

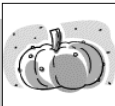
# FRESH NEWS

ANOTHER SERVICE FROM THE MERCHANTS OF SAN FRANCISCO WHOLESALE PRODUCE MARKET

SAN FRANCISCO

OCTOBER 6, 2008

## FALL FUN



Take in the fall festivities at the 38th Annual Pumpkin Festival coming up on October 18th and 19th in Half Moon Bay. Lots of food, music and yes pumpkins to take in over the weekend. For more information, visit [www.miramarevents.com](http://www.miramarevents.com).

## FRUIT

### GRAPES

On the red and green seedless side of the grape aisle, prices are stable and qualities are fine. Just check your lots of green seedless as they do tend to amber up in color and experience more shatter late in the season. A reminder to your customers along the line of "amber colored grapes are actually sweeter" may be in order. Look too for the purple almost black Autumn Royal variety of seedless grape. Although this has actually been around for about ten years, it is really quite new on the grape scene. A long, impressive grape with excellent flavor. And before you dismiss a black grape (remember the unknown variety black grape) this Autumn Royal really is worth a try. Time to add to the standard seedless varieties with some old-fashioned grapes with seeds. If you only carry one grape with seeds, make it the red globe. It is a very large sized grape with a good bite. Others are in the marketplace with seeds, but lots of flavor to go with them.

P.S.-Extra diligence is required to maintain a safe floor area around an abundant grape display. Help avoid slip-and-falls by watching for loose grapes on the floor, using rugs around the display or using a number of bagging techniques.

### APPLE OUTLOOK

The Washington apple scene in 2008 will look much the same as last year, maybe up 3-4% or so in volume from '07. (But down from 2006 by about the same amount.) Washington got some poor spring weather which will affect early pickings, not necessarily late maturing fruit. Even though other regions produce apples, New York and Michigan among others, Washington produces almost 60% of the nation's totals. Closer to home Oregon's production is up some and California continues to produce fewer every year. Fall, being the natural harvest season for fresh apples is the best time to expand the apple offerings in terms of varieties and pack options. So go lo-n-g.....

## BERRIES

Shorter days and cooler nights suggest a somewhat unstable berry picture. Strawberry price pickins' are on the high side. Production is all the way from Watsonville on the downside to Oxnard which is just gearing up. Blacks and blues are skimpier in supply. Argentina will be next in line with blueberries. Local raspberries are still making an adequate showing with again, Oxnard playing an increasing role in supply.

## MANGO

Still the California Keitt variety around, although their numbers will soon dwindle. But what a fruit. Yes, pricier than "low price point" mangoes, but so creamy and flavorful. Another thing to remember about the keitt, besides it doesn't much move off of the green color is that it only needs to be OK soft to be ripe. After their exit, expect South American fruit until Mexico starts again in March.

## ASIAN PEARS



Sometimes, and misleadingly so, called "apple pears". Although their crunch and juiciness is more like that of an apple, they really are pears. The variety names read like an eye chart, but its safe to assume that the brown, russeted skinned varieties have a spicier, bolder flavor than their greenish/yellow skinned brethren. Handle with extreme care as they crack and bruise easily, but they will reward you with a very long shelf life is kept cold. For display, slice across like a tomato to reveal an eye catching "star" design made by the black seeds. Sample freely. We've had the first major look at this juicy native of the Orient.

## ORGANIC

Fall is in full swing when the mixed bins of winter squash roll in. Heavy on the butternut, acorn and kabocha they also include less common varieties like the sweet dumpling, delicata and red kuri. To complement the winter squash a number of growers do a good job with cooking pumpkins such as the Sugar Pie. "Tis the season." As with the conventional side, there is a wide field of organic apples to choose from. The organic Jonagold, part Jonathan and part Gold Delicious has been very good. Although stiffer in price compared to their conventional counterparts, organic apples are the only choice for many shoppers. Get your last licks in for heirloom tomatoes as they are fading in numbers.

## MELONS

It's cantaloupes and honeydews cleaning up from the Westside, then onto the desert/Mexico and then off shore-South America). Currently cantaloupes are up from recent lows, but honeydews are still more than reasonable. And even though no one expects major surprises, regional growing transition time can be tricky.

## VEGETABLES

With the changing seasons, brings changes in growing areas for some of our most common commodities. The Salinas Valley, "The Salad Bowl of America" has kept us well supplied for many months. That is soon to change as supplies of lettuce primarily, will move inland over the mountains and south to Huron and into the desert, the Imperial Valley.

## TOMATOES

Still experiencing reasonable prices for place pacs overall. Both romas and cherries continue to be reasonable in price. Fall is still bringing California tomatoes of all stripes, but with more fall weather, this will tail off. Baja is also producing so there should be enough to go around. The only wild card is that Florida, the major east coast supplier has less volume which may put price pressure on own supply. For those looking at small, local tomato offerings now is close to the closing bell.

## RAIN?

Our recent one day rain is hopefully a sign of the weather future. But that rain, as always, dooms our local offering of summer produce including tomatoes, squash, beans, bell peppers and eggplant.

## EGGPLANT





Even though daytime temps are high, evenings are cooler. Thus the Fresno supply will shrink in size while the desert and then Mexico will size up. In the meantime there is still plenty for fans of grilled eggplant. (Don't winterize those grills just yet!)

## BROCCOLI

So reasonable for so long it is surprising to see higher prices. Weather induced planting gaps are responsible for the tight broccoli supply.

Written by Mark Ferro

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### CAULIFLOWER

Roller coaster ride of prices. Currently on the down side. Quality has been better than fine.

### CORN

Sure, demand falls off every year just after Labor Day, but folks still like their fresh corn. Even so, this summer favorite is seeing the end of our local Brentwood offerings. Some is coming from the Mendota and Dixon (Sacto) areas. How far away can Florida and Mexico be?

### SQUASH Part 1

As to soft shelled summer squashes, all is OK except price tags are experiencing their fall rise. The Santa Rosa and Watsonville connections among others have supply until the weather goes bad.

### SQUASH Part 2

Of the winter variety, even though the supply has quietly increased, it is now ready to make a rumble.

### BELL PEPPERS

A heavy position is well warranted for all bells currently. The supply out of Hollister/Gilroy/San Jose is still strong and at bargain prices. For now, go long. But let the calendar be your buying guide.

### CHILES

Popular in your spot? All shapes, sizes, colors and mouth burning levels

### SPINACH

Overall quality is quite good and said box will not set you back much.

### AVOCADOS



The new Chilean crop has arrived, and with satisfying flavor. The good news is that these trees are one year more mature and should yield a better tasting crop than last

year, which of itself was a better crop than '06. For those looking to stretch out your post-season baseball and for-real season football guacamole, check out second tier varieties. Decent flavor with a lower price tag.

### ONIONS

Less available than you would expect for fall. Northwest red and yellow onions are around but white onions from anywhere are tough to come by. Although pricey, the Maui onions continue to be the sweet one of choice. This will change when the southern hemisphere opens up with their supply of sweet, "spring" onions.

### SPECIALTY

Look for 'em! If mini-pumpkins and Indian corn is your thing, then hay bales, corn stalks and Big Max should also attract your attention. Pomegranates are around, but not in any great numbers. With the evenings getting cooler, warm the oven up for some roasted elephant garlic. Slice off the top, drizzle in some olive oil, wrap the whole thing in foil and bake at 350 degrees until soft. Very tasty stuff. A forever fall favorite, persimmons are on the edge entering the market. Just don't expect much color until the evenings get chillier than they are now.

### 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](http://www.producepair.com).

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