

Foodservice conference marks 25 years

Produce Marketing Association meets in July in Monterey

By **SUNITA VIJAYAN**
The Salinas Californian

Since 1981, the Produce Marketing Association has made Monterey the home of its annual foodservice conference.

An event that promises to be bigger and better in this, its 25th year, the Foodservice Conference and Exposition will be held from July 14-16 at the Monterey Conference Center.

The three-day event will feature 140 exhibitors and organizers expect more than 1,500 people to participate, said Debra Mitchell,

director of public relations for Delaware-based PMA.

With rising emphasis placed on the role of fresh fruits and vegetables in a healthy diet, Mitchell said, the conference is a place where people in the industry can learn more innovative ways to market their products.

"I think it's a beautiful setting where all the right people are," she said. "After 25 years, it still remains the only event we know of that focuses on fresh produce as it specifically relates to foodservice."

Attributing last year's conference success to growing awareness of fresh produce in the foodservice industry, Mitchell said attending the expo is critical for those who want to ensure the profitability of their businesses.

"It's such a nice-size gathering," Mitchell said. "You get to make con-

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nections without getting overwhelmed and the opportunity to see it first hand — the latest and the greatest are there."

Calling the conference a perfect occasion to network and learn of the newest trends in cutting-edge workshops, Dave Mills, senior vice president of Salinas-based Mills Family Farms, said it's also easy for Salinas Valley growers to take part in.

"The fact that it's right here in Monterey with customers from all

over — we are able to show them our products in a relaxed and casual atmosphere," Mills said.

"It's right in our own back yard, so it gets our entire sales staff involved."

Product lines showcased

Bruce Knobloch, vice president of marketing for Salinas-based River Ranch Fresh Foods, said the purpose of attending the conference is to obtain necessary information about consumers, especially food-service buyers and restaurant operators.

"The interesting thing about it is the amount of time allocated to education, networking and immediate direct contact with everybody involved," Knobloch said. "This is, year-to-year, a very good event to attend."

TO ATTEND

n **WHAT:** Produce Marketing Association's annual foodservice conference.

n **WHEN:** July 14-16.

n **WHERE:** Monterey Conference Center, 1 Portola Plaza, Monterey.

n **WHO:** Foodservice distributors, growers, shippers, restaurant owners and operators, chefs, menu developers and more

n **INFORMATION:** Produce Marketing Association, (302) 738-7100 or www.pma.com.

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