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CMI Orchards anticipates trends to support growers and retailers

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CMI Orchards, its growers, partners and retailers are enjoying success built on accurate trend forecasts first identified years ago.

“CMI Orchards is built on a culture of looking toward the future. This ethos is driven by our owners and embraced by our entire team, including our growers, partners, and retailers. Our shared expertise and emphasis on data analysis has helped us identify consumer and retail trends, then position our efforts to maximize those opportunities,” said Bob Mast, president of CMI Orchards.



One previously identified opportunity included the shift to online shopping. “We began to really focus on ways to support retailers recognizing that a large portion of shoppers were already migrating to online purchasing versus in-store. When COVID hit last spring, we were well positioned to pivot to the changes in consumer shopping habits,” said Rochelle Bohm, brand manager for CMI Orchards.

CMI Orchards was the first Washington apple shipper to work directly with Instacart to sell bagged product. “We began partnering directly with Instacart just over a year ago. It’s a partnership we plan to continue to grow as we see online shopping continue to increase,” said CMI Orchards’ Marketing Specialist Danelle Huber.

Another forecasted trend was the emphasis placed on digital advertising. “Several years ago, CMI Orchards invested heavily in understanding digital advertising channels to support online and

traditional shopping. We established relationships with partners who have helped us execute extremely successful digital campaigns. Together, this focus drives retail sales because we're able to very effectively reach consumers when they are ready to make a purchasing decision," said Huber. "This effort has resulted in a significant and measurable ROI for our growers."

In late 2019, CMI Orchards launched a digital marketing strategy designed to directly target apple consumers and drive retail sales. In the most recent campaign, the participating retailer's apple category sales dollars grew 14.8 percent over the previous year, with KIKU and Kanzi apple sales showing a 28 percent growth during the promotion period.

"A big focus at CMI Orchards is to strategically forecast marketplace dynamics 10 years from now. This helps us to really understand how to best help our growers produce the very best fruit possible in the most efficient manner to meet anticipated consumer demands," said George Harter, vice president of marketing for CMI Orchards.

The combination of investment in digital advertising and increased demand required the company to identify new grower partners.

"In the past few years, we've added three growers to the CMI Orchards' family to help meet demand," said Bohm. The new partners include Independent Warehouse, Yakima Fruit and Pine Canyon Growers. "Each partner was selected for the exceptional quality of their fruit and ability to consistently cover year-round supply of conventional and organic fruit."

Another trend identified early by the team at CMI Orchards is the shift in consumer preference to purchasing pre-packaged fruit. In addition to providing fruit in poly and pouch bags, the size of the bags has increased. "Consumers are making fewer trips to the store with larger purchases due to COVID. They're buying all their groceries at once, and they want enough fruit to last their family until the next trip. To meet this shift in demand, we've increased the package volume," explained Harter. "We're not only offering large volume packaging for our core apples, but we also have branded apple packaging so you don't have to worry about deflating the category — you can still capture the incremental sales that branded apples deliver."

CMI Orchards' growers have all invested heavily in technology to deliver products that exceed consumer expectations. From robotic tray fillers to soil monitoring software, the growers understand that innovation is a key component to success.

"This has become an industry that uses technology at every step. At Yakima Fruit, sales drive many of our technology-related decisions. Shifting consumer preferences and a need to maintain a competitive price point leads us to continually look for new innovation that can help us maintain quality," said Mike Wilcox, co-owner of Yakima Fruit.

In addition, CMI Orchards has continued to increase its supply of organic fruit to meet retail and consumer demand. The company's overall organic apple production is up over 25 percent compared to last year, and organic pear production is up 73 percent. Additional growth is expected in the new year. CMI Orchards continues to offer the largest selection of branded apples in the United States.

"Moving forward, we're going to continue to research and look a few years down the road to anticipate where the industry is headed. This commitment has proven to provide the greatest success for our growers, partners, and retailers," said Harter.

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