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Delta Fresh diversifying offerings with new blueberry deal

By

John Groh

February 16, 2023

[Delta Fresh Sales](#), based in Nogales, AZ, has carved out a solid reputation as a leading distributor of tomatoes and other Mexican produce items, but this year it is adding a blueberry deal that will further diversify its line of products.

Pedro Balderrama, who is in sales at Delta Fresh, said the decision to add a blueberry program was the result of company officials identifying a good opportunity with an excellent grower in Mexico.

“This is the first time Delta will be offering blueberries,” he said. “The grower we are working with has been supplying the domestic market in Mexico for some time, and we wanted to start an import program to bring fruit to the United States. We are very excited to be working with him, because he is an excellent grower and everything he produces is superb.”

Balderrama said the blueberries are the Biloxi variety and are grown in Mexico in the Guanajuato region and will be marketed under the “Delta Fresh” label. Initial shipments were expected to begin the first week of February.

“We’ll start small in the first year, but we’ll have sufficient volume for promotions,” he said. “We anticipate this will be a successful program and one that we will look to grow in the future.”

Regarding winter vegetable items, Balderrama said it has been somewhat volatile so far this season, with up-and-down markets. Volume was unpredictable earlier in the season due to a spate of cold weather in the growing regions of Mexico.

“Volume slipped slightly a couple of weeks ago and last week we had a cold snap that stretched from northern Sonora all the way down to northern Sinaloa, which affected volume on crops such as soft squash and cucumbers,” Balderrama told *The Produce News* Jan. 30. “But as the weather warms up, production picks up quickly so we’re back to steady volume.”

Balderrama said Delta is adding a veteran squash grower in the coming weeks and will be able to increase offerings on both squash and cucumbers from the Hermosillo region into mid-June.

Delta’s tomato production also saw a few hiccups earlier in the season, especially on Romas, according to Balderrama.

“Our Roma deal from the shadehouses got off to a late start, maybe by around two weeks, but that is not too unusual as sometimes the season can get off to a rough start,” he said. “Now, we are in full stride out of Culiacan, and the Sonora crop will be coming on in early to mid-March, which is normal timing.”

He said quality on the Romas is “outstanding,” and the markets are “decent” with promotable volumes.

Delta’s hothouse vine-ripe tomatoes have been excellent so far this season, said Balderrama.

“We’re running our vine-ripes under glass in Sinaloa, and quality has been great from the start of the deal and should remain that way throughout the season,” he said.

Balderrama said Delta is year-round with Roma tomatoes, and this year it will have a year-round program for vine-ripes as well.

“In the past, we have taken a break on the vine-ripes, but this year we partnered with several growers in central Mexico, which will allow us to offer a year-round program with those,” he said.

Additionally, Delta’s colored Bell pepper deal kicked off in early January and will run into mid-May.

“We’re working with a grower that has an excellent operation in Guaymas,” said Balderrama. “His product is exceptional, and we will be marketing it under his ‘GYS’ label.”

Finally, Balderrama said Delta will promote its melon deal later this spring, and is looking forward to a return to table grapes this year.

“On melons, we’ll have seedless watermelons from late April to mid-June, and cantaloupes will start mid-April and run to mid-May, with fruit coming out of Hermosillo,” he said.

Regarding table grapes, Balderrama said, “We’re excited to be getting back into the grape deal this season with a reputable producer. We had done grapes in the past, but it’s been several years since we last handled them.”

He said Delta will be promoting Early Sweets and early-season Sugar Drops on the green varieties, and the Flame and Passion Fire varieties on the reds. Grapes will be grown in Hermosillo and promoted under the “Delta Fresh” label.

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About John Groh |

John Groh graduated from the University of San Diego in 1989 with a bachelors of arts degree in English. Following a brief stint as a sportswriter covering the New York Giants football team, he joined The Produce News in 1995 as an assistant editor and worked his way up the ranks, becoming publisher in 2006. He and his wife, Mary Anne, live in northern New Jersey in the suburbs of New York City.

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