



**Overall Outstanding  
New Concept Design**

# Harvest Market, Champaign, Ill.

**W**ith a name like Harvest Market, a supermarket is firmly connecting itself to the land. And Quincy, Ill.-based Niemann Foods' newest concept does just that. Instead of the standard ribbon-cutting, the grand opening last October featured two tractors pulling away haywagons to reveal the store after a recording of Paul Harvey's "So God Made a Farmer."

"We said, 'This is what inspired us every step of the way in this process,' and it is," says Rich Niemann Jr., president and CEO of Niemann Foods, of the opening. More than

two years ago, the company realized that its newly acquired location in Champaign, Ill., would be a whole new concept, one that was rooted in the farm-to-table idea.

The new concept would be a break from the company's signature banner — County Market, which is generally located in smaller, rural communities. Champaign, a university town, is one of the larger markets in which the company operates, and, with the new concept, it would be serving a slightly different demographic. "We began with the idea that we wanted our customers to have a connection that is unique in the industry and allow them to understand who the producers and makers are, because that allows them to understand where their food came from, what's in it and what's not in it," Niemann explains.

The team took to heart the knowledge that such a small percentage of the population is involved in agriculture, yet agriculture is what sustains us all, and that people are growing more interested in where their food hails from. "Everything flows in this store," Niemann says, "flows from the producers and makers, with all the fresh product."

The fresh departments became increasingly important in the store design, and most are open to customers' view, so they can see the food being prepared fresh, from scratch, in the deli, bakery and Farmhouse restaurant. Everything is designed around the concept of fresh, wholesome food.

The store also features its own butter-churning room, which makes plain and compound butters for retail sale and for use in the store's other departments, including the restaurant and deli, the bakery, and even the seafood department. Even bumping up the ceiling in the floral/produce section of the store to let in more natural light plays into the idea of fresh, natural food.

"The culinary conversation here is so much greater than other stores," says Tim Fink, VP fresh product, business development. "There's a certain expectation starting to happen with this Harvest Market experience."

While the produce department does have a tractor situated on the sales floor, the Niemann team was careful to not go down the hokey "Hee Haw" route when it came to design elements in the store. The Los Angeles-based design firm Shook Kelley was instrumental in helping keep the store homey, but with a modern feel that would be attractive to today's customers.

"We reach back to farm symbols of yesterday, but they're tweaked to make you feel that this is not a joke," Niemann notes. "This is not a plastic marketing campaign. It's what we believe in. This is a mission that we're on to help our customers and provide that information, that interest, that passion for food."

Learn more about Harvest Market in *PG's* March 2017 issue, in which it will be profiled as the Store of the Month.

