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**Kurt Zuhlke & Associates sees more demand for downsizing of containers**

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By

Keith Loria

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As president and CEO of [Kurt Zuhlke & Associates](#), an Easton, PA-based company that creates more than 40 different packaging molds, Kurt Zuhlke is one of the most trusted names in the produce packaging business.

After all, through his guidance and expertise in the packaging industry, Zuhlke helps retailers find the ideal options they want and need to keep consumers coming back into their stores for their produce needs.

He has long been a champion of Polyethylene Terephthalate (commonly referred to as PET) packaging for use by the produce industry, noting it's vital to maintain the circle of recycling in an effort to keep materials out of landfills as much as possible.

Zuhlke continues to see more customers interested in PET and helping the environment, so he's hoping that's a trend that gains steam.

“Our company’s motto is to ‘recycle and reuse.’ Once it’s been used we clean it, grind it and create new product,” Zuhlke said. “Many growers and suppliers use our products to pack according to their customers’ specifications, but many retailers today repack at the store level in order to customize their offerings. This means that all levels of the industry are important to us.”

Zuhlke spent the last days of January at a trade show in Hershey, PA, where he spoke with customers about what’s trending in the packaging world.

“Produce is up in price and there are people being very frugal, but other than that, things are doing well; we haven’t had any bumps in 2024 yet,” he said. “At the show, we highlighted a lot of trays and containers we have, especially for strawberries. A lot of small farms — roadside stands mainly — go after that business.”

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Downsize containers are becoming more popular than ever, with Zuhlke explaining that many stores are going from 12- to 10-ounce as a result of the increased prices.

Kurt Zuhlke & Associates is coming off a strong year, and it's been a string of big years since the pandemic first reared its ugly head in 2020. Zuhlke credits the fact that once COVID-19 hit, consumers were fearful of anything touching their produce items, so packaging became much more prevalent in the department.

“We can provide exceptional protection of produce, while at the same time, allowing consumers to see what they're actually buying,” he said, explaining that there are different sizes for different commodities that are doing well — whether the packaging is for strawberries, blueberries, tomatoes, avocados or something else. “People aren't buying bulk like they once did, and people want food that is protected and sanitized.”

Being successful in this business for so long is no simple task, and Zuhlke noted that offering quality service and a great product are keys to his longevity in the business.

“It's about the service we provide,” he said. “If you're not servicing your customers right, they are going to go somewhere else. I've had customers for over 40 years, so we must be doing something right.”

*Photo: Kurt and Cynthia Zuhlke*

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## About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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