

# Have We Gone Back to the Future?

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In many ways the produce industry has, in order to prosper, gone back to the future. Just look around your own city, Farmer's Markets are booming all over the country as consumers are following the "local is better" mantra. Many consumers believe that purchasing product grown outside of a 20-mile radius of where they live is bad for the environment and economy.

Today's green movement is causing many consumers to look for products that go beyond simple organically grown produce. They are looking for and demanding product that comes from farms that are focused on environmentally-friendly growing practices; companies that have a philosophy of sustainability. Small farms that focus on these areas and market their products to this consumer are growing rapidly and consumers are eating it up. Aren't these the farms of 20 or 30 years ago?

With the consolidation of supermarkets in the United States came the birth of corporate farms -- big, efficient, production farms that promised high-quality, low-priced produce for the masses. How are those operations doing today? As consumers begin to purchase less, but more often, focusing on freshness, quality, environmentally-sound product over quantity and price, the small focused farms and companies that utilize them are thriving.

I have found a company like this; one that is re-inventing the value-added vegetable category in supermarkets today. One that has focused a great deal of attention on good farming practices, developing environmentally-friendly farming operations and ensuring sustainable practices for years to come in farms around the world.

A.M.S. Exotic has developed products for foodservice suppliers throughout the United States.



In October 2004 A.M.S. Exotic launched the Earth Exotic's Premium Baby Vegetable line to supermarket chains throughout the United States. The Earth Exotic's Premium Vegetable line is made up of 19 SKUs ranging from A to Z, -- asparagus tips to baby zucchini squash. The eight-ounce vegetable line was developed for today's busy consumer; with extended shelf life that allows the product to be distributed nationwide. The product goes beyond the typical microwavable packaging; this product can also be boiled, steamed or micro-waved right in the bag. With the extended shelf life that is now available, retail supermarkets can expand their specialty offerings while, reducing their shrink and improving their sales and profits in the Value Added Vegetable Category.

“We like to believe that we have gone a step beyond simply putting vegetables in a bag,” said Jorge Manriquez, director of operations. He stated that “from the beginning of this process we wanted to establish a strong, efficient, conscientious growing network, to ensure that our growers are growing environmentally-friendly products and using sustainable growing practices.” A.M.S. Exotic and our Growing Partners have put into affect a number of practices that allow for greater sustainability of the land we farm.

These practices include drip irrigation in all fields, which lets us use less water, and we utilize specific seed varieties that give us better yield, allowing us to farm less land. We do not allow field burning as a mechanism for controlling pests or bacteria. This



robs the land of its powerful nutrients.

Although utilizing sustainable growing practices are important and ongoing, A.M.S. Exotic goes beyond that to introduce Environmentally Friendly practices and Food Safety protocols in our fields as well. Our products are hand harvested, which certainly adds to the cost to grow the product, but it's good for the environment and for the economies of the areas from which we grow. Our crops are fenced and closed, and there is full traceability down to the field where the product was grown.

“At A.M.S. Exotic we are proud of our efforts, which are always ongoing, and we will continue to find ways to improve our products through good environmentally sound practices, with an effort to improve our sustainability in the fields we farm with our growing partners.” Mr. Manriquez states.

Providing produce to the Retail Supermarkets isn't just about filling an order any more, it is about understanding our place in the world, our responsibility to provide high quality, safe, environmentally friendly product, with a focus on the long term effect on the land we inhabit.

Although A.M.S. Exotic is a small company, we have recognized the importance of this. We have come to the realization that you can be successful by going back to the future.