

THE PRODUCE NEWS

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Krichmar Produce relies on family-oriented work atmosphere for success

By Keith Loria June 1, 2022

Over a quarter century, [Krichmar Produce](#), operating out of Vineland, NJ, has prided itself on providing businesses from Florida to Maine with the finest quality fruits and vegetables, thanks in part to a trucking operation it added to the company 15 years ago.

That part of the business continues to increase, even though challenges such as driver shortages, freight costs and lack of trucks plagues many in the industry.

“Over the last two years, we started increasing the fleet and trailers because we saw an opening for transportation in the Northeast,” said Jay Krichmar, the company’s president. Today, the fleet

consists of 19 tractors and 44 trailers, with 20 trucks and 25 independents who work for the company.

Not that this side of the business isn't feeling the impact of those problems.

"The fuel is killing us, we had to go with a fuel surcharge," said Matt Rieti who handles Krichmar's trucking operation. "And getting trucks — they won't even take new orders, and we might see new ones in the latter part of 2023."

Rieti, who is transitioning more to the veg side of the business in 2022, noted there is a lot going on in 2022 that the company is excited about.

"We're constantly growing," he said, noting dedication by the team is behind the growth that it's experiencing. "Everyone at this company is very dedicated. We have some young people, and it's hard to find young people in produce and trucking, but we did, and they've been working out great."

Working in New Jersey, the company deals with many customers in Philadelphia and New York, and sees the markets changing a bit with effects from the pandemic.

"It seems like a lot of these chain stores aren't supporting them as much as they used to," Krichmar said. "A lot of places that used to always go into the markets are now looking to go direct. Larger chain stores are gobbling up the little ones, and it's less and less. But volume has been really good."

Growers are dealing with higher expenses with fertilizer prices going up and energy costs increasing, so it's become difficult for many, especially with empty pallets now over \$10 each.

"It was hard enough when it was \$3, but now you almost have to charge just to cover that; and it's hard to absorb \$10 - \$12 on 28 pallets on each truck," Rieti said.

But Krichmar Produce has dealt with challenges before and is doing what it can to stay ahead as it always does.

A lot of the success it finds comes from being a family-oriented work environment, something that has been a staple of the company since its founding.

"We have a corporate vibe here and people tend to enjoy the climate in the office, and know they have to produce," Krichmar said.

On the veg side, cabbage is starting a few weeks off, and being the first big volume crop that starts in New Jersey, that's getting things off to a slow start this season. But once it does, cabbage and cucumbers are expected to perform very well this spring. Those will be followed by lettuces and greens, which will lead to the July crops of string beans, peppers, corn, blueberries and tomatoes.

"We're just continuing our course and going with the flow," Rieti said.