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Pricing on tropicals, specialties reflects pressures of economy

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Special to The Packer

While industry experts say more tropicals are being consumed than in past years, the recession has deflated prices and diminished sales to foodservice.

"Pricing has been lower than expected, than what it should have been during a nonrecession time," said Jose Rossignoli, vice president of sales for Brooks Tropicals Inc., Homestead, Fla., which markets papayas from Belize and Florida avocados.

"Pricing is definitely lower than where it should have been."

Rossignoli said the recession has caused a shift in papaya demand toward lower-cost maradol papayas from Mexico.

"Mexico is actually the largest exporter of papayas to the U.S.," he said, adding that Brooks imports taining papayas from Belize, where papaya exports to the U.S. have dropped significantly.

Chuy Loza, co-owner of Freska Produce International LLC, Ventura, Calif., said he has noticed that

the movement of mangoes has been primarily through retail channels, with the recession causing a dip in foodservice sales.

"Our consumers are buying more mangoes now versus other commodities sold primarily to foodservice," he said in explaining how commodities popular with foodservice are seeing a decline.

"Those commodities have been affected more greatly than others because less people are eating out."

William Watson, executive director of the National Mango Board, Orlando, Fla., said preliminary data suggests that consumers are buying more mangoes in 2009 than they did last year.

"We have actually seen the U.S. market absorb more mangoes than in the past," he said.

Wendy McManus, director of marketing for the mango board, said the board has kept moving forward with its long-term plans for mango promotion.

"The economic downturn won't last forever," she said. "In the meantime, we'll keep working for the mango industry, doing every-

thing in our power to drive mango consumption."

Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development for Southern Specialties, Pompano Beach, Fla., called this year "a good year, not a great year," and he said Southern Specialties expects to grow overall in 2009 over 2008 based on a stronger customer base.

"We're adding customers to our existing base, and that has really supported a lot of the growth of our program," he said.

Greg Golden, sales manager at the Amazon Produce Network, Mullica Hill, N.J., which specializes in Brazilian mangoes, said there is a definite ceiling on mango prices in a down economy.

"In general, for any commodity there just seems to be a real ceiling," he said.



Eagle