

# TESTA PRODUCE Market Report

Outlook for the Week of  
**February 20,  
2012**



## Market Report

So why is Chicago, and the entire Midwest, having such a good winter? And do you really want to know? I have a theory: Mother Nature hit us with a blizzard last year that took a toll on the city; so this year she decided to take it easy on us and for the next five years we are going to get slammed- but its just a theory. It is really cool to go out in February to temps in the 50's. I almost went to the golf course to play but they don't have any pins in the greens, and there are tarps on some of them; but the rough is really easy to get out of. Soon, very soon.

Produce prices are in the toilet on most items. There are a few high priced items but definitely the cheap outweigh the high. The biggest issue on most items is quality. Here again, almost all the items are very good- except, the usual ones that are always a problem are still a problem: the main one being Berries. The growing areas are both having issues with rain- Florida and California are being hit with 4- 5 days of rain. This causes the Berries to become very tender and easily bruised while in transit. That is why you see the bruising on almost all Berries. Growers and the USDA allow a certain amount of bruising, but if it gets too bad, the growers will send most of the Berries to freezers and wait for less rain. That causes shortages in the market and that's when you see prices shoot up. Even though the FOB price is cheap, the sell price on the east coast or Chicago is double that because everyone in those areas is looking for strong fruit. This happens with all Berries: Blues, Reds, and Blackberries. The variety of the berry also determines how it will arrive after a two or three thousand-mile trip. Growers are constantly trying new varieties of Berries to see which ones holds up better, tastes better, grows better in certain weather, and ships

better in season. You probably didn't know that there are over hundreds of varieties of Strawberries that have been grown and most of the current varieties were developed in the last few years. A lot of this research is done on University campuses and some hold the patent on certain varieties. They also do a lot of research on Veggies and Citrus the same way- mostly the Southern Universities because they get grants from growers. Some growers do not want everyone to know what they are doing, so some work is done on the QT but when a new item is introduced, it is usually with a college's help.

English Peas are back and next week we have a sale price on them, so get them while you can. We have only a couple of pallets and when they are gone, they're gone. Beans are steady, Broc is steady, Cabbage is steady, Savory Cabbage is higher, Cauliflower is down, and Celery is steady. Eggplant is a problem; it looks like it will be double this week from what it was last week. That may only be the product from one growing area, but that might be the best growing area- we will wait and see. Head Lettuce is steady for now and price has remained cheap, but we all know that could change with one big storm in a growing area. Romaine is steady also and quality has improved greatly. Mesclun is excellent and the Organic product we carry has been very good. Baby Spinach and Baby Arugula are also in good shape. The Pepper market is rising on Greens, steady on Reds, and steady on Yellows. Specialty Peppers are all over the board: Jalapenos are higher, Banana Peppers are lower, and Anaheims are steady.

Tomatoes are starting to come to life this year. We can't complain about Tomatoes. The market has been super cheap, quality had been very good, and we have had all kinds of different products at great prices. Heirloom

## Market Report, Cont'd...

Organic Tomatoes under \$20 in February- that is great. Yellow Teardrops under \$20 is a great price and they are Organic also. Red Teardrop and Mixed Medley are cheap as well. Single layer Beefsteaks under \$20 is another great price. The entire Tomato market has been great for customers and hopefully you have taken advantage of it.

Winter Citrus is always tricky. Some items are constant. Clementines are stable during winter but some are much better than others, and most of the difference is in the growing areas. Spanish Clementines are always very good but as the season goes on, product tends to get older and lose flavor. California product is excellent at times but different fields sometimes are very different in quality. Morocco Clementines hit this week and they are outstanding- great flavor and excellent quality, so let's hope that lasts a while. We have outstanding Organic Citrus with great flavors, but sometimes the skin doesn't look that great. Remember you can't always judge a book by its cover (you can with most men and women but that's another story); so if you order them, always eat one before you send it back because it doesn't look pretty.

We test all of our Honeydew and Cantaloupes for Brix level (sugar). In the last week we have rejected certain pallets of both- we don't want junk going to our customers, however it does happen. Just so you know, some boxes can be better than others but we can't test every box- so we're sorry, we still try and make sure you get the best.

Which brings us to Bananas and what is happening. It boils down to supply and who has it and who doesn't. All Bananas have to be gassed in order to turn from green to ripe. How long you gas them is key to different shades of color and how hot they get is also key to color. The amount of humidity is also another factor in Banana ripening. All of the above is what I have to think about and also figure out how many of each color my customers are going to take every day. The key is getting the Banana ripeners to give me different colors everyday so I can rotate out all of the colors daily. I use 4 different companies; all 4 only had green Bananas for 3-4 days. That's a problem and they didn't have enough Bananas coming in to keep up with the color demand of all their customers. Now they say it might last 4-6 weeks, that's not good.

Trying to stay ahead of them can be a problem because

Bananas do not turn off; they will keep ripening from the moment you gas them. So a good idea is if you use Bananas every day, and always order stage 5/6, and sell out every-day, order a little extra stage 3/4 and have some product to put out just in case product comes in too green one day. You could even set up a rotation that you could never be out of color if you kept certain stages in house, if you have the room. Now that I made you all into Banana ripeners, I can retire. Hopefully this situation is not too long and I will just go back to keeping everyone happy. As a side note, noticing the difference between a 3 color and a 3 ½ color is tricky, 10 out of 10 produce guys couldn't tell the difference so my pickers have a hard time with that. If you want different stages, I might suggest asking for a green, turn, or ripe instead of numbers. It will get you what you want more consistently.

## Produce Quiz

I am a fruit. You know me best as a drink, but I am a fruit. Discovered in a province of Ethiopia that somewhat still bears my name, my cultivation was initiated by Arabs around 1575. At that time my seeds were boiled so no one who ate my bright red berries could plant me. This did not last long. By the early 1600's I had been smuggled into Europe and I was seen in Bali and Sumatra. By the 1700's I arrived in Martinique. In the same century I reached Spanish shores and they shared my shrub with the Philippines and Latin America. From there I went viral. As a world trade item I am second only to oil (or maybe by "i" parts). I am listed in commodity exchanges and there have even been times when I was used as a currency. Cool beans, eh? Today I even have my own organization that determines price and quantities for over 90% of my producers. My greatest areas of production are Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Mexico and one single grower in the USA. My shrub can grow up to 20 feet but I am usually trimmed to 15 feet or under so I can be harvested. I have the luxury of being harvested by hand because I have both red and green cherries on each branch. I produce my delicious red cherries (from light red to a robust sensual burgundy, the darker the sweeter) year round but my main harvest is usually about three months. If pruned properly I can be productive for up to 30 years. My branch is strong and ¼" thick. My green leaves have a sheen and a shape that makes me look fake. I would be a beautiful Christmas or café décor. I have tiny white flowers that will shrivel brown almost immediately upon being picked. Once bitten, my slightly tough exterior reveals a refreshing burst of juice with a compelling delicate watermelon/hibiscus/rosewater flavor. I also contain one or two seeds that are not edible. The seeds can be dried and roasted once I am stripped of my endocarp, and while that is what I am famous for, that's another journey. It's time you discovered my cherry as I am available for the first time in America this season. While my seed keeps people up nights, my cherry can be used in game sauces, iced creams, compotes, mulled spices, cascara, cakes, breads and pies. No cigarettes required!

## Last Quiz Answer: Longan



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