You Want Any Fruit With That Big Mac?

McDonald's buys so much food that its product decisions affect United States farmers.

Approximate annual purchases by McDonald's	BEEF 1 billion pounds	POTATOES 1 billion pounds	LETTUCE 110 million pounds	TOMATOES 50 million pounds	FRESH APPLES 54 million pounds ('05 expected)	GRAPES 11 million pounds ('05 expected)
'04 U.S. production	24.5 billion pounds	45.6 billion pounds	220 billion pounds	72 billion pounds	10 billion pounds	12 billion pounds
McDonald's share	4.1%	2.2%	0.05%	0.07%	0.5%	0.09%

(A planned fruit-and-walnut salad will contain apples and grapes.)

Each day, 50,000 shiny red, Gala apples work their way through a sprawling factory in Swedesboro, New Jersey, where 26 machines wash them, core them, peel them, seed them, slice them and chill them. At the end of the line, they are dunked in a solution of calcium ascorbate and then deposited into green bags featuring a jogging Ronald McDonald. The bags make their way in refrigerated trucks to cavernous distribution centers and then to thousands of McDonald's restaurants in the eastern United States. No more than 14 days after leaving the plant, the fruit will take the place of French fries in some child's Happy Meal.

The apple slices, called Apple Dippers, are a symbol of how McDonald's is trying to offer healthier foods to its customers. McDonald's has also introduced 'premium salads' that will soon be joined by a salad of grapes, walnuts – and, of course, apples. No one knows whether these new offerings will assuage the concerns of public health officials and other critics of McDonald's highly processed fat-and-calorie-laden sandwiches, drinks and fries. So far they have not entirely done so. But this much is already clear: just as its hamburgers and French fries have made McDonald's the largest buyer of beef and potatoes in America, its new focus on fresh fruits and vegetables is making it a major player in the $80 billion American produce industry.

Some believe that McDonald's could influence not only the volume, variety and prices of fruit and produce in the United States, but also *how* they are grown.

The company now buys more fresh apples than any other restaurant or food service operation, by far. This year, it expects to buy 24,500,000 kilograms of fresh apples – 54 million pounds, or about 135 million individual pieces of fruit. That is up from zero apples just two years ago. (This does not include fruit used to make juice and pies, which use a different quality of apple.) McDonald's is also among the top five food-service buyers of grape tomatoes and spring mix lettuce. Of course, other fast-food chains have similar salads and fruit choices, but they have not had a comparable influence on the market because of their smaller size. Burger King, for example, has 7,600 restaurants in the United States, while Wendy's has 5,900. McDonald's has 13,700.

Missa Bay, the company that runs the Swedesboro plant, one of six McDonald's apple slicing facilities around the United States, could not be happier about that. In a few months, Missa Bay will also be supplying roughly one-quarter of the 13,700 restaurants with sliced green apples for the new fruit salad. These two items will increase Missa Bay's revenue by at least 10 percent this year.

Just as the enormous size of McDonald's once helped the company turn the nation's beef, chicken and potato industries into highly mechanized, consistent and low-cost businesses, McDonald's is using its purchasing power to build a reliable supply of fresh fruits and vegetables that meet its exacting specifications. At the U.S. Apple Association's annual marketing conference in Chicago, the McDonald's director of quality systems in the United States told a crowd of growers that if they wanted to work with McDonald's, they should grow Cameo and Pink Lady apples. Already, Cameo production in Washington State is up 58 percent in the current crop year from a year earlier, according to the Yakima Valley Growers-Shippers Association.

Eventually, a bigger supply of certain varieties will drive prices down, which will be good for McDonald's. But at present, the company's huge presence in the market is keeping prices high. However, if the new power that McDonald's exerts over the produce industry ends up reducing prices and squeezing profit margins, said James R. Cranney Jr., vice-president of the apple association, it would be a trade-off that many growers and producers seem willing to accept.

'Apple consumption has been flat over the past 10 to 15 years,' he said. 'This is exactly what the apple industry needs because we think it's going to increase consumption.'

LIVEWORKSHEETS

True, False, Not Given

Pay special attention to words in the questions and passage which show:

1 number or amount, eg all, every, half, a few, few
2 time or frequency, eg always, already
3 negativity, eg not, none
4 comparison, eg more / less than, most
5 probability eg will, may

These words can have a significant effect on meaning.

4 Answer questions **1–6.** Use the words in *italics* to help you find the answers.

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the passage?

Write: **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information
FALSE if the statement contradicts the information
NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this

1 McDonald's has *already* introduced salads with fruit.
2 The introduction of fruit and produce into McDonald's menus *may* reassure health officials.
3 Criticism of the calorie and fat content of McDonald's food has affected sales.
4 Other fast-food chains have *not* affected food production.
5 Missa Bay's income is predicted to rise by *less than 10%*.
6 McDonald's has influenced the efficiency of parts of the American food producing industry.

Remember

True/False/Not Given questions ask you to identify whether a statement agrees with or contradicts **information** in the passage.

Yes/No/Not Given questions ask you to say whether a statement agrees with or contradicts **the writer's views.**

LIVEWORKSHEETS