

Costa fosters locally grown produce with 2-tiered system

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BOSTON — Costa Fruit & Produce is using economics and customer education to sustain and encourage local produce growers. It's part of a two-tiered plan Costa introduced this spring.

Costa implemented a seven-day net payment program for all produce and agricultural products grown or produced in New England by independent farmers and producers. The payment plan was established to help local farmers operate their farms more efficiently and increase overall profitability, said Mike Scuderi, marketing director for Costa.

To increase communication between growers and customers, Costa began distributing weekly emails, faxes and phone calls to make customers aware of what produce is being grown and where. The communication is crucial, Scuderi said, because if the quality and price of local produce is competitive, most foodservice operators would use local products if they could. Having direct knowledge of product availability and product quality allows Costa to offer the best quality and variety of products to its customers, Scuderi said.

Costa buys directly and indirectly from 40 to 50 farms, ranging in size from just a few acres to several hundred. These individual farms and grower co-ops are spread throughout the New England area, including New Hampshire, Connecticut, Vermont and Maine.

Scuderi couldn't quantify how much produce Costa sources from local growers, but he said Costa tries to buy as much local produce as possible. When demand exceeds available local supplies, Costa turns to other sources.

Costa has always prided itself on supporting the local produce industry. People are becoming more aware of the benefits of buying local products and want to support their communities, Scuderi said. Echoing the consumers' sentiments, Scuderi said the most important benefit is, in fact, giving back to the local communities they live in and do business with. In addition to supporting the local economy, he said, sourcing products locally also reduces the use of fossil fuels, protects the environment from exhaust fumes and protects the land from being over developed.