

Produce Report



Organically Grown
Company

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Promoting Health through Organic Agriculture as a Leading Sustainable Organization

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What to look for that is NEW and EXCITING April is upon us, and as always there's just a snap of excitement in the air with trees and plants blooming all over the Pacific Northwest. After what was by many accounts a more challenging winter, although tell that to anyone from the upper Midwest or New England and they may chuckle some, for food lovers there's a lot that we can begin to bask in. Enthusiasm in the produce department is about change. While year-round supplies have tempered some of this, when the season shifts to local or regional production, the mood shift is notable.

Among the many, many offerings that will begin to come our way here on the West Coast over the next several weeks, we'll see peaches, cherries, melons, grapes, berries and local veg. kick in. Rhubarb, Purple Sprouting broccoli and a handful of unique raab options are in fact already here. Asparagus is slowly moving its way north, with California volume steady and the first NW harvest slated for mid-month. How about an ode to sugar snap peas? Is there anything like eating these fresh off of the vine? A spring produce department should wholly encompass this feeling of excitement!

Merchandising plans should include items such as fresh daffodils, tulips and seeds wherever possible. Large ice tables with asparagus, rhubarb, spring onions, garlic greens, Purple Sprouting broccoli and whatever else the team is passionate about, will absolutely set the tone and strike the right note of abundance and excitement. For spring, much like produce, is every bit as much about the joy of anticipation as it is the experience itself. A merchandising plan that acknowledges both will capture the hearts and minds of the eater.

Apples Import fruit is just around the corner, but there is still a strong amount of NW volume coming out of controlled atmosphere storage, with multiple varieties going later into the season. Among these, Fuji remain the most solid option, per usual, while Pink Lady supply is expected to last into May. Cameo apples are solid and promotable as well. One surprise is that domestic Gala supplies are expected to run into summer this year; with imported new crop fruit on the way shortly out of Chile, this sets up a decision point. Expect just one more shot of Ambrosia for this weekend, with Granny Smith also tightening up some, along with regional favorite, Gold Blush, from our friends at Columbia Gorge Organic.

Berries The time for the cliché strawberry and rhubarb displays have arrived. With multiple regions now on ranging from Mexico up to California's Central Coast (i.e. Watsonville), a period of abundance is upon us. All of this is happening while our first shot of local NW rhubarb is a rocking. On the blueberry front, despite word that volume is tight, we continue to see both 6 and 18 oz packs out of California, and may

end up seeing strong supply again as we move thru April. NW fruit is expected to start up in early June. Golden berries, coming to us from Columbia, are expected to be out for a few more weeks; raspberries remain tight out of Mexico with the market on the high side.

Citrus While some of the higher volume category staples, such as Navel, are largely winding down, there is still a whole lot of good eating in citrus. It starts with late season mandarins. Among these, Murcott, Tango and Pixie are all fairly abundant for that targeted spring promotion, and the eating quality remains exceptional. The Pixie in particular, with its thick skin and delectably sweet flavor, is a must have. The allusion to Navel oranges above refers to the fact that they are mostly winding down, but there are a few exceptions out there, including the last of the heirlooms from Deer Creek Heights (aka Buck Brand), as well as some Cara Cara that are still out there. As an added, but perhaps less than abundant bonus, we may see a few boxes of Sanguinelli Blood oranges early next week. In grapefruit, both Honeygold and Rio Star continue to show good supply out of Texas, and that should last at least a few more weeks.

Misc. Fruit Import plums are largely winding down; offshore pear supplies remain steady, with multiple varieties on, primarily out of Argentina. A quick shot of Peruvian Red Globe grapes popped up last week, but given some quality challenges will wind down rather quickly. Mexican supply is still a month away, with California not too far behind. Look for cantaloupe to start up in about two weeks out of Mexico, joining mini watermelon, and even some bins, all in preparation for the cloud cover giving way to sunshine. This is the number one key to melon sales, as we all know the sun has a special quality that changes our behavior and mood in multiple ways, among them....many of us suddenly want to eat melon.

Stone fruit Peaches. Yes, peaches! The time has come for the first exciting trickle of our next round of departmental excitement. Stone fruit is where it will be at from May into September, and our first shot is expected early next week. In 2017, this starts with Mexico first up, unlike last season when the crop was decimated at the blossom stage. Expect to also see some California fruit out there, however, the domestic market is likely to be double the cost with growers seeking an early harvest premium. We're also not too far away from seeing cherries, with the first appearance still slated for early May.

Tropical Fruit Papaya varietal diversity is reaching new heights, at least on the organic side. Formosa, coming to us from Mexico, and Strawberry, from the Hawaiian Islands, are both steady; they are now joined by a smaller volume of a variety called Sunrise Solo, which will arrive from Mexico over the weekend. Speaking of Hawaii, how about ginger? While pricing is set at a premium over ginger from South America, a worthwhile endeavor it may be, with a higher level of pungency born of the volcanic soils. For those seeking a great spring tropical promotion, look no further than the world of mangos. Ataulfo in particular, perhaps because they are the color of sunshine, tend to be a strong opportunity in April and are currently abundant out of Mexico. Tommy Atkins is also on in good supply. Again, spring is a fantastic time to

promote mangos, as citrus starts to wind down and stone fruit has not taken hold. In other news, look for pineapple to flow from both Mexico and Costa Rica; cherimoya, coming to us from California, is at its usual trickle.

Avocados The overall outlook continues to look tight and expensive out of both Mexico and California. Expect much the same story all season, until the next round of Mexican harvest starts up over the summer. The primary reason for all of this is two-fold; Mexican supply is falling short of projections, and California is experiencing a down year.

Beans/Peas Volume isn't necessarily flowing at its peak just yet, but sugar snap peas are on in California. This is one of those harbingers of springtime, which will make its way up the West Coast over the next several weeks, creating a nice opportunity to highlight nature's strongest contender in the impulsive eating/ potato chip category. In addition, look for snow peas to continue out of Mexico. Green beans are starting out of the California desert early next week, with Mexico still on in the meantime, but largely declining.

Broccoli/Cauliflower It's looking as if Purple Sprouting broccoli is about to peak, and it couldn't come at a better time. The broccoli market in California is sky high, and there is significant pent-up demand for something, anything grown in the soils of the Pacific Northwest. Some other options locally include a dazzling array of unique raab options, including green kale, Italian kale, and collard raab to name a few. Again, the market is still way up on broccoli and cauliflower out of California, as growers muddle thru the transition north. Expect some orange and purple cauliflower to appear next week, but with no market relief in sight until northern growing regions start cranking.

Bunched Greens/row crops Much like broccoli and cauliflower, there's a host of items in tight supply due mostly to the annual spring transition of growing regions. A few of these items include baby bok choy, savoy and Napa cabbage, cilantro, parsley, escarole, bunched spinach and radishes. All will likely be limited for the next week or two. Bunched carrots should be in better shape for the weekend, with more Nantes expected next week and a few purple bunched around as well. Red, green and rainbow chard, on the other hand, are plentiful, while green and Italian kale are also in better supply. Purple remains limited. All in all, this is pretty typical for April, with a transition that will eventually lead us all the way up to our own regional Pacific NW growing season, now under way.

Cucumbers The market is up in cuke land, as Mexican supply slows down and nothing is going domestically just yet. That said, there are some specialty cucumbers hitting the market, including heart and star-shaped options, which certainly save time in creative knife work.

Leaf/Salad Supply continues to improve in salad land, with the number of available SKUs seemingly growing each and every week. In the land of leaf, most of the market remains high, as the aforementioned transition treads on. Availability has been there

on the major varieties, however, with some Red Romaine even popping back up to splash some color.

Potatoes/Onions While there's plenty of fine Pacific Northwest spuds still in storage sheds around the region, their tendency to start sprouting in spring will of course start having an impact (ah nature..). Thus, new crop California potatoes are expected to start up next week, with reds and golds out first. Russets, per usual, will be a bit behind, with at least another month of NW supply and quality still quite solid. On the specialty front, another shot of German Butterball from Lazy J Tree Farm is here, along with some Klamath Pearl from our friends at Wong. Overall, onions are steady here in the NW, with no imminent demise in the forecast.

Tomatoes The market is starting to inch up ever so slightly on some Mexican tomatoes, but there are still targeted promotions available. Heirlooms continue to be in the mix, along with a strong supply of Tasti-Lee, which has become a favorite variety for its flavor profile. Cherry tomatoes out of Mexico are still in play, with targeted promo opportunities for those that seek that sort of value offering.

Trivia Question of the week: The Chinese were cultivating rhubarb as early as 2,700 BC. It was imported eventually along the Silk Road and brought into ancient Greece. It was traditionally thought of and used as a medicinal root. The widespread use of rhubarb stalks as food didn't really occur until the 17th century in Europe when this culinary item became available to common people. What became available and cheap in the 17th century?

Variety Veg Artichokes remain limited out of California, but should continue to trickle in. Rhubarb is on from our friends at Montecucco here in the Pacific Northwest, and the window of showing it some love in the produce department is now. Asparagus volumes look strong with springtime promotions available and the Pacific NW projected to start up in mid-April.