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BelleHarvest increases capacity with recent acquisition

By

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As one of Michigan's oldest grower-owned distributors of fresh apples, now in its 66th year, BelleHarvest is known for building deep partnerships and offering consistent, high-quality, flavorful apples while staying rooted within the local community.

To do this, BelleHarvest partners with top growers throughout Michigan to project future flavor trends and maximize productivity while still maintaining the high-quality standards it has long been recognized for.

"We are one of the top and largest grower/shippers of Michigan apples," said Casey Jarrard, vice president of marketing and sales for the Belding, MI-based company. "The category is at the upmost importance to our company since it is our primary focus. We are beginning to build out our local and national vegetable program."

Earlier this year, BelleHarvest acquired Valley View Co., which significantly increased its overall growing and storage capacity by 20 percent and provided the company with a greater ability to expand its varietal mix and enhance overall quality for the end consumer.

Increased acreage, packinghouse operations and storage capacity has been added to the BelleHarvest organization through the acquisition, bolstering its access to popular high-flavor varieties such as Honeycrisp, Gala, EverCrisp, and SweetTango, alongside traditional varieties.

"At our core, BelleHarvest embodies the spirit of farmers, serving as the backbone of our company for over 50 years," Jarrard said. "We place a high emphasis on introducing new specialized varieties and packaging to meet the ever-changing demands of our customers and consumers. The evolving needs of our customers have influenced our packaging choices over the years and will continue to do so. Consumer flavor profiles and demographics have shifted, resulting in new varieties to come to market and some to disappear."

On average, BelleHarvest produces around 1 million bushels annually, and has seen an increase in that volume by variety year over year.

"To achieve success in the category, a few key factors come into play for us," Jarrard said. "Embracing a customer-centric approach by prioritizing excellent service to meet their needs; educating customers about different flavor profiles, accompanied by offering relevant merchandise and marketing support; and acting as educators in a strategic manner, providing valuable insights and information to customers."

A strong season is expected with Honeycrisp, Gala and SweetTangos expected to be the most popular.

“We deal with all of the major varieties and different eating profile apples,” Jarrard said. “We will start harvest on our varieties the second or third week of August. Our program is essentially year-round since there is always something that we are doing to prep or harvest the trees. We provide apples year-round from our cold storage as well.”

BelleHarvest’s leadership team sits on different associations and boards within the industry and for various specialized varieties where it grows.

“We discuss everything, from best growing practices to unique varieties coming to market,” Jarrard said. “It is a very collaborative industry.”

In other news, the company recently broke ground on its BelleHarvest West facility, which will hold 600,000 cases for packing and cold storage. This will enable the company to continue being a major player in Michigan apples.

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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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