



Baby Spinach



Spring Mix



LEFT: RON MONDO
RIGHT: DAN CANALES

IPPOLITO INTERNATIONAL

A Natural Progression

BY: MELISSA DE LEON



rganically expanding, changing, and now launching an organic line.

After significant strides in new categories and value-added offerings, Ippolito International is diving into yet another realm of fresh produce.

“Everything was in place, we just needed to make the move,” Dan Canales, SVP of Sales, Marketing, and Processing for Ippolito International, tells me. Like pieces on a chessboard, Dan shares with me how the latest strategic move in Ippolito International’s growth kicked into gear when the quality and consistency of its organic resources met the standards of the Queen Victoria brand.

This month, the company that made its start in 2001 with just two commodities and a humble desire to serve its customers will add a full line of six organic salad options to its repertoire. And the man behind the curtain, Founding Partner Ron Mondo, tells me he never saw it coming.

“We were strictly going to market Brussels sprouts and green onions,” Ron laughs, his voice reflecting solid surprise over where that initial vision led the company in the last 16 years. “With 46 different items and 127 SKUs, we’re now a fully-integrated company shipping year-round. Our main commodity was Brussels sprouts, and from there it just grew into what we now have—our own harvesting, our own coolers, our own sales company—we’re fully integrated and expanding. I would have never imagined this.”

A swift spurt that Dan emphasized is unmatched in his 30-plus years in produce. “I joined the team in February of 2016, and in the short time I have been here I’ve been continually impressed by the aggressive but calculated manner in which the program has been rapidly growing,” Dan comments.

The organic arena is the next step in that advancement, as the company continues to hone in on the trajectory of the industry, the VP of Sales shares with me.

“We knew we had to stay relevant, and with the expanding reach organics has experienced we knew we had the foundation to enter the category through our own brand,” Dan says, explaining that while this may be Ippolito’s big launch, it has been softly involved in organics through its Canadian sister company, The Ippolito Group, for some time—the perfect platform for the California provider to tag in.

“We have quietly helped to provide our Canadian arm with organic product for a while now,” Ron explains, sharing with me the team approach the two sister companies operate on despite being separate entities. “Joel Ippolito offers great support, and it is with those resources and what we had already begun in our own facility here in California that enabled us to answer the demand we were receiving.”

It just makes sense, Ron states, and when it comes to the team’s overall philosophy, organic offerings by the California company weren’t just probable, they were inevitable.



Arugula



50-50 Blend

“We are a full-service company, and we saw this as a necessary step to uphold that and fulfill all our customers needs, whether those are conventional or organic,” Ron’s voice resonates the simple and profound commitment the brand has to quality and customer satisfaction.

Dan echoes this when he tells me why Ippolito didn’t dive into the organic category earlier..

“We wanted to have everything in place—equipment, product consistency, and quality—before putting ourselves out there in the organic industry,” Dan says. “Throughout my time in produce, I have learned that it is better to take it slow and ensure everything is correct from the start. I would rather be one of the best than one of the first.”

So, Dan comments, Ippolito went through a swift but extensive equipment acquisition to have all the pieces in place for a smooth launch and a line of six on-trend organic products, with plans for additional packs, varieties, and blends as demand dictates. “We knew that with the best equipment and facility in place, the next step would be to launch our own brand.”

Included in the Ippolito arsenal is a slew of the latest in packing and tech, like its state-of-the-art facility, wash systems, mechanized applicators, and more. With all the cutting-edge works at the team’s

fingertips, it was time to take to the organic stage.

“I think, in this day and age, with organics making such a huge impact on the industry, it is necessary to be in that arena to be relevant,” Dan shares. “We have definitely been expanding on our conventional offerings with great success, but we don’t want to continue down any one path. Our goal is to grow and differentiate, not only in the organic category, but value-added as well.”

In that vein, the new organic Queen Victoria line features retail offerings in three different sizes, 5 oz, 11 oz, and 16 oz, as well as providing foodservice options that are currently in the works.

“One of the key benefits of this exciting launch is that we can continue to offer any product our customers need; conventional, value-added, or organic from each coast of each country we service,” Ron tells me.

While that might seem far-reaching from the humble roots of providing conventional, whole Brussel’s sprouts and green onions, the right team makes anything possible. Ron assures me of this when I ask him how in the world he keeps up with the full-steam ahead trek his company has forged.

“I’m fortunate enough to have a lot of good people supporting and looking out for Ippolito. What keeps ours and any company going is having a strong team to back us up and offer support so that we can continue to grow.”

It’s “night and day,” Ron says, from the start to the present. The company now spans over 20,000 acres from the 360 he began on, selling a wide span of offerings, conventional and organic, value-added, and beyond.

And the Ippolito team isn’t done yet, not even close. Both Ron and Dan share that the brand is just beginning to toil in this latest facet to grip the produce industry.

“Absolutely stay tuned,” Dan says with an assured smile, “because there is definitely far more to come.”

With so much accomplished in so little time, I have no trouble believing him. 🍅

