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Pan Hellenic is optimistic for the coming season

By

Keith Loria

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[Pan Hellenic](#) is a wholesale produce company at the Hunts Point Market in the Bronx, servicing the restaurant and foodservice industries with a full line of fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables.

The company, which began in 1993, offers a variety of produce items, including citrus fruits, herbs, melons, mushrooms, potatoes, onions, carrots, salad, tomatoes, tropicals and western vegetables.

Nick Varvatsoulis, CEO of Pan Hellenic, admitted the early months of 2024 have been a bit challenging, with a lot of weather challenges in the growing regions and a lack of supplies for a lot of items.

“In terms of logistics, things haven’t gotten easier, demand has been a little less than steady, but overall, that’s the produce industry,” he said.

Coming off a year that was above average and saw some growth for Pan Hellenic, the company is optimistic that things can return to those levels as the spring arrives.

“We’ve been growing consistency over the last 10 years, expanding our commodity line and breaking into different markets,” Varvatsoulis said. “The customers today are more open to different growing areas as long as the price point and the quality is there.”

Under Varvatsoulis’ leadership, Pan Hellenic has been aggressive with both customers and vendors, and he believes that’s what has helped the company succeed.

“At the same time, being ethical and trying to represent them in the best way,” Varvatsoulis said. “If your customers are healthy, you’re going to get paid; and if your shippers are happy, you’re going to get product. Explaining that to both sides when they believe they should get more or pay less is a balancing act that lets us be fair to everyone.”

In 2024, the company will be expanding its direct-to-restaurant program, as opposed to going through distributors or mediators. Pan Hellenic also has found it’s better to skip the warehouses of the chains and go directly to the individual supermarkets as well.

Succeeding in Hunts Point also comes with an aggressive mindset, Varvatsoulis added.

“We’re always trying to stay in front of things,” he said. “The biggest thing that we needed to change when I got here was trucking. Less and less people were coming to the market, and purchases are being made more by email and digitally, so the trucks are more like a mobile storefront.”

There have been some recent personnel changes in an effort to infuse youth in the company, but Varvatsoulis knows that's a challenge because the younger generations don't necessarily see produce as an exciting industry.

"I feel that once they get it in their blood, it's a very unique industry," he said. "We don't have a lot of turnaround normally. People who come here, stay here, which is nice. If they are leaving, it's usually for personal reasons or retirement. We promote a team effort and support each other wherever we can."

The philosophy of the company has changed a bit since 31 years ago when it started, adjusting with the differences in the market that Varvatsoulis mentioned.

"It's about capturing our customers' customers now," he said. "We need to get out there and let people know the Hunts Point Market is not just a hub for you to come, but we can now come to you and provide that need in a smarter way."

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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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