



New Technology Adds Life to Organic Produce

A number of natural products retailers would like to sell organic produce, but regularly complain about the inability to maintain or extend its life naturally. To counter this problem new cold storage technologies have been introduced that can work with or eliminate water spraying.

Ozone, from Novazone, Inc., is certified as a food contact substance and certified organic. The system is designed to kill decay-causing microorganisms like mold and consume natural ethylene gas emitted from many fruits that accelerate ripening. The Ozone solution for cold storage rooms extends the shelf life of produce at the retail level, the company says. In a store setting, a small unit delivers ozone gas continuously and at precise concentrations to control decay.

Water spray systems for produce can also benefit. "Novazone's equipment can dissolve ozone into spray water used on fresh produce. This water will remain free of contaminants and also disinfect the surface of the produce when sprayed preventing the build-up of molds, yeasts, bacteria, or viruses," noted Dave Cope, Novazone's chief marketing officer.

Another system, AirOcare air purification systems, has over 10 years of experience with organic produce in storage and at retail. AirOcare systems meet organic handling requirements and are very easy

to implement in retail locations. The units are installed easily inside the storage or cooler areas and operate automatically to clean the air and keep the produce free of contaminants.

AirOcare (Rockville, MD) can also organically sanitize produce through water spraying systems.

"Where sprayers are used, the humidified air is cleaned by AirOcare units and maintains sanitary conditions with reduced risk of airborne pathogens," explained Bob McDonald, president of AirOcare.

If the retailer wants to eliminate water spraying, McDonald said, the AirOcare system virtually eliminates ethylene in the air, which causes excessive ripening and rotting, enhances the appearance of the product, and establishes a cleaner set of environmental conditions which increases produce shelf life.

Studies by the U.S. Department of Agriculture with bananas show the ability of AirOcare to reduce ripening, and therefore extend shelf life.

"We have had the same experience with peaches at the grower/shipper level where AirOcare units allowed the grower to hold peaches for an additional two weeks without disease or over-ripening. A major west coast strawberry producer saw an increase in shelf life of up to six days without botrytis growth, based on the use of AirOcare equipment in its pre-coolers," McDonald explained.