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Giddings Berries USA in expansion mode

By

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A year after opening its U.S. office in Monterey, CA, Giddings Berries USA continues to expand its presence as it builds out its staff and prepares for increased volume both immediately and over the next several years.

While Santiago, Chile-based Giddings Fruit has had a presence in the United States for a handful of years, it first opened the Monterey office for its U.S. subsidiary in October of 2020 with industry veterans Ian Grigg as the chief operating officer and Helena Beckett as director of sales. In early October, Beckett told *The Produce News* the U.S. staff now numbers nine with the company in the midst of its organic blueberry season in Peru, which will soon be followed by production from Chile.



Helena Beckett

Giddings' production from these two countries is steadily increasing with major volume expansion expected in the near future. "We started with organic blueberries from Peru and Chile, but we are in preparation for much greater supply from other countries," she said, adding that Giddings is building its North American grower base. The sheer size of the company's planned berry production in the next few years will be many times greater than that coming from its South American farms.

Moving forward, Giddings Fruit, a vertically integrated company with facilities throughout North and South America, is planning on representing a full line of berries in the United States through its Giddings Berries USA entity. When the Monterey office was opened a year ago, the reasoning was simple: be closer to its customers and simplify the logistics piece.

In early October, Beckett said the firm's current Peruvian organic blueberry production is in the middle of its season with peak shipments to the U.S. market continuing through mid-November. "This is a good year in terms of both volume and quality," she said.

On that same day, the company's first air shipments of organic blueberries from Chile arrived in the United States. Beckett said the bulk of the crop will come via ocean liner with the first arrivals expected around Nov. 1 and continuing well into March of 2022. "We are expecting to have promotable volume of organic blueberries from early November through early December and then again from mid-January to March. We will still have supplies from mid-December to mid-January, but the volume won't be as great."

While the company does expect to ship more volume of organic blueberries to the United States this season than it did last year, Beckett said, "the emphasis is on quality not volume," as it builds its U.S. program.

She said the U.S. appetite for both organic and conventional blueberries continue to expand, especially because of the healthful reputation that blueberries enjoy. While Beckett lamented that the worldwide pandemic is still in our midst, she did say that it has heightened interest in eating healthy, which has helped boost demand for organic blueberries.

The pandemic also continues to disrupt the normal flow of business. The problem with container ships getting unloaded in the side-by-side Los Angeles and Long Beach ports has caused Giddings to shift its incoming West Coast business a bit north to the port of Hueneme near Oxnard, CA. That port has different dimensions, so it has different capabilities. "It can't take the larger vessels, so it primarily unloads automobiles and produce," Beckett said, noting that its unload time is only a few days compared to the weeks it is taking in Los Angeles and Long Beach. Giddings also utilizes the East Coast ports of Philadelphia and Miami, giving it several different ports of entry from which to service its customers.

Beckett noted that the pandemic also continues to alter the way produce suppliers are interacting with their customers. As a relatively new company, the Giddings Berries team was very much looking forward to the face-to-face meetings that the Produce Marketing Association Fresh Summit in New Orleans was sure to supply. "PMA was going to be a huge coming out party for us," she said. "This is a lost opportunity for us to get in front of our customers and introduce ourselves to others."

Beckett said the team is anticipating attending one or two additional regional produce shows now that PMA has been canceled. However, she added that the produce industry has become quite adept at using the internet to communicate and she is certain that will continue. "Zoom is an accepted form of communication now," she said. "Even though we are excited to get back on the road and see customers in person, I don't think we will be doing that as much... and that is okay. That's a silver lining, if there is one."

The Giddings Berries sales executive added that the company fully supports the decision to cancel PMA. She noted it would not have been appropriate to go to New Orleans in light of both the pandemic and the hurricane. But she said that city still needs the economic boost that could have come with the PMA convention. As a company, Giddings is identifying specific non-profits to work with in New Orleans to donate at least some of the dollars it would have spent at the convention.

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