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Riveridge expects large volume of Evercrisps in 2021

By

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It was more than three decades ago when Riveridge Produce Marketing was founded in Sparta, MI, by three partners — Don Armock, Roger Geers and the late Dan Rock Sr. — who shared a background in Michigan produce, and a vision for a different way of doing business.

Today, the vertically-integrated apple grower/packer/shipper/marketer represents about 50 percent of Michigan's fresh apple crop and is leading the way in food safety, new orchard technology and innovation in sales and marketing.

"Winter apples are an important product for Riveridge because it is part of keeping Michigan apples available year-round," said Trish Taylor, marketing manager for the company. "The category has evolved in that there really isn't so much of a 'winter' apple anymore. With today's storage techniques in controlled atmosphere rooms, we're able to provide apples that eat like apples right from harvest. However, there are certain varieties that mellow a bit with storage and become even more flavorful with time stored such as Evercrisp."

In fact, Evercrisp apples are expected to have a lot of volume this year.

"Evercrisp apples are shipping now," Taylor said. "Consumers looking for a Michigan apple that reminds them of Honeycrisp but has a great storage life in their refrigerator crisper will really enjoy this variety. For people doing fewer shopping trips and storing more produce at home, they can feel confident keeping Evercrisp on hand."

She noted the quality has been good across the season and things are storing well and as more consumers discover this apple created from with Honeycrisp/Fuji patronage, it will gain even more favor.

Kari Soldaat, sales director of Riveridge Marketing, noted the demand for apples this season has been extremely strong.

"Whether it be retail driven or USDA driven, the demand has exceeded initial expectations for the season," she said. "The industry as whole, is down double-digits in holdings due to a smaller crop than recent years, which coupled with strong demand has kept pricing stable."

Additionally, the company has noticed a shift in purchase behavior at retail from bulk to consumer packs like pouch or poly bags.

"Due to the pandemic, consumers are spending less time in-store and these packs are easier to grab and go or simply pick out on an online ordering app," Soldaat said. "That makes it important to merchandise pouch and poly bags front-and-center so consumers can easily spot them and put them in their cart as they move more strategically through the store."

Being located in Sparta, Riveridge operates in a unique growing region in West Michigan in part due to the elevation, proximity to Lake Michigan and ideal soil conditions.

"To be successful, a solid quality control program and food-safety program needs to be in place, along with strong relationships with growers who utilize CA rooms," Taylor said. "The biggest opportunity is being available year-round with varieties that are in demand."

Apples also are great sellers in winter as more people start to think about health and fitness at the beginning of the new year.

"Being available year-round, tasting just as they do in fall, consumers can keep apples in their refrigerators for a quick, healthy snack at home or on the go," Taylor said.

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