

Berries

Driven by consumer demand for healthier snacking options and year-round availability, the berry category remains a strong performer.

BY CAROLYN O'NEILL

With increased berry popularity driven by health and year-round availability, berries are a successful and integral produce category for retailers.

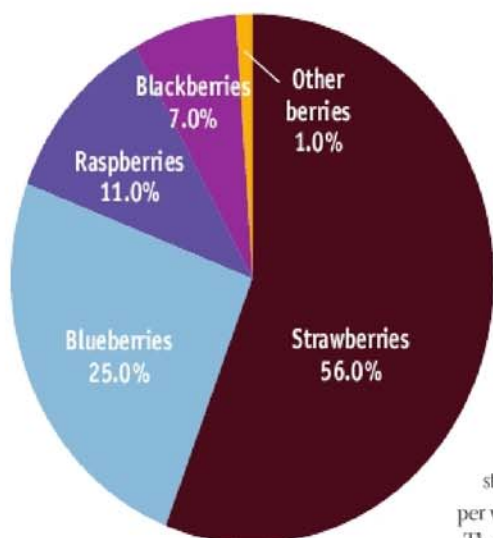
Berries are the largest subcategory within fruit, accounting for 16.6% of fruit dollar sales during the 52 weeks ended Dec. 26 and contributing 7.5% to total produce department dollar sales.

Nationally, berries averaged \$2,962 in per-week-per-store sales, a 7.7% increase from 2008. This is in sharp contrast to the overall produce department, which had a year-over-year decline of 2.5%.

With their patriotic red and blue color palette, berry sales peaked during the week of July 4, at \$4,798 per week per store due to the holiday, aided by berries' peak in supply. Consumer demand for berries also rose in November due to the traditional cranberry dish served during the Thanksgiving holiday.

While strawberries accounted for the majority of berry dollar sales with a 56% share across the U.S., blackberries had the greatest growth for the most recent tracked period. Blackberries increased 29.1% in average dollars, making up 7% of total berry category sales. Blueberries and raspberries accounted for 25% and 11%, respectively. The remaining 1.4% of berry category dollar sales was made up of other berries and currants.

The East and Central regions both surpassed the nation-



**Sales of berries
by subcategory**

al average in dollar sales per week per store for berries. The East region had the highest average weekly dollar sales at \$4,601 per week per store, 55% higher than the national average. The Central region sold \$3,895 per week per store, 32% higher than the U.S. average of \$2,962 in average weekly sales. The South averaged the lowest sales with \$2,113 per week per store, followed by the West with \$2,703 per week per store.

The Central and East regions contributed the most to overall produce department sales with 8.7% and 8%, respectively. The East

region presents an opportunity for berries. While the East ranked highest in average weekly dollar sales, it saw 9.1% growth in average weekly dollar sales over the previous year—the highest increase of the category for any region and yet only the second highest dollar contribution to the total produce department. With the berry category still growing in the East, there is potential to make it the highest dollar contributor to the produce department.

As another thriving berry year is complete, industry observers will be closely monitoring 2010 berry sales, especially as inclement weather affected berry supplies in the early months of 2010. □

This sales review is provided by the Chicago-based Perishables Group, an independent consulting firm focused on creating innovation and value for clients in the fresh food industry. Reported results are for the 52 weeks ending Dec. 26, 2009. Results were compiled from grocery stores nationwide, representing 63% percent of national supermarket ACV share. For more information, contact Kelli Beckel at 773-929-7013, or kelli@perishablesgroup.com.

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