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Michigan Produce • **Distribution Software** • *Wholesale Market: Minneapolis*
Garlic • **Private Label** • *DATES & FIGS* • FLORAL PLANNING FOR CHRISTMAS

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TASTE TRENDS 2008

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PRODUCE QUIZ

THIS MONTH'S WINNER:

Michael Daroshefski
Perishable Senior Buyer
U.S. Foodservice
Salem, PA

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For Michael Daroshefski, perishable senior buyer at U.S. Foodservice, staying ahead of the curve is of utmost importance. "I'm always trying to look for ways to stay up with the market," he explains. "Having that extra edge is important."

Michael works almost entirely in produce, specifically in lettuce and salad products. He has worked for U.S. Foodservice, the second largest foodservice distributor in the country, for about 11 years. A foodservice veteran for 21 years, he is responsible for buying, replenishing and merchandising. "Nothing is ever the same, that's for sure," he notes.

A PRODUCE BUSINESS reader since he joined U.S. Foodservice, Michael enjoys reading articles on displays, new items and availability. "I also look at the advertisements a lot and the new things introduced in the market."

As the winner of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Quiz, Michael wins an integrated GPS receiver.

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

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_____

2) What is the phone number for Grimmway Farms? _____

_____

3) What is the P.O. Box number for the National Mango Board? _____

_____

4) What is the fax number for Jerry Porricelli Produce? _____

_____

5) What milestone is being celebrated by Mann Packing Company, Inc.? _____

_____

6) How many years has Sun World been in business? _____

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

Homeland Security's E-Verify

On June 12, the Office of the Federal Register (FR) published a set of proposed rules of particular interest to the produce industry. The proposed rule would require federal contractors to enroll in and use the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) E-Verify employment verification system. Combined with a similar executive order issued by President Bush on June 6, this rule has the potential to significantly impact the way federal contractors manage their workforces and businesses.

For produce companies doing business with the federal government, this proposed rule has the potential to adversely impact their work as a federal contractor or subcontractor. Once the rule is in effect, federal contractors will have to closely monitor their workforce in order to comply with the rule, and they will have to carefully consider which business entities they use to bid on federal contracts.

E-Verify is a new version of its predecessor, the Basic Pilot Program, in existence since 1997. By law, enrollment in E-Verify is currently voluntary. Any business can use the electronic employment verification system created by DHS and the Social Security Administration (SSA).

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) oversees E-Verify, a Web-based system that electronically verifies the employment eligibility of employees. In E-Verify, an employer enters I-9 data into the system via the Internet. That information is then checked against data from SSA and DHS. The system will either return an immediate notification that the worker is authorized to work or return a tentative non-confirmation. A worker (including a U.S. citizen) who receives a tentative non-confirmation must resolve the issue with DHS and/or SSA. If the issue is not resolved, the worker receives a final non-confirmation notice and the employer must terminate the worker.

The June 12 proposal amends the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) to require federal contracts to include language requiring the contractor to use E-Verify to verify the employment authorization of all employees assigned to the contract as well as all new hires. Under the proposed rule, federal contracts would be required to include the following terms:

1. The contractor will enroll in the E-Verify program within 30 days of the date the contract is awarded.

2. Within 30 days of the enrollment date, the contractor will use E-Verify to verify the employment authorization of all employees assigned to the contract. If the contractor is already enrolled in E-Verify, it must use E-Verify for the employees assigned to the contract within 30 days of the date the contract is awarded.

3. The contractor will use E-Verify within three days of the date of hire for all new employees hired after the contract is awarded as well as for all existing employees later assigned to the contract.

4. The contractor will require all subcontractors performing work that exceeds $3,000 under the contract to adhere to the E-Verify requirement.

This proposed rule has the potential to dramatically affect how produce companies ... structure their operations, manage their workforce and determine whether or not to bid on federal contracts.

Under contracting rules, solicitations are required to state the terms such as these that will be applicable to the contract, so employers should know at the time of making a federal bid whether the contract will contain an E-Verify requirement.

The rule applies to solicitations issued and contracts awarded after the effective date of the final rule. The rule does not apply to solicitations and contracts for what are known as commercially available off-the-shelf items (COTS), contracts under the micro-purchase threshold ($3,000) or those that do not include any work that will be performed in the United States.

This proposed rule has the potential to dramatically affect how produce companies that do business with the federal government structure their operations, manage their workforce and determine whether or not to bid on federal contracts.

The rule defines a covered employee as an employee who is performing direct work in the United States under a contract and who was hired after Nov. 6, 1986. This means produce companies with federal contracts would have to use the E-Verify system to verify employment authorization of all employees who perform work on the federal contract, regardless of whether the employees are new hires or existing hires.

Produce companies acting as federal contractors will be required to impose or flow down the E-Verify requirement to its subcontractors if the subcontract is for commercial or noncommercial services or construction exceeds $3,000 and includes work performed in the United States.

Since the rule applies simply to the contractor and does not distinguish among worksites or locations, it is unclear what the consequences would be if a produce company enters into a federal contract for work that is done only at one location and attempts to enroll only that location in E-Verify. This is just one interpretive question that will need to be addressed in the final rule. Produce companies that do business as federal contractors would be wise to keep their eye on the E-verify proposed rule. We will be.

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Pondering Produce Marketing

Former Labor Secretary Robert Reich, himself an economist, told a PMA Fresh Summit audience about how economists predicted 10 of the last six recessions. I thought about that because if you get 20 produce marketers together to discuss what marketing tactics best motivate consumers to buy more fruit and vegetables, you'll likely get at least 20 different opinions. So we recently asked consumers what most influences their purchase behavior. We learned the magic is in the marketing mix.

We asked how many could recall advertisements for produce; 59 percent couldn't recall any TV advertising. Among the 38 percent witnessing TV ads, only 16 percent were motivated to purchase produce, while 56 percent say the ads had no influence. It is likely TV advertising didn't register with many of them because so little produce advertising takes place. So that compels me to consider what opinion I would share with those 19 other produce marketers in the room with me.

1. Rethink advertising. (A caveat: Our research comes from talking to consumers, not trade buyers. It is critical to differentiate between trade and consumer advertising budgets — you need to talk to the trade, too.) If you have even a small consumer advertising budget, focus it on the vehicles and markets where it will be most effective. For example, 21 percent of respondents told us newspaper ads influence their produce purchase decisions, 19 percent say cooking shows are most influential, followed by television among 17 percent; magazine and radio ads ranked less than 10 percent of respondents.

So consider creative advertising options to reach end consumers — for example, partner with your retailers or cross-merchandising partners on print ads to stand out from the weekly retail circular. "Cooking shows" don't have to mean the Food Network; look in your local markets for local food shows and those popular local morning shows, too. Don't neglect an online presence.

2. All communication is advertising. Consider the whole marketing mix. PMA's 2006 consumer packaging survey found we could use packaging to communicate much better with consumers. Storage and handling tips, recipes and company information all influence purchases. A PLU sticker can carry a Web address — use that site to tell your story and make personal connections with consumers. And good old-fashioned personal communication right in the produce department shouldn't be overlooked. Our March 2007 survey found 45 percent of shoppers saying they have no interaction with produce personnel in their produce department, while 65 percent said they'd be more likely to purchase a product a store clerk recommended.

3. Taste sells. Taste drives purchasing decisions more than anything — certainly not a revelation. An April 2007 study shows taste even dictates store choice for 54 percent of consumers, yet only 25 percent of shoppers are truly satisfied with the flavor coming from their produce departments. One way to reassure customers is with product sampling. In a March 2007 PMA survey, of the 31 percent of shoppers whose produce departments have taste testing, 55 percent are significantly more likely to buy as a result. Among the 64 percent who don't have taste testing, an identical 55 percent report a greater likelihood to buy more fresh fruits and vegetables if sampling were available. Sampling puts good taste within consumers' control by showing them what ripeness looks like, feels like, smells like and should taste like.

4. Health matters, too. While taste rules, health clearly motivates certain consumers to buy fruits and vegetables. Positive (read: "not preachy") nutritional information makes 54 percent of respondents more likely to purchase produce, according to PMA's latest survey. Celebratory messaging — such as *Fruits and Veggies — More Matters!* — resonates loudest. Produce virtually owns the health card, more so than most other food products. Reminding consumers that your products also taste great — and delivering on the promise — will help overcome the perception that good-for-you food can't taste good, too.

5. Recalls matter, too. PMA's current survey again documents the adverse effect food safety recalls have on fresh fruit and vegetable purchases and underscores the importance of working toward an industry-wide food-safety culture. Seventy-five percent of consumers say they are less likely to purchase a specific fruit or vegetable upon news of a recall. No amount of advertising or PR will help us here — if consumers think our products aren't safe, they won't buy them; they have other choices.

Successful produce marketing should rely on the cost-effective classic formula of consistent and strategically focused communications.

What my experience lends to the conversation is not an opinion that any one media is better than another. I believe our latest research is a reminder of the bigger-picture common threads I feel we all could rally behind as we work to move from a sales-focused industry to a marketing-focused industry. Successful produce marketing should rely on the cost-effective classic formula of consistent and strategically focused communications highlighting the genuine goodness of our products and delivering on the taste promise every bite, every time.

Our recent survey was conducted Feb. 25-27 by Opinion Dynamics Corporation using a national telephone survey asking 1,000 consumers about their produce shopping habits. The full report and other consumer surveys from PMA's research center can be accessed by calling 302-738-7100.

Five Challenges To Marketing

Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.

— John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*

The thought expressed above explains why surveying people on the subject of what motivates them is a short-term phenomenon — they don't know the forces behind the scenes.

Mighty brands such as Sunkist live today on the reputational capital they built through advertising in the early 20th century. It has been decades since they spent much money on national advertising, but it is difficult to pick up issues of *The Ladies Home Journal* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, the great mass media of the first two decades of the 20th century, without seeing a Sunkist ad.

So when children today think Sunkist when they think oranges, it is the influence of their great-grandma reading *The Ladies Home Journal* in 1922 that is reverberating through the generations. Such is the immense power of advertising.

Yet despite the immense power of consumer advertising, it is a tool inappropriate for most producers. Five problems:

1. The margin isn't there. Advertising costs money and with many products it is possible to establish a set price that includes a margin for marketing. In fresh produce, we are dealing principally with commodities; the producer is a "price-taker" not able to insist on that margin for marketing.

2. The product isn't there. When Heinz, Campbell's and Coca-Cola advertise, they can count on having product in almost every supermarket in America, so advertising has a far better chance of moving product than with fresh produce. Even the strongest produce brands, say those of the banana giants, may have any given product in only a third of all supermarkets. Some, such as Dole, because of its fresh, frozen and canned products may, together, have a branded product in every store — but not necessarily the product being advertised. If the product isn't universally available, the advertising will be less effective.

3. The consistency isn't there. To market a product, it must be consistent, yet few branded efforts have maintained this consistency. Mother Nature doesn't produce consistently proper-sized, flavorful product at a reasonable price. Still, marketers have an enormous investment in shelf space at retail and in consumer habits. They also have infrastructure costs — warehouses, offices, salespeople, etc. Marketers are loathe to simply announce they won't be shipping this month because quality is not up to snuff. Most will try to keep shipping with the best available product — but that offers the consumer a variable-quality value proposition and reduces confidence in the brand.

4. The commitment isn't there. Proper consumer advertising is typically an exercise in long-term brand development. Yet we frequently see companies begin consumer-marketing efforts, then pull back because of a bad year or a bad crop. Consumer attitudes and habits toward food change gradually and require persistent exposure to a message over extended time periods. One needs to have the capital or financing in place to see the project through regardless of short-term fluctuations.

5. The money isn't there. Even if margins are adequate, a widely distributed, consistent product is offered and management is committed, changing national eating habits is expensive. It is easy to imagine a requirement of $50 million a year to begin to move the needle on national consumption of an item.

This means consumer advertising is out of reach for most marketers of fresh produce. As an industry, we have the *Fruits & Veggies — More Matters* program but it is underfunded and its health orientation and inclusion of canned, frozen and juice make it a problematic vehicle for fresh produce industry promotion.

So if consumer advertising is unreasonable for most companies and the trade does not have an overall effective marketing program, what is a company to do?

The best answer right now is to piggyback on interest in sustainability and use what assets one has — packaging, labels, Web sites, PR — to communicate the authenticity of one's product. Every produce item starts with a real farm, and the authenticity of that message can resonate far.

We need to abandon the trade's "TV envy" and use the impressions we gain from product on the shelves, effective PR and the tools of Internet options to market to consumers in the way we actually can.

Many companies — Frieda's comes to mind — have never had the money for extensive advertising but have effectively used PR, labeling and branding to build a reputation with the media and consumers.

Every year some company or commodity promotion group drags us to its booth at PMA to show us its new TV spot. We all applaud and rarely see it again as the company runs it in a few cities as part of a deal with a local supermarket, a kind of trade incentive. Basically we need to abandon the trade's "TV envy" and use the impressions we gain from product on the shelves, effective PR and the tools of viral marketing, social networking and other Internet options to market to consumers in the way we actually can.

One day the industry as a whole will realize we are competing with dairy, beef, pork, etc., all with one hand tied behind our backs. Then we can rally behind an industry-wide consumer-marketing program that would actually be large enough to make a difference.

By James Prevor
President & Editor-in-Chief

The Courage Of Our Convictions

The government's handling — or mishandling — of the current *Salmonella Saintpaul* outbreak reveals a deep conceptual divide between the way regulators perceive food safety and the reality of fresh field-grown produce. This situation builds on previous outbreaks to give evidence of the *de facto* power of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to destroy individual businesses or whole industries.

We can critique FDA mistakes, we can propose improvements in the systems it uses to make decisions, and we can have hearings held to evaluate the actions of the FDA and petition that expert reports be written. Through these methods, we may achieve some improvements, but we will not solve the problem.

It is now the fate of our industry not merely to demand a more reasonable food safety system but to be the catalyst of a movement to reign in the arbitrary exercise of power by the state.

The power of the FDA to protect the public health is not the power to crush innocent businesses. It is quite possible the Courts would rule this right now, but two unfortunate facts keep that question from coming before the court.

First, because FDA exercises its powers by discretionarily inspecting one plant and not another, stopping one producer's product for testing and not another's, FDA effectively intimidates and prevents producers from filing lawsuits against the FDA.

Second, the nature of perishable products requires a producer to seek the route most likely to quickly lift an FDA "recommendation not to consume" or an "import alert." It will do a producer little good to file a lawsuit against FDA and win five years later if it has lost the ability to sell five crops in the interim.

It is now the fate of our industry to be the catalyst of a movement to reign in the arbitrary exercise of power by the state.

So individual companies will take the expedient path in the hope of staying in business, and the expedient path is to do whatever the FDA says — justified by law, science or nothing at all. With individual companies sidelined, our communal institutions, especially the trade associations, must speak for us. Here is what they should say:

1) We recognize that in electing to sell processed product with a representation to consumers to eat without washing, members of the trade take on the role of food processors and ought to be subject to the rules other processors must conform to.

2) We acknowledge that raw produce can pose special risk for those with immature or compromised immune systems. We have adjusted our Web sites and those of industry promotional organizations and, when product is packaged, we have adjusted the packaging to reflect this message.

3) We are committed to delivering safe food. It must be noted, however, that just as cars are generally "safe" and airplanes are generally "safe" — nobody interprets this to mean that there will be no auto accidents or plane crashes — so, the fact that fresh produce is generally "safe" does not mean that nobody can or will get sick from eating fresh produce.

4) We grow fresh produce, generally, in soil; it is exposed to rain and wind, to animals and people. It is the natural state of such a product to occasionally contain pathogens that can make people sick. Much, but not all, of this risk can be avoided by consumers and restaurants playing their part in food safety and carefully washing all produce. In any case, the risk of illness, especially serious illness with long-term effects, is very small.

5) Scientific efforts to advance food safety continue and the industry supports such science financially. We encourage the government to accelerate progress in this area with additional financing.

6) With current science, each enhancement of food safety increases the cost of the product. So we can put animal traps at every 100 feet or every five feet or anywhere in between. Each step is believed to enhance safety, but each step costs money. There is no correct food-safety answer. It is a political decision how much society is willing to increase the cost of these foods in exchange for higher levels of safety, just as it is a political decision to what extent cars should have 15-mph bumpers or 25-mph bumpers.

7) It is the responsibility of Congress and the FDA to express that political choice through laws and regulations. Just as the law may require a 15-mph bumper, so the law for the produce industry may require set buffer zones, soil amendments, etc.

8) The FDA, working with state departments of agriculture, its own personnel or third-party auditors, shall define a regimen of inspection and testing that suppliers can follow to be certified as compliant with food- safety laws and regulations.

9) It shall be the option of the government to decide if non-compliant companies can continue to produce and market product.

10) Farms and other production facilities certified as compliant shall be presumed to be producing safe food unless specific evidence implicates a particular farm or facility. In the absence of specific evidence, they shall be exempt from any "recalls," "recommendations not to consume" or other health messaging.

Basically, we are now all in agreement that safety cannot be inspected at the end. Instead, we need to build safety into the production of our crops. Because there is no set level of activity — buffer zone, water tests, etc. — that guarantees safety, the government must decide what level of safety investment it wants to mandate.

The occasional pathogen in the system must be viewed as normal, and although tracking back a problem to its source is reasonable, mass blanket recommendations not to consume product of infinitesimal risk make no sense at all and give the government too much discretionary power.

Our industry has to stand up for reasonable food-safety systems and for clear rules of conduct taking the place of discretionary authority. **pb**

Standing Ovation

Mann's Healthy Snacks on the Go! now have a stand up feature providing superior merchandising capabilities. This stand up tray, exclusive to Mann, also grows the opportunity for incremental displays in produce and throughout the store.

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Reader Service # 71

PRODUCE WATCH

TRANSITIONS

RIVER RANCH FRESH FOODS, LLC
SALINAS, CA

Tom Welch joined the executive management team as chief financial officer and is responsible for leading the company's finance and business technology resources. He previously worked as the chief financial officer for Salyer American Fresh Foods and vice president of administration for Dole Fresh Vegetables.

SEALD SWEET INTERNATIONAL
VERO BEACH, FL

Steve Tursi was hired as vice president of new business development. His previous position was as produce merchandising manager for Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., where he played a key role in driving consumer, food-safety and supply chain initiatives. He will be based out of Seald Sweet's New Jersey office.

DOLE FRESH VEGETABLES, INC.
MONTEREY, CA

Rick Bravo was hired as national director of sales. He will be responsible for developing and monitoring vegetable product sales to the top national grocery companies. His focus will be on attaining new business, training sales people and monitoring the sales support system. He sits on the board and foodservice board of the Produce Marketing Association.

SUMMERIPE WORLDWIDE, INC.
DINUBA, CA

Mike Broyles was hired as business development manager. He brings an entrepreneurial business perspective, energy and enthusiasm, and he exemplifies the best in customer service. He will be responsible for enhancing the existing communication and collaboration from tree to table.

WILKINSON INDUSTRIES, INC.
FORT CALHOUN, NE

Dale Sprosty was appointed vice president of sales. His previous positions included the executive vice president of sales and marketing for PWP Industries and vice president of global sales and business development for U.S. Can Company as well as various leadership positions within Pactiv Corporation.

COLUMBIA MARKETING INTERNATIONAL (CMI), WENATCHEE, WA

Brett Burdsal was hired as marketing manager. He previously worked for Eurofresh Farms and a marketing agency in the Midwest. His background in sustainability, promotional partnerships, new product development and packaging will be beneficial in helping retailers grow the CMI fruit category.

MURANAKA FARM, INC.
MOORPARK, CA

John Killeen joined the company as vice president, sales and marketing. He previously worked as the vice president of marketing and business development and later vice president of Midwest sales for Tanimura & Antle. He also worked in citrus and banana sales for Dole Fresh Fruit.

DEMINSKI, VAN VALKENBURG & ASSOCIATES (DVA)
COVINA, CA

Mike Walls was hired as account manager. With nearly 50 years of experience in the produce/grocery industry, he has a wealth of knowledge. His most recent position was as a partner and vice president of sales at Golden State/Impact Sales. He will be responsible for managing key product lines and headquarter sales.

NEW PRODUCTS

Premium Salad Kits By Dole

Dole Fresh Vegetables, Monterey, CA, has released the Distinctively Dole line of new premium salad kits. The six all-in-one salad kits come with herbs and spice packets to be sprinkled over prepared salads. Flavors include Asian Island Crunch, Hearty Italian, Ultimate Caesar, Perfect Harvest, Southwest Salad and Summer Salad.

Reader Service No. 300

Mega-Vitamin D Mushrooms

Dole Food Company, Inc., Westlake Village, CA, has launched its Dole Portobello Mushrooms line with naturally enhanced levels of vitamin D. The line is available sliced or whole in 6-ounce packages. The innovation offers consumers a nutrient-dense, natural source of vitamin D in addition to the vitamins and minerals found in portobellos.

Reader Service No. 301

Crispy Fruit Snacks

Crispy Green, Inc., Fairfield, NJ, revealed its new line of all-natural, freeze-dried fruit products available in single-serving, snack-sized packages. Available for produce sections nationwide, in five flavors, Crispy Fruit snacks are fruit slices with real fruit taste and natural fruit fiber with no additives, preservatives, fat or cholesterol.

Reader Service No. 302

Mann's Leaf Lettuce Singles

Mann Packing Co., Inc., Salinas, CA, has introduced Simply Singles, a line of whole-leaf lettuce singles. This is the retail version of the product Mann introduced to the foodservice industry with much success. Simply Singles includes green leaf, romaine and red leaf lettuce singles — perfect for salads, sandwiches and lettuce wraps.

Reader Service No. 303

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

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Reader Service # 29

Califresh To Showcase Garbanzos

Califresh of California, LLC, Sanger, CA, will feature its fresh garbanzos at the Produce Marketing Association's Foodservice Conference and Exposition in Monterey, CA. This produce delicacy is highly prized for its flavor and nutrition by consumers of Hispanic, Indian, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean descent.

Reader Service No. 304

CMI Releases Pocket Pro Series

Columbia Marketing International (CMI), Wenatchee, WA, has created CMI Pocket Pro, a quick and easy reference for produce managers. Available in three versions, apples/pears, cherries and organics, the Pocket Pro includes flavor profiles, suggested uses and information on ripening, handling, increasing profits and health benefits.

Reader Service No. 305

Sahlman Williams Opens New Office

Sahlman Williams, Tampa, FL, opened a West Coast office in Southern California and celebrated its 25th anniversary. The cross-country expansion is in response to the firm's growing roster of food clients with national communications needs. During the last decade, the company has strategically built a reputation for its regional and national communications.

Reader Service No. 306

Fresh King's Drippy Mango Program

Fresh King, Homestead, FL, has released its innovative Drippy Elbow Mango program aimed at providing consumers with superior mangos and boosting sales for retailers. The program helps promote new mango products packed under the Drippy Elbow label, which gives consumers an indication of the great-tasting product.

Reader Service No. 307

NMB Strengthens Promotions

The National Mango Board (NMB), Orlando, FL, beefed up its promotional programs to increase U.S. mango consumption through demonstration events, displays and education materials at the retail level. NMB staff is also working through the media, direct marketing events and foodservice industry activities.

Reader Service No. 308

IPC Announces Contest Winners

The Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), Eagle, ID, received 1,886 entries and awarded more than $150,000 in cash for the 2008 Potato Lover's Month Retail Display Contest. Pictured is the first-place display from Randy Bonner of Spains Supermarket, Grenada, MS, in the 1 to 5 cash-register category.

Reader Service No. 309

PBN Announces Culinary Contest Winner

The Pear Bureau Northwest (PBN), Portland, OR, named Nelita Silva from Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) as the grand-prize winner of the 2008 Culinary Student Recipe Competition. The winning entry was Red Anjou Crisp (pictured right). The contest encourages students to submit a creative recipe that utilizes fresh USA Pears.

Reader Service No. 310

Earthcycle Partners With Champag

Earthcycle Packaging, Vancouver, BC, Canada, has partnered with Champag, a mushroom farm based just outside of Montreal, QC, Canada. By launching this new partnership in celebration of Earth Day, Earthcycle and Champag hope to inform and inspire consumers to become environmental leaders within their communities.

Reader Service No. 311

Leger & Son To Deliver Traceable Watermelons

Leger & Son, Inc., Cordele, GA, plans to deliver traceable watermelons to select retail locations using the HarvestMark solution from YottaMark, Inc., Redwood City, CA. The implementation will enable Leger & Son to augment its ongoing food safety program and deliver new levels of produce information to retail produce buyers and consumers online.

Reader Service No. 312

Giumarra Rolls Out NZ Royal Galas

Giumarra of Wenatchee, Wenatchee, WA, reports its supply of New Zealand Royal Galas is well balanced throughout the growing regions despite New Zealand freezes. This will allow Giumarra to meet the needs of retailers and support their retail programs with the size of fruit they require.

Reader Service No. 313

WCCPF Unveils Branding Efforts

The Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF), Philadelphia, PA, launched new branding for its fruit that makes a bold statement about the quality and unmistakable heritage of the citrus. The new logo depicts a lion staring across an African plain. A cluster of navel oranges is at the foot of the lion.

Reader Service No. 314

River Point Farms Reaches Milestone

River Point Farms, Hemiston, OR, celebrated its 1-year anniversary. Formed in April 2007 as the result of the American Onion and Rivergate Farms merger, River Point Farms plans to produce over 490 million pounds of onions in 2008, a 23 percent increase in production over the last year.

Reader Service No. 315

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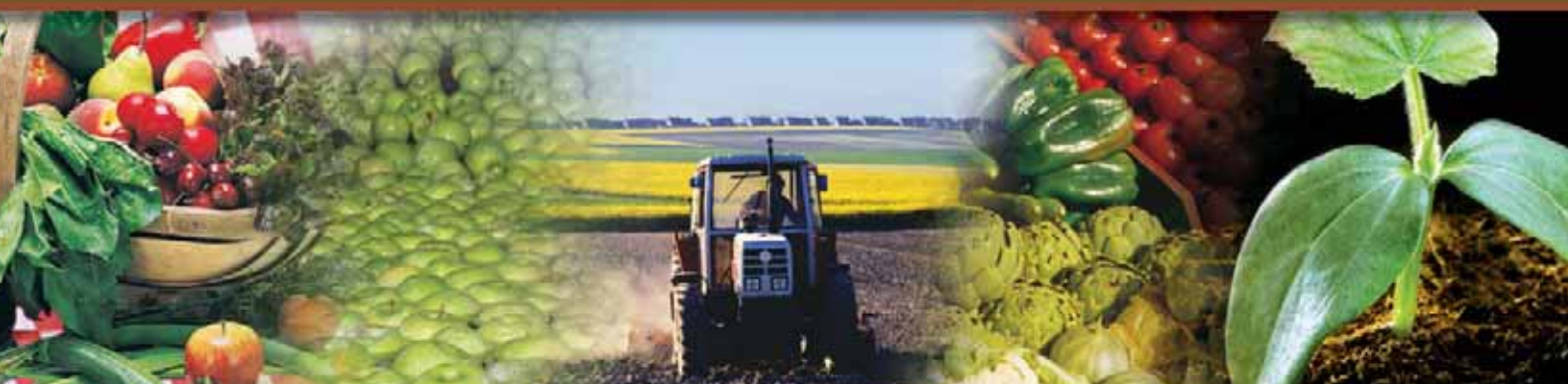
2008

WASHINGTON PUBLIC POLICY CONFERENCE

United Fresh PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

Washington Public Policy Conference

Reader Service # 16



Frieda's Practices COOL

Frieda's, Inc., Los Alamitos, CA, has made country-of-origin labeling (COOL) a top priority for many years. It recently conducted an independent audit of all of its produce items in regards to COOL and found all of its products were fully complaint. Retailers can be confident that Frieda's products contain COOL.

Reader Service No. 316

CAC Database Showcases Avocado Creations

The California Avocado Commission (CAC), Irvine, CA, has catalogued recipes from a variety of foodservice segments from white tablecloth to quick-service restaurants to the foodservice recipe database on its Web site. The site shows how leading chefs are using fresh hand-grown in California avocados to make delicious dishes.

Reader Service No. 317

Vidalia Onion Hosts Contest

The Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC), Vidalia, GA, is offering retailers and consumers the opportunity to participate in the Original Sweet Onion Trivia Contest by visiting the VOC Web site. Retailers can request POS materials, such as posters, price cards and trivia game-card tear-off pads. Grand prize includes a trip for four to Savannah, GA.

Reader Service No. 318

Sunkist Kicks Off Campaign

Sunkist Growers, Inc., Sherman Oaks, CA, launched the fifth annual *Sunkist Take a Stand* campaign to encourage young people to give back to their community by donating their earnings from old-fashioned lemonade sales. As part of the cause-marketing program, Sunkist distributes free lemonade stands to help children with their efforts.

Reader Service No. 319

Wild Mushroom Distributor Formed

The Kinoko Company, San Marcos, CA, has been established to distribute fresh cultivated wild mushrooms. The new corporate entity will offer mushrooms from a state-of-the-art growing facility currently under construction in San Marcos. Kinoko will continue to distribute the Gold Gourmet and Hokto Kinoko brands.

Reader Service No. 320

MPB Launches Campaign

The Maine Potato Board (MPB), Augusta, ME, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., Bentonville, AR, Bushwick Commission Co., Inc., Farmingdale, NY, and Guerette Farms, St. Agatha, ME, teamed up for a campaign to bring the freshest tablestock potatoes to Maine consumers. *Get Real, Get Maine* reinforces the importance of purchasing Maine-grown produce.

Reader Service No. 321

MAC Sweepstakes Winners Announced

The Michigan Apple Committee (MAC), DeWitt, MI, named nine schools winners in the 2nd Annual Michigan Apple School Sweepstakes, which strives to instill healthful eating habits in students and give support to local farmers. Participating schools collected Michigan Apple logos from bags of apples. Winners were chosen in a random drawing.

Reader Service No. 322

Del Monte Kicks Off Grilling Promotion

Del Monte Fresh Produce Company, N.A., Inc., Coral Gables, FL, has partnered with Char-Broil to launch the *Fresh Grill Thrill Sweepstakes*. The promotion offers retailers an opportunity to generate sales and educate consumers on the various ways they can incorporate Del Monte products into their grilling activities.

Reader Service No. 323

UFPA Honors Top Chefs

The United Fresh Produce Association (UFPA), Washington, D.C., honored the winners of its 2008 Produce Excellence in Foodservice Award at its annual awards banquet in Las Vegas, NV. Winners were selected based on a number of factors, including incorporation of fresh produce into menu development and overall positive dinning experience.

Reader Service No. 324

NYAA Announces Contest Winners

The New York Apple Association (NYAA), Fishers, NY, named six winners in the 2008 Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) display contest sponsored by NYAA and T. Marzetti Co., Columbus, OH. Commissaries were asked to construct apple displays that identify or mention New York State apples or use NYAA's Apple Country logo.

Reader Service No. 325

Packaging Technology Makes TV Appearance

Cryovac Simple Steps packaging technology, designed by Seald Air, Duncan, SC, was featured on Lifetime Television Network's *The Balancing Act*, a morning program that focuses on the needs of busy women. Simple Steps packaging is an easy-open microwavable package designed with Cryovac vacuum skin packaging technology.

Reader Service No. 326

CORRECTION

A photo on page 4 of the June issue of Produce Business *incorrectly identified the winner of the* Produce Business *Quiz. The correct photo of Tom Dills, buyer, Feesers Foodservice Distributor, Inc., Harrisburg, PA, is to the right.*

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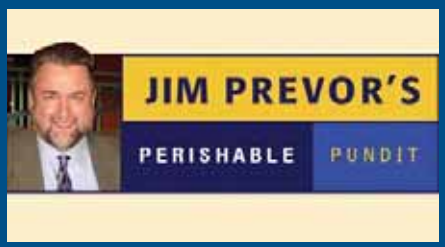
Food Prices And Free Markets



From Jim Prevor's *Perishable Pundit*, June 3, 2008

Our piece entitled, *Food Shortages? Blame Governments*, focused on an article in *The Wall Street Journal* revealing that efforts to maintain small landholdings in the Ukraine were having an impact on food production in this country that was once the bread basket of the Soviet Union.

The gist of the piece was that laws precluding individuals from selling their land were also precluding the development of modern, efficient farming — and thus contributing to high food prices around the world.

The piece brought several letters including this one:

> *The capitalism vs. socialism discussion is easily polarizing, no? Using the Ukraine situation to explain the global food crisis, and to argue for free enterprise as the solution, does not convince me.*
>
> *No free market advocate would argue that social and economic Darwinism is without pain and suffering; but staunch free market advocates would insist (perhaps correctly) that in spite of the hardships, the free market system is the best we've got.*
>
> *If wealthy people can pay more for food to put in their cars than poor people can pay for food for their bellies, isn't this just an example of market adjustments that happen to be very difficult and painful for some people?*
>
> *I am horrified by this, as I think all of us are. But from my limited understanding, I see the free market being as much the cause as the possible solution.*
>
> *Bob Sanderson*
> *President*
> *Jonathan's Sprouts*

We've been fortunate to gain Bob's perspective on several issues.

Bob always looks at the big picture and often comes from a different perspective — which makes us think more broadly and makes Bob a valuable friend.

In this case, however, we think the issue is less capitalism vs. socialism than a need to be aware of the law of unintended consequences or, even, the basic necessity of thinking through one's priorities.

After all, in the Ukraine, the divvying up of old collective farms into small, private plots was a pro-capitalist measure. Restricting the sale of the land was an attempt to maintain a diversity of ownership as a counterbalance to a resurgent state at some future date.

At the time, the incentives of small plot ownership were also seen as such that small plots could out-produce the large communal farms. That there was another option of large landholdings combining efficient production with capitalist incentives wasn't really recognized.

This particular article really just pointed out that an unintended consequence of the law restricting the sale of land was a difficulty in achieving maximally efficient food production.

It should be noted that this does not mean the law is wrong. It just means that one of the costs of the law is higher food prices.

We face similar issues every day. Ought we to drill for oil in Alaska or off our Atlantic and Pacific coasts or should we forgo that oil in order to maintain a more pristine environment? These questions, by their nature, are value questions without obviously correct or incorrect answers.

Yet, logic still rules. If one says the top priority is lowering the price of crude, you have to be in favor of exploring in these places. Otherwise your top priority is maintaining a pristine environment.

These basic rules would apply whatever political or economic system one is functioning under.

Bob's point about the stomachs of poor people vs. the gas tanks of rich people is certainly emotive, but we think it sets up a false dichotomy. The world does not have some fixed amount of food that must be divvied up according to some system of justice.

The amount of food is dynamic and responds quite well to price signals. Surely those of us in the produce trade can attest to that. The implication that if affluent people will only sacrifice and do without, then the poor would have plenty, just isn't true.

People grow, say, sprouts in New England because there are people ready, willing and able to pay for them. If they suddenly decided to abstain, it is highly unlikely that this production would be on the next flight to Myanmar. Most likely the sprouts wouldn't be produced at all.

In this whole debate over food policy, it is easy to inadvertently adopt a stilted view of man as some sort of drain on resources. Such a view is impoverishing to the dignity of humanity. For although people consume resources, they create them as well. Petroleum, for example, is not a naturally useable resource; it is only when combined with the ingenuity of man that a worthless, sticky annoyance becomes fertilizer, pharmaceuticals, containers, clothing, etc.

Perhaps the prospect of a life rich in so much drives the creativity that creates resources each day. So if we put moral opprobrium on those who are able and motivated to produce by the prospect of providing an easier life for their loved ones, we may turn off the spigots of innovation that fuel the future and in so doing condemn countless people to lives poorer than they needed to be.

The horror Bob feels at human suffering is noble and can be an important motivator for positive change. But the Ukraine story was telling us of how easily and inadvertently public policy can lead to outcomes no one intended. If this is not precisely an argument for capitalism, it is surely an argument for humility in interfering with the operations of markets.

Markets encapsulate the collective wisdom of players across the globe, each expert in his own sphere. If it is impoverishing to think of men as only consumers of resources, it is arrogant to think that a few men, of noble or ignoble motive, are knowledgeable enough to allocate resources more aptly than the market will.

Many thanks to Bob Sanderson of Jonathan's Sprouts for his thought-provoking letter.

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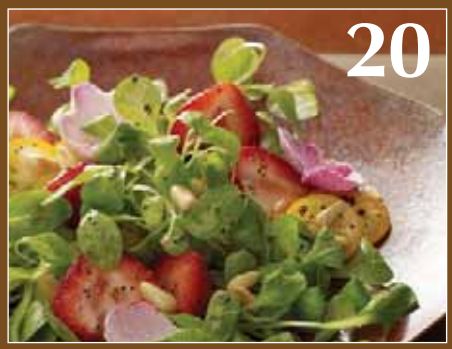
TASTE TRENDS 2008



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Taste **Trends 2008**

AS AMERICAN PALATES EXPAND, THE ROLE OF PRODUCE BECOMES INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT. HERE ARE 10 TRENDS TO CONSIDER.

By Carol M. Bareuther, RD

Americans today are hungry for bold flavors, adventurous new tastes and copious variety. This will be reflected in restaurant menus and services in the coming year, according to *2008 Restaurant Industry Forecast*, published by the National Restaurant Association (NRA), Washington, D.C.

"Consumers expect restaurants to make available a variety of healthful options and exciting flavors on menus, and they want to place their orders quickly and easily whether dining in the restaurant, enjoying at home or eating-on-the-go," relates Dawn Sweeney, NRA president and CEO. "In addition, restaurant-goers want to be in control of their experiences, for example, customizing menu items to fit their preferred tastes and diets, to get the most out of each restaurant occasion."

NRA has forecast the 2008 percentage of food dollars spent away from home at 48 percent, an all-time high that underlines how powerful the restaurant community is when it comes to influencing consumer tastes.

Photo courtesy of McCormick & Company, Inc.

1. ETHNIC FUSION GOES GLOBAL

Mainstream American fare is mingling with Asian, African, Latin American, Mediterranean and more to create a melting pot, dubbed ethnic fusion. According to NRA's 2007 *What's Hot, What's Not* survey, ethnic fusion ranked 11th out of 194 items rated as 'hot' by nearly 1,300 member chefs of the American Culinary Federation (ACF), based in St. Augustine, FL.

"The long-term trend is that traditional core foods — American food — are on the decline and what we call ethnic foods are coming to the forefront. This is an incredible message for produce," says Greg Drescher, executive director of strategic initiatives for the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) at Greystone, in Helena, CA.

Chefs are using a global cornucopia to create new and exciting dishes. As a result, a variety of both foreign and familiar fruits and vegetables are moving into the spotlight. For example, pomegranate, dragon fruit, fig, passion fruit, lychee and papaya all ranked among the Top 10 fruits, according to the 2007 *What's Hot, What's Not* survey.

Consumers love the idea of super fruits, according to Sharon Olson, president of Olson Communications, Inc., Chicago, IL. "They are enamored with pomegranate, looking at their old favorite blueberries in a new light and intrigued by açai but they're not too excited about the taste. Pomegranate continues to grow in everything from martinis to ethnic sauces."

Jonathan Milder, research librarian for the Food Network, New York, NY, notes, "We've seen an avalanche of exotic fruits such as lychees, longans and rambutans become much more familiar over the past five years."

Mangos "are commonly used in both Asian and Hispanic cuisines," relates Christine Bruhn, PhD, director of the Center for Consumer Research at the University of California, Davis, CA. "As such, we're seeing a mingling of flavors. For example, Latin cultures eat mangos out of hand with a sprinkle of chili. My favorite dish in our local Thai restaurant is mangos served with a sweet red curry sauce topped with prawns."

Familiar fruits are taking on new twists, points out Robert Danhi, executive chef/founder Chef Danhi & Co., Los Angeles, CA, and consultant chef for last April's Produce Solutions Conference sponsored by Produce Marketing Association (PMA). Newark, DE. "For example, green mangos rather than ripe used in salads and green papaya used for both salads and curries are popular in Asian cuisines."

Micro-vegetables (e.g., greens, zucchini, cucumber), chili peppers (e.g., piri piri, habanero, chipotle), exotic mushrooms (e.g., morel, enoki, shiitake), specialty greens (e.g., escarole, endive, radicchio), and root vegetables (rutabaga, turnips, beets) ranked in the Top 10 vegetables, according to the NRA's 2007 *What's Hot, What's Not* survey.

"People are trying to eat more healthfully," says Patricia Schmeling, food editor for *Taste of Home*, Greendale, WI. "Roots such as parsnips, turnips, beets and sweet potato have continued in popularity. Celery root — or celeriac — is roasted for use in salads or puréed to use in soups. Celery root, bok choy, jicama, savoy, napa cabbage and kale add unique flavors to dishes, especially when roasted. Served raw, the daikon radish acts as a 'cracker,' while cooked it has juiciness similar to the turnip."

Greens are definitely growing in interest level with chefs and consumers alike, reports Olson. "Collards, kale and mustard greens, for example, have had long historically ethnic demand. Now we're seeing these greens prepared in new ways — for example, kale lightly sautéed in olive oil

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Reader Service # 74

and sesame oil with a sprinkle of sesame seeds."

2. LATIN CUISINE DIVERSIFIES

Latin American was named the second hottest cuisine — after ethnic fusion — by ACF-member chefs participating in the 2007 *What's Hot, What's Not* survey.

"Like Asian and Mediterranean, we see Latin cuisine segmenting," Olson of Olson Consulting continues. "It's not just Mexican anymore. It's Peruvian, Brazilian, Chilean, for example."

"Latin is synonymous with heat to many people," says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Los Angeles, CA, "but chiles are also full of flavor. For example, Anaheim and pasilla chiles are basically bell peppers with a kick. Jalapeño, serrano, Hungarian wax and red Fresno chiles are all taking off in popularity as people find out about their flavoring potential."

Beyond use as a supporting ingredient, chiles are also increasingly taking center stage, he adds, "For example, chile rellenos and jalapeño nachos are appearing more on menus."

Other Latin produce picking up steam includes avocados, cilantro, cinnamon, garlic, jicama, onions, parsley, salsas, tomatillos and tomatoes.

Plantains are also becoming more popular, notes K. Dun Gifford, founder and president of Oldways Preservation Trust, Boston, MA. They "are increasingly showing up on mainstream menus — for example, blackened red fish and fried plantains. It's the intense flavor and freshness of Latino cuisine that customers crave."

3. ASIAN GOES REGIONAL

The days when restaurants will list an 'Asian' dish on their menu are numbered, says CIA's Drescher. "Consumers today want their food to be authentic. That means Thai, Vietnamese, Japanese, for example, rather than the general term 'Asian.' Chefs are really getting their arms around this concept and it will only accelerate."

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics *Consumer Expenditures Survey 2005*, top Asian ethnic groups in the United states are Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean and Japanese.

NRA's 2007 *What's Hot, What's Not* survey ranked Thai 4th, Pan-Asian 5th, Japanese 10th, Indonesian 13th and Chinese 19th among the 'in' cuisines.

"Asian Americans routinely consume mainstream fruits and vegetables plus an enormous variety of Asian produce," notes Danhi of Chef Danhi. "In fruits, this means a larger variety of tropical fruits including coconuts, mangos, papayas, guavas, citrus, star fruit and durians. In vegetables, [this means] an enormous variety of green leaf vegetables, melons and squash, and roots."

In the past, adds Danhi, "Green beans would substitute in a Chinese dish that called for traditional yard-long beans. Similarly, a regular purple-skinned oblong eggplant would be used in place of a Chinese eggplant. No more. Today, there is greater interest and availability of, for example, water spinach [ong choy], bok choy, Chinese broccoli [gailon], Chinese flowering cabbage [choy sum], mustard greens, yard-long or snake beans, Chinese eggplant and cilantro root."

Vietnamese is one of the hottest growing food trends of the last 15 years, he continues. "As a result, we're seeing an expansion of varietals. True limes, key limes, kalamansi limes and kaffir limes, for example. The Vietnamese use limes in beef stew and pho ga [chicken and rice noodle soup]."

He also mentions several chile varietals. "There's a relative lack of variety in chiles in Asian

Advice To Foodservice Distributors And Wholesalers

When a group of professional chefs recently visited the warehouse of a specialty produce wholesaler, they acted like kids in a candy shop. "Why can't we get things like this from our suppliers?" was the united cry.

Trends spanning from the demand for authentic world cuisines to the freshest local ingredients are creating challenges that are ripe with opportunity for foodservice distributors and wholesalers. Here are five things chefs want and how to make them happen:

1. Source from local growers. Year-round sourcing is very important in the restaurant business, says Don Odiorne, vice president of foodservice for the Idaho Potato Commission, Eagle, ID. "But, the buy-local movement may increase efforts to purchase not only with contracts with major suppliers but also with more trips to farmers markets."

Sharon Olson, president of Olson Communications, Inc., Chicago, IL, agrees and adds, "Restaurants are looking for seasonal produce and vendors who can reliably deliver the quantities they need to make their menus work. Of the moment and of the season are the big drivers."

"We source about 50:50, that is, about 50 percent from distributors and 50 percent directly from farmers," relates John Clark, chef de cuisine at Walt Disney World's flagship Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, Lake Buena Vista, FL. "Some of our farmers will work with a distributor to piggyback their produce for delivery directly from field to restaurant."

Foodservice distributors that take the time to negotiate with several local farmers and consolidate produce for delivery "are in a good position to supply these items to high-volume foodservice operations," adds Olson.

2. Serve up ideas. If you ask the produce industry what it needs to source for Thanksgiving, "You'll get a quick answer," notes Greg Drescher, executive director of strategic initiatives for the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) at Greystone, Helena, CA, "If you ask the same thing of Asian street foods, most have no clue. It's important for food distributors to educate themselves on the major culinary trends — not just individual products, but how various fruits and vegetables are prepared. Then, they must be able to turn around and offer chefs ideas of how these items can be creatively used and even demo these suggestions."

Robert Danhi, executive chef/founder of Chef Danhi & Co., Los Angeles, CA, adds, "More manufacturers are hiring a corporate chef or outsourcing research and development duties to a consultant chef in order to effectively sell their produce. This wasn't true five to 10 years ago."

"We have an in-house produce newsletter that's delivered weekly," explains Clark. "It tells us what's in season, what's an oddity and what quantities are available. We ask other chefs for ideas if we haven't worked with something before. Conversely, if someone brings in something, say white peaches, and does something creative, he or she will share with the rest of us. It's rougher when you don't have that kind of support."

3. Find forms that work. Labor issues in foodservice make convenience important. Donna Skidmore, director of consumer services for Dole Food Company, Inc., Westlake Village, CA, notes, "Ready-to-use vegetables and fruits are in demand in foodservice, and operators will look to distributors who can supply these products."

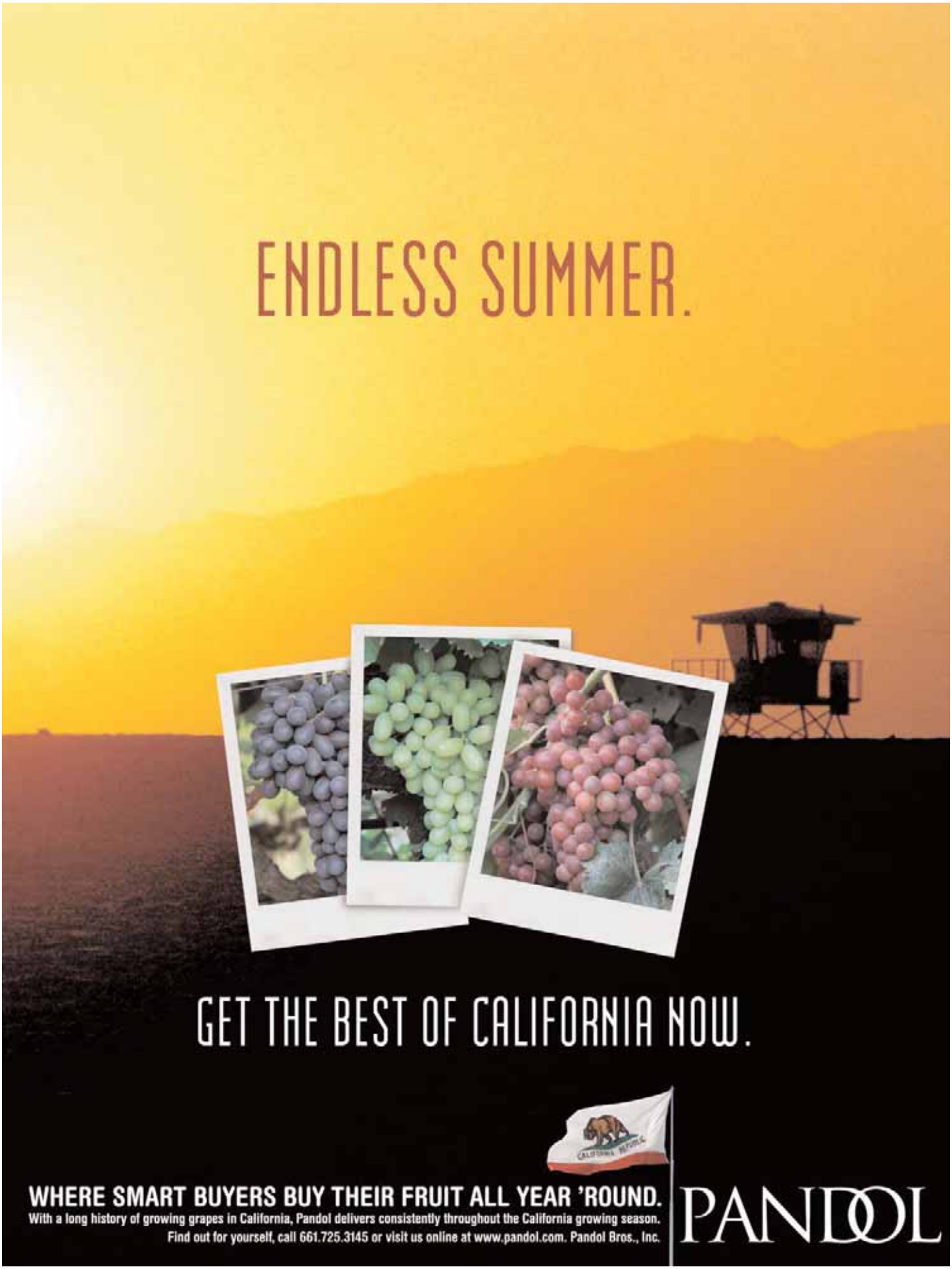
Stephen A. Kalil, president of the Research Chef's Association, Atlanta, GA, lauds one major foodservice distributor that "will process produce in whatever form a restaurant wants with a day's notice, even to the point of making fresh pico de gallo for customers. This is definitely a competitive advantage."

High-pressure or non-thermal processing is a technique that brings fresh guacamole to foodservice, says Christine Bruhn, director of the Center for Consumer Research at the University of California, Davis, CA. "I think we'll see this technique used to extend the shelf life of fresh products to a greater degree. For example, there are opportunities with mangos and passion fruit for use in desserts and beverages."

4. Offer enough of a sample to allow creativity. Daniel Scannell, executive chef at the Carnegie Abbey Club, Portsmouth, RI, says one of his pet peeves is having a supplier offer a product sample that is far too small. "If I only get a slice or a little taste, how can I experiment with it and see if I want it for my menu?"

5. Deliver consistently and on time. Another problem, says Scannell, "is suppliers eager to sell me a product, then not being able to deliver because the product is no longer available or not available in sufficient quantities for my needs. Give me a realistic outlook on availability and quantity — not just a fast pitch."

Foodservice wholesalers need to realize that menu development is a multi-step process that takes time, advises Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's Inc., Los Alamitos, CA. "There needs to be cooperation and trust. In addition, consistent quality, flavor, pricing and on-time delivery. That's what makes a restaurant stick with a supplier." **pb**



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compared to Latin American cuisines. Still, there are some unique ones such as long chiles, bird's eye [chile padi] and Thai bird [Dragon's eye]."

He predicts the next hot Asian cuisine will be from Singapore. "It has Chinese, Indian and Malay elements all combined in one."

4. MEDITERRANEAN, INDIAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN FLAVORS MOVE MAINSTREAM

Mediterranean ranked third, Indian 11th and Middle Eastern 12th among today's top cuisines as identified by chefs in the 2007 *What's Hot, What's Not* survey.

According to Elizabeth Pivonka, PhD, RD, president and CEO of the Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH), Wilmington, DE, "Produce popular to Mediterranean cuisine includes basil, garlic, lemon, marjoram, olive oil, olives, onions, oregano, pine nuts, thyme and tomatoes. From India, there are almonds, apples, pears, cardamom, chiles and other hot peppers, chutneys, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, garlic, ginger, grapes, mace, mustard seeds, onion, raisins and currants, saffron and turmeric. And, from the Middle East, beans, especially chickpeas, eggplant, garlic, mint, onions, parsley, pine nuts, saffron, sesame seeds and again tomatoes.

"As Americans become more accustomed to such ingredients, we begin to see more and more of these used in menu items in family-dining establishments and even quick-service restaurants," she adds.

Photo courtesy of Idaho Potato Commission

Travel and television are powerful influencers on taste, relates Oldways' Gifford. "Americans today are more willing to try new things. One thing we'll be looking at in our Mediterranean conference in November is what people in this region do with produce to make it taste good. Vegetables are of particular interest since consumers don't eat enough of this food group. For example, we do know that Mediterranean peoples sauté their greens in a little olive oil. And, they use a variety of greens in soups."

In the future, says Olson of Olson Communication, "We'll see the Mediterranean segment out into Italian, Greek, Turkish and Moroccan, for example."

Stephen A Kalil, president of the Atlanta, GA-based Research Chefs Association and executive chef at Frito Lay, Plano, TX, says, "The flavors of Italy are bringing radicchio and romanesco into greater demand and interest in Moroccan cuisine is spurring greater interest in apricots and dates."

While Mediterranean and Middle Eastern flavors are already moving mainstream, Danhi of Chef Danhi believes, "Indian cuisine is right on the cusp. It's intense in its flavors."

5. THE QUEST FOR LOCAL GROWS

Locally grown produce topped the vegetable category in NRA's 2007 *What's Hot, What's Not* survey; organic came in second.

"The locavore movement is driving chefs and foodservice operators to local farmers and farm markets to source their ingredients," notes CIA's Drescher.

John Clark, chef de cuisine at Walt Disney World's flagship Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, Lake Buena Vista, FL, agrees and adds, "We're sourcing a lot more ingredients that are in season or from the region in order to leave a smaller carbon footprint."

Chefs are turning this environmental concern

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to advantage. According to Gena Berry, restaurant coordinator for Culinary Works, Atlanta, GA, "We're seeing a greater creative use of fresh local products and names of farms and specific artisan products put right on the menu."

Trendsetting consumers are moving from organic to local, says the Food Network's Milder. "It's a consciousness, a lifestyle, a pride of place that's much more powerful and has grown much more quickly than local. This translates into freshness, diversity and choice and an incredible proliferation of a variety of familiar fruits and vegetables. For example, we're seeing more varieties of heirloom tomatoes at farmers markets today. Potatoes, melons and squash, too, for example."

At the Grand Floridian, "We've created salads of green zebra, tear drop and beefsteak tomatoes that offer guests different sizes, textures, colors, sweetness and flavors all in one dish," Clark says. "Likewise, instead or roasting winter squash with brown sugar, we'll leave the skin on and fill it with apples, onions, thyme and a sprinkle of olive oil."

Yet even the greenest, most zealous consumer understands tradeoffs, says Olson Communication's Olson. "There is an expectation of abundance and variety among American consumers that allows them to accept imported foods or larger carbon footprints if they have confidence in their purveyor and a taste for specialty foods that are not readily available in the united States."

6. SMALL PLATES EQUAL BIG FLAVOR

CIA's Drescher comments on the continuous unraveling of the typical American menu. "Produce used to have one shot at the menu, as a salad or side dish. Now, we're seeing many more small plates," he explains. "This is definitely opening up a lot of possibilities for the use of fruits and vegetables and encourages a sense of adventure and experimentation. The good news is that many of the world's cuisines are much more produce-oriented than America."

Danhi of Chef Danhi agrees, adding, "Customers today are more willing to accept a produce-based dish, rather than being intent on getting their value in a big protein entrée. This is allowing chefs to create more options with lower cost and smaller portions that allow customers to customize their flavor experience."

"For the past few years we have been saying small is the new big, but consumers still want big," states Olson. "Produce lets consumers have those big, beautiful, luscious portions without the guilt. Protein is becoming more of the sideshow than the main attraction with produce taking center stage. Healthful eating is becoming a mainstream desire because consumers are learning that they don't have to compromise taste, flavor and satisfaction."

7. SWEET AND SAVORY BLUR

According to Danhi, the lines between sweet or savory "are not so clear anymore. Savory items are taking on a sweet side and desserts are welcoming savory seasonings."

"We're seeing interesting vegetables used to make desserts, such as pumpkin brûlé," comments Donna Skidmore, director of consumer services for the Dole Food Company, based in Westlake Village, CA.

Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's Inc., Los Alamitos, CA, adds, "Chocolate with chipotle is a combination we're seeing more often. Also, fennel is becoming more appreciated for its licorice flavor. Some chefs are flavoring sugar with fennel."

The combination of sweet and heat is playing out in chain restaurants and in the kitchens of celebrity chefs, says the Food Network's Milder. "It's something that's common to many cuisines and appealing. It doesn't take an adventurous palate to enjoy."

Examples include Jamaican Black Pepper Shrimp, in which spicy black pepper sauce meets cooling mango salsa at the Cheesecake Factory, based in Calabasas Hills, CA. Celebrity chef Bobby Flay marries chiles and fruit in his recipe for Grilled Pork Tenderloin with Guava Glaze and Orange-Habanero Mojo in his cookbook, *Bobby Flay's Boy Gets Grill*.

8. HERBS GO GLOBAL

Copious amounts of herbs are filling our plates and bowls, according to Danhi. "Their presentations are enabling guests to finish the food their way. Salt and pepper are not enough."

Taste of Home's Schmeling notes, "Consumers still love dill, chives, basil, thyme, mint, lemon balm, oregano and rosemary for day-to-day cooking. Herbs are especially popular in desserts and their uses include rosemary ice cream, lavender cakes and basil cupcakes. Tarragon is an herb that is growing more popular. Many herbs such as tarragon are especially popular in herb-flavored vinegars."

Fresh herbs, not dried, are important on menus today, advises Melissa's Schueller. "For example, only fresh mint will do to garnish a sorbet or make a mojito. This is playing out in world cuisines, too — for example, fresh basil in Italian dishes and fresh cilantro in Hispanic and Asian dishes."

There's also an ongoing explosion in herb varieties. "In Asian cuisine, we're seeing mint as peppermint, spearmint and perilla," adds Danhi. "Similarly with basil — there's Thai basil, lemon basil and holy basil. There's also been an introduction of entirely new varieties. For example, curry leaves, pandan [screwpine], Vietnamese coriander [rau ram], sawtooth [culantro] and betel leaves."

9. SIMPLICITY RULES

There's a new simplicity on menus today, says Caplan. "It's all about ingredients, minimalist techniques and letting natural flavors shine through."

Skidmore agrees, adding, "Chefs are whipping up lighter, more healthful sauces with cleaner flavors, made of vegetables, herbs and seasonings.

A Look At Future Trends

Taste trends start in white tablecloth restaurants, says Donna Skidmore, director of consumer services for Dole Food Company, Inc., Westlake Village, CA. "Then, as more people try a dish, and at the same time see these same dishes and ingredients appear in magazines such as *Glamour*, *Bon Appetit* and *Cooking Light*, demand grows and the concept heads mainstream."

The search for the next cutting-edge cuisine and taste trend is sending produce professionals into the fields — literally. This is dovetailing with new immigrants who are finding a livelihood and market opportunity for their crops outside of their ethnic community.

Gus Schumacher, Jr., former under secretary for farm and foreign agricultural services at the U.S. Department of Agriculture and now a Washington, D.C.-based consultant for the New Immigrant Farmer Initiative, says, "Large foodservice companies that serve university dining services at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA] and Harvard [University, Cambridge, MA], for example, as well as independent and chain restaurants, are reaching out and buying ethnic produce locally."

Novel ethnic produce production is nationwide, Schumacher adds. "There's a substantial group of Asian and Hispanic farmers in New Jersey and Brazilian farmers in western Massachusetts. Beyond this, Asian farmers from Vietnam, Laos and China as well as Indian farmers are in California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and even Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. Hispanic farmers are growing in the southern and central states as well as into Arkansas and Georgia. African immigrants from Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone are growing pea shoots and squash tips, for example."

What are some of the items making their way into upscale retailers and restaurants?

Maxixe is one, says Frank Mangan, Ph.D., extension association profession at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, MA. "Similar to a cucumber with a lemony taste, this popular Brazilian vegetable is used in salads and soups and cooked with beef dishes."

Jiló, a Brazilian eggplant, and taioba, a leaf of the South American tannia plant that is used similarly to spinach, are also growing in popularity.

"[Austin, TX-based] Whole Foods Market started buying Brazilian as well as Asian vegetables last year to use in its prepared dishes," he adds. "This is the first use of these products beyond farmers markets and ethnic restaurants."

On the West Coast, Fresno County has the largest number of Asian farm operators in California. "In descending acreage, these farmers grow gailon [Chinese broccoli], sugar peas, daikon, Chinese long beans, oriental eggplant, bitter melon, bok choy, lemon grass, moqua [squash], sinqua [hairy melon], donqua [winter melon) and opo [gourd]," according to Richard Molinar, small farms and specialty crops advisor for the University of California's Cooperative Extension Service, in Fresno, CA.

"When chefs become aware of these items and want to incorporate them into their menus, they ask their foodservice wholesalers and the wholesalers to call us," he adds. "We work with 2,000 to 3,000 farmers. You could say we do a lot of linking." **pb**

Allspice and exotic meats

Vanilla bean and cardamom

Lemon grass and lycheee

Red curry and masa

Poppy seed and rose

Poppy seed and rose

Chili and cocoa

Coriander and coconut water

Orange peel and natural wood

Rubbed sage and rye whiskey

Photos courtesy of McCormack & Company, Inc.

Chimichurri sauce is a good example of fresh raw ingredients — herbs and a little oil."

In Argentina, chimichurri is used as both a sauce and marinade when grilling meats. It's made from chopped parsley, oregano, garlic, salt, pepper, onion, paprika and olive oil. Lemon juice or vinegar is often added for an extra kick.

Fruit purées are becoming big, too, says Dole's Skidmore. "Interesting flavors, such as mango peach with ginger, for example."

Bringing new foods to the attention of American consumers was the Food Network's goal early on, says Milder. "We still chase trends, but our programming tends to involve more around familiar foods such s potatoes, carrots, onions and peas and giving them a twist. A good example is Rachael Ray's smashed rather than mashed potatoes."

Don Odiorne, vice president of foodservice for the Idaho Potato Commission, Eagle, ID, notes, "Potatoes are getting quite a bit of attention these days, especially the heirloom and specialty niche varieties. Their preparation seems fairly straightforward. For example, at Osteria Via Strato in Chicago, [IL], Chef David Di Gregario serves an octopus and fingerling salad that is basically calamari and sliced Russian banana fingerlings marinated in vinegar and olive oil over a bed of micro greens."

Chefs are bringing out the natural flavors in fruits and vegetables in novel ways. According to Daniel Scannell, executive chef at the Carnegie Abbey Club, Portsmouth, RI, and a member of ACF's Culinary National Team, "It's cool now to dehydrate vegetables. Dehydrated carrots and beets make great chewy vegetable rollups, similar to the fruit rollups kids enjoy. Take the dehydrating one more step and you've made crispy vegetable chips. Texture is just as important as taste to today's customers."

10. FLAVOR PAIRINGS BREAK THE MOLD

Each year, McCormick & Company, Inc., headquartered in Hunt Valley, MD, taps into the culinary foresight of leading trendsetting chefs, cookbook authors and TV personalities to identify the top taste trends.

"This is the second year we have expanded our look into pairings," explains Laurie Harrsen, director of consumer communications. "Chefs have long celebrated the exciting impact of complementary and contrasting flavor pairings in their cooking. Home cooks are also embracing this spirit of culinary adventure."

"Chefs have long celebrated the exciting impact of complementary and contrasting flavor pairings in their cooking. Home cooks are also embracing this spirit of culinary adventure."

— Laurie Harrsen McCormick & Company, Inc.

The Top 10 hot flavor pairings on McCormick's 2008 Flavor Forecast and what they mean for produce are:

- **Oregano and Heirloom Beans**. There's a growing interest in heirloom fruits and vegetables. Example: Cuban-Spiced Heirloom Bean Soup with Mint Crema.
- **Vanilla Bean and Cardamom.** Indulgent ingredients are paired with exquisite produce such as berries, specialty fruits and unique mushrooms. Example: Vanilla Cardamom Whoopie Pies and Milk Shake Shooter.
- **Chile and Cocoa**. Interest continues in fresh and dried chiles. Chile and cocoa is a complex flavor combination often combined with cranberries, dried fruits, cilantro and corn. Example: Cocoa Chile Pork Ribs.
- **Coriander and Coconut Water.** Coconut water is starting to show up in the produce section as a refreshing beverage. This pairing is best enjoyed with fresh produce as a fruit sorbet, chilled soup, tropical ceviche or fruit salsa as well as in Asian-inspired dishes. Example: Chilled Papaya and Watermelon Soup with Lemon Coriander Cream.
- **Lemon Grass and Lychee.** The quest is on for more Asian ingredients in the produce section. Example: Seared Sesame Tuna with Lemon Grass and Lychee Coulis.
- **Red Curry and Masa.** The mixing of Asian and Latin flavors is hot. Example: Red Curry Shrimp and Plantain Tempura.
- **Orange Peel and Natural Wood.** Fresh seasonal oranges, from bloods to clementines, as well as other citrus fruit, deliver a strongly aromatic, tangy flavor to all kinds of foods when combined with smoky accents. This is common in many cuisines such as Middle Eastern, North African and Asian. Example: Wood-Smoked Chicken Burgers with Orange Peel Aïoli.
- **Allspice and Exotic Meats.** Produce items, such as figs, sweet potatoes and bitter greens, complement many of the new, exotic meats and are complemented by the sweet, warm spice. Example: Spice-Rubbed Buffalo Steaks with Fig Balsamic Reduction.
- **Poppy Seed and Rose.** This total sensory experience teams a pleasantly nutty taste and crunchy texture with a sweet, floral flavor and aroma. It is a popular combination in Middle Eastern and North African cuisines. It works well with produce items such as apricots, kumquats, nuts, cucumbers, mint and more. Example: Field Salad with Strawberries, Kumquats and Rose Petals.
- **Rubbed Sage and Rye Whiskey.** This combination uses American ingredients in new, inventive ways. Example: Rye on Rye Roast Beef Panini.

Chefs interested in recipes for these examples and many others can find them at the McCormick Web site. **pb**

Menu Development 101

THE PROCESS OF MENU DEVELOPMENT IS A COMBINATION OF CHEFS' CREATIVITY AND MEETING THE DEMANDS OF CONSUMERS WHO ARE ORDERING MORE FRESH PRODUCE.

By Lisa Socarras

The art of menu development involves balancing chefs' creativity with the ever-evolving demands of consumers. This isn't an easy skill to master, particularly when it comes to getting more produce on the menu. A lot of effort goes into researching and developing the flavorful dishes consumers enjoy.

"It's based half on research collected by talking to customers and half on your gut feeling about what you think should be on the menu," according to Gerard Lewis, chief concept officer for Boston Market Corp., Golden, CO. "We have a test kitchen with culinarians, follow our brand position and listen to consumers."

Many experts agree consumers want more fresh produce on menus. According to a recent menu trend survey, which ranked the Top 10 "Hot Items" for 2007, from the National Restaurant Association, (NRA), Washington, D.C., organic produce ranked third and locally grown fresh produce ranked second — only to be topped by bite-size desserts as No.1.

"Produce has an opportunity to play into that shift in consumer interest in more healthful meals," says Dan'l Mackey Almy, owner of DMA Solutions, Inc., Irving, TX. "Advertising by big companies helps everyone in the produce industry by preaching the green message."

Advertising, marketing, test kitchens, collaboration between owners and chefs and consumer testing all influence how menus are developed, but ultimately, consumers drive what appears on menus. Researching what the consumer wants leads to what appears in restaurants. Each restaurant has its own formula to calculate what should appear on the perfect menu. The key is to keep menus fresh so customers never become bored.

"Fruit plays a major role on our menu during our summer months, particularly with strawberries and bananas," explains Mary Cusick, senior vice president of marketing for restaurants at Bob Evans Farms, Inc., Columbus, OH. "Since we only offer strawberries when we can get them fresh, they're on our menus only from May through August. We put them in desserts, spinach salads and our breakfast and fruit bowls. Consumers really look forward to it."

Photo courtesy Idaho Potato Commission

In addition to fruit, vegetable side dishes, such as Bob Evans' stir-fry line, are important accompaniments to entrées such as pasta. Vegetables play an important role in consumer appeal and offer flavor and bright colors that dress up the plate. Restaurant owners are routinely looking for new menu ideas and inspiration for new recipes.

"We are constantly shopping different markets, especially on the East and West Coasts," reports Steve Greer, owner of the Golden Ox Restaurant and Lounge, Kansas City, MO. "We change our menu four times a year. We must vary the side dishes because we are a steakhouse and the meat items basically stay the same. Plus, we use only fresh produce because it tastes better." However, chains do not have the flexibility that a single operation has.

Greer sees old-fashioned vegetable dishes making a comeback on menus. Seasoned green beans with bacon and onions, and corn bake with ham are examples of reoccurring home-style recipes, he says. He works with his chefs to create new dishes and changes to suit consumer trends.

CREATIVE MARKETING LEADS TO INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES

Produce industry suppliers, wholesalers, distributors and industry groups can go a long way to

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assist creativity in the foodservice industry. For instance, Mann Packing Co., Inc., Salinas, CA, uses innovative marketing, creative advertising and marketing techniques, such as sponsoring luncheons at industry events.

"Chefs are artists and like to create," relates Gina Nucci, Mann's director of foodservice marketing. "Their ideas work along with advertising your product. This provides an opportunity for chefs to sample our products used in creative ways and perhaps inspire more creativity for them to take back to their own restaurants." This way, recipes are reinvented and customized as they wish.

The Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), Eagle, ID, also uses creating marketing to stir up new ideas and recipes in chefs' kitchens. One new innovative idea, "Ideation Events," is taking place for the second year in a row, notes Don Odiorne, vice president of foodservice. IPC brings together corporate chefs from chain restaurants to talk about menu ideas. "This allows us to get exposure to a chain, where normally the shipper contacts the purchasing person. We get contact with the person who has the most say in using our product," he adds.

Odiorne says IPC also supplies recipes to restaurants, but a research-and-development chef typically takes the idea from the recipe and remakes it into something completely different. Sometimes chefs approach suppliers with their own produce requests.

GREAT SERVICE KEEPS ORDERS COMING

Great customer service means ongoing business for suppliers and wholesalers. "McCormick and Schmick's [Seafood Restaurants, Inc., based in Portland, OR] chef approached me to get kimchi for its [New York, NY] restaurant," according to Alan Gargiulo, vice president of sales at D'Arrigo Bros. Food Service, Bronx, NY. "The up-and-coming chefs want to make their mark in the city and must find ways to be more creative than their competitors. We do a lot of specialty items for these guys." Rainbow Swiss chard, heirloom tomatoes, dragon fruit and monster fruit are examples of items D'Arrigo provides to its foodservice customers.

"Your relationship with your supplier is everything," notes Greer of the Golden Ox. "You must pick up the phone and tell your distributor what you need. You know the people and they come through for you."

The supplier's role is crucial when chefs are looking for quality in produce for their signature dishes. Dependability, consistency and food safety are extremely important. "Chefs develop recipes and are willing to pay any price for produce when it comes to quality," says Richard Strauss, head vegetable buyer for Nathel and Nathel, Inc., Bronx, NY. "Quality still reigns No.1 and freshness is also very important. We turn more than 95 percent of our merchandise every 48 hours. We offer our products 365 days a year — thanks to planes shipping products to us from as far as Peru."

The supplier's role is crucial when chefs are looking for quality in produce for their signature dishes. Dependability, consistency and food safety are extremely important.

TEST MARKETING REVEALS TRUE CONSUMER OPINIONS

Fresh tastes best and has greater consumer appeal. Cusick explains Bob Evans uses a select online testing company to rate its menu appeal among customers. The system asks a chosen panel of consumers to select salads they most prefer. These choices are then prepared and tried in test markets in certain parts of the country. Successful salads are chosen to be the chain's new spring salads, which are sometimes added to the permanent menu. Enhancements, such as changes to the tomato variety or onion selection, are ongoing.

Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA, is actively involved in focus groups and test markets, says Lisa McNeece, vice president of foodservice and industry sales. "We do inside focus groups with recipes. We work with companies' marketing departments to develop and test recipes. We hire outside people like college students to give us honest opinions on the recipes. We love doing training shows to educate chefs about what we have available. We also do demos whenever we can and participate in food shows."

Boston Market consumers place the final order on menu items, reports Lewis. "Chefs get the blueprint. The blueprint gives parameters. The innovative team then creates a menu item that is shown to consumers who say whether we should use it or not." Boston Market restaurants use 2,000 pounds of fresh vegetables a week, including more than one variety of potatoes. **pb**

Menus Spice It Up For Sales

In terms of trends, restaurateurs observe an emphasis on flavor, added spices, unusual combinations and increased interest in ethnic tastes.

"Palates are more adventurous now in all segments of the market," explains Janet Erickson, executive vice president of purchasing and quality assurance at Del Taco, LLC, Lake Forest, CA. "People are traveling more and are influenced by our increased Hispanic/Latino populations." She adds cooking television shows are also major influencers.

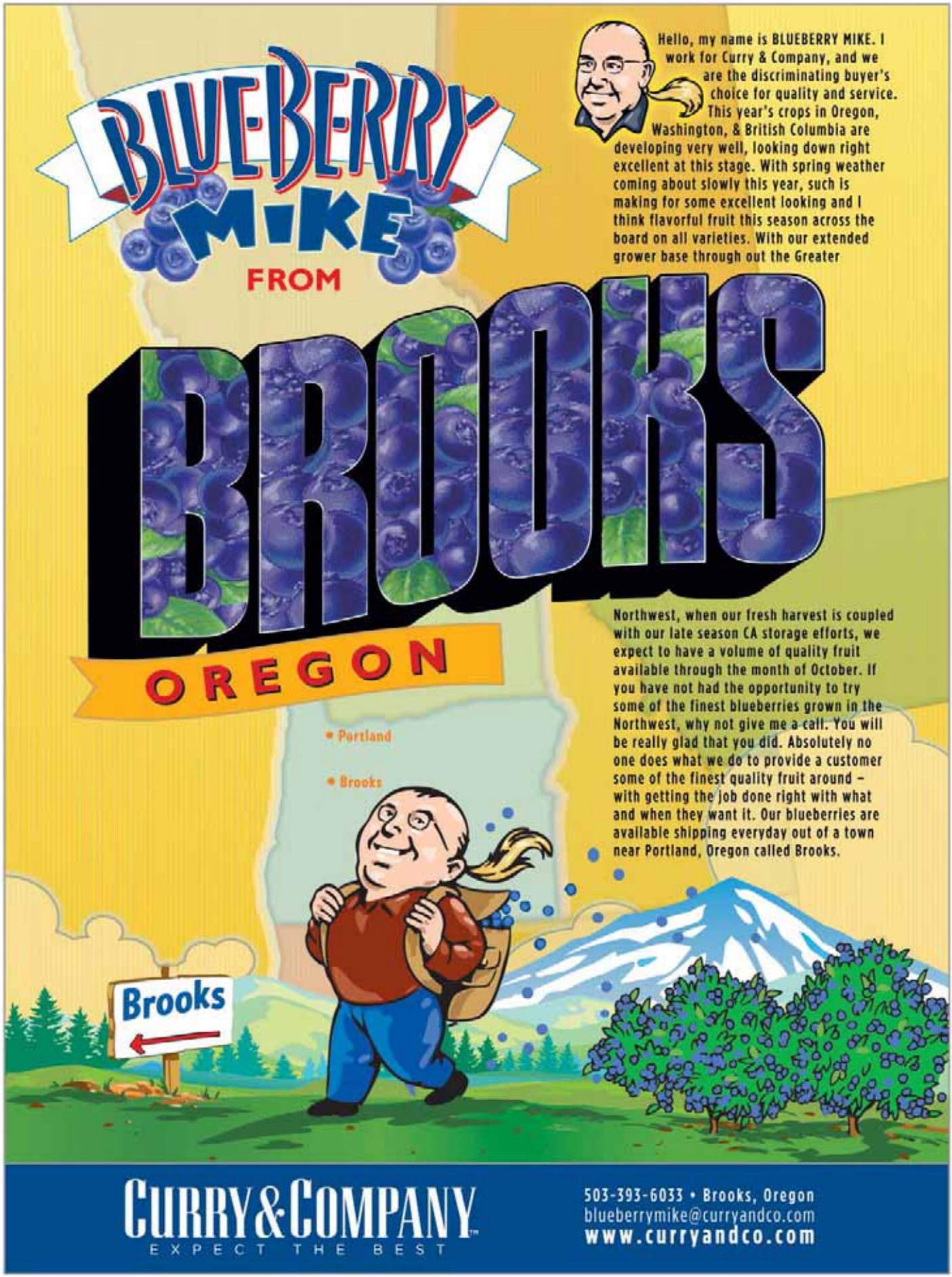
The potato industry is also experiencing increased interest in dishes with new flavors. "In addition to our ever-popular fries, we're now seeing flavored chips, such as thinly sliced chips with balsamic vinegar," according to Don Odiorne, vice president of foodservice for the Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), Eagle, ID. "We also see roasted fingerling potatoes with cotija cheese or blue cheese on top of the potatoes, instead of twice-baked stuffed potatoes."

Variety in produce items is capturing the attention of chefs, reports Alan Gargiulo, vice president of sales at D'Arrigo Bros. Food Service. "Television shows like the Iron Chef and Hell's Kitchen have made creativity popular," he explains. "I sell a lot of specialty items like the large gold beet, which wasn't available five years ago. High-end restaurants want quality to set them apart. Dragon tongue French beans, candy cane beets, French breakfast radishes — we carry all of these."

"In the Jewish New Year, you have to get new fruits to be successful. Banana-shaped Monster Fruit has been extremely popular. You put it on the counter and don't eat it until the scales fall off," according to Gargiulo. "Inside, it's a surprise."

Produce surprises make menus exciting. Dana Tilley, vice president of culinary for Chili's Grill and Bar, owned by Brinker International, Dallas, TX, advises the produce industry to keep supply, availability and quality produce coming. "Menus are depending on it!" **pb**

Photo courtesy of Boston Market Corp.



Reader Service # 79

Produce Trends In Fast-Food Restaurants

EVER-EXPANDING MENUS MEAN AN INCREASE IN DEMAND FOR PRODUCE OF EVERY VARIETY AND CUT.

By Jacqueline Ross Lieberman

Once consisting of a limited number of simple items, fast-food menus have expanded to include dozens of options from hefty 1,000-plus calorie sandwiches, premium steakhouse burgers and $1 cartons of fries to exotic salads and sliced fresh apples.

Burger King Restaurants, headquartered in Miami, FL, is currently test-marketing its BK Apple Fries, fresh apple slices in the shape of French fries that come with caramel dipping sauce. "We're excited about Apple Fries as a new item for kids," reports Jonathan Muhtar, senior director of product marketing. "It's taking a tried-and-true menu offering and making it fun to eat. It's a way to bring a healthful fresh product to consumers and make it fun."

Although BK Apple Fries are aimed at children, "We're finding that adults are purchasing it, as well," he adds. This summer, they will be available at a suggested price of $1.49 or as a substitute for a side in a combo meal for an additional 49¢.

For Burger King, it's all about giving their customers choices. "We've added quite a few items in the past four years," Muhtar adds. "We've added more premium-positioned items and we've added a value menu and value breakfast items.

"We have a lot of loyal customers, but they are looking for something new and they love twists on an old favorite. This summer, we have a new limited-time Whopper coming out with a tie-in to the Indiana Jones movie. Another limited-time Whopper is called the Angry Whopper. That has sliced jalapeño peppers and an onion with a spicy coating," he continues.

Fast-food companies perform an enormous amount of research before introducing new items. "Look at the size of fast-food menus compared to 15 years ago," says Steven Karr, CEO, Pride Pak Canada Ltd., headquartered in Mississauga, ON, Canada. "They've tripled. It creates all sorts of complications. They are continuously looking for something new, something different, but they are very careful because they need to make sure there will be supply year-round. Is there enough product out there to supply these fast-food chains on a continuous basis?"

That is a question Oak Brooks, IL-based McDonald's USA considers very carefully. "Our menu has expanded with the customer base that we serve. I would certainly say that it has continued to evolve," explains Danya Proud, spokeswoman. Last year, McDonald's rolled out new salads that included 16 types of lettuce and several unprecedented varieties of produce. "Consumer preferences have really changed. People want ingredients — like edamame and mandarin oranges — that they wouldn't have years ago."

Photo courtesy of McDonald's

In fact, edamame and mandarin oranges are part of McDonald's Premium Asian salad, introduced last year. Salads make up a large part of new fast-food offerings. "Consumers are all looking for something more healthful. Ten years ago, fast-food chains hardly offered any salads. Now they all have salads," adds Karr. "They're promot-

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ing full salads and they're promoting salads much more with combos. Salads are not selling so much as far as volume, but they're a big part of fast-food chains' marketing campaigns."

The healthful image is one that Milford, CT-based Subway has pursued for years with several Fresh Fit subs containing six grams of fat or less in addition to its calorie-laden subs, such as the Chicken & Bacon Ranch sandwich. The chain, a sponsor of the American Heart Association's Start! Heart Walk, is perhaps best known for its spokesperson, Jared Fogle, who lost 245 pounds eating low-fat Subway sandwiches and has maintained a healthy weight for 10 years while keeping the fast-food sandwiches in his diet.

According to Kevin Kane, public relations manager, Subway, the real emphasis is on choices. "Healthfulness is something that some customers look for and we try to assist by providing nutritional information in our restaurants and on our Web site. People look for many different things in their sandwiches. Some want low-fat options while others aren't as concerned with that. We just want to be able to provide the options so no matter what you are looking for in a sandwich, you can find it at Subway."

Photo courtesy of McDonald's

OFFER THE RIGHT CHOICES

As menus expand, so does the difficulty in providing a consistent product. In addition to training employees to make the new menu item, restaurants must also allocate space for preparation. Many companies are turning to processed produce to take those factors out of the equation.

Burger King is now testing pre-made, pre-packaged salads that will allow restaurant employees to just open and serve without any other work on their part. The packaging could allow Burger King to offer a larger variety of salads than before while saving labor costs and preparation space.

Burger King is now testing pre-made, pre-packaged salads that will allow restaurant employees to just open and serve without any other work on their part.

Currently, some salads, such as a cranberry-walnut salad that Burger King intends to make available in a few months, are sold only at Burger King restaurants in regions of the country where salads sell best, such as in larger urban areas and the Northeast. That could change with pre-packaged salads. "This will allow us to bring in a much bigger variety of salads everywhere and allow us to

How Green Is That Sandwich?

Fast-food restaurants might be the last place you would expect to find environmentalists chowing down. Yet, as more consumers make the effort to go green, many are interested in how the companies who make their meals affect the earth.

Tina Fitzgerald, director of produce, Independent Purchasing Cooperative, headquartered in Miami, FL, believes that Milford, CT-based Subway consumers and store owners are very interested in greener fast food. "A very big percentage of people care about sustainability. The latest polls show that some customers will pay even more for it." But that may never become necessary. "Our goal is to save our franchisees money," she adds. "You want to get more and more out of less and less."

For produce, food miles, or how far food travels from farm to fork — and therefore how much fuel is burned — is a major part of the equation. "Fuel affects everything that we buy," says Fitzgerald. To that end, efforts to make the sandwich chain more sustainable are more than altruistic. "You can find cost savings in sustainable solutions. It might be more efficient to ship sliced peppers because you reduce waste. If they can get the technology there to get the [12-day minimum] shelf-life requirement, this could be a solution."

Buying from nearby farms is occasionally an option. "We are looking at local buying," reports Fitzgerald. "In some areas, we can say we're using local tomatoes, but you can't necessarily do that everywhere."

Organic produce is also a favorite among the environmentally minded, but for Subway's 28,000 locations, this is not yet an option. "The level of demand is greater than the level of supply," Fitzgerald explains.

Steven Karr, CEO, Pride Pak Canada, Ltd., Mississauga, ON, Canada, says the demand for sustainable food comes from every link in the food chain — up to and including growers and processors. "If we destroy that land, we're going to pay the price for it. Everybody's scrambling, trying to find the answers, so that the right things are done."

Karr has spoken to fast-food restaurants about the possibility of procuring organic produce. "There have been discussions, but there is concern about product availability," he says. There is the liability that goes along with promising an organic product. "If something slips through the system there's always somebody there waiting to sue them."

Not every fast-food customer cares about organic produce. "I do think that consumers are concerned about the environment," explains Jonathan Muhtar, senior director of product marketing, Burger King Restaurants, based in Miami, FL. "Organics are a trend, but we haven't found it to be a strong driver of the purchase decisions of our core consumers."

Janet Erickson, executive vice president of purchasing and quality assurance, Del Taco, LLC, headquartered in Lake Forest, CA, says research shows that its consumers are more interested in fast, cheap, tasty food than environmental causes. "It has not touched us yet. Our consumers are not really telling us anything different than they have before." **pb**

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introduce those salad varieties all over the country instead of just those regions where salad sales are strong," reports Muhtar. "Additionally, we're testing whether we can position these salads as fresher because of the packaging."

While the produce portion of the salads would be completely pre-packaged and ready to serve, "We would add the grilled chicken to those salads because we have a strength in the area of flame-grilling," Burger King's Muhtar points out.

In recent years, McDonald's has used salads to add a healthful side to its image, although "It's less about healthful versus non-healthful," Proud explains. "Any expert will tell you there are no bad foods." Nonetheless, when McDonald's added more produce choices, including salads, to its menu, "The response was good. Our customers appreciate having choice and variety."

Fast-food chains have reason to be wary of new healthful items. Although research shows that consumers want more low-fat, nutritious options, "What the public is saying doesn't always translate to what they're purchasing," says Pride Pak's Karr, who often sits in fast-food restaurants to observe what consumers are ordering. He sees the difference in what consumer research shows will sell and what actually sells. "Last year, Wendy's [International, Columbus, OH] introduced melon salads. It thought it was going to capture the world by the tail with these, but they disappeared from the menu in no time."

While some restaurants are differentiating themselves from the competition by marketing themselves as healthful, others are sticking with the traditional selling points of fast food — quick, cheap and tasty.

Del Taco consumers are not seeking healthful meals, reports Janet Erickson, executive vice president of purchasing and quality assurance, Del Taco, LLC, Lake Forest, CA. However, she says, there is one area of the menu where healthful

Maintain Low Prices

The price of fast-food is a major selling point, which is why so many fast-food restaurants do everything they can to avoid raising the prices of menu items. Much of this is due to a weakening American dollar and the increasing costs of fertilizer, transportation, fuel, labor and now grains and meat. "Price has always been important, but the sad reality is prices are higher," explains Janet Erickson, executive vice president of purchasing and quality assurance, Del Taco, LLC, headquartered in Lake Forest, CA. "It's unique this year because the general public is facing the same food costs and fuel costs as the industry."

High food costs have turned out to be a double-edged sword for fast-food chains. Consumers looking to save money may turn from pricier restaurants to cheaper fast food, but these fast-food outlets may not be able to keep prices as low as diners are accustomed to. "Value is more important than ever in our current economy," according to Jonathan Muhtar, senior director of product marketing, Burger King Restaurants, headquartered in Miami, FL. For now, Burger King does not intend to raise its prices, although individual franchisees are allowed the flexibility to set their own prices below or above what corporate headquarters recommends.

Some question how restaurants will avoid price increases as items with the biggest profit margins are making room on the menu for high-cost salads and other fresh produce items. "They are selling fewer servings of sodas and fewer servings of fries than five years ago," notes Steven Karr, CEO, Pride Pak Canada Ltd., headquartered in Mississauga, ON, Canada. "I believe they are going to have to raise their prices. How will these fast-food chains survive if they don't?"

There is a silver lining in all of this for the produce industry. In the past, "Produce has tended to be much more volatile than the other commodities because of the seasonality of the products," explains Erickson. This year, however, "It has not been as dramatic in the produce segment as it has been in years past. Mercifully, produce has been less impacted so far than the other categories." In fact, perhaps for the fist time in fast-food history, produce is starting to look like a bargain. **pb**

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options make sense. "Right now, we are looking for some produce options for our kids meals. We're getting the sense that mothers are becoming more concerned about their kids eating healthfully. McDonald's has led the pack and we've got to follow what our competition is doing."

"It's all about what our consumers want. There has to be a demand for it at our restaurants and we have to be able to get it for all the restaurants on a consistent basis."

— Danya Proud
McDonald's USA

In 2004, McDonald's added Apple Dippers and low-fat milk as options for its Happy Meals.

Pride Pak's Karr agrees, adding, "Parents are concerned and trying to do a lot more for their kids than they do for themselves." He says children still eat french fries but are often given permission by their parents to do so after eating a produce item. "Down the road, we'll see more varieties being added for kids."

A year ago, Subway first introduced Fresh Fit options for kids meals, including low-fat subs and side options, such as apples, yogurt and raisins along with the traditional bag of chips. Subway is considering additional produce options for sides, such as carrots and grapes, according to Tina Fitzgerald, director of produce, Independent Purchasing Cooperative, Miami, FL, a franchisee-owned and operated purchasing cooperative for the owners of Subway. As with Burger King's Apple Fries, "Adults may want that instead of chips," she adds.

"The feedback we have received is that families are thankful any time you can provide vegetables as an option on their child's sandwich," points out Subway's Kane. "As kids get older, they appreciate being able to customize their sandwich the way they like with the vegetables they like."

KEEP IT FRESH AND TASTY

Flavor and freshness are important factors for new fast-food items. "For us, the biggest driving factor for our consumers is taste," explains Burger Kings' Muhtar. Fresh produce plays a huge role in that. "Our Whopper is known for having a lot of fresh produce on it. Whenever we do a limited-time offer, we always keep those core produce items as part of that."

"Our customers are looking for taste," according to Erickson of Del Taco. "We did some consumer research last year and found that our consumers are people who love Mexican food and who love spice."

Most importantly, "It's all about what our consumers want," reports Proud of McDonald's. "There has to be a demand for it at our restaurants and we have to be able to get it for all the restaurants on a consistent basis." **pb**

Photo courtesy of Burger King

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Stress-Free Meals Incorporate Fresh Produce

FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES SERVE AS STAPLE INGREDIENTS FOR MEAL-PREPARATION CONCEPT.

By Amy Shannon

Meal-assembly centers (MACs) are quickly gaining fans among consumers who gravitate toward healthful meals but away from complicated preparation steps and costly ingredients. The meal-preparation concept takes the stress out of figuring out what to make for dinner by allowing consumers to assemble multiple meals that can be refrigerated or frozen. Although the popular business helps consumers cut corners on time, they don't have to settle for less when it comes to flavorful ingredients.

"Our guests are looking for restaurant-quality meals without the hassle, therefore, we feel the need to provide the same high-quality ingredients that we get at the best restaurants in town. Obviously fresh produce is a key part of this value," explains Howard Rosenthal, CEO of Mr. Food No-Fuss Meals, a Fort Lauderdale, FL-based franchised operation with 14 locations.

With more than 442 meal preparation companies and more than 1,300 outlets nationwide, according to the Easy Meal Prep Association (EMPA), Oak Creek, WI, this growing segment of the foodservice industry relies heavily on fresh produce to add fresh taste, texture and nutrition to its offerings.

"Produce is definitely playing an increasing role in the meal-preparation business," explains Bert Vermeulen, EMPA founder and president of the Easy Meal Prep Company, a Cheyenne, WY-based consulting company for meal-prep businesses. "The whole industry is focused on providing more healthful foods, and produce is certainly a driving force in that trend."

Using fresh produce is a critical part of the success for Mr. Food No-Fuss Meals, reports Rosenthal. "The items we use most are fresh herbs, parsley, basil, rosemary, oregano, and of course, onions, carrots, celery and spinach highlight a lot of our dishes."

Mr. Food invites consumers to prepare fresh, great-tasting, family-sized meals in a unique, interactive environment using appropriate packaging, ingredients and instructions. Consumers select their dishes from the monthly menu and follow recipes posted on the salad bar-like counters filled with the dish's components, such as chicken, cooked pasta, fresh herbs and sauces. Completed dishes can be taken home in plastic freezer bags or aluminum containers to be refrigerated or frozen until they are ready to be baked.

Photo courtesy of Mr. Food No-Fuss Meals

Organizations or groups of friends are encouraged to let Mr. Food host a private party or corporate event. Consumers are also welcome to bring a bottle of wine to enjoy while cooking. Mr. Food also offers the opportunity for consumers to earn free meals through reward points and referrals.

The company opened its flagship store in 2004 in Coral Springs, FL, and started franchise operations the next year. The no-fuss idea originated with Art Ginsberg, also known as Mr. Food,

the star of the 26-year-old nationally syndicated cooking show, *Mr. Food*. "When we first started Mr. Food No-Fuss Meals, we found that all of the other similar-type concepts use mostly frozen vegetables and/or dried herbs. Unfortunately that didn't meet our standards and we [realized we] have to provide the freshest ingredients possible to satisfy our guests," adds Rosenthal.

Mr. Food No-Fuss Meals uses Sysco Corp., based in Houston, TX, as one of its primary vendors. "We work closely with its buyers to ensure consistency and the freshest product for all of our stores," Rosenthal explains. "On occasion, we work with specialty buyers to obtain unique items. This keeps our menu fresh and exciting for our guests."

Sysco delivers an average of two shipments per week to each Mr. Food MAC. Produce items include diced, slivered, whole and green onions, fresh herbs, carrots, sliced mushrooms, celery, broccoli florets, tomatoes, garlic, lettuce, pineapple, lemons and spinach, according to Eryn Miller, Sysco marketing associate. "The most popular produce items are onions, tomatoes, lettuce, carrots, celery and lemons. Mr. Food buys mostly fresh produce, but they do buy a little frozen, as well."

Each Mr. Food location goes through hundreds of pounds of fresh produce each week; approximately 90 percent of its dishes include fresh produce. The Mr. Food No-Fuss Meals menu changes monthly and includes a dozen or more dishes. July's selections include chicken Picasso with lemon, fresh mushrooms and fresh seasonings,

Meal-Preparation Industry Pushing Cost Savings

As the economy continues to free-fall, consumers are rethinking how they spend their food dollars, taking a toll on meal-assembly centers (MACs) and all sectors of the foodservice industry.

"We are constantly searching the marketplace for the best product at the best price," notes Eryn Miller, marketing associate, Sysco Corp., the Houston, TX-based supplier that works with multiple meal-preparation businesses. "We also offer a huge selection of items that are sold in small-case sizes or as splits to help customers from purchasing more than they need. This also eliminates waste and overstocking their inventory."

While some MACs have been forced to close, many are staying positive by promoting the concept's cost-savings. "It's an affordable luxury," explains Howard Rosenthal, CEO of Mr. Food No-Fuss Meals, Fort Lauderdale, FL.

Many companies, including Mr. Food, Easy Entrées of Lakewood, CO, and Simply Homemade of Naperville, IL, have put together price comparisons to illustrate the money that can be saved by purchasing meals from a meal-prep company.

In the following chart, Mr. Food compares the cost of its Greek Isles chicken with the cost of making the dish with ingredients purchased at a supermarket and with a comparable restaurant dish.

Greek Isles Chicken (serves 4 to 6)

Ingredient	Supermarket Price
All-natural white-meat chicken	$ 6.48
Fresh baby spinach	$ 3.59
Fresh tomatoes	$ 2.41
Feta cheese	$ 3.61
Greek olives	$ 2.19
Chicken gravy	$ 1.99
Lemon	$ .89
Fresh oregano	$ 1.99
Heavy cream	$ 1.20
Total Supermarket Cost:	$ 24.35
Mr. Food No-Fuss Meals: (serves 4 to 6)	$ 20.95
Approx. Cost Savings:	$ 3.40
Restaurant Price: (for 6 guests @ $13.95 each)	$ 83.70
Mr. Food No-Fuss Meals: (serves 4 to 6)	$ 20.95
Approx. Cost Savings: (at 6 servings)	$ 62.75

Source: Mr. Food No-Fuss Meals

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and hula hula pork accented by pineapple, cherries and green peppers.

YEAR-ROUND OBSTACLES

One of the biggest challenges to operating successful MACs is obtaining high quality produce year-round. "Since we are a franchised operation, consistency is critical," explains Rosenthal. "At times, we will use shortcuts by working with superior-grade canned tomatoes, frozen peas and corn. This way we are always getting the best tasting produce available any time of year."

The MAC must also provide its employees with the proper training so they know how to correctly rotate, store and order its products. "Our unique layout allows for plenty of fresh produce storage," adds Mr. Food's Rosenthal. "We also have our staff prep these items on a daily basis."

Sysco's Miller says the challenges at the supply end are the same for meal-preparation businesses as they are for all types of food establishments. "The largest challenge is making sure product is delivered at peak freshness. Produce has an extremely short shelf life, making this a constant challenge. Plus, fresh produce brings a higher level of quality to the final product. The texture and flavors of fresh produce are very difficult to obtain if used at their frozen stage."

EMERGING TRENDS

The concept of MACs was created in 1999 after several organizations began to offer sophisticated cooking classes. Three years later, the first

Photo courtesy of Mr. Food No-Fuss Meals

Meal-Assembly Centers Partner With Supermarkets

The majority of meal-preparation centers are freestanding operations, but a few have found success partnering with local supermarkets. In fact, between five and 10 retailers have teamed up with meal-preparations companies, operating either on site or at an adjacent location, explains Bert Vermeulen, founder of the Easy Meal Prep Association, Oak Creek, WI.

Although the concept has met with mixed opinions, many industry insiders are saying take-and-bake businesses are not taking business away from retailers. Instead, both operations are pulling from each other's walk-up traffic. "Generally, when a meal-preparation center is next to a grocery store, both parties benefit, he notes. "If you want to pick up milk at the same time you pick up dinner, it's all in the same place."

Howard Rosenthal, CEO of Mr. Food No-Fuss Meals, Fort Lauderdale, FL, agrees, adding, "I don't truly believe meal-prep centers are affecting grocery stores any more than restaurants or fast-food providers do. All of us are competing for the consumers' dinner-time dollar. We are, however, finding that more and more consumers, in these economic times, prefer to eat at home rather than at restaurants. This saves them fuel costs and the price of a meal-prep meal is considerably less — not to mention you don't have to tip Mom."

Vermeulen, who is also the president of the Easy Meal Prep Company, Cheyenne, WY, says retailers are incorporating the meal-preparation concept into their stores in varying ways. "All are going pretty well. They're drawing in customers — many who would normally go out to dinner — just as a dress store would for a shoe store."

In January 2007, Piggly Wiggly Carolina Co., Inc., a Charleston, SC-based chain with more than 600 stores, entered into a licensing agreement with Dream Dinners, a Seattle, WA-based meal-preparation center. The retailer approached the company in an effort to offer its consumers more in-store mealtime options. Piggly Wiggly consumers can schedule in-store appointments with Dream Dinners to assemble meals from a variety of menu options.

In April 2007, Studio Gourmet, Yardley, PA, opened its only outlet inside a McCaffrey's in Yardley, PA, where consumers can complete their food shopping and meal preparation in one stop. The supermarket is one of five retail stores owned by McCaffrey's Supermarkets, Langhorne, PA. "They are two independent businesses working very closely together," Vermeulen explains.

In late 2007, Schnuck Markets, Inc., a St. Louis, MO-based chain with more than 100 stores, opened Meal Creations, an interactive meal-planning facility attached to a Schnucks supermarket in Dardenne Prairie, MO. "In this case, Schnuck has full ownership," he notes.

"There is also one in a Publix [Super Markets, Inc., based in Lakeland, FL] in Jacksonville, [FL]," he adds. **pb**

franchise MAC opened under the name Dream Dinners. Today, the Snohomish, WA-based MAC owns more than 230 locations in 34 states.

"It started out with moms coming in and putting together 12 meals to refrigerate or freeze for later use," explains EMPA's Vermeulen, but consumers are beginning to show interest in purchasing single-serving pre-made meals to consume either the same day or the next.

Photo courtesy of Dinner Me Quickly

Photo courtesy of Mr. Food No-Fuss Meals

"Take-and-bake is the key concept this year," Vemeulen continues. Traditional foodservice outlets are offering take-and-bake options to compete in areas where MACs are gaining strength. "Businesses like Nick-N-Willy's Pizza [headquartered in Centennial, CO] are making pizza and other meals fresh in the store, but the customer cooks it at home." The fast-casual restaurant franchise offers pizzas in fresh and ready, open-air coolers so customers can stop in on their way home and pick up a fresh pizza to cook in their own oven.

While a time saver, this restaurant take-and-bake concept doesn't fulfill the social networking aspect of a Mr. Food or other MAC.

"Other places are offering things like grilled herbed chicken," Vermeulen adds. "They're various dinners prepared fresh that customers can pick up and enjoy that same night. Some people may pick up to three meals to cook over the next few days — all prepared fresh."

MACs are increasingly offering consumers side items to take home to accompany their main dishes. Many of these side items are fresh vegetables that can be refrigerated. "That's where the fresh produce is coming in," Vermeulen reports. "The original concept consisted of a main entrée only, but that is all starting to change. It's becoming more about the entire meal."

Other popular produce items making their way onto side item lists include green beans, corn, mashed potatoes and fresh vegetables other than traditional lettuce or salad items. "The idea is that they can buy everything for dinner in one trip," reports Vermeulen.

According to Miller, Sysco supplies several value-added produce items, such as mashed potatoes and potato wedges to Mr. Food for use as side dishes. **pb**

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Organics Becoming A Mainstay In Foodservice

MORE RESTAURANTS ARE USING FRESH PRODUCE IN AN EFFORT TO INCORPORATE ORGANIC, ECO-FRIENDLY OFFERINGS.

By Lisa Lieberman

Foodservice can be one of the toughest industries to break into. Studies show that at least half of all restaurants fail within the first three to five years of business. That's why it's critical for restaurants and other foodservice operators to stay in tune with what their patrons want. Today, one of the special ingredients to a successful foodservice operation is offering environmentally friendly, organic produce.

"Some chefs are really into the 'green' of their menu," explains Robert Schueller, director of public relations, Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc., a Los Angeles, CA-based distributor that offers 350 different types of organic produce items to mostly white-tablecloth restaurants along the West Coast. "There is certainly a driving trend in organics."

Melinda Richardson, national account manager for Pacific International Marketing, based in Salinas, CA, has observed an increasing demand for organics in foodservice — in all levels of the industry — ranging from white-tablecloth to casual family-dining restaurants. "As more stories about food safety pop up in the news and as people become more concerned about their health and the environment, we're seeing a greater demand for organics all over."

Traditionally, organics have almost exclusively been the domain of white tablecloth chefs, but that is rapidly changing. "Today, we see the trends trickling down to other types of foodservice operators, including some casual operators who are putting one or two organic items on the menu because their consumers are asking for it," Richardson explains. "Organics have been all over the news and when you see major retailers, like Wal-Mart, who you wouldn't normally think of as getting into organics, everyone kind of stands up and takes notice."

Pizza Fusion, an eco-friendly national fast-casual chain headquartered in Ft. Lauderdale, FL, is raising the green movement bar with its nearly all-organic menu made up of gourmet pizzas, ciabatta sandwiches and salads. With the majority of its ingredients being organic, it's no surprise the rapidly growing franchise uses a number of produce items to round out its menu selections. "We have about 15 organic produce items we bring in regularly, including peppers, tomatoes, broccoli, garlic and basil," reports Ashley Rathgeber, supply chain manager. "We try to source as local as possible to cut down on food miles and to support local farmers."

All photos courtesy of Pizza Fusion

The rapidly expanding restaurant purchases $650 to $700 worth of organic produce items per week for each of its six stores, she notes. Pizza Fusion, which opened its first location in February 2006 in Deerfield Beach, FL, plans to open 25 more locations over the next year and has another 45 locations in the early development stages.

SUPPLY GROWS WHILE COST SLOWLY DROPS

One reason organics have become more prevalent in nontraditional foodservice venues is that cost of organic produce has come down over

the past couple of years, bringing it more in line with the prices of conventional produce, Richardson of Pacific International reports. "Organic growers are growing produce more efficiently and using new seed and varieties, so in a lot of cases, you're not paying more than [an additional] $2 a box for organics than you would for conventional produce. This makes it easier for foodservice operators to use organics because it's not as much of a financial risk."

Another reason more casual-dining restaurants have been able to afford organics is because it has become easier to order a variety of organic items in bulk, according to Frank McCarthy, vice president of marketing for Albert's Organics, Inc., Bridgeport, NJ. "One thing that almost any restaurant can do is get a foodservice salad kit that has a couple of 4-pound bags of green organics, salad dressings, tomatoes and cucumbers. This allows them to put at least one organic item on the menu for their customers."

The good thing about these organic foodservice salad kits is that everything comes in one box, so it's easy to store all the organic items together in one place, McCarthy adds.

Organic salad mixes are definitely the leader in all organic produce at foodservice, especially in casual and institutional operations, comments Jon Kiley, senior manager of foodservice sales, Earthbound Farm, San Juan, CA. "Organic salad mixes are a great first step to incorporating organic food onto a menu. People are accustomed to choosing organic salads at retail and so they get excited when they see organics on the menu at their favorite eating establishments."

Other popular organic produce items appearing on restaurant menus include tomatoes, onions, lettuce, mixed greens, basil, parsley, cilantro, potatoes and berries, reports Melissa's Schueller. He is also seeing increasing interest in organic heirloom tomatoes, organic bell peppers and organic avocados.

Matt Roberts, marketing coordinator, CF Fresh, based in Sedro Wooley, WA, says organic vegetables are becoming more popular than organic fruit at the foodservice level. "There are companies like Earthbound and some people on the veggie side that are doing a lot of organics in the foodservice business."

As the organic fruit category begins to pick up steam at the retail level, "You're going to see it filtering more into foodservice and see more restaurants putting organic fruit on their menus," Roberts continues.

NEW ORGANIC ITEMS HELP SALES

To make it easier for a variety of foodservice operators to provide organic produce to their customers, Earthbound recently developed a proprietary 2-pound clamshell self-shipper that helps extend the shelf life of greens and vegetables, Kiley notes.

Along with packaging innovations, the growing availability of fresh-cut stir-fry vegetables, such as celery, peppers and onions, is also helping to create more demand for organic produce at the foodservice level, according to Bonnie Poux, president of Access Organics, Inc., Whitefish, MT. "When you have more availability of organic produce items like these, it has a big impact on sup-

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plies and makes it easier for people in foodservice to become more involved with organics."

Brooke Cain, sales and marketing representative, Classic Salads, LLC, based in Watsonville, CA, agrees, noting a steadier supply of organics is making it easier for foodservice companies to offer organic dishes on their menus. "The new trend right now is definitely organics, so our sales team has been marketing more organic commodities, including spring mix, baby spinach and baby arugula. We're also focusing on coming up with more specialty organic items since that's what really sells these days."

The demand for organics at colleges has become especially strong in the past 18 months, especially on the East and West Coasts, where many food trends get started.

Misionero Vegetables, based in Salinas, CA, also reports a growing demand from foodservice operators for organic product. The grower, shipper and processor of certified organic products offers several standardized organic foodservice packages, including spring mix, spinach and arugula, explains Danny Canales, vice president of sales and marketing. "We do 13 to 14 different blends of mixes and individual bulk items. Our newest item is a washed, trimmed and ready-to-use head of romaine lettuce that you can use right out of the bag."

ORGANICS TREND QUICKLY SPREADING

As more consumers become accustomed to enjoying organic items at their favorite restaurants, organic fruits and vegetables are appearing in other foodservice venues, including universities and colleges throughout the country.

"Organics are really expanding in colleges and universities," according to Lloyd Ligier, vice president of business development for Pro*Act, a distributor of fresh produce to the foodservice industry headquartered in Monterey, CA. "It seems college students are on the cutting edge of movements, and students these days want healthful locally grown organic produce."

The demand for organics at colleges has become especially strong in the past 18 months, especially on the East and West Coasts, where many food trends get started, reports Albert's

McCarthy. "There's a big mixture of public and private universities that are demanding more organic produce. Most of the time, it can be as simple as providing organics for the cafeteria's salad bar or just a few organic apples."

Cruise ship lines and private hospitals are also getting onboard to meet consumers' growing desire for organic produce, he adds. "In hospitals, there are patients who are incredibly sensitive to pesticides and need organics.

"In high-end cruise lines, there's a lot of competition for customers, and people tend to choose one cruise line over another because of the quality of the food. Using organic foods, particularly fresh produce, is one way cruise lines can differentiate themselves from their competitors," Albert's McCarthy explains.

High-end restaurants at professional sporting venues are also getting into the organics game. "There are about 80 major professional sports venues in the United States," states McCarthy. "Some of the sky boxes in these venues have exclusive restaurants with chefs who are experimenting in organics."

CONSUMERS WILLING TO PAY MORE

When restaurants and other foodservice venues offer organic produce, it typically requires setting their prices higher than they would with conventional produce. This is the case for Pizza Fusion, where prices run slightly higher than other pizza restaurants in order to offset the price of the organic ingredients it uses.

That doesn't deter customers who find value in shelling out a little more for a better-prepared, better-tasting product, Pizza Fusion's Rathgeber explains. "Our customers love it. There are very few places you can go and have the assurance that what you're buying is organic and handled correctly all the way from the source to the store."

According to a December 2007 National Restaurant Association (NRA) survey, 62 percent of consumers say they are likely to choose a restaurant based on how environmentally friendly it is. Statistics like this are evidence organics in foodservice is a trend that will continue to grow, notes Earthbound's Kiley. "I think that the data from the NRA survey shows sustainability, personal and environmental health matter increasingly more to consumers [who] are voting with their dollars because organic food satisfies the need for all three of these things." **pb**

Overcoming Year-Round Supply Challenges

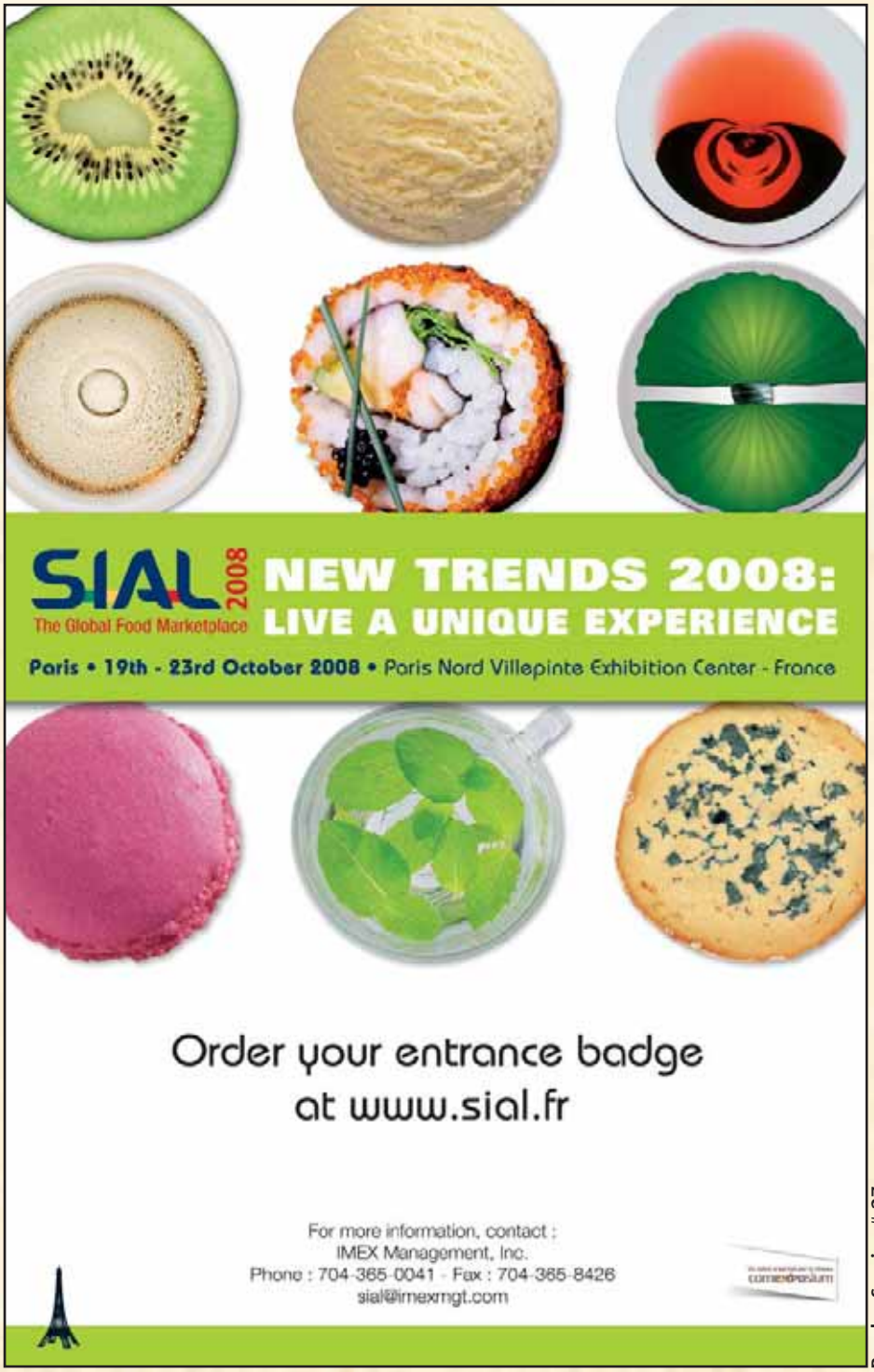
Although organic ingredients are becoming a mainstay on menus all across the country, finding year-round supplies of organic produce items still presents a challenge.

"Organic items are much more seasonal than conventional produce," reports Robert Schueller, director of public relations, Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc., Los Angeles. "You're much more limited in availability and that can be very intimidating for restaurant owners. This is something they must take into consideration when creating their menus."

Ashley Rathgeber, supply chain manager, Pizza Fusion, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, can relate. "The supply game has been a huge challenge for us. We've been toying with the idea of having some items seasonally or substituting in a conventional alternative when we need to." The organic pizza chain is also considering removing specific organic produce items from its menu when they are out of season and unavailable. "We don't want to compromise the integrity of our menu items."

Rathgeber admits it's relatively easy to find supplies of organic broccoli and lettuce throughout the year, but for items such as organic tri-colored peppers and even tomatoes sometimes, it can be difficult to find year-round supplies.

"We're usually able to find some type of organic tomato," she notes. "It may not always be the same type of tomato. We may get organic beefsteaks or romas or cherry tomatoes, depending on what time of the year it is." **pb**



Reader Service # 27

Five Ways To Promote Produce On The Grill

Excitement, health and convenience make grill season a great time to promote fresh fruits and vegetables.

BY TRISHA WOOLDRIDGE

With summer in full swing, consumers are firing up their grills across the nation.

Thanks to the growing consumer desire for food information and experimentation, more people are moving beyond throwing hot dogs and hamburgers on the grill and looking to prepare entire meals there. Grills provide a healthful food preparation alternative and allow cooks to keep the kitchen cool when the temperature soars. Retailers that use the produce department to create excitement about grilling create opportunities for increased sales.

"Grilling makes a nutritious meal," explains Scott Seddon, marketing and advertising specialist, Pero Vegetable Company, LLC, headquartered in Delray Beach, FL. "It takes the heat out of the kitchen, keeps the electric bill down and adds a rich flavor to the average vegetable."

1. COOK UP SOMETHING NEW

Whether it is a new twist on an old favorite such as shish kebab or an unusual fresh choice, consumers want something different to cook up on the grill. Retailers trying to figure out what to include in a grill display or where to put a great-for-grilling POS sign should consider vegetables and fruits not commonly associated with grilling. "Cucumbers have a light citrus flavor," advises Seddon. "The grill turns up the flavor, and they add a crisp crunch to a salad or a sandwich."

Sweet potatoes are also growing in popularity. They can be cooked on the grill in foil, just like conventional potatoes. George Wooten, CEO, Wayne E. Bailey Produce Company, Inc., Chadbourn, NC, shares more options. "Sweet potatoes are great for shish kebabs. Cube them and try them with mushrooms, peppers and pineapple on skewers." This season, the company is offering sweet potato slabs in fresh-cut packages and in bulk. The product is cut in a horizontal filet like a steak. "It's a very healthful option. The caramelization from the grill really brings out the flavor," Wooten notes.

Gina Nucci, director of foodservice marketing, Mann Packing Co., Inc., Salinas, CA, suggests, "Blanche artichokes, drizzle with olive oil and balsamic vinegar, and finish them off on the grill. Try fruit, such as grilled pineapple or cherimoya with ice cream."

"Mangos just taste like summer," notes Wendy McManus, director of marketing, National Mango Board (NMB), Orlando, FL. "They're so much fun [to grill]. They have a tropical, sunny flavor. With grilling, mangos are extremely versatile. Any grilled protein really goes well with mangos as a chutney, sauce or relish."

To help retailers inform consumers about the various ways mangos can be incorporated into grilled dishes, NMB produced recipe cards that are

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available to retailers upon request. Recipes include jerk chicken with spicy mango topper, grilled mango with spicy rum glaze and vanilla ice cream, and bacon-wrapped pork with spicy mango-basil relish.

"Grilled mangos work well as a side item, dessert or on shish kebabs with fresh-cut pineapple," McManus points out. "Grilling intensifies and brings out the flavor of mangos. They make a nice and refreshing dessert if you want to do something other than the traditional fruit bowl after dinner."

Fruit is a great grill item that few people think about. "People shy away from fruit because it's not traditional to grill, but a lot of fruits work very well on the grill," according to Rob White, produce manager, Living Earth Foods, a single-store natural health food market in Worcester, MA. While the store offers traditional skewers of mushrooms, onions, cherry tomatoes, bell peppers and summer squash, White suggests fruit skewers, such as "mango and apple brushed with cinnamon and ginger," for a special treat. He lists many fruits, including peaches, apricots, apples, pears and melons, as rarely considered options that are particularly good matches for the grill. But forego berries, he adds. They're too delicate for the high heat of the grill and best eaten fresh.

Citrus fruits are great on the grill. Celebrity chef Jill Davie, who represents Sherman Oaks, CA-based Sunkist Growers, Inc., as the Sunkist Lemon Lady and is host of *Shopping with Chefs* on the Fine Living network, says citrus fruits can be warmed on the grill right in their skins to release juices for sauces and marinades. As ingredients, citrus fruits work very well with white meat and fish, but they can also be infused into barbeque sauces or used in marinades. "They're low fat and make their own sauce," she adds. "They're simple and delicious."

2. SUGGEST UNCONVENTIONAL PAIRINGS

Cross-promotion is a well-known strategy for boosting sales for not only the department but also the store as a whole. When it comes to grilling, it's almost too easy. Cross-merchandising produce with good-for-grilling cuts of meat or providing pre-packaged skewer or shish kebab kits is just the beginning. Retailers can combine cheese from the dairy department, breads from the bakery and marinades and grilling hardware from grocery into one large display.

"Cross-merchandise with dressings and marinades," recommends Tony Tuteri, a produce manager with Stop & Shop Supermarket Company, a Quincy, MA-based chain with more than 355 stores and a wholly owned subsidiary of Ahold USA, Inc., based in Braintree, MA. "People want to try new flavors on the grill, and there are so many now."

"Produce departments shouldn't forget about fresh herbs when creating a grilling theme," White adds. "Dill, rosemary and thyme match well with grilling. We take advantage of the local fresh herbs and pair them with grilling promotions for an extra ring." He suggests promoting the use of large rosemary boughs as skewers, noting, "It puts the taste right into the food."

Many suppliers offer ready-to-go promotions. For the third year, Mann is partnering with Reynolds Wrap on grilling promotions. Free-standing display units will feature Reynolds Wrap products and include a grilling guide featuring recipes and coupons for Mann's products. Just about any vegetable can be cooked on the grill with foil squares, notes Nucci.

In a recent press release, Lorri Koster, Mann vice president of marketing, says, "We like this promotion because it provides new ideas for using vegetables beyond traditional stir-fry or steam applications. It's also a fresh idea because it adds more healthful options to the traditional barbecue-type recipes."

Who Needs Meat?

As the number of vegetarians, vegans and health-conscious consumers grows, the produce department should take an active role in offering alternatives for the usual center-of-the-plate grill protein, such as hot dogs and hamburgers.

Portobello mushroom caps have become a popular vegetarian choice in restaurants. With their naturally beefy flavor, the mushrooms provide several health benefits. Fred Recchiuti, general manager for Basciani Mushroom Farms, Avondale, PA, notes, "They are high in powerful antioxidants and asparagine [an important amino acid], as well as niacin and riboflavin. For vegetarians, they're a good source of these nutrients often found in meat."

Another popular alternative is tofu. Firm tofu can be marinated like any cut of meat and grilled like soft-fleshed fish. Softer tofu works well in foil-wrapped mixes of seasoned vegetables on the grill. There are also a growing number of tofu products that work for grilling. Rob White, produce manager, Living Earth Foods, Worcester, MA, relates, "We have a tofu section with our veggie burgers, and we offer marinated tofu steaks, ready to grill, as well as veggie dogs and tofu sausages."

By offering produce-based center-of-the-plate items and teaching consumers about these alternatives, produce departments can continue to boost sales by making the department the one-stop answer for an entire meal on the grill. **pb**

Photo courtesy of National Mango Board

Bacon-wrapped pork with spicy mango-basil relish is one of the grilling recipes available from the National Mango Board.

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Cross-promotion and merchandising capitalize on grilling's convenience factor, with many stores stocking small grills and charcoal during grilling season. Creating a grill display with everything consumers need in one place creates a one-stop shopping experience and can serve as an informational provider by showing consumers how to prepare the items they purchase. And when consumers find unusual or unexpected on the display, it boosts impulse sales.

3. CREATE A FEAST FOR THE EYES

"People eat with their eyes," explains Sunkist's Davie. Pictures of prepared foods inspire consumers and show them what the finished product should look like. "People normally just see the produce in the produce aisle, but they need to see what they can make with it."

"Have a nice display," suggests Eric Wusterbearth, a produce manager with Stop & Shop. "It depends on the store, but a nice end cap with recipe cards and a grill helps increase sales."

Stop & Shop's Tuteri agrees, adding, "Just set up [products] near grills with charcoal and lighter fluid." Displays that include prepared and fresh-cut product for shish kebabs play up the convenience factor. Combine traditional skewer items, such as peppers, onions, mushrooms and tomatoes, with less conventional options, such as squash, sweet potato, apple, yucca or ginger chunks. This caters to a wide variety of consumers and catches their eye with vibrant color combinations. Include recipe cards and pictures to show people how good the finished product looks. Plan impactful displays to inspire sales, draw consumers to the products and show them the possibilities.

4. EDUCATE CONSUMERS

Good displays and advertising play an important role in teaching consumers why they should explore options for grilling produce.

Many consumers won't try something without being exposed to it first. A lot of people are fearful when it comes to cooking, Davie points out. "When working with ingredients that are new to them, people don't rely on their senses because they think they don't know what they're doing and they don't trust their instincts." Showing people pictures of what food should look like, along with detailed preparation instructions, helps allay those fears. With the rise of celebrity chefs who show TV viewers how to use various produce items, consumers are more willing to try products because they trust the chef's knowledge. If a celebrity chef isn't available, "Offer recipe cards and pictures," she adds.

Wusterbearth agrees, "Having recipes available helps increase sales. I always see people grabbing recipe cards."

> **"When you have a sale on grilling vegetables, list them all and group them together. Advertise for awareness."**
>
> **—Tony Tuteri**
> **Stop & Shop Supermarket Company**

Living Earth offer recipes throughout its department. "Promote to help consumers find healthful, creative options on the grill," White suggests. "[Consumers] want recipes out there with ideas of how to use the products on the grill." It's also important for retailers to select fruits and vegetables ready to grill, he adds. "Make sure [the product] is firm, ripe and ready to eat. Don't use unripe fruits or vegetables."

"When you have a sale on grilling vegetables, list them all and group them together," Tuteri suggests. This helps consumers realize how many items can be grilled successfully. "Advertise for awareness."

5. LIGHT UP SOME EXCITEMENT

Retailers should take advantage of the association between grilling and summer festivities. Major summer holidays, such as Memorial Day, Father's Day, the Fourth of July and Labor Day, are easy to match with a backyard grilling theme.

Bright signage and festive advertising can be the first step, but consider going the extra mile and throwing a little party in produce. "Have an outdoor grilling party," suggests Davie. "Invite consumers to the store for a grill party."

Setting up a grill outside the store — or inside the department, if it's a small camp-grill and fire regulations permit — and offering patrons a chance to taste grilled produce can go a long way in driving sales. After a demonstration showing how easy it is to prepare the items, people are less afraid to try them at home.

To celebrate summer grilling and help retailers boast sales, Del Monte Fresh Produce, North America, Inc., based in Coral Gables, FL, partnered with the leading grill maker, Char-Broil, Columbus, GA, to launch the *Fresh Grill Thrill Sweepstakes*. Del Monte will promote the 2-year-old sweepstakes with special tags and stickers on its Extra Sweet pineapples, bananas, melons and fresh-cut products. Participating retailers can request in-store merchandising support, including shipper displays, promotional posters and demo events.

"This year, the sweepstakes is an integral part of our campaign to help consumers lead more healthful lifestyles," explains Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing. "When consumers realize how easy it is to incorporate fresh fruits into a variety of grilling recipes or even as a side dish to complement their barbeque chicken, meats, or seafood, we are certain that they will become a staple on every grill.

"Retailers should keep in mind that consumers are focusing their recipes around healthful eating and will continue to demand more fruits," Christou continues. "This means more repeat sales and profits for retailers." **pb**

Photo courtesy of Mann Packing Co.

New York State Supplies A Wide Swath Of The Country

The Empire State's depth of offerings and myriad of promotional initiatives give retailers many opportunities to build vegetable sales.

BY LIZ PARKS

New York state may not have as long a growing season as more southern states, but it has advantages that make its produce extremely high in quality, wonderfully diverse, very affordable and locally available to almost half of the country within just a day's drive.

Some New York farms grow as many as 50 different types of produce, according to the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM), Albany, NY, in one year. In 2007, the state ranked second nationally in cabbage production, third in cauliflower production, fourth in snap beans, sweet corn and pumpkin, fifth in onions and squash, and sixth in cucumber production, according to Stephen Ropel, NYSDAM director.

Much of the diversity is a result of New York's climate and soil, which consists of mostly organic matter, according to Jessica Chittenden, director of communications for the New York Field Office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). The New York Field Office is operated in cooperation with NYSDAM.

Photo courtesy of New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets

New York farmers follow some of the best business practices in the nation, notes Ropel. "The common practice of rotating crops combined with our good soil and climate also make it relatively easy for farmers here to plant a wide variety of crops. Crop rotation is an economical and natural way to control pests without using pesticides. It's cheaper and the absence of pesticides makes our produce more appealing to consumers."

John Vasapoli, produce director, D'Agostino Supermarkets, Inc., a Larchmont, NY-based chain with 18 stores, buys a wide variety of produce from New York state growers. "Many New York farmers have adopted the practices of the more sophisticated farmers out west so the product looks good, is fresher and lasts longer because it goes from the farm right to the store," he explains. "It does not spend time with a middle man. It takes less time to get to the marketplace, and when it comes to us from within 100 miles, we market it as locally grown. Our consumers like that. They want to support local agriculture. Plus, it keeps the cost low because less fuel is used transporting it to us."

The quality of the soil in New York is "excellent for produce and for cabbage," notes Helen Sam, office manager, A Sam And Sons Produce Farms, Inc., Dunkirk, NY, and spokeswoman for its sister company, Dayoub Marketing, Inc., Fredonia, NY. Dayoub is an international marketing company that provides custom and special packs as well as custom labeling the retailers can use to brand the cabbage they buy.

Formed by glaciers thousands of years ago, the nutrient-rich, fertile, dark soils of New York produce very pungent onions that are wonderful for cooking, according to Judy Queale-Dunsmoor, president of sales and marketing for New York Bold, LLC, an Oswego, NY-based marketing cooperative for New York's pungent local onions. Queale-Dunsmoor's farm, John Dunsmoor Farms, Inc., Oswego,

NY, is a member of the 17-member New York Bold cooperative.

High in antioxidants, New York onions provide numerous health benefits, states Queale-Dunsmoor. Studies show they can help prevent and fight cancer, and help prevent strokes. Similar health information is prominently featured on packaging for New York Bold onions.

> **"The growers can deliver overnight, so the produce is always fresh and the quality is always good."**
>
> **— Dominick Doria**
> **Grace's Marketplace**

DIVERSITY ENABLES SINGLE-SOURCE PURCHASING

Providing variety at any given time makes it easier for retailers to consolidate their purchases from a single-source supply, notes Maureen Torrey Marshall, vice president, Torrey Farms, Inc., Elba, NY. Diversity helps lower the costs of transporting produce because many New York growers can ship multiple types of produce in the same truck. "Apple growers, for example, can ship five or more different varieties at one time," she points out.

Laurie Gregori, spokeswoman, Lynn-ette & Sons, Inc., Kent, NY, agrees, adding, "Because we're diversified, we can make up mixtures up to 10 truckloads a day going out of here to different areas. That volume makes it easier for our produce buyers because they have the capability of receiving five, six, seven different crops on one truck." Produce is typically not kept more than a day in Lynn-ette's warehouse either. Shipments go out on the same or next day they are packed, further enhancing freshness."

BENEFITS OF LOCALLY GROWN

New York growers use a variety of cooling techniques to insure their produce gets to market with the freshness of its harvesting preserved in transit. Processes such as vacuum cooling, which pulls the heat out of produce after harvesting, and hydro-cooling, which adds coldness to produce by immersing it in a cooling bath after harvest, minimize deterioration and ensure the produce has a long shelf life after it reaches its retail or foodservice destination.

"The secret to fresh, nutritional produce is to get it as cool as you can as fast as possible," explains Marshall. "For example, we have a specific hydro-cooler for beans. We harvest the beans at 80° F, and by the time they are in the crate and ready to be shipped, they are down to about 38° F."

Dominick Doria, produce director, Grace's Marketplace, a single-store specialty food company in New York, NY, buys a variety of New York produce as it comes into season. "The growers can deliver overnight, so the produce is always fresh and the quality is always good."

Onions and potatoes grown in New York have excellent storage capabilities, notes Robert Rapasadi, vice president, Isadore A. Rapasadi & Sons, Inc., Canastota, NY. The company packages potatoes and onions grown from seeds that minimize sprouting and facilitate maximal storage capabilities, extending their shelf life for up to 10 months without sprouting or decay.

East Coast markets are within a day's

State Department Helps Promote New York-Grown Produce

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) New York Field Office, Albany, NY, stages a number of promotional events at fairs and other public venues designed to connect consumers with the growers and retailers of locally grown produce. It operates in cooperation with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM), Albany, NY.

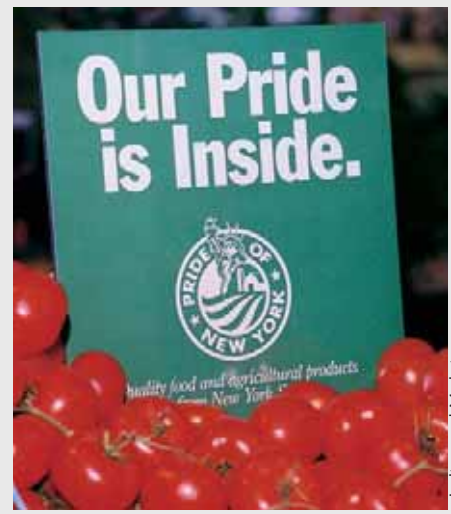
The field office also sponsors events that give growers the opportunity to meet and talk to consumer groups and retailers to explain how New York produce is grown and transported.

In addition, the field office produces a number of consumer informational brochures that discuss the state's agricultural industry and *Pride of New York* program, which promotes the benefits of locally grown produce.

The field office also produces a seasonal availability chart as well as recipes featuring locally grown produce and provides retailers with POP aids, including banners, window signs, shelf talkers, stickers and logos that can be used for customized retail advertising to help promote *Pride of New York* products.

The informational materials are distributed free of charge at retail stores, farmers markets and NYSDAM-sponsored events.

NYSDAM also is able to help retailers and growers that contribute cooperative dollars to retail advertising programs to find the most affordable advertising outlets through spot buying of television commercials. **pb**



Photos courtesy of New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets

Consistency, quality, a steady source of supply. That's been the Torrey story for 200 years.

The "Buy Local "movement is all about being able to promise your customers fresh, quality products.

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Reader Service # 86

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Reader Service # 56

Photo courtesy of Torrey Farms

drive of New York-grown produce, allowing retailers to market it as locally grown produce — an increasingly important selling point. Many consumers are concerned both with the environmental impact of food transportation and with putting the freshest possible produce on the table.

"We're within reach of 40 percent of the U.S. population," notes Torrey Farms' Marshall, "There is a tremendous advantage in how far New York-grown produce can go overnight. We deliver fresh, nutritional produce direct from the harvest. The longer produce has to travel to reach its market, the more there is a decrease in nutritional value."

Andrew Gurda, president, A. Gurda Produce, Co., based in Pine Island, NY, agrees, adding, "Transportation is a big factor for us. Our location provides major accessibility to the market. Plus, we're 80 miles from New York City."

To promote locally grown produce, Gurda works with retailers to organize in-store promotions for some of its New York-grown items, which include sweet corn and solid greens.

STRINGENT FOOD-SAFETY PRACTICES

Buying local produce also helps allay consumer fears about food safety because many consumers look at locally grown as some how intrinsically safer.

New York's food-safety regulations are among the most stringent in the country. "We have a whole big program built around the Good Agricultural Practices [GAP] program," reports Lynn-ette's Gregori. "We are audited by GAP [Good Agricultural Practices], by the New York State USDA inspection office and by a third-party auditor to make sure we are compliant for food safety, meaning everything in our operation has to be sanitary."

Like New York Bold and other New York growers, Lynn-ette puts codes on all produce coming out of its packinghouses so product can be traced back to its source if an outbreak occurs.

Buying local produce also helps allay consumer fears about food safety because many consumers look at locally grown as some how intrinsically safer.

"Buying local is almost a catch phrase now," explains Rapasadi of Rapasadi And Sons. "Even Wal-Mart [Stores, Inc., Bentonville, AR] in the last several years has been supporting local grown marketing programs like the *Pride of New York* [the NYSDAM promotional program]."

TRUSTED BRANDS

Created by Governor George Pataki in 1995 and administered by NYSDAM, the *Pride of New York* program gives farmers the opportunity to participate in a series of ini-

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Reader Service # 12

tiatives, including online, billboard, print and electronic media advertising, to build awareness. All produce carrying the *Pride of New York* logo is locally grown or locally produced. Currently, there are more than 2,000 participants in the program, including retailers, restaurants, trade associations, farmers markets, schools and growers, reports USDA's Chittenden. The program helps retailers and others who sell produce find local providers.

Some retailers, such as Whole Foods Market, headquartered in Austin, TX, play up the locally grown theme and promote the farms where the produce was grown. A recent Whole Foods ad featured produce grown by Red Jacket Orchards, Inc., Geneva, NY. It focused on Red Jacket's installment of a high-tunnel greenhouse system tall enough to enclose cherry trees, berries and high-end produce varieties to help protect them from hail or other types of inclement weather.

Wegmans Food Markets, Inc., based in Rochester, NY, uses in-store POP signs to showcase the farms where it sources produce, specifying the distance between the farms and its stores. The signs also describe the farmers and how they grow their crops, connecting consumers to the farm and the land where the produce was grown.

Promotional initiatives drive produce sales and support local farmers. D'Agostino's Vasapoli says the programs "helps us with signage and other materials that let consumers know we're supporting New York growers."

Photo courtesy of Rapasadi And Sons

AD PLANNING

Most retailers need an advertising lead time of at least four weeks — sometimes up to eight or 12 weeks — to plan ads. Although growers compare dealing with advertising lead times to looking into a crystal ball, they manage to meet the volume needs of retailers by planting crops in various fields deployed 20 or so miles apart.

Although growers compare dealing with advertising lead times to looking into a crystal ball, they manage to meet the volume needs of retailers by planting crops in various fields deployed 20 or so miles apart.

"I can go to bed at night thinking I will have a field of cabbage to harvest in a week, and wake up the next morning to discover I've lost a 100-acre field because of hail," explains Torrey Farms' Marshall. "We divide our plantings. Instead of planting them all in one area, we put them 20 to 25 miles apart so they can be harvested within a day or two of one another."

Growers have also found ways to help retailers merchandise and promote produce. In conjunction with various produce associations and cooperatives, such as New York Bold, growers develop marketing materials to promote the usage and sale of New York state produce.

New York growers also serve as informational resources for their retail partners, providing materials, such as recipe cards or articles for their individual Web sites, to help generate incremental sales and increase the frequency of shopping trips.

New York Bold created an animated character, Chef Bold, to help promote its onions. The character appears on recipes and the packaging for most New York Bold onions and makes personal appearances at fairs, trade shows and retail events.

RECIPE/PRODUCT USE INFORMATION

Representatives from New York Bold make appearances on local television cooking shows, whipping up dishes made with New York Bold onions to "stimulate the consumer's appetite," notes Queale-Dunsmoor.

New York growers are also branding their produce, transitioning it from commodity status to value-added produce that demands a premium price.

Torrey Farms, which uses the brand name Elba or Torrey Farms for most of its produce, uses the Big O brand for its onions. The company sells most of its produce in bulk but it does put recipes and preparation instruction on stickers affixed to its winter squash, relates Marshall.

Rapasadi And Sons uses the Raps Blue Ribbon brand on its produce, and its packaging contains its address so consumers can immediately identify where the onions were packaged. "People pick that up," according to Rapasadi. "It's information that can be traced back if any health issues arise. It also helps market what otherwise might be considered boring items." **pb**

Reader Service # 38

PRODUCE FOODSERVICE PORTFOLIO

Grape Rosemary Focaccia Bread

60 **DRISCOLL'S**
Mixed Berry Crepes

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Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred™ Carrot and Shrimp Summer Rolls with Spicy Peanut Dipping Sauce & Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred™ Carrot Asian Slaw

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Broccolini with Vanilla Butter Sauce Developed by Michael McGeeney, executive chef, Omni Austin Hotel

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Grilled Artichoke Bruschetta with Pesto Aïoli Created By Chef Tony Baker, Montrio Bistro, Monterey, CA

72 **PRODUCE FOR BETTER HEALTH FOUNDATION**
Fifty Ways for Adding Fruits and Vegetables to Menus

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TENTH ANNUAL PRODUCE FOODSERVICE AWARD

For distributors and wholesalers, the information that follows — recipes, tips and techniques, product availability, unique attributes, company contact information and much more — is perfectly designed to be passed down to operators.

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The Tenth Annual PRODUCE BUSINESS Produce Foodservice Portfolio is filled with fresh ideas for using fresh product. Use the portfolio often and wisely, and get valuable fresh ideas to help make the foodservice market a growing part of our bottom line.

For additional copies of this year's PRODUCE BUSINESS Foodservice Portfolio, please contact us at 561-994-1118 or email at info@producebusiness.com

DRISCOLL'S

Mixed Berry Crepes

MAKES 6 SERVINGS/12 CREPES
PREP TIME: 15 MINUTES

- 2 cups Driscoll's Raspberries, rinsed
- 1 cup Driscoll's Blueberries, rinsed
- 1 cup Driscoll's Blackberries, rinsed
- 1 cup Driscoll's Strawberries, rinsed and sliced
- 8 oz cream cheese, softened
- 1 Tbs honey
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 Tbs fresh lemon juice
- 12 crepes

1. Stir cream cheese, honey and lemon zest until thoroughly blended.
2. Place sugar, berries and lemon juice in medium saucepan.
3. Cook over medium heat, stirring gently, until mixture boils and sugar is dissolved (about 5 min).
4. Remove from heat; allow to cool slightly.
5. To assemble, place crepe on serving plate; spoon 1 heaping Tbsp cream cheese mixture down center of crepe.
6. Spoon approximately ¼ cup berry mixture over cream cheese. Roll crepes.
7. Drizzling sauce over finished crepes and top with Fresh Driscoll's berries.

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES:

Driscoll's berries are preferred by chefs and foodservice operators worldwide for their superior taste and quality. Driscoll's raspberries, strawberries, blackberries and blueberries, organic and conventional, provide unparalleled customer satisfaction, add-on sales and higher check averages. They allow versatility limited only by your imagination when planning today's more healthful menus. An assortment of Driscoll's berries adds color and flare to even simple menu ideas. Put strawberries, raspberries and blackberries on cereal or shortcake. Combine blueberries and strawberries on pancakes and waffles. Each berry has its own great combination of antioxidants and micronutrients, so an assortment of berries packs a huge nutritional punch.

Trust the Driscoll's Brand – The Finest Berries in the World®.

- Berries should be moved quickly to refrigerated storage. Store them at 32° to 34° F.
- Avoid moisture. Do not store under refrigerator condenser units.
- Wash berries with a light rinse immediately before serving.

UNIQUE ATTRIBUTES:

Driscoll's has been breeding its own proprietary berry varieties for over 60 years and the first priority in selecting new varieties is delighting consumers. That means berries that are sweet, juicy and aromatic with just the right texture and bright color – quality that satisfies the most discriminating restaurateurs. Look for Driscoll's strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and blackberries and add even more excitement with specialty berries such as Driscoll's famous long-stem strawberries and unique golden raspberries.

PRODUCT AVAILABILITY:

Driscoll's provides the highest quality berries in the world by developing superior berry varieties grown by independent farmers in carefully chosen locations to produce a truly delightful eating experience with every Driscoll's berry. Add to that Driscoll's incomparable quality assurance program and commitment to food safety, and you've got The Finest Berries in the World®.

Driscoll's is your one-source supplier for premium conventional and organic berries year-round.

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Raspberries
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Long Stem Strawberries

COMPANY INFO

Driscoll's®
The Finest Berries in the World®

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345 Westridge Drive
Watsonville, CA 95076
P: 831-763-5000
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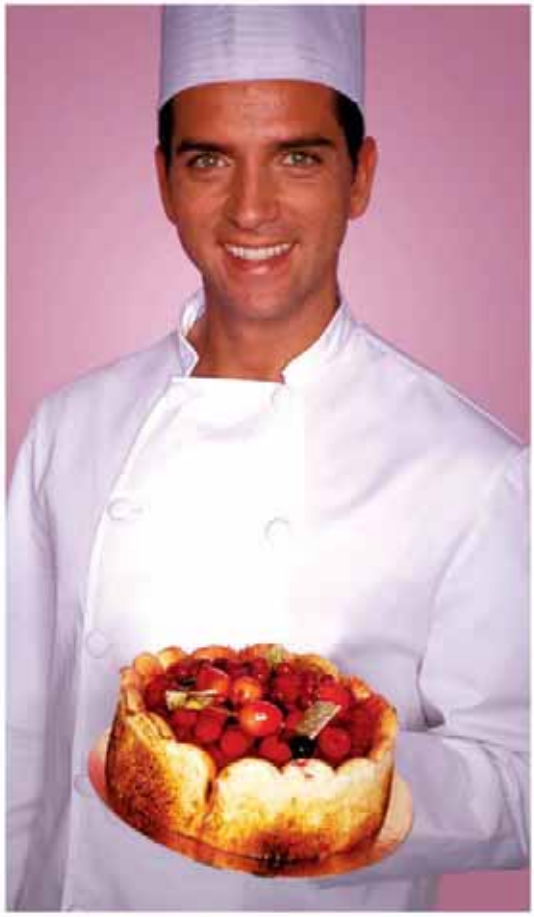

with berries you'll be proud to offer—and your customers will be excited to buy—every day.

At Driscoll's, everything we do centers around continually **delighting berry consumers.** And our Conventional, Organic and Specialty berries will delight your customers in a variety of ways each and every day. Boost your customer loyalty, and increase your sales and profits, with Driscoll's berries—and *set yourself apart.*

Driscoll's
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Reader Service # 100

GRIMMWAY FARMS

Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred™ Carrot and Shrimp Summer Rolls with Spicy Peanut Dipping Sauce & Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred™ Carrot Asian Slaw

Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred™ Carrot and Shrimp Summer Rolls:
MAKES 8 SUMMER ROLLS

- 2 ounces thin rice vermicelli noodles
- 16 rounds (6-8 inches in diameter) rice paper (bahn trang)
- 4 large Boston lettuce leaves cut in half
- 8 large shrimp, peeled deveined, blanched for 2 minutes, drained and cut in half lengthwise
- 1 cup Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred™ Carrots
- 1/2 cup fresh mung bean sprouts
- 8 large mint leaves, washed, patted dry and cut in half lengthwise

1. Soak the rice vermicelli noodles in warm water to cover for 15 minutes and drain.
2. In a large pot of boiling water cook the noodles for 2 minutes or until al dente, stirring to separate the strands. Drain, rinse with cold water and shake dry in colander.
3. Fill a small shallow dish with warm water. Immerse two sheets of rice paper, one on top of the other in the water and let stand until pliable, about 45 seconds. Blot any excess water with paper towel. Repeat. Put rice paper sheets on work surface. Lay down 2 tablespoons of Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred™ Carrots, some bean sprouts, 1 tablespoon of rice noodles, 2 halves of mint leaves end to end and a half of lettuce leaf. Roll up the paper halfway into a cylinder and fold both sides of the paper over the filling. Lay 2 shrimp halves cut side down and end to end, along the crease. Continue to roll the rice paper into a cylinder pressing the edge against the cylinder to seal. Place the roll, seam side down, on a plate and cover with a damp towel. Continue making the Summer Rolls in same manner with remaining ingredients. Slice in the middle of each roll on the diagonal to serve with dipping sauce.

Spicy Peanut Dipping Sauce
MAKES 8 SERVINGS TO GO WITH SUMMER ROLLS
You might want to double the recipe, it is delicious!

- 1 tablespoon of canola oil
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons of toasted sesame oil
- 1 to 2 teaspoons of hot chili paste depending on how hot you like it
- 1 tablespoon of tomato paste
- 3 tablespoons of creamy peanut butter
- 3 tablespoons of hoisin sauce
- 3/4 cup water
- 2 green onion tops for garnish

1. In a small saucepan heat oil over medium high heat and cook the garlic and chili paste for 2 minutes.
2. Add the tomato paste, peanut butter, hoisin sauce and water, whisking until smooth.
3. Simmer for 2 minutes or until heated through. If necessary add a little more water to thin sauce to desired consistency. Pour sauce into a dipping bowl and sprinkle with sliced green onion tops. Serve with Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred™ Carrot Shrimp Summer Rolls.

Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred™ Carrot Asian Slaw
MAKES 8 SERVINGS

- 1 Head Green Cabbage Shredded
- 1/2 Head Savoy Cabbage Shredded
- 3 Cups Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred™ Carrots
- 4 green onions, julienned and cut on the bias
- 1 cup bean sprouts
- 2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
- 1/2 cup rice wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon hot chili paste
- 2 tablespoons creamy peanut butter
- 1 teaspoon fresh ginger grated
- Salt and Pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons sesame seeds for garnish

1. Toss the green cabbage, savoy cabbage, Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred™ Carrots, green onions and bean sprouts in a large bowl.
2. In a small bowl whisk together rice wine vinegar, soy sauce, sesame oil, chili paste, peanut butter and ginger until smooth. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Toss the dressing in with the Grimmway Farms Organic ColorShred™ Carrot Asian Slaw and sprinkle with sesame seeds.

COMPANY INFO

A family of *Growing* companies.

GRIMMWAY FARMS
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Reader Service # 101

HMC MARKETING — THE LUNCH BUNCH

Grape Rosemary Focaccia Bread

MAKES 16 SERVINGS

- 1/4 cup garlic puree
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 3 cups (1 lb 2 oz) California seedless grapes, halved
- 3/4 cup shredded Parmesan cheese
- 1 tsp fresh rosemary, finely chopped
- 1 1/4 lbs ready-to-bake pizza dough

1. Sauté garlic in olive oil. Add grapes and heat thoroughly. Remove pan from heat; add cheese and rosemary; mix well.
2. Press pizza dough to fit two 12-inch pizza pans. Spread mixture evenly between the two pans.
3. Bake at 400°F 10 minutes or until topping and edges of bread brown. Cut each into 8 pieces.

Nutritional Analysis:

Calories 132, Carbohydrates 19 g, Protein 3.5 g, Sodium 192 mg, Fat 5 g, Cholesterol 2 mg, Calories from Fat 34%, Fiber 0.7 g.

UNIQUE ATTRIBUTES:

- Perfect as a garnish or fruit requirement for schools
- One of Mother Nature's most convenient snack foods
- Excellent source of vitamin C and high in potassium
- Kids love 'em!

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES:

The ideal holding conditions for grapes are 32° to 34° Fahrenheit with 90 to 95 percent relative humidity.

Avoid storing grapes next to green onions, as their odor will tend to be absorbed by grapes.

Never store or display grapes where they will come in direct contact with ice or iced products, as this will damage the grapes.

Stack grape lugs to allow circulation around all sides.

Grapes can:

Generate add-on revenue as a take-out item.

Provide a signature ingredient for sensational salads and entrées; they're always juicy and beautiful, even when heated.

Plate enhancement: What's better than a plump, colorful cluster of fresh Lunch Bunch grapes?

PRODUCT AVAILABILITY:

HMC Foodservice grapes are available year-round from Chile, Peru, Mexico and the United States. HMC is also a provider of stone fruit and table grapes during the summer season.

COMPANY INFO

HMC MARKETING
13138 S. Bethel
Kingsburg, CA 93631
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1-800-LUNCHBUNCH
www.hmcmarketing.com
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Reader Service # 8

HOLLANDIA PRODUCE

Watercress Salad with Beets and Pistachio-Crusted Brie

A restaurant-quality salad with great flavors and simple enough to make at home.

SERVES 4 AS AN APPETIZER.

- ½ cup chopped pistachios
- 1 8-oz wheel triple crème Brie, cut into 12 wedges
- 12 baby or 6 regular beets, greens trimmed (about 1 lb)
- ¼ cup white balsamic vinegar (see Note)
- 1 shallot, minced
- 1 tsp kosher salt, plus more to taste
- ¼ tsp finely ground pepper, plus more to taste
- ¼ cup pistachio oil (see Note)
- 2 Tbs extra virgin olive oil
- 2 heads Live Gourmet Living Watercress, top half (leafy parts) only

1. Place pistachios on a plate. Gently press cut sides of Brie wedges into nuts. Place coated wedges on a plate and freeze for at least 1 hour.
2. Combine beets and enough cold water to cover by 1 inch in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil over high heat, reduce to a simmer, cover, and cook until tender, 20 to 30 minutes. Drain. Under cold running water, slip off and discard skins and stems. Cut beets into wedges, place in a medium bowl, and set aside.
3. In a large bowl, whisk together vinegar, shallot, salt and pepper. Whisk in pistachio and olive oils. Drizzle about 2 Tbs dressing over beets and toss. Add additional salt and pepper to taste. Add Live Gourmet Living Watercress to bowl with remaining dressing and toss. Add additional salt and pepper to taste. Divide watercress among 4 serving plates. Arrange beets around watercress, dividing evenly.
4. Heat a 10- or 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add Brie wedges, crusted side down, and cook until browned, about 1½ minutes. Carefully turn and cook other crusted side until brown, about 1½ minutes more. Arrange three Brie wedges on each plate and serve.

Note: White balsamic vinegar and pistachio oil are available at many specialty food stores.

TIPS AND TECHNIQUE:

To maximize shelf life, keep refrigerated at 34° to 40° F

Rinse thoroughly before use.

Use what you need from the bunch, leaving any unused portion with its roots intact and return to refrigeration.

PRODUCT AVAILABILITY:

At Hollandia Produce, we back all of our Live Gourmet Living Lettuces and Living Watercress with category-leading quality assurance and food safety programs. Unmatched product uniformity and stable year-round pricing helps fix your cost and provides a consistent quality for all your signature dishes.

UNIQUE ATTRIBUTES:

Live Gourmet Living Watercress is iceless and stays fresher longer than conventional watercress because it is harvested with its roots intact to preserve freshness.

Live Gourmet Living Watercress requires nominal processing and no discarding of woody stems. Our smaller, more delicate stems are edible, contain flavor and can be incorporated into your recipes.

Watercress is a very nutritious leafy green rich in vitamins A and C, calcium and iron.

Our living watercress has a peppery flavor providing a zesty contrast to other greens. It complements meat and cheese dishes and makes great sandwiches and wraps.

COMPANY INFO

HOLLANDIA PRODUCE
P.O. Box 1327
Carpinteria, CA 93014
P: 805-684-4146
F: 805-684-9363
info@livegourmet.com
www.livegourmet.com

Living Watercress

It's Fast

Live Gourmet Living Watercress is so easy to use because prep time is minimal. There's no woody stems, it's iceless and it only needs a quick rinse. Then it's all ready to go!

It's Fresh

Hydroponically-grown and harvested with its roots intact, Live Gourmet Living Watercress is the freshest watercress you can buy! "It's absolutely fresh because its still alive!"

It's Flavorful

Award-winning Live Gourmet Living Watercress received a Gold Medal for Superior Taste from the American Academy of Taste. Just like the rest of the Live Gourmet Family!

"Live Gourmet Living Watercress is rich in color, loaded with flavor and uniform bunch after bunch. It adds a zesty flavor to wraps, salads, soups and sandwiches and can be highlighted in an entrée or used as a garnish. I just love using it!"

Chef Jill Silverman Hough

P.O. Box 1327 Carpinteria, CA 93014(805) 684-4146 • www.LiveGourmet.com

Hollandia PRODUCE

Reader Service # 58

Broccolini with Vanilla Butter Sauce
Developed by Michael McGeeney, executive chef, Omni Austin Hotel

MAKES 4 SERVINGS
PREP TIME: 20 MINUTES

Broccolini® with Vanilla Butter Sauce

1	pkg Mann Packing Broccolini®
2	oz olive oil
3	shallots, julienned
¼	cup brown sugar
3	Tbs vanilla bean paste
1	qt heavy cream
4	oz butter
	Salt and pepper to taste

1. Blanch* package of Broccolini®
2. Heat saucepot on medium; add olive oil. Add shallots when hot; sauté until lightly caramelized. Add brown sugar and vanilla paste; mix well. Add heavy cream; turn heat to low. Reduce by one third.
3. Remove from heat; add butter a little at a time. Season to taste. Drizzle over Broccolini®

Instructions for blanching:

Boil 2 to 6 cups of water (depending on size of Broccolini® package) in a large saucepan. Once at a boil, place Broccolini® in the water for 1 to 2 minutes. Remove the Broccolini® and strain in a colander. Rinse under cold water or immerse in ice water to stop from cooking further. Strain and pat dry with paper towels.

PRODUCT AVAILABILITY:

Broccolini® is available year-round from foodservice distributors, restaurants and grocery stores nationwide.

For more information about Broccolini® visit *www.veggiesmadeeasy.com*.

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES:

Broccolini® baby broccoli is a cross between broccoli and Chinese kale grown exclusively by Mann Packing Company, Inc. It has a long, slender stem, similar to asparagus, and is topped with small flowering buds that resemble a cross between broccoli florets and an asparagus tip. Its sweet, delicate flavor with a subtle, peppery taste is milder and sweeter when cooked. When eaten raw, the vegetable has a tender, yet crunchy texture. Developed with natural plant breeding methods, Broccolini® is not genetically modified.

It may be blanched, steamed, sautéed, poached, roasted, fried and grilled. Microwave Broccolini® for a quick and nutritious snack. Stir-fry Broccolini® with a selection of other fresh vegetables and add a ginger soy sauce for an Asian-inspired, light meal. Dip Broccolini® in a flour-and-beer batter and deep-fry for a delicious and crunchy appetizer. Sauté with olive oil, yellow onions and capers for a flavorful side dish to accompany a favorite entrée. Grill Broccolini® for a smoky, sweet summertime treat; wrap the flower tip in foil to prevent charring.

Preparation tip: Cook al dente, so Broccolini® retains its brilliant green color and crisp texture.

Nutrition Facts:

- Good source of vitamin A, folate, iron and potassium
- Excellent source of vitamin C
- 35 calories per 3-oz serving (around 5 to 6 stalks)

COMPANY INFO

MANN'S SUNNY SHORES

MANN PACKING COMPANY, INC.
1250 Hansen Street
Salinas, CA 93901
P: 800-884-MANN (6266)
www.broccoli.com

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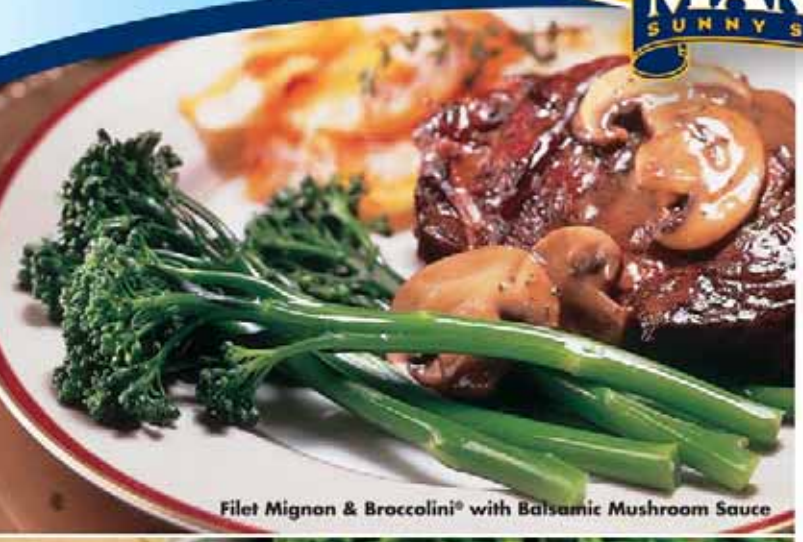
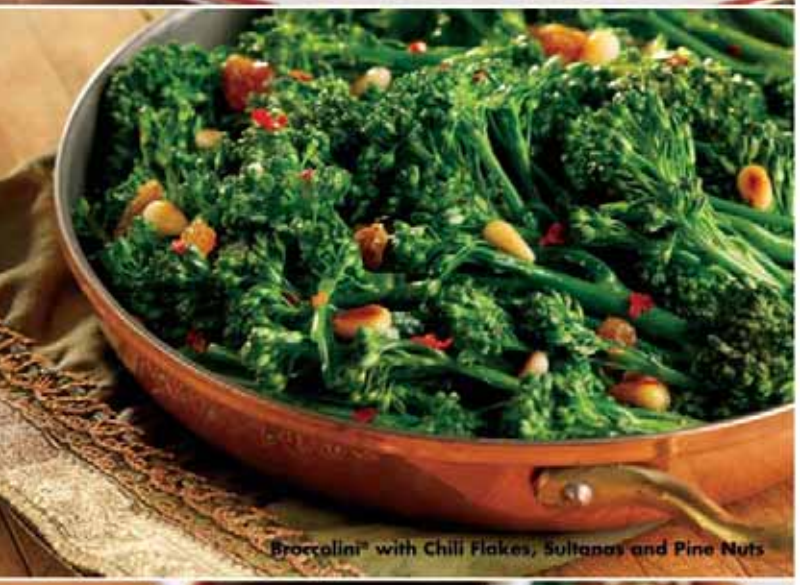
Broccolini

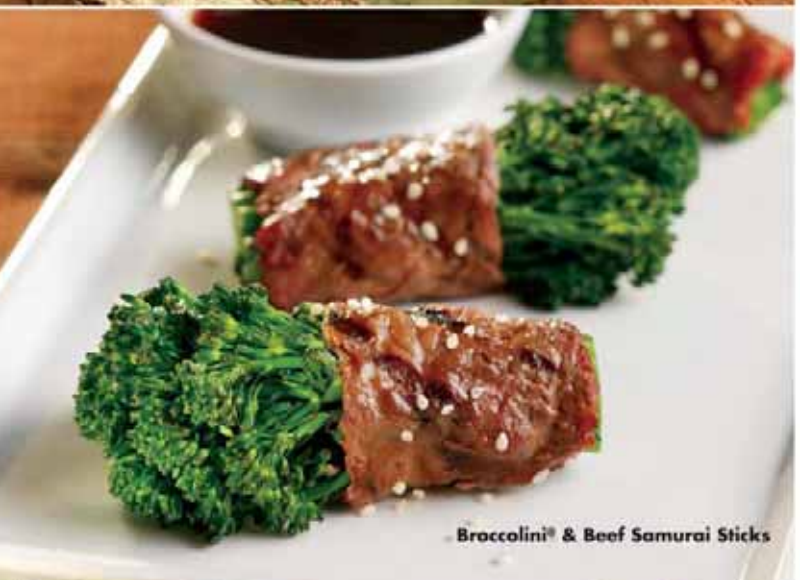
MANN'S SUNNY SHORES



Filet Mignon & Broccolini® with Balsamic Mushroom Sauce



Broccolini® with Chili Flakes, Sultanas and Pine Nuts



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Reader Service # 70

OCEAN MIST FARMS

Grilled Artichoke Bruschetta with Pesto Aïoli
Created By Chef Tony Baker, Montrio Bistro, Monterey, CA

SERVINGS: 24
PORTION SIZE: 1 ARTICHOKE EACH

Artichokes are a good fit for use in high-volume restaurants; the low cost yet high perceived value make artichokes very attractive to operators.

This dish is simple and works well at high-volume establishments that want to introduce artichokes to their customers by using familiar items such as pesto and bruschetta. Bruschetta usually refers to garlic-rubbed toast topped with a mixture of tomatoes and basil. In this recipe, the artichoke replaces toast as the base for the familiar tomato mixture used in bruschetta. The fresh twist on a menu classic is a nice surprise for diners and truly delicious.

Cooking an Artichoke

PREP TIME: 15 MINUTES
COOK TIME: 35 MINUTES

- 5 gallons water
- 1 quart red wine vinegar
- 2 bulbs of garlic (split)
- 1/4 cup dried oregano
- 2 cups olive oil
- Salt to taste
- 1 case of artichokes (24 count)

1. Bring water to a boil with the vinegar, garlic, oregano, oil and salt.
2. Using a sharp serrated knife remove the top inch from the artichoke.
3. Using a pair of scissors, trim the thorns from the leaves.
4. When the water reaches a boil, place all of the artichokes in the water, and weight them down so they all cook below the water level. Cover and cook for approx. 35 minutes.
5. Remove from the cooking liquid and place on a sheet tray upside down to drain and cool.
6. Using a dessert spoon, remove the center leaves and the inedible "furry"choke from the center; take care not to damage the heart.
7. The artichoke is ready for any number of preparations — stuffing, grilling or enjoying as it is with a favorite dip.

Tomato Bruschetta

PREP TIME: 10 MINUTES

- 18 tomatoes, seeded and diced
- 1 red onion, peeled and finely chopped
- 1/2 cup red wine vinegar
- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 bunch basil, finely shredded
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. Combine ingredients. Do not add salt unless serving right way.

Pesto

PREP TIME: 10 MINUTES
MAKES 1 CUP OF PESTO

- 1/3 cup pine nuts, toasted
- 3 cloves garlic , chopped
- 2 cups or 4 oz basil leaves, washed and dried
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 lemon, juiced
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. Using a food processor, lightly pulse the pine nuts and garlic. Add the basil and pulse. Add the cheese and pulse; gradually add the oil and lemon and run until all is incorporated.
2. Check seasoning.

Pesto Aïoli

PREP TIME: 10 MINUTES
MAKES 6 CUPS OR 1½ QUARTS, 24 X 2FL. OZ. SERVINGS

- 6 egg yolks
- 1/2 cup lemon juice, fresh
- 3 cloves garlic
- 4 cups olive oil (do not use a strong virgin oil)
- 1 cup pesto (see recipe)
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. Using a food processor, pulse the egg, lemon and garlic. Do not over mix or air will get incorporated and throw off the texture.
2. With the machine running gradually add all of the oil.
3. Gently pulse in the pesto.
4. Taste and adjust seasoning as necessary.

To Serve:

1. Split the artichoke in half, drizzle with olive oil and season with salt and pepper.
2. Place on a hot grill for approx. 3 to 5 minutes until hot.
3. Serve topped with the tomato mixture and a small dish of the pesto aïoli.

COMPANY INFO

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Castroville, CA 95012
P: 831-770-6435
F: 831-633-4363
www.oceanmist.com

Tony Baker,
Montrio Bistro
Monterey, California

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Ocean Mist artichokes. Good taste and good business were never so compatible.

OCEAN MIST FARMS

www.oceanmist.com

Reader Service # 9

50 Ways for Adding Fruits and Vegetables to Menus

Breakfast Tips:

1. Use mashed avocado and nut butters on toast instead of butter or margarine.
2. Blend puréed fruit into cream cheese and butter to top bagels and margarine.
3. Add veggies to your breakfast potatoes--fresh and roasted peppers, onions, and mushrooms.
4. Use pancakes as a wrap for mixed fruits or veggies–apples, raisins, peaches; sautéed peppers, asparagus, and mushrooms.
5. Top waffles with fresh and dried fruit and a dash of cinnamon.
6. Add a variety of veggies like spinach, scallions, and peppers to scrambled eggs or omelets.
7. Serve 100% fruit or vegetable juice in both traditional and non-traditional varieties.
8. Serve assorted cut-up fresh fruit, such as melons, pineapple, and berries, with low-fat yogurt; use unusual serving bowls, such as hollowed–out melons.
9. Offer a variety of fruit smoothies made with frozen fruit.
10. Offer broiled grapefruit halves, pre-cut orange and grapefruit sections, or ambrosia.

Lunch Tips:

11. Offer vegetable soups year round, cold or hot.
12. Serve raw spinach leaves in addition to lettuce for burgers and, or corn to tossed green salads.
13. Add beets, corn, beans or peas to tossed green salads.
14. Offer fruit desserts, such as fresh berries, baked apples, poached pears, or a fruit cobbler or tart.
15. Serve chopped Asian chicken and vegetables rolled in lettuce cups.
16. Add sliced mushrooms, chopped tomatoes, and shredded carrots to create a veggie Caesar salad.
17. Offer a tropical fruit plate with mangos, papayas, and other exotic fruits.
18. Add cooked sweet potato cubes to potato salad.
19. Serve sandwiches with a colorful side of grilled cauliflower with peppers, baby vegetables, or a mixture of olives.
20. Add wilted greens, chick peas, garlic, and olive oil to pasta.

Dinner Tips:

21. Add veggie color to your whole grains–shredded carrots, pesto, and chopped peppers.
22. Top grilled veggies with fish or chicken.
23. Serve two vegetables with each meal.
24. Add dried fruit (dates, blueberries, apricots) and nuts to puddings and baked goods.
25. Add colorful veggies to your wraps--red radishes, yellow peppers, purple cabbage, and leafy greens.
26. Offer a baked sweet potato in addition to regular baked potatoes.
27. Serve roasted vegetables, such as carrots, asparagus, eggplant, squash, and bell peppers.
28. Poach pears in cranberry juice and stuff with cream cheese, dates, and walnuts.
29. Add some ethnic bean dishes–rice and beans, curried chick peas, and lentil dahl with fresh ginger, green chilies, and cilantro.
30. Add fruit to stir-fry dishes.
31. Serve poultry or beef dishes with a fruit sauce.

Contact Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) at 302-235-2329; fax to 302-235-5555; or write to 5341 Limestone Road, Wilmington, DE 19808.
Learn more about PBH at www.pbhfoundation.org
Learn more about Fruits & Veggies—More Matters at www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org

pbh

Produce for Better Health Foundation

50 Ways for Adding Fruits and Vegetables to Menus

Appetizer and Snack Tips:

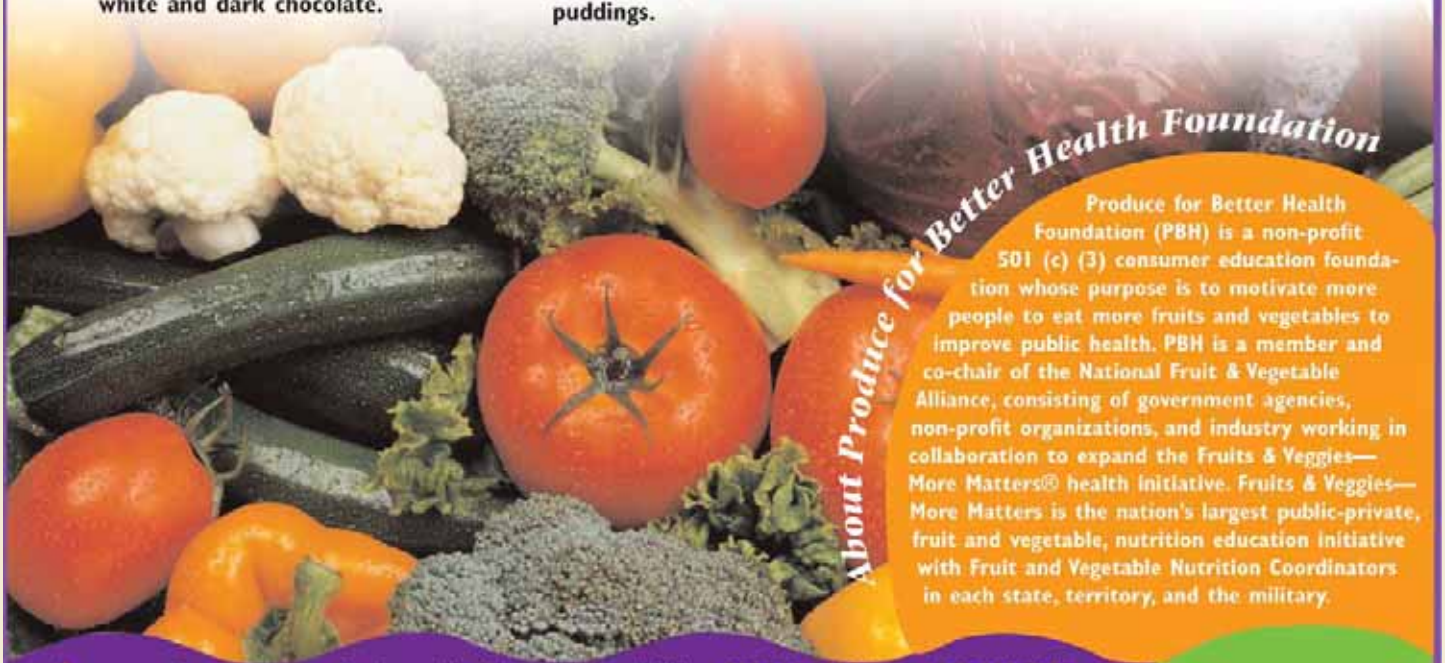
32. Offer bean dip, hummus, or mango salsa with baked chips for an appetizer.
33. Put together fresh fruit, cheese, and nut trays.
34. Offer a veggie plate with cooked and raw veggies--fresh baby carrots, marinated Brussels sprouts, stuffed mushroom caps, and grilled tomatoes.
35. Chop berries or tropical fruits, mix with fresh basil and balsamic vinegar, and spread on thinly-sliced, toasted baguettes.
36. Spear fruits or vegetables on skewers and grill.
37. Offer fresh chopped tomatoes with herbs, olive oil, and feta cheese on whole grain rusks.
38. Crush berries and mix with ricotta cheese; serve as a spread for crackers.
39. Serve frozen grapes in small cups
40. Dip long-stem strawberries in white and dark chocolate.

Add a New Twist to Traditional Favorites:

41. Stuff winter or summer squash, artichokes, or peppers with seasoned whole grains.
42. Combine mashed potatoes with cooked sweet potatoes, cauliflower, or leafy greens.
43. Add a frittata brimming with colorful veggies.
44. Serve a colorful veggie pizza topped with parmesan or pecorino cheese instead of mozzarella.
45. Add intrigue to your wraps with an unusual ingredient--like fresh figs or pomegranate seeds.
46. Make lasagna with eggplant, zucchini, and roasted red pepper.
47. Add a variety of citrus sections to your salads--pink grapefruit, pummelo, and kumquat.
48. Substitute nontraditional fruits in cobblers, pies, and bread puddings.

General Tips:

49. Serve stir fries with many colorful veggies; reduce the meat to improve health and reduce expense.
50. Add veggies to your whole grains--like bulgur salad with chopped veggies, herbs, and an olive oil vinaigrette.



About Produce for Better Health Foundation

Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) consumer education foundation whose purpose is to motivate more people to eat more fruits and vegetables to improve public health. PBH is a member and co-chair of the National Fruit & Vegetable Alliance, consisting of government agencies, non-profit organizations, and industry working in collaboration to expand the Fruits & Veggies—More Matters® health initiative. Fruits & Veggies—More Matters is the nation's largest public-private, fruit and vegetable, nutrition education initiative with Fruit and Vegetable Nutrition Coordinators in each state, territory, and the military.

pbh.

Contact Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) at 302-235-2329; fax to 302-235-5555; or write to 5341 Limestone Road, Wilmington, DE 19808.

Learn more about PBH at www.pbhfoundation.org

Learn more about Fruits & Veggies—More Matters at www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org

Produce for Better Health® Foundation

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Produce for Better Health Foundation

Changing the way our children eat - one bite at a time!

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

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

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

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

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

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

You can get involved.

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

Theresa Kaufmann at Produce for Better Health Foundation at (302) 235-2329, or visit www.pbhfoundation.org/childrenshealth

We can't afford to continue to lose the health of our future generations . . . the future of America.

A Campaign for Children's Health

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fruits & veggies more matters.

Reader Service # 21

Publix Offers Successful Strategies In Action

An industry insider provides a glimpse into Publix's business philosophy.

BY DAVE DIVER

Dave Diver is a former vice president of produce at Hannaford Brothers and a regular columnist for PRODUCE BUSINESS.

For years, Publix Super Markets, Inc., a Lakeland, FL-based chain with 929 stores, has made consistent sales and earnings gains. Its earnings have reached a level approaching 5 percent after taxes — far surpassing Kroger Co., the Cincinnati, Ohio-based chain operating 2,507 supermarkets either directly or through subsidiaries. Although Kroger's volume, at $70.2 billion, is approximately three times as great as Publix's, and its after tax profits are about 1.5 percent or $1.18 billion, it barely matches the Publix net profit of $23 billion of sales.

The 10-K report Publix supplied to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) provides a general description of its business philosophy. In the 2007 report, Publix identifies competition as based on price, quality of goods and services, convenience, product mix and store location. It lists its core strategies as customer service, product quality, shopping environment, competitive pricing and convenient location.

Although the company's stock — owned by present and past employees — is not publically traded, it is priced quarterly, thus providing a financial comparison with peer supermarket companies and those included in the S&P 500 Composite. The most recent 5-year period ending in 2007 shows Publix stock investment gaining 198 percent while the peer supermarket group increased 70 percent and the S&P 500 rose 85 percent.

To understand Publix's operation, one needs to view the chain's produce operation up close and speak with its associates. I had the opportunity to do this during a store opening in late March in Savannah, GA.

Publix took over this particular 40,000-square-foot location in an existing strip mall, and the store's footprint falls short of the chain's typical footprint of approximately 45,000-square feet for stores built ground up. In contrast, Kroger has two 70,000-square-foot locations within a 5-to-10-mile radius from this store.

Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., the Bentonville, AR-based chain with more than 2,500 stores, also has a location nearby. While the new Publix store could be described as tight, it has nearly everything any conventional consumer would want in the slightly reduced space allocation.

Produce Personnel Training Opportunities

Arriving prior to opening provided me an opportunity to meet with

Publix's Culture Built On People

The culture and strategy at Lakeland, FL-based Publix prevail across all departments. Dave Bornmann, vice president of product business development for grocery and non-foods, spoke at the 2008 Retail Executive Conference hosted by the National Frozen and Refrigerated Foods Association (NFRA), Harrisburg, PA. "We need actionable ideas that are Publix-customer centric, that fit within our market position and culture, including improving the overall shopping experience," he explained. About the chain's expectations of suppliers he related, "Not surprisingly, it's the basics first — 100 percent order fill rates, on time delivery, accurate inventory and timely communications for new items and promotion.

"To grow our joint business, we need suppliers who are flexible with price and non-price funds to permit Publix to differentiate itself from the competition," he added. "When we're out of stock, so are our customers. We also expect a sincere interest and involvement in improving our joint supply chain. The Publix culture is our joint improvement. At Publix, the objective is beneficiaries for suppliers, the retailer and the customer."

Publix produce departments definitely embrace this culture. There is no magic to the Publix produce operation. It's been developed over the years to meet the company's core strategies. Even cleanliness in all areas throughout the store appears to be a major priority. Everyone is trained and programs are implemented to achieve freshness, variety and value. **pb**

and obtain insight from the produce manager, the division vice president and everyone in between. All articulated the same concept of importance — people are important, important as consumers, important as associates and important as suppliers.

For associates, knowledge of produce and the produce industry is paramount, so understanding product sources and seasonality is part of the training. Experience gained over the long term is crucial; nearly 50 percent of Publix's 144,000 employees are full time — a ratio exceeding many in the industry.

Training in how to display, handle, allocate, merchandise and insure variety stands out. Developing ordering skill is mandatory to maintaining freshness. The ordering schedule allows placing an order approximately 24 hours or less prior to delivery and is enhanced by having deliveries seven days a week, enabling departments to achieve a 1½-day inventory level objective.

Procurement specifications by item are equally important for providing freshness and flavorful taste. For fruit, the focus is having a specific high level of sugar, which ensures consumer confidence and increases repeat purchases. Product safety is also a priority.

COLORFUL, INVITING DISPLAYS ARE A PUBLIX HALLMARK.

Maintaining A Pleasant Shopping Experience

At this store's entrance, a mammoth display of oranges and mangos, bunches of cut flowers and a large display of cored pineapple welcome shoppers. This gives consumers an idea of what to expect once they reach the produce department at the far corner of the first aisle just past the deli, bakery and hot takeout foods sections. Additional visits reveal that while produce sometimes occupies less space in the front-of-the-store display, fresh fruit and vegetables are always promoted there along with tie-ins from other departments.

Consumers approaching the produce department are drawn to multiple refrigerated, stair-stepped island display cases containing in-store prepared cut fruit. Publix's definition of the cost of goods sold, which includes inbound freight, warehousing, allowances and the cost of in-store production, provides a clue to understanding this strategy. Looking at this approach for fresh-cut, one quickly understands one reason why nearly 100 percent of pre-cut fruit and variety vegetable trays are prepared daily in the department.

Color and convenience are highlights throughout the department. No matter where consumers look — end caps with advertised items, organic groupings, wall cases or display tables — the distinctive colorful arrangements catch consumers' attention.

When it comes to eye appeal, nothing is left to chance. Deeper into the department, color, size and shape contrasts between tomatoes and eggplant on the promotional table greet customers. The side of one island case devoted to bulk potatoes, onions, tomatoes and assorted items of contrasting color provides a rainbow effect and subliminal shopping hints. Island displays of citrus and apples are equally appealing.

Photos of product line the wall cases. Each 4-foot section is organized to provide the greatest potential for shopping impact. Not only is there a substantial wall case allocation for organics in the Greenwise Market area, but there is also an end-cap display containing more than 15 organic items in baskets arranged for maximum impulse. The narrow, rectangular display tables provide a subtle "down on the farm" message.

Tie-in displays do not end there. They're promoted on end-cap displays and grocery shelving throughout the store. Fresh fruit and vegetables cannot escape a consumer's mind. Publix has cleverly integrated a sampling station, identified chainwide as Apron's, at the end of a gondola near the front of the store. Each week, a new recipe is prepared, and most of the ingredients are displayed nearby in a special upright refrigerated case. Consumers can pick up a list of the

food items, required utensils, cooking times, sequences and preparation steps, as well as shortcuts and tips. During this visit, one recipe included five produce items.

Offering Value And Competitive Pricing

Special seasonal advertising is important, particularly when price breaks can make an impact. On May 11, after many weeks of high-priced tomatoes, Publix devoted a full page ad headlined, *Florida Grown Vine-Ripe Tomatoes At Season's Peak. Best Flavor Of The Season. Picked Ripe And Brought In Fresh.*

Additional text includes, "Right now is a great time of the year for enjoying Florida grown tomatoes — grown on some of the most reputable farms in Florida. Take for example our partnership with H D Budd Farms [Inc.] in Plant City. For 38 years, the Budd family has grown, handpicked, hand packed and personally delivered their farm-fresh tomatoes to Publix. And right now, they're bringing in their best, most flavorful and fragrant tomatoes of the season. These tomatoes are more flavorful because they're fully ripened, naturally on the vine. They're fresher from the field because they are grown closer to home and require less delivery time. And the deep red color is the brightest Mother Nature can produce."

The ad says it all — flavor, freshness, relatively locally grown with no mention of price, just the value story. Incidentally, a few days earlier the regular weekly flyer had tomatoes featured for 99¢ a pound. On this same day, when a large competitor advertised tomatoes for the same price, a store visit revealed the competition's tomatoes were from Mexico. Thus the advantage is to a regional operator capitalizing on the image-building, locally grown, flavorful message.

In the last week of May, blueberries were featured at two full pints for $5 while most of competition was still displaying 4.4-ounce packages at a similar or higher price point. Timeliness is key to attracting consumers and Publix's holiday promotions, such as the aforementioned Memorial Day blueberries, have proven to draw many consumers into stores.

Competitive pricing does not mean price matching. It's a combination of selection, product quality and service, which leads to value or competitive pricing. Media presentation and selection are important. As food prices increase, buy-one-get-one-free promotions expand, seasonal item low prices dominate ad space and convenience and freshness stand out. In the consumer's mind, all fit the competitive composite pricing definition. **pb**

Reader Service # 105

Michigan Moves Produce Nationwide

The state's central location allows retailers to promote a plethora of fresh produce during the summer months and beyond.

BY LISA SOCARRAS

As concern about shipping and fuel costs heightens, Michigan's prime location allows it to ship fresh produce overnight to most parts of the United States — a big selling point for retailers and consumers.

This results in a fresh, high quality product typically considered locally or regionally grown.

Touted the "Mitten of Plenty," Michigan ranks No. 1 in domestic production of blueberries, tart cherries, cucumbers and dry beans, according to a 2006 report by the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Additional Michigan produce items include everything from apples to zucchini. "Personally, I buy a lot of local radishes, green onions, leaf lettuces, greens, turnips and mustard and collard greens from Michigan," reports Scott Calandra, produce buyer, Meijer, Inc., a Grand Rapids, MI-based chain with 182 stores. "We also sell a ton of local asparagus."

"Consumers like to perceive everything as grown in the backyard," he continues. "They like to think that Farmer Ted grows it down the street — instead of going to the farm, they can get it right in the store."

Photo courtesy of Save-A-Lot, Ltd.

"You can taste a big difference because of the freshness," notes John Baker, executive director of the Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board (MAAB), DeWitt, MI. "You can taste a big difference in asparagus that is less than a week old." Michigan asparagus is hand picked rather than cut with a knife, making every bit of it edible, not one part of it tough, he adds.

In the produce industry, product timing is everything. "Once it's picked, the life of the product doesn't get any better," reports a produce buyer, who wishes to remain unknown, from Cincinnati, OH-based Kroger Co.

Todd Miedema, owner of Miedema Produce, Hudsonville, MI, agrees, adding, "The closer you are to home, the better the product. We can ship overnight to most parts of the country within 12 hours [of harvesting]. We can reach a huge population base with our overnight deliveries."

"We're in an area where we can go anywhere," explains Gene Talsma, owner of Crispheart Produce, Inc., Hudsonville, MI. "We ship all the way to the Mississippi and throughout the South."

Retail produce buyers notice and appreciate the job Michigan growers and shippers are doing. "Michigan does a fantastic job," comments Bruce VonOehsen, produce buyer for Save-A-Lot, Ltd., an Earth City, MO-based chain with 1,190 stores and a subsidiary of Eden Prairie, MN-based Supervalu, Inc. "The mid-country location makes Michigan a big player now. Freshness is a big issue."

Freshness and health benefits of Crispheart's celery and celery hearts help boost sales. "You're always trying for the freshest product," Talsma explains.

FREIGHT-FRIENDLY LOCATION

Produce imported a long distance ages the prod-

uct, decreasing taste and quality. "By ship, you get an older product," notes MAAB's Baker. "Peru sends half of its asparagus by ship, half by air freight, exporting 365 days a year except for Christmas and Easter. It makes sense for consumers to buy domestic products rather than from South America."

"If consumers can identify a local product, they will buy it even if it costs more," contends Christine Lietzau, program manager of *Select Michigan*, the consumer education program organized by the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA), Lansing, MI.

Most of Michigan asparagus is consumed within 400 to 500 miles of the state, shipped out to markets in Chicago, Indianapolis and the eastern United States, reports Baker, adding that consumer demand for locally and regionally grown produce is on the rise. "There is a fresh movement. Consumers are aware of food miles. People want to buy locally grown, within 500 miles is regional to any market — one day away."

Shorter shipping distances also mean less cost for the entire industry. "When you come all the way across the country, freight costs are huge," Miedema of Miedema Produce points out.

"When you don't burn as much fuel, its part of being green," adds the Kroger produce buyer.

Save-A-Lot's VonOehsen agrees, adding, "Hauling celery from California to Michigan versus 50 miles down the street — that's a big difference. People are in tune with the environment. They want to support their local economy. These are new issues that have surfaced and they are here to stay."

Other produce buyers agree. "People are naturally drawn to homegrown, local and regional products," according to the anonymous Kroger produce buyer. "It supports the state's economy and it lengthens the shelf life of the product. People perceive closer products as fresher."

Closer products mean warehouses are emptied more quickly and time and money are saved in inventory. "There are a lot of savings in inventory control because of the shorter distance," notes Miedema. "You can turn product around much faster."

SUCCESSFUL IN-STORE PROMOTIONS

MDA is working hard to market the state's agricultural products and thus, boost Michigan's economy. "Manufacturing is an $80 billion business and the agricultural food sector is a $64 billion business here in Michigan," states Melinda Curtis, *Select Michigan* program representative. "We promote local, fresh produce."

Funded by the private sector and a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant, *Select Michigan* has earned measurable success since its origin in 1997. "It really started operating in 2003 when it became re-energized with new funding," notes Lietzau. The program works with commodity groups to raise money for funding, and now distributors are willing to share some of the costs because of the end result — sales increases.

Select Michigan has tremendous outreach and success through statewide promotions. Chain stores currently participating in the in-store events include Meijer, Save-A-Lot, Grand Rapids, MI-based Spartan Stores, Inc., Kroger and select independent stores.

"The in-store events create plenty of excitement at store level," reports Brian Coates, Meijer senior produce buyer. "We do in-store tastings and they bring in a chef to cook in the store. It's very successful for us.

> ***Select Michigan* has tremendous outreach and success through statewide promotions.**

It is a bigger event than a normal demo service. This is an event where they're actually preparing a recipe. It's been a very good idea." The events are set up in a general food aisle or in the produce department itself.

Events promoting Michigan products are becoming more widespread. "We have a statewide presence," Lietzau explains, "although our major events are in Detroit and the Grand Rapids areas."

Everyone benefits from the promotion of Michigan produce — the growers, shippers, retailers and consumers. "It's a win-win situation," she adds. "This is a stand-alone promotional program for retailers."

According to USDA, sales data collected from retailers incorporating *Select Michigan* promotions showed a 111 percent increase in sales the first year alone. For each product promoted, sales success can be proven.

"One retailer had a 58 percent increase

First-Rate Customer Service

Beyond quality products, Michigan growers and shippers are known for their customer service. "They listen to our needs as buyers," explains Bruce VonOehsen, produce buyer for Save-A-Lot, Ltd., Earth City, MO. "For the most part, Michigan growers are also shippers. Miedema Produce [Inc., Hudsonville, MI] is an example — they do a fantastic job for us.

"They grow their own celery, but they work together with all the growers up there," he continues. "If it rains and they have only 100 packs for us and we ordered 200, they get the entire order for us from their brother or their cousin. This past year, they did this for us and we had a 100 percent success rate."

Save-A-Lot and Miedema Produce had record sales years this past year because of the great service, adds VonOehsen. "We plan to [continue to] improve on sales this year," he says positively. "Consumers want what they want, when they want it. If growers and shippers can fulfill our needs to please our consumers, we use them. If not, we have to move on." **pb**

Photo courtesy of Save-A-Lot, Ltd.

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in asparagus sales, which added up to a $10,000 increase in sales," Lietzau notes.

Curtis adds, "We've worked with Michigan asparagus, blueberries, apples, onions, potatoes, peaches and carrots. We try to follow the harvest schedule."

More than 250 events a year promote Michigan products through the *Select Michigan* program. Some events feature celebrity chefs brought in to prepare produce items in new and creative ways and provide samples to shoppers. One event included an in-store disc jockey, calling people's attention to the produce department. Up to 500 people have attended some of these special events, usually held for two hours on a Saturday or Sunday. "The No.1 disc jockey in Grand Rapids, Kim Carson, and I were in the store," MDA's Curtis explains, emphasizing how shoppers were drawn to this local celebrity. "We do retail promotion events throughout the season. Most retailers like it. They like the in-store events."

In-store promotions, however, can be costly. "Save-A-Lot paid a good amount for the signage," she adds. "They had a lot of POP identification of Michigan-grown items."

Another creative in-store *Select Michigan* promotion is a partnership with Wayne State University in Detroit. "We're bringing in local Wayne State University dietitian to do in-store tastings," reports Curtis. Recipes are prepared for consumers to try; they can also take home a recipe card.

More than 250 events a year promote Michigan products through the *Select Michigan* program. Some events feature celebrity chefs brought in to prepare produce items in new and creative ways and provide samples to shoppers.

A new *Select Michigan* event features a culinary historian cooking in stores. "We hired a culinary historian who is an expert in Michigan foods made back in the 1800s," MDA's Lietzau shares. "[She] wears an era-appropriate dress with her hair up in a bun. She cooks with old cooking equipment."

Other program promotions include hosting special farmers markets — one on the lawn of the state capitol and one on the grounds of the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit. The *Select Michigan* program also promotes Michigan produce at area and national trade shows as well as some international shows in Chicago.

The program's POS materials, including posters and program brochures, are in the process of being expanded.

Miedema Produce experienced tremendous sales success last year by working with retailers to cross-merchandise multiple items within the produce department. "One retailer took six items in season — sweet corn, cabbage, blueberries, radishes, celery and cucumbers — and did a big display, backing it up with a full-page newspaper ad, running it for two weeks," according to Miedema. "It really jumped their traffic and their sales."

The retailer ran the first ad at the end of July and early August, then ran another ad at the end of August, before Labor Day weekend. The first ad featured mostly blueberries — a big seller. The second ad focused on squashes and hard cabbage as well as football munching foods. **pb**

Michigan Cherries Offer An Array Of Health Benefits

Highlighting the health benefits of Michigan produce can help attract consumers. For example, Jeff Manning, chief marketing officer, the Cherry Marketing Institute (CMI), Lansing, MI, recommends retailers let consumers know about the health benefits of Michigan's tart cherries. "Emerging evidence links cherries to many important health benefits, from helping to ease the pain of arthritis and gout to reducing risk factors for heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers."

Manning points to a new study from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, that links this super fruit to protection against diseases, due to its high levels of antioxidants. "As science continues to reveal inflammation may be a marker for many chronic diseases, researchers say emerging studies like this are important in examining the role diet may play in disease management and prevention." **pb**

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Simplify Inventory Management

Use robust software systems to eliminate the headaches involved in inventory management.

BY DUANE CRAIG

In an environment filled with surprises, fast-moving product and the need for traceability, software tames the beast.

"The most important thing that is shaping the industry right now is traceability and point-of-origin," explains Charles Shafae, president and founder of dProduceman Software, Half Moon Bay, CA. "This is especially true for the produce industry where there is a lot of mixing and matching of lots and where the challenge is to determine where each item came from."

Shafae's answer to getting a handle on that is dProduceman Software, a lot-tracking system. When a distributor places an order with a vendor, the system records the vendor's identification number and attaches it to the purchase order number and the incoming lot, providing traceability and supplying product origin information. The major benefit to the software is the elimination of human error. The old process of creating lot numbers in log books allowed for too many mistakes, Shafae adds.

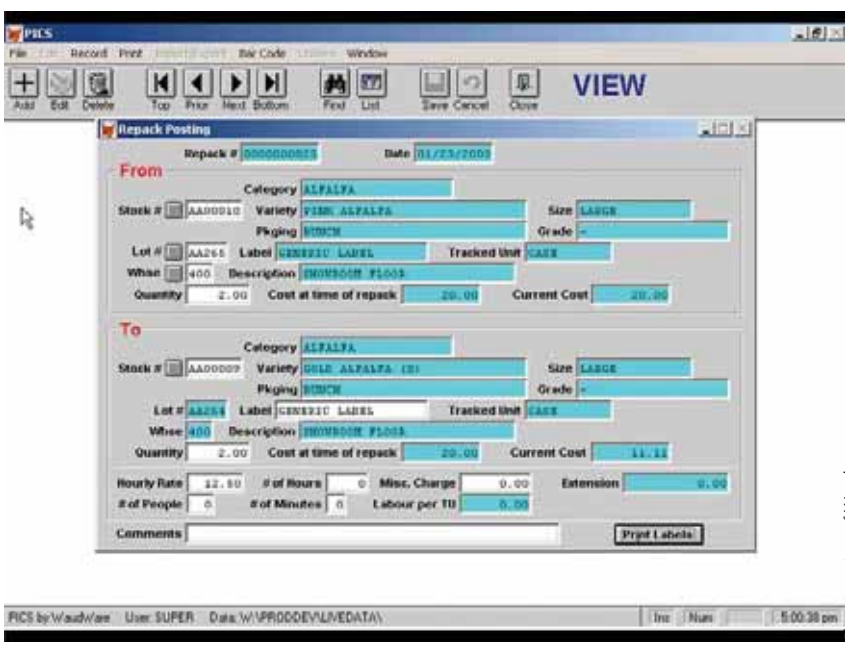

Photo courtesy of Waudware

Charles Waud, president of WaudWare, Inc., Brampton, ON, Canada, agrees that traceability should be high priority. He spent the past 18 months visiting farms and talking to farmers and packingshed people about traceability. Most of the farms he visited had either no system or just rudimentary paper systems, so they were looking for someone to help them get a handle on tracking the new abundance of information.

Many inventory software systems focus on simple operation and making sure users are able to adapt to the software. "Touch screens make a huge difference in training and overall ease of use," according to Waud. "You can train a receiver in a couple of minutes on how to receive a load. The touch-screen code can be custom tailored to the user's language."

As companies grow, efficient inventory management that springs from a robust warehouse management system (WMS) becomes critical, according to David Price, senior operations consultant for Motek, Beverly Hills, CA. "You've got trucks showing up without purchase orders. You've got will-calls showing up without orders. You've got an environment where whatever is shipped to you can't be refused," Price explains. "A more traditional WMS can't handle that kind of a dynamic environment and so we designed our [WMS] to do just that since we grew up in produce."

Just before it adopted WMS, one of Motek's customers had a 95 percent fill rate and problems identifying what was actually in particular locations. It thought it had the product but couldn't find it in time so the orders shipped short. Today, the company is achieving a 99.8 percent fill rate.

WIDENING MARGINS

Henri Morris, president of Solid Software Solutions, Houston, TX, points to significant gains in

margins as being the outgrowth of adopting some kind of inventory management system. "The produce industry doesn't have barcodes on its products so there's no quick and easy way to track inventory coming in, or going out," says Morris. "That is the biggest challenge in the industry. It's something that makes it very difficult to decide how inventory should be managed. We typically tell our clients that if they can track their inventory carefully and monitor costs carefully, we will virtually guarantee they can increase their margin between 1 and 3 percent."

But, he cautions, this is only possible when users can track which items came from which vendors, which costs were added and which customers bought those items. Edible Software, Morris' product, is designed to create labels at the time an order is placed. The labels are available at receiving to be applied to the product as it is received and placed into stock. As the product is being pulled for delivery to customers, a worker uses a handheld wireless device to view the item's location and quantity to be pulled. The wireless device is also used to scan the barcode, so the inventory is updated and there is continuation of the item-tracking process. The software is MS Windows-based so it can interface with new technologies quickly and incorporate peripherals easily. The inventory is also tracked in real time so stock levels are known right to the second.

> **"The produce industry doesn't have barcodes on its products so there's no quick and easy way to track inventory coming in, or going out. That is the biggest challenge in the industry."**
>
> **— Henri Morris**
> **Solid Software Solutions**

As businesses expand, they seek advanced tracking software to simplify their business and automate their processes, explains John Carpenter, president of Silver Creek Software, headquartered in Boise, ID. "We have designed our program to fit our customers' unique business requirements. That includes inventory, sales and warehouse management."

Silver Creek offers a diverse group of software geared toward the produce industry, including Business Intelligence Reporting, which allows users to look up where products came from and where they were shipped to. "Country-of-origin tracking and food safety are very important these days."

Produce Pro Software, Inc., Woodridge, IL, also offers software with real-time tracking abilities and built-in best practices, according to Steve Reilly, national sales manager. The best practices included in the system reduce product shrink, resolve inventory issues and catch human errors in product movement and handling. The system also automatically notifies selected people within the company about inventory discrepancies that occurred throughout the day.

Cardinal-link, Camarillo, CA, has designed sophisticated operational software for the agricultural industry. "We specifically address issues pertaining to traceability, shrink and optimization of business metrics," according to Helmut Leili, shareholder

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Reader Service # 73

What's Next?

WaudWare, Inc., Brampton, ON, Canada, is on the verge of installing a touch-screen system, so produce managers can order produce right from store level and the order flows directly into the distributor's warehouse, notes Charles Waud, president.

While other industries benefit from adding mechanized enhancements to improve warehouse efficiencies, the produce industry is better served by making people more efficient, according to David Price, senior operations consultant for Motek, Beverly Hills, CA. "The nature of produce doesn't lend itself well to robotics and material-handling automation. Instead of automating the warehouse, it's cheaper and more flexible to automate the people." One of those automation aspects allows warehouse workers to holster the scan gun they normally use for pallet operations, plug a headset into it and then do hands-free case picking while receiving instructions and confirming actions using voice, a method that can be 50 percent more productive.

The move toward third-party logistics where established produce wholesalers are now handling transfers for others in order to put excess warehouse capacity to use is a growing trend that requires a warehouse management system (WMS) that can handle the various accounting actions necessary for those operations, Price adds.

To assist with sales and production management, a future trend is the use of more business intelligence models that include more than traceability and tracking of movement, says Don Walborn, director of marketing for Kirkey Products Group, Longwood, FL. Data collected will be analyzed to find opportunities for increased sales and efficiencies.

"I don't see RFID [radio frequency identification] becoming widespread in the near future because it's just too costly," states Henri Morris, president of Solid Software Solutions, Houston, TX. "The only way to do it is to work on the bar-coding capability, which means getting down to the grass-roots level and ensuring warehouse workers have some kind of hand-held PDA [personal digital assistant] or recording device that matches items to sales being made. That validates the product, validates the sale, validates the delivery route, validates that the right quantities are going out and ultimately drops shrinkage dramatically."

Steve Reilly, national sales manager for Produce Pro Software, Inc., Woodridge, IL, sees the future of the industry software evolving to accommodate more automation of procedures and taking advantage of new tags and wireless devices. His view also includes more interaction between distributor companies and their customers as well as more paperless behaviors. **pb**

and consultant. "By having accurate inventory management protocols, we can find where all the shrink is coming from."

One of the biggest problems associated with inventory tracking actually originates at retail, explains Randy Fields, chairman and CEO for Park City Group, Park City, UT. The question of how much product should be in the distribution center depends on the retailer's needs on a day-in and day-out basis. "The distributors get caught in a bind because the retailer is not good at doing its forecasting, and that keeps backing up the whole food chain until everybody is scrambling to solve a problem," he explains. His group uses a Fresh Market Manager product to help retailers improve forecasting and electronic ordering. This improves the quality of the retailer's order, which improves the quality of the distributor's ordering.

CUTTING LOSSES

Ray Connelly, sales manager for Famous Software, LLC, Fresno, CA, claims the biggest benefit of inventory management software is the establishment of a trace-back system that lets people know where items came from and where they went. This puts visibility into the system and can also reduce losses. "I've heard people say they lose five to 10 percent of their inventory every month, but when they implement software, that number drops. It's too easy for losses to pile up if you don't have everything identified on the inbound."

For those who are considering the move to a software package that will handle inventory functions, Don Walborn, director of marketing for Kirkey Products Group, Longwood, FL, suggests, "Using pallet tags is the very first step to begin controlling inventory. Then you can start adding additional features, such as wired or wireless devices, case coding and RFID [radio frequency identification]."

Walborn says Kirkey's software will seldom have all the features and functionality

a customer wants because it tailors the package to fit the customer's business. At the same time, those developments end up being rolled into the base code to provide a stable development platform and to make it less costly and more effective to support. Kirkey also prides itself in a small user base that allows it to focus heavily on customer service and support.

Adopting new systems is seldom a simple operation especially in light of company cultures. "With inventory management, the biggest challenge is that it forces a certain amount of procedures onto your workforce," reports Connelly. "More accountability means more procedures, so software solutions require a certain amount of rigidity in the procedures for handling the product." He relates the story of a company that took three tries to implement inventory management software before getting it right. One of the major issues the company faced was a company culture resistant to accountability and control.

Most software vendors can relate stories of how the additional accountability brought by software can uncover theft and side businesses by employees. In one extreme situation, a company discovered a 30-year employee was actually running a company within the company and from the profits had amassed rental properties and other assets that went well beyond his income.

> **"With inventory management, the biggest challenge is that it forces a certain amount of procedures onto your workforce."**
>
> **— Ray Connelly**
> **Famous Software, LLC**

FINDING NEW EFFICIENCIES

Motek's Price lists issues such as optimizing travel paths, combining work to minimize empty forklift moves and assigning standard times to various movements as efficiencies that can grow out of having a WMS. This can lead to incentivizing the tasks so people who perform them efficiently and correctly can be paid bonuses. Price has customers who pay extra hourly dollars to employees who exceed the standards by various percentages. The total result is productivity gains of 20 to 30 percent when companies move from paper to real-time systems, and then another 20 to 30 percent gain when they implement standards and incentivize the work.

Instead of determining how long a particular task should take, Edible Software's approach is to track actual efficiencies over a period of time, which can then be used to establish benchmarks of performance, notes Morris. Once those are in place, a company can establish incentives for exceeding the benchmarks and help under-performing workers achieve its standards.

Produce Pro's Reilly also speaks of customers that offer incentives to employees for demonstrating accurate, rapid and efficient warehouse behaviors. Users recording inventory shrink report their shrink dropped below 2 percent and stayed there since adopting the software, Reilly adds. Before the software, that number was as high as 10 percent. **pb**

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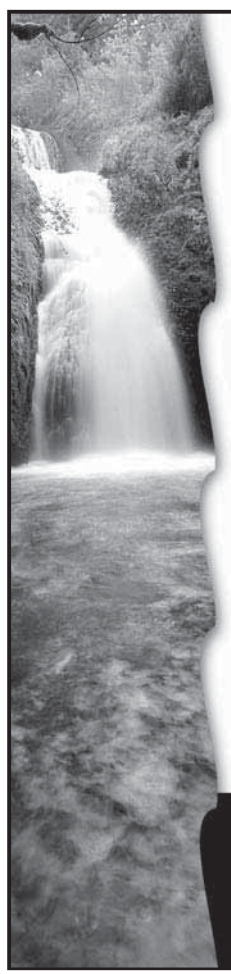

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Reader Service # 52

TWIN CITIES
Boasts Healthy Produce Sales

The Minneapolis/St. Paul produce market has a long-standing history of loyalty and great product offerings.

BY K.O. MORGAN

Healthful living has long been a part of the lifestyle in the Twin Cities. The Minneapolis/St. Paul area boasts more than a dozen farmers markets and hundreds of certified organic farmers. Many residents gravitate to popular locally grown items, such as Honeycrisp apples, morel mushrooms, wild leeks, rutabagas and yellow, white and red onions.

Minnesota is the fifth healthiest state in the country, and Minneapolis/St. Paul is on the top list of healthiest areas in which to live, according to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), St. Paul, MN.

"I don't know why people in the Twin Cities are more health conscious than in some other places, but they are into reading up on the health benefits of certain foods," explains, Chris Strube, head of business development, Strube Celery and Vegetable Company, a Chicago, IL-based wholesaler that does business in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. "It's also a combination of the retailers there educating their consumers, and the consumers wanting better foods for themselves."

"People have to eat, and here they want to eat healthfully," states Andy DeLisi, chief of operations at J & J Distributing Company, St. Paul, MN. "People are into their produce and are involved in many outdoor activities. They live healthful lifestyles that include a diet rich in fruits and vegetables."

Brian Hauge, president, Wholesale Produce Supply, Inc., Minneapolis, MN, adds, "The whole country is focused on health and wellness, so produce is doing well here and everywhere. The population in the Twin Cities, as a whole, is well off financially, so people here can afford to eat healthfully."

"What you have here is an educated public and a great standard of living," explains Phillip Brooks, third-generation owner of H. Brooks and Company, New Brighten, MN. "Minneapolis scores high on educational test scores and has one of the highest numbers of people in the country with a secondary or post-secondary education. The Twin Cities are also headquarters to many Fortune 500 companies, so economically, the area is doing well."

Frank McCarthy, vice president of marketing, Albert's Organics, Inc., a Bridgeport, NJ-based distributor with a Twin Cities division in Mounds View, MN, agrees. "Minneapolis/St. Paul is unique in three ways: Its income is higher than the national average, its population is highly educated and it has a history and tradition of tolerance with thriving ethnic communities. This confluence of income, culture and lifestyle favors high produce consumption."

Brad Anderson, vice president, Metro Produce, Minneapolis, MN, says the area seems to be doing better economically than the rest of the nation. "Combine that with the population's commitment to more healthful living, and that makes a big difference in consumer choices."

The population consists of more white-collar than blue-collar workers, notes Paul Piazza, president, Minnesota Produce, Inc., Minneapolis, MN. Many Fortune 500 companies, such as 3M and General Mills, call Minneapolis home, he adds. "Eating healthfully can get expensive, but this market can handle it."

"There are quite a few independent companies here that try to use produce as part of their business and look at produce as an important part of their business," explains Brooks. "We provide a fresh sup-

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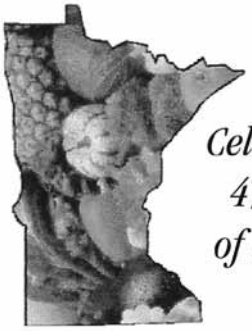

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Left to right: Brian Hauge of Wholesale Produce Supply Co. (WPS), Jason Hendrickson (now with Target Corp.), Art Quiggle and Reed Silbert of WPS

ply chain for retailers, distributors and manufacturers to help them improve their produce quality, sales and profitability."

People in the Twin Cities seem willing to try new types of produce. "People in Minnesota like to cook," relates Andrew Kartak, associate team leader, Whole Foods Market in Minneapolis, one of more than 270 stores operated by Whole Foods Market, Inc., Austin, TX. "A large group of people here stay home and cook, and many of them are into trying new items. We try to have a diverse selection of fruits and vegetables for them to choose from."

"There's a Nordic tradition of home cooking here," adds McCarthy.

The area's growing ethnic population has also aided wholesale produce sales. The area's traditional Swedish, German and Polish foods combine with newer Somali, Cambodian and Mexican fare. "There are many ethnic groups here that drive the sales," states Hauge of Wholesale Produce. "The area is made up of many nationalities, particularly Scandinavians, Germans, Hispanics and Asians, so the range of produce offered is wide."

"In the last several years, a lot of immigrants have moved into the area, particularly Hispanics and Asians," explains J & J's DeLisi. "It's been fun to watch this ethnic market grow, and it has certainly added to our business!"

FARMERS MARKETS AND ORGANICS

The Minneapolis Farmers Market has operated in various locations since 1876. The Midtown Global Market, opened in 2006, is an internationally themed public market made up of ethnically diverse retail stores. The Mill City Market in downtown Minneapolis also opened in 2006. The St. Paul Farmers Market, which began in 1852, was St. Paul's first farmers market. While these markets tend to benefit local growers, many of the Twin Cities' wholesalers also take advantage of the their' popularity.

"The wholesale markets are thriving for several reasons," notes Albert's McCarthy. "First, they're easily accessible. Second, a large number of foodservice establishments purchase from them. Finally, in a town where produce is important, independent retailers can get good prices, freshness and quality, so they can compete with the chains. These markets are also the destination of choice for the local growers in season, which adds another attraction."

"People here flock in droves to roadside produce stands," explains DeLisi. "At Midtown Global Market, we have an offshoot subsidiary retail market called Midtown Produce Exchange. We're finding it to be very successful with people who are interested in diversity. Plus, our business is big with the organics market, and our retail store tries to cater to everyone's tastes. It's an exciting venture for us, and people seem to like the small personal touch of our store."

Organics resonate with Twin Cities consumers. "People here like the availability during the summer and fall of locally grown products, so we buy a lot of our produce from Minnesota and maybe Wisconsin," says Whole Foods' Kartak. "We buy from local growers for the normal stuff, like squash and corn, but our unique items sometimes come from California and Florida. We focus primarily on organics — not entirely, but that's a lot of our product line. There's a huge demand these days for organics, and while our local produce isn't completely organic, we have a strong partnership with the organic growers and wholesalers. Even the conventional supermarkets in this area are increasing their organic product line. I think it's because people here are educated about food. They hear the horror stories about pesticides and fertilizers, and so our consumer base wants to know what they're eating and what they're feeding their families."

Strube of Strube Celery, agrees, adding, "Organics are huge. It's a big mover. It's not a fad. The organics scene has been up here a long time — something other markets, like

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What's New In Minneapolis/St. Paul?

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

J & J Distributing Co., St. Paul, MN – J & J continues to emphasize sustainability as it celebrates its 30th anniversary. Adjacent to its warehouse, it is installing a rain garden designed to help purify storm water runoff. J & J purchased the addition through a grant attained in cooperation with the City of St. Paul, according to president Jim Hannigan. "We also put an energy-efficient white roof on our building. This is part of our statement of sustainability, responsibility and giving back to the community."

In another environmentally friendly endeavor, the company is expanding its use of packaging made of low-carbon biopolymers derived from 100 percent renewable resources. "We've made a commitment to a plant-sugar-based container program for anything we pack in organics and fresh cut," according to Hannigan. J & J partnered with NatureWorks LLC, Minnetonka, MN. In the first half of 2008, J & J saved "nearly 27,000 gallons of gasoline and reduced greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to driving a car 580,000 miles in the United States," by using trays made from plants, he adds.

Ron Forman joined J & J in April. He previously worked with Albert's Organics, Inc., Bridgeport, NJ, and gained the bulk of his experience working for Minneapolis, MN-based Roots & Fruits Co. "Ron is very well respected in the organic community," Hannigan notes.

Another key contributor is Hannigan's son, Kevin Hannigan, executive director of operations. Much of J & J's continuing success in the organics category is attributed to Kevin's efforts. "We're now very established as an organic destination," he explains. "About one-third of our business is in organics."

J & J has four full-time organic sales staff members and its 18 merchandisers spend about two-thirds of their time on organics. "Not only are we organic-certified at all levels of our distribution chain but we are also all about food safety," Hannigan emphasizes. "We are certified through all necessary third-party auditors, and each of our employees is food safety-trained. We practice good manufacturing practices [GMP] and manage our hazardous analysis critical control points [HACCP]. We're supporting Fairtrade, which promotes fair wage and sustainability in the agricultural industry.

"J & J started in 1978 with 3,000 square feet, four employees and a passion for excellence. Today, we're in an innovative 108,000-square-foot warehouse [90,000 square-feet refrigerated] in the heart of St. Paul staffed by 240 experienced, dedicated employees," he notes.

Wholesale Produce Supply LLC, Minneapolis, MN – An expanding organic program, enhanced foodservice focus, facility upgrades and numerous staff additions are part of the ongoing efforts to stay a step above the competition, according to president Brian Hauge. "We're now organic-certified to pack tomatoes and avocados. We're not limited to those organic items, but they are our specialties."

Wholesale Produce recently obtained full GMP compliance through required audits. "We continue to exceed industry standards for food safety," notes Art Quiggle, vice president and tomato buyer.

Jason Hendrickson, produce buyer and business development coordinator, agrees, adding, "We go above and beyond what certification requires on several levels. This includes training all employees – at all levels from the janitors to the president – through meetings and videos on food safety and sanitation."

Wholesale' Produce's efforts in this arena are vertically integrated and extend through all levels of the distribution chain, beginning with grower/shipper suppliers. "Our wholesale and purchasing patterns are evolving toward giving the most support to those with good agricultural practices [GAP], and all of our tomato shippers have GAP and HACCP programs in place. Whenever possible, we try to buy from socially responsible and socially accountable growers."

The company continues to support its local growers as much as possible. "We have already made exclusive contracts with local growers for peppers, tomatoes and other Minnesota-grown products," reports Hauge.

Facility upgrades include a new overwrap machine. "We've tripled our production in overwrap packing, and we are adding more retail-ready items custom-packed to meet our customers' specific needs," notes Quiggle. "We have historically outperformed our competitors on packaging." Specifically, "Our premium-pack, extra-large peppers have been successful at store level."

When it comes to quality control, Wholesale Produce maintains there are times where nothing compares to manual labor. "We continually travel the country to seek out the newest in tomato repacking and color sorting, and we still haven't found anything to take the place of hand packing," Hauge stresses. "We believe the product still gets damaged too much by automation. To maintain the best quality, we believe hand packing is still the best."

Wholesale Produce is the exclusive distributor to Midwest receivers for tomatoes packed for Green Giant brands. "We've been very happy with the growth of our Green Giant lines with our customers, Affiliated Foods [Inc., Amarillo, TX] and Super Target [Minneapolis, MN]," Hauge explains. The Green Giant label is offered in the full line of consumer packs for retail.

Numerous key staff joined the company during the past year, including Dave Kadlec, a buyer for apples, pears and potatoes. Doug Weller, who assists with tomato buying and coordination for national retail accounts, logged more than 20 years of produce experience in the Twin Cities region before joining.

Jen Rigdon is focusing "on business development, including expanded growth with existing customers and attaining new customers in the Midwest," explains Hauge. Jason Hendrickson is back with Wholesale Produce as a buyer and business development coordinator after a brief departure this past year.

Wholesale doubled its staff in its Canada office. Denise St. Pierre worked as a produce and meat buyer before joining the Winnipeg, MB, office. "Our business is expanding into the western provinces," reports Hauge. "We are providing our customers to the north the added confidence of proper inspections, quality control, and timely delivery."

H. Brooks & Co., New Brighton, MN – The company became the second in the nation and first in the Midwest to obtain certification from the Midwest Food Alliance, Minneapolis, MN. To gain compliance, companies must "focus on the purity and nutritional value of food, adhere to quality controls and food safety, reduce the use of toxic chemicals and hazardous materials, commit to resource management and recycling and provide safe and fair working conditions," explains Phillip Brooks, CEO.

Midwest Food Alliance is a branch of Food Alliance, a Portland, OR-based organization with more than 250 Food Alliance certified farmers and manufacturers in the United States. Food Alliance gives producers and handlers a way to verify they are conducting business in a sustainable manner through environment-friendly procedures.

H. Brooks is an approved handler of products from local certified farms and is meeting the alliance's sustainability standards. "We've always supported and bought local produce, but now we provide the additional support and official documentation," Brooks adds. "Today's consumers are looking for more local, regional and sustainable options."

Minnesota Produce, Minneapolis, MN – President Paul Piazza emphasizes, "Things are stable here, which I almost have to say is a surprise to us because of the economy." The company has been in business for nearly 50 years, and the bulk of its customer base remains with foodservice distributors and processors.

The Brings Co. Inc., St. Paul, MN – A new company logo introduced last year reflects both innovation and tradition, according to Pat Coan, president. "It's modern, yet old fashioned," she notes. "We'll be able to use it forever as a great representation of our company philosophy and values."

Brings' new conventional onion 4-pack, the Chef's Choice Tray, has received good response. Introduced to the retail sector last summer, "It features two yellow, one red and one white onion," explains Beth Arel, sales manager. "It's value-added, since it also has recipes, onion tips and nutritional information printed on the packaging. It also works well for secondary onion displays for cross-promotions." **pb**

Phillip Brooks of H. Brooks & Co.

Jim Hannigan of J & J Distributing

Pat Coan of Brings Co.

Brian Hauge, Wholesale Produce Supply Co.

Kevin Hannigan of J & J Distributing Co.

Paul Piazza of Minnesota Produce Inc.

Chicago, are only just now catching on to."

H. Brooks is a certified organic wholesale produce distributor. "We have more than 130 products that are organic, and we're adding to that line all the time," says Brooks. The company works with the Midwest Food Alliance, a Minneapolis, MN-based non-profit organization focused on purity and nutritional value, quality control, food safety, reduction of toxins and hazardous materials, resource management and recycling, and safe and fair working conditions.

Metro Produce stresses the importance of quality. "We distribute to high-end receivers who want the best," notes Anderson. "Organics are huge here, and the market has grown for us and the industry as a whole, but I believe Minnesota has had a larger organic market growth than the rest of the nation due to the high-end lifestyle and educational level of the population.

"That doesn't mean organics are necessarily better, but people here seem to want to choose organics over conventional produce," he stresses. "We're a full-line wholesale produce company. Organics is just a small area of our line — about 10 percent of our sales."

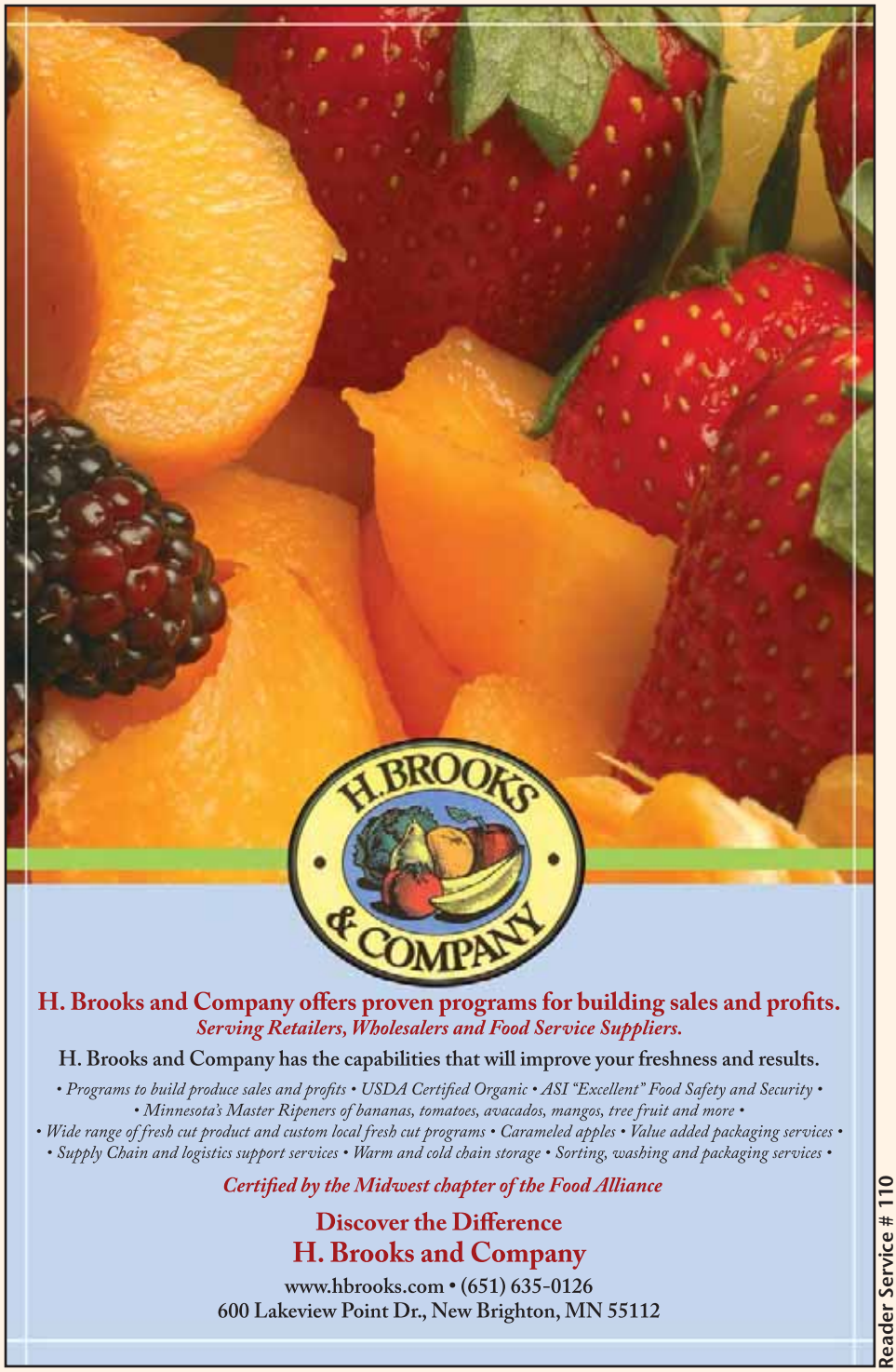
La Belle Vie restaurant in Minneapolis, MN, boasts a high-end menu. "Organics are always a component of that, but we get fantastic produce products in general," according to Bill Summerville, partner. "We use local growers as much as possible, and when produce is fresh and in season, we make that a highlight on our menu.

"There are a a large group of vegetarians in the Twin Cities area, so we keep that in mind when planning meals," he continues.

Chef Lenny Russo, who co-owns Heartland Contemporary Midwestern Restaurant with his wife, Mega Hoehn, in St. Paul, MN, says the term organics can be misleading. "We believe in organic, but we're not big on organic as a label. Organic can simply mean the farmer used organic fertilizer, but we try to also make sure the products have proper crop rotation and the soil is fed and sustainable. We give preference to farmers that meet certain standards. We also change the menu daily, so we use what's fresh at that time of year. Most of our produce comes from a 200-mile radius."

SUPPLY CHAIN CHALLENGES

Although the Minneapolis/St. Paul produce market looks bright, it's not without it's challenges. "The list of big produce players is getting shorter," states Minnesota Produce's Piazza. "Supervalu [Inc., based in Eden



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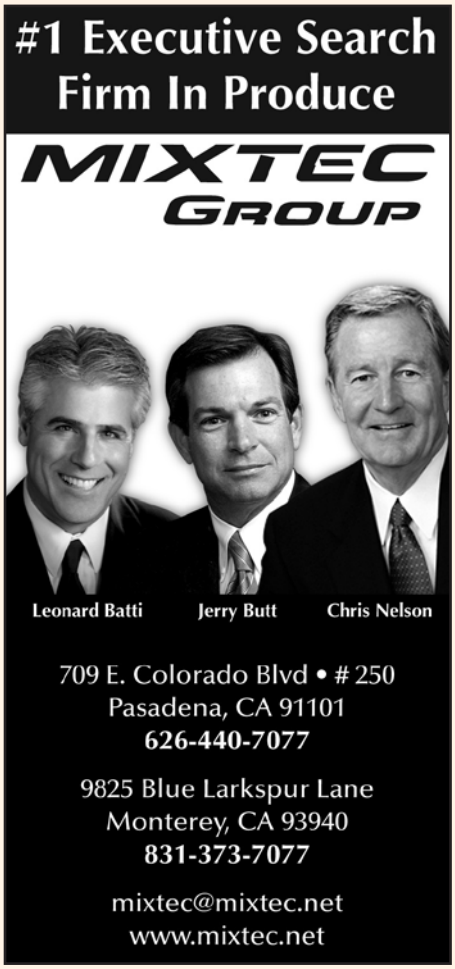

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Prairie, MN] dominates the market. The few independent chains have their niche and are competing on that level, but right now, we're seeing a fast swing to corporate level that's killing wholesale, retail and distributor businesses. The big chains are getting bigger, and the medium and small guys are getting smaller. In our local market, the wholesalers, processors and retailers are doing the bare minimum. Our role as brokers is that we can see the overall perspective of the market, and small and medium companies need our services. No one wants to carry an extra load of product, so we have to work at building the loads, work at getting companies to buy extra inventory. Increasingly, more companies are buying via a corporate mandate, and fewer sales are done the old-fashioned way with true buying and selling. We are a good, old-fashioned company."

Minnesota Produce's Piazza says the Twin Cities are losing their traditional skills of buying and selling produce. "On a local level, we're losing our pool of human resources — people aged 50 and older who have the traditional skills of buying or selling produce. Today's corporate trend is to draw on a younger resource that does what they're told, and takes orders from who they're told to. From my perspective, produce is becoming less human."

Brooks of H. Brooks has a different take. "I view our role as one of helping people grow their produce businesses. We have a refrigerated warehouse and distribute to different retailers and distributors. We provide logistics support for people out of town to deliver here, to keep the chain going so our customers are treated like royalty. To do that, we take the bumps out of handling produce. We help them find the good stuff and make sure it arrives fresh and often. We're experts at ripening bananas, avocados, peaches, nectarines and pears because of our facility's temperature-controlled environment.

"We run things differently than most wholesalers because our whole operation is designed around a European concept of fresh produce," he continues. "We have studied how they handle food in Europe, where the produce comes in and goes out fresh every day. We travel to Europe and study their procedures, design them into our facilities and make it part of our culture of business."

H. Brooks' facilities are humidity controlled to protect its buildings and produce from mold. Plus, the temperature control is specific to the type of produce. "For example, with fruits, such as tomatoes and bananas, it's very important to keep the temperature consistent, in order to protect the flavor and texture," Brooks explains. "We also have temperature-controlled trucks."

Anderson of Metro Produce also sees the Twin Cities wholesale produce business as flourishing. "We're a wholesale distribution company, and the market here thrives for the same reasons it has thrived for the past decade or so — we specialize in it and can react quicker to market changes and conditions. Basically, if you focus on one section of the market or restaurateur, you can do it better than the competitors. Not meaning to take away from the full-line distributors, you understand. But there's a definite need from consumers for companies that specialize in produce and only produce."

Helping local growers grow their produce business can also benefit the area's produce wholesalers. "We're one of the first companies to proactively put together training sessions for local growers, where the top people in the industry come in and where growers can receive training, third-party certification, and gather new products," says Brooks.

Educating consumers how to prepare produce, particularly unique or unusual items, can also boost sales. "We provide our customers with lots of informative demos," says Whole Foods' Kartak. "Our customers like to cook — many walk around our store with cookbooks! So we have recipe racks by the produce section, and if we have a strange or unusual item, we'll provide information on how to prepare it."

The area's size helps keep competition from other areas, such as Chicago, from intruding on the Twin Cities wholesale produce market. "We have a tremendous customer base of our own," says J & J's DeLisi. "Most people who live here are loyal to the local growers."

Metro Produce may use products from Chicago if it's out of stock "but it's not cost effective for those distributors to deliver up here," notes Anderson. "We may be close to Chicago, but it's still a good 400 miles away, and with the cost of gasoline, it doesn't make sense for them to try to do business here."

Piazza agrees, adding, "The Twin Cities is a regional hub. Our markets include all of Minnesota, parts of Wisconsin, Iowa and the Dakotas. We're not concerned with the Chicago market at all."

Albert's McCarthy sees the situation differently, "Local demand for produce in Minneapolis is very high, but the disadvantage is the proximity of the Chicago wholesale market that provides stiff competition when local product is not available. The Chicago market is more of a national and global market, whereas more local produce goes to the farmers markets in Minneapolis."

Most wholesalers, distributors and growers in Minneapolis/St. Paul are multi-generational. Outsiders who want to do business here can penetrate this close-knit market if they keep in mind Minnesotans' loyalty to businesses that care about providing quality produce.

With the local demand for produce high and the combination of affluence, a cooking culture and a large health-conscious population, the Twin Cities are booming. **pb**

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Garlic Drives Produce Sales

Maximize marketing opportunities throughout the year to build profits in bulk and processed garlic items.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

The small garlic bulb packs significant flavor and a tremendous merchandising punch for retailers looking to boost sales in the produce department. "Garlic is very profitable and a driver of incremental sales," explains Louis Hymel, director of purchasing and marketing, Spice World, Inc., Orlando, FL. "Popular because of its use in many recipes, garlic is a very durable item with low shrink and minimum loss."

"Garlic is important because it sells other produce items, such as spinach and broccoli rabe," states Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for Kings Super Markets, a Parsippany, NJ-based chain with 36 stores. "Consumers expect it as a basic so retailers really need to have it."

Patsy Ross, vice president of marketing, Christopher Ranch, LLC, Gilroy, CA, agrees, adding, "Garlic can help sell everything else in the department and the store. It can take a bland vegetable and make it a dish. It can also give consumers ideas for fish and meat."

Exposure on television has increased interest in garlic. "Garlic is important because it's a key ingredient in so many recipes," notes Raul Gallegos, senior director of produce and floral, Bristol Farms, a Carson, CA-based chain with 19 stores. "With the increasing popularity of food shows, garlic has really made an impact as a key ingredient in many dishes."

"There is a need to carry fresh garlic," adds Ross. "A retailer must have the products the Food Network is showing because it has a lot of very loyal viewers."

As garlic grows in popularity, retailers must be on top of how to maximize sales. "Garlic never seems to go out of style," notes Jeff Schwartz, vice president, Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc., South Hackensack, NJ. "We have seen exponential growth of the item and I think it will continue for the foreseeable future."

Garlic is used by a large percentage of the shopping public and retailers are encouraged to recognize its broad appeal. "Every ethnic group uses it," he states. "Garlic appeals to Southeast Asians, Southern Asians, Chinese, Southern Europeans, French, Italians, Hispanics and many more."

Photos courtesy of Christopher Ranch

Fresh garlic often leads to sales of other fresh vegetables.

Ross agrees garlic is an amazing product and important to so many different cuisines. "Whether the demographic is Asian, Hispanic, Italian or European, plenty of garlic is used in cooking. Retailers should not underestimate who is a garlic consumer."

Tailoring and expanding promotions to cover a wide range of consumers will increase sales. "Each retailer should look at its consumer base and devise its own garlic strategy," she advises. "You can do a lot of things at retail to promote garlic. We want to help each of our retail customers make its garlic statement because there is no cookie-cutter solution."

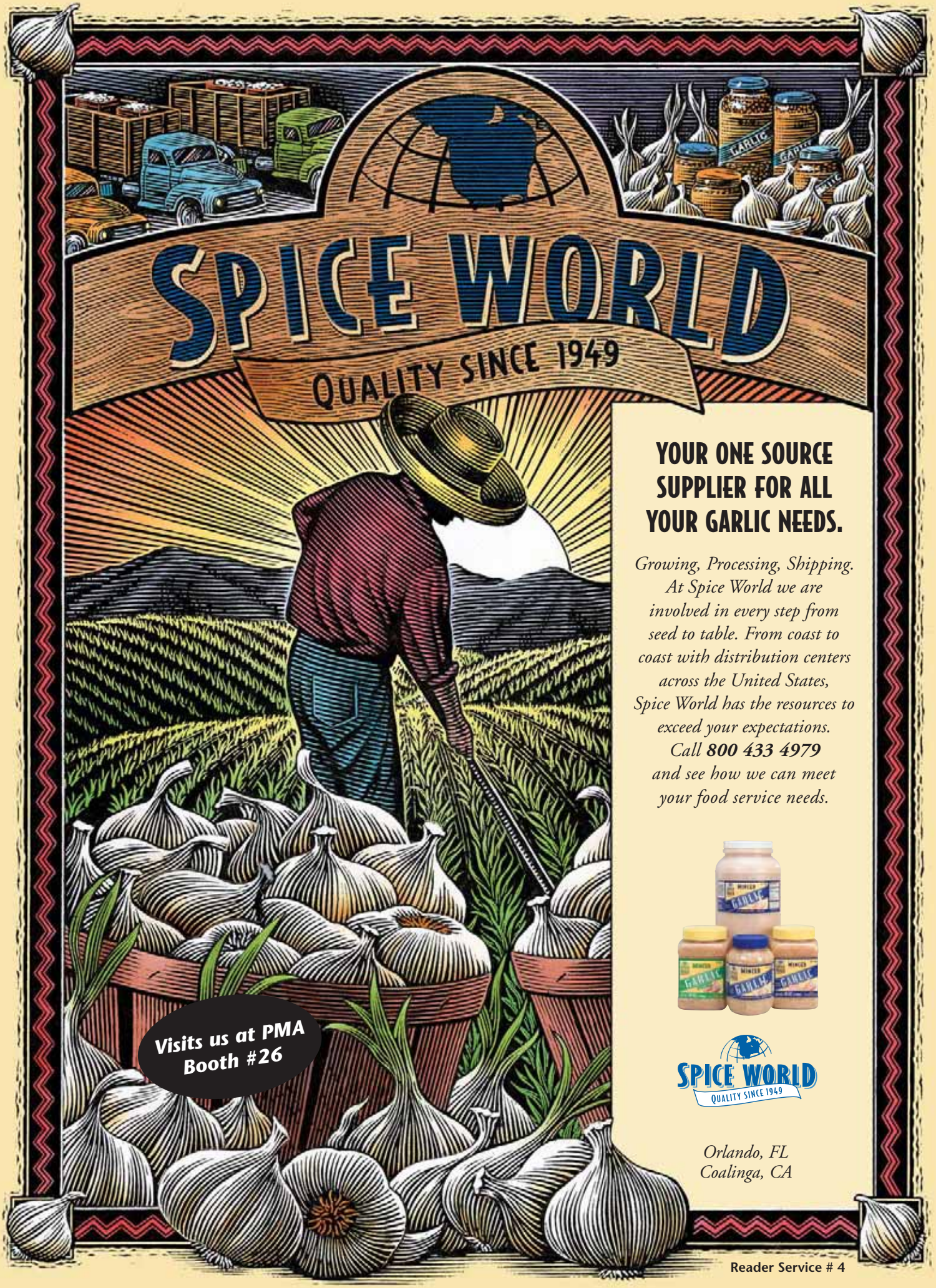
TIE INTO HOLIDAYS

Promoting during holidays and seasonal events will help stimulate sales of garlic. "Cinco de Mayo, Thanksgiving, Italian festivals and summertime barbeques are great opportunities to promote," explains Hymel. "Cross-merchandising during football season using garlic and guacamole dip enhances incremental sales of garlic, avocados and other ingredients."

"For Easter and Passover, we promote the garlic with roasted meats," reports Schwartz. "For Halloween, there is the obvious vampire tie-in and we decorate our box in Halloween colors," he continues. "During the summer, fresh fruits and vegetables are high on people's agenda, so we promote it with the barbeque foods."

Gallegos recommends "stores take advantage of the opportunities with events like the Gilroy Garlic Festival or others. They can piggy back on those events and get on the bandwagon using the festivals as a promotion in the department, such as a 'We Bring the Garlic Festival to You' theme."

Promoting different types or presentations of garlic can help stimulate sales at certain times. "The summer may be slower



Reader Service # 4

The Source Controversy

Chinese garlic imports have taken the United States by storm, but despite widespread availability, thunder still rumbles when discussion regarding imports arises. In the past, concerns have focused on food-safety issues, especially given last year's flurry of Chinese recalls in other products, but importers maintain the safety of their Chinese product.

"More Chinese garlic is sold in the United States than garlic from the United States, Mexico and Argentina combined," states Jim Provost, president of I Love Produce, LLC, Kelton, PA. "This demonstrates the market's belief in our product. Our company has a food-safety plan in place that ensures our products from all growing regions, including China, are wholesome and safe. There is no need to sacrifice safety in order to maximize profits if you are dealing with the right company. Retailers should look for the inspection sticker on each case of Chinese garlic they buy. Stricter scientific testing requirements were put into place last September."

However, a new debate is now brewing over flavor. "Chinese garlic is less expensive, but nine times out of 10, the California garlic quality is better," according to Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral, Kings Super Markets, based in Parsippany, NJ. "For my consumers, we try to move toward quality over price. The more educated the consumer is about food, the more they care about where it comes from — and they'll ask."

"Our consumers are very critical about the source of garlic, but maybe it's because we're in the heartland of production," adds Raul Gallegos, senior director of produce and floral for Bristol Farms, based in Carson, CA. "Of course, there are times of the year when we need imported garlic to fill the windows, but our preference is California grown when we can."

Although the industry acknowledges the need for imports to fill certain windows, perceived quality remains a differentiation.

than winter for garlic sales, but retailers can promote elephant garlic to roast on the grill," explains Kneeland.

"Having a big display of garlic multiple times a year has proven to be successful in driving sales," adds Christopher Ranch's Ross. "Promoting garlic four times a year has proven to be very successful."

PROVIDE VARIETY AND MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Experts agree choice leads to sales. "The produce department should carry a complete selection of all garlic items and sizes," suggests Spice World's Hymel. "Different cooks and recipes call for different garlic items. The more offered, the more garlic sales will grow."

"Retailers can increase profitability by offering different varieties like elephant garlic," King's Kneeland agrees. "They can offer packages, such as sleeves with four in a pack. The more choices consumers have, the more apt they are to buy the product."

Multiple displays also increase profitability. "Having garlic in as many spots as possible helps retailers get the garlic sale as well as sell other stuff," notes Kneeland. "We always have at least three garlic displays — 1-foot by 18-inch — one near the tomatoes, one in the seafood department and one in the onion section."

"Merchandising in multiple locations increases profit," Bristol Farms' Gallegos concurs. "Space constraints can be a challenge, but the more exposure you give it, the more likely consumers will buy. Many times, people will overlook the need for garlic and use a dried version instead of buying fresh."

"We'd like to see more garlic merchandised as a commodity and as part of colorful displays around the tomatoes and avocados,"

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"There is a place for Chinese product in our market," states Jeff Schwartz, vice president of Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc., South Hackensack, NJ. "However, as a garlic connoisseur, I find the taste properties are not the same. California garlic is still tops when it comes to eye appeal and taste. When it's winter in North America, the Argentine product is excellent garlic, tasty and appealing."

The California industry claims to have tests confirming quality differences. "We've done some actual oils testing," explains Patsy Ross, vice president of marketing for Christopher Ranch in Gilroy, CA. "The tests found there is a real quality difference but we're not sure why. It could be a climate, production or seed difference. It seems Chinese garlic has a higher water content which affects the flavor profile. California garlic, especially late season product, has higher oil content. We've done blind taste tests and have had chefs do tests and they have all reported the California flavor is better [than Chinese garlic]."

However, those involved with Chinese garlic are not yet ready to concede a quality difference. Provost explains, "A study from Ronald Voss, a vegetable crops professor with the University of California in Davis, CA, who has been involved with garlic production in many international production areas, including California, shows our Chinese production practices and facility are as good as any in the Western Hemisphere."

"Retailers should look at the numbers and let consumers dictate what sells or not," advises Provost. "Legitimate suppliers should be able to offer food-safety credentials and traceability from their garlic supply areas for safety of the consumer and the benefit of the produce industry. Our company is passionate about growing the garlic category. We enjoy promoting garlic from all of our supply areas, including California, Argentina, Mexico and China. We work only with growers and suppliers meeting our standards and our customers' standards. It would be a contradiction to do otherwise." **pb**

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Reader Service #53

ful displays around the tomatoes and avocados," explains Ross. "Garlic can be an impulse item, so if consumers see it, they'll often grab it. Merchandising it in multiple locations is a way to increase sales."

DISPLAY PROMINENTLY

Large, well-managed displays will attract consumers. "Big, clean eye-catching displays will draw purchasing attention," according to Hymel.

"A veteran of the produce industry once told me, 'Pile it high and let it fly,'" explains Jim Provost, president of I Love Produce, LLC, Kelton, PA. "Impulse sales are generated with large displays because garlic is used in so many ways."

Be creative in using color, quality and placement for merchandising. "A fresh, attractive and well-filled display enhances sales," states Auerbach's Schwartz. "If garlic is bright and white and skins are intact and looking supple, it increases sales. An attractive and inviting display encourages consumers to pick up a handful."

"Fresh garlic displays very well next to the tomato sections," adds Provost. "The color contrast is visually appealing to the consumer, and many dishes using tomatoes also use garlic. Peeled garlic does well in the Asian specialty refrigerated section with tofu. Jarred garlic can be added anywhere because it is shelf-stable. The key is to keep it at eye level and not in knee-high bins."

CROSS-MERCHANDISE

Taking garlic beyond the produce department can also add incremental sales. "We merchandise garlic in different places within the department, but we also go outside the department," explains Kneeland. "We always have a display over by seafood with a nice fish on special. We try to do a lot of cross-merchandising outside of the department to help consumers pick up the item."

Stores should look for cross-merchandising opportunities throughout the store. "We are seeing garlic displayed by meats and in other areas of the store," notes Schwartz.

Likewise, Gallegos notes, "We do additional cross-merchandising opportunities throughout the store. We'll do a tomato display with garlic and specialty tomato varieties like heirlooms. We've also done some garlic for a visual in bakery with breads."

"It should be displayed with other items complementing each other," states Hymel. "Display size and visibility are key. Within the department, good places include next to the avocados, tomatoes, corn, potatoes, salads and countless other areas. It can also be displayed in the bakery department next to fresh loaves of bread for garlic bread and it can be displayed in the pasta and sauce section. Garlic will drive sales."

TOUT HEALTH AND FLAVOR ASPECTS

There are strong promotional health messages for garlic. "Health is always a concern and we're an aging society," reasons Hymel. "Garlic is known for many of its health benefits. Healthy eating and garlic complement each other."

"Play up the health benefits," recommends Schwartz. "Garlic is known to reduce blood pressure and provide a host of other health benefits."

Retailers can promote the flavor of garlic by taking a cue from television. "With the popularity of the cooking shows, more and more people like flavor and will be prone to buy more garlic because it adds flavor," explains Kneeland.

INCLUDE VALUE-ADDED

Retailers should offer value-added garlic items as a means of bringing in an extra ring. "Processed value-added garlic items are very popular," explains Spice World's Hymel. "Convenient, ready-to-use jarred garlic is a winner with all consumers."

"Jarred garlic, including chopped and crushed in a shelf-stable form, as well as refrigerated, fresh peeled garlic have expanded the garlic category at retail," reports Provost of I Love Produce. "These items are typically sold in the refrigerated case next to Asian specialties or dressings."

Value-added items can be merchandised in different places, depending on the department's other promotions. "We sell the value-added items usually close to the tomato display because we have dried tomatoes in the same set," notes King's Kneeland. "We have chopped, crushed and organic chopped garlic. We merchandise olive oil and balsamic vinegar there as well. It gives people ideas and helps entice them to buy more than just one produce item."

Retailers may also want to consider organic. "Our consumers are replacing or supplementing their conventional garlic displays with USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture]/NOP [National Organic Program] Organic Certified garlic," says Provost. "Every bulb is PLU stickered to prevent any confusion at the register. Retailers enjoy increased sales because our imported organic garlic is priced to meet the needs of all consumers. The consumers win because they get bigger, whiter organic garlic, and it costs less. Retailers win with increased consumer loyalty and wider margins." **pb**

"The garlic produced, prepared and shipped from China by I Love Produce, is as safe and free from health risks as garlic grown, prepared and shipped in the USA."

- *Dr. Ron Voss*

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No Place Like New York

The country's largest wholesale produce market serves one of the country's most diverse communities.

By Jacqueline Ross Lieberman

Welcome to New York, NY, a city so diverse that a trip from one neighborhood to another might as well be a trip from China to Beverly Hills. A city that is home to pushcarts, old-fashioned greengrocers and some of the most lavish supermarkets in the world: A Whole Foods Market in Columbus Circle offers 59,000 square feet of retail and dining space just blocks from the Metropolitan Opera. New York was one of the first cities where residents began to have groceries delivered to their door any day of the week — via a service called FreshDirect — as though they were ordering a pizza.

Yet this is also a city where, in the poorest neighborhoods, a trip to buy fresh produce requires a bus ticket. Many residents of these areas live without fresh fruits and vegetables, relying on bodegas and drugstores to fill their pantries. To many, this is a city of unfulfilled opportunities.

New Yorkers eat more specialty items than Midwesterners. According to Myra Gordon, executive administrative director, Hunts Point Terminal Cooperative Association, Inc., Bronx, NY, "We're very spoiled. There are parts of the United States where people can only get mushrooms from a can." Here in New York, shoppers expect to see not just one type of fresh mushroom but a large variety.

Much like city-dwelling Europeans, folks in this area do not mind hopping from store to store to get exactly what they want. "They 'cherry pick,'" explains Jim D'Amato, vice president of sales for the newly formed Katzman Global, located at the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market, Bronx, NY. One shopper may visit three stores to find the best local pears at one, olives from Italy at another and super-sweet California berries at yet another. In a city filled with green markets, butcher shops, cheese specialists and bakeries, shopping at several stores just seems natural.

Gourmet shops are booming in and around Manhattan. "A year ago [Monrovia, CA-based] Trader Joe's came here. No one had heard of them. That store just exploded. People here want variety, they want quality and they're willing to pay for it," says D'Amato.

But New York is not just for the elite. At Hunts Point, "There's a full line, from the very cheap to the very expensive, here. That's what makes this market," says Jimmy Margiotta, president, J. Margiotta Company, wholesalers at the Hunts Point Market.

New York is fast-paced, competitive and dynamic. "If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere — I really believe that," says Steve Katzman, co-president of the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Cooperative Association and owner of S. Katzman Produce, Katzman Berry Corp. and Katzman Global at Hunts Point. At the heart of the produce business lies the New York Terminal Produce Market. And, says Katzman, "There is no place like the New York Terminal Market."

ONE-STOP SHOPPING

Jim Renella, owner, J. Renella Produce, Inc., Hunts Point, is part of a dying breed of wholesalers. He specializes in just one item — Border

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Rising Fuel Costs Affect New York

It's hard to find an area in the United States farther from California's prime growing region than New York, and fuel costs for this cross-country trek are beginning to take a bite out of profits. "Freight is so high. Every week it's higher," says Jim Renella, owner, J. Renella Produce, Inc., Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market, Bronx, NY.

"It costs more to deliver the goods and it costs more to get the goods in. In some cases, the freight is more than the FOB costs," points out Paul Auerbach, president, Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc., South Hackensack, NJ. "The less expensive the item, the more the cost of fuel will have an affect on it."

"It's really scary when freight is more than the purchase price of the product itself," says Paul Manfre, sales, Top Katz Brokers, LLC, Hunts Point.

"I had loose beets I wanted to bring in from California. The beets were $4 and the freight was $5," relates Jason Gelbaum, sales, Top Katz. He passed on the deal.

"Last May, fuel was $2.80 a gallon," notes Paul Kazan, president, Target Interstate Systems, Hunts Point. Today, it is nearly twice that. "What's happening is that everyone's going to pass around the fuel costs."

Some companies have already begun raising their prices. "The customers complain, but they have to have the product," reports Mike Doles, sales, Top Katz. "The freight rate goes up, we hand it off to the customer. But we're not making any money on the freight."

Despite the rising costs that shrink his margins, Renella says his business continues to thrive. "I sell enough," he explains.

But some companies are changing the way they do business. Fuel prices are causing folks at Junior's Produce, Hunts Point, to rethink their practice of storing and shipping bananas from Connecticut. "The gas price was at least $150 for [a recent] trip," according to Louis Augone III, executive.

"We're not efficient enough in the transportation industry. We're going to have to be," says Kazan. In some cases, that means finding product closer to home — from say, Georgia instead of California. "Everything is becoming more regional," he notes.

The most efficient trips send trucks back to their starting point with "backhaul" — some kind of freight that pays for the trip home. But New York does not have the kind of manufacturing the Midwest is known for. In the future, predicts Kazan, "It will be a lot harder to get someone to go to the East Coast than to go to the Midwest."

Meanwhile, dedicated drivers are becoming harder and harder to find, especially since their pay takes a cut as a result of the cost of diesel. All this has some people in the industry beginning to wonder if trucking is still the best method of shipment.

"Prior to 1967, when we were downtown, a lot of fruit used to come by rail from California and Florida," remembers Salvatore Vacca, president, A.J. Trucco, Inc., Hunts Point. "They had refrigeration. I remember the trains used to arrive on the Jersey side. They used barges to bring them to the New York Side. There used to be two railroads."

Times have changed. The interstate system improved while, for years, rail systems declined. "Currently, we [the Hunts Point Market] are the largest rail users in New York City. But we don't do nearly the job we did in the '70s," according to Matthew D'Arrigo, co-owner of D'Arrigo Brothers Co. of New York, Inc., Hunts Point.

Some are skeptical about an increase in rail usage. "For us, we don't take enough. You need something that'll take a long wait getting here. Potatoes, onions," says Ciro Porricelli, co-owner, Jerry Porricelli Produce, Hunts Point.

"Rail is cyclic. Right now, everyone is using it," notes Joel Fierman, president, Joseph Fierman & Son, Inc., Hunts Point. "Rail is cheaper, but rail is unreliable. We don't get schedules."

"They're unreliable. They'll tell you Friday of this week and it winds up being Friday of next week," says Renella. And, he adds, "It takes too long,"

"Trains are slower and time is money, but how much money?" wonders Kazan. He is thinking of adding rail service to the trucking services that Target currently offers. "We've been actively looking into it to service our clients better."

He admits rail is not ideal for all situations. "Trains will do only one pickup, one drop," says Kazan. Rail cargo often requires more handling, which can become problematic for more delicate items. But while trains have some disadvantages, "They are getting better," he notes. For example, more refrigerated cars are available to carry items such as berries.

D'Arrigo believes it will take more than refrigerated cars to make rail work for most merchants. "Rail usage in the new market will not increase unless there are changes in the rail system," he says. However, looking forward, the Hunts Point Terminal Cooperative Association has drawn up plans for a new market that could handle much more rail than the current market can. As it is, "We're perfectly capable of handling double the cars today and we could handle more," he notes. **pb**

brand Banner watermelons. "It's the old-fashioned way," admits Renella. And while this works for him (quite nicely, he will tell you), others here would not dream of carrying only a single item.

Consolidation is at least partly to blame for the disappearance of "the onion guy" and "the potato man" who used to stake out their tiny niches on this market. When the terminal market opened 41 years ago, 125 businesses set up shop here. Today, there are just over 50. As the big fish eat the smaller fish, these companies take on the items that the smaller companies sold.

It takes a completely different mentality to buy and sell produce these days. "My father would not be successful the way the market is today," says Steve Katzman of S. Katzman Produce. "The market has changed."

"Now you've got to push 250 items — really 250 per warehouse, so it's 1,000 — not eight," says Stefanie Katzman, general administrative supervisor, S. Katzman Produce.

Myra Gordon of Hunts Point Market Co-op Association

Dorn Wenninger of Katzman Global

Sal Biondo of Market Basket

Sal Vacca of A.J. Trucco, Inc.

Jim D'Amato of Katzman Global

Ronnie Cohen and Paul Millan of Vision Import Group

Nick Pacia, Tony Biondo and Vito Cangialosi of A.J. Trucco, Inc.

Chelsea and Chris Armata of E. Armata Produce

Junior's Produce, Inc., Hunts Point, like most wholesalers on the market, offers a full line of produce. "It's one-stop shopping for the customers," explains Louis Augone III, executive.

One-stop shopping here no longer ends with produce. To provide additional service to Hunts Point customers, The Food Barn opened in 2006, offering staple items such as dairy, eggs, frozen foods, olive oil and now bottled water and flowers in addition to some fresh produce. "It's kind of like a 7-Eleven — a little bit of everything," explains Brian Donovan, foreman.

Fresh produce at The Food Barn is aimed at the small customers — restaurants and retail operations that want items such as limes and watermelons by the piece. "There are a lot of smaller guys who only need four or five," says Donovan. In turn, The Food Barn buys its produce from the market's wholesalers.

"It's good for the market," says Tim Motley, president of The Food Barn. "Those guys outside the market, they're handling produce, too. We keep customers inside the market." The Food Barn has become so popular in just two years that Motley wishes he had more room. "We're maxed out," he says. "It's a good problem."

CHANGING TASTES

Popular items have changed over the years. An influx of new immigrants has increased demand for Latino and Asian items. "I think that the lime market — the volume — is going to keep increasing in the United States," says Raul Millan, executive vice president, River Edge, NJ-based Vision Import Group, LLC, which imports items like mangos, lemons and limes. "There is a growing Hispanic population. It's the Hispanic housewife who is going home and putting it on fish and in

Reviving The Trade Association

Everyone at the Hunts Point Terminal Market in the Bronx, NY, knew that the New York Produce Trade Association was in need of resuscitation for years. "They didn't keep it up," says Salvatore Vacca, president, A.J. Trucco, Inc., Hunts Point.

However, "Over the past year, the New York Produce Trade Association has taken on a new complexion," notes Angela Venuti, vice president of the association and secretary and treasurer of Ven-Co Produce Co., Inc., Hunts Point. "We have hired a credit analyst to oversee and implement new credit procedures. We have expanded the way we review customers and make it more conducive to have customers do business with our trade members."

"The board is doing a terrific job putting the association back on track," according to Nick Pacia, vice president of A.J. Trucco and a member of the association's board. "The association is going to be good for everybody."

"I think it's going to help us tremendously as a market to see a little bit better when there's trouble on the horizon with a particular customer. It lets us, in a confidential, professional way, pool our knowledge," predicts Matthew D'Arrigo, co-owner of D'Arrigo Brothers Co. of New York, Inc., Hunts Point, and a member of the association's board. "Our goal is to know what a customer owes the entire market, not what he owes each individual business."

This simple knowledge could help merchants tremendously. "We had 120 bad checks here last month," laments Joel Fierman, president, Joseph Fierman & Son, Inc., Hunts Point. Some customers owe more to Fierman than a bank would ever loan them. "That's the big problem with the produce business."

As useful as this information will be, the association is not stopping there. "Part of the new and expanded roll our trade association has taken on is the way we have capitalized on the everyday needs of our members. We have exploited our overall size to gain price advantages in capitol assets like pallet jacks and loading plates to consumables such as shrink wrap and wooden pallets," says Venuti.

"The Trade Association has expanded its roll from years gone by as simply a mailroom to negotiating contracts with our trade unions and insurance carriers. Overall, we have given breadth and depth from credit to operating in our ever-demanding market environment," Venuti concludes. **pb**

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sauces."

Chefs influence the way New Yorkers eat. "There are many more Mexican restaurants than there were 20 years ago," observes John Garcia, president, Krisp-Pak Sales Corp., Hunts Point. "[Celebrity chef] Bobby Flay uses a lot of limes in his cooking. That's a big influence."

Avocados have gained popularity in recent years, according to Donovan of The Food Barn. "Other than eggs, avocados are probably our biggest item. Most of ours are for the restaurants," he notes. In fact, avocados are so important that the company has added its own avocado ripening room.

Arugula and herbs, such as basil and cilantro, have become important items, notes Ciro Porricelli, co-owner, Jerry Porricelli Produce, Hunts Point. "Fresh herbs are moving much more strongly within the last three or four years. A lot of restaurants are cooking with rosemary and thyme, especially for chicken and fish dishes. Even cilantro got to be a big number now. People in general are enjoying the flavor. They've acquired a taste for something different," he says.

"Cilantro is selling much better than it used to. Everyone is using it now," according to Richard Cochran, president, Robt T. Cochran & Co. Inc., produce commission merchants at Hunts Point.

Even familiar items differ from how New Yorkers remember them being in years past. Much of today's produce is grown not to taste great but to last long trips across the country or even overseas. "Women today don't have the luxury of daily shopping the way they used to," notes Gordon of the Cooperative Association. Many buy their produce underripe so that it will last through the week.

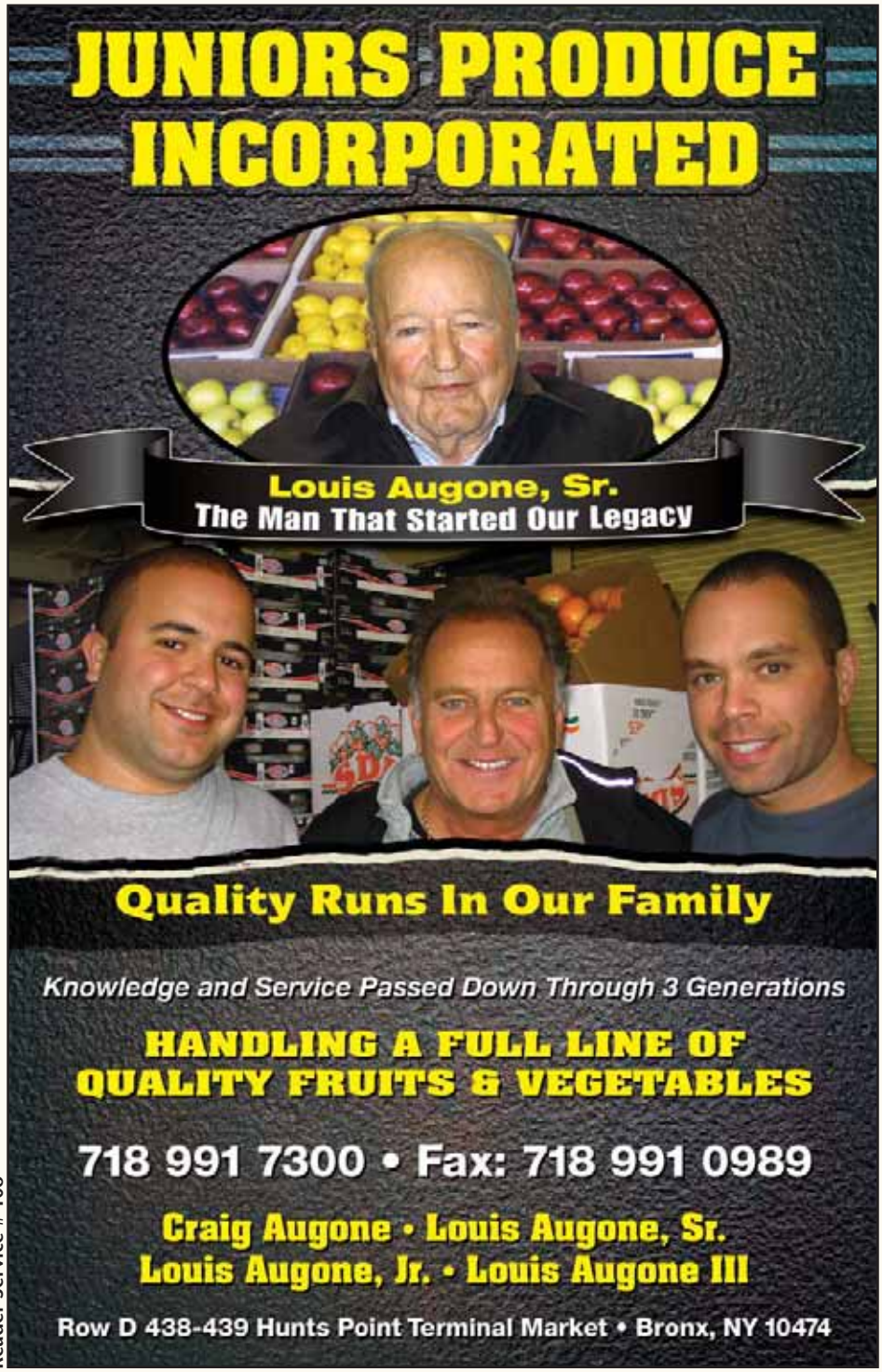
But many consumers have grown nostalgic for a time when fruits and vegetables tasted more as if they were grown in a garden than on a farm thousands of miles away. Dorn Wenninger, vice president international division, Katzman Global, believes more and more consumers are looking for great taste. "They buy with their eyes, but they re-purchase after they taste," he claims.

For example, his company offers a super-sweet proprietary variety of grape tomatoes. "Frequently tomatoes with higher levels of Brix don't have a longer shelf life, which is an issue. But we're interested in bringing produce that tastes good on the palate," he adds.

SPECIALTIES RULE

Between world-famous restaurants and the area's international population, niche items are big business in New York.

D'Amato of Katzman Global says the newly formed branch of S. Katzman Produce will make available more niche items at great prices. "Our true model is to take a direct deal from the grower right to the retailer," he explains. Some of the company's first items include jarred cynara artichoke hearts to be sold in the produce section, pomegranate kernels (called arils), sweet onions



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Jimmy Margiotta
of J. Margiotta Company

Tyrone Davis
of Juniors Produce

Tricia Augone
of Juniors Produce

Richard Cochran
of Robt. T. Cochran & Co.

Richard LoBello
of Robt. T. Cochran & Co.

Billy Langone
of Robt. T. Cochran & Co.

and summer squashes.

Not all of these specialties are for the mainstream population. "It's a slightly different customer base," says Stefanie Katzman of S. Katzman Produce. Many specialties are higher priced, have shorter shelf lives and tend to be more delicate than staple items. She believes those in the specialty business must be prepared to sell smaller volumes and carry many different items.

Many of these items are used at high-end restaurants. "What the chefs are using are usually what the average person can't afford," observes Gordon. "There are certain potatoes that are never going to become mainstream. Fingerlings, purple potatoes."

But in a city this size, if even a small percentage of people are buying specialty potatoes, there is money to be made. "We've put out a very true baby potato, a true creamer," says Paul Auerbach, president, of Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc., in South Hackensack, NJ. "It seems as if a lot of foodservice companies — even if it's just a couple of boxes — they place a great deal of importance on specialties."

Chefs have a great deal of influence on what people buy at the retail end. Garcia of Krisp-Pak sells items including baby arugula, zucchini blossoms and daikon radish. "The cooking station has a direct influence. Everyone watches these shows. Everyone's aware of what's out there now. They go to the store and ask for it. They're even watching cooking shows in college dorms," he says, noting his son John, 18, is a fan of *Good Eats* on the Food Network.

Erwan Landivinec, vice president of International Produce Exchange Hunts Point Cold Storage and Logistics (IPEX), believes miracle fruit will be the next produce item to make headlines, even if it makes it onto very few plates. Available from Baldor Specialty Foods, Inc., based in Bronx, NY, just one of these tiny (and relatively expensive) berries will change the flavor of everything eaten after it for about an hour. A few chefs in the area are already exploiting the fruit's ability to make sour foods taste sweet with "miracle" cocktails and tasting parties.

Landivinec is also excited about finger limes, a new fruit Baldor hopes to import from Australia. These long limes are filled with caviar-like pulp that chefs could use as a garnish and ingredient. "It's the next thing. People are going to love it. There are a lot of culinary applications," he says.

"There's that fad fashion end of produce," notes Matthew D'Arrigo, co-owner of D'Arrigo Brothers Co. of New York, Inc., Hunts Point, but plenty of specialty items are sold at the retail level.

"There are a lot of different ethnic items,"

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according to Jason Gelbaum, sales, Top Katz Brokers LLC, representatives of growers at the Hunts Point Market. For example, "Menthi, which Indians use. All different varieties of eggplants — Italian, Dominican, Chinese, Spanish. All kinds of peppers. Retail uses most of them. And you have specialty foodservice that uses them also — your better restaurants."

"We sell a lot of avocados, pineapple, papaya, Latino root vegetables," according to Joel Fierman, president, Joseph Fierman & Son, Inc., located at Hunts Point.

Junior's Produce sells a number of ethnic specialty items, including riacao, kabocha squash, batatas and mangos. "We move a lot of mangos," says Augone.

New York's large Muslim population frequently uses dates, especially during the month-long holiday of Ramadan that will take place in September this year. "There's actually going to be a date shortage this year," predicts Shaleen Heffernan, date specialist, Agrexco (USA) Ltd., Jamaica, NY, importers of specialty produce and flowers. According to Heffernan, there are 12 kinds of dates that can be imported to the United States and 15 that can be imported to Canada. (In all, there are 160 varieties worldwide.) "More and more people are eating them, not just for religious holidays," she notes.

Variations on familiar items enter supermarkets with regularity. This year, A.J. Trucco, Inc., distributors and wholesalers of dried fruit, nuts and fresh produce at Hunts Point, introduced kiwi berries — tiny kiwifruit that can be consumed whole without peeling.

Meanwhile, regular-sized green and gold kiwifruit continue to gain popularity here. "We still have the lowest per capita consumption in the United States, but I think the category is slowly increasing," relates Nick Pacia, vice president of A.J. Trucco. "At the same time, supply is increasing twice as much. The volume of New Zealand kiwifruit has increased big time. Size-wise, the fruit is bigger this year, and the crop is bigger than this past year."

ORGANICS A GROWING NICHE

For the most part, organic produce does not sell well out of the Hunts Point Market. "It's expensive and the shelf life doesn't last," says Porricelli of Jerry Porricelli Produce.

However, some believe its popularity will change. "The wholesale customers are not too concerned about organic, yet. They will be eventually," says Pacia, who cites two reasons for this. For one, as the cost of chemical fertilizers rise and the cost of growing organically becomes lower, the price differences between organic and conventional items are slowly becoming more negligible. He also believes that, in the future, conventional farmers will use fewer pesticides and chemical fertilizers, so the actual difference between organic and conventional produce will shrink.

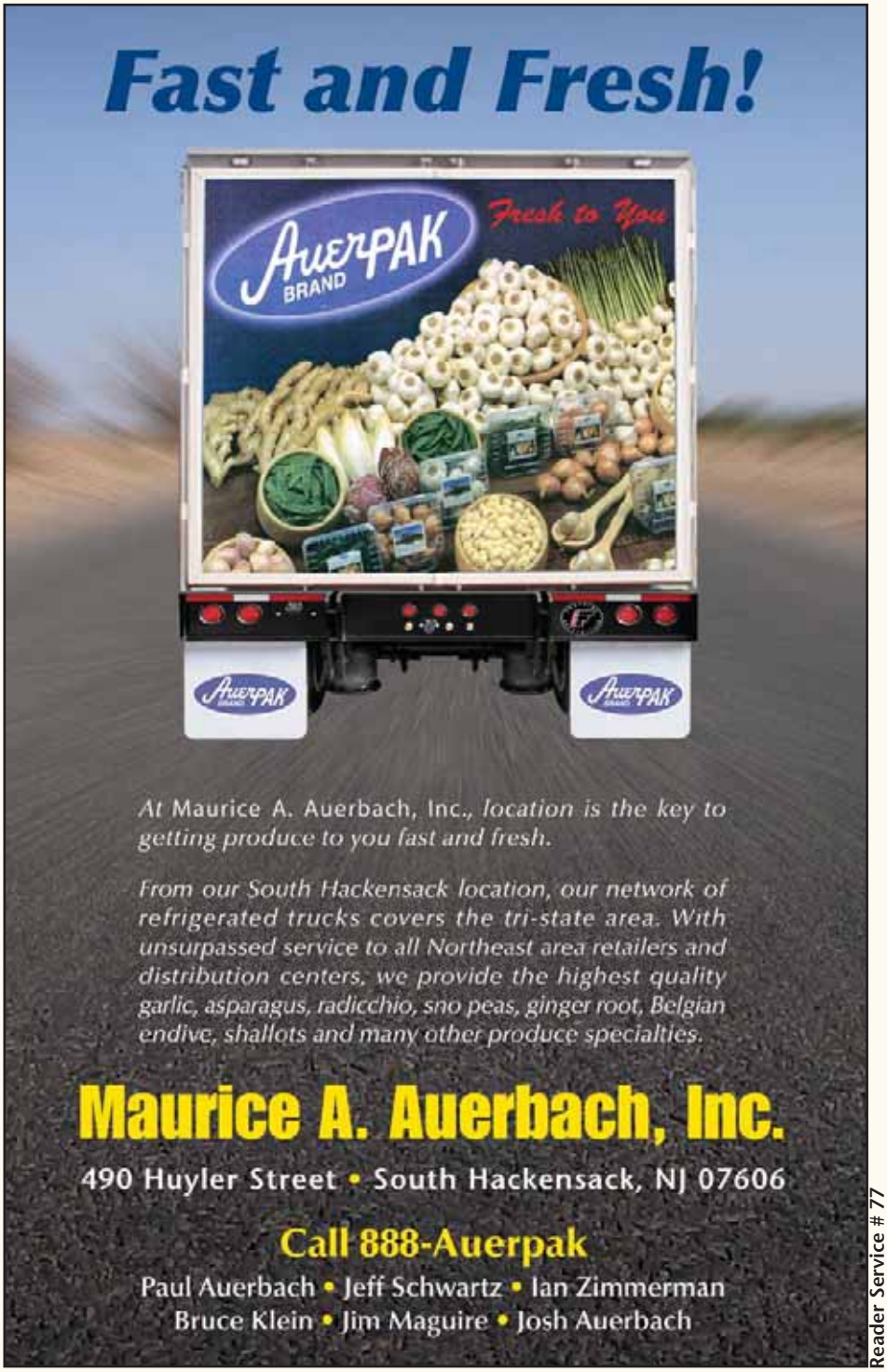
At the moment, independent stores and greengrocers are more interested in quality produce at cheap prices than in organics. "Right now, the customers we get for organic are major retailers," says Pacia.

Organic produce can be difficult to handle at the antiquated terminal market. "The market needs to be updated to do the organic lines," he continues. "They need to somehow be separated from the other commodities. Right now, the wholesale volume is not there to make the investment needed for those changes."

Off the market, companies specializing in upscale produce, such as Eli & Ali's Love Tomatoes, Brooklyn, NY, continue to see sales of organics grow. "We believe in it," stresses Jeffrey Ornstein, owner.

And at Baldor Specialty Foods, Bronx, NY, "Our organic department is developing at light speed," according to Rania Abboud, director of specialty foods.

"Most of that is retail. It still hasn't made that quantum leap to restaurants because it's so hard to convey that it's organic to the customer," adds Alan Butzbach, director of marketing. But when



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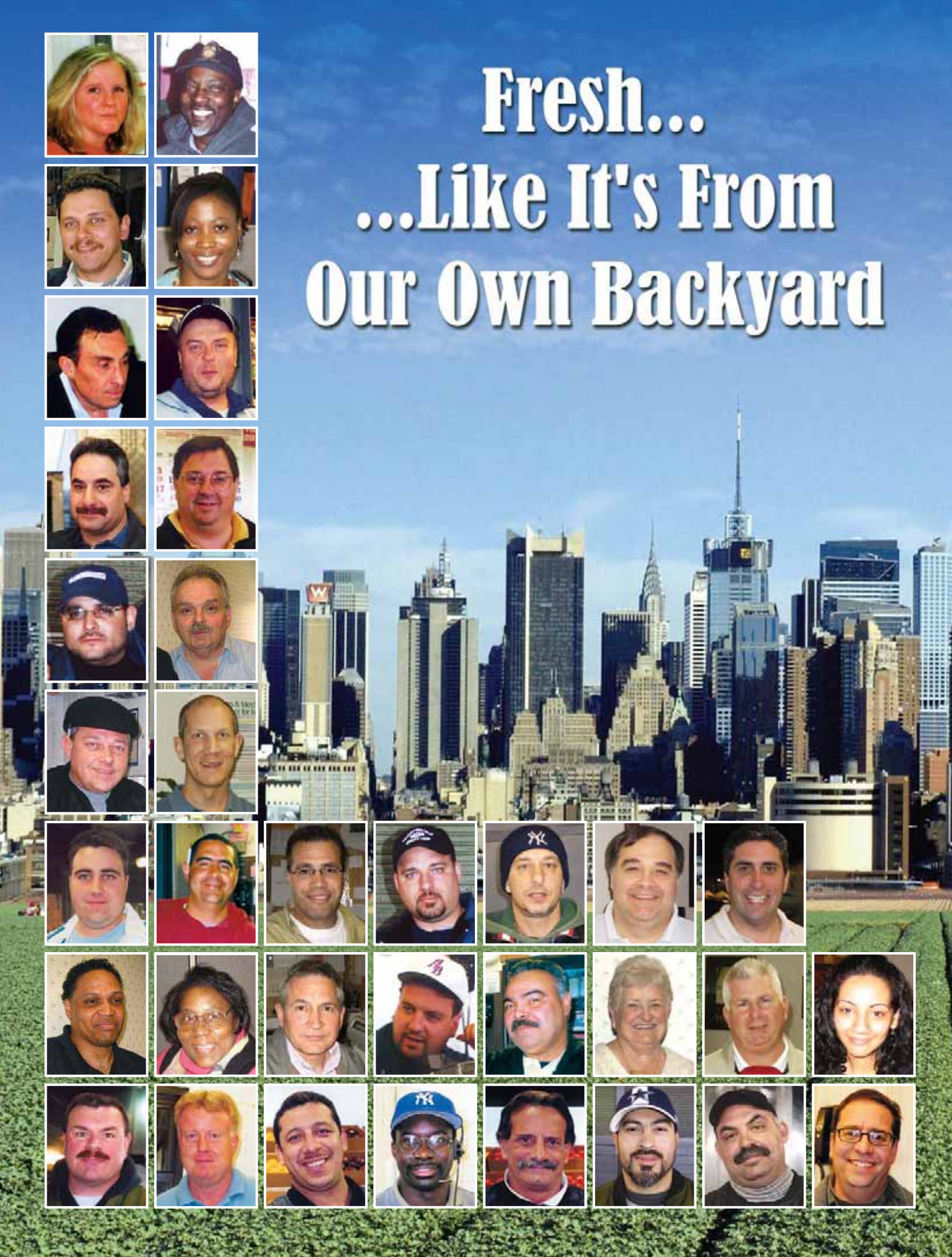

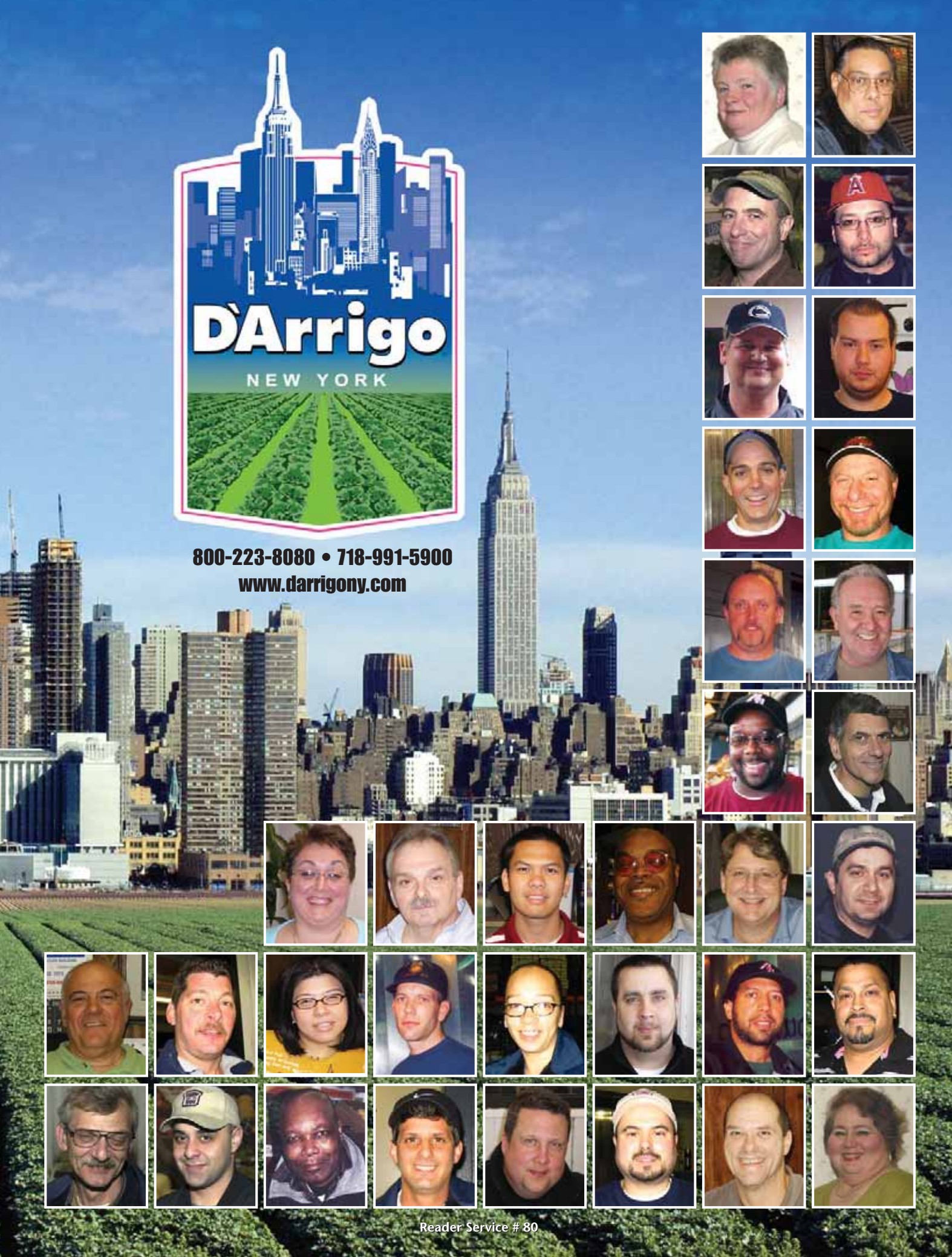

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the quality of the organic item is higher than that of the conventional item, chefs often opt for the organic despite this. And Baldor does what it can to keep organic items priced low. For example, says Butzbach, "We're working directly with one farm in Brazil, so their prices are going to be conventional prices."

LOCALLY GROWN GAINS POPULARITY

Years behind the West Coast, New York is finally catching on to the local-food mantra. "Local is the big word. It's replaced organic," says D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Brothers.

"Local is really big and hot," agrees Butzbach. "Talk of carbon footprints, food miles is big."

Why is a progressive city like New York so far behind in this trend? For one thing, unlike Californians, New Yorkers must be reminded of local produce each season, according to Elyse Corwin, sales, S. Katzman Produce. "When you're in California, everything is mostly from California and locally grown."

Although the general public is just starting to catch on, the New York merchants have always understood the importance of local produce. "I support anything grown and shipped in the United States, and local is even more important," relates Margiotta of J. Margiotta Company.

Much of the reason he loves local produce is the freight cost savings, which keeps prices low for both him and the consumer. But Margiotta also wants to see local farmers succeed. "I want to see those guys stay in business. That's what this country is built on."

"The farms are starting to diminish year by year. This is going to be a tough year," says Porricelli of Jerry Porricelli Produce. "The price of fuel. Labor, too. Farmers are the last man on the totem poll. We try to get them the best price for their product. A farmer has to pay for the fuel, he has to pay for the fertilizer."

Locally grown produce is not necessarily cheaper, according to Gordon of the Cooperative Association. "They have to get more because their season is so short," she observes, noting that the growing season in New York runs only from May through November. "They don't have the opportunity for three plantings as California does," she explains.

Many customers don't care if the product they're buying is local, especially if that customer is a small store offering bargains. "Color, ripeness, taste and price are important," says Augone of Junior's Produce. "More guys are holding onto their cash a little tighter."

There can be savings on freight for locally grown produce, however. This year, much more than in the past, that can make a huge difference. "Freight out of Jersey is $1-$1.50 [per box]. Freight out of California is maybe $7," points out Cochran of Robt. T. Cochran & Co.

Even when the price is higher, "The good thing about local is that it's fresh," says D'Arrigo.

When it comes to some seasonal items, local farmers often offer a superior product. "Jersey tomatoes are some of the best tomatoes we get all year," according to Augone. "Summer corn is a great item."

With many items, "The quality is much better. Within 24 hours it goes from the farm right to your kitchen. From California, it might be seven days," notes Garcia of Krisp-Pak.

Consumers look forward to local produce here, according to Gelbaum of Top Katz. "They know what time of year it comes out. Some of the retailers will advertise local produce."

FOOD FROM AFAR

While local may be the buzzword, produce is a global business now more than ever. "We're buying product from all over the world," says Ornstein of Eli & Ali's.

New York produce departments know no seasons. Even when it comes to delicate items such as berries, "The consumer expects to get the same quality in January that they get in the second week in June," according to Wenninger of Katzman Global.

Some companies, such as Vision Import Group, deal only in food from afar.

As its name implies, the newly formed Katzman Global sources directly from farmers around the world, gathering luxury items such farflung countries as Turkey, India, Israel and Spain and placing them under the Bloom Fresh label. "We're bringing pomegranate arils in direct from the farms in India. There are six growers and a small packinghouse," reports Wenninger. "As far as we know, this is the first time someone's bringing in arils from India to the United States. India's so big that they produce virtually year-round."

Certified Safety & Traceability

Miami, FL-based Coosemans Worldwide, Inc., is pioneering hazard analysis and critical control point (HACCP) certification at the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market, Bronx, NY. "I think it's going to become important in the industry. Especially the bigger customers are going to require we be certified for safety reasons," relates René Gosselin, operations manager, Coosemans New York, Inc., the Hunts Point arm of Coosemans Worldwide. "Already we're getting letters from big companies asking, 'Are you HACCP certified?' I think the industry is becoming more aware of possible contaminants in light of previous situations."

With the program overseen by Emeryville, CA-based Scientific Certification Systems, Coosemans is able to give buyers a higher level of assurance when it comes to food safety and traceability. The program carefully monitors critical control points, such as "when you're repacking or receiving the merchandise. Whenever there's a possibility of a contaminant entering a product," according to Gosselin. There is no doubt safety rules are strictly enforced. "The repackers aren't allowed to wear jewelry, for example. They have to wear certain clothing — nets, gloves." Surface areas are swabbed after each cleaning to check for bacteria.

Other companies have stepped up their food safety programs to protect their product from potential hazards, as well. For example, A.J. Trucco, Inc., Hunts Point, began a traceability program about six years ago and is Arlington, VA-based Safe Quality Food (SQF) certified. "It's important for everybody. If there's a problem, we need to know where that problem came from and eliminate it," according Nick Pacia, vice president.

René Gosselin, operations manager, Coosemans New York, Inc.

Still, HACCP certification is not for everyone on the market. "It's time-consuming, there are costs involved," says Gosselin.

"We're a public place here," notes Matthew D'Arrigo, co-owner of D'Arrigo Brothers Co. of New York, Inc., Hunts Point. "We're a 40-year-old market that's got thousands of customers coming in every day." If and when a new market is built, he says, HACCP certification may become more popular. **pb**

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Mike Doles
of Top Katz Brokers

Deals such as these do not hurt the local economy, some argue, because these items are not available fresh locally. At the same time, they help smaller farming operations in the developing world. "We work with people who have wonderful items but no representation here," says D'Amato of Katzman Global.

"Our tag line is *Bloom Fresh: Produce you can feel good about*," says Wenninger. "Our customers are telling us that consumers in general want to feel good about their produce and want to have great value and great product."

"In the future, we plan to have some sort of story board," says D'Amato. The boards, placed in the store next to items under the company's Bloom Fresh label, would use pictures to tell the story of how the item got from the farm where it was grown to the store.

It's a very different way of doing business than in the past. "I've worked and traveled in 78 countries and I'm 39 years old," says Wenninger. "For Steve [Katzman]'s grandfather, that would have been impossible."

PACKAGING TAKES CENTER STAGE

Increasingly, how a produce item is packaged is just as important as the item itself. "There's certainly more packaging. Everyone wants something in a bag," according to Cochran of Robt. T. Cochran & Co. "It's about $2 a box more and the freight is higher but if they're willing to pay, we'll do it for them."

"Packaging makes it easier for the consumer," says Gelbaum of Top Katz. He notes many people like the fact that the produce is handled less by other shoppers and everything is previously weighed, saving them time and effort. And, he says, "It's less labor for the retailer."

Saving labor is a definite priority for many retailers. "Greengrocers still like to buy in bulk," explains Fierman of Joseph Fierman & Son, but "The supermarkets find it a lot easier to take everything packaged."

Cochran notes it's cheaper to package produce at the store level. "A smart retailer puts it in a bag himself, but many don't want to bother."

"All the supermarkets have the prepackaged salads," says Garcia of Krisp-Pak. "They don't even want to look at a carton of spinach."

Marc Rubin, president, Rubin Bros. Produce Corp., Hunts Point, agrees bagged salads have become a top item, noting, "It's a product that's come into its own. The quality is very good and

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Paul Manfre of Top Katz Brokers

Yolanda Rivera of Target Interstate Systems

it's something that's very dependable as far as the pricing structure."

And while the most environmentally friendly packaging may be no packaging at all, that does not stop companies such as Katzman Global from looking into "greener" grab-and-go solutions. D'Amato believes biodegradable packaging may be the next trend to watch for. "That's one of the biggest things I noticed in Europe," he relates. "No one's doing that here. That's a big thing that we're going to try to do down the road."

Eli & Ali's is looking into biodegradable packaging and more easily recyclable containers. "Everyone's going to be doing it," is the prediction of Peter Kroner, director of business development, who notes that environmentalism is on the rise. "I really do believe people across the board are starting to care."

A CHANGING ECONOMY

There is no question that these are rough economic times for American consumers. The dollar is weak. Gasoline is expensive. The price of bread has doubled. But opinions are mixed about how the current economy affects produce merchants in New York.

"Recession? Forget about it," says Renella of J. Renella Produce. "We're doing a little more business than last year."

"A lot of times when people complain business is slow, we're still doing pretty good," agrees Donovan of The Food Barn.

"The dollar is weak," concedes D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Brothers. But that doesn't worry him when it comes to selling produce. "I frankly think we're resistant to it. General behavior is people go to restaurants less, they buy prepared food less and they spend more in the produce department. It might hurt higher-priced produce — asparagus, avocados, anything that's short. They won't spend $6 on strawberries. They'll spend it on something else. The high priced stuff may take it on the chin a little bit, so to speak."

"It's definitely affecting luxury items," according to Ornstein of Eli & Ali's. The company specializes in upscale produce items such as organic heirloom tomatoes.

"We may not sell as much exotic stuff, but we'll sell more meat-and-potatoes stuff," predicts Steve Katzman of S. Katzman Produce. That may be more a result of consumers watching their wallets than a rise in the cost of fruits and vegetables.

And some people may be looking for bargains in the canned and frozen aisles. "Produce looks like a bargain until you realize that the shelf life on produce is not the same as the shelf life on a can of tuna," says Billy Fierman, treasurer, Joseph Fierman & Son.

Produce prices remain as stable as ever, argues D'Arrigo. "We always get headlines written about us when produce prices are high, which happens every winter. But in terms of inflation, prices have hardly gone up at all. It's a very inflation-resistant industry," he says. "With the recession coming, that enhances the retail business and has a certain negative factor on the foodservice business."

At Eli & Ali's, the difference is noticeable. "We're very foodservice-oriented," says Ornstein. "We're taking a hit because the restaurants are slowing down."

Motley of The Food Barn has noticed a drop in restaurant purchases. "All those costs eat into their pockets. Their food costs are going up," he

Bye, Bye Bronx Market?

Could the New York Terminal Market become the New Jersey Terminal Market? That's a possibility some are considering. At 41 years old, the New York Terminal Produce Market, Bronx, NY, is hardly state-of the-art. And as one of the largest wholesale produce markets in the world — more than three billion pounds of produce move through the facility each year — it has certainly seen its share of wear and tear.

The Hunts Point Terminal Produce Cooperative Association and New York City have been in talks to build a new market on adjacent land for more than eight years, notes Matthew D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Brothers Co. of New York, Inc. and co-president of the association. Merchants spent $300,000 in the past year alone on a design for new buildings, which they presented to New York City's Economic Development Corporation at what D'Arrigo describes as an "unsatisfying" meeting in May. Soon after, D'Arrigo and association co-president Steve Katzman of S. Katzman Produce publicly stated the possibility of relocating to another city, perhaps in New Jersey or Westchester County, NY.

"We're going to look at all of our options," says D'Arrigo. "I think we do have the ability to move out of here, although I don't necessarily want to. A rebuild here would be best for everybody. But if they're not going to rebuild us, we have to face reality and look elsewhere."

Certainly another city would welcome the jobs and the billions of dollars that flow through the market each year, argues D'Arrigo. New York would hate to lose them, but there are a multitude of reasons why city officials have put off a rebuild, from the revolving door of city personnel to a lack of understanding. D'Arrigo notes many city officials seem to be under the false impression that merchants can afford to pay for more of the construction than they are offering.

Rebuilding a terminal market does not attract the kinds of headlines that new stadiums and Olympic bids get. "There's no sex appeal to this at all," says Katzman. But, he adds, "We provide a valuable service and keep a lot of companies in the area in business." Studies showing the importance of rebuilding have been presented to officials. "We're not starting from scratch trying to prove we need a new market."

Philadelphia's long-awaited new terminal market may break ground as soon as this summer. When that project is finished, it's possible New York merchants will lose some of their business to merchants on this newer, more efficient facility.

A real shame, according to Katzman, is how much more business a New York market could do if only it had the space. "Our terminal is viable because we can go to places that already have terminals and are able to compete," he says, explaining the market could expand its customer base both to the north and the south, given the opportunity. "The only thing hindering us from growing faster is the facility. We're bursting at the seams here. I honestly believe my business would go to three times the volume I have if we had the new market." **pb**

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Peter Kroner and Jeff Ornstein
of Eli & Ali's

Edith Escobales
of Target Interstate Systems

Paul D'Arrigo, Matthew D'Arrigo and
Michael D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, Inc.

Howard Ginsberg, Nick Pacia and
John Stewart of A.J. Trucco, Inc.

explains. This could be especially hard on independent restaurant owners, he believes. "I think we'll see more and more chains."

As more people hold on to their cash, they eat out less and cook at home more frequently. "The end user, the consumer, supposedly uses more," says Joel Fierman of Joseph Fierman & Son.

"People are buying more," agrees Augone of Junior's Produce. "It's cheaper to make a salad than to go out."

"On the wholesale side, people are still buying food. That won't change," says Corwin of S. Katzman Produce. "People whine more. Maybe they'll buy 10 where they bought 15 [before]."

"I think our business has been somewhat steady," reports Auerbach of Maurice A. Auerbach. "Our sales are up over the past year. The biggest thing I see is the tremendous increase in fuel prices."

Motley of the Food Barn agrees. "Overall, everything's higher. Just trucking is up. Freight is

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Reader Service # 37

ridiculous. Surcharges on everything. You have to have more money to operate. I'm not saying business is not good. You just have to have more money to start with."

"I think it's affecting everyone. Expenses are higher all around. We just have to keep pushing the volume," says Porricelli of Jerry Porricelli Produce. "You watch your credit, make sure you don't get bombarded there."

Some believe that the cost of doing business will eventually lead to a jump in the price of produce. "Fertilizers, transportation costs. I can't see produce getting any cheaper," says Joel Fierman of Joseph Fierman & Son.

Already, the price of imported produce is beginning to rise. "Imports are going to suffer a little bit because of the exchange rate," predicts Pacia of A.J. Trucco. "Chile, Europe — the exchange rate has made it prohibitive to do business with them. So we're starting to look at other sources."

"Imports are under pressure because of the weak dollar and logistics," says Yoram Shalev, president, Agrexco. "Produce is 50 percent logistics."

"The bulk of our date crop went to Europe this year because of the weak dollar and transportation costs," adds Heffernan of Agrexco.

But despite rising prices, "You still have people — retail consumers and chefs — asking for imported products," notes Baldor's Abboud.

The cost of packaging has also risen. At Eli & Ali's, where packaging is an important part of the products' appeal, new packing equipment has made the process more efficient and therefore less expensive. "It improved our productivity at least 30 percent," says Ornstein.

Some try to keep prices low by other methods. "Every year, the shippers try to push the envelope of what they can do to protect their own financial interests," notes Dana Taback, director Western Division, Joseph Fierman & Son. In some cases, that means pushing for acceptance of lower quality produce.

Others simply watch their companies take a financial hit. Recently, "I've done more business and made less money," notes Steve Katzman of S. Katzman Produce. "I'm not complaining, but everything is being squeezed. Your expenses keep going up but you get the same prices."

"It seems to be a lot more demanding marketplace," says Auerbach of Maurice A. Auerbach. "Customer's expectations are for very high quality and high service, but you still have to meet the price of the market."

"It gets a little tougher each year. It's the Wal-Mart effect. Everyone wants it cheaper," says Garcia of Krisp-Pak. As more companies open up shop outside the market — including Bentonville, AR-based Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., Issaquah, WA-based Costco Wholesale and College Point, NY-based Restaurant Depot — he is forced to compete by lowering prices.

"It's supply and demand," says Porricelli of J. Porricelli Produce, explaining that when costs are high, prices for product may still be low. "The freight's higher. You should get more money to cover the freight. Sometimes it marks that way, but not always."

"There's nothing we can do about rising prices. You just have to tighten your belt and find ways to save money," says D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Brothers. But although cost increases hurt margins, he believes that will correct itself.

Augone of Junior's Produce remains optimistic. "Fruit and vegetables are relatively inexpensive. We're not serving lobster over here."

Steve Katzman believes produce prices will continue to rise. "Over the next two years, you'll see drastic changes in the produce industry. People will start growing less." In the meantime, some may choose not to ship as often, even letting some produce rot in the fields. "I think we are still much cheaper than produce in every other place in the world and it will catch up," he adds.

But Katzman doesn't worry about going out of business anytime soon. In fact, he is readying for the opposite. "We don't lay people off in our business," he remarks. "Our business keeps getting bigger. We find more ways to keep making more."

THE DEBATE OVER BRANDING

As the economy falters, many wonder if consumers and buyers are still willing to pay a higher price for branded products. "The jury's still out," according to Chris Armata, president, E Armata Fruit & Produce, Hunts Point.

"Branding in this kind of economy is an elitist concept," argues Gordon of the Cooperative Association. "Two percent of the population has the time to read and find out what brand to buy. They can barely afford to buy the necessary food for their family. In general, branded items are just for the individual who has the excess money to buy the branded product."

"As the economy goes down the tubes, I really believe that quality and no branding are more important than no quality and branding," says Billy Fierman of Joseph Fierman & Son.

Mike Doles, sales, Top Katz, agrees. "I think, in the near future, people are going to be looking for the better bargain. It will probably take them away from the label buying."

"Brands shouldn't make a difference," says Cochran of Robt. T. Cochran & Co. "You should look at the quality of what you are buying. But a lot of people don't. They trust certain brands."

Renella of J. Renella Produce disagrees. As money gets tight, customers want to know they are getting a quality product for their money. His only item is Border brand Banner watermelons. "They can depend on it. If they buy Borders and 99 percent of the time they're good, they'll come back."

Baldor Makes Its Move

This summer, Baldor Specialty Foods, Inc. began occupying a newly renovated 170,000-square-foot facility — more than double the size of its old facility on nearby Barry Street — just across the street from the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market, Bronx, NY. Some say it is a smart move for the company, which is known for its foodservice delivery and upscale retail products because Baldor buys much of its produce from the market.

While the heart of Baldor's expertise is produce, today the company has reached beyond its roots as a produce delivery service to provide its customers with all kinds of specialty items, including artisanal cheeses, imported pastas, pastry ingredients, frozen foods, smoked seafood and fresh meat.

The new state-of-the-art, hazard analysis and critical control point (HACCP)-certified facility includes 58 bays for over 150 refrigerated delivery trucks (Baldor hopes to have 300 by next year), a room for processing fresh-cut produce, a room for packing caviar, a separate berry refrigerator and a storage room with the appropriate temperature and humidity for chocolate. An on-site demo kitchen will soon serve as a place to experiment with new ingredients and showcase new products to customers. Baldor's president, Michael Muzyk, hopes to make the demo kitchen a place where Baldor employees can teach cooking arts to underprivileged children from the area, perhaps teaming up with celebrity chefs to do so.

Beyond all-in-one shopping, Baldor offers foodservice operators something wholesalers cannot — small orders (as little as $100 worth) delivered daily. "This niche that we formed is servicing the places that can't take truckloads," explains Alan Butzbach, director of marketing for Baldor. "We're not only selling the product, but we're also selling the service."

Baldor employs specialists in dairy, meats, pastry and spices in addition to produce. "We even hired a truffle specialist," says Rania Abboud, director of specialty foods. With a highly educated staff, Baldor is able to teach its customers about everything from distinguishing different types of imported olive oils to how to plate and serve cheese. Abboud believes the effort is paying off. "It's a challenge, but we're getting a huge response to it." **pb**

"When people pick up an Eli & Ali item [in a store], they know it's going to be a consistent item, day in and day out," says Ornstein. Eli & Ali's items that are not packaged are marked with a prominent sticker.

"I think brands are important. It's good for the consumer as well as the buyers along the distribution chain," says Auerbach. The AuerPak brand has been around for 40 of the 50 years Maurice A. Auerbach has existed. "Unfortunately, many of the commodities are very price driven. One part of my customer base recognize the reputation and the service, and other parts have become more price driven than in the past."

"Top brand names do, relatively, cost more," notes Augone of Junior's Produce, whose biggest item is bananas. "You can always find quality in other brand names as well. We're not concerned with the brand names here. I'm sure some people like to see Dole and Chiquita, but our customers are concerned with color and taste. The large chains may care more."

"The brand is very important to the wholesaler who is selling the merchandise," according to Bobby Venuti, president, Ven-Co Produce Co. Inc., Hunts Point. "The economy has no effect on the brand. The consumer is no more or less conscious of the brand due to the economy."

"I don't know if brand recognition is as important as we want it to be," adds Joel Fierman of Joseph Fierman & Son. "It's about quality — if it's a good-looking item. I was always led to believe the product was more important than the brand. If a housewife is looking at a product, if it's no good, it doesn't matter if it's got a brand. She's not buying it."

"If you look at all the major soft-drink companies, each has a logo and slogan that has been drilled into the public's mind over time. A good catch phrase and a good logo give a product a life of its own," says Venuti.

Joel Fierman believes produce is not like soft drinks. "I think people buy on impulse. If I see an item that's less expensive and the quality is the same, then I'm buying the less expensive item. I'm not a big proponent of branding. Produce is not manufactured. If a produce man is sticking with a brand, he might not always be getting the best of a product that time of year."

"To some people, labels are important. To some people, it's about getting the right kind of product," believes Gelbaum of Top Katz. "Retailers are always looking for a brand that's consumer friendly or recognizable. And foodservice — they're just concerned there's quality product inside the box."

Some of Jerry Porricelli Produce's customers ask for brands "because of the consistency of the quality. Labor's so high. They don't want to worry about cheap stuff anymore," Porricelli explains.

"I think brands hold their head up pretty strongly — if it's a good brand. People will pay a little bit more if they perceive it's better," notes D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Brothers, whose brands include Andy Boy broccoli and broccoli rabe. "Brands do better in any economy in any time. The leading brand of that commodity has a way of setting the price."

Indeed, "Our customers ask for Andy Boy by name," says Butzbach of Baldor. "These are recognizable brands with quality attached to them."

Potatoes from GPOD of Idaho, Shelley, ID, are still a hot seller with Top Katz. "It's a brand name that people care about," says Gelbaum, who says customers are still willing to pay a premium price for it.

Driscoll's is another brand buyers love, according to Doles of Top Katz. "You have that conception that it's a Driscoll's berry and it's going to be better," he says.

"We've been carrying Foxy lettuce, Ocean Mist product and Grimmway carrots — various brands that consistently have premium product," says Garcia of Krisp-Pak. "The customers always come back to Krisp-Pak because of that."

"People come in asking for them," agrees his son, John Garcia, sales.

"I always believed in branding. It's what I base

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my business on. It's a way to distinguish our product among competitors," says Pacia of A.J. Trucco, whose brands include Kiwistar, Grapestar, Fichi figs and clementines and Fresco garlic.

"Our whole thing is branding. Every customer eventually is going to care about a label if you put quality in a box," says Millan of Vision Import Group, whose branded items include Mojito limes, Mr. Squeeze limes and lemons and Mango Maniac mangos. The trick, he says, is to get several growers under one label. "Every grower wants to promote its own package. But we're very limited with one grower, one label. Putting the growers together and having some quality control is the key. It's hard to do because you have to have the continuity. But it's a battle we can win."

"It's more than just putting stuff in a box," agrees Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales, Vision Import Group.

Consistency is the key, according to Benny Ravet, incoming president, Agrexco, whose brand is Carmel. "A strong brand is one that's always good," he says.

"The produce industry has a problem with brands because it's so fractured," notes Shalev of Agrexco. "You're not manufacturing something. You're bound by nature." In the past, many brands disappeared and reappeared seasonally. Carmel is able to get around that because the company sources internationally, shipping from one country when another country's season is over.

Ravet believes the consumer rarely considers brands. "She's looking first for cheap price and good quality. The people making the decisions are the supermarkets."

Renella of J. Renella Produce admits most consumers do not notice the brand name on a loose item such as watermelon. Instead, they learn to trust the store where they buy it. And he sells to the stores.

At the consumer level, "I don't think branding fresh ever had a value, especially with the younger generation. They didn't grow up with the Dole, Green Giant, Chiquita that we grew up with," asserts Gordon of the Cooperative Association. "When I was growing up, when you got an orange, you got Sunkist. There was no other orange. Today, unless you've had a particularly bad experience with non-branded produce, it's going to be of no use."

But some argue consumers do notice brands. If the consumer has had a good experience with a brand of say, pineapple, then the brand has value, believes D'Amato of Katzman Global. "Consumers are willing to pay a premium for a pineapple if it's got the brix and it's fair trade," he says.

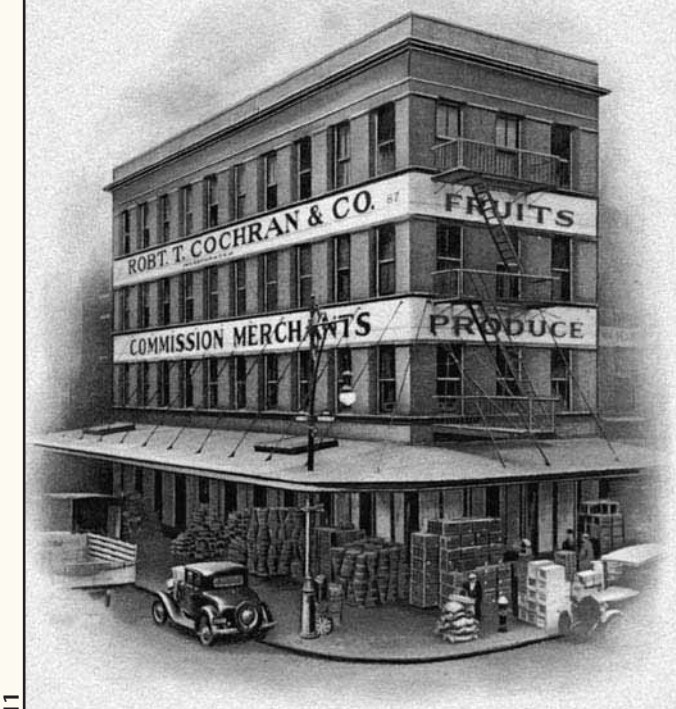
"The buying public in the Northeast has gotten a whole lot more educated and branding has become more important," according to Steve Katzman of S. Katzman Produce. "There have been so many scares over the past years. You want to keep the consumers' trust." For him, branding upscale products such as Katzman Global's French beans and pomegranate arils is "a no-brainer."

"It's the way a supermarket prepares the setup. If it's attractive, regardless of the label you're going to buy it anyway," says Doles of Top Katz. "But I would say that better than 50 percent of consumers would buy because of labels if they've had a good experience with them."

Labels have become much more important with the expansion of packaged produce. Even Gordon concedes, "There's an exception with packaged produce, because it's a processed item and the brand is so prominent on the label." But, she notes, "All the stores are bagging their own salads and they're cheaper."

Marc Rubin of Rubin Bros. Produce Corp., a Hunts Point company that carries Dole salads, argues consumers will still pay a higher price for salads labeled with well-known names. "Branding with a product like this involves food safety," he explains. "Compared to a non-branded product, the product goes through a tremendous amount of scrutiny. I feel the customer would feel safer buying a branded product."

As much as brands can assure consumers of food safety, having a brand's name on anything remotely related to a food scare can sometimes hurt that product's sales. "You've got all these



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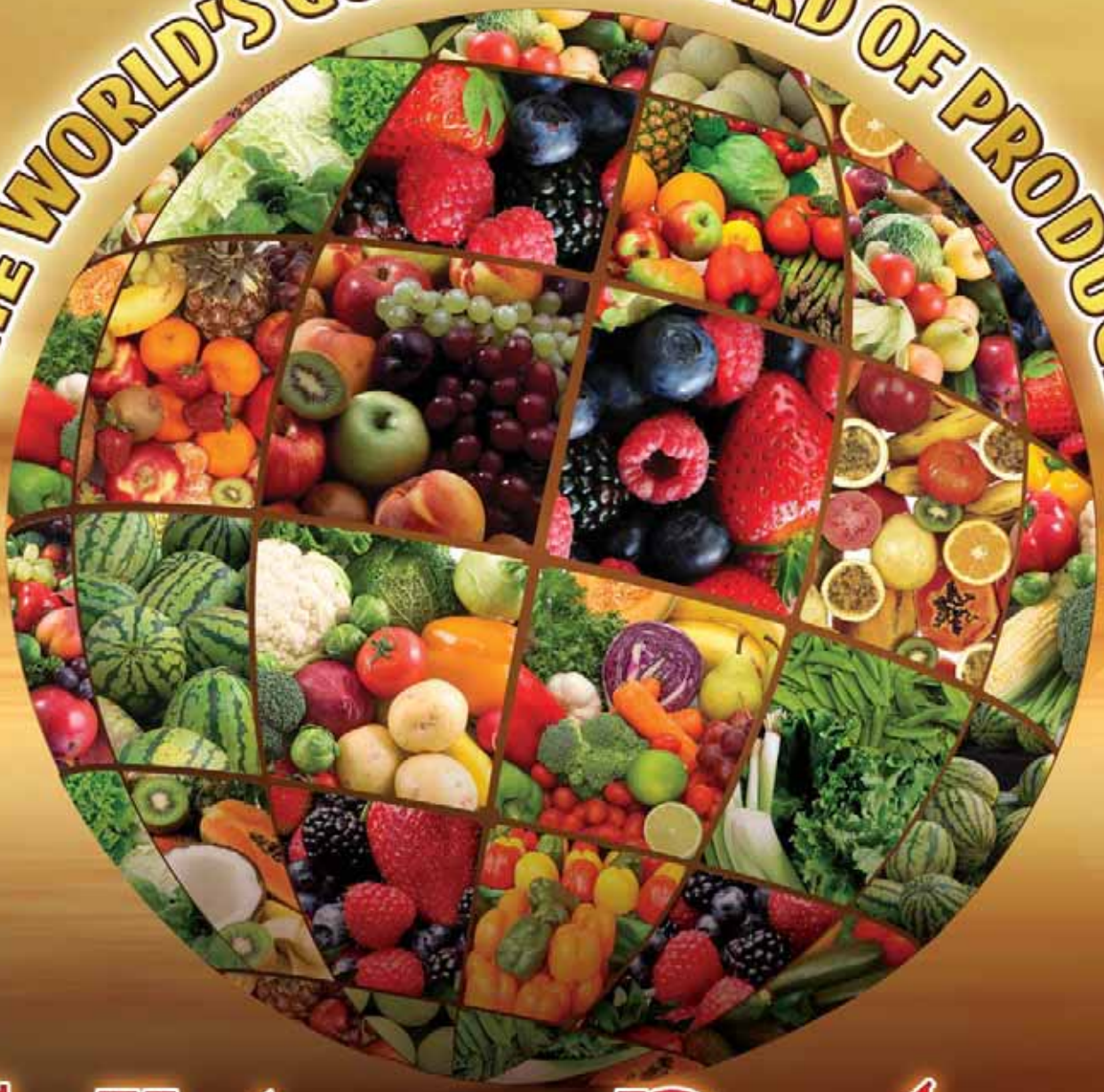

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Reader Service # 114

scares with these big plants because they do a whole lot of product," notes Joel Fierman of Joseph Fierman & Son. "As responsible as Foxy was with the lettuce scare, it almost killed them."

But, notes Garcia of Krisp-Pak, "[Salinas, CA-based] Nunes [Co., Inc.] preempted that. The company jumped out in front of it and showed the industry the right way a company can handle a crisis situation. It rebounded and the brand stayed intact and stayed strong. Nunes showed everyone that a produce company can handle a situation the right way."

As much as the big brands still attract customers, in recent years private labels have come into their own. No longer viewed as "off-brand," many private-label items are considered the premium product at grocery stores. While Katzman Global is packing a number of upscale items under its new Bloom Fresh brand, "We think it's a duel-edged sword," says D'Amato, explaining some stores would rather carry the premium items under their own label.

"The private-labeling program gives the store operator the opportunity to establish its own label, quality and slogan unique to its store," says Venuti of Ven-Co Produce.

Ornstein of Eli & Ali's notes many supermarkets opt for private labels not only for their chain but also for specific locations, tailoring each store's packages to its demographics.

Packaged products may have other added values, such as kosher certification. The big question, say some, is how all this labeling translates to loose items, which still take up much of the space at supermarkets and almost all of the space at independent greengrocers.

"I don't think labels are as big a deal as they used to be, especially for the Market. Especially when something's out on display loose," agrees Margiotta of J. Margiotta. "People down here [at Hunts Point] look at the product itself for the quality. This is an outdoor walking market."

Vision Import's Millan believes his customers care about brands, whether they realize it or not. "Branding is so subliminal," he explains. "People are subliminally oriented to buy something they've see before." To Vision Import, branding is not aimed at the final consumer but at the wholesale or retail buyers who want some sort of guarantee they're offering their customers a quality product. "Hopefully, the goal is for the consumer to recognize our brand. We want our brands to be known. But it has to start with our customers."

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Businesses old and new understand the importance of relationships. "Our company dates back to 1900. That's when my grandfather came from Italy," says Margiotta, who still deals with some of the same farmers his father and, in some cases, his grandfather did business with.

"We've probably had some shippers over 30 years," says Cochran of Robt. T. Cochran & Co., one of the longest running companies on the Hunts Point Market at 115 years old.

In the case of J. Renella Produce, a good relationship with his shipper is what makes the business work, as Renella carries only one item and one brand. "I'm committed to these guys," he says. By helping his shipper when supply is high, he knows Borders will always make sure he has watermelons to sell. "When those things are red hot, I have them. It's a 2-way street. We have to help each other."

As times change, companies discover relationships with shippers and growers become more essential. Ornstein of Eli & Ali's notes it is especially important to have close ties when it comes to organics because of the rules that apply to a certified organic product.

Not all merchants deal directly with growers. As representatives of growers, Top Katz seeks to bridge the gap between growers and the people who sell their product. "The farmers tell us what's coming, when it's going to be heavy and when to promote, and we give customers the advantage," says Gelbaum. In turn, the growers can focus on what they do best and leave the selling to Top Katz.

Using a service such as Top Katz can work well for wholesalers as well as retail customers. "If it's a bad day, we make sure no one is too happy or too sad. We make sure it's a fair deal," adds Paul Manfre, sales.

While growers and shippers are important on one end, customer relationships are never to be neglected on the other. "Without the farmer, the wholesaler and the customer taken care of, you don't have a business," notes Stefanie Katzman of S. Katzman Produce.

Like shippers, customers remain loyal to wholesalers for generations. "We've had the same core customers for 15 years," relates Augone of Junior's Produce.

Customers who have built good relationships with wholesalers trust them more than ever these days. "Ninety percent of customers don't look at anything anymore. They ask if it's good and they buy it," says Cochran.

"They call in their orders. They rely a lot more on their wholesalers," agrees D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Brothers. "For the most part, you've got to do the quality control for them."

While small business owners still come to the market to see products for themselves, many rely on wholesalers for advice. "They'll ask me 'What do you think the market's going to do? What should I do today?'" says Cochran.

"The respect is made on how successful you both are — your customers and yourself. It all comes down to money," observes Richard LoBello, sales, Robt. T. Cochran. "Honesty will win you respect, too. If you're honest, they'll trust you."

LOOKING AHEAD

It's a changing world, but New York's appetite for produce remains the same — voracious. "We're an accordion. You can push us so far when the market is so tight, but when you need us to take stuff there's no end to it — we expand," says Steve Katzman of S. Katzman Produce.

These days it expands to include not just potatoes from Idaho and onions from New York but herbs from Israel, garlic from China and cherries from Chile. It takes a certain kind of business prowess to keep up with today's world. "If you're successful in this business you're very streetwise," says Steve Katzman. "You need to watch what customers buy. You read body language. You hear tones of voices."

Mario Andreani, manager, S. Katzman Produce, doesn't worry about learning new or unusual items. "Buying is buying. Give me three months to learn tires and I'll buy tires," he laughs. "Take the time to learn the product, the shelf life. It's all how you treat people and customer relations. I like to make everybody comfortable. When you're selling, you're not selling a product. You're selling yourself."

Despite what could be tough times ahead, wholesalers in New York are optimistic. "What we're looking forward to in the produce business is real exciting," says Steve Katzman.

"It's an interesting marketplace and an exciting industry," agrees Auerbach of Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc. "Despite the challenges, we enjoy being in this industry." **pb**

The Next Generation

These young people — mostly in their twenties — poised to lead Hunts Point into the future have produce in their blood.

Richard Cochran, president, Robt. T. Cochran & Co. Inc., at the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market, Bronx, NY, knows a little about running a family operation. The business, which opened in 1893, has been in his family for 115 years. Today, his son Mike, 26, is fifth generation at the company. "You grow up with it. It gets in your blood," says Richard Cochran.

That's good news for owners such as Steve Katzman of S. Katzman Produce, Katzman Berry Corp. and Katzman Global, Hunts Point. "It brings the reassurance to our suppliers that if something happens to me, we're still in business," he explains. His daughter Stefanie Katzman and his niece Elyse Corwin are part of the fourth generation to work at Hunts Point. "Young blood is real important."

For some, there was never a question they would work in the family produce business. "I've always wanted to be here," says Stefanie Katzman, 25. Today, after seven summers and 1½ years as a full-time employee, she is the general administrative supervisor.

Stefanie Katzman and Elyse Corwin of S. Katzman Produce

Twenty-year-old Chelsea Armata claims she has been — at least on a small level — a part of her father's and uncle Paul's company since she was eight. As daughter of president Chris Armata, "I'd come in and do 20 little things," she relates. Today, along with brothers Nicky and Michael, she is among the fourth generation working at E. Armata Fruit & Produce, Hunts Point.

Others came to the business after careful consideration. "I was going to go out and do something else after college," says Mike Cochran, Robt. T. Cochran & Co. "My father always told me to do what I wanted to do. But it just felt right, so I came here. It's a good job."

"I went to school and I've tried different jobs, but I've been doing this all my life. It's something that's definitely in my blood," says Louis Augone III, who is third-generation at Junior's Produce, Inc., Hunts Point. "I like the chaos at the market. The hustle and bustle. Especially in the summer during the season. It makes the day go by fast."

Perhaps it is that fast pace that keeps attracting the younger generation. "Every day is different," says Richard Cochran. "That's what my father told me. That's why he did it. There are always new deals starting. Somebody's long on something and asks, 'Can you take it?'"

"You've got to be on your toes all the time," agrees Mike Cochran. "It's interesting. Every day, when you walk up the stairs, you don't know what you're coming into."

"You always get to come into a new day. It's a perishable product, so each sale is exciting," says

Corwin. Now 26, she first began working for her uncle during summers while she was in college. "I enjoyed it. It's exciting compared to a job in a cubicle, where it's the same each day."

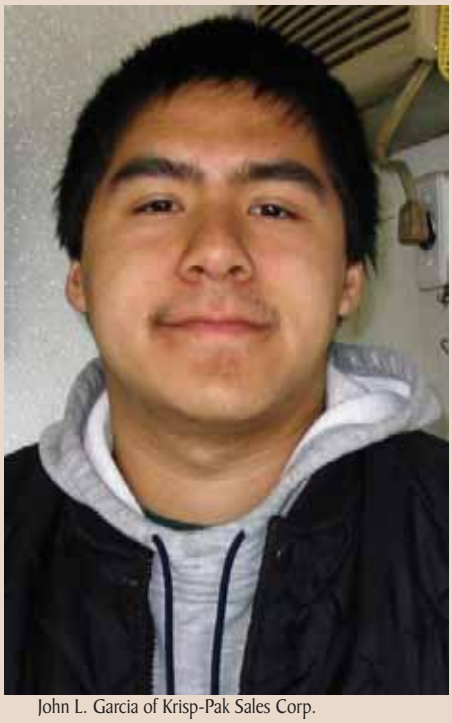
NO EASY BREAKS

This generation at Hunts Point is as hard working as its fathers. Chelsea Armata puts in a full week at the office and is also a student at Nassau Community College, majoring in accounting. "I get here around 7:30 and stay until 3:30 or 4:40," she says. "I never woke up this early before. I'm getting used to it."

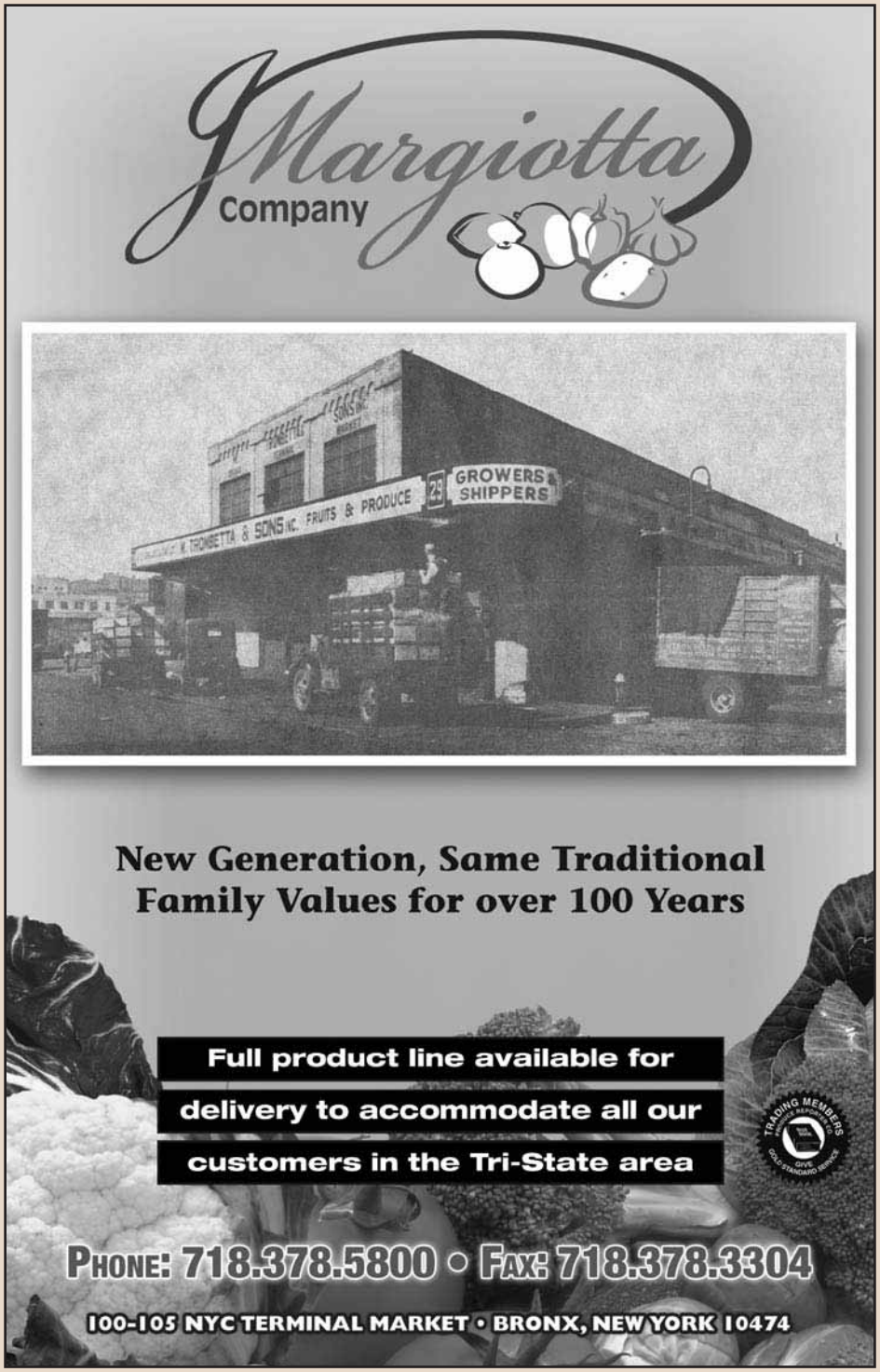
Chelsea is learning — one by one — how to do every job at the E. Armata office. "It's just the way I learned," says Chris Armata. "There's no bending of the rules. She gets treated like everyone else."

Eighteen-year-old John L. Garcia, son of Krisp-Pak Sales Corp. president John Garcia, is working in sales for his father at Hunts Point this summer. His grandmother Millie was a pioneer in the produce business and is famous for having

Mike Cochran of Robt. T. Cochran & Co.



John L. Garcia of Krisp-Pak Sales Corp.



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developed the first bagged spinach in 1946. "It's busy, it's quiet, it's busy," laughs the younger Garcia. He is learning every job so he can cover for people when they're out.

When Stefanie Katzman came to her father's company, her job was "penciling" berries — picking through the containers and culling out the bad ones. "One thing you have to give Stefanie credit for — there's no special treatment," says Mario Andreani, manager, S. Katzman Produce. "You have to earn respect. She earned it. There's nothing upstairs or downstairs she can't do."

> "It's hard work. You have to put a lot of effort into it, but it can be good. It can be very exciting."
>
> — Stefanie Katzman
> S. Katzman Produce

"I'm real proud of my daughter and niece," adds Steve Katzman.

"Right now there is so much to learn," says Corwin of S. Katzman Produce. "When is the rainy season in Guatemala? What's the shipper's name? There's always something new. It's always challenging." Her goal, for now, is to become a better salesperson.

Hard work is not the only lesson passed on to the next generation. Chelsea Armata listens to her father's advice about dealing with shippers and customers. "He always said you have to be honest and fair in everything you do, and especially this."

Steve Katzman gave his daughter this advice: "It's hard work. You have to put a lot of effort into it, but it can be good. It can be very exciting," notes Stefanie Katzman.

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Chelsea Armata of E. Armata Produce

the next generation at Hunts Point. Not everyone is quick to embrace a female worker in such a down-and-dirty environment. "Women are accepted in the produce industry at a few levels. Terminal markets are not usually one of those places," says Steve Katzman.

"I'm sure they didn't accept me at first," acknowledges Stefanie Katzman, "but I feel I've held my own. You have to earn respect, whether you're male or female."

When Chelsea Armata gets the impression that someone doesn't want to work with a woman on the market, "It just makes me want to do it even more," she says.

One of the first people she had to convince was her father. When Chelsea first said she wanted to work for him, "My reaction was mixed," relates Chris Armata, "because I'm very tough with my sons and I'd have to be tough with her or it's not fair. I was excited at the same time. I'm excited to teach her. She's a good learner."

But "tough" or not, Chelsea is not treated the same as her brothers. "When I came here I was a porter. I was 14 years old. I worked every summer," says Chris Armata. But Chelsea is starting in the office. "My sons now come in and do whatever the men do. They unload railcars. They do deliveries. They have to do more than the men to set a good example," says Chris Armata of E Armata. But as for Chelsea, "She does not belong downstairs. It's a man's environment down there on the platform."

Few women would complain about such an arrangement. "It's a setting that isn't appealing to most people," notes S. Katzman's Corwin of the platform. "It's dirty, it's cold."

When it comes to buying and selling, however, "That is not only a man's world. It used to be, but not anymore," adds Chris Armata.

"There's definitely a glass ceiling. The mindset of most of the business is that it's a man's world," according to Corwin. But she is quick to point out the advantages a woman brings to the business. "Most of the people I talk to are females and it's a novelty for them that I'm female." Since retail shoppers are mostly female, she points out to customers that she can relate to their shoppers.

Since Corwin began working full time for Katzman Produce in 2005, more people have grown receptive to a female salesperson. "There are people who are more comfortable talking to women now. They're more accepting," she says.

Reader Service #3

Reader Service #72

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Reader Service #31

"The ceiling has gotten higher. There are more women in higher positions. More females farming, more females buying."

PASSING THE TORCH

Today's 20-somethings have a lot to learn before they're ready to run the show for themselves. "People say, 'Where'd you graduate?' I say, 'The University of Hunts Point,'" laughs Ronnie Cohen, who worked his way up in the family business. Today he is the vice president of sales for the new Vision Import Group LLC in River Edge, NJ. (He also graduated from an actual college — American University in Washington, D.C.)

Louis Augone III of Junior's Produce

On-the-job training here can be tougher than any college course. "Chelsea's learning things some people here don't know. She's learning not the numbers on the screen but where the numbers come from," explains Chris Armata. "Because she does the inventory, I took her in the car to show her where the warehouses are so she can visualize it when she looks at her computer."

Times have changed since her father began working at Hunts Point, and Chelsea Armata finds that youth has its advantages. The computers she grew up with play a much larger role, for instance. "They used to write everything by hand," she says. "That's so crazy."

Looking back at how his great-grandfather conducted business, Mike Cochran of Robt. T. Cochran reflects, "It's pretty crazy to think they used to work on those narrow streets with horses and carriages." His father's office still holds some of the antique safes, furniture and even a stapler from those earlier days to remind them both of where they came from.

Becoming the next generation in the family business is a dream come true for Chelsea Armata, who has childhood memories of her father talking about work at the dinner table. Today, she's happy to be part of the conversation. "I love it. And it's even cooler that I work with my family."

For some, those moments are the most rewarding part of bringing children to the family business. According to Chris Armata, "The best thing is that every morning she gives me and her uncle John a kiss on the cheek." **pb**

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Reader Service # 25

Eden Gourmet Café And Marketplace

Culinary mecca offers shoppers fine produce at a good price.

By Jacqueline Ross Lieberman

This new extension of New York's famed Garden of Eden gourmet shop offers surprises and delights around every corner. On a sunny spring day in South Orange, NJ, shoppers step past a display of fresh produce and through a set of inner doors into the newly opened Eden Gourmet. Immediately, they are greeted with the scent of fresh chocolate and apple cider doughnuts that are temptingly displayed for sampling. A man at a Wonka-like rice cake machine offers guests a taste of some surprisingly appealing low-calorie treats. They smell every bit as good as the doughnuts.

"From fried chicken to caviar, we're selling it all," explains Steve Katzman, owner, S. Katzman Produce, Inc., the Bronx, NY-based parent company of Eden Gourmet.

"The way we set up the store is healthful with a gourmet attitude or gourmet with a healthful attitude," according to Nicholas Kotsianas, manager. For Kotsianas, who originally hails from Greece, there is no contradiction. In Mediterranean cuisines, he explains, you can have your cake and eat it, too.

He believes you can have great service, high quality and low prices, as well. "In our industry, it's tough to have those three factors in one sentence. But we buy in bulk, so we can be competitive," notes Kotsianas.

Just past the rice-cake machine, shoppers find a number of gourmet takeout stations, including freshly made sushi bar; a yogurt bar featuring Greek-style yogurt and a plethora of toppings, such as honey, granola and berries; a salad bar; a hot food bar; and a juice and smoothie bar. "Everything is made on premises," adds Kotsianas. "Our salads are prepared twice a day. The yogurt bar is being constantly replenished and we only use seasonal fruit."

The store is designed to make life easy for the grab-and-go shopper. Unlike most grocery stores, the layout does not force consumers to walk to the back of the store to pick up a quick bite.

For shoppers with a bit more time, browsing Eden Gourmet can be a highly rewarding experience. Just past the smoothie bar sits a bakery headed by a French pastry chef who once worked at Le Cirque 2000 and Payard Patisserie in Manhattan. The gorgeous pastries and handmade candies are as enjoyable to look at as they are to eat.

In the deli department, wheels of authentic Parmigiano-Reggiano sit below a display of small elephants and pigs carved from cheese. On some days, shoppers can watch a demonstration of how mozzarella is made on-site. Smoked meats, pâtés, prosciutto and Serrano ham all await the gourmet shopper, as do a fresh meat counter and a fish department.

A kosher section offers fresh meat and prepared staples such as matzo balls, stuffed cabbage and knishes. Fresh pastas occupy another refrigerated display case, while imported dried Italian pastas take up a small section of their own.

At the back of the store — or the front, depending on which entrance you use — lies the produce department. Specialties rule here among the looming trees and tiny waterfalls that make up the section's rainforest décor. Delights include gourmet eggplants and apples delicately placed between layers of tissue paper, quinces, fresh lychees, mini watermelons, tomatillos, chayotes, pattypan squash and mushrooms of all kinds.

The meaning of this abundance from near and far is not lost on Kotsianas. "In the Mediterranean, we go from deprivation to opulence," he explains. Many remember when wars were fought and food was scarce, making times of abundance all the more special. This is the feeling of luxury and celebration that he wishes to pass on to consumers.

It is a profusion of gourmet goods, yet the space is still intimate. This is possible in part because, while there are some mainstays, items offered at Eden Gourmet are constantly rotated. "The whole idea is to keep changing," according to Katzman. For example, he says, "The only staple items on the hot bar are meatballs and mashed potatoes. Rotisserie chickens are always there, but they're flavored somewhat differently every time."

"Variety is the spice of life, but sometimes it gets to be too much and people get overwhelmed," says Kotsianas. You could get lost in the oil and vinegar section alone if you do not know what you're looking at. This is why he believes consumer education is extremely important.

"The next step is going to be cooking classes," explains Mario Andreani, manager, S. Katzman Produce. "We'll call them Temptation in Every Aisle. You can take a course on cheese, for example, and learn how to serve it and what wines to pair with it."

Eden Gourmet will soon unveil its Italian-style café and restaurant upstairs, where patrons will be able enjoy a meal or quick bite, completing the store's promise to serve as a place to relax, socialize and shop. "Consumers know it's not just a grocery store," explains Kotsianas. "In the old countries, in the cafés, you can buy and shop."

For now, the store offers catering in addition to grab-and-go meals. "The prepared food is going very well," he adds. "I'm amazed how much catering we do, and it's all word-of-mouth. We don't do any advertising."

Perhaps the reason so many consumers speak highly of Eden Gourmet is because the store's concept invites them to enjoy the experience. But Kotsianas believes consumer relations have a big influence. "We have to be authentic here," he says. "You have to really love this to do this. You have to love interacting with the consumers. You have to love the cuisine. I talk to my consumers. I enjoy it. I don't think of them as consumers, I think of them as friends."

For Katzman, as well, the business is very personal. His wife and some of his children work at the store, and he spends time there getting to know his employees and consumers. "I'll stand up front and people will come to me and just say 'Thank you.'" **pb**

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Reader Service # 112

Sal's Fruit Tree

Independent Long Island shop attracts consumers from far and wide with its bargain produce deals.

By Jacqueline Ross Lieberman

Originally named The Fruit Tree, Sal's Fruit Tree has served shoppers on Long Island since the 1970s. Sal Messina, owner, estimates that the small supermarket nestled in Copiague, NY, sees 20,000 consumers each week. In addition to the store's two parking lots, "People park all over the streets, around the corner," he notes.

The biggest attraction is Sal's bargain-priced produce. "I focus my entire business on fruits and vegetables," he adds, waving his hand at an international grocery section that draws consumers from as far away as 30 miles. "The rest is window dressing." The shelves overflow with goods from Poland, Turkey, Spain, Greece and other parts of the globe. The meat, fish and deli departments are rented out, allowing Messina to concentrate on what he does best.

Messina can credit his own existence to produce — his parents, first-generation Americans, met while selling it from pushcarts. "My dad immigrated to America in 1921 from Palermo, Sicily, Italy. He came here with his mom and dad. His father was in the produce business in Palermo."

As a young man, Messina's father sold grapes he bought on the Washington Street Market, which housed wholesale operations before the Hunts Point Terminal Market was built. Messina's mother sold basil. "My mother was parked between 12th or 13th Street and First Avenue — two blocks away from my dad." [*Editor's note: Please see this month's Blast From The Past on page 162*].

Throughout his career, Messina has always been involved in produce in one way or another, as a wholesaler as well as retailer. "Three's no one who moves more produce than Sal Messina," he stresses. "I live, breathe, eat, sleep produce."

In 1974, Messina opened The Fruit Tree with an 800-square-foot building and a lot of outdoor displays. At the time, no one in the New York metro area had seen a store like it, bursting at the seams with gorgeous produce at great prices. "I'm a pioneer into the huge produce markets," Messina explains.

The Fruit Tree eventually moved across the parking lot to a larger building. During the 1990s, Messina sold the store but eventually foreclosed on the new owners and re-opened the space as Sal's Fruit Tree. Today, consumers can find Messina at the store seven days a week — even on Christmas.

Like the international section, Sal's produce department appeals to consumers of all nationalities. Whether it's cranberry beans, celery knobs, parsnips, pomelos or fresh green almonds, "I have it all. Maybe not 52 weeks a year, but I have it," Messina reports. He maintains that his knowledge of produce gives him an

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Reader Service # 115

edge over the chain stores that carry items used by a wide array of ethnic groups. "The chains don't know what they do with the items. We know what the people do with them."

The store's layout is far from typical. Before entering, shoppers pass outdoor displays of fruits, vegetables and garden plants. Walls are lined with big, beautiful displays of fresh produce. Street signs hang over two islands, named after Messina's twin daughters — Francessca's Square of fruit and Arianna's Corner of vegetables. Checkout registers sit at the center of the store as opposed to the front.

Consumers jockey for space to maneuver their carts around the overflowing displays even on fairly quiet weekdays. On weekends, the crowds pile in for great deals. Many shoppers know Messina by name and greet him with a smile. "This is not a fancy supermarket," he explains, after exchanging pleasantries with one consumer. What matters the most are quality and value. All the fresh-cut produce is processed on-site. Many of his consumers don't care about brand names on their produce, and organic items are nowhere to be seen.

Messina buys most of his produce from the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market, Bronx, NY — eight or nine trailer loads a week. "There's not one vendor we don't shop from. I used to go to the market myself, but I gave up going 18 years ago." Now he has a buyer who "walks the street" in his place. Messina also works with brokers. "I like dealing with brokers better than buying direct because they offer great service."

The amount of produce bought and sold through this modest store is astounding. "I sell 25 or 26 trailers of watermelons alone from Memorial Day to Labor Day," Messina proudly notes. **pb**

Angela and Sal Messina of Sal's Fruit Tree

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Reader Service # 116

Bobo

Unique restaurant delights diners with its old-world cooking and European-themed atmosphere.

By Jacqueline Ross Lieberman

All photos courtesy of Bobo

Since opening in September 2007, Bobo has been wooing locals and tourists alike with a fantasy dinner-party atmosphere and a menu with European appeal. The name comes from a combination of the words "bourgeoisie" and "bohemian." With a style that's one part moneyed elegance and one part wild artistic flair, Bobo is unlike any other restaurant in New York. "It's unique," notes chef Jared Stafford-Hill. "The whole restaurant is full of antiques. It's very intimate."

The space that now houses the West Village restaurant was once a townhouse. A subterranean bar — complete with an old-fashioned turntable record player — upper-level dinning room and rooftop garden give diners the feeling they are attending a well-to-do European's dinner party. Shelves lined with books, chandeliers and black-and-white photos add to the illusion.

The food resembles the kind of old-world home cooking you may expect in a countryside manor or Paris apartment. "We call it seasonal European," describes Stafford-Hill. "It's mostly rooted in French cooking with Spanish and Italian influences, plus American produce."

With today's weak American dollar, New York is beginning to look like a bargain vacation to many Europeans. It's no wonder many of Bobo's patrons are visiting from Europe. "I try to give

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Reader Service # 103

them what's regional," reports Stafford-Hill. When he arrived at Bobo this past winter, he changed the restaurant's policy from using a great deal of imported produce to using more American produce. "When I go to Europe, I don't want to eat things from South Africa and New Zealand."

On a spring day, you might find entrées, such as lamb pot au feu, halibut with white asparagus and Berkshire pork with shell peas and sausage. Just don't expect to find them for long — the menu changes at least six times a year.

Although the menu may seem to be centered on local fish and meat, "We get whole lambs and pigs and prepare them a bunch of different ways," notes Stafford-Hill. But produce is the real star here, differentiating Bobo's menu from its competitors. He buys most of his produce from local farms and specialty produce suppliers.

Because so much of the produce is locally grown, the Northeast's short growing season can create challenges. "Ramps have a relatively short season," he explains. "Wild mushrooms — I always have two or three items on the menu that are totally seasonal. I think spring and summer start to become more vegetable-driven, then protein-driven as it gets into winter. Toward the end of winter, there isn't really anything in season. Citrus. Tropical fruits. Things in storage. I try to stay local. It's important for our sense of regionality."

Much of the food he buys is grown organically, although some of Stafford-Hill's suppliers are not certified. Many of his consumers are interested in organics, he says, noting, "People care nowadays. They ask these kinds of questions a lot." Stafford-Hill favors organic-minded growing. "It usually implies that the people growing the stuff care a little more."

This kind of careful attention makes its way into everything Stafford-Hill creates. "I'm terribly proud of everything on the menu," he adds. **pb**

Bobo
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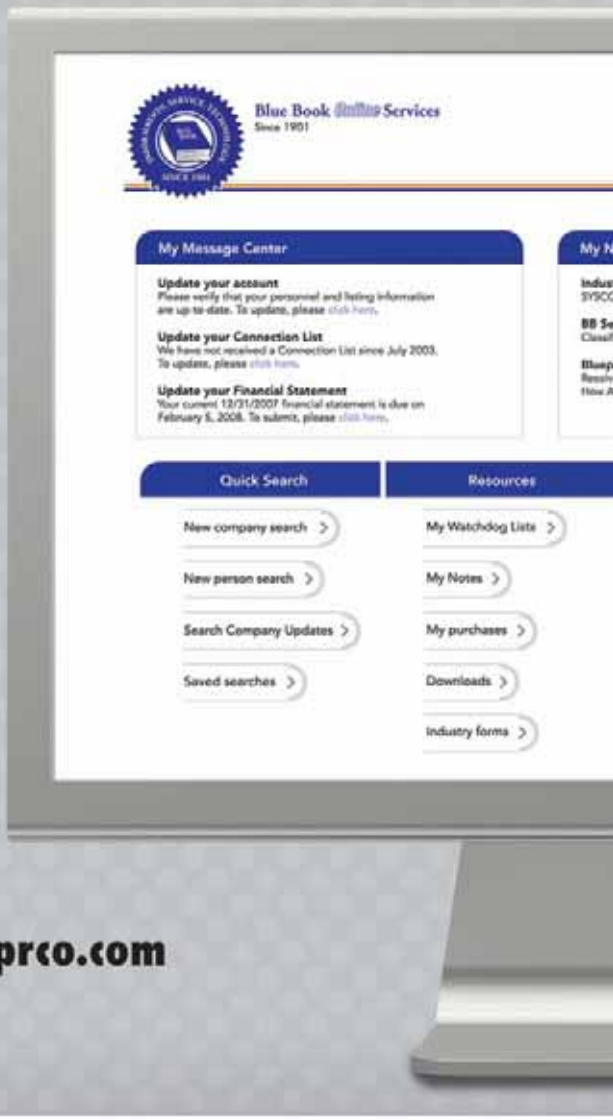

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Reader Service # 108

X2O Xaviars On The Hudson

Hudson River gem offers guests spectacular views and an array of original cuisine.

By Jacqueline Ross Lieberman

All photos courtesy of X2O Xaviars

Even Manhattanites make the trek to this fine dining experience in Yonkers, NY, to enjoy excellent food with amazing views of the Hudson River. Opened one year ago by restaurateur Peter Xaviar Kelly and chef Kenneth Breiman, X2O Xaviars on the Hudson is set on the only turn-of-the-century Victorian pier still in use on the Hudson River.

Also known simply as X2O, the restaurant is home to an impressive main dining room featuring a 25-foot-high vaulted ceiling and a three-sided view of the water. From here, diners glimpse the George Washington and Tappan Zee Bridges, and in the evenings, they enjoy a stunning sunset over the Palisades cliffs. X2O is one of several restaurants, including Xaviar's at Piermont and Restaurant X, owned by Kelly.

The food is equally important to diners who travel to X2O from miles away. "I have often

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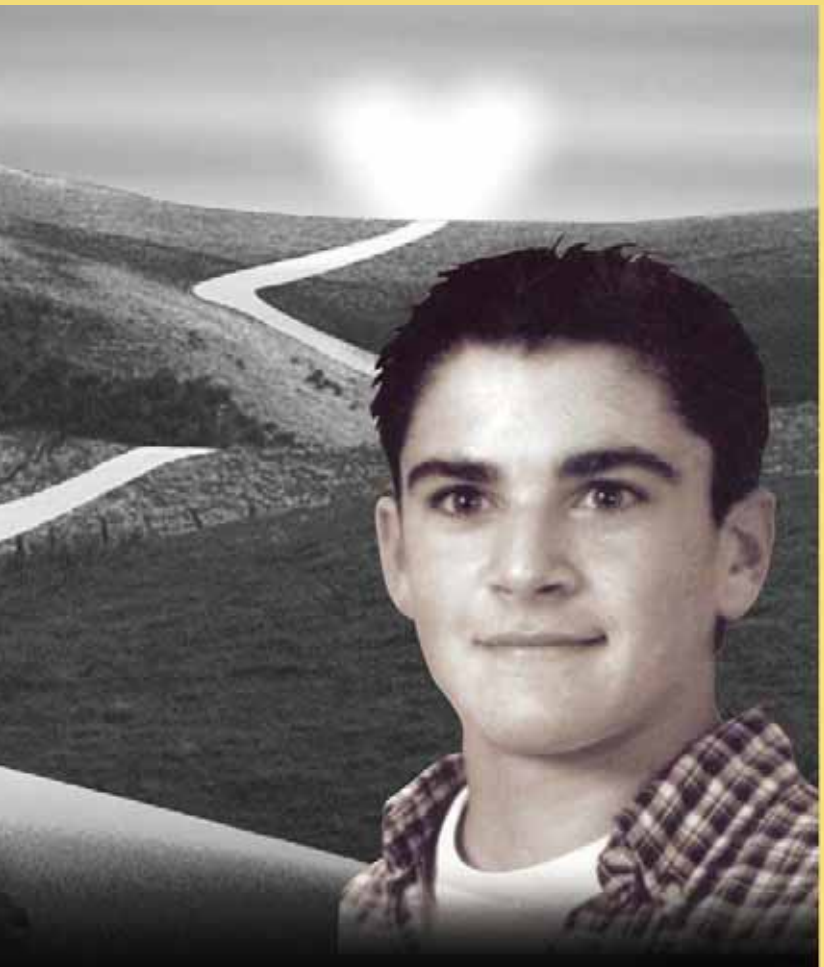
Survivors of "Louis' Law" in New York State Public Schools.



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What would you do if you found that your children were not safe?

Imagine going to your son's basketball game to watch him play. At half time he goes into the locker room and dies of cardiac arrest. Imagine attending your son's first high school lacrosse game, he is the goalie; he blocks a shot with his chest and dies of cardiac arrest.

Andrew, 18, went to sleep and did not wake up. Danielle, 11, was playing with friends when a car honked and startled her. She collapsed and died instantly. Bryan, 15, died following a PE class. Gregory, 15, died during half time of a high school basketball game. Stacey, a 15-year-old gymnast, Brian, a 17-year old football player, a 14-year-old swimmer, a 20-year-old college student …the list goes on and on.

On March 25, 2000, in Northport NY, our 14-year old son, Louis, lost his life during his first high school lacrosse game from a syndrome known as Commotio Cordis. Louis, the goalie, was struck in the chest, which caused his heart to go into an irregular rhythm called ventricular fibrillation. An AED(Automated External Defibrillator) was needed on the field to correct this irregularity, but it was not available.

It is believed that 7,000 to 10,000 children/teens will die annually in the United States from sudden cardiac arrest.

There are several undiagnosed cardiac problems that a young healthy person could collapse due to sudden cardiac arrest. Commotio Cordis however, is simply a blow to the chest at the time the heart is recharging. This makes each and everyone of our children vulnerable.

During SCA the heart fails to effectively pump blood to the body. When SCA strikes, the American Heart Association recommends that defibrillation be delivered within five minutes. For every minute that passes the chances of survival diminish by about 10 percent. Average ambulance response time is 9 - 12 minutes. With those response times survival rates hover around 5 percent. Studies show that survival rates as high as 74 percent are possible when defibrillation is given within three minutes of collapse.

In June of 2002, Governor George Pataki of New York signed Louis' Law, which requires AEDs in all public schools. Both the Senate and the State Assembly unanimously passed this bill.

New York has seen first hand the importance of Louis' Law. Already 40 lives have been saved in New York State Public School districts because there was an Automated External Defibrillator on sight. School districts across the state, with the assistance of the foundation, have supported the training of staff in the use of these life saving devices.

Pennsylvania, Maryland,Ohio and Texas have passed laws mandating placement of AEDs in schools. These devices have been credited with saving the lives of students, teachers, coaches, parents and spectators, alike. All of our correctional facilities, all airlines, and all federal buildings have AEDs. Now…..let's protect our children.

It is time for you to take the important step and ask those questions Does your school have an AED? Is there an AED at your child's baseball game? Do your police officers carry AEDs? Do you know CPR?

As of press time the US Congress had passed the Josh Miller Hearts Act. The Josh Miller HEARTS Act will establish a grant program through the Department of Education that will provide schools with funds for lifesaving AEDs and AED/CPR training. Please take the time to write your State Senator asking them to pass this lifesaving legislation as well.

Contact www.LA12.org or the American Heart association for more information

Reader Service # 34

prided myself on being well versed in all types of cuisine," explains Breiman. "I have had the honor of being trained by Charles Palmer, David Burke, Tom Valenti and now the great Peter X. Kelly. I use only the freshest produce, meats and seafood I can get my hands on."

X2O's menu is widely appealing and focused on produce. "We have a very diversified menu, including a full-service sushi bar in our Dylan Lounge, which I think gives us an appeal to just about everyone," notes Breiman. "Without great produce, you are pretty much just looking at a piece of meat or fish on a plate."

Much of what Breiman uses is locally grown, so the menu naturally changes with availability. "I am happy to say we had the first ramps of the season. I currently have fiddlehead ferns and spring onions on the menu. As we near the summer season, I will start leaning toward corn, heirloom tomatoes, etc."

Breiman enjoys wowing vegetarians with a special option. "We take great pride in our vegetarian presentation, where we feature no less than 10 vegetables in a spectacular plated presentation," he relates.

The chef also uses short-seasoned items to his advantage. "A favorite special can sometimes depend on the quality of the ingredients used, especially produce," he explains. "We currently are running a diver sea scallop with local morels and Washington state asparagus and celery root vermicelli, which is phenomenal. But, again, what truly makes it great is the spectacular quality of the ingredients going into the dish. I love the overlap of mission figs with the introduction of venison in the fall."

During the winter, Breiman relies somewhat on produce from warmer locales, but during the spring, summer and fall months, local produce is extremely important. "Right now, we are using local asparagus, white morels and fiddlehead ferns from Syracuse, NY. From May through October, we source our mesclun mix, baby spinach and baby arugula — all from New York and New Jersey farmers. All arugula, basil, cilantro, squashes, tri-star berries, blueberries, specialty root crops and herbs are coming from these New York and New Jersey farmers, as well as heirloom tomatoes and vegetables. Fall local items include fingerling potatoes, Yukon potatoes and red potatoes."

Some of what he uses is organic. "The baby white turnips, all baby beets — gold, red and candy cane — and baby lettuces are organic because the farmers we buy those items from have been growing that way for 20 years. The quality is superior and the price is reasonable compared to other growers of the same items who farm non-organic or conventionally," adds Breiman. "As the price of organic gets closer in price to conventionally grown items, our mix in the restaurant of organic produce will grow."

Whatever he is doing, it seems to be working. Even on a Tuesday night, the dining room is packed. "We have been extremely busy and booked for months in advance since opening," he notes, "which keeps the place bristling with energy every day we are open." **pb**

X2O Xaviars
71 Water Grant St.
Yonkers, NY 10701
914-965-1111

Business hours:

Lunch
Tuesday – Friday
Noon to 2:00 PM

Sunday Brunch
Noon to 2:00 PM

Dinner
Tuesday – Friday
5:30 PM to 10:00 PM
Saturday
5:00 PM to 10:00 PM
Sunday
5:00 PM to 9:00 PM

Dylan Lounge
Tuesday – Sunday
5:00 PM – 10:00 PM

House	Unit(s)	Phone
A & J Produce Corp.	126-133, 137-144, 450-463	718-589-7877
Albee Tomato Co., Inc.	118-120	718-542-6054
Alphas Corp.	223-225	718-893-0222
Armata, E.	111-117, 338-341 369-370, 372-373	718-991-5600
B.T. Produce Co., Inc.	163-166	718-893-7520
Best Tropical Produce	237	718-861-3131
Chain Produce.	266-268, 400-402	718-893-1717
CM Produce LLC	123-125	
Cochran Robert. T. & Co., Inc.	408-412	718-991-2340
C and J Produce	238-241	718-991-5050
Coosemans New York, Inc.	242-244, 249	718-328-3060
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, Inc.	301-305, 307-308, 310-320 323-330, 332-336	718-991-5900
Fierman Produce Exchange, Inc.	247-248, 250-257, 271	718-893-1640
Food Barn	31B	718-617-3800
Fruitco Corp.	200-204	718-893-4500
Georgallas Tomato & Produce	447-449	718-842-6317
Gold Medal Produce	167,168	
Henry Haas, Inc.	464	718-378-2550
Hothouse AFL.	110	718-542-3777
Hunts Point Tropical	134-136	718-893-0895
Issam Kanawi	331	718-542-2217
Juniors Produce Inc.	438-439	718-991-7300
Katzman Berry Corp.	153, 260-263	718-589-1400
Katzman S. Produce, Inc.	154-157, 423-428	718-991-4700
Korean Farm Corp.	352-353	718-589-4440
Krisp-Pak Sales Corp.	347-350	718-991-4800
LBD	226-233, 403-407	914-522-3049
Lee Loi Industries, Inc.	234-236	718-542-4115
M. Y. Produce	264-265	718-378-5100
Mabijo	271	718-893-1640
M & R Tomato Distributors, Inc.	149-151	718-589-8500
M & R Trading	309	718-589-8500
Margiotta, J. Company, Inc.	100-105	718-378-5800
Mendez Int'l. Fruit & Veg.	152, 158-162	718-893-0100
Nathel & Nathel, Inc.	354-364, 367-368, 464-468	718-991-6050
National Farm Wholesale Corp.	434-437	718-617-6229
Okun, Morris, Inc.	205-220	718-589-7700
Pan Hellenic Food Corp.	440-444	718-328-8654
Porricelli, Ciro	342	718-893-6000
Renella, J. Produce, Inc.	351	718-991-4210
RMD Produce	306	718-991-3432
Robangela	374-376	718-893-3311
Rothman, D.M. Co., Inc.	106-109	718-991-4920
Rubin Bros. Produce Corp.	147-148, 269-270, 272-274	718-589-3200
Top Banana LLC	413-420	718-328-6700
Trucco, A. J.	343-344	718-893-3060
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Yola Produce	371	516-292-8821

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309	M&R TRADING
308	D'ARRIGO BROS. CO. OF NY
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306	RMD PRODUCE
305	D'ARRIGO BROS. COMPANY OF NEW YORK, INC
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30C	PT.TERM FD
	ROW C

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402	CHAIN PRODUCE
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	ROW D

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Attract Consumers With Private Label Produce

Take advantage of branding opportunities to bank on higher profit margins and build consumer loyalty.

BY DUANE CRAIG

Branding the produce department is a great opportunity for retailers to strengthen relationships with consumers while expanding their overall brand offerings.

"I think when we talk about a retailer's own label, we have the private label, which is exclusively for the retailer, and the control label, which is a brand that is sold as an exclusive item," explains Bill Bishop, president of Willard Bishop Consulting, Ltd., Barrington, IL. "Retailers are growing and finding it's worth their while to move from a controlled private label to an exclusive private label."

Retailers typically go this route once they reach a size where they can do what they haven't been able to do before and they have the desire to brand the store or business more agressively. "That's harder to do with a control label, even if it is exclusively yours in whatever town you are in," he adds. "Precut and processed products are certainly a growing segment of the produce business, and along with these products comes their packaging, providing a platform on which to create a brand."

Photo courtesy of Fresh & Easy

Exclusive private labels can offer retailers higher margins than advertised brands, so there is a profit motive to move to private label, at least as a percentage of the retail price, Bishop notes.

Private-label produce ranked No. 8 in unit volume within the Top 20 supermarket private-label categories in 2007, according to the Private Label Manufacturers Association, New York, NY. This translates to a 14.8 percent share of the Top 20 dollar volume.

Neil Stern, senior partner with McMillan Doolittle, a Chicago, IL-based group of retail consultants specializing in strategy and new store concept development, says that from the larger view, retailers definitely are moving toward private label produce because it offers higher margins and allows them to differentiate themselves from the competition. "The more you can be known for the great private brands in your store, and build loyalty around those brands, the more consumer loyalty you build." Brands cost more than private labels in the grocery department because national brands have much higher R&D costs associated with innovation, he adds. They also have much higher marketing costs because they spend so much money on advertising; they also have a higher margin structure since they are trying to maximize their operating profit. Private-brand cost might be the same, but manufacturers are not taking as much profit in many cases and there aren't the attendant extra R&D and marketing costs included.

"Private-label produce is a bit different in some ways and in other ways not," continues Stern. "If you look at the overview of the produce department, it has moved in the past 10 or 20 years to more packaged products and more brand representation. In those cases, it also represents an opportunity to create a private label since the same sort of prevailing market conditions apply. It gets trickier if you're talking about bulk seasonal fruit. The real opportunity in produce is in those areas where they are packaged, allowing you to create a private brand

Private label produce offers an opportunity to build profit and differentiation.

for differentiation. Some retailers argue that, in many ways, the entire produce department is actually privately branded."

"Private label is certainly a trend," stresses Lorna Christie, senior vice president of industry products and services for the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), Newark, DE. "More retailers are looking at private labeling in produce as a way of differentiating their brand and because of the draw of the fresh fruits and vegetables to the store."

The quality of the produce defines the store because the consumer is most often remembering the store where the fruit or vegetable was purchased and not the name on the package, Stern notes. The produce department is a profit and margin builder as well as a differentiation builder.

Bruce Knobeloch, vice president of marketing for River Ranch Fresh Foods, LLC, Salinas, CA, reinforces that private label adds to the differentiation, stating, "The greatest advantage is differentiation in the marketplace. The ability to offer unique, high-quality, competitively priced, private-branded, value-added produce enables the retailer to truly differentiate its produce offerings versus its competition. Private brand can also help drive positive consumer impressions regarding quality and innovation."

CONSUMER MEMORIES

Some experts see the advantages of private labeling for the retailer adding up since produce does not have high-brand recognition. Less than 2 percent of consumers actually recognize a produce brand, and most of those brands are in the fruit category, according to Christie. "Consumers recognize the store and not necessarily the brand they bought," she explains. "Our other research shows the selection of produce and the quality and the freshness of produce is a key factor in how consumers choose a store."

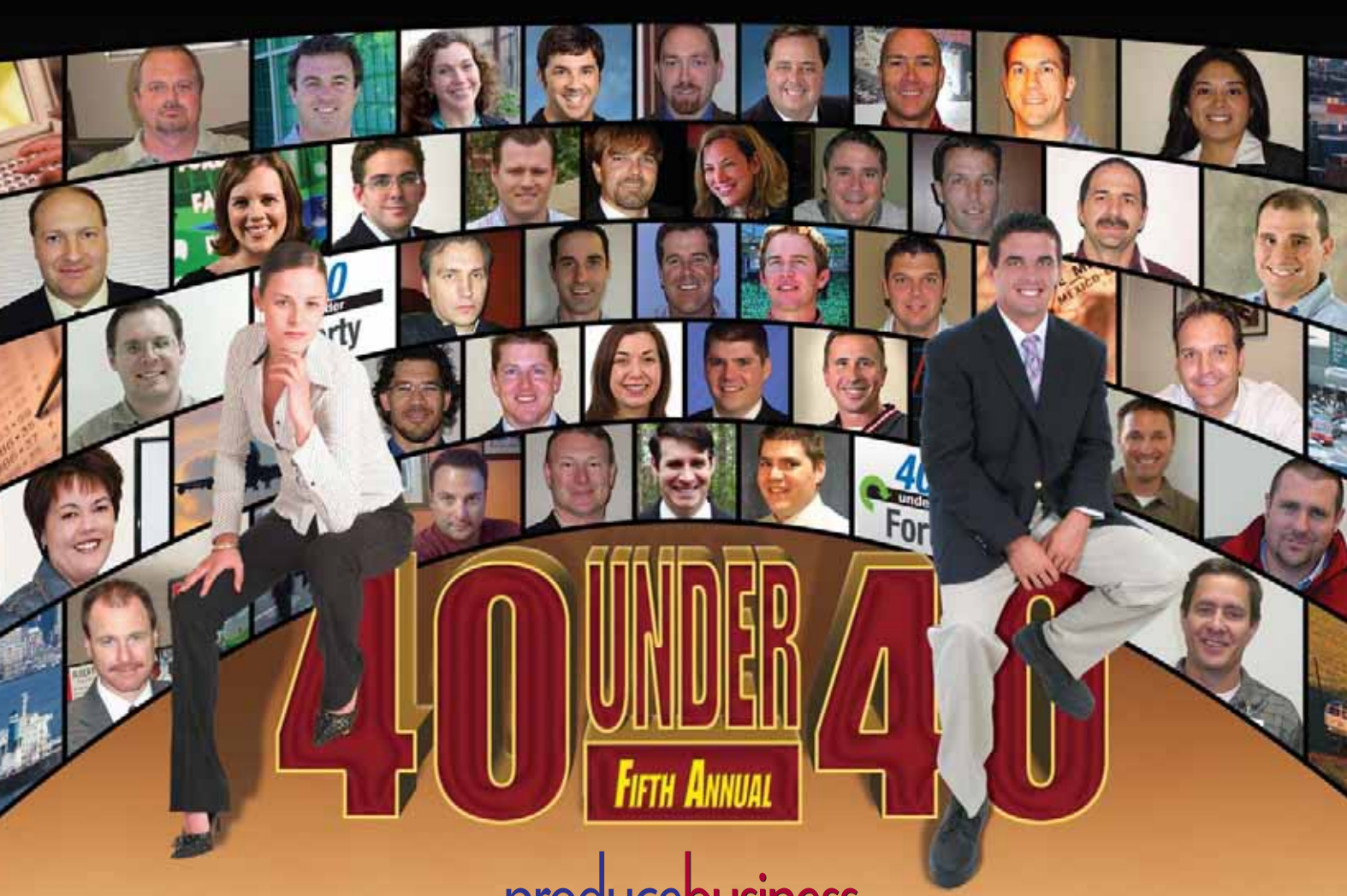
Harry Balzar, vice president of the NPD Group, a Chicago, IL-based consumer marketing research firm that tracks how people eat in the United States, agrees the store name is remembered more than the name on the package and produce by itself doesn't have strong brand presence until it is linked to the store. "There is probably some produce that has a strong brand presence, but most doesn't. The real question becomes what value does private label offer the retailer since the consumers are more likely going to remember the store where they bought the item and not the name on the package. The reality is that the produce is probably closely tied to the store already."

Consumers have been requesting more Fresh & Easy labeled produce, according to Brendan Wonnacott, spokesman for Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market, the new El Segundo, CA-based foray into the U.S. retail market by Tesco, based in Chestnut, Herefordshire, England. "More produce is included in the 250 new items we're going to be rolling out over the next couple of months. Our produce has been proven to be a big hit and our move to include more of it is based purely on consumer feedback. We've been soliciting feedback on our Web site and we've conducted interviews with consumers." The company's total private label line comprises roughly half of the store's total offerings.

Loblaw Companies Limited in Brampton, ON, Canada, offers President's Choice, a control-label program that includes value-added fresh fruits and vegetables. Glenn Acton, spokesman, highlights fresh vegetables for grilling and organic field greens as just two items his customers say are outstanding values. The company cross-merchandises with other control brand items as well. Its President's Choice Roasting Vegetables contain President's Choice Balsamic Vinaigrette.

With rising prices, private label may offer a value point for consumers because the consistency in quality shows value to the consumer, according to John Aune, vice president of national operations for W. Newell & Co., Champagne, IL, a produce distributor that is a subsidiary of Eden Prairie, MN-based Supervalu, Inc. That quality aspect comes from meticulous attention to detail. Because retailers dictate the standards and specifications and then monitor the quality, consumers can be confident that what they are buying will be same across all visits to the store. Private labels give retailers buying power, which allows shippers to bid on the business and add a value equation that can show up on the shelves. "The challenge in anything is establishing the brand and gaining consumer confidence, and we've successfully done that by maintaining our strict standards to quality. When a consumer comes in and

With rising prices, private label may offer a value point for consumers because the consistency in quality shows value to the consumer... Because retailers dictate the standards and specifications and then monitor the quality, consumers can be confident that what they are buying will be same across all visits to the store.



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

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

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

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buys that brand, they come back again knowing that it has always been good and because we control that we're not dependent on some other marketing company to oversee it. We do it ourselves," stresses Newell's Aune.

> **"The key to a successful private-label program in produce is strongly contingent upon picking the right vendor partner before you put your name on its product."**
>
> **— Will Wedge**
> **Hannaford Bros. Co.**

"The key strategy to address challenges is strong coordination and communication between consumer and vendor," notes River Ranch's Knobeloch. "Graphic design, product development, demand planning and other aspects all come together nicely with good coordination and communication."

GETTING BEYOND PRICE

"From a price perspective, private label produce can offer a price advantage for consumers, but price isn't the only advantage private label produce offers," notes Brian Josephs, vice president of produce and floral for Topco Associates, LLC, Skokie, IL. "For example, Topco's Full Circle brand of natural and organic products currently has about 1,000 SKUs. This organic produce is an important part of the brand offering. Being able to provide it effectively complements the brand's center store, meat and seafood offerings and helps to build consumer awareness and loyalty. For those companies that choose to offer private-label commodity products, it allows them to present one consistent brand to their consumers."

Retailer considerations in regards to a private-label produce brand depend on consumer demographics. "Private labeling is an extension of the pull or draw of the produce department because produce is seen by a good portion of consumers as a key factor as to why they shop at a store," explains PMA's Christie. Stores that already have a very strong brand will gain the benefit of private-label produce better than stores that don't have strong brand recognition.

However, the potential risks for some may not be worth the trip down private-label lane. "I think the food safety issue is a huge area and if you're going to have your own label, you are going to own the label and own the liability," according to Bishop of Willard Bishop. "You want to know a whole bunch about the way the product is grown and handled. Getting into your own label requires being big enough to get visibility back into the system to assure yourself that you're dealing with some very reputable suppliers who won't blemish your brand."

"When it comes to fruit and vegetables, consumers shop with their eyes," notes Will Wedge, director of produce merchandising for Hannaford Bros. Co., a Scarborough, ME-based chain with more than 150 stores. "The key to a successful private-label program in produce is strongly contingent upon picking the right vendor partner before you put your name on its product. If customers buy that product and they don't have a good eating experience, it doesn't reflect negatively on the grower — it reflects negatively on the supermarket. The real gain for a supermarket is in the equity that you build in promoting your name and in how the consumer values your name in the market." **pb**

Private Label Tiers

Bill Bishop, president of Willard Bishop Consulting, Ltd., Barrington, IL, offers advice on something that hasn't shown up in produce yet but that has shown up with other types of private label tiers of product. When retailers develop a private label, they will first have a private label that's comparable to the national brand but is a little cheaper. Then they often go to different tiers of private label. One tier moving up the line is called specialty private label and includes organic items and products with particular health benefits or ethnic appeal. Another tier is the value line. Eventually there will be three tiers.

Long-term trends show consumers picking products for their ability to save them time and money, according to Harry Balzar, vice president of the NPD Group, Chicago, IL. Those two conditions, he says, are the equivalent of making people's lives easier. "Time and money are the driving forces of our lives. So to the extent that private label may offer some advantage in terms of time or cost, it will be around a long time compared to if it's just capitalizing on the novelty."

Historically, in economic downtimes, private label has increased and so it stands to reason it will probably do that again, reports Neil Stern, senior partner with McMillan Doolittle, Chicago, IL. He believes it will extend across all departments in the store.

"It appears private-branded products, including value-added produce, gain additional consumer acceptance during inflationary times," explains Bruce Knobeloch, vice president of marketing for River Ranch Fresh Foods, LLC, Salinas, CA. "The overriding purchase decision is still driven by the overall value proposition, including quality, convenience and price."

Will Wedge, director of produce merchandising for Hannaford Bros. Co., Scarborough, ME, concludes, "Where I see the benefit of high-quality private label produce is that even though consumers may never remember the name, they will remember the name of the store and that makes it more likely they will make that conscious choice to shop at my store and not the competition. **pb**

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Dried Fig And Date Consumption On The Rise

Encourage sales beyond winter holidays with attractive displays, advertisements and promotions.

BY FRITZ ESKER

Despite a number of challenges, growers and retailers have reasons to be excited about the future of fig and date consumption. In the past year, fig and date growers/shippers have had to cope with high fuel costs, a devalued dollar, a crop shortfall and the misconception that these fruits are only seasonal items. In spite of these problems, figs and dates are growing in popularity and have the potential to secure an even bigger foothold in the produce industry.

Economic issues affecting the rest of the United States are also impacting the fig and date industries. The weak dollar is hurting importers. "Our biggest challenge right now is the euro," explains Salvatore Vacca, president, A.J. Trucco, Inc., Bronx, NY. Because the dollar/euro exchange rate is so poor, it costs more money to import figs from places such as Greece and Italy. The added cost must be passed on to the consumer.

While most people are still buying figs, they're not buying them in the quantities they used to, Vacca adds. And some don't buy them at all. "When they hear the price, some consumers say 'OK, thank you,' and leave."

Another problem is the rising cost of fuel. "The cost of fuel adds to the cost at all levels," reports Dave Nelson, vice president, Bard Valley Medjool Date Growers Association, Bard, CA.

The past few years have also seen a crop shortfall in the United States, according to Linda Cain, vice president of marketing, Valley Fig Growers, Pleasanton, CA.

Photos courtesy of Valley Fig Growers

Although seasonal displays attract new consumers, dried figs and dates are available yea-round.

"Our demand is higher than our supply," explains Denise Junqueiro, director of marketing for the California Fig Advisory Board, Fresno, CA.

Similar challenges exist with dates. "Supply has been rather tight the past three to four years," explains Sean Dougherty, vice president of Hadley Date Gardens, Inc., Thermal, CA. He cites the visual appearance of date trees as another burden. Nurseries will pull prime trees and use them for commercial applications, such as placement at casinos in Las Vegas [NV] or at Disneyland [in California] for aesthetic purposes, he adds. Once new trees are planted as replacements, it takes approximately seven to 10 years before a good crop of dates can be harvested from the tree.

FIGHTING THE ILLUSION OF SEASONALITY

The seasonality of dates and figs presents a problem for merchandisers. "We've gotten into a bit of a chicken-or-the-egg situation," reports Cain. Figs and dates sell best during the holiday season, but unfortunately, some retailers stock them only during the holidays. The question is: Are people willing to buy dates and figs only during the

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Reader Service # 6

A Booming Business

Despite challenges, figs and dates are selling well and showing signs of increasing popularity. "It's just a really booming business," reports Kurt Cappelluti, sales manager for Stellar Distributing, Inc., Fresno, CA. "I can never get enough figs for the consumer base." As recently as 10 years ago, Stellar's sales were 80 percent wholesale and 20 percent retail. Today, the opposite is true. "That's a good indication [figs and dates] are getting out to mom-and-pop [shops]," adds Cappelluti.

One reason figs and dates are growing in popularity is their nutritional value. A 40-gram serving of figs offers more potassium than a banana, according to Denise Junqueiro, director of marketing for the California Fig Advisory Board, Fresno, CA. Figs also contain fiber, calcium, magnesium, and antioxidants. "Not many fruits are high in calcium," she notes. The high levels of calcium make figs particularly attractive to vegans, who do not consume dairy products.

Although fresh figs, unlike dried, are still seasonal, stocking them when available may spark interest in consumers familiar with the dried fruit. "In the past, convincing retailers to purchase fresh figs was difficult," explains George Kragie, president of Western Fresh Marketing, Madera, CA. Popularity increased with the advent of the Food Channel and Emeril Lagasse's cooking show, which allowed viewers to see uses for figs that they had not previously seen, he adds. While fig sales used to be limited to specific communities, sales have now expanded. "The people in Nebraska are buying figs, the people in Missouri are buying figs."

Dates also have several nutritional benefits. Like figs, they are high in potassium. "The ideal benefit of dates is they give you a slow release on the sugar," notes Sean Dougherty, vice president of Hadley Date Gardens, Inc., Thermal, CA. The sugar spike is not immediate and there is no subsequent crash. Dates are also rich in antioxidants.

With either fruit, the health benefits are numerous and should be accentuated. Among dried fruits, "The most healthful of them all are dates and right behind them are figs," reports Andrew Stillman, president of Amport Foods, Minneapolis, MN. On top of their health benefits, both fruits also last a long time. "They are always in season and they are ripe all of the time." **pb**

holiday season or do they just sell better at that time because that's the only time of the year consumers can find them at retail?

To find the answer, figs and dates need to get a fair chance during non-holiday months. "People set up nice displays for the holidays and then kill the item," explains Andrew Stillman, president of Amport Foods, Minneapolis, MN. "You can't sell something you don't have on the shelf."

He suggests putting photos of three non-holiday uses and one non-holiday recipe on the front of packaging. He also advises dried fruits be kept as a family by grouping dates and figs with other dried fruits, such as blueberries, cherries, and cranberries.

Reader Service # 32

> **"People set up nice displays for the holidays and then kill the item. You can't sell something you don't have on the shelf."**
>
> **— Andrew Stillman**
> **Amport Foods**

While date and fig suppliers want to get away from the preconception their products sell only during holidays, Stillman says the holiday season should still be used as an opportunity to attract new consumers. "The best time to start building up your display for dried fruit is during the traditional Jewish holidays — September or October."

Even when figs are stocked year-round, consumers may not know where to find them. Retailers should stock figs in the produce department because consumers often look there for them. "Usually, they're there [in a supermarket], they're just very hard to find," notes Junqueiro of the California Fig Advisory Board. "People sometimes get confused because they're near raisins or dried cranberries [in the grocery aisles]." **pb**

FLORAL WATCH

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Floral Fresh Connections

Produce Marketing Association (PMA), Newark, DE, will host a floral Fresh Connections networking event from 11:30 AM to 2:00 PM on July 17 at the Coral Springs Marriott Hotel and Convention Center, Coral Springs, FL. The complimentary lunchtime reception will feature a presentation from floral industry expert Sandy Hering.

Reader Service No. 300

Avery Reaches Milestone

Avery Imports, Batavia, NY, is celebrating 80 years of business. Founded in 1928, the family owned and operated company imports and distributes products used in the floral, supermarket, packaging, home décor and garden industries.

Reader Service No. 301

SAF Annual Convention

Society of American Florists (SAF), Alexandria, VA, will host its 124th Annual Convention Sept. 17-20 in Palm Beach, FL. The opening day's session will focus on sustainability. Additional educational topics include the marketing and financial aspects of running a successful business, keeping digital information secure and packaging a business brand, as well as tips on business and personal technology.

Reader Service No. 302

Name That Green

Floral Greens Direct, Inc., Crescent City, FL, announces a Name That Green contest encouraging industry members to submit clever and easy-to-pronounce names appropriate for the Variegated Elaeagnus cut green. The winner of the contest will be announced by the end of the year.

Reader Service No. 303

NEW PRODUCTS

Pretty In Pink

Schubert Nursery, Inc., Salinas, CA, introduces Pink Pixie, a Bougainvillea plant that grows in a compact shrub form, making it a perfect topiary gift plant. With plenty of light and warm weather, Pink Pixie will provide months of fantastic color for the patio or a sunny window. The plant is available in 3-inch clay pots or in Schubert's classic clay wash pots.

Reader Service No. 304

Frugal Florist Announces New Line

The Frugal Florist, aka John Klingel, AIFD, West Palm Beach, FL, introduces a line of easy-to-use floral products for novice designers to create floral arrangements on a budget. The line includes fresh flower foam brick in five bright colors, candle stakes, floral scissors and fresh flower-cake foam for creating popular floral birthday cakes.

Reader Service No. 305

No Wilt Wooden Roses

Forever Flowers, Hunter, NY, has expanded its line of wooden roses to feature brighter colors. The stemmed roses made of finely shaved, carved willow wood are available in more than 50 colors. A UPC number is attached to the bouquet wrapper and for single-rose purchases, the UPC number is directly attached to the individual rose wrapper.

Reader Service No. 306

Herb 6-Pack To Go

Somerset Organic Farms, Naples, FL, introduces a new line of six herb varieties — all certified organic by Quality Certification Services (QCS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Each 6-pack handled kit features tomato plants or basil, parsley, oregano, dill, cilantro, rosemary and chives. The herbs are grown in biodegradable pots made for planting.

Reader Service No. 307

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

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Ring In The Holiday Floral Season

Ensure a successful December sales period by planning a merchandising strategy and taking steps to prevent inventory shortages.

BY JON VANZILE

Retailers are already preparing for a modest holiday season. Last year, 60 percent of retailers said the December holiday season did not meet their expectations, according to the Newark, DE-based Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) *Floral Holiday Market Watch* newsletter. Industry wide, same store sales were down from 2006.

Historically high gas prices and an ailing economy are expected to continue weighing down purchasing decisions, especially the impulse buys that can make or break a holiday season, but this doesn't mean December will be a bust. With the right merchandising and careful control of inventory, floral departments can ensure a profitable season.

Aside from Christmas trees, no plant is as closely associated with Christmas as red poinsettias. Although their sales have drifted down in recent years, Americans still snap up more than $200 million worth of poinsettias each year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The most popular variety is a standard 6-inch red poinsettia, which usually retails for about $6.

In recent years, nurseries have introduced new varieties, including white and pink, as well as poinsettias dyed bright orange and blue. These products, however, account for less than 10 percent of overall poinsettia sales, says Robert Zeliff, greenhouse manager, Manatee Floral, Inc., Palmetto, FL. Manatee grows about 75,000 poinsettias for the Christmas season each year. "The dyed poinsettias have been around for only a few years," he reports. "They're not a flash in the pan, but red is still king."

Geissler's Supermarkets, a East Windsor, CT-based chain with seven stores, regularly stocks red, white and even light purple poinsettias, according to Fay Davis, produce supervisor. "But, we deal mainly in red and sell only a few of the others."

Sandy Buss, floral director, Trig's, a 5-store chain based in Minocqua, WI, cites similar experiences. "We're a fairly traditional market. We sell mostly red. We might sell a little bit of a novelty item, like a Norfolk Island pine, but we're pretty traditional."

The poinsettia is a hardy, subtropical bush native to the Pacific Coast and Mexico, but over the years, breeders have introduced more than 200 varieties in differing colors and hardiness. "Not every kind of poinsettia will do well in a particular area," Zeliff notes. He recommends retailers call a local university or agricultural extension office to find out which poinsettias will do best in their areas and then buying only those varieties.

Freshness is also key — poinsettias are notoriously brittle plants, and consumers will pass up leggy or broken plants as well as drooping displays. Instead of wasting employee hours watering and tending plants daily,retailers should refresh stock frequently. "Don't get 10 zillion of them at once," Zeliff advises. "I'm an advocate of keeping them fresh. Order 1,000 a day instead of 5,000 a week. I don't know a grower who would say, 'I won't come back tomorrow.'"

Both Davis and Buss report frequent deliveries from suppliers to keep stock fresh. Davis, who sells about 5,000 poinsettias each year, even takes his staff to visit greenhouses in November to select the best plants.

CREATING THAT CHRISTMAS FEEL

Poinsettias might bring consumers into the floral department, but they are only the beginning of a successful December. Gary Gelzer, owner of Jay Gee Sales, merchandising consultants and distributors based in Fort Smith, AR, recommends using advertised discounts on poinsettias to bring in consumers. This might be especially important in a year when consumers are likely to feel nervous about extra spending. "Right now, people are choosing between gas, eating and flowers," he adds.

Photo courtesy of Teufel farms

Retailers must face this holiday season knowing consumers are feeling economically strapped.

Gelzer is working with one California retailer to create a traditional atmosphere that also reflects market realities. "We're pushing giving this year. Nothing glitzy. The message is, 'Wouldn't it be nice if you got something for your neighbor?' You have to show you care for consumers."

The floral department sets the holiday tone of the store, points out Gelzer, who often uses creative yet simple displays to push certain items. He might elevate a few poinsettias to eye level or stock Christmas-themed vases or red bows next to cut flowers to encourage impulse purchases.

Fake snow is a consistently popular

impulse purchase, especially if it's displayed well. JRM Chemical, Inc., Cleveland, OH, offers packets of fake snow packaged with easy-to-display stands. Each packet, which retails for about $3, makes two quarts of "instant, fluffy" snow, according to Dave Czehut, vice president.

"This product really sells itself," he says. "The best way is to demonstrate it. You can tie it in with candles, vases, cake plates or tabletop settings. It's very lifelike and lasts 10 to 14 days. Then you just remix it, and it's like new again."

Trig's runs large, themed displays all through the year. To control costs, Buss and her staff purchase most of their hard goods for the entire year in February. Careful inventory planning is crucial, she notes. "In the past few years, suppliers aren't inventorying at the level they once did. Our inventory often comes from China, so if you run out of something, it'll be hard to replace it."

Buss works hard to reduce her inventory risk by buying non-holiday specific items. "We try to purchase products that can flow from one season to the next. That way, if you don't sell through one season, you can go to the next." Red vases, for example, can be used in December and again for Valentine's Day. Baskets and pottery can also be used throughout the year. "You only have to get a little of the holiday-specific stuff," Buss adds.

Oh, Christmas Tree!

New shipping and packaging techniques are making Christmas tree sales less labor-intensive and easier than in the past.

Many growers offer pre-packaged trees shipped on easy-to-handle pallets. "All [retailers] have to do is display the trees on pegs where people can see them," says Mitchell Bottomley, owner, Bottomley Evergreens & Farms, Inc., Ennice, NC.

Trees stored in a cool, dry place, out of sunlight, should last four to six weeks . The same goes for fresh wreaths and pine garlands, although they are often displayed inside as impulse items. "Don't just throw garland or wreaths in a pile on a shelf in the front of the store," warns Frank Kauffman, sales manager, Teufel Holly Farms, Inc., Portland, OR.

He recommends hanging garland from shelves or on upright stands. The most economical way to stock garland is to buy 75-foot lengths and cut to length. Teufel also offers boxed wreaths that can be displayed next to the cash registers.

Wreaths, swag and garland should be misted daily and stored overnight in the floral cooler or outside with the Christmas trees. "It's better to display just a few wreaths at a time and keep the rest in a cooler," advises Bottomley. "If you put a Christmas tree in 50° F weather and a wreath in 50° F weather, the tree will last about three times longer." **pb**

LABOR PAINS

The trick to maintaining profitability during the December holidays is to hold down labor costs while providing excellent customer service. Most retailers resist additional labor if at all possible. "Staffing is decided by dollars," explains Gelzer of Jay Gee Sales. "Floral departments are playing defense, not offense, in December."

He expects this year to be a difficult sales environment, especially for more costly items. "With the economy like this, it's tough to make sales. The low dollar and high cost of fuel is hurting, especially the high end. We can sell a lot with extra service and just doing the basics." **pb**

Reader Service # 30

By Dave Diver

Industry Role Models

I started in the supermarket industry as a management trainee in 1958 and retired as corporate vice president for produce and floral procurement, operations and marketing of Hannaford Bros. in 1992 and began consulting. During this 36-year period, I had the privilege to know and work with many industry leaders. I always studied the industry carefully and observed leadership at other supermarket chains from a distance. So when *Supermarket News* inducted three supermarket industry leaders who were more or less contemporaries of mine into its Hall of Fame, the names selected immediately struck me as meritorious.

The three honorees, Charles C. Butt, chairman and CEO H.E. Butt Grocery Company (HEB); Jim Sinegal, president and CEO, Costco Wholesale Corporation; and the late Robert B. Wegman, former chairman, Wegmans Food Markets, Inc., brought new and valuable ideas to their companies. The editors of *Supermarket News* identified four shared characteristics these leaders had in common to help explain their outstanding success.

First, they built on the work of others. Wegmans and HEB started as family companies, but Wegman and Butt grew them by developing into new formats, products and services. Sinegal developed the Costco operation by expanding the membership warehouse club concept established by Sol Price, founder of Price Club, making Costco a leader with growth accelerating over 30 percent in today's sluggish economy.

These three men developed profitable consumer programs that proved effective regardless of competition and economic conditions.

Second, each leader stayed in touch with his consumers. HEB executives are encouraged to understand the needs of low-income consumers by asking them to feed their families for a week on minimal budgets. Sinegal values the longtime trust of Costco members and has gradually extended the relationship to new categories, such as fresh foods and private label, to make the shoppers' visit fit the all-in-one shopping experience. In a 1967 speech, Wegman stated the only reason for being in business is "to do something no one else is doing and to be able to offer the customer a choice she doesn't have at the moment."

Third, each leader made his employees a priority. Sinegal credits his career success to developing the right team on whom he bestows all the credit. To this day, Costco is among the leaders in providing fringe compensation. Likewise, Wegmans has been cited as one of the best employers in the nation. HEB's response to employees has created outstanding loyalty as the company continues to put a premium on character in the promotion process.

Fourth, each merchant exhibited a close connection to store implementation of merchandising. They learned the business on the sales floor. Wegman's and Butt's families exposed them to store operations at an early age. Sinegal received his first exposure unloading mattresses for Fed-Mart, where he met Price and became involved with store operations and merchandising.

Wegman traveled the world to identify new marketing methods and products for testing in his upstate New York stores to implement his philosophy of merchandising. "I think that uniqueness gives one an opportunity to profit," he stated during his 1967 speech. "If you are doing the same thing everyone else is doing, your opportunity for a substantial profit is materially reduced because of the price ceiling your competition will impose. Thus, good merchandising resolves itself into rendering a service in such a way as to be difficult for your competitors to emulate." As a result, consumers have recognized Wegmans as the leader in the Atlantic Northeast.

All three leaders specifically recognized the importance of offering consumers outstanding fresh fruit and vegetables merchandised in relation to the demographics of their respective trade areas.

Each of these three men developed profitable consumer programs that proved effective regardless of competition and economic conditions. These store operations should be observed and studied in detail not only for the product and its display but also for overall merchandising, including preparation, pricing and packaging.

As corporate vice president for produce and floral for Hannaford, I ran an important department but no departmental leader can be fully effective if the top executives — and in the case of family ownership, the owners — don't provide the commitment and infrastructure to allow excellence to flourish. The key to success is knowing what opportunities to leave by the wayside. These three honorees are some of my personal business favorites because they focused and did not try to be all things to all people.

Of course, there are other great industry leaders and there will be future years to induct more members into a Hall of Fame. These three, however, were a special group, defining excellence in a way that paid off for the mutual benefit of the consumers, the associates and the ownership. **pb**

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Reader Service # 11

By Abraham Barno
Agricultural Attaché Kenya High Commission
London, United Kingdom

UK's Food Mile Obsession Harming Kenya

Q: How is the issue of food miles impacting Kenya?

A: This matter came up very strongly when certain UK supermarkets decided to enforce labeling and cap imports on the basis of food miles. We are seeing this action as an affront to Kenyan farmers because 90 percent of our agriculture exports are to the United Kingdom, and our fresh produce is delivered by air. Hearing this, we had to take action.

The concept of food miles is a simplistic idea. It doesn't show the true qualities of carbon dioxide (CO2) influencing the environment. It ignores numerous factors, such as farming methods, transportation between supermarkets and households buying, and greenhouse gas emissions. We needed a lifecycle analysis, a fair measure to reflect better the truth of food product life.

Q: When and why did this food miles labeling start?

A: Tesco, [as part of its green initiatives] released the measure last [year]. We thought this matter was going to get out of hand. Consumers were being given false information. Food miles labeling is a marketing strategy. Supermarkets in the United Kingdom are competing on being the greenest on High Street, and they are using food miles as the test to show it. Facts about food miles are being manipulated and used as a marketing tool.

Kenyan farmers are being misrepresented and the consumers at these stores are not being told the true virtues of our products. The intention of these supermarkets is to put airplane stickers on all air-freighted products, not just from Kenya, but from all over the world.

Kenya, being a small developing country, plays an important role in international trade. We thought this was not right. Surely we have concerns about the environment and use the cleanest growing practices, which produce far less carbon emissions than many Western farming methods. Locally grown produce is not always more environmentally friendly, according to a DEFRA [Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, UK] report.

Q: What have you done to change these perceptions?

A: We wrote to DEFRA, the United Kingdom equivalent of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The secretary of DEFRA heard our concerns and spoke to the UK minister of environment and climate change. When UK supermarkets heard we were making noise with those in power, they expressed a concern and we used the opportunity to set up meetings. We had a long conversation with Tesco independently, and then with Marks & Spencer

Q: Were the meetings productive? What was the retail reasoning behind the food miles labeling?

A: They said it was their duty to respond to the concerns of their consumers who were saying they should do something about climate change. They thought they needed to address air freight, which emit higher CO2, and they wanted to be seen to be taking action.

Our argument on the other side was that this is like targeting a developing country, which exports fresh produce mostly by air. It is not right to punish us. In any case, our product travels via cargo in the bellies of passenger airplanes. You could not apportion CO2 from passengers and the cargo it's carrying. This is a very difficult way to look at the problem. In most instances, these planes are carrying tourists from the UK.

This is the only product segment we are able to produce competitively. This is very high quality product. Why can't we be given our fair chance? We offer quite a selection of fresh produce. In vegetables, mainly French beans, snap peas and most Asian varieties.

There is the potential of bringing in a trade dispute under WTO, discriminating against a product, a non-tariff barrier to trade. They need to know they are affecting these kinds of things with the policies they want to enforce.

The market for fresh produce in Kenya was created to serve the demand in Europe. We have invested heavily in supporting that market. Who will pay for the investments we have made already?

Q: Do you have reports to quantify the financial impact?

A: We export close to 700 million U.S. dollars, so we have a lot to lose. Since the introduction of airplane stickers, our initial reports show very little impact on consumer behavior. There is not substantive evidence of change in demand or buying habits at this point, but that could change. Indications are that consumers are taking notice.

We don't have the facts clear on why there is not much impact. It could just be a time issue, since the labeling is so new. The labels connote different meanings to consumers. Most consumers are aware of high carbon footprints and feel a need to do something to reduce the problem, but products may not always be available locally.

Q: How are you going forward?

A: We think our efforts are already making a difference. In our meetings with supermarket executives, there was acknowledgement that air-freighted product could actually be environmentally cleaner than they originally thought, and a remark to this effect came from none other than the CEO of Tesco.

Several diverse and prominent organizations have pointed to problematic issues related to food miles, including The International Trade Center in Geneva. A study by Cranfield University in the UK did a comparative analysis of the impact of carbon emissions for roses produced and exported from Kenya versus the Netherlands. It found that Kenyan exports including airfreight were actually six times more carbon efficient than by the Netherlands-grown process, and the heating requirements of putting product in greenhouses. We would like the consumers to look at food miles as a kind of marketing gimmick that does not hold water and denies people product diversity and tropical vegetables grown with less fertilizer.

With regards to products from Africa, we strive to produce healthy, safe and quality product with Good Agricultural Practices. We believe this is good for business and we should not be punished.

Excerpted from the Perishable Pundit - November 21, 2007
Interviewed by Mira Slott

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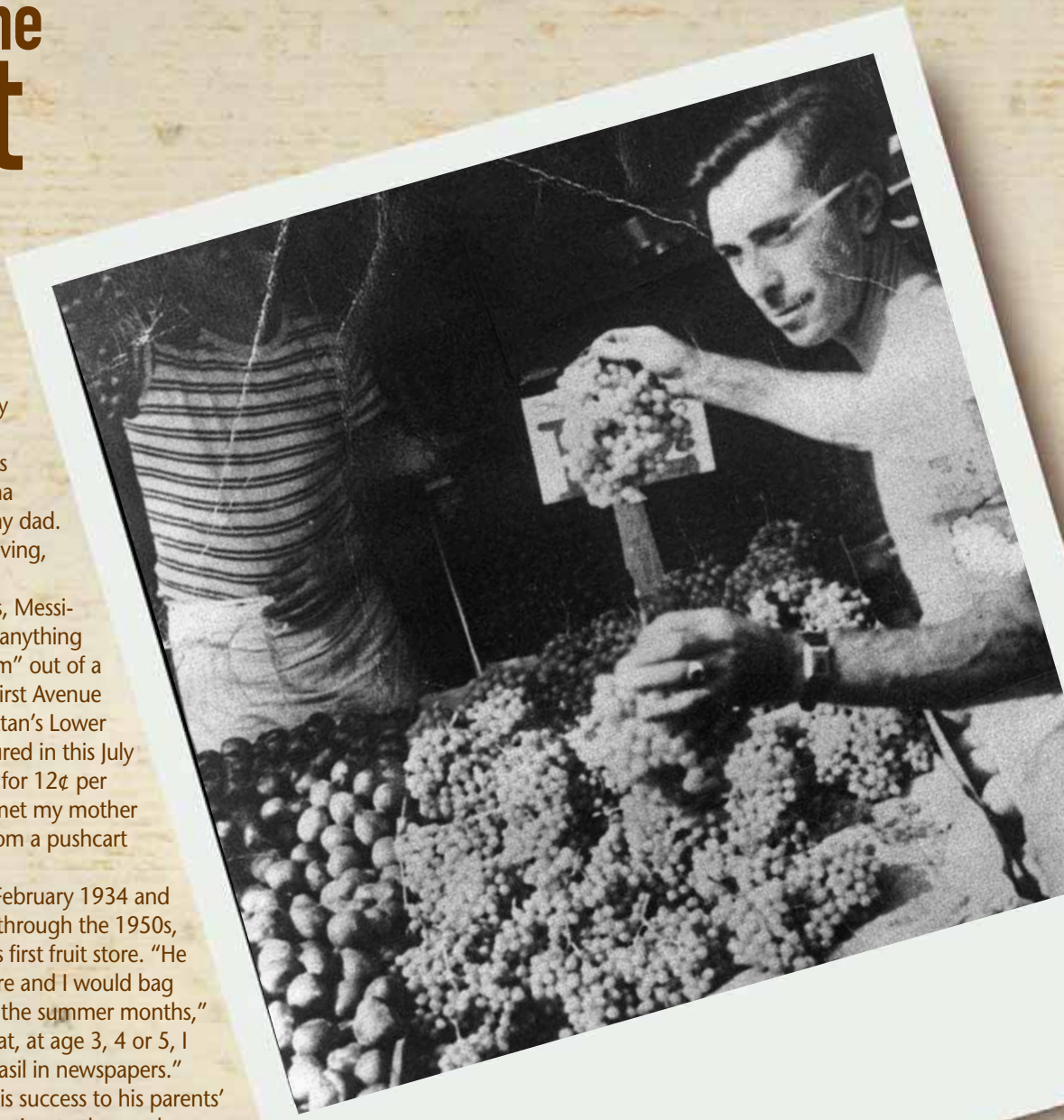
Agrexco USA, Ltd.	118	76	718-481-8700	718-481-8710
Amport Foods	154	32	612-331-7000	612-331-1122
E. Armata, Inc.	113	33	800-223-8070	718-991-1599
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	109	77	888-AUERPAK	201-807-9596
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	96	64	201-807-9292	201-807-9596
Babe Farms, Inc.	127	61	800-648-6772	805-922-3950
Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co.	40	68	800-845-6149	910-654-4734
Basciani Foods, Inc.	36	99	610-268-3044	610-268-2194
Blue Book Services	141	108	630-668-3500	630-668-0303
Bodega San Marcos	80	98	616-243-7809	616-248-2998
Boskovich Farms, Inc.	35	22	805-487-2299	805-487-5189
H. Brooks and Company	91	110	651-635-0126	651-746-2210
Brooks Tropicals	21	74	800-327-4833	305-246-5827
California Assoc. of Nurseries & Garden Centers	157	30	800-748-6214	916-567-0505
Canada Garlic	97	14	905-362-1888	905-362-1889
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	36	1	515-981-5111	515-981-4564
Castle Rock Vineyards	93	36	661-721-8717	661-721-0419
Catania Worldwide	153	6	559-275-8400	559-275-7594
CF Fresh	46	69	360-855-3192	360-855-2430
Chelan Fresh Marketing	29	49	509-682-3854	509-682-5766
Chilean Avocado Importers Association	37	78	202-626-0560	
Christopher Ranch	96	63	408-847-1100	408-847-0581
Classic Salads, LLC	24	66	831-763-4520	831-763-1542
Robt. T. Cochran & Co., Incorporated	122	111	718-991-2340	718-589-6704
Coosemans New York, Inc.	107	82	718-328-3060	718-842-6545
Curry & Company	31	79	503-393-6033	503-393-6085
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York	110-111	80	800-223-8080	718-960-0544
Del Monte Fresh Produce	49	59	800-950-3683	305-520-8495
Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.	104-105	83	800-333-5454	831-754-5243
Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.	2	81	800-333-5454	831-754-5243
dProduce Man Software	84	57	888-PRODMAN	650-712-9973
Driscoll's	60-61	100	831-763-5000	831-761-5988
Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc.	33	75	866-669-8166	561-978-5705
East Coast Brokers & Packers, Inc.	163	17	800-557-7751	863-869-9850
Edible Software	85	47	832-200-8000	832-200-8001
Eli & Ali, LLC	114	46	866-354-2547	718-389-1514
Family Tree Farms	93	45	866-FLAVOR-1	559-595-7795
Joseph Fierman & Son, Inc.	133	112	718-893-1640	718-328-3738
Food Barn	118	84	718-617-3800	718-617-3854
Fresh Quest	128	3	954-946-9554	954-946-8760
Garber Farms	129	85	337-824-6328	337-824-2676
Genpro Transportation Services, Inc.	121	10	800-243-6770	973-589-1877
Giorgio Fresh Co.	127	65	800-330-5711	610-429-3810
The Giumarra Companies	38	41	559-897-5060	559-897-8363
Gourmet Specialty Imports LLC	97	50	610-345-1113	610-345-1116
GPOD of Idaho	130	25	208-357-7691	208-357-5151
Grimmway Farms	62-63	101	661-845-9435	661-845-9750
A. Gurda Produce Farms	56	44	845-258-4422	845-258-4852
HMC Group Marketing, Inc.	64-65	8	559-897-1009	559-897-1610
Hollandia Produce	66-67	58	805-684-4146	805-684-9363
Hunts Point Co-Op Association	146	109	718-542-2944	718-542-2971
Hunts Point Co-Op Association	145		718-589-4095	718-589-1570
I Love Produce	98	104	610-869-4664	610-869-5711
I Love Produce, LLC	128	72	610-869-4664	610-869-2711
J&J Distributing Co.	89	51	651-221-0560	651-221-0570
Juniors Produce, Inc.	106	106	718-991-7300	718-991-0989
S. Katzman Produce	123	114	718-991-4700	718-589-3655
Kingsburg Orchards	7	23	559-897-2986	559-897-4532
Kirkey Products Group, LLC	84	73	407-331-5151	407-331-5158
Krisp-Pak Sales Corp.	135	115	718-991-4800	718-617-7304
The Kunkel Co., Inc.	88	39	800-747-7741	952-938-3528
Lynn-Ette & Sons, Inc.	129	31	800-473-2040	585-682-4968
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	68-69	70	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	11	71	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
J. Margiotta Company	126	107	718-378-5800	718-378-3304
Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc.	45	43	800-468-7111	323-588-7841
Miatech	56	56	800-339-5234	503-659-2204
Minnesota Produce, Inc.	88	40	612-377-6790	612-377-3768
MIXTEC Group	92	67	626-440-7077	626-440-1557
National Mango Board	51	18	877-MANGOS-1	407-629-7593
New York Apple Association, Inc.	101	15	585-924-2171	585-924-1629
New York State Dept. of Agriculture and Markets	55	86	800-554-4501	518-457-2716
Niagara Fresh Fruit Co.	129	42	716-778-7631	716-778-8768
Ocean Mist Farms	70-71	9	831-770-6435	831-633-4363
Pandol Brothers, Inc.	23	62	661-725-3145	661-725-4741
Peri & Sons Farms	40	60	775-463-4444	775-463-4028
Jerry Porricelli Produce	115	97	718-893-6000	718-893-0158
Produce for Better Health Foundation	17	20	302-235-2329	302-235-5555
Produce for Better Health Foundation	72-74	21	302-235-2329	302-235-5555
The Produce Marketing Association	159	11	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
The Produce Marketing Association	57	12	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
Produce Pro, Inc.	83	55	630-395-0535	630-572-0390
J. Renella Produce, Inc.	108	35	718-991-4210	914-764-8050
Rubin Bros.	104-105	83	718-589-3200	718-589-6544
Shannon Vineyards	58	38	912-857-3876	305-675-3876
SIAL Paris	47	27	704-365-0041	704-365-8426
Silver Creek Software	85	52	208-388-4555	208-322-3510
Solid Software Solutions, LLC	85	47	832-200-8000	832-200-8001
Spice World, Inc.	95	4	800-433-4979	407-857-7171
Spice World, Inc.	97	53	800-433-4979	407-857-7171
Spring Valley Farms	80	102	231-834-7546	231-834-7710
Stellar Distributing, Inc.	153	6	559-275-8400	559-275-7594
Sun World International	13	29	760-398-9430	760-398-9613
Sunlight Int'l. Sales	25	13	661-792-6360	661-792-6529
Sweet Onion Trading Company	129	54	800-699-3727	321-674-2003
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	5	2	800-772-4542	831-455-3915
Target Interstate Systems, Inc.	139	103	800-338-2743	800-422-4329
Tavilla Sales Co. of LA/Vision Import Group	119	37	213-622-4435	213-622-0004
Tennessee Dept. of Agriculture	45	28	615-837-5517	615-837-5194
Trinity Fruit Sales	93	88	559-433-3777	559-433-3790
A.J. Trucco, Inc.	117	7	718-893-3060	718-617-9884
U.S. Apple Association	77	105	717-432-0090	717-432-9317
United Fresh Produce Association	15	16	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
Ven-Co Produce, Inc.	137	116	718-893-3311	718-893-3193
Vision Import Group	119	37	213-622-4435	213-622-0004
Well-Pict Berries	164	117	831-722-3871	831-722-6340
Wholesale Produce Supply Company	87	5	612-378-2025	612-378-9547

Blast from the Past



It's a good thing Sal Messina, president of Sal's Fruit Tree, Copiague, NY, didn't take his father's advice about the produce industry to heart. "'Stay out of the business. It's not for you,' is what he'd tell me," Messina recalls. "I didn't listen to my dad. It's a hard way to make a living, but I love this business."

In the 1930s and 1940s, Messina's father Salvatore sold "anything he could make a living from" out of a pushcart at the corner of First Avenue and 11th Street in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Salvatore is pictured in this July 1931 photo selling grapes for 12¢ per pound. "That's where he met my mother [Frances] who sold basil from a pushcart down the street from his."

The couple married in February 1934 and continued to sell produce through the 1950s, when Salvatore opened his first fruit store. "He used to take me to the store and I would bag fruit at age 9 or 10 during the summer months," Messina recalls. "Before that, at age 3, 4 or 5, I helped my mother wrap basil in newspapers."

Messina says he owes his success to his parents' influence and early introduction to the produce industry. In November 1970, he acquired an 800-square-foot building where a hamburger stand once stood and through the years transformed it into a 30,000-square-foot marketplace known today as Sal's Fruit Tree. "We're thriving and I owe all of it to my parents and my uncles."

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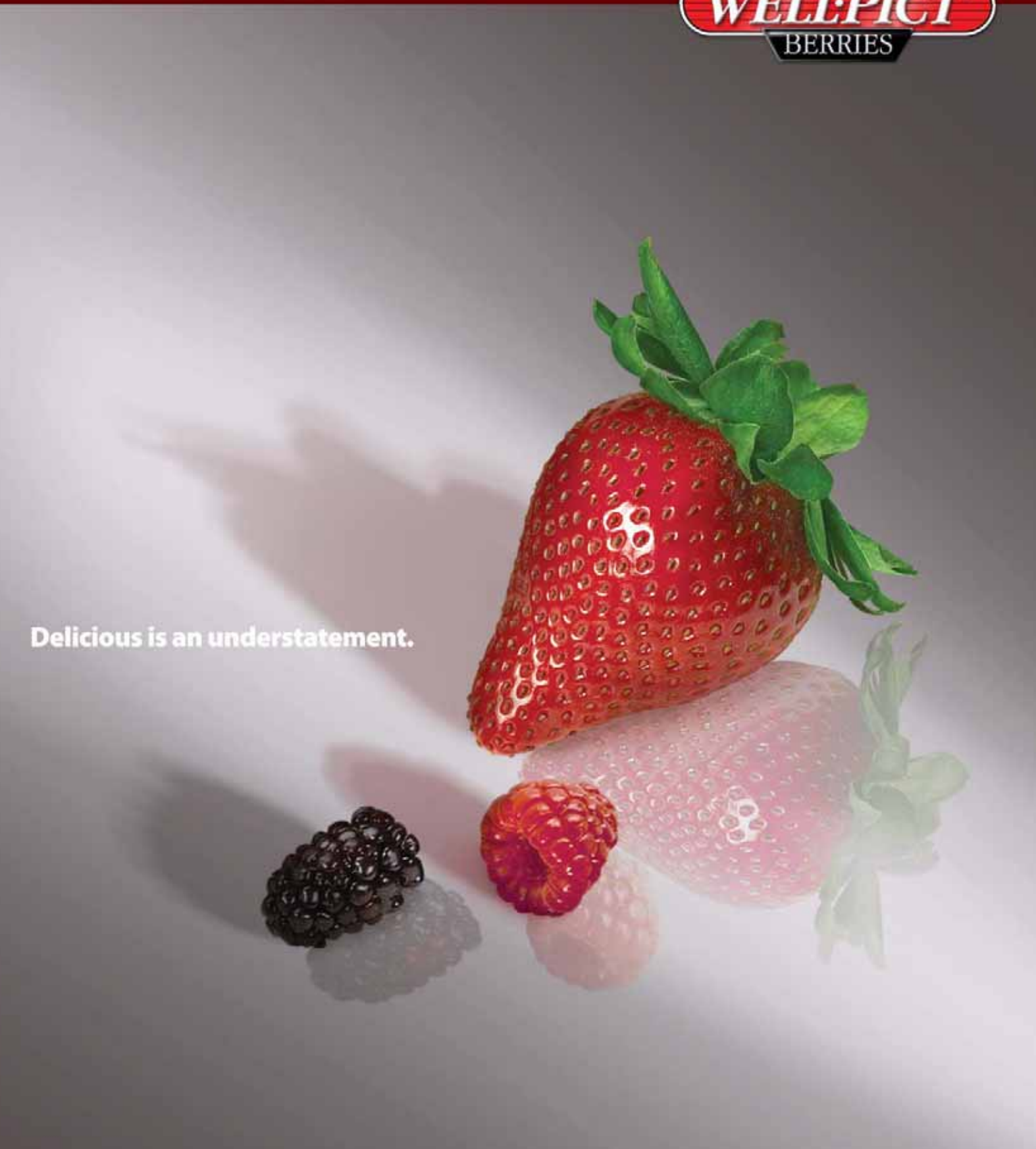

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