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The Magazine for Value-Added Produce

March 2005

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## Club Chef Expands into New Facility

## Spotlight:

# Club Chef Expands into New Facility

*New 210,000-square-foot Processing Facility Opens Its Doors*



*Shown are two of many state-of-the-art processing lines at Club Chef's facility.*

Club Chef LLC recently announced the opening of its new world-class, 210,000-square-foot fresh-cut processing facility in Covington, Ky., just across the river from Cincinnati, Ohio, where the company has been operating for more than 25 years.

The new facility, expected to be fully operational by March 1, boosts the company's space availability by over 100 percent and, with the addition of new state-of-the-art processing equipment, positions Club Chef to aggressively compete for years to come.

The move significantly increases Club Chef's ability to add more fresh-cut products including fruit, according to Tom Spohn, vice president and general manager. Randy Marcum,

director of operations, states, "I'm excited about what the new facility design and layout does for productivity, but most importantly our flexibility. The attention we placed on our employee welfare area reflects our commitment to our most important asset, our people."

When fully operational, Club Chef's new plant will employ approximately 400 workers.

"The facility has been designed and built with the recognition that product quality and production output are complimentary ideals," explains Mick Steele, facility engineer.

"Some of the new equipment installed is considered the first of its kind in the country," according to Spohn. Included are fully integrated line and flume systems. Volume capacity is "virtually double" that of the company's previous downtown Cincinnati plant.

Jeff Klare, vice president of sales and marketing, is particularly excited about Club Chef's continued commitment to quality and new product development.

"Dr. Meg Barth, a recognized technical professional in our industry, joined our company as vice president of quality and technology," he announces. "Also joining the quality team is Beverly Kempf, a recognized quality professional, as our senior quality assurance manager. These additions, combined with the experience of Bob Herdeman, our product development director, provide Club Chef with a quality and technical team second to none."



*Randy Marcum, left, Mick Steele, Mike Lunsford and Logan Marcum performing a daily product quality review in the lab.*

## Significant Service Improvements

Klare is also excited about several new service improvements, including an enhanced GAP-certified field program, field service support and the company's new customer response center. Club Chef already is HACCP certified and has cutting-edge quality and food safety systems in place. It also procures raw product through an approved supplier base.



Bob Herdeman, left, Angelina Cancino and Mark Jewell inspecting a load of lettuce.

“With greater knowledge at our fingertips, we can better help our customers be more successful handling products properly, particularly during new product roll-outs,” says Herdeman. “We want them to have the best experience. We now have everything in place to produce the most consistent product possible.”

Klare refers to the company effort as “total quality control—all of the way from field to the center of the plate.”

With Herdeman focusing on product development, Spohn and Klare are both excited about future possibilities, particularly in the area of new products, including fresh-cut fruit, a growing industry segment. They see such products as important to the future growth of the company, coming at a time when the fresh-cut industry is poised for significant growth. Various types of product possibilities, including improved packaging to add shelf life, are under review.

“The industry is transitioning from basic garden salads to more sophisticated salad blends,” Klare says.

## Castellini Group of Companies, a One Source Produce Solution

Club Chef LLC is a member of the Castellini Group of Companies, one of the nation's oldest and largest fresh produce distributors. Founded in 1896, Castellini offers one of the broadest ranges of products and services in the produce industry today, including an extensive value-added line of fresh-cut fruits and vegetables, tomato repackaging, banana ripening, bagged potatoes, onions and citrus, custom packag-

ing and tray packs. Club Chef is Castellini's value-added fresh-cut arm.

Club Chef is primarily focused on serving the needs of the foodservice industry. However, the new facility has been designed to help pursue new growth opportunities within the fresh-cut market, including retail.

“Today, most of Club Chef's customers, which include top restaurant chains and broad-line foodservice operators, are located east of the Mississippi River within a 600-mile radius of Cincinnati,” Klare notes. Fresh-cut products are delivered to customers as far north as Wisconsin, as far west as Missouri, as far south as Alabama and the Carolinas and as far east as New York. Over 600 SKUs are offered.

“One of the significant marketing strengths the Castellini Group offers is its ‘one source’ concept,” Klare points out. “From a full line produce inventory to transportation, fresh-cut processing to tomato ripening, direct sales to retail category management, floral to organics, the Castellini Group is the ‘one source’ for all of the produce needs of its foodservice and retail customers.”



The front entrance area of the new Club Chef facility.

“Club Chef is also targeting custom manufacturing and private label,” he explains. “The marketplace is looking for suppliers able to customize programs to their specific business strategies. We're in a great position to accommodate the special needs of our customers from specific cuts to private label programs.” ♦



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Club Chef, one of the Castellini affiliate companies, is continuing their commitment to stay at the forefront of the fresh-cut industry.

Their new 210,000 square foot plant and distribution center in Covington, Kentucky is the largest independent regional fresh cut produce plant in the country, offering more efficient distribution opportunities and expanded distribution markets.

Club Chef's new facility features flexible temperatures for different commodities, including fruit rooms and fresh cut capabilities.

Tippmann Group and Club Chef worked together to place a strong emphasis on food safety through the sanitary design of this state-of-the-art thru-put facility.

One of the reasons Club Chef chose to work with Tippmann Group on the project was because they knew they could count on Tippmann as their single source of knowledge and experience when it comes to building distribution facilities for the produce industry.

- 210,000 square foot fresh-cut facility
- State-of-the-art thru-put facility
- Flexible temperatures for different commodities
- Emphasis on food safety through sanitary design

Tippmann Group offers more than 50 years of experience in the refrigeration industry, specializing in construction and management of refrigerated / frozen distribution centers.

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