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To-Jo seeing return to normal with mushroom sales patterns

By

John Groh, publisher

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[To-Jo Mushrooms](#), a grower, packer, shipper and processor of fresh mushrooms, based in Avondale, PA, is seeing a return to normal with mushroom sales patterns, according to Kevin Delaney, vice president of sales and marketing.

“Summer time is actually a traditionally slower period for mushroom sales,” said Delaney. “The last few years, with the pandemic and immediately after, some of the patterns were thrown off, so we’re trying to find a new balance.”

Delaney explained that during the pandemic in 2020 and for a year or so following, retail sales of mushrooms had spiked and foodservice sales plummeted due to restrictions on dining out. Now, with the pandemic in the past and people free to come and go as they please, things are returning to the pre-pandemic norm.

“We’re seeing foodservice sales back to where they were before Covid, which is great,” he said. “But at the same time retail sales, which enjoyed a bump during the pandemic years, are back to where they were.”

Delaney said the key to propping up retail sales during the summer is to urge retail partners to implement more consistent ad schedules for mushrooms to drive incremental sales. But there is only so much that can be done, as there is a lot of competition in the produce department during the summer season.

The exception is the Portabella, which has carved out a following as a popular summer grilling item.

“We treat Ports as a seasonal item, and many retailers will promote them from May until September,” said Delaney. “In fact, we have some retailers who do great cross-promotions with Martin’s slider rolls to prompt people to create their own Portabella sliders. It’s a healthier, low-fat alternative to regular sliders.”

Speaking of healthier alternatives, Delaney also noted that the Mushroom Council has done a great job in promoting the nutritional aspects of mushrooms, and activating dieticians to promote the health benefits of mushrooms.

Additionally, he said the council’s Blended Burger Project has been an effective promotion to help increase mushroom consumption, and summer is a perfect time to remind consumers of the benefits of the concept.

With the Blended Burger Project, consumers use a mix of 25 percent chopped mushrooms and 75 percent chopped meat in creating their burgers. In addition to decreasing the fat, cholesterol, sodium

and calorie content of a burger, the mushroom component adds umami flavor and creates a juicier texture to the burger. It also results in a more sustainable meal, as mushrooms require much less water, space and electricity than raising cattle. What's more, the cost of mushrooms is much less than beef — an especially important benefit during a time of high costs and high inflation.

Delaney said that as summer comes to a close, To-Jo will gear up for a much busier fall season, where retail sales pick up again due to people spending more time at home and in their kitchens.

Here, Portabella sales will give way to other varieties, especially the popular Shiitake and Crimini.

While organics comprise a relatively small percentage (10-12 percent) of To-Jo's sales, Delaney said organics are moving at a relatively steady pace.

"The limiting factor with organic and specialty items has been pack sizes," he said. "They have been only offered in smaller packs, such as eight-ounce sizes. As they continue to increase in popularity, we plan to increase sizes to 16 or 20 ounces."

He said there still is a notable premium in the price of organic mushrooms, but there are still organic devotees who are willing to pay the premium, and To-Jo is happy to meet the needs of those consumers.

[John Groh](#)

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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