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THE NATION'S MOST HIGHLY HONORED FOOD TRADE PUBLICATION

10 Produce

Bagged Salad: Only as Fresh as the Weakest Ingredient



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Bagged salad. We all buy it, but by the time we get around to eating it a few days later, the sog-

giness has already set in and it ends up getting tossed. In fact, 40 percent of bagged salad is thrown out every year in the UK, and 33 percent of all food products in the U.S. are thrown away, costing the nation more than \$161 billion per year.

The real problem in this scenario starts all the way at the beginning of the process—when the lettuce, kale or other vegetables are harvested. Even produce harvested on

the same day may spoil at different rates depending on post-harvest processing and handling. Some will actually go bad days before others.

Essentially, a bagged salad is only as fresh as its weakest ingredient—and that's where the problem lies. Growers, food brands and grocers have not been taking into account varying freshness for ingredients across mixed produce products like bagged salads and meal kits, making expiration dates effectively useless. By combining produce without taking into account that each ingredient has a different freshness capacity (total shelf life) and spoiling rate, bagged salads are destined to be in the trash quicker than grocers and consumers expect.

Traditionally, fresh food was grown, harvested and eaten all in a highly local environ-

ment. But as the agriculture industry has expanded to meet higher demand and consumers have become accustomed to full year availability of fruits and vegetables, products can now travel thousands of miles over days to reach your grocery store. These changes to our fresh food supply chain have led to significant growing pains resulting in roughly 1.3 billion tons of food waste every year.

This extended fresh food supply chain has led to selling many products much closer to their expiration date, and spoilage for products that do not meet their expected expiration date. If quality managers dealing with growers, shippers and grocers had real-time insight into their supply chain however, and could monitor the actual remaining freshness of each product, they could better match the freshness of each ingredient on delivery—and manufacture a bagged salad

with consistent freshness that can survive in a consumer's refrigerator more than a couple days. Better yet, they could even route produce that has less remaining freshness to stores closer by.

With food waste at an all-time high, real-time tracking and predictive analytics can improve visibility and decision making within the supply chain and create less waste, while also saving consumers money.

PETER MEHRING serves as CEO and President of Zest Labs. Peter brings extensive experience in engineering, operations and general management at emerging companies and large enterprises. As CEO of Zest Labs, he has led the company's efforts in pioneering freshness management solutions for the fresh produce and meal delivery markets.