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Holt Logistics invests to make Philadelphia the top choice for perishables

By

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As the produce industry continues on its path of increased globalization, Holt Logistics has made it a priority to invest in its facilities at the Port of Philadelphia to maintain its lofty status as the top choice for shipments of fruits and vegetables from all corners of the world.

Christian Holt, who works in sales and marketing for the family-owned business, said ongoing investment throughout the port community via both private and public shareholders will enable the Port of Philadelphia to continue to grow business with current customers and attract new business, leading to year-over-year growth.

“The Port of Philadelphia continues to be the preferred destination for perishable products more so than anywhere else in the United States,” said Holt. “In 2022, the Port of Philadelphia handled over 2.27 million tons of imported fruit, vegetables and flowers compared to 1.25 million tons in 2012, and just under 2 million tons in 2020. This growth has helped create more family-sustaining jobs in the region as well.”

Holt said there are several key reasons the Port of Philadelphia has been able to maintain its leadership role with perishables. Chief among them is the fact that it has made new infrastructure investments, including five new super post panamex cranes; 3,000 brand new linear feet of berth; additional port acreage; and the development of food-grade warehousing.

Holt said there is also a new on-dock inspection program that includes a Customs & Border Protection inspection station that seeks to double the inspection productivity and greatly expedite the speed to market. This on-dock station comprises 44,000 square feet of temperature-controlled space, so the cold chain is maintained throughout the inspection process.

Additionally, PhilaPort is opening a new distribution center to attract new international cargo and ocean lines to the port. This includes 201,600 square feet of Class A dry warehouse with 32 dock doors and 27,000 pallet positions just one mile from the Packer Avenue Terminal.

More specific to produce, Holt said a new PhilaPort refrigerated warehouse is scheduled to be operational by 2025, and that will add 230,000 square feet of Class A refrigerated and frozen space right next to the dry space near Packer Avenue. This gives the port the ability to handle frozen cargoes, as well as temperature-controlled and food-grade cargoes.

To best handle the current customers and the anticipated growth in the future, Holt Logistics has added a Customer Excellence Division, said Holt, which provides a single point of contact across all companies and customized solutions to better facilitate long-term client relationships.

Overall, Holt said that 2023 has seen a return to normal from the ebbs and flows of the past few years, when the pandemic upended typical business operations.

“Business is slowly coming back down to Earth,” he said. “The record highs during the pandemic are over, but real estate costs [for investments in warehousing] have not yet decreased. This is an issue for the whole supply chain, where low-margin products are having a hard time paying high rental rates, which causes downward pressure and costs being passed along to the consumer.”

He added that ocean freight costs went from a record high to now a low, and that limits carriers from entering new markets with service.

“We will also be putting more focus on rail movement and the expansion of Philadelphia as a highly efficient rail hub,” he said.

Other goals for 2024 include attracting new business (trade lanes), specifically Asia, Europe and India, to and from the Port of Philadelphia. Also, Holt Logistics will continue to concentrate on providing excellent customer service by continuing to invest in technology, while training and developing its employees.

Holt said the Port of Philadelphia offers multiple advantages over other ports and receiving points, including prime location that is in close proximity to major East Coast cities, facilitating speed to market; access to the best ocean services from the largest global perishable countries; over 2,500 reefer plugs, with plans to eclipse 3,000 by 2024; and rapid turn times.

Additionally, Holt said there is a major focus on sustainability, with the facility having one of the largest roof top solar arrays in North America.

“This includes more than 33,500 solar panels that cover 1.3 million square feet of roof top and provide 11.4 megawatts of power each year,” he said.

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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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