



MARKET UPDATE

Round Tomatoes: With improved weather from last week's, Florida's round tomato production is back in a steady mode with most product coming out of the Ruskin/Palmetto area. With a mix of crown and 2nd picks in the system, all sizing options are available. Last week's rain has caused a few more grade outs during the packing process, but the final product in the box continues to have good quality. On the Lipman front, we are currently harvesting in both Estero and Duette, but will transition completely to Duette in the next 10 days. West Mexico's vine-ripe and mature green volumes have reached the downside of the season and will gradually decline, along with sizing, from now until they finish up in early to mid-June. Meanwhile, East Mexico farms should see the numbers build over the next few weeks as they get into Spring acreage. With the California desert on tap to start May 10th, we're looking for a smooth transition to California's Central Valley in June. Quality is acceptable with no major issues to report.

Roma Tomatoes: Florida's roma tomato volume has also rebounded from last week's lighter numbers to consistent levels for this time of year. There's some rain check to be culled during the packing process, which has reduced yields slightly. Shipping quality can vary, with the best fruit coming from those who run the product multiple times during the packing process, such as Lipman. West Mexico is working both existing and new acreage with mostly steady supply, while East Mexico should begin to bring more volume as they move further into new Spring acreage over the next few weeks. So far, Baja remains limited to a single shipper, but will become more of a factor as other growers join in on the fun over the coming weeks. Several growers are experiencing green shoulders and/or

other quality and color issues, so the fruit must be assessed carefully.

Grape Tomatoes: Lipman's grape tomato production is steady this week, with harvests in both Estero and Duette. A few other growers have seen light to moderate increases this week, so there is more product in the overall market. Quality can vary, depending on whether the fruit is packed to order or packed to sell, as those who pack to sell have had a few issues with older inventoried product. In the West, we'll see production gradually decrease out of Mainland Mexico as we move through May. Baja has started in a light way and will be more of a supplement than primary supply area until the deal transitions in that direction in a few weeks.

Bell Peppers: South Florida and East Coast growers are winding down the pepper season, with volume lightening up and quality declining, as is typical at the end of crops. Plant City (and the surrounding areas) have started but volumes are still limited at this time. We expect to see harvests gain some strength over the coming days which should help to bridge the gap until Georgia gets started in 2-3 weeks. All sizes are available, although the retail-friendly XL is the shortest option. Mainland Mexico's bell pepper crops are getting tired as they near the season's end. Sizing is down to mostly mediums and smaller and the fruit isn't traveling very well at this point. Jumbo and XL fruit is available from the California desert's new crop crown picks. Cooler weather slowed things down slightly last week, but volume has been strong this week.

Cucumbers: The Florida cucumber situation has improved a notch or two this week as a few new, late fields have come into production.

Quality is average, as most of these crops have experienced weather. Volume will remain light and limited until Georgia gets up and running, likely in the next 7-10 days. In the West, Sinaloa is wrapping up their season but we expect to have fruit out of Sonora for the next month or so. Baja has very light supply and many growers are still 2-3 weeks away from starting. There should be plenty of volume from Sonora to get us through the transition to Baja.

Yellow/Zucchini Squash: Growers have walked away from most of the older fields in South Florida, as production makes the transition to Plant City, FL and Georgia. Between these two areas, good supply is available but, as usual, there are some wind and rain-related quality challenges on yellow squash. With many growers picking and dropping squash in the fields over the last couple of weeks and now past their natural peak in production, Sonora's supplies are on the lighter side. Light to moderate supplies should continue over the next few weeks from this area. Meanwhile, Baja is now providing supply daily. Looking ahead, the Santa Maria, CA area is targeting a mid-May start to their season and we may see some production out of Fresno sometime within the next 10-14 days as well.

Eggplant: Florida's eggplant supply is sufficient to meet demand. Although there is light volume in Plant City, the majority of the eggs are coming from South Florida. There's a wide variety of quality, depending on the age of the plants. We will continue to see good supplies from the Culiacan area of Mexico for the next few weeks. Growers can go through the month of May, but we could see a few drop out if the market declines. The California desert has started in a light way and will see volume pick up as we

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MARKET UPDATE Continued...

Eggplant *continued*: move into warmer weather. Looking ahead, the Fresno area is projected to get going in early June.

Green Beans: Between recent rains taking out some acreage and crop transitions, Eastern green bean supply remains snug this week. We should see a little relief over the weekend as South Georgia/North Florida comes online. Mainland Mexico's numbers continue to drop as more growers finish up for the season. However, our ranch in Guasave looks to continue with moderate numbers until mid to late May. Domestic programs are on the horizon and we're seeing a few from the Coachella valley now. We are also hearing the Fresno area will start harvesting in a few weeks. With all these factors in play, we could see some volume ups and downs during the next few weeks.

Chili Peppers: Chili pepper remains light in the East as South Florida winds down and Plant City's start has been slowed by weather. They've started with jalapenos and expect to start more specialties such as poblanos and Hungarians next week. Mainland Mexico crops are just about done and the quality is struggling from the high temperatures. Baja Mexico has already started with good quality chilies and we'll transition supply to that area next week.

Hard Squash: Aside from a few Florida acorn squashes, the East continues to bring in Honduran and Mexican hard squash. Expect more of the same at least until late May. Mexico's seasonal decline is upon us and quality issues have become a bit more prevalent, specifically with ground spots on acorn, stem punctures on butternut and scarring on spaghetti. Late fields should provide fruit into June, at which point the California desert will be up and running. Growers are forecasting good supply and quality when the season starts.

Colored Bell Peppers: There are a lot of moving parts to the colored bell situation, but overall supply is adequate. West Mexico is seeing lighter volumes this week as some growers are finishing up for the season and others have less product because they harvested at the green stage to capitalize on the higher green bell markets from several weeks ago. Quality is varied, but sizing is holding on with a good percentage of jumbo fruit. Central Mexico's houses are in a lighter spot now, as they are winding down Spring crops. Meanwhile, in Canada, production is expected to be pretty steady for the next few weeks. Quality has been superb from our own houses and is also good from other shippers.

Mini Sweet Peppers: Sinaloa's production has been mostly steady despite being in the downside of the season. Growers are starting to harvest with a little more green on the pepper to maintain quality from these older plants, so we are seeing more greening on arrival. This area should continue through most of May then we could experience a short situation between then and mid-June when Baja gets started.

Mini Cucumbers: Northern Mexico is just about done for the season and we'll switch over to Baja fruit starting next week. Baja has good volume and quality with more plantings/growers projected to start in a few weeks.

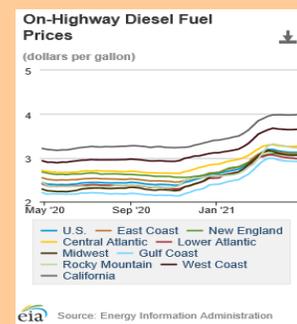
Beefsteak Tomatoes: Canada has plentiful volumes of beefsteak tomatoes to offer this week and our crops are coming on steady and strong with good quality. The demand has definitely shifted north as Mexico programs wind down.

HH English Cucumbers: This item is also in transition, with light production in Mexico as many growers wind down the current season by the end of May. There are a few growers who have year-round production, but volume will be much lighter than the prime Winter and Spring seasons. Canadian production has been rolling along soundly but gloomy weather slowed production and the start of new Summer crops while demand strengthened, creating a snug situation for the past week or so. We are seeing availability improvements this week and anticipate that to continue as weather improves and new plantings get started. Our Florida program has been on the lighter side, but started new houses this week and expects good numbers for the near future.



TRANSPORTATION FACTS

- *The National Diesel Average is unchanged this week at \$3.12 per gallon.
- *This year's pricing is \$.69 higher than the same time period in 2020.
- *Four areas (the East Coast, Lower Atlantic, Gulf Coast and Rocky Mountains) reported lower prices, with the remainder showing slight increases.
- *California has the highest fuel price at \$3.99 per gallon, while the Gulf Coast remains the low-price leader at \$2.92 per gallon.
- *The WTI Crude Oil price rose 4.1% this week, moving from \$61.35 to \$63.86.
- *Transportation remains slightly to moderately short in all active tomato and vegetable shipping areas.



NEWS IN THE GROCERY TRADE

Vaccinated Shoppers Headed Back to Grocery Stores

www.theproducenews.com, April 28, 2021

Over a quarter (27 percent) of consumers plan on doing most of their grocery shopping in-store once they are fully vaccinated, and over a third (38 percent) will be doing a combination of online and in-store shopping, according to findings from a new survey conducted by Inmar Intelligence, a data-driven, technology-enabled services company.

“As vaccines become more widely available, it is natural that today’s shoppers choose to head back into the store as a part of their grocery shopping routine,” said Spencer Baird, executive vice president and president of Inmar Intelligence’s MarTech division. “Most consumers are familiar with an in-store shopping experience — browsing and discovering new products — and there are some products that shoppers prefer to buy in-store.”

A return to the physical store is already under way with today’s grocery shoppers. While 48 percent of shoppers are currently hybrid shoppers, almost a third (33 percent) are currently shopping for groceries in-store, suggesting a steady return to normalcy and increased comfort with in-store shopping. Additionally, the survey found that over half (51 percent) of shoppers are still looking to stockpile throughout 2021, adopting a longer-term “be prepared” mentality. Thirty-eight percent plan on stockpiling toilet paper, cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, food and alcohol.

Despite the growing trend toward heading to physical stores to shop, online shopping is not going anywhere — 41 percent of shoppers have ordered groceries online for delivery or pickup over the past six months. Although, there are still hurdles to conducting online shopping that can deter today’s shoppers, especially around quality and price. The greatest challenges that shoppers face with online delivery include delivery surcharges (18 percent), quality of groceries delivered (16 percent) and availability of delivery time slots (14 percent).

Moreover, the same survey found that the outlook for restaurants and bars is positive. As restaurants and bars begin to open back up, consumers are ready to dine out. Eighty-five percent of consumers plan to eat out more often, either inside or outside, showcasing this eagerness.

“The survey found that as consumers head back to the physical store, they plan to continue stockpiling everyday items, indicating the importance of longer-term preparedness,” Baird said. “Retailers must prepare for this longer-term shift, not only in terms of stock, but also providing today’s hybrid shoppers with a seamless omnichannel experience across a variety of touchpoints. No matter the age, shoppers expect to receive personalization, convenience and cost savings during each of their grocery trips.”



PRODUCE BAROMETER

ITEM	QUALITY	PRICING
Bell Pepper	Varied	E-Steady; W-Steady
Cucumber	Varied	E-Lower; W-Lower
Eggplant	Varied	E-Lower; W-Lower
Green Beans	Varied	E-Higher; W-Higher
Jalapenos	Good	E-Steady W-Steady
Squash-Hard	Varied	E-Steady; W-Steady
Squash-Soft	Varied	E-Steady; W-Higher
Tomatoes	Good	E-Steady; W-Higher



Did you know?

- *One zucchini is a “zucchiniina.”
- *Zucchini was first brought to the United States in the 1920s by the Italians.
- *A zucchini has more potassium than a banana.
- *There are two calendar holidays celebrating this vegetable: April 25th is National Zucchini Bread Day and August 8th is National Sneak Some Zucchini on Your Neighbor’s Porch Day!



Duette, FL Weather

Fri Apr 30	Sat May 1	Sun May 2	Mon May 3	Tue May 4	Wed May 5
90° F	90° F	91° F	94° F	95° F	95° F
68° F	70° F	70° F	71° F	72° F	72° F
SSW 13 MPH	NW 7 MPH	ENE 9 MPH	SSE 13 MPH	S 11 MPH	S 10 MPH
	Precip 10%				

RESTAURANT ROUNDUP**More New Restaurants are Opening Their Doors****By: Ben Coley, www.qsrmagazine.com, April 22, 2021**

New business openings reached their highest peak in the past 12 months, another positive sign the U.S. economy is storming back, according to Yelp's latest Economic Average report. Nearly 146,500 businesses opened in Q1, a decrease of just 2 percent, year-over-year, and an increase of 4 percent compared to Q1 2019.

The 18,217 restaurant and food openings were 5 percent better than Q1 2020 and only 4 percent below Q1 2019. In April 2020, new restaurant and food openings fell to a pandemic-low of 3,160, but they soon rebounded with a 29 percent average monthly increase from May to July. In Q3 2020, Yelp observed restaurant and food businesses open at pre-pandemic levels because of innovation around outdoor seating and prioritizing nontraditional services like farmers markets and food trucks. New restaurant openings in Q3 were only down 10 percent compared to 2019. The fourth quarter saw the same trend—18,207 restaurant businesses opened, only a 4 percent decrease from the year-ago period. "The start of the new year brought many positive changes to local economies – a downward trend of nationwide COVID-19 cases, more than 200 million vaccinations administered and many local businesses reopening with larger capacity and indoor operations," Yelp said in its report.

Yelp said food businesses that lean toward takeout, outdoor dining, and other COVID safety measures experienced the most growth in the recent period. When comparing Q1 to Q4 2020, food delivery services saw the highest jump by far at 22.1 percent. That category was followed by seafood markets (10.4 percent), macarons (10.3 percent), desserts (9.6 percent), chicken shops (8.5 percent), and food trucks (8.4 percent).

The pandemic is still affecting some dining experiences, particularly those designed for a group occasion, Yelp noted. The restaurant and food categories that experienced the least growth compared to Q4 2020 were hot pot restaurants (-22 percent), buffets (-19.8 percent), tapas/small plates (-12.7 percent), ramen (-12.4 percent), and diners (-11.3 percent).

Almost every state saw an increase in business openings in Q1 as compared to Q4 2020, with the best growth seen in Mississippi (39 percent, 979 openings), Alabama (35 percent, 1,921 openings), Maine (32 percent, 450 openings), South Carolina (31 percent, 2,493 openings), and Michigan (30 percent, 3,557 openings). Yelp pointed out that each of these states eased restrictions throughout March, such as allowing indoor dining capacity at 50 percent or more and reducing limits on mass gatherings. The states with the largest amount of openings in Q1 were the obvious ones—California (22,157 openings), Texas (14,860 openings), Florida (14,793 openings), and New York (7,080 openings).

In terms of restaurant and food business openings, these states had the best quarter-over-quarter results: Wyoming (59 percent, 27 openings), Alaska (58 percent, 41 openings), Kentucky (44 percent, 204 openings), Nebraska (26 percent, 68 openings), and Maine (6 percent, 73 openings).

As one might imagine, business reopenings have witnessed a spike, as well. According to Yelp's data, 258,191 businesses have reopened since March 1, 2020. An average of 17,104 businesses reopened in Q1, which is the most since Q2 2020 when several states restarted their economies for the first time after tight shutdowns. "After a challenging year, 2021 is off to an encouraging start for the local economy, with Yelp data signaling a recovery as new business openings and business reopenings soar in the first quarter," Justin Norman, Yelp's vice president of data science, said in a statement. "... Along with a downward trend of nationwide COVID-19 cases and an increase in vaccinations, these are all promising signs of rebounding local economies."

These food categories saw more than 50 percent of their reopenings come in Q1 during the August to March period: bars (3,146 Q1 reopenings), sandwich shops (2,366 Q1 reopenings), coffee houses (2,330 Q1 reopenings), and breakfast and brunch spots (1,861 Q1 reopenings). In addition, these states witnessed more than 65 percent of their reopenings come in Q1 during the August to March period: Arkansas (302 Q1 reopenings), Delaware (140 Q1 reopenings), Mississippi (287 Q1 reopenings), Maryland (951 Q1 reopenings), Tennessee (872 Q1 reopenings), and Texas (5,331 Q1 reopenings).

Nearly all signs are pointing toward a significant boom this summer. A growing list of states—from California and Nevada on the West Coast to North Carolina in the East—are expecting to lift all COVID restrictions by June. More than 134.4 million people have received at least one vaccine dose, which is more than 51 percent of adults, and more than 87.5 million are fully vaccinated, which is 33.8 percent of adults.

Additionally, a recent survey of 8,943 small business owners between March 27 and April 5 showed that 35 percent of restaurants couldn't cover rent in April, a 28-point improvement from March, according to online referral network Alignable. The combination of stimulus checks and vaccinations have boosted consumer confidence and spending power in the past two months. That comes as hundreds of thousands of restaurants await the rollout of the \$28.6 billion Restaurant Revitalization Fund, which will target independent concepts and chains with 20 units or less.

KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE CONSUMER**Consumer Demand for Sustainable Packaging Holds Despite Pandemic**By: Lauren Manning, www.grocerydive.com, April 27, 2021**Dive Brief:**

*Two-thirds (67%) of consumers consider it important that the products they buy are in recyclable packaging, and the same percentage consider themselves environmentally aware — the same share as before the pandemic, according to Trivium Packaging's 2021 Global Buying Green Report. The report is based on a survey conducted with Boston Consulting Group with 15,000 consumers in Europe, North America and South America.

*More than half (54%) take sustainable packaging into consideration when selecting a product. Younger consumers — those 44 years and younger — are leading the charge, with 83% reporting that they are willing to pay more for it, compared to 70% of all consumers. However, the pandemic has caused about one in three consumers to lower the importance they place on sustainable packaging.

*Despite their willingness to support sustainable packaging, many consumers are misinformed about the recycling rates of different materials. Survey respondents believed that 48% of metal was recycled, when the real rate is 64%, according to figures from Global Recycling and the International Aluminum Institute cited in the report. However, the recycling rates for glass, plastic and liquid cartons were much lower than consumers expected.

Despite the pressures of the pandemic, sustainable packaging has emerged as a top priority as consumers show more interest in their environmental footprint and that of the overall food system. Trivium's research tracks with other efforts to quantify consumers' sentiments during this time. A 2020 Study from Shorr Packaging found that two-thirds of shoppers who have made changes in their purchasing behaviors during the pandemic are paying more attention to packaging. Fifty-eight percent of survey respondents reported being "likely" or "very likely" to select products that use recyclable or reusable packaging.

This is especially true among younger consumers. Millennials are more likely to buy sustainable products than other generations, while Gen Z is emerging as a generation that is willing to spend more for products that meet their sustainability standards.

Swapping out conventional packaging for eco-friendly alternatives is not an easy task, however. In many cases, switching to sustainable packaging materials can cost a company 25% more compared to traditional packaging. These newer options may not perform like their conventional counterparts, either, especially when it comes to product freshness and being able to withstand temperature changes. Consumers' willingness to pay more for products with sustainable packaging could help the industry absorb the increased costs around making the switch.

Despite the clear momentum towards sustainable packaging, Trivium's study suggests that there is still more work to be done in educating consumers — especially about which materials are and can be recycled. The report blamed the misconceptions to mixed messages in labeling and marketing materials around packaging as well as different local recycling practices.

Figuring out the most effective way to help consumers make educated purchasing decisions is not a new endeavor for the food industry. Although consumers report being influenced by sustainability initiatives, many do not notice these claims on packaging, according to a 2018 study from QuadPackaging and Package Insight. Many attribute the ineffectiveness of on-pack sustainability messaging to the serious label fatigue that some consumers suffer. Retailers and brands that want to reach consumers through sustainable packaging efforts may need to do more than simply add a label claim or logo to catch consumers' attention.

This article has been edited for content and space. Please visit www.grocerydive.com to read the entire selection.

INDUSTRY EVENT CALENDAR**May 18-19, 2021**

West Coast Produce Expo
Red Rock Casino and Spa
Las Vegas, NV

www.events.farmjournal.com/west-coast-produce-expo-2021

September 29-30, 2021

NEPC Produce, Floral & Foodservice Expo
Hynes Convention Center
Boston, MA

www.newenglandproduceCouncil.com

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