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Atlanta fulfills an essential role for the produce industry

By

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Atlanta is known as an exciting and vibrant city that offers people a great quality of life, lots of things to do, world-famous restaurants, and the World Series champion Atlanta Braves, but it also plays a vital role in terms of produce.

“Atlanta has been a great produce town for a long time,” said Andrew Scott, director of marketing and business development for Nickey Gregory Co. “There’s been a state farmers market here since the original location was built in the mid-1950s, and there was another one before that on the west side of Atlanta.”

Another contributor to the city’s key role in produce is the interstate infrastructure.

“It’s got major interstates rolling through here, you can get anywhere across the southeast, and probably more than half the population in the U.S. overnight out of Atlanta,” Scott said. “Of course, Atlanta was built on the train yards and there are train tracks that still go right through downtown Atlanta, right by Mercedes-Benz Stadium, it’s something else. The city was kind of built on transportation logistics.”

He also described Atlanta as a city with a lot of transplants, a lot of Fortune 500 companies, and a thriving dining scene.

Atlanta’s produce business is rooted in the Atlanta Farmers Market, which at 150 acres is one of the largest markets of its kind. Located in Forrest Park, the Atlanta Farmers Market is where various top produce companies operate out of. The market is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In addition to the numerous produce companies operating there, the market showcases a garden center and wholesale and retail activities as it fulfills its role as a major hub and distribution center for fresh produce, not only in the southeast but throughout the United States. It is also home to two restaurants and a USDA Federal-State office.

All of that serves the Georgia Department of Agriculture’s mission to protect consumers, promote agriculture locally and globally, and support its customers through education, technology, and a professional workforce.

Of course, as thriving as Atlanta is, its produce professionals have also dealt with numerous challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 2021 has seen issues regarding transportation.

“It’s kind of difficult for buyers to order product during the pandemic, because there’s been so many spikes up and down — mainly up — with usages,” Scott said. “So, trying to navigate and trying to buy right, it’s been much more difficult and interesting, especially for our buyers too.”

Availability of product is another challenging issue Atlanta's produce professionals have had to deal with.

"There are labor shortages on the grower-shipper side getting product, so that that's tighten things up, as well versus having an abundance of product," Scott said. "It's all around, this labor deal."

Despite these hurdles, Atlanta's produce professionals have continued their important work, and while challenges remain, there is no doubt they will continue to overcome those obstacles and make sure that Georgia's capital city continues to serve the needs of growers, shippers, retailers, and consumers throughout the United States.

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