

# THE PACKER

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## Marketers maintain ad budgets in downturn

By Abraham Mahshie  
Special to The Packer

Marketers of Central American and Caribbean produce say that they are keeping their advertising budgets steady despite the economic downturn.

"We have a very progressive marketing program both on the consumer and the retail level," said Larry Nienkerk, partner

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Mark Vertrees  
M&M Farms

and general manager of Splendid Products L L C , Burlingame, Calif., who described a litany of programs to push winter-time mangoes. "We are doing what we can to promote specials, doing what we can to get editors in the papers in the country [to place] stories about mangoes." Nienkerk, elected chairman of the National Mango Board, Orlando, Fla., in November, also said the board is working to promote mangoes with processors and restaurant chains, and the board hopes research programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture extension services show the nutritional value of the mango that corroborate its distinction as a superfruit.

Mark Vertrees, marketing manager for M&M Farms, Miami, said companies that scale back marketing in bad times are those that are going out of business.

"We have maintained our advertising and increased our advertising versus previous years," he said. "A lot of companies are cutting back on marketing, and that's really the last thing as a marketing director that you should be cutting back on."

Vertrees said educating retailers helps give them solutions to offer new customers.

Mary Ostlund, director of marketing for Brooks Tropicals, Homestead, Fla., uses the free advertising of e-mails and the blogosphere to gauge public opinion and promote Brooks Tropicals produce.

"It's very anecdotal, but I do find people talking about tropicals quite a lot," she said. "To me, it's showing a general acceptance. I am answering probably a dozen questions a day about tropicals."