

Veg foray pays off for Poupart

POUPART IMPORTS has described its first year in the vegetable and salad business as “difficult, but positive”.

After 20 years’ trading as the Poupart Group, under management of the Olins family, last February marked the first time the company expanded its portfolio outside the fruit industry, supplying veg and salads to primary wholesalers, foodservice suppliers, regional supermarkets, packers, retail co-operatives and caterers.

Tony Cholwill, with 20 years’ experience in the salad and veg industry, joined the company a year ago to head up the new section.

He told FPJ: “There is no doubt it has been a difficult year. We entered the market at the back-end of Spain’s imported season in the spring. It was like coming in with a blank piece of paper at the tip of the iceberg.

“But it was convenient to have our



reputation for fruit and, to an extent, an existing customer base. Also we have an office in Figueres in Spain, so having a local base takes a lot of the headaches away from the growers.”

Cholwill, pictured, believes that Poupart's benefits from not supplying the major retailers. “The fear is if you get drawn into working with a supermarket, you may become vulnerable by focusing too much on

one area,” he said. “In a bad season, with the marketplace as it is, you may lose out,” he said.

Poupart Imports is working on strengthening its veg lines in the coming year and bolstering the good reputation it has already established. “We need and want to sell more, but we have to show we can do the right job for these people and prove ourselves,” said Cholwill.

“It’s going to be a very interesting year – the Dutch have always dominated the wholesale market so people in the UK will be looking at the Dutch prices when they come out at the end of next month.

“It has been a very trying year – the euro is going all over the place and, effectively, we have pulled a rabbit out of the hat,” said Cholwill.

But he believes working with UK growers will become essential. “Our customers would give their right arm to get a good UK food supplier,” he added. ○