



**Frank Ratto, vice president of marketing for Modesto, Calif.-based Ratto Bros. Inc., says green kale has become very popular over the past few years, but red kale and lacinato — or dino kale — also are selling well, as are green, red and rainbow chards, dandelion greens and spinach.**

Photo by Ratto Bros. Inc.

## Focus on health puts greens in spotlight

By Tom Burfield June 28, 2017 | 2:01 pm EDT

As more consumers slash their intake of fat and calories and resolve to eat healthier, the greens category has assumed a prominent spot in the produce department.

“Greens are a mainstay in the general population’s diets,” said Claudia Pizarro-Villalobos, director of marketing and culinary for Salinas-based D’Arrigo Bros. Co. of California.

Consumption of fresh vegetables, including greens, is expected to grow 10% by 2024, and millennials and Gen Z will sustain this growth, she said.

Meanwhile, consumers and chefs alike are looking for new, unique and interesting alternatives beyond kale — like broccoli rabe, beet greens, chard, turnip greens, mustard greens and carrot tops — Pizarro-Villalobos said.

While kale remains immensely popular, consumption seems to have plateaued, said Bill Nardelli Jr., vice president of sales for Nardelli Bros. Inc., Cedarville, N.J.

“We don’t see it increasing by leaps and bounds as it has in years past,” he said.

But kale seems to have had a sort of halo effect on the entire greens category.

“When kale became so big, (consumers) started looking into the other greens a little more than they had in the past,” Nardelli said.

“People were more likely to try collards or mustard greens or turnip greens.”

Modesto, Calif.-based Ratto Bros. has been selling greens since 1905, said Frank Ratto, vice president of marketing.

Besides standard green kale, he said red kale and lacinato — or dino kale — also are selling well, as are green, red and rainbow chards, dandelion greens and spinach.

“The health craze has made greens very popular,” Ratto said.

Consumers and chefs alike are coming up with myriad ways to prepare greens, including juicing, boiling, sautéing, frying and tossing them into soups and stews, he said.

Oxnard, Calif.-based San Miguel Produce has been producing everything from popular comfort greens like collard, mustard and turnips, to specialty blends of kale, chards and spinach and beet greens for more than 20 years, said Jan Berk, chief operating officer.

“Over the past 10 years, kale has been on trend with explosive growth, and collards continue to be a steady comfort food favorite,” she said.

Value-added greens is another trend that only seems to expand every year.

Besides a variety of bunch greens, Ocean Mist Farms, Castroville, Calif., offers spinach in 10-ounce and 1-pound cello packs, said Diana McClean, director of marketing.

“Our value-added spinach has experienced increased demand, aligning with the general market conditions of increased demand for convenience products,” she said.

Andy Boy offers a premium cut iceless broccoli rabe “cut-ready for any recipe,” Pizarro-Villalobos said.

Foodservice value-added lettuce and salad offerings from D’Arrigo Bros. include shredded lettuce, lettuce salad, chopped lettuce, chopped romaine, spring mix, arugula, cello spinach and baby spinach, she said.

San Miguel’s Cut ‘N Clean Greens are the original washed and ready-to-use greens in a bag, Berk said.

The company has expanded its line of convenient, nutrient-dense greens to include all types of dark, leafy greens in single varieties and blends, she said.

### Organic greens

As might be expected, the organic greens category also has taken off.

“Demand for organics has consistently increased, which, in turn, has driven us to increase our production capacity,” said Gary James, director of sales for Walter P. Rawl & Sons, Pelion, S.C.

The company offers bagged organic green kale in 12-ounce and 1.5-pound bags and also has bulk organic greens and herbs available, said Gary James, director of sales.

Andy Boy offers bunched organic broccoli rabe and organic romaine Hearts in cartons of 12 three-count packages and seven six-count packs, Pizarro-Villalobos said.

San Miguel offers a variety of organic kales and multiple blends, Berk said.

Kale and bunch spinach are available in the Ocean Mist organic line, McClean said.

“Organic is a buzzword right now,” Ratto added. “We jumped on the bandwagon, and we’re growing some organics.”

Ratto Bros. offers organic leaf lettuces, kales, spinach and collards.

Demand continues to grow, he said. “We can’t keep up with it.”

As for the future, “We believe the healthy trend will slowly continue as people look to find other ‘healthy’ greens, like Swiss chard or bok choy to add to their diet,” Berk said.

Indeed, Asian items may be the next wave of greens, said Ratto, who has received customer inquiries about red mustard greens and red baby bok choy.

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**Greens:**  
 Beet Tops • Broccoli Rabe • Collard Greens • Dandelion Greens • Green Kale • Red Kale  
 La Cinato Kale • Curly Mustard • Flat Mustard • Spinach • Swiss Chard • Rainbow Chard • Red Chard  
 Turnip Greens • Daikon Tops • Kohlrabi Tops • Asian Greens

**Herbs/Specialty:**  
 Anise • Basil • Beets • Beets Poly • Belgian Endive • Baby Bok • Bok Choy  
 Cabbage (Green, Nappa, Red, Savoy) • Celery Root • Chives • Cilantro • Daikon • Dill (Baby, Large)  
 Kohlrabi • Leeks • Mint • Turnip (Poly) • Parsley • Italian Parsley • Parsnip • Radicchio  
 Rutabagas • Snap Peas • Snow Peas • Watercress

**Leaf:**  
 Butter Leaf • Green Leaf • Red Leaf • Romaine • Endive • Escarole

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