

## Packers expect stores to add more fresh-cut

By Jim Offner  
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Fresh-cut produce shippers and marketing agents are noticing more retail space devoted to fresh-cut, packaged product these days.

And, they add, the trend is likely to continue.

"Retailers are requesting fresh-cut products that appeal to consumers on the go, like grab-and-go cups with a mix of fruits or vegetables," said Dennis Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce NA Inc., Coral Gables, Fla.

The items that retailers are requesting are getting more diverse, as well, Christou said.

"Cups with dips are also successful because they serve as great snacks for the car or finger food for kids," he said. "Retailers also request overwrap fruits because consumers often prefer to buy larger fruit, like cantaloupes and watermelons, that is pre-cut into halves or quarters."

Shippers are happy to oblige.

"The main objective is to try to create a 4-foot, if not an 8-foot section," said Jason Landry, director of sales for the value-added line The Scholl Group II, Eden Prairie, Minn. "A lot of the retailers don't have enough space to accommodate the a variety of products coming out. The category is growing so fast they need to expand their sets at the stores to accommodate it all."

### More space

Retailers will continue to increase the amount of their coveted shelf space to fresh-cut items, Landry said.

A strategic goal of The Scholl Group II is to encourage retailers to have an entire section dedicated to a company's fresh-cut products.

"One of the great things about it, the concept I really support is that the Green Giant cut vegetable section that may have eight different categories in cut vegetables that allow us to promote one item one week and another item the next week," Landry said. "That way, the retailer can bring that customer back to that section on a weekly basis by promoting something different on ad each week."

Joe Caldwell, vice president of Watsonville, Calif.-based Monterey Mushrooms Inc., agreed that fresh-cut sections would continue to expand. But, Caldwell added, it's not going to be an easy process.

"There are a lot of items out there that are competing for that space," he said. "As more producers continue to be innovative and come out with more items, that continues to be a challenge for retailers."

### Lots of growth

Tony Freytag, marketing director for Cashmere, Wash.-based Crunch Pak, said he has seen the growth in store visits.

"I was probably in a dozen

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Tony Freytag  
Crunch Pak

stores in the Southeast last week, and from national chains to regional stores you see more and more dedicated shelf space just to fresh-cut fruit and vegetables," he said.

The growth is limited only by the number of products the category can produce, said Phil Gruszka, vice president of marketing for Bakersfield, Calif.-based carrot grower/shipper Grimmway Farms.

"Retailers realize sales are growing, and it makes more sense to give more space to things in that category," he said. "Carrots fit really well into that."

So do a lot of other items, said Jonna Parker, senior account manager with the Perishables Group, a Chicago-area research firm that tracks produce sales.

"Obviously, the amount of space in the department shows the retailer's investment in fresh-cut produce, and that translates to sales as well," she said. "A few years ago, fresh-cut wasn't mandatory part of produce, but now it is."

