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**G&R Farms uses creativity and innovation to market Vidalia onions**

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By

Keith Loria

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For [G&R Farms](#), the Vidalia onion category is of the utmost importance as the company has grown into a third-generation, family farm based on consumers love for the product.

“Vidalia’s are a type of mild yellow sweet onion that are the staple of our brand and the backbone of our company and history,” said Steven Shuman, general manager and vice president of sales for the Glennville, GA-based company. “It was the onion that started it all and helped us become a year-



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round sweet onion supplier and a leader in the Vidalia onion industry.”

Through its popularity, G&R Farms has launched other sweet onions and even expanded into other crop categories.

“Vidalia’s are the backbone of who we are, and we owe it to this vegetable for our success,” Shuman said.

The company dates back to 1945 when G&R founder, Walter L. Dasher, had a few acres and a dream — to put Vidalia’s on the map. He worked with retailer Piggly Wiggly as they saw the potential to popularize the new sweet onion later to be named Vidalia.

“After this vegetable became available on the market the word quickly spread among shoppers and the sweet onion became a hit,” Shuman said. “As the years progressed, we began selling the Vidalia nationwide, and even in Canada and beyond. The Vidalia onion has had a massive impact on the entire onion category and sweet onions alone are responsible for 30 percent of the onion category. It is safe to say that thanks to the efforts of our family patriarch this beloved vegetable is a household name.”

Today, G&R Farms grows more than 1,500 acres of Vidalia onions that are available April through August.

“As a third-generation family farm, you can imagine that 1,500 acres didn’t happen overnight and has been able to grow thanks to our commitment to quality and innovation and the trust that our customers have put in us,” Shuman said. “The growth of our Vidalia program also allowed us to expand to a year-round program provider of sweets, which has included Peruvian Sweet Onions for the last 12 years.”

The key to being successful, he noted, is providing good quality and good service.

“It is a priority for us to provide high-quality onions that meet and exceed consumers’ expectations for consistency and flavor,” Shuman said. “When people walk into a store, they are eager to see Vidalia onions and our brand and our product should deliver a positive experience.”

G&R’s marketing strategies are planned to capture the buyer through creativity and innovation.

“The moment a consumer sees our brand they are picturing grilling, baking or eating our onions raw,” Shuman said. “We have been around for 75 years and by keeping with up trends and committing to provide consistent quality our market share in the space will only continue to grow.”

The upcoming crops are looking good and are on target for a normal size and volume. With sandy soils and moderate growing conditions, the company is expecting to have a consistent crop with weather being favorable.

“As harvest season is underway, we will continue to monitor weather conditions, but after checking our progress we are anticipating a great season,” Shuman said. “With the cold snap occurring towards the beginning of wintertime we have been able to have plenty of time to recover with regrowth. As spring approaches, we are keeping a lookout for the shipping date announced by the Vidalia Onion Committee along with the Georgia Department of Ag.”

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As the company transitions into the Vidalia season, in mid-April, its new grading equipment and packing line will be installed, further solidifying G&R's commitment to quality.

"Through the accuracy of the sizer, we are able to provide customers product that meet their exact spec requirements," Shuman said. "It also facilitates gentler handling and electronic sorting for overall improved quality. Furthermore, through our sustainability efforts we have also been able to reduce our pesticide and fertilizer inputs through integrated pest management and precision agriculture tools."

The company employs a rigorous protocol that starts with Cliff Riner, vice president of ag production and grower relations. His role is to monitor growth, improve flavor, and oversee onion production protocols that manage quality.

"Our program is always rooted in our ability to serve our customers and the end consumer," Shuman said. "Our signature promotional program Growing America's Farmers will be moving into its seventh year and more than nearly a dozen retailers have already participated and are always eager to re-up and this year is no exception. The program brings awareness to the changing face of production agriculture and the challenge of who will grow our food."

The program has helped raise more than \$350,000 for students pursuing production agriculture careers through the National FFA program.

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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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