

The Extra Mile: Tracking Flavor

Pocono Produce is one of the largest independent broadliners servicing the Northeast and mid-Atlantic, but produce—which makes up 15 percent of sales—is still a calling card. A new program underscores that.

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Beginning in February, some Pocono produce boxes will carry “WOW!” stickers to draw attention to exceptional quality. The boxes may also have “Inspected By...” cards inserted, touting the work of the distributor’s quality assurance team, which pulls samples for inspection on all produce items. And e-mail alerts called “Brix Blasts” now go out to customers and DSRs alike, letting them know which fruits and vegetables are particularly sweet and flavorful right now.

“Everyone’s trying to find an edge and we’ve found that produce—especially things like local and sustainable products—has become an important differentiator,” says Doug Petruzzi, executive chef and marketing manager. “To enhance what our customers are doing and get them the very best products to showcase on their menus, we’ve developed a communications program that leverages what our QA staff is doing.”

As part of the program, that staff of four full-time inspectors has been outfitted with refractometers—instruments that allow them to measure the sugar content in fruits and vegetables. Those readings, called brix readings, provide a statistical measure of flavor and quality, according to Petruzzi. “A strawberry can look perfect, but be sour or lack flavor when you bite into it,” he says. “With a brix reading, we have scientific confirmation that says, wow, it really is sweet.”

As brix readings are gathered, Pocono’s QA staff reviews them and, roughly twice each week, puts out a Brix Blast to draw attention to items at peak flavor.

“We want customers to know that we’re looking out for their best interests,” says Petruzzi. And judging by positive

e-mails flooding his inbox and spikes in orders for items highlighted in Brix Blast, customers appreciate the effort.

Pocono Produce Company

Stroudsburg, PA

Estimated 2008 Sales: \$100 million

Marketing territory: Pennsylvania; Maryland; Washington; D.C.; New York; New Jersey; Delaware

Marketing affiliations: Frosty Acres, Tailor Made Distribution; PRO*ACT

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