

# THE PACKER

## Consalo Family Farms continues cold storage, packhouse expansion



Consalo Family Farms/Freshwave Fruit & Produce expands cold storage, packing facility. (Photo courtesy of Perley-Halladay Associates, Inc.)

By [Jennifer Strailey](#) May 20, 2022

Consalo Family Farms/Freshwave Fruit & Produce is eager to stretch out in roomier digs. The Vineland, N.J.-based family-owned and -operated company is just weeks away from marking the completion of phase II of its cold storage and packing facility expansion. The new space will allow for the storage of an additional 1,000 pallets of fruits and vegetables.

Last June, Consalo opened a 30,000-square-foot cold storage and packing facility with the capacity to hold 2,500 pallets. Phase III of its expansion, which is slated for completion next year, will bring the company's total storage capacity to between 5,000-7,000 pallets.

The Consalo family tapped Perley-Halladay Associates Inc., a design and build contractor specializing in cold storage facilities and refrigerated warehouses, for the construction project.

"The main reason we're expanding cold storage is for ourselves — having our own storage gives us greater control over everything we do here," said Joe Rosa, Consalo Family Farms senior vice president of operations. "Lots of companies need to have their produce packed and labeled for them. By offering this in-house, we can better serve our customers.

"We have control over repack, quality, condition and service," Rosa continued. "If a retailer needs produce delivered overnight, we can do it. We're a one-stop shop."

The newly expanded cold storage and packing facility is also equipped with a bar code system that can provide the exact location of an item on a pallet, along with who packed the item, and when and where it was packed.

### **Growing quality near and far**

Blueberries are big business for the grower, packer, shipper, importer and distributor of fresh fruits and vegetables, as is citrus, which the company markets under its Little Smoochies brand.

"People say [the Little Smoochies character] looks like our father," said Chelsea Consalo, vice president of produce operations. "I think it's the glasses." Indeed, her father, CEO Skip Consalo, wears black-rimmed glasses that look a good deal like the ones adorning the lipstick-kissed citrus character.

Both the character and the brand of premium grapefruit, clementines, lemons and limes are a hit with consumers, says Chelsea Consalo.

"Last year was the first year with the brand and consumers loved it," said Consalo, who added that a number of consumers somehow got her personal phone number and sent selfies in which they held up a Smoochies bag. "It's really nice when you get that feedback. We love that consumer feedback even though we're marketing to retailers."

As consumers increasingly sought out healthful foods and vitamin C at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Consalo saw its sales of citrus soar.

"Everyone wanted clementines, and we're seeing that demand carry over from last year," said Rosa. "We got so much busier in COVID [across all fruit and vegetable items] and now we're continuing to grow with retailers — adding commodities, special bags or packs, own brands — we can pack it and we're willing to invest in new machinery to make it happen."

In addition to growing and sourcing local New Jersey produce, as well as produce from California, Texas, Georgia, North Carolina and Florida, Consalo also imports from Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Uruguay and South Africa.

But it's the local vegetable season in New Jersey from April to November that has everyone in this family business pulling together to make it a success.

"It's a big thing," said Rosa of the local produce season. Consalo Family Farms' romaine, beets, herbs, asparagus and more are promoted through the Jersey Fresh advertising, promotional and quality grading program.

Originally launched in 1984 by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Jersey Fresh was intended to help farmers inform consumers about the variety of fruit and vegetables grown in the state.

### **Family commitment**

"The good thing about our company is it's a family," said Rosa, who added that the family bond extends to employees, like himself, who aren't blood related.

In addition to Chelsea Consalo, the CEO's other children are part of the business. His son, Anthony "AJ" Consalo, serves as senior vice president of procurement and his daughter, Sarah Consalo, is vice president of finance.

"When we commit, we commit," added Rosa. "Their father is a stickler. His word is his word."