

Marketers refocus for down economy

By Amy Fischbach
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With many consumers facing tight budgets, the National Watermelon Promotion Board, Orlando, Fla., is promoting the value of watermelon.

The association is working on graphics to show how many slices can be carved from a watermelon.

The promotion board also has a value calculator on its Web site to allow consumers to determine how much a watermelon costs per serving based upon the price of the watermelon and how much it weighs. For example, if a consumer buys a 15-pound watermelon, the cost can boil down to 30 cents per serving.

Finally, the association offers a variety of recipes that consumers can make from a single watermelon.

"Everyone is concerned with how much the grocery lists costs, and how healthy it is," said Stephanie Simek, marketing and communications manager for the the promotion board. "With watermelon, you can get the most bang for your buck, the most nutrition and versatility and the least amount out of your pocket."

Melon grower-shippers are also on board with helping spread this message. Increased supply and aggressive promotions have contributed to a successful season for Coral Gables, Fla.-based Del Monte Fresh Produce NA, whose offshore season extends from the

end of November to early May.

"As a result of the current economic climate, this year has been very different," said Dennis Christou, vice president of marketing. "Demand is much more sensitive to promotions, and good deals on the shelf have become one of the key drivers to move product."

Dulcinea Farms, a Ladera Ranch, Calif., grower of melons, watermelons and cantaloupes, creates, develops and executes all of its marketing programs. The company is focusing on promotions by creating custom programs that build excitement at the store level and help to



Dennis Christou
Del Monte Fresh Produce NA

drive sales, said Monique McLaws, marketing manager.

Rather than only doing promotions during the peak of the season, the company also is backing promotions at off-peak periods to educate consumers.

"We have had the most success with programs that create value for the consumer," McLaws said. "Driving traffic to our retailers with consumer incentives, high graphic point-of-sale materials and educational messages are all components that need to be a part of the program to be successful."

While the company does not have a merchandising program this year, the company is working closely with individual stores on

in-store execution.

In the summer, the company's ready-to-display cases of PureHeart miniature watermelons and Tuscan-style cantaloupe go in high-traffic areas of the produce department.

"Many retailers also have great success when they display Dulcinea melon cases by the checkout stand," McLaws said.

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