

producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

30
YEARS
INITIATING
INDUSTRY
IMPROVEMENT



recycle



energy



water



community



earth



WEIS MARKETS

Closing The Loop On Sustainability



**30-YEAR
RETROSPECTIVE
WITH
ROGER
PEPPERL**

INSIDE:

THE PUNDIT EXAMINES AN INDUSTRY ISSUE VERSUS AN INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITY
SNACK BARS • ORGANIC BERRIES • SUMMER MERCHANDISING
STATE DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE • SOUTHERN VEGETABLES
SOUTH AFRICAN CITRUS • CHERRIES • MANGOS • LETTUCE
NEW LEAF COMMUNITY MARKETS RETAIL PROFILE • SALAD DRESSINGS
UNITED FRESH BOOTH REVIEW • IFE BOOTH REVIEW



• GET UP •

AND GROW!

for a happier world

Dole is on a mission to make the world a happier, healthier place in 2015. From our North American summer Tour to our healthy-eating Pledge and dozens of delicious new recipes, we're driving traffic to retailers with a world of ways to Get Up and Grow!

PLEDGE

Submit your own personalized pledge to eat and live healthier in 2015 and receive tasty recipes and nutrition tips to help you reach your personal goal.



**THIS YEAR I
PLEDGE TO GET UP
AND GROW! TOWARD
A HEALTHIER,
HAPPIER me.**

CELEBRATE

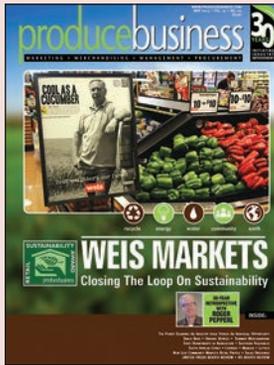
On May 21st, Dole is introducing the first national celebration designed to make eating fruit and vegetables tasty, easy and fun.

**NATIONAL
EAT MORE
FRUITS AND
VEGETABLES DAY**



HOSTED BY DOLE

Contact your Dole representative to provide you with all of the ways to Get Up and Grow! in 2015.
Visit Dole.com/GetUpAndGrow for more information. #GetUpAndGrow



cover story

27 WEIS MARKETS
 Closing The Loop On Sustainability

commentary

- 8 THE FRUITS OF THOUGHT**
McDonald's Identity Crisis
- 100 RETAIL PERSPECTIVE**
Quality Redefined
- 102 EUROPEAN MARKET**
Conversation With Global Fruit Point's Sven Heinsohn
- 104 WHOLESALE MARKET**
SYSCO/US Foods Merger: Good Or Bad For The Wholesale Industry?
- 105 VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY**
In Pursuit Of A Paradigm Shift For Cranberry Sales

in this issue

- 4 THE QUIZ**
- 6 WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE**
- 12 PRODUCE WATCH**
- 18 RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES**
- 19 COMMENTS AND ANALYSIS**
- 20 FORWARD THINKING**
- 106 INFORMATION SHOWCASE**
- 106 BLAST FROM THE PAST**



features

- 56 SUMMER SCHOOL**
Merchandising tips for retailers in the upcoming season.
- 62 STATE DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE: RETAIL PARTNERSHIPS TO GROW PRODUCE SALES**
Local receipts reach record highs after branding initiatives make inroads with consumers.
- 66 SOUTHERN VEGGIES GAIN TRACTION**
A look at why commodities down South achieve popularity.
- 70 SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE CITRUS**
Ensuring year-round enjoyment of North America's favorite fruits.
- 92 DRESSING UP PRODUCE DEPARTMENTS**
Salad dressings provide additional cross-merchandising and add-on sales opportunities.

special features

- 10 UNITED FRESH BOOTH REVIEW**
- 14 IFE BOOTH REVIEW**
- 22 ASCENDENT INDEPENDENTS: NEW LEAF COMMUNITY MARKETS**
Building relationships with farmers to expand its independent niche.
- 24 FROM THE PAGES OF THE PERISHABLE PUNDIT**
WHAT IS IN A BRAND? Will Marketing Boost Sales Of Inconsistent Produce? Industry Issue Versus Individual Opportunity
- 44 30-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE**
After 36 Years On Different Ends Of The Food Supply Chain, Roger Pepperl Proves His Sustainability



departments

ORGANIC MARKETING

- 46 SETTING THE BAR FOR EXCEPTIONAL ORGANIC PRODUCE**
An examination of retailers on the forefront of innovation for the category.
- 50 DEMAND RIPENS FOR ORGANIC BERRIES**
Producers struggle to keep pace amid complexity of transition from conventional crops.

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS

- 74 MERCHANDISING CHERRIES FOR MAXIMUM SALES AND PROFITS**
How displays, special labels, signage, demos, social media and the roles they play generate sales.
- 82 UNTAPPED CONSUMERS ARE KEY TO INCREASING MANGO SALES**
Store promotions, signage and associate education create distinction.
- 87 BULK LETTUCE 'ROMAINES' ON TOP**
Still a produce leader even with the proliferation of fresh-cut salads.

DRIED FRUIT AND NUTS

- 98 MAKING THE CASE FOR NUTS AND DRIED FRUIT IN PRODUCE**
Variety and health benefits are earning these popular snack items a place alongside fresh fruits and vegetables.

THIS MONTH'S WINNER



MIKE CONSTANTINE
Merchandiser
Supervalu Inc./
Pittsburgh Division
New Stanton, PA

Supervalu has more than 3,400 stores across the U.S., and Mike Constantine is one of the integral members of the grocery chain's marketing arm.

"I work with the senior merchandiser to write all the ads for all the banners and set all pricing, pick products for the circulars, anything that has to deal with the total [sales and marketing] outcome of the produce department," explains Constantine regarding his

responsibilities as a merchandiser.

Constantine has been with Supervalu for many years and worked in different facets of the produce industry since 1979. "I have a degree in education, and when I first came to Supervalu in 1979, I was the training supervisor for new employees," says Constantine.

He also spent time working with Bethel Park Shop 'N Save, sold Washington state apples, pears and cherries for a company in the Northeast, and worked at Powerhouse Produce, a potato and onion packing facility. Eventually he returned to Supervalu as merchandiser.

Constantine says the produce business is a "people-friendly business; there's always something new happening—that's how I got hooked."

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

WIN AN ELECTRONIC RETURN PUTTING MAT

Whether you are a serious golfer or an occasional player, you can practice your putting skills with this putting mat made from high-quality, non-directional turf. This 8-foot long by 16-inch wide practice green features a regulation-sized hole, a "water hazard" and a "sand bunker" as well as a target flag (clubs and balls are not included). The ball is electronically returned if you make it in the hole and/or the hazard and bunker slots. The device plugs into an AC outlet, and no batteries are required.



QUESTIONS FOR THE MAY ISSUE

- 1) According to Dole's ad, what is the date for National Eat More Fruits and Vegetables Day? _____
- 2) What is the full web address to learn more about California Avocados? _____
- 3) What kind of green vegetable is used in the classic Tanimura & Antle logo? _____
- 4) How many kinds of fruit are shown on the ad for Jersey Fresh? _____
- 5) What two kinds of cherries are shown on the Yakima Fresh ad? _____
- 6) Ciruli Brothers has been growing and shipping since what year? _____

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

Name _____ Position _____
Company _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ ZIP _____
Phone _____ Fax _____

Photocopies of this form are acceptable. Please send answers to:
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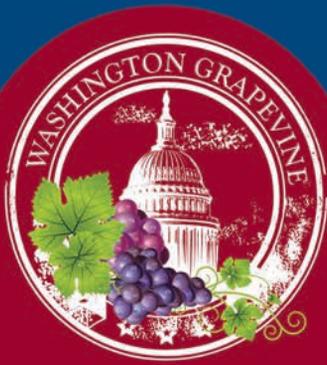


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Budget Battle Nears End, But Uncertainty Still Lingers For Produce Industry



BY ROBERT GUENTHER,
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, PUBLIC POLICY

It's that time of year again when Congress wades through the weeds of government spending to develop next year's budget. The important process of establishing spending priorities for all federal government activities used to be a relatively straightforward process. Unfortunately, it has, of late, turned into a never-ending game of Bingo. Anticipation builds inside the beltway as Congress gets close to a deal (or deadline), but then quickly fades when a deal is not reached, and nobody gets to shout Bingo.

In theory, the process is simple. The president is required to submit his budget to Congress early in the year. The House and Senate then conduct hearings, questioning administration officials and examining spending requests. Congress was to have its own budget resolution drafted and adopted by April 15 — a date most Americans dread for an entirely different reason.

Interestingly, the congressional budget resolution is not a law; the president will never sign it. It merely acts as a guide, setting limits for congressional committees that can propose legislation that actually directs spending. And, though Congress and the president are both bound by law to produce their own budget proposals, there is no penalty if either fails to do so.

The budget process provides a blueprint of the Administration's and Congress's visions for how to spend hard-earned tax dollars, and it sets the stage for legislative action that actually allocates those dollars for the activities of all federal agencies.

In the past six years, partisan politics, infighting and an inability to find common ground resulted in zero budgets being passed. Instead, it's been round after round of continuing resolutions — temporary funding extensions so the government can continue operating — which left businesses weary of investing; analysts scratching their

While it appears likely that a budget resolution for FY 2016 will be passed, regardless of whether or not that happens, the produce industry must remain vigilant to ensure our hard-fought efforts advancing much-needed resources of the fruit and vegetable industry in the 2014 Farm Bill, are protected.

heads; and taxpayers growing outraged from the lack of progress made by the very people they elected.

This year though, the House and Senate both passed separate budget resolutions in March. And, as Republicans now control both chambers, many in the GOP are quick to connect the change in leadership to a breakthrough in the years-long budget stalemate.

For fiscal year 2016, the House resolution provides \$4.7 trillion over 10 years while the Senate's proposal calls for \$5.3 trillion — a difference of \$523 billion. Still early in the process, uncertainty remains as to how the budget will specifically impact key agriculture and nutrition programs. In addition to cuts associated with the FY 2016 budget, the House Agriculture Committee was instructed to come up with additional savings, which we anticipate will likely impact the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

More cuts and less money are two things neither of which the produce industry needs right now. Just last year, the 2014 Farm Bill was passed and signed into law, making sweeping changes to the nation's food and farm policy, of which deficit reduction was a major focus.

While some will argue that businesses and industries have resources enabling them to find ways to adapt and innovate with less, there comes a point when enough is enough.

In a recent letter to the leadership of the House and Senate Budget Committees, nearly 400 interest groups — including dozens of

food industry organizations — requested that no additional cuts be made to the farm safety net, conservation programs and nutrition programs because the reforms from last year's Farm Bill are just now being fully implemented by USDA. On top of that, our industry was hit hard before the Farm Bill by sequestration — those automatic, across-the-board spending cuts back in 2013.

From a business perspective, it simply is not effective governing to put in place any additional or new cuts until current policies have had time to take effect and be thoroughly evaluated. From a moral perspective, we should not be cutting programs that will help feed underserved populations and help America's most vulnerable children establish good eating habits that will serve them well for life.

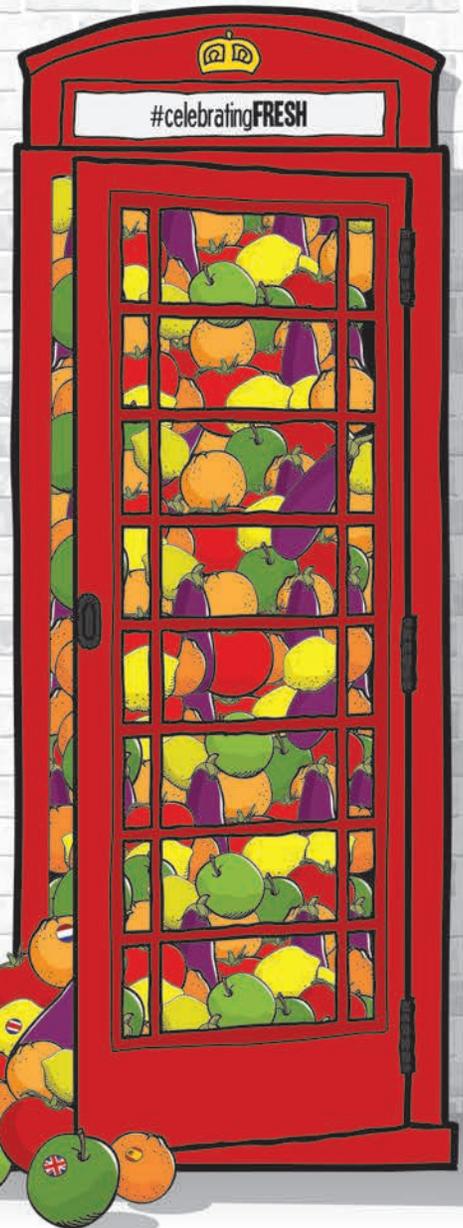
As of press time, both the House and Senate budget resolutions resided in conference committee, where differences between the two versions must now be ironed out in the form of one single document. While it appears likely that a budget resolution for FY 2016 will be passed, regardless of whether or not that happens, the produce industry must remain vigilant to ensure our hard-fought efforts advancing much-needed resources of the fruit and vegetable industry in the 2014 Farm Bill, are protected. In the coming weeks and months, we will advocate against more specific cuts, so the produce industry can continue to deliver the most nutritious and abundant food supply to the consumer.



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McDonald's Identity Crisis

BY JIM PREVOR, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

McDonald's chief executive Steve Easterbrook recently gave a much-anticipated video presentation in which he announced "the initial steps of the company's turnaround plan." He really didn't announce a turnaround plan; he announced an organizational revamp — basically dividing McDonald's up into four internal "market segments." The idea being to unite businesses with similar growth strategies rather than those that happen to be geographically contiguous. It may be marginally better than the current organization — though I doubt China and Switzerland, both "high-growth markets" for McDonald's, actually have many similarities.

The other big initiative is to sell off 3,500 company-owned restaurants to franchisees. This is standard strategy. Selling the restaurants means the corporation makes money off licensing fees and whatnot; since very little capital is involved in this, it leaves the company with a much higher return on investment than if it owned a lot of brick-and-mortar property. However, it is also true that it makes the company harder to control. The chefs at headquarters have some brilliant ideas; but bringing something from inspiration to actual product on the menu is very difficult at McDonald's, because they have to win franchise approval.

The rest of the announcement was financial legerdemain — returning money to shareholders or vague promises of General and Administration (G&A) cost reductions that somehow will fall right to the bottomline.

The obvious questions confronting McDonald's:

- How will it compete with more hip or upscale offerings — everything from In-N-Out Burger, to Five Guys Burgers and Fries, to Shake Shack?
- What will it do about menu proliferation and its impact on service time?
- What will McDonald's mean in the years ahead?

The presentation was silent on all these topics and more.

Strategically, McDonald's faces the same problem that mainstream supermarket chains do. Not all that long ago, the local supermarket served everyone in the community. Now, markets are fracturing. So the competitive threat is not typically another supermarket trying to do the same thing a little better. The new competitive threat is an Aldi opening down the block, a Costco opening in the neighborhood, a Whole Foods appearing nearby, an Internet shopping service opening, the drug store adding a larger food department that includes more fresh items — none of these shopping iterations take the place of a supermarket, but all threaten its livelihood.

Equally, now one can have breakfast at Starbucks, grab a more upscale burger at BurgerFi, or eat alternative cuisine at Chipotle, and like that old community supermarket, McDonald's just isn't clear on

how to position itself.

Shortly before the McDonald's announcement, Chipotle also made an announcement that it was eliminating ingredients containing genetically modified organisms (GMOs) from its menu. It is a brilliant move, deeply cynical and bordering on ridiculous, but brilliant nonetheless. It shows that Chipotle understands its market positioning in a way McDonald's does not.

Chipotle's move is pure marketing genius. There is no indication that eating GMOs is bad for a person, and Chipotle doesn't make that claim. It can't. As a matter of fact, if the chain did claim anything of that nature, then it would be sued for product disparagement.

Its plan is filled with giant loopholes. Even the normally left-wing folks at the Center for Science in the Public Interest called the position hypocritical — essentially on the grounds that sodas are made with corn syrup, and all corn syrup basically is made with GMO corn.

But Chipotle is not planning on enforcing these rules against the soda companies. Chipotle itself uses very little GMO product — corn tortillas and soybean oil mostly — so renouncing these ingredients is cheap. The big use of GMOs is the soda and the animal feed. But Chipotle doesn't count the animal feed — that would be pretty expensive to replace.

The big health concerns at Chipotle? The sugar in soda and lots of salt. A recent *New York Times* article critiquing the chain's menu said a typical Chipotle meal uses up to a full day's recommended salt allowance, but there are no plans to deal with either of these issues.

There is a bunch of technicalities proving Chipotle's position is inconsistent. Chipotle doesn't like GMOs, because GMOs allow farmers to use an herbicide named glyphosate (most commonly associated with Roundup), which kills weeds but not the GMO plants. Sunflowers, which make the new sunflower oil Chipotle is switching to, are bred without GMOs to tolerate ALS inhibitors, another class of herbicides. There is no reason Chipotle should prefer one over the other.

Despite all this, the always incisive essayist and author Virginia Postrel nailed the point: "... even if you don't care about GMOs, the decision sends a positive signal. It's a high-profile sign that Chipotle is paying close attention to the ingredients in its food. Replacing GMOs required reworking recipes, finding new suppliers and paying more for canola oil. It demanded concentrated effort. The process reinforces the message that Chipotle isn't just doing what's easy or cheap. It reminds customers that the company isn't delivering generic, mass-market meals ... Chipotle cares about the food."

If McDonald's wants to succeed, it doesn't need to reorganize which country is in which division. It needs to answer the question: "What does McDonald's care about?"

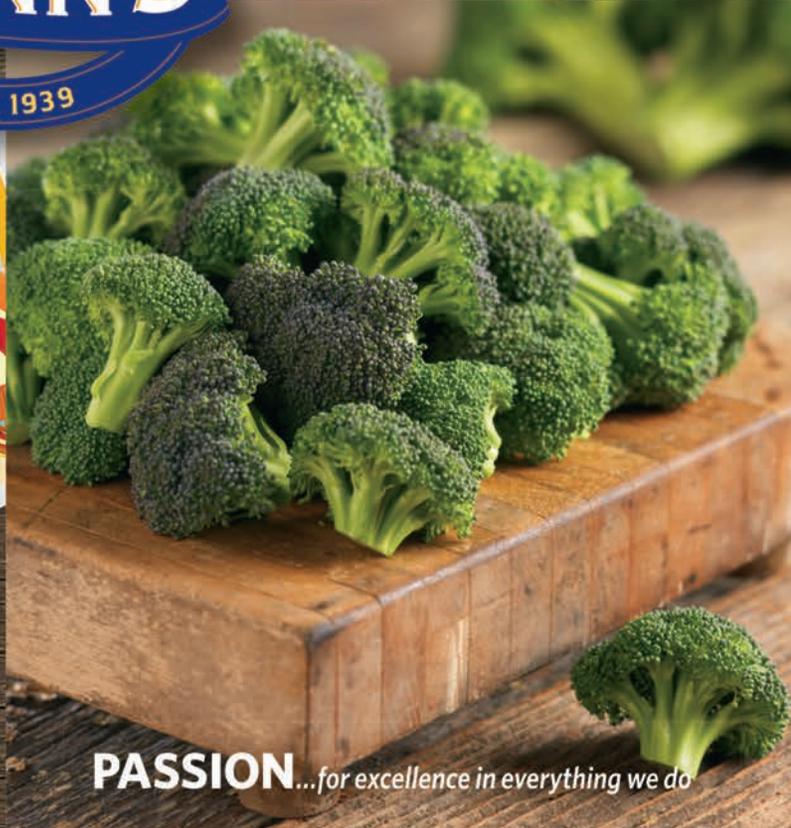
Strategically, McDonald's faces the same problem that mainstream supermarket chains do: It just isn't clear on how to position itself.

pb

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UNITED FRESH AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH REVIEW

AISLE 1200

BOOTH #1218
NATURE FRESH FARMS
LEAMINGTON, ON

Family-owned and employee-managed, Nature Fresh Farms ships Non-GMO Project Verified greenhouse grown produce year-round to key retailers throughout North America.



BOOTH #1235
NATURIFE FARMS
SALINAS, CA



Naturipe Farms consistently brings you vibrant, delicious and nutritious berries. Since 1917, generations of family farmers in local communities produced these berries responsibly, with integrity and respect through all the seasons of the year.

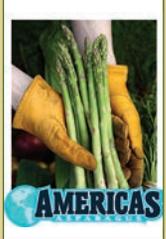
BOOTH #1242
REICHEL FOODS, INC.
ROCHESTER, MN

Consumers top choice for “fresh to go” produce snacks with dip. Retailers benefit from sustainable packaging, extended shelf life, outstanding quality and variety, as well as stimulating and multiple unit sales at purchase. Several shelf-merchandising displays provide the opportunity to merchandise all 12 Dippin’ Stix flavors in only 36 inches of shelf space.



BOOTH #1245
PROGRESSIVE PRODUCE
LOS ANGELES, CA

Progressive Produce provides customers a national supply of Americas Asparagus year-round. Progressive has thousands of acres of farm-fresh asparagus grown throughout the “Americas” in Mexico, Peru, California and Washington. Available in bulk and retail packages.



BOOTH #1246
PURE FLAVOR
LEAMINGTON, ON



Marzanito mini San Marzano tomatoes — amazingly good tasting for cooking and perfectly sized for all your everyday snacking needs.

AISLE 1300

BOOTH #1344
TIGER COOL EXPRESS
OVERLAND PARK, KS



Tiger Cool Express solves the problem of reliable, asset-based capacity in long-haul produce shipping. A temperature-controlled intermodal provider with routes from all major growing areas, Tiger Cool offers unbeatable advantages. Stop by and visit with our team. Whether your pain point is cost or capacity, we can help.

AISLE 1400

BOOTH #1434
YERECIC LABEL
NEW KENSINGTON, PA

Inspire consumer confidence while offering re-sealable convenience! This label construction keeps clamshells closed during transit, ensures product safety through tamper evident features, and allows customers to reseal packages to maintain freshness.



BOOTH #1456
STEMILT GROWERS
WENATCHEE, WA

Stemilt is a leading and family-owned supplier of fresh apples, pears, cherries, and summer fruits from Washington state. See new Fresh Blenders apples, Lil Snappers kid-sized fruits, and more at the booth.



BOOTH #1521
SUNKIST GROWERS
VALENCIA, CA

Like a cherished family recipe handed down through generations, our citrus is nurtured by more than 120 years of experience. At Sunkist, we're deeply committed to tradition, but also to innovation and sustainability on the farm and in the marketplace — embracing fresh approaches for citrus lovers today and tomorrow.



AISLE 1500

BOOTH #1554
LINKFRESH
VENTURA, CA

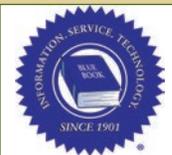


LINKFRESH Inc. is a software and IT consultancy with extensive fresh produce supply chain expertise. LINKFRESH ERP is a complete business management solution for the fresh produce supply chain. Our customers include: The Giumarra Companies, Gourmet Trading, Alsum Farms & Produce and The Fresca Group.

AISLE 1600

BOOTH #1609
BLUE BOOK SERVICES
CAROL STREAM, IL

Whether a sales team requires more leads or a credit team needs Ratings & Scores, Blue Book membership gives the business information necessary to grow and protect any business. We have the data to make confident business decisions. Stop by to learn why we are the industry's trusted resource!



BOOTH #1635
FOX PACKAGING
MCCALLEN, TX



Fox Packaging is a family-owned and -operated manufacturer of innovative packaging solutions for onion, citrus and vegetables. Sister company, Fox Solutions, provides labor-saving equipment solutions that improve operational efficiencies and increase your bottomline.

BOOTH #1650
RUBY FRESH
FIREBAUGH, CA



Ruby Fresh is a premium supplier of whole pomegranates and year-round packaged arils. Our popular Jewels Grab-n-Go Arils, in convenient 4- and 5.3-ounce snack cups, are now available in handy 2-packs and 4-packs.

AISLE 1700

BOOTH #1711
PRODUCE PRO SOFTWARE
WOODRIDGE, IL

Produce Pro is a fully integrated software solution for wholesale food distributors, terminal markets, grower/packer/shippers and processors. Produce Pro's software provides real time inventory, traceability, reporting and accounting capabilities. Produce Pro's powerful software solutions together with its perishable food industry expertise and business consulting services allow their clients to take their company to the next level.



BOOTH #1743
INDIANAPOLIS FRUIT
INDIANAPOLIS, IN

Family-owned and -operated, Indianapolis Fruit supplies grocers and retailers in more than 14 Midwestern states with the freshest and safest fruits, vegetables and other essential produce items. Capitalize on the rising popularity of convenience products with healthy fresh offerings from Garden Cut ToGo snacks. Let's Produce a Fresh Experience Together!



BOOTH #1752
USDA AGRICULTURAL
MARKETING SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) serves the needs of the U.S. fruit and vegetable industry. AMS grades and inspects product to enhance communication between buyers and sellers, fosters fair trade, and partners with state and industry boards to help overcome marketing barriers. Visit us and celebrate our Fruit & Vegetable Market News 100th Anniversary!



UNITED FRESH AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #1800
RED SUN FARMS
KINGSVILLE, ON

Red Sun Farms' Greenhouse grown produce provides you with greenhouse perfection — all year long. We're known as your greenhouse go-to team, with produce grown in Canada, U.S. and Mexico. Our regional sales teams are here to support your greenhouse category needs including planning support, marketing support, and new product launch support. Stop by to learn about our new Organic Series, which includes collection of tomatoes, bell peppers and cucumbers organically grown indoors for freshness that lasts.



BOOTH #1819
VOLM COMPANIES, INC.
ANTIGO, WI

Visit Volm to find out how we're bringing fresh produce from packing facility to market. Volm is an industry manufacturer and distributor of fresh produce packaging, packing equipment and packing facility with full equipment integration, design and engineering.



BOOTH #1832
CRUNCH PAK
CASHMERE, WA

Crunch Pak, the fresh sliced apples specialist, will launch three items at the United Fresh Expo: a DipperZ snack tray featuring the Disney character Olaf from the popular Frozen movie; a Tart Apple with Salted Caramel DipperZ; and a Sweet Apple with Strawberry Greek Yogurt DipperZ. The three items are extensions of the Crunch Pak branded DipperZ line.



BOOTH #1908
PRODUCE BUSINESS
BOCA RATON, FL

PRODUCE BUSINESS delivers marketing, merchandising, management and procurement insights to retail, foodservice and other buyers. Its 30-year relationship with leaders worldwide is extended through sister publications, Jim Prevor's PerishablePundit.com and PerishableNews.com, in addition to The New York Produce Show and Conference and The London Produce Show and Conference.



BOOTH #1934
NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
TRENTON, NJ

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture represents New Jersey's diverse fruit and vegetable industry, and serves as a resource for buyers interested in sourcing New Jersey farm products. For more than 30 years, Jersey Fresh has been the Department's venue to advertise and promote New Jersey's farm products.



BOOTH #2019
PAKSENSE
BOISE, ID

Cold chain monitoring at your fingertips. PakSense helps retailers, suppliers, growers, and restaurants ensure that only the freshest and safest foods reach consumers. Learn more about our comprehensive cold chain monitoring system, AutoSense.



BOOTH #2021
BRAGA FRESH FAMILY FARMS
SOLEDAD, CA

Braga Fresh Family Farms sells Josie's Organics brand premium-quality organic vegetables, inspired by grandmother, Josie Braga. Today, the Bragas farm their home ranch, established in the 1920s, plus thousands of organic acres throughout CA and AZ.



BOOTH #2021
CALIFORNIA GIANT BERRY FARMS
WATSONVILLE, CA

It's peak season at California Giant, so be sure to stop by and learn about our summer promotions in place and how you can capitalize on increased sales. We also have free training tools to help store level personnel maintain the cold chain providing quality fruit to the consumer.



BOOTH #2114
KWIK LOK CORPORATION
YAKIMA, WA

Explore and experience Kwik Lok's world of solutions for your bag closing needs. In addition to bag closing, we offer companies a way to advertise, promote, and trace their product using the Kwik Lok closure or closure label. Also, for the first time, come see the ARC Kwik Link Binder.



BOOTH #2118
EARTH SOURCE TRADING
EPHRATA, PA

The produce industry is changing more rapidly than ever! Are you ready? At Earth Source Trading, we're positioned with the freshest product and innovative solutions to help you navigate this changing landscape.



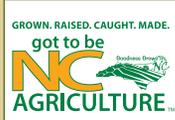
BOOTH #2203
SAN MIGUEL PRODUCE
OXNARD, CA

The Growing Standard of Greens. San Miguel Produce is a vertically integrated grower/processor from California and Georgia celebrating 20 years of the original Cut 'N Clean Greens. Organic greens, Asian vegetables and Persian herbs are available.



BOOTH #2211
NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
RALEIGH, NC

The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services provides services that promote and improve agriculture, agribusiness and forests; protect consumers and businesses; and conserve farmland and natural resources for the prosperity of all North Carolinians.



BOOTH #2214
MIXTEC GROUP
GLENDALE, CA

As the No. 1 executive search firm in produce, we are proud to have spent the past 30 years providing exceptional recruitment and leadership consulting to leading companies in our industry.



BOOTH #2414
MULTIVAC
KANSAS CITY, MO

MULTIVAC invites you to join us at United Fresh 2015. MULTIVAC is sure to have a packaging solution that suits your needs. From thermoformers, traysealers, chamber machines and labeling equipment, come see how MULTIVAC can help you package better.



BOOTH #2604
MAXWELL CHASE TECHNOLOGIES
ATLANTA, GA

Maxwell Chase Technologies specializes in the development and manufacture of patented absorbent packaging that delivers freshness and extends shelf life of fresh foods. Our product line includes absorbent pads, pouches, trays, tray sealers, lidding films, as well as tomato and onion slicing equipment. We are now introducing "mini containers" for fresh-cut fruit.



BOOTH #2614
TRIANGLE PACKAGE MACHINERY COMPANY
CHICAGO, IL

With a diverse product line that includes vertical form fill seal (VFFS) baggers, combination weighers, rotary depositors/tray loaders, and more, Triangle is your single source for automated produce packaging solutions. Our X-Series is a line of technically-advanced, operator-friendly bagging machines — available with Ultrasonic welding or traditional heat sealing.



TRANSITION

**HARVEST SENSATIONS
LOS ANGELES, CA**



Produce industry veteran, **Doug Ranno**, is named president of Harvest Sensations by the company's board of directors. One of America's top specialty produce, retail and foodservice distributors, Harvest Sensations has state-of-the-art facilities in Los Angeles, CA and Miami, FL. Ranno will lead the company and its growth in all areas including strategic planning, business development and overall team development. He will report to the Harvest Sensations board of directors, currently chaired by Charles Gilbert.

TRANSITION

**DIMARE FRESH
INDIO, CA**

DiMare Fresh welcomes **Bob Wright** and **Charlotte Vernon** to its team. A veteran in the produce industry, Wright brings a breadth of knowledge and executive leadership and management skills to the DiMare International team with more than 25 years of experience.



Vernon, previously at SunWorld International, brings more than 30 years of experience with a strong emphasis on business development and sales to her new role as a DiMare Indio Sales Associate. Her appointment comes at a time of major growth for DiMare Indio citrus division.

ANNOUNCEMENT

**HALF YOUR PLATE CAMPAIGN
WELCOMES CHEF MICHAEL
SMITH AS AMBASSADOR**



The Half Your Plate Campaign announces chef Michael Smith will act as the brand's new ambassador. One of Canada's most recognizable chefs, Smith is a passionate advocate for cooking fresh, healthy food at home. Host of Chef Michael's Kitchen, Chef Abroad and Chef at Home on Food Network Canada,

Smith devoted his life to helping Canadians create a healthy food lifestyle that includes lots of daily fruits and vegetables.

TRANSITION

**MANN PACKING
SALINAS, CA**

Mann Packing hires **Pam Hudson** as the manager of marketing and communications. In this role, Hudson will oversee the company's advertising and promotional programs while engaging in customer and consumer marketing support. Hudson has a diverse background in marketing with experience in



brand building, agency management and sales resource development. Prior to joining Mann, she held various marketing positions at Superior Foods Inc. in Watsonville, Williams-Sonoma, Inc., Paramount Pictures and Fox Broadcasting, as well as owned a small business.

TRANSITION

**CENTRAL AMERICAN PRODUCE
POMPAÑO BEACH, FL**

As part of a strategic growth plan, Central American Produce hires **Davide Scarsini** and **Marissa Geofroy** to its staff. Scarsini, a 12-year veteran, joins the company as a senior sales representative. He was most recently employed by Southern Specialties. Geofroy is assuming the position of director of strategic initiatives and will be initially working in the areas of logistics and new software implementation. She was most recently employed by Topco Associates.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**TONY FREYTAG TO
CHAIR PRODUCE
INDUSTRY BOARD**

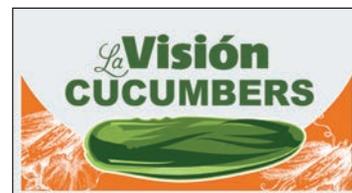
Tony Freytag, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Cashmere, WA-based Crunch Pak, was named chairman-elect for the United Fresh Produce Association board of directors. Originally from Austin, TX, Freytag is a graduate of the University of Texas. His career in produce began with Naumes, Inc., of Medford, Oregon, in 1997 where the idea of sliced apples was first introduced. Prior to joining the produce industry, Freytag held several management positions specializing in inventory and sales programs for retailers including Bloomingdales, Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**VISION COMPANIES EXPANDS
CUCUMBER PROGRAM**

The Los Angeles, CA-based Vision Companies is adding another item to its extensive list of "grower direct" deals with an exclusive shade house cucumber program starting Mid-April out of Caborca, Mexico. In collaboration with the Agrícola Los Chacuales partner of growers, the La Visión label will accompany this program that will be available starting the second week of April through June. This relationship has led Vision Produce and its growers to explore new markets together.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**SEALD SWEET EXPANDS
GRAPE PRODUCTION**

Seald Sweet International, Vero Beach, FL, announces the expansion of its commodity division through long-term commitments and substantial financial investments, which increases production of the Mexican grape program. These agreements bring significant growth, primarily in the Hermosillo and Caborca areas, to its current supply of fresh table grapes.



ANNOUNCEMENT

**ONEONTA STARR RANCH GROWERS
TO HAVE NEW ZEALAND HONEYCRISP
THIS MONTH**

Oneonta Starr Ranch Growers will fill a five-week window with Honeycrisp New Zealand apples starting this month. The national sales representative Bruce Turner said in a company press release that the new crop, which exhibits "outstanding color, flavor and texture," is grown in the Timaru region of the Canterbury Plains on the nation's south island. Turner also said the growers' expertise and the natural growing conditions produce "the perfect blend of sugars and acid, and the crunch and juiciness are terrific. We're seeing better color and more optimal retail sizes than Honeycrisp from other Southern Hemisphere growing areas."



ANNOUNCEMENT

CONCORD FOODS LAUNCHES BLUEBERRY BANANA SMOOTHIE MIX

Concord Foods, Brockton, MA, is introducing a new addition to its line of easy-to-make smoothie mixes: Blueberry Banana Smoothie Mix. Consumers will be able to purchase the mix in the U.S. starting this month. The mix is packaged in a



1.3-ounce pouch, and it will be displayed in produce departments. The suggested retail is \$1.29/pouch. These pouches are available to retailers in 18 pack cases, 48 pack clip strips, 72 pack floor shippers, or as a 144 pack combination shipper with the Kale & Apple Smoothie Mix.

ANNOUNCEMENT

OCEAN MIST FARMS UPGRADES COACHELLA FACILITY



Ocean Mist Farms, Castroville, CA, is expanding its cooler facility in Coachella, CA, this spring to be in operation for the Fall 2015 desert-growing season. When completed, the facility will have double the cooling and storage capacity and twice as many bays for receiving and loading trucks. Ocean Mist Farms grows and cools artichokes and 30 other fresh vegetables at the Coachella facility.

ANNOUNCEMENT

COLORFUL HARVEST OFFERS PARTY TRAY

Colorful Harvest, Salinas, CA, now offers a crystal clear 20-ounce party tray that combines famous Rainbow Crunch Carrots with multi-colored cauliflower and a sweet onion honey Dijon dipping sauce. With more acres of colorful veggies under cultivation for the new party tray, Colorful Harvest anticipates consistent year-round supply.



ANNOUNCEMENT



C.H. ROBINSON

»Accelerate Your Advantage®

C.H. ROBINSON RECEIVES 3PL AWARD FROM WAL-MART

Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. recognized C.H. Robinson, Eden Prairie, MN, with the retail leader's first-ever 3rd Party Logistical (3PL) Carrier of the Year award for 2014 noting contributions for outstanding service, effective communication, and providing solutions and innovations in a changing industry. Last year was filled with challenges in the area of logistics and transportation, with extreme weather conditions and capacity issues challenging the industry as a whole. Through dedicated hard work and strategic collaboration, C.H. Robinson was able to exceed Wal-Mart's expectations as a logistics service provider.

ANNOUNCEMENT

SETTON FARMS ANNOUNCES DISTRIBUTION IN AIRPORTS

Setton Pistachio of Terra Bella, Inc. announces the new distribution of its Premium Dark Chocolate Pistachios in airports around the world. The pistachios are now available in more than 100 airport retail locations in U.S. airports such as JFK, Newark, Islip, Burbank, Long Beach, San Diego, San Francisco, and Phoenix. Stores carrying the product include CNBC News, Market Place, NY Times in addition to International Duty Free shops across the globe.



ANNOUNCEMENT

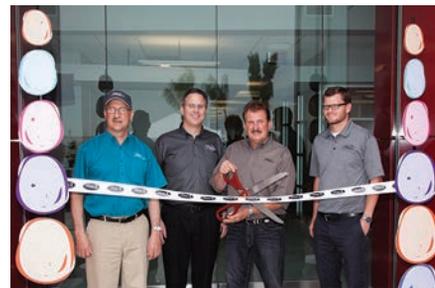
HOUSE FOODS INTRODUCES SMART NOODLE

House Foods, Garden Grove, CA, a premium tofu purveyor, introduces Smart Noodle — a new product that contains fiber from oats and rice bran, and Omega-3. Available in late spring, Smart Noodle will be offered in fettuccine and spaghetti shapes. With only 20 calories, 6 grams of fiber and 400 mg of ALA Omega-3 per serving, Smart Noodle is an easy and nourishing replacement to virtually any high-calorie pasta dish. Smart Noodle does not contain any tofu, but is comprised of noodle substitutes made from Konjac (an Asian yam), flaxseed, oat and rice fiber.



ANNOUNCEMENT

RPE'S TASTEFUL SELECTIONS OPENS NEW FACILITY



Tasteful Selections, a vertically integrated grower, shipper, marketer of premium specialty potatoes in Bancroft, WI, celebrates its investment in the future of the potato industry with the grand opening of its new 200,000 square foot state-of-the-art facility in Bakersfield, CA. The celebrations kicked off with a ribbon cutting ceremony, press conference, luncheon and tours of the facility. Tasteful Selections potatoes are proudly marketed by RPE.

ANNOUNCEMENT

VILLAGE FARMS & FLORIDA ORGANIC FARMS ENTER EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTION AGREEMENT



Village Farms International Inc., with U.S. headquarters in Heathrow, FL, and Florida Organic Farms Int. LLC., in Okeechobee, FL, announce an exclusive distribution agreement between the two companies. Village Farms will offer USDA-certified organic fruits and vegetable to its customers beginning in the fall of this year. This is a first time Village Farms will partner with another farmer to offer organic produce under one of the company's labels.

ANNOUNCEMENT

LIMONEIRA INTRODUCES LEMON MISFITS

Limoneira Company, an agribusiness with agricultural land and operations, real estate and water rights in California, announces the introduction of Lemon Misfits. The lemons come in a variety of sizes and packaging/pallet configurations. Consumers can juice up Lemon Misfits for a variety of family occasions, and Misfit Madness Recipes will be featured on Limoneira's website and through Limoneira's global opinion leader network and social media bloggers. Retailers can receive point of sale material for their stores.





INTERNATIONAL FLORICULTURE EXPO

JUNE 8-10, 2015 MCCORMICK PLACE CONVENTION CENTER, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

New Strategy: Co-location! The International Floriculture Expo is an annual event where the floral industry gathers to discover new products, source new suppliers, network, and learn. IFE 2015 will be co-located with United Fresh and FMI Connect in Chicago at McCormick Place. The combination of these powerful events will bring together cross-category retailers from high volume mass markets and mid-size grocers, to independent operators from the local, national and international markets. The Education Program is on Monday, June 8, and the two days of exhibits featuring more than 225 exhibitors will be held June 9 to 10. For more details on the event produced by Diversified Communications of Portland, ME, see floriexpo.com. (Booth numbers subject to change.)

AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #100
SHATLEY FARMS LLC
West Jefferson, NC

With farmland in production in North Carolina and Virginia, Shatley Farms is one of the largest producers of Fraser Fir Christmas trees in the U.S. We have been a reliable supplier of top quality Christmas trees and evergreen products shipped fresh, on schedule, and to grade for more than 35 years.



BOOTH #104
HI-RISE BALLOONS & FLORAL SUPPLIES
Austin, TX

Want to increase balloon sales and reduce costs related to helium, inventory, and labor? Visit our booth at the IFE Show to learn how Hi-Rise can help.



BOOTH #118
ALEXANDRA FARMS
Coral Gables, FL

Alexandra Farms is a boutique garden rose grower located high in the Andes Mountains of Colombia. We specialize in growing fragrant, nostalgic and beautiful garden roses that have been selected as optimal as cut flowers. All of our roses have a 10 to 12 day vase life after a five-day shipping window.



BOOTH #137
STAR VALLEY FLOWERS
Soldiers Grove, WI

The Midwest's largest field-grown, cut flower producer of fruiting, flowering and decorative branches. Peonies and various herbaceous perennials along with unique wild crafted local finds round out our selection. Grocery stores, garden centers, event planners, landscapers, wholesale and retail florists are all pleased to find our unique quality products.



BOOTH #139
JETRAM SALES
St. Louis, MO

JetRam's Jetwrap Delivery System gives thousands of florists the ability to wrap arrangements quickly and efficiently. The combination of box and sleeve dramatically improves any arrangement and protects them from weather and transportation damage. Our products work together seamlessly to give florists a fast, efficient, and professional look.



BOOTH #200
B AND H FLOWERS
Carpinteria, CA

B and H Flowers produces a variety of commercial, VeriFlora-certified flower crops for both mass retail and wholesale distribution, providing customers nationwide with sustainably grown, vibrant, and long-lasting California flowers. Sustainably grown for a beautiful world.



BOOTH #219
TAIWAN ORCHID GROWERS ASSOCIATION (TOGA)
Tainan City, Taiwan

TOGA is a nonprofit organization that assembles wholesale growers and distributors in Taiwan to promote the orchid industry and develop various markets. We prepare domestic and international promotions for the Taiwan International Orchid Show. We also enhance the cooperation between growers and distributors to accelerate the development of the orchid industry.



BOOTH #221
FLOWERS CANADA GROWERS
Guelph, Ontario, Canada

Flowers Canada Growers represents floriculture greenhouse growers and industry partners. We produce the *Canadian Greenhouse Growers' Directory & Buyers' Guide*, a valuable resource tool for the floriculture industry.



BOOTH #224
PENANG NURSERY INC.
Apopka, FL

For more than 30 years, Penang Nursery has been a top producer of unique bamboo, bonsai, and tabletop gardens, including the popular braided Pachira tree. We pride ourselves in offering beautifully designed gardens in the latest, trend-setting containers available at an exceptional value.



BOOTH #244
HOMESTEAD GROWERS NIAGARA INC.
Vineland, Ontario, Canada

See the wonder of the potted Calla Lily at our booth. Our inventive and fun booth theme will inspire your creative juices to pump up your own floral department! Fabulous colors and amazing quality will be showcased.



BOOTH #250
WORLD CLASS FLOWERS
Egg Harbor City, NJ

GROWER/PLANNER/MARKETER/INNOVATOR — Let us create your next winning program!



BOOTH #260
KOEN PACK
Miami, FL

We specialize in containers and vases, films, sleeves, wraps and pot covers. Especially known for our innovative packaging for potted plants and bouquets, we have a large inventory of sleeves, sheets, picks, bags and other accessories to enhance the look of your final product.



BOOTH #341
TRIUMPH PLANT CO.
New City, NY

Triumph Plant Company specializes in unique plant products. See our Crayola — 'My First Garden' Children's seed kits and our *Gardening for Dummies* 'Gardening for the rest of us' planter kits. We also have real mistletoe, hanging salad gardens and air fern.



BOOTH #404
HIAWATHA CORPORATION
Shelton, WA

Hiawatha Evergreens, a pioneer in the floral industry, has been exhibiting at the Super Floral Show/IFE for 24 years. We've been supplying fresh Christmas greens, Western greens and Moss products from the Pacific Northwest since 1938. Stop by our booth to see our greens and our new products for 2015.





INTERNATIONAL FLORICULTURE EXPO

JUNE 8-10, 2015

AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #423 DECOWRAPPS

Doral, FL
Deco Wraps is a leading supplier of distinctive packaging options for fresh flowers and potted plants. We offer prompt service, simplified logistics, and competitive pricing. We create products that are always fresh and innovative. Come visit us and see our exciting new items.



BOOTH #426 BAYVIEW FLOWERS

Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada
With more than 40 years of experience, we specialize in potted plants, dish gardens, indoor tropical foliage along with cut greens and fresh-cut flowers. Our vases, containers and home décor items will entice your customers. Count on us for quality and innovation to keep your floral department fresh and inviting.



BOOTH #434 CHRYSAL AMERICAS

Miami, FL
Chrysal Americas is an international company offering a multitude of products for the complete nutrition and care of fresh-cut flowers for growers, wholesalers, florist and supermarkets in the U.S., Canada and Latin America.



BOOTH #438 FRESHBLOOMS

Sewell, NJ
FreshBlooms is an accomplished floral importer and full-service distributor dedicated to servicing all facets of the floriculture industry. We present an extensive variety of premium fresh-cut flowers from our worldwide farm sources while providing custom-made promotions, innovative product lines, hardgoods, and integrated logistics. FreshBlooms brings it all together.



BOOTH #459 ENCORE FLORAL MARKETING

Grand Rapids, MI
We will showcase a selection of color bouquets, arrangements and balloons. Importing allows us to bring together product from countries around the world into our unique offerings. In addition, our Miami and Dallas facilities enhance our distribution opportunities nationwide.



BOOTH #470 THE PINERY LLC

Escondido, CA
We are growers of living Christmas trees and Rosemary for the holidays. Our beautifully sculpted miniature trees add freshness, fragrance and flair to any setting whether in the home, courtyard, kitchen or workplace. Stop by and experience our aromatic varieties of Rosemary Pine and Cypress.



BOOTH #555 P.N.P. PLAST

Altopascio Lucca, Italy
P.N.P. PLAST manufactures and distributes products for flower, gift and confectionery packaging. Polypropylene rolls, sheets and pot covers: a wide range that well represents the Italian quality. Our 30 years of experience in Flexo-technology along with our own inner graphic studio, allows us to create nice items and personalized ideas.



BOOTH #611 ALDERSHOT GREENHOUSES LTD.

Burlington, Ontario Canada
One of North America's premier potted blooming producers — Aldershot Greenhouses Ltd. unsurpassed commitment to quality has made us a top producer of potted blooming plants in North America. Long lasting blooms for home and office, Aldershot Greenhouses Ltd. potted plants perform with excellence.



BOOTH #644 MEYERS FLOWERS

Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada
With 15 plus acres of greenhouse space and more than 50 years of experience, Meyers is the premiere choice for quality potted flowers. Our floral products range from spring bedding plants to holiday crops such as Poinsettias and Easter lilies. We are very accommodating with our variety of weekly flowers and promotional programs.



BOOTH #650 SYNDICATE SALES

Kokomo, IN
Syndicate Sales is a manufacturer, importer, and distributor of more than 1,500 items to the floral industry. Brand names including Aquapic, Aquafoam, Aquaplus the Difference is Clear, Aquahold, Garden Collection, Hoosier Glass, and designer vases are known throughout the industry as representing the highest quality products.



BOOTH #669 WESTBROOK FLORAL LTD.

Grimby, Ontario, Canada
Westbrook Floral Ltd. is a full-service wholesaler offering floral supplies, home and garden décor, botanicals and potted plants. In our 1.5 million square feet of greenhouses, we specialize in supplying North America with Mini Roses, Phalaenopsis Orchids, Kalanchoes, African Violets, Ferns, Succulents and seasonal potted plant varieties.



BOOTH #800 BURTON + BURTON

Bogart, GA
burton + BURTON will showcase 2016 Valentine and Spring products at this year's IFE show. Come by to see the latest designs in balloons, plush, pot covers, ribbons, and more! burton + BURTON is a family-owned and -operated business, serving the floral industry since 1982.



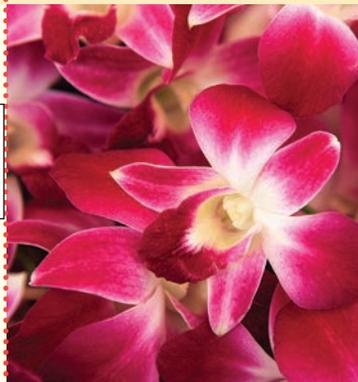
BOOTH #805 GALLERIA FARMS

Miami, FL
We are one of the largest growers of chrysanthemums and specialty flowers in the world with more than 100 hectares in production. Galleria Farms is a solution and service provider of premium floral products to mass retailers and supermarkets.



BOOTH #814 SUNSHINE BOUQUET COMPANY

Miami, FL
Get ready to be blown away with the latest trends and cutting edge designs this year at Sunshine Bouquet's booth at IFE. Our stellar product line is getting a fresh look with the addition of our new premium California enhanced bouquets, the perfect way to help increase your sales!





INTERNATIONAL FLORICULTURE EXPO

JUNE 8-10, 2015

AISLE-BY-AISLE BOOTH REVIEW

BOOTH #835
ARMELLINI EXPRESS LINES INC.

Palm City, FL

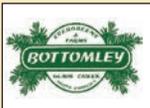
Look to us for scheduled LTL service. Since 1945, Armellini Logistics, a family-owned perishable logistics business, has specialized in the transportation of flowers. We offer the best freight service and performance handled with complete care — concentrating on temperature controlled shipments of perishable products across America.



BOOTH #838
BOTTOMLEY EVERGREENS & FARMS

Ennice, NC

Bottomley Evergreens will help you meet all your live Christmas decor needs including garlands, wreaths, bouquets and centerpieces. We pride ourselves on providing the highest quality and service available to our valuable customers. Be sure to see what's new at Bottomleys.



BOOTH #863
BLOOMQUEST LLC

Englewood, NJ

BloomQuest supplies roses and spray roses directly from Kenya to retail partners in the U.S. We have an exceptional trading relationship with Kenya and work closely with a number of specially selected farms in Ecuador. This enables us to offer our customers the best possible flowers in the industry.



BOOTH #847
THE SUN VALLEY GROUP

Arcata, CA

Flowers have powers! Sun Valley will present a series of retail-ready vignettes highlighting the powerful effects flower have on you. Sun Valley's mission is to achieve an unwavering dedication to quality, year-round availability and unparalleled customer service in the floral industry. Join us in creating a world of color. See you there!



BOOTH #902
FLORAL EXPRESS

Bensenville, IL

Floral Express is the Midwest's leading wholesale and mass-market service provider specializing in handling and distribution. The 2015 Floral Express will join the Chicago Department of Aviation in the finalizing plans for opening the Perishable Center. This will provide multiple layers of service into the Midwest and expand global markets.



BOOTH #957
TEUFEL HOLLY FARMS

Portland, OR

Our exceptional quality and unparalleled customer service allowed Teufel Holly Farms to be a leading supplier of the finest Pacific Northwest evergreens for more than 120 years. Stop by our booth and see how our experience and expertise can maximize your holiday sales.



BOOTH #959
MICKY'S MINIS FLORA EXPRESS

St. Louis, MO

Micky's Minis specializes in growing and shipping 2-inch miniature potted plants. Our plant selection includes roses, violets, mums, kalanchoes, azaleas, poinsettias, assorted herbs, cactus, succulents and foliage plants. Plus we offer a great line of seasonal and holiday accessories. Stop by our booth to see what's new!



BOOTH #973
THE ELITE BOUQUET

Miami, FL

Located in the heart of Miami, Elite also has four other U.S. locations covering the surrounding regions of New Jersey, Chicago, Denver and Los Angeles. Elite's primary imports are roses, spray roses, gerberas and alstroemeria. See Elite for bouquets, consumer bunches, cut greens, fresh arrangements, grower bunches, fresh-cut and specialty cut flowers.



BOOTH #1022
A-ROO COMPANY

Strongsville, OH

For more than 40 years A-ROO created marketing, merchandising and packaging solutions for the floral industry. We have containers and vases, decorative packaging, display fixtures and accessories, films, sleeves and wraps, pot covers, ribbons, bows and picks. Offices in Ohio, Florida, Texas and California provide service to North, Central and South America.



BOOTH #1026
THE USA BOUQUET COMPANY

Miami, FL

The USA Bouquet Company, a North American provider of fresh floral products, will showcase new and exciting ideas for your stores. See our new line of Premium Arrangements that help us better serve you with occasion-driven purchases. Look for our other innovative designs when you visit our booth in Chicago!



BOOTH #1036
POTTER INC.

Bryan, OH

Potter Inc. specializes in products to enhance floral and produce departments. Our hand-tied bows and corsage lines are proudly made in the USA. Potter Kit programs create gift-ready merchandise, quickly and easily, in today's labor-crunched market. Visit us at our booth to see our new 2015/2016 upgrades.



BOOTH #1050
TEMKIN INTERNATIONAL

Payson, UT

Whether its a coordinated program, a stylish new sleeve, or a custom floral pick, Temkin International will help you create an enticing look for your blooms. Temkin's coordinated sheets, sleeves and accessories make it easy to craft a striking display with designs made for every season, holiday and special occasion.



BOOTH #1058
AVERY IMPORTS/WILLOW GROUP LTD.

Batavia, NY



Whether you are a garden center, florist, greenhouse, nursery, designer or gift store, Avery Imports offers a variety of more than 1,000 different items.

BOOTHS #1068 & 867
BAY CITY FLOWER CO.

Half Moon Bay, CA

Family-owned Bay City Flower Company has more than 100 years of growing. We are known for producing the most diverse assortments of unique, high quality flowering plants in the country. Our aim is to keep our customers floral displays fresh, interesting and colorful.



CALIFORNIA AVOCADOS



THIS IS WHAT SUCCESS TASTES LIKE

Nothing tastes better than success, and that's exactly what you get by merchandising Fresh California Avocados — now in season.

Your customers look for the California Avocado label as a symbol of quality they can rely on. Partner with California Avocados for a tailored retail program

developed just for you. Our nearly 5,000 California Avocado growers thank you for your loyalty!

Call 1-800-344-4333 or visit CaliforniaAvocado.com/A-Look-Behind-The-Label to learn more.
Produce of U.S.A.

Produce Aisle Predictions

BY MS. ANNA SAFFER, DIRECTOR OF NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT, DUNNHUMBYUSA

Consumers want to understand as much as they can about what is going into the products they purchase. While this isn't a new trend — in fact, recent reports show the concern is relatively widespread in most markets — the desire for consumers to know the origin of their food and the process it goes through on the way to the store or restaurant remains a growing interest. Data leads us to believe that an “open door policy” with food will continue to be a relevant topic for consumers.

With packaged goods, consumers can easily look to nutrition and ingredient labels to clearly and thoroughly understand what is going into the products they buy. For produce it can be a little more complicated as the products often do not come with a tell-all label. Transparency is key with produce. This practice really boils down to not just ensuring the customers feel confident that they're purchasing responsibly produced food, but rather that they feel the brand is making an effort to try and explain the what, where and how of produce.

In dunnhumby's annual *Food Trend Report*, we developed a unique methodology — taking the best of food and culinary trends uncovered through research, online recipes, restaurant menus, industry journals, the news, purchasing behavior, and talking to consumers — and applied a rigorous model to truly understand and predict the big trends of 2015. We wanted a rich historical view and examined up to 5 years of actual purchase data on each of the trends identified. By understanding past performance and current performance, we could better predict the future of the trend.

Our first step was to build a bank of more than 150 food and culinary-related product trends. The trends we looked at stretched wide — from diet specific, such as Paleo; to packaging, such as pouches; from products, like leben (or Israeli-style yogurt); to product claims, such as “free range.”

Once we had a robust list of trends, we wanted to understand the factors that could impact them. We looked at hundreds of variables that were driving growth and could

Consumers are placing a new, and significant, value on these claims of the what, where and how produce is grown and making purchasing decisions to reflect these themes.

predict future growth. Specifically, we looked at metrics across key driver areas such as: Trend Acceptance, Shopper DNA, Proliferation and Digital Footprint.

All this data helped us obtain a good view and identify the trend drivers. By looking at what consumers are actually buying, we were able to reveal changes in behavior.

Based on our analysis, we identified the big trends we expect to continue to stay on top of consumers' minds and affect their shopping list in 2015. These trends are: Natural Sweeteners, Responsibly Produced, Fermented Foods, Small Batch Goods and Religious Standards. Overwhelmingly most consumers (nearly 80 percent) believed they would engage with these specific trends going forward.

One key theme that emerged was produce consumers are interested in supporting the little guy, or in this case local farmers. Some consumers even told us supporting local farmers gave them a sense of nostalgia for a simpler time when people were closer to the production of the food

they consume. Many shoppers also equated 'locally grown' with the perception of higher quality and/or fresher products.

Consumers value how their products are cultivated in advance of arriving on the grocery shelves. In our *Food Trends* research, consumers shared sentiments like “It is important to me how my food is raised,” and “Treatment, feed, and conditions are important.” In addition to valuing the treatment of the food they'll be consuming, shoppers want that to be translated clearly on the product packaging. Unclear labels are a prevalent frustration amongst many consumers; one customer articulated it as, “I would not buy any of the above mentioned products unless it also said 'organic.' Otherwise, all those labels you are stating are meaningless.”

By purchasing sustainable grown foods, consumers felt they were doing something better not just for themselves and their families by monitoring and understanding what they put into the body, but they felt like this benefited the larger environment as well.

While price still remains important to consumers, we have seen a willingness to up-trade for higher quality products. One consumer stated it as “Price is still a factor in my choice, but if I find these products [organic, natural, etc.] at prices that are not totally out of line with traditional grocery prices, then I will buy.”

Consumers are placing a new, and significant, value on these claims of the what, where and how produce is grown and making purchasing decisions to reflect these themes.

The most important area for consumers remains not just what's trending, but whether they should care about the trend. We believe by grounding innovation in the core values of the brand, consumers can help ensure brands and producers are focusing on the trends that are right for their brand specifically.



About the Author

Anna Saffer is director of new product development at dunnhumbyUSA. She leads dunnhumbyUSA's product innovation capability and is responsible for the development of sophisticated solutions that allow manufacturers to think differently about their innovation through data and insights.

What Do People Really Want?

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

Nobody handles consumer data better than dunnhumby, so when it lays out a case that producers and marketers ought to focus on core values, one should heed its findings. Yet one is reminded of French statesman Georges Clemenceau, who repeated the common expression that the voice of the people was the voice of God and added that it was the function of leaders to follow that voice “shrewdly.” Into that one word, much cynicism and skepticism was packed.

For the industry, the challenge is how to reconcile the dunnhumby insights — “Natural Sweeteners, Responsibly Produced, Fermented Foods, Small Batch Goods and Religious Standards,” etc. — with the fact that the fastest growing retailer in America is the deep discounter Aldi. How will the industry reconcile the idea that “produce consumers are interested in supporting the little guy” with the fact that the largest retailer is Wal-Mart?

Items such as soda, processed meat products, and frozen dinners are among the top items sold by supermarkets, so how are we to reconcile that factor with the consumer desire, as dunnhumby reports, to care about how their food is raised, to support small producers, and do something for the environment?

Part of the issue is that ascertaining consumer preferences, in the absence of price, poses odd issues. Capitalism is different than democracy. Votes in a democracy tell us what people want, but votes in the marketplace are specifically designed to tell us what consumers want most.

Presumably, many people would, in the absence of price, prefer diamonds to cubic zirconias and Ferraris to Fords. When a consumer says, “Price is still a factor in my choice, but if I find these products [organic, natural, etc.] at prices that are not totally out of line with traditional grocery prices, then I will buy,” one is not certain what to make of it. A price that is “totally out of line” represents different thresholds for each person.

The USDA says organic sales account for less than 5 percent of food sales — and that

Votes in a democracy tell us what people want, but votes in the marketplace are specifically designed to tell us what consumers want most.

is by dollars, not volume, which would be significantly less. It also includes a great deal of “accidental” organic purchases, which is when a retailer only stocks the organic item on low-volume SKUs to avoid having to procure and slot two items.

So, once again, when a consumer says, “I would not buy any of the above-mentioned products unless it also said ‘organic’ ... otherwise, all those labels you are stating are meaningless,” how common could these sentiments possibly be?

Part of the problem is that none of these terms are value-neutral. There is a zeitgeist to the times, and asking consumers if they prefer “responsibly produced” is like asking if they favor helping blind old ladies cross the street. One can’t answer negatively without identifying oneself as a horrible person. Who precisely is in favor of “irresponsibly produced” food?

Many of these terms are so complicated that claiming affiliation with them is more an expression of an aesthetic preference than it is an explanation of what kind of food production one prefers.

Which is more responsible: a farm that hires foreign workers at higher pay than they could get at home, but still very little by U.S. standards; a farm that relocates to Mexico and pays even less than its American competitors do, but more than is common in Mexico; or a farm that invests heavily in automation and hires very few workers, but pays them much higher wages?

There is no possibility of a label that will

explore this issue in any meaningful way. Indeed, it is unlikely that significant numbers of consumers are inclined or able to evaluate these issues even if websites and whatnot provide total transparency.

In this sense, the dunnhumby report simply gives guidance for marketers to position themselves so consumers of a product can feel good about being aligned with it. This is a wise reminder that consumers do consider more than the end product.

One suspects a lot of these things only impact purchase if there is a negative sentiment in the knowledge base of the consumer. In other words, it is hard to imagine how consumers would even know — much less that it would have much impact on purchasing — if a farm pays its workers 10 percent more. But a discovery that a farm illegally abuses its staff and withholds wages might lead people to boycott the products of that firm.

Many of the words used in this study have little real meaning. Local, for example, is not necessarily small-scale. And there are questions that presume consumers already have expectations for these “local” products, which could be defined differently by each individual: more flavorful, less expensive, or fresher condition.

We take the dunnhumby report, add to it feedback we get from retailers, and come up with this: Primarily consumers base their purchasing decisions on the same factors they always have: price, quality, variety and convenience. As the world becomes more sophisticated, people want to present a face to their community, to their family, to themselves, of doing the right thing and of being on the right side. In today’s world, that means being a foodie, supporting local, being pro-environment, and in favor of good conditions for labor.

So it behooves producers to position themselves this way, but the emphasis must remain on efficient production of quality goods as most consumers are not prepared to pay a premium on sub-par goods to support this ethos — although they might pay a premium to avoid being associated with an egregious wrongdoer. **pb**

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Phone: (562) 497-1012
Email: carole@wafc.com
Website: wafc.com

MAY 6 - 8, 2015 SIAL CHINA

Conference Venue: Shanghai New International Expo Centre, Shanghai, China
Conference Management: SIAL Group, Paris, France
Phone: 33 (0)1 76 77 13 33
Email: exhibit-sial-china@comexposium.com
Website: sialchina.com

MAY 16 - 19, 2015 NATIONAL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION SHOW

Conference Venue: The International Foodservice Marketplace, McCormick Place, Chicago, IL
Conference Management: National Restaurant Association, Chicago, IL
Phone: (312) 580-5410 • Fax: (312) 853-2548
Email: nraregistration@restaurant.org
Website: restaurant.org/show

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Conference Venue: McCormick Place, Chicago, IL
Conference Management: National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, Arlington, VA
Phone: (703) 934-4700 • Fax: (703) 934-4899
Email: aff@cmgexpo.com
Website: nasdatradeshow.org

JUNE 3 - 5, 2015 THE LONDON PRODUCE SHOW AND CONFERENCE

Conference Venue: The Grosvenor House Hotel, London, England
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Phone: U.S. - (561) 994-1118
UK - 44 (0) 20 3143 3222
Email: info@LondonProduceShow.co.uk
Website: londonproduceshow.co.uk

JUNE 8 - 10, 2015 UNITED FRESH CONVENTION

Conference Venue: McCormick Place Convention Center, Chicago, IL
Conference Management: United Fresh Produce Association, Washington D.C.
Phone: (202) 303-3420
Email: jwoodside@unitedfresh.org
Website: unitedfreshshow.org

JUNE 8 - 11, 2015 FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE SHOW

Conference Venue: McCormick Place, Chicago, IL
Conference Management: Food Marketing Institute, Arlington, VA
Phone: (202) 452-8444 • Fax: (202) 429-4519
Email: mgrizzard@fmi.org
Website: fmi.org

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Conference Venue: Jacob Javits Convention Center, New York, NY
Conference Management: Specialty Food Association, New York, NY
Phone: (212) 482-6440 Fax: (212) 482-6459
Email: eriveria@specialtyfood.com
Website: fancyfoodshows.com

JULY 11 -14, 2015 INSTITUTE OF FOOD TECHNOLOGIES ANNUAL MEETING + FOOD EXPO

Conference Venue: McCormick Place South, Chicago, IL
Conference Management: Institute of Food Technologists, Chicago, IL
Phone: (312) 782-8424 • Fax: (312) 416-7933
Email: info@ift.org
Website: ift.org

JULY 14, 2015 SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA FRESH PRODUCE & FLORAL EXPO

Conference Venue: Disneyland Hotel, Anaheim, CA
Conference Management: Fresh Produce & Floral Council, Anaheim, CA
Phone: (714) 739-0177
Email: info@fpfc.org
Website: fpfc.org

JULY 24 - 26, 2015 PMA FOODSERVICE CONFERENCE TOURS & EXPO 2015

Conference Venue: Monterey Conference Center, Monterey, CA
Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE
Phone: (302) 738-7100 • Fax: (302) 731-2409
Email: bkeota@pma.com
Website: pma.com

AUGUST 23 - 25, 2015 WESTERN FOODSERVICE & HOSPITALITY EXPO

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Conference Management: Urban Expositions, Shelton, CT
Phone: (203) 484-8051
Email: atencza@urban-expo.com
Website: westernfoodexpo.com

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New Leaf Community Markets

Building relationships with farmers to expand its independent niche.

BY OSCAR KATOV

The relationship between New Leaf Community Markets and its partnering farmers sets the independently operated grocery chain apart from the competition, says Maroka Kawamura, produce director and New Leaf veteran of 15 years.

“Not many companies of our size are really working with farmers directly,” says Kawamura, who is responsible for six of New Leaf’s seven stores scattered across 70 miles on California’s central coast. “It means a huge benefit for us, enjoying direct access to quality products without having a distributor center. It’s the defining aspect of how we operate, and has an impact on every department in the store, such as prepared foods. For example, the same quality gourmet cheese available in the store for a customer to take home also goes into our sandwiches.”

In her position, Kawamura’s responsibilities range from approving vendors to developing business programs and policies — but there is no centralized buying. About 95 percent of the produce sold at New Leaf locations is organic, and each store does its own buying.

As New Leaf’s reliance on farms has grown, so has the strength of the connection between each store and farmer. Each store’s produce manager works with about 15 farms in summer and eight in winter, says Kawamura, who began working for New Leaf in 2006. “It’s our strong differentiation from competitors in the marketplace. In each

store, the produce manager has authority to buy products from those farms. There’s a lot more awareness by the store produce manager to know where products are coming from — to have his finger on the pulse in terms of seasons and deliveries.”

With its emphasis on fresh organics, New Leaf maintains a disciplined replenishment program without a distribution center. “Sometimes that’s challenging,” says Kawamura. The stores receive product six days a week from its principal distributors, Earl’s Organic in San Francisco and Nor-Cal in Sacramento, and from direct farm delivery. In the summer, there is no need for a warehouse since the peppers, cucumbers, zucchini and melons come directly from farms.

“Some farmers offer six-day schedules, while smaller ones will give us two- and three-day schedules,” she says. “By the time we add up all our different sources, we’re getting products into the store every day of the week.”

Another dimension to the relationship is the interest by produce managers in the development of unique products, such as the Trumpet Royale mushroom, which had brisk sales for \$26 per pound. “We also have a couple of really fantastic farmers who develop products such as a dry-farmed tomato,” says Kawamura. “It’s a tomato that is not irrigated, that’s really flavorful, with a short window of 10 weeks — something that people wait for year after year. And we also have some great orchards for heirloom apples and Meyer lemons.



About 95 percent of the produce sold at New Leaf locations is organic, and each store does its own buying. Produce managers work with about 15 farms in summer and eight in winter in addition to the company's two principal distributors (Earl's Organic and Nor-Cal).

“We also have some good strawberry vendors that are growing the Chandler variety versus just Albions that you can get everywhere. Bunch broccoli is another thing that’s pretty unique that we really like in our stores. There are farms that do really great variety potatoes — something beyond getting Russet, or red, or Yukon. So, there are a lot of really unique varieties we have access to just by having the relationships with farms.

Every New Leaf store has a hot bar (that changes out multiple times a day), salad bar, bakery and full deli case. Five stores offer rotisserie chicken and two offer fresh pizza. There is also a sit-down space where customers can eat lunch or take a break, says Kawamura.

Like other independent operators across the country, New Leaf recognizes that additional marketing goes beyond the local newspaper. “Our focus has shifted to electronic media,” says Kawamura. “We do a lot of e-blasts from our marketing department to our email lists, not just sales information but about events that might be coming up, or cooking classes. We also use social media — such as a Facebook page, which is tailored for each store. In the communities where our stores are located, we support a lot of fitness events, such as marathons where we put up a

tent and provide grab-bags of fruit and water at the finish line.”

When founder Scott Roseman opened the first New Leaf in Santa Cruz 30 years ago, he emphasized healthy food and organics. “In contributing to community welfare and development, and involvement in environmental programs, New Leaf also has become a force for good, other than just selling food,” he says.

Roseman describes a new route to meeting rigorous standards of social and environmental responsibility, accountability and transparency, through a nonprofit world organization called B Corporation. Functioning in 33 countries in more than 60 industries, B Corporation offers certification to businesses — New Leaf was the second grocery chain in the world to receive this certification — meeting those high standards. The first B Corporation chain is Portland, OR-based New Seasons Market, which acquired New Leaf Community Markets in November 2013 as a wholly owned subsidiary.

“When I learned there was a way to certify my business as one that makes a difference in the world, that makes the world a better place, I immediately jumped right on it,” he says. “We had been operating as a B Corp for

years, and this certification was made for companies like ours. When I started New Leaf, I committed to giving 10 percent of our profits back to the community — because I wanted to do that as a good business citizen, but more importantly, as a model that I thought all businesses should do. If we’re fortunate enough to be successful, we can certainly share in that success with our community.”

New Leaf also developed a profit-sharing plan for employees, says Roseman, “which allows them to share in whatever success we created together. Add that to the product we’re offering — natural and organic foods that promotes health for our customers and sustainability to our planet. So becoming a B Corp was a natural fit for us.” **pb**

Editor’s Note: We thank the Food Marketing Institute for its recommendation of independent members who are recognized for their outstanding produce operation in this series of PRODUCE BUSINESS articles.





JIM PREVOR'S

PERISHABLE PUNDIT

WHAT IS IN A BRAND? Will Marketing Boost Sales Of Inconsistent Produce? Industry Issue vs. Individual Opportunity

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT 04.07.2015

After PMA announced its million dollar contribution to a new promotional effort designed to increase produce consumption, we wrote a piece titled, "Solving The Right Problems," in the March issue of *PRODUCE BUSINESS*.

Much of the piece was devoted to the question of how we know what is the right problem to solve. For example, we pointed out something that might possibly have a great short-term impact, say a new salad bar, could, if children put together bad combinations, be less effective at boosting long term consumption than giving the children composed salads that have been carefully designed to be easy to digest and delicious. So the dilemma for the industry becomes: Is the problem getting children exposed to fruits and vegetables, or is the problem making sure children eat produce that is deliciously prepared?

In addressing PMA's initiative, we were interested in the question of whether the trade's problem is actually a lack of marketing. Here is what we wrote:

...the Produce Marketing Association recently unveiled its support for a major new marketing campaign for the industry — contributing \$1 million to kick it off. The campaign is being led by the Partnership for a Healthier America and is basically a marketing campaign to promote fruit and vegetable consumption.

There are many things to be said about these efforts, but one of the more interesting questions is to assess whether the problem holding back consumption is inadequate marketing. Of course it is well known that Coca-Cola outspends the entire produce industry on marketing — many times over. And it is easy to focus on this fact. In fact, many in the produce industry like to focus on this fact because it implies they are doing everything well and the problem is beyond their control. "If the industry had access to the Coca-Cola marketing budget, then consumption would boom."

Well, we bow before no man in our respect for the power of proper marketing, and individual companies can certainly differentiate themselves through marketing efforts. But whether the industry's issue is really a lack of marketing is most uncertain. Many a peach sold is virtually inedible. Children love blueberries, but the sweetness is irregular, and even the same brand of "easy peel" citrus peels inconsistently through the year.

In other words, produce is very unpredictable. Today, marketing an individual company's produce under a

brand umbrella might make sense. Love Beets can be consistently delicious; POM juices never vary. Branded items can consign lower quality to a different label. But the industry as a whole can't distinguish — it markets lousy produce along with good. It has no mechanism for excluding anyone or anything.

Is the trade's problem really a lack of marketing? Or is it inconsistent product that often disappoints the promise any marketing effort would make to consumers?

Put another way, you can't put the cart before the horse. Branding involves a promise to the consumer, and if the brand can't consistently deliver on that promise, the marketing will just ensure consumers get dissatisfied faster.

If you are interested in a luxury vacation, you may sign up to stay at the Four Seasons — indeed you may do so blindly, never having seen the resort, because you trust the Four Seasons brand will bring a very high-end luxury experience. Indeed, you may pay a premium to stay at the hotel just because of the name. But it is not just the name — it is the consistent delivery, the brand promise-keeping, that justifies both the purchase and the premium.

Now if Four Seasons can't deliver on that promise — if sometimes you received a high-end experience and sometimes you received a poor experience — all the marketing dollars in the world would not help.

We note that Bolthouse is behind a lot of these initiatives, indeed PMA seems to showcase Bolthouse as an example for the industry. The thing about Bolthouse, however, is that Campbell's Soup didn't pay \$1.5 billion in order to grow some carrots.

In an interesting presentation to Wall Street, Jeff Dunn, president of Bolthouse, made the point whereas the actual carrot category is growing 3 percent a year, the beverage category is growing 15 percent a year and dressings 6 percent a year. Bolthouse itself was seeing 24 percent growth in its refrigerated dressing sales and a two-year compound annual growth rate on beverages of 15 percent. Put another way, for a company such as Bolthouse, money spent on marketing fresh produce is a great idea because Bolthouse sees that marketing as a halo for the sale not just of low margin fresh produce but also of fast-growing and high margin dressings and juices.

This is great and we wish the people at Bolthouse all good fortune. We admire many of the very innovative and clever things Bolthouse is doing — catch its website game — but, truth be told, Bolthouse is an entirely different position than 99 percent



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of produce companies and will profit from marketing in a way that these other companies can't.

There are many things about initiatives of these types that raise questions. Typically they get good funding for the first year or two and then the funding dries up. Then there is the question of rollout potential ... the initial campaign is to be conducted in two small cities — Fresno, California, and Hampton Roads, Virginia — plus there will be some national social media efforts. It is budgeted at \$5 million.

So let us be optimistic and assume it actually works, consumption goes up in those two cities, and let us assume good research is done to prove that.

Those two cities have a population of approximately 2.1 million and the U.S. population is 320 million, so a national rollout on this scale would cost about \$762 million. Is that a feasible amount to raise under any circumstances?

The real question is will it work? Last time the industry considered the possibility of a national campaign, we profiled the discussion. The industry didn't see enough potential to fund it. This time PMA provided the start-up industry funds, but the question of whether it will boost consumption remains.

We, of course, hope this works. We want PMA's investment of \$1 million to earn great returns for the industry and merit expansion of the program, but we are not certain that the problem is correctly identified. Until we can promise consumers that if you buy a peach, you will get a delicious peach-like experience, it is unclear that blowing our horn to consumers will actually help.

After we wrote the column in *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, the head produce executive for one of the top five produce retailers in America sent a note:

Just had to send a word of encouragement.

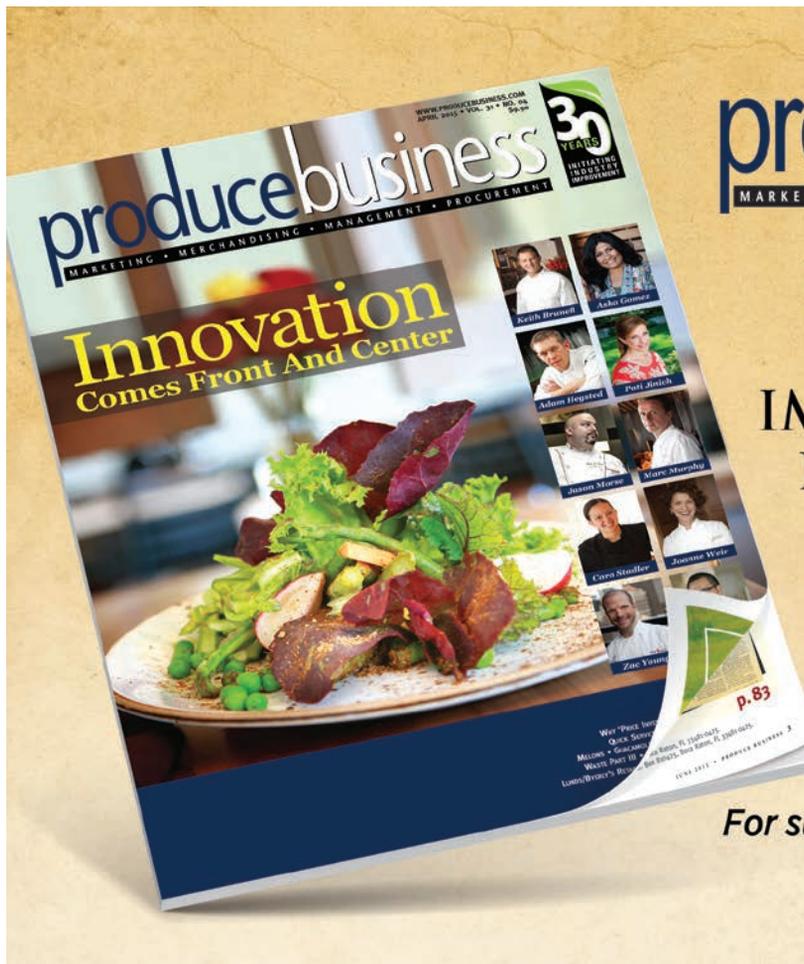
Loved your article. You are right on message. "Marketing" is an individual issue/opportunity. "Flavor" is the real industry issue/opportunity.

Well done!

When thinking about Coca-Cola's marketing budget, it is worth remembering every bottle of Coca-Cola, everywhere in the world, tastes exactly the same, every single day. It is the consistency of that promise that makes branding possible — and marketing profitable.

So how do we, as an industry, build this prerequisite for successful marketing investments? Perhaps that is the question.

A national rollout on this scale would cost about \$762 million. Is that a feasible amount to raise under any circumstances?



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WEIS MARKETS

Closing The Loop On Sustainability

BY MIRA SLOTT



Considering the previous recipients of PRODUCE BUSINESS' Retail Sustainability Award — H-E-B, Kroger, Publix, Safeway, Wakefern/Shoprite and Wegmans — the magnitude of the news set in. Patti Olenick, sustainability manager for this year's winner, Weis Markets — the 163-store, family chain, headquartered in Sunbury, PA, with stores scattered among five eastern states, — says she was taken aback. "We were honored and elated, but did we have enough to fill the pages?" she and her execu-

utive team contemplated after receiving word of this unexpected recognition.

If only Olenick realized the novella unfolding as she welcomed us to the corporate headquarters of the publicly held — yet independently spirited retailer — to begin a tour of the new Weis/Selinsgrove store, then its remodeled flagship located in Lewisburg, PA, followed by a visit to its bustling centralized distribution center in Milton, and lastly to a burgeoning "Urban Fresh"-format store near Philadelphia. The

award's validity resonated as the corporate team shared the company's story and vision — revealing the latest sustainability developments.

SUSTAINABLE TO THE PRODUCE CORE

Weis is closing the loop on sustainability from field to fork; from family farms to family tables; from unsaleable food to food banks; to 360-degree composting and recycling programs; as well as impactful energy reduction initiatives. All the while bringing its employees, suppliers, customers and the industry along for the ride.

Innovative sustainable initiatives start at the heart of the produce department — ranging from a resourceful way to recycle troublesome waxed cardboard produce boxes [see "Recycling Wax Cardboard" on page 40] to pioneering closed-door refrigerated cases for bagged salads, explains Dan Koch, vice president of fresh. Piggybacking off the chain's unique commitment to enclosed refrigerated cases for dairy products and meat, the choice is proving a solid return on investment — not only to save energy, but also to prolong product



(L-R) Kevin Small, Patti Olenick and John Lerch at the "Urban Fresh" store.

quality and shelf life — while maintaining sales numbers of open refrigerated cases, according to Kevin Small, vice president of construction and

development.

The store development department is the central catalyst for all things sustainable within the corporate structure.

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Behind the scenes without bravado, Weis Markets has been turning the pages on sustainability since its founding in 1912.

Initially, the Weis brothers, Sigmund and Harry, worked in their father's general store. Eventually, they opened their first Weis Pure Foods corner grocery store, embracing local farmers, piloting promising technologies, and inventing solutions to long-standing industry problems, explains Dan Koch, vice president of fresh.

Continuing the generational legacy, Robert Weis recently stepped down as chairman after 69 years at the company to serve as an adviser, as his son Jonathan Weis, president and chief executive, is taking the reins.

TAKING OWNERSHIP

"Yes, we have been publicly traded on the New York Stock Exchange since 1965, but the Weis Family lives by a philosophy of being self-reliant and independent," as well as diehard stewards of the environment, says



(L-R) Weis associate; Patti Olenick, sustainability manager; Kurt Schertle, COO; Ken Whitacre, Publisher of PRODUCE BUSINESS; Weis floral associate; David Gose, senior vice president of operations; and Weis associate.

Dennis Curtin, director of communications, and 20-year veteran at Weis.

The company owns and operates its own dairy, ice cream, and meat processing plants, as well as in-house, fresh-cut produce program.

"While a lot of supermarket companies contract with a third party to supply their stores, we do it ourselves through a 1.1

million-square-foot distribution center near our store support center, which is about 12 miles away in Milton, PA," says Joe Kleman, vice president distribution.

The East Coast chain's radius spans five states; primarily Pennsylvania, with a good presence in Maryland, as well as New York, New Jersey, and a couple of stores in West Virginia.

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Titus Hoover's family farm is one of roughly 100 local farmers Weis partners with to supply produce. The Hoover family established a relationship with the store more than 50 years ago.

Other retailers typically choose to run sustainability through human resources. For Weis, it made sense to build and streamline the sustainability platform using sustainable material in building renovations. This decision also supports new store openings and various formats, explains Olenick.

"We invested more than half a billion dollars in our store base to upgrade, to build new stores, and to acquire some locations," says Small.

"Our focus in the past year was a more targeted, tactical approach to capitalize on these significant investments in our store base, but we also want to ensure we have the products people desire; what people want today versus five years ago is ever-changing," says Koch, noting a push toward more healthy, natural and organic offerings to complement its ingrained locally grown produce programs through relationships with third- and fourth-generation regional farmers as well as connections from state agriculture departments.

YOUR NEIGHBOR'S FARMER

"Our local produce is one of our key touchstones," says Koch. "In a given year, we'll buy 25 million pounds of local

“Weis has been very good to us. Some people are hard to deal with. I feel Weis has more respect for the farmer. When a lot of product is crowding the market, Weis doesn't beat you around on price.”

TITUS HOOVER, LOCAL FARMER

produce supplied by approximately 100 local farmers in the markets we serve.”

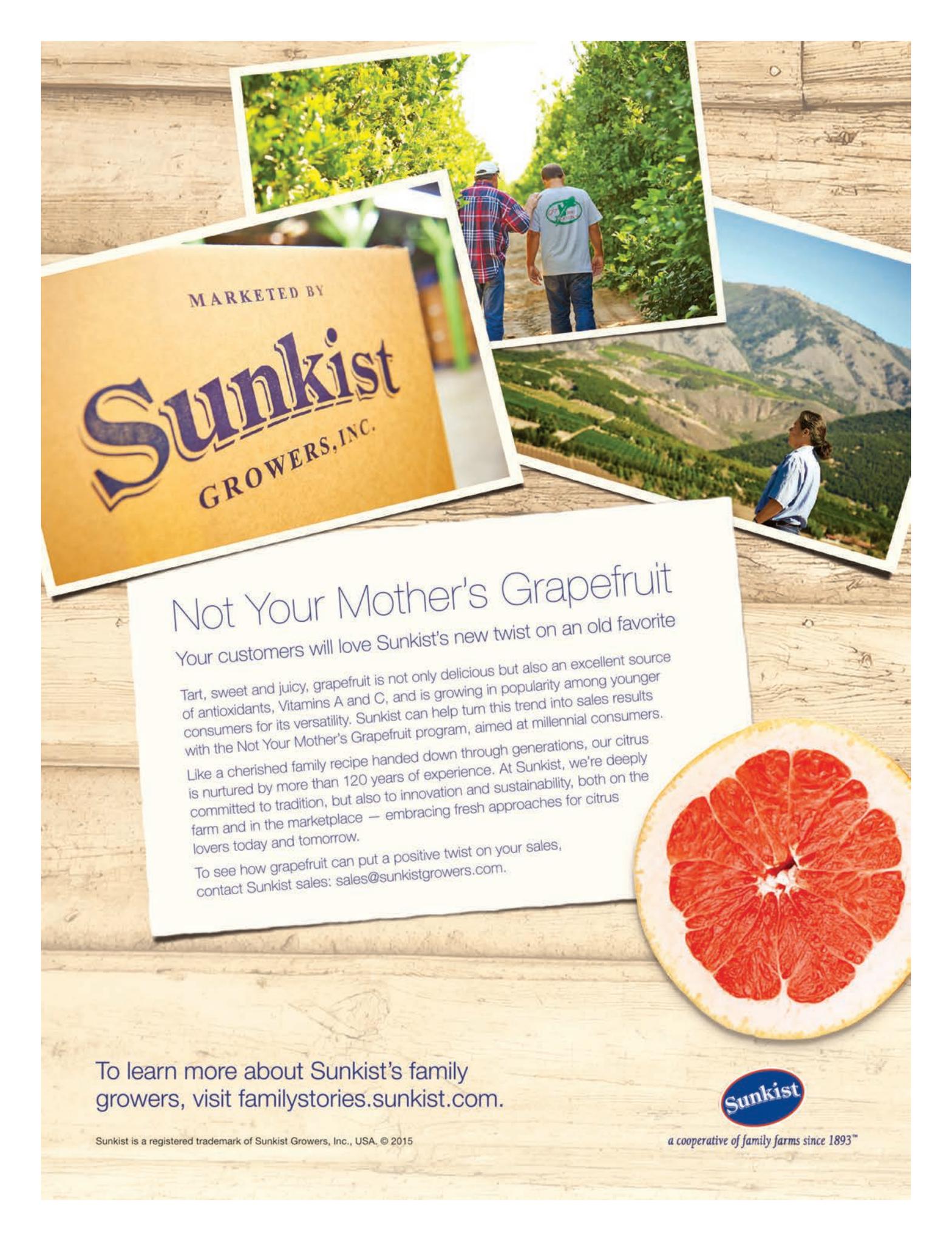
"If it weren't for Weis Markets, we probably would have quit a long time ago," says Titus Hoover, regarding his 600-acre family farm in Port Treverton, PA. "My dad started supplying fresh fruits and vegetables to Weis more than 50 years ago, and I've been working with Weis for 20 years," he says.

"Weis has been very good to us," he says. "Some people are hard to deal with. I feel Weis has more respect for the farmer. When a lot of product is crowding the market, Weis doesn't beat

you around on price. Margins are tough. I remember when I was a little boy (maybe 14 years old) and my dad got the same amount for a box of tomatoes as you can today. Sometimes it feels people want to put the little guys out of business," he says.

"Our season goes from the middle of June through October, and we're pretty diversified in product," says Hoover. "We ship everything to the Weis distribution center, which is only 26 miles away."

The retail chain has a soft spot for its farmers like Hoover, whose photo and personal story graces Weis produce



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Customers have an opportunity to learn about local growers. Customers can scan the QR code on signage to watch a video about the farm and its produce.

departments with attention-grabbing floor signage: “Cool as a Cucumber, Titus Hoover is a pretty awesome guy. It takes nothing less than the coolest of cool to grow everything he’s growing on his Port Treverton, PA farm. From tomatoes to cucumbers, this cool cat

produces it all. From the farm to the store in 24 hours.”

“When there’s a grand opening, I sometimes come to the store to greet customers,” he says. “Recently, I went to a store to shop, and I walked right by my picture on the big sign. Customers were so busy buying the fresh produce, no one noticed it was me.”

Customers have plenty of opportunity to get to know the local growers. For instance, a descriptive sign above each local apple variety at the flagship store highlights the farmer that grew it. Customers can scan the QR code shown on signage with their smartphones and watch a dynamic video that brings them right to the farm.

Farmers’ photos are also integrated on the ever-changing reusable bag designs at check out. Weis also promotes the PA Preferred program and other state produce campaigns for its local markets.

“We’re proud sponsors of the Pennsylvania Farm Show, which is the largest indoor agricultural exposition in the U.S., held every January in Harrisburg, PA,” says Olenick.

In addition to supporting local farmers with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture at the show, Weis designs a small-scale replica of its grocery store

and showcases the local agriculture products it purchases, such as apples, potatoes, milk and beer. “We do a big floral display as well,” says Olenick.

Weis also sponsors a culinary kitchen with local chefs. “Next year we are looking to bring in local hydro greens to supplement the produce selection, since there isn’t as much local produce available at that time,” says Olenick. At the Farm Show, Weis also donated \$10,000 to the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank.

Periodically, Weis honors its local farmers and brings them together at different events. “Weis invited us for a growers’ meeting and supper,” says Hoover. “It gave us a chance to get to know some of the other growers, buyers, and Weis family,” he says.

Weis executives collaborate with like-minded associations and organizations to build necessary infrastructures and industry-wide solutions. Through Olenick’s participation with the FMI’s Sustainability Executive Committee, the company gladly shares sustainability practices with retail competitors to reach new plateaus as well. [See “Saying No To Landfills.”]

“Patti Olenick has been a great leader and member of FMI’s Sustainability Executive Committee for the past four years,”



In addition to supporting local farmers with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture at the show, Weis designs a small-scale replica of its grocery store and showcases the local agriculture products it purchases, such as apples, potatoes, milk and beer.

says Jeanne Von Zastrow, senior director of sustainability at FMI. "She was chair of this committee in 2013, which includes 18 companies working to identify issues and develop tools and resources to help our industry move faster with sustainability practices in our industry." Olenick is also a key player in the Food Waste Reduction Alliance, a multi association effort to reduce, repurpose and recycle food waste and keep it out of landfill. "Her enthusiasm and hard work has been an incredible asset to FMI and the pre-competitive collaborative work to help our industry — including developing the Food Waste Reduction Best Practices Toolkit and our Sustainable Sourcing Guide," she says.

Capitalizing on the most proven and promising sustainability programs, Weis also is unafraid to forge new territory and challenge the industry's status quo, according to John Lerch, director of energy and facilities and 36-year veteran with the company.

Weis Markets brings an important piece to the industry's multifaceted retail sustainability puzzle. Acknowledging jagged edges, Weis executives amped up the mission several years ago. According to Small, the company recognized the need to systemize evolving sustainability programs with

clarity by using consistent marketing and colorful brand messaging within the company, throughout the supply chain, and directly with its customers and communities.

ICONIC MESSAGING

In an effort to align its message, explains Olenick, Weis highlights five pillars of its sustainability program. These are represented by cleverly designed icons represented on store

signage and marketing materials to symbolically show how Weis: recycles and reduces waste; reduces energy use; reduces water use; impacts the community; and remains earth friendly.

While the icons are similar in size, design and number of descriptive benefits, each element encompasses a varied range of the company's overall sustainability strategy and the paybacks. For instance, Weis dived deep into the energy pillar, which was "the low-hanging fruit,"



Jeremy Hazlak, energy projects manager



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Weis proudly promotes its five pillars of sustainability.



Weis shares with shoppers how the store is conserving energy.



Signage throughout every store initiates a call to sustainable action.

by improving refrigeration efficiencies, alleviating dangerous refrigeration leakage, and generating significant savings, according to Jeremy Hazlak, energy projects manager.

"The greatest impact on carbon footprint is refrigerant. The second would be electricity," he says.

Overall, the company's goals are to reach a 20-percent reduction in Green-

house Gas Emissions (GHE) by 2020, and to reduce energy use by 2 percent each year, says Olenick.

"We're very committed to EPA's Green-Chill program and what it represents in

ONE DISTRIBUTION CENTER SERVES AS WEIS' EPICENTER

The DC is at the epicenter of the chain's sustainability loops, from recycling to logistics and managed transportation systems. "We don't want to put anything in the trash," says Joe Klemin, vice president distribution. "We want to be as efficient as possible, leverage resources, and create closed loop systems," he says.

In addition, as part of its corporate sustainability mandates, Weis intends to replace 50 percent of its tractor fleet with cleaner fuel vehicles within three years, combined with its fuel savings measures.

"The biggest thing on the radar is working on cutting-edge transportation strategies," says Klemin, pointing to its partnership with TOPCO Associates, the member-owner co-op headquartered in Elk Grove Village, IL, for managing inbound freight. Weis is looking to elevate those efforts. TOPCO is branching out to different categories and services, and managed transportation is one of those areas, according to Klemin.

"Linking up the supply chain distribution network and merchandising is new to us," says Chris Sands, business analyst for distri-



Weis intends to replace 50 percent of its tractor fleet with cleaner fuel vehicles within three years, combined with its fuel savings measures.

bution. "We are peeling away the layers and fully exposing all the true costs," he continues. "Empty miles are a killer. We want to make sure we're getting more bang for the buck on the backhauls. We will also help our vendors get better as they have backhaul issues as well."

"We're just getting into local opportunities to backhaul produce. We looked at

potatoes, apples and cabbage," says Sands.

Locally grown produce is channeled from the farms through the centralized DC, where it is inspected and monitored for quality and safety and then distributed to Weis stores. In that respect, Weis avoids supplemental distribution arrangements on a store-by-store basis with nearby farmers, according to Dan Koch, vice president of fresh. **pb**

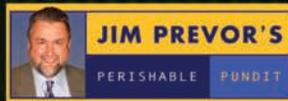
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Weis' floral department is removing all its refrigerated cases for a more European-style of merchandising.

efforts to reduce refrigerant emissions and decrease impact on the ozone layer as well as climate change," says Olenick. To date, 12 of its stores achieved EPA GreenChill Certification Awards.

"We have a store pending LEED certi-

fication, and we learned a lot of measures we continue to implement in remodels and new stores." One example of an energy efficiency measure the Weis team learned from the LEED store was a reduction in its

lighting usage.

"It has not impacted sales, so we will install skylights in every new store as a standard building feature," says Olenick.

In what may appear at first ironic, the floral department is taking away all its refrigerated cases for a more European-style of merchandising, according to Lucy Jason, director of floral, who joined Weis from Wegmans — where she worked in floral for some 23 years. "As long as we have the freshest product, buy from the right growers, and turn product frequently when it comes in the door, refrigeration makes no difference," she says. "A big piece [to the transition] is taking the refrigeration out. The bigger piece is redesigning the program and expanding to be a full-service florist in a new footprint."

Originally, a décor decision, Olenick says when floral decided to pull all the refrigerated cases out, it also served to conserve energy.

WIN-WIN

"For a sustainability program to work, it must have a practical aspect to it,"

says Small. "Sometimes, you have to sacrifice something in the process, but we really haven't had to do that."

"Refrigeration technologies we employed provided better, more consistent delivery of the refrigeration environment for the products," says Lerch. "The lighting conversions generated less heat on the product. The old fluorescent light waves would turn the potatoes green. Our LED track lighting doesn't have those light frequencies, so product stays fresher longer. It also helps us illuminate produce items in a targeted, more appealing way to maximize value," explains Lerch at a tour of a new format "Urban Fresh" store outside of Philadelphia, PA, which is designed with a farmers market-style décor.

Small says the aesthetic of the "Urban Fresh" store is "more urban and edgy than our new Selinsgrove location." The format is also one of two stores piloting a program that houses closed-door refrigerated cases for bagged salads.

"Even the doors on the bagged salad cases are a win-win for us, because it



Interior of Weis' "Urban Fresh"-concept store, which provides a more farmers market-style shopping experience.

allowed us to improve the life of the product and the presentation," says Small. "Shelf life is greatly enhanced with the doors. Product quality is more consistent, and the cold chain is better maintained. It is slightly more money,

but the hurdle has been convincing merchandisers it won't decrease sales."

OPENING THE DOOR ON CLOSED DOOR CASES

Retail resistance to closed doors on

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Bagged salads merchandised in refrigeration units are proving successful for Weis' "Urban Fresh" stores.

fresh fruits and vegetables in the produce department, which is traditionally celebrated for its intoxicating aromas and tactile experiences, is not surprising.

"The concern is always putting a

barrier between the customer and a product, but we found this has not been an issue," says Hazlak.

"We examined sales in stores that have doors on the bagged salad cases

versus those that don't, and we see no changes — no increase or decrease," says Hazlak, "But no change is positive because of the impression, or misconception, people in the industry have



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“We’re authentic and we’re sincere. We move deliberately once an initiative has our commitment. We’re faithful to it, and we see it through.”

KEVIN SMALL, VICE PRESIDENT OF CONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

about closed door cases.”

So is Weis considering putting any other produce items behind closed doors? Right now, it’s just the bagged salads. “As customers adapt to doors on refrigerated produce cases, then we’ll start to move ahead slowly, but I think we are as far as we’re going to go for a period of time,” says Small. “We’re authentic, and we’re sincere. We move deliberately once an initiative has our commitment. We’re faithful to it, and we see it through.”

In fact, the chain’s strategy of merchandising perishable products, including dairy items such as yogurt, inside closed-door, refrigerated cases can provide a fresher element. “Customers tell us they feel the product is going to be better maintained in consistent temperature, and yes, it definitely would be,” says Hazlak.

“We don’t have to defrost the cases as often in the refrigeration system cycle, where moisture collects and the temperature rises,” says Lerch. “With the

enclosed system, static pressure keeps all refrigerated air more dense, so everything remains at the same temperature.

“Customers are more likely to feel secure buying the product,” says Lerch, expounding that associates can explain to customers that product will stay fresher longer in the refrigerator at home

because the cold chain is maintained much better behind the glass.”

“Consumers don’t go digging for the product two or three back in the open case,” says Olenick. “They’ll grab it right off the front. Furthermore, it also makes shopping more comfortable for our customers. They tend to linger longer in a warm aisle compared to an open-case environment.”

It also doesn’t impact the quantity of the pack out compared to open cases. If anything, it would be increased, says Small, in terms of inventory issues and shelf space restraints in the produce department.

“Regarding the payback for reach-in doors on refrigerated cases — in particular when talking about bagged salads — we’re expecting a 2.8 year payback, or it can go as high as four years,” says Hazlak. “It’s still in its infancy as far as all the testing goes. We’re going a little above



Kevin Small, vice president of construction and development

SAYING NO TO LANDFILLS

Reducing food waste and reclaiming unsaleable food is a complex undertaking, especially when handling produce and other highly perishable items. Ideally, the goal is to donate safe, edible product to local food banks and other charitable organizations positioned to take it, or alternatively, get it to farms.

Weis gains advantages by utilizing its centralized distribution center to orchestrate recycling and unsaleable non-perishable food items for donation programs, according to Chris Sands, business analyst for distribution/transportation. “We have a deep list

of folks we donate to from here. Food banks will bring their trucks to this centralized location, through an integrated store-wide reclamation process,” he says.

If it’s perishable or fresh food for donation, it goes out from the store. “We have relationships with our statewide food banks, and they help us distribute through local organizations that are in need, such as churches, food kitchens and shelters that are getting the food out to the communities where it’s needed,” says Olenick. “We’re putting more emphasis at the store level, driven by the store manager, and all the

associates are part of the program.”

To scale the program, “we are putting together an infrastructure map anywhere it can be managed, coordinating efforts with organizations like the Food Waste Reduction Alliance, and even working with our competition to spur necessary infrastructure,” says Patti Olenick, sustainability manager for Weis. “Giant and Wegmans are down the road, and we’re fighting for the same customers, but we can all use the same food banks and foundational underpinnings to reduce the amount of food waste going to landfills,” she says. **pb**

and beyond as far as just putting doors on those cases. We're also making some big changes on the refrigeration racks with installing digital compressors, and still monitoring stores to watch the energy savings," says Hazlak.

"As we improve and remodel stores, other stores will be upgraded to this standardization when possible," says Small.

Olenick predicts, "It will be an industry standard at some point."

"What Weis Markets is doing with closed-door refrigerated cases for bagged salads is really exciting," says Dr. Yaguang (Sunny) Luo, research food technologist for the Beltsville, MD-based Food Quality Laboratory and Environmental Microbial and Food Safety Laboratory, USDA-ARS.

Dr. Luo played an integral role in ongoing USDA-ARS studies on the effects of commercial open-refrigerated displays under different operating conditions and their impact on the quality and microbial growth of packaged fresh-cut, leafy green products. According to Dr. Luo, maintaining proper storage temperature is critical for ensuring the quality

“What Weis Markets is doing with closed-door refrigerated cases for bagged salads is really exciting.”

DR. YAGUANG LUO, FOOD QUALITY LABORATORY, USDA-ARS

and safety of fresh-cut products.

However, substantial temperature variations within the widely used open-refrigerated display cases used in retail stores are known to present the technical challenge of complying with federal guidance temperature standards for the industry. Dr. Luo says closed-door refrigerated cases are a way to alleviate the problem.

"Storing packaged fresh-cut leafy greens behind clear glass doors was the most cost-effective solution to enable compliance with Food Code, with consistently low temperatures below 41

°F, yet above freezing," says Dr. Luo.

CALIBRATING THE 'TEMPERATURE' ON SUSTAINABILITY

"We were already practicing good stewardship, but we wanted to create a base to measure progress in everything we do," says Small.

RECYCLING WAX CARDBOARD AND OTHER WASTE

Typically wax cardboard is difficult to recycle. "There are no outlets for it," explains Patti Olenick, sustainability manager for Weis Markets. "We're able to partner with Enviro-Log [an eco-friendly, consumer products and recycling company headquartered in Fitzgerald, GA]. The arrangement is we collect the waxed cardboard in back of our stores, take it to our DC and load up a storage container provided by Enviro-Log, then transport it to the company's plant in Georgia.

"The cardboard is then converted into the Enviro-Log and sold back in our stores. Not only is it a green product that burns cleaner, but we are turning waste into product. In 2014, we recycled more than 400 tons of waxed boxes. To add on to that, we're avoiding disposal costs and there is no financial exchange through either party; it's about Weis providing a resource to Enviro-Log."

In 2014, Weis converted 35,261 tons of recycled waste in diverted landfill savings for the year, and it's on pace for similar results this year. "Our recycling rate for the company is 47 percent," says Olenick. The company's goal is to increase the recycling rate by 5 percent each year toward zero waste.

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Patti Olenick took Weis' produce composting pilot in a couple of stores and turned it into a robust, well-run food-composting program, which is now in 64 stores.

In 2008, Olenick was brought in as sustainability manager to help develop and facilitate the strategy, establish corporate goals and set baselines for growth.

"I used to work for the Pennsylvania State Department of Environmental Protection," reveals Olenick. "Weis was doing a produce composting pilot in a couple of stores, and sought my help to get it working." Which is exactly what she did and turned the pilot into a robust, well-run food-composting program, which is now in 64 stores. Plans are in motion for a chain-wide roll out.

"This year, our goal is to get all the Pennsylvania stores in the program, and then get the Maryland stores on board," she says. "Many produce departments shy away from composting, or give it up because it is financially or logistically untenable. Composting has to be cost-neutral compared to trash handling in order to rationalize pursuing it," acknowledges Olenick.

"One of the biggest costs is transportation. We have a local compost vendor, who has a farm with stone quarries," she says. In an effort to tie in its composting program to its customers — keeping motion in full circle from the stores and back again — Weis started selling bags of compost through the floral department.

Floral also participates in the store-

wide waste-management program by recycling floral buckets and plastic film sleeves, as well as using paper for

wrapping plants, explains the floral department's Jason.

"Our customers were buying our stock right out," says Jason, adding, Weis is certified through the U.S. Compost Council standards. While customers praised the composting idea, they often commented that the bags were too large and cumbersome. In response, Weis redesigned the compost bag to be smaller, lighter and easier to put in the cart. "We'll carry it year-round and it won't be a seasonal product any longer," says Olenick.

GREEN LEADERS

Olenick says sustainability initiatives used to be led by the voluntary efforts of a store manager. This past year, Weis created a store process coordinator position, and part of the job description is sustainability practices as well as being a "green leader."

"Now I have contacts in the stores, which allows better communication and a systematic approach. Internally, consistent sustainability messaging and clear tactical direction helps employees



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conduct practices correctly and also creates enthusiasm for the mission, which is critical for proper follow through," according to Olenick. She says green leaders in every store represent the "grassroots" efforts being made by each team.

"The green leaders are responsible for helping us educate and inform all employees of the company's sustainability initiatives. They also facilitate

“Weis Markets is truly a leader in sustainability practices in our field.”

JEANNE VON ZASTROW, FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE

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recycling, food donations, and our energy awareness program, where we teach all of our associates to conserve energy," says Olenick.

The green leaders started in the fall of 2014. Their first assignment was taking on the Grocery Stewardship Certification Program, which is a system designed by the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences (a nonprofit organization of international scientists, headquartered in Plymouth, MA) to help retailers reduce their environmental footprint, explains Olenick. She credits Hannaford Bros. Co. as an early adapter.

"Weis green leaders performed a complete green inventory in their stores, reported back to us, and that information is being summarized now," says Olenick. They have since gone through corporate energy awareness training, which includes instructional signage and a video.

"Also, we're distributing a communication board for each store with an energy report on it to monitor energy use status," says Olenick. "The communication board is the responsibility of the green leader. As a company, we send out information every month on how to perform better."

Weis Markets' Creating Energy Awareness Program is highlighted in FMI's sustainability guide for practitioners, as an exemplary case study of sustainability in action, according to FMI's Von Zastrow. "Weis Markets is truly a leader in sustainability practices in our field."

Continually cycling the wheels of sustainability, Weis is committed to protecting and improving the environment in tandem with product quality, safety and shelf life. More profoundly, Weis' efforts revitalize communities and the quality of life for the good of the broader public — bringing sustainability full circle.

pb



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AFTER 36 YEARS ON DIFFERENT
 ENDS OF THE FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN,
**ROGER PEPPERL PROVES
 HIS SUSTAINABILITY**

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

Globally sourced produce, groundbreaking varieties and growers as food industry celebrities were not in consumers' consciousness when Roger Pepperl started his retail career at Meijer, a Grand Rapids, MI-based supermarket chain with more than 200 stores today. Pepperl spent nearly 21 years at Meijer as a buyer/merchandiser before moving west and switching to the supply side — where he is currently the marketing director for Wenatchee, WA-based Stemilt Growers, LLC.

In the past six years, Pepperl held a variety of voluntary posts, including chairman of the Produce Marketing & Merchandising Council; member of the board of directors for the United Fresh Produce Association, and sat on its Center for Global Produce Sustainability Advisory Board; member of the Exhibitor Advisory Committee for the Produce Marketing Association; and an executive board member of the Produce for Better Health Foundation.

Where were you 30 years ago?

In 1985, I was working as a buyer/merchandiser in the produce office at Meijer in Lansing, MI. That's when the chain had less than 50 stores.

What was the produce department like in 1985?

The SKU counts were in the 400 range — not 1,300 like today. There was no organic produce. The only organic available was in the food co-ops located in college communities like where we lived near Michigan State University. Fresh-cut items were very simple: coleslaw, carrot sticks, celery sticks, water chestnuts and bamboo shoots. I remember one of our suppliers came up with a "Salad for Two" in a poly bag. We tried it, and it failed. We all knew it wouldn't work. I laugh at this experience as we know what happened with salad mixes today. PLU numbers were very basic and the apple category was Red Delicious, Golden Deli-



Roger Pepperl, today, at the Stemilt packing plant.

cious and Granny Smith in bulk. We had very limited products from South America, New Zealand and South Africa. Things were truly seasonal and it worked.

How would you characterize the overall retail environment back then?

Much simpler, and this [environment] had its advantages. Because of limited SKUs, product turns were very good and rotation skills were at their best. Staff knew all about the products and customer service was important. Local and regionalized grocery chains were the norm. Stores were not open 24 hours and that allowed for the refrigerated racks to be broken down daily and hosed clean. Fresh ice was also a part of the presentation as well as freshly vacuumed tables with lots of signage to promote and tell about the items.

When did things start to change, and what were the drivers of that change?

Things really changed in the 1990s.

Customers desired more choices, and this became the driver for change. Variety began to flourish with a Southern Hemisphere extension of the season. Much of the Southern Hemisphere product was grown for windows or calendar needs. Flavor lacked, and prices were high but the season was extended. Holland and Spain gave us new sources of dry vegetables from greenhouses and flew the product to the U.S. every week. Clementines came from Spain, not California. From 2000 on, the changes moved to convenience and variety. Variety reasoning changed from availability needs to new genetics and new items.

What led you to the supply side of the industry? What insights did you gain that could help retailers?

Being a Baby Boomer, my loyalty to my employer made it hard for me to leave, but in the end I did. The insight I learned was that not all produce products are created the same way, and a grower's passion can truly create a better

product. We all know the saying, “you get what you pay for,” but I truly understand this statement today. If I was back at retail, I would seek out people with passion and integrity as fast as I could and buy from them alone. Price is important, but selling products people want to eat is so much more important.

What are some of the biggest innovations you saw during your career in the produce industry?

For me, it's the new genetic development of the varieties, flavors and colors of fruits and vegetables; the containerization of the banana industry; globalization of the supply chain; optical sizing in packing lines and data research. The biggest renaissance is to inform consumers about “who grew my food.”

How would you describe the produce department today?

It's a high-speed growth area and the most successful part of a supermarket. It's the department, more than any other, that differentiates the store or chain from its competitors. Produce departments also deliver profit at a time when center store continues to slow. Yet, I would say the average produce department lacks employee product knowledge and signage is poor for an area with so many new items.

What is the greatest lesson you learned about retailing from your career?

Anyone can sell an item once, but a great eating experience delivers sustainable success. Also, we need to focus 80 percent of our time on how to sell consumers more produce and 20 percent on the transaction between supplier and retailer. The best retail/supplier relationships are based on building sales. The real sale is to the consumer who pushes the shopping cart or orders food online.

What do you think will drive the produce industry in the next 10 to 20 years?

I think produce will become ubiquitous. The channels will be so wide and deep. Online shopping will become 40 percent of the marketplace. “Who grew my food” [themes] will become the major marketing strategy for retailers. Branded produce will become the majority of offerings with new genetics trademarked to the grower becoming the differentiator. Branding is already taking off in the produce industry today. The produce department will be so much better because of this move. Better flavors and more sustainable agriculture will come out of this evolution.



(Top to Bottom): Pepper in 1993 at a banana plantation in Costa Rica and in 1987 at a papaya operation in Costa Rica as well.

What are the challenges holding the industry back?

Educating consumers on the wealth of new products. Retail signage lacks information about nutrition and flavor expectation. Best-in-class retailers have signage programs that tell a very compelling story about the produce they sell. However, too many stores have “visual clean” policies that leave only a business card white sign with the item's name and price. In addition, growers must focus more on flavor. Retailers need to focus on flavor, demand for it, and pay the price for it too. Low-priced goods often deliver nothing more than a cheap price. We must resist this type of transaction. Prod-

ucts that don't deliver an excellent eating experience are hurting all of us.

What advice would you give young retailers entering the produce industry?

Shop the stores you work for and purchase the products with your own money. If it feels good, you are probably doing the right things. Consumers judge our performance every day, so judge yourself like a consumer would. Fresh, friendly and fun should be the results of a produce operation. I also would tell young retailers they'll never be bored. Things change every season, every year and every day in produce. How much fun is that?

pb

Setting The Bar For Exceptional Organic Produce



PHOTO COURTESY TOP ROW/LEFT TO RIGHT: LAZY ACRES AND NEW SEASON MARKET
PHOTO COURTESY BOTTOM ROW/LEFT TO RIGHT: PCC AND PUBLIX GREENWISE

An examination of retailers on the forefront of innovation for the category.

BY MARK HAMSTRA

In many ways, organic produce has gone mainstream. A category that previously had been the exclusive domain of small cooperatives, farmers markets and a handful of independents can now be found in virtually every food outlet across the country.

Austin, TX-based Whole Foods Market, with more than 400 stores across the country, has set the standard for merchandising organic produce with its eye-catching displays and creative department configurations.

The company looks beyond organic, however, in order to offer more breadth of product and reach a wider customer base.

“Their focus is that they have to stay differentiated, so consumers will pay a little more,” says Andrew Wolf, a Boston-based analyst with BB&T Capital Markets. “Some of that is organic produce, and some of that is high-quality conventional. Their philosophy

is if they can give you a little more information about the product, then you can make a rational choice based on where its grown, farming practices, and things like that. That’s increasingly important.”

Wolf notes supply has not caught up with demand in lots of organic produce categories, so much of organic produce “still carries a hefty premium.”

“Most consumers are looking for healthy food that fits their budget,” he says. “Whole Foods’ idea is to get you in the store, and if you can’t afford organic, you can buy conventional.”

The company built such a reputation for having high-quality offerings that customers expect Whole Foods’ conventional produce to meet high standards. “The assumption there is that if there’s a conventional item at a lower price, it’s still a pretty good item,” says Wolf.

PRODUCE BUSINESS spoke to some of the leaders in organic produce merchandising, including some that have long specialized in such product — New Seasons Market in Portland, OR, and PCC Natural Markets in Seattle — as well as more conventional retailers that expanded with new banners and bolstered their own produce sets with more

organic offerings, including Publix Super Markets and Bristol Farms.

While Whole Foods was setting the standard for organic produce merchandising with eye-popping displays, a new retail segment emerged that looks at produce differently. The so-called “fresh box” stores, led by Sprouts Farmers Markets, focuses on sharp produce pricing but does not necessarily always merchandise organic offerings. For Sprouts, local sourcing and rigid pricing are the attributes it chooses to hang its hat on.

Wolf notes that Whole Foods does face a threat in Sprouts, which, according to Wolf, is sourcing from producer over-runs.

“The pressure is there to buy cheaper — to buy riper fruit, for example, because the farmer has to get rid of it — but Whole Foods is not going to go too far down the quality scale,” says Wolf.

For many retailers, focusing on organic produce remains a cornerstone of their business. For others, organic produce has become a more important aspect of their high-quality positioning.

Some other examples of retailers with strong organic produce merchandising include:

● **Natural Grocers by Vitamin Cottage**, which is based in Lakewood, CO, sets a high bar for its product sourcing, and now has about 90 stores across the country. It offers only organic produce in its relatively small-format stores, which it is rolling out rapidly.

● **MOM's Organic Market**, a 12-store chain based in Rockville, MD, also carries only organic produce. The chain, which recently opened its first Washington, D.C., location, also focuses on sustainable business practices and shuns plastic packaging in favor of compostable produce bags.

● **Mrs. Green's Natural Market**, is an Irvington, NY-based chain that also carries 100 percent organic produce. The company, which has several locations in the New York-New Jersey area, one store in Chicago, IL and two in Canada, also pledges to only source from producers with sustainable business practices. Local sourcing is also key to Mrs. Green's positioning.

● **Lucky's Market**, based in Boulder, CO, which, like Sprouts Farmers Market, focuses on quality, value and local sourcing in the produce department. The stores tout 90 percent of their products are organic or natural. Founded in 2003, the chain has been expanding rapidly across the country with its first Florida opening set for January, according to reports.

Wolf of BB&T Capital Markets notes many of these smaller stores offer less variety and can thus focus on organic authenticity.

"There is a customer who just wants organic food, but Whole Foods does serve a larger market, and it has to take a broader approach, or it is not going to support its growth," he explains.

Whole Foods' influence on organics, and on healthy eating in general, has had a lasting impact, notes Wolf. "They wanted to popularize this type of eating, and they succeeded," he says.

LAZY ACRES MERCHANDISES WITH ACUMEN TO ORGANICS

At the upscale Bristol Farms chain in Southern California, organic produce merchandising evolved from a minor subset of fruits and vegetables into a majority of the offering.

Consumer interest in healthy eating and natural and organic product led the company to expand with a retail banner specifically for that purpose — *Lazy Acres Market*, which now has two locations in Long Beach and Santa Barbara, CA.

"Organics used to be a secondary itemiza-

"Organic cut fruit is hot right now, organic berries is a category growing like crazy, and organic salads are also really hot."

—John Savidan, Bristol Farms

tion with smaller displays, and it evolved into more of what conventional used to be for many retailers," says John Savidan, director of produce merchandising for Bristol Farms and Lazy Acres. He estimates about 80 to 90 percent of the produce offered at Lazy Acres is organic.

"As long as availability and quality are there, we are able to stay mostly organic," says Savidan. "For us, anything that is locally grown and organic is by far the hottest ticket in town."

Lazy Acres' merchandising benefits from the experience of Bristol Farms, where the focus is on high-quality products in attractive displays.

"We merchandise both stores very well," says Savidan, who notes almost all of the wet-rack vegetables at Bristol Farms are now organically produced.

"We merchandise similarly to a degree in the newer stores, especially where we have the multi-deck wet racks," he says.

But there are some key differences between organic product merchandising at Bristol Farms and Lazy Acres. While Bristol Farms maintains its focus on only the highest quality produce, Lazy Acres will opt for an organic version of an item instead — for example, an apple that may be too small for Bristol Farms will be perfectly acceptable at Lazy Acres.

Lazy Acres buys direct from local organic farmers in the area, and one of its biggest partners is Lakeside Organic Gardens, Watsonville, CA, a family-owned farming operation that is 100 percent organic. Bristol Farms also has a tenured relationship with Kenter Canyon Farms, an organic produce supplier based in Sun Valley, CA.

"One of the emerging trends in organic merchandising is organic cut fruit," explains Savidan. Lazy Acres cuts its own organic fruit in-house.

"Organic cut fruit is hot right now, organic berries is a category growing like crazy, and organic salads are also really hot," says Savidan.

NEW SEASONS MARKET MAINTAINS FOCUS ON QUALITY

As the competitive landscape for organic produce becomes increasingly crowded, Portland, OR-based New Seasons Market distinguishes itself by seeking the highest quality among the organic purveyors in the market.

"I think we're different from a lot of people in that organic is one of our stakes in the ground," says Jeff Fairchild, produce merchandising director, New Seasons Market. "For a lot of people, that is a part of their business, but not a central part of their business.

"What we are able to really do effectively is highlight a signature part of our business in a way that really shows off our exceptional quality and value," he says. "Instead of having it as just another commodity, we treat it with a little more respect."

New Seasons, which operates 15 stores in the Portland area, typically carries about 220 to 240 SKUs of organic produce, or about 75 percent of the total produce.

"Being in the Northwest, about 90 percent of what we sell is in bulk and hand-stacked," says Fairchild.

He says one of the goals at New Seasons is to merchandise organic produce "in a way that emphasizes its specialness," often by sharing the story of the local growers it buys from. In doing so, it tries to avoid getting drawn into a price-based competition with more mainstream retailers in its market.

"The biggest challenge right now is that the field is becoming crowded, and every large retailer surrounding us is doing a fair amount of promotional work around organic," says Fairchild. "How do you differentiate what you do when everyone else is trying to turn organic produce into the same sort of price game that conventional always has lived in?"

The market conditions are squeezing out some of the small producers who can't provide product at the prices demanded by these larger mainstream retailers, he says.

"It certainly happened with blueberries last year, and it happened with other commodities, where small grocers can't be as efficient as large growers," explains Fairchild.

As more mainstream retailers expand their organic assortments, New Seasons also finds itself competing with them for product, says Fairchild.

"As the industry becomes more competitive, our challenge is to continue to tell stories about what the value is in working with us versus working with a different chain," he says. "We continue to find ways to do that."

New Seasons highlights its local produce partners in the stores and in a section on its website called “Meet the Locals.” Many of the suppliers are from Oregon — such as Mustard Seed Farms in St. Paul, OR, which supplies a range of items to New Seasons — or from Northern California and Washington.

Fairchild says New Seasons also competes with the farmers markets in the region, which are plentiful in the Pacific Northwest.

“Our customers are very seasonally focused, and they are aware of the seasonality in produce, and it is reflected in the success of the farmers markets in this neighborhood,” says Fairchild. “It’s a challenge, but it’s good for the growers.”

ORGANIC AND LOCAL CONVERGE AT PCC NATURAL MARKETS

The Pacific Northwest in many ways has been the heart of the natural and organic food movement, so it should be no surprise that some of the nation’s top natural and organic retailers thrived there.

One of the most unique of these is Seattle-based PCC Natural Markets, which operates 10 stores in the Puget Sound area. PCC is the

“Ninety-five percent of produce at PCC is organic and identified in store by green price and origin signs. The number of organic SKUs PCC offers varies, depending on the season. Active items are close to 500.”

—Joe Hardiman, PCC Natural Markets

nation’s largest cooperatively owned grocery chain, with 52,000 members, among thousands of additional local shoppers who are not members.

The chain is widely known for its bountiful,

cleanly merchandised produce sets that highlight local producers and are predominantly organic. PCC has a strong commitment to both locally grown and organically produced products, with an emphasis on “local,” according to Joe Hardiman, produce merchandiser for PCC Natural Markets.

“Today’s organic produce shopper demands the best quality, highest grade products and competitive prices,” says Hardiman. “Year-round selection is also demanded, which means that organic produce sometimes comes from long distances.

“But the ‘local’ mantra resonates loudly,” he says. “There has been a significant shift to supporting local. At PCC Natural Markets, sourcing local has always been our priority.”

The company is able to source almost all of its produce in organic varieties because so many producers in the region adopted organic farming and production.

“Ninety-five percent of produce at PCC is organic and identified in store by green price and origin signs,” says Hardiman, noting conventional produce signs are yellow.

“The number of organic SKUs PCC offers varies, depending on the season,” he says.

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“Active items are close to 500.”

PCC's primary supplier for organic produce includes the Organically Grown Co. (a large wholesaler of organic produce in the Pacific Northwest with Eugene and Portland, OR and Kent, WA locations), Peterson Fruit Co. (wholesale produce company located in Mukilteo, WA), and Pacific Coast Fruit Co. (a local, family-owned produce distributor that serves the Pacific Northwest retail, wholesale and foodservice areas). The chain touts its local suppliers with “Producer Profiles” on its website, where consumers can learn about farmers such as Seattle, WA-based Full Circle, which supplies PCC with salad mix, lettuces, leafy greens (kale and chard), radishes, potatoes, culinary herbs and other items.

Consumers can obtain extensive information about each of the suppliers featured on the website, including their policies toward sustainability and other information.

The website also includes an interactive chart that allows consumers to check the growing seasons for organic and local produce items throughout the year. A click on the “What’s New” tab on the website reveals the latest produce items to hit the stores.

Hardiman says there is a trend toward more value-added organic produce offerings. “Value added, convenient grab-n-go packaging has grown dramatically,” he says. “Ready-to-serve cello and clamshell salads are very significant segments now, whereas bulk was always preferred previously.”

PCC promotes its organic produce, along with its other products through its in-house monthly *Taste* magazine and its bi-weekly Market Specials.

GREENWISE PERKS UP PUBLIX'S ORGANIC PRODUCE

Publix Super Markets has long been one of the few large conventional supermarket chains that has been able to show significant growth year after year, so it only made sense that the Lakeland, FL-based company launched a format that gave it a foothold in the fast-growing organic and natural segment of food retailing.

While Publix GreenWise Market (launched in 2007) only grew to three locations in Boca Raton, Tampa and Palm Beach Gardens, FL, it gave the company a learning lab for new merchandising and product, including organic produce, which it has since expanded in so-called “hybrid” stores incorporating elements from the GreenWise banner.

The result has put Publix at the forefront of conventional retailers offering organic fruits

and vegetables. Its merchandising illustrates how mainstream organic products have become for the chain's customers.

“Over the years, our merchandising of organic produce evolved to in-line merchandising — meaning organic product, while separated by dividers, is displayed with the conventional produce items,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix.

“Previously, we had organic sections within the produce department,” she explains. “In our current format, customers can select their organic and conventional produce items in the same sections.”

Brous says Publix now carries “several hundred” SKUs of organic products in its stores.

“Overall, the availability of organic produce increased over the years, so you’ll see more organic produce items, including snacks and juices in our traditional stores.”

Some of the company's main suppliers of organic product include Lamont, CA-based Cal-Organic Farms, Salinas, CA-based Organic Girl and Salinas, CA-based The Nunes Co.

When Publix opened its first North Carolina supermarket earlier this year in Charlotte, the store included a GreenWise organic produce section with items supplied by Global Organic Specialty Source, the Sarasota, FL-based wholesaler.

Oscar Torres, merchandising specialist and new business sales for Global Organic, says he noticed growth in the Publix organic produce offering, and he sees the company promoting organics regularly.

“They are good marketers, and they have beautiful stores,” says Torres. “I think they made some improvements, for example, with some of their multi-deck displays.”

He also notes that the three GreenWise locations themselves, situated in upscale neighborhoods, are “gorgeous stores.”

“From a fixture and display standpoint, they are doing a lot with their merchandising,” says Torres.

On its website, Publix says the GreenWise concept — which began as a section within its traditional stores before it became a standalone format — was created in part because of consumers' growing demand for organic fruits and vegetables.

“At Publix GreenWise Markets, you’ll enjoy the same Publix experience that you know and love, but with a vast selection of organic and earth-conscious products,” the company states on its website.

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Demand Ripens For Organic Berries



Producers struggle to keep pace amid complexity of transition from conventional crops.

BY MARK HAMSTRA

Consumer demand for organic strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries has increased as the economy has improved, although suppliers say increasing production of these crops remains a challenge.

“We’re starting to see a little more increase in organic demand,” says Jim Grabowski, director of marketing at Well Pict Berries, based in Watsonville, CA. “It was going very strong before the economy tanked, but when the economy tanked, the organic market pretty much did too.

“It was probably seeing double-digit growth before the economy took a dive,” he says. “Now it’s coming back, not as fast or as strong as it was before, but it’s nice, steady growth.”

In the 52 weeks ending Jan. 31, retail sales of organic berries — strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries and other berries —

totaled \$391.1 million, according to a Nielsen report. That represented 9.6 percent of total berry sales.

Cindy Jewell, vice president of marketing at California Giant Berry Farms, Watsonville, CA, cites data from the United Fresh Produce Association’s 2014 *FreshFacts on Retail* report indicating organic berries ranked the highest

among organic produce in terms of sales per store in the U.S., with an average of \$385 weekly. That was a 14 percent increase from 2013. Average pricing was at \$4.04 per unit, which was a 5 percent increase from 2013.

“What this tells us is we are doing the right thing in expanding our organic acreage each year to meet the increased consumer demand,”



PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA STRAWBERRY COMMISSION

“We continue to see the growth of organic berries outpace the growth of conventional berries as the demand for organic produce in general continues to grow.”

—Mike Orf, Hy-Vee

says Jewell. “It also tells us berries may not be as price sensitive to the consumer, and they are willing to pay more for organic.”

California Giant is always on the lookout for opportunities to expand its organic production, she says.

“We currently have organic strawberries in both our Southern California and Northern California growing regions, and continually look for new ground to plant on each year,” she says. “We also assess our current ground each year for opportunities to put some acreage into transition.”

The grower can only transition the land it owns, she notes; leased land is rotated with other crops.

“While organic is still less than 10 percent of our total berry acreage, we see the potential to continually increase as demand dictates,” says Jewell.

Likewise, Grabowski estimates “close to 10 percent” of Well Pict’s strawberry production is organic, with fields in the same regions as its conventional crops — the California areas of Oxnard, Santa Maria and Watsonville. Well Pict offers organic strawberries in 1- and 2-pound packages and organic raspberries in 6-ounce and 12-ounce packages.

“We haven’t increased our production as much as we probably should, but it’s a hard process to turn conventional into organic land,” he says. “It’s a long and expensive proposition.”

As with all organic crops, the soil must remain free of chemical contaminants for three full years before a crop grown on the ground can be certified as organic.

“Right now demand is strong, so we are selling as much as we produce,” says Grabowski of Well Pict’s organic lines.

One factor that may be contributing to the

increased demand for organic berries has been the expansion of the products into more classes of retail trade, he says. While these items historically had been offered primarily by retailers specializing in natural and organic foods, they are now widely available in conventional supermarkets, and increasingly in membership warehouse clubs such as Costco Wholesale and Sam’s Club.

“Organics are starting to get a little bit more exposure, so I think that’s probably helping fuel the push for those products,” says Grabowski.

Grabowski says while organic raspberries currently only account for a very small portion

of Well Pict’s product offerings, he expects the company to increase production to accommodate rising demand.

OUTPACING CONVENTIONAL

At supermarket retailer Hy-Vee, based in West Des Moines, IA, sales of organic berries have been increasing, says Mike Orf, assistant vice president of produce operations.

“We continue to see the growth of organic berries outpace the growth of conventional berries as the demand for organic produce in general continues to grow,” says Orf. “The demand for organic strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and blueberries is growing.”

ORGANIC BERRY PRICING GAP CLOSING

As more and more berry farms become certified as organic, observers say retail pricing could begin closing the gap with conventional berries.

However, growers say the increased costs of growing organic crops should command higher prices at their end of the supply chain.

“When you grow organic, it’s a lot more expensive than conventional berries, and the yield is a lot less, so that has to be taken into consideration,” says Jim Grabowski, director of marketing at Well Pict Berries, based in Watsonville, Calif. “We obviously get a premium for organic versus conventional.”

An examination of recent retail prices reported by the USDA showed that while organic strawberries were more expensive than a year ago — \$4 per pound versus \$3.33 in March of 2014 — the prices of organic blueberries, raspberries and blackberries all declined.

Those strawberry prices compare with conventional prices for strawberries of \$2.32 this year and \$2.30 a year ago.

Conventional prices for all berry types were relatively stable, compared with organics.

The gap between conventional and organic narrowed the most among blackberries, where observers say an increase in Mexican production could be having an impact.

“Organic berries tend to be less stable than conventional, and seem to vary more with shifts in production levels,” says Kyla Oberman, director of marketing at Naturipe Farms, Salinas, CA, which offers organic

strawberries and blueberries year-round in addition to seasonal programs of organic blackberries.

Renae Achondo, a buyer for Santa Cruz, CA-based Albert’s Organics, a division of United Natural Foods Inc., Providence, RI, says she has seen downward pressure on organic berry pricing.

“This season it seems organic prices are lower from the pressure of conventional/organic retailers playing the field,” she says.

Retailers also often use strawberries as a loss leader to drive traffic, according to Carolyn O’Donnell, communications director for the California Strawberry Commission, Watsonville.

“Often we see retailers will sell strawberries for less than what they paid for them simply to draw customers in the door,” she says. “Our past research has shown that people who put strawberries in their basket tend to spend more than someone who is not putting strawberries in their basket. Retailers are aware of that, and will often use them to draw customers in.”

Meanwhile pricing on organic imports of blueberries has been affected by the 2013 finding of the European Grapevine Moth (GVM) in some Chilean growing regions, according to Simcha Weinstein, director of marketing at Albert’s Organics.

“The import pricing is much stronger due to the finding of the GVM relative to previous years,” he says. “As the domestic market gains more acreage, the price spread between organic and conventional is not expected to be as wide, especially when the organic supplies begin peaking.” **pb**



“This overall upward trend in organic blueberry production has been driven both by consumer demand and more retail interest in driving the sales category on organic blueberries.”

— Simcha Weinstein, Albert's Organics

With its 235 stores located across eight Midwestern states, Hy-Vee typically sources its product from the East and West Coasts.

“We have very little access to organic strawberries in the Midwest,” says Orf. “We rely on berries grown by suppliers in the larger berry-growing areas such as California and Florida.”

Hy-Vee, considered one of the nation's leading supermarket retailers, has a unique operating model, in which individual store managers have an ownership stake in their stores. That structure creates a high degree of store-level autonomy.

As a result, some Hy-Vee locations integrate their organic produce offerings, while

others keep them separate.

“Some stores have large organic sections, in which the organic berries are displayed,” explains Orf. “Other stores display the organic berries with conventional berries.”

According to a 2014 report from the California Strawberry Commission (CSC), Watsonville, CA, sales of organic strawberries

TACKLING ORGANIC PRODUCTION CHALLENGES

In addition to the time and expense involved in turning land over to organic production, organic growers also face other obstacles, such as pest and disease control.

Along those lines, one major project underway at the CSC is research into alternatives to soil fumigation for the production of disease-free plant stock in nurseries. The use of fumigation to grow organic strawberry plant starts blew up in the media a few years ago, but Carolyn O'Donnell, the CSC Communications Director, says she is not aware of any impact on sales.

“Nurseries are required to certify they are shipping plant stock that are free of disease, and there's not any system in place at this point for growing strawberry plant starts with enough certainty there's no disease unless they grow them on fumigated soil,” says O'Donnell.

Earlier this year the CSC revealed it received more than \$1 million in state and federal grants to research alternatives to growing strawberries without the use of fumigants, including a process called anaerobic soil disinfestation (ASD). The project is a partnership with the CSC, the USDA, the University of California-Santa Cruz, and California Polytechnic Institute in San Luis

Obispo.

ASD involves mixing a carbon source such as rice bran or mustard seed meal into the soil, soaking it with water, and then covering it with plastic. This forces the decomposing carbon to use up all the oxygen in the soil.

“It goes from aerobic to anaerobic digestion, and in the process, the pH changes, the soil chemistry changes, and the microbes in the soil change,” explains O'Donnell. “We don't know exactly how it all works, but it appears to help suppress the disease in the soil. It doesn't outright get rid of it, but it suppresses it enough for a season.”

Some early tests have been successful in terms of producing comparable levels of strawberry volume and quality, but the cost is still prohibitive, she says. Although the research is geared to benefit both organic and conventional growers, it would be a major boon to organic farming if the process proves viable.

ASD is used in other parts of the world where temperatures are higher on average, such as Italy and Israel, says O'Donnell.

“But in Central California, we're mopping our brows if it's 80 degrees,” she says. “That's why it's great for growing strawber-

ries. It's not too hot and not too cold.”

The CSC is seeking to put together what O'Donnell described as a “recipe book” for growers seeking to use ASD. This would specify the steps growers should take, and the ingredients they should use, based on their soil chemistry and other factors.

“We are finding some practices suppress diseases better than others, so it will really have to be fine-tuned to the particular location and the soil conditions of the ranch,” she says.

Some organic growers are currently using it, because it's the only tool available, other than ground rotation, to prevent disease.

“We're seeing growers installing it in a section of their acreage, trying different things to see what works,” says O'Donnell.

The CSC has also been working on integrated pest management, including looking at the optimal use of bug vacuums. These devices have had varying levels of effectiveness, says O'Donnell.

“Now we are really honing in on things like how high the hood should be over the top of the rows, how to set the louvers at the top of the vacuum, what pressure you should be using — looking at just how to make those bug vacuums more effective.” **pb**

“We have been growing organic strawberries in Florida for about 10 years now. We started with 1 acre. Our acreage is about 200 acres now. Five years ago it was about 100.”

— Gary Wishnatzki, Wish Farms

and 2-pound packages of conventional strawberries increased by 50 percent when they were merchandised on extended displays along with 1-pound conventional packages.

EXPANDING IN CALIFORNIA

Gary Wishnatzki, the third-generation owner of Wish Farms, a berry grower and shipper based in Plant City, FL, says his company has been increasing its production of organic berries, including its first planting of organic crops in California last year.

“The entire organic category continues to grow,” he says. “We have seen growth in demand for organic strawberries.”

Wish Farms is one of the largest growers of organic strawberries outside of California, and is also a shipper of organic blueberries from Chile.

Wishnatzki says Wish Farms expanded its California organic strawberry acreage because it has been challenging to meet demand in the winter months from its Florida crop alone.

“We have been growing organic strawberries in Florida for about 10 years now,” he says. “We started with 1 acre. Our acreage is about 200 acres now. Five years ago it was about 100.”

Wish Farms also expanded its California organic strawberry acreage for its sophomore season there. Last year it had 40 acres, and this year it has planted about 50 acres.

He also says Wish Farms has greatly increased its organic blueberry supply during the Florida season, which runs from late March through May.

ORGANIC BLUEBERRIES GO GLOBAL

Simcha Weinstein, director of marketing at Albert’s Organics, a division of Providence,

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RI-based wholesaler United Natural Foods, says organic blueberry production has increased around the world.

“Each year we have seen continued growth on organic blueberries — this being the trend with all growing regions: West Coast, Pacific Northwest, East Coast, Southeast, Mexico, South America, New Zealand and Holland.”

Weinstein says organic blueberry production from Argentina and Chile provides important volume to meet demand when the domestic season ends.

“This overall upward trend in organic blueberry production has been driven both by consumer demand and more retail interest in driving the sales category on organic blueber-



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ries,” he says.

One of the challenges in providing organic blueberries from South America was the discovery of the European Grapevine Moth — *Lobesia botrana* — in many of the growing zones in Chile about two years ago. As a result, the USDA now requires Chilean-grown blueberries from those zones to be fumigated, which negates their organic status.

“This has had a tremendous impact on the overall volume of South American organic blueberries entering the U.S.,” says Weinstein, who notes grower/shippers have been working hard to develop other areas of Chile to offset the declines in imported organic blueberries.

Meanwhile Mexico has stepped up its production of organic blackberries, according

“We are finding some practices suppress diseases better than others, so it will really have to be fine-tuned to the particular location and the soil conditions of the ranch.”

— Carolyn O’Donnell,
California Strawberry Commission

to Renae Achondo, a buyer for Santa Cruz, CA-based Albert’s Organics. She cited the increase in Mexican production as one of the biggest trends in the organic berry category. **pb**

MORE PRODUCTIVE FARMS

About 90 percent of strawberry production in the U.S. comes out of California, and the state is also the leader in organic strawberry varieties, says Carolyn O’Donnell, communications director at the California Strawberry Commission (CSC), which represents both organic and conventional growers.

Total strawberry acreage is projected to be down slightly overall in 2015, to 37,438 total acres, and organic acreage is also projected to decline a couple of percentage points. The decreases in acreage reflect the fact that newer varieties of crops provide increased yields, explains O’Donnell.

“Overall, there’s really not much difference in production,” she says.

Some of the varieties bred at the University of California-Davis, particularly the Monterey Strawberry, have done well in terms of yields, says O’Donnell.

“Monterey strawberries don’t do as well in Southern California, but up in Santa Maria and Watsonville, we see trends toward increasing acreage for Monterey,” she says.

Monterey strawberries account for 22.7 percent of California’s total acreage planted for 2015 winter, spring and summer production, and 12.2 percent of the organic acreage, both up several percentage points over 2014 levels, according to the CSC.

All of the major varieties of strawberries are included among the state’s organic crops. Growers’ proprietary varieties comprise more than half the organic acreage, at 57.9 percent for 2015, followed by the Monterey variety.

Overall, California planted 39,073 acres of strawberries in 2014, of which less than 10 percent — about 3,268 acres — were organic. Organic acreage is projected to total about 3,184 in 2015. About two-thirds of that acreage is in the Watsonville/Salinas area.

About 20 percent of conventional strawberry growers are also growing organic product, says O’Donnell.

“We are also seeing more of these organic practices being implemented in a lot of different areas, even if they are not organic farms,” adds O’Donnell. **pb**



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Summer School

Merchandising tips for retailers in the upcoming season.

BY MARK HAMSTRA

Summer is prime time for retailers to go the extra mile in merchandising fresh fruits and vegetables with an abundance of opportunities for sports tie-ins, holiday promotions, and the advent of outdoor grilling in markets across the country.

Bridget Bennett, produce category manager at the Fort Lee, VA-based Defense Commissary Agency, which operates retail grocery commissaries for military members, retirees and their families around the world, says store-level execution is important to making the most of summer's opportunities in the produce section.

"Promotional planning is key to driving sales, but merchandising excellence and execution at store level is just as important to a positive result," she says. "The produce sales team works closely with our industry partners to communicate our ideas, goals, and expectations to ensure the consumer gets the right items at the right price."

The DeCA commissaries are known for attractive produce displays, and in fact were the winners of last summer's National Watermelon Promotion Board watermelon display contest, in which every commissary participated.

"Our stores' teams, in tandem with our produce contractors, build exciting displays that

are second to none," says Bennett. "The displays entice the customer to check it out a little closer and often find recipe ideas, complementary ingredients, and coupons for their fresh produce. We want our customers to feel special, give them a reason to try something new, and see the value."

In anticipation of the upcoming seasonal opportunities, the DeCA produce category management team recently worked with retail operations and industry partners to coordinate best practices for promotional and merchandising strategies in the produce department. DeCA leadership from around the world were on hand at the commissary's

headquarters to speak with produce experts about promotional planning and other issues, from ordering to end display.

“As we get busy with peak seasons approaching, it is important to ensure the department flow engages the customer to build the basket,” says Bennett.

This year DeCA is focusing on increased produce consumption. It has a goal for every store to reach 10 percent of store sales in produce, and, for those already exceeding 10 percent, to continue to grow.

“We continue to focus on weekly promotional items and maximizing those opportunities,” says Bennett. “The commissary is a worldwide agency, and our shoppers are a global customer, so we consistently rise to the challenge of offering local produce and a selection that compares to the commercial market, as well as provide those unique items that our customers grew to love in other parts of the world.”

WATERMELON DISPLAY CONTESTS

One of the top produce items for summer merchandising opportunities is watermelon, which lends itself to creative retail displays and is a natural summertime draw for shoppers.

The Winter Springs, FL-based National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) runs summer contests and promotions in July (National Watermelon Month) including a retail display contest in conjunction with the Lakeland, FL-based National Watermelon Association. Retailers of any size can compete to win a trip to the National Watermelon Convention in February of the following year.

“It really is a win-win for the retailer and the consumer. Watermelon is the biggest item in the produce department, so why not use it?”

— Juliemar Rosado, Watermelon Promotion Board

The contest attracts a lot of retail participation, according to Juliemar Rosado, director of retail operations and international marketing at the NWPB.

“Big displays do sell a lot of watermelon, especially when you make it pretty,” she says. “The retailers definitely get very creative with their displays.”

“It really is a win-win for the retailer and the consumer. Watermelon is the biggest item in the produce department, so why not use it?”

While some retailers seek to wow customers with the sheer size of their displays — a few years ago the largest watermelon display in the world was in the contest — others are also very informational, with displays that include brochures and recipe information.

At DeCA, watermelon displays are an important part of summer merchandising strategies.

“Watermelon is fundamental to summer,” says Bennett. “Who doesn’t want watermelon in July, and who isn’t already selling it? So we capitalize on the opportunity.”

“Watermelon is a high-dollar ring, and to grow the category, we offer additional options such as minis, yellow flesh, and fruit cups, cut watermelon halves, in addition to the traditional seedless and seeded.”

She says the promotion times perfectly with

DeCA’s annual Healthy Lifestyle Festival. The NWPB awards commissary gift cards to the winners in each category, which are coordinated through in-store merchandisers to be given away to the shoppers in those stores.

“We do what we do because the military shopper deserves to be honored every day, and our store associates work very hard to put the ‘fun’ into their displays to make shopping their commissary an experience that sets the tone,” says Bennett.

Retailers can also get a boost in their watermelon sales from appearances of their local Watermelon Queens, who represent various watermelon growing regions. A National Watermelon Queen also helps promote consumption of U.S. watermelon, both at home and overseas.

“These young women are smart, they are educated, they are unique to the produce department, and they have the ability to help the customers select the best watermelon,” says Rosado. “Usually if there is a Watermelon Queen in the store, talking about usage and selection, those customers will go home with a watermelon.”

RECIPES AND NUTRITION

The NWPB also has been active in promoting the use of watermelon in recipes,



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD

and in encouraging customers to use the whole watermelon, including the rind, in recipes such as watermelon-rind slaw. The Board has a variety of promotional tools available for retailers, including two-sided recipe cards for customers and other sales collateral.

The cards offer various uses for watermelon, including in Asian dishes such as stir-fry, and in salsas, salads and beverages.

Rosado says mixing in fresh-cut watermelon in displays also helps promote sales. According to the NWPB, sales can rise 67

percent when fresh-cut watermelon is part of the display.

Displaying nutritional information about watermelons also helps drive sales, according to the NWPB. Watermelons are high in vitamins A, C and B6, as well as potassium and lycopene. Displaying watermelon with nutritional information leads to a 74 percent increase in sales, on average, according to the NWPB.

Rosado describes watermelons as “a super-fruit and a multivitamin in a sweet, juicy package.”

The NWPB also suggests using large, colorful bins to display watermelons in order to attract shoppers, and to avoid storing watermelons near bananas, as the ethylene gas given off by ripening bananas can damage the watermelons.

Recipe demonstrations, and cross-merchandising with other produce items or with other ingredients from the recipes can also help drive watermelon sales, says Rosado.

“By doing a recipe demo and having the ingredients together right there, the customers will have the opportunity to taste something that may be new or different, and if they like it, the items are right there at their fingertips to buy,” she says.

The NWPB does not recommend freezing watermelon as it breaks down the integrity of the flesh, which is 92 percent water. Watermelon can be juiced, however, and the juice can be frozen in ice cube trays, says Rosado.

“Watermelon juice in general is now very popular, and more research shows that it is good for post-workout recoveries, and it’s good for your heart,” she says, adding watermelon also makes a good smoothie ingredient.



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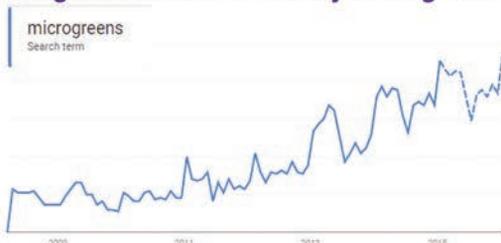
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FRUIT FOR GRILLING

Jeff Simonian, vice president of sales and marketing at Simonian Fruit Co. in Fowler, CA, says his company’s output peaks in the fall with pomegranate season, but he does offer some tips for retailers to merchandise its summer produce, which includes stone fruit as well as grapes.

“One of the big things we always recommend, especially with stone fruit, is sampling,” he says. “We really feel that once they taste the fruit, it really builds sales.”

Simonian Fruit and others in the industry have in recent seasons been promoting opportunities for grilling fruit in the summer as well.

“The industry pushed that in the past few years, and we have as well, to the individual retailers,” says Simonian.

He suggests there might be opportunities for retailers to cross-promote stone fruits with items such as steaks and barbeque sauces to create a summer grilling package.

Kevin Guilfooy, area retail sales manager for Indianapolis, IN-based Indianapolis Fruit Company, which offers a wide selection of produce items for distribution in the Midwest, agrees produce can be an important component of grilling promotions.

“Theme displays around the holidays and sporting events is a win-win for all departments,” he says. “One-stop shopping for the barbeque can be done outside of the meat



PHOTO COURTESY OF INDIANAPOLIS FRUIT

Indianapolis Fruit's Garden Griller's Grilling and Oven Roasting Kits, which include an asparagus kit, a fajita mix, sweet potato chips, and a garden fresh vegetable kit among others, cross-merchandise well.

department. A spot cooler of ribs and steaks surrounded by all of the corn, potatoes, peppers, etc., can help increase sales for everyone. Don't forget to include the bakery."

Cross-merchandising produce in the meat department has grown since both departments see the opportunities to move more products, says Antonia Mascari, assistant director of marketing at Indianapolis Fruit.

"Our Garden Griller line is a success when cross-merchandising," she says.

The company's Garden Griller's Grilling and Oven Roasting Kits include a range of items, from an asparagus kit and a fajita mix to sweet potato chips, and a garden fresh vegetable kit.

"The grillers have in-kit spice blends to give the dishes unique and bold flavors," says Mascari. "The kits are prepped and ready for grilling and roasting, which makes them ideal for retailers to promote and perfect for consumers to buy as the summer grilling season gets underway.

"A real treat every year is grilled pineapple rings with a splash of teriyaki seasoning," she adds. "Providing ready-to-grill vegetables with no fuss is a home run for the busy lifestyles consumers lead."

Another tip Guilfooy has for retailers is to make sure they are offering conditioned, soft fruit for their customers to purchase.

"It's okay to have some of the greener fruit out to sell, but conditioned, ready-to-eat soft fruit will drive more sales for the total category," he says. "Just the aroma from ripe peaches will help with impulse sales."

Fruit can be conditioned outside of the cooler in a dry back room, says Guilfooy.

While Simonian notes the summer holidays represent a terrific opportunity for promotion of stone fruits, he says retailers typically seek to promote other summer produce items, such as watermelon and corn, during that time period.

"We definitely think there are opportunities for retailers to promote both stone fruits

and grapes, but for whatever reason, they just don't," he says.

The stone fruit season begins in early May, and the harvest peaks around the Fourth of July, when California grapes are also in season, he says.

For summer merchandising of grapes, Simonian recommends retailers offer three or four varieties, "and of course a big, full display," he says.

Asked about the potential for promoting grapes as something that could be frozen for

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consumption in the future, Simonian said he has heard of the practice but has not discussed it with his retail partners as a promotional option.

"I imagine that [approach] has potential — maybe if there was a particular variety you enjoyed, like Muscat, or maybe if you like California grapes, you could stock up on them for the winter months," he says.

BASEBALL TIE-INS

Summer is also the time of year when umpires yell, "Play ball!" — heralding a big opportunity for promotional tie-ins, according to many in the industry.

At Belle Glade, FL-based Duda Farm Fresh Foods, one of the world's largest grower and processor of celery, the company is launching a multifaceted baseball promotional campaign that includes both national and regional components.

New this season, three of Duda's top selling fresh-cut celery bags will have baseball-themed packaging from May through October to tie in with the Major League Baseball season. The theme is "An All American Snack."

"We are also working with dip partners to

do in-store and on-pack promotions that will be applied to these special baseball-themed bags," says Nichole Towell, director of marketing at Duda, who notes that the company also plans to engage with its followers on all of its social media channels — Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest — during the promotional period.

In addition, Duda will have San Francisco Giants-themed point-of-sale materials available during a six-week period this summer. Towell says the company plans to work with Northern California retailers to tailor programs that fit each retailer's individual needs.

Duda is also a 2015 sponsor of the Living Garden at AT&T Park, where the Giants play. The first-of-its-kind garden showcases sustainability and wellness, and teaches consumers where food comes from.

"Fans can visit the garden for a unique experience engaging with the edible bounty the garden will produce," says Towell.

The Living Garden is used year-round for community outreach, including special children's events where San Francisco Bay-area kids can visit to learn about farming in California and healthy eating.

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-operated grower of fresh fruits and vegetables, Duda Farm Fresh Foods not only values family, but also finds it extremely important to educate current and future generations about how their food is grown," says Towell.

"The Garden at AT&T Park offers a one-of-a-kind experience for Giants fans to see first-hand how celery, radishes and citrus are grown," she says. "In turn, they will be equipped with a larger toolkit of knowledge for the next time they are shopping the produce aisle at their local Bay Area grocery store."

Duda, which offers fresh-cut celery and radish products under the Dandy brand, also recently introduced Ready-to-Eat Radishes. The extensive line includes Radish Coins and Radish MiniSticks, in addition to Ready Radishes — washed and trimmed for immediate consumption.

"All three products entice the radish lover and the non-user who may not use radishes due to prep and unfamiliarity," says Towell.

Duda also provides coupon opportunities and offers additional support, such as 18 promotional weeks per year that can be tailored to retailers' individual sales goals.



Duda is a 2015 sponsor of the Living Garden at AT&T Park, where the Giants play. The first-of-its-kind garden showcases sustainability and wellness, and teaches consumers where food comes from.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FUTURE GROWING

Duda also leverages various social media tools, and has a network of brand ambassadors including bloggers, food writers and editors, all connecting with consumers to drive product awareness and inspire usage ideas before, during and after product purchase.

When asked how produce retailers can best

leverage the excitement around summer holidays, Towell suggests: "Monitor inventories closely to avoid out-of-stocks, especially during key promotional periods; keep displays consistent; use point-of-purchase signage to draw attention to the category and new items in the category; promote, promote, promote!" **pb**

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STATE DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE: Retail Partnerships To Grow Produce Sales

Local receipts reach record highs after branding initiatives make inroads with consumers.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

The lucrative cycle of local is increasing retail produce rings in supermarkets nationwide. This cycle takes root with consumer demand; driven by shopper's environmental and economic concerns as well as a perception that just-picked fruits and vegetables are fresher, riper and more flavorful. In turn, growers cultivate this market opportunity and increased production.

For example, total agricultural cash receipts totaled a record \$5.68 billion in New York in 2012, reached a historic high of 8.45 billion in Florida in 2013, and an all-time total of 9.7 billion in Idaho in 2014. This rising tide of revenue led state departments of agriculture to develop branded marketing programs.

Many are now well known. For example, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's Jersey Fresh brand enjoys a 79 percent recognition rate in the state, according to the Jersey Fresh Branding Awareness and Tracking Study, conducted in October 2014. The many retailers

that now partner with state agriculture departments complete the cycle of local by sourcing and selling a wide variety and volume of state-grown fruits and vegetables to their customers.

"Local is the buzzword today and it's not showing signs of slowing down," says Eric Beelitz, director of produce and floral for the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co, a Montvale, NJ-headquartered chain of 300 stores operating under banners such as A&P, Pathmark and Super Fresh.

"At the peak of the Garden State season 65 to 70 percent of the produce we sell is sourced locally. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture assists in a variety of ways such as providing weekly email updates of what is being harvested. This includes an in-depth analysis of what is expected moving forward — so we can plan ahead. This season, we are getting back to more in-store programs with our farmers and using avenues such as social media to let our customers know what's just arrived fresh in-store," he says.

RETAILERS ASK, AG DEPARTMENTS ANSWER

The number one question asked by retailers, according to state department of agriculture professionals, is where they can source a variety of fruits and vegetables locally.

"Most retailers are trying to source locally before looking elsewhere," says Bryan Black, director of communications for the Austin, TX-based Texas Department of Agriculture and its GO TEXAN marketing program. "We provide a list of GO TEXAN member fruit and vegetable producers. In addition, we offer a produce availability information piece we provide to retailers, chefs and consumers. We also work closely with our local produce industry associations and, in doing so, can generally find whatever product retailers need."

The collaboration between Albertsons, a 2,200-plus store chain based in Boise, ID, and the Idaho Department of Agriculture's Idaho Preferred Program, is a good illustration of this sourcing assistance in action.

"Idaho is known for its potatoes. However, the state's farmers also grow apples, stone fruit, corn, cherries, watermelons, asparagus, hard squash, pumpkins and more. The Idaho Department of Agriculture helps us make



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connections with many of these suppliers, and with their help, we create strong partnerships with local growers and suppliers,” explains Kent Frazee, produce sales manager in Albertsons’ Intermountain Division.

“A great example of this happened last summer when we collaborated with Matt Wissel at Wissel Farms to plant and sell top quality, local, sweet corn,” says Frazee. “This corn cost a little more to produce, but you could clearly taste the difference. Matt and his team picked the corn in the cool of the night and

delivered it to our Treasure Valley Albertsons’ stores by 10 a.m. each morning. We were so successful with this process that we sold every ear of corn Wissel supplied.”

Retailers new to a region will look to the state’s department of agriculture as a sourcing resource.

“When Sprouts and Earth Fare moved into Georgia, we shared contacts of growers and distributors and hosted one-on-one meetings with farmers to familiarize the buyers with what is available in the state,” explains

Matthew Kulinski, deputy director of marketing for the Atlanta, GA-based Georgia Department of Agriculture, which markets the Georgia Grown program.

Some retailers, those with well-established buying relationships with large growers in the state, call on departments of agriculture when seeking to source niche items.

“Variety hot peppers, cilantro, broccoli and asparagus are some of the crops that are either new for us or gone by the wayside due to competition in other regions and are now coming back into production,” says Martin Eubanks, senior marketing specialist for the South Carolina Department of Agriculture, in

■ STATE BREEDING PROGRAMS OFFER SOMETHING NEW

Like departments of agriculture, universities are at the forefront of promoting states’ fruit and vegetable industries. However, it is in plant breeding rather than marketing — in other words the creation of new, novel produce well suited for the state’s climate — where these educational institutions make their mark. The results of this cutting-edge cultivation are products retailers can stock to support local businesses, stand out from the competition, and offer customers something new. Here are three examples:

• **Florida Peaches** — High-quality, low-chilling, early-maturing peach varieties that ripen during April and May, are the result of more than a half-century of breeding development at the University of Florida in Gainesville. These peaches, with variety names such as UFSun, UFBest and UFOne, are grown on 1,231 acres of which approximately 40 percent is south of Orlando in Polk County. “This is our fifth season marketing a Florida tree-ripe peach,” says Al Finch, president of Florida Classic Growers, in Dundee, FL. “We have a six-week window where we are the only domestic peach in the market.” Finch says his company’s volume has grown enough to supply mid-sized East Coast chains. Florida is estimated to produce 150,000 to 200,000 20-pound carton equivalents of peaches this season, according to Dan Sleep, chief of the bureau of strategic development for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ Division of Marketing and Development, in Tallahassee. “With careful expansion and promotional support in select markets, Florida’s peach industry has the potential to reach 5,000 to 6,000 bearing acres valued at \$20 to 30 million during the next five to seven years,” says Sleep.

• **Scarlet Lettuce** — New Jersey is known for its production of blueberries, a fruit with

one of the highest antioxidant levels thanks to its complement of phytonutrients. Since blueberries are seasonal, Ilya Raskin, professor of plant biology at Rutgers University, the state university based in New Brunswick, chose widely available red leaf lettuce and naturally bred it to create a deep burgundy colored lettuce with two to three times the phytonutrients of blueberries. Rutgers Scarlet Lettuce, named after the school’s mascot and color, was patented and licensed to a university spin-off company specializing in enhancing the phytoactive compounds in foods, which then licensed it to Shamrock Seeds. Paul Devisme, sales and development manager for the Salinas, CA-based Shamrock Seed Company, estimates commercial production to reach 1.2 million heads in the next three years. Coastline Family Farms, in Salinas, CA, is the first company to market the lettuce trademarked Nutraleaf.

• **Masquerade Potato** — Named for its eye-catching purple and yellow skin and tasty yellow flesh, the Masquerade is one of the latest naturally bred commercial varieties of potatoes developed by the breeding program at Colorado State University’s (CSU) San Luis Valley Research Center, in Center, CO. “The potato is high in specific gravity which makes it good for baking and frying. It also contains healthful phytonutrients like anthocyanins and carotenoids,” says David Holm, CSU professor of potato breeding and physiology. Gunrock Management, in Center, CO, purchased the exclusive rights to grow and market the Masquerade potato. It is currently available from October to February in a 3-pound high-graphic bag. Masquerade potato salad was featured on the media lunch menu that kicked off the Colorado Department of Agriculture’s ‘Choose Colorado’ tour last summer. **pb**

■ STATE AG DEPARTMENTS PROMOTE CHEFS AT RETAIL

Chefs are no longer in the exclusive domain of foodservice. Several state departments of agriculture either have a chef on staff or chefs it can call on to host cooking demonstrations and sampling sessions in retail supermarkets.

“There is a direct correlation between demos, sampling and purchase of ingredients on-site,” says Chef Justin Timineri, certified executive chef and culinary ambassador for the Florida Department of Agriculture’s Fresh From Florida brand. Timineri has conducted numerous in-store demos at U.S. retailers such as Publix and Whole Foods as well as at Waitrose in the UK and Sobeys in Canada.

Last summer, Safeway in Boulder, CO, one of 2,200-plus stores in the Pleasanton, CA-headquartered chain, hosted a cantaloupe cook-off with four chefs in a full-kitchen setup in-store. The Rocky Ford Cantaloupe Association, Colorado Chef Association as well as the Colorado Department of Agriculture’s Colorado Proud program coordinated the event. Customers watched recipes being created and then sampled the results throughout the event.

“Customers really enjoy chef demos as they add an extra level of excitement to the produce department,” says Kris Staaf, director of public affairs for Safeway’s Denver division.

Last summer, Chef Jane Deal worked with the Idaho Department of Agriculture’s Idaho Preferred program to host in-store cooking classes at Rosauers Supermarkets, a 22-store chain based in Spokane, WA.

On another front, 40 Georgia high-school culinary students will demo recipes featuring nearly 20 state-grown fruits and vegetables in of their local Kroger stores in April and May. This is an offshoot of the Georgia Department of Agriculture awarding a grant to the Hospitality Education Foundation of Georgia (HEFG). **pb**

Columbia, SC, which markets the Certified SC Grown brand. "We give retailers looking for these items a harvest calendar as well as several names. We'll also set up farm tours or work with them in any other way they need to find what they are looking for."

Questions about food safety certification are the second most likely question to be asked by retailers. It's the work of personnel from agriculture departments to ensure the states' farmers are up to par.

"Our department, along with the USDA, offers a voluntary third-party Good Agricultural Practices/Good Handling Practices audit program. We do this in partnership with Rutgers' Cooperative Extension Service, which trains our farmers, then our team performs the audits. More than 4,000 growers in the state have made use of this program," says Al Murray, assistant secretary of agriculture for the Trenton, NJ-based New Jersey Department of Agriculture, which started its Jersey Fresh branding program 31 years ago.

The third question most often asked by

retailers to state departments of agriculture concerns distribution.

"We've worked with the Food Industry Alliance of New York to create aggregation points for distribution of fresh produce to a network of stores," explains Richard Ball, commissioner of the New York Department of Agriculture and Markets, in Albany, NY. Representatives of independent stores as well as supermarket chains, wholesalers, co-operatives, manufacturers and suppliers govern the Alliance.

MARKETING TOOLS BUILD RETAIL SALES

Departments of agriculture offer manpower and marketing tools to assist retailers in promoting state-grown produce.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDA&CS) has 'Theater of Operations' teams deployed to more than 50 retail and distribution partners beginning each fiscal year," says Dan Sleep, chief of the bureau of strategic development

for the FDA&CS division of marketing and development in Tallahassee. "Many of our retail partners have been with our program for more than a decade, others, for instance, Rouse's just joined a few months ago. So, although 90 percent or more of our retail participants are identified early on, our marketing team is always interested in developing new contacts and seeing how they could become part of the 'Fresh From Florida' family of promoters worldwide."

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Market Development, based in Harrisburg, PA, offers multifaceted promotional materials. These include "a variety of point-of-purchase (POP) materials with the PA Preferred logo such as shelf talkers, banners and door clings. In addition, we work with retailers to promote the state's brand to customers in-store; at in-store activities; out-of-state such as at our state farm show; and online via the Internet and social media," explains Lela Reichart, director of the PA Preferred Program. **pb**

■ CROSS-POLLINATION FOR RETAILERS

Here are five examples of how state departments of agriculture and retailers successfully partner:

Ad Incentives: The FDA&CS's Fresh From Florida program offers ad incentives to retailers who feature the state's fruits and vegetables as well as brand logo in weekly store circulars. This ad incentive program can substantially grow retail sales of a particular produce item. For example, total Florida blueberry cash receipts rose from \$11.9 million in 2000 to \$76.5 million in 2013. Retailers produced more than 300,000 store ads last season and the FDA&CS goal is 400,000 this year.

"In peak season I usually have eight Fresh From Florida fruits and vegetables inside and one to two on the front page of our weekly circular," says Derek Christian, director of perishable operations for Hitchcock's Supermarkets, a 10-store chain based in Alachua, FL. "Twice a season I do an entire Fresh From Florida ad overlay on the circular's front page. In this we put the farmer's name and town next to the item as well as the Fresh From Florida logo. The ad program is a win-win program for us and our farmers."

Signage & POS: Hitchcock's Markets received development cost funding from the FDA&CS to create a chain-wide POP display campaign. Ten POP signs hang from the ceiling in the chain's produce departments and tell the story of local Florida farmers. Additional

signage is attached to floor display bins and store shelf clip-on signs.

TV And Radio: Colorado Proud, the Broomfield, CO-based marketing program of the Colorado Department of Agriculture, completed a successful television advertising campaign on the Denver NBC affiliate Channel 9-KUSA. Similarly, Safeway also hosted a series of television commercials featuring local growers and local employees.

"The TV spots highlight Colorado produce from the fields and farms to our stores. We also feature Colorado Proud on our print advertising throughout the growing season," says Kris Staaf, director of public affairs for Safeway's Denver division.

Social Media: The Buy California Marketing Agreement, in Sacramento, CA, which manages the California Grown brand, and Wal-Mart Supercenters and Neighborhood Markets in California worked together last year to support a food bank donation program spearheaded by the California State Board of Food and Agriculture and California Association of Food Banks. More than 100 California growers, representing more than 50 fruits and vegetables, participated in this program that was successful in getting 100 million pounds of surplus foods donated to food banks across the state. CA Grown backed the campaign by using social media to get an additional 1 million pounds of produce donated. They did

so by asking followers to post a photo of themselves standing next to CA Grown-signed produce on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram with the hashtag #CAGrown. Each photo produced a 1-pound produce donation by a CA Grown member.

"Wal-Mart joined with us by letting their customers know about this promotion via signage in-store. After all, where is a better place than in the supermarket produce department for someone to take a picture of themselves with CA Grown produce," says Nick Matteis, executive director of the Buy California Marketing Agreement.

Promotional Tours: Colorado Proud hosted a 27-day, 11-city, 17-stop promotional tour using its iconic Colorado Proud vehicle last August. Destination markets on the tour route matched up with local growers. In addition, Safeway stores were in nearly every market the tour stopped hence the retailers' partnership with the promotion.

"Safeway displayed large banners on the front of the store to let customers know when the tour was scheduled. Many stores got creative and built unique displays. One store brought a 1950s pickup truck into the lobby and loaded it with Sakata Farms' sweet corn. Overall, working with Colorado Proud is incredibly successful for us and we've seen that success equate to increased sales across the board," says Staaf. **pb**



Southern Veggies Gain Traction

A look at why commodities down South achieve popularity.

BY KEITH LORIA

If there's one trend growers really capitalized on in recent years, it's the ever-increasing demand for local product and the desire by retailers to offer consumers product from closer to their homes.

That's especially true in the South, where vegetables from southeastern states (south of Ohio) are suddenly plentiful and in high demand as more consumers eat at home and are looking for local vegetables on their plate.

"A large number of people are interested in getting fruits and vegetables closer to their home, so offering products from your region is a distinct advantage over those coming in from the West Coast," says Charles Hall, executive director of the Georgia Fruit and

Vegetable Growers Association, based in LaGrange, GA. "Here in Georgia, broccoli is fairly new and kale is coming along."

Georgia, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Kentucky, West Virginia and Virginia are all southern states taking advantage of the local movement, and retailers are beefing up its product offerings.

Julie McPeake, chief communications officer with the Georgia Department of Agriculture, based in Atlanta, GA, says its Georgia Grown marketing program strives to assist growers and others involved in Georgia agriculture to find viable marketing opportunities for their products. This is carried out through its Feed My School initiative, the

Executive Chef program, Farmers Market Showcases, and much more.

Zinnia Alvarez, food safety administrator for Herndon Farms, operating in Lyons, GA, says the farm produces 500 acres of Vidalia sweet onions, 550 acres of sweet corn and 520 acres of leafy green vegetables (collards, mustard, turnips and kale).

“People want to buy food from a family business that’s local, something they know. I think that attracts people to the Georgia name,” she says. “You can drive by a field and know that’s the food you are going to eat. That’s big in today’s age. You don’t know where this other stuff is grown or how.”

WEATHER ISSUES

A big factor affecting growing vegetables in the South is the heat and rain. Growing greens, like any vegetable, can be tricky. You need to select the best varieties, have adequate irrigation, and monitor your crops closely to

“People want to buy food from a family business that’s local, something they know. I think that attracts people to the Georgia name.”

— Zinnia Alvarez, Herndon Farms

be successful.

“Every vegetable crop needs a certain amount of heat for a certain number of days in order to be productive. The required amount of heat (usually measured in degrees) can vary from crop to crop,” says McPeake. “In some cases, extended periods of extreme heat can leave some vegetable crops unproductive, as is the case with tomatoes. However, in the South, periods of high heat and below average rainfall produce drought conditions which lead to rapid tran-

spiration in vegetable plants. Such conditions can be disastrous.”

Many farmers in the South utilize a variety of irrigation methods to supplement water availability to plants during such periods.

Greg Cardamone, general manager, L&M Companies, Inc., headquartered in Raleigh, NC, has farms that grow bell peppers, cucumbers, cabbage, yellow squash, zucchini, eggplant, chili peppers and melons each spring, plus broccoli and greens in the fall.

■ FINDING NEW VARIETIES

Southern growers made an increased effort to find economical alternatives to the produce from the West Coast of the U.S., such as broccoli, cauliflower and lettuce.

A recent report by the CropLife Foundation, a Washington, D.C.-based research and stewardship arm of CropLife America, revealed that seven southeastern states (Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia), are responsible for 121,000 acres of squash, pepper, cucumber, cantaloupe, watermelon, cabbage and tomato with an annual production of 2.5 billion pounds and value to growers of \$700 million. This production accounts for nearly 25 percent of the total U.S. fresh market production of these crops.

Tim Coolong, associate professor, vegetable production, at the University of Georgia’s department of horticulture (Tifton campus), notes that for a number of years, distributors and buyers have been looking at East Coast production alternatives for many crops primarily produced on the West Coast due to transportation costs. Additionally, there have been some recent discussions about the water situation in California, though it is too early to tell exactly how this will impact the market.

“Nonetheless, while these opportunities exist, in order to capitalize on them, we must be able to tackle numerous production issues that can limit growers in the southeast U.S.,”

he says. “While there are different disease and insect pressures here, as a horticulturist I have been focusing on variety selection and planting dates for some crops that traditionally haven’t been grown here. We have so little information about suitable varieties for different planting slots for some crops, such as lettuce, that there is a lot of work to be done.”

Coolong says that improved disease resistance is always important in our climate — particularly for fall-grown crops.

“We are constantly trialing new varieties. One thing of particular interest is that several seed companies have really been focusing on improving quality through enhanced nutritional attributes, flavor and appearance,” he says. “The consuming public is much more knowledgeable regarding the diversity of fruits and vegetables that are available to them. The increase in cooking shows on television means that consumers all across the U.S. may now want to incorporate a huge array of vegetables into their diet, that previously may have only been available in specialty markets in urban areas are now being sought out in all corners of the country.”

Coolong’s department has been fortunate to work with several seed companies to evaluate new germplasm, particularly in the cucurbit vegetables, at the pre-commercial stages.

“Although I cannot elaborate too much on

what we’re doing, it does allow us as researchers and extension faculty to see how new introductions might perform prior to hitting the market,” he says.

J. Powell Smith, PhD, horticulture program team leader at Clemson University’s Lexington County branch, based in Lexington, SC, supervises county agents who work with growers in this region. He says another crop that’s rising in the area is kale.

“There has been a lot of interesting things happening with kale, and a lot of farms are now producing different types of kale,” he says. “We’re also looking to improve the nutritional values of food, so there’s a lot of interest in growing here.”

Surprisingly, the hot, sandy soil isn’t the best ground for kale, says Smith, who is also the extension associate for small fruits and vegetable crops at Clemson University’s Lexington County branch. While kale actually grows better in different parts of the country, southern rain and weather allow for about 800 acres of the green leafy vegetable to be grown each year and what’s produced is as tasty as anything else out there.

The university developed notable varieties of vegetables through the years, but because of budget costs, it’s been more than a decade since it has invested in finding more. That’s why Smith says it’s up to the farmers and private industry in the area to do their part. **pb**



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“As the weather heats up, and we finish [harvesting] our Florida farms, most of our East Coast customers will receive product from Georgia. Then as the summer heats up, our production spreads north and transitions fanning out into a wide variety of the local grown seasons,” he says. “It’s like the jumping off point for lots of local programs. In Moultrie, GA, we grow a wide variety of items — peppers, chili peppers, cucumbers, eggplant, squash, cabbage, greens, broccoli, melons, sweet potatoes — and you never know what we could add in to try the next season.”

Tim Coolong, associate professor, vegetable production, at the University of Georgia’s department of horticulture (Tifton campus) notes that although the heat down south can be extreme, his research team found that perhaps the biggest impact is the tremendous variability in temperatures that may not be found in other large growing areas.

“Highs can easily go from the 80s in the spring to near freezing and back up again,” he says. “That variability can stress plants. When you think about the relatively stable temperatures in which some crops are typically grown, it can be a challenge trying to ensure they are successful here.”

APPEALING TO CONSUMERS

Coolong feels that consumers increasingly want to know where their food comes from and want to support more local production.

“While local to some individuals can mean their county and shopping at the local farmers market, ‘local’ to others may simply

mean within their state or even from adjacent states,” he says. “Even though most of the growers I work with ship on the wholesale market, one of the largest markets in the eastern U.S. just happens to be in Atlanta, so we have a number of growers who, while they are shipping long distances, also participate in the ‘buy local’ movement.”

MARKETING FOR RETAIL

Victor Savanello, director of produce and floral for Allegiance Retail Services, LLC, headquartered in Iselin, NJ, says a lot of southern vegetables become promotable during this time of year because of the depreciated markets due to the proximity and reduced freight rates.

“A lot of retailers prefer the domestic option versus the Mexican counterpart, just based on consumer preferences,” he says. “How we merchandise these items is really dictated by their markets and the retails that result from them.”

Brian Rayfield, vice president of business development for Loxahatchee, FL-based J&J Produce, says the company is pursuing longer shelf life green bell peppers with a sweeter less bitter flavor for its retail clientele.

Consolidation, value-added packaging, private labeling, national distribution, year-round contractual supply availability are services and items that J&J Produce’s retail clientele find appealing.

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“Making a recommendation on a vegetable variety is nuanced. Yield is obviously very important, but only a part of the total package.”

—Tim Coolong, University of Georgia

trials many varieties of a wide range of vegetables, nearly all are developed by private industry.

“We are simply looking to evaluate what is

available to growers in a non-biased way and provide them with scientifically based information that they can use to make informed decisions,” says Coolong. “Making a recom-

mendation on a vegetable variety is nuanced. Yield is obviously very important, but only a part of the total package. Because quality and appearance are so very important in fruits and vegetables, growers will often choose a lower yielding variety that has improved quality characteristics.”

There was a time when you could only count on flavorful vegetables from the Southwest, but thanks to savvy growers and new technology, produce from southeastern states is now plentiful and in high demand. **pb**

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SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE CITRUS

Ensuring year-round enjoyment of North America's favorite fruits.

BY MINDY HERMANN, RD

A generation ago, the retail citrus season more closely followed the rhythms of U.S. agriculture. Oranges and grapefruits were in short supply by spring and Clementines were enjoyed mainly in December. Today's produce section couldn't be more different, filled with citrus year-round thanks to the continuing expansion of citrus exports from South Africa and South America.

LEADING THE WAY IN SUMMER CITRUS

Before the year 2000, Australia was the sole source of summer citrus, with shipments totaling approximately 20,000 metric tons (MT). Bruce McEvoy, director of global affairs for Seald Sweet in Vero Beach, FL, told an audience at the recent CGA Citrus Summit that Southern Hemisphere imports have grown dramatically since that time to more than 200,000 metric tons (MT) in 2014, with South America and South Africa as major sources and Australia as a minor one.

According to the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA), Chile supplies the highest percentage of Southern Hemisphere imports. "Chile has been shipping Clementines and Mandarins to the U.S. since 2004 and oranges since 2009," says Karen Brux, North America managing director for the CFFA in San Carlos, CA. "Consumers want to eat citrus year-round so Chilean loadings to the U.S. have steadily risen due to an increase in both demand and supply of Mandarins and Navels. In the past two years, however, Clementine imports dropped

as a result of a strong drought in the north of Chile."

Peru and, most recently, Uruguay are newer entrants to the market. "Uruguay citrus first arrived in the U.S. in late 2013 after a decade of efforts by government officials and Seald Sweet," says Marta Bentancur, spokesperson for Union of Fruit Growers and Exporters of Uruguay (UPEFRUY) in Montevideo, Uruguay. The country exports Mandarins, Satsumas, Clementines, White Murcotts and Navels, "and we are continuing to test new varieties."

The growing appetite for summer citrus led to a marketplace that adjusts to ups and downs in crop size. Luke Sears, founder and president of LGS Sales in Bronx, NY, expects Peruvian and South African Clementines will fill in the gap left by the smaller Chilean crop and sales for Chilean Murcotts will continue to go up.

According to the Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF), a consortium of 200-plus approved citrus growers/exporters in South Africa, South Africa is second to Chile in exports to the U.S. Only 3 percent of South African citrus exports are sent to the U.S. — largely because a relatively small number of growers meet the rigorous standards required for export to the U.S. The USDA Foreign Agricultural Service's (FAS) 2014 *South Africa Citrus Annual Report* predicts South African citrus exports to the U.S. will surpass 50,000 MT in the 2014/15 marketing year (MY).

"Our fruit basket consists of 80 percent oranges, mainly Navels and the balance Easy Peelers, with a small percentage of Star Ruby Grape-

fruit,” says Suhanra Conradie, chief executive of the South African-based Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF). “Midnights have a small window if summer Navels are finished and U.S. production is not available.”

SUMMER CITRUS VARIES FROM MONTH TO MONTH

Summer citrus generally is available from May through October, although some South American citrus arrives in the late winter and early spring.

“Our Southern Hemisphere season begins in February with tangerines and is followed by lemons and oranges in March and April,” says Macarena Beltrán, a spokesperson for lemon producer San Miguel, with headquarters in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and offices in Uruguay and South Africa.

Newcomer Uruguay starts exporting in March, depending on variety, and continues until September, according to UPEFRUY’s Bentancur. Currently, exports include Mandarins, Satsumas, Clementines, White Murcotts, and oranges. UPEFRUY estimates 2015 shipments of around 15,000 tons.

Markets eagerly anticipate the return of Southern Hemisphere citrus. “We are excited by the word from our suppliers that this year’s summer citrus will be arriving two weeks earlier than last year,” says Melvin Contreras, produce director at DeCicco Family Markets in Brewster, NY.

“Our Southern Hemisphere season begins in February with tangerines and is followed by lemons and oranges in March and April.”

— Macarena Beltrán, San Miguel

TRANSPORTATION AND PRODUCT SAFETY

South African summer citrus travels to North America under a cold sterilization process in refrigerated vessels, eliminating the need for chemical fumigation upon arrival in the United States. However, the process takes more than three weeks. Last year, the USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) agreed to a pilot project with the Port of Houston to decrease the cold treatment period for South African citrus from 24 to 22 days. The pilot project’s success means South African citrus can reach Midwestern and Southwestern markets in fewer days and have a longer shelf life. Additionally, the process could positively affect price if shorter cold storage reduces product loss during transit.

The transit time from parts of South America is similar to that from South Africa. San Miguel’s Beltrán notes, “almost all our fruit requires transit times greater than three weeks on top of the one week of time from harvest to port. Thus, we take all the necessary measures for the fruit to reach the U.S. in

optimal condition.”

Efforts are being made to shorten shipping. This year, UPEFRUY is shipping directly from Montevideo to Philadelphia during certain periods in the season to deliver higher quality products faster. Chile follows strict phytosanitary conditions, allowing its citrus to avoid cold sterilization treatments and to be shipped by sea for fewer days at an optimal temperature that preserves quality.

“Throughout the supply chain, Chilean fruit is managed to provide the best eating experience for the end consumer. Growers take the best care to produce and harvest the fruit. The fruit is picked at the perfect stage of maturity, and exporters take special care in packing and post-harvest management to ensure quality is maintained and any losses are minimized,” says Karen Brux of CFFA. “The reopening of the Panama Canal is going to make a difference, as transit time will be further reduced. It will also impact shipping costs, although one has to consider the cost of using the canal.”

Once the produce arrives in North





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Uruguay citrus exports typically include Mandarins, Satsumas, Clementines, White Murcotts and Navels; new varieties are being tested as well.

At Haggen, almost every summer citrus variety matches its domestic counterpart and tracks similarly on popularity and sales.

MEETING CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS

“California created the standards for Clementines and that is the standard we adhere to — seedless, sweet, and easy to peel,” notes Macarena Beltrán of San Miguel. “Thanks to Southern Hemisphere citrus, customers now can enjoy Clementines year-round.”

“We send only top quality citrus to the U.S.,” says Bentancur from UPEFRUY. “Our fruit stands out in color and taste, two very important attributes for the consumer. Additionally, Uruguayan farmers are planting new varieties that are highly appealing.”

Retailers are pleased with Southern Hemisphere citrus. At Haggen, almost every summer citrus variety matches its domestic counterpart and tracks similarly on popularity and sales, says Linskey. Contreras at DeCicco’s is particularly pleased with South African Navel oranges, which are extremely popular in stores frequented by shoppers from Africa.

“We bring in Southern Hemisphere citrus to provide our customers with the best selection possible until domestic fruit that meets our quality standards becomes available,” says

Dan Donovan, spokesperson for Giant Eagle in Pittsburgh, PA.

TAKING ACTION TO MARKET SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE CITRUS

CFFA supports promotional partnerships that include store displays, ads, and social media. “With larger volumes of Chilean citrus arriving from August onward, retail promotions focus on the August/September/October timeframe and include back-to-school and fall themes. Promotions vary with the retailer. In the Midwest, we’re working with a 1,300-plus store chain on a branded, two-week Navel ad. The retailer has more than 420,000 Facebook likes, and will be posting some fun facts from our new e-newsletter. On the West Coast, we’re providing nutrition messaging to a group of stores targeting low income families.” CFFA also plans to expand its joint promotion partnership with Tajin, a spicy seasoning for fruit, in Hispanic retailers.

“We can provide retailers with tools to draw their shoppers’ attention to Chilean citrus,” says Brux. “Whether it’s usage ideas to post on their Facebook page, shopper giveaways, short videos from Chilean orchards, partner demos, sales incentive programs for produce managers, or other programs, we work with individual retailers to design programs that are going to work for them. It’s all about finding the effective tools to drive sales.”

Brux calls out Clementines as a marketing success story. “Who hasn’t seen an ad for easy peelers? The strong marketing force behind this product created great demand. Retailers build large displays throughout the year and McDonald’s carried them in their Happy Meals. The demand for these, especially among kids, is amazing!”

The WCCPF supports grocers with recipes, advertising, in-store tastings, the King Citrus mascot and a kid-friendly lion.

“While South African products are available in the eastern U.S. and widely available in the Midwest and West, our shipments to the Port of Houston open additional expansion opportunities to grow our presence in the U.S.,” says Conradie. **pb**

America, responsibility shifts. “Stores must do their part to ensure freshness,” says Chris Linskey, senior vice president of marketing of Haggen Markets Southwest in Irvine, CA. “Our transit time is 48 hours from dock to store, and we turn around produce within seven days.”

■ HOT SALES CONTINUE DESPITE COOL

Country of origin labeling (COOL) doesn’t appear to impact sales. “Price is the dominant factor that impacts consumer choice. Country of origin is a lower priority,” says Barbara Ruhs, a registered dietitian with Neighborhood Nutrition LLC in Phoenix, AZ. “Customers have no idea that citrus in the middle of July comes from South America or the Southern Hemisphere. Some customers will react to country of origin information in a negative manner, but I believe they are the minority, especially in the summer when competition for locally grown or domestic produce is not as significant.”

“Country of origin labeling does not affect shopper purchases,” says Chris Linskey, senior vice president of marketing of Haggen Markets Southwest in Irvine, CA. “When quality is high and customers don’t have much choice, they buy. Southern Hemisphere countries are the source of citrus in the

summer.”

Giant Eagle often displays summer citrus with signage indicating country of origin and also periodically identifies it as a feature product that is showcased at the front of the produce section and highlighted in the weekly circular.

Competition appears to be a greater challenge than COOL. “I think the U.S. shopper expects produce to be available year-round and retail sales would certainly show that they eat citrus even when domestic supply ends. As long as the quality is consistent, sales continue. The main challenge faced by retailers is the huge onslaught of summer fruit they need to promote. Peaches, plums, nectarines, grapes, cherries ... lots of fruit is fighting for shelf space and promotion,” says Karen Brux, North America managing director for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA) in San Carlos, CA. **pb**

Merchandising Cherries For Maximum Sales And Profits



How displays, special labels, signage, demos, social media and the roles they play generate sales.

BY CHRIS AUMAN

For many people, the arrival of the first cherries at the supermarket is a signal summer has officially begun. As cherry marketing season approaches, produce executives can remind potential consumers of their love of this sweet, pitted fruit. Signage, colorful attention-grabbing displays and in-store demos are still effective ways to make shoppers aware of the fruit's availability, but cross-merchandising and social media can also play an important role in increasing sales and profits.

The consumption of fresh cherries in the U.S. enjoyed a rapid rise over the past few decades, from lows in the 1990s of 1.3 pounds per person to a peak in 2009 that saw that number hit 2.4 pounds according to the Economic Research Service for the USDA. This trend has held strong despite occasional setbacks in crop yield. There's no question that Americans love this sweet, healthful fruit; the challenge is how to make shoppers more aware of their presence in produce sections.

HIGH VISIBILITY

Cherries are now enjoying a longer season

and cherry promotions can be effective well through July. In fact, the marketing season for cherries now extends from early May through July and into mid-August, with tart cherries in season from mid-June through the end of August according to the National Agricultural Statistical Service of the USDA. The Fourth of July holiday presents a great opportunity to promote cherries. With so many picnics and backyard barbecues planned around this holiday weekend, it's a great time for fruit sales. Consumers can be reminded that cherries are still available. In-store displays are perhaps the best way to engage consumers and get cherries on their minds.

According to Roger Pepperl, marketing director at Stemilt Growers in Wenatchee, WA, the company's retail partners have seen success by challenging produce managers to compete against each other to create the most imaginative and sales-driven displays. Pepperl also saw stores have success with special labels designed to compete with the lesser-quality cherries that hit the market later in the season. One such label, "Kyle's Pick," touts a larger cherry (10 row up to an 8.5 row) endorsed by Stemilt's owner Kyle Mathison. Kyle's Pick includes only cherries that, according to Pepperl, possess "high firmness, proper sugars and acids ... only certain varieties pass the test." Types such as Skeena, Bing and Sweetheart are included in this program.

Another program that retailers have been

using in connection to Stemilt Growers is "Half-Mile Closer to the Moon," which features cherries that are grown at a minimum of a half-mile above sea level. Pepperl explains, "Kyle Mathison believes much of the horticultural practices of feeding these cherries during full moon cycles helps bring out the best flavors."

The graphic on this pouch bag features a high elevation cherry orchard set against a mountainous backdrop and bathed in the light of a full moon. "It truly brings quality and a 'Who grew my food?' marketing sense to the program," says Pepperl. "Retailers are putting up signage and digital assets to show off this program that harvests from August 7th until we finish around the first week of September." Pepperl says this packaging creates the type of product differentiation that is key to marketing cherries.

Some consumers may feel cherries, because of price, are a luxury and not for everyday consumption. Once they taste them, however, they may be reminded of their childhood when perhaps they ate cherries on the front porch or tied cherry stems into bows. Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing at Sage Fruit Company, recognizes the importance of making cherries highly visible to consumers through the use of displays. Many shoppers, especially those in the Northeast and Midwest, may be used to an absence of certain fruits during the preceding winter months and need

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a reminder of their return to the market.

Sinks has seen success among retailers who employ a two-tier system with their cherry displays. “Some of the people we see who are having a really good response are people who are starting to do a two-tier program where they may have an 11 row for a consumer who is somewhat price conscious, and then they’ll have a 9.5 row cherry for a consumer that’s willing to pay higher dollars. They’re not missing either spectrum.”

From a retail perspective, Paul Kneeland, vice president of produce, meat, seafood and floral at Parsippany, NJ-based Kings Food Markets, sees value in price choice as well. Kneeland believes growers who use gusseted bags to sell cherries in smaller quantities are more successful.

“This year, the smart growers will get even smaller on the bags,” says Kneeland. “If growers can get them down to a 1-pound bag, then that will reduce the sticker shock when customers get to the register. When shoppers see cherries selling for \$4.99 a pound, but get to the register and see an \$8 ring — that may discourage them from buying cherries again that season. Gusseted bags at a set price, work well to prevent this.”

SOCIAL MEDIA’S ROLE

The rise in popularity of social media gives supermarket executives another great tool to market cherries. Pepperl has seen success on these platforms in connecting with customers. “We are doing social media programs for retailers with Facebook, Twitter — including Twitter parties — and Pinterest. We write a Stemilt blog called “The Stem” to talk about cherries during the summer. Retail partners also do ads with our assets, featuring the large-size cherries we sell.” For Stemilt, this is an effective way to let consumers know about the quality of its cherries, and it also helps the stores set their product apart from what Pepperl calls the “poor eating cherry that the competitor has down the street.”

Mac Riggan, vice president of marketing at Chelan Fresh in Chelan, WA, also recognizes the value of a strong online and mobile marketing presence and sees e-commerce as key to making customers aware of cherries. This is accomplished through the use of downloadable coupons, which retailers display on their websites to entice consumers to add the fruit to their shopping lists.

“One of the things we’re doing is e-commerce, where we try to engage the customer before they even get to the store,” says Riggan. This approach enables stores to grab

the attention of consumers who may be using the website to make their shopping lists and who are looking for potential savings. “E-commerce is a great way to promote cherries — maybe even more effectively than demos,” adds Riggan. “Retailers have a huge impact on what customers put on their shopping lists.”

A PROMISING SIGN

In conjunction with these marketing strategies, it’s important for supermarkets to remember the basics. Something as simple as signage can reap significant benefits in raising consumer awareness and increasing cherry sales. For Dovey Plain, marketing coordinator

at Family Tree Farms based in Reedley, CA, it’s important to make consumers aware of the start of the cherry season. “For the first U.S. cherries of the season, signage like ‘Fresh from California’ helps consumers know summer cherry season started. It can start much earlier than many consumers realize, so signage like this is important to help them understand that this is fresh U.S. product,” says Plain.

It’s important to recognize that while people may love the sweet taste of cherries, the fruit’s months-long absence from the produce aisles may put cherries right out of consumers’ minds. Signage reminds them of cherries’ return to the market and also helps customers

CROSS-MERCHANDISING AND MARKETING



Bing Beverage Company produces a naturally-flavored, caffeinated beverage made with Bing cherries called Petey's Bing Juice. The company partnered with the Chilean Cherry Committee to demo product in produce.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CHILEAN CHERRY COMMITTEE

Cross-merchandising promotions are another good way to increase consumer awareness. Toward this end, the Sage Fruit Company partnered with one of the most popular sports organizations in the U.S. — NASCAR. As a part of this relationship, Sage goes into markets where a race is being held and does promotions the week before, the week of, and the week after, in an effort to maximize the impact of the campaign. Everyday promotions with Disney and Marvel have likewise produced dividends for Sage. Its Spider-Man cherry promotion features packaging that grabs the attention of parents and kids alike. Sinks credits this packaging with increasing sales by 18 percent in the stores that offered them.

Naturally relatable products can also join forces to form associations in the minds of consumers, and demos are a key part of this cross-marketing partnership. For Brux, a likely ally was Denver-based Bing Beverage Company, which produces a naturally-flavored, caffeinated beverage made with Bing cherries called Petey’s Bing Juice.

“This past season, the Chilean Cherry Committee partnered with Bing Juice on demos in select retail chains,” says Karen Brux, managing director of the Santiago, Chile-based Chilean Fresh Fruit Association North America. “Bing has a cherry-flavored variety that is very popular around the holidays, so it was a perfect tie-in with fresh Chilean cherries. Bing developed signage that showed both their juice and Chilean Cherries, and then we also sent our own materials including table-top cards with easel stands and recipe handouts.”

A good mix of traditional displays and signage, combined with the latest trends in packaging and labeling, cross-merchandising, marketing partnerships and the use of social media and e-commerce platforms, give produce executives many tools with which they can successfully market cherries. Used independently or in concert with each other, retailers can practice these methods to improve sales and increase profits year-round as well as help ensure Americans continue to enjoy the sweet taste and great health benefits of cherries.

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distinguish between the different varieties.

“Most consumers are familiar with the Bing variety and its deep, red color,” explains Plain. “Most of the early varieties are a bright, vibrant red — simple variety signage can help consumers understand that difference. Variety information also helps feed the knowledge of fruit connoisseurs.”

Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets, agrees signage is an important part of any complete marketing package. “Successful merchandising of cherries occurs when the displays are full, with signage, supported by ad placement and secondary displays.” Each part of the promotional program supports the other.

VARIETY EQUALS CHOICE

Bing is one of the most recognizable cherry varieties, although shoppers may know it by its color and shape and not necessarily by name. Besides the beloved Bing, there are other varieties that are sure to get cherry lovers excited about the new season. At Stemilt Growers, Pepperl predicts Skylar Rae will be a popular variety on the cherry market this year. The color of the Skylar Rae is a much darker yellow

than a yellow Rainier and has an orange-red hue, yet not the deep burgundy color of the Dark Sweet.

“This cherry has completely different DNA from any Dark Sweet or Rainier cherry and truly is the first really distinctive cherry variety,” says Pepperl. The Skylar Rae variety is unique because the fruit’s sugar content of 25 brix, which is higher than that of the Dark Sweet (at about 19 brix), and Rainier cherries, which average about 21 brix. According to Pepperl, the firmness tests about 35 to 40 percent above other varieties. “The flavor, crunch and juice are addictive as they are hard to quit eating. This will become a huge variety for Stemilt and its partnered retailers over the next several years as orchards come into production. This cherry is unbelievable.”

For Family Tree Farms, whose growing area is in the central and southern part of the San Joaquin Valley, there are some new varieties in store for consumers this year as well. The brand’s usual varieties of Brooks and Tulare will be complemented by newer cherries like Coral Champagne, Minnie Royal and Royal Tioga, to name a few, says Dovey Plain. These varieties are harvested in a short time and brought to market quickly. “Our season is from late

April through the end of May — very fast and furious,” says Plain.

PACKAGING TRENDS

Packaging is another way to engage shoppers. Sinks at Sage sees a trend in consumer preference that leans toward pouch bags. “More consumers are starting to look for the pouch bags,” says Sinks, “as opposed to the traditional cherry bag.”

Pepperl would agree with that assessment and says pouch bags are good for random weight packages, but he also sees success with clamshells. “Clamshells continue to flourish especially for club stores and large 3# or 4# units,” he says. “Many retailers are upping their random weight bags from 2.25# bags to 2.5# bags to increase the purchase size. Smaller size packages are a diminishing item as driving purchase size down below a pound is foolish for any retailer. If you can’t afford to sell a pound or more, you are selling too much packaging per ounce of cherries.”

While pouch bags and clamshells are effective ways to package cherries, alternative packaging ideas can serve a variety of consumer needs as well. Chelan Fresh’s Cup o’ Cherries is a way for consumers to eat cherries on the go.

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5 WAYS ONE OF THE LARGEST NORTHWEST CHERRY GROWERS HELPS RETAILERS BOOST CHERRY SALES



BY CAROL BAREUTHER, RD

Northwest growers are enjoying a 20/20 cherry season. That is, the five states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Utah are projected to harvest nearly 20 million, 20-pound boxes of red and Rainier cherries from May through August, according to Yakima, WA-headquartered Northwest Cherry Growers. Columbia Marketing International (CMI), will ship some 2 million, or 10 percent, of this crop, making the Wenatchee-based company one of the largest cherry grower/shipper/marketers in the Northwest. Because of this high volume, CMI devised a variety of ways in which the company works in concert with its retailers to move the lucrative and seasonal fruit through its fast and furious marketing window. Here are a few tips from the company's playbook.

1. Do Your Homework

Advance work and analysis of category performance is one way CMI works with its retailers to most profitably sell cherries. This includes an assessment of past performance and how a retailer's cherry category sales stacks up against its competitors as well as to documented category best practices. For example, an analysis this year revealed how critical the first few weeks of the season are in optimizing cherry performance.

"The top retail chains (based on the percentage of cherry dollars to total produce) start the cherry season very aggressively and

build sales into the peak," explains Steve Lutz, CMI's vice president of marketing. "Low performing chains lay out the first few weeks and don't get behind the category until at least three to four weeks after the Washington crop starts. The result is missed sales. Early momentum springboards cherry sales at top retailers to over 9 percent of total produce dollars by the key Fourth of July holiday. Low-performing retailers fail to establish this early season buying habit with their customers by not promoting the category. As a result, on average, their category contribution rarely reaches above 5 percent of total produce contribution."

2. Plan Carefully

It is crucial for suppliers and retailers to work together closely to plan weekly volume and production forecasts. This gives retailers the ability to forecast and align their planning to ensure they can fully cover their supply needs.

"Cherries can be extremely volatile in production, so we think it's helpful for everyone to support this advance volume and promotional planning," explains Lutz.

3. Add Organics

Organically grown cherries represent approximately 2 percent of the total crop, according to Northwest Cherry Growers. Yet, they can be a potentially lucrative ring.

"We added cherries to our line of Daisy Girl organics this season. Daisy Girl is the No. 1 selling organic apple brand in the United States,

so we're pretty excited to add red and Rainier cherries to the Daisy Girl product line," says Lutz.

4. Packaging That Sells

Nearly the entire Northwest cherry crop is sold in some type of packaging. It is a retailer's choice of packaging that can boost sales.

"We have done a lot to perfect our cherry pouch bag over the past two seasons. We made significant advancements and improvements in our cherry pouch bag in terms of materials, graphics, colors and even how the bag design is tapered and cut. All of this work is focused on helping retailers put a package on the shelf that maximizes the impulse appeal of cherries," explains Lutz.

5. Secondary Displays Sell

Retail studies conducted on behalf of Northwest Cherry Growers document that consumer cherry purchases are highly impulsive. In fact, this research reveals that secondary displays can drive a 25 percent increase in weekly volume, even though displays are relatively small. This information underscores the importance of secondary displays as a valuable selling tool.

"We offer retailers our '3D window display' unit. This free-standing unit can be merchandised anywhere in the produce department or even any high-traffic area in the store to drive incremental sales. These units can be shipped packed with fruit or flat if that is preferred by the retail account," concludes Lutz

pb

The 16-ounce cup holds 8 ounces of cherries and is topped with a two-compartment “smart lid,” which dispenses the cherries from one side and allows the consumer to dispose of the seeds in the other, for what Riggan calls “a one-handed eating experience.”

FOREVER CHERRIES

A good source of antioxidants, cherries are linked to pain relief for arthritis, gout and headaches, while tart cherries are said to

SWEET PROMOTIONS

With the arrival of the 2015 cherry season, growers are busy and so are the folks at Northwest Cherry Growers (NWCWG). It's the mission of the NWCWG, as a part of the Washington State Fruit Commission, to promote this sweet, versatile fruit to retailers and ultimately to consumers. James Michael, promotions director for the organization, explains, “We're a direct voice for more than 2,100 growers with orchards of all sizes. Our messaging dovetails with the current focus of consumers and retailers alike.”

The Fourth of July is one of the biggest produce holiday of the year for retailers, and Michael is looking forward to strong cherry volume this year. “We're anticipating one of the earliest starts in Northwest cherry history,” says Michael, “which will mean cherries could be the No. 1 dollar-per-square foot item for July.” That's reason enough to celebrate a fruit that already has ties to American history. After all, it was a young George Washington who could not tell a lie and confessed to chopping down his father's favorite cherry tree.

Numbers don't lie either, and they show an increase in demand for Rainier yellow cherries, especially among Hispanics, with the variety making up for 10 percent of the crop produced by Northwest Cherry Growers. Retailers showcasing this delicately flavored variety can take advantage of this growing market segment.

The taste of cherries alone should be enough to put them at the top of summertime shopping lists, but Michael reminds us, many times out-of-sight means out-of-mind for consumers. Consumers need a reminder of the great taste and health benefits of this wonderful pitted fruit. “How can one convince someone to strive for the cherry on top until they've tasted it?” asks Michael. The answer is in-store and street team demos combined with social media campaigns that jumpstart the cherry conversation and gets this fruit back on the shopping lists of consumers. **pb**

reduce the risk of stroke, heart disease and diabetes. With such great health benefits, consumers should be eating cherries year-round, yet many may be unaware that this is even a possibility.

Karen Brux, managing director of the Santiago, Chile-based Chilean Fresh Fruit Association North America, wants consumers to know that cherries are available most of the year. “When it's winter here, it's summer in Chile,” says Brux, “so from November through January, U.S. consumers can get the fresh, flavorful cherries they love from Chile. Chile's Southern Hemisphere location allows U.S. consumers to enjoy their favorite summer fruits, like cherries, during our winter months.”

If making shoppers aware that cherries are actually available during winter months is the only setback, there are ways to reverse this and get consumers thinking about this fresh fruit option. The shiny red sheen of cherries can make a great tie-in with the Christmas holiday when desserts abound. Brux advises produce executives to “communicate easy wintery ideas, like cherry pie pops, hearty wild rice salad with cherries, cherry chocolate muffins, or grilled cheese with cherry compote.”

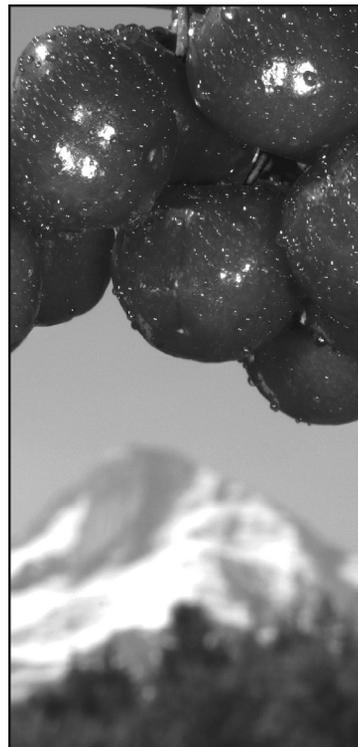
Associating cherries with cooking goes a

“More consumers are starting to look for the pouch bags as opposed to the traditional cherry bag.”

— Chuck Sinks, Sage Fruit Company

long way toward increasing sales. So does simply letting the cherries market themselves. “I saw a retailer that had a large bulk display of cherries,” says Brux. “Yes, there was a lot of self-sampling taking place by consumers, but when they discovered the fabulous taste, many grabbed a bag and bought some to take home.”

Pepperl also sees value in the connection to cooking and baking and he sees retailers have success with these types of programs, such as cherry festival ads that create a link between bakery and grocery cherry items. Stemilt's “Who Grew my Cherry” program, which features the fifth generation Mathison family in posters, digital ads and point-of-sale displays, is also used by in-store dietitians to stress the important health aspects of cherries. **pb**



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Untapped Consumers Are Key To Increasing Mango Sales



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL MANGO BOARD

Store promotions, signage and associate education create distinction.

BY KRISTEN POPE

Four out of 10 consumers have never purchased a mango, according to the National Mango Board (NMB). This figure shows the tremendous opportunity to reach an untapped market. Once consumers start purchasing mangos, they are likely to continue, according to the NMB's 2013 *Consumers Attitude and Usage Study*, which also found almost all current purchasers plan to continue buying mangos in the future.

The NMB also found consumers are most interested in purchasing "ripe and ready" fruit with four out of five current mango buyers seeking ripe and ready fruit. However, Nielsen Perishables Group's *FreshFacts* shows retail mango purchases declined 12.6 percent from 2013 to 2014. What can retailers do to change this trend?

REACHING OUT TO FIRST-TIME MANGO BUYERS

Tasting is believing, according to many mango experts. In-store sampling events lure

in new consumers and remind those who've previously tried mangos just how tasty they are. "It may seem old-school, but a knowledgeable produce associate with a knife and a willingness to cut and sample ripe mangos from time to time can do wonders for mango sales and shopper loyalty," says Angela Serna, communications manager, the NMB, Orlando, FL.

The taste appeal of mangos can also be used to promote the health appeal of the fruit. "I've seen success from demos," says Tom Hall, sales manager, Freska Produce, Oxnard, CA. "Demos typically get people to try mangos and see how sweet they are and how good they taste, and they're more likely to buy. Also, it helps at the point-of-sale to have material touting the health benefits and that they're high in Vitamin C."

According to one mango expert, ripe mangos are quite effective at selling themselves. "Most people don't know mangos other than what they've had in juices," says Lorenz Hartmann de Barros, director of sales, HLB Specialties, LLC, Pompano Beach, FL. "Cut one open and have them eat a ripe one first-hand and it sells itself. I've yet to find someone who eats a good, ripe mango and says 'I don't like that.' It's really hard not to like a mango."

While the flavor of mangos delights

consumers, the idea of selecting a ripe fruit, slicing, and preparing it may be overwhelming enough that many keep walking right past the mangos and instead fill their shopping baskets with the more familiar apples and bananas. "Most people say they like the flavor of mangos," says Serna. "They have tasted mangos in salsa or smoothies, maybe at a restaurant, but if they don't know how to select, ripen, or cut the fruit, they may be afraid to purchase it." That's why communicating how to select, slice, and prepare a mango is a key part of the NMB's strategy to reach out to consumers to help them feel confident in purchasing the fruit.

HOW DO YOU SLICE IT?

Learning how to slice and dice a ripe mango can be a barrier for consumers. The NMB is working to educate people on the best way to cut a mango, including featuring a video and step-by-step directions on its website. Dodging the flat, long seed in the center is the most important part, but other than that, there are a few different ways to cut a mango, including dicing, slicing it into spears, and even using a mango splitter.

"The No. 1 question that comes back from retailers is, 'How do you cut this thing?'" says Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer, Ciruli



One of the 2014 winning displays, built by Jodie Murdock of Fresh Market in Richfield, UT.

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Brothers, Tubac, AZ, who recommends training produce department members with back-of-store posters and many of the videos available online through the NMB and other sources.

“The National Mango Board is a good source of information for people to find out more about mangos,” says Hall. “Many people may not even know what the Mango Board is, but it’s good to look and have that information. POS materials are always a good way, and so are demos and showing people how to cut mangos.”

Keeping information readily on hand for consumers is key. “One of the best ways is to have a bin program with a cutting diagram right on the bin,” says Ciruli. “The person buying a piece of fruit can see how to cut it on the diagram.”

CROSS-MERCHANDISING AND HOLIDAY SALES

Cross merchandising is another way to show consumers the variety of ways they can use mangos. “Market them with other commodities and show people recipes,” says Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales, Vision Import Group, Hackensack, NJ. “It’s a very diverse fruit and has multiple uses. Maybe some people don’t realize what you can do with a mango.”

Cohen suggests adding mango to guacamole to enhance the sweet-and-savory flavor profile. He also recommends a new twist on the classic PB&J: PB and mango, or even switching mangos for tomatoes in a Caprese



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL MANGO BOARD

salad, then adding mozzarella, basil, and a drizzle of balsamic. Combining mango salsa with chicken, fish, or pork can liven up a classic meal. Slicing mango into yogurt and granola for breakfast is a way to add a fun twist to.

MANGOS ON THE MIND

With a fruit that might not already be on the top of people’s weekly shopping lists, it’s important to make sure it’s easy for consumers to find mangos, and that they’re appealing. “Mangos are usually an impulse buy, so it helps

to build big, beautiful displays and rotate out any old or damaged fruit,” says Serna.

Those displays can incorporate a number of different varieties of mangos to present a diverse color palette and display. The six major mango varieties the U.S. imports are Ataulfo, Tommy Atkins, Kent, Haden, Francis and Keitt.

“I love it when people do multiple displays of different varieties with different colors,” says Ciruli. “It gives shoppers an opportunity to see them more than once and also see different

MANGO-SELECTION EDUCATION LEADS TO REPEAT SALES

It can be perplexing to look at a mango display and try and pick out the best fruit. Consumers wonder whether they should select a mango based on its color, softness, smell, or other factors. It can be a huge turn-off to bring home a mango, anticipating a sweet and ripe fruit only to find it’s rock-hard and not at all ripe. Educating consumers on ripeness and how to select a mango can help boost repeat sales.

“It’s never about the color, it’s always about the softness,” says Lorenz Hartmann de Barros, director of sales, HLB Specialties, LLC, Pompano Beach, FL. “Cup it in your hand, and use all five fingers to give it a little squeeze. It has to have some give; it can’t be hard. You can’t use just one finger — it will damage the fruit. You have to use all five fingers, and if you see it give, it’s ready. The ripe fruit usually has more aroma and you can smell it.”

Like an avocado, gentle pressure should find the fruit slightly yielding. Hard mangos can also be ripened at home. “When it’s hard, bring it home at room temperature or in a paper bag and let it ripen for a few days,” says Cohen.

Ripeness is also based on personal preference. “I find that everybody has a different taste profile,” says Tom Hall, sales manager, Freska Produce, Oxnard, CA. “It really depends on personal preference. Some people tend to like mangos a little more on the ripe side, some like them over-ripe. Some people like them greener.”

Consumers unaccustomed to tropical fruits may be surprised by some of the characteristics of a mango. Some varieties, such as Ataulfo mangos, will have small wrinkles at peak ripeness. To unfamiliar customers, this may appear to be a fruit gone bad.

Storing mangos at the right temperatures is an important thing retailers can do to make sure consumers have the best experience with ripe fruit. “If it’s held too cold, it will be too hard,” says Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer, Ciruli Brothers, Tubac, AZ. “It needs to be 55 degrees or higher at the store level.”

The NMB recommends storing whole mangos between 54-60 degrees Fahrenheit, and never below 50 degrees. Mangos should be displayed at room temperature only. The board also offers a Mango Ripening Webinar available for retailers and importers to learn about the specific ripening of mangos, as well as a backroom educational piece called “Treat Me Like a Banana.” The idea is everyone in produce knows not to refrigerate bananas,” says Angela Serna, communications manager, the NMB, Orlando, FL.

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types.” Bin programs that display mangos by cash registers and in other departments throughout the store, perhaps next to other menu options, are also useful.

SHELF LIFE

Determining a mango’s shelf life isn’t an exact science. It depends on many different factors, according to Serna. “There’s no easy answer to the shelf life of a mango at retail,” says Serna. “It all depends on when it was harvested, the maturity level at harvest, the time in transportation, and distribution. One mistake we see way too often is retailers holding mangos too cold, probably in an attempt to increase shelf life. While their intentions are good, the result will most likely be chill damage that will show up later in the supply chain or in the customer’s kitchen.”

Serna encourages customers to let mangos that need a little extra ripening sit on the counter at room temperature. “Once the mango reaches just the right level of ripeness, it can be moved to the refrigerator for a few days or cut up and placed in the freezer for up to six months,” says Serna.

A number of different factors can cause

A MANGO FOR ALL SEASONS

In the U.S., consumers can find mangos available year-round. Six varieties are most common, with peak availability shifting so different mangos from different regions are available at different times.

Ataulfo from Mexico	March-July
Francis from Haiti	May-July
Haden from Mexico	April-May
Keitt from Mexico and the U.S.	August-September
Kent from Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru.....	January-March and June-August
Tommy Atkins from Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru	March-July and October-January

Source: National Mango Board

varying shelf life for different mangos. “If everything goes right, a mango’s shelf life will be 7-10 days,” says Hall. “Different varieties tend to have different ripening characteristics. It depends on the variety, what area it’s coming out of, and what time of year it is.”

With longer transit times, mangos can have a shorter shelf life depending on how far they have to travel. Cohen emphasizes the key is to sell ripe mangos. “Buy ripe, sell ripe,” says Cohen.

MULTIPLICITY OF MANGO USAGE

Smoothies and juices are favorite ways for consumers to enjoy mangos, but there is a wealth of other ways to enjoy their flavors. “The number one usage is smoothies and juices,” says Ciruli. “But we want to convince a person that mangos are good for more than just that. We’re seeing a lot of mangos mixed into guacamole to add some zest, and in the topping on fresh fish. Fresh fish and mangos go really well together. There’s a recipe with grilled mango for dessert, seared on a grill with sugar and honey and heated up. There are a lot of creative ways to eat it.”

Mangos are a great addition to many different items. “Typically, we’re starting to see more people use mangos as salsas,” says Hall. “Mangos go well with quite a few items, from smoothies to ham sandwiches with mangos.”

TRUST OVERCOMES CONSUMER INTIMIDATION

Offering samples, social media promotion, and recipe suggestions are some ways to encourage cautious consumers to sample the mango. “Recipes work,” says Hartmann de Barros. “People say ‘I like that item, why not add it to that to try it out?’ If you already like pork roast, might as well try mangos with it.”

Having knowledgeable produce staff is also very important, as it can spread information and help build trust. “Employees of the supermarket have to know what they’re selling,” says Hartmann de Barros. “No one really wants to buy something from someone who doesn’t know. Everyone wants to buy from a specialist. With fruit in particular, people want to go to a person who knows the fruit and can say ‘Pair it with this recipe’ or ‘Store it this way, cut it this way.’ All these details transmit trust and that’s ultimately what we’re looking for when we buy something. Having a knowledgeable produce clerk develops trust.”

A FRESH-CUT OPPORTUNITY

Fresh-cut mangos are a way for consumers to overcome the obstacles of selecting the perfectly ripe mango and finding the best way to slice or dice it. However, fresh-cut sales do provide obstacles for retailers. “If you peel a banana, it looks great the second you peel it, but 5-10 minutes later it starts getting brown from oxygen,” says Lorenz Hartmann de Barros, director of sales, HLB Specialties, LLC, Pompano Beach, FL. “The skin protects it. If you cut fruit open, it has oxygen attacking it.”

Distributors want to deliver a product “with optimal ripeness, not too crunchy but sweet enough,” says Hartmann de Barros. “If it’s too ripe and mushy, people don’t like it either ... It’s challenging to have something ready to eat and keep it that way longer than half an hour.”

Consumers are latching onto the fresh-cut mango market. In 2014, as whole mangos declined in sales, fresh-cut mango sales increased, with “fresh-cut mango dollars per store per week” increasing by 6 percent, according to the NMB. “Lots of people are not really familiar with how to cut a mango, but when it’s already cut, they are more apt to try it,” says Tom Hall, sales manager, Freska Produce, Oxnard, CA.

It also helps consumers overcome the

intimidation factor when choosing a ripe piece of fruit. For the retailer, however, it can be difficult to get the ripeness level right. “An under-ripe mango will be too crunchy and not sweet enough, but let the mango ripen too much and it may not hold up to the rigors of cutting and transportation,” says Angela Serna, communications manager, the NMB, Orlando, FL.

And the preparation and transportation process can be difficult for such a tropical fruit. “The challenge is always temperature and how they ship it, because mostly when dealing with pre-prepped or cut fruit, it’s a lot colder than tropical fruit should run,” Chris Ciruli, chief operating officer, Ciruli Brothers, Tubac, AZ. He notes when the fruit is perfect for slicing, it’s not at peak ripeness, yet at peak ripeness, it’s not as easy to slice since it’s softer.

“Offer the pre-cut the way it’s supposed to be,” says Hartmann de Barros. “Mangos are a tropical item ... If it’s crunchy and they don’t like it, next time they’ll buy a banana or an apple. Give them a mango in the right condition — ripe and ready to eat. If not, you have to work twice as hard to overcome mistrust instead of, if from the get-go, they have a ripe product.”

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Bulk Lettuce ‘Romaines’ On Top



Still a produce leader even with the proliferation of fresh-cut salads.

BY BOB JOHNSON

A renaissance of sorts descended on the bulk lettuce category, as red, green and oak leaf varieties take their place next to iceberg; as lolla rosa becomes a familiar term; and as a deep red lettuce with a nutritional punch — even greater than the superfood blueberry — is on the way.

Fresh-cut salad products touch all the bases in current food megatrends — they are convenient, interesting and nutritious — but bulk lettuces refuse to relinquish their role in fresh produce.

“With the phenomenal growth of the value-added category and the growing number of SKUs that fill produce departments today, it is tempting to reduce the displays of bulk lettuce,” says Pierre Dolbec, vice president of sales and procurement at Veg Pro International, Sherrington, Quebec. “Bulk lettuce is also more labor intensive, and with tight operating budgets, retailers are continuously seeking ways to optimize labor in the departments.”

It is worth the effort, however, to find the

resources needed to maintain the role of bulk lettuce as a refreshing centerpiece in produce.

“Bulk lettuce, in my opinion, is a key component in giving the produce department a fresh and vibrant appearance,” says Dolbec. “The size and disposition of produce departments vary greatly, and produce managers need to adapt to their individual customer bases. I feel it is important to maintain an important part of the overall display dedicated to bulk lettuce.”

EFFECTIVE DISPLAYS ARE THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

Lettuce should be given the respect that comes with an eye-catching spot in the produce department.

“Bulk lettuce should be merchandised in a high-traffic area, refrigerated at eye level,” advises Claudia Villalobos, marketing and culinary manager at D’Arrigo Brothers of California, Salinas, CA, which ships under the Andy Boy label.

Regardless of the abundance or simplicity of the offering, the lettuce display must above all convey freshness.

“Bulk lettuce is the cornerstone to the fresh look in grocery stores,” says Caitlin Antle-Wilson, sales and marketing director at Tanimura & Antle Produce, Salinas, CA. “It should take up 25 to 30 percent of the fresh

bulk category space. It should be merchandised in a way that allows customers to see it from afar. In addition it should be refrigerated and misted properly.”

Nothing says “past its peak” like limp lettuce, which means freshness demands a commitment to care for the product after it reaches the store.

“If lettuce is unwrapped, you put it in the wet rack and mist it; if it’s wrapped it’s not going to be sprayed,” says Diana McClean, director of marketing at Ocean Mist Farms, Castroville, CA.

Retailers must have the staff available to provide additional care for unwrapped lettuce, to make sure it keeps that fresh-from-the-garden look.

“The wrapped lettuce is more shelf-ready,” says McClean. “You can just take it out of the case and put it on the rack. With the naked iceberg lettuce you have to have the labor available for crisping and trimming.”

Appealing lettuce anchors a fresh salad section that answers the call for healthy eating.

“We recommend bulk iceberg lettuce be merchandised on the wet rack near its other leafy green counterparts to create a salad-making destination and color-blocking displays,” says Kori Tuggle, vice president of marketing at Church Brothers Produce, Salinas, CA.

Some creative retailers combine wrapped and bagged bulk lettuce in a separate dry section that lends itself to merchandising numerous salad ingredients.

“We are building a dry pack salad destination,” says Aaron Riveras, produce sales manager at Fry’s Food Stores, Scottsdale, AZ, a subsidiary of Kroger. “There’s the Romaine hearts in the dry lettuce section. We already have a dry butter lettuce. Iceberg is doing well, and we’re trying to convert to a new flow. Traditionally, we had iceberg next to the leaf lettuces, but we’re separating the wet from the dry and will put wrapped iceberg with the dry.”

A salad “section” opens up the possibility for also displaying other ingredients, including some from outside produce.

“Cross-merchandising grocery products in the produce department such as bacon bits, croutons and dressing — as many retailers are already doing — stimulates sales of bulk lettuce,” says Veg Pro’s Dolbec. “Many shoppers enter the store with a vague idea of what they are looking for, but they generally want to eat healthy. What better way to sell bulk lettuce than to have all the ‘fixings’ there at arm’s reach to put together a delicious salad.”

“A full-service grocery store or super center should merchandise a full range of bulk lettuce items”

— Caitlin Antle-Wilson, Tanimura & Antle

Salads have grown so popular that the bulk lettuce section, like its fresh-cut cousin, keeps sprouting new and interesting alternatives.

“In the past few years, consumers placed more focus on healthy eating and become more open to different types of produce items, including a wider variety of lettuces,” says Antle-Wilson. “A full-service grocery store or super center should merchandise a full range of bulk lettuce items including iceberg, Romaine, red leaf, green leaf, artisan lettuce, gem lettuces, and butter, to name a few.”

‘LETTUCE’ MIX IT UP

Many grower-shippers jazz up the head

lettuce category with different varieties that bring a little excitement to the category.

“As a spin-off of our foodservice offering — we grow, pack and sell a Tuscan Lettuce Mix Clamshell: a combination of small, whole heads of six different red and green leaf lettuce varieties,” says Tuggle. “This allows the consumer to create their own salad tailored to their color and texture preferences.”

Tanimura & Antle found its product, a combination of petite gem, tango and oak lettuce, enjoys crossover appeal in both retail and foodservice outlets, according to Antle-Wilson.

Even retailers who consider bulk lettuce a relatively simple category carry more products than would have been common in the past.

“I don’t believe it is a category that has an extended number of varieties,” says Riveras from Fry’s Food Stores. “It’s just Romaine, green leaf, red leaf, Boston or bibb. We also carry a clamshell pack of artisan lettuce. I think that’s important.”

Retailers face a challenge composing the mix of available lettuce varieties suited to their customer base.

“A full lettuce category should reflect each

FINER RESTAURANTS PREFER SMALLER HEAD LETTUCE

To see the trends in bulk lettuce, look to the finer restaurants where customers are hoping to escape salad ennui.

“People get bored and they’re reading the food blogs and watching the food shows on TV,” says Paulette Satur, founder and owner of Satur Farms, Cutchogue, NY.

“I only grow baby lettuce heads. They are into the three and four-star restaurants, and upscale food stores such as Whole Foods Market. The restaurants like it because they can make the plate look different; they’re not just putting a handful of spring mix on it.”

Satur specializes in finding and learning to grow lettuces that can be harvested as small heads. “They are varieties chosen to head when they are small,” says Satur. “We have red and green oak, summer crisps, bibb, Romaines, lolla rosa, and spotted freckles. They head ever so slightly. We do frisee as well.”

Small, young lettuce heads are in vogue and some producers concentrate on them exclusively. “We do baby head lettuce for foodservice only,” says Ande Manos, marketing director for Babé Farms, Santa Maria, CA. “We’ve been doing it for 30 years. It’s mostly the continental varieties like red oak, green oak

and lolla rosa. Baby head lettuce has become more popular ever since we started growing it 30 years ago, but it took off in the late 1990s.”

The market appeal of these smaller lettuces is attracting an increasing number of grower-shippers. “We started offering miniature varieties of lettuce to restaurants and other foodservice outlets in a small way last season and were satisfied with the interest from customers,” says Pierre Dolbec, vice president for sales & procurement at Veg Pro International, Sherrington, Quebec. “We will definitely be growing that program for the coming season.”

New and interesting greens play a major role in enticing consumers to try restaurant salads. “Some 83 percent of restaurant consumers say the type of salad green is an important factor in their decision to order a salad at a restaurant,” says Kim St. George, director of marketing and communications at Mann Packing, Salinas, CA. “Menu analysis indicates foodservice operators are moving away from Romaine lettuce and are experimenting with a wider selection of salad green varieties.”

That information was gleaned from a Mann Packing-commissioned Technomic survey that

produced a wealth of information on changing lettuce tastes.

“Six in 10 consumers say that a darker color is more appealing,” says St. George. “Two-thirds of respondents report they perceive salad greens with a darker color as more upscale or premium, and four in 10 consumers indicate they are willing to pay more for darker salad green varieties.”

The survey also found a preference for crunchier texture in greens, and darker green color. “Seven in 10 consumers agree that curly, robust, leafy salad greens enhance the visual appeal of salad,” says St. George.

There are crossover products offering foodservice operations larger quantities of specialty lettuces that can also be found in some super-market produce sections.

“Our 8-pound bulk Tuscan lettuce mix is growing in popularity with foodservice operators,” says Kori Tuggle, vice president for marketing at Church Brothers Produce, Salinas, CA. “It makes it easy for chefs to customize their salad offering from one carton versus multiple cartons. The eight-pound box includes a combination of small, whole heads of six different lettuce varieties.”

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store's demographics; what may be appealing in one part of the country may not fit another," says Kim St. George, director of marketing and communications at Mann Packing, Salinas, CA. "We can provide that insight to our customers based on an overall category review."

The next lettuce to make a splash could be a red variety offering more antioxidants than blueberries, and a powerful vitamin punch.

"At a minimum, Nutraleaf has double the polyphenol antioxidants of blueberries, and is high in vitamins A and C, and manganese, which is good for diabetics," says Steve Henderson, president of Coastline Family Farms, Salinas, CA. "This plant is not going to be as large as a regular head of red leaf lettuce, and can't take the place of red leaf."

Coastline's new lettuce garnered enthusiastic reviews at its public debut among retailers last fall. "We rolled it out at the PMA in Anaheim and the interest was unbelievable," says Henderson.

Unfortunately, the Nutraleaf plants already growing in the California desert region at the time of the Anaheim convention set seed prematurely and were unfit for market, but Henderson remains undaunted.

"This is too good to abandon; we're going to retool," says Henderson. "It has the nutritional attributes and a color that is dramatic. It's probably going to end up being just a Salinas season thing, from April to mid-November."

Nutraleaf faces another agronomic challenge because there was a tradeoff in the breeding that left the variety vulnerable to the most important lettuce disease as the price for nutritional and visual superiority.

"It doesn't have resistance to mildew, and organically you can't spray fungicides," says Henderson. "I believe if we could grow it organically, we wouldn't be able to produce enough of it."

If Nutraleaf has a future it will have to be in bulk lettuce, because it performs poorly in salad packages.

"We sell it in cartons; it doesn't lend itself to processing," says Henderson. "Ready Pac did some tests with it, and it just doesn't have the shelf life. It's more of a commodity and would be in with the regular red leaf lettuces."

Merchandising Nutraleaf and other more exotic head lettuces is a matter of matching the varieties to the demographics.

"Going forward, I think we're going to retool and do a grassroots campaign to build a market," says Henderson. "Our feeling is to gradually build up a market starting at the high



PHOTO COURTESY OF TANIMURA & ANTLE

end with Nugget Markets grocery store in the Sacramento area, Andronico's in the San Francisco area, a Whole Foods Market in Monterey, and a restaurant in Paso Robles that I will deliver to personally."

Whether it is artisan, oak leaf, lolita rosa or the new Nutraleaf, retailers are charged with learning for themselves which varieties will excite their customers.

"The number of bulk lettuce items is going to depend on what their shoppers want to buy," says McClean from Ocean Mist.

There are many SKUs to consider for bulk lettuce from field and greenhouse alike.

"Boston, butter or bibb lettuce are sold mostly in clamshells and are greenhouse grown," says Veg Pro's Dolbec. "In certain markets, field butter has a limited popularity, but very few stores on our market actually carry it because of minimal sales. With the growth of the value-added category, the leaf lettuce sales definitely shrunk, but during the summer months when in season locally, it is definitely wise to have them in stock."

As much as the newer varieties boost excitement in the bulk lettuce section, three products, done well, remain the backbone of the category: Romaine singles, Romaine hearts three-to-a-pack, and iceberg.

"I don't think there are any big changes in the varieties," says Matt Seeley, vice president for marketing at Nunes Company/ Foxy produce, Salinas, CA. "The varieties vary by the retailer. I would say Romaine is probably the most popular variety, and the single head or three-in-a-pack depends on the retailer. Iceberg is No. 2."

Lettuces are growing more varied and interesting, but a core product continues to capture the largest marketshare.

"They are all in high demand by consumers

that have palates that like a variety of products," says Villalobos at D'Arrigo Brothers. But, she adds, "Romaine hearts sell the best."

ROMAINE-ING FRESH

Most of the nation's lettuce comes from the Salinas Valley, where growers reduced their iceberg lettuce production over the past decade by 20 percent, according to the Monterey County Crop Report, with the lion's share of that harvest sold wrapped or in bulk for shredding into salad products.

Meanwhile, leaf lettuce production in the "Salad Bowl" climbed more than 10 percent, to one-and-a-half times as much as iceberg, as the new leader Romaine is joined by significant production of red leaf, green leaf and butter lettuce.

Romaine three to a pack, Romaine singles, and iceberg head lettuce done well are the heart of bulk lettuce.

"Iceberg and Romaine are a must," says Dolbec. "Traditional bulk Romaine is losing ground to the packaged hearts, but still remains an important SKU in the bulk section; especially during the summer months. Depending on available space, red and green leaf should definitely find some space."

Other lettuces provide variety, but Romaine and iceberg account for volume in bulk lettuce.

"There are also red leaf, green leaf and butter lettuce, because our retail partners want a complete selection to offer to their shoppers," says McClean from Ocean Mist. "For our customers the Top 3 are going to be Romaine, Romaine hearts and iceberg."

There are demographic and regional differences in the relative popularity of these three staples.

"Iceberg is most popular in the Midwest," says McClean. "You see more of the colored



leaf lettuces on the coasts and the culinary dynamic areas like Chicago, the East Coast and the West Coast.”

Despite the regional taste differences, Romaine enjoys continued growth as the No. 1 bulk lettuce.

“Both three Romaine to a pack and singles have growing sales,” says Antle-Wilson from Tanimura & Antle. “Romaine hearts, three heads, outsell Romaine lettuce, one head, at most retailers.”

Many grower-shippers report Romaine hearts sold three-in-a-pack are leading single head Romaine.

“In our markets, the three-to-a-pack Romaine grew tremendously over the past several years,” says Veg Pro’s Dolbec. “Bulk Romaine is still present in most produce departments especially during the local season when freshness and price are more appealing. However, the practicality of the packaged Romaine makes it a favorite among consumers

throughout the year.”

Romaine is so dominant some retailers strive to identify themselves through their offerings of this variety.

“As of last year, 2014, private label makes up 39.5 percent of volume sales of the conventional Romaine heart category, according to Nielsen’s Perishable Group,” says Tuggle. “We see retailers continuing to offer their shoppers both organic and conventional Romaine hearts.”

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Dressing Up

PRODUCE DEPARTMENTS

Salad dressings provide additional cross-merchandising and add-on sales opportunities.

BY LISA WHITE



Although numerous reports reveal close to 50 percent of all American households use ranch dressing most often, new flavors are making much headway in today's produce departments.

This is good news for retailers, who have more opportunities for cross merchandising and incremental sales.

"Overall, we've seen a definite consumer trend with people moving from the center of the store to the perimeter, so there has been increased sales in the produce department," says Alison Kellogg, brand manager at Litehouse Foods, based in Sandpoint, ID. "This ties in with [increased sales of] refrigerated dressing found in the produce set."

The proliferation of fresh refrigerated dressings and new flavors is partially due to expanded usage occasions. These products are often used as dips, marinades and sauces. Also, with healthier versions becoming more available, even those consumers seeking to cut calories or find more nutritional options are able to find a dressing that fits the bill.

"Millennials have been driving sales," says Kellogg. "This demographic has been raised on more ethnic and unique flavors, which have become more common in the salad dressing segment."

DRESSING TRENDS

Retailers are expanding their offerings, due to the added opportunities in the salad dressing segment.

Priceville Foodland, a single-store operator located in Decatur, AL, offers three brands and several fresh dressing varieties in its produce department and doesn't charge slotting fees. Tye Newburger, the store's produce manager, says Blue Cheese and Ranch are the most popular.

Another independent, Freeburg, IL-based Tom's Supermarket, offers seven dressing varieties in a grab-and-go salad case. There are no slotting fees for suppliers.

"This display faces our checkouts and includes 18 salad types," says Kenny Carel, produce manager. "Our biggest sellers are slaw dressing, with the regular selling four-to-one over the light, and Poppy Seed dressing, which sells five-to-one against the other dressing varieties."

Although Ranch and Blue Cheese remain perennial favorites, according to manufacturers and retailers, more consumers are experimenting with different dressing varieties.

"There have been more fruity and artisanal flavors launched recently," says Suzanne Gine-

stro, chief marketing officer at Bakersfield, CA-based Bolthouse Farms. The company recently introduced its Cilantro Avocado dressing variety, which has become almost as popular as its Ranch line, as well as Caramelized Sweet Onion and Creamy Balsamic flavors.

Litehouse Foods' biggest sellers are Ranch, Blue Cheese, Caesar and Dill, but Roasted Pepper and Kalamata olive flavors are trending, as well.

"Consumers are excited to step out of their comfort zone and try new dressing varieties," says Kellogg.

At Makoto Dressing Inc. in Melbourne, FL, fruit-flavored vinaigrettes and yogurt-based ranch alternatives have been popular.

"Our consumer research has revealed brand loyalty exists when it comes to a decision to purchase," says Charles "Buzzy" Blyer, sales manager at Makoto Dressing.

In addition, more consumers are seeking a

fresh taste, along with premium ingredients.

This has been the catalyst for growth with Waukesha, WI-based Ventura Foods' Marie's line.

"Refrigerated produce dressings continue to grow, as compared to shelf-stable dressings, which are flat to declining," says Amanda Baiada, senior brand manager for Marie's Refrigerated Salad Dressings. "Shelf-stable premium dressings are also increasing in their retail pricing, making the difference between these and refrigerated produce dressings' price much less, with some being priced higher."

HEALTHFUL DEVELOPMENTS

In response to the increasing number of consumers seeking healthier salad dressing options, a number of manufacturers have expanded their lines to offer low-calorie, low-fat and/or more nutritious yogurt-based varieties.

■ INNOVATIVE DRESSING OPTIONS

Dressings aren't just for salads anymore. With the proliferation of flavors, consistencies and unique ingredients, consumers are discovering more uses for these products, with help from manufacturers.

Produce departments that help promote alternative ways to consume salad dressing can not only expand sales of these products, but also increase add-on sales of complementary products.

For example, today's dressings have become a catalyst for creating restaurant-style dinners at home.

Marie's Refrigerated Salad Dressings' website offers a search engine to help consumers pair their need — whether entrée, side dish or dessert — with their favorite dressing.

"They will then receive a suggested recipe from our collection of more than 1,000 available on the site," says Amanda Baiada, senior brand manager for Marie's Refrigerated Salad Dressings, produced by Ventura Foods, based in Brea, CA. "We recommend grilled chicken breast marinated with Marie's Balsamic Vinaigrette or Lemon Herb Vinaigrette."

The company's new Marie's coleslaw flavors provide another opportunity to extend usage of its dressing line.

Last fall, Ventura Foods collaborated with food bloggers to develop recipes for each of its four coleslaw flavors, including Original Coleslaw, Sesame Ginger, BBQ and Chipotle. These recipes are available on Marie's

Pinterest board and Facebook page.

"From a more flavorful coleslaw recipe to twice-baked potatoes and grilled shrimp skewers, Marie's is inspiring its consumers to go beyond the basic salad," says Baiada.

Today's salad dressings are more likely to be used as spreads and dips rather than just a salad topper.

"We've also seen varieties used as marinades and sauces on proteins," says Suzanne Ginestro, chief marketing officer at Bolthouse Farms, based in Bakersfield, CA. "This is because today's flavors lend themselves to more usage occasions."

For example, Bolthouse Farms' Caramelized Sweet Onion dressing works well as a substitute for onion dip when paired with chips and vegetables, but also can be used as a sandwich spread.

"Salad dressings have transcended the produce department and grocery aisle, making their way into meat departments and as a complement to foods other than lettuce and vegetables," says Alison Kellogg, brand manager at Litehouse Foods, headquartered in Sandpoint, ID.

Salad dressing portion packs also have become increasingly popular, further expanding the use of these products.

"These packets are becoming increasingly popular as a grab-and-go item for chopped salad kits and sauté packages," says Charles "Buzzy" Blyer, sales manager at Makoto Dressing, Inc., located in Melbourne, FL. **pb**



In some regions, these versions have not been well-received.

Although Priceville Foodland used to carry Greek yogurt dressing, it stopped when the line was discontinued by its distributor. "It sold well at first, but then sales slowed down significantly," says Newburger.

Tom's Supermarket currently carries only one Greek yogurt salad dressing, which has not yet caught on.

Yet, data from Bolthouse Farms shows the growth in fresh salad dressings is driven by varieties with healthier profiles. "Our entire line fits this healthier profile," says Ginestro. "Our brands are made with yogurt, not mayonnaise, which provides improved taste and nutritional benefits." The company also launched a line of Greek yogurt dressing earlier this year.

Litehouse Foods introduced its Opa Greek yogurt dressing line in 2013. In response to this success, the company recently unveiled Opa Dippity, a Greek yogurt dip.

"Today's consumers are looking more at labels and seek fresh, plant-based or natural ingredients when looking at dressings," says Kellogg. "There are still occasions where more indulgent dressings like Ranch and Blue Cheese are preferred."

Ventura Foods' top Marie's flavors include Blue Cheese, Coleslaw, Creamy Ranch and Caesar.

"While some consumers are looking for lower-calorie products, such as light dressings, we continue to see growth in these top Marie's flavors," says Baiada.

MARKETING AND MERCHANDISING

The merchandising opportunities for fresh salad dressings in the produce department are part of what gives these items an edge over shelf-stable varieties found in the grocery aisle.

Priceville Foodland displays its refrigerated

"Today's consumers are looking more at labels and seek fresh, plant-based or natural ingredients when looking at dressings."

— Alison Kellogg, Litehouse Foods

dressings directly adjacent to the packaged bagged salads.

"This is a very effective way to sell these products," says Newburger. "We also keep baby carrots, celery and other compatible items in this vicinity to help spur sales."

After placing these dressings in the vegetable case by the lettuce and cucumbers, Tom's Supermarket relocated these products by the pre-packaged salads and has had more success.

"We cross-merchandise refrigerated dressings with grape tomatoes, croutons, sunflower seeds, honey-roasted pecans, honey-roasted walnuts and dried peas, which are all displayed in our stand-up grab-and-go case by the checkout section," says Carel. "The traffic flow is perfect."

The fact that these dressings require refrigeration can be a challenge in terms of cross-merchandising and marketing. But with more shoppers visiting the perimeter of the store looking for healthier alternatives, this has provided greater visibility for these items.

"Today's consumers are looking for fresher alternatives and dressings that provide health benefits and fresh taste," says Ginestro. "Although these dressings haven't moved into the dip or sauce space yet, this would be a logical place to evolve."

Litehouse Foods recommends that its dressing be merchandised by bagged salad and fresh-cut vegetables to help drive sales. The company works with retail partners to provide

cross-merchandising opportunities in conjunction with other compatible companies, such as crouton or other salad topper suppliers.

"The most successful way to merchandise refrigerated produce dressings continues to be in a vertical set adjacent to or within the bagged-salad section," says Baiada. "Several customers who have experimented with the horizontal sets have come back to the vertical sets, recognizing that the small amount of engagement time the consumer has with the shelf is maximized by having all products located together."

The fact remains refrigerated salad dressings can build basket rings and offset the shrink of companion fresh items. "Anytime you can link a refrigerated dressing to a related item that has higher household penetration than the 20 percent currently associated with the segment, you build more sales and satisfaction with the consumer," says Baiada.

Consequently, dressings are best paired with companion items that have higher household penetrations to build the category and basket ring.

While bagged salads are a natural in terms of cross merchandising, Romaine hearts, kale, tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers are other options.

"With the shift toward healthier eating, salads have become the star of a meal instead of just a starter or side," says Kellogg. "As a result, refrigerated salad dressings are playing a larger part in consumers' eating habits." **pb**

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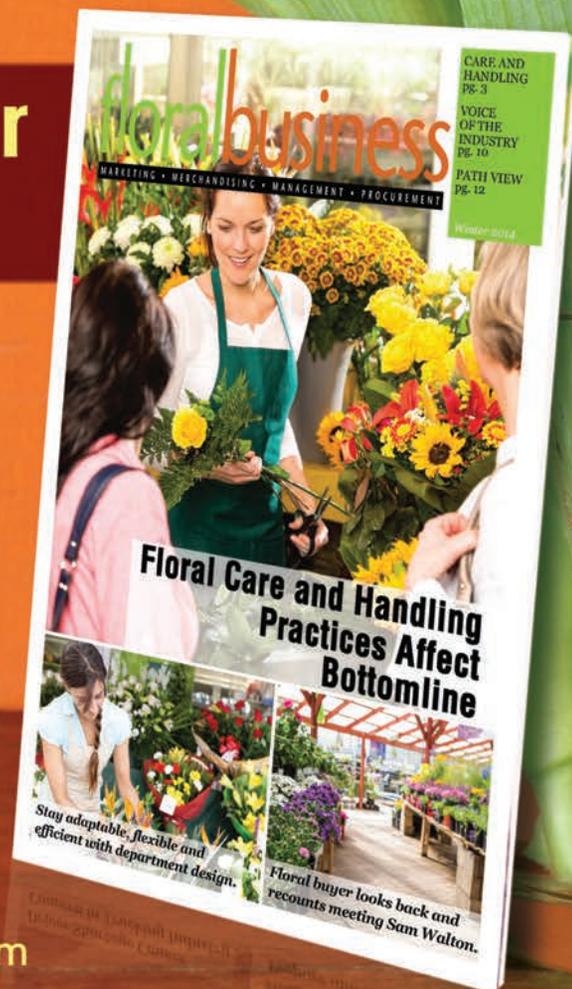
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Making The Case for Nuts And Dried Fruit In Produce



Variety and health benefits are earning these popular snack items a place alongside fresh fruits and vegetables.

BY ANTHONY STOECKERT
AND LINDA BROCKMAN

Things are getting nuttier in produce departments. Nuts and dried fruits are becoming more mutually exclusive with the produce department alongside fresh vegetables and fruit.

“The total dried fruit category is most profitable when positioned/sold in the produce department,” says Joe Tamble, vice president of retail sales execution-North America for Kingsburg, CA-based Sun-Maid Growers. “Syndicated data shows that dollar velocity for dried fruit is up to 30 percent higher in the produce section compared to center store.”

Tamble says the produce department is an ideal location for the dried fruit category, and “Sun-Maid Growers of California supports this in-store position.”

While these products might not seem like traditional produce, marketers agree they make

for a good fit in produce departments, because items like dried cranberries, raisins, peanuts and various trail mix combinations are popular among shoppers looking for a convenient and healthy snack.

“More consumers are looking for healthy snacks; what better place to find them than in the produce section,” says Mark McHale, national sales director for Crispy Green, headquartered in Fairfield, NJ, which sells freeze-dried fruit under the brand Crispy Fruit. “Crispy Fruit is an excellent complement to natural fruit when snacking on a fresh mango or apple is not readily available or the most convenient.” He adds that Crispy Fruit’s line of freeze-dried products should be in the produce section because they are pure fruit. “It’s just in a different form.”

Consumers are increasingly interested in non-GMO foods with no artificial ingredients, says Howard Brandeisky, senior vice president of global marketing and customer solutions for John B. Sanfilippo & Son in Elgin, IL. The company’s brand, Orchard Valley Harvest, appeals to the produce shopper who is “fundamentally different than the core center store shopper. By meeting their needs, Orchard Valley Harvest helps drive incremental sales for both the produce department and the entire store,” he says.

VARIETY IN FRUIT

While raisins, prunes and figs have been around for centuries, today there are plenty of other varieties. As McHale notes, Crispy Fruit offers seven flavors: apple, Asian pear, mango, banana, pineapple, cantaloupe and tangerine. “Apple and mango are quite popular, but all our flavors are loved by consumers across the nation,” he says. One reason he says those fruits are a good fit for produce departments is “nothing is added,” says McHale. It’s almost as if it were picked right off the tree, but tastes like a crunchy snack.”

This year, Carlsbad, CA-based Mamma Chia released two new products — Organic Chia Granola Clusters and Organic Chia Vitality Bars — that are perfect for the produce department, says Janie Hoffman, company founder and chief executive. The company, which infuses its snacks with chia seeds, is executing a merchandising program that creates a kind of ‘chia destination center,’ where one rack displays all of the brand’s products.

While location within a store is dependent on each retailer, “our primary focus on placement is in the produce department where the Mamma Chia beverages and the Chia Squeeze product lines launched in most conventional retailers,” says Hoffman. “Most retailers consider our new products a brand extension

and want to leverage our brand's strength by cross-merchandising all of the Mamma Chia product lines in the produce department to maximize sales opportunities."

BY THE NUMBERS

Chicago-based Information Resources Inc. (IRI) found one of the biggest trends happening across all demographic groups is an increased frequency in all kinds of snacking. In its 2013 *State of the Snack Industry* report, it found "snacking behavior has clearly escalated in recent years, catapulting the blurring of eating occasions to a whole new level."

That's a welcome trend for Sun-Maid Growers. Tamble cited an IRI study when explaining dried fruit's appeal.

"About 40 to 50 percent of U.S. retailers have dried fruit as a category in produce, and this percent has been stable during the past few years. Produce managers recognize it as a fruit that is dried, and dried fruit can also serve as an alternative to salty and sugary snacking," says Tamble. "They know the trend toward healthier snacking continues to grow. Parents looking for healthier options for their kids and themselves know dried fruit can meet those needs."

According to Chicago, IL-based Nielsen Perishables Group FreshFacts 2014, there are some big sellers for the overall dried fruit and nut category, with the Top 3 being dried cranberries (\$130.2 million in revenue), snack mixes (\$96.2 million) and raisins (\$32.9 million).

Maria Brous, director of media and community relations of Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets, says these healthy snacks are growing in popularity.

"Nuts and dried fruits are popular with our customers and are seeing double digit increases each year," says Brous. "We began offering a selection of Publix [private label] nuts, dried fruits and dried vegetables more than eight years ago. Today, that selection is comprised of more than 60 options. Raw nuts, such as almonds and nut mixes are strong sellers."

HEALTH FOODS FOR A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Jane Asmar, senior vice president of marketing and sales for the Fowler, CA-based National Raisin Company, says there are "numerous health and wellness themes that can be applied across dried fruit promotions. It's a great category to get behind; it's moderately priced, requires no special handling or refrigeration, it has significant household penetration and it appeals to most consumers."

According to the National Raisin Company



website, dried fruits (such as raisins, figs and prunes) are the perfect way to eat the right amount of fruit. Most Americans eat far less fruit than recommended by the U.S. Dietary Guidelines, according to the website. "A good way to add fruit to your diet is with something portable, convenient and readily available like raisins," suggests the National Raisin Company. "Not only do raisins fit into today's busy lifestyles, they provide a wide range of health benefits. They're packed with powerful phytochemicals and antioxidants, contain no fat or cholesterol, they're naturally low in sodium and a good source of iron, fiber and potassium. And as every mom knows, raisins are an excellent source of all-natural energy."

The National Raisin Company, which packages dried fruits for Newman's Own, other brands and its private label, considers two tablespoons of raisins to be one serving of fruit, with 15 grams of carbohydrate and 60 calories, according to the website. It also states raisins are gluten-free and fit diets that avoid added sugar. Raisins might be dusted with sugar for cereals and other items, but packaged raisins contain no sugar.

FITTING IN THE PRODUCE SECTION

Health is just one reason dried fruits and nuts are making their way in the produce section. Versatility is another. Dried fruit can be eaten on its own as a healthy snack or included in recipes such as salads.

"People like seeing dried fruit next to fresh fruit," says Asmar of the National Raisin Company. "In Produce, where products are constantly being handled and rotated, dried fruit is comparatively easy to stock and merchandise with minimal shrink levels."

According to Paul Bellacero, director of sales development for Aurora Products Inc., based in Orange, CT, dried fruits have had a place in the produce department for a long time. Aurora produces packaged dried fruit, as well as granola, trail mix and nuts.

"Aurora Products has been selling into the

produce department from the start," he says. "We are an all-natural and organic company and people connect that with fresh product."

The preferred choice is to be marketed in produce, says Sun-Maid's Tamble. "Dried fruit enjoys better exposure as shoppers today are more likely to shop the perimeter of the store. Retailer profit margins — which can vary from retailer to retailer — are up to 30 percent higher. Tamble says Sun-Maid's products sell at a higher rate when shelved in produce and the produce departments usually do a better job of marketing dried fruits.

McHale of Crispy Green says health and convenience are the biggest selling points when it comes to marketing dried fruits and nuts.

"Crispy Fruit is promoted as the perfect grab-n-go snack, because it is 100 percent pure fruit — nothing added," he says. "Consumers know they are purchasing pure fruit, in a very snackable, take-along form."

Health factors are a key point in Aurora's marketing strategy. "More people are concerned with their health and are eating more fresh produce and organic foods," says Bellacero. "With more people shopping the produce section, and spending time and money there, it translates into more sales for any item in the department."

pb



Quality Redefined

BY DON HARRIS

During strategy meetings, the subject of the cost of product often comes up, and management wants to know if there is any way to decrease the costs of products for sale in the stores. They often ask how we could reduce the costs of fresh produce to allow for more profitability. Their question often is “Why do we have to pay for the best quality when other retailers use good quality and create additional profit as well as reduce their prices accordingly?” The answer is far more complex than they realize and, once again, “they just don’t get it!”

In discussions about the quality of fresh fruits and vegetables it is inevitable that we discuss the USDA grading standards. We, as an industry, are guilty of conditioning the customer to accept aesthetic beauty as a prerequisite for a product to be deemed of high quality. Product with less attractive appearance is judged to be of lesser quality and is assigned a grade accordingly. While there are still some minimum requirements for sugar and other attributes, the primary determination of grade is made on the appearance and condition of the product. Through years of experience, one learns that the best quality must include the deliverable to the consumer — flavor and the pleasurable aspects of consumption.

Many retailers rely exclusively on buying the best quality available, and presume this factor will guarantee the best experience for their customers and spark repeat business. Given the present grading standards and requirements, this strategy often delivers the best potential experience for the customer. The problem is produce does not behave or perform like manufactured goods that are manipulated to exacting standards, recipes, and specific procedures to ensure the same flavor, texture, and “eating experience” each time it is purchased. Produce, on the other hand, is dependent on multiple factors including weather conditions, soil makeup, water sources, and harvest schedules. All of these variables are difficult to isolate, measure, and quantify, which leaves ample space for variance in quality.

Among the top tier of growers and shippers, there are a few of the very best who focus not only on the appearance and condition of the product but also on its “eating quality.” These growers and shippers take the time necessary to monitor their harvest. During this monitoring, they watch the maturity of the fruit, the ratio of sugar and starch (Brix) readings, and the texture of the fruit. It is vitally impor-

tant these factors be considered, especially in fruit, to deliver the type of “eating experience” expected by the consumer — who is judging and basing their expectations on the appearance of the fruit.

Identifying which of the top growers and shippers produce these types of products takes diligence and exploration. Many buyers garnered these relationships over many years of experience and observed their best-in-class procedures for growing and harvesting fruit that is at its peak of performance and flavor. This complete atten-

tion to detail comes with a cost that is justifiably reflected in the premium price for the fruit. All too often, many lesser experienced buyers and those newcomers to the industry rely on the reputation of a grower to provide this type of quality. It is a common trap many retail buyers fall into when they believe paying a premium price will allow them to receive premium quality. This often results in a beautiful looking produce department but with produce that tastes like “cardboard.”

The group that stands to lose the most from this type of activity is the consumer. There are many documented cases where product, especially fruit, is developed and produced for beauty and has not been successful due to a lack of flavor or delivery of perceived “eating quality.”

If the industry expects to continue growing, not only among the present customer base, but also gather new generations of customers to produce, it must revise and adopt new standards for every

grade specification that provides the customer with the type of “eating experience” promised by the outward appearance of the item. In addition, retailers must do their part and check on the execution by adopting inspection standards that not only check on the appearance and condition of the product but also look at the maturity and flavor profile ensuring they are receiving what they paid for. It will require this type of joint effort by both sides of the industry if we are to convince the customer that not only does the produce look healthy and attractive, but it also delivers a truly enjoyable “eating experience.”

If the industry expects to continue growing ... it must revise and adopt new standards for every grade specification that provides the customer with the type of “eating experience” promised by the outward appearance of the item.

Don Harris is a 40-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 is presently consulting on all subjects of retail, category development and sales strategies, among others. Comments can be directed to editor@producebusiness.com.

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Conversation With Global Fruit Point's Sven Heinsohn

INTERVIEW BY STEVEN MAXWELL

For the co-owner of Germany's Global Fruit Point, Sven Heinsohn, the roots of his involvement in the fresh produce sector can be traced back to childhood when his family ran an apple farm and business in the fertile Altes Land region in northwest Germany.

However, Heinsohn — now aged 42 — began his real apprenticeship in the sector when he became a wholesale and foreign trade merchant for the Bremen-based Atlanta Group, now known as Univeg Deutschland.

Over the years, Heinsohn held a number of positions in the business until he was appointed co-managing director of Direct Fruit Marketing DFM, Atlanta's subsidiary focused on direct sourcing from overseas.

In 2007, with his colleagues Matthias Neuel and René Struve, Heinsohn set up a new import and distribution company, Global Fruit Point, based in Buxtehude near Hamburg. The owner-managed business specializes in fresh fruit from overseas, mainly from the Southern Hemisphere.

What have been the key developments for Global Fruit Point's import business during the past 12 months?

In 2014, we increased our import volumes in table grapes — one of our key products — from South Africa, Namibia, Peru, Brazil and Chile. As far as citrus is concerned, we intensified our easy peeler business, mainly with the Nadorcott variety, and also lemons from South Africa have developed very satisfactorily. The latter is a relatively new item for Global Fruit Point, but with very good prospects, as are blueberries from Chile and Argentina. We haven't launched any new product but rather concentrated on the consolidation and extension of our existing business.

What would you identify as the key import products for Global Fruit Point, and where are the most important import sources?

We source table grapes from South Africa, Namibia, Peru, Brazil, and Chile. They are by far the most important product for Global Fruit Point. Also pears from Argentina, South Africa and Chile play a major role within our product range. At present, we are in the full swing for the overseas season, with the most important volumes coming from South Africa, Chile, Peru, Argentina, New Zealand, Brazil, India, and Costa Rica.

I understand Global Fruit Point imports pears from the U.S. Could you tell us a little bit more about this business?

Imports of U.S. pears always depend on the European season and existing European stocks. When the regional stocks are low, we have the chance to import from the U.S., otherwise it is difficult to compete with the regional production.

Our partner in the U.S. pear business is Odell, OR-based Duckwall Fruit. We very much appreciate the cooperation with Rob Petersen who has been a loyal partner for years. We feel Duckwall is the best pear brand in the U.S., especially with regard to the outstanding quality of their Anjou variety. Anjou pears are sourced from the West Coast, in close cooperation with Duckwall.

Also, Florida grapefruits are an interesting item, depending on the seasonal opportunities.

How did Global Fruit Point become involved in fresh produce imports from the U.S.?

When you are more than 20 years in the fruit business, having visited the main fruit fairs in the U.S. for years, over time you get to know the right people and know where to source in the U.S. It's mainly a question of personal contacts and mutually trustful relationships.

In your opinion, what further opportunities do you see for U.S. fresh produce in Germany and the rest of Europe?

I think pomegranates are a product with very good prospects for the German and European market.

Are there any challenges that would have to be overcome before this could be achieved?

Sea freight is certainly an important cost factor for products such as grapefruits and pears. Their competitiveness against the regional European production largely depends on the logistical costs.

Also the exchange rate euro/dollar is somewhat disadvantageous at present, though the situation may change again depending on the general economic development.

Are there any products in the U.S. market you believe have the potential for big success in Germany and the rest of Europe?

As I said, I see very good prospects for pomegranates, but also papayas may find a ready market in Germany and Europe. Furthermore, all kinds of berries have a huge potential in our markets, as the mega-trend for berries will certainly continue also over the years. Berries are very much appreciated by consumers due to their delicious taste and nutritional benefits. Crown-less pineapples are another product that is very common in the U.S. market but usually can't be found in German supermarkets.

Sven Heinsohn is married and has three children and two dogs. The family lives in the small town of Jork, amidst one of Germany's most important apple growing regions. In his spare time, Heinsohn enjoys spending time with his family and friends, and is a sports' enthusiast, taking an active part in soccer, tennis, windsurfing, skiing and biking.



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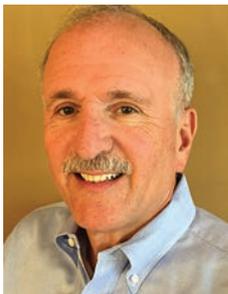
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SYSCO/US Foods Merger: Good Or Bad For The Wholesale Industry?

BY ALAN SIGER

In February of this year, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) blocked the Sysco/US Foods merger in a 3 – 2 ruling saying it would be anti-competitive, as the new entity would control 27 percent of post-merger United States foodservice market share, and 75 percent of national accounts market share.

The FTC further stated that if the merger did go through, 32 local markets would have only the new Sysco as a broadline distributor. Industry sales are estimated to be more than \$230 billion; based on the FTC's 27 percent estimate, the merger would give the new entity more than \$60 billion in sales. Performance Food Group would be a distant second with sales at approximately \$15 to \$18 billion.

Early in May, the FTC is scheduled to hold hearings on Sysco's appeal of the ruling. Many State Attorneys General, editorialists and consumer advocates jumped on the FTC's bandwagon, and claim the merger would create a dominant national distributor and eliminate most significant competition.

"Prices will increase," "smaller distributors will be pushed out," and "costs at restaurants, hospitals, schools, and hotels will rise" are a few of the predictions if the merger goes through. Interestingly, these comments are coming from everywhere except from those one would expect to hear from — competing foodservice distributors. The silence of this industry segment indicates that the FTC's concern is unwarranted, and blocking the proposed merger would be a mistake.

The FTC's ruling is centered on the concept of a "national market"; in reality, this does not exist. If for no other reason than to ensure their primary distributor is in line with the local pricing, most national foodservice customers without their own distribution systems rely on more than one supplier in each market, which quite often is US Foods. The proposed merger will result in US Foods disappearing from the marketplace, creating a void that will be quickly filled by other distributors that wish to grow their businesses.

The Sysco/US Foods merger will not stifle competition — it will stimulate it. Local and regional foodservice distributors across the country danced in their offices when the merger was announced. Plans are already being implemented to take advantage of the vacuum that will be created by the disappearance of US Foods. Like distributors, customers also began moving to alternate suppliers in anticipation of the merger. Sysco's competitors are planning to expand

into other markets; this growth will require capital expenditure and create jobs.

Mergers of giant distributors can result in a cultural clash; the new entity can struggle to maintain momentum, let alone blow the doors off the competition. In December of 2001, US Foods acquired national broadliner, Alliant Foodservice. In Western Pennsylvania, a mid-sized market, the acquisition left the new company with three divisions in the area: Cranberry, 22 miles north of Pittsburgh; Greensburg, 30 miles east of Pittsburgh; and Altoona, an hour east of Greensburg.

Those of us in the marketplace waited to see which one or two of the divisions would close their doors after the merger. Remarkably, there seemed to be little or no coordination between the divisions. Sales representatives from one division solicited customers from the other US Foods divisions, and often offered deals that undercut their "brother" company's prices. Eventually there was some integration on the purchasing side, but it took almost five years for corporate to finally close the Greensburg facility. Sysco and the foodservice marketplace are not standing and waiting for FTC approval of the proposed Sysco/US Foods merger. Plans are in motion inside Sysco for the new combined company. If the merger is prohibited, it will cost Sysco millions of dollars in time allocated to strategy, as well as legal fees. The competition that spent time and money on expansion in anticipation of the merger may scale back their plans a bit, but they will be aggressive wherever they go.

The only folks not planning for their future as an operator in the marketplace has been US Foods. In the past several months, US Foods' energy was focused on integrating into the new Sysco, and not at means for organic growth and collaboration with their supplier base. Meanwhile, the rest of the marketplace (both competitors and customers) is

planning a future that does not include US Foods.

If the merger falls through, the question may very well be: "Can a weakened US Foods make it on its own?" If US Foods does not survive, the FTC will end up with a marketplace that looks like the one they fear from the merger.

Alan Siger is chairman of Siger Group LLC, offering consulting services in business strategy, logistics, and operations to the produce industry. Prior to selling Consumers Produce in 2014, Siger spent more than four decades growing Consumers into a major regional distributor. Active in issues affecting the produce industry throughout his career, Siger is a former president of the United Fresh Produce Association.

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In Pursuit Of A Paradigm Shift For Cranberry Sales

BY SCOTT J. SOARES

How do you create year-round demand for an iconic fruit that is so historically tied to one particular season? The short answer: create interest at the time of year when we are least apt to think of it. As a native American fruit, cranberries are well aligned with Fourth of July and summer grilling — a favorite American holiday and pastime that is also well served through the produce aisle. As an inroad to accessing cranberry products, placement of cranberry items in produce also allows the retailer to link complementary offerings and build on [cranberry] education.

Creating a new seasonality and sales spike is not quick or easy. Because of the commitment, cost and effort, the Wareham, MA-based Cranberry Marketing Committee USA (CMC) began with a pilot program to determine if in-store promotions, coupled with digital marketing and product sales events, would pique consumer interest and result in a positive sales impact.

Step 1: We identified a retail chain located in one of the country's top cranberry growing regions — Southern New England.

Step 2: We reached out to the retailer and proposed building on an existing in-store dietitian program designed to enhance customers' shopping experiences.

Step 3: We invited industry partners to consider coupling with these “off season” activities by running in-store sales events for products that complemented digital, print and in-store sampling as well as promotional activities.

The CMC reached out to retailer Big Y Foods, Inc., Springfield, MA, and proposed building on its existing *Living Well Eating Smart* (LWES) program, run by Big Y's in-house registered dietitians (RDs). The CMC and Big Y worked together, leveraging the retailer's nutrition program to introduce shoppers to the health benefits, flavors and versatility of cranberries. LWES features healthy foods — along with their benefits and uses — in supermarket newsletters as well as during key promotion windows.

Cranberry industry partners took advantage of the sales opportunities that accompanied LWES programming. We worked with Big Y to add various layers of consumer engagement in the effort. When determining additional elements of this program, we expected consumers would appreciate not only the sale prices but also new ideas for what they could do with cranberries during the summer months.

Throughout the summer, cranberries in dried, frozen and sauce form were highlighted in the LWES newsletter and through social media promotions; Big Y offered cranberry recipe giveaways and the CMC posted geo-targeted messages on Facebook and Twitter to drive awareness and sales. We enlisted a Connecticut-based registered dietitian who participated in several local television segments to amplify messaging around the benefits and versatility of the fruit and reference the cranberry news at the Big Y locations throughout Massachusetts

and Connecticut.

We also worked with Big Y to host culinary demos (two dried fruit events, one juice and one frozen fruit event within produce) at high-traffic Big Y locations — featuring Fourth of July and summer barbeque recipes. Shoppers are looking for new recipe ideas, especially those that incorporate fruits and vegetables in unique ways, so we provided shoppers with summer recipe cards to take home post-demonstration with ideas such as a cranberry barbeque sauce, smoothie or potato salad. When attending an in-store cranberry food demo at a Big Y store in Massachusetts, we heard shoppers talk about how they never thought of using dried cranberries in potato salad or coleslaw, but they were enthusiastic about trying it.

The added benefit of sale prices and free recipe cards that accompanied these demonstrations created a winning combination for raising cranberry awareness. By design, the execution of this pilot in a region where customers are familiar with cranberry production also allowed shoppers to support local farmers and to think about diverse year-round applications for this familiar fruit.

One key learning with this experience was the value of partnering with an established in-house retailer nutrition program. Health plays a role in food purchase decisions with 64 percent of consumers — according to the *2013 Food & Health Survey* conducted by the Washington D.C.-based International Food Information Council Foundation (IFIC), which is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to communicate science-based information on food safety and nutrition to consumers. Other research shows evidence that the cranberry may provide big health benefits, and a serving of fresh cranberries is a good source of vitamin C and fiber. We were able to leverage these health messages through our promotions to pique consumer interest for cranberries.

The LWES channels and additional promotions increased cranberry visibility in-store and drove sales throughout the summer. Consumers were very responsive to cranberries as a food fit for Fourth of July parties and the summer grilling season. Our 360-degree approach resulted in upwards of a 50 percent increase in sales compared to a product sale alone.

Through this pilot program, we proved what we already know to be true. There is always an opportunity to educate consumers about the versatility of food they enjoy but don't always think about throughout the year. We “simply” needed to provide them with the right tools: new and unique ideas; delicious and easy recipes; and highlighting the nutritional value to make cranberries appealing.

Scott J. Soares is the executive director at the Wareham, MA-based Cranberry Marketing Committee USA. The Cranberry Marketing Committee USA was established as a Federal Marketing Order in 1962 to ensure a stable, orderly supply of good quality product.

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BLAZING NEW JERSEY TRAILS

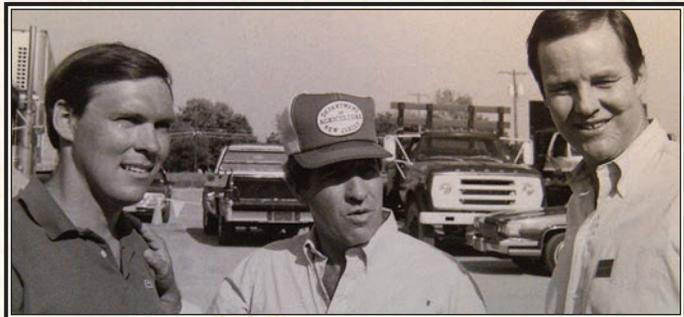
It was spring of 1984, and 22-year-old Al Murray was a year into his position as products marketing representative with the New Jersey State Department of Agriculture when this picture was taken. This was also his first job after graduating Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, PA, with a degree in business marketing and management.

"I answered an ad in the paper ... and 32 years later, I'm still here," says Murray with a chuckle. Today, Murray is the assistant secretary of agriculture. Throughout his time with the Department, he held the positions of Bureau Chief, Bureau of Market Development and Product Promotion, Director, and Division of Markets.

Murray recalls the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's Jersey Fresh advertising and promotional program was in its infancy in the early '80s. "The Department was filming its first Jersey Fresh television ad featuring New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Arthur R. Brown, Jr. and New Jersey Governor Thomas H. Kean," says Murray.

Part of the commercial was shot at the Vineland Produce Auction, a farmer-owned co-op that now generates around \$67 million in business — making it the largest co-op in New Jersey, according to Murray.

"The average size farm in Jersey is about 71 acres, which can't generate much to sell to major retailers, so the co-op is for small



(L-R) Al Murray, Arthur R. Brown, Jr. and Thomas H. Kean

farmers to consolidate loads into one giant load that can be sold throughout the country," says Murray.

"This commercial was the first in a series featuring the Governor and the Secretary, and it promoted New Jersey's farm products throughout the New Jersey/New York/Philadelphia region. The Jersey Fresh program was one of the first state-sponsored programs to advertise and promote its state's agricultural products.

"I was taking photographs to be used for publicity photos in later projects, possible news releases, and to document our activities," explains Murray. "It was a very exciting time, because we were blazing new trails."

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