



May 26th 2008

Personality can open doors, but only character can keep them open.

Elmer G. Letterman

This week marks the beginning of summer with Memorial Day. We'll begin by honoring those who have fought for our freedom. When we step back to look at the big picture, to remember the soldiers who have bravely paid the ultimate price, we can worry less about gas prices, the stock market, and the economy. Without our freedom, our very way of life, everything else is for not. Hopefully, all of you will find the time over this holiday, and the long summer days ahead, to spend time with your family and friends and cherish what we all have in America—Freedom.



River Ranch Fresh Foods, LLC

River Ranch Fresh Foods, LLC is one of the Big Four fresh produce processors in the United States. With two major state-of-the-art processing and cooling facilities, one in Salinas, California, and one in El Centro, California, the company maintains year-round operations.

The origins of River Ranch are linked to one of the oldest lettuce-producing and shipping companies in the Salinas area, the Bruce Church Company. River Ranch, known originally as Fresh Western Marketing, has taken Salinas' strong agricultural heritage into the future by generating technological and marketing innovations

River Ranch is the leading processor of private label and River Ranch salads, Popeye Fresh! spinach salads and River Ranch fresh-cut vegetables as well as a broad-line shipper of high quality commodity products to customers throughout North America. River Ranch is the home of America's top selling Popeye brand spinach. The Popeye brand offers the most complete, nationally distributed product line in the Fresh Spinach segment with six items.

River Ranch now offers over 23 different sizes of salad items in its product line. The company also provides the highest quality through proprietary harvesting methods and following a strict food safety process. River Ranch Fresh Foods was one of the original signatories of the CA Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement.

The company focuses on its position as a value-added shipper for both the food service and retail industries. While cut vegetables and packaged salads are a large part of River Ranch's current business, the company still maintains a strong presence in the commodity business, supplying head lettuce, carton broccoli, carton cauliflower, and numerous other commodity items to the foodservice and retail industries.





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PRODUCE SPOTLIGHT

FIDDLEHEADS

I think almost everyone has heard of "fiddlehead ferns," the tasty wild vegetable reminiscent of asparagus and found across much of North America in the spring. Yet, unfortunately, not all fiddleheads are edible. Three, however, are, and they are so widespread that one or more are available to over half the inhabitants of the United States in April (South) and May (North).

The king of the edible fiddleheads is the ostrich fern (*Matteucia struthiopteris*, also known as *Matteuccia pennsylvanica*). It inhabits the eastern half of America from Virginia up into Canada. In the fiddlehead stage, its upper coil is covered with papery, brown scales that fall away as the leaves uncoil. The fiddleheads emerge in clusters of 2-8 amid brown fertile leaves from the previous year. They are best harvested when about 8 inches tall.



Both the lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*) and bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*) have edible fiddleheads. The lady fern is a lighter green than the ostrich fern, with thinner, less tightly coiled fiddleheads. The bracken fern is probably the most abundant fern on earth and fossils date it around at least 55 million years. It rises singularly (both ostrich and lady ferns grow in clusters, called rosettes) to a height of up to 5 feet. Each stalk splits into three main forks, forming a large, roughly triangular frond that grows horizontally. Bracken fiddleheads are not coiled up like ostrich or lady ferns. The top may droop down slightly or may not, may curl up slightly or may not. The three main forks are each unfurled next to one another and are called croziers. Bracken shoots are covered with a layer of short, rusty-colored fuzz that is easily rubbed off before use.



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COMMODITY REPORT

ASPARAGUS

The Washington growing region is in full production with good supplies. Peruvian asparagus is also available. The quality has been only fair at best up until now. Some lots have even shown slight dehydration, and small amounts of decay

AVOCADO

California fruit –California crop estimates have been lowered for this year by 6 to 10 percent. Size curve continues to be heavier to smaller sizes. Growers are stripping some trees to relieve stress to the trees damaged by last years freeze. 48's and larger are becoming a little tight. There remains a light supply of #2 fruit, as the crop is very clean. Demand for fruit remains very good as less Mexican fruit is crossing into the States.

Mexican fruit – Mexico's crop continues to service mostly the Midwest and East Coast; supplies continue to drop.

BELL PEPPERS

Western Green Bells and Colored Bells: Mexico will continue to harvest limited numbers into next week on green bells, but quality will remain a problem. Coachella Valley is going with new crop green bells; supplies are good, but increased demand coming from the east coast is keeping shippers cleaned up. Red and Yellow bells from Mexico look to be finished for the season. The few that are left in Nogales are fair at best in quality, and has no legs for traveling. One shipper is going on Red's from Baja, and Coachella has started with light volume and will slowly increase over the next 2 week.

BERRIES

Strawberries: Weather has cooled off again. The forecast is calling for at least 4 – 5 days of high 50's to low 60's. The cooler temperatures and strong winds very well may slow production down a bit. We can expect to see some moderate to minor quality defects from this weather development. Sizing is still irregular but quality remains good to fair.

Raspberries: Production is increasing daily in Watsonville. More shippers are now producing raspberries. Quality remains good.

Blackberries: Overall production is increasing in all areas Watsonville, Santa Maria and Kingsburg, Quality is good.

Blueberries: New crops in California are producing good volume in Delano Ca. and Watsonville is just starting with very small numbers. The Carolinas are now producing. Most shippers will be up to full production by the end of May.

BROCCOLI

Supplies from all growing regions look to be steady. Broccoli bunched is ranging fro 2 to 4 stalks per bunch. There is also good supplies of Broccoli Crowns and Asian cut broccoli crowns This commodity is showing some branchiness, purple cast, and knuckly. In addition, there has been some yellow discoloration in some lots.

CELERY

Supplies are very short. All shippers are reaching way ahead of harvesting schedules due to the seeders in the fields. There will not be any relief until the Salinas growing season starts in mid June.

CITRUS

Lemon: Demand continues to get stronger as warm weather drives usage up. Growers are harvesting at a rate to meet demand in most sizes. Fruit is peaking on 115's and 165's, with **200's beginning to get tight**. Storage levels are remaining steady, but continue lighter than normal for this time of year.

Oranges: Many growers are finishing on Navel's; Sunkist has 2 houses that will pack into next week. Sizing is mostly large fruit, 72's & 88's. Valencia oranges are going with all shippers now, with sizing ruining mainly 88's and smaller. Quality is very good with brix in the 11.5 range.

SQUASH

Western Squash: Mexico has dropped way off in volume; high temperatures have caused some quality issues. Expect about 1 to 2 weeks left with limited supplies. The Central Valley of California production is into good supplies, and Baja production is increasing and will have some very good supplies by next week.

TOMATOES

Western: San Diego production is increasing with good quality. San Diego is still getting up to speed. Production should significantly increase as we get into June. Roma tomato market has increased slightly. McAllen TX is currently crossing good quality tomatoes, greenhouse/shade grown in 25# and two layer packs and Romas. Slight market increase. **Eastern:** Growing conditions have been fair. Weather forecast calls to remain steady Tomato quality is also good but volume and sizing are irregular. There is an abundance medium and large fruit lacking the extra large sizes, but no vine ripe tomatoes at this time