

TESTA PRODUCE Market Report

Outlook for the Week of

**January 16,
2012**



Market Report

Snow and cold arrived in Chicago last week and yes, everyone forgot how to drive in the snow. It never ceases to amaze me how stupid people get in snow. You would think that living in Chicago you would realize that a 4000-pound car does not stop on a dime when it snows, and yes, you will lose control and crash into something or someone. But every year without a doubt, the news media shows us big pile-ups of stupid people driving too fast and wrecking their car. By the way, the same thing happens when it rains, it just doesn't get as much publicity as snow.

Bad weather does not help my business because everyone likes to stay in- which means restaurants are not busy, except pizza joints, and that's not a big part of my business. The other thing bad weather does is cause issues with supplies; especially when the bad weather is on major truck routes across the country. Semis don't do well in blizzard and white out conditions. They usually will pull off the road and wait for it to clear; which is a smart thing to do, but causes delays in product arrival.

Bad weather is striking across America lately and some of the victims are Zucchini, Yellow Squash, Green Peppers, Corn, and Beans. Those are just a few of the products with issues. Prices for all of those, and a few others, have doubled and the winter weather always makes for unpredictable prices. Availability of product is what causes these big jumps in prices. Most of the country is in a deep freeze so product

coming from the south is your only source. When that source has issues, you get very big price swings for either one week, or several. When you hear people talk about locally grown and you live in the Midwest, it's always a conversation that you take with a grain of salt. I would love to source everything from locally grown farms but its never going to happen unless Illinois sets up the largest hydro-production facility in the country; and even then we still won't be able to get everything I need to supply all of the my customers, but it certainly would help. The economics of doing that are mind-boggling. It's a discussion for another day, but I would support it tomorrow.

Winter causes transportation headaches across the country. Of course no customer ever has had an employee or manager come in late to work, so they don't quite understand how a semi loaded with produce could possibly not show up on time. Your employees live close by; the semis are coming from Cali to Chicago so the weather for them is the entire country, and yes, sometimes they're late. Which means product that is needed for our operations is not available and that can cause issues. We like to rotate our product as much as possible, we feel fresher product is better and every one of our customers agrees. They also understand that winter is a very challenging time for produce so some adjustments have to be made in their buying. Taking extra care in the winter is always a good thing, so you don't have to wait on the truck. By the way, truck drivers, pickers, and customer service people come late to work also.

Market Report, Cont'd...

Red Peppers are going down, Yellow Peppers are high, and Green Peppers took off- prices doubled in a week and the market is very strong. Growers are saying it's because of the cold snap that hit Florida but I have my doubts. I don't think the weather was that bad and I think they got a good excuse to raise prices; if they fall quickly you will know I was right, so we will wait and see. Basil and Chives have returned to normal almost. There are still some high prices out there but we went back to normal pricing. Seedless Cucs went nuts- Price also doubled in a week. Growers are in 'Act of God Mode' so prices will stay high for a short while- this also should not last long. Honeydew and Cantaloupe took a jump also but that is just the normal price increase for this time of year. What is more important is quality of Melons, and that has not been great. We do testing on our Melons' Brix count and some are not too good. Unfortunately you cannot test every Melon, so some low Brix fruit may get by, we apologize if you get one. Usually it's just like California and Arizona with Melons: the longer they go, the more sugar they develop, so later in the year is always better. Clementines are still great. Heirloom Apples are the best eating Apple in the house- they are more expensive than your regular Apple but they are worth it. Organic citrus is also a little pricier but also definitely worth it if you need high quality Citrus. Regular Oranges are getting better all the time so don't count them out either. The best way to shop for good hand fruit is to mix and match high-end stuff and regular stuff for the budget- minded executive. In Chicago we are lucky, we have very high-end properties and we have the not-so-high-end and everything in between. We can handle them all so just tell us what you need and we'll get it.

Strawberries are much better but not cheaper. Raspberries are better and higher. Blackberries are better and higher. Blueberries are excellent and steady. Capped Gooseberries are out for a month or so. Pears are still going strong and Kiwi is excellent. Offshore Plums are super pricey and just OK- it's a Plum, nothing special. Buddah's Hands are cool and make a great zest. Jicama makes great sticks for

any fruit or veggie platter. Serve more fruits and veggies and live longer.

Produce Quiz

I started in India and spread quickly throughout Europe and to the New World. Everywhere I am hated and loved. I am a nuisance weed to many a farmer that just can't get rid of me. I was claimed common by William Cobbett who, in 1817, suggested I was fodder only for Frenchman and pigs who could find nothing else to eat. I was an honorable staple at Walden, and today I am heralded due to my alpha-linoleic acid content which is one of the major good Omega-3 fatty acids. I am just a succulent weed that grows wild in the summer and can tolerate harsh conditions. I have many names but I prefer the one that sounds most academic. My stems are rubbery and I am only two inches tall but can stretch out several feet in length. I am often used in edible landscaping which is most convenient for those who desire my oil. I am one of the few greens that freeze well. I am consumed as a salad green, boiled in butter or pickled after a good thaw. I am a welcome addition to stews, gumbos and soups and essential for fattouch. I can also be consumed raw. I am a good source of potassium, magnesium and vitamin A. My high water content makes me a good thirst quencher and I serve well as a diuretic, intestinal cleanser and emollient. Common mischievous weed my eye!

Last Quiz Answer: Grapes



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