

Specialty Crops Market News: Reporting With You

By: Tom Lister, Market News Reporter

The valuable movement and pricing information within our Market News reports are only possible due to collaboration among reporters and industry representatives. Market News reporter Tom Lister, from our Phoenix office, began his career as a terminal market reporter, later covering shipping point as the West Mexico vegetable reporter and currently covers berry markets. He shares his insights into what matters most to make this collaboration successful.



Tom Lister (left) on the market

Everyone matters. On terminal markets, I focused on developing relationships with salesmen but also relied on sales assistants, brokers, and buyers to provide valuable insight and shipment information. As a shipping point reporter, I was occasionally able to reach retail chain buyers but considering their busy schedules, it was challenging. I learned to read tones of voice and body language when approaching sales staff and the importance of making connections mutually beneficial by sharing insight from our many reports, including shipping point trends and freight rates. I went beyond sales displays to check inventories inside warehouses each day. This helped me develop ties with warehouse employees and foremen, who in turn let me know when new items arrived.

Being creative matters. I often reach out to my sources by phone, email, and text. With the increase of telework within the industry it's been increasingly common for me to reach them on their mobile phones. I routinely visit with USDA inspectors for their insights and perspectives. Often I learn about market conditions simply by observing transactions occurring around me in both English and Spanish.

Relating on a personal level matters. My supervisor during my time in our New York office told me as market reporters we needed to engage in a little psychology to read sources' moods. We also kept up on current events to get conversations started. Most mornings I read the *New York Post* on the train on my way to the market and got to know what the vibe of everyone's chatter was going to be that day. I listened to the details of salesmen's stories they would share of their lives outside the market and committed the stories to memory. All of this helped create ease and trust between myself and my sources, which lead to open sharing of pricing and conditions.

The right attitude matters. I learned early on in my career that being positive and polite matters. I always thank my sources for information and reciprocate by sharing my perspective and helping them find information they might need from the Specialty Crops Market News portal. Establishing yourself as a market reporter can be challenging, especially for rookie reporters on terminal markets. While most sources were exceptionally friendly to a Midwestern kid like me, others needed time to get to know me while I just kept taking notes and continued to ask questions relevant to markets. With time, I got their respect and trust. Selling perishable commodities can put plenty of pressure on salesmen and understanding their ups and downs during the day and week help to develop timing that leads to successful conversations.

Collecting accurate information for our Market News reports is important and being inclusive, creative, relatable, and having the right attitude makes all the difference.