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Organic fresh produce sales up, top \$2 billion for Q1

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Total organic fresh produce sales for the first quarter of 2021 saw a continuation of last year's growth, increasing by 9.3 percent from the same period in 2020 and topping \$2.2 billion for the quarter, according to the Q1 2021 Organic Produce Performance Report released exclusively by Organic Produce Network and Category Partners.

Organic fresh produce sales and volume in the first quarter of 2021 maintained a trend established in March of last year, with elevated sales across the entire supermarket, as consumers continued at-home eating in light of restaurant closures. However, moving into the second quarter of 2021, it is apparent that the pandemic closures are beginning to ease, and the question has now become if — and how fast — consumers will return to their pre-COVID-19 food purchasing behaviors.

The 9.3 percent year-over-year sales growth of organic fresh produce for the first quarter of 2021 outpaced conventional produce sales, which grew by only 2.9 percent. Organic fresh produce volume grew by 5.7 percent, while conventional volume saw a decline of 0.6 percent.

The top 10 organic produce categories continued to perform very well, with eight of the top 10 categories generating increases in both dollars and volume. Of these top 10 categories, only organic carrots and apples failed to generate year-over-year dollar and volume gains during the first quarter.

The top 10 organic categories drove 72 percent of total organic volume and 70 percent of total organic sales. In conventional produce, these same categories drive only 64 percent of total sales and 67 percent of volume.

“Once again, sales of organic fresh produce continue to be a major growth opportunity for retailers across the country. At the same time, as the country enters a post-COVID environment, with restaurants reopening and other foodservice options available, it appears the double-digit growth rate will be slowing,” said Matt Seeley, CEO of Organic Produce Network.

Packaged salads remain the single largest driver of organic dollars, accounting for 17 percent of all organic sales. During the first quarter of 2021, packaged salad dollars saw a year-over-year increase of 9.5 percent. Organic berries have become a key winter category, driving over 15 percent of total organic produce dollars during the first quarter. The first quarter of 2021 was a strong quarter for berries, generating a year-over-year sales increase of 8.8 percent.

“Within the top 10 categories, fresh herbs (up 28.2 percent), lettuce (up 34.7 percent), and tomatoes (up 14.7 percent) generated the largest percentage gains in dollars,” said Steve Lutz, senior vice president for insights and innovation at Category Partners. “In terms of Q1 volume, bananas, carrots, and apples rank as the top drivers of organic volume at retail, generating a remarkable 37 percent of total organic volume. Bananas alone drive 17 percent of all organic volume.”

Year-over-year organic sales and volume increases during the first quarter of 2021 were strong in every region of the U.S. The West and Northeast are historically the strongest regions for organic produce sales and the two regions generated the highest increases in dollar growth.

The Q1 2021 Organic Produce Performance Report utilized Nielsen retail scan data covering total

food sales and outlets in the US over the months of January, February, and March. The full Q1 2021 Organic Produce Performance Report is available on the Organic Produce Network website [here](#).

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