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Trucco looking forward to chestnuts for the holidays

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AJ Trucco Inc., has been involved in chestnuts for most of its existence, with its product grown in the mountains of Campania, Italy.

Chestnuts naturally drop from trees when they're ready, and are collected by the Contadini, the local farmers who use centuries-old methods to get them ready to ship to the United States.

The Italian chestnuts season starts in fall and reaches its peak in mid-December, making them perfect for the holidays.

"It's important for our company, and we've been distributing fresh chestnuts for a long time," said

Nick Pacia, CEO and president of Trucco. “It’s a personal passion for me and a passion for the team as well.”

Although the season is short and chestnuts make up only a small percentage of what the company does overall, it was an important commodity to the founders of Trucco and it’s a tradition that everyone at the company revels in.

The chestnuts are starting to come in now, and Pacia admitted that there was concern this summer because it was hot and little rain, but things started to turn around in September.

“The crop size seems to be OK, but the size profile seems to be on the smaller side compared to the previous year,” Pacia said. “The quality seems to be really good. We just started harvesting and our first arrivals should be here on Oct. 19. We’ll follow with a sea shipment arriving around Nov. 8.”

Success comes from a combination of consistency and keeping a strong reputation with dealing with chestnuts in a first-class way.

“I believe we have done just that for the last 60-plus years that we’ve been in business with chestnuts,” Pacia said. “AJ Trucco brought chestnuts to the Washington Street Market in 1937 and moved to Hunts Point in 1967. In 2018, we opened up a distribution center in New Jersey to continue to tradition.”

The commodity is so important, he added, that a separate area in the distribution center has been carved out just for the chestnuts.

Naturally, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed a lot of things for the company this year, and that’s impacted the category as well. For example, shipments out of Italy are normally plentiful, but this year it’s going to be just once a week because of fewer flights coming out of Italy.

“All of the packaging houses in Italy — including our own — have very strict protocols in place, and so far, everything is looking very good,” Pacia said.

Chestnuts always sell well during the holiday time, but that doesn’t mean that retailers couldn’t do more to showcase them during the winter months.

“With more space and a nice display, there’s no question that consumers will buy more,” Pacia said. “These days everyone is looking for space on the shelves, but because chestnuts are such a specialty item, during Christmas and the holidays, I would like to see retailers make them more visible for consumers.”

For 2020, Trucco has some new packaging for its chestnuts, including some new clamshell packaging that was introduced because of the COVID-19 climate.

In the nut category, the company also distributes walnuts, almonds and more. Overall, the company has been busy in 2020 and the coronavirus impact has been minimal.

“We continue to face challenges, but we are prepared and were one of the few companies to activate safety protocols early, and our team is safe and everyone is doing well,” Pacia said.

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