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Peter Condakes Company keeping it positive

By

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Peter Condakes Co. Inc., a full-line distributor of produce specializing in tomatoes, has been a mainstay in the New England Produce Center since 1974.

Peter John Condakes, president and co-owner of the Chelsea, MA-based company, goes into every day with an optimistic view of business.

“I look at things being not too bad,” he noted, when asked to describe the uncertain 2021 that the company has experienced. “Things are trending in the direction of normal. I’m not sure it’s 100 percent normal, but sometimes it’s even hard to remember what that was.”



Peter John Condakes and

Stephen Condakes.

The company shifted its strategy quickly at the beginning of the pandemic, putting the brakes on to figure out what was happening, but it eventually started to make some sense.

“We did the best we could buying against what demand was out there,” Condakes said. “It’s basically what we always did, only the pandemic influenced the demand. We had a good summer, and it extended into September and a little in October.”

Still, the company is feeling the effect of November, which isn’t that unusual for the Peter Condakes Co., considering the company works with tomatoes more than anything else, and Thanksgiving isn’t known for its tomato-inspired dishes.

“When was the last time you had tomato stuffing in your turkey? It’s just not a fall item, historically,” he said. “People are more focused on squash, yams and celery.”

The astronomical freight rates are the biggest issue for the company as 2021 comes to an end.

“We’re able to get trucks to transport the products, so that’s not the problem, as long as you’re willing to pay for it,” Condakes said. “It’s when you want them at a certain price, that’s when it becomes a situation. Relative to historic levels, there is a shortage of transportation available.”

It’s also feeling the effects of the labor shortage with Condakes noting the company had numerous positions to fill between April and August in the tomato repacking plant, with four positions that went vacant during the busiest time.

“We were finally able to fill them in early September,” he said. “It’s not like there are plenty of people out there, but there’s more than there were.”

Recently, there’s been a lot of rain in Florida and that’s influenced a little bit of where the company is buying product from, but again, that’s something that’s not too unusual.

“It could create pockets of challenged quality, but only for a little bit,” Condakes said.

Condakes has found the best way to keep morale up is by getting on the line with employees and helping.

“When we were short people and the product started to be a bit challenged, I was on the production line sorting product” he said. “You have to show them that we’re all in this together. I would say most of the family businesses in any market around the country would say the same thing. You can’t just sit in your office and watch what’s going on, and you need to lend a hand. They get a charge out of the boss being out there.”

Looking ahead to 2022, Condakes, expects to keep his positive attitude and roll with the punches inside the produce center.

“You just have to stay in communication with your customers, see what they are up to and what they see new, and how they are feeling things out,” he said. “I think most of them are feeling a little bit better on an overall basis.”

He plans on continuing to promote the company to customers and help them pick up business and keep that good attitude all year long.

“You try to be reasonable with the customers you deal with,” he said. “Be truthful and honest with the description you give them and hopefully hit the right price point for them so they buy from you.”

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