

GOURMET NEWS

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L.A. distributor adds new products under retail label

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LOS ANGELES—MCL Distributing Inc. and its retail label, 4-Earth, recently launched several new products here. Dried items such as crystallized ginger, red tomatoes, sugar cane swizzle sticks and zante currants were added in the first quarter of 2006 to complement a line of dried berries that included Bing cherries, blueberries, currants and cranberries.

These dried items are the latest addition to 4-Earth's ever-growing label, which also recently added four potato offerings and expanded its specialty microwaveable vegetables. The potatoes are all packed in 1-lb., 8-ounce mesh bags, and the available varieties are baby red, baby white, baby gold and assorted fingerling potatoes. The assorted fingerling potatoes are also available in 4-Earth/MCL's patented microwaveable bag. The retail sizes of the vegetables were added at the end of 2005, and a foodservice size was made available in earlier this year.

"We're always looking to come up with unique packaging for retailers to take advantage of, and our specialty micro-perf for vegetables is a good example of that," said Rick McGregor, spokesperson for 4-Earth/MCL. These micro-perforated bags have a respiratory film that naturally allows the vegetable to "breathe" and maintain their freshness for a longer shelf life. Eight varieties are currently available in both retail and food service portions, including fingerling potatoes, haricot verts, baby zucchini squash, Brussels sprouts and peeled and diced sweet potatoes.

All items are received, cleaned, packaged and distributed out of MCL's facility that features 100 percent climate control throughout its 60,000 square feet.

"None of our merchandise ever leaves the 'cold chain,' and each commodity is stored at its ideal temperature," said McGregor.



The recent wave of e.coli concerns are something MCL has been safeguarding against since it built the facility, which follows one of the strictest food safety programs in the industry, with a track-back system on all products and yearly audits of suppliers all the way down to field level. The 17 loading bays are also sealed.

MCL also recently hired two new warehouse managers, Ray Jackson and Brian Bolstad, to bolster their management staff and continue the 24/6-distribution ratio it has been following since 2004.

4-Earth was launched in 2004 as MCL's retail label and includes chilies, fruit, herbs, nine varieties of mushrooms and other specialty products.

The line also features a selection Asian, Latin, Organic, and Specialty items. MCL/4-Earth delivers products using their own trucks, as well as other specialty and supermarket distributors.

MCL Distributing, Inc. was founded in 1993.