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Baloian Farms offers unique wet veg program

By

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With its Fresno, CA, location, Baloian Farms offers a strategic option for the fall to spring western vegetable production period. While most California-based leafy green vegetable grower-shippers tend to have a year-round program that transitions from the coast to the desert with the seasons, Baloian starts in the fall and transitions to the Coachella Valley for the winter and early spring.



Jay Angulo

Veteran salesman Jay Angulo noted that the fourth generation, vertically integrated family farm does provide high-quality produce year-round, but its leafy greens program is seasonal. With a strong focus on Bell peppers, Baloian Farms also offers other fresh vegetables such as eggplant, mini peppers, and squash as well as a wet veg program including leaf, romaine, and cauliflower.

“What sets Baloian Farms apart from most, is that we are a year-round supplier with our pepper program, and we are also in the final stages of bringing to market our year-round programs to supply eggplant, chilies, zucchini, cucumbers, yellow squash and hard squash,” Angulo said, noting that the company grows throughout the state of California and Mexico, starting in Thermal, CA, where the production begins in April and stretches through the end of June. After that, production moves north to Bakersfield, Huron, Fresno, Stockton, Hollister, Oxnard and then back to Thermal in the fall. Once the cold weather starts creeping in, Baloian transitions to several growing districts in Mexico — in the states of Baja California, Sonora and Sinaloa.

“This month Baloian Farms will be celebrating over 50 years of growing premium quality leaf and wet veg crops,” said Angulo, who has been with the firm for more than 16 years. “We built a reputation for servicing the industry by supplying reliable leaf and wet veg. To achieve this, we strategically schedule our fall programs to start in Fresno before transitioning to the Coachella Valley which will carry the winter program through spring. This allows us to fulfill our customers’ needs for romaine, romaine hearts, green leaf, red leaf, spinach, napa cabbage, Brussel sprouts, green onions, bok choy, celery, cauliflower, and daikon.



Drilling down a bit deeper, Angulo said “more and more, customers seem to be getting away from some varieties. The biggest notable there is red leaf and butter to me. A lot of consumers are buying ‘living’ butter at the stores and shying away from the traditional fresh 24-count butter pack. We do pack 12x3 count bags and 7x6 count romaine hearts bags, so we do have a value-added component. That is a section of our program that we have devoted some attention to over the past few years and our customers have responded by increasing their purchases on those items.”

He added that the demand for romaine hearts continues to increase. “We’re thrilled to be able to bring that product to market and look forward to increasing our volume there,” he said. “Consumers seem to be attracted to more items that are bagged, wrapped, so increasing romaine hearts, or beginning to individually sleeve romaine, leaf would be something that you might see the industry as a whole start to move toward.” Angulo said the company has a good reputation for all its veg items but takes particular pride in a few base core items. “Baloian Farms is known to have excellent quality in all our packs. But, in particular, I think we have some of the best cauliflower, spinach, romaine, and romaine hearts around and our customers really enjoy receiving our Pam Pak label.”

Those customers cut across the supply chain. “There is great diversity in our customer base,” he noted. “Retail, foodservice, wholesale, as well as meal kit companies are all important and meaningful customers to our program.”

He added that customer service is the firm’s calling card. “We invest time in getting to know our customers, their particular packs, timetables, desired loading locations or delivery dates, and weekly usage numbers. We take all that information and design a service level tailored for each customer that involves lots of forecasting and advanced planning that can overcome the most difficult supply positions, tough freight situations, holidays, or any other curveballs that produce companies can and

do experience on any given day.”

Angulo said it has been an interesting year with COVID-19, but he opined no more so for Baloian than anyone else. “Labor is definitely an issue. High freight cost and lack of availability of freight is a concern heading into next year. Foodservice doesn’t appear to be completely ‘back to normal’ from what we can tell.”

The company has added a new consolidation hub in Los Angeles to go along with its California distribution centers in Fresno and Thermal, and its Arizona location in Nogales.

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