

# Interest in good health should help boost sales

By Doug Ohlemeier  
Eastern Editor

NEW YORK — Despite depressing economic news, those selling produce to New York-area residents are optimistic consumption will increase.

The good news about the health benefits provided by fresh produce should help the category remain viable, they say.

While many areas of the economy have taken a big sales hit, produce shouldn't suffer as much, said Roni Okun, owner of Morris Okun Inc. Indeed, fresh produce may see some sales gains over certain processed foods.

"Certain trade for produce will increase, as people can no longer just grab frozen items off the shelf and pay for all the packaging," she said.

"Paying for that fancy packaging costs money. With a 5-pound bag of potatoes, you have 5 pounds of potatoes versus all of that frozen packaging. I think people will revert to fresh. The smart shopper watching her food budget will buy fresh."

## Health foods boost

Jeff Young, a buyer for A&J Produce Corp., said interest in foods containing antioxidants and superfoods should help drive future sales.

"People are looking for nutritional value and things that can help balance their lives," Young said.

"The more press you have on these superfoods and antioxidant foods, they will think more about what they are actually ingesting. That can lead to selling more fresh fruits and vegetables."

Joel Panagakos, executive vice president of J. Kings Foodservice Professionals Inc., Holtsville, said sales of specialty fruits have seen increases. He said fruits such as blood oranges, Asian pears and mandarin oranges have become particularly popular.

"If you take a look at local supermarkets, you'd be hard-pressed five years ago to see a box of pomegranates in the produce aisle," he said. "Now they have a display of 10 cases because it is healthy to eat those seeds. There is a lot of fruit out there that has become very much in demand."

## Imports and exports

Nick Pacia, co-owner and vice president of A.J. Trucco Inc., which imports and exports kiwifruit and distributes other wholesale produce, said he expects difficult times for importers and exporters.

"Price will come down," he said. "Overseas demand for U.S. goods will decrease. Overseas con-

sumption of the items that we handle is not flat but is much less. That creates more product available and, consequently, lower prices."

Krisp-Pak Sales Corp. entered the Chilean deal last year. John Garcia, president, said he hopes to do well with that deal again this winter.

"That comes on during a good time of the year when you are normally at a slow point with regular vegetables, in January, February and March," he said. "The offshore deal gives us an added boost to the business."

Krisp-Pak imports Chilean cherries and grapes as well as Guatemalan snow peas, snap beans, French beans, some asparagus and some Central American melons.

## Strong sales

Robert T. Cochran & Co. Inc. experienced a strong autumn in produce sales, said Richard Cochran, president.

Cochran said buyers were hungry for apples because there were shortages of South American product. When Northeastern apples came on the market, buyers were eager to buy them and the item consequently saw good movement, he said.

"It's uncanny how the customers know whatever's short, and that's what they want," Cochran said.



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Nick Pacia, co-owner and vice president of A.J. Trucco Inc., examines some Italian kiwifruit. Trucco is an importer and exporter of kiwifruit. Pacia says he expects a tough first quarter of 2009 and thinks export prices likely will decline.