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Demographics Trends Influence Produce Marketing

BY LISA RISSER
WILLOW STREET (Lancaster) — The most profitable section in a grocery store is the produce department. Little wonder as fresh fruits and vegetables have taken on a greater importance in the American consumer's diet during the past several years.

Producers and retailers alike are beginning to explore new marketing avenues that capitalize on this change and the changes in social demographics. But before they can do this, they must have an understanding of the changes that are occurring, Bryan Silberman told attendees of the Agriculture Marketing Alternatives Conference last week.

Among the trends Silberman, staff vice president of the Produce Marketing Association, mentioned included the need for processing foods before they get to the store and consumer. "Preprocessing: things that save time for consumers and grocers are increasing in popularity," he said.

A trend closely related to this is the diminishing difference between grocery stores and restaurants. "There is a fight for the disposable food dollar between food service operators (restaurants) and grocers," commented Silberman. "Chain stores are looking for draws; they're offering salad bars and gourmet food to go."

The other major trends Silberman listed include:

•Cocooning—People are coming back to the home as a focus of family activities. This means an increase in food to go.

•UPC Codes—Price look-up codes will one day be applied to produce at shipping time.

Silberman stressed the need for an industry-wide understanding of each step's problems. "Producers and distributors should know the purchasing needs of retailers, and everyone should know the buying habits of consumers," he remarked.

"In addition, producers must focus on the market needs first, before planting."



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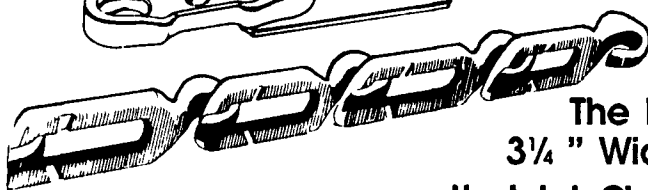
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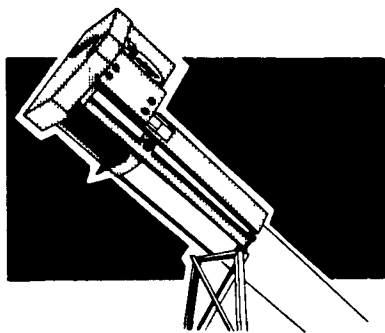
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