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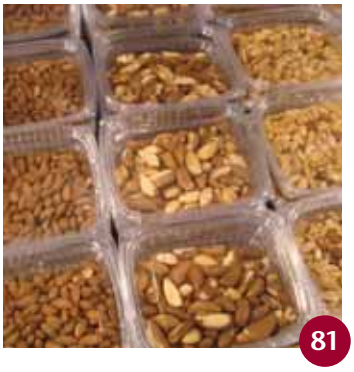

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PRODUCE QUIZ

THIS MONTH'S WINNER:

Emily Fragoso
Marketing Manager
Coast Produce Company
Los Angeles, CA

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For Emily Fragoso, people make the produce industry worthwhile. "You learn so much from those around you. Most are generous with their knowledge and guidance. It's really been an asset to my career."

Formerly the executive vice president of the Fresh Produce and Floral Council, Emily joined Coast in September 2007. Her primary responsibilities include branding the company and category management.

A PRODUCE BUSINESS reader for about 6½ years, Emily most enjoys reading about industry trends involving corporate responsibility, environmentally friendly packaging and locally grown organic products.

One of her biggest challenges is utilizing all the tools she acquires attending conferences and trade show and reading PRODUCE BUSINESS. "The real reason I read your magazine is to gain different perspectives on the industry," she explains. "It's important to utilize all of the information I learn."

As the winner of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Quiz, Emily wins an eco-luxury organic cotton robe.

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

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3) What is the P.O. Box number for Ciruli Brothers? _____

4) What is the toll-free number for Wada Farms? _____

5) What is the street address for Fresh Taste Produce Limited Canada? _____

6) What is the fax number for Richard E. Ryan & Associated. Ltd.? _____

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Reader Service # 4

SUBMITTED BY DR. DAVID GOMBAS, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT • UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

Have We Done Everything We Can?

This is the question CEOs and legal counsels are asking their technical people and produce buyers in an effort to improve food safety. Until there is an acceptable "kill step" to assure the elimination of any potential pathogen contaminants, food safety will rely on prevention and detection programs. If finished-product testing can be done, how can a customer say, "No, we don't need it"?

First, look at the potential benefits of finished-product testing. The reliability of microbiological testing to detect pathogens is primarily based on the size of the test sample. According to statistics published by the International Commission on Microbiological Specifications for Foods (*ICMSF*, vol. 7), you would need to test about 3,000 samples per lot to have a 95 percent chance of detecting lots with one or more contaminated units per thousand. This is not practical; the testing costs would be more than the value of the lot tested.

Instead, say a more reasonable sample size of 60 samples per lot is used. Using the same statistics, this would give a 95 percent chance of detecting lots with 5 percent or more contamination. Keep in mind a 5 percent contamination rate is considered "gross" contamination and is much higher than what is thought to have occurred in any produce-related outbreak of the past several years except for the spinach-related outbreak of 2006. A finished-product testing program that samples and tests 60 items per lot would have been statistically unlikely to detect contamination in any other outbreak-related produce lot in the past several years. This includes whole produce as well as packaged.

Second, look at unintended consequences of finished-product testing. Any company testing produce for pathogens should "hold" the product until negative test results are obtained. To test and release, hoping for negative results, is playing Russian roulette with a Class 1 recall and headlines as the prize. Obtaining test results can take from one to five days, depending on the test method and whether the test requires confirmation. That reduces the marketability of commodities that already have a short shelf life.

Microbiological testing should be justified for commodities where current practices have not yet been demonstrated to be sufficient.

In addition, a positive result could implicate more than the lot that tests positive. If contamination is detected in a finished product, all produce from that field may be implicated. This can eliminate an entire day's production from the supply chain or multiple days' production if the contamination is not detected on the first day of a field's harvest. If product from the same field are sold to multiple customers, various companies can be affected because a negative test result in a finished product may not be defensible if another product lot using produce from the same field tests positive. This is still true if the test result is a "false positive," meaning the test mistakenly reports a pathogen is present because, unless there is a way to prove it was false, there is no way to set aside a positive test result. Again, this is just as true of whole produce as it is of packaged.

How does one escape this conundrum? One suggested approach is, instead of testing finished product, use a risk assessment to determine the most likely sources of potential contamination and test those. If the most likely sources of contamination occur in the field and subsequent steps are expected to reduce the numbers through dilution if not by actual disinfection, then any contamination should be at a higher level in the field than in finished product. Thus, the same 60-sample plan should be more likely to detect contamination in the field than in finished product.

All of the unintended consequences noted above can be avoided by testing produce at the field level: The field can be tested with results prior to harvest, avoiding the test and release, loss of shelf life and loss of supply issues. If the field does test positive, it provides the grower an opportunity to investigate and perhaps limit the amount of the field implicated. Once harvested, that opportunity is gone.

Finally, before you decide to test all produce in the field or orchard, consider whether testing is even warranted. For the vast majority of commodities described as "fresh produce," current good agricultural and management practices appear to be effective at controlling potential pathogen contamination. Microbiological testing should be justified for commodities where current practices have not yet been demonstrated to be sufficient.

As to customers' management asking their technical staff and buyers, "Are we doing all we can to assure produce safety?" — remember that microbiological testing — if you decide to use it — may be better performed at points of the supply chain other than finished product.

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BellaVita

Reader Service # 16

By James Prevor
President & Editor-in-Chief

Prelude To A Recovery

If we are currently in a recession or are about to enter one, we can count ourselves blessed to be in the produce industry. For the industry as a whole, the effects of a recession may be surprisingly small.

Unlike the dot-coms or subprime mortgage industry, where massive inflows of capital set the stage for a massive collapse when the bubble burst, this industry supplies food to 300 million-plus Americans, as well as others around the world. It will continue to do that through all but the most extreme business-cycle swings.

One doesn't enjoy benefiting from the distress of others but, ironically, the first pangs of a mild recession are generally positive for the produce industry. If there is economic uncertainty, people hesitate to make big ticket purchases. They don't buy new homes or vacation homes; they may postpone buying cars or going on major vacations.

The practical effect is simple: Initially the vast majority of those who have jobs or live on fixed incomes actually increase their disposable income since they aren't buying homes or cars or taking elaborate vacations. Combine higher disposable income with a mild sense of deprivation and you have a recipe for small indulgences. They may go out to eat a bit more or splurge on some higher priced produce items.

As a recession deepens, one can expect reallocations of where food is eaten. Businesses cut back on expense-account dining, so white tablecloth restaurants start to suffer. Business and vacation travel gets depressed, so restaurants in hotels and vacation destinations start feeling softening demand.

Although this hits these businesses, and those who supply them, hard, it has little effect on total demand for food or fresh produce. The people still eat, just at home rather than out of town. In fact, restaurants in areas that traditionally empty during the summer or on holidays, as the local population heads to the mountains or shores, often experience a boost as the population stays put.

At some point in the process, fast-food chains start to suffer from a one-two-three combination punch: First the inner-city clientele, who consider a night out at KFC as a sign of affluence and prestige, lose their jobs and pull back. Second, the important teenage market, fueled by after-school jobs and generous allowances, find that both get cut. Third, the convenience crowd picking up a salad before or during work often decides to brown-bag it.

It is impossible to know precisely how deep a recession may get. Still, it seems likely that the kind of changes described on this page, which basically represent a rejuggling of where consumption takes place, will be the main effect of any likely recession. Of course, theoretically, if things get very bad, more people may plant gardens, buy less expensive canned or frozen produce, or buy more inexpensive starches, including potatoes, to stretch their meals.

The biggest wild card is probably fresh-cut. We have never had a major recession since the blooming of the modern fresh-cut industry. If unemployment rises, people will have time on their hands; will they chop their own lettuce? It is possible, but it would have to get pretty bad before we had a massive move in that direction.

Long before that happens, you will see a squeeze at retail, as consumers react to tough times by scouting for deals. High/low operators may be cherry-picked, and deep discounters such as Aldi and Sav-a-Lot may find business brisk. Coupon clipping will rise and consumers will not accept many price increases.

People may pool together to buy large quantities at warehouse clubs and divide them up at home. Restaurants will offer deals to attract consumers. Yet brand loyalty can actually increase as consumers become risk-averse and avoid trying things they may not like.

> **There are never more opportunities to make money than in a recession.**

Although the overall industry is likely to sell as much or more produce each year, recession or not, the effect on individual businesses can be vast. Those in particular sectors, say purveying to white tablecloth restaurants, need to both watch the credit and look for other outlets. Geographically limited businesses are more vulnerable than those with a national and international account base. If demand for some items get depressed, that can create export opportunities.

The biggest change for industry executives, though, may be in dealing with banks and other lenders and equity investors. Banks that are looking to charge more and reduce their loans outstanding will hesitate to sign waivers of loan conditions. Valuations can easily shrink. An investor may point to the stock market and show that he can buy a listed company for much less than he could have a year ago, so the effect is to depress the value of all companies.

Yet, the truth is that there are never more opportunities to make money than in a recession. Why? If you expand through acquisition, you are typically buying companies at lower valuations. As long as they are good operations that will make it through to the next upturn, you will do well.

Recessions are also a fantastic opportunity to build a brand. As some pull back and weak players are lost, the amount of marketing noise is reduced, so marketing messages will have stronger impact in a reduced playing field. Study after study shows that those who market themselves most aggressively during downturns are the ones positioned to pick up business in the next upturn.

Perhaps that is the key lesson: We are very lucky in that in the depths of a recession lie the seeds of the next upturn. And in this industry, of all industries, we know the value of seeds growing where no one can see. **pb**

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Reader Service # 22

BY BRYAN SILBERMANN, PRESIDENT • PRODUCE MARKETING ASSOCIATION

The Zen Of Dining Out Healthfully

National Restaurant Association (NRA) recently reported that four of five consumers think going out to a restaurant is a better use of their time than cooking and cleaning up. Let's face it — eating out largely boils down to wanting to achieve time efficiencies and be entertained, not to wanting to count fruit and vegetable servings. Nonetheless, the ever-present buzz surrounding more healthful eating can't and shouldn't be ignored.

Operators, suppliers and diners alike recognize that as eating out increases, increasing fruit and vegetable options on menus is also necessary to maintain health and wellness. Enjoyable, timesaving and nutritious meals eaten out — can there be balance?

In our latest consumer survey, Produce Marketing Association (PMA) finds harmony in variety. Working with Opinion Dynamics Corporation, PMA conducted a national telephone survey in October of 1,000 primary shoppers on their produce preferences specifically at casual and white tablecloth restaurants. We find that the more menu parts into which we can insert fruits and vegetables, the more Americans will eat, and the less guilt they will feel about indulging and the more enjoyable their dining experiences will be.

I've written before of the role produce plays in steering diners to a location. These results reinforce that, and they look further at where we might have our biggest impact. Our diners put a premium on the presence of fresh produce on the menu when deciding where to dine — 58 percent say this is important to their restaurant selection.

They also prefer ethnic cuisines when dining out, including Italian, Chinese and Mexican (which tied with American). All of these cuisines also happen to be naturally rich in fruits and vegetables. While their tastes run to what were once considered the "exotic" side of dining, respondents nonetheless associate these cuisines most often with "staple" produce items, including tomatoes, beans, broccoli, onions, carrots and "salad."

Driven by the changing demographics of 21st century America and the demand for more authenticity in what we eat, these once broadly defined ethnic restaurant categories are splintering. Americans want their meals spiced up with tastes, textures and colors. Even today's ingredients in fast-food salads would have been unthinkable a decade ago. More matters!

As you make plans for 2008, remember that PMA's annual consumer trends conference will focus on the opportunities being presented by the exploding popularity of ethnic cuisines. In particular, the 2008 Produce Solutions Conference in April will look at Chinese, Vietnamese and Mexican cuisines and consumers. For more information, visit *www.pma.com/psc*. Conference registrants will also receive a 1-year subscription to PMA's consumer surveys.

While the flavorful aspect of produce is very much on consumers' minds while dining out, health appears to be less so. Only 15 percent of respondents say they request more healthful meal substitutions most of the time, while 78 percent say they do so only occasionally. When they do make healthful substitutions, their preference is produce; of those people making substitutions, 24 percent request fresh fruits or vegetables all or most of the time and 65 percent do so some of the time. Our diners tend to think more healthfully in the middle of the day than at the end. They report a much greater likelihood of ordering an entrée salad at lunch than dinner, and over one-quarter are not likely at all to order a salad for dinner.

Action item: Think of the marketing opportunities you have as a consumer. Have you ever asked a waiter for a fresh fruit dessert option when none is offered on the menu? I make a point of asking for mixed berries whenever I want a dessert while eating out. I learned that early in my career, at the elbow of two produce marketing greats: Jack Pandol, who asked for fresh fruit in the middle of winter (to promote awareness of the Chilean deal), and Joe Stubbs, who prompted every waiter to add a slice of lemon (preferably Sunkist!) to his water.

Foodservice remains a huge opportunity for fresh fruits and vegetables — from seeking ways for guests to substitute and customize their meals to add more fruits and vegetables, to identifying underserved meal parts and developing innovative dishes that dish up healthful and exotic flavors.

> **We must meet busy Americans dining out where their mouths are.**

In our quest to meet diners' wishes for pleasure, convenience and health, we must balance our nutrition and produce marketing hats. A majority — 53 percent — doesn't want nutritional information to be in their face on menu listings but rather be available upon request — and it should come as no surprise that 40 percent report they never choose fruit for dessert (after all, how many restaurants offer a fruit dessert option?).

As much as we would like to see menus scream with fresh produce and guests to gobble up healthful fruits and vegetables, the reality is we are a nation heavy into indulgence and don't want to be constantly reminded of portion sizes and calorie counts. The fact that a dish is also healthful should be the icing on the cake. The onus is on our industry to continue collaborating with menu developers to increase the variety of fruit and vegetable dishes and menu options; meals that offer exotic flavors, introduce different produce from what's always used at home, and deliver a sense of indulgence. We must meet busy Americans dining out where their mouths are. After all, it's just good karma.

What Does 'Fresh' Mean?

What does "going out to a restaurant" mean? The same National Restaurant Association that tells us four out of five consumers think going out to a restaurant is a better use of their time than cooking and cleaning up also tells us that back in 2001, what the restaurant industry calls "off-premises" — takeout and delivery — accounted for 58 percent of total restaurant traffic. (That number is likely much higher today.)

What does "casual dining" mean and does the word "dine" bias answers when many times consumers view their restaurant adventure as a form of refueling?

We wonder about the significance of the word "fresh" when Bryan writes: "Our diners put a premium on the presence of fresh produce on the menu when deciding where to dine — 58 percent say this is important to their restaurant selection." We have some uncertainty as to what that means.

Perhaps they like to go to restaurants that offer a lot of obviously fresh items, such as entrée salads and many choices of fresh vegetables. It might mean that if they order items with fresh produce — a salad or a burger topped with lettuce, tomato and onion — they want the produce to be high quality and crispy — fresh being shorthand for quality.

Or could they be saying they want all the side dishes to be fresh as opposed to frozen or canned? One wonders if they could really tell the difference in a lot of cases.

Maybe they want the cooking to be done with fresh produce, say french fries made from potatoes cut, peeled and fried in house. They want soups made with fresh vegetables.

It is impossible to know without further research. One of the dangers of having a goal in research — such as learning consumer attitudes toward fresh — is we sometimes use words without really knowing what the consumer means in answering our questions.

Sometimes a word is just a throwaway. Next time we do such a survey, we should try to divide the respondents and ask some to rank the importance of fresh fruits and vegetables on the menu and some to rank the importance of fruits and vegetables on the menu. We could also try other qualifiers such as "healthful." This would enable us to judge if we need to work on consumer perceptions of fresh vs. frozen or canned items.

One key place where the produce industry can help itself is recipe development in ethnic food areas. Bryan's comments about consumer enthusiasm for Italian, Chinese and Mexican, as well as cuisines growing fast in popularity, such as the Vietnamese cuisine that is being discussed at PMA's Produce Solutions Conference, points less to the popularity of ethnic cuisines than to the mainstreaming of these foods into American cuisine.

Just as nobody thinks of Frankfurt, Germany, when eating a hot dog (frankfurter), or Hamburg, Germany, when eating a hamburger, few foods are more American than pizza. In fact, chefs such as Wolfgang Puck and chains such as California Pizza Kitchen have developed countless pizzas no one in Italy would recognize as Italian food.

Relatively few ethnic restaurants are focused on authentically duplicating the eating experience of the home country. The trend is to both fusion cuisine — combining attributes of different cuisines — or a kind of nouvelle cuisine of ethnic foods, a re-imagining of dishes to use ingredients and equipment that were never available back home. This opens the door for the produce industry to suggest usages that, though true to the spirit of the cuisine, are light years away from anything Grandma or Grandpa would have recognized.

The issue of health and produce in restaurants also needs to be explored in greater depth. Of those 89 percent who request to substitute and add in fresh fruit or vegetables items at least sometimes — how many are requesting a second vegetable portion rather than a starch, such as pasta, rice or, most of the time, a potato. Perhaps they were all on Atkins when they made the request. We would also like to see research that distinguishes between those seeking weight loss and those seeking health enhancement.

Bryan makes a strong point about the power industry members possess as consumers. As a father, this author has tried to prod restaurants to alter the children's menu to include more healthful options — grilled chicken instead of deep fried; peas, carrots and corn, in addition to a starch; fresh fruit for dessert instead of a scoop of ice cream. Generally if they have it, they will substitute.

> **We sometimes use words without really knowing what the consumer means in answering our questions**

If we regularly go to an independent restaurant so the owners know us, they will even inventory a new item and change the menu — assuming we are reasonably representative of what parents want. We have found they are often quicker to add canned peas or pears to the menu — knowing they can store it — than fresh fruit or vegetables.

The industry must confront a broader problem, namely consumers' unprompted responses usually focus on protein. Most casual dining chains will report customer comment cards focus almost exclusively on the protein. Was the steak, chicken, fish plentiful, well cooked, good quality, delicious? As long as that is the focus of consumer comment, the inclination will be for restaurants to put their money into the protein, fill up the plate with the cheapest starch they can find and then add a couple stalks of asparagus and a cherry tomato for color.

Restaurants are pretty responsive to consumers. If we get consumers to really care — not just say they care — about eating more fresh produce, bet the restaurant menu problem will take care of itself.

PRODUCE WATCH

TRANSITIONS

DOLE FRESH FRUIT COMPANY
SALINAS, CA

Yvonne Rentmeester was promoted to marketing services manager. She will be responsible for banana ripening and product handling from warehouse to retail. Formerly a manager in the technical services division, she will assume direct responsibility for Dole Fresh Fruit's marketing representatives and merchandising program.

Odalis Hawit-Rivera was hired as a brand manager. In this position, she will leverage market research and lead Dole's marketing efforts to deliver value for customers and drive long-term sales through message positioning and new product development. She has extensive experience in trade and consumer marketing.

Keith Kelley was hired as a marketing manager for new products. He will be responsible for leading the group's efforts in new product development planning, specifically focusing the company's cross-functional resources against top priority new product segments and co-managing the innovation process to drive long-term sales and profit growth.

MIXTEC GROUP
PASADENA, CA

Leonard Batti was hired as managing/senior partner for the newly opened Monterey/Salinas, CA-based office. With 30 years of produce experience, he began his career with Fresh Express, Inc., and advanced his career as one of the early pioneers in value-added salad processing. He currently serves on the Produce Marketing Association's board of directors.

TANIMURA & ANTLE, INC.
SALINAS, CA

Doug Meyer has been appointed director of sales for Wal-Mart and Sam's Club. He will manage all aspects of Tanimura & Antle's product sales to these customers. including the 8-member team currently in place. Meyer joined the company in 1995 after graduating from California Polytechnic Institute with a degree in agribusiness.

APIO, INC.
GUADALUPE, CA

Ron Midyett was promoted to CEO.
With 20 years of technology and operations experience in the produce industry and nearly three years experience as COO, he will focus on integrating technology, operations, marketing and sales to advance and lead Apio's future growth. Before joining Apio, he was senior vice president of operations for Dole Fresh Vegetables, Inc.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Red Blossom, ASG Produce Merge

Red Blossom Farms, Inc., Santa Maria, CA, and ASG Produce, Inc., Fresno, CA, have merged to form a seamless marketing company with in-house sales under the name Red Blossom Sales, Inc. The merger comes after three years of teaming up and will create administrative and service synergies for Red Blossom Sales, its growers and its customers.

Reader Service No. 300

South African Citrus Season Appears Promising

Citrus Producers Forum (CPF), a Citrusdal, South Africa, organization representing nearly 300 producers eligible to export citrus into the United States, expects 2008 to be its best year for summer citrus exports. According to Piet Smith, managing director for CPF (photo at right), more than 34,000 tons of summer citrus from South Africa was shipped to the United States during the 2007 season.

Reader Service No. 301

Mexico Calidad Suprema Plans In-Store Pilot Programs

Mexico Supreme Quality/Mexico Calidad Suprema (MCS), Mexico City, Mexico, will offer in-store events to retailers this year. The retail outreach effort will focus on hands-on, in-store activities. Participating retailers will receive ad, product, demo and signage support. MCS merchandisers will also offer these chains educational events.

Reader Service No. 302

Concord Foods' New Packaging

Concord Foods, Inc., Brockton, MA, has launched new smoothie and seasoning packaging. The 1.5-ounce foil pouches include Banana Smoothie Mix, Guacamole Dip, Onion Ring Batter and a variety of other smoothie and seasoning products carried in produce departments. The pouches are available in 18-pack cases and 144-pack assorted shippers.

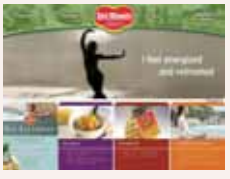
Reader Service No. 303

Farmers Fruit Express Selects New Name

Farmers Fruit Express, Inc., Capitola, CA, has changed its name to Awe Sum Organics, Inc., in effort to better reflect its Awe Sum brand of organic fruit. The company's president and CEO, David Posner, started thinking about changing its name less than five years after founding it in 1985.

Reader Service No. 304

Del Monte Launches Consumer Web Site

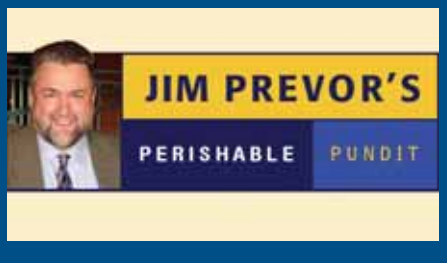


Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A., Inc., Coral Gables, FL, launched a new Web site, *www.fruits.com*, in an effort to provide consumers with the information and tools to lead a healthful lifestyle. The site contains sections with information about Del Monte products, along with recipes, nutrition facts and fitness tips. Visitors to the site can also participate in the latest Del Monte promotions.

Reader Service No. 305

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

The Pundit Looks At *What's In A Meal?*



From Jim Prevor's *Perishable Pundit*, January 4, 2008

A hat tip to Rick Eastes, director special projects for the Ballantine Produce Co., Inc., Reedley, CA, for passing along an e-mail that shows photos of different families around the world with a picture of what foods they eat in a week as well as the cost for the foods.

Germany
The Melander family
of Bargteheide
Food expenditure for one week: 375.39 Euros or $500.07

United States
The Revis family
of North Carolina
(Sure hope most American families eat more fresh fruits and vegetables and less junk food than this family.)
Food expenditure for one week: $341.98

Italy
The Manzo family
of Sicily
Food expenditure for one week: 214.36 Euros or $260.11

Mexico
The Casales family
of Cuernavaca
Food expenditure for one week: 1,862.78 Mexican Pesos or $189.09

Poland
The Sobczynscy family
of Konstancin-Jeziorna
Food expenditure for one week: 582.48 Zlotys or $151.27

Egypt
The Ahmed family
of Cairo
Food expenditure for one week: 387.85 Egyptian Pounds or $68.53

Ecuador
The Ayme family
of Tingo
Food expenditure for one week: $31.55

Bhutan
The Namgay family
of Shingkhey Village
Food expenditure for one week: 224.93 ngultrum or $5.03

Chad
The Aboubakar family
of Breidjing Camp
Food expenditure for one week: 685 CFA Francs or $1.23

The e-mail, being sent all over the world, is derived from a *Time* feature that gives portraits of 15 families. You can read the full *Time* piece at *www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1626519,00.html.*

The photos are by Peter Menzel, and *Time* derived its piece by excerpting from the book *Hungry Planet*. Here is how the publisher summarizes the book:

On the banks of Mali's Niger River, Soumana Natomo and his family gather for a communal dinner of millet porridge with tamarind juice. In the USA, the Ronayne-Caven family enjoys corndogs-on-a-stick with a tossed green salad. This age-old practice of sitting down to a family meal is undergoing unprecedented change as rising world affluence and trade, along with the spread of global food conglomerates, transform diets worldwide.

In Hungry Planet, *the creative team behind the best-selling* Material World, Women in the Material World, *and* Man Eating Bugs *presents a photographic study of families from around the world, revealing what people eat during the course of one week. Each family's profile includes a detailed description.*

A glance at the photos leads those in affluent countries to count their blessings. It also seems there is a decided lack of fresh produce in the American diet.

Since the American population came from these other places, we really need to think what it is about our society that leads us to so deemphasize fresh produce. **www.perishablepundit.com**

Are You Ready For COOL?

COOL legislation will go into effect this year — and many retailers are not fully prepared.

BY DUANE CRAIG

Are your stores cool with COOL?

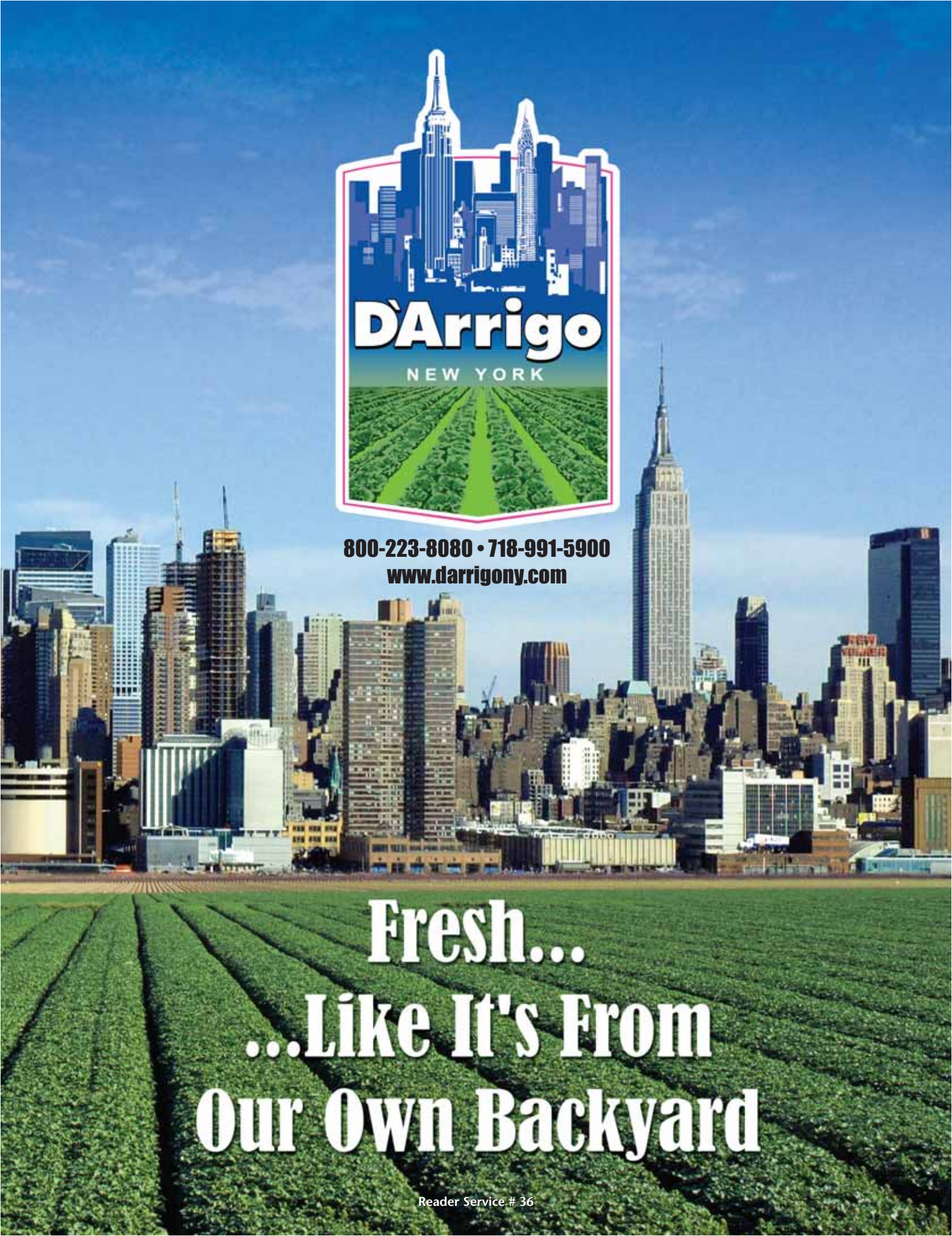
Since June 28, 2007, nearly 27 percent of retail stores randomly audited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), the organization tasked with implementing country-of-origin labeling (COOL) requirements, were not in full compliance with existing requirements — and the voluntary compliance that exist right now will be superceded by more stringent mandates on Sept. 30, 2008.

According to Billy Cox, AMS director of public affairs, "393 audits have been completed since June 28, 2007. Of those audits, 122 had non-compliance findings reported. Out of the 122 findings reported, 15 of the audits had findings that were minor or insignificant and did not indicate that the Country of Origin Labeling and Record Keeping system at that facility was not reliably identifying the covered commodities. This would be a full compliance rate of 286/393 = 72.7 percent It is important to note that retail facilities not in full compliance are required to correct noted non-compliances, respond to the audit findings with corrective/preventative measures, and are subject to follow-up audits."

These results were better than in 2006, Cox continues, when "1,159 audits were conducted with 59 percent of these audits indicating full compliance." Last year may have been an improvement over the previous year, but a 27 percent non-compliance rate is still too high.

Retailers have a lot of work ahead of them, since responsibility for COOL compliance rests on their shoulders.

"As originally proposed, the responsibility of COOL would fall heavily on the retailers since they will be required to have the country-of-origin information properly displayed at the retail level," explains Dionysios Christou, vice president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Reader Service # 36

marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce in Coral Gables, FL. "Currently, under the Tariff Act of 1930, containers, such as cartons and boxes holding imported fresh fruits and vegetables, must bear a country-of-origin declaration, as defined by current Bureau of Customs and Border Protection regulations when entering the United States. However, under current law, a retailer may remove loose produce from a labeled container and display it in an open bin, selling each individual piece of produce without a country-of-origin declaration. In contrast, this proposed rule would require the retailer to notify the consumer as to the country of origin of all covered commodities whether individually packaged or displayed in a bin. Del Monte Fresh Produce has begun to make this process as easy as possible for the retailers by creating display ready boxes and applying COOL on each product sticker."

"Right now our focus is on moving on," claims Bill Greer, director of communications for the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) in Arlington, VA. "We've got a law that's about to be on the books so we have to figure out what it is we have to implement whether it's the [2007] Farm Bill version or it's the original version. We sure hope it's going to be the 2007 Farm Bill version. But we have to get regulations in place so we know just exactly what's going to be required of not only retailers but also the entire industry. We want to make sure those regulations are as workable as possible. We're still a long way from knowing exactly what the law is going to require as the regulation is implemented." He sees those who have to comply needing six to nine months from the time regulations are formulated to get things into compliance.

INDUSTRY REACTION

There is a wide range of viewpoints on both the retail side and the supply side. Some see COOL as a potential boon to food safety, some see it as an onerous mandate and some see it as having little or no effect.

Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for King's Supermarket in Parsippany, NJ, explains his company already labels the origins of produce items and believes King's would get some feedback if it were to stop labeling. But overall he doesn't see labeling as something that will cause changes in purchase decisions. "I came from a company that didn't [do country of origin labeling] and we had very few people say that we should do it," he says. "If customers want something, they're going to buy it."

"We're not seeing a flood of consumers saying they need to know where [their produce] is coming from," says Eric Schwartz, president of Dole Fresh Vegetables in Salinas, CA, "so I really couldn't tell you how much of this is just certain industries wanting to protect what they have versus the consumers asking to know where their products are coming from. As long as any company has traceability, which under the Bioterrorism Act it needs to have, then the country of origin from a regulatory standpoint is covered."

John Pandol, manager of Mexican sourcing and special projects for Pandol Brothers in Delano, CA, is more strident in his assessment of COOL and its championed effect on consumers. "It's one of those great lies out there that if consumers only knew the national origin, it would benefit U.S. growers — and that is a categorically false assumption," he claims. "I cannot believe the amount of time, talent and treasure our produce industry has spent essentially chasing a non-issue that does not benefit us at all. The idea seems to be that if we can't beat them on quality or freshness we'll just throw tacks in the road."

Historical Perspective

In June 2001, near the end of the House Committee on Agriculture hearings related to the formulation of the 2002 Farm Bill, committee member Rep. Adam H. Putnam (R-FL) asked five industry witnesses a question regarding country of origin labeling (COOL): "...As we have these imports flooding the supermarkets and the retail area, to what degree will some type of labeling requirement improve demand for domestically grown fruits and vegetables?"

Two witnesses thought the idea would raise consumer awareness of where their food was coming from and supported the idea. Two responded the consumer was more concerned with other things but labeling would be important to them in times of food-safety crises.

The remaining witness pointed to a Florida law, in effect since 1979, that requires country-of-origin labeling and cited the statistic that 90 percent of consumers were in favor of it. Still, in a subsequent statement added to the record, when asked to produce evidence the Florida law actually increased the percentage of domestic produce purchased, the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association (FFVA), Maitland, FL, stated it couldn't find any such evidence.

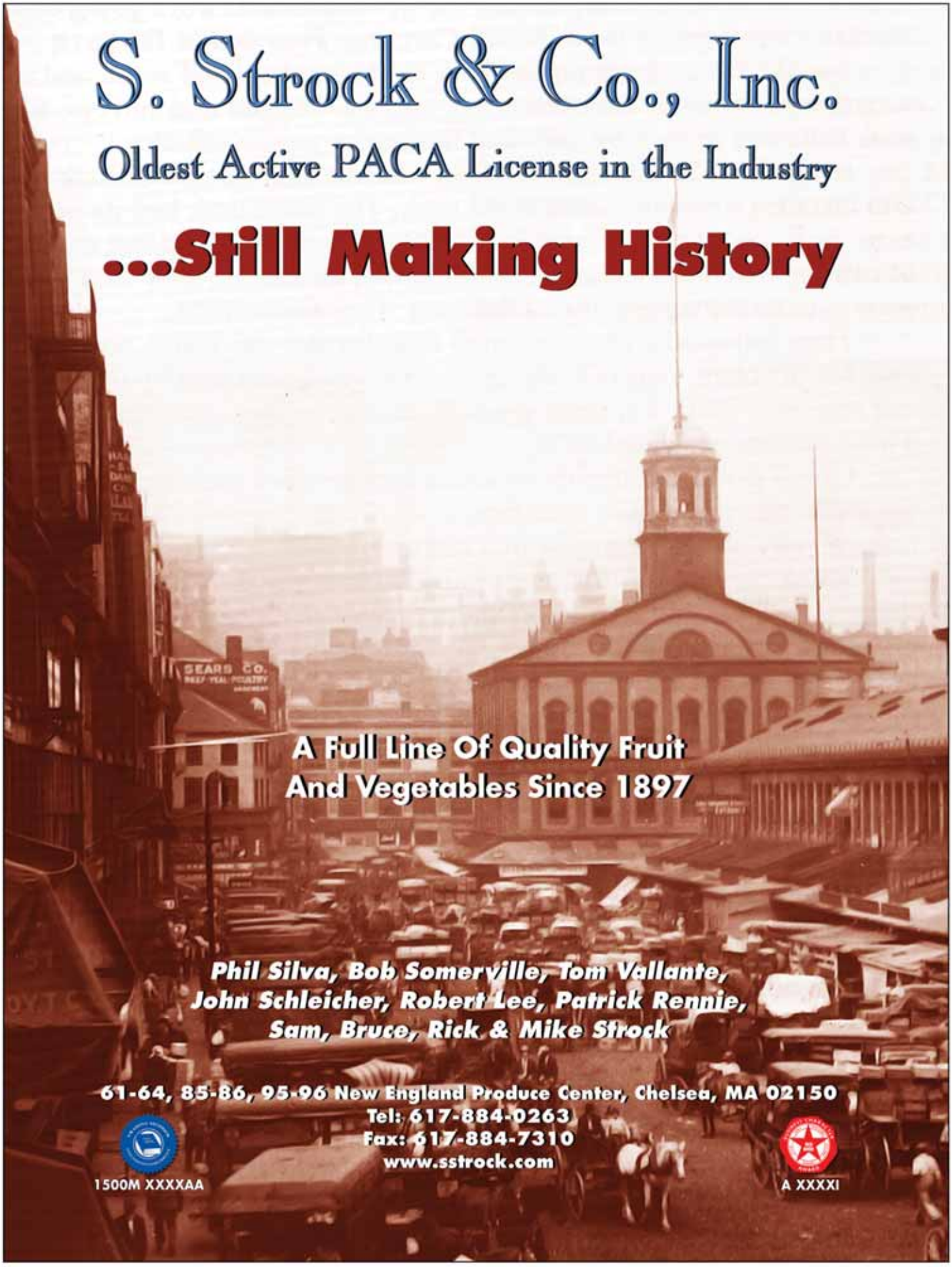
That one question — whether or not consumers really do care to know where their produce comes from — has always been a point of contention in COOL discussions and one that blurred the line between an effort aimed at protecting markets versus one aimed at consumers' right to know. Food safety has also been thrown into the mix on occasion.

"It was really a marketing program," says Bill Greer, director of communications for the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) in Arlington, VA. "Basically, the idea was to highlight which products were made in the United States and to encourage consumers to buy those products." He backs this up by saying he recalls that in a later hearing, industry proponents of COOL were asked whether COOL was a food-safety program or a marketing program. He says each one acknowledged — on the record — that it was a marketing program.

Mike Stuart, FFVA president, says his organization has always been in favor of COOL and FFVA's biggest problem with it has been in getting it implemented. He believes consumers really do care where their food comes from. "We have supported the concept of getting information to consumers on the products they buy for a long, long time. This has been entirely consistent with FFVA's position going back well before the 2002 Farm Bill."

Stuart says the original version of COOL was fine with his organization but the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) implementation was too burdensome. FFVA wasn't happy about USDA's rigid regulatory approach and its not taking into account some unique features of the fruit and vegetable industry. "We have a law in place that hasn't been implemented," he says. "We have changes coming through the 2007 Farm Bill that will make some modifications to the original bill that was passed back in 2002, which I think will ease some of the major issues that had arisen, particularly in areas such as record keeping where there was a lot of concern expressed out there in the industry. So hopefully, if the Farm Bill is passed, that would clear the decks for this thing to be finally implemented and be put in place."

According to Robert Guenther, senior vice president of public policy, the United Fresh Produce Association in Washington, D.C., initially supported the law as long as it didn't cause any undue regulatory burden on the industry. "We were at a point where we felt that labeling in the produce industry was fairly robust," he explains. "Then what happened was those regulations started coming out and they were telling people that you could not use your state labeling as sufficient for country-of-origin and you had to label it with all the different ingredients if it was commingled with other countries. That's when we became very concerned about it and that's why we said that if USDA were going to interpret the law this way, then we needed to slow down a bit, look at this and try to create a labeling program that is going to be helpful to the industry and in-line with what they're already doing." **pb**



Reader Service # 67

John McClung, president and CEO of the Texas Produce Association (TPA) in Mission, TX, who was a witness at the 2001 House Committee on Agriculture hearing (Please see *Historical Perspective* sidebar), also wonders about the validity of the consumer question. "We have never believed that the origin, except in some narrow circumstances, matters a great deal to consumers. Consumers are more concerned with what they judge to be quality and to a much lesser extent price. After that, I recognize that when you do consumer surveys, they tell you origin is important to them. The trouble is it's not important enough in the grand scheme of things to influence their purchasing patterns. The exception is when you have a food-safety scare involving a given commodity, and in that case then maybe you do have [more interest]."

FMI points to evidence it says shows a majority of consumers "prefer no labeling at all or labels only for U.S. products." FMI cites consumer surveys from 2004 and 2005 in which 3 percent and less of those surveyed expressed assigning any importance to COOL.

Lorna Christie, senior vice president of industry products and services for the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) in Newark, DE, agrees with McClung about consumer interest in where the food comes from as it relates to food safety but also raises the idea of COOL helping to promote locally grown produce. "Given the growing concern over imports from China and other regions, providing COOL is just another way to let consumers know where their food is coming from.

"Since the compromise provisions allow for regional designations, established marketing programs like *Jersey Fresh* would remain valid and, in addition to promoting locally grown produce, would also provide COOL. We certainly understand that with the enhanced sensitivities about the origin of products, it is certainly an important issue for consumers," she continues. The compromise provisions she references were worked out between industry groups and Congress to make the provision for COOL more palatable to retailers and the produce industry. These are reflected in the 2007 Farm Bill versions of COOL from both the House and Senate.

RETAIL CHALLENGES

FMI has been critical of mandatory COOL; it cites the estimated $3.9 billion in first year costs and postulates that labeling for produce, in particular, will not always be accurate. "The 2002 law requires retailers to show the product's country of origin with signs, shelf tags, labels on individual items or other means," according to FMI pronouncements. "Because of the rapid turnover in the department, the country information will have to be changed and updated constantly. In addition, it would be difficult for the many part-time produce clerks to keep this information accurate and current."

Some retailers see much the same scenario. Brad Fritz, director of produce marketing for Nugget Markets, Inc. an 11-store chain based in Woodland, CA, says his customers are more into buying local but he still gets produce from all over the world. He's not sure how his company will label for COOL — whether they will use flags or write on the signs — but he does have reservations about how accurate labeling can always be. "It's going to be tough but it's going to be one of those things people are going to have to be understanding about," he says. "I'm sure we'll have a great system in place and I'm confident we'll do a great job — but there's always that human error factor."

He says knowing where the products come from is not a problem; the problem will be in making sure the signage is correct. One day a product might come from California, the next day it might come from Mexico and then it could switch back to California the following day. He believes the transition times when suppliers are following the prevailing production are potentially the most challenging for making sure signage is correct.

In a statement filed with AMS, the Western Growers Association (WGA), based in Irvine, CA, came out in support of COOL with some reservations, one of which applied to the labeling of bulk produce. WGA called for the allowance of "flexible labeling of bulk displayed unwrapped produce commodities, which would include the use of signage or stickers applied to a reasonable percentage of produce commodity."

King's Kneeland sees challenges associated with the changing seasons of produce since stores could

A View From The North

Standing on a mountainside overlooking the forest often provides the big picture. Being among the trees can cause tunnel vision focused on the near term rather than the long term. Both views are part of seeing the whole picture, and when it comes to initiatives like COOL, Canada has a view from the mountainside.

"We've had country-of-origin labeling requirements in Canada for what seems to be over 30 years," says Danny Dempster, president of the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA), Ottawa, Ontario. "I don't know that a lot of people go into a store and say they are looking for Canadian first. I'm sure that exists, but I think people buy for other reasons."

According to Dempster, Canada puts the burden of making sure products are labeled according to country of origin on retailers; it can be a challenge to try to keep all the signs — especially the bulk produce signs — accurate.

"Retail chains have told me they've implemented programs to make sure people know about it and they put the signs up properly," he notes. "Is that to say it's foolproof and will be right 100 percent of the time? I don't think so because you can probably go into a store anytime up here — even those that are committed to try to comply — and find product labeled from one place when it's really from somewhere else. It would be a challenge for anybody in the retail business, given the multitude of different products and the number of different countries from where they're sourcing."

Dempster claims the Canadian government's approach to enforcing its version of COOL is more focused on education than enforcement. While violators aren't aggressively pursued, he suspects that when violators are discovered, it may be because foreign produce is seen as competing with in-season local supplies. "My experience up here has been when there's a complaint about a package that's not legit, you almost have a suspicion it's one of the other suppliers or a competing supplier or a competing customer that's complaining because, to be quite honest, I don't know that the average consumer would know — or care," he says.

However, he does acknowledge the valid business concerns of those in any industry when it comes to government mandates. As he has watched the COOL process unfold in the United States, he has seen definite points of contention that, under similar circumstances, would also have arisen in Canada. "I suspect that if you had $10,000 fines for violations — or even $1,000 fines for violations — you'd be adding a major cost at the source to be compliant," he says. "If $10,000 fines had been part of the discussion when Canada was adding COOL to their requirements, there would have been more furor." He also points to record maintenance requirements as being a potential point of contention for retailers.

Some have advocated labeling as a means to let consumers know the food they are about to purchase may be from a source that has had food-safety issues. Dempster perceives the tendency to make food safety a jurisdictional issue as dangerous and questions the assumption that products from one particular country, or locale, are safer than those from others, when the records don't necessarily bear that out.

"Food safety has no jurisdictional place," he says. "Food safety should mean the same thing to somebody living in Ottawa, Washington, Tokyo, Mexico City or wherever. It's not about ours versus theirs. It's about food safety." **pb**

very well have a single commodity from different sources and from different countries. "We already put up country of origin on signs," he says. "As far as the other things that are required, that would have to be worked on once it's all finalized — assuming they're going to give us a little bit of time to get it up and running." He thinks it will be difficult to achieve compliance with the requirements if retailers are not allowed enough time.

MANDATORY QUESTION

McClung says TPA's desire was to have a voluntary effort aimed at labeling the countries of origin. Indeed, the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) issued a report in January 2004 that found making COOL provisions mandatory would likely generate more costs than benefits. The report also noted food suppliers can voluntarily label their products with country of origin but they "have not emphasized, advertised or labeled food made in the United States because they discount this attribute's potential to attract sufficient consumer interest."

TPA has never had an issue with COOL since it was already largely in place, according to McClung. "We had wanted it to be a voluntary program and that is the way the industry coalition [developed] the program," he relates. "But when we took it to Congress, it rather whimsically put the ball right back in the mandatory program category. The practical reality is that most products are already labeled. It doesn't require a law to get it labeled as to origin." He's always thought it was an economic issue masquerading as a public-right-to-know issue and contends that, like it or not, the United States is in a global produce economy.

"One thing people should know from the retail perspective is that we were never opposed to country of origin labeling or origin labeling of any kind," says FMI's Greer. "To the extent that consumers want it, retailers for years have been featuring locally grown products or products associated with different states or different regions. Retailers have been doing that for decades. The problem we had was the mandatory labeling law and the law that put the onus on retailers for the labeling — that just didn't make any sense. This is really the only labeling program we can think of where the retailer is responsible for the labeling, and that is an entirely backwards notion. The labeling on a product ought to be the responsibility of the supplier of the product because only the supplier can vouch for the quality of the product, the contents of the product and the origin of the product."

COOL, as originally written into the 2002 Farm Bill, has been delayed twice by Public Laws signed by President George W. Bush, according to AMS. Regardless of the motivations behind COOL and the long road to its implementation, the version in the 2002 Farm Bill is now slated to go into effect on Sept. 30, 2008, according to Billy Cox, AMS director of public affairs. Unless Congress makes some change relating to an implementation date, he says, even if the 2007 Farm Bill passes, it will be implemented in September of this year.

To many in the industry the COOL provision as written in the 2002 Farm Bill would be unwelcome. "If what's in the [2007] Farm Bill right now does not pass, then what we are dealing with is the original regulation, which does contain some challenges for the industry," notes PMA's Christie. "We worked very hard in the coalition to get provisions in the existing Farm Bill that were responsive to consumers wanting to know where their produce comes from, but also we were able to work within those provisions so they were not overly burdensome or costly without any benefit for the industry."

"I just can't see anything happening that's going to make this string out any longer than September 2008," says Robert Guenther, senior vice president of public policy, United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, D.C. He theorizes that if the 2007 Farm Bill doesn't become law, the COOL provisions within that bill would end up being attached to something such as an appropriations bill that has to pass this year. This would cause USDA to implement the law with the changes that have been agreed to.

"Del Monte Fresh Produce supports giving consumers information about our products, including COOL," explains Christou. "Once enacted, the new law will supplement COOL practices that are already voluntarily in place. So long as USDA implements the new law fairly and does not impose any additional unexpected costs or burdens on the industry, the COOL law should go into effect with minimal disruption or impact in the marketplace." **pb**

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Reader Service # 63

Spring Merchandising Ideas

'Tis the season to shower stores with fresh promotions.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

Actor Robin Williams' quote, "Spring is nature's way of saying 'Let's party,'" hits home in the produce department.

In spite of year-round availability, the first domestic asparagus of the season excites consumers as much as the return of green lawns.

According to Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for Kings Super Markets, Inc., a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ, "Spring is one of the best-selling seasons in produce."

FRUITS & VEGGIES — MORE MATTERS MONTH March

March is the anniversary of the *Fruits & Veggies — More Matters* message, reports Mike O'Brien, vice president of produce for Schnuck Markets, Inc. (Schnucks), a 101-store chain headquartered in St. Louis, MO, and 2007 chair of the Wilmington, DE-based Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) board of trustees. "We plan on making a big splash about this 1-year anniversary and the fact that March is Nutrition Month."

Elizabeth Pivonka, president and CEO of PBH, explains, "Our goal for 2008 is to build on momentum generated this first year and continue to encourage moms to include more fruits and veggies in every eating occasion."

One feature of National Nutrition Month 2008 will be a new series of consumer tips under the slogan, *Get Smart! Fruits & Veggies — More Matters*. The tips are designed to help consumers overcome traditional barriers to purchasing, preparing and serving more fruits and veggies at every eating occasion. Ideas and information will be organized under three topics — As You Shop, In Your Family Dinner and Eating On the Go — to address separate opportunities that often present challenges to mothers.

O'Brien plans to communicate this message to shoppers by taking advantage of materials received from PBH. "They make life so easy for a retailer by providing a [computer] disc with all of the materials needed to have a successful ad campaign."

Continued on page 24

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St. Patrick's Day At Kings Super Markets And New Seasons Market

Cabbage is often featured in St. Patrick's Day ads at Kings Super Markets, Inc., based in Parsippany, NJ. "We've advertised green items like Granny Smith apples, cucumbers and green peppers, along with cabbage, in ads printed with a green background," explains Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral. In-store displays echo the green theme. "We'll decorate displays with leprechauns and shamrocks, and tie in produce along with other items from throughout the store, such as bakery cakes with green frosting."

On the Saturday before St. Patrick's Day, customers at the Happy Valley outlet of New Seasons Market, a 10-store chain based in Portland, OR, will be able to attend a 1½-hour class that will teach them how to select and prepare many types of leafy greens. "Classes like this and others are definitely popular with our customers," reports Jeff Fairchild, director of produce. **pb**

Continued from page 20

PBH also offers a downloadable version of its advertising tool kit on its Web site.

MARCH MADNESS
March 16-April 7

Sports fans may call it "March Madness," but the series' official name is the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Men's Division I Basketball Championship. It's a group of regional competitions that take place over three weeks in March and culminate in the national semifinals or Final Four in April. According to the Snack Food Association (SFA), Alexandria, VA, consumption of snack foods by March Madness fans can nearly match that of the Super Bowl bite for bite.

Lara Grossman, director of marketing and business development for Tanimura & Antle (T&A), Inc., Salinas, CA, says, "This is a great time for produce promotions at the retail and foodservice level, especially for those areas whose local college teams may be advancing in their own division."

Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc., Vernon, CA, advises, "Create large displays of snack items. End caps are popular as well as ads in the weekly supermarket flyers that group these items with a sports theme. Top-selling items include salsa and guacamole and their ingredients, key limes for salsa, nuts like pistachios and beer."

ST. PATRICK'S DAY
March 17

Corned beef and cabbage is the traditional dish of St. Patrick's Day.

Maureen Torrey Marshall, vice president of Torrey Farms, Inc., in Elba, NY, notes, "St. Patrick's Day is still one of the year's biggest holidays for cabbage sales. We introduced a wrapped head a few years ago, but retailers are now looking for a more natural look and demanding unwrapped heads."

Retailers usually put cabbage on special in the one to two weeks leading up to St. Patrick's Day, Torrey adds. "Some retailers feature cabbage on the front page of their weekly ad circular with a loss-leader price as low as 10¢ per pound. This is especially popular in areas with a large Irish population, such as the Northeast. But they don't have to go this low. Cabbage will sell any way during this holiday."

LeeAnne Oxford, marketing director for L&M Companies, Inc., in Raleigh, NC, recommends, "It's helpful to offer POS recipes

for cabbage. Even simple instructions that describe how to boil cabbage are helpful. Many younger consumers don't have the basic cooking skills of past generations."

Savvy retailers are branching beyond cabbage and promoting an entire green theme, reports Karen Caplan, president and CEO of Frieda's, Inc., in Los Alamitos, CA. "This time of year, retailers can also promote cherimoya, snow peas, baby bok choy, romaine lettuce and Granny Smith apples."

T&A's Grossman adds, "Broccoflower is a festive product to offer during St. Patrick's Day due to its bright green color and all-around uniqueness."

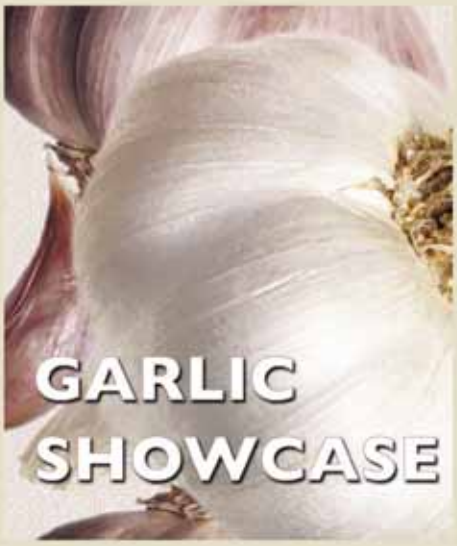
Artichokes Take Center Stage At Econo Food Stores

Getting customers hooked on artichokes by promoting them via a sampling demo is what produce supervisor, Jim Weber, and his staff do each spring at Econo Food Stores, based in Iron Mountain, MI, and owned by Nash Finch Company, Minneapolis, MN. "It amazes me how many customers have never tried them. It's like introducing a brand new vegetable."

Weber orders large artichokes for the promotion, 12- to 15-count size. Then he has his staff demo them accompanied by two to three sauces. These may include mayonnaise-based, butter-based and spicy-flavored dipping sauces. The promotion pays off, Weber notes. "Typically, we have about a case on the shelf at any one time, but during this spring promotion, we'll display as many as 20 cases at a time and sell as many as 50 cases a week at each of our six stores." **pb**

EASTER March 23

Think of Easter as a duplicate of Thanksgiving but replacing turkey with ham, explains Schueller. "It's a time for big family meals — ham with all the ingredients and fixings for side dishes, such as potatoes, green peas, pearl onions, fresh corn, asparagus and salad fixings."



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Caplan agrees, adding, "Pineapple is always a big seller to accompany ham."

California asparagus cranks up into full production from all growing areas by the third week of March, according to Tom Tjerandsen, spokesman for the California Asparagus Commission (CAC), Stockton, CA. "Typically, retailers will promote asparagus for Easter, then not again until maybe Mother's Day. The peaks in production have smoothed out, however, and there is ample quantity to promote several times throughout the spring." [***Editor's note:*** *Please see* Year-Round Asparagus Requires Year-Round Vigilance*, beginning on page 62 for additonal information.*]

"We don't recommend retailers display asparagus in standing water due to bacterial concerns," explains Cherie Watte, CAC executive director. "Instead, it's best to keep asparagus upright on a sanitary moisture pad and at a constant temperature of 33° to 34°F. This will assure a safe and high-quality product."

Offer customers asparagus in a variety of widths, Tjerandsen recommends. "We've seen big movement recently in the pencil-thin size for salads and crudité platters. Consumers have also discovered that jumbo asparagus can be tender, not fibrous, and it's great for grilling."

CAC offers POS recipe cards and booklets that can be incorporated into a display and prompt impulse sales by offering consumers new ways to prepare this spring vegetable.

The industry is experimenting with a new pack size, says Watte. "Currently, growers pack in 11-pound or 28-pound cartons. We're now looking at replacing the 28-pound with a 22-pound carton and expect to debut this size for the 2009 season. Benefits are that the 22-pound cartoon fits on a pallet better and offers shipping advantages that can increase quality through faster arrivals."

In addition to asparagus, Easter is a big berry holiday. Valerie Sill, strawberry business manager for Driscoll Strawberry Associates, Inc., in Watsonville, CA, says, "Easter is early this year, creating a significant opportunity for retailers to generate excitement around the berry patch early on. Selling in a berry patch format takes advantage of the combined aromas and natural colors of popular berry commodities — strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries. This gives the retailer increased flexibility to expand and contract the display as seasonality allows. Secondary displays can be used to handle the increased demand during promotions."

Chris Christian, director of nutrition and category development for the California Strawberry Commission (CSC), in Watsonville, CA, recommends "retailers maintain consistent displays of 1-pound clamshells and merchandise and promote 2- and 4-pound clamshells during spring and summer months."

FLORIDA TOMATO MONTH
April

Florida is the country's major source for field-grown tomatoes in the spring. According to according to *Florida Agriculture Statistical Highlights 2006*, a brochure published by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Tallahassee, FL, the state supplies 49 percent of total U.S. sales value for fresh market tomatoes.

Round, Roma, cherry, beefsteak, vine-ripe and heirloom varieties of tomatoes are grown in the state. This season, the Florida Tomato Committee (FTC), in Maitland, FL, has teamed up with The Food Network for a major springtime promotion. [***Editor's note:*** *Please see* Florida Spring Produce Report*, beginning on page 32 for a discussion of this promotional program.*]

ARTICHOKE MONTH
April

Nearly 100 percent of all artichokes grown commercially in the United States are harvested in California — specifically in Monterey County.

Kori Tuggle, marketing manager for Ocean Mist Farms, Castroville, CA, reports, "The peak of the annual Castroville crop will start in March and go through the end of May. Traditionally, there's heavier volume on the larger artichokes — the 12-, 18- and 24-count — in April, and heavier volume on the medium — the 30- to 36-count and baby sizes — in May. We suggest retailers utilize the natural variation of the crop volume by size to maximize their sales."

When shopping for artichokes, consumers respond best to price reductions, attractive displays, in-store advertising,

B&R Store Celebrate Cinco De Mayo

An increase in the number of Latino produce items offered and the highlighting of Latino items regularly stocked are part of the annual Cinco de Mayo promotion at Lincoln, NE-based B&R Stores, Inc., a 15-unit chain operating under the Super Saver and Russ's Market banners.

Produce director Randy Bohaty explains, "We have a big display in front of each of our produce departments and a secondary display in the front of each store. Each display is marked with quite a bit of signage, including a big banner that calls attention to the holiday. Our stores stock a mandatory list of Latino produce items to be carried. For those stores that don't have as much Hispanic clientele, we bring in different items, such as aloe vera leaves or something that gives a 'What's that?' appeal. We highlight these items, so customers will give them a second look, revisit the category and ultimately buy." **pb**

> **"Typically, retailers will promote asparagus for Easter, then not again until maybe Mother's Day."**
>
> **— Tom Tjerandsen**
> **California Asparagus Commission**

coupons and signage in the store. "With less than half of consumers making the decision to buy at the store, it increases the importance of reaching out with information about artichoke usage, preparation and nutrition information," she adds.

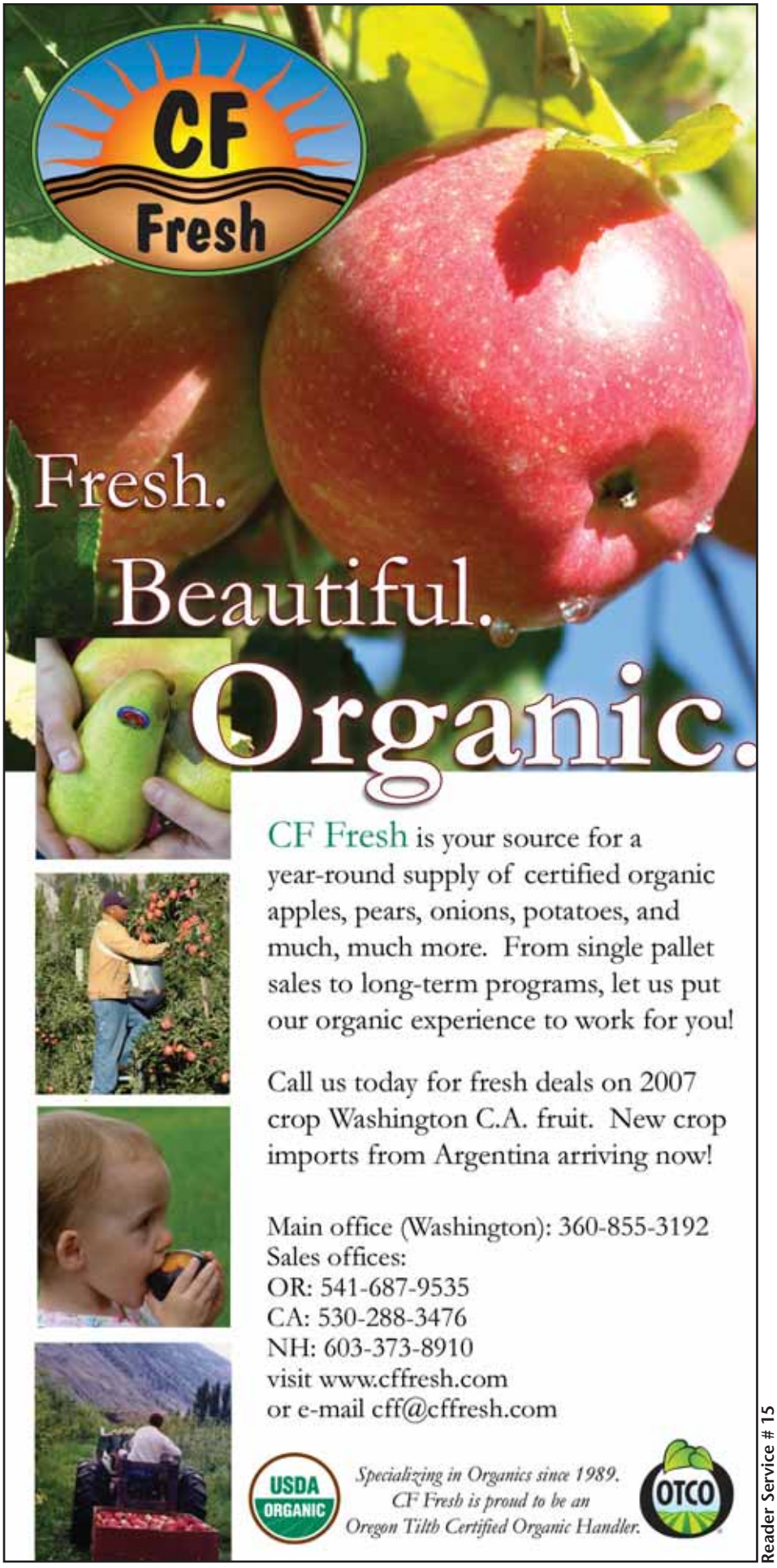
Tuggle says research shows most shoppers (72 percent) prefer to purchase individual artichokes from bulk displays. However, more than half (54 percent) of consumers who buy packaged artichokes said it was because they were more convenient or were perceived to be of better value.

PASSOVER
April 19

The timing of Passover this year — nearly four weeks after Easter — "gives retailers a chance to shine in terms of stocking ample quantities and promoting key items like apples, walnuts, root vegetables and especially horseradish," according to Frieda's Caplan.

Horseradish is one of the five bitter herbs of the Jewish Passover. Dennis Diekemper, manager for the J.R. Kelly Company, Collinsville, IL, explains, "One-third of all fresh horseradish is sold for this holiday."

Melissa's Schueller recommends, "Create a special section of Passover items with sig-



Reader Service # 15

Spring Berries At Acme Markets And New Seasons Market

Fresh berries are the feature of some much-anticipated annual promotions at Acme Markets, Inc., a 134-store chain based in Malvern, PA. "We do two or three berry festival promotions from April to July," according to Jay Schneider, produce assistant sales manager for the eastern division.

During each of these 1-week promotions, Acme stores stock eight to 10 SKUs of berries, including long-stem strawberries, half-flats, 1-, 2- and 4-pound packs, chocolate-dipped strawberries and, depending on availability, pints of blueberries, raspberries and blackberries in a refrigerated display area — averaging 12 feet — at the entrance to both the produce department and the store. All the berries are price promoted in a center-spread color ad in the store's newspaper circular.

"We'll roll a cooler of whipped cream into the produce department as a tie-in. The bakery sends over pre-made strawberry shortcakes. It's really a lot of fun and there's an extra kick in berry sales," Schneider adds.

New Seasons Market, a 10-store chain headquartered in Portland, OR, serves up strawberry shortcake — with a twist — to its customers. Proceeds from each slice sold benefit a local organization dedicated to the prevention of domestic violence.

"We hold the promotion each year on the Saturday before Mother's Day," notes Jeff Fairchild, director of produce. "Last year, we featured Haagen-Dazs vanilla ice cream on shortcake made by our bakery, covered with Driscoll strawberries and topped with Organic Valley whipped cream. Each slice sold for $3.50. The promotion ran from 11 AM until 5 PM."

An advertisement in the store's weekly flyer pulls customers into the store for this sweet treat. "It's a really great event that our customers love and look forward to each year," he adds. **pb**

Reader Service # 19

nage to identify this significant Jewish holiday. Also, create ads that focus on the meal as a whole and feature multiple items." Melissa's offers Passover Haggadahs retailers can offer their customers. A Haggadah is a small booklet that tells the story and tradition of Passover. Melissa's Haggadahs also contain a recipe section.

EARTH DAY
April 23

Earth Day is a big activity in many schools, says L&M's Oxford, "and as a result, many retailers are tying in and promoting both organics and locally grown produce."

Last year, more than 3,500 supermarkets and 40 name-brand organic manufacturers across the country participated in the *Go Organic! for Earth Day* campaign, which encourages consumers to try organic products and raises awareness about how organic production can benefit the planet. Spearheaded by the Organic Trade Association (OTA), Greenfield, MA, the campaign includes special in-store events, promotions and organic product sampling, as well as coupons available at participating stores throughout April.

Caren Wilcox, OTA executive director, explains, "We've seen an exponential growth in consumer demand for organics over the last few years, fueled by the desire for improved personal health and a better environment. Not only are organic products available at specialty grocery stores and co-ops that championed the cause in the early days but they are also now available at mainstream retailers."

CINCO DE MAYO
May 5

Cinco de Mayo is a Mexican holiday that commemorates the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862. Today, in the United States, it has become a reason to party and feast on a variety of favorite Mexican dishes.

Melissa's Schueller says, "Top sellers for

Cinco de Mayo include all kinds of chilies, tomatillos, cactus leaves, cilantro, chayote squash, yucca root, corn husks, pinto beans, jicama, cactus leaves, tomatoes, avocados and plantains." Melissa's offers retailers a themed POS kit that includes shelf danglers, shelf strips and recipe tear pads, featuring the instructions for Chayote Salad.

The popularity of guacamole makes avocado sales soar for Cinco de Mayo. Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the Hass Avocado Board (HAB) and vice president of merchandising for the California Avocado Commission (CAC), both in Irvine, CA, explains, "Cinco de Mayo is consistently the No.1 or No. 2 avocado sales opportunity of the year.

"Start building awareness of Cinco de Mayo in consumers' minds at least three weeks prior to the holiday with themed displays," she recommends. "Ads should run two weeks prior to the event and avocados should be prominently displayed on the front page for maximum lift. Offer a 2-size strategy by selling large and small avocados. This can increase category volume and sales by nearly 100 percent. Of course, make sure you have plenty of ripe avocados on hand for May 5 in order to take advantage of last-minute shoppers and shoppers wanting to re-stock their supply."

Maximum sales result with multiple displays of avocados co-marketed with other Cinco favorites and located in produce and throughout other areas of the store, according to DeLyser. "This could include a display next to snacks and chips or in the soft beverage aisle.

"POS signage creates a big sales boost. In emerging avocado markets, signage that provides avocado selection and usage information can increase sales. Bagged avocados make an excellent impulse item and provide a strong-value perception," she adds.

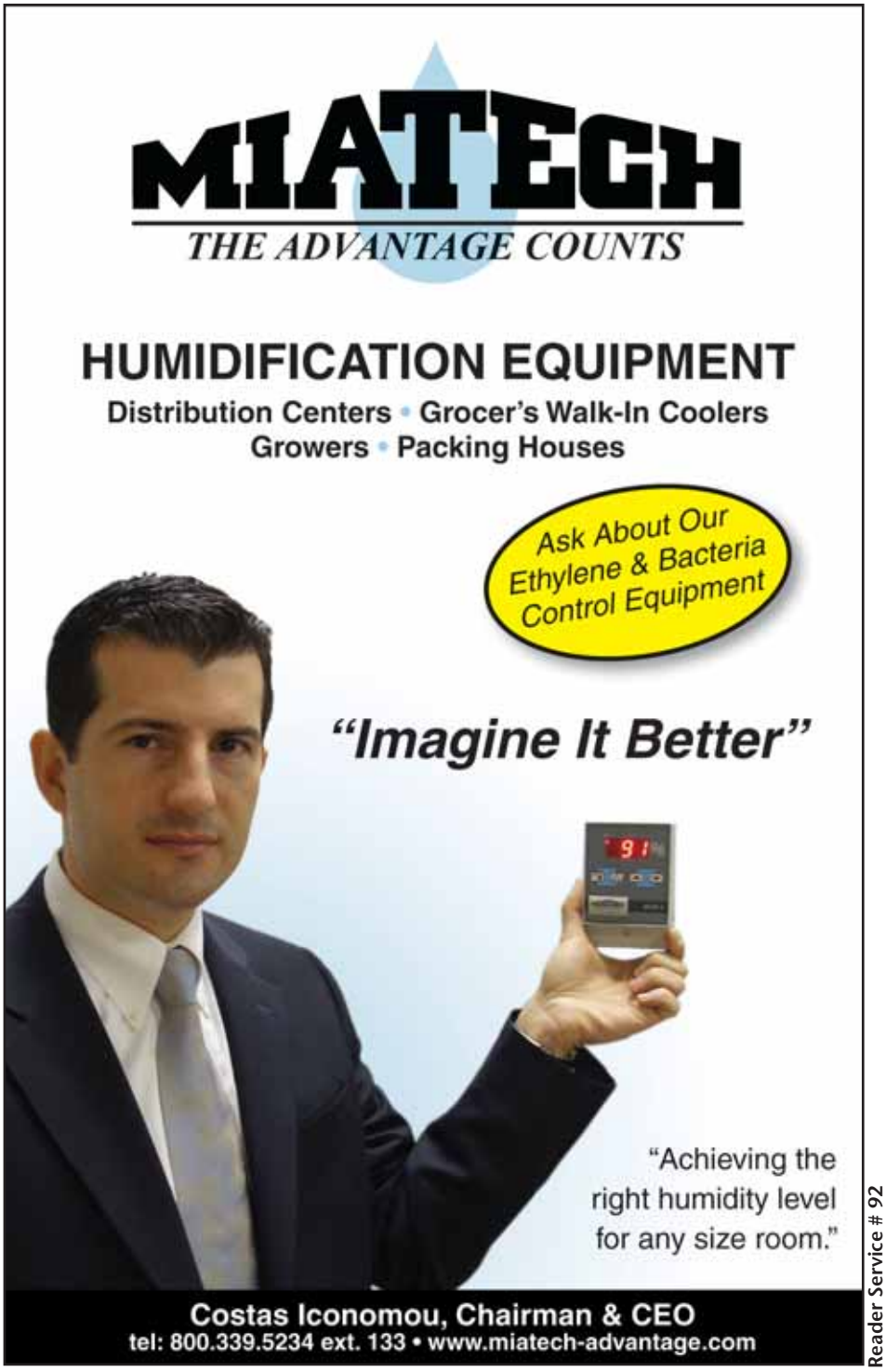
MEMORIAL DAY May 26

Memorial Day kicks off the grilling season, explains Melissa's Schueller. "In addition to staples like meats and poultry, grilled fruits, such as pineapple and nectarines, and vegetables like eggplant, zucchini, onions and bell peppers have become trendy."

Mike Way, sales manager for Prime Time International, in Coachella, CA, says, "Peppers are a hot item for the grill and in salads. Red peppers have exploded in sales over the last five years because of their sweet taste. Most retailers like to merchandise green, red and yellow bell peppers in bulk. However, we also pack in bags for those who want to sell them this way."

Fresh corn is also synonymous with the grilling season. Jason Stemm, spokesman for the Fresh Super Sweet Corn Council (FSSCC), in Maitland, FL, reports, "Production out of Florida peaks at more than 1 million crates per week in April and May.

New this season, FSSCC will employ the technology of a Google-based ad service to put triggers into its *Taste of Summer Now* supersweet corn commercials aired on AM and FM radio stations in target markets. [***Editor's note:*** *Please see* Florida Spring Produce Report, *beginning on page 34 for a discussion of this promotional program.*] **pb**



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Reader Service #91

Florida Spring Produce Report

The Sunshine State continues to thrive in the produce arena, and provides many opportunities to promote its fresh offerings.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

"Florida owns the spring," notes Dan Sleep, development representative supervisor for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS)'s Division of Marketing and Development, Tallahassee, FL.

Daniel Whittles, director of marketing for Rosemont Farms, Corp., Boca Raton, FL, explains, "While much of the nation is still suffering with colder weather, Florida is not. This makes Florida one of the primary domestic production areas for vegetables and fruit during the springtime."

Strawberries: Tom O'Brien, president of C&D Fruit & Vegetable Company, Inc., Bradenton, FL, states, "The hallmark of our fruit is consistent taste and sugar. This comes from our temperatures, soils and the varieties we grow."

Many retailers automatically switch to California at the beginning of April, notes Gary Wishnatzki, president and CEO, Wishnatzki Farms, Plant City, FL, "but this may change, particularly for our in-state and East Coast retailers as the sustainability trend takes hold and consumers start demanding more locally grown produce. We've got a significant volume of strawberries into April and need to promote it."

This season, the Florida Strawberry Growers Association, Inc. (FSGA), Plant City, FL, released new materials for its marketing campaign. The effort is designed to build a brand name for the state's berries under the tag line, *Nutritious and Delicious*. "We've created a brochure we can hand out to consumers at taste demos and other promotions. The plan is to keep adding pieces, such as bin wrap and recipe pads, so over the next five years, we'll have a consistent look to our materials consumers will recognize," explains Sue Harrell, director of marketing.

FSGA will host its annual retail display contest again this year. Sweetbay Supermarket, a 137-store chain based in Tampa, FL, and Publix Super Markets, Inc., an 834-store chain based in Lakeland, FL, are among major Florida retailers to participate in this contest, Harrell reports.

Tomatoes: "Florida tomatoes are an integral part of retailers' spring set," notes Billy Heller, COO of Pacific Tomato Growers Ltd., Palmetto, FL. "The round field-grown tomatoes are prized for their size, shape, flavor, meatiness and overall quality. Peak production is mid-April to May, so this is the best time for promotion. We'll be expanding our grape tomato program this spring due to strong demand from retail, but we've pulled back on our Romas due to competition with Mexico this time of year."

The Florida Tomato Committee (FTC), Maitland, FL, has teamed with the Food Network to air commercials for fresh Florida tomatoes between Feb. 27 and May 11. Samantha Winters, FTC director of education and promotions, explains, "These will run Wednesdays through Fridays inside programs hosted by all-star personalities, such as Rachael Ray, Emeril Lagasse, Paula Deen and Bobby Flay, for a total of 46 million impressions during our peak production season. We're offering retailers POS materials that include a poster, channel strip, coupon sign and coupon/recipe pad, urging customers to buy Florida tomatoes. The coupon offers 25 percent off the purchase of a Food Network Cookbook at any Borders [bookstore]."

This season, FTC has employed merchandisers to work with retailers in Northeast, Southeast and Midwest target markets to set up promotional displays using the Food Network POS. "The idea is to strengthen the Florida tomato brand and make the biggest impact," she explains.

Sweet Corn: "Production peaks at more than 1 million crates per week in April and May," notes Jason Stemm, spokesman for the Fresh Super Sweet Corn Council (FSSCC), Maitland, FL.

Paul Allen, vice president of R.C. Hatton, Inc.,

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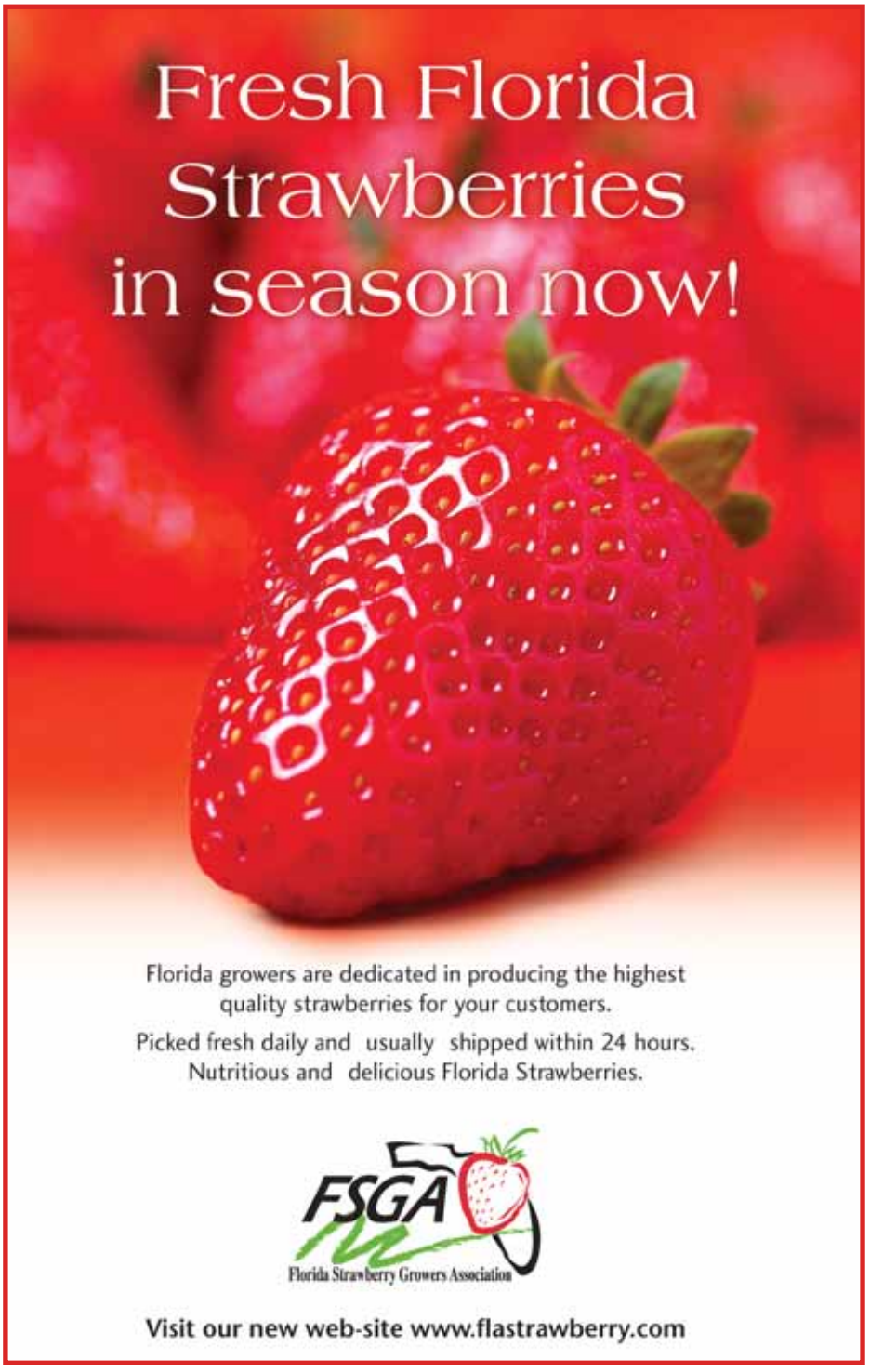
Pahokee, FL, and president of the Florida Sweet Corn Exchange, Maitland, FL, adds, "The supersweet variety has really revolutionized the sweet corn industry. We ship twice the volume out of Florida that we did 15 to 20 years ago. It's the muck soils in the Everglades area, black soil or black gold, that gives the corn its flavor." Last season, Hatton introduced its gourmet extra-sweet corn in white, yellow and bi-color. It also produces 4-packs, cobbettes and single-ear packaging of supersweet corn under the Disney Garden label.

"We launched a dynamic new fresh sweet corn product this winter, which we hope to have ready for full commercial production this spring," adds Rosemont's Whittles.

New this season, FSSCC will employ a Google-based ad service to put triggers into its *Taste of Summer* super sweet corn commercials set to air on AM and FM radio in target markets. "If we see it's going to be sunny and 70°F in the Baltimore/Washington D.C. market, for example, or a retailer in a particular market is putting supersweet corn on promotion, we can electronically send a trigger for more commercials to run in that market to dovetail with these events," Stemm reports. "This means we don't have to plan so far in advance and we can take advantage of impromptu opportunities."

Green Vegetables: Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc., Oviedo, FL, offers a plethora of spring vegetables, including celery, celery hearts, radishes, cut and trimmed radishes, endive, escarole, cilantro, romaine, iceberg



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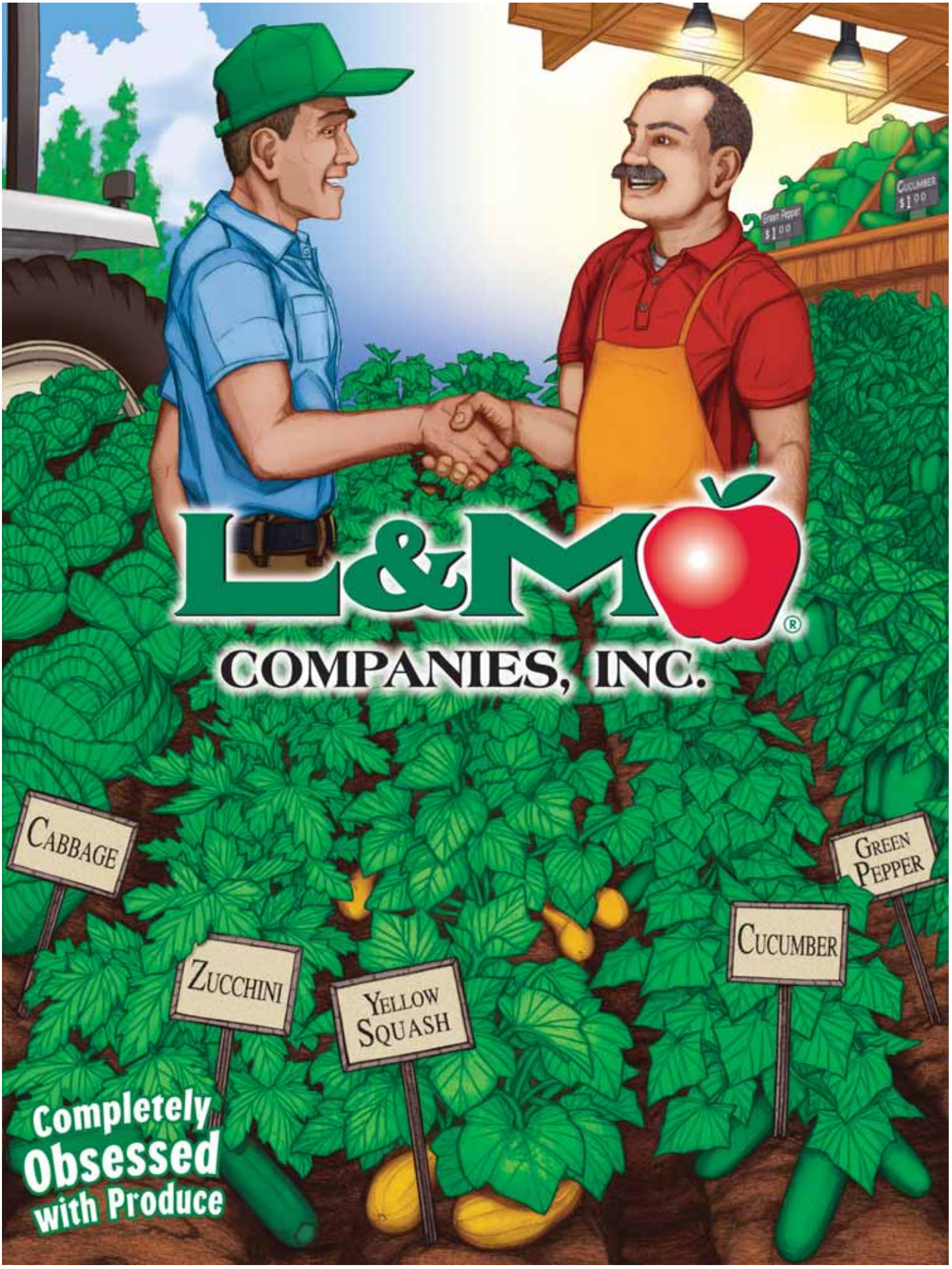
Retail Success

For several years, Tampa, FL-based Sweetbay Supermarket has promoted Florida produce under a locally grown theme, explains Steve Williams, director of produce and floral. "We call it our home-field advantage." The produce staff profiles local farmers at display points throughout the growing season. Additional in-store promotions include annual display contests and informational signage.

At Kings Super Markets, Inc., a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ, Florida sweet corn is a perennial Memorial Day feature. "We'll build a huge display with white, yellow and bi-color corn and place it next to peppers, tomatoes and other items that go on the grill or in salads," notes Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral. "We'll also put the corn on ad. Corn is a great seller that time of year. Since Jersey corn isn't in yet, we source from Florida."

Sobeys Capital, Inc., a Stellarton, NS, Canada-based chain with more than 1,300 stores, is the leading importer of Florida produce. Francis Berube, merchandising manager, notes, "Florida is very important to us, especially in the winter and spring when fresh produce isn't as available from Quebec and freight for the same items from California can cost nearly double. We'll carry field tomatoes, sweet corn, strawberries, and a variety of green vegetables. We'll also advertise these items in our weekly flyer and accompany each with the *Fresh from Florida* logo."

As part of its Salute to America's Farmers program, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., a Bentonville, AR-based chain with more than 2,500 stores, showcased blueberries with the *Fresh from Florida* logo from Sunnyridge Farm, Inc., Winter Haven, FL, last May and June. "We're proud of our ability to bring wholesome, home-grown selections to our customers in Florida," explains Ron McCormick, vice president and divisional merchandise manager of produce and floral. "This allow us to offer fresh, quality selections and to generate savings on distribution costs that we can pass on to our customers." **pb**



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lettuce, and green, red and savoy cabbage. Donna Duda, communications specialist, notes, "Generally, these vegetable products are available from mid-December through April. Peak production of leaf lettuce and celery will fall between January and March."

"Green snap beans is a growing category in the state," adds Danny Raulerson, director of marketing and trade for the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (FFVA), Maitland, FL. "Florida acreage has increased significantly in the last 15 years."

Pero Vegetable Co., LLC, Delray Beach, FL, will expand its variety pepper program to include mini sweet and chocolate peppers. "Chocolate peppers are green bells with the red bred out," explains Scott Seddon, marketing and advertising specialist. "A number of retailers have suggested it." Pero will introduce an organic vegetable line that includes value-added tray-pack and bulk green bell peppers, yellow squash, zucchini and cucumbers. "Organic production can be difficult in Florida due to the moisture and humidity, but we've worked to develop the right seed and the right location in the state."

Florida's Top Spring Produce
2005-2006 Season

Pounds (millions) Sold	
Tomatoes	1,347.0
Sweet Corn	486.6
Bell Peppers	404.6
Snap Beans	272.7
Cucumbers	237.5
Cabbage	204.6
Strawberries	204.4
Squash	102.0
Blueberries	7.0

Dollars (millions) Sold	
Tomatoes	$551.1
Strawberries	$239.1
Bell Peppers	$187.3
Snap Beans	$141.8
Sweet Corn	$117.3
Cucumbers	$73.8
Squash	$38.7
Cabbage	$30.7

Source: USDA NASS, March 14, 2007

MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES

The availability of a large variety and volume of produce from Florida in the spring "means fresh fruits and vegetables are available to retailers overnight or second-day delivery," explains Duda. "It also means a freight and fuel savings. Retailers can market the products as locally or regionally grown. This is a terrific selling point to consumers."

"Florida has a unique relationship with consumers in the Northeast and takes advantage of this in marketing, " Raulerson adds,

Since 2000, FDACS has represented and marketed the state's entire crop inventory. "We start planning in August for the upcoming crop season," says Sleep, "and begin meeting with retailers in the fall. Our goals include making retailers aware Florida is more than just a citrus producing state and building a relationship with them so we can let them know what's available and when on an ongoing basis throughout the season."

Three FDACS produce marketing campaigns — Global Grid, Florida Farmers' Express and the Florida Watermelon Campaign — helped increase retail sales of Florida-grown agricultural products by $544.3 million during the 2006-07 season.

The marketing strategy behind these campaigns is geared toward encouraging participating grocery chains to increase purchases of Florida products, increase display size of these products and to use the *Fresh from Florida* logo in their newspaper ads and circulars. Ad incentives offered throughout the season help to pull product into the market when a surplus occurs or a marketing window expands. **pb**

Reader Service # 25

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Uses:
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Apple Tips:
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Flavor:
Sweet with a tart tang. Very juicy.

Uses:
Eating, sauce, salads, and pies.

Apple Tips:
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EMPIRE

Flavor:
Blends sweet and tart, crisp and juicy.

Uses:
Eating, sauce, and pies.

Apple Tips:
Try a slice on your next burger.

GALA

Flavor:
Mild, sweet flavor and juicy.

Uses:
Eating and salads.

Apple Tips:
Mellow flavor and thin skin make a perfect choice for kids.

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Flavor:
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Silver Creek Software (SCS) focuses on delivering a state-of-the-art, high-quality ERP accounting and management system to fresh produce distributors, growers, packers, shippers and brokers. Established in 1982 by John Carpenter, president, and Tina Reminger, vice president, the company flourished as a family-owned business throughout the '80s and '90s, eventually receiving IBM's top VAR award of 1988 and Inacom's President's Award of Excellence. The company's increasing orientation toward software development led it to deliver Visual Produce in 1993 to its first produce distribution customer.

"Since then we have installed Visual Produce in over 75 companies both in the United States and abroad," says Reminger. "Many of our customers have experienced explosive growth in their respective markets, and Silver Creek Software has met or exceeded the related challenges of accommodating those changing business needs."

SCS' Visual Produce accounting software has several key operational and financial capabilities. Carpenter explains, "Standard Visual Produce modules include sales orders, purchase orders, inventory processing, accounts receivable, accounts payable and general ledger. Optional modules include payroll, packing plant manager, grower settlements, brokerage management, fresh-pack processing, repack management, warehouse management, crop accounting and EDI — Electronic Data Interchange."

Additionally there are software enhancements such as customer menus, route analysis and management, contract pricing, soft breaker units, commodity boards, business status reports and lot tracking, which allow users to maximize their productivity while using Visual Produce. "When you buy Visual Produce, you get a full copy of Sage Pro Enterprise," reports Carpenter. "This is a robust and feature-rich accounting and ERP system with over 25,000 installs worldwide. The feature set is comparable to programs such as MS Great Plains, MAS 200, Navision, ACCPAC Advantage and other business accounting systems."

Visual Produce can be integrated with Sage CRM, a powerful customer relations management system. "Sage CRM is an easy-to-use, fast-to-deploy, feature-rich CRM solution providing enterprise-wide access to vital customer information — anytime, anywhere. With Sage Accpac CRM, you can better manage your business by integrating field sales, internal sales, customer care and marketing information," Carpenter further explains.

John

Tina

The software allows customized sales and operations tracking boards to be designed to address specific business challenges, such as tracking order status, load status, item status and alerts on problems. "Through the use of ProAlert, Visual Produce can be set up to automatically notify managers or users when predefined alert criteria are met," states Reminger. "As an example, an e-mail alert can be sent to a manager whenever an order margin amount falls below a specific value. Or a report can automatically be generated and routed to an individual at the same time every day. This tool is limited only by your imagination."

Visual Produce provides easy access to data from many different tools including Report Writer, DataHabitat, Excel, F9 (an Excel-based financial report tool), Visual Internet, ZetaFax, Sage CFO, Roadnet and many others. "Our software's unique features and benefits insure our customers are never told the program doesn't work the way they need it to, they have to change their business practices or they have to wait until the next version of the software becomes available before a problem is fixed," Carpenter adds.

Visual Produce's Internet connectivity allows order entry via the Web, and it gives customers access to reporting and data publishing capabilities. "Some of our current customers have in excess of 40 percent of their orders being entered through Visual Internet," according to Reminger.

SCS advises thinking on a long-term, large scale when looking at software needs. "When choosing software think long term," suggests Reminger. "Remember your business needs will change and your software needs will change as well. Also, ask to speak with customers and ask them about service and product. When you buy software, you enter into a close knit relationship with your software provider."

Reminger cautions companies to realize the IT industry is much bigger than just their ERP software provider. "How does the program you are evaluating fit into the big picture?" she asks. "Is it proprietary or open? What operating systems does it run on? Are the programs and data accessible to other entities in the market?"

Produce companies currently using Visual Produce for wholesale distribution and processing include Coastal Sunbelt Produce, Pacific Coast Fruit, Baldor Specialty Foods and Loffredo Fresh Produce. Companies using the software for distribution, packing and grower settlements include Country Fresh Mushrooms, Sweet Clover Produce, Global Agri and MCL Distributing.

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Reader Service # 24

Mexican Mangos Offer Category Growth

Promotions, exposure and consumer education should soon help propel the category to new heights.

BY DUANE CRAIG

Thanks to heavy volumes, strong promotions and proximity advantages, Mexican mangos are bracing for major expansion into the homes of U.S. consumers.

As the rest of the world merrily devours the world's most popular fruit, the United States continues a slow but steady warm-up to the mango. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) reports per capita U.S. consumption of mangos in 2006 at a bit more than two pounds. Considering just 30 percent of American consumers have tried a mango, there is plenty of room for volume increases in sales at the retail level.

As more people are exposed to the mango in restaurants and in various food preparations, their likelihood of buying fresh mangos increases, according to Allison Moore, communications director for the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), Nogales, AZ. "There's been more integrated use of mangos in foodservice. This started the trend. Plus, we're seeing more processed foods that have mango flavor, so I think that makes people more interested and curious about buying the fruit and using it at home."

Of all the mangos shipped into the United States, those from Mexico account for approximately 61 percent of the annual total, and there are some natural reasons for that. "The key reason Mexico is such a large piece of the mango picture is because we share a border," reasons Wendy McManus, director of marketing for the National Mango Board (NMB), Orlando, FL. "Mexico also has a very long growing season, so it can supply five varieties in heavy volumes and then some other specialty varieties in smaller quantities."

Gary Clevenger, a partner in Freska Produce International, LLC, Oxnard, CA, agrees, adding, "The sheer volume of fruit coming from Mexico coupled with its proximity to the U.S. market makes the Mexican mango very attractive from a price perspective."

According to Rodrigo Diaz, vice president of sales and marketing for Diazteca Company in Nogales, AZ, proximity, varieties and timing are main advantages. Mexico provides a very specific window for sourcing. "The peak volume is in July. The Mexican mango is one to two days by truck, meaning we can pick the mangos tree-ripened with higher brix so they taste their best." During peak times of the harvest in June and July, the taste is at its peak, he adds.

"When Mexico is in, that's the only deal that's going on," states Larry Nienkerk, partner and general manager for Splendid Products, LLC, Burlingame, CA. "That's just the time of the year for Mexico and that is a long-standing tradition. It's one of the lengthier deals of the year. It starts in late January with the yellow varieties and continues on into late September with the Keitt variety."

MEXICAN VARIETIES OFFER LOTS OF COLOR

During the deal, Mexico's most popular varieties roll from south to north, creating waves of colorful mangos for many months.

"Probably the most attractive in reference to retailers is the Tommy Atkins, which is all red, then the Haden, a red and yellow fruit, and then the Kent, which could be sour green to red with a little green," reports Chuck Ciruli III, CEO of Ciruli Brothers, LLC, Rio Rico, AZ. "The Ataulfo has gained a lot of market share during the past few years because of its flavor and that's a full yellow mango, and then the Keitt is basically green."

"We traditionally think of Mexico as being divided into five areas," explains Nienkerk. "Production moves from south to north. In the years ahead, we

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will look for other cultivars to use for varieties. The varieties currently in commercial use are varieties developed from the original nursery stock in the early part of the 20th century, and they aren't necessarily what we we'd like to see 10 years from now as varieties. Apple varieties are being developed for consumer appeal the same way mangos are being developed."

"The Ataulfo is the most misunderstood," explains Freska's Clevenger. "People don't normally know what it is, but I think we can thank Costco [Wholesale, Issaquah, WA] for its popularity. It's starting to offer the Ataulfo in clamshells, creating demand. Many Latinos and the Asians know about them since the Ataulfo looks a lot like the fruit that comes from the Philippines. People from India also like it because it looks a lot like the fruit that comes out of India."

Jerry Garcia, manager of London Fruit, Inc., Pharr, TX, says the Ataulfo is becoming increasingly popular. "It's starting to be about 75 percent of my business, and I enjoy working those better than reds. If you put it out when it's still green, people will buy it, eat it and never buy another one again. Stores need to understand how to display this product. If you eat a green Ataulfo, I guarantee you'll never eat another one again. It's horrible." He works with retailers to get the product into the store at the right color by holding them until they're at the right stage.

Brad Fritz, director of produce marketing for Nugget Market, Inc. an 11-store chain based in Woodland, CA, knows very well how important the color is. "If they come in with nice color and we know they're going to turn, we're going to sell a lot of mangos. We put them in a warm spot in the backroom to get them going and definitely do not refrigerate them." Store employees are trained to help people in selecting them by showing them how they yield to gentle pressure.

"I think it's important to be variety specific, so customers understand green mangos are great to eat and so is a yellow mango."

— Chuck Ciruli III
Ciruli Brothers, LLC

Refrigeration can hurt sales by lowering fruit quality, stresses Splendid's Nienkerk. "I think it's important that the [supply] chain maintains temperatures properly. Too many times, the fruit is carried too cold. It really shouldn't be refrigerated."

MERCHANDISING TIPS

Displaying mangos at the right stage relays a statement of quality to consumers. "The challenge is to make sure consumers are getting high-quality, flavorful mangos," says Ciruli of Ciruli Bros. "I think the industry needs help from the retailer. When you go into a store and you buy apples, you know what you're buying. I think it's important to be variety specific, so customers understand green mangos are great to eat and so is a yellow mango. Ataulfo has made a hit at retail because it is such a great tasting mango as long as it's treated properly. It's about consumer education, and certainly the chains can help us out there."

Nienkerk echoes the need to put out

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Reader Service # 93

Mango Research And Promotions

Research is a key ingredient in the continuing development of the mango category in the United States, notes Wendy McManus, director of marketing for the National Mango Board (NMB) in Orlando, FL. The organization is in its second year of crop forecasting, and the major growing regions are already on board.

"This program was started in May 2007 and going into our second year of forecasting, it just keeps getting stronger," she explains. "Our research specialist, Leo Ortega, coordinates with the mango producer associations in each of the major growing regions. As ship dates grow near, he works with the associations to develop and fine-tune projections. So far, [Guadalajara, Mexico-based] EMEX, Mexico's largest produce association, has done an outstanding job of forecasting its production and ship dates. The NMB formats this information into a short 3- to 4-page document with easy-to-read graphs accompanied by short overviews of what to expect. We make it available to retailers through the retailer section of our Web site and through our retail account managers. The crop forecast is already a powerful tool and it will continue to improve over time."

NMB is delving deeply into category management by partnering with Perishables Group, LLC, W. Dundee, IL. Initial work with the independent consulting firm focused on developing mango category performance benchmarks and quarterly reporting on trends in the category. Future efforts are aimed at identifying the retail channels where mangos are purchased, demographic and lifestyle indicators, and how these things affect purchasing behavior.

Other research efforts include monitoring and evaluating the supply chain for quality improvements, seeking alternatives to hot water treatments, researching mango nutrition and reviewing mango grade standards.

NMB recently finished beefing up its staff to provide more robust retailer support through its retail account manager team concept. McManus reports retailers now can have more direct access to NMB resources and faster turnaround times on requests.

The organization has print media messages planned for Valentine's Day and Mother's Day as well as a spring wine pairings feature and a spring press kit. There is also information on its concerted effort to get mangos talked about more on Internet Web blogs. **pb**

quality fruit, but he also sees an opportunity for some creativity when it comes to merchandising. "There's always been too much emphasis on price as far as specials are concerned. Price should be only one factor. There are other creative ways that are being developed, such as pushing pairings with other fruits or finding different ways to display and package them."

Freska's Clevenger points to one particular retail partner when he describes savvy merchandising of mangos. "HEB [H.E. Butt Grocery Company, San Antonio, TX] does a great deal with mangos," he says. "If you go into an HEB store and look at the mango displays, they do it right." He believes California's Latino stores also merchandise mangos well. "They throw piles of stuff on there and offer a good deal to the general public. They move a lot of volume and they make money at it." He emphasizes that the people stocking the shelves are the best resources for consumer information, including mangos' various colors and ripeness levels.

Diazteca's Diaz goes one step further in consumer education by telling the story of mango varieties and providing handling and eating tips. "Varietal differentiation, knowing the best eating time and how to cut mangos can all be included at the point-of-sale," he explains.

When it comes to pricing and optimizing sales, suppliers see the seasonal volumes of available mangos as opportunities.

London Fruit's Garcia is staging delivery slightly later this year to offset some of the pressure from the growing Guatemalan mango deal. "We're going to try to start heavier in the last part of March and first part of April," he reports. "Last year was one of the first years there was a good supply out of Guatemala and that affected the market by bringing the price down considerably. Guatemala is playing more into when the Mexican market is available, so that means retailers will have more options with cheaper prices. The pricing structure is going to be lower throughout the year." He also expects prices to stabilize earlier this year than in past years.

VOLUME PRICING STRATEGIES

Clevenger sees opportunities in pricing multiples. "Some retailers like the smaller size of the Ataulfo because it lends itself to pricing in multiples, while others like to do the larger fruit on a per-piece price," he points out. "Most of the Latino independent markets are running the smaller fruit, so they can get the price point for multiples, and that usually happens later in the deal. Then the price comes down and that's when you get the good price points for ads. Retailers could probably use a little help because at this point, I don't know if they're making it beneficial to the consumer. They should offer the fruit at better multiple prices." Although some stores will advertise 10 for $10, Clevenger doubts that will move the volume the industry needs to move.

To get consumers to try mangos, Diaz thinks they should be priced at two for 99¢ on sizes 10 or 12. He adds that price should work almost on a year-round basis, except during the offshore deal, so ad frequency could definitely be increased. He believes the best time to promote is when the fruit is at its peak in June and July.

NMB is pulling out all the stops in promotions aimed at getting Americans to fall for mangos. According to McManus, the organization has seven research programs in progress, including a crop forecast in its second year, category development in connection with Perishables Group, LLC, W. Dundee, IL, and mango packaging research.

"As in the past, we will work with each retailer to customize promotions that will work the best for their organization," she reports. "We will continue to focus on demo events, which can help introduce new customers to the luscious flavor of fresh mango. We are also working on options for retailers, such as display or store contests and themed promotions to support holidays and events. For example, we are working on themed mango promotions for Cinco de Mayo, and we are pursuing a proclamation to make June National Mango Month. This will be a fun year, and I believe retailers will really like what we have to offer." **pb**

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The Benefits Of Greenhouse Produce

High-quality product in wide availability is good for retailers and consumers.

BY TRISHA WOOLDRIDGE

Whether it is a simple structure for protection against harsh outdoor elements or a state-of-the-art indoor facility that monitors water usage, fertilizer and heat, a greenhouse helps growers produce quality fruit and vegetables through a higher than usual degree of control.

Greenhouse produce suffers less stress than its field-grown counterparts, so there are higher yields of better looking products available with virtually no interruption throughout the year. Because consumers are becoming savvy about the quality offered by greenhouse-grown produce, it isn't hard for supermarkets to merchandise these products as premium options. Plus, the massive growth in the greenhouse industry has created an atmosphere of competitive pricing for high-quality choices.

Photo courtesy of Pero Vegetable Company, LLC

"There's been a national switch of agriculture from outdoors to indoors," observes Alejandro Canelos, Jr., COO and founding partner of Melones Internacional, in Nogales, AZ. The company recently separated from Chiquita Brands, LLC, based in Cincinnati, OH, to release its own Plain Jane brand of greenhouse vegetables.

Chris Veillon, marketing manager for Mastronardi Produce Ltd., Kingsville, ON, Canada, explains, "People know greenhouse produce is rich in quality. The word 'greenhouse' has such a powerful meaning behind it that people just know it."

"In general, greenhouses protect the crop," states Canelos. "Greenhouse farming protects produce from Mother Nature. [Besides protection from the weather, it also] protects against pests, such as virus-spreading white flies, mites, crickets, rodents and more."

Greenhouse growers think their products have such good quality because of the protection offered by the structures enclosing them, as well as by the ability to control the environment within the facility. Greenhouse produce often looks better than field-grown fruits and vegetables because it does not have damage — such as wind scarring or bruising — from the elements.

For example, "Greenhouse bell peppers are not exposed to rain spotting, bug marks and other problems typical of their field-grown counterparts," Canelos notes. "Greenhouses allow fruits and vegetables to retain their natural beauty."

Rob White, produce manager for Living Earth, a single-store natural health food market in Worcester, MA, points out, "It has to taste good, but the customers see it first. They buy based on looks."

The beauty of the produce is more than skin deep, however. Flavor, breeding and longevity make for an overall better quality product.

"We control the product from A to Z," according to Veillon. "Water, pollution, temperature, fertilizer — no outside forces are working against us. We can control the produce sufficiently and effectively.

The quality is superior because we can manage these factors."

CONSISTENT QUALITY

The ability to control also fosters produce uniformity. Growers can measure the same amounts of water, fertilizer, heat and sunlight for each plant. "Each plant is watered and fertilized individually," Veillon explains. "In a controlled environment, you get consistent growth and a consistent piece of fruit."

Greenhouses also promote a dependable, and fresh, supply throughout the year. The growth of the greenhouse industry means more greenhouses are closer to more supermarkets, so that produce is also fresher and can ripen longer on the plants.

"[Our] Backyard Beauties provide a locally grown product distributed to New England within one day of harvest," offers Roy Lubetkin, president and CEO, Backyard Farms, Madison, ME. "They're grown through the whole year, so New England can get local produce year-round. That means customers can still get fresh product, even during New England winters."

Consistent, high-quality availability is a major benefit, says Melones' Canelos. "If we didn't have greenhouses, we'd be subject to weather and disease. The less stressful life [for the plants] means a good, solid 50 percent longer season. It used to be you would go to the store and buy whatever was in season. Now, you can pretty much get whatever you want, whenever."

Canadian greenhouse-grown winter tomatoes on display.

Scott Seddon, marketing and advertising specialist for Pero Vegetable Company, LLC, Delray Beach, FL, adds, "Everything is controlled in a consistent environment, so your produce will have the same quality 365 days from now as it has today."

A BUYER'S MARKET

Prior to the 1990s, much of the world's greenhouse tomatoes, bell peppers and cucumbers came out of high-tech greenhouses in Holland and Israel. By the mid-1990s, North American greenhouses proliferated in Canada, the United States and Mexico.

The differing climates spurred all types of greenhouses, from low-cost structures to high-tech environmentally controlled buildings. Mexico, in particular, benefited because banks were offering low interest rates for land purchase. This rate of growth has created more competitive pricing and greater quality in greenhouse produce.

According to Fried de Schouwer, president of Greenhouse Produce Company, LLC, Vero Beach, FL, greenhouse acreage has more than doubled in the past five years. Currently, he figures, there are more than 8,000 acres across North America dedicated to greenhouse growing, particularly tomatoes. "The current tomato market is a commoditized saturated market," he describes. "Simply said, it's a buyer's market."

A buyer's market lowers prices and

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allows retailers to offer only the best products. "With so many producers and so many products, marketers must pay attention to quality," Melones Canelos says.

While greenhouse produce is generally high quality, retailers should remember quality standards for greenhouse produce have been formalized. "There isn't really a quality standard to make greenhouse more than just a word," he notes,

Purchasing the lowest price rather than opting for quality erodes both value and price. "You can always buy a lesser quality product," Canelos adds, "but you're telling the customer that greenhouse doesn't mean anything."

THE GREEN DEMAND

Many consumers are becoming knowledgeable about environmental concerns and are looking for "natural" products that are better for the planet. Greenhouses are rising to meet this demand by using natural pest control, recycling rainwater and maximizing their energy efficiency and space.

Pero's Seddon says greenhouses are the best way to meet consumers' growing demand for earth-friendly products grown in earth-friendly conditions. "It's on the front of everyone's thought process. [A] greenhouse is the No. 1 sustainable environment for growing produce."

This season, Pero is dedicating its 7 acres of greenhouses at its farm in Delray Beach, FL, to seedless European cucumbers. In Canada, Pero operates 100 acres of greenhouses. Pero's hyroponic greenhouses allow it to grow produce year-round.

"Backyard Beauties has 24 acres of environmentally friendly greenhouses," explains Lubetkin. "We have an integrated pest management system that would be what occurs in nature, such as using bumblebees and ladybugs. Automatic grow lamps supplement natural sunlight and we use thermal blankets at night. We minimize water usage by recycling and capturing rain and snow to water the tomatoes."

"Because the fruit is protected, you need less chemicals," Canelos says.

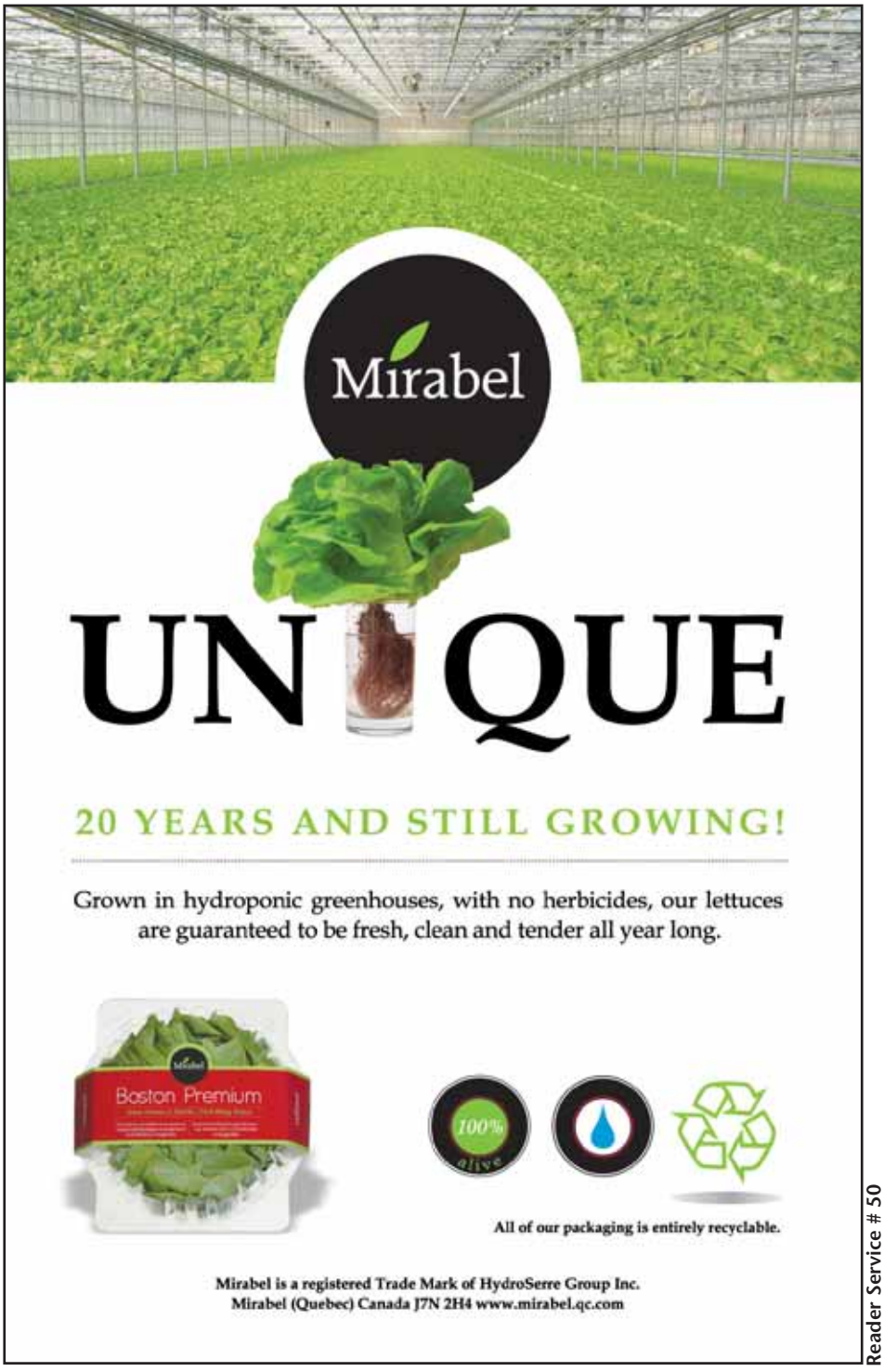
GREENHOUSE COMMODITIES

Tomatoes are the top greenhouse produce item, with more than 30 different varieties available. Following tomatoes are bell peppers and seedless cucumbers.

The top tomatoes produced and sold are tomatoes on the vine (TOV). "On-the-vine product has become the retailers' product of choice," explains Greenhouse Produce's de Schouwer. "Consumers' exposure has fueled consumption with double digit growth during the past few years to the No. 1 selling tomato. Year-round promotional opportunities have not only improved sales but have also created retail margins previously unheard of for a high-volume product."

Living Earth's White is particularly fond of TOV. "The tomatoes with the green stems are a great thing. You see the green stem

Continued on page 54



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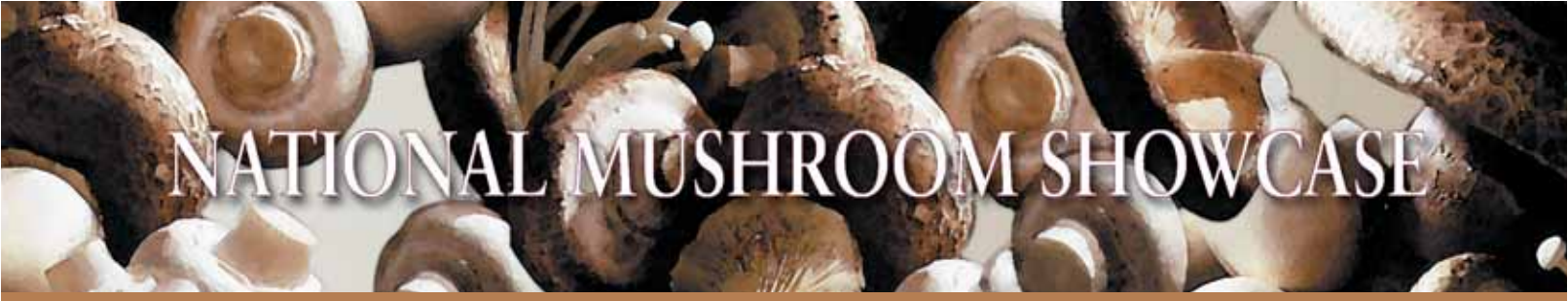

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Reader Service # 118

The Defining Structure

Some companies calling themselves greenhouse use little more than tents to protect the plants from the elements and pests. Others are high-tech environmental facilities that control every possible aspect of a plant's life, from the exact amount of water and fertilizer to how many hours of natural or man-made sunlight are available each day.

Many in the greenhouse industry are debating the use of the term "greenhouse" based on the structure housing the plants. Some believe the lower-tech greenhouses should not be able to use the term. A lower-tech greenhouse doesn't have as much overhead, so it can charge a lower price and still carry the greenhouse imprimatur. Many high-tech greenhouse growers believe that product is inferior because there is not as much control over the water, food, sunlight and care of the overall plants.

"When you are trying to produce a top-quality product, the more control you have over the final product, the fewer problems you have in in regards to quality and flavor. You maximize your yield, flavor and quality," says Chris Veillon, marketing manager for Mastronardi Produce Ltd., Kingsville, ON, Canada.

Location has a major effect on greenhouse technology. In northern areas, high-tech greenhouses are essential to protect produce from harsh winters. Reinforced buildings protect against storms and snow, and sunlamps make up for shorter days in winter. In areas of Mexico, where the weather is hotter and more stable year-round, a greenhouse doesn't need to spend the money for as much environmental control.

Alejandro Canelos Jr., COO, Melones Internacional, in Nogales, AZ, believes the structure itself shouldn't matter, but there should be a uniform quality expected from greenhouses. "It should be all about the end product. We're not selling greenhouses. We're selling tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers. There is plenty of room for high-, mid- and low-technology greenhouses. There are so many items to grow. If you put out a good product, people will buy it." **pb**

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Continued from page 51

and you have the idea that they are fresher."

Beefsteak tomatoes are losing popularity, notes De Schouwer. "The demand for greenhouse beefsteak tomatoes continues to decline at retail level. This is caused by a cannibalization of the category partially through the plentiful availability of on-the-vine products and the improved field-product quality."

Some companies are setting themselves apart with new breeds of tomato. Veillon describes Mastronardi's signature Campari tomato as "a European variety with a highly regarded flavor. They have an excellent balance of sweetness and acidity. Their perfect size makes them the most versatile tomato in the kitchen."

After tomatoes, colored bell peppers are growing in availability and demand. Greenhouse Produce's de Schouwer states, "Bell pepper demand continues to increase with consumer acceptance in the United States. Retail consumer pricing remains high as pricing is posted by weight and retail emphasis is on larger sizes."

Greenhouse bell peppers are distinctively block-shaped — "as wide as they are tall," notes Melones' Canelos.

The greenhouse environment can be ideal for developing new produce lines. Mastronardi's Veillon describes two specialty peppers, the Ancient Sweet and the Ancient Hot. "The Ancient Sweet is long, thin, crunchy and sweet. At the PMA [Produce Marketing Association, Inc., Newark, DE] conference, a chef cut off the top and stuffed it with cream cheese." Tasters called it "sweet, with no bitter taste." The Ancient Hot is a smaller pepper that meets growing consumer demand for hot foods.

> **"It's worth it. The way it looks makes the whole department look good. People want it."**
>
> **— Rob White**
> **Living Earth**

Overall, retailers stand to gain from the current greenhouse industry and the value of greenhouse products. Living Earth's White summarizes this way: "It's worth it. The way it looks makes the whole department look good. People want it." **pb**

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Value-Added Potatoes Expand The Category

Value-added spuds are a premium produce department staple.

BY KIMBERLY RINKER

In the past 10 years, as consumer's demand for convenience soared, so has the need for value-added potatoes in the form of small amounts, expanded varieties and advanced packaging.

Kevin Stanger, vice president of marketing for Wada Farms Marketing Group, LLC, Idaho Falls, ID, says value-added refers to "pre-cooked, cut, mashed or sliced [products] — basically any process in the product or packaging itself that allows consumers to prepare potatoes more easily and quickly.

"It also includes any extra washing of the product to allow potatoes in their fresh, uncooked, uncut form to be cooked and eaten without washing. Microwavable packaging also constitutes value-added," he adds

According to Mac Johnson, vice president of the U.S. Potato Board (USPB), Denver, CO, "I define it as a product that a consumer sees value in. It can be the individually wrapped Micro Baker russet, a 2-pound bag of fingerling potatoes or potatoes that have been double washed, sorted, sized and packaged in a clamshell. To specific consumers, organic or locally grown can be perceived as value-added. Refrigerated mashed potatoes, hash browns and twice-baked potatoes have also really taken off."

Seth Pemsler, vice president, retail/international, at the Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), Eagle, ID, says retailers need to be aware of marketing challenges. "The biggest challenge facing value-added potatoes is price versus value. The retailer must allot space to display premium potato products and the consumer must pay higher prices for them. There are going to be people who see higher prices and back away because of the disparity. People typically see potatoes as cheap. Due to the abundance of cooking shows, potatoes have gotten a rebirth of sorts. As a result, consumers ask for potatoes that weren't mainstream 10 years ago."

Foodservice also helps drive the market, he adds. "Home usage of potatoes has declined 1 to 2 percent in the last five years. However, in the foodservice industry, we've seen an increase as chefs continue to look for ways to dress up restaurant plates."

New potato varieties in restaurants quickly translate to consumer demand in produce departments, Pemsler explains. "Most grocery stores stock five or six varieties of potatoes now. In some upscale markets, you'll find eight to nine varieties or more. The organic sector has grown, too. However, that's a tougher sell because the organic products don't store or ship as well and retailers are not as willing to pay growers premium prices for these products."

Value-added potatoes offer retailers both sales growth and differentiation.

Stanger reports value-added potatoes spark repeat sales once consumers make the initial foray into purchasing them. "Consumers who have tried value-added potatoes have been very impressed with the product, first with microwavable Easy Bakers and now with the Easy Steamer."

Sales of value-added potato products are impressive and growing, Johnson reports. "If we evaluate responses by sales, they are very good. The individual Micro Baker started with one manufacturer [Progressive Produce Corp., Los Angeles, CA,] with individually wrapped microwave potatoes that cook in seven minutes. Now, there are a number of suppliers. The refrigerated category, which is led by refrigerated mashed potatoes, has experienced double-digit [dollars and pounds] growth for several years. And while Russets, Reds, Whites and Golds are the mainstays, Fingerlings, Purples, organics and Baby Dutch are showing significant sales growth."

Ted Kreis, marketing director for the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association, Inc., (NPPGA), East Grand Forks, MN, agrees, adding, "By far, the most growth has been in refrigerated potato products. Fresh organic potatoes have impressive increases in sales but realistically still make up a very small portion of the fresh potato market."

Today, potatoes are typically separated in supermarkets by brand, name and culinary use. Years ago, value-added status was first achieved through packaging innovations, then by cleaning, culling and size grading, as well as category specifics like baking only, Yukon Gold varieties and Blue Russets.

In 2007, a variety of innovative, value-added potato offerings was available in supermarket produce departments, including Wada Farm's Easy-Steamer, introduced under the Wada Farms and Dole labels.

"Many retailers are expanding their offerings to include specialty potatoes," explains Johnson. "The Food Network and restau-

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rants have certainly helped introduce these to consumers. Last year, a major potato grower/supplier introduced several varieties of fresh potatoes packaged in a steamer bag. Take them home, pop the entire bag into the microwave and you've got a potato side dish in less than 15 minutes."

PACKAGING INNOVATIONS

Packaging techniques for value-added potatoes have also evolved, as growers, shippers and retailers look to improve shipping stability and shelf life.

"Packaging innovations are being tested and brought to the market. We are changing our packaging materials to utilize more recyclable resins and materials. This will be more environmentally friendly," says Wada Farms' Stanger.

"I think microwave-friendly packaging of all types will become more popular as will fresh potatoes combined with meat and other vegetables for easy-meal solutions," states NPPGA's Kreis.

USPB's Johnson agrees, adding, "I think we'll see an increase in quick-and-easy fresh potato packaging options for the microwave, maybe the oven and even the grill."

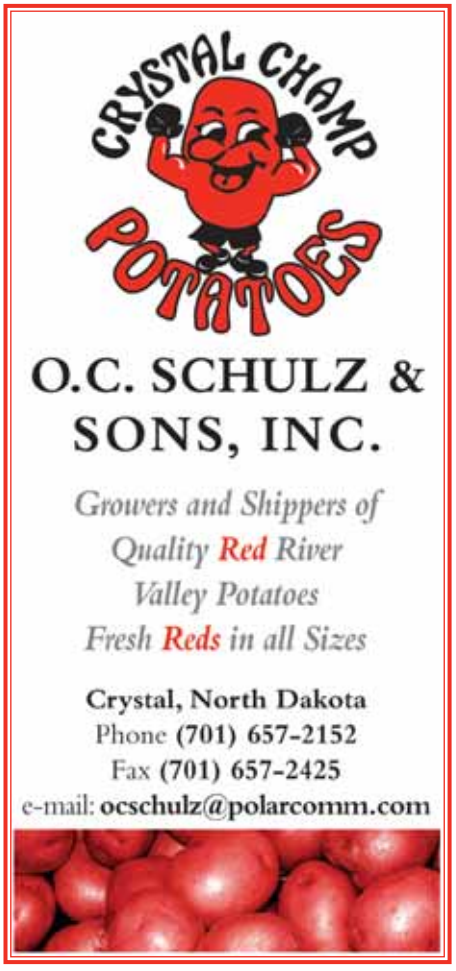
IPC's Pemsler cites steam technology as a major breakthrough. "This was a technology that didn't exist a year ago. In many cases, cooking at home has lost its appeal – unless convenience is involved."

CATEGORY GROWTH

"While fresh potato sales have been OK, they have not kept pace with the population growth," notes Johnson. "Our research indicates we're not losing consumers – we're losing frequency of consumption. Time-starved dual-income families, empty nesters and baby boomers looking for new items have all played a role. The refrigerated potatoes, specialty potatoes, organics, the Micro Baker, and package sizes under four pounds have done very well."

IPC's Pemsler says retailers could benefit from co-placement or tie-ins to promote full-meal sales. "We are saying to the customer, 'Here's a meal solution.' It presents a challenge to store management because they've got to allot space between departments. Department heads need to work together for increased sales of both products. This gives the consumer a quick, easy solution for providing a family meal."

Study demographics and match the supply and offerings, advises Stanger. "Beyond the baby-boomers, many young adults do not know how to cook like their parents," he stresses. "New value-added products assist us in keeping the consumption of potato



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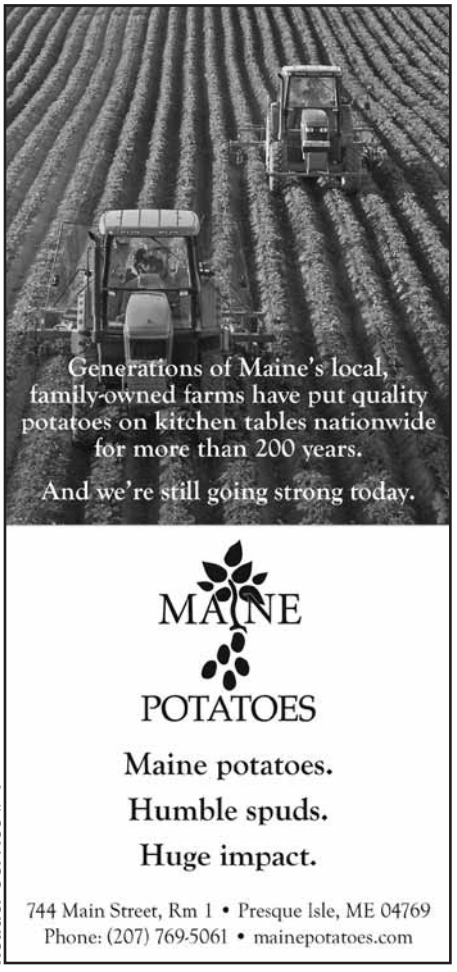

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products where it should be."

EDUCATION AND PRODUCT POSITIONING

Educating consumers on ways value-added potatoes can be used in meal preparation is key. Proper positioning or pairing value-added potatoes with other items can boost sales dramatically.

"The challenge comes in presenting the proper information to customers," says Vince Mastramoro, produce director at Sunset Foods Mart, Inc., a 4-store chain based in Highland Park, IL. "The retailer must have the information out there for consumers. If I have a new product, I'll get it out there and in two weeks, I'll feature it in an ad with information about the product and how to incorporate it into meals. That's the ultimate way to move an item."

Retailers make a larger profit on value-added items, notes IPC's Pemsler, but they must make sure those items receive appropriate shelf and space allotment. "The first priority is getting optimum visibility and the product on the shelf. Retailers need to secure proper space allocation and signage for potatoes. Jewel-Osco [based in Melrose Park, IL] does a great job of determining what its customers want by studying its neighborhoods and adjusting its produce department varieties and signage accordingly."

"Education and merchandising are the greatest challenges," states Wada Farms' Stanger. "Most value-added potato products are not easily recognized by the consumer as being drastically improved and different than other fresh potato products. Our challenge is to educate the in-store retail staff, display the product in the right location and enable the individual stores to create awareness of the product's value. The important factors are to keep the product fresh, merchandise it for maximum effect and draw the consumer to the display."

"Getting sufficient space will always be an issue," USPB's Johnson notes. "Many retailers have a 'clean space' policy for signage and POP materials. It's a problem if a consumer doesn't know a product's there or what to do with it. One of the biggest challenges is giving the new product enough time. Too often, a product is given only a few weeks, and if it doesn't sell as well as expected, it's pulled."

NPPGA's Kreis sees confusion about refrigerated potatoes. "Retailers are still confused as to where to place them. You'll find them in dairy, produce — even the meat department. Too often, staple items such as potatoes are buried in a department in an attempt to pull traffic by other items." **pb**

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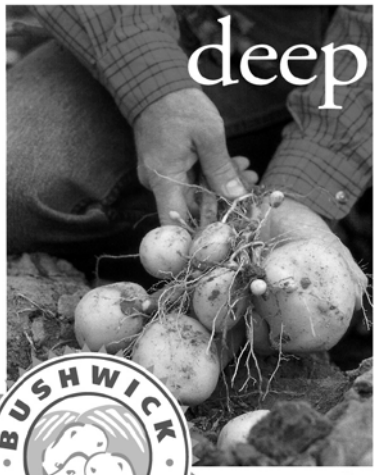

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Reader Service #73

Year-Round Asparagus Requires Year-Round Vigilance

Retail asparagus programs expanding as manufacturers innovate category offerings.

BY JEANNE CARPENTER

With increased consumer demand for year-round fresh asparagus, more supermarkets are sourcing green, white and even purple asparagus from Peru and Mexico during winter months, leading store executives to seek additional ways to effectively merchandise this once seasonal vegetable.

While typical consumers still buy bundles of fresh, upright asparagus, more shoppers are looking for convenience, says John Campbell-Barmmer, director of marketing for Chestnut Hill Farms, Miami, FL. That's led to an explosion in new packaging and splashy marketing for value-added items, such as fresh, washed, trimmed asparagus spears in microwavable bags, "great on the grill" premium packs, kosher asparagus and specialized white and purple varieties.

"Supporting different formats is critical to growing this category," Campbell-Barmmer notes. "If retailers cooperate with sellers and offer different formats that highlight value and convenience, asparagus has the potential to appeal to a whole new audience."

While past generations of consumers may have sought out asparagus only in the spring — the time when it was traditionally offered in the United States — contemporary shoppers not only expect the item to be available year-round but also demand it.

Today's consumers are not content with spring-only asparagus availability.

According to Julia Inestroza, marketing merchandising manager for Gourmet Trading Company, Los Angeles, CA, "The average American consumer has no concept of seasons anymore. If you asked shoppers younger than 35 what the season is for asparagus, they wouldn't know."

THE ASPARAGUS WARS: WHITE VS. GREEN

Once a specialty item served in top restaurants and virtually unheard of in the U.S. retail market until recently, white asparagus is one of the hottest items in today's produce department.

White asparagus has creamy white stalks and ivory tips because it is grown under mounds of soil; each individual spear is gently covered with earth as it pokes through the ground, preventing the creation of chlorophyll, which turns asparagus green. The flavor of white asparagus also differs slightly from that of green asparagus. Some liken the flavor to a mild version of salsify, heart of palm and artichoke.

Peru is the largest exporter of fresh white asparagus in the western hemisphere. The ideal growing conditions in its desert areas allow harvesting year-round, and Peruvian white asparagus is consumed throughout Europe and the United States.

The price difference between white

asparagus and green asparagus has traditionally been too high to make it profitable for U.S. distributors. However, that's changing because of increased supply and better-educated consumers who are willing to pay more for the item, explains Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development at Southern Specialties, Pompano Beach, FL. "More white asparagus than green asparagus is grown in more countries around the world. Europeans have favored white asparagus for years, and it's just now hitting the U.S. market. It has tremendous growth opportunities here in America."

As one of the largest importers of white asparagus in the United States, Southern Specialties offers the product year-round and wraps it in an attractive, high-end black and gold wrapper. "The product has a gourmet appeal, largely because people are not as familiar with it as they are green asparagus. We're seeing explosive growth in this category," Eagle notes.

"For years, the industry has offered asparagus in one way — a bundle of approximately one pound with 11 or 18 bundles per box. Now, we're developing new products that are exciting the consumer and driving sales upward."

— John Campbell-Barmmer
Chestnut Hill Farms

BEYOND THE BUNDLE

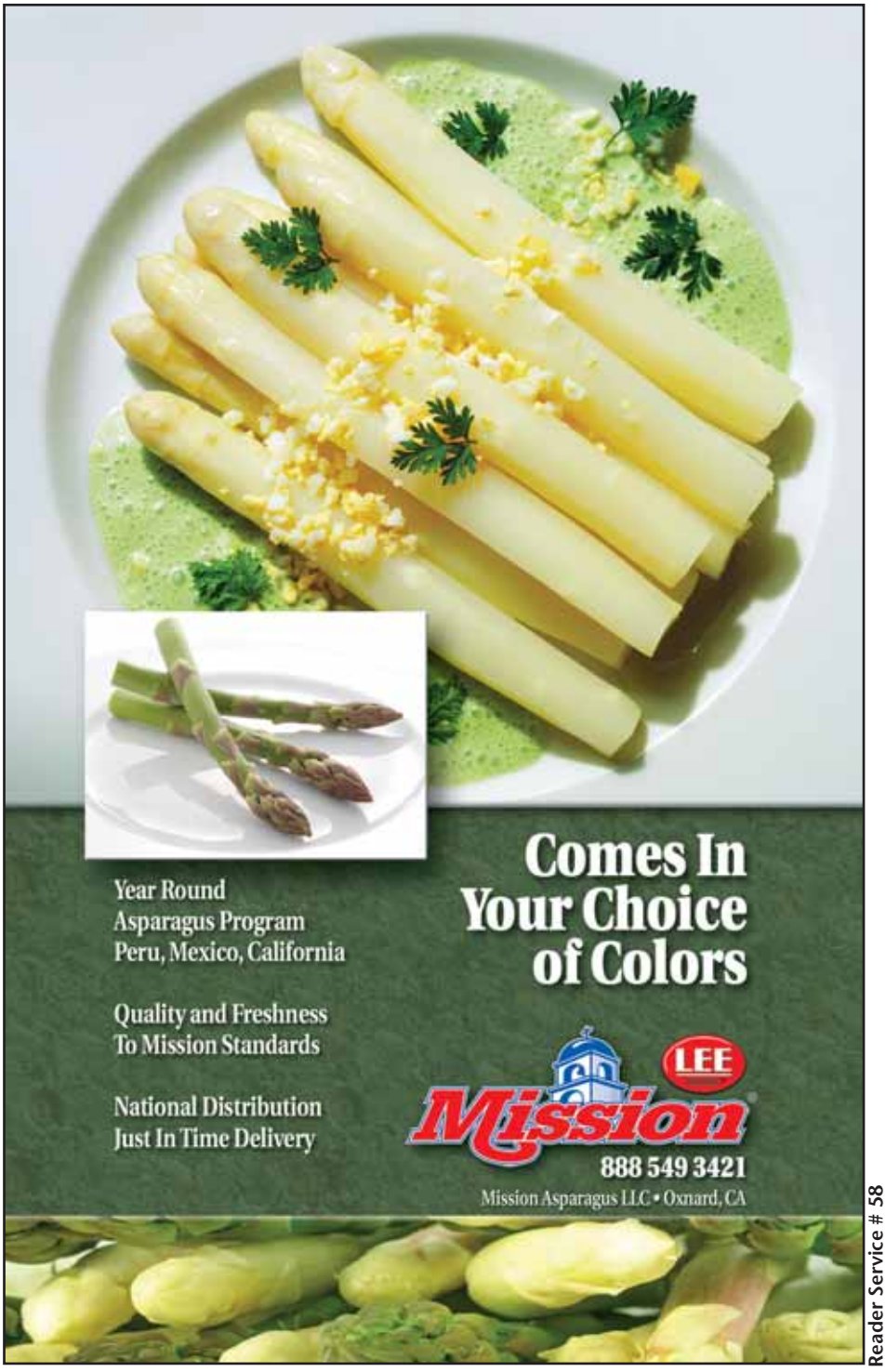
With a new generation of shoppers expecting to find year-round produce and improved convenience, manufacturers are beginning to innovate the asparagus category not only by diversifying product types but also by creating new packaging and merchandising programs.

Chestnut Hill's Campbell-Barmmer likens the evolution of the asparagus retail market to the retail pineapple market of old: "Five years ago, a consumer could purchase a pineapple in one of two ways — cored or whole. Now, you can buy pineapple in six or seven different formats — whole, cored, sliced, shrink-wrapped and bits in plastic bags. And what's happened to that category? Sales have gone through the roof."

Why should asparagus be any different, Barmmer asks. "For years, the industry has offered asparagus in one way — a bundle of approximately one pound with 11 or 18 bundles per box. Now, we're developing new products that are exciting the consumer and driving sales upward."

One new innovation includes packaging asparagus tenders or tips. Southern Specialties packages and markets its premium asparagus tips as the most flavorful, tender part of asparagus, offering no waste and precut for the convenience of the buyer. The company also offers a "great on the grill" premium asparagus pack, while Ayco Farms, Inc., Deerfield Beach, FL, just launched its own line of bagged and kosher asparagus.

Many companies also offer trimmed asparagus spears in microwavable bags in a variety of sizes to appeal to on-the-go consumers or to shoppers who many not know how to prepare the vegetable in their own kitchens. "Microwavable bags are appealing



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to a whole new audience looking for convenience," Campbell-Barmmer says.

DISPLAY TECHNIQUES

One of the keys to selling more asparagus in at retail is for stores to offer a variety of products in a variety of ways. "When you give customers more choices within a category, they will typically buy more," according to Eagle.

Gourmet Trading's Inestroza recommends retailers combine displays of white and green asparagus bundles to attract shoppers with the natural color contrast that comes with naked bundles. "We suggest placing two-thirds green and one-third white asparagus in a display with the white in the middle. It creates great visual impact." Try stocking asparagus near other gourmet items, such as chanterelle mushrooms, red bell peppers and artichokes, she adds.

Retailers should place packaged asparagus tips and microwavable asparagus packages nearby in the produce section, according to Inestroza, who recommends placing six to 10 packages at a time, at eye level, upright on the shelf with a slight forward angle. She adds asparagus can also be displayed with other packaged produce, such as chopped red bell peppers, bagged lettuce and fresh-cut stir-fry vegetables.

Experiment with expanding asparagus in other store departments, advises Troy Mesa, sales manager for Alpine Marketing Corp., Miami, FL. "More consumers are using asparagus as an ingredient in their cooking, placing it in egg quiches, baking it in croissants and using it as an hors d'œuvre with prosciutto and cream cheese. Why not try placing a few bundles in different sections of the store?"

Southern Specialties Eagle suggests placing asparagus with proteins. "Take a couple of bundles and put them next to steaks and meats that would traditionally be grilled because asparagus tastes great on the grill."

STORAGE AND HANDLING

One of the most important things to consider when merchandising asparagus is that it must stay cold, between 34° and 36°F. "Asparagus has one of the highest respiration rates of all produce, so it must be kept at a steady temperature and it needs high humidity," Mesa notes.

Naked bundles are best displayed at an even temperature, standing upright in ½ inch of fresh water or on a moist pad to keep it fresh and well hydrated. Even microwavable bags of asparagus should be kept at a steady temperature, Mesa says. Although the packaged product is micro-perforated, it still needs attention. "Packages are micro-perforated to meet the respiration rate of the product. You want the package to retain moisture, but not sweat. Temperature is key."

As with most produce, the cold chain during shipping and delivery of the product must not be broken, Eagle advises. To maintain its top condition and shelf life, asparagus must be refrigerated at all times.

WHAT'S NEXT?

With increased demand for year-round asparagus, more companies are offering it. In January 2007, Mission Produce, Inc., Oxnard, CA, announced its entry into the fresh asparagus market with an agreement to purchase Lee Pacific Asparagus. That purchase guaranteed a California and Mexican source, which Mission will complement with a grower in Peru that is already working to supply the company with avocados.

"We are just moving into the asparagus market and recently finished our first full year in this new venture," according to Bill Tarleton, Mission's director of marketing communications. "We've found a lot of our customers have jumped on board with our asparagus program and the future looks promising." **pb**

[***Editor's note:*** *For additonal information on merchandising asparagus, please see* Spring Merchandising, *beginning on page 20.*]

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Reader Service # 99

Six Tips To Move More Bulk Lettuce

To best increase lettuce sales, keep the techniques that work and toss the rest.

BY BOB JOHNSON

As the variety and quality of packaged salads improved, bulk lettuces were all too often ignored. Sales of this salad staple were bound to suffer with the rise of convenience packaging, but bulk lettuce continues to hold an important spot in the produce lineup. And there are signs the sales decline has finally plateaued.

"In the past five years or so, the decline of sales of bulk lettuce has stopped or leveled off," says Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Service, Inc., Monrovia, CA, and former produce and floral executive. Bulk lettuce, he adds, can still be vital and profitable, but it requires time and effort. Take a look at these six tips for reviving bulk lettuce sales.

1. OFFER VARIETY

Bulk lettuce is still one of the produce department's best sellers, and it plays a major role in driving sales for the entire department. An abundant and attractive variety of lettuces is essential to promote sales and is worth the space it takes.

"Lettuce is one of the top movers in the produce department, so it makes sense to allocate a proportionately ample space to accommodate it," says Bil Goldfield, communications manager for Dole Fresh Fruit Co., Westlake Village, CA. "With the many varieties that consumers have available — iceberg, romaine, romaine hearts, red leaf, green leaf, butter, radicchio — we suggest that the more choices the better. This is true also for packaging options — naked, sleeved, etc. The more options available to consumers, the more volume will move through the department."

In the past, lettuce may have meant iceberg, but those days are long over. "Romaine has passed iceberg in total sales," explains Jason Lathos, sales and marketing manager for Fresh Kist Produce, LLC, Salinas, CA.

Beyond the rise of romaine, an incredible variety of red and green leaf lettuces has emerged, notes Spezzano. "You have to have the right varieties out there. It might not be enough to have romaine lettuce. You might also have to have red romaine. You might need to have Bibb and Boston lettuce — and even some hydroponic lettuce. It depends on the demographics of the store."

Not all consumers seek bagged salads; many still seek out bulk lettuce for a variety of culinary uses.

Demographic differences affect lettuce preferences. "Retailers need to look at what products move best in a particular region," says Lara Grossman, director of marketing and business development for Tanimura & Antle, Inc. (T&A), Salinas, CA. "For some markets, green leaf is a higher velocity item than it is in others. For best results, retailers should look closely at store data to determine the optimum product mix."

In general, however, the greater the variety, the greater the volume. "The more variety you have in the store, the better," advises Michael Boggiatto, president of Boggiatto Produce, Inc., Brawley, CA. "You want a display with colors and textures. You want the consumer to think it looks good."

This is particularly true with affluent consumers, who are willing to spend more for their produce. "At a higher-end store, the more variety you have, the better," says Rick Osterhues, marketing director for Capurro Farms, Moss Landing, CA. *[**Editor's note:** In late December 2007, Capurro and Growers Express, LLC, Salinas, CA, entered into a partnership. This article was written prior to that agreement, and Capurro Farms is still identified by its original name.]*

Some producers offer living lettuce. "We package in a clamshell with the roots still on," relates Pierre Dolbec, vice president for sales and marketing at Hydroserre Mirabel, Inc., Mirabel, QC, Canada. Consumers can store the hydroponic lettuce in the refrigerator for a long time and use a few leaves at a time. "It has a very long shelf life," he adds.

2. DISPLAY ATTRACTIVELY

A look of abundance can help seal the lettuce deal. "We recommend retailers offer all flavors of leaf lettuces to give consumers options and create a sense of abundance," explains Kori Tuggle, marketing manager of Ocean Mist Farms, Castroville, CA. "Group shapes, color shades and textures together. Consider the product mix. Use green cloth under lettuce to create an illusion that there is more product than there actually is. Peo-

Healthful Cabbage Needs Retailer Attention

A close relative of broccoli, cabbage is considered healthful, but unlike broccoli, cabbage has not benefited from the increasing demand for healthful foods.

"*Men's Health* magazine rated cabbage as the No. 2 vegetable we should be eating more of," reports Maureen Torrey Marshall, vice president of Torrey Farms, Inc., Elba, NY. "It's good for you and it's inexpensive."

It can be a challenge to increase cabbage sales, but this vegetable has a lot going for it as an economical, healthful, versatile food. "Emphasizing the plentiful nutrition benefits, such as being a cruciferous vegetable that may help fight cancer, can help to encourage people to think about cabbage outside its traditional uses," says Lindsay Martinez, director of marketing for Boskovich Farms, Inc., Oxnard, CA.

"Cabbage consumption may not double in the next three or four years, but I believe we will see a steady increase in cabbage consumption in the future," notes LeeAnne Oxford, director of marketing for L&M Companies, Inc., Raleigh, NC. "Cabbage is an easy-to-prepare, healthful item that can be served in many ways."

In-store demonstrations can be an effective way to increase cabbage sales. "The North Carolina Department of Agriculture [Raleigh, NC] has been successful in raising sales with sampling," Oxford explains. "Simple, easy-to-prepare slaw recipes have worked very well. Recipes and cooking instructions are helpful, too."

These demos are particularly important with cabbage because an entire generation has come of age not knowing how to use it, notes Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Service, Inc., Monrovia, CA. "The average couple in their 40s with two kids isn't buying cabbage because no one has taught them how to prepare it. They might not even know how to make coleslaw, and that's the simplest thing in the world."

Torrey advises keeping cabbage next to carrots, lettuce and other salad ingredients. "Show people how easy it is to keep a head of cabbage and make coleslaw," Torrey suggests.

"Recipes and cooking suggestions can also help consumers who may need some ideas about how to incorporate more cabbage into their diets," Martinez recommends.

"Our consultants for the past couple years say surveys show the No. 1 consumer request is recipes," says Tim Greene, director of marketing and farming, Hollar and Greene Produce Co., Inc., Boone, NC. "This lead us to intensify our shrink-wrapping program, where we include our brand, Fresh Mountain Farms, nutrition information, recipes and PLU. The wrapping also helped consumers differentiate between conventional and organic varieties."

Price promotions can also be effective because cabbage is very inexpensive. "Some of the chains we deal with have been successful outside of the holiday seasons by using price and or locally grown promotions," Greene adds. "Most people who sell it by the pound in the rack also sell it by the pound in bulk displays."

Experts agree bulk cabbage is best priced by the unit. "Some stores are selling cabbage wrapped individually, rather than by the pound," according to Spezzano. "You can take some of the labor out of it by getting it trimmed and wrapped."

Bulk cabbage is best displayed on 40-by-40 pallets that are 26 inches high, explains Greene. "Bulk cabbage can be located wherever you choose to put it because it is on a pallet and that makes it a flexible item to go any where in the produce area."

Spezzano believes demographics have a lot to do with the relative decline in bulk cabbage sales. "We have fewer Eastern European immigrants coming to the United States. Cabbage is a poor person's food, and it used to be eaten by Polish, Lithuanian and Czechoslovakian immigrants. Hispanic immigrants don't buy a lot of cabbage."

Like any product, cabbage needs promotion to reach its potential. "Space allocation will change with store size, demographics and regions of the country," notes Oxford. "In all stores, cabbage should be promoted in every season. When on ad, cabbage should be promoted with large end-cap displays or in well-positioned bins."

Despite all the demographic hurdles, U.S. cabbage sales have averaged around 2.5 billion pounds annually this decade, according to Ray Clark, executive director of the Leafy Greens Council, St. Paul, MN. And that is up more than 100 million pounds a year from the 1990s. **pb**

ple believe they have a better choice when they are surrounded by abundance."

If bulk lettuce is going to move, displays must look attractive. "First impressions are everything," Tuggle explains. "When merchandise is displayed neatly, creatively and attractively, it will attract customers' interest to the category. Display lettuce under misters, especially if it is displayed in a naked, non-cello format."

Leaf lettuces, in particular, require regular attention to look appealing. "You have to go through the leaf lettuce section daily and recondition it," Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting says. "Trim it, and fluff it up."

Capurro is working on a new rack with an entirely new way of displaying leaf lettuces. "We are doing a test developing a wet rack fixture that merchandises leaf lettuce in a vertical position," explains Osterhues.

A well-conceived and maintained display offers opportunities for a variety of POP materials. "Generally speaking, POS techniques are effective if they are simple, helpful and pique a consumer's interest," notes T&A's Grossman. "There's room for improvement with retail produce departments since consumers are bombarded today with messaging on increasing their fruit and vegetable intake. POS tactics are needed to promote the action of not only purchasing but also increasing consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables."

Appealing lettuce displays are important, but price is also part of the appeal. "Pricing helps establish a segmentation strategy within the salad category," notes Ocean Mist's Tuggle. "When retail prices are in line with consumers' expectations, the overall effect on the salad category is the maximization of sales volume and dollars."

3. PUT IT IN A SLEEVE

When an effective sleeve is used and lettuce is displayed in a 5-down carton, the case sell-through goes up 30 percent, Osterhues contends. A larger sleeve makes it possible to identify the variety, brand, country of origin and UPC ring up.

According to Woody Johnson, senior vice president for sales and marketing at Growers Express, iceberg and romaine hearts are wrapped in the field. Some grower/shippers are also starting to wrap red- and green-leaf lettuce in the field, he adds. "You've got this minimally value-added category."

The use of sleeves means retailers need to choose whether to go with their own brand, the producer's brand or no brand at all. "Most of the really big chains like Kroger

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[Co., Cincinnati, OH], Safeway [Inc., Pleasanton, CA] and Wal-Mart [Stores, Inc., Bentonville, AR] want clear-wrapped iceberg," Johnson notes.

It may be advisable to let consumers know the lettuce was wrapped in the field and needs to be washed at home, he advises. "People know they need to wash iceberg; some people don't know to do this with wrapped romaine hearts."

4. PROMOTE LETTUCE

Failure to promote bulk lettuce may be a major cause of its decline. "The chains have de-emphasized the space and promotion of bulk lettuce," Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting reports. "You almost never see red leaf, green leaf or romaine lettuce in store ads. We constantly see the value-added products promoted. If you want to maintain sales of the bulk, you have to promote it."

One way to promote bulk lettuce is to highlight its benefits. "Leaf lettuce is high in vitamin A," Ocean Mist's Tuggle notes. "Romaine lettuce is also an excellent source of vitamin A and contains folate. Use signage to communicate these values and give shoppers a reason to buy lettuce."

Fresh Kist's Lathos suggests cross-merchandising bulk lettuce with related items, such as tomatoes or salad dressing.

"The important thing is to make it easy on the consumer by putting salad ingredients close to each other," according to Hydroserre's Dolbec.

It is helpful to have items like croutons or bacon bits close to the lettuce even if there is no price promotion, adds Tuggle. "May is National Salad Month. Kick off the beginning of summer with a 'Salad Days' promotion by showcasing all of the greens shoppers can add to salads, including broccoli, peas and green peppers."

5. INCLUDE DEMOS

Although convenience will continue to be important, many consumers still enjoy a hands-on approach. "Even with the pressure and convenience of the value-added products, there's still an old-style demographic that enjoys preparing and tasting bulk lettuce," Lathos points out.

Keep in mind, he adds, many of the consumers who want to prepare food are new to this game. "A lot of people think it's a feather in their cap if they can make something at home. I think you're getting a lot of consumers coming back to the wedge salad. The kitchen is the center of the new homes."

Recipes can help entice these consumers to the lettuce section. "You have to follow the trends in the foodservice industry," Lathos continues. "Consumers also learn from the foodservice sector with items, such as more ornate salads."

Even lettuces can benefit from a taste of free sampling, suggests Capurro's Osterhues. "We've got an array of recipes for sampling. He advises having a sleeve that clearly identifies the variety being sampled.

6. CONSIDER PRICING OPTIONS

Bulk lettuce consumers usually expect to find a bargain, unless the retailer is offering some of the gourmet varieties. "Make sure iceberg lettuce is not priced as a luxury item," Lathos suggests.

The right pricing can be by the pound or by the unit. "There can be advantages to pricing both ways," notes Dole's Goldfield. "By the unit gives the retailer a good promotional tool, such as two for 99¢ to drive traffic into the produce department and move through more volume. By the pound allows retailers to retain pricing and profits should a shipment contain larger or smaller units than usual. At Dole, we prefer the opportunity to work closely with retailers, get an understanding of their desired margins and help them on pricing strategies that will work best for them." **pb**

Make Mine A Mini

While retailers try to find the right balance of bulk and value-added lettuce, a small number of producers are offering a third alternative.

In 2005, Tanimura & Antle, Inc., Salinas, CA, began offering retailers its Sweet Gem lettuce, which was already popular among some foodservice outlets. A miniature lettuce, Sweet Gem is about the size of a softball, tastes sweeter than conventional lettuce and is sold in clamshells.

A handful of other lettuce suppliers are also offering miniature lettuces. "We do some of our baby head lettuces in clamshell," reports Ande Manos, sales and marketing manager, Babé Farms, Inc., Santa Maria, CA. The Babé Farms baby head lettuce is around five inches tall. "They are different varieties, and we harvest them earlier," Manos explains. The miniature lettuce is something of an intermediate product and offers convenience similar to that of packaged salads. You want them to be near the packaged salads to differentiate from the other lettuces." **pb**

TORONTO MARKET PROFILE

Strength In Diversity

Ontario Food Terminal personifies the city's diversity, passion and sense of community.

By Analisa Danowski

The Ontario Food Terminal, Toronto, ON, the largest wholesale fruit and produce market in Canada, is a community composed of mavericks and fierce individualists who share respect for the past, passion for the business and vision for the future. "This business is just as alive as the product we sell," explains Steven Green, vice president of Richard E. Ryan & Associates Ltd..

Built in 1954, the 40-acre Ontario Food Terminal still provides easy access to highways and ample parking space. "Our market is the reverse of New York," reports Lorie Goldfarb, vice president of Morris Brown & Sons Company Ltd. "Toronto starts happening when the sun comes up."

The terminal structure is unique. A 2-story U-shaped building encloses an open-air buyers court. Accessible 24 hours a day year-round, the terminal is surrounded by loading docks and parking space. Twenty-two warehouse tenants occupy the main level. Each unit is fully enclosed, with a line of low-ceilinged offices overlooking a large showroom floor. Covered pathways link the tenants' spaces, which are divided by iron railings for equipment and pedestrian use. Produce and transportation brokers operate out of office space on the second floor. There is an 80,000-square-foot cold-storage facility at the terminal, but most of the wholesale tenants use off-site warehouses for storage and repacking.

The Canadian government, which owns and operates the terminal, issues perpetual leases on each unit. some of which have been held by multiple generations of the same family. Several companies occupy more than one unit. "They never really become available," explains Anthony Pitoscia, vice president of Fresh Advancements, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Bamford Produce Co., Ltd., Toronto, ON. Bamford is a vertically integrated operation that encompasses wholesale, foodservice, processing, organics and logistics.

While wholesalers now do most of the business on the terminal, its original purpose was to improve local farmers' access to the wholesale market. Several years ago, there was push to bring more local farmers back to the terminal. Today, with the emphasis on locally grown and sustainability, there is a 450-stall farmers market on the terminal grounds.

The Toronto Wholesale Produce Association (TWPA), a central billing and credit management operation, is on-site at the terminal. All wholesale tenants are voting members and TWPA collects most of each company's billing on its behalf. An elected president serves a 2-year term and heads a board of directors made up of eight people. The controller and his staff operate from a second-floor office. TWPA's mission is to manage the financial relationships among produce importers, wholesalers and retailers in Southern Ontario.

"We make sure bills are paid on time," explains Ron Doucet, president of Fresh Taste Produce Ltd., Canada, and current TWPA president. "All payments come through the association, and we send out the checks to the members on the market. The role of the president presents its challenges. You can't make decisions just because it's your business. You have to make decisions that are good for all members."

The association helps foster a strong sense of community that thrives even in an atmosphere of intense competition. Vince Carpino, a TWPA past president who still serves on the board, is a produce buyer for Tomato King Ltd. He notes, "I'm friends with a lot of my competition. You can't spend 12 to 14 hours a day fighting with everyone."

"We each run our own business, but we look at the overall picture of what's good for the market," Doucet adds. "If the market is strong, our business will be good. We're very competitive with each other, but we're trying to stay together, so we are strong as a whole."

THE MARKET, THEN AND NOW

The market ranks in the Top 5 by volume of wholesale fruit and produce distribution centers in North America, and many of the businesses on the market have been there long enough to chart the changes over decades. "Toronto is a different market from the United States, where chain stores are king," explains Goldfarb.

While some large chains use the market for shorts, "This market supplies mostly independents," states Steven Weinstein, buyer and sales representative for Canadian Fruit & Produce Company, Inc.. "The independents offer service and freshness compared to the chains." For example, Longo Brothers Fruit Markets, Inc., Mississauga, ON, which has expanded to multiple locations throughout the Greater Toronto area and surrounding communities, still shops the terminal daily.

Weinstein notes that until the 1980s, Toronto enforced Sunday store closure, but small independent groceries were exempt. After the Sunday closing laws were repealed, chain stores began to bite into the independent trade. "Now, of course, you have big box and everything else," Weinstein says, noting increased competition is a common theme on the Toronto Market.

Although the pace of business certainly hasn't slowed, many voices mark the gradual passing of what Tomato King's Carpino, calls "that old market buyer, who would touch, taste and open the boxes." Ten years

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Stronach & Sons, Inc.

Rick Carnevale and Dorjee Namgyal
Veg-Pak Produce Ltd.

Lorie Goldfarb
Morris Brown & Sons Co. Ltd.

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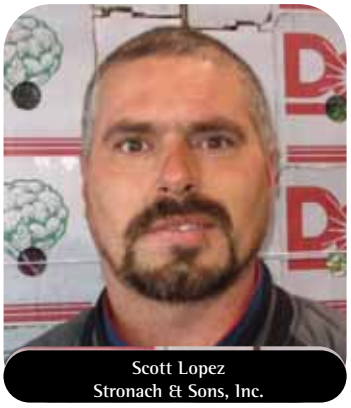
Scott Lopez
Stronach & Sons, Inc.

ago, he continues, he would never have believed people would consider placing orders online.

Morris Brown's Goldfarb remarks, "What we have now is the replenisher who looks at numbers on the computer. The replenisher has lost the touch and feel of the business. Anybody can be an order taker, but being a buyer or a seller comes from inside."

Other considerations now take center stage for terminal wholesalers. "Although the foodservice business has been flat over the last few years, it is still a very large portion of the Ontario Food Terminal volume," notes Richard Rose, vice president of Gambles Ontario Produce, Inc. "Food safety is pushing how we do business in this area and the Ontario Food Terminal has made significant improvements to meet those needs."

Morris Brown's tomato business evolved along with the fast-food industry, generating the forward-looking approach the company continues to take in terms of traceability and food safety, Goldfarb notes. He believes the rise of fast-food came about because "our children don't understand how to prepare produce. They see a head of lettuce for 99¢ and buy bagged salad for $3.99. That's cooking to them. Processed produce is the way of the future."

STRATEGIES FOR ADVANTAGE

"In the old days, everyone concentrated on a few specialty items," notes Rick Carnevale, vice president of sales for Veg-Pak Produce Ltd. "There were not as many people concentrating on growing their business 10 years ago." Competition on the market is intense, and space is limited. Each company uses diverse strategies to give it an edge.

For Sal Sarraino, CEO of Fresh Taste Produce Ltd., Canada, one of the largest importers of offshore product, the strategy is thinking beyond borders. The offshore business, which was his father's the vision, has been successful for 30 years, notes Sarraino, who personally travels to Fresh Taste's growing regions. "We are truly global. It's what sets us apart from everyone else. Our goal is to offer the consumer the best mix of produce at the most aggressive price and quality. We want everyone to be competitive in their own zone."

Although he travels the world to visit growing regions, Sarraino remains closely linked to the Toronto market. "It's like a heartbeat," he describes. "Whether a person buys one case or a truckload, I can see it. I can see the trends, and I can feel it."

According to Rose, the key to the produce industry is listening. "You also have to love the industry, or you won't do well at it. You'll get weeded out. Part of our mandate is to get everyone who works with our company to have that passion. If you don't care, how do you improve?" He cites constant communication – within the company and with customers – as a major part of offering optimal price, quality and service.

Carpino, who owned a retail store before joining Tomato King, brings insider insight to the wholesale business. "All our buyers are ex-retailers," he says. "We can think retail and offer insight on the business."

"Watermelon is our spinal column," notes Canadian Fruit's Weinstein. "We learned to be experts at what we handle." While the compa-

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ny handles other items, such as eggplants and zucchini, Weinstein looks to the "three generations of expertise" upon which the specialty house was built and cautions that over-experimentation comes with a cost: "Tuition fees in this business are very high."

Fresh Advancements' Pitoscia reports, "Our motto in building this business has always been diversification." The company dedicated an entire terminal unit to a full line of organics, instituting private label conventional, organic and value-added lines and opening a logistics company. In 2006, Bamford Produce become a distributor/member of Monterey, CA-based PRO*ACT. "Since we did that, we have become even more vertically integrated as we work closely with more shippers daily on season-long contracts," he adds.

Barry Green, president of Richard E. Ryan, identifies a different set of challenges. "Downstairs, floor space is money. Upstairs, it's time." Ryan's edge comes from building relationships and finding the right fit for his clients and suppliers. "Anyone can get the knowledge. The key is interpreting it and having knowledgeable people who can give advice."

MULTICULTURAL CITY, MULTICULTURAL MARKET

"We are blessed with a huge new ethnic mix of people," according to Gambles' Rose, who is originally from Jamaica.

Joe Da Silva, vice president of Ippolito Fruit & Produce Ltd., Burlington, ON, a wholly owned subsidiary of Ippolito Fruit and Produce, Inc., Toronto, ON, came to Canada as a teenager from the Azores Islands, located about 950 miles west of Lisbon in the Atlantic Ocean. In terms of the multicultural nature of the Toronto market, he says, "Our biggest support comes from the Chinese and Koreans. They are really good to us."

Canada's world reputation for welcoming immigrants and Toronto's economic opportunities attract people from all over the globe. "Our customers from different cultural backgrounds

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Reader Service # 42

Danny Kurtz and Teddy Stronach
Stronach & Sons, Inc.

Steve Bamford and Anthony Pitoscia
Fresh Advancements, Inc./Bamford Produce Co., Ltd.

educate us," explains Veg-Pak's Carnevale. He credits his father, Vic Carnevale, with seeing the future of the business was in supplying the produce needs of the expanding ethnic market.

Toronto's East Indian population has driven the success of items such as long squash and okra. Dorjee Namgyal, sales representative for Veg-Pak, says customer demand often follows the calendar of a culture's religious holidays.

Ted Kurtz, a director at Stronach & Sons, Inc., explains, "We cater our business to the independents. Where that used to be Italians and Jews, now it's Koreans, Chinese, Vietnamese and people of Indian decent. We cater our buying towards them." One example he cites is methi, a leafy green also known as fenugreek that Indian customers seek. Stronach now carries coriander with the root ball still attached because his customers prefer it.

At the Ontario Food Terminal, deals are made in a variety of languages. Many houses have multilingual personnel. But, as Da Silva says, "Everybody helps everybody." He tells the story of a day Ippolito's Korean-speaking salesman was away and a Korean man and woman, – regular customers – came in. They spoke no English and Da Silva spoke no Korean, "but I showed them around and when they saw a skid of cabbage, the woman pointed to the cabbage and rocked her arms as if she was holding a

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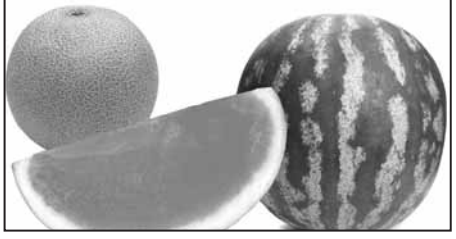

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Reader Service # 43

Richard Rose and Angelo Vento
Gambles Ontario Produce, Inc.

Robert Piccone, Randy Weinstein, Seymour Weinstein and Steven Weinstein
Canadian Fruit and Produce Company, Inc.

baby. Baby cabbage! Then I realized they wanted Brussels sprouts."

TAKING THE ORGANIC PATH

According to Da Silva, Ippolito now carries organic items. "I believe it's a thing of the future. More and more people will switch eventually." Many of the terminal's houses carry at least a few organics and are keeping an eye on the trend as a whole.

Fresh Advancements, the first wholesaler in North America in any market to commit an entire stall to 100 percent organic, deals with hundreds of domestic and international organic farmers. "We build strong business and personal relationships to ensure we have the year-round quality assurance and volume we need. At the same time, we want to make sure we get the farmers enough money to keep them in business for the long term. After all, we're here for the long term and we're only as good as they are," says Pitoscia.

A TRACEABLE FUTURE

Traceability and food-safety issues now take center stage in the produce industry. "You're always educating yourself in this business," explains Morris Brown's Goldfarb. "Traceability is the foundation of everything. If you can't trace back, there's no foundation to

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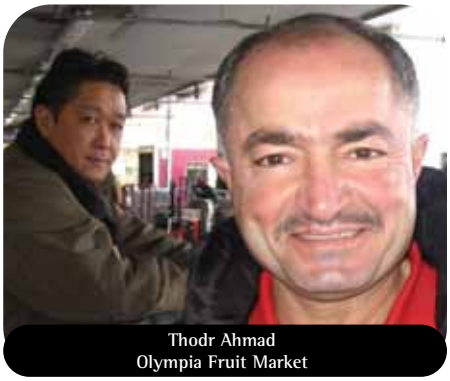
Thodr Ahmad
Olympia Fruit Market

Wayne MacKinnon
Gambles Ontario Produce, Inc.

Vince Carpino
Tomato King Ltd.

your HACCP [Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point] systems. From the early 1990s, we took a very proactive position. We started protecting ourselves, which protects the end user." Morris Brown institutes critical control points throughout its system in an effort to consistently produce a quality finished product that is safe for consumers. It employs a government inspector "to help create the foundations and teach people how to follow protocols and procedures," Goldfarb adds. The company also employs a HACCP coordinator to audit the grower/shippers.

For Veg-Pak's Carnevale, traceability also means an improvement in quality for the end user. "Packaged items are the next wave," he states, noting Veg-Pak now has a HACCP-compliant packing and storage facility off-site.

HONORING THE PAST, WELCOMING THE FUTURE

"We have a responsibility to our ancestors

Reader Service # 103

The Ontario Food Terminal has many unique design features.

> "The food terminal is like the Bermuda Triangle – you really can't get out. The pace, the adrenaline – any other industry is just too slow."
>
> – Rick Carnevale
> Veg-Pak Produce Ltd.

to maintain what they have built," stresses Canadian Fruit's Weinstein. He has worked at the terminal since 1977 but still represents one of the Toronto market's younger generations.

Bamford Produce, founded in 1881, is Canada's oldest produce company, so Steve Bamford, president, has deep roots in the industry. Pitoscia's family emigrated from Italy and started its business in 1903. When Bamford and Pitoscia become partners, they could call upon hundreds of years of family tradition and integrity. Both hope their own children will carry on the family traditions.

Carnevale tells a similar tale: "I came here to help out my father, but then I got addicted. The food terminal is like the Bermuda Triangle – you really can't get out. The pace, the adrenaline – any other industry is just too slow." **pb**

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TORONTO RETAIL PROFILE

Thorncrest IGA

Grocery chain builds relationships on quality.

By Analisa Danowski

The season's first snowflakes drift down outside Thorncrest IGA, Etobicoke, ON, as Joey Carnevale, store manager and produce manager, arranges display shelving for fresh-cut pine branches outside. A self-proclaimed jack-of-all-trades, Carnevale uses a hands-on management style, displaying his commitment to customer service and his passion for his business – especially when it comes to fresh produce. "I do some grocery buying, but I like buying produce a lot better," he explains.

Located in an upscale, established neighborhood west of downtown Toronto, Thorncrest IGA has served its customers for 45 years – the last 11 under Carnevale's management. Like other retailers in the worldwide network of supermarkets under the banner of Independent Grocers Alliance, Inc., (IGA), Chicago, IL, Thorncrest IGA is independently owned and reflects the needs and personality of its surrounding community. Thorncrest IGA offers a line of store-brand dry goods, meat and deli products, but IGA retailers can also choose their own suppliers. "We steer outside for produce to cater to our niche," according to Carnevale, who buys produce from the Ontario Food Terminal.

Just as Carnevale has formed relationships with wholesalers on the market, his customers have come to rely on their relationship with Thorncrest IGA. "We've been here for a while and they trust the quality we're putting out there," he notes. "We believe produce is the future for the small grocery store. We can handpick the best. We look at quality first."

Although produce occupies only about 10 percent of the store's 6,500 square-foot selling area, it is one of the most profitable departments, and Carnevale is constantly looking for innovative ways to market existing items and experiment with new ones. He credits Toronto's vibrant, multicultural restaurant scene for introducing new items to consumers'' kitchens. Baby French beans, zucchinis, sunburst squash and dragon fruit are just a few examples.

Marketing organics alongside conventional produce, item by item, is one way Thorncrest IGA highlights quality and choice for its customers. When all the organic items were grouped together in a dedicated section, consumers tended to overlook them. An integrated marketing approach brings the organic option to consumers' attention, doubling the sales of organics overall. Since quality is the driving force behind his selection, Carnevale won't buy over the phone, He prefers to personally source his organic items from the Ontario Food Terminal. "We don't have everything all the time. When we see nice, fresh goods, we bring them in," he reports.

Consumer interest in locally grown Ontario items also helps shape the produce department, and once again the city's food terminal is fundamental in meeting that demand throughout the growing seasons. Ontario is a major apple producer, and the store packages local apples by the dozen in traditional, rustic paper bags with handles. Local purple and yellow cauliflower are growing in popularity. Basket fruits, such as peaches and plums, are perennial favorites, as are the fragrant, intensely flavored local strawberries, which are smaller and rounder than the imported varieties. "The strawberries were unbelievable this year," Carnevale notes.

The store does all its produce repackaging in-house, including apples in paper bags, tray-packed vegetables and fresh chopped vegetables, fresh herbs and prepared salads in resealable clamshells. Repackaging is a trend Carnevale spotted early on with the burgeoning of bagged salads. "Right away, we saw opportunities to be stand out. The clamshell salads we do outsell the bagged ones."

Convenience certainly appeals to the consumer, but even more important is the freshness of the prepared product. "It has to be done in-house for it to work," Carnevale maintains.

The benefits of repackaging include improvements to quality control, presentation and food safety, as well as the ability to offer more variety within the space allotted to produce within the store. The environmental impact of packaged items, as well as customer concerns for greener options, is taken into account. The store has sourced biodegradable trays for all packaged items. Cloth grocery bags are available for sale, and customers may request paper bags at checkout. A projected renovation will include a freight elevator to the basement, allowing the use of special bins to consolidate produce waste and trimmings for composting.

IGA Thorncrest shows its community spirit by working with the Toronto Food Bank during its twice-yearly food drives. "People want to donate, but they don't know what to give. We call the Food Bank to see where they're short, and then we stuff the bags," explains Carnevale. Paper bags containing a range of packaged staple items are available at several price points, close to the checkout. Customers can buy and donate on the spot for later collection.

Thorncrest IGA's relationship with its customers drives the business, Carnevale notes. When a consumer, looking over the vibrant colors of the store's produce section, asks him if the store carries a pre-cut mix of vegetables for minestrone, Carnevale smiles and replies, "We'll do that for you." **pb**

Thorncrest IGA

1500 Islington Ave.
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Merchandising Packaged Nuts

Packaged nuts are fun for consumers and profitable for stores.

BY SUZANNE SMITHER

Known to attract impulse buyers, sports fans, health-conscious snackers and year-round bakers, packaged nuts can boost produce department profits. The tricky part is catching the attention of shoppers.

Nut-savvy manufacturers, retailers and promoters know what it takes to drive those incremental sales. They offer five tried-and-true tips for effective merchandising:

1. USE ALLURING VISUALS

"One of the keys to having a successful peanut promotion is high visibility," explains Terry Williams, national sales manager for Sachs Peanuts, owned by E.J. Cox, Company, Inc., both of Clarkton, NC. "Peanuts are an impulse item. They need to be highly visible in a high-traffic area of the supermarket. When you think of peanuts, your first thought is freshness."

Williams suggests showcasing packages on a large display table in the produce department. He favors pallet displays — an entire pallet of product put out on display. "An almost ready-made display makes it easy for produce mangers. And there's excitement for the customer that creates an impulse sale.

"Graphics are very important as are the colors of the packaging," he continues. "You want bright colors that make packages stand out to the customer. Anything that draws attention increases sales."

Brian Gannon, director of produce and florals for Big Y Foods, Inc., based in Springfield, MA, points out, "A lot of people are trying to work nuts into their diet [for health reasons], making them a steady impulse item. Some of the nut manufacturers are now moving toward gusseted bags. This is huge for the retailer because it makes for much better shelf organization, Once they stand up on the shelf, the product begins to sell itself — that's huge. The more the manufacturers do this, the better for the retailers."

Williams agrees, adding, "Stand-up packages are more visible to the consumer and result in more sales [because] consumers can easily identify the products."

To maximize sales of "nuts that sell well no matter what season it is — such as pecan halves, walnut meats and pistachios," Gannon recommends "creating a secondary display where customers can see them and grab them. Putting the right nuts in the right traffic location ensures you'll make those sales."

Betsy Owens, executive director, Virginia-Carolina Peanut Promotions, Nashville, NC, advises, "Do something unique and different in your display to attract the customer's attention. Use large displays and large graphics that set it apart from other displays."

Inviting displays with many options spur consumers to make impulse purchases of nuts.

Promotions as simple as "nut houses made of stacked packages" or as dramatic as "a guy dressed as a clown to do sampling" attract consumers, Owens advises. "One store did an art contest for fourth-graders. They let the children bring in peanut drawings they'd made and hung them on clotheslines." Friends and relatives flocked to the store to admire the artwork and bought nuts while they were there, she recalls.

"The best displays we have go up during the holidays and involve Planters and Diamond nuts creatively displayed in bins within our produce departments," explains Maria Brous, director of media and community relations, Publix Super Markets, Inc., headquartered in Lakeland, FL.

Owens works on an annual grocery store promotion for peanuts — "a contest to motivate produce people to put up displays." One memorable display, she relates, involved a lawn mower towing a trailer full of peanuts with a sign that read "Mowing down the price of peanuts."

"Keep it simple, with one major thought, idea or theme to a display," she advises. "When it comes to signage, keep the copy brief. If you can involve the whole staff, or at least the produce staff, you'd be amazed at the response."

2. OFFER CHOICES

According to Hayden Price, director of customer marketing, Diamond Foods, Inc., Stockton, CA, "Retailers should create that key display or shelving space that gives the consumer good variety across all nuts. We have a special baking center where you can find a ⅔-ounce package or a 16-ounce one. If you want walnuts, you might buy almonds, too, as an incremental purchase."

Diamond offers culinary and baking nuts, including almonds, walnuts, pecans, hazelnuts, macadamias, peanuts, black walnuts and pine nuts. He stresses stores need to display "proper quantities and all key varieties and sizes in a key location with lots of traffic."

Ron Van Amburgh, vice president of sales for Harvest Manor Farms, a Cedar Rapids, IA-based peanut vendor that supplies nuts

Year-Round Merchandising Opportunities

Finding new and innovative opportunities to move more nuts isn't always easy. Holiday bakers are guaranteed to pick up more packaged nuts during Halloween, Thanksgiving and the December holidays, but it's important to consider additional opportunities that will help attract year-round sales:

* Super Bowl
* Mardi Gras
* Valentine's Day
* March Madness
* Spring Training
* Major League Baseball season
* Memorial Day
* June weddings and graduations
* NASCAR races
* Golfing events
* Summer vacations
* Fourth of July
* Back to school
* National Football League season
* World Series
* Baseball playoffs
* National Collegiate Athletic Association basketball season
* National Basketball Association season

Sources: Ron Van Amburgh, vice president of sales for Harvest Manor Farms, Cedar Rapids, IA; Terry Williams, national sales manager for Sachs Peanuts, Clarkton, NC; and Betsy Owens, executive director of Virginia-Carolina Peanut Promotions, Nashville, NC

and other snack food items to retailers and foodservice operators, also stresses the importance of offering the consumer many choices. "We have all kinds of nuts — cashews, Brazils, walnuts and trail mixes. We offer 60 different items, including peanuts, mixed nuts, praline pecans and cinnamon-flavored almonds." A recent innovation, he says, is Harvest Manor's "prepackaged instant consumable and variety pack for specific holidays like Halloween." This 3-item sleeve pack doesn't have to become a permanent item unless it sells really well, he adds.

"Certain nuts are key to certain holidays with some used in baking and some eaten out of hand," notes Big Y's Gannon. "Offer the different nut options and match them to specific holidays and sporting events."

Carrying both private-label and national brands is another way retailers can offer consumers options. Private label nuts are "for customers who have grown to look for and enjoy the Publix brand," notes Brous. "We say our private label is equal to or greater than the national brands. Cost may be a factor. Our private label can save the customer 10 to 30 percent off the price of a national brand. But there are also customers who will be brand loyal. Our job is to provide both options."

"Data is available that if you use both private labels and national labels, you increase sales 20 percent," notes Sachs' Williams. "People like a choice, so offer both."

3. HIGHLIGHT ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

"The sale of nuts in produce departments is a related-item sale — related to an activity — so displays should be planned around an activity, something that's fun. For a creative display, tie in to a pleasurable activity. Look for merchandising occasions," Harvest Manor's Van Amburgh advises. Packaged nut displays with holiday themes or tie-ins to major sporting events offer the retailer "an opportunity to make another $400 to $500 in a week or two."

"We're working with Virginia-Carolina Peanut Promotions," Williams relates. "We have a Super Bowl promotion every January. Stores send in pictures of peanut displays and a prize goes to the produce manager who shows the most creativity and uniqueness. Jerseys, helmets and footballs are built into the displays. Every year, we see more creativity and thought put into these events."

According to Virginia-Carolina's Owens, high school sports also provide good merchandising opportunities. Use jerseys from a nearby high school or the colors of its team, or recruit a cheerleader or athlete to offer samples to shoppers, she adds.

Valentine's Day is also a good time to promote peanuts as a heart friendly item by displaying them in heart-shaped bins. Owens recalls one store dressed its produce staff in Valentine's Day-themed shirts that read "I'm nuts about you."

4. CROSS-MERCHANDISE AND CO-BRAND

Williams believes deals, such as 10 items for $10 or five items for $10, are good ways to attract customers and suggests cross-merchandising in an area that has pricing deals on different items like cereals and chips. He also recommends cross-merchandising in the beer, soft drinks and snack food aisles.

Van Amburgh offers a different perspective. "The focus should be on cross-merchandising not discount pricing. It ought to be a very profitable, no-shrink opportunity for the produce department. Focus on it with dedicated space displays that remind consumers to make purchases." Discount pricing is not necessary, he says, because "the customer looks only for good value, whether it's worth the money or not."

"Co-marketing with other branded items, such as Hershey and Borden, drives incremental sales," Diamond's Price points out.

Williams says Sachs is now marketing a Tabasco-infused peanut, co-branded with Avery Island, LA-based McIlhenny Co., maker of the hot pepper sauce. Other co-branded products are in development.

5. KEEP IT CONVENIENT

"People are looking for something that stimulates," Van Amburgh notes. "A very small percentage of shoppers are into doing lots of cooking. Most are looking for convenience items."

Diamond tries to use signage that illustrates what the product is and what it can be used for. Price contends Diamond 's signage differentiates itself from competitors by providing "recipes that offer the consumer ways to use nuts. We've also experimented with displayable cases — display-ready with nice graphics on the outside, so the consumer can shop right from the case."

Brous says Publix combines convenience with cross-merchandising in its popular "Aprons Simple Meals program, which offers customers complete meals that require 30 minutes or less to prepare. The ingredients are all in one kiosk, plus a refrigerator case with everything they need to make." **pb**

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FLORAL WATCH

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The California Grown Show

The California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers, Sacramento, CA, in conjunction with the Nursery Growers Association of California, Lancaster, CA, and the San Diego County Flower and Plant Association announce The California Grown Show. The event will be June 4 at the Orange County Fairgrounds in Costa Mesa, CA.

Reader Service No. 316

The Super Floral Show

SFS The Super Floral Show™
Floral and Foliage Products for the Volume Buyer

Diversified Business Communications, Portland, ME, announces the Super Floral Show is set for June 17-20 in Orlando, FL. Geared toward high-volume buying, the show will feature floral and foliage items as well as floral department-related products. Educational sessions including seminars on sustainability, branding and merchandising will also be available.

Reader Service No. 317

NEW PRODUCTS

Wipe It Away

Botani-Wipe, Trinidad, CA, introduces Botani-Wipe, The Original Wipe For Plants, an all-natural plant and leaf polish. The wipes are non-toxic, disposable, flushable and alcohol free. Featuring 100 percent pure Neem oil, the biodegradable wipes can clean away pests, molds and dust from stems, tops and undersides of leaves.

Reader Service No. 318

Self-Watering Container

Pecketts, Inc., Apopka, FL, introduces its new 5-inch self watering container with a reservoir that holds an extra 1½ to 2 cups of water. A rope wick system delivers the water to the roots. The insert pot that holds the plant is easily removed when filling the container's reservoir. This low-maintenance container gives the plant an extra two to three weeks of water.

Reader Service No. 319

Netting For Convenience

G & R Trellis & Supply Co., Delray Beach, FL, offers Net Sleeves, a new mesh fabric plant sleeve that eliminates the need to remove paper or plastic plant sleeves. Plants receive maximum ambient light and air exchange and can even be watered through the sleeve. Container plants can be left in the sleeve for several days without harm, saving labor, floor space and disposal costs.

Reader Service No. 320

Bold And Prickly

Sorensen Greenhouses, Inc., Ruthven, ON, Canada, offers 6-inch cacti in designer pots. These easy-to-care-for plants potted with moss toppers feature an assortment of interesting cacti varieties. Many have multiple plants per pot, giving a full bold look. They are ideal accents for bright locations.

Reader Service No. 321

Petal-Look Pot Covers

Koenpack USA, Inc., Miami, FL, introduces the Silk Pot Cover in 4- and 6-inch sizes. Designed to complement the plant, the petal-shaped cover has a convenient clear plastic container inside to retain excess water. The covers are available in vibrant colors, including green, red, orange, yellow, pink and lilac. They are sold in packs of 250. Each cover weighs less than one ounce.

Reader Service No. 322

Reflective Terrarium Planters

Bill Brown's Greenhouses, Inc., Apopka, FL, is offering mirrored terrarium planters in assorted sizes. Available with foliage or cactus plants, the scenic glass planters are fun to collect and easy to maintain. Ideal as floral department gifts for men, women and children, the terrariums bring the outdoors in and engage green thumbs of all ages.

Reader Service No. 323

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Orchids As Profit Builders

These exotic beauties can easily blossom into major moneymakers.

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

Elegant and unusual, orchids have an appeal that has grown with the plant's increasing availability. "Once considered exotic and difficult to care for, orchids are now No. 2 in sales behind poinsettias," explains Marc Clark, vice president of Rocket Farms, Inc., Salinas, CA. "Their popularity began to increase once consumers began to see them priced less than $20 in supermarkets and large retail stores."

"The lure of orchids is almost unexplainable, but the mystique and popularity of these amazing flowers continues to grow," notes Marla McCasland, sales representative for Happy Hawaiian Plants, Hilo, HI. "Sales have grown because there is large demand from general consumers who want to use the orchid in home décor and don't care too much about collecting. They buy for what will go well in the bathroom or on the coffee table or the nightstand."

Not long ago, it was rare to find an orchid in someone's living room. "Orchids were kind of in the realm of people who had a hothouse to grow them," according to Clark. "Seven or eight years ago, they were exotic. Market forces and technological changes made phalaenopsis orchids more available and cheaper."

Scott Glazer, president, Turtle Pond Orchids Etc., Delray Beach, FL, says, "More orchids are being grown in today's marketplace, reducing their wholesale price and enabling those who thought they were too expensive to now carry them and charge a fairly cheap price."

Live orchids are also easier to import since new laws allow the plants to cross the U.S. border in moss — something that was prohibited just a few years ago, he adds.

"There exists no classier flower than the orchid," asserts Glazer.

Clark agrees, adding, "In my view, orchids are the king of the floral world. In Europe, it's the No. 1 plant. I believe soon the orchid will be No.1 in the United States."

One reason for this is variety. "Orchids sell themselves. They can be big or small, and the delicate flowers are fragrant and come in nearly every color," relates Charles Chapman, president, Chapman's Orchids, Apopka, FL. "There are approximately 29,000 species of orchids and approximately 450,000 hybrids. Every year, they find 100 to 500 new species. Orchids are the second largest plant species in the world behind the grasses. From the Himalayas to the deserts, they are found on every continent except Antarctica.

"Currently the most popular sellers are dendrobium and phalaenopsis," notes McCasland. "This is because of their availability. They're grown in mass numbers for mass-market sales. Many other varieties are also easy to cultivate and continue to grow in popularity. As we expand our offerings, consumers become more sophisticated in what they want to purchase."

A varied display of orchids adds sophistication to the floral department. "Orchids are very impressive in groups. Novelty phalaenopsis — spots, stripes, yellows, orange, etc. — tend to attract customers' interest. You would be surprised how many consumers have not been exposed to the wide variety of colors and patterns," adds Clark.

Photo courtesy of Rocket Farms, Inc.

Photo courtesy of Turtle Pond Orchids, Inc.

Varieties, ease of care and reasonable price points have spurred orchid category growth.

Depending on climate, orchids can be grown just about anywhere. "Some varieties grow better in cooler climates, while others grow better in warmer climates," explains Glazer. "Greenhouses can manipulate the climate to match the orchid's needs. Certain areas of the country are known for particular varieties because the natural climate meets certain varieties' needs more easily. For example, Florida is known for phalaenopsis, California for cymbidiums and Hawaii for dendrobiums and oncidiums."

They may appear delicate, but orchids are actually quite hardy and require relatively simple care, adding to their appeal for consumers and retailers. "Most orchids can easily go a week inside a store with no watering at all — sometimes longer," notes

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Reader Service # 111

Glazer. "They like to be on the dry side, which is to the store's advantage."

A few simple rules can help keep orchids in prime condition while on display. "Humidity is important, as is keeping orchids away from drafts," according to Rocket Farms' Clark. "You would not want to create an orchid display next to the outside doors that keep opening and closing."

Turtle Pond's Glazer stresses that air vents are a hazard to orchids. "Keep them away from direct air coming from air conditioning or heating vents," he says.

Also, orchids fare better when kept far from fresh fruit. "The ethylene in a lot of fruits will cause the flowers to drop," explains Happy Hawaiian's McCasland.

A good display also prevents accidental damage. "Try and space them so they don't get tangled when customers take them off shelf," recommends Clark. "Keeping them in plastic sleeves for up to a week or more will not hurt them and will actually help keep them warm, retain humidity and stay protected from physical damage."

Always In Bloom

Live orchids sell well only when they flower — something Happy Hawaiian Plants in Hilo, HI, has remedied in a unique way. Its Floral Fusion plants, which combine a live orchid plant with realistic-looking clay flowers, always appear to be in bloom.

"This flower is so realistic that even upon close inspection, it is hard to tell it is not a real orchid blooming," explains Marla McCasland, sales representative. "This is packaged and ready for the retail shelf in a way that it cannot be damaged in the store. It goes into the customer's home and looks like a beautiful blooming orchid plant all year round. Once the plant blooms, the flower will resemble the clay flower that was purchased."

The packaging was also designed to help retailers offer beautiful plants with a minimal amount of labor. "The live orchid plants are packaged in a way that does not require watering or other in-store care. They are protected from ethylene, temperature and moisture variations, which normally cause flowers to droop. And the products have a strong one-month-or-more shelf life," she notes. "Anybody can put them out and they take care of themselves."

Sold only in test markets for the past two years, the Fusion plants are now available nationwide. **pb**

MORE BANG FOR THE BUCK

Though pricier than other live plants, potted orchids offer a great value for the consumer. "People are realizing that buying an orchid costs them the same as a bouquet of cut flowers — but with two major advantages," notes Glazer. "Orchids can last up to three months, where the bouquet of cut flowers barely lasts a week. And after the flowers fade, customers are left with a plant they keep in hopes of it blooming again next year."

Orchids also offer a great value for the retailer. "If they're of good quality and don't sustain shipping damage, they can be very profitable, high-margin items," says Clark.

"With our pricing structure, our supermarkets report profit margins of 42 to 48 percent per orchid," Glazer adds.

"It's a relatively high-dollar item in a small plant," states Clark, noting the shipping cost is the same for orchids as it is for a similar-size plant with a lower price point. Orchids also take up a relatively small amount of shelf space. "Real estate is very valuable in a grocery store. If I can sell 100 of something at $15 or 100 of something at $4, I'll sell the one at $15."

McCasland agrees, adding "If retailers sell a little blooming annual they got for $1 and sell for $2, they'll double their money. But if they buy an orchid for $6 and sell it for $12, they'll double their money and make more."

SELLING FOR HOLIDAYS AND BEYOND

Orchids have tremendous potential as gift items during holidays. "Show the public they can buy a unique, classy, upscale choice. We found they love the option of choosing something different," Glazer adds. "Customers get bored of the same old thing like roses for Valentine's Day. Give them a chance to impress someone they love with something different and make them heroes."

Available year-round, orchids easily adjust to any season. "There are many fall, spring and summer colors. Sell in color-coordinated and seasonally adjusted containers," suggests Clark.

"Many suppliers offer creative packaging and switch up the packaging depending on season or holiday," adds Glazer.

Chapman of Chapman's Orchids suggests supermarkets can learn from garden centers that place orchids at the registers. "If the orchids are made readily available while the customers are waiting to pay the cashier, it is very inviting to take an orchid as a gift or to enjoy in their own home."

Other opportunities include catering to the growing number of people who want do-it-yourself corsages. "Many people are making their own these days, so it might be a good idea to have potted orchids around just for weddings," advises Clark. "White phalaenopsis is very popular."

As growers develop new and interesting orchids for the public, experts predict the popularity of these plants will continue to soar. "The availability is going to get better," according to Clark. "Quality will go up. I think the demand is going to continue to increase. People love orchids." **pb**

A Cut Above

Cut orchids can add instant elegance to an upscale bouquet. "Orchids, especially the big white phalaenopsis, are fantastic in arrangements," explains Marc Clark, vice president, Rocket Farms, Inc., Salinas, CA. "It's definitely as high end as you can get."

"Cut sprays are very popular among floral wholesalers and retailers," notes Nancy Welty, operating manager for Gallup and Stribling Orchids, Carpinteria, CA. "These can last up to two or three weeks when properly cut and maintained. Additionally, blooms have begun to be used in arrangements. By placing the bloom in a water tube on the end of a stick, florists can use single blooms in bouquet arrangements."

Many suppliers offer ready-made corsages that require little or no work on the part of the retailer. "Orchid corsages remain a popular item for many supermarkets and big-box retailers," according to Welty. "Corsages maintain the beauty and elegance of the cymbidium but allow it to be sold as a no-maintenance-required product. The blooms are placed in water tubes inside the corsage box to ensure their longevity. All that is required of the end user is to remove the water tube and attach the corsage."

Welty recommends keeping orchid corsages on hand for holidays, including Valentine's Day, Easter and Mother's Day. "Retailers are encouraged to use POS locations to display the corsages, due to the discretionary nature of the product. This acts as a catalyst for last-minute purchases." **pb**

By Dave Diver

McDonald's Consistency

On an afternoon in early December 2007, when the Dow Jones Industrial Average was making one of its largest declines for the entire year, McDonald's was not only climbing but also reaching another new yearly high. The gain for the previous 12 months was nearly 40 percent while the overall stock market was only several percentage points above its break-even point. The gain during the past 10 years for the Standard and Poor's 500 Index is approximately 50 percent; McDonald's shares gained triple that amount.

Within several days, financial commentators on CNBC were discussing the company, once blamed for contributing to the country's obesity epidemic. This time, commentators focused on McDonald's success and its ability to create a consistent product without any surprises for the consumer.

Known for meticulous training and stringent steps to achieve the perfect french fry, McDonald's has left little to chance for new attendees at the McDonald's training college — but creating consistency does not mean standing still. Consistency requires maintaining a company's core strategy with tactics adjusted to keep moving forward as the world around it changes. Consistency also requires implementing new themes and benefits for your customers better than anyone else does.

Even with a seemingly well-defined core, storms do occur, requiring steps be taken to bring the business back on course. Such was the case for McDonald's soon after entering the new millennium. Facilities looked tired — some even run down — and the menu had become stale and was subject to attacks from all directions by health gurus. Nothing seemed to be keeping sales and profit trends growing at the former pace.

It wasn't long before salads were recognized as a primary source of sales gains and chicken rivaled beef in sales volume. Facilities were upgraded with an emphasis on cleanliness and children. McDonald's focused on making its facilities places where children could be entertained and fed. Corporate eyes opened to Starbucks' dynamics. Now coffee and breakfast have grown to where they own more than a quarter share of business activity.

One may see these as more than upgrades, but there is a consistency evident at all facilities, whether you're in the Washington state or Washington, D.C. You're always home when you visit. As a result, McDonald's franchises have been so successful they number more millionaires than any other U.S. economic entity.

When friends travel overseas for any length of time, invariably the comment is the same regardless of how many fine restaurants they have eaten in — "I just wanted to stop at McDonald's to remind myself of home." According to CEO Jim Skinner, the average American eats three meals each month at a McDonald's.

A similar strategy holds true for the more successful food retailers. They have a core mission statement with consistent program implementation. Consistency stands out among chains receiving the highest scores from shoppers. Less successful companies appear to fall far short not only in operational prowess but also with programming. Issues, such as health care, unpaid overtime, product import screening and quality, often cloud the underlying problems.

Consistency requires maintaining a company's core strategy with tactics adjusted to keep moving forward as the world around it changes.

Just as McDonald's innovates around its core consistencies, retailers recognize similar opportunities. Private label has been a longtime, important aid to supermarket profitability. In the past decade, numerous chains have placed primary emphasis on their private label quality being at least equal to the best national brand. Now, the focus is being revised with as many as three different private label grades marketed for some categories. This places pressure on national brand producers and offers choices for the entire consumer shopping spectrum. The consistency is price savings for consumers regardless of their economic level.

For most consumers, consistency of fresh fruit and vegetable taste is even more important. Just as McDonald's customers expect evolution rather than surprises, so does the consumer when eating at home. The struggles to increase the number of daily servings of fresh fruit and vegetable consumed would be substantially decreased if the taste differentials among particular items could be reduced to levels consumers find acceptable. That consistency is in the self-interest of the industry

In 1963, long before becoming head of the Federal Reserve Bank, Alan Greenspan naively objected to the idea "businessmen would attempt to sell unsafe food and drugs, fraudulent securities and shoddy buildings." On the contrary, he noted, "It is in the self-interest of every businessman to have a reputation for honest dealings and a quality product." Fortunately or unfortunately, there tends to be a consistency within each group. **pb**

Auke Heins is the senior project manager for Holland Produce Promotion, Zoetermeer, the Netherlands.

Q & A With Auke Heins

Q: What was the impetus for your company's Fresh Day Vending pilot [to promote fresh fruit and vegetables in vending machines]?

A: We wanted to create a new way to approach people with fruits and vegetables — that's the main reason, while addressing gaps in the foodservice market.

Q: What did you learn from the Fresh Day Vending pilot?

A: We tested in a large company, high school, university and factory. The results varied. However, all in all, it was successful. We started vending at a large bank in the Netherlands, with 1,100 people working there. They had their own restaurant facilities operating for specific hours, not open continuously throughout day.

They found it would be interesting to have vending machines situated right near the restaurant to fill the void, and the location would be logical since it would be easier for the foodservice staff to fill the machines. The board of the company said it would subsidize the project and allay some of the costs of the fruits and vegetables on display and being sold, so employees wouldn't need to pay as much.

It was very successful. People ate more fruits and vegetables than they did before and it was easier for them. Employees were content with the availability of the machine and ate more produce with the convenient access. Normally they had to bring snacks or buy snacks —not always healthy ones — at stores in the neighborhood. Vending machines kept them at the office continuing work. Obviously the employers were very pleased with that.

Also the vending machines stood as a sign for the employees that the company cared for them.

Q: What kinds of products worked best? How effective was the machine in protecting product quality and freshness?

A: We tested a variety of fruits and vegetables and healthy drinks like smoothies. Success of individual items varied. People in the Netherlands are interested in the snack tomato, a size of 1.5 centimeters or 1 inch. They are very tasteful and fit into a small plastic bag. Ten in one bag eat like a snack.

Q: What differences did you find when piloting at schools?

A: In the Netherlands, the ordinary school (ages 12 to 18) is structured where kids go in the morning and leave in the evening. It wasn't always very successful, depending on situations. For example, when a big test was coming up, there wouldn't be many students around, and there wouldn't be enough people interested in buying. If vending machines weren't closely monitored during these times, products would go bad, another difficulty to overcome.

When a test was taking place, students brought small snacks and were very interested in buying fruits and vegetables, and that's the time when it might be interesting to increase availability.

Fruits and vegetables in vending machines are highly perishable and need to be closely monitored. Those managing the machines need to be aware the products can only be left there for one or two weeks. Everything needs to be sold or needs to be replaced.

In regular snack machines, you can leave Mars, Snickers and Coca-Cola cans for a year. With perishables, you need to be alert and replenish the vending machine several times a week. One day product can be sold out in a few minutes, and some days not at all.

Q: Did the school vending machines incorporate food items from the cafeteria?

A: All food was brought in by manufacturers. One of our goals was to create new channels for these growers. We thought it was a good idea but it doesn't work in practice. When you provide food for a school, you have to deliver what is asked for. Logistics are very important. By limiting the vending program to specific partners or brands, the school won't be able to get all the different products from different companies. You need to work through the school caterer and they don't want to pay that much for produce.

You won't be able to provide a particular specialized packaged product designed for the machine all the time. The suppliers we started with won't be enough to start the program everywhere. We need to be more flexible with who provides product. The company or organization that has the machine has to decide the selection.

Q: Have you tested different salads and meal-type items?

A: We tried salads in the machine with mixed results. When we tested in a factory where a lot of men were working, they said, 'We need something to fill our stomach.' In the end salads didn't work in that venue. Big men are looking for something else to eat.

We also tested salads at machines in the bank, and they were very successful. It has everything to do with the people around the machines. You need to know your target groups. You won't be able to just provide salad and expect they will buy it. What you need to find out is what is interesting for that particular customer.

Q: How does branding come into play?

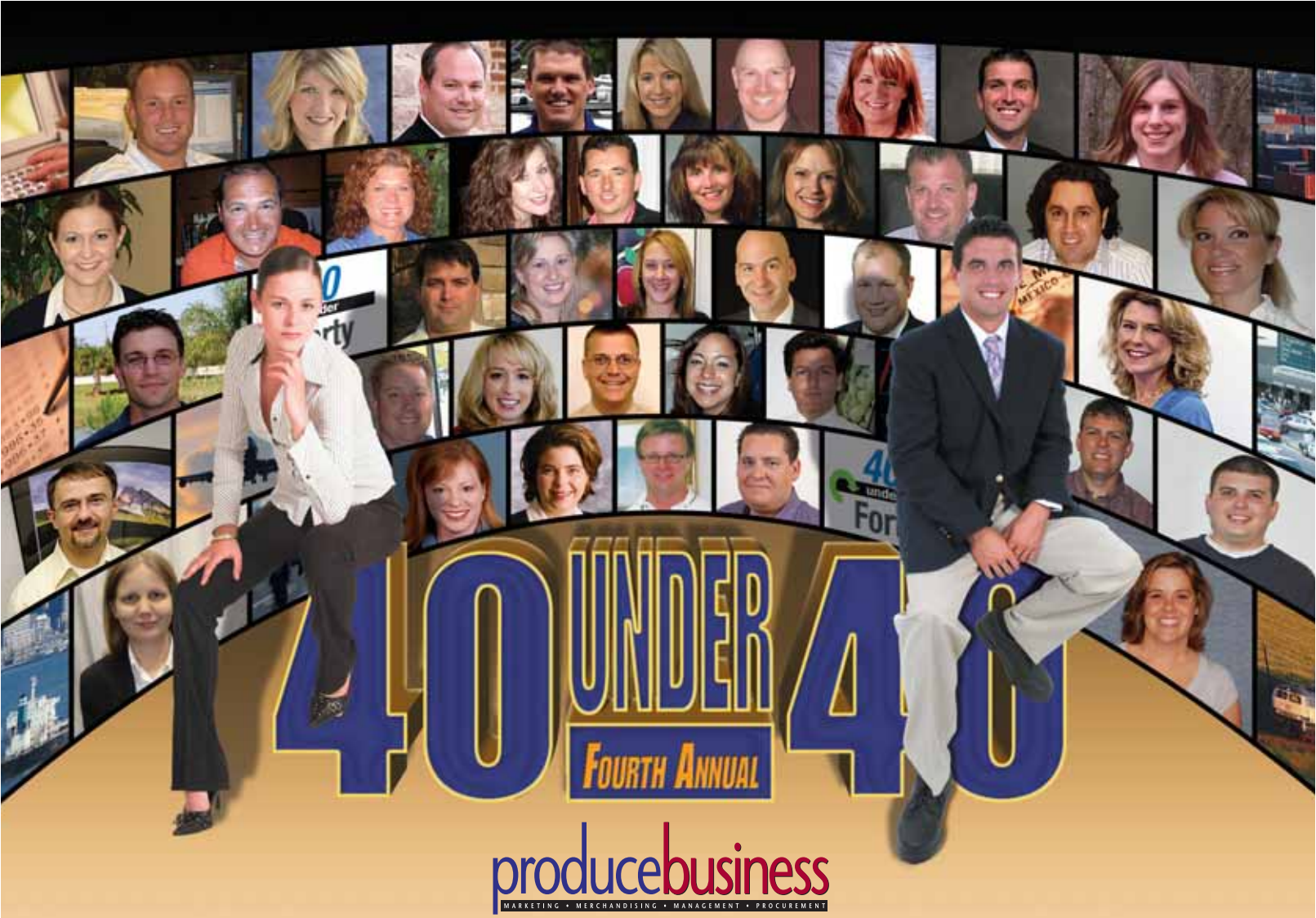
A: We started with the idea to launch a new brand, called Fresh Day, but fruit and vegetable companies said, "You're competing with our brands." Chiquita said it was a very nice idea but wanted its brand on its products.

You have to be creative. It's easier to snack on sliced fruit. For fruit and vegetable sectors to succeed, they have to provide products in ways to get people to buy them. You'd expect when product is more expensive people wouldn't buy it, but that's not the trigger.

Q: What is your realistic assessment of healthy vending machines as a viable channel for selling produce?

A: In my opinion, vending is one of the biggest opportunities for large fruit and vegetable companies to contribute to society with healthy products. It also is a very good way of building a firm's own corporate brand. School vending is a very interesting place to start since the technology, facilities, and fruits and vegetables are available to implement a program, and there's no better target audience when it comes to increasing produce consumption.

Excerpted from the Perishable Pundit *— January 31, 2008*
Interview by Mira Slott



Produce Business is accepting nominations for its third 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 April 1 (People born after April 1, 1968).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by April 1, 2008, and fax back to 561-994-1610.

Once nominated, the candidate will receive forms from us to fill out asking for detailed information. A candidate only needs to be nominated one time. Multiple nominations will have no bearing on selection.

ABOUT THE NOMINEE:

First Name _____ Last Name _____
Approximate Age _____
Company _____
Position _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Postal Code _____
Country _____
Phone _____ Fax _____
E-mail _____

In 100 words or less, describe why this person should be nominated:
(You can use a separate sheet for this)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Nominee's Professional Achievements:

_____
_____
_____

Nominee's Industry/Community/Charitable Activities:

_____
_____
_____

ABOUT THE NOMINATOR:

First Name _____ Last Name _____
Company _____
Position _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Postal Code _____
Country _____
Phone _____ Fax _____
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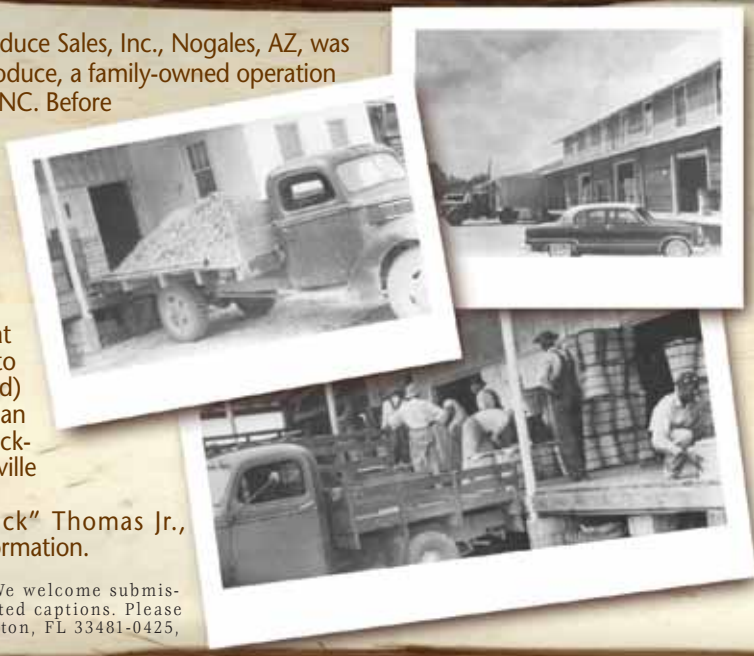
Nominator information is for our use only and will not be shared with candidate or have a bearing on selection.

For more information email: producebusiness@phoenixmedianet.com

Blast from the Past

In the 1950s, Thomas Produce Sales, Inc., Nogales, AZ, was known as J.R. Thomas Produce, a family-owned operation based in Hendersonville, NC. Before moving to its current location, the company's name changed several times and included J.R. Thomas and Sons, Bo Thomas Produce and Thomas Brothers Produce, all based in Hendersonville.



These photos were taken during the summer of 1955 at company headquarters in Hendersonville. The top left photo shows a 1941 Ford flatbed truck used to haul culled (rejected) string beans to the dump; at top right is a 1953 Dodge with an Autocar diesel tractor-trailer ready to load beans in the background; the bottom photo shows local farmers in Hendersonville delivering pole beans.

PRODUCE BUSINESS would like to thank Charles "Chuck" Thomas Jr., president/secretary/treasurer, for his help in gathering this information.

The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of PRODUCE BUSINESS. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, PRODUCE BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail ProduceBusiness@PhoenixMediaNet.com

INFORMATION SHOWCASE

FEBRUARY 2008

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COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX
A&A Organic Marketing, Inc.	30	105	831-685-0300	831-685-0302
Albert's Organics	30	31	800-899-5944	610-388-8418
Associated Potato Growers, Inc.	60	7	800-437-4685	701-746-5767
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	25	28	201-807-9292	201-807-9596
Awe Sum Organics, Inc.	31	101	831-457-2244	831-462-2552
Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co.	61	13	800-845-6149	910-654-4734
Bamford Produce	73	42	905-615-9400	416-251-2090
Basciani Foods, Inc.	52	29	610-268-3044	610-268-2194
Black Stallion Logistics	72	11	646-401-9995	646-514-1614
Blue Book Services	55	116	630-668-3500	630-668-0303
Morris Brown & Sons Co. Inc.	72	30	416-259-7619	416-259-7082
Bushwick Commission Co., Inc.	60	31	800-645-9470	516-249-6047
Canadian Fruit & Produce Co.	74	32	416-259-5007	416-259-0431
Canadian Produce Marketing Association	78	106	613-226-4187	613-226-2984
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	24	2	515-981-5111	515-981-4564
CF Fresh	27	15	360-855-3192	360-855-2430
Christopher Ranch	30	33	408-847-1100	408-847-0581
Christopher Ranch	25	34	408-847-1100	408-847-0581
Ciruli Brothers	43	23	520-281-9696	520-281-1473
Corona Marketing Co.	23	107	805-346-2114	805-346-8138
Country Fresh Mushroom Co.	53	35	610-268-3043	610-268-0479
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York	15	36	800-223-8080	718-960-0544
Dawson Farms	61	37	318-878-5806	318-878-2826
Del Monte Fresh Produce	92	38	800-950-3683	305-520-8495
Dole Fresh Fruit Company	2	115	818-879-6600	818-879-6628
dProduce Man Software	76	39	888-PRODMAN	650-712-9973
Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc.	35	40	561-978-5714	561-978-5705
Earthbound Farm	30	108	888-624-1004	831-623-7886
Eclipse Berry Farms, LLC	22	88	310-207-7879	310-207-7868
Eurofresh Farms, Ltd.	50	41	520-384-4621	520-384-4187
Florida Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services	38	25	850-487-8908	850-488-7127
Florida Strawberry Growers Association	36	109	813-752-6822	813-752-2167
Four Seasons Produce, Inc.	60		800-422-8384	717-721-2597
Fresh Advancements, Inc.	73	42	416-259-5400	416-251-2090
Fresh Partners AB	54	118	46-8-742-1215	46-8-742-6201
Fresh Taste Produce Limited Canada	75	43	416-255-0157	416-255-8742
Friedman & Broussard Produce, Inc.	61	44	888-242-7297	985-646-2302
Gambles Ontario Produce, Inc.	77	103	416-259-6391	416-259-4392
Garber Farms	61	45	337-824-6328	337-824-2676
Giorgio Fresh Co.	52	46	800-330-5711	610-939-0296
Global Organic Specialty Source, Inc.	33	89	877-952-1198	941-358-6551
Greenhouse Produce Company, LLC	54	47	888-492-1492	772-492-1592
Al Harrison Co. Dist.	48	18	520-281-1222	520-281-1104
Herb Thyme Farms	31	48	831-476-9733	831-476-3710
Highline Mushrooms	52	49	519-326-8643	519-326-7222
HydroSerre Mirabel, Inc.	51	50	888-868-6060	450-475-6884
I Love Produce, LLC	32	27	610-869-4664	610-869-2711
Idaho Potato Commission	57	6	208-334-2350	208-334-2274
Ippolito Produce	74	90	905-639-1174	905-631-7711
JBJ Distributing, Inc.	32	110	714-992-4920	714-992-0433
J.R. Kelly Company	28	19	888-344-4392	618-344-2297
Kern Ridge Growers, LLC	33	51	661-854-3156	661-854-2832
L&M Companies, Inc.	37	52	509-698-3881	509-698-3922
Lakeside Organic Gardens	33	53	831-761-8797	831-728-1104
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.	24	20	800-796-2349	718-542-2354
Lisa Inc.	48	54	520-281-1863	520-281-2848
Lynn-Ette & Sons, Inc.	68	55	585-682-4435	585-682-4968
Maine Potato Board	58	1	207-769-5061	207-764-4148
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	9	22	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
J. Marchini & Son / LeGrand	33	91	559-665-9710	559-665-9714
Mediterranean Pleasures	7	16	800-491-VITA	856-467-2638
Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc.	32	57	800-468-7111	323-588-7841
Mexico Quality Supreme	47	104	877-281-9305	
Miatech	29	92	800-339-5234	503-659-2204
Misionero Vegetables	30	113	800-EAT-SALAD	831-424-0740
Mission Produce, Inc.	63	58	888-549-3421	805-981-3660
MIXTEC Group	19	12	626-440-7077	626-440-1557
MJB Sales, Inc.	53	56	610-268-0444	610-268-0837
Monterey Mushrooms	53	59	636-587-2771	831-763-2300
N&W Farms	61	60	662-682-7961	662-682-7998
National Mango Board	45	93	877-MANGOS-1	407-629-7593
New England Organics	31	17	617-884-4141	617-887-1899
New England Produce Council	91	94	781-273-0444	781-273-4154
New Harvest Organics, LLC	33	61	520-281-0231	520-281-0237
New York Apple Association, Inc.	39	62	585-924-2171	585-924-1629
P.E.I. Potato Board	58	5	902-892-6551	902-566-4914
Pacific Organic Produce	32	114	415-673-5555	415-673-5585
Pennsylvania Exotic Mushroom Sales, Inc.	53	95	610-444-0275	610-444-5751
Peri & Sons Farms	19	63	775-463-4444	775-463-4028
Premium International Canada, Inc.	78	64	416-253-2000	416-253-2007
Produce for Better Health Foundation	79	117	302-295-2329	302-235-5555
R.C.F. Produce, Inc.	48	26	520-281-0230	520-281-9670
Red Blossom Farms, Inc.	22	97	805-981-1839	805-693-0032
Rene Produce Distributors, Inc.	48	65	520-281-9206	520-281-2933
Richard E. Ryan & Associates Limited	71	66	416-259-2381	416-259-2689
O. C. Schulz & Sons, Inc.	58	14	701-657-2152	701-657-2425
Silver Creek Software	40-41	24	208-388-4555	208-322-3510
Spice World, Inc.	25	8	800-433-4979	407-857-7171
Splended Products	44	98	650-342-4525	650-342-3180
S. Strock & Co., Inc.	17	67	617-884-0263	617-884-7310
Sun Valley Group	85	111	800-747-0396	707-826-8708
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	5	4	800-772-4542	831-455-3915
Texas Sweet Potato Distributing, Inc.	61	112	903-896-4895	903-896-1971
Uncle Matt's Organic	30	68	866-626-4613	352-394-1003
United Fresh Produce Association	65	99	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
Veg-Pak Produce, Ltd.	76	10	416-259-4686	416-259-4677
Vessey & Company, Inc.	68	100	888-505-7798	760-356-0137
Victoria Island Farms	64	69	209-465-5600	209-465-3837
Wada Farms Potatoes Inc	59	9	888-BUY-WADA	208-785-0415
Well-Pict Berries	21	70	831-722-3871	831-722-6340
Well-Pict Berries	22	71	831-722-3871	831-722-6340
West Lake Fresh	22	72	831-724-0644	831-724-0117
Williamson Produce	61	73	800-726-8899	252-291-6791
Wilson Produce	48	74	520-375-5752	520-375-5852
Wishnatzki Farms	22	75	813-752-5111	813-752-9472
Wm P. Hearne Produce co., Inc.	22	102	813-633-8910	813-633-2657

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