



Van-Whole Produce

service with quality



**VAN-WHOLE PRODUCE
CELEBRATES**

40
years

*In the ever-changing
world of produce, one
wholesaler proves to
be a constant force*

From left to right: **Raymond Tsang** (Purchasing Manager), **Leonard Jang** (Vice President & General Manager), **Samuel Chui** (Sales Manager), **Keith Liu** (Operations Manager)

Congratulations

**Van-Whole
Produce**

**on your
40th anniversary**



Few companies in Canada can say they've played an active role in helping grow and evolve produce wholesaling in Western Canada. But after 40 years in business, Van-Whole Produce has demonstrated what it takes to be a key part of history on Vancouver's Produce Row, while staying relevant to this day.

The Vancouver-based company has become a formidable force in produce wholesaling because of its ability to fulfill customers' needs even as demographics and tastes change, says vice-president and general manager Leonard Jang. "As an independent we have stood out among other wholesalers by constantly evolving to meet market demands and our customers' needs, from small specialty retailers, to neighbourhood markets to large chains," he says. "We adapt and pivot without jeopardizing on service and quality—and we have suppliers from the very beginning who have grown right along with us to prove it."

Van-Whole Produce first opened in Vancouver in 1984, sourcing specialty fruits and vegetables along with produce staples. It was acquired by the Jim Pattison Group in 2001, which enabled more opportunities for growth. Today the company has 240 employees, a fleet of over 40 trucks, and has expanded its physical footprint into Vancouver Island and Calgary, making it one of Western Canada's largest produce wholesalers. As Vancouver is the Pacific gateway for imported products, Van-Whole has been well positioned to send imports from overseas to major cities across Canada, reaching as far east as Quebec. The partnership with specialized food distribution companies extends the reach of Van-Whole's service to remote and under-served areas. Jang, who has been with the company for 37 years, says every day is new and dynamic in the world of produce wholesaling. "Once produce is in your blood, it never leaves you," he says.





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The secret to long-term success

Surviving and thriving for four decades in the often-volatile produce sector is no easy feat. On top of unpredictable weather patterns, labour challenges and escalating fuel costs, there are economic and demographic factors that affect consumer preferences year to year. At Van-Whole, the buying team has always recognized the importance of expanding its network of suppliers as a means to mitigate risks associated with weather and supply chain disruptions.

Thanks to alliances with suppliers and growers all over the world, Van-Whole offers more than 1,000 different items from 40 countries, but also maintains long-term relationships with local growers as essential sources of seasonal fruits and vegetables.

Raymond Tsang, purchasing manager at Van-Whole, says the buying team is committed to striking that delicate balance between quality and price to maximize value for its customers. “By staying attuned to shifting dynamics in the marketplace, the team can



proactively adapt procurement strategies to meet evolving customer demands and preferences,” he says. “By meticulously evaluating every aspect of our procurement processes—from supplier selection to product specifications—we endeavor to identify opportunities for refinement and optimization.”



In fact, he says through this iterative process of continuous improvement, his team can ensure that customers receive “nothing short of the best value, quality, and stability in every purchase they make.”

With the goal always being to maintain long-term relationships with valued suppliers, he

“

Our biggest competitive advantage is our company culture and our people.”

—Leonard Jang



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says Van-Whole's suppliers are like family who have grown up in the industry together. "It is easy to source new suppliers based on price. However, our relationships with long-term suppliers are also based on trust and integrity; we have common interest," says Tsang.

It also helps that Van-Whole and its suppliers hold the same values in being consistent and adaptive to change. "Consistent product quality and an adaptive marketing approach leads to healthy and long-term business relationships," he says.

Service with Quality

The Van-Whole team points to an emphasis on quality products and customer service that goes the extra mile as key ingredients for success in the produce sector. "In this day and age with so many demands on businesses, it's easy to lose sight of how important customers are," says Jang. "But we know without

our customers we'd be nowhere, and they are absolutely what keeps us in the game."

That's why he says it's so critical to ensure customers are happy with the produce provided.

"In a world where technologies and processes can fulfill the basic duties of a purchaser, it over simplifies the importance of knowing what you are purchasing," says Jang. "It starts at the source and that's where we're asking detailed questions about things like variety, size, colour, growing conditions, when it was picked and when it's arriving." He says Van-Whole customers now expect to get an array of interesting, top-quality produce to choose from, be it citrus from Pakistan, mangos from India or freshly picked local peaches and apples. "Our customers know we're reliable as we always strive for consistent quality to meet the end consumer's demands."

By the same token, at Van-Whole the goal is to help customers stay competitive via qual-

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—**Samuel Chui**

ity product selection and price. “We deliver proactive customer experiences, anticipate customers' needs and drive to go above and beyond,” says sales manager Samuel Chui. This means making regular customer visits and checking inventory to find their perfect produce fit, he says, as well as keeping them well-informed on market trends and industry news. “We try and bring in the best-quality produce we can find and make sure the prices are very competitive in order for our customers to compete in their market areas.”

Chui says it's common for him to work with his other team members whose expertise



is in buying, packing and shipping, to make sure customers are well looked after. “We also focus on customer feedback so if any problems arise, we immediately come together as a team to find and implement solutions,” he says.

If Van-Whole customers are having labour challenges, for example, Chui says the Van-Whole team can offer packaging solutions. Van-Whole also offers a complete line of products to provide a one-stop shopping experience for its customers. “Our customers' employees can better focus on taking care of the store and providing better service to their end consumers,” he says.

Emerging markets are top of mind

On top of nurturing these relationships with retailers, Chui says the team is always on the lookout for new markets to penetrate, whether that's working with juice bars, restaurant chains or other food processing companies. “We also focus on new emerging demographics, such as the growth of new Canadian immigrants from different ethnicities,” he says. “What kinds of foods and customs do they bring? How can we bring in those items that remind them of home?”

From a purchasing perspective, participation in market visits and trade shows serves as another valuable avenue for expanding supplier networks too, says Tsang. “These platforms provide unparalleled opportunities for networking, forging new partnerships, and discovering innovative solutions,” he says. On top of that is a willingness to embrace experimentation, he adds, which includes adopting a mindset that encourages explora-



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“

With 40 years' worth of history and customer data, We conduct in-depth analysis and develop strategies to satisfy demands from different demographic segments.”

—Samantha Chan

tion and risk-taking. “By being open to trying new approaches, technologies and suppliers, organizations can unlock untapped potential and access a wider pool of resources.”

As the business development strategist and food safety program leader at Van-Whole Produce, Samantha Chan also plays a key role in helping both purchasing and sales groups get a better handle on emerging markets. “With 40 years' worth of history and customer data, we conduct in-depth analysis and develop strategies to satisfy demands from different demographic segments,” she says, noting that this information also highlights where there are strengths in-house to go above and beyond. “It supports our decision-making processes so we can always stay competitive and flexible to meet market demands.”

Given that the produce industry is such a dynamic area in the food sector, Chan says it is essential for the entire team to “stay sharp and in tune” with changes in the market every day. “Our customers' requirements are constantly changing as they adjust to their end-consumer's ever-changing purchas-

ing habits,” she says. What hasn't changed though, she adds, is the end-consumer's demand for quality and value. “That's why our focus for strategy development has constantly been to ensure we offer the best quality produce while passing the value along to the end consumer,” says Chan.

The power of teamwork

Just as important as the suppliers and customers who have helped Van-Whole Produce thrive for the past 40 years, is its team of employees made up of drivers, packers, receivers, repackers, warehouse and office support staff, and management—many of whom have been with the company for more than 10 years. A collaborative culture throughout Van-Whole has enabled the company to deliver on its promise of consistent quality and service. “We have total team involvement here, and while the work can be demanding, there is a great work ethic in place where we're all striving to be and do the best we can,” says Jang. “Our biggest competitive advantage is our company culture and our people.”

To facilitate collaboration and ongoing connection between team members, Jang says



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to VAN-WHOLE PRODUCE on their

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there is a strong emphasis on frequent in-person meetings when possible. "By doing this, we don't lose the dynamic of speaking to each other face to face," he says.

In fostering an equitable work environment where all team members can thrive, Van-Whole also recognizes the value of diverse voices and inclusivity. Over time, the company has evolved to include team members from various cultures and backgrounds. Having this diversified team provides opportunities for all staff members to learn and adapt to the fast-changing environment in produce wholesale, while bringing in new perspectives, creative ideas and solutions to help refine processes.

A favourite company tradition is Van-Whole's annual service awards ceremony to celebrate staff members who have demonstrated their dedication and long-term commitment to the business. In addition to opportunities for learning and growing within the company, there is also time allotted for festive fun. Holiday functions, summer picnics and department celebrations are important events where employees and their families can spend quality time together. To mark the



company's 40th anniversary, a special celebration was held earlier this year with all staff to share excitement around reaching such a significant milestone.

In building a successful wholesale business over the last 40 years, Van-Whole Produce has also been consistent in giving back to its community. "Our charity work is extremely important to us and always has been," says Jang. In fact, the company has consistently supported various charitable groups for more than two decades. Every year, a large number of Van-Whole's staff and their families participate in the BC Children's Hospital Foundation's Race for the Kids to raise money to support children's health. The company also supports many community-based, non-profit organizations by donating fresh produce to help them with their programs.

As for the future of Van-Whole Produce, the mission to provide a broad range of best value, quality produce and excellent service continues, says Jang. "We are committed to keep on doing what we have done best in the past 40 years, and we're excited for this next phase, wherever future opportunities will take us."



**Congratulations to
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on 40 years of success!**

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