

You Want Any Fruit With That Big Mac?

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

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.

| 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.)

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.'

Remember

These questions ask for factual information.

TIP

Answers to reading questions may also be found in tables, graphs or other illustrations.

Language focus

TIP

Clauses beginning with *that* may be used to report speech, information or opinions.

eg Some believe that McDonald's could influence not only the volume, variety and prices of fruit, but also how they are grown.
(Opinion)

Short answer questions

Question strategy

See Unit 4, page 58 for a suggested approach to answering these questions.

Answer the questions. Write **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** for each answer.

- 10 Which two fruits will go into the fruit and walnut salad?
- 11 What percent of the total number of potatoes sold in the United States are bought by McDonald's?
- 12 What proportion of McDonald's restaurants will Missa Bay be supplying apples to?
- 13 Which two types of apples is McDonald's encouraging growers to produce?

that-clauses

See Grammar reference, page 175.

- 1 These sentences all contain clauses beginning with *that*.

- A Missa Bay is the company that (Missa Bay) will be supplying one-quarter of McDonald's restaurants with sliced apples.
- B Missa Bay is the company that McDonald's has chosen (Missa Bay) for its apple slicing facilities.
- C Missa Bay reported that sales revenue should increase by 10% in 2005.

Which sentence contains:

- 1 a defining relative clause where the pronoun replaces the object?
- 2 a defining relative clause where the pronoun replaces the subject?
- 3 a *that*-clause which could function independently as a sentence?

- 2 Decide whether these expressions would introduce a fact or an attitude/opinion. Which is NOT a main clause containing a subject and a verb?

- 0 Experts have found that fact

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1 It has been proven that ... | 6 It is interesting that ... |
| 2 Tests indicate that ... | 7 In spite of/Despite the fact that ... |
| 3 Scientists can confirm that ... | 8 It is doubtful that ... |
| 4 It is certain that ... | 9 Many would argue that ... |
| 5 Results show that ... | 10 Some believe that ... |

- 3 Notice that the base structure of sentence 1 is the same as that of sentence 2.

Sentence 1: Alex advised John that if he wanted the job, he should apply for it.

Sentence 2: 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.