

Fresh talk

by Richard Turcsik
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Bigger Giant

Look for an even bigger Green Giant in the produce aisle now that The Sholl Group II, the Eden Prairie, Minn.-based firm that licenses the Green Giant Fresh name from General Mills, is updating its packaging. In a move that capitalizes on the immense equity and recognition of the Jolly Green Giant, the top third of the packaging is now devoted 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, as well as now delivering first rate on-shelf shop-ability,” says Darci Ekermann, senior vice president.

The Sholl Group II has also entered into a partnership with F&S Produce Co., Inc. to create a line of Green Giant Fresh vegetable trays. Featuring carrots, celery, grape tomatoes, broccoli and ranch dip, the trays are available in 22- and 40-ounce sizes. Founded in 1981, Rosenhayn, N.J.-based F&S Produce recently completed a 20,000-square-foot plant to process fresh fruits and vegetables for the foodservice industry, industrial food manufacturing plants and for retail chains. For more information, visit www.greengiantfresh.com.

Bagging an apple

Yakima, Wash.-based Taylor Ann Enterprises LLC, a start-up founded by industry veteran Alan Taylor and named after his granddaughter, is introducing Apple On The Go —a single fresh apple packed in a biodegradable package and being marketed as a perfect healthy snack for today’s busy lifestyles. The pre-washed Apple On The Go will be a standard Red Delicious or Golden Delicious, with a suggested retail price of 99 cents.

In 2009, Taylor is looking to introduce Organic On The Go single-serve organic apples and Jazz On The Go. “This is the Jazz variety of apple, which is another trademarked variety that has proved very popular like Pink Lady,” Taylor says.

For more information, visit www.appleonthego.org.

One on One....

C. Gregory Sagan, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Modern Mushroom Farms, based in Avondale, Pa., says that environmental issues are becoming a big deal for his company.

Please provide an overview of Modern Mushroom Farms and the brand names that you distribute.

C. Gregory Sagan: Modern Mushroom Farms is a third-generation family-owned operation where customers and families are top priority and the environment is part of our legacy. Modern Mushroom Farms has farms on both coasts and distributes into 37-plus states. As Modern Mushroom Farms looked to the future,

we made environmental stewardship a priority and developed a partnership with Protected Harvest. This relationship has allowed us to work directly with an independent, technical organization and call on the expertise of scientists and advisors to develop a sustainable agriculture program that is realistic and measurable as well as economically feasible.

Last fall, Modern Mushroom Farms was certified by Protected Harvest. Our brands now carry the Protect Harvest seal. Currently, we go to market with a two-brand strategy. The Modern Farms' brand is our trade name and brand. We have developed a very clean and contemporary look with a color-coded system for ease of shopability. We also are the exclusive packer/shipper of the Green Giant Fresh brand for North America. With its high consumer recognition, we market Green Giant as our consumer brand. We also offer a store brand program. Our goal is to offer our customers a choice, so that our mushroom brand will fit their brand strategy for mushrooms.

What benefit does a brand name mushroom offer both the retailer and consumer over a no-name commodity product?

When it comes to produce, consumers continue to buy with their eyes wanting the very freshest product. Retailers know that Green Giant and Modern brands packed by Modern Mushroom Farms adhere to stringent food safety standards. Consumer recognition for the Green Giant brand is 97%.

How are you marketing and advertising the brand? Can you tie-in with other branded products in produce or elsewhere in the store?

Our marketing strategy is to offer our customers a two-brand approach. (Modern-trade, GG-consumer). With both brands we have communicated our sustainability initiative. We participated in a "Cook to Win" promotion which was a consumer tie-in with the Disney movie Ratatouille. We have taken advantage of the Mushroom Council programs first with Bob Greene's Best Life and for this summer have tied in with the Weight Watchers national campaign, Pick of the Season.

Do you offer a private label branded program? If so, what benefits can that offer a retailer?

Yes, we offer a private label branded program. We feel in order to have a successful relationship with our key customers, it is imperative to understand their "go-to-market" strategies and be able to offer branding options for their success in the marketplace. —Seth Mendelson

Turkey talk

The secret to a tender turkey is brining the bird in a salt solution before roasting or grilling it. That's why Davis and Gena Knox, the owners of Athens, Ga.-based Fire & Flavor, have introduced Turkey Perfect Apple Sage Brining Mix. The brining process vastly improves the flavor and moisture content of lean meats, such as pork, chicken and turkey, by unwinding meat proteins, trapping in the juices and creating a crisp, golden skin.

Designed to be sold in the meat department, adjacent to the turkeys, Fire & Flavor's Turkey Perfect Apple Sage Browning Mix involves one easy step. The package contains all of the needed spices (dehydrated apples, cranberries, pink peppercorns and sage) necessary for flavoring a turkey. All the consumer has to do is place the bird in the bag with the spices and add apple cider, sugar and ice.

A box of the shelf-stable mix retails for \$6.99 to \$7.99. For more information, visit www.fireandflavor.com.

Aladdin's Mexican wish

Brooklyn, N.Y.-based aladdin bakers has added gorditas to its line of bread products. Gordita Bread is used either tamped down in the center and topped, or sliced and stuffed with meats, cheeses, beans, vegetables and seasoning. It has a corn taste and can also be served toasted for breakfast or an anytime treat.

“The translation of Gordita is ‘little fat one,’” Kurt Wolfram, national retail sales manager at Aladdin tells *Grocery Headquarters*. “It is a bread that is used for sandwiches. We’re the only commercial baker in the country baking this right now. We have it in retail and are looking to go into foodservice.”

Aladdin's Gorditas are packed in sleeves of eight and are shipped frozen, with a 10-day shelf life after slack-out.

For more information, visit www.aladdinbakers.com, or call 718-499-1818.

State of the department

The Perishables Group, a Chicago-based market research firm specializing in the fresh food industry, has released its annual State of the Department series of reports. In addition to key sales statistics for each fresh department, these reports show suppliers and retailers products that are currently hot, factors affecting consumer purchases and significant changes happening in the industry. This information can then be used to capitalize on current opportunities in the market. The reports break down fresh food departments and use Perishables Group's market research, data and analytics to provide a comprehensive review of each department's performance and notable trends over the year.

For more information or to purchase the reports, e-mail info@perishablesgroup.com or call Deandra Carbone at 847-426-2665.

Now that's Italian

Smithfield RMH Foods of Cincinnati is launching a line of authentic, restaurant-inspired Italian entrees under the Milano's Italian Grille brand name.

Merchandised in the refrigerated meats or entrees section, the line consists of six fully cooked, restaurant-inspired entrees that are ready in minutes and are designed to attract the convenience-oriented shopper who still desires high quality dinner solutions.

Milano's Italian Grille offers items such as Chicken Milano—a grilled chicken breast and bowtie pasta smothered with sun-dried tomatoes and mushrooms in a garlic cream sauce. The other items in the line are Chicken Parmesan, Chicken Marsala, Lasagna with Meat Sauce, Fettuccine Alfredo and Spaghetti with Meatballs.

Milano's Italian Grille entrees are packaged in 18- to 20-ounce microwavable trays with a suggested retail of \$6.99 to \$7.99.

For more information, visit www.rmhfoods.com.

SUPPLIER NEWS

Easier PLU: Castroville, Calif.-based Ocean Mist Farms has developed a PLU sticker. It is the first of its kind for bulk artichokes. Ocean Mist Farms created the PLU sticker to proactively comply with country of origin labeling laws that go into effect this year. The stickers will be available on two sizes of artichokes with the current PLU codes 4262 and 4084. The individual stickers will be applied in the field as each artichoke is hand-packed during harvest. In addition to the country of origin information, the size-specific PLU number allows stores to feature a two-size artichoke program while capturing sales of bulk product accurately at checkout. www.oceanmistfarms.com.

Name change: The Produce Marketing Association Education Foundation has officially changed its name to the PMA Foundation for Industry Talent. The name change culminates a three-month long strategic planning process, and more closely reflects the newly refined purpose and goals of the foundation. “We feel that ‘Foundation for Industry Talent’ conveys our mission more effectively than our former name,” says Cindy Seel, the foundation’s executive director. www.pma.com.

Pesticide free ‘shrooms: Colusa, Calif.-based Premier Mushrooms has earned the NutriClean “Lab Tested and Certified Pesticide Free” designation for its full line of white, brown and portabello mushrooms. The certification was issued by Scientific Certification Systems (SCS), Emeryville, Calif., an independent certifier of environmental, sustainability, food quality and food purity claims. www.scs-certified.com; 530-458-8600.

Exclusive tomato: Kingsville, Ont.-based Mastronardi Produce/Sunset has reached a long-term deal with Dutch seed producer Enza Zaden for exclusive North American rights to the trademarked Campari Brand Cocktail Tomato. Deemed “the tomato lover’s tomato,” Campari tomatoes are said to offer the perfect balance of sweetness and acidity, according to company officials. “Every year we conduct worldwide searches for new specialty items, we test more than 100 different varieties in our greenhouses trying to improve the best of the best,” says Paul Mastronardi, executive vice president. www.sunsetproduce.com.

Mango contest: The National Mango Board of Orlando, Fla., has wrapped up its inaugural Rising Mango Star recipe contest, which successfully promoted mangos to the important kids market. Supporting the board’s goal of increasing mango consumption, the promotion has earned consumer media attention from across the country with nearly 26 million impressions to date. The promotion included an innovative strategy using national print media, as well as online components, such as reaching out to bloggers and promoting the contest on the social networking sites MySpace, Facebook and YouTube. The winner was Dean Stuart, age 10, from Rowlett, Texas, for his Mangolicious Flip Flop Cake recipe. <http://mango.org/risingstar>.

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