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By Craig Levitt Published: October 1, 2008 Growers gear up for the upcoming PMA show, where food safety will be a hot topic.

Food safety is poised to take center stage at the Produce Marketing Association Fresh Summit International Convention and Exposition, to be held in Orlando on Oct. 24 to 27. As some high-profile outbreaks of foodborne illnesses have been linked to produce, industry insiders agree that substantial changes are needed to restore consumer confidence in produce safety and to address regulators' and legislators' growing concerns.

A two-hour town hall meeting on the recent salmonella outbreak has been added to the convention's food safety track. During the meeting, public health authorities, government officials and industry insiders will discuss the investigative process, provide insight and information learned from each outbreak and answer industry members' questions.

"We continue to discuss ways to improve food safety practices within the produce industry, but our consumer research and government interactions make it clear that we need to do less talking and more changing to retain our customers and avoid more government involvement in our business," says Bryan Silbermann, president of the Newark, Del.-based PMA. "If it is not already, food safety must become an integral part of a company's culture."

In addition to the town hall meeting, several food safety-themed workshops are planned. "Food Safety + Risk Management = Profitability" is designed to provide a new way to look at food safety programs. "Finding Your Place in Whole Chain Traceability" addresses how the entire produce supply chain will be affected by new initiatives to achieve whole chain traceability. "Food Safety: Keeping Your Business Healthy" will review the latest regulatory updates and initiatives while looking at food safety from an ROI perspective.

"Food safety will also be a major theme in my annual 'State of the Industry' address, and I expect it will also be a prominent feature in the comments of outgoing chairman Dave Corsi," says Silbermann. "Food safety is an integral part of our produce business now, and that will be evident at Fresh Summit."

Of course there is much more to Fresh Summit than meetings and workshops for the nearly 17,000 attendees expected. Exhibitors from around the world display their latest and greatest products, packaging, promotions and merchandising materials. Here's a sampling of what just a few are doing.

New York Apple Commission

The Fishers N.Y.-based organization will be sampling fresh apple cider as well as fresh New York state apples, but according to president Jim Allen, the highlight will once again be the New York Apple Commission's version of an appletini. "Our appletinis are applesauce and a fresh slice of apple in a martini glass," says Allen. "We have different flavors of applesauce that make it look pretty exciting. We did more than 1,000 appletini glasses last year. It's nice, unique and it shows different ways to use applesauce."

Allen says the Apple Commission will also continue to highlight its buy local theme for New York state apples and the booth will feature The New York Apple Advantage, a 40-page guide dedicated toward healthy eating and lifestyles. In addition to providing tips on how to incorporate apples as well as other fruits and vegetables into a diet, the book provides exercise tips and recipes. Allen says the book is available for retailers to incorporate into their merchandising plans and point-of-sale material.

The *Sholl Group II/Green Giant Fresh*

In an effort to take advantage of the equity and recognition of the Green Giant, the marketer of select *Green Giant Fresh* produce products is changing the packaging and increasing the size of the Jolly Green Giant on all of its *Green Giant Fresh* products for grocery stores nationwide. The top third of the packaging is now devoted entirely to the Green Giant, his logo and his valley.

"We decided to increase the size of the Green Giant because the Green Giant brand is recognized by 96% of consumers and has tremendous brand equity," says Darci Eckermann, senior vice president. "It's synonymous in consumers' minds with quality freshness and trust."

New in the *Green Giant Fresh* line are Klondike Gourmet and Klondike Petite small gourmet potatoes in a 1.5-pound mesh convenience bag, available in yellow, red-yellow fleshed, golden, purple and medley varieties. The line also includes: steam line, previously called *Freshtables*, which are vegetables with chef created sauces that come in a steaming bag allowing for microwavable steaming; stir-fries, premium cut vegetables with sauce packets; cut vegetables in a steaming bag and branded fruits and vegetables such as a vegetable tray, berries, citrus, kiwi, tomatoes, lettuce, asparagus, green beans, mushrooms, broccoli, cauliflower, onions, carrots and spinach.

Vidalia Onion Committee

It's game time at the Vidalia Onion Committee booth as the Vidalia, Ga.-based organization is holding a trivia contest in an effort to raise retailer awareness for Vidalia onions. According to Wendy Brannen, executive director, the contest, which will be held randomly throughout the day, features different levels of questions relating to the history and growing practices of Vidalia onions as well as what makes them unique. Brannen says prizes will be awarded throughout the day with the grand prize being a \$1,000 gas card. The contest is a continuation of a recent nationwide consumer trivia contest the company ran called the original sweet onion trivia contest, in which consumers learned about Vidalia onions.

"We are hoping that (the gas card) incentive will encourage retailers to come by our booth, where they can have a good time with us, learn about our product, while we also learn something about them," says Brannen. "We all know knowledge is the key in selling any product, so we hope by better educating consumers and retailers we can help boost sales."

In addition to the trivia contest, which sports a Wheel of Fortune-like theme, back of house storage and handling posters will be displayed, as well as informational brochures and a "bevy of recipes."

Russet Potato Exchange

This year the Bancroft, Wis.-based company is expanding its relationship with the Disney Garden brand, featuring the Disney Garden Singles wrapped potatoes. The Singles are made specifically for the microwave and is a 6-ounce potato versus the traditional 10-ounce potato. They also have four collectible labels from Disney's Cars movie featuring characters Lightning McQueen, Mater, Sally and Sheriff. A new brand of fingerling potatoes will be introduced that will be marked under the Naturally Nutritious name.

"Traditionally our Disney products are bags, but now we are extending into the value-added category, primarily for that appeal to kids," says Rachel Leach, marketing manager. "They provide portion control, and they are easy to cook. The product really focuses on the mission to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among children. We've already gotten feedback from other shows that people like the smaller size."

Leach says the booth also features a new Healthy Grown display that touts Wisconsin's sustainable "green" potato. The display accommodates 18 packs of potatoes, with three potatoes in each pack. The packaging includes an eco-friendly message.

"Healthy Grown addresses what is happening now in the market, along the lines of sustainability and we have developed a new display to send that message," says Leach.

TexaSweat Citrus Marketing

The nonprofit corporation, created for the purpose of advertising and promoting the sale of fresh citrus fruits grown in Texas, is displaying its new marketing materials this year. In addition to providing retailers with a wide array of promotional material, the Mission, Texas based organization is promoting a national recipe contest for both consumers and professionals. According to TexaSweat's executive director, Eleisha Ensign, the contest has three categories, desserts, entrees and salads. Ensign says a total of \$5000 in prize money will be awarded, with \$500 going to the winners of each category. "We are providing retailers with tear leaf cards and posters to put into displays in order to promoting the recipe contest," says Ensign.

Each year TexasSweet also develops and provides retailers with a cookbook featuring citrus recipes that they can display for consumers. Ensign says they also provide retailers with a lot of kids' material, including a cookbook for children, as well as a compact easy-to-read consumer brochure that has information on citrus fruit and is easy to display around the citrus area. "All of our materials are free and are mainly focused on helping the retailer help the consumer learn more about grapefruit," says Ensign.

Rainier Fruit Co.

With company roots dating back to 1888, Rainier operates with the philosophy of growing the highest quality apples, pears and cherries under the watchful eye of knowledgeable fruit growers. This year the grower is introducing and sampling its latest apple variety called Lady Alice. According to Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing, the Lady Alice was a chance seedling—meaning it is not a cross between any particular varieties—that was found in an orchard of the Selah, Wash.-based grower. Wolter says the apple, which is pinkish red in color, can be found in the new products showcase in addition to being in Rainer's booth. "We have been producing the Lady Alice for three years now, and we are reaching the point where we have a fair amount of volume as we move into the 2008 season," says Wolter.

Along with the Lady Alice, Rainier is showing its grapple display units. According to Wolter, the displays will ship to retailers before the holidays. This year Wolter also expects to have a better supply of grapples, which are premium apples infused with grape flavor.

Idaho Potato Commission

According to Seth Pemsler, vice president of retail and international, the Idaho Potato Commission booth will once again be a can't miss for show-goers. "For the past four years we have had huge events at our booth, from featuring Barbara Eden and Denise Austin to last year's Texas rodeo theme," says Pemsler. "This year we are going to do something more outrageous."

He says that because the IPC is a commission and doesn't launch new items, it is important to be creative and generate excitement in order to get people to visit the booth. Aside from providing visitors with a memorable experience, the Idaho Potato Commission attends PMA to meet with its customers to talk about the industry and opportunities specific to Idaho potatoes.

"Because we are a commission, our venue is always going to be potatoes," says Pemsler. "Because this is PMA, our message is going to be fresh potatoes. Part of that message is just reminding everyone that we offer a whole portfolio of varieties. We are not just russets."

Pemsler adds that one of the goals of the IPC is to emphasize to retailers that they are the premier potato marketing organization in the industry and to encourage retailers to utilize the organizations marketing abilities for their own specific needs.

Sun-Maid Growers

From sampling and giving away product to meeting with brokers and retailers, this long time PMA participant goes all out in preparing for the Fresh Summit show. This year that includes featuring its latest product launch, the six-pack Cape Cod cranberries.

"I don't know if there is a product we sell to retail that we will not have at PMA in one form or another," says Joe Tamble, vice president of sales for the Kingsburg, Calif.-based grower. "We will have nearly 30 shipper displays and around 25 different products in the booth."

Highlighted throughout the booth are the three products that carry the new "healthy 100 calories or less" flags on the front of its packaging. Tamble says the flag is an over wrap featured on its six-packs of regular natural California raisins, golden raisins as well as the new Cape Cod cranberries.

In addition to the wide array of displays, the booth will also feature shelving similar to what is seen in supermarkets. The intention, says Tamble, is offer up to retailers a suggested planogram of dried fruit. Sun-Maid is also proud of its growing practices and sustainability efforts, which will be featured via a video presentation that will run in a loop through the day.

The Garlic Co.

According to sales/marketing director John Duffus, The Garlic Co. is a vertically integrated company that grows and processes its own product. He says the Bakersfield, Calif.-based company offers a complete product line from bald garlic to whole peeled garlic to fresh garlic puree and dices that they display at the PMA show every year. He adds that they sell more than 25 million pounds of garlic a year to a diverse customer base including retailers and the food service industry.

This year the Garlic Co. is directing much of its energies towards the retail side of its business. The company will highlight their new vacuum pack garlic product, which Duffus says is essentially three smaller cloves of garlic, vacuum-sealed in a breathable membrane.

"I like to describe it as a new mouse trap for garlic," says Duffus. "We think this is a convenient way for consumers to buy whole fresh peeled garlic. It is the right size for consumers as we have found that most consumers buy garlic and wind up throwing a good amount away. This new product is portion sized so that a consumer can make a meal without wasting any and it has a longer shelf-life than regular peeled garlic because it is vacuum-sealed."

Well-Pict Berries

"They taste great straight," says sales manager Dan Crowley, when referring to Well-Pict's strawberries and raspberries. Unlike previous years when the Watsonville, Calif.-based grower would offer PMA attendees chef-created dishes, Crowley says this year the plan is to keep it very simple. "We are going to just have rinsed berries. They are an all-natural snack, which is all you need day-to-day to get your antioxidants and live long healthy lives."

In addition to offering its proprietary strawberries and raspberries, which are available to retailers year-round, Well-Pict ships blackberries and blueberries from spring through fall. The grower offers a range of merchandising support to assist in-store berry sales, including Well-Pict informational brochures and point-of-sale materials from the California Strawberry Commission. Crowley says Well-Pict's sales forces is dedicated to meet each of its customers' needs as the company regularly supplies retailers with crop information, as well as help retailers plan consumer promotions.

According to Crowley, Well-Pict has also increased its organic acreage and now offers retailers year-round

organic raspberries to go along with its 12-month organic strawberry crop. The organic raspberries are available in 6- and 12-ounce clamshells while the organic strawberries receive new 2-pound packaging. Rounding out Well-Pict's organic program are sweet blackberries, also in 6- and 12-ounce packs and available to retailers from May through July.

Chelan Fresh Marketing

Subtlety seems to be the theme at the Chelan Fresh booth this year. According to Terry Braithwaite, director of marketing, the Chelan, Wash.-based group has redone all of its materials for its in-house varietal programs, from point-of-sale cards to bins and packaging.

"The look is similar, but everything is color-coded now," says Braithwaite. "All the apples will have green headers, the pears headers have a rustic look, what we really are trying to do is tie everything together and it looks great."

A big part of the Chelan Fresh booth will also be dedicated to its array of licensed Disney products, whose packaging received a touch up as well. Braithwaite says the amount of graphics on the package have been decreased in order to better see the fruit inside. A large part of Chelan Fresh's Disney offering is the year-long program dedicated to the High School Musical franchise. The company is also showing its redone Christmas bins and new Christmas tote bag.

Braithwaite says Chelan Fresh is intent on emphasizing to retailers the extensive selection of marketing and merchandising programs the company offers. "We invite anybody over for a look at any of our new stuff," says Braithwaite. "We are always changing, always on the cutting edge and we do have some exciting stuff moving forward."

Crunch Pak

According to Tony Freytag, director of marketing, Crunch Pak's organics program is going to have a bigger presence this year. That presence is expected to include an in-depth presentation on its organic program as well as a continued emphasis on its snacking program, which includes grapes, dips and apples. Crunch Pak will also be sampling grapes as well as its organic and regular apple slices, with accompanying caramel dipping sauce. Crunch Pak has been hesitant in the past to promote its organic products, but with an increased supply, officials at the Cashmere, Wash.-based company believe now is the perfect time.

"We want people to know that this year we are going to be much more aggressive with our organics program and be out there as the number one brand of sliced apples," says Freytag. "We believe we have the opportunity to take our organic strategy to a broader array of customers and consumers than we have in the past—just because we have the ability to do it now."

Also featured prominently within the booth are materials promoting Crunch Pak's recently launched program called Crunch Pak Cares. On display throughout the booth are action photos featuring Crunch Pak's involvement with various philanthropic organizations. "We want to highlight that we want to be a partner with our retailers," says Freytag. "If a community is involved with giving and sharing to a local organization, we want to partner with them to make sure we are doing our part along those lines."

Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee

For show-goers yearning to extend the summer, a visit to the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee booth is in order. The Parma, Idaho.-based organization will be operating a surf simulator, playing Jimmy Buffet and Beach Boys music and giving away prizes that include "funky" surf t-shirts. According to Sherise Jones, marketing director, there is a method to the madness, as promotional materials such as sizing charts and new recipe cards are available as well. "We are trying to communicate a healthy lifestyle with our promotional material this year," says Jones. "We have developed new recipes revolving around that theme."

Jones says the tagline "Onions for Life" is also new for this year and materials have been created that incorporate onions as people participate in outdoor activities. For example, one ad features a man fishing, but using an onion as a bobber. The booth will also feature sampling, which in the past usually consisted of simply caramelized onions, but Jones expects to add to that this year. "We are going to step it up a bit and offer something more substantial, perhaps incorporate protein with our onions," says Jones. "It seems any time you offer any kind of meat, people tend to visit the booth more.

"Basically we are just trying to push the message of increased onion consumption," she explains. "That will help us kick off our onion lovers display contest in January."

Dovex Marketing

Growing organic produce for nearly 15 years, Gene Loudon, director of marketing, says that Dovex is now close to 75% organic. As one of the leading organic suppliers from the Northwest, it is no surprise that the Wentatchee, Wash.-based grower is pushing forward with its organic message. One of their main objectives at PMA is to show retailers its leadership position, as a packer and shipper of organic apples and pears in the Pacific Northwest via point-of-sale materials and posters, product display and of course, sampling of whole apples. Loudon says they also want to emphasize the advantages of organics as well as work to educate retailers about the apple and pear industry.

"We want to let people know who we are and what kind of player we are in the apple and pear industry," says Loudon. "We have the largest and best quality of organics out there today. We have been doing this for a long time and have more experience than most of our competition in organics. Our idea is that Dovex is a better way."

Chilean Fresh Fruit Association

"We are finding that people who attend Fresh Summit are interested in learning more about the global movement of produce," says Tom Tjerandsen, managing director. "Not only are we providing a full range of support programs for them, assisting this movement, we are showcasing samples."

Those samples include many unique ways in which Chilean fruits can be used including ice creams, pastries and avocado dogs, all to be made fresh daily. Tjerandsen says most of the sampling flavors are fairly usual, such as black berry ice cream. Other flavors are lesser know in the U.S. yet popular in Hispanic countries, which Tjerandsen thinks booth visitors will find intriguing. One such as flavor is called lucuma.

Also showcased are upbeat bright image featuring children around the world enjoying Chilean fruit, designed, says Tjerandsen, to emphasize Chile as a major supplier of food to the world.

"We expect to provide some pretty dramatic information about harvesting that we think visitors will significantly benefit from," says Tjerandsen. "So we encourage all who are in the acquisition business to come by."

Sun World International

According to Mike Aiton, senior vice president of sales and marketing, the focus at Sun World has always been on new and unique varieties of fruits, with an emphasis on flavor. With that credo in mind, the Bakersfield, Calif.-based company is showcasing and sampling an array of new varieties of late season grapes and tree fruits, including plums. In addition to showcasing their product, Aiton says Sun World is also looking for customer feedback in an effort to determine what the next course of action will be with some of the new varieties. While Aiton says that this is the core of their exhibit, many of their ancillary items will also be on display, including a full line of citrus, peppers and watermelon. Kits that include a wide range of point-of-sale material are available to customers, as are Sun World's own demographic and consumption

studies.

"One of the things that has really changed for Sun World over the past four years has been the international presence," says Aiton "This is very much an international show for us. We have many visitors to our booth from around the world, and it is great to have these people look at what we are doing, and talk to them. We have visitors from dozens of countries that we schedule meetings with to talk about different things we can do together in the future."

Kingsburg Orchards

Known primarily for its early fruit, Kingsburg Orchards will now have fruit that will last through mid-October, and, according to Dan Spain, vice president of sales and marketing, in a couple of years they expect to have fruit that will last through Thanksgiving. "We've got some later fruit and I expect we will be one of the few to have summer fruit at PMA," says Spain. "In baseball terms, we had the season opener, now we have the World Series as well."

Featured will be Kingsburg's apple pears, which will have a number of different packages, from a four-count to volume filled. The Kingsburg, Calif.-based grower is also featuring in-store bin displays called Flavor Farmer, and will build displays for retailers that contain apple pears. Sampling includes whole apple pears, new plums and the company's OnTrack energy bar.

This past summer, Kingsburg was successful with its Pluarama promotion and some of the signage from that will be on hand as well, Spain says. "We have about 47 varieties of pluots during the summer and retailers were looking for a way to tell the story at point-of purchase," says Spain. "We actually ran a number of contests that worked out really well and the pictures surrounding Pluarama are outstanding and will be featured at the booth."

Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement

Operating under the authority of the California Marketing Act of 1937, and administered by the California Department of Agriculture, The two year-old organization is making its first appearance at PMA as part of the California Grown pavilion. According to April Ward, communications coordinator, the main objective for the Sacramento-based group is to get out in front of retailers and answer any questions they may have about the program. "We want to get people familiar with our seal, which is what retailers should look for if they are buying from our certified members," says Ward.

Ward adds that the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement has also started an email newsletter, which will be sent out intermittently, as per news dictates. The newsletter is expected to include information such as when a new member joins the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement or if a member is decertified. Ward says visitors to the booth can sign-up to receive the newsletter free of charge. "We recently went to a food service show, and the email newsletter was a big hit," says Ward. "Virtually everybody that I spoke to said 'yes, sign me up'."

Bland Farms

"They only make you cry when they are gone," says owner of Bland Farms, Delbert Bland, when referring to sweet onions. Only four hours from its home base in Glennville, Ga., the Bland Farms booth will be filled with the majority of its sales staff, says Bland. The main message the staff will be conveying this year is that Bland Farms offers both conventional as well as organic sweet onions year-round. Bland says the booth also features a chef offering cooking demos and serving up sweet onion recipes. Recipes include sweet onion rings, sweet onion petals and a classic sweet baked onion.

Bland Farms started with Vidalia onions but around six years ago expanded to include sweet onions from Peru as well as other locations in North and South America and now, in addition to Peru they offer sweet onions from Ecuador, Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Idaho and California. Bland says it is the expansion that has allowed

them to offer onions year-round.

"We offer sweet onions, as most people know," says Bland. "What they may not know is we do them year-round. We also offer conventional as well as organics. We are probably one of the few companies that have a 12-month supply of organic sweet onions and we are going to convey that message at the show."

Oso Sweet Onions

The Waterford, Mich.-based company takes its twenty years of experience growing, marketing and providing customers with sweet onions from Chile and has developed its Oso Sweet of Texas program. Product available in the Texas program includes 2-, 3- and 5-pound bags, bins and 40-pound cartons and is supported by national and regional marketing and a fixed priced program. According to company officials the Texas onions are available from March through May. Also available to retailers is information on Oso Sweet's Chile product, which is available January through March. In an effort to entice visitors, each day a \$250 Visa card will be raffled off as well as samplings of Oso Sweet Onions.

Oneonta Starr Ranch Growers

The Wenatchee, Wash.-based grower welcomes its newest family member, Diamond Starr Growers, and has expanded its booth size in order to integrate new point-of-sale materials and several sizes of new packing that emphasize the brand. The company also plans to debut a euro display sleeve that targets pear pre-ripening and conditioning, which is intended to catch the eye of the consumer.

To kick off the marketing merger, the "healthCARE + me" promotion has been created, with the added intention of increasing breast cancer awareness. "We are heavily promoting several apple and pear varieties with our healthCARE + me stanchion size posters and mesh bags," says Scott Marboe, director of marketing. "The promotion restarts again in February for Valentine's Day and then again for Mother's Day, as the concept is to create awareness throughout the year." Marboe says additional visual materials as well as Oneonta's latest display bins will also be featured at their booth.

Potandon Produce

Much of the conversation in the Potandon booth will center on the companies mini potatoes, the Klondike Gourmet and the Klondike Petite. Both are mini potatoes in mesh 1.5-pound bags. According to Barbara Keckler, marketing coordinator, one bag is a serving size for a family of four and there are six varieties: Klondike Gourmet Yellow Idaho Potatoes, Klondike Gourmet Red-Yellow Fleshed Idaho Potatoes, Klondike Gourmet Medley Pack (includes red-yellow, yellow and purple), Red Petite Idaho Potatoes, Klondike Petite Purple Idaho Potatoes and Klondike Petite Golden Idaho Potatoes.

"We have the largest supply base in North America, giving us the most flexible sourcing network to deal with quality, weather and unanticipated spikes in demand or transportation issues," say Keckler. She says that in addition to having the exclusive rights to the Green Giant brand for fresh potatoes and onions, the Idaho Falls, Idaho-based company also has year-round domestic sweet onions and will be featuring them as well.

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