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TastyFrutti taking things one day at a time

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Since 1984, TastyFrutti, located in Philadelphia, PA, has served as a major importer and domestic shipper of fresh fruit, with distribution throughout the United States and Canada.

One of its main products is grapes, which it sources from Chile and other countries, providing them year-round for customers. These grapes come from mostly family growers who have been working their land for generations.

Chilean growers are a big component of TastyFrutti's business, as they are also responsible for sourcing stone fruit, pears, cherries, citrus fruit, apples and kiwifruit.

Naturally, the company is feeling the impact of the Coronavirus, but that doesn't mean it's going to stop being the best it can be.

"We're still here and doing what we do, and as long as the governments (Chile and the U.S.) let us, we don't plan to close," said Andreas (Andy) Economou, who has been working with Chilean grapes for 34 years. "We are experiencing certain changes in our business right now."

For example, programs for plums are seeing cancellations because produce customers are planning to use the space in the produce departments for more essential things such as potatoes.

"That's a major change we are dealing with and it's something we need to work around, and things like this could be happening every day," Economou said. "It's unfortunate but we hope it doesn't affect things too much. We are waiting to see what happens in the future."

One of the challenges, Economou noted, is that consumers are scared to pick up produce because of the nature of people touching fruits and vegetables with their hands in search of the perfect item.

"For me, I get angry when they do that, especially when they pick something up and put it back, and change grapes from one package to another," he said. "Especially in these times, it's ridiculous."

Before all this happened, the company was projecting a strong spring and summer, as Economou said the grape crop was especially good.

"It was a normal year as far as the quality and condition of the grapes," he said. "The same with stone fruit. Very nice and normal. Up to this point, we have not exhibited any problems."

The thing that has Economou most worried is that if things continue to slow down with grapes and stone fruit at the supermarket level, it's going to impact everyone in the industry.

"We know things are going to take months, and imports are in a very delicate situation right now," he said. "By summertime, maybe the virus will have subsided and things will be OK, but we can't predict that, and no one knows."

With restaurants closing in Philadelphia and elsewhere, TastyFrutti is also now losing a lot of its foodservice business, which will also affect business going forward.

"We're going to take things day by day and see what happens," Economou said. "There's no one to blame. We have to roll with the punches."

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