“Offering great quality at a reasonable price is the key going forward”

An interview about citrus took a different direction when learning about the reason this Canadian brokerage company was established in the first place. "I founded the company to raise money for a special boy, named Billy," says Paul Katsabanis, owner of Billy Boy Produce in Montreal. "Billy is my son who has autism and epilepsy," he added. He explains how he owes a debt of gratitude to his late father Bill Katsabanis for his tutelage as well as to the many mentors in the Montreal market that have helped Billy Boy Produce. "Thanks to those who hired us, supported us, and held our goal of helping the cause most dear to our hearts."

Expertise in citrus

The company covers all commodities under the sun, but citrus is one of their specialties. "We try to match global suppliers with distributors in Canada, mostly in the citrus category." From Eureka lemons to seedless mandarins, Navel oranges, Valencias, Pomelos, and grapefruits, the company has access to all needs and offers citrus year-round to the Canadian market, from east coast to west coast."

This time of year, the majority of citrus items are sourced from South Africa and Latin America. In South Africa, the climate has thrown some curveballs. "Torrential rains have caused damage, which will impact volumes going forward," Katsabanis commented. Taking all southern hemisphere shipping countries into account, volumes will likely be a little lighter than last year but seem to be okay overall.

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Cost increases

In Canada, citrus is such a staple item that there is always room for citrus products and as a result, demand shows a very steady pattern. However, there is some concern in terms of pricing. "While it is relatively consistent compared to some other commodities, it is increasing ever so slightly." This is causing concern to everyone in the supply chain with the end consumer being mostly impacted. "In working with buyers, I strongly believe that offering great quality at a reasonable price is the key going forward," Katsabanis commented. However, geopolitical events have caused rising production costs as well as soaring transport cost increases. "In respect to freight costs, solutions are crucial because the developments aren't positive with longer transit times, less available equipment, and the cost of fuel at an all time high."

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Meeting expectations

While cost increases and logistics are testing the produce supply chain, meeting expectations of suppliers is probably the biggest challenge. "Pairing a great box of fruit for the needs of every customer is a balancing act," commented Katsabanis. Some are retail heavy, need bigger fruit, and fruit that stands out on the shelf. Others need a serviceable smaller size for foodservice. "We try and accommodate as best as we can while meeting expectations of our buyers," he concluded.

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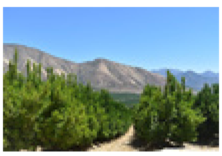

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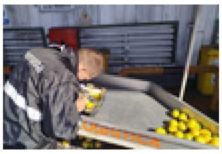

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