inside... *The Pundit Looks At Lousy Fruit* • **Web Retailing** • *Canadian Produce* • **State Agriculture Departments** • JUICES
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Starts on page 87

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MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT
MAY 2008 • VOL. 24 • NO. 5

52

COVER STORY

PRODUCE PLAYS LEAD ROLE IN DEMOGRAPHIC MARKETING 19
Retail experts share their experience and ideas for capitalizing on growing segmentation opportunities.

COMMENTARY

THE FRUITS OF THOUGHT
First Priority For Produce 8

RETAIL PERSPECTIVE
Job Descriptions 150

EUROPEAN MARKET
Q & A with Catherine Francois 152

IN EVERY ISSUE

THE QUIZ 4

WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE 6

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE 10

COMMENTS AND ANALYSIS 11

PRODUCE WATCH 12

FLORAL WATCH 146

INFORMATION SHOWCASE 153

BLAST FROM THE PAST 154

MARKET PROFILE

CHICAGO MARKET PROFILE
Chicago Serves As A Mecca For Midwestern Produce 91
A strong transportation system, a diverse population and a bustling terminal business keep Chicago's produce industry going strong.

Retail Profile: The 320 Store 104
Local legend holds its own against encroaching chains.

SPECIAL SECTION

PRODUCE PACKAGING PORTFOLIO
Starts on page 87

FEATURES

THE RETURN OF WEB RETAILING 27
Online grocery shopping makes a comeback as technology and delivery logistics advance.

NEW STRATEGIES FOR CANADIAN PRODUCE 34
With exchange rates no longer in their favor, neighbors to the north strive to differentiate and highlight their product strengths.

KEEPING STATE GROWN AT THE FOREFRONT 39
State agriculture departments are pumping up ad campaigns to help attract consumers to locally grown produce.

FRESH HERBS TAKE CENTER STAGE 48
As consumers experiment with a variety of dishes at home, their interest in fresh herbs is rapidly growing.

RIPENING PROGRAMS PRESENT QUALITY FRUIT 52
Fruits used in ripening programs represent a premium to consumers and should be priced accordingly.

SOUTH AFRICA BREEDS EXCEPTIONAL SUMMER CITRUS 59
Implement smart promotional tactics to increase the demand on this ever-popular, fresh-tasting commodity.

ATTRACTING ORGANIC CONSUMERS 63
As more and more consumers turn to their local "mainstream" retailer for organic produce, some retailers respond by competing with specialty outlets.

ORGANIC FRUIT REVIEW 68
Industry insiders discuss what's happening in the organic fruit category.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE REFRIGERATED JUICE CATEGORY? 106
Juice marketers describe their latest innovations.

DEPARTMENTS

MERCHANDISING REVIEW
Making The Most Of Cherry Season 76
Seasonality excites customers, so use the short time wisely to boost sales in this big category earner.

Eight Ways To Sell More Mangos 116
Mangos rate as one of the top tropical fruits in the produce department.

Merchandising Stone Fruit 124
Tips on how to effectively promote these sweet delights of summer.

Six Ways To Sell More Melons 130
Consumer cravings for melons offer retailers an opportunity to increase sales and profits.

FOODSERVICE MARKETING
It's Not Your Father's Las Vegas 136
Dine with celebrity chefs in Sin City's famous establishments.

DRIED FRUIT AND NUTS
Portable Snacks Serve Up Sales 142
For consumers with never enough time in the day, peanuts, raisins and other dried fruit are popular quick fixes.

FLORAL AND FOLIAGE MARKETING
Exotic Plants Continue To Wow 148
Retailers can garner more sales and attract more consumers by bringing in exotic plants.

SPECIAL FEATURES

FROM THE PAGES OF *THE PERISHABLE PUNDIT*
Lousy Fruit Undermines Consumption 18

WAL-MART PRICING STUDY ROUND XVII
In LA, Wal-Mart Out-Prices Fresh & Easy And Others 110

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PRODUCE QUIZ

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Produce Merchandiser
Colemans Food Centre
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Solving everyday challenges is a major task for Byron Bellows, produce merchandiser at Colemans. "We live on an island," he says. "Procurement is definitely our biggest challenge, but it's a rewarding challenge."

Prior to becoming a corporate level produce merchandiser, he was a produce manager at a Colemans store for 15 years. Today, he oversees all produce managers plus day-to-day and procurement operations. "It's something new and fresh every day. It's not like putting cans on a shelf. You have to work quickly in order to be successful."

A long-time PRODUCE BUSINESS reader, Byron enjoys reading about new innovations and industry trends from food safety to merchandising tips. "I most enjoy looking at the advertising and new products. We're fairly removed, and it's important for me to know what's coming out. We often rely on magazines like PRODUCE BUSINESS."

As the winner of the PRODUCE BUSINESS Quiz, Byron wins a flip video camcorder.

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2) In what year did Boskovich Farms begin business? _____

_____

3) What are the unit numbers for La Galera Produce? _____

_____

4) What is the toll-free number for Albert's Organics? _____

_____

5) What is the street address for Domex Superfresh Growers? _____

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6) What is the phone number for Simonian? _____

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Reader Service # 4

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

Country of Origin Labeling

Country-of-origin labeling of fresh produce — also known as COOL — has been discussed for many years. Surveys indicate more than 50 percent of produce commodities offered for sale in retail grocery stores today are labeled with country of origin on packaging or PLU stickers. Many retailers provide country-of-origin information on in-store signage. But, beginning in September 2008, all fresh produce sold in retail stores in the United States is likely to come under a mandatory COOL rule. Unfortunately, this law and pending federal rules (which were not yet proposed when this article was submitted) have caused concern and, in some cases, outright confusion throughout the produce distribution chain. This month we will discuss the facts and what we can expect from the rules that will apply to labeling produce in the United States.

In 2002, Congress passed a law requiring retailers to provide country-of-origin information at point of sale for perishable agricultural commodities. Because of concerns about regulatory burden, its effective date, originally Sept. 30, 2004, was delayed until Sept. 30, 2008. All stakeholders in the COOL debate in Congress have since reached agreement on important revisions to the 2002 law, which are contained in the 2008 Farm Bill legislation pending in Congress. These changes are now non-controversial and likely to go into effect at some point before Sept. 30. However, because these changes have not yet been passed into law, the 2002 law is due to go into effect Sept. 30.

Because of continued delay and pending changes to the 2002 law, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has not issued final regulations to instruct the industry how to comply. However, on Oct. 30, 2003, USDA issued a "Proposed Rule" to implement the 2002 law. These proposed rules are not in effect, even though they suggest some guidance to the industry on USDA's potential thinking about eventual regulations. USDA is waiting to propose a new set of regulations that would actually implement the law based on the legislative changes now pending in the new Farm Bill.

First and foremost this is a *retail* law — it requires *retailers* of a perishable agricultural commodity to "inform consumers" at the "final point of sale" of the commodity's country of origin. Retailer and perishable agricultural commodity have the same meaning as the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act of 1930 (7 U.S.C. 499a(b)); retailers are covered when their "invoice cost of fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables exceeds $230,000 in a calendar year" and "fresh fruits and fresh vegetables of every kind and character" (PACA definition) are covered.

We will discuss the facts and what we can expect from the rules that will apply to labeling produce in the United States.

Foodservice establishments, defined as a "restaurant, cafeteria, lunch room, food stand, saloon, tavern, bar, lounge, or other similar facility operated as an enterprise engaged in the business of selling food to the public," are exempt from COOL.

Retailers can inform consumers of country of origin at point of sale "by means of a label, stamp, mark, placard, or other clear and visible sign on the covered commodity or on the package, display, holding unit or bin containing the commodity." There are no provisions in the law to specify what method to use nor any requirements for suppliers to label produce. These are marketplace decisions of supply-chain partners.

If a "covered commodity is already individually labeled for retail sale regarding country of origin," the retailer shall not be required to provide any further information. Finally, any produce supplier must "provide information to the retailer indicating country of origin of the covered commodity." Under current PACA law, such information must be accurate or the supplier risks losing its PACA license. The law contains no provisions as to how to convey that information.

The 2008 Farm Bill contains several important improvements to reduce the regulatory burden and cost of the country-of-origin law for produce now on the books.

First, the potential liability for retail mistakes or absence of labeling at point of purchase will be significantly reduced. After finding a retailer to be "in violation," USDA must give it 30 days to "comply" with the Act. At the end of 30 days, USDA cannot fine a retailer unless it has "not made a good faith effort" and "continues to willfully violate the Act." Suppliers who do not provide country-of-origin information to the retailer, as required in the Act, are held to the same terms — 30 days to come into compliance, with potential fines imposed only if they do not "make a good faith effort" or if they "continue to willfully violate the Act" by not providing country-of-origin information to retailers.

All proposed fines on retailers or suppliers who are found to be "willfully violating" the Act are subject to a hearing before USDA and are limited to $1,000 for each violation.

Another change under consideration would bar USDA from requiring any new recordkeeping other than normal records kept in the regular course of doing business.

Finally, a new specific provision will allow labeling of a U.S. state, region or locality in which a product is produced to meet label standards as product of the United States. Therefore, a descriptor such as *Minnesota Grown* or *Pride of New York* would be sufficient labeling to comply with the law.

Uncertainties about which specific provisions may go into effect and how USDA may interpret the law in future regulations make it difficult to prepare for COOL. It is critical all supply-chain partners work together to understand the facts and begin steps toward compliance that reduce total supply-chain cost and potential for market disruption.

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By James Prevor
President & Editor-in-Chief

First Priority For Produce

Increasing food production is a key element of sustainability. It has to be. It is the prime directive when it comes to the social responsibility of the food industry. This point may yet startle environmentalists who soon will learn sustainable development is about the balance between environmental, financial and social responsibilities — and, sometimes, social responsibilities are going to come first.

Already we are seeing a backlash against biofuels, as it begins to sink in that all these government mandates and subsidies are designed to encourage farmers to switch from growing human food and animal feed to fuel — and that resources devoted to biofuels are not available to increase food production. One need not be a skeptic on global warming to realize it is unsustainable to divert food to fuel in a world still increasing in population and with many populations finally able to eat at a level above subsistence.

All over the world, food prices are going up. In rich countries, it is putting pressure on politicians. In poor countries, it is causing riots and threatening the progress of a generation in poverty reduction.

The solutions governments are promoting will mostly make the problem worse and ensure it continues. Among these "solutions":

1. Blocking exports — the reason farmers export is because someone will pay them more money than if they sold locally. To block exports is, by definition, to depress farmers' returns. It is high returns that encourage increased plantings and the application of advanced technology to increase yields.

2. Price controls — higher prices both provide higher returns to producers and encourage consumers to switch to alternative, lower priced foods. Price controls blunt both these incentives to produce more and consume less. As such, they encourage shortages rather than clearing markets.

3. Criminalizing business and consumer behavior — laws against "hoarding" and earning "windfall profits" criminalize normal business activities and make the situation worse. The opportunity to earn a windfall profit is precisely what will motivate entrepreneurs to transfer food from where it is plentiful to where it is scarce — and letting government officials second-guess business decisions on appropriate inventory levels is a recipe for disrupted production.

4. Subsidizing items — this encourages shortages by encouraging consumption at below-market prices. It is far better to give people money or food stamps and let them buy the best value rather than *a priori* decide to subsidize one item.

The real solutions are not obscure:

A. Free trade in food and ag products — let product be produced where it can be produced most efficiently and used by those who value it the highest.

B. Drop anti-GMO laws and regulations — it is perfectly clear that to produce the food we need, we have to increase yields. The alternative would be destroying countless thousands of acres of rainforest and woodland. To do this we need the best technology. We should be underwriting more GMO research rather than trying to choke off this new technology.

C. Avoid giving away food as food aid — dumping food in a market serves to reduce the returns of local farmers. How can a local grower compete with free food? Better to give people resources so they can purchase food at market value. If we are dealing with a genuinely desperate situation such as famine, make sure the local production is all purchased at top dollar so as to insulate producers from the effects of free food on the market.

D. Create finance operations to make sure credit is available to growers in poor countries so they can buy seed, fertilizer, etc., despite the global credit crunch.

E. Invest more in ag research and ag extension to bring new technology to bear on this problem.

As farmers react to high prices by planting fence post to fence post and apply new technology, we will see this problem mitigate. Yet it is crucial to use this moment to remind the world and the non-governmental organizations about the purpose of our industry — to feed the world.

Cutting energy use, reducing our carbon footprint, etc., may all be great ideas — but only if we have first taken care of job one: feeding the world.

Cutting energy use, reducing our carbon footprint, etc., may all be great ideas — but only if we have first taken care of job one: feeding the world.

In Salinas, we are seeing actual reductions in acreage and production; in tree fruit and grapes, we see consolidation in packing and marketing, but, so far, the long-term nature of planting trees means we are not seeing any drops in production.

Yet with a growing population both in the United States and around the world — with more affluent people in places such as China and India clamoring for top-quality food, including fresh produce — it may well be very important to realize the enormous efforts we have made to get tiny improvements on food safety and the enormous expenditures made to measure carbon footprints and look at industry impact on the environment, even the massive efforts to score better pay and conditions for migrant workers, all these things and all the good they do will count for nothing if we can't feed the world.

The industry has been in a defensive posture related to food safety, workers' rights, GMOs and much more. Maybe it is time to turn the tables and point out that our real job is bringing the fruit of the earth to the people of the world. We do this job well, and we need to measure other things people would have us do against the way such proposals will contribute or detract from feeding the world. **pb**

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Reader Service # 112

Mumbai Magic

PMA's International Council recently met in Mumbai, India's commercial capital. Together with PMA members from every continent, we studied the country's produce distribution and marketing through tours, meetings and discussions with Indian leaders. This was research by observation, seeing a very different world and trying to make sense of its opportunities.

Trying to make sense of the massively complex social and economic values in this country of more than 1 billion people is daunting. It is mysterious, it defies labeling. But don't for a moment think India won't grow in power and influence on our global industry.

We were all products of Western education and culture raised on rational thought. Order, symmetry and reason rule our thinking and our business practices. How would we respond to what *A Passage to India* author E.M. Forster called India's "muddle," and others have called a study in contrasts or organized chaos?

Consider these Indian snapshots:

* The economy has been averaging 8.5 percent growth per year
* It is currently the world's largest producer of fruit and the second largest producer of vegetables (China is first)
* Its high-quality grape exports (certified by GlobalGAP) now compete late season in European markets with established southern hemisphere producers
* 80 percent of Indian produce imports are apples; the U.S. supplies 1/3 of those
* India has the world's largest vegetarian population

The Vashi wholesale market near Mumbai is a massive sprawling place where horns honk as trucks, boys pushing carts and others carrying baskets filled with produce jostle for a place on the narrow paths between buildings. Multicolored, highly decorated trucks back up to decrepit concrete loading docks to offload pineapples, grapes, onions, garlic and more. The items are piled high on the truck and are offloaded by men with large baskets — three feet wide by one foot deep. They stack as much as they can from the truck into the basket, and then make their winding way, basket on head, through a mass of humanity to the stall of the wholesaler. You're hard-pressed to find corrugated or plastic packaging.

When the hauler gets to a stall, the basket is unloaded — usually onto the concrete floor — and the produce is piled up for sale. Then a strange "covered hand" ritual often takes place, with buyer and seller making and accepting or rejecting the offer to buy by placing their hands together under a cloth and using hand signals nobody else can see to make the deal!

Trash is everywhere in the market, dogs are common, and someone remarked that a U.S. food inspector coming close to this market would be in shock. A foreman stands knee-deep in a huge pile of onions on the floor being sorted by women, dressed in colorful saris and seated on their ankles as he shouts direction. But return late in the day, and you will find everything tidied up; the muddle has disappeared, magically.

Markets like these will likely go through 50 years worth of upgrading in the next five to 10 years if they're to meet the demands of the growing retail and foodservice sector. The incoming trucks were completely without refrigeration as were most of the market vendors themselves. I'd estimate 98+ percent of the produce didn't see the inside of a cooler. Labor is everywhere; work is done by hand.

Organized retail outlets comprise less than 3 percent of the consumer food market today but staggering expansion is planned. A Reliance Fresh store (around 12,000 square feet) is one of 500 now operating in India with thousands more in the works by 2010. The produce was clean and merchandised well. The much larger, 2-level HyperCity store showcased produce near the entrance with lots of fresh-cut produce (cut in the store's backroom), and multiple freestanding wooden bin displays for the rest of the bulk product. The manager of HyperCity talks enthusiastically about plans for another two dozen stores to be added soon.

Demographic trends are with the retailers. The working population and household disposable income are growing fast. There are many more working couples, and younger professionals are savvy about global brands and the Western shopping experience. But to get there will require massive investments in public and private infrastructure: good roads, refrigerated storage and transportation, packaging enhancements, training and more.

Don't for a moment think India won't grow in power and influence on our global industry.

Making sense of — and money from — Forster's "muddle" is where leading companies are heading. Just days after our visit, one of our host companies, the agribusiness giant Mahindra, along with South African global fruit marketer Capespan announced a 12-month pilot project to investigate forming a long-term joint venture. The goals are lofty, yet they focus keenly on the critical needs of the Indian marketplace: technical support to farmers, developing import and export capabilities, and acting "as a receiver, handler and distributor of selected produce into the emerging retail and foodservice sector."

In China two years ago, our PMA group saw the marvels of modernization. There, the pace of change is amazing as the government decides, then acts, brushing people out of the way, carving new freeways and railways where before there were houses. Development comes first, people second. India is a democracy, though, and the pace of infrastructural development has been painfully slow.

Then I remembered the metaphor one Indian produce leader shared: "India is like an elephant: difficult to see all at once, moving slowly, with a vegetarian diet. But when it runs, look out — it is unstoppable."

Country Of Contradictions

On the success of India much depends — and that is problematic, as India is slow in deciding things, not only because it is a democracy but also because it a seething cauldron of people, languages and castes. For example, India has a larger Muslim population than every country in the world save Indonesia, yet Muslims are a small minority in populous India.

Indeed, the great miracle of the post-independence governments of India is that the country has not unraveled. It stands as the world's most populous democracy, astride history, one foot anchored in the past and one food firmly in modernity.

India is so far from America that it is more mysterious to us than China, our great neighbor across the Pacific. Yet India shall not be denied. Its decision to go nuclear, for example, is best understood as an unwillingness to accept a post-colonial identity that relegated it to a position lesser than China's.

We interact with modern India often. In business, if you work with Tesco's Fresh & Easy division and want to get paid, that transaction is processed in India. Personally, call up any number of customer service or technical support lines and you'll be calling India.

Much depends on India because peace typically depends on a balance of power maintaining equilibrium in a region. Only a rising, modernizing and vibrant India will be able to offset the ambitions of a powerful China to the north and east and a rising Islamic world to the west. This thesis was set out by Samuel P. Huntington, a political theorist based at Harvard University in his seminal article in *Foreign Affairs* entitled "The Clash of Civilizations?" and expanded in his book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.

Admittedly, this is all heady stuff and, although India is a heavily vegetarian nation — 31 percent vegetarian, with an additional 9% consuming eggs, according to a 2006 Hindu-CNN-IBN survey — it seems unlikely that the produce sector will play much of a role in any great clash of civilizations that we may be unlucky enough to experience.

Yet, a produce sector functioning on world-class standards — as in the export of GlobalGAP-certified India grapes to Europe in the example Bryan gives — is a sign of both modernization and economic integration with the West — as trade and commerce weave a web that serves to tie India closer to the West and the West closer to India. A closeness we both may come to cherish if Huntington's thesis should come to pass.

Another change, both marker and cause of integration with the West, is the rise of western-style retailing. Although, as Bryan identifies, this is still a small matter, companies such as Pantaloon Retail India Ltd., Aditya Biria Group, RPG Group and Reliance Industries have been transforming the retail scene.

Most recently Bharti Retail Ltd., a subsidiary of the Bharti Enterprises, which, among other things, operates a big cell phone company, has opened its first "Easy Day" food and grocery stores. Bharti also has a joint venture with Wal-Mart to provide the "back end" in the form of logistics and supply-chain management for stores and to open a chain of "wholesale" or "cash-and-carry" type stores.

These convoluted arrangements are legally necessary because India is still a very closed market. Foreign firms may open retail stores to sell only a particular product line — say a Gucci or Hermes boutique. Carrefour and Tesco are both known to be in negotiation for joint ventures similar to the one Wal-Mart has in place. Metro AG and Shoprite Holdings both have wholesale operations in India.

Yet although modern, clean and efficient shopping may be welcomed by many consumers and, over time, doubtless will both enhance standards of food production and processing throughout the country and offer consumers many new options from across India and around the world, for now western-style retailing is very controversial. Protests, some becoming violent, have roared across the country as there is a popular fear that modern retailers will drive independent vendors and small shopkeepers out of business.

This is a concern particularly acute regarding fresh fruit and vegetable vendors. Some western-style retailers are agreeing not to sell fresh produce, while others are making a point to hire displaced shopkeepers. It is an eternal battle in India, as steps toward modernity — such as modern western-style retailing — must battle with powerful interests that seek to preserve the status quo.

> **It is an eternal battle in India, as steps toward modernity must battle with powerful interests that seek to preserve the status quo.**

This column is typically about research, and we typically think of research in terms of surveys and focus groups. Yet the most important part of research is knowing what areas to research. The buggy whip manufacturer would not be saved by more intensive surveying on consumer attitudes toward better buggy whip features.

So great research begins with stepping out of our conceptual lens and seeing the world anew. The very best way to do that is to travel and see the sites, hear the sounds, touch the textures and absorb the scents. It may remind you of things you have known; it often has hints of a world we have yet to see.

PMA has very few members in India, and its other members do very little business with India. Very few associations in that situation would think to have a meeting in India. Yet such an effort is research at its most valuable, confronting a new world and thinking about the questions we might ask.

PRODUCE WATCH

TRANSITIONS

ALBERT'S ORGANICS, INC.
BRIDGEPORT, NJ

Mark Zeller was promoted to business unit manager for Albert's Denver division. He was national director of merchandising at Wild Oats before joining the company as Albert's Denver sales manager. Prior to that, he worked for Albert's Organics in sales and operations and spent 27 years with King Sooper/Kroger.

MANN PACKING COMPANY
SALINAS, CA

Larry Olivo was hired as the western regional sales manager for the retail market. His diverse background includes the produce industry, consumer packaged goods sales and food broker management. He served as business development manager for Capurro Farms where he developed an innovative value-added packaging concept for commodity produce.

DULCINEA FARMS, LLC
LADERA RANCH, CA

Keith Kato was appointed senior vice president of sales and marketing. He brings vast experience in branded consumer goods. He has spent the past five years building Dulcinea quality and brand recognition. He will be instrumental in delivering Dulcinea's brand promise and growing retailer and consumer awareness of Dulcinea's products.

DOLE FRESH VEGETABLES, INC.
SALINAS, CA

Ray DeRiggi has been named president. He brings nearly 30 years of food industry experience. His leadership roles include president and chief operating officer of the specialty meat division of ConAgra Foods, Inc. Prior to joining ConAgra, he spent 18 years with Pet, Inc., working in senior level finance, operations and general management.

GIUMARRA COMPANIES
LOS ANGELES, CA

Miguel Beltran has been hired as a salesman for the Reedley stone-fruit team. His duties will include selling stone fruit under the Nature's Partner brand. He has more than a decade of experience in the produce industry. He previously worked for Ballantine Produce Co. as quality assurance manager.

SUPREME CUTS, LLC
MAHWAH, NJ

Merle Axelrod is the new president. She will manage day-to-day operations and oversee the company's management team and the business development of the company's existing and new product lines. She brings more than 20 years of business experience and expertise in orchestrating and managing strategic business growth.

NEW PRODUCTS

Sustainable Packaging

PWP Industries, Vernon, CA, introduces AgroResin sustainable packaging. Designed to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers, AgroResin packaging is 100 percent biodegradable and compostible. It's made from non-GM renewable agricultural biomass fiber composite that was once considered a waste product and incinerated or placed in a landfill.

Reader Service No. 300

Garlic Delight

Frieda's, Inc., Los Alamitos, CA, offers Frieda's Garlic Delight. All-natural and preservative-free, it can be used as a marinade for meats, in a sauce for shrimp or pasta, as a dip or as an alternative to mayonnaise. Available in resealable 7-ounce containers (12-count case) in original, chipotle, sun-dried tomato and green olive flavors.

Reader Service No. 301

Organic Yellow Carrots

Cal Organic Farms, Lamont, CA, introduces two new yellow carrot products. Organic peeled yellow baby carrots are now available in a 1-pound bag and organic color shred carrots are available in a 10-ounce bag. Yellow carrots are packed with antioxidants, including lutein, which help maintain good eye health.

Reader Service No. 302

Temperature-Monitoring Labels

PakSense, Inc., Boise, ID, now offers standard label configurations for its temperature-monitoring label. Standard temperature range specifications for the most frequently shipped produce items have been pre-programmed into different label categories. Users order the appropriate label, snap the corner to activate it and attach it to product or packaging.

Reader Service No. 303

Shipping Ventilation System

Carrier Transicold, Syracuse, NY, offers its eAutoFresh system for shipping produce between North and South America. The system features an on-demand ventilation option designed for produce-shipping container refrigeration units and is an energy-efficient alternative to the common practice of continuously ventilating refrigerated containers to address cargo respiration.

Reader Service No. 304

At-Home Produce Life Extender

Ozonator, Inc., Las Vegas, NV, launches The Original Ozonator, a lightweight, compact, battery-operated device that purifies the air and cleanses the environment inside refrigerators. Sold in the produce department, the Ozonator delays the onset of mold and decay to extend the life of fruits, vegetables and other perishable foods. The Ozonator replicates the Earth's ozone in a safe, natural way.

Reader Service No. 305

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Imagination Farms Adds Mangos

Imagination Farms, Indianapolis, IN, expanded its category reach to include mangos supplied by Progreso Produce, Boerne, TX. Marketer of the Disney Garden brand, it will promote the new addition using collectible PLU stickers that peel open to reveal instructions on how to cut a mango along with a recipe for Sing And Share Salsa.

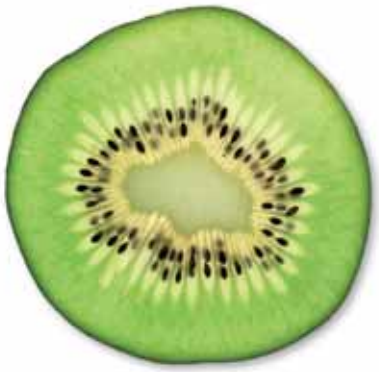
Reader Service No. 306

CAC Kicks Off Campaign

HAND GROWN IN CALIFORNIA

The California Avocado Commission (CAC), Irvine, CA, introduced its California Grower Campaign, which touts the benefits of California avocados through the stories of real growers to encourage consumers to buy California avocados. The campaign introduces the Hand Grown in California logo and capitalizes on consumer interest in locally grown produce.

Reader Service No. 307



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Reader Service # 62

Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc.

congratulates

Erin Hanas Archey

on her graduation from the 2007 United Leadership Class

Duda farm fresh foods

Reader Service # 80

PRODUCE WATCH

ANNOUNCEMENTS

MCL To Supply Irvine Ranch

MCL Distributing, Inc./4-Earth, Los Angeles, CA, was selected as a key supplier of organic fruit and vegetables for Irvine Ranch Market's second store in Lake Forrest, CA, using its 4-Earth Organics label. MCL offers more than 150 organic products packaged in clamshells, bags, bulk, twist ties and PLU under its 4-Earth Organics label.

Reader Service No. 308

Blueberry Partnership Expands To Florida

California Giant Berry Farms, Watsonville, CA, has partnered with Clear Springs Packing, Bartow, FL, to provide flavorful, high-quality berries along with recipes and serving suggestions. They began shipping fresh blueberries from Florida in late March. Total Florida blueberry volume is expected to surpass 7 million pounds in a 7-week period.

Reader Service No. 309

IPC Launches Recipes For Relief

The Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), Eagle, ID, kicked off its Recipes for Relief online program. Each month, a chef and his or her recipe will be featured on *www.idahopotato2008.org*. Each time a visitor clicks on the link, the IPC will donate 10¢ to the U.S. Fund for UNICEF with a guaranteed donation of $50,000.

Reader Service No. 310

CTFA Program Underway

The California Tree Fruit Agreement (CTFA), Reedley, CA, launched its Summer C program aimed at promoting the nutritional benefits of peaches, plums and nectarines. The program includes a digital media campaign, an expansive public relations campaign and POS materials available to retailers.

Reader Service No. 311

CONGRATULATIONS!

Amy Feldman

Produce Industry Leadership Program Graduate

POM WONDERFUL

Reader Service # 124

Thanks to the DuPont Corporation and the United Fresh Leadership Program for selecting Jamey Higham, Vice President of Business Development and Foodservice to be a member of its 2007 – 2008 class. We extend our congratulations to Jamey and the entire group for their accomplishments throughout the year long program.

Green Giant Fresh POTANDON PRODUCE Sun Spiced

Reader Service # 54

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Pear Bureau Inspires Foodservice

The Pear Bureau Northwest, (PBN) Portland, OR, has released a set of recipe cards designed to illustrate how fresh USA pears can add color, flavor and texture to a wide variety or menu items all year long. The materials are designed to encourage chefs to add fresh pears to their menus. Foodservice recipes can be requested on PBN's Web site.

Reader Service No. 312

Fresh Link Tomato Created

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

Reader Service No. 313

A & A Organic Relocates

A & A Organic Marketing, Inc., Watsonville, CA, moved its headquarters to the Strawberry Business Center in Watsonville. The new 2,000-square-foot office was built to A & A's specifications, utilizing state-of-the-art computer wiring, a large, multi-purpose conference room and an interactive sales area.

Reader Service No. 314

United Fresh To Honor Chefs

United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, D.C., will honor chefs and foodservice companies with the United Fresh Research and Education Foundation's new Produce Excellence in Foodservice Awards, sponsored by Pro*Act, LLC. Recipients get complimentary airfare, hotel accommodations and registrations to the 2008 United Fresh Show in Las Vegas, NV.

Reader Service No. 315

Miatech Sells Direct

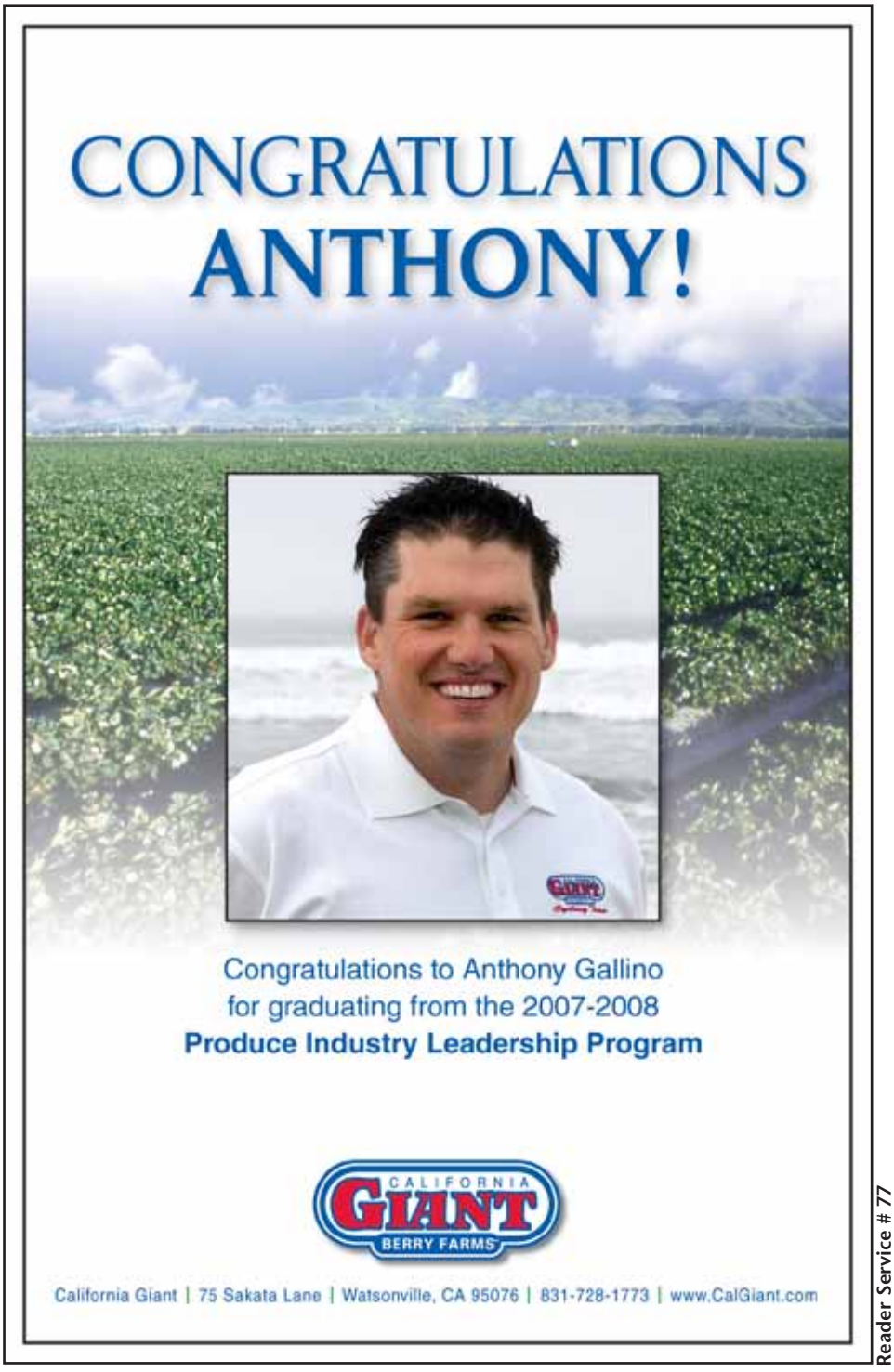
Miatech, Clackamas, OR, will be focusing on direct sales and will no longer manufacture products for KES Science and Technology, Inc. During the wind-down period, retailers that previously purchased Miatech-manufactured equipment through this secondary source are eligible to purchase equipment direct from Miatech at a 31 percent savings.

Reader Service No. 316

Pura Vida Farms Formed

Pura Vida Farms, Scottsdale, AZ, was formed by Chris Elsie, the former vice president of sales for Martori Farms, one of the world's largest melon growers. Beginning in May and continuing through November, Pura Vida will ship a full range of melons grown in Arizona, California, Florida and Mexico.

Reader Service No. 317



Reader Service # 77

Kosher Grape Tomatoes Available

Santa Sweets, Inc., Plant City, FL, announces its Roma, cherry, UglyRipe, round and grape tomatoes are now certified kosher by Florida Kosher Services, Maitland, FL. The produce will carry a label reading *Certified kosher, Florida K*. Meeting the standard required multiple inspections at farms and packing plants across the United States and Mexico.

Reader Service No. 318

NatureSweet Encourages Healthful Snacking

NatureSweet, San Antonio, TX, launched a comprehensive marketing initiative with Walt Disney Records and Radio Disney to build awareness about Cherubs, its bite-sized tomato. Marketing efforts are aimed at attracting the attention of moms and kids. The snacking product is packaged in a convenient resealable "fruit-bowl" container.

Reader Service No. 319

Sun World Launches Summer Promo

Sun World International, Coachella, CA, launched a summer promotion for Superior Seedless brand grapes. With every purchase, consumers receive a special offer to visit a zoo or aquarium in their area by redeeming the Superior Seedless bag at the entrance. Retail support includes POS cards with the name of the participating zoo or aquarium.

Reader Service No. 320

Integrity S.A. To Expand

Integrity S.A., Santiago, Chile, plans to expand its internationalization into Mexico and the United States as well as several other key countries. U.S. companies will be able to take advantage of its services, which include freezing, controlled atmosphere, storage, vacuum-cooling, logistics consolidation, fumigation and origin inspection.

Reader Service No. 321

Tavilla Offers Pineapple Program

Tavilla Sales Company, Los Angeles, CA, offers a variety of golden MD2 variety pineapple with clean crowns, golden color and great taste under the Pinicola label. The pineapples are from a grower in Veracruz, Mexico. Tavilla crosses its loads through McAllen, TX, and into the surrounding states, including California and Arizona.

Reader Service No. 322

Stemilt Introduces New Label

Stemilt Growers, Inc., Wenatchee, WA, has introduced a new logo as part of its Responsible Choice program. The logo symbolizes the company's past, present and future sustainability and social responsibility efforts. The Responsible Choice logo will appear on program materials as well as the boxes used to pack Stemilt fruit.

Reader Service No. 323

Mann Grilling Promotion

Mann Packing Co., Inc., Salinas, CA, kicked off its 2008 Reynolds Wrap Foil summer grilling program designed to provide consumers with ideas and instructions for grilling. The program combines in-store displays, recipe books and product coupons with freestanding Reynolds Wrap display units in more than 10,000 retail stores nationwide.

Reader Service No. 324

Giumarra Announces Organic Peaches

The Giumarra Companies, Los Angeles, CA, is offering certified organic peaches from Mexico to complement its California stone fruit season. Grown in Sonora, Mexico, and shipped from Guimarra's facility in Nogales, AZ, the organic peaches will be available from mid-April through mid-May. Giumarra will also offer conventional Mexican peaches.

Reader Service No. 325

Ciruli Offers Organic Mangos

Ciruli Brothers, LLC, Rio Rico, AZ, has made a significant commitment to the organic market by introducing a line of organic mangos under the Ciruli Brothers Organika brand. The line, launched with imports of Ataulfo, Tommy Atkins, Haden, Keitt and Kent varieties of organic mangos.

Reader Service No. 326

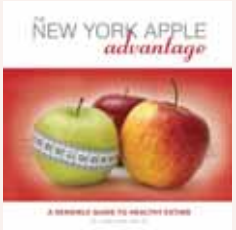
Greenleaf Announces New Partnership

Greenleaf, Inc., San Francisco, CA, announced Oakville Produce Partners, a Napa Valley, CA-based investment group, has taken a majority stake in the company. Oakville's investment will allow Greenleaf to continue to grow its network of local farmers, enhance its customer experience, invest in technology and expand it specialty line.

Reader Service No. 327

NYAA Publishes Healthful-Eating Book

The New York Apple Association (NYAA), Fishers, NY, has published *The New York Apple Advantage: A Sensible Eating Plan for Life*. It serves as an excellent tool to help retailers connect with consumers on the value of apples in healthful eating choices. The book is being distributed through NYAA's Web site.



Reader Service No. 328

Valley Fig Introduces Organic Mission Figs

Valley Fig Growers, Fresno, CA, has introduced Blue Ribbon Orchard Choice Organic Mission Figs, grown by farmers who follow earth-friendly growing practices and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and California Certified Organic Farmers (COOF) organic requirements. Available in 7-ounce resealable, stay-fresh-bags and in bulk.

Reader Service No. 329

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

Recognition is hereby granted to

WILL WEDGE

of Hannaford Brothers Company

as Winner of the 4th Annual

RETAILER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Presented at the New England Produce Council Expo

April 9, 2008

by PRODUCE BUSINESS and the New England Produce Council

Excerpt from the speech by Ken Whitacre, publisher of PRODUCE BUSINESS

This year, PRODUCE BUSINESS is pleased to present its fourth annual New England Produce Retailer of the Year Award. The winner was chosen by you – the members of the New England Produce Council.

Like the first three recipients of the award — Paul Kneeland, Jack Salamon and Domenic D'Antuono — this year's honoree has spent his entire career with the same retailer and, over a 20-year period, has climbed the corporate ladder from a part-time bag boy to director of produce.

Our honoree worked his way through college bagging groceries and joined a retail management-training program after he graduated.

Now how's this for upward mobility? He has been an assistant store manager, held several positions in retail operations, been a center-store category manager, a dairy category manager and is presently director of produce.

It is this diverse background in other departments of his company that makes this year's honoree unique. As one vendor observed: "His background and training in other departments give him a keen understanding of the consumer. When other retailers simply talk about serving the consumer, this person acts as a true representative and advocate. He knows how the consumer shops, and he enthusiastically communicates that extensive knowledge with his suppliers."

Passion: If there is one word that best describes this year's honoree, it is that word.

What clearly stands out is the passion this honoree has for his position and the opportunity it gives him to serve his company and the consumers of New England.

As another nominator put it: "This tireless worker walks and talks produce… he walks and talks his company's mission — he believes in what he and his company are doing — 100%."

Our honoree has been described as a leader in merchandising concepts that drive innovation and growth, as a man whose passion shines through in any position he holds, and as someone with whom everyone else tries to keep up.

He has been commended for his ability to work collaboratively with his vendor partners to deliver new products to the marketplace.

He supports his team of category managers and buyers by allowing them the autonomy to make key decisions.

And the vice president to whom he reports has this to say about our honoree: "I have complete confidence that he will accomplish any project or assignment completely and in a timely manner."

One vendor praises him by saying that when he took over a department that had many experienced professionals before him, he knew how to use his own unique experience and blend it with new resources: "to create one of the best produce programs in the country."

On the personal front, our honoree is a devoted husband and father of two daughters.

Even though he and Melissa, his wife of 21 years, grew up in the same town, they did not meet until they were in college at the University of Maine. They have two teenage daughters – Emily and Abby.

Today the family spends as much free time as they can at their extended family's camp on Lake Ambajejus in Maine, where they enjoy boating, kayaking and hiking.

And since we're in New England, it goes without saying that he is a fan of the Red Sox and the Patriots.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in congratulating the 2008 New England Produce Retailer of the year – Will Wedge of Hannaford Brothers.

Lousy Fruit Undermines Consumption

From Jim Prevor's *Perishable Pundit*, March 25, 2008

We think we should nominate Elizabeth Pivonka, president of the Produce for Better Health Foundation, as the holder of the most thankless job in the industry. Here she is charged with boosting consumption through marketing and education and we so often don't do the job with product and at retail that is required to build consumption.

Elizabeth Pivonka

This weekend, we went shopping at a local supermarket — part of a well-respected chain — and bought lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. Most were fine but among the purchases were one box of imported clementines and some imported nectarines.

We typically eat these clementines like they are candy. Sweet, seedless and perfect for little kids to peel themselves — but at the bottom of the crate there were four dead rotten clementines. After gingerly dumping those and putting the "good" fruit in a bowl, we gave one to the Jr. Pundit Primo, aka William, age 6. He spit it out. We don't blame him. It was dry and basically inedible, as was the next one we tried and the one after that.

Fortunately we had those nice nectarines but, once again, one bite showed they ate like sawdust. They were rock hard and basically inedible.

Now we suspect that the store will gladly refund our money or give us other fruit if we ask, but it should be noted that there is no signage indicating that at all. Plus it is an inconvenience; we don't go there every day, and we probably won't have the product or the receipt with us when we do go back.

Maybe the nectarines can be ripened . . . we are putting them in a paper bag and we will see. But there was no signage or other suggestion that this fruit is unfit for human consumption if you don't put it through a procedure.

Now the problem is that both of these situations are not aberrant. It is not the luck of the draw that we stumbled on bad produce in an island of great product.

The clementines are either very old or really at the end of the season. The same store didn't have clementines the week before — at least not on the floor. We went back to look at the other cases of clementines, and every case has rotten fruit, some with insects flying around. It shouldn't be for sale. Yet there it is on the sales floor of a highly respected chain in a fairly fancy neighborhood.

Was this a forced distribution? A manager who "discovered" some product in the cooler? We don't know but someone was putting shrink reduction ahead of the customer.

Our nectarines weren't an exception either. All the nectarines were hard as a rock and tasteless. Yet there was zero signage as to what consumers should do about this fact or if anything should be done at all. We are not sure that fruit such as this should be sold at all. If it is put on display, it certainly should be sold with a clear indication as to what a consumer can expect to do to make it edible.

Consumption in general can only be increased if individuals consume more. And it is no small matter for a 6-year-old to be turned off to our products because we offer lousy produce for sale.

Warren Buffet, the famed billionaire investor, once said, "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently."

Elizabeth works hard, as have a long line of staffers and board members at *Fruits & Veggies — More Matters*, *Five-A-Day* and the Produce for Better Health Foundation, but whatever good they do can be undone in one bite by a small child sold subpar fruits and vegetables. We better start thinking about doing things differently. **www.pershablepundit.com**

Produce Plays Lead Role In Demographic Marketing

RETAIL EXPERTS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE AND IDEAS FOR CAPITALIZING ON GROWING SEGMENTATION OPPORTUNITIES.

By Jodean Robbins

Although demographic marketing is often synonymous with marketing to ethnic groups, the term means far more than ethnicity. More retailers are recognizing the benefits of identifying and selling specific produce items based on other demographic factors, including income, age, marital status and lifestyle.

"The main objective for any operation is to maximize sales, and knowing your demographic base should allow you to boost sales," explains Bob DiPiazza, president of DiPiazza Consulting Services, Inc., St. Charles, IL. DiPiazza was formerly senior vice president and general merchandising manager for fresh at Bentonville, AK-based Sam's Club and vice president of produce at Oak Brook, IL-based Dominick's Finer Foods, Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Pleasanton, CA-based Safeway, Inc., where he pioneered demographic marketing.

According to Dick Rissman, produce director for Dahl's Food Markets, a Des Moines, IA-based chain with 12 stores, "Looking at demographics results in increased sales and lower shrink. If you ignore the area around you, you're not going to meet the needs of your customers, and you'll be buying products your shoppers don't want."

While retailers are increasingly more sophisticated, there is still the need to be the neighborhood store. "The neighborhood is defined by the demographics around the store," explains DiPiazza of DiPiazza Consulting Services. "Demographic marketing started with the original concept of being the neighborhood market. As retailers tried to understand it better, they developed category plans, which incorporated understanding the demographics of the trade area and having products to fit."

Ed Odron of Produce Marketing and Consulting Services, Stockton, CA, says demographic marketing it more important today than it was when a one-size-fits-all footprint worked for most companies. "Today, you have many differences with ethnicity, age and lifestyle. The outside walls may still be the same, but the key to being successful is what you put inside the store."

On the front lines, Jeff Robbins, produce manager at the East Haven, CT, Stop & Shop, one of the 360 stores comprising the Quincy, MA-based Stop & Shop Supermarket Co., a division of Amsterdam, Netherlands-based Ahold, states, "Here, we have a real demographic mix due to the makeup of the town of East Haven and the surrounding areas. You have to have the right item at the

right time. You have to know every holiday and what it means to each demographic group. You must know your people and be on a personal level with your customers."

Demographic marketing, also known as market segmentation, divides the market into groups based on various demographic factors, such as age, income, ethnicity, education, family size, etc. "The retailer of today is going to have to address demographic marketing," advises Odron. "Whether it's low income, blue collar or white collar, it doesn't just break down into Hispanic or Asian. Education, size of family, age and lifestyle each play a role. Demographic marketing is so much deeper than just one element."

According to Raul Gallegos, senior director of produce and floral for Bristol Farms, a Carson, CA-based chain with 16 stores, "Demographic marketing helps us tailor ourselves to those specific customers around our stores. Different segments are looking for different sizes, different prices, etc. There is a total mix."

"Demographic marketing is very important to our store," reports Dwayne Buttler, director of produce operations for Pete's Frootique, Bedford, NS, Canada, which owns two specialty stores and a foodservice operation. "We serve a wide range of people, so we have to know all the nationalities and other groups within our region."

The Produce Advantage

Perishable departments — especially produce — provide the greatest opportunity to tailor promotion to various demographics. "Produce is a chance for retailers to show difference in segmentation," notes Odron. "In some areas of Northern California, you'd have a large section of red leaf, green leaf, romaine and mushrooms, but across the bay in Oakland, you'd cut back and open up on chili peppers, cilantro and onions. You'd also offer smaller sizes at a better price point."

"Produce has certain attributes that can help retailers market it to specific demographic groups, such as health-conscious consumers or ethnic groups that use fresh fruits and vegetables as main foods," according to Buttler.

Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Service, Inc., Monrovia, CA, says produce is important to most demographics. "For a retailer, it really comes down to how you manage the SKU count in each individual store. Consumers want their store to offer items that are most appealing to them. From a corporate point of view, it's how you go to market on those items. What's your merchandising? What's your promotional point-of-view? Produce gives you more flexibility than many other departments on targeting items to specific groups. If you identify demographics by store and by cluster, whatever you do for one store with a certain demographic cluster you can do for other stores with the same cluster. Out of 150 stores, you may have 20 with the same demographic cluster. For a chain, if you're really great in one store, it doesn't get you a lot. You have to be able to go to scale with it and replicate your success in other stores, too."

When considering demographic marketing, retail experts advise looking at the entire scope of merchandising and promotion. "You need to look at merchandising, marketing, pricing and sizing as well as variety," suggests Produce Marketing's Odron.

Stop & Shop's Robbins notes, "We focus mostly on merchandising, targeting the right holidays and having the right products for all the different segments within our area."

"You're trying to utilize the information to make better decisions about what you offer in your store," according to DiPiazza Consulting's DiPiazza. "There is also application here on pricing because you want to be priced right for those items that are sensitive to the demographics in the trade area of the store."

Ethnicity Considerations

For many retailers, the ethnicity of their customers provides easy merchandising and promotion. "An obvious demographic is ethnic background, especially as the Hispanic population continues to grow," notes Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting. "There's also a growing African immigration in some areas."

The U.S. Census Bureau reports 14.8 percent of the U.S. population is Hispanic. The African-American/Black community

WHO ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS?

Retailers can utilize information from the U.S. Census Bureau as well as their own loyalty card programs. "The U.S. Census Bureau gives you ethnic population and household size within a radius of the store," reports Ed Odron of Produce Marketing and Consulting Services, Stockton, CA. "You can have a dramatically different demographic between two stores within two miles of each other."

"A good way to develop information on customer segmentation is through the store loyalty card because you can identify the person and what they're purchasing," explains Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Service, Inc., Monrovia, CA. "You can communicate to them in-store or out of store, and you don't need to tell everyone what you're giving one segment."

Promotion observations are another important way of getting to know area demographics. "We maintain a one-on-one relationship with customers to stay abreast on who they are and what they want," explains Dwayne Buttler, director of produce operations for Pete's Frootique, Bedford, NS, Canada "Each department manager is a specialist in his or her field not only on product knowledge but also on customer knowledge."

"I rely a lot on feedback from store-level personnel like the produce managers and produce clerks," notes Raul Gallegos, senior director of produce and floral for Bristol Farms, Carson, CA. "I try to make myself available to them by physically being at the stores. Communicating at the store, asking questions and watching patterns of how consumers shop are all crucial to gathering demographic information."

Observation of what's going on around a store, including at the competition, is also important. "What you observe in the store is good for starters, but it just shows what's in your store," reports Dick Rissman, produce director for Dahl's Food Markets, Des Moines, IA. "It doesn't show what you're missing. We use some data to see who lives around the stores, but by simply driving to work in the morning, you can observe the neighborhood and competition. You must be observant to what's going on."

Small and medium retailers may feel at a disadvantage to the resources offered by large chains, but they can make up for it in their ability to institute changes. "Some of the programs take money to do right," states Ray Klocke, president of The Klocke Advantage, Scottsdale, AZ, "and retailers must put in the parameters to measure results. However, smaller retailers may have more flexibility and grass-roots ability."

"The smaller guys tend to have a better handle on their consumer than many of the bigger guys," adds Spezzano. "The national chains may tell in reports what they can do, but they have a harder time implementing it and an even harder time maintaining it. Regional chains have a tendency to think more locally. They're an arm's length from the field and can better understand what's happening."

"You have to be a student of retail," agrees Bob DiPiazza, president of DiPiazza Consulting Services, Inc., St. Charles, IL. "Smaller players need to pay attention to what the big players are doing, then look at what the application can be, given their size. Sometimes, the smaller retailer can be more nimble and can do more event-type activities at its stores. This can have a strong pull in the neighborhood. Event merchandising is important. This hasn't changed throughout the years. How do you make the shopping trip more fun? It may mean having a mariachi band out front with produce samples, or seafood events for Asians. For the high-income segment, you can do a gourmet-type event."

"Our advantage is we're not a cookie-cutter store," stresses Dick Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner's Markets, Inc., a 51-store chain based in Reading, PA. "We have the flexibility to tailor our stores to the community's specifics. We observe what we see in and around our store, collect a good deal of information and translate it into marketing and promotion." **pb**

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represents 12.4 percent and Asians make up 4.4 percent. The Bureau also reports 19.7 percent of U.S. residents speak a language other than English at home, and 12.5 percent were born out of the country.

Dick Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner's Markets, Inc., a 51-store chain based in Reading, PA, reports, "We have growing Hispanic, African-American or Asian communities depending on the store. We do a lot of in-store specials for these groups."

"We put on themed weekends and advertise within the store or on the side of our trucks," explains Pete's Frootique's Buttler. "We do this especially for Chinese New Year and some Italian-themed weekends. For these themed weekends, we bring every department together for one massive promotion. We also ask suppliers of products that relate to the promotion to provide additional promotional materials or pricing."

Retailers are cautioned not to overlook multiple segments in a store's area. "It is important to make sure you hit all the demographics in your area," advises Robbins. "If your area is 50 percent Italian-American, you need to realize the other 50 percent of your customers are a different demographic. You need to make sure you have something for them and to recognize their holidays and important items."

As segmentation based on ethnicity continues to grow, retailers need to understand the differences within specific ethnic or racial groups. "You must now have the ability to break it down and understand the differences between the different Hispanics and Asians, such as Caribbean Hispanics versus southwestern Mexicans," DiPiazza explains. "You must gear your assortment to the differences. You can't lump them all together — it's like saying all Europeans are the same. You need to drill down and understand the differences between the cultures even within the same ethnic group."

"In primarily Hispanic areas, we can have 20 linear feet or even more of Hispanic items," explains Stiles. "The next phase stores need to look at with ethnicity is to recognize the differences within the ethnic groups. Assistance from our vendors has really helped put us where we need to be as far as providing the right products to the right ethnic subgroups."

The Age Factor

Consumer needs and wants change with age and retailers are beginning to recognize the benefit of segmenting certain age groups. The U.S. Census Bureau reports 13.8 percent of the U.S. population is between 20 and 30 years old, 17 percent is 60 years and older, and 12.4 percent is 65 years or older.

"Younger generations are more into convenience and new varieties than older shoppers," reports Dahl's Rissman. "Older shoppers tend to limit their size. We offer a lot of bulk items, so shoppers have a choice beyond bagged or convenience products."

Retailers can look at package size, pricing and special store services for their senior customers. "Older customers tend to want smaller sizes, but they're willing to spend a little more because they don't have kids, and many times their home is paid for," according to Spezzano. "What they buy is determined by what they want and not based on family considerations anymore."

"Many retailers are looking for the new, young consumer, but at the same time, they must remember the older consumer," adds Bristol Farms' Gallegos. "They may actually still have time to prepare a meal using key ingredients they're familiar with. At one of our stores, we started a Senior Discount Day on Tuesdays. This encourages the seniors to come in and shop on a day when they can avoid the crowds. We're now expanding it to another location where we know there are a significant amount of retirees in the area."

Pete's Frootique gives senior tours set up principally by bus tour companies. "This comes principally because of the exposure of our owner, but it allows us to target yet another age demographic," Buttler explains.

A substantial student population also offers opportunity. "We work in a store in Chico, CA, which is a university town," explains Odron. "The students are very well-educated but don't have a lot of money, so a retailer can offer organics but has to watch the price point."

Marketing to kids is another growing area for retailers and suppliers. "*Fruit & Veggies — More Matters!* and PBH [Produce for Better Health Foundation, Wilmington, DE] have been the big originating promoters of consumption for children," states Spezzano. "If you can get kids hooked on fresh produce at an early age, you've made a customer for life. It requires investment, but if done properly, you'll get an ROI with repeat purchases. In this case, you can use purchase history to customize your marketing look for purchases indicating households with kids."

"Produce companies are using Disney characters and other cartoons on their packages to market to kids," notes Produce Marketing's Odron. "Some retailers are also conducting produce department tours for school children and many schools are taking advantage of it. They explain the many benefits of eating fresh fruits and vegetables and their great flavors."

Health and education are key elements in marketing to kids. "With our nutritionist, we cater to schools and kids," according to Pete's Frootique's Buttler. "She'll go to schools to promote healthful eating and we give tours of the stores."

"We try to focus on the theme of health and wellness and introducing fruits and vegetables to kids," says Redner's Stiles. "We do school tours for the kids and sample items when they come through."

Retailers are advised to utilize their entire store. "If you're going after young children, you may focus on having more promotions on baby food and diapers," suggests Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting. "Your toy area and school supplies can work as additional promotional or cross-merchandising opportunities. If marketing to households with children, you may want to carry more Disney program items or more items for snacks and lunches."

Income Or Social Class

Income and educational level or perceived social class are other significant segmentation

Photo courtesy of Pete's Frootique

Pete's Frootique uses humor in its appeal to various demographic groups.

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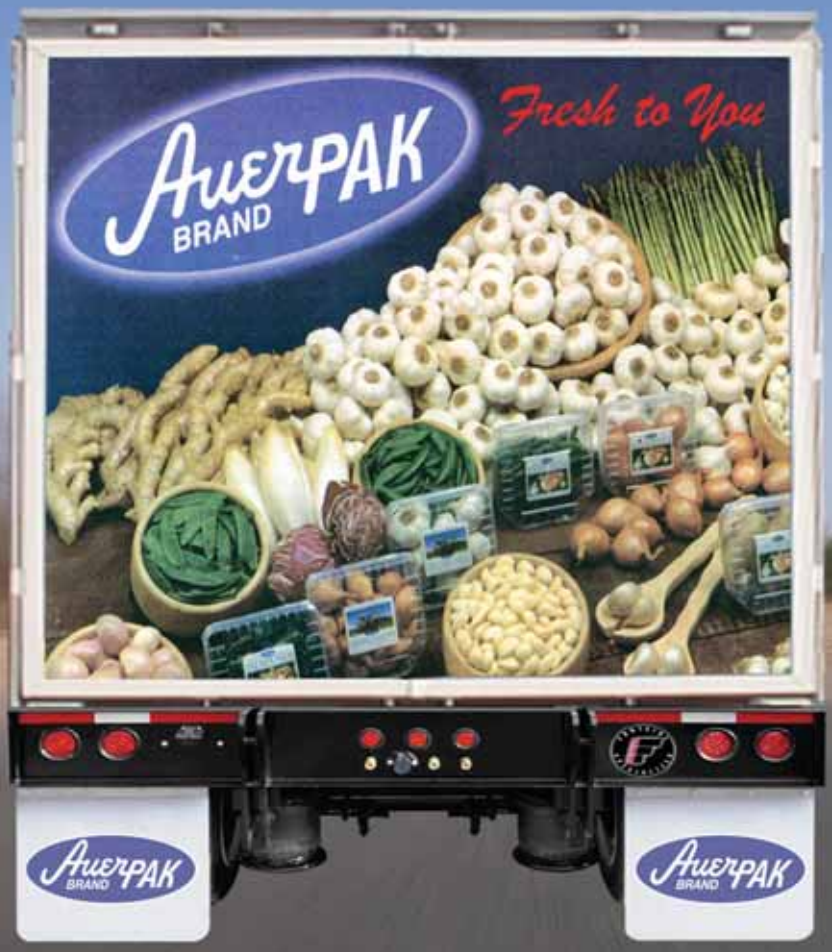

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Reader Service # 95

factors. "Two important segments to look at are income and education," states Odron. "If you have well-educated, high-income folks in your area, you can target them with recipes, gourmet items and organics."

One of the newer developments in demographic marketing to higher income consumers is the direct mailing of high-end, full-color recipe magazines by major chains.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports 20.9 percent of the U.S. population has a family income of $50,000 to $74,999. Of married families, 16.8 percent have an income of $75,000 to $99,999 and another 16.8 percent have an income of $100,000 to $149,999. The average married couple family income is $69,027. On the other side of the coin, 22.6 percent of the population has income between $15,000 and $34,999.

"Economic status is a factor," reports Dahl's Rissman. "You might have a more affluent area, so you can offer higher-end products. Or maybe you're in a more blue collar/middle income area. The way the economy is going now, there may be more people moving into this segment. We have items and programs to fit different income demographics, such as our 2-tiered program, where we have a high-end then a medium-value range of items. We always want good quality, but sometimes you can have a premium size and a very good item that is a smaller size or a packer label."

"Redner's has always focused on giving our customers the best price on product. This appeals to many demographics but especially to the middle class," says Stiles. "Our no-gimmick philosophy is really attractive to middle-class customers."

One of the newer developments in demographic marketing to higher income consumers is the direct mailing of high-end, full-color recipe magazines by major chains, such as Genuardi's Family Markets, based in Norristown, PA, and Wegmans Food Markets, Inc., based in Rochester, NY. "Save Mart [Supermarkets, Modesto, CA] puts together a booklet at least four times a year with recipes and a shopping list," reports Produce Marketing's Odron. "It's really a

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Reader Service # 61

nice looking piece."

"Direct marketing to targeted segments has been in the works at large corporations for the last 10 to 18 years," reports Ray Klocke, president of The Klocke Advantage, Scottsdale, AZ. "It can be a very effective tool to market to your customers."

Chains are marketing produce, high-end items and even organics through these direct mail pieces. According to DiPiazza of DiPiazza Consulting, "Major retailers are sending out direct offers with direct appeal. Stores like Fresh Market [Inc., based in Greensboro, NC], Wegmans and Genuardi's are sending high-quality magazines to their customers. For years, freestanding inserts have declined and direct marketing has increased. I see it when I'm in the store. Going back to my store manager days, everybody had a little box with his or her coupon cards. Today, I don't see them used as much."

Lifestyle/Household Size

Retailers should be increasingly interested in the effect of consumer lifestyles. "When we talk about this whole area of customer segmentation, it gets into not only ethnicity, age or income but also a whole lifestyle," explains DiPiazza. "What stage of life are you in? What is your lifestyle? Are you an active baby boomer? This means the purchasing may be different.

"For example, active boomers may be purchasing baby food for their grandchildren, so their purchase pattern and type of product will be different. Or, you can have two people both earning in excess of $150,000, but they may have two very different lifestyles. For example, one may be a trade person with a large family and the other may be a single executive," he continues.

> **"When we talk about this whole area of customer segmentation, it gets into not only ethnicity, age or income but also a whole lifestyle."**
>
> **— Bob DiPiazza**
> **DiPiazza Consulting Services, Inc.**

Some useful statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau report 33.1 percent of children in the population are under six years old, 50.4 percent of the population is married and another 30.5 percent have never been married. Veterans make up more than 10 percent of the population. Retailers can use these statistics on a local level to devise different marketing strategies. "For example, do you want to attract households of 4.5 people or singe-person households?" queries Spezzano Consulting's Spezzano. "Households of 4.5 will spend more money but single-person households will spend more on high-ticket items."

"On household size, we promote family packs or large sizes where it's more economical for them," reports Stiles. "We offer individual loose items as well as what we call our grab-and-go items and convenience foods like pre-cut or steam veggies for singles or couples without kids. We advertise these items in the paper as well."

Health and convenience are increasingly important for several demographic groups. "Routine and lifestyle play a big role," according to Bristol Farms' Gallegos. "It seems like everyone is pressed for time. Our focus is to try to bring value, convenience and healthful choices to these customers."

"One big lifestyle issue right now is how people want to eat healthful meals but don't have the time to prepare them," reports Pete's Frootique's Buttler. "We have ready-to-go meals to cater to this part of our customer demographic made up of mostly young families and professionals." **pb**

Reader Service # 59

Reader Service # 108

The Return Of Web Retailing

Online grocery shopping makes a comeback as technology and delivery logistics advance.

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

Supermarkets that not only deliver to your door but also deliver higher quality food than you might have picked up yourself — sound too good to be true?

Perhaps once, but no longer. Today's online grocery stores offer the ultimate in convenience, service and quality at increasingly affordable prices. Those who gain loyal Web customers during these formative years may just corner the market in what many believe is the future of retailing.

For Malvern, PA-based Acme Markets, a subsidiary of Eden Prairie, MN-based Supervalu, Inc., there's been a spike in online business during the last year, according to Mike Pieciuk, manager of marketing ebusiness. Acme made the 2007 *Best of Philly* list for food delivery service in *Philadelphia Magazine*. Acme delivers from most of its store locations to homes in and around Philadelphia, as well as in the suburbs of New Jersey and Delaware.

"People are becoming more comfortable with not only ordering online but also ordering perishables online," notes Tony Stallone, vice president of merchandising, Peapod, Inc., Lake Zurich, IL. "The produce category keeps growing for us, and it's been our largest category online. We're passionate about our produce. It's the centerpiece of our business."

Peapod, a subsidiary of Amsterdam, Netherlands-based Royal Ahold, was a web-retailing pioneer, selling groceries to about 400 Evanston, IL, customers online as early as 1990. In the days when only academics used the Internet, Peapod sold shoppers the modems they needed to dial directly into the service. Today Peapod is partnered with a number of supermarket chains, including Braintree, MA-based Stop & Shop and Carlisle, PA-based Giant Food Stores, LLC, both Ahold subsidiaries, offering delivery in key markets in the Midwest and East Coast. "It's a pretty exciting time," says Stallone.

"The penetration of the Internet and the comfort level of users on the Internet is totally different now than from where it was in the late '90s," says Steve Druckman, COO, FreshDirect, Long Island City, NY, a service that began delivering to online customers in Manhattan just over five years ago. Today the company delivers to all five boroughs of New York as well as some of the city's suburbs.

In recent years, computer programs that allow customers to shop online have become easier to use and more like traditional grocery shopping. For example, as shoppers browse the virtual "aisles" of *Peapod.com*, produce specials appear at the bottom of each page, much as if one were wheeling a cart through a physical grocery store and noting the signage. Items on sale are marked with a red flag.

As software becomes more user-friendly, computers are becoming a part of daily life. "Computers have gotten faster," says Stallone, "and have made their way into the kitchen." With many computers left on and connected to the Internet day and night, it's easy to see why the ease of shopping online has begun to appeal to more people.

Today's 20-somethings barely remember a time before the Internet was all pervasive. "The kids are growing up now," says Stallone. "Where do they shop? They shop online."

Eventually, customers may find themselves ordering anytime, anywhere the way some now receive e-mail on iPhones and BlackBerries, although how that will work is yet to be determined. "There's a section on our site called Quick Shop that allows you to order from your past order, and that's more conducive to ordering from your BlackBerry or PDA," notes Druckman.

Photo courtesy of Fresh Direct

Photos courtesy of Acme Markets

GETTING PRODUCE RIGHT

Online shops that get it right do at least as good a job bringing you what is on your list as a spouse would — sometimes better. And while that might be an easy task when it comes to boxes of cereal and frozen dinners, getting produce to customers the way they want it can be much trickier.

"Produce is such an important percep-

tion item," according to FreshDirect's Druckman. "It sets us apart from the competition."

The best online services hire and train employees whose only job is to select produce. "We like to have it so that the produce is better than the consumer can pick for themselves," says Peapod's Stallone.

At Acme, "We make sure we send out exactly what we would send to our own houses," says Pieciuk, who believes the quality of produce delivered to his customers is no longer an issue. In fact, comments about produce make up only 2 percent of the complaints Acme receives from online shoppers. At the same time, one out of every 61 Web customers sends Acme a compliment about the quality of its produce. (The national average, he says, is one out of 72.)

Produce delivered to homes has another advantage, in that it does not spend time sitting in a cart and then in a car. "We can keep the cold chain intact, so they'll notice produce lasts longer," adds Stallone of Peapod, which places groceries in individual cold totes from the time they are shopped until they are brought to customers' doors.

At Acme, shopped items are placed in color-coded totes (blue for frozen, red for refrigerated and gray for dry) and placed in the appropriate storage areas until they are loaded onto temperature-controlled vans with refrigerator, freezer and dry compartments. "There's no time when these things are just sitting around," says Pieciuk. Employees are trained to know which produce items are refrigerated and which items — such as bananas and tomatoes — are not.

The intact cold chain is especially noticeable when it comes to highly perishable items, such as berries and salads. "Bagged salads are our No. 1 selling produce item in online commerce," notes Pieciuk.

It is particularly important that produce bought online lasts as long as possible in the consumers' homes. "The consumers who shop online will buy a lot more than if they would buy in the store," says Pieciuk. "They purchase once a month and have large orders delivered."

MAKING LIFE EASIER

Online shopping is all about convenience, so consumers need to know they will not have to waste time returning unsatisfactory items to the store. For that reason, customer service is an important part of Acme's program. "Even though this is an online business, we have no problem giving consumers a call if a store needs to substitute one item for another," says Pieciuk. Employees limit the number of calls they make to consumers — shoppers are, after all, time-starved — but Pieciuk has found, "Most of our customers really like this. They really enjoy that personal touch."

Each Acme store keeps a logbook of consumer comments. Whenever a complaint is entered, employees review the issue — Was the item close to its expiration date? Was the quality not up to snuff? — so that the problem does not occur again.

Many online retailers allow customers to get picky about the details, such as whether they want large apples or small or whether they like their bananas green or yellow.

"It's definitely a balancing act between too much selection and not enough," says Druckman. FreshDirect does not let consumers choose the ripeness of its produce. Instead, he says, "We've chosen to try and pick the way the majority of people want it. Wherever we can on the Website, we try to explain how you're going to receive some of that."

FreshDirect offers a number of solutions that set the service apart from its competitors. "We do sell Cheerios and Bounty like everyone else does, but that's not how we're going to win," says Druckman. "Our customers love what we've done from a meal perspective." A shopper can browse through the site's recipes and, finding one she likes, click a button to instantly add the necessary ingredients to her cart.

Because so many of their customers are time-starved, FreshDirect offers a number of quick meal options under the banner "Easy meals prepared by expert chefs." These include 4-Minute-Meals – individual servings in special microwavable containers that pressure-cook the raw ingredients in just four minutes. Many of these options are co-branded with some of New York's top restaurants, such as Rosa Mexicano and Tabla.

DELIVERY OPTIONS

Most grocery delivery services charge by the order, usually between $5 and $10 per delivery plus a fuel charge of under a dollar when gas prices are high. The cost may not seem like much to shoppers who place orders of $100 or more, but to others the price can be a deterrent.

While she was in graduate school, Jennifer Baird, 29, of Chicago, IL, often split Peapod orders with friends. "It is a little bit expensive to get groceries just for myself but it can be worth it if you buy groceries for several people," she says. "I haven't ordered with them for a while — since school just because I'm broke — but when I could afford it, the service was very much worth it."

FreshDirect is trying to appeal more to customers like Baird with delivery passes, which let customers order as often as they want at a price of $59 for six months or $99 for a year. "It basically allows people to get in the habit of using FreshDirect on a regular basis," says Druckman.

The price of delivery rarely covers the

Photos courtesy of Frieda's, Inc.

On-line produce shopping saves consumers both time and gasoline.

The Age Of Information

Customers who shop online often get their information online. Now they can get both from the same Websites. Peapod.com, the Web site for Peapod, Inc., Lake Zurich, IL, offers information on what is in season and how to handle produce, such as which items should be refrigerated and how best to ripen them.

Peapod also lets shoppers sort items by nutritional content as well as by price. Diabetic? You can see which fruits contain the least carbohydrates. On a diet? Click a button and you'll see which salad dressings contain the most fat. Soon shoppers will also be able to sort items by individual vitamins and minerals, according to Tony Stallone, vice president of merchandising.

Not long from now, Peapod shoppers will also be able rate items they have bought according to quality, an idea that Peapod took from *LeShop.ch*, Switzerland's leading online supermarket. By the end of the year, Stallone hopes customers will be able to write online reviews for other customers. For now, shoppers can see which items rate as most popular. In the vegetable category, that would be tomatoes on-the-vine and Hass avocados. Zesty sprouts appear to be the least sought out. **pb**

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cost to the operator. "We subsidize our customers every day. But that's part of the business model," he adds.

Most stores allow shoppers to choose a 1- to 2-hour delivery window during the next few days after placing the order. Acme is acutely aware of timing. "If we think we're going to be late with a delivery, we'll call. And when we do that, we'll register that as a complaint against ourselves," says Pieciuk.

Some sites allow shoppers to come to the store and pick up purchases at a pre-designated time — say, on their way home from work. *Weisishop.com*, a new service currently being test-marketed at a Parsippany, NJ-based Kings Supermarket in Allentown, PA, offers delivery as well as pickup. Online customers can drive up and have their groceries loaded right into their cars.

During the summer, some online services expand delivery areas to meet the needs of vacationers, such as when FreshDirect offers summer service a few days each week to the Hamptons, a Long Island destination for wealthy New Yorkers. Acme delivers to summer homes on the New Jersey shore. Customers can place their orders before they even pack their cars, knowing their groceries will arrive when they want them.

Photos courtesy of Melissa's/World Variety Produce

User-friendly software makes ordering produce on line easier for consumers.

ROOM FOR GROWTH

The current Web retailing boom shows no sign of slowing down. "In our division, we have had growth steadily over the last four years," says Pieciuk. Acme saw this growth even as new companies began offering online service in the same area.

Local services are not the only Web retailers to see increased demand. *Melissas.com* has offered produce online for nine years, with the business "growing significantly over the past four years," says Robert Schueller, director of public relations, Melissa's World Variety Produce, Inc., Los Angeles, CA.

Popular items from Melissa's include an exotic-and-tropical fruit basket, a baby vegetables basket and an all-in-one tamale set. "People are more comfortable buying online and find it a great way to save gas and send presents to loved ones across the country," says Schueller. The site is also popular among consumers who want a variety of produce not found at their local stores.

Frieda's, Inc., Los Angeles, CA, recently launched its redesigned Web site, featuring a

Cities Vs. Suburbs

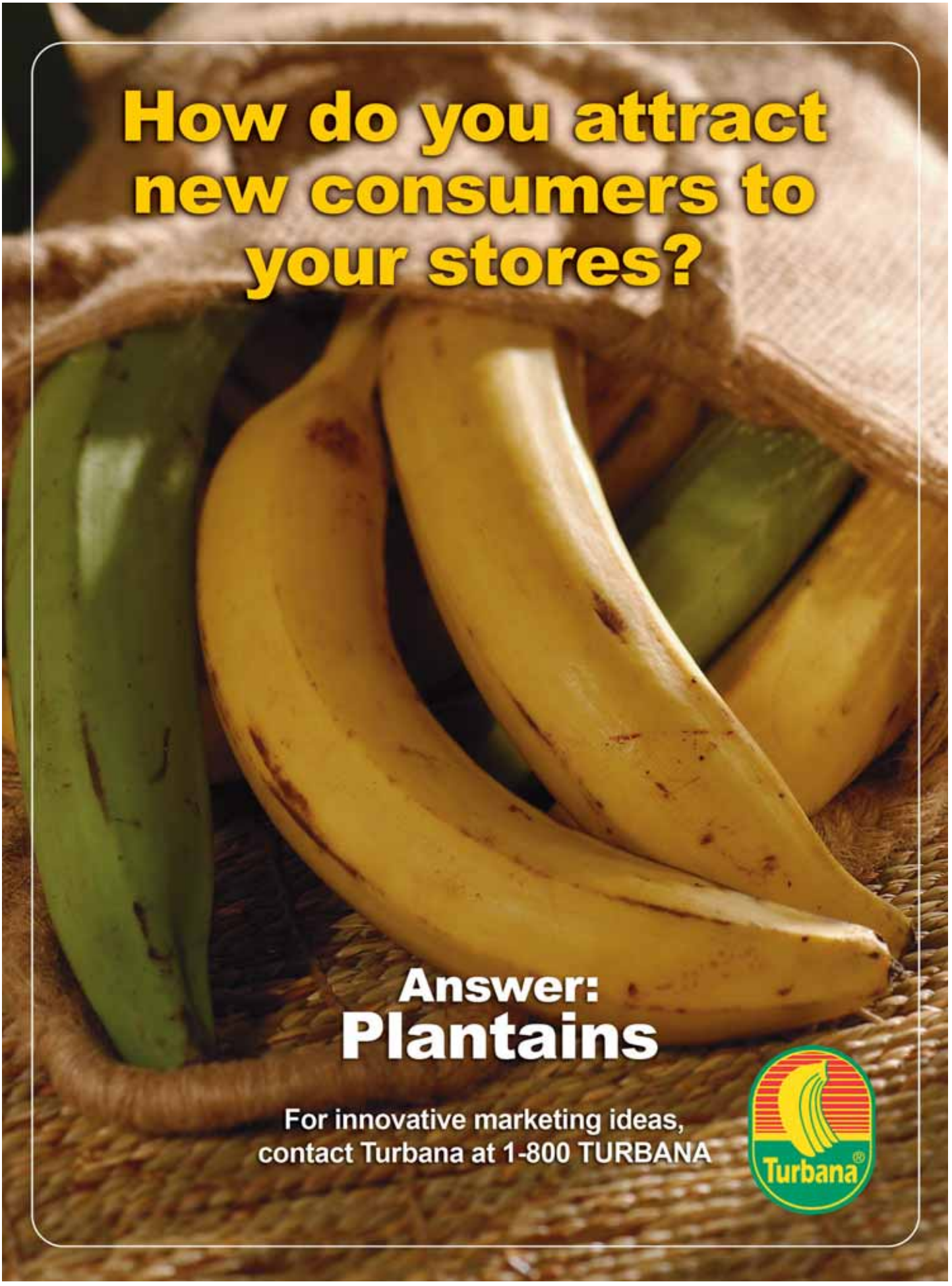
As online services grow, many wonder which areas will turn out to be most profitable — densely populated cities or sprawled-out suburbs? Delivery within cities at first appears to be more efficient, as stops are closer together. In Manhattan, one truck may even make all its deliveries to a single building. But big cities hold disadvantages, too, such as lack of parking and difficult rush hour traffic. City dwellers, with their cramped quarters, also tend to purchase smaller orders.

Successful online grocery services have grown slowly and steadily, often starting in large cities and expanding out to the suburbs. Long Island City, NY-based FreshDirect, which saw instant demand from the outer boroughs when it began delivering to Manhattan five years ago, allows possible future customers to pre-register with the site so they can be contacted when the service becomes available in their area. In turn, FreshDirect uses this information to decide where to expand its service to next.

Since its Manhattan debut, FreshDirect has added delivery service to the remaining four boroughs of New York City as well as to parts of upstate New York, Long Island and Northern New Jersey.

Online services in cities, suburbs and even rural areas require different plans, but all hold tremendous potential, according to Mike Pieciuk, manager of marketing ebusiness at Acme Markets, based in Malvern, PA. "I believe this is the way of the future regardless of where you live," he says. **pb**

Reader Service # 74



Reader Service # 75

Frieda's shop where visitors can purchase a variety of items such as gift baskets. "We took a break from selling online for a couple of years," explains Karen Caplan, president and CEO. "We were doing a significant amount of business, but the logistics were difficult. Our new site is much more consumer oriented."

Caplan says online shops like Frieda's are winning fans because of the growing number of people buying from home. Consumers searching for gifts can visit Frieda's for a variety of gift baskets made with fruit and other food items. "So many people are concerned with healthful eating now. We're offering consumers something beyond cookies and chocolate. Plus, we can customize baskets to suit every consumer's budget."

As in traditional stores, online shops are seeing growing demand for organics and fresh-cut produce, notes Stallone of Peapod. The same is true for local produce. FreshDirect found locally grown and made products were so important to its consumers that it dedicated an entire section to local foods, as well as one to organic and another to kosher.

The average online shopper has a higher level of education than those who never shop online. According to FreshDirect's Druckman, most are between the ages of 25 and 54 and, just as in traditional stores, three quarters of them are women.

Eventually, online grocery shoppers could include just about everyone. "Look at [Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, England-based] Tesco in the United Kingdom. It has a huge set of retail stores, but it has a massive online section as well," says Druckman. "I can imagine online orders getting to be up to a quarter of shopping eventually."

For now, "Busy families are our biggest customers," says Stallone, who notes items marketed to children sell especially well online. "Those are really, really big for us."

"Families are really the sweet spot," agrees Druckman. "Families who have more mouths to feed, who are time-starved — they are the core group that we go after."

Photos courtesy of Acme Markets

Web retailers offer produce that meets the demands of picky consumers.

Acme's Pieciuk sees potential with senior citizens and people who are unable to leave their homes. "A lot of people have asked for call-in services, but a lot of senior citizens are online," notes Pieciuk. Many of the people who lack computer skills "use friends and family to place the order for them from their computers." Pieciuk often fields calls from consumers himself, helping those who are not Internet-savvy learn to use the system.

Some shoppers — people who are uncomfortable with the Internet or simply enjoy their trips to the supermarket— may never buy their groceries online. But as baby boomers age and a new generation of shoppers looks to buy their groceries, most will eventually do at least some shopping online. "Generation Y — that's what they were brought up on. That's the way they know life," says Druckman. **pb**

Reader Service # 89

Reader Service # 84

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Reader Service # 109

New Strategies For Canadian Produce

With exchange rates no longer in their favor, neighbors to the north strive to differentiate and highlight their product strengths.

BY DUANE CRAIG

The relatively strong Canadian dollar is driving Canadian exporters of fresh fruits and vegetables to seek alliances, improve efficiencies and look for areas where they can differentiate their products.

For U.S. retailers, Canadian produce may offer a respite from high transportation costs and stale product shipped from longer distances.

"It used to be the weakness of the Canadian dollar was an advantage for a U.S. buyer, but that's not the case anymore," reports Ron Lemaire, executive vice president of the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA), Ottawa, ON. "Right now, the Canadian shippers are relying on delivering high-quality product, providing value-added and ensuring consistency.

Viv Agresti, president of Gemini Farms, a Bradford, ON-based shipper of carrots and onions, is not enjoying the present market. "I've been at this since 1968. I've gone through some highs and lows and this is one of those lows. The growers will have to understand that the stronger U.S. dollar we enjoyed for many years is gone. For us to export, we will have to be more competitive." He has maintained his market shares, but business is not as lucrative.

Strong competition from Mexico is an emerging challenge, he adds, using peppers as an example. Gemini started picking peppers March 19 and will harvest until November. Mexico has a significant impact by overlapping with its supplies in the late winter and early spring. Agresti sees no end to that competition since Mexico's cost of production is so inexpensive and the country is expanding its growing areas to cover more of the calendar each year.

OFF-SETTING HIGH COSTS

Jim Veri, sales, Exeter Produce and Storage Co., Ltd., an Exeter, ON-based produce grower and shipper, says higher production costs in Canada, when compared to competing countries, are a large factor in the current lower returns Canadian firms are getting from their exports. Higher costs are the results of regulation, minimum wages, taxes and fees, he adds.

"The higher cost used to be somewhat offset by the exchange rate," he explains. "Everybody thought we were just rolling in the dough when the exchange rate was different, but that really wasn't the case. What it was doing was buffering us from the higher costs we experience. So now, if you're looking at the greenhouse industry during the overlapping time of the year when we compete with Mexico, it is devastating here because the two biggest components in a greenhouse are labor and heat. Canada has a high minimum wage relative to Mexico and the heating requirement is much larger."

Brenda Lammens, chairperson of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (OFVGA), Guelph, ON, states growers used to assume the exchange rate advantage would cover the transportation costs. Now, they're seeing a legislated 28 percent increase in Ontario's minimum wage over the next three years. "It's a huge increase for us and we're not getting a 28 percent increase in the price of the product out in the marketplace, so we have to figure out how to offset it," she explains.

"It's difficult to continue to match the existing pricing profile we offer into the United States because of the growth in the value of the Canadian dollar," notes Robert Chapman, director of sales and marketing for Pride Pak Canada, Ltd., Mississauga, ON. "We've tried as much as possible to fine-tune our business and our operations to ensure that we're trying to find savings here. We work to increase pounds produced per person per hour. We look into

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Reader Service # 117

areas such as savings in utilities and trying to run larger volume runs of product, so we can maximize savings at our door. But, at the end of the day, we have to raise prices for our export products into the United States."

Chapman also points to added expenses when exporting product from Canada to the United States because of higher costs associated with the post-9/11 bio-terrorism prevention initiatives.

In some areas, certain commodities just don't make it to the export market. Some experts say Ontario apple production doesn't even supply its own markets. Adrian Huisman, manger of the Ontario Tender Fruit Producers Marketing Board (OTFPMB), Vineland Station, ON, and advisor to Ontario apple growers, states, "2004 and 2005 were horrible years for the apple industry all around the world and that's why we don't even try to export into the United States when we can get higher prices at home."

Canada's top exports are greenhouse tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, cucumbers, mushrooms, blueberries, onions, cranberries, carrots and apples, according to Statistics Canada 2007 data. Other fresh exports include cabbage, lettuce, cherries, garlic, leeks, chives and other alliaceous vegetables.

Almost 50 percent of Canadian fruit, vegetable and nut exports destined for the United States go to 11 states, according to Canadian agricultural statistics for 2004 to 2007. Kentucky, West Virginia, Michigan, Ohio, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska are all top receivers of Canadian produce. California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah and Hawaii are the next heaviest destinations.

Long-Term Views

Viv Agresti, president of Gemini Farms, Bradford, ON, describes a 6,000-acre area in Canada that once had 12 growers but has only two today. He is concerned about where the food is going to come from as more growers are squeezed out of production.

Apple acreage has dropped quite sharply in regions near the Ontario Tender Fruit Producers Marketing Board (OTFPMB), Vineland Station, ON, according to Adrian Huisman, manager. "We used to have about 34,000 acres of apples in Ontario and that's now down to about 18,000," he says. "That's over 15 years — it's just lack of profitability as growers decided to get out."

Jim Veri, sales, Exeter Produce and Storage Co., Ltd., Exeter, ON, believes those who continue to grow and ship from Canada have to be serious about it in order to put up with the more challenging economic environment. Exeter has been around for 57 years and has always been retail driven, so it matches its efforts to what retailers want. That means always innovating in order to keep up with retail demand.

"If we don't start partnering to hold our market space, there could be a threat of losing it because retailers can bring product in from all over the world," notes Brenda Lammens, chairperson of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (OFVGA), Guelph, ON. "I think there is opportunity if people are willing to partner and collaborate with other countries and states. You want to do it as close to home as you can because of all the costs associated with transportation and exporting." **pb**

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Canadian and U.S. markets are surprisingly similar relative to chances for growth, CPMA's Lemaire notes. Innovative packers and shippers look to the U.S. market for opportunities. Producers in Canada are becoming quite efficient and effective at working with their customers. "I think the partnership development is a large part of what Canadian growers and shippers are looking to establish," he explains, referring to Canadian companies working with their buyers to nail down the requirements needed to make sure items sell.

"Our dealers and exporters are working with their customers to determine what they're looking for," says Robert Harding, general manager, Prince Edward Island Potato Board, Charlottetown, PEI. "It's always a changing market and that's what makes it exciting."

OFGA's Lammens, who is also the chairperson of the Ontario Asparagus Growers Marketing Board, Simcoe, ON, says the organization has developed a relationship with Michigan asparagus growers and they are sharing research. The businesses are very similar and experience the same production issues, so they can both gain by sharing expenses for research. "It has been extremely beneficial to both of us," she notes. "We've also started talking about marketing."

The asparagus board can handle process-

Reader Service # 125

ing sales so it will be shipping processing asparagus into Michigan. Ontario doesn't have any asparagus processors, but Michigan does and those companies are looking for additional volumes, Lammens explains.

Ontario typically has a surplus of fresh product that drives down prices. "We're looking at this to be a catalyst to keep our No. 1 fresh price up, to keep the less desirable out of our fresh market and we can do that by selling it to a processing market," Lammens reports. "So we're hoping this will cause some stability in our fresh market and keep that retail price up."

DIFFERENTIATION TACTICS

The pieces of the differentiation puzzle companies are looking at in order to stay competitive have a range, notes CPMA's Lemaire. "People are looking at everything from improved strategic alliances with each other to ensuring they are working with other like-minded suppliers to creating the right product and providing it at the right price and consistency all year long,"

Harding of the PEI Potato Board says many U.S. consumers look to Canada for products they are comfortable with, but they are also very interested in new trends such as nutrition.

Companies are identifying their products' core health attributes. They are running community-focused programs that reinforce physical activity, balanced diets, flavor profiles and ease of preparation. Methods used to do this are Web sites, POS materials and community programming.

B.C. Tree Fruits Ltd., Kelowna, BC, differentiates itself by being the West Coast shipper of McIntosh, explains Rick Austin, international sales director. Its Royal Gala and Lapin cherries, a variety developed for British Columbia, are also top exports. The company aligns itself with U.S. shippers and fills in their lines when they have retailer requests for more variety than they might have themselves.

Other tree fruit doesn't have enough volume for export, so it is primarily used in Canada, Lemaire states. A great deal of value-added processing is also going on, with imported and local produce being included in blends and fresh cuts.

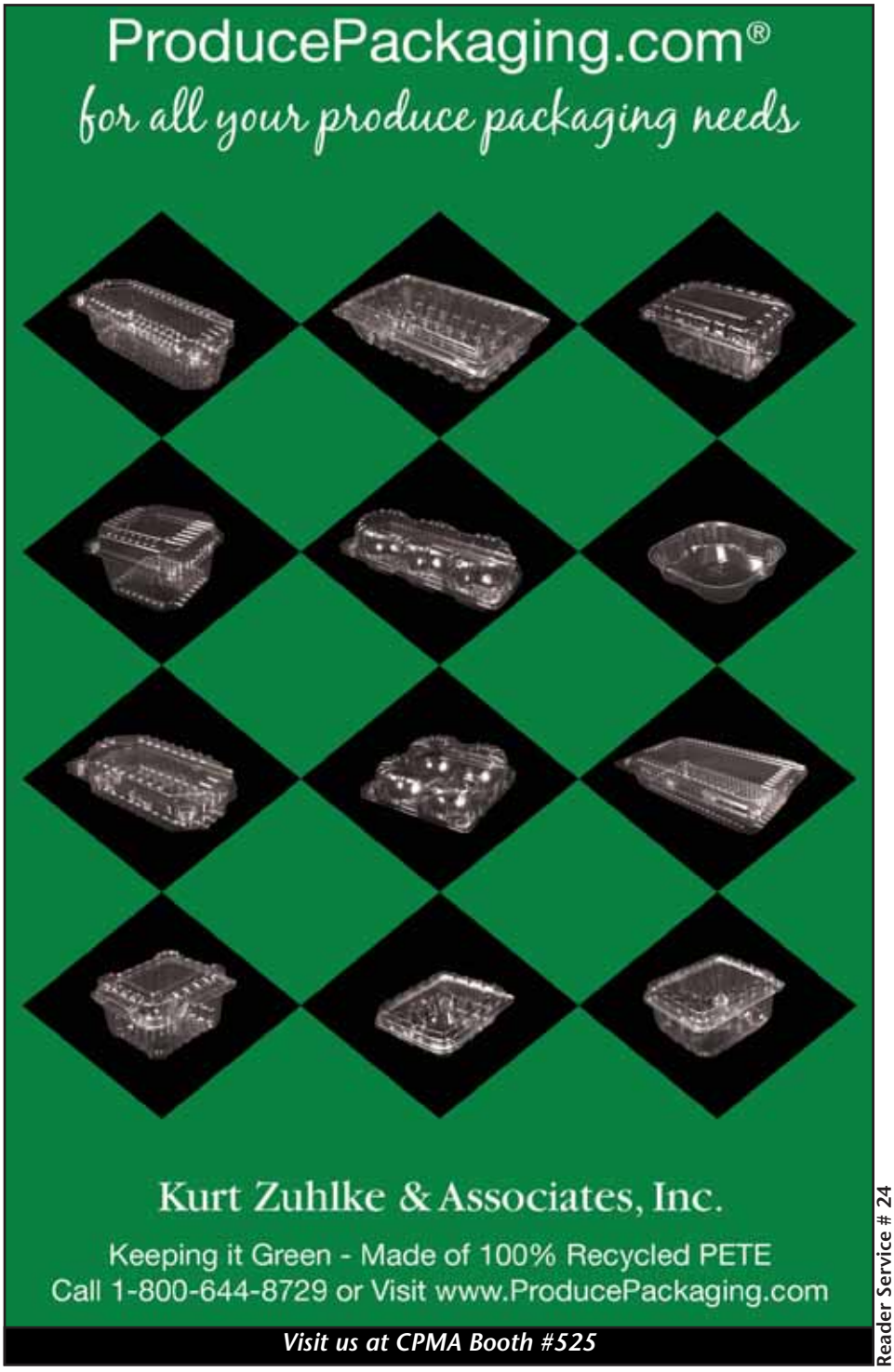
OTFPMB's Huisman says very few of the peaches, pears, plums, prunes, fresh grapes and apples grown in his area are shipped to the United States. "We've been able to sell them in Canada to a better advantage for our growers."

Honeycrisp apples in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritime provinces have caught on pretty quickly. Still, Gala is in demand and, while McIntosh is a big mover, Huisman says they don't produce much profit. Honeycrisp grows better in Ontario than in many other places because the climate is cool, and some retailers claim they like their taste better than those from other locales.

B.C. Tree Fruits specializes in exporting apples and cherries. Its biggest effort focuses on selling Royal Gala, McIntosh and Ambrosia. Austin reports Ambrosia, a premium apple that was a chance seedling discovered in British Columbia, is doing very well with U.S. retailers. The grower group that controls the variety has sold licensing agreements to certain areas.

Chapman says Pride Pak's foray into an arrangement with a large retailer in New York is paying off. Pride Pak has a fresh-cut operation using contract purchases from the western U.S. growing regions with product sometimes from Mexico and Florida. It uses carrots and other root vegetables from Canada.

According to Chapman, sales in New York are phenomenal. The winter-style pre-cut vegetables, soup mixes, stew vegetables and pot roast mixes are popular during dark, cold months. Some products tend to do better at holiday times, such as pre-cut yams at Thanksgiving and Christmas. He sees large



Reader Service # 24

movement from the end of January into mid-March for stir-fry products because of the Chinese New Year.

HIGHLIGHTING STRENGTHS

Canadian producers like to think their products are competitive from a quality perspective. "It's a competitive market and we're at a point where, because we are seeing high-quality product coming in from so many parts of the world on a day-to-day basis, quality is just an expectation now," reports CPMA's Lemaire. "All of our consumer surveys keep coming back to that. Quality is No. 1 and price is less than a percentage point below that."

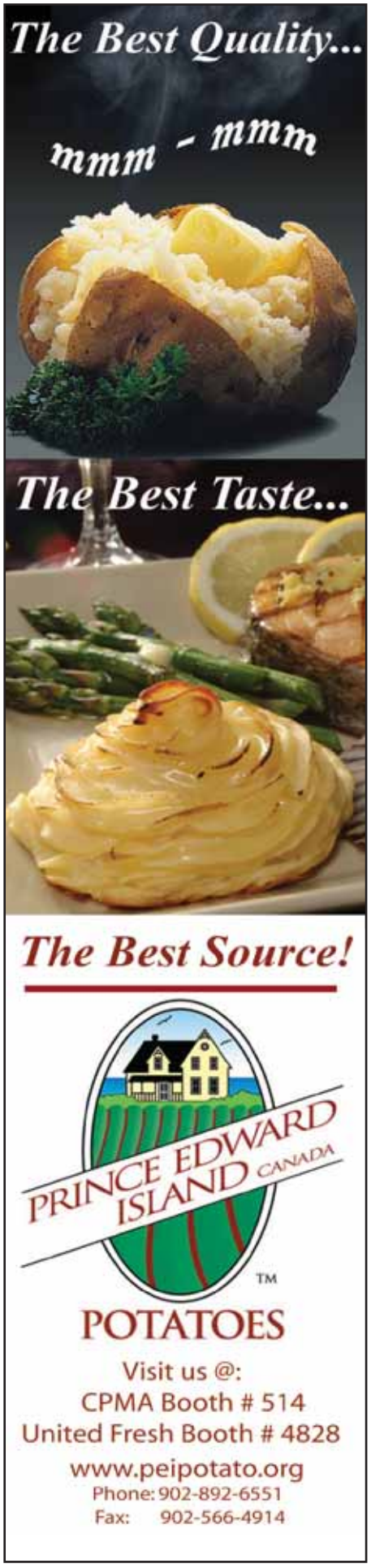
Exeter's Veri sees the attraction of Canadian produce to retailers in the United States as multi-faceted. Since Canada is in the beginning of its season during the overlapping Mexican deal, product should be fresher, especially in light of shorter transportation times to places near the Canadian border. "Retailers who source from Canada have sourced from a quality standpoint and not because it was cheap," Veri notes. "If you are sourcing carrots from California, with freight rates being what they are, you may choose to source Canadian carrots instead."

Canada can deliver fresher produce at a similar cost to alternatives, Veri adds. Canada's volumes can supply opportunities for large northern chains to get the volumes they need nearby.

Beyond quality, the big advantage to U.S. retailers in sourcing from Canada is the availability of different varieties, explains B.C. Tree Fruit's Austin. The other advantage is the ability to promote something different than just the standard U.S. varieties week after week. It gives the consumer a different perspective if after five or six weeks of Washington cherry ads, they see cherries from Canada.

"For Prince Edward Island potatoes, there's a positive association with fresh air and clean beaches," notes Harding. "We're pleased to have an internationally recognized food-safety program that goes into every bag of Prince Edward Island potatoes. It's important for our Canadian producers."

Retailers can be assured of on-farm safety plans, fair labor practices and products with superior quality and nutritional values because of the maturity of Canadian producers, notes OFVGA's Lammens. "We're here — it's just that we're not that big and that's why we have to work together to supply the volumes retailers may be looking for. If they will tell us what they need in terms of volumes, the grower groups could get together and meet the needs." **pb**



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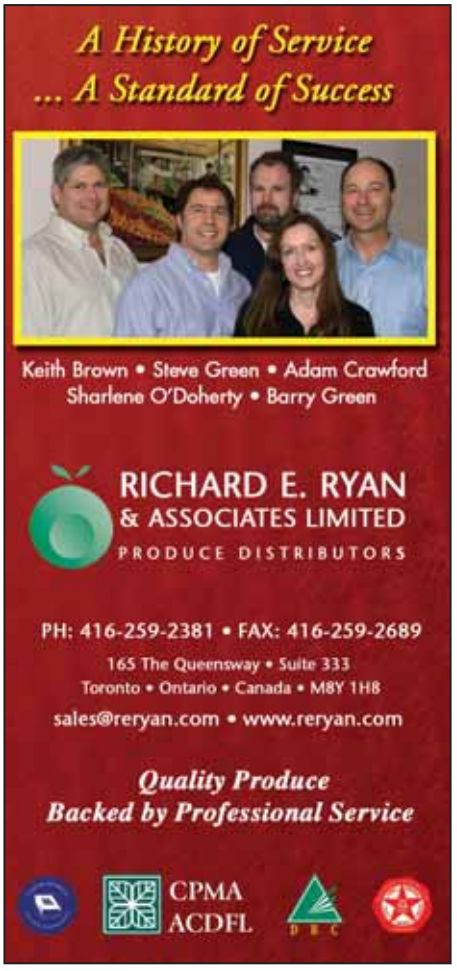


Reader Service # 93

Reader Service # 129

Keeping State Grown At The Forefront

State agriculture departments are pumping up ad campaigns to help attract consumers to locally grown produce.

BY DUANE CRAIG

State agriculture departments and retailers are seeing a growing desire by consumers for local produce.

John Stulp, commissioner of agriculture, Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA), Lakewood, CO, reports regular increases in the number of consumers who recognize the *Colorado Proud* logos used on the state's produce. "Buying products with the *Colorado Proud* logo helps farmers, ranchers and processors and the state economy while offering a safe, abundant food supply to residents," he says.

According to a CDA study, 61 percent of consumers are very or somewhat familiar with the *Colorado Proud* brand. The study also showed an 8 percent increase in the numbers of consumers who purchased Colorado products from 2006 to 2007. The *Colorado Proud* program has more than 900 members representing producers, growers, manufacturers, associations, restaurants and retailers.

Photo courtesy of Colorado Department of Agriculture

Wendy White, marketing specialist for CDA notes a corresponding increase in Colorado residents' affection for the native food. "*Colorado Proud* was developed in 1999 to help consumers, restaurants and retailers identify and purchase Colorado food and agricultural products. Nearly 92 percent of state residents would buy more Colorado-grown and Colorado-produced products if they were available and identified as being from Colorado."

Retailers have an affinity for the program, too. Many support *Colorado Proud* by using the logo in their weekly advertising inserts and on point-of-purchase materials, billboards and in-store signs. Examples of participating retailers include King Soopers, based in Denver, CO; Safeway, Inc., based in Pleasanton, CA; Albertson's, based in Fullerton, CA; Super Target, based in Minneapolis, MN; Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., based in Bentonville, AR; Wild Oats Markets, Inc., based in Boulder, CO; and Whole Foods Market, Inc., based in Austin, TX.

One supermarket executive, who asked not to be named, states not only is homegrown and close-to-market produce recognized by customers as a way to help their local economies, but it also means the food will be fresher and more healthful. He explains the ease of purchasing is attractive, especially since he hardly ever has late trucks when the product is local, and that simplifies turning product and maintaining just-in-time delivery at the warehouse.

Photo courtesy of Michigan Department of Agriculture

TRACKING SUCCESSES

More state agriculture departments are tracking the results of advocating for local produce. The Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA), Lansing, MI, reports the amount of apples moved through its 2007 promotions increased 1 percent over 2006 even though the prices of the apples were higher in 2007. The department also noted asparagus sales increased by 4 percent over 2006, while prices were up 8 to 10 percent. In a single in-store demo, fresh asparagus sales jumped 58 percent.

Besides its *Select Michigan* logo and labeling program, MDA also used in-store radio messages that

highlight in-season Michigan produce. "Choosing locally grown foods help fuel a more healthful lifestyle, keeps dollars circulating in our local communities, and preserves Michigan's rich agricultural heritage," explains Don Koivisto, MDA director. "The *Select Michigan* branding program encourages consumers to shop for locally grown and processed products while providing them with a taste of farm-fresh products."

Warren Wirtanen, director of produce for Sav-A-Lot, Ltd., the 1,170-plus store chain based in St Louis, MO, sees the advantages of supporting Michigan's buy-local efforts because consumers like supporting the local farming community and believe the produce is fresher. The state's efforts also work well for retailers as consumers spend more money on fruits and vegetables.

Factors such as weather, making sure store associates know about keeping signage correct and the variable supply of the product all figure into the challenges associated with maintaining a buy-local program, but Wirtanen is not about to let those things dampen his enthusiasm. "There is a definite preference to buy local, especially in Michigan where the economy is weak," he notes. "I strongly support the local farmers around the country and we will be buying more locally grown produce in the future."

Florida's Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Tallahassee, FL, continues to build on long-term successes with marketing local produce. From working with retailers one-on-one to develop and run custom campaigns to operating commodity specific promotions, FDACS' efforts are always evolving.

Dan Sleep, supervisor and senior analyst, explains FDACS will also partner with growers of specific commodities and tailor a retail program to match. He cites recent success with a strawberry campaign focused on in-store ads — one of FDACS' most extensively used tactics. The campaign is credited with increasing cash receipts of local strawberries by more than $200 million over four years. "For the strawberry industry, cash receipts fluctuated until 2000 when they declined to a low of $129.2 million," he recounts. "That's when the first major campaigns generated more than 5,800 in-store ads. Whether or not the industry would have continued to decline is debatable. However, it is no coincidence that continued support through marketing efforts made a significant difference. In 2007, Florida's strawberry cash receipts hit a historic high for a fourth year in a row, reaching $329 million. FDACS marketing programs generated more than 28,000 individual store ads that same year. At some point, you reach diminishing returns. Right now, we haven't reached that point."

FDACS typically negotiates directly with retailers on a variety of marketing ideas. Concepts include POP materials, display contests, incentives to put items on ad and taste testing. Sleep admits the programs faced initial challenges educating consumers about the rich variety of products Florida produces. Now, he says, when a particular product is on ad using the *Fresh From Florida* logo, additional sales will range from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand dollars per store. The number of participating Florida stores ranges between 1,700 and 2,000.

Customizing buy-local programs has also been high on the to-do list for the North Carolina Department of Agriculture (NCDA), Raleigh, NC, as it continues to find out the needs of stores and then tailors promotions to meet them. The program, *Got to Be NC*, employs a monthly newsletter that supplies crop information to buyer contacts and assesses how the growing season is shaping up. NCDA also maintains a Web site that has a grower/shipper directory buyers use to find suppliers by category or crop.

"Every week it seems like there is something in our local paper about local food and local food companies," reports Jeff Jennings, NCDA domestic marketing manager. "What a lot of people thought was a trend a couple of years ago has really come into its own and is here to stay. They at least want to know where their food is coming from."

Steve Troxler, NCDA commissioner, sees a noticeable increase in people asking for grown commodities grown in North Carolina. "The *Got to Be NC* campaign has helped increase sales of North Carolina products at grocery stores and created higher demand for commodities from our farmers and food companies. From a consumer standpoint, buying locally grown products is one of the best ways to know that you are getting the freshest products available."

FOCUSING ON CONSUMERS

The South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA), Columbia, SC, worked for years with retailers to promote South Caroli-

"Garden State" With No Department Of Agriculture?

By Jan Fialkow

In one of the more acute attempts to bring state budgets into line during this economic downturn, Gov. Jon Corzine of New Jersey has proposed eliminating the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), Trenton, NJ, as well as the Commerce Commission and Department of Personnel. If this budget measure is approved, New Jersey will be the only state without an ag department.

However, only the department has been targeted for elimination – not its functions. One proposal has the department's functions falling under the auspices of the Department of Environmental Protection (DPE), but farmers complain that the DPE will not be the advocate for their causes that the NJDA is. Moreover, they claim, elimination of NJDA exposes the state to the risk of losing millions of dollars in federal money.

Jim Prevor, editor-in-chief of PRODUCE BUSINESS, writing online in *Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit* on Feb. 27, 2008, had this to say: "In other words, the governor did not propose to end most of the functions of the department, so the whole thing is probably best seen as a political effort.

"Here is how it could work: Propose to take away from a passionate constituency — farmers – something that the farmers value greatly — a seat at the cabinet table — but that doesn't cost much money. Then, in exchange for the farmers backing something enormous — say the governor's dead-on-arrival plan to raise highway tolls and use the money to fund debt of a new non-profit corporation he hopes to set up — the governor relents and gives them back their own department," he continues.

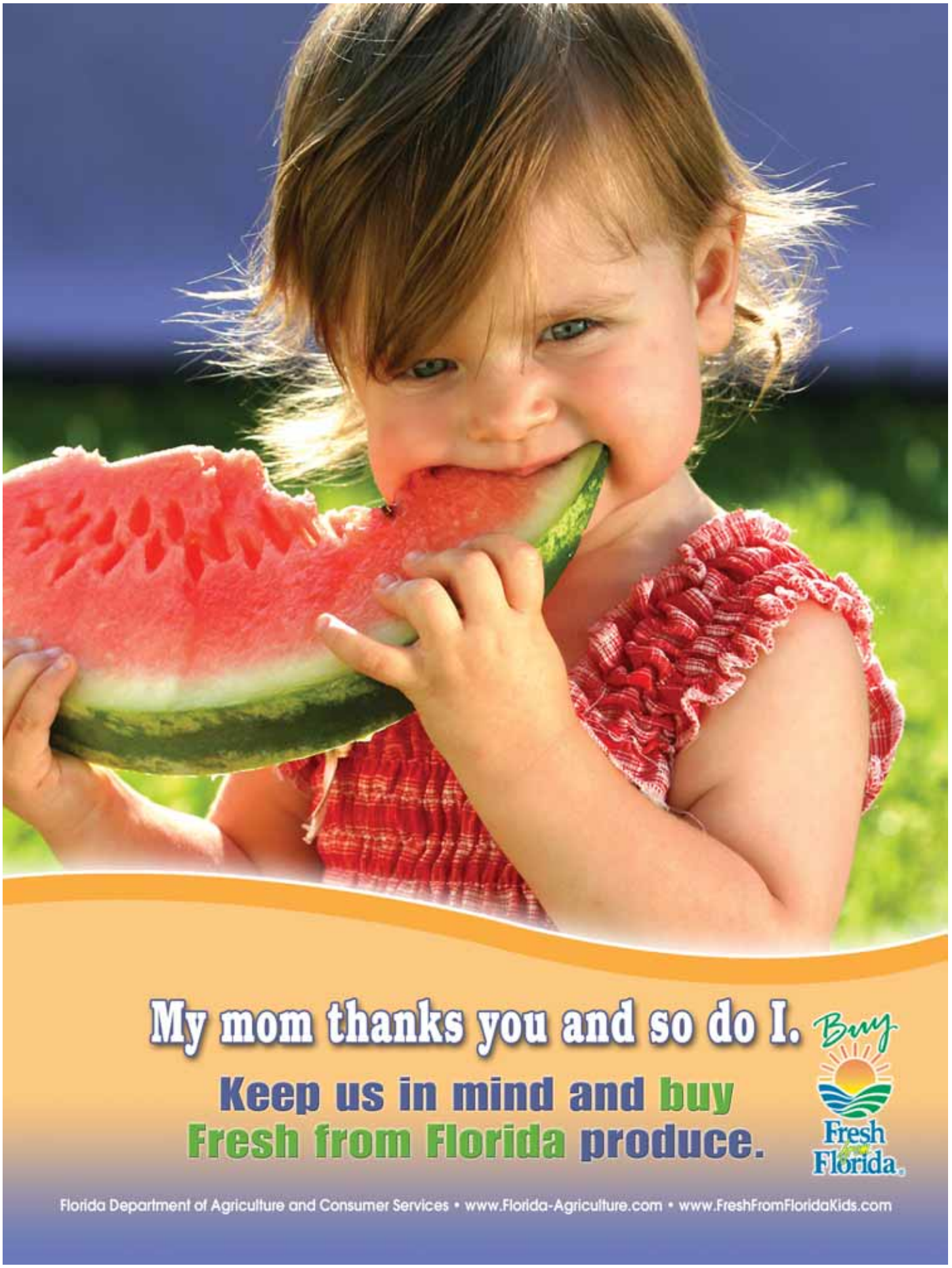
"Still and all, the fact that it would be proposed at all shows the increasing political weakness of U.S. farmers. How could it be otherwise? When Abraham Lincoln was president, 90 percent of Americans were farmers; now it is around 2 percent."

According to the April 9, 2008, edition of *The Hammonton News*, "'Closing the NJDA saves the state budget very little money, since most of its vital services will need to be transferred to other state agencies,' says Richard Nieuwenhuis, president of the [New Jersey] Farm Bureau [Trenton, NJ].

"After all the essential functions are reassigned, this could mean a savings of as little as $300,000 or $400,000."

On April 1, hundreds of farmers from throughout the state converged on Trenton to register their protest against the governor's Draconian proposal.

At press time, this matter had not yet been settled. **pb**



Reader Service # 114

na products but never had a lot of money to do a consumer-driven program to help enhance the retail effort, according to Martin Eubanks, director of marketing. "In 2007, we rolled out the *Certified SC Grown* program when the General Assembly made funding available. The program is a comprehensive consumer and retail program. We have an in-state media campaign with the message of *Buy South Carolina — Nothing's Fresher, Nothing's Finer*. We have also developed a *Certified SC Grown* logo used with POP materials and media campaigns so shippers can use them on PLU stickers and retailers can use them in ads. We're taking the approach of getting the message to the consumer and then giving them a way to identify the product at store level."

That same message will go regional in the future, he adds. SCDA provides a list of suppliers to retailers and encourages them to buy products from those folks. It also works with commodity groups to offer promotions and ad incentives to retailers.

"The goal of the *Certified South Carolina* program is to brand and market locally grown South Carolina produce and products and explore new opportunities in order to provide a source of sustainable growth for our state's farmers and our rural communities," adds Hugh E. Weathers, SCDA commissioner. "Our research shows South Carolinians want South Carolina products. *Certified SC Grown* provides a tool for our state's shippers and the retail community to help consumers identify local products so they can make informed purchasing decisions."

Prior to rolling out the program, an SCDA study showed 95 percent of South Carolina consumers would prefer an opportunity to buy local products yet only 27 percent could identify local products at store level.

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA), Nashville, TN, did research using focus groups and surveys to gauge consumer interest in locally grown products. According to its report, 63 percent of respondents would pay extra for locally grown product because it supports the local economy (50 percent), is fresher (27 percent), safer (9 percent), more healthful (7 percent) and a better value (6 percent).

The state's *Pick Tennessee Products* campaign includes a logo that growers and shippers can use on boxes and packages, notes Rob Beets, TDA marketing specialist. The department also works with retailers across the state, such as Food City, based in Abingdon, VA, and Schnuck Markets, Inc., based in St. Louis, MO; Wal-Mart in tailoring promotional efforts to their particular needs.

REACHING OUT

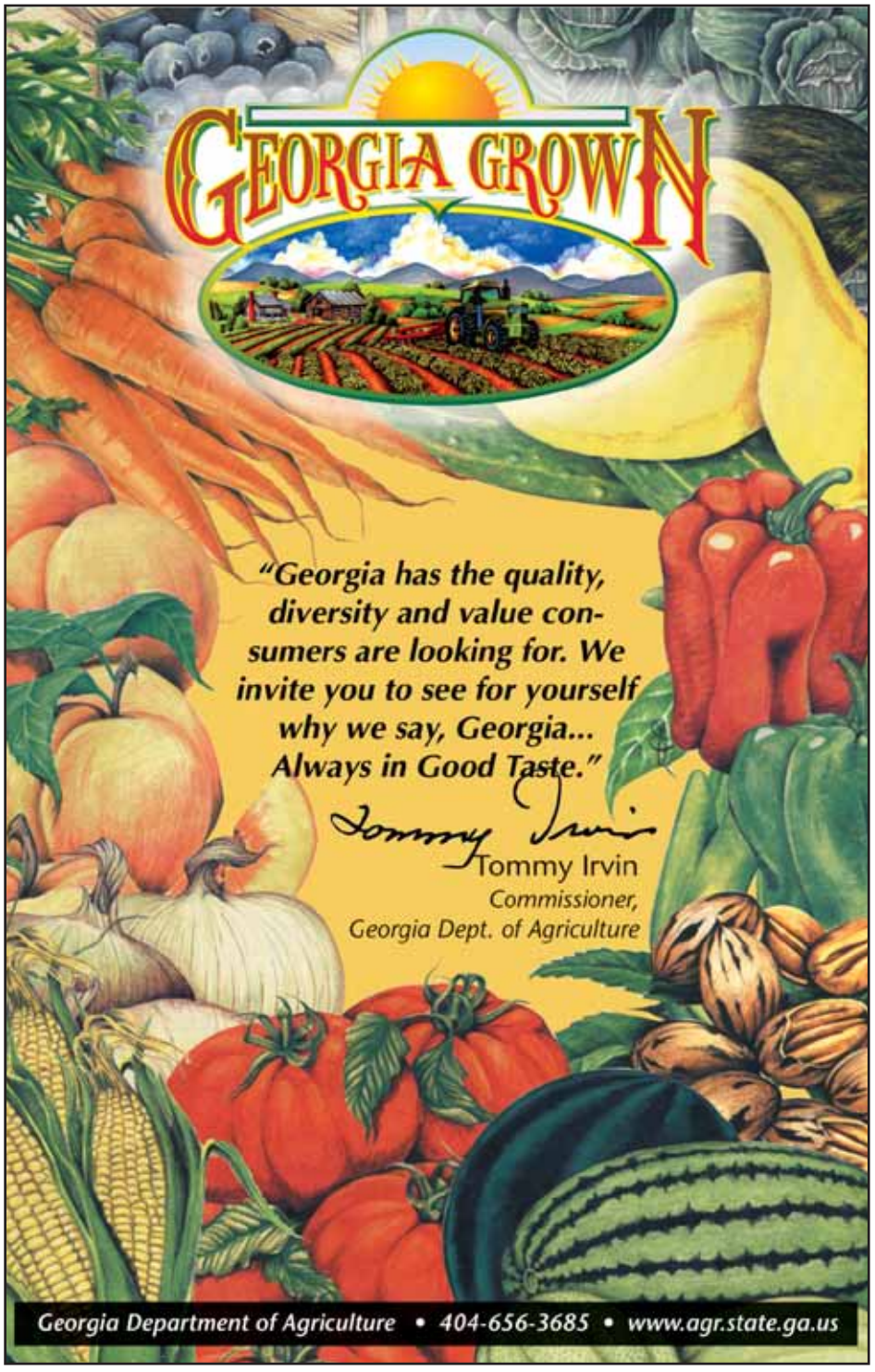
Just as local crops are beginning to reach market ripeness in the Garden State, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), Trenton, NJ, brings retailers together at a *Jersey Fresh* breakfast hosted at the governor's mansion. Jeff Beach, spokesperson, says buyers from all the chains in the state participate and get a glimpse of the local produce being offered that year.

NJDA visits stores to ensure they have all the promotional materials and signage they need to market the locally grown produce. It also runs product-specific TV commercials. Most major chains and independents are involved, reports Beach.

The New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA), Las Cruces, NM, uses a unique approach to help market the state's famous green chiles. The chiles have to be roasted, so NMDA leases roasters to supermarkets. In late summer and early fall, the air outside the markets is filled with the tantalizing aroma of chiles roasting over open flames.

Craig Mapel, NMDA marketing specialist, reports the state also has its own labeling program under the banner, *Grown and Taste With Tradition*.

Texas created the *Go Texan* marketing program in 1999. The trademark symbol, a glow-



Reader Service # 133

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Reader Service # 16

ing livestock brand in the shape of the state, applies to all Texas-grown commodities. It helps consumers identify Texas products and acts as a brand opportunity for retailers. The state also maintains a searchable database for producers of various products and makes a wealth of information available online for consumers, producers and retailers.

Retailers organize *Go Texan* days or events, use the logo to identify the local produce and include the logo in media pieces.

A survey from the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), Austin, TX, revealed consumers are demanding Texas items and retailers are reporting increased sales because of the *Go Texan* marketing campaign. TDA faces challenges in regard to availability and uniformity. If a grower cannot produce enough to satisfy the orders for large retail chains, TDA works to unify producers so several can meet the demand.

New York and others states report similar issues. Bill Kimball, director of the Division of Agriculture Protection and Development Services for the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM), Albany, NY, notes the state has many medium-sized growers that package, size and grade differently. Getting consistent product in volumes attractive to large chains is one challenge NYSDAM is working to remedy. One idea is to share an upstate distribution center with Railex, a Riverhead, NY-based 55-car train that runs non-stop from Washington state to Rotterdam, NY.

"We want our retailers participating and we want to give them all the signage, co-op advertising, in-store promotions, cross-merchandising materials and information about the local farmers." Informing the consumer and having product available in the store at the same time is always a challenge, he adds.

The state's *Pride of New York* campaign emphasizes the personal care given to anything wrapped and labeled as being from New York. Outdoor billboard ads take the message to the streets while print ads showcase stories about producers and growers.

Matthew Loke, administrator of the Agricultural Development division of the Hawaii Department of Agriculture (HDA), Honolulu, HI, says its buy-local program is very young. Created in 2006, the program focuses on local markets and food events with some small steps into the retail sector. "We have worked with Costco [Wholesale, based in Issaquah, WA], and we hope to work with Whole Foods," he explains.

Loke sees buy-local efforts expanding as the department makes its *Genuine Hawaii* brand products available to retail, provides brochures, sampling and POS material and allows retailers to use the Hawaii Seal of Quality in ads.

The *Georgia Grown* program from the Georgia Department of Agriculture, (GDA) Atlanta, GA, supports the efforts of state growers by making the brand available for use on their cartons and packages. Retailers also use the logos for ads and signage at stores. Wal-Mart supports the program, particularly for watermelon, by using a large banner in its stores. The department also maintains a directory of growers that retailers can use to locate sources for fresh produce.

"The consumers want something extremely fresh, and we try to make sure it's not only fresh but it's in good quality and in ample supply," according to Tommy Irvin, GDA commissioner. "We have a good marketing staff that stays on tops of this."

Maile Shanahan Geis, marketing director for the *California Grown* program administered by the Buy California Marketing Agreement, Sacramento, CA, says research shows 70 percent of Californians claim the campaign made them feel good about purchasing locally grown products. "Over the years, we've done quite a few telephone surveys of Californians to gauge their propensity to buy California products," Geis adds. "We also worked with Sacramento State University [Sacramento, CA] to come up with an overall economic impact of the campaign."

Geis claims the economic impact has amounted to $891 million since the program's inception in 2001. Growers in the state have noted increases in their sales. For example, Tudor Ranch, a Mecca, CA-based grape grower, reports it sold more grapes the year it began putting the label on its grape packages than it had sold during the previous three years combined.

The agency advertises in print, radio and on TV, and it works with retailers to promote products in the stores. Geis says this is particularly important since it links the advertising to the consumers in their day-to-day shopping. The agency supplies POS materials to help identify the products and it supplies the logo for retailer use. *California Grown* focuses not only on consumers but also on growers and shippers.

Like other agricultural agencies, Buy California Marketing faces some obstacles. "I think one of our big challenges is that we do represent a wide range of products and we're facing challenges with continued funding," Geis admits. "The majority of our funding has come through federal block grants in the past, so we really have our hopes pinned on the new federal farm bill that has support for specialty crops. We have put a great deal of effort behind our brand and look forward to continuing." **pb**

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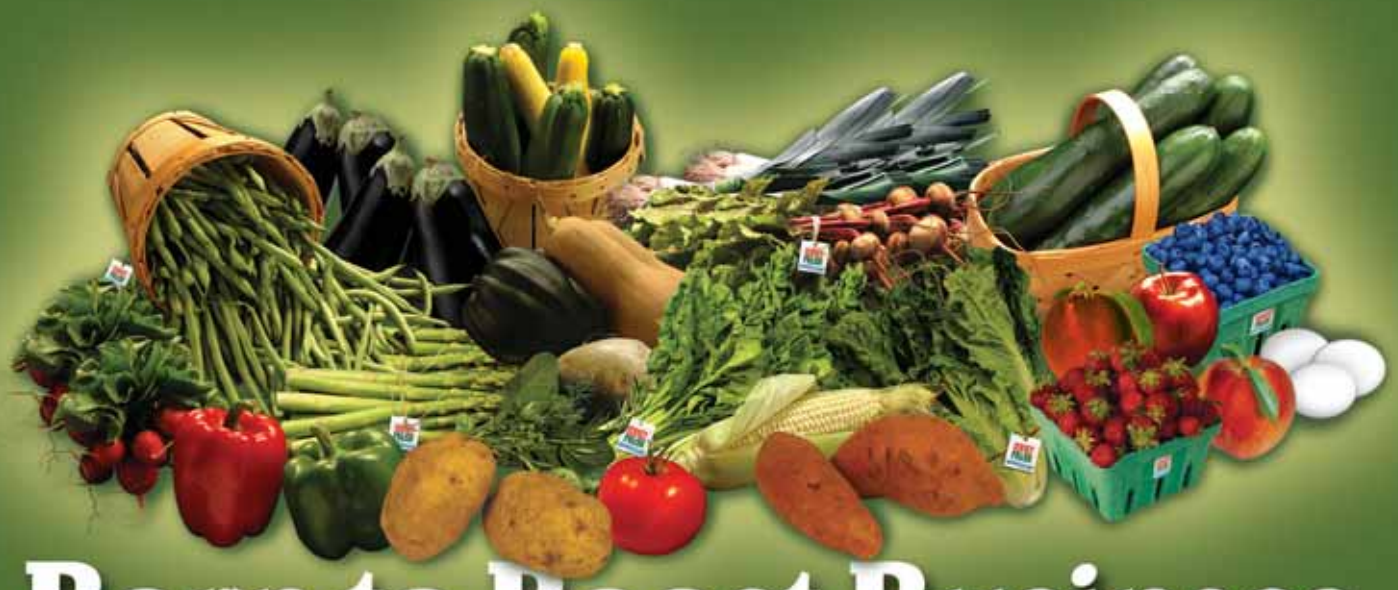

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Fresh Herbs Take Center Stage

As consumers experiment with a variety of dishes at home, their interest in fresh herbs is rapidly growing.

BY KIMBERLY RINKER

Fresh herbs have gone mainstream. Once found only seasonally in health food stores and upscale specialty grocery outlets, fresh herbs are nearly ubiquitous year-round in produce departments throughout North America.

"Fresh herbs set the stage for the whole produce department," advises Michele Henning, vice president, sales and marketing, for Shenandoah Growers, Inc., based in Harrisonburg, VA. "You've got a highly perishable item in a highly perishable department, and the fresh herbs are the image builder for that whole department."

Ryan Cherry, director of business development, International Herbs, Ltd., based in Surrey, BC, Canada, states, "Although fresh herbs won't be your No. 1 or even in your Top 10 items, more of your regular consumers are purchasing them, particularly with the influx of cooking shows. More consumers are becoming involved in their culinary experience at home."

Henning believes consumers who visit a particular store to purchase fresh herbs are more likely to purchase all their produce items from that outlet. "If consumers know they can get fresh herbs in your produce arena on a daily basis, they're likely to have confidence in the rest of your produce department," she adds.

According to Chick Goodman, vice president, sales and marketing, Herb Thyme Farms, Inc., based in Compton, CA, "Fresh herbs are one of the hottest trends in the produce department. Fresh herb sales have seen double-digit growth in the past decade. It's no longer the gourmet chefs who are using all kinds of fresh herbs — now we've got the soccer moms involved. Using fresh herbs is seen by the average cook as a quick and efficient way to add flavor to home meals."

Henning agrees, adding, "Retailers used to ask me five to 10 years ago, 'Fresh herbs?' Now they don't say that anymore. Produce managers want fresh herbs in their departments because they realize how much these items reflect a positive image of the whole department."

EMERGING TRENDS

The herb market is flourishing because fresh herbs complement the fresh and organic trends and because they're key ingredients in many recipes.

Woodland Foods, Ltd., Gurnee, IL, offers fresh herbs and caters to a wide variety of customers. Paul Suhre, product manager, explains a heightened ethnic base has spurred fresh herb sales. "With various ethnic restaurants opening, the public is exposed to new flavors and dishes they didn't have in their communities 20 years ago. People in the United States are now really comfortable with Mexican cuisine because it has been here for over a decade. The mom-and-pop home-meal preparers, however, still aren't comfortable trying the more exotic cuisine. Still, the younger crowd, who tends to eat out more at a large array of exotic restaurants, is more likely to cook exotically at home, which translates to more fresh herb use."

According to Jenni Simcoe, sales and marketing, North Shore Greenhouses, Thermal, CA, "Since people are developing more sophisticated palates due to the popularity of farmer's markets, cooking shows and celebrity chefs, they are experimenting with new flavors. Our basil line offers consumers the chance to use unique varieties of basil that in the past were hard to find outside of a farmer's market. We offer consumers several varieties of basil, including Thai, lemon, lime, spicy and opal in addition to regular basil."

DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

Successful growers tend to establish relationships with retailers in close proximity to their growing operations because fresh herbs have a relatively

short shelf life. According to USDA, the majority of fresh herb production in the United States occurs in California and Florida, where growing can take place 365 days a year. However, advances in handling, storing and transportation have also helped to expand options for growers in other states.

"Each greenhouse that we use has a range of 500 miles," explains Henning. "We don't go beyond that radius, as it compromises our product's freshness. Our greenhouses are highly efficient and automated to create a year-round, consistent product."

Freshness is the main priority growers strive for when delivering product to retailers, she stresses, adding a quick turn-around from the grower to the retailer is imperative for successful sales. "Herbs are extremely perishable," she notes. "Once the herbs are harvested, they start to dry out and their oils begin to evaporate almost immediately."

> **"The younger crowd, who tends to eat out more at a large array of exotic restaurants, is more likely to cook exotically at home, which translates to more fresh herb use."**
>
> **— Paul Suhre**
> **Woodland Foods, Ltd.**

International's Cherry advises storing the majority of fresh herbs at 40° F. "It's impossible to have a specific environment for each one, but that's the standard. The best thing retailers can do is keep fresh herbs away from misters. Moisture will further deplete their characteristics."

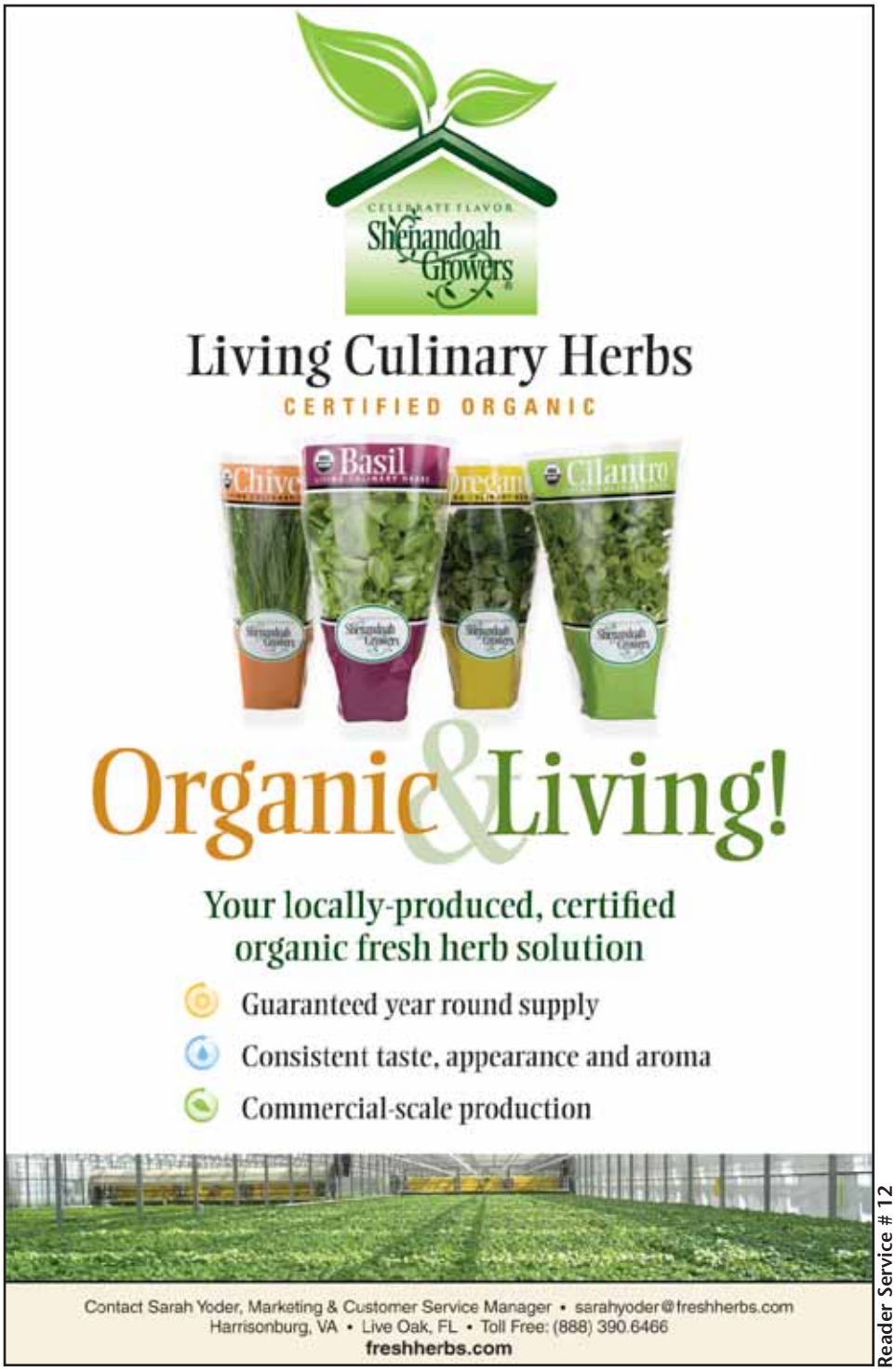
PACKAGING AND SHELF LIFE

When hydroponic environments first enabled growers to cultivate fresh herbs on a year-round basis, they also helped trigger additional usage by upscale restaurant chefs. This, coupled with the public's increasing desire for no-salt dishes, pushed chefs at all restaurant levels to experiment with fresh herbs and to demand not only more of the traditional herbs but also more exotic varieties. As a result, containers to ensure safe transport from field to kitchens were created. "In retail, all our fresh culinary herbs come in the clamshells," explains Herb Thyme's Goodman.

Two traditional types of clamshell packaging, polyethylene teraphthalate (PET) and polylactic acid (PLA), accommodate most fresh herbs for shipping, display and storage. A high-tech plastic material, PET is used almost exclusively for food packaging and is 100 percent recyclable. PLA is a clear, naturally based plastic made entirely from corn and is 100 percent compostable. Microperforated bags are also used for packaged herbs, primarily for foodservice herbs and for basil at the retail level.

"We use PET and PLA clamshells," reports Goodman. "Our chains want one of these for their private labels, depending on the demographic of their shoppers."

If fresh herbs dry out, become wilted or turn black before purchase, the retailer must discard them and the sale is lost. If the herbs deteriorate after purchase, their purpose is nullified and the consumer is less likely to purchase them in the future. "Herbs are delicate, and changes in shelf life can wreak havoc on them," Goodman explains. "Clam-



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Reader Service # 15

Evolution Of The Market

Fresh, dried and powered herbs have been used in kitchens since ancient times. Revered for their culinary and medicinal uses, these delicate plants consist of more than 80,000 varieties; the name originates from the Latin word herba, meaning green crops. Originally, fresh herbs were not cultivated but were harvested wherever they grew naturally. As demand increased, fresh herbs evolved into viable, cultivated crops.

The use of fresh herbs in meal preparation has sparked increased sales of traditional favorites, such as basil, chives, oregano and parsley, because they are healthful flavor alternatives beyond salt, sugar or fat. "Ten percent of households are using 80 percent of fresh herbs," notes Goodman. "The broadening of American cuisines has led people to become far more adventurous in cooking."

The value of North American herb production is estimated to be over $500 million and climbing annually — with a global estimate in excess of $60 billion — according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In all cases, fewer than 100 varieties dominate 80 percent of the market, according to the USDA's National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service.

Many cooking shows, culinary magazines and cookbooks call for fresh herbs in meal preparation. "Cooking shows are helping to drive the market," Henning explains. "As consumers become familiar with more exotic dishes thanks to the abundance of TV cooking shows, they have begun to migrate back into their home kitchens."

Patrick Killiany, produce manager, Giant Food Stores, LLC, a Carlisle, PA-based chain with 147 stores, cites cooking shows and a demand for flavorings that are healthful and natural as two reasons behind strong herb sales. "The trend of flavoring dishes has been driven by cooking shows," he notes. "Sales are reflective of other trends, such as organics, based on consumers looking to be more healthful when they cook."

Shenandoah Growers' Henning reports, "Fresh herbs are mirroring the entire produce department. There is tremendous attention on eating fresh and organic products — and food safety." **pb**

shells act like storm windows, adding a controlled atmosphere and 20 percent more shelf life to herbs."

Clamshells definitely prolong the life of fresh herbs and provide for less initial damage in shipping and display, adds Shenandoah Growers' Henning. "We've seen huge growth in our 2- and 4-ounce clamshell packages. Herbs are so delicate. Every time you touch an herb, you potentially damage it. The clamshells are great protectors for containing herbs, as most damage occurs at the retail level."

North Shore Greenhouses markets its herbs under the North Shore Living Herbs label. "Our herbs come in a clamshell. They're living herbs with the roots attached," explains Donald Souther, sales manager. "Consumers buy what we like to think of as a mini greenhouse. They store the clamshell in the refrigerator and when they need herbs, they just clip off what they want and return the clamshell to the fridge. It definitely extends the life of the herbs."

North Shore is in the process of rolling out a new label designed to feature country-of-origin-labeling (COOL). The updated label has the UPC code and country of origin on the front with a recipe on the back.

Regardless of the type of packaging, International's Cherry urges retailers to keep all displays neat and well-stocked. "If they're not properly merchandised, it doesn't look very nice. Fresh herb displays can become very messy very quickly. Be sure to display your Top 5 items — basil, dill, rosemary, mint and oregano.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

As consumers continue to focus on more healthful lifestyles, growth in the sales of fresh herbs will increase. At home, meal preparation of organic and ethnic dishes and dining experiences at restaurants will stimulate consumers to purchase fresh herbs.

"Education at all levels is imperative," stresses Henning. "Proper signage with herb identification charts and recipes certainly help, but it's also important to educate the produce department staff, so they, in turn, can educate their customers."

Goodman agrees, adding, "Retailers are getting a double-deal with fresh herbs. You've got the fresh herb and organic trend in one package, and you have to inform consumers what to do with them. On each of our fresh herb packages we feature item-specific recipes to educate consumers how to use them. This kind of information is key for growth." **pb**

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Ripening Programs Present Quality Fruit

Fruits used in ripening programs represent a premium to consumers and should be priced accordingly.

BY TRISHA WOOLDRIDGE

Consumers want every piece of fruit they buy to taste great — and many are unwilling to wait to take their first bite.

Ripening programs provide the flavor experience consumers seek, but these programs don't come without considerable effort and work on the part of growers and shippers. Most major shippers have exceptionally high standards that must be met before they send any conditioned fruit to retailers. The end result — satisfied customers and repeat fruit sales — is worth the work and the premium price tag that accompanies it.

"The concept of ripening fruit implies a premium due to the effects that cause the fruit to be more ready-to-eat with a good sugar content at the retail level, while offering a consistent product," states Brad Cantwell, vice president of the North American deciduous program at Dole Fresh Fruit Co., based in Westlake Village, CA.

Photo courtesy of California Avocado Commission

Dr. Carlos Crisosto, assistant cooperative extension specialist and assistant pomologist at the University of California, Davis (UC Davis), is a conditioning pioneer. His studies paved the way for the high standards of today's ripening programs. "Under an efficient marketing program, pre-conditioned [or] pre-ripened fruit should have a consistently higher retail price."

Ripening programs can increase overall sales depending on the fruit. Dennis James, director of marketing for the Pear Bureau Northwest (PBN), Milwaukie, OR, observes, "When we launch ripe programs, we can see up to a 50 percent increase."

WHAT IS A RIPENING PROGRAM?

The terms pre-conditioned, pre-ripened, conditioned and ripened are used interchangeably and define a specific treatment used to induce the ripening process and then halt it before shipping to retailers. The process enhances the sweetness and lengthens the shelf life of fruit, creating a quality fruit experience for the customer and better sales for the retailer.

"It's the right thing to do for the fruit," explains Don Goforth, marketing director for Family Tree Farms Marketing, LLC, in Reedley, CA. "If the mission is to consistently provide a quality eating experience at the store level, a ripening program is the best [route]."

Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing for the California Avocado Commission (CAC), Irvine, CA, agrees, adding, "Pre-conditioned avocados tend to ripen more consistently and allow the customer to act on impulse at the point of purchase. Research shows the purchase patterns accelerate when ripe fruit is on display."

During the ripening process, mature fruit is harvested from the tree and cooled. It is then packaged,

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treated and heated back to the appropriate temperature for ripening. During ripening, fruit pressure is continually checked. When the fruit hits the optimal pressure for its variety, it is very quickly cooled down to almost freezing temperatures. This cold temperature is maintained until the fruit reaches the store. Once displayed, the fruit warms.

"Fast cooling and maintaining temperature prior to and during shipment are essential to protect fruit quality from fast deterioration," explains Crisosto of UC Davis. "The product should be packed to specific marketing requirements depending on customer desires in attractive display-ready, pre-printed cartons that are either single-layer or double-layer in depth."

If fruit were allowed to drop to eating pressure while on the tree, it would be significantly bruised and damaged during packing and shipping. "It gets packed while it's still firm," states Pat Steider, president of Summeripe Worldwide, Inc., in Dinuba, CA. "Once it's packed securely, the fruit is exposed to temperatures and conditions — a simulation of the fruit still being on the tree. It's a natural process."

The specifics of ripening programs vary between different fruits and different fruit varieties. In fact, the same variety of the same fruit may not ripen the same way between harvests. According to Dale Janzen, director of industry relations for the California Tree Fruit Agreement (CTFA), Reedley, CA, "It will depend on the variety and season. There is never just one factor that causes certain conditions [that affect the ripening process]. There are always a number of factors." Depending on these factors, the fruit could be kept at ripening temperatures anywhere between 12 and 72 hours.

With so much potential for difference, fruit ripening is calculated by pressure to ensure consistency. Pressure is measured multiple times starting before harvest and

Store-Level Tips For Ripening Programs

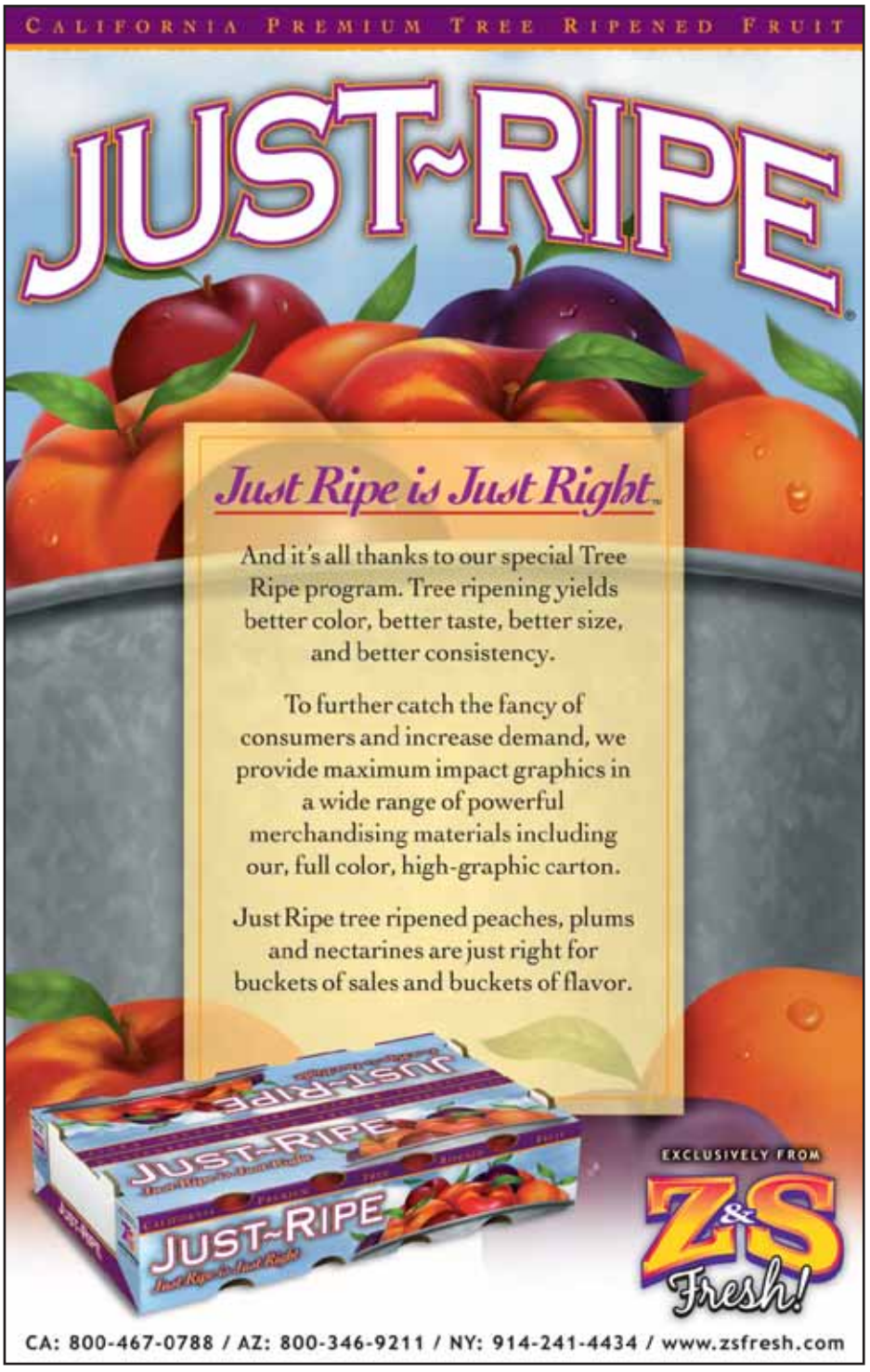
For retailers to make the most of ripening programs, it is key to let consumers know fruit is ripe. Displays and signage that clearly show the fruit is ready to be eaten that day or the next have proven to increase sales significantly.

Many avocados contain stickers stating their ripeness. According to a study by the California Avocado Commission (CAC), Irvine, CA, fruit with "Ripe" stickers generated an average of 13 percent greater volume sales than fruit without stickers.

Placement is also very important. Don Goforth, marketing director, Family Tree Farms Marketing, LLC, Reedley, CA, suggests placing peaches in the front of the store. "If the first thing consumers see is a peach display, it's very effective." He also advises retailers to study their flow patterns and place the premium ripened fruit where they will meet the most traffic. From there, many customers will smell the ripe fruit.

Blair Richardson, president of Parlier, CA-based FreshSense, which manages the Ripe 'N Ready brand, reports that partnership plays a major role in developing a strong ripening program. "We have a little different relationship — a more hands-on approach — with stores to help them get the most out of the category."

Ripening programs offer a dedication to consumer satisfaction, raising treated fruit to a premium level. A great deal of research and work goes into creating the perfect eating experience, so a little attention and a suitable price can enhance department profits as well as consumer satisfaction. **pb**



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Offering pre-ripened fruit can increase sales up to 50 percent.

throughout the process. How the fruit gives to pressure is the most accurate way to measure ripeness. Fruit is harvested at a particular pressure, is treated to reach lower pressure for shipping and will drop to an even lower pressure in the store.

Due to the immediate cooling upon reaching shipping pressure, the ripening process is halted, so shelf life is enhanced. Before the fruit is cooled, the sugar and acid levels rebalance within the fruit. "At Summeripe, we enhance the flavor of the fruit through the conditioning process," Steider reports.

HISTORY OF RIPENING

Many fruits have ripening programs. Avocados have been studied and ripened for about 25 to 30 years, for example, according to CAC's DeLyser. "There are a number of different philosophies and technologies employed by handlers and retailers."

Tree fruits, such as peaches, plums, nectarines and pears, share a unified history. Ripening programs for these fruits were developed to combat customer complaints about a lack of taste and texture abnormalities, explains UC Davis' Crisosto's research. Browning caused these problems. The fruits' temperatures climbed to the "killing range" — between 35° and 50° F — during shipping or storage, causing a cellular breakdown and a hardening and browning of the membranes between cells as the fruit died from the inside out.

"If you squeeze the juice out of a piece of fruit affected by internal browning and a normal piece of fruit, you get the same amount of juice," CTFA's Janzen explains, "but if you eat the brown flesh, you get the feel of fuzzy ball bearings since you can't break the membranes and can't get to the juice."

Pre-conditioning was designed to make fruit immune to internal browning. When people began to realize the treatment also enhanced flavor and extended shelf life, the program focused on the ripening aspect for marketing purposes.

Pre-conditioning was designed to make fruit immune to internal browning. When people began to realize the treatment also enhanced flavor and extended shelf life, the program focused on the ripening aspect for marketing purposes.

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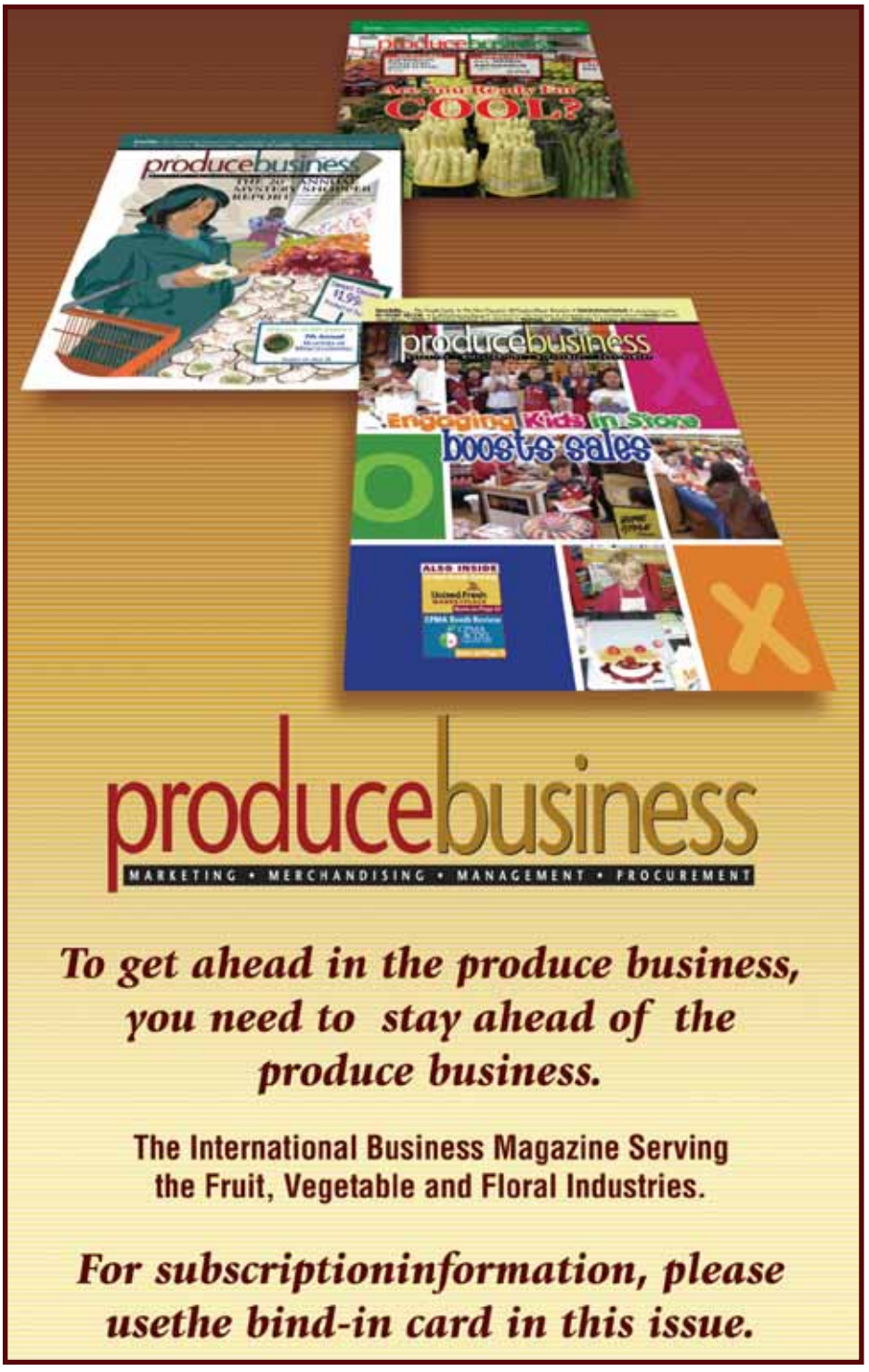
sistency are key. Many programs have stringent quality-control regulations. Unfortunately, not all programs do, so retailers should make sure they have a program that ensures a consistent quality. "A bad experience makes a big difference," states Dick Spezzano, president of Spezzano Consulting Services, Monrovia, CA.

Blair Richardson, president of Parlier, CA-based FreshSense, which manages the Ripe 'N Ready brand, talks about the focus on enhanced consistency. "[We] have set higher expectations to ensure that the fruit is ripe and of good eating quality. It is more important now than it has ever been because the consumer expects it."



All parties must maintain consistency, advises PBN's James. "There is no question that [ripe programs] are highly beneficial and generate profit, but everyone needs to follow the procedures and practice consistency at all levels."

RIPENING CHALLENGES

With ripened produce, retailers need to pay attention to the product; they cannot stack it as deep as unripened produce — no more than two layers — because it risks bruising and damaging the product. Associates need to remove fruit that is past its prime, bruised or damaged.

A major obstacle with tree fruit in particular is competition for shelf space and consumer attention. More summer fruits are now available year-round, which cuts into the tree fruit sales. This can make it more challenging to draw consumer attention to the benefits of a ripening program, but it is not impossible.

"Although there is more competition, [tree fruits] don't seem to be losing shelf space," notes Spezzano.

Dole's Cantwell points out, "All claims state that fruit sales have increased over the years. Conditioned stone fruit has proven to increase repeat sales as Chilean stone fruit has improved through this process. Avocado consumption has increased dramatically over the past few years with the help of ripening [programs]."

White-fleshed peaches and nectarines do not — and cannot — have a ripening program. The acid is naturally lower in these fruits, so the treatment does not ripen them — it kills them. These fruits are sent to stores untreated, but they ripen quickly on display.

Spreading the word about ripening programs boosts sales and, if the program is consistent, repeat sales will continue to follow good eating experiences. **pb**

South Africa Breeds Exceptional Summer Citrus

Implement smart promotional tactics to increase the demand on this ever-popular, fresh-tasting commodity.

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Although a relatively new product on the U.S. summer fruit scene, South African citrus has long been a major player throughout the world, and it is growing in importance to U.S. retailers.

According to Piet Smit, managing director of the Citrus Producers Forum (CPF) in Citrusdal, Western Cape, South Africa, "South Africa is the 12th biggest producer of citrus in the world and the second largest exporter. Close to 60 percent of all Southern Hemisphere citrus is produced in South Africa, and last year we exported 34,000 tons of citrus products to the U.S. market."

"Summer citrus has been a fixture in U.S. retail chain stores for many years, led by South African navel oranges and soft citrus," explains Mark Greenberg, senior vice president procurement and COO for Fisher Capespan in its North American office in Montreal, QC, Canada. "While retailers tend to focus on more summer-type fruit, such as grapes, tree fruit, melons and berries, they like the opportunity to continue to offer their consumers premium, fresh citrus products."

Photo courtesy of DNE World Fruit Sales

"South African citrus is very important to our program because it allows us to have navels year-round," reports Julie Feltis, fresh produce category manager with Hannaford Supermarkets, a 160-store chain based in Scarborough, ME. "We feel it's important to be able to offer our consumers navels year-round. Certainly the citrus category moves down a bit in terms of percentage of produce sales during the summer as compared to the winter, but it remains an important category."

Summer citrus is a must-have category for U.S. retailers. "This category has come to stay and is a valuable tool," states Smit. "Consumers are starting to look for it and are eating more summer citrus. It's a good value product to have on the shelf and retailers can make money."

"Consumers are coming to expect the availability of the product," agrees Teagan Donovan, produce manager/buyer for Jungle Jim's International Market in Fairfield, OH, an independent upscale store. "We've handled South African product for quite a while now."

PROMOTE FRESH AVAILABILITY

South African summer citrus presents consumers with a variety of fruit previously considered seasonal. "This is a commodity that hasn't been available in the past for consistent supply throughout the year," states Mayda Sotomayor, CEO of Seald Sweet International, Vero Beach, FL. "This product can give retailers an additional ring on a product not traditionally available."

"Our research and U.S. producer reports show us U.S. consumers love citrus," notes Smit. "For the first time, they have this great variety of fruit available in summertime. It's a huge benefit for consumers and retailers."

"South Africa offers seedless product when none has been available at this time of year," adds Andre Santori, owner of Atlantic City, NJ-based Santori's Fruit & Vegetable, a 4-store chain. "It's another example of the counter-seasonal opportunities filling a gap and offering variety for our consumers."

Summer citrus is growing as a category due to availability and quality. "We did some research last year among primary retailers and club stores and found from a retail point of view there is growing appreciation and recognition of summer citrus as a viable category," notes John Wannenburg, partner in Robinson Packer & Wannenburg, a strategic com-

munications company based in Wayne, PA. "This category has a lot of promise."

Tom Cowan, South African sales manager with DNE World Fruit Sales, Fort Pierce, FL, adds, "For consumers, South Africa offers some of the best quality citrus varieties and for retailers, the summer citrus program offers increased sales and profits for their produce department."

"They are filling an important spot when California navels aren't available," agrees Jungle Jim's Donovan. "The navel is a much better eating orange so it is definitely a must-have during the summer. It's one of the few seedless products available at this time."

ENJOY THE VARIETY

South Africa provides a consistent supply of top-selling citrus varieties. "We have an exciting basket of varieties many competing countries don't have," explains CPF's Smit. "We start off with clementines and navels. The clementines and navels are seedless and good eating quality. In the middle of the season, we add Minneolas, a deep orange good looking fruit. We finish the season with a seedless Valencia called MidKnight."

Retailers will find the availability of the seedless products especially advantageous during this summer period. "We merchandise whatever varieties we can get our hands on, especially seedless," states Santori of Santori's Fruit & Vegetable.

According to CPF, shipments from South Africa last year included 19,000 tons of navels, 5,700 tons of MidKnights, 8,300 tons of clementines and 1,200 tons of Minneolas. "The South African crop is expected to be larger in volume for most varieties this year," reports DNE's Cowan. "The navel estimate is 1.6 million boxes, clementine estimate is 3.2 million boxes, Minneolas at 119,000 boxes, and MidKnight at 500,000 boxes."

"South African clementines will start to arrive in the United States in early June and will be available through the summer," reports Greenberg of Fisher Capespan. "In late summer and early autumn, we will see the arrival of the late clementine varieties. Navel oranges will be available from mid-June through September. Seedless Valencias will be available September through November."

HAVE CONFIDENCE

South Africa has shipped citrus to the United States since 1999, and producers have committed to quality and safety. "Retailers should have confidence in the product," advises Sotomayor of Seald Sweet. "The producers are really striving and put all their energy and focus into producing a superior product. The U.S. market is so important to them. Retailers need to know this product is being produced in a socially responsible way as well as with all the certifications you can imagine for safety. Their production area is beautiful and produces very good fruit."

"The CPF rigorously adheres to self-imposed seal-of-approval guidelines that embody sustainable agriculture, traceability and trade agreements," according to Smit. "It is committed to growing and shipping the best summer citrus in the world to the U.S. marketplace and maintaining its preferred supplier status by meeting and exceeding USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] and USFDA [U.S. Food and Drug Administration] protocols."

South Africa exports its best quality to the United States. Smit adds, "No fruit leaves this country without a minimum brix, minimum color level and safety standards. Over the past seven to eight years, we have proven we can supply the product and quality we promise. We have a very open information system so retailers and marketers know exactly what's coming and when it's coming. We are passionate about our country and our fruit, which is why we call it *The Pride of our Land* — the tagline of our new logo."

The quality of the fruit builds sales. "The fruit is a good eating fruit and is very popular with consumers," says Santori. "They buy it. We put the product out there with a seedless label. The consumers will grab it once and they keep coming back."

"It's good quality product," agrees Donovan. "They have very nice looking and eating fruit. It's important for us to get No. 1 quality because many other countries are sending their top stuff to Europe since they get more money for it."

PROMOTE PEAKS

Peak volume offers good promotional opportunity. "By July, all citrus feels the pressure of the domestic fruit production combined with fairly heavy arrival volumes," says Fisher Capespan's Greenberg. "It is through July and up to mid-August when sellers will try to encourage movement by offering promotional pricing."

"There is always a peak and the product is at its best is when it's at peak volume," advises Seald Sweet's Sotomayor. "In clementines, the peak is the end of June to the third week of July. The navels peak in the August time period. The late mandarin variety is about the third week of September to the second week of October. These are the times when we want to generate more interest and promotion."

Retailers will find the extra promotion pays off. "You have to try a little harder to sell it because in summer people are eating soft fruit like cherries, grapes, strawberries and melons," explains Donovan. "We run it in on ad to make sure consumers know it's available. We also do some in-store demos especially if it's good tasting fruit."

"South African citrus is an excellent item

Help Build The Category

The South African citrus industry is working diligently to provide promotion and marketing information designed especially for the U.S. market. "South Africa has made a commitment to the U.S. market and retailers can count on building business with this supply area," explains Mayda Sotomayor, CEO of Seald Sweet International, Vero Beach, FL. "They are working to increase production and areas of production, although this may be far off in the future depending on if and when phytosanitary restrictions are lifted."

John Wannenburg, partner in Robinson Packer & Wannenburg, Wayne, PA, explains, "At the beginning of last year, the South Africans realized they needed to raise their profile in the United States. This reflects their recognition of the United States as a growing and important market for them."

"We want to develop this relatively new category with our partners in the United States," says Piet Smit, managing director of Citrus Producers Forum (CPF) in Citrusdal, Western Cape, South Africa. "We're updating our Web site to make it easier for U.S. retailers to access the site and see exactly what South African citrus is all about. We have a new summer citrus logo especially for the U.S. market and other materials especially designed for the U.S. market."

Marketers and retailers also focus on ads and demos to raise awareness. "DNE will be offering promotional dollars and demo monies this summer to feature South African citrus items in their ads and produce departments," reports Tom Cowan, South African sales manager with DNE World Fruit Sales, Fort Pierce, FL.

"We certainly try to promote our South African citrus at least a couple of times during the summer to make sure our consumers know citrus is still available and still a great, high-quality item," says Julie Feltis, fresh produce category manager, Hannaford Bros. Supermarkets, Scarborough, ME. **pb**

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for retailers to promote since it's high-quality and brings additional consumers to the retailer's produce department," advises DNE's Cowan. "Include summer citrus in your ads and displays because consumers want citrus year-round and it will grow the category."

LOOK TOWARD THE WORLD CUP

One of the most exciting future promotions for U.S. retailers is a CPF program linked to youth and soccer. "We want to be associated with the youth in the United States and soccer is one of the major growing sports," Smit explains. "As a pilot project, we have identified some sponsorship opportunities of youth soccer leagues in different regions and will be working with our U.S. importers and specific regional retailers to execute this pilot program. We intend to develop and provide soccer balls and other giveaways to use in the promotion."

South Africa's hosting of the 2010 Soccer World Cup will provide especially unique future promotional opportunity. "There will be some future tie-ins since South Africa will be hosting the World Cup," says Cowan.

"The 2010 World Cup will be a great tie-in and we're very excited about what we can do," adds Smit. **pb**

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Reader Service # 21

Consider Per-Pound Pricing

Suppliers and retailers alike suggest moving to per-pound pricing. "Traditionally the West Coast does more per-pound pricing and the East Coast does more per-piece," states Mayda Sotomayor, CEO of Seald Sweet International, Vero Beach, FL. "We feel the per-pound generates the best consumer impact during the transitioning from one season and supply area to another. Of course, this depends very much on each individual store's criteria as well. We can suggest but each retailer has to decide on its own best pricing practices."

"Since everything else is sold by the pound, it's much easier if navels are priced likewise," concurs Piet Smit, managing director of Citrus Producers Forum (CPF), Citrusdal, Western Cape, South Africa. "However, retailers are in touch with their consumers and we try to accommodate all the different needs retailers have."

Per-pound pricing is linked to consumer perception. "We sell all our citrus by the pound," states Teagan Donovan, produce manager/buyer for Jungle Jim's International Market, Fairfield, OH. "We used to sell it by piece but we realized it really should be sold by the pound because it all weighs different. We make a better gross profit and the price sounds more attractive if we sell it by the pound. The perception is better."

"Selling summer citrus by the pound rather than by the piece allows the retailer to offer the best value to the consumer," agrees Tom Cowan, South African sales manager, DNE World Fruit Sales, Fort Pierce, FL.

Retailers can also consider moving to smaller sized packaged product during summer. "We've seen clementines tend to move faster in the bags than in a box in the summer," reports Smit. "However once we get into September, then the box moves faster than the bag."

"With clementines in the summer program, we are seeing more opportunities for 2- and 3-pound bags since we have found consumers generally buy citrus in smaller quantities in the summer time," adds Cowan. **pb**

Attracting Organic Consumers

As more and more consumers turn to their local "mainstream" retailer for organic produce, some retailers respond by competing with specialty outlets.

BY BARBARA ROBISON

Although there are many small independents doing a terrific job with organic produce, for most consumers the choice comes down to Whole Foods (based in Aurora, CO) or their local mainstream retailer.

By and large, mainstream retailers have recognized that the small but growing sector of the population that seeks organic produce is a dedicated cohort that just might forego an item if conventional is the only option. For the rest of the buying public, organic presents an intriguing option at least some of the time. It's no surprise, then, that mainstream retailers are offering a greater number of organic produce items than they did in years past.

The percentage of organic produce sales in mainstream markets is difficult to pin down. In its *2007 Manufacturers' Survey*, the Organic Trade Association (OTA), Greenfield, MA, definitely found an increase in organic fresh produce sales, according to Barbara Haumann, OTA spokesperson. Much more data is available on grocery sales than on produce, but industry figures for mainstream markets generally put organics at about 3 percent of sales.

This can vary from region to region and even from store to store within a chain.

In 2007, The Perishables Group, West Dundee, IL, conducted a research study on organic produce in conventional supermarkets, funded through Dovex Fruit Company, Wenatchee, WA; Paramount Citrus Association, Delano, CA; Sunripe Pre-Pak, LLC, Mulberry, FL; and Syngenta Corporation, Wilmington, DE. "Our research showed that organic sales dollars were higher in the East and weakest in the South," says Steve Lutz, executive vice president of The Perishables Group. "We found that organic pricing was the lowest in the East, with the largest promotional discounts (-19 percent) and the smallest gap between conventional and organic produce ($.54). In the South, organic pricing was the highest, with the smallest promotion discounts (-11 percent) and the largest gap between conventional and organic ($1.07)."

Lutz suggests a retailer is showing a level of commitment and building a customer base beyond produce by offering at least a few organic items in produce. "Organic and natural foods have a 'health' halo effect that can be leveraged by supermarkets and suppliers," he says. "More than 70 percent of the consumers in our study indicated they believed organics were 'better for you,' and lighter users are more likely to be motivated to purchase organic products on perception of health rather than environmental values. Consumers also expect to pay more, although lighter users are more price sensitive than heavier users."

REGIONAL INSIGHTS

"In some of our stores, primarily college campus locations and upscale units, organic produce can be as much as 11 percent of produce sales," says Kevin Weaver, vice president, produce merchandising, Marsh Supermarkets, LLC, a 100-store chain based in Indianapolis, IN. "In other stores it can be as little as 1 to 2 percent of produce sales. Our focus on 'Neighborhood Merchandising' helps us offer the right mix to our customers in each of our locations. Mini peeled carrots, celery hearts, salad blends, strawberries, raspberries and bananas are typically among the best selling organic items."

Neil Fowler, a produce manager for the 100-plus-store Sweetbay Supermarket chain, based in Tampa, FL, and a wholly owned subsidiary of Brussels, Belgium-based Delhaize Group, sees his organic business growing. Recently baby peeled carrots jumped to the No. 1 organic item. "Many customers are using them for juicing," he says.

At Acme Markets, Inc., a 130-store chain based in Malvern, PA, the organic herb and varietal apple business is picking up, according to Jay Schneider, category manager.

Some markets handle organics only for particular items during the season, especially the lower volume items, such as herbs or leeks. The Perishables Group study showed that within affluent neighborhood stores, an expanded product offering with key organic items fully replacing similar conventional items may offer the best opportunity to maximize product visibility and shelf-turns while minimizing both consumer resistance and shrink.

"In some periods in upper demographic area stores, we can offer only organic packaged herbs and cooking greens. However, in lower demographic area markets, the customers are looking for good prices so that strategy won't work. Sometimes, in season, organics and conventional items are nearly

Specific Issues/ Specific Solutions

When assessing the problems that arise with organic produce, preventing its cross contamination with conventional items ranks high on the list. This is handled in different ways, depending on what works for an individual retailer.

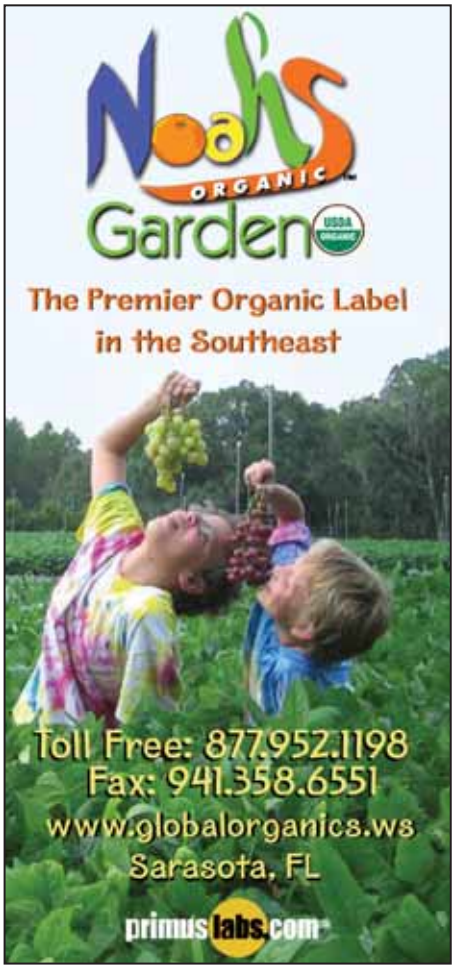
For example, Save Mart Supermarkets, based in Modesto, CA, has a segregated area within its warehouses for storage of the organic items. Hannaford Bros. Co., Scarborough, ME, stores its organic produce within the guidelines of its certified organic status [*Editor's note: Please see* Certified Organic Retailers *on page 66.*] and uses dividers and signs to maintain integrity.

Accuracy of checkout rings is another problem stores need to address because organic items are usually higher priced than conventional items. "Many organic items are packaged, making it easier for the register personnel to know proper charges. For bulk items, we provide extra yellow stickers on the items and special price lookup charts for the front end. We work closely with our front-end managers on proper procedures, and we have 'organic bags' for customers to use for organic produce purchases," states Jay Schneider, category manager, Acme Markets, Inc., Malvern, PA.

Marsh Supermarkets, Inc., Indianapolis, IN, provides detailed training of front-end personnel. "This is supplemented with monthly tests administered by our store management teams. There is always a possibility of human error, but we don't see a significant problem at this time," reports Kevin Weaver, vice president, produce merchandising.

According to Brian Gannon, director of produce and floral, Big Y Supermarkets, headquartered inSpringfield, MA, "We have training for the front-end managers and register employees, emphasizing paying attention to PLUs and not trying to just remember them. Packaging of organics is good for the front-end accuracy, but you need to be careful of the image you present. Customers don't necessarily want packaged organic produce — bulk displays can have real sales appeal." **pb**

Reader Service # 76



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Certified Organic Retailers

When a chain makes the decision to highlight its organic offerings, it would do well to follow the example of Hannaford Bros. Co., based in Scarborough, ME, which has become a certified organic retailer.

Many produce executives say the series of food-safety incidents that have garnered massive press coverage in the last year or so are increasing the number of customers seeking organic produce items.

That could be one reason Hannaford Bros. completed the rigorous process to become a certified organic retailer. Hannaford met the strict guidelines of the California Organic Certification Program for Retailers set by Quality Assurance International (QAI), San Diego, CA. QAI is an independent third-party group that verifies organic quality and integrity for organizations globally. Other markets, particularly in the Northeast, are looking to become retail organic certificated

Will Wedge, Hannaford director of produce and floral merchandising, reports organic produce sales nearly doubled from 2.5 percent to just under 4 percent during the two years since it obtained organic certification. "We integrated to make it easier for the consumers," he notes. "We went for the certification because we want consumers to view Hannaford as a place where they can trust purchasing organic products. It's just good business sense." **pb**

the same price, or organics could even be lower. Then we might carry only organic celery, for an example," explains Brian Gannon, director of produce and floral for Big Y Supermarkets, a 56-store chain based in Springfield, MA.

"We believe we'll sell more organics if we integrate them with conventional categories," says Gannon. "The bulk of our customers are not going to spot organics in a separate section, so we typically display the organics in a merchandising vehicle, along with signage, among conventional items. That's where the consumer sees the items when shopping for a particular category. The organics won't have the same space allocation, but we might use a range of baskets, a special high divider or some device to prevent cross-contamination of organics with neighboring conventional items."

Jack Armstrong, senior produce buyer, Bashas', Inc., a 160-store chain headquartered in Chandler, AZ, states, "Our organic business has really increased in the past six months. We handle the major items and as the business grows, we look to expand into some of the lower volume items."

Publix Super Markets, Inc., the 900-plus-store chain headquartered in Lakeland FL, is using segregated sections of organic produce, with multiple banners, until a good foothold is made. Then the company will look at the possibility of integrating the organic items with conventional categories. "Organic sales have increased in the past year," says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations. "Typically, we display organic produce separately, using special signage to raise consumer awareness. We also are working to bring more earth-friendly products to market and to encourage sustainability."

"We've found price points for organic produce are pretty compatible with conventional items," explains Jason Cook, category manager for Winn-Dixie Stores, Inc., Jacksonville, FL. "We use a 2-part system of segregating the bulk organic items and integrating the packaged organics within the conventional categories." According to many mainstream produce retailers, packaged salads are the most popular organic item sold.

> **"With the increase in organic sales, we've set up 'destination spots' in separate sections from the traditional items."**
>
> **— Vince Maggio**
> **Lucky/Save Mart**

"With the increase in organic sales, we've set up 'destination spots' in separate sections from the traditional items," notes Vince Maggio, produce procurement manager for the 126 Lucky/Save Mart stores that are part of the 255-store Save Mart Supermarkets chain, based in Modesto, CA. "Ban-

Retailers differ on whether organics should be integrated or segregated.

ners direct customers to the spots. We are increasing our offerings, but a retailer needs to be cautious and weigh carefully the organic price points versus traditional produce price points."

Many retailers believe the best methods for displaying organic produce will come about as markets develop and try different strategies.

A produce category manager of a major eastern area market chain says that the company integrates organic items with conventional ones. Value-added salads, berries and staple items are the best organic sellers; for lower volume items, the chain never offers solely organics.

Many retailers believe the best methods for displaying organic produce will come about as markets develop and try different strategies. Jay Schneider, category manager for Acme Markets, Inc., a Malvern, PA-based 130-store chain and a division of Supervalu, Inc., Eden Prairie, MN, says, "Everyone needs to do what works for them. We have a diverse customer base, from inner city stores to upscale markets. We integrate organics as segregated units within a conventional category in our level-one stores and as totally segregated sections in our level-two stores."

PROMOTIONS

Promotional programs are an important part of retailers' organic produce sales strategies. Save Mart Supermarkets uses large banners to call attention to its organic produce destination spots and its advertising of organics continues to grow.

"Education about organic produce is extremely important," says Cook. "We use leader cards and danglers, and we provide literature for our customers. We also include organics in our ads."

Many markets advertise two to three organic produce items a week; Bashas' features four items each week in its ads.

Acme Markets runs full-page natural/organic ads three or four times a year and organic produce items are included. During the period when the market is handling locally grown produce, it runs a half-page natural/organic ad, featuring participating farmers' photographs. "The ads have received excellent customer response," reports Schneider.

Some markets display their ads, which often include organic produce items, on their Web sites. Hannaford Bros. the 159-store chain based in Scarborough, ME, uses flyers frequently and satellite location within the department to promote its organics, according to Will Wedge, director of produce and floral merchandising. **pb**

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Reader Service # 87

Organic Fruit Review

Industry insiders discuss what's happening in the organic fruit category.

BY BARBARA ROBISON

Organic fruit is on the move — in the growing areas, in food markets and in foodservice.

The industry is expanding quantities, types and varieties of fruit offered to retailers and foodservice operators. Greater supplies and varieties are helping retailers and foodservice venues meet the increased demands of customers seeking more organically grown fruit. "It's a consumer-driven business," says Sara Clow, domestic commodity manager, Pacific Organic Produce, San Francisco, CA.

"We've found the growth of organics in our stores has been slow, but we've just been offering more items the past eight months, working with Earthbound Farm, [San Juan Bautista, CA]," notes David Merjimekyan, director of produce operations for Jon's Marketplace, a 14-store chain headquartered in Los Angeles, CA. "Some more affluent areas do well with organics, but consumers in our store locations are slower to accept the higher prices for organics," he adds.

Haggen, Inc., a 33-store chain based Bellingham, WA, with outlets in Washington and Oregon, finds the demand for organic fruit is steadily increasing, but it seems to be seasonal, says Lee Reynolds, director of produce. "There is a significant increase during the Washington apple season, and berry demand increases in the spring. The biggest customer comment I hear is that they want fruit that hasn't been sprayed. We're still experimenting with displays due to the difficulty of keeping organics from touching traditional items. We've kept the items separate but are trying to display the two types of bananas together."

WEST COAST DISTRIBUTORS

Earthbound Farm, an organic produce marketer, focuses on core category drivers, such as apples, grapes and pears, working to build promotable volumes. "Our company doesn't just market organic fruit; our relationships go much deeper. We partner with our growers and work with them to plan — as much as possible — to meet the demand for particular varieties. Seasonality is important because we want varieties, such as the Gala apple or stone fruit, to be at their peak," reports Tonya Antle, vice president organic sales.

Robert Gurney, sales manager, JBJ Distributing, Inc., Fullerton, CA, a wholesale distributor of both organic and traditional produce, agrees that relationships with customers are important. "We want our customers to know that we've taken great care to assure products are labeled properly and have met all the organic standards. We have country of origin on our packaged items and our PLU stickers allow us to track products through the distribution center back to the grower. Demands for strawberries, blueberries and apples have increased dramatically, and even consumers in smaller midwestern towns are asking for organic fruit."

Stemilt Growers, Inc., Wenatchee, WA, markets 28 percent of Washington's organic apples and 30 percent of the Northwest's organic pears, according to marketing director Roger Pepperl. The firm also

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markets organic cherries and soon will add peaches and nectarines.

"We are experiencing a 20 percent yearly growth and are going to have to market more aggressively as supplies increase," Pepperl states. "The past five years has seen a mass swing to planting organic apple varieties. Gala and Fuji are really growing and consumers will be seeing more organic varieties, such as Ambrosia and Pink Lady. Organic d'Anjou pears continue to lead, but there are also newer varieties, like Star Crimson and Concorde. We suggest being selective in a SKU mix, using three or four organic apple varieties with one or two organic pear varieties."

> **"The biggest customer comment I hear is that they want fruit that hasn't been sprayed."**
>
> **—Lee Reynolds**
> **Haggen, Inc.**

Melissa's/World Wide Variety Produce, Los Angeles, CA, saw 12 percent growth in the organic citrus category in the 2007-2008 season (December-March), 8 percent growth in the 2007 organic melon season and 15 percent growth in organic tree fruit in the 2007 season (mid-May to July). "Organic citrus and melons are the most popular, although kiwi and mangos are top sellers the year-round," reports Robert Schueller, director of public relations. "We pack to order, which helps retailers with the proper ring through at checkout. We offer organic citrus varieties in grab-and-go recyclable Vexar net bags and plums in recyclable clamshells, as examples. The Ojai Pixie tangerine is an excellent newer citrus variety. Soon we will focus on organic melon varieties, as well as tree fruits."

Awe Sum Organics, Santa Cruz, CA, markets a wide variety of organic fruit nationwide, with primary distribution on the East and West Coasts. "Special items we're marketing are the Argentine Bartlett pear, which tastes like a California Bartlett, and the New Zealand Royal Gala with incredible color. We tray pack our large size apples and tissue

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Reader Service # 100

wrap bulk pack the large size pears," states David Posner, president and CEO.

Rainbow Valley Orchards, Inc., Rainbow, CA, markets primarily organic citrus and avocados, with a small amount of exotic fruit, such as cherimoyas. The company monitors third-party independent organic certification for 325 certified growers plus its own organic produce, says Patrick Raymond, vice president. "Retailers want a consistent year-round supply of at least the major organic items. By pulling from different regions, we can offer all organic citrus 90 percent of the time. We also can supply organic avocados year-round. Most retailers are now investing in quality, prominent displays, which have replaced the old, dingy organic produce displays. We want to be sure we supply the product quality that is expected in the new displays," he adds.

Strawberries are the featured organic fruit of Beach Street Farms LLC, Watsonville, CA. "Twenty percent of our strawberry acreage is dedicated to organic," reports Stephanie Hilton, marketing manager. "We are a medium-size shipper, but we ship nationally and internationally, with a large demand in Canada. We do our own merchandising, providing guidelines for retailers on how to maximize berry shelf life."

According to Marina Pace, marketing spokesperson, Jacobs Farm/Del Cabo, Inc., Pescadero, CA, "Jacobs Farm markets organic herbs. Our organic fruit programs are handled by Del Cabo, with spring melons available from April through May and winter melons in season mid-November through December. We also will start shipping desert-grown mangos from late June for approximately two months. The growing area is free of fruit flies so the mangos do not require the mandatory hot water treatment for export, which contributes to their freshness and flavor." The firm has just reintroduced a papaya program, following a few years' hiatus due to crop loss from tropical storms.

Pacific International Marketing, Salinas, CA, farms approximately 3,000 acres of certified organic land in California, Arizona, and Mexico. "Our land, as well as our processing and cooling facilities, is USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] certified. We market our organics under the Pure Pacific Organics brand, and the organic fruit we sell includes cantaloupes, honeydews, watermelons and strawberries," says marketing director Melinda Richardson.

SOUTHEAST DISTRIBUTORS

Global Organic Specialty Source, Inc., Sarasota, FL, an organic produce distributor, imports some products directly and represents some organic farms in the Southeast. "We market a full line of organic fruit, focusing on taste and quality. The newest item we carry is certified organic young Thai coconut. We also will have an organic Ataulfo mango, one of the tastiest of all mango varieties," says Mitch Blumenthal, founder and owner. "One way we help retailers be sure organics are rung up properly at the register is by offering a custom packaged organic fruit line in-house under the Noah's Organic Garden label. We pack to any specification, from six kiwis in a clamshell to a 10-pound bulk fruit package with a bright yellow PLU sticker. These items are all packaged with UPCs to insure a proper ring. In total, we offer 50 fruits with UPCs."

MIDWEST DISTRIBUTORS

Goodness Greeness, Chicago, IL, distributes organic fruit nationally but is especially strong in the Midwest. "What is the most effective way to merchandise the increasing organic supplies is one of the biggest questions among retailers. Everyone realizes mixing organic and traditional items can be an issue. I personally like to see the displays separated but not with organics off in a corner. Signage will help. We provide a newsletter to educate the customers and there is an organic club consumers can join," reports David Allen, buyer in purchasing.

NORTHEAST DISTRIBUTORS

Organic bananas are going to be more expensive and harder to supply during the next six months due to weather conditions in major banana growing areas, according to Frank McCarthy, vice president of marketing, Albert's Organics, Bridgeport, NJ, a wholly owned subsidiary of United Natural Foods, Danielson, CT.

"The increase in availability of apples is dramatic, organic pineapple varieties are better and sweeter, and berries are virtually available year-round," he explains. "To be nearer our customers we have six distribution centers, in New Hampshire, New Jersey, Florida, Minnesota, Denver and California. We've found the three largest markets for our organic fruit are New England, California and the upper Midwest. The Southeast is smaller but growing quickly."

Photo courtesy of Jonathan's Organics

To assist retailers as they expand their organic produce offerings Albert's Organics offers an on-line training program.

Line Extensions

Marketing under the Purity Organic label, Pacific Organic Produce, San Francisco, CA, has been in the organic fruit business for the past 15 years. Besides organic fresh produce, the company is now marketing five flavored organic fruit juices and four functional organic fruit-flavored waters. "The products are shelf stable. They can be displayed next to organic fruit, as Northern California Safeway has done, or as part of the produce cold rack or next to other non-refrigerated juices in produce. Consumers seem to prefer the products chilled. We also do some private label business for large customers," states Sara Clow, domestic commodity manager.

"Our newest variety is dried mango, an extension of our dried fruit line. We also are working to expand avocado supplies," reports Tonya Antle, vice president organic sales, Earthbound Farm, San Juan Bautista, CA. **pb**

The 20-lesson Organic Produce College is available in both English and Spanish.

Jonathan's Organics, East Freetown, MA, markets organic fruit under a Fair Trade-certified label, explains CEO John Musser. "Our bananas and mangoes are Fair Trade certified organic, which assures that strict labor and environmental guidelines are followed by producers. Fair Trade ensures that growers can and do provide fair wages to their workers. The organic mango will be coming from Haiti until July, and we will also have organic apples and pears from Argentina and Chile until July. Demographic research shows that young, well educated, more affluent consumers care about what they and their children are eating."

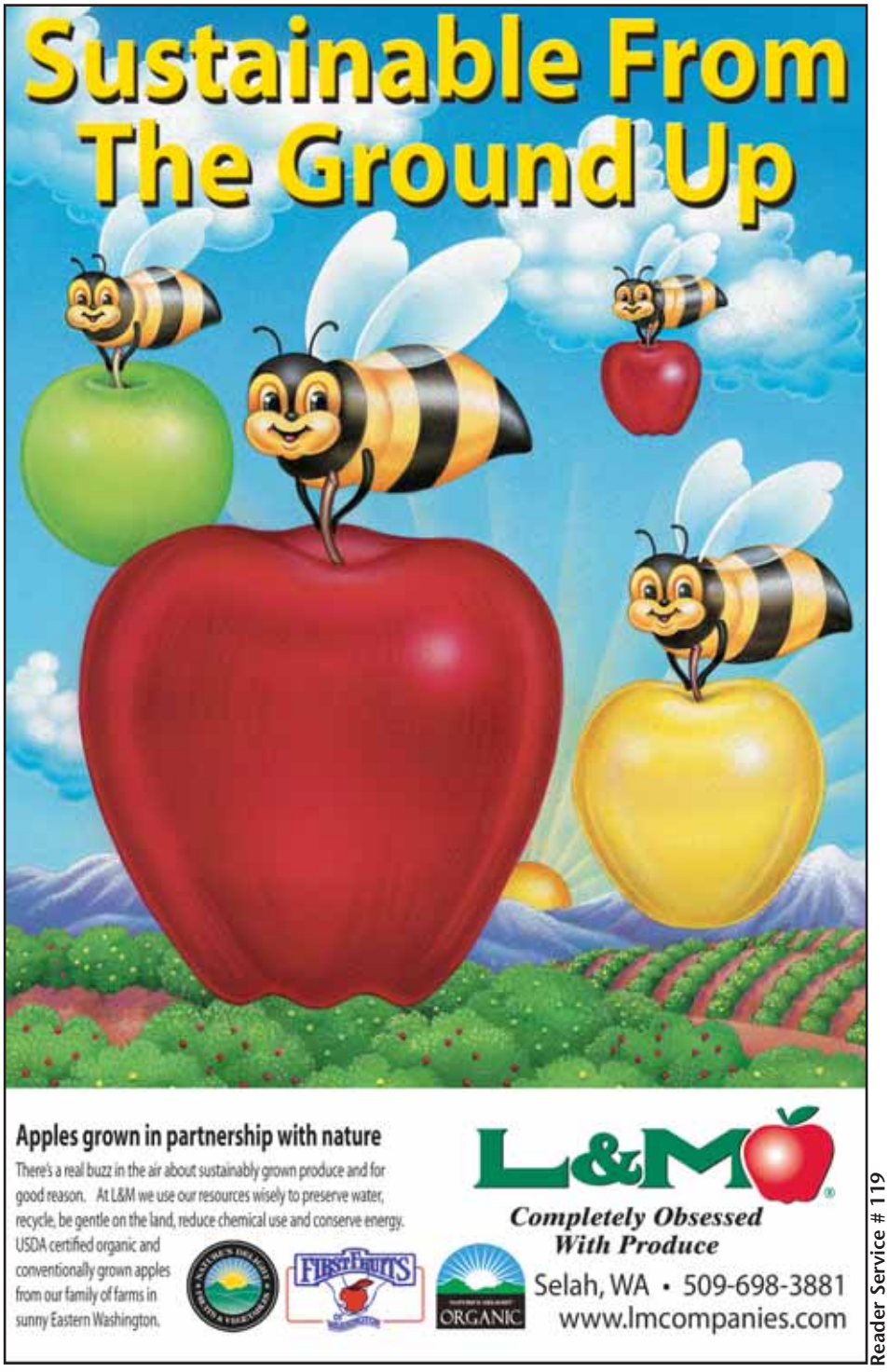
"We distribute a full line of certified organic produce primarily to smaller independent stores in the Boston area," says Jack Ford, president, New England Organics, Ltd., Chelsea, MA. "Right now apples and Florida citrus are big and later domestic grapes and stone fruit will be major items."

WESTERN DISTRIBUTORS

New Harvest Organics LLC, Rio Rico, AZ, works with partners in Arizona, Mexico, Peru and Chile to provide an array of organic fruit. "Major markets for us are Florida, New England and the Northwest. Mangoes are one of our specialties and gold pineapple and young Thai coconuts are special items. We have point-of-sale materials and support our fruit with in-store sampling programs," states Philip Ostrom, owner and sales manager.

Photo courtesy of New Harvest Organics, LLC

"There has been a tremendous shift to mainstream markets for organic fruit," according to Jonathan Allen, president and owner, First Fruits International Ltd., Montrose, CO. "Our climate is conducive to growing organic produce. We are known especially for our summer organic cherries, stone fruit, pears and apples, along with some melons. We supply health food stores, Whole Foods-type operations, as well as conventional food markets." **pb**



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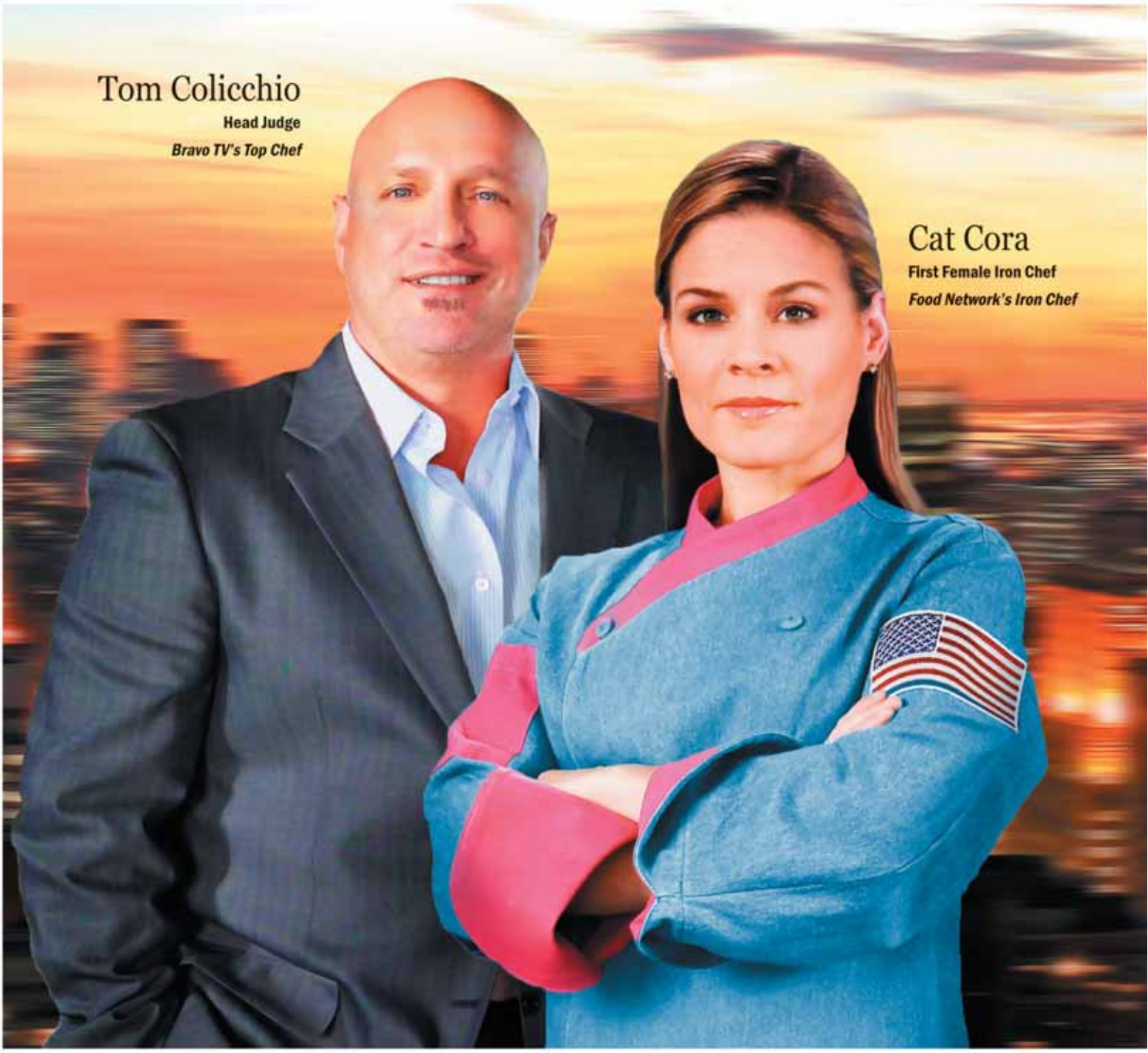

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Reader Service # 11

Making The Most Of Cherry Season

Seasonality excites customers, so use the short time wisely to boost sales in this big category earner.

BY TRISHA J. WOOLDRIDGE

Cherries are one of the few seasonal fruits left. Most items in the produce department are available virtually year-round. While constant availability means sales throughout the year, customers become so used to seeing fruits — even exotic ones — that they are viewed as a commodity. When something is still seasonal, like cherries, the limited-time availability is exciting — and customers are willing to pay premium prices for impulse purchases. With a little extra effort in consumer education, advertising, merchandising, and positioning, retailers should be able to boost cherry sales.

"The seasonality generates excitement," notes Jim Culbertson, executive manager of the California Cherry Advisory Board (CCAB) in Lodi, CA. Beyond retailers keeping on top of the season's crop and informing their customers of availability, he explains, "There's not much you need to tell consumers. They tend to know what cherries are all about."

There are many varieties of cherries, but in most consumers' eyes, there are two: dark red cherries, such as the Bing, and white- or gold-flesh Rainier cherries. The Rainier is but one cultivar of cherries; the dark red sweet cherries have multiple varieties. However, the flavor profile of the dark red cherries is very similar; the difference lies in when they are ripe. The lengthening summer season of cherries is due to the development of varieties that mature either earlier or later.

Photo courtesy of Rainier Fruit Company

As one of the few seasonal fruits left, cherries generate a great deal of consumer excitement.

Another way to look at the 2-kind view of cherries is to split it into four kinds and consider the organic versions of the red and Rainier varieties. Organic — with double-digit growth — is a buzzword of the industry, so organic cherries are not to be ignored; they are an additional avenue for sales. The organic cherry option is a new development and something to look for in the 2008 season.

More important than variety, though, is quality. People pay premium prices for consistent quality in cherries, often even more for good quality Rainiers, which are sweeter and have lower acid and an even more limited season.

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Reader Service # 118

pound, but only if [the cherries] are good quality," states Jim Mertz, partner and co-owner of Caldwell, ID-based Symms Fruit Ranch. "You must assume every farmer, grower, packer is working their hardest to get quality. And, overall, the whole industry is doing good." Mertz place a great deal of the responsibility on suppliers, "It's our job to get retailers quality product; it's their job to turn it over quickly."

> **"It starts with the grower. We rely on the grower for good quality, a product with a long shelf life that eats well."**
>
> **— Sharlene Taylor**
> **Costco Wholesale**

Sharlene Taylor, produce buyer for Costco Wholesale, based in Issaquah, WA, agrees, saying, "It starts with the grower. We rely on the grower for good quality, a product with a long shelf life that eats well." Costco also relies on the packer to make sure the packaging holds up for transportation and protects the fruit.

MAINTAINING QUALITY AT STORE LEVEL

Cherries are delicate and need to be handled properly to maximize their shelf life. This is best done by keeping them cool but without getting them wet. Moisture drops weaken the skin and flesh, so the best place to keep cherries is in a chilled display without water sprinklers. If they are not kept in a chilled display, they should be brought into a chilled back room at night.

Loren Queen, marketing and communications manager, Domex Superfresh Growers, Yakima, WA, agrees, adding, "Refrigeration is the most critical part. They shouldn't be on display for more than a few hours. Let them sit there for more than a full day and the consumer will have a poor experience."

Bob Mast, vice president of marketing, Columbia Marketing International Corp. (CMI), Wenatchee, WA, which specializes in red cherries and Rainier cherries, notes, "The No. 1 merchandising tactic is giving proper rotation. Getting the fruit turned is critical. The optimal temperature is between 32° to 34° F, and even if you have a refrigerated case, it's better to store them in a cooler overnight."

Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing, Sage Fruit Company, LLC, Yakima, WA, advises, "Handle them correctly. Keep cold chain going and use the bags as oppose to bulk so consumers don't rummage through the displays."

Because cherries sell quickly, floor associates need to maintain the display; a full display sells more than an empty one. However, associates should also check and remove any bruised product or product with dry stems.

"It looks fresher with a green stem," says Culbertson, who also advises, "Try to keep the product good and cold in the back room. [Cherries] can be stored right down to almost freezing level."

Because they don't ripen once picked, "Cherries are harvested right when they are ripe — at optimum ripeness," notes Andrew Willis, promotional director for the Yakima, WA-based Northwest Cherry Growers.

Their ripeness contributes to their delicate quality and makes it essential to maintain the cold chain and monitor stock rotation. The low temperatures give them a longer shelf life and minimize bruising and

Photo courtesy of Symms Fruit Ranch

Tart Dried Cherries Deserve Attention, Too

In between — and even during — fresh cherry seasons, retailers can increase sales by marketing tart dried cherries. They are available year-round packaged or in bulk. Good for multiple usages, such as for baking, snacking and trail mixes, added to salads or cereal, and as an ingredient in sauces to accompany many types of protein, dried tart cherries offer additional incremental sales to the produce department year-round.

"We want people to see cherries as not just a summer fruit but as year round," relates Jeff Manning, chief marketing officer for the Cherry Marketing Institute, based in Lansing, MI.

The challenge with dried cherries, he explains, is a distribution issue. While the cherries do come in packages, they are most often a bulk item — but are not often included in bulk dried fruit displays. "The cherries have a sweet tart taste that is not as intensely sweet as other dried fruits, so they are appealing to people," he describes. They are also a good match with bulk nuts, such as almonds and walnuts.

When fresh cherries are out of season, retailers might consider running special promotions for dried cherries and see what sort of sweet sales they can grow! **pb**

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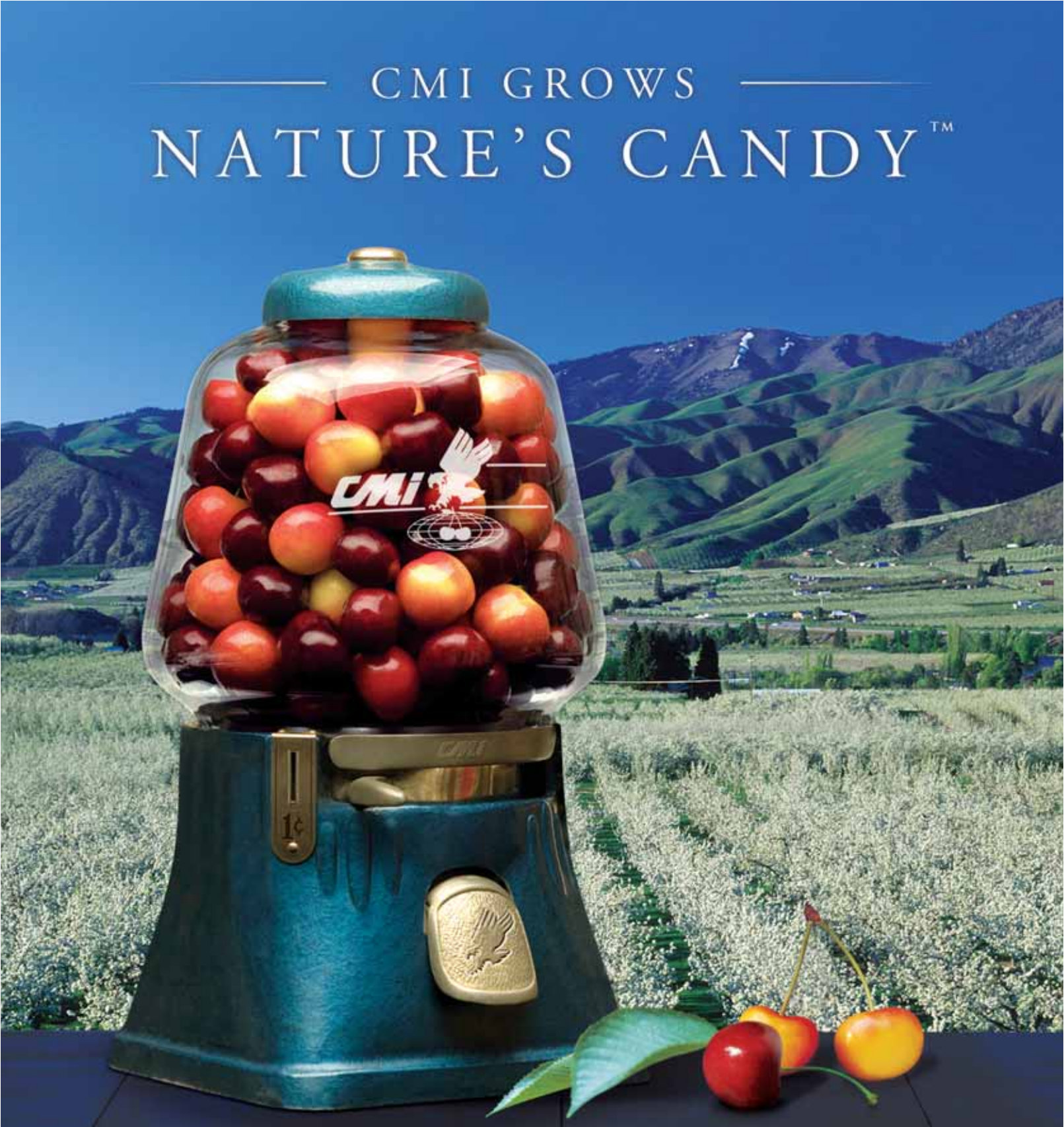

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Photo courtesy of Stemilt Growers, Inc.

Looking north into Wenatchee, East Wenatchee and the Columbia River.

damage; proper rotation keeps the display looking desirable. While it may take a little extra effort, ripeness ensures a better consumer experience because the cherries, which can be eaten immediately, provide instant gratification.

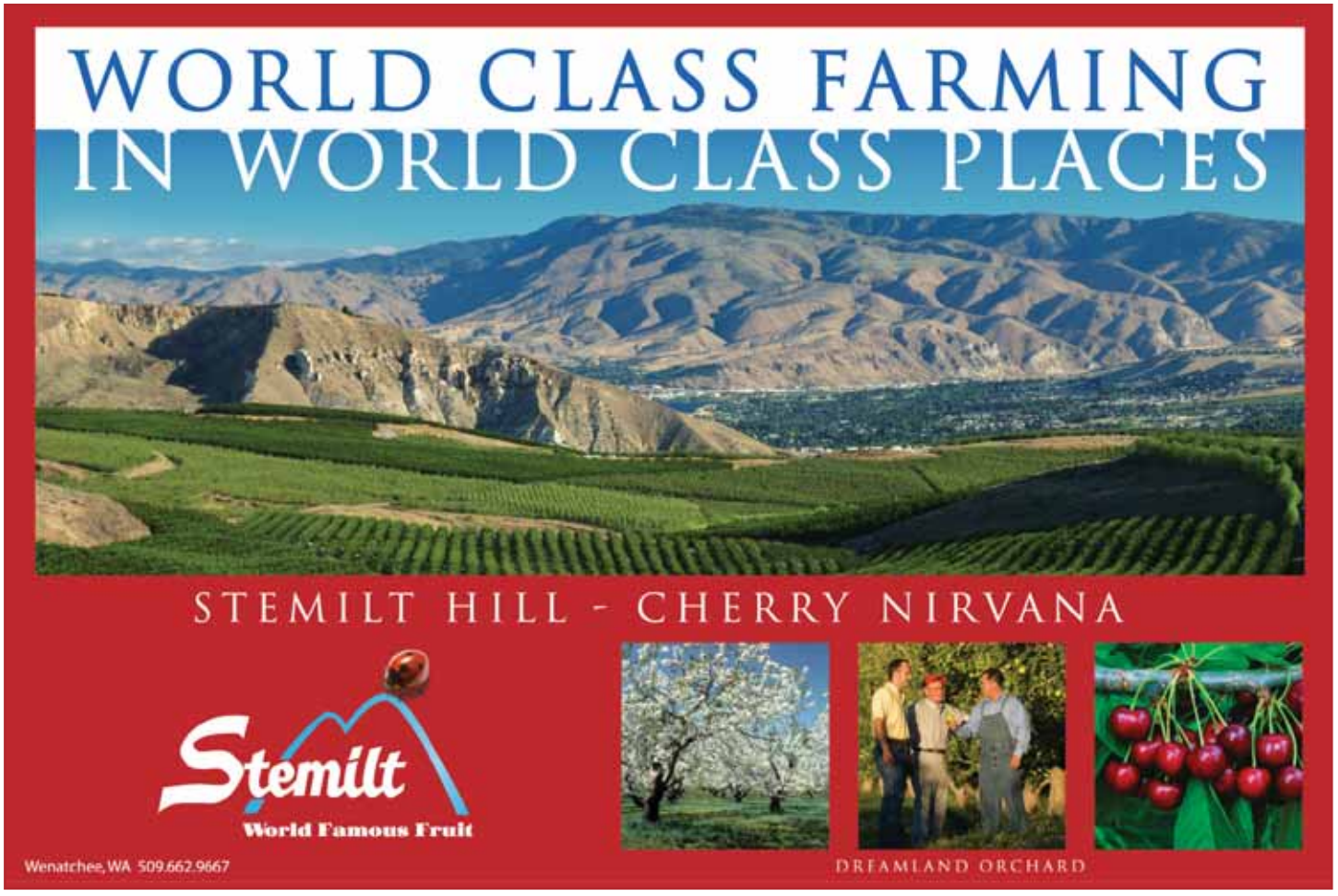
When considering quality, stores should also consider size. "There's a direct correlation between the size of the cherry and carbohydrates and between carbohydrates and sugar," explains Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Stemilt Growers, Inc., headquartered in Wenatchee, WA "Sugar and flavor are higher in a bigger cherry." Certain chains, he points out, will only accept a 10½ size cherry or larger.

The cherry sizes are based on how many were able to fit in a row for packing. Cherries are measured by 64ths of an inch. A 10½ cherry would be approximately one inch (65/64ths) in diameter across the largest swell. A 9½ cherry, would be even bigger, at 71/64ths. On the other hand, a 12-row cherry would be about 54/64ths. Larger fruit also produces more of a "Wow" factor in overall experience, appearance and flavor, according to Pepperl.

A BREAK OUT OF THE MARKETING SEASON

Retailers have many ways to capitalize on the seasonality of cherries. Some stores start raising consumer interest before the season starts, getting customers excited about the first cherries of the season. Ads and in-store signage remind customers that cherries are coming and they should expect cherries soon. One of the problems with this strategy is a season that is late due to inclement weather can disappoint customers. To combat this, pre-season advertising should avoid specific dates while still inviting customers to look for cherries when they do arrive.

Some retailers wait for June and July to promote because cherries are at their most abundant during those months. Although greater availability makes this a good time for sales and specials, limiting advertising and promotion to a short period of time within an already short period of time won't maximize product sales.



Reader Service # 13

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Other stores focus on mainly summer holidays associated with cherries, such as Memorial Day (the unofficial start of cherry season) and Fourth of July (mid-cherry season) with a push at the end of August, when the season is wrapping up. The problem with this is, once again, a limited time span during a limited selling season. Additionally, the holidays already inspire people to buy something special, such as cherries; it is the everyday impulse buy that needs the push.

Domex's Queen recommends retailers should advertise throughout the entire season — from the second week of June through the first week of August. "If anything, advertise every week in July. That's when the quality and quantities are there. You just really need to make sure you're pounding it home."

"Cherries are a high-impulse purchase," says Tom Tjerandsen, managing director for North America for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA) in Sonoma, CA. "Retailers need to be ready to call attention to cherries so shoppers know they're there."

Pepperl also points out, "Don't forget August!" There are two solid weeks of strong cherry supply during the month. In addition, he says, "After the 15th, you've got niche opportunities for big cherries, which garner a higher price."

Suzanne Wolters, director of marketing for Rainier Fruit Company, Selah, WA, suggests including Rainier-specific ads alongside dark red cherry ads or alternating dark red ads and Rainier ads during the variety's season, which runs from mid-June and until the second or third week in July. "If you have a successful white-flesh fruit program, use similar messaging with Rainier cherries," she adds. The white-flesh Rainier cherries have a lower acid and different chemical makeup, so they share many of the unique distinctions of other white-flesh fruits.

Many shippers and distributors help retailers sell cherries. Costco, which simply plugs in full and half pallets of cherries for a display, relies on the shipper to package the fruit so the consumer can realize what's inside. "No other retailer sells produce like we do," Taylor explains. The clear clamshells Costco uses show the fruit at a variety of angles while protecting the delicate product inside.

Some retailers wait for June and July to promote because cherries are at their most abundant during those months. Although greater availability makes this a good time for sales and specials, limiting advertising and promotion to a short period of time within an already short period of time won't maximize product sales.

Taking a different tack, Stemilt offers a

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Reader Service # 122

Sesame Street Elmo shipper to appeal to children. The character draws in customers, and the packaging lists health benefits.

Symms' Mertz says retailers know best what will work for their stores, "Each different retailer has its own program. They do a lot of research, they know their demographic. They know what to do and what works for them."

While Domex provides some of its customers with POS materials, he suggests retailers create large and inviting posters and banners that state "Cherries are here" and "It's Cherry Season."

CMI's Mast says, "Retailers can also use countdown signage like 'Only six more weeks of cherries' so consumers know they better buy them now — while they last."

> **"People watch for cherries. They are easy to eat, universally enjoyable, portable, a good source of energy and nutrition, have no fat and children love them."**
>
> **— Tom Tjerandsen**
> **Chilean Fresh Fruit Association**

A NEW SALES SEASON: CHILEAN CHERRIES

In addition to the summer domestic cherry season, there is now a winter season for cherries from Chile — right in time for holiday marketing.

The Chilean season typically runs from mid-November until the end of January, although this past season ran through mid-February of 2008. This timing creates an entire second season for retail sales. The beautiful red color and the "special" reputation of the fruit make it ideal for gift baskets, fruit trays, fruit platters and other types of holiday specials. It is also a prime candidate for cross-merchandising with the bakery and specialty cheese departments.

Several domestic growers and distributors now have branches in Chile, and Chilean domestic growers and distributors have seen considerable growth in sales over the years. Tjerandsen relates that in the 2005-2006 year, Chile exported 4.4 million cases of cherries, about half of which came to North America. In the 2006-2007 season, the number went up to approximately 4.8 million cases, again with half coming to North America. This past season Chile exported 7.5 million cases. Tjerandsen cites prices ranging from $3.99 per pound all the way up to $9.99 per pound; the holiday season suits premium pricing for the fruit.

GOOD HEALTH AND GREAT FLAVOR

Education is an excellent promotional device. With the trend toward healthful eating, cherries are excellent poster-fruits for a healthful lifestyle. They are high in antioxidants and considered a "superfruit." When something tastes great and is good for you, it's an easy sell.

"The health message of cherries is undervalued," observes Stemilt's Pepperl, who notes cherries are good for the health of joints, gall bladder, memory and blood. He suggests retailers that work with nutritionists ask about how they can promote cherries for their health benefits.

Jeff Manning, chief marketing officer for the Cherry Marketing Institute in Lansing, MI, says, "The produce department knows that produce is good for us, so they should do more to promote the health benefits. They need to go beyond just 'Produce is good for us,' and explain why it is good." He stresses the importance of citing cherries' antioxidant properties and traces them back

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Reader Service #25

to the chemicals that cause the color red. He suggests stores create an "eat red" program to explain antioxidants and sell more colored fruits and vegetables, which are said to help ease pain from arthritis and promote heart health.

Along with nutrition programs, Sage Fruit's Sinks notes retailers can highlight the healthful benefits of cherries through creative POS materials and good product positioning. "Put them front and center so consumers can't miss them when they walk in the store. This increases sales and brings more attention to the fruit."

Although selling cherries isn't always easy, their potential is worth the effort. Letting customers know about the availability, providing a little extra care and attention to product and display, and capitalizing on health benefits can do a lot to drive sales.

"People watch for cherries," summarizes CFFA's Tjerandsen. "They are easy to eat, universally enjoyable, portable, a good source of energy and nutrition, have no fat and children love them."

That's the kind of challenge we should have more of. **pb**

Photo courtesy of Stemilt Growers, Inc.

Reader Service #82

PRODUCE PACKAGING Portfolio

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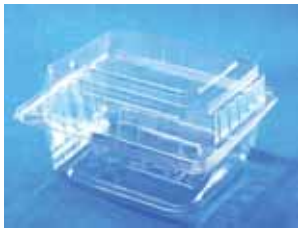

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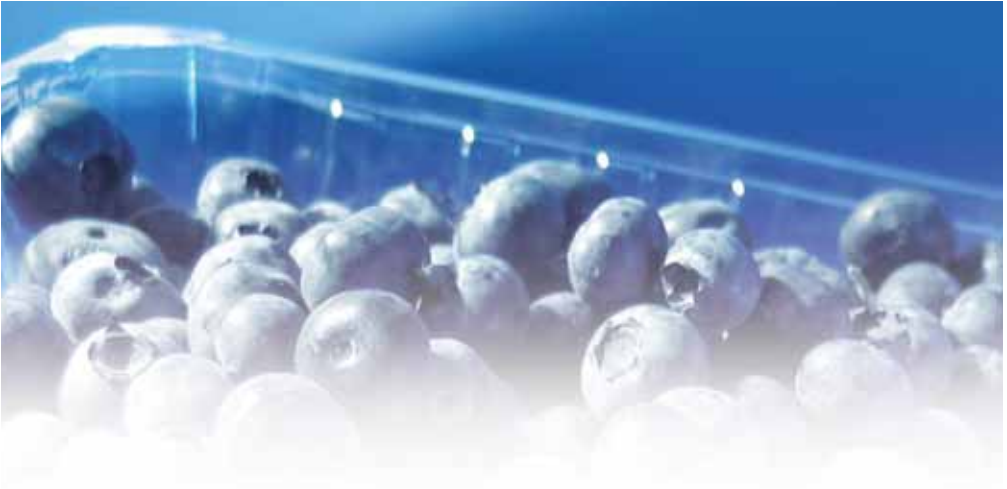

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Typically, EarthFirst PLA films will run on existing equipment with minimal modifications. In today's applications, the only machine changes required to run EarthFirst PLA films are a reduction in temperatures and reduced dwell times, resulting in a more favorable environmental footprint. Similarly, EarthFirst PLA TDO shrink film has a high degree of shrinkage at a lower initiation temperature. This is important for reduced energy consumption and increased production, and may offer favorable future capital expenditures. Ultimately, the advantage to the end users is the branding of their product's packaging as being earth friendly and compostable.

End users will see the value of this product as more environmentally friendly than current petroleum-based films. EarthFirst is a pure biopolymer though it is virtually indistinguishable from typical plastics. It looks like any other plastic film and may be mistaken for plastic made from petrochemicals. There are absolutely no additives in this product that can migrate to the surface. There are no petrochemical plasticizers and no slip additives; nothing will leach out of the product.

Using 100 pounds of EarthFirst PLA film provides equivalent energy savings to run a 100-watt light bulb for eight months or saves 14 gallons of gasoline. The amount of energy saved can be measured in the form of mega joules, a generally accepted energy measurement associated with producing a given product. PLA requires 27 mega joules of energy to manufacture compared to PVC, which requires 61 mega joules (32 mega joules of energy and 29 mega joules of oil). PET is a close third requiring 76 mega joules (39 and 37 respectively).

The world is going green and the demand for biopolymers and environmentally friendly films continues to grow. Plastic Suppliers is committed to understanding our products' impact upon the environment. We are members of the Sustainable Packaging Coalition (SPC) and our products are certified by the Biodegradable Products Institute and DinCertco, which state EarthFirst® PLA film is a compostable product. EarthFirst PLA film is produced utilizing Ingeo™ polymer from NatureWorks® LLC, the most widely recognized PLA resin on the market today. Our United Kingdom Sidaplax distribution center belongs to the Compostable Packaging Group, a strong supporter of preserving the environment.

Biopolymers are a trend gaining credibility in the market because of large brand owner awareness and acceptance. Other biopolymer resins are on the horizon and will complement our current offerings and address applications not able to utilize products available today.

Current commercial products made from this material include flexible packaging for spinach, tomatoes and green onions. EarthFirst can be used in applications where MAP (modified atmosphere packaging) technology is being incorporated. One very important characteristic of EarthFirst PLA film is its very low heat-seal initiation temperature; sealing the material into packages takes less energy. EarthFirst is also being used in shrink-sleeve labels, folding carton, over wrap, lidding, and tamper-evident and windowing applications.

Plastic Suppliers will continue to seek out opportunities to participate in environmental research and associations to create an understanding of how biopolymers may be used in the future and how EarthFirst PLA film may offer an environmentally friendly plastic film alternative.

EarthFirst PLA film is readily available. For more information contact Plastic Suppliers at 1-866-ERTH-1ST or visit www.earthfirstpla.com.

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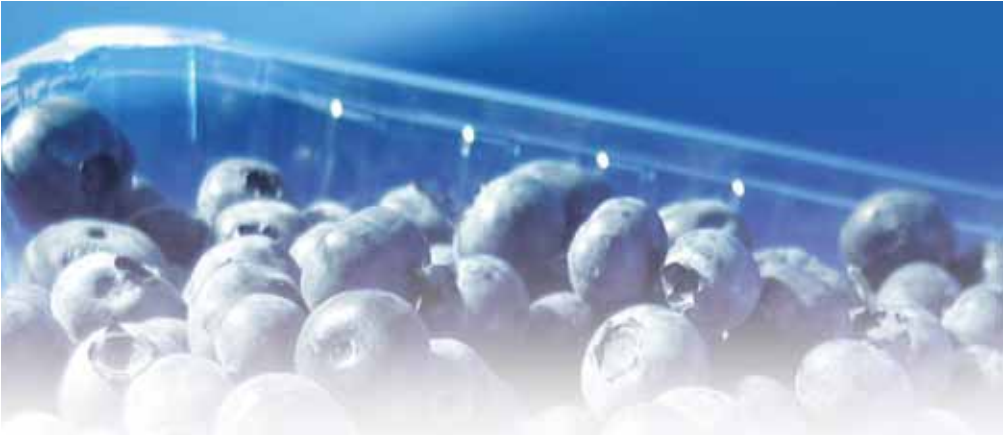

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Sambrailo Packaging is a third-generation family-owned company serving the produce and floral industries since 1923. With locations in California and Mexico, we have built our reputation on innovation, service and quality. Known for our "design to distribution" packaging solutions, Sambrailo was the first to develop a plastic clamshell for berries. Similarly, we have continued to provide improvements to the industry with a patented freight-saving MIXIM Packaging System and family of MIXIM Snap-Flap Containers.

Sambrailo specializes in designing packaging systems for berries, grapes, tomatoes, leafy greens and value-added fruits and veggies. We define packaging systems as innovative, efficient and high-quality clamshells and trays. We then take it a step further with our service, including on-site tray make-up, vendor managed inventory and warehouse-to-field distribution.

Through years of experience, Sambrailo has accumulated an unparalleled knowledge of both our customers and products. When this savvy is combined with our ingenuity and ability to stay in front of trends, the result has been a win-win for all. We foresaw the effects the larger strawberry varieties would have on the clamshell capacity needs and have proactively come to the market with a MIXIM LV (large volume) 1-pound clamshell.

Sambrailo saw an opportunity to remove steps from the process of shed packing leafy greens and developed and introduced the Snap Flap clamshell. This 1-piece design replaces the lid-and-till style container for many retail and foodservice applications. It features a dual-hinged top with a center-snap closure and can be filled, closed and labeled in one efficient process. The label automatically provides a tamper–evident seal for consumer confidence and safety. While the Snap Flap concept was initially developed to answer the needs of the leafy greens market, the application has expanded to other products, currently in the prototype stages.

At this year's United Fresh Tech Expo in Las Vegas, we will display a new packing line that has been custom-built for the Snap Flap — so all attendees will have the opportunity to see both in action.

Sambrailo starts by listening to the needs of the consumer, the retailer and the grower/shipper. By staying very closely tuned in to each of these three segments, we are able to devise innovative packaging solutions based on their demands. The results are packaging solutions that add tremendous value to food packaging. Soon we will introduce a family of RunRite blueberry clamshell sizes that will denest, fill, close, stack and cool more efficiently and with less down-time than any other currently on the market.

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Reader Service # 18

CHICAGO Serves As A Mecca For Midwestern Produce

A strong transportation system, a diverse population and a bustling terminal business keep Chicago's produce industry going strong.

BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ

One of America's most treasured cities, Chicago has a history as deep and vast as Lake Michigan itself. Dubbed The Windy City because of the tremendous gusts that plague its residents year-round, Chicago was the home of the world's first skyscraper in 1885, as well as the first aquarium just eight years later. In 1973, Chicago's world-famous Sears Tower joined the landscape.

The third largest city in America, Chicago is home to more than 2.8 million people with more than 9.7 million residing in the greater Metropolitan Chicago area. The city has served as birthplace to many of America's most notable citizens, including Walt Disney, Robin Williams, Harrison Ford, Dorothy Hamill, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Jack Benny, Bob Newhart and a host of others.

Nick and Sam Gaglioni of Dietz & Kolodenko

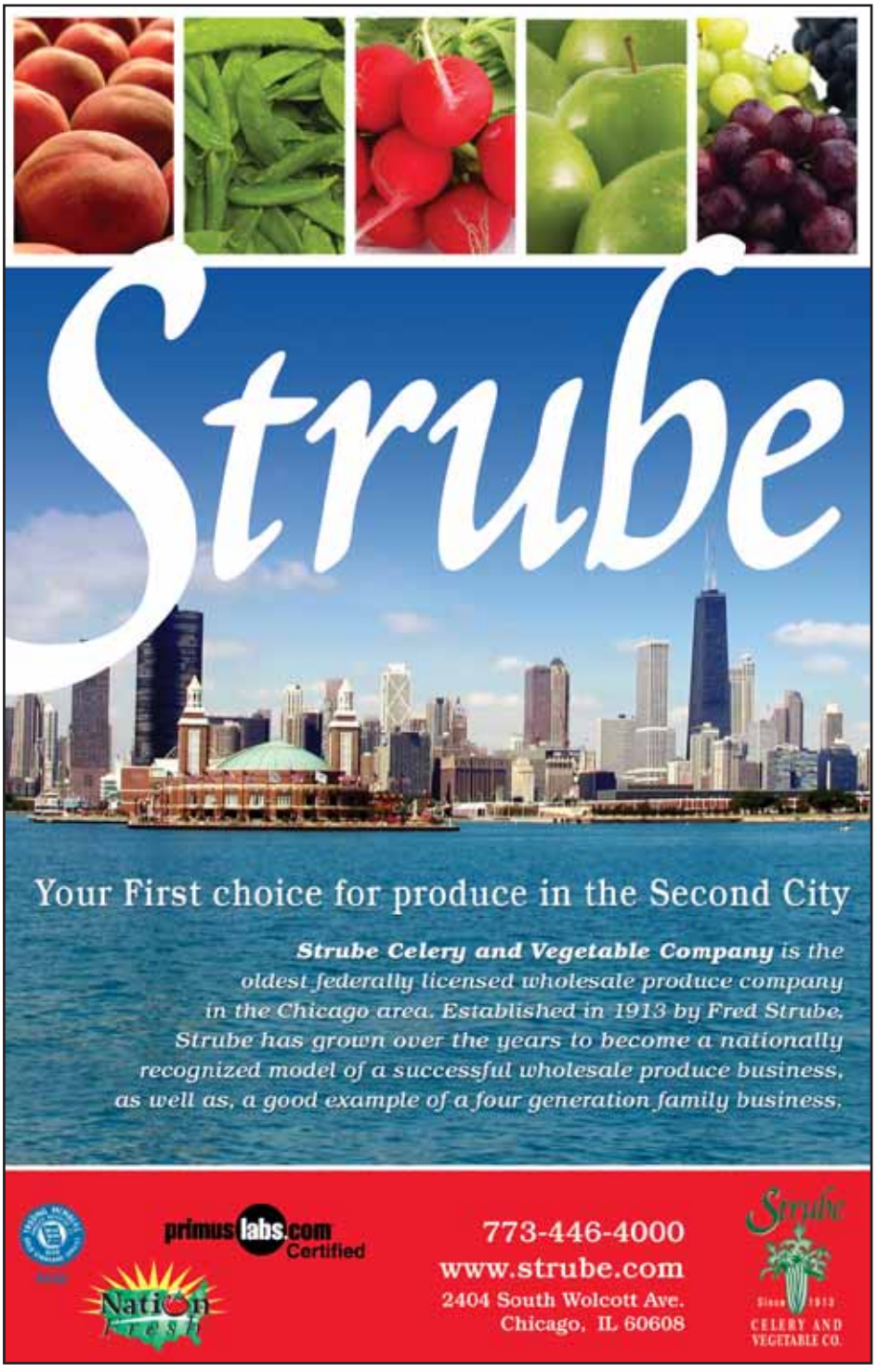
Greg Mandolini of Mandolini Co., Inc.

Tom Wilmoth of Eclipse Produce, Inc.

Paco Vega Jr. of La Galera

Chicago's legendary The Second City comedy club gave rise to many of the world's funniest comedians, including John Belushi, Joan Rivers, Mike Myers, Gilda Radner, Tim Meadows, Robert Klein and Tina Fey. Of course, we can't forget Chicago's immensely popular sports teams — The Bears, The Cubs, The White Sox and The Blackhawks.

Since its incorporation in 1837, Chicago has been a long-time hub of industry. Today, it plays host to corporate headquarters of some of the world's leading companies, including Boeing, Morton Salt, Quaker Oats, WM Wrigley, US Cellular and Playboy. Then there's the restaurant trade. The



Reader Service # 33

Chicago is a diner's paradise. . . Chicago boasts large numbers of Germans, Italians, Poles, Chinese, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and African-Americans. Add to that the city's bustling tourism trade. . . and it's easy to see why demand for virtually every kind of produce is so high among both retailers and restaurateurs.

Windy City may best be known for its deep-dish pizza and topping-heavy hot dogs, but Chicago cuisine is far more diverse than that.

"I can't think of a better place for restaurants or diversity of food than Chicago," explains Tim Fleming, executive vice president, Strube Celery and Vegetable Company, a Chicago-based produce wholesaler. "You go from the little boutique bistros to

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Left to right: Darrell Miller, Mark Martin, Brent Schmit, Jose Garcia and Scott Rhodes of Eclipse Distribution, Inc.

major chains like Lettuce Entertain You, where produce is the pallet and there are a very creative things being done with it."

At Osteria Via Stato, an Italian restaurant in Chicago's affluent River North neighborhood, David DiGregorio, executive chef and partner, notes produce plays a "real big" role in his development of new dishes. "This restaurant, in my philosophy, is based on seasonality. Produce tastes best when it's in season, so we try to focus on that and we change our menus based on that."

Sometimes, DiGregorio reveals, a new dish is developed out of a desire to use a particularly tasty fruit or vegetable. For example, when he received fresh huckleberries from the Northwest, he ended up making a fresh huckleberry sauce to go with a ricotta cheesecake.

> "Chicago has such a fantastic diversity of population and ethnic backgrounds and menus that creates a real demand to get the products to service those appetites."
>
> —Tim Fleming
> Strube Celery
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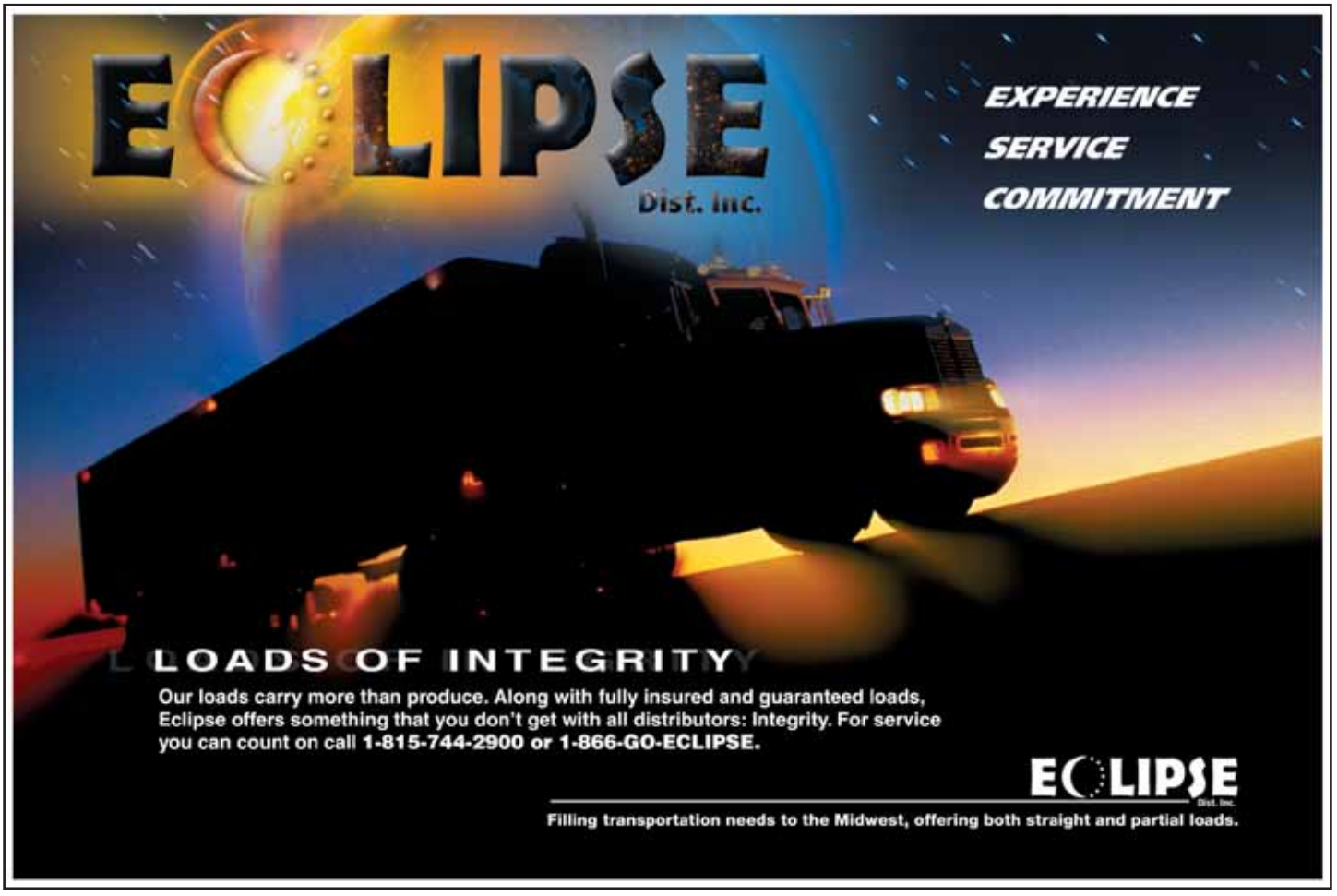


Reader Service # 36

Fred Plotsky
of Cool Runnings

Pepe Vega Jr.
of La Galera

Dan Pyke of
Muller Trading Co., Inc.

Nico Berlen of
Shop & Save Markets

points for every wallet, Chicago is a diner's paradise. In large part, that's due to the incredible diversity of the city. Chicago boasts large numbers of Germans, Italians, Poles, Chinese, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and African-Americans. Add to that the city's bustling tourism trade — Chicago played host to more than 44 million visitors in 2006 — and it's easy to see why demand for virtually every kind of produce is so high among both retailers and restaurateurs.

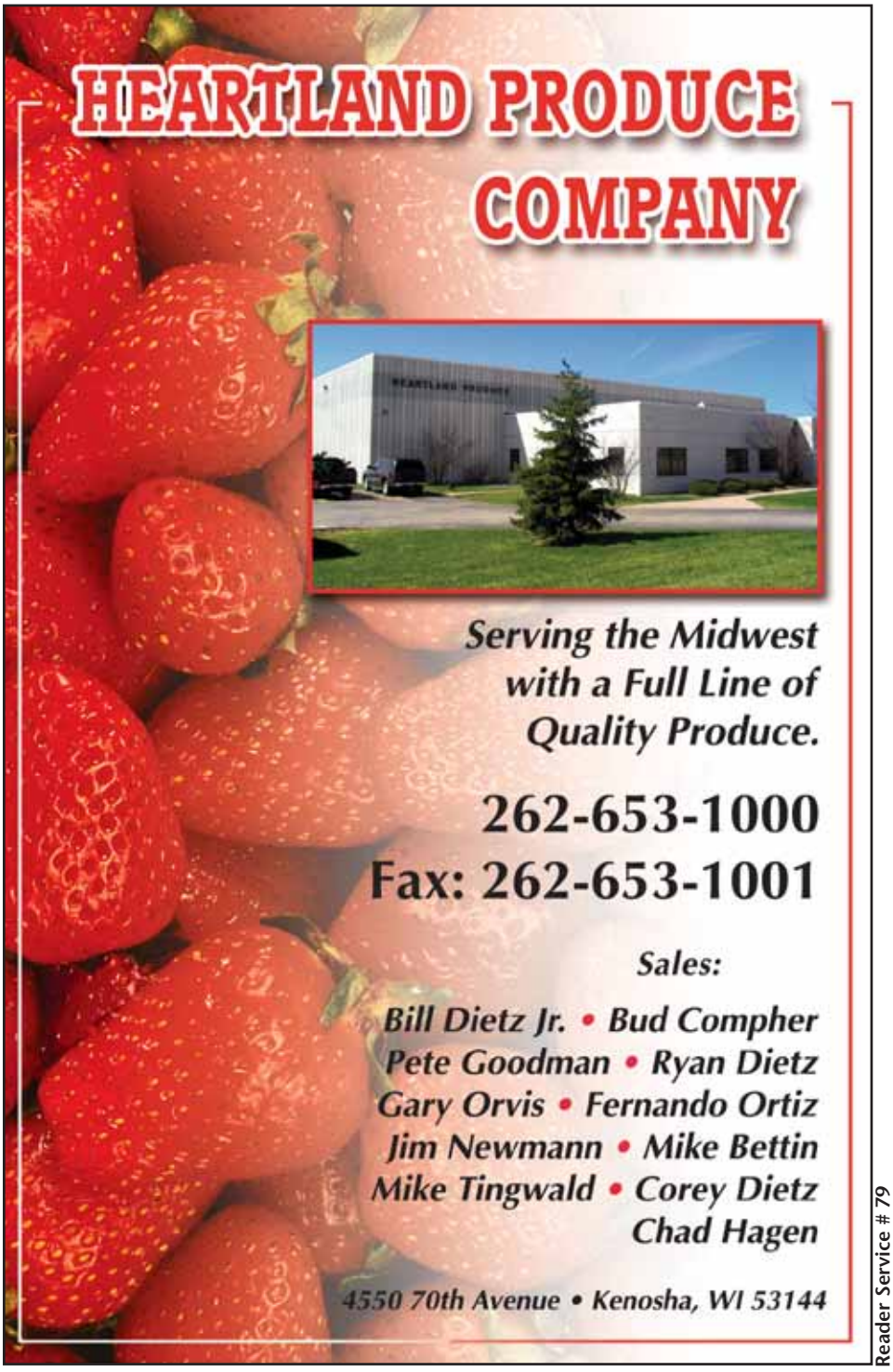
"Here in Chicago, you have a Polish neighborhood, a Spanish neighborhood and a Russian neighborhood. That makes it easier for us to know exactly who our customers are and then gear our selection to give them what they need."

— Adi Mor
Garden Fresh

"Chicago has such a fantastic diversity of population and ethnic backgrounds and menus that creates a real demand to get the products to service those appetites," explains Fleming. "The combination of people immigrating to Chicago from other countries, coupled with people traveling internationally and trying new things, has resulted in many consumers asking their grocer or produce supplier, 'Where can I get this?'"

At Nature's Best Fruit Market in suburban Westmont, IL, George Kazantzis, produce buyer, finds himself catering to a growing number of Asian consumers. During his daily treks to the Chicago International Produce Market (CIPM), he seeks out such exotic finds as Hawaiian papaya, kabocha squash and opo, a bat-like gourd popular in Taiwan.

Known for its "quirky selection of eth-



Reader Service # 79

nic produce," each of the nine Garden Fresh stores scattered throughout the greater Chicago area offers a different selection based on the ethnicity of the neighborhood in which it is located. CEO Adi Mor cites Chicago's segregated nature as making it possible for him to give his customers what they want.

"Unlike cities like New York where you have a big mix of everything, here in Chicago, you have a Polish neighborhood, a Spanish neighborhood and a Russian neighborhood," Mor explains. "That makes it easier for us to know exactly who our customers are and then gear our selection to give them what they need."

The rise of the independent retailer is cited by many produce suppliers as one of the industry's most significant changes in recent years. Its ability to cater to their consumer base has given them a competitive edge against the big chains. "Independent retailers are better equipped to react to cultural demands within their neighborhoods," explains Robert Scaman, CEO, Goodness Greeness, a Chicago-based sup-

Independent Streak

On the retail side, a number of independent retailers work directly with local farmers to procure product for their stores. Sunset Foods, a Chicago, IL-based chain with four stores has long maintained a relationship with Didier Farms, Long Grove, IL. For nearly 75 years, Didier has provided the upscale retailer with cucumbers, tomatoes, zucchinis, squash, corn and just about every vegetable grown in Illinois.

Sunset Foods also procures produce from Indianapolis Fruit Company, Inc., Indianapolis, IN, and Goodness Greeness, Chicago, IL. When Sunset cannot obtain desired product from any of these three suppliers, Vince Mastromauro, produce director/floral director puts in a call to the Chicago International Produce Market (CIPM), a 30- to 45-minute drive away.

Nature's Best Fruit Market in suburban Westmont, IL, relies on CIPM during the winter but switches over to Michigan and Wisconsin farmers each summer. George Kazantzis, produce buyer, says the difference in quality is noticeable, particularly in terms of shelf life. "We deal directly with farmers and we tell them when we are coming, so it's literally picked the day before," he explains. "I've noticed a big difference in the quality and so have my customers. If they don't use it in the first two or three days, it holds up."

Such selectiveness is common among independent retailers. Coupled with highly personalized service, it's also what helps them stand apart from the large chains. In recent years, Mark Pappas, president and CEO, Coosemans Chicago, a division of Coosemans Worldwide, Inc., based in Miami, FL, has seen a dramatic increase in the number of independent retailers visiting the markets. "A lot of the smaller retailers don't want to just phone it in," he adds. "They want to see what's going on, so they come in every Monday, Wednesday and Friday."

For years, Coosemans has had a buyer fly in from Louisville, KY, twice a week to walk the street and select produce to be trucked back to the Bluegrass State.

Not only do independent retailers give consumers an alternate source for produce, but they are also effectively giving the chains a run for their money. While fruits and vegetables account for 8 to 12 percent of sales at most grocery chains, they make up 32 percent of Chica-

Your Key to Transportation Needs

Reader Service # 73

Contact: Jeff • Andy • Curt • Dan • Tom

go, IL-based Garden Fresh's sales in the winter and 45 percent in the summer, notes Adi Mor, CEO. That fact hasn't escaped produce wholesalers who have recognized it's no longer the chains keeping the market afloat.

Pappas agrees, adding, "I don't think the chains support the street like they used to. Now, there's a lot more mom-and-pop stores."

Daily trips to the market give independent retailers the ability to respond quickly to customer requests. As long as an item is requested before noon, Garden Fresh can usually get it to the customer the same day, according to Mor, who says such personalized service gives stores like his a competitive advantage.

Larry Damico, co-owner, Hyde Park Produce, a Chicago South Side grocery store known for its selection of fresh, inexpensive produce, hand-selects produce for customers who call in their order to be delivered. "They'll ask, 'Do I have to come and pick it out?' I explain to them, 'No, you tell me what you want and I'll be happy to pick it out. I know exactly what I bought, so it's easy for me to go right to that item and get it for you.' It makes things a lot easier and a little more personal for everybody."

The ability to handle problems or customer complaints as they arise is much appreciated, Damico adds. That belief is echoed by other independent retailers, who point out that large chains often don't even have anyone working the produce department, much less anyone empowered to handle issues as they come up.

"When you go into the bigger stores, you don't see anybody," notes Kazantzis. "Here, we are on the floor all the time, so if there's something not right, we hear about it right away." **pb**

plier of organic produce. "They have the ability to drill down into their consumer base and be specific with the items they bring in to meet their customers' needs."

THE WHOLESALE PRODUCE SCENE

Chicago produce wholesalers are an optimistic lot. After coming off of one of the worst winters the Windy City has ever recorded, they speak enthusiastically of the coming summer, the joy of the seasons and the daily excitement of overcoming challenges to deliver the freshest, tastiest produce to their customers.

It's in Chicagoans' nature to remain upbeat no matter the situation. After all, this is the community that has retained its faith in the Chicago Cubs even after decades of a seemingly endless losing streak, but there's much more to it than that. Ask any Chicago produce guy, and he'll say it's a good time to be in produce — and the general consensus is there couldn't be a better place to be in produce than Chicago. "Chicago is the hub of the

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"We truck product in from as far away as California, Florida, Arizona and Idaho, and we fly product in from all over the world," reports John Fitzgerald, co-owner and director of purchasing, Midwest Foods, a Chicago-based produce supplier to white tablecloth restaurants, hotels, hospitals and resorts. "We do sea containers out of Costa Rica. We even have some product shipped

Chicago's centralized location makes it possible to get produce from virtually anywhere — often in a matter of hours, but rarely taking longer than a few days.

whole country," explains Scaman. "The ability to pull product from all over the country and all over the world gives Chicago an absolute advantage."

That advantage stems from Chicago's powerful transportation system. All hours of the day and night, shipments arrive via rail, road and air, coming through the city's two major international airports — O'Hare and Midway. That gives Chicago produce wholesalers a definite edge because they can source product from neighboring states, from the East and West Coasts and from around the globe.

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in via FedEx because it's very perishable."

Chicago's centralized location makes it possible to get produce from virtually anywhere — often in a matter of hours, but rarely taking longer than a few days.

"We source a lot of produce from Europe and Holland," notes Mark Pappas, president and CEO, Coosemans Chicago, a division of Coosemans Worldwide, Inc., headquartered in Miami, FL. "From the time I buy it till the time it actually gets here, cleared, and ready to be sold, it's typically about four days. We get shipments nightly from the Canadian hothouses we do business with."

For Coosemans, which concentrates on specialty produce, the ability to source product from virtually anywhere is the key to building its business and exposing consumers to new kinds of produce. During its two decades in operation, Coosemans has seen produce previously considered "weird stuff" become mainstream, Pappas says. "People used to look at us like we had two heads with some of the things we brought in. Now, they're staple items." Grape toma-

The Demise Of Seasonality

Chicago's transportation system has helped make seasonality largely a thing of the past. The ability to source produce globally makes it possible to meet consumer demand for produce that otherwise would not be available.

"When I started in this business in the mid-1960s, things were certainly seasonal," reports Tim Fleming, executive vice president, Strube Celery and Vegetable Company, Chicago, IL. "If you wanted peaches, you got them from June to October, then you waited till next June. With hemispheral growing and international trade, importing has become a major influence."

Not everyone is thrilled by this turn of events. Larry Damico, co-owner, Hyde Park Produce, a Chicago South Side gro-

Photos courtesy of Stir Crazy

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cery store known for its selection of fresh, inexpensive produce, says consumers now expect peaches, cherries, nectarines and the like to be available any time of the year. He has no problems with getting these products for them; he just wishes they understood they are not going to taste as good as locally sourced, true summertime fruit. "People get upset if they don't eat well," he adds. "I tell them, 'This isn't a summer cherry. No matter where you get it from, it's not going to taste the same.'"

For restaurants that rely on certain kinds of produce for their cuisine's unique flavor, the ability to obtain produce that might previously have been considered out-of-season is absolutely essential.

At the Chicago-based Stir Crazy chain of Asian restaurants, diners expect certain vegetables to always be available, according to Rob Flohr, executive vice president of operations. That often results in the chain paying higher prices when certain items cannot be sourced locally. "We never like to go without an item, so we don't," reports Flohr. "Our guests expect to have it here, so we'll pay whatever we have to."

At times, the increasing availability of imports has helped suppliers resolve weather-related issues that would have previously caused substantial shortages.

"If there are major weather problems and the orange crop in California is compromised, we, as an industry, can go to Spain or Morocco or other countries to get oranges," Fleming points out. "This gives us the ability to continue to meet consumer demand without interruption during major catastrophes in growing areas." **pb**

toes, portobello mushrooms and spring mix, for example, are all now widely considered commodities, he adds.

PRODUCE PARADISE

Chicago produce suppliers got a major boost in November 2002 when the Chicago International Produce Market (CIPM) replaced the old South Water Market. Encompassing 25 acres, CIPM is double the size of the South Water Market. It boasts 36 tenant spaces, including 22 currently occupied spaces. Built at a cost of $58 million, CIPM features 1,000 tons of cooling equipment, providing vendors with state-of-the-art, computer-regulated refrigeration technology. The system is designed to respond immediately to humidity and temperature fluctuations, retarding spoilage and maximizing sales. Opening most weekdays between 2:00 and 3:00 AM and by 6:00 AM on weekends, CIPM's market merchants feature imports from 48 states, Canada and more than 20 other countries.

Increasingly, notes Pappas, those merchants are offering a broader array of pro-

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duce. Rather than specializing in potatoes or tomatoes, they have branched out in different areas, offering a broader line of produce to those retailers and restaurateurs who frequent the market. Coosemans' Pappas believes it's less a matter of trying to be a one-stop shop and more of a necessity. It's borne out of a need to increase revenue in order to pay the bills.

In recent years, Strube's Fleming has noticed a significant shift in the amount of product being delivered versus being trucked away by the buyer. In years past, 80 percent of product was loaded onto the purchaser's truck and the remaining 20 percent was slated for delivery. Today, those numbers have virtually flip-flopped — just 20 to 30 percent of product is loaded onto trucks brought to the market and the remaining 70 to 80 percent is delivered, he notes.

For CIPM wholesalers like Strube, the new facility makes it easier to provide timely delivery services because trucks and

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trailers can get in and out of the market easily. That wasn't the case at South Water. "At the old market, it was a horrendous day of trying to get a trailer in to get it loaded or unloaded and back on its way," he explains. "The new market has given Chicago a real benefit there."

The general public is not allowed to purchase produce on CIPM. However, Garden Fresh, a chain of nine Chicago grocery stores, offers its consumers the unique opportunity to visit the market with them. Each Wednesday during the spring and summer months, consumers are invited to make a 6:00 AM trek to CIPM and see where much of the greater Chicago area gets its produce.

No doubt Chicago's produce wholesalers are hopeful that such opportunities for consumers to see firsthand the array of fresh produce coming in to the CIPM each and every day might help stem the trend toward locally grown produce. In recent years, farmer's markets have grown in popularity, as consumers welcome the opportunity to buy directly from the source. "The movement is definitely gaining steam every year," notes Goodness Greeness' Scaman. "There's something sexy to consumers about knowing the producer and knowing where their food has come from."

For his part, Pappas admits that farm stands have a natural draw, but he says this unique novelty has a minimal impact at best on Coosemans' business. That's because of the seasonal nature of his company's foodservice business. "Over the winter, we lose a lot of foodservice business because the country clubs close down their golf courses, swimming pools and outdoor cafes," he says. "But then our foodservice business picks up a lot in the summer, so what we lose in business to a farmers' market, we gain on the foodservice end of it." **pb**

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Reader Service # 32

THE 320 Store

Local legend holds its own against encroaching chains.

BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ

Nestled in downtown Rockford, IL — 90 miles north of Chicago — The 320 Store can be described as a local institution. From its humble beginnings as Rockford Produce in the 1940s, this unassuming market has long been renowned as the place to buy fruits and vegetables in the Forest City.

Dennis Bragelman, owner, began working at the store just out of high school and eventually worked his way up to buyer. When the store's original owner, Dick Ramer, decided to retire in 1990, Bragelman and his wife, Sandy, took over day-to-day operations of Rockford's produce treasure.

Bragelman handles all of the store's purchasing. Twice a week, he personally makes the trek to the Chicago International Produce

Market (CIPM), leaving Rockford at 2:00 AM and returning with a truck full of fresh produce before noon. Twice a week, he receives shipments from a Kenosha, WI-based supplier. In the fall, he buys directly from a number of Michigan farmers.

In addition to a full array of fruits and vegetables, The 320 Store sells a variety of other products, including cheeses, pastas, breads and snacks as well as an assortment of complementary items, such as salad dressings and croutons.

On weekdays, there is a full salad bar, which is heavily frequented by the many police officers, attorneys and office personnel who work in the nearby Winnebago County Courthouse. Bragelman also runs a thriving fruit basket business, selling 4,000 baskets each year — 2,500 to 3,000 in December alone.

Bragelman prides himself on selling produce that's ready-to-eat. "When you see something appealing, you want to buy it and eat it," he explains. "If you can't eat it for a few days, it ends up sitting until it rots and you have to throw it away."

From value shoppers to produce aficionados on the hunt for top quality, The 320 Store's clientele runs the gamut. While many other successful Rockford businesses have fled the downtown area for greener pastures — typically in the eastern-most part of the city, toward Chicago — The 320 Store remains firmly rooted in downtown. According to Bragelman, his rationale is two-fold: the building is already paid for and he has a great customer base that has no qualms about driving a little further to patronize his store.

During his 30-plus years in the industry, Bragelman has witnessed a great deal of change. Most significant is the death of seasonality — consumers expect to be able to purchase any kind of produce any time of the year. To accommodate their requests, he buys more imported produce, such as Chilean grapes and South American plums.

Bragelman has also taken to stocking more organic produce to meet the growing demand. He considers this an important service for his customers. After all, there isn't an Austin, TX-based Whole Foods Market, in Rockford — not yet anyway. Even if there were, chances are Bragelman's loyal customers would still frequent his store. When Valli Produce, Inc., a 3-store chain based in Arlington Heights, IL, recently opened an impressive-looking new store in nearby Loves Park, Bragelman reports some 320 consumers went to check it out, but in the end, they came back, thanks to the personalized service his store has built its reputation upon. "Consumers really appreciate the hands-on service they get here," he notes. "I leave each afternoon around 3:00 PM and my wife says everybody is always looking for me to pick out a melon for them or tell them what the best apples are." **pb**

THE 320 STORE

320 N. Court St.
Rockford, IL 61103
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Reader Service # 81

What's New In The Refrigerated Juice Category?

Juice marketers describe their latest innovations.

BY JAN FIALKOW

PRODUCE BUSINESS invited major juice marketers to tell us about their latest innovations in product, packaging and promotion for refrigerated juices sold in the produce department.

We told them they would have an opportunity to speak with retailers "virtually one-on-one" and tell them what was going on behind the scenes at their companies.

ALLYN BROWN PRESTON, CT

Allyn Brown, the largest grower of black currants in North America, announces the development and new product launch of two new Black Currant Juice Blends: Apple Black Currant and Black Currant and Cranberry under the Maple Lane Farms brand.

Maple Lane Farms has been producing and distributing Black Currant juice in 16- and 64-ounce sizes for six years into the refrigerated produce juice sections of major retailers throughout New England. A renewed health initiative has fueled the growth of the premium juice category with fruit types, such as pomegranate, which have high antioxidant properties. Maple Lane has experienced unprecedented growth through new business in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic markets.

Black currants were banned from growing in North America for 50 years prior to their reestablishment in 2000 into their indigenous habitat in New England. A number of international studies tout the black currant for its ability to boost the memory and prevent Alzheimer's disease. Their antioxidant value is one of the highest currently available and exceeds that of blueberries.

The introduction of the new 64-ounce Apple Black Currant and Black Currant Cranberry is currently proceeding well in established markets. Both contain 100 percent juice and must be sold under refrigeration in HDPE plastic bottles. They are line priced along with the traditional black currant juice.

BLUE LAKE CITRUS PRODUCTS, LLC WINTER HAVEN, FL

Noble brand 100 percent pure and organic juices are delicious and responsibly packaged in earth-friendly packaging. New varieties, blood orange and tangerine cranberry, are bottled in new contemporary design.

Noble is the first juice brand to have a retail bottle and label made from all natural renewable resources. This new concept in environmental packaging reduces dependency on oil, emits fewer greenhouse gases and increases energy efficiency.

A stylish new look also accompanies the new green packaging. "We have made a commitment to creating eco-friendly packaging with the first juice bottle made from NatureWorks PLA. Along with our move into a shrink sleeve made from the all natural material, we decided to give our packaging a fresh new look to communicate the all natural goodness of our product inside and out," explains Wade Groetsch, president. "Our new package design emphasizes the freshness and unique flavor of the fruits squeezed into our delicious juices."

Since they are derived from plant-based materials, the bottle and label will offer a meaningful alternative to oil-based plastic packaging. As a result of converting a year's supply of 32-ounce plastic bottles from petroleum-based to nature-based packaging, Noble will save the fossil-fuel equivalent of burning 114,000 gallons of gasoline and the greenhouse gases equivalent to driving a car more than 2.7 million miles.

Noble continues to explore and adopt innovative ideas in earth-friendly packaging. By using new technology, Noble has became a leader in the movement of retail brands toward reducing the environmental impact of packaging and energy used during production. Noble is committed to making a difference in the preservation of our natural resources and environment.

BOSSA NOVA BEVERAGE GROUP LOS ANGELES, CA

Continuing a tradition of innovation, Bossa Nova Beverage Group, the superfruit company and creator of the original and best-selling açai juice, is launching a new superfruit juice line that features five SKUs. The five new flavors include Acerola Juice with Mango, Acerola Juice with Red Peach, Goji Berry Juice with Tart Cherry, Mangosteen Juice with Passion Fruit, and Mangosteen Juice with Dragonfruit.

The new juices continue Bossa Nova's winning proposition of

higher nutritional performance with lower sugar levels than traditional juices, with a price and product presentation similar to its premium juices. This represents the first brand extension for Bossa Nova since the company's açai juices hit the marketplace in early 2005.

The five new superfruit juices, which will be available in 10-ounce bottles in the refrigerated quick-serve area of leading natural foods retailers and in the produce department of major conventional supermarkets nationwide beginning July 2008, are supported by a dedicated multi-million-dollar communication initiative.

Bossa Nova's Original Açai juices are currently available in approximately 10,000 retail stores nationwide

BRADFORD TONIC, INC.
MIAMI BEACH, FL

Bradford Tonic manufactures and distributes three all-natural, healthful, vegetarian, no- or low fat Caribbean drinks. They are all made with organic raw agave and are high in antioxidants.

The three drinks are: The Original B-Tonic, an Irish moss and roots essential vitality drink, with a cinnamon twist; B-Sorrel, the red sorrel revitalizer, known as the other cranberry; and B-Ginger, a ginger and lime refresher.

Bradford is successfully selling these Caribbean drinks in non-Caribbean markets — and is doing it without traditional advertising, marketing and public relations. The upside to this market is vast. There is very little competition.

Bradford promotes its products through in-store demonstrations at which it gives out samples and explain the benefits associated with each drink.

NORTHLAND
PORT WASHINGTON, NY

Northland has introduced Pomegranate Plus — significantly enhancing the proven health benefits of pomegranate juice by adding 10 essential vitamins and minerals.

The new all-natural juice blend offers a major health advantage for those seeking even more nutritional benefits in their juice — and is a major "plus" when it comes to an easy way to gain the protective health benefits of pomegranates, with added vitamins and minerals.

Pomegranate Plus, available in Pomegranate Blueberry and Pomegranate Cherry, is sold in 64-ounce bottles. In addition to the high level of antioxidants, Pomegranate Plus has been fortified with vitamins C, B3, B5, B6 and B12 as well as calcium, iron, biotin, magnesium and zinc — and contains no added sugars or sweeteners. Pomegranate Blueberry and Pomegranate Cherry also contain the natural antioxidants found in blueberries and cherries respectively — making both flavors a delicious, highly nutritious all-natural fruit juice choice. "With so much evidence pointing toward the advantages of pomegranate juice, we wanted to give health-conscious consumers even more reasons to incorporate pomegranate juice as part of a healthful diet," says Brad Angevine, vice president of marketing. "By fortifying Pomegranate Plus with these key 10 vitamins, consumers can

In Memoriam

Anthony Freni, beloved member of the State Garden, Inc./Olivia's Organics family, passed away on April 12th at the age of 55. Anthony worked in the Produce Industry in New England for over 35 years beginning in his mid teens at the Haymarket Market Place in Boston for approximately 10 years. He worked in his father's brokerage business (A.J. Freni Brokerage) after spending 6 years in the Army National Guard until the late 1990's. He later worked for Hall & Cole in the New England Produce Center until he joined State Garden in 2002 where he remained until his untimely passing.

Anthony will be deeply missed by all of us.

Reader Service # 123

get more nutritional benefit from every serving of what is quickly becoming known as the most healthful fruit juice on the market."

Pomegranate Plus will be available in grocery stores, club stores and health food stores nationwide at a suggested retail price of $3.50 to $4.50.

ORCHID ISLAND JUICE COMPANY FT. PIERCE, FL

Orchid Island is nestled on the shores of the beautiful Indian River, whose growing district is famous for growing the finest citrus in the world. Founder and CEO, Marygrace Sexton, has established Orchid Island Juice Company as a benchmark of the fresh-squeezed juice industry and is committed to the highest quality juice, uncompromising service and attention to detail.

Orchid Island is known for its award winning orange and grapefruit juices. Its fresh-squeezed citrus juices dominate the fresh juice sector. The Gourmet Pasteurized line of squeezed fresh products was recently established for customers who prefer an extended shelf life. This juice has the same live enzymatic activity, nutritional value and flavor as Orchid Island's fresh squeezed juice but with a 26-day shelf life.

The company also offers lemon juice, lime juice, organic orange juice, tangerine juice and seasonal lemonades and limeade. All Florida citrus all year long.

PACIFIC ORGANIC PRODUCE/ PURITY.ORGANIC SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Pacific Organic Produce/ Purity.Organic provides a full line of organic juice drinks for sale in the produce department year-round.

Enjoy the high volume of a grab-and-go drink in your produce section with Purity.Organic's five juices and four functional fruit waters, now available at Safeway, based in Pleasanton, CA, and Raley's, based in Sacramento, CA.

The Purity.Organic juice line includes: Lemonade, Cranberry Harmony, Citrus Passion, Strawberry Paradise and Apple. Puri-

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ty.Organic functional fruit water flavors include: Pomegranate Raspberry (Healthy Energy); Orange Mango (Restore); Pomegranate Blueberry (Memory); Acerola Cherry (Immune).

POM WONDERFUL LOS ANGELES, CA

POM Wonderful, the largest producer of California Wonderful pomegranates, juices its fresh pomegranates to make its delicious, all-natural, POM Wonderful Pomegranate Juice. Through its proprietary juicing technology, POM Wonderful is the only company able to extract the full benefits of polyphenol antioxidants and guarantee its juice is 100 percent authentic pomegranate juice derived from its California-grown Wonderful variety of pomegranate.

POM Wonderful 100% Pomegranate Juice is the only pomegranate juice backed by $23 million in medical research. Over the last decade, 10 medical research studies have been published in peer-reviewed journals documenting the beneficial effects of POM Wonderful 100% Pomegranate Juice on human health, particularly in regards to heart disease, prostate cancer and erectile dysfunction. A recent study, published in the *Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry*, showed that POM Wonderful 100% Pomegranate Juice had the greatest range of free-radical fighting ability over several healthful beverages including red wine, concord grape, açai and blueberry juices. The antioxidant potency composite index was at least 20 percent greater than any other beverage included in the study. To determine overall antioxidant content and functionality, each of the polyphenol-rich beverages included in the study were run against seven tests, making it the most comprehensive test of its kind.

PURELY JUICE, INC. NEWPORT BEACH, CA

Purely Juice, which has successfully launched a full line of all natural pomegranate-based juices, has announced the exciting introduction of its new 100 percent certified organic juice line. These two new organic juice flavors are Totally Tropical with Goji and Berry Xtreme with Açai. These new, great-tasting flavors are available in 16- and 32-ounce bottles. Purely Juice's organic products are made with certified organic ingredients and carry the USDA Organic and QAI certification seals.

SAMBAZON SAN CLEMENTE, CA

Sambazon is the global market leader in açaí — a delicious and powerfully nutritious purple berry from the Amazon Rainforest. Sambazon's product portfolio includes six fresh organic açaí beverages that have a delicious, exotic berry taste and are packed with powerful antioxidants, omega 3-6-9, phytonutrients, protein and fiber.

Sambazon juices include Original Blend (açaí lightly sweetened with agave), Antioxidant Trinity (açaí with blueberry and pomegranate) and Rio Energy (açaí boosted with guaraná and yerba mate). Smoothies feature Strawberry Samba (açaí and strawberry blend), Supergreens Revolution (açaí with Amazing Grass supergreens) and Mango Uprising (açaí and mango blend). All products, available in a 10.5-ounce size with a suggested retail price of $2.99, are available at major retailers across America.

Earlier this year, Sambazon was named a top Breakout Brand by Beverage World, and in 2007 Sambazon's Original Açaí juice was named Best New Product, Non-Carbonated Beverage by a leading trade publication, Beverage Spectrum/Bev Net.

Sambazon is recognized in the industry as a green business leader with a mission of promoting organic foods, sustainable agriculture, fair trade and a healthful, active lifestyle. Sambazon continues to support its grocery accounts with ongoing in-store demos, regional events and local market press outreach.

SMART JUICES, LLC BETHLEHEM, PA

All Smart Juices are USDA NOP Certified Organic. They are always 100 percent juice. No additives, preservatives or fillers are ever used. No sugar is ever added.

Smart Juices partners with the growers of the organic fruit it uses to squeeze its juice, so the quality is always high and the supply chain is always full. Product is readily available in its East or West Coast warehouses. Smart Juices believes the quality of the fruit used in its juice is superior to those of its competitors and the juice flavor and colors are bright and appealing.

Smart Juices is the largest grower/suppliers of organic pomegranate worldwide. It also offers a complete line of other organic juices that go along side its signature pomegranate and pomegranate juice blends. The manufacturer suggested retail price (MSRP) of its Organic Pomegranate Juice is 20 percent lower than the MSRP of the leading conventional (non-organic) competitor. As the grower, bottler and wholesaler, Smart Juices' pricing is very competitive.

The company offers in-store merchandising racks and promotional programs on a regular and consistent basis to stimulate sales throughout the year. The product is kosher and bottled in a HACCP-approved facility. Smart Juices is fully insured and all of products are coded with complete tracking capabilities.

The company can private label with minimum runs of 5,000 cases in PET and 2000 cases in glass.

UNCLE MATT'S ORGANIC, INC. CLERMONT, FL

Family owned and Florida grown — these are two essential ingredients for making great fresh fruit and juice.

Uncle Matt's is not your average orange juice company. And they're glad they're not. The fourth generation citrus family's philosophy rests on building a healthy soil, which in turn builds a healthy tree and great tasting fruit and juice. When you buy its products, you're not only supporting Uncle Matt's, you're also helping more than 15 other small growers that make up our family of farms.

Uncle Matt's orange juice is a delicious blend of Hamlin and Valencia oranges. Its citrus is USDA certified organic, grown without the help of synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. Uncle Matt's is flash pasteurized, 100 percent not-from-concentrate orange juice and has no added peel oil or flavors. Your customers will love the fresh-squeezed taste reminiscent of a roadside stand.

Choose from with pulp, pulp free and calcium plus vitamin D. **pb**

WAL-MART PRICING STUDY ROUND XVII

In LA, Wal-Mart Out-Prices Fresh & Easy And Others

In the first-round battle between Wal-Mart and Tesco on U.S. soil, the battle goes to the home team — and by a substantial margin.

BY JIM PREVOR

Einstein said, "Things should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler." And now, in the 17th iteration of our Wal-Mart Pricing Reports, we have discovered a simple answer to a complex question. For this month, we expand our pricing study to Los Angeles, and we include for the first time in our analysis a store from the U.S. division of Tesco, Fresh & Easy.

Tesco and Wal-Mart battle in markets around the globe, including in the United Kingdom, Tesco's home base where Wal-Mart operates under the ASDA banner.

Although ASDA is one of Wal-Mart's more successful overseas acquisitions, Tesco has continued to grow and gain market share

How They Stack Up Against Wal-Mart Supercenter*

Region	Store	% over Wal-Mart	Store	% over Wal-Mart	Store	% over Wal-Mart
Connecticut	Super Stop & Shop	23%	Shaws	34%	Big Y	36%
Salt Lake City	Harmon's	2%	Smith's	6%	Albertson's	12%
South Florida	Super Target	22%	Publix	31%	Winn-Dixie	52%
Dallas, Texas	Albertson's	23%	Brookshires	7%	Kroger	19%
	Neighborhood Market	–1.2%	Tom Thumb	27%		
Portland, OR	Albertson's	30%	Fred Meyer	22%	Haggen	27%
	Safeway	37%				
Phoenix, AZ	Albertson's	22%	Bashas'	25%	Fry's	15%
	Safeway	17%				
Palm Springs, CA	Albertson's	19%	Jensen's	60%	Ralphs	16%
	Vons	20%				
Detroit, MI	A&P Food Basic	–17%	Farmer Jack	24%	Kroger	28%
	Meijer	3%				
St. Louis, MO	Dierbergs	22%	Schnucks	14%		
Houston, TX	HEB	15%	Kroger	30%	Fiesta Mart	–0.3%
Atlanta, GA	Harry's	18%	Ingles	16%	Kroger	25%
	Publix	13%	Target	3%		
Denver, CO	Albertsons	16%	King Sooper	21%	Safeway	25%
Portland, OR	Albertsons	32%	Fred Meyer	21%	QFC	54%
	Safeway	30%				
Los Angeles, CA	Fresh & Easy	15%	Stater Bros.	8%	Ralphs	25%
	Vons	14%				

**Editor's Note: The version of the* PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report *that was published in the January 2008, issue, covered stores in the Sacramento, CA, market. We have discovered a data collection and computational error that made the prices published incorrect. As such, please disregard this edition of the report. We will be returning to the market shortly to publish a new, up-to-date and accurate price comparison for this market.*

during the period that Wal-Mart has owned ASDA.

Many wonder if Tesco will similarly outperform Wal-Mart on its home turf.

Now that the results of this month's *PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report* are in, we can say that if Tesco does beat out Wal-Mart, it won't be based on price or assortment in the produce department.

In this chapter of the *PRODUCE BUSINESS Wal-Mart Pricing Report*, we elected to study a cluster of stores around the Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market store in Arcadia, CA, a suburb of Los Angeles with an upscale demographic. Though Wal-Mart's Supercenter is generally the nucleus of our studies, this time we used Fresh & Easy's more limited assortment as the base for the market basket we studied in Los Angeles, CA.

In addition to the Fresh & Easy in Arcadia, we also included:

- A Vons, which is the Safeway banner in the area, in Glendora, also an upscale demographic
- A Wal-Mart Supercenter in Rosemead, an area skewing Hispanic
- A Ralphs, which is the Kroger division in the area, also in Arcadia, just across the street from the Fresh & Easy
- A Stater Bros. store in Azusa — a middle-income demographic area

The methodology we used for this study was simple. We went to Fresh & Easy and priced the fresh produce items it had on display. Our market basket included one of whatever item was for sale. We used the package size Fresh & Easy sold as our base.

We then priced the identical items in the other stores.

As Fresh & Easy very often sells product in a fixed package of, say, a set number of apples — whereas the American-owned chains tended to sell by the pound — we then made adjustments to equalize quantity.

If Tesco does beat out Wal-Mart, it won't be based on price or assortment in the produce department.

For the purpose of this study, we excluded any ancillary items such as salad dressings or dips, soy products, juices, etc. Although we included value-added items, such as fresh-cut iceberg lettuce and romaine hearts, we did not include most value-added items because Fresh & Easy generally sells proprietary private label blends, which makes it difficult to compare to the branded value-added items.

We also excluded from the comparison any items that were not common in all the

Wal-Mart Supercenter vs 4 Chains
APRIL

Produce Item	Wal-Mart Supercenter	F&E	% Over Wal-Mart	Stater Bros.	% Over Wal-Mart	Ralphs	% Over Wal-Mart	Vons	% Over Wal-Mart
Apples-Fuji - 4 count	$1.77	$1.95	10.17%	$1.96	10.73%	$2.40	35.59%	$2.16	22.03%
Apples-Gala - 4 count	$1.70	$1.95	14.71%	$1.30	-23.53%	$3.75	120.59%	$3.90	129.41%
Apples-Granny Smith - 10 count	$3.49	$3.90	11.75%	$3.47	-0.57%	$4.30	23.21%	$3.47	-0.57%
Apples-Pink Lady - 4 count	$2.80	$4.11	46.79%	$2.45	-12.50%	$2.75	-1.79%	$2.75	-1.79%
Apples-Red Delicious - 10 count	$2.49	$3.90	56.63%	$4.40	76.71%	$4.00	60.64%	$4.00	60.64%
Artichoke	$1.50	$3.15	110.00%	$1.99	32.67%	$1.40	-6.67%	$2.98	98.67%
Asparagus	$1.79	$3.66	104.47%	$0.57	-68.16%	$1.69	-5.59%	$1.12	-37.43%
Avocados	$2.72	$3.27	20.22%	$3.96	45.59%	$2.40	-11.76%	$3.70	36.03%
Bananas-each	$0.19	$0.18	-5.26%	$0.24	26.32%	$0.33	73.68%	$0.26	36.84%
Bean sprouts	$0.79	$2.09	164.56%	$0.59	-25.32%	$0.79	0.00%	$0.75	-5.06%
Blueberry	$2.99	$3.07	2.68%	$4.07	36.12%	$1.44	-51.84%	$4.09	36.79%
Broccoli crowns	$0.60	$1.58	163.33%	$0.24	-60.00%	$0.60	0.00%	$0.75	25.00%
Cabbage-green	$1.90	$1.68	-11.58%	$0.90	-52.63%	$1.60	-15.79%	$1.30	-31.58%
Cabbage-red	$1.63	$1.51	-7.36%	$1.65	1.23%	$1.40	-14.11%	$1.50	-7.98%
Cantaloupe	$2.38	$2.48	4.20%	$1.90	-20.17%	$2.00	-15.97%	$1.50	-36.97%
Carrots Baby-Organic-1#	$1.58	$1.38	-12.66%	$1.69	6.96%	$1.99	25.95%	$1.49	-5.70%
Carrots-Regular Organic - 16 oz.	$0.79	$1.03	30.38%	$0.99	25.32%	$0.98	24.05%	$0.99	25.32%
Cauliflower-each	$2.64	$2.48	-6.06%	$2.99	13.26%	$5.05	91.29%	$3.60	36.36%
Cilantro	$0.25	$0.99	296.00%	$0.89	256.00%	$0.69	176.00%	$0.59	136.00%
Celery	$1.38	$1.38	0.00%	$1.19	-13.77%	$1.19	-13.77%	$1.20	-13.04%
Clementines	$5.59	$5.99	7.16%	$4.79	-14.31%	$7.19	28.62%	$7.99	42.93%
Cucumbers	$1.76	$1.55	-11.93%	$1.98	12.50%	$2.00	13.64%	$1.58	-10.23%
Cucumbers-Hot House	$1.88	$1.98	5.32%	$1.99	5.85%	$1.99	5.85%	$1.99	5.85%
Eggplant	$1.99	$1.66	-16.58%	$1.50	-24.62%	$2.52	26.63%	$1.70	-14.57%
Grapefruit-Texas - 3-pack	$1.80	$2.19	21.67%	$1.90	5.56%	$2.20	22.22%	$1.47	-18.33%
Grapes-Green Seedless	$1.78	$2.38	33.71%	$2.99	67.98%	$2.99	67.98%	$2.99	67.98%
Grapes-Red Seedless	$1.78	$2.38	33.71%	$1.50	-15.73%	$2.99	67.98%	$2.99	67.98%
Green beans	$1.49	$2.99	100.67%	$2.99	100.67%	$2.99	100.67%	$1.49	0.00%
Green leaf	$1.48	$1.49	0.68%	$1.49	0.68%	$1.79	20.95%	$1.49	0.68%
Green Onions	$0.99	$1.05	6.06%	$1.17	18.18%	$0.99	0.00%	$0.99	0.00%
Herbs-Organic	$2.96	$1.98	-33.11%	$1.99	-32.77%	$1.99	-32.77%	$1.99	-32.77%
Honeydew	$3.99	$3.28	-17.79%	$4.00	0.25%	$3.99	0.00%	$4.00	0.25%
Iceberg-each	$1.38	$0.99	-28.26%	$1.59	15.22%	$1.00	-27.54%	$1.49	7.97%
Iceberg-Value Added	$1.12	$3.03	170.54%	$1.79	59.82%	$1.99	77.68%	$1.99	77.68%
Jicama	$0.59	$0.60	1.69%	$0.79	33.90%	$0.99	67.80%	$0.69	16.95%
Lemons	$3.54	$3.37	-4.80%	$3.90	10.17%	$4.34	22.60%	$3.14	-11.30%
Limes	$1.50	$1.98	32.00%	$3.00	100.00%	$3.00	100.00%	$3.00	100.00%
Limes-Key	$2.49	$1.28	-48.59%	$2.99	20.08%	$3.99	60.24%	$1.99	-20.08%
Mango - 2 pack	$1.26	$2.45	94.44%	$2.00	58.73%	$2.00	58.73%	$1.98	57.14%
Mushrooms-Brown - 8 oz	$2.78	$2.49	-10.43%	$2.29	-17.63%	$2.99	7.55%	$2.69	-3.24%

stores surveyed. Some of the American chains, for example, weren't carrying late-season Chilean tree fruit, so that item is not included in the numbers.

We also did not include any coupons, whether provided by the product marketer or the store. Presumably on a promotional basis, as part of its launch Fresh & Easy has been giving out its own coupon for $5 off of a $20 purchase excluding alcohol and dairy products. Fresh & Easy does not accept manufacturers' coupons.

In the end, we wound up with a diversified market basket of 85 items on which we thought a reasonable comparison could be made. Of course, no comparison is perfect. In general, Fresh & Easy stocks smaller sizes than its Los Angeles competitors — its apples, pears, melons, onions, tomatoes on the vine, peppers, potatoes, pineapple and bananas were consistently sold in smaller sizes.

The bananas Fresh & Easy sold were smaller sized Bonita brand bananas as opposed to the Chiquita and Del Monte brands sold in the other stores. These smaller bananas typically bring lower prices on the wholesale market.

Also Fresh & Easy produce is typically sold under its own brand, so popular brands, such as Dole, Chiquita, Del Monte, Sunkist, Driscoll's and others that often bring a premium at FOB or on the wholesale market are not available at Fresh &

Price Comparison — Los Angeles, California 2008

Produce Item	Wal-Mart Supercenter	F&E	% Over Wal-Mart	Stater Bros.	% Over Wal-Mart	Ralphs	% Over Wal-Mart	Vons	% Over Wal-Mart
Mushrooms-Portobello - 2 pack	$2.99	$2.79	-6.69%	$3.99	33.44%	$3.99	33.44%	$3.99	33.44%
Mushrooms-sliced - 8 oz	$1.98	$1.76	-11.11%	$2.19	10.61%	$2.99	51.01%	$2.99	51.01%
Mushrooms-whole - 8 oz	$1.88	$1.47	-21.81%	$2.69	43.09%	$2.99	59.04%	$2.99	59.04%
Onions-Red - 3 count	$2.62	$2.53	-3.44%	$3.80	45.04%	$3.20	22.14%	$3.82	45.80%
Onions-White - 3#	$2.62	$2.99	14.12%	$2.72	3.82%	$3.75	43.13%	$2.70	3.05%
Onions-Yellow - 4 count	$2.58	$1.78	-31.01%	$2.16	-16.28%	$2.97	15.12%	$2.14	-17.05%
Oranges-Navel - 5 count	$2.10	$3.17	50.95%	$2.20	4.76%	$2.50	19.05%	$2.40	14.29%
Papaya	$2.99	$2.96	-1.00%	$2.91	-2.68%	$3.99	33.44%	$2.99	0.00%
Parsley	$0.99	$1.98	100.00%	$0.79	-20.20%	$0.69	-30.30%	$0.69	-30.30%
Pears-Anjou - 4 count	$2.92	$2.00	-31.51%	$2.80	-4.11%	$2.70	-7.53%	$2.70	-7.53%
Pears-Bosc - 4 count	$3.20	$2.00	-37.50%	$3.00	-6.25%	$3.30	3.12%	$3.00	-6.25%
Peppers-Anaheim - 2 pk	$0.40	$0.99	147.50%	$0.77	92.50%	$0.88	120.00%	$0.45	12.50%
Peppers-Green	$0.65	$1.98	204.62%	$2.97	356.92%	$5.97	818.46%	$4.50	592.31%
Peppers-Jalapeño - 1#	$1.49	$1.57	5.37%	$1.99	33.56%	$2.99	100.67%	$1.99	33.56%
Peppers-Jalapeño - 16 oz	$1.29	$2.15	66.67%	$1.99	54.26%	$1.99	54.26%	$1.99	54.26%
Peppers-Poblano - 4 pk	$2.00	$2.15	7.50%	$2.20	10.00%	$2.80	40.00%	$2.20	10.00%
Peppers-Red	$3.00	$2.80	-6.67%	$1.20	-60.00%	$1.46	-51.33%	$2.00	-33.33%
Peppers-Serrano - 8 oz	$0.75	$1.25	66.67%	$0.98	30.67%	$1.48	97.33%	$0.98	30.67%
Pineapple	$2.97	$2.99	0.67%	$3.00	1.01%	$4.50	51.52%	$2.99	0.67%
Potatoes-Red - 3#	$1.49	$2.39	60.40%	$1.79	20.13%	$2.40	61.07%	$1.79	20.13%
Potatoes-Russet - 2 pack	$1.24	$1.62	30.65%	$1.20	-3.23%	$1.00	-19.35%	$0.44	-64.52%
Potatoes-Russet - 5# bag	$2.47	$2.92	18.22%	$2.99	21.05%	$2.99	21.05%	$2.99	21.05%
Potatoes-White - 1.5 #	$1.94	$1.78	-8.25%	$1.98	2.06%	$1.98	2.06%	$1.98	2.06%
Radishes	$1.68	$1.66	-1.19%	$0.88	-47.62%	$1.80	7.14%	$0.74	-55.95%
Red leaf	$1.48	$1.49	0.68%	$1.49	0.68%	$1.59	7.43%	$1.49	0.68%
Romaine	$1.58	$1.49	-5.70%	$1.59	0.63%	$1.59	0.63%	$1.49	-5.70%
Romaine Hearts	$1.53	$1.88	22.88%	$1.67	9.15%	$1.99	30.07%	$1.99	30.07%
Squash-Italian	$1.06	$2.09	97.17%	$0.91	-14.15%	$2.24	111.32%	$1.50	41.51%
Squash-Yellow	$1.00	$1.42	42.00%	$0.94	-6.00%	$1.56	56.00%	$0.80	-20.00%
Strawberry	$1.99	$2.49	25.13%	$1.99	0.00%	$1.25	-37.19%	$2.99	50.25%
Tomatillo - 32 oz	$1.98	$2.66	34.34%	$2.99	51.01%	$3.98	101.01%	$1.99	0.51%
Tomatoes	$1.49	$1.97	32.21%	$1.99	33.56%	$1.89	26.85%	$1.99	33.56%
Tomatoes on the Vine	$2.81	$3.53	25.62%	$2.99	6.41%	$0.80	-71.53%	$3.10	10.32%
Tomatoes-Extra Large	$3.09	$2.98	-3.40%	$2.70	-12.48%	$3.40	10.21%	$1.00	-67.59%
Tomatoes-Roma	$1.02	$1.98	94.12%	$1.98	94.12%	$2.10	105.88%	$2.10	105.88%
Tomatoes-Grape	$3.52	$2.45	-30.40%	$3.99	13.35%	$6.39	81.53%	$5.90	67.61%
Watercress	$3.14	$3.14	0.00%	$0.69	-78.03%	$0.69	-78.03%	$0.69	-78.03%
Yams - 2 pack	$0.68	$2.99	339.71%	$0.66	-2.94%	$0.59	-13.24%	$0.56	-17.65%
TOTAL MARKET BASKET	**$152.14**	**$175.09**	**15.09%**	**$163.85**	**7.70%**	**$190.05**	**24.92%**	**$172.78**	**13.57%**

Easy but are often sold at its American competitors.

THE FRESH & EASY DISCONNECT

Now with smaller sizes and no top-line brands, one might expect Fresh & Easy to easily under-price the market, and the company has made clear that the design and organization of its stores is focused on providing good prices. Here are a couple of quotes Fresh & Easy has made available regarding its focus on low prices:

"We've kept Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market simple to make it easy for our customers and to keep our prices low for everyone. Our stores are 10,000 square feet, much smaller than a typical supermarket, with easy-to-shop aisles for a quick and easy shopping experience. And by carefully selecting our assortment of products, we simplify our operation and reduce our costs, which mean lower prices for customers."

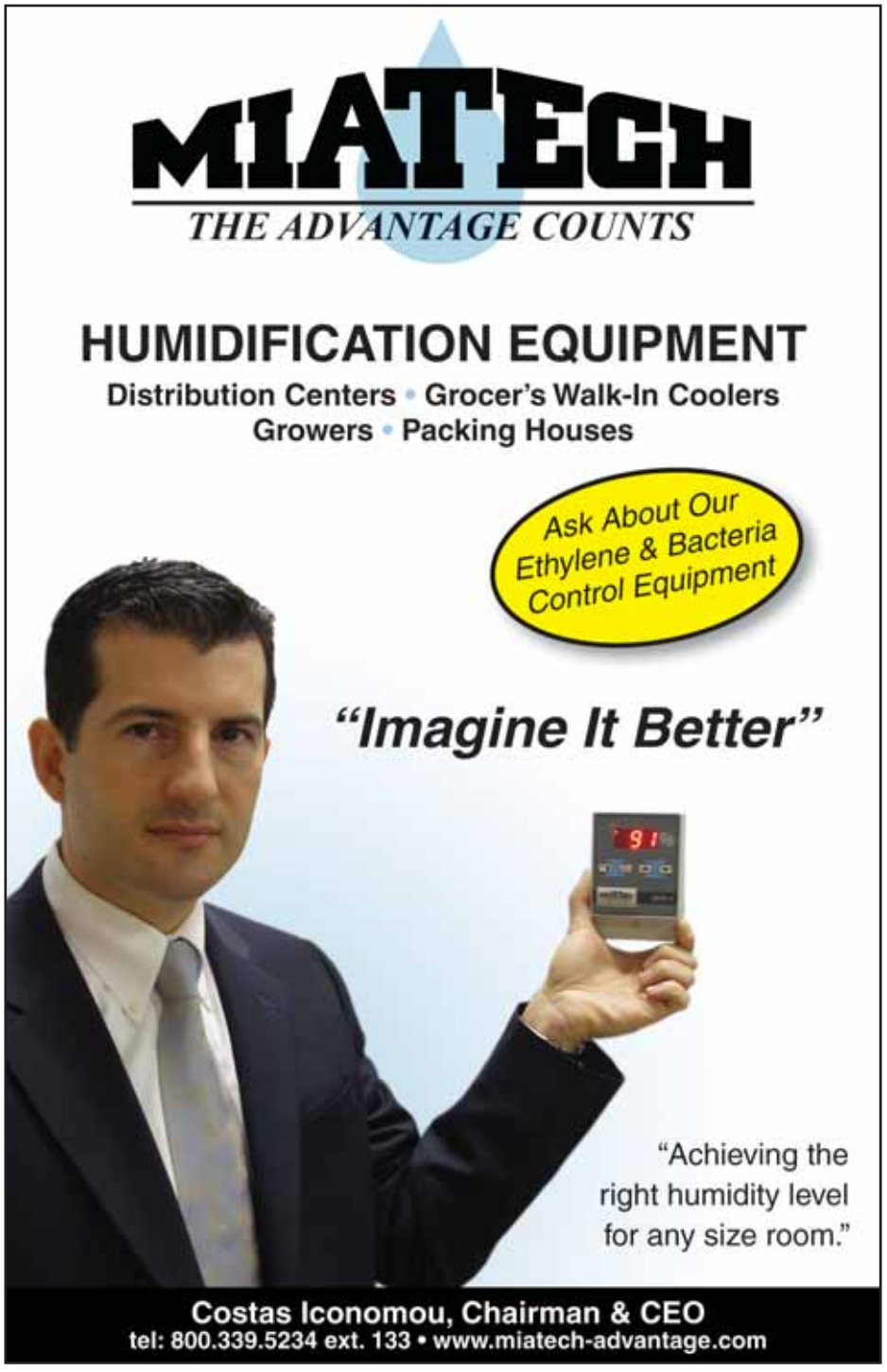
— Bryan Pugh
Chief Operations Officer

"There's no need for product coupons or loyalty cards; our prices are low everyday for everyone."

— John Burry
Chief Commercial Officer

Yet, despite this focus on providing everyday low prices, we found that, aside

Los Angeles Area Retailer Produce SKU Count Comparison					
SKU Item	**Wal-Mart**	**F&E**	**Staters**	**Ralphs**	**Vons**
Dry/Tables	85	55	90	95	147
Wet Rack	87	57	169	191	199
Value Added Vegetables	38	11	40	33	44
Value Added Salads	37	17	74	56	58
Value Added Cut Fruit	22	15	26	54	48
Dressings/Dips	37	19	60	55	68
Soy Products	38	18	22	24	36
Juices	6	23	33	89	88
Dry Items/Dried Fruits/Nuts/etc	129	0	141	180	254
TOTAL	**479**	**215**	**655**	**777**	**942**



Reader Service # 85

from Ralphs, which — coming in at almost 25 percent over Wal-Mart — proved it deserves its reputation for being pricey, Fresh & Easy was the most expensive store of those surveyed, with produce prices 15.09 percent over Wal-Mart.

Tesco's Fresh & Easy was beaten cold by Stater Bros. This regional chain was the only local retailer within striking distance of Wal-Mart, coming in at 7.7 percent over Wal-Mart's pricing.

Vons came it a 13.57 percent over Wal-Mart's pricing.

Wal-Mart remains the undisputed king of low prices in this market.

If Tesco's Fresh & Easy won't win the battle on grounds of price, what about variety? There Fresh & Easy performs even worse, coming in dead last among the surveyed stores.

Whereas Vons titillates with almost a thousand SKUs in produce, Fresh & Easy presents less than half the SKUs that Wal-Mart offers the public. Part of this is because Fresh & Easy sells no nuts or dried fruit in produce. Even excluding this category, Fresh & Easy still offers less assortment than even Wal-Mart, and it is crushed by the supermarkets.

The small-footprint store may appeal to certain consumers. But Tesco's focus on driving costs out of the system by avoiding loyalty cards, reducing assortment and not accepting manufacturer's coupons has not served to make it a "Wal-Mart beater" price-wise.

So in the first-round battle between Wal-Mart and Tesco on U.S. soil, the battle goes to the home team — and by a substantial margin. Will Tesco react? Is it serious about providing a price-point competitive with Wal-Mart? Look for future editions of the *Produce Business Wal-Mart Pricing Report* to find out. **pb**

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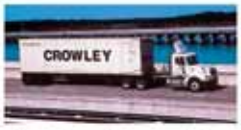

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Reader Service # 103

Eight Ways To Sell More Mangos

Mangos rate as one of the top tropical fruits in the produce department.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Data from the Perishables Group, W. Dundee, IL, as provided by the Orlando, FL-based National Mango Board (NMB), indicate mangos are the driver of the specialty fruit category, making up 36.4 percent of sales in 2007. The data also says mango sales per store per week grew from $109 to $132 from 2005 to 2007.

According to Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for King's Super Markets Inc., a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ, "Mangos are very popular with our customers, extremely mainstream."

Maintaining well-stocked, year-round displays with a choice of several mango varieties lets consumers know they can enjoy this delicious fruit at any time.

1. MOVE MAINSTREAM

Mangos are fast becoming a mainstream commodity, says Ken Nabal, sales manager at Frontera Imports, Boca Raton, FL, a division of Frontera Produce LLC, based in Edinburg, TX. "They're even a staple in some retail sectors with heavy Hispanic customer trade. U.S. consumption has almost tripled since 1990 and continues to trend up."

"We continue to see increases in the volume of mango shipments into the U.S. from Mexico, Central and South America," adds Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer at Ciruli Bros., Nogales, AZ.

According to the NMB report, *Three-Year Trends for U.S. Mango Imports by Country and by Month, 2004-2006*, mango imports topped 625.4 million pounds in 2007, up 9 percent from 2005.

To keep sales trending upwards, says Ciruli, "We need consumers who buy mangos regularly — Hispanics and Asians — to buy more and also to entice new consumers to the category. The real growth opportunity, I believe, is in new consumers."

Research by NMB verifies this opportunity. According to results of its *Mango Attitude & Usage Survey*, conducted by Jeffrey B. Gross Marketing Research, Carnelian Bay, CA, and published in November 2007, 67 percent of consumers in a 454-household survey said they had eaten a mango in a restaurant or purchased at retail and consumed at home. However, only 35 percent of respondents stated they had purchased a mango in the last six months.

"The percentage of mango eaters — 67 percent — is nearly double the percentage of current mango purchasers — 35 percent," notes Wendy McManus, NMB director of marketing. "This represents a huge opportunity for future fresh mango movement."

2. OFFER YEAR-ROUND

Mangos hold annual shelf space at Rice Epicurean Markets, an upscale 8-store chain based in Houston, TX, according to Mark Luchak, director of produce and floral. "We stock them 12 months."

Year-round availability helps mangos move mainstream, says Nabal.

Ciruli points out, however, "The supply isn't all from one country or one shipper, and there are some small gaps. One of the last gaps to bridge is in September and October. Mexico is winding up at that time and Brazil is just coming into the market. In recent years, we're seeing more plantings out of northern Mexico to extend its season, Brazil coming in earlier and some production starting in mid-August out of California to fill in this period."

Indeed, according to NMB's *Three-Year Trends* report, the lowest single month for imports in 2007 was October, with the fourth quarter representing only 15 percent of annual imports. Conversely, imports peaked in June, with the second quarter representing 38 percent of the annual total. Mean-

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Reader Service # 113

while, mango imports represented 20 percent of the year's total in the first quarter and 28 percent in the third quarter.

Six countries represent 98 percent of U.S. mango imports, with Mexico by far the leader at 61 percent of the total in 2007, according to NMB. Following Mexico, and in descending order are Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Guatemala and Haiti.

Six countries represent 98 percent of U.S. mango imports, with Mexico by far the leader at 61 percent of the total in 2007... Following Mexico, and in descending order are Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Guatemala and Haiti.

Interestingly, according the NMB's *Usage Survey*, respondents were in strongest agreement with the sentence, "Mangos are not available all year-round where I usually buy fruit." This represents a significant retail opportunity.

The study also revealed that over 90 percent of current purchasers bought mangos in the spring and summer months. Just 55 percent of current purchasers bought mangos during fall and winter.

"Both the likelihood of purchase and the frequency of serving mangos drops significantly in the fall and winter months," states NMB's McManus. "With good quality mangos available from South America during these months, and with increased familiarity, fall and winter present unique opportunities to stock and promote mangos."

3. EXPAND MANGO OFFERINGS

"Typically we carry one variety of mango. However, when more than one variety is available, we'll carry a red-skinned and yellow-skinned," explains Rice Epicurean's Luchak.

King's Kneeland adds, "We regularly stock the yellow-skinned or Ataulfo and the

Mangos From India

India is the largest grower of mangos in the world, yet, U.S. consumers had to wait 18 years before Indian exporters could obtain U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) permission to ship fruit into this country. This green light hinged on Indian fruit being treated with low doses of irradiation to kill pests. Final approvals were issued on April 26, 2007, and the first shipments of Indian mangos arrived by air to New York City the following day.

Photos cutesy of Melissa's/World Variety Produce

For three years, Dr. Bhaskar Savani, owner of Savani Farms in Chalfont, PA, and a dentist whose family farms mangos in India, lobbied U.S. officials to allow the importation of Indian mangos. "We decided to bring in the most popular varieties of mangos, the Alphonso and Kesar — what Indians call the king and queen of mangos," he explains.

The Kesar has gold colored skin with green overtones, a relatively small size and unique sweet taste. The Alphonso has bright yellow skin with a pink blush and average 10-ounce size. The flavor is intensely sweet with a rich sweet aroma.

Savani is considering importing other varieties such as Baganpalli, Dashheri, Langra and Chausa if there is demand.

Last year, he says, "We started mid-season and flew in only 180 to 200 tons. The bottleneck was the capacity of the irradiation plant in India. This season, we have two USDA-certified plants capable of performing the irradiation round-the-clock. We're starting earlier in the season, with the first shipments coming in April and hope to bring in 1,000 tons of mangos.

"We will ship most mangos by air, but we will also experiment with some mangos by boat, maintaining them at 55° F. It's a 17-day voyage from Bombay to Port Elizabeth, NJ," he adds. Last year, the Indian mangos sold for upward of $35 to $40 per box — or higher.

According to Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for Kings Super Markets Inc., based in Parsippany, NJ, "We tried a small amount of the Indian mangos at the end of the season last year and it worked out fine. Our stores are all about variety, especially specialty varieties, so that's what customers know and look for."

The Indian mangos found ready buyers in spite of the high price, says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa's/World Variety Produce, a Los Angeles, CA-based specialty produce marketer that handled Indian mangos last year. "The stores we sold to in the Southwest and Northeast sold out."

However, Schueller continues, "May and June are tough times to promote [Indian] mangos because of the plentiful supplies of Mexican mangos at that time. For example, it's about selling a $4 to $5 Indian mango in a 50¢ market — and that's tough."

Wendy McManus, director of marketing, National Mango Board, Orlando, FL, notes, "Indian mangos represent a great opportunity for particular retailers. Having a customer base that includes folks from that part of the world is a huge factor in the retailer's success. Indians or Pakistanis who have childhood memories of these amazing mangos will pay dearly to have that experience again and to share it with their children."

"I think one of the keys to successfully selling Indian mangos is for the retailer to really build on the hype and media attention surrounding the product," she adds. "Build displays to cradle the fruit and put up signs to tell customers how special this fruit is. Retailers who just display these mangos like a typical produce item and slap a $4 price sign above it won't find as much success." **pb**

As the Hispanic and Asian population continues to grow in the United States, shopping patterns and tastes will surely follow. With this trend in mind, Tavilla Sales Company of Los Angeles is proud to introduce the creation & partnership of Vision Import Group .... combining efforts to take advantage of mutual experience and grower relationships for the ultimate benefit of our customers.

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Reader Service # 58

regular Tommy Atkins. We won't carry the Keitts unless we get a deal on them. They aren't as fast movers."

However, NMB's *Mango Attitude & Usage Survey* indicates most mango purchasers are not aware of varieties.

Rod Diaz, vice president of sales and marketing for Diazteca, headquartered in Rio Rico, AZ, says, "The five most common varieties are the Tommy Atkins and Haden, both because they have a red blush. The Kent and Keitt are green-skinned varieties. The Kent has a high brix, up to 16, and is popular fresh-cut and in overseas markets like Japan, where a high brix is coveted. Consumers need to learn about these different varieties and this will help grow the variety carried at retail, as has happened in the apple category."

Tommy Atkins ships at the highest volume and some retailers love to sell this mango because it ships well and has a deep crimson blush, explains McManus. "However, there are other varieties that might be more satisfying to consumers in terms of flavor and texture. For most retailers, a red mango, which includes Tommy Atkins, Kent and some other lesser-known varieties in a large or small size depending on their customer base, will be the core of their mango program. Depending on availability and the time of year, many retailers can offer their customers a second choice of an Ataulfo, Francine or Keitt. This offering of a second variety will speak volumes to savvy mango customers who understand that these differ-

Mangos 101

There's a 3-fold learning curve when it comes to educating consumers about mangos, says Rod Diaz, vice president of sales and marketing, Diazteca, Rio Rico, AZ. "One is the different varieties, two is how to cut and eat, and three is how to pick a good mango."

The biggest educational challenge, adds Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer at Ciruli Bros., Nogales, AZ, "is that consumers think skin color is the way to pick a ripe and flavorful mango."

According to the *Mango Attitude & Usage Survey* from the Orlando, FL-based National Mango Board (NMB), between 37 and 48 percent of current purchasers determine the ripeness of a mango from its outside color.

Wendy McManus, NMB director of marketing, notes, "Consumers buy with their eyes, which is why the Tommy Atkins has become the dominant variety in mangos. The reality is that color has almost nothing to do with quality or ripeness. With some varieties, color can be a ripeness indicator, but the red color consumers crave is not the right signal. Our point-of-sale header card, *Don't Judge A Mango By Its Color*, explains how to select a mango by squeezing gently."

Educating consumers is a long and arduous process, she adds. "It takes a retailer willing to communicate the information in as many formats as possible — Web, store circulars, ads, POS information and taste demos."

To this end, NMB offers monetary allocations to fund incremental promotional activities. "We have a heavy emphasis on demo events for these promotional funds and we look for non-mango partners to help extend the number of demo events we can afford," McManus says. "We're in the process of identifying demo-friendly and ad-friendly recipes that retailers can use to promote mangos at different times of the year." **pb**

Reader Service # 127

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Reader Service # 22

ent varieties are something unique and different. In terms of sizes, very few retailers can support multiple sizes within the same color for mangos, but those who do tend to perform extremely well in the category."

Some retailers have added fresh-cut mangos to their offerings. According to Perishables Group data as provided by the NMB, sales of cut mangos are growing faster than other cut fruit items. In 2007, total cut fruit sales grew 6.5 percent while cut mango sales grew 19.3 percent over the year prior.

4. CONSIDER ORGANIC

Sales of organic produce continue to grow and mangos are no exception.

"There's demand by both retail chains and customers," according to Ciruli of Ciruli Bros. "This year will be our first to market organic mangos. Our company's goal over the next five years is to offer 10 to 15 percent of all our mangos from Mexico as organic and to provide organic in all five available varieties."

Beyond Mexico, adds Diazteca's Diaz, "Farmers in South America have experimented with converting a small part of their operation to organic."

According to the *Usage Survey* from NMB, 38 percent of current purchasers are either very or extremely interested in purchasing organic mangos.

5. PRESENT RIPE FRUIT

One of the biggest challenges in mango merchandising, says Frontera's Nabal, "is getting fruit at a ripe stage into the customers shopping basket. Ripe fruit sells."

According to NMB's *Usage Survey*, 63 percent of current mango purchasers would like more of the mangos they purchase to be at the just-ripe stage. "The greatest opportunity to decrease shrink and increase customers' satisfaction seems to be in fine tuning levels of ripeness of mangos available for purchase and educating consumers in how to select a ripe mango," advises McManus. "Rotation is also a factor. Some retailers have done a great job grouping and rotating their avocado displays to keep the ripest fruit together and the least ripe fruit together. We believe this type of approach would work well for mangos."

> **"The greatest opportunity to decrease shrink and increase customers' satisfaction seems to be in fine tuning levels of ripeness of mangos available for purchase and educating consumers in how to select a ripe mango."**
>
> **— Wendy McManus**
> **National Mango Board**

Mary Ostlund, director of marketing for Brooks Tropicals Inc., headquartered in Homestead, FL, agrees and adds, "It has got to the point where customers are becoming aware of ripeness stages in mangos, similar to avocados."

Most retailers like to offer customers ready-to-eat fruit, says Diazteca's Diaz. "That doesn't mean everyone is doing so and no retailer I know of is using their ripening rooms for mangos. Still, it's at the orchard and packing-shed levels where level of ripeness starts. For example, about 15 percent of the mangos out of Mexico are picked and shipped tree-ripe."

Ciruli adds, "Mangos are a tropical fruit and should never be refrigerated or kept cooler than 55° F. Colder temperatures kill both flavor and shelf life."

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New Mango Varieties

Dr. Richard Campbell, senior curator of tropical fruit for Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in Coral Gables, FL, is often asked what the next hot mango variety will be.

"Mangos have been cultivated for thousands of years," he says, "but when it comes to varietal development, we're still very much in our infancy. There's no overarching organized global effort to develop new commercial varieties. There are currently breeding programs in Israel, South Africa and Brazil. There are also private companies who make money by patenting and trademarking their variety. A good example is OneHarvest in Australia, which exclusively markets Calypso mangos."

Breeders at Fairchild are in the final year of evaluating three varieties they will patent, trademark and then license to a grower who shares their philosophy on quality for commercial production and marketing. "We breed for flavor, grower friendly horticulture, disease resistance, a commercially friendly shape for boxing and extreme eating quality for the fresh-cut as well as fresh market."

The parentage of these three new varieties is from either Southeast Asia or those discarded in Florida back in the 1950s in favor of hardier varieties.

"Marketing premium-quality mangos needs to be of a different mindset. That means educating the customer about key attributes, merchandising out of trays rather than bags and promoting on flavor profile rather than price," he says. **pb**

However, adds Larry Nienkerk, partner and general manager at Splendid Products, Burlingame, CA, "Once mangos are ripe, chilling will extend the shelf life."

Diaz advises retailers to "expect to have 2 to 8 percent shrink."

6. CREATE ENTICING DISPLAYS

In summer, mangos are displayed with berries and soft fruit at Rice Epicurean Markets. "In the winter, we'll include them with other tropicals like pineapple. Either way, they get a prominent location," says Luchak.

At King's, mangos make for an eye-catching display. "We'll put a basket of them in the middle of a citrus display as a color break," notes Kneeland

A small basket of rock-hard mangos on the third shelf in the back of the department isn't going to do it, says Nabal. "The bigger the display the more incremental sales you will drive. Typically, mangos get at least a 2-foot-plus section in high-volume stores."

The optimal display, says NMB's McManus, "is different for each retailer, based on how its customers respond to larger mango displays. We have engaged the Perishables Group to handle in-store testing of merchandising practices and develop a best practices guide for retailers. Until that work is done, we recommend that bigger displays will sell more mangos, but we understand that each retailer has to find the right balance considering shrink and profitability of that space."

Consumer information about selection and preparation is also ideally a part of the display. NMB offers one header card that reads *Don't Judge a Mango by Its Color,* and another that depicts how to slice a mango that reads *Mango: Easy As One, Two, Three*.

"Think outside the tomato box and cross-merchandise mangos with other ingredients for salsa-making," Brook's Ostlund adds. "Offer recipe cards with the display as well."

7. PROFFER PACKAGES

Although most mangos are sold bulk, according to McManus, "We are seeing some large clamshell packs in warehouse stores, and retailers are starting to ask about retail clamshells and mesh bags."

Ciruli of Ciruli Bros. notes, "We pack a 6-pack clamshell for a major club store. This gives us a chance to offer consumers recipes on the flip side of the lid. Some of the recipes we've printed have been for mango salsa, mango chutney and a chilled mango soup."

John Campbell-Barmmer, director of marketing for Chestnut Hill Farms, Miami, FL, notes, "Sleeved mangos, three fruit per sleeve, are ideal for selling 12-count mangos. They usually retail for $2.99 per sleeve."

Typically, says Frontera's Nabal, "Mangos are shipped in an 8/9 count-size in a 9-pound carton. Some retailers will sell mangos by the entire carton. For example, Mexican mangos for $4.99 and fruit from Brazil for $7.99 to $8.99."

8. PROMOTE OFTEN

Mangos are advertised and promoted at least once or twice per month year-round at King's, says Kneeland. "The weeks we don't promote them, we'll put them in a prominent area of the department and increase the size of the display."

Nabal believes ideal times to promote mangos "are when each country peaks. That means May, June and July out of Mexico; September to November for Brazil; November and December for Ecuador; January and February for Peru; and April and May out of both Guatemala and Haiti."

This season, NMB will offer retailers a crop forecast. "We work with the mango producer associations in each of the top producing countries to get the information and fold it together into something meaningful to retailers and mango industry members. It's always available and updated on the retailer section of our Web site," says McManus.

"Some stores will carry two sizes of mangos so they can promote at two different price points," relates Barry London, president of London Fruit, Inc., Pharr, TX.

Retailers should not promote mangos solely on price, says Splendid's Nienkerk. "Costs keep going up and the value of the dollar is less against overseas currencies — you can only go so low before a grower goes out of business. It's important for retailers to promote mangos in different ways — say ready-to-eat fruit is available, set up a display by the checkout or offer consumer packs. There' are many ways to get creative."

This summer season, NMB will offer a Cinco de Mayo-themed consumer media program in broadcast, print and online called Cinco de Mango, says McManus. "This will be our first program with our new national spokesperson, Ingrid Hoffman [of the Food Network's *Simply Delicioso*]. We're offering a recipe and POS to retailers to develop their own Cinco de Mango promotion. They can use their promotional allocation to fund demos during that time,because the recipe will be a demo-friendly salsa. The retailers are responding well to the idea that they can have an in-store promotion that mirrors what their shoppers will be seeing in the media.

"We'll have a similar promotion for National Mango Month," she adds. "We're working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to get an approved proclamation to make June National Mango Month. The result will be another multi-media program extended to retail in a very similar manner." **pb**

Merchandising Stone Fruit

Tips on how to effectively promote these sweet delights of summer.

BY SUZANNE SMITHER

Retailers of stone fruit face a dizzying array of choices and a host of challenges marketing their wares effectively and profitably. Produce departments must provide attractive displays that draw consumers and offer the right mix of varieties to keep them coming back. Retailers wrestle constantly with problems posed by space limitations, seasonal availability, storage and shelf life.

Growers, shippers and other innovators, aware of retailers' needs, are branching out to offer solutions for virtually every challenge they face.

Dovey Plain, promotions coordinator, Family Tree Farms Marketing, LLC, based in Reedley, CA, notes, "Remember that what you like could be very different from what your customers like.

"Sweet seems to be the Holy Grail," but she notes, pleasing flavor in stone fruit is "a balancing act between sugar and acid." Sweetness becomes more prominent as the fruit ripens, but "consistency in flavor builds loyalty to a particular store."

"When it comes to peaches, flavor and eating quality are very important to today's consumer," observes Martin Eubanks, director of marketing, South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA), Columbia, SC. "Consumers want sweet flavor." He says they can find it in South Carolina fruit that is "grown in low-acid soils, ripens naturally on the tree and is harvested at a mature, ripe stage.

"There are varieties consumers recognize, but the most important things are the taste and flavor issues," he adds. "A consumer who buys a good eating peach this week is going to go back for more next week."

Dan Spain, vice president of sales and marketing for Kingsburg Orchards, based in Kingsburg, CA, explains consumers are far more concerned with flavor than with the size and appearance of stone fruit. "Flavor is the key. It has to have flavor. If the fruit is small but it has an intense flavor, we can put it in a clamshell and it will sell."

Retailers and consumers often differ on the ideal sweetness level and perfect size for summer's bountiful stone fruits.

"All consumers have their own perception of taste, the way they remember it as a child," observes Sabrina Mak, director of trade marketing, Ballantine Produce Company, based in Sanger, CA. While the most common preference is for fruit that's "juicy with a nice balance of tart and sweet, there's a growing population that likes fruit on the sweeter side," she adds. "That's where low acid comes in. We as an industry could do a better job of educating retailers and consumers about lower-acid stone fruit that has a sweeter profile."

Plain agrees and notes that when choosing between white flesh and yellow flesh, consumers need to know "white flesh does not have the same acid content as yellow so you taste the sugar more." And, she adds, since many consumers prefer white flesh on the crispy side, they need to know that white ripens faster than yellow.

To offer peaches with the best flavor, Eubanks advises retailers to "put them in a room over 50° F and rotate your stock. That fruit will ripen and provide a great eating experience for the consumer."

BIGGER AND REDDER NOT ALWAYS BETTER

When it comes to the ideal size and color of stone fruit, "Consumers and retailers are polar opposites," claims Mak. "Retailers like their fruit huge. It's a procurement mentality — to buy a larger piece of fruit for price value. There's also the American perception that bigger is better." But in focus groups, "Repeatedly the consumers — most of them were mothers — would pick something the size of a tennis ball" rather than the baseball-size fruit the retailer would be more likely to pick.

Retailers and consumers also vary greatly about desirable color, she says. "Retailers like their fruit high-colored in terms of red, with a lot more blush. Consumers like a yellow and red combination, with more yellow." The challenge for retailers, she notes, is "balancing customer preferences with the procurement part of the equation."

"All a red peach says is that it's a red peach," adds Eubanks. Red hue is not really

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a sign of ripeness, he explains. "You want a creamy yellow background color. That's a sign of maturity, more of an indicator than just the big red blush. Consumers tend to buy with their eyes." But he adds, "A big, red, beautiful peach doesn't mean a good eating peach."

"It would be nice if retailers weren't relating flavor to color," offers Kathy Taylor, peach specialist for the University of Georgia, who works at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) fruit and nut tree lab in Byron, GA., "The redder the peach, the better, generally speaking, but, if you get 100 percent red, it's hard to tell if they're ripe." Taylor says 80 percent red is a good color compromise, "appealing in the marketplace but still workable for the grower."

However, since color is variety specific, she continues, "Some wonderful peaches with even better flavor are not as red. The reason the consumer loves those antique peaches is their mix of flavors, beyond just sweet and acid. The color is not as red, the shelf life is not that good, but the older varieties have more flavor complexity."

Customers shopping for plumcots, a plum/apricot hybrid, might be pleasantly surprised to find out that the green ones "are super sweet, honey yellow inside, with a honey flavor," Family Tree's Plain says.

"Maturity doesn't necessarily go by color," notes Justin Bedwell, director of marketing for Fresno, CA-based Z & S Fresh, a grower of plums, apricots, cherries and white- and yellow-fleshed peaches and nectarines. He suggests retailers have tastings of the fruit in the produce department so customers can discover this for themselves.

THE RIGHT MIX OF VARIETIES

"The biggest thing to catch on is that most shippers are investing in new varieties," Bedwell notes. Z & S is investing in several proprietary varieties of red-fleshed plums, which, he says, are better tasting pieces of fruit. Promotions are under way as Z & S touts these new plums that will be available from June through August.

A new, peach-size apricot called the Lorna that's better tasting and crunchier than traditional apricots is also on the way, he says. "It has form and structure, dark orange flesh and high sugar."

Kingsburg, which specializes in yellow- and white-flesh peaches and nectarines, pluots, apricots and several specialty stone fruit varieties, works with two breeders to produce new varieties high in sweetness. "This keeps us ahead of the curve and producing innovative fruits," explains Spain.

In order to market the right mix of stone fruit, Bedwell adds, "The burden is on shippers to take out the old varieties that aren't what the consumer wants. As the consumer gets more educated, a peach is not just a peach. Varieties are changing frequently. Retailers should get behind merchandising varieties at different times of the year, including proprietary varieties."

Mak notes Ballantine Produce, which ships peaches, plums, nectarines, apricots and pluots, offers a different perspective. "We as a company do not encourage merchandising by varieties. Our goal is to grow and select the best varieties for our retail partners. Every piece of fruit we put in the box is already the best variety available in terms of flavor, size, color and how it yields in terms of farming, which affect the cost.

"Consumers know how to handle by feel, but consumers don't really know the varieties," she believes. "They want their stone fruit juicy with the perfect sweetness and tartness they're used to. None of our consumers write in asking about specific varieties."

Offering the right mix of varieties is often a matter of timing and shelf space, Bedwell comments. "June through August is

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a great time for tree fruit, but there are also late varieties that carry into September and October." But, he cautions, "The availability of fruit year-round now with imports has desensitized consumers — they expect California quality year-round when that's not a valid expectation."

Barry Winkel, general manager, Greg Orchards and Produce, based in Benton Harbor, MI, advises retailers, "Don't get hung up on varieties. Varieties are overturned so fast it's hard to establish a variety that people will look for. In a couple of weeks, that variety will be over for the season.

"We grow more than 15 varieties of peaches. One is good for a week or 10 days, then another comes in. One variety doesn't go all season. They ripen at different times and have a short shelf life," he continues.

Growers deal with other issues that affect the varieties they can offer, Winkel explains. For example, "You can't always take a variety from California and grow it in Michigan. California is drier, so a tree might not be adaptable to our climate. Some varieties are hard to raise. With some of the best tasting, the tree is hard to grow or gets various diseases so you can't plant a lot of them. Retailers and shippers have to be careful in promoting." It's best, he says, "to promote a variety that's easy to raise with good flavor."

"We try to provide retailers the opportunity to have several different types of fruit to display," notes SCDA's Eubanks. "We offer peaches in 25-pound bulk bushel boxes, single-layer tray packs and double-layer tray packs, and we have fruit available in clamshells — six peaches in a pack, ready to grab and go."

Taylor of the University of Georgia is working on a way to offer even more convenience to the consumer. "We are hoping in the next year to be providing a recipe for coating fresh, ripe peaches to prevent browning and early softening in the store. Fresh-sliced peaches should be available very shortly," she predicts.

"There are no one-size-fits-all solutions" for retailers seeking to market the right mix of stone fruit, Family Tree's Plain relates. "It depends on the retailer's approach. There are space limitations and always new products coming out," forcing them to evaluate the merits of proven sellers vs. new varieties. New PLU stickers — Family Tree has applied for three to add to the two they already use — should help retailers display more varieties, she says.

CONSUMER-FAVORITE PEACH VARIETIES

While those seeking plums, cherries, apricots and nectarines may be happy with any variety that offers pleasing taste and texture, peach lovers seem to have definite ideas about what they are looking for

Winkel says his customers "are still looking for Red Haven peaches — the most popular variety in Michigan. We've been improving on the Red Haven, a variety that's 60 years old." Other popular Michigan varieties include "Flaming Fury — red and firm when shipped, with good flavor — and the Stellar series of varieties."

Plain observes that while many stone fruit buyers "will try something just because it's new, most consumers don't know how many varieties there are." However, she says some people "are starting to look for certain varieties, like Saturn peaches."

"In the South, the two main peach varieties in terms of name recognition are Georgia Bell and Alberta," notes Taylor. "These are antique, old-fashioned varieties that don't ship well — they're roadside varieties."

Among South Carolina peach varieties, the Red Globe is a longstanding favorite, according to Eubanks.

MARKETING BY LOCALE

"Many consumers look for a Georgia peach, but some people want nothing but a Colorado peach — they think they are the best in the world," Taylor remarks. In any region, she says, "Local peaches are generally going to be the best peaches, the closest to freshly picked because they're only trucked a few hours."

Ballantine Produce's Mak sees certain

Stone Fruit Comes With Guarantee

By Amy Shannon

FreshSense, the Parlier, CA-based marketing arm for the Ripe 'N Ready label, promises to buy back any piece of tree fruit from consumers if they are unsatisfied with its taste. The label's Great Taste Guarantee is one of several innovative efforts to deliver consistently great-tasting tree fruit and improve consumer confidence with flavor and quality.

To prove its dedication to consumer satisfaction, Ripe 'N Ready products are printed with a toll-free number that connects directly to CEO Blair Richardson's mobile phone, allowing dissatisfied consumers to voice complaints and request a refund.

The program, which began in May, requires consumers to provide a receipt, PLU sticker, name of the store where the fruit was purchased and explanation of their displeasure. In return, FreshSense will buy back any piece of fruit that fails to deliver great taste by mailing consumers a full refund up to $5 per request and $20 per family.

"With all that is going into growing, packing and shipping a top quality, good-tasting product, we are more than confident we can deliver on our promise to the consumer," explains Richardson. "Certainly our goal is not to give consumers their money back but to make sure they keep buying our product."

Retailers on a full program with Ripe 'N Ready products can participate in the Great Taste Guarantee's concept, which includes in-store training programs for produce managers and POS materials. "It takes the pressure off produce managers," reports Shalyne Van Worth, quality coordinator. "We have a lot of pride in our product and if a consumer isn't happy, we want to hear about it directly."

"If we believe our product is the best, we should stand behind it or stop saying it," Richardson adds. FreshSense will keep records of consumer concerns and attempt to correct problems through its quality management program, which includes specific measurements to verify that taste and quality attributes are present.

"Fruit is inspected at least four times during the packing process," Van Worth notes. "Any fruit that does not meet the Ripe 'N Ready standards is not allowed to be sold under our label."

Ripe 'N Ready producers, which include Ballantine Produce Co., Inc., Reedley, CA; George Bros., Inc., Sultana, CA; Sunwest Fruit Co., Inc., Parlier, CA; and Fowler Packing Co., Inc., Fowler, CA, reorganized in 2007 to form FreshSense. Each partner is committed to producing uniquely flavorful fruit to meet the demands of today's retailers and consumers.

Beyond its Great Taste Guarantee, FreshSense has undergone other improvements, including a new logo, redesigned packaging and merchandising programs custom-tailored to meet retailers' unique needs, store profiles and target audiences. **pb**

advantages to marketing by locale, but cautions, "Peaches are grown in 48 states. However, over 90 percent of nectarines and plums are grown right here in the Central Valley of California." From the merchandising point of view, "It's tough to promote buying locally when the value is in promoting buying California." She concedes, however, "You could have locally grown peaches in the southern states and Colorado."

"In Michigan, people are more into buying local than they were five years ago," Winkel points out. "We've cut into enough of the California market that we can sell more than we can raise."

One reason for the popularity of locally grown stone fruit, Greg Orchards' Winkel believes, is "people perceive if it's grown down the road, it's got to be safer." And, he adds, there are the environmentally conscious consumers who think, "If I buy it from Michigan, I'm not putting fumes in the air shipping it from California.

"With freight rates going up," he continues, "locally grown fruit is a bargain. We can ship riper fruit that's more mature and tastes more like it's supposed to" because it's "not in the cooler for more than three or four days."

"California fruit is distributed around the country and around the world," Family Tree's Plain says. "Marketing by locale can sometimes work to our advantage provided we maintain a superior product. Sometimes California fruit is displayed side-by-side with locally grown. We just ask retailers to keep us in there."

EDUCATING RETAILERS AND CONSUMERS

Education is a major focus at Family Tree Farms, notes Plain. Its Flavor Tech University, now in its fifth year, brings in 20 produce associates at a time for two days of classes followed by time in the fields. "We have eight groups booked so far for this summer," she says. "One store wants to bring its produce manager and store manager."

Flavor Tech students learn "how to talk to consumers about the fruit" — how stone fruit ripens and the differences between various types of stone fruit. They get to try white-fleshed fruit and taste new varieties so they'll be more knowledgeable when it comes to guiding consumers' choices.

Family Tree uses several media to share information with consumers directly, according to Plain. "We try to offer point-of-sale materials and publish a newsletter every two to three weeks, covering topics like maturity and irrigation. We also provide e-mail bulletins and POS signage." Consumer brochures provide information about white-fleshed peaches and nectarines and explain hybridization, which can happen naturally through pollination and does not involve genetic modification.

Plain also tries to keep consumers abreast of name changes, such as the one that occurred last year when the company started referring to its plum-apricot hybrid as a plumcot rather than the trademarked name Pluot. She also corresponds with consumers via e-mail, uses Google news alerts and watches "foodie blogs" for opportunities to correct consumer misinformation.

According to Bedwell of Z & S Fresh, "We offer POS materials for consumers about Lorna apricots and proprietary red and black plums, and we send retailers a variety list each year."

"Ballantine is one of four grower/owners of the Ripe 'N Ready brand," Mak says. "With that brand, we have taught consumers that every piece of fruit they pick will be ready to eat. We work very closely with our retail partners about education at all levels — store associates, quality control and consumers — so expectations are real." *[Editor's note: See* Stone Fruit Promises Guarantee *on page 128.]*

According to Eubanks, upon request SCDA offers posters that offer information about varieties, chilling issues and proper temperatures. **pb**

Indiana Retailer Offers Tips To Attract And Keep Customers

Offer consumers the most eye-catching array of stone fruit that's available each month and educate them on how to choose, store and handle it to ensure the best eating experience possible. That's what Tony Moore, produce manager, Babb's Supervalu, Spencer, IN, does to keep his customers coming back season after season for their favorites.

This 40-year produce retailing veteran, who says with pride, "I've been doing this since I was 12 years old," offers fruit from various locales and finds each has its loyal customers.

"In May and June, peaches, plums and nectarines come in, first from California, then from Georgia or Michigan," he says. "Later on, there are California cherries, then Washington cherries."

When it comes to peaches, he relates, "I like California — they hold up very well. The ones from Georgia, New Jersey and Michigan are the best tasting. I think they're just fantastic."

Moore also offers peaches grown in southern Indiana but finds it actually costs more to drive them a few hours to his store than to bring in fruit from distant states. Fortunately, he says, "They taste real good so price is no factor" for customers who favor locally grown fruit.

When purchasing Indiana peaches, "I always try to buy the largest," Moore says. "Customers ask for freestone, especially older customers. They know they can just pop it open." In addition, his customers often ask for Red Haven, a traditional variety that's still popular.

Moore finds his customers perceive differences in peaches from various states and have their favorites. "People here like Michigan or Georgia or New Jersey more than California, although some say California is the best there is." Every spring, he says, people start asking, "When are the Michigan peaches going to be here?"

Since customers want their peaches juicy, ripe and sweet, Moore keeps them off the refrigerated rack. "Once they get a little ripeness, I can put them back in the cooler overnight," he explains.

At the point of sale, "If customers see a lot of reddish color, they're going to buy," Moore observes. "When peaches and nectarines have that pretty reddish tint, they pick them up quicker. They associate it with the best peaches and nectarines they've had."

Educating customers is an ongoing process, the veteran produce manager says. "I show customers how to pick the fruit and tell them a peach with a slight bruise is a ripe one. If it looks perfect, it's not ready to go. If it doesn't give at all, it's not ready to eat."

The brown paper bags displayed with Babb's stone fruit do their part to teach consumers about handling and storage at home. Instructions printed on them, Moore says, tell consumers to ripen their fruit in the brown paper bag for a day or two and leave it out on the table, since refrigeration prohibits ripening. Once the fruit ripens, it can be chilled. **pb**

Six Ways To Sell More Melons

Consumer cravings for melons offer retailers an opportunity to increase sales and profits.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Consumers demand sweet, ripe and crunchy melons so at retailers' requests, growers selectively breed for the qualities.

According to *Vegetable and Melons Outlook*, published by the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on Feb. 20, 2008, per capita consumption of melons was 28.1 pounds in 2007. Of this, watermelon represented 16.2 pounds (58 percent), cantaloupe 9.9 pounds (35 percent), and honeydew 2.0 pounds (7 percent).

"Melons are a Top 5 category in the 20 percent range," claims Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce and floral for King's Super Markets Inc., a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ. "Following the 80/20 rule — that 80 percent of sales comes from 20 percent of the department — melons certainly fall in the top 20-percent-of-the-department range. This is especially true in the summer when they peak. But all year long, melons are steady contributors to department sales and gross."

As one of the top categories in the produce department, melons offer multiple opportunities for year-round sales.

1. BUILD THE CATEGORY AROUND WATERMELON

King's stocks predominately seedless watermelon, however, says Kneeland, "We brought in some seeded product last summer. There are some consumers who claim seeded watermelon has a better flavor than the seedless."

That claim rings true, says Adam Lytch, grower development specialist for L&M Companies, Raleigh, NC. "Seedless watermelon is still a ways from being able to compete with seeded on taste, color and texture. Seedless is obviously a convenience item, and for some stores, carrying seeded would almost now be akin to a specialty melon."

Gordon Hunt, director of marketing for National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB), Orlando, FL, has also seen this trend. "Several retailers last summer opted to carry large, seeded watermelon, even though the product retailed for $1 or more per pound over seedless."

Still, says Brent Harrison, vice president of the Al Harrison Company, Nogales, AZ, "Seedless watermelon is a big seller. It's about 80 percent of the market, compared to 20 percent for seeded."

Seedless watermelon does have better shelf life than seeded, notes Dean Liere, production business manager for melons, Syngenta Seeds, Boise, ID. "The seeds give off ethylene, which causes the melon to ripen."

Seasonality dictates what form of watermelon sells best, says Hunt. "Whole watermelon and mini watermelon are generally more popular in the summer, while watermelon sections, slices and cubes are skewed toward the winter. However, the minis are increasingly becoming the main variety sold during the winter. Mini imports are way up."

Randy Bohaty, produce director for B&R Stores, a 15-unit chain headquartered in Lincoln, NE, and operating under the Super Saver and Russ's Market banners, says, "The personal size or mini watermelon is picking up in sales for us during the winter season. Customers like watermelon, but they don't want to have a 16-pound melon sitting in their refrigerator at that time of year."

According to the NWPB retail scan data report for Dec. 31, 2007, whole watermelon represented 62.9 percent of retail sales in pounds in 2007, down 20.2 percent from the previous year, but it posted an average national price per pound increase from 41¢ to 52¢. Cut watermelon sales were also down by 2.6 percent and represented 27.4 percent of retail volume sales. The average price for cut watermelon dropped from 95¢ to 91¢ per pound. Mini watermelon made up 9.6 percent of retail sales in pounds, up 34.1 percent from the year previous, with the average price rising from 90¢ to $1.03 per pound.

When it comes to whole watermelon, Harrison of Al Harrison notes, "Most U.S. retailers look for melons in the 13- to 18-pound size. The Canadian market likes them smaller, about 11- to 15-pounds."

"Mini watermelons in the 4-pound range move best," according to Avi Nir, president of Ayco Farms, Pompano Beach, FL. "It makes one serving for dessert after a meal."

Sales of mini watermelons are poised to

Make Melon Safety A Priority

By Amy Shannon

Improvements in food safety throughout the supply chain have boosted consumer confidence in the safety of fresh produce, but the recent import alert concerning cantaloupes from Honduras may undermine some of the recent progress.

In March, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released an import alert on cantaloupes produced by Agropecuaria Montelibano, a Honduran grower and packer. The alert indicated fruit from this company appeared to be associated with a *salmonella* Litchfield outbreak in the United States and Canada. FDA ordered the detention of all cantaloupes shipped to the United States by Agropecuaria.

The alert serves as a reminder to retailers about the importance of stressing food safety. One way to do this is by educating produce managers with tips for safe handling of fresh fruits and vegetables so they can pass this critical information along to consumers. Trevor Suslow, extension postharvest specialist with the Department of Plant Sciences at the University of California, Davis, offers four consumer friendly resources for melon washing:

1. *Safe-Handling of Fruits & Vegetables* http://wifss.ucdavis.edu/pdf/ucfoodsafety_english.pdf
2. *Cantaloupe: Safe Methods to Store, Preserve, and Enjoy* http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/pdf/8095.pdf
3. *Safe Handling of Raw Produce and Fresh-Squeezed Fruit and Vegetable Juices* http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~acrobat/prod-safe.pdf
4. *Safe Handling of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/pdf/8121.pdf **pb**

grow, says Syngenta's Liere. "Their quality is becoming much more consistent."

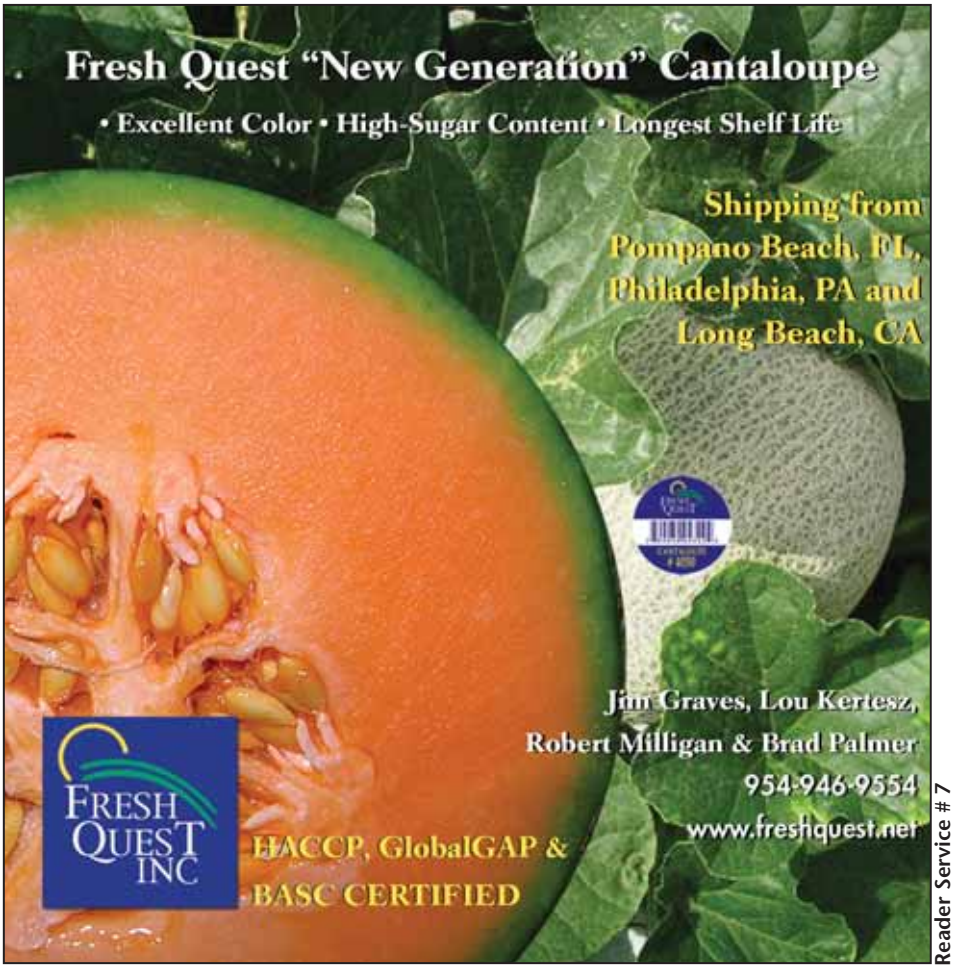
Ken Kodish, Ayco's watermelon commodity manager, agrees, adding, "Mini watermelon has experienced the largest growth in the melon category over the last few years. Retailers were seeing double-digit and sometimes triple-digit growth."

Ayco grows, picks, packs and imports watermelon, honeydew and cantaloupe, and 80 percent of its watermelon sales are from mini-watermelons. "This is Ayco's second year experiencing growth in the domestic seedless category." Kodish believes it's critical for retailers to offer seedless watermelon in both large and mini sizes to meet the needs of all consumers. "There was a big market for mini watermelons getting missed. Small families, couples or single people were buying large, 20-pound watermelons, eating some of it but throwing the rest away. Now they can buy mini-watermelons and not feel like they are wasting the product or their money."

Watermelon breeding is heading toward a deep red flesh with 70 to 100 percent more of lycopene, a phytonutrient, than conventional watermelons, relates Syngenta's Liere. "The gorgeous red color has really impressed the retailers we've shown. In additional to color, the new variety has a nice full flavor and a firm, crunchy texture. Consumers like the mouth-feel of a crunchier melon, retailers like it because it ships better, and the fresh-cut folks like it because cut chunks hold their shape longer."

At the same time, he adds, "There's not that much of the yellow-flesh watermelon on the market. We sell some but not a lot. However, we're looking at developing a variety that will retain liquid in its flesh and not

Reader Service # 2



Reader Service # 7

Looking To The Future

Michael Warren, president of Central American Produce, based in Pompano Beach, FL, believes the development of new varieties of melons "is an integral and always evolving part of the industry."

Breeders look for "seed varieties that produce melons with greater yield, size and flavor," according Ken Nabal, sales manager at Frontera Imports, Boca Raton, FL, a division of Frontera Produce LLC, based in Edinburg, TX.

James McCreight, Ph.D., research horticulturalist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Station, Salinas, CA, agrees and adds, "Public breeders — including molecular geneticists — are working on sugar, flavor and shelf life. Commercial breeders are trying to combine every beneficial trait into a large, flavorful melon for every market throughout the year."

There are several new varieties of cantaloupes and watermelons, adds Adam Lytch, grower development specialist for L&M Companies, headquartered in Raleigh, NC. "Newer, sweeter varieties of cantaloupes have firmer flesh, higher brix and longer shelf life. There are also lots of new watermelon varieties as the seedless offerings have been improved significantly over the last few years — with many options as far as rind types, flesh firmness, texture and interior flesh color.

"There are new specialty melons as well," he adds. "Melons long considered to be available only in short windows or seasons are now being adapted in order to broaden the availability."

Dr. Kevin Crosby, melon and pepper breeder at the Texas A&M Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Weslaco, TX, notes, "Current [cantaloupe] melon research areas include improved flavor and nutritional value. For example, we have emphasized selection for improved concentrations of beta-carotene, ascorbic acid and sugars, as well as a nice flavor and texture. This means firm, deep orange fruit with limited muskiness, brix of at least 10 to 12 and uniform rind netting, with a tan rather than green appearance." **pb**

bleed out. If we can do this, the fresh-cut people will be interested. After all, the main attribute of the yellow flesh is its color."

"We've increased our production of yellow-fleshed watermelon in response to a sales increase of about 5 percent," according to Harrison of Al Harrison. "It's a slow increase, mainly coming from specialty retail markets."

Interest in yellow-flesh watermelon, says NWPB's Hunt, "is growing faster than for the orange. Growers, such as Perfection Fresh in Australia, now market a yellow-fleshed mini watermelon."

Ayco's Kodish believes it's a good idea to group seedless watermelon with honeydew and cantaloupe varieties. "They complement each other. People want a mixture. If they didn't, there wouldn't be fruit salad. I know it helps us to offer all three [watermelon, honeydew and cantaloupe]."

2. OFFER SWEETER CANTALOUPE

Cantaloupe continues to be very popular at B&R Stores, says Bohaty. "We promote them once per week during the summer season. The winter imports have become more consistent in quality and flavor, so we'll promote these at least once per month in the winter."

Western-shipper type cantaloupes are a staple item in the produce department, says Ken Nabal, sales manager at Frontera Imports, Boca Raton, FL, a division of Frontera Produce LLC, based in Edinburg, TX. "Beyond this, seed companies today look to develop cantaloupe varieties that eat well and have a high brix content, compact seed category and large size."

According to King's Kneeland, size does matter to his customers. "We look for a 6- or 9-count cantaloupe."

Bruce Smith, general manager, Sahara Packing Co., Brawley, CA, agrees with the size trend and adds, "We used to throw the 6s away. Now we have varieties that taste as good in the large sizes as small. I think this drive for larger sized cantaloupes comes from retailers who cut them in half, fill them with another fruit, such as grapes, and merchandise them this way. Or the cut them to use on a fruit platter."

Ripe, ready-to-eat cantaloupe has been the focus of many grower/shippers. For example, Dulcinea Farms, LLC, Ladera, CA, has marketed its Extra Sweet Tuscan-style Cantaloupe since 2004. "Western shippers have their value as everyday cantaloupe, while something like a Tuscan variety takes a more premium position," notes Keith Kato, senior vice president of sales and marketing.

Miami, FL-based Chestnut Hill Farms introduced its Perfect Melon in 2005. "We offer a money-back guarantee to customers if the melon isn't ripe and ready to eat. Research shows that 59 percent of customers prefer to buy a ripe and ready-to-eat cantaloupe," notes marketing director, John Campbell-Barmmer.

Liere says Syngenta has been looking into deep orange flesh, consistent eating quality and high sugar content. "To this end, some grower/shippers have made great investments into Harper-type cantaloupes."

One of these companies is Pompano Beach, FL-based Fresh Quest Inc. Lou Kertesz, vice president of sales, explains, "It's is a new generation of melon. For example, while typical cantaloupes will brix at 10 to 12 percent, the Harpers will brix in the 12 to 16 ranges. It's important for retailers to educate their customers about brix and melons.

"This is our fourth year, but last year was our first large commercial production," he adds. "The amount represented about 50 percent of our movement. It was so successful that we've increased our program to 100 percent Harper."

The company grows Harper cantaloupes in Honduras and Guatemala, importing them from November to mid-May. It plans some trial plots in the southeast United States this coming year so as to eventually achieve a year-round supply.

3. ADD HONEYDEW

"Sales of regular honeydew have dropped off, but the orange-fleshed honeydew is delicious and sells well," note King's Kneeland.

According to Dr. Kevin Crosby, melon and pepper breeder at Texas A&M Agricultural Research and Extension Center (TAMU), Weslaco, TX, "We'll likely see more production of orange-fleshed honeydews because they have good shelf life and high sugars. Also, their smooth rinds are easier to disinfect, lowering the probability of foodborne illnesses."

In general, honeydew melons brix higher than cantaloupe, says Michael Warren, president of Central American Produce, Pompano Beach, FL. "In winter, they stay a bit more popular due to this [brix]. For example, honeydew will sell 1:3 compared to cantaloupe rather than 1:4 in the summer."

Fresh Quest will import consistent quality, high-brix honeydew from Honduras starting this fall, says Kertesz. "It's got a sweet taste, firm texture and more compact seed cavity that gives consumers more meat for the dollar."

Today's consumers, relates Chris Elise, formerly vice president of sales for Martori Farms and now owner of Pure Vida Farms,

both in Scottsdale, AZ, "want a bigger honeydew. Five is now the predominant size, not a six or an eight."

Eye appeal is oftentimes a problem with honeydew, says Harrison of Al Harrison. "Unfortunately, they're quick to show blemishes and that's a huge quality factor."

4. PRESENT VARIETY MELONS

"We'll carry all the specialty melons, including Casaba, Santa Claus and Persian," says B&R's Bohaty. "These are often more expensive than the traditional melons, so we find it crucial to sample. This takes the risk out of purchase for the consumer. We also post charts at displays that explain the attributes of all the different type melons."

King's makes a point to offer customers a full variety of specialty melons. In March, the company ran an ad "that included Charantais and Galia. Today, we have Tuscan cantaloupes and French Kiss melons coming in," notes Kneeland

L&M's Lytch sees a trend toward more niche varieties of melons at the retail level. "Retailers seem to be looking for things that set them apart and make them unique and separate them from their competition."

Robert Schueller, director of public relations, Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Los Angeles, CA, agrees and adds, "Specialty melons have made tremendous gains in the last five to six years. For us, the variety melon category grew 6 percent from the May to August season in 2006 to the same summer months in 2007. Sprite melons grew 13 percent and Golden King melons 11 percent."

Sprite melons are exclusively grown in North Carolina. They are small, averaging just over one pound and have a mottled yellow rind when ripe. "The sugar content in Sprite melons can reach 4 to 6 percent higher than most sweet melons," says Schueller. The Golden King melon is a new variety of a mini size melon. "This hybrid Korean melon produces bright golden color fruits with white, crisp flesh that is very sweet."

Galia and Uzbek melons, says TAMU's Crosby, "may also see an increase due to their very high sugars and increased populations of Middle Eastern and Asian immigrants."

Juan Canary, Piel de Sapo, Crenshaw, Sharlyn and Athena melons are also gaining popularity," notes Pure Vida's Elise. "The Athena is grown in Florida and Georgia and my prediction is it will get a lot of traction as a locally friendly melon on the East Coast."

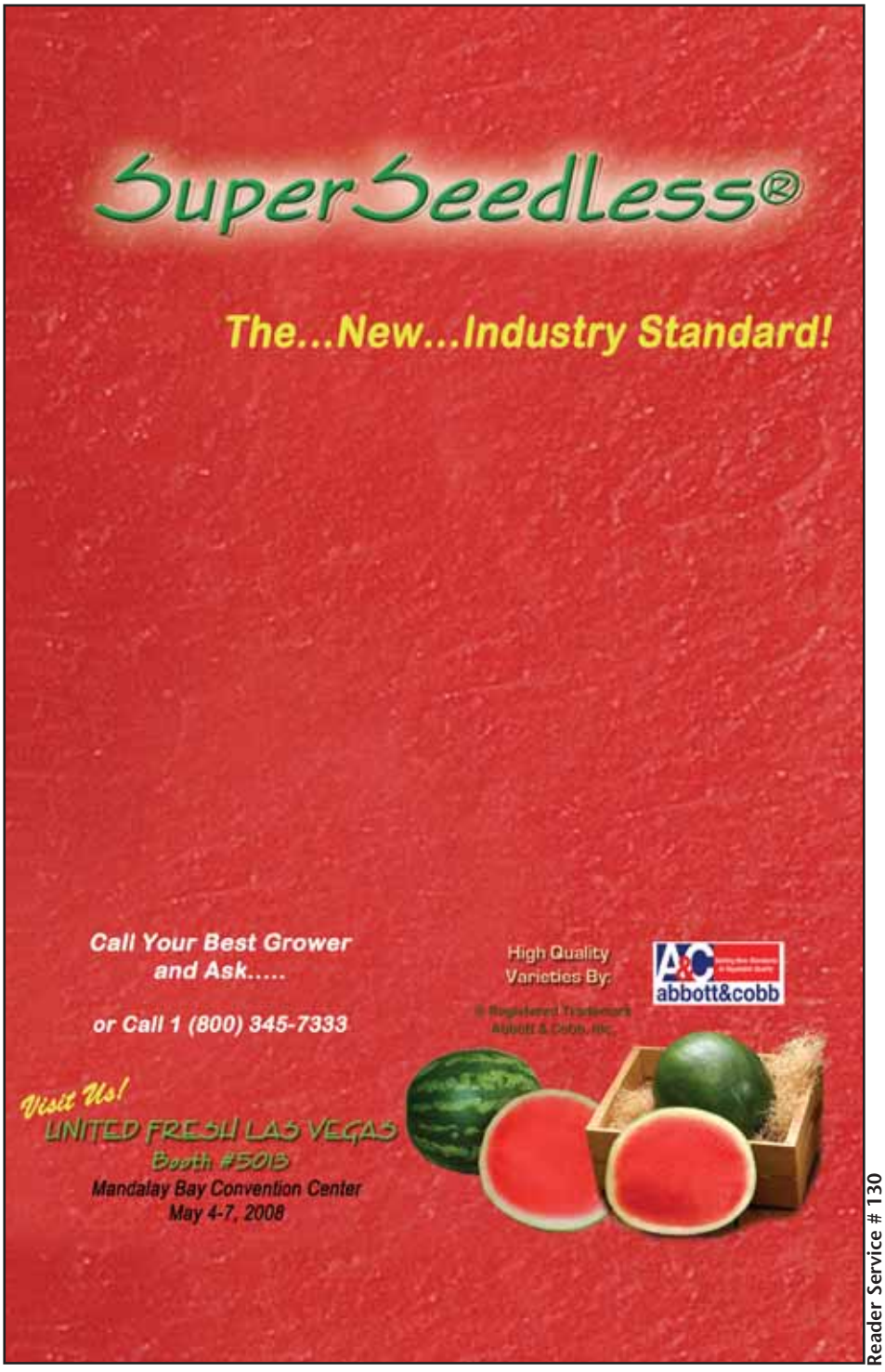
5. INCLUDE FRESH CUTS

Fresh-cut melon "can add incremental sales dollars, especially in city stores where there are smaller households, convenience is a big draw, and there's a limit on trash," explains King's Kneeland. "Fresh-cuts do have a higher ring than whole melons, but we do take a lower gross and margin to achieve a certain price point."

According to data in *Making the Cut* from the Perishables Group, W. Dundee, IL, published in October 2007, melons account for three of the five top selling fresh-cut fruit subcategories, with watermelon capturing 23 percent of category dollar sales, cantaloupe 6 percent and other melon 5 percent.

Retailers are handling the cut-in-store versus outsource decision differently. "We used to cut watermelon in store and now we outsource. Why? Food safety, a greater variety of fresh-cut melon varieties, and our staff couldn't keep up with the demand," explains Kneeland.

Doug Burris, director of marketing for Country Fresh, Inc., a Houston, TX-based fresh-cut fruit processor, says, "Historically, a lot of our customers cut in store. Now, there's a minimum of in-store programs. Consistency, food safety, quality and labor issues are all reasons."



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However, says Dulcinea's Kato, "Some retailers are bucking the trend and bringing their fresh-cut operation back in house. The reason is quality, same-day sales."

6. PROMOTE DURING WINTER AND SUMMER

Melons are featured front and center during their peak summer season in B&R's produce departments, says Bohaty. "We'll have anywhere from four to 12 bins of melons on display at any one time." In the winter, he adds, "We'll transfer from bins to smaller-sized table displays for melons."

The chain features a Melon Mania promotion each summer. "We build big displays with eight to 10 varieties of melons and invite customers to sample," he adds. "We do this in the beginning of the summer to acquaint customers so they will keep buying melons all summer long."

Kneeland also uses bin displays for melon. "We'll take the bins outside and merchandise — especially the watermelons — this way during the summer. We do a lot of 2/fors and 3/fors. Not many BOGOs [buy one, get one free]. We'll promote unique spe-

Retail Action Plan

VARIETY: Offer watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew and specialty melons in assorted sizes and styles. Consider merchandising fresh-cut forms of the melon near whole fruit.

DISPLAY: Create a melon destination within the produce department. When a specific melon is promoted, move it to an end cap and/or build secondary displays within the produce department as well as outside of the produce department, such as in the front of the store or near the checkout registers.

ATTENTION TO CARE AND HANDLING: To maximize shelf life and preserve freshness, store and display whole melons at 45° to 55° F. Display cut melons in refrigerated shelving or cabinets at 37° to 39° F.

ADS AND PROMOTION: Promote melons year-round. Do so when domestic and import supplies are at their peak. Theme promotions work particulary well for melons around key spring and summer holidays such as Memorial Day and Fourth of July. **pb**

cialty varieties in high volume along with education information in our ad."

L&M's Lytch says, "Watermelons and cantaloupes should be on large displays at reasonable price points from Memorial Day through July Fourth, and then again in the weeks prior to Labor Day." He advises retailers to be more flexible on price points for summer merchandising. "Memorial Day ads will be higher than Fourth of July ads due to availability and shipping locations, so retail prices should reflect this in order to move product."

This summer, says Steve Fore, national brand manager for produce, for the Sundia Corporation, San Francisco, CA, "We'll introduce a new bin design. It shows sky, clouds and watermelon and just screams summer. It really draws attention to the product."

Chestnut Hill's Campbell-Barmmer believes winter "is an ideal time to play on the theme of a taste of tropics. Display melons with other tropical fruits such as mangos and papayas."

In general, notes Dulcinea's Kato, "Group all melon varieties together in a central location. It's also good — when volume is good — to merchandise melons in secondary displays both within and outside of the produce department."

Sales of watermelon traditionally lag after Labor Day, says Bohaty. "In the past, that's been due to inconsistent flavor and the quality not being there. But, as long as product has consistent flavor and quality, we'll continue to promote. However, we do switch to the smaller personal sized melons."

Promotable volumes of melons are available year-round, says Central American's Warren. "The problem is that when there's snow outside, consumers don't think about melon. This makes regular promotions even more important."

Pricing of melons is typically by the pound on the West Coast and by the each in the East, according to Pure Vida's Elise. "I think there's a trend to more by-the-unit sales. Consumers don't want sticker shock when they get to the register — they want to know what to pay up front."

Cross-promoting is an ideal way to spur watermelon sales, says Sundia's Fore. "In the summer, display watermelon alongside paper plates and cups for a picnic theme."

Melissa's Schueller suggests retailers promote melons with specific recipes or with recipe brochures.

This summer, says NWPB's Hunt, "We've partnered with Katie Brown, star of PBS' *Outdoor Entertaining*, for a satellite media tour during the month of July. July is National Watermelon Month. Brown will feature the many ways to enjoy watermelon. This is something retailers can easily tie into." **pb**

It's Not Your Father's Las Vegas

Dine with celebrity chefs in Sin City's famous establishments.

BY MEREDITH AUERBACH

Establishments under the direction of celebrity chefs from all over the world line Nevada's famous 4-mile Las Vegas Strip, attracting eager and receptive audiences with their glamour and innovation. More exciting food and restaurant concepts operate in Las Vegas than in any other city in the country.

The annual convention of the United Fresh Produce Association (United), Washington, D.C., meets May 4 to 7 in Las Vegas, and attendees will be looking for great restaurants and dining experiences. A list of world-class restaurants developed by chefs whose names have become legendary is easy to assemble. The challenge may be deciding where you want to go or getting a last-minute reservation. Keep in mind that some renowned chefs have developed restaurants in more than one resort.

Most of the chefs discussed here have earned awards from the New York, NY-based James Beard Foundation, — a very good indicator of skill in the kitchen and the dining room.

THE NORTH STRIP

The newest luxury hotel, The Palazzo, hosts several of the top tickets for dining and it redefines the concept of steakhouse with Carnevino from Mario Batali and Joe Bastianich as well as Cut and Morels French Steakhouse and Bistro from Wolfgang Puck. Each of these restaurants focuses on the best of American and Japanese Wagyu beef accompanied by extensive and extravagant wine lists. The newest unique complement tends to be a selection of hand-made artisanal cheeses.

Photos on this page courtesy of Hash House A Go Go

Las Vegas has become a mecca for serious diners.

The long-awaited Restaurant Charlie by acclaimed chef Charlie Trotter opened in March with a seafood emphasis. Here, produce moves closer to the center of the plate as the restaurant relies less on butter and cream and more on fruits and vegetables to make entrée flavors and textures explode with freshness. Trotter offers a vegetable menu likely to make vegetarians cry with joy and produce companies check their availability and sourcing lists to be sure they

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Reader Service # 67

Photo on this page courtesy of Joël Robochon

can compete. Restaurant Charlie also features an exclusive skybox — an 8-top table, the Kitchen Table Loft — suspended over the kitchen and serving a different, spontaneous — and very pricey — tasting menu every evening.

Emeril Lagasse rounds out the list of celebrity chefs with his Palazzo venue. Called Table 10, it offers a coastal Creole menu and highlights Lagasse's ability to connect with small producers of meat, seafood and produce.

Lagasse and Batali also operate restaurants in The Venetian, The Palazzo's sister resort next door. Emeril's Delmonico is an all-American steakhouse with New Orleans flavor and a sense of hospitality. Batali and Bastianich bring Italy to Las Vegas with B & B Ristorante for fine dining and Enoteca San Marco for casual fare. Fresh fruits, herbs and vegetables in innovative combinations dominate the seasonings and flavors of antipasti, pasta, entrées, salads and desserts.

One of California's favorites, Thomas Keller, originator of the French Laundry in Napa, offers the classic bistro cuisine of Lyon at Boucheron — simple, straightforward, impeccable and downright reasonable. The restaurant's operations are unusual for the length of its hours and service — virtually all day most days — staring at 7:00 AM weekdays for breakfast.

Look for the whimsical approach at David Burke, the home of Modern American Cuisine, where his flair with presentation might tempt you to underestimate his expertise with bold flavors and interesting combinations. Arriving in Las Vegas from success in Chicago and New York, Burke exemplifies American cuisine with an approach to the business characteristic of a chef, an entrepreneur and a product developer. A meal here is for the curious, the contemporary and anyone looking for a twist. The restaurant welcomes, but doesn't require, reservations.

[Charlie] Trotter offers a vegetable menu likely to make vegetarians cry with joy and produce companies check their availability and sourcing lists to be sure they can compete.

Moving north along the North Strip, visitors will encounter the two curved towers of the Wynn Las Vegas as well as the opportunity to try Daniel Boulud Brasserie, an elegant, yet casual tribute to France's simple foods in contrast to haute cuisine. Indulge in caviar, specialty cheeses, lobster and other

Photo on this page courtesy of Robochon

seafood in this spectacular location on the Lake of Dreams.

THE SOUTH STRIP

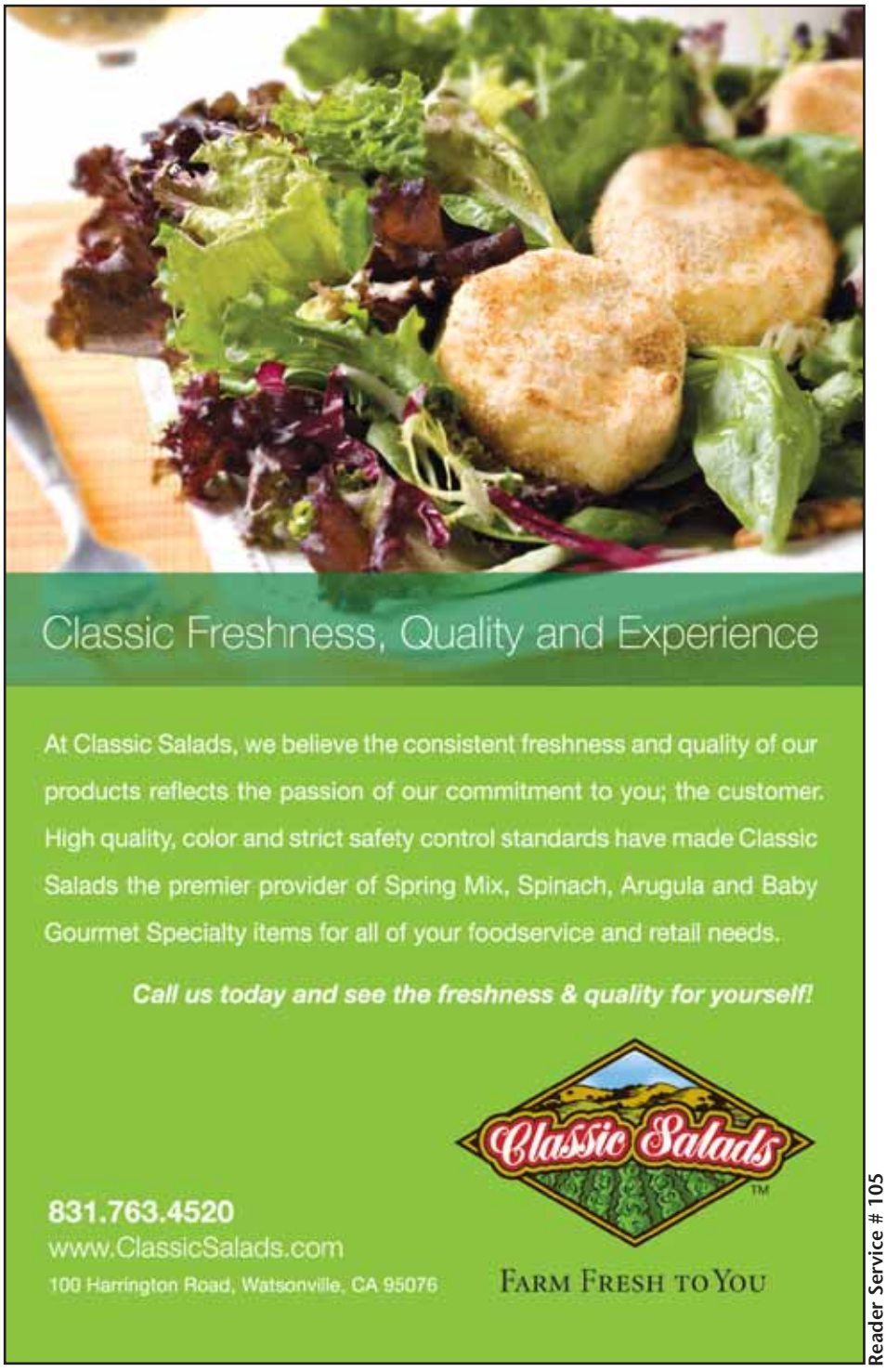
The Mandalay Bay Resort anchors the south strip and is home to some classic restaurants covering a broad culinary range. Charlie Palmer has operated Aureole in Las Vegas, as he does in New York, with what he designates "progressive American cuisine," an approach to reinventing classic European cooking with the use of American specialty and artisanal farm products. He was one of the first to bring this level of fine dining to the Strip. Exceptional meats and seafood entrées incorporate extensive use of fresh fruits and vegetables to make them distinctive.

[Steve Peterson, executive chef, MGM Grand Las Vegas] works closely with the Santa Monica Farmers Market and the Los Angeles Terminal Market. A truck leaving at midnight can be back in Las Vegas by 5:00 AM.

The discipline of French haute cuisine can be found at Fleur de Lys and MiX restaurants at Mandalay Bay. Originating in San Francisco, Fleur de Lys is a concept developed by Hubert Keller with the goal of putting a California gleam on French cuisine and extending classic service and menu concepts to customers.

Once declared "The Finest Chef in the World," Alain Ducasse is a culinary superstar and the vision behind MiX with its innovative menu and stylish ambiance. It's a heady mix of elegant '30s-style glamour and contemporary food experimentation.

At the opposite end of the Mandalay Bay range is Border Grill, an all-time favorite dining spot where chefs Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger intrigue guests with upscale Mexican specialties. Meet friends here or bring your kids for lunch or dinner at less than half the cost of other celeb chef



Reader Service # 105

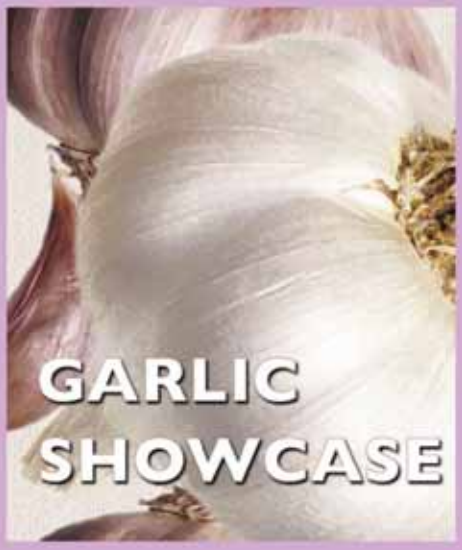
restaurants. The two women, both classically trained, started back in Los Angeles more than 20 years ago — long before the Food Network discovered them.

The MGM Grand, part of the MGM Mirage Group, is one of the older hotels on the strip but today it partners with Joël Robuchon, the chef behind two restaurants in the hotel that are his only restaurants in the United States. Raymond Sokolov of the *Wall Street Journal* considers Joël Robuchon, the restaurant, to be "the hands-down, front-runner of all places to eat in this hemisphere." It is the only 3-star *Michelin Guide* winner in Las Vegas. Robuchon serves up traditional French cuisine but uses modern cooking techniques and the finest ingredients available. It is also, perhaps, the most expensive meal in town with a 6-course tasting menu for $250 and a 16-course menu for $385. Only serious foodies should contemplate it, as the flavors of the dishes are designed to be complex and philosophical — much like poetry.

Photo on this page courtesy of Robochon

Robuchon's other restaurant is L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon, which serves tapas, an a la carte menu or a tasting menu prepared before you at a service counter. Less expensive, the kitchen still relies on impeccable ingredients and cooking methods.

Steve Peterson, executive chef of the MGM Grand Las Vegas, has been with the organization for five years and is charged with making sure all of the restaurants can work. "We own all the restaurants here and partner with chefs, such as Mr. Robuchon, who provide direction and support with products. [Our restaurants] grew out of a



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Reader Service #17

focus on organic product that has gradually become a whole sustainability discipline. We work closely with small organic farms — often owned and worked by immigrant farmers who have become sole suppliers to the restaurants here at the hotel. It's all about strong relationships between chefs and producers."

The chefs specify the products they want and it is Peterson's job to make sure they get it. He works closely with the Santa Monica Farmers Market and the Los Angeles Terminal Market. A truck leaving at midnight can be back in Las Vegas by 5:00 AM.

Peterson described another restaurant, Craftsteak, developed by Tom Colicchio with MGM Grand, as the restaurant that constantly seeks out new produce uses and presentations to accompany the menu of a simple and straightforward classic steakhouse.

OFF THE STRIP

In the Las Vegas world of fine dining and casual meal segments, the cost of entry is nothing less than pure excellence. There is no more competitive environment than what you see in this town. Beyond the establishments inspired or run by today's notable celebrity chefs, there are other noteworthy and unique restaurants to experience.

Jeff Pugh, vice president of sales for Fresh Point, Inc., based in Jacksonville, FL, recommends an unusual and fun restaurant, just a few miles beyond the strip — where produce is king. "Hash House A Go Go is just like Las Vegas itself," he notes. "It's eclectic, wild, amusing and sometimes over the top. As a produce distributor, we think it's great they use so much produce. According to the chef, it is maybe 85 percent of what shows on the plate."

Jim Rees, owner of Hash House A Go Go, likens the food to home-style but with strong visual style. "We use an 18-inch sprig of rosemary as a garnish stuck into most menu items and believe in stacking things tall. Our portions are huge — plenty to take home to enjoy later and we consistently win awards for Best Breakfast or Best Dessert. It takes something like four produce companies to keep up with us. We're at the farmers market every week to find what's new and how we can make it exciting. Come to us for a great time. In a certain way, you could call us a celebrity restaurant. Everybody knows about us." **pb**

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Reader Service #115

Portable Snacks Serve Up Sales

For consumers with never enough time in the day, peanuts, raisins and other dried fruit are popular quick fixes.

BY LISA SOCARRAS

Today's consumers are always on the go. Their meals are often cut short so they rely on portable snacks as vital energy sources. Retailers can take advantage of this trend by offering them small-sized and resealable packages — perfect for kids, adults and seniors. Year-round displays of these portable snack items in the produce department convey the image of freshness and taste for dried fruits and nuts.

Not only are we a fast-food nation, but we are also a snacking country. According to the *2007 Mintel Nut and Fruit Study* conducted for the California Raisin Marketing Board (CALRAB), Fresno, CA, sales of trail mixes jumped from $103 million to $164 million between 2004 and 2006. "That 59 percent increase was the fastest among all items and categories of dried fruits and nuts," explains Larry Blagg, senior vice president of marketing for CALRAB. "It is attributed to the product being correct for the times — people want healthful, portable snacks."

Portable snacks vary from raisins and other dried fruits to nuts and trail mixtures. Consumer demand is fueling new sizes and packages that are easy to grab and go. "We're seeing trail mixes with raisins, nuts and dried fruits in gusseted 4-ounce to 1-pound bags that stand up by themselves," reports Blagg, "in addition to California raisins, which are available in ½-ounce, 1-ounce and 1½-ounce snack packages."

Companies are now producing a wide variety of 100-calorie packages as well traditional large packages. Oftentimes, small packets are eaten for energy throughout the day and to improve exercise routines. This is also true of nut products lines, such as peanuts. "Some of our companies have 4-ounce packages of salted or unsalted peanuts in the shell," notes Betsy Owens, executive director of Virginia-Carolina Peanut Promotions, Nashville, NC. "In most cases, the produce department has the shelled peanuts — the unshelled ones are in other parts of the store."

Time-crunched consumers want tasty, healthful snacks they can eat on the go.

Owens reports that lunchtime is a popular time to grab a bag of peanuts for quick energy, particularly while walking. They're satisfying and people like to shell them. "Part of the magic of eating peanuts is shelling them," she adds. "It gives you something to do between bites."

PEANUTS AND RAISINS

A recent study confirmed that peanuts and raisins aided performance in soccer players by boosting their energy, according to Blagg. "There were two recent studies of 11- and 12-year-old soccer players who were given raisins and peanuts during their games. Results showed higher sustained energy."

Consumers of all ages are eating raisins, dried fruit and nuts, however, and young people are growing up with the snack mentality to grab nutrition when needed.

Senior citizens are also eating raisins and trail mixes. "The older you get — 60- to 70-

Displays That Work

Throughout the country, people are buying portable snacks, which is evident when walking into produce departments from the East to West Coasts.

"A lot of stores are doing a good job displaying our products," according to Mark Bagley, senior vice president of sales and marketing, Sun-Maid Growers of California, Kingsburg, CA. "On the East Coast, Stop & Shop [Supermarket Company, Quincy, MA] is really doing great. In the Midwest, Schnuck [Markets, Inc., St. Louis, MO] looks good, too. On the West Coast, Save Mart [Supermarkets, Modesto, CA] is also — they're all doing a good job."

This seems to be a national trend, explains Larry Blagg, senior vice president of marketing for California Raisin Marketing Board [CALRAB], Fresno, CA. "I was just at a Dillons' [Companies, Inc., Hutchinson, KS, a wholly owned subsidiary of Cincinnati, OH-based Kroger, Co.] store in Manhattan, KS," he explains. "They had an amazing variety of raisins, dried fruit and yogurt-covered fruit and chocolate-covered raisins."

"We have a whole wall of dried fruits, including chocolate-coated products like apricots," reports Tyler Weninger, produce clerk at the Manhattan, KS, Dillons, where the department sets up additional displays during the year to go with themes, such as football. Dillons constantly changes theme displays to keep customers interested. **pb**

year-olds — are eating raisins," explains CALRAB's Blagg. "They are the best value of any dried fruit product, costing only about $2 to $3 for a pound, which equals about 1,200 pieces of fruit."

Raisin sales have skyrocketed. They're loaded with iron, potassium, calcium and vitamin A, and are free of fat, cholesterol and sodium. Mariani Packing Company, Inc., Vacaville, CA, is selling a lot of yogurt-coated and candy-coated raisins — all big sellers and great for snacks.

Consumers are eager to purchase these items, but they often need to be reminded with a store display, such as ones produced by Sun-Maid Growers of California, Kingsburg, CA. "It is extremely important that retailers merchandise their products in free-standing displays," advises Mark Bagley, senior vice president of sales and marketing. "Over 82 percent of purchasing decisions for dried fruit is made in the store."

Consumers respond well to displays in the produce department, particularly when they are tied in with a theme such as back to school in August or Halloween in October, reports Bagley. "There is a resurgence in raisin purchases. They have a nutritious image with consumers and raisins are thought of as health foods because they contain only grapes and sunshine," he notes, echoing the latest Sun-Maid slogan.

SUN-DRIED TOMATOES — A NEW SNACKING IDEA

Health-conscious consumers are always looking for snacks that offer not only nutritional benefits but also great taste. One they seem to have discovered on their own is sun-dried tomatoes.

According to MaryEllen Mooney, general partner, Mooney Farms in Chico, CA,

Reader Service # 30

"There's been an evolution in the way people think about sun-dried tomatoes. Sales are up by 40 percent, so people are definitely using them for more than cooking."

"Sun-dried tomatoes are favored by on-the-go folks looking for a healthful snack," adds Lisa Mooney, sales and marketing. "They offer 12 times the lycopene — a powerful antioxidant — as a raw tomato and come in a reclosable ziplock bag so consumers can take out what they want, close the bag and stow it in a purse or desk drawer."

When dry-pack sun-dried tomatoes first made an appearance in the United States, they tended to be very dry and very chewy, but as they have left the strictly-ingredient arena and entered the snacking arena, the processing has changed. "Now they're extra moist, pliable and easy to chew," she continues. "They're actually moister than a dried apricot. And they're perfect for people who ask, 'Can I enjoy this and is it good for me?'"

MaryEllen Mooney explains that the packaging has changed to reflect the consumer interest in sun-dried tomatoes as a snack food. "First the packages let consumers know they were rich in lycopene. Then we added moisture to them so they're ready to eat — and the packaging now touts both attributes."

Reader Service # 29

MULTIPLE USES

People are snacking on raisins, but they are also eating them on cereal and salads and using them in trail mixes. Dates are also selling well. "Some of our growers do their own trail mix pack," reports Lorrie Cooper, manager, California Date Administrative Committee, Indio, CA. "Dates are nutritious — high in antioxidants, no fat, no sodium, virtually fat-free and contain no cholesterol," she adds.

Nutrition is a big factor in the purchasing of dried fruit and nuts as portable snacks. "Dried cherries are high in antioxidants and natural melatonin," according to Brent Tackett, national sales manager of Traverse Bay Farms, a Bellaire, MI-supplier of dried cherries, blueberries, cranberries, and yogurt- and chocolate-covered cherries.

Sales are up and consumers are purchasing a great many portable-sized containers. "In the retail segment, we are up 4 percent in cases and 15 percent in dollars from the previous fiscal year," reports Tackett. "We are selling our 3-ounce packages nationwide and our 8-ounce clear deli cups to independents in Michigan and to Jewel Stores in Chicago, [IL]."

Consumers respond well to displays in the produce department, particularly when they are tied in with a theme such as back to school in August or Halloween in October.

The clear deli cup with a tamper proof seal shows the product to the consumer and is extremely popular. "Consumers' perception is that the deli cup is fresher — that's also a reason why our products have to be in the produce department," Tackett explains. "People have the impression of fresh and healthful if it is in the produce department." He says the 8-ounce deli cup is sold in stores owned by Kroger Co., the Cincinnati, OH-based chain with 2,507 stores, and it could

extra health benefits for people."

Many people attribute relief from arthritic symptoms from nutritional components found in tart Montmorency cherries — the kind used by Traverse Bay. Throughout the day, many people keep portable deli cups of dried fruit on top of their desks for easy snacking and energy. People are also putting dried cherries on cereal and oatmeal, and using them in salads and baking. "A pork loin roast baked or grilled with dried cherries on it develops the richest baking sauce you've ever tasted," suggests Tackett. **pb**

be available by request from other retailers. Traverse Bay sells larger-size packages to Sam's Club, the Bentonville, AR-based chain with more than 580 stores owned by Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.

Throughout the day, many people keep portable deli cups of dried fruit on top of their desks for easy snacking and energy.

The biggest problem he encounters is consumer education. "Consumers don't know what [the dried cherry] is," Traverse Bay's Tackett notes. "They think it's a raisin." Sometimes this is overcome with in-store sampling, but costs add up. "We try to do some sampling as best as we can afford," he explains. "Usually Sam's Club is the most affordable — $150 a day, plus the costs of samples, labor, etc." Cost prohibits it from doing more in-store samplings.

Kroger does a good job displaying its products in a gondola in the produce department, Tackett reports. Consumers are drawn to the display but its buyers are not impulse buyers. "The 3-ounce size of dried tart Montmorency cherries is $2.59 to $3.49 in the store," he explains. "Dried blueberries are $1 to $2 higher [than fresh blueberries] and dried cranberries are $1 to $2 lower [than fresh cranberries]. That's a range."

"Dried tart Montmorency cherries show the biggest sales increase for us," Tackett shares. "Right now, the price of blueberries is 40 to 50 percent higher [than usual]. Also, the tart cherries that we use have so many

Congratulations!

Inshell Peanut Display Contest Winners

$1000 Grand Prize Winners

Joel Z. Bowman
Food City #605
Kingsport, TN

Roxanne Cole
Save Mart
Antioch, CA

Lorie Switzer
Sack-N-Save
Chillicothe, OH

John Wallace
Bob Corson
Stop & Shop
Middletown, CT

Sharon Brennan
Viking Village
Reedsburg, WI

Ronnie Roddenberry
Sweetbay #1865
Spring Hill, FL

Debbie Wallace
Waynesburg Shop 'n Save
Waynesburg, PA

$500 Second Place Winners

Derf Page
Community Market
Bellefontaine, OH

Mark Stannard & Rick Donegan
#621 Stop & Shop Southbury
Southbury, CT

Jane Trimnal
Piggly Wiggly #78
Camden, SC

$250 Third Place Winners

Matthew Kework
Publix Supermarket #446
Ormond Beach, FL

Ron Liput
Delmont Shop 'n Save
Delmont, PA

Angela White
Community Market
Wilmington, OH

$100 Honorable Mentions

Martin Barker
Community Market
Marion, OH

Barb Creczely
Shop 'n Save
Canonsburg, PA

Harold Good
Imperial Shop 'n Save
Ocklale, PA

Lonnie Morrison
Country Mart
Forsyth, MO

Mark A. Ryan
Hy-Vee Foods
Omaha, NE

Todd Blease
Publix Supermarkets
Port Saint Lucie, FL

Lynette DeClerck
Pana County Market
Pana, IL

Christopher Ierubino
Publix
Coral Springs, FL

Dennis Moushon
Cub Foods
Peoria, IL

Scott Sampson
Community Market
Ada, OH

Bill Boucher
Hannaford - Elm Plaza
Waterville, ME

Casey T. Erlacher
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Canton, IL

Lisa Kissee
Seltzer's Market
New Haven, MO

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Findlay, OH

Ann Schurtz
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Marysville, OH

Melody Bowman
Great Scot
North Baltimore, OH

Alice Fryar
Harps
Rogers, AR

Vito Magri
Market Basket
Farmington, NH

Diane E. Nellis
Sunway #88
Henderson, KY

Dennis Seward
Mars Super Markets Inc.
Windsor Mill, MD

Don Cauthon
Westwood Apple Market
Westwood, KS

Jeffery Chad Givens
Ingles Markets
Forest City, NC

Michael Martorana
Jewel Foods
Highland Park, IL

Dennis Noel
County Market
Monmouth, IL

Fred Sweany
Buehlers Food Market
Wooster, OH

Darren Codol
Publix Store #1160
Clearwater, FL

Jorge Gonzalez
Publix Super Market
Greenacres, FL

Margie Mitchell
Great Scot
Fostoria, OH

Robert Pitts
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Reader Service # 6

FLORAL WATCH

Super Floral Show Booth Preview

Super Floral Show • June 17 — 20, 2008
Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, FL

SFS The Super Floral Show℠
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www.SuperFloralShow.com

Geared toward high-volume buying, the show will feature supermarket floral and foliage items as well as products for garden centers and mass markets. Educational sessions will be held June 17 - 19. See the June issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS for additional booth listings.

AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH PREVIEW

Booth 149
DecoWraps
Miami, FL
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Booth 437
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Athens, GA

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Booth 468
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Booth 549
Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses, Inc.
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Booth 669
Aldershot of New Mexico
Mesilla Park, NM
With more than 22 acres in production near Las Cruces, NM, we are a quality grower of potted blooming and foliage plants. Our specialties include mums, kalanchoes, mini roses, begonias, cyclamen, poinsettias and Easter lilies.

Booth 837
World Class Flowers
Egg Harbor City, NJ
If you agree that spotting and utilizing trends are vital to sales, then visit our booth! This year we are focusing on what's new, what's marketable and what's going to sizzle for the next year. Our booth has everything your customers are looking for — fun, green, trendy and value-packed.

Booth 858
CosMic Plants, Inc.
Beamsville, ON Canada
CosMic Plants Inc. is a grower/shipper of quality Phalaenopsis orchids. State-of-the-art greenhouse facilities located in Beamsville, ON, allow for year-round production. Please visit our booth and see the best orchids in beautiful gift packs and displays!

Booth 1027
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Des Moines, IA
For over 20 years, Borgen has listened to architects, designers, managers and floral professionals to deliver the finest floral merchandising cases available. Retailers have used our cases to formalize, rejuvenate and liven up floral departments and set the design tone for the whole store
.

Booth 1062
Palm Tree Packaging
Apopka, FL
Palm Tree Packaging is a manufacturer of plant and floral sleeves. We make sleeves out of a large variety of materials including HDPE, CPP, BOPP, fiber and Kraft paper. Custom printing can be done in up to photo quality. This SFS we are debuting our new product, the bloom bag.

Booth 1143
Botanical Interests, Inc.
Broomfield, CO
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Booth 1146
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Land O' Lakes, FL
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Portland, OR

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Booth 1173
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Kissimmee, FL
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Booth 1304
S. I. Colibri Flowers S.A.
Bogotá, Colombia
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Booth 1306
TransFair USA
Oakland, CA
TransFair USA is the third-party certifier of Fair Trade products in the United States. The Fair Trade Certified label on flowers guarantees growers meet strict social and environmental standards and that workers receive a premium to invest in community development.

Booth 1339
The Sun Valley Group
Arcata, CA
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Booth 1374
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Producer of environmentally friendly plant fiber pots. Renewable plant-fiber-made (grain-husk) nursery and decoration series available. Best solution for replacement of terracotta and plastic pots. Competitive price. Convenient transportation. Low damage rate.

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Booth 1500
Sherwood Farms
Groveland, FL

Now offering customers a new "Fresh Direct" orchid program requiring no minimum purchase and convenient delivery to your door. One case per order, no more trucking minimums and no ethylene problems! Let us show you how we can help increase your orchid sales and profits.

Booth 1511
ASB Greenworld
Valdosta, GA
ASB's own peat bog is located in New Brunswick, Canada, with additional U.S. locations in Georgia and Virginia. Peat moss and related mixes, including potting soil and mulch products. Professional assortment of soil and bark. Over 50 years experience in the industry, international market presence.

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

AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH PREVIEW

Booth 1539
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Miami, FL
Your one-stop floral/bouquet manufacturer provider offering complete category management, customized product development, e-commerce fulfillment and marketing services. We can provide DSD or CDC Logistics. We believe quality, innovation and communication with customers in the floral industry are essential.

Booth 1548
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San Marcos, CA
Exceptional indoor foliage plants and unrivaled Anthuriums. Premium varieties and promotional quantities for the interiorscapers, garden centers, wholesale nurseries and supermarkets. Upgraded containers planted with theme or holiday plants. We consistently provide our customers with supreme quality and service.

Booth 1573
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Fallbrook, CA
Kendall Farms will showcase Grown Green flowers at the 2008 Super Floral Show. The Grown Green label tells the world we are a sustainable farm. All products are organically or sustainably farmed, giving the consumer unique flowers and bouquets that are good for the environment.

Booth 1627
Potter, Inc.
Bryan, OH
We specialize floral products and programs to create home décor and gift-ready merchandise quickly and easily. If you find yourself asking the question — How do I increase floral department sales dollars per square foot? — visit our booth for the answer in booth.

Booth 1648
Schubert Nursery, Inc.
Salinas, CA
With over 40 years in business, Schubert continues to build a reputation for the highest quality topiary, patio plants and foliage products that the independent nursery and floral trade demand. While we specialize in ivy topiaries, we also have a unique collection of herbs, ferns, foliage and other specialty plants.

Booth 1676
Scientific Certification Systems (SCS)
Emeryville, CA
SCS is a leader in the establishment of internationally recognized certification standards and programs. The VeriFlora certification program recognizes efforts in to grow and deliver flowers that meet the highest standards for environmental sustainability, social responsibility and quality.

Booth 1705
For Every Body
Provo, UT
For Every Body's Delicate Floral premium oil reed diffusers are a safe, eco-friendly way to naturally fragrance a home, office or dorm room without a flame. Available in 12 distinct floral fragrances, these elegant ready-made gift sets have a suggested retail of $14.99.

Booth 1747
MEI
LaGrange Park, IL
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Booth 1759
Avery Imports/
Willow Group Ltd.
Batavia, NY
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Booth 1804
Blossom Bucket, Inc.
North Lawrence, OH
We have been a reliable source of quality home décor and gift items for over 20 years, providing top-of-the-line merchandise and outstanding customer service. From primitive to country cute and everything in between, our extensive Everyday line is complemented by collections for each holiday.

Booth 1839
Chrysal USA
Miami, FL
Chrysal USA is an international company offering a multitude of products for the complete nutrition and care of fresh-cut flowers for growers, wholesalers, florists and supermarkets in the United States, Canada and Latin America. Join us at the Reunion Party. For more information visit our Super Floral booth.

Booth 1872
JRM Chemical, Inc.
Cleveland, OH
Deco Beads packages make over 1½ quarts of round translucent beads for floral arrangements and gifts. Eight colors. Less expensive and less damaging to the stems of flowers than marbles. Available in color-coded retail packs, attractive displays and in bulk sizes.

Booth 1875
Botani Wipe
Trinidad, CA
We are introducing Botani Wipe, The Original Wipe For Plants, an all-natural plant and leaf polish. The wipes are non-toxic, disposable, flushable and alcohol free. Featuring 100 percent pure Neem oil, the biodegradable wipes can clean away pests, molds and dust from stems, tops and undersides of leaves.

Booth 1939
Hawaiian Sunshine Nursery, Inc.
Hilo, HI
Exciting, unique products from Hawaii. Hawaiian Volcano Plants are available in Show & Go mini greenhouses made entirely of recycled plastic. We also offer unique bromeliads, Hawaiian Volcano Plants in bulk and specimen-size bromeliads. Products shipped direct to store doors.

Booth 1973
EZ Bouquet
Fall City, WA
EZ Bouquet™ — The new patent-pending approach to arranging flowers! Featured on Oprah's Next Big Idea. EZ Bouquet™ comes in three sizes and fits almost any type of container. Use for pomanders, ornaments, fruit bouquets, wedding cake toppers or any kind of floral arrangement. The possibilities are endless!

Booth 2038
Flora Novara
Virginia Beach, VA
We are an importer and distributor of exclusive, high-quality silk plants and other home and garden products. During this show, we will be introducing some innovative novelties, like the Tuscany Herbpot, the B-Fresh DIY sprouts/cresses growing kit and much more! So come and see us in our booth!

Booth 2044
Bill Brown's Greenhouses
Apopka, FL
Bill Brown's Greenhouses is the nation's largest manufacturer of foliage and cactus terrariums. Our mission is to provide our customers with the finest selection of product available. We ship throughout the United States and Canada.

Booth 2050
Razbuton Ferns, Inc.
Winter Garden, FL
Our 8" fern baskets are bigger than many growers' 10" baskets. They ship in less than one cubic foot each. There are truckloads available from May 15, 2008, through January 31, 2009. Visit our booth for full details, pricing, and specials.

Booth 2055
CO2 Technologies, Inc.
West Des Moines, IA
CO2 Technologies will display new ways to give retailers longer vase life on fresh-cut flowers and bouquets. This new technology is getting rave reviews from florists and is available for pennies a day. A "must see" at our SFS booth.

Booth 2076
Candy Blossoms
Comstock Park, MI
We offer candy bouquets to supermarkets with floral departments. These unique grab-and-go gifts can turn any floral area into a true, year-round gifting center. Our variety of Candy Blossoms is sure to cover your customers' entire gift-giving needs. Here is a sweet way to boost floral department sales.

Booth 2107
American Eagle, LLC
Coram, NY
We have specialized in designing and producing handmade butterflies since 2000. They can be attached to walls or windows and displayed as beautiful accents in the garden. Our products fit nicely in the floral department of a store. For more information please visit our booth.

Booth 2135
Landscapes Within, Inc.
Boulder, CO
Donating to Alzheimer's research, Landscapes Within's greeting and enclosure cards provide consistent add-on sales in supermarket floral departments. Rich floral photography cards are printed on glossy recycled papers and arrive with eye-catching floor or counter displays.

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Super Floral Show Booth Preview

Super Floral Show
June 17 - 20, 2008

Exotic Plants Continue To Wow

Retailers can garner more sales and attract more consumers by bringing in exotic plants.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Standard bouquets suitable for holiday occasions are a good start to driving sales in the floral department, but they may no longer be enough. Exotic plants give retailers the opportunity to attract consumers to different and unexpected varieties.

"Regardless of demographics, cool plants sell," explains Jane Van Cleave, president of J Van Cleave Marketing, Mount Dora, FL. "We are seeing a nice trend in Alocasia and Colocasia species for the discerning consumer who likes exotic structure and character in tropicals. Cut gingers work so well in exotic arrangements. Watch for more varieties coming through the Florida production pipeline."

Since many of these plants are unfamiliar to most consumers, they must have a look that grabs attention and makes the sale. "Color, texture, design and value are the key ingredients to tropical and exotic plant category growth," Van Cleave reports. "Get creative and tell your tropical plant suppliers that they, too, must get their creative juices flowing. Insist that your tropical and exotic plant suppliers are in touch with trend, color and style — insist on the wow factor!"

The category of exotic and unusual plants opens up new opportunities for supermarket floral departments because most of the low-price competition is going for deep supplies of a narrowing range of plants. "Exotic plants have the ability to create excitement and freshness in the category and broaden the appeal to grocery shoppers," according to Steve Chan, vice president for marketing at Nurserymen's Exchange, Inc., Half Moon Bay, CA. "They reinforce the role of the floral department as a florist inside the supermarket."

Consumers sometimes pass by the floral department without making a purchase because plants are not on their shopping list. The remedy to this can be exotic, attention-grabbing plants. "You need to have an element of surprise to draw attention to the floral section," explains Kathrein Markle, co-owner of Wekiwa Gardens, Inc., Apopka, FL. "You need to give consumers something different to look at."

Photo courtesy of Wekiwa Gardens, Inc.

Consumers respond to new and unusual flowers and plants.

Photo courtesy of Driftwood Gardens, Inc.

Wekiwa Gardens is building up the interest in an intriguing house plant called *Selaginella erythropus* 'Sanguinea.' Commonly known as Ruby Red, this alluring spike moss plant has feathery leaves that are reddish brown on the top and brighter red underneath. "It's kind of primeval looking," Markle says. "A light spray of glitter gives it a frosted look. We are still building up the numbers but people who see it are excited — it's different and has different colors."

OFFER UNUSUAL VARIETIES

Retailers should consider stocking a handful of plants that are unusual but still familiar to consumers. "Orchids and bromeliads are going to be the most common because people are comfortable with them," reports William Tippit, president, Driftwood Gardens, Inc., Apopka, FL.

Driftwood Gardens produces Tillandsia dish gardens and novelty planters as well as blooming bromeliads. Tillandsia is a bromeliad with wiry tough leaves that can handle a range of weather conditions. The near prehistoric look of tillandsias captivates customers who like plants with texture and something that proves hardy.

Breeders are also changing the economics of familiar plants that used to be luxury items, Van Cleave adds. "Phalaenopsis orchids are now affordable for everyone

because the Florida producers have gotten so darn good at the production methods."

"Phalaenopsis and other premium orchids, such as Odontoglossum and Miltoniopsis are popular," Nurserymen's Chan explains. Popular candidates for an exotic selection include carnivorous plants, pin cushion, bonsai, protea, sun star, campanula, corkscrew grass, pomegranate, lemon scented trees and flowering echeveria.

Many of the exotic plants are valued because they serve a therapeutic purpose. "Bonsai trees are selling well because they're therapeutic in times of stress," according to Eve Johnson, owner of Eve's Garden, Land O' Lakes, FL.

"There really is no defined ceiling to retail pricing of tropical plants. Wouldn't it be cool to sell $79.99 tropical plant arrangements? It's happening big time."

— Jane Van Cleave
J Van Cleave Marketing

Bonsais can sell at retail from $9.95 and up and are moving well at supermarkets and other outlets, Johnson notes. Eve's Garden also supplies Lucky Bamboo because it is supposed to give the owner good luck. "This is an oriental plant shaped in spirals, hearts or other shapes," she adds.

Tropicals provide psychological value. "Tropical plants are very chic once again," reports Van Cleave of J Van Cleave Marketing. "Consumers are readily experiencing the well-being attributes that plants naturally provide. For the savvy buyers who attended the Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition this past January [in Fort Lauderdale, FL], visualizing the latest trends in tropical and exotic tropical design arrangements was a special experience. The featured tropical floral arrangements created by the design team at the Breakers [Resort] in Palm Beach [FL] gave buyers an exhilarating rush of possibilities in home décor and gift categories."

Even some of the familiar plants that are exotic-looking can provide the benefit of something different in the floral department. "We are actually seeing high interest levels in even the nostalgic plant categories such as spider plants," Van Cleave explains. "Begonias, too, are very popular. They are an ancient old plant, yet with tissue culture technologies, exquisitely colored begonia varieties are reaching retail in higher volume this year."

KEEP DISPLAYS NEAT AND INVITING

Regardless of which exotics are carried, they must be displayed well. Plants need to be displayed below chest level for visibility, out of full sun and in a high-traffic area. "Retailers must efficiently use space where the plants will not get knocked over," reports Driftwood's Tippit. "You want to have the most perishable items at the front."

Retailers should think of floral displays as works of art. "You have to have an eye for design; you can't just stick plants on a shelf," states Wekiwa's Markle.

Ordering fewer plants more often is worth the trouble if it keeps the display fresh. "Keep the displays fresh," she advises. "I would rather send a store a 6-pack every week than a 12-pack every two weeks. I would rather see the stores bring in more product."

If retailers offer the right stuff, they can sell at prices that were unthinkable not long ago. "There really is no defined ceiling to retail pricing of tropical plants," Van Cleave points out. "Wouldn't it be cool to sell $79.99 tropical plant arrangements? It's happening big time. A major Florida supermarket chain is selling the heck out of $30, $45 and even $80 tropical home-décor designs. People are paying handsome prices for creativity, design and value because they enjoy the happy thoughts provided by tropical and exotic plants."

IT'S ALMOST ALWAYS THE SEASON

There are a handful of holidays that account for a very large share of floral department sales — Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter and Mother's Day. After that, the field is wide open for offerings the consumer will be surprised and delighted to find. "Unique plants can be used to drive events during certain time periods like Halloween," suggests Nurserymen's Chan.

According to Markle, unusual plants can be effectively merchandised any time of the year except Christmas and Valentine's Day, when most consumers tend to become traditional in their tastes.

"We find the summer has no major holiday for the floral department — traffic in the floral department is slow," Tippit reports.

Driftwood Gardens offers a bromeliad named Neoregelia — or New Crown — to help bridge the gap between two of the most important floral holidays. The exotic product grows bright red during the Christmas season and until Valentine's Day — the next red holiday. "You want to be able to get out of poinsettias and into something else right after Christmas," he continues. "We do displays that are interesting, unusual and last a long time." **pb**

Grow Your Own

Offering plants that actually produce food in the produce and floral departments is a great way to boost sales while offering your consumer something different. Miami, FL-based 12 Basket Farms, Inc., supplies a wide range of plants that produce food — ranging from conventional herbs to more exotic items, such as bananas and pineapples.

"These plants grow the things that people like to eat," explains company president John Hughes. "Display them in an obvious place. The produce department is a good place to put them, particularly next to the food they produce."

12 Basket Farms also supplies guavas and avocados. These easy-to-grow food plants can be retailed at less than $30, according to Hughes. "It's not difficult to grow pineapples — it just takes patience. Bananas aren't hard if you make the right environment for them."

From health-food stores to supermarkets, food-producing plants are a natural fit, offering consumers something unusual, exotic and inviting. "People go to the floral department to buy bouquets for birthdays, Mother's Day, Valentine's Day or other holidays," Hughes notes. "All of a sudden, you see something that you can grow yourself." **pb**

By Dave Diver

Job Descriptions

A recent *Wall Street Journal* article proclaimed, "Supply chain managers used to have one main job: Purchasing stuff cheaply," and stated this group needs a whole new skill set. Supply-chain managers must handle increasingly complex and critical technology, possess strong management, team-working and decision-making skills, and be able to think in terms of overall company strategy and shareholder value. This is in addition to pursuing career development that will enable them to excel and create competitive advantages for their company.

This job description is sometimes used as a basis for declaring that some new retail personnel are unskilled and unknowledgeable of the produce industry. Ironically, it has been this same group of supposedly unskilled workers that has helped increase the produce retail share of consumer dollars for decades. Snapshots of a dozen retail produce departments from 15 years ago are in stark contrast to what produce departments look like today.

For the most part, today's overall condition, variety and presentation is far superior and an important reason behind sales growth. Likewise, agricultural producers require mathematical, scientific and information technology skills beyond what were required two decades ago. Shippers require people with equal amounts of sophisticated knowledge and an understanding of the distribution systems of foodservice and retail environments.

Fifteen years ago, associates with the capability to be the hardest workers often had a half-step advantage in achieving promotion. But just as in other industries today, strong backs are being replaced by the need for mental prowess and management skills. These are qualities enabling employees to move both from one business category to another and in between industries. Within the last year, the former head of Home Depot and senior executive with General Electric, Bob Nardelli, became the head of Chrysler. His knowledge of the auto industry revolved around driving his own personal automobile, but his skill sets enabled him to quickly adjust to new people and products.

This is true for people in low and middle management who are pushed into new positions with limited knowledge of the product category. Today, they bring spreadsheet knowledge, people skills and the ability to absorb quickly all types of new information.

At Hannaford Bros., associates often switch between product categories and merchandising departments, operations and support functions as well as changing levels of responsibility. The key is being able to identify new people with the intelligence, personal skills and work ethic to respond at a high level. The objective is to find individuals who can make others forget about the incumbent's accomplishments. Not all selections are winners, but where would the produce industry be if Peter Goulet had found himself chained to a dry grocery product desk in the event that he couldn't spell perishable? Sounds absurd, doesn't it? And what about his replacement, Will Wedge? [*Editor's note: Please see page 17 for Will Wedge's award as the New England produce retailer of the year.*] The Hannaford produce operation continues to rise to new heights.

The same can be said for perishable-product salespeople who often move from one organization to another with limited knowledge of how the new category operates or the requirements of the customer base. In some instances, they may even be thrust into managing a customer's inventory without a good understanding of its business model. Perhaps more than any other industry, produce — with its passionate people — requires understanding both buyers' and sellers' respective business characteristics.

Snapshots of a dozen retail produce departments from 15 years ago are in stark contrast to what produce departments look like today.

These transitions are not easy. Somehow, using all the advancements in information technology, there should be a way for the leading industry groups to develop programs for helping new people entering the produce industry become more knowledgeable of the entire spectrum.

Growing up on a farm and having earned an agricultural marketing degree, I was still very green to the business when I started with a buying position at Kroger. Thanks to those willing to provide the knowledge, I learned some of the product and marketing variances. Of course, there were no computerized spreadsheets a half century ago, but the job still required bridging the gap between suppliers and consumers.

At that time, the relatively limited market information accounted for a much wider variation between quality and price throughout the distribution system as consumers found themselves confronted with these inconsistencies among retail chains and their stores. In the meantime, system improvements have lead to produce purchases' share of the food dollar increasing two to three times.

Continuing that growth requires spreadsheet expertise and trained, knowledgeable associates. More thorough and timely industry educational programs have the potential to close this perceived gap among the various groups that make up the produce world. **pb**

JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT

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

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Catherine Francois is the senior manager food safety at CIES, The Food Business Forum, Paris, France

Q & A With Catherine Francois

Wal-Mart is the first nationwide U.S. grocery chain to require suppliers of its private label and other food products, such as produce, to have its factories certified under one of the internationally recognized Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) standards.

Selected by CIES, The Food Business Forum, [Comité International d'Entreprises à Succursales] to safeguard and ensure high quality in the international food supply chain, GFSI standards provide real time details on where suppliers fall short in food safety on a plant-by-plant basis and go beyond the current FDA or USDA required audit process.

Q: What does Wal-Mart's adoption of GFSI standards mean?

A: Wal-Mart is one of seven international retail chains representing the governing structure of GFSI. They have been working together since spring 2000 on aligning food-safety schemes and standards. The primary goal: convergence of standards through a benchmarking process that could be commonly recognized and implemented to improve cost efficiency throughout the supply chain and enhance confidence in the delivery of safe food to consumers.

Q: What other global chains collaborated in the effort?

A: Carrefour, Tesco, Metro, Migros, Ahold and Delhaize.

Q: Did they agree upon a universal set of standards?

A: A GFSI Guidance Document forms the backbone. GFSI's technical committee set out key elements in production of food to use as a framework to benchmark existing food safety schemes. We have commonly agreed criteria for food-safety standards and minimum requirements defined by food-safety experts to enable implementation and put into practice what is outlined in the Guidance Document.

We come to a point where requirements are very similar to four standards: BRC — British Retail Consortium Global Food Standard; IFS — International Food Standard; Dutch HACCP Scheme (Option B) and SQF 2000 — Safe Quality Food Scheme, owned by the Food Marketing Institute. The retailers can have confidence in the results from these standards as equivalent.

Q: As long as a supplier has one of these four standards, does it now meet the food-safety standards, and do the seven retail chains agree these are acceptable?

A: At last June's CIES annual World Food Business Summit in Shanghai, those seven major companies announced they had come to a landmark agreement to adhere to common food-safety standards accepting any of the four GFSI benchmarked food-safety schemes.

Q: Are these global retailers actually mandating their suppliers follow these GFSI standards?

A: All these companies are putting this idea into practice. The objective is to reduce duplication in the marketplace. GFSI simplifies the requirements by a multitude of retailers. It means suppliers don't need multiple audits on their sites, which are very costly with little benefit. Suppliers could go from 80 audits to three or four.

Q: Will some retailers use this as a base and require additional and/or more rigorous food-safety measures of their suppliers beyond the GFSI agreed-upon schemes?

A: We are in a transition period. Some retailers will obviously have their own standards and policies in place. The agreement and intent is to move to and implement the four recognized schemes.

Q: What is GFSI's role in auditing and certification?

A: It does not undertake any accreditation or certification activities.

Q: How comfortable do you feel that every place in the world getting certificates requires adhering to the standards?

A: In many ways, it comes down to the actual competence of the auditors and the methods used in carrying out the auditing and certifications. We are taking a hard look at how this is handled along with other issues of food security and food safety in emerging markets. We must assure manufacturers that certifications provide consistent, legitimate results. It is critical we verify the integrity of the process for the consumers.

Q: Does GFSI address product testing, either raw product ingredients and or finished product testing?

A: One of the fundamental requirements of GFSI is to ensure product/ingredient analysis and testing procedures are in place in the recognized standards, critical to the confirmation of product safety.

Q: What if Wal-Mart wanted to make an exception, determining the product was safe but not certified by the GFSI process? Is there a way consumers can be confident they are getting the benefits of this program?

A: The schemes recognized by GFSI have no consumer logo or seal. This is a business-to-business initiative. Retailers are working with suppliers, and food safety is a non-competitive issue. Consumers expect food to be safe.

Q: What is the relationship between CIES and GFSI?

A: CIES coordinates and manages the GFSI process, communicating and building awareness of GFSI. We're an independent, global food-business network, made up of some 400 members in more than 150 countries, with retailers the largest single group. Our mission is to provide a platform for knowledge exchange, thought-leadership and networking and to facilitate development of common positions and tools on key strategic and practical issues affecting the food business.

CIES is working with many U.S. companies, including Hannaford, Whole Foods, Harris Teeter, Target, U.S. Foodservice, Wakefern and Shop Rite, and we've developed a strategic alliance with NRA.

Q: Do the GFSI food-safety standards start at the processing level or go back to the field?

A: We've been focused on the manufacturing and processing side but are now starting to focus more on the grower. We are about to start discussions for developing standards for the farm side and broadening the food-safety program we already have solidified.

Excerpted from The Perishable Pundit — February 8, 2008
Interview by Mira Slott

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Agricultural Office of Mexico	25	61	613-563-0733	613-563-0933
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Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	23	95	888-AUERPAK	201-807-9596
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	140	96	201-807-9292	201-807-9596
Babe Farms, Inc.	122	91	800-648-6772	805-922-3950
Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co.	26	108	800-845-6149	910-654-4734
Philip Balsamo Company	98	72	630-575-8000	630-575-8004
Basciani Foods, Inc.	26	59	610-268-3044	610-268-2194
Battle Produce Exchange	86	56	213-946-9696	
Blue Book Services	99	63	630-668-3500	630-668-0303
Boskovich Farms, Inc.	21	27	805-487-2299	805-487-5189
Brooks Tropicals	35	117	800-327-4833	305-246-5827
California Avocado Commission	53	26	800-344-4333	714-641-7024
California Giant Berry Farms	15	77	831-728-1773	831-728-0613
California Leafy Greens Marketing	156	131	916-441-1240	
Canada Garlic	140	17	905-362-1888	905-362-1889
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	131	2	515-981-5111	515-981-4564
CF Fresh	70	110	360-855-3192	360-855-2430
Christopher Ranch	140	94	408-847-1100	408-847-0581
Ciruli Brothers	117	113	520-281-9696	520-281-1473
Citrus Producers Forum in South Africa	INSERT		011-272-291-2636	
Classic Salads, LLC	139	105	831-763-4520	831-763-1542
Classic Vidalia	84	37	800-984-3254	252-291-6791
Coastline Produce	122	50	831-755-1430	831-755-1429
Columbia Marketing International	79	102	509-663-1955	509-663-2231
Cool Runnings, Ltd.	98	68	800-522-5623	262-657-8018
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Dole Fresh Fruit Company	2	64	818-879-6600	818-879-6628
Domex Superfresh Growers	83	122	509-966-1814	509-966-3608
dProduce Man Software	103	86	888-PRODMAN	650-712-9973
Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc.	14	80	561-978-5714	561-978-5705
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East Coast Brokers & Packers, Inc.	155	20	800-557-7751	863-869-9850
Eclipse Dist., Inc.	94	36	866-GO-ECLIPSE	815-744-2522
Ethylene Control, Inc.	56	101	800-200-1909	559-896-3232
Family Tree Farms	135	97	866-FLAVOR-1	559-595-7795
Fisher Capesapn	62	21	800-388-3074	514-737-3676
Florida Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services	41	114	850-487-8908	850-488-7127
Four Corners Farm	85	120	912-852-5098	912-852-5097
Fresh Partners AB	105	140	46-8-742-1215	46-8-742-6201
Fresh Quest	131	7	954-946-9554	954-946-8760
Fresh Sense	55	47	866-747-3673	
Georgia Department of Agriculture	42	133	404-656-3685	404-656-9380
The Giumarra Companies	126	14	559-897-5060	559-897-8363
Global Organic Specialty Source, Inc.	64	51	877-952-1198	941-358-6551
David E. Grimes Co.	141	52	831-637-1499	831-636-4660
Heartland Produce	95	79	262-653-1000	262-653-1001
Herb Thyme Farms	50	15	831-476-9733	831-476-3710
Grant J. Hunt Co.	82	70	509-575-8770	509-452-1769
I Love Produce, LLC.	141	115	610-869-4664	610-869-2711
JAB Produce	101	35	312-226-7805	312-226-5154
JBJ Distributing, Inc.	64	76	714-992-4920	714-992-0433
Kern Ridge Growers, LLC.	67	87	661-854-3156	661-854-2832
Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc.	85	69	717-597-2112	717-597-4096
Kingsburg Orchards	125	38	559-897-2986	559-897-4532
Kirkey Products Group, LLC	82	116	407-331-5151	407-331-5158
L&M Companies, Inc.	73	119	509-698-3881	509-698-3922
LaGalera Produce	93	34	773-446-6161	773-446-6165
Lakeside Organic Gardens	66	48	831-761-8797	831-728-1104
Tom Lange Co.	105	81	217-786-3300	217-786-2570
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.	61	111	800-796-2349	718-542-2354

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Mandolini Co.	101	42	312-226-1690	312-226-1833
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	9	112	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
Maple Lane Farms LLC	107	123	860-889-3766	860-887-3087
J. Marchini & Son / LeGrand	134	71	559-665-9710	559-433-3790
J. Marchini & Son / LeGrand	122	28	559-665-9710	559-665-9714
Mediterranean Pleasures	33	109	800-491-VITA	856-467-2638
Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Inc.	66	44	800-468-7111	323-588-7841
Miatech	32	84	800-339-5234	503-659-2204
Miatech	114	85	800-339-5234	503-659-2204
MIXTEC Group	72	107	626-440-7077	626-440-1557
Mooney Farms	143	30	530-899-2661	530-899-7746
Muller Trading Co., Inc.	102	57	847-549-9511	847-540-7758
National Mango Board	121	22	877-MANGOS-1	407-629-7593
National Raisin Company	144	29	800-874-3726	559-834-1055
New England Produce Council	17		561-994-1118	561-994-1610
New Jersey Department of Agriculture	45	39	609-292-8853	609-292-2508
New York State Dept. of Agriculture and Markets	43	16	800-554-4501	518-457-2716
Orchid Island Juice Co.	108	132	800-FRESHHH	772-465-1693
Ozonator, LLC	30	74	877-678-FRESH	760-862-2673
P.E.I. Potato Board	38	5	902-892-6551	902-566-4914
Pacific Organic Produce	108	78	415-673-5555	415-673-5585
Pandol Brothers, Inc.	134	92	661-725-3145	661-725-4741
Peri & Sons Farms	32	89	775-463-4444	
Plastic Suppliers	88-89	99	866-ERTH-1ST	614-471-9033
Pom Wonderful	14	124	800-380-4656	707-966-5801
Potandon Produce	14	54	800-767-6104	208-524-2420
Pride of New York	43	16	800-554-4501	518-457-2716
Produce for Better Health Foundation	51	23	302-235-2329	302-235-5555
The Produce Marketing Association	46-47	10	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
The Produce Marketing Association	74-75	11	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
Produce Plus	96-97	73	800-323-3730	815-293-3701
Produce Pro, Inc.	102	83	630-395-0535	630-572-0390
ProducePackaging.com	37	24	800-644-8729	610-588-6245
Richter and Company, Inc.	85	46	800-438-4834	704-333-9366
Roberson Onion Co.	85	19	912-375-5760	912-375-3610
C. Ruffolo & Sons	31	41	773-927-8862	773-927-8865
Richard E. Ryan & Associates Limited	38	93	416-259-2381	416-259-2689
Sage Fruit	81	1	913-239-0060	913-239-0055
Sambrailo Packaging	90	18	800-563-4467	831-724-1403
Shenandoah Growers	49	12	888-390-6466	540-896-6615
SIAL Paris	13	62	704-365-0041	704-365-8426
Silver Creek Software	36	125	208-388-4555	208-322-3510
Simonian Fruit Co.	127	126	559-834-5307	559-834-2363
Southern Specialties	24	104	954-784-6500	954-784-5800
Spice World, Inc.	141	8	800-433-4979	407-857-7171
Splendid Products	120	127	650-342-4525	650-342-3180
State Garden, Inc.	107		617-884-1816	617-884-4919
Stemilt Growers, Inc.	80	13	509-662-9667	509-663-2914
Strube Celery & Vegetable Company	92	33	773-446-4000	312-226-7644
Sun World International	7	9	760-398-9430	760-398-9613
Sweet Onion Trading Company	86	82	800-699-3727	321-674-2003
Tanimura & Antle, Inc.	5	4	800-772-4542	831-455-3915
Tavilla Sales Company of L.A.	119	58	213-622-4435	213-622-0004
Tennessee Dept. of Agriculture	44	128	615-837-5517	615-837-5194
Testa Produce, Inc.	103	32	312-226-3237	312-226-3410
Thermal Technologies, Incorporated	57	90	803-691-8000	803-691-8010
Trinity Fruit Sales	134	106	559-433-3777	559-433-3790
Turbana Banana Corp.	31	75	800-TURBANA	305-443-8908
Uncle Matt's Organic	108	60	866-626-4613	352-394-1003
Veg-Pak Produce, Ltd.	38	129	416-255-7400	416-255-3859
Vessey & Company, Inc.	141	53	760-356-0134	760-356-0137
Virginia-Carolina Peanut Promotions	145	6	252-459-9977	252-459-7396
Well-Pict Berries	69	40	831-722-3871	831-722-6340
West Coast Tomato, LLC	24	98	941-722-4537	941-729-6778
Wilson Produce	138	67	520-375-5752	520-375-5852
Yakima Fresh LLC.	77	118	800-541-0394	847-685-0474
Z&S Fresh	54	43	800-467-0788	559-432-2888
Kurt Zuhlke & Association	37	24	800-644-8729	610-588-6245

Blast from the Past

When it comes to success, family is a major ingredient for D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of California, a Salinas, CA-based shipper specializing in fresh vegetables under its Andy Boy brand. Family owned and operated by the D'Arrigo family, the company was founded in 1923. The D'Arrigo family also owns and operates two wholesaler/distributors — D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York, Inc., New York, NY, and D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of Massachusetts, Boston, MA.

"Family is the key to our company's success," notes Margaret D'Arrigo, executive vice president of sales and marketing of D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of California. "The principles established by our grandfather and founder in the 1920s were adopted by my father [Andrew D'Arrigo] and passed down by him to his employees over the years."

The photo features members of the D'Arrigo family at the Western Growers Association Annual Convention in San Francisco, CA, in 1978 — the year Andrew was chairman of the association.

Family members are identified by the company for which they worked when the picture was taken.

Back row (left to right), Stephen D'Arrigo (CA), Phyllis D'Arrigo (CA), Andrew D'Arrigo (CA), Mary D'Arrigo (MA), Peter D'Arrigo (MA), Mary Jane D'Arrigo (NY) and Stephen D'Arrigo (NY).

Bottom row (left to right), John D'Arrigo (CA), David D'Arrigo (CA), Margaret D'Arrigo (CA), Marianne D'Arrigo (CA), Patricia D'Arrigo (NY) and Andy D'Arrigo (NY).

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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