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## HoneySweet key to J&D onion program success

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J&D Produce Inc. targets onion lovers with its proprietary, branded HoneySweet onion variety.

Jimmy Bassetti, president of J&D, explained that there are people who see onions as a commodity. And then there are onion lovers.

For the lovers, “Our HoneySweet onion has been tearless for nearly 15 years and our customers are loving it. The HoneySweet has a mild, sweet taste and a bright yellow color,” said Bassetti. “We’re seeing our sales volumes continue to make strong gains, which means we are converting onion lovers each and every day.” J&D promotes the elite status of HoneySweet by packing in cartons, not bags.



Outside the Edinburg, TX, offices of J&D Produce Inc. are company executives Bret Erickson, Jeff Brechler, Jimmy Bassetti and his son, James

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Bassetti. The firm keeps year-round HoneySweet supplies by producing the special onions in five carefully selected regions including the state of Tamaulipas, Mexico; the Rio Grande Valley, TX; Deming, NM; Vidalia, GA; and two growing regions in Peru. The onions, like everything on the long J&D product list, are marketed under the Little Bear brand.

Bassetti emphasized that the organic HoneySweet program is also beginning to take off. “We continue to secure additional organic acreage in our growing areas as the organic component of our program is gaining a lot of steam.” commented Bassetti.

Jeff Brechler, a J&D salesman specializing in the firm’s onion business, said J&D maintains the character of its onion program with watchful, consistent management practices for all producing areas.

In certain parts of the country, HoneySweet onions are marketed to consumers in retail ads and promotions. These onions are promoted for hamburger garnish, raw in salads and for other such uses.

J&D’s Little Bear Produce promotions suggest these are the most “eatable” onion available anywhere.

Typically, when retailers advertise onions, sales rise for a low-cost promotion and then fall back to original volume levels. “That’s not so with the HoneySweet,” Bassetti noted. “Consumers like the flavor and consistency of the variety and continue to buy them after the promotion.”

Brechler said J&D’s objective is not to mass produce HoneySweets but make every generation better through natural selection. The Honeysweet onion seed is selected for the shape, color, internal quality (having one center) and palatability, or mildness. Thus, a strong onion variety is becoming better with each generation.

J&D’s website indicates that, “thanks to partnerships with the National Onion Labs, Inc. and Texas A&M University, the pyruvic acid of our onions is tested continually to measure sweetness. While most onions in the industry have a pungency level of 5, our HoneySweet Onions consistently rate with a pungency level of 3.5 or less. Early testing on our latest generation of onions are now showing pungency levels of 2.5 or less. This means that no matter what, our HoneySweet onions are the most mild and delicious onions on the market today.”

Brechler said J&D’s onion sales increased by 26 percent in the 2015-16 season, and by an additional ten percent in 2016-17.

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