CROSSET
COMPANY

10295 Toebben Drive, Independence, KY 41051

January 5, 2012

PRODUCE TALK

Volume 20
Issue 1

Remember Chinese New Year 2012

This January 23, 2012 is Chinese New Year 4710, the Year of the Dragon. All sorts of people celebrate Chinese New Year. People of all ethnic groups will appreciate the Asian items that you promote for Chinese New Year, so don't be shy. Asian food is the third most popular type of food in the United States, and is getting more popular every day. January is a tough month for produce sales, and I think you need to really promote Chinese New Year this year. It grows in popularity every year!

The traditional Chinese New Year combines the elements of many American holidays in one celebration. It is a time of reflection and resolution; a time to spend with family and friends; a time to come home; a time for feasts and festivals and a time to give gifts. Food has a major prominence in all Chinese festivals and New Year is no exception.

According to Chinese legend, Buddha invited all of the animals in his kingdom to come before him to celebrate his departure from earth, but only 12 animals came. The first to arrive was the mouse, followed by the ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, ram, monkey, rooster, dog and finally the boar. In gratitude, Buddha decided to name a year after each of the animals. People born during that year inherit some of the personality traits of the animal. In addition, it is thought that the year itself adapts the characters of the animal as well.

Here are 7 reasons why you should promote Chinese New Year:

1. To increase your incremental sales in a booming ethnic-driven category. The Asian category is growing every day and you need to capture the extra sales.
2. To highlight your existing variety; variety presents a positive image. Customers buy more when they feel you are catering to them.
3. To increase awareness and demand of the Asian category. Asian people aren't the only people eating Asian items. All people are looking for good tasting healthy items to eat; so you need to build the category.
4. To service the needs of a growing Asian population. If you want to reach out to ethnic groups, you have to let them know you have the products they want. It may be time to do an ethnic study for your marketing area.
5. To support consumer demand for healthy foods. People want to eat healthy.
6. To increase sales on mainstream items through cross merchandising. We can sell other items through cross merchandising.
7. To create "excitement" in your department.

A great way to promote the holiday is to set up a demo for some of the Asian items and have your store manager bring in a demo person to cook different stir-fry's and other Chinese dishes. It's an easy way to educate your customers, build the Asian category and sell product. Who doesn't want to do that?

Frieda will offer decorations if you order a certain amount of product, so go for it; order the product, decorate the display and create some excitement in your department. Call Mark Deem if you have any questions.

Here is a list of the top selling Asian items for Chinese New Year: Egg roll wrappers, Won ton wrappers, tofu, sugar snap peas, ginger root, daikon, bok choy, fortune cookies, kim chee, kumquats, Napa cabbage, snow peas, Asian pears, water chestnuts, celery cabbage, bean sprouts, cilantro, garlic, star fruit and stir fry vegetables. You're probably surprised how many of the Asian items you are already carrying.

Build it and they will come!

Good Selling!!

WESTERN VEGETABLES

ARTICHOKES: Frosted.

AVOCADOS: No changes.

BROCCOLI: Prices keep dropping as there is less demand, slightly better growing conditions and multiple growing areas all in production.

BRUSSEL SPROUTS: No big deal, prices are up a few bucks.

CAULIFLOWER: It has warmed up but prices are soaring. Cold weather, holiday demand and in general, cauliflower crops are much smaller than the other major crops.

CELERY: Price has dropped about four bucks as Florida has starting shipping product.

GREEN ONIONS: No price relief until Mexican laborers return to work.

LETTUCE: Price has dropped a couple of bucks. With limited labor and cold temperatures, supplies have diminished but anticipated holiday demands did not materialize. Epidermal peel is more evident now especially on Romaine.

VALUE-ADDED

Prorates and shortages from all suppliers in the southwest continues due to the cold weather. Frost/freeze damage to all varieties of lettuce, especially Romaine, has reduced the amount of product available for processing.

FLORIDA VEGETABLES

Freezing weather is moving in. Most vegetable prices will soar.

ONIONS: Western organic and conventional onion supplies remain good. Markets are steady. Imported sweet onions from Peru should continue through January for both organic and conventional sweet onions. The Mexican 1015 sweet onion deal is set to start as early as next week and be in full production the first of February.

ORGANIC TOMAOTES: Grape and cherry tomatoes are out of Florida and price may increase depending on potential damage. Round and Roma's is Mexican product that will also increase in price based on Florida situation.

POTATOES: Russet markets from Idaho and the Midwest are good and continue to be steady. Quality is good. Northwest organic potatoes are mostly in good supply with organic Yukon Gold potatoes a bit tight. Markets are steady.

ORGANICS

BROCCOLI: Another sizable price drop. Cal-O still has very little supplies.

BUNCH BEETS: Still no red bunch beets available from Cal-O. Gold bunch beets are now available but not from Cal-O.

CELERY: Big quality problems out west. It will be tough going for the next couple of weeks to find good product.

CUCUMBERS: Very few supplies are out there.

RADISHES: Still no Cal-O. Market prices are high. Easter egg radishes will be available but not from Cal-O.

RASPBERRIES: No change; very light supplies continue.

SPINACH: Prices have dropped.

STRAWBERRIES: Florida organic berry prices have dropped 25%.

YELLOW SQUASH: Light supplies, just can't get enough.

ASPARAGUS

This market is on fire. Limited volume out of Peru is due to a combination of factors; cool weather and available space on flights. Mexico would normally have volume, but with the cool weather they had, there is hardly any volume to speak of. Asparagus is an item once the weather gets warm will come on strong.

FRUIT

APPLES: Washington State apple markets are mostly steady on conventional and organic apples. Sizing is becoming an issue with the later harvested apples. Organic Pink Lady apples, for example, are peaking on 100 and 113 size apples with very few 88 and larger.

BLACKBERRIES: No changes.

BLUEBERRIES: Volume is strong and should stay this way through the month of January. Great item; continue to promote.

CANTALOUPES & HONEYDEWS: Cantaloupe market is off slightly while honeydews are showing a little strength.

CHERRIES: Markets are stable.

CITRUS: California navel orange production is in full gear for both organic and conventional navels. Sizing is improving and the fruit looks and eats great. Minneola tangelos, Cara Cara navels, blood oranges, Cutie clementines, Pummelo's and Meyer lemons are all available. Organic blood oranges should start in about a week or so. Texas organic and conventional grapefruit quality continues to be very good. Supplies have improved after the holidays as labor was an issue. Markets are steady.

CLEMENTINES: Very stable with plenty of fruit. January will be a good month to keep rolling with clementines. Good sizing 18/20 ct.

GRAPES: The domestic deal is pretty much finished. Import volume is picking up; look for markets to start easing. Some organic grapes will be available around the first of February.

PEARS: Anjou, Red and Bosc pears are in good supply both conventional and organic. This year, pear crop is very clean and markets are steady.

POMEGRANATES: Still excellent quantities on both conventional and organic Wonderful's.

STRAWBERRIES: California has more supplies; Driscoll prices have dropped and Florida is preparing for freezing weather. Prices are up. Overall quality is very good.

CHILEAN STONE FRUIT

The season is starting to pick up with more boat fruit arriving. Look for markets to start coming off. Sizing should also improve in the coming weeks. Red plums will be added to order guides.

TROPICAL FRUIT/VEGETABLE

FRENCH BEANS: No 10.1 microwave. Took them off order guides while in gap; they are still scarce and not available. The 5# market is up but with holiday pulls over, supplies will improve.

GREENSKIN AVOCADOS: Good volume on Greenskin avocados. Single layer and double layer are available. Switch from Florida to Dominican Republic product.

LIMES: Markets are steady.

MANGOES: Markets are steady.

SNOW/SUGAR PEAS: Improving; quality nice with product out of Guatemala. Market is dropping from highs earlier this month.

SOLO PAPAYAS: Markets are steady.

STAR FRUIT: Florida season on downswing and cost moving upward.

Merchandising Tips

Now that the frenzy of the Christmas season is over, and New Year celebrations are complete, it's time to go forward with the business of selling. January can be the slowest month of the year for sales so each department cannot afford to be complacent. Take the time to clean up your department of all Christmas decorations and any other sanitation issues that were skipped during the busy Holiday season.

Valentine's Day surveys were sent out last week so look over them closely and January is the time to start to plan for this promotion. Review your orders, delivery dates, storage space and display space with your store manager and Crosset merchandiser. Post signs and banners NOW to remind your customers of the date.

Now is also the time to evaluate your entire in-store floral program. It takes time to build sales in this category but with consistency and determination you can develop a floral department that your customers will look forward to shopping. Begin with one case of bouquets and one case of roses. Keep them fresh and in a high traffic area.

January is citrus season and time to put your department in full winter citrus set. California navels and Florida grapefruit lead the way. Clementine's in 5# boxes and 3# bags are very popular and try sampling all varieties of citrus to increase your sales. Sunburst tangerines are not only an excellent eating piece of fruit but the color stands out like a light bulb. They are great additions to your display. Show the color of each piece of fruit by cutting them in half and overwrapping and placing on your display.

Good Selling!!

Kung Pao Chicken Recipe (Serves 4)

Quick Asian stir-fries make especially satisfying weeknight dinners. Kung Pao is traditionally a seriously spicy dish, but we've given ours a moderate level of heat; feel free to adjust the quantity of re-pepper flakes to suit your taste. Serve with steamed rice.

Ingredients: 1 1/3 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts (about 4), cut into ½ inch pieces - 5 tablespoons soy sauce – 2 tablespoon plus 2 teaspoons cornstarch – 2 teaspoons sugar – 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar or rice vinegar - 2 teaspoons Asian sesame oil – 1/3 cup water – 2 tablespoons cooking oil – ½ cup peanuts – 4 scallions, white bulbs and green tops cut separately into ½ inch pieces – ¼ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes.

Method – **In a medium bowl**, toss the chicken with 1 tablespoon of the soy sauce, 1 tablespoon of the sherry, and the 1-tablespoon cornstarch. **In a small bowl**, combine the sugar, vinegar, sesame oil, water, and the remaining 4 tablespoons of soy sauce, 1 tablespoon of sherry, and 2 teaspoons cornstarch. **In a wok or large frying pan**, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil over moderately high heat. Add the peanuts and stir-fry until light brown, about 30 seconds. Remove from the pan. Heat the remaining 1-tablespoon oil. Add the white part of the scallions and the red-pepper flakes to the pan and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Add the chicken with its marinade and cook, stirring, until almost done, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the soy-sauce mixture and the scallion tops and simmer until the chicken is just done, about 1 minute longer. Stir in the peanuts. **Only 382 calories**

Garlic Pepper Chicken (Serves 4)

It is surprising that the Humanese people are known in China as possessing strong wills and a fighting spirit, for they surely are a reflection of their cuisine. Their food is strong, robust and full of jostling flavors. This dish typifies the style of cooking that has made Hunan food a strong contender for the best cuisine in China.

Ingredients: 3 chicken thighs, boned and skinned removed
For Marinade: 1 egg, lightly beaten – 2 teaspoons light soy sauce – ½ teaspoon cornstarch – 3 cups peanut oil, for deep-frying – 1 green bell pepper, seeded and cut into 1-inch triangles – 2 red chili peppers, seeded and chopped – 6 cloves garlic, thinly sliced – 12 black peppercorns, crushed.
For Seasonings: 1 teaspoon dark soy sauce 1 teaspoon light soy sauce – ½ teaspoon sugar – 2 teaspoons white vinegar – 1 teaspoon Shaoxing rice wine (available at Chinese Stores) or dry sherry – ½ teaspoon cornstarch, mixed with 1 tablespoon cold water, for thickening – ½ teaspoon sesame oil – ½ teaspoon hot chili oil.

Method - To Marinate: Score the chicken meat all over; then, cut into 1-inch square bite-sizes pieces. Mix the chicken with all of the marinade ingredients and set aside for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, assemble the remaining ingredients so they are ready for cooking. Heat the peanut oil for deep-frying in a wok until moderately hot. Deep-fry the chicken until golden brown, 3-4 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon, and drain on paper towels. Pour off the peanut oil from the wok, leaving a generous film of oil, about 2 teaspoons. Set over high heat and stir-fry the bell peppers, chili peppers, and garlic for 30 seconds. Add the peppercorns and chicken and stir-fry for 2-3 minutes. Add the seasonings, and stir in the thickening. Add the sesame oil and hot chili oil and toss to combine thoroughly for 10 seconds. Remove to a serving plate and serve hot. **Only 417 calories**