

THE PACKER 25

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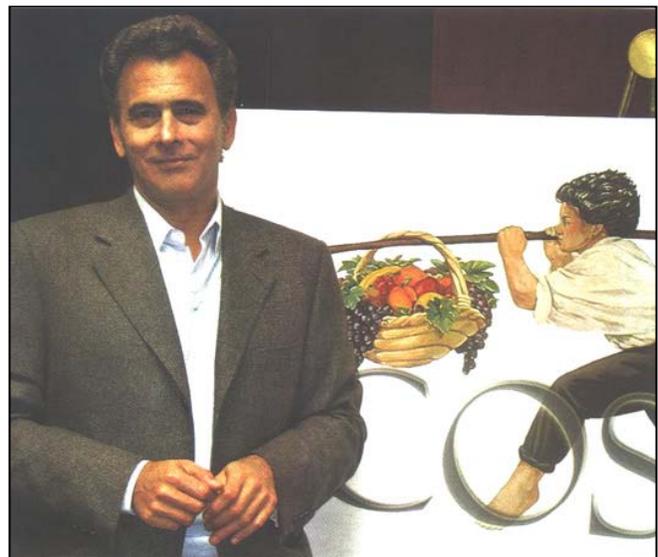
Profiles in Leadership

The Packer, owned by Vance Publications, is the nation's leading periodical dedicated to the produce industry. Recently, The Packer included a new special section entitled **THE PACKER 25** in which they profiled the twenty-five individuals they selected as 'the standard bearers for leadership in the produce industry'. **THE PACKER 25** included such industry giants as the President and CEO of Sunkist and Dole. We are proud to say that our company president, Manny Costa, was also chosen. The following is a re-print of the special section.

Manny Costa Costa Fruit & Produce

He wanted to travel the world...His father wanted him to go to work. And being an English major fresh out of college, Manny Costa admits he "wasn't thrilled" about starting his post-collegiate career in the produce industry.

For a student who enjoyed creative writing, lets face it, fruits and vegetables just didn't provide the innovative environment Costa desired. Not for someone full of ideas. What Costa didn't know, however, was that the industry was behind the times. It was fragmented, and from his perspective, there was room to try new things.



"All of a sudden it got to be an extremely creative environment," he said of his decision to follow his father's advice and join Boston-based Costa Fruit & Produce when he graduated in 1974. "I quickly fell in love with that aspect of it." It's that form of inspiration- the challenge to think differently, to create- for which Costa said his company, "The Fresh Idea Company," operates today.

It all started with his parents, who he said encouraged creativity. As far back as the 1940's, Costa's father asked customers if they would purchase value-added items, Costa said. "If I cut this stuff up for you at no charge, would you buy my cauliflower?" Costa's father asked.

Costa, who became president and chief executive officer of Costa Fruit in 1980, said his father was an innovator – he sought to develop ideas ahead of his time, some of which would take shape decades after his death in 1981.

Fresh Ideas, including new programs, products and sales arrangements, have helped boost sales from about \$3 million in 1974 to more than \$100 million today. Costa Fruit now supplies about 1,500 products.

Among the innovative initiatives Costa has brought to his company are sales divisions School Pros and Chef Central. The School Pros program concentrates on kindergarten through high school foodservice sales, while the latter provides chefs with produce and specialties.

Costa Fruit has also launched imove, a program that offers students incentives to eat more healthful lunches. Local schools are provided with nutrition information, menu planning assistance and merchandising materials.

An accomplishment Costa seems most proud of is the 1991 co-founding of Pro* Act, a foodservice purchasing collective. It now comprises about 40 distributors and more than \$2 billion in annual sales.

But beyond “fresh ideas” is a commitment to the advancement of the produce industry, employees and the good of the community in which Costa Fruit operates Costa said. “I get inspired when I think I’ve done something for the good of the industry, or for the good of the people that I’m associated with,” he said.

Joe DeMarco, vice president of strategic distribution, at a company that had purchased product from Costa for more than 20 years, said Costa goes beyond the call of duty as a distributor.

In the realm of school dining, for example, Costa attends foodservice shows, produce foodservice calendars, and strives to source different products, said DeMarco, who works for Charlotte, N.C.- based Compass Group North America, a contract feeder that supplies offices, universities, prisons and airports.

DeMarco said Costa is credible and honors his promises. He’s down to earth, DeMarco said, but also a shrewd businessman.

Internally, Brad Woodgate, vice president of Costa Fruit, said Costa allows his employees to tackle various responsibilities. He said employees feel like they are part of the company’s success.

Whether they are executives or delivery drivers, many of Costa’s 250 employees have been with the company for more that 20 years. Last year a driver retired after 38 years with the company.

“We all have goals to obtain, and he kind of lets us get there” said Woodgate, a 25- year Costa veteran. “He’s always there to help people get through situations.”

Get to know...

MANNY COSTA, president and chief executive officer of Boston-based Costa Fruit & Produce

BACKGROUND

Costa’s father, who was born in the U.S. but raised on the Azores islands near Portugal, started Costa Fruit & Produce in 1953. Manny was born July 28 of that year.

Costa joined his father’s company in 1974 after he graduated from Boston University, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in English. He had previously worked at Costa Fruit during summers and holidays. When Costa’s father became ill, it was necessary for Costa to take on presidential duties. He became president in 1980, a year before his father died.

Costa has lived in Massachusetts his entire life. He and his girlfriend have been together for more than 10 years.

Costa has served as chairman of the Alexandria, Va. - based International Fresh-cut Produce Association. Costa is also involved with the School of Hospitality Administration at Boston University.

Costa Fruit & Produce is in the Nation Restaurant Association Hall of Fame, has been named Purveyor of the Year, earned the Perpetual Purveyor Award from the Epicurean Club of Boston and was recognized as Innovator of the Year by *ID* magazine, a foodservice publication.

Costa garnered **The Packer’s** and *Produce Concepts* magazine’s Foodservice Achievement Award in 2004.

PASTIMES

Costa enjoys reading and writing, and he has aspirations to write a novel- if he ever finds the time. “Those hours of real clarity are so rare, when your mind’s free and rested and it seems to go well,” he said. “You try to do it when you come home, and your mind’s just so beat.”

Costa has been writing since he graduated from Boston University. He calls his hobby a “secret passion.”