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Israeli pomegranates to extend promotional season into March

As supplies of late-season pomegranates from California begin to dwindle, [John Vena Inc.](#), a specialty produce wholesaler based in Philadelphia, has stepped up volumes of Israeli fruit through its import partnership with EDOM Fruits, an experienced grower cooperative specializing in supplying exotic fruits to some of Europe's largest retailers.

Israel is in the height of its main season for the preferred Wonderful variety as we enter January. According to John Vena, president of John Vena Inc., "The timing of the Israeli season is a perfect complement to U.S. production. Just as California fruit loses steam, we welcome the first arrivals of main season varieties out of Israel. This allows a continuous supply of premium fruit through March."

Weather conditions were favorable in Israel this year, allowing fruit to develop good size and color. John Vena Inc. is offering fruit as large as 1.8 pounds per piece, as long as supplies last, with containers arriving weekly.

"I've been working with pomegranates out of Israel for a number of years now and I'm impressed with the quality of our fruit this year," said Vena. "Israeli pomegranates must be cold-treated before shipment to the US, which can affect color — but so far this season the color has been excellent. Strong pigment with deep red tones. I'm sure this is in part from the professional packing work of our partners at EDOM — they are specialists in producing premium packs for export."

While costs of transportation have skyrocketed, the ability to utilize sea freight instead of air has allowed the import program to continue to offer value in the US market.

Retail Readiness

Unlike domestic pomegranate production, which favors double-layer packs, Israel, which primarily serves the European and Asian markets, uses a four- or five-kilogram tray pack. The smaller pack size allows for more flexibility in purchasing, particularly for retailers. Also enhancing retail appeal, Vena reports that this is the first year EDOM is offering a sticker with a scannable Databar UPC for improved accuracy at the register.

According to John Vena Inc. Director of Marketing Emily Kohlhas, Wonderful is the "gold standard" pomegranate variety in the global marketplace due to its large size, well-formed arils, high Brix, juiciness, red color and long shelf life. It is the ideal variety for commercial fresh market production and preferred by consumers. While Israel offers other varieties, John Vena Inc. will be sourcing exclusively Wonderful EDOM label fruit in order to ensure premium quality.

The season for Israeli pomegranates allows retailers to capitalize on the emphasis on health and wellness that follows the indulgent holiday season, with availability extending into March. According to Harvard Medical School, pomegranates have three times more antioxidant activity than green tea or red wine — a fact that consumers are increasingly aware of.

"A lot of work has been done to establish pomegranates in the consumer market, so the awareness is there," said Kohlhas. "But it's important to focus on the benefits of whole fruit over processed pomegranate products. Arils are preferred over juice from a nutrition standpoint for their fiber content, and fresh arils are preferred over pre-processed ones that have begun to deteriorate in flavor and

texture. The superior eating experience benefits the consumer, and the ease of handling whole poms versus arils with an extremely short shelf life benefits the retailer — a win-win!”

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