

Companies expand facilities for fresh-cut programs

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NEW YORK — Demand for fresh-cut product in the tri-state area shows little indication of declining.

Distributors outside of the Hunts Point Terminal Market's gates and in the suburbs have upgraded their fresh-cut programs.

Fresh-cut sales have been so good for J. Kings Foodservice Professionals Inc., Holtsville, that the Long Island-based foodservice distributor has relocated and expanded its produce cutting operations.

J. Kings for nearly a decade cut produce in a facility at its main distribution operation.

The distributor has relocated its Kitchen Cuts processing division a few miles from its current operation.

The building — which also includes a U.S. Department of Agriculture-certified meatpacking facility to provide J. Kings' customers custom meat cuts to help monitor portion costs — is four times larger than the older operation.

It provides J. Kings better efficiencies to do more fresh-cut produce cutting and to better produce product, said Joel Panagakos, executive vice president.

Expanding sales

"Our fresh-cut business is continually growing," he said. "We are coming up with new and creative ideas, including new blends of vegetables specific to different types of restaurants."

Panagakos said J. Kings' in-house chefs create the company's vegetable blends.

The chefs, he said, frequently confer with J. Kings' restaurateurs on what would sell well. When J. Kings develops a vegetable fresh-cut blend, it's something the distributor has invested a lot of research into instead of just arbitrarily combining four different vegetables, Panagakos said.

"It usually works very well when you get the chefs involved," he said.

J. Kings offers more than 230 fresh-cut produce stock-keeping units.

A new fresh-cut facility came along to the expanded distribution warehouse Bronx-based Baldor Specialty Foods Inc. moved into in May.

New Baldor operation

Baldor enlarged its fresh-cut operation and included many upgrades in the new operation south of the market, said Mike Muzyk, president.

Baldor's older fresh-cut operation had received food safety certification. Because of changing industry critical control points, the new plant needed recertification.

During early December, the company's fresh-cut operation achieved Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point certification.

"We have always been a leader in terms of food safety, recalls and traceability, especially when there's a problem in fresh-cuts with carrots that have been shredded in a coleslaw mix," Muzyk said. "How do you trace that? We have really worked out a lot of those issues. You have to be able to trace it to where it has gone."

Baldor performs mock recalls to trace back their product to the warehouse, Muzyk said.

Fresh-cut safety

Baldor's lettuce, for example, is cleaned, which involves triple washing. The lettuce undergoes slicing, dicing and chopping. The process — in which the product is not touched by human hands — includes many steps, such as drying, before the lettuce bagged.

The extra steps involved in the long fresh-cutting process, Muzyk said, reduce cross-contamination and have many benefits, such as extended shelf life, which provides



Photos courtesy J. Kings Foodservice Professionals Inc.

J. Kings Foodservice Professionals Inc., Holtsville, N.Y., has moved its Kitchen Cuts processing division to a larger facility. Joel Panagakos, executive vice president, says the new facility allows the company to do more fresh-cut and produce a better product.

for a fresher product.

The pallets and the cardboard used to pack the lettuce are stored in a separate room away from the

fresh cutting process.

Baldor, which packs and distributes a more than 100 fresh-cut SKUs, provides many proprietary

custom cuts for its customers.

"Demand for fresh-cut is strong," Muzyk said. "We are seeing strong demand from chefs."