

California-based vegetable grower-shipper Fresh Alliance has announced plans to expand into tropicals through the incorporation of Mexican-grown Persian limes sold under the "Margaritaville" brand.



The company has only dealt with tomato, bell pepper and cucumber since it started up four years ago, but managing partner Bob Hartmann believes there are strong opportunities in the U.S. lime market.

"The lime category is growing but underdeveloped," he said, adding part of Fresh Alliance's five-year plan had been to expand into tropicals.

Two of the company's managing partners have experience with the business, and limes have now been targeted for the initial launch mid-August.

"There are a lot of players in the lime category, but there isn't much differentiation. We knew we wanted to do something different with the pack style - something to set us apart," Hartmann told *Fresh Fruit Portal*.

"Then one evening while making a batch of margaritas I got the idea to reach out to Margaritaville. The folks [there] were very receptive to the idea, so we went to work."

Margaritaville is a U.S.-based chain of restaurant and stores selling Jimmy Buffett-themed merchandise. It is owned by Buffett's Margaritaville Holdings, a subsidiary of Cheeseburger Holding Company. The subsidiary's sales last year topped US\$1 billion.

"The Margaritaville brand resonates with consumers. There's an immediate association with tropical escape, fun, food, and drink. And the brand loyalty is amazing," Hartmann said.

The limes will be sold in 'grab and go' resealable bags, which the representative said brought something "new and exciting" to the category.

Hartmann's expectations for the market are high.

"Limes are not on enough shopping lists, which means most sales are impulse driven. The grab and go Margaritaville lime bag is perfect for capturing those impulse sales," he said.

"The clean lines, bright colors, and logo will draw consumers to the displays. The bags will be shipped in a colored, display ready box that not only adds to drawing the consumers to the display, it also will make it turn-key to display in secondary locations like the beer aisle, the international aisle, or the seafood department.

"By packing to order in the grab and go bags, we are playing the role of the picky consumer. We will be packing for quality and uniformity. Ultimately this will lead to increased sales and reduced shrink at the retail level."

The company will also be offering banner-specific annual marketing plans to retailers who carry the Margaritaville limes.

"We've been working on this concept for over a year. Now that the launch is weeks away, we couldn't be happier," he said.

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