



FRESH WORKS™ PRODUCE SAVER Storage Containers

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Introduction

Foodservice operators have historically faced significant challenges in efficiently sourcing, storing, and utilizing perishables—including fruits and vegetables. Even the most efficient operations experience a moderate level of waste, which is highly problematic in today’s environment of low profitability and cost control. Operators are trying to reduce costs in many ways and those efforts feel ‘squandered’ when high waste neutralizes those cost control practices.

Storage containers designed for produce are considered commodity products by most operators. Benefits are considered to be few, as the containers are thought to be a holding device. At present, there are several leading brands marketing commercial food storage containers to restaurants and non-commercial foodservice operators. But recently, Rubbermaid Commercial Products (RCP) has developed a new line of storage containers designed specifically to extend the life of produce. A solution designed around optimal sealing and air filtering may reduce spoilage, a major benefit for operators as they continue to optimize kitchen operations.

Following design and prototype development, the Activation team within Rubbermaid Commercial Products sought to capture feedback on the new FreshWorks™ Produce Saver storage containers from the foodservice operator community. There was a need to learn—directly from the daily users themselves—whether these containers provided the quality benefits, operational advantages, and financial returns that were part of the FreshWorks™ Produce Saver development mission.

The results of the month-long operator test indicate that the Rubbermaid Commercial Products’ development team was successful in its efforts to bring to market a storage container that provides multiple benefits to the operator. The details of the test are described in this white paper.

Methodology

Rubbermaid Commercial Products, working together with its research and insights partner Technomic Inc., recruited eight (8) independent restaurants across the country to test the FreshWorks™ Produce Saver storage containers in everyday working conditions. These restaurants participated in a 28-day test, which began with one week of observation of current produce storage and handling practices and ended with a three-week period in which these restaurants made use of 8-gallon versions of the FreshWorks™ Produce Saver containers.

These full-service restaurants incorporated the containers into daily operations and tracked impressions, employee observations, container pros and cons, produce conditions, waste (and timing of waste/disposal), and shelf life, among other data points. The test was conducted with a focus on lettuce (typically either Iceberg or Romaine).

Throughout the test, each operator was asked to keep a ‘produce diary’ and responded to Technomic questions about experiences and results multiple times each week. At the conclusion of the test period, results were compiled into eight distinct case studies, one for each operator. Research participants are described in the black box.

Operator Characteristics

- Full-service restaurants
 - Primarily casual dining with one midscale operator
- 3 varied menu operators
 - Remainder split between seafood (2), Italian, Mexican and French
- All independent restaurants
 - Annual sales ranging from \$750K+ to over \$5 million
- Operators purchasing fresh lettuce between 2 and 7 times per week
- 2 operators using plastic storage bins
- 5 operators storing lettuce in original distributor box/bag
- 1 operator using combination of distributor box and drain trays

Initial Impressions of the FreshWorks™ Produce Saver Containers

Upon first inspection, participating operators were consistent in making a number of container observations. Among the most frequently cited impressions were:

- Solid material; impression of durability
- Smart design with a clear understanding of commercial kitchen needs
- Sleek, attractive look
- Perfect clarity; the see-through walls of the container were immediately seen as a point of differentiation
- Easily stackable
- Indications of ease of use
- Tight fit of the lid
- Advantageous bottom contours meaning produce won't sit flat
- Innovative drain tray and air filter

Initial impressions were universally positive, particularly for operators using the original produce cardboard boxes for storage purposes (a common industry practice). The most common 'wait-and-see' observation was the size of the containers which operators noted might not be appropriate for smaller types of produce (but consider that operators were only testing 8-gallon containers - FreshWorks™ Produce Saver containers are also available in 3.5-gallon, 5-gallon, and 12.5-gallon sizes).

Daily Impressions

As mentioned, the eight independent restaurants testing the FreshWorks™ Produce Saver had the opportunity to use the storage containers extensively. Over that time, initial impressions transformed into concrete product feedback.

In response to questions and in tracking results, the restaurant owners and managers pointed to immediate results. Within the first 7 to 10 days, participants were recognizing shelf life improvements and commenting on the limited amount of produce being thrown away.

Further, many of the initial observations of the operators were validated. Of note, ease-of-use and durability were frequently praised. And the clarity of the containers led several managers to report how that single characteristic improved staff awareness of freshness status and reduced time in a meaningful way (in not having to open every container/box).

"The lettuce (in the FreshWorks™ Produce Saver containers) didn't wilt, even the outer leaves. That's usually a problem for us—the outer leaves wilting. Additionally, those outer leaves didn't brown as fast. Typically, if there's a split in a leaf that browns overnight, but in these containers, it didn't seem to be affected like that."

— Full-service casual-dining restaurant



Post Test Commentary

Many aspects of the FreshWorks™ Produce Saver containers were ultimately given high praise by the eight restaurant operations. These praiseworthy features covered a wide variety of product characteristics and benefits. In their own words:

"Performed above and beyond my expectations. The lettuce stayed fresher longer with crisp leaves on the whole head. Stuff didn't get squished due to rigidity of container and the thickness of lid. A tight seal meant the lid couldn't get dislodged. Was nice to be able to stack them on one another."

— Full-service casual-dining restaurant

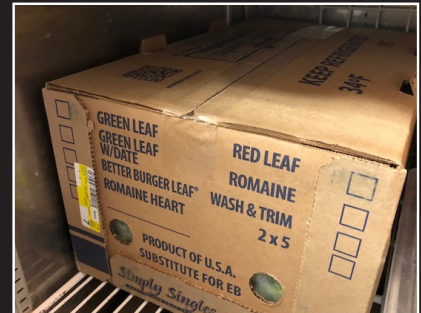
"(FreshWorks™ Produce Saver) is better, cleaner and more uniform; it also makes our walk-in appear more organized."

— Full-service casual-dining restaurant

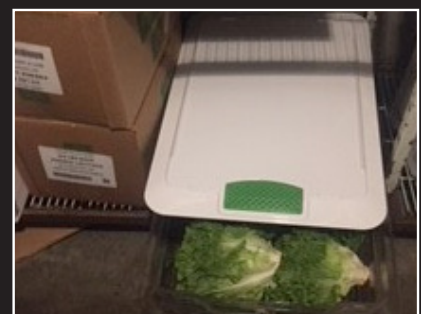
"((The) romaine being stored in the new containers after two days is perfect quality. Beginning of browning can be seen on the stem of some of the leaves in the regular container. (This is a) clear indication that the new containers have a better result in maintaining freshness."

— Full-service casual-dining restaurant

Current Storage Solution



FreshWorks™ Produce Saver Solution



Key Conclusions

In the end, 7 of the 8 test operators report an intent to purchase FreshWorks™ Produce Saver containers when they become available to the foodservice industry (and the eighth held off on reporting intent until observing the smaller available sizes).

And that purchase intent was based on performance. For operators, cost control is of heightened priority in today's challenging foodservice environment. Therefore, expressing an intent to buy a non-essential item (storage, of course, being done through many different means) is significant – and based on value. Perhaps the two most important test results were the following:

1. Operators observed an increase in uncut lettuce shelf life of up to 7 days, and
2. There was up to 25% waste reduction in using FreshWorks™ Produce Saver containers (this in comparison to each operator's normal storage methods).

These results indicate a meaningful return on investment. And operators were quick to point out that these observations were made in testing only one type of lettuce. There was an element of anticipation of the benefits that could be achieved in storing multiple types of fruits, vegetables, and other foodservice ingredients.

For More Information, Please Contact:

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