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Atlas anticipating strong date futures

By

Tim Linden

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[Atlas Produce & Distribution Inc.](#) has been in the date deal for 20 years with the company growing and selling dates out of its Coachella, CA, facility under its Fresh Energy brand.

“The main variety we sell is the Medjool, but we also carry pitted Deglet Noors, and Zahidis, and we do offer value-added products such as date rolls and chopped dates,” said Luke Fountain, a sales representative for the organization. “Every item we carry is offered both in organic and conventional.”

He noted that the date category “has seen tremendous growth due to several healthy lifestyle trends such as substituting sugar out of recipes in favor of dates. Atlas has seen close to 30 percent growth year-over-year in our sales for the past five years, which is awesome. We always plan for sales growth, and we have more plantings coming online this next harvest that will produce fruit to keep up with demand.”

Atlas has made some packing line improvements since last season to keep up with demand by being more efficient, more sustainable and more cost effective. “We are very excited about the innovation we can implement in our packinghouse that allows us to pack fruit quicker and cheaper,” Fountain said, adding that these savings are always passed on to retailers.

With coronavirus issues appearing to dimmish, he said Atlas is very much looking forward to the traditional sales spike that comes every spring. “After the last two years, I feel like we can conquer anything. Due to the struggles of freight as of late, we have contracted out secure lines to the Midwest and the East Coast as well as introduced new distribution to these regions to keep costs low and shipping times at a minimal,” he said. “We are always preparing months in advance for Easter and Ramadan, and I always encourage our retailers to do the same.”

He added that the company’s “Fresh Energy 24 x 1-pound Medjool Date offering is always our best seller this time of year as it comes in a ready-display shipper. Retailers then don’t have to waste time at the store level cutting open boxes and placing individual units on the shelf. Our ready-display shipper also has key selling points to encourage first time buyers as well,” he said, adding that it is perfect as a secondary display unit.

Atlas offers two different floor displays, both drop bin and shelf displays, as well as three different ready display master cases. “We also offer a promotional calendar to all of our retailers for the holidays,” Fountain said.

Speaking of the impacts of COVID-19 over the past couple of years, Fountain said it “slowed us down briefly due to social distancing as well as added precautions for our employees in the packhouse. We have also seen increased shipping times for anything going by boat but most of our

business is in the Americas. The ports on the West did make it more difficult for our material suppliers to ship plastic but we were able to think ahead and stock up on the necessary tubs and lids before it got too bad. It's always important to be proactive and think ahead versus reactive."

Like virtually everyone in the industry, Fountain expressed optimism about the future. "Consumers are using dates in everything and for everything," he said. "They are in cereals, protein bars, energy balls, and consumers are always finding new ways to implement them in their diets. Every day our company is tagged on a social media post of dates being used all over the country. People want to be healthy and take control of their sugar intake, so they eat dates for their multiple health benefits."

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About Tim Linden |

Tim Linden grew up in a produce family as both his father and grandfather spent their business careers on the wholesale terminal markets in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Tim graduated from San Diego State University in 1974 with a degree in journalism. Shortly thereafter he began his career at The Packer where he stayed for eight years, leaving in 1983 to join Western Growers as editor of its monthly magazine. In 1986, Tim launched Champ Publishing as an agricultural publishing specialty company.

Today he is a contract publisher for several trade associations and writes extensively on all aspects of the produce business. He began writing for The Produce News in 1997, and currently wears the title of Editor at Large.

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