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Ryeco adjusting to new normal

May 7, 2020



Ryeco LLC has been in the produce industry for more than four decades and has been operating in the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market for almost a quarter century.

The company is a full line fruit and vegetable receiver and distributor handling product from five different continents with a mission to offer an extensive product line with excellent quality and aggressive pricing.

The challenge these days is trying to figure out customer buying patterns, which according to Filindo Colace, vice president of operations, is virtually impossible due to the coronavirus concerns.

“It’s very difficult to order and keep product stocked and fresh when you don’t know when people are going to flock to the supermarket,” he said. “We sell everything, and it’s very difficult to keep the delicate items stocked properly so we don’t miss any sales there.”

That has meant developing a new strategy, and the company is using a lot more team truck drivers so it can get produce to the facility quicker.

“We’re trying to keep inventory levels high, and if we have to, we’ll put a team on it and pay a little more money to get it here quicker,” Colace said.

Some items are trending hotter than others in these times. For instance, he noted that anything sold in a bag is doing well.

“Any common retail items are moving well, while anything that’s a common restaurant item is not moving well,” Colace said. “In our case, we have both wholesale and retail customers, so we’re just increasing more of the supermarket items and in some cases, we’re not handling those items we know won’t be taken.”

Before this pandemic hit, business in 2020 was off to a good start for Ryeco. That’s not the case now as there’s a lot of anxiety among customers.

“We have a lot of customers who do nothing but sell restaurants who have called us up and told us they don’t know when they will be able to order from us again and don’t know when they will be able to pay you again,” Colace said.

“That’s created a lot of uncertainty. Any money they get from the government now is going to allow them to pay for their employees, but we’re hoping the government lets everyone get back in business soon so we can get people buying again.”

Colace noted that another issue with customer ordering is that there’s no rhyme or reason to when people go to the supermarkets.

“People buy everything and go nuts for three to four days and then they don’t buy nothing for three to four days, so that inconsistency is tough. It’s hard to plan for the unplannable,” he said.

“Because our market is in a big metropolis, and this is where most of the higher cases are, I don’t see restaurants in this area opening for at least a month or two. I don’t see how they’re going to let them open and getting back to normal for a while.”

But the company needs to be prepared for when it is, and that’s the challenge of it all.

One thing it has done recently is it’s installed a warehouse management program, improving traceability and increasing the speed it serves its customers.

“It’s important to service your customers on a daily basis, giving them a value and making sure there are no surprises,” Colace said. “When you take care of people, they come back.”

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