

FRESH NEWS

ANOTHER SERVICE FROM THE MERCHANTS OF SAN FRANCISCO WHOLESALE PRODUCE MARKET

SAN FRANCISCO

FEBRUARY 10, 2010

WELCOME!



More is better now that the San Francisco Wholesale Market has added another business to the lineup. On Monday February 1st, Golden Banana opened for business at the San Francisco Wholesale Market. Please join us in welcoming Spencer Levy and his colleagues to our slice of San Francisco! Earlier in his produce career Spencer worked at Western Produce in Oakland and was able to work for many years directly with Franklin Chu. By all accounts Mr. Chu had a sterling reputation in all aspects of operating a banana house. Golden Banana has invested significant resources in their facility to support their full line banana operations.

HOLIDAY

The market will observe Monday February 15th for President's Day. Check with your favorite wholesalers as to their schedules, if any.

GUNG HAY FAT CHOW

Chinese New Year is February 14th as we usher in the Year of the Tiger (year 4707 in Chinese years if you are wondering!) Large family gatherings with traditional food, lots of it, are prepared not only on that day but also on New Year's Eve, February 13th. There are many reasons to promote the produce festivities. One is to better serve our Asian customers who will be looking for more of usually purchased produce. Another reason is to use this celebration to encourage those who generally do not participate, to join in the food fun. Remember, it's not just the Irish who eat corned beef and cabbage on St. Patrick's Day? And third, there may be an opportunity to cross merchandise with other non produce items such as sauces, beverages and the like. One thing to keep in mind is that it is a celebration for a prosperous new year, for longevity and completeness. The latter two characteristics are mirrored in the food that is featured. For example, oranges, mandarins and pommelo (some BIG ones are around!!) complete with leaf and stem, long leaved Nappa cabbage (Michihihi) as opposed to the common barrel shaped variety. Green onions with the tips, or better yet, the roots attached. Same goes for complete leeks. Even lettuce with the roots! Some of the traditional fare includes; gai lon or Chinese broccoli. This is a flowering loose leaved type that is quite mild and succulent.

Gai lon is a great addition to the wet rack in any case. Chinese celery, which is similar to loose leaved or cutting celery, is most often used as a flavoring, as opposed to a prominent vegetable. Other traditional dishes feature snow peas, bok choy, cilantro (also known as Chinese parsley) baby leeks with tips attached, fresh water chestnuts, ginger and lotus root. This is an excellent way to expose many people to an ancient celebration. With a bit of creativity it may even make the cash register ring a few times!

MORE TO CELEBRATE

It is not only a double whammy, but a triple whammy! So Chinese New Year and Valentine's Day are on the same day, February 14th. But I can't tell a lie, the next day is President's Day, February 15th. This is an amazing opportunity to attract your customer's attention to some produce items they infrequently purchase. The potential tie-in sales with related grocery items are equally enticing. Valentine's Day provides lovely cross promotional possibilities. RED strawberries, special kits to make chocolate covered berries, champagne, cut flowers, greeting cards, Valentine's candy even bubble bath! Think more red!

VEGETABLES BROCCOLI



Lots of it coming from everywhere. A popular, nutritious cooking vegetable is always a great special item. Check you quality as some coastal broccoli has shown some weather stress.

ASPARAGUS

More supply and better quality is coming out of Mexico. The arrival of 28 pound containers from Mexico and a trickling from El Centro, California should tell you we are fast approaching domestic asparagus season.

LETTUCE

Iceberg has been at great prices with nice quality. Red, green and romaine are even in good supply. Windy and wet coastal weather may have strained the quality on some lettuce, so check you boxes.

CELERY

Roller coaster ride prices, but enough to go around. Weights have been heavy and supply can be found in all sizes.

AVOCADOS

California Hass season is joining the strawberry in its quest to be a year round Golden State fruit. The flavor is OK for this early in the season. Don't expect many big sizes yet. There are still plenty of late season, high oil and flavor Chilean avos around and at very competitive prices. Even with the Super Bowl demand there was more than enough.

MUSHROOMS

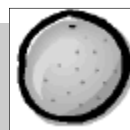
Nothing like a little rain to bring out the mushrooms! Hedgehogs mushrooms have been in good supply out of the northwest. Regular and even black chanterelles are also in good supply for the gourmet mushroom fancier.

TOMATOES



Strict supply and demand. More Mexican shipments out of Nogales and Baja brought some price sanity to the marketplace. Romas are reasonably priced as are grape tomatoes. (Cherry toms are still up there.) What a difference a few weeks can make. But given cool weather look around for, or plan ahead for good color.

ORGANICALLY GROWN





Organic navels oranges are spot on, both in quality and price. Organic Texas red grapefruits have been excellent so far. Some are a bit on the rough side, skin appearance wise, but the flavor is good.

Organic minneolas are very good-juicy and with not much more than a hint of tartness. Organic roma tomatoes, like their conventional counter parts are reasonable-nice color and size also. Some beautiful leeks are waiting for the organic russet 100 count potatoes to make some music (and soup) together. Del Cabo tomatoes from the tippy tip of Baja California are currently available with the bulk of the season still to come.

SPECIALTY

Some local Belgium endive, hearty and from new root stock is available. Very nice stuff. And speaking of Valentine's Day RED, the red colored endive is plentiful!

Written by Mark Ferro

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FRUITS

GRAPEFRUIT

Take your pick, Florida or Texas, 27's or juice 48's. Mild flavor, big color. There are even some marsh whites from Florida for the nostalgia buffs.

SPECIAL CITRUS

Pommelos have moved from the dead green stage to a big yellow. And just in time for Chinese New Year, six count and sharp are pommelos with the stem and leaves. The stunning wine red color of the Blood Orange flesh is in full bloom. Fantastic flavor. The cara caras are also in very fine form. If you have not gotten the hint, there is plenty of very flavorful citrus to be had. And the meyer lemons have been so mild that you can literally eat the skin. Lots of oil, flavor and juice but without the harsh bite.

JUICE UP!

Check out the smaller, but flavorful Blood Oranges. As a juice unto themselves, or as an addition to regular orange juice, they make quite a visual and taste sensation.

MANDARINS

Satsumas are done, but there is always something to fill the gap. Whether it is the Tahoe variety or the more plentiful California murcot, with stem and leaf, no one will be disappointed. But there is plenty more around to satisfy citrus wants. The Honey tangerine from Florida is also in fine form.

BERRIES

After a very rough January we are seeing just a sliver of hope come February for berries. Strawberries are in better supply, but not flush, unfortunately for Valentine's Day. And prices are no real bargain yet either. Raspberries are fairly short supply and stiff price. Mexican blackberries and Chilean blueberries are in better supply with lower tariffs.

TROPICALS

Mangos are coming out of Peru with the Kent variety with decent flavor. (Color on the Kent is on the green side.) The Kent, being a late season fruit is signaling the upcoming Mexican season. Early word and bad word unfortunately is that last year's big and early manila mango appearance will not be repeated this year. 2010 will be shorter and lighter for early fruit.

CHILEAN FRUIT

The Chilean grapes have fallen drastically from just a couple of weeks ago. The peaches and nectarines have been fine. The fruit of choice every year has been the Larry Anne plum. Dark speckled skin and great flavor. Sorry, but not quite in yet. Feast on the black amber and laroda in the meantime.

APPLES

With the controlled atmosphere rooms now open, expect to keep a better eye on the fruit. Once it breaks its comfortable dormancy, the fruit remembers that it's about four months old.

PEARS

Look for Southern hemisphere Bartlett supplies from Chile and Argentina to augment our substantial, but dwindling domestic stock. Mix up some color with the addition of some nice red d'anjou pears.

MELONS

They are a bit hit and miss, with a combination of both Mexican, but mostly offshore (meaning Central American) fruit. The cantaloupe has actually been pretty good. Honeydews will only get better as we move through the winter.



ABOUT THE WRITER

Mark Ferro is an active produce professional who not only writes a weekly newspaper column, but also co-hosts an hour-long radio show about fresh fruits and vegetables. As part of the "Produce Pair" he can be heard Saturdays at noon (PST) on the Talk America Radio Network on over 60 stations coast to coast., including Yada Yada Radio 1550AM here in the Bay Area or listen on the Internet at www.producepair.com.

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