

## Reach Out To New Consumers

**D**ates and figs have many fans, but to really increase sales you must reach out to those who have thus far not thought to try them.

David Nelson, vice president of Bard Valley Date Growers Association, Bard CA, recommends holding in-store tastings to introduce the flavor of Medjool dates to the uninitiated. "Tastings are very successful with Medjools. People who think they don't like dates often will like a Medjool."

If that sounds too costly, try selling out of bins, suggests Salvatore Vacca, president of A. J. Trucco, Inc., New York, NY, especially when it comes to those big, plump Medjool dates. "If you display Medjools in the 15-pound cartons we sell them in with a scoop, they sell better. At upscale supermarkets, like Fairway and Citarella in Manhattan, they do a fantastic job selling them that way. I'm sure this can increase sales 25 to 30 percent."

Offering recipes also helps greatly, says Vacca. "Whenever we give consumers recipes, sales increase." **pb**

Bakers are also responsible for the disparity between pitted and unpitted dates according to Salvatore Vacca, president of A. J. Trucco, Inc., New York, NY. "Of the clamshells, we sell about 35 percent dried dates with pits, 65 percent pitted. Consumers who bake will use the pitted ones, because the ones with the pits are more time-consuming."

The most important aspect of a display is visibility. "When consumers see figs, they buy them — they're a big impulse purchase," notes Valley Fig's Cain.

"You have to put figs where people can see them. If you want to sell more, you have to display them prominently," says Kopke.

In the past, retailers often kept dried dates in the baking aisle and out of the produce department. "If you put them on the bottom shelf in the baking aisle, you'll sell only to people looking for dates," says Ampport's Stillman. "Dual location allows for the impulse sale of the item." If a customer walks into the store with no intention of baking or buying a date, he says, two displays provide two opportunities to make a sale.

Stillman even goes so far as to recommend setting up a "baking section" within the produce department. "You can drive

multiple sales with how you display them," he says. "Display dates with walnuts, pecans, glacé fruit and raisins. It will plant the idea of fall baking in their heads. It gets consumers into buying something they hadn't planned on buying that day.

"You'll sell twice as many dates in the produce section as anywhere else in the store," he says. "And along with them, you'll sell more sugar, flour, butter and pecans."

Another suggestion from Stillman is to promote dried dates. "Dried dates make for a nice loss-leader. When you sell a package of dates, you aren't just selling one item — you're selling what goes with it. You're selling cereal, pecans, baking ingredients."

Vacca agrees with the produce department placement. "When stores follow our suggestion to move dates and figs to the produce department, their volume of sales increases quite a bit."

Vacca believes the produce section gives dates and dried figs a better image. "Dried fruits are usually considered a winter item. Placing them in the produce section gives the impression that they're a 'fresher' item."

Labeling can go a long way to encourage consumers who are less familiar with the fruit to buy them. "We sell our figs in ready-to-display cases that include header cards,"

says Cain. "Retailers have successfully displayed figs in the produce section next to anything from bananas to peaches."

## ENJOY YEAR-ROUND SALES

Keep dates and dried figs available all year to make the most of them.

"Retailers don't think they can sell figs outside the holidays, so they don't stock them," says Cain. "Retailers who stock them year-round do very well. I would encourage retailers to try to have them on the shelves all year long. I think they'll be pleasantly surprised by the results."

Bard's Nelson believes the same goes for dates. "Years ago, Medjools were a fall and holiday item. Now, most of the major chains carry them 12 months of the year," he says. "Consumers can get Medjools any time they go into the store. So it's a plus to the retailer and the consumer to have them year-round."

Waiting for Thanksgiving to give your sales a boost? Not a good idea, notes Stillman. "Retailers often believe dates are only a holiday product — that is a mistake. Start promoting dried dates early in the fall. Early September is when the harvest typically ends. When the weather starts to turn cold, baking season begins. As soon as we get a cold snap, the consumer wants to bake." **pb**



# THE "AMPORT" DIFFERENCE



- Leading imported date in the U.S.
- Only vacuum packed date
- Unique shipper display to create additional sales
- Bake display, stacker boxes, and modules
- Custom promotional programs to fit your needs
- Private Label specialist
- **New** – Full line of gusseted, stand-up fruits and snacks






2112 Broadway St. N.E. • Minneapolis, MN 55413 • 612-331-7000 • fax 612-331-1122 • Web site [www.ampportfoods.com](http://www.ampportfoods.com)