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Village aggressively researching new hydroponic varieties

By CHRISTINA DiMARTINO

"Village Farms services Florida out of our hydroponic facilities in Texas," Doug Kling, senior vice president and chief marketing officer for the Eatontown, NJ-based company, told *The Produce News* Oct. 29. "We start producing in Texas in mid-August, and we will service our customers from there with cucumbers, mini cucumbers, beefsteak tomatoes, Campari tomatoes, Roma tomatoes on the vine and grape tomatoes right through next July."

Village Farms' Texas locations in Marfa and South Fort Davis offer excellent climate conditions with optimal light and perfect temperatures. Its Texas facilities also are where the company's research and development work is conducted. Mr. Kling said that trials on several new exclusive pepper and tomato varieties are currently underway that show promise for products with enhanced flavor, shelf life and overall value.

The company has green-

house operations and/or growing partners in Canada, the northeastern United States and Mexico. Besides Eatontown, NJ, the company maintains corporate offices in Heathrow, FL, and British Columbia.

At the Produce Marketing Association's Fresh Summit last month in Orlando, FL, Village Farms launched several new products that feature value-added packaging. The company received favorable response from its customers to the new items. New tomato items 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



Doug Kling

items at Village Farms are mini cucumbers in eight-count trays and two-pound resealable, tamper-proof bags.

"We've been launching some fairly intensive programs in category management," said Mr. Kling. "We're working with retail partners to maximize sales to consumers based on consumption trends at retail."

The company has found that retail grocery consumer scanner

data are strong assets in building partnerships with its retail customers using category management.

During the past several years, it 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.

"Village Farms fosters retail partnerships that add mutual value and build growth driven by actual results derived from this hard trend data," said Mr. Kling. "We look forward to strengthening partnerships through our category management efforts into 2011 and to growing our ability to customize this process with retailers for the future. 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."

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

Mr. Kling said that its partners find value in comparing overall market data with their own as competitive benchmarks on such measures as sales and volume.

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.

Mr. Kling said that Village Farms' intension is to continue expanding its operation. "We have significant growth strategies in place for the future that will build both trade and consumer equity," he concluded.