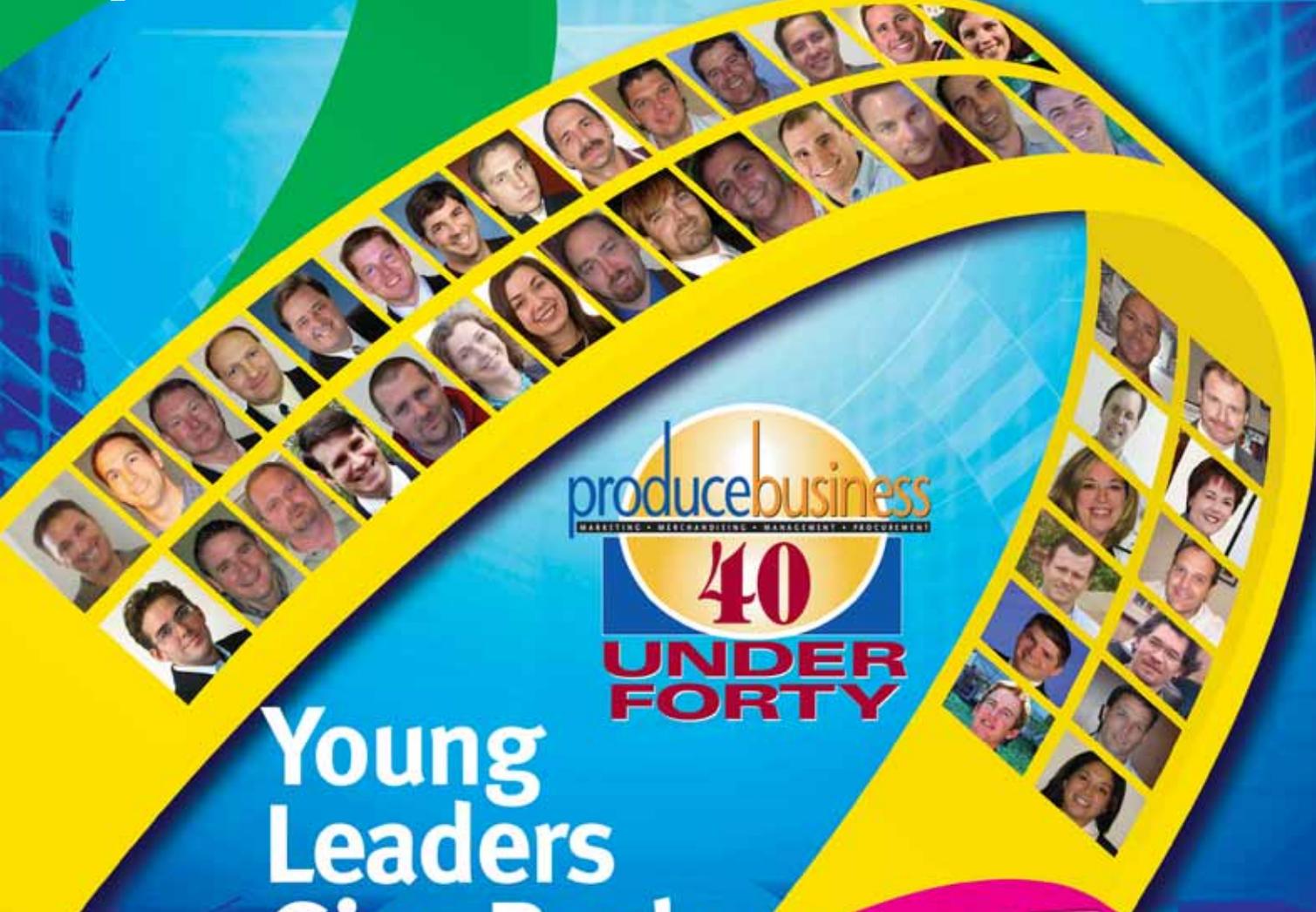


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California Avocados • Southern Vegetables • *Retail Produce Profile: New Seasons* • GRAPES • DRIED PLUMS • DISH GARDENS

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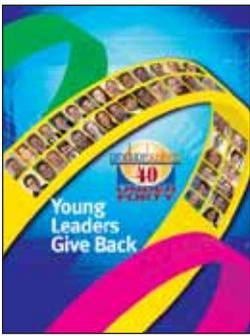
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Buyer
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A 5-year veteran of the buying side, Tom Dills, Feesers Foodservice Distributor, Inc., Harrisburg, PA, works primarily with perishables, particularly fresh vegetables.

Feesers is a full-line foodservice distributor delivering to five states in the mid-Atlantic region. "My responsibilities include purchasing, inventory and maintaining that inventory," notes Tom, who has worked in the foodservice industry since 1980. "Every day is different. There's always something to look forward to."

In terms of major foodservice trends, Tom sees a heightened interest in food safety and product origin. "Today, there's a lot more educational involvement than just selling the product."

A PRODUCE BUSINESS reader for five years, he enjoys articles affecting the foodservice industry. "I like reading about demographics, marketing, various markets and where things are headed."

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- 4) What is the phone number for Naturipe Farms? _____
- 5) What is the Web address for Jersey Fresh? _____
- 6) What is the street address for Jasmine Vineyards? _____

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WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE

A report on the inside happenings of government.

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



Farm Bill Priorities Realized

By the time you read this, Congress will have more than likely overridden a veto by President Bush and the law that will manage the U.S. farm policy for the next five years will go into place.

During this debate over the bill, the produce industry didn't ask for subsidies; we asked for investment in research, technical assistance and grants to improve industry competitiveness, and for major new programs to bring fresh fruits and vegetables to schoolchildren across the country. Most importantly, the investments in this Farm Bill will help all sectors of the produce industry deliver the highest quality, safest and most affordable fresh produce to consumers in the United States and around the world. Those investments will come back many times over in better health for our children and reduced long-term health care costs for the next generation.

Below is a summary of some of the key funding and policy highlights:

\$1.02 billion: Expands the Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Snack Program to all 50 states and will develop lifelong healthful eating habits for millions of children by providing fresh fruits and vegetables in our nation's schools.

\$466 million: Enhances funding for Specialty Crop Block Grants that focus on local efforts to enhance producers' ability to compete in the marketplace and provide consumers with safe, abundant food.

\$377 million: Creates a new Pest and Disease Program focused on combating invasive pests and disease. It will be a joint collaborative effort between the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) and state departments of agriculture.

\$250 million: Provides the Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh Program, which partners with USDA, a unique program to purchase and deliver fresh fruits and vegetable to schools and in schools.

\$230 million: Establishes the Specialty Crop Research Initiative to develop and disseminate science-based tools to address spe-

cific crops and their regions. Its priorities include food safety, mechanization, genetics, plant breeding and pests and diseases.

\$200 million (per year): Maintains funding for the Market Access Program (MAP), which increases the availability and viability of U.S. specialty crops in foreign markets.

\$59 million: Enhances critical trade assis-

This Farm Bill will help all sectors of the produce industry deliver the highest quality, safest and most affordable fresh produce to consumers in the United States and around the world.

tance and market promotion tools to grow international markets for specialty crops. Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC) has been successful identifying and removing specialty-crop trade barriers.

\$20 million: Creates the National Clean Plant Network to provide a sustainable source of healthy planting stock for fruit trees, nut trees and grapevines.

\$20 million: Creates a Pilot Food Stamp Pilot Project to test how incentives at point of purchase encourage participants in the Food Stamp Program to purchase fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods.

In addition to funding priorities, the bill contains several policy initiatives that will be critical to the long-term success and competitiveness of the fresh produce industry:

Maintains integrity of U.S. planting flexibility policy. Continues to maintain the planting flexibility safety net policy for fruit and veg-

etable farmers, ensuring that growers who receive federal payments will not be able to also plant fruits and vegetables on that subsidized acreage.

Adds "processing (packing), storing and transportation" to the approved list of on-farm income related to the adjusted gross income (AGI) conservation programs. Many specialty crop producers "process (including packing), store and transport" crops and were prevented from participating in conservation programs because their AGI exceeded limits.

Prioritizes federal research activities for specialty crops. USDA will collaborate with specialty crop producers and organizations to develop and implement applied research and extension initiatives funded and sponsored by the agency.

Expands purchases of fruits and vegetables under Section 32 program. Increases the minimum threshold (currently \$200 million per year) of Section 32 funds dedicated to fruit, vegetable and nut purchases and expands the secretary's purchase discretion to include value-added fruit, vegetable and nut products. Funding Levels: \$390 FY08; \$393 FY09; \$399 FY10; \$403 FY 11; \$406 FY12.

Improves provision for technical assistance under conservation programs to make sure specifications are complete and relevant. Seeks to ensure adequate technical assistance to specialty crop growers by directing the secretary to develop programs that meet their needs, using cooperative agreements with other federal agencies

Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) Reforms. Amends the COOL law of 2002 by reducing penalties for mistakes in labeling at point of purchase, including a "good faith" standard reducing the liability for retailers, unless shown to be disregarding or willfully violating the law. It includes self-attestation of origin so retailers can rely on what suppliers tell them. Normal records kept in the regular course of doing business are sufficient to comply. A specific provision allows labeling of a U.S. state, region or locality in which a product is produced to meet label standards as U.S. product.



JIM PREVOR'S

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Defining Sustainability

Sustainability has become so frequently spoken of in the produce industry that one might presume executives had a clear vision of what it entails. There are as many industry definitions as there are programs and proposals, and the end result of this cacophony on the subject is very unclear.

That may be how it should be. As with so much in the industry, it has been big buyers' sustainability programs that introduced the concept to many growers and other vendors. The first inclination of producers has been to simply pray for standardization in the hope of avoiding the expense and hassle of duplicate audits and differentiating standards as we have experienced in the food-safety world.

Yet in many ways, sustainability is particularly unsuited to a prescriptive standard, and much of the industry headache is coming about out of misguided efforts to create a one-size-fits-all type of approach to sustainability.

It is helpful, even imperative, to start the discussion of sustainability by defining what it is not. And it is not environmentalism. Though in a sense obvious — why create a new term when a concept has been around for decades? — a notion that sustainability and being “green” are the same thing is a common misconception.

Sustainability differs from environmentalism in that in addition to acknowledging an environmental responsibility, sustainability also recognizes a social and economic responsibility.

Many in the industry want to run from the idea that businesses have a social responsibility. Sustainability's social sphere is highly divisive. Beyond the notion that laws must be obeyed, there is no consensus on how much workers should be paid or what level of charity or community support is reasonable or any other metric one might throw against the social responsibility of business.

Yet dealt with alone, environmentalism is a concept with no limits. One can always reduce one's footprint on the environment by using fewer chemicals, less water, less carbon output. But held as a value on its own, environmentalism doesn't stop at any particular point. Why not let half the land revert to nature? Why not all of it?

Extremism of that type is unsustainable. If someone proposes leaving land fallow, how would that environmental demand comport with our social responsibility to produce adequate food and our financial or economic responsibility to sustain the business?

Sustainability broadly considered — with the inherent tension among the environmental, social and economic spheres — ensures a kind of moderation. Extremism, which pushes things too far in any one direction, winds up being unsustainable by the other measures.

Because there is no objective agreement on how to balance the three spheres of sustainability, efforts that seek a prescriptive standard for sustainability in the produce industry inevitably wind up

making subjective value judgments.

Imagine three farms:

Farm # 1

- Reduced synthetic chemical use by 80 percent last year.
- Increased use of substances permitted in organic agriculture (copper, sulfur, et al) by 135 percent
- Yield dropped 14 percent
- Stopped matching the 401K plan

Farm #2

- Switched to approved GMO seed for 65 percent of production
- Overall yield up 30 percent
- Synthetic chemical use down 26 percent
- Majority of the board of directors is female

- Donated 12 percent of crop to earthquake and storm relief overseas

Farm #3

- Donated library to local community college
- Funded scholarship program for migrant worker children
- Invested in farm in South Africa working to empower indigenous population
- Employees own 30 percent of the company through ESOP

Now which farm is more sustainable? Not only is there no way to tell, but it is also not clear the question has real meaning. Yet a prescriptive sustainability standard must choose.

When one speaks to the British vendor community, which has been working on sustainability longer than the U.S. trade, it becomes clear they have no useable definition either. Instead, they worry about what individual stakeholders want. If they sell Tesco, the program is Nature's Choice; if they work with Marks & Spencer, it is Field to Fork. Of course, these organizations have to please a broader audience — government, media, citizenry, etc. — so through the retailers a broad stakeholder engagement does take place.

Efforts to develop one industry standard for sustainability are, at best, going to create a chimera, something that might pass for sustainability but, actually, is just a representation of a particular bias.

Every piece of land is different, each crop is different, moral standards differ. So if Wal-Mart wants to focus on packaging reduction and J. Sainsbury wants to focus on increasing its percentage of business done under the Fair Trade program to help workers, there is no standardization because there is no clear right or wrong.

What we can do is try to excite the industry about becoming more sustainable. We can help people look at where they are and help define where they want to go.

Well-considered sustainability is driven by the enthusiasm of people doing things that are compelling, and in so doing, helping move their companies and the industry to a more sustainable future. **pb**

Sustainability is particularly unsuited to a descriptive standard.

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Something About Mary

During her career as a household cook in the early 19th century, Mary Mallon infected 47 known people with typhoid, three of whom died. Typhoid Mary denied having the disease and refused to stop working until she was forcibly quarantined. While our understanding of foodborne illness has come a long way, the dire impact of food-safety lapses remains. Mary's story underscores the intimate connection between those who prepare and serve food and the food itself.

This piece of history explains why I feel it is essential for the produce industry to educate consumers (and food handlers) on the do's and don'ts of handling fruits and vegetables. Last year I took on the role of chairman of the Partnership for Food Safety Education, whose vision is to change consumer behavior to prevent foodborne illness (www.befood-safe.org and www.fightbac.org). If we as an industry do little to proactively teach, then consumer ignorance of what causes foodborne illness has little value as our defense.

Fresh produce is a powerful solution for foodservice operators: Produce fills the plate inexpensively, adds color and texture, and satisfies consumers' demands for fresh, nutritious food. Collaboration can be a win-win relationship for supplier, operator and diner alike, especially when the supplier and operator partner to improve meal quality and safety. Both know firsthand that the consequences of a food-safety violation spread like fever — and can kill a business just as fast.

Because of Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) ongoing work to elevate the food-safety dialog and generate solutions, we've been tracking consumer attitudes about produce safety for over two years. In March, Opinion Dynamics Corporation asked 1,000 consumers a range of produce safety-related questions on PMA's behalf. Their findings will interest supermarket and restaurant foodservice operators — and their produce suppliers.

We learned a majority of Americans buying prepared foods place the burden for produce safety on dining establishments, much more than suppliers or growers. Fifty-one percent of

consumers assign that responsibility to operators, 21 percent to produce suppliers and 16 percent to farmers. Surveyed consumers also perceive foodservice segments differently; they are most confident in produce safety at fine-dining establishments, followed by supermarkets, then casual dining; quick-service restaurants (QSR) ranked last. As we'd expect, those same consumers report they patronize QSRs most often; as many as 13 percent eat at them five to 10 times a month.

That juxtaposition is important. Our customers are dining at QSRs out of necessity for convenience and value, while at the same time feeling the lowest level of confidence in the safety of our fresh products. That's a precarious balance between their needs and their fears. And that's not a recipe for our long-term foodservice success.

Our latest survey indicates the 2006 leafy greens crisis is still hanging over us. While 80 percent of people surveyed say they don't avoid ordering specific produce because of safety concerns, 17 percent say they do. Twenty-four percent of those say they won't order spinach, and 22 percent avoid lettuces. PMA's survey hit shortly after reports of contaminated restaurant lemons broke in the media; no surprise that 6 percent won't order lemons.

While consumers may place the onus on foodservice operators, food safety is a responsibility shared by operators, suppliers and growers. This is one reason why PMA hosts the only conference dedicated to produce in foodservice, the PMA Foodservice Conference & Exposition, providing the produce foodservice supply chain with the knowledge and business relationships needed to position produce as the smart, safe solution to operators' needs.

Food safety is a key focus of this year's conference, which will be held July 25-27 in Monterey, CA. Attendees will find out the status of food-safety legislation and regulations and hear updates on industry initiatives, including the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement and the Produce Traceability Initiative. Speakers will include PMA's new chief science officer, Dr. Bob Whitaker. We look forward to seeing you at the conference in Monterey.

While consumers may place the onus on foodservice operators, the reality is that food safety is a shared responsibility among operators, suppliers and growers.

Supermarkets shouldn't take comfort from the public's concern about dining establishments; surveyed consumers gave us an earful about food safety at supermarket foodservice operations. On one hand, only fine-dining restaurants rated higher than supermarkets on consumers' food-safety confidence scale. On the other, significantly more consumers report having seen a food-safety violation in a supermarket than any restaurant type; 20 percent claim to have seen a supermarket violation versus 16 percent for QSRs and 7 percent for casual dining. (I'm not surprised — supermarket food preparation areas are typically built with far more transparency to the shopper than most dining establishments.)

The types of violations consumers perceive and report most often include spoiled or rotten food, employees not wearing gloves and poor hygiene in food handling. This suggests the confidence they hold in supermarkets also is fragile. It behooves us to double-check where we can further tighten our food-safety practices in our supermarket foodservice operations. On many days, we are today's household cooks — and there is no room for more Typhoid Marys.

The Rest Of The Story

Although it is easy for us all to agree that everyone should do the right thing, the longer version of Typhoid Mary's story points to why it is hard to adopt procedures that will actually make that happen.

What most people don't know about Typhoid Mary is that she was ultimately released from quarantine with one simple condition: She agreed never to work as a cook again.

Not working as a cook, however, put Mary Mallon in the category of an unskilled worker. She was a laundress for a while and had other domestic employment but, ultimately, she went back to being a cook — which was a better paying job.

It is hard to know if Mary Mallon ever really understood or emotionally accepted the risk she posed to others. Mary was what is known as a "healthy carrier" and was seemingly unaware she had ever had typhoid fever — not unusual as a mild case could seem like the flu.

Almost five years after Mary Mallon was released from quarantine, she used an alias and got a job cooking at, of all places, the Sloane Maternity Hospital in Manhattan. Soon there was a typhoid fever outbreak. Twenty-five people became ill and two died.

Although Typhoid Mary was famous, she was not alone. Every year, New York City generated around 100 healthy carriers and only a fraction of them were ever caught. Among those whose livelihood was in the food business, others were also known to have violated their pledge not to work in the food industry.

Making rules is easy. What is difficult is having the policies in place to make sure the rules really are implemented. Let us say a supermarket produce department wants to make sure that whenever an employee is on the floor, his apron is clean. Making the rule may help some, but people will forget. So if a supermarket produce department is serious about wanting clean aprons, the policy will be that the company will launder aprons, it will have aprons pre-positioned by the door and

employees will be required to put on new aprons every time they begin a shift or even every time they come on the floor.

Equally, making rules requiring employees to practice food safety is easy; developing the policies and procedures to make it happen is a challenge.

For example, the very first rule of food safety is that if an employee is sick, you don't want him working. Most organizations, from picking crews to restaurant operators, have a rule such as that. Very few, though, have the kind of sick-leave policies that would make such a decision easy for a worker, especially a lower paid worker such as one at a quick-serve restaurant.

Another example is foodservice workers who wear gloves. In some localities, this is required by code; in other cases, it is a restaurant policy. Yet it is not uncommon to see a worker turn around, while still wearing those gloves, and accept payment or ring someone up.

Once again, making a policy about when to wear and when not to wear gloves is fine. But really, if one is serious, it is a matter of staffing and operational design. In this example, the problem is that one person has responsibility for both food handling and accepting cash. It is eliminating that organizational design flaw that will enhance food safety more than any rule about gloves.

Proper hand washing is perhaps the single most important rule to enhance food safety. Even in the case of typhoid fever, the typical route of transmission is through people who were infected with the typhoid bacillus passing the disease from their infected stool onto food that they were preparing with unwashed or inadequately washed hands. Yes, Typhoid Mary probably transmitted typhoid fever because she didn't wash her hands adequately or at all.

Now, in most places, it's the law that employees handling food have to wash their hands. Yet few establishments have taken any practical steps to make sure it happens and is effective. If a bathroom requires someone to touch a door or handle to exit, even a

Making rules requiring employees to practice food safety is easy; developing the policies and procedures to make it happen is a challenge.

conscientious hand washer may re-infect himself just by leaving the bathroom. Same thing if he has to turn a crank or push a button to get paper towels to dry his hands.

For obvious reasons, monitoring employee behavior in restrooms is problematic, so those organizations serious about hand washing will redesign bathrooms to place the sinks outside the restrooms. This way cameras and other devices can monitor hand washing.

It also turns social pressure on employees and customers alike to wash their hands. For those working in kitchens or food-processing facilities, another effective procedure is requiring everyone to wash their hands when they come into the kitchen and have them do it publicly in plain view of everyone.

What unites all these ideas and more is this: If the industry wants to deliver safe food, the habits of our employees are crucial. Moving those habits in the direction of safety is more than a matter of issuing proclamations; it is a matter of engineering work flow, work place design and compensation schemes all designed to move food safety forward.

DULCINEA FARMS, LLC LADERA RANCH, CA

Luzius Caviezel was appointed general manager. He brings vast experience in branded consumer goods and will be responsible for improving efficiencies, enhancing innovation, introducing innovative products and developing packaging. He brings 20 years of experience in building successful start-up companies and managing global processes in production, research, sales and marketing.



CREEKSIDE MUSHROOMS, LTD. WORTHINGTON, PA

Dan Lucovich has been named president. His responsibilities include supporting the company's new market-driven strategies to grow and expand the business. Since the inception of Creekside in 1994, he served as vice president of marketing. With more than 30 years of experience in the mushroom industry, he is also president of the Mushrooms Alliance.



SUN WORLD INTERNATIONAL, LLC BAKERSFIELD, CA

David Hostetter was named chief administration officer. He will oversee finance, accounting, human resources, corporate compliance and legal affairs/enforcement, information technology and enterprise transformation and continuous improvement. He will also be responsible for the planning and management of external service and administrative support operations.



DOLE FOOD COMPANY MONTEREY, CA

Chris Mayhew joined the company as senior new products strategist. She will be responsible for leading the new product development plan, identifying new product platforms and co-managing innovation processes to drive long-term sales and profit growth. She will specifically focus on new product opportunities outside the existing core value-added salad business within all classes of trade.



Kevin Andrew was appointed chief operations officer. In his new role, he will oversee farming operations, supply chain/logistics, management of water assets, and research and development. Since 1996, he has served as Sun World's senior vice president of operations. He joined the company in 1984 and has had diverse operations management duties.



Silvana Kocovski joined the company as a sales strategy manager, overseeing sales strategy for Canada. Her duties will include working in partnership with consumer marketing, account marketing and the sales and broker teams to provide analysis, selling strategies and tools to ensure the division exceeds annual revenue, volume and share targets.



David Marguleas was named chief marketing officer. In his new role, he will oversee global sales and marketing, business development, sourcing and licensing. Since 2001, he served as Sun World's senior vice president of licensing and corporate development. He joined the company in 1986 and has served in various marketing, sales, merchandising and licensing management roles.



Charlotte Kavanagh joined the company as a sales strategy manager, driving sales strategy as a key member of the Supervalu team. Her duties will include working in partnership with consumer marketing, account marketing and the sales and broker teams to provide analysis, selling strategies and tools to ensure the division exceeds annual revenue, volume and share targets.



T. MARZETTI COMPANY COLUMBUS, OH

Irena Castle has joined the company as senior brand manager. She will be responsible for product and brand management as well as creation and execution of marketing strategies for veggie dip, apple dip and fruit dip lines. She previously worked as project manager and director of marketing at L'Oréal in Prague, Czech Republic.



UNITED STATES POTATO BOARD DENVER, CO

Shane Webster was elected to the United States Potato Board (USPB)'s executive committee. He is serving his third year on the board and first year as co-chairman of USPB's Domestic Marketing Committee. His responsibilities include executing USPB's nutrition program aimed at connecting fresh potatoes with today's active consumers.



NEW PRODUCTS

RENEWABLY SOURCED POLYMERS

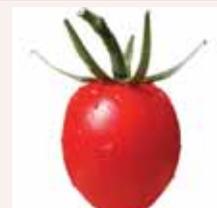
DuPont, Düsseldorf, Germany, launched DuPont Biomax TPS (thermoplastic starch) and DuPont Biomax PTT (polytrimethylterephthalate) injection moldable resin. Renewably sourced materials reduce dependency on petroleum and, in many instances, reduce the net production of greenhouse gases and energy consumption when compared to incumbent products.



Reader Service No. 300

NEW TOMATO VARIETY

Lakeside Produce, Leamington, ON, Canada, announced the availability of the Stramato, the original strawberry-tomato. Shaped like a strawberry, the Stramato has a naturally sweet taste and a rich, deep red color. Ideal for salads, sauces or as a healthful snack, the Stramato is popular among children and chefs.



Reader Service No. 301

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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FRONTERA ADDS

FOOD SAFETY AND SECURITY DIVISION
Frontera Produce, Ltd., Edinburg, TX, has created a dedicated division focused on food safety and security. The initiative reinforces Frontera's commitment to quality assurance. The new division will focus on compliance with regulatory programs, government protocol, Safe Quality Food (SQF) certification and good manufacturing practices.



Reader Service No. 302

DISNEY GARDENS EXPANDS IN MEXICO

Imagination Farms, LLC, Indianapolis, IN, is continuing its mission to increase children's consumption of fresh produce by taking its message and Disney-branded fresh produce program to consumers in Mexico. The program will feature similar products and packaging to those in the United States along with Disney's global brand standard and Spanish-language packaging.



Reader Service No. 303

BRAMBLES ACQUIRES LEANLOGISTICS

Brambles, a Sydney, Australia-based global provider of support services and owner of CHEP and Recall, acquired LeanLogistics, a Holland, MI-based provider of technology-based transport and supply-chain solutions. The acquisition will enable CHEP to provide a new, value-enhancing service to both existing and new customers.



Reader Service No. 304

IMPORTED FROM ISRAEL

Agrexco USA, Ltd., Jamaica, NY, announced the arrival of two new commodities, dates and pomegranate arils. It grows dates along the Dead Sea Plains in Israel's Jordan Valley, an area known for its extremely arid climate and abundance of underground water. Pomegranates are grown throughout the country. The company will offer the commodities year-round.



Reader Service No. 305

NATIONAL WATERMELON MONTH APPROVED

The National Watermelon Association, Inc. (NWA), Plant City, FL, announced that the U.S. House of Representatives has officially designated July as National Watermelon Month. The resolution allows NWA to pursue and promote National Watermelon Month and utilize the designation to promote watermelon in numerous methods, including POS materials, advertisements and in-store signage.



Reader Service No. 306

PURA VIDA STARTS WITH MELONS

Pura Vida Farms, Scottsdale, AZ, has emerged as a new grower and distributor of a full-range of quality fruits and vegetables. From May through December, it will ship melons grown in Arizona, California, Florida and Mexico. Initially, the product mix will include cantaloupe, honeydew, watermelon, Athena melons and varieties.



Reader Service No. 307

FPAА PRODUCES CONSUMER BROCHURE

The Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), Nogales, AZ, has announced its Sonora, Mexico, grape distributor members have just produced their first-ever consumer rack brochure as part of the *Sonora Spring Grapes* retail merchandising campaign, which peaks in June. Retailers may print their own (with chain logo) to use in-store or contact the FPAA for a supply, which is first-come, first-served.



Reader Service No. 308

SEEDLESS ITALIAN ORANGES AVAILABLE

A.J. Trucco, Inc., Bronx, NY, is now offering Tarocco seedless Italian oranges. The Tarocco orange has the highest vitamin C content of any orange variety grown due primarily to the fertile volcanic soil surrounding Mount Etna. Its unique flavor and juiciness give consumers instant gratification and provide notable health benefits.



Reader Service No. 309

NOBLE CITRUS OFFERS NEW PACKAGING

Noble Citrus, Winter Haven, FL, announces the kickoff of its Go Healthy Snack Pack Clementine in a new, convenient ready-to-go 3-pack. It is an anytime, anywhere snack that encourages healthful consumption of fruit loaded with vitamin C and natural antioxidants. The clamshell and label are made from compostable corn plastic.



Reader Service No. 310

ASPARAGUS CATEGORY MANAGEMENT PLAN CREATED

The Peruvian Asparagus Importer's Association (PAIA), Drexel Hill, PA, is distributing its 2008/2009 *Category Management Plan Outline* for fresh Peruvian asparagus. The plan focuses on sharing information regarding the health benefits of fresh Peruvian asparagus with retailers, consumers and the industry at large as well as data pertaining to the trade.



Reader Service No. 311

CALIFORNIA GIANT AND TENNIS CHANNEL TEAM UP

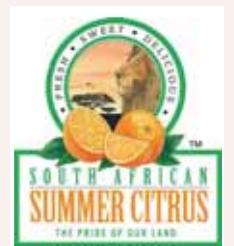
California Giant Berry Farms, Watsonville, CA, has teamed up with the Tennis Channel in a national co-branding effort to coincide with the TV network's first-time coverage of Wimbledon. The partnership, named *The Sweetest Match*, includes a national retail campaign and runs from May 9 to the conclusion of the competition, which runs June 23 to July 6.



Reader Service No. 312

SOUTH AFRICA EXPORT PROJECTIONS RELEASED

Citrus Growers Association of South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, announces South African citrus exports are projected to total 89.6 million cartons or 1.35 million tons for the 2008 season, marginally down from 90.9 million during the 2007 season. At this level, South Africa is expected to retain its No. 2 ranking in world citrus exports.



Reader Service No. 313

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Reader Service # 15





Tree Fruit Boasts Sustainability Certification

California marketer finds new way to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers.

By Amy Shannon

As more consumers make lifestyle changes to address social and environmental issues, manufacturers are expanding their offerings for sustainable produce. FreshSense, the Parlier, CA-based marketer of Ripe 'N Ready peaches, plums and nectarines, introduced Zeal, a new tree-fruit label for items that are certified as sustainable through independent audit. In order for fruit to be packed under the Zeal label, it must meet strict standards developed and maintained by Protected Harvest, a Soquel, CA-based non-profit entity overseeing Zeal's audit systems.

Blair Richardson, president and CEO of FreshSense (pictured below, bottom right), says Zeal appeals to retailers catering to consumers who are both concerned about the environment and looking for great-tasting fruit. "Zeal sustainable, certified tree fruit is different from organic because it must meet a strict set of standards involving a number of farm inputs, not just those concerning pesticide use. The standards were developed working with Protected Harvest and a technical committee of scientific and environmental experts."

Zeal tree fruit adheres to commodity-specific standards that address a lengthy list of farming practices, according to Jeff Dlott, president of Protected Harvest. "The focus of the Protected Harvest approach is to develop and approve production practices that actually make a difference when it comes to protecting the environment, employees, farm neighbors and communities by reducing the impact of farming on soil, water and air." A complete list of

Zeal-approved farming practices for sustainable stone fruit production is available on Protected Harvest's Web site.

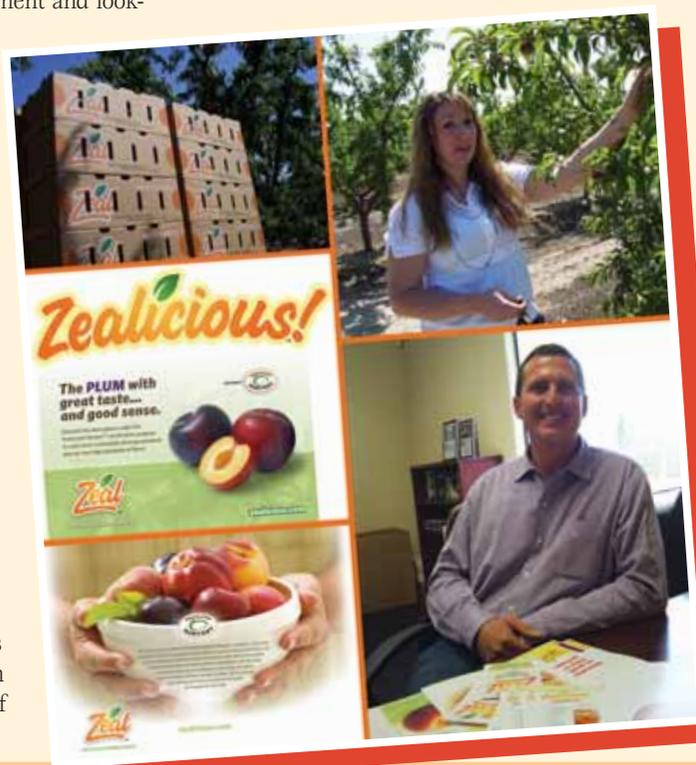
The label's tree fruit is packaged in uncoated, corrugated material produced with wood products certified by the Sustainable Forest Initiative, Inc. (SFI), Arlington, VA. "There's a lot of pride put into the product," explains Shalyne Van Worth, FreshSense quality coordinator (pictured below, top right). "We use less ink than more traditional packaging practices."

The label uses a POS program designed to showcase Zeal's commitment to sustainable farming practices and extraordinary flavor in

an informational and inspirational format. At the retail level, materials incorporate a message to enviro-savvy consumers about the social and environmental benefits of Protected Harvest-certified practices. The message is included on small POS cards on each Zeal carton to spark consumer interest. The program also includes 11x7-inch cards and small take-away brochures explaining the Zeal promise along with a recipe with creative options for preparing Zeal fruit.

FreshSense plans to launch a Zeal marketing campaign that will be supported by a Web site that will offer information for both consumers and retailers.

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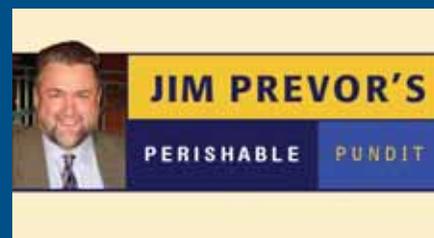
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Will Wal-Mart's Energy-Efficient/Hispanic Store Make A Real Contribution?



From Jim Prevor's *Perishable Pundit*, May 14, 2008

In early May, Wal-Mart opened a new HE.2 (High Efficiency — 2nd version) Supercenter in Garland, TX. The company's decision to introduce energy-efficient stores and its first "Hispanic Community" store opens the door to many possibilities.

The energy efficiency is part of Wal-Mart's sustainability campaign, heavily focused on initiatives that can potentially pay off in lower costs.

The Hispanic community store is a good idea but may not go far enough to make a real contribution to Wal-Mart's growth.

For at least 10 years, executives at Wal-Mart have told us it would be an easy win for Wal-Mart, which has a dominant position in Mexico, with its Wal-Mex subsidiary. The lower incomes of recent Hispanic immigrants play to its demographic, and going back years, Hispanic Americans have been telling surveyors Wal-Mart is their favorite store.

But merely tweaking a Supercenter by adding a few Hispanic brands, buying a tortilla machine and opening up a money-wiring and check-cashing store is more in the vein of micro marketing than a new concept store.

Presumably, Wal-Mart has been exploring all these options for almost 20 years under its "store of the community" initiative — and if it didn't put tortillarias in every store in Hispanic neighborhoods, it is probably because the machines didn't pay for themselves and caused troubles in other ways.

For example, how many tortillas per hour will the in-store machine produce? Is that anywhere near what Wal-Mart can sell at peak hours? Will Wal-Mart staff that tortilla machine 24 hours a day? Or will customers drawn by the prospect of warm, just-cooked tortillas be disappointed most of the time? What is the backup when the machine breaks?

We find Wal-Mart usually does better focusing on things done in high volume and these seemingly appealing things turn out not to work on Wal-Mart's scale. This isn't to say they shouldn't be done, but not within the operating constraints of a Wal-Mart Supercenter.

If Wal-Mart wants a breakout concept for truly appealing to the Hispanic shoppers, it needs to start with a blank sheet of paper.

Wal-Mart is taking this blank-sheet-of-paper approach right now as it prepares to launch its new small footprint store. Very little information has been given out so far, but we are guardedly optimistic about its new concept.

Why? It is a 20,000-square-foot concept — not 10,000 — and this strikes us as the size needed to offer sufficient assortment to appease American consumers. It also may allow for more service in the fresh departments — which is probably crucial if the stores are going to be perceived as fresh.

One of Tesco's biggest problems has been a failure to deliver on its "fresh" promise. To Americans, sandwiches wrapped in plastic and cardboard are what one gets from a vending machine. Why buy that if every Subway offers a fresher alternative?

We are also encouraged by what we are not hearing about Wal-Mart's

small format stores. By now, we would have heard the moans and groans of vendors if they were all being asked to do a lot of private labeling for the small format stores. That we haven't leads us to surmise the concept will be mostly branded — and that, if combined with aggressive pricing, is a dagger pointed at Tesco's heart.

Tesco may spend the next 30 years building brand equity while Wal-Mart sells the best recognized and admired brands far more cheaply than others and rides that branded equity into households across America.

Mostly, our guarded optimism is because when Wal-Mart brought David Wild to the United States as senior vice president of new business development, it allowed the team designing this new small-store concept to locate in the Bay Area in California. Not only is this far from Bentonville but it is also far from any Wal-Mart stores at all. (Wild is a former Tesco executive who had been working for Wal-Mart in Germany.)

This isolation from Wal-Mart's headquarters and stores might give the small-format team the freedom to explore niche marketing without the encumbrances of Wal-Mart's real estate concerns or corporate dictates.

The Hispanic community Supercenter may help Wal-Mart a little, but it was fundamentally designed by a team mostly concerned with not alienating any Supercenter customers. Yet the very first strategic planning question is often not "Who is your customer?" but, rather "Who is not your customer?"

It is easy for a company such as Wal-Mart to declare the addition of assortment or services to attract Hispanics. However, it is culturally almost impossible to get Wal-Mart to say it is willing to alienate another group — say Anglos — to win those Hispanics to that store.

The key to the success of the new Wal-Mart small-footprint concept will be if management knows who is not a customer for the new banner. We will see soon enough if Bentonville has allowed the California team the autonomy to think this way.

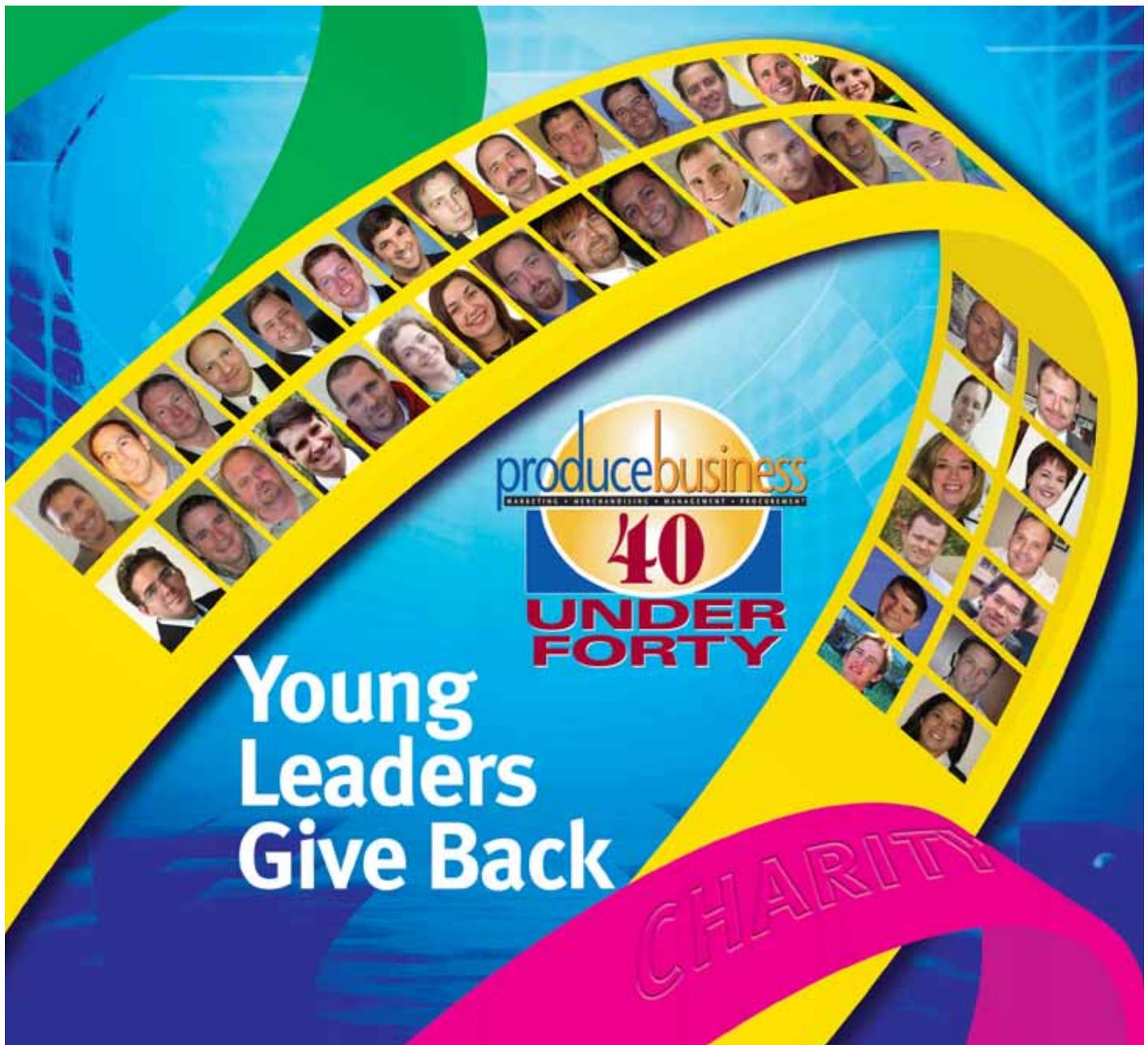
The new Supercenter in Garland symbolizes an end of an era. It replaces the first Hypermarket USA, which Wal-Mart opened with the Cullum Cos., operators of Tom Thumb supermarkets. It was a new era in retailing.

Wal-Mart opened one Hypermarket, then a second, then the first Supercenter. It opened slowly so it could change its concept as it received input, and it made many changes, including changing the box size and getting rid of roller-skate-wearing clerks.

Wal-Mart worked with a partner so it didn't have to invest in distribution centers and related costs before it had the volume to support it. It took almost two years for the Hypermarket USA to evolve into the Wal-Mart Supercenter.

What confidence Sam Walton had! He didn't worry Kroger or Safeway would copy him. He felt he could out-execute them no matter what they did. Will David Wild, who watched Wal-Mart fail in Germany, have Sam Walton's confidence in the new concept?

www.perishablepundit.com



Winners of our fourth annual *40 Under Forty* Awards Program should be truly honored because they were chosen by industry mentors. PRODUCE BUSINESS conducted an extensive, widespread search throughout the industry to elicit nominations for top young industry leaders under the age of 40. The search involved communication with thousands of executives, consultants, associations and universities.

This year's winners are exemplified by an outstanding array of community involvement. The winners have demonstrated an extremely high degree of giving back to the people and places that have helped them reach their current positions.

We had far more nominations than we could use. Individual candidates were contacted to highlight their key company, industry and community accomplishments, sharing meaningful examples of how they have been leaders in the industry, as well as their goals and aspirations.

If you were not chosen this year or if you nominated someone who was not selected, please understand that the process was highly competitive, and we encourage you to re-submit updated nominations for next year's competition. We encouraged everyone to alert PRODUCE BUSINESS of well-deserving candidates and to help praise and support future produce movers and shakers as we look forward to honoring *40-Under-Forty* leaders in 2009.

PROFILES BY JODEAN ROBBINS



GREG ANDERSEN, 38
Senior Sales Representative
Driscoll's Strawberry
Associates, Inc.
Watsonville, CA

From 2004 to 2005, Andersen led a customer satisfaction project team that enabled the company to take its satisfaction rating from 76 to 94 percent within a 2-year span. He successfully managed cross-functional departments to achieve a common goal.

Andersen is a graduate of the 2007 United Fresh Leadership Program, which he credits for helping him network with many other key leaders throughout our industry.

In 2003, he completed Leadership Salinas Valley, where he worked on a project called Tennis for Kids Day. It raised over \$5,000 to help at-risk kids on the Monterey peninsula learn tennis from local teaching professionals and purchased equipment for them. He is also on the board of directors for Ag Against Hunger, which distributes over 10 million pounds of fresh produce annually to help feed the hungry throughout California.

"We as an industry face many challenges such as transportation, land costs, consolidation and labor issues," he says. "Each of these is a great opportunity for us to overcome. We have faced these issues in our past and overcome them. However, it takes persistence and willpower to achieve solutions. My hope is to bring together my talents and drive to achieve great things in the produce industry, so consumers all over the world can enjoy the good, healthful products we produce."

He wants to continue his community work on the Ag Against Hunger Board and to develop Driscoll's berry customers. "I believe this program is essential to feed the one out of five people who go hungry in our communities. Additionally, I'm focused on continually developing Driscoll's berry customers. Providing fresh berries all over the country is such an exciting business. Another part of my job is developing people within the retail sales department. I view this as a critical piece of the company's future growth."

He names Michael Hollister, Driscoll's vice president of marketing and sales, as a mentor. "He's always been a great mentor and coach for me. He always displays great business practices and is always available to help you with anything."



JOSEPH A. ANGE III, 30
Director of Purchasing
Markon Cooperative, Inc.
Salinas, CA

Ange, who joined Markon after graduating from Cal Poly in 2001, has learned how to lead by example and become an information source for people from other companies who call for information regarding market trends. Markon's 2002 Employee of the Year, he is known for his persistence, strong work

ethic and integrity.

He was featured in a weekly article in the *Salinas Californian's Ag Outlook* magazine showcasing a different industry professional and giving a background of his or her job and life outside of work. An Eagle Scout Award in 1996 provided values and leadership skills still applicable to real life experiences and of use to him in his daily life.

The history of Salinas Valley agriculture inspires him to preserve the integrity of the industry. "When food-safety issues hit the news, I was concerned about the negative image communicated by some media sources," he says. "I'm amazed by the amount of hard work people have put into making the Salinas Valley what it is today. I've been lucky enough to sit with some of those who have been around for 30-plus years and to listen to how they have seen companies come and go and why. My challenge is to operate within the industry, doing the right thing for the consumer as well as sustaining relationships with suppliers."

Ange aspires to be one of those who lead positive change in the ag industry. "I want to be viewed as someone who knows and understands his company and can influence changes that will benefit it. Our current leaders are cutting new trails in food safety, harvest/production/loading efficiencies and new and exciting products. It will be up to us to maintain and build upon those positive changes."

He credits Tim York of Markon for his foresightedness, Mark Shaw of Markon for his ability to build and maintain relationships with people, and Steve Church of Church Brothers for his ability to take a great idea and manage it from inception to make sure it is successful. "The unique qualities of each of these people inspire me to learn from them to become an effective leader."



TODD BERNITT, 39
General Manager, Central Region
CH Robinson Worldwide, Inc. (CHRW)
Eden Prairie, MN

Bernitt is known for strong leadership abilities, desire to learn and willingness to take on new challenges. During his 15 years with CHRW, his expertise and sales talents in both produce sourcing and transportation have lead his team to success. His dedication to leading by example and his commitment

to doing the right thing have earned him the respect of management, peers and employees.

Bernitt, who works out of CHRW's Woodridge, IL, office, led efforts to develop a comprehensive value-added logistics solution for foodservice end users, created and implemented a National Account Management Center to manage national restaurant chains, became general manager of CHRW Central Region in February 2006 and implemented a restructuring program that reinvigorated CHRW's entire business segment (retail, foodservice, transportation, repack/warehousing facility and wholesale business divisions) in the Midwest. He assisted in the development and rollout of CHRW online ordering process at end user level.

He has received a Certificate of Recognition from the Institute for Supply Chain Management, developed and instituted complete distribution and sourcing produce supply chains for multiple national restaurant chains and assisted in the creation of CHRW branded and private-label repack and distribution programs for several Midwest retailers.

Since 2006, Bernitt has orchestrated CHRW Central Produce's participation in events for the March of Dimes, the Lustgarten Foundation for Pancreatic Cancer Research, Juvenile Diabetes and the Kyler Marshall Golf Outing, which raises funds for Kyler Marshall, a special-needs child. "Each of these foundations has been a source of support, information and comfort for some of our CHRW Central Produce employees," he says.

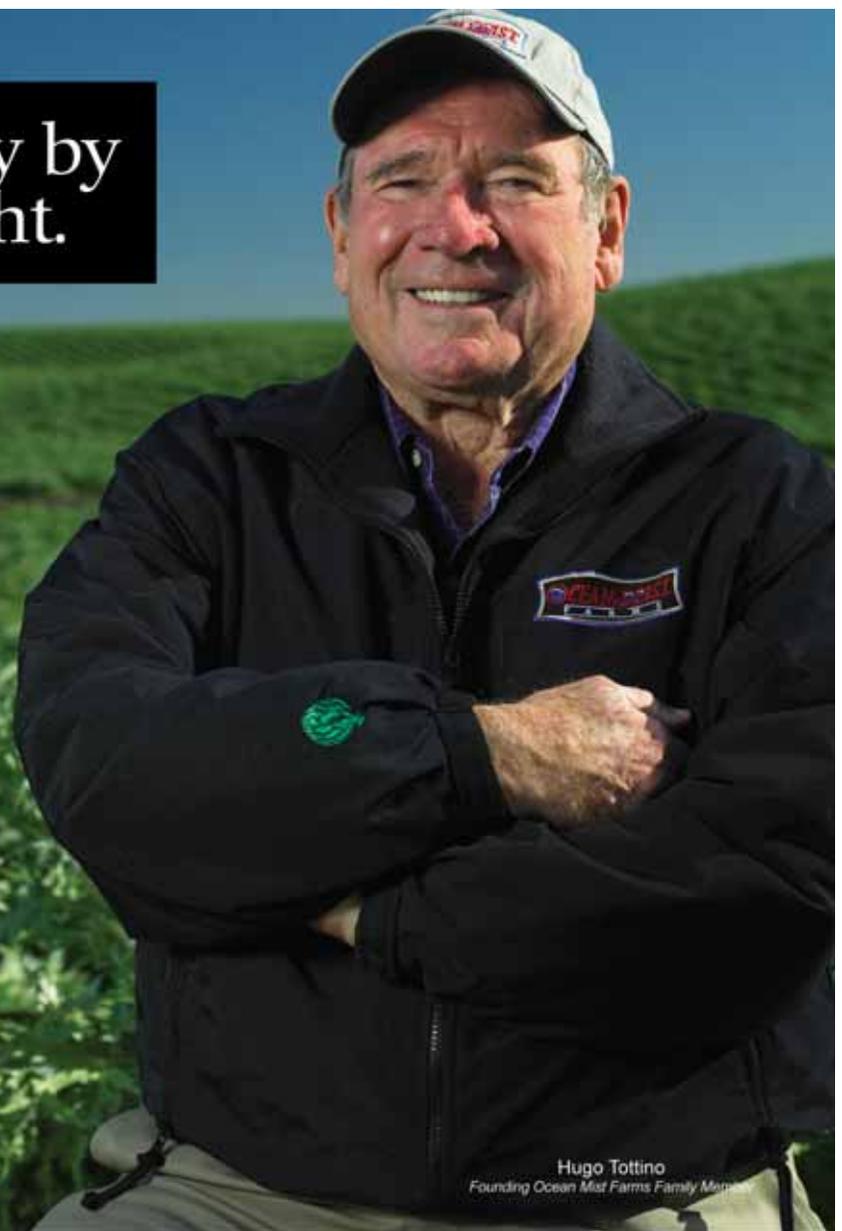
Among his greatest challenges to date have been streamlining and providing visibility to national restaurant chain produce supply networks, and standardizing (on many occasions fully building) food-safety programs for both distributors and national restaurant chains. The "rebirth" of the local or regional grower has proven an inspiration. "The challenge is getting those local or regional products grown and shipped safely with full traceability and finding the most efficient means possible to deliver those products to the consumer."

He wants to continue to develop customized distribution networks for national restaurant chains. "I want to develop unique, customized repacks and packaged goods for the retail consumer. I'm very interested in the development and implementation of local or regionally grown produce supply chains, utilizing certified, third-party food-safety standards, technology and flexibility for the grower and ultimately the consumer."

Nelson Griffin of Diversity, CBRL Group, Inc. taught Bernitt about the value of building a relationship on a personal level. "He has given me valuable insight from the customer's perspective as well as shown me the benefits of a true partnership when building out a supply chain from the customer perspective."

Jim Lemke, CHRW executive vice president, is another mentor. "Jim gave me an opportunity in this industry and has supported me in my per-

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doing things right.



Hugo Tottino
Founding Ocean Mist Farms Family Member

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sonal and professional development throughout my career. Jim has led our company's produce division down the path of infusing technology into the everyday needs of the produce supply chain. He truly has vision for the future needs of the consumer and the industry and the development of the means to meet those growing needs."

United Leadership program, I saw a man who did everything with passion and got everyone around him involved and excited, too."



RYAN T. BYBEE, 33
Sales Manager
GPOD of Idaho
Shelley, ID

Bybee started at GPOD of Idaho (General Potato and Onion Distributors) by proving himself in sales; he was promoted to assistant sales manager in 2003 and then to sales manager in 2005. He helped lead the sales department through a large expansion in which production and sales grew 30 percent.

His first major industry contribution was in 2001 when he began a 3-year stint on the Idaho Grower Shippers Association (IGSA) Transportation Committee. In 2003, he also served on the IGSA Convention Committee and was accepted into the United Fresh Leadership Program sponsored by Dupont. In 2005, he served on the United Fresh Convention Committee and he currently serves on the Idaho Potato Commission's Marketing Committee.

While serving on the IGSA Transportation Committee, he helped work with the Union Pacific and CSXT railroads to implement the popular Fresh Lane for perishables. This helped transit times for perishable commodities from the western United States to the East Coast.

He is very active in his church and spent three years as a leader for youth aged 14 to 18. He received his Eagle Scout Award from the Boy Scouts of America when he was 18 and a Rotary Club Scholarship his senior year of high school for his work with the Natural Helpers Society.

The people in the produce industry have been an inspiration. "The great leaders I have been around are always so enthusiastic and proud to do what they do and they just keep giving back," he says. "I noticed this the first time I met Tom Stenzel of United Fresh. He was so personable and passionate about the industry. Tom gave me great advice — 'Always give back and the industry will always give to you.'"

His biggest challenge right now is to continue to offer flexibility and options for customers in an increasingly competitive environment. "Since we do not actually grow our own produce, our challenge is to keep the customers and growers happy at the same time. Customers are demanding more options and better quality, and our grower base is slowly being swallowed up by larger corporate entities. If I can keep our customers happy and profitable, I can, in return, keep our growers happy and profitable."

He aspires to become a leader of change. "The industry is changing faster than ever. We have issues such as the environment, sustainability, food safety, profitability and so many others. I think change is good and I can adapt quickly to change, which is why I feel I can be a great leader for the future of the produce industry. With change comes fear and uneasiness. If I can help make the changes go smoother and in the right direction, I will know I accomplished something good."

Bybee names Bob Wilkins, the retired general manager of GPOD, and Kevin Searle, current GPOD general manager, as mentors. "Bob taught me to be patient and look at all sides of a situation. He also showed me how to be professional and learn in a business environment. Kevin taught me not to be afraid of trying something different and to look outside the box. He also showed me how to look ahead and plan for the future so it does not jump up and scare you at the last second."

Chris Puentes, president of Interfresh, and Tom Stenzel, president of United Fresh, are also mentors. "Chris is so genuine and professional. His actions taught me that going out of your way, being generous and treating everyone as if they are important are the true makeup of a leader. Tom is always very professional but at the same time very personable. He taught me whatever you do, be excited and passionate about it. He has never said it to me but his actions show it. As I worked with Tom in the



GARY CALOROSO, 39
Vice President
Sahlman Williams
Tampa, FL

Caloroso oversees Sahlman Williams' new West Coast office in Westlake Village, CA, managing, directing, organizing and providing leadership on client account teams. He creates and executes short-range and long-range communications plans for clients and mentors, and motivates and leads

employees in supporting the account teams. He is known for his kind and generous spirit and being passionate about helping kids.

Caloroso has won numerous professional commendations including the Public Relations Society of America Los Angeles Chapter Merit Award for Community Relations and its Merit Award for Ethnic/Multicultural, and the Latino Marketing Award for Best Community Relations Program.

During his previous work with Porter Novelli in Los Angeles, he, along with other team members, managed the McDonald's Operators' Association of Southern California's McTeacher's Night program and all English- and Spanish-language media relations outreach for their McMariachi y Folklorico Juvenil program, receiving awards for this work.

He currently serves as communications director for Produce for Kids and is a member of the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) and the Southeast Produce Council, serving on the Southern Exposure 2008 committee. He delivered the keynote address at the 2007 Fresh Produce and Floral Council (FPFC) meeting about Marketing Produce to Hispanic Consumers and served as moderator of the Marketing Produce to Multi-Ethnic Consumers meeting at the United Fresh show in Chicago.

He is active with the American Youth Soccer Organization, Camp Ronald McDonald for Good Times, the Hispanic Services Council and the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southern California.

The people in the industry inspire him. "I have had the good fortune to work with a variety of industries, but I have chosen to work in the produce industry because of its great people and values," he says. "I'm inspired every day by their hard work, loyalty and strong commitment to do the right thing."

His goal is to serve as an industry leader for marketing and crisis communications. "A thoughtful and nimble approach to crisis preparedness and communications is needed as we face ongoing issues such as food safety and labor. I would also like to help the industry increase consumption of fruits and vegetables with general market and multi-ethnic consumers. Given our nation's increased desire for healthful and great-tasting food, I believe it's a ripe opportunity for us. I would love to see produce suppliers work more closely with supermarket and foodservice retailers in targeting consumers."

He names Dick Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting as a primary mentor. "He has great wisdom, honesty, integrity and ideas." He admires Phil Adrian of Coastline Produce as an innovator, researcher and marketer, and Dee Munson of the Food Professionals as a communicator and for her creativity and kindness. John Williams and Cheryl Miller, both of Sahlman Williams, are also mentors. "John is a great marketer with creativity and kindness. Cheryl is a great financial mind and has a lot of compassion and a strong desire to do the right thing."

"I have had the good fortune to work with a variety of industries, but I have chosen to work in the produce industry because of its great people and values."

— Gary Caloroso

MARK CAMPION, 31
Vice President Foodservice Sales
Taylor Farms
Salinas, CA



In his 10 years with Taylor Farms, Campion has watched it grow from \$150 million in sales to over \$1 billion and has been a part of the team managing this growth. He has spoken on numerous PMA panels and was an inaugural graduate of the United Executive Development Program.

In his community he serves on the board of directors at Notre Dame High School, an all girls' Catholic school in Salinas, CA. Shortly after joining the board, he was elected secretary and chair of the development committee.

The speed the produce industry is a daily challenge. "Mother Nature gives short notice and you never know when she's going to be cranky," he says. "I believe my inspiration comes from a unique source. I was born and raised in Salinas and am thankful for the opportunities it's provided me. I've seen how the success of Taylor Farms impacts my community. If I perform well and Taylor Farms performs well, jobs are created and people live better lives. It's easy to be inspired if you feel responsible for 1,400 jobs."

His produce goals are simple — to keep customers happy and loyal. "If I take care of keeping loyal and happy customers, the rest will fall into place."

His original mentor is his late grandfather, Ed Campion. "He owned Merit Packing and claims to have invented bagged produce. Merit was the first company to put carrots into cellophane bags, something I'm sure Mr. Taylor and Mr. Goodman would argue. My grandfather encouraged me to work in produce because of the people. He always said produce people were different. He believed real produce people had great passion for their work. Ten years later, I concur with him. Bruce Taylor and Alec Leach have also been great mentors. Their experience and success in value-added produce is unsurpassed in the industry. I feel fortunate to have learned from them."

JOE CIMINO, 37
Director of
Procurement
Pro*Act, LLC
Monterey, CA



Cimino's drive and determination have led to his current role, managing over \$700 million in sales. He has

shown the leadership skills to manage the day-to-day responsibilities of procurement, quality control and transportation.

He began at Pro*Act in December 2000 as a row-crop product manager, and in January 2003, Cimino helped start its retail category along with transitioning into melon product manager. In developing the retail category, he was involved in numerous holiday promotions to encourage the consumption of safe

and healthful fruits and vegetables, such as Super Bowl avocados, Easter asparagus, Memorial Day strawberries and Thanksgiving cranberries. In September 2005, he was promoted to procurement manager, leading his team through a department restructuring that helped increase efficiencies, achieving higher levels of customer service and growing the business 9.9 percent. Since becoming director of procurement in October 2007, he has been heavily involved in supplier relations and contract negotiations. Under his direction, Pro*Act successfully completed a banana program with Dole Fruit, started a tomato source program and hired a tomato product manager to help develop the business.

He has been involved with the Kinship Center in Salinas for several years, sponsoring less-fortunate families by making sure they have clothes, food, computers, school supplies and even toys for the children.

His inspiration comes from three previous generations of passionate

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Alyssa Wolterton
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produce people in his family. "My great-grandfather, Peter Martori, started his New York produce stand in the early 20th century and delivered door-to-door with a pushcart," he explains. "My grandfather, Frank Condello, moved the family to the Arizona desert to become a grower/shipper and eventually ended up in Salinas, starting P&R Brokerage, and my dad took over P&R and ultimately got back into the grower/shipper side of things with Cimino Brothers Produce. Seeing things change within the industry and being a part of the change while also realizing some things have held true from one generation to the next continue to inspire me."

His goals include helping each Pro*Act distributor become the 'best in class' within its marketplace, enabling local, regional and national chains to utilize this distribution network to deliver fresh, safe and healthful fruits and vegetables nationwide. "I also want to help continue educating our children about the importance of eating fresh fruits and vegetables every day as they not only are our current and future consumers but are also heading down a disastrous path of health issues due to poor diets. While I absolutely support domestic suppliers, I also desire to help facilitate better relationships with foreign grower/shippers. I see an ever-increasing need to source product globally as weather patterns change and consumers' needs and demands transform the industry."

His dad, Armand Cimino, and Max Yeater of Pro*Act, are mentors. "His passion and love for the business are second to none," he says of his father. "He has never forced any of us Cimino children into the business but has always been excited to pass on his knowledge. Although he is in his mid-60s, his hard work and dedication continue. He learned to speak Spanish at the age of 54 in order to build a grower base and form a produce company in Mexico. Max, who has been my boss since I started at Pro*Act, has leadership, dedication and maturity far beyond his years. He continually sets a great example of what a true leader should be."



CHRIS DALMARES, 39
President
Dalmares Produce, Inc.
Chicago, IL

All of Dalmares' life has been spent, in one way or another, in the produce industry. His father, a Greek immigrant, started distributing produce to restaurants in 1955. When he was a child, Dalmares worked with his father and eventually graduated to working as a salesman on Chicago's terminal market

during summer breaks from college. Upon finishing school, he entered the family business, which at the time consisted of two trucks — one of which he drove.

Fifteen years later and with the help of his brother Bill, Dalmares Produce, Inc. has achieved growth of at least 20 percent per year to become one of the largest produce distribution companies in the Midwest. Its customer base includes independent restaurants, institutions, and national multi-units. The company was honored by *Inc.* magazine as one of the fastest growing businesses in the nation in 2007.

Dalmares has participated in designing and implementing critical perishables distribution solutions for many of the largest restaurant chains in America. The rapid pace of change in the industry over the past decade and his company's ability to embrace and prosper through it brings him his greatest sense of accomplishment. "Whether it be our industry leading development of comprehensive food-safety practices and guidelines or forming mutually beneficial strategic relationships with our grower partners, the challenges have always been formidable, yet the rewards have been great," he says.

He is actively involved in his local parish and the company supports many local charities as well as The Make-A-Wish Foundation and The National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

He hopes to continue the managed growth the company has attained to this point. "Development of a new facility is in the works. It promises to be one of the most advanced perishables distribution centers in the nation. The company also seeks to become more vertically

integrated, with plans to seek out opportunities in production, processing and logistics."



MICHAEL S. DAROSHEFSKI, 39
Senior Buyer/Merchandiser
Produce/Perishable
U.S. Foodservice, Rosemont, IL
Roanoke Division

Daroshefski is credited with taking the division's produce sales from 2.5 percent of case sales to over 10 percent and growing. Working out of the Salem, VA, office, he has helped build relationships with key vendors and has helped the corporation achieve over

\$1 billion in produce related sales.

He is known for consistently looking for pricing and selling techniques that will benefit his company and strongly promoting the company's private-label Cross Valley Farms program. He has completed USDA training and is a strong proponent of field tours, processing plant tours and producer training.

He has coached and assisted with several t-ball and Little League baseball teams and has helped out with Cub Scouts. He is currently a middle school Catholic religious ED teacher. "It has been great to pass on my experiences," he says.

His most significant community accomplishment was on May 18 when he participated in a triathlon in Memphis, TN, as a member of the Virginia Chapter of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.

He has been inspired by the company's growth since he took over the program and everything he has learned in his seven years in his position. "My challenges would be the ever-changing world of produce. You just never know what is going to happen from day to day and what and how you will combat and communicate these things. An example would be an unexpected rainstorm that damaged 60 percent of the strawberries in Oxnard, CA. It's something different every day and why I keep at it. It's never boring and you never stop learning."

Daroshefski's goal is to grow the division's produce sales. "I would like to see us achieve 15 percent of the case and 9 percent of the dollars in produce sales. If we achieve these numbers, it would make us the top USF division in regards to produce sales. Also, I would like to develop some better training materials for sales reps so they have the understanding and knowledge to sell more produce."

He has had many mentors but four stick out: Pete Delzell of Eagle Eye Produce, Cyndy Dennis of ToJo Mushroom, Clark Fideler of C&D Company, and Al Yancey of Branscomb Produce. "They have all gone above and beyond what they needed to do to help me learn and grow. They have unselfishly taught and helped me to better understand how the industry works. I have learned a great deal about the different commodities each of them deals with. In turn, I have been able to better answer customer and sales reps questions. I also have been able to take all of this knowledge and teach it to our sales force to help them grow and ultimately sell more product."



STEPHAN DOLBEC, 36
President
Patates Dolbec, Inc.
Saint-Ubalde, QC, Canada

Dolbec is president of the largest potato farm in eastern Canada. The company has grown 100-fold since he took the reins. Under his management, it developed the market in the United States as well as new markets in Montreal and Ontario. The farm has increased to 10,000 acres and put procedures in place for better yield and better quality.

Twelve years ago, he started Legubec, a fresh-cut processing company

that now processes over 400,000 pounds of potatoes a week plus other vegetables and has reached annual sales of around \$4 million. In 2003, he won Quebec Entrepreneur of the Year from Ernst and Young.

He is vice president of the Quebec Produce Marketing Association, serves on the board of directors for the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) and is vice president of the Quebec Growers Association. He is a sponsor for the 5-to-10-A-Day program, is a donor to the local Children's School and Community Centre and works in conjunction with Laval University to create new potato varieties. Over \$250,000 dollars in research and development is invested annually on the farm.

His father, Herman Dolbec, started the business over 40 years ago and is his inspiration. "He was involved in a tragic car accident 14 years ago, which left me with the huge responsibility and challenge to continue the business at a young age," he explains, "so I surrounded myself with a great team. Our challenge is to continuously try to stay ahead of our competition for quality and service to keep our customers happy. We are always looking for new ways and ideas to improve our growing techniques and packaging for our product, and better ways to market our products. It is a very competitive business today and will be even more so in the future."

His goals are to better educate customers about potatoes and to continue searching for new varieties. "Another goal of mine is one day for everyone to eat potatoes not only because they are good for you but also because they taste good."

He names three mentors. "My father introduced me to the potato industry and taught me to follow my goals and dreams as well as to believe in myself. Ghislain Perron with Metro in Quebec has given me guidance and knowledge in business as well as everyday life in general, and Claude Heber, now retired from Metro, has taught me how to approach business and to always listen to my customers needs."



CHRIS DUGAN, 40
Vice President Sales East
Chiquita Fresh North America
Cincinnati, OH

Dugan has held various sales and management positions during his 12 years at Chiquita. In his current position in Norfolk, MA, he is responsible for the territory from eastern Canada down to Florida and manages the sales directors, managers and retail merchandising teams for the banana and salad business. Under his direction, the company has achieved Perishable Vendor of the Year Status at Giant Carlisle and successfully grown its business with new items to improve profitability, for example, Chiquita Minis and organic bananas. It has also been very successful in growing revenue through new business and improved business models.

Active in his community coaching kids' sports and giving time and donations to charities, he finds the Relay for Life cancer walk especially meaningful.

He is a graduate of the United Fresh leadership program. "It was a great learning experience and a lot of fun being part of a great group," Dugan says.

His inspiration was a desire to be part of a healthful and fun industry. "It is always rewarding when some of the charities I work with ask for donations and samples for events. It further validates the healthful aspects and positive view of produce."

He notes the industry's many exciting challenges. "One of the biggest issues we are facing today is working through the ongoing cost increases with respect to production and logistics. It has become very difficult to contain costs due to the volatility of fuel, fuel-related by-products, labor, etc. Additionally, exchange rates have played a role in the cost equation. Food prices are on the rise and consumers could potentially shy away from more expensive offerings."

He wants to continue to offer solutions for customers and consumers. "We need to constantly challenge ourselves to be innovative to



meet the consumers' needs. With the heightened requirements and expectations on packaging, food safety and quality, it is more important than ever to partner with our customers to achieve our common goals. The entire industry will win when we work together."

He lists Craig Stephen, vice president of finance and business for Chiquita Fresh North America, as a mentor. "Craig's industry knowledge is unsurpassed. I have spent a great deal of time learning the business from him and leaning on his extensive experience in the industry. Craig has worked internationally in various roles and in several cross-functional areas throughout his career. He brings tremendous value to our company and our customers. I've learned many things from him, but perhaps the most important is how he manages people. Craig is respected throughout our entire organization for his industry knowledge, interpersonal skills and overall leadership."

Jeff Beaulieu, vice president of produce at Giant Food Stores, LLC, is another influence. "Jeff taught me never to underestimate the importance of customer service and collaboration. We met many years ago, and his leadership brought our teams together to drive business results. We continue to work together to drive overall performance, and our teams support one another throughout the process. In the end, we create wins for each other and the consumer. Jeff is a person of great integrity, honesty and leadership. His influence has been instrumental in reminding me that business building begins with customer service."



TODD EAGAN, 39
Buyer (berries, avocados,
asparagus and corn)
Costco Wholesale
Issaquah, WA

Eagan, who works in Costco's San Diego, CA, office, has been responsible for the company's berry category since 2000. He has worked to improve packaging, specifications and vendor relations and has significantly grown the category. The betterment of Costco's strawberry packaging has improved the quality of fruit, maximized trucking per cube and reduced cardboard usage. Eagan's efforts have paid off not only for the company in reduced freight but also for the environment through less trucking.

He is a member of the United Fresh Leadership class of 2007/2008.

Eagan is both challenged and inspired by the dynamic of the industry. "The nature of produce makes every day a little different, which creates challenges and opportunities," he says. "I love the global aspect of what we do and how a change in weather on the other side of the world is affecting our orders today."

His goal is to continue to work with Costco's berry shippers to improve the eating experience of the different berry varieties. "By focusing Costco's demand for the better eating varieties, we can help influence future programs and send better eating berries home with our members. I believe this will lead to increased consumption, which is good for the industry and our members."

His mentors within Costco include Frank Padilla and Rich Wright. "They have created the vision of produce at Costco."

He credits many other mentors from the supplier community including Brian Bocock of Naturipe Farms, Fred Williamson of A&W, Greg Mixon of Sunnyridge Farms, Sam Gabriel of Westlake Produce, Walter Yager of Alpine Fresh and Dana Thomas of Index Fresh. "They have always been generous with their time and willing to teach me about their operations."

"The nature of produce makes every day a little different, which creates challenges and opportunities."

— Todd Eagan

TIM FLEMING JR., 39
Vice President
Strube Celery and Vegetable
Chicago, IL



Fleming is a member of the fourth generation in his family's nearly 100-year-old produce business. He began at a very young age and after college joined Strube full-time. He now serves as a vice president and department head.

When Fleming took over as vegetable department head, the company had specific goals to streamline the department to make it more efficient and to increase gross profit of all its commodities. Within a year, it was able to adjust its buying and selling patterns to become more efficient and to hit — and maintain — its gross profit goals.

Fleming was a member of United Leadership class #10. Outside work, he enjoys coaching multiple sports for his children and donating his time and resources to hunger-based charity organizations.

The very nature of the industry inspires him. "I love the pace of it and how it's never stagnant," he says. "Change is also the constant challenge I am faced with as a wholesaler. It requires me to continually evaluate our role and be creative on how to best service our customers. Thus, it's very important for me to keep expanding my knowledge of the entire industry and not just my little corner of the world. Last year, I was selected to take part in an agricultural tour of Bari, Italy, which confirmed my belief in my need to keep learning and stay proactive."

His most influential mentor is his grandfather, Bob Strube. "He took over the struggling company from his father in the 1940s and under his leadership, Strube became the largest produce wholesaler in Chicago. We grew up hearing 'Work is a blessing.' He woke up at 2 AM every day with the mentality of being extremely lucky to be going to work. He modeled for me what it means to be not only a successful leader but also a leader with integrity. Eradicating hunger was also a passion for him. He co-founded the Chicago Food Depository to help get food to those who needed it. It has inspired me to remember 'to whom much is given, much is expected.' I feel extremely lucky to have learned work lessons and life lessons from him."

MAILE SHANAHAN GEIS, 30
Marketing Director
Buy California Marketing
Agreement (BCMA)
or California Grown Campaign
Sacramento, CA



Shanahan Geis began her career in the produce industry directly out of college as a sales coordinator with Muranaka Farms. This position provided her a rapid education into the world of produce. She moved from

Muranaka to the marketing department at Apio where she implemented marketing tactics for its fruit and vegetable divisions as well as its fresh-cut vegetable business. As a member of the marketing team, she was responsible for new product launches, industry press relations, tradeshow coordination, sales support materials, market research and category analysis.

In 2004, she became director of trade relations for the *California Grown* Campaign with responsibility for maintaining relationships with the retail community and encouraging the promotion of California-grown products. In 2006 she was promoted to marketing director and is now responsible for all activities associated with the campaign including public relations, advertising, industry outreach and retail promotion. "One of my proudest achievements is being a part of a movement contributing close to \$1 billion in increased economic activity to the state of California," she relates.

Shanahan Geis is an active member of PMA, United Fresh, FPFC and California Women for Agriculture. She also is involved in volunteer

activities in her local community with Big Brothers Big Sisters and WEAVE, a crisis intervention and service provider for victims of domestic violence.

Her inspiration is educating the public about California agriculture and the importance of purchasing locally grown items. "Because so few Californians are directly involved in the production of our food supply, I believe campaigns such as *California Grown* play a vital role in telling the positive story of agriculture and the health benefits associated with fresh produce. We aim to keep fresh produce and other agricultural products in front of consumers and proactively seek out positive ways to interact with the public and educate them about agriculture. Working on behalf of California farmers, who supply the nation with a healthful assortment of fruits and vegetables, has continued to inspire me to support our campaign efforts having a direct effect on our nation's health as well as the economic viability of the state."

She looks forward to continuing the *California Grown* Campaign by finding unique ways to encourage the state's residents to seek out and purchase locally grown, healthful agricultural products. "I also strive to be an active member of the produce industry organizations by serving on committees and becoming an active advocate for industry causes."

As a successful woman in the produce industry, Jan DeLyster of the California Avocado Commission has been an inspiration to her. "As a past board member of the BCMA, she offered guidance and support. I believe she exemplifies the true qualities of leadership — being both effective and kind. I strive to model my career after hers."

Chris Zanobini of the California Pear Advisory Board has also served as one of her mentors in his role as BCMA chairperson. "I have looked to Chris for guidance and support often in my current role with *California Grown*. Most of all, Chris has encouraged an environment of autonomy, allowing me to develop into a leader within the organization as well as the industry."

ELLIOTT GRANT, 36
Founder & Chief Marketing Officer
YottaMark, Inc.
Redwood City, CA



Grant has made news with his vision to give products a unique identity and thus help defend against counterfeiting, diversion and fraud, while creating a new channel for brand owners to deliver consumers more information. He founded YottaMark in 2003 to develop and commercialize technology to protect

consumers around the world from the threat of counterfeit and tampered products. Since then, YottaMark has become a leading developer of Secure Serialization solutions — a way of giving every item a unique identity a consumer can easily verify either online or with a cell phone.

Just after the 2006 spinach crisis, several produce companies approached YottaMark to explore whether the technology could bring cost-effective traceability to individual items of produce — especially field packed. The company ran successful field trials in strawberries, carrots, tomatoes, melons and grapes — and was recognized by PMA as a finalist for the Food Safety Award in 2007.

HarvestMark, the company's unit-level traceability solution for the produce industry, provides new opportunities for growers and retailers to enhance their brands, differentiate products in the store and improve customer loyalty. HarvestMark brings consumers traceability, transparency and assurance, and gives growers critical distribution-chain information and a powerful tool to respond to recall or foodborne illness events.

Grant has a passion for helping consumers make informed decisions that can keep them safe. "Whether this means enabling villagers in Africa to ensure their anti-malaria drugs are real and in-date with a cell phone or giving a mom the confidence to buy healthful, fresh produce for her family," he says, "I am inspired by our potential to make a positive difference."

The passion and commitment to food safety he sees in the produce

industry also inspire him. "I want to help growers and packer/shippers communicate the passion and all the hard work they're putting in through to the end consumer."

Grant's goals revolve around solving the innumerable problems in delivering cost-effective traceability to the produce industry and educating consumers about it. "Once traceability is in place, there are also as-yet untapped benefits to growers, packer/shippers and retailers — in the same way no one really knew how useful Google was going to be when it first began."

He has had help and encouragement from many forward-thinking individuals. He credits Devon Zagory, now with NSF Davis Fresh, as having been very supportive and helpful in early efforts and also finds JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT column a fantastic way to get some unfiltered insight into the industry.



and honors the fastest growing companies in Northeast Ohio during the previous year. The Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University has been in the top 10 percent of the world's business schools for decades.

His goal for Lakeside is to become known as the premier supplier to the salad manufacturing industry. "Through becoming a premier supplier, Lakeside will enjoy stable growth into the future for our customers, suppliers and employees," he says.

He names Bruce Taylor of Taylor Farms, Phil and Frank Gilardi of Freshway Foods and Keith Gustafson of Lakeside Produce as mentors. "Bruce's name is synonymous with salad manufacturing. He is one of the nation's largest and most respected foodservice salad manufacturers and has always been known to be one of the industry's sharpest minds, all while maintaining a reputation as one of the most desired employers in the field."

"Frank and Phil created Freshway Foods, which has become one of the most respected and fastest growing produce companies in the United States. No one has been a bigger influence or helped me more than my mentor and colleague Keith Gustafson. He has guided me through the highs and lows of our seasons and helped me mold Lakeside into what it is today and what we hope it to be in the future."



TERRY GRANZIER, 37
President
Lakeside Produce Distribution, Inc.
Westlake, OH

Granzier anticipated the need for increased emphasis on food safety and product traceability. In 2002, after the green onion recall, he developed the industry's first Internet-based product traceability system, ProTrace, which is available to contract customers on a proprietary basis. Since he founded Lakeside Produce in 2002, the company has realized over a 1,500 percent increase in sales; it anticipates sales growth of over 30 percent for 2008.

In 2007, Lakeside was awarded the prestigious Number One Upstart Company rank in the Weatherhead 100, which acknowledges, supports

In 2002, after the green onion recall, [Granzier] developed the industry's first Internet-based product traceability system, ProTrace, which is available to contract customers on a proprietary basis.

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JON GRECO, 37
General Manager
BSCC Produce, A Division of Sysco
Houston, TX

In 2000, when Greco was appointed sales manager of Sysco Produce West Coast Procurement, he was the youngest sales manager of the Sysco Procurement Office. In an effort to better understand the shipping side of the business, he joined the sales team at Taylor Farms. He returned to Sysco, then titled BSCC

Baugh Supply Chain Cooperative, at the beginning of 2003 and was shortly thereafter appointed to sales manager again. In 2005, he was promoted to general manager, responsible for the oversight or management of just under 30 sales people and roughly 80 million cases in sales a year.

After the 2006 spinach crisis, he was heavily involved with a promotion to increase spinach sales. Run strictly out of Sysco's own budget, it offered \$5 per case off every case of Sysco Natural and FreshPoint's Finest spinach that companies could sell for a two-week period in February 2007. "To me, this was a huge sign of what our growers and suppliers mean to Sysco," he says. "We did this out of our own budget, we asked for nothing from the supplier community and did it simply to show our support of this valley and all its growers."

He has always been driven by challenges. "Over the years, we have had significant systems changes that created a need for further training to our group. Changes can be difficult for many people so the need to manage different people in different ways becomes increasingly important. Successful management of people is what has driven me in the past and continues to be a major driving force for me."

He is known for not being complacent. "I want to have more impact in various areas of our corporation as well as the foodservice industry itself. At some time in the near future, I would also enjoy the challenge of working at one of our operating companies in an effort to better understand their overall produce needs, thereby creating a more customer-friendly and efficient operation in my office."

He names Bruce Taylor of Taylor Farms as a mentor. "Although coming from an incredibly influential family in the produce industry, Bruce started up Taylor Farms, shipping only a few semi loads of value-added vegetables a week. Now, he is the industry leader as a value added shipper. However, he has remained an incredibly humble and easily approachable person."

Rich Dachman and Tom Wason, both of Sysco, are also mentors. "Rich has run his own foodservice distribution company, managed a buying or procurement office for foodservice and now serves as vice president of produce for Sysco Corporation. It is a career path I would truly appreciate to follow, not just for the experiences it would bring but also because he allows for upward movement in management based on performance. Tom served as the vice president of perishables for Sysco and was one of my managers. Over the years he has given me the opportunity to grow with this great company. He also rewards based on performance, as any good or strong manager should."



ANDY HAMILTON, 37
Director of Sales
IFCO Systems, N.A.
Tampa, FL

Hamilton excels in his ability to collaborate with diverse teams. He previously managed Chiquita's innovations group when its Costa Rican packaging team needed to devise a pack for the North American market.

He approaches problems and opportunities from the perspective of his engineering degree. While working in sales at Chiquita for Wal-Mart, he developed a complex regression model based on nearly a billion transactions through Wal-Mart's Retail Link data to substantiate a critical change in farming practices. He could explain the multivariate regression in lay-

man's terms to everyone from farm quality-control managers to the COO, triggering a change and reversing a lagging performance.

Since joining IFCO two years ago, "I have taken the experiences from each farm and packing station I visit to expand my knowledge and ensure we tailor our message to help the growers, shippers and retailers with whom we do business," he says. "As a result of our efforts, we have transformed IFCO into the largest RPC [reusable plastic container] pooler in North America and we're one of the fastest growing businesses within the produce industry."

Since he travels over 100,000 miles per year for business, his main goal is to maintain a balanced lifestyle, caring for his wife and three young children while accomplishing as much as possible at work. He has coached youth basketball and baseball almost every year since he was a student at Georgia Tech.

"I always remember my family and being a good community role model is what is most important in my life. I firmly believe this balanced approach has also made me a better leader and manager at work. Too many people who are singularly focused on work quickly lose perspective. When you understand what is important by proper prioritization, you're in the right frame of mind to make rational decisions."

He is a graduate of the United Leadership program. "The best part of the program is learning from the other individuals within the group. I am most inspired by hearing the stories of the entrepreneurs in the program. Hearing their stories motivates me to make where I work more entrepreneurial and to focus on what makes the produce industry so special — the people who work in this dynamic industry."

In his current position at IFCO, he has the opportunity to expand the use of RPCs. "While RPCs are the predominant produce transport package in Europe and parts of Asia, the penetration of RPCs here in North America is relatively low. As a trained industrial engineer, I get the opportunity to show how to integrate the supply chain in a holistic approach. Through our work with some retail partners and many growers, we're demonstrating there is a cost at each step in the supply chain and we're showing how to look at what package works best from A to Z or from field to the shelf — not just from the farm to the warehouse. Challenging and changing decades of ingrained processes and mindsets aren't easy processes, but nothing worthwhile ever is."

Scott Owens at Paramount Citrus, his manager when he transitioned from engineering to sales, helped him develop despite his inexperience. He also credits Chris Dugan as a mentor. [Editor's note: Please see Chris Dugan profile on page 25.] "I watched Chris build relationships with customers and develop trust and rapport, which became invaluable in later negotiations and crises. Chris gave me a lot of confidence by selling my potential to others inside the organization and ingrained in my management philosophy the importance of being an advocate for others."

Bob Hartmann at Eurofresh was another key influence. "I worked extensively with Bob when I first started at Chiquita — he was my first real exposure to what sales is all about. Like Chris, Bob developed tremendous rapport with customers and he deftly managed a cerebral side with his affable personality."



CHRIS HARRIS, 32
Category Manager Produce
and Horticulture
Fresh & Easy/Tesco
El Segundo, CA

As produce point person for British retail giant Tesco's U.S. division, Harris is on the front lines of innovation. Last November, Tesco launched the first of its Fresh & Easy small-format stores with a quick turnaround focus. Estimates predict there could be over

200 Fresh & Easy stores in California and the Southwest by the end of the year.

Harris is renowned for his focus not just on customers but also on the supply side, for his relationship-building skills and for his philosophy of leading by example and his trust.

Harris, his team and their supply partners have designed and launched a successful consumer-focused produce range from scratch. Consumer feedback has been excellent and sales support the feedback. The team has accomplished this in an approach consistent with Harris' business philosophy of bringing the growers and packers into all discussions relating to their products. In only six months, they have made 75 additions or changes to the range led by consumer feedback and desire.

Harris is involved with the Los Angeles Children's Hospital, specifically its Elf program, which gives Christmas presents to families in need with seriously ill children. He also recently drove an effort to raise money inside Fresh & Easy for the Debbie Chisholm Memorial Foundation, a local make-a-wish foundation based in Riverside, CA.

Mother Nature inspires, frustrates and challenges him every day. "The consumer wants perfect product every time and we are continually challenged to deliver this," he says. "The very wet winter we saw a few years ago was the hardest I have ever experienced. It was a different crisis every day."

He wants to be part of delivering the unparalleled quality U.S. growers achieve every day. "Food safety is a massive focus and it is important to make the right decisions to protect the consumer without adding unnecessary cost. I strongly believe by working together and forming long-term relationships we can all invest in each other's future and have a stronger industry for it."

He has many mentors in the produce industry, including Mark Munger of Andrew & Williamson, as well as many in other fields. "Mark had helped me to pick through the industry and find the very best in the people involved in it. He shows me that giving back to the industry is important if it is to continue. It is also very useful to look beyond our walls to take lessons from other industries. I have friends and confidants in the finance industry, telecommunications, energy fields and Internet businesses."



JULIA KNOTT, 27
Sales Representative
and New Products Developer
Oké USA
Watertown, MA

Knott's career has delved deeply into the intersection of food, environment and social justice with a focus on how to create a food system that nourishes eaters and at the same time supports small family farmers and nurtures the earth.

She is the lead outside sales representative for Oké USA, a fair-trade tropical fruit company. Since Oké's ownership structure gives the farmers who supply its fruit a one-third ownership share of the company, her work benefits many small farmers. As a member of a small team in a startup environment, she is challenged daily to construct new systems and build the company's sales to where they can break even and, hopefully, soon have modest profits to share with its farmer co-owners.

She previously worked in consumer marketing at Equal Exchange, a fair-trade food company that handled dried fruit, nuts, coffee, tea, chocolate and sugar. She developed a fund-raising program enabling schools to raise money by selling Equal Exchange's healthful snack products while engaging teachers and students to learn about fair trade and farmer cooperatives.

She is inspired by the growing fair-trade awareness in the United States yet challenged by the lack of fair-trade produce items available. "It has been a real challenge — and one I relish — to build awareness among produce buyers and retailers about the opportunity to tap into a growing desire of consumers to support the family farmers who grow their fruit. So far, our results are pretty encouraging, with many of the retailers who carry our bananas seeing their banana sales increase by as much as 20 percent."

Visiting the farmer cooperatives that grow Oké's bananas and co-own its brand is an inspiration. "In Ecuador, our producer partners, El

Guabo, created a community clinic and pharmacy accessible to all community members at very low cost. In order to alleviate the costs of schooling, all co-op families with children receive a stipend for school supplies. Moreover, women benefit from fair trade by being included in the work force. In El Guabo, a cooperative of women has been employed in creating organic fertilizer for the crops."

Projects made possible by El Guabo's co-ownership of Oké have transformed the quality of life for many. "In Machala, El Guabo helped build the first school for mentally disabled children in the region. It donates bananas weekly to neighboring low-resource schools, feeding a total of 6,000 children within the region, and has donated soccer and basketball courts to neighboring schools. These contributions are a part of a holistic view of development that involves projects not only focusing on necessities but also giving kids the opportunity to be kids."

She is deeply committed to understanding how consumer choices here in the United States connect us to the well-being of producer communities. "I want to be an integral part of growing Oké USA into an agent of change within the produce industry. I have a lot to learn about the industry and look forward to continuing to expand the conversation about what it means to eat a banana — or mango or pineapple."

Her mentors in the industry include Jonathan Rosenthal and Rob Amsterdam at Oké USA and Kate Howell and Michael Rozyne at Red Tomato. "Jonathan's commitment to social and economic justice while at the same time promoting a very livable work/life balance for his team has been a major inspiration for me. Rob has really brought the spirit of the produce industry to our office and has been a great mentor in sharing his deep experience with domestic sustainable agriculture. Kate has been a great inspiration as a fellow saleswoman in the produce industry and Michael was instrumental in coaching me in the art of conversation in my first year in produce sales."



CHRISTINE LOTT, 31
Merchandising Manager
Stemilt Growers, Inc.
Wenatchee, WA

Lott's ability to identify with a wide range of consumers and find the specific selling points relevant to them have brought her industry success. In her current position, she is responsible for direct account promotion coordination for Stemilt World Famous Fruits with major retail grocery chains throughout the United States and Canada. From her Sacramento, CA, location, she manages such activities as brand management, category management, ad planning and merchandising, and promotion tactics to generate sales and build partner relationships.

Previously, with the California Pear Advisory Board (CPAB), she was responsible for developing and managing marketing and promotion activities for all California Bartlett pears and domestic marketing programs for California Bing cherries. She developed and implemented retail promotion, advertising and public relations programs, industry communications and event coordination, managed a 5-member regional merchandising team and developed the California Pear Ambassadors program, enabling growers to participate in regional events and in-store demonstrations to represent and promote the California pear industry.

She is chapter treasurer for the California Women for Agriculture and the alumni chapter treasurer and past president the Sigma Alpha Professional Agriculture Sorority.

She grew up on a dairy farm and has always had a passion for promoting the farmer's bounty. "I have had the opportunity to represent many growers over the years and be their spokeswoman to the public," she says. "A farmer's job is not an easy one and educating the public on what it takes to bring their products to the family's table is something important to share."

She would like to continue being a spokeswoman and advocate for the grower, be it a private company of growers or an industry group.

She cites Chris Zanobini of CPAB as a primary influence. "While I

was working for the Board, he was always there as a mentor, pushing me to expand my knowledge and experience and guiding me into the roles I have served over the years. He has had an integral role in my development as a leader and industry advocate."

Another inspiration is Tom Mathison, founder of Stemilt Growers. "He is a man with a true passion for farming and a return to the land. He has a goal of providing high-quality, premium Stemilt fruit to customers. Even though he has retired and transferred the leadership of Stemilt Growers to his grandson West Mathison, he can still be seen visiting the orchards and keeping involved in the activities and programs the company implements."



LEE MANNERING, 35
Government Relations Manager
Produce Marketing Association
Newark, DE

In an industry deluged with regulations, legislation and issues, Mannering holds an increasingly critical position with PMA. After joining in 1994 as a staff writer, he advanced to public relations coordinator, handling public affairs issues, managing media coverage for PMA events and evaluating and

improving member communications. In early 2005, Mannering became PMA's government relations manager, leading its efforts on immigration reform and especially getting AgJOBS passed, a critical step to solving the labor issues created by the crackdown on illegal immigrant workers in the industry. He serves as PMA's content expert in this area, participates and represents PMA in the overall ag coalition supporting AgJOBS, activates its grass-roots member network to contact Congress and keeps staff up to date.

He has also played a major role in PMA's efforts on country-of-origin labeling, forging legislative and regulatory efforts and developing compliance communications, and on transportation issues, including information delivery, coordination with PMA's Transportation Task Force and collaborative efforts with transportation organizations. He represents PMA and the industry in federal food-security efforts and creates and manages strong Web resources and communications efforts.

Mannering established and now manages GROW (Grass Roots Organized to Win), PMA's grassroots network. He builds its membership, manages external resources and technology, works one-on-one with members to enhance participation and manages the bimonthly GROW newsletter. "Government issues are more critical than ever as they affect each company's bottom line through increased costs, increased scrutiny and changes in business practices," says Mannering. "Recognizing this changing environment, PMA is more involved in issues management and government relations than ever before."

He is the No. 2 person in the department for many legislative and regulatory issues, food safety, food security, international trade and more. He participated in an agroterrorism assessment for produce and served on the PMA emergency response team during the spinach crisis. He was responsible for producing and distributing PMA member communications in an around-the-clock effort to keep members informed about what was happening. "While it was a very hectic time, it was rewarding to hear members report the information PMA was giving them was valuable."

Mannering is engaged and plans to marry this November.

Involved in Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, he has been to the Gulfport, MS, region four times to help families and communities rebuild. He is also a second-degree black belt instructor at the martial arts school

where he teaches kids and adults after work.

"It's often said the produce industry gets in your blood. When I started at PMA, I had very little experience with produce, but this is a business people are passionate about. I feel very blessed to have gotten to know and work with some of the brightest marketers in this business, as well as to have some of the best association professionals as colleagues. The produce industry is ever-evolving and being part of it every day is inspiring."

Mannering's switch to government relations after 11 years in public relations was a big challenge. "Getting up to speed quickly on the issues affecting this industry and developing a grassroots program of member advocates was demanding. One of the unique aspects about PMA's grassroots program is we're able to reach into urban areas through our foodservice and supermarket members and inform and educate them about industry issues."

He wants to continue to make PMA relevant and valuable to its members by giving them the information they need about legislative, regulatory and policy issues. "PMA research shows government relations is one of the most important services the association provides its members. Another goal is to help keep PMA in the pattern of growth and success it's enjoyed since the early 1990s."

Mannering considers PMA's Kathy Means, who hired him 13 years ago, as his mentor. "She has helped me grow tremendously over the course of my career and gives me freedom and creativity to develop PMA member resources. Kathy is always focused on providing member value, which is the cornerstone of association work, and I have learned a lot from her over the years. Every time I talk to members, I try to learn more about their business and issues."

"When I joined PMA, I wrote newsletter articles on topics completely new to me, so having a chance to talk to people such as Bruce Peterson and Bob DiPiazza really brought me up to speed on what was happening in the industry. Now that I am in government relations, having the opportunity to discuss legislative and regulatory matters with peers at Western Growers, American Nursery and Landscapers Association and other associations has helped me grow professionally."



BRAD MATHIS, 32
President
BMI Produce
Adel, Georgia

As founder of BMI Produce, Mathis focuses on helping growers and shippers to maximize return on their crop. He brings his vast experience from previous positions to this new company, which has been in operation for almost one year, and is moving forward rapidly, already averaging around \$1 million

in sales per month. "The success of the company has been absolutely unbelievable and it is completely attributed to our ability to service customers the way they like to be serviced," says Mathis.

For more than 12 years, Mathis worked at Southern Valley Fruit & Vegetable, Inc., leading the company to the forefront in supplying produce from its organizations in Georgia and Mexico. His work in establishing relationships and building business greatly supported the two divisions. He has set up programs with major retailers and foodservice organizations worldwide and has given back to the industry by serving on the Southeast Produce Council board of directors.

Constant industry changes and improving business and relationships on a daily basis are his inspirations. His goals are to continuously strive to stay at the forefront of the industry by providing value to his customers with quality product, superior service and a food-safety standard above the rest.

Mathis enjoys talking with the older generations of the industry. "I value learning about the past. It's interesting to hear their opinions of the future and listen to how they achieved some of their accomplishments over the years in our business by using some of the tricks of the trade they have learned."

"It's often said the produce industry gets in your blood."

— Lee Mannering

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Reader Service # 2



TATE MATHISON, 30
Food Service Team Leader
Stemilt Growers
Wenatchee, WA

Part of the fifth generation of Mathisons farming apples, pears and cherries, Mathison is the third generation in the warehouse and packing business. He grew up on Stemilt Hill, farming with his dad, brother and sister. He's done everything from picking up rocks to preparing the ground for planting to running a 350-person cherry harvesting operation.

In his current position, he heads Stemilt's foodservice sales department, accounting for over a million cases of whole apples, and is the business head for the value-added Applesweets division. He is known for his willingness and ability to jump in wherever needed. During high school and college, he ran the cherry harvest crew for his father. When he started, it picked around 1,000 tons with roughly 150 harvesters but by the time he finished, it was picking nearly 3,000 tons with 350 harvesters.

After college, he worked for Dole Fresh Fruit as a banana ripener and then as a tropical sales manager, seeing nearly every major retailer's supply chain from the port of entry to the retail shelf and helping troubleshoot any issues Dole customers were facing with their banana program.

He sits on the donation committee board for Stemilt and has been nominated for a position on the PMA Food Service Board of Directors. He played college football and was team captain for Pacific Lutheran University, which won national titles in 1999 and 2002.

He is challenged by the pursuit to return money to the land, and maximization of this end. "I want to build consumer demand for products that are good for people and good for the earth," he says. "My interest is to more closely integrate the land to the end consumer."

His goals include positioning Stemilt and Applesweets in a greater capacity. "My 3-year goal is to make Stemilt a leader in the foodservice segment of the market, both in whole and value added tree fruit. "My 5-year goal is to make Applesweets the leader in the sliced apple category."

His grandfather Tom Mathison, father Kyle Mathison and brother West Mathison have all served as his mentors. "My grandfather taught me the end goal of Stemilt is to return the money to the land. My grandfather's words made an impact on me. I can't imagine going to work every day with a goal any less admirable than what he has charged me with.

"Of all the things I have learned from my father, the one thing with the greatest impact is his vision. If our company is going to make it for another generation, we must have the vision to do so. My brother West has the staying power and the personal resolve to see tough situations to their end. He has shown me how a leader has to make the tough decisions. If you are humble and take advice from trusted advisors, you can be confident in their choices even when they are unpopular."



JOE MERENDA, 39
Director of Business Development
FoodSource, a C.H. Robinson Co.
Monterey, CA

Merenda and the foodservice group at FoodSource have developed successful programs with distributors and suppliers across the country. His visionary abilities have helped create unique foodservice solutions for large-scale restaurant chains.

Merenda has successfully worked in start-up and entrepreneurial companies. He started the Fresh 1 Marketing division for CHRW in 1997, going from \$0 to \$60 million in five years, and developed its produce import division. He developed an \$80-million foodservice division for FoodSource and was instrumental in the successful launch of the Newman's Own Organics Fresh Produce line, a \$30 million business unit.

He has helped end users eliminate waste by offering transparency of

the supply chain, which has led to more trust and better service for all parties. He has continued to work on driving costs out of the supply chain through long-term partnerships in transportation, growing and distribution.

Merenda is very active in his community through recreational sports, YMCA and Pony Baseball. He coaches baseball, soccer and basketball, and he and his wife are very active in the PTA and school site council. He coordinates a multiple fund-raising event each year to benefit the Pacific Grove school system.

He is challenged and inspired by the rapid change and consolidation of the industry. "Change creates opportunities to provide new solutions to old problems and we have a lot of old problems in our industry," he says. "I worked in the beverage industry [Coca-Cola] prior to produce, and we have a long way to go in catching up to the dry-grocery industry in terms of technology, services and pricing stability. I love the challenge of taking on a seemingly impossible project and coming up with a solution that can be repeated and applied to other organizations."

Merenda would like to continue to build long-term relationships with grower partners and customers. "Strategic alliances are the future and the only way to be successful in our industry for the long run. There is a generational shift coming, and my goal is to grab as much knowledge from our industry leaders as I can and use it to create new solutions for the future. I would like to continue to work for all aspects of the supply chain to restore and build profitability for growers, distributors and end users."

He would also like to work on standardizing food-safety practices. "Food safety should not be a marketing tool — it should be about public safety. We need to adopt standardized practices we can all agree to. Millions are being spent and wasted on redundant practices no one can afford right now."

Mike Remppe, retired from C.H. Robinson, and Tom Minnich, owner of FoodSource, are two of his mentors. "Mike gave me my first job in produce. He taught me to always be honest, never take yourself too seriously and when you get into a bad situation, ask for help early. Mike gave me a chance to be successful, gave me more responsibility than I was ready to handle and helped me navigate the industry. Tom was one of the owners of FoodSource when I came over to Monterey in 2002 and he showed me the value of a good business plan. Tom really focused on not trying to be everything to everybody and always looking at things through the customers' or growers' eyes."



DARREN P. MICELLE, 39
Chief Marketing Officer
Custom Pak/Six L's
Immokalee, FL

Micelle founded Custom Pak in 1994 and built it into a premier packaging operation specializing in distributing and repackaging tomatoes and dry vegetables. It currently has seven locations and over 750 key employees nationwide. With a vision to be a bi-coastal producer of fresh tomatoes servicing

customers throughout the country, he set up a joint growing venture with Six L's and CAB produce out of Mexico. He started a research and development program for Six L's that includes developing proprietary varieties and new product lines of tomatoes.

In his community, he is involved in youth sports and is the coach for the 10- to 11-year old Pop Warner League football and coaches 8- to 9-year old Little League Baseball.

His inspiration comes from growing up in New Orleans and being a third-generation tomato man. "It is a challenge keeping every customer satisfied daily with such a volatile product line of fresh vegetables," he says. "If it is not quality, then price or logistics challenges us. Every day is different in the produce industry and meeting this ever-changing environment, while keeping our client base satisfied, is the driving force behind what keeps me motivated to succeed."

Micelle wants to focus on getting kids to eat more vegetables and on

new varieties. "I want to continue to increase consumption of tomatoes and vegetables among children. They are the foundation of our future growth. If we get them started on vegetables earlier in life, it is one more customer we will have in the future. The development of new tomato varieties will stimulate increases in consumption with consumers."

A global brand is also on his wish list. "I'd like to develop a branded tomato program recognized globally. This will set our organization apart from our competitors and establish the increase in consumption we are all looking for. It can only be done with the production of a special product delivering freshness, appearance, flavor and shelf life all in one tomato."

Buddy Micelle, his father, is his principal mentor. "He taught me the essentials of making sure the customers made money before you make yours. He also taught me to treat everyone with respect, whether they are a customer, supplier or employee. You never know where they will end up in life."

Other mentors include his grandfather Sal Peraino of Dixon Tomato, Bill Lipman of Six L's and Jeff Gargiulo of Gargiulo Inc. "I admire the company Bill Lipman and his family built. He mentors me daily about his experience and how it can relate to current market situations. Jeff Gargiulo succeeded in the tomato business and then continued his success in other industry items like oranges, wine and melons."



JOSH MITCHELL, 37
Vice President of Technical Services
Misionero Vegetables
Gonzales, CA

After graduating as valedictorian from McMaster University's Michael G. DeGroote School of Business, Mitchell joined Misionero as manager of the then new salad plant, which had one process line, one shift with 18 workers and total production of about \$3 million per year. Under his management over the next seven years, the plant grew to over \$70 million dollars in business per year with operations running 24/7. He was responsible for all operations, product development, quality assurance, organic certification, procurement and maintenance and engineering. Misionero was one of the first in the industry to fully implement a hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) program and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). One key aspect of this growth was developing two patented systems for Misionero's "Washed and Trimmed" line of whole-head lettuce products, sold under the Garden Cuts brand and several private brands. One of the two named patent holders, Mitchell notes he could not have done it without the close support of some key customers and personnel.

In 2002, he became value-added manager, continuing his responsibilities for the plant but focusing more on food safety, product/systems/process development and procurement. He also served as technical liaison to key co-manufacture partners as Misionero grew several private brand programs for some of North America's largest and most respected brands.

In 2007, with the effects of the spinach crisis still lingering and the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (LGMA) looming, he became vice president of technical services, focusing on food safety, quality, sustainability and product development programs and initiatives. He represented Misionero at the United Fresh annual Washington Public Policy conference and was a member of United Fresh Leadership Program Class 11.

He is a member of the National Autosport Association, which allows him to take his car on some of the greatest tracks in the world, and is a member of the United States Sailing Association with a certification to captain bareboat sailing vessels up to 50 feet. He is an avid, sometimes competitive mountain biker and enjoys scuba diving and snow skiing.

He is a proud part of Misionero's local initiative with a group that improves on-farm water management and educational outreach to local schools. This group includes Ecology Action, Chualar School district,

Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation Districts and Life Lab under the auspices of the Model School Program and the State Water Resources Control Board. "This is a model community-based project to reduce runoff from the farms and allow the community, particularly the school children, to participate in conservation, food safety, and food security," he explains.

Being part of the industry at a time of rapid change and evolution has been inspirational. "While our industry accepts no subsidies, it provides some of the most economical, safest products that form one of the cornerstones of most retail offerings. Since my first day in this business, I have seen the competitive forces within this industry allow prices of certain items to fall to 15 percent of their former levels in some cases, while at the same time the level of sophistication in both food technology and safety have increased dramatically.

As for the future, "I look forward to helping our company and this industry meet the needs of this environment. Beyond this, I look forward to continuing to take on more responsibility with in this company and the industry as a whole."

Mitchell names Floyd Griffen, founder of Misionero, and Stephen Griffin, Floyd's son and current company president, as well as Javier Velasco of Sonora Packing, as mentors. "They have all been key mentors in helping me learn and develop in the various roles I have played. I have to thank both Stephen and Floyd for having the faith in me to allow me the opportunities they have, without which I would not be where I am today."



DAVID NELLEY, 38
Director, Pipfruit
& Pineapple Categories
The Oppenheimer Group
Vancouver, BC, Canada

Over the last dozen years, Nelley has become one of the most visionary members of his company, dedicating his expertise beyond New Zealand apples and pears to guide the entire pipfruit category, and since 2001, has built the pineapple business from the ground up.

At just 24, Nelley opened an office for Enza in Seattle, WA, and was responsible for marketing New Zealand apples in Mexico, Hawaii and west of the Mississippi. During this time he helped introduce the Braeburn and Pacific Rose apples and the Taylor's Gold Pear to North America.

In 1997 he became marketing manager for Enza North Asia, based in Singapore, with total responsibility for marketing the New Zealand crop of apples in Hong Kong, China, Taiwan and Philippines and he sold the first New Zealand apples into India.

He started working for Oppenheimer in 2001 with responsibility for its total apple and pear crop and has held bottom-line accountability for over \$550 million worth of business. He introduced Enza's Jazz and Pacific Rose apples grown in Washington state. Soon after, he took on responsibility for the company's pineapple category and has helped grow the business from \$7 million to over \$20 million.

He has participated in Food Leadership at Portland State and the PMA's produce leadership course in association with Cornell University.

His family has been involved in agriculture for generations in New Zealand. He explains, "Coming from a farm, I know what it's like to be completely vulnerable to weather, pour everything into your product, send it to market and then wait at the end of a dusty road for, hopefully, a check to arrive in the mail. I wanted to be involved at the other end of the agricultural market, and this has taken me around the world. Fruit is my favorite food and I do not want to be in another industry."

Nelley wants to focus on forming mutually profitable relationships between retailers and the growers he represents. "I also will continue to develop market penetration for the phenomenal Jazz apple."

John Anderson and James Milne at Oppenheimer are two of Nelley's mentors. "I admire John's ability to find a solution and his readiness to share his time with me. I have worked for and alongside James Milne at

the Oppenheimer Group for over 15 years and enjoy his energy.”



MARK E. PETERSEN, 40
General Manager
CH Robinson Worldwide
Eden Prairie, MN

Petersen is a senior manager within the CHRW organization and responsible for one of its largest produce sourcing divisions, corporate procurement and distribution services (CPDS). He is responsible for shaping the way the company transacts business in the produce industry and for creating the structural framework that is now the model for all divisions and transportation departments within the produce division as a collective whole. He is known for challenging the status quo and not accepting the statement “That’s the way it’s always been done.”

Throughout his 16-year produce career, Petersen has turned challenges into opportunities. He has often demonstrated effective leadership by looking to diversify his business into segments designed to provide service and value to customers and vendors.

An encouraging mentor, he has contributed to many CHRW employee success stories. He was a member of the United Fresh Leadership Program Class 12. “This program is made up of great people and great content,” he says. “I was very fortunate to be involved and have appreciated a great deal what I learned and the people I had the opportunity to interact with.”

He has been a sitting board member of the American Trucking Association (ATA) Agricultural Transporters for four years, working to provide greater visibility to produce transportation; most ATA members have been in the livestock hauling or raw ingredients hauling sector. He has made positive change and reviewed contracts and legislation to ensure the produce haulers’ voice is heard within the transportation industry. Petersen is also on the Council for Supply Chain Management and the Culture Club at CPDS.

He sees produce as an industry that has a great history but really needs to change and adapt to a new way of doing business. “Specifically, we need this in the transportation sector. This is a challenge and an inspiration to me in because it’s an opportunity to make a difference.”

He wants to continue to network, communicate, interact, execute and actively drive positive change. “It’s a benefit to the industry, as well as my company, and it’s something we must do because it’s the right thing to do. I would like to see the supply chain reviewed as to terms, conditions and accountabilities of the parties. I want to see where things are outdated and lobby the parties involved to make the changes necessary to ensure long-term sustainability of the movement of our goods.”

Jim Lemke of C.H. Robinson, and Bob Fair, now retired from C.H. Robinson, are mentors. “Jim Lemke has always accepted and encouraged people to challenge the system, to be open to ideas other than his own or the industry’s and to foster and promote positive change. I have always appreciated the mentorship of my old manager from when I started with CH Robinson, Bob Fair, who really taught me additional business ethics and about doing the right thing, promoting your people, accepting responsibility and the value of teamwork.”



ROBERT SCHUELLER, 34
Director of Public Relations
Melissa’s/World Variety Produce, Inc.
Vernon, CA

Schueller has been the voice/spokesman for Melissa’s for the past 10 years and has been quoted in leading consumer publications, including the *Washington Post*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Orange County Register*, *New York Times*, *Kansas City Star*, *Savueur* magazine and *Cooking Light* magazine,

and in leading trade publications such as *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, *Progressive Grocer*, *Grocery Headquarter*, *The Produce News* and *The Packer*.

Schueller is frequently asked to present at leading food and produce trade industry conferences including PMA, United Fresh, FPFC, Culinary Institute of America (St. Helena) and the National Association of the Specialty Food Trade (NASFT) Fancy Food Show.

He creates and writes a significant amount of Melissa’s marketing strategy, including selling tools, presentations, Web site and newsletters. He was a co-creator of the *Melissa’s Great Book of Produce* published in 2006. He is currently working as co-creator on a “produce book No. 2” that will be published in 2010.

He takes an active role in FPFC (subcommittee and past board member), PBH (subcommittee) and PMA (subcommittee).

Food is his inspiration. “I love to eat and cook,” he says. “Who wouldn’t want to work in this industry? I look at the produce industry as the ‘health’ industry. No other segment of the food industry has so many different varieties of items. Almost everyday, something new comes into season and that is what makes it so exciting, too!”

His main challenge is getting America to eat more produce. “Eating different varieties of produce and trying something outside their comfort zone can be difficult for many. Ethnic restaurants and the media play an important role in inspiring and educating America to try all these different varieties of produce available to us.”

He wants to continue to build the Melissa’s brand. “It’s more than just my job — it’s an adventure. I will also continue to introduce new, exciting varieties of produce to the United States. Melissa’s continues to scratch the surface of a whole new world of varieties day after day.”

Schueller also wants to educate the press and consumers. “I will keep the trade and consumer media updated on current issues and trends in the produce and food industry. I will also continue to seek out creative ways to educate America on the world of produce in America today. If America only knew the exciting world of produce, it would look at produce more importantly — it is coming!”

Schueller credits Joe Hernandez, Jimmy Hernandez and Bill Schneider of Melissa’s for mentoring him in marketing, media and public relations and customer service. Bob Brown, Debra Cohen and Peter Steinbrick of Melissa’s were mentors in the areas of produce knowledge, public and customer relations, marketing and team building.



VALERIE SILL, 31
Strawberry Business Manager
Driscoll Strawberry Associates, Inc.
Watsonville, CA

Sill has been involved in the produce industry since 1999, when she graduated from UC Davis and joined Driscoll’s marketing department. She helped build its category management program, starting with just a vision and building it into the renowned program it is today. “Finishing my masters of

business management in 2006 has helped me to think about the business both strategically and with an out-of-the-box perspective,” she says.

In 2007, she became Driscoll’s strawberry business manager, a new product business management group that has full P&L responsibility in both the short-term and long-term. Areas of activity include strategic demand and supply planning, operations planning, grower communication and coordination, and sales planning. “I am grateful for the opportunity to take on new assignments within Driscoll’s that continue to challenge me and help us to craft our way into the future.”

She finds the most inspiring part about working in produce to be the personalities and individual skills throughout the industry. “It truly ‘takes a village’ when it comes to produce. For me, it’s both a humbling and inspiring experience to work side-by-side with such a diversity of talent. There’s always something urgent and important going on in produce. Although this can often make us anxious, it’s the inherent challenge the industry presents.”

A common career thread thus far has been her efforts to align the supply chain and she wants to continue this pursuit. “Regardless of my position or title, I will continue my path towards alignment. Although

this is something the produce industry hasn't been generally good at, it is important for all of our futures combined. Understanding each other's business, and creating plans producing positive solutions for all, is the future of produce."

Her most influential mentor is Chuck Sweeney of Driscoll's. "Chuck has taught me the art of perseverance — what he calls being courageous with your conviction. He also helped me learn about the produce trade in general, given his extensive experience in merchandising, retail operations and planning. I am grateful for his continued support and friendship to this day."

She also cites mentorship from Driscoll's customers. "In my role as senior category manager, I had the great fortune to work directly with some of the industry's very best retailers. As our partnership grew, I, too, was able to grow as I discovered more and more about the details of the produce retail strategy. I will carry this knowledge with me as my career path continues and, for this, I am grateful to our partnered customers."



JONATHAN K. STEFFY, 30
Retail & Foodservice Sales Manager,
Four Seasons Produce, Inc. (FSPI)
Ephrata, PA

Steffy leads an outstanding team of produce sales professionals (currently 13) with diverse experience and backgrounds. In the last three years, seven of his team members have been promoted, a credit to his management skills. He is responsible for considering new ways to approach old problems and current issues facing grocery stores and foodservice operators, brainstorming with customers and other associates, and forming produce sales programs. He developed the Organic Made Easy program as a turnkey program to help existing and potential customers understand how FSPI can help them successfully introduce fresh-packaged and value-added organic produce.

To add excitement to the retail customer base he put together a 12-month schedule of display contests for the FSPI independent retailer base. His Earth Week event to showcase sustainability initiatives celebrates Earth Day, highlights the new Sustainability and Energy Initiatives page on FSPI'S Web site, and explains that FSPI will donate 25¢ to the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture for each case of organic produce shipped during Earth Week.

He is a member of Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture and has participated in the Harold Lloyd Supermarket SMARTS program, the Penn State Management Development Creating Effective Sales Development Program and the World Innovation Forum in New York City. He has been a church youth group leader and junior high Sunday school teacher.

He gets his inspiration from his love for food. "What better way for me to stay involved with the most dynamic kind of food than to work with fresh produce and its changing seasons, variety, growing conditions, origins, tastes and, best of all, its people," he asks. "I am inspired by great people and great ideas and Four Seasons Produce and the produce industry have so many great ones. Building relationships that make everyone successful is important to me and to Four Seasons."

The perishable nature of fresh produce keeps him on his toes. "The commoditization of so many produce items challenges me to think about better ways to market, sell and merchandise it so price, while important, is not the only piece of the purchase equation. I also care about the environment and am moved to consider what can be done in the produce industry throughout the supply chain to make more positive impacts."

He looks forward to becoming even better in his current role and furthering his career at Four Seasons. "Learning and teaching are part of my personality. I want to continue to gain knowledge from my mentors, customers and vendor partners and to find opportunities to relate my experiences to other produce professionals for their development. I also want to be a part of helping the produce industry address sustainability, labor and consumption issues and find new formats to reach consumers."

He mentions Wendell Hahn and Ron Carkoski of FSPI as two of his mentors. "Wendell, a former Washington D.C. grocery store chain produce executive, has been my supervisor for most of my time at FSPI and has always given me latitude to be creative and the accountability coaching to be successful. Ron has been very involved in the broader produce industry through United and PMA, is a wealth of information and injects humor into the day-to-day. I seek to emulate his strengths in dynamic public speaking, organization and keeping things fun."

Bill Saussaman of Seminole Produce and Nelson Longenecker of FSPI have also influenced Steffy. "Bill trained me on retail and wholesale produce pricing strategy. Nelson introduced me to the wholesale produce business through an operations internship at FSPI. He has shown me how technology and data analysis can help guide strategy and execution."



JARROD SNIDER, 30
National Accounts Manager
Frontera Produce, LTD
Edinburg TX

Snider embodies the traits of a young, talented and dedicated leader with his work ethic and passion for excellence. His work on several Frontera initiatives continues to earn him respect as he strives to position his company and team for success.

His challenge has been to restructure and build a department to manage national accounts and he has implemented processes and procedures positioning Frontera's business to grow in excess of 30 percent. He spearheaded the change, allowing Frontera to achieve a level of execution that caused one of its largest customers to recognize Frontera as Vendor of the Quarter in the fourth quarter of 2007. Snider is very involved in promoting industry awareness and opportunities to aspiring college students and teaches classes at Texas A&M University.

He is an active alumnus of the United Fresh Leadership Program and participates annually at the Public Policy Conference in Washington D.C. In his community, he is involved in local civic events, including publishing a local newsletter to promote produce awareness and consumption.

He is motivated by the fast pace and constant challenges facing the produce industry. "I love the opportunity to make a positive impact on a global scale through helping provide solutions and a healthful food supply," he says. "Opportunities for leadership and growth, both within our organization and within the industry as a whole, are very exciting."

He plans to continue taking an active leadership role in the industry through its various boards and committees. "I want to increase the visibility and awareness of the industry and the opportunities available to young talent."

Dan'l Mackey Almy of DMA Solutions and Ken Nabel of Frontera are two of his mentors. "Dan'l's drive and enthusiasm have always motivated me and helped me realize no obstacle is too great. Ken's intensity and willingness to share his knowledge have really helped me expand my overall understanding of the industry and challenged me to always evaluate and improve the way I address issues and/or opportunities."

"I love the opportunity to make a positive impact on a global scale through helping provide solutions and a healthful food supply."

— Jarrod Snider



JAMIE STRACHAN, 35
President/CEO
Growers Express
Salinas, CA

Strachan's initial exposure to the Salinas agricultural scene was as a principal with Pacific Risk Management, where he advised the partners of Growers Express on financial matters such as workers' compensation, employee benefits, risk assessment and asset management. His ability to understand the needs of

the owners and develop tools to meet and optimize their needs led to him becoming interim general manager of Growers Express and then to president and CEO of this \$150 million company.

He sponsored a community program called Health Eating Lifestyle Principles (HELP), which was designed to educate school children and adults about eating right and exercising. Jamie has been featured in commercials as a HELP spokesperson to promote healthy recipes and healthy eating within the community. Growers Express worked with HELP to provide weekly health seminars within Growers Express and affiliated company offices for our employees.

Strachan was one of the founding board members of the California LGMA; he is currently vice chairman and serves on the executive committee and communication committee and currently. He has been instrumental in establishing the program guidelines, staffing, budget and direction for the LGMA which has quickly become the standard and model for Food Safety across the produce industry.

Under Jamie's leadership Growers Express has been investing and collaborating with top universities and testing laboratories in science and research relating to food-safety issues.

He believes consolidation in the industry is key to providing better, more efficient and more valuable services to customers long-term. Under his leadership and direction, the Capurro Partners recently joined Growers Express, which has successfully consolidated its customers, products, brands and sales forces with their own. The partners, employees, customers, products and production base have proven to be very complementary and the combination has been a huge success.

Strachan came from the Silicon Valley and was in the technology businesses prior to coming to the Salinas Valley over seven years ago. He brings a vision of how to leverage technology, science and marketing for Growers Express and the produce industry. Under his leadership Growers Express was the first shipper to implement the first fully integrated grower/shipper version of Microsoft Axapta with Hitachi Consulting. He has also led Growers Express to develop a revolutionary new tracking system called TrueTrac.

When he considers his mentors, he notes, "Woody Johnson [of Growers Express] has helped me understand the industry and dynamics. Every one of my employees and each of the owners are my mentors every day."



MIKE TIPTON, 37
Director of Produce & Floral Operations
K-VAT Food Stores, Inc.
Abingdon, VA

Tipton started his grocery career in 1987, bagging groceries and thinking he would be a computer technician. Then he caught the produce bug and became a part-time clerk during high school. He was promoted to produce manager six months before graduation and held the position for five years before becoming

district produce supervisor over 11 stores. He served as produce supervisor over three districts for seven years and then applied to be director of produce. Despite his youth, he was given the position, which he has held for six years. He has taken the foundation laid with the help of lots of good people and begun to move Food City produce to the next level in sales, merchandising and training associates.

Tipton is currently serving his first term on the Southeast Produce Council board of directors and has worked with different state departments of agriculture to help build their locally grown programs. He also works with local schools to educate young kids on eating healthfully and the benefits of eating produce. He strives to instill the importance of community education in K-VAT's produce managers. As a result, K-VAT has had a produce manager nominee in the United Fresh Produce Manager of the Year program since its inception and had the first Produce Manager of the Year award winner.

He is most proud of his family. He has been married for 18 years and has two daughters.

Educating people inspires him and the continuous change of the industry challenges him. "We are not just in the produce business but also the people business," he says. "Without investing in properly training and educating your associates and customers, you cannot expect your business to grow. This business is constant change. You have to be able to motivate and have a strong drive since you don't get a chance to reflect back on what you just accomplished before it's time to move on."

His goals relate to consumer education in produce. "I want to drive produce consumption and promote food safety. My goal is for customers to have confidence in the produce they buy."

Larry Harkleroad and Jesse Lewis of K-VAT are among his mentors. "Mr. Harkleroad instilled the importance of operating the freshest produce departments in town, as well as the importance of relationships with suppliers. Mr. Lewis has taught me the people side of the business — how important it is to take the time to listen to people and how you are only as good as the people who work for you."

Other mentors include Brian Gannon of Big Y, Steve Duello of Dierbergs and Paul Kneeland of Kings. "These are just some of the guys who shared their learning and success with me to help make me succeed in this business."



NICHOLE TOWELL, 32
Marketing Development Manager
Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc.
Oviedo, FL

Having grown up in the Salinas Valley, the produce industry has always been a part of Towell's life. "My father has always been employed in the Salinas Valley on the growing side of produce. My passion for fresh produce began early in my life," she says.

As sales account manager, she managed the top three accounts (in sales dollar volume) for her division. In less than two years, she helped grow sales to these three customers by 30 percent.

She was instrumental in embracing and bringing third-party Internet trading platforms, such as I-Tradenetwork and Food Link Online, and direct EDI technology to Duda. E-commerce management is still part of her daily duties and tasks; over the past five years Duda's e-commerce sales have grown from 8 percent to over 50 percent of sales revenue. She helped create a business intelligence reporting and planning model and about four years ago helped develop Duda's Sharepoint site, which allows collaboration across the company, supporting open communication among employees across geographic and organizational boundaries.

Towell developed a successful tradeshow program that maximizes Duda's ROI and drives company growth. She is involved in PMA, CPMA, United Fresh, Southeast Produce Council and the New England Produce Council (NEPC). She is a Sigma Alpha Alumna (Professional Women in Agriculture), a member of California Women in Agriculture, a Monterey County Fair volunteer and she participates in the Salinas Chamber of Commerce's Salute to Agriculture Marketing Committee. She is a Food and Culinary Practice Group member of the American Dietetic Association and is involved with the Florida Farm Bureau, National Association of Professional Women and Saint Rita Catholic Church.

The constant change in the industry challenges and inspires her. "There are no two days the same when dealing with Mother Nature and

while daunting at times, the fast pace of the industry piques my interest," she says. "The biggest challenges come from keeping in front of growing consumer trends and aligning our products to meet those needs. Healthful, convenient, safe food products are a given for a market-driven company in our industry. I don't take this lightly and will continue to work diligently, pressing forward to help create consumer-minded convenient, fresh, healthful products easing the public health crisis in our American culture."

She wants to continue educating consumers and driving consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. "American consumers need to understand our industry is working diligently to ensure the safety of fresh produce. Food safety is imperative to the economic viability of this industry and we must convey it is priority No. 1. Continuing to promote teamwork in the industry to find solutions and help create consistent consumer messaging to reassure the public of our industry's pledge to safe food products is a lofty goal but one I will work toward."

Her father, Bill Sullivan, a farmer in the Salinas Valley, has influenced her by imparting the ethics of hard work and determination, the importance of constant education, the virtue of patience and the importance of caring. "Allowing me to follow my dreams and providing solid support throughout my life fostered my self esteem and helped me to develop personally and professionally."

Mark Bassetti of Duda is another mentor. "Mark has taught me a lot about the industry over the past eight years but more importantly has shared an entrepreneurial spirit driving his unvarying commitment to the fresh produce industry. His leadership skills foster cooperation and teamwork and allow all members of the team to grow and prosper while achieving outstanding results."

Towell also mentions Lisa McNeece of Grimmway, Lorrie Koster of Mann Packing, Jen Ju Wilder of Coast Produce, Twila York of Duda and Dan'l Mackey Almy of DMA Solutions as consummate professional women whom she admires as leaders within the industry.

"These three gentlemen played a key role in my involvement in the produce industry at different times. Their quest for innovation on product development, processing ideas and the development of people and talent is what made me admire them."



DORN WENNINGER, 39
Vice President International
S. Katzman Produce
Bronx, NY

Wenninger is an international produce veteran who has spent his entire professional life in the produce industry. His work has taken him to 76 countries and six continents; he spent 12 years living abroad in London, England; Medellin, Colombia; San Jose, Costa Rica; Antwerp, Belgium; and Castries,

St. Lucia. He has worked in all functional areas of produce, including farming, logistics, port operations, breeding, sales, category management and general management.

Although he has been at Katzman for only a few months, he has already contributed significantly to the company. He successfully redesigned its Web site and established a new consumer brand, Bloom Fresh, which has just been launched with several direct suppliers. He has established international sales to Istanbul and the United Kingdom, and increased the export business to Bermuda. He secured the exclusive U.S. distribution of Australian finger limes from the only producer with commercial volume in the world, with the result that Katzman now sells to some of the top restaurants in New York City.

Wenninger has already set up direct sourcing from the farm to the supermarket of French beans, sugar snaps and snow peas, as well as fresh herbs from Guatemala, and has traveled and set up business relationships in Germany, Bermuda, Mexico and Guatemala. He was invited to speak to the ownership and senior management team of Stew Leonard's Supermarkets at its annual strategic planning meeting on how to drive consumer confidence in produce.

He was the first management development associate at Chiquita Brands International in 1992. He worked with the human resources department to establish the Global Management Development Program for Chiquita. He climbed the leadership ladder from logistics manager to farm manager to chief administrative officer (CAO) of Chiquita Colombia; as CAO he was responsible for a \$100-million operating budget at Chiquita's low cost producing banana division.

In 2001 he was hired by Driscoll's as vice president of European business to create and execute a European business. He grew its export business by a factor of 10. He established new production in Portugal and was a founding member of Luso Morango, a Portuguese berry producer cooperative. He set up a sales office in Holland and took the lead in negotiating a joint venture in Europe with Driscoll's two European partners (KG in the United Kingdom and Alconera in Spain).

Wenninger sits on the international board of directors of Amigos de las Americas, a non-profit organization that sends more than 800 young U.S. volunteers to work in Central and South America during the summer. Chairman of its business plan committee and strategic growth coordinating council, he was the keynote speaker at this year's New York City fund-raising event.

The dynamic nature of the produce business inspires him. "Being in produce is about as international, complex and competitive as it gets," he says. "It's impressive how leadership, hard work and drive are sufficient to drive success. I'm impressed how new ventures with these characteristics are capable of making quick inroads, even against entrenched incumbents. It's a constant challenge to maintain one's competitive position. At Katzman Produce, we continue to re-invent our competitive advantages as the market changes to maintain our leadership position."

Two industry challenges he cites are the rising costs of inputs and the competitive selling environment. "We are constantly challenged on how to lower the delivered cost to our customers in an environment where production and logistics costs are rising. Through creative solutions and



MIGUEL USABIAGA, 38
Vice President
Comercializadora GAB SA de CV
Cortazar, Guanajuato, Mexico

Usabiaga is responsible for developing a fully integrated produce, packing and distribution system for retail and foodservice customers in Mexico and developing a worldwide-recognized label. He has led the restructuring of U.S. sales for his company and led the food-safety initiative in Mexico, develop-

ing standards for the Mexican produce industry. He is also a key player in leading a social responsibility program, helping the communities around farms with infrastructure projects and scholarship programs.

Handling more than 96 agricultural products in both domestic and overseas markets, Usabiaga is known for his dedication and hard work and has earned the accounts of such multinational companies as McDonalds and KFC. Helping to pull his family's company out of turmoil in the mid-1990s, he successfully developed and built the Mr. Lucky brand into a name known now around the world."

He is inspired by the dynamics of this changing industry and being able to make a difference. "You have to innovate all the time to stay ahead," he states. "You have to work with people to make things happen. People and the marketplace are always changing, so working in an ever-changing environment keeps me challenged all the time. The way someone can make a difference in the community inspires me to work in the produce industry."

His goals are to make his company the leader in service and innovation for international fresh produce sales. "I want to be able to trickle success down to the community and my team members. My other goal, as it relates to the industry, is to be able to finalize the standardization for food safety, labeling and packaging worldwide."

Javier Usabiaga of Empacadora GAB, Tom Church of Church Brothers and Don Christopher of Christopher Ranch are three of his mentors.

eliminating non-value-added segments of the supply chain, we're actively building sustainable relationships from the field to the supermarket."

He mentions Stephen Katzman as a true leader and mentor. "He has been responsible for significantly growing his business over the years. He is willing to look at his business in new ways and is forward thinking about what he needs to do to maintain his leadership position."

He also credits Miles Reiter of Driscoll's as a mentor. "Miles has an incredible focus and dedication to the consumer. His relentless pursuit of quality has been a driving force in Driscoll's success and has served me as an example for future endeavors. He's also a real example of leading a large organization but also maintaining a healthy balance of family, friends and life enjoyment. For me, Miles is one of the great produce leaders in America, and I was lucky to have worked for him for six years."

Another mentor is Charles 'Buck' Kaiser at Chiquita. "Buck has spent his entire adult life working internationally. Like me, he got his start doing volunteer work. Buck taught me about the fanatical attention to detail and operations as a means to drive for superior, predictable results. He's not afraid to look at how he and his operations need to improve, and he leads by example."



JACKSON WOODWARD, 37
CEO/President
Horton Fruit Co.
Louisville, KY

Woodward is a staunch supporter of local and family farms. He has been active in promoting Kentucky farmers in a way that enables them to have a sustainable business.

He participated in the United Fresh Leadership Program and is active with several inner city schools helping with healthful eating and mentoring. He also has worked with a new private boarding school for at-risk inner city African-American boys.

The business of providing healthful food inspires him. "I find the industry fulfilling because we provide healthful food," he says. "As a business, it is very fast paced and always changing, which certainly provides many challenges. The timing of this business with regards to both service and quality is so crucial that most of my challenges revolve around those issues. Our growers have different issues than our packing plant and than our trucking entity. Keeping these entities in harmony is mandatory."

He would like to get as involved as possible in growing the industry and his business. "I also feel supporting local family farms is important. As land and natural resources become scarcer, farmers will need to have sustainable business models in order to survive or to continue choosing fruits and vegetables as a profitable crop."

Al Horton is his mentor in the produce business. "I came to work for Horton Fruit out of graduate school. I have known Mr. Horton since I was 18 and was best friends with his now deceased son. Mr. Horton has grown up in the produce business and is a man of integrity."



MISTY DAWN YSASI, 32
Buyer
Kroger Co.
Cincinnati, OH

Starting her produce career as an inspector, Ysasi toured growing fields and packing facilities. Working from McAllen, TX, and also covering Colorado in certain seasons, she is responsible for making sure all vendors follow Kroger food-safety requirements. Prior to Kroger centralizing transportation,

she was also in charge of logistics in the McAllen office and for transportation of the loads procured out of South America, Mexico, Texas, New Mexico and Colorado. In her current buying position, she is the

category manager of watermelons, pumpkins, Colorado vegetables, Colorado stone fruit, new categories, Hispanic items, organics and local "homegrown" products.

The organic items available from these areas are limited, but several Kroger divisions have benefited from her ability to seek these items out. The local homegrown program not only supports Texas growers but also contributes to Kroger's effort to reduce its carbon footprint. The program helps cut down on freight and puts a fresher product on the shelves. Ysasi has been able to offer a variety of items with lower freight costs, support local growers, contribute to building the organics category and play a part in saving the planet.

She has attended training in Virginia for USDA Produce Inspection and the PMA Leadership Symposium in Dallas in 2007.

For the past five years, she has been involved with the Brown Bag Challenge, a non-profit organization providing hot meals for the homeless of Corpus Christi, TX. It stuffs brown paper sacks with sanitary items and energy foods for the homeless, gives information on where to seek help, shelter and showers, and collects coats, toys, gloves, blankets and socks. She donates mixed produce to the men, women and children the organization serves. She has worked with the Texas A&M Hispanic Alumni group, which mentors high school seniors and parents of students who have been accepted to Texas A&M.

Her main source of inspiration is working for a company celebrating 125 years of servicing and satisfying customers. "Kroger has evolved with the changing demands and standards and has raised the bar when it comes to quality," she relates. "I'm proud to be part of an organization that is as large as it is yet still makes me feel it is behind me every step of the way. The company supports my every effort in growth as a leader and encourages me to continue building my skills. It's extremely inspiring when you feel your company is constantly giving you the thumbs-up."

Her biggest challenge in the produce industry is its unpredictability. "As a buyer, I'm keeping tabs on several commodities coming from several areas at certain times of the year. Weather can be my best friend and my biggest enemy. Other challenges I have faced include logistic issues, consumer concerns over food safety or company environmental responsibility, and availability of new, local or organic products."

She is filled with ideas for environmental sustainability, category growth and grocery retail trends and would love to get involved in all aspects of the industry. "My passion drives me and wherever this roller-coaster ride takes me. Be it Kroger or somewhere else, I'm going to be on top of the industry trends, food safety, customer needs and demands, and moving my company to the top of the leader boards."

Her mentors are her father, who spent 20 years in the grocery retail business, and her current boss, Jerry Kachtik. "My father has been a big influence and inspiration to my produce career. Jerry continually teaches me everyday about the twists and turns to expect from the industry, which will eventually come full circle. From them I have learned how all my hard work pays off in the end and how being a leader doesn't only involve the workplace."

Call for 2009 Nominees!

40 Under Forty is an annual feature of
PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine.

If you would like to nominate a young leader
for next year's edition, please visit
www.producebusiness.com
or fax your nomination to
561-994-1610.

Next year's nominees must be under the age
of 40 as of March 1, 2009
(born after March 1, 1969).



It's Time to Plan!

Fruits & Veggies—More Matters® Month will be here before you know it, but there is still plenty of time to plan your September promotions and activities. We're here to help!

Produce for Better Health Foundation is reminding you that now is the perfect time to plan your ads, promotions, and in-store activities to support this annual event. You can find or order everything from ad copy to posters, on our website or in our online catalog. Taking care of all your Fruits & Veggies—More Matters® Month needs is only a couple of clicks away.

You have plenty of things to worry about, right? Planning your Fruits & Veggies—More Matters Month promotions doesn't have to be one of them. So, give us a call or browse our website today!

Check out these useful tools created for retailers' Fruits & Veggies—More Matters Month marketing activities.

Advertising toolkits:

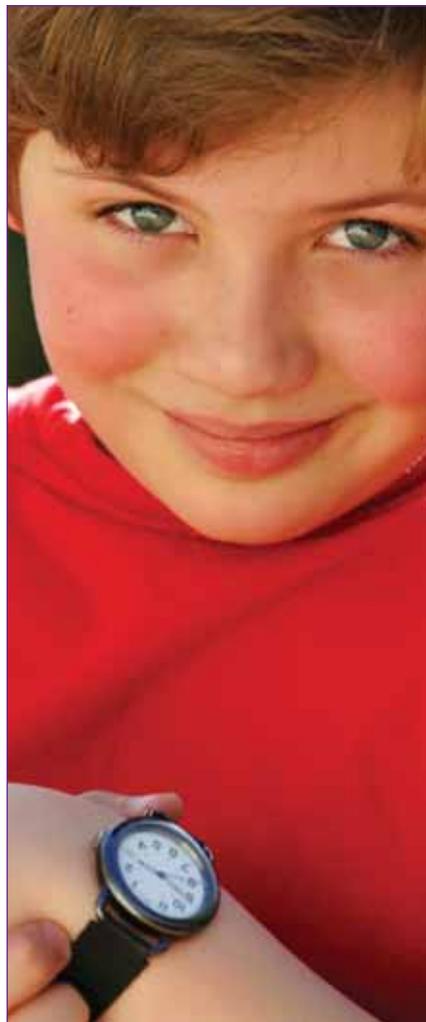
Licensed retailers have access to a variety of advertising tools:

- Ad slicks and graphics
- Radio scripts (great for in-store radio)
- Sign templates
- Consumer columns
- Recipe cards
- Customizable leaflets



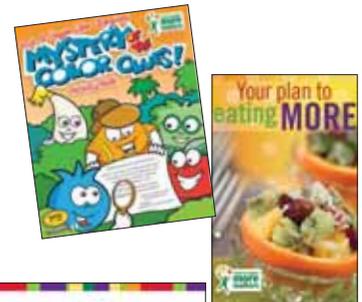
To access these advertising tools, go to the PBH website retail page, <http://www.pbhfoundation.org/retail/partners/retailers/>, and click the "Members Enter" button. Enter your username and password and download whatever you need.

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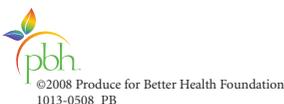
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Put Sizzle In Summer Merchandising

Keep summer produce sales soaring with exceptional promotions.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

Turn up the heat on produce sales this summer. While June, July and August offer only two holidays to build sales around, the entire season is centered around grilling, light meals and even no-cook meals, providing plenty of opportunities to sell fresh produce.

Take advantage of summer cuisine themes to promote the bounty of just-picked domestic and imported produce. By doing so, you can maintain the produce department's bottom line in the face of competition from farm-stand and home-grown product.

FATHER'S DAY

June 15

"Father's Day is a big barbecue promotion," explains Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc., Los Angeles, CA. "Fathers do the cooking and the highlight is foods that can go on the grill. For produce, this means vegetables, such as onions, potatoes, mushrooms and asparagus. Fruit is finding its way on the grill, too, especially pineapple."

Peppers are popular for grilling, adds Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's, Inc., Los Alamitos, CA. "Bell peppers, poblanos, and long red and yellow sweet-tooth peppers are great to grill. So is eggplant. Pearl and boiler onions are ideal for making shish kabobs."

Retailers should also consider special promotions for Flag Day – June 14 – the day before Father's Day this

year. "Crepes filled with strawberries, blueberries and whipped cream are a popular way to celebrate this holiday," suggests Caplan. "While many people think of berries when it comes to crepes, soft summer fruits like peaches and nectarines also work well."

FOURTH OF JULY

July 4

Frieda's markets red-, yellow- and purple-skinned potatoes packaged in custom mesh bags and labeled as Star Spangled Spuds. "It's a pack we introduced last season," notes Caplan. "The header contains a recipe for potato salad made with parsley and crumbled blue cheese."

Red pears are the first of the season coming out of California, notes Chris Zanobini, executive director of the California Pear Advisory Board (CPAB), Sacramento, CA. "Timing this year is a little earlier than average. That means we'll definitely have red pears available for Fourth of July promotions, at least for retailers west of the Mississippi."

Blueberries are one of the most popular fruits for Fourth of July promotions due to their color and availability. Mike Klackle, vice president of berry sales at Curry & Co., Brooks, OR, states, "Blueberries feature prominently in red, white and blue Fourth of July-theme ads."

"The abundance of domestic berries picks up in early June coming from the Southeast and California. Growing areas in New Jersey, Michigan and the Northwest kick in at the end of June and throughout July," he adds.

Jim Grabowski, marketing manager, Well-Pict Berries, Watsonville, CA, says berries, particularly strawberries and raspberries, tend to produce a big ring for the produce department during summer, particularly around the Fourth of July. "Retailers should incorporate the entire berry patch – strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries – into their Fourth of July promotions. They can work with the red, white and blue concept, maybe add some whipped cream for the white."

Retailers could also promote a flag cake kit offering strawberries, blueberries, whipped topping and cakes from their bakery or freezer department, suggests Cindy Jewell, director of marketing for California Giant, Inc., Oxnard, CA. "Promotions could also focus on large-sized packs of



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strawberries and other berries for family picnics and barbecues typical for this holiday."

Stephanie Hilton, director of marketing for Beach Street Farms, Watsonville, CA, agrees, adding, "Strawberries dominate the berry category. Plus [blueberry, raspberry and blackberry] availability has increased, calling for a berry patch approach [to merchandising]."

Creative display techniques include ribbons of color created with strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries, reports California Giant's Jewell. "Retailers can promote one berry type on a regular basis while gaining add-on sales of other berries in the display at regular pricing."

"Retailers should not miss this opportunity for incremental sales by maintaining their focus on strawberries as a key part of the berry patch strategy into early August," recommends Valerie Sill, strawberry business manager for Driscoll Strawberry Associates, Watsonville, CA. "Opportunities for promotion include using large-package types, such as the 2-pound and 4-pound, and implementing multiple strategies such as three for \$5 promotions. This will encourage a high per-capita consumption, resulting in stronger sales."

Demand-building is essential, notes Robert Verloop, vice president of marketing for Naturipe Farms, Salinas, CA, "especially with acreage for California strawberries on the rise."

Think up merchandising strategies that incorporate a summertime message or usage occasions that focus on light, healthful eating — everything from appetizers to aperitifs, advises Verloop. "Display berries with fresh-cut fruit for a fast, custom add-in, for example, or with bagged salads or cereal. We ran a promotion in April and May that offered a \$1 IRC [instant redeemable coupon] for the purchase of a box of Smart Start cereal and 4.4-ounce clamshell of blueberries. We're looking at doing something similar again."

FRUITS OF SUMMER

The California cherry crop is forecast slightly down from last year, a function of this being an alternate bearing year, explains Jim Culbertson, executive manager of the California Cherry Advisory Board (CCAB), Lodi, CA. "The real promotional volume comes in the last week of May and first three weeks of June. During this time, cherries are most often used as an enticement — a loss leader — in front-page retail ads. Cherries are one of the last truly seasonal items in the produce department. Since they freeze well, some retailers use signage suggesting consumers stock up and freeze cherries before they become unavailable. If pitted before frozen, it's easy to throw them into cakes and make smoothies."

Tree fruit — peaches, plums, nectarines and plumcots — is a much-anticipated summer produce category. "There use to be a huge peak in production in August," explains Don Goforth, director of marketing for Family Tree Farms, Reedley, CA. "We've leveled out supply and now there

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Summer Peaches Star At Retail

Locally grown Texas peaches are a big draw for consumers who shop Rice Epicurean Markets, an 8-store chain based in Houston, TX. "We build a big, 8- to 20-foot display in the front of the store and advertise the peaches every week or every other week while available from May through July," reports Mark Luchak, director of produce and floral. "The peaches are tree ripe, picked one day and in the store the next. They're juicy and have great flavor and high sugars."

Taste testing has long been a part of the in-store promotion. "We'll be bringing in one of our local growers to talk to consumers and sample product," Luchak notes.

The height of the tree fruit season will produce peaches from Texas, California and South Carolina. "We'll carry white and yellow flesh," he adds. "It's an exciting time when all the major growing areas are in the market — and we capitalize on that."

Metropolitan Markets, a 5-store chain based in Seattle, WA, hosts its annual Peach-O-Rama promotion from the last week in July through the third week in August. "We can't compete with the buy guys on price, so we try to differentiate ourselves," explains Ed Laster, produce specialist. "Peach-O-Rama is now 12 years old and so well known that customers 50 miles away call ahead to be sure fruit is available."

Organic peaches are sourced from California and conventional peaches from Washington. "Most commercial peaches have a brix level of 12 or under, while Peach-O-Rama peaches have a brix level of 13 or higher," notes Laster. The peaches are displayed in the front lobby of each store, packed in single-layer boxes, on two to three Euro tables. A 30-foot banner hangs overhead announcing the Peach-O-Rama promotion. At the same time, in-store chefs regularly whip up peach creations for taste sampling and provide the recipes to consumers. Last year, these recipes included Summer Peach Relish, Pork Tenderloin with Peach Chutney and Peach Kuchen. **pb**

excitement," he advises. "Last year, we worked with a retailer last year that ran a huge, white-flesh promotion. It moved product to a huge display in the front of the store. Same store sales tripled."

"Plumcots have brix so high on the refractometer they've become consumer favorites," notes Melissa's Schueller. "Many retailers display and promote a variety to gain larger, incremental sales."

Frieda's Caplan agrees, adding, "Donut peaches are available out of California in July and Washington in August. I've seen retailers build a little mini display of them in the middle of their commodity tree fruit. They're a real attention-grabber."

Catch the eye of consumers "with secondary displays or creative cross merchandising," suggests Goforth. "Place a box of ready-to-eat peaches by the checkout. Also, build a homemade ice cream display with fruit, salt, cream and a recipe."

California's Bartlett pears come on strong at the beginning of July. "We push that July and August time frame," notes CPAB's Zanobini. "That first of the domestic season positioning is critical."

Promotional pricing always makes an impact, Zanobini adds. "So does a full-category display of pears, good positioning and good quality. With Bartletts, which turn from green to yellow as they ripen, it's advantageous to display them at different stages — green, almost ripe, and ripe and ready to eat. Last year, a major retail chain increased the variety in its displays — both by pear type and ripeness stage — and saw a significant sales

are no real big highs or lows. June, July and August are all good months to promote.

"Rather than always placing on ad the same

old thing such as traditional yellow-fleshed peaches or nectarines, do a plumcot ad or a white fleshed ad to break the monotony and add some



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Reader Service # 8

increase as a result."

Steve Woodyear-Smith, kiwifruit category director, Zespri International, Ltd., Auckland, New Zealand, expects to see increases in all three Zespri varieties; green, gold and green organic. "The growing season has produced a heavy crop with a larger standard fruit size overall than last year, when the sizes, especially green, tended on the small side. One exciting addition to the lineup this year is gold organic, which will be available on a limited basis in some sizes to those retailers who are interested in setting up a program. The increasing popularity of the tropical-sweet flavor of gold, combined with the climbing demand for organics, gives retailers the ability to appeal to a wider variety of consumers.

"June will be an excellent month for kiwi promotions as volumes will be coming into full swing," he adds.

"Kiwifruit goes great with many other popular summer fruits, so consider building a display next to strawberries or peaches," adds Karen Brux, Zespri's business development manager for North America. "It's a great nutrition, taste and color boost to any fruit salad. With the Olympics happening this summer, how about a special *Go for the Gold* promotion for Zespri gold kiwifruit?"

Grapes are a perfect on-the-go snack food, says Cindy Plummer, domestic trade manager for California Table Grape Commission (CTGC), Fresno, CA. "Research conducted in 2006 by the Perishables Group [W. Dundee, IL] indicates front-page grape ads generated triple the volume and dollar lift of back page ads from May to August."

Spice up displays with that something different, suggests Melissa's Schueller. "Champagne grapes or red and green muscato grapes offer something in addition to the commodity product."

Mel Nass, owner of Venture Vineyards, Lodi, NY, notes, "We'll get into the market sooner this year with Concord grapes. Last year, a freeze at Easter wiped out the Arkansas crop that typically comes in the second week of August. The Concord is a unique grape. Its aroma pulls consumers into the display."

When Concord grapes are cross-merchandised with Thompson or Crimson seedless, three things can happen, Nass notes. "Since ConCORDS sell for a higher price than regular California grapes, consumers see the comparison and buy twice as much of the lower-priced California varieties, or they can say they want premium grapes, buy the ConCORDS and the retailer gets an incremental ring."

GRILLING SEASON

People are gravitating toward grilling. According to the 19th Annual Weber GrillWatch survey commissioned by Weber-Stephen Products Co., Palatine, IL, 31 percent of American grill owners are grilling more than they did a year ago because they're trying to eat more healthfully. More than one-third of survey respondents reported they are grilling leaner meats (39 percent), more vegeta-

Locally Grown Produce A Hit With Consumers

Jungle Jim's International Market, Inc., of Fairfield, OH, a single unit retailer known for its produce, hangs signs that read *Ohio Grown* over displays of fresh fruits and vegetables. "During the summer, we get a lot of corn, beans and melons in from the Amish farmers in the area," reports Dave Brossert, general manager for produce and floral. "It's all put in the No. 1 merchandising positions — on the in-and-out tables — and we sign it so consumers know it's something special and something they'd better buy now because it might not be available next week."

In June, trucks from nearby farms will deliver ultra-fresh loads of vegetables, fruits or berries that were picked earlier in the day to the 70 stores owned by Wegmans Food Markets, Inc., based in Rochester, NY. This produce will be displayed and merchandised as part of the chain's *Homegrown Program*, a partnership with nearly 800 local growers it has cultivated over decades. "Local growers have a market for their fruits and vegetables they can depend on," explains Kelly Schoeneck, produce group manager. "Several sell their entire harvest to Wegmans."

Produce managers in each store are in contact with growers daily about which crops will be ready, in order to place orders that are delivered by noon the following day. "Consumers feel good about supporting growers who live and work nearby. They feel that it helps the entire community prosper, and it does," explains Schoeneck.

Corn is probably the most popular *Homegrown* crop, Schoeneck says, "but strawberries, blueberries, peaches, melons and heirloom tomatoes are also eagerly awaited and snapped up. Some local growers take special pride in offering new or unusual varieties, like a purple or orange cauliflower or baby vegetable-size sweet peppers."

At Acme Markets, a 134-store chain based in Malvern, PA, and owned by Supervalu, based in Eden Prairie, MN, consumers love to buy locally grown produce, notes Jay Schneider, produce assistant sales manager for the eastern division. "Each August we'll run a full-page locally grown ad in our coupon book that features photos of several local farmers. At the same time, we'll build 4- to 6- or 8-foot displays of locally grown produce in the front of our stores and sign it as such."

Farmer's markets are popular and traditionally draw customers away from supermarkets during the summer. However, Schneider states, "We've found that carrying a large selection of locally grown items and displaying them in a farm-market theme is convenient for time-starved consumers. After all, it makes us a one-stop shop, and they can still enjoy purchasing fresh locally grown fruits and vegetables."

pb

bles (38 percent), more poultry (34 percent) and more fish (22 percent) than they did a year ago. Six percent are grilling more meat substitutes, such as veggie burgers and tofu, and 5 percent are grilling more fruit. Women are more likely than men to grill more vegetables (43 percent versus 33 percent) and more fruit (7 percent versus 4 percent). The implications for the produce department are huge.

Alan Kleinman, sales manager for Gourmet's Finest, Kennett Square, PA, says, "Portobello mushrooms are a big grill feature. They're a great meat substitute for vegetarians and they go well with steak. In fact, portobellos, as well as the white and brown mushrooms, are great to cross-merchandise in the meat department."

Create a sweet corn display in the meat department, advises Nichole Towell, marketing manager for Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc., Oviedo, FL. "This should tie into most retailers grill promotions for the summer months and provide a great opportunity for consumers to buy sweet corn when they come in to buy meat for grilling at their summer get-togethers."

"Share recipes on how to grill corn in the husks. Chef demonstrations always create excitement for products," she adds.

Supersweet corn is harvested in Georgia and Carolina in June, in the Carolinas in July and in

northern Colorado, New Jersey and New York in July and August, according to Jason Stemm, spokesman for the Fresh Supersweet Corn Council, Maitland, FL. "Corn is often advertised as a loss leader in front-page supermarket ads during the summer. You'll see blowout pricing of five ears for \$1 or 10 ears for \$2."

Kiwifruit is a great fit for grill-outs or barbecues, reports Brux. "Include a display of green or gold kiwifruit, along with recipes for kiwifruit salsa, guacamole or fruit kebabs. Green kiwifruit is a great meat tenderizer, so some retailers have included it in the meat counter."

Frieda's Caplan recommends, "Just as some retailers feature a variety item of the week or month, during the summer, it's a wonderful idea to promote a grill item of the week."

LIGHT AND EASY DOES IT

Sarah Wangler, marketing manager, Green Giant Fresh/The Sholl Group II, Inc., Eden Prairie, MN, notes, "Stir-fry vegetable mixes are a fast and easy way for consumers to have a meal on the table in less than 15 minutes without having to heat up the kitchen.

"The best place to merchandise these is in the kit or meal solution area with salads," she adds. "Or, they can be cross-merchandised in the meat department since any type of meat or poultry can

Summer's Bounty On Promotion

Cherries are the No. 1 impulse buy of the summer, reports Mike McGuire, director of produce at DeMoulas/Market Basket, a 60-store chain based in Tewksbury, MA. "They're the No. 1 contributor to produce department sales when they're available. We'll build big, front-of-the-store displays, group cherries with other tree fruit and hang a banner over top. We'll also make cherries a front-page ad feature."

Beyond cherries, McGuire points out, "We'll rotate ads all summer long that highlight what's fresh, newly available and seasonal. That could be tree fruit, melons, grapes, tomatoes, you name it."

Jungle Jim's International Market, Inc, a single unit retailer known for its produce in Fairfield, OH, runs a big promotion on corn each summer. The corn is displayed in large bins in its 1-acre produce department. "Second to strawberries, fresh sweet corn is one of our biggest early summer items," notes Dave Brossert, general manager for produce and floral. "We set up plastic garbage bins next to the display so consumers can shuck their own corn. About 90 percent of our consumers like to shuck on the spot. In fact, we've had up to 40 to 50 consumers shucking at once during peak season." **pb**

be added to make a customized meal."

Summer is an active time for families, notes Towell. "Kids are out of school and the warm weather entices people to host barbeques, attend picnics and take trips to the beach. Convenient, fresh, healthful produce needs to fit easily into this active lifestyle. Some ideas to consider include promoting different fruits and vegetables every week, keeping the department fresh with rotating promotions and offering fresh ideas to keep customers in the produce department in a treasure hunt-type atmosphere.

"Cross-merchandising shares customer excitement throughout the store and helps showcase new ways to utilize the same products," she explains. "Consider bringing cheese-based dips or spreads to display in the produce department next to fresh-cut vegetables. Be sure to provide recipes and tasting events centered on your theme." **pb**

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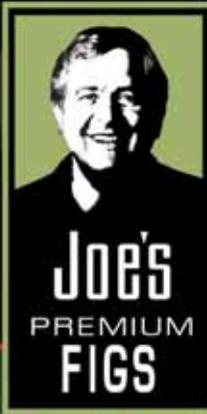
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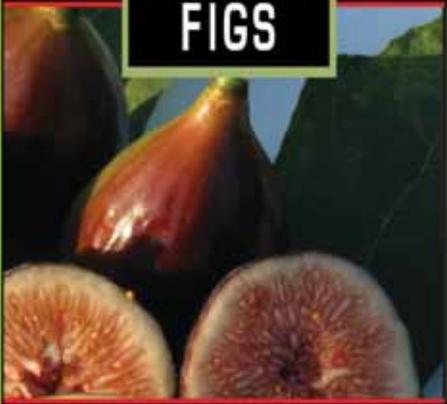
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Reader Service #56

Garden State Well Positioned For Diverse Supply Outlet

New Jersey growers produce product out of small acreage and short production periods.

BY DUANE CRAIG

When you talk to growers, shippers, distributors and others in the New Jersey produce chain, you get a wealth of reasons why the Garden State's produce is great.

New Jersey's soil and weather conditions allow local growers to produce a diverse list of commodities, according to Bill Nardelli, president of Nardelli Brothers, Inc., Cedarville, NJ.

Jeff Shilling, vice president of procurement for RLB Food Distributors, LP, West Caldwell, NJ, agrees, adding, "In the southern part of the state, the sandy soil gets excellent drainage, making for healthier plants. The climate conditions produce more flavorful products. While there is a concern in many places about pesticide sprays and other artificial inputs used in agriculture, there is a lot of integrated pest management going on in New Jersey growing areas to limit the amount of chemicals used."

David Arena, president, Frank Donio, Inc., Hammonton, NJ, mentions the state's proximity to major population points. "One thing that is coming up more in the news and on peoples' minds is the carbon footprint of the produce. New Jersey can supply just about everything those markets need during the summer months. Plus, because of its proximity, it can supply markets on a daily basis, which helps ensure freshness."

Nardelli also notes New Jersey's favorable location. "Being so close to major metropolitan areas, such as Philadelphia, New York [City] and Baltimore, allows us to do a lot of business."

New Jersey is also unique because of its grower diversity. "In New Jersey, you might have 1,000 10-acre farms, whereas in California, you might have 10 1,000-acre farms," Arena adds. "So the dynamics are flipped," meaning businesses can also act as marketers and distributors that provide the infrastructure for procedures such as proper post-harvest cooling.

Cooling product after harvest is an important part of maintaining freshness; Peter C. Bylone Sr., manager, Vineland Co-op Produce Auction Association, Inc., Vineland, NJ, says the auction covers all the bases. "We hydrocool, vacuum cool, hydrovac and pressure-cool depending on the commodity. The unique part about New Jersey is product can be harvested this morning, put on a truck and delivered by tonight."

One fascinating aspect of New Jersey produce is that it has three seasons, relates Vincent Consalo, president, William Consalo & Sons Farms, Inc., Vineland, NJ. In spring, wet items such as romaine, green leaf and red leaf lettuce, herbs, bunch beats and red savoy cabbage are available. In summer, the state produces dry products such as peppers, squash, eggplant, blueberries and peaches. In fall, production moves back to the wet items. Consalo believes it may surprise some to know that because the ocean affects New Jersey's climate, it doesn't





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Reader Service # 19

get as cold as the inland states, so growers can harvest product well into November and early December.

This season, retailers can expect a robust marketing effort supporting New Jersey produce. The *Jersey Fresh* brand, as advanced by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), Trenton, NJ, is recognized throughout the country, and RLB's Shilling believes its effectiveness is legendary for a few key reasons. "They do their homework. They find out what the needs are of the retailers and wholesalers and what the farmers need in order to sell their products to them. They

reach out and meet with the produce community on a regular basis. They have focus groups that include consumers, and they find out what message needs to be told. They develop the message and get out there and advertise it."

BLUEBERRIES RULE

"New Jersey produces more fresh blueberries than any area and we are close to the whole northeast corridor, so it gives consumers really fresh produce here," according to Art Galletta, part owner of Atlantic Blueberry Co., Inc., Hammonton, NJ. "We

are known as the best quality fresh [blue] berry you can get. Retailers ought to have good opportunities for promotions this year because the supply looks as if it is going to be good." The state's main varieties are Weymouth, Duke, Bluecrop and Elliott.

"New Jersey is the No. 2 largest producer of blueberries in the United States," points out Al Murray, NJDA assistant secretary of agriculture and secretary of the New Jersey Blueberry Industry Advisory Council (NJBI-AC), Trenton, NJ. "Blueberries got started in New Jersey in 1905, and we've been at the category's cutting edge ever since."

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"We are known as the best quality fresh [blue]berry you can get. Retailers ought to have good opportunities for promotions this year because the supply looks as if it is going to be good."

**— Art Galletta
Atlantic
Blueberry Co., Inc.**

Tim Wetherbee, sales manager, Diamond Blueberry, Inc., Hammonton, NJ, and NJBI-AC chairman, notes most of the blueberries are grown in Atlantic County and the deal runs mid-June to mid-August or Sept. 1. Weymouth is the first variety to harvest followed by Duke, Bluecrop and Elliott. The Dukes and the Bluecrops are the bigger berries. Elliotts will be large at the beginning but then taper off. Dukes and Bluecrops have the volumes for promotions with the Dukes providing earlier volumes to support the blue in the red, white and blue themes at the Fourth of July.

The category continues to grow as consumers discover the health benefits blueberries provide, notes Murray. New Jersey is

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Proposed Changes Upset Produce Industry

On Feb. 26, 2008, New Jersey Governor Jon S. Corzine introduced a budget to reduce the state's spending. The plan includes eliminating the departments of commerce, personnel and agriculture. In a later press release, the governor dealt specifically with the elimination of the Department of Agriculture, stating, "These budget cuts, painful as they may be for all of us, are what the times demand. Years of overspending and over-borrowing have forced this state into an incredibly difficult, but valuable, public discussion about the priorities of government. I laid out my priorities in my budget address — education, public safety and protecting the most vulnerable."

"Consolidating the functions of the Department of Agriculture into other government agencies is not an effort to short-change the economic and cultural importance of farms to this great state," the release continues. "It is part of an across-the-board effort by the state to do more with less. The critical functions of the department will remain, and the state will continue as a staunch advocate for farms and agri-business. Regardless of where the phone rings, the state will be there to assist in the same ways it does now."

Many in the produce industry do not see a true benefit in terms of reducing spending and some wonder if the state's aid to the agriculture sector will wane. Others feel threatened by the change. "The governor thinks that by cutting the NJDA, it's going to help things. Unfortunately, I don't know that the few dollars that would be saved are going to make a difference," explains David Arena, president of Frank Donio, Inc., Hammononton, NJ. "Agriculture still is a viable industry in New Jersey and the NJDA is an integral part of agriculture. From what I understand, it's a department that's pretty lean to begin with."

Tom Sheppard, president of Eastern Fresh Growers, Inc., and vice president of

Sheppard Farms, Inc., both in Cedarville, NJ, believes moving the department functions to other agencies that are not as efficient and knowledgeable of agriculture is a mistake. "Jersey Fresh is a program that other states have modeled their programs after and because we've had budget problems in the past, [NJDA] has gotten pretty lean and mean already. The staff up there is doing a really good job and we don't think the Garden State should do away with the NJDA."

"We rely on the Department of Agriculture in helping to promote the local farm products we represent," stresses Bob Von Rohr, director of marketing and customer relations, Jersey Fruit Co-op Association, Inc., Glassboro, NJ. "It's sad to hear there is some talk about them maybe being eliminated."

Jersey Fresh put New Jersey on the map, notes Vincent Consalo, president of William Consalo & Sons Farms, Inc., Vineland, NJ. "Right now, it's a little bit up in the air because of the governor's decision of trying to disband the department. It's a shame. The Garden State is known for agriculture and Jersey Fresh is known throughout the country as an excellent program. To put that in jeopardy doesn't make sense."

"The man [governor] should have his head examined," claims Jeff Shilling, vice president of procurement for RLB Food Distributors, LP, West Caldwell, NJ. "As a taxpayer, I appreciate his effort to control spending, but I think he's making a very big mistake. Besides all of the reasons stated by others in the industry as to why this is not a good idea, the one that concerns me the most is the people aspect of this business. The produce business is a people business and the reason the agricultural industry in the state of New Jersey has been so successful is because of the individuals who have lead the NJDA. If the governor ends up eliminating the office of the secretary of agriculture and keeps all of the other functions, the leadership is missing." **pb**

the perfect places to meet this demand due to its "hot and humid weather and soil conditions, which make the perfect setting to provide outstanding berries."

"Blueberries are the one item New Jersey has during a window of time when no one else has them," explains Frank Donio's Arena. "That's what many people think of when they think of produce from the state.

But we grow so many more items and cover the whole range of dry and wet vegetables."

DIVERSITY OF PRODUCT

Vineland's Bylone has noticed different crops being grown as ethnic populations change. Now, he says, there are all kinds of peppers that he never knew existed being produced. These tend to be favorites of Indi-



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an, Asian and Mexican populations.

Tom Sheppard, president of Eastern Fresh Growers, Inc., and vice president of Sheppard Farms, Inc., both based in Cedarville, NJ, says New Jersey tomatoes have a very good reputation for flavor in both conventional and organic lines. The state is also one of the largest producers of summer bell peppers, which are available July into October. "We can ship riper tomatoes. We are within hours of tremendous population centers and people will pay extra for Jersey tomatoes within their area."

Organics continue to expand and the growers are meeting the challenges. New items being tried out include eggplant, more cucumber varieties and asparagus.

When it comes to packaging, more retailers are demanding display-ready boxes,

Sheppard notes.

Bob Von Rohr, director of marketing and customer relations for Jersey Fruit Co-op Association, Inc., Glassboro, NJ, says packaging is definitely evolving. For example, blueberry packs are as growing in size from the traditional pint to two pounds. "There have been more requests for the larger packs over the last two years and I'm beginning to hear the same thing again this year."

He says the green movement is causing retailers to pay more attention to the distance the produce is shipped and he, too, notes the continuing increase of organics.

Nardelli says Nardelli Brothers packs many combination products, particularly mixed greens, because they're "perfect for the customer who doesn't want a whole pack of collard greens."

New Jersey has sizeable volumes of peaches. Von Rohr's organization represents the largest group of peach growers, with a combined production of 800,000 to a million cases of the fruit. He says paper tote bags are gaining renewed interest as retailers exhaust their supplies of plastic bags; his organization is now offering 4-pound boxes of peaches.

"We have a lot of different products that are grown here and because of the demanding consumer in New Jersey, they're grown with an emphasis more on flavor and quality than excessive yields," notes Shilling. RLB includes flavor in its inspection criteria so not only the produce is checked for Brix and pressure, as appropriate, but it is also taste-tested. "I know that we grow the best tasting tomatoes in the world," he adds.

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"The amazing thing about New Jersey's produce industry is the diversity and volume of fruits and vegetables produced in such a small state — the most densely populated state in the United States."

**— Jeff Beach
New Jersey Department
of Agriculture**

Jeff Beach, NJDA spokesman, reports, "The amazing thing about New Jersey's produce industry is the diversity and volume of fruits and vegetables produced in such a small state — the most densely populated state in the United States. With about 9,800 farms left on approximately 800,000 acres, we're still able to rank in the nation's Top 10 for blueberries, cranberries, peaches, spinach, squash, tomatoes, bell peppers and more. That's attributable to having some of the most innovative and hard-working produce growers you can find anywhere, people who are willing to make the investments and changes necessary to keep up with an evolving marketplace."

pb



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CAC Kicks Off Campaign In Anticipation Of Fruitful Avocado Season

Web site focuses on real-life stories from California avocado growers.

By Amy Shannon

Despite past challenges brought on by poor weather and wildfires, California's avocado season is expected to produce a high-quality crop, rich in flavor and taste. The Golden State grows 90 percent of the country's avocado supply on 6,000 small family farms throughout central and southern California.

The California Avocado Commission, the Irvine, CA-based information source for the California avocado industry, plans to focus its marketing efforts in the April-to-September period when California avocados are at their peak of availability, providing consumers excellent eating quality.

To kick off the season, CAC launched its 2008 California Campaign, beginning with promotional opportunities geared around Cinco de Mayo, the May 5 celebration that is the second biggest avocado consumption event of the year. "We've augmented our groundbreaking CAC advertising campaign with Cinco de Mayo-focused promotions to encourage growth of consumer demand for fresh California avocados," notes Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing.

CAC is also gearing up for a successful season through its newly launched California Grower Campaign, which uses real-life stories from California avocado growers to promote the flavorful fruit. Featured growers include Carol and Bill Steed, who own Fairfield Farms, a 400-acre farm in Pauma Valley, CA, where they grow avocados, both organic and

conventional, as well as blueberries and citrus.

Carol Steed explains the crop cycle this way: "You get a crop and you watch it grow from the beginning of the year, and they're small, little beautiful flowers and then they set... and you watch them grow. It's like your children. You can also have a very dramatic effect [on the crops]...if you do something wrong, you dramatically see it pretty quickly, and if you do the right thing, you see it also. It's a very exciting crop to grow."

The growers' personal experiences with farming will be conveyed through video clips and short articles on the CAC Web site. Featuring a new, authentic, home-grown look, the revamped online resource is intended to satisfy interest from consumers — as well as retailers — in knowing where their food comes from. "It shows the roots of the California avocado industry as never before seen by consumers," reports DeLyser.

TV ads can be watched on the CAC Web site, which also highlights the newly unveiled *Hand Grown in California* logo. To help retailers ease into the avocado season, CAC's merchandising team has developed new POS materials aimed at helping retailers identify the California avocado displays for their consumers. CAC also created a new display bin that will identify the fruit as *Hand Grown in California*.

pb



Photos taken by Amy Shannon



Bill Steed, co-owner of Fairfield Farms, Pauma Valley, CA, talks about this year's avocado crop.



Celebrity chefs and restaurateurs Mary Sue Milliken (left) and Susan Feniger (right) prepare delicious dishes highlighting the California avocado's unique flavor.



Carol Steed, co-owner of Fairfield Farms, discusses growing practices.



Workers at Stehly Farms Organics prepare avocados in Valley Center, CA.



West Pak Avocado workers examine avocados at its Temecula, CA, facility.



A farmer stands next to a display of avocados at Fairfield Farms.



A Stehly Farms Organics worker packages avocados in Valley Center, CA.



A West Pak Avocado worker packages Hass avocados in Temecula, CA.



A roll of PLU stickers at West Pak's facility.

Southern Vegetables Hint At Branching Out

Vegetables from southeastern states north of Florida and south of Ohio are plentiful and in high demand.

BY DUANE CRAIG

The seasonal flow of fresh southern vegetables, beginning in Georgia and moving up the East Coast, rises to accommodate consumer anticipation for a taste of summer.

This season coincides with the slowdown in vegetables coming from Mexico and offers retailers the opportunity to capitalize on a growing source of local produce.

Bob Denomme, director of produce and floral for Bi-Lo, LLC, a Mauldin, SC-based chain with 222 stores, sources southern vegetables in a big way. "It's very important for our business for a couple of reasons. It's a home-grown product, so it arrives fresher and is less expensive in terms of freight.

The South and Southeast have perfect weather conditions for growing vegetables. A really great crop comes in all the way from the middle part of Florida and up through Virginia. Probably the largest marketing campaign of the year for us is our local produce campaign we run every summer, and those Southeast vegetables play a critical role."

"These vegetables have been growing in warm days and cool nights so as temperatures warm up in May and June, it makes for the best yields all year, barring any severe weather events," explains Brian Rayfield, vice president of sales and marketing, J & J Produce, Inc., Loxahatchee, FL. "These are bumper crops of generally better-quality vegetables than what people have been used to through the winter months." He says the availability and the moods of the shoppers who are ready for spring make this a great time for promoting vegetables.

According to Charles Hall, executive director of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA), LaGrange, GA, the big advantage to southern vegetables is the proximity to stores in the region, meaning lower transportation costs and fresher product than sourcing from farther away.

"South Carolina traditionally grows summer vegetables, such as beans, squash, cucumbers, tomatoes and eggplant," notes Martin Eubanks, director of marketing, South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA), Columbia, SC. "We generally ship something every month of the year, including leafy greens and value-added products like bags of greens and pre-cut, pre-packed squash. We've also seen plenty of our farmers increase acreage to offer a more diversified mix of vegetables."

"We have an outstanding product mix in commercial volumes," he adds. "I think the keynote is the growers are doing the right things in terms of GAP [good agricultural practices] and third-party certification. We've seen a lot of growth over the past few years and we also have seen South Carolina-based farms growing in Florida and Delaware.



Sourcing Opportunities Expand

East Coast leaf items and other typical California items are becoming more popular. Georgia, in particular, is looking at broccoli, cauliflower and lettuces with research and development underway, according to Brian Rayfield, vice president of sales and marketing, J & J Produce, Inc., Loxahatchee, FL.

"The Southeast has its own microclimate and the high levels of humidity make it different from the dry weather of California," notes Rayfield. "There are different soil types and anytime you've got that, you must learn how the ground irrigates, how it drains and how the various diseases and pests can affect the crop. We've got several growers that have expressed interest in diversifying and we've been watching some trials closely so we can keep our cost of entry down."

Nick Augostini, marketing specialist for the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDACS), Raleigh, NC, highlights the North Carolina Specialty Crop Program, a partnership between North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, and NCDACS. "We have farmers who have grown lettuce here in the past and the problem was the varieties weren't quite right," he explains. "However a 2-year Gold Leaf Foundation grant, now in its second year, is shedding light on the varieties and care necessary to grow lettuce crops.

We also have some farmers in the northeastern part of North Carolina growing broccoli and we're growing a lot of cabbage in the East."

L & M Companies, Inc., Raleigh, NC, has been growing broccoli for five years, reports Adam Lytch, grower development specialist. Initially it was challenging since people resisted the idea of broccoli grown in the South. "People now are asking for it especially to save on freight cost."

Vegetable variety in other southern states is also on the rise. "What's been interesting is to see the product mix change over the past few years," notes Martin Eubanks, director of marketing for the South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA), Columbia, SC. "We're seeing items that might be considered staple items, such as sweet corn, on the increase just because it adds to our product mix during the harvest season. This way, retailers can get more items in one stop. Also we've seen tremendous increases in Hispanic items, such as cilantro and mixed peppers, and those have significantly added to the product mix. We're growing a lot of parsley, green onions and oddball things like dandelion greens. We also have leafy greens year-round. There are niche markets out there and we have folks growing for those niche markets."

pb

They're looking at opportunities to extend their marketing season because that's become more important to retailers as they seek suppliers that can handle their needs for long periods of time.

explains. "They always say they had no idea that it is as big as it is down here. I welcome retailers to send their buyers down. Let them look around a bit and see what is available."

"Southeastern retailers tell me of the advantages to having a home-grown program they can run with, especially in the South where it generates a good amount of business," he continues. "Outside of Georgia,

As the southern veggies transition up the coast, there are periods of low volumes; this is a commodity-wide volume issue rather than a supplier issue.

Harry Sheaffer, salesman, Marker 29 Produce, Inc., Lake Park, GA, believes people have gotten away from taking the time to see what's really available. During field tours of the company, supermarket buyers are always amazed at the volume of vegetables the South is growing, he



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the other option is California. Stores on the eastern seaboard have to plan a week ahead of time when they source from far away, and sometimes they have shrink issues and difficulties maintaining stocks."

Daniel Whittles, director of marketing and product development, Rosemont Farms Corp., Boca Raton, FL, agrees, adding the cost of freight is a very alluring to retailers along the eastern seaboard. "It definitely gives them an advantage when buying southern produce that's fresh and affordable. Plus, folks retailing out of the Southeast have the benefit of pulling from their backyard."

Consumers are drawn to locally grown produce, giving retailers in southern and southeastern regions an advantage. "The home-grown theme is especially prevalent out of Georgia. There are also tie-ins to the down-home style of cooking," he adds.

STAY LOCAL

The local-grown banner does particularly well for retailers in the Southeast, says Greg Cardamone, general manager of the vegetable division, L & M Companies, Inc., Raleigh, NC. He says it is important for retailers to work closely with suppliers to find out

when the peaks and valleys will occur, so ads can be supported most effectively. As the southern veggies transition up the coast, there are periods of low volumes; this is a

**Consumers are drawn
to locally grown
produce, giving
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regions an advantage.**

commodity-wide volume issue rather than a supplier issue. Most of the time, if the volume is low on one commodity from one supplier,

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that will be the case across all suppliers. Sometimes weather events can create excess volumes or low volumes as crops ripen.

J & J's Rayfield notes one of the downsides of the southern vegetable deal is that it is very fragmented because of the number of small growers and the seasonal nature. Companies like his help with that issue because their centralized warehouses and year-round operations help ensure a seamless supply.

Marker 29's Sheaffer suggests finding someone who has experience and isn't just brokering. He recommends sticking with companies that not only have volumes of their own products but can also pull smaller volumes of specialty product from other sources as needed. Niche items may be an overlooked opportunity, he adds.

DIVERSIFY WITH SPECIALTY ITEMS

Adam Lytch, grower development specialist, L & M, notes mini bell peppers and specialty types of fruits and vegetables have been extensively experimented with, so there are many varieties that could be available if retailers would request them and commit to purchase. Developing the crops and packaging them is a large commitment



on growers' parts but if they have retailer commitments, they can put programs together. He says retailers could differentiate themselves by introducing groups of these specialty items.

Sheaffer sees the new crops as a response to consumer expectations for fresher product, but he worries items may not always be as plentiful as they are now. He cites returns

not keeping up with inputs causing growers to seek crops with better returns. Grain crops are coming back as farmers try to plant the most profitable crops. Cotton is also being planted again where it hasn't been in a long time. "It's almost a no-win [situation] for some of these guys to take a chance on the vegetable markets when they can go contract corn for a profit," he adds. **pb**

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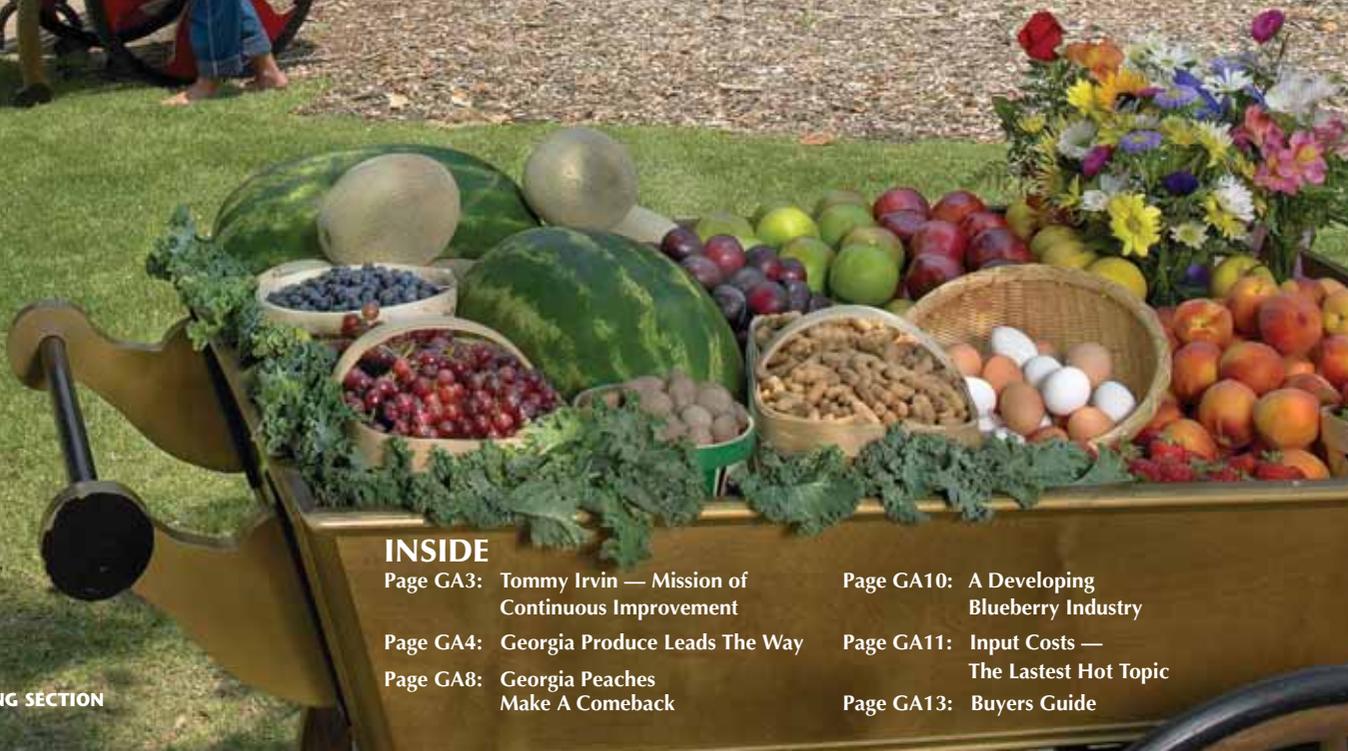
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Georgia Produce Leads The Way



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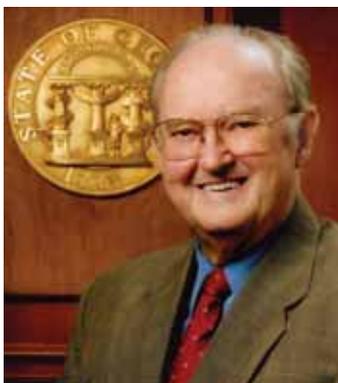


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Tommy Irvin

Mission of Continuous Improvement

A personal look at the nation's longest serving state agricultural commissioner.

By Dave Diver

My first meeting with Commissioner of Agriculture Tommy Irvin was a barbeque lunch for retailers, produce wholesalers and state and local political officials that was held at the Atlanta Wholesale Produce market in the late 1960s. At the time, I did not know whether to be happy or sad for this imposing figure who was attempting to lead an agricultural community somewhat behind the achievements already being made in other areas of the nation. Now, nearly 40 years later, the longest serving state agricultural head has not only righted the ship but has also brought numerous areas and activities to the leading edge of the agricultural community.

In addition to peaches in a limited-time-frame competitive market, watermelons and pecans, the balance of produce production back then was confined primarily to small growers shipping mainly to in-state operators. All of that has now changed, with major grower/shippers involved in the distribution of quality products, many year-round, throughout the eastern United States and, increasingly, the entire world.

New variety development and improved growing and handling practices have been important, ongoing steps as grower groups and the University of Georgia (UGA), in Athens, work closely together with common purpose.

Food safety has been a leading initiative throughout this century. The state's leading growers closely follow the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) program. The record keeping enables producers to have product traceability not only to the location in a field but also to the individuals responsible for various practices.

During the past year, the Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) in Atlanta, in cooperation with the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA) in La Grange, and the respective product commissions were instrumental in getting the growers of beans, bell peppers, cabbage, cantaloupe, cucumbers, sweet corn,

tomatoes, greens and squash to approve a marketing order with assessments collected to fund research projects to enhance the profitability of vegetable growers and for promotion activities. This becomes a first in the nation for a marketing order encompassing multiple items to warrant separate programs.

Recent promotion programs to enhance Georgia produce have included the *Georgia Grown* label for approved growers with promotional material available to retail outlets and media advertising in selected markets.

A recent food show for chefs held at the Atlanta Wholesale Produce Market has become a catalyst for creating additional foodservice interest in Georgia fresh fruit and vegetables. Historically, consumers who find interesting produce while eating out often try to duplicate the experience at home.

Likewise, educating out-of-state produce buyers about the industry has encouraged interested buyers to take advantage of expense-paid tours to meet with major grower/shippers fitting their areas of interest.

In recent years, Irvin has facilitated closer coordination between the agricultural research programs at UGA and Clemson University, Clemson, SC, for development of improved varieties acceptable to production in the two adjoining states. This new era of cooperation is leading to much more cooperative marketing during respective shipping seasons.

Irvin has brought Georgia to the forefront of states that recognize the potential of increasing global demands. With an established international trade group headed by David Bryant, GDA has an office in Belgium and is active at trade functions in countries as far-flung as Spain, Dubai, India and China. Groups from developing countries have been sending delegations to Georgia to observe agricultural production, post-harvest handling and shipping facilities at the port of Savannah. Together these are all leading to increasing agricultural exports.

The challenge to whomever succeeds Irvin will be continuing this level of improvement after his nearly 40 years of productive service to Georgia.

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





Georgia Produce Leads The Way

The Peach State has a thriving agricultural base that extends way beyond its most famous product.

By Dave Diver

Many years ago, a graduate school economics paper led me to investigate agriculture in the Deep South. Later, I joined the corporate produce department for Cincinnati, OH-based Kroger and eight years later was in the Atlanta Division, where I had a first-hand opportunity to observe and interact with southern agriculture for five years.

Fast forward to the present, where I enjoy retirement from an additional 17-year stint as vice president of produce for Hannaford Brothers, based in Portland, ME. I returned to the fields of Georgia for a tour of the state's growers and marketing organizations.

Bo Herndon Jr., current chairman of the Georgia Agricultural Commodity Commission for Vegetables [See sidebar on page GA12] and president of L.G. Herndon Jr. Farms, Inc. in Lyons, started farming in the late '70s, purchasing his first farm in 1979. Now, with the involvement of other family members, he grows and markets 400 acres of Vidalia onions, 800 acres of sweet corn and 500 acres of greens.

Each of these items fills an important aspect of the business plan enabling him to survive today's business challenges. Although Vidalia onions have a primarily spring and summer shipping season, arrangements with producers in Peru, Mexico and Texas enable the company to supply sweet onions on a year-round basis, as is typical for many of the larger Vidalia onion shippers.

Bland Farms, LLC, in Glenville has seen its marketing of Vidalia onions grow from 27 to 46 percent of the total crop through acquisition of smaller operations, according to Michael Hively, general manager and CFO. Having reached this critical mass, the company has also added a food-safety manager and agronomist to the staff.

Through the addition of new packaging graders purchased from Australia, Bland has been able to reduce the number of people working in the packing shed by over 40 percent, according to sales manager Sloan Scott. Although efficiency is important, the new equipment sharply reduces the amount of bruised product, leading to lower rejection rates upon delivery with increased storage life for the consumer.

An important addition to the packing line is a high-speed labeler that labels in excess of 80 percent of the product, thus enabling retailers to differentiate product and allow consumers to recognize exactly what they are purchasing from bulk displays.



To supply the majority of its customers' needs, Bland also raises 150 acres of organics and 100 acres of red onions. During the off-season, contracts from the northern and southern hemispheres provide the necessary supplies.

VIDALIA ONIONS

To reach the promotion cutting edge, the Vidalia Onion Commission (VOC) in Vidalia hired Georgia resident Wendy Brannen 2½ years ago. Last year, promotional programs exceeded the expectations for both consumer and retail involvement.

This year's promotion program has two major thrusts. For the first time, Vidalia onions will be tied in with a Corona beer/salsa promotion — the *Fiesta Day Flavor* promotion — which is expected to have displays in 15,000 retail grocery stores during the summer. Other produce items included in the program are limes, avocados and tomatoes.

The *Fiesta Day Flavor* promotion will include a recipe brochure with consumer savings coupons for each of the produce items as well as a consumer sweepstakes offer.

This approach is designed to expand the customer base into the growing younger and ethnic populations. The in-store promotion reinforced by the distinctive Corona TV advertising is designed to meet the objective.

The other arm of this season's promotions is the *Original Sweet Onion Trivia* contest, a Web-based consumer sweepstakes contest that will run until Aug. 15. Point-of sale material will ask customers to log onto *Vidalia Onion.org* to participate in the contest. The winner will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to historic Savannah, including dinner at The Lady and Sons restaurant, owned by Food Network personality Paula Deen.

Among the messages directed at consumers are food news articles focusing on the seasonality of Vidalia sweet onions and including tips for storing them in a dry, cool place. Consumers will be advised that wrapping the onions in paper towels and keeping them in a low-humidity drawer in the refrigerator extends the shelf life for months.

Of the approximately 12,000 acres of onions planted for 2008, the organic acreage will nearly double from last year's level to 400 acres. With the expansion of organic sections at retail, it may be logical to anticipate continued growth in this category.

However, the change in organic acreage is not uniform. Jamie



Brannen, vice president at Gerrald's Vidalia Sweet Onions, Inc., in Statesboro, indicates the company reduced its organic acreage this year.

As the harvest was beginning, Gerrald's was seeing a great quality crop, but pricing was lower than usual due to the increased supply of onions from other growing areas.

As consumers have shown more interest in 2- to 5-pound packages of onions, the D-pack upright bag, which is a type of packaging that has an information label on two sides of the bag, has become popular. New computerized packing lines from companies, such as Daumar Corporation, based in Miami, FL, and Durand Wayland, based in LaGrange, GA, just two of the many manufacturers, are available. One of the major gains from this

new generation of equipment is the reduction of bruising — a key to longer shelf life when properly stored at home.

OTHER VEGETABLES

Gerrald's carrot acreage this year has been nearly doubled with harvesting taking place from January to June. Packaging includes both cuts and full size, notes Gerrald's Jamie Brannen.

Lewis Taylor Farms, Inc., in Tifton, grows approximately 2,000 acres of vegetables with a 2-season crop cycle, marketing everything through Boca Raton, FL-based Rosemont Farms Corp., which has a sales office on Taylor Farms' property. Taylor has its own greenhouse providing seedlings for itself and other growers.

Bell peppers and cucumbers require the highest percentage of input cost per production unit, according to Bill Brim, president. As a consequence, pepper acreage has been reduced approximately 15 percent. Although winter is not favorable for harvesting of most vegetables, Taylor Farms finds it nearly ideal for producing broccoli.

Rosemont saw opportunity to grow winter broccoli when its Georgia facilities were not in use. Last year, the grower/shipper started

marketing broccoli for the first time. "The idea was to create year-round use of our facilities," explains Daniel Whittles, director of marketing and product development.

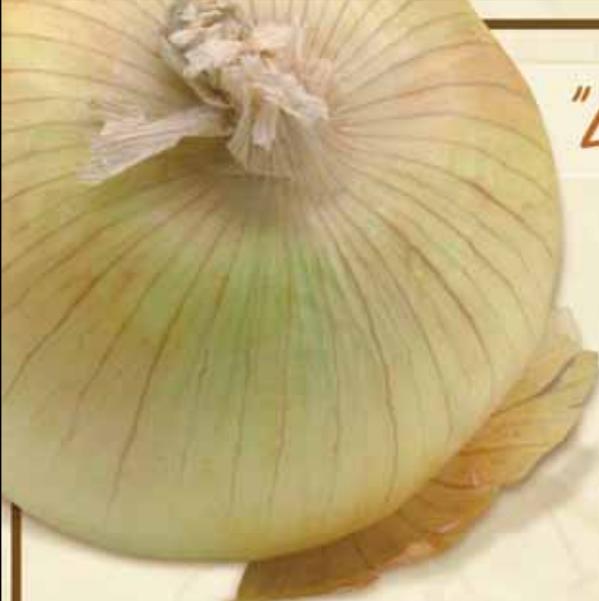
"The Georgia season is fairly short and our facilities don't have much use six or seven months of the year."

Whittles says Rosemont is excited about the deal and notes, "It's a good fit for us." The season, which begins in early November and runs through the first week of April was slightly affected by an extended freeze in January. Nonetheless, "The quality of the was really well received," he adds. "We've received a ton of interest from the Southeast all the way up to the New England area."

Brim, who is also president of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA) in LaGrange, and Charles Hall, its executive secretary, were the leaders in starting Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) in Georgia in 2000, positioning the state at the forefront of food-safety programs.

David Corbett, president of South Georgia Produce, Inc., in Lake Park, grows and sells a variety of vegetables on a year-round schedule, using supplemental product from Michigan, Tennessee and Florida when local pro-





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According to Corbett, the government buyout of tobacco farmers resulted initially in more people going into vegetable production, creating additional supplies and leading to downward market pricing pressures. The latest round of cost increases may cause some of these growers to re-evaluate future production plans.

Charles Hart, owner of Fresh Plants, Inc. in Americus, has specialized in green beans since 1991. In addition to his own acreage, he has contracts with a dozen growers handling production on 3,000 acres. These include growers in Tennessee and Florida as well as Georgia shipping for over seven months; sup-

plies for the balance of the year come from Texas and Mexico.

In 2001, his son Phil began a fresh-cut operation, Americus Bean Company, Inc. in Americus. This vertical integration provides value-added products, including medley vegetable fresh packs sold under private label and Green Giant brands, clipped snap beans and microwavable products, to take advantage of consumer interest in convenience and develop a potential profit opportunity.

PECANS

Pearson Farms, formerly known as Big 6 Farms, LLC in Fort Valley, has 2,000 acres of pecans in addition to its peach acreage.

South Georgia Pecan Company in Valdosta has been in the business as a sheller for over 100 years, says owner Jim Worn, although under several different ownerships. It now shells 50 million pounds of the nuts and sells 15,000 to 20,000 tons of shells, a by-product, to the plywood industry.

With the assistance of the Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) in Atlanta, China is now a substantial pecan purchaser, helping to hold up the price of last year's record crop. Currently South Georgia

Pecan ships a container daily through the Port of Savannah. Without this export volume, growers would have received sharply reduced returns last year.

This had not previously had the cause-and-effect relationship with large crops, according to Hilton Segler, president of the Georgia Pecan Growers Association in Tifton. As a result growers have practically no inventory. The growth of incomes in developing countries is changing eating habits and offering improved opportunities for many U.S. producers.

Segler is bullish about the future, stating there has been more headway in the last 10 years than the previous 50. New cultivars have helped smooth out the alternate-year peaks and valleys of the production cycle away from Stuarts, which had been the dominant variety. Now the Desirable cultivar provides 50 to 60 percent of production; new trees require 10 to 15 years to reach productivity.

A bright spot for the industry is the 1/4¢-per-pound assessment passed by the growers to provide funds for research and product promotion. GFVGA, the Georgia Pecan Commission in Atlanta and GDA have joined to promote pecans as a healthful snack food.

There is anticipation pecans will qualify under the proposed 2008 Farm Bill section



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FRESH BOILING PEANUTS By Bob Johnson

The lion's share of the 1.5-billion-pound Georgia peanut harvest, the nation's largest, goes to peanut butter, but Georgia farmers also produce boiling peanuts that make for a unique eating experience.

"The boiled ones are going to be moist and soft, while the roasted ones are going to be dry and hard," explains Alex Hardy, co-owner of Hardy Farms in Hawkinsville. Done right, boiling peanuts are also a bit sweet; they can also be boiled with spices to give them an extra kick.

The arrival of the next crop of fresh green boiling peanuts is just around the corner. "For three months of the year, we have the fresh ones," Hardy adds. His harvest begins in late July and goes through October.

Some Georgia farmers have fresh boiling peanuts available deep into the fall. Fresh boiling peanuts usually become available in early August; planting dates are spread out so they are still available in November, says Don Koehler, executive director of the Georgia Peanut Commission in Tifton.

High-quality boiling peanuts are the result of a unique and painstaking approach to growing, harvesting and processing. It all begins with an early harvest before the peanut is fully mature. "It needs to be a green peanut; it needs to be pliable so it will absorb the moisture," Koehler explains.

The early harvest is part of the secret. "The best boiled peanut is harvested a few weeks before maturity," Hardy notes. He believes the early harvest makes the peanut sweeter and more absorbent of water, salt and other spices.

Boiling peanuts must be harvested by hand. "You don't want to have it blemished from machine harvesting because the peanut will bruise easily when it's green," Koehler says.

"We try to have top-quality product, that's the key," notes Joey Johnson, owner of J&S Produce, Inc. in Mount Vernon. "You also look for consistent size because otherwise, when you boil them, there's not much there. But you don't want them over-mature because you don't want the peanut to stick to the shell."

There is some disagreement as to which variety makes the best boiler. "Valencia is the No. 1 seller in our area, but jumbos are also still popular," Johnson reports.

Hardy grows the NC V11 variety, a Virginia-type peanut from North Carolina, for his boiling peanuts. Although many people prefer the Valencia variety for boiling, he believes the Virginia type has better flavor. "The flavor is in the oil."

"The Virginia variety peanut is the best for roasting," says Bob Goins, sales representative at Jardina Co., Inc. in Atlanta. "Georgia is the peanut state but most of it goes into peanut butter. The variety most use makes a better peanut butter."

There is a short 3-month window for fresh boiling peanuts, but some producers supply them already boiled throughout the year. "We freeze them and take them out and boil them for retailers 12 months of the year," explains Hardy. His original flavor is boiled in salt and water. "We also have a Hot and Spicy. We put other spices in there to give them a little kick."



promoting fresh produce for snacks in an expanding number of schools, according to Georgia Pecan Growers' Segler.

WATERMELON

In terms of acreage, watermelon is near the top of the list of fresh fruit and vegetables grown in Georgia. [See related table on page xx.] With a primary marketing period between June 10 and July 15, 65 percent of the volume is sold during the two weeks prior to the Fourth of July.

Jackson Farms, located near Cordele, grows about 85 percent seedless on its 350 acres. In 1991, Ricky Jackson, owner, became one of the early growers for Sun World in its early stages of transforming watermelon to a more appealing consumer product. With pre-cut fruit growing in popularity, the seedless variety is becoming an increasingly important commodity.

Similar to other produce growers, Jackson says input cost increases have doubled over the last 10 years. [See *Hot Topic — Input Costs* on page GA11.] Following GAP also increases cost; Jackson Farms is Primus-certified, pest free and capable of tracking melons from field to packing by way of the harvester.

To fill out its year-round operation, Gerald's grows watermelon and cantaloupe for harvesting between early June and mid July; they are shipped primarily in bulk bins, notes Jamie Brannen.

The development of 4- to 6-pound mini seedless personal melons is the next great advance, according to Lewis Taylor's Brim. Shipments occur from late May until the end of August. Athena-type cantaloupes, shipped from June 1 to July 10, complement them. Acreage of both in the state is expected to decline by up to 30 percent this year due to higher input costs.



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Reader Service # 39



Georgia Peaches Make A Comeback

This year's crop looks to counterbalance last year's weather-ravaged season.

By Lisa Lieberman

After Georgia almost got frozen out of the peach deal last year, retailers across the country are looking forward to the start of this year's peach season. Total volume will be 1.5 to 2 million boxes, which is about twice as many boxes as last year.

"We're still going to be a little off normal volume, but we're really glad to be back in the game," according to Jeff Wainwright, president of the Georgia Peach Council in Byron and a partner at Taylor Orchards in Reynolds.

Most growers will begin harvesting their early peaches during the third week in May, which is about a week off from normal. Larger, more promotable volumes should start coming in after the first week in June.

"Our industry will be starting a little bit later than normal because of some cooler temperatures that pushed things back, but the industry as a whole is going to have a pretty good crop," predicts Duke Lane III, vice president of sales at Lane Southern Orchards in Ft. Valley.

Robert Dickey, co-owner of Dickey Farms in Musella, says sizing should be fairly good this year. Initially, the industry will start off with 2¼s, but by mid June, there should be steady supplies of 2½s and 2¾s.

So far, the industry has had strong interest from retailers who are planning ads for the upcoming season. "We already have retailers who are on order for ads for Memorial Day weekend and we have several big ads booked for the summer," says Wainwright. "We've always had good demand for Georgia peaches, but this year, people all over want to promote Georgia peaches. People like them because our peaches are a little bit sweeter than peaches [grown] elsewhere, even though the peaches don't always have the same size or color as some peaches from other areas."

This year marks the first time that the Georgia Peach Council will promote Georgia peaches throughout the South, Wainwright says.

"Usually, individual packinghouses do their own promotions, but this year we're starting to do some ads in magazines and sending some promotional materials about Georgia peaches to retailers," he notes.



"We're really trying to get the word out about peaches, especially to nearby states like Kentucky, Texas and Florida."

Richter and Co., Inc. is based in Charlotte, NC, but it has peach production in Georgia and is one of the largest East Coast shippers of peaches. According to Lloyd Richter, vice president, the company is planning on doing a series of peach promotions this season. "A lot of companies are going to be promoting for Fourth of July, but we're not just pinpointing a few periods. We're constantly going to have something on promotion."

The biggest selling point of southeastern peaches is their "eat-ability," says Richter. "They're better

than peaches from the West Coast because this is a natural growing region for peaches. Our fruit is naturally juicy and sweet-eating and a lot of that has to do with the soils and the climate, which has a lot of high humidity."

Another advantage for retailers, especially those on the East Coast, is that freight costs substantially less than for peaches shipped from across the country. "The cost of fuel is astronomical, but it's not only about saving money on fuel for people. It's also this concept of 'food miles' and people wanting to eat locally. It's also convenient for our eastern customers who buy from us because we're so close to them and they can make quick orders with us instead of having to wait several days for the fruit to come over from the West Coast," Richter adds.

The fact that the fruit is so close to



HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY COUNT By Dave Diver

In 1870, Samuel Henry Rumph identified a new peach variety, naming it Elberta after his wife. The yellow-flesh variety was soon joined by the white-flesh Georgia Bell. By 1880, Rumph had engineered a refrigerated railcar to ship these peaches to northern markets and started an industry expansion that would lead to a production peak of eight million bushels in 1928. Since that time, production has gradually dwindled, but with new improved varieties the state ranks third in the United States with approximately 12,000 acres.

Following the discovery of the Elberta, Prosper J.A. Beckman's nursery was used to develop future varieties until it was sold to become the Augusta National Golf Club, host of the Masters Tournament each April.

Relatives of Mr. Rumph continue to grow peaches under the name Pearson Farms in Fort Valley. There are now 27 varieties grown on the farm; approximately 40 varieties are grown in the state.

Bill McGee, sales, at Pearson Farms, formerly known as Big 6 Farms, LLC, indicated five growers produce about 95 percent of the

state's commercial peach production. Harvesting starts around May 5, with approximately 28 percent done in May, 38 percent in June, 25 percent in July, 9 percent in August and the remainder in September.

The objective of new varietal development has been the improvement of taste and exterior color characteristics. With the old peach varieties, most buyers would purchase from other growing areas whenever supplies became available; Georgia may have had lower prices, but other areas had better flavor.

Geography accounts for the concentration of peach growing in four central Georgia counties; a fall line runs between the Piedmont and the coastal plain. The 490-foot high point in the Piedmont provides temperature drainage – in which cooler air sinks to lower levels – to the 410-foot level further south, preventing most of the damaging cooler springtime temperatures. The sandy loam soil of the coastal plain is also more favorable than the heavy clay of the Piedmont.

Jeff Wainwright, a partner at Taylor Orchards in Reynolds, grows and markets

according to his customers' wants. These range from one retailer interested in hard, large-size product to the opposite-end-of-the-scale customer interested in 2¾ size left on trees one to two days longer than usual to achieve a closer to tree-ripened status.

Although he estimates an 18-percent cost increase above 2007, Wainwright is optimistic about recouping much of the difference by keeping at least one receiver promoting each week and having a monthly pricing program.

Likewise McGee emphasizes setting up promotion programs with buyers months in advance of the picking season.

The industry has a regionalized program of communication with South Carolina producers so all are aware of volume and marketing considerations. In addition, the research arms of the University of Georgia (UGA) in Athens and Clemson University in Clemson, SC, are becoming more cooperative, leading to a program directed toward stimulating consumer demand. Likewise, *Georgia Grown* has become a significant positive identifier to consumers in northeastern metro markets.



home for eastern retailers is also a big bonus for consumers, Dickey says. "We don't have

our peaches sitting around in cold storage for days. We get them to the store in a matter of

a couple days. And that's a big selling point. It makes a real difference in taste."



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Reader Service # 7



A Developing Blueberry Industry

Georgia makes a bid for expanded berry importance.

By Dave Diver

On a percentage basis, blueberries are the most rapidly increasing crop in terms of acreage and production — they require only two years to come into production. Their health benefits are helping to drive consumption and, with a nearly perfect harvesting niche in the now year-round cycle of blueberry availability, Georgia is positioned to fill the demand.

The Superior Berry Farm in Fargo was carved out of forest land owned by the Superior Pine Company. Started in 2003, the blueberry enterprise now has 520 producing acres, up from 310 acres last year, according to Mike Bruorton, director of agricultural operations.

Production is anticipated to begin around May 25 with the Premier variety, to be followed by Brights about June 5 and Powder Blues on June 10; production concludes around July 4. Nearly all the berries are machine harvested; a smaller proportion of Georgia blues are high-bush varieties that are hand-picked starting about April 15.

Blueberries are available nearly year-round, thanks to globalization. Consumers have become accustomed to winter pricing in the \$2.99 to \$3.99 range for the 4.4-ounce container — except for a few promotional periods — so they are used to this price level. When supplies increase — and the package size increases reducing cost per ounce — the higher unit pricing provides higher-than-previous returns throughout the distribution system. Marketing is done through SunnyRidge Farm, Inc. in Winter Haven, FL.

Food-safety GAP standards are closely followed. Bruorton indicates he can trace product according to field, day and hour of picking. To enhance its already rigorous standards, Superior is constructing a cooler at the farm to hold berries at 50° F while waiting to be packed in consumer units. A small percentage is also sold for processing.

Stanley Scarborough, production manager at SunnyRidge, indicates Mexican blackberries have helped extend the South American season and provide an excellent transition into the Georgia-grown blackberries, which are anticipated to have a 30 percent volume increase this year.



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Reader Service # 22





Input Costs — The Latest Hot Topic

Rising costs across the board will impact this year's growing season.

By Dave Diver

No matter what entity you talk with in the agricultural community — from growers to the Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) in Atlanta — increasing input costs are mentioned most often. Costs for seed, fertilizer, fuel, agricultural chemicals, equipment and fuel are sharply higher.

Bill Brim, president of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA) in LaGrange, estimates cost of vegetable production has increased 45 percent since 2004. Making a reasonable profit is becoming a severe challenge for some producers in a world where returns are determined by the interaction of supply-and-demand factors on a daily basis.

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) data for fresh fruit and vegetables, the grower f.o.b. selling price currently accounts for, on average, about 25 percent of the consumer price after all of the middleman charges have been included. As of last

December, USDA was projecting only a 2.5 to 3.5 percent price grower FOB selling price for fresh vegetables in 2008 and an additional 1 percent increase for fresh fruit, which hardly meet input increases.

The high cost of fuel and copper is also bringing out thieves looking for above-ground fuel tanks used to power irrigation system motors and copper tubing wherever they can find it. Ride through the countryside and you can see numerous construction projects designed to protect equipment in open fields.

In some instances, the grower's equity is providing cash flow. Unless buyers pay more for their products, growers will have to make hard decisions that may lead to curtailed supply and much higher pricing in future years.

For some, the alternative may be transferring some acreage from vegetable and fruit crops into basic crops such as corn and soybeans, according to Bo Herndon Jr., president of L.G. Herndon Jr. Farms,

Inc. in Lyons. Corn and soybeans require less labor to plant and harvest and futures trading can lock in a price for future delivery that will insure profitability, barring an unexpected natural disaster.

Of course, locking in a price carries the risk of facing a margin call whenever the future's price goes against the position, even if the cash market price may be trending in the same direction. In the current economic environment of greater price volatility due to increased trader speculation, margin calls may even be exacerbated. There is also a margin cost at the time of the initial trade.

Retailers do not want to see fewer productive acres because commodity prices skyrocket under low-supply conditions. And consumers are more likely to continue purchasing with more moderate long-term price increases rather than with one big jump. The challenge becomes how to transfer input cost increases to the purchasing sector so as to provide stability throughout the distribution system.

GEORGIA FRUIT & VEGETABLE HARVEST SEASON												
COMMODITY	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
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BLUEBERRIES												
CABBAGE												
CARROTS												
CUCUMBERS												
FIELD PEAS												
GRAPES												
GREENS												
MELONS												
MUSCADINES												
PECANS												
PEACHES												
SNAP BEANS												
STRAWBERRIES												
SWEET CORN												
SWEET POTATOES												
TOMATOES												
VIDALIA ONIONS												
YELLOW SQUASH												
ZUCCHINI												



Already some growers have reduced acreage by small percentages. The estimated Vidalia onion acreage has declined approximately 10 percent from last year as some smaller growers have ceased operations.

Although previous input costs have tended to consolidate at each higher level, the current changes, affected by an evolving global economy coupled with demand for alternative fuel production, create challenges and

uncertainties never before experienced. As a result, it is crucial for buyers and sellers to understand the others' situation. While the short-term objective may be purchasing at the lowest possible price for a respective value level, if producers can't cover variable costs, then conditions in future years may be compromised. The unintended consequences could include, to name a few, supply inconsistencies, lower levels of quality and lack of innovation. All would be difficult for purchasers to cope with while meeting their expected levels of profitability.



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Georgia Agricultural Commodity Commission For Vegetables

Bo Herndon Jr., current chairman of the Georgia Agricultural Commodity Commission for Vegetables, is one of many individuals who recognize the importance of taking an active role in agricultural affairs. Perhaps his greatest accomplishment as Commission chair was overseeing the vote on the creation of the proposed marketing order.

During November and December 2007, the Commission held nine educational meetings across the state, providing growers an opportunity to learn more about the proposed marketing order and to offer their input. The proposed operating policy indicated that no less than 75 percent of the funds collected were to be used to fund research projects to enhance the profitability of Georgia vegetable producers. The balance can be used only for commodity promotion and education.

Important to the operating policy, the Commission will not create an administrative organization. No employees or staff will be hired, keeping the operation of the Commission as lean as possible. Salaries will not be paid with Commission funds to producer members of the Commission, members of special committees or advisory board members. These individuals will be reimbursed only for travel, meals and reasonable out-of-pocket expenses in the performance of their duties.

Assessments are only for producers with 50 acres or more of total annual production of beans, bell peppers, cabbage, cantaloupe, cucumber, sweet corn, tomatoes, greens and squash. In 2006, the farm value of these items was estimated at over \$700 million.

After a month-long voting period ending in mid-February, the bill passed with an 80 percent margin enabling assessments to be collected starting April 1, 2008. Besides Herndon, other Commission producer members are Jim Gillespie, owner, Gillespie Farms in Rabun Gap; Felton Coggins, vice president of Coggins Farms and Produce, Inc. in Lake Park; Dick Minor, shareholder, Holloway's Vegetable House in Andersonville; and Greg Murray, partner, Murray Farms in Bainbridge. This becomes the country's first commodity board combining nine items and with mandatory assessments.



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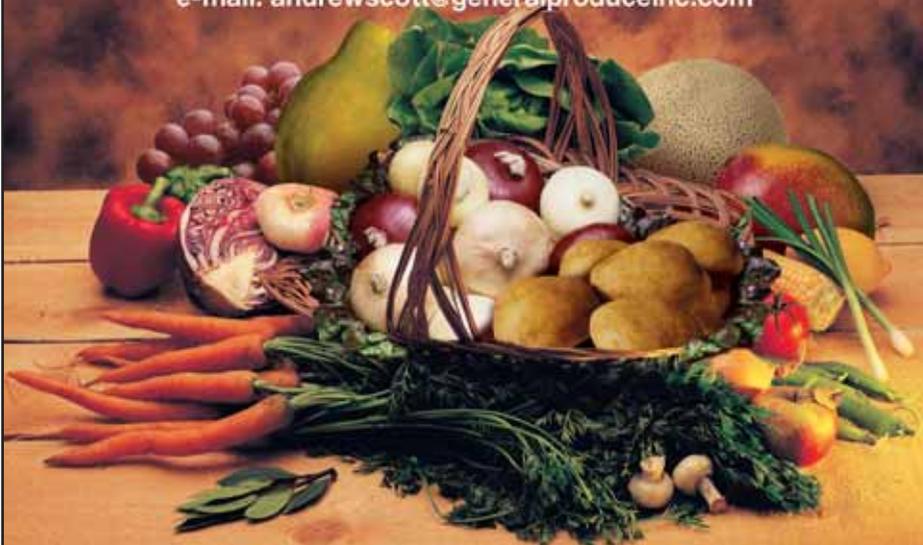
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GEORGIA FRUIT & VEGETABLE GROWERS ASSOCIATION RETAIL BUYER'S GUIDE

COMPANY INFORMATION	APPLES	ASIAN PEARS	BEANS	BELL PEPPERS	BLACKBERRIES	BLUEBERRIES	BUTTER BEANS	CABBAGE	CANTALOUPE	CARROTS	CORN	CUCUMBERS	EGGPLANT	GRAPES	GREENS	MUSCADINE	OKRA	PEACHES	PEANUTS	PEAS	PECANS	SPECIALTY PEPPERS	SQUASH	STRAWBERRIES	SWEET POTATOES	TOMATOES	VIDALIA ONIONS	WATERMELON
Larry Fuller/912-832-6010 Fax: 912-832-2015						x																						
5 Brothers Produce / Dan King 229-392-4724			x	x																			x		x		x	
A C Produce / Fred Paulk 912-534-5700 Fax: 912-534-5479				x				x				x											x					
Baker Farms / Joe Baker 229-769-3218 Fax: 229-769-3991				x				x				x			x								x					
Baker Farms / Mike Baker 229-686-4719 Fax: 229-543-1089																												x
Bell Farms / Rusty Bell 912-647-2807 Fax: 912-647-2806				x				x															x					
Bentley / Tom Bentley 800-489-3762 Fax: 205-646-3763																		x										
Bland Farms / Michael Hively 912-654-1426 Fax: 912-654-1330			x									x																x
Marty Bloodworth Farms / Marty Bloodworth 229-313-9266 Fax: 229-624-2328											x									x								x
Braddy Farms, Inc. / Gary P. Braddy 912-583-4414 Fax: 912-583-4087																					x							x
Brent Blosser Farms / Brent Blosser 877-870-8053				x				x				x	x															x
Bridges Farm / John Bridges, Jr 229-246-9575 Fax: 229-248-0069			x								x																	
Browning and Sons, Inc. / Michael Browning 850-973-6896 Fax: 850-973-3531																												x
Bruce West Farms / Bruce West 478-433-2700 Fax: 478-433-2702																												x
Bullard Farms / Jason Bullard / 229-896-7111													x										x					
Calhoun Produce, Inc. / Joyce & Gerald Calhoun 229-273-1887 Fax: 229-273-0082			x																		x			x				
Callaway Farms / Larry Callaway 912-684-3256																												x
Chambers Brothers / Adair Chambers-Peterson 912-487-3053 Fax: 912-487-1633							x																					
Chapman Farms / Jamie Chapman 478-433-2700 Fax: 478-433-2702			x																									x
Cogdell Berry Farm / Russ Goodman 912-487-3374 Fax: 912-487-2629					x	x																						
Coggins Farms / Harry Shaffer 229-559-7100 Fax: 229-559-6097			x	x						x		x	x										x				x	
Ken Corbett Farms, LLC / Jeff Stepanovich 229-559-9051 Fax: 229-559-9053			x	x								x	x	x									x					
Cowart, Inc. / Jim Cowart 912-565-9199 Fax: 912-565-0199												x											x					x
Cuthbert Berry Farms, LLC / James Cuthbert 912-832-3341 Fax: 912-832-3341					x	x																						
D & D Farms / David Davis 229-543-1450 Fax: 229-543-1452			x	x				x				x												x				x
D.H.L. Farms / David Lee						x																						
Dan Jones Farms / Dan C. Jones 229-872-3393 Fax: 229-872-3393			x	x				x				x											x					x
Dewitt Produce / Randy Dewitt 229-263-5000 Fax: 229-263-4099				x				x				x	x										x	x				
Dickey Farms, Inc. / Robert L. Dickey, III 478-836-4362 Fax: 478-836-2966																												
Docia Farms Inc / Philip Grimes 229-382-3872 Fax: 229-382-1057																												x
Dos Gatos Vineyard / Clay Lee / 912-449-9766																												
Dounoco Land Company, Inc. / Gillis J. Conway 912-283-0084 Fax: 912-28-3-3311					x																							
Emerich Farms / Terrell Hudson 478-627-3039 Fax: 478-627-3553																								x				x
Farmers Organics / Chad Heard 229-734-5018 Fax: 229-734-5019												x																
Joe Fletcher Farms / Joe Fletcher/229-924-4744			x	x									x															
Flowers Brothers Produce / Chip Flowers 229-387-8212 Fax: 229-387-8097				x									x															
Four Corners Farms / Rawls Neville 912-852-5098 Fax: 912-852-5097																												x
Fresh Plants / Charles Heart 800-424-3553 Fax: 229-928-0183				x																								
Georgia Vegetable Company / Billy Taylor 229-386-2374 Fax: 229-386-2500			x					x					x	x														x

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Gerrald's Vidalia Sweet Onion / Jamie Brannen 912-587-5902 Fax: 912-587-2258									x						x											x	x	
Gibbs Partick Farms, Inc / Gibbs Patrick, Jr 229-528-4252 Fax: 229-528-4589				x					x			x	x		x						x	x	x	x				
Glenn Heard Farms / Glenn Heard 561-996-6704 Fax: 229-246-0200											x																	
Gore Farms / Paul & Brenda Gore 912-245-4411																										x	x	
Hardy Brothers Peanuts / Alex Hardy 478-783-3044 Fax: 478-783-0606																			x									
Heagan Farms / Alex H./Cathy M Cornelius 912-284-0266						x																						
Hendrix Produce / Kevin Hendrix 912-685-3220 Fax: 912-685-4420									x																	x	x	
L. G. Herndon, Jr. Farms / L.G. Herndon Jr. 912-565-7640 Fax: 912-565-7158											x				x											x		
Herring Farms / Danny/Joey Herring 229-559-0101 Fax: 229-559-0066				x								x	x									x	x					
Hopkins Farms / Carroll Hopkins 229-872-3504 Fax: 229-872-3216			x	x				x		x		x	x											x				
Horner Farms, Inc. / Connie Horner 912-487-3049					x																							
Hoyt Altman Blueberry Farm / Hoyt Altman 912-36--7466						x					x									x								
J & B Blueberry Farms, Inc. / Joe Coarnelius, Jr. 912-285-1602 Fax: 912-284-1956						x																						
Jerod & Rodney Baker Farms / Jerod Baker 229-324-2739									x																		x	
JPM Farms / Jeff Miles 888-404-1609 Fax: 912--65-4-1068					x																							
K.G.Cardin & Sons Farms / K.G. Cardin Sr. 229-324-3275 Fax: 229-324-2933									x						x				x	x								
Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc. / Kurt Schweitzer 717-597-2112 Fax: 717-597-4096	x																		x							x		
Lane Southern Orchards / Duke Lane III 478-825-3592 Fax: 478-825-0015																			x		x							
Leger & Son, Inc. / Greg Leger 229-273-4548 Fax: 229-273-4998																											x	
Little River Produce, Inc. / Cal 229-559-5375 Fax: 229-559-6371				x			x						x							x		x	x		x	x		
G.W. Long Farm / Gerald Long 229-246-8086				x	x				x		x	x								x			x		x	x		
MBG Marketing / Derrin Wheeler 912-632-6406 Fax: 912-632-4140					x	x																						
McLain Farms, Inc. / James McLain 912-526-8436 Fax: 912-526-6600																											x	
McLeod Farms / Ronnie McLeod 912-654-9459 Fax: 912-654-3854																											x	x
Mercier Orchards, Inc. / Tim Mercier 706-632-3411 Fax: 706-632-2685	x				x	x													x									
Miles Berry Farm / James Allen Miles, Jr. 912-367-0651 Fax: 912-367-1147							x																					
Minor Produce, Inc. / Richard Minor 229-924-2241 Fax: 229-928-0862				x								x																
Moore Farms / Gene Moore / 912-285-3432				x	x								x											x			x	
Moore Farms / Ricky Moore 229-54-64936 Fax: 229-546-4963									x																			x
Mouzin Brothers Farms / Dennis Mouzin 812-890-1926 Fax: 812-882-0688																									x			x
Mtn Honey / Virginia Webb 706-754-7062	x					x																						
Murray Farms / Ledlow & Associates 850-627-9469																										x	x	
Ochlockonee Ridge Farms / Scott Hart, Jr 229-941-5971																									x	x		
Osage Farms / Ricky James 828-526-3989									x																x	x		
Osage Farms, Inc. / Melinda/Clint James 706-746-6952					x																				x	x		
P.G.C. Farms / Gregg Calhoun 229-246-7090 Fax: 229-246-0605																												
Jacob W. Paulk Farms, Inc. / Gary Paulk 229-468-7873 Fax: 229-468-7876															x	x												
Payne Farms / Jeff Payne																											x	
Pearson Farms / Lawton Pearson 478-825-7504 Fax: 478-825-1194																				x								

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Pete's Little Idaho Tater Farm / Terry England 770-867-1601 Fax: 770-867-2160			X	X							X					X			X			X			X		X	
Pinecliff Growers / Hamill Mcnair 229-336-8417 Fax: 229-336-5056				X						X	X	X	X						X			X	X					
Pittman Family Farms / Timothy Pittman 912-565-7055 Fax: 912-565-7699								X								X							X					
Plantation Sweets / Ronny Collins 800-541-2272 Fax: 912-684-4545																			X	X				X		X		
Quality Produce, LLC / Bill Brim 229-382-4454 Fax: 229-382-8930				X				X				X	X		X								X					X
R & H Farms, Inc. / Randy Hiers 229-559-4176 Fax: 229-559-9851				X								X	X									X	X					
Ralph Eubanks & Sons Produce / Trey Eubanks 229-294-8657 Fax: 229-294-0574								X	X					X						X								
Rawlins Farm / Bob Rawlins / 229-643-7609																												X
Roberson Farms, Inc. / Sid Roberson 229-382-6678 Fax: 229-386-0251			X					X			X											X						
Roger T. Price Farms / Roger Price 229-263-5024 Fax: 229-229-8971												X																
Rutland Farms / Greg Rutland 229-821-0581 Fax: 229-382-0233									X															X				X
Sanders Farms, Inc. / David/Ben Sanders 912-565-7477 Fax: 912-565-7578			X					X				X												X			X	X
Shuman Produce, Inc. / John G. Shuman 912-557-4477 Fax: 912-557-4478																												X
South Georgia Produce, Inc. / David Corbett 229-559-6071 Fax: 229-559-4955				X				X	X			X	X										X					X
Southern Grace Farms / Timothy Mcmillan 229-533-8585 Fax: 229-533-3058					X														X					X				
Southern Valley Fruit & Vegetable, Inc. / Dug Schwalls 229-769-3676 Fax: 229-769-5800				X				X	X			X	X										X					X
Stanley Farms / R.T. Stanley, Jr 912-526-3575 Fax: 912-526-3705				X								X																X
Still Pond Farms / Charles W Cowart, Jr 229-792-6382 Fax: 229-792-3944														X		X												
Sun State Produce Sales, Inc. / Brad Jones 352-243-6487 Fax: 352-243-6943																												X
Sunburst Farms, Inc. / Wendell Sumner 229-528-6692 Fax: 229-528-6692									X																			X
Sunnyridge Farms, Inc. / Stanley Scaarborough 863-294-8856 Fax: 863-595-4095						X														X								
Superior Berries Company / Mike Bruoton 912-637-5261 Fax: 912-637-5344						X																						
Sweet Corn Co-Op, Inc / David Larrimore 229-774-2332 Fax: 229-774-2873											X																	
Sweet Dixie Melon, Inc. / Alan Parrish 229-387-7577 Fax: 229-387-0400				X				X	X																			
Sweetwater Growers / James Dault 404-992-0199 Fax: 678-669-2396								X						X														
J. Taylor Farms / Johnny Taylor 912-294-8763				X	X					X	X	X	X										X					
Taylor Orchards / Walter Wainwright 478-847-4464 Fax: 478-847-4464																		X						X				
Tucker Farms / Ricky Tucker 229-533-9078 Fax: 229-533-9212																												X
Valdosta Plant Co., Inc. / Tom Daughtrey 229-896-4802 Fax: 229-896-3020																										X		
Van Solkema Produce, Inc / Jerry Van Solkema 616-878-1508 Fax: 616-878-1432	X		X	X	X			X		X	X	X	X		X										X		X	
Veazey Plant Co., Inc / Johnny Veazey 229-382-6443 Fax: 229-382-7100				X				X	X				X		X							X	X		X	X	X	
Veitch Blueberry Farm / Herschel J. Veitch 850-593-5753						X																						
Vidalia Organics, Inc. / Shad Dasher 800-241-2019 Fax: 912-654-9023				X											X										X	X		
Walter P. Rawl & Sons, Inc. / Charles Wingard 803-894-1900															X								X					
Wavell Robinson Farms / Wavell Robinson 229-859-2011 Fax: 229-859-2043																												X
Williams Farms / Brett Williams 912-293-1324 Fax: 912-594-8079				X																			X					
Williams Produce, Inc. / Joey Tucker 229-324-2242 Fax: 229-324-2501				X				X				X	X		X								X					
ZBLU, Inc. / Dan/Denise Moody 912-462-6895 Fax: 912-462-6895						X																						

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Portland's New Seasons Selling Passion

A small, northwest chain positions itself to compete with the "big boys."

BY MEREDITH AUERBACH

Around the country, industry experts and consumers alike are watching the rise of small regional chains as they "out-nimble" the big retailers in customer service and product selection uniquely suited to their own geographic and demographic situations.

In Portland, OR, the company generating excitement is New Seasons, a 9-store locally owned and operated chain riding the wave of changes in food retailing.

The original iteration of a natural foods store in the Portland area was Nature's Fresh, which was bought by GNC, based in Pittsburgh, PA, and Wild Oats, now owned by Whole Foods, based in Aurora, CO. About the time Wild Oats bought Nature's Fresh, a number of personnel split off and opened News Seasons with the idea there was space for something in the middle — a natural foods store

/small conventional market blend. Currently, one of its primary strategies is to continue to develop *Home Grown*, a program geared toward promoting products produced primarily in Oregon and closely followed by those from Washington and northern California.

The stores range from a small 18,000 square feet to 50,000 square feet at the large flagship store in Happy Valley. The typical store serves customers with eight checkout stands. Produce departments are usually on the left or right side close to the front. They range from 1,000 to about 2,000 square feet and offer, depending on time of year, between 300 and 400 SKUs.

According to Jeff Fairchild, director of produce since the company's beginning in 1999, "New Seasons is a different kind of place, and it's hard to tell who is more passionate about what we do — staff or consumers. We work to develop partnerships with local, organic and sustainable farmers and producers. Our community has enthusiastically supported us in that effort."

A visit to stores on a recent Sunday found jammed parking lots at



10 AM and stores buzzing with energy. Just inside the door were two long tables set up with a breakfast tasting — probably a dozen different varieties of locally produced natural cereals and granolas and every kind of milk available from cow to goat to soy. For those feeling a bit more self-indulgent, samples of waffles, syrup and whipped cream were being served from the Solutions Desk, which is located at the front of each store and where shoppers can ask questions.

Service Matters

This small chain maintains a staff of three nutritionists, who work out of the Solutions Desk, to help customers make sense of nutrition and health information, labels, portion sizes, weight-loss news and trends; they also conduct frequent food classes. A wellness staff handles matters of supplements, herbs and products supporting a natural lifestyle. Both groups set the tone within the stores — healthful, vibrant, open and available.

The store was filled with people — having a good time shop-

ping. And shopping is easy as well as fun. In the produce department, there's a remarkably simple but effective label program — green signs for organics, gray for conventional, yellow tags and a special logo for the *Home Grown* program, and country-of-origin labels throughout the department.

Produce displays look as if they are stacked high but they are carefully pitched to place product right at eye level without too many layers to cause weight or crush damage. The result is a palette of blazing, bright colors.

Organic and conventional product displays are separate but adjacent. "We offer organic whenever it is available but will also use conventional product if it is the only one we can get or if there is such a large price differential that it is important to customers to be able to choose what's right for them," Fairchild notes.

The refrigerated case for vegetables runs along the side wall and wraps the corner to create a section that includes five or six varieties of fresh mushrooms, herbs and bulk salad greens and blends. There are some value-added selections but little branded product in the traditional sense.

On this Sunday morning, there were five people actively working the produce department. They were needed — produce was fly-

ing out of the store and restocking was an important priority.

Promotion Matters

New Seasons produces a weekly promotion flyer with each department promoting its best offerings for the week. Fairchild expresses New Seasons' and his philosophy of customer service, "We count on our ads to drive sales. We choose the best seasonal items — our very best stuff — and price it to move volume so customers have the best buy possible."

The obvious competition for New Seasons is the Wild Oats stores. Several are located just short distances from New Seasons stores.

Wild Oats stores are about the same size as New Seasons stores, offer organic and natural foods and cater to the same general population. Pricing is about the same and each has a locally sourced program in place. Both companies offer in-store baked breads and bakery items, sampling in all departments, extensive delis, salad bars and restaurant foodservice.

Yet on this Sunday, New Seasons stores were significantly busier with a greater sense of energy and activity. The two Wild Oats stores visited were darker, sometimes due to burned out lights, and had signs in the pro-

duce department that were confusing or didn't match product next to them. Staff people, especially in produce, were friendly and knowledgeable but less visible and available.

Wild Oats does not produce a weekly produce flyer, missing an opportunity to let people know what is of interest for the week. At the checkout stand, the checker had problems with code numbers and identification, but this was quickly and graciously fixed. It wasn't a bad experience by any means — just a bit off.

Because New Seasons stocks both organic and conventional product, Fairchild believes all food stores — whether grocery, club, convenience or specialty — are competition. "Large chains like Safeway [based in Pleasanton, CA] and Fred Meyer [based in Portland, OR, and a subsidiary of Cincinnati, OH-based Kroger Co.] now stock more organic and bulk foods and wellness products. And it is clear to us that conventional pricing is getting closer to organic levels all the time. It will be very interesting to see what happens over the next year as the Northwest economy, which has been pretty hot, slows down or if there is a stronger recession than is now predicted. Will they pull back? It's hard to tell. I don't expect we will."

Each of the New Seasons stores is slightly different, largely due to somewhat different

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configurations and the touch of individuality allowed in each store. Most have three free-standing displays down the center of the department, which, at the time of our visit, were used for citrus, avocados, pears, apples and winter staples of squash, onions and potatoes. One full endcap was devoted to five varieties of imported grapes, including Muscats from Chile and highly unusual organic South African La Rochelle black grapes

Sourcing Matters

"Most of our purchases are direct from the producer or shipper," continues Fairchild. "Because so much of our product falls under our local supply designation, our relationships with farmers and shippers make it possible. We work closely with a company here in Portland, Organically Grown, to receive produce from various farms, cross dock and get it to us, often the same day. This collaborative style of business is how we have always worked."

The long list of local producers, proudly posted on the New Seasons Web site, is the result of years of working to build strong ties of trust and confidence. Some supply only a few products but they are still important to New Seasons.

New Ways Matter

A year ago, New Seasons moved into online sales for customers. A couple of delivery vans are parked outside the stores. Consumers can specify delivery or pickup and there's a special parking space complete with a big button and speaker to notify the store to bring the order outside to the car. According to Fairchild, acceptance is growing and the company is constantly learning more about handling this new kind of business.

Commitment Matters

Portland is a thriving cultural locus of the organic, locally and sustainably grown movement in the Pacific Northwest. Specialty farms and small producers abound in the temperate climate and lush valleys of the area. They have found success with small chains like New Seasons and a population of well-educated people who look at food quite differently from most mainstream consumers.

Fairchild comments, "Our early customers were old hippies from the '60s. Now we attract families seeking healthful, responsible food for their kids and foodies who want to know everything about where and how it's grown, what's new, what's hot. They expect us to be knowledgeable about flavors and sourcing and growing. We know them well, share their beliefs and are committed to serving them."

pb



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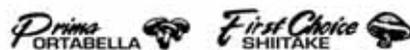
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Reader Service #29

Five Tips To Grape Profits

Retailers can overcome obstacles by focusing on profitable solutions.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

Grape category product mix, unpredictable availability and packaging perplexities can cause growers, shippers and retailers to cry sour grapes, but successfully circumventing these problems can translate into bigger profits.

"We put grapes on ad regularly in summer and winter," explains Mike McGuire, director of produce for DeMoulas/Market Basket, a 60-store chain based in Tewksbury, MA. "They bring a significant volume and dollar sales to the department."

McGuire and other experts offer tips for addressing challenges and producing major profits within the category.

1. STOCK WHAT CONSUMERS WANT

Green grapes were the most popular with consumers for years, notes McGuire, "but today they've been supplanted by better varieties of seedless reds."

Dave Brassart, general manager for produce and floral at Jungle Jim's International Market, Inc., a single-unit retailer known for its produce in Fairfield, OH, agrees, adding, "Greens follow the reds in sales volume with Red Globes, black seedless and then other varieties like Champagne, Muscats and Concord as they're available. That's our order of demand."

Black grapes are slow movers, reports Ed Laster, produce specialist at Metropolitan Markets, a 5-store chain based in Seattle, WA. "Consumers equate the color with seeds."

The popularity of red grapes may be due to greater availability later in the season, explains Scott Boyajian, president of Sun-view Marketing International, Delano, CA. "The ratio of sales, red to green grapes, is skewed in the spring and fall as a result of supply issues. Reds go longer and later into the season. This may change in the next five to six years as newer varieties of green grapes come on."



Offering grapes in multiple colors is both an opportunity and a challenge.

Late season green grapes can have problems, notes Brad Cantwell, vice president of sales, Dole Fresh Fruit Co., Westlake Village, CA. "The final Thompsons are clear and have thin skin. Defects show up easily. Retailers will aggressively advertise late season Crimson red grapes because they can count on the quality, condition, sugar and shelf life. They don't have as much confidence in the green seedless at this time."

As for black grapes, Rick Eastes, director of special projects for Ballentine Produce Sales, Reedley, CA, says, "There's more acreage planted than there is consumption in the United States right now, but there's been an increase demand for black grapes in global markets."

Trial is very important for black grapes, says Patty Boman, director of category management for the Giumarra Companies, Los Angeles, CA. "Availability, sampling and promotion can encourage sales of this variety."

Good quality grapes entice customers to buy so it's important to have the right mix on display, relates John Pandol, vice president of special projects for Pandol Brothers, Inc., Delano, CA. "I often see black grapes in

poorer condition at retail than other varieties. I think that's because many retailers offer all three colors in the same volume within the display, but because each color of grape doesn't sell in equal volumes, there tends to be higher shrink for the blacks. I think it would be better to set the display in a 5:4:1 ratio, for example, of reds, greens and blacks. Just run a racing stripe of blacks down the middle between reds and greens."

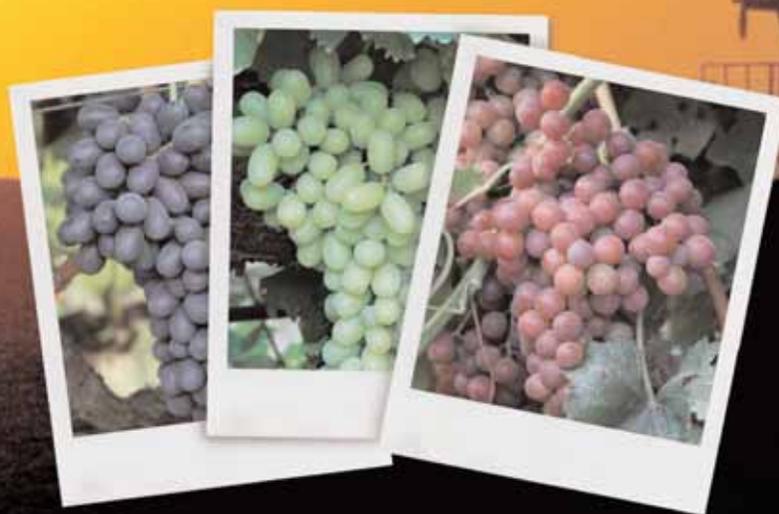
Consumers perceive black grapes as seeded and that has hindered sales, reports Domenick Bianco, president and owner of Anthony Vineyards, Bakersfield, CA. "Education helps to solve this issue. Also, there are newer black varieties, such as Autumn Royal, that eat well."

Red Globe is a seeded variety that has found a market due to its jumbo size. "Red Globes are selling on a similar price par with red seedless grapes on the East Coast, so demand is there," Eastes explains.

Demographics play a key role in offering the right mix of grapes for optimal sales. "Red Globes are popular with Asian and Hispanic customers," Bowman states.

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imports several varieties of Italian grapes, including Vittoria, Italia (Muscat) and Red Globe table grapes, through its BellaVita brand. Seeded grapes such as these are very popular overseas because they offer a variety of health benefits, notes Celso Paganini, CEO and founder. "The majority of grape antioxidants are found in the seeds." This is something retailers should consider when expanding their grape offerings. "[Italian grapes] usually arrive sometime between Aug. 15 and Aug. 20. They're later than California's grapes, so if retailers have a good deal with Italian grapes, they can offer them through the Thanksgiving holiday when the California deal is over."

2. INTERCHANGE VARIETIES

Grapes are signed and advertised by color rather than variety at Metropolitan Markets. "We'll carry two, three, up to four red seedless varieties throughout a season," reports Laster. "If I promote by variety name, I'm locked into that variety. If I don't, I'm able to take the best quality and eating red seedless grape on the market at the time for the ad. If they're unique, however, like Champagne grapes, I'll identify them."

What sells "isn't a variety by name, but what's new and fresh at the time," notes Dole's Cantwell. "Chile and California tend to be the same. For the reds, Flames come in first and then the Crimson. Perlettes start in the green deal before the Thompsons kick in. When a new variety starts, retailers will switch over even though they pay more for this fruit because of the quality."

"It's easy to interchange different varieties during the season because, for example, Flame and Crimson, have the same PLU. Plus, most consumers don't know grapes by their variety name," he adds.

Whether consumers recognize grapes by variety name "depends on how a retailer trains its customers to buy," notes Jerry DiBudo, Ballentine chief operating officer.

Since 1981, the California Table Grape Commission (CTGC), Fresno, CA, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have worked to develop high-quality grape varieties, including the Crimson Seedless (red), Princess (green) and Autumn Royal (black). Newer grape varieties just now coming into commercial production include the Autumn King, a late-season, green seedless variety with large berries; Scarlet Royal, a mid-season red, seedless variety that ripens between Flames and Crimson in mid-August; and Sweet Scarlet, a red seedless variety with a light Muscat flavor that is harvested at the end of August.

Blair Richardson, CEO of FreshSense, the Parlier, CA-based marketing arm for Ripe 'N

The Scoop On Shatter

How much shatter — loose berries — is acceptable in a bunch of grapes? This is the crux of an issue California grower/shippers and produce wholesalers have debated for the past three years. The issue is whether the U.S. Grade No. 1 standard for grapes should incorporate an additional 5 percent for shatter. Currently, loose grapes are counted toward a 12- to 15-percent total for defects. If the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) approves the additional 5 percent, defective grapes could total up to 20 percent of the berries in a container.

Brendon Cull, director of government and regulatory affairs for Kroger Company, the 2,400-store chain based in Cincinnati, OH, is not satisfied with the proposed change. In a letter filed during USDA's comment period on the ruling, he wrote that the proposal would be "unacceptable to many consumers and families who want their grapes to be fresh."

Other retailers, including Mike McGuire, director of produce for DeMoulas Market Basket, Tewksbury, MA, are not as concerned. "Grapes are sold bagged today, so shatter really isn't an issue," he explains.

"Today, 80 to 90 percent of grapes are sold in a bag or clamshell," notes Barry Bedwell, president of the California Grape &

Tree Fruit League, Fresno, CA. This means consumers purchase and retailers sell the loose grapes. This shatter was more of an issue in the past, when grapes were sold in bulk and loose grapes fell to the bottom of the box or lug and went unsold."

Opponents of the added 5 percent shatter tolerance feel it may lead to an overall decrease in the quality of grapes. A study commissioned by the Arlington, VA-based North American Perishable Agricultural Receivers and conducted by Deibel Labs, a Lincolnwood, IL-based independent food testing laboratory, suggested shattered grapes were more susceptible to microbial contamination than bunched grapes.

Advocates cite a survey by the Fresno, CA-based California Table Grape Commission that revealed more than 80 percent of shoppers considered shatter levels of up to 10 percent to still equate with grapes that were "excellent [or] very good quality."

"Right now, the decision rests with the USDA," Bedwell states. "We expect to hear back in [mid-May or mid-June]."

In the meantime, Dave Brassart, general manager for produce and floral at Jungle Jim's International Market, Fairfield, OH, points out, "We do check for shatter, but if the grapes don't eat well — shatter or not — we don't want them." **pb**

Ready tree fruit, explains, "Crimson red seedless and Thompson green seedless are still the most popular by volume and tradition. However, this is changing as better, newer varieties become more readily available. The Princess green seedless variety looks to be growing in popularity. As for red seedless, the Crimson variety is still preferred, but the Scarlet Royal red seedless is getting some attention."

"This blossoming of new grapes to the market is the most variety we've seen in such a short time," says Randy Parnagian, co-owner and director of marketing, Fowler Packing Co., Inc., Fresno, CA, "but the challenge is the consumers don't see it because they don't think of grapes by variety."

Richardson agrees, adding, "This presents a challenge for us from a marketing perspective, since industry marketing is done from a generic basis and retailers have limited resources and opportunities to develop consumer recognition of specific varieties. To take advantage of the eating characteristics of the new varieties and capture growth in the category, it will be up to private compa-

nies to partner with appropriate retailers who are willing to actively engage consumers with creative marketing programs."

The challenge, says Pandol Brother's Pandol, "is that unlike apples, for example, the newer varieties of grapes don't look different. You don't see retailers carrying two red or two green varieties at a time. This may be because we as grower/shippers have concentrated on the produce buyer as our customer and not thought from a merchandising point of view when bringing these new varieties to market."

Mike Aiton, senior vice president of sales and marketing, Sun World International, LLC, Bakersfield, CA, says retailers can take advantage of the emerging explosion of grape varieties by educating themselves and their consumers. "Retailers need to be aware and be proactive in promoting grapes and building the category's new varieties."

"Private companies and even individual growers are taking a more active role in developing new varieties of grapes in an effort to create a competitive edge," adds Richardson. "This could be good for the

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industry, or it could be a challenge if grape varieties become a commodity as in some fruit categories such as stone fruit."

3. PLAN AHEAD

California, Chile and Mexico overlap and create year-round availability for grapes, but there can be blips of low or no supply. "Last year, we finished early in California and Chile was late coming in," reports Fowler's Parnagian. "There's always the potential for supply chain gaps in the fall/winter and winter/spring."

There's also the prospect for last minute deals. "A grower who has a good-quality late Thompson can make some money," explains Dole's Cantwell. "Traditionally, when markets open in December, FOBs for green grapes will be around \$30 for an 18-pound box. This shifts to the mid \$20s in January and mid-to-high teens by March and April. Prices will then rise again as supplies dwindle and demand remains strong. Crimsons, on the other hand, have somewhat more stable pricing throughout the season. In general, there's a consistency in other fruit, bananas for example, that isn't found in grapes. That's why 90 percent of bananas are sold on contract and why grape pricing can vary dramatically. For example,

last season we closed the market in Brazil at \$50 for Festivals. In the same season, we marketed Thompsons out of Chile for \$14."

Selling off of estimates instead of inventory and the pressure to accurately hit the right price are big challenges, according to Pandol of Pandol Brothers. "Consider that the industry transitions from South America to Mexico to California in an 8-week window. That can be a volatile situation. Produce buyers still ask me in January to give them a forecast for late spring so they can plan their ads. It's like trying to play the futures market."

It's critical to keep fruit moving through the supply chain, notes Cantwell. "This can be a problem when retailers don't adjust their prices to FOBs. A retailer might take Flames in February with a \$16 FOB and put them on ad for \$1.29. The next week, they might bump back to a regular price of \$2.99 per pound even though the FOB hasn't changed. This less aggressive retail can dampen volume movement."

This can also occur when retailers plan for 3-color ads. "The disadvantage is that each color grape isn't in the same supply at certain times of the year," Cantwell explains. "We might have Flames at \$14, Thompsons at \$18 and black seedless at \$22. At these prices, a retailer can't go out on a 99¢-per-

pound ad on all three, so they go to \$1.69 and average the costs. The problem is I want a 99¢ ad to move my Flames just because I've got more supply."

Buyers can solve this problem by "keeping in close contact with growers/shippers and exporters, especially at the front and back of a season," advises Guimarra's Boman.

4. SOLVE PACKAGING WOES

Grapes are displayed in bulk with tissue paper separating each bunch at Metropolitan Markets. "It's the farm-stand look we're after," explains Laster.

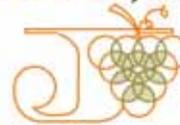
"Our grapes are merchandised in zip-lock bags that remain open," reports DeMoulas' McGuire. "Consumers can choose the size they like. We also offer a red and green mixed, over-wrap pack. It's a good impulse item and a value-add for consumers rather than having to pick up two different bags."

Mark Luchak, director of produce and floral, Rice Epicurean Markets, an 8-store upscale chain based in Houston, TX, explains, "We've been exploring clamshell packaging for grapes. We think the clamshell might protect the grapes and lead to less damage, less shrink and longer quality."

"The way companies differentiate themselves is by packaging," Cantwell explains.



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Reader Service # 67

"Bags are the most popular. They're typically sold open or unsealed by random rather than fixed weight. This gives retailers flexibility in merchandising and removes the risk to the grower/shipper of not making weight."

Bags are most cost efficient, adds Jon Zaninovich, vice president of Jasmine Vineyards, Inc., Delano, CA. "Clamshells are more expensive. This is one reason why the industry hasn't gone into them in a big way."

Clamshell "are pretty much isolated to the club stores," according to Sunview's Boyajian. "I've seen some chain retailers switch to clams and back again to bags due to cost. It's the cost of the packaging itself and the cost of labor."

Ballentine's DiBuduo agrees, adding, "Not only does clamshell packaging cost more, but it also requires additional labor to pack into a fixed-weight box."

Three- and 4-pound fixed-weight clamshells can be field packed "whereas we have to do the 1- and 2-pounders in the packing-house," notes Anthony Vineyard's Bianco. "They're more labor intensive. Plus, you always have to pack a little more product in a fixed-weight pack — for example, 4 1/2-pounds in a 4-pound clamshell. If you don't, it can be a real problem. Imagine the cost of a recall on a truck carrying 1,500 to 2,000 boxes for maybe 10 boxes that don't make weight."

Some retailers stock tri-color clamshell packs of red, green and black grapes, which can add another layer of complexity and cost, says Zaninovich.

Sun World is in its third season of offering its Rainbow of Flavors clamshell, featuring two or three colors of grapes in 2-, 3- and 4-pound clamshells. "It's one of our big growth items," notes Aiton.

Clamshell packs provide great visual appeal. FreshSense's Richardson explains, "From a marketing perspective, clamshells allow greater interaction with consumers through messaging and creative design. Clamshells can also be merchandised more easily and attractively than bags or bulk. In terms of quality, there is less bruising. The primary disadvantage is all these advantages have a cost — the incremental cost of a clamshell."

"If we're looking for traceability to the package level, how can we continue to do random-weight packs?" asks Pandol Brothers' Pandol. "We need to go to a fixed weight — either a sealed bag or a clamshell. If we're talking fixed weight, I see 1-pound, 20-ounce, 2-, 3-, 4- and 5-pound. We have clamshell anarchy right now."

5. PROMOTE SUMMER AND WINTER

Although there's no seasonality to grapes

anymore, "We definitely sell more in the summer when the weather is warm," notes DeMoulas' McGuire.

The display location and size for grapes changes seasonally at Metropolitan Markets. "We move grapes from an island to table, summer to winter," reports Laster. "There's more caution in the winter since the potential for shrink is greater."

In the summer, there's a battle for shelf space, notes Steve Ryan, Ballentine executive vice president of sales. "We're competing with cherries, tree fruit, melons — all the fruit that comes into abundance during the summer — not to mention all the locally and regionally grown fruits and vegetables that come to market at this time of the year. What's positive is that grapes command a higher price and have good demand by consumers. Retailers find it's profitable to sell a higher velocity and margin item and we're able to get the shelf space."

Ads are effective in moving volume and making up dollars in the summer. Cindy Plummer, CTGC domestic trade manager, reports, "Research conducted in 2006 by the [W. Dundee, IL-based] Perishables Group indicates that front-page grape ads generated triple the volume and dollar lift of back page ads from May to August."

The research indicates the greatest category lift in both volume and dollar sales during the early California grape season is with ads that feature four or five varieties. Volume is maximized with discount levels of 50 percent or more from May through August. Three promotions per month during May through August generated the best volume and dollar lift for the category.

This season, CTGC will launch an updated advertising campaign. "We've updated our logo for the first time in 30 years," notes Jim Howard, consumer educator. "Grower/shippers will start using it on their packaging. The idea is to identify grapes as coming from California to convey a sense of heritage about the state's industry. This message will resonate through small billboards strategically placed on the side or in parking lots of retail supermarkets, in ads, POS materials and via a satellite media tour."

Beyond the summer, Zaninovich says, "There's opportunity in the fall deal to promote grapes, especially the Crimsons for decoration and eating."

"Realistically, there is not a lot of difference in merchandising grapes in the summer versus the winter," notes FreshSense's Richardson. "However, volumes are greater in the summer, and the quality of the fruit is generally better. This allows for more exciting displays and more interesting merchandising opportunities."

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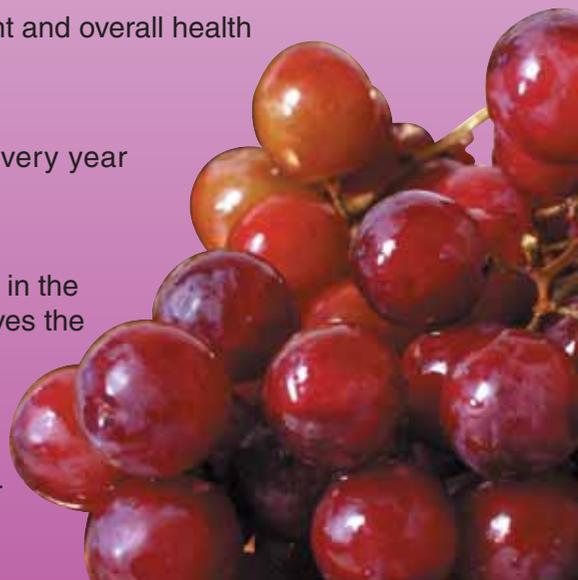
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Dried Plums Appeal To Health-Conscious Snackers

Eye-catching displays with high-visibility are the key to boosting sales.

BY BOB JOHNSON

The old prune is now young again, shedding its shriveled name and finding new and exciting markets. “The growth in demand for dried plums is phenomenal right now,” reports Jeff McLemore, product manager at Sunsweet Growers Inc., Yuba City, CA.

In decades past, the demand for dried plums was driven by consumers buying them for baking purposes or seniors using dried plums for medical purposes.

Experts say those days are over. Dried plums, like other dried fruit, are a healthful snack-food alternative. “The use is overwhelmingly weighted toward snacks — much more than 20 years ago,” explains Richard Peterson, general manager of the California Dried Plum Board, Sacramento, CA. “Convenience and the desire for healthful snacks are driving the demand.”

This newfound demand for dried plums is a result of consumers perceiving them as a healthful and convenient snack. To reach their full potential, dried plums need to be merchandised as a healthful fruit among other fruit.

This trend toward dried fruit snacks has completely changed the makeup of the market for dried plums. “About 90 percent of prunes are consumed as a snack,” notes Mark Bagley, senior vice president for sales and marketing at Sun-Maid Growers of California, Kingsburg, CA.



Consumers looking for convenient, healthful snacks turn to dried plums.



In almost all cases, continuing to display dried plums outside the produce department costs sales. “Some retailers have them with dry grocery items by the baking section but sales tend to be better and margins tend to be higher when they are in the produce

department,” says Tom Tjerandsen, president of McClure and Tjerndsen, a Sonoma, CA-based trade marketing agency that represents Sun-Maid Growers of California.

The produce department gives more people a chance to see dried plums. “Considering fresh fruit is something consumers purchase on a weekly basis, I would think that produce would find it most profitable to sell this type of product because the traffic is higher,” says Lisa Goshgarian, marketing manager for Mariani Packing, Vacaville, CA.

More people come through the produce department than the baking area, meaning more potential buyers see the dried plums when they are near the other fruits. “In the produce area you see a higher velocity,” McLemore states.

“Dried plums move better in produce,” agrees Peterson. “People are more health conscious and they know that eating a piece



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of fruit, like a dried plum, is more healthful than eating a candy bar.”

Not only do they move better in produce, but dried plums are also easier to handle than almost anything else in the department. “One thing that is good about dried plums is that they have a longer shelf life than most of the items in the produce department,” Sunsweet’s McLemore notes.

That can add up to a high-volume, low-maintenance product. “There’s no trimming, no watering and no shrink,” Sun-Maid’s Bagley reports. “People snack all year-round. Snacking does not have a season. It’s a tremendous profit item.”

Not only do they move better in produce, but dried plums are also easier to handle than almost anything else in the department.

FOCUS ON THE IMPULSE FACTOR

Most consumers don’t plan on buying dried plums when they walk in the door. “People tend to write milk, butter, eggs and flour on their shopping lists, but they don’t very often write down dried plums,” Tjerandsen explains. “Dried plums are a high-impulse item so they need to be displayed visibly. Eight out of 10 items that end up in a shopping cart weren’t on the list.”

Producers are taking the lead in developing packages that catch consumers’ eyes. “Low visibility is always an issue any time you’re trying to sell and merchandise a product,” Mariani’s Goshgarian states. “One challenge with dried plums in produce is that you’re competing with fresh foods that are visibly bright and beautiful. Dried plums are dark. Our packaging always has a window because we feel it’s critical that consumers see the moist nature of the product. We’re extremely proud to show them off. The key is making sure your packaging focuses on the benefits that prunes offer, especially as a super fruit with high antioxidant power.”

New Lines And Packaging Aids Sales

Many dried plum producers are focusing on packaging and promotion. Sunsweet Growers, Inc., Yuba City, CA, introduced Sunsweet Ones, a line of colorfully wrapped, individual dried plums being marketed as an “irresistibly delicious snack you can take anywhere.”

The line extension, which is available nationwide, is supported by a national television campaign, reports Steve Harris, Sunsweet’s vice president of marketing. “This product, in addition to the advertising, is driving the dried plum growth in the category,” he notes. “In fact, Sunsweet is growing between 25 and 30 percent, with 70 percent of this growth coming from incremental volume from Ones.”

Flavored dried plums are also finding a niche within the category. Sunsweet recently launched its 60 Calorie Pack Pitted Prunes line. One of the first “truly healthful” calorie packs available, according to Harris, the calorie packs consist of regular prunes as well as cherry, orange and lemon essence flavors. Each bag consists of eight 0.75-ounce packs containing four prunes (60 calories).

Product innovation and television communication has helped Sunsweet expand and promote its dried plum offerings. “Not to pat ourselves on the back, but we’ve done a lot of advertising and it has worked,” explains Jeff McLemore,



Photo courtesy of Sunsweet Growers, Inc.

Sunsweet product manager.

This emphasis on line extensions and attractive packaging options continues to push dried plums to new heights, notes Lisa Goshgarian, marketing manager, Mariani Packing, Vacaville, CA. “As we continue to see convenience and enhanced wellness play a major role in the food industry, I would imagine you’re going to continue to see a strong push on packaging options for dried fruit that caters to on-the-go snacking.” **pb**

There are also display packages that colorfully show dried plums and describe their benefits. “Sun-Maid has a number of display packages,” Tjerandsen says.

A secondary display with 30 to 60 individual items can draw attention to the product. “The biggest mistake retailers can make is to forget to promote them,” Bagley points out. “Merchandise them off the shelf. It’s a fruit and should be off the shelf with the other fruits. Promoting dried fruits off the shelf can increase sales up to 400 percent.”

THE VERSATILE PARTNER

Dried plums are versatile and can be cross-merchandised with a broad range of partners. They pose a variety of cross-merchandising opportunities with healthful products, such as salads and nuts, according

to McLemore. Combining two healthful products can help attract the growing number of consumers concerned with eating more healthfully.

Breakfast products and salad products are also good tie-ins with dried plums, he adds. “Baking ingredients are still a good tie-in with dried plums. Nuts are another good one, because they are used in trail mix.”

Dried plums sell year-round, but there are still promotional opportunities for special seasons. “The winter holidays and Easter are the two biggest selling cycles,” Goshgarian reports. “Use table-top promotions, cross-promotional activities and creative usage information. Most importantly, focus on the super-fruit status, digestive health properties and high antioxidant properties of dried plums.” **pb**

ALL DRESSED UP

Micky's Minis Flora Express, Millstadt, IL, introduces a line of All Dressed Up gift-able miniature plants. Packed 24 per case, each gift set includes one 2-inch potted plant, clear acetate viewing tube, decorated lid and base that comprise a reusable keepsake box, color-coordinated bow, watering straw, plant care instructions and a fashion tag with space for writing To and From.



Reader Service No. 316

18 STEMS HAND-TIED

Fantasy Farms LLC, Miami, FL, introduces the 18 Stem Special Design bouquet line. Featuring three focals per bouquet, the hand-tied design also boasts three novelty greens. The selection of greens will vary and may include stems of palm, eucalyptus, acacia, leucodendron or cynera. Retailers receive the bouquets in a wet-pack format with UPC codes on the sleeves and a floral preservative packet in each design.



Reader Service No. 317

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FPFC EXPO

CELEBRATES 25TH YEAR

The Fresh Produce and Floral Council (FPFC), La Mirada, CA, announces the 25th Annual Southern California Expo will be held July 15, 2008, at the Disneyland Hotel in Anaheim, CA. Attendees will gather for a day of educational programming and an exposition featuring more than 170 companies.



Fresh Produce
& Floral Council

Reader Service No. 318

TPIE DATES SET

Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA) Orlando, FL will hold its Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition (TPIE) Jan. 15-17, 2009. Featuring approximately 500 exhibitors and an extensive schedule of educational seminars, TPIE is the only national tropical plant event. The exhibition and seminars will take place at the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale, FL.



Reader Service No. 319

KENDALL'S GROWN GREEN BRAND

Kendall Farms, LP, Fallbrook, CA, introduces the Grown Green branding program to communicate its commitment to farm every day in a way that is good for the earth and its inhabitants. Numerous marketing tools, including product labeling, consumer information cards and co-op in-store signage for customers, will support and promote the Grown Green program.



Reader Service No. 320

WORLDWIDE

FLOWER BUYERS GATHER

Expoflores and HPP Exhibitions, both of Quito, Ecuador, will hold FLORECUDADOR AGRIFLOR 2008 in Quito Sept. 24-27. The international flower trade exhibition features the largest collection of worldwide flower buyers and decision-makers in one place. Exhibitors will showcase the newest and most innovative products in the international floral industry.



Reader Service No. 321

ALTMAN RECEIVES CERTIFICATION

Altman Plants, Emeryville, CA, recently earned VeriFlora certification issued by Scientific Certification Systems, an independent standards developer and certifier of environmental, sustainability and product quality achievement. The certification covers annual and perennial color, including landscaping plants, houseplants, garden vegetables, cactus and succulents, grown in Altman's San Diego and Riverside facilities on 650 acres.



Reader Service No. 322

SUPER FLORAL SHOW JUNE 17-20

In addition to those companies listed in the May *Floral Watch*, many more companies are exhibiting at the Super Floral Show, at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, FL, including: Booth #927, Bayview Flowers, Jordon Station, ON; #1165, The Liquid Fence Company, Brodheadsville, PA #1174, Harster Greenhouses, Dundas, ON; #1259, Floratech, North Syracuse, NY; #1977, DOTPots/Bethel Farms, Arcadia, FL; and #2173, Forever Flowers Wooden Roses, Hunter, NY.



Reader Service No. 323

READY FOR SPRING 2009

Napco Marketing Corp., Jacksonville, FL, announces the availability of its 2009 *Spring Catalog*. Showcasing a line of innovative floral containers made of metal, ceramic, glass and bamboo, the catalog also includes traditional favorites such as ceramic musical baby planters.



Reader Service No. 324

PREVIEW FLORAL DÉCOR ON CD

Arko Associates, Inc., Spring, TX, and RJT Foliage, Apopka, FL, announce the availability of a CD previewing products in the Green Expressions line. From hand-painted ceramic containers to dish garden-style decorative baskets, the extensive variety of vases and plant containers available empty or planted are shown on the CD. Foliage plants, orchids, succulents and blooming plants are available to complement and complete container orders.



Reader Service No. 325

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

Maximize Sales Of Dish Gardens

Retailers can garner extra profits by merchandising and promoting dish gardens throughout the year.

BY KIMBERLY RINKER

Since the late 1950s, dish gardens have satisfied consumers' needs for simple ways to enhance their home interiors. Easy to purchase as grab-and-go items, they also make thoughtful gifts. Originally a seasonal item comprised of a few ivies and philodendron in a ceramic bowl, dish gardens are now beautiful and creative floral designs found year-round in supermarkets.

Dish gardens can be combinations of flowering plants, neatly positioned low-light seeking plants and terrarium cacti. They provide a unique addition to a home atmosphere or serve as a special occasion gift for men or women. Typically, dish gardens are a convenient impulse purchase, found in a wide variety of containers, arrangements and designs, incorporating everything from Venus fly traps to miniature roses adorned with Easter Bunnies or Valentine's Day hearts.

Retailers can persuade consumers to purchase dish gardens based on a variety of factors, including convenience, indulgence and fashion. Their purchases are also influenced by special occasions, such as birthdays, graduations, anniversaries and get-well occasions, while calendar holidays, such as Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas, represent key selling periods.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistical Services, foliage plant production was \$630 million in 2007 — a 19 percent jump from the previous year. Potted foliage plants represented 90 percent of the total foliage value while 10 percent was from hanging baskets.

Nearly one-third of floral transactions in the United States are impulse purchases



Dish gardens offer consumers a high-impulse convenience item that works well as a gift or for self-indulgence.

with foliage and flowering houseplants garnering four of every 10 unplanned purchases, according to the American Floral Endowment, Edwardsville, IL. Options retailers can use to increase impulse sales include heavy traffic areas, display prominence, ease of selection by customer and readily identifiable price.

THE MARKET

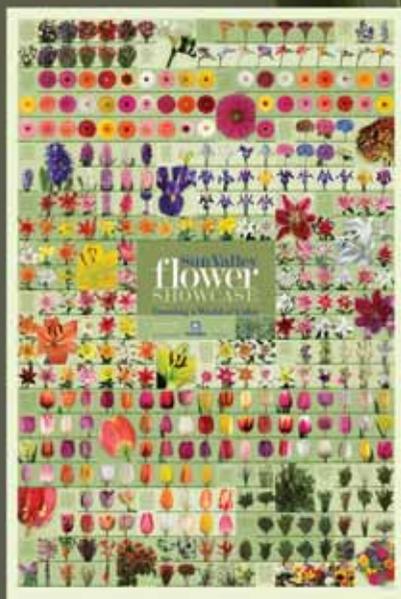
With seven decades of production, Vaughan, Inc., Sanford, FL, is one of North America's oldest dish garden suppliers, according to Jack Vaughan, president. It sells everything from traditional to contemporary dish gardens. "We offer dish gardens with flowers, in ceramic or wicker baskets, as well as many seasonal items with specific themes and holiday colors," he notes. "We'll make enormous baskets designed to be focal points in floral departments, using indoor

tropical foliages, such as Dieffenbachia, Pothos, ivy, Aralia, Dracaena and palms. We'll enhance them with colorful plants, such as Anthurium, Kalanchoe, Spathiphyllum and Bromeliads."

Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses, Apopka, FL, has found success with its Exotic Angel Gardens line, offering a colorful assortment of indoor, low-light exotic foliages. "We are continually adding to the Exotic Angel Garden line by incorporating different container and arrangement designs each year," explains Erin Leonard, marketing coordinator. "This year, we're offering a new line of German ceramic bowls paired with an assortment of foliage from over 400 varieties."

Angel Gardens range from a petite 5-inch garden to a 16-inch tabletop showpiece. Each contains complementing selections of foliage varieties that share similar light and

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Considered to be the foliage capital of the world, Apopka, FL, is also home to Bill Brown's Greenhouses, Inc., which offers dish gardens in the form of glass and mirror terrariums, featuring locally grown foliage and nationally grown cacti. "Because we cut and assemble all of our containers in our Apopka facility, we have the ability to be very creative," reports Kurt Brown, president. "Our line of birdhouse terrariums and our church terrarium are a result of those requests. They are among our best sellers."

EMERGING TRENDS

One of the biggest factors driving the dish-garden market is the green factor or eco-awareness. "Eco-awareness will continue to be a lifestyle trend in 2009," notes Bisser Georgiev, Engelmann vice president sales and marketing. "Consumers will continue to be thoughtful of items they purchase and the effects they have on the environment. With the movement toward nature, you will also see elements besides plants in mixed containers. Natural elements, such as stones, branches and mosses will become part of the arrangement — no longer just an add-on."

Brown says customization is yet another solid trend in dish garden sales. "We now laser-engrave on the glass itself. We engrave a cross, for example, on a church terrarium — our most popular item — and we can engrave sentiments, such as 'Home, Sweet, Home' on a house terrarium or 'Mom's Garden' on a Mother's Day terrarium. We engrave corporate logos, people's names or whatever our consumers want."

"We are also seeing an upswing in novelty requests this year," reports Vaughan of Vaughan, Inc. "The biggest sellers are every-

Lead Time Advice

Retailers can help suppliers provide better product by indicating in advance how much product they require by a specific date.

"We need between 120 and 150 days lead time to acquire containers and decorations from overseas," explains Jack Vaughan, president of Vaughan, Inc., Sanford, FL. "Each year, the lead times are getting longer."

Kurt Brown, president of Bill Brown's Greenhouses, Inc., Apopka, FL, asks for "as much time as possible. Generally, we get our holiday orders well in advance and have produced and shipped as many as 10,000 terrariums in a week."

Erin Leonard, marketing coordinator, Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses, Apopka, FL, recommends retailers provide "a 2-week lead time for small orders and up to six months for planned promotions." **pb**

day items that can be used in-store for upgrading on-the-floor gift purchases."

Engelmann's Leonard notes, "One of our best selling lines is our 8- to 10-inch, hand-crafted copper gardens. This line comes in an assortment of styles and sizes that we expanded in early 2008 to include a modern twist to our original design — a contemporary style Square Angel Garden. The vibrant foliage and unique containers appeal to the average consumer with a slightly more modern approach to home décor."

SEASONAL, REGIONAL AND HOLIDAY SALES

Brown emphasizes that while the demand for dish gardens is high year-round, holidays are sure-fire sale boosters. "January through June is the busiest time for us. Obviously, there are periods of increased sales around the floral holidays."

Focusing on smaller holidays such as Secretary's Day can also push sales, asserts Vaughan. "We try to sandwich in minor events, such as Earth Day, Teacher Appreciation and this year, Breast Cancer Awareness in October. Spring sales focus on Easter, Mother's Day and Valentine's Day, one of our strongest [sale

periods]. Fall is strong, too, continuing into Christmas."

Sales vary by regions. "Regional differences are as expected," Vaughan notes. "It's wild on either coast. Trends start there and move inland. The Northeast is color oriented, while the Midwest is more home décor and traditional."

"There are definitely differences by region," agrees Leonard. "The main thing determining selection is the average income in a region. Metropolitan areas, such as Atlanta, New York and Chicago, are always going to go for more expensive and exclusive collections."

Offering retailers supplier upgrades and add-ons also boosts sales, Vaughan reveals. "We offer many upgrades for our products. Some of it is seasonal with a particular color scheme. Silk flowers might be added, while fall items may have colorful leaves or fall picks inserted. Christmas gardens will have colorful holiday balls and pine accents, and Valentine gardens might feature traditional heart accents and not-so-traditional hand-made dried rose picks."

"We offer numerous seasonal upgrades," notes Engelmann's Georgiev. "Holiday inspiration comes from picks and color hues that are appropriate for the season. However, our goal is to create gardens that are not overly seasonal in their looks. This allows the retailer to sell inventory even a week or two after the holiday. The same goes for the consumer — we strive to provide a beautiful piece of décor that can be used any time."

LOOKING AHEAD

Retailers can continue to spark sales by marketing dish gardens as everyday, holiday and specialty gifts. Location, price recognition and ease of selection in retail outlets will drive consumers to think about buying dish gardens on impulse.

"There are some fantastic retailers that do a great job marketing dish gardens and terrariums," notes Brown. "Jewel Foods [Stores, Inc., based in Melrose Park, IL], Meijer [Inc., based in Grand Rapids, MI], Bi-Lo [LLC, based in Mauldin, SC], Harris-Teeter [Super Markets, Inc., based in Charlotte, NC], K-VAT [Food Stores, based in Abingdon, VA] and Associated Wholesale Grocers [Inc., based in Springfield, MD] have carried our line for over 15 years."

The introduction of new varieties, colors and textures of foliage, growers' design and container innovations and supplier assistance with upgrades and add-ons will also boost year-round sales. These factors, coupled with strong retail marketing programs should solidify continued increases in the sale of dish gardens in supermarkets. **pb**



Photo courtesy of Vaughan, Inc.

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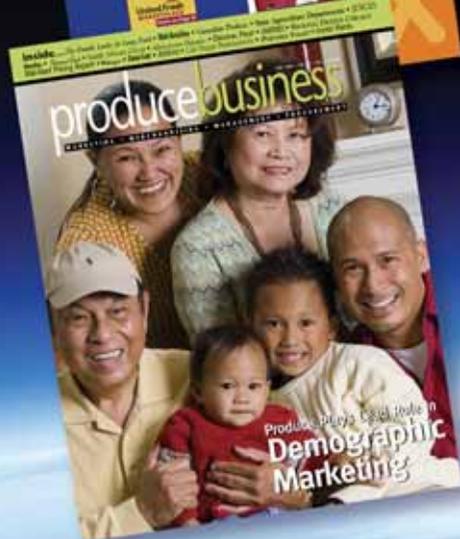
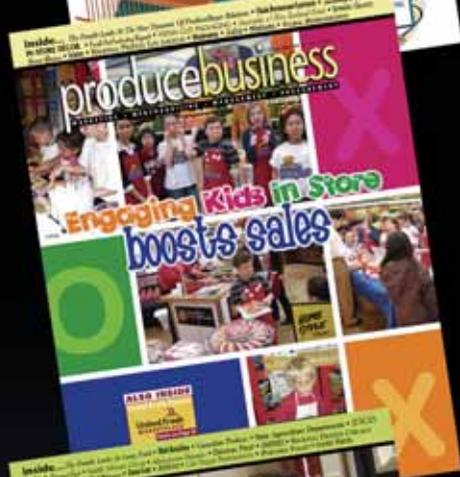
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Alternatives In A World Of Limited Resources

Beginning with World War I, demand for farm products has exceeded supply with a cycle of roughly 30 to 40 years. The repeats occurred during the 1940s, the 1970s and now the first decade in the 21st century.

All these occurrences were accompanied not only by high-demand levels in relation to supplies but also higher cost of inputs used in production and distribution. At some point in each of these time frames, the balance between cost of production and return to growers became unhinged.

For many producers, there is a changing, more profitable alternative to the acreage choices of the previous year. What one may project for the coming year may turn out to be drastically different from an acreage standpoint. In the end, unpredictable weather — with the possibility of abnormal temperatures and/or precipitation — may accentuate the result even further.

However, in this latest cycle, even greater forces are at work; globalization and government programming are altering the expected extrapolation of previous trends. Not to be forgotten is the limitation of energy resources to meet expanding worldwide demand.

During the latter half of April, CNBC and other cable news channels devoted expanded coverage to global food shortages, the high costs of production and the weather extremes that are contributing to higher food costs. Controversy reigns supreme over the role corn for ethanol is playing as an influence on food scarcity. Some argue corn converted to ethanol fails to effectively provide an alternative fuel, while others have amassed numbers to make a positive case for the program.

Experts with the National Corn Growers Association use figures to prove field corn used for ethanol has no effect on food consumption or prices; economists taking a broader view of alternatives show that corn used for ethanol has distorted the production of alternative crops and increased cost of animal feed substantially.

One analyst reduced the ethanol craze to pure politics. The early presidential primaries began in Iowa, and the big corn state is where political support must be acquired. Look at the number of farm states with important grain acreage. Some believe there is substantial political reason to favor subsidies for corn ethanol and tariffs on sugar cane-based ethanol, which otherwise could be imported at lower prices, minimizing the grain acreage distortions with its

effects on supply and the price paid by the consumer.

One quickly realizes the implications of free-market trade in this country. Combine these implications with weather problems elsewhere in the world and, all of a sudden, Sam's Club and Costco are limiting the amount of rice that can be purchased as other areas of the world face shortages. Consideration is being given to the potential need for greater potato production, but with input costs increasing, there are already indications U.S. growers will reduce this year's plantings, transferring acreage to wheat or soybeans.

The demand side in many developing countries with huge populations is exacerbating the situation. As their economies improved,

increasing percentages of the population have moved from subsistence farms to industrial cities. Greater incomes create demand for improved diets and fewer people are left to grow the necessary food to meet these demands, leaving imports to fill any voids.

Suddenly, a tsunami of sorts is developing worldwide, creating nearly daily re-evaluation of possible production alternatives with consideration of the risk-management aspects involved in each decision. All these grower decisions have vast implications for retailers that have developed the expectation there would always be product from global sources when growing conditions reduce customary supplies.

This year, I have not spoken with a grower who is not concerned with increased production costs in relation to current selling prices. As a result, this year's profit-and-loss statements may contribute to entirely different acreage use in the future.

Federal government programs primarily address only a cause-and-effect relationship for one set of factors. Failing to address the macro

situation, the unintended consequences from such decisions have continued — and will continue — to be far reaching. One has to question if the 2008 Farm Bill will be viewed as a true accomplishment for the fresh fruit and vegetable industry in light of the current environment.

Fresh fruit and vegetable buyers need to address these changing dynamics in a world where scarcity decides alternatives. To have sufficient supplies and meet potential consumer demand for quality product at a realistic price level, attention must be given to commitments more closely in line with producers' production costs, or unintended consequences may alter future availability and the marketing dynamics of the distribution system.

Fresh fruit and vegetable buyers need to address these changing dynamics in a world where scarcity decides alternatives.



Where's The Management?

The world is changing! We used to have a group of retail experts across the land who tasted the product if they knew there was opportunity or risk to build or lose sales.

With structural change in the industry and the retail sector, economies of scale mean individual stores may lose the battle to survive even if they have a passionate and skilled Greengrocer. Remember them?

There is a massive opportunity to build sales, generating new business rather than chasing a declining market on a downward price spiral. But our ability to take advantage of this opportunity must be built on skilled staff and good management.

Of course, we need to incorporate all new technologies, respect the environmental health and safety issues and address all these issues and more in regard to due diligence.

But above all, we need to instill in the retail sales staff passion and enthusiasm for the product and pass that on to the consumer.

Most products, such as chocolate, have a hefty marketing budget. For fresh produce, this money may be better spent on training and education — of both the retailer and the consumer.

Blood, sweat and tears go into getting the product to market, and often it now becomes just another product competing for space with the crisps and booze.

The proposition is simple, managing it is not, or we would all be doing it, making good profits and improving the health of the population.

A few simple rules drive the category:

1. If you wouldn't buy it yourself, it should not be on the fixture.
2. The product must be of good quality.
3. The product must be priced fairly.

The rest is flimflam and excuses for which the retail sector is to blame.

Anyone in the industry would probably pick oranges and peaches as taste opportunities to build sales.

The problem is that short-term profit on an item such as peaches means that retailers both buy and display peaches under-ripe at the start of the season. Consumers pay a premium to get this early fruit and are disappointed when they don't ripen properly.

Consumers then informally boycott the fruit, come back to the item halfway through the season and enjoy them. Then two weeks after they should have been taken off sale at the end of the season, consumers end up with a mouth full of cotton wool. This results in year-on-year sales declines rather than sales growth.

Oranges can be sensational but consumer expectations built on experience are often very low, which does nothing for the industry and its potential.

There are lots of clever people driving the industry now, so why do we struggle with "simple" products like fruit and veg?

The implications for an underperforming fresh produce section and for the industry as a whole are that it will impact not only on a company's bottom line but also on the health of local communities and across the nation.

The big chains compete with each other on produce and should be able to address issues that arise and grow their business.

A major concern in the United Kingdom is that with the increasing dominance of the supermarkets, the fragmented independent retail estate that remains sometimes struggles to manage even a basic fresh produce offering.

Depending on whose figures are used, there are around 35,000 small convenience stores and the like in the United Kingdom, the majority of which massively underperform on fruit and veg. Given that they probably average around 2,000 customers a week, the opportunity for the industry to create new business is tremendous.

If even well-managed, large organisations sometimes struggle with fresh produce, how can the independents be expected to do a decent job consistently or indeed if at all? This does not include the specialists who are tenaciously hanging on and taking opportunities where they arise, but even for them, an independent supply chain bolstered with more volume passing through it for the convenience stores would enhance their longer-term prospects.

The confectionary and beverage manufacturers support retailers. With fresh produce, it

is generally lines, such as prepared salads, where there is more value in the brand, that there is support from the packer.

Given that generally there is less scope to build brand value that helps justify marketing costs and given the need to provide fresh produce for the health of the population, it may be that governments need to provide more support to fill the gaps, helping the produce industry to develop the business models that will drive this sector. An example of this could be reduced or exemption-of-business rates per linear foot of produce fixture, thus making it more difficult for retailers not to sell fresh produce. Other public-sector bodies could be used to give practical support in partnership with the private sector, sharing the costs and the benefits either on the bottom line or in improved health.

To summarise: The producers need to get their product to the consumers, and managing that through the convenience sector in a competitive and sustainable way is the challenge.

pb

This is an expanded version of a letter that appeared in Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit on April 1, 2008

**We need to instill
in the retail sales
staff passion and
enthusiasm for
the product and
pass that on to
the consumer.**

Blast from the Past

Decades before his appointment to president of the Mission, TX-based Texas Produce Association in 1999, John McClung worked for Miller Publishing Corp., Memphis, TN, covering agricultural news coming out of the nation's capitol. During his 7-year stint as Washington, D.C. bureau chief, McClung was responsible for writing, editing and compiling weekly columns.

McClung met former president Gerald Ford at a reception following a White House briefing in 1976. Although McClung doesn't remember too much from the meeting, he notes, "It was some sort of discussion on agricultural policy."

In this photo is, from left, George Gates, the then vice president of Miller Publishing, McClung and Ford.

McClung says many issues affecting the agriculture industry back in the 1970s are similar to today's issues. "I think the single biggest trend has been the ongoing trend toward globalization, including international trade and food safety."



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

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Basciani Foods, Inc.	82	42	610-268-3044	610-268-2194
Battle Produce Exchange	44	65	231-946-9696	231-946-9696
Bland Farms	GA2	10	800-440-9543	912-654-3532
Blue Book Services	61	66	630-668-3500	630-668-0303
Canadian Produce Marketing Association	80	52	613-226-4187	613-226-2984
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	44	1	515-981-5111	515-981-4564
CF Fresh	42	62	360-855-3192	360-855-2430
Champ's Mushrooms	82	27	866-Champs1	604-607-0787
Country Fresh Mushroom Co.	82	48	610-268-3043	610-268-0479
Dole Fresh Vegetable Co.	2	26	800-333-5454	831-754-5243
dProduce Man Software	80	50	888-PRODMAN	650-712-9973
East Coast Brokers & Packers, Inc.	103	16	800-557-7751	863-869-9850
Eastern Fresh Growers, Inc.	50	23	856-447-3563	856-447-4227
F&S Produce Co.	44	8	800-886-3316	856-453-0494
Family Tree Farms	47	56	866-FLAVOR-1	559-595-7795
Fresh Partners AB	90	67	46-8-742-1215	46-8-742-6201
Fresh Sense	43	20	866-747-3673	559-646-3662
General Produce, Inc.	GA12	21	800-782-5833	404-361-1841
Georgia Peach Council	GA9	7	478-956-6418	478-956-2929
Giannini Packing Corp.	46	4	559-591-3758	559-591-5708
Giorgio Fresh Co.	81	58	800-330-5711	610-939-0296
Hardy Farms Peanuts	GA6	30	888-368-NUTS	478-783-0606
Hendrix Produce, Inc.	GA5	43	800-752-1551	912-685-4420
Highline Mushrooms	83	57	519-326-8643	519-326-7222
J J Jardina Company, Inc.	GA6	25	404-366-6868	404-366-1386
Jasmine Vineyards, Inc.	88	46	661-792-2141	661-792-6365
Laurel Farmers' Auction Market	54	13	302-875-3147	
Lynn-Ette & Sons, Inc.	60	32	800-473-2040	585-682-4968
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	9	64	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
J. Marchini & Son / LeGrand	46	3	559-665-9710	559-665-9714
Mediterranean Pleasures	87	61	800-491-VITA	856-467-2638
Miatech	90	49	800-339-5234	503-659-2204

COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX
MIXTEC Group	27	59	626-440-7077	626-440-1557
MJB Sales, Inc.	83	41	610-268-0444	610-268-0837
Monterey Mushrooms	83	29	636-587-2771	831-763-2300
Naturipe Farms	104	28	239-598-1664	239-591-8133
New Jersey Blueberry Industry Council	53	36	609-292-8853	609-984-2508
New Jersey Department of Agriculture	49	19	609-292-8853	609-292-2508
Ocean Mist Farms	21	37	831-633-2492	831-633-4363
Pandol Brothers, Inc.	85	54	661-725-3145	661-725-4741
Pandol Brothers, Inc.	46	55	661-725-3145	661-725-4741
Pappas & Company	54	33	559-655-4277	559-655-4841
Paulk Vineyards	GA7	35	229-468-7873	229-468-7876
Pennsylvania Exotic Mushroom Sales, Inc.	82	47	610-444-0275	610-444-5751
Peri & Sons Farms	27	51	775-463-4444	775-463-4028
Produce Exchange Co. of Atlanta, Inc.	59	63	800-480-4463	404-608-0401
Produce for Better Health Foundation	39	17	302-235-2329	302-235-5555
The Produce Marketing Association	55	11	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
The Produce Marketing Association	13	12	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
Red Blossom Farms, Inc.	23	18	805-981-1839	805-693-0032
Shannon Vineyards	GA7	39	912-857-3876	305-675-3876
Shuman Produce, Inc.	GA16	5	912-557-4477	912-557-4478
Sonora Grape Growers Association	91	38	520-287-2707	520-287-2948
South Georgia Produce, Inc.	GA10	22	229-559-6071	229-559-1091
Stamoules Produce Co.	54	6	559-655-9777	559-655-2511
Sun Valley Group	97	53	800-747-0396	707-826-8708
Sun Valley Orchards	51	45	856-769-5280	856-769-5213
Sun World International	89	31	760-398-9430	760-398-9613
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	31	2	800-772-4542	831-455-3915
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	5	9	800-772-4542	831-455-3915
To-Jo Fresh Mushrooms, Inc.	83	40	610-268-8082	610-268-8644
Trinity Fruit Sales	47	44	559-433-3777	559-433-3790
United Fresh Produce Association	15	15	202-303-3400	202-303-3433
Vineland Co-op Produce Auction, Inc.	52	24	856-691-0721	856-794-2301
Well-Pict Berries	41	34	831-722-3871	831-722-6340

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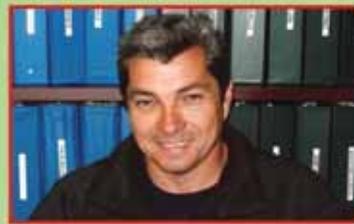
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