins, president of Litehouse Inc., Sandpoint, ID, notes, "We've introduced a single-serve yogurt dip in vanilla and strawberry flavors and a chocolate dip in a 100-calorie portion pack."

Imagination Farms recently introduced Foodles, kid-friendly snack combos that combine sliced fruit and vegetables with dips, dried fruit or pretzels. "Our Foodles combos will be in full distribution during the back-to-school time period," says Goodman. "These combos give kids the opportunity to chose their favorite flavor combos for every day of the week."

3. BUILD DISPLAYS

Retailers can set up eye-catching back-to-school displays, notes Del Monte's Christou, "that focus on all produce that is lunch-box friendly, such as bananas, apples, grapes, berries and fresh-cuts.

Several companies offer display aids for retailers to create a kid-friendly one-stop shop. For example, Chelan Fresh offers a Disney-themed bin for bagged apples that can be placed anywhere in the store, and Rainier Fruit offers a high-graphic display

stand for Grapples.

This season, FreshSense will introduce a freestanding display with a very small footprint to accommodate two 2-layer cartons or one returnable plastic carton. The unit sits lower than typical retail shelving to encourage kids to choose their own fruit. The company plans to ship a new variety of fruit every two weeks with accompanying point-of-sale materials that tell moms and kids what's special about the product. A camera-ready ad accompanies each product.

4. RUN PROMOTIONS

Kids, and parents, are receptive to a broad range of in-store produce promotions.

"Retailers that have in-store cooking demonstrations could develop a 'Lunchbox By Me' program that enables kids to be part of the demonstration and teaches them how to make a fun, healthful and delicious lunch," Goodman suggests. "Along with choosing convenient healthful foods, in-store demonstrators or chefs might also make fun sandwiches or other lunch-box items." She also suggests offering prepared daily lunch boxes that moms can purchase each night or morning.

Kevin Moffitt, PBN president and CEO, creates excitement during back-to-school season by teaming up with retailers and schools to promote summer-fall varieties through its Halloween PEARade. The annual promotion reinforces the importance of buying USA Pears and other healthful treats during the holiday period. "We like to get them thinking about putting pears in lunch boxes."

Dole's Bright advises, "Back-to-school brings an array of emotions, including excitement, an expectation of change in season and a realization that its time to get back to business. Retailers can tap into this with messages to help consumers. Imagine signs with the appearance of handwritten notes — like the ones Mom used to put in your lunch box — in the produce department. For example, suggest consumers draw a happy face on the banana to greet their child when they open their lunch box. Sponsor a banana-decorating contest in the store with a back-to-school theme."

As for ad planning, Cindy Plummer, vice president of domestic marketing for the California Table Grape Commission, Fresno, CA, says, "Create ads that will remind consumers that grapes are the perfect snack and lunch box item for children."

Rich Harris, president of Sunkist Taylor LLC, Watertown, MA, suggests, "Line price our 5-item Sunkist Fun Fruits in an ad."

5. USE AVAILABLE TOOLS

A number of organizations offer retail-ready back-to-school promotional ideas that retailers can customize.

According to Julia Stewart, public relations director, Produce Marketing Association (PMA), Newark, DE, "*Crunch the Numbers* is an elementary school curriculum that was developed in partnership with Scholastic [New York, NY] and launched in October 2007. It's designed not only to teach math but also to encourage fruit and vegetable consumption, which we feel in our hearts is an excellent way to help combat the childhood obesity crisis."

"We've developed an online tool kit with tips our members can use in their communities to get the curriculum and its pro-consumption message into the hands of teachers, students and their families. Retailers could network with their community schools and reinforce this curriculum by way of, for example, store tours," she adds.

During the next four years, the print program is expected to reach 70,000 teachers, 2 million students and 3 million family members. There will also be Internet access. *Crunch the Numbers* will be refreshed each year to ensure it stays current and appealing.

The Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH), Wilmington, DE, offers three tools for back-to-school this year. Bryant Wynes, senior executive of retail marketing, says, "September is National *Fruits & Veggies — More Matters* Month. Back-to-school messages are part of our More Matters tool kit. This copy is available in ad slicks, pamphlets/leaflets, consumer affairs columns,

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Reader Service # 6

Savvy Retailers Capitalize On Back-To-School

Several retailers across the nation use back-to-school to creatively promote produce.

Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets, will hold an in-store back-to-school event on a Saturday in early August. "In addition to the sale items that are a part of the Back-To-School Sales Event, we will be providing the following for the first 150 kids to attend the festivities [called] Crayon Wheels and Lenticular Notepads," says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations. "We will provide parents with Apron's Booklets that contain five easy recipes. The recipes focus on family-friendly meals that include five items or less and use Publix Private Label Brand items. For example, one of the recipes, Parmesan and Roasted Garlic Chicken Salad, calls for a 10-ounce bag of Publix Italian Salad Blend."

At St. Louis, MO-based Schnucks, "We'll usually promote items such as raisin snack packs and carrot snack packs for back-to-school," notes Mike O'Brien, vice president of produce. "We also promote the *Fruits and Veggies — More Matter* Web site, which is full of ideas to help moms provide convenient, healthful choices for their kids."

Modesto, CA-based Save Mart/Food Maxx/Lucky has many tentative back-to-school promotional plans. According to Sharon Blakely, food and nutrition supervisor, one "is 'incentivising' a physical activity component in our SuperFriend tours by offering veggie trays to classes that become a 'Walking School Bus' and walk to our stores or parking the bus ½ mile away, for example, and walking the remainder.

"As part of MyPyramid: The Corporate Challenge, we're considering printing paper lunch sacks with Project M.O.M. advice on packing lunches," she adds. Project M.O.M. —Mothers & Others & MyPyramid — is a multi-pronged initiative by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP) aimed at transforming the way the American family eats.

Last year, Austin, TX-based Whole Foods Market offered brochures packed with back-to-school coupons and information. One offered nutritional guidance to kids, tweens and teens, and the other was tailored to college students. The K-12 brochure suggested lunch-box solutions such as: Pack an antipasto plate with sliced organic turkey, cubes of cheese, a favorite dip, crackers and grapes; and Bring along your favorite bowtie pasta salad made with broccoli, sliced pork or chicken, baby corn and sesame dressing. In addition to these brochures, Whole Foods produced back-to-school themed podcasts that offered recipes to help kids fortify their brainpower.

Back-to-school at Quincy, MA-based Stop & Shop means store tour time. "Store tours are perfect for pre-school through third grade," says Paulette Thompson, manager of health and wellness. "The tours teach children the food groups in MyPyramid for Kids, emphasizing color and variety of fruits and vegetables. Teachers receive a curriculum guide to use in the classroom and all the children receive an activity book and handout all about MyPyramid for Kids. Individual stores often host other events in partnership with their neighborhood schools. It's a win-win for everyone." **pb**

and in-store radio scripts.

"We've developed a school store tour lesson plan. It offers retailers several game and activity ideas they can do with kids and incorporates all forms of produce — fresh, canned, dried, frozen and juice. The lesson plan is created in blocks or chapters so that retailers can pick and choose what works for them," PBH's Wynes adds.

PBH's *Take Your Child to the Supermarket* activity is also new. "We've created a group of activities such as coloring pages and supporting materials like ads, leaflets and radio scripts, that encourage moms to shop with their kids and make it both fun and educational for kids. Licensed retailers can download these materials from our Web site," he continues. "They can then tie these materials into prizes such as a free piece of produce, for example, when kids complete a coloring sheet or an activity such as finding five different colors of fruits and vegetables in-store."

On the request of retail partners, the fall promotion from Produce For Kids (PFK) will be held in September rather than October. "Back-to-school is a major focus for retailers and an ideal time to reinforce the produce message," reltes Orlando, FL-based marketing director Heidi McIntyre. "Our retail partners told us they wanted to focus on this time of year." **pb**

Entice Shoppers With Tailgating Promotions

Use tailgate marketing promotions to showcase produce that's perfect for outdoor grilling and sporting events.

BY LIZ PARKS

One of the best ways to drive produce sales at this time of year is to create marketing programs themed around tailgating parties.

Not only do fresh fruits and vegetables serve as healthful snacks but they also travel well and are easy to prepare.

"Tailgating programs are another way to present vegetables to consumers that seem to work fairly well," reports Jack Armstrong, produce buyer, Bashas' Supermarkets, a Chandler, AZ-based chain with 160 stores under multiple banners. Bashas' begins tailgate promotions during the late summer and early fall, but Armstrong says tailgating promotions can be used year-round if tied to outdoor barbequing or grilling for retailers in warmer climates

Bashas' tailgating-themed displays are set up in the front of its stores and feature a wide variety of produce, including asparagus, avocados, sweet onions, corn, red potatoes, zucchini and "just about anything you can throw onto a grill," adds Armstrong. Displays also include products, such as beer, soda and condiments, from other parts of the store.

PW Markets, a 9-store chain based in San Jose, CA, conducted its first tailgate-themed produce promotion last summer, mailing out flyers and putting up POS signs tied into a tailgate marketing promotion created by the Chilean Avocado Importers Association (CAIA), Washington, D.C. "Anything you can do to promote an item in an interesting way is good," explains Jim Pohndorf, produce merchandiser.

Photo courtesy of Chilean Avocado Importers Association

PW created off-shelf displays in its produce department, merchandising avocados on an endcap along with lemons and tomatoes. Adjacent to the produce endcap, PW cross-merchandised snacks, beer, wine, soda and other items that would be popular at a tailgate party. "It gives people an idea of what they can do with the produce, what they can use for a tailgate party," says Pohndorf, "and it gives us a chance to do a promotion a little out of the ordinary. Anytime you can jazz up a product, you can increase your sales — and this did that."

Promotions created by growers and shippers in partnership with retailers focus generically on sporting events and barbecuing and treat tailgating as a subset of those promotions. "We focus our marketing efforts on barbecuing," states Robert Schueller, director of public relations, Melissa's/ World Variety Produce, Inc., Los Angeles, CA. "We support barbecuing in all settings whether it's at home, a park or a sporting field. In our programs, we focus on products that lend themselves to barbecuing. We even emphasize using rosemary as a skewer for vegetables to be grilled and we promote grilling fruits, such as nectarines and other tree fruits."

Bill Munger, director of fresh cut sales for Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc., a subsidiary of A Duda & Sons, Inc., both of Oviedo, FL, says retailers are interested in promotions featuring produce to serve at tailgating events. The trend is particularly strong in the Southeast because the weather supports a fairly strong season for tailgating and consumer passion for football is strong. "Tailgating promotions also fit very well into back-to-school season, which ties into the football season," he adds.

Tanimura & Antle, Inc, Salinas, CA, created football promotions themed to tailgate events and published recipes on its Web site. Its *Get A Head In The Game* promotion encouraged retailers to customize displays of Tanimura & Antle iceberg lettuce with elements of their local teams. Tear-off pads of game day recipes, such as Touchdown Taco Cups and Sloppy Joe Footballs, and large headlines such as *Add Iceberg Lettuce To Your Starting Lineup* incorporated football jargon. Three retail chains participat-

Continued on page 42

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Reader Service # 32

Continued from page 39
ed in the promotion and one retailer reported a sell-through increase of 265 percent during the promotional week.

Tailgating parties have traditionally been tied to football games, but today their popularity has expanded to include a wide variety of events held outdoors, including soccer games, baseball games and concerts.

CREATE YEAR-ROUND OPPORTUNITIES

"Football season is obviously the largest draw," notes Candice Blackmoore, director of marketing, Apio, Inc., Guadalupe, CA, "so promoting during August and September helps keep our trays top-of-mind through the entire season. But because so much tailgating happens at college games, the bowl season in late December is a great time to make another push." Baseball season is also a great time to promote products for tailgating, she adds.

Tailgating parties have traditionally been tied to football games, but today their popularity has expanded to include a wide variety of events held outdoors, including soccer games, baseball games and concerts.

CAIA has created tailgate-themed events for football games and food festivals, but this year it's focusing heavily on promotions featuring tailgating at soccer games. "Soccer is one of the fastest growing sports in the United States and some pretty big parties go on at these events," explains Maggie Bezart, CAIA marketing director. "Tailgating is tied into more than just the games. Families get together and have tailgating events."

For the second year, Ingrid Hoffmann (shown below left), a celebrity chef and author who stars on the Food Network and Univision TV, will serve as CAIA's spokeswoman, introducing avocados through television programs and at food festivals. Many of the promotions encourage consumers to incorporate avocados into their year-round outdoor activities. Of Hispanic origin, Hoffman is doing a number of promotions targeting Hispanic consumers and designed to increase consumption of avocados.

INCORPORATE APPROPRIATE PRODUCE

Many types of produce lend themselves to tailgate parties and other sports-related promotions. Duda's celery products work very well with menus that include chicken wings and blue cheese dressing. The Super Bowl has become Duda's "third biggest holiday event in terms of volume," reports Munger. "It seems as if everybody is going to a party or having a party centered around the game, and tailgate parties are tied into that."

Z & S Fresh, Fresno, CA, introduced a ready-to-use fresh salsa kit that makes a perfect accessory to a tailgate party, according to Justin Bedwell, marketing director. Sold under the Old El Paso brand, the kit contains everything a consumer needs to make fresh salsa, including tomatoes, limes, chili peppers and a special seasoning mix. Z & S targets consumers who attend cookouts for all types of events.

Tailgating season is an opportunity to "expose a large group of consumers to our products and in the process, increase the frequency of their use and overall sales," says Melissa's Schueller. The Food Network and other media outlets have helped boost the appeal of produce by driving home its ease of preparation and nutritional value, he adds.

"There's a lot more creativity in the preparation of meals today, including casual meals prepared for outdoor socializing, such as tailgate parties," notes Michael Boggiatto, president and founder, Boggiatto Produce, Inc., Salinas, CA. "I think a lot of that starts with the creativity of chefs and dining out. I think people experience more different foods that way and decide they want to try something new at home. It's not that they want to become master chefs, but they see a great recipe for grilling corn and they want to try it at home."

Schueller says the flavor of produce is driving the increased consumption and its use at social events, such as tailgate parties. "As people understand and work with fresh produce, they see that it adds a particular flair and variety to their meals."

DRIVE SALES WITH RECIPES

In July, a search for "tailgate" on the Food Network Web site produced 129 recipes — most containing produce.

As tailgating events grow in popularity, vegetables are playing an increasing role. "You see everything from the traditional salads and sweet corn at tailgating events to a growing variety of dishes both prepared in advance and served fresh or cooked at the scene," Boggiatto explains. "When you're tailgating, foods have to be fairly easy to transport and easy to

Photo courtesy of Chilean Avocado Importers Association

Photo courtesy of Culinary Institute of America

Photo courtesy of Ocean Mist

Tailgating Parties Start with Hass Avocados

GET IN THE GAME!

Over the past 4 Tailgating seasons[1], an average of **300 million Hass Avocados** were sold at retail with an average dollar sales growth of +10% each year![2]

1 Tailgating timeframe includes September through January
2 Data Source: IRI/FreshLook Marketing

Food Network

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Tailgating With Avocados

Cross-merchandising avocados with beverages and chips is a great technique for tailgating promotions. The Hass Avocado Board (HAB), Irvine, CA, offers multiple avocado-inspired recipes on its Web site, including Southwestern guacamole, grilled shrimp and avocado BLT sandwich and smoked turkey and avocado salad in a bread shell. HAB has developed tailgating related co-marketing programs with Miller Beer and Sutter Home Winery — two brands with extensive sports advertising.

To take full advantage of the growing popularity of soccer, the Chilean Avocado Importers Association (CAIA), Washington, D.C, sponsors national promotional programs tied into sporting events and tailgating in partnership with the American Youth Soccer Organization, Inc. (AYSO), Hawthorne, CA, and running ads in the AYSO magazine, which reaches more than a million consumers.

With many retailers, growers and industry organizations supporting such programs, Jose Luis Obregon, HAB managing director, believes events such as tailgate parties can increase the consumption of produce as a barbecue stable. "We see tailgating as a big, year-round opportunity to add avocados and other fruits and vegetables into gathering events for any sports-related activity that might happen. People relate the Super Bowl and football with avocados, so why not have a Super Bowl every weekend?

"From people simply gathering at a friend's house for a weekend to gathering at a game, concert or other public gathering, tailgating encompasses a growing number of event-related activities," he continues. "And we want avocados to be a must-have item for those events.

"People like to eat healthfully," he adds, "so when they are gathering for events, fruits and veggies are always good menu choices." **pb**

eat once you get there, but people are also looking for something different to serve, not just the traditional fare. This is why you see more exotic produce, such as star fruit or artichokes, showing up at tailgate parties. People are looking for something a little unique. Maybe there's an element of one-upmanship. Some people seem to be saying 'You have hamburgers and potato salad, but we have steak and artichokes.'"

People are looking for produce that fits easily "into a tailgate menu," according to Avi Crane, president and CEO, Prime Produce International, LLC, headquartered in Orange, CA. "There are industry organizations, such as the CAIA and the Hass Avocado Board [(HAB), Irvine, CA], that have done promotions themed to tailgating. "During the times of the year when these promotions are going out, we see our sales increase. It's one more venue for avocados that was previously untapped."

Crane sees avocados paired with hamburgers at restaurants and tailgating events. "I think people understand that anytime they can add more things to a meal, it's a winner for everyone, especially when you're in a parking lot. The more recipes you can provide to consumers, the more consumption increases."

KEEP CULINARY TRENDS IN MIND

The tailgate parties attended by Chef Joseph DiPerri, spokesman for the Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, NY, tend to be a little chilly or cold, so people bring warm, already prepared dishes, including vegetarian chili, eggplant parmigiana and pumpkin soup. He also sees relatively sophisticated but simple dishes, such as salad of tomatoes, mozzarella and red onions, making their way into tailgate parties.

While many tailgate-event side dishes may be prepared at home, DiPerri sees people "go so far as to set up their own little cooker and do corn on the cob and grilled vegetables, such as zucchini, mushrooms and roasted peppers, as both side and main dishes. Not everybody wants to eat hamburgers and frankfurters. Something a little different is always nice to have as an option."

For example, DiPerri recalls a very elaborate tailgate party that included a New England clambake complete with lobsters, mussels, corn on the cob and baked potatoes. Another party included deep-fried turkey. "It's become one more thing to do to enjoy the day a little bit more."

"People who tailgate are often connected first by the event they are attending and second by the show of a tailgate cookout, so people can get pretty involved," he adds. "They like to outdo each other so they will ask themselves what they can do each year that will be different than what they brought last year. It can get to be pretty crazy — and lots of fun." **pb**

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fruits & veggies more matters

Variety Growth Maintains Washington Apples' Appeal

Rapid change is in the air as new varieties move into dominance and become consumer-preferred.

BY MEREDITH AUERBACH

Changes in the Washington apple industry are arriving fast and furiously.

New varieties with different and intriguing favors, appealing names and new looks make choosing apples something of an adventure.

Today's apple market is the result of careful but risky decisions made years ago. Predicting future consumer tastes and needs is becoming tougher, and the process can't help but create both winners and losers.

According to Keith Mathews, executive director at the Yakima Valley Growers-Shippers Association (YVGSA), Yakima, WA, "Washington state produces an annual apple crop between about 85 and 100 million [40-pound] boxes. Based on today's domestic demand and export shipments, 100 million is a very marketable crop. What has changed is the list of varieties available to consumers worldwide. While Red Delicious is still about a third of the crop, the relative positions of other varieties have changed.

Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing for Rainier Fruit Company, Yakima, WA, notes, "Gala has shown the fastest growth. In 2002, Gala accounted for 12 percent of the crop. In 2007, it jumped to 19 percent. It should continue to grow because of increased acreage."

Galas appeal to a wide group of consumers because they offer a middle-of-the-road flavor that's not as sweet as Fujis and not as sour as Granny Smiths, says Mac Riggan, vice president of marketing for Chelan Fresh Marketing, Chelan, WA. "Galas have a good, consistent flavor profile that attracts many consumers."

"For us, [Galas] have moved from being a specialty variety to a mainstream commodity," adds Andy Tudor, director of sales, apples/pears, L&M Companies, Inc., a Raleigh, NC-based distributor with an operation in Selah, WA.

Experts agree Honey Crisp, a relatively new bicolored apple prized for its balanced sweet and tart flavor and succulent but melting texture, is the winner to watch. Developed at the Horticultural Research Station of the University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN, in 1974 and released as a commercial variety in 1991, Honey Crisp has captured attention over the last several years and carries a premium price at retail.

Roger Pepperl, director of marketing for Stemilt Growers, Inc., Wenatchee, WA, reports, "Honey Crisp is about only 5 percent of the market — about a million boxes now — but there's plenty of excess consumer demand for the variety. Many more acres are coming on. It's a great variety but not an easy apple to grow. We're learning fast how to make it more productive as times goes on."

Virtually all major Washington operations now grow Honey Crisp so it seems likely the premium will decline as availability increases. That experience would mirror what happened with both Gala

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and Fuji. As supply increases, new apple specialty varieties become mainstream and other newcomers become the day's stars.

Other growth varieties include Cripps Pink and Cameo, which are supported by their own marketing organizations. Cripps Pink is better known in the United States as Pink Lady, but some sellers use the Cripps Pink name to avoid licensing requirements and royalties associated with Pink Lady.

"Pink Lady America [LLC, Yakima, WA] was established in 2000 to promote year-round sales and control quality standards of the variety," explains Alan Taylor, the organization's executive director. "We own the trademark in North America. The crop's up to about 2.5 million boxes in Washington. We can measure growth because Pink Lady is an opt-in variety. Anyone can buy trees and trees are selling well. Pink Lady is becoming a star at retail."

Just behind Pink Lady in Washington volume is Cameo with about 1.4 million boxes in 2007. Kevin Precht, who manages the Cameo Apple Marketing Association (CAMA), Wenatchee, WA, describes his organization as "the first association to market the variety and develop variety-specific quality control."

The variety growth is good news for consumers who enjoy these great apples often and over a long period of time. It also creates a market opportunity for growers, shippers and retailers to offer the next new thing.

Washington apple varieties have changed over the course of the last three seasons with continuing decreases in shipments of traditional standbys, Red Delicious and Golden Delicious. Gala has surged in shipments while Fuji and other varieties have generally held steady. All have their aficionados, cheerleaders and market preferences. [*Editor's note: Please see* Washington Apple Shipments *on page 54.*]

JOIN THE CLUB

Club varieties are the latest trend in the Washington apple industry. These varieties are viewed and handled similarly to intellectual property. They have been found or developed, trademarked or patented and then licensed to be grown and shipped under rigorous control of quality and volume.

Many of the major shippers have one or more club varieties they talk about and pro-

Organics As Specialties

A full range of organic varieties can fulfill the same roll as a new apple. Growers/shippers have bet big on the growth of organics. Those decisions were made three or more years ago to allow for the transition of orchards to organic production. Increasingly, growers/shippers market an organic alternative for every variety they sell. Yet it is a risk.

"As the largest grower of organic apples in Washington, we expect our organic share of production to double to 15 percent over the next year," according to Roger Pepperl, director of marketing for Stemilt Growers, Inc., Wenatchee, WA. "The Washington growing area has great conditions for organic apples because it is largely a desert climate."

Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing for Rainier Fruit Company, Yakima, WA, notes, "During the past couple of years, demand for organic apples has exceeded supply. The price premium has been getting smaller, but it is still there. What is unknown is the willingness of the consumer to pay more for organics in an uncertain economy. Only time will tell." **pb**

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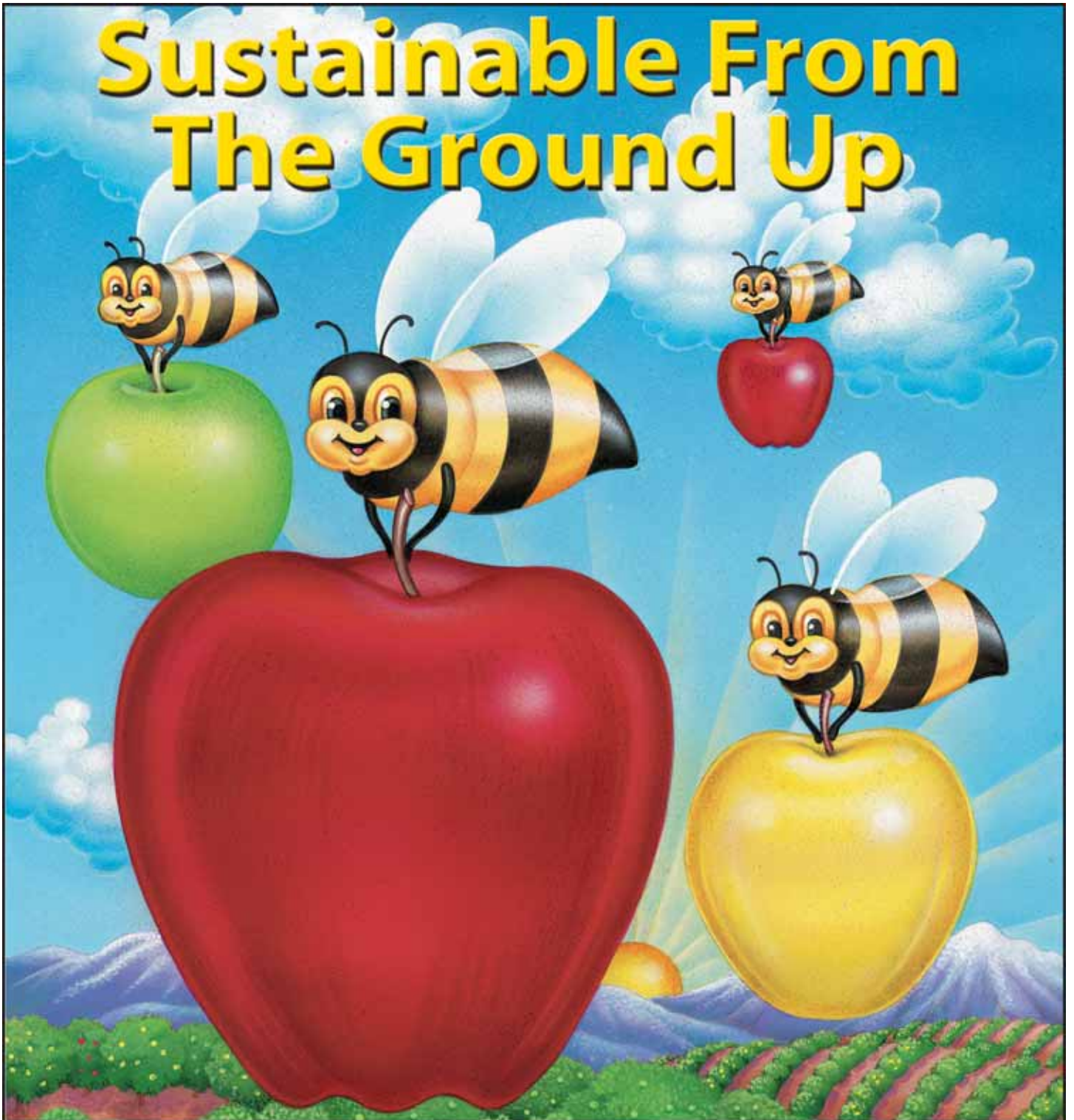

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mote. Other new varieties may be unnamed or still in the testing phase. Even with stepped-up development processes and the ability to buy rights to a developed variety, getting a new apple to U.S. markets can take seven or more years.

L & M's Tudor lays out the math: "Say, you start in 2006 with buds for 20 trees. By year three, that can mean 100 trees. By year four, you can get 300 boxes of fruit. At that time, you have to make the big decision on proceeding. If you move ahead, typically by year seven you can have 70,000 boxes and you can then work not just to introduce but also to establish the variety with retailers and consumers. Full volume takes more years. It's our goal to take what has often been a 12-year process and cut it to six. Right now, we're testing eight new varieties at various stages and we're working with both international and domestic nursery breeding programs."

Bob Mast, vice president of marketing for Columbia Marketing International (CMI), Wenatchee, WA, highlights Ambrosia, a chance seedling discovered in Canada and now marketed in the United States exclusively by CMI. "It has a sweet honey-like flavor and color much like a Fuji. Volume has increased the past few years with 100,000 cases anticipated for 2008 and rapid growth to 400,000 cases by 2009.

"Our other club variety is Kiku, which was developed in Italy and is a proven apple variety throughout Europe," he continues. "We think it will be a winner here because it has Fuji flavor and texture but almost 20 percent more sugar. This will be a test year for the variety. We will use an exclusive market strategy with some of our top retail customers to help get it established."

Lady Alice, Rainier Fruit's club variety, is now in its fourth year of production, which means promotable volume. Wolter describes it as a true Washington variety, started from a chance seedling in Naches, WA, close to Yakima. "Lady Alice is a dense, firm, sweet-tart, bi-colored apple with excellent crunch. Its flavor continues to develop and deepen during storage, helping us stretch out the season."

Lady Alice will find January competition from Piñata!, the club variety for which Stemilt purchased U.S. rights. "We're targeting this bi-color specifically for the first of the year even though we pick it in October," Pepperl explains. "There a great window following Honey Crisp that is ideal for Piñata. The variety has a similar thin skin, but stores very well, holding its pressure."

YVGSA's Mathews lists other new varieties gaining market traction. "Most of them are out of New Zealand. Sonya is licensed to

Even with stepped-up development processes and the ability to buy rights to a developed variety, getting a new apple to U.S. markets can take seven or more years.

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three handlers in Washington, Jazz is getting promotional support, and we are beginning to hear more about Pacific Rose."

Predicting which competing varieties will be most popular with consumers is a challenge. There simply is not enough retail space or consumers for every new apple that comes along.

Taking on a club variety involves a major growing and marketing project along with substantial risk. Howard Nager, vice president of marketing for Domex Superfresh Growers, Yakima, WA, describes some of the details of club varieties. "You must own your PLU code for the variety. That's getting harder [than before] because of the shortage of codes."

Rainier's Wolter agrees, adding, "One solution is G-10 coding, which can handle random weight. However, it's a new system and many retailers don't have the equipment to scan it at checkout. There's a prediction of three to five years for the system to be fully implemented."

A club variety's licensing agreement may specify both acreage and production volume, fruit standards, packing, packaging and markets. It's not for everyone, although it seems increasingly clear that it is the wave of the future. Traceability to enforce these rules has not yet been fully tested.

Photo courtesy of Columbia Marketing International

Reader Service # 81

EDUCATION AND RETAIL SUPPORT

All new varieties emphasize the need for a massive effort to educate retailers and consumers. Most of the new varieties are bi-colored, red or pink with a yellow background. Stand 10 feet back from a display and even apple experts can have trouble telling them apart visually. Flavor descriptions can be tricky and part of success in the marketplace may be the ability to describe what makes a variety unique so that it stands out.

CMI uses Pocket Pro, a tool used to measure flavor ranging from tart to sweet, along with stand-alone shippers, story-driven ads and training videos to support establishing newer varieties.

"We work for end caps and use tools such as sampling and ads to get them," reports Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing at Sage Fruit Company, Yakima, WA. "The most important tool is getting consumers to taste a variety. Retail commitment comes from helping them get shoppers involved with a variety. We are a marketer of Sonya, and sampling and offering market exclusivity to retailers dominate our approach."

Tom Papke, vice president of marketing and business development at Yakima Fresh, LLC, Yakima, WA, focuses on the need to

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WASHINGTON APPLE SHIPMENTS 2005-2007 MAJOR VARIETIES*

Variety	2007**	Share**	2006	Share	2005	Share
Red Delicious	32.5M	33.0%	35.9M	36.2%	33.7M	33.4%
Golden Delicious	10.7M	10.9%	10.4M	10.5%	14.3M	14.1%
Granny Smith	13M	13.2%	14.3M	14.3%	13.1M	13.0%
Gala	19M	19.3%	15.9M	16.0%	16.7M	16.6%
Fuji	12M	12.2%	12.6M	12.6%	12.9M	12.7%
Braeburn	3M	3.0%	3.5M	3.5%	3.3M	3.2%
Pink Lady/Cripps Pink	2.5M	2.5%	1.9M	1.9%	2.1M	2.1%
Cameo	1.4M	1.4%	1.3M	1.3%	2.3M	1.3%
Jonagold	1M	1.0%	1.2M	1.2%	1.2M	1.2%

Source: Yakima Valley Grower Shipper Association
** Percentages do not add up to 100 because minor varieties are not represented on this table*
*** Estimate, shipping year not completed by time of publication*

educate the consumer. "We don't currently market any club varieties, but marketing doesn't really change. The apple category is growing — movement is good and price is still a factor of supply and demand. It's key that we educate consumers to understand all the varieties. We've developed a program called *Fit for Life: Take a Healthy Bite* that uses strong graphics, simple concepts and display materials for retailers. Great working relationships with retailers are very important. You need their commitment whether it's a club variety, a specialty variety or a commodity variety."

Chelan Fresh's Riggan encourages retailers to give Washington apples ample shelf space. "Location — whether it's by the checkout stand or in the produce department — is key to putting apples front and center in peoples' minds."

He suggests retailers focus on working with individual shippers and the Washington Apple Commission, based in Wenatchee, WA, to get the message out about the health benefits of Washington-grown apples. "There's a lot of research out there and we've posted some on our Web site," he adds.

Most shippers work closely with retailers to track the performance of all apple varieties using category management processes. "We have a staff of three dedicated to tracking performance and fine-tuning the decision-making process around apples," notes Domex's Nager. "Specialty varieties add some of the excitement, but other factors drive the category, too."

Photo courtesy of Cameo Apple Marketing Association

RETAIL WEIGHS IN

"For us, the apple category is ahead of bananas," explains Lee Reynolds, director of produce for Haggen, a 16-store chain headquartered in Bellingham, WA. "Our shoppers are willing to pay a premium price for a great piece of fruit. Our big test is pricing apples on ad at $2 per pound or more in the spring. That will give us signals on where to go during the fall. We consider consumers to be the final judges. In some stores, we still carry Romes because shoppers want them and ask for them.

Category management programs sophisticated enough to fine-tune selection at the store level can help balance the assortment for best results and still provide for neighborhood preferences and consumer requests.

"Our consumers want the latest trend in apple varieties," notes Jack Armstrong, senior produce buyer for Bashas' Supermarkets, a Chandler, AZ-based chain with 160 stores under multiple banners. "Honey Crisp and Jazz are hot. Ambrosia competes with Honey Crisp. We can price specialty varieties between $2.49 and $2.99 with good results. If a variety lags, we will easily replace it with another and work through it. Sometimes we do 2-tier pricing. I know we miss some at checkout, but it brings more consumers to the apple category." **pb**

Put The Green In Produce Packaging

As the industry discovers new innovations in earth-friendly packaging, retailers are seeking ways to educate consumers.

BY DUANE CRAIG

Making environmentally friendly packaging choices is certainly complex, but matching thoughtful company efforts to customer and consumer perceptions can help to wrap it all up.

In the wake of the green tidal wave, businesses around the globe are trying to understand its immediate and long-term implications. Nowhere is the water deeper than in the world of packaging and in particular packaging for fresh fruits and vegetables.

At the heart of green packaging is the notion consumers want to know if their produce is packaged in environmentally friendly material because of the impact it may have on the world at large. "We find a broad range of customer interest in the material their produce is wrapped and packaged in," states Ron McCormick, vice president and divisional merchandise manager of produce and floral, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., Bentonville, AR. "A growing number of consumers are deeply interested because of their commitment to environmentalism."

According to Kurt Zuhlke, president and CEO of Easton, PA-based Kurt Zuhlke & Associates, Inc., which has introduced many innovative packaging concepts utilized by the produce industry, "The education of the consumer by the media is starting to have a positive effect. I'd like to see a little bit more of it, but I'd also like to make sure consumers understand that when they get something wrapped in a material made from corn, it could be taking the food out of the mouth of someone halfway around the world."

Photo courtesy of Conwed Global Netting Solutions

However, NatureWorks, LLC, Minnetonka, MN, the producer of Ingeo, a corn-based packaging solution, says its product accounted for less than a tenth of 1 percent of the 2007 U.S. corn crop. The company plans on transitioning to agricultural waste and non-food plants.

The demands of growing populations and competition for limited resources, along with climate change, are driving an unprecedented need for innovation, says David Stanton, brand manager for NatureWorks. Oil-derived plastics are ubiquitous because of convenience and performance, but they tap a non-renewable resource. NatureWorks' products have all the performance attributes and a significantly better environmental footprint, he contends.

THE COST QUESTION

Candice Blackmoore, director of marketing, Apio, Inc., Guadalupe, CA, believes consumers are interested in more sustainable packaging but wonders about their commitment. Apio processes Eat Smart fresh-cut vegetables with Breatheway membrane technology, which preserves freshness, extends shelf life and reduces dehydration.

"While they like the idea and it makes them feel they're doing their part for the planet, most do not want to pay more for it," she notes. "We're in a time now when people are making trade-offs in their purchase patterns. Those 'eco-friendly' efforts many people were willing to do last year have now been compromised by rising fuel, food and energy costs. While greener packaging is still a consideration for many, it's more about value, getting more for your food dollar and if it's also green, even better."

Some experts point to a conflict between what consumers want from produce and from packaging. "I hear on one hand consumers want less packaging, but then I see data where consumers under the age of 50 tend to want produce that comes in a package," explains Fred Heptinstall, president and general manager, RPC Management Services, Tampa, FL, a division of Houston, TX-based IFCO Systems, which manages a worldwide rental pool of over 80 million reusable plastic containers (RPCs) used to transport fruit and vegetables. "Common wisdom is to reduce packaging, but consumer preferences are driving things toward more packaging."

McCormick says most consumers are unwilling to

pay more for green packaging "at a conscious level" but are willing to pay for convenience or uniqueness. "The price they pay may often be more, but it isn't made with the cost of stewardship in mind. I think green packaging makes shoppers feel better about the purchase and can prompt a purchase, but they expect us to deliver green without added cost."

Consumer interest in ecological packaging is growing, explains Niall Kelly, president of Oxnard, CA-based Cool Pak, LLC, which produces clamshells primarily from recycled PET plastic (RPET). Cool Pak will change the composition to 100 percent RPET or PLA to meet customer requests. "It will be important for produce and packaging companies to continue to try new materials and educate consumers about what packaging contributes to the picking, packing, cooling, shipping and freshness of produce. Many consumers believe the sole use of packaging is to make products look good on the shelf, and that is only a small part of what packaging provides," Kelly notes.

INFORMING CONSUMERS

Another packaging issue hinges on how consumers will be able to tell if packaging is green. With all the variations from compostable to recyclable to biodegradable and beyond, some question if consumers will truly understand the results of choosing one packaging type over another.

"I think consumers are overwhelmed with all different types of packaging," notes Zuhlke of Kurt Zuhlke & Associates. "Many are going to give up and not bother. Others will want to push the issue more. But the more they're educated, the better for everyone."

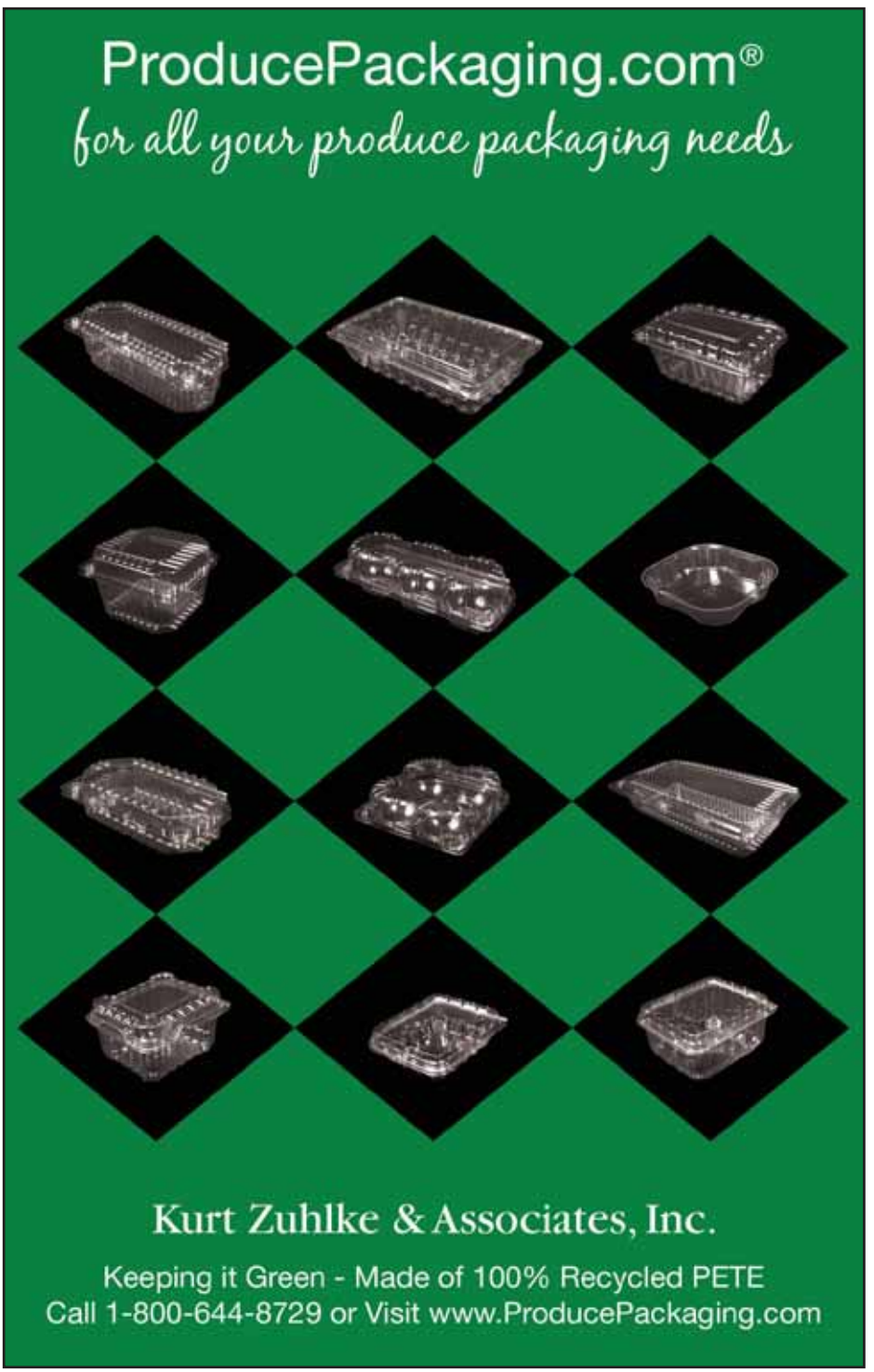
Besides recycle symbols and messages stating packaging was made from post-consumer waste, not much else exists, reports Apio's Blackmoore. When messages or symbols are used, they're small and on the bottom of the product or on the back panel. But, she adds, as consumers become more aware waste, efforts to communicate packaging information will gain in prominence.

"We work with many growers and when we have the opportunity to get the right messaging for a retailer or brand, we get with the growers and work with consumer-facing messaging so the consumer does know there is a difference," explains NatureWorks' Stanton. "It goes right on the label. Ultimately, we should be part of the [retailer or brand] story. We don't want to be the whole story, we just want to be part of the story and tell how we make their products different."

Emily Davis, manager of packaging sustainability, International Paper, Memphis, TN, agrees, adding, "I think labels are one way we communicate the message. There is increasing focus on recyclable logos as well, and we are starting to see other logos that are pertinent to carbon footprints." The company's DEFOR system was designed specifically for produce, with interlocking modular corrugated boxes, customized case erectors and specially engineered palletizing materials.

The packaging story is much bigger than just what the consumer sees and interacts with. Some believe the whole story will continue to gain importance. "There is a lot of fog," notes Cheryl Gregson, marketing director, Weyerhaeuser, Federal Way, WA, which was recently bought by International Paper. Weyerhaeuser is a leader in delivering distinctive paper and packaging solutions. "Consumers don't necessarily think about the packaging that helped get the product from the field into the store, so what the consumers are getting right now are sound bites, but not necessarily the whole picture."

Paper has always been considered green. Keyes Packaging Group, Inc., Wenatchee, WA, manufactures paper-based products, such as apple trays, that are instantly recognizable as recyclable, says Ross Riedinger, vice president of sales and marketing. Keyes also manufactures trays for an array of pro-



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duce commodities, including avocados, grapefruit and other citrus.

Mark Spencer, business manager sustainability, Pactiv Corp., City of Industry, CA, says products made from recycled newspaper are intuitively recognized as being green. Pactiv is a leading provider of foodservice and food packaging in North America.

THE INDUSTRY PUSH

Consumers represent only one aspect of the push for green packaging. Much emphasis is also coming from within the industry. Customers in every segment of International Paper's business are interested in more sustainable packaging, says Pat Pochiro, marketing manager for produce and protein.

With produce, wax replacement, Styrofoam and issues related to landfills are top priorities. "Retailers are pushing it down to the growers, especially in the past five or 10 years," he notes. "As a packaging supplier, we are in that mix so we feel fortunate to have a product that is as sustainable as it is."

According to Weyerhaeuser's Gregson, key retailers have advanced the idea of sustainability. Her customers and the general public are playing an increasingly prevalent role in the demand for green packaging.

PACKAGING CHOICES

Most experts agree green is here to stay, but the packaging still has to do its job.

"I think the trade needs to actively pursue green packaging in every respect and start to experiment with alternatives," states Cool Pak's Kelly. "I believe this is a trend that is with us to stay and education will be a critical component as we move forward."

"At the end of the day, you have to protect the product. I don't think we can say packaging is doing its job unless it gets a commodity to an end user in useable form. I think people are going to look for not only sustainable solutions but also source reduction and ways to use the least amount of packaging to get the job done," says Keyes' Riedinger.

"What we feel is most important is the message you share with your customers and what it means to you as a produce grower or packer," explains Brad Budde, strategic business manager for packaging products, Minneapolis, MN-based Conwed Global Netting Solutions, an industry leader in providing innovative single-source plastic netting solutions. "We're trying to teach our customers to share a broader perspective of how they're making the world a better place. Too often the industry is focused on the package itself." To combine the message with the package, Conwed teamed with Sunkist Growers, Inc., Sherman Oaks, CA, and created a fold-out header bag that contains recipes and suggestions for use of lemons, notes Budde.

"People want a good, sturdy package that protects the product and has pre-punched venting so it can cool down quickly for shipment," says Pactiv's Spencer. "After that, it's tough to say since they're already set up for other materials. I think a lot of them will go to PET material because it is recyclable."

Gregson adds, "There are things we can do to reduce the amount of material in a box, to help strengthen it or to reconfigure the way pallets stack so you can get one more layer of cases in a truck."

"It is a fine balance between green packaging initiatives and price," reports Apio's Blackmoore. "Since the market is relatively new and packaging is available in alternative materials, it can be costlier. A consideration instead may be to look at how to reduce existing packaging. You should ask, 'How can we be green within our current operations?'"

Pochiro advises balancing economics, product performance and the environment. He also advocates looking seriously at display-ready packaging. "Instead of having to pack produce in the field in one box and then having to repack it in another box for a particular retailer, you can use display-ready packaging. The trays go right out in the field, get loaded up and the next time you see that tray is when you walk into the store."

"I think the easiest advice is to read through everything and try to make a determination of what is best for you," advises Zuhlke of Zuhlke & Associates. "In our case, we just decided to go with 100-percent recyclable. We felt that using recycled materials in the manufacturing of our pints and quarts was the best route to go since it did the least amount of damage to the environment and it helps with the waste."

Jim Scattini, director of new business development, Sambrailo Packaging, Watsonville, CA, notes a level of uncertainty about what truly is the way to go for green packaging and what is hype. Until the industry adopts a uniform code and guidelines, it's difficult to put a large investment into any one area. Because of the way American consumers use their products, he says, PET is still the way to go because it's recyclable. Sambrailo manufactures Mixim packaging to maximize product visibility, cooling efficiency and pallet space. **pb**

Finding An Appropriate Green Focus

It isn't always very clear how much focus should be on the green angle. Deciding how much to trumpet efforts aimed at packaging can be even hazier.

"We challenge our buyers to continuous improvement on reducing our environmental footprint as part of their performance review goals, therefore, we are expecting a steady increase in green packaging," notes Ron McCormick, vice president and divisional merchandise manager of produce and floral, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., Bentonville, AR.

Jim Scattini, director of new business development, Sambrailo Packaging, Watsonville, CA, says his customers want a story telling why the packaging is beneficial. If that can be done while protecting the product, extending the shelf life, making it visually appealing to the consumer, reducing mechanical damage in transit and reducing product handling, then it will be a great story.

"If you want a green solution, don't focus on the buzz words," advises David Stanton, brand manager for NatureWorks, LLC, Minnetonka, MN. "Bioplastics, for example, are a journey and we are definitely taking a step in the right direction. Is it the final answer? No, it is not, but it is a great step forward."

He warns of "greenwashing" — making something seem green when it isn't — and uses the example of a claim that one fruit packaging is more recyclable than another. "Fruit packaging in North America isn't recycled today, so it's misleading to highlight one being more recyclable than another because none of it is going to get recycled."

Dave Sexton, vice president of marketing, Maxco Packaging, Parlier, CA, believes sometimes it's a matter of choosing the greenest solution that still gets the job done. Maxco makes corrugated plastic boxes and a substitute for the petroleum-based wax used on boxes. That wax has been an industry staple for years, but it is falling from favor due to environmental issues and recent rapid price increases. However, replacement boxes must be able to stand up to the same rigors the wax boxes withstood, so even though corrugated plastic boxes may be petroleum-based, they're still greener than the wax box.

"We're seeing a lot of solutions coming to market and with any new technology, there is rarely one magic solution," concludes Niall Kelly, president of Cool Pak, LLC, Oxnard, CA. "It is important that innovation continues across the board, including recycled materials, fiber-based materials and other bio-degradable solutions. Ultimately, some of the solutions may look different, but I think the market is receptive." **pb**

California Pear Category Expanding

To best spark consumer interest, retailers should offer a variety of pears that go beyond the tried-and-true.

BY LISA SOCARRAS

Pears are now available year-round and consumers are branching beyond the popular Bartletts to try new varieties.

"Consumers are trying more varieties," explains Atomic Torosian, managing partner of Crown Jewels Marketing and Distribution, Fresno, CA. "Bartletts are still a top seller, but Starkcrimson, Golden Bosc, Comice, Seckel and specialty pears like French Butter Pears are selling, as well."

Retailers are offering a full array of pears, including organic products, he adds. "Retailers are offering a fuller basket to consumers. About 80 percent of pear sales are Bartletts, about 15 percent are Bosc and the rest have smaller numbers."

George Rossi, sales manager, Farmington Fresh, Stockton, CA, reports, "Customers are asking for more varieties. What's hot is varietal pears — Forelle, Seckel, Taylor's Gold. Sales of Asian Pears, Bartlett and Bosc are steady. Retailers are finding more ways to promote varieties so they are selling more."

Selling all varieties of pears at the right stage of ripeness contributes to sales volume. "When pears are green, they aren't an impulse item," notes Matt Roberts, marketing and sales coordinator at Green and Hemly, Inc., Cortland, CA. "Obviously, pears move better when they are starting to break — then they sell much faster. Consumers buy what they think they can eat within a week."

Pears that are too green, or so hard that consumers avoid purchasing them are an industry problem. "One trend is to offer pre-conditioned or quality conditioned fruit," suggests Torosian. "We expose pears to ethylene gas, just as we do bananas. We then tag the fruit and the pallets — it's in the starting-to-turn stage. It still has a long shelf life, but consumers don't have a bad eating experience."

Packaging can assist the grower in shipping the best quality product at the right stage of ripeness. New technology is helping to produce a superior product. "A new technology is modified-atmosphere packaging," reports Rossi. "The micro-plastic film controls the atmosphere of the fruit. Once pears start to ripen, they continue to ripen. Retailers are asking for this." He is seeing modified-atmosphere packaging on imported pears in the marketplace — an indication that Farmington Fresh will be using more of it.

Other packaging selections include volume fill packs, tissue wrapped packs, tray packs, specialty packs and Euro Boxes or bags, according to the California Pear Advisory Board, Sacramento, CA.

Rossi says there are choices in bags, including pre-ripening bags. "The pre-ripening bags use a lit-

tle different technology," he elaborates. "They slowly release the ethylene gas."

Retailers can request whatever type of packaging they need, and it will be customized just for them. "Clamshells, display cartons, display ready — each retailer has a different need," he explains. "Club and discount stores ask for a bigger pack."

"We do anything the retailer wants," explains David Thiesson, sales manager, Scully Packing Company, LLC, Finley, CA. "Some products don't ship as well in bags. Bags are not big."

California growers and shippers haven't gotten into indicated ripening packaging, Thiesson adds. "Anjou Pears from Washington state are shipped in clamshell packages that show product ripeness. We really don't have to do that — Bartletts turn yellow on their own.

Scully offers nine or 10 kinds of consumer packs and promotes split ripeness displays for retailers. "We're encouraging retailers to use the largest space they have available and divide the pears, according to ripeness," Thiesson says. He believes consumers want to be able to choose between ready-to-eat fruit and fruit that needs a few days to reach perfect ripeness.

Some packaging educates consumers about the product, such as 3-pound poly bags with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)-approved organic sticker, explaining the definition of organic. These organic products are sometimes merchandised in the organic section or next to conventional pears. "There are POP materials next to organic," notes Torosian. "We have to explain what we mean by organic."

Organic supplies are looking positive so far this year. "Organic pears are in pretty good demand," according to Green and Hemly's Roberts. "It's looking good this year. We're supposed to be up on acreage."

Know Proper Ripening Tips

The California Pear Advisory Board, Sacramento, CA, advises teaching consumers about proper ripening techniques to capitalize on sales, according to its Web site. Pears should be ripened in a bowl at room temperature. Once pears have reached desired ripeness, they should be placed in the refrigerator to slow further ripening.

Green pears will take four to six days to ripen at room temperature. Pears turning yellow from green are usually ready to eat within two to three days. When Bartlett pears are yellow, they are ready to eat and are at their juiciest, ripest, most flavorful stage. California Bartletts can keep in the refrigerator for about a week. **pb**

PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS ARE KEY

Promotions encourage consumers to purchase products, and retailers can obtain POP materials from the California Pear Advisory Board and the Pear Bureau Northwest (PBN), Milwaukie, OR, under the USA Pears label.

"Promotional materials are available through the California Pear Advisory Board," says Carolyn Becker, national accounts manager for merchandising. Representatives call on retailers and assist them with providing promotional materials if requested. They also help retailers design marketing plans for their stores. Materials, such as recipe cards and themed promotional materials, are available to help promote products.

PBN has promotional materials to support the entire pear season. It also customizes promotions to meet the needs of its clients. Ethnic language promotions encourage sales by specific market groups, such as Hispanics or Asians. PBN has materials available in Spanish to reach targeted audiences. Another idea for promotion is pushing organics along with theme and seasonal promotions. Customized promotions that focus on creativity are also encouraged.

"A big promotion is to tie in with back to school," recommends Crown Jewels' Torosian. "Pears and apples are promoted for school lunches in August and September. We promote a smaller size pear, a 135- or 125-size [pear] for school lunches. Some schools have eliminated candy. We focus on the health aspect."

CREATE QUALITY DISPLAYS

Farmington Fresh conducts a good amount of regional promotions, notes Rossi. "We promote locally grown and food miles."

PSN offers display tips to retailers for optimum pear sales. One suggestion is to build a permanent pear display in the produce department, for example, featuring pears in a waterfall display. A waterfall display with a variety of color breaks attracts attention and makes the greatest impact on consumers.

Retailers should rotate product frequently to put the best quality products in the hands of shoppers. They should also continually remove damaged fruit and keep the ripest fruit on the top and end of the display — ready for consumers to pick up. PBN suggests retailers offer consumers a variety of pears through sampling to increase impulse buying.

Use tray displays instead of jumble displays. Jumble displays require ongoing attention to keep them up. Raised bottom displays look great without damaging fruit by piling it too high.

Volume sales increase by using 3- and 5-pound cello bags, according to PBN.

"In previous years, there were never so many imports," explains Torosian. "Now, pears are a year-round product. There is a lot of overlap with Chile and Argentina. " **pb**

Build Profits With Gift Baskets

Create a gift basket program that best suits the produce department.

BY DUANE CRAIG

Tackling a gift basket program requires some finesse but the rewards — enhanced customer service and new profit opportunities — are well worth the effort.

"I think the potential is there to make very good profit and it is also a convenience for your consumers," explains Rebecca Gibson, director of sales and marketing for Basket Ease, Prior Lake, MN. "Your customers who want fruit baskets won't be going down to your competition — they'll be making the impulse buy at your store. I really believe that if you get it set up and find the right people, it is not as much work as you might think."

Photo courtesy of Wholesale Produce Supply

Fruit baskets are the oldest types of gift baskets, according to Rodney Melillo, director of kitchen and gifts for Bristol Farms, an upscale Carson, CA-based chain with 17-stores. "Fruits were done before gourmet gift baskets and certainly before bakery baskets. Unlike most of our other gift baskets, our fruit baskets are based on the price and the items the consumer wants in them. It seems they have made a resurgence lately because the fruit itself has become more special and it is available year-round." Bristol Farms makes its own baskets except sometimes during the Christmas season, when demand is high and it adds pre-made baskets to keep up.

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

Fruit basket programs are not an endeavor to undertake lightly. It's critical retailers keep baskets fresh without any spoiled fruit. "It's very important to have good fruit in there," stresses Gibson. "If you see something that doesn't look right, take it off because you are going to lose sales on every one of them if you have one that is not good." She suggests adding little packets that absorb ethylene to extend shelf life.

Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc., Los Angeles, CA, offers fruit baskets on its Web site year-round. However, there are certain times of the year, such as Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter, when they are in greater demand, reports Robert Schueller, director of public relations.

The holidays typically yield the greatest sales, and consumers are showing increasing interest in baskets for other special days, such as Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and Father's Day, reports Gibson. "Many people say it's just Christmas when you're going to sell them, but that hinders the amount of baskets you're going to turn because no one knows you're selling them unless they happen to stop in your store and you have fruit baskets in there."

"Traditionally, fruit baskets have been very seasonal, but I believe the trends are definitely changing," continues Lori Fischer, sales representative in organics, specialties and fruit baskets, Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., Philadelphia, PA. "The retailers are now experiencing substantial business throughout the year, and we have had quite a few retailers carrying fruit baskets all the time."

Cheryl Thompson, packaging specialist, Willow Specialties, a Batavia, NY-based supplier of gift basket packaging materials, says, "Fruit baskets are truly having a resurgence. People are eating more healthful these days and the baskets are more bang for your buck."

CHOOSING A PROCESS

The biggest challenges for in-store assembly are dedicating the space, having enough staff and doing the necessary planning. Basket Ease's Gibson suggests using an area that would accommodate an 8-foot table with some storage beneath. Don't overlook having the baskets assembled right in the department so the consumer sees them being built, she adds. This approach creates excitement and also offers the chance to build custom baskets for people who want to select their own ingredients.

Assembling in-store works well for lower volume operations, reports Fischer. Since the materials the store will buy to assemble the baskets are materials it probably won't have any other use for, that capital outlay and the additional labor for assembly should be considered. She suggests blending an in-store fruit basket program with an outsourced one.

"Even retailers that have an in-house program are finding a lot of advantages in supplementing those with premade baskets," explains Fischer. "They don't have to put out the added expense of materials. They save on labor and they are getting premium produce in a professional looking package."

Don't limit the display to the produce department — try different locations near the store's entrances, in the frozen food aisles and throughout the checkout area.

Willow Specialities works with retailers to design customized, in-store gift basket programs. "We don't have a cut-and-dry program," reports Thompson. "Retailers are becoming much more conscious of their consumer demographics and they're creating programs that best fit their needs."

Jim Ruma, president, Ruma's Fruit and Gift Basket World, Everett, MA, agrees, adding that in-store gift basket programs allow retailers to control the quality and make them as they are needed.

"Many retailers are still going to have to make their own baskets because there are a number of special needs and special requests from consumers, but stores don't always have the labor," notes Reed Sibet, director of sales and marketing for Wholesale Produce Supply (WPS), LLC, Minneapolis, MN. "The advantage of outsourcing is that it gives them a head start so they have baskets readily available for impulse sales."

Melissa's Schueller recommends using durable fruit, such as apples, oranges, coconuts and fruits that don't require refrigeration. Some stores offer a basket ordering service where customers orders the kind of basket they want for pick up at the store or for delivery directly to their home.

SETTING PRICE POINTS

Gift baskets cover a wide range of price points. "You just can't put one basket out and say this is what is going to sell and this is what you are going to make money on," says Basket Ease's Gibson. Offering a range of baskets that differ from each other in size and contents will maximize profits. Prices ranging from $15.95 up to $50, with a small quantity of high-priced baskets against a greater quantity of lower-cost baskets, might work well for many stores. Since more people can buy the lower-cost baskets, there is opportunity to get some volume turning, she adds.

Schueller suggests a target of $19.99 to $29.95, making gift baskets the highest-priced items in the produce department. In his experience, higher-end stores tend to order Melissa's fruit baskets, so price is not as large an issue as it may be in other venues. Melissa's exotic fruit deluxe is the kind of higher-end basket that would be difficult for a retailer to assemble in-store simply because it most likely wouldn't have the type of fruit required. A very large basket priced at $39.99 would be about tops for a produce department to handle on a regular basis, he notes.

To appeal to the widest range of consumers, Ruma encourages offering multiple price points ranging from $30 to $100.

GETTING THE RIGHT LOOK

Don't limit the display to the produce department — try different locations near the store's entrances, in the frozen food aisles and throughout the checkout area.

Procacci's Fischer recommends keeping the display in the front of the store and in other high-visibility areas. "As soon as you walk in, you should be able to see the fruit baskets," she says. "Depending on shelving and space, the store should try to display the baskets in layers so they are easily viewed, as opposed to on a flat table where consumers would have to dive in to look."

You should also consider the look of the containers. Fischer says consumers should be able to re-use the basket once it is empty.

Gibson recommends letting consumers know ahead of time that the store will be selling fruit baskets. Signage, advertising and $1-off coupons are good techniques. Promotions with gift-giving themes remind consumers about the ways other people may enjoy gift baskets. Fruit baskets can serve as nutritious gifts for the elderly in nursing or assisted living facilities.

All suppliers highlight the value of using the baskets to cross-promote with other departments by including items such as wine, cheese and crackers. "I think each year it gets better," notes Gibson. "Your first year you might not have the greatest sales, but then nobody knows that you have fruit baskets. It is not something to start and see how it goes and if you don't get the sales you expected then, you assume it wasn't a successful program. Instead, you review your whole program and find out what worked and what didn't work and you improve on things so you can do better next year." **pb**

Overcoming Challenges

While fruit basket programs can offer excellent produce department profits, they may not work in all types of stores. Challenges include inadequate planning, insufficient supply and not enough time for development.

"Some of that also depends on demographics and the type of food store," explains Lori Fischer, a sales representative in organics, specialties and fruit basket sales for Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., Philadelphia, PA.

Some stores that have never tried a gift basket program may view it as too much work, notes Rebecca Gibson, director of sales and marketing for Basket Ease, Prior Lake, MN.

"I would think if a retailer is not selling them, it is probably because it doesn't know it can buy them pre-made," according to Reed Sibet, director of sales and marketing, Wholesale Produce Supply Co., Minneapolis, MN. "It can be difficult to buy the volume of supplies necessary to be competitive when making them in the store. As retailers who were used to doing it themselves over the years got tired of dealing with it, they didn't pick up on the fact that there are pre-made baskets available."

Jim Ruma, president of Ruma's Fruit and Gift Basket World, Everett, MA, sees not having enough staff, especially during the holidays as a major hurdle. He believes it is far better to stay out of the gift basket market then to try it and not do it right. **pb**

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Five Ways To Spur Year-Round Onion Sales

Expand consumer interest in onions with recipe cards, usage suggestions and other merchandising tactics.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER RD

Name a savory dish and onions are likely to be one of its ingredients. Bulb onions were the fourth-ranked ingredient included on menus of the top 200 restaurant chains, according to a July 2004 report conducted by Wheaton, IL-based Food Beat, Inc., for the National Onion Association (NOA), Greeley, CO.

Experts believe sales of the traditionally affordable vegetable may strengthen during the current economic downturn. "Consumers are more structured now," explains Marvin Lyons, produce director at Bigg's, an 11-store chain based in Milford, OH, and a subsidiary of Supervalu, Inc., based in Eden Prairie, MN. "They have a goal in mind when they shop and their desire to stretch food dollars even further may lead to a pickup in sales of affordable items such as onions."

Retailers can increase sales by taking a cue from the apple category and displaying onions with color breaks.

1. STOCK THE RIGHT MIX

Yellow onions are the staple of the category, reports Randy Bohaty, produce director, B & R Stores, Inc., a 15-store chain based in Lincoln, NE, and operating under the Super Saver and Russ's Market banners. "Then, for us, come whites, reds, sweets and all the rest."

"Yellow onions are full-flavored and ideal for savory, long-cooking dishes, such as soups and stews," notes Kim Reddin, NOA director of public and industry relations. "Red onions lend color to salads while white onions are traditionally used in classic Mexican cuisine."

Pungent yellow onions are a specialty grown in Idaho, Eastern Oregon and New York. "Our soils and growing conditions create a bold-flavored onion that's a cooking staple," explains Maureen Torrey Marshall, vice president, Torrey Farms, Inc., Elba, NY.

New York Bold, LLC, a consortium of 14 Oswego County growers, actively promotes the pungent flavor of the state's onions. "We tell customers right up front on the package how to use our product with the tag, 'America's cooking onion,'" states Judy Queale-Dunsmoor, brand manager.

Organic yellow onions are seeing resurgence, reports John Vlahandreas, national onion sales director, Wada Farms Marketing Group, LLC, Idaho Falls, ID. "They didn't catch on when first introduced a few years ago, but now they are."

However, Robert DeBruyn, president, DeBruyn Produce, Zeeland, MI, cautions, "While there is growth in organic onions, it could be fairly easy to overgrow supply in relation to demand."

"Consumers typically buy a yellow onion out of habit," Lyons notes, "but I do see more incremental sales and impulse purchases on reds and whites because of their eye appeal."

Red onions "have seen significant growth due to their increased use, particularly in salads, at the foodservice level," says Reddin.

"Our Artisan Reds are distinctively flat-shaped, mild-flavored and versatile," notes Rick Antle, CEO, Tanimura & Antle, Salinas, CA. "For example, they're ideal as a burger topping, chopped atop a hot dog, as a garnish for chili, atop salads and stirred into potato and pasta salads. We source them and they are available year-round."

Robert Rapasadi, vice president, Isadore A. Rapasadi & Sons, Inc., Canastota, NY, describes white onions as the Cadillac of the category. "This past year, the FOB was $60 for 50 pounds and now it's $120. We don't grow them, but we do bring them in from Nevada and California for our retailers who serve Hispanic consumers."

According to Ed Laster, produce specialist, Metropolitan Market, a 5-store chain

based in Seattle, WA, "Sweet onions are our predominant tonnage."

The sweet onion category is growing, stresses Nichole Towell, marketing development manager, Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc., Oviedo, FL. "In years past, sweet onions were seen only in the late spring and summer when Vidalia and Texas 1015 onions were in season. Now, with better storage practices and imports from Mexico and South America, sweet onions are available throughout the year."

"Vidalias are the dominant variety among all sweet onions, outselling Texas sweet onions five to one and Walla Walla sweets seven to one, in a retail supermarket sales analysis," reports Wendy Brannen, executive director, Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC), Vidalia, GA. "In addition, Vidalias represent 16 percent of all annual onion sales nationally — while all other sweet onions combined represent just 20 percent. Each year, total sweet onion sales in the United States represent 36 percent of dried onion sales."

Curry & Company, Inc., Brooks, OR, is in its fourth season of marketing Gerald's Vidalia sweet onions, which run from April through August. "It's the end of our Vidalia season as well as our Walla Walla sweet program," explains Matt Curry, president. "We're getting ready to transition into Hermiston Sweet season." He says the Hermiston Sweet does quite well during its season, which runs from August to December.

2. DEMO AND SAMPLE

Offering consumers a variety of onions in addition to recipe brochures, demos, signage and videos are great ways to demonstrate new and exciting usages, states Marty Kramer, sales manager, Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc., Greencastle, PA. They "can spike sales of onions all year long."

As taste profiles broaden, "It is up to us to educate the consumer on onion varieties and their uses," Towell advises. "Informing the consumer that an onion is hot, sweet, mild or somewhere in between and backing that information with an actual certification process would be great steps toward fostering and nurturing the ever-changing palate of the American consumer.

"As consumers begin to choose onions with flavor profiles that best match their palate preferences, merchandising on taste should create positive eating experiences that will lead to return business. Of course, the product mix will change from store to store, based on local demographics," she adds.

"Retailers can offer recipe cards with their onion displays, incorporate recipe ideas into POS signage or offer packaging with recipes," explains Steve Phipps, principal owner/sales and marketing director for Market Fresh Produce, LLC, Springfield, MO.

High-graphic bags with color photos of prepared onion dishes and recipes on packs are popular with some retailers, states Rapasadi of Rapasadi & Sons. "They offer a value to the customer and can help a chain set itself apart from the competition. They are more expensive than traditional mesh packs. For that reason, we pack about 60 percent of our onions in the traditional mesh pack and 40 percent in high-graphic bags."

Rodger Helwig, San Francisco, CA-based marketing communications director, OSO Sweet Onions, suggests, "offering recipes by listing the label's Web site on all packaging, pointing consumers to tasty recipes. By doing this, you eliminate clutter at point-of-sale and create an opportunity to build an ongoing relationship with consumers."

For retailers with cooking schools, such as Wegmans Food Markets, Inc., based in Rochester, NY, and H.E. Butt Grocery Company (HEB), based in San Antonio, TX, NOA offers a CD with key tips and recipe ideas for cooking with onions. "There's even a segment on how to cut an onion as instructed by a chef from the Culinary Institute of

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America [Hyde Park, NY]," notes Reddin.

Bigg's Lyons recommends cross-merchandising onions with blooming onion kits, salad dressings and other like ingredients to boost sales.

"We'll cross-merchandise onions with steaks and burgers in the meat department, especially during the summer," reports B & R's Bohaty. "Pearl and boiler onions are especially popular for shish kebabs."

VOC's Brannen advises, "Offer pre-made skewers with Vidalias, peppers, tomatoes, pineapple and meats or seafood in the meat department. You can also set up a free-standing display of Vidalia onions along with tin foil and skewers."

One of the top produce items to cross-merchandise with sweet onions is bagged salads, according to OSO Sweet's Helwig, "Onions, especially sweet ones, are such an integral part of most salads."

During the winter, "Display onions with carrots and potatoes for soups and stews," advises Torrey Farm's Torrey.

For gourmet dishes, Tanimura & Antle's Antle suggests cross-merchandising Artisan Reds with bakery baguettes and goat cheese.

Or cross-merchandise onion with "croutons, bacon bits, hamburger buns, cheese slices, barbecue sauce, tortillas, salsa, tomatoes, pizza mix, soups mix and tuna," Marketing Fresh's Phipps. "The list is endless."

From June through August, VOC is running its *Fiesta of Flavor* produce promotion, showcasing recipes that combine Vidalia onions with Corona beer, fresh salsa and guacamole, reports Brannen. Vidalia onions are cross-displayed in the retail beer, wine and alcohol aisles, and with limes, avocados and tomatoes in the produce department. "Combining Vidalias with beer, recipes and coupons helps us reach a younger, more diversified audience," she adds.

Candi Fitch, executive director, Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee (IEO), Parma, ID, suggests holding a taste demonstration with a simple onion recipe to increase onion sales. "It allows consumers to taste the product and gives them a recipe idea to try at home with the onions."

Taste demos "should be specific in nature to benefit onion sales," adds Duda's Towell. "Showcase recipes that utilize a specific variety or type of onion or highlight how the onion adds flavors to recipes. Demos must convey why or how purchasing and adding onions to recipes is beneficial to the consumer."

According to Keystone's Kramer, "You get what you pay for in a demo. If you just set out product, you're essentially giving product

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Grow Your Green Onion Sales

Green onions are steady sellers due to their many usages. "Americans are progressing towards more ethnic foods, especially Latin and Asian cuisines, and bolder flavors," states a industry insider who wishes to remain anonymous.

Lindsay Martinez, director of marketing for Boskovich Farms, Inc., Oxnard, CA, notes, "Green onion consumption is pretty consistent year-round, but summer is definitely a time when retailers can promote them as an accompaniment for outdoor cookouts. Barbequed green onions, also known as cebollitas, are hot right now. These grilling onions are especially popular this time of year for barbequing. Green onions are also great in salads, another summertime staple."

Most consumers buy green onions in bunches, however, washed, trimmed and packaged green onions has had significant growth over the past few years.

The industry source says, "I don't think we'll ever see the market go exclusively to packaged. There's a tactile aspect to buying produce that will always create a market for the bunched product."

Bunched green onions are best sold on the wet rack, as they traditionally have been, advises Martinez. "They must be kept hydrated, so they cannot be merchandised with dry onions. Packaged green onions can be merchandised in the value-added case."

Green onions also do well when included in Hispanic and Asian cuisine. Cross-merchandise them with salsa ingredients, potatoes and salads, she advises.

Fresh-cut green onions are even more convenient for the consumer, notes the anonymous industry source. For best sales results, "Price green onions consistently throughout the year, as opposed to high during the winter and low during the summer. A constant price will garner greater overall profits for the produce department." **pb**

away. If you have a knowledgeable person who's sampling product with consumers, you're having valuable education taking place that can translate into sales."

3. MAKE ONIONS EASY TO FIND

At Bigg's, onions are typically sold from a 4x7-foot display, notes Lyons. "In the spring and summer, we'll have the end cap filled with sweet onions. In the fall and winter, the end cap will be piled with 3-pound bags of yellow cooking onions. This makes it easy for consumers to find the type of onions they are looking for."

B & R Stores display all onions together in one destination, reports Bohaty. "It's easier to trade consumers up this way."

Duda's Towell agrees, adding, "The more choices offered to consumers within the same viewing area, the better your chances of selling more than one type of onion."

Look to the apple category as a good example of setting up eye-catching displays.

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"Use the different colors of onions to make attractive color breaks," suggests Tanimura & Antle's Antle. "Reds are especially good for this."

High-graphic, display-ready cartons reduce labor and create a theater display in the store, explains Marketing Fresh's Phipps. "The carton becomes a selling tool for the product. It's a nice landscape to get the message out."

The most important part of a display is signage, states OSO Sweets' Helwig. "Always mark each bin of onions with proper signage and price. Don't mix together different types or brands of sweet onions. Unfortunately, there are a lot of so-called sweet onions that should not wear the sweet label and can turn consumers off to the category."

Some retailers are going a step beyond simply labeling the display with an onion's name, remarks VOC's Brannen. "Some will use chalkboards and tell the story of the product. Consumers today want to learn more about their food."

Onions can be displayed in bulk, bags or trays depending on consumer demands, says Duda's Towell. "Many consumers prefer to buy their onions from bulk display. They have greater control to pick the onion they want and the quantity they are looking for. Mesh bags are the preferred bag type. Most popular sizes include the 2-pound and 3-pound bags."

"With consumers now looking for value, I think you'll see more large packs, such as the 5- and 10-pound bags of sweet onions, sold mainly through club stores," adds Helwig.

When merchandising onions, be mindful of bruising. "Many retailers think because an onion is hard it can be treated like a baseball," Phipps notes. "Onions need to be handled properly and kept clean, removing loose shucks daily. Otherwise you get a dirty display that drives sales south."

4. PROMOTE OFTEN

Promoting sweet onions a couple of times per month during the summer works well, says Bigg's Lyons. "In the fall, especially in the run up to the holidays, we'll put a 3- or 5-pound bag of yellow onions on special."

Though sweet and storage onions are available year-round, Metropolitan Market's Laster uses seasonality to promote various types of onions. "We'll promote onions and let consumers know they're a new crop as they come in from Georgia, Texas, California and South America."

Summer sweet onion promotions are successful during grilling holidays, such as Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day, explains Towell. "Offering special promotions for cooking holidays, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas is also effective."

Derrell Kelso Jr., owner and president, Onions Etc., Inc., Stockton, CA, agrees. "For the winter holidays, we suggest running ads on yellow cooking onions a week or two before the holiday, such as week 49 or 50. This gets consumers to load up ahead of time. Since onions don't go bad in this length of time, any leftovers can be sold the following week during the big rush leading up to the holiday itself. Retailers who tried this promotional method this past year were very happy with it."

In January, IEO hosts Onion Lover's Month, a retail display contest that requires participating stores to incorporate Idaho-E. Oregon onion promotional materials in a weeklong display. "Many of the contest entrants do a creative job of incorporating the POS materials along with cross-merchandising other products from outside of the produce department," Finch notes. "This contest comes after the holidays to help boost onion movement for the retail stores and the Idaho-E. Oregon onion region."

5. HIGHLIGHT HEALTH BENEFITS

The healthful-eating movement is one reason why U.S. onion consumption has doubled in the past 30 years, according to Helwig. "Onions deliver great flavor without fat.

Onions are low in calories and add an abundance of flavor to any recipe, adds Towell. "They're fat- and cholesterol-free, low in sodium, high in vitamin C and a good source of fiber. Onions also contain quercetin, a flavonoid that helps protect against cardiovascular disease and cancer. This provides an excellent opportunity to educate consumers by including the health and nutritional benefits of onions on packaging and POS material."

Curry & Co.'s Curry agrees, adding, "We've been working with retailers to include some of that language on our packaging. There is a growing demand for products that educate the consumer on the health benefits of onions and where the product originates."

A study conducted by Cornell University, based in Ithaca, NY, in 2004 revealed the greater the pungent phenolic and flavanoid content in an onion, the greater its antioxidants and protective effects. "New York Bold onions were actually the pungent yellow onions used in this study," according to Queale-Dunsmoor.

Other onions that showed high levels of these health-protective pungent substances included shallots, Western Yellow and Northern Red onions. **pb**

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Reader Service #7

Discover A New Angle To Merchandising Mushrooms

Boost sales of this profitable category by focusing on health benefits, unique uses and notable versatility.

BY TRISHA J. WOOLDRIDGE

With consumers looking for new food experiences and more health benefits, mushrooms stand to benefit. The tasty vegetable can play to just about any palate. A regular shopper can enjoy mushrooms raw in a salad or cooked in side dish. Many home cooks already incorporate mushrooms into a number of unique recipes, from side dishes to main courses. Growing vegan and vegetarian demographics can utilize mushrooms, particularly portobello caps, as nutrient-rich center-of-the-plate alternatives to meat.

A major trend driving mushroom sales is health benefits. Recent discoveries about mushrooms' nutritional benefits coincide with an upsurge in consumers who read product labels.

Playing up nutritional benefits appeals to health-conscious consumers.

"It's a whole new addition to the product that's allowed us to recast mushrooms," explains Gary Schroeder, director, Dole Mushrooms, Westlake Village, CA, and president, Oakshire Mushroom Farm, Inc., Kennett Square, PA, the exclusive distributor of Dole mushrooms. "There's a nutritional identity with mushrooms that wasn't there before."

Mushrooms can be a major source of vitamin D. "It's the only natural, non-animal source — the only vegetable — to be able to supply the full recommendation of vitamin D," explains Schroeder.

Dole has a patent pending on its process of triggering vitamin D with a flash of light. "Until now, getting 100 percent of your vitamin D needs from food alone has been hard," notes Nicholas Gillitt, PhD, nutrition research and labeling manager, Dole Nutrition Institute (DMI), Westlake Village, CA.

"Mushrooms are a true super food, offering a complete package of high-impact health benefits," states Steve Farrar, chief operations officer, Golden Gourmet Mushrooms, Inc., San Marcos, CA. "[They're] high in protein content, low in calories and fat, an excellent source of niacin and vitamin D, a good source of potassium, selenium, vitamins B1 and B2 and rich in antioxidants."

"Mushrooms are an excellent meat substitute," Farrar points out. "One of the most successful mushroom marketing promotions used the catchphrase, *Mushrooms: The Meat for Vegetarians*. The promotion not only attracted vegetarians but also a large number of meat eaters who wanted ideas on reducing their meat consumption."

Promoting mushrooms in the meat department can boost sales. They can be merchandised alongside meat products for shoppers looking for a quick stop. Mushrooms in shish-kebab or stir-fry packages also sell well in the meat department]

Jim Weber, produce manager, Econo Foods, an independent 6-store chain based in Iron Mountain, MI, says, "We have mushrooms in the meat department at all times, including stuffing mushrooms, shish-kebab-cuts and 8-ounce sliced mushrooms near the steaks. They sell very well there."

Cross-merchandising with salads is a great way to remind consumers that mushrooms are excellent raw in salads. While it's a simple match, it's often forgotten. "The most common response to 'Why not put mushrooms on your salad?' is 'I didn't think of that,'" Dole's Schroeder says.

EDUCATE CONSUMERS

More consumers want information about what they eat, so providing education is essential. "North America is way behind Asia and Europe for knowledge of usage and health benefits of mushrooms," observes Joseph Salvo, president, Ponderosa Mushrooms and Specialty Foods, Port Coquitlam, BC, Canada. "[Showing] ease of use is a good

avenue for promoting mushrooms. With any mushroom, it's just slice, dice and heat on high with a little butter, salt and pepper to taste. That's it."

Brad Fritz, director of product marketing, Nugget Markets, Inc., a Woodland, CA-based chain with nine stores, does not see much information on mushroom health benefits except in certain stores and demographics. However, he adds, "The more people who know about the benefits, the better for sales."

Robert Schueller, director of public relations, Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc., Los Angeles, CA, suggests running educational promotions offering new products — "not necessarily coupons, but advertising 'Now available!' and 'Fresh!' and including information on the products."

"Mushrooms have a great nutritional story to tell," explains Paul Frederic, senior vice president of sales and marketing, To-Jo Fresh Mushrooms, Inc., Avondale, PA. "Many people are not aware of it, so it's important to get information out on the nutritional benefits of mushrooms."

For the second year in a row, the Mushroom Council, San Jose, CA, has teamed up with Weight Watchers Pick of the Season program. The promotion runs from July through September 2008. The Council will place Weight Watchers Pick of the Season labels on packs. The program will also feature in-store radio advertising highlighting the health and dietary benefits of mushrooms, and Weight Watchers will produce and distribute 1 million recipe cards featuring recipes from the Mushroom Council.

FIND A BALANCE

Stores should offer as many mushroom options as appropriate for their demographics. "We carry as many varieties as we can," reports Econo Foods' Weber. "We promote more experimenting, different tastes. We have gourmet mixes at $8 to $10 retail points selling very well."

Display size is important when deciding what is a good mix of mushrooms. Kevin Donovan, national sales manager, Phillips Mushroom Farms, Kennett Square, PA, notes most stores are still in the 4- to 6-foot range for their mushroom section and suggests "an 8- to 12-foot section is better because mushrooms are an everyday item, not seasonal."

"Shiitake is now making headway similar to how portobello and value-added did in the early 2000s," according to Schueller. "Before 2000, you really only saw white button and brown whole mushrooms."

On the other hand, Golden Gourmet's Farrar explains, "In our opinion, button mushrooms and their derivatives [criminis and portobellos] take up way too much of the allocated space. More space should be devoted to specialty mushrooms, giving the consumer more variety."

Value-added mushrooms, such as sliced or prepared, are also important to keep in the mix. To-Jo is offering a line of prepared mushrooms that need only be heated.

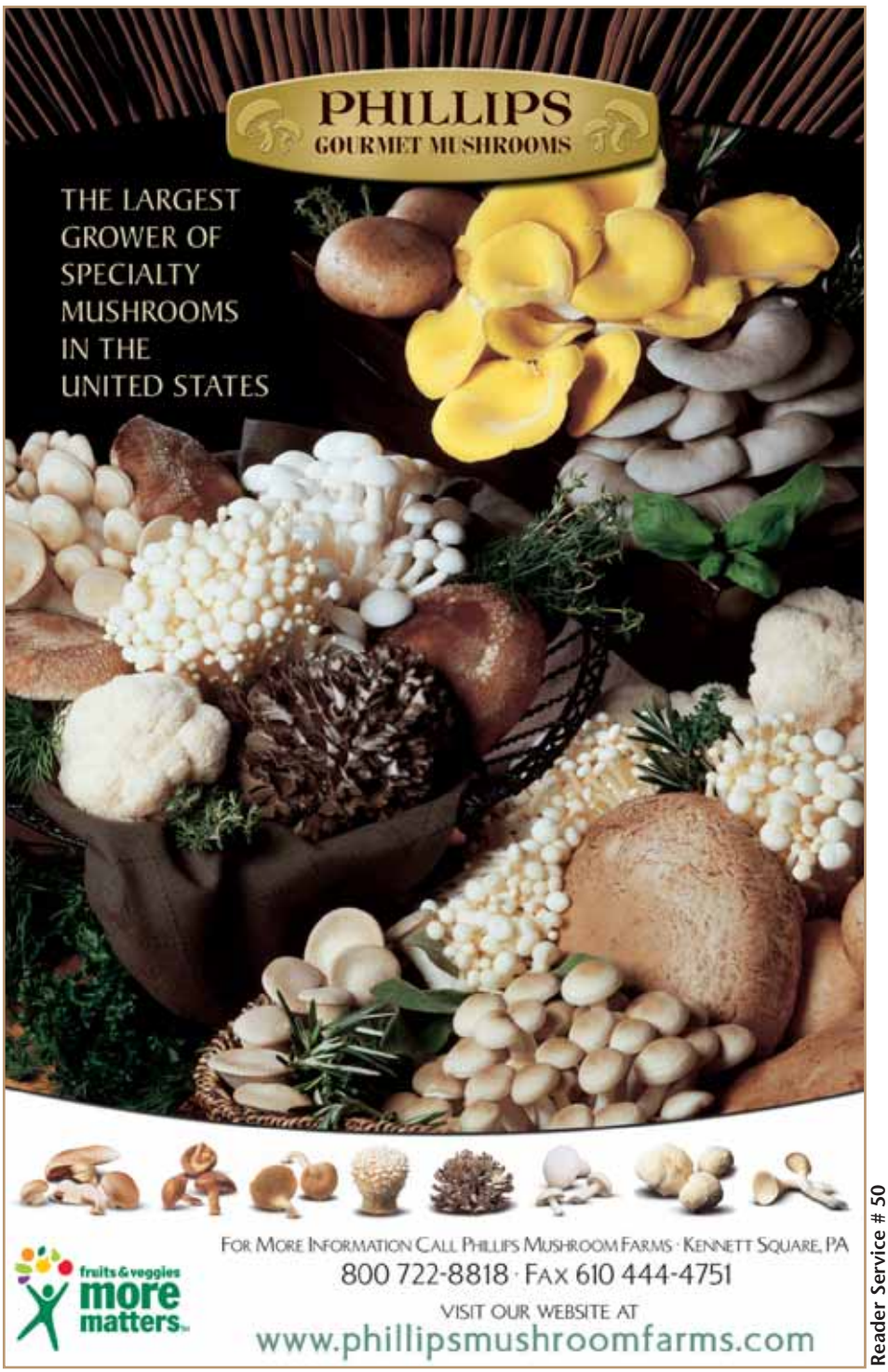
Pre-mixed mushrooms offer exotic specialty mushrooms with familiar ones. Ponderosa offers Chef's Mix, a group of five different mushrooms. "It's very attractive and a nice way to try new kinds of mushrooms," explains Salvo.

Dried mushrooms fit in best "alongside fresh, on a shelf strip," notes Melissa's Schueller. "They give an alternative. If fresh morel or porcini are unavailable, it offers that alternative."

PRESENT POWERFULLY

Maintaining the right temperature, about 34° F, and moisture extends the shelf life and makes mushrooms look more appealing. If it is too moist, mushrooms start to turn. If it's too dry, they dry out.

"If they're fresh, they sell," says Nugget Markets' Fritz. "If they're not fresh, they don't sell. We always start fresh when we fill



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Minimize Shrink

Many stores keep product on the shelves longer than it should to try to maximize sales. A poor food experience hurts not only the category but also the department.

"I'm always surprised at the number of bad looking mushrooms," notes Joseph Salvo, president, Ponderosa Mushrooms and Specialty Foods, Port Coquitlam, BC, Canada. "It filters through the whole produce department. A retailer has to know when to throw [mushrooms] away or put them somewhere else." He suggests stores use mushrooms that are still good, but not as fresh, in the deli for prepared meals.

Paul Frederic, senior vice president of sales and marketing, To-Jo Fresh Mushrooms, Inc., Avondale, PA, is surprised at how often he sees mushrooms out of stock, particularly late in the day. "Mushrooms won't sell if they're not out or if the shelves are in poor condition."

Packaging or bulk can also make a difference in shrink. "Bulk sales of specialty mushrooms generally result in a lot of shrink from both moisture loss and mechanical damage," notes Steve Farrar, chief operations officer, Golden Gourmet Mushrooms, Inc., San Marcos, CA. "Most of the specialty mushroom species are more delicate than the button mushrooms and unless the mushrooms are packaged carefully, they may become quickly unappealing on the produce shelf." **pb**

the display first thing in the morning and continue to put the freshest on the top."

To help maintain freshness, moisture and even temperature, Fritz suggests displaying bulk mushrooms on beds of parsley. "They don't dry up as quickly," he adds.

"It turns my stomach when I lift a package with an exorbitant price and it looks awful," claims Salvo. He argues that many stores price mushrooms, particularly specialties, too high so people are afraid to buy. If they do buy and the mushrooms aren't fresh, it jeopardizes future purchases.

"A retailer needs to commit to keeping an item on the shelf," he advises. "It takes time to develop and expand a category. If it's seasonal, get it in. People watch Food Network and know when items should be available. You just need that commitment." **pb**

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Reader Service # 26

DETROIT
Caters To Diverse Market

Motor City revs up produce offerings to meet the evolving needs of its complex consumer base.

BY LISA LIEBERMAN

Founded in 1701, Detroit is one of the oldest cities in the Midwest and the 11th largest city in the United States. It is also home to one of the country's oldest and most unique terminal produce markets. The market, which opened in 1929, services a very diverse clientele, including people with English, German, Polish, Irish, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, African and Greek backgrounds. African Americans, Hispanics and Middle Easterners currently make up the majority of the city's population.

"One thing that makes the city unique is that it has one million Arab Americans," notes Phillip Riggio, president of Aunt Mid's Produce Company in the Detroit Produce Terminal. "This is huge for us because Arab Americans do a lot of cooking and use a lot more vegetables than many Caucasian Americans do and they go to the markets every day, not just once or twice a week."

The Detroit metropolitan area has a population of four million people and is the 12th wealthiest metropolitan district in the United States. Although the automotive industry still accounts for roughly 20 percent of all jobs in the Detroit, more than 75 percent of the labor force is employed in non-manufacturing jobs.

The spirit of innovation in Detroit has made the city a mecca of commerce and is reflected in the Detroit Produce Terminal market, which has been a major part of the city's commercial hub for the past 80 years. Jeff

Abrash, president of Andrews Brothers, Inc. in Detroit, says his company has had a presence in the marketplace since its inception. "We've been in the Detroit area for more than 100 years. There have been four generations of us at Andrews Brothers – my father, my great uncle and my great grandfather."

Family tradition also keeps Ben B. Schwartz & Sons, Inc., Detroit, MI, strong, explains Nate Stone, chief operating officer. "The fourth generation of the family has just come on board in this company and it's really fun to see the continuity. We have four pairs of fathers and sons in the company and I think it really says a lot about us because the older generation has so much confidence and trust in its children."

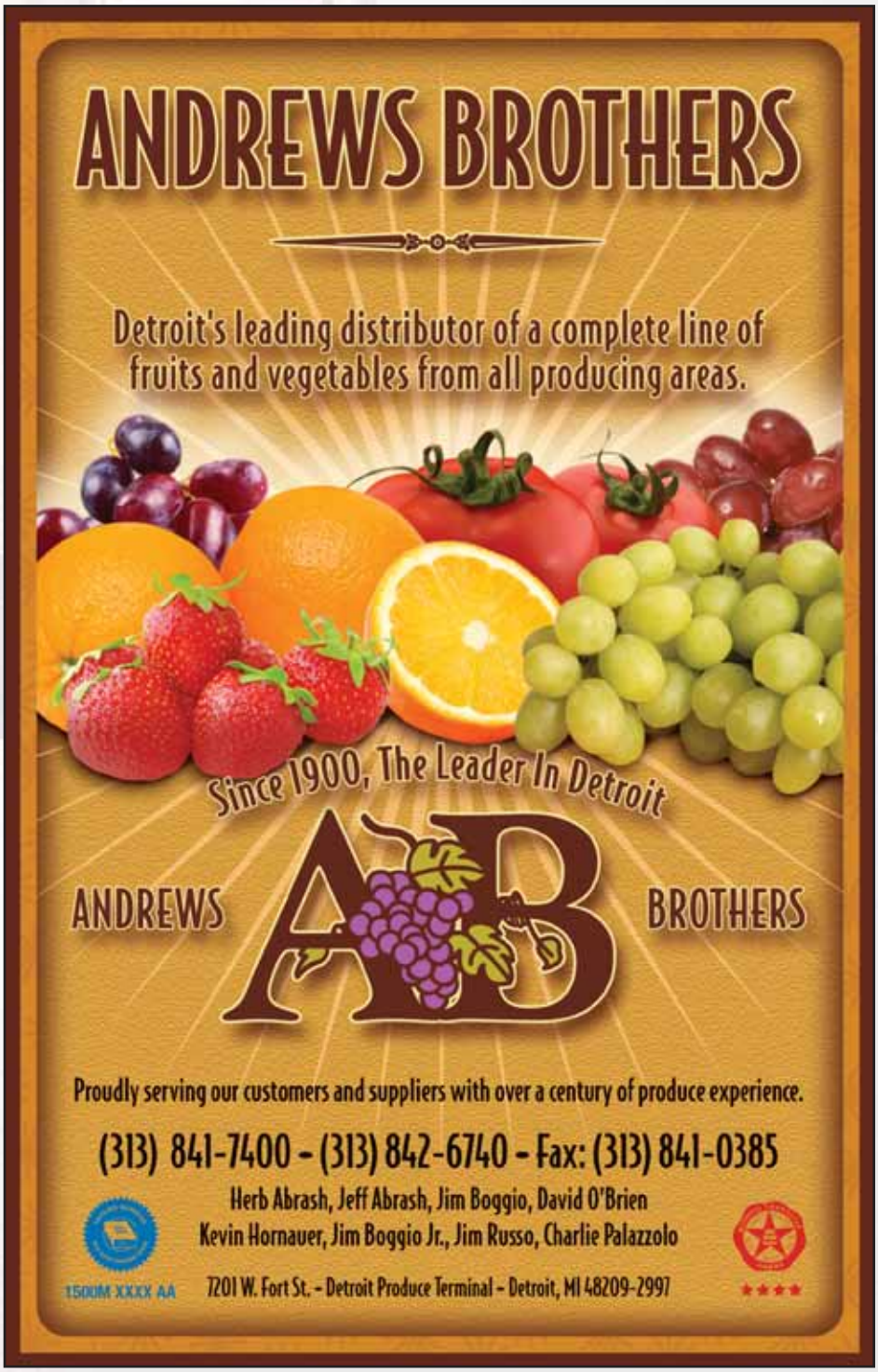
Abrash, who has worked at the market for 31 years, says the Detroit Produce Terminal has always been one of the strongest produce markets in the country. "We have some strong operators on the terminal who are aggressive about doing their best to source product properly and pass it along to the trade at what ends up being a relatively modest up-charge. Whether we're selling to independent retailers, chain stores or foodservice wholesalers, people can take advantage of all the variety we have to offer. There are some people who shop the market every day and source 100 percent of their product from the market."

One of the main advantages of working out of Detroit is its proximity to Canada. The Ambassador Bridge, which is one of the world's longest suspension bridges, links the city to Ontario. The closeness to Canada puts the terminal market in a prime position to supply produce to Canada and to source Canadian produce, particularly hothouse tomatoes and vegetables. The city is in the process of building a second bridge, which will make commerce even easier for produce operators at the terminal, next to the Ambassador Bridge, explains Mike Bommarito, president, R.A.M. Produce Distributors, LLC in Detroit. "We have one of the best locations for a produce market anywhere. We're right next to Canada and we have great access to major freeways."

STRONG CUSTOMER MIX

Buyers at the Detroit market include a mix of fruit marketers, independent retailers, chain stores and wholesale foodservice operators. The fruit marketers are among the terminal market's main supporters. Rather than selling large numbers of grocery items, most of the fruit markets specialize in produce as well as deli, meats, wines and cheeses, reports Jack Russo, president, Rocky Produce, Inc. in Detroit. "A lot of these people come every single day to buy fresh. They're trying to buy the best quality produce that's out there and they want nothing but the best. That's why you get some people who start shopping at 1:30 AM and wait as late as 10 or 11 AM to get what they want. None of the business is over the phone. It's all in person."

Eddie Isayev, president of Brooklyn, NY-based Eddie's Produce Express, which also operates out of the Detroit terminal market, says that many of his customers shop the market at least three or four times a week. "There are guys who have five or 10 stores who come here all



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Cost-Savings Strategies

Buying habits in Detroit are already beginning to change as the costs of produce rise. "The high price of fuel is affecting everything in a negative way, and people are going to spend only so much on food, especially people who are on fixed incomes," explains Sonny Randazzo, owner, Randazzo Fresh Market, Macomb, MI. Since produce makes up the majority — 70 percent — of his business, he's going to have to find ways to satisfy his customers while still making a profit.

One thing Randazzo plans on doing to keep prices down is to start selling smaller sizes. "Instead of selling a 72 orange, we might sell an 88. Instead of a 72 apple, we might sell a 100-sized apple," he explains. "This is a way to keep quality high and costs down. You never want to sacrifice quality. You can always go to smaller sizes, but you never want to sacrifice quality."

In some ways, offering smaller sizes makes sense, Randazzo adds. "Everyone wants to get a little bit more for their buck and the good thing about smaller sizes is that you're wasting less. If you have a big apple, for example, sometimes you can't finish the whole thing, but with a small apple you can. If you can get three small apples for the price of one big apple, you're ahead of the game." **pb**

the time. They like the market because it's easy access and easy to get what they want."

Bob Harding, produce director/terminal buyer, Westborn Market, a Livonia, MI-based chain with three stores, spends about 10 hours a day at the market at least five days a week. "The Detroit terminal market is really good for us because we're able to pick and choose our own fruits and vegetables on a daily basis. The chain stores, meanwhile, are all buying their product fob off of trucks."

The Detroit fruit markets are a unique story in and of themselves. "Many of the chains in Detroit try to emulate the fruit markets because they don't do as good of a job with produce as we do," explains Harding. "We're down at the terminal on a daily basis, so we have more of an edge over the chain stores. We're able to get very high quality produce items and sell them cheaper than the chains."

Another thing Harding does to give himself an edge over the chains is to sell larger sizes. "We're very price competitive and we up the sizes of our produce. We sell things like jumbo cantaloupes, and if the chains are selling size 12 cauliflowers, we'll be selling size 9."

Westborn's three stores service a varied clientele including working class, elderly, middle class and upscale consumers. "We also have a whole realm of ethnicities we try to cater to. We serve Middle Easterners and a high population of Mexican and Chinese consumers."

According to Ben Schwartz' Stone, the ethnic diversity of the Detroit metropolitan area is one of the major factors that has fueled so much of the company's growth. "We've really expanded our product line and a lot of our exotic items have become a lot more mainstream."

The strong cooking tradition among different ethnic groups in the Detroit area helps keep the terminal market strong. "Our biggest growth area has been in the Middle Eastern population," according to Stone. "They eat as the did in the old days when people went shopping every day and cooked homemade meals." Opo squash, Indian bitter melon and burro bananas are a few of the ethnic niche items Ben Schwarz offers.

The fact that small retailers such as Westborn have managed to stay strong in the face of retail consolidation around the country, speaks well of the retailers and their suppliers at the terminal market. "[Fruit marketers] are a very dedicated and hard-working group of people who work around the clock," Andrew Brothers' Abrash notes. "We do our best to satisfy their needs. There are several hundred retailers like them who all have different ideas about what they're looking for. That gives us a lot of options as far as outlets go, and so we know if one thing isn't right for one customer, it will be right for another customer."

PRODUCE BUYING TRENDS

Local consumers are becoming savvy about specialty produce items, such as Persian pickles, heirloom tomatoes, personal-sized watermelons and different pluot varieties.

The Rosso Bruno tomato, a small, brown, very flavorful tomato sourced directly from Canada, has become especially popular in the past two years, Harding reports.

Sonny Randazzo, owner, Randazzo Fresh Market, a Macomb, MI-based chain with three stores, describes his customers as mostly Italians, Croatians and Southern Europeans, who all use plenty of produce in their cooking. "One thing I've noticed is that everyone likes Italian food. We sell a lot of your meat-and-potatoes-type produce like cauliflower and broccoli, but we also sell a whole lot of tomatoes, rapini, fen-

nel, basil and parsley."

Organics are on the rise. "The organic category was stagnant for a while, states Harding, "but now we're starting to see a boost in sales."

Abrash views the rise in organics as more evolutionary than revolutionary. "Typically, when new things arrive, it's a slow process. With organics, for example, we're selling certain organic commodities where there's volume to support the offerings. We've noticed a few commodities in organics growing in the past two or three years. Berries, for example, are becoming more popular. They went from a crawl to a walk to a steady walk – not at a run, but at a steady walk."

Photo courtesy of Westborn Market

VALUE-ADDED PRODUCT

Value-added product is growing in popularity in the Detroit area. At Aunt Mid's, for example, the main produce item is spinach. Aunt Mid's is a household name for spinach in the Tri-State Region, where much of the company's product gets sold. "We do more processing than any other wholesaler on the market," according to Riggio. "We buy spinach in bulk, process it, package it and sell it under our own label. It's become a very important item for us because there's a big push for value-added products."

Buyers are also asking for other types of value-added vegetables, such as microwavable vegetables and greens. "People used to buy the whole green, then cut and process it themselves, but not anymore," Riggio explains. "People are in a rush and they want prepackaged food."

About 65 percent of Aunt Mid's business is retail. The rest is foodservice, which mostly comprises large broadliners, such as U.S. Foodservice, Inc., based in Columbia, MD, and Sysco Corporation, based in Houston, TX.

Like many terminal markets, a big challenge facing the Detroit terminal market is the high price of fuel. "Trucks from California are costing $7,000," Riggio points out. "I've never seen them that high in my life. It makes it pretty tough on us. Traditionally, the cost of the product would be $10 and freight would be $4. These days, that number has reversed and the fobs are lower than the cost of freight." Fortunately, most buyers understand the rising costs, because, he adds, "since it's hitting everyone at once." **pb**

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Reader Service # 76

Potatoes Heating Up Menus

Restaurateurs are spicing up menus with new and exciting forms of the popular vegetable.

BY MEREDITH AUERBACH

Today, restaurant owners and chefs are looking at potatoes with a fresh point of view and finding new opportunities to utilize the popular vegetable on their menus. The vast majority of foodservice usage involves baked russet-type potatoes, hash browns and french fries, but foodservice potato professionals urge menu planners and restaurateurs to think of the potato as a blank canvas receptive to creativity in terms of flavors and presentation.

"We are seeing traditional potato treatments moved upscale to accompany lunch and dinner entrées," explains Don Ordiorne, vice president of foodservice, Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), Boise, ID. "The seasoning becomes more exotic and distinct — say grated parmesan and truffle oil on fried fresh chips or slices. Or, take a commercial potato concept like Tater Tots and adapt it to mashed potatoes mixed with fresh herbs and cheese, rolled in Japanese-style crispy bread crumbs and then fried. It's the loved and familiar re-invented. Many levels of restaurants can make use of these ideas."

Innovation begins in the potato fields where growers plant and harvest new or less familiar varieties in an effort to offer interesting choices to customers. Many are heirloom or heritage varieties with appealing sizes, creative shapes and unique colors.

"An early potato to spark up the variety mix was the yellow-fleshed potato, often Yukon Gold," reports Jamey Higham, vice president of new business development and foodservice, Potandon Produce, LLC, an Idaho Falls, ID-based marketer of Green Giant potatoes. "People loved them and it helped create curiosity about other varieties. The newest hot varieties are European fingerlings, colored potatoes, such as deep purple, and our own proprietary potato Klondike Rose, a red-skinned potato with buttery yellow flesh."

Photo courtesy of Idaho Potato Commission

Foodservice venues of all kinds are creating new, exciting and upscale presentations for America's favorite vegetable.

Cliff Corwin, marketing and sales manager for Skagit Valley's Best Produce, Inc., Mount Vernon, WA, says, "The industry is rebounding following several years of low prices and weak demand associated with low-carb diets. We had a smaller crop this past year and that translated into strong demand and pricing.

"Today, foodservice breaks into several layers," he continues. "Some chains are trying to stabilize costs and asking for contract pricing. If the menu allows it, some buys are moving to a U.S. No. 2, which allows certain small defects that can be cut out if the recipes call for dices or slices. High-end operations raise public awareness of all potatoes by using fingerlings, roasted or mashed yellow varieties and potatoes done in different ways. Most of foodservice, however, doesn't change quickly."

FOODSERVICE RESEARCH

Industry promotion and marketing organizations are uniquely positioned to support their grower/shipper members by working with foodservice leaders to develop menu concepts using potatoes. Most consumer food trends have their starts at U.S. restaurants or abroad.

Each year, the U.S. Potato Board (USPB), Denver, CO, and Greystone, the Napa Valley campus of the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), Hyde Park, NY, host a 3-day seminar called Menu Ideas with Potatoes and invite research and executive chefs from major chain restaurants to attend. [*Editor's note: Please see* Cultivate Potatoes' Versatility *on page 91*.] Sessions with demonstrations by award-winning chefs, growers and nutrition-

Cultivate Potatoes' Versatility

Photo courtesy of Culinary Institute Of America

The potato has longtime served as an essential part of menus both nationally and internationally. "I don't think there's a country in the world that doesn't view the potato as an essential part of its food," reports Bill Briwa, chef-instructor, Culinary Institute of America (CIA), Hyde Park, NY. "It's all about tried-and-true satisfaction and familiarity. Potatoes have such a high satiety value."

The U.S. Potato Board (USPB), Denver, CO, teams up with Greystone, the Napa Valley campus of CIA, to host an annual 3-day seminar, Menu Ideas with Potatoes, inviting research and executive chefs from major chain restaurants. "The seminars we have held here move fast, changing flavor themes day to day," explains Briwa. "Chefs from major companies are invited and they attend because the bottom line is about using creativity to impact sales. The participants bring their world experience and we all learn from each other. In foodservice today, we don't have much time to be playful with food ideas.

"Look at a company like Compass [Group, North America, Charlotte, NC] that does the foodservice for the main Google campus [in Mountain View, CA]," he continues. "It has a lot of purchasing power and a very exacting audience. What it brings to us and what we give to it keep the cycle going."

CIA even has a free online training course on potatoes to help foodservice companies. "We've always promoted the versatility of the potato," according to Meredith Myers, USPB public relations manager. "After doing these programs, the enduring lesson is how simple it is to innovate with potatoes. Dipping sauces of all kinds are ideal with roasted or fried potatoes. We see potatoes substituted for bread. Nancy Silverton, chef and partner at Mozza, a popular restaurant in Los Angeles, developed a Caesar salad with grilled potatoes instead of croutons. The possibilities are endless.

"More restaurants are interested in offering better-for-you food and the great nutrition profile of the potatoes works well with this approach," Myers continues. "Trends of using lighter flavors that are enhanced with vinegars, mustards, vegetables and herbs are showing up on more menus. It is a natural outgrowth of how global flavors travel."

In a less rarified atmosphere, there are still many highly successful restaurant and foodservice operations that continue to rely on the same potato recipes that have satisfied customers for years.

Frisch's Big Boy, a Cincinnati, OH-based franchise operation of Raleigh, NC-based Golden Corral, has 89 locations. The chain uses potatoes as a filler food. "We use potatoes about every way they come — fresh, frozen, refrigerated and dehydrated," explains Karen Maier, a member of the operating family. "We use the type that's right for each menu item. Our menu and recipes come from headquarters so we don't have much latitude [to innovate]. Baked potatoes, hash browns, french fries and mashed potatoes are all customer favorites. We need the right potatoes because holding quality is so important to us and to our customers." **pb**

ists focus on numerous varieties of potatoes. The seminar culminates with presentations from participating chefs who strut their stuff using all forms of potatoes in restaurant-appropriate recipes.

These concepts form the basis of the USPB foodservice promotion program for the year. The ideas are flavorful, full of visual impact and easy to adapt to different styles of restaurants. During the past couple of years, the hot flavor palates tend to be Latin, Mediterranean and Asian. Indeed, these flavors — citrus, chiles, olive oil, tropical fruits, vinaigrettes — drive consumer tastes and elevate potatoes above the old standards of bakers and french fries and negate the need for traditional high-fat toppings of butter, sour cream and bacon.

Like the USPB, the IPC is taking the lead to identify and track new foodservice potato concepts and get the word out to chefs and restaurant operators, working with individual top chefs to "reinvent classic potato recipes with modern flair."

IPC's Ordiorne has a list of potato ideas that can be readily executed in foodservice operations. He points to Idaho Potato Lollipops developed by Marriott Corp., Washington, D.C. — thick-sliced rounds of russet potatoes seasoned, fried and served on popsicle sticks with a variety of dipping sauces. He also notes potato waffles served with prime rib at Denver's Cherry Hills Country Club in Englewood, CO, and fried potato salad with a hot crisp crust from the West Town Tavern in Chicago, IL. "These all represent familiar foods taken upscale very simply."

Odiorne continues, "We are promoting another concept called Regional Flavors. Everyone loves the flavor combinations of the Mediterranean, Southeast Asia, Indian, Latin American and the Pacific Rim. These flavor groups become the foundation toppings for baked potatoes, dipping sauces for roasted wedges, french fries or herb and seasoning blends to use with fried, roasted or mashed potatoes."

The Colorado Potato Administrative Committee (CPAC), Monte Vista, CO, created a promotional team with an innovative local restaurant chef and the American Lamb Board (ALB), Denver, CO. "We grow a great deal of specialty potato varieties, including fingerlings, reds and a purple variety called Purple Majesty that stays purple during cooking," notes Linda Weyers, CPAC assistant director.

"Working with local chef Lachlan McKinnon-Patterson gives us the opportunity to demonstrate new ideas with our varieties and to exemplify the local food movement that is important to Colorado residents," she adds. "Consumers then buy more local prod-

Reader Service # 14

uct and other restaurants are inspired by recipes using potatoes closer to the center of the plate. The ideas are straightforward and involve different varieties combined and roasted, smashed and distinctively seasoned."

Photo courtesy of Idaho Potato Commission

Tim Hobbs, director of development and grower relations, Maine Potato Board (MPB), Presque Isle, ME, points out, "The potato industry is a mature one that keeps getting more productive. Yield per acre keeps increasing, so about 65 percent of our crop goes to processing. Even so, new products like blue potato chips keep people interested. Several of our member companies are developing refrigerated fresh processed potatoes for foodservice use. Items, such as fresh mashed, shreds for hash browns and various cuts from wedges to diced potatoes, enable restaurants to serve distinctive potato dishes while controlling labor costs. We think these products will be the wave of the future for chains."

Industry insiders predict promotional activities will bring new awareness of potatoes in foodservice.

"Most of the volume for foodservice is in russet-type potatoes for fries and baking and often are the smaller sizes," according to Karen Lynn-Townshend, market development officer, Prince Edward Island (PEI) Potato Board, Charlottetown, PEI, Canada. "During the past few years, red-skinned and yellow potatoes have increased and creamers — the small round red and yellow potatoes — are gaining popularity."

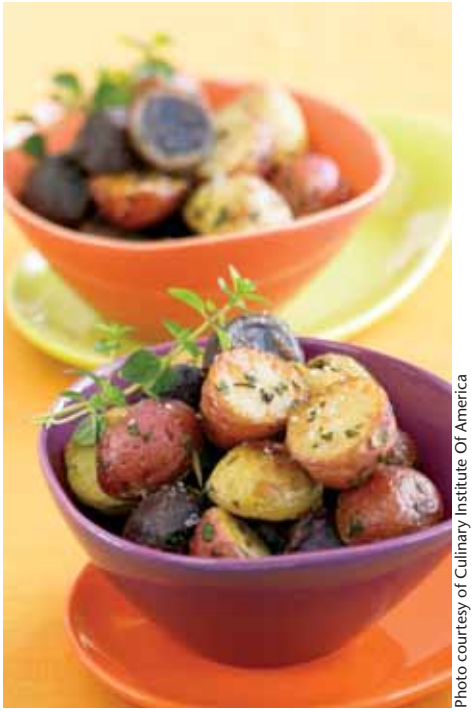
Photo courtesy of Culinary Institute Of America

SPECIALTY POTATOES

New and unusual potato varieties are often born in Europe and brought back to the United States by chefs or forward-thinking potato growers.

Wada Farms Marketing Group, LLC, Idaho Falls, ID, produces a full range of potato varieties. Kevin Stanger, senior vice president of sales and marketing, identifies colored potatoes, primarily purple and fingerling, as currently trendy. "We mostly sell to foodservice distributors. Some of their customers are requesting fingerlings, but most chains don't yet because they are so expensive. Fingerlings are a great tasting potato. Their skin gives them an earthy flavor. They're not easy to grow and even more difficult to harvest. We can't use the normal equipment because potato fingers break off so easily."

To take advantage of a market niche, Richard Leibowitz, president and owner of Culinary Specialty Produce, Inc., Mountainside, NJ, is building a group of small, sustainable, organic farms in four states to grow specialty potatoes for foodservice and retail customers. The group will supply small boxes of creamers, marble creamers, three varieties of fingerlings and Purple Peruvians. "We believe these heirloom varieties from around the world can capture the center of the plate," Leibowitz explains. "They look better and taste better than typical potatoes. Roasted slices in a napoleon with other vegetables and creamy cheese can be a lovely entrée. For this market, specialty ingredient pricing is reasonable, and with sufficient volume, a year-round market can be developed." **pb**

Offer Consumers Options With Fresh-Cut Carrots

Attract consumers to the fresh-cut carrot category with a good selection of quality product.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Some industry experts believe the fresh-cut carrot phenomena has reached its peak, while many others point to steady sales and continued opportunity.

"The category has been surprisingly strong and is really being driven over the past two to three years by value-added and organic," reports Phil Gruszka, vice president of marketing, Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA. "Value-added has consistently performed in the double digits."

"The category is a steady staple," says Dick Rissman, produce director for Dahl's Food Stores, a 12-store chain based in Des Moines, IA. "The convenience definitely sells the product and [carrots] remain popular with consumers."

Baby carrots and value-added items continue to top the category. "Babies are still the main choice for consumers," according to Harry Sheaffer, sales representative, Marker 29 Produce, Inc., Onancock, VA, "but they're picking up other convenience fresh-cut carrot items as well. I think we're going to see growth on chips and anything geared toward kids, such as snack packs."

"We're doing more in category management and doing more in terms of bringing insight to our retailers," states Gruszka. "The carrot category is one of the largest for grocery stores. Consumers have responded particularly to our value-added products. The encouraging thing for me is while many of these products are in double-digit growth, there are still a lot of distribution voids out there. As more retailers realize the potential for these products, they will put them in more stores and it will continue to grow."

Retailers can grow sales by broadening their offering. "A great deal of this is dictated by space limitations, but we encourage the retailer to get a full line of value-added carrots in the department because our research has shown these are incremental to the category," he continues. "Consumers will automatically buy the 1-pound baby carrots but they'll buy the other items, too. The big issue is having a full line of products rather than large space. The 1-pound baby carrot bag is the highest velocity, but if you add these other carrot items, you'll see incremental sales."

A good selection and options help attract consumers. "Each product can have a special use, such as grilled, microwaved, boiled, steamed, baked, stir-fried, snacking, soups, desserts, salads or juicing," notes Mark Luchak, vice president of produce and floral operations, Rice Epicurean Markets, a 5-store chain based in Houston, TX. "We get incremental sales, especially with cross-merchandising and secondary displays."

Photo courtesy of Food Lion

With valued-added carrots, the broader the selection, the greater the sales potential.

Adequate space is important when offering variety. "Don't cheat on the presentation or it will hurt you," notes Rissman. "A wider selection of products draws attention and gives consumers the confidence you have what they're looking for. If you don't have it, you can't sell it!"

"The more products in the category, the more attention it will draw," Sheaffer adds. "Other presentations, such as chips and shreds, can be impulse items."

KNOW WHAT'S OUT THERE

While many stores focus on the babies, it's important to know the other products available in the category. "Organics are taking off on a wide spectrum and we're seeing distribution going up strong," reports Gruszka. "Another strong product is the microwavable bag. We have some partners doing the same dollars in this one SKU as they're doing in their entire bagged carrots combined."

One of the most popular items at Lowe's Pay N Save Supermarket, an 80-plus-store chain based in Littlefield, TX, is the 2-pound baby carrot pack, notes Julian Haligan, produce manager at a store in Lubbock, TX. "But we're seeing some interest in other products like the chips."

"While the peeled baby is the most popular, we have a lot of luck with shredded and the carrot dippers, baby carrots with dip," reports Luchak.

Introducing new or innovative items in the category will help keep it exciting for consumers, suggests Jeff Brechler, sales representative, J & D Produce, Inc., Edinburg, TX.

"Look at innovation and try to bring new things out," recommends Gruszka. "Under the CalOrganic [label], we've introduced yellow baby carrots and what we call Color Shred, which are a combination of yellow and orange shreds."

OFFER DEMOS

Retailers can help consumers learn about newer value-added carrot products through demos. "There's a huge learning curve to be tackled as far as consumer education and consumer awareness on some of these newer items," reports J & D's Brechler.

Newer color varieties, such as J & D's Beta Sweet Maroon, a bi-color purple and orange carrot, are good products to use for samplings and other in-store consumer education events, he adds.

"These are great demo items because you can tie in other things," agrees Rice's Luchak. "In produce, you can demo with dips and sauces or you can combine them with items other departments may be sampling. Make sure to keep a display of carrots with all demos."

Kids — baby-carrot fans — can drive sales of new products. "Value-added carrots appeal to kids and can be cross-merchandised with dips for incremental sales," advises Brechler. "The newer products are no exception. We're looking into a multipack so we can make a lunchbox-oriented pack. Right now, we're looking at different types of packaging to see what will work the best."

"Catering more to kids will increase sales," states Marker 29's Scheaffer. "Introducing kids to other products in the category, such as the chips and sticks, will promote more items. Make it a fun spot in the store."

PROMOTE VALUE

A good promotion strategy will help move this profitable category. "The products on a price-per-pound standpoint tend to be higher for the retailer, and you can get some good rings in there," adds Grimmway's Gruszka. "However, don't promote the same sizes of different products during the same week. For example, you don't want a 1-pound baby conventional and a 1-pound organic on ad at the same time. Our research has shown it doesn't add sales."

These items should be put on sale often, says Lowe's Haligan. "They move significantly more when they're on sale. Even a slight reduction in price really helps move them."

Retailers are cautioned to treat different items in the category with distinct sales pricing. "The price point on organics does not need to be as low as what you promote on a conventional product," advises Gruszka. "We recommend an average of 10¢ higher on promotions when you do organic versus conventional. The price point should not be a parity on promotion. Organic should be higher for similar size product."

Stores should continue to use all promotional tools. "We keep carrots in our monthly promotional calendar with our ads or do in-store promotions," adds Luchak.

DISPLAY EFFECTIVELY

The right display will be oriented toward your consumers' preference. "We have retailers going about their display two different ways — either using carrots as color breaks between the green vegetables or putting all the carrots in one section," Gruszka notes. "We've seen good results either way. The most important thing is to discover what works with your consumers."

Dahl's spreads carrots "throughout the department for greater exposure and to promote impulse sales," reports Rissman.

Keeping carrots visible is important. "Our main focus is to display them where consumers can see them easily," says Lowe's Haligan. "We put the 2-pound minis on the top shelf. We also like to display them near the lettuce. Consumers will pick up a head of lettuce and the carrots."

Other fresh-cut items complement fresh-cut carrots. "Value-added items are complementary," Rissman notes. "Carrots are a unique item and go with so many different things, so cross-merchandising them with other fresh-cut items only helps sell."

"We have multiple displays," reports Luchak. "The value-added section is a great place to display the shredded, sticks, matchsticks and crinkle-cut coins. We have multiple displays, and it's great to use their color to brighten up display cases. This color can bring attention to the many different choices we have to offer."

PUSH HEALTH ATTRIBUTES

Carrots have considerable scientific research behind their long-standing health claims. "Retailers can promote the health benefits and direct consumers to the nutritional information on the fresh-cut packaging," states Scheaffer. "Antioxidants are the 'in' thing right now. Retailers can gain greater exposure for the product and their department by highlighting these attributes."

"Our new Beta Sweet fits into selling health benefits," explains Brechler. It's something unique for retailers to promote within the health-message area. We're now offering them in an 8-ounce package with nutritional info on the bag." **pb**

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Reader Service # 48

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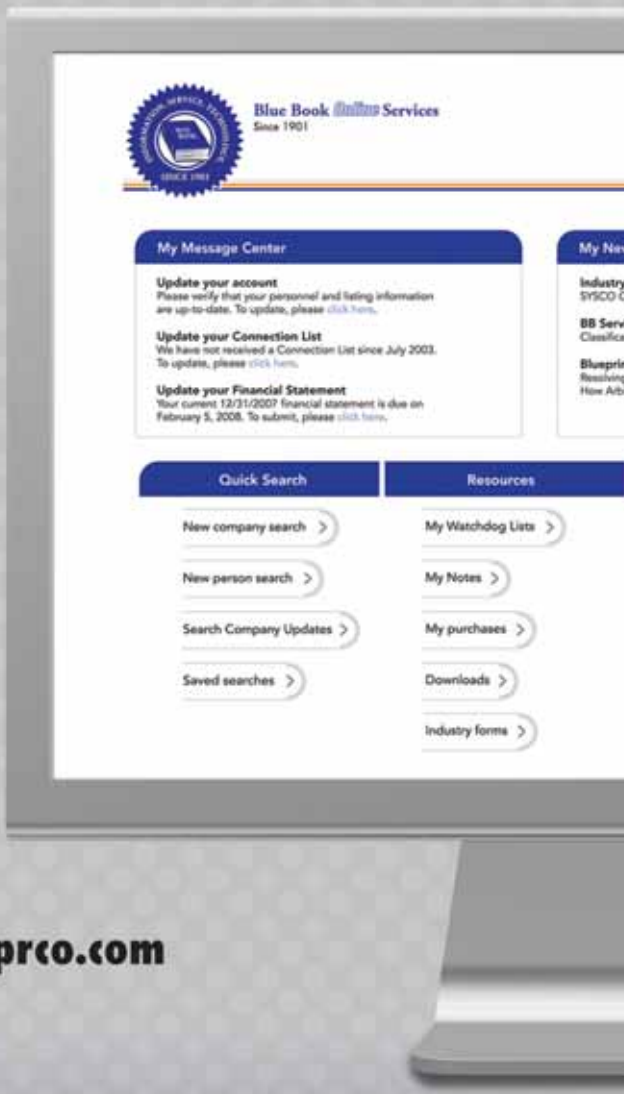

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The most important tip – Try it out!

Reader Service # 95

Rake In Sales With Raisins

Drive sales of this long-time favorite through additional promotion, cross-merchandising and good product placement.

BY LISA SOCARRAS

The wide appeal of raisins means retailers can increase year-round retail sales. "Raisins are one of the most natural snack foods that appeal to the broadest consumer base," explains Lisa Goshgarian, marketing manager of Mariani Packing Company, Vacaville, CA.

"The demographics will surprise you," notes Jeff McLemore, product manager of Sunsweet Growers, Inc., Yuba City, CA. "It's not just the moms buying raisins. The elderly like them for adding to their cereal or oatmeal or snacks."

Joe Tamble, vice president of sales, Sun-Maid Growers of California, Kingsburg, CA, adds, "The vast majority of dried fruit, including raisins, gets purchased by all demographic groups. Purchases are highest in the 50-plus age group and among mothers, ages 28 to 48."

Raisins are portable and can be carried in vehicles, bags, lunch boxes and backpacks. Plus, they can withstand temperature changes. "Actually, they're better in the heat," reports Michele Meisch, who recently left her position as marketing manager for the California Raisin Marketing Board (CRMB), Fresno, CA. "Keep them in the glove box of your car — they taste great warm. You can throw a box of raisins in your gym bag, diaper bag and your desk drawer."

The health benefits of raisins make them a perfect snack between meals. "With an increased consumer focus on healthful snacking, raisins and other dried fruit can play a starring role," explains Tonya Antle, vice president of organic sales, Earthbound Farm, San Juan Bautista, CA.

Raisins are a nutritious alternative to junk food and satisfy the sweet tooth without the negative effects of sugared products. "Raisins are a perfect healthful snack along with juice boxes and water bottles that have replaced soda in machines in many schools," notes Tamble.

Raisins have a wide demographic appeal and a long shelf life.

For consumers to purchase raisins, they have to know where to find them. "The produce section is where everybody is putting raisins — that's where it's at," notes Chris Rosendahl, manager of Batth Farms, Caruthers, CA.

"It's always best for dried fruit to be in the produce department as opposed to being hidden in grocery with the baking ingredients," Antle advises. "When they're in produce, shoppers think about them as a fresh and delicious food. When they're in grocery, consumers think of them as ingredients."

Displaying raisins in prime locations is the best way to get the attention of consumers. "Merchandising raisins [in the produce department] is a fresh way for retailers to promote the product," according to Goshgarian. "You typically find raisins in the grocery aisle, but when they're in produce, it can show consumers additional ways to utilize the product — salad, yogurt or cottage cheese — since these areas are often adjacent to produce."

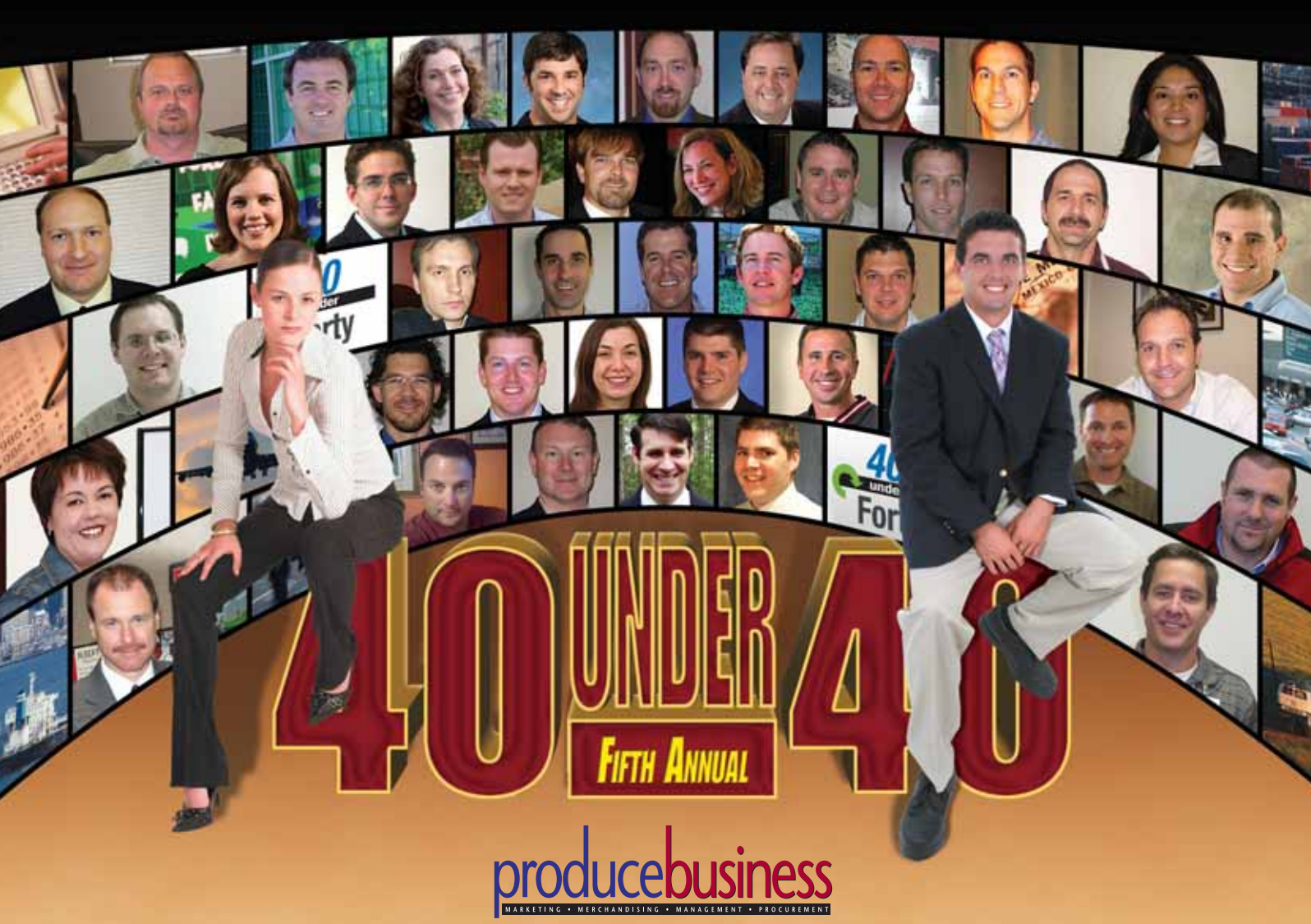
"Since we sell through produce, we prefer the end of the produce aisle for our display," reports Paul Bellacero, director of sales development for Aurora Products, Inc., Stratford, CT. "Separate displays help sales. Using a display-ready case out in the open helps tremendously. In many stores, the produce department is in the front of the store, so most people notice."

A new seasonal location can add consumer interest. "During fall and winter, try rowing them within your apple display, especially between Rome, Beauty, Cortland and Granny Smith varieties since they're a great baking item," Adam Peltz, perishable merchandiser/buyer, Home Economist Market, a 3-store chain based in Charlotte, NC, suggests.

"In the summer months, when bag salad displays seem to produce the most volume, try a nice presentation with croutons and dressings," he notes. "They help complement any salad."

THEMED PROMOTIONS

Promotions with unique themes work



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PRODUCE BUSINESS is accepting nominations for its Fifth Annual 40 Under Forty Project, which recognizes the produce industry's top young leaders.

Honorees will be selected based on their professional accomplishments, demonstrated leadership and industry/community contributions. To be eligible, nominees must be under the age of 40 as of January 1 (People born after January 1, 1969).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by March 1, 2009, and fax back to 561-994-1610.

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In 100 words or less, describe why this person should be nominated:
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well to create excitement. "It is important to attract back-to-school shoppers," says Sunsweet's McLemore. "It's good to use a secondary display — the display-ready case that goes somewhere besides the normal place."

"Back-to-school time is huge," CRMB's Meisch stresses. "People are concerned about what their kids eat and want it to be healthful and affordable."

"Many times there is a dedicated section in the produce department for dried fruits and raisins where displays are placed," says Aurora's Bellacero. "Back-to-school season is an important promotion time. Most kids like raisins. They're an alternative to candy."

Displays can also be included in other parts of the store for back-to-school time. "The fake-fruit snack aisle [where items like fruit rollups and gummy fruit snacks are kept] is also good for displays," McLemore adds, stating that this could supplement the display in the produce department.

Displays, accompanied by ads produce the best results. "If you create a display along with an ad, you will increase sales," advises Bellacero. "Fifteen or 20¢ off helps increase sales."

"Floor shippers are a great way to bring attention to dried fruit in produce without taking up too much room," notes Earthbound's Antle. This past year, the company offered customers a fall promotion using a floor shipper pre-loaded with raisins, cranberries, dates and plums from its dried fruit line. The display included a tear pad of flyer/coupons with a recipe for a salad with dried fruit. "We saw our organic dried fruit sales jump by 50 percent during that promotion, so I'd say it was a great success."

Holiday baking is always a good time to increase promotion of raisins. "Our biggest sales are during the holidays," Bellacero shares. "Baking and the holidays go together."

Still, retailers should keep in mind raisins are great to promote year-round, according to Meisch. "We promote raisins as ingredients in cooking, grilling, for Mother's Day and for snacking. For New Year's, we promote raisins for health. People want to start the new year eating healthfully."

There are five key raisin-consumption periods. "The first is January — school starts after the holidays and New Year's diets begin," explains Tamble. "The second is back-to-school season, beginning in July and August. The third is the Halloween period, fourth is holiday promotions of November and December, and the fifth is Easter baking."

Raisin and dried fruit consumption is on the rise. "The dried-fruit category is definitely growing, both across the category and for Earthbound Farm," reports Antle. "According to ACNielsen figures, the dried fruit category saw $500 million in sales for 2007, up 6.6 percent from 2006." **pb**

Long Shelf Life

Two attributes of raisins are long shelf life and sustainability. "When stored at a temperature between 40° and 50° F, raisins retain a shelf life for up to 15 months," explains, Adam Peltz, perishable merchandiser/buyer, Home Economist Market, based in Charlotte, NC.

"They freeze fabulously," notes Michele Meisch, who recently left her position as marketing manager, California Raisin Marketing Board (CRMB), Fresno, CA. "If they get dried, just add water. Let them soak for 10 minutes."

Earthbound Farm, San Juan Bautista, CA, offers organic raisins with an 18-month shelf life, "but consumers never keep them that long," reports Tonya Antle, vice president of organic sales. "They're so good." **pb**

Reader Service # 34

FLORAL WATCH

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sustainability Council Formed

The VeriFlora Sustainability Council, Oakland, CA, a not-for-profit membership association, was recently launched. The new group brings producers, wholesalers, suppliers and retailers together to stimulate sales in cut flowers and nursery plants by providing members with relevant information, marketing and education services. The VeriFlora certification advances sustainability in floriculture and communicates brand and market differentiation.

Reader Service No. 330

Garden Show Set For Vegas

California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers (CANGC), Sacramento, CA, is set to host the 2008 Garden Market Expo, Sept. 10-11 at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center in Las Vegas, NV. Featuring approximately 400 exhibitors, the event also includes a powerhouse lineup of speakers who will discuss incorporating, promoting and profiting from green practices.

Reader Service No. 331

Certification Awarded

Delray Plants, Inc., Venus, FL, became the first potted foliage producer and the fifth potted ornamental plant producer in North America to attain sustainability certification under the VeriFlora program. The VeriFlora label was issued by Scientific Certification Systems, an Emeryville, CA-based independent standards developer and certifier of environmental, sustainability and product-quality achievement.

Reader Service No. 332

Alliance Formed

TotalFloral, LLC, Homestead, FL, and The Perishables Group, Inc., West Dundee, IL, have formed a working alliance to advance the floral category within the supermarket channel. The alliance combines TotalFloral's supermarket floral category expertise with The Perishables Group's category analysis and market data. TotalFloral clients will now be able to receive regional and national market comparisons.

Reader Service No. 333

NEW PRODUCTS

Wired For Green Fun

Green Piece Wire Art, Mount Hope, ON, Canada, has expanded its topiary creations to feature more pets and animals, including a golden retriever, dachshund, donkey, moose, schnauzer and sailfish. The By George product-line of topiary frames can come apart into sections, allowing for reduced shipping, easier storage and alternative ways to plant.

Reader Service No. 334

Halloween Totes

Potter, Inc., Bryan, OH, offers Halloween Totes perfect to use with seasonal potted plants or as fun candy totes for collecting sweet treats. The 4-inch totes are available in packs of 24.

Reader Service No. 335

Butterflies For Spring

Burton & Burton, Bogart, GA, introduces new butterfly ceramics for its spring giftware collection. Low minimum orders and fast shipping are a specialty of this family-owned and operated business known for its balloons and floral department accessories.

Reader Service No. 336

Gardening In A Box

FloraNovara, Virginia Beach, VA, introduces B'Fresh, a fun and easy indoor gardening kit that makes it possible to grow cresses, such as garden, mustard and radish cress, all year-round. Featuring three sachets of seeds and three growing pads — enough for three harvests — the watertight box, which is the cultivation dish, is ideal for windowsill gardening.

Reader Service No. 337

Ready For Christmas

Harster Greenhouses, Dundas, ON, Canada, introduces L'Orchidee as the newest addition to its product line. Available for Christmas 2008, the true miniature orchids arrive in a 9-pack display box. L'Or, comes from the French word for gold and L'Orchidee represents the highest quality of true miniature orchids.

Reader Service No. 338

From Flat To Full

Vazu USA, Cleveland, OH, introduces the innovative Vazu expandable flower vase to the U.S. market. Designed and manufactured in Israel, the Vazu, which can be stored as flat as a sheet of paper, expands into a full-size vase when filled with water. The tear-off top line combines the product and packaging into one unit. The upscale gift sleeve line uses more artistic designs, a more traditional vase shape and its own gift envelope.

Reader Service No. 339

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

Sell More Succulents And Cacti

Consider profitable ways to merchandise these long-living, water-wise plants throughout the year.

BY JON VANZILE

Sales of cacti and succulents are booming. From a retailer's point of view, cacti and succulents have it all. They are easy to maintain, have minimum shrinkage on the shelf, boast a long shelf life and enjoy strong sales year-round. "Every time I turn around, there's someone new selling cactus," explains Joe Corrado, owner of Corrado's Family Affair, a single-store operation in Clifton, NJ, that sells about 1,000 plants a month. "Three or four years ago, no one was selling them. I was the exception."

It doesn't take much effort to move "a lot of merchandise," adds Corrado. "We cross-merchandise with the floral department and the supermarket. You put all that together, and you get a nice draw."

Cacti and succulents sell year-round and don't seem to be associated with any particular holiday or event.

It's not completely clear why consumers are buying more cacti and succulents than in previous years, but some growers, such as Deena Altman, vice president of marketing for Altman Plants in Vista, CA, believes, "People are looking for more exotic and durable plants."

Photo courtesy of Altman Plants

There are more than 1,000 varieties of cacti and succulents on the market. Many of the cacti boast beautiful flowers, especially in spring, while succulents are known for soft pastel colors and interesting leaf shapes.

Unlike more tender tropicals or cut flowers, cacti and succulents are practically indestructible and will live for a very long time in poor conditions. They need to be watered only once a week, and if consumers miss a watering, the plant will probably be just fine. Many varieties will slowly grow into large, beautiful specimen plants.

Other growers believe the boom in popularity is due to new products that have recently flooded the market. The mixed cacti garden or dish garden has taken off in popularity, particularly in the last year or so. These gardens are usually sold in 6-inch pots with rocks that have been glued in place. Larger gardens in 10- or 14-inch pots are also available, and there are even smaller 4-inch dish gardens. Dish gardens tend to bring a higher price that single-pot plants, retailing between about $10 and $25, depending on their size.

"Cactus gardens have become the new bamboo," explains Jeff Patterson, vice president of produce and floral for Minyards Food Stores, Inc., a 58-store chain based in Coppell, TX. "There's very little shrink in them, so your profit is much higher. You get low velocity of sales, but they last a long time. People want something that's easy to take care of and they can put on their desks."

Other retailers suspect the growing popularity of cacti and succulents might be environmental in nature. With drought and water restrictions popping up all over the country, buying a desk cactus is a small feel-good purchase, notes Arlene Holland, floral manager at Straub's Market in Clayton, Mis-

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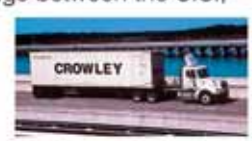

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souri. "I think summers are getting hotter and drier and people are going with easier-to-care-for plants."

VARIETY IS KING

Most consumers who buy cacti and succulents probably have no idea what kind of plant they're buying. Exceptions to this include aloe, which is valued for its healing properties, and seasonal plants, such as Christmas cactus.

People typically buy cacti and succulents for their interesting leaves and leaf shapes. It's common for growers to leave off species names or for retailers to include only basic care tags that never identify the plant.

The cactus and succulent market is subject to faddism. Right now, the hen-and-chicks plants are the biggest sellers, but next year it could easily be something else, experts predict. "We're dependent on consumers to see what's selling on the market," reports Mike Roberts, sales manager at Florida Cactus, Inc., Apopka, Florida, "but cactus grows slowly and it might be two to three years before a plant is ready to sell."

It's also difficult to predict cacti and succulent sales by season or region. Outside of Christmas cactus, which is almost a separate market, cactus and succulents aren't really tied to any particular holiday or month. To sell them around holidays, such as Secretary's Day, some growers offer themed containers. Generally, however, these plants are consistent, year-round sellers with a small burst in spring when many cacti flower.

To increase sales, retailers use two approaches to attract consumers and keep plants moving: variety and store placement. "The more variety you have, the faster the product sells," according to Doug Painter, sales manager with Sorensen Greenhouses, Inc., Ruthven, ON, Canada. "They have to be in a high-traffic area. You want to make a display out of them. It might take awhile to sell one flat, but if you have a few flats, it will draw attention."

THE DISPLAY MATTERS

People rarely go into a supermarket or a club store looking to buy a live cactus. They usually purchase them on impulse when a mass cactus and succulent display wows them and creates curiosity.

Cacti and succulents are normally offered in flats with pot sizes that range from very small — some are as little as 1.5 inches — up to 6 inches. Sorensen ships its plants in pre-priced display shippers with individual plant sleeves, making it easier to handle the cacti.

Roberts recommends retailers increase sales by using one or two large 10- or 14-inch specimen plants. "Our customers have found it's helpful to buy a big specimen, such as a 10-inch pot, and then place 4- or 6-inch pots around it," he explains. "You want people to see what the plant will become, and sooner or later, somebody will step up and buy that specimen."

Straub's Holland likes to create mixed displays in her floral department. She frequently scatters pots of cacti and succulents throughout orchid displays or among foliage plants. This works for her because she has a very small display area. Since she can't do large displays, she doesn't buy large quantities of cacti or succulents.

Holland also takes another unusual step — making her own gardens and container displays. Most people don't like to handle cacti unless they have to, but she enjoys making her displays. "It's labor intensive," she notes, "but we're a higher-end specialty grocery store. We try to have things that no one else has. The only things I don't repot are the dish gardens."

Holland is following the general industry trend by doing her own upgrades. As consumers discover cacti and succulents, the market is steadily expanding away from simple plastic pots to more intricate presentations. "They're getting fancier by using rocks and little figures and making it more decorative," according to Corrado of Corrado's Family Affair. "This helps a little during the holidays. I think presentation has changed the way people look at them."

Altman of Altman Plants suggests a cactus of the month program to heighten interest in the plants. "I think supermarkets should try bringing in a different plant each month," she explains. "They'll always sell. If you have them, they'll sell." **pb**

Cactus Care

One of the great selling points for cacti and succulents is their ease of care. In general, the plants like bright light and low water. The plant should be thoroughly soaked and then the soil should be completely dried out before watering again. Cacti and succulents should never be allowed to sit in water.

These are pretty forgiving plants for floral department employees and consumers. The biggest threat is a stabbed finger. Unlike cacti, succulents do not have spines, which may account for some of their popularity. "You just can't get enough of them — the demand is incredible," explains Doug Painter, sales manager with Sorensen Greenhouses, Inc., Ruthven, ON, Canada. "They're a little friendlier than a cactus, and they have a little softer colors."

Next year, Florida Cactus, Inc., Apopka, FL, hopes to introduce a video for its customers showing ways cacti and succulents can be displayed to help increase sales, reports Mike Roberts, sales manager. "There's a lot of interest in cacti." **pb**

RETAIL PERSPECTIVE

By Dave Diver

Confronting The Perfect Storm

The 1991 Halloween nor'easter, also known as the Perfect Storm, was the result of the confluence of three different weather-related phenomena and later served as the subject of a movie and novel. The three weather factors — a warm air, low-pressure system, a cool air, high-pressure system from another direction and tropical moisture proceeding the hurricane — were unusual, but not unique.

Nearly 17 years later, those associated with the fresh fruit and vegetable distribution system are encountering a parallel situation with limited ability to make adjustments so as to survive the economic winds sweeping our globalized world. The difference is this economic storm is not going to be as limited in time or effected area as the 1991 weather storm, so it portends far broader ramifications.

While this storm initially has greater effects on producers, retailers and foodservice organizations also have equally as great considerations to explore.

For the producers of government price-supported basic crops, such as corn, wheat and soybeans, the worldwide demand side of the equation has lead to higher prices for their product and to potential acreage increases. Since nothing happens in a vacuum, the explosive demand has lead to dramatic increases in cost of nearly all production inputs, including seed, fertilizer, pesticides and fungicides. Corn input costs that were $2 to $2.50 per bushel a year ago are now nearly $4 per bushel. In late June, the futures market nearly exceeded $8 per bushel — it had been below $4 earlier in the year — creating the potential for record-breaking profits and alternative acreage changes.

On the other hand, growers of fresh fruit and vegetables facing similar input cost increases find that the recent supply-and-demand relationships provide limited sales income increases for many products. Add to this the dramatic increases in the cost of transportation to market — and buyers find themselves paying more delivered even though growers receive little more for their crop.

It's no secret that buyers will attempt to pass along these cost increases to the buying public while maintaining their normal margin percentages. As a result, the consumer is going to face higher retails; even under normal economic circumstances, one would anticipate a nominal decline in demand, triggering the potential for even lower perishable price levels until the supply/demand balance reaches a new higher level.

Mohamed El-Erian, co-chief executive and co-chief investment officer of Pacific Investment Management Company, LLC (PIMCO), one of the largest and most astute financial organizations, recently said, "Pity the U.S. consumers. Their ability to sustain spending is already challenged by the declining availability of credit, a negative wealth effect triggered by declining house values and a lower standard of living as the result of higher energy and food prices, and a depreciating dollar. Job losses will accentuate the pressures on consumers leading to income declines and a further loss of confidence."

And then, in early July, the Dow hit its lowest level since September 2006.

Here we have three disruptive forces creating a conundrum not faced by the industry in recent years. Higher input costs, higher transportation costs and a consumer sector unable to afford higher food prices and forced to make alternative food purchasing decisions are a confluence of problems not encountered in decades.

Product sourcing requires a new thought process for buyers at all levels in anticipation of consumer reactions to higher price levels and lower disposable income.

The question becomes one of how will consumers trade down. Will they spend 80 to 90 percent as much as previously spent on some items or will they trade down to lower cost per pound product? Does a nice head of iceberg lettuce replace the 5-ounce package of spring mix? Do sale prices bring a heavier percentage response than previously? Do bananas cut into the sales of pineapple? Do 10-pound potato promotions replace sales of smaller units and bulk? Only time will tell, and the answers will be played out in the retail store as well as in foodservice, including school lunch programs with limited budgets facing these increasing costs. Overall sales results are beginning to reflect these changes as consumers change shopping habits — among and within retail outlets.

Product sourcing requires a new thought process for buyers at all levels in anticipation of consumer reactions to higher price levels and lower disposable income. Increased costs of transportation — as well as trucker availability — not only affect regional alternatives within the United States but also compromise global trade, both import and export. Will local become an even larger marketing program?

Growers and buyers will need to carefully evaluate balancing the need for profitability with the need to maintain long-term economic relationships. Consumers will be balancing nutrition needs with pocketbook issues. This perfect storm affects everyone. Hopefully, consumers will develop a capacity to enable all segments to achieve a profitable but adjusted business mix. **pb**

Dr. Laurence Swan (back row, far right) is Director of Fyffes Group Ireland Ltd., Fyffes plc, headquartered in Dublin, Ireland

Q & A with Dr. Laurence Swan

Q: The European Commission has proposed The Pan-European School Fruit Scheme with 90 million euros annually to purchase and distribute free fresh fruit and vegetables to schools, the money to be matched by national funds in member states that make use of the program. Various news releases say the E.U. contribution will be 90 million euros per year, yet a report out of Bangor University says the European Union has proposed a 156-million-euro scheme.

A: The amount originally asked for was 100 million euros and the European Commission came back with 90 million euros. A substantial lobby says the money coming from the European Union should be allotted for the free fruit and distribution to schools. If that is the case, DG Agri [Directorate General for Agriculture] estimates it would cost 156 million euros. The discrepancy in numbers relates to Brussels taking on the total cost of the fruit and vegetable distribution of each project that's been sanctioned.

Q: Could you update us on the Food Dudes program, which you were instrumental in championing?

A: Food Dudes is now running in Ireland by the Department of Agriculture. It has finished its first year, I believe very successfully. This September Food Dudes will be starting its second year, reaching 85,000 students each year. Over a period of four or five years, the program will be implemented for children 4 to 11 years old in every primary school in the country. All primary schools will receive the Food Dudes indoctrination of 16 days. This will cost 53 euros per student — about $65 or $75 U.S. That covers the cost of fruit and distribution, rewards and their costs and distribution, videos in each class where students see junk punks defeated by children eating fruits and vegetables, administration costs and home packs. All schools need to be visited, the principal and staff convinced the program worth doing, and then it all made to happen on day one. Administration amounts to about a third of the cost.

Q: How are logistics of product distribution handled?

A: At the government level, it went out to tender. A company in the distribution trade was awarded that tender because it had lots of vehicles on the road to get around to these schools. When you look to expand the program nationwide, you need a company with little vans and lorries that can distribute product to schools. The economics and logistics of distribution are being watched closely by many in Brussels and elsewhere.

Q: Where does the Pan-European school produce proposal stand at this point?

A: The process has been underway for quite some time. Three or four years ago, under the auspices of Freshfel [Europe, the European association of fresh produce, importers, exporters, wholesalers and distributors, and retailers based in Brussels, Belgium], I was asked to write a business plan by DG Agri and DG Sanco [Directorate General for Health and Consumer Affairs] in Brussels. We wanted 100 million euros to have a serious fruit and vegetable scheme in Europe.

On May 30, 2007, a white paper on nutrition, overweight and obesity was produced. The European Agricultural Commission stated a school fruit scheme would be a step in the right direction. From that, the Joint Services Commission had consultations with various key drivers and produced a report under DG Sanco to launch the E.U. Platform for Action on Health, Diet and Physical Activity. DG Sanco started back in 2005, but Freshfel was not elected on it until 2006. Since then we've been welcomed with open arms and made tremendous progress with them.

Q: What about disparities in economic structure? Is the proposed funding sufficient to cover such a broad spectrum of countries across Europe?

A: Some of our newer E.U. members would find it difficult to fund a program like this. And therefore, in discussions going on, national governments will likely ask if they can contribute less. If you take $90 million, it won't cover all the children of Europe. Someone has to make a difficult call. We could do two or three more countries well and then move on to others. If forced to spread the money thinly to all, you wouldn't be able to do a good job in any of them.

Q: The produce industry operates on such low margins that you may be hard-pressed to garner large funds there, despite general goodwill towards such worthy programs.

A: Our experience with Food Dudes is that to get industry to pay is impossible and the whole thing can fall down if the program is based on industry contributions. In Ireland, Fyffes was core and central to success — Fyffes kept Food Dudes going when money wasn't coming in. Some people said they'd contribute but failed to. If we waited till we get all the money in, we'd still be sitting. Many times we paid the bills to keep the program going.

From an interview by Mira Slott in The Perishable Pundit — August 5, 2008

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Blast from the Past

"We started out as just two guys buying and selling product," explains Chris Puentes, president, Interfresh, Inc., Orange, CA. He was a contracted produce buyer on the Los Angeles, CA, wholesale terminal market and Craig Smith, CEO, "had a small restaurant distribution business in the Fullerton area."

The top photo, taken in 1987, shows Smith (left) and Puentes picking up their first two pallets from the Index Mutual packaging house in La Habra, CA. "When Craig and I founded Interfresh, we pooled our businesses and resources, and this old van was one of the things Craig brought to the business."

Today, Interfresh employs 65 people and operates five sales offices and a 30,000-square-foot distribution facility in Los Angeles.

The bottom photo features members of the Orange, CA, staff. From left to right, Brandon Gritters, sales; Rick Illig, sales; Mary Tinkham, chief financial officer; Deanna Maserjian, accounting support; Liz Kennedy, director of administration; Nancy Porche, accounting team; Maria DiPasqua, accounting team; Jenni Karmarkar, accounting team; and Tom Finnerty, sales.

The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of PRODUCE BUSINESS. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, PRODUCE BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail info@producebusiness.com

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The Produce Marketing Association	77	26	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
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Spice World, Inc.	44	42	800-433-4979	407-857-7171
Stemilt Growers, Inc.	73	91	509-662-9667	509-663-2914
Sunlight Int'l. Sales	25	27	661-792-6360	661-792-6529
Sweet Onion Trading Company	27	43	800-699-3727	321-674-2003
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	5	2	800-772-4542	831-455-3915
Team Produce International, Inc.	63	75	800-505-0665	305-513-9596
Tennessee Dept. of Agriculture	34	36	615-837-5517	615-837-5194
Uncle Matt's Organic	73	7	866-626-4613	352-394-1003
United Fresh Produce Association	37	28	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
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