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Christopher Ranch sees demand for garlic at all-time high

By

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Christopher Ranch offers 100 percent United States-grown garlic to its customers, delivering from coast to coast out of its Gilroy, CA-based headquarters.

Although it's tried to continue being successful doing so during the pandemic, it hasn't been easy.

“Back in March, when states started initially undergoing shelter-in-place orders, essentially every single household raced out to the grocery store at one time, and that caused great turbulence in the garlic market,” said Ken Christopher, executive vice president. “We simply were underequipped to handle that type of demand.”

The company did what it could to satisfy supply chains, but unfortunately, there was something of a national garlic shortage this summer.

“Demand simply outpaced anything we could do,” Christopher said. “We really try not to import garlic at all, but we found ourselves in a position that for some customers that really needed garlic, we were dealing with Spanish garlic, Mexican garlic and it was a bit of a mess.”

Thankfully, Christopher Ranch’s new crop of garlic came in at the end of June and early July, and it was one of the best crops it had ever seen.

“That has perfectly lined up with anticipated demand, at least for right now,” Christopher said. “Normally, we might have half of our garlic perfect for retail and half for foodservice, but since the foodservice side is still pretty weak, we’re preparing for another wave of high retail sales.”

He feels that as winter approaches fewer consumers are going to dine out, so he believes the foodservice numbers will decrease even lower than they’ve been. He also feels retail is once again going to pick up to huge numbers.

“I think there’s a general consensus within America that garlic is healthy and is a superfood, the kind of thing that keeps your system going,” Christopher said. “We like to talk about the flavor here at Christopher Ranch. People are just drawn to it.”

As of late October, the sales model has stabilized as Christopher Ranch has gotten into a new rhythm that focuses a lot more on fresh garlic and less on restaurants, but as 2021 approaches, the strategy is going to return to a historic focus.

“With New Year’s resolutions, more people tend to consume garlic,” Christopher said. “We are building up inventory right now in anticipation of a very strong final quarter of the year. We feel we are ready to take on whatever demand is out there.”

Organic garlic continues to be an increasingly important part of Christopher Ranch’s business and has increased 10-fold from when it started more than a decade ago.

“That continues to grow every single year,” Christopher said. “Demand is simply extraordinary for it. If I look at weekly reports, I see that organic demand is 30 percent higher than it was at this point last year. In agriculture, as a mature industry, that’s simply unheard of.”

In the past, the company had to rely on organic imports from Mexico or Argentina, but in 2020, it’s been able to offer 100 percent California-grown organic garlic.

“We understand we’re never going to be the cheapest garlic, but we want to make sure we are a prestige brand, that we have the best garlic and our consumers know exactly where it’s coming from,” Christopher said. “So, we are doubling down on investing in increased organic production.”

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