

Dulcinea to stress individualized marketing support at United

By LORA ABCARIAN

Monique McLaws, marketing manager for **Dulcinea Farms** in Ladera Ranch, CA, said that company staff will be available at the United Fresh Produce Association show April 21-25 in Las Vegas, NV, to talk with retailers and buyers about the many ways marketing support can build bottom lines. "Every dollar is going to count. During 2009, let's hunker down and get back to basics," she told *The Produce News*. "The show is going to really reflect what we are doing right now with marketing support. United really helps with the changing landscape."

Dulcinea works with its retail partners to move Pure-Heart and Ruby Bliss watermelons, Tuscan-style cantaloupes and Rosso Bruno tomatoes. Fresh-cut and overwrap commodities are marketed through the "Dulcinea and Garden Highway" program.

General Manager Luzius Caviezel, Vice President of Sales & Marketing John McGuigan and Marketing Associate Corey Hill will join Ms. McLaws at booth No. 1910.

It is critical for Dulcinea to individualize marketing strategies to meet both retailer and customer needs, Ms. McLaws said. "All of our programs are very customizable. It's important not to offer a canned program."

The company is making a big push to market melons in the eastern United States in 2009. Volumes are anticipated to increase by as much as 40 percent. "As we expand into the

Midwest and East, we're working with our retailers to tailor these programs." The effort has already been successful in Ohio, Georgia, North Carolina and Indiana, she said.

General strategies that can be made retailer-specific to bring added value include mixed floor space and cross-traffic positioning of displays such as mini bins. "This offers consumers a secondary chance to buy," Ms. McLaws said.

Supply-chain challenges and solutions will also be discussed.

Dulcinea will talk about the physical characteristics of Tuscan-style cantaloupes, which can help consumers purchase product at preferred stages of ripeness. The oval-shaped cantaloupes have grooves on the outer skin that the company refers to as "ripening grooves." Green grooves mean the cantaloupe is ripe and crisp, while cream-colored ridges mean the fruit is more full flavored and aromatic. Ms. McLaws said that this simple characteristic can be extremely helpful when produce managers and their staff address consumer questions.

Because Dulcinea is focusing on expansion of year-round markets, Ms. McLaws was asked how consumers react to such availability, particularly since melons are typically associated with summer-time consumption. "We must be sure it is as great an eating experience during the winter as it is in July," she replied. "I expect purchasing patterns to shift easily when we get this going."

Sampling has proven to be a critical component in overall marketing strategies, especially during the off-season. An initiative undertaken by Kroger in Ohio during 2008 exemplified the value of the efforts. The initiative sought to tantalize consumers with new and different applications for melons. A chef-developed melon soup was offered, which Ms. McLaws said was a hit.

"You already have a perception. It's hard to get people to eat something new," she said. "It takes a little innovation and someone with great experience. This kind of recipe stands out."



Dulcinea Farms plans to talk with retailers about the importance of customized marketing programs at the United Fresh show. An initiative undertaken by Kroger in Ohio last year successfully increased melon sales. (Photo courtesy of Dulcinea Farms)

