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Produce trends bringing holiday cheer this year

Tis' the season for seasonal produce and retail surges. Consistently high inflation and weakening consumer demand are eating into retail sales expectations this year, but holiday celebrations offer hope for a surge in grocery and retail channel growth.

Based on industry data, Robinson Fresh predicts that there will be a slight uptick in food purchases this year with large family gatherings driving demand for both fruit and vegetables. As retailers continue to navigate market volatility, especially around seasonal surges, the company expects retailers and foodservice companies to rely more heavily on demand forecasting tools in 2024 to help navigate the ups and downs of consumers' buying patterns.

Robinson Fresh has identified industry insights highlighting themes this holiday season, as well as broader produce trends across the fresh produce supply chain.

December holiday trends:

- This month consumers are expected to spend similarly to last. Gifts and food will be the most widely purchased items.
- 93 percent of survey respondents expect to celebrate Christmas this year; 80 percent expect to purchase food for their holiday celebrations and 87 percent expect to spend the same or more than last year.
- While vegetables dominate at Thanksgiving, fruit tends to be more popular at Christmas, with apples, pineapples, citrus and avocados being a few of the top selling items in the two weeks prior to Christmas.
- Online retailers will likely see the most sales activity this Christmas season (70 percent of survey respondents expect to shop online) while 39 percent say they will spend at traditional grocery stores.

“Even with the consumer dollar under pressure, signs point to a strong Christmas season for retailers with spending projected to come in near or slightly better than 2022 levels,” said Jose Rossignoli, president of Robinson Fresh. “We continue to see an uptick in online sales reinforcing the need for retailers — both big and small — to incorporate an omnichannel approach in order to create a cohesive physical and digital shopping experience that is easy and frictionless for shoppers. A digital presence, coupled with strong loyalty offers, will help retailers draw consumers, both in store and online, seeking fruits and vegetables for their holiday celebrations.”

Fresh trends for 2024:

- Advanced technology used for practices such as demand forecasting will be key in 2024. Tech such as artificial intelligence, advanced analytics and automation will continue to grow in importance and can benefit retailers around the holidays and year-round. If used effectively, these tools will make it more efficient to ensure shelves are stocked adequately thus helping reduce over or under supply.
- Surety of supply continues to increase in importance with global supply chain disruptions caused by climate change and unrest in traditional growing regions. As retailers and the food service industry work to keep their shelves stocked, providers need to be able to open up new

growing regions and ensure transportation of those goods to the market through temperature-controlled transportation providers.

- Reduction of costs across the perishable supply chains is also top-of-mind for retailers and foodservice companies. There has been an increase in refrigerated goods moving through the supply chain, which has led to a shortage of available warehouse space, causing the cost of existing warehouse space to rapidly rise thus increasing overall supply chain costs. Robinson Fresh works to mitigate these costs by helping design more efficient supply chains and incorporating new capacity as it comes online.

“Supply chain data, transparency and customer trust all play an increasingly critical part in the foodservice, grocery retailer and consumer relationship,” said Rossignoli. “This is especially important to our customers right now as they look for more efficient and effective ways to adjust to consumers’ ever-changing buying patterns. As we look ahead to 2024, we’ve heard our customers’ need for greater technology solutions, such as tools to help with demand forecasting, to ensure they can be agile and respond quickly to market fluctuations. At Robinson Fresh we are thrilled to have the product, technology, and supply chain solutions to keep their shelves stocked, optimize sales and ensure customer loyalty.”

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