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**Texas 1015 onion gets the spotlight at Viva Fresh**

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By

Tim Linden, editor at large

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A virtual tour of a Texas 1015 onion field in the Rio Grande Valley, featuring grower Wayne Reavis of Reavis Farms reporting live from the ground via video, was one of the highlight events at the Viva Fresh Expo in Dallas, March 30-April 1.

Dante Galeazzi, president and CEO of the Texas International Produce Association, moderated the session as he led Reavis through a series of topics designed to give the buyer community a firsthand look at an onion operation in Rio Grande City, even though they sat comfortably 500 miles north in the Gaylord Texas Resort in Dallas.

Galeazzi said a major rain storm earlier in the week shifted the emphasis of the scheduled live event from harvesting onions to relaying how to cope with rain events, which are a common occurrence during the spring harvest time. Reavis stood in the field surrounded by bins loaded with onions that had been harvested before five inches of rain drenched that particular field. He said the key is to be patient and let the prevailing winds from the nearby Rio Grande dry out those onions. He told the crowd on Friday, March 31, that after the March 27-28 deluge, he expected to be back in the field the following Monday (April 3) to finish harvesting this particular field.

During this portion of the educational session, Reavis noted that pounds per acre have increased significantly over the years, which has allowed Texas to reduce its acreage but still produce a robust crop for the market. He currently can get as many as 1,100 bags per acre compared to 500 or 600 bags in years gone by.

After the visual tour, a trio of onion producers appeared on stage in Dallas with Galeazzi, answering questions from the TIPA executive and the audience about the Texas onion industry and what makes the famous Texas 1015 onion so special. The panel featured Will Steele of Frontera Produce, South Texas Onion Committee Chairman Steve Cargil and Jimmy Bassetti of J&D Produce.

Cargil said it's a combination of climate and soil. He said the lighter soils that are prevalent from the Rio Grande to the Winter Garden area near San Antonio are perfect for onion production, especially the 1015 short-day onion developed at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research facility by the legendary Leonard Pike. For years, Pike, who died in 2019, has been credited with developing the super sweet onion that put Texas on the map.

The 1015 is a cross between a line of onions that originally came to Texas from Bermuda and round onions with a single center. Steele said the combination, which began being grown and marketed around 1980, created a perfectly shaped onions that had a sweet taste and caught the fancy of consumers.

"Personally, I can't stand cutting a flat onion," Steele said in touting the advantages the Texas onion

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has over its well- marketed Vidalia sweet onion counterpart.

During the discussion, Galeazzi revealed that the 1015 moniker comes from the ideal planting date of Oct. 15. Bassetti said planting the onions around that date is very important to the success of the crop. As it creates enough time for the onions to mature and size before their spring into summer harvest.

In talking directly to retailers, Steele said educating the consumer is a very important part of the success of the Texas onion program. He would like to see more sampling at retail, noting that many consumers just don't have a clue how sweet an onion can be.

Galeazzi noted that the South Texas Onion Committee is aggressively pushing this message through social media channels this year.

Bassetti said the Texas onion's best marketing window is from late March to July 4. Cargil chimed in, noting that the onion can grow later in the season, but "you start losing size."

In discussing the acreage decline vs. yield increase, Cargil said Texas used to grow 10,000 to 15,000 acres a couple of decades ago and produce 4.5 million bags of onions. "Now we grow 6,000 to 7,000 acres and still produce 4.5 million bags," he reported.

Bassetti added that the Texas onion industry has lost a little bit of its identity over the years as both sweet onion imports and domestic onions from other regions have captured some of the spotlight. He believes the Texas industry needs to be more aggressive and vocal in protecting its marketing slot as he is absolutely certain no other sweet onion can compete on taste and shape.

The panelists agreed that the biggest problem Texas has is perception. Bassetti said they have to do a better job of messaging. He said it's all about education and communication.

[Tim Linden](#)

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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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