



By Kimberly Warren
Editor

Everyone at Glory Foods knows what good collard greens are supposed to taste like. That's how the company assures consumers are getting what they pay for.

"We're not putting a label on something and selling it," said Michael Brown, head of the fresh produce division at Glory Foods. "We're putting a label on something that's part of us."

And consumers appreciate that. Since the company entered the fresh-cut produce arena four years ago, customers have been embracing the down-home products offered by Glory Foods. Among those specialties are fresh-cut sweet potatoes and collard greens.

Those who eat Glory Foods' products already seem to know that the dark greens and oranges of collard greens, turnip greens and sweet potatoes provide healthful benefits. They're just looking for a more convenient way to prepare them.

"Our first target group is the elderly and older, semi-retired and retired people who grew up eating the product, so they know the benefits of the product," Brown said. "Then we're looking at the younger generation who grew up eating their grandparents' food but may not know how to cook it and don't want to mess around with it."

"We want to show them that you can still eat the traditional homestyle cooked food with more convenience."

The company primarily does business east of Texas in the mid-South and South, as well as in the Midwest, with its largest groups of consumers based in urban areas. The suburban sectors of its consumer base are growing rapidly, Brown said.

"The consumer is more savvy with food overall, and everyone understands the health aspects," he said. "I foresee that this category will continually grow, in particular for the consumer base that is diversify-

ing America."

As North America continues to diversify ethnically, Brown said the growth of convenient foods speaking to those ethnic groups will expand.

"It'll all depend on the demographic shift that starts on the coastal regions and gravitates inland," he said.

For right now, health and convenience continue to drive the growth of the fresh-cut industry. Where Brown said he sees a plateau in the markets for other food items, fresh-cut produce continues its upward growth.

"Everyone knows about the health benefits, it depends on what tastes better," Brown said. "There are a lot of foods out there that people like that you shouldn't eat, but they still eat them. You can have the greatest vitamin-packed product out there, but if it doesn't taste good people won't eat it."

This is where providing high-quality, tasty fresh-cut products that people



enjoy eating is successful – and it will keep fresh-cut moving ahead.

A CHALLENGING INDUSTRY

Fresh-cut does have its share of challenges. The toughest thing with the category, Brown said, is maintaining quality through the distribution channel. One important member of this chain – who can make or break the quality – is the produce manager.

“You really want to have that front-line produce manager backing up the product line because when you have management, (the product) moves better,” Brown said. “Retail is learning how to look at how they sell the product.”

Transportation also is key. The cost, efficiency and reliability of trucking can cause some of the biggest headaches in day-to-day operations.

“It is a major factor in being competitive and serving the customer,” Brown said. “And more and more responsibility is placed on the sup-

plier on managing the product.”

Retailers are asking for more just-in-time shipments and moving away from warehousing, which can add another concern to the growing issue many processors are finding with transportation.

Glory Foods began 14 years ago focusing on canned products. Getting used to the freshness demands of fresh-cut has been an interesting challenge.

“The canned product line you can move in a hearse, but the fresh-cut you have to move in an ambulance,” Brown said. “The two don’t parallel each other in how you manage them.”

Add packaging to the list of changes from a canning business to a fresh-cut business.

“A can is a can, but the film continually evolves,” Brown said.

Fresh-cut produce packages have to maintain the integrity of the product while drawing consumers to the shelves. It also has to have

durability to make it through the entire system.

“It keeps it interesting, at least,” Brown said. “This product’s alive.”

For more information about Glory Foods, visit www.gloryfoods.com.



Creative logo