

Story

Opening a colorful new frontier

The ever-changing produce aisle is getting even more colorful, thanks to the contributions of an emerging Salinas-based business.

Colorful Harvest, an independent business with ownership ties to the Green Giant Fresh produce company, grows, packs and ships a decidedly different line of fruits and vegetables - those you literally have to see to believe.

"I kind of like to be a little different and a little off the beaten path," said company managing partner Doug Ranno. "It's fun to be driving a cutting-edge produce company that has a foot in the familiar and a foot out of the familiar."

What's familiar is the types of produce they grow, while their walk on the wild side involves color. The end result is red sweet corn, orange cauliflower, purple broccoli and rainbow crunch carrots, which include yellow, red and white varieties.

Experts say that this Technicolor produce has an opportunity to thrive, especially since industry studies suggest up to 70 percent of fruit and vegetable purchases are based on their visual appeal.

"Consumers are looking for something their family is going to enjoy eating," said Dr. Christine Bruhn, director of the Center for Consumer Research at the University of California, Davis. "They want it to be appealing in color, yes, but showing signs that the product is freshly harvested and taken care of appropriately. They want things that are crisp, clean and interesting. These new colors that are coming out are quite appealing because people like novelty as well."

Ranno said he's optimistic this venture will work, especially as production, sales and distribution have risen steadily since it started four years ago.

Colorful Harvest produce is available nationwide, at stores including Safeway and Save Mart, foodservice distributors including Sysco and a growing number of restaurants.

"People really love it," said Moises Robles, executive chef of Grill at Ryan Ranch in Monterey. "The flavor is awesome and the colors are really remarkable and beautiful. You just have to put them on a dish with a nice sauce and that's all you need."

Robles uses the Colorful Harvest vegetables in a variety of ways, including making a rainbow carrot salad with iceberg lettuce, roasted red corn and Cajun grilled shrimp and sautéed salmon with red corn salsa and orange cauliflower.



"Oh, I think it's huge," said the restaurant owner, Lee Connally. "Any time you can make a product look more appetizing with color, that is huge."

Much of the company's produce comes from heirloom seeds and up to a decade of research, through test plantings at a farm in Merced County.

That farm site is where the red corn is grown, which provides an exciting prospect for farmer Tim Pellissier Jr.

"It's a lot of fun for me to go out and try to find something different that nobody else is doing and let the world see it," Pellissier said.

The orange cauliflower, prized for its mild, nutty flavor and high beta-carotene level, is grown in Monterey County, near the carrot plantings.

Ranno said the company delivers more than just colorful produce: Its fruits and vegetables also are tasty and nutritious.

"Once we get them to taste them, we have won them over for, hopefully, many years to come," he said.

Ranno said the benefits of his work extend beyond success at the supermarket and restaurant level; they have enticed his family to eat better.

"I have a four-year old and seven-year old," he said. "I appreciate any tool I can find to get them to eat more healthy, and if color in produce does that, it's a great thing!"

For more information log on to: <http://www.colorfulharvest.com>.