

# Bartletts: The King Of California Pears

*But experts say retailers should focus on variety to make register ring.*

BY CHUCK GREEN

**Seems the Bartlett is a peach among California pears. By far, the Bartlett is "the king," says Atomic Torosian, managing partner of Crown Jewels Marketing LLC, headquartered in Fresno, CA.**

So what makes the Bartlett so delectable? Similar to bananas, but unlike most other fruits, the Bartlett changes colors when it ripens, explains Chris Zanobini, executive director of the Sacramento-based California Pear Advisory Board (CPAB). "It kind of has that allure," he adds, noting that the Bartlett is also the sweetest pear available and has the gentlest texture.

It's the pear by which all others are measured, echoes Patrick Archibeque, chief operating officer of All State Packers Inc., based in Lodi, CA. Because of its taste, even baby food companies, such as Ger-

ber and Heinz, specify the pear in their formulas, he comments.

A majority of the 215,686 tons of pears produced in California in 2009 were mostly Bartlett, according to the CPAB. This past year, California was responsible for 27 percent of U.S. pear production. However, at the same time, fewer people consumed pears in 2009, according to the USDA's Economic Research Service, which reports a 22 percent drop in pear consumption, especially canned pears. Yet, perhaps not surprisingly, the demand for Bartletts spiked 28 percent.

## BARTLETTS NOT ALONE

Despite their popularity, however, Bartletts aren't the only show in town. For instance, California has experienced "dramatic" growth in the production of varieties such as Golden Bosc, Comice and various red varieties, adds Archibeque.

Maria Brous, spokesperson for Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets Inc., says the Bosc is the next most popular variety behind the Bartlett because of its eating quality and customers' ability to cook with it. That's followed by the Red Pear and Green Anjou, she continues. The Green Anjou is generally available when the Bartletts are done for the season, Brous explains.

Furthermore, despite their higher sugar content, Ted Fujii, head produce buyer at Gelson's-Mayfair Market in Los Angeles, CA, prefers varieties like Taylor Gold, as well as the Bosc and Comice. He also leans more toward some smaller types, such as the Forelle and Seckel, which he calls more special-ty than mainstream pears.

Whatever the pear, by and large, experts believe stores should offer various types to cater to a cornucopia of tastes. While centering its selection on Bartletts, Torosian suggests retailers feature five or six varieties and promote them in large ads, as they do seasonally with other fruits, such as melons, cantaloupes and honeydews.

Chains run ads based on as many varieties as they simultaneously can stock, adds Broc Bengard,



**Pear experts suggest stocking up to five or six varieties of pears at once and promoting them in large ads.**



vice president of Kelseyville, CA-based Bengard Marketing Inc. The more progressive chains like to offer the full line-up, or what sometimes is referred to as a Pear-O-Rama, when they can, he notes.

#### CHOICES ARE SPICE OF LIFE

Consumers today expect choices, echoes Zanobini of the CPAB, and as attitudes and desires change, the industry must adjust accordingly, down to what retailers stock. However, overall, much work remains to be done in this area, he says. While some retail chains have done an "incredible job" and

continue to improve year after year, others tend to spend an inordinate amount of time concentrating on the calendar rather than focusing on what's available, he notes.

Zanobini says that approach might largely be based on a store's general strategy and specific demographics. "Pear consumers are said to be at a little higher end of demographics," he remarks. Further still, while acknowledging stores' ongoing battle with space, Zanobini says that, based on CPAB research on pears, the advisory board emphasizes that the more varieties available, the more sales a retailer will ring up. More education would be helpful, too, he emphasizes.

While Archibeque of All State Packers concurs that some retailers have been somewhat slow to adjust to trends, he acknowledges that part of that is "our fault, too — as an industry." All State Packers takes it seriously and spends "considerable" marketing dollars and effort trying to convince retailers of the best way to impact their category, all of which is data supported, he adds.

No one has to persuade Gelson's of the importance of paying attention to what customers think, which Fujii notes the chain does earnestly.

#### SIZING UP A DISPLAY

One way to encourage shoppers to think about pears is through display size. To help generate interest, retailers would be well advised to utilize an end cap display, as large as possible, near a store's entrance, recommends Bengard.

Generally, Crown Jewel's pears, which consist mostly of Bartletts and Boscs, are packed in 40-lb. cartons, reveals Tbrobian. Meantime, the company's grower has expanded into the specialty pear category,

such as Stark Crimsons, Forelles, Seckels, Comice and Taylor's Gold, and is packing all these varieties this season, he notes. The company will pack them into half cartons, which are approximately 22 pounds.

Additionally, Archibeque encourages retailers to merchandise Reds and Boscs alongside Bartletts, especially in July and August since it's the beginning of the Northern Hemisphere pear season. No pears in the world are fresher and more local than California pears, he notes. The Bartletts should be the focal point.

Ultimately, though, Zanobini says, "What we want and what's being done is always two different things. You want the world; you want the biggest displays possible," because often, produce purchases are set to basic items, based on what items are available to customers and how they're presented.

#### SOME PACKAGE

Once a display catches a customer's eye, economy-minded packaging can further facilitate sales. For example, All State commonly creates value packaging by selling smaller pears in the punnet-type containers, in larger volume. However, interestingly, with the exception of club store shoppers, traditional bulk consumers searching for pears seem to prefer bag-type packaging, such as 3-lb. units, Archibeque says.

Meanwhile, Zanobini notes an effort is underway to develop consumer packaging for pears, perhaps in the form of a six-pack. That's been augmented with "fairly significant" research on how to do so while ensuring the product can be safely transported, he adds. It's now up to buyers to determine whether it's a viable option. After all, the more consumer type of packaging is in play, the better the opportunity to provide a high-

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er quality piece of fruit.

On the other hand, Publix does not display packaged pears, Brous reports. She says the chain always has displayed pears in bulk, based on the belief it will lend the display a "market-like atmosphere."

Ripeness is always a selling point, too, particularly with Bartletts, Crown Jewel's Tobrosian believes. If pears are too hard and green upon shipment, they won't sell, he says.

At the same time, Gelson's Fujii points out it would be difficult to build a display consisting entirely of ripe pears. Unlike apples and citrus, which remain hard and therefore can be stacked higher, pears, if ripened, bruise more easily, he explains.

### PRICE IS RIGHT

Pricing varies based on the retailer, observes All State's Archibeque. He believes a percentage of them work off the "biggest margins and drive sales dollars in volume," which he describes as "unfortunate margin-grabbing." Those stores are selling at a much higher price than would be considered standard retail margin, he adds. However, not much can be done about it, he laments. "It's a struggle for us



Large end-cap displays, located near the front entrance of the store, will encourage consumer interest and purchases.



Peter Sticco was born on December 31, 1952. Sadly he lost his battle with cancer on September 1, 2008. He was only 55 years old. Peter's life was our industry.

Peter was an only child, and his Dad passed away when Peter was in his early 20's. He is survived by his Mom Millie, whom has kept Peter's spirit alive, in all of our hearts today.

Peter always took care of others before himself. His belief in God and family kept his spirit strong during his 3 1/2 years of cancer treatment. He worked in the office tirelessly, and without complaint. During this time fellow employees would assist Peter from the office to the treat-

## PETER STICCO'S

ment center. He loved the business so much that it was hard to get Peter to leave the office for his treatments.

On his family farm, he learned the values of hard work and sacrifice. He also learned that we sometimes have no control over the elements that affect our industry. For example, the weather, and how it can affect both the crops in supply and the consumers' demand for the item. When the crop is short, the demand is high. When the crop is plentiful, the demand is low. Peter understood this basic principle which drives our current global marketplace. Within the last year, we have witnessed record cold temperatures in Florida, and some parts of Mexico, an earthquake in Chile, and record rains in the Northeast. We have seen historic increases in pricing as a result of these natural disasters.

Peter left his family farm, and pursued a career in produce as a produce inspector for Bozzuto's in Connecticut. It was here that Peter learned the characteristics that define the best quality fruit and vegetables. Peter rose quickly at Bozzuto's. He built their produce program from its infancy, as he grew into the position of produce direc-

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— Ted Fujii  
Gelson's-Mayfair Market

to convince retailers to get margins in line. It's their business." While his company makes recommendations, "it's not often we see a lot of response."

Perhaps, but Fujii says his company bases its prices on what it pays for an item and retails it "appropriately," according to cost.

Zanobini regards pricing and ripening as more of a merchandising tool used to provide consumers with a piece of fruit as opposed to a selling factor. "You never want to sell something that's ripe; you want to sell something that's ready to eat."

In the end, marketing is the ultimate challenge for the industry, says Fujii. California is known for California Pears, especially the Bartletts, and has marketed them well, he points out. Still, burgeoning competition, including overseas markets, is helping to raise the stakes, making conditions increasingly difficult in the future, he projects.

Fujii explains that competition not only emanates from the Northwest, but from imported products as well, including inventory out of places such as Chile and Argentina, especially as far as Bartletts are con-



cerned. "While Bartletts were seasonal at one point, they've now evolved into a nearly year-round item, which makes things more difficult for California," he points out. "It's always nicer when you have something only during certain times of the year, like cherries, which are really seasonal. People look forward to seeing them in stores." **pb**

## LEGACY CONTINUES

for at Bozzuto's. Peter spent 13 years cultivating Bozzuto's produce program into one of the most respected wholesale produce enterprises in the Northeast. His commitment to honesty, fairness, and genuinely caring about the growers, shippers, retailers and transportation companies perpetuated Peter into his new venture: Coast to Coast Produce in 1985.

What started out as a 2 person brokerage operation in a closet office in Cheshire, CT, grew into an organization that currently consists of 20 employees in 4 regional offices: Monterey, CA; Bakersfield; Boston; and their headquarters in Cheshire, CT. Peter's last endeavor was completed in 2002, as they became a grower of California table grapes. They now have over 500 acres to farm in Arvin, CA. The company will be celebrating their 25th anniversary this year. And owe it to Peter, from his humble beginnings, to where the company is today. Peter always stayed true to his underlining principles. In quoting John Wooden, "be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are". We are all proud to be a part of Peter's legacy,



and it is Coast To Coast's privilege to sponsor this year's PMA Career Pathways program. CTC is honored to play a role in helping this year's students in pursuing a career in our Produce industry.



### CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS

P. O. Box 250 - 125 Commerce Ct.  
Cheshire, CT 06410

Phone: 203-271-2006

Toll Free: 800-433-1403

Fax: 203-271-2796

www.ctcproduce.com