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Bushwick Commission focuses on locally grown potatoes

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Ken Gray, vice president of sales and marketing for the Bushwick Commission in Farmingdale, NY, told *The Produce News* that the company continues its focus on offering customers potatoes that have traveled the least amount of miles, are of high quality, offer retailers value and provide the savings that today's consumers are searching out.

"Everyone wants a deal today, and bargain hunting is a common consumer theme," said Mr. Gray. "But they don't want inferior product. Retailers need commodity products that provide them with promotional opportunities, and they want superior service. Bushwick's aim is to provide all of these things on a year-round basis."

He noted that the company reached out to help its customers during pre-, through and post-Hurricane sandy.

"Fortunately we didn't lose power during the storm, so we never missed a beat," he added. "We were able to get deliveries on time, and that was very important because consumers needed fresh produce once the storm passed."

The Bushwick Commission also reached out to those in need with financial aid. It donated to the Newsday Charities, a McCormick Foundation Fund, to help it in its community work to those in need on Long Island. The organization was matching donations up to half a million dollars to help people who were affected by the storm.

Mr. Gray said that the company feels that having a variety of package options gives it an edge.

“Our options include size A three-pound red potatoes from Maine, white potatoes from New York, and other varieties from several growing regions,” he said. “These help retailers in ensuring that their customers have what they want right in front of them in the produce department. We are seeing increasingly more retailers looking for the three-pound size.”

The company is also seeing produce buyers, department managers and workers putting together highly attractive displays with potatoes, especially for their locally grown produce.

“Retailers are using more bins with potatoes from local growers,” said Mr. Gray. “These bins can offer a number of things. They can promote locally grown, educate consumers, deliver a nutritional message and even offer consumer handling and usage suggestions. We feel that the use of bins will continue to increase because retailers know that consumers translate locally grown to mean superior quality and exceptional value due to the fewer freight miles.”

He said that the quality of this year’s crop is excellent, despite that the area did get more rain than growers would have liked.

The Bushwick Commission works with numerous state-supported locally grown programs and with the Produce for Better Health Foundation. Mr. Gray said that when consumers go to grocery stores and see the banners and other point of purchase materials, it makes them feel that they’re making good choices.

“We are proud of our food-safety initiatives,” he added. “All of our packing sheds are third party audited, which is also an imperative to retailers and consumers alike today.”

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