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## Babé Farms delves more into retail

By

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Babé Farms Inc., is unique in that it grows a vast spectrum of specialty vegetables, with more than 70 different varieties.

“With everything from colorful root vegetables to baby head lettuces, our product line is ever-expanding as we look to keep up with the trends in foodservice and fresh produce,” said Matt Hiltner, marketing coordinator for the Santa Maria, CA-based company.

“You would be hard-pressed to find another grower out there that grows as many items as Babé does on a year-round basis. We pride ourselves on being a one-stop-shop for our customers for all things specialty vegetables.”

Coming into 2021, the company’s leaders weren’t sure what to expect. However, given the gradual reopening across the country, business has been better than it could have hoped for.

“The foodservice industry is steadily recovering, and things are starting to feel normal around here for the first time in a while,” Hiltner said. “We are hoping things keep trending in this direction.”

Some of Babé Farms’ top items this year have been its root crops (rainbow carrots, baby beets, specialty radishes, and Tokyo turnips), baby bok choy (Shanghai), kohlrabi, and baby head lettuces.

“One item that has seen significant growth is our stunning, golden Blonde Frisée,” Hiltner said. “This gorgeous chicory is coveted by chefs for its ultra-blanchéd heart and delicate yellow tendrils. Each head is virtually a 100-percent usable product. Blonde Frisée is an ideal addition to salads and a world class garnish to any dish. We attribute its recent rise to a reinvigorated foodservice industry and renewed sense of creativity among chefs.”

The company is happy to announce that it will once again be a participating location in SEEAG’s Santa Barbara County Farm Day on Sept. 18.

“Farm Day is a family-friendly event that gives individuals the opportunity to learn about the farms in

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their own backyard,” Hiltner said. “On Farm Day, attendees can explore everything from berry fields to livestock ranches and wineries, all while having the option to shop for fresh and local products at many different farm locations.”

Babé Farms will be hosting an open house at its production office in Santa Maria, with a Farmers Market-style set-up, displaying the company’s brightest specialty vegetables.

“Staff will be on hand to share the Babé Farms story, discuss our farming operation, specialty vegetables and answer questions,” Hiltner said. “Attendees will even be able to select a small assortment of vegetables to take home with them. We will also have activities such as cornhole and product demonstrations for guests to participate in. Babé Farms invites anyone who is interested to join us for Farm Day 2021.”

With the foodservice shutdown during the pandemic, delving more into the retail space was essential for Babé Farms’ business.

“One positive development that came from the pandemic was that it forced most of us to spend more time cooking at home,” Hiltner said. “As a product of that, we noticed more of a willingness from consumers to purchase specialties in order to recreate dishes from their favorite restaurants or that they see on social media. We see a real opportunity to continue growing Babé Farms’ retail presence as we move into the second half of the year.”

Plus, since getting more involved on the retail side, the company has seen tons of interest in its produce from consumers.

“Intriguing items such as our baby colorful carrots, vibrant purple ninja radishes, and mind boggling Romanesco cauliflower have garnered the most attention among shoppers,” Hiltner said. “The convenience factor goes a long way with our customers — they love being able to purchase all their specialties in one place, only having to schedule one stop for their trucks.”

As of early July, the overall quality of crops was looking “excellent across the board.”

“We are thrilled to be entering into our local growing season on a number of our seasonal specialties including romanesco, celery root, baby squash, and baby purple and green Brussels sprouts,” Hiltner said.

“Babé is always willing to bring in new items and run field trials at our customers’ request in order to better serve them,” he added.

*Photo: Some of Babé Farms’ top items this year have been its root crops (rainbow carrots, baby beets, specialty radishes, and Tokyo turnips), baby bok choy (Shanghai), kohlrabi, and baby head lettuces.*

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