



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

Organic produce sales continue strong through the first quarter of 2021.

Organic produce sales continue growing

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

The pandemic has driven record sales and interest in organic food — and that momentum isn't yet slowing.

A new report from the Organic Produce Network and Category Partners this month shows total U.S. organic fresh produce sales for the first quarter of 2021 increased 9.3% from the same period in 2020 — nearly \$88 million additional sales.

Conventional produce dollars, in contrast, saw only a modest year-over-year increase at about 2.9% during the first quarter.

By volume sold, organic bananas, carrots and apples ranked as the top drivers at retail this first quarter, according to the report.

By dollar amount sold, the top 10 categories, from highest to lowest, were:

- Pre-packaged salads.
- Berries.
- Apples.
- Herbs and spices.
- Carrots.
- Lettuce.
- Bananas.

- Citrus.
- Tomatoes.
- Potatoes.

Packaged salads, in the No. 1 spot, accounted for 17% of all organic sales.

Sarah Brown, education and advocacy director at Oregon Tilth, a nonprofit that certifies organic producers, told the Capital Press last year that consumers turned to organic produce during the pandemic for several reasons. People were cooking more at home and appeared to be looking for a sense of security and a stable, local food source.

"But I also think people are just really tuned into health right now," she said.

Moving into the second quarter of 2021, as pandemic closures ease up and restaurants reopen, the Organic Produce Network report said it's not yet clear how quickly consumers will return to pre-pandemic purchasing behaviors.

"Once again, sales of organic fresh produce continue to be a major growth opportunity for retailers across the country," Matt

Seeley, CEO of Organic Produce Network, said in a statement. "At the same time, as the country enters a post-COVID environment, with restaurants reopening and other food-service options available, it appears the double-digit growth rate will be slowing."

Some experts say it may be easier to predict continued high sales in the direct farm-to-consumers space, where consumers often have longer-term contracts or subscriptions to farms.

The past two months, for example, several organic farms running Community Supported Agriculture programs have told the Capital Press they expect even more CSA shares to be sold this year than in 2020.

Organic certifiers continue to predict more farms will enter the organic space, and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack told the Capital Press in an interview last week USDA will be looking at ways to make the transition from conventional to organic production easier.

Bank of EO reports 1st quarter earnings

East Oregonian

HEPPNER — BEO Bancorp and its subsidiary Bank of Eastern Oregon announced first quarter 2021 consolidated net income of \$1,337,000, or \$1.11 per share, compared to \$1,110,000, or \$0.94 per share, for first quarter 2020.

Total assets were \$710.5 million, up 46.38% year over year. Net loans of \$508.6 million were up 20.08% from the same period in 2020, while deposits were at \$650.7 million up 48.88% year over year.

"The first quarter of 2021 has in some ways been a continuation of what we all had to endure in 2020, but in most of our trade areas we are seeing signs of a return to a 'new normal' with businesses opening up and some restrictions easing. We have also seen another round of economic stim-

ulus, with payments hitting bank accounts, as well as another round of PPP lending through the Small Business Administration. I applaud our team of bankers that have spent countless hours working with existing and new customers to help them navigate the new lending programs and get those funds disbursed to help our communities," said President and CEO Jeff Bailey in a press release.

Chief Financial Officer Mark Lemmon said, "Shareholder equity is up 10.5% over the past year; Return on Average Assets and Return on Average Equity are 0.78% and 12.73% respectively." Lemmon added, "The various government stimulus programs over the past year have put a tremendous amount of liquidity into the financial system. This has been the primary

cause of our significant increase in assets."

Chief Operations Officer Becky Kindle said, "We are very pleased with the new banking relationships that our teams have developed over the past year along with maintaining our existing customer base. Employees have worked very hard to make sure customers' financial needs were met during very trying times."

"Year over year the bank has seen growth across all branches and loan offices. The strategic addition of personnel and locations over the past few years has complimented our existing operations and expanded our brand of banking to many new customers and communities. We are grateful for the trust that our existing and new customers have in our bank and team members," concluded Bailey.

NAILS

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said. "I've got too much life to live. ... I'm just trying to live every day by day."

After a stint at cosmetology school — Bella Institute in Beaverton — that was dragged out from four to six months because of the COVID-19 pandemic, she got her nail technician license and set up shop in Forest Grove.

"You have to do a certain amount of literal hands-on work and a certain amount of services in order to graduate," she said. "It's kind of ironic that I went to Bella Institute and ended up at Belle Salon."

In addition to acrylic

nails, LaFave does regular manicures, overlays and forms, which are filled with a liquid product that can be shaped.

"I'm really big on designs, so I do a lot of them," she said. "There's tons of other things you can do. I do pedicures and feet rubbing. There's also hard gels, like acrylics. For me, personally, it's better for my nails ... it doesn't do as much damage to them. But it just depends."

Shop owner Amy Anton was eager to have another nail tech in her establishment.

"There's a need for it. We've been having a lot of calls and unfortunately, we're only one person and can only do so much and have a pretty

full clientele," Anton said. "Having Dajah come in and ask to work was pretty awesome. We're pretty excited. We're trying to do everything we can to help her out and get her going and she's doing pretty well on her own. I think she's going to do pretty well."

LaFave's hours are Tuesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. She can be reached by phone at 503-849-3896. See some of her work on her Facebook page.

But she urges potential customers to call soon for an appointment.

"Book soon, because people are coming left and right and I'll probably be full," she said.

WATER

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The amended version of HB 2244 that's headed for a House vote creates a special procedure for disputes related to in-stream water rights held by tribes and state agencies.

The automatic stay only becomes effective once the junior irrigator actually files a "proof of service" that OWRD was served with a lawsuit.

The agency must notify affected tribes within five days.

The OWRD may also override the automatic stay if it causes "substantial public harm" but the junior irrigator can challenge this denial in court within 21 days.

"That does put a little more burden on the junior who is petitioning but not an inappropriate one or a difficult one to meet," Wilde said of the proposed procedure. "We're not changing anyone's substantive rights. It's just about speeding up the process so that everyone gets a quicker answer."



The Observer, File

A central pivot irrigation system applies water April 26, 2016, to a field of Kentucky bluegrass on a farm in the Sandridge area southwest of Alicel. A new bill in the Oregon House that would alter the process for enforcing Oregon water rights is gaining traction.

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