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Grower Alliance adds to staff, storage space to accommodate growth

By

John Groh

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[Grower Alliance](#) was coming off two successful industry events in early November, emboldened about its growth plans for the future.

“We had a great IFPA Global show,” said Michelle Ramirez-Jacobson, owners representative. “It was our first time exhibiting there, and we made a lot of great contacts. We took 28 growers with us, and most of our long-time growers already registered for next year.”

Just a week later, Grower Alliance regrouped at the FPAA’s inaugural SWIPE expo in Tucson, AZ, which Ramirez-Jacobson also considered a success.

“SWIPE made quite an impression on our sales team, and moving to a new location and shaking up the format seemed to have paid off,” she said, referring to the new show format and location, having moved from the Tubac Golf Resort to the Loews Ventana Canyon in Tucson. “The event drew good buyer numbers and facilitated meaningful face-to-face interactions. Although I was unable to attend SWIPE, the positive feedback from the team members was reassuring and speaks volumes about the success of SWIPE. We have already signed up for next year.”

The increased presence at more industry events is part of Grower Alliance’s plan to gain exposure for its brand as it continues to introduce new lines to its mix.

Last year the Rio Rico, AZ-based company started a new strawberry program, which was a big success, according to Ramirez-Jacobson. “We’ll be growing that program this year. We are growing those in Baja and had 40 hectares in the first year, and we’re increasing that to 80 hectares this year. All strawberries will continue to cross in San Diego.”

When The Produce News visited in early November, Grower Alliance had just received the first boxes of strawberries, and “they look outstanding,” said Ramirez-Jacobson. “We’ll also have organic strawberries starting in early December, which is new this year. We’re very excited about that.”

Grower Alliance is also entering its sophomore year with watermelons from the Dominican Republic, aiming to build upon a challenging first year.

“The inaugural season served as an exploratory phase aimed at familiarizing ourselves with maritime law and sea transport dynamics,” said Ramirez-Jacobson. “Our strategic investment in this initial harvest was pivotal in acquainting us with the nuances of a new port of entry, specifically Miami, although it presented its share of challenges.

“Nevertheless, driven by the exceptional fertility and quality of the land in the Dominican Republic,

we resolved to proceed for another season,” she continued. “To uphold Grower Alliance’s high standards, our engineers consistently travel to and from the DR throughout the plantation cycle, ensuring adherence to our rigorous quality benchmarks. We eagerly anticipate leveraging the insights gained from our past experiences to optimize the upcoming harvest.”

“The fertile soil in the Dominican Republic presents us with immense potential to cultivate promising opportunities,” added Ramon Barraza, who works in sales at Grower Alliance. “Its richness offers a strong foundation for our endeavors.”

The first seasonal plantings of DR watermelons happened in early November, with initial shipments expected by mid-January.

“These are full-size melons that are packed in bins or cartons, and everything is conventional,” said Barraza. “We’ll solidify this program before we consider adding a mini watermelon program.”

When *The Produce News* visited in early November, Ramirez-Jacobson said slicer cukes were just beginning to pick up and demand was expected to remain strong as is normally the case during the holiday season. She was hopeful the hard shell squash program would see equal success this year.

Aside from the aforementioned items, Grower Alliance will be offering organic English cukes on a year-round basis, organic Persian cukes and organic Roma tomatoes.

“We had a good run on our organic slicers out of Baja this summer, and we will look to increase that next year,” said Barraza. “It’s the same grower that handles our organic strawberries.”

To help support the additional lines and increases to the existing ones, Grower Alliance has added two new members to its sales team.

Eddie Condes joined the company in October as business development manager and is overseeing the retail business.

“We plan to do more direct business with our retail clients, and Eddie will be leading that effort,” said Ramirez-Jacobson.

“With Eddie on board, we might look to add some additional organics, like TOV and Beefsteak tomatoes, as well as grapes,” said Barraza.

Luis Hanna also recently joined Grower Alliance as McAllen operations manager and will oversee the company’s Texas operation.

“We want to expand our business in the Midwest and East Coast, and Texas offers a good strategic location to take advantage of the better transit to those regions,” said Ramirez-Jacobson.

Another factor that will support future growth at the company is additional warehouse space. Grower Alliance recently purchased the old Omega Produce warehouse that had been vacant for the last few years.

“This additional space will help us greatly,” said Barraza. “The building is certified organic and will provide an additional 32,000-plus square feet of storage for us. We were very limited in our current space, so this will be a nice upgrade for us and will enable us to cut down on our loading times

because we can consolidate to one or two places instead of five.”

“This will be especially beneficial for Grow-All Procurement, our brokerage division,” said Ramirez-Jacobson.

Barraza added that Grower Alliance will use the new warehouse space initially for hard shell squash, watermelon and melons, and once the refrigeration system is updated it will be used for various other items.

Ramirez-Jacobson said the transportation division, Grower Alliance Logistics, also saw growth, with the fleet increasing from five trucks to 10 trucks. “We’ve had a good year despite the challenges with the transportation industry,” she said.

[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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