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Dulcinea Farms and Rosemont Farms form strategic alliance

By Tim Linden

California-based Dulcinea Farms and Florida-based Rosemont Farms announced at the Produce Marketing Association convention in San Diego a strategic alliance that will increase the production and distribution of "Dulcinea" brand fresh fruits and vegetables.

Keith Kato, general manager of Dulcinea Farms, told *The Produce News* that currently about 80 percent of the company's output is marketed west of the Rockies. The alliance with Rosemont will allow the company to significantly increase its production by next spring and facilitate tremendous

sales expansion into the eastern half of the United States.

Dulcinea Farms, which is a subsidiary of seed industry giant Syngenta, burst on the produce scene several years ago with the introduction of its personal size "Dulcinea PureHeart" seedless watermelon. Since then it has added the extra sweet Tuscan style cantaloupe, the "SunnyGold" sweet golden honeydew and the "Rosso Bruno" premium vine-fresh tomato to its list of products. According to Mr. Kato, each product was bred specifically to address consumer needs and wants that were determined through extensive consumer research. He said that the unique element to "Dulcinea" branded

produce is that the development starts with the consumer and ends with the seed, rather than the reverse.

For example, the "Rosso Bruno," which is a brown tomato, came to fruition after research showed that consumers have a high level of dissatisfaction with current tomato products. Searching the globe for germplasm, Dulcinea Farms' representatives discovered this brown tomato, which Mr. Kato said has superior flavor. Though he admitted that it is going to be an uphill battle to educate consumers about the nuances of this tomato, he said that the flavor will satisfy consumers and hence it is a perfect fit for Dulcinea.

Dulcinea Farms also believes that Rosemont Farms is a perfect fit. Rosemont President Andrew Schwartz said that the company is a fully integrated grower, shipper, marketer and distributor with a

focus on execution. Headquartered in Boca Raton, FL, the firm has long produced watermelons as well as an extensive list of other fruits and vegetables, which it will continue to do. But it will also produce, market and distribute the "Dulcinea" line of products beginning next spring with the melon items. Mr. Schwartz said that Dulcinea experts will soon be on the ground in Florida providing training so that the Florida firm can produce those crops to Dulcinea's specific requirements.

Mr. Kato said that besides the obvious benefit of adding significant new acreage for these branded items, Rosemont Farms is well known as an expert in supply chain development and perishable logistics. He said that Dulcinea will benefit greatly in these areas through the strategic alliance.

Mr. Kato said that Dulcinea also has a number of other proprietary products in the production pipeline that will be introduced in the not-too-distant future. Dulcinea's per-

sonal-sized watermelon has found converts throughout the country, and it has also spawned imitators. Mr. Kato quipped that the industry is "slow to innovate but quick to replicate." Though that causes some concern, he is not overly fazed. "Other are imitating us, but we are already working on generation two or three of these items," he said, indicating that Dulcinea's connection with Syngenta is helping the company stay ahead of the curve.

With the addition of the Florida production and East Coast distribution, Mr. Kato expects the "Dulcinea" brand to garner more consumer recognition. Long term, the firm wants to build its brand and it wants consumers to equate that brand name with superior tasting product. But he acknowledged that building a consumer brand is a long and expensive process, and that in the produce industry, the key to increasing sales is to appeal to the retail buyers, as they are the gatekeepers to space on the shelves.