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VILLAGE FARMS

New value-added items are the result of in-depth research

By CHRISTINA DIMARTINO

Helen L. Aquino, marketing manager for Village Farms LP in Eatontown, NJ, told *The Produce News* that the company would be exhibiting at the New York Produce Show & Conference, Nov. 9-11 at the Hilton Hotel in New York City, at booth No. 1105.

"We are excited about this opportunity to connect with our existing customers in the Northeast as well as having an opportunity to meet new ones," said Ms. Aquino. "The Northeast is one of the strongest growing regions of the country for hothouse tomatoes. Given this, the potential is there for partnering with new accounts."

Ms. Aquino noted that according to the most recent consumer consumption data from The Perishables Group, an independent consulting firm focused on innovation and creating value for clients in the fresh food industry, grocery-store sales for hothouse tomatoes in dollars and volume were up in the eastern region of the United States by roughly 15 percent over the last 52-week period ending June 26, 2010.

"This is good news for Village Farms as well as those we supply," Ms. Aquino stated.

Village Farms will be exhibiting a number of new items from its full range of value-added packaging line of products at the New York Produce Show.

"We first launched these new products at the PMA Fresh Summit in Orlando, and we received favorable response from our customers," she said. "New tomato items in our line are tomatoes on the vine in two-pound clamshells, Roma tomatoes in two-pound clamshells and Beefsteak tomatoes in three-pound clamshells. Village Farms is also offering sweet bell peppers in two-pound and six-count resealable bags. The peppers come in red or yellow and orange combined, or in a mixed bag with all three colors."

Village Farms is also offering long English cucumbers in two-count and three-count pack sizes. Other new value-added items at Village Farms are mini cucumbers in eight-count trays and two-pound resealable tamper-proof bags.

"As North America's largest fully integrated hydroponic greenhouse grower of tomatoes, sweet bell peppers and cucumber varieties, we are able to offer great



Village Farms' exhibition booth banner and its tomatoes on the vine. (Photos courtesy of Village Farms)

tasting highest quality produce to our customers 365 days a year," said Ms. Aquino. "We grow, market and distribute our products picked fresh from the vine and delivered to our customers in a matter of days. This brings tomatoes with garden fresh flavor to consumers all year long."

She continued, "Our quality is unsurpassed as well as our food-safety standards. We have some of the highest food-safety scores in the industry today achieved through our Primus third-party audits."

Village Farms also takes pride in its environmentally friendly growing manner that Ms. Aquino said is truly in tune with nature.

"Our greenhouses get their light only from the sun, and our water is recycled through the irrigation system up to five times," she said. "We do not grow in soil, so there is no erosion, and we grow intensively, producing more vegetables on less land. In fact, we have the highest yield in the industry today. Pound for pound, we grow the same amount of tomatoes on 50 acres that field-grown tomatoes would require 1,500 acres to produce, and we do this using 86 percent less water."

Village Farms also uses beneficial insects as its primary control in its Integrated Pest Management program.

Village Farms has found retail grocery consumer scanner data to be a strong asset in building partnerships with its retail customers using category management. During the past several years, the company worked with The Perishables Group to develop customized reports based on quarterly retail scanner data aggregated by A.C. Nielsen for key commodities across

60 percent of the actual grocery channel base in the United States.

Further analyzed by Village Farms for market trends, the data are utilized as a key planning tool both internally and with its customers.

Doug Kling, senior vice president and chief marketing officer for Village Farms said, "Village Farms fosters retail partnerships that add mutual value and build growth driven by actual results derived from this hard trend data."

Core retail partners

Building on category management dynamics with key accounts throughout 2010, Village Farms has seen significant growth with core retail partners.

"Our partners find value in comparing overall market data with their own as competitive benchmarks on such measures as sales and volume," said Ms. Aquino.

Village Farms' category management has helped drive decision-making for its retail partners in areas such as best pack size for growth, targeting price points and building retail advantages that reduce shrink and provide a fresher product to customers.

"Village Farms looks forward to strengthening partnerships through its category management efforts into 2011 and to growing its ability to customize this process with retailers for the future," said Ms. Aquino.

"It is our goal to build strong partnerships with our customer base that will continue to evolve in a challenging global economy through information sharing that can mitigate risk by targeting future trends," added Mr. Kling.