

Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

# the SNACK

ISSUE 58 MAY 2021

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A decorative border at the top of the page featuring various citrus fruits: a whole orange, a sliced orange showing its segments, a whole lime, a sliced lime, and a whole lemon. 

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**T**

**HE WAY A PERSON DOES ONE THING  
IS THE WAY THEY DO EVERYTHING.**

I have had this saying floating around in my head for a couple of years now. The idea haunted me at first. Then, it washed over me with a different lightness in the confined room created by COVID-19 and 2020. It became that trapdoor—the way through, the way out, and, simultaneously, the way in.

The old Zen proverb has been tapped far and wide from professional coaches to business consultants and lifestyle gurus. No matter the germinating origin, it seems to have propagated in my life in recent years. Now, it has taken on a new meaning in the house of mirrors that has been a hallmark of these incredible past fifteen-plus months.

The trap is that this saying is a condemnation—a verdict of who a business is or who we are as individuals, perpetually.

The trapdoor is that this sentiment is an opening, a way to change who we are, how our companies approach the industry, impact the space, and propagate rather than restrict innovation and thought.

Believe me, I am risk-averse. So, the idea of breaking out of patterned comfort zones and ways of doing business is slightly terrifying. But also exhilarating.

What I love about this phrase is that, maybe, it suggests—and this is idealistic “me” talking here—that small pivots, changes, shifts in perspectives, risks, can ripple out and through a greater strategy.

The ability to execute. To summon ingenuity instead of armor.




Idealistic? Maybe. But, then again, we have seen a year and a half of firsts.

Perhaps it all comes down to choosing a perspective shift, and also realizing that perspective is not a volatile weather system we can slightly predict but never control. For us, it's like seeing two sides of the same coin and then choosing the value—the surface—that perpetuates opportunity. For example, seeing marketing as an investment as opposed to a cost or vice versa, or viewing sustainability as a finite or infinite game (using a couple coined terms by thought-leaders like Simon Sinek.)

I guess what I am really trying to distill is the idea that an open mind opens minds, and a closed mind closes them.

I have seen our industry go from “What if we can't do this?” during the peak of COVID-19's gravity to “But, what if we can?” Many companies already had that mind-shift or mindset as part of their DNA, and I call on those friends and hearts to continue to help us see the new normal as an opportunity and not a cage...

A way out, and also a way in. 

**Jordan Okumura**

Editor in Chief  
*AndNowUKnow* and *The Snack Magazine*





# Going Bananas for our New Facility.

Our expansion into 725 Edgewater Road, directly across from the entrance to the NYC Terminal Market, has added 30,000 sq feet of space for offices, coolers and, yes, 15 banana ripening rooms.

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# FEATURES

## PURE FLAVOR®

### BEHIND THE GLASS, BEYOND THE BOX

Bringing innovation to the forefront, Jamie Moracci, Jeff Moracci, and Matt Mastronardi are the leadership trifecta breaking out of the echo chamber of industry messaging and envisioning marketing prowess, innovation, and a new standard for greenhouse. In other words, let the games begin...



### RAINIER FRUIT COMPANY A FAMILIAL FRAMEWORK

The intricacies of family are evident in everything that this innovative supplier does. From its teamwork philosophy to a genuine love for the craft, Rainier Fruit Company goes beyond its position as a premium fruit provider by carving out a vision of its own...



### FRESKA PRODUCE INTERNATIONAL MASTERING THE WINDS

With the winds of consumer demand ever changing direction, Managing Member Gary Clevenger shows us how to harness the shifting gusts to build a powerful retail strategy...



**DUDA FARM FRESH FOODS**  
**TRUST: THE CURRENCY OF TODAY**  
Duda Farm Fresh Foods is the action and subject of "generation." Sammy Duda helps us understand why this company, in a commitment to evolve while staying true to itself, is approaching 100 years young...



### CALAVO GROWERS AN AVO-LUTION

Even though many in the industry recognize Calavo, the depth of this company's reach has yet to be realized. As Chief Executive Officer Jim Gibson envisions a united way forward, the only thing truly known about the multifaceted stalwart is that this is just the beginning...



**IPPOLITO INTERNATIONAL**  
**A PRODUCE PRACTICE**  
The grower adds value to the supply chain at every turn. With expertise garnered through years of experience, this vegetable all-star continues to build its repertoire and, in turn, reimagines its influential network...



**IW PRODUCTIONS**  
**THE LOVE LANGUAGE OF FOOD**  
Irene Wong is the woman behind the camera, turning food into entertainment. We dig into how stepping away from and returning to Food Network is just one step in the journey to share her commitment and passion for food...



# A Closer Look at Little Bear Produce Fresh-Cut Bagged Greens

By Lilian Diep

Spring denotes fresh beginnings, and nothing exemplifies this better than fresh produce. A great way to entice shoppers to taste the season's bounty is through value-added products, and Little Bear Produce has just the solution. Pairing convenience with health, the grower is expanding the value-added aisle with Fresh-Cut Bagged Greens.

With five fresh-cut products, the grower hits a wide range of flavor profiles and needs in its new line. While all new SKUs are worth showcasing, my eyes gravitate toward the Greens Trio. The purple bag draws my attention; and the mix of Collard, Turnip, and Mustard Greens gives home cooking various tastes and textures.

In this day of experimentation, having produce in a ready-to-go format is advantageous for impulse buyers looking for healthier products to use in their cooking. Shoppers are also seeking inspiration in the aisle while keeping prep time low; therefore creating more time to enjoy the dish! With this lineup—which also includes Kale, Collard Greens, Mustard Greens, and Turnip Greens—consumers would be more inclined to reach for items that are convenient yet experimental to expand their palates.

Consumers are also continuing to widen their produce intake while looking for the freshest product available. With these SKUs, you can assure your shoppers are buying quality with flavor, as they are cut and packed right in the fields.

The Fresh-Cut Bagged Greens line is sold in 1 lb bags, with the Kale, Collard Greens, and Turnip Greens varieties also available in 2 lb bags. Little Bear also creates custom packs to match each retailer's varying needs.

While spring spreads her warming rays here in the States, get shoppers in the mood for fresh with this can't-miss lineup. 🍴

# UP CLOSE





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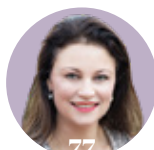
**MENTORS IN THE MAKING**  
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**THE IF LIST**  
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**WHOLESOME HEROES**  
MYLES CHASSER



**MY FAVORITE THINGS**  
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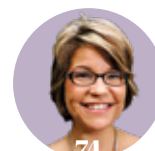
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# WTF

## DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

## Mucci Farms Teeny Tiny Smuccies™ Strawberries ?



### TEENY TINY SMUCCIES™ STRAWBERRIES BELGIAN WAFFLES

#### INGREDIENTS

**2 cups** Teeny Tiny Smuccies™  
Strawberries, whole or sliced  
**1¾ cups** all-purpose flour  
**2 tsp** baking powder  
**½ tsp** salt  
**1 tbsp** granulated sugar  
**3** eggs, separated  
**2 tbsp** melted butter or vegetable oil  
**1½ cups** whole or 2% milk  
Maple syrup  
Additional berries of choice

**Prep Time:** 25 min

**Cook Time:** 15 min

**Servings:** 6 full-sized waffles, or 12 mini waffles

#### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat waffle iron. Sift together flour, baking powder, salt, and sugar into a medium-sized bowl. Then, make a well in the middle of the mixture. Add egg yolks, milk, and melted butter or oil. Gently mix until combined.
- 2 In a separate bowl, whisk egg whites until stiff, then fold into the batter until incorporated.
- 3 Using a ladle, spoon batter into center of waffle iron and close lid, cooking for about 2–3 minutes.
- 4 Top each waffle with Teeny Tiny Smuccies™ plus berries of your choice. Drizzle with maple syrup before serving. Enjoy!

To learn more about Mucci Farms, visit [www.muccifarms.com](http://www.muccifarms.com)





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## MENTORS IN THE MAKING

# David Dudley

BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ

➤ **FROM MY FIRST CONVERSATION WITH DAVID DUDLEY,** I had the feeling we were picking up where we left off rather than starting at a beginning.

I hear an open laugh on the other line—the kind you rarely hear outside your inner circle—and I’m immediately at ease. I have no problem believing this man, now a Senior Manager of Sales and Merchandising of Produce and Floral at Sprouts Farmers Market, will help several others find their footing in fresh produce.

“My stepdad, Mark Perez, worked for a local produce business, Perez Brothers, and I got to hang out at the office with him from time to time. I spent summers working at the tomato packing shed and learned quickly that I had a burning passion for produce that’s still with me today,” David shares with me.

His stepfather laid the first foundational bricks that gave David purpose through the hazy years of adolescence, assuring him of what he should do.

“I went to California Polytechnic State University and studied Agribusiness. So, I had an idea of what I wanted to do when I graduated in 2010, and I was very fortunate it was in the food industry—produce in particular,” David recalls as we both reflect on what it was like entering the workforce during the Great Recession. “Through Cal Poly, I had an interview with Markon Cooperative in Salinas, California, two weeks before I graduated, and I was offered the job post-graduation.”

Upon starting, David immediately became acquainted with the importance of relationships thanks to Joe Ange, now Director of Business Development at Eagle Eye Produce.

“Joe taught me so much about produce,” David tells me. “He was the Assistant Director of Purchasing, and I was his first—for lack of a better term—apprentice as a Produce Buyer. He was a great mentor. For the four years I was at Markon, my experience felt like an extension of college—I went to produce college, and Joe was my

Big Brother. Everything I have learned since then is built off of the education I got there.”

While David’s experience on the foodservice-side of buying was invaluable to him, life happened in the most challenging way it can.

“My stepdad passed away in 2012 after a year-long battle with cancer. I stayed on with Markon for one more year, but realized it was time to come home,” he tells me.

Returning to California’s Central Valley, David entered a new circle of the industry by making the jump from foodservice to retail.

“I started working for a guy named Jim Corby, who was, and is, a very important mentor. Markon was all foodservice, so this was my first job in retail, and I was the only Category Manager for produce at Save Mart—a chain of about 90 stores at that time,” David laughs.

The relationship was a perfect fit. After serving as Food Lion’s Vice President of Produce, Jim joined Save Mart three months before David, making them a pair with produce acumen and a new company to navigate.

“It was just the two of us running 90 stores’ worth of produce—ads, item assortment, pricing... everything in produce retail—and Jim and I hit it off. He was at the end of his career and really taught me a lot of great lessons: how to treat people as far as relationships with supplier partners go, and how to handle challenging situations. We formed a really good friendship, and I still talk to Jim to this day. He’s still very much a mentor to me,” he tells me.

In addition to Jim, David met another mentor, who continues to be a strong anchor today, in Steve

Junqueiro. Steve, who has since moved into consulting, was Save Mart’s President at the time.

“All of these individuals really focused on my personal development, but Steve helped guide the way as a leader of a privately held company,” David says, explaining how, thanks to Steve, he had the opportunity to prove himself at 27 years old as interim Director of Produce for Save Mart.

“It was definitely a sink-or-swim situation, but Steve had a lot of faith in me. When the President of the company is checking in with you on a regular basis, that means a lot. He always called me ‘the kid’ and set a strong example for me to follow,” David remembers.

It’s true that while Save Mart’s rich heritage added to David’s produce foundation, there was still more structure to build and an opportunity with the California Table Grape Commission (CTGC) presented David with a new building block—supply-side experience.

“I was on the other side of the fence now,” David laughs. “I wasn’t looking for a new job, but I was missing the pace of retail without realizing it.”

The realization came when David received a call about a position at Sprouts Farmers Market, asking if he



**David Dudley,**

Senior Manager of Sales and Merchandising of Produce and Floral, Sprouts Farmers Market



wanted to throw his hat in the ring. Now, one year later, David is back on the buy-side and in the space that feels most like home.

"I didn't know how much I missed it until my first day. Working for the CTGC was a great experience that still informs how I work with and maintain supplier relationships. But coming back to retail was the moment I realized that this is where I belong," David tells me, adding that his mentors continue to be invaluable in these moments of clarity.

When I ask David how he identifies and enlists the help of such experience, he pauses.

"I'm forever a student," he finally says. "I was constantly asking questions, and now, if anybody ever calls me a mentor, I will explain the 'why' behind the what. Too often we take for granted that the 'why' is obvious. When you empower people with the reason, they buy into it, then they execute. There's no way I'd be where I am without the mentorship that I received along the way, and I'm humble enough to know that."

I know, in speaking to David, I never hesitate to ask a question. In doing so, he teaches me to make a few more phone calls, talk a little longer, and that there is a lot of runway left for this rising mentor.

There are many styles and cadences to leadership, but there is one prominent characteristic to mentorship that stands out for me—a presence, one that invites others to make themselves comfortable.

Stay awhile.

And ask questions like David would—as though a legacy depends on it. 🍌

## THE MENTORS ➤

Here is what they have to say about David...



### **Joe Ange,**

*Director Of Business Development,  
Eagle Eye Produce*

"I have always thought of David as a guy with a strong work ethic who has never shied away from jumping into the thick of it to help get the job done. David is an open book, and my advice to anyone working with him is to ask as many questions as you can. He probably doesn't know how much he knows. He's so energetic and makes the job fun. We taught each other, and anyone learning from David should understand that is a great opportunity. Once they do, the quicker they will grow."



### **Jim Corby,**

*Former Vice President of Produce,  
The Fresh Market*

"It was always a great pleasure to work with David. He has a very good head on his shoulders, a good sense of humor, and proved to be the kind of person you can always count on. He has a great sense of doing right by anyone, whether they are on the supply-side or the buy-side. David is great about staying connected with me and other former leaders from Save Mart; he is never afraid to reach out and get an opinion. We've continued to stay in touch over the years, talking about once a month, through new experiences in work and in life. I remember, at his wedding, I met his sister and she told me David has a young man's mind and an old soul, which I think is a perfect line to describe him. He has always been a good, salt-of-the-earth kid."



### **Steve Junqueiro,**

*Chief Executive Officer, Steve  
Junqueiro Associates*

"David is a very unique talent in our industry and was always a great young person to work with. He is one of those people who you can see will definitely make a difference. I think David has a unique quality—he incorporates the use of data and information with a real passion, desire, and instinct for the business that I don't always see in today's young produce individuals. It is an important attribute to look for. He embodies the old-school respect for relationships combined with the use of new technology that is becoming increasingly crucial. As a leader, David listens to and connects with others. He understands it takes a team to win."

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# WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Mission Produce  
Avocados

?



## AVOCADO PROTEIN PASTA

### INGREDIENTS

#### SAUCE

**1** ripe Mission Produce Avocado  
**½ pack** silken tofu  
**¼ cup** plant-based milk of choice  
**3 tbsp** nutritional yeast  
**2 tsp** garlic powder  
**2 tsp** onion powder  
**1 tsp** dried oregano  
**1** lemon, juiced  
Salt and pepper, to taste

#### PASTA

**8 oz** dry pasta of choice  
**½ lb** asparagus, chopped  
**1 cup** cherry tomatoes  
**1 tsp** olive oil  
Basil, for garnish

**Prep Time:** 5 min

**Cook Time:** 10 min

**Servings:** 4–6

### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Heat water and boil pasta according to instructions on the package. Reserving 1 cup of pasta water, drain and set pasta aside.
- 2 In a blender or food processor, add all ingredients for the sauce and blend until smooth.
- 3 In a large saucepan or Dutch oven, heat olive oil over medium-low heat. Add asparagus and cook 3–4 minutes, until soft. Add cherry tomatoes and cook another 2 minutes, until the tomatoes are slightly soft. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the drained pasta.
- 4 Add the avocado sauce and toss gently to combine, adding a bit of the reserved pasta water as needed if the pasta is too thick or clumping together. Taste and add chopped basil and additional salt and pepper as desired. Serve immediately.

To learn more about Mission Produce,  
visit [www.missionproduce.com](http://www.missionproduce.com)





# A Familial FRAMEWORK

By Chandler James



**T**he interconnectedness of a family, chosen or otherwise, is infinitely complex. There is the path you choose, and then there is the one laid out for you, and each is as multidimensional as the next.

We often talk about the values passed down from generation to generation. Though we all pursue many of the same tenets of humanity—kindness, dedication, creativity—when it comes to familial bonds, each group’s pursuit will be informed by the culture they were raised in.

Rainier Fruit Company, for example, has a fierce drive that is firmly rooted in its upbringing. Though the company’s value proposition has evolved over the years, that familial framework remains the same. And a hunger for the truth is what allows such cornerstones to live on.

“The company wasn’t simply handed off from my dad to me,” said Chief Executive Officer Mark Zirkle, looking back on how in 2003 he took the reins from his father, Bill Zirkle, who officially retired in 2011. “I became part of a larger family that puts in tireless hours right alongside me. I never wanted to do anything else or even thought about doing anything else. This is it.”



**“Trust and responsibility were core beliefs of my dad’s, and that culture lives on to this day.”**

*Mark Zirkle,*

Chief Executive Officer, Rainier Fruit Company



If you talk to anyone at Rainier for very long, you will notice a continuous thread of humanity demonstrated through acts of service, unspoken trust, and determination beyond words. These core values may be easy for a company to claim, but the fruits of such mottos can be seen in the company’s employees, as well as its products.

“Rainier was founded on service; that’s what sets us apart. Trust and responsibility were core beliefs of my dad’s, and that culture lives on to this day,” Mark continued. “The team here knows what to do—once the fruit is harvested, they take the wheel. We invest in people here, and that’s the best part.”

Rainier’s headquarters sits in the heart of Selah, Washington, while its ranches expand up and down the central spine of Washington State. From the ranchers to the sales team, everyone at Rainier is well versed in their shared vision, and they can tell you why consumers taste the Rainier quality in every bite.



“There’s a kind of trickle-down effect here on the ranch,” said **Aran Urlacher, Area Manager at the Mattawa ranch,** where many of Rainier’s innovations, like its partnership with Equitable Food Initiative (EFI)

and its Bee Better Certified™ program, originated. “It’s a matter of circular repercussions. Whether that’s to an employee or the ground, the care and effort that is put in, you’ll get back.”

Mark chimed in, adding that getting EFI certified was another form of support for Rainier’s people-first organizational culture. He explained that getting EFI certified was confirmation that the company has been on the right path all along, as putting people first and treating them with integrity is what the team has always done. With an organization like EFI backing that up, it goes to show how Rainier has made its mark on the industry.

Aran went on to explain that organic growing methods are more than a goal, but a necessity. Led by the company’s continuous expansion, organic operations are the foundation of all that Aran does at Mattawa, and he is always pushing the limits.

“I am very supported by everyone when I have ideas on how to grow produce organically or expand on our employees’ benefits,” he said. “If it supports our people or our land, Rainier will back it up, simply because it’s the right thing to do. I love working for a company that prioritizes having organics year-round. All of our organics are grown here in Washington, and we are going into our fourth consecutive year with those year-round domestic programs.”

Historically known as apple growers, Rainier expanded its lineup to include cherries and blueberries in the early 2000s. Though the Rainier team has their gaze fixed on these seasonal sensations, they’re also producing a year-round organic apple program for the fourth consecutive year.

**Ralph Garcia, one of Rainier’s original Field Managers,**

has been with the company since 1980. At 16 years old, he was working side-by-side with Bill back when



Rainier’s operations had not yet surpassed one hundred acres. Ralph is practically part of the Zirkle family, having seen both challenges and the wave of Rainier’s success. He now manages the Selah-based ranches where Rainier grows Honeycrisp and Gala apples, as well as several varieties of cherries.

“Cherries teach you things about growing other fruit. They’re in season for such a short time, so the opportunity for me to grow them is a privilege. Over the years, my team and I have learned how to read the trees and their needs—adjusting nutrition, watching how the trees react, and finding that balance of water until we finally find what our crop needs to thrive,” Ralph said. “To me, Rainier is the gold standard.”





**“To me, Rainier is the gold standard.”**

*Ralph Garcia,*  
Field Manager, Rainier Fruit Company



Familial bonds seemingly extend beyond employee relationships, as Ralph explained the immense pride he experiences when he sees Rainier cherries on retail shelves. And, for a moment, I lost sight of the boundaries between the product and the producer.

“Seeing the Rainier logo and the quality of the fruit in the store provides a huge feeling of pride for me and my team,” he continued. “We have worked together to optimize warehouses, sales, data, and everything in-between as we aim to grow what consumers are looking for. We rely on Rainier and our family of growers to hit the nail on the head every time.”

Utilizing the rain shadows of the Cascade Mountains, Rainier’s blueberries are truly something to behold. Because of the extremely dry climate, the amount of water its plants receive is an exact science, controlled down to the last drop. On top of this, the supplier’s blueberries are all grown by one family, providing consistency all summer long.



**Brian Hoover, Area Manager** for all of the company’s southern ranches, found his way to the ranches after attending school for another discipline entirely.

“I’m not a multigenerational farmer. I grew up in Yakima and had my finger on the pulse of agriculture in central Washington, but I went to school for business. I found my path to produce, and I’ve been on it for 10 years now. I really can’t imagine doing anything else,” Brian said. “Blueberry season is a grind. Kicking off in early June, it’ll overlap with our cherry season and early apple harvest, and will wrap up in late September. Then we head straight into late apple harvests for varieties like Pink Lady and Envy™, which will last into November. There’s no break for a solid six months.”

All of Rainier’s blueberries are organically grown, a commitment the family made to the land and its customers when it started growing blueberries fifteen years ago. And, without the support of growers like Brian, the continuation of that commitment would not be possible.

“It really is a labor of love,” said Brian. “The Rainier logo exemplifies quality; it’s not just a sales tool. These products are our babies, and the winter pruning takes true skill and hours of time. We watch our products bloom, see them leave the farm in their bins, and track them by the lot number all the way to retail.”

Brian is another of Rainier’s organic produce experts, explaining that Rainier’s journey isn’t seen as a well-worn path in the world of farming.



“We are setting the pace for growth in this sector, farming 100 percent organic blueberries in a location that traditionally doesn’t grow blueberries,” Brian told me. “There’s a lot of counterculture in what we are doing.”

Rainier’s team of produce players-turned-family-members is vested in these core tenets, which not only challenge the practices of others, but forge an incomparable footprint.

Reflecting on this path built by the company’s Founders, Mark’s great-grandparents, is a practice in gratitude. If they could see Rainier’s premier operations as we enter the summer fruit season, I am positive that they would beam with pride.

In our conversations, I could see that Mark, Aran, Ralph, and Brian were returning to their roots, reminding themselves of why they rise every morning with the beating heart of Rainier inside them.

After all, without their earthly vessels, there would be no Rainier to speak of. 🍓





# » The IF List «

## Jennifer Wagner Sanchez

Director of Marketing, Church Brothers Farms

With **Jordan Okumura**

**W**ith almost 20 years in the industry, this marketing maven has seen the term innovation evolve from an abstract vision to an industry requirement—while helping to execute its progress along the way. There are few in this industry with such gravity and passion, and our team at *The Snack Magazine* has been awestruck to witness Jennifer's growth, tenacity, insight, and attitude impact fresh produce in the most dynamic of ways. With such spark and vibrance, Jennifer is the ideal candidate for a list like this; one that draws on the imaginative, the dreamer, and the driven. Check out some of the *IFs* that make this industry member tick and follow her mind on paper in Issue 58 of *The Snack*...

**» IF you could have been born in another century or decade, which would it be and why?**

I would love to experience the 1950s—the style and all the new innovations that took place during the decade and shaped where we are today.

**» IF you had to choose now, what would your last meal consist of?**

Cheese enchiladas with rice, beans, and homemade guacamole. They remind me of growing up cooking alongside my grandmother.

**» IF you could imagine yourself in a different industry, what would it be?**

Hospitality or art. Wedding and event planning was high on my list of career interests. I love collecting the details and creating someone's vision for an event. I also love landscape and family photography; capturing that one moment in time that will never be experienced in the same way again.

**» IF you could have dinner with anyone, dead or alive, who would it be?**

My grandparents. I miss hearing their stories about living through some of the most challenging and amazing years in our nation's history.

**» IF you wrote an autobiography, what would be the title?**

*Still I Rise*. Inspired by Maya Angelou's poem.

**» IF you had to eat the same thing every day for the rest of your days, what would you eat?**

Pizza. There are so many potential variations: vegetarian, cauliflower crust, topped with salad, thin crust, deep dish...

**» IF you could re-experience an awesome day in your life, what day would you choose and why?**

At the top of my list are the days my three sons were born, my wedding to Matt—my amazing husband—making tamales with my family, and the Christmas Eve parties that my parents would throw with family and friends.

**» IF you had \$10 million that you had to donate to someone else, who would you choose and why?**

I would choose an organization that helps domestic violence survivors get back on their feet or an organization like A Precious Child in Colorado, which is focused on helping children get the help and supplies they need to be successful in school.

**» IF you had a superpower, what would you want it to be?**

The power to teleport—it would make business travel while having kids at home so much easier!

**» IF you could give your younger self one piece of advice, what would it be?**

Trust your gut. Your instincts are usually dead on. 🍕





# MOTHER'S DAY snackchat

**BY LILIAN DIEP**

**a** mother's love knows no bounds, and I would go so far as to say neither does our industry. Whether consumers are celebrating their mothers, sisters, grandmothers, or friends, Mother's Day is ripe with fresh produce opportunities to make anyone feel special. From handmade berry bouquets to a lavish spread, I—and our produce friends—can think of no better way to honor the occasion than with fresh produce...





## CATHERINE GIPE-STEWART,

Communications Manager, Superfresh Growers®

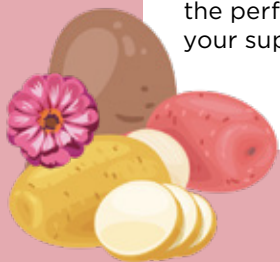
"When I think of Mother's Day, brunch instantly comes to mind. Apples add pops of flavor to traditional classics to create an original and special dish. We've been eating more plant-based at Superfresh Growers, using apples combined with vegetables in place of meat. One of our current brunch favorites is Spiralized Apple and Sweet Potato Egg Nests. Spiralize an apple and sweet potato, shape in a nest, and bake at 400° F in a ramekin until tender. Then, crack an egg into the nest and bake until eggs are set, about 15 minutes. Other plant-based brunch twists that we've been enjoying are Apple, Butternut Squash, and Black Bean Breakfast Tacos and Apple and Squash Hash With Sage and Onion."



## ANTHONY INNOCENTI,

Co-Founder and Managing Partner, LIV Organic Produce

"LIV Organic Produce is a one-stop shop for some of the key categories in demand for spring and summer holiday promotions. Retail displays with LIV Organic potatoes front and center will drive your shoppers to create a brunch or dinner heavy on the produce, perfect for showing appreciation for moms. Organic red and yellow potatoes are an ideal side dish for a Mother's Day feast as well! Generating conversations as early as possible will help retailers plan the perfect merchandising opportunities, and we can assist in all your supply-side needs."



## BRIAN JENNY,

Vice President of Sales, Monterey Mushrooms

"Mother's Day is a time to honor the hard work moms put in throughout the year, and what better way to do that than with a healthy and delicious brunch? Since we like to have a wide variety of brunch options, Portabellas are a perfect pairing because they're an amazing meat substitute due to their wide, thick body and deep, robust taste. Yet, they're not as filling as meat. At our house, we make my wife omelettes with bagels and lox. Mushrooms go great in omelettes! At Monterey Mushrooms, we've seen retailers have great success promoting mushrooms around Mother's Day, as they are versatile and can be added to any Mother's Day menu."







## CRAIG SLATE,

President and Chief Executive Officer, SunFed

"Let's face it, we all know 'health is wealth.' And what better way to show all moms just how much they are loved than with some tasty dishes made with SunFed summer squash, which can benefit eyes, skin, and the all-important heart. For consumers cooking at home and/or restaurant operators preparing to serve moms all across the U.S., make sure to have squash on the menu. You and your customers can check out SunFed's site for great recipes like SunFed Herbed Grey Squash, Potato, and Sausage Casserole, or Quick 'N Easy Zucchini Chicken Pesto. So this year, ensure moms have some beautiful roses, tasty SunFed Perfect Squash®, and an outstanding Mother's Day!"



## BLAKE BELKNAP,

Vice President of Sales, Rainier Fruit Company

"Pink Ladys are the perfect spring apple and festive Mother's Day focus. They are great for everything from snacking to baking, thanks to a crisp texture and sweet-tart flavor. Being the original club variety, these high-flavor apples bring in significant dollars and excitement to the category. Retailers would be keen to remember these pink beauties for their Mother's Day ads. They're practically begging to be the feature of a Mother's Day brunch!"



## CARL MASTRONARDI,

President, DelFrescoPure®

"To better advertise strawberries, retailers need to increase merchandising and present a clear message to the consumers. DelFrescoPure® strawberries are grown locally and shipped the same day as they are picked. Retailers can take advantage of our fresh, clean berries and create larger advertising displays to captivate consumers. These larger displays paired with more shelf talkers, shelf strips, and special callouts will be sure to inspire any husband or child to create the perfect meal and spoil their mothers this holiday. DelFrescoPure's® outrageously sweet YES!Berries strawberries are the perfect pairing to any Mother's Day brunch or breakfast in bed."







## JEFF NICHOL,

Los Angeles Office Salesperson, Dulcinea Farms/Pacific Trellis Fruit

"There is nothing better than creating an easy dish that everyone in the family will enjoy—even the kids. That is why we love sharing simple summer salad ideas featuring our Dulcinea melons. Start with your favorite green and then add some Dulcinea PureHeart®, SunnyGold®, and Tuscan-Style® melon balls for extra color and flavor variety. Toss in some feta cheese, red onion, olive oil, and balsamic vinegar, and you have a beautiful and tasty salad that is ready in minutes—especially because you don't have to spend any time removing the melon seeds, as all of Dulcinea melons are seedless!"



## nate HEFTI,

Director of Sales, Superior Fresh

"Promoting organic salads during Mother's Day is a great way to invoke the feeling of spring in the air—and getting kids involved is a great way to do it! Retailers can bundle ingredients together to promote several DIY organic salad kits. Think cake-decorating kit, but with salad! This gives kids a surefire way to treat mom, get excited about dinner preparation, and increase their loyal consumption of healthy organic salads. Take it up a notch and consider adding a fillet of Superior Fresh Atlantic Salmon!"



## DIANA MCCLEAN,

Senior Director of Marketing, Ocean Mist® Farms

"Mother's Day is the perfect time of year to have artichokes on the table! Our biggest takeaways for retailers is to take advantage of the bright green that Ocean Mist® Farms Gold Standard Artichokes bring to the produce aisles. To build visibility, use display bins and cross-merchandise artichokes with ingredients for delicious Mother's Day meals like Instant Pot® Lemon and Herb White Wine Artichokes or No Fuss Easy Baked Artichokes. We have several merchandising tools, including display bins, recipe cards, and shelf wobblers for retailers to boost in-store purchase of Ocean Mist Farms artichokes on our trade resources page."





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# BEHIND THE GLASS,

# BEYOND THE BOX

By Jordan Okumura



**JAMIE MORACCI,**  
President, Pure Flavor®

**S**ome companies fight for market share in a way that reinforces the boxes they are in. Other companies completely step out of the echo chamber.

When there are no walls to conform your ideas, innovation takes on new roots. You start a new game, build your own rules, become your own rival. In the centrifuge of today, propelled by the eye and the wallet of the consumer, the components of marketing and creation are cast into the light and require a deeper gaze—a look at all the parts that make up the whole. For companies like Pure Flavor®, these strategies and foundational stones are not just laid in vision, they are elemental.

It is under this new microscope that today's fresh produce companies must learn to not only adapt—but thrive. And, lucky for us, the future is already fresh-friendly.

"The landscape is changing rapidly for a number of reasons: The product assortment is evolving, demand has significantly increased,

competition can be fierce, and the capital investment and infrastructure needed to expand is skyrocketing," President Jamie Moracci tells me. "When we look at our brand, we are no longer just a grower/marketer or sales company. Not really. We are actually a lifestyle company that grows greenhouse vegetables to fuel healthy lives. Yes, we grow, pick, pack, and sell, but our brand communication strategy is to go beyond the package, connect with consumers, and drive them into our retail partners looking for our product."

Pure Flavor's evolving connectivity with its buy-side customers and loyal consumer following is deeply embedded in its ability to execute at high levels with brand penetration—something that the company views as a living and breathing component of an overall mission and vision. This mission and vision is to support healthier lifestyles and remain a humble, trusted, and innovative partner priming the industry for sustainable growth.





## MISSION & VISION

"Pure Flavor® is committed to supporting healthier lifestyles by providing greenhouse-grown vegetables that meet our exceptional quality standards, and to remain a humble, trusted, and innovative family-owned company that treats our growers, employees, and customers as valued partners in our sustainable growth. Our go-to market strategy is based on delivering the best that we grow, regardless of the season. Our family of growers understand the need to deliver the best, week in week out, our customers expect it so we work diligently, no matter the team, department, or facility, to make sure this happens."



Pure Flavor is an organism in constant evolution.

And that movement took on new energy nearly three years ago. Pure Flavor went through a rigorous brand revitalization to align with its strategic growth plans, providing a vehicle for the company's continued progress and its willingness—and capability—to adapt and change.

"We needed to solidify the position that we weren't just selling a box—or a thousand—of fresh greenhouse vegetables. We're actively contributing to healthy lifestyles every single day. We don't look at our business as just shipping another case; it goes far beyond that, and we wanted to ensure that belief was consistent from the seed to the shelf," Jamie remarks. "We rebuilt our packaging strategy from the bottom up, honed our messaging to be honest, sincere, and factual, and created both retail and consumer-focused content that was relevant and engaging to the audience it was meant for."

The eye-opening experience was the result of innovative forethought, but the process itself has been a mirror, one held up to the company to inform and develop the *why* behind its decisions and philosophies.

"The brand revitalization project we went through really opened our eyes to being strategic beyond our growing strategies. It requires an integrated plan that is multifaceted across many channels to connect with customers and consumers. Our sales and marketing teams are strategic in how they look at the business, it is not just about cases moved," Jamie adds. "We do not conform to a checklist or box. The quota for growth does not have a ceiling."

Add in major infrastructure projects in Georgia and Leamington, Ontario, to meet the demand for more product, and the holistic picture comes into focus even more clearly. Pure Flavor is not a "growth for growth's sake" type company—every move is strategic and foreshadowing.

Bottom line? Pure Flavor offers differentiation to rival, and a resounding vision that only this trifecta of minds can uniquely produce. And execute.

"Our recipe for success is distinctive and rare. After 18 years in business, we have created a roadmap for our company and a brand that others may not have followed if they had been in our shoes," he reflects. "Are we learning every day? Absolutely. Our teams are growing across all of our facilities no matter where they are located or the role they are in."

In other words, every box I try and put Pure Flavor in, the team breaks out of it. The word innovation, Jamie adds, can be viewed loosely as "what new item are you creating" or "how are you packaging things differently." But, to Pure Flavor, the team thinks innovation can take many different forms. For Pure Flavor, the team sees innovation as something that moves the industry forward, something that can be a game-changer.



These regenerating components have been key in evolving this industry trailblazer's message, connection, and opportunities for growth through operational and product expansion—essential for Pure Flavor's strategic execution.

And **Chief Financial Officer Jeff Moracci**



is one mind with a hand in this progressive plan.

"With a need to accelerate our internal acreage, we put together a multi-year plan in 2016 to lay the groundwork to support our growth. It not only involved building greenhouses to increase our production capabilities, but the greater need of adding varying degrees of technology to automate our operations," Jeff shares with me. "Now, five years later, the plan is expanding to version 2.0 with even more acreage, more technology, and a greater emphasis on research and development."

What I glean from Jeff's incredible expertise is that innovation happens on multiple fronts. It is all pieces of a puzzle working cohesively and critically together to map out a vision.

The product of that vision? A continent-wide, three-country-strong facility footprint with more than 800 employees across all of its operations. The natural evolution of

Pure Flavor's business is to expand in a meaningful way.

"In order to satisfy the explosive demand of our customer base, we have embarked on an aggressive expansion plan in Leamington that will see us add 250 acres over five years. The production will be a combination of both lit and unlit crops that will produce a year-round supply of Pure Flavor product," Jeff reveals. "Our retail and foodservice reach continues to experience significant growth that justifies the capital investments."

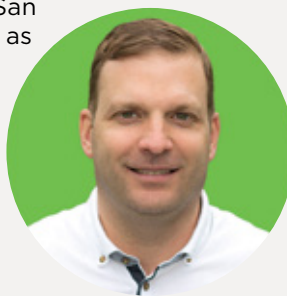
With the addition of Pure Flavor's new distribution center in southern Georgia, it has been able to vastly increase its distribution throughout the Southeast as a regional hub. Coupled with distribution centers (DC) in Leamington, Ontario; Romulus, Michigan; and San Antonio, Texas, Pure Flavor is also reducing food miles traveled by shipping from specific locations.

"Our facility in San Antonio serves as our Southwest

hub for all inbound product coming in from Mexico on a daily basis," **Matt**

**Mastronardi, Executive Vice President**, reveals.

"With strategically located facilities just like the one in San Antonio, we have the ability to ship more product



faster, with next-day delivery for more than two-thirds of the country. The ability to create custom orders for our retail and foodservice partners at all distribution centers is key to delivering a heightened, superior level of service, no matter the season. With a vast variety of product options, we can fulfill all partner orders regardless of the location."

The unprecedented growth for Pure Flavor in Peach County, Georgia, has been a boon to the business and, as Jeff notes, was all about supply, demand, and economics.

"We researched hundreds of sites in the U.S. and decided on South Georgia for a variety of reasons. Already rich in agricultural heritage, the build of a high-tech greenhouse facility in Georgia satisfied the immediate need for more year-round product at the 10,000-foot level. It also opens the door for new retail and foodservice markets, stronger distribution channels, and a regional growing program in the U.S. that we could take through the winter on a mass scale," he says.

Using forward-thinking technology to grow year-round in Georgia, Pure Flavor put a two-fold strategy into play. The first component was to expand growing operations, product assortment, and reach to meet the increased demands from its retail and foodservice partners by removing the seasonality of the business to provide greater opportunities to service those

"In order to satisfy the explosive demand of our customer base, we have embarked on an aggressive expansion plan in Leamington that will see us add 250 acres over five years. [...] Our retail and foodservice reach continues to experience significant growth that justifies the capital investments."

**-JEFF MORACCI,**  
Chief Financial Officer,  
Pure Flavor®





# BRAND STATEMENT

"Pure Flavor® is a family of greenhouse vegetable growers who share a commitment to bringing A Life of Pure Flavor™ to communities everywhere. Our passion for sustainable greenhouse growing, strong support for our retail and foodservice customers, and focus on engaging consumers is built on a foundation drawn from generations of growing expertise."



in need, regardless of location. The second component includes the execution of developing an integrated, USA-grown program that reduces food miles and delivers fresh, flavorful greenhouse-grown tomatoes and cucumbers year-round.

"Fast forward three years and the facility is consistently delivering great, Georgia Grown and branded products. Our new distribution center is working nearly around the clock to ship to customers throughout the Southeast, and we are creating a steady flow of job opportunities in a region that has a high degree of unemployment," Matt says. "To top it off, we are actively involved in the local community with our Adopt-A-School program, as we donate fresh vegetables to primary schools each week."

This multitiered approach to growth has the heart of a family-forward company along with the architecture of a well-engineered citadel. The combination is unique, but then again so is Pure Flavor.

On the engineering front, this robust expansion blueprint is not solely focused on significant capital investments, but forming strategic partnerships to expand Pure Flavor's grower family. The evolution of the team's business model is to have more owned acreage to complement Pure Flavor's expanding network of resources. Georgia has been an essential element in helping this overarching vision become a reality.

"It is increasingly essential to offer year-round supplies, a need which has prompted us to evaluate region-specific needs and how quickly we can get the product to market. New products are helping fuel the need for increased acreage," Jeff notes.

The beauty of what Pure Flavor brings to market lies in its proactive mindset and ability to flex ingenuity in a way that spurs demand instead of reacting to it. The Pure Flavor portfolio is a vehicle for Pure Flavor to layer in a very distinct aesthetic and product marketing strategy for its partners, that is completely different from what most companies traditionally do.

To put it simply, Pure Flavor is once again creating its own recipe for success.

What a wonderful way to grow. And, while anticipating growth is necessary—especially to prime the pipeline for the years ahead—it is also a great advantage to grow because your products and excellence are desired and coveted.

"Consumers are demanding and so they should be. They want better varieties, more flavor, more choices—they want more information on where and how it was grown, how it was sustainably sourced, and most importantly, how can they use it," Matt expresses, adding that as greenhouse vegetable growers, Pure Flavor's goal is to consistently meet consumer expectations, regardless of the season. "As a consumer-facing brand, we have evolved into storytellers to help influence consumer decision making. Our transparency in explaining how products come to life instills confidence in consumer perception of what greenhouse growing is all about. You then layer in supporting content through packaging and a slew of strategic marketing initiatives to create awareness not only for the product, but the brand, and how our product impacts people's lives."







Collaborative thought fuels innovation, and Matt Mastronardi, Jeff Moracci, and Jamie Moracci bring their fresh focus and drive to the progressive Pure Flavor® operations every day

Product versatility has been key in this area, as having one tomato for every snack, sandwich, sauce, and salad is no longer a high bar for consumers. They want options, flavor, and differentiation.

“The key is in research and development. We trial an extensive variety of tomatoes every year—every color, shape, size, and flavor profile you can think of—in our trial facilities in Canada, the U.S., and Mexico, trying to find something that will fit our customers’ needs. We see customers as two-fold, the retail and foodservice partner on the B2B side, to the end consumer on the B2C side. New varieties don’t just appear overnight, it can sometimes take years of trialing to determine the opportunity of new product ABC’s,” Matt says.

He pivots my attention from concept to execution, pointing out the launch of its new Cloud 9® Bite-Sized Fruity Tomatoes in February of this year.

“Our teams spent years working on a variety that had specific characteristics that others did not. Yield, crop health, color, shape, flavor profile, and shelf-life all played a factor in delivering a better tomato experience to our customers,” Matt expresses. “Now, more than ever, we need to empower consumers to get back in the kitchen.”

This need prompted the development of Pure Flavor’s Craft House Collection™. Promoting the tagline “grown for the chef in you,” the goal is to inspire consumers to create fantastic recipes with great products they can easily grill, bake,

stuff, or even sauté. Revealing four offerings with unique flavor profiles, the Craft House Collection is versatile in its variety of applications.

The recently debuted Cloud 9 fulfills another need in the consumer basket today, while also raising the bar on what consumers will want from a tomato in the future. And, if you ask the Pure Flavor team, Cloud 9 will be a charcuterie board hero, hands down.

“This is not your everyday red grape snacking tomato that only gets tossed into a salad as a garnish or popped into your kid’s lunch box because they need a vegetable snack. This little gem is a game-changer when it comes to flavor,” Jamie says, turning the ace over in his mind. “This tomato presents a darker burgundy in color, tends to be smaller than your typical grape tomato, and packs a juicy fruity flavor when you pop it into your mouth.”

If flavor is the box in which the rules conform to taste, the Cloud 9 broke out of that box with its debut. Just ask my personal meals and flavor standards today.

Cloud 9, RedRoyals, Uno Bites™, Craft House Collection, and Pure Flavor’s Snacking Series are just a handful of the ways the company is shifting away from traditional product marketing methods to creating multiple brands and families of products. Targeting specific consumer segments that have specific needs and interests is not just an afterthought for Pure Flavor, it is the lifeblood of its strategy around taste and quality.

Pure Flavor’s research and data from search engines and web traffic highlight that consumer preference is becoming more and more targeted. There is no longer a one-size-fits-all approach to marketing.

“We create strategic content that is designed to generate double-rings in-store and help differentiate. But, more importantly, the strategic content is also there to reduce consumer confusion and better inform what products are best for what uses,” Matt adds.

It is amazing to think that this all started back in 2003, with three guys who simply knew produce and deeply believed they could change the way that consumers experience greenhouse fruits and vegetables.

“The funny thing is, we tell each other every year, there is so much opportunity in the marketplace if we stay the course we set on day one: Grow the business with the right products and people and everything else will fall into place,” Jamie reflects.

This simple sentiment can seem so ungraspable and idealistic at times, especially in the saturated echo chamber of marketing today.

But, if you ask me, Pure Flavor has already moved beyond the box, the herd, the traditional vision.

That echo you hear, it’s actually the consumer.

And what you are hearing is a resounding: Yes. 🍅



# Mastering the Winds



## A Q&A with Gary Clevenger, Managing Member, Freska Produce International

By Jenna Plasterer

**W**ith every stake that we drove into the earth, the wind changed direction. Another stake would pop out of the ground, leaving us running around our tent, mallets in hand, trying to keep our precious shelter from flying away—imagine a scene à la *Love Lucy* or *The Three Stooges*.

All of this unfolded when a friend and I decided to go camping in the Mojave Desert a few months ago. The first night there, we were met with incredible winds that whipped our hair across our faces while blowing a swirl of fine desert dirt and the smell of thick campfire smoke into the air. As the gusts bowed our tent poles and ripped the stakes out of the ground, we were faced with an intense challenge as night approached.

Eventually, the wind became more predictable, and we were able to come up with a solution for our camping troubles, sheltering us from the frigid nighttime air.

Maybe it's just my role as a trade writer, but looking back, I can't help but think of this as a metaphor for anticipating consumer habits—just when you think you have your strategy staked in place, the winds of change blow, knocking everything off-kilter and completely rearranging your approach. However, there are some companies in our industry akin to experienced mountaineers, with a wetted finger in the air as they expertly maneuver the changing gusts to plant their tents firmly on the ground. These are companies like Freska Produce International, who have spent years honing their craft and mastering the metaphorical weather patterns of both shopper and buyer demand.

As the winds of demand have continued to shift toward sustainability, ethics, and healthy eating habits, I got the chance to sit down with Gary Clevenger, Managing Member, as he shared some of Freska's survival tips for conquering these demanding landscapes.





**Q1** **Jenna Plasterer:** Gary, as a consumer myself on top of being a trade writer, I know that the ethics of a company remain top-of-mind for shoppers as they go in search of products. Freska became Fair Trade Certified™ to back its commitment to its principles. How has this affected the company and business?



**Gary Clevenger, Managing Member, Freska Produce**

**International:** Fair Trade is Freska's way of meeting ethical trade standards, along with the advantage of paying a fair wage and other added benefits to workers who pack with us.



The rigorous standards that are required to become Fair Trade Certified give our business credibility by proving to retail buyers that we are serious about ethical standards and that we work together toward the same goals—this not only benefits the workers who produce the product, but also helps give credence to the marketers and retailers who sell the product. That is something we are very proud of at Freska.

Through our Fair Trade Certification, we, along with our retail partners, have returned over \$984,000 back to our Mexican partners since 2018.

**Q2** **JP:** Sustainability and social responsibility are also on consumers' radars nowadays. How does this certification benefit Freska in terms of those aspects?

**GC:** We are always looking for ways to be better stewards of social, economic, and environmental protections for ourselves and the growers and packers we work with. Empowering the communities is part of the Fair Trade vision, and allowing them to make the decisions that affect their communities is all part of social and economic responsibility.

**Q3** **JP:** Gaining Fair Trade Certification seems to play a key role in Freska's commitment to the future. Which of your operations are currently certified, and how do you see it expanding as you look ahead?

**GC:** Right now, we have all our partners in Mexico Fair Trade Certified, and we are looking to expand this outside of Mexico soon, but it takes cooperation from all levels, from farmer to retailer, to make this happen effectively.

**Q4** **JP:** In the same vein of the company's ethos, Freska has added dried mangos to its portfolio as a way to promote sustainability—another key aspect that shoppers go in search of more often than not these days. What was the inspiration behind this addition?

**GC:** We have markets for what we call number 1 fruit and number 2 fruit quality, but the number 3 fruit was being tossed out for cattle feed. We wanted to be able to say we use 100 percent of our growers' fruit and give them that value back for their mangos.

A few years back, we began experimenting with dried mangos due to the category's rapid growth and the fact that it directly lined up with our vertical expansion goals. Since then, we have done a lot of tests and trials over the years and have a nice product to offer: All natural, organic, great-tasting dried mangos.

Now, we are producing upwards of seven million pounds of product and still growing.

But the part we are most proud of is that we use 100 percent of our growers' product, practically eliminating all waste—something that very few of our competitors can claim.

**Q5** **JP:** Since introducing this creative new product, Gary, how have you seen consumer demand evolve?

**GC:** Demand keeps growing, and we are only scratching the surface of our potential in this category. Our dried mangos have also been driving the demand for our fresh mangos as well—when people try dried mangos, they want to try fresh mangos.

We are working hard to meet all of our orders with demand being so high. We only use certain varieties of mangos that create the flavor profile we are looking for in the finished product.

Overall, we see this category as one that will drive growth for Freska while keeping with our "Think Mangos, Think Freska" motto.



**Q6** JP: I know that the search for healthy, delicious snacks is on the majority of shoppers' radars as they hit the grocery store. How do dried mangos play into this demand?

**GC:** Mangos pack over a dozen polyphenols, an antioxidant that shields cells and tissue from damage and disease. Mangos also boost the immune system with vitamin A, which can improve skin and hair health.

One cup of mangos provides 75 percent of daily vitamin C. Studies on people with chronic constipation, funded partly by the National Mango Board\*, found vitamin C to be more helpful than fiber, and what better way to take your vitamins than with a delicious mango?

Additionally, while it seems unlikely that such a sweet food like mangos would improve blood sugar, a study by Oklahoma State University\*\* found it to be true.

To top it off, our dried mangos are 100 percent natural, USDA Organic certified, non-GMO, and kosher. The ingredients on the package say Organic Dried Mangos, and that is exactly what consumers will get.

It's hard to deny the health benefits, and these dried mangos are even harder to put down.

**Q7** JP: I noticed that while you were discussing Freska's dried mangos, you touched on organics quite a bit, Gary. As consumers have continued to embrace the category, how have you seen the call for organic products shift?

**GC:** Organic mangos have been a driving force in our sales growth, and we have seen exponential growth over the last five years across the category.

Most people see organic as better for one's health, and they like the fact that the products are free of conventional pesticides and fertilizers. Thus, we have seen tremendous growth as more people pay

**"But the part we are most proud of is that we use 100 percent of our growers' product, practically eliminating all waste—something that very few of our competitors can claim."**

*Gary Clevenger,*


Managing Member, Freska Produce International

attention to organic, leaving retailers wanting to offer organic products to customers more and more within the last few years.

**Q8** JP: Obviously, Freska likes to stay ahead of the curve on shopper trends. How have you evolved your strategy to match the growing push for organic products?

**GC:** Organic fruits and vegetable sales in 2020 alone were over \$8.5 billion, up more than 14 percent from the year before\*\*\*. Already representing 12 percent of fresh produce sales, we see this trend continuing with the industry and our growers, so we are urging them to become organically certified as this demand continues to increase.

Consumers are increasingly selecting organically produced food due to health, environmental, and animal welfare reasons. Even though price premiums remain higher for organic than conventional, they are willing to pay the price premium for the benefits and the way the category fits with their lifestyle.

Now, as you continue your journey across the oftentimes challenging territory of consumer habits, take this field guide along to make navigation a little bit easier. And always remember to pay close attention to the change of the winds. That is the key to mastering the landscape. 



\*<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/mnfr.201701034>

\*\*<https://news.okstate.edu/articles/communications/2011/nutritional-sciences-researcher-finds-mangos-beneficial.html>

\*\*\*(<https://www.organicproducenetwork.com/article/1253/organic-produce-sales-up-14-percent-in-2020-topping-85-billion>)



# WTF DO I DO WITH Lemonade™ Apples ?

{ what the fork }



## LEMONADE™ APPLE PIE HUMMUS DIP

### INGREDIENTS

**2** Lemonade™ Apples, peeled, cored, and diced  
**1 tbsp** unsalted butter  
**1 tsp** cinnamon  
**¼ tsp** ground ginger  
**¼ tsp** ground nutmeg  
**3 tbsp** brown sugar  
**1** lemon, juiced  
**1 can (15 oz)** chickpeas, rinsed and drained  
**¼ cup** cashew nut butter  
*Optional: walnut or other nut-based oil, for drizzling*  
*For serving: baked vegetable chips, sweet potato tortilla chips, or additional slices of Lemonade Apples*

**Prep Time:** 15 min

**Cook Time:** 10 min

**Servings:** 4–6

### DIRECTIONS

- 1 In a frying pan set over medium-high heat, combine diced apples, butter, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, brown sugar, and lemon juice. Sauté for about 10 minutes or until the apples are slightly soft and have a golden-brown color. Set aside ¼ cup of the sautéed apples.
- 2 Using a food processor, blend the remaining portion of sautéed apples with the chickpeas and cashew butter at a high speed until a creamy consistency is reached.
- 3 Pour into a bowl to serve and drizzle a nut-based oil, such as walnut or pistachio oil, over the hummus. Top with the reserved ¼ cup of apples from earlier. Best served warm. Enjoy!

To learn more about Lemonade Apples, visit [www.lemonadeapple.com](http://www.lemonadeapple.com)

**Giumarra**  
nature's partner

**lemonade™**  
apples



# MANGO

## SNAPSHOT

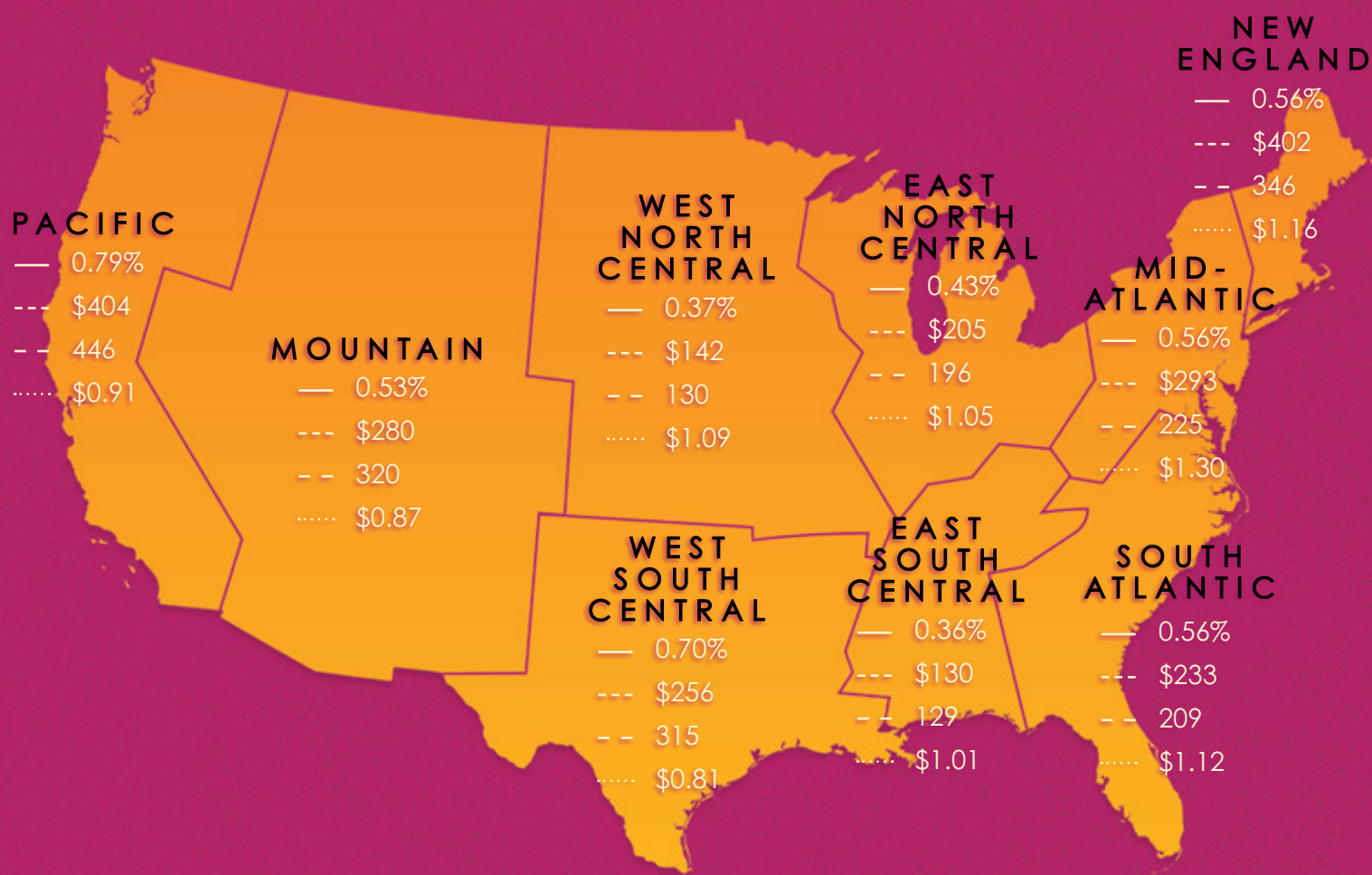
BY JENNA PLASTERER

With vibrant yellow, orange, and red flesh to attract shoppers; uniquely flavored varieties to please all palates; and the versatility to elevate any eating experience, mangos are making their mark on fresh produce. Continuing to grow its tropical market share, the bright-tasting fruit offers plenty of creative merchandising options to make the produce section the life of the party. To get this shindig underway, read on as the National Mango Board provides key insights to keep the buy-side in the know this mango season...





# PERFORMANCE BY REGION



## LEGEND

- DOLLARS CONTRIBUTED
- DOLLAR VELOCITY
- - VOLUME VELOCITY
- ..... AVERAGE RETAIL PRICE

## TOTAL U.S.

- 0.57%
- \$262
- 261 UNITS
- \$1.01



# MANGO STATS

**\$407M\***

WHOLE MANGO RETAIL  
DOLLARS 2020, UP 18%

**404M UNITS\***

WHOLE MANGO RETAIL  
VOLUME 2020, UP 12%

**\$95.6M\***

FRESH-CUT MANGO RETAIL  
DOLLARS 2020, UP 8%

**9.35M UNITS\***

ORGANIC MANGO RETAIL  
VOLUME 2020, UP 12%

**132M (4.0kg) BOXES\*\***

TOTAL MANGO VOLUME IMPORTED IN 2020

**40%\*\*\***

MANGO MENU PENETRATION

**3.63LBS PER PERSON\*\***

MANGO PER CAPITA AVAILABILITY IN 2020, UP 12%

**\$661M\*\***

TOTAL MANGO VALUE  
IMPORTED INTO THE U.S. IN 2020

SOURCES:

\* NIELSEN ANSWERS ON DEMAND® (52 WEEKS ENDING  
12/16/20) TOTAL U.S. X AOC

\*\* NATIONAL MANGO BOARD, USDA\_AMS, USDA\_FAS

\*\*\* DATASSENTIAL







**ZINGY GINGER  
MANGO SMOOTHIE**



**MANGO  
SPRING ROLLS**



SCAN THE QR CODES TO  
DISCOVER DELICIOUS RECIPES





Duda Farm Fresh Foods

# Trust:

## THE CURRENCY OF TODAY

BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ

**T**o generate gives rise to something new, seeing a piece of yourself take shape in the world around you.

A generation is a sweeping body of people building on the world left to them for those who will follow.



**Sammy Duda,**

PRESIDENT,  
DUDA FARM  
FRESH FOODS

A generation is also the span of time between parent and child, a single step in a lineage of shared DNA from ancestor to descendant.

“The generational component, in our case, could mean our family name. But it could mean our intellectual property (IP)—in what we’ve done with celery since we were founded almost 100 years ago,” Sammy Duda points out.





"We actually named our celery varieties Duda Generations because it fits who we are. When we say we are a generational company, we mean the family and the varieties."

**Sammy Duda,**

PRESIDENT, DUDA FARM FRESH FOODS

You would think, or at least I did, that growing up in and around Duda Farm Fresh Foods would mean leading it was something Sammy always dreamed of. But, the now-President was invariably steeped in ag, so the thought never really occurred to him.

"Now that you say it, yes, I've always wanted to lead the company. But I never actually thought of it that way," Sammy answers. "A part of that is due to DNA, I think. That is what ties together our continued success; that there's always been a desire to do a little bit better than what we're doing. My great-grandfather came from Eastern Europe with absolutely nothing and managed to own something. That's the American Dream. But he didn't stop. And then the next generation of Owners, his sons, with only an eighth-grade education, took up where he left off. It's fair to think, at some point in every leader's life, enough was enough. But each one kept going further, and now we have far exceeded anything any single person could have ever expected in life."

The duality of generation, as a noun and verb, defines and is defined by Duda Farm Fresh Foods, which considers its legacy to be more than family ownership—it is in the very genetics of its proprietary varieties.

"We actually named our celery varieties Duda Generations because it fits who we

are. When we say we are a generational company, we mean the family and the varieties," Sammy explains. "When you look at Dandy® celery, they are all proprietary varieties that are the result of generations of intellectual property."

Six generations, a portfolio of patented varieties, and a reputation for innovation that spans the globe from California to Australia are the links in a chain that has continued to grow as it is passed down from the time the company began. Now, as Dan Duda, former Chief Executive Officer, retired earlier this year, Sammy has taken up the next link to that legacy.

"We've been blessed, really. Most families don't make it this far, and not only are we here, we are in as good of shape as we've ever been as a company. That speaks to not just my leadership—I'll take a little credit—but to my family and our company's family," Sammy notes. "It's not been easy, but having very able professionals has really been the key for us to be successful as long as we have. And so we're happy, but we've got to keep chopping wood going forward to make sure we stay that way."

Because it is not enough to succeed, Sammy reminds me, or even just to know your discipline.

"You have to have a curiosity about how the industry fits together, otherwise you miss opportunities or fail to understand



how you can be your best,” Sammy shares, adding that it isn’t getting any easier to accomplish this. “I think those challenges are getting greater as we move into more efforts in sustainability, transparency, and different ways to shop. You have to have the knowledge, or at least a curiosity, for how all those things fit together.”

Even as we speak to the DNA that has constructed a culture like Duda, building through several new worlds of consumption, Sammy doesn’t think you have to be born with dirt under your nails to be what our industry needs.

“I think you can acquire industry talent, and a lot of skills or talents can be strengthened as you go,” he sums up. “If it makes sense to you, then I think you have what the business takes. If it doesn’t make sense to you, then this is probably not your career path.”

And keep TUMS® in your desk—or whiskey, depending on the time of day—Sammy and I laugh, discussing the ways to keep balance in a job that calls for more than a 9-to-5 mentality.

“That curiosity about the business is crucial to being a reliable, authentic produce person, so I think that’s a key element to being successful—really successful—in this business. Being curious about the whole and how it all

fits together, and indulging that curiosity, is how we have gotten this far and how we will continue to go further,” Sammy shares.

While the never-enough attitude that has driven Duda’s success remains unrelenting and unchanged, Sammy points out that nearly nothing else has stayed so consistent.

“The company I am leading today is not my great-grandfather’s company, because the world and the needs of our customers are not the needs and the world he served. And yet, we’ve been able to hold onto the authenticity and genuineness we have always had. Knowing and understanding who we are has allowed us to hold onto those values while still being able to adapt and change. We have to give people a reason to believe in us—that’s our challenge, but I think it’s something that we are up for. At least, up to now, we have provided enough authenticity and innovation to balance the two,” he laughs.

The rearview mirror, as Sammy puts it, holds nothing for him and his team. So then, what does the road ahead look like?

“Well, in the short-term, COVID-19 has obviously upset the status quo,” he

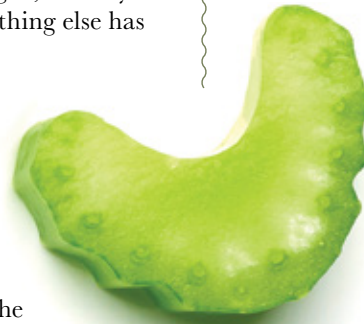
points out, before chuckling and adding, “if there ever was one. I don’t think it’s going to go back to the way it was even if we wanted it to, such as having everybody at the office all the time. So, strategically, I think we have to continue to be innovative. We’ve certainly put a

lot more emphasis on new product development and leveraging our IP with varieties and so forth. I think, also, leveraging our regionality. We’re a very good West Coast shipper with year-round supplies and the consistency and quality of California, but we also have regional options in

Florida, Georgia, and Michigan, which is a unique offering.”

And Sammy’s own experience, in addition to growing up in the business, is as unique as Duda’s geographical footprint. He knows and can lead such a diverse landscape because he has, at one time or another, lived in just about every one of Duda’s regions.

“It’s funny, I grew up in Belle Glade, Florida, then I moved to McAllen, Texas, to Yuma, Arizona, then from there to Salinas, California. I think those experiences, spending time in Georgia, in Michigan, and even New Mexico, have informed me in ways I am not even



The logo for Duda farm fresh foods. It features the word "Duda" in a large, white, serif font, with "farm fresh foods" in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it. The logo is set against a dark background.





"The company I am leading today is not my great-grandfather's company, because the world and the needs of our customers are not the needs and the world he served."



aware of," he reflects. "You never know when you're going through experiences how they will accumulate and give you an understanding of the produce industry. But, because of it, I think I have a pretty clear-eyed view of what the business is and what it isn't."

That perspective has also gleaned for Sammy a sharper view of his next steps than many I have had the opportunity to ask about the future.

"Marrying consistency with our regionality to give people both options, in addition to the IP and the new product development, is crucial to our success. I'd say those are probably my top priorities in regard to going forward over the next two to four years," Sammy says.

Even as he gives me a timetable, he points out that upheaval, while immeasurable, can always be counted upon. But that in and of itself is the nature of the game.

In fact, against reason, Duda seems to have this down to—quite literally—a science. As we discuss the juggling act

between sharing a deeply rooted story with adaptability and the ever-sought-after innovative spirit, we come back to Duda Generations, continuously serving up something new while attached to a name that has worked for nearly a century to build trust.

Trust, Sammy and I agree, is the currency of today. Perhaps of every day.

"It's an interesting dynamic. In today's society, we're all skeptics, right? Even if a company is honest, how can anyone believe in the message when all it takes is this Tweet or that post to create doubt?" Sammy shares. It's a question

that leads us right into the fight he is taking up as he leads this latest chapter for Duda. "To me, it's a fight to give everyone, our customers and theirs, something they can believe in."

That, he tells me, is the tradition of Duda. No matter what changes inside or out, this is a company that will always be true to what it is.

A value that can resonate with anyone, in any generation. 







# FIRE UP YOUR TASTEBUDS!

AMERICA'S FAVORITE MUSHROOM

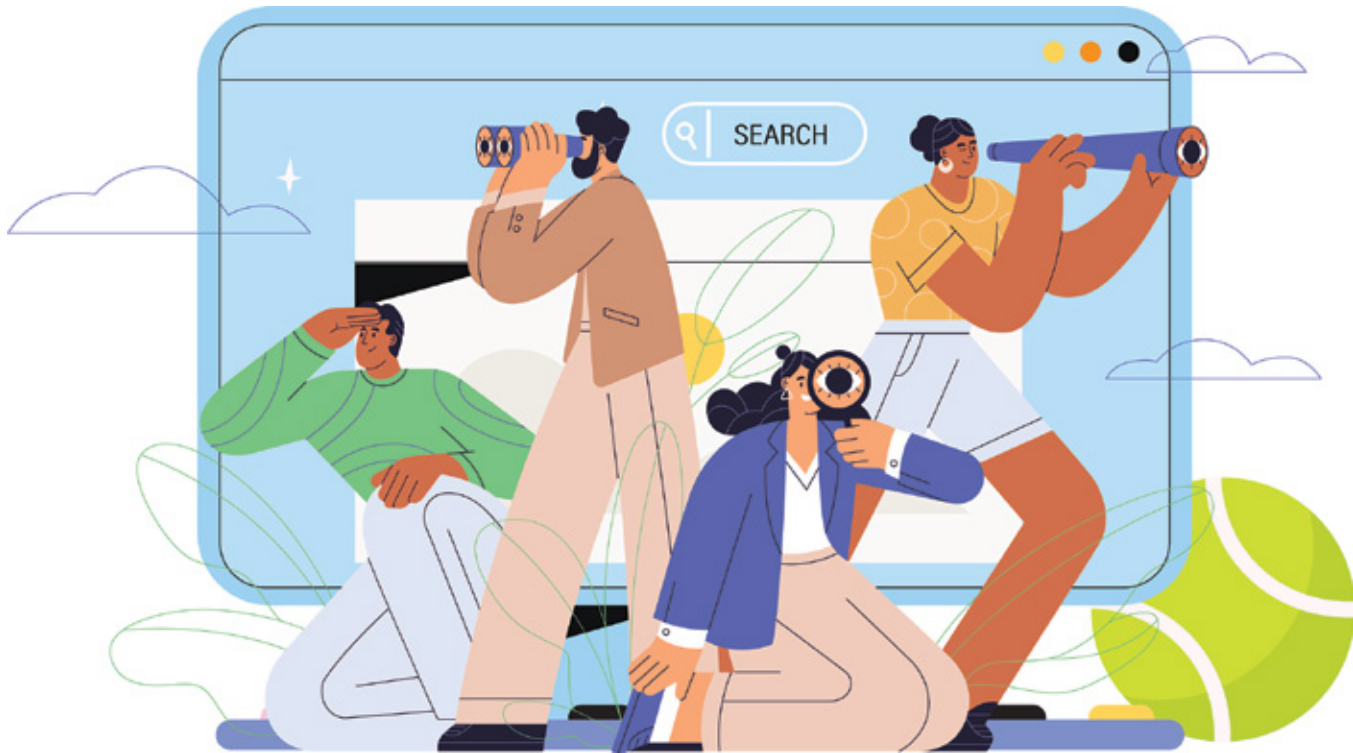
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# Choosing a Search Firm

By *The Snack* Editorial Contributor Julie Marcik, Senior Director, JOE Produce Search<sup>SM</sup>

**T**he industry is changing, and many of us are looking ahead and thinking about who we need to add to our teams to facilitate positive change within our respective companies. This was made clear when our team recently completed a call with a seasoned produce industry veteran who stressed the importance of surrounding themselves with great people.

This story is about selecting the right search partner, and I'll get to that below. But, first, I think it's important to ask, "Why even use a recruiter?"

One of the aspects of providing search services I enjoy is speaking with produce companies, like yours, about your hiring and growth strategies. A common theme in these conversations is how challenging it can be to find and attract exceptional candidates in a timely manner, who fit your team, within the industry and outside of it. Despite unemployment rates rising over the past year in various sectors, experienced produce industry professionals remain in short supply. Those who fit your company culture are an even smaller subset.

For some companies, these are the times when they consider utilizing the services of an executive search firm. However, there is much to consider and research.

## Here are some reasons why your company should consider a search firm:

### Matchmaking

Much like choosing tailored versus off-the-rack, a good search firm will identify and attract candidates to fit your company and the role. In many cases, these are "passive candidates" who are not actively in the market, yet are interested in quietly exploring the next step in their careers.

### Connections

Professional search firms have a wide network. We are talking to people all day, every day, and conducting several interviews each week. We are involved in the industries in which we work, staying up to date on trends and people.

### Targeted Recruiting

If you want to recruit top talent from another company, perhaps a friendly competitor, without "upsetting the apple cart," the confidentiality with which a professional search firm operates helps.

### Hiring Experts

Beyond "source, attract, engage, introduce," a well-trained executive search consultant will guide you through the rigorous process of hiring the best person for your job, company, and culture.



## Experience

Search consultants are professionals that have time and experience under their belts, including evaluating many successes and mistakes in the hiring process. Because of this, they can proactively address challenges both before and after they occur. They usually have a proven process that is constantly being refined to provide clients with exactly what they need.

## Time and Resource Savings

Hiring great people takes time—in fact, it is a full-time job. Do not be fooled by a firm that sells speed over quality. Your search firm should be working for you with urgency and efficiency, limiting the resources you need to tap into within your organization.

## Choosing a Search Firm:

**A checklist and guide for decision-makers who are considering engaging a search firm.**

- Professional specialty, such as fresh produce
- Level of positions the firm typically manages (mid-level, senior-level, C-level)
- Average length of time to present the final candidates
- “Off-limits” restrictions: a reputable firm will never recruit away the candidate they placed with a client organization and will not approach other individuals within that organization for at least one year after placing the last executive

### Important factors to consider:

- Listen carefully. What is their approach and process? Do they understand your business, culture, and needs? Do their priorities align with yours?
- Who does the work? Are experienced search consultants involved throughout the search, or is the work done by junior associates?
- How many assignments is every search consultant currently managing?
- Is the research done in-house or outsourced?
- What is the firm’s vetting and reference-checking process?

Let’s talk about the “elephant in the room”—paying a recruiter to help you fill a job is not cheap. And we’ll certainly be the first to tell you that not all roles deserve that level of investment and/or resource allocation. But, some do! The ROI needs to be evident.

Like most investments, you need to weigh the level of investment versus, in this case, the expense of not filling the role, or worse, filling it with the wrong person. Both may be costly. And if either expense exceeds the price of hiring a search firm, then perhaps you’re ready to take the next step.


Before you go too far down the path, remember: A good firm will take the time to get to know your business, understand your culture, and evaluate your needs to ensure that it makes sense for you to hire them. If they aren’t asking questions, beware. If they are selling more than listening, this could also be a sign.

You should be ready to invest time in the process to ensure a successful search and hire. There are easily definable details to look for as you consider which firm to engage, as listed above. Besides what’s noted on the checklist, I recommend that, first and foremost, you trust your instincts.

Ask yourself: Is this someone I can trust? Am I willing to share confidential information with them? Are they someone I’m comfortable working closely with? Do I feel comfortable having them represent myself and my company in the market?

If the answer is “no” to any of these questions, I would recommend reevaluating the firm.

As recruiters, we talk and think about “fit” all the time. With that said, the “first fit” needs to be between the employer and the search firm.

Call us anytime to discuss your needs and objectives, and how we might fit. 



Julie leads the JOE Produce Search team, leveraging more than 20 years of experience in executive search.

Produce is not a job, it’s a lifestyle. Once you “check the boxes” on skills and experience, the real job becomes matching the people with the culture of the business and leadership. This takes time, expertise, and a robust process Julie and the JOE Produce Search team know well.

JOE Produce Search is composed of experienced search consultants and produce professionals. Placements range from middle management to C-level positions throughout North America, covering a wide range of produce and produce-related businesses.

**JOE** Produce Search



**Julie Marcik,**  
Senior Director,  
JOE Produce Search<sup>SM</sup>



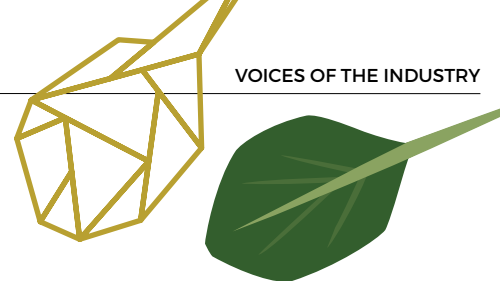
# A NEW AGE DAWNS

A **Q&A** with Tim York,  
Chief Executive Officer, California  
Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement

**By Melissa De Leon Chavez**







“For me, living in California’s Salinas Valley, there’s nothing that hits home more than challenges in lettuce and leafy greens.”

- Tim York, Chief Executive Officer, California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement



The first annual California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (LGMA) Golden Checkmark Award was presented to Arnold Schwarzenegger, former Governor of California, in 2007. The second went to former Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, A.G. Kawamura.

The third went to Tim York.

The announcement of the association’s new Chief Executive Officer, who retired from a long and successful career with Markon Cooperative in June 2020, initially seemed a surprise. But, as Tim and I explore the plot twist to his produce story and his passion for leafy greens, his community, and for those they serve, it becomes less a surprise and more a fated unfolding of events.

This “twist” is, in fact, a sequence that began with that first Checkmark and a dream to see leafy greens’ volatile experiences find balance and confidence in a new era.



**Q1** **Melissa De Leon Chavez:** Tim, the last time you sat down with *The Snack Magazine*, you were retiring! And, if I remember correctly, you were

very specific that, while it was an end, it was also a beginning...?

**Tim York:** Yes. I was retiring from Markon.

My intention was to continue to work in ag; I just didn’t know what opportunities would open up and what I really felt called to. When I left Markon, I didn’t have any direction, but that was okay. My family and I went to our Connecticut beach house for the summer, I spent time with my kids, then came back to the West Coast in mid-September and started looking around in earnest. At that point, I learned that Scott Horsfall was going to be retiring from LGMA. That was one role that held immediate interest to me and was in line with so much of the work that I’ve done over the last 20-plus years.

**Q2** **MDC:** What was it about the role with LGMA that really called to you? How would you compare the jump from your previous roles and experiences to this new path?

**TY:** At Markon, we’d become very good at handling recalls as well as crisis communications and responses. And, unfortunately, there aren’t many categories that have been more frequent or more impactful in that space than lettuce and leafy greens. So, this is an area that was calling for some

focus. I think my predecessor, Scott, did a great job of bringing the organization to this point over the last 13 years. But, I also believe—and having worked with Scott, I think he would agree—the past few years have been especially challenging.

For me, living in California’s Salinas Valley, there’s nothing that hits home more than challenges in lettuce and leafy greens. The growers, shippers, and processors out of Salinas grow and ship 70 percent of the lettuce and leafy greens that are consumed in the United States alone. That’s the foundation of this valley. So, that was why it was calling to me.

**Q3** **MDC:** It is great, especially with the challenges you mentioned, that Scott stayed on to help ensure a smooth transition. Am I correct in assuming it was still quite a jump after Markon?

**TY:** I will say it’s different coming from 35 years of the buy-side to an organization that answers to the state. Coming from that side of the business and taking off my buyer hat to put on my producer/grower hat was a shift. And, obviously, I was very comfortable with the routine at Markon, who I was working with, and what the days held. I do feel that I was culturally attuned to



Not only do we have to work collaboratively with our member handlers, but we have to do so with [U.S. government agencies], and more. Whether we agree or disagree, we still need to find direction and come to solutions together.

growers. Having grown up in the Salinas Valley, the shift in that way of moving from the buy-side to the production side came more naturally.

But, the LGMA is an instrumentality of the state of California. We're one of 60-plus associations that work under California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Secretary Karen Ross, interacting with multiple levels of folks within that organization. The USDA is training our auditors. It's all a little more complicated than just a private sector where, when I needed to make a decision, I'd pick up a phone and it was done. This is all a brand-new rhythm and culture. I'm settled in now, but it's been more difficult than I anticipated.

**Q4** **MDC:** Now that you have settled in, where do you see room for growth with LGMA? How can partners in the industry help realize these goals?

**TY:** Every one of us in the business knows the role that fresh fruits and vegetables play in a healthy diet and lifestyle, but people have to have confidence in the foods that we're growing and putting on their plates. We have a responsibility to get this right.

To do so, this is a job that requires collaboration. Not only do we have to work collaboratively with our member handlers, but we have to do so with the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), CDFA, United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and more. Whether we agree or disagree, we still need to find direction and come to solutions together.

Finally, another piece of collaboration needed is addressing the proliferation of differing buy-side standards. We need one standard a grower can farm to. That's what we endeavored to do when the LGMA was formed in 2007, and I think we've wandered away from that a little bit.

We have to work with buyers, especially those in the community that are very influential around food safety, to understand their requirements. We need to see if we can come to some common

solutions together using science and research that we have to base those decisions upon or, at least, guide those decisions. We don't always have perfect science informing decisions we need to make, but we can make educated decisions around what it is that we're doing, and do so collectively.


**Q5** **MDC:** That definitely makes sense, Tim. So, as you apply your knowledge to help facilitate that collaboration, do you have any advice for those in the industry who might think that they're in the home stretch of their career and continuing?

**TY:** I feel like I've learned a lot over the last 43 years of my produce career that I can contribute to the industry. My background equipped me to take this on. We will be challenged, but we'll also—I think—be rewarded. I had a wonderful summer on the beach, but, at the end of the day, I was not ready to retire. There's just too much energy around this business—things to be done and places that I felt I could contribute. So, I think it came down to: Where can I use what I have learned, the relationships and skills I've cultivated, in a way that's going to be meaningful for societal good?

In his book *Halftime*, Bob Buford writes, "You make that shift from working toward success to significance." That's what I feel I can do at LGMA—build on the success of my last 40 years in the business and do something significant for the industry and for consumers.

In our discussion, Tim and I speak about how part of adapting to change is growing into a role which you may not yet be perfectly suited for, but is perfect for you. As this leader settles into his latest fit, I see not just a new Chief, but a new champion.

Yet, as he puts it, this is all just a continuation of a story that started with that first Checkmark.

This is not a new venture, but a homecoming. 



# A Closer Look at Misionero Garden Life Salad Kits


By Chandler James

**A**h, the salad kit category—where stars align in the produce aisle to blend convenience with fresh flavor, all in one wildly attractive bag. And now, seemingly out of thin air, Misionero has brought a distinctive edge to the sector: plant-based meat.

The Garden Life lineup is sure to stop shoppers in their tracks with not only one, but three flavors—Hail Kale Caesar, Rancho Santa Fe, and Mindful Mediterranean—to offer every consumer a variety they can be excited about.

Misionero partnered with key suppliers in the plant-based category to revolutionize the salad kit sector. I, for one, have got my eye on the Rancho Santa Fe kit, which is built with convenience and satisfaction at the forefront. The kit was designed for anyone from meat lovers to vegans, but especially for consumers leaning toward a flexitarian lifestyle.

Meatless offerings are no longer just a trend, as data shows that consumers are more eager and willing to try them. Placing these Garden Life kits next to the traditional packaged salad section will gain attention from those who are less likely to venture toward your plant-based set.

Nothing spells out a boost in sales quite like product differentiation. With these new offerings on your shelf, the possibilities are endless. 

# UP CLOSE



garden  
life



MISIONERO®



# Libations

FOR ALL OCCASIONS:

## THE GETAWAY

—  —  
By Anne Allen

**D**isclaimer: I have never been to Greece. However, I am drinking blueberry ginger sangria while grilling souvlaki, whipping up tzatziki, and listening to ABBA. I've essentially made my backyard into a *Mamma Mia* set.

We can't travel. Yet. But that doesn't mean we should confine ourselves mentally, and that's precisely what the blueberry ginger sangria—also known as *The Getaway*—is here for.

A delicious blend of gingery fizz, lemon zest, and blueberry sweetness, this drink will whisk you and your shoppers away to a Mediterranean island. (Don't have too many, otherwise, the trip may become a reality.)

May is the ideal backdrop for this sangria, as it blends perfectly with my California weather: warm, blue-filled skies and soft evenings that banish the memory of too-crisp nights.

As the domestic blueberry season hits its stride, this drink is a perfect way to showcase the gorgeous berries hitting retail shelves. Cross-merchandising opportunities are endless in multiple departments as well, as a retail display for sangria wouldn't look out of place next to grilling ads or the drinks department. I, for one, wouldn't mind seeing a blue-and-white themed set-up that could pass as a *Mamma Mia* backdrop.

Now, I must ask the industry: Are you joining me in Greece? I've got enough sangria to go around. Opal! 🍷

### INGREDIENTS

**1 bottle** of white wine  
**1 lemon**, cut into wedges  
**1 cup** fresh blueberries  
**1 oz** brandy, *optional*  
**2 cups** ginger ale

**Prep Time:** 5 min  
**Chill Time:** 1 hr  
**Servings:** 6-8

### DIRECTIONS

1. Combine all ingredients in a large pitcher and stash in the fridge for at least 1 hour (or until chilled).
2. Serve over ice. That's it!

*Optional: If you like an extra kick as I do, double the brandy for takeoff!*









# AN AVO LUTION

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

Three units. Two sides. One brand to bridge them all together over the river that is time—ever moving, always changing, and infinite in its possibilities.

“One of the big initiatives for me is creating a company of one unified vision, breaking down the siloed approaches and bringing those business units closer together,” Jim Gibson tells me. “Historically, our three points of operation functioned in something of a silo as the Calavo name continued to acquire and expand. I’m kind of looking to create the next evolution for our legacy company.”

“Kind of” is a modest overview of the blending of businesses Jim has taken on since inheriting the role of Chief Executive Officer for Calavo Growers from longtime leader Lee Cole, who retired in early 2020.

Yet, as grand a feat as that might seem to scale, the way Jim tells it, the shift is a very natural one. As though each had always been making its way toward the other.

“Looking back on the culture Calavo has established, this is a noble brand that has continued to innovate and stay ahead of the curve. The entire operation began by growing avocados in 1924, a category that is only continuing to expand both in where it’s grown and how it’s used,” Jim points out. “This is a brand

that was instrumental in California’s agricultural standards, because back then, growers had no quality grade and no distribution channels. Our Founders were a group of growers who banded together and, essentially, launched an entire industry that continues to know limitless potential.”

Floating a timeline that spans nearly a century, the company has continued to evolve through the decades with diversification and innovation that now includes guacamole, tomatoes, salsa, Hawaiian papayas, and freshly prepared foods. Marketed under a wide range of brand names spanning a network with global touchpoints all prior to the latest millennium, Calavo was among the first to know such versatility in range and reach.

“Calavo has carved out a unique space for itself, and I think the business recognized a similar innovative spirit in Renaissance Food Group (RFG) when making the acquisition in 2011. Now, the next phase is to ensure that everyone we work with on the buy-side understands the scope of our business, all we are capable of across the vast Calavo enterprise, and how we





Jim Gibson, Chief Executive Officer, Calavo Growers





“Our Founders were a group of growers who banded together and, essentially, launched an entire industry that continues to know  
**LIMITLESS POTENTIAL.**”

-Jim Gibson, Chief Executive Officer,  
Calavo Growers

| Calavo Growers is undergoing a transformative approach to further exercise the resources of its multidimensional operation

continue to be a solutions provider for our retail and foodservice partners. I think that’s the evolution for us,” Jim details.

For example, the Calavo reach and breadth might be well-known, whereas RFG has been methodically building and positioning its nationwide presence since it was founded by Jim and his two partners in 2003.

“All of our facilities are strategically placed around the country to better serve our customers, with the intention of taking an order and having it reach the end-user at its optimum freshness,” Jim explains. “We translate this thought process to all aspects of our current business and begin to bridge our business model with trends in the marketplace, what our customers are looking for, and how we can use our unique positioning as a one-stop solution to respond to their needs.”

Each one of the RFG plants, Jim shares, are a three-plants-in-one offering: Each providing a fresh-cut fruit room, a fresh-cut vegetable operation, and a deli or fresh food area.

“Our capabilities are very broad and allow us to react to any customer need. At the same time, retail and foodservice buyers are listening to their consumers and communicating how we can provide solutions, and we’re proud to have the platform execute,” Jim says. “Undoubtedly, the RFG product set will continue to

evolve, and we have the systems in place to flex and grow with our customers. We can now brand in a way that tells the holistic story of Calavo as we haven’t done before.”

That story is two sides reaching toward each other, reflecting mirrored visions of the future of fresh produce as they meet over current demands and possible innovations. The Calavo side holds deep-set roots in the ever-expanding avocado category, while RFG has been at the forefront of value-added offerings.

“Setting up Calavo into three succinct business units is by design,” Jim lays out, and the story begins to flow. “We have the ‘Fresh’ side that is more commodity-oriented, which is dominated mainly by avocados. Next is the ‘Foods’ segment, which manufactures guacamole and dips in Mexico. Those items run through a state-of-the-art high-pressure process (HPP) for a safe product with extended shelf-life. Finally, the Renaissance Food Group side is the fresh value-added and prepared foods operation, encompassing seven of the 17 total facilities in the United States. The intention is that if we are selling an item into





Beginning in avocados, Calavo Growers has since expanded into several categories, regions, and pack methods to become a solutions provider to its buy-side partners

Now, the next phase is to ensure that everyone we work with on the buy-side understands the scope of our business, all we are capable of across  
**THE VAST CALAVO ENTERPRISE...**

retail or foodservice, we can begin to connect the dots for Calavo customers as a single entity through branding and storytelling.”

This is not to say, by any means, that Calavo is not known or recognized—just look back on the ground-breaking legacy we began with. Instead, it is the awareness that there is much more beneath the surface of an already existing brand—like falling back in love with an old favorite song or film whose lines resonate differently in a new phase of life. Likewise, retailers may know the name when they see it, but will soon do so in a whole new light.

“We’ve always prided ourselves on being a solution and, as such, the nature of our business is unique and dynamic. For example, we deliver upwards of 100 SKUs per day to some of our customers, because, when we’re delivering, we hit a variety of locations inside the store,” Jim sums up, showing how one company manages to traverse not just the spectrum of innovation, but also of the produce and deli departments.

It comes back, he says, to that constant desire to have the capability and capacity to be a great solutions provider.

As to how Calavo continues to manage this, the team dives into those rushing possibilities with much more than a paddle.





Chief Executive Officer Jim Gibson envisions an even more unified Calavo Growers moving forward as the brand seeks to further share its story

The intention is that if we are selling an item into retail or foodservice, we can begin to connect the dots for Calavo customers as a single entity through branding and **STORYTELLING.**

“Throughout the years, we’ve worked to hone our business with the goal of reaching the point we’re at today: Ensuring we are in the marketplace to offer value-added distribution centers positioned around the country to handle ripening and bagging-type operations for our customers to service them more efficiently, innovating out of our test kitchens to craft on-trend products for our customers, and optimizing synergies across all business units to streamline operations and strengthen our supply chain,” Jim shares. “We strive to be first to market with all our innovation and premium offerings, and we’re excited for this next chapter in Calavo’s storied history.”

It is the ability to adapt to these constantly moving parts, Jim tells me, to get to the right place and to find a solution, that keeps us coming back.

“Our industry is always shifting and changing,” he points out. “Even from season to season, you can’t have the pure expectation

that raw material inputs are going to be the same, because they’re probably not. There are just so many more opportunities in this industry to do better.”

The final answer, he says simply, is not there yet.

“Whether it’s a packaging innovation, a manufacturing method that’s going to change everything again, new products that we can evolve and move to market, or ways to extend shelf-life, there are so many facets of this industry that will continue to evolve over time,” Jim shares.

As to where that temporal river will take us, Calavo’s is a pattern of success which does not just flow with the current, but sets it. The past informs the present to determine the future, and this tide is set toward an avo-lution. 🥑





# STONEFRUIT

## SNAPSHOT

By Lilian Diep

**T**aking a juicy bite of ripe stonefruit is one experience most consumers look forward to, and one of this season's biggest draws! Bring the taste of spring straight to shopping carts as Mother Nature intended it: sweet, juicy, and flavorful. Check out some enticing varieties below that are sure to keep sales and interests high...





## WHITE PEACH

**Flavor:** Very sweet, ranging from sugary to more mild with herbal tones

**Color:** Red and orange

**Season:** May–Oct

## WHITE NECTARINE

**Flavor:** Very sweet, ranging from sugary to more mild with herbal tones

**Color:** Red and orange, with white and beige coloring

**Season:** May–mid-Sep



## YELLOW PEACH

**Flavor:** Sweet, tangy, and bright, with aromatic nectar

**Color:** Red and orange with yellow undertones

**Season:** Apr–Oct

## YELLOW NECTARINE

**Flavor:** Smooth, sorbet sweetness

**Color:** Yellow flesh

**Season:** End of Apr–Sep



## DONUT PEACH

**Flavor:** Similar to white peach

**Color:** Varies

**Season:** May





## APRICOT

**Flavor:** Tangy and sweet, develops a richer sweetness as it ripens

**Color:** Soft yellow and orange tones, red hints

**Season:** End of Apr–Jul

## RED & BLACK PLUMS

**Flavor:** Juicy and sweet

**Color:** Ranging from dark purple to deep red/  
yellow blends

**Season:** Apr–Nov



## PLUOT (PLUMCOT\*)

\*60%–75% Plum, 25%–40% Apricot

**Flavor:** Fusion of flavor by variety

**Color:** Purple, red, spotted white, green, and yellow

**Season:** May–Oct

## APRIUM\*

\*60%–75% Apricot, 25%–40% Plum

**Flavor:** Hearty flesh with abundant nectar

**Color:** Soft yellow and orange notes

**Season:** End of Apr–May, Jul





*Wholesome Heroes*

represents individuals who are making a positive impact in their community through their work, volunteer efforts, sustainability, or health and wellness initiatives.



### WHAT MAKES MYLES A WHOLESOME HERO?

To lead is to grow, whether that be personal growth or that of others. Myles Chasser blazes a path for others to follow in his stead. That path, however, is but the starting point for those he has influenced.

This *Wholesome Hero* sets an example for the children he takes under his wing. As he rotates through many different hats, Myles still finds time to secure the pillars of leadership necessary for future generations to succeed.

- 1 LEADERSHIP
- 2 PAYING IT FORWARD
- 3 ACCOMPLISHMENTS
- 4 MENTORSHIP
- 5 VALUES
- 6 VOLUNTEERING



## RAINIER® FRUIT CELEBRATES WHOLESOME HEROES

# Myles Chasser

*Organic Produce Buyer, Four Seasons Produce*

YEARS AT FOUR  
SEASONS PRODUCE:

14

YEARS IN  
PRODUCE:

39

FAVORITE  
PRODUCE ITEM:

Mandarins



For the past 14 years, Myles has been a Scout Leader for his local Scout troop. He first started as a leader for his sons when they entered the organization. Now, he helps lead a group of 27 aspiring kids in Troop 83, based in Pennsylvania.



Myles' parents opened up the second natural/organic food market in Long Island, New York, in 1976. Growing up around fresh produce, it isn't difficult to be inspired by an industry with amazing role models like his parents. Through the mentorship of his parents and their influence on the community, Myles has made it his life's work to invest in future generations and give back—just as his parents before him.



From hiking and target shooting to urban trips, Myles finds ways to incorporate valuable lessons on his excursions and to pass on his knowledge to future generations. Through these activities, Myles can distill values that will have an impact when they start their careers as young adults.



"I have such pride for what my three sons have accomplished in scouting. They have risen through the ranks and accomplished so much. One of my sons entered the National Guard recently. As he was preparing to leave, he said the skills he gained as a Scout have already helped him in the military."



"One highlight of my time working with the Cub Scouts, a precursor to Boy Scouts, was watching my own kids make that crossover to Boy Scouts around age 12. Witnessing my young boys transition to young adults was extremely rewarding. I was able to lead during that informative time of these kids' lives, and it is such a fulfilling process."



In addition to his charge as Assistant Scout Master, Myles has volunteered in the Oceanside Fire Department and is on the Lancaster Red Rose Credit Union Board of Directors.



# ONE-STOP SHOP

From Our Fields to Your Shelf



Cherries

100% Organic Blueberries

Fuji

Granny Smith

75% of Apple \$\$\$

Pink Lady®

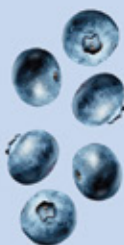
Honeycrisp

Gala



Sale  
Sale  
Sale  
\$4.99  
/18 OZ

**ONE GROWER  
ALL ORGANIC  
ALL SUMMER**



Sale  
Sale  
Sale  
\$1.99  
/lb







# PRODUCE PRACTICE

By Chandler James

*What do we mean when we say expert?*

Merriam-Webster defines the noun as “one with the special skill or knowledge representing mastery of a particular subject.” At first glance, this feels like an authentic take. But when I step back and consider the context of our industry—in which we are both the constant teacher and the constant student—I realize that the kinetic energy of “expert” as an adjective is more apt: “Having, involving, or displaying special skill or knowledge derived from training or experience.”





The difference is subtle, but crucial.

The former suggests that one inherits their expertise—tethered to a singular view of their craft. The latter, which is closely aligned with Ippolito International's value proposition, asserts that expertise can only be acquired through repetition.

In other words, expertise is best earned by taking a risk with the first attempt, and then continuing to practice.

One could even say that it's less about the end result, at least in the very beginning. It's more about the simple, repetitive actions that might, over time, produce a consistent result. An expert golf swing, for example, takes years of practice. And even with the perfect swing, there's always a sand trap or two lying in wait. It's all a gamble. The only thing to do is to focus on your own practice, as consistently as you know how.

"Our foundation as a grower/packer/shipper has certainly contributed to our expertise in the value-added sector," says Lara Grossman, Marketing Manager. "Many years ago, we were singularly focused as a Brussels sprouts grower. The

expertise gained in those early years positioned us to expand into other vegetable categories."

A few years ago, the grower broke into the value-added sector, giving birth to a new era of non-stop expansion across Ippolito's operations. An uptick in consumer demand for Brussels sprouts coincided with Ippolito's adventure into value-added.

The category continues to grow across retail and foodservice segments. Today, Ippolito is a very energized, expanding, vertically integrated company.

With a culture that might be considered somewhat "old school," Ippolito prides itself on being a constant communicator.

"We are very tight with our production and harvest crews, and any one of us

could probably give a fairly decent crop report on demand! So there's a pretty strong brain trust here. When it comes to our customers, we try and keep them updated as well," Lara continues.

With significant practice under its belt, the team has now been able to pivot its products to new formats, such as the 1 lb and 2 lb netted



**"Our foundation as a grower/packer/shipper has certainly contributed to our expertise in the value-added sector."**

*Lara Grossman,*

Marketing Manager, Ippolito International





bags of Brussels sprouts, which are unique to the market and two of Ippolito's best-selling offerings.

I want to pause here to highlight an area in which Ippolito seems to be able to successfully steer: supply chain relationships.

From the field to the packing line, all the way to the shelf, Ippolito's umbrella of expertise permeates across both supply- and buy-sides. When it comes to controlling the flow of product to the fresh field-

pack program, the company is able to manage the business strategically in terms of what it puts into the carton versus what it processes at the plant.

"At the end of the day, our primary goal is to keep our word with our customers. It is a challenge, as it is for anybody in this business! I would say that overall, we are cautious optimists who want to over-deliver," Lara tells me. "This is what drives us—keeping our customers in a good place with supply and quality."

Fundamental to the success of Ippolito's operations is having a very close-knit company, as Lara explains. Led by a handful of adept managers, everyone who works for the supplier puts this expert mindset into practice, and every team is in constant communication with each other. Success is embedded in the very nature of Ippolito's team, as Lara explains that even some of the most tenured employees have been surprised by the company's strong growth.

"Our growth has been very rapid, and much of that can be attributed to our steady focus and energetic culture," Lara adds. "Because of this, I think we're going to continue to perform in the value-added space. The most important thing for us will be to evaluate opportunities and make sure, again, that we can deliver. We want to ensure that we're good at what we do before we expand too aggressively."

What is expertise if not the ability to know when to pull back and when to charge ahead?

I am enthralled by Ippolito's selectiveness in the value-added category. And to tell you the truth, I think the term "value-adding" is more accurate, as no practice ever remains finished for this supplier.

The sector has grown exponentially in recent years, which has opened up endless opportunities for innovation. Ippolito recognizes this and has been strategically precise in how it positions itself in the value-added category.

"We consider ourselves a leader in the Brussels sprouts category as we are one of the largest suppliers in North America. Up and down within this category, we are everywhere in the produce section. We offer washed, trimmed, and halved Brussels sprouts, as well as one of our newer items, Brussels sprouts leaves. Around the holidays, we also sell Brussels sprouts that are still on the stalk, which is incredibly unique. We even have a microwaveable bag pack—and these examples only cover our Brussels sprouts segment," Lara says assuredly. "We still grow the main produce categories: leafy lettuces, broccoli, cauliflower, asparagus, artichokes, etc."

This aggressive expansion into value-added has not only brought Ippolito into the limelight; it has been a boon for buyers, too. The company has adopted a new presence in the eyes of its customers, serving as a one-stop veg shop.

Lara tells me that Ippolito has long had a loyal group of commodity-based customers, with which it has expanded its sales because of these new value-added items. As we know, growth begets growth, and where there is an expansion of sales, there will also be an influx of shoppers opening their wallets.

Moreover, company transparency remains at the forefront of consumer demands, and I would bet that the vertically integrated Ippolito brand will only continue to grow in popularity.

So, in the dictionary of Ippolito International, what does the word 'expert' mean?

Practice, practice, practice. 🍅



"At the end of the day, our primary goal is to keep our word with our customers."



# AVOCADOS

The best avocados  
have California in them.



Shoppers anxiously anticipate the California season because there is a California difference. In fact, 80% of avocado shoppers said it's important that the avocados they buy are grown by California farmers. They value the care our nearly 3,000 growers put into nurturing each avocado to ensure they get that creamy California avocado taste with every slice.

Keep up with the demand and give your shoppers the consistent quality, freshness and homegrown taste they anticipate—all season long.

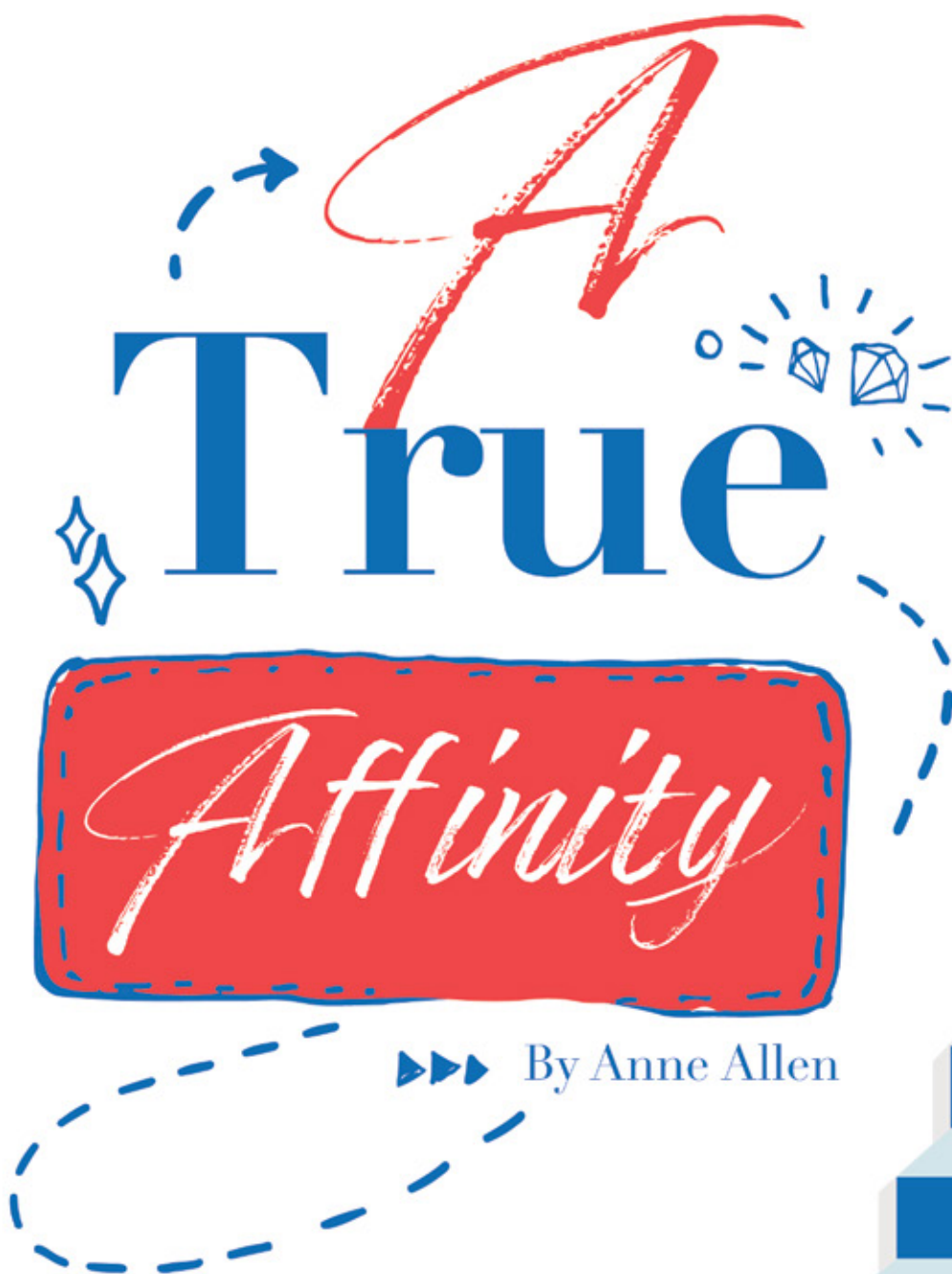


Source: 2020 California Avocado Tracking Study QC1. Price and ripeness are sometimes important factors in purchasing avocados. How important are each of the following when purchasing avocados? (Grown by California farmers.)  
Answers: extremely/very/somewhat important.

For Customized Marketing Support:  
[CaliforniaAvocado.com/Retail](https://CaliforniaAvocado.com/Retail)

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▶▶▶ By Anne Allen

*a Q & A with*  
**Nicole Hulstein,**  
Produce Category Manager,  
Food Lion





## Blessed with vision, grounded in community.

This could be Nicole Hulstein's tagline if she were to pen an autobiography. The notion would take up space in the reader's head. It would be a phrase that clings to the rafters of the mind rather than vanishing through the beams like smoke. I can't imagine a better mantra for a woman whose career took her to lofty heights—all while maintaining a firm sense of who she was from the ground floor.

Known throughout the industry as Food Lion's Produce Category Manager, Nicole's passion for produce extends beyond the day-to-day operations. She embodies an authenticity that speaks to more than just buy-side excellence, but a true affinity for the people she serves.

Treating this piece as an autobiography of sorts is fitting—and one of the reasons why I love Q&As. Intimate conversations mean more to the world than I think we can accurately capture. Walking in someone's shoes is an incredible tribute to their own voice, and in this article, you get to hear Nicole's voice better than I could ever render it.

For that, I imagine you'll want to keep reading.



Anne Allen



**AA:** Nicole, as a publication, we've been fortunate to watch your growth in the industry. What has your professional journey been like, and how did it lead you to Food Lion?



Nicole Hulstein,  
Produce Category Manager,  
Food Lion



**NH:** I joined Food Lion right out of college. My mother worked there until her retirement; I have early memories of needing to go into the office with her. You could say I am a living image of growing up at Food Lion! While working for the retailer was always a consideration for me, finding produce was a gift I was not expecting. I knew Food Lion when I started, but I was completely blind to the industry with all of its beauty. I have spent most of my professional career in produce, with the exception of an 18-month window working in the snack category—talk about polar ends of the spectrum in terms of health.



**AA:** I can tell that produce has influenced you in many ways—something I think we can't avoid when we're working in this industry! How do some of your passions link back to fresh?

**NH:** I have always been passionate about health, being active, and feeling good.

Being an athlete in college meant I needed nutritious foods to fuel performance, and this turned into a lifelong love for produce! A Board opportunity about eight years ago opened my eyes to an underserved part of our community, children that may not

have opportunities for early childhood education, nutrition to fuel their brains, and the long-term impacts that food insecurity can have on our communities. I take pride in being able to connect communities with fresh produce for long-term health goals.



**AA:** As you've grown in your career at Food Lion, how does your personal vision for produce align with the company's overall mission?

**NH:** At Food Lion, we truly are the towns and cities that we serve. We believe this ideal at our very core. My personal vision is connected to this mission, and the strategic design of my programs is built with my customers in mind. My customers expect good retail pricing and fresh produce in a convenient and enjoyable shop. Easy, Fresh, and Affordable—you can count on Food Lion every day, and you can count on Nicole Hulstein to give 100 percent to make this happen.

**"I take pride in being able to connect communities with fresh produce for long-term health goals."**

Nicole Hulstein,  
Produce Category Manager,  
Food Lion



**"At Food Lion, we truly are the towns and cities that we serve. We believe this ideal at our very core. My personal vision is connected to this mission, and the strategic design of my programs is built with my customers in mind."**



**AA:** I love that sentiment. It sounds like a mantra others can learn from. Throughout your professional journey, what learning experiences have shaped you? Any a-ha moments?

**NH:** I have these frequently! I believe we should look for learning at every opportunity. Learning experiences can be big or smaller, everyday occurrences.

A big one for me was in the area of people management. I have learned that we are all unique in the way that we like to be led and managed. I have personally always enjoyed a puzzle and enjoyed the satisfaction of figuring things out. The level of engagement in the puzzle-solving mission is different for us all, and I had to learn that my leadership needed to be catered to the individual.

**AA:** The individual is so important to fresh produce—I think in ways we never quite expect. As we work together as an industry to tackle challenges, which opportunities at retail are you most excited to spearhead?

**NH:** I believe this past year has been an experience that most of us will never forget. There have been hardships, and there have been moments of pride and accomplishment.

Some areas of grocery retail, in general, have been amplified, such as e-commerce. Some customers would have not transitioned to ordering groceries online had there not been a pandemic, and some of those that transitioned have discovered that they truly enjoy the experience. I believe


the fresh produce industry will have to tackle 'talking' to those customers in a different way.

Packaging and sustainability are challenges ahead, and I'm excited to see how this industry will take them on as well.



**S**peaking with Nicole is like speaking to a friend. Perhaps it's the blend of determination and warmth, but it isn't hard to see why a community would flock to her.

After all, what is this industry if not one large family?

And large families make for very good memoirs. 





► MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀

## SUHANRA CONRADIE

*Chief Executive Officer, Summer Citrus from South Africa*

With **Peggy Packer**

When this bold and inspiring leader speaks, it's nearly impossible not to stop and listen. Her drive, endless knowledge, and fearlessness when taking challenges head-on are only a few pieces of the puzzle that make up the innovator's decades of success. Curious what the other pieces could be, I dug into some of her favorite things...



- |                |               |                    |
|----------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1 A Good Movie | 2 The Beach   | 3 Family           |
| 4 Quality Time | 5 Nature      | 6 Sunsets          |
| 7 Exercise     | 8 Great Music | 9 A Driven Mindset |



# WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Bako Sweet®  
Sweet Potatoes

?



## GRILLED CILANTRO BAKO SWEET® SWEET POTATOES

### INGREDIENTS

- 3 lb** bag of Bako Sweet® Sweet Potatoes
- 1 tbsp** extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp** pink Himalayan salt
- ¼ tsp** cayenne pepper
- ⅓ cup** chopped cilantro
- 1 tbsp** fresh-squeezed lime juice

**Prep Time:** 5 min

**Cook Time:** 45–65 min

**Servings:** 3



### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat grill to medium heat.
- 2 Poke potatoes several times with a fork, then tightly wrap in tin foil.
- 3 Cook for 40–50 minutes on the grill with the lid closed. Cook times vary depending on the size and may need another 15 minutes or so.
- 4 Meanwhile, stir together lime juice and extra virgin olive oil. In a separate small bowl, combine salt and cayenne pepper.
- 5 Once the sweet potatoes are done, slice sweet potato down the middle to open.
- 6 Top with cayenne mixture, lime juice mix, and cilantro. Enjoy!

To learn more about Bako Sweet, visit [www.bakosweet.com](http://www.bakosweet.com)



# The LOVE LANGUAGE of FOOD

BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ

With IRENE WŌNG, Founder, IW Productions



“Not one day passes where I’m not deeply amazed by the power of food and how it connects people.”

Irene Wong begins at the heart of her story, and I feel like I already know the person I’ve just met on the other side of the phone.

“Gathering at the table to share a meal truly brings people together,” she reflects.

With creations like *Everyday Italian*, *My Country My Kitchen*, and *Melting Pot* for the Food Network under her belt before founding her own television production company, IW Productions—which has given us *Man Fire Food*; *Food Paradise*; and *Unique Eats*, among other popular foods shows—Irene has become one of the key storytellers of the food industry, bridging the gap between foodservice and foodie.

But before traversing the world in the age of the celebrity chef, she was a daughter, a granddaughter, and, at her core, a lover of food.

“My favorite way of connecting with people is by feeding them. My family taught me this throughout my childhood. Exhausted after a long day at the office, they still prepared a home-cooked meal every single





Irene Wong traces her love of the power of food to her grandparents, who owned Chinese takeout spot Bo Jen in Brooklyn, New York

"I'm always feeding people, no matter where I am in the world, and I am sure that comes from my grandparents."

IRENE WONG,  
Founder, IW Productions

night," Irene says, painting a picture many of us can likely recall.

Cooking, it seems, has always been Irene's love language, with the ingredients creating words better heard and felt when eaten.

"My love for food began in my grandparents' home and restaurant. My grandfather bought a building in Brooklyn, New York, in the early 1970s, where he lived upstairs with his wife and children. Downstairs, he had his own Chinese takeout called Bo Jen," she tells me. "My parents had full-time jobs in Manhattan. My grandparents helped raise my brother and me. I grew up in their kitchen and around their food. As I got older, I would do my homework in the back room and step into the restaurant to help my grandparents. They didn't have a staff, it was all family-run—they did all of the food shopping in Chinatown, while also prepping and cleaning all of the ingredients."

It wasn't a sit-down restaurant, and there were no deliveries. Irene points out that the pure takeout-style meant if you wanted her grandparents' food, you

had to come to the restaurant and then take it to-go, creating true face-to-face interaction and extending that love language from her grandparents' kitchen to the neighborhood they served. It's an environment I can easily see living on in Irene, who swears she still feels the need to feed everyone in her life.

"When I'm on location shooting a TV show, I always research the best bakery, the best café, the best restaurant. When we have a five-minute break, I'm out the door to pick up something delicious to bring back to my crew. I'm always feeding people, no matter where I am in the world, and I am sure that comes from my grandparents," she laughs.

How far these moments in that Brooklyn building have taken the now powerhouse producer and chef. Today, when Irene says, "no matter where I am in the world," she genuinely means anywhere.

Irene has been helping to close the gap between the food industry and consumer through a television medium for more than 20 years, having helped maintain the star status of some well-known chefs

while being a key part of what built that distinguished status for others.

"There is a reason we're mesmerized by actors," Irene says when I ask about producing and directing a chef. "Their performance transcends the screen, and you can't take your eyes off of them. Chefs, however, are trained to prepare delicious food that will draw customers to their restaurants. How to get critics to come in and write glowing reviews is very different from how to be a dynamic presenter on television. You can be the most famous chef in the world, but if you get stage fright and struggle to complete a sentence while the camera is rolling, that could be very damaging. It's my job to study chefs quickly in the short amount of time that we have together on set and to figure out what makes them feel at ease and excited so that I can help them deliver a four-star performance."

And the chefs aren't the only actors on set. In fact, they are costars.

"Because I work with a wide variety of ingredients for all types of cuisines, I know what their on-camera personality will look like on screen. Leafy herbs wilt quickly once the TV lights are on. Uncovered granulated sugar clumps easily. I provide a shot list to our featured chef guests which gives specific instructions on how the ingredients need to be prepped for our cameras. It's my job to know the best lighting, camera angle, and dishes to use that will make the food look picture-perfect," she emphasizes.

It's a humbling moment, and yet also a kindred one, as Irene relives these experiences. Anyone who has shot a video interview with me can now compare their experience to the likes of Rachael Ray and Giada De Laurentiis, because I can't count the times I have heard our own peers say, "I'm just the chef," or, "I'm just the grower," when I ask them to step in front of the camera. And every time I tell them, truly, people want to know them.

I can't think of a better way to bridge Irene's world and mine than through a mutual connection we all know from trade shows and television screens: Roger Mooking.

"I've been working with Roger for nine years now. I don't think either of us would have guessed back in 2011 when we started shooting *Man Fire Food* that



we would have such longevity with this small but fun, exciting show,” Irene says.

She created the show pitch for *Man Fire Food* long before she had the opportunity to bring it to life because Irene and the Cooking Channel both knew that a strong host would be key. That host was Roger.

“We did 10 episodes for Season One, and then it just kept getting picked up—I believe it’s still the longest-running original program on Cooking Channel at nine consecutive seasons,” she tells me, pointing out that the personality and work ethic Roger brings to the table cannot be overstated. “Roger and I have always had a very open line of communication. He wants to do the best job possible and I think, from day one, he noticed my passion and attention to detail. We have always been very collaborative and respectful of one another.”

Ironically, while the two have been close colleagues for a decade, it’s the pandemic, Irene says, that has helped them really get to know one another.

“Roger traveled across America with the crew and me for 10 years, but it was always a work environment. We’ve always been friends, but during quarantine, he would spontaneously reach out through WhatsApp or FaceTime almost weekly. Production was shut down, so our conversations focused on family and what was happening in the world. It was a much-needed silver lining,” Irene points out.



"Through work, I've met many fascinating, talented people from all walks of life, and I realized that this is what I want to do forever—just play with food, travel, and meet people."



Irene's *Man Fire Food*, hosted by Chef Roger Mooking, stands as one of Cooking Channel's longest-running original programs





Another silver lining Irene has found is that she herself is cooking more, and with an increasingly adventurous spirit. The inspiration, she shares, lies in learning about different avenues and options she didn't know prior to the COVID-19 shutdowns.

"The pandemic introduced me to a network of food purveyors. Food companies, restaurants, and farmers had to pivot, so they started to deliver high-quality ingredients to home cooks. Whether it was a large restaurant supply company like Baldor, or local farmers who I never knew about, I had access to impeccable seasonal ingredients and that inspired me to be more adventurous in the kitchen. I don't think I've ever

developed so many recipes in such a short period of time. It really inspired me to cook differently," Irene says.

And while she hopes her access to the supply will not fade, she says she has missed restaurants and is sure the demand is there for the long-awaited return.

"I know every restaurant is racking their brains trying to figure out how to survive. The few times I've had a restaurant meal, whether it's takeout or outdoor dining, I take a bite and think, 'Oh, that's right. This is why I love restaurants.' I'm a good home cook, but I could never recreate the emotions and experiences I feel in a restaurant," Irene reflects.

As for the trying times ahead, I don't know that there is anyone better to talk to about one really tough year turning your life into a pile of ashes for you to rise from. In asking Irene to look back to the very start of her food career in 1999, I was dazzled by the symmetry of her past and our present.

"1999 was actually the best and the worst year for me," she says. "I was working at *Good Morning America* at the time, and supposed to get married that fall. But the engagement ended abruptly and because my ex-fiance also worked there, I decided to quit. I started working at Food Network that summer and it turned out to be a dream job."

"I'm comfortable in any kitchen. Even if it's a Michelin star restaurant, I'm not intimidated. I'm fascinated! I just want to hang out with the chefs and learn from them and get excited by the food they create."



Not only does Irene have a brilliant mind for food behind the camera, but she also creates recipes of her own in her mission to feed everyone in her life







Irene was hired by Bob Tuschman, who became one of the most prominent executives at Food Network.

“Bob mentored and inspired me. He gave me tremendous opportunities,” Irene continues. “During my seven years at the network, I learned how to produce and direct studio cooking shows. I traveled across the country and all over the world to shoot travelogue food shows. I worked with hundreds of chefs and home cooks. The year had started terribly, but it ended up being a very pivotal time in my life. Through work, I’ve met many fascinating, talented people from all walks of life, and I realized that this is what I want to do forever—just play with food, travel, and meet people.”

The desire to be in everyone’s kitchen eventually compelled Irene to leave the Food Network to begin her own production company.

“Towards the latter years at Food Network, I was a Director of Programming and supervised all the daytime instructional cooking shows produced by outside production companies. But I missed getting my hands dirty—producing and directing my own shows, being on set with my crew, staging all the food and working with talent, and clocking intense 15-hour days,” Irene says, sounding as crazy in love with the lifestyle as any produce veteran I’ve ever met.



Irene's job ensures a televised spotlight on food and those who craft it are shown in the best way



So, Irene took a chance on founding her own company. And, while it took a few years of sweat equity, she eventually returned to doing shows for the Food Network on her terms, as well as Cooking Channel and Travel Channel, where she has continued to contribute for the last decade.

“I’m comfortable in any kitchen. Even if it’s a Michelin star restaurant, I’m not intimidated. I’m fascinated! I just want to hang out with the chefs and learn

from them and get excited by the food they create. I can do that for the rest of my life because that, to me, is home,” Irene says.

As simple and as strong as the ties of love itself. 🍓






# BLOOD ORANGES

BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ



## FLAVOR TREND

 It should come as no surprise that a fruit, especially a fruit with a blood-red color, has some mythical and historical stories attached to it. A connection to inspiration, creativity, and imagination has even made it popular not just for consumption, but for aromatherapy.

So, as we all become increasingly adventurous with our palates, the blood orange is a match made in heaven with, basically, any dish or drink.

I cannot tell you exactly when it happened. I just know that, at some point, it became an unquestioned expectation that I'd enjoy anything if blood orange was a featured ingredient. It could be in a beverage, a salad, or ice cream and I would dive in, no questions asked.

If I am under a spell, though, so are menus and food-favored Instagram accounts. I have been watching this beautiful fruit make its way into all sorts of options over the past five years, first offering intrigue and then appeal.

Treat shoppers to a display with a few of these citrus slices on a cheese plate and see the ruby color lift it to a gourmet-level presentation. Let the blood orange be your muse, and inspire the imaginations of even the most hesitant eaters.

While there are three varieties, the one most quickly to come to my mind is the Moro. With its blushing rind and crimson interior, the Moro looks to be Mother Nature's inversion of what the U.S. consumer has come to expect of an orange. Just as tantalizing is the flavor—even after having had several blood oranges myself, I still can't anticipate the more-berry-than-citrus tang that the fruit leaves on my tongue.

Thankfully, *NPR*, too, reported how attempts to explain this gem's flavor go back as far as the 1640s, so imagine how long I could wax poetic about the topic.

But even with increasing gravitas as more and more suppliers get into the blood orange game, the similarity between Moro and its siblings, Tarocco and Sanguinello, leaves room for me to think this particular citrus avenue has further ground to gain. And, as it becomes ever-more available across North America, the blood orange's intriguing lore might move further into the spotlight.

Maybe it does have powers of inspiration and the fruit itself mused its way into my mind, along with the rest of the consumers. I simply remember saying out loud, "If it has blood orange in it, I'll try it,"—a verbal bellwether of the transition from flavor fancy to a desired staple. 🍊



# WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

## Progressive Farms Jalapeños

?



### GIVE IT SOME SPICE! JALAPEÑO POTATO NACHOS

#### INGREDIENTS

**1–3** Progressive Farms Jalapeño Peppers, sliced

**4 large** Pacific Gold Russet Potatoes, scrubbed clean, sliced in 1/4" discs

**3 tbsp** olive oil

**1 tbsp** chile powder

**1 tbsp** cumin

**1/2 tsp** salt

#### OPTIONAL NACHO TOPPINGS

Pacific Gold Onions, Progressive Farms Cilantro, cheese, scallions, pico de gallo, guacamole, sour cream

#### GRAPEFRUIT JALAPEÑO MARGARITA

**2–3** Progressive Farms Jalapeño Peppers, sliced with seeds removed

**2 oz** fresh juice of Progressive Farms Lime

**4 oz** fresh juice of Nature's Bounty Grapefruit

**2 tsp** agave syrup

**3 oz** tequila

Grapefruit slices, lime slices, jalapeño coins, ice, and chili-salt for garnish

**Prep Time:** 15 min

**Cook Time:** 40 min

**Servings:** 4



#### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat the oven to 400° F.
- 2 Toss potato slices with olive oil, chile powder, cumin, and salt. Arrange in a single layer on one or more foil-lined baking sheets.
- 3 Bake for about 15 minutes, flip the slices, and bake for another 10–15 minutes. For crispier potato slices, set oven to broil and cook for a few extra minutes.
- 4 In a cast iron skillet or baking dish, arrange a layer of cooked potato slices, sprinkle with your favorite cheese or cheese combination. Repeat. Place skillet or dish back into the oven and bake at 400° F until the cheese is melted.
- 5 Allow the potato slices to cool for 5 minutes. Add your favorite potato nacho toppings and Progressive Farms Jalapeño Peppers in the amount of your choosing.

#### OPTIONAL: SERVE WITH GRAPEFRUIT JALAPEÑO MARGARITA

- 1 In a shaker, muddle a few jalapeño slices with agave syrup. Add tequila, fresh grapefruit juice, fresh lime juice, and ice. Shake well.
- 2 Strain your spicy margarita into an ice-filled, chili-salt rimmed glass. Garnish with grapefruit slices, lime slices, and jalapeño coins. Sit back and enjoy!

To learn more about Progressive Produce, visit [www.progressiveproduce.com](http://www.progressiveproduce.com)





# CALIFORNIA TABLE *GRAPE*

## SNAPSHOT

By Jordan Okumura

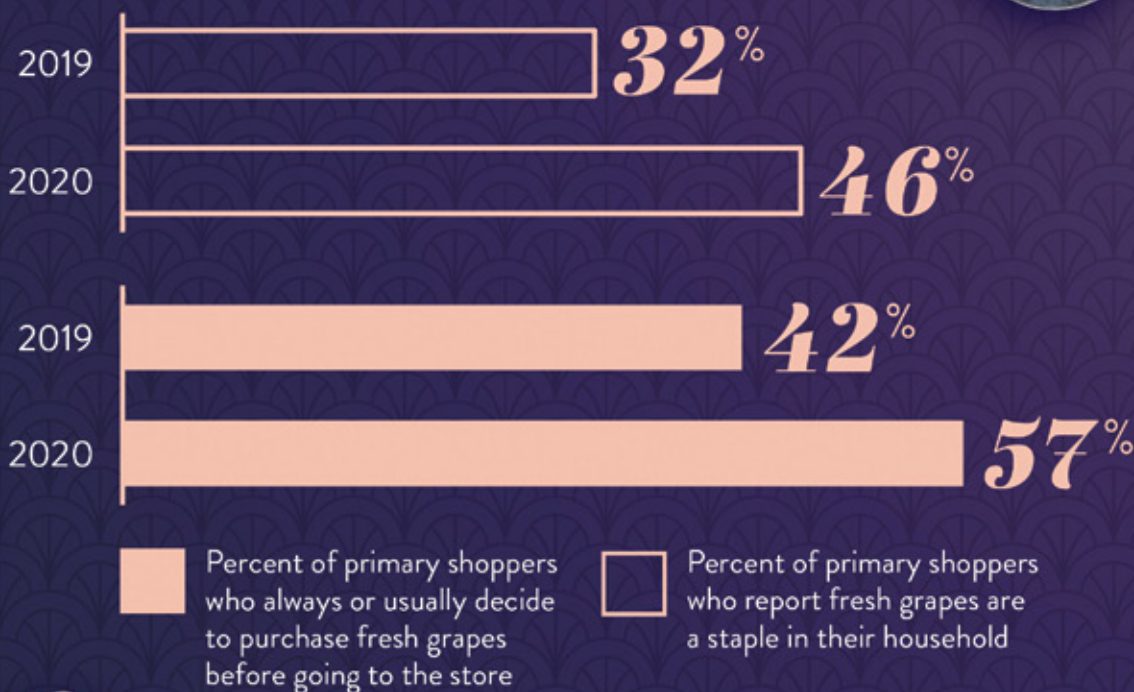
**C**onsumers anxiously await the approach of the California table grape season as there is nothing quite like its annual return in the fresh produce department. A brimming destination of research and development, innovation, and flavor, the California table grape category holds court, captures sales, and drives the bar up across all things fresh. With the premium sector top of mind, the California Table Grape Commission joins us to share the information that is driving retailers to tap the segment with the hunger that it deserves...





GRAPE  
**SEASON: MAY**  
through **JANUARY**

**350+**  
TABLE GRAPE  
OPERATIONS  
GROWING  
**80**  
Varieties



\*Primary shoppers ages 25–73 who have purchased fresh grapes within the past three months





49% have made changes to their food choices due to the COVID-19 pandemic to  
SUPPORT A HEALTHY  
+ **IMMUNE**  
+ **SYSTEM**



OF PRIMARY SHOPPERS have purchased fresh grapes via  
**ONLINE ORDERING**



OF THOSE WHO HAVE EVER  
PURCHASED FRESH GRAPES VIA  
**ONLINE ORDERING**

70% are very likely to  
continue to purchase  
fresh grapes via online  
ordering in the next  
**12 MONTHS**



OF THOSE WHO HAVE EVER  
PURCHASED FRESH GRAPES VIA  
**ONLINE ORDERING**

58%

use an app for a  
specific retailer

52%

use an app that  
services multiple  
retailers



SOURCE / California  
Table Grape Commission





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