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Organic and conventional mushroom demand still growing

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Kennett Square, PA-based Phillips Mushroom Farms, a leading producer and shipper of a wide range of both conventional and organic mushrooms, is always responsive to its customers' requests for mushroom promotions, including during National Mushroom Month.

Kevin Donovan, national sales manager for the company, told *The Produce News* that promotional activity at any time of the year is dependent on the current crop and customer demand, and demand continues on an uphill curve.

"Demand for both organic and conventional mushrooms is still growing, and the Mushroom Council's The Blend initiative continues to be a strong driver in the increasing consumption," said Donovan. "The council's recent announcement that Sonic will be debuting a blended burger later this summer is very interesting and optimistic news. A large and well-known chain that offers a blended burger can have a large impact on consumer trends. And, one chef talks to another and the word can quickly spread about all the benefits of replacing a portion of protein with mushrooms in burgers and other foods."



The Mushroom Council has conducted research that has resulted in nutritional, medicinal and general health claims associated with increased mushroom consumption. The list of benefits of implementing The Blend are numerous. Mushrooms are highly nutritious, are fat-free, cost less than most meat proteins and are very flavorful.

“The results from the council’s extensive research is being used today to help in marketing mushrooms, and it will continue to be used in the future to benefit not only the mushroom industry, but also health and science,” Donovan pointed out.

The Blend program, he added, is spreading rapidly across the country in mainstream media, including cooking shows, cooking segments in talk shows and articles in food magazines and newspapers.

“I just recently heard about The Blend on a local radio show,” said Donovan. “The more chefs use The Blend techniques, the more home chefs are embracing it in their own kitchens.”

Donovan explained that white and brown mushrooms continue to be the category leaders, but he noted the growing interest in Shiitakes and Royal Trumpets, among other specialties.

The company has also developed a new organic product that it launched at the Organic Produce Summit in July.

“The new item is Phillips Mushroom Farms Organic Gourmet Blend, which comes in a four-ounce pack,” said Donovan. “It combines sliced Baby Bellas, sliced Shitakes and yellow Oyster mushrooms, giving consumers a mix of their favorite varieties, and in an organic option. It stirred a lot of interest at the show.”

Prices, overall in the mushroom category, have remained pretty constant, but labor and the high cost of air conditioning in the mushroom farms have an effect on production.

“Mushrooms are available in the summer, but these factors mean they’re not as available as during other times of the year,” Donovan pointed out. “Baby Bellas are strong sellers in the Northeast in the summer, especially for grilling and summer recipes. As fall encroaches we ease back into a higher demand for whites.”

Phillips Mushroom Farms’ new cutting-edge mushroom farm in Warwick, MD, has been completed

for about a year. Donovan said that the bugs have been worked out and it's producing smoothly and strongly.

"We're currently growing white conventional mushrooms at the new facility, but it is organized so that it can also produce organics as the market continues to grow," he said. "We also have the ability to expand at the new facility when the need arises."

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