

Specialty items popular among New York chefs

Microgreens and exotic fruits top the list of in-demand products.

By Doug Ohlemeier
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NEW YORK — With a population and marketplace as diverse as New York's, specialty produce remains a big seller.

Microgreens, herbs and items such as blood oranges sell well for purveyors such as Coosemans New York Inc.

"There's big demand in New York as you don't have too many specialty houses in this market," said Maria Tejada, saleswoman.

"All of these new chefs these days are always looking for something different to use, just to be different out there. People come to us for specialties that they don't get anywhere else. The key is to bring in new items."

Although some other Coosemans locations have diversified into selling more mainstream items as certain specialty items become shipped in greater volume, specialty produce still accounts for up to 90% of Coosemans' New York

sales, Tejada said.

Microgreens popular

A line of microgreens that Coosemans Worldwide Inc. launched last summer through a partnership with Long Island greenhouse grower Koppert Cress USA LLC, Lake Success, N.Y., at its Cutchogue, N.Y., greenhouse operation, has seen success, Tejada said.

The amaranth, arugula, Italian basil, opal basil, cilantro and rainbow mix microgreens are used as garnishes in fish dishes, Tejada said.

Koppert Cress packs exclusively for Coosemans under Coosemans' Diam label.

Microgreens remain the new trend now, Tejada said. The items are in high demand and are doing well in restaurants.

Exotic monster fruit, star fruit and heirloom tomatoes also sell well, she said.

Tejada said the majority of his

customer base — largely made up of Asians and Hispanics — shops the market during the day as opposed to the large foodservice purveyors that bring their trucks to Coosemans' docks during nighttime hours.

Constantly changing category

Many chefs incorporate a lot of specialty produce into their menus, said Joel Panagakos, executive vice president of J. Kings Foodservice Professionals Inc., Holtsville.

The specialties category, he said, is constantly evolving. As a result, items once considered specialty produce, such as endive or radicchio, have since become mainstream, Panagakos said.

While specialties remain strong sellers for J. Kings, Panagakos said the economy has affected their movement.

The foodservice distributor, however, continues to see a strong demand for specialties, Panagakos said.



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Maria Tejada, saleswoman for Coosemans New York Inc., shows off some packs of microgreens. Tejada says specialties such as microgreens and exotic fruits are in high demand among New York chefs.