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Vee's Marketing pushing sustainably packaged Brown Bag Potatoes

By

Keith Loria

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[Vee's Marketing](#) began operations in 1990, and today distributes onions and potatoes all over the United States and Canada.

"We are heavier to retail, but we do some foodservice as well," said Jason Vee, president of the Superior, WI-based company. "Our volume varies. In the summer, when onions are busiest, we probably do 60-70 loads per week. Then late summer, when Minnesota potatoes get going, we probably do 20-30 loads of potatoes as well."

Having been at this for a while, Vee noted that the produce industry isn't for everyone, and the company has survived thanks to strong workers and a savvy mindset.

"It's good business, but we earn every penny," he said. "Every season, district and personnel changes bring new challenges."

The past couple of years have been up and down with many challenges caused by the pandemic, and Vee characterized 2020 as one of the strangest, hardest, and most lucrative times for Vee's Marketing.

"2021 was good. We had high summer markets in onions," Vee said. "Trucking was still as difficult as it was in 2020, but we are built for challenges and difficulty. 2020 was a wild ride. I didn't realize how much heavier Vee's Marketing was to retail than foodservice until the pandemic hit and foodservice stopped, and retail doubled."

For the current season, on the onion side, size profile in the Northwest is small.

"Yields are down slightly as a result," Vee said. "And smaller sizes will be less expensive than larger sizes."

Other challenges exist as well, with inflation being one of the biggest trouble spots right now.

"The higher cost of farming has pushed contract prices up around 30 percent from just a couple years ago," Vee said. "Stores are looking for discount items for ads and not finding the discounted prices they are expecting."

One thing that Vee has noticed recently is more of an interest from retailers in sustainable packaging, as consumers have gravitated toward a more earth-friendly mindset.

"We have spent the last two years working with our paper and machine suppliers to create a

sustainable package solution for potatoes, and I think we really nailed it with our new label, Brown Bag Potatoes,” Vee said. “Seventy percent of consumers say they are willing to pay a little more for products in sustainable packaging. I think stores can create more interest in otherwise not-so-interesting products like potatoes by leaning into well-branded potatoes in recyclable and compostable packaging.”

Potatoes, he believes, are where a lot of the company’s growth will be over the next year.

“We are pushing really hard to get Brown Bag Potatoes in front of retail buyers,” Vee said, noting the sustainable packaged products are shipped out of Long Prairie, MN.

That’s one of the messages the company looked to get across at this year’s IFPA Global Produce & Floral Show.

“We have never been an active trade show participant. We have been to the shows, but this was our first time with a booth and being part of the Fresh Ideas Showcase,” Vee said. “I’m excited to see what kind of impact a good showing will have for our business and brand. The sheer size of this show is so impressive. I love the displays, the designs, and the smell of the floral section.”

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About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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