

# TESTA PRODUCE Market Report

Outlook for the Week of

**February 13,  
2011**



## Market Report

So I leave for a week and all hell breaks loose. First, Chicago gets hit with a massive snowstorm and then Mexico gets hit with freezing temps that they have not had in 50 years. I think I am not going to go away anymore- too much drama when I come back.

The freeze in Mexico was in a word- devastating. You have entire fields of product completely wiped out. What makes their freeze so problematic is that Mexico is the major gun for product during this time of year. They would supply or keep in check everyone else, but since they are wiped out, we have a huge problem. The major items affected are Tomatoes, Eggplant, Peppers, Tomatillos, Serrano and Poblano Peppers, Basil, Herbs in general, Romaine, Romaine Hearts, Lettuce, Celery, Mesclun, Cucs, Escarole, Endive, Cauliflower, Green Onions, Baby Spinach, and the kitchen sink. As you can see by the list- not good. Some of these will be more plentiful in 2-3 weeks, but some will not recover for at least 4-6 weeks. What happened that made this freeze so bad was the previous freeze in Florida 8 weeks ago. It wiped out a lot of their crops that they didn't plant again because Mexico was too cheap and they didn't want to compete against them till their season ended. So with very little extra acres in Florida producing when Mexico got hit, those growers saw a chance

to recover some of their losses from their freeze and naturally prices for Florida Tomatoes, the few there are, went crazy. The only other area that has any volume of Tomatoes is Puerto Rico, which is shipping in some volume but the shipping costs are much higher. Those Tomatoes are going to stay high priced for a while. If you can switch to a different size on Tomatoes, now might be a good time to try.

As the market settles you will see different price levels on different sizes but right now nobody knows what they're doing so everything is high priced. I will tell you that a random Tomato will be anything they put in the box and we were told they will only have limited availability on them. To give you some idea on prices: most Tomatoes will be over 40, closer to 50, dollars a box. Lettuce will be in the \$30's, Romaine in the \$30's, Celery over \$45, Escarole \$30-\$40, Endive \$30-\$40, Mesclun \$10-\$15, Cauliflower over \$20, Green Onion over \$20, Peppers- XL and Jumbo \$50-\$60 and Large and Medium \$45-\$55, Red Peppers 25# \$45-\$48, Romaine Hearts 48ct \$35-\$45 and going higher, Boston Lettuce \$20-\$25, Spinach \$25-\$28.

The 64 Million Dollar Question is- What are my options? Most restaurants can stop using some of these items but not all. I have some ideas, here are a few: if you use Leaf Lettuce, Red or Green, for

## Market Report, Cont'd...

garnish or plate liner, switch to Kale or Mustard Green. Collards and Turnip Green are also available and still in the teens. Red and Green Swiss Chard can also be used for garnishing. On Tomatoes, if you use Repack 5x6, try switching to Loose 6x6 sizes- about the same size as Repack 5x6 but you get 5 lbs. more in the box, however you can have some bruising and size issues. If you use Plum Tomatoes in salads but the price of 20 lbs. Vine Ripe Tomatoes drops \$10 less than Plum, consider slicing up the 4x5 instead of the Plums. It could go the other way also if Plum Tomatoes drop because of more production. Use those in place of Loose 6x6 and you can slice them long ways for burgers to get by for a few weeks. Salad Squash can be used for Baby Spinach at times, if you mix the salad Spinach in a larger salad, it actually looks pretty good and you get 10 lbs. versus 4 lbs. of product.

On Cucs, don't buy super select at high prices, switch to select or plain. Most of the time price will be 6-8 dollars cheaper, sometimes \$10-\$12 less. On Celery, don't worry about size as long as its healthy; your yield on 24, 30, and 36 sizes is the same but there could be a difference in price.

Now, the other big issue you are going to have when you pay those high prices for product- you may not get great quality. Growers are putting just about anything in the box to recoup their losses, so if you reject a product for quality, we may not have anything else to replace it with for a few days. Just so you are aware of it. I have not seen a market this high, this quick, and this many items in 40 years of doing this. I will have a better feel of things in a week. I expect it to be rough for a while. If a product is poor quality, or not available, we may have to 'out of stock' an item- that could happen and customer service may not know we are going to do that till the next day. My buyers and I make those calls sometimes in the morning and the day we are shipping.

We will do everything to fill everyone's order but we may have to prorate product as well. With all the bad news, we do have one good news item- winter is officially over in 17 days!

If you need something different next week, we have English Peas and they are very reasonable.

## Sale Items

Pinneapple, Case 8ct \$14.95	<b>Testa Item # 31603</b>
Oranges, Minneola Case \$26.00	<b>Testa Item # 30366</b>
Watermelon, Yellow Case \$39.00	<b>Testa Item # 45056</b>
Honeydew, Case 8ct \$12.50	<b>Testa Item # 16653</b>
Oranges, Clementine Small Box \$6.95	<b>Testa Item#00384</b>
Carrots, Baby Peeled w/ top, 5# \$19.50	<b>Testa Item #05084</b>

Quantities are Limited.

Available While Supplies Last!

**BE SURE TO USE THESE ITEM NUMBERS!**

## Produce Quiz

Dating back to the fourth century AD I was held in high regard by the Greeks and Romans for my medicinal properties. I am similar to spinach, but easier to prep and consume because my stems are edible. Often called a leaf beet, I am grown for my leaves, not my root. I come in many colors including white, red, green and even a rainbow variety, but we all turn the same darkish green when cooked. My hardy leaves keep better than spinach due to the lower levels of oxalic acid, which allows for better nutritional absorption. Our baby leaves are used in salads, while the elders get braised or steamed, and often served with lemon. Mixed with raisins, apples, pine nuts, lemon and cheese I create a traditional specialty of Nice of ten served on Christmas Eve called tourte de blettes. I will also find me combined with ham in quiche. Eaten raw, I am an excellent source of vitamins C and A. Cooked I become an excellent source of iron, copper, vitamins C, and B6. We are also used as a laxative and a diuretic. Although we share a first name, I am no relation to cheese.

**Last Quiz Answer: Eggplant**