



Network for a Healthy California—Retail Program

Retail Fruit & Vegetable Marketing Guide

June 2011



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Eating the right amount of fruits and vegetables as part of a lowfat, high-fiber diet may lower the risk of serious health problems like obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and certain types of cancer. For this reason, the *Network for a Healthy California—Retail Program (Retail Program)* forms partnerships with California fruit and vegetable growers, packers, shippers, wholesale distributors, retailers, and commodity boards to create more opportunities for low-income California families to eat the recommended amount of colorful fruits and vegetables every day.

The *Network for a Healthy California (Network)* is a statewide social marketing campaign administered by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) in cooperation with the California Department of Social Services. It is funded primarily through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide a variety of nutrition education services (such as those offered by the *Retail Program*) through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known in California as CalFresh.

After the *Network* adopted the Champions for Change brand in 2007, the *Retail Program* updated their retailer materials and services and found that owners of small and medium size, independently-owned markets and corner stores were interested in participating in the *Retail Program* even though they did not sell fresh fruits and vegetables.

The addition of fruits and vegetables to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food package in 2009 caused even more small retailers in our service areas to ask for resources that could help them improve their fresh produce offerings.

In response to these requests, we were able to compile the *Retail Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Guide (Guide)* which we hope is a good introduction to handling, storage, and produce marketing in the small- or medium-size store environment. Because this *Guide* is not meant to be all-inclusive, we also list a number of resources that may help motivated retailers like you learn even more about the fresh produce business.

Retail Program Regional Specialists can provide you with additional information, materials, and may even be able to refer you to community-based organizations that promote healthy retailing in your area.

We hope that you will find this *Guide* informative and helpful. Many thanks to the people, publications, and organizations whose experience and expertise (see page 54) made this *Guide* a reality.

Healthy Changes Can Pay Off!

Thank you for choosing to promote fruits and vegetables in your store. Educating your customers about the healthy food items that you choose to make available is not only a great service to the community, but the best way to increase your fresh produce sales. This *Guide* is full of helpful ideas, tips, and resources that will help make your fresh produce marketing plan more successful.

Choosing to sell fresh fruits and vegetables and creating marketing plans for new produce can be time consuming. But dedicated store owners like you have seen great results, whether it is in improved produce sales, an increase in customer loyalty, or welcoming new shoppers to their store.

Before you get started, consider finding community organizations that are dedicated to improving the public's health by creating healthy communities. They may be able to help you make and promote changes that will help you improve your selection of fresh produce. The *Network* works with a variety of schools, local health departments, community youth organizations, churches, community centers, clinics, worksites, and other organizations to promote fruits and vegetables.



To find out more about community organizations in your neighborhood that are already working with the *Network*, contact your local [Retail Program Specialist](#).

Meeting Your Customers' Needs

If you have never sold produce before, it might be a good idea to start small with snacking and impulse buy items like apples, oranges, bananas, baby carrots, or even seasonal items packaged into “snack bags.”

When the time comes to expand, try to find out what types of produce your customers prefer. A 2007 survey of women that participate in the WIC Program found that bananas, tomatoes, apples, oranges, grapes, onions, strawberries, avocados, asparagus, carrots, and lettuce were the preferred items among those shoppers. You'll also want to select the items that you are best equipped to carry and store so that they stay fresh and attractive to your customers (see *Selecting Produce Items*, page 6).

ASK AROUND

As you talk to your customers day in and day out, what types of produce items have they asked for? Ask if there are any seasonal favorites that they'd like you to carry. Find out if there are any produce items that they would use as day-to-day snacks for their families. As an independent retailer, you have a personal relationship with your customers that can help you make good decisions about what type of produce to start carrying and how to promote the new items to maximize sales.

IN-STORE CUSTOMER SURVEYS

Surveying your customers is another way to improve your chances of successfully carrying and selling more fruits and vegetables. This *Guide* has an example of a survey (see Appendix B) that you can use to help choose fruits and vegetables that your customers will buy. Providing short surveys for your current shoppers is easy to do, in-store, and can tell you a lot about what they like.

Alternatively, you can work with community organizations to conduct a sidewalk or door-to-door survey to find out what the entire community thinks about fruits and vegetables.



Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC

WORKING WITH YOUTH GROUPS

You can recruit local youth to help talk with customers or conduct surveys. Community organizations that have after-school programs or a non-profit that works with young people can help you find volunteer youth to help conduct surveys.

Three to seven volunteers can talk to enough customers to help you make a sound decision about what types of changes you should make to promote fruits and vegetables in your store. Talking to or surveying 50–100 of your customers or community members that live near your store will give you a good idea of what types of changes you might consider. It is ideal to conduct the surveys at different times of the day or even “semi-randomly” (for example, interviewing every third or fifth customer) to ensure you collect responses from a broad sample of your customers. This takes more time and effort, but you may get more responses as well as an additional opportunity to alert community members of the changes you plan to make. If the youth go door-to-door, have them work in groups of two or three. If they survey people on the sidewalk, have them split up to prevent holding up foot traffic.

Making a Plan for Success

To ensure a successful and sustainable fruit and vegetable marketing plan, you will need to revisit your current business plan. Whatever you do to promote fruits and vegetables in your store must make good business sense.

- What are your reasons for wanting to sell more fruits and vegetables?
- What are your store's strengths and weaknesses? Which items pull in the most profits?
- What are your future fruit and vegetable sales goals?
- How can increased fruit and vegetable sales pay for any storage or display equipment that you'd like to buy?
- Can you get assistance from local business, redevelopment, or public health organizations?
- Can you buy produce directly from local farmers?
- Are there produce distributors who can offer you good prices and assistance with storage, display, and merchandising plans?

Once you have a good idea of your overall goals, strengths, weaknesses, local resources, and opportunities, you can ask yourself some detailed questions that will help you make a successful produce marketing plan.

MAKING A BUDGET

Your main goal is to maintain or to increase your current profits so that you can continue to offer this wonderful service for the community. Increasing your produce sales may create a loss in profits at first, but with the right plan, you will likely recover your profits and maintain your produce sales with time. Create a budget for your produce marketing plan that allows you to stay on track with your financial goals.

Your Financial Investment

- How much can you invest in produce items? How many different items can you afford to store and display?
- Will you need any additional storage or display equipment (see *Storage and Display Equipment*, page 13)?
- If so, how much can you afford to invest and what kind of produce sales will you need to cover the cost of the equipment? The average amount spent on getting the supplies needed to store and display fresh produce can range from \$3,000-\$5,000.
- Consider any extra electricity costs for new equipment.
- How much would you have to markup produce items to pay for any new equipment?
- What is a reasonable markup (enough to pay for any new equipment and sustain the inventory while remaining affordable for your customers)?
- What are your labor costs? For example, if you have a 7% markup on bananas, how much does it cost you to have them delivered or picked-up, stored, and displayed?

You are not alone. Private, community, city, and state agencies may be able to provide resources (funds, equipment, staff assistance, etc.) to support your plan to sell more fruits and vegetables in your store. Agencies like your local chamber of commerce or city redevelopment agency may be able to help you evaluate your business plan and provide business counseling to build a strong business model. This will give a solid foundation to sell more fruits and vegetables.

Your Customer Service Options

Should you sell items by piece, package, or weight?

- Selling by the piece is easy for both you and your customers because you won't have to invest in scales. Customers will know exactly what they are getting and for how much (three bananas for a dollar, apples for \$0.30 each, etc.), which will lead to a speedy check-out.



Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC

- Selling by the package is also convenient, but requires additional work by either your staff or your distributor. Packaged produce also has special handling considerations (see *Produce Storage Guidelines*, page 6).
- Selling by weight is common in larger stores, but if you don't have room for scales, or the time to make sure they are correctly calibrated, selling by the piece or package may be the way to go.

Do you, or should you, accept EBT CalFresh benefits (formerly known as Food Stamps and currently known federally as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP] benefits) or WIC vouchers as a way to help customers pay for fresh fruits and vegetables (see *Keep it Going!*, page 29)?

CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Review the surveys completed by your customers to find out which produce items will sell the best, as well as what type of promotions are likely to help them learn how to purchase and prepare fruits and vegetables (see *Meeting Your Customers' Needs*, page 2). Consider the minimum amount of markup necessary to sustain your fruit and vegetable sales and which promotions are most appropriate and affordable for your store. Communicate your decision to sell fresh produce to your shoppers. This will establish a sense of trust, showing that you value their opinion and that they have a voice in what produce is sold at your store.

STORE LAYOUT

Look around your store. Where can you stock varieties of fresh produce so that they can easily be seen by customers? The answer to this question will help you determine how much produce you can stock and what type of promotions you can hold within your store.

- After reviewing your business plan, can you identify items that can be moved, decreased, or eliminated to make room for the fresh produce items you would like to carry?
- Check if you have any vendor contracts that require you to keep certain items in the front of your store before you move anything (e.g., if an ice cream company gave you a free freezer with their name on it under the condition that you place it within 20 feet of your front door). If you choose to change your floor plan, try to leave enough room for customers to shop, and be careful to keep household and food items separate (e.g., do NOT place bleach near a basket of apples).
- Are you using your sales space for all it's worth? Try to avoid using your valuable floor space to store items that could be kept in your backroom.

STORE APPEARANCE

The way your store looks can affect how much produce you sell. If your sales floor is cluttered, customers may assume your produce is not fresh. If your store displays a lot of alcohol and tobacco advertisements, people may not realize you sell fresh produce. Are there any visual improvements that you will need to make to help your fresh produce selection seem more attractive (replacing unnecessary, cluttered, or damaged signs with attractive signage, clear pricing on shelf talkers, proper lighting, etc.)?

Once you have completed your customer surveys and evaluated your business plan, you are prepared to decide if a produce marketing plan is right for you, your business, and the community that you serve.



Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC

Selecting Produce Items

Compare the produce items your customers reported that they would like to buy with what is in season, what will sell quickly, what you are able to store and display, and what you can find at a reasonable price from a local farmer or distributor (see *Selecting a Produce Distributor*, page 20). It's a good idea to start off selling a small amount of produce to test what will sell well. That way you will not have to find space for scales and maintain their accuracy.

PRODUCE STORAGE GUIDELINES

Storage Temperature

Different produce items require different storage temperatures to maintain good quality, which will improve sales. Keep the following storage chart in mind when selecting produce items.

Optimal Storage Temperatures for up to Seven Days of Storage		
Group A: 32-35°F	Group B: 45-50°F	Group C: 55-64°F Or an air conditioned room
Fruit Apples Avocados (ripe) Cantaloupe Cherries Grapes Kiwifruit Nectarines Peaches Pears Persimmons Plums Strawberries	Fruit Avocados (unripe) Grapefruit Lemons Mangos* Oranges Pineapples*	Fruit Bananas* Papayas* Watermelon
Vegetables Artichokes Asparagus Broccoli Bok Choy Cabbage Carrots Cauliflower Celery Collard Greens Corn Kale Lettuce Mushrooms Parsnips Spinach Swiss Chard	Vegetables Bell Peppers Cactus Leaves (Nopales) Chayotes Chili Peppers Eggplants Green Beans Okra Zucchini Yellow Squash	Vegetables Acorn Squash Butternut Squash Jicama* Onions* Potatoes* Sweet Potatoes* Tomatoes*

* Do not refrigerate this item! Cold temperatures may damage flavor and texture.

Ethylene

Produce items that **make ethylene** are:

Apples	Nectarines	Plums
Avocados	Papayas	Tomatoes
Bananas	Peaches	
Cantaloupe	Pears	

Asparagus	Green Beans	Oranges
Broccoli	Kale	Persimmons
Cabbage	Kiwifruit	Potatoes
Cauliflower	Lemons	Spinach
Celery	Lettuce	Watermelon
Chayotes	Mangos	Yellow Squash
Collard Greens	Mushrooms	
Grapefruit	Okra	

Some produce items can tolerate being iced and may be delivered packed in crushed ice. It is important to know if your produce distributor delivers any of the following items packed in ice when you are making your storage plans so that you can be sure you have adequate drainage for melting ice. Produce items that can tolerate (but do not require) icing are:

Artichokes	Cauliflower	Parsnips
Asparagus	Celery	Spinach
Broccoli	Collard Greens	Watermelon
Cantaloupe	Corn	
Carrots	Kale	

RECEIVING AND STOCKING TIPS

(Adapted from an article written by Armand Lobato of Produce Merchandising Magazine)

Follow this general, nine-step process to properly prepare for, receive, and handle an incoming produce delivery.

1. Prepare the backroom. Get rid of trash, stack empty boxes, and condense merchandise to make room for the load.
2. A place for everything, and everything in its place. You can create maps of your refrigerator space to find out where the coldest (usually near the fan) and warmest (usually near the door) spots are located to help you store your produce at the right temperature for the best flavor and the least spoilage. Keep items in the same place each day so you can quickly find needed product. When unloading the truck, try to park items in set areas to minimize handling them multiple times.
3. Know your temperature zones. When picking up or receiving a produce delivery, accept only produce items that are within their recommended temperature ranges (see *Storage Temperature* on page 6). Otherwise, they may not last as long in storage or on display.

Maintain the “cold chain.” Cold stuff stays cold. Warm items, such as bananas, get stacked outside of the cooler. Packaged salads lose a day’s shelf life for every hour kept out of refrigeration. Bananas and pineapples sustain chill damage easily, and stone fruit (peaches, plums, and nectarines) has “kill zones” if kept too cold or too warm. Basic knowledge about storage will help minimize waste and maximize profits.

4. Handle with care! Never throw or drop produce. This can cause damage and shrink (i.e., loss of inventory). Be careful not to subject fragile items, such as berries or mushrooms, to crushing. Dropping a box of apples as little as

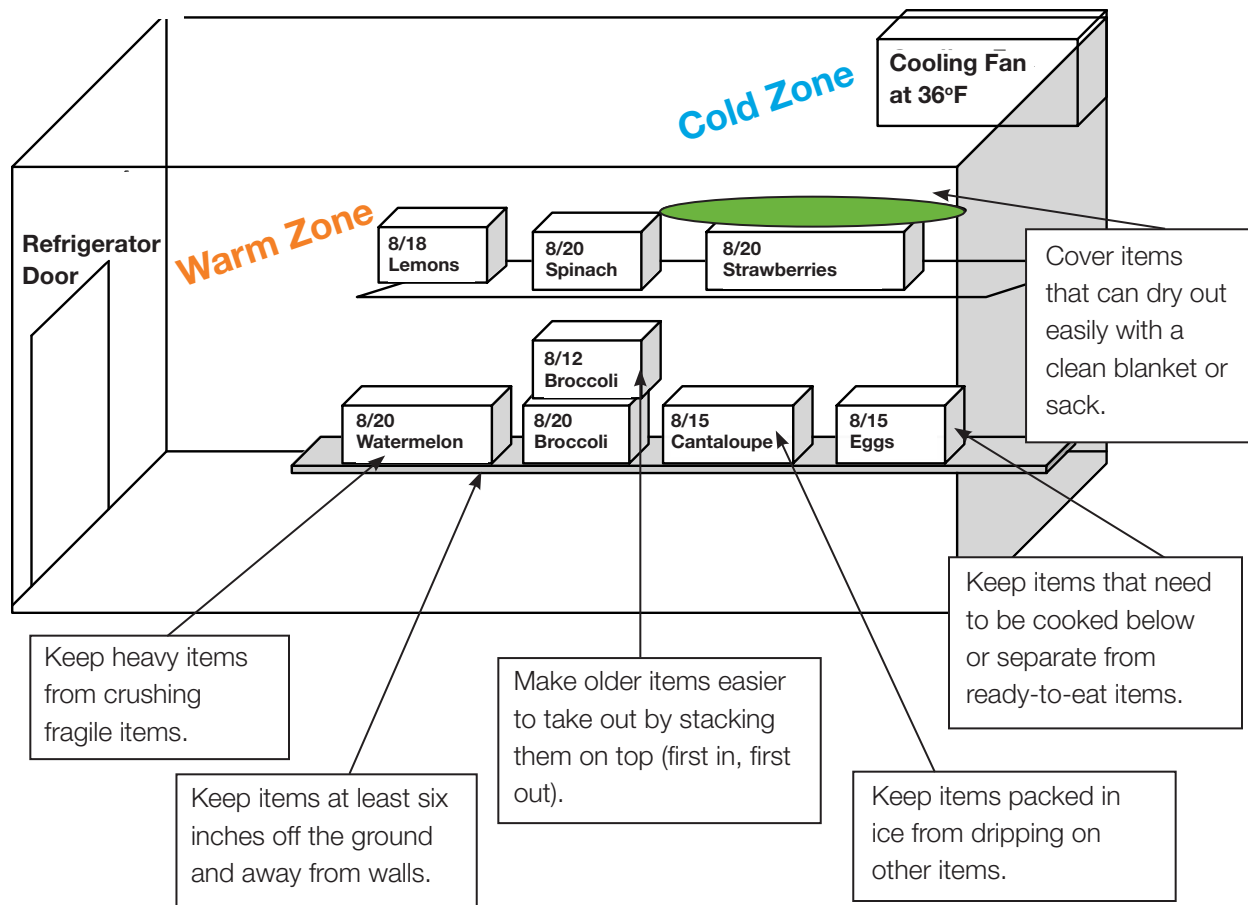
three inches can drastically decrease their shelf life and increase waste. Inspect items as you put them away for signs of damage. If you see a produce item that you would not buy, neither will your customers!

5. Rotate items using the First-In-First-Out (FIFO) method. Place newer items below or behind older items so that you can be sure to rotate all of your produce inventory out onto the sales floor before it goes bad. When stacking cases, make sure the printing on the outside of boxes is visible so you know what is being stacked where. This will make selection a breeze and save valuable time.
6. Dating keeps track of aged inventory. Cartons have a way of overstaying their welcome, so by marking cases with a received-on date (either with a marking pen or price gun) you can see at a glance which items must be moved first.
7. A clean ship is a happy (and safe) ship. Stack away empty pallets, dump the trash, sweep, and mop the floor.
8. Check the load you just put away. Did everything arrive as ordered, compared to your invoice? This is the time to note outages or shorts and make adjustments with your supplier or warehouse.
9. When a load is put away, step into the cooler and dry storage area and ask these questions:
 - Is everything accessible? Can I quickly tell which apple varieties are which? Which shelf holds chilies? Which shelf has cabbage?
 - Are the items in the cooler rotated and dated?
 - Are sensitive items protected (i.e. nothing heavy crushing boxes of grapes, mushrooms aren’t being dried out by the fan, are the banana lids off to slow ripening)?
 - Finally, is the storage area safe? Free from excess water or debris, and well lit?

Mapping Your Storage

There is a lot to remember when it comes to storing fresh produce. One way to keep track of it all is to make a storage map for your refrigeration and dry storage areas.

The diagram below is an example of how a store owner might map out his or her storage space to prepare for new produce items (see Appendix F for more information on how to do this).



Misting (optional)

Some produce items go bad because they dry out too quickly. These items would benefit from regular misting while on display. Misting can help double the shelf life of certain produce items and give produce a fresh, crisp look. Be careful **not** to soak these items with water. Misting these items for 6-8 seconds every 6-8 minutes is recommended if you have access to a refrigerated display case with an automatic misting system. Produce items that benefit from regular misting are:

Artichokes	Cauliflower	Lettuce
Broccoli	Celery	Parsnips
Cabbage	Collard Greens	Spinach
Carrots	Kale	Swiss Chard

If you do not have access to refrigerated misting equipment, these items will benefit from being sold in clamshell containers or plastic bags, which can help prevent them from drying out. Other items can be damaged by misting, so if you are not carrying and selling enough of the items listed above to justify purchasing misting equipment, then making that kind of investment is not recommended.

Considerations About Leafy Produce

If you choose to carry leafy produce, be sure that you have room for trimming, soaking, and crisping these items (lettuces, kale, collard greens, cabbage, etc.). This does not have to take a lot of space, but it is a vital process that will revive wilted leafy green produce items and almost triple their shelf life.

- 1. Cut a thin slice off the bottom of the stalk or core, making sure not to cut so deep that items like cabbage or heads of lettuce fall apart. Remove any damaged or discolored outer leaves.
- 2. Soak the items in lukewarm water for about 15-20 minutes.
- 3. Drain and place back in the refrigerator to cool before displaying.

You can prep an entire box of leafy greens using a trash can for the trimmings and bucket of clean, drinkable water for soaking. You'll be amazed at how much these three steps can refresh your inventory of leafy greens.

STORAGE AND DISPLAY EQUIPMENT

Consider the following when choosing equipment to help display produce items:

- The size of your store may limit the amount of produce you can sell. You may need to make some hard decisions about moving other products around to make room for the produce.
- Make sure produce displays are visible and easy for shoppers to see and to reach.
- Make sure that your electrical wiring is up to date. Most refrigeration units use 220-Volt outlets. Find the unit that is compatible to your outlets.
- Buying used equipment is tempting, but newer models may be more energy efficient and keep your monthly electricity bill down. Do some research on how much it will cost to have the unit plugged in 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

- Do not unplug refrigeration displays or units at night if they still have produce in them! The produce needs a constant temperature to stay fresh.
- Be careful when considering getting loans for expensive equipment. Review your business plan to be sure you would be able to pay back the loan. Otherwise look for other programs that offer incentives that help retailers strengthen their business model, make upgrades to the store exterior, or retrofit appliances.
- If you are looking for used equipment, try appliance stores that carry refurbished merchandise.

Remember, not all produce needs to be refrigerated. Consider baskets or display islands for items that can be stored and displayed at room temperature.

OPTIONS FOR DISPLAY EQUIPMENT



Single- and multi-deck displays make your produce easy to see and to reach.



Refrigerated produce islands keep your produce at stable temperatures.



There are a variety of display options for produce that can be displayed at room temperature.



Sometimes, simple is best. Especially if you do not have a lot of room. These baskets have a false bottom so that they look full when they are actually half empty.



Here are examples of simple register displays created by a corner store that offers healthy snacks to their WIC participants.* These cash register displays sell quickly, so the ethylene created by the bananas and apples should have less of an effect on the oranges, lemons, and limes.



Example of a small store's cooler display*



Example of a small store's dry display*

**Images courtesy of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy*

Before you invest in any equipment to help promote your produce items, check out a few sources of additional support. Various grant opportunities can be found through:

- California Business Portals
www.sos.ca.gov/business/
- The California Economic Development Partnership
www.labor.ca.gov/cedp/default.htm
- Grants.gov
www.grants.gov/
- Public Health Law and Policy
www.phlpnet.org/healthy-planning
- Your city's business development Web site

Small business loans are available through the Small Business Administration and private lending organizations. Before applying for a loan, be sure to plan out how your produce sales can help pay back the loan plus interest. If you cannot find out how to make a loan work, try grants and other resources.

DISPLAY TIPS

(Adapted from articles written by Armand Lobato of Produce Merchandising Magazine)

How to Dummy Up a Display

Even in the busiest stores there are displays that simply do not turn quickly for a variety of reasons, such as having too much space or misallocation of the space provided. While this is not a problem with “hardware” items (like onions, potatoes, winter squash, or watermelons), highly perishable items, such as tomatoes or berries, require several turns a day to remain fresh.

If you keep only a layer or two on display, the product will stay fresh, but the customer may think that there is a lack of selection, which brings sales down. So the goal is to look full without using a lot of product. One way to do this is to “dummy up” your displays. In this example, we’ll look at the process of dummied up a display of tangerines.

When you dummy a display, you are replacing good product with a false bottom made of material that is of little value. You will want to create a display that appears full, is easy to work with, and helps turn your product quickly. This will help keep displays looking fresh, which maximizes sales and decreases shrink (i.e., inventory losses).



An overflowing, 16-case display? No, an abundant looking, less than eight-case creation. This display is only three layers high, but thanks to the dummied effort, appears larger, which triggers increased sales.



Bottoms Up! — By using original shipping cartons that would otherwise be thrown away, a nice false base is built. Note how the inner box is trimmed and turned upside down so the first layer of fruit will begin near the top of the box.

Five Steps to Dummy Up a Display

1. **Consider how much you would sell** if you didn't have to worry about rotation or shrink and your display was kept ideally full throughout the day. Suppose this came to 8 cartons of tangerines. Compare this to the amount actually on display. If you have a base of 8 cartons to form the foundation of the display and another 8 cases are piled on top to make the rest of the display, you're using 16 cartons of produce to sell only 8.
2. **Build up your base.** If it's a bulk display, you can create a foundation with a variety of materials: crushed paper, foam, inverted crates—anything that builds up the base and minimizes the amount of merchandise actually on display. In the tangerine photo, shipping cartons are used by cutting and turning the box upside down so no product is in the base of the display.
3. **Stock the display.** Follow the typical FIFO routine of placing new product on the bottom and rotating older stock on top to fill the display to the desired height (delicate items should not be stacked more than two layers deep). Note that less product is needed while the result is an abundant appearance.
4. **Cull and rotate frequently.** With a dummied display, product will be fresher and sell quickly. Keep up the image of fullness with constant attention, rotating with each stocking trip, which requires less labor with such a shallow base.
5. **Maintain the fresh-built look.** In our box-on-table example, replace cartons that become old or damaged. Try to use cartons of the same color or design, placed tight and level with labels up and facing the same direction. Attach price and merchandising signs and keep bags handy.

Wet Rack Considerations

Wet racks (*a.k.a.*, green racks or vegetable racks) come in all styles and sizes but the function remains the same—to display vegetables in a refrigerated case, most of which supply a misting system. If you don't have the space or the money for a wet rack, review *Produce Display Considerations* (see page 10) to find alternative ways to carry produce items that are sensitive to moisture loss.

1. **Have a plan for space allocation.** Ideally, a wet rack is torn down and cleaned weekly, one end to the other. The best night to do this is usually the day before your ad circulars go out so the set-up person can adjust the produce items for changes published in the ad circular. With a plan in hand for where everything goes, the rack set-up can begin.
2. **Have items prepped.** This is an important step. By having items prepped (*i.e.*, washed and trimmed) the night before, valuable time is saved and the race to get the rack set before the store opens is manageable. Typically these items include head and leaf lettuces, greens, celery, green onions, and cabbage. Additionally any items that were delivered packed in ice should be washed, banded, and ready to go.
3. **Lay out fresh product, enough for a layer or two.** Take a look at how much older product you have to re-work. You may need more or less new product to begin, but always put a new layer down first (FIFO). Keep in mind “dummying” some areas may be necessary for slow-moving items (use waterproof materials to dummy wet rack displays).

Closing a Produce Aisle for the Night

Because some retailers have more refrigeration than others or are open 24 hours, these examples can change the how-to closing duties. Each store's closing procedure will vary, and what follows is but *one example*.

1. **Mid-afternoon:** start by stocking. At this point you're a long way from the closing bell, but knowing what the end result of your work should look like makes it easier to work toward that end. Keep up stock levels and rotate every display faithfully. Typically the closer will work on prioritized tasks such as keeping banana, lettuce, and tomato displays full as these key items tend to sell fastest. Follow by replenishing ad displays, then end caps and all the displays in between. With the wet rack, the procedure is the same – working to keep the fresh produce rotated, full, and level.
2. **Early evening:** timing the closing procedure. It takes some experience to know when to say when, so time the stocking so displays will sell down to manageable levels. Typically the strategy for highly perishable items is to keep the display fresh but not overly full, taking care to straighten and cull so as to not lose potential late-night sales.
3. **Evening:** know what to do at closing time. The usual process is for the closer to pull selected items such as berries and grapes as well as vegetables such as asparagus, peppers, or leaf lettuces. No matter what you pull, be sure to handle each item carefully. Don't overfill crates. Stack items neatly in the cooler to avoid damage.
4. **The 'golden hour':** 60 minutes before the store closes. Typically, this is the quietest stretch of the shift when most of the stocking is completed and there are few shoppers. This is the perfect time for the closer to do one final straightening and culling of the entire produce aisle. This is the best situation for the opening staff.
5. **After closing:** preserve and protect. The store is now closed, and the closer has a half hour to pull product and finish up. Most owners will also have the closer perform other duties, such as cover potatoes to avoid greening, make sure the lid is off the banana cases or prepare the backroom for an upcoming load by organizing the cooler, dumping old boxes, and sweeping up. Depending on the time allotted, a closer may also do prep work for the following morning such as trimming and crisping wet rack items for the next day.



SELECTING A PRODUCE DISTRIBUTOR

Picking a produce distributor should be a strategic business move. Evaluate the quality of the distributor's fruits and vegetables, their customer service, and price. Pick a distributor who can be flexible to your business needs whether you are looking for small produce deliveries or larger quantities of produce that you pick up yourself.

Types of Distributors

Wholesale Distributors: may carry a large variety of produce at a low price. Check if they have any added-value programs, meaning that they may offer promotional materials for certain products or additional training on handling and display. Find out if they can sell amounts small enough for your store and if they have any delivery or pick-up restrictions. Many distributors may have a *Will Call* program for ripe, ready-to-eat fruit at a lower cost. This can be a great deal, but only if you would be able to sell the produce before it goes bad. Some wholesale distributors may also be able to set up a produce box program very similar to the community supported agriculture programs described below.

Farmers' Markets: Check out your local farmers' market to see if you can get a good price for your produce selections and some additional training on how to handle and promote your selections. Farmers' markets will allow you to buy less produce and you can also tell your customers that you know the person who grows the fruits and vegetables that you stock! Check with your county Farm Bureau or the California Federation of Certified Farmers' Markets (see Appendix K) to find the farmers' markets or farmers that grow specific items in your area.



Community Supported Agriculture Programs:

If you are not sure about having the space to display produce in your store, look into Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs. These programs connect local farmers or community gardens directly to their surrounding community by allowing families to pay a low fee for regular produce box deliveries throughout the growing season. The produce boxes are usually delivered to a central location in the community so residents have easier access to them. Consider becoming an official drop-off site for your community. Some CSA programs may agree to give you a portion of the profits in exchange for promoting the program and encouraging your customers to sign up for produce deliveries.

Find a Partner

If you are concerned about delivery fees or find that the deal you want would require ordering more produce than you can sell, consider partnering with other independent retailers or restaurants in your area. When you work with one or more partners, you can combine your produce orders to get a lower cost and cut down on delivery fees. Look within your community or grocers association to find other retailers that can help increase your buying power and lower costs by sharing bulk orders.

Delivery or Pickup

Consider how frequently you'll need to restock your produce — once a week, twice a week, three or more times a week? All this will depend on how much produce you can sell before it goes bad. Can you afford the convenience of a delivery, or would you prefer to pick up? These decisions will help you find the distributor that is best for you. If you are able to set up a delivery service, make sure to confirm with the distributor at what temperature they store the produce and at what temperature it will be when you receive it. Schedule deliveries at times when you or your staff can stop what you are doing to check and to store the produce while it is still cold.

Produce Aisle Merchandising

LOCATION AND PACKAGING

Location

Fresh fruits and vegetables are very delicate, so you want to sell them as quickly as possible. With this in mind, displaying your produce items near the front of the store is very important. Look for ways to find more room in your store for produce displays. Are you using some of your floor space to store cases of canned foods, paper products, or other non-perishable items? Store these items out of sight. Not only will this give you more room for your produce items, but it will also give your store a clean and orderly appearance that will make your produce more attractive.

One Dollar “Snack Bags”

Make small, affordable snack packs or a “2 for \$1” deal for seasonal items near the register. These are healthy impulse buys that children can choose on the way to school or adults might buy for their lunch break.

Cross Merchandising Displays

Suggest easy ways to eat fruits and vegetables by selling complementary items together, like stocking peanut butter near apples and pears, or placing light ranch dressing by carrots and celery.

Cross Merchandise Packaging

Shoppers love convenience! If the responses to your customer surveys call for it, consider putting together meal and snack kits for a reasonable price. Popularity with these will vary based on your shoppers’ preferences and seasonality, so start small and see what works.

Guacamole Kit

- 2 avocados
- 1 onion
- cilantro
- 1 tomato
- 1 lime
- 1 jalapeño pepper

Soup Kit

- 1 chayote
- ½ corn cob
- 2 celery sticks
- 1 onion
- 2 carrots

Fruit Salsa Kit

- 1 mango or persimmon
- 1 onion
- 1 garlic head
- cilantro
- 2 jalapeños



Guacamole kit in a clamshell

SIGNAGE AND EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Attractive signage helps your produce section look fresh and attractive. Consider what types of signage and educational materials you can fit in your store without making the produce section look too cluttered. See Appendix H for examples of the signage and educational materials described below that are available from the *Network for a Healthy California—Retail Program*.

Shelf Talkers

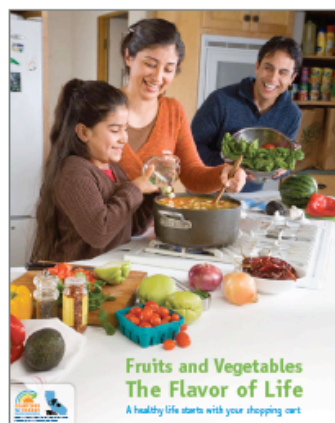
Shelf talkers can do more than just let a shopper know how much a produce item costs, they can



also give shoppers ideas on how to prepare an item or just make the item look more attractive through the use of photography. Another way to help shoppers select produce is to label ripe produce as “Ready to Eat” so that they know they can eat it when they get home or within a day or so.

Posters

Posters can brighten up your store front or your produce section by reminding shoppers that fresh produce is an important part of a healthy life and happy family. Try to change signage seasonally to keep your store looking fresh.



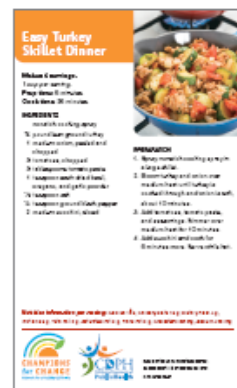
Floor Stands or Kiosks

Posters and shelf talkers are great eye-catching merchandising tools, but if you want to give your shoppers something to take home so that they can prepare the great produce they bought at your store, consider using floor stands or small countertop kiosks that can hold posters and take away items like recipe cards or newsletters containing cost-saving and/or produce selection tips.



Recipe Cards

Recipe cards that highlight your produce items are a great way to help customers feel more confident about buying fresh fruits and vegetables to prepare at home. Recipe cards are also a great way to push ripe produce like posting a recipe for banana bread by some bananas that are beginning to brown.



Newsletters

Newsletters are a good way to teach your shoppers how to select, store, and prepare the items they find at your store. Consider displaying newsletters near the front door or near the produce section. If you or your distributor knows the farmer who grew the produce, newsletters are also a good way to tell shoppers about the person who grew their food and help them feel more confident about buying your produce.



Cross-Promotion Merchandising Signage

You can't always stack items that go well together in the same area. Help customers learn all the easy ways they can



eat more fruits and vegetables every day by using signage that suggests how to mix and match different items for a fast meal or snack. This signage can go in your non-produce aisles to remind shoppers to check out your produce selections (e.g., a sign by the oatmeal asking shoppers to try topping it with chopped apples and raisins).

Produce Aisle Promotional Activities

PRODUCT SAMPLING

Taste Tests

If you are carrying fruits or vegetables that are great for snacking (carrots, grapes, etc.) a simple taste test can go a long way to let your customers experience the excellent quality of produce you have decided to carry and to give them ideas on quick snacks to serve their family. With taste tests, a little goes a long way!

Provide up to 100 shoppers with a healthy treat that shows off your fresh and canned fruit! It only takes:

- 8 grapefruit
- 4 cans of tropical fruit cocktail (in 100% juice), drained
- 4 cans of pineapple chunks (in 100% juice), drained



Tropical salad

Provide up to 100 shoppers with a sample of your leafy greens! It only takes:

- 1.5 pounds of washed spinach
- 2 bags of dried cranberries or raisins
- 1 bottle of balsamic vinaigrette dressing



Sweet and tangy spinach salad

Food Demonstrations

If you have the space inside or outside of your store, you can take a taste test to the next level by holding a food demonstration. A food demonstration is when you actually prepare a healthy fruit or vegetable recipe so that your customers feel more comfortable with the idea of buying more fruits and vegetables to prepare at home. Keep it simple with recipes that require very little equipment (like smoothies). Both taste tests and food demonstrations are a great way to promote the other items that you carry in your store.



OTHER COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Holidays and Observances

If you are planning your promotional activity near a holiday, choose a fun theme that your customers will enjoy. Choose a fruit or vegetable that relates to the holiday to put on sale or to be part of a display (e.g., sweet potatoes for Thanksgiving or small “lunch box” apples for back to school week). Find ways to decorate your produce aisle for the selected theme and help your shoppers have healthy celebrations. You can also work with your local American Diabetes Association, American Cancer Society, or American Heart Association to let your shoppers know about health observances and educate them on how to prevent serious health problems by eating the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables every day.

Month	Holidays and Celebrations	Health Observances
January	Happy Healthy New Year Martin Luther King Day	Healthy Weight Week National Fiber Focus Month Family Fit Lifestyle Month
February	Black History Month Super Bowl™ Valentines Day Chinese New Year	American Heart Month
March	Cesar Chavez Day	National Nutrition Month
April	Easter (sometimes in March)	National Cancer Control Month National Public Health Week World Health Month
May	Mother's Day Cinco De Mayo	Fruit and Veggie Fest National Women's Health Week
June	Father's Day Juneteenth	National Men's Health Week
July	4th of July	No major nutrition related health observances
August	No major holidays	No major nutrition related health observances
September	Back to School Labor Day	Latino Health Awareness Month Fruits & Veggies More Matters Month
October	Halloween	Child Health Month
November	Thanksgiving	National Diabetes Month
December	Happy Healthy Holidays Kwanzaa	No major nutrition related health observances

Working with Nearby Organizations

If your store is close to a school, library, or other community-based organization, consider teaming up to host a contest or other small marketing event that will promote your produce aisle.

Sales Flyers and Coupons

Create coupons or flyers to pass out before the day of your promotional activity. The *Network for a Healthy California—Retail Program* has flyer templates that you can use to put these together. Visit the *Network's* Communications Resource Library at www.networkforahealthycalifornia.net/Library.

For help planning an activity to promote your new focus on fruits and vegetables contact your regional [Retail Program Specialist](#).



Staff Training Tools

Making sure that your produce is stacked, iced, misted, and looking great is not always enough to get customers to buy. Your best resource is your staff! If they know how to talk to your shoppers about how to select, store, and prepare fresh produce, customers are much more likely to buy. Once your staff feels comfortable talking about produce with your customers, they can begin to “suggestion sell,” meaning that they can suggest additional items for customers to buy that complement their produce selections. For example, they can suggest that shoppers add mashed avocados to their baked potatoes. They can also suggest adding fresh fruits or vegetables to other items in the store, like suggesting customers buy peanut butter and dip celery sticks or slices of apples, pears, and bananas in it. Consider using any combination of the following materials to train staff on produce storage and promotions.

Backroom Posters

Posters displayed in the backroom can help remind staff how to store produce, decrease spoilage, cull damaged product, and rotate-in new product as necessary. Knowing this storage information will also help them advise customers on how to care for the produce they purchase at home. See Appendix E for a grid of the information presented in this *Guide*.

Produce Quick Tips

Produce Quick Tips (PQTs) are easy-to-carry cards that list helpful selection, nutrition, storage, preparation, and seasonality tips for shoppers. These tips can be used to guide your staff on how to answer shopper questions and make suggestions about their produce choices. See Appendix G for more information about *Produce Quick Tips*.

Food Demonstration Guide

The *Network for a Healthy California* provides training materials for retailers who want to set up taste tests and food demonstrations for fruits and vegetables. The *Food Demonstration Guide* also includes tips for engaging customers in conversations about produce with the goals of helping them make healthy choices and increasing produce sales.

Store Tour Guide

Depending on the size of your produce department/aisle, the *Network for a Healthy California—Retail Program's Store Tour Guide* provides tips for your staff on how to take small groups of shoppers on a tour of fresh, frozen, canned and dried fruits and vegetables. These tours can educate shoppers, help them feel more confident about buying more fruits and vegetables, and improve your relationship with them. Don't have a large produce section? There are also tips on how to give presentations for schools and other community groups that are eager to hear about the healthy items that you provide.

Produce Industry Resources

Check with your grocers association, fruit and vegetable commodity boards and marketing agreements, and other produce marketing groups for on-going training opportunities for your staff. Produce industry magazines and newspapers are also good sources of information that will help your staff handle, display, merchandise, and promote your produce aisle.

To find out more about community organizations in your neighborhood that are already working with the *Network*, contact your local *Retail Program Specialist*.

Keep It Going!

Once you have made changes to your store, you want to be sure that you can maintain them over time. Pricing your healthy items can be tricky. You want to be sure the produce is affordable for your customers and still make enough to maintain your produce section (additional electricity cost for refrigeration, paying for display baskets, etc.). Consider the following ways to help control the price of your produce.

OPERATIONS GUIDELINES

Buy in Season

Seasonal, California grown produce tends to taste better and cost less than produce shipped from other regions. For this reason, you will have to be careful in the winter when the variety of fresh produce becomes limited. You can try talking to your customers about which winter fruits and vegetables they like best and holding a promotional event or two to keep sales steady until spring.

Lower Shrink (Waste)

The more produce that goes bad, the higher you have to raise your prices to cover the loss. Follow the produce handling guidelines in this *Guide* to limit the amount of produce that gets bruised or goes bad (Appendix D). Be careful to only order as much produce as you can realistically sell. If that is a small amount, use the display tips (Page 15) in this *Guide* for ways to make small amounts of produce look appealing to your shoppers.

Be Consistent

Keep a consistent stock of produce items. If you stop selling produce for a week, or only have it every now and then, customers won't be able to count on getting their produce from you and will go somewhere else. Try to keep pricing as consistent as possible and do not resort to having sales too frequently. When this happens customers may start expecting sales and wait for prices to come down before buying any produce.

Keep the Lines of Communication Open

Keep asking customers if you are buying the right produce. You can also use a suggestion box to stay connected to your customers. Place the box in a location where the customers notice it, like near the front door or the cash register. Give your customers an opportunity to let you know how their tastes change with time.

Most importantly, keep track of what works and what doesn't work. If something doesn't work, find out why so you can learn from the experience.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (known as CalFresh in California)

In California, SNAP provides nutrition education in several thousand community locations each year to an estimated 7 million low-income parents and children. These efforts are led by the California Department of Public Health and the University of California who work with *Regional Networks* and local partners in schools, health departments, Extension agencies, food banks, clinics, worksites, churches, and a variety of other organizations.

The USDA administers SNAP benefits through its Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). State agencies administer the program through local and social service agencies that determine eligibility and monthly benefits based on household income and size.

or go online for more information and/or for
the online application at

Any retailer that would like to accept SNAP benefits must be certified to participate. The only form of SNAP benefit issuance is the EBT—Electronic Benefits Transfer card. EBT allows you, the retailer, to accept SNAP payment for food using the EBT card as a debit card.

To be eligible to accept SNAP benefits, a store must sell food for home preparation and meet at least one of the criteria below:

- Bread & Grains
- Dairy
- Fruits & Vegetables
- Meat, Poultry, Fish

B. At least 50 percent of your total sales (e.g., food, non-food, services, etc.) at your store must be from the sale of eligible staple foods. This includes basic dietary items like bread, flour, fruits, vegetables, beef, chicken, and fish. Snack or “accessory foods” such as chips, soda, coffee, condiments, and spices, are not staple foods. In addition, you may not count ready-to-eat, prepared foods as staple foods. Variety is defined as different types of food. For example, your store has a variety of dairy items if you sell milk, yogurt, and cheese on a daily basis. It would not have a variety of dairy items if you only sold three versions of milk (e.g., skim milk, evaporated milk, whole milk).

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program is a federally-funded health and nutrition program for growing, young families. WIC helps by providing vouchers that families can use like cash to buy healthy supplemental foods from WIC-authorized vendors. WIC also offers nutrition education classes and helps participants with finding healthcare and other community services. Participants must meet the income guidelines and be a pregnant woman, new mother, infant, or child under age five. In California, 82 WIC agencies provide services locally to over 1.4 million women, infants, and children each month at over 600 sites throughout the state.

If you are interested in becoming a WIC-authorized vendor, an application package can be found on the WIC Web site

www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/wicworks/Pages/WIC-Grocer-NewVendorStoreApplicationPackages.aspx.

The package consists of documents explaining the process and forms that can be printed, filled out, and mailed to the WIC Program. Included in the information is a minimum inventory of WIC-authorized foods. Upon receipt of the application, the following steps are taken by state staff:

1. The package undergoes an initial review for completeness and accuracy.
2. Once the package is deemed to be complete, the ownership entity (partner, corporation, sole proprietor, etc.) is reviewed for business integrity. This consists of a background check to ensure the company or its officers have a clean record.

3. The applicant is then scheduled for a face-to-face vendor education session, held at one of six locations throughout the state. A test is given at the end of the training, and the applicant (the owner or a representative of the store) must pass in order to continue with the process.
4. State staff then schedule an on-site inspection, reminding the vendor of the minimum inventory requirements. The inspection consists of obtaining shelf prices of WIC-authorized foods, collecting data on the quantity and variety of foods in the store, counting the number of cash registers, and ensuring the necessary permits and licenses are properly displayed.
5. If the store's shelf prices are competitive with other, similarly sized stores and the other requirements are satisfactorily met, the WIC-authorized vendor will receive a signed, executed vendor agreement and may start accepting WIC food vouchers.

The entire process can take 90 days or longer. Most of the delays in processing can be attributed to incomplete applications or applications containing errors. A correction letter will be sent in such cases and the time it takes to respond will affect the overall processing time.

If you have any questions please call
(916) 928-8705 or (800) 852-5770.

Appendix A: Glossary

Category: A group of products that meets a similar consumer need or is closely related. Fresh produce is a category.

Chill Damage: Discoloration, poor ripening, mushy texture, bad flavor, or other such damage that occurs to a produce item as a result of being exposed to temperatures that are too cold.

Cold Chain: The temperate control of produce items from the farm to a retailer's storage and display equipment. If a produce item is shipped, stored, or displayed at a temperature that is too warm, the cold chain is said to be “broken” and that produce item is more likely to experience a shorter shelf life and poor flavor.

Cold Table: An open refrigerated display table or island.

Color Break: Placing different colored products next to each other to create an eye-catching display.

Commodity Board: An organization that provides agricultural producers and handlers an organizational structure, operating under government sanction, which allows them to solve production and marketing problems collectively that they could not address individually. Activities include commodity promotion, research, and maintenance of quality standards. Some boards carry out all three activities, while others carry out only one or two, depending on the needs of each respective industry. These entities may be marketing agreements/programs, advisory boards, or commissions (e.g., the California Tree Fruit Agreement, the California Strawberry Commission, the Cherry Advisory Board).

Cross Merchandising: A display of related products, such as cereal and bananas or pasta and tomato sauces.

Cull: To cull is to remove damaged or spoiled produce from display.

Dry Table: A non-refrigerated display table or island.

EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer): A system through which recipients of certain government benefits like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program receive and spend funds electronically, on a monthly basis, using a plastic card similar to a bank debit or credit card.

Ethylene: A colorless gas that is naturally created by plants to cause ripening.

Event Marketing: A store or community-wide promotion of targeted products through a series of related activities or using a particular theme.

FIFO (First In First Out): An inventory rotation system to sell older products before newer products.

Hardware: Produce items such as citrus fruits, apples, potatoes, and root vegetables that can be kept in storage for two to three weeks and in some cases do not require refrigeration.

Kill Zone: A temperature range for produce that increases browning, poor texture, or off flavors.

Merchandising: The creative handling and presentation of products at the point of sale to maximize their sales appeal.

Merchandising Calendar: An annual merchandising schedule coordinating seasonal, ethnic, and traditional events.

Organic: Organic food is produced by farmers who emphasize the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. Organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic produce is grown without using synthetic pesticides, fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge, bioengineering, or ionizing radiation. The United States Department of Agriculture does not recognize organic foods as healthier than non-organic foods.

Perishables: Foods requiring refrigeration or special handling because they spoil easily. These items are usually ordered one or more times a week.

Appendix B: In-Store Shopper Survey

1. How often do you shop at this store?

- ☐ Once a day ☐ 2 or more times per week ☐ Once a week ☐ Once a month

2. What are your views of produce prices at this store compared to other grocery stores where you shop?

- ☐ Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Same ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

3. How do you view the produce quality at this store compared to other grocery stores where you shop?

- ☐ Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Same ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

4. How do you view the variety of produce offered at this store compared to other grocery stores where you shop?

- ☐ Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Same ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

5. What produce items do you buy at other grocery stores compared to this store?

6. What other items would you like to see at this store?

IN-STORE SHOPPER SURVEY ANALYSIS

1. Split the surveys into two groups:
 - Group A: frequent shoppers. These are the people who reported that they shop at your store once a day or 2 or more times a week.
 - Group B: occasional shoppers. These are the people who reported that they shop at your store weekly or monthly.
2. Look at the Group A first, these regular shoppers will have an opportunity to buy the most food.
 - Questions 2 and 3: responses to these questions will help you find out about the value that your customers place on your produce items. If customers think that the quality of your produce is excellent compared to other stores then they will probably see your produce as a valuable item so long as prices are at least the same as other stores. If customers think that the quality of your produce is fair or poor compared to other stores, and they think the prices are also poor (meaning that they are too high) then they don't place a high value on your produce items.

Before you consider selling new or additional items make sure that most of the surveys rate your produce quality and prices as the same or better than other stores. If they don't, look at what you can do to improve quality (improve your storage, handling, and display practices or switch distributors) and prices (finding different distributors, changing your delivery/pick-up method, improving storage and handling practices to lower your product losses).

- Question 4: once you have a plan in place for maintaining or improving the value of the produce you already sell, look at how well your produce variety is rated. If customers rate your variety as fair or poor, look at question 6 to see what types of produce you should consider adding to your inventory.
 - Question 5: look at the most common produce items that customers say they are already buying. If you are considering changing your variety of produce, this information may help you decide which items to keep and which items can be replaced with produce that might sell better.
3. Don't count out Group B! Look for reasons why these shoppers don't shop with you more often. Review the Group B surveys the same way you reviewed the Group A surveys and find out if there are changes that you can make that would cause these occasional shoppers to become regular shoppers.

Appendix C: Community Survey

[STORE NAME] FRUIT AND VEGETABLE CUSTOMER SURVEY

Hello. I'd like to ask you some questions about fruits and vegetables and your experience shopping at _____ store. The questions take about 5 minutes. Your participation is voluntary. No personal contact information about you will be collected. All responses are kept confidential and your individual answers will not be shared with anyone. Are you willing to complete the survey?

```
[ ] Check if customer consents
```

1. How often do you shop at this store?

- ☐ Once a day ☐ 2 or more days per week ☐ Once per week ☐ Once per month
- ☐ Rarely or never

2. How do you view produce prices at this store compared to other grocery stores where you shop?

- ☐
- Excellent
- ☐
- Good
- ☐
- Same
- ☐
- Fair
- ☐
- Poor

3. How do you view the produce quality at this store compared to other grocery stores where you shop?

- ☐
- Excellent
- ☐
- Good
- ☐
- Same
- ☐
- Fair
- ☐
- Poor

4. How do you view the variety of produce offered at this store compared to other grocery stores where you shop?

- ☐
- Excellent
- ☐
- Good
- ☐
- Same
- ☐
- Fair
- ☐
- Poor

5. What produce items do you buy at other grocery stores compared to this store?

6. What other items would you like to see at this store?

7. How much would you estimate you spend on produce for yourself and your family in the average week OR in the average month? (Record amount or check box)

\$_____ per average week OR \$_____ per average month

- ☐ Don't know ☐ Refused to answer

8. When you purchase fruits and vegetables, do you ever use SNAP (food stamps) Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT)? (Check box)

- ☐
- Yes
- ☐
- No
- ☐
- Refused to answer

9. When you purchase fruits and vegetables, do you ever use WIC vouchers? (Check box)

- ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Refused to answer

10. Which, if any, of the following do you think would encourage you to purchase more fruits and vegetables at this store?

(Mark appropriate box)	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't know
a. If more fruits and vegetables were sold				
b. If different fruits and vegetables were sold				
c. If pre-packaged "snack" bags were sold Example: a \$1 bag of cherries or grapes				
d. If pre-packaged "meal kits" were sold Example: pre-packaged ingredients for a soup, stir-fry, or casserole				
e. The chance to taste free samples of individual fruits and vegetables				
f. Cooking demonstration where a selected produce item was featured in a recipe				
g. Recipe cards for quick, delicious ways to prepare fruits and vegetables at home				
h. Newsletter with information about featured produce				
i. Signs throughout the store encouraging shoppers to purchase fruits and vegetables				

11. Are there any improvements that can be made to the store that would cause you to buy more produce here (such as the quality of other items sold here, lighting, loiterers, etc.)?

Finally, I just have a few questions about you.

12. How far is this store from your home? (Select one)

- ☐ On the same block
- ☐ A few blocks away — within walking distance
- ☐ Within a mile
- ☐ Between 1-3 miles
- ☐ Over 3 miles

13. How many people are in your household (yourself included)? _____

14. How many children under 18 are in your household? _____

15. Your gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

COMMUNITY SURVEY ANALYSIS

1. Split the surveys into two groups:
 - Group A: frequent shoppers. These are the people who reported that they shop at your store once a day or two or more times a week.
 - Group B: occasional shoppers. These are the people who reported that they shop at your store weekly or monthly.
2. Look at the Group A first, these regular shoppers will have an opportunity to buy the most food.
 - Questions 2 and 3: responses to these questions will help you find out about the value that your customers place on your produce items. If customers think that the quality of your produce is excellent compared to other stores then they will probably see your produce as a valuable item so long as prices are at least the same as other stores. If customers think that the quality of your produce is fair or poor compared to other stores, and they think the prices are also poor (meaning that they are too high) then they don't place a high value on your produce items.

Before you consider selling new or additional items make sure that most of the surveys rate your produce quality and prices as the same or better than other stores. If they don't, look at what you can do to improve quality (improve your storage, handling, and display practices or switch distributors) and prices (finding different distributors, changing your delivery/pick-up method, improving storage and handling practices to lower your product losses).

- Question 4: once you have a plan in place for maintaining or improving the value of the produce you already sell, look at how well your produce variety is rated. If customers rate your variety as fair or poor, look at question 6 to see what types of produce you should consider adding to your inventory.
- Question 5: look at the most common produce items that customers say they are already buying. If you are considering changing your variety of produce, this information may help you decide which items to keep and which items can be replaced with produce that might sell better.
- Questions 7 – 9: this information will help you estimate how much more money your shoppers could spend if you carried the produce items that they are looking for. If you are currently deciding whether or not to apply to be a WIC or Food Stamp vendor, this information will also help you estimate how much you can earn in sales if you provided this service to your customers.
- Question 10: this information will help you create a produce merchandising and promotion plan. Consider the top three or four activities that customers said would cause them to buy more fresh produce as a starting point to promote any new changes that you are planning for your produce aisle.
- Question 11: this question gives customers a chance let you know about other things that you could do to improve their shopping experience. Pay close attention to any issues that are brought up multiple times, and keep your eye out for any new ideas or suggestions that you haven't thought of yet.

Appendix D: Produce Handling Grids

Fruits	Temp Group	ES	EP	Mist	Icing	Absorbs Odors From...	Other Display Tips
Apples	32-35°F		X			Onions	Use room temperature display
Avocados	32-35°F		X			Bell Peppers	Use room temperature display
Bananas*	55-64°F or Room with AC		X				Use room temperature display
Cantaloupe	32-35°F		X		X		Use room temperature display
Cherries	32-35°F						Use refrigerated display unless there is a fast turnover
Grapes	32-35°F						Use refrigerated display unless there is a fast turnover
Grapefruit	45-50°F	X					Use room temperature display
Kiwifruit	32-35°F	X					Keep dry. Use room temperature display
Lemons	45-50°F	X					Keep dry. Use room temperature display
Mangos*	45-50°F	X					Keep dry. Use room temperature display
Nectarines	32-35°F		X				Keep dry. Use room temperature display if unripe Use refrigerated display if ripe
Oranges	45-50°F	X					Keep dry. Use room temperature display
Papayas*	55-64°F or Room with AC		X				Use refrigerated display if ripe Use room temperature display if unripe
Peaches	32-35°F		X				Keep dry. Use room temperature display if unripe Use refrigerated display if ripe
Pears	32-35°F		X				Use room temperature display
Persimmons	32-35°F	X					Keep dry Use refrigerated display if ripe
Pineapples*	45-50°F						Keep dry. Use room temperature display
Plums	32-35°F		X				Keep dry. Use room temperature display if unripe Use refrigerated display if ripe
Strawberries	32-35°F						Use refrigerated display unless there is a fast turnover
Watermelon	55-64°F or Room with AC	X			X		Use room temperature display

ES= Ethylene Sensitive EP= Ethylene Producing

* Do not refrigerate these items.

Vegetables	Temp	ES	EP	Mist	Icing	Absorbs Odors From...	Other Display Tips
Acorn Squash	55-64°F or Room with AC						Keep dry
Artichokes	32-35°F			X	X		Use refrigerated display unless fast turnover
Asparagus	32-35°F	X			X		Display vertically with cut ends down Use refrigerated display unless fast turnover
Bell Peppers	45-50°F						Use room temperature display
Bok Choy	32-35°F			X			Use refrigerated display unless fast turnover
Broccoli	32-35°F	X		X	X		Keep dry Use refrigerated display unless fast turnover
Butternut Squash	55-64°F or Room with AC						
Cabbage	32-35°F	X		X		Apples, Pears	Keep outer leaves intact Use refrigerated display
Cactus Leaves (Nopales)	45-50°F						Use refrigerated display
Carrots	32-35°F			X	X	Apples, Pears	
Cauliflower	32-35°F	X		X	X		Use refrigerated display unless fast turnover
Celery	32-35°F	X		X	X	Apples, Carrots, Onions, Pears	Use refrigerated display unless fast turnover
Chayotes	45-50°F	X					Keep dry
Chili Peppers	45-50°F						Store away from drafts
Collard Greens	32-35°F	X		X	X		Use refrigerated display unless fast turnover
Corn	32-35°F			X	X	Onions	Use refrigerated display unless fast turnover
Eggplants	45-50°F						Use room temperature display
Green Beans	45-50°F	X					Use refrigerated display
Jicama*	55-64°F or Room with AC						Keep dry Use room temperature display
Kale	32-35°F	X		X	X		

ES= Ethylene Sensitive EP= Ethylene Producing


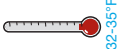
* Do not refrigerate these items.


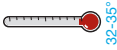
Vegetables	Temp	ES	EP	Mist	Icing	Absorbs Odors From...	Other Display Tips
Lettuce	32-35°F	X		X			Keep outer leaves intact Use refrigerated display
Mushrooms	32-35°F	X				Onions	Use refrigerated display unless fast turnover
Okra	45-50°F	X					
Onions*	55-64°F or Room with AC					Apples, Pears	Use room temperature display
Parsnips	32-35°F			X	X		
Potatoes*	55-64°F or Room with AC	X				Apples, Pears	Use room temperature display
Spinach	32-35°F	X		X	X		Use refrigerated display unless fast turnover
Sweet Potatoes*	55-64°F or Room with AC						Keep dry Use room temperature display
Swiss Chard	32-35°F			X			
Tomatoes*	55-64°F or Room with AC		X				Display stem side up Use room temperature display
Yellow Squash	45-50°F	X					
Zucchini	45-50°F						

ES= Ethylene Sensitive EP= Ethylene Producing

* Do not refrigerate these items.



Appendix E: Produce Receiving Tips

RECEIVING TIPS	
 Storage Temperature 32-35°F 	
FRUIT	HANDLING TIPS
Apples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene producing Absorb onion smell
Avocados	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene producing Absorb bell pepper smell Store unripe avocados at 45-50°F
Cantaloupe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene producing Tolerates icing
Cherries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep away from strong smelling foods
Grapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absorb onion smell
Kiwifruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene sensitive Keep dry
Nectarines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene producing Keep dry
Peaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene producing Keep dry
Pears	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene producing Absorb onion smell
Persimmons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene sensitive Keep dry
Plums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene producing Keep dry
Strawberries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cover to maintain moisture

RECEIVING TIPS	
 Storage Temperature 32-35°F 	
VEGETABLE	HANDLING TIPS
Artichokes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tolerate top ice
Asparagus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene sensitive Tolerates ice
Broccoli	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene sensitive Tolerates bottom ice
Bok Choy	
Cabbage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene sensitive Absorbs apple and pear smells Keep outer leaves intact
Carrots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tolerate ice Absorb apple and pear smells
Cauliflower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene sensitive Tolerates bottom ice
Celery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene sensitive Absorbs apple, pear, carrot, and onion smells Tolerates top ice
Collard Greens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene sensitive Tolerate bottom ice
Corn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tolerates ice Absorbs onion smell
Kale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene sensitive Tolerates bottom ice
Lettuce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene sensitive Keep outer leaves intact
Mushrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene sensitive Absorb onion smell
Parsnips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tolerate top ice
Spinach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethylene sensitive Tolerates bottom ice
Swiss Chard	

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RECEIVING TIPS	
 Storage Temperature 45-50°F 	
FRUIT	HANDLING TIPS
Grapefruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethylene sensitive
Lemons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethylene sensitive • Keep dry
Mangos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethylene sensitive • Keep dry • Do not refrigerate
Oranges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethylene sensitive • Keep dry
Pineapples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep dry • Do not refrigerate

 Storage Temperature 45-50°F 	
VEGETABLE	HANDLING TIPS
Bell Peppers	
Cactus Leaves (Nopales)	
Chayotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethylene sensitive • Keep dry
Chili Peppers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Store away from drafts
Eggplants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absorb onion smell
Green Beans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethylene sensitive
Okra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethylene sensitive
Yellow Squash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethylene sensitive
Zucchini	

Funded by the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

California Department of Public Health, June 2010

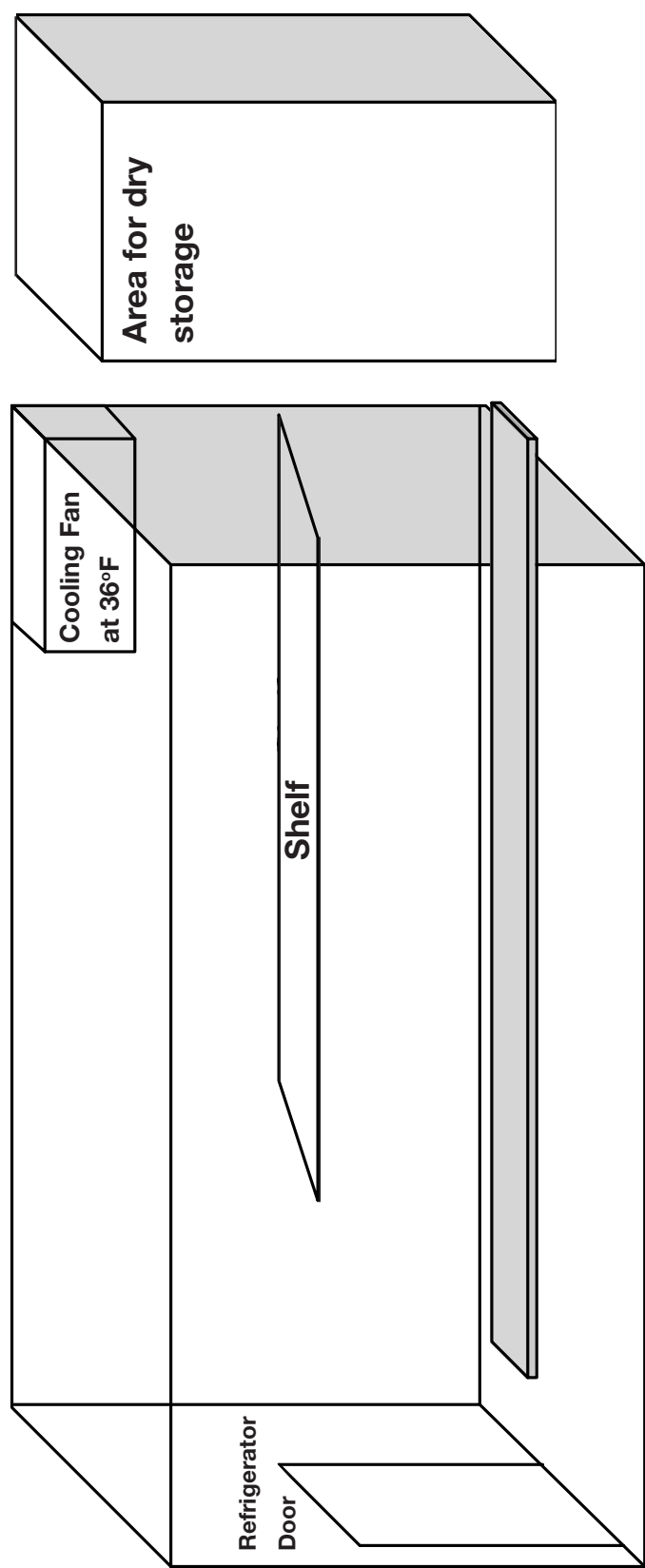
RECEIVING TIPS	
 Storage Temperature 55-64°F (or an air conditioned room) 	
FRUIT	HANDLING TIPS
Bananas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethylene producing • Do not refrigerate
Papayas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethylene producing • Do not refrigerate
Watermelon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethylene sensitive • Tolerates ice

 Storage Temperature 55-64°F (or an air conditioned room) 	
VEGETABLE	HANDLING TIPS
Acorn Squash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep dry
Butternut Squash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep dry
Jicama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep dry • Do not refrigerate
Onions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absorb apple and pear smells • Do not refrigerate
Potatoes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethylene sensitive • Absorb apple and pear smells • Store in cool, dark place • Do not refrigerate
Sweet Potatoes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep dry • Do not refrigerate
Tomatoes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethylene producing • Do not refrigerate

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California Department of Public Health, June 2010

Appendix F: Storage Mapping



MAP YOUR STORAGE SPACE

Have all the tables and charts left you thinking that you need three refrigerators and two pantries to carry produce? Not to worry, this activity will help you practice how you can plan to store produce items while paying attention to ethylene, storage temperatures, odor absorbers, moisture, and ice. If the diagram above represented a small retailer's refrigeration unit and dry storage area:

- The first thing they should do is decide which items do not require refrigeration. Items like tomatoes and potatoes can become damaged in cold temperatures and should be kept in dry storage.

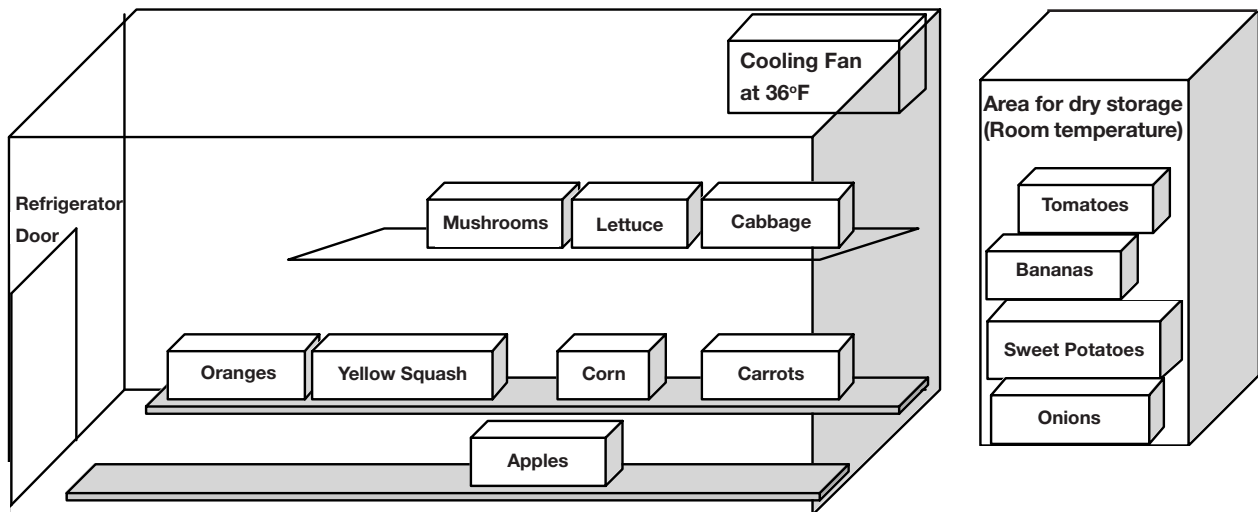
- In addition, the produce that should be kept coldest should be near the refrigerator fan, while items that should be kept at slightly warmer temperatures can be kept near the door.
- Items that are either very heavy or packed in ice, should be stored near the floor, but at least 6 inches off the ground. That way, melting ice won't drip on other items, and staff can avoid straining themselves to place heavy items on the shelf.
- Items that absorb odors can be kept on the opposite wall of an item that has a strong smell.

- Items that make a lot of ethylene can be stored in open containers so that they don't ripen too quickly.
- Other items that are sensitive to cold or moisture loss can be covered with a blanket.

With this in mind, can you figure out a way to stock the following items in the diagram above?

Apples	Corn	Oranges
Bananas	Lettuce	Sweet Potatoes
Carrots	Mushrooms	Tomatoes
Cabbage	Onions	Yellow Squash

ANSWERS:



Dry Storage

Tomatoes, bananas, sweet potatoes, and onions should not be refrigerated but kept at room temperature. Remember that tomatoes and bananas make a lot of ethylene, so make sure the dry storage area has good air circulation and that the tops of the tomato and banana boxes are opened enough to let the ethylene escape.

Cold Storage

- Assuming the carrots and corn were shipped in ice, they should be on the bottom of the storage area so that water from the melting ice can drain properly.
- The oranges and yellow squash may be heavy and require storage on the floor to avoid crushing other items or injuring staff. They also need slightly warmer temperatures, so they can be kept closer to the refrigerator door and covered with a clean blanket to prevent chill damage.
- The cabbage, lettuce, mushrooms, corn, and carrots should be kept cooler than the squash and onions. So they are placed closer to the fan.

If there is concern about these items drying out, they can be covered with a clean sack or blanket.

- While apples need to be kept cool too, they produce ethylene that may cause the carrots, lettuce, cabbage, and mushrooms to spoil over time. They are kept near the cooler but on the opposite wall. This also works since the mushrooms, lettuce, and cabbage can be stacked high to avoid being crushed and to be near the cooler fan. The apples should also stay on the opposite wall because cabbage and carrots can absorb odor from apples over time.

This is just one of many possible stocking choices. The important thing to remember is that mapping your storage space can save stocking time and help you keep your produce items fresher longer. If you find that items are going bad quickly, reviewing your storage map could be the first step in finding out how you may be able to fix the problem (assuming that the produce was not already damaged upon delivery).

Appendix G: Produce Quick Tips

HOW TO USE PRODUCE QUICK TIPS

Produce Quick Tips (PQTs) are portable guides that highlight a variety of popular fruits and vegetables. These tips can be used in multiple settings to educate shoppers through interactive activities and promotions like food demonstrations or store tours. While *PQTs* are easy to carry to multiple events and activities, the goal is to study and retain the information so that there is no need to flip through them while interacting with customers.

PQTs were developed to address a number of challenges to eating the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables every day voiced by consumers — taste, time to prepare, cost, and fear of waste.

Go to www.cachampionsforchange.net/en/Produce-Quick-Tips.php to download individual *PQT* cards or the complete set.

ANATOMY OF A PQT CARD

Shopper's Tips

This section provides tips on what to look for in a quality piece of produce. Good quality produce has a better flavor than under- or over-ripe produce. By making better selections, consumers will experience better flavor.

Fun Facts

This section provides facts about the origin, naming, or folklore of a particular fruit or vegetable. These facts can serve as interesting conversation starters for consumers to share with family and friends.

What Is In It For You?

This section provides a quick list of the nutrients found in about one cup of each fruit or vegetable. The last card in the *PQT* set is a Benefits of Fruits and Vegetables card that summarizes the health benefits of the nutrients listed in this section.



An excellent source of a nutrient means that the amount of the food described (in this case, about 1 cup) contains at least 20% of the daily value of that nutrient.

A good source of a nutrient means that the amount of the food described contains 10% – 19% of the daily value of that nutrient.

Serving Ideas

This section offers quick preparation tips that save time and deliver excellent results. Please note that the first tip listed is usually represented as the photo on the front of the card.

Peak Season

This section provides information on California peak seasons for each type of produce. Produce may be more affordable and flavorful during the peak season than at any other time of the year.

Storage

The storage guidelines help consumers plan ahead so that they can avoid waste and experience optimal flavor with each fruit and vegetable selection.

Additional information on produce items represented in *PQTs* can be found in *Harvest of the Month* materials located at www.harvestofthemoth.com.

Appendix H: Retail Program Merchandising Materials

The *Network for a Healthy California—Retail Program* has a variety of merchandising materials available to help you promote your produce aisle. Contact your nearest [Retail Program Specialist](#) for more information.

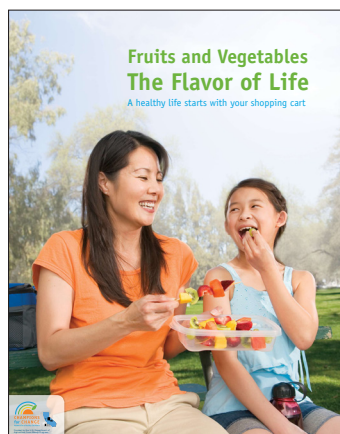
SHELF TALKERS

The *Retail Program* offers 51 shelf talker templates of various sizes that you can print out and display to add a fresh look to your produce aisle for free.



POSTERS

Posters can brighten up your store front or your produce section by reminding shoppers that fresh produce is an important part of a healthy life and happy family. The *Retail Program* offers a variety of posters showing different photos of families enjoying fruits and vegetables all year long.



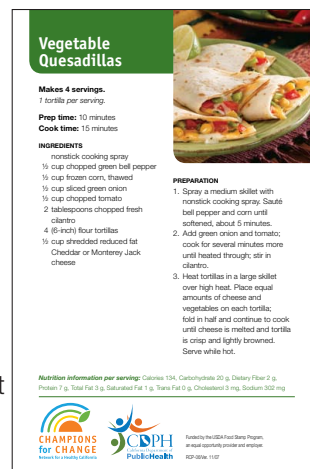
FLOOR STANDS OR KIOSKS

Floor stands or small countertop kiosks that can hold posters and take-away items like recipe cards or newsletters.



RECIPE CARDS

Recipe cards that highlight your produce items are a great way to help customers feel more confident about buying fresh fruits and vegetables to prepare at home. The *Retail Program* offers 14 different recipe cards in English and Spanish that can promote a number of your produce items.



NEWSLETTERS

The *Retail Program* offers over 30, one-page *Harvest of the Month* community newsletters about seasonal produce items in both English and Spanish. These attractive and informative newsletters can be downloaded, copied, and distributed to your customers for free. They work best for highlighting a specific produce item that is on sale because it is in season or because it is ripe and ready to eat.

School districts throughout California participate in *Harvest of the Month* activities that help children learn the benefits of eating a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables.

If you or your distributor knows the farmer who grew the produce, Farmer of the Month Newsletters are a great way to help shoppers feel connected to their food. The *Retail Program* offers templates that you can fill out with farmer information and provide to shoppers to help them feel more confident about buying your produce.

Consider displaying these newsletters in a floor stand near the front door or the produce section.



CROSS MERCHANDISING WOBBLERS

The *Retail Program* offers bright and colorful signs for use outside of your produce section. These signs (available in English and Spanish) remind shoppers how foods like oatmeal, bread, spaghetti, milk, and chicken can taste even better with fruits and vegetables.



Appendix K: Resources

PRODUCE HANDLING RESOURCES REFERRED TO IN THIS GUIDE

- *Network for a Healthy California—Retail Program*
Fresh Produce and Floral Council Produce Handling Guide
www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/Documents/Network-FV-RP-ProduceHandlingGuideFPFC.pdf
- *UC Davis Postharvest Technology Research and Information Center*
Short term produce storage temperatures
<http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu/Pubs/postthermo.shtml>
- *Grocery Store Display Storage*
<http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu/datastorefiles/234-101.pdf>
- *Kansas State University*
Storage Operations: Fruits and Vegetables
<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/postharvest.pdf>
- *USDA, ARS Agriculture Handbook Number 66*
The Commercial Storage of Fruits, Vegetables, and Florist and Nursery Stocks
www.ba.ars.usda.gov/hb66/contents.html
- *Produce Merchandising Magazine*
10-minute Merchandiser articles
www.producemerchandising.com/10MinuteMerchandiser/tabid/127/Default.aspx
- *Water Conditioning and Purification International Magazine*
Add Misting to Add Revenue
www.wcponline.com/PDF/0805%20Creative%20Marketing.pdf

OTHER RESOURCES

Produce Marketing Organizations: have educational materials and trainings that may further assist your produce marketing efforts.

- Fresh Produce and Floral Council: www.fpfc.org
- Produce Marketing Association: www.pma.org

Produce Publications: keep up with what is current in the world of fresh produce with these publications.

- The Packer www.thepacker.com
- Perishable Pundit www.PerishablePundit.com
- Produce Business www.producebusiness.com
- Produce Merchandising www.producemerchandising.com

Healthy Retail Projects/Organizations: read about other stores that have had help providing more healthy foods to the communities they serve.

- Healthy Community Store National Network: www.thefoodtrust.org/php/programs/store.network.php

California County Farm Bureaus, Farmers' Markets, Family Farms, and Community Supported Agriculture: find out if there are local farms, farmers' markets, or community supported agriculture programs that may be able to provide produce for your store.

- California Farm Bureau Federation county list: www.cfbf.com/counties/index.cfm
- California Federation of Certified Farmers' Markets: www.cafarmersmarkets.com
- Community Alliance with Family Farmers: www.caff.org
- USDA list of Community Supported Agriculture Web sites:
www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csaorgs.shtml

Commodity Boards: experts in handling, storing, merchandising, and promoting their respective produce item. Some of them have free artwork and recipes that you can download while others have free merchandising signage or promotional items to give to customers.

- California Apple Commission: www.calapple.org
- California Artichoke Advisory Board: www.artichokes.org
- California Asparagus Commission: www.calasparagus.com
- California Avocado Commission: www.avocado.org
- California Cherry Marketing Program: www.calcherry.com
- California Cling Peach Growers Advisory Board: www.calclingpeach.com
- California Date Commission: www.datesaregreat.com
- California Fresh Carrot Advisory Board Email: jerry@tabcomp.com
- California Fig Advisory Board: www.californiafigs.com
- California Grown: www.californiagrown.org

- California Kiwifruit Commission: www.kiwifruit.org
- California Pear Advisory Board: www.calpear.com
- California Strawberry Commission: www.calstrawberry.com
- California Table Grape Commission: www.freshcaliforniagrapes.com
- California Tree Fruit Agreement: www.eatcaliforniafruit.com
- Hass Avocado Board: www.avocadocentral.com
- Mushroom Council: www.mushroomcouncil.com
- National Mango Board: www.mango.org
- National Watermelon Promotion Board: www.watermelon.org
- Sweet Potato Council of California: www.cayam.com

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www.foodsecurity.org

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Healthy Eating Active Living

www.publichealthadvocacy.org/heal.html

Adel A. Kader and James F. Thompson

<http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu>

HELPFUL INSIGHTS ON PRODUCE HANDLING FROM PUBLICATIONS DEVELOPED BY:

Fresh Produce and Floral Council

UC Davis Postharvest Technology Research and Information Center

USDA, ARS Agriculture Handbook Number 66

Kansas State University

Water Conditioning and Purification International Magazine

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH MEMBERS OF:

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