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NEPC concludes its premier event at a new venue

By

Gordon M. Hochberg

August 28, 2023

EVERETT, MA — The produce industry came to New England in late August to see the latest products and services at the [New England Produce Council](#)'s Produce, Floral & Food Service Expo 2023, its premier event.

This year's annual event was held Monday, Aug. 21, and Tuesday, Aug. 22 at the Encore Boston Harbor, here, a new venue for the council. The council also surprised attendees by unveiling its brand new logo.

Attendees enjoyed the VIP reception, sponsored by North Bay Produce, and the opening cocktail reception, sponsored by 4M Fruit Distributors, both held outside on the first evening.

The keynote breakfast was held on a bright sunny Tuesday morning, as NEPC President Tom Murray of Roche Bros. welcomed everyone to the event.

Posing as a "consumer expert," comedian Jim Colliton provided some light-hearted entertainment during the keynote breakfast, setting the tone for attendees before they prepared for the busy day ahead walking the show floor.

During that breakfast, Murray and Lauren Mordasky, of RPE Inc., unveiled the council's new logo. Mordasky, who is a member of the NEPC board of directors, spearheaded the redesign of the logo as well as the rebranding and marketing initiatives of the council.

The council's Produce Manager Leadership Development Program was held Tuesday morning, featuring Wendy McManus, speaker/facilitator and chief executive officer and founder of Connect 2 Potential, who presented "The Last 50 Feet: Leading with Purpose and Confidence."

The expo took place all day long, with lunch available during the show.

"We had 156 booths and about 1,000 people in attendance, both more than last year," NEPC Executive Director Laura Sullivan told *The Produce News* about midway through the expo. "People enjoyed last night, being able to socialize before the show today. The floor has been busy. All in all, it's shaping up to be a great event."

NEPC President Murray reinforced that assessment. "The show's been great. It's been very busy out there, which is great for all the vendors and brokers," he said. "Last night we had a country and western singer who did a really good job out there under the tent. So we had a nice time, and everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves."

Speaking about the trade show itself, he said, "All the major buyers are here. The exhibitors are seeing all the right people. We also have a lot of produce managers here from all the companies. They're getting to see what goes on behind the scenes, and they're really enjoying it. They're really quite into it."

And the new venue? "Everyone loves the hotel," he stated. "People are asking me to come back here next year. And we've already booked it for next year."

The Produce News spoke to a number exhibitors midway through the show, and they were enjoying all aspects of the event.

Joe Atchison III of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture said, "It really got a good start right out of the gate. We met with a couple of people who were following up with different products they were looking for from New Jersey growers. And that's certainly the purpose that we're here: to connect retailers with New Jersey growers."

He continued, "It's been a fantastic year for New Jersey crops. The peaches are probably one of the best deals they've had in almost 50 years. Perfect quality, perfect sizing, perfect pricing."

More specifically, "We're very excited about being here. With New England being our second largest market, it's essential that we make sure that we have a presence here."

Ryan Cherry of Mission Produce said, "The traffic was nice. Our location is a good spot. You can meet some buyers and also see the regional managers for each of the retailers. And it was nice to hear some store-level feedback." This was his first NEPC show, and he "definitely had a favorable impression."

Josh Auerbach of Maurice A. Auerbach Inc. said, "This is one of our core constituencies in New England, and obviously there are great opportunities for produce sales. A large diverse population is good for specialty ethnic items. So it's been a very good opportunity to be at the show. It means a lot to us."

He added, "New York metro and New England have basically been our core areas. New England has long been really important to our business — and still is." Asked what his company was showcasing, he replied, "In addition to the regular garlic, asparagus, shallots, the old standbys, we're always promoting our organic line. Elephant garlic has been popular, and some of our specialty root vegetables have taken off."

Tim Harrington of Stemilt Growers said, "It's been a phenomenal show. We've had great representation from all of the regional retailers. It's great to see them come out in droves and

support this traditional annual event. It's a broad range of suppliers here exhibiting their products. And we are thrilled to be here exhibiting our first-of-the-season Rave apples."

He continued, "It's really great to see all the buyers and merchants and specialists and produce managers. It's terrific to get us all together for this event to celebrate and showcase the produce that we have to offer."

This is probably his 12th year coming the NEPC show, "and I enjoy it very much," he said. "It's just the right amount of time, and it's just the right size show to have folks be able to take their time, come see their suppliers, and for us to see our retailers."

Brandon Parker of Shuman Farms said, "It's always good to be here in Boston. There's such a strong retail following in this area, so this show certainly has a strong retail attendance because of the location. It's always good to come up and be able to see some longstanding partners we've had for years, to see them and connect with them — and talk with potential new partners as well."

He added, "It's been a good event. Last night was really good, with good entertainment. The venue is very good, and it's good to see the retail support."

Asked how the traffic had been at the expo, Parker replied, "The show floor from the opening was really busy. We're glad to be a part of it and have an opportunity to promote our sweet onion programs." He elaborated, "We've just recently made the transition out of our Vidalia season into our Peruvian sweet onion season, so we're talking about that. The quality on Peru is really good. We're talking about opportunities for promotions that we see coming up in the fall and winter months. We're talking with folks, trying to better understand where they have needs and where we can help fulfill those needs."

He continued, "This show is definitely important for us as a company. We're very fortunate to have a number of partners in the area, so it's just a natural fit for us to be in attendance at this show. We've been coming for 15-plus years, and we always look forward to coming back. Laura and her team do a great job."

Tom Beaver of Sunny Valley International said, "So far it's been an excellent show. I think the change of venue has reinvigorated the show, revitalized the show, which is great. Attendance has been very strong. For us, this is a critically important show. Most of our product from New Jersey goes within the mid-Atlantic or up here into New England. And we're fortunate to get outstanding support from retailers throughout New England. So this is a must-attend show to see customers who have been supporting us all summer for our blueberry and peach programs. We're glad to be here as always. It's been a wonderful show."

And the traffic on the show floor? "We've seen a lot of familiar faces, people we do business with, so it's good to connect with them. But [there are] also a lot of new faces, so for us it's an opportunity to grow in this region as well."

As NEPC President Murray noted, next year's annual expo will return to the Encore Boston Harbor, scheduled for Monday and Tuesday, Aug. 19-20, 2024.

Photo: NEPC President Tom Murray and Lauren Mordasky, a member of the NEPC board of directors, unveiled the council's brand new logo during the keynote breakfast Aug. 22.

[Gordon Hochberg](#)

About Gordon M. Hochberg | 

Gordon M. Hochberg was born in New York City, and grew up in Westchester County, NY. He earned a bachelor of arts degree in history from Lafayette College in 1973.

He started his career at The Produce News in the late 1970s, and has been with the publication ever since.

He served on the Board of Trustees of the New Jersey Agricultural Society from 2012 to 2018. He currently serves on the Southeast Produce Council's Board of Governors.

He enjoys music, theater and reading (American and ancient history are his favorites). And he's been a lifelong fan of the New York Yankees since attending his first game in the late 1950s. He and his wife, Kathi, have been married since 1974.

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