



MARKET UPDATE

Tomatoes: South Florida's tomato volume is light, as farms wait for Spring plantings to mature. This week's cold front will slow things down into next week as well. Fortunately, supply should pick up the last week of March/first week of April as new plantings in South Florida get going and the Ruskin/Palmetto area begins its Spring season in earnest. Quality has been nice on all varieties, but size is short on rounds. Romas are the shortest of the varieties, with a lack of product available to meet Florida-specific demand.

Cool temperatures and transitions have also affected Mexico's tomato volumes this week. Production from the Sinaloa area is light due to cooler weather in previous weeks and older harvest areas/fields are finishing up or are done for the season. Look for overall volumes to pick up gradually over the next 2-3 weeks as new crops and growing areas come to the table. Larger round tomatoes and romas (overall) are the most challenged in supply but overall quality remains good. Grape tomatoes also have less supply available, but light demand has kept things in check. Quality is a bit more hit-and-miss on grape tomatoes.

Bell Peppers: Although South Florida volumes are fairly steady and a few fields in more northern parts of the state have begun, Eastern bell pepper availability is becoming snug. With Mexican crops winding down and California set to start in mid-April, shoppers are looking to the East for size. Mexican farms still offer reasonably good supply and nice quality on smaller sizes, but are tight on retail-sized fruit.

Cucumbers: The last of Honduran cucumbers will continue to flow for the next few weeks, but South Florida farms are now up and running on Spring crops. Fruit from new fields is looking nice so far, but we'll see a mixture of quality in the market as Honduran volumes and quality slip.

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Availability has improved slightly in the West this week. One larger shipper from Baja has just begun harvesting and expects steady volume increases over the next few weeks.

Summer Squash: New crops have finally begun in both Florida and Mexico, bringing some much-needed relief in the Summer squash arena. By no means is there an oversupply at this time, but quality has improved as farms move out of older fields and into new ones. Hermosillo, Mexico expects to see both volume and quality increase over the next week as farms work through early picks of new crops.

Green Beans: With South Florida and the Lake area both in strong production, there should be plenty of nice-quality beans in the East to meet Easter demand. Western markets also expect strong supply for the next two weeks.

Eggplant: New eggplant crops in Florida are finally coming on, bringing more fruit to the East. Quality reports have been favorable. Mexico's production continues to be steady-ashe- goes with strong quality.

Hard Squash: Hard squash supply is light throughout the country. In the East, limited volumes are available from older fields in Honduras and new-crop fruit in Florida. But, we should begin to see better numbers from Florida over the next few weeks. Mexico's quality and volume are declining rapidly as farms wait on new Spring plantings to get started. Quality concerns include spotting on acorn, undersize on butternut and light color on spaghetti. Grading will be key until the new crops begin in the 2nd week of April.

Chili Peppers: Chili pepper production continues at a steady pace in Mexico. Quality has been excellent with all sizes and heat levels available. Florida farms have light volumes of select varieties, mostly jalapenos, poblanos and Hungarians.

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TRANSPORTATION FACTS

*The National Diesel Average declined for the fifth week in a row (down \$.016), moving from \$2.99 to \$2.98 per gallon.

* The average price for a gallon of diesel fuel is \$.41 higher than the same time last year.

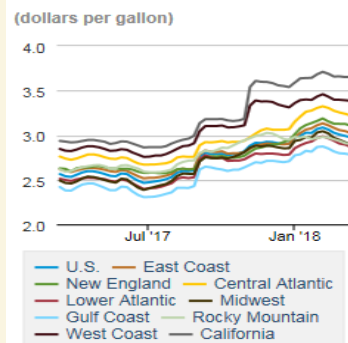
* Nine of the ten reporting zones enjoyed price declines with the most significant change coming from the Lower Atlantic (down \$.023 per gallon). California held its price of \$3.65 per gallon.

*California maintains its role as the high price leader for diesel fuel while the Gulf Coast region continues to offer the best bargain at \$2.78 per gallon.

*In the last two weeks, the WTI Crude Oil price has fallen 3.2%, moving from \$63.01 to \$60.96 per barrel

* Mexico crossings at Texas are slightly short on trucks, but all other production areas have adequate transportation available.

On-Highway Diesel Fuel Prices



Source: Energy Information Administration

KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE CONSUMER

Meet Gen Z: Technology is Comforting, Convenient

By: Claire Lentsch, www.theshelbyreport.com, March 12, 2018

Technology creates convenience. By introducing technology into the food industry, food becomes convenient. Vending machines are a prime example of a convenient food source. Leaving the house in the morning, as most know, can be a hustle of grabbing and going. However, many forget to grab food to fuel the day. Students are not an exception to this. For the majority of the day, the cafeterias in schools are closed. Therefore, students resort to the trusty vending machines for a quick snack.

Nearly every student carries their phone on them, with constant messaging and intake of information. Text messages are the most efficient route to spread information. Countless colleges recognize this and reach aspiring students through text messages. However, many companies still use email to inform customers of deals and events. This is highly ineffective as the majority of these emails get sent to a "spam" account, an account the consumer creates to avoid clutter. This results in a pile of unreceived messages and failed communication. Email is becoming a thing of the past.

With technology and services on the rise, it is possible to use shopping services from the comfort of your own home. My brother is in college. He tells me how handy it is to go online and have your groceries arrive on your doorstep. It saves time, money and the hassle of transportation.

Some companies track what their consumers purchase. I appreciate companies that put effort toward understanding what consumers personally tend to purchase and that send customized coupons. I enjoy saving money on products I

already invest in rather than a clutter of random items I would never use.

Self-checkout is comforting

Self-service is a tool I find myself using frequently. Why have someone else do something you can do yourself? My generation is incredibly independent and enjoys the freedom to be self-reliant. I like using the self-checkout because I tend to feel more efficient doing something myself instead of waiting in a line only to have someone else do it for me.

Self-service technology creates a sense of comfort for many. For one, people don't need to worry about their appearance. They can show up in the most unique or grungy of outfits with a sense of comfort knowing they won't be forced to talk to anyone.

Everyone naturally gravitates towards comfort and convenience. This is why "ordering in" is so popular. Today's society is very busy, so many prefer to take a break from running around and have a nice evening at home. Cooking can take a lot of time and preparation, and nobody has time for that anymore. Ordering online is the way to go.

Phone-induced anxiety

Call-in orders are becoming outdated. Communication over the phone for many can be difficult to understand and may be awkward. My generation is developing a slight anxiety over phone calls or face-to-face contact with a stranger. Unsure of how to handle the encounter, it appears many strive to avoid it all together.

Although online orders remove the human aspect of the dining experience, it excels in accuracy. Most websites have pictures of the food items one can order, thus, enforcing a sense of confidence in the consumer. Because they are able to see the product, they develop a clear idea of what to expect.

Some surprises are pleasant, however, when it involves food it is imperative to know exactly what the end result will be. It also prevents the hassle of confusion when it comes to questions such as: "What does this sandwich have on it?" "How many calories does this have?" or "What sides can I get with this?" Everything online provides information, pictures, descriptions and health facts. Technology creates a launching pad for people to conveniently get what they want when they want it.

Comfort and convenience are evolving. Snacking is becoming more accessible within schools. Text messages are replacing emails. Online orders are replacing call-in orders. People are choosing fast, more efficient methods of obtaining their wants and needs as technology evolves.

Claire Lentsch, a member of Gen Z, is a semi-regular columnist for The Shelby Report of the Midwest.



Fruit of the Week- Watermelon

Maturity Indices

Watermelon (*Citrullus lanatus* Thunb.) are harvested at full maturity as they typically do not develop in internal color or increase in sugars after being removed from the vine. The ground spot (the portion of the melon resting on the soil) changes from pale white to a creamy yellow at proper harvest maturity. Another indicator used at harvest include a wilted but not fully desiccated vine tendril proximal to the stem-end attachment. Destructive sampling is used to judge maturity of a population of watermelons. For seeded cultivars, maturity is reached when the gelatinous covering (aril) around the seed is no longer apparent and the seed coat is hard. Cultivars vary widely in soluble solids at maturity. In general, a soluble solids content of at least 10% in the flesh near the center of the melon is an indicator of proper maturity if the flesh is also firm, crisp and of good color.

Quality Indices

- Watermelons should be symmetrical and uniform in appearance
- The surface should be waxy and bright in appearance
- Absence of scars, sunburn, transit abrasions or other surface defects or dirt
- No evidence of bruising
- Appears heavy for size

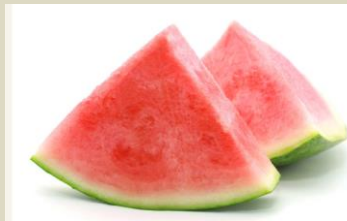
U.S. grades Fancy, No. 1, and No. 2. Distinction among grades is based predominantly on external appearances.

Optimum Temperature

10-15°C (50-59°F) Storage life is typically 14 days at 15°C (59°F) with up to 21 days attainable at 7-10°C (45-50°F).

For short-term storage or transit to distant markets (>7 days), most recommendations use 7.2°C (45°F) and 85-90% R.H. as the acceptable handling conditions. Watermelons are, however, prone to chilling injury at this temperature. Extended holding at this temperature will induce chilling injury, rapidly evident after transfer to typical retail display temperatures.

Many watermelons are still shipped without precooling or refrigeration during transit. These fruit must be utilized for prompt market sales as quality declines rapidly under these conditions.



SWEETER HEART SEEDLESS WATERMELON

Lipman's "Sweeter Heart Melons" prove that farming really is all about heart. With much higher sugar content than regular melons, this juicy variety is known for being super sweet. And, our specially grown thin rind provides more edible product when compared to other varieties.

Suslow T., 1997. Watermelon: Recommendations for Maintaining Postharvest Quality. http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu/Commodity_Resources/Fact_Sheets/Datastores/Vegetables_English/?uid=&ds=798

PRODUCE BAROMETER

ITEM	QUALITY	PRICING
Bell Pepper	Good	Higher
Cucumber	Good	Higher
Eggplant	Good	Higher
Green Beans	Good	Steady
Jalapenos	Good	Steady
Onions	Good	Steady
Squash	Average to Good	Lower
Tomatoes	Good	Higher



MARCH CALENDAR

- March-All Month**
- National Sauce Month
- March 18th-24th**
- National Agriculture Week
- March 20th**
- National Ravioli Day
- March 21st**
- National Crunchy Taco Day
- March 23rd**
- National Chips and Dip Day

Estero, FL Weather

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
Mar 16	Mar 17	Mar 18	Mar 19	Mar 20
75° F	79° F	81° F	82° F	82° F
58° F	63° F	66° F	68° F	61° F
NE 9 MPH	E 6 MPH	ESE 8 MPH	S 10 MPH	SSW 13 MPH
Precip 20%				

NEWS IN THE GROCERY TRADE

Brick-and-Mortar Key to Omnichannel Success

By: Gina Acosta, www.retailleader.com, March 14, 2018

More retailers plan to open new physical locations this year as companies focus on using brick-and-mortar stores to expedite order fulfillment. According to the annual State of Retail Online study released Wednesday by the National Retail Federation and Forrester, 42% of retailers surveyed say that faster delivery of online orders is their top customer-facing priority, and many plan to use stores to achieve that goal. Omnichannel services such as buy online, pick up in-store are an in-store priority for 21%, along with 15% that cite ship-from-store as a fulfillment priority.

“More brands plan to open stores versus close them this year, which proves that the physical retail store is not doomed as many think it is,” Forrester Vice President and Principal Analyst Sucharita Kodali said. “Smart retailers understand that the two go hand-in-hand, but customer-obsessed retailers will continue investing in areas like omnichannel to provide customers with the seamless on and offline experiences they expect and now require. This year’s survey proved that while they have work to do in 2018, retailers are moving in the right direction.”

Of the companies surveyed this year, 32% were “pure play” online retailers while 57% were multichannel retailers, including traditional bricks-and-mortar retailers that also sell online. This year’s data reveals that 43% of store-based retailers surveyed expect a net increase in the number of brick-and-mortar stores they operate by the end of 2018 compared with 2017, and only 16% expect a net reduction.

“This report shows more than ever that retail is retail regardless of where a sale is made or how the product is delivered,” NRF Vice President for Research Development and Industry Analysis Mark Mathews said. “Products ordered online are increasingly picked up in-store or shipped from a nearby store, and digital technology being used at bricks-and-mortar locations lets retailers help customers find what they want or make the sale even if the product is out of stock. Traditional retailers have seen the opportunities of online selling for years now, and those selling online increasingly see that stores are part of the key to success.” Additionally, retailers are proactively working on their real estate assets, whether testing new store formats such as opening some type of pop-up store (24%), and opening new warehouses or distribution centers (12%).

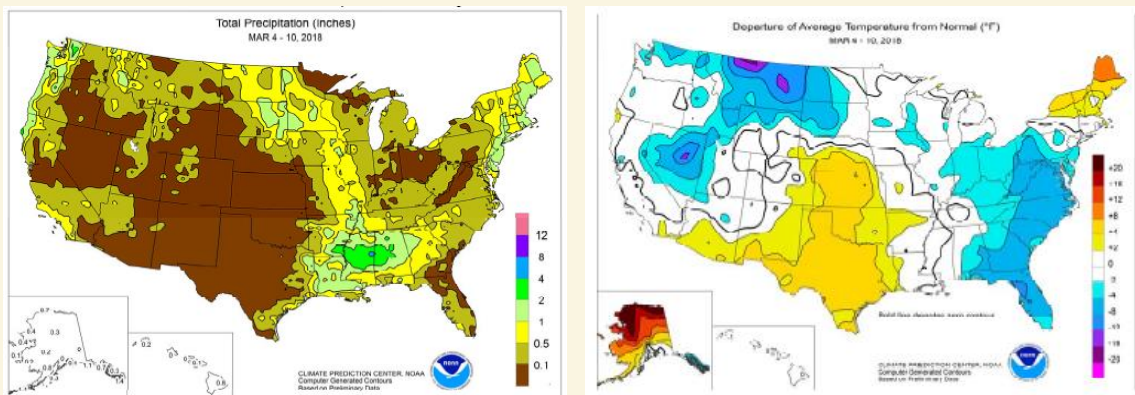
Personalizing the shopping experience was another top priority, cited by 15% of store-based retailers. Retailers surveyed are also focused on using technology to better enable store associates to help customers (12%), as well as improving the in-store experience (12%). To support their store associates providing service to customers, 61% of retailers surveyed plan to spend more on employee training. Digital continues to contribute significantly to retail overall, both directly and as it influences sales in stores.

Seventy percent of retailers surveyed noted that online conversion rates – the number of people browsing an item online who actually follow through and make a purchase online – increased in the past year. Further good news: 62% said repeat customers were up and 57% said average order values had increased.

While online sales coming from desktop computers currently double those of mobile browsers, mobile sales are growing 36% per year versus 8% on desktop. Mobile app sales are growing at an annual rate of 16%, and accordingly, 89% of retailers plan to increase investments in mobile initiatives.

NATIONAL WEATHER SPOTLIGHT

Weekly Precipitation and Temperature Deviation



RESTAURANT INDUSTRY NEWS

Study: Mobile Orders Skyrocket in 2017, But 2 in 5 Still Use Cash

www.fastcasual.com, March 13, 2018

Restaurant visits paid via mobile app grew by 50 percent over the last year, a new NPD study finds. However, cash payment still captures two of every five restaurant visits, a news release said.

Both of those revelations were provided in a report just released by NPD Group on the "Digital Evolution of Foodservice." The growth in mobile app use is stunning news when seen through the lens of overall foodservice traffic statistics which have been stalled between flat and 1 percent growth for several years.

But the cash usage among consumers is equally eye-opening in an industry that has been increasingly inundated with tech news and innovations over the last several years. The NPD results suggest consumers are split on how they want to order, pay and receive services from the restaurants they love.

NPD's latest analysis indicates that convenience-enabling technologies, like mobile ordering and delivery apps, are the ray of sunshine in what is otherwise a relatively slow time for foodservice overall. Time-starved consumers said they use mobile apps so the restaurant food they order is ready and paid for when they get to the store, or when the restaurant delivers to them.

Supporting reasons for app usage also include:

- Earning rewards and loyalty points.
- Receiving specials and coupons.
- Accessing menu offerings.

However, as mentioned, tech isn't a slam-dunk with consumers, according to the NPD report which found last year that a substantial two in five visits to restaurants were paid for in cash. Of these digital non-users, 22 percent said they preferred to pay in cash, while 18 percent didn't want to pay service fees, and 16 percent were worried about identity theft or credit card fraud.

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR
PACK YOUR BAGS!

April 5-7, 2018
Viva Fresh Expo
JW Marriott Hill Country Resort and Spa
San Antonio, TX
www.vivafreshexpo.com
Come join Team Lipman at Booth 96!

August 22-23, 2018
New England Produce Council
Produce, Floral & Foodservice Expo
Hynes Convention Center
Boston, MA
www.newenglandproduceCouncil.com/expo

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