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North Bay Produce making a world of difference

By

Keith Loria

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[North Bay Produce](#), a powerful cooperative of 33 grower-owners representing more than 1,000 farms from around the world, markets and distributes fresh fruits and vegetables 52 weeks a year.

“This is a vibrant company and always has been, and there are three major themes going on today,” said Brian Klumpp, director of marketing and strategic development for the Traverse City, MI-based company, which represents farms in North, Central and South America. “The first is we are an international grower-owned cooperative, which is unique in fresh produce. We truly have our grower-owners all over the world.”

And being grower-owners means they are more invested in everything the company does and that helps North Bay Produce grow with key retail partners.

“It’s imperative to the businesses that we’re working with and will be working with that we have that kind of arrangement,” Klumpp said.

The second theme is the work being done with varietal developments, and that’s led to an increase in items being offered.

Sekoya blueberries for example, is an item that has grown in popularity in recent years and more of North Bay’s farmers are growing them now.

“We’re seeing retailers and consumers regularly say they want better products” Klumpp said. “We have all been buying apples by varieties for decades and that may be what’s going to start happening in other areas soon, and blueberries may be one of the first we’re going to see. People starting to recognize classes and families and varieties of blueberries.”

There are also some unique varieties of blackberries gaining in prominence, including the Erandy™, which is trending upward. Other premium berries are expected to be coming along in 2023 as well.

“The last thing is the vibrancy of our company; it’s a great bunch of people that hustle and work hard while maintaining great positivity,” Klumpp said.

With each passing year, more farms are becoming a part of North Bay Produce, and that’s going to be a continual part of its growth strategy in the years ahead.

“Our vegetable category continues to be a strong growth area for us too,” Klumpp said. “We do a Michigan asparagus season, which is short. But throughout the year we offer snow and snap peas, French beans and Brussels sprouts and those are all growing really well for us and are excellent products.”

Operating out of Michigan, labor is one of the biggest challenges that the company faces in 2023, which is similar to most produce companies this year.

“The cost of our labor continues to rise which makes it difficult as well as a shortage of people that are interested in working” Klumpp said. “We do what we can. Our farmers do an excellent job managing that. Automation continues to increase on our farms as one solution to the labor challenges. Whether it’s mechanical picking equipment or automation in packing lines, these steps are taken to help.”

Another challenge is freezer space availability in the state of Michigan, as there’s currently a shortage.

“We want to make sure we help our farmers the best we can and that’s something we’re dealing with now,” Klumpp said.

As the marketing arm and partners for these farms, North Bay Produce also helps by making investments with universities and nurseries to help with varietal developments, growth support of the farms with the ultimate goal to help our farms to be the best they can be.

[Keith Loria](#)

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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