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Val Verde touts cauliflower, other veg crops

By

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Frank Schuster, owner of [Val Verde Vegetable Co.](#) in McAllen, TX, said that for years he has been saying that his company is the largest cauliflower grower in Texas. “Nobody has ever challenged that, so I think it’s true,” he told *The Produce News*. “I know I have the largest cauliflower program in the Rio Grande Valley.”

Val Verde Vegetable Co. is a third-generation, family-owned grower, packer and produce shipping company that was founded more than three decades ago by Schuster. The Schuster farming legacy began long before that when Frank Sr. began farming in 1947, establishing one of the oldest farming operations still currently operating in Texas.

As the company name implies, Val Verde specializes in vegetables with cauliflower being its top crop followed by cabbage, and a host of other items. It mostly sells vegetables grown in the valley but it also represents product from Mexico. In fact, on this early November day, Schuster was waiting on a load of iceberg lettuce from Mexico to arrive. That was particularly noteworthy as iceberg lettuce from California had hit the \$50 per carton mark in late October and was maintaining a very high market price as Schuster spoke. He was looking forward to taking advantage of the hot market.

He said a very good market for vegetables will be necessary this winter as rising costs have plagued

grower-shippers. “Everything has gone up in price,” he said, rattling off a list of items that have been impacted. “Pallets are up; nitrogen fertilizers are up 250 percent; phosphate is up 150 percent; Roundup is up 300 percent; transportation rates are through the roof; fuel costs are up.”

As a further illustration, Schuster noted that he has had an order for 30-inch plastic pipe on hold from the local supply store since July of 2020. “When I place the order, it was \$21 per foot,” he said. “They still haven’t been able to fill that order but right now my cost would be \$80 per foot. That the most glaring example of rising costs that I can think of.”

But despite those challenges, Schuster is anticipating a fairly good winter deal. He sees no major increase in production from South Texas and he said current f.o.b. prices are pretty good on most commodities.

Speaking of the past 18 months in which the coronavirus played a big role in everyone’s operations, Schuster said there is some level of normalcy returning to the Rio Grande Valley. “Things are getting back to normal,” he said. “The number of incidences of COVID-19 have gone down and we don’t have to wear masks anymore. Last year was a nightmare but this year’s it has been good. We are looking forward to a good year.”

He said winter vegetable volume was beginning to ramp up and Val Verde will be in peak production with its vegetables from December through March, followed by the arrival of the well-known Texas onion crop.

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