

# Growers Express takes weight out of iced cartons

Using less ice allows it to load 56 cartons per pallets instead of 48.

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Green Giant Fresh by Growers Express LLC, Salinas, Calif., has introduced a new way to ship iced broccoli with less ice and lower freight costs.

"It's all about trying to minimize transportation costs," said Woody Johnson, vice president of sales and marketing.

Deepchill ice has been used in the seafood industry for several years, but Growers Express has licensed exclusive rights for shipping produce in North America with Deepchill technology from Woodbridge, Ontario-based Sunwell Technologies Inc.

Johnson said Growers Express has been using the technology for shipping broccoli in a pilot program for six months and plans to eventually expand Deepchill packing to other commodities, including green onions, cilantro and parsley.

With traditional iced broccoli, ice is injected into boxes through the handholds. Icing an entire pallet, Johnson said, can take five to 10 minutes. With Deepchilling, an entire pallet of waxed boxes is loaded onto a forklift and delivered to an elevator, which lowers the pallet into a stainless steel chamber containing a mix of ice crystals and water.

After one minute, the pallet is re-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GREEN GIANT FRESH BY GROWERS EXPRESS

Green Giant Fresh by Growers Express LLC, Salinas, Calif., uses Deepchill technology from Sunwell Technologies Inc., Woodbridge, Ontario to pack broccoli cartons that weigh 32-34 pounds, instead of the standard 44. Growers Express cartons contain the same 22 pounds of broccoli as standard cartons.

moved. Water drains out of the boxes, leaving the ice behind. Johnson said the tiny crystals — about 1/64th of an inch in diameter — fill every void in the carton and even permeate between beads of broccoli.

"You're cooling it quicker, so the ice lasts longer," he said.

The process uses much less ice than traditional methods. A standard box of iced broccoli weighs about 44 pounds, and about half that weight is ice. With Deepchilling, Johnson said Growers Express packs the same 22

pounds of broccoli with 10 to 12 pounds of ice crystals.

Using a smaller box has allowed Growers Express to increase its pallets from 48 boxes to 56. On a 24-pallet truckload, that translates to 192 more boxes.

"Putting on an extra layer alone reduces freight costs by 17%," Johnson said.

Growers Express is still developing the program. Johnson said there might be a slight premium on a Deepchill box compared to a conventional iced box, but the difference in freight will make the new



The Deepchill system lowers an entire pallet of waxed boxes into a stainless steel chamber containing a mix of ice crystals and water. After one minute, the pallet is removed. Water drains out of the boxes, leaving the ice behind.

process much cheaper.

"We're trying to take costs out of the system," he said. "When we get through this, we think we'll have a better product and be the low-cost provider."

Johnson said Growers Express will continue to offer shrink-wrapped broccoli in a traditional iced box as well as iceless broccoli.

He said that while many foodservice companies request iceless broccoli, which is cheaper than iced, most retailers request iced shipments.

"We think iceless makes a lot of sense," he said, "but there's a segment of the industry that still wants ice."

Johnson said Growers Express

has produced about 35 tons of the ice crystals per day during its pilot program in Salinas. That number will increase to 135 tons a day next season, he said. The company also plans to use the technology in its Yuma, Ariz., facility next year.

Deepchilled broccoli is available in Green Giant and Western Express labels.