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Produce Pro continues to grow as a result of its diverse offerings

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WOODRIDGE, IL — Over the last 24 years, a company that started as a produce industry accounting software supplier learned and spread its wings to become a preferred perishable software solution.

Marc Hatfield, Produce Pro's national sales manager, said that Produce Pro now provides software for the complete produce operation, such as inventory management, traceability, pricing, routing, sales order entry, repacking, processing, picking, packing, receiving, reporting and related realms.

"Lot tracking for complete inventory management is really a big piece of what we do with integrated warehouse management RF scanning solution," added Courtney Heim, sales representative of the firm. "With lot tracking inventory management we see customers reduce shrink and mis-picks, allowing the business to operate more efficiently, freeing up employees' time to focus on what matters: their customer and growing their business."

"Many of our employees (trainers, programmers, and developers) have been in the industry for a number of years. They have worked with various produce operations and bring a well-rounded industry perspective to each of their accounts." This extends to many aspects of the fresh fruit and vegetable industry.

Heim said Produce Pro may carry an image as a provider to foodservice and wholesale distributors but the company is "very diverse in what we offer to all perishable business models."

Hatfield noted that Produce Pro is "expanding greatly" in its service to grower-packer-shippers.

Apple, stone fruit, potato, onion, avocado, tomato and blueberry suppliers are on board with Produce Pro.

Heim added that Produce Pro software serves growers by tracking functions such as field prep, planting, fertilizing, irrigation, picking, sorting and packing, as well as grower settlements, liquidations and packout reports.

Hatfield said that many produce companies need better business intelligence or reporting capabilities: "As the business world changes we need to be smarter in how we operate." To that end, Produce Pro is partnering with IBM's Cognos software. According to the Cognos website, "From business intelligence to financial performance and strategy management to analytics applications, Cognos software can provide what your organization needs to become top-performing and analytics-driven."

Hatfield said his software has become associated with the industry's food-safety efforts. "Our customers have had food-safety binders for years and they continue to grow. Produce Pro is responding to this need by making a way to assign, track, record and report food-safety tasks electronically. It's all about data and having a process in place to identify trends and take action."

Beyond its package of software services, Produce Pro is offering three apps for its customers. These are a Sales App, a Checkout App and a Driver App.

The Sales App allows a sales staff real-time access to customer-specific information while at a customer's facility. In brief, a thorough customer history is available to a salesman and he has the ability to create an order while making a customer call.

The Checkout App is for the customers of Produce Pro customers. Hatfield gave the example of a chef taking his smartphone into a cooler to check his inventory. From the Checkout App on that smartphone, the chef can check what he ordered last time and order what he needs as he takes inventory of the cooler. The order is sent from the device to the supplier immediately and error-free.

The Driver App is used by Produce Pro customers who have a truck fleet. Those truck drivers can use the app to capture customer signatures, mark delivery error, such as shorts on truck, and cash on delivery support. The Driver App removes the need for truck drivers to carry a lot of paperwork and to have an additional GPS in their trucks.

Produce Pro has other apps that are in the test-and-design phase. A new app will be introduced in October by Produce Pro at the PMA convention in Anaheim, CA.

Heim said that Produce Pro has 70 employees and more than 150 customers. Most of the customers are in the United States, but Canada is a fast-growing market for the software company.

Produce Pro has offices in Austin, TX, and Commerce City, CA, as well as in the Chicago area.

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