

produce business

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

29th ANNUAL
MARKETING
EXCELLENCE
AWARDS



Winners Hit The Mark

INSIDE

THE PUNDIT LOOKS AT CHILDHOOD PRODUCE CONSUMPTION
FAREWAY STORES • PRINT PACKAGING • FALL MERCHANDISING
FRESH-CUT PROCESSING • WASHINGTON APPLES • POMEGRANATES
ORGANIC MARKETING • MUSHROOMS • RAISINS
REGIONAL PROFILES: MONTREAL, ATLANTA & DES MOINES



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To learn more about upcoming promotions and how Dole and Disney are working together to help families live healthier, contact your Dole sales representative.

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THIS MONTH'S WINNER



THOMAS OGLIN
Owner
Diverse Packaging
Rockwall, TX

Tom Oglin, chief executive and owner of Diverse Packaging in Rockwall, TX, is as diverse as the packaging he manufactures. He's been in the packaging side of the industry since the late 1960s, selling packaging materials. He has worked for company giants, including Bemis Company, Paramount Packaging and Interpak (International Packaging Corp.).

In 1990, he started Diverse Packaging, serving as a manufacturer's representative

for several companies. He sells food packaging, plastics, lamination, thermoformed and more. "I sell mainly woven polypropylene bags to onion and cabbage packers. I also sell spice packaging and other food packaging," he says.

Oglin has been reading *PRODUCE BUSINESS* for some time — he picked up a copy at a trade show. "I enjoy the packaging articles because I learn about new innovations and ideas, plus, I get to see what my competition is doing. I also enjoy reading the restaurant profiles and how they use produce, which gives me ideas for my own cooking," he says.

When not meeting with clients, Oglin can most likely be found on the water scuba diving or fishing. He also enjoys photography and cooking. He is a longtime volunteer with the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary in Galveston, TX.

How To Win! To win the *PRODUCE BUSINESS* Quiz, the first thing you must do is enter. The rules are simple: Read through the articles and advertisements in this issue to find the answers. Fill in the blanks corresponding to the questions below, and either cut along the dotted line or photocopy the page, and send your answers along with a business card or company letterhead to the address listed on the coupon. The winner will be chosen by drawing from the responses received before the publication of our October 2017 issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*. The winner must agree to submit a color photo to be published in that issue.

WIN 12-CUP & SINGLE-SERVE COFFEE MAKER

Prepare coffee by the cup or the carafe. This two-in-one machine is a 12-cup coffee maker on one side and a single-serve brewer on the other. Single-serve brewer works with K-Cup pods or your own coffee; brews 6-, 8- and 10-oz. cup sizes. Carafe brewer offers 24-hour brew start, self-cleaning, adjustable auto-off, ready alert and bold setting for stronger coffee flavor. No-drip glass carafe with ergonomic handle and measurement markings. Heats hot water for tea, instant soup and cocoa. All plastics are BPA-free. Weighs 8 lb., 12 oz.



QUESTIONS FOR THE AUGUST ISSUE

- 1) Finish this sentence: "Ain't nothin better in the whole wide world than a..." _____
- 2) Name one of the companies that "Hit the Mark" and earned a *Marketing Excellence Award*. _____
- 3) Which advertiser says, "It's not on your shelf. But it will keep your shelves stocked."? _____
- 4) Which advertiser says, "August is like the Sunday of Summer"? _____
- 5) Which advertiser wants you to "Get a new perspective on your California table grapes and stone fruit programs"? _____
- 6) When and where is the United Fresh BRANDSTORM conference being held? _____

This issue was: Personally addressed to me Addressed to someone else

Name _____ Position _____
 Company _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ ZIP _____
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Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
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Sources: IRI, Total U.S. California mandarin season (weeks ending 10/30/2016–6/11/2017); IRI Panel Data, household penetration.

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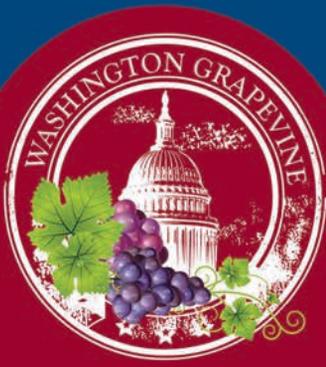
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No Time To Slow Down



BY JULIE MANES, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS,
UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

After a long lull, Congress is poised to take legislative action on several issues critical to the well-being of the fresh produce industry and our ability to keep Americans supplied with nutritious fruits and vegetables. That's why it was particularly timely when a group of United Fresh members recently went to Capitol Hill to advocate for policies that are essential to the ability of fruit and vegetable providers to thrive in the marketplace.

Members of all segments of the fresh produce production chain were in the nation's capital the last week in July to meet with offices of the House of Representatives and Senate to advocate for the industry's positions on a variety of issues, including agriculture workforce, *Farm Bill*, nutrition and food safety. The group met with policymakers who are in particularly relevant committee or leadership positions with maximum influence on policy formation and actions. They met with House and Senate leadership offices, the offices of committees of jurisdiction and congressional offices that represent their operations. Specifically, the messages United Fresh delivered during the visit included:

Agriculture Workforce: After refusing to take action on immigration reform for years, the situation with America's agriculture workforce is reaching a critical point. America's fruit and vegetable producers and Americans who need the nutritious benefits of our industry's products will suffer if Congress continues to ignore this critical issue. Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-VA), is working on a proposal to establish a new agriculture guestworker program that holds great promise for the ability of produce

providers to recruit and maintain a skilled, dedicated workforce. Congress needs to support the chairman's efforts to find a workable solution to our labor challenges.

Farm Bill: In the 2014 *Farm Bill*, Congress demonstrated it recognizes the value of our industry by enacting proposals that address key priorities our industry advocated for, such as the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, Specialty Crop Research Initiative, trade, pest and disease management, and nutrition. In order for producers and consumers to see the full benefits of these programs, Congress needs to continue its commitment by maintaining them in the face of tight budget constraints, as well as efforts to undermine the integrity of crucial programs such as the *Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program*. This program provides a fresh fruit or vegetable snack each day to underserved school kids and has been very successful in exposing children to the healthful benefits of fresh produce. Congress should resist efforts to open this program up to all forms of produce.

Trade: The centerpiece of President Trump's trade agenda has been the renegotiation of the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA). With discussions among the Agreement's principals, we urged policymakers to be mindful of the benefits and challenges NAFTA has brought to the fruit and vegetable sector. We support the administration seeking to understand the concerns of some producers, and potentially assisting vulnerable commodities with WTO-acceptable support programs. However, the answer to competition cannot be erecting protectionist barriers that would only be mimicked by other countries to protect their own industries from U.S. exports. It is essential the administration

recognizes that the business of fresh fruit and vegetable production, distribution and marketing has become highly integrated across the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Food Safety: United Fresh and its membership support FSMA, but would like to see the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) make some changes that they discussed with the Hill last week. First, FDA needs to draw clear lines between operations covered under the *Produce Safety Rule* and the *Preventive Controls Rule*. We believe the *Produce Safety Rule* should apply to those who simply "grow, harvest, pack or hold" fresh produce. Two, FDA has acknowledged the problems with the water testing requirements in the *Produce Rule*, but hasn't offered a new path forward, just an announcement of a delay in compliance. United Fresh would like to see FDA provide more information on what the new water testing requirements will be for the industry.

With the latest collapse of healthcare reform, the legislative agenda has an opening for debate and action on these critical issues. We in the industry need to maintain a steady drumbeat of advocacy for the policies our industry needs. Produce providers need to continue to reach out to lawmakers, engage in constructive dialogue and assertively ask for policies that will allow produce providers to succeed. United Fresh's annual Washington conference provides the best forum each year for fruit and vegetable providers to join forces and demonstrate how each of these policy priorities are essential for the entire produce production chain. As an industry, we can't afford to not make our voices heard.

Together, they mean business.



When you have delicious POM POMS in your berry cooler, you're in store for big sales. In fact, your profits could quadruple. Not only are they the #1 seller in the pomegranate arils category, 9 out of 10 berry buyers say they are open to trying POM POMS. Our sales are also supported by POM's multimillion-dollar marketing campaign, including TV commercials, FSIs, digital and PR. So stock your produce section with POM POMS, and you'll see they are berry, berry good for business.

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Source: POM Fresh Consumer Landscape Study, nationally representative online survey, March 2013. IRI 12 weeks ending December 31, 2015. 2015 Average Velocity Unit/Store/Week, berry cooler vs. shelf placement, Regional Account

TRANSITION

BOGGIATTO PRODUCE

Jeff Hitchcock has purchased Michael Boggiatto's stock in Boggiatto Produce, Salinas, CA, making him majority shareholder. For the past 28 years, Hitchcock has managed the farming and production operations of Boggiatto Produce. He has been an officer and shareholder since 1989. As president and chief executive, Hitchcock will provide the vision and management to continue the company's growth trajectory. Growers **Ron Panziera** and **Ed Panziera** will remain shareholders and directors.



TRANSITION

E FOODS INC.

Wholesaler and brokerage firm, E Foods Inc., Altamonte Springs, FL, celebrated **Manuel Fernandez's** 16th anniversary. Fernandez began working at E Foods Inc., as a sales representative, where he continues to build relationships in Puerto Rico.



TRANSITION

GIORGIO COMPANIES

The Giorgio Companies, Blandon, PA, has named **Joe Caldwell** president. Dave Carroll, current president, will transition toward retirement. Caldwell has been with Monterey Mushrooms for the past 32 years, most recently as vice president.



TRANSITION

IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION

The Idaho Potato Commission (IPC), Eagle, ID, has named Matthew Brigotti foodservice promotions director for the Northeast and Midwest regions. Brigotti leads marketing outreach to restaurant operators, distributors and produce specialists. He will also conduct potato product seminars and represent the industry at foodservice trade shows. With more than 17 years of sales, marketing and promotion, and management expertise, Brigotti was president of the New York Spaghetti House in Cleveland, OH, and represented Taylor Farms, managing the McDonald's and US Foods accounts.



TRANSITION

CHURCH BROTHERS FARMS

Church Brothers Farms, Salinas, CA, has named **Brian Church** chief executive. Church, who has been with the company since 1999, will focus on the company's growth, regional processing and innovation. The company promoted **Chuck Church** to the sales department, responsible for handling a range of accounts. The company also named **Mark Zahnlecker** and **Sebastian Pagano** general sales. **Ernst van Eeghen** has returned to the company as vice president of business development.



Brian Church

Ernst van Eeghen

TRANSITION

PURE FLAVOR

Pure Flavor, Leamington, Ontario, Canada, has named **Chris Veillon** chief marketing officer. The company also promoted **Matt Mastronardi** to executive vice president. Mastronardi is one of the founding partners of Pure Flavor and is part of the sales team.



Chris Veillon

TRANSITION

TANIMURA & ANTLE

Tanimura & Antle, Salinas, CA, has named **John McKeon** senior manager of organic compliance and sustainability. In his new role, McKeon directs all compliance activities for the company's organic program, quality assurance for the company's organic, commission and consolidation supply chain, R&D for organic materials and new business platforms, customer compliance management, FSMA compliance management for organic items, and standards development for sustainability and social accountability programs. Prior to joining the company, McKeon worked for Earthbound Farm, most recently as director of agriculture supply.



TRANSITION

VIDALIA ONION COMMITTEE

Bob Stafford, manager of the Vidalia Onion Business Council, Vildalia, GA, has been named to manage the Vidalia Onion Committee, Vildalia, GA. Stafford has managed the Council since 1994. He was formally named manager by the board of directors in May 2017, when **Susan Waters**, executive director, announced her retirement. Stafford works as a liaison between Vidalia growers and the Georgia Department of Agriculture. He also works to protect the onion's trademark.



TRANSITION

WILSON PRODUCE

Wilson Produce, Nogales, AZ, has named **Guillermo Martinez** general manager. Prior to joining the company, Martinez worked for Kingdom Fresh as general manager, where he was instrumental in the rebranding and marketing program. He currently serves as a member of the United Fresh Council of Food Safety & Technology and as a member of PMA's Science & Technology Committee.



TRANSITION



Tami Bacon

Cynthia Haskins

TRANSITION

RAINIER FRUIT

Rainier Fruit, Selah, WA, has named **Jeff Weidner** director of warehouse and grower relations, responsible for building closer relationships with all grower partners and shipping facilities to create a seamless and efficient supply change that meets customer needs and expectations. Weidner previously worked for L&M and First Fruits Marketing.



ANNOUNCEMENT

CHRISTOPHER RANCH CELEBRATES FARMING HERITAGE WITH NEW BOXES

Christopher Ranch, Gilroy, CA, has launched new boxes to celebrate its family owned farming heritage. The boxes, adorned with custom artwork depicting California garlic fields, will house fresh garlic bags.



NEW YORK APPLE ASSOCIATION

Fishers, New York-based New York Apple Association Inc., (NYAA) has announced "Team 2017." **Cynthia Haskins**, president and chief executive, will direct the association's activities to market and promote the 2017 New York state apple crop. Haskins will work with **Michele Hoard**, new retail and foodservice account manager, and **Susan Sarlund**, NYAA's longtime Northeast account manager. Hoard and Sarlund will call on retailers and other buyer partners. **David McClurg** will support the association's 2017 retail promotional activities and implement a foodservice market development grant project. **Tami Bacon** has been named administrative and public relations assistant.



Michele Hoard

David McClurg

Susan Sarlund



ALLEN LUND PARTNERS WITH SANTOS INTERNATIONAL

Allen Lund Company, La Cañada Flintridge, CA, and Santos International, McAllen, TX, are launching a new company, TransKool Solutions, to provide warehousing solutions. TransKool Solutions will be optimized in LTL and FTL services, load consolidations and U.S. customs brokerage.



MAJOR RETAILERS DISPLAY COLORADO PRODUCE CALENDAR

The Colorado Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (CFVGA), Eaton, CO, is encouraging the public to look for its produce calendar when shopping at Sprouts Farmers Market, City Markets and King Soopers stores. Produced in cooperation with *Colorado Proud*, the calendar is designed to provide an approximate calendar of when Colorado produce is available fresh from local growers' fields and orchards. The calendar shows the season of typical availability for 44 produce items grown in Colorado. Retailers wishing to order poster-size calendars can contact CFVGA.



GRIMMWAY FARMS JOINS "PACK TO SCHOOL" GIVEAWAY

Volunteers from Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA, joined the Lamont, CA, business community to distribute hundreds of backpacks and school supplies collected by local business for the "Pack to School Supply Drive" led by the Greater Lamont Chamber of Commerce. Nearly 500 local school children were on hand for the event. The Greater Lamont Chamber of Commerce coordinated the drive to ensure area school children have access to the essential supplies needed for the upcoming school year. The children were allowed to pick and choose from donated supplies, giving them a "shopping" experience to connect each student with items appropriate for their grade level. Grimmway Farms donated 330 backpacks and 800 carrot snack packs.

CORRECTION:

In the *New York Regional Market Profile*, page 88, which appeared in the July 2017 issue, Bobby Dunn was misidentified in the photo with Gabriela D'Arrigo. PRODUCE BUSINESS regrets the error.

MANN PACKING LAUNCHES REDESIGNED WEBSITE

Mann Packing, Salinas, CA, has redesigned its website with new recipes, updated content and a product locator tool that allows users to search for Mann's products by city, state or ZIP code. The locator can be accessed on mobile devices and provides users with specific product availability in their area. If a product is not specified, the locator will list all retail locations carrying Mann's products within a specified region. The website will be updated regularly with new recipes, media releases, videos and product information.



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CRYSTAL VALLEY FOODS REDESIGNS SITE

Crystal Valley Foods, Miami, has redesigned its website. The new site features more streamlined menus, simplified navigation and a responsive layout. It also features information and resources about the company and tips on how to prepare and store the products it markets. The company will be updating the site with new information and products, and a recipe section will be coming in the near future. The company has launched several social media accounts, including Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

ANNOUNCEMENT

MANN PACKING AWARDS FOUR SCHOLARSHIPS

The Scholarship Committee at California State University Monterey Bay College of Business, Marina, CA, has selected four candidates to receive The Mann Packing Scholarship. Mann Packing will continue its effort to reach future leaders in agriculture by making the scholarship available through 2022. The Mann Packing Scholarship was established in 2016 and seeks to recognize candidates who have demonstrated local leadership and who have shown a commitment to future involvement in the agriculture industry.



ANNOUNCEMENT

MOBILE GREENHOUSE IMPACTS PURCHASING DECISIONS

NatureFresh Farms' mobile greenhouse tour has completed nearly 50 events since mid-April. The tour involves the company's mobile greenhouse — Greenhouse Education Center (GEC), a 38-foot custom-built unit that is an exact snapshot of how NatureFresh Farms grows its vegetables in its greenhouses in Leamington, Ontario, Canada, and Delta, OH. Equipped with fruit-bearing plants and complemented by a live bumblebee eco-system, the GEC serves as an education resource to inform consumers about how greenhouse vegetables are grown. Now in its third year, the #GreenInTheCity Tour has completed more than 200 events to date across eastern North America connecting with consumers at retail stores, summer camps, schools and community fairs. The 2017 tour will continue through early November, wrapping up at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto on Nov. 12.



Produce & Floral Watch are regular features of PRODUCE BUSINESS. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a high resolution image to: Managing Editor, PRODUCE BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425 or email us at info@producebusiness.com

ANNOUNCEMENT

HARDIE'S FRESH FOODS EARNS SAFE QUALITY FOOD CERTIFICATION

Hardie's Fresh Foods, Dallas, has earned its Safe Quality Food (SQF) Level 2 certification at its four warehouses located in Austin, Dallas, Houston and San Antonio, TX. Recognized by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI), the SQF certification is a worldwide initiative that provides the standard of providing the safest foods to consumers. To further its commitment to educating more than 500 employees, Hardie's Fresh Foods recently held its annual Safety Week to share the long-lasting impact the SQF Level 2 standards have with the restaurants it serves. SQF standards require rigorous testing, including audits that measure traceability and safety standards.



ANNOUNCEMENT

MELON 1 INC., AND SYNGENTA VEGETABLE TEAM UP

Watermelon grower-shipper Melon 1 Inc., Arabi, GA, has partnered with agriculture company Syngenta to grow and distribute firm flesh varieties of seedless watermelon, including Crisp Delight and Crisp Desire. These new varieties have increased flesh firmness compared to a traditional seedless watermelon. Syngenta has developed these varieties specifically for the fresh-cut market. The watermelons retain more of their juice as opposed to having excessive post-processing liquid loss. Melon 1 and Syngenta are actively trialing new firm flesh varieties that are not available commercially yet. The two agribusinesses have an agreement to grow and distribute these new varieties.



ANNOUNCEMENT

SMOKY MOUNTAIN FAMILY FARMS GOES ORGANIC

Pete Pappas & Sons Inc., announced its premium tomato farm, Smoky Mountain Family Farms (SMFF), Newport, TN, is now USDA organic certified. SMFF has added certified Round and Roma organics to its 2017 offerings. Organic watermelons will be available starting in September.



ANNOUNCEMENT



INLINE PLASTICS LAUNCHES NEW CONTAINER LINE

Inline Plastics, Sheldon, CT, announced the launch of its SnackWare food containers, the newest members of the company's line of Safe-T-Fresh tamper-evident products. The line is the only one-piece tamper clamshell on the market and includes three sizes, all with the same SureGrip technology. Sizes include one, two and four compartments to accommodate different food combinations.

ANNOUNCEMENT

STEMILT PREPARES FOR FALL PEAR SALES

Stemilt Growers, Wenatchee, WA, is urging retailers to get a jump start on Rushing Rivers ads and supplementing with a Lil Snappers plan for early September back-to-school timing. As pear harvest nears for its new crop, Stemilt suggests starting promotions early and promoting often during the fall and winter months. The company expects Northwest pear crop to be down slightly over last year. Stemilt's harvest starts in early August with its Tosca pear.



ANNOUNCEMENT

OCEANSIDE POLE EXPANDS ROMA ACREAGE

Oceanside Pole vine ripe tomatoes are back with 60 new acres of Romas. Increasing Roma production by 50 percent, West Coast Tomato Growers, Oceanside, CA, owners of the Oceanside Pole tomato brand, aim to keep up with consumer demand. Harvest began at the end of June; Oceanside Pole will produce Romas and vine ripens through the fall.



ANNOUNCEMENT

GRIMMWAY FARMS' BABY CARROT PROCESSING FACILITY READY

Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA, has activated its Pasco, WA, baby carrot processing facility to provide customers with freight savings and additional shipping options this season. The facility is modeled after the company's Malaga facility in Arvin, CA. This year marks the first time the Pasco facility is operating at larger capacity.





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NAFTA Discourse Divides Us Again

BY JIM PREVORA, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Since President Trump expressed his intent to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the produce industry discussion reminds one of Yogi Berra's famous quote, "It's Déjà vu all over again," as the arguments have changed little since the original debate over NAFTA, which came into force in 1994.

Producers directly affected by Mexican imports, such as Florida tomato growers, point out the difficulties imports cause for the domestic industry and allege various subsidies for Mexican growers creating unfair competition.

Producers in the United States that have export markets in Mexico, such as the apple growers of Washington, point out the importance of keeping export markets open.

And those who do direct trade with Mexico — the importers in Nogales, McAllen and other places along the border — point out the benefits consumers derive from being able to buy the products they wish at the prices vendors, including those from countries outside of the United States, are willing to sell them.

Free trade agreements, which sound like they should be simple documents — "No tariffs between our two countries" — actually turn out to be highly complex. Partly it is because of content. If the United States and Mexico have a free trade agreement, but the United States and Japan do not, well what happens if a car is assembled in Mexico, but most of the parts come from Japan?

It is also unclear what the term "trade" actually encompasses. Is a truck driving cross the border included? Intellectual property protections? What about non-tariff barriers to trade? Requiring packaging in a particular language? For hundreds of years, Germany had its own beer purity laws, which proscribed anything but water, barley and hops in beer. In 1987, however, a group of French brewers brought a case to the European court of justice, which found the German law protectionist and thus a violation of its own free trade agreement — The Treaty of Rome, established in 1958.

We also have a situation where many want free trade only with restrictions, so negotiations may include labor and environmental restrictions and, in all cases, there is a need for dispute resolution mechanisms. Agriculture is so sensitive an area that, in fact, NAFTA has separate clauses related to U.S./Canadian trade and U.S./Mexican trade.

Despite the politics, the economics are not really much in dispute. Virtually all economists believe free trade leads to greater prosperity. The problem is those disadvantaged by free trade are obvious and specific, whereas the benefits tend to be more diffuse,

and thus people who specifically benefit are harder to identify. In other words, if Florida tomato growers have to close down because they can't compete effectively, they all have names, their workers have names and their communities are easily identified.

If the benefit to allowing free trade imports in America is that consumers get a less expensive or better quality product, the benefit is tiny to each consumer. Collectively, however, lower prices may mean consumers can take more vacations or buy more cars, but it is hard to specifically say that an individual person got a job at Disney World because consumers in the Northeast got cheaper tomatoes and subsequently went on more vacations.

President Trump built his campaign around the idea that imports were hurting American workers, but the poster boy for this claim was a Midwestern factory worker who, it was claimed, lost a good paying union job to foreign competition — not a low paying agricultural job.

It is not at all clear that NAFTA had much to do with the loss of jobs in the industrial Midwest. There is some argument that by incorporating a lower labor work force into the American production process, America has been able to export more manufactured products than it would have had this option been proscribed.

But, in any case, it is hard to imagine President Trump wants U.S. workers to take harvesting jobs, and it is even harder to believe the president wants to allow immigrants to do the harvesting. So, while

growers who feel damaged by NAFTA are, quite reasonably, seeing this as their moment to try to revise the accords, it seems likely these agricultural interests will be thrown under the bus in any negotiations as the administration looks for a face-saving agreement that will allow it to claim it is helping to revive manufacturing in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin.

When NAFTA was originally negotiated, it so divided the industry that the United Fresh Produce Association didn't dare take a position on the issue. Now, institutionalized, it is hard to see how the industry as a whole can do anything but consider itself open to modernization of the accords. In the end, this is a dispute not about policy, but about politics, and if those looking to limit consumer choice win, it will not be by the persuasiveness of their arguments, but by the political force they are able to marshal.

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It is hard to see how the industry as a whole can do anything but consider itself open to modernization of the accords.

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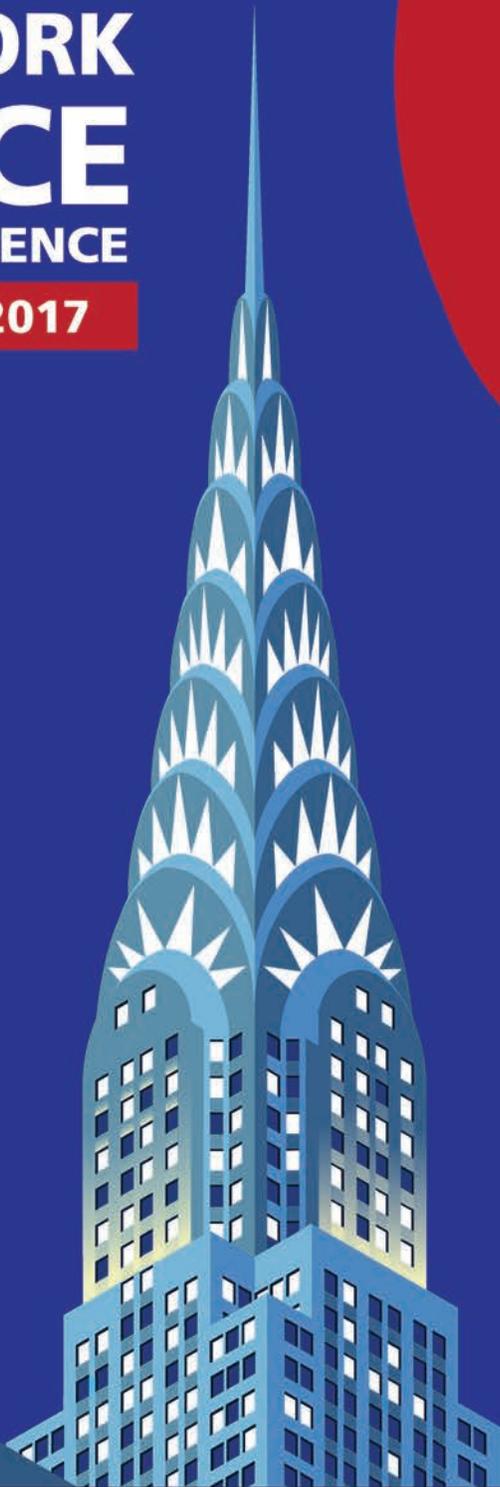
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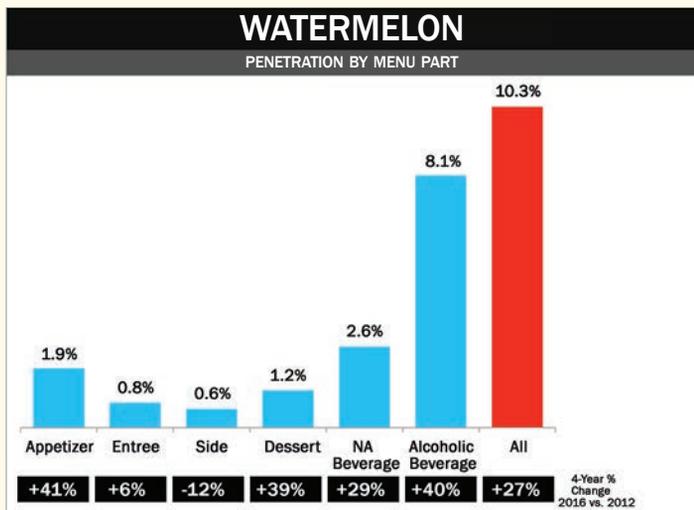
Menu research points to proliferation, highlights opportunities

BY MEGAN MCKENNA, DIRECTOR OF FOODSERVICE AT NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD

Watermelon on menus has grown by 27 percent in the past four years, according to a recent MenuTrends Research study commissioned by the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) and conducted by Chicago-based Datassential. The database used in this study includes menus from more than 7,000 commercial restaurants including independents, regional chains, and national chains in all restaurant segments. The biennial research program allows NWPB to identify trends in foodservice, furthering its goals of education and ideation assistance to maximize watermelon usage and distinguish menu items.

Watermelon has progressed from “Adoption” to “Proliferation” in the usage-menu adoption cycle as independent and chain foodservice operators alike are embracing watermelon’s unique yet-versatile flavor profile. Chefs can pair watermelon with salty, savory, bitter and umami.

According to the study, watermelon is one of the fastest-growing fruits featured on salads with more than 100 percent 4-year growth. Proteins most commonly menued with watermelon are chicken and pork. In addition to watermelon offerings trends, the research also helps identify opportunities for new, innovative usage: Watermelon is featured most often on alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverage menus. With the exception of side items, watermelon is expanding across the menu with appetizers experiencing the most rapid growth.



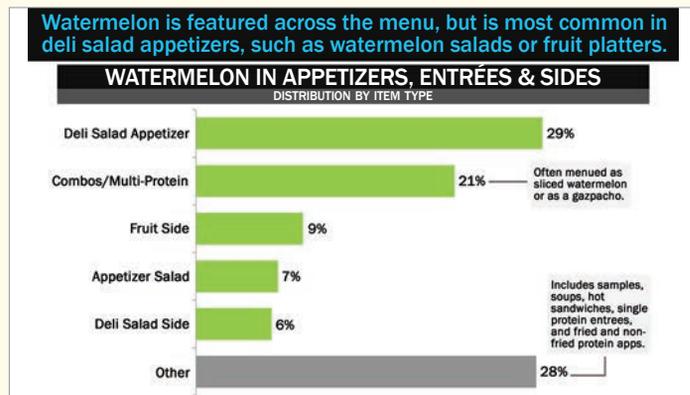
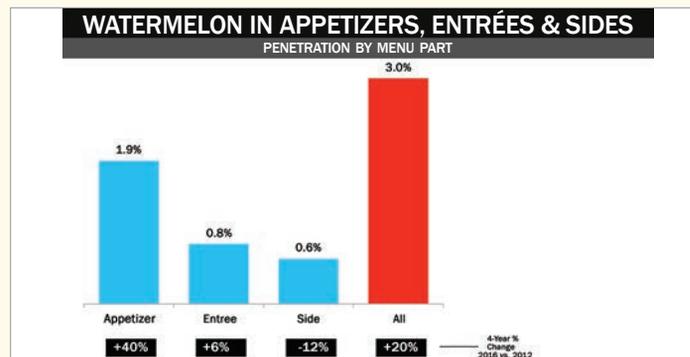
Using this information allows us to assist operators with recipe ideation to optimize consumption based on research-backed consumer preference.

Additional research highlights include the following:

- Watermelon ranks 24th among most popular fruits and 20th among fastest four-year growth.
- Watermelon is most often found on all day menus and has

seen the largest growth on dinner menus.

- With the exception of side items, watermelon is expanding across the menu with appetizers experiencing the most rapid growth.
- All regions of the U.S. are experiencing increased use of watermelon.
- Watermelon is found more often on casual and fine dining menus.
- Despite being featured on only 1 percent of all dessert menus, watermelon is among one of the fastest-growing dessert fruits (34 percent 4-year growth)
- Watermelon is one of the fastest-growing fruit flavors in non-alcoholic beverages (29 percent 4-year growth).
- Watermelon is among the fastest-growing fruits in alcoholic beverages, up 39 percent over the past four years.



The National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB), based in Winter Springs, FL, was established in 1989 as an agricultural promotion group to promote watermelon in the United States and in various markets abroad. Funded through a self-mandated industry assessment paid by more than 1,500 watermelon producers, handlers and importers, the NWPB mission is to increase consumer demand for watermelon through promotion, research and education programs.



Megan McKenna is the director of foodservice and marketing for the National Watermelon Promotion Board since December 2014, but in the produce industry since 2007. She works with decision-makers in foodservice such as culinary, marketing, purchasing, nutrition and more, to get more watermelon on menus.

Small Things Make A Big Difference

BY JIM PREVOR, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PRODUCE BUSINESS

The news about watermelon is great. It especially bodes well for watermelon growers, the produce industry at large and for consumers who are experiencing watermelon more frequently when dining out. What it means for the future of produce consumption overall is uncertain.

The National Watermelon Board, working with Datassential, has utilized a four-step process by which foods gain currency on menus. It is called the Menu Adoption Cycle, and it goes from Inception — where menu items are mostly in fine dining or ethnic restaurants — to Adoption — where menu items move into fast casual and casual restaurants — to Proliferation — with menu items in casual chain restaurants and some quick service restaurants — and finally on to Ubiquity — where items are picked up in family restaurants and school cafeterias and similar enterprises. There is a similar path at retail, from specialty gourmet stores to dollar stores.

This is all very true, but not as illuminating as one would hope. In retrospect — after items become ubiquitous, we can trace this path — but there are loads of items that just never take off. Even stalwart produce items, say pears, which have been around for decades, never run the cycle. We don't really know why some items, say kale, boom, while others, say cucumbers, don't.

As an industry, we also have to be careful about making too much of these statistics. It is very nice that menu mentions of, say, blood oranges have boomed, but what does that really mean? Does it mean a mention of a squeeze of blood orange juice or a slice of blood orange for color?

Beyond Penetration — the percentage of restaurants that serve the item — and Incidence — the percentage of menu items that feature a food, flavor or ingredient — the industry actually cares a lot about quantity. If a mention of a steak means a 32-ounce

If the Watermelon Board can persuade a restaurant chain to add a single slice of watermelon as a side dish with a sandwich, or convert every chicken salad to a watermelon chicken salad, these small changes can mean big increases in sales and consumption.

serving, and the mention of a blood orange only means a bit of juice on a salad, the increase in mentions won't mean much in terms of sales or consumption.

Indeed, one issue with tracking menu mentions is that we can't be sure if we are tracking actual changes in dishes served or changes in menu language trends. So maybe the roasted chicken was always served with a slice of orange as a garnish, but only now is the orange mentioned.

Another factor for the industry to take note of is the Watermelon Board's research points to a divergence from what the industry has traditionally thought most important. Although the Watermelon Board, as with most of the produce industry, has thought it wise to focus on health in its marketing — lycopene and whatnot — the Number One penetration area for watermelon is not on the food side at all — it is alcoholic beverages. And that area has grown by 40 percent in the past four years. Now maybe the healthy image makes restaurant guests feel less guilty when drinking their alcohol, or maybe consumers don't care much about the industry's various health claims.

One thing the research also indicates is that an "all for one and one for all" industry strategy can often make sense. Watermelons are often featured with grapes, cantaloupe, pineapple, honeydew and

strawberries in fruit cups and on platters. A broader assortment can help sell more of an item than if only the one item is available because consumers often enjoy variety. Different items provide different levels of flavor, different textures and whatnot — so avocados are the top "fruit" on salads, and their creaminess encourages purchase from people who might find solely conventional fruits to be too sweet.

The rapid growth of watermelon in food-service also points out that small things can make a big difference. If the Watermelon Board can persuade a restaurant chain to add a single slice of watermelon as a side dish with a sandwich, or convert every chicken salad to a watermelon chicken salad, these small changes can mean big increases in sales and consumption.

Of course, the big issue for the produce industry is whether the growth we see in items such as watermelon actually means higher overall consumption. In other words, if consumers eat Rita's Jolly Rancher Watermelon Italian Ice, does that simply mean that strawberry or lemon flavors are down? Do more salads being made with watermelon mean less protein in the salads? Or is it fewer berries or tomatoes? We don't really know.

But, at the next convention, we can gather over a Watermelon Jalapeno Margarita and discuss the issue at length.

Can Children Be Wooed To Eat Bitter Vegetables? Gertrude Zeinstra Says Repetition Is The Key



James S. Prevor
JIM PREVOR
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

There is near unanimity on the desirability of children eating more produce. But when one looks at the initiatives actually done, almost all wind up getting children to eat more sweet fruit and calling it a victory.

The problem, of course, is that many of the healthiest elements of produce consumption come about through consuming more vegetables. When we learned of a researcher focused on this area, we asked Pundit Investigator and Special Projects Editor Mira Slott to speak with Gertrude Zeinstra of the Consumer Science Department at Wageningen University in the Netherlands to find out more:

Q: What are the key points you can shed on your study?

A: What I think is important to point out is that for children, there is often a large difference between fruits and vegetables. We have an inborn preference for sweet, so usually fruit is quite liked by children, whereas vegetables are often not.

We also have an inborn tendency to like foods with a lot of energy, and vegetables do not contain a lot of energy. So, that's also a reason why we probably don't like vegetables that much right from the start.

Q: How do we go about tackling that challenge?

A: We know taste is very important. In general, children won't eat something they don't like, even if it will have a positive impact, or relieve pain. For instance, if they have an earache and the medication is not-so-nice tasting, they will not take it, even if you explain it will be good for their ear and make the pain go away. It's difficult. In our research, we looked at known strategies for increasing children's likings of food, and we studied whether these strategies could be applied to vegetables.

First, we conducted a qualitative study with three age groups from primary school representing different cognitive development stages, and a parental survey study.

In this parental questionnaire, we wanted to see what Dutch parents were doing to increase their children's fruit and vegetable intake. Here we also found a difference between fruits and vegetables. The atmosphere around vegetables was more negative than for fruit, mainly because there was more pressure put on the kids to eat the vegetables. We know from the literature that using pressure to get kids to eat certain food items is often counter-productive.

These initial studies indicated parents who give their children a choice or some kind of autonomy with eating fruits and vegetables have children who eat more fruit and vegetables. Texture is also an important factor. We know from literature that raw

vegetables are often easier for children, and they don't like very slippery or mushy vegetables, such as asparagus or mushrooms, but cucumber or raw carrots are usually OK. In our study, texture was more vital for 4- to 5-year-old's food preferences than for 11- to 12-year-olds.

We then conducted three intervention studies, focusing on vegetables.

Q: Could you walk us through the methodology, how the studies worked, and what you learned, etc.?

A: We wanted to explore the effects of different preparation methods. We had carrots and French beans prepared using six different methods — mashed, boiled, steamed, grilled, stir-fried and deep-fried — to see which the children preferred most and least, in a ranked order. An adult panel scored the six preparations on their appearance, taste and texture characteristics.

We found steamed and boiled were most appreciated by the kids, and boiled is also the most familiar method in the Netherlands. Familiarity is also important for children's food choice; they are often reluctant to try unfamiliar foods. We found when the appearance of the vegetable is uniform, it positively influenced their liking.

This was also the case for a crunchy texture. Whereas, when there was brown coloring on the vegetables due to the preparation, it negatively influenced their liking. When the texture was granular (mashed with pieces inside), that was not really liked either. So, the advice is if a child doesn't like a certain preparation, try another.

Q: What other factors did you consider?

A: We wanted to test in an experiment whether choice and autonomy would influence intake. If you offer children a choice of vegetables, will it increase their consumption? We conducted a study with 300 children. Each child was invited with one of his/her parents to have dinner in a restaurant. For each child, two target vegetables were selected that were similarly liked by the child. One hundred children in the control group didn't have a choice, and just got one vegetable. One hundred had a choice between the two vegetables, and the other group had both of these vegetables on the plate, thus having choice and variation. We measured consumption and how much they liked the vegetables.

Q: Did the results meet your hypothesis?

A: Unfortunately, we did not see any difference in their intake. In addition, we found no difference in the liking of the vegetables.

Q: At one of our past New York Produce Shows, Gabriella

Morini, a taste and food sciences professor and researcher at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo, Italy, presented research on the molecular aspects of taste, and argued the need to condition taste receptors, which are naturally opposed to bitter vegetables, starting at an early age, preferably when the child is in the womb. And studies have found that children may require multiple repeated tastings of a vegetable before liking it, due to their developing and changing taste buds. Did this phenomenon play into your research?

A: This repeated tasting is one of the key findings. Most of these repeated exposure studies have been done in very young children when eating their first solid foods. When introducing new vegetable tastes, repeated exposure is very important to make the child familiar with the taste.

Repeated exposure has been compared with other conditioning mechanisms. One of those mechanisms is pairing a new taste vegetable with a high-energy food such as a sweet fruit, usually resulting in higher liking. It's an important question to ask if this works also for vegetables to use high energy as a bridge to liking. The other mechanism is to pair an unfamiliar taste with a liked sweet taste. Various studies have been done with these three mechanisms.

Q: Are these conditioning mechanisms effective when applied to vegetables?

A: Repeated exposure is the key. Adding energy or adding sweetness was not really necessary. So, repeated exposure is very effective for unfamiliar/novel vegetable tastes. But what can we do to increase consumption with more familiar vegetables? When children are 3 or 4 years old, they've already learned, 'this is a vegetable I like, and this is one I don't.'

Q: Have you weighed the influence of biological factors with environmental and social factors?

A: Yes, we often look at the whole picture; eating behavior is very complex. For example, role modeling is a very important influence. In many studies, parental intake is a strong predictor of children's intake. For this project, we did a role-modeling study with child idols that took place at the schools. We played a movie where a role model was eating vegetables enthusiastically, and we did several exposures to the vegetables and the movie. There was not an immediate effect of higher intake due to the intervention.

What we did find, though, was the kids who were exposed to these role-model movies had a higher intake compared to the children in the control group over an extended period of time when we later measured intake of the children again.

The study is challenging because there may be a delayed effect from the intervention. In future research, it is important to take into account direct and delayed effects. Especially with children who develop in steps, it is possible delayed effects may occur.

Q: Could you elaborate on the complications of studying delayed effects? Aren't there many variables, which also differ from child to child?

A: Definitely. It is impossible to control for all impacts that influence consumption. There is also a technical side. It is costly to do a study where you follow children over time. Also, children vary a lot in their vegetable intake, so if you want to measure accurately, you have to measure at an individual level, what you give them, and the actual amount of what they consume at the

different stages of the process. Therefore, longer-term studies also require money.

In the Netherlands vegetables are practically only eaten during dinner, so the recommended amount is hard to consume in one eating moment. In the Netherlands, we should try to increase the number of eating moments for these vegetables. Also for children, it's quite a high amount to eat in one single session, and parents are eager for children to eat healthfully, so there will be pressure for them to eat all their vegetables. It would be better to spread out eating moments with snacks in between meals.

Q: Did you undertake a study to test this strategy?

A: We developed a project called Veggie Time in various daycare centers. In the Netherlands, in the morning around 10 or 11 a.m., it's fruit time, but there is no such moment for vegetables. We knew repeated exposure was such a strong mechanism. We thought it would be good to conduct an experiment in a natural setting. We chose three different unfamiliar vegetables for the experiment.

We had a control group and an intervention group, where we pre-measured their intake of these three vegetables. Then the intervention group had an exposure period of five months where they had these three vegetables offered repeatedly, in various product forms, where the control group did not have exposure to these three vegetables. After the five months, we went back and measured intake in the intervention and control group. We saw for two of the three vegetables, the children in the intervention group increased their intake quite nicely compared to the control group.

Q: What were the three vegetables, and why were just two out of three a hit with the children?

A: We used pumpkin, white radish and zucchini. Pumpkin and white radish showed an increase in intake. With the zucchini, we didn't see the intake increase or decrease; it remained stable. This could be due to the blander taste of zucchini, or to the fact that — we also checked with the parents — zucchini was more often on the menu, so more familiar than expected beforehand.

Q: You said familiarity was an appealing trait for children. Yet, you found the increased intake with the less familiar items?

A: Yes, in general, familiarity is a positive trait, but there is a difference between willingness to eat and increasing intake. Familiarity is a positive predictor of children's intake; when offered a choice, most children will choose familiar foods. But when products are unfamiliar, repeated exposure is a very effective mechanism to increase liking and intake.

Q: Is availability and presentation half the battle?

A: Making produce available is very important. Usually, children like fruit, and if you put it in front of them, they'll eat it. If you put cookies in front of them, they'll eat those as well. But additionally, the item should be accessible. If a young child eats his apple without the peel and cut in slices, then a complete apple is not accessible to this child. This is necessary to take into account.

Ready-to-eat is great for the children and easy for the parents to provide to the children. That's indeed very important.

Also, it should not only be about health as a selling argument because young children don't understand this term; it's too abstract for them, and several studies show children may associate healthy with distaste. So, it's better to focus on fun and pleasant.



Doing Things The Fareway

Fareway Stores Inc., bills itself committed to family values, and extends that vision to the way it treats employees.

BY BOB JOHNSON



With 17 stores throughout the greater Des Moines, IA, area, Fareway Stores is second only to Hy-Vee in number of units. And across five Midwestern states — Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Nebraska and South Dakota — the family owned company has a total of 117 stores with 10,000 employees. And none of them work on Sunday. Ever.

“Fareway’s policy of being closed on Sunday has been in place for as long as our company has been in existence,” says the company’s website. “We believe our customers, employees and business partners

deserve a day at home with their families — free from the fast-paced life we all live the other six days of the week.”

That sense of community also extends to the importance of sourcing as much produce as possible from neighbors who farm. “As a company we try to source as much farm-fresh local product as we can,” says Chris Boothe, vice president of produce purchasing at Fareway Stores, Boone, IA. “I would think Des Moines considers local to be the surrounding communities, and possibly could even consider the entire state of Iowa local. Our stores also have the option to buy local and are encouraged to do so.”

At store #900, located on Euclid Avenue in Des Moines, local produce is an important draw. “Local produce is very important,” says produce worker Joe Harkness. “Locally sourced produce is very important to our customers. Local means from the Des Moines metropolitan area, as well as from all over Iowa. People like it local. Sometimes we put up signage for the produce from Iowa.”

Store #900 is in a pocket shopping center that also includes a Walgreen’s and two bank branches. It is close to Little John’s Burgers, and three blocks away from competitors Linn’s Super Market and the All Africans Market. Demand for organic at this store



The first Fareway store opened for business at 624 Story St. in Boone, IA, on May 12, 1938.

generally trends up, but the jury is still out with some in the neighborhood. “Organic is growing, but not as fast as the local,” says Harkness. “Some customers like organic, some don’t.”

There is general agreement, however, that the produce department is at the heart of this store.

“Produce is one of the more important areas,” says Harkness. “We use produce from the store in the deli department.”

The importance of produce extends throughout Fareway’s 117 stores. “Produce is extremely important in defining our stores,” says Boothe. “It is the first impression our

customers have when they walk in the front door. It can be a reflection on the rest of their shopping experience.”

While the stores go the extra mile to support Iowa and other Midwestern farmers, Fareway has also developed a global supply chain to keep the department well-stocked. “We source from all over the country, and certain times of the year from outside the states,” says Boothe. “Product can be sourced from California, Texas, Florida, Arizona, Washington, Idaho, Mexico, Canada, Chile, just to name a few.”

The first Fareway store opened for business at 624 Story St. in Boone, IA, on May 12, 1938. Founder Paul S. Beckwith’s concept of a self-service grocery store was considered revolutionary. Shopping carts were a novelty, referred to as “rubber-tired gliders” that carried shopping baskets. The chain remains family owned and is said to be one of the largest employers in Iowa.

“It has become extremely competitive in the grocery industry in the past few years,”

says Boothe. “Des Moines is a thriving market. I believe it is the fastest-growing area in the Midwest and is the 34th fastest-growing in the nation.”

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FACT FILE:

Fareway Stores - Store #900
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- UMass Dining/University of Massachusetts Amherst/California Grape Commission
- U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council



Strategic, well-executed marketing campaigns are hard to ignore, especially when savvy professionals have skillfully targeted the message to an organization's core constituency. But make no mistake; hitting the bull's-eye is no easy feat. So, all the more reason kudos are in order for the companies and organizations that have done just that. So raise a glass, or give high-fives to these 10 honorees for winning *PRODUCE BUSINESS' 29th Annual Marketing Excellence Awards*.

Our intent is to offer readers compelling examples of produce marketing programs that hit the mark. These recipients display not only innovative thinking and creativity, but also consistency of messaging across several

mediums. By sharing this impressive collection of winners and outlining some of the efforts, strategies and targeted marketing tactics, we celebrate imagination, sound research and meticulous execution.

This year's roster of winners is diverse in myriad ways. One clever campaign targets moms, while another seeks to reach influential bloggers, and yet another's audience is comprised of students.

Monterey Mushrooms created a clever beer and mushroom pairing guide, while Mann Packing Co. Inc., launched a successful rollout of single-serve, warm meals with fresh veggies, grains and sauce. Avocados From Mexico converted a shipping container into the Avo-Matic — a one-of-a-kind avocado vending machine.

Clearly, any campaign that resonates

in this day and age employs strong social media components. And, of course, there were plenty of posts, pins, tweets, retweets and likes.

By sharing the best the industry has to offer, hopefully, we can inspire, build awareness, heighten produce sales and consumption, and engage the next generation of marketers.

We'd like to thank all the entrants for taking the time and effort to share their campaigns. We enjoy getting an annual reminder of what this industry means to retail, foodservice and the country at large. With sincere congratulations, we celebrate our 10 winners on the pages that follow. They have more than demonstrated they know a thing or two about targeted marketing and hitting the mark. Bull's-eye!

Avocados From Mexico Irving, TX

Introducing The Avo-Matic

OBJECTIVES:

Increase booth traffic by 20 percent to more than 12,000 visitors. Highlight recipe innovation and new usage ideas from campaign. Serve 750 “completely customized” avocado creations through the new Avo-Matic “vending machine.”

CAMPAIGN:

The Avocados From Mexico team converted a shipping container into the Avo-Matic — a one-of-kind avocado vending machine. The Avo-Matic features four computer screens where attendees can select their favorite ingredients to create the perfect, personalized avocado dish. Minutes after selecting their favorite ingredients, their Avo-creation appears.

RESULTS:

Avocado From Mexico’s booth traffic increased by 40 percent to more than 14,000, twice the goal. A real attention-getter, the Avo-Matic was the talk of the PMA Fresh Summit Convention and Expo. Guests continually lined up to try the interactive touchscreen and personalize their menu options. Staffers were able to serve 858 customized avocado creations over 2 days, surpassing the goal of 750 by 14 percent. The brand also collected important consumer data for future engagement and promotional offers. The 2016 AFM booth had the highest engagement to date: More than 40 partner and retailer meetings to discuss upcoming programs and seasonal promotions. Avocados From Mexico staffers were also able to share innovative recipes and usage ideas to reinforce the many ways to enjoy avocados. More than 5,000 food samples were served — a combined total of the Avo-Matic and other sampling stations within the booth, including Avo Toast, Guacamole Bar, and Avo Hot Dogs.



CMI Orchards, LLC Wenatchee, WA

CMI’s Rebranding

OBJECTIVES:

CMI was established in 1989 as Columbia Marketing International. Since that time, the company has grown into one of the largest apple, pear and cherry shippers in Washington state. To celebrate more than 25 years of operations, the company refreshed its brand to bring renewed energy and vitality into the business.

CAMPAIGN:

Columbia Marketing International’s name was changed to CMI Orchards. A new facelift and name celebrates the place “where magic happens” — in the orchard, which is the very heart of the company’s mission statement. A simple green leaf inside the logo resembles a wing of the eagle, bringing the company’s longtime mascot — the bald eagle — back into the orchards, too. The rebrand included updating of all apple, pear, and cherry shipping cartons and PLUs, freshening up designs. The collateral material is eye-catching and appealing to consumers and retailers alike. CMI launched its rebrand with a beautiful new tradeshow booth at PMA in Atlanta in 2016.

RESULTS:

CMI’s rebrand has been met with positive feedback from retail customers and consumers. Significant media attention was received both at PMA 2016 and during the year following the rebrand, particularly when CMI leaped to the #1 position in the United States to become the top-selling apple brand in the country. This was significant achievement and validated the success of the rebrand.



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California Avocado Commission Irvine, CA

Made Of California

OBJECTIVES:

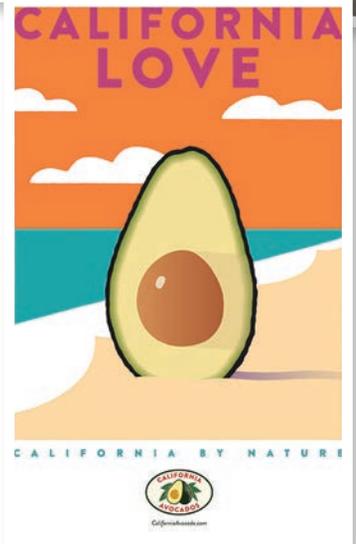
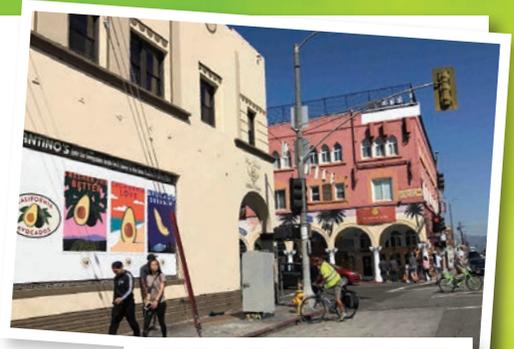
Position California Avocados to be the world's most valued and desired avocados. Increase the real and perceived values of California Avocados. Increase preference and loyalty for California Avocados versus avocados of other origins. Achieve media plan targets. Inform target consumers when California Avocados are in season and where to find them. Ensure target consumers link California Avocados to summer. Communicate "the essence of California." Reinforce that California Avocados are the premium choice. Accomplish plan within budget. Make the campaign engaging and enjoyable.

CAMPAIGN:

The creative thought behind the campaign: California Avocados are not just made in California, they are *Made Of California*. The campaign featured a combination of outdoor advertising, print advertising, radio, digital advertising, native content, online videos and social media engagement.

RESULTS:

Media delivered more than 400 million impressions between June 2016 and May 2017. Social media showed significant improvement year over year. Total Facebook fans increased by 6 percent to 319,000 and impressions rose by 28 percent to 9.9 million. Instagram followers rose by 21 percent to 35,000. Instagram impressions reached 4 million. Not to be left out, Twitter followers increased 17 percent to 16,500 with total retweets increasing by 45 percent, or 2,000. YouTube subscribers increased 24 percent, to 566. YouTube views likewise increased to 215,000, an 83 percent jump. In 2017, from January through May, 25 retailers also participated with the California Avocado's Commission custom media programs.



Mann Packing Co. Inc. Salinas, CA

Mann's Nourish Bowls

OBJECTIVES:

Mann's Nourish Bowls is a new line of single-serve, warm meals with fresh veggies, grains and sauce. Developed by a panel of chefs, Mann's Nourish Bowls feature trending vegetables like kohlrabi, butternut squash, cauliflower, sweet potatoes, kale and sugar snap peas. Promotions aimed to create consumer awareness and support the market launch for Mann's Nourish Bowls across North America.

CAMPAIGN:

In order to help shoppers find, understand and try Nourish Bowls, Mann's leveraged a variety of marketing tools, including local, national, culinary influencers and consumer promotions, among others. The company initially focused on POS marketing in an effort to increase awareness and spur sales at the store level. The support efforts included channel strips, danglers, coupons, sell sheets and a guide to Nourish Bowls for produce managers. The company also partnered with Monterey Mushrooms and HEB on a "meal deal" cross-promotion. Nourish Bowls were featured on the Weight Watchers Wants list in January 2017. Weight Watchers promoted Nourish Bowls as filling meals ranging from 8 to 14 SmartPoints.

RESULTS:

The marketing and communications plan to support the launch of Mann's Nourish Bowls was highly successful and resulted in traditional media stories, social media activity and an increase in sales that helped the company decide to expand the line and provide distribution to additional markets in the United States and Canada. Through the marketing and communications plan, Mann's Nourish Bowls has garnered 31,700 total points of distribution in the United States and Canada in a little more than one year from initial launch. The five Nourish Bowls SKUs rank in the Top 20 of Salad and Veggie Meal Kits, according to Chicago-based Nielsen quarter one 2017 data. Mann's Nourish Bowls were honored with numerous industry awards, including the coveted *Impact Award* from 2016's PMA Fresh Summit.

Monterey Mushrooms Watsonville, CA

Mushroom And Beer Pairing Guide — A Small Bite To Go With Your Favorite Pint!

OBJECTIVES:

The objective of Monterey Mushrooms' *Beer Pairing Guide* promotion was to engage with foodservice and retail trade customers via a new tool, Hubspot, as well as educate shoppers in a manner that prompted fresh mushroom purchase.

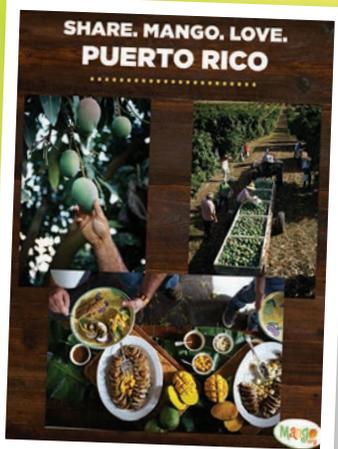
CAMPAIGN:

For the PMA Convention in October 2016, the company sent emails via Hubspot to its key target list inviting them to visit the company's booth for an exclusive tasting of Portabella Porter, with a further call to action asking customers to download sales collateral electronically. Visitors to the sales collateral page became part of the Hubspot retail database and were sent bottle openers to complement the beer pairing guide. Branded coasters were used as a customer giveaway in the booth during the show and a tool to drive contacts to the website and be captured in the database.

For shoppers, the guide was promoted through traditional media relations. In addition, the same information was sent to influential bloggers who had an interest in food and beer pairings. In addition, the guide was promoted through the company's website and social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest. Responses from consumers were also added to the database.

RESULTS:

During the promotion period, Monterey Mushrooms had nearly 1,000 visitors to the promotion's page, resulting in 110 new contacts. The combination of media outreach, online and social media outreach delivered more than 2 million consumer impressions. With Hubspot as a communication tool, Monterey Mushrooms continues to expand the size of its database, trade and consumer, so that it can further communicate mushroom marketing messages directly and efficiently.



National Mango Board Orlando, FL

Mangos As A Cultural Icon

OBJECTIVES:

"To bring the world's love of mangos to the United States," is the National Mango Board's (NMB) vision that is inspiring all marketing initiatives from 2015 to the present day.

CAMPAIGN:

The *Mangos As A Cultural Icon* campaign manifests in all of the NMB programs from 2016 to date. From social campaigns to spokespeople, the NMB conceptualized the mango culinary impact and illustrated its varying global forms for mango lovers. The NMB garnered more Facebook engagement than ever before by connecting with consumers through the *Mangos Around the World* campaign. This success inspired both social and blog content that dug deep into mango's roots. Similarly, the *Share. Mango. Love.* efforts helped to illuminate the identity. Recipes were created and shared with foodservice and retail programs. The NMB teamed up with celebrity chef Ayesha Curry, who remembered mangos from her colorful upbringing and provided recipes inspired by her Jamaican grandmother. All these efforts connect mangos to more than just a variety or recipe — they guide the journey of the mango experience and tell the story of this cultural icon.

RESULTS:

Mangos Around the World 2016 is the most successful social media campaign to date. It engages consumers by highlighting the global love for mangos and the culture surrounding it. There were 23,000 record-breaking entries to date. Other 2017 statistics include 32,000 total engagement (reactions, comments and shares) and more than 585,000 total reach. Bloggers were also a large part of the campaign and generated more than 863 million media impressions. Recipes, including Mango Mustard Honey Glazed Ham (Easter) and Tropical Mango Guacamole (Cinco de Mayo), were shared across contributors' blogs and social channels. The campaign also had results through 10 mommy bloggers and their kids. Curry participated in a NYC Media Day, where she shared her love for mangos. Placements included the *Rachael Ray Show*, AOL, *Good Morning America*, *Refinery 29*, *Woman's Day*, *People.com* and *USA Today*.

Scott Farms Inc. Lucama, NC

Innovation In Sweet Potatoes

OBJECTIVES:

Innovation in and on the farm has proven to increase the safety of products produced, yield of crops and better quality for the end user. Scott Farms aimed to showcase innovation in sweet potatoes, focusing on the technology behind the scenes of the product. Scott Farms' campaign highlighted the benefits of these innovative measures to industry professionals and consumers alike.

This technology allows them to grow, pack and ship higher quality and more consistent products while building brand awareness to the consumer.



CAMPAIGN:

Scott Farms spent the 2016 growing season documenting the entire process of growing sweet potatoes from plant micropropagation to the shipping of product through video. This nine-month endeavor encompassed focusing on the process and the technology that made it possible. The campaign began with a promotional farm video, which led to cable television broadcasts on the Discovery Channel and RFD-TV. The broadcasts were geared toward viewers with an interest in farming and technology. Scott Farms also teamed with Raleigh, NC-based restaurateur Jason Smith of 18 Restaurant Group for recipe development via web cooking demonstrations. Scott Farms also engaged with consumers on the various uses of its branded fresh items.

RESULTS:

Generating more than 5 million broadcast views on the Discovery Channel and RFD-TV, the campaign video went on to garner more than 22,000 online views and 47,000 social media interactions. As a result, website visitors increased in the six-month campaign over the previous six months in total page views by 127 percent and total users by 114 percent. Gaining additional traction, the campaign also generated more than 70,000 traditional media impressions.

Tanimura & Antle Soquel, CA

Eat Healthy Be Merry With Artisan Lettuce

OBJECTIVES:

The *Eat Healthy Be Merry* campaign was developed to invigorate seasonal sales for the Tanimura & Antle product line. Additional goals were to give the sales team a compelling program to deliver to retailers, and continue to generate general brand awareness with consumers.

CAMPAIGN:

Sales materials, in-store materials, video and social media content were offered to retailers in a special toolkit. Geo-targeted Facebook ads were employed in an effort to drive awareness in key markets. Retailers were also reached with a special mailing that coincided with calls from the sales team and a promotional email campaign. A consumer sweepstakes was hosted at the Artisan Lettuce landing page throughout the duration of the campaign, and gift card prizes were awarded for shoppers to spend at the retail location where the product was purchased. A partnership was also formed with a blogger to develop custom recipes and images in addition to posts that pushed the sweepstakes and tagged retailers. Additional custom photography and video were produced and promoted to both retail customers and consumers.

RESULTS:

Both internally at Tanimura & Antle and among retailers and shoppers, the campaign was well received. Hundreds of sweepstakes entries were submitted by consumers each week; Facebook followers increased, as did traffic to both the landing page and the Tanimura & Antle website. The campaign earned awards for the marketing effectiveness at national and regional levels. In fact, at the *Silicon Valley American Advertising Awards*, the campaign not only won the highest honor in the B2B Campaigns category (an ADDY), but also earned *Best in Show* among all entries. It also received a *2016 Award of Distinction for The Communicators Awards*.



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UMass Dining/University of Massachusetts Amherst/California Grape Commission

Amherst, MA

California Grape Week — A Flavorful Way To Enhance Your Health!

OBJECTIVES:

The goal for UMass Dining was to promote the versatility of California grapes, healthy eating and to create exciting menu options using the featured fruit. The week-long special and increased menuing throughout the semester allowed the university dining program to increase the use of grapes through innovative menu design, while increasing the awareness of grapes within dining locations.

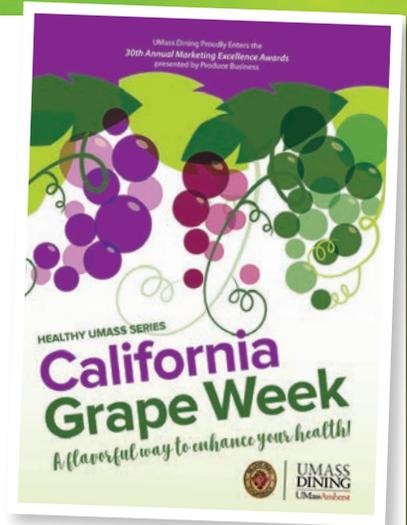
CAMPAIGN:

The program launched in partnership with the California Table Grape Commission. The campaign focused on promoting the healthy, sustainable and delicious properties of California grapes. In addition to the week-long promotion, more innovative and tasty grape-themed dishes were included in the 21-cycle menu and throughout the grab-and-go operation in both retail and residential dining.

The school's long-term goal is to make vegetables, fruits, grains and plant-based proteins the center of the plate. Grape-inspired dishes during the promotional period helped UMass Dining achieve its goal.

RESULTS:

Grape Week and the fall semester's increase in grape-focused menu items was successful. Students, faculty and staff were treated to innovative and delicious grape-themed dishes, and were educated on myriad of ways to use the fruit as part of a healthy diet. For many of the school's customers, it was the first time they sampled grapes prepared in less traditional ways. The dishes served were innovative and full of flavor, and allowed the school to show there are many ways to incorporate grapes into a balanced diet.



U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council Folsom, CA

Winter Fresh Summer Somewhere

OBJECTIVES:

With an overall goal to drive winter fresh blueberry purchase and consumption in January and February, and the knowledge that social content drives purchase intent among Millennials, the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council identified the following objectives: To generate 2 million views of the campaign videos through pre-roll ads and a partnership with *Fatherly* parenting network; secure 300 million earned media impressions, including survey results and key messages by March 1, 2017; and to spur 100,000 consumer engagements with campaign content by March 1, 2017.

CAMPAIGN:

Primary and secondary research helped the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council unearth insights to guide its strategies. During the winter, six in 10 parents think their families eat too much junk food, and 42 percent miss eating fresh fruits and veggies. This insight allowed the Council to show consumers in a light-hearted, memorable way that every season is blueberry season thanks to the seasonal swap with South

America. This switcheroo helped to position blueberries as a delicious way to help beat the winter blues. Social and online media top the list of channels frequented by the target Millennials audience.

RESULTS:

The campaign generated more than 2.7 million video views — 135 percent of its goal. Pre-roll ads also generated 13,000 click-throughs to the landing page. The promotion secured 300 million earned media impressions of survey results by March 1, 2017, and generated more than 1.6 billion media impressions through 16 placements of survey results and campaign messaging assets on outlets, such as MSN, AOL and Yahoo. Additionally, the video content spurred more than 149,000 views on the Council's social platforms.

TRANSMITTING PROPER PACKAGING MESSAGES



Effective communications can be key sales tools in produce marketers' efforts to persuade shoppers to purchase their products.

LEFT PHOTO COURTESY OF STEMILT GROWERS
CENTER PHOTO COURTESY OF CLEAR LAM PACKAGING INC.
RIGHT PHOTO COURTESY OF TEMKIN INTERNATIONAL INC.

BY DOUG OHLEMEIER

Shoppers walking grocery aisles are faced with a large number of purchasing decisions. As the typical American supermarket carries more than 30,000 products competing for consumers' attention, produce marketers of any size can use attractive and trendy packaging to communicate their messages and capture shoppers' interest.

Packaging design is a key element in brand development. Today's packaging moves beyond solid design. Marketers understand that to persuade shoppers to place their products in shopping carts, their work involves more than designing visually interesting packaging. To engage shoppers and better compete against other products inside and outside the produce aisles, effective produce packaging considers design early on in the process.

"You can't just create a package," says Roger Pepperl, director of marketing for Stemilt Growers Inc., a Wenatchee,

WA-based tree fruit grower-shipper. A product's flavor is crucial. If a product never gets purchased, people won't know its benefits. "Color, shapes and sizes are so important," he says. "It's not just the cosmetics of the fruit. It's the cosmetics of the packaging and how it stops shoppers in the stores and captures their attention, which has to happen. There's a lot of noise in grocery stores. Products have to stand-up and say they want to be purchased."

Calling out a product's flavor and nutritional content, for example, can help differentiate a product from other shelf items. "Packaging is going into the next levels of pushing people to buy your products instead of just getting it on the shelves and you're done," says Noam Temkin, vice president of sales and marketing for Temkin International Inc., a Payson, UT-based manufacturer of flexible film packaging. "The work definitely continues once you get it on the shelves."

THE SILENT SALESMAN

Packaging can be one of the most inexpensive components of a company's marketing efforts. Packaging containing effective design, messaging and action items can help produce companies sell more products. Proper messaging should be a key element on labels. Grower-shippers place much effort into growing and packing their products, but many market their products in substandard packaging or with ineffective messaging, says Temkin. Retail is where packaging can and does make a difference in buying decisions. "Packaging is that silent salesman," he says. "Everyone knows it's not just about a pretty package anymore."

Lifestyle imagery is becoming important in packaging. Instead of showing only the product, produce companies show people using the product in a variety of places, including in automobiles and eating while pausing during bike rides. Other trends include different form factors, such as

multi-compartment bags, which separate products to avoid respiration issues. Another is shake bags where seasoning is included with the vegetables and when shaken, the compartment seasons the product.

Packaging plays a major role in communicating key product benefits supporting a brand's positioning, says Paul Mastronardi, president and chief executive of Mastronardi Produce Ltd., headquartered in Kingsville, Ontario, Canada. "Packaging design is one of the key elements in

supporting and building a successful brand," he says. "Strong design supports the overall positioning, has aesthetic appeal to capture attention and uses elements such as color, pattern and shape to differentiate it from the competition and increase brand recognition."

The convenience trend, where packaging includes dual pouches and compartment pouches for ready-made meal kits, has been a European trend for five years. Hans Christian Schur, chief executive of Schur

Star Systems Inc., a Carlsbad, CA, packaging and packaging systems manufacturer, says he expects the trend to emerge in the United States within the next two to five years. "We are trying to add to that level of creativity, especially in the produce segment, where more and more growers and distributors are going in the direction of disrupting the shelves, going into handle pouches and shake pouches to increase the convenience factor for people wanting to pick-up product," he says. "Pouching and creative flexible packaging can be a vehicle for brand owners to satisfy what we believe consumers will want in the future. Packaging is also important for food safety and convenience."



IMPULSE BUY DESIGN

Final purchases depend on a variety of inputs. Some consumers go for brand names and some prefer to do research, but a large majority buy on impulse. Those decisions can often be influenced by package design.

"Color, typography, brightness and graphics influence how consumers perceive a company's products on the shelf," says Jacob Shafer, senior marketing and communications specialist for Mann Packing Co. Inc., Salinas, CA. Recipes, social media links to videos and other content, including coupons, can be effective in boosting a product's value.

Because of a plethora of companies competing for limited shelf space, package design is critical. "Obviously, the quality of the product and the reputation of the brand are important, but packaging can serve as a reflection of that," says Shafer. "The more innovative the company or product is, the more innovative and attractive the packaging. Unique packaging can also become synonymous with a product. Building that kind of rapport with consumers is where any company should want to be."

Effective color, typography and graphics help visually communicate with consumers. People see color before any other visual message. Red is a power color signifying alarm or immediacy, while green is associated with ecology and health. Yellow communicates positive, happy thoughts and orange communicates zest and energy. Typography can communicate visually, and in addition to the actual words, font choices can tell a shopper if the product is playful or sophisticated, while graphic shapes communicate on the subconscious level. Take the FedEx logo, for example. It features an arrow, which communicates forward motion, explains Mary Coppola, senior director of

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Consumers are choosing eco-friendly alternatives when they shop, buying products where packaging can be recycled. Monte Package offers sustainable packaging for Fresh Produce, proudly carrying the Earth Choice brand, which is renewable, biodegradable, and eco-responsible.

Let our packaging allow your produce department managers become your on-site masters of merchandising. Increase your sales and profits with packaging and props that can be used season after season, "year after year."

marketing communications for the United Fresh Produce Association in Washington, D.C.

A key to effective messaging is to know and understand one's target audience and prioritize messages that will connect them with the brand, says Coppola. The design of a company's packaging can communicate its values without taking up critical space. Companies can tell their stories through packaging material. "Packaging has become the billboard of brands," she says. "The real

estate on packaging is becoming more valuable, and the hierarchy of messaging being the most critical component."

Michael Dyer, produce team leader for West Sacramento, CA-based Raley's Supermarkets' Golden Valley, NV, store says visual appeal is crucial. "Packaging is huge. Anything that can stand out and be brighter and catch the customers' eyes will definitely sell," he says.

On a scale of one to 10, packaging's importance is nine to 10, says Dyer. "You

need the right amount of color, eye-catching color, where it pops out," he says. "The brighter the package, the more the 'wow factor' catches shoppers' eyes. The yellows and reds really stick out." If an item is merchandised in a section with different packaging, Dyer advises marketers to use different colors so the packaging is distinct.

SHOWING OFF

A product redesign allowed for a larger viewing window in Mann's vegetable platters and trays. Product viewing areas are becoming more important, especially for fresh produce, says Shafer. "Consumers want to see the freshness, color and condition of the vegetables they buy, and we've seen tremendous response to a larger viewing area," he says. Other trends include simplicity, cleanliness and ease of use and understanding.

Typography must be legible from a distance, advises Temkin International's Temkin. Many young agency designers contracted by produce companies may develop effective packaging that utilizes good font choices but often forgets shopper demographics by printing fonts too small for older eyes, he says. "You have to know who the shopper is and make the typography legible and the right size for it to be seen by multiple demographics," says Temkin.

Imagery, color and messaging are vital components. Companies should ensure packaging features the right call-outs. It's also important to not oversell product benefits. Consistency in brand messages is critical, as are repetition and constancy.

"If you keep changing it, it won't get that repetition that's needed," says Temkin.

Properly designed flexible or rigid packaging should protect the product, extend freshness and enhance the consumer experience, says Roman Forowycz, chief marketing officer at Clear Lam Packaging Inc., in Elk Grove Village, IL. "Unique and innovative packages help exploit impulse buys and increase sales velocity," he says. "Processors and retailers who properly design their packaging to consumer trends achieve the highest level of sales velocity." Traditionally, many consumer product goods companies viewed packaging as an after-thought. Today, effective marketers design packaging early in a product's development cycle.

Not detracting from the packaging image, labels and printed graphics should complement the overall design, communicate a consistent message and provide usable infor-

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mation for consumers, says Forowycz. Today's consumers want to see the product and don't want packages covered in graphics, he says. The color and texture of fruits and vegetables should be highlighted. Packaging that provides short ingredient statements, location of origin and some personalization is highly effective, says Forowycz.

THE PROCESS

The package development process begins with defining the objectives for the product being packaged. Questions include if the product is best used as a snack or a meal, and should it be packaged in a convenient format allowing purchasers to consume it outside of home? How will reclosing be addressed if the packaging is in a multi-serve product line?

Once features are determined, companies create digital images followed by mock-ups. Commercial-quality samples are produced for testing in consumer focus groups, at home and through other regional test markets.

Packaging development should be a focus, says Jack Tilley, market research manager at Inline Plastics, a Shelton, CT-based manufacturer of clear, recyclable PET or

polyethylene terephthalate clamshell and two-piece packaging. "Packaging design is very important in merchandising produce," he says. For example, proper selection of container type in rigid containers, whether round, rectangular or square, allows retailers to best utilize shelf space and highlight the quality of its food contents. "Packaging often changes to reflect eating trends."

Point-of-purchase impact is a major goal. Larger produce companies develop packaging and graphics through consumer research combined with internal needs and distribution demands. Newer packaging trends include making packages feel "more natural" by using special materials and coatings. Consumers like to handle packages that feel softer and more friendly, says Forowycz.

Dyer agrees with providing a natural product feel, particularly for customers who purchase a lot of produce. Product viewing is important because customers want to see if the item is changing color as it ages on the shelves. To help produce clerks, marketers should ensure sell-by code dates are clearly visible but don't block product view. "Customers want to feel and touch it,

especially dedicated produce customers," he says.

Roy Ferguson, chief executive of Chantler Packaging Inc., in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, says packaging design is sales-driven. Decades ago, innovation came from the producers. Today, about 70 percent of packaging ideas originate from customers, he says.

IMPULSE PURCHASES

Packaging can trigger impulse purchases. Clamshells, for example, require labels which can often be too small to include much information on product use, says Ferguson. Because of their limited size, elastic bands and twist ties aren't effective in letting shoppers know the products' purpose. "Some of those package concepts are good, but they don't really suit trying to get people to impulse buy to use for other things," he says. "It goes back to printed roll stock in bags and stand-up pouches. That gives you a greater area which you can utilize to convey great messages on nutrition and alternative uses for products. The bigger the footprint you have on a package, the more information you can add." **pb**



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Heat Up FALL PRODUCE SALES

The seasonal harvest brings an abundance of fresh, flavorful fruits and vegetables.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER

The cornucopia of seasonal and new crop produce available in the fall makes these traditionally cooler weather months a hot time to sell more produce. For example, consider that just 10 categories of autumn staples — apples, bell peppers, cranberries, grapes, herbs, kiwifruit, pears, pumpkins, sweet potato and winter squash — represented more than one-fifth (20.4 percent) of total produce dollar sales in fourth-quarter 2016, according to *FreshFacts* data supplied

by Chicago-based Nielsen Perishables Group.

The key to maximizing sales this time of year is to give shoppers what they want.

“One of the enjoyable parts of being a routine fresh produce shopper is the changing of the seasons and the differing product availability that goes with it,” says Earl McGrath, produce director for Freshfields Farm, a two-store retailer based in Orlando, FL.

“In the fall, I think customers are looking primarily for two things: high-quality items for cooler weather cooking and ornamental

items for display throughout their homes.”

Here are some ways retailers can move autumn produce throughout the season.

Apples. New harvest fall apples are a best-seller at Redner’s Markets, a Reading, PA, chain with 44 markets and 13 quick shoppes in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware. “We offer bagged apples for back-to-school, totes of apples for eating and baking, as many different apple varieties as we can get, as well as tie-in items such as caramel wraps, caramel dip and apple crisp,”

says Richard Stiles, director of produce and floral.

Just in time for fall merchandising, Concord Foods is extending its line of clean label fruit dips, branded Simply Concord, to include organic caramel and chocolate fruit dips, according to Samantha McCaul, marketing manager for the Brockton, MA-based company. "For back-to-school time, feature dip snack packs with the apple display. For Halloween and Thanksgiving, create prominent displays using Apple Crisp Mix, Caramel Dip and apples. We have a Halloween-themed shipper available, which is always a lot of fun to see in stores."

New York-grown apples are a big hit with customers at Tops Markets, a 173-store chain headquartered in Williamsville, NY. "We carry just about every variety of New York apple, including Empire, Cortland, Macintosh, Red Delicious, Crispin, Honeycrisp, Snap Dragon, Ruby Frost, Macoun, Gala; the list goes on and on," says Jeff Cady, director of produce and floral. "In the fall, we move apples to what we call the '1st Seasonal Run.' Basically, other than promo-type displays, this is the primary feature. Apples are in every

weekly circular ad in some form, be it bulk, bagged or specialty. Customers are looking, so we make it easy."

To get customers to expand their purchase, Cynthia Haskins, president and chief executive of the New York Apple Association in Fishers, NY, suggests hosting an *Applepalooza*. "That is, feature a different variety each week on Facebook, your blog or other social channels. Think outside the (apple) box, too, by extending apple merchandising beyond the produce department to the front checkouts and salad bar. For the holidays, suggest an apple-themed Thanksgiving meal featuring apples and cider from the starting soup course to the apple pie for dessert."

In October, Okanagan Specialty Fruits Inc., Summerland, British Columbia, Canada, will commercially debut its Arctic-brand naturally non-browning apples in select supermarkets. This year, 10-ounce grab-and-go bags of Arctic Golden apple slices will be exclusively available.

"We estimate this year's crop will be about 250,000 pounds of Arctic Golden; however, expect rapidly increasing volume

as we ramp up production, including additional non-browning varieties," says Neal Carter, president. "We have a wealth of infographics, recipe cards, including seasonal and holiday themed content, and much more to assist interested retailers. In addition, we are working with our retail partners on in-store activities to draw consumer attention to our apples that don't need any anti-browning treatments, which can affect flavor and texture."

According to Alex Jackson Berkley, senior account manager at Frieda's Specialty Produce in Los Alamitos, CA, some 18th century-old, organically grown heirloom apple varieties, including Ashmead's Kernel, Cox's Orange Pippin, King David, Orleans Reinette and Roxbury Russet, are each available for retail during one- to two-week windows in the fall. "Since each variety harvests at a different time, we suggest merchandising the apples on a dedicated end cap to showcase an ever-changing offering. We provide retailers with an 8x11-inch display sign that identifies the varieties to educate and to encourage shoppers to try something new each week," says Berkley.

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Bell Peppers. Sweet mini-peppers are perfect for back-to-school lunchboxes and holiday party trays, while regular-sized bell peppers are a versatile ingredient in many cool-weather dishes, according to Brian Miller, director of business development at Prime Time International in Coachella, CA. “We have very good availability in the fall, with red and green bell peppers most popular, followed by yellow and orange.”

The bell pepper can complement a variety of meals throughout the fall as its sweetness brings back summer garden-like flavors, says Chris Veillon, former director of marketing for Leamington, Ontario, Canada-based NatureFresh Farms and currently chief marketing officer for Pure Hothouse Foods, Leamington, Canada. “A number of retailers in the Midwest build displays of bell peppers near the entrance to the produce department to spawn ideas of what products could be used in addition to the peppers. Sampling is always a hit at retail, so consumers can recognize the different tastes by color.”

Cranberries. Fresh cranberries start harvest in late September, with 55 to 60 percent of the crop sold in November and 25 percent in December, according to Bob Wilson, owner and managing director of the Cranberry Network and Cranberry Partners in Wisconsin Rapids, WI. “We’re seeing a gradual increase in demand for organic cranberries. There will be somewhat of a supply increase this fall with a big bump expected in 2018.”

October is when Redner’s Markets brings in and promotes fresh cranberries. “We have them out every week in the build-up to Thanksgiving. We place them in two places: the fruit case next to the berries, and the vegetable case next to celery,” says Stiles.

Cranberry promotions don’t stop after Thanksgiving at Tadych’s Econofoods, a six-store chain headquartered in Brillion, WI. “We recommend customers buy two bags and freeze one for when fresh cranberries aren’t available,” says Jim Weber, produce supervisor.

Sharon Newcomb, senior public relations specialist at Middleboro, MA-based Ocean Spray Cranberries Inc., suggests promoting the culinary versatility of fresh cranberries. “There are many ways to incorporate cranberries into fall holiday meals. The best way to do this is by offering recipe tear pads, recipes and ads in fliers and usage suggestions as part of a display,” she says. This season Ocean Spray will introduce a 1-pound gusseted bag for better merchandising.

Last year, fresh cranberries were featured

in a recipe on the weekly ad circular’s produce page at Jewel-Osco, a 185-store chain headquartered in Itasca, IL, as part of the retailer’s supermarket dietitian marketing effort called *Build a Better Basket*. Along with the ad feature, several other promotional activities included a recipe post on the retailer’s *What’s Cookin’* blog, an article in the quarterly newsletter, *Dietitian*, and in-store recipe signage and demos. The result was a 9 percent increase in units sold when compared to the same week the previous year, according to supermarket dietitians Samantha Woulfe, MS, RD, LDN and Melissa O’Brien, MS, RD, LDN.

Starting this fall, Wareham, MA-based Cranberry Marketing Committee (CMC) will expand its fresh cranberry footprint in-store by bridging into floral departments. “Beyond food, fresh cranberries are a decorative secret weapon,” says Michelle Hogan, executive director. “With their bright-hued reds and pearl-like shape, cranberries enhance tablescapes, brighten floral and candle arrangements, and bejewel wreaths and garlands. To help, the CMC is developing a new handout and video educating shoppers how they can enhance their store-bought floral arrangements with fresh cranberries. These resources will be free and available for all retailers to use this fall.”

Grapes. “We expect a substantial volume of red, green and black grapes this fall, and heavy promotions during this time that highlight some of the 92 varieties (and growing) grown in California,” says Andy Kampa, grape category manager for Robinson Fresh, Eden Prairie, MN. “It is important to include organic grapes in fall displays because our research shows growth in organic grapes of 15 percent annually.”

The company’s primary fall grape advertising campaign centers on back-to-school. “This year, we are producing both random weight back-to-school bags and clamshells. We are excited to have a connection to the



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBINSON FRESH

second-largest shopping period of the year by drawing consumers to the produce department to round out their back-to-school shopping experiences,” says Kampa.

Nick Dulcich, co-owner and president of Delano, CA-headquartered Sunlight International Sales Inc., which promotes its Harvest Hobgoblin grapes for the fall and Pretty Lady for the winter holidays, says to take advantage of supply by building big, well-stocked, well-maintained displays at the front of the produce department. “Cross-merchandise display bins in the wine and cheese departments to entice customers shopping for holiday parties.”

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“Expand your fresh herbs set to include oregano, sage and thyme for the Thanksgiving holiday. Offer conventional and organic.”

— Robert Schueller, Melissa’s World Variety Produce

thyme for the Thanksgiving holiday,” says Robert Schueller, director of public relations for Melissa’s/World Variety Produce in Los

Angeles. “Offer conventional and organic. Organic herbs were a non-existent category a decade ago. Now, we’re seeing a great increase year-round, especially of oregano, sage, thyme and marjoram in the fall.”

Make sure to have ample supplies of fresh herbs on display, says Chris Wada, marketing manager for Thermal, CA-based North Shore Greenhouses Inc., which grows and markets 22 herbs with roots intact for three times longer shelf life than herbs without roots, as well as products such as Poultry Delights, a combination of rosemary, sage and thyme either mixed together in a clamshell or available as a trio of single potted herbs. “Our clamshell-packed living herbs sell four times the normal volume weekly between Thanks-

giving and Christmas,” says Wada.

Wada says an out-of-the-box selling technique is to create a “living wall” display of herbs, lettuces and other roots-on produce. Beyond this, the company offers a variety of secondary display units, ranging from tabletop shippers and rolling units to wire racks.

Cross-merchandising is an ideal way to sell more microgreens in the fall, says David Sasuga, owner of Fresh Origins in San Marcos, CA. “Microgreens are a great basket-builder. That’s because consumers who purchase are usually planning for a special meal that would also include other high-quality, high-value components like fresh salmon, steak and good wine. Retailers

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“Two- and three-pound bagged pears are the fastest-growing part of the category, and since the fruit is usually smaller, it’s great for back-to-school lunches.”

— Kathy Stephenson, Pear Bureau Northwest

can illustrate using microgreens to elevate a special meal with images, videos and demos. In-store and circular ads can contribute to greater sales.”

Kiwifruit. Merchandise bulk and packaged kiwifruit alongside each other to meet the needs of a variety of customers, recommends Jason Bushong, Wenatchee, WA-based division manager at Giumarra Companies. Some shoppers may be purchasing kiwifruit as a specialty item, while others consider it a staple, seasonal item for fall lunch boxes. Bulk kiwifruit sold by the pound versus per piece demonstrates a sales lift.”

Bushong also suggests promoting kiwifruit with attractive pricing and a value-added element, such as kiwifruit ‘spife’ (spoon + knife) tools packaged in clamshells. The company offers pink spifes that can be used to promote *Breast Cancer Awareness Month* during October.

Imports of Zespri-brand kiwifruit are customarily in the market until mid-November, although the New Zealand-headquartered company is working to extend this, according to Sarah Deaton, the Newport Beach, CA-based marketing manager for Zespri North America. “We will partner with Produce for Kids’ fall *Power Your Lunchbox* pledge promotion this fall, which encourages healthy eating and benefits Feeding America.”

Deaton recommends retailers promote kiwi at Thanksgiving to give the holiday menu a new twist. The company offers recipe cards for a SunGold Kiwi and Cranberry Relish.

Pears. The peak season when all 10 pear varieties are available is from October to January, according to the marketing organization Pear Bureau Northwest, Milwaukie, OR. However, says Kathy Stephenson, director of marketing communications, “Pears from the Northwest begin arriving in September in



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measurable amounts. Two- and three-pound bagged pears are the fastest-growing part of the category, and since the fruit is usually smaller, it's great for back-to-school lunches. For Halloween, we have a fun sticker set for decorating pears that retailers can order from

us for their customers. Thanksgiving is peak pear season and we encourage cross-merchandising with cranberries, yams, potatoes, salads and more."

Stephenson adds the overall best way to increase impulse purchases, especially in the fall, is multi-variety ads. Average pricing across the varieties gives shoppers the incentive to try new varieties, she says.

Just-harvested freshness and flavor is one reason why Tops Markets' Cady likes to promote pears in the fall. "Pears are really driven by the Bartlett, but both Bosc and Anjou are great pears — just a little harder for customers to judge ripeness. Check the neck is a great rule, but communicating is always a challenge. Reds, Concorde and Comice are nice additions, although they don't move as well; it's the same for Seckel and Forelle, they move very slowly."

Pumpkins. "Bin displays of assorted pumpkins set at the store's entrance can prompt shoppers to put \$20-plus worth of produce in their cart before even going inside," says Jason Kazmirski, director of produce and floral for Tukwila, WA-based Northwest Grocers, which serves 120-plus independent retailers operating under

banners such as Thriftway, Red Apple Markets and Select Markets.

Freshfields Farm's McGrath says his stores take pride in merchandising mass displays of fresh product. "Our biggest display item in the fall is always the largest carving pumpkins that we source with good external quality and thick stems from farms in Pennsylvania and Ohio. As for specialty items, we typically will carry pie pumpkins, white and orange mini pumpkins, native ornamental corns, a variety of ornamental gourds, assorted hard squashes and corn stalks. We also try to have one decorative pumpkin for outside of each store that is 150 to 200 pounds in size."

Plan to get pumpkins no later than mid-September to maximize sales, recommends Michele Youngquist, president of Bay Baby Produce Inc./A.M.F. Farms in Burlington, WA. "New this year, we have white and orange pumpkins with silhouette designs on them that just pop when displayed together, as well as our long-stem Sparkler, Tiger and Casper ornamentals. We offer bin merchandisers that have header cards at the top that show easy home decorating ideas. In addition, retailers should cross-merchandise pumpkins in floral."

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Sweet Potatoes. Thanksgiving remains the largest selling holiday for sweet potatoes, despite year-round availability, says George Wooten, president and owner of Wayne E. Bailey Produce Company Inc., in Chadbourn, NC. "Twenty years ago, we'd sell 25 to 30 percent of the crop in November. Today, it's 15 to 18 percent. This isn't because of any lost volume on the Thanksgiving holiday, but the fact that sales have picked up in other months of the year."

Starting with a new crop in October, sweet potatoes are sold in storefront bins along with Brussels sprouts, Russet potatoes and Acorn squash by the Northwest Grocers independent retailers, according to Kazmirski. "The stores will also sell loose organic and 3-pound bags of conventional sweet potatoes inside the produce department."

Larger displays and loss leader pricing is how Tadych's Econofoods merchandises sweet potatoes in November. "We move 10 times the usual amount in the run up to Thanksgiving this way," says Weber.

Shoppers looking for something different this holiday are attracted to products such as conventional and organic Stokes Purple sweet potatoes, according to Frieda's Berkley. "We recommend retailers start carrying the produce in September as part of their fall reset. Display between Russets and sweet potatoes for an eye-catching color break. Sign 'delicious when roasted' to let shoppers know how easy they are to cook. For Thanksgiving, we suggest cross-merchandising with fresh herbs and shallots."

Winter Squash. "Hard winter squash is the new item now in addition to pumpkins, for both decorating and eating," says Youngquist. "Promote both at the same time."

Varietal winter squash such as Buttercup, Carnival, Delicata, Gold Nugget, Hubbard, Red Kuri, Sweet Dumpling and Turban are only available from August to December, according to Melissa's Schueller. "This offers retailers the opportunity to expand their winter squash offerings up to a dozen varieties. Start bringing winter squash in during August; peak sales months are September and October."

To make it easy to highlight many winter squash, Frieda's offers a pallet-sized mixed variety bin in both organic and conventionally grown squash. "Or, retailers can start with five varieties of winter squash displayed on an end cap, for example, and rotate other types in and out through the season to see what works best for their customers," says Berkley.



Fresh-Cut Salads: New Challenges and Opportunities

Convenience reaches
even higher levels.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Innovation in the fresh-cut salad category has brought about new products that go beyond leafy greens, increasing both the convenience of fresh produce and consumption. The next trend could be products that include enough protein to make for a healthy, convenient and filling small meal.

“Our Bistro Bowl salads, as well as our soon-to-launch Fresh Prep’d brand of fresh meals, including soup kits and wrap kits, are the perfect one-stop complete meal solution,” says Alan Hilowitz, company spokesperson for Ready Pac Foods, Irwindale, CA.

A Bistro Bowl contains the chopped lettuce, poblano peppers and fire roasted corn with enough pulled pork to make a meal with six grams of protein.

Innovative minds must think alike because a five-hour drive up the coast from Ready Pac

is Salinas, CA-based Mann Packing, which is also having success with fresh-cut vegetable-based bowls that pack a protein punch.

“Our Nourish Bowls have resulted in a 27 percent expansion in sales and 42 percent of dollar growth contribution to the category,” says Jacob Shafer, senior marketing and communications specialist at Mann Packing, Salinas, CA.

The vegetarian Southwest Chipotle bowl, with cauliflower, kale and kohlrabi, has enough black beans and shredded cheddar cheese to add up to 11 grams of protein; while the vegan Sesame Sriracha bowl with broccoli, kohlrabi, cabbage and snap peas has enough rice to make for seven grams of protein.

Mann Packing is a women-owned company with a history of coming up with products that creatively link the harvest of the

Salinas Valley with the changing trends and needs of the country’s kitchens.

These companies responded to a rarely discussed challenge facing the entire produce sector: Consumers are eating fewer vegetables because they are too busy to prepare meals that include sides and salads.

“After a brief rise through 2009, per capita fruit and vegetable consumption has declined 7 percent in the past five years. This has been driven primarily by decreased consumption of vegetables and fruit juice,” reports Produce for Better Health Foundation’s *State of the Plate: 2015 Study on America’s Consumption of Fruits and Vegetables*.

The Produce for Better Health Foundation, Hockessin, DE, launched in 1991 with the support of 60 produce industry companies and commodity boards to partner with the National Cancer Institute to sponsor the



5-A-Day for Better Health program.

“Sizable declines for vegetables — fewer eating a week per capita versus just five years ago — have been driven by lower side dish ‘as is’ use at in-home dinner meals,” states *State of the Plate*. “Lettuce and salad-related vegetables, like tomatoes, have been hit the hardest, as have onions, potatoes and mixed vegetables. Consumption at lunch has declined as well, though vegetables at breakfast have increased slightly.”

THE DECLINING VEGETABLE

Fresh-cut burst on the scene during nearly a quarter century of increasing vegetable consumption as consumers looked to eat healthy.

“According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, annual per capita disappearance/consumption of fruits and vegetables, in both fresh and processed form, increased 8.4 percent from 1976 to 2009, reaching 675 pounds,” says Roberta Cook, University of California Cooperative Extension specialist in agricultural economics, in her report, *Tracking Demographics and U.S. Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Patterns*.

In the later years, salads and other conveniently packaged vegetable products fueled much of this growth, as fresh-cut produce rose to become a major category almost overnight, riding the twin waves of convenience and better-for-you food.

According to Cook, first came triple-washed iceberg lettuce or cabbage that let consumers simply reach into a bag for the major ingredient in their green salad or coleslaw. Then microwaveable pouches of washed and cut vegetables hit the store shelves, making healthy sides effortless. Finally, fruit got into the act with pre-cut chunks.

Fresh-cut sales skyrocketed from \$3.3 billion in 1994 to \$8.9 in 2003, \$11.8 in 2005 and \$15.5 billion in 2007, according to Cook, with \$6 billion of that in retail, as all the major markets developed eye-catching displays. Supermarkets seized on the opportunity to add an exciting new category to the produce department.

“We have a robust fresh-cut produce program where customers can find single-serve and multi-portioned servings,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Publix, Lakeland, FL. “Varieties include single fruit bowls, like watermelon, pineapple and cantaloupe, as well as mixed varieties, like mixed fruit bowls and tropical fruit bowls. We also introduced a cut vegetable program.”

But now fresh-cut producers and supermarket retailers face the challenge of recent decline in fruit and vegetable consumption.

“Vegetables have long been affected by shifts occurring at the dinner table,” says the *State of the Plate* report. “Americans have been looking for convenience at the dinner occasion, and one way to make things more convenient is to include fewer side dishes in their dinner meal and to include them less often.”

Fresh-cut vegetable producers have increased sales by developing offerings that are nutritious, filling and convenient.

Ready Pac has taken pride in its ability to innovate to meet new challenges in offering vegetable-based products that encourage people to eat healthy foods.

The firm was started 48 years ago, on the eve of a period of greater and more varied vegetable consumption. In 1980, the company introduced bagged clipped spinach as its first fresh-cut produce. Most recently, the company has responded to the decline



of vegetable sides by developing lines like its Bistro Bowls.

Another strategy the company is using to reach consumers who don't have time to prepare vegetable sides is to make it as easy as possible to use fresh-cut products. "Ready Pac Foods is able to provide our customers with culinary expertise, delivering delicious recipes that will satisfy any type of consumers' cravings, as well as quality products and longer shelf life, helping to reduce waste and maximizing sales," says Ready Pac's Hilowitz.

But tomorrow's fresh-cut section will likely not feature the same mix of products seen today.

"Leveraging the trend of warm veggie-based meals, retailers have been partnering with Mann to grow their overall category by focusing on new innovation items," says Shafer. "Mann's growth strategy is to provide a comprehensive value-added vegetable assortment that can apply to all usage, meal occasions and household sizes."

Shafer sees growth in the 6 to 8 percent range for these vegetable-based meal products. The future growth of the fresh-cut category could well be in items that provide a convenient complete meal or eating event.

"When we can save our customers time and also allow them to put good food in their bodies, that is a win-win for all," says Laura Himes, merchandising manager of produce for Wal-Mart, Bentonville, AR. "Most growth in this segment has stemmed from the single-serve bowls and the salad kits. We have seen great innovation in this space and more emphasis on healthful ingredients."

CONGESTED SHELVES

Produce has become a busier and more interesting place as consumers demand, and farmers provide, many more varieties of most of the major fruits and vegetables. But as everything in the produce department — from apples to citrus and potatoes to grapes — has grown more complex and varied, competition for shelf space has become fierce.

"As the importance of the perimeter of the store grows, prime shelf space becomes very limited," says Hilowitz. "This is true not only related to space, but also the large variety of the type of products consumers are looking for in their salads or as cooking ingredients."

Within the fresh-cut category, retailers face the further challenge of deciding how much of this limited shelf space is dedicated to grab-and-go items, and those that consumers take home to the kitchen.

"Space is always a concern, as we will

"When we can save our customers time and also allow them to put good food in their bodies, that is a win-win for all."

— Laura Himes, Wal-Mart

need to balance grab-and-go offerings with the traditional produce customers like to take home to fix on their own," says Himes.

Retailers do well to constantly monitor product sales to see which fresh-cut items are justifying their shelf space, and which are not.

"At Publix, we have a robust program that monitors the sales of each item. If an item does not sell within the established criteria, it is discontinued," says Brous. "In general, there is a defined amount of space within a retail location, and retailers are charged with carrying the products that are representative of their customers and meet their expectations."

For producers, it is important to develop packaging that catches the eye, entices the mouth and informs the cook.

"It is critical that packaging is designed in a way that clearly communicates either the type of produce or the flavor profile for easy identification, since consumers have limited time for at-shelf purchase decisions," says Ready Pac's Hilowitz.

THE ELUSIVE CONSUMER

It is also important to reach consumers with the message of convenience, plus good nutrition before they even enter the store.

"Pre-cut produce and bagged salads and blends are all pre-planned purchases, so it is important to provide consumers with fresh meal ideas or suggestions that could help them manage their daily busy schedule," says Hilowitz.

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demand, fresh-cut companies invest in marketing efforts both inside and out of the store.

“We promote the products regularly through consumer engagement and advertising,” says Mann Packing’s Shafer. “We continue to drive trial and are always looking to feature Sugar Snap Peas at special events, in cross-promotions.” This marketing program includes social media and the internet to reach potential customers.

“Mann’s has a wide range of marketing

materials available to retailers, including recipe ideas in its *Girlfriends Guide for Moms* series,” says Shafer. “The guides feature creative consumer usage ideas. Further product support comes via how-to videos on our YouTube page, a variety of social media promotions and contests to engage consumers, and a dedicated website for the United States and Canada.”

With an increasing number of consumers shopping convenience stores, suppliers of fresh-cut products have developed a number

of strategies for getting their products into these stores and reaching customers.

“Convenience and small format stores are quickly seeing the need to carry fresh food products to cater to today’s consumers’ needs for healthier, convenient, tasty and satisfying meals,” says Ready Pac’s Hilowitz.

Ready Pac finds success in the convenience store sector, in particular, marketing its Bistro Bowl product line, which allows customers to purchase a single item that provides a meal healthier and more interesting than they are likely to find at a fast food outlet.

For their part, progressive retailers pay attention to the challenge of reaching their customers with information as many ways as possible, both in the store and beyond.

“At Publix, we view our customers as an extension of our family,” says Brous. “We connect with them within our stores, online and within the communities we live and work. Our customers hear and see us in radio and television advertising, as well as billboard presence. In addition, we connect online via our website and social platforms. We consistently communicate around our products, services, service, quality and commitment to our communities.”

Fresh-cut suppliers and retailers are meeting the challenge by showing consumers that salad products do fit with time-starved lifestyles.

“Packaged salads continue to grow at a high rate due to the customer’s demand for convenience and ready-to-eat meals,” says Wal-Mart’s Himes.

The concentration of fresh produce purchases among people with higher education and income, however, suggests there is room to vastly expand the market.

“Analyzing fresh produce expenditures by demographic group reveals some striking patterns,” says University of California Cooperative Extension’s Cook. “For example, households whose members have not attended college spent on average \$369 for fresh produce compared with \$521 for households with members with bachelor’s degrees, and \$651 for those with post-graduate degrees.”

According to Cook, “The national average of annual household expenditures on fresh produce was \$429 in 2009, while households earning \$100,000 or more spent \$712. Households earning more than \$70,000 represented 32 percent of U.S. households in 2009, yet accounted for 49 percent of total food spending.”

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All Eyes On Washington

New apple varieties are expected to offer exceptional flavor and heightened consumer appeal.

BY HOWARD RIELL

Every year consumers eagerly await the arrival of a new crop of Washington apples. The latest developments in apple varieties are given a kick-start on promotions in the early fall when Washington state begins harvesting. Indeed, it seems the future trends for new varieties tend to originate out west.

“Consumers are initially attracted to their bright, bold coloring and unique names,” says Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing for Sage Fruit Company in Yakima, WA. “But, what keeps them coming back is their appreciation for a sweet, juicy and crunchy apple.”

In fact, what also keeps apple lovers coming back is a combination of great fruit, abundant variety, and savvy marketing and



The Breeze apple was discovered in a Gala block in New Zealand. It is just one of many new varieties being harvested this year in Washington state.

merchandising. Maintaining that formula remains key to continued strong sales.

VARIETIES

The large number and superior quality of Washington varieties are sure to keep sales brisk.

“Our packers are developing proprietary varieties (PVs) at break-neck speed,” says Todd Fryhover, president of the Washington Apple Commission in Wenatchee, WA. “But for the industry, Cosmic Crisp is the next big thing for all Washington apple growers; Honeycrisp continues expansion, as well.”

“There are lots of new branded apples coming out of Washington and from growers all over the United States and the rest of the world” says Steve Lutz, senior strategist for CMI Orchards in Wenatchee, WA. “In the fall, it’s not particularly uncommon for retailers to run fall ‘Apple-rama’ promotions

featuring displays of 40 varieties or more.”

Lutz and his colleagues believe the “big key” for retailers is in identifying new varieties that have staying power versus items that are “essentially new, but just eating up valuable retail shelf space without creating incremental sales.”

Lutz begins with Ambrosia. “It’s now the ninth best-selling apple in the United States. That’s great, but for at least one-third of the country, retailers have yet to put it on their shelves. That’s a huge loss in potential sales simply because they haven’t yet figured out this is truly a winning variety.”

In line with that is Jazz, which Lutz says enjoys “pretty solid distribution nationally and is now the 10th best-selling variety.” But like Ambrosia, it still has room to grow as retailers allocate shelf space and consumers discover it. Beyond that, Envy, KIKU, Kanzi and Pacific Rose are all seen as strong,

PHOTO COURTESY OF WASHINGTON APPLE COMMISSION



up-and-coming sellers, gaining traction.

“The sales data shows these apples are building a strong following of consumers who seek them out and are willing to pay top retail prices,” says Lutz.

New apples on the horizon are Rosalynn and Smitten. “Rosalynn is a delightful apple, discovered as a chance seedling here in Washington a few years ago,” says Lutz. “While it’s in limited production, it has the added benefit

of being the only new variety being grown 100 percent organic.”

There are no conventionally grown Rosalynn apples, “so this is an apple — available for a limited time in the fall — that retailers can use to not only build varietal apple sales, but grow organic sales at the same time. That’s a double hit,” says Lutz.

Lutz says Smitten is an apple for retailers to jump on early in the season, before the

main harvest takes place and all of the other varietal apples come on the scene. “It’s fantastic; a very dense apple that matures early in the season,” he says.

Chuck Zeutenhorst, general manager of FirstFruits Marketing of Washington, Yakima, WA, says there has been what he terms a “huge proliferation of new apple varieties from the state, both grown here and shipped from here in the past 10 years.”

According to Zeutenhorst, the top five new varieties by volume in descending order are Ambrosia, Jazz, Envy, Pacific Rose and Opal. FirstFruits Marketing of Washington is the exclusive Opal variety grower/packer. “We also have a variety called Sweetie that is exclusive to our company, which is gaining popularity.”

Brianna Shales, communications manager for Stemilt Growers in Wenatchee, WA, says the Rave varietal is a new and exciting offering available exclusively through Stemilt. The apple is a Honeycrisp-MonArk cross, and was developed by the same breeder who bred Honeycrisp and SweeTango. “It’s very exciting, as it will have the unique position as being the first apple to harvest in Washington State — typically coming off the tree in late

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July, but with a later harvest start in early August. That is two weeks ahead of other apples," says Shales.

Sage Fruit Company's newest varieties include Breeze and Cheekie. Breeze was discovered in a Gala block in New Zealand. Although its parentage is not entirely known, its flavor profile has resonated. "We've been selling offshore inventory for the past few seasons," says Sinks, "and this year, we will harvest our own."

The Cheekie is a cross between a Splendor and a Granny Smith. It has a distinctive, slightly tropical flavor with a hint of tartness. As for varieties being offered industrywide, Sinks says the Cosmic Crisp "is coming in a very big way and will be available in 2019."

With the introduction of these new varieties across the board, Sinks says he and his colleagues have seen less demand for the older, more "original" varieties. "Slowly, we're seeing Red Delicious make its way out; it's the same with varieties like Braeburn, Jonagold and Cameo."

VARIETAL TRENDS

As with nearly every other product cate-

"... It's important to point out that the traditional apple varieties still drive more than 75 percent of total category volume. We're adamant that retailers cannot walk away from selling Gala, Fuji, Granny, Reds and the other traditional apples that still have a strong following."

— Steve Lutz, CMI Orchards

gory, consumers are increasingly insisting on variety when it comes to apples.

"New variety trends are taking center stage," says Washington Apple Commission's Fryhover, "but most are in control of the individual shippers, with the exception of Honeycrisp and Cosmic Crisp."

According to Lutz, the trends are very clear. Sales and volume of branded apples, including Honeycrisp, are gaining category share while the mature apple varieties are losing share. "That said, it's important to point out that the traditional apple varieties still drive more than 75 percent of total category volume. We're adamant that retailers cannot walk away from selling Gala, Fuji, Granny, Reds and the other traditional apples

that still have a strong following."

However, according to Lutz, growth is coming from Honeycrisp and the branded apples. "If retailers want to drive sales, they absolutely have to make sure they get their share of sales dollars from varieties like Ambrosia, Jazz, KIKU, Kanzi and others."

According to Lutz, consumers like these new branded apples for a variety of reasons, including flavor. These new apples have been specifically selected for optimal flavor and texture. "Once consumers get a taste, they tend to become loyal customers," says Lutz. "It's a lot like Starbucks coffee. Once a consumer gets a taste of high-flavored coffee, it's very difficult for them to go back to buying the basic ground coffee in a can.

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varieties with a long-time stagnant fresh apple consumption curve. We simply have to entice folks to eat more of our amazing and healthy products.”

“We will soon see more Honeycrisp crosses coming out, as well as more selection overall. This creates more competition for shelf space, and means that in order for an apple to make it in the crowded area, it’s going to have to stand out. It’s very exciting to see the category evolve with these new genetics.”

— Brianna Shales, Stemilt Growers

Their tastes are changed forever. The result is they are not only willing to spend more to get the high flavor; they are typically much more satisfied with their purchases. That’s exactly what we’re seeing with high-flavored apples.”

Shales says there are many new varieties available now, with more coming each year. “We will soon see more Honeycrisp crosses coming out, as well as more selection overall. This creates more competition for shelf space, and means that in order for an apple to make it in the crowded area, it’s going to have to stand out. It’s very exciting to see the category evolve with these new genetics.”

According to Shales, the biggest trend is the changing of the varietal mix. “We are seeing increased volumes of the consumer favorite, Honeycrisp, as well as new varieties. That means a decline in varieties like Red Delicious. We have better strains of great apples like Pink Lady and Fuji, and an increase in organic. Stemilt is on the leading edge of all of this because we are consumer-focused and flavor-focused. We want to grow what the consumer wants.”

Sinks says the obvious when he points out that healthy attributes play into marketing campaigns, and always have. “It’s fresh fruit; it’s good for you. But lately, we’ve seen an increase in consumer interest toward farm-to-fork and local. Consumers want to know where their food comes from. In addition, they tend to gravitate toward merchandising material that reminds them of an orchard or a farm.”

Zeutenhorst is convinced consumers

are becoming apple connoisseurs with very specific wants in flavor and crunch factor. At the same time, however, he suggests “the varietal situation is becoming over-developed. We now have a potential for 30-plus new apple

AT RETAIL

Much of that enticement must — and will — take place in the retail setting.

Retailers can't overlook a foundation of strong merchandising and shelf allocation for traditional varieties. "Not doing so almost guarantees the category will fall short," says CMI's Lutz.

That said, it is also important retailers recognize new apples lack the consumer base of established varieties. "Great signage, shelf position and promotion are even more important to create consumer awareness at the point-of-sale," says Lutz, who has found the best merchandising tools on new apples are the secondary, free-standing display units. "We have a five-box and two-box secondary display shipper. These displays ship with fruit and have everything needed for the display included. That means retailers don't have to worry about how to get the various pieces of the display unit out to the stores."

The basic premise, CMI Orchards says, is these displays have very strong branding, sell the attributes of the new apple and are vivid enough to catch the eye of consumers who tend to zoom through produce departments. "When we can slow shoppers down with these colorful displays, they buy," says Lutz.

This year CMI is focusing on promotional programs to drive consumer trial. Management believes the key to new apple sales is getting a consumer out of his/her rut to try something new. "When that happens, we usually convert a pretty high number of shoppers on future trips," says Lutz.

The company is working closely with its retail partners to customize and implement promotions that work best for them. In some cases, that means in-store sampling events.

With others, it is digital couponing to stimulate trial. Still other retailers prefer secondary displays. "We think the key is to be flexible in applying the tactic that works best in a particular store environment," says Lutz.

"When introducing a new variety to the market place, it's best to put them front and center for the consumer to see and try," says Sage Fruit's Sinks. He says demos and display contests are some of the best ways to get consumers to try new varieties and capture repeat sales, as is creative packaging and merchandising bins. "However, it's always best to keep them in refrigeration when possible to decrease the rate of dehydration. If a consumer bites into a new variety and has an unfavorable experience, he or she isn't going to be very likely to purchase them again."

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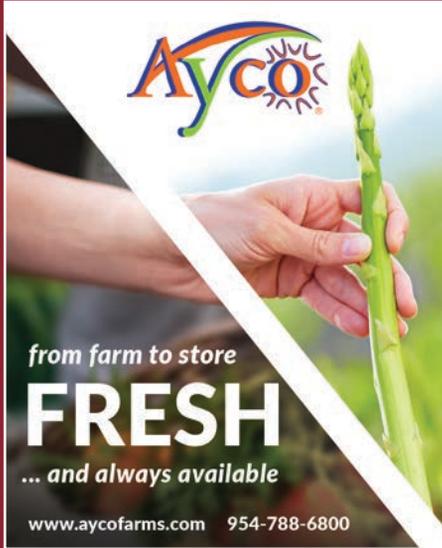
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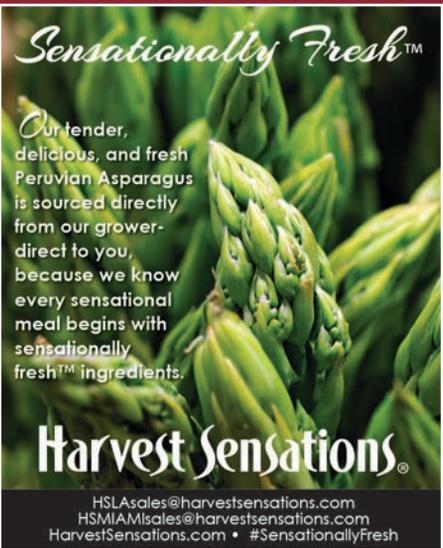
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Make More Space For Bulk And Value-Added Pomegranates

The biblical fruit with health and taste attributes overcomes convenience challenges.

BY LARRY BERNSTEIN

While volume continues to increase and year-round availability becomes achievable, consumer demand for pomegranates grows as convenient arils and education on seed extraction open new opportunities.

According to Tom Tjerandsen, manager of the Pomegranate Council in Sonoma, CA, 20 percent of people in the United States have had a pomegranate experience, while 12 percent have actually purchased the fruit. Pomegranates' index of consumption peaks on both coasts, but drops in the mid-section of the country. "Anytime you have product with limited penetration with perspective target users, there is room for substantial growth," says Tjerandsen.

Created in 1991, the Council has a few objectives, including being a resource for consumers who have questions regarding usage, conducting research on the efficacy of pomegranates, helping to build an export market business for U.S. growers, and gathering/delivering information to the public and industry.

Robert Schueller, director of public relations of Melissa's Produce in Los Angeles, is similarly optimistic about the pomegranate market. He notes pomegranates have been growing 5 to 10 percent each year for the past few years while the arils have been growing at 10 to 15 percent per year. "From our perspective, in the past five years, people have gotten to appreciate the product due to its being available nearly all year."

Traditionally, pomegranates were only available in the fall. Simonian Fruit Company in Fowler, CA, has been growing, packing and marketing pomegranates and other produce since 1960. "Pomegranates have been growing in terms of availability and volume, even though the industry decreased," says Jeff Simonian, president. According to Simonian, there has been a decline in American farmland dedicated to pomegranates with the current acreage at approximately 40,000, down 5,000 acres. The decrease is primarily attributed to drought conditions in California, where the mass majority of American-grown pomegranates come from and the challenging economics related to the product.

Today, pomegranates are available most of the year, with the exception of a couple

of weeks at the end of July and February. This is due to imports from Chile and Peru. "The near seamless 52-week supply is quite important for retailers. It also allows pomegranates to hold their place in the produce section," says Tjerandsen.

In 1990, there were only 2,000 acres of farmland dedicated to growing pomegranates. Most of these early pomegranates weren't consumed; instead, they were used for holiday decor. The market changed after Stewart and Lynda Resnick, owners of POM Wonderful, committed to planting them. POM Wonderful is part of The Wonderful Company in Los Angeles. The company is the largest grower and producer of fresh pomegranates and pomegranate juice in the United States, and a worldwide leader in fresh California pomegranates and pomegranate-based products. "It is the most popular variety in the United States and is sweeter and juicier than the other varieties," says Adam Cooper, vice president of marketing for POM Wonderful.

POM Wonderful has invested more than \$200 million in marketing to drive the demand for pomegranate products. The company continues to invest in marketing



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in order to raise the profile, awareness and popularity of pomegranates. Cooper says the company is planning a big marketing campaign for the coming season, which will include a billboard in New York's Times Square.

SunnyGem Produce, located in Buttonwillow, CA, has approximately 2,800 acres of Wonderful pomegranates. "People wait for the California Wonderfuls." says Mitchell Ritchie, sales director. "They're unique because they are sugary, plump and taste good. It's a longer-lasting fruit with holding power, and is attractive in appearance."

ARILS FUEL GROWTH

Besides being eaten straight, pomegranates can be used as a garnish. People enjoy them on salads, guacamole, with meat and even on top of ice cream.

"They can be part of a meal from the appetizer to dessert," says Shaleen Heffernan, an independent sales representative who sells for various growers and shippers, including Gargiulo Produce in Hillside, NJ.

Katzman Berry Corp., Bronx, NY, has been importing arils for 10 years under its private label, Bloom Fresh. Stefanie Katzman, executive manager, says the two biggest factors behind the sales increase of arils is due to their high nutritional value and flavor. "Anything that tastes good and is good for you is going to show constant growth," she says.

In 2014, Bloom Fresh redesigned its clamshell packaging and label, and relaunched the product in a 4.4-oz. grab-and-go cup with a spoon included under the lid. The company also offers a 2.1-oz. cup and a 2.2-pound bulk bag to its line. "We import our pomegranate arils from India several times a week because they have year-round supply and a unique variety that has a deeper red color and sweeter flavor than some of our domestic varieties grown in the United States," says Katzman.

Besides being delicious, pomegranates are very healthy. POM Wonderful invested \$40 million into ongoing scientific research to explore the potential health benefits in the areas of sports performance, memory and cognition, inflammation reduction, fetal health and gut health. Researchers have found pomegranates to be an excellent source of antioxidants. With consumers interested in healthy, tasty snacks, pomegranates seem like a perfect fit.

"They don't sacrifice flavor for health, allowing buyers to feel good about what they

are eating," says POM Wonderful's Cooper.

So, why do pomegranates lag behind many other produce items?

"Extracting the seeds can be a messy process," says John Forry, principal of DJ Forry, Pismo Beach, CA. Forry says when people become aware of techniques to extract the seeds they become more comfortable with it and can do it with relative ease. So, a significant challenge in growing the pomegranate market has been the difficulty people have eating them.

Pomegranates are popular in the Middle East and South America, as well as Korea and China. They grow best in tropical-like conditions. However, to expand their popularity in America, the burden of extracting the seeds needed to be overcome. According to Heffernan, a machine was developed in 2007 to seed the whole pomegranate. "This took the intimidation element of eating the product away," he says.

The machine led to the creation of the aril — the seeds within the pomegranate — market. "Produce department dollar growth was relatively flat with only 0.4 percent growth. However, POM POMS (arils marketed by POM Wonderful) were on fire with 30 percent dollar growth, which contributed to 7 percent of produce department growth," says Cooper. It also opened the product up to a new audience. "It's allowed us to reach a broader audience from younger, on-the-go consumers to families. The grab-and-go convenience of a 100 calorie healthy snack is appealing."

The aril market is growing the overall pomegranate market. "We've taken the bad part about eating a pomegranate out of the mix," says Katzman. "I expect to see much more growth in the years to come."

While pomegranates remain particularly popular with those who grew up on them, they have also become popular with higher-income women living an active lifestyle who are looking for simple, easy and convenient ways to eat healthy.

"Someone who is afraid to try and open the pomegranate will buy the arils," says Jeff Simonian, president of Simonian Fruit Company in Fowler, CA. "If they like the product, they may consider buying it both ways, but the die-hards buy the whole fruit."

Forry refers to those who buy the arils as "the fast and the furious. They're trying to figure out how to eat better, and this item falls into the category as it's a healthy positive alternative." He also notes consumers who purchase arils want instant satisfaction

and are not as price sensitive. Arils do cost more than the whole fruit due to the cost of extraction and packaging.

MERCHANDISING

Wonderful pomegranates are in season from October to January, making the holiday season key consumption periods. However, more than for a particular holiday, pomegranates are known as a fall fruit (despite the extended season due to imports).

“Pomegranates are unique in the fall season, as are persimmons, which have a similar season. Putting them near each other along with other fall fruits like pears and apples, which don’t have to be refrigerated, is a good idea,” says Schueller.

One way retailers can educate consumers is through point-of-sale and point-of-purchase materials. Bloom Fresh uses both print and digital platforms to grow its aril sales. The company utilizes in-store point-of-sales material and runs ads with customers. “We support many charities that focus on healthy hearts and children,” says Katzman. “And we send samples to these events to show everyone that eating healthy also means eating something delicious.

SunnyGem’s point-of-sale material includes instructions on how to open pomegranates. In addition, the company has created displays and branded endcaps.

Simonian Fruit Company is also trying to educate consumers. Simonian says it spends time showing retailers how to open pomegranates. The company also includes a booklet illustrating a three-step process on how to open them along with recipe cards. Simonian suggests selling pomegranates in bulk bins. “Having a pomegranate cut open and showing the inside helps people to get a better idea of them as well,” he says.

Heffernan suggests placing pomegranates in multiple areas and cross-merchandising them. “They can be put in the refrigerator case of fresh produce, in the gourmet section and the ready-to-eat section,” she says.

Like Heffernan, Cooper says pomegranates should be in multiple sections of the grocery store. “Because POM POMS are seasonal, consumers might not remember to put them on their list. Help them out by putting them where it’s convenient for them to find them, such as in the berry cooler, cut-fruit section, grab-n-go healthy coolers and anywhere else in the store where consumers are looking for something healthy, delicious and convenient.”

Bin displays and cartons are also essen-

tial to driving increased volume for fresh pomegranates. POM Wonderful has merchandising tools, including tear pads with coupons, balloons and signage that call attention to the benefits, shows what the fruit looks like inside and how to open it.

While Tjerandsen acknowledges that selling pomegranates is a challenge, he also believes they have a number of unique attributes, including color, no trim requirement, little shrink and can be in a stand-alone display, as they require little labor. One big

advantage pomegranates have over other items in the produce department is they last. When a customer buys a pomegranate, he/she can store it in the refrigerator for a month. Arils have a shorter life span, lasting approximately five days in the refrigerator.

After a downturn year last year due to weather, pomegranates are poised to reach their highest level of production. As consumers become more comfortable with the item, grocers are going to need to find more space. **pb**



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Larger Organic Demand Triggers Growing Pains



Handling requirements necessitate extra care during transport and warehousing.

BY DOUG OHLEMEIER

As organic offerings become a larger portion of what mainstream supermarkets sell, the category suddenly demands more attention to growing pains throughout the supply chain, according to wholesalers.

Organic produce accounts for 9.5 percent of all produce dollars for the 52 weeks ending July 1, 2017, according to Chicago-based Nielsen FreshFacts. Dollar sales in the category increased 10 percent while volume increased 12 percent.

In today's world of stricter food safety rules, it's critical organic produce is shipped on separate skids and identified as organic. To prevent commingling with conventional produce, U.S. Department of Agriculture National Organic Program standards are also

strict. Distributors say keeping items separate is the best way to handle organic produce.

If a group of supermarkets requests an organic papaya program but the demand is for two pallets, how can a distributor make that work, if realistically, the volume needs to reach 10 pallets? That's where the supply chain enters the equation, say wholesalers. Demand is one thing, but making it happen is the responsibility of distributors working closely with retailers.

HANDLING CONCERNS

Organic rules require no commingling with conventional product. "Like a junior high dance, no skin-to-skin contact is allowed for organic and conventional product," says Jonathan Steffy, director of sales and retail services for Four Seasons Produce Inc., which distributes organic product from Ephrata, PA, to customers in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest and parts of New England.

Because packaging separation prevents residue from conventional product affecting organics, a box of conventional apples stacked next to a box of organic apples doesn't represent a problem. The dynamic, however,

changes with wet produce, such as vegetables packed with ice. The situation becomes even more challenging when truckload orders are not large enough to fill single organic items on one pallet. For example, a 90-case order might include 40 items of conventional and organic combined in the same truck.

Also, when some of the national retailers first order organic produce beyond a few stock-keeping units like bananas, carrots or product in packages, people need to ratchet-up their attention to the supply chain part of the equation, says Steffy.

It's easier for distributors to solve that challenge at the warehouse level, where processes can be built into their put-aways through storage rules that prevent iced conventional product from dripping on organic, says Steffy. All organic iced product should be stacked on the skids above the conventional wet product or shrouded with slip sheets of plastic to prevent cross-contamination, he says. Wholesalers that sell both must include those types of rules to prevent commingling, adds Steffy. Retailers should also ensure the same care to prevent commingling in the stores' back rooms, he says.

In general, the industry is doing a good job keeping the two separate, maintains Steffy. But he cautions smaller distributors, or those who may be organizing their own mixed loads, may not be paying attention to all the rules.

WHOLESALE ROLE

Wholesalers play an important role with shippers using forward distribution centers, says Eric Mitchnick, director of the specialty division for E. Armata Inc., on the Hunts Point Market in Bronx, NY. "Because a lot of the retail chains don't want to take a lot of extra product, having shippers utilize forward distributors is very important," he says. "Forward distributors and wholesalers are critical in helping support the chains, food-service operators and the smaller retailers. It's a strong aspect of the organic business."

When a wholesaler is involved, a buyer can purchase cautiously, says Mitchnick. If a retailer only moves five pallets of organic Romaine hearts, if it's short a pallet or two,

"Like a junior high dance, no skin-to-skin contact is allowed for organic and conventional product."

— Jonathan Steffy, Four Seasons Produce Inc.

the wholesaler can supply the shortage. "This makes the wholesaler more important in the dynamic of the whole organic realm, as long as it has the proper quality and the right label," he says. In organics, shorts are more prevalent because buyers prefer not carrying large inventories of organic product. As many believe organics don't possess the same shelf-life as their conventional counterparts, buyers often order more frequently, he says.

At Lakeside Organic Gardens, which grows and ships more than 45 organic vege-

tables from Watsonville, CA, almost all of its retail customers now purchase direct loads. Dick Peixoto, partner, says there is a learning curve because while chains may purchase full loads, it's the mixed loads with several different items to a pallet that organic shippers must make work.

Peixoto recently worked with a retail customer that operates 17 stores. The retailer was purchasing from distributors but approached Lakeside and worked out a deal to buy full truckloads of mixed organic product. "Distribution is definitely a factor," says Peixoto. "We are doing more full loads of organic than before. Lots of trucks come to us already loaded with organic berries and vegetables. Before, organic was just part of the load. Now it's the whole truck."

Fresh-cut sales growth is increasing and growers report an increase of organic supply movement to fresh-cut processors. "It has become a growing market," says Peixoto. "There's a lot of processed product that is eliminating conventional products from

MIDWEST, SOUTHEAST REPORTED AS GROWING ORGANIC REGIONS

BY DOUG OHLEMEIER

The East Coast and West Coast represent the strongest organic produce markets, but more areas are becoming bigger buyers of the category.

In the past, pins on a wall map would mark customers' locations, which was predominantly on the two coasts with everything blank in-between except for Kansas City, MO. Today, organics ship all over the country in every state, says Dick Peixoto, partner with Lakeside Organic Gardens, which ships vegetables from Watsonville, CA.

The Pacific Northwest Corridor, including western Canada, is in a growth pattern as is the Midwest. "The Midwest is catching on," says Peixoto. "It's a big area, but with fewer people. It's not as strong as the coasts, but before, you wouldn't even hear about it (in the Midwest). Now, we get customers from the Midwest on a regular basis. It has definitely grown."

Some regions were weaker than others in organic produce demand, but that has changed, says Andy Martin, president of A&A Organic Farms Corp., based in Watsonville, CA. Regions including the northern areas of the

Midwest, North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana, aren't as weak as once thought. "Most everybody is drawing organic now," he says. "You may think North Dakota is dead, but not really." Someone is selling to Minneapolis, but delivering to North Dakota. "Packers are seeing a lot more product going to Michigan, and the Southeast is a huge organic territory," says Martin.

Four Seasons Produce Inc., which distributes conventional and organic produce from Ephrata, PA, has wholesaled organic product since the 1990s. In the past, the category represented less than 5 percent of its business. Today, it's about half, says Jonathan Steffy, director of sales and retail services. During the early 2000s, the distributor focused on natural food stores. As distributors built critical mass within the supply chain they could provide more opportunities to mainstream grocery stores building organic programs, he says.

Today there is more organic produce demand from Midwestern shoppers. "While the coasts certainly still drive a lot of organic demand, other parts of the country are also increasing," says Steffy.

"There was a time when other than Wisconsin and Minnesota, there wasn't much organic demand in the middle of the country. That's definitely changing."

Rick Feighery, vice president of sales for Philadelphia-based Procacci Bros. Sales Corp., and Plant City, FL-based Santa Sweets Inc., notes an increasing demand in Midwestern and Southeastern markets. "We are seeing an increase in the Southeast," he says. "The strengths, however, are still on the West Coast and the Northeast. The organic business is definitely increasing. The organic category is seen throughout all 50 states now."

Since 1988, Fullerton, CA-based JBJ Distributing, Inc., has distributed a full line of organic produce. Jimmy Matiasovich, co-owner of JBJ, Veg-Land Inc., and Fresh Cut Inc., says the organic category is increasing in demand. "Because it's such a growing category, there are areas that have more demand than others," he says. "But all in all, demand is throughout the entire United States. The Southeast wasn't ever a big mover in the past, but as organic pricing gets closer to conventional, consumers can make a choice and afford it." **pb**

the shelves, like organic bagged salads and Romaine hearts. Many customers handling organics have removed the conventional counterpart from the shelf, particularly if the price points are similar, says Peixoto.

COMMODITIZATION TREND

Like conventional produce, many retailers receive organic produce predominantly through direct shipments. Retailers try to source as close as possible to the grower. One trend is the commoditization of certain

organic items, such as apples. During Washington state's season, many retail buyers receive shipments directly from the larger grower-shippers. During the import season, however, when volumes are smaller, buyers will often rely more on wholesalers, says Rick Feighery, vice president of sales for Philadelphia-based Procacci Bros. Sales Corp., and Plant City, FL-based Santa Sweets Inc.

Romaine lettuce, celery hearts, strawberries, grape tomatoes and carrots are organic staples that are relatively easy for retailers

doing organic programs to load at the same shipping points as conventional, he says. "There is quite a bit of those commodities going through warehouse operations direct to retailers versus through wholesalers whether in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and even in the Southeast. That has brought some decrease in movement while our direct-to-store deliveries are seeing incredible increases," says Feighery.

A diminishment in wholesale volume on certain items is a natural progression following increases in direct shipments, he says. Procacci works directly with growers to supply its retail partners fresher product that's closer to home. Because cold storage facilities in closer proximity to East Coast buyers provide fresher product for California shippers, the forward distribution trend also helps organic movement, he says, adding, there are many pieces of the puzzle with logistics being one of the biggest. Growers and distributors want to maximize trucks, so bringing a full load east and splitting among customers keeps costs down, he says.

"Wholesalers are heavily involved," says Feighery. "The wholesalers' place is still there with organics. We provide a good service to our retailers." But, he says, organics are still relatively low volume. As volume increases with specific items, more items will ship direct. For slower moving products, wholesalers can add value by providing different pack sizes, different overall sizings of the product as well as labeling for proper register scans, he says.

A majority of larger retailers receive organic product direct, but many smaller operations receive via a mix of forward distribution and direct. Many chains, which may operate as many as 30 stores in the Midwest, don't own distribution centers, says Andy Martin, president of A&A Organic Farms Corp., which ships from Watsonville, CA. "They rely on distributors to source everything, bringing it on truck, breaking it down and delivering to each store," he says. "They have distributors do the dirty work. That's working well. The larger chains that have warehouses are more apt to work directly with the shipper."

The downside is while a shipper may win a bid from a distributor for one week and believe it has made a connection with a chain store for its business, the store may then decide to purchase broccoli from someone else because it's \$1 cheaper, which makes for inconsistent business, says Martin. In certain markets, wholesalers on the produce termi-

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nals remain highly involved in distribution. There's a lot of walk-up and cash business in typically aggressive marketplaces, he says.

PRODUCT CONSOLIDATION

Fullerton, CA-based Veg-Land Inc., and its subsidiaries, JBJ Distributing Inc., and Fresh Cut Inc., works direct with customers and doesn't use many outside carriers for organic shipments. Some of its other customers use freight forwarders and trucking companies, says Jimmy Matiasevich, co-owner. Matiasevich says some of the larger transportation companies are gaining ground by engaging in forward distribution.

One trend is logistics companies — as well as some large retailers — are using JBJ's cross-dock and consolidation services. JBJ serves as one of a larger retailer's four different product consolidation points. New driver hours-of-service rules, expected to begin in early 2018, should increase product consolidation so that a truck can load half a dozen organic items in one spot versus driving to several shippers, says Matiasevich.

Retailers and wholesalers are heavily involved in organics, says Matiasevich. "The market wholesalers and foodservice whole-

"Many customers handling organics have removed the conventional counterpart from the shelf, particularly if the price points are similar."

— Dick Peixoto, Lakeside Organic Gardens

salers are dabbling," he says. "There are some retailers that specify what they would like for us to grow, but it depends how heavily involved a retailer wants to be." Another trend is buyers requesting sustainability certifications. The certification systems aren't uniform, but require paper trails throughout the system.

In terms of handling, organics and conventional are closer than ever because of tighter food safety rules, says Stefanie Katzman, executive manager of the Bronx, NY-based S. Katzman Produce Inc., and

Katzman Berry Corp. "A decade ago, rules were more stringent on how one could handle organics," she says. "Because of the focus on food safety, there's not as much difference anymore." With the regulations, Katzman says she avoids cross-contamination with every lot entering its docks.

Many specialty stores that focus on organics have emerged in Manhattan because of increased demand. In the populous New York and tri-state region, organic demand is increasing. As late as 2014, organics constituted less than 1 percent of Katzman's sales. Today, the segment is about 3 percent of sales, but many of the company's conventional vendors tell Katzman they are considering growing organics in 10 percent of their fields.

After constructing organic sections in their stores, customers who purchase 100 boxes of conventional lettuce will now buy five boxes of organic. Katzman can bring a truckload of organics and sell 90 percent of it to the larger chains while sending 10 percent to the smaller operators who are increasing their organics programs. The movement allows those smaller operations to purchase 30 percent from two truckloads, she says. "There are new people trying new things." **pb**

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Montréal: A World-Class Food City

PRODUCE IS CENTER-OF-MIND AND OFTEN CENTER-PLATE IN THIS CANADIAN FOOD MECCA.

By Sophia McDonald

No matter how you look at it, Montréal is an amazing place for food lovers. After New York, it's the city with the highest number of restaurants per capita. These eateries offer 120 types of cuisines from around the world. Some of the world's largest grocery chains operate alongside daily markets that sell produce from the region's many farms. The city is home to a number of wholesalers, many of which have been family owned for generations.

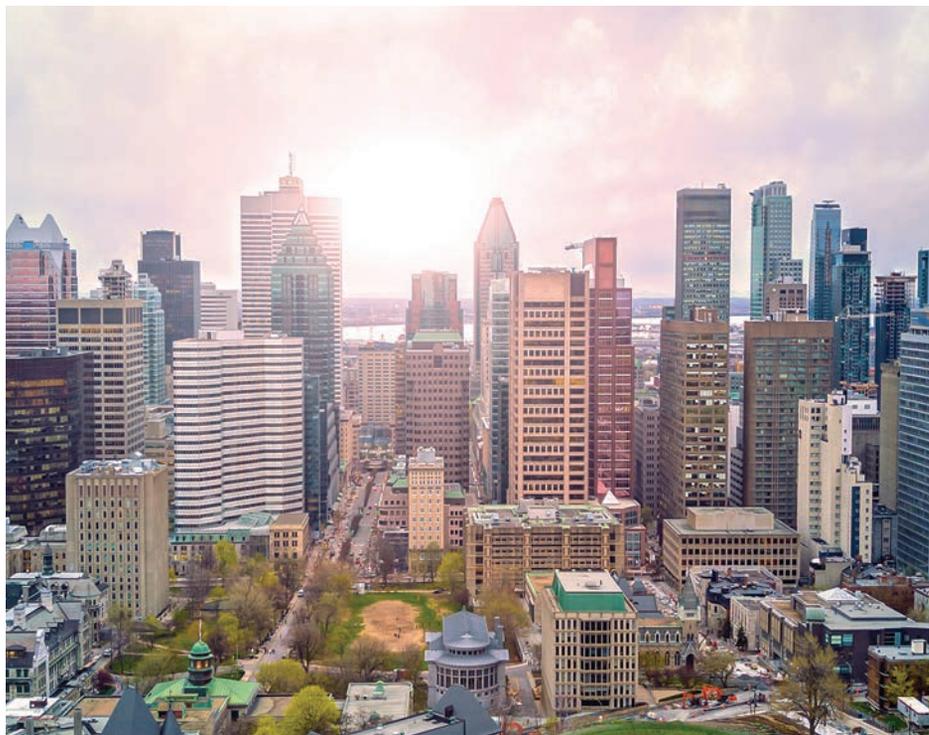
"We're certainly in the right industry," says George Pitsikoulis, president and chief executive of Canadawide Inc., a wholesale company with its headquarters in Montréal. "It's always been part of the culture over here to eat fresh produce, and the trend and talk has been to eat more and more."

This is a worldwide trend, but Pitsikoulis believes it's especially strong in Montréal, and for good reason. One out of every three residents is an immigrant. People move there from all over the world, with the top five countries of origin being Algeria, Morocco, Haiti, France and China.

"In these cultures there's more of a demand for fresh produce as opposed to frozen or prepared meals," says Pitsikoulis. "A lot of these things don't exist in nations where people are coming from."

The Canadian government is encouraging people to eat more fruits and vegetables. It's adopted an *Eat Well Plate* similar to the *MyPlate* concept that replaced the U.S. food pyramid. In addition, the Quebec Produce Marketing Association has its own campaign, called *I Love 5 to 10 Servings a Day*, which runs ads and educates consumers about the benefits of eating fresh produce.

"One of Montréal's many charms is its vibrant and creative food scene," says Martin Vézina, spokesperson for the Association des restaurateurs du Québec. "The city's restaurants have successfully pushed forward inno-



vative dishes that combine local food and different flavors. Is it not for nothing that *Town and Country* has declared Montréal the best restaurant city?" All of this adds up to bountiful opportunities for food-related businesses.

WHOLESALE PERSPECTIVE

Montréal is home to several produce wholesale companies. One is JB Laverdure, a family owned wholesaler, importer and exporter that's been doing business in Canada for 120 years. It serves Quebec and a handful of states in the eastern United States.

JB Laverdure has been in the same location since 1974, but the firm renovated and expanded its facility in 2014. It now has 92,000 square feet of space with a 36,000 pallet storage capacity. The facility has 18 refrigerated rooms and 26 rooms intended for banana storage. Seven receiving docks and 17 shipping docks serve a logistic fleet outfitted with GPS tracking devices so they can be tracked in real time. The company received CanadaGAP certification in 2016.

Canadawide is a relative newbie in the marketplace. This Montréal-based company started as a greengrocer in 1961 and switched its focus to fruit and vegetable wholesaling

in 1983. It serves Quebec, Ontario and the Maritimes (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island).

Canadawide also built a new facility recently. The company's 300,000-square-foot warehouse has space to store 7,000 pallets, mostly in refrigerated space. It has 30 cold rooms, 44 loading docks, spaces specifically designed for bananas and other tropicals, and state-of-the-art food preservation and storage technology. A new sales room allows customers to "shop" in a pleasant environment. The Frescadel division within the company packs organic and non-organic produce for distribution to grocery stores.

Benny D'Angelo Produce in St-Remi, Canada, is a family owned distribution and shipping company that opened in 1998. It purchases produce from surrounding farms — many of which are only 10 minutes away, notes salesperson Corri Morison — packs it and distributes it to locations in the eastern United States.

The company operates from a 40,000-square-foot warehouse with eight refrigerated loading docks and five coolers, all of which are set to different temperatures to accommodate different types of produce. The company owns a fleet of 16 trucks and



John Pitsikoulis – Canadawide Inc.

19 refrigerated trailers, which ensures product can be picked up and delivered to customers on time. It is CanadaGAP-certified.

CDS Foods, which also has its headquarters in Montréal, is a produce specialty company that focuses on garlic, but also deals with ginger, pearl onions, shallots and other items. It serves Quebec, Ontario and the Maritimes, and is CanadaGAP-certified.

In addition to its import and wholesale business, CDS Foods has a line of freeze-dried produce items called City Snacks. Consumers can purchase pre-packaged apples, bananas, strawberries, pineapple, pears and peaches. The company moved to a new facility in February 2015.

Wholesalers see many produce trends play out in their businesses. “I see growth in ready-to-eat, but I also see some people going back to their roots,” says Cesare Della Santina, president of CDS Foods. Those customers are more focused on either cooking the foods from their culture or branching out. People in that market are keen to try new things, he says.

“People want more and more berries,” says Jean-François Laverdure, president of JB Laverdure, Montréal. “We see kale and the good greens popping out. People are more conscious about what they’re eating.”

“All the different varieties of tree fruit are doing well,” says Canadawide’s Pitsikoulis. “It used to be basic varieties, but now there’s always something new, like pluots or plum varieties. Everyone’s always looking for the newest thing. Avocados have been on a steep incline with all the strong press they’re getting for their nutritional value. Anything that has a green leaf on it, or a strong, deep color, like tomatoes and beets, is doing well.”

Product pricing is always a challenge for wholesalers. “We’re being squeezed from the customer side and also from the shippers and the growers,” says Laverdure.

Logistics is another. “It’s a tough business where decisions need to be made quickly in

terms of inventory movement,” says Pitsikoulis. “You need a hands-on type of approach if you want to be successful in this type of business.”

But wholesalers see opportunities, too. Immigration into Canada and the United States is creating markets for new and interesting produce items, says Benny D’Angelo Produce’s Morison. “There’s such a wide span of items that wouldn’t have been offered five years ago, but now because of the diversity of people coming in and making a life in

Montréal, the demand is there. Every year there’s a new item we add to our sheet that one of our farmers has started to grow and it takes off.” Golden and Chioggia (candy-striped) beets and flat Dutch cabbage are examples of products that have become popular in recent years.

“I never look at anything negatively,” says Pitsikoulis. “For me, a challenge is an opportunity. These are always opportunities to further meet our customers’ needs and develop our relationship with them and

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A CLOSER LOOK AT RETAIL

Meeting customer needs is a top priority for the five stores that make up IGA Louise Ménard, which has operated in Montréal for more than 30 years. “Our goal is to provide, at every moment, exceptional customer service, quality, and varied and exclusive products,” says Pierre Guibord, director of operations and non-perishable foods.

In addition to fruits, vegetables and fresh herbs, produce departments carry nuts and dried fruits; prepared products such as fruit cups and yogurt with granola; tie-in products such as tofu and chocolate sauce; and non-perishable items such as kitchen tools.

Providing fresh products that are high quality is top-of-mind for everyone working in produce. “We require our staff to review their department for quality and quantity several times a day. They are continually trained on quality and safety.”

Guibord says shoppers want to know where their food comes from and they want less packaging on products. Good signage helps with the first. “We use professionally printed signage provided by our banner and created in-store,” he says.

Getting food with fewer pesticides is another concern. “Customers are looking for local, bio [organic] and fair trade products.”

As customers get increasingly interested in ready-to-cook products, IGA Louise Ménard is responding. Cut-up vegetables ready for the barbecue is one example.

Besides paying attention to these trends, Guibord offers numerous demos and promotions to increase sales. Since we are an independent operator, we have the leisure of organizing our department as we see fit,” he says. “Because customers are fond of local products, putting them in the spotlight always creates a buzz.”

Guibord points to the Nun’s Island location as one of the best examples of the company’s success with produce. The store is 28,000 square feet, and approximately a quarter of it is dedicated to fruits and vegetables. It’s scheduled to undergo a remodel, which will expand the department by 1,500 square feet. “The volume of the fruits and vegetables section is about 22 to 23 percent of the sales of the store,” says Guibord. “Absolute sales are growing generally, but volume remains similar as our stores are on the rise.”

THRIVING SERVICE

Weather plays a major factor in Montréal. From December through March, the average temperature is below zero F.

“What do we do all winter? We hibernate; and when spring comes, we don’t want to be inside anymore,” says Della Santina with CDS Foods. When outdoor temperatures begin to warm, there’s an explosion of people looking to break out of hibernation and explore the city. They flock to restaurants, bars and markets, eager for social interaction and fresh food.

There are many places to serve them. According to Tourisme Montréal, the metropolitan area had 3,900 restaurants and 430 bars and breweries in 2014. Cuisines from 120 different cultures are found within the city, which makes for an exciting and eclectic restaurant scene. “Literally, anything is available for anyone to taste, which is a really strong pull for tourism,” says Benny D’Angelo Produce’s Morison. “It gives people an opportunity to try something different that they haven’t tried before, which makes eating out very interesting.”

“Montréal has all of the major restaurant chains you expect for a city of its size,” says Association des restaurateurs du Québec’s Vézina. “For locally owned chains, there’s St-Hubert, Pacini and Cooper Branch. One



with a variety of shaved radishes tossed in a cucumber vinaigrette, and finished with a cucumber relish and smoked salmon roe.

Another popular veggie-forward dish featured cured salmon sliced thin and dressed with broken cherry tomatoes, olive oil, and green and purple basil. To make the dressing, Dammann pureed tomatoes with garlic, horseradish, basil and salt, and hung it in cheesecloth to capture the liquid. He added a little gelatin to thicken the sauce, then seasoned it with cayenne and added it

to the plate.

Summer is also a busy time for preserving and pickling produce that can be used on the menu later in the year. The chef likes to grill asparagus, dressed with olive oil and rosemary, then vacuum pack it so it can be served later.

Whatever the season, Dammann is committed to giving visitors an authentic Montréal experience. "I figure, you go to France and you have French food. In Italy you have Italian food and wine. Why not do the same when in Canada?" **pb**

interesting thing about Cooper Branch is it's a relatively new chain based on a vegetarian quick-service menu."

Montréal also has an unusually high number of small, locally owned restaurants. "In other areas of North America you have huge multinationals that have taken on a majority of the business," says Canadawide's Pitsikoulis. "Here they're the minority."

This can perhaps be explained by the fact that residents place high priority on high-quality, creative food. "Montréalers are open to trying new things," says Catherine Morellon, manager, media and leisure market for Tourisme Montréal. "They have very broad expectations and are always curious about what you can do next."

Restaurants also follow the food trends seen elsewhere. After being banned for more than 60 years, food carts are now legal and are making a comeback. "The poke bowl is the latest craze, as well as seafood appetizers," says Vézina. "Montréalers like sharing plates, so many restaurants offer small plates. Cocktails and mocktails mixed with fresh ingredients are popular. One trend that's interesting is the prevalence of restaurants where the vegetables are the star of the plate."

One such restaurant is Maison Publique, a gastropub specializing in locally sourced food, beer and wine. Chef/owner Derek Dammann opened the restaurant five years ago with the goal of creating a cozy, inviting place where people could enjoy good food.

What he gets differs from farm to farm, and even from year to year. "Over the years of working with them they've started approaching us and saying, 'What do you want us to grow?'" he says.

Dammann changes the menu at his 50-seat restaurant monthly during the year — and sometimes weekly during the summer — to take advantage of produce items at their peak season. In the late spring he had a salad with a base of buttermilk panna cotta topped



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Atlanta Gains Produce Prominence

EXPANDING POPULATION, ECONOMY AND GEOGRAPHIC ADVANTAGES FUEL CITY'S PRODUCE MOVEMENT.

By Doug Ohlemeier

Considered the “Capital of the South,” Atlanta remains on an economic and population roll. The city and region’s growth continues at a high pace as thousands of people pack moving vans to relocate to the Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell metropolitan statistical area. At 5.8 million people, the metro area is the ninth largest in the United States. For the seventh consecutive year, the birthplace of the American civil rights movement has been named the top moving destination by truck rental giant Penske.

“The population is growing and it’s growing quite rapidly,” says Eric Hoffmann, vice president of sales for the Atlanta division of Springfield, IL-based Tom Lange Co. Inc. “There are a lot of people in Atlanta. With that heavy population comes commerce.”

From 2010 to 2016, 502,975 people — more than the 472,522 people who live in the city of Atlanta — moved to the metropolitan Atlanta area, the fourth-largest population gain behind Houston, Dallas and New York. Jobs are what are attracting people to the 29-county region, particularly in the suburbs. The 77,000 jobs added in 2016 were third in the nation, behind Dallas and Phoenix, according to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

“The city continues to spread out,” says Andrew Scott, director of marketing and business development for Atlanta-based Nickey Gregory Co., LLC. “Atlanta has many different suburbs, which makes the metropolitan area a big area. More and more people continue to move to the Atlanta area. A lot of Fortune 500 companies have set up shop here and have made this city their headquarters.”

The metro area is home to 16 Fortune 500 companies, including The Home Depot,



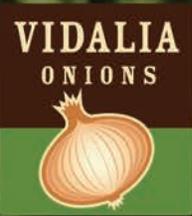
United Parcel Service (UPS), The Coca-Cola Company and Delta Air Lines, according to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce.

Wholesalers report the population growth spurs increased produce distribution. “We have seen overall growth in this city,” says Bryan Thornton, general manager of Coosemans Atlanta Inc. “It continues to grow as more people migrate to the southeast and to the Atlanta region. Distribution for produce has also grown.”

Aside from a booming economy and population, those moving to the region enjoy affordable housing and a high overall quality of life. “It’s very simple to live in Atlanta,” says Thornton. “Housing is relatively affordable, and we have four seasons, which is nice, as it doesn’t get too hot or too cold. It’s comfortable to live here.”

According to Chris Garmendia, general manager of Produce Exchange of Atlanta Inc., which distributes from Forest Park, GA, Atlanta has both lifestyle and logistical advantages. “Atlanta is so centrally located. From here, one can hit so many other states in a matter of hours, which is a nice thing. Being in Georgia, you have the comforts of being in the South, which is a plus. I just love the people here in Georgia. They’re great, down-home people.”

The restaurant scene in Atlanta is healthy, says Carl Muth, managing partner of Atlanta-based FoodService Resource Associates LLC, which tracks restaurant activity in the city. “I think it’s vibrant,” he says. “We are a destination location for people, dining and tourism. We have a lot of really good chefs in town. There is also a lot of farm-to-table in Atlanta. It’s been trending that way.”



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The strong economy and population growth are ideal for restaurant sales, says Robert Poole, senior sales coordinator for Athena Farms in Forest Park, GA. "It's amazing how many new restaurants there are in Atlanta," he says. "There are more openings than closings. That speaks to the health of the city. Otherwise, people wouldn't be taking the plunge."

Restaurants are doing well in Atlanta. "There are all kinds of great restaurants popping up," says Paul Thompson, market

manager of the Atlanta State Farmers Market, headquartered in Forest Park. The new SunTrust Park Stadium, home of the Atlanta Braves, includes restaurants around the battery of the stadium, he says. "This is a good place to be. There's a lot going on now."

The grocery store business is also strong, and so are the wholesalers distributing to the chains — which range from small independent operations to some of the nation's leading players — including Kroger, Publix and Wal-Mart. Atlanta is home to a variety of



Atlanta hosts a variety of ethnic groups that consume a lot of produce at home and at restaurants.

■ RETAIL DISTRIBUTION CROSSROADS

Viewed as the leading city of the South and one of the most-populated U.S. metropolitan areas, Atlanta has long been a retail supermarket magnet. In the past two years, the metro region has experienced a large explosion of grocery stores. Dozens of stores have opened, or are planning to open in the metropolitan region, according to articles in the *Atlanta Business Chronicle*. In April 2017, the *Chronicle* reported on the grocery wars as German-based Lidl and Aldi plan to open a dozen stores in Georgia and four stores in the Atlanta area, respectively.

According to *Chain Store Guide's 2016 Market Share* report, Kroger and Publix battle for the top spot in the Atlanta metro area, capturing 25.8 percent and 23.9 percent respective market shares. Kroger operates with 127 area stores while Publix sells through 142. Wal-Mart's 69 stores earn it an 18.3 percent market share. Its 11 Walmart Neighborhood Markets account for 1 percent of the region's sales.

"This is a very strong retail scene," says Andrew Scott, director of marketing and business development for Atlanta-based Nickey Gregory. While in the 1990s, chains including A&P and Harris-Teeter closed their stores, retailers have begun to bounce back, he says. Chains, including Trader Joe's, Sprouts and Whole Foods, are increasing their presence in the market.

Other leading players are Costco, which has a 5.8 percent market share; Ingles, 4.4 percent; Sam's Club, 4.4 percent; Food Depot, 2.4 percent; Target, 2.1 percent; and Whole Foods at 1.9 percent. Aldi, Dollar General, BJ's, Trader Joe's, Family Dollar, Wayfield Foods, Sprouts, H Mart and The Fresh Market, in descending order, each account for less than 1.4 percent of the market's business, according to the *Market*

Share report.

Retail competition in Atlanta remains intense, says Bryan Thornton, general manager of Coosemans Atlanta Inc., in Atlanta. "It has always been competitive," he says. "During the past 20 years, you have seen retailers come and go. You continue to see that." Thornton says retailers do well merchandising produce. "Everyone has their own nuances," he says.

Dollar General increased its store count from 170 stores to 195, with 1.4 percent of the market, while Family Dollar increased the number of its stores from 151 to 169 at 1 percent market share, according to the *Chain Store Guide* report.

The Atlanta area is a highly developed area with a diverse demographic that offers more local options. Matt Jardina, vice president of general business operations for J.J. Jardina Co. Inc., Atlanta, agrees retail aggressiveness is intense. "It is very competitive," he says. "Discounters are making some inroads, though many consumers are willing to pay more for better quality."

Sales are disappointing at the independent retail stores Produce Exchange of Atlanta Inc., Forest Park, GA, services. "It just seems tougher, but they're staying afloat," says Chris Garmendia, general manager.

The city's supermarkets seem to be doing more with produce. "It's more and more of a focus," says Paul Thompson, market manager of the Atlanta State Farmers Market, Forest Park. "There are more of these stores that you see pop up, whether the Whole Foods, the Kroger's, the Sprouts or Aldi's. In my opinion, the produce selections are getting stronger. More people are focused on it. It's doing very well in the grocery store chains." **pb**

ethnic groups, and produce moves well at the stores and restaurants that serve them. "We are starting to see more retail diversity here, especially Asian and Korean grocery stores, which do well," says Nickey Gregory's Scott. "Atlanta is the capital of the Southeast, and many vendors not based in the region sell in the region. To me, you need to have a presence down here. The population growth says people are investing in Atlanta's growth. It shows that this is a popular city."

ADVANTAGES & CHALLENGES

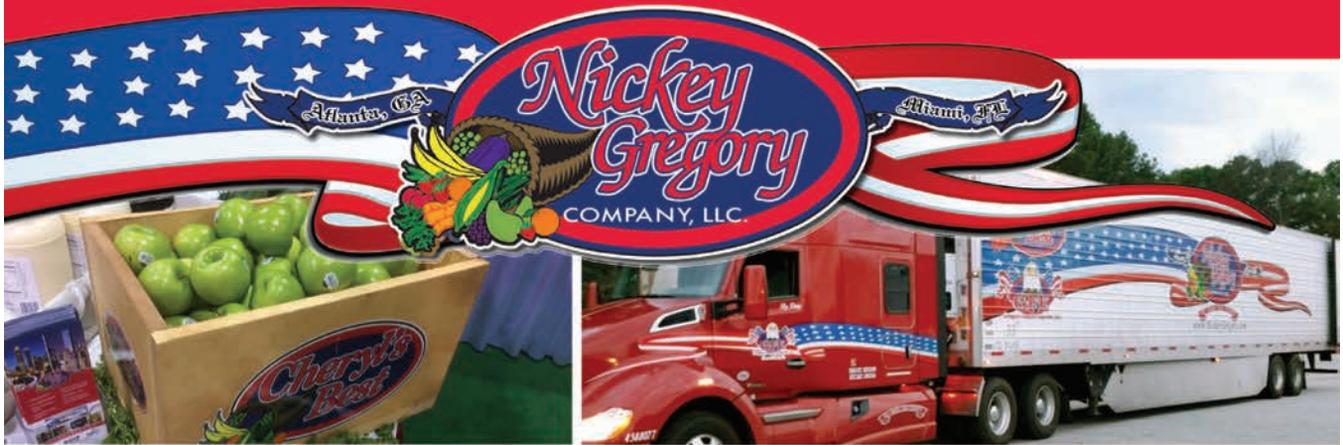
Like with bigger cities, Atlanta's constant growth is bringing transportation, logistics and distribution challenges. The city is located at the junctions of numerous interstate highways. Those who distribute produce to the metropolitan area's numerous grocery stores, restaurants, other foodservice venues and eateries report experiencing headaches from voluminous highway traffic.

The economic and population development has brought congestion, which causes issues for trucks distributing produce throughout the region. "This town is horrible with traffic," says Tom Lange's Hoffmann. "Getting your trucks around town can be difficult. Everyone heading east or west, north or south anywhere in the Southeast has to go through Atlanta. We have so much out-of-town traffic, commercially and privately."

The congestion can be daunting. Nickey Gregory distributes to retail and foodservice customers in 11 Southeastern states. "It can be challenging," says Scott. "We try to get all our trucks out by 3 or 4 p.m., heading them out of town before the traffic becomes too bad."

Produce Exchange distributes vegeta-

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bles and apples to retail and foodservice customers in the greater Atlanta area. “Atlanta is a rapidly growing city,” says Garmendia. “Congestion is always an issue. It seems like traffic is bad here any time of the day. But with the city growing, it means more opportunities for us.”

Many wholesalers, including J.J. Jardina Co. Inc., headquartered in Atlanta, truck produce as far south as South Florida. “It depends, but some travel great distances, especially if there is an opportunity for freight on a return trip,” says Matt Jardina, vice president of general business operations. J.J. Jardina will travel to Miami at times, depending on the volume of freight and will pick up freight on the return trip.

Atlanta possesses some geographic distribution advantages. Jardina points to the Port of Savannah infrastructure, located 239 miles southeast of the Atlanta Produce Terminal, to support imports into the market. “This creates a more local and direct point-to-point service for imports into the region. That creates time savings and some cost savings into our market.” Combined with a growing populace and increasing economic activity helps “all boats rise,” he observes.

“The airport is a big deal for Atlanta. It is a great place for any sales rep to fly around the country. In produce distribution, you can get to a lot of places around the Southeast overnight.”

— Andrew Scott, Nickey Gregory

A plus for the region is Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. The airport has been rated as one of the country’s busiest. “The airport is a big deal for Atlanta,” says Scott. “It is a great place for any sales rep to fly around the country. In produce distribution, from Atlanta, you can get to a lot of places around the Southeast overnight.”

The airport helps expand the reach of distribution for wholesalers who work out of the Atlanta State Farmers Market. Located on 150 acres on the south side of the city’s metropolitan area, the 24-hour market houses produce wholesalers, a farmers market and a garden center. It is a major distribution and marketing hub that distributes fresh produce throughout the Southeast and the rest of the United States.

Thompson points to its proximity. “We have a great location,” he says. “To be across the street from the airport, and just south of I-285 is a benefit. The ability to get into the city without getting into the city makes this a great place to be. I don’t know if the footprint could be better. We could be larger and could use some more room, but in terms of location, we couldn’t be much better.”

Wholesale movement remains strong, says Thompson. The market remains critical for direct sales or filling shorts via vendors working to provide products demanded by chefs or for operations performing fresh-cut processing, he says. “The wholesale business is going well on the market,” says Thompson. “It continues to grow. We are looking to expand our offerings.” **pb**




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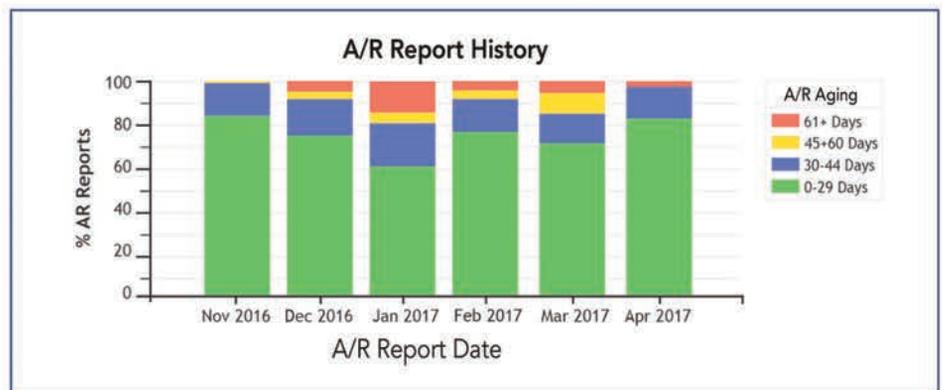
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Des Moines: A Great Place to Set Up Shop

THIS CITY HAS A WHOLE LOT MORE THAN CORN.

By Bob Johnson

Des Moines, IA, is thriving, and it's not all about the corn as this Midwestern agricultural hub joins Hartford, CT, as a strong global hub in the number of insurance and financial services corporate offices.

Forbes gave Des Moines the Number Six spot on its 2016 list of the top 10 best places for business and careers, citing in particular the low cost of doing business. "Business costs are 18 percent below the national average in Des Moines, and economic growth has outpaced the United States as a whole by 68 percent since 2010," the magazine said. "Des Moines is a major center for the insurance industry and maintains a sizable financial services and publishing business base."

The city still benefits from its deep connection to agriculture, which as a whole was steadier than most industries during the recession and recovery.

"Because our economy is so closely tied to agriculture, after 2008 and 2009, we recovered, but the growth was not in spikes," says Jessica Dunker, president and chief executive of the Iowa Restaurant Association, Des Moines. "We are growing, but it is slower growth than the past few years. We have been growing at 3 percent, but in 2017, for the first time in a while, it's hovering around 2.5 percent."

"We have a healthy economy in Des Moines," says Gene Loffredo, president and chief executive of Loffredo Fresh Produce, Des Moines.

Loffredo, who wholesales out of five Midwestern locations, including Des Moines, has enjoyed enough of an uptick in business to open a Produce Innovations packing facility in Norwalk, IA, to service the growing demand for value added.

While the metropolitan area of a little more than 600,000 people remains 85 percent Anglo, with only a scattering of Afri-



PHOTO COURTESY OF CATCH DES MOINES

can-Americans, Hispanics and Asians, locals have seen it grow more diverse in the job market.

"There are a lot of jobs in finance and insurance for college educated kids, and that wasn't true 30 years ago," says Brendan Comito, chief of operations at Capital City Fruit in Norwalk, IA. "Des Moines is one of the most financially set areas of the country."

Comito has seen the job base spawn a more diverse produce sector from his vantage point at Capital City, which has shipped and repacked a full line of fruits and vegetables for nearly seven decades. "There's more diversity among Des Moines retailers," says Comito. "Whole Foods came, and they weren't here 10 years ago. Fresh Thyme came, too."

There is also far greater diversity in the produce available throughout the area.

"I've seen a broader product line in every category," says Jimmy DeMatteis, president and chief executive of Des Moines Truck Brokers, Norwalk. "There are different peppers, tomatoes and avocados that we didn't used to see."

For DeMatteis, keeping up to date and competitive has also involved investing

heavily in modern technology. "The biggest change for us is in our number of people, and in technology," he says. "We've spent a lot of money investing in technology. We have to have connectivity with our customers, and real-time tracking on where our freight is."

RETAIL GROWS MORE DIVERSE

Whole Foods has already captured 2 percent of the Des Moines retail business, according to *Chain Store Guide*, and Trader Joe's is not far behind. But despite the growth of these newer markets serving the city's growing number of professionals, this is largely a two supermarket town with Hy-Vee and Fareway Stores leading the way. [*Editor's Note: See more information about Fareway in our "Ascendant Independent" article on page 21.*]

"We have two retailers here that do a great job of serving their customer base," says Ron Chandler, president and chief executive of Summertime Potato Company, Des Moines. "Additionally, the repackers, distributors and wholesalers are also great partners. Lastly, most people would be surprised how much locally grown produce is here."

Summertime, one of central Iowa's only

potato processing plants, wholesales red, yellow and white onions, as well as red, white, gold, Russet and medley potatoes.

The retail leader in Des Moines is Hy-Vee, with 19 stores and nearly one-third of all the retail business in the metropolitan area.

“Hy-Vee has grown since their start,” says Comito. “They moved into the Minneapolis area, and I think that’s gone well. We’re not seeing a huge difference in what we sell to Hy-Vee. We sell to Hy-Vee every day, same with Fareway.”

Although Capital City still does regular business with Hy-Vee, the leading retailer has shifted in recent years toward bypassing wholesalers and sourcing more produce directly from growers and shippers.

“We do work for Wal-Mart and Costco, but we do very little with Hy-Vee,” says Loffredo Fresh Produce’s Loffredo. “They are in a ‘do it yourself’ mode, but we do fill short orders for them.”

Wal-Mart is a major player in Des Moines produce, with 17 percent market share, and the Costco outlet is also increasing its sales.

But the market Loffredo sees growing most is convenience stores, which create demand for his company’s new Produce Innovations value-added line. “The convenience store sector is expanding very much,” says Loffredo. “We do a lot of single-serving items for them. We’re also working on meal products.”

Although consolidation has shifted retailing toward the distribution center model, there is still a diversity of produce outlets.

“In the Des Moines area I don’t feel the distribution centers have affected or changed the market for wholesalers” says Chandler. “Each of the wholesalers here has their own piece of the pie.”

Although modern retailers from Wal-Mart to Whole Foods are thriving, the locals still show their attachment to area agriculture with one of the country’s truly spectacular farmers markets.

“From May to October we have a farmers market every Saturday that takes up nine square blocks,” says Greg Edwards, president and chief executive of the Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau (GDMCVB). “It draws 15,000 to 20,000 people every week, and is ranked Number Two to Seattle among farmers markets in the country.”

This massive seasonal celebration has echoes of the time a century ago when produce was mostly sold at large markets that



Ben Batten and James DeMatteis — Des Moines Truck Brokers

were a regular meeting place for city residents and their farmer neighbors.

“Find your handful of happiness at the downtown farmers market, where urban and rural communities come together,” say the market organizers. “The farmers market supports nearly 300 entrepreneurial vendors from 50 Iowa counties. Nourishing the community, the market offers diverse products, including locally grown produce, seasonal flowers, farm fresh eggs and cheese, locally produced wine and fresh baked goods.”

FROM NEARBY FARM TO FORK

Des Moines restaurants enjoy a substantial business with out-of-towners, and the city has invested heavily in modern facilities to keep this sector growing.

“We’ve expanded the visitors industry the past 10 years,” says GDMCVB’s Edwards. “We built a 17,000-seat arena, and attached is a 250,000-square-foot convention center. The 330 rooms at the Hilton Hotel are slated to open April 2018, and we already have 12,500 rooms in the greater Des Moines area. Visitor expenditures in the area exceed \$2.1 billion; for the whole state it is \$8 billion.”

Foodservice is big business in Des Moines, and the industry pays homage to both national trends and local farmers.

“We estimate there are around 30,000 people in the foodservice industry in the greater Des Moines area,” says the Restaurant Association’s Dunker. “There is growing interest in food in general, because of the *Food Network*, including interest in ethnic cuisines. People are interested in expanding their horizons. Things happening in the rest of the country are happening in Iowa.”

Wholesalers find this expanding foodservice sector is adding to the demand for locally sourced produce.

“Local matters to us, and it matters a great deal to our customers,” says Loffredo. “It’s more sweet corn than anything else, but it’s also peppers, cucumbers and squashes of all kinds. We get a lot of produce out of

Michigan. Local in Des Moines is 200 miles around us.”

Loffredo Fresh Produce is a member of PRO*ACT, a Monterey, CA-based group of largely family owned foodservice distributors committed to ties to the local community. Loffredo takes part in PRO*ACT’s *Greener Fields* program, which encourages sustainable local farming practices.

In addition to its headquarters in Des Moines, Loffredo’s also has facilities just over the state lines in Omaha, NE, and Quad Cities, MN, and a few miles further away in Madison, WI, and Kansas City, MO.

Produce considered “local” by chefs in one of these towns might not be across the state line, just an hour or two away. “We have five branches, and each one has its own ‘local,’” says Loffredo. “Every chef wants to source his/her own ‘local.’”

While Des Moines is in the middle of farm country, communications technology is bringing the same culinary tastes to people all over the country.

“The *Food Network* is bringing awareness,” says Des Moines Trucking’s DeMatteis. “People are self-proclaimed foodies; I don’t know if that term even existed 10 years ago.”

This awareness has given birth to a Des Moines restaurant scene unimaginable just a few years ago.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Despite greater reliance among larger retailers on sourcing produce directly, wholesalers are still playing important roles in providing hard-to-find items.

“The Des Moines area market has become very diverse in the past decade,” says Summertime Potato’s Chandler. “In the urban areas, downtown living is thriving with young generations experiencing that big city feel. The outer sections of Des Moines are also expanding for younger families who want to live in smaller communities for several reasons. In the past 10 years, cities like West Des Moines and Waukee have doubled in size, if not more. So with all the growth, wholesalers and distributors have filled in the gaps of growing population areas.”

Although the mix of customers may be different, Loffredo still enjoys a healthy wholesale business. “The market is more diverse than it was; there’s a lot of opportunity,” he says. “There are more hotels and restaurants, and a new convention center is being built.”

According to Comito of Capital City, “With all the food shows and restaurants

DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF 'LOCAL' IN DES MOINES

"Locally sourced produce is surging in the Des Moines market," says Ron Chandler, president and chief executive of Summer-time Potato Company, Des Moines. "I believe it is here to stay for the simple reason that consumers are telling us verbally and by their buying habits. If I were to put a percentage to it, I would say 15 to 20 percent."

Interest in "local" extends beyond the Des Moines metro area to include the entire state of Iowa.

"With Iowa having a smaller population compared to a few states around us, I think there is a different meaning to local," says Chandler. "In the Des Moines area, I would say local means within 100 miles. However, I also think local means the whole state of Iowa. I put that in there for the reason that most of the population moving to the

urban areas come from small towns across the state. In addition, Iowans trust the Iowa growers and farmers, as I am sure it is the same in other markets. Both major state universities have really stepped up their game to help promote and educate locally grown produce."

Capital City fills demand for locally sourced fruits and vegetables more than half the year. "The big change is the demand for locally grown has increased every year," says Brendan Comito, chief of operations at Capital City Fruit in Norwalk, IA. "We can get local produce from May until November, then we get local onions and potatoes out of storage. We have 40 or 50 local items in both organic and conventional. Everything except citrus can be grown here in the summer."

With a network of customers spanning

seven Midwestern states, Capital City has to stay on its toes to satisfy many different definitions of "local." "Local means different things to different retailers," says Comito. "One retailer might want something from within the state. If the state touches on Iowa, that might be considered local. Our farms are spread out over the Midwest."

Some produce retailers are looking, in particular, for produce from within a certain number of miles from the store.

"Everyone gravitates toward the local produce," says a produce manager at a Hy-Vee store in a Des Moines suburb. "Anything grown within 200 miles of this location is considered local. In mid-June, the only local items are asparagus, broccoli and rhubarb. The local sweet corn comes in shortly after that." **pb**

that opened up, people are more familiar with non-traditional items. Ten years ago, nobody had kale, now everybody does."

The *Food Network* and other television shows have extended the appeal of eating

lighter and healthier to Iowa.

"We've seen a tremendous interest in locally grown and locally sourced, and we have seen interest in eating lighter," says Iowa Restaurant Association's Dunker. "There is

also interest in smaller plates."

"We're trying to help our customers with their supply chain," says Comito. "Anybody can sell produce, but there's not much value unless you can help them with logistics." **pb**

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Shroom To Grow



The “Blend” trend is expected to make merchandising mushrooms more successful.

BY KD LORIA

Mushrooms often get overlooked by retailers who may not fully appreciate the fact that “mushroom consumers” are very desirable shoppers. After all, they tend to buy more healthy foods and are open to trying new products with higher margins.

According to recent figures by the Mushroom Council, from 2012 to 2016, volume at retail increased +10.4 percent while the average price increased +3 percent and retail sales increased by +13.7 percent. For the 52 weeks ending May 14, 2017, the category grew 2.1 percent, reaching nearly \$1.2 billion.

Mike O’Brien, vice president of sales and marketing for Monterey Mushrooms in Watsonville, CA, says the company’s total mushroom category dollar sales growth has been driven by Brown mushrooms. “The conversion from White Button mushrooms to Brown mushrooms continues. If you love mushroom pizza, a Portabella makes the

pizza even better,” he says. “It’s the Baby Bella that continues to grow, and in some areas, outsells White mushrooms.”

Victor Savanello, senior director of produce and floral for Allegiance Retail Services, LLC, based in Iselin, NJ, says the two biggest trends are targeting consumers using the mushroom as a protein substitute, like a Portabella hamburger, and targeting foodie consumers looking to emulate a dish sampled in a restaurant or seen on a television cooking show.

“Both these consumers are typically

your better shoppers and push the largest carriage through your stores,” says Savanello. “The methods I have found most successful are selling in multiples — trying to get the consumer to take one more package; merchandising mushrooms for cooking with proteins in the ad as a cross-merchandising practice; and suggestive selling by using an over-line in an ad or POS signage — saying things like, ‘Great on the Grill’ or ‘Try me in Salads.’”

IT’S ALL ABOUT THE BLEND

Kevin M. Delaney, vice president of sales and marketing for To-Jo Mushrooms Inc., Avondale, PA, says blending mushrooms with beef, turkey or other protein continues to gain traction. “The Mushroom Council has had a tremendous impact in promoting this concept in the foodservice arena. This year, we are seeing the demand and interest increase from the retail side, which is a great sign this trend is here to stay,” he says.

Steven Muro, president of Chatsworth, CA-based Fusion Marketing, which runs the retail segment of the Mushroom Council, says blending meat and fresh mushrooms to make better-tasting and healthier meals like burgers, meatballs, meatloaf and spaghetti sauce is happening all over the country in foodservice and at retail — be it in prepared



PHOTO COURTESY OF MONTEREY MUSHROOMS

meats or produce departments.

Recent research by the Mushroom Council shows when the blendability concept is introduced in-store, retailers experienced a 60 percent increase in the sale of fresh mushrooms in the produce department. Retailers also witnessed sales increases in deli (+10 percent) and prepared meat (+12 percent).

“This concept is leading to scores of new recipes that all use fresh, delicious mushrooms,” says Muro.

The Mushroom Council has been focused on creating awareness of a usage concept: The Blend, where consumers create delicious, healthy meals with one simple ingredient — mushrooms. This simple blending strategy plays on mushrooms’ compatibility with meat in terms of taste and texture. “Consumers can springboard their own ideas for mixing mushrooms with meat and other proteins to use to replace some of the meat in burgers, tacos, meatballs, lasagna, spaghetti sauce and more,” says Muro.

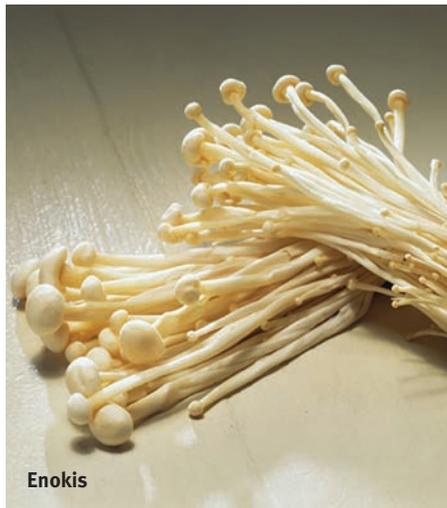
Fred Recchiuti, general manager of Basciani Foods Inc., Avondale, PA, says the company packs for a select few retailers, but its real strength is in servicing national food-service restaurant chains with custom, innovative products upon executive chefs’ requests.

Basciani Foods is one of the companies involved in the Blended Burger Project, a movement in partnership with the James Beard Foundation to make burgers better by blending mushrooms with meat, creating a more nutritious and sustainable burger. “We’re looking to change the way future generations eat with a healthier, more planet-friendly, more flavorful blended burger,” says Recchiuti. “Just by blending one meal a week can make a world of difference.”

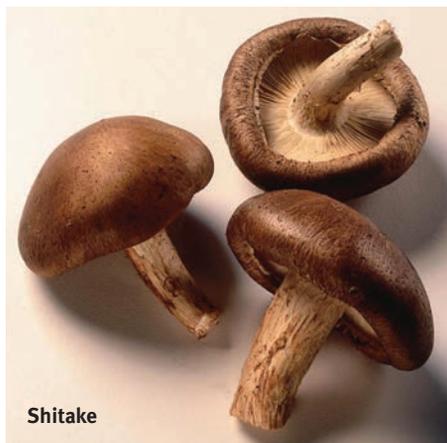
HEALTH AND WELLNESS

One of the larger marketing initiatives for Monterey Mushrooms has been promoting the health benefits within the category. Mushrooms are low in calories, fat-free, cholesterol-free, gluten-free and low in sodium, yet they provide important nutrients, including selenium, potassium, riboflavin, niacin, vitamin D, dietary fiber and more. Often categorized with vegetables, mushrooms provide many nutritional attributes of produce, as well as those commonly found in meat, beans and grains.

Looking at current research and sales trends, Threlfall says the health benefits are a prime motivation to purchase the product. “Consumers of all ages are looking for healthy food options, and mushrooms rank



Enoki



Shitake



Cremini

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MUSHROOM COUNCIL

right there at the top of their list,” he says. “We are working closely with our retailers to give them the knowledge and tools to promote the multiple health benefits of mushrooms.”

Retailers are using health and nutrition as calling cards — mushrooms play well in that arena with phytonutrients, minerals and being the only produce item with vitamin D. This is especially important with the vast number of consumers with vitamin D deficiency.

“Further, consumers who eat The Blend reduce their intake of fat, calories, sodium and cholesterol while eating a serving of produce,” says Muro. “This concept provides an excellent opportunity to highlight to the shopper base. Retailers with registered dietitians are already focusing on this new healthy eating concept. Adding a serving of produce to a burger, taco or meatballs is something consumers both welcome and enjoy.”

In addition to bulking up protein, mushrooms deliver a savory, earthy taste because of their umami. “Because umami flavor is so robust, it allows you to use less salt when cooking,” adds Muro.

Playing to consumer demand for pesti-

cide-free fruits and vegetables, Brian Threlfall, executive vice president of sales and marketing for Giorgio Fresh Co., in Blandon, PA, says organic has been the leading growth category in mushrooms. “At Giorgio, we continue to meet consumers’ growing demand for organic mushrooms by offering a complete fresh mushroom line that includes White whole and sliced, Baby Bella whole and sliced, Portabella caps and sliced caps, Shiitake whole and sliced, Royal Trumpet, Maitake and Beech. Giorgio’s business has grown significantly year over year, and we are seeing continued growth in 2017. There is no question the health and nutritional story of mushrooms has fueled the growth, along with the growing popularity of specialty and organic mushrooms.”

VALUE-ADDED OFFERINGS

Another area retailers can raise the mushroom profile is with value-added offerings, such as kabobs, salads and stuffed mushrooms. To-Jo Mushrooms’ Delaney says consumers are always looking for new ideas and new ingredients, and specialty mushrooms offer an opportunity for retailers to encourage shoppers to experiment with product outside their comfort zone.

Muro says value-added mushroom sales have shown great strength in the past 52 weeks, with California showing an increase of 23.5 percent, the Southeast an increase

“New usage ideas are an excellent means to drive fresh mushroom sales. Moreover, consider offering complete menu ideas, not just the ingredients. Showing the complete meal builds appetite appeal and with it impulse purchases.”

— Steven Muro, Fusion Marketing

of 32.9 percent and the West a 13.3 percent increase. Total poundage has also increased, 14.8 percent from 2016.

“Demand for other value-added items that include mushrooms is certainly increasing because of the convenience they offer,” says Muro. “New usage ideas are an excellent means to drive fresh mushroom sales. Moreover, consider offering complete menu ideas, not just the ingredients. Showing the complete meal builds appetite appeal and with it impulse purchases.”

MERCHANDIZING MATTERS

The Mushroom Council offers best practices tips such as using secondary displays that tie in with complementary products and promoting a range of fresh mushrooms year-round with attractive discounts during selected time periods.

To be successful at mushroom sales, Muro says offering an assortment of varieties, types and package sizes helps make the purchasing decision easier. “Consumers have learned variety is key to creating exciting and memorable dishes. From traditional White Button to meaty Portabella and Cremini to other delicately flavored varieties, there is a variety for every need, every recipe. Having a broad range of offerings will increase category sales,” he says.

Mushrooms have a unique story to tell with some key “selling points.” The best tactics for retailers to show consumers they care is to use attractive displays with clear labeling and pricing, feature ongoing promotional activity and include a focus on health, recipe concepts and meal kit options.

“We are putting an emphasis on the flavor, health benefits and the tremendous value

fresh mushrooms represent,” says Giorgio Fresh’s Threlfall. “We also have focused on the trend-to-blend and reducing fat and sodium by substituting portions of meat with mushrooms. By thinking differently, we are changing the way mushrooms are marketed and how consumers view them.”

Allegiance’s Savanello says merchandising mushrooms with protein as an alternative and offering recipe cards or online recipes to stimulate cooking and at-home menu creation help sell more mushrooms. “Listing

attributes in your ad, or on store signage helps consumers discover the health benefits of the different varieties,” he says.

Monterey Mushrooms just launched a summer grilling webpage along with the introduction of its recipe ebook, 10 Ways to Kebab with Mushrooms. “Our goal is to encourage consumers to grill with mushrooms this summer,” says O’Brien. “The web page includes recipe videos along with the free, downloadable ebook filled with pro-grilling tips and recipe ideas.”

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merchandising review ▶ mushrooms

O'Brien says mushrooms are one of the most perishable categories in the produce department. To minimize shrink and maximize sales it's important to know the consumer base and offer variety that matches the store demographics. "Sophisticated category management is how retailers optimize their shelf space to maximize their sales and profits," he says. "Also important is the utilization of scan sales, purchases and shrink data, and matching demographics to your planograms. Access to IRI or Nielsen data is also an important component of category management."

Still, perhaps the biggest challenge in merchandising mushrooms focuses on education. Basciani's Recchiuti would like stores to educate consumers about the benefits of becoming a "blenditarian" and offering chopped mushrooms by the ground beef in the meat section.

"We work closely with our retail partners to provide as much educational material and training as needed to help promote the category," says To-Jo Mushrooms' Delaney. "Sometimes the challenge with mushrooms is identifying which message will have the best



PHOTO COURTESY OF TO-JO MUSHROOMS

impact. Chefs and consumers use mushrooms to enhance flavor in their dishes while many consumers will add mushrooms for health reasons."

Retailers can help spur mushroom sales by providing information to the consumer

at point-of-purchase, highlighting the nutritional benefits and versatility of fresh mushrooms. "Helping shoppers with recipes, nutrition and information about all the varieties of mushrooms carried is a winning method to grow category sales," says Muro. **pb**



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Lift Sales With Displays Promoting Onion Diversity



Prime ways to highlight this workhorse vegetable include educating consumers about new and popular varieties, cooking methods and recipes, and health benefits.

BY SOPHIA BENNETT

Onions may not generate the same excitement as first-of-the-season stone fruit or exotic new citrus and tropicals. But can you imagine a world without their pungent, spicy, sometimes sweet flavor? There would be no French onion soup or onion rings. Salsa and *mujadara* (a lentil and rice dish with caramelized onions) wouldn't have the same distinctive flavor. And, it's hard to imagine a hamburger without savory chunks of onion on top.

The ubiquity and popularity of onions means sales are steady or increasing slightly. "I would say it's a strong category for sure," says Steve Oates, vice president of produce

and floral for Lucky's Market, a chain based in Niwot, CO, with stores in 11 states and a focus on natural and organic food. "It's pretty consistent. That goes for all varieties. It doesn't change much."

"We're seeing an increase in them," says Kerri Adams, produce category manager and buyer for Rouses Markets, a Thibodaux, LA-based family owned independent grocery chain with 55 stores. "A lot of it is a different level of participation on the sweet onion side. More of the traditional-type cooking onions are staying flat."

Matt Curry, president of Curry & Company, which grows and markets onions and other produce items from its headquarters in Brooks, OR, says onion sales remain relatively consistent year to year. "Sweet onions are increasing the most in sales, as more consumers recognize them, especially during the peak seasons, such as our Vidalia onion season."

The rising interest in sweet onions presents a real opportunity for produce executives looking to increase sales. But there are many other ways to successfully market the popular alliums. "On onions you cannot just rest on

your laurels," says Adams. "You have to really get on the cross-merchandising."

Another powerful way to promote onions is to share cooking suggestions and recipes. As people become more interested in cooking cuisines from different cultures, and as North America's population becomes more diverse, shoppers are ripe for suggestions on new and exciting ways to use familiar produce items.

"Onions are a staple, but if retailers embrace that and capitalize on it they can really increase their sales," says Herb Haun, promotion committee chairman for the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee, a marketing board representing farmers in Idaho and Oregon and is based in Parma, ID. "Basically, they're food's best friend."

ONION TYPES

There are five main types of onions: yellow, red, white, sweet and specialty (which includes Pearl, creamer and boiler). "Approximately 85 percent of the crop is yellow onions," says Kimberly Reddin, director of public and industry relations for the National Onion Association, Greeley, CO. The association provides promotions, communica-

tions and government relations for the onion industry. Eight to 10 percent of the crop is reds; the remaining onions grown in the United States fall into the other categories.

There isn't a lot of new onion varieties coming on the market, but two that merit attention are the HoneySweet, a mild yellow onion, and the Honeysuckle, a red onion with less pungency. Both are relatively new proprietary varieties grown by J&D Produce, an Edinburg, TX, brokerage and packing company that sells under the name Little Bear Brand. These onions have lower levels of pyruvic acid, which gives them less of the spicy flavor often associated with red onions.

"When you compare the Honeysuckle red to the current reds that claim to be sweet, the pyruvic acid levels are half of what's out there now," says Jeff Brechler, who works in sales and production at the company. "It's a very good eating onion. We are trying to give consumers a different option to allow them to use a red onion more often.."

True sweet onions are a subcategory that's receiving a lot of attention. "We try to promote the trendier items consumers are looking more for," says Adams.

"We do a lot with sweet onions when the first of the season Walla Wallas come out; people are interested in eating them raw and grilling them," says Lucky's Market's Oates. "Next are the Vidalias and Mauis, and as those seasons come out we generally do more."

Part of the reason sweet onions are doing so well is they're getting plenty of love from food professionals. "We're doing more food-service now and getting a lot of chefs using our products by name," says Bob Stafford,



manager of the Vidalia Onion Committee, a marketing organization based in Vidalia, GA. They're also showing up in a variety of processed foods, including sausages and salad dressings, which is drawing attention to their unusual flavor.

Sweet onions are more available than they used to be, says Adams. Products start rolling into stores around April and last into the summer months.

"We try to have enough onions to last until Labor Day," says Stafford. "We work closely with the University of Georgia, and we're perfecting new varieties every year.

"On onions you cannot just rest on your laurels. You have to really get on the cross-merchandising."

— Kerri Adams, Rouses Markets

Those new varieties are being geared up for a longer shelf life. Vidalia onions are available nationwide, although most of our customer base is on the East Coast."

Onions of all types have health benefits consumers may not know about. They are rich in fiber, vitamin C and chromium. The bulbs contain an antioxidant called quercetin, which has anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial properties. This and other nutrients mean eating onions can help lower the risk of heart disease, diabetes and other chronic conditions. They are also low in calories and have no sodium. "They add flavor, but they don't add fat," says Reddin.

WHAT DRIVES ONION SALES?

Offering good pricing on onions can lead to increases in sales, of course. "The onion market is pretty aggressive right now, so there are lots of opportunities for more aggressive than usual onion retail prices," says Curry.



“Use this as a time to drive some volume sales.”

Tim Hanline, president of Onion Boy, a grower/packer/shipper based in Shelby, OH, says offering low prices on onions doesn't necessary increase sales. “If a person needs an onion, they're going to go to the store and buy an onion.”

Oates agrees. “The price of onions doesn't seem to matter, but promotions do. If you put the reds on sale they're going to outsell the sweets.”

One key challenge for retailers is making sure they're getting the proper price for different types of onions. “Depending on the time of the year, when you start getting in the spring and the fresh crop, the onions are all very similar looking,” says J&D Produce's Brechler. “Since they're priced differently, a lot of folks have them rung up wrong, so they're losing money every time a sweet goes out as a Spanish.”

One way to solve that problem is to sell all of one type of onion in bags and carry others



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only in bulk. “That way you can capture the necessary ring at the register and not be giving money away,” says Brechler.

Shopper demographics may also drive the popularity of different types of onions. “Retailers with a heavy Hispanic shopping demographic will have huge displays of white onions, far larger than their yellow and red onions,” says Curry. “White onions are used extensively in salsas, so these stores will more actively promote white onions, have them at the front of the store and drive a ton of sales.”

MERCHANDISING IDEAS

When it comes to merchandising onions, one of the most important things retailers can do is keep the displays clean and culled, says Lucky's Market's Oates.

Clean displays make for a much better shopping experience, says Reddin. “Nobody wants to sift through a bin that's half skin and half onions.”

The temperature at which onions are stored doesn't matter much, says Onion Boy's Hanline. “But it's really important to have a lot of air blowing through your onions.” If that's not possible, turn the onions or find another way to get good air circulation around them so they don't spoil as quickly.

Displays should be well-signed so consumers can clearly see the onion type and price, and placed in visible locations. “We'll always pick at least one variety and have it in the front of the department, as well as in a home location in what we call a dirt table,” says Lucky's Oates. (The dirt table houses a variety of vegetables that grow in the dirt.)

Cross-merchandising is essential to onion sales. Because they don't require cooling or misting, they're an easy item to place next to



“This time of year, put onions with foil packets and skewers for kabobs. As you head into the fall, you’ve got tailgating and slow cookers and slow cooker liners.”

— Kimberly Reddin, National Onion Association

produce and non-produce items.

“We like to cross-merchandise onions with sweet peppers or locally grown tomatoes, so you can get that cooking aspect, as well as the eating raw consumer who wants to slice them or put them on a salad,” says Rouses Markets’ Adams. “That way you catch two different types of customer.”

“This time of year, put onions with foil packets and skewers for kabobs,” says Reddin. “As you head into the fall, you’ve got tailgating and slow cookers and slow cooker liners.”

“Do a menu thing so if you buy two white onions, you get a free bunch of cilantro for pico de gallo,” suggests Brechler. “Or if you buy a 3-pound bag of onions you get a free package of hot dogs or buns.”

A hot dog promotion can be as fun for the staff as it is for consumers. “Pull items from other parts of the store to create cool hot dogs,” suggests Haun. “Put buns, relish and other items near the red onions with a picture of a loaded hot dog.”

As strange as it sounds, sampling onions can be a way to promote them. “We’ll occasionally do sampling on onions if they’re

really sweet and don’t ruin someone’s day,” says Oates.

Haun agrees. “Onions are a little bit different than some of the produce items when it comes to sampling. You have to get a little creative.” If sweet onions aren’t in season, try sampling onions treated to some of the popular preparation methods mentioned above, including caramelizing, pickling or

roasting.

Another entertaining way to merchandise onions is to run promotions on what Brechler calls “quirky holidays.” “They’re dates that are not on the calendar, such as National Hot Dog Day or National Chili Dog Day. I think that might be a neat spin for retailers trying to increase consumption at non-traditional ad times.”

For stores that want to focus on the health benefits of onions, the National Onion Association is working on a promotional kit that retail dietitians can use to educate shoppers about onions. The Vidalia Onion Committee also has promotional materials that retailers can use to educate consumers about this still somewhat unknown commodity.

Education is, in fact, still something consumers need when it comes to onions, says Brechler. “Education is the best way for retailers to sell more product. If a staff person knows what to do with a product and can answer questions, retailers are going to be moving a lot more product because the consumer won’t be afraid of it.”

More onion information can be found at producebusiness.com: Inspire Onion Sales With Cooking Ideas. **pb**

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Raisins: A Good Fit In Produce



With a growing popularity of new flavors and its well-promoted health benefits, this dried fruit has boundless opportunities for robust sales.

BY JANEL LEITNER

With a focus on health and wellness, and more frequent snacking, U.S. consumption has boosted the popularity of raisins.

According to the California Raisin Marketing Board, Fresno, CA, “3,000 California raisin growers produce 100 percent of the U.S. raisins. Two-thirds of the U.S. raisin production is consumed in the United States and Canada, while one-third is exported to nearly 50 countries, with Japan and the United Kingdom being the top two export markets.”

Redner’s Markets, with 44 stores based out of Reading, PA, reinforces the importance of raisins. “The raisin segment as a whole is right up there on top with our dried fruit category,” says Richard Stiles, director of

produce and floral.

LindaKay Abdulian, president and chief executive of National Raisin Company in Fowler, CA, notes total worldwide raisin tonnage has grown 2.1 percent annually from 2011 through 2016, according to *statista.com*. “U.S. retail raisin sales were down during that time period, but prices were increasing dramatically and much of the available high-demand California raisins were being exported,” she says.

California raisins are respected the world over as the premier raisin in taste, texture and appearance, according to Abdulian. “Much of the available crop has gone to export sales, especially as foreign currency has gotten stronger,” she says.

Consumers are also becoming more aware of the numerous health benefits of raisins. “Raisins are one of the healthiest foods available in stores, with no added sugar, no fat and no cholesterol,” says Joe Tamble, vice president of retail sales execution with Sun-Maid Growers of California located in Kingsburg, CA. “Raisins provide valuable fiber to satisfy hunger and promote a healthy digestive system; and like most fruits, raisins are high in potassium and low in sodium, making them a natural fit for a heart-healthy diet. They are also an important source of antioxidants. Studies have also shown raisins

promote healthy teeth and gums. One ounce of raisins is equivalent to one serving of fruit and is less than 100 calories.”

INNOVATION

To give consumers more options and reasons to buy, companies continue to innovate. National Raisin Company has introduced Raisels, a “sourlicious” line of flavored Golden raisins meant for kids. The line features Watermelon Shock, Lemon Blast and Orange Burst. “Raisels are not currently in retail distribution, but are featured as fruit servings in school lunch programs and institutional feeding programs across the country,” says Abdulian. “Additionally, Raisels enjoy a significant online presence.”

Golden raisins also play a larger role in the category. “Golden raisins originate from the same natural seedless grapes as traditional raisins; however, they are dried in institutional ovens rather than in the sun,” says Tamble. “They are treated with sulfur dioxide, a safe preservative that has been used for centuries to prevent darkening and preserve vitamins A and C.”

According to National Raisin Company, approximately 10 percent of all raisins sold are Golden. “Golden raisins are the tenth-selling segment in dried fruit, ahead of figs, pineapple, mixed fruit and others,” says

Abdulian. “National Raisin category management data suggests Golden raisins enjoy strong sales year-round, and we are working with our customers to increase distribution.”

The Wine RayZyn Company in Napa, CA, has developed a line of crunchy superfood snacks made from premium dried wine grapes called Wine RayZyns (not raisins). “Prior to the creation of RayZyns, there was not a USDA food category for wine grapes,” says Eleanor Cates, vice president of marketing. “RayZyns are a completely new fruit. Common raisins are made from Thompson seedless grapes, which are obviously seedless and thin-skinned. RayZyns are made from premium dried wine grapes, which have seeds and thick skins.”

Cates says RayZyns are important to the produce section because they are a new fruit item and a superfood. “It is not often that a completely new fruit item is available in produce,” she says. “Our products are very exciting for consumers and retailers. RayZyns are right on trend, as they are a superfood with 20 percent daily value of fiber in each 1.6 ounce serving and have more antioxidants than wine. Also, RayZyn snacks are all natural, non-GMO, vegan, gluten free, Kosher certified, naturally sweet, and have no preservatives or artificial flavors.”

ORGANIC AND PACKAGE VARIETY

Organic products add their own excitement and growth to the category. “One of the fastest-growing areas within the dried fruit category is organics — specifically raisins,” says Tamble. “More and more consumers are looking for food that is pure and simple.”

The organic category for Redner’s Markets continues to grow each year. “As far as raisins, we see our sales in the organic raisin category increasing, too,” says Stiles.

Offering packaging in a variety of sizes boosts consumer choice and sales. The smaller six-pack snack and the mini box raisins are the two biggest items we promote throughout the year,” says Stiles. “We use shipper displays, and we sell quite a bit.”

Sun-Maid Growers has a multitude of products tying-in with the on-the-go snacking consumer. “The Sun-Maid six-pack and mini packages in both raisins and yogurt raisins are the right package for the healthy snacking consumer,” says Tamble. “In addition, the resealable zipper bags of dried fruit are ideal as a snacking package.”

Sun-Maid has developed seasonal packaging for Easter, Halloween and summer holidays to provide healthier snacking

“One of the easiest ways for retailers to encourage raisins/dried fruit purchases is to get it up on display.”

— Joe Tamble, Sun-Maid Growers

alternatives. “Most on-the-go dried fruit consumers want packaging that is simple, easy to carry and portion controlled,” says Tamble.

National Raisin Company offers new recyclable plastic canisters with better sealability and more efficient air barriers, thus keeping the product fresher for consumers.

RayZyns also present as on-the-go snacks. “We offer a wide variety of flavors and package sizes to satisfy consumers’ demand.”

A PLACE IN PRODUCE

When promoted with produce, raisins do sell. “Dried fruit is highly responsive to promotions, and fourth-quarter sales peaks coincide to a quieter time for other fruits,” says Abdulian. “In addition, dried fruit has higher velocity in produce than it does when placed in grocery.”

Redner’s Markets sees evidence of good raisin volume when sold in produce. “Even at times where we don’t get a sale deal through our supplier, we will still place them in an ad or just put them in the store at a special sale price because they do sell so fast,” says Stiles. “Raisins are a prime cooking fruit because you can use them in so many different ways, and they are a great healthy snack.”

Sun-Maid Growers partners with many retailers in the produce department to successfully promote raisins and dried fruit as healthy impulse snacks. “Many produce retailers have health-focused initiatives, and Sun-Maid is often a key partner in these programs,” says Tamble.

The shelf-stable aspect of raisins makes them an easy product to manage. “Dried fruit’s shrink is negligible compared to fresh produce, and dried fruit requires no special handling or refrigeration,” says Abdulian.

According to Sun-Maid Growers of California, the dried fruit category is very profitable for the retailer because there is almost zero shrink. “The preferred in-store location for the total dried fruit category is in the produce department,” says Tamble.

However, placement of raisins in the

produce department is not without challenges. “Many retailers have adopted a ‘green and growing’ philosophy and have limited their produce section to fresh fruits, vegetables, herbs, peripherals and select processed products,” says Abdulian. “In these instances, dried fruit is relocated to center of store, often near baking or canned fruits.”

PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

According to Sun-Maid Growers, more than 20 percent of total dried fruit category dollars are generated from displays located throughout the store, away from the shelf. “One of the easiest ways for retailers to encourage raisins/dried fruit purchases is to get it up on display, including pallets, shippers and end aisle,” says Tamble.

Sun-Maid Growers offers different types of shipper and pallet displays to generate impulse purchases. “These displays are pre-filled and assembled when delivered to retailers,” says Tamble. “The displays provide an easy method for retailers to drive sales and increase basket size with minimal labor costs.”

Promoting is key for maximizing sales. “It’s a sure increase in sales when it is back-to-school,” says Redner’s Stiles. “Sales will peak, and when you get into November and December baking, the Goldens sell well.”

Promoting different size options at all times increases profitability. “Most retailers actively push large sizes during baking season, 0.5 ounce ‘mini’ raisins at Halloween and six-pack 1 ounce during back-to-school, but data suggests raisins react well to promotions any time,” says Abdulian. “National Raisin works with its customers to promote store brand raisins two weeks before events and national brands the week before. Promotional data suggests raisins are impulse-oriented and react well to displays, ads and price reductions.”

For RayZyan’s, some retailers utilize shippers while others enter into its Wooden Barrel Display POS program, a more permanent display solution. “These displays have been very successful,” says Cates. “They offer flexibility to the retailer and quickly communicate what RayZyn’s are, how you use them and why they are good for you.”

Cross-promoting is also essential. “It’s important retailers convey messages through cross-merchandising and cross-promoting during in-store demonstrations, retail advertising and consumer messaging,” says Abdulian. “These contacts give consumers a reason to purchase, which will lift sales of all products involved; not just raisins.” **pb**



The Proper Mindset

BY DON HARRIS

During the third month of the summer selling season, much of the strategy revolves around preparation for back-to-school. Meetings primarily focus on the store's "other" departments more directly involved with back-to-school. Produce is often relegated to a second-class position in terms of promotional activity and emphasis. Management responds to requests from produce for more support by pointing out summer produce is old news and customers are ready for a new promotional push for the upcoming fall season. Once again, this response shows management "just doesn't get it!"

This type of mindset is common in retail during the month of August; it's been this way for most of retail's modern era. Just because it is common practice doesn't necessarily mean it is the correct mindset to have. This viewpoint ignores some great opportunities for continuing the sales momentum in produce by utilizing some of the best quality and best-tasting varieties of summer fruit produced in August. Many of the later-season varieties of peaches, nectarines, grapes, berries and melons are among the most flavorful and offer great quality and value to the customer. Instead of allowing other departments and their back-to-school promotions to dominate the promotional activity, the innovative and creative produce retailer capitalizes on the opportunities represented by these outstanding items. Continued promotion in all media, as well as in the displays in the produce department, should be utilized to highlight and drive customers to these items.

While the preoccupation with back-to-school dominates the retail scene, the rest of agriculture utilizes the timeframe to promote the abundance of fresh, quality produce items. After all, August is peak season for many fresh, local vegetable crops bursting with flavor. Consumers have been coming into the retail stores for produce since Memorial Day; there is no reason to back off and ignore consumer demand and interest to move on to fall items. The progressive retailer recognizes this and takes advantage by continuing to promote the peak season

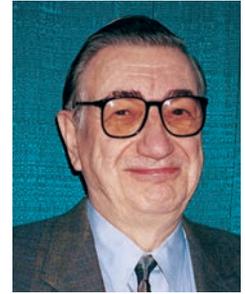
quality of these key produce commodities. While members of the produce department certainly realize this fact, it is management who needs to be convinced this is the proper course of action. This is not easy to accomplish, but the benefits in terms of rewards in sales and profit are worth the effort.

The resourceful produce manager will utilize the successful sales momentum built up during the first two months of the summer selling season to show management the benefits of maintaining the momentum and drive of sales in the produce department. Not only will this increase sales, but it will also help the other departments by attracting consumers to the store. This type of argument can be very persuasive with management, as it appeals to their need for "traffic" to continue to shop the store and can add additional opportunities for sales in the other departments and back-to-school merchandise. The produce management team can piggyback on this effort at store level with upper management reinforcing the message.

It makes sense to take advantage of these opportunities in the world of fresh produce and the varieties available during August in a collaborative effort with the rest of the store to continue to drive sales and offer customers value throughout every department and fulfill their needs as they move into the fall. The continued promotion of "high-quality, peak of the season" flavor summer commodities will no doubt enhance the store's reputation for offering the best "fresh" items along with the promoted value items for the back-to-school season. With this type of innovative, cooperative effort throughout the store, we can begin to banish the dog days of August. **pb**

While the pre-occupation with back-to-school dominates the retail scene, the rest of agriculture utilizes the timeframe to promote the abundance of fresh, quality produce items. After all, August is peak season for many fresh, local vegetable crops bursting with flavor.

Don Harris is a 43-year veteran of the produce industry, with most of that time spent in retail. He has worked in every aspect of the industry, from "field-to-fork" in both the conventional and organic arenas. Harris has consulted with government agencies, agricultural organizations and non-profit entities. He is presently consulting in the industry. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com



BY ROBERT STRUBE

Customer Services For The Independent

Editor's note: Al Siger is on extended vacation. As a result, we bring you this classic article by Robert Strube, Sr. (b. 1919 -- d. 2010), who wrote for this magazine from 1985 – 2002.

Reprinted from March 2001

Today, the produce wholesaler must cater to a diverse number of customers. Large chain stores, small independent wholesalers, foodservice distributors, small independent “Mom and Pop” stores, small independent chains, and even our wholesaling competitors.

Servicing the small independent chains and the “Mom and Pop” local grocery stores is a challenge. In order to be competitive with other stores in the neighborhood, these smaller stores must be able to offer something more. The three areas of difference are price, quality and service. These independent grocers and fruit stores must be able to give customers “that something extra” in one or more of these three areas. How can they do this?

There are several ways independent grocers and fruit stores can accomplish what they want to do:

- **In the area of service, the small independent grocer can be more knowledgeable about the various fruits and vegetables they offer.** This knowledge is available from the wholesaler that the grocer buys merchandise from. The commodity associations and state commissions that suppliers are a part of often distribute helpful information to the wholesaler. There might also be recipes or innovative ways of serving a product that are readily available.

- **There also might be taste tests with sample product available to those who ask for them.**

Signage and advertising material is usually made available to those who request it.

- **Many growers and commodity associations sponsor special promotions for their product.** Cooperative advertising between the wholesaler and independent operator is one method that comes to mind. The local teenager, employed by the large chain stores to restock produce shelves, cannot answer the customers’ questions about specific products or take part in the special programs. By working with the wholesaler who can leverage commodity-board promotions, the smaller independent stores can give the customer the “SERVICE” they might be seeking.

When it comes to quality, the local independent grocer can usually

beat the large chain stores hands down. Another word for quality in fresh fruits and vegetables is “FRESH.” The local independent can come down to the wholesale market or order from the market on a daily basis, thereby assuring the freshness of the product.

Large chain stores bring in truckloads to a main distribution center, and the product is released from that warehouse until the supply is replenished. It could be a day or it could be several days. Every day the product sits in the warehouse waiting for the local chain store to have it released is a day of freshness lost.

Even in the best of “cold-chain” conditions, fresh fruits and vegetables lose some freshness every day. The local independent may not have 100 cases of oranges on display, but the ones it has may be a lot fresher than the 100 on display at the chain.

Another area of concern is price. Yes, it is true when large retailers or chain stores bring in special loads of product, they will pay less for it and can offer it to the public for less by volume-selling to make the desired profit. However, an independent grocer can learn to work with wholesalers on the market to obtain special pricing because of promotional items or special deals worked out by a specific shipper.

Using this special pricing, the independent can offer produce at competitive prices to the public. If the prices are comparable and the local independents can offer the service and quality the consumer requires, they can compete with the large chain stores.

As the supplier to these local independent grocers, we have responsibilities to them in regards to the produce we have to offer. Clearly, we can only offer the aforementioned services if we work

in cooperation with them to have what they need to serve the public.

When my father opened the business in 1913, he had a checklist that he believed would be a key to our success.

- Carry the finest produce available for the money.
- Provide an unsurpassed level of service to your customer.
- Always work to meet your customers’ needs and expectations.
- Carry the widest possible selection of produce available at the time.
- Do all that is possible to never run out of product for the customer.
- Treat all customers and suppliers fairly.

At Strube Celery & Vegetable Co., we continue to believe in these tenets many generations later.

pb

The local independent can come down to the market or order from the market on a daily basis, thereby assuring the freshness of the product.



What Is Happening Beyond Brexit?

BY JOHN GILES

The whole issue of Brexit has become an all-consuming subject for many, not just in the fresh produce sector, but in the wider economy as well. The decisions made in the next 18 to 24 months will have a profound impact on British society as a whole. These will be mirrored in the fresh produce sector.

Key issues to contend with will be those surrounding the availability of labor, the ability to trade with other European countries, the potential to open new markets outside of the European Union and the level of support farmers will receive under what might be a new “British Agricultural Policy” that will replace the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The outcomes of all these issues are unsure. This adds to a sense of uncertainty for U.K. growers, packers, importers and distributors, as well as retailers, foodservice customers and eventually, consumers.

Fresh produce companies are in a situation where they are being asked to plan for a future where there are many unknowns. A good deal of flexibility will be required in looking forward, as these companies have to contend with what might be either a hard or softer Brexit, and then maybe some form of transitional period, too — or not, as the case might be — as we exit the EU in the middle of 2019. This is far from easy, and does not mean the issues should not be thought about.

What is clear, however, is that a number of other fundamental drivers will remain at play in the U.K. and international fresh produce sector, regardless of the Brexit outcome. While many of these are also entwined with this big picture “end game,” there is a danger in getting so wrapped up in Brexit that the eye is taken off the ball in other important areas. There are many other factors fresh produce companies need to be focusing on as they come to grips with the possible outcome of Brexit. These include:

The changing face of retail. The continued growth of discount retailers has transformed the market in the past six years. It has added a new level of competition to an already highly competitive market. Until recently, there was a sense that the German-based discounters were not for the United Kingdom. However, U.K. consumers like shopping these chains. Their presence has shaken up the market in a way that was unimaginable, and it looks like the discount retailers will continue to gain market share.

Online growth. Kantar Worldpanel, which tracks spending data across the grocery industry globally, reported that in 2016, global FMCG, also known as CPG (consumer package goods) online sales grew by 26 percent, with e-commerce now contributing 35 percent of global FMCG growth. In the U.K., online sales grew from 6.7 percent to 7.3 percent value share in the past year alone, making British shoppers second only to South Koreans in the proportion of groceries they buy

online. With the entry of new players such as Amazon Fresh to the online supermarkets, consumers will have a plethora of choices to buy fresh produce in the future. The U.K. online market is expected to continue to grow in both market share and new players.

Sustainability issues. Growers, packers and distributors will need to make further efforts to show how they are looking to mitigate issues relating to water usage, input applications, energy utilization, carbon emissions, etc. These are major issues, and looking to reduce their impact not only makes good sense from an environmental perspective, but in most cases, from an economic one.

Consolidation of the supply chain. This has been an ongoing feature of the sector for some time now. It began with U.K. supermarkets looking to shorten supply chains some 20 years ago. In many categories, the number of key players has been reduced significantly. In the future, there will probably be fewer but larger growers, fewer packers and distributors and fewer support/service providers.

Supply security. The U.K. has always been a net importer of fresh produce. The country exports relatively little, and most of what is exported goes to other EU markets. The attraction of places such as Africa, the Middle East and Asia means that the best quality produce will not automatically come to the U.K. in the future. U.K. customers will need to strengthen supply chain relationships with international suppliers and make a strong proposition to them as to why the U.K. should still be seen as an attractive market. Will these countries stop supplying the country? It’s unlikely, but there are now other options to consider.

Technology. There is a plethora of supply chain technologies available for pre- and post-harvest applications, as well as communicating with consumers. Having good, quality fresh produce and logistics is a given these days. To be successful, companies will need to understand and harness new technology, and develop more efficient and sustainable supply chains.

All this adds up to a challenging U.K. market and industry environment, but one that will present opportunities for the well-prepared and informed. Brexit will still be a major issue and talking point. The outcome to the key issues it raises will gradually become clearer over time. In the meantime, there are plenty of other things happening in the supply chain that will need time, effort, resources and thought given to them. Nothing stays the same for long in the world of fresh produce. In the next few years, this will clearly continue to be the case.

pb

Fresh produce companies are in a situation where they are being asked to plan for a future where there are many unknowns.

John Giles is a divisional director with Promar International, the value chain consulting arm of Genus plc., Basingstoke, Hampshire, England. He has worked on fresh produce assignments in more than 60 countries around the world and can be contacted at john.giles@genusplc.com



BY AMY MYRDAL MILLER

How To Sell Produce To A Foodservice Buyer

This is the second of a three-part series looking at the unique challenges both small and large foodservice operations face in getting product into their operation.

Last month I gave insights from chefs working for major volume foodservice operations on what they want from their produce suppliers. This month I'm focusing on recommendations for selling produce to foodservice buyers. These insights are based on conversations I've had with buyers from a variety of foodservice operations, including campus dining operations and large chains, as well as buyers for large contract foodservice organizations.

I mentioned last month there are two themes that run through all comments I receive — communication and collaboration. Chefs want this, and so do their buyers.

Build Relationships

Nobody really wants to be sold, but most everyone wants to enjoy the process. Events like the PMA Foodservice Conference show the power of the relationship. More time is spent on field and facility tours and at local golf courses than in sessions or the exhibit halls. This is because great produce companies and their sales team know it's important to build relationships with the people making purchasing decisions. We all like doing business with people we know and trust. Think about what more you can do to enhance relationships with the foodservice buyers.

Provide Experiences

A golf outing is great for building the relationship — you get to know your customer's kids' names, where they vacation, and you can start joking about each other's golf swings... or misses — but a field tour is much more powerful. The bottom line is that showing is always better than telling.

Show the buyers you work with how you grow the product. I'm always shocked by how many chefs and buyers tell me they've never been in a field or orchard. People who work with or buy the product every day may have very little understanding of how you grow, pack and ship produce.

Walk the buyers through the rows. Talk about crop inputs like irrigation or crop protection products. Show them how you work to ensure food safety. Invite them to talk with your farmers, field workers and harvest crews. Talk about harvest and packing innovation. Walk them through your packing houses, cold storage environments and distribution centers.

Don't hesitate to talk about the challenges of growing your product given climate change, water shortages, new threats to yield and quality, and how you're dealing with the challenges from Mother Nature and beyond. Growing, packing and shipping produce is not easy, and your customers need to know how you're dealing with endless challenges to bring safe, high-quality produce to market.

Do you work with a seed company developing new varieties for your operation? Take your customers on tours of the seed company's operation. Does your vendor offer field days? Ask if you can invite customers to join you so you can all see the new varieties, talk to the breeders and most importantly, taste new varieties you may be able to bring to market in the future.

Can you make the buying process easier by clarifying the specification process?

Sell Solutions

While it may seem like all buyers want is to snag the lowest cost, most are very interested in products that help them and their operation solve challenges. I've talked extensively about the labor challenges in foodservice. If you have an idea for, or are already offering, a new value-added product, talk to the buyer about this option. He/she may be eager to help the operations team reduce labor costs.

Do you have options for increasing shelf-life?

If so, talk to your customers about these innovations. Decreasing delivery frequency may be a benefit for certain operations, and reducing food waste is a benefit for every organization.

Can you make the buying process easier by clarifying the specification process? Do you have visual guides to help a buyer specify degrees of ripeness? Can you specify if your product is harvested at a certain brix level? Can you help buyers identify which produce items may be genetically modified and which are developed only through traditional or advanced breeding techniques? Confusion over GMOs in produce is making the lives of some buyers quite complicated right now.

Finally, can you provide lower-cost product by selling the foodservice buyer "ugly" fruits and vegetables? Foodservice doesn't need perfect produce. If you've got great quality in terms of flavor, but challenges with appearance, talk to buyers about special pricing. **pb**

Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RDN, FAND is a farmer's daughter from North Dakota, award-winning dietitian, culinary nutrition expert, and founder and president of Farmer's Daughter Consulting, Inc. She is the director of The Culinary Institute of America Healthy Menus R&D Collaborative. You can learn more about her business at farmersdaughterconsulting.com, and you can follow her insights on food and flavor on Twitter @AmyMyrdalMiller.

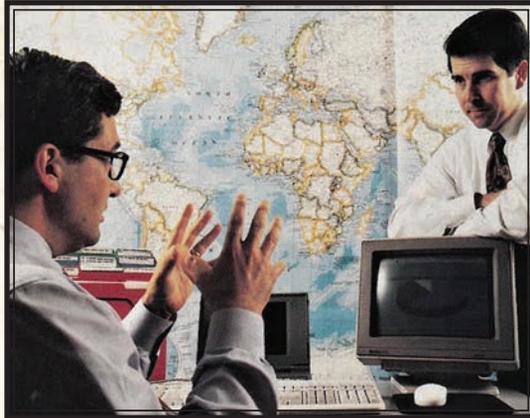
BROADENING FOOTPRINT IN GLOBAL REGULATORY INTELLIGENCE

Bryant Christie Inc., a Seattle company focused on helping agricultural, food and beverage companies open and expand foreign markets, is celebrating its 25th anniversary.

Bill Bryant's journey started right after college, when he went to work for Washington state Gov. John Spellman on trade policy issues. "I met folks in the tree fruit industry. After Gov. Spellman lost his re-election bid, the Northwest apple, pear and cherry industry asked me to help them open new markets around the world," says Bryant, founder.

"By 1992, other commodity groups and agricultural companies were calling asking for advice on how to solve foreign trade problems. I realized there was a demand for the services I provided, so I moved to Seattle and started W.L. Bryant Co. in my basement."

Within a year, James Christie joined the company as managing director and partner. Prior to joining, Christie was president of the California Cherry Export Association. In 1996, the company changed its name to Bryant Christie Inc. "In those first years,



James and I had Monday 7 a.m. 'staff' meetings — the staff was me, James and one other person — but we enjoyed it because we knew we weren't just trying to get business to keep the doors open, we were committed to building a company that could outlast us," says Bryant.

The photo was taken in 1995; Bryant is on the left and Christie is on the right. "Bill was probably lecturing me on the mega possibilities of the internet while I was trying to bring it down to a practical level. Funny thing is, we largely accomplished our goal of developing internet,

subscription-based databases that help our clients comply with foreign regulations," says Christie.

As part of its 25th anniversary, the company has launched BCGlobal, a single portal into global regulations affecting food, beverage and agricultural products. "Our 25th is a time to explore new ways to meet our clients' changing needs. Companies and governments have come to us with ideas and requests for new databases. There are lots of opportunities ahead," says Bryant. **pb**

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

Honorees will be selected based on their professional accomplishments, demonstrated leadership and industry/community contributions. To be eligible, nominees must be under the age of 40 as of June 1, 2018 (People born after June 1, 1978).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by April 1, 2018, and fax back to 561-994-1610 or go to our website at producebusiness.com and look for the 40 Under Forty icon to link to the online application.

Once nominated, the candidate will be interviewed by one of our editors, and will receive forms to fill out asking for detailed information. A candidate only needs to be nominated one time. Multiple nominations will have no bearing on selection.

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Nominee's Professional Achievements:

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

ABOUT THE NOMINATOR:

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

For more information email: info@producebusiness.com

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