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East Coast apples look to gain market share with retailers and shoppers

By

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Who is going to win the battle for apple supremacy amongst the various regions of the country? Perhaps, more importantly, can everyone be a winner in apple sales, as the growers across the country seek to gain more traction with consumers and new varieties continue to be introduced that pump extra energy into the marketplace?

The state of Washington has longed dominated the apples category, accounting for about 60 percent of total apples harvested in the country. Plus the state, through its various marketing boards and long reputation for quality and consistency, should continue to maintain a strong market share well into the future.

That does not mean that other regions, particularly the Northeastern states, do not have an opportunity to gain a greater share of market.

Apple growers on the East Coast, for example, are trying to gain an edge with retailers and consumers in their own areas by stressing three factors: the lower cost of transporting apples to nearby merchants, a sense of loyalty among both retailers and consumers to purchase product from their own region of the nation and, most importantly, a consistent, high-quality commodity that tastes great.

“Right now, we are resorting to guerilla tactics to build volume for ourselves and other growers,” said Austin Fowler, vice president at Fowler Farms, based in Lockport, NY.

“Collectively, many farmers in our area are stressing the savings to retailers to use apples from the East Coast because of lower transportation and logistics costs. It might take a tractor-trailer 200 extra gallons of diesel fuel to get apples to the East Coast from Michigan or the Pacific Northwest over what is used from a local grower.

“We are also stressing to our retail partners that they emphasize that they are sourcing apples locally,” Fowler continued. “Not only do consumers take a lot of pride buying local product, but they are much more comfortable purchasing apples from nearby communities or communities in the same

state. I think a number of retailers are now recognizing this and taking steps to be part of this trend and they are utilizing in-store signage to make consumers aware of this.”

Growers and associations in the Northeast say that to cut into Washington’s lead requires a number of things, especially more focused marketing efforts that get both retailers and consumers to ask for locally-grown apples.

The New York Apple Association, for example, highlights its working relationship with the National Football League’s Buffalo Bills as one way to build awareness of the New York-grown SnapDragon apples. The NYAA is also involved in in-store activities with retailers to make consumers aware of apples grown in the Empire State.

“The entire industry has a lot of work to do letting consumers know about the benefits of apples, that price points are friendly and that they are a healthy snack,” noted Gabriela D’Arrigo, the longtime vice president of marketing and communications for D’Arrigo New York, based at the Hunts Point Market in Bronx, NY. “I think that the NYAA does a great job working with retailers to let consumers know that these are high-quality local products and they should be eager to purchase them.”

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