

## Marketing Roundtable

Karen Caplan - Moderator  
Friedas

Mary Mahaffey  
Heart of Texas

Jay McCarthy  
Chef, Central Market - Austin

Patricia Sharpe  
*Texas Monthly*

David D'Arrigo  
D'Arrigo Bros.

A very diverse and exciting marketing panel was chaired by Karen Caplan, President of Friedas in Los Angeles. Also on the panel was Mary Mahaffey, owner of Heart of Texas that specializes in supplying exotic produce to the restaurant trade; Patricia Sharpe, Senior Editor of Texas' most prestigious monthly magazine, *Texas Monthly*; and David D'Arrigo, the developer behind the cactus puree, of the D'Arrigo Bros.

Pat Sharpe began the discussion with the following comments. She thought it important to better educate the consumer by developing one- or two-page fact sheets with nutritional information on nopalitos and tunas. If the sky were the limit, she thought it would be desirable to find a well-known southwestern personality or movie star to endorse cactus products. It would also be useful to develop a cartoon character such as the Pillsbury doughboy, the Frito bandito or the Marlboro Man to symbolize cactus products. Another suggestion was to develop slogans such as "Soup is good food", "O.J. - not just for breakfast", "The Pepsi Generation". Pat thought it important to hand out free samples in grocery stores, to provide recipe cards, and to develop a cactus cookbook. If the cactus industry had lots of money, she thought it would be important to hire a public-relations agency to develop stories. She stressed that in Houston and San Antonio there were at least 20 or 30 publications that would be likely opportunities for news releases on cactus. Last, she thought the idea being developed by Jay McCarthy of a Cactus Poster was superb.

Mary Mahaffey began with a little background about her company, which was started in 1986 to serve the needs of specialty chefs who could not find the exotic ingredients for unusual and trendy dishes. She stated the biggest obstacle for cactus pears, especially for the red fruit, is that it cannot be obtained year round. From April through August there is no red fruit on the market. This makes it almost impossible for restaurants to include it on their menus. She thought the frozen cactus puree helped a great deal. In fact, the largest users of cactus pears—those who make sorbet, vinaigrettes, and margaritas—have switched from fresh cactus pears to puree. However, there still is a demand for fresh red fruits.

With regard to nopalitos, Mary Mahaffey thought the Texas A&M 1308 had revolutionized the industry because of the low slime. This low slime has made possible the pickles, which are a really big hit.

With regard to packaging and labeling, Mary Mahaffey noted the needs of the wholesale and retail trade were radically different. At the wholesale level, the chefs who know the product, don't want to pay for expensive packaging. However, at the retail level, expensive, well-designed packaging is very important. She noted that in a survey of pasta sales by the pasta industry, quality was not related to price or volume. Price and volume were only related to the upscale nature of the packaging.

David D'Arrigo commented on some aspects of the marketing of his company's new frozen puree and shelf-stable concentrate. His company has lost some sales by not utilizing all the fresh fruit, which commands a high price. However, he feels the exposure of having people all over the world try the cactus taste without the seeds is worth short-term losses in fruit sales. It has taken D'Arrigo Bros., which grosses more than \$70 million per year, a very great deal of money to produce a shelf-stable acidified product. It is absolutely critical to meet the very rigid food specifications, especially if the cactus concentrate is to be used with dairy products, such as yogurt or ice cream. He stressed that it was extremely critical that the cactus puree be made from the highest quality fruits so as not to introduce harmful bacteria into the products. David D'Arrigo also stressed that it was very critical that the fruit be maintained at the correct temperature all the way to the end producer. If they are picked and processed hot, or if the refrigerated truck is opened for any reason, the quality of the product can degrade rapidly.

To recap the marketing session, Karen Caplan reiterated that recipes are an excellent idea, but they have to work and they must be simple, easy-to-use recipes whose ingredients are readily available. Before distributing the recipes, Friedas tests all of them in their company kitchen to make sure they work. In-store demonstrations are a good idea, but they often cost \$80 to \$120 for a 6-hour demonstration. The audience commented that it is less costly and more effective to have a company or family member do the in-store demonstrations because they will be truly interested in seeing the products succeed.