



## **The Packer**

### **For pineapples, demos work; health sells**

By Angie Hanson

(Feb. 11) Whether it's touting health benefits, mixing pineapple with other tropicals or offering in-store samples, pineapple importers and produce merchandisers are experimenting with various promotional vehicles.

"It's a very exciting fruit for consumers," said Robert Schueller, public relations director for Los Angeles-based World Variety Produce Inc., which markets under the Melissa's label. "It's not looked at as an exotic anymore."

Dean Balzum, produce specialist and merchandiser at Woodbury, Minn.-based Kowalski's Markets, agreed, and said the Del Monte Gold Extra Sweet Pineapple that Kowalski's offers is so popular, that it became a signature item for the retailer.

"It's pretty close to mainstream," Balzum said of the pineapple, which is one of the top 10 sellers in the produce department. "Signature represents what we're getting with consistency and quality, and the everyday price is pretty reasonable."

Indeed, pineapple sales rose almost 3% from 2006 to 2007, and the category represents 1.1% of total produce department sales, which actually is a sizable amount when considering the vast produce selection available today, said Adam Brohimer, vice president of Chatsworth, Calif.-based Fusion Marketing Inc., who provided data compiled by Hoffman Estates, Ill.-based FreshLook Marketing Group.

Balzum strives to promote the pineapple every eight weeks and organizes a demonstration — showing the customer how to cut the pineapple with a corer sold at Kowalski's — every three to four weeks.

Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix Super Markets Inc., Lakeland, Fla., said Publix also frequently publicizes pineapple and during promotions brings its in-house pineapple corer out on the floor so consumers can get a visual.

Marketing the pineapple year-round is precisely what needs to happen to drive category sales, which have recently stabilized, said Bill Sheridan, executive vice president of sales and marketing for Coral Gables, Fla.-based Banacol Marketing Corp.

"We're trying to get an everyday low price on pineapple and trying to get away from the seasonal and holiday spike," Sheridan said.

One factor that should help: pineapple volume and quality have become steadier in recent years, Sheridan said.

"What's really changed in the business from years ago is that we can guarantee volume on a certain size year-round, and that helps, having a price point where customers feel like purchasing," Sheridan said. "Size, quality and price point is the focus for 2008."

While the statistics from FreshLook indicate that pineapple sales rose in 2007, the pounds of pineapples sold had dropped nearly 11%, suggesting higher prices and fewer pineapples were purchased, Brohimer said.

To fuel pineapple sales, in-store sampling has proven the most effective catalyst for Frontera, said Ken Nabal, vice president of sales and logistics for Edinburg, Texas-based Frontera Produce Ltd.

"In-store sampling still remains the best vehicle to increase demand and consumption," Nabal said.

Brennon Neff, national sales manager for diversified products Westlake Village, Calif.-based Dole Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, echoed Nabal's sentiments, and said sampling usually facilitates double- or triple-digit sales spikes for retailers.

## **SEASONAL PROMOS**



Although some are focusing on year-round sales, holidays are still a promotional focus for many, and Melissa's generally targets Valentine's Day, Easter and Passover, Mother's Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day, while Frontera also incorporates the Super Bowl and Father's Day into the mix.

Chiquita Brands International LLC, Cincinnati, also concentrates on Thanksgiving and Christmas, said Ed Loyd, manager of investment relations and corporate communications.

Dole considers fall and spring the ideal seasons to push the pineapple, Neff said.

Frontera is taking advantage of the warm spring and summer months, when barbeques are frequent, by highlighting the champaca pineapple's grilling abilities, Nabal said.

Beginning in the spring, Frontera will place a packaging band on its champacas that reads, "Great for Grilling," in the Southwest region, where there is a higher Hispanic population, Nabal said.

"A lot of Hispanics use the champaca for cooking because it's a better grilling pineapple," he said. "We will test it in Southwest markets to see if there's a demand."

### **FOCUS ON NUTRITION**

Wellness, on the other hand, is at the forefront of Vancouver, British Columbia-based The Oppenheimer Group's partnership with the American Diabetics Association, in support of its "I Decide to Fight Diabetes" campaign.

The campaign is a reminder that diabetics can help control the disease through their own actions and healthful decisions.

Scheduled to begin in March and run through 2008, Oppenheimer's Linda Gold brand pineapples will feature the ADA's logo and a message underscoring the benefits of including pineapples in a diabetic's diet, said David Nelley, Oppenheimer's pineapple category director.

Signs, point-of-sale materials and boxes displaying the ADA logo also will be provided to retailers, Nelley said.

"A serving of pineapple is a good treatment" Nelley said of diabetes. "We're really appealing to the health aspects and people that are interested in self-medicating and eating more fruits and vegetables."

The partnership with ADA is not pineapple specific. It will span across a number of produce items, such as grapes, sweet bell peppers, organic green kiwifruit, OriginO-branded organic tomatoes-on-the-vine and OriginO-branded organic cucumbers, said Karin Gardner, Oppenheimer's communications manager.

In addition to the ADA logo, Oppenheimer also is incorporating new graphics on its pineapple boxes in March, she said.

Chiquita also is stressing the nutritional value a pineapple affords — such as its bromelain enzyme content — which is a multitasking supplement that eases the symptoms of poor digestion and may speed the healing of sports injuries, Loyd said.

Pineapples also are high in Vitamin C and fiber, which should be emphasized, Sheridan said.