

# Celebrating 60 Years!

**A**s many of you are reading this column at Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) 2009 Fresh Summit International Convention & Exposition, I'll extend my annual greeting: Welcome, welcome home to Fresh Summit.

The 2009 Fresh Summit marks a particularly noteworthy year, as the fruit and vegetable community gathers after a year spent largely under a cloud of the most difficult economic times in decades. Fortunately, most leading economic experts see this dark cloud beginning to lift, and the economic indicators appear to bear that out.

In my business travels and many conversations with industry leaders across the United States and all around the world, I listen to people share ideas that spur innovation. What I've sensed recently is the dawning of brighter days ahead. I've also been reminded how the community of fruit and vegetable industry members draws closer and proves even more important in times of crisis. It is this community that sets PMA's Fresh Summit apart from other fruit and vegetable conventions, making Fresh Summit as much about the trade of ideas, best practices and relationships as it is about the trade of fresh fruits and vegetables. The intangible value of insights and information shared there is today — and will be increasingly tomorrow — as critical as the products themselves.

As one of the largest international events solely dedicated to fruit, vegetables and floral, this year's Fresh Summit is expected to draw an estimated 17,000-plus attendees from more than 50 countries spanning the globe. The scope and energy of the Fresh Summit community is astounding. It's what makes being in Anaheim the best way to stay abreast of so many forces driving this business. So welcome home to the opportunities this convention offers, from business marketing and networking, to learning and professional development.

But there's yet another reason the 2009 Fresh Summit is particularly noteworthy. It's PMA's 60th Fresh Summit, and we're celebrating. But we aren't celebrating PMA. We're

celebrating you — our members. PMA members and volunteer leaders have helped make it the strong, responsive and growing organization it is today. Yes, I say *growing*. Because at this 60th Fresh Summit, PMA proudly announces the formation of the association's first international affiliate: PMA Australia-New Zealand. This affiliate exemplifies PMA's growth in direct response to member support, feedback and needs.

PMA A-NZ rises in reply to our Australia/New Zealand Country Council's request for a stronger and more structured PMA presence in the region. Simply put, the affiliate helps the association better serve its Australia and New Zealand members through enhanced resources and a formal structure. As I told the audience in May at our Fresh Connections conference in Sydney, our partnership is evolving into this next phase because there is no greater common interest for our industry than strengthening the global fresh fruit and vegetable supply chain and building better connections internationally.

PMA A-NZ is independently incorporated in Australia, and will serve the entire supply chain, from seed to store to table. The affiliate will be run by an elected board of directors of industry leaders from Australia and New Zealand, offering programs and services targeted for PMA members in those two countries. Thanks to input on a needs-assessment survey given by our members there, the affiliate's new board already has its main areas of focus, which include networking; global and domestic information and trends; and analysis and response to major issues pressing the industry such as scarce water resources, scarce talent, the impact of the global economic downturn and increasing supply chain costs. PMA truly is thinking globally and acting locally, whether in Australasia or in the United States, where our U.S. Fresh Connections events deliver the benefits of networking, information and business solutions close to home.

Speaking of building better international connection, the PERISHABLE PUNDIT deserves a bit of credit. It's wonderful to find his words



attracting an increasingly global readership. This expanded readership further connects the world's fruit and vegetable supply-chain, circulates more ideas and best practices and helps strengthen our industry's community. Let's also not forget that PRODUCE BUSINESS was launched at Fresh Summit more than two decades ago, and its growth has paralleled that of PMA's flagship gathering.

Regardless of where on the globe you live and do business, you can count on Fresh Summit as your home for a 60-year tradition of business marketing, networking, learning and professional development. As we've experienced challenges through this tough economy, Fresh Summit is a place to which we draw closer in crises. It's where ideas are discovered and developed, and it's a place where we lay the foundation for a community — a community here at PMA's Fresh Summit, and a community for our global businesses year-round. Welcome home to Fresh Summit, welcome home to all the support and opportunities this unique community offers during this week and throughout the year.



# Combustion of Commerce

*There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.  
On such a full sea are we now afloat,  
And we must take the current when it serves,  
Or lose our ventures.*

— Julius Caesar Act 4, scene 3, 218-224

**T**his writer has traveled far and seen much and has found value in many things. It is, however, worth noting on the occasion of the 60th annual Produce Marketing Association Convention and Exposition or, as the marketing folks dubbed it some years ago, Fresh Summit, that there is nothing remotely like this event in the entire world.

If we could somehow place ourselves back at that first humble meeting of the Produce Prepackaging Association in New York City, we could imagine how improbable this month's assemblage in Anaheim would seem.

If we could stand in line with a young Bob Carey, PMA's first chief executive (and only employee) as he stood in the military recruitment office signing up for the reserves as PMA had no pension plan and he was uncertain how he would live in his old age — the enormity of this gathering would astound us.

Or if we could be flies on the wall at that meeting when PMA's board went hat-in-hand to another produce trade association and pleaded that they might merge, only to be rejected — how unlikely the conclave in Anaheim would have appeared.

For students of business, the growth of PMA is instructive, for it was not accidental. A specific strategy was drafted to align the association with key buying segments of the trade and then to capitalize on that buyer involvement with marketing and networking events, Fresh Summit being preeminent among them,

That strategy was framed a long time ago, and for a generation now, PMA has been working diligently to broaden its scope and

make sure members did not define the organization as just a long weekend in October.

Yet for all of PMA's efforts to diversify, it has been like running a race with a never-ending finish line, for the PMA Convention and Exhibition has been growing so consistently and so enormously that even extensive growth by PMA in other areas can barely keep up.

PMA's initial strategy to attract buyers tied in with the switch from rail to truck transport and the rise of self-supply by major supermarket chains, so an industry that had been accustomed to indirect relationships with buyers through wholesalers, brokers and auctions found itself on a wave of outreach to retailers — and PMA surfed it perfectly.

This created a critical mass at the annual convention and like some kind of super-powerful breeder-reactor, the mass itself became the attraction and the number of exhibitors and attendees grew ever larger.

Of course, there are other events and many find value in them. It is also true many even prefer less populated venues, but Fresh Summit is unique for the exact same reason that New York City, London, Tokyo or Shanghai are unique — because there is a stimulus in the diversity of attendees and activities that creates the milieu for creativity, for learning and, yes, for making a connection.

Events that are simply trade shows or events where there is no critical mass of hotel rooms encouraging hospitality suites, dinners and late night conversations at the bar may be useful for business, but they are far less congenial to the brainstorming and bonding crucial to business breakthroughs than a multi-faceted event such as Fresh Summit.

The fact that the Australian and New Zealand produce industries are looking to affiliate more closely with PMA is hardly surprising. Fresh Summit is the brightest light in the produce galaxy and just as a moth is drawn to the flame, so, too, are those distant outposts of western civilization — of what Winston Churchill called our brethren among the “English-Speaking Peoples” — drawn to the font of knowledge, the sparkle of energy

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and the combustion of commerce that is Fresh Summit.

The details of the new PMA A-NZ are bound to get lots of attention, yet they are not as important as the connection dictated by common interests and good friendship.

The produce industry is not an easy business. Every day, practically every company has issues to deal with reflecting the perishability of the product and the role of Mother Nature in the often serendipitous conduct of the trade.

The Internet, Skype and remote conferencing have made the world and the industry smaller, but no amount of electrons buzzing around the planet can lubricate a sticky business moment like the experience of having met first-hand, having broken bread together, or the knowledge that you will see your business partner again at next year's event.

PRODUCE BUSINESS was launched at PMA back in 1985, the effort of hopeful entrepreneurs to find a tide to ride. Now, with the PERISHABLE PUNDIT, we send a beacon to the entrepreneurs and executives of the produce industry in every hamlet of America and every corner of every country across the globe: Come to America, come to Fresh Summit, for if there is a tide awaiting your ventures, your enterprise, your dreams, you shall find it rising here.