

Costa garners Packer foodservice kudos

(July 28) MONTEREY, Calif. — In a time when childhood obesity weighs heavy in the media and on the minds of food suppliers, Manny Costa, president and chief executive officer of Boston-based Costa Fruit & Produce, decided to take matters in his own hands and money from his own pockets to do something about it.

His efforts earned him the The Packer's and Produce Concepts magazine's third annual Foodservice Achievement Award presented to him at the July 25 general session breakfast at the 2004 Produce Marketing Association's Foodservice Conference, Tours & Expo.

Robb Bertels, vice president of Vance Publishing and the publishing director of The Packer Publications, cited several reasons for the award, the most notable for the "imove" program Costa and his company launched earlier this year in two middle schools in Massachusetts offering students an incentive to eat more healthful lunches.

Working with a dietitian, Costa Fruit & Produce developed the program, which provides schools with nutrition information, menu planning assistance and merchandising materials.

Healthful lunch items have "imove" stickers on them, and when kids buy those items for lunch, the cashier stamps the child's re-demption point card. Students earn points toward such prizes as hats, t-shirts, jackets, skateboards, sports water bottles, back packs — on up to a mountain bike.

While the company self funded the pilot program, it has received a grant from United Way to help spread the program. Costa hopes to bring the program to more than 100 schools this fall.

"I'm humbled and honored to receive this award," Costa said.

He has led the company from \$3 million in sales when he started working for his father in 1974 to more than \$100 million and ex-panded it from selling single commodities to a broad line of produce, including value-added products, food safety expertise and branded marketing programs, Bertels said.

Costa has organized the company with a team approach, Bertels pointed out. Team Fresh covers commercial and noncommercial markets while Chef Central provides chefs with top-quality produce and specialty foods.

Real Meal Solutions specializes in retail and foodservice salad bars, delis and home meal replacement. SchoolPros serves the school foodservice market segment.

In 1991, Costa became a founding member of Pro*Act, Monterey, a foodservice purchasing collective made up of more than 40 distributors with more than \$2 billion in annual sales.

He has served as the chairman of the International Fresh-cut Produce Association, Alexandria, Va., has served on the main board and foodservice board of PMA, has been chairman of the New England Foodservice conference and has chaired the board of the Massachusetts Restaurant Association.

Costa is in the National Restaurant Association Hall of Fame and has been named the Purveyor of the Year and received the Per-petual Purveyor Award from the Epicurean Club of Boston.



Manny Costa accepts Foodservice Achievement Award