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IPR Fresh has sights set on becoming top Bell pepper shipper

By

John Groh

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[IPR Fresh](#) recently celebrated its 20th year in business, and it has its eye trained on further growth with a focus on Bell peppers.

“We now have Bell peppers, watermelon and European cukes, and sweet corn will be starting in late November,” Jose Luis Obregon, president of IPR Fresh, told *The Produce News* in early November. “We had a bit of a delay on peppers from Sinaloa due to the hurricane in October, but only about 10 days. By early December, we should be really cranking.”

He added that the season was getting off to a challenging start, with a glut of product causing downward pressure on prices.

“The local East Coast deals lasted longer this year, and that caused an overlap,” he said. “Growers are getting better and better at what they do and they develop better varieties, so seasons are expanding. Everyone wants to be year-round now, so the normal change of seasons has gone out the window. This started happening a couple of years ago. I think the industry should try to do a better job to work together to prevent that from happening.”

Obregon said that while IPR Fresh has the infrastructure and ability to provide all things from Nogales, this coming year will see the company focusing more on Bell peppers.

“We’re working to become a top Bell pepper shipper,” he said.

In some ways, that brings the company full circle, he said, since IPR originally started as a brokerage and bought chopper peppers for processing.

“The grower we were working with noticed that and we started selling No. 2s and then it just evolved from there to what we are today,” he said.

Obregon credits much of the success of IPR Fresh to the solid relationships it has with its growers.

“We have four main growers, and we have excellent relationships with all of them,” he said. “One has been with us for 15 years, one for 10 years, one for eight years and one is now in its third season with us. It’s so important to have good growers, because without them we have nothing to sell.”

He said the good relationships are based on mutual trust and transparency, which works in both directions.

“They trust us to make the best possible decisions when selling their product, and we trust them to

make the best decisions when growing the product,” he said. “We give them full access to our system so they can see exactly what we are selling their products for and where.”

Part of IPR’s growth strategy is having a larger presence at industry events. When *The Produce News* visited IPR in Nogales, AZ, in early November, the FPAA’s inaugural SWIPE had just concluded and Obregon, a member of the FPAA board of directors, was reveling in the success of the event.

“We were very excited about SWIPE,” said Obregon. “I feel like we grew up as an industry. The quality of the people who attended was great and it was exciting how everyone from Nogales was there. We’re looking forward to next year.”

But before then, IPR will continue to boost its profile by attending other trade shows, such as the New York Produce Show and the Organic Produce Summit. “We feel it is important to have that face-to-face contact with our clients,” he said.

IPR’s client base is a mix of institutional, processors and retail, which is reflected in the acronym of its name.

“Each year we add more retail customers, but we feel each channel has importance in the market. Processors play a very important role in our business because they can take seconds, which benefits our growers because we can sell all their grades. That makes us more attractive to them.”

[John Groh](#)

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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