

inside... Wal-Mart Pricing • Winter Merchandising • Central American Produce • Dried Fruit and Nuts • Imported Sweet Onions
Salad Dressings • California Citrus • Fresh-Cuts • Specialties On The Menu • PMH Convention Menu • FLORIDA BLUE • Overcoming Childhood Obesity

NOV 2009 • VOL. 25 • NO. 11 • \$9.99

producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT



PART 2

OUT-OF-THE-BOX THINKING The New Wholesale Model

Never miss an issue!
To get your own subscription
to PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine,
please see the cards between
pages 114 & 115 and 146 & 147



Specialties On The Menu

Almost anything new, exotic or just plain beautiful gets introduced to the public by adventuresome chefs at upscale restaurants.

BY BETSY SLINKARD

Sitafal, chikoo sapote, turia, arbi edo, rainbow chard, bull's blood, red perella, mâche, tatsoi, Buddha's Hand lemons, crosnes, yuzu, dragon fruit — names as colorful and exotic as the produce they denote.

Are chefs these days looking for the most exotic, "far out" specialty produce they can find? Or are there other criteria driving their selections?

PRODUCE BUSINESS asked a number of chefs, specialty produce marketers and distributors around the country these questions as well as others relating to the use of specialty produce on the menu. Some of the answers were as diverse as the chefs and the produce industry representatives themselves, although there were also areas of almost unanimous agreement.

Carrie Jordan, marketing manager for Babé Farms, Santa Maria, CA, says the more exotic the better. "Chefs like different, strange — the weirder the better. Chefs are really looking for color," she says. Babé Farms sells white, pink and red carrots in a mixed pack, but some chefs want their own specialty vegetable mix.

"Babé makes up a mix especially for the chef at the Bellagio in Las Vegas. It's just for him, for his signature dish," she explains.

Karen Caplan, president of Frieda's Inc., Los Alamitos, CA, agrees that chefs are looking for more color. "Produce colors have brought attention to the plate with a multitude of hues. Colorful produce is better received than just all yellow," she says. Caplan also agrees with the desire for a lot of unusual, esoteric items. "High-end chefs are looking for obscure varieties."

Jody Adams, chef/owner of Rialto restaurant, Boston, MA, has another perspective. For Adams, the most important thing is to work with ingredients that are local and make sense on her particular menu rather



Chefs in upscale restaurants are looking for produce that will make their creations distinct and memorable.

than squeezing something in because it is trendy. "For example, I wouldn't use some wild Asian squash," she says.

Notes Tom Leonardelli, produce specialist with US Foodservice in Livermore, CA, "Ask any chef what he or she looks for and the answer will be perception of value on the plate, then color, then taste, in that order."

Seasonality is an extremely important criterion as well. "Chefs still use what's available in season and find new ways of using these items. All of the chefs are going for root vegetables now since it's fall. Nothing is 'out,'" reports Chris Elipulos, director of produce operations, Sysco Food Services-Chicago, based in Des Plaines, IL.

Gary Teague, senior produce buyer for US Foodservice, Livermore, CA, says most of his company's requests are for seasonal items. Teague says that chefs often want to keep them on the menu rotation longer than the seasonality allows. "For example, heirloom tomatoes. They were very success-



Photos courtesy of Epic Foods

ful for us this summer," Teague adds.

Tom Fraker, corporate chef of Los Angeles, CA-based Melissa's/World Variety Produce, agrees that seasonality is of prime importance. The choice of specialty produce "really goes seasonal — whatever's prime is the best at that point. Dishes focus on what's hot at that particular time of the year. We're fortunate in California to almost always have what we need."

Rob Ondrus, director of produce procurement, US Foodservice in Columbia, MD, echoes this sentiment. "Seasonality is the key." What's hot in his opinion? "Persian pickles 6 to 7 inches long. They're dark green, similar to English cucumbers and have a mild flavor. Chefs use them for garnishes and salad. Banana leaves, microgreens, baby iceberg lettuce, marble potatoes in various colors — red, purple, pink. Cut them and they're gorgeous." Ondrus says he also is seeing a lot of sugar cane skewers.

The hot fruit items are heirloom melons, champagne grapes and dragon fruit, a member of the cactus family. It is magenta colored with green leaves and has white meat with little seeds.

Other hot items, according to Ondrus, are star fruit, various persimmon varieties and pomegranates. "Chefs do their own creative things," he says. "They're looking at flavor profile and plate presentation."

US Foodservice has chefs in approximately 50 percent of its 70 broadline divisions. "They communicate chef-to-chef. They speak the same language. It's a 'push-pull' situation. We, the distributor, push the information through staff chefs and sales people. The chefs will talk with their friends and will contact us. We'll use our connections to find the items they need. Chefs are using the Internet more, and trial-and-error plays a role in what they use," Ondrus explains.

Robert Schueller, director of public relations, Melissa's/World Variety Produce, says, "Chefs are using specialties as side dishes to entrées as seasonal signature dishes."

WHAT'S "HOT"? WHAT'S "NOT"?

Several produce industry experts and chefs around the country have voiced their opinions on what the "hot" produce specialties are — and what's passé.

According to Melissa's Schueller, shallots have been hot since last year. Avocados are growing more and more popular — and not just on the West Coast. All 60 varieties of rainbow microgreens are still hot although chefs prefer some varieties over others. Cilantro is hot.

Chefs are using more yellow wax beans, arugula, ginger root and yellow bell pepper, he claims. Baby spinach has been popular for quite some time.

What's Old Is New

"The real question is 'What's new?'" says Jeffrey Jake, executive chef, The Lodge at Pebble Beach, CA. "Today, what's 'hot' is old, for example, heirloom tomatoes. It's ironic that things that have been around for a long time such as radishes and tomatoes are available now in new varieties," Jake says. "The heirloom business is the part that's fascinating. We're bringing back things that had the best flavor. These will be the new products of the future."

Todd Stein, chef de cuisine at mk restaurant, Chicago, IL, agrees. "Old school' things — like heirloom apples, beets, potatoes — that are delicious to eat are hot. We source them from local farmers. Farmers are starting to grow the old stuff again. They're introducing it to us at the restaurant, and we, in turn, introduce the old/new items to our customers. Our apple growers produce 200 different varieties that we use in pastries as well as savory menu items. We're going back to things people remember from childhood. Beautiful hand-grown lettuce instead of a mix," Stein notes.

pb

Fingerling potatoes are hot. The No. 1 variety is Russian banana, No. 2 is ruby crescent (cream color on the outside, it looks like a potato without the skin), No. 3 is red skin and No. 4 is purple Peruvian. "It's always a struggle within foodservice to find a product that doesn't lose its color as soon as you cook with it. The purple Peruvian doesn't lose its color," says Schueller.

What's out? "Spring mix and baby spinach have overtaken Romaine. Curly parsley is less popular than Italian parsley," according to Schueller.

For Michael Muzyk, president, Baldor, Bronx, NY, the list of hot items includes mushrooms — blue foot, oyster, shiitake, fresh chanterelle, hedgehog, black trumpet, all of which spike in the fall; wild arugula, fino verde basil, varieties of golden nugget potatoes; in spring and summer, Canestrino heirloom tomatoes, Tuscan plum tomatoes and San Marzano tomatoes.

On his out list: "Green and yellow pattypan squash, baby squash — peaked 10 years ago. The varieties are becoming too great so

there's a decline in squash. Now baby turnips, baby carrots. Ten years ago mesclun didn't exist, now everybody has it. But it will never go out of style. There are 12 to 14 varieties of it. With labor being so high, a chef can take it out of the box and just plop it on a plate. Now microgreens are overtaking in the lettuce category," Muzyk claims.

Babé Farms' Jordan says colored cauliflower is a good seller. Purple, green orange and white all do well for foodservice. "All the varieties taste the same — it's all in the presentation. One whole head of baby cauliflower looks nice on a plate. It's great for foodservice."

Jordan says colorful radishes move well and are most probably used in garnishes. There are many radish varieties. The icicle is elongated, all white. The Italian, or Cincinnati, radish looks like a pink carrot. The Easter egg variety when harvested is round, white to pink and looks like an Easter egg. The rosa, a large variety, is bright pink, and there is a purple variety, too.

Richard Collins, president, California Vegetable Specialties, Inc., Rio Vista, CA, has seen an "explosion in endive usage. You see it everywhere." Endive is used primarily for salad but the company is trying to get more people to cook with it.

"We have a new specialty item, pissenlit, which is a forced white dandelion," says Collins. "It's pretty. We sell it to high-end restaurants. It's still a relatively small deal, three acres, a pretty light crop. It's expensive to grow, in the \$15 per pound range. It's beautiful blanched, a great salad item. Most good French chefs know what to do with it. We held a luncheon at the Culinary Institute of America and served blanched white sweet corn and dandelions with artisanal sheep cheese from Bellweather Farms."

Catherine Baggott, marketing manager, Epic Roots, Salinas, CA, explains that Epic Roots was the first commercial sales grower



Photo courtesy of Babé Farms

Chefs are definitely looking for color. These baby cauliflower fit the bill.

of mâche, one of the few new salad greens in the past 15 years. Mâche has been popular in Europe. "Mâche is used simply dressed in salads, in pastas, in purées, braised. It has a mild, sweet, nutty flavor. It's very nutritious. It lends itself to every range of food preparation. It has a tender texture and can add texture and flavor to different foods without being overwhelming."

Isaac Cronin, Epic Roots' public relations director, includes microgreens on his list of "hot" specialty items. "At \$40 per pound, they're expensive and mainly used as a gar-

"Ask any chef what he or she looks for and the answer will be perception of value on the plate, then color, then taste, in that order."

**— Tom Leonardelli
US Foodservice**

nish," he says. Other hot items on his list are Asian pears, organic ambrosia melons and organic lettuce.

Aram Shah, chief operating officer at Miami, FL-based Morari Specialties, Inc., a totally integrated grower/shipper/marketer/distributor with its own label, supplies chefs with baby eggplant, a hot item, year-round. It also sells exotic fruits such as sitafal (also known as sugar apple) and chikoo sapote (also known as nispero in Spanish). Sitafal is commonly used in the Asian market as a fresh fruit and for ice cream. Chikoo sapote is a delicious fruit commonly eaten out of hand but also very good for milk shakes and ice cream.

Frieda's Caplan says mango or papaya cobbler, lingonberries and fruit salsas instead of tomatillo salsa are growing in popularity. "Although they're not yet mainstream, tropical fruits — excluding bananas — are becoming more ingrained on upscale menus," Caplan notes.

In general, Asian Fusion cuisine is popular. Guvar beans are hot. Caplan is seeing a lot of sugar cane skewers. "Nothing is 'out,'" says Caplan, "just used differently."

US Foodservice's Leonardelli, who spends all his time working with chefs, has his own opinion of what's in and out and what chefs are doing with specialties on their menus.

Getting Out The News On Specialty Produce

Jody Adams, chef/owner of Rialto restaurant, Boston, MA gets information from people who call or fax, from word of mouth or from exchanges with other chefs. "I don't go on the Internet to look for what's hot," she says.

Melissa's/World Variety Produce, Los Angeles, CA, has a chef-to-chef communications sales team. "It's easier to sell a new concept into a restaurant because of that connection from the culinary perspective. This is especially important when we're trying to educate chefs about a new category or product or an emerging cuisine such as Indian," says Robert Schueller, director of public relations.

How does Baldor get information to the chefs? "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" quips Michael Muzyk, president, Baldor, Bronx, NY. "The chefs know us and come to us. We, in turn, communicate with the chefs. We're big on communication and have a great infrastructure in place to tell chefs what we have. We also bring chefs to our facility to talk directly with our farmers, maybe ask them to grow something for them on a small area of their acreage like eight bale squash or the agretti variety of arugula."

Babé Farms, Santa Maria, CA, has a quarterly newsletter and a "huge mailing list," reports Carrie Jordan, marketing manager. "Twice a week our sales people will take a picture of something they just got in

and e-mail to buyers. Pictures really do sell. The buyers say, 'Hey, this is new, this is hot.' We reach the core buyers and they in turn talk to the chefs."

California Vegetable Specialties, Inc., Rio Vista, CA, reaches chefs via a chef educator kit that includes a set of roots, a video [DVD or VHS], brochures and a 6-pound box of mixed endive. Richard Collins, president, sends these out to culinary schools two to four times a week. The company also offers free resources on a Website for chef educators. That's where most of their requests come from, according to Collins.

The personnel at Epic Roots, Salinas, CA, attend foodservice shows. The company places a lot of PR into foodservice trade publications. "The French heritage of mâche lends a cachet to the product. The mâche rosette is beautiful on the plate. Epic gets a lot of word-of-mouth in the chef community," Catherine Baggott, marketing manager, explains.

Karen Caplan, president, Frieda's Inc., Los Angeles, CA, mentions communications vehicles within the company. Clients and chefs are in the database. Frieda's sends out e-mails and also samples. "This is the age of the Internet. People are looking for instant gratification. When we post a new piece of information on the Internet, we're deluged with calls within an hour," Caplan states. **pb**

"The No. 1 hot item is asparagus, not standard, but white or purple. Broccolini and broccoli rabe, or rapini, are hot. Chefs sauté it, and it adds a lot of plate coverage. They put root vegetables on the top and then some microgreens. It covers the plate, adds height, and the food cost is negligible," he explains.

Relishes and compotes, such as mango chutney, are used as toppings for fish dishes. Chefs are doing a lot of corn medleys for toppings, too, according to Leonardelli.

"The portabellini, a relatively new mushroom — it's the stage in between the portabello and the crimini — is becoming popular," Leonardelli says. It is about 5 inches and provides good plate coverage. Other hot mushrooms on Leonardelli's list are hedgehogs and morels.

"Baby bok choy and spicy greens are hot. Chefs are putting entrée items on a bed of

spicy greens. Broccolini that's 4 to 5 inches long really covers the plate. Rainbow beets, golden beets and all sorts of root vegetables are big now. Sweet potatoes are very in." In the fruit arena, "Tons of berries are on the market all year-round now," he notes.

What's out? "Spring mix is almost on the way out. Chefs now are customizing their own mix. Edible flowers are out. Standard Bermuda onions are giving way to sweet onions. Cauliflower is out except for the gold and purple varieties," he asserts.

Clark Fraiser, chef at Arrows Restaurant, Ogunquit, ME, says the latest trend is growing "really tiny" microgreens such as corn and pea sprouts and chard. They are popular for meat and fish accompaniments and are also used to sprinkle on salads. "We have a greenhouse and we raise a lots of these. They have great flavor," he says.

Is anything out? "Nothing, really. As a

Photo courtesy of Melissa Wood Valley Produce



Microgreens are hot — and likely to stay that way for quite some time.

chef, one gets tired using some things, baby bok choy, for example. But there's always a place for the basics like chard and spinach," Fraiser continues.

Todd Stein, chef de cuisine at mk restaurant, Chicago, IL, uses "old time" Italian cooking greens called bietina. He also uses Italian leaf chard, black kale and spigariello, a hearty green that has an almost nutty flavor. "Delicious," he says.

Stein braises greens in olive oil with garlic to "let the flavor shine" — to let greens taste like themselves. He uses raw apples for flavor and roasted beets caramelized in

Organics On The Menu

Almost everyone sees a rise in organic specialty produce on the menu. According to Richard Collins, president, California Vegetables Specialties, Inc., Rio Vista, CA, the company produces certified organic endive "that has a niche in certain restaurants."

Sysco Food Services-Chicago, based in Des Plaines, IL, is starting an organic program, according to Chris Elipulos, director of produce operations. "We'll have a line or organic items available all the time. Organics are one of the hottest trends now."

Jeffrey Jake, executive chef, The Lodge at Pebble Beach, CA explains, "Organic produce is now more available because the costs have been lowered and the knowledge of what organics are is much greater than it used to be. People are better educated about the problems with commercial agriculture. A lot of people are choosing

organics for health benefits. Some believe the flavor profile of organics is much better because organic farmers don't drive a lot of water into their produce."

Mark Marino, director of research and development for Earthbound Farm, San Juan Bautista, CA, notes, "There's an increase in organics across the board of 17 to 21 percent per year. Organic produce is growing at a 25 percent annual rate and accounts for 42 percent of all organic sales."

Matt Millea, executive chef of Earthbound Farm, explains, "The trend in the amount of organic produce is continuing to grow day by day. The quality of what's available is better day by day, year by year. Whether the certification is Monterey County or CCOF [California Certified Organic farmers], it's an assurance of quality and a sense of responsibility about how the product is grown." **pb**

the oven. He wants everything to remain true to its taste, to speak for itself.

What's out? Stein does not use a lot of

micro sprouts. Instead, he uses chervil tops and carrot tops.

Executive chef/co-owner David Burke of

How to get "a head" of the best

Baby head lettuce, now in nine varieties, is cut to order for maximum freshness.



Earning a growing reputation in freshness.

How do you get a competitive edge in foodservice or retail? One simple, inexpensive way is to look at your lettuce offerings. If they can now be duplicated at the local fast food outlet, it's time to look at baby head lettuce, which is special any way you cut it.

Yes, this palm-sized head of specialty lettuce, while flashy, is for real. It can be used in a salad, as an individual salad, or in a display on a plate or buffet.

Brought to you by the pioneer of baby lettuce varieties, these baby heads come in nine varieties. Select from red perella, baby red romaine, baby red leaf, baby green oak, lollo rossa, baby green romaine, baby green leaf, red oak, and tango.

And, since two heads are better than one, Babe Farms packs your retail or foodservice order in a "variety pack." Just ask your sales representative for all the details.

Santa Maria, CA
Phone: 800-648-6772 / 805-925-4144
Fax: 805-922-3950 • www.babefarms.com
Email: customerservice@babefarms.com

Reader Service # 110

David Burke & Donatella, New York, NY, has been hailed as one of the leading pioneers in American cooking today. He is fascinated with the art of the meal and likes to experiment with interesting ingredients and cooking techniques. Burke thinks Asian pears, kumquats, Buddha's hand lemons and microgreens are hot now. His menu includes Asian pears in a market salad with goat cheese, walnuts, crisp potato, bacon and fresh-snipped herbs. He uses microgreens in soups and on top of fish for texture and taste. Kumquats are used with foie gras and duck. He says he does not use as many specialty potatoes or baby vegetables these days as in the past.

Jeffrey Jake, executive chef, The Lodge at Pebble Beach, CA says yuzu, an Asian citrus that is now available in this country, is hot. "Chefs are using this now where they were using lemon or lime before. The taste is more tart. Yuzu fruit can be used from tartare to martinis. It's being inserted into different dishes. I marinate tomatoes in yuzu fruit. The Asian quality adds to tomato dishes," he explains.

According to Jake, crosnes, also called Chinese artichokes or chorogi, are another "hot" new item. It is a gnarly tuber, grown in bunches, with a nutty taste, somewhat like a Jerusalem artichoke, but not as crisp. Jake uses it in different applications with fish and beef because of its texture.

"There's a lot of use of vegetables within the pastry and dessert world such as beet ice cream, different vegetables to create sorbets that weren't used before. Lime ice for oyster topping, red pepper sorbet and fromage blanc ice cream are examples," says Jake.

Melissa's Fraker says many chefs use microgreens as a bed for chicken or tenderloin. Chefs are using roasted pepitas and pine nuts for salads. "They give a nice crunch. Pearl onions in a variety of colors are getting big as sides for turkey or beef. They come red, gold, white — a rainbow to brighten the dish," he relates.

Dragon fruit is up-and-coming because it is "very refreshing," according to Fraker. It is unique, flavorful and has texture like kiwifruit. The colors are white, pink and magenta — a "big eye-catcher." Fraker says some chefs dice it in salads.

Nothing is really "out," he believes. "Menus are going seasonal, whatever's fresh, exciting, whatever's prime is best."

Rialto's Adams thinks locally grown produce such as watermelon radishes and Chartenay carrots — beautiful, sweet French carrots — are hot. She uses early fall cresses, Asian greens, chards and kale from local farmers. For parties, she uses microgreens because they're "perishable and special." **pb**



AYCO FARMS®
Fresh Asparagus

**ASPARAGUS?
ALWAYS — ALL WAYS**

Bunches • Bags • Value-Added
GREEN & WHITE ASPARAGUS
OUR SALES TEAM IS READY TO SERVE YOU

954-788-6800
www.aycofarms.com
Deerfield Beach, FL

SEE US AT PMA BOOTH #3061

Reader Service #108

CRYSTAL VALLEY FOODS

"Year-Round Shippers of
Green & White Asparagus

Buying & Purchasing by
Jay, Jay T., John & Veronic

305-591-6567
sales@crystalvalleyfoods.cc
www.crystalvalleyfoods.co

6901 N.W. 41st Street
Miami, FL 33166

Reader Service #123

PEAK QUALITY®

ALPINE Fresh®

SPECIALIZING IN
ASPARAGUS AND MANGOS
YEAR-ROUND

*Alpine, Peak Quality,
Rico Mango,
TWM65 & Rojas brands*

Greg Fleming, John Lyons
and Javier Moran

305-594-9117
Fax: 305-594-8506

gfleming@alpinefresh.com
jlyons@alpinefresh.com
jmoran@alpinefresh.com

9300 N.W. 58TH ST.
MIAMI, FL 33178

Reader Service #104

Golden Asparagus Soup
4 SERVINGS

4 CUPS CHICKEN STOCK*
(SEE RECIPE BELOW) OR CANNED BROTH

2 THIN SLICES FRESH GINGER (1/4 TSP.
GROUND GINGER MAY BE SUBSTITUTED)

1/2 CUP DRY SHERRY

2 TEASPOONS SESAME OIL

1/2 POUND, FRESH ASPARAGUS SPEARS, CUT
INTO 1 1/2 INCH PIECES (14 1/2 OUNCE CANNED
ASPARAGUS CUTS AND TIPS, DRAINED
MAY BE SUBSTITUTED FOR FRESH ASPARAGUS)

2 OZ. CELLOPHANE NOODLES,
COOKED AND DRAINED

2 GREEN ONIONS, THINLY SLICED

BRING CHICKEN STOCK AND GINGER TO
BOIL. STIR IN SHERRY AND SESAME OIL.
REDUCE TO A SIMMER AND ADD FRESH
ASPARAGUS AND NOODLES (ADD CANNED
ASPARAGUS AT THE LAST MINUTE ONLY
HEAT THROUGH). COOK UNTIL ASPARAGUS
IS TENDER-CRISP, 2 TO 4 MINUTES. STIR
GREEN ONIONS AND SERVE IMMEDIATELY.

*CHICKEN STOCK

IN A STOCK POT, COMBINE 1 1/2 QUARTS
WATER, 3 LBS. CHICKEN BACK AND
NECK PIECES WITH SKIN, 1/2 LEMON, 2
STALKS CELERY CUT IN HALF, 2 CARROT
CUT IN HALF, AND 5-6 PEPPERCORNS.

BRING TO A BOIL. LOWER HEAT AND
SIMMER, COVERED, 3 TO 4 HOURS. POOR
THROUGH A FINE STRAINER AND
SKIM FAT FROM TOP.