

Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

# the SNACK

ISSUE 60 JULY 2021

# Making History

PG 96

CASTELLINI  
GROUP OF COMPANIES

From the creators of *AndNowUKnow*





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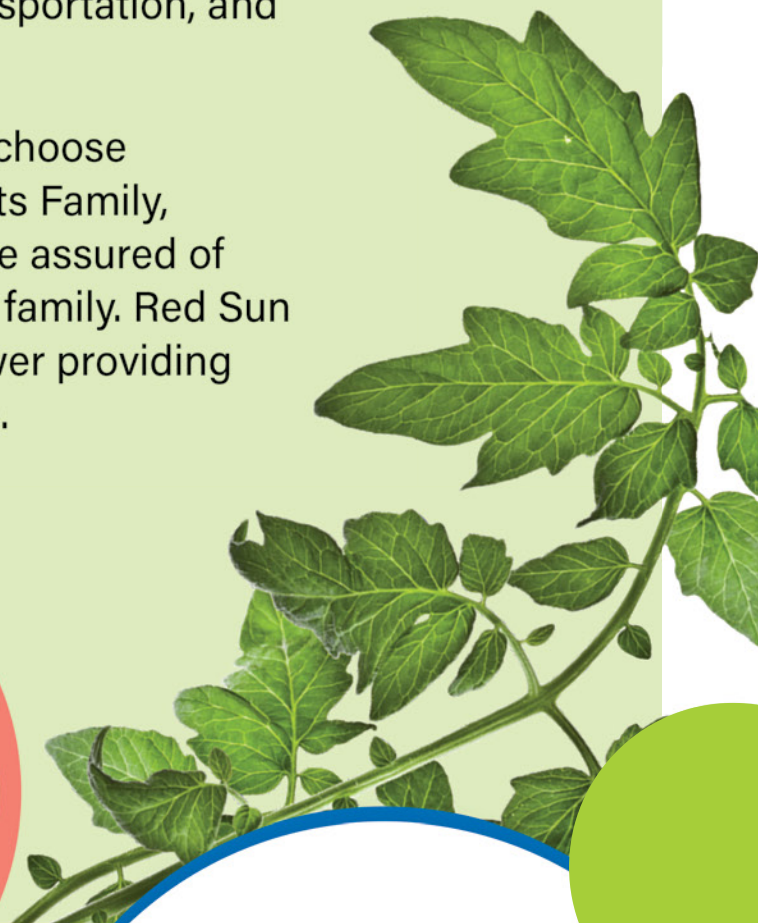


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**I DO NOT BELIEVE IN WRITER'S BLOCK.** At least, not in the traditional sense. As with any belief, affirming and investing your confirmation in it gives the idea life. This age-old concept—and the self-fulfilling prophecy it enamors to create—has seemed driven to convince me of its existence in recent times.

But, sometimes writing cracks open writing. The act of it, of scraping at the page toward the story beneath the writing. One of the most recent struggles for me was the endeavor to reconnect in a world that was primed to isolate us. What surfaced was a whisper, and a deeper love for your struggles as families, leaders, owners, growers, marketers, salespeople—your desire and drive to put something into the world that matters.

The volume over the past year and a half has been louder across all walks of life. Social and political tectonic plates have shifted, and our words have garnered a heavier weight than they ever have before. We, our team and our industry, are no strangers to the pressure of the expectations that this shift has created, but still, gravity does its work.

This is what feels true: Writing has changed for me as our world has changed. We have had to dress rehearse so many different scenarios, hurdles, outcomes, and tragedies, personally and professionally, that I—and I will only speak for myself—have forgotten what the ground under my feet feels like. And so, these recent weeks have been a journey in walking myself back to water.

The antidote to the struggle for speech, to the pressure to put our experiences into words—the answer is storytelling. Even as storytelling has taken on new colors, myths, and challenges, the antidote is rediscovering why storytelling is so important, especially now.

Stories do not only make us immortal; they remind us of who we are. They stabilize us inside the uncertainties of what is hypothetical—what is controllable only in myth. This, at once, also appears counterintuitive to the space that fresh produce occupies, where we must always keep an eye, a strategy, and a recovery route on the horizon. But if anyone can accomplish these feats, it is our people.

I have to remember that storytelling is not a fair-weather friend. It is essential. My relationship to storytelling is dependent upon my belief in its power, the collective power

it inspires, its connectivity, and its immortality. Bringing a tale to life changes the way we move through the world, and change is what we need.

Earlier this year, I was trying to get back into an old manuscript as a way to reinvigorate and trigger the muscle memory of writing in new ways. I wrote the words: *This line is fighting me to arrive.*

In reality, I was fighting the line.

Sometimes we must move our bodies toward evolution, let the writing crack open the writing. Instead of walking up river, we should let the current reveal what is next.

This fresh realization was a reconnection, one to you. And, it has been one of the gifts of my life.

One of the most challenging and rewarding parts of my job is convincing others that their stories matter, that they have a rendering to tell, a chronology worth mapping. The idea that they don't have a narrative that resonates is just an artificial framework of protection from the vulnerability of our truths, but also prevents us from connecting to each other.

We all have stories to tell. Beneath the one that you do not believe matters is the one that does. The real story. The story that admits that there is no innovation without risk and failure. The memory that wraps light around struggle and makes the hurdle so much sweeter.

In many ways, this is a beautiful thing to fight against—humility and hesitancy—because of a deep care for what is put on the page. Thank you for your resistance. In my world, it means you honor what is laid bare.

Because, I believe, that under that resistance is our collective walk toward water.

It is our resilience. 



**Jordan Okumura**

Editor in Chief

*AndNowUKnow* and *The Snack Magazine*





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# FEATURES

## 4EARTH FARMS™ CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

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HALIBUT WITH APPLE, PEPPER, AND CORN SALSA

## INGREDIENTS

**½ cup** Red Sun Farms Sweetpops Tomatoes, diced small  
**½ cup** apple, diced small  
**¼ cup** red pepper, diced small  
**¼ cup** green pepper, diced small  
**4 (4 oz) portions** (1" thick) fresh or thawed halibut with skin on one side  
**1 tsp** kosher salt  
**1 tsp** black pepper  
**¼ cup** corn  
**¼ cup** parsley, freshly chopped  
**¼ cup** dill, freshly chopped (save 4 sprigs for presentation)  
**½** lemon, cut into wedges  
 Salt and pepper, to taste  
**1 tbsp** of olive or vegetable oil  
**1 tsp** butter

**Prep Time:** 20 min

**Cook Time:** 45 min

**Servings:** 4

## DIRECTIONS

- 1** Preheat oven to 350° F. Wash and pat dry halibut with paper towel. Liberally coat with salt and pepper.
- 2** Preheat heavy frying pan to medium-high heat (cast iron or oven-ready pan). Add 1 tbsp olive or vegetable oil to the pan and a knob of butter (optional) for richness.
- 3** Place the coated fish skin-side up and sear for 3 minutes or until a crust has formed. Carefully turn the fish onto the skin-side and cook another 3 minutes until the skin has been seared.
- 4** Place pan in the oven on the middle rack. Turn broiler onto high for 5 minutes to finish cooking the center of the fish and further brown the top.
- 5** To cook the salsa, preheat pan or griddle to medium heat and melt 1 tsp butter.
- 6** Sauté corn, add salt and pepper to taste, until corn is slightly charred.
- 7** Add diced apple, tomatoes, peppers, and parsley.
- 8** Add a drizzle of oil and toss until all ingredients are mixed thoroughly.
- 9** Place halibut flesh-side up and top with salsa. Add a sprig of dill and a lemon wedge for presentation. Enjoy!



To learn more about Red Sun Farms, visit [www.redsunfarms.com](http://www.redsunfarms.com)





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

**T**he last 16 months have brought change to our personal lives, our work lives, and our businesses. But, through the challenges, we found solutions to continue moving forward. Across businesses, industries, and lifestyles, these solutions became the new normal. As those of us in the fresh produce industry look ahead to the future, I can't help but think of the next normal. I'll be expanding on the "next normal" in the second part of our post-pandemic breakdown, but first, let's check in and see how employers pivoted during the pandemic.

Companies had to act quickly in March of 2020 to keep businesses going while much of the workforce stayed home.

Of course, the produce industry saw unique challenges, yet we had to keep moving. People need healthy food to survive—there was no time to stop and recreate. We had to plow through, pivoting as needed and wherever possible to get the job done.





## Employer Pivots We've Seen:

### Remote Working

- Companies who traditionally resist make it work
- Some employees are anxious to go back to the office
- Many employees want to remain remote
  - Surveys suggest 60–70 percent of employees want to work remotely post-pandemic
  - In produce, we see this particularly in sales, but also in other more traditionally based disciplines

### Flexibility and Balance

- Accommodating kids' schedules and distance learning needs at home
- Hybrid schedules: Less time in office, but still getting that face-to-face interaction with managers and colleagues
- Less travel: Some customers are not accepting visitors, suppliers are staying home; business travel came to a screeching halt

### Technology and Investments

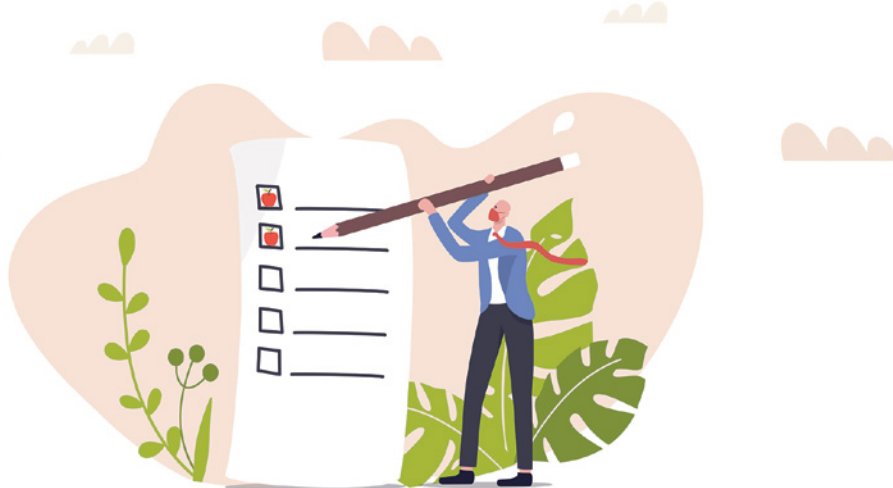
- Video calling: Huge meetings are getting done this way; employees are meeting and more people are requesting video calls instead of conference calls
- Software/applications: Adding programs such as Zoom to make personal cell phones work for business
- Trade shows: As pandemic mandates went into effect, in-person trade shows stopped altogether. Almost overnight, the industry rallied and created virtual platforms, ensuring that product showcases, industry panels, and meetings between buy and supply were still at the heart of the industry—even if we couldn't be there to shake hands
- Wellness: Companies sponsored online wellness programs such as the Calm app, online fitness subscriptions, and online medical and mental healthcare

### Hiring Practices

- Creative interviewing: Online, in-person at a distance, masks, plexiglass, and even meeting up in parking lots and talking car-to-car
- Onboarding and training virtually: We have seen many successful hires this year, and in many cases these new hires have not yet been in the same room as their colleagues
- Reevaluating relocation: Essentially, it's expensive out there. Prices are way up for moving, real estate, etc. Both candidates and employers are less enthusiastic about relocation right now, especially when considering moves to higher cost of living areas such as California and New York

As businesses pivoted the way they conducted themselves during the pandemic, many are now considering whether or not to keep those changes in place. Positives can always be found during challenging times—we realized how strong we are as an industry. I mean, we can tackle just about anything! Not everyone lives through a global pandemic and finds out ways to be more successful at what they do. A new kind of collaboration and teamwork blossomed during the pandemic, one that has made nearly all of our businesses stronger than ever.

JOE Produce will be looking ahead to what we're facing post-pandemic in the next issue of *The Snack*, so keep your eyes to the horizon. 🍌



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™



*Wholesome Heroes*

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### WHAT MAKES PJ A WHOLESOME HERO?

PJ gives her all for those she cares about and the values she holds dear. Whether it's through community commitments or going above and beyond at Zirkle Fruit Company, PJ has the kind of whirlwind spirit that lifts those around her. Her relentless energy and ability to be consistently optimistic make her invaluable, both within Zirkle and her community.

1 TALENT SCOUTING

2 DEDICATION TO HER JOB

3 VAST TOOLKIT

4 COMMUNITY EFFORTS

5 IRREPLACEABLE

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# PJ Pitts

*Bulk Inventory Manager, Zirkle Fruit Company*

YEARS AT  
ZIRKLE FRUIT COMPANY:

15

YEARS IN  
THE INDUSTRY:

15

FAVORITE  
PRODUCE ITEM:

*Blueberries*



PJ has helped multiple employees over the years find what position best fits their desires and skills. Sometimes, she hires people because they have that raw talent without even having a specific job in mind. PJ works with new talents until she places them in the best-suited position where they will thrive long-term.



"The absolute best part of my job is quality control on the blueberries in the summer. The only real way to do quality control is to taste them! There really is nothing quite like a handful of blueberries."



PJ is quick on her feet and is known for coming up with solutions on the fly. If you want to create something, give her a couple of ideas and she's off and running. Her cheerful attitude and can-do spirit are just a few resources in her vast toolkit.

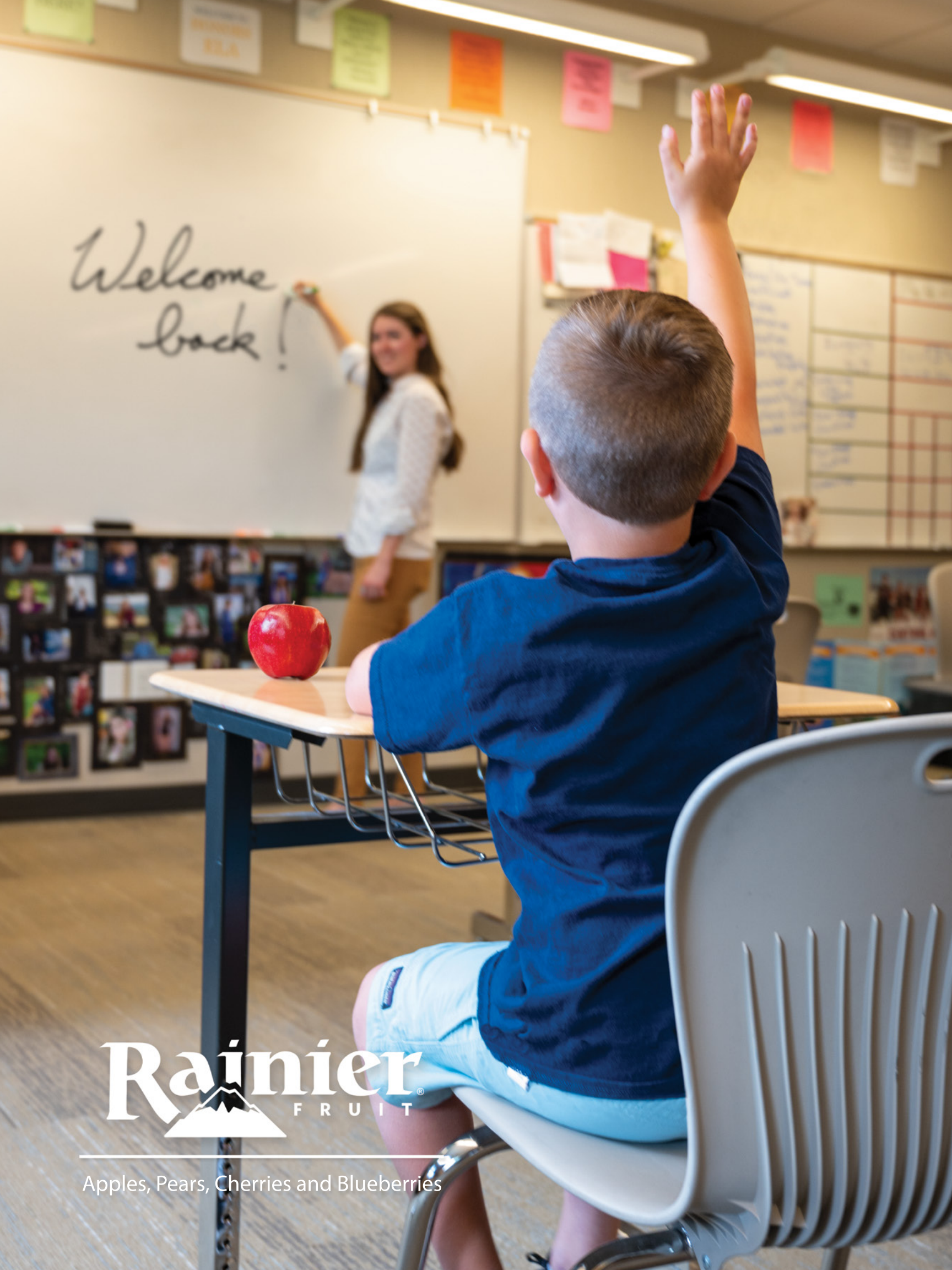


PJ is the first one to dress up and show support to any cause. She always volunteers at community events including the Selah Community Day Parade, road litter cleanup Adopt-a-Highway, and Relay for Life. Relay for Life holds a special place in PJ's heart as the event helps raise money for the American Cancer Society. PJ is also known for her love of animals and for bringing home another critter to love and care for.



With her positive attitude and zest for life, PJ has proven herself to be a valuable asset not only at Zirkle, but to her entire community.





**Rainier**  
FRUIT

Apples, Pears, Cherries and Blueberries





Jasmine Vineyards

LET  
FLAVOR  
**LEAD**

BY  
CHANDLER JAMES





## FLAVOR IS THE PRESIDENT OF JASMINE VINEYARDS.

That is, of course, my own writerly observation—for Jon Zaninovich is the visionary behind this President’s execution. Although, I think he’d agree with my interpretation just as well.

“To a certain extent, new flavors drive demand, because shoppers will go out of their way for the grapes they love,” he told me. “Once they’ve had a taste of our premium varieties, they remember the name Jasmine Vineyards and look for us time and time again.”

The presidency of flavor can be traced all the way back to the founding family’s immigration to the United States from Croatia. All of the Zaninovich “nonas” (grandmothers) married the harvest of the Croatian Adriatic Sea and the fruit they grew on the islands of Hvar and Vis to craft delicious recipes that would live on long into the future. You can find one such dish, the Dalmatian Cioppino featuring red seedless grapes, amongst our *What the Fork (WTF)* spreads in this issue.

Today, Sweet Globe™, Summer Crunch, and Sweet Celebration™ are but a few of the tantalizing varieties that headline Jasmine Vineyards’ dazzling portfolio. Evident of its proactivity in the space, the grower

is seeing a spike in demand for green seedless grapes in both Korea and Japan, while its red seedless variety, Sweet Celebration, is garnering attention in the U.S.

“Sweet Celebration bunches, as well as the individual berries, are huge. It’s a really gorgeous variety that is firm, crunchy, juicy, and sweet. The color is a brilliant raspberry hue, and the flavor is similar to that of a cherry,” Jon said. “Our Hawaiian grocery partners are known to promote the variety itself, which is less common in the retail space as a whole. Any time they help make that connection for shoppers, we see a natural boost in consumer demand.”

As part of its flavor-driven strategy, Jasmine Vineyards will strategically phase out several varieties and replace them with new ones that are entirely unique to the market. In 2018, for

example, the company phased out green varieties like Thompson, Princess, and Sweet Sunshine™ to introduce Summer Crunch, Great Green, and Sweet Globe. Although the former typically performed well both in the field and on the shelf, Jon said that, after several years of production, it’s simply time for something new.

“We have to keep our eyes (and taste buds) on the lookout for those favorable qualities that are slightly ahead of the market so we can stay in front of that demand,” he reiterated.

Furthermore, Jasmine Vineyards knows that shoppers are always looking for healthy snacking options, and there’s nothing healthier than whole fruits and vegetables.

“Thanks to the California Table Grape Commission (CTGC), grape health



**“ONCE THEY’VE HAD A TASTE OF OUR PREMIUM VARIETIES, THEY REMEMBER THE NAME JASMINE VINEYARDS AND LOOK FOR US TIME AND TIME AGAIN.”**

**JON ZANINOVICH**, President, Jasmine Vineyards



research is promoted throughout the season in television commercials, digital and social media ads, on e-commerce platforms, as well as in radio spots and print magazines, including *Oprah*, *Real Simple*, *Women's Health*, *Men's Health*, *Shape*, *People*, and more. This all does a great job of raising awareness and getting grapes on the shopping list," Jon said.

Big, beautiful displays on the retail floor are also essential to capturing shopper dollars. Jasmine Vineyards encourages grocers to utilize its "Happy California Grape Season!" banners and emphasize seasonal, California-grown, whole, and natural fruit, which already checks many of the boxes on a consumer's list.

"Grapes are one of the most appealing, convenient, and versatile options in the produce aisle," Jon asserted. "As such,

they tend to do well year-round, and they are easily promotable from the Fourth of July and summertime picnics to Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, and even to the everyday cheese, wine, and bread pairings, ultimately driving sales throughout the store."

Many people are surprised to learn that grapes are a type of berry, and this opens up even more creative possibilities for strategic merchandising. Sliced or quartered grapes of all varieties can be paired with cereal, granola and yogurt, and other traditionally berry-friendly dishes.

When shoppers have choices, both in terms of flavor and function, they are willing to ask for their favorite varieties by name. Jasmine Vineyards, as well as its retail partners, receive numerous

emails and messages from consumers praising these grapes' unique flavor, impressive size, and outstanding crunch. However, Jon relayed to me that the number-one reason consumers come back for Jasmine Vineyards grapes is the brand's consistency.

"We are always assessing our programs and consulting with breeders to optimize operations, as well as learn about new varieties to be considered among our offerings," Jon explained. "As a conventional grower that uses progressive California farming practices, we share helpful information on the safety and nutrition parity among conventionally and organically grown grapes. While we pay attention to trends, getting the facts and sharing them is a trait that's been passed down in our four-generation ranch."

## "PACKAGING PREFERENCES ARE VERY CULTURE-DRIVEN."

Jasmine Vineyards knows that shoppers are always looking for healthy snacking options, and there's nothing healthier than whole fruits and vegetables







**“RETAILERS KNOW THEIR BUYERS’ NEEDS AND WANTS BEST. THAT’S WHY WE OFFER A FULL LINE OF PACKAGING OPTIONS, INCLUDING PRIVATE LABEL.”**



 Jasmine Vineyards innovates across packaging needs depending upon demand, region, demographic, and variety

Jasmine Vineyards touts a 74-year history as a conventional table grape grower using progressive farming practices. With an emphasis on minimal environmental impact, the company utilizes drip-irrigation to maximize efficiency in water consumption; reduces pesticide use with natural enemies; invests in state-of-the-art cold storage technology; and uses recyclable materials, including its grape bags, clamshells, and punnett containers, as well as its shipping and packing supplies.

“Clamshells are probably our most unique offering in the market and are available in both 1 and 2 lb sized bags,” Jon continued. “Packaging preferences are very culture-driven. In Australia and New Zealand, retailers tend to use more sealed punnets and pouches, while in the U.S. and Asia, retailers lean more heavily on the standard field bag. Our diverse network allows us to offer more


versatile pack options like the clamshell, which might not be seen often in the U.S. but is used to serve other markets. Retailers know their buyers’ needs and wants best. That’s why we offer a full line of packaging options, including private label.”

Its equitable efforts do not end there, though, as Jasmine Vineyards also invests heavily in employee development and fair labor practices.

“In the last several years, we’ve worked closely with the California Farmworker Foundation (CFF),” Jon stated. “Through CFF, we support services that enhance the lives of farmworkers, including the Education on the Vineyard program; the *Less Salt, More Health* campaign; COVID-19 and flu shot clinics; the *Register to Vote* campaign; the Pharmacy at the Vineyards program; food distribution; and more.”

All of these efforts made by Jasmine Vineyards have been integral in the rise of table grape demand. Everyone from recipe bloggers, celebrated chefs, dietitians, and even everyday consumers have been captivated by the diversity of table grapes.

As you read these words and ponder how the grower’s category stand-outs might play into your own produce department strategy, Jasmine Vineyards is also pointing the trade directly toward its operations’ day-to-day updates with Fresh Alerts™. This platform allows retailers to receive images, videos, and commentary on just-picked varieties from the Jasmine Vineyards ranch.

Who knows? Your next flavor treasure trove may be lying in wait within these pages. 



» The **IF** List «

## Marianne Santo

Senior Category Manager of Produce and Floral, Wakefern Food Corp.

With **Jordan Okumura**

**E**nergetic, passionate, and deeply invested in the progress and impact of fresh produce, Marianne Santo is one industry member many up-and-comers, as well as veterans, look to for guidance, support, and insights in the fruit and veg space. An industry like ours requires she remain nimble, resilient, and present, and the Senior Category Manager of Produce and Floral exudes these qualities in her work and her relationships. With such spark and drive, we quickly identified Marianne as a candidate for our *IF List* feature and hope you are as thrilled and intrigued by her answers as we were. Expect the unexpected from this 30-plus-year produce aficionado and buy-side maven. We did. And more than impressed, we were...

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

Gather up all of the strong women you can of every age, personally and professionally. Together, you can rule the world!

## » IF you could make everyone watch a movie of your choosing, which movie would you want them to see?

*Hidden Figures*. I never get tired of watching that. It's an amazing story of perseverance and achievement.

## » IF you could be a character in any book, who would you be?

Brave and independent Jo March from *Little Women*. I read that book when I was in fourth grade (voracious reader very early on) and like to think that was the seedling for me to break norms.

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

In the medical field. I'd love to have been a surgeon—I'm not squeamish at all!

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

Herman Fadem. He was 76 when I started with Wakefern in 1985. I would treasure one more hour with him to hear his amazing stories and bask in the generosity of his teachings. He passed away at 93 and worked up until six months before he died.

## » IF you had to wear the same thing every day, what items of clothing would you pick?

Black-tie formal wear at all times. I'm tired of the beyond-casual climate of last year!

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

Cheese. Hands down.

## » IF you could enhance one aspect of your intelligence, what part would you want to improve?

Math. It's my Achilles' heel.

## » IF you could reexperience an awesome day in your life, what would you choose and why?

July 22, 2017, in Dublin, Ireland, seeing U2 with my favorite concert buddy, my sister Eileen. That was quite a bucket list check-off.

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

God's Love We Deliver in New York City. They provide meals and care for those who are homebound with HIV, MS, and other illnesses.

## » IF you had to choose one song to be the soundtrack of your summer season, what would it be?

*I'm Still Standing* by Elton John. 🎧







# A HALF-MILE CLOSER TO THE MOON<sup>®</sup>

Premium High-Altitude Cherries<sup>™</sup>



## Moon Time



## MENTORS IN THE MAKING

# Natalie J. Machado

BY CHANDLER JAMES

### ➤ “LET’S RUN, IT TAKES TOO LONG TO WALK!”

The voice of three-year-old Natalie J. Machado echoes through her father, Steve Junqueiro, as we sit down to discuss FreshSource’s National Director of Marketing’s path to mentorship. He recalls the memory of Natalie pulling him across a soccer field, already so eager to explore the world that was hers for the taking.

The picture he paints reminds me of a nagging question that paws at me often and with persistence:

Must we lose our childlike wonder and enthusiasm somewhere along the way to adulthood?

Looking at Natalie and the expansiveness of her path, I say, absolutely not.

That same sense of wonder and excitement that Steve speaks to is evident to everyone Natalie works with as she continues to build her career as a distinguished fresh marketer. With such an esteemed industry veteran as her father, it is little wonder why Natalie knew from a very young age that this is the industry where she was meant to plant her roots.

“Seeing my dad interact with all aspects of the industry, from connecting with buyers and suppliers to walking show floors, I came to understand and love the people of produce,” says Natalie. “I have been blessed to be able to call him day or night and receive feedback on business insights as I’ve grown in the industry. He has always encouraged me to apply myself in all aspects of my life, and I cherish what he has shown me and teaches me daily.”

Natalie officially began her career in college, working summer internships for various suppliers. These were the first stepping stones, experiences, and learning tools that primed her for the future—a testament to her

alma mater, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, whose motto is “Learn by Doing.”

“I then had the very fortunate opportunity to be introduced to Robert Thompson, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of FreshSource, over eight years ago. I witnessed his many entrepreneurial hats, and quickly knew this was the gentleman I needed to learn from and work for!” Natalie tells me with an infectious smile across her face. “With FreshSource being a smaller company at that time, I was able to expand my ‘learn by doing’ mentality to all aspects of my job. Through all of these experiences in the company, I truly found my niche in marketing.”

FreshSource is a premier in-store merchandising and retail sales company that provides sales and merchandising solutions for brands both large and small. Equipped with a group of enthusiastic merchandising, sales, and marketing professionals, FreshSource truly understands the importance of helping its clients achieve and reach their growth goals—a quality I am sure Natalie is willing to protect at all costs.

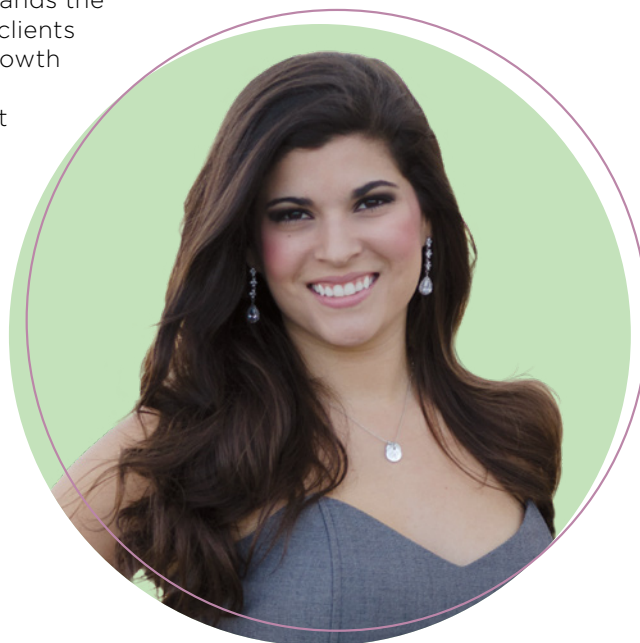
She poses her venture to FreshSource as Robert “taking a chance on her.” Conversely, though, Robert tells me that he quickly gravitated toward Natalie’s energetic and curious spirit, and her acumen as a produce icon’s daughter certainly didn’t hurt.

“At that time, there were only four of us working at FreshSource. It was ‘all hands on deck,’ and the team truly worked all angles of the company to make it the successful sales and merchandising resource it is

today,” Natalie explains. “Robert took me under his wing and taught me the ins and outs of the industry, helping me become the National Director of Marketing at FreshSource, where we now have over 80 employees and are still growing!”

In this role, Natalie aims to continue branding FreshSource across the produce industry as a premier solutions-driven sales and merchandising company. Having started the marketing department from the ground up, she now leads long-term objectives and provides the necessary reporting and communication processes and tools to keep FreshSource interconnected in all divisions. She delivers planning, governance, and support functions to her team so they are able to focus on providing value to vendor and retail partners. From focusing on end-to-end marketing optimization, to developing in-depth reports that showcase all of the sales and merchandising teams’ efforts, Natalie’s drive is to motivate and innovate.

I suspect that this “let’s run, not walk” mentality is not only what made her so successful in helping build FreshSource into the company it is today, but what allows her to learn from such distinguished mentors as these. She reiterates that



**Natalie J. Machado,**

National Director of Marketing,  
FreshSource



the produce industry is truly a “people’s industry” where you find yourself excited to attend the next exhibition or sales call because you know you will interact with friends who are now a part of your extended family.

Another extension of that produce family and a source for industry inspiration is Shannon Dambach, the Director of Sales, National Accounts at FreshSource.

“She has been my go-to for all industry knowledge for the past eight years,” Natalie expresses. “She is extremely knowledgeable, and I have leaned on her greatly throughout the years for advice, support, and friendship. She was the second employee hired at FreshSource, and I can still recall our first ‘all-hands on-deck’ store visits and sales calls we did together. Whether we were traveling cross-country, merchandising vendor products, or making sales calls together, I found comfort in knowing she was always a phone call away. We are there for one another.”

Surrounding herself with people who have so much experience and knowledge may not have been by design, but it has proven essential to Natalie’s career.

Many might assume that growing up in the industry and gaining strong mentorship are the primary factors in Natalie’s success. However, I would argue that her unique fresh produce strategy has always lived inside her.

A childlike wonder turned fierce. 

## THE MENTORS

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



### **Steve Junqueiro,**

*Chief Executive Officer,  
Steve Junqueiro Associates*

“From a very early age, Natalie exhibited a driven passion for excellence and leadership. This was demonstrated throughout her childhood and continues today in her personal and professional life. She is a born leader and understands the importance of the team and teamwork. She has grown up in the produce industry and continues to be thrilled to be part of such a vibrant and vital business. An illustration of Natalie’s approach to life, which is encapsulated in this *Mentors in the Making*, is the experience we had together when she was three years old: As we were walking across a soccer field to see her older brother’s game, she shouted, ‘Let’s run, it takes too long to walk!’ I have used this inspiration in my personal life as well as a lesson to mentor and coach teams that I have led.”



### **Robert Thompson,**

*Founder and Chief Executive Officer,  
FreshSource*

“When I heard Steve Junqueiro’s daughter was looking to break into the industry, I instantly wanted to meet her. I was just starting FreshSource, so we didn’t have the merchandising team we do today. Natalie was one of, maybe, four team members when she came on, and she was willing to do it all. I quickly recognized that she is a deeper well of potential than any of us could have anticipated. The next thing I knew, she stepped up to design the FreshSource logo—that is so exemplary of Natalie’s work ethic. Every project she tackles has turned into something very successful because of her can-do attitude. My advice to Natalie is to start thinking about where she’s taking FreshSource next. If she maintains an open mind, I don’t know where she’ll be able to go. I just hope that she does it with us.”



### **Shannon Dambach,**

*Director of Sales, National Accounts,  
FreshSource*

“I met Natalie about eight years ago, when I had the opportunity to mentor her. She came to FreshSource highly recommended by one of our principal partners, Taylor Farms. The first time I worked with Natalie, she was impeccably dressed, with curled hair and great heels. I was wary at first. I let her know that we are not the ‘typical’ broker. We pride ourselves on being a hands-on sales and merchandising solution company that never says no to a retailer partner.

We spent the day cleaning, stocking, and helping out at stores. She dove right in, not afraid to roll up her sleeves and work hard. The next day Natalie showed up in jeans and flats, ready to get her hands dirty again. That has been my experience with Natalie ever since. When she is faced with a challenge, she not only finds a solution, but goes above and beyond. Natalie is a team player who welcomes feedback and offers support freely. My only advice for Natalie is, ‘Stay the course, because you’re incredible!’”

POWERED BY **JOE PRODUCE®**



# WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Dole® Chopped Salad Kits

?



## CHOPPED SALAD WRAP TO-GO

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 package (13 oz)** Dole® Chopped Sunflower Crunch Salad Kit, or other favorite Dole® Chopped Salad Kit
- 4 (10")** flour tortillas
- 4 tbsp** prepared hummus
- ¼ cup** crumbled feta cheese (optional)
- ¼ cup** chopped fresh cilantro
- ½ tsp** ground cayenne red pepper

**Prep Time:** 15 min

**Servings:** 4

### DIRECTIONS

- 1** Warm tortillas until softened.
- 2** Spread 1 tbsp hummus onto each tortilla. Sprinkle cheese, cilantro, and pepper evenly over hummus.
- 3** Pour salad kit ingredients into bowl and toss together. Divide salad between tortillas. Fold tortilla sides over and roll up. Enjoy!

To learn more about Dole®, visit [www.dole.com](http://www.dole.com)





# A Closer Look at Superfresh Growers® New Organic Apple Bags

By Jenna Plasterer

**T**hroughout history, the relationship between human beings and color has been a strong one, especially for shoppers as they look for unique packaging to catch their attention. Tapping into the important meaning behind different pigments, Superfresh Growers® has chosen a regal purple tone, symbolic of grandeur and nobility, for its new Superfresh Organics® 2 lb pouch bags, signaling to shoppers the premium quality of the Fuji, Granny Smith, Gala, Honeycrisp, and Pink Lady® organic apple varieties housed within each package.

Drawn in by the packaging's pops of vibrant hues visible across the produce aisles, consumers will remain entranced by the fruit inside. If the eyes are the windows to the soul, the large, clear windows adorning the outside of the packaging are the door to high-quality apples. By guaranteeing shoppers the chance to see the products for ripeness before leaving the store, this feature will create not only happy customers, but repeat purchases.

As if the eye-catching packaging wasn't enough, Superfresh Organics offers an environmentally friendly edge to give shoppers the chance to make a positive impact on the Earth while enjoying the mouth-watering fruit. Through integrated pest management and cultivating the land in sync with nature, Superfresh has all but mastered the delicate balance between growing prime organic fruit and supporting the environment—a win-win for buyers and shoppers alike.

There is no need to pinch yourself; you're not dreaming. Superfresh Organics' newly rebranded packaging is ready and waiting to make its way into your produce department, where it will seize the gaze—and dollars—of your shoppers. **S**

# UP CLOSE





# CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

A **Q&A** With **Dave Hewitt**,  
Vice President of Sales, 4Earth Farms™

by Melissa De Leon Chavez

36

**"I**n my experience, telling people our story invites them to be a part of it." In an industry of competitors fighting to be chosen, Dave Hewitt feels the way to shine is not to pound his chest, but to let his passion galvanize ours.

The produce maverick and newly named Vice President of Sales proves his strategy right by me as he recounts how one of the greatest hurdles to the organic segment became 4Earth Farms™ sweet spot.

Settle in as challenges pave the way for victories, doubt becomes intrigue, and one sales guy transforms into a raconteur for the company that made it all possible.







**Melissa De Leon Chavez**

**Q1**

**MDC:** Dave, I can only imagine the number of challenges, hoops, and hurdles you and 4Earth Farms have had to navigate in the time you've been with the team. Can you tell me about how this all started?



**Dave Hewitt,**  
Vice President of Sales,  
4Earth Farms™

**DH:** I recently celebrated 18 years with the company, and we all have come a long way—we've grown up together. I came on board to help grow sales as we were beginning to expand our audience from a primarily foodservice focus. My experience in produce up to that point had been mostly, if not entirely, focused on selling to retail. I started out at Perricone Citrus in the early '90s and really found this industry fun! I was having a blast while being trusted to go out to spread the word, make new friends, and grow sales.

Back then, I could not have imagined the evolution of 4Earth Farms. In the early days, it often felt like we were crashing parties we weren't invited to, so to speak. Looking back, we were searching for our identity, our niche, and how to differentiate ourselves. It took a lot of work, some misses and some successes, but all necessary—and certainly more successes than misses.

Vice President of Sales Dave Hewitt (right) working with sales team member Valerie Gonzalez (left) at the 4Earth Farms™ facility in Commerce, California

**Q2**

**MDC:** Looking back over your 18 years, is there a turning point where that search for the company's identity shifted to more tangible successes? Did you see any changes in our industry that might have fueled that?

**DH:** 4Earth Farms really turned the corner, and certainly I did in my journey, when we were presented with a game-changing opportunity to step into the organic arena. The industry desire and demand for more organic was just underway when an extraordinary opportunity came to help meet that demand. We stepped up to the challenge, way out of our comfort zone and into our next chapter. That's where the fire really started within us, definitely within me. Talk about a rejuvenation!

Through that experience, we have transitioned more focus on organic opportunities and found ourselves on the leading edge of what the segment is today.



**“We have a great story, and I am passionate about sharing it with others. In fact, it’s probably my favorite part of the job.”**

**Dave Hewitt,**  
Vice President of Sales,  
4Earth Farms™

**Q3**

**MDC:** Speaking of rejuvenation, 4Earth’s organic prowess seems to have been a continuation of its already strong conventional offerings. Was this an intentional move or—for lack of a better word—organic?

**DH:** It was absolutely intentional. We’ve got a great team that has figured out how to overcome our largest challenge: How do we grow organically and expand our conventional mix into the organic world with year-round supply? This, as it turns out, was a huge puzzle that a very talented group in our company was able to solve: Finding the most optimal areas to grow effectively, responsibly, and with consistency. And while we certainly have stubbed our toes in some areas, and will continue to, it’s this experience that enables us to evolve into the organic partner we strive to be, focused on the items that we do really well and making them available all year long.

**Q4**

**MDC:** It definitely seems there were a lot of miles involved in working out how to pick up the gauntlet the company was thrown. Would you say this team is part of what differentiates 4Earth Farms from others in the organic arena?

**DH:** I definitely would. Putting that global puzzle together and finding the right elements to the equation to make a consistent organic supply actually work resulted in us utilizing tools other people aren’t using yet. 4Earth Farms has the passion and, thankfully, the resources, to be out there figuring this out. We have team members with the experience that only comes with time and all that that brings to the table.

We have a great story, and I am passionate about sharing it with others. In fact, it’s probably my favorite part of the job.

These things combined have allowed us to grow not just our organic timeline but our entire portfolio. In addition to Brussels sprouts, we have added a diverse range of core offerings that include Persian cucumbers, zucchini, French beans, green beans, sugar snap peas, mini sweet peppers, and colored bell peppers. The list only continues to grow. These moves have instilled such faith in our retail partners that we have two new projects with two different retail customers who we’ve kept in a 52-week supply. Now, they’re ready to launch it in their own brand.

I think that’s always such a strong indicator of our capabilities, especially when it’s a new item for the customer.

**While 4Earth Farms™ has created a global network to ensure year-round organic produce, each operation brings the same quality and assurance as the company’s home base in Commerce, California**





Q5

**MDC:** I know you identify as a foodie—when we discussed the *What The Fork* recipe 4Earth Farms featured in our June issue, you called your own experience with the dish a religious one. How would you say the foodie movement has impacted fresh produce?

**DH:** It starts at the top with Brussels sprouts, which it seems not long ago were not even remotely on our radar, let alone that of foodies'. Now, we continue to have fun with it, and the demand for it is always climbing, which inspired us to focus on providing organic Brussels sprouts all year long. Foodies want something new and exciting and, oftentimes, they want it organically grown.

Shishito peppers are another one of our items that has just skyrocketed from being unknown to demanded, and it's great to be able to educate and teach people about them.

And then, as these items grow in popularity, we get to dive into how we are presenting the product. Do they want it trimmed and cleaned, with spices and certain bags they can cook it in? Are those bags the right recyclability? So, the whole process from how it's grown to how it's packaged, presented, and taken from the farm is going to continue to evolve thanks in large part to foodies, and it's fun to be at the center of that as we are.

We've really ridden the wave into the gourmet experience, and retailers and consumers have relied on our product support to help build sales.

Q6

**MDC:** It does sound like ensuring consistent supply allows 4Earth Farms to both shine and nurture rising demand. What is the team doing to supply these new standards year-round, especially in organic?


**DH:** A key part of our strategy is that we continue to diversify and expand where we grow. It's this diversity, and our neverending search for optimum growing regions, that enables us to supply our organic SKUs 365 days a year. Our experience has shown us that when you're out of an item, the door is wide open for somebody else to jump in and take it. Challenges always arise, but our customers appreciate our approach and expect us to continue to raise the bar when it comes to supply. Additionally, we take pride and value the confidence many of our customers put in us to be private label partners. You're doing something right when you're invited to participate at that level. It's those opportunities to be strategic, crop plan, develop items, and elevate the partnership that fire me up and keep me coming back for more.



While there's joy in success, it is the challenges that Dave points to as the true moments of victory.

The hoops that seemed too high, the puzzles that looked unsolvable, the feats which he was sure the team wouldn't be able to pull off, are what Dave remembers now with a smile.

Those crazy ideas like "let's supply organic items year-round" become defining moments that inspire others to be a part of what he and 4Earth Farms do.

Because win or lose, you can always bet on a good story. 





# Sweet Potato snapshot

By Chandler James



There is warmth in the sweet potato category. From its glorious color palette to the feeling of comfort that comes with each eating experience, these special spuds have consumers coming back to the produce aisle again and again. Diversity of supply is key, though, so check out all of the exciting varieties and let your merchandising imagination run wild...



## Beauregard

<b>Flavor</b>	Traditional sweet flavor; apricot and floral aroma; excellent for baking, roasting, or in casseroles
<b>Shape</b>	Elongated
<b>Eatability</b>	Smooth; brown sugar
<b>Color</b>	Copper-rose to tan skin; orange flesh



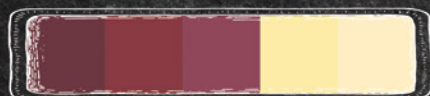
## Diane

<b>Flavor</b>	Very sweet and extra moist
<b>Shape</b>	Elongated
<b>Eatability</b>	Smooth
<b>Color</b>	Red-copper to plum skin; orange flesh



## Murasaki/Japanese

<b>Flavor</b>	Mildly sweet, drier-tasting, full, nutty flavor, with vanilla aroma; exotic alternative to traditional sweet potatoes
<b>Shape</b>	Short and blocky
<b>Eatability</b>	Smooth, dry, firm, and dense
<b>Color</b>	Dark purple skin; white flesh



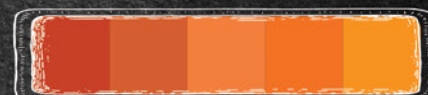
## Covington

<b>Flavor</b>	Moist, sweet, and earthy
<b>Shape</b>	Short and blocky
<b>Eatability</b>	Smooth and fibrous; softer variety
<b>Color</b>	Burnt-orange skin; orange flesh



## Evangeline

<b>Flavor</b>	Sweet and moist
<b>Shape</b>	Elongated and blocky
<b>Eatability</b>	Smooth and fibrous
<b>Color</b>	Rust-orange skin; orange flesh



## O'Henry/Bonita

<b>Flavor</b>	Mild, sweet, drier-tasting, with nutty and earthy flavor
<b>Shape</b>	Longer and thinner when compared to blocky, elongated spuds
<b>Eatability</b>	Smooth and dry with medium firmness; low in visual and residual fiber
<b>Color</b>	Yellow skin; white to yellow flesh



SOURCE | INFORMATION PROVIDED BY  
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SWEET POTATO GROWER CONTRIBUTORS



# WTF DO I DO WITH LIV Organic Sweet Yellow Onions?

{ what the fork }



*Adapted from a recipe by Williams Sonoma*

## LIV ORGANIC SWEET YELLOW ONION AND APPLE TARTS WITH GRUYÈRE AND THYME

### INGREDIENTS

**1½ lb** LIV Organic Sweet Yellow Onions, halved and thinly sliced  
**2 tbsp** vegetable oil  
 Kosher salt and pepper  
**3 tbsp** unsalted butter  
**1 lb** organic tart apples, peeled and sliced ⅛" thick  
**2 tsp** turbinado sugar  
**3 oz** Gruyère cheese, grated  
**3 tbsp** minced chives  
**2 tbsp** fresh thyme, chopped  
**½ cup** walnuts, coarsely chopped  
**1 package (1 lb)** puff pastry dough, thawed  
**1** egg  
 Honey, to taste

**Prep Time:** 15 min

**Cook Time:** 60 min

**Servings:** 18 tarts



### DIRECTIONS

- 1** Preheat oven to 400° F. Place top rack at the top third and another at the bottom third. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper.
- 2** Thaw puff pastry following package instructions, cut into 2" x 2" squares, and evenly space on baking sheets. Beat egg in a small bowl and brush onto the top of the puff pastry squares.
- 3** In a large frying pan, warm oil over medium heat. Add LIV Organic onions to pan, stirring occasionally until they are golden brown, about 25 minutes. Place into bowl and let cool.
- 4** While onions are cooking, lightly roast chopped walnuts in a small pan with ½ tsp butter over medium heat. Transfer to a bowl.
- 5** In the same pan used for the onions, melt the remaining butter. Add the apples and sugar to pan and cook, stirring until they are lightly caramelized and softened, about 15 minutes. Transfer to the bowl with onions and stir in cheese, chives, thyme, and some cracked black pepper.
- 6** Spoon a heaping portion onto each pastry square and season with salt and pepper.
- 7** Bake tarts, rotating rack position every 5 minutes until pastry is golden brown, about 25–30 minutes.
- 8** Transfer baking sheets to wire racks and let the tarts cool. Drizzle with honey and serve at room temperature. Enjoy!

To learn more about LIV Organic, visit [www.livorganicproduce.com](http://www.livorganicproduce.com)



# B B Q

## SnackChat

By Jordan Okumura

**W**hat can consumers do with onions, squash, corn, melons, peppers, and mushrooms this summer and how can retailers promote their versatility? Take your pick: grill, slice, smoke, pickle, toss, julienne them, you name it—there are only opportunities when it comes to the preparation possibilities and category winners for barbecue season here in the Northern Hemisphere. And, one could argue, barbecuing is not just seasonal anymore as the table spread creates numerous chances to push fresh produce and drive sales. Check out some of the passionate insights our industry friends have in this issue...







## ALEXANDRA "RAE" MOLUMBY,

MARKETING MANAGER, COUNTRY SWEET PRODUCE

"Heat up the grill, because sweet potatoes are the perfect addition to summer BBQ cookouts. Not everyone knows how to cook a sweet potato unless it is in a casserole, so we created several sweet potato grilling recipes for shoppers. My personal favorite is the Grilled Sweet Potato Kebab, which is made up entirely of fresh produce ingredients. Feature bagged sweet potatoes at the front of the produce department in grilling displays. Complement the displays with produce and barbecue supplies like skewers for shoppers to make their very own kebabs. Retailers can take advantage of the Country Sweet Produce merchandising materials such as recipe brochures and complimentary secondary display bins to inspire shoppers."

## NICHOLE TOWELL,

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND PACKAGING PROCUREMENT,  
DUDA FARM FRESH FOODS

"One thing we've learned from partnering with Weber Grills is, when it comes to grilling, the sides are JUST as important for shoppers! Not only do we love to promote new, inventive ways to make produce the center of the plate with recipes like grilled Romaine salad, we've also found that shoppers are equally as excited to devour light yet flavorful summer side dishes to accompany their grilled protein. Retailers can increase basket size in the produce department by cross-merchandising items for grilling pairings with various texture combos like steak and grilled tomato and corn salad, chicken and potato salad and chopped celery, or fish with a colorful, crunchy radish slaw."



## GREG SAGAN,

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, SALES AND MARKETING, GIORGIO FRESH CO.

"Mushrooms are a grilling season staple! Because mushrooms have that deep umami flavor that everyone loves, they can easily be incorporated into and elevate the flavor profile of any recipe. One of the best ways to drive mushroom sales is cross-merchandising. Mushrooms should be displayed near other products that complement each other such as kebabs, onions, peppers, pre-made salads, and of course, near all of your other summer grilling essentials. Needless to say, all of our classic mushrooms are absolutely scrumptious cooked on the grill, but we highly recommend encouraging consumers to try our stuffed mushrooms. They are available in a variety of delicious flavors, including Buffalo and Mediterranean! Giorgio Stuffed Mushrooms are sure to be a staple at every BBQ this summer."







## JOSH LEICHTER,

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, PACIFIC TRELIS FRUIT

“Watermelons have traditionally been consumed as delicious, fresh-cut snacks. However, over the last year, consumers have started to experiment with using watermelon in a variety of fun and unique recipes, such as grilling them and topping with basil, balsamic dressing, and feta cheese. As such, a great way to win at retail is to showcase the versatility of watermelons to shoppers. This can be done by leveraging recipe cards and in-store signage in addition to using displays to cross-merchandise with other relevant brands and products, such as herbs. The more you get creative and have fun with it, the more shoppers will, too.”



## KATY JOHNSON,

MARKETING ASSISTANT, PRIME TIME INTERNATIONAL

“Simple point-of-purchase recipe cards or signs can inspire shoppers to pick up a variety of colored bell peppers. Not only are they a beautiful and bright addition to any dish, but they have many health benefits as well! Peppers are loaded with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants. Flavor varies slightly by color as red peppers are sweet, yellow and orange peppers are fairly mild, and green peppers tend to be more savory. Peppers have a multitude of culinary uses and are delicious when roasted, sautéed, grilled, stuffed, or simply sliced and eaten with your favorite dip!”



## WALT DASHER,

PRESIDENT, G&R FARMS

“Consumers all over the country look forward to Vidalia® onion season. Their sweet, crisp, and distinctive flavor can’t be replicated. And, of course, their versatility makes them a great component for summer dishes! Simplicity is sometimes best! Retailers, share these tips with your shoppers: Cut the ends so that they sit flat, brush with olive oil, and sprinkle with salt. Place them on the grill for 30 minutes, and that’s it! As for merchandising, Vidalia onions have many layers, if you will. Call them out—consumers know them by name. Point-of-sale materials, box displays, and recipe cards are an integral part of communicating the beauty and flavor of what some call ‘America’s Favorite Onion.’”





# In the SADDLE of SUCCESS

By Jenna Plasterer



**J**essica Peri loves horses.

It's one of the last things she tells me as our discussion comes to a close, but it stampedes through my mind—shaking the landscape of my thoughts, sending a jolt of unbridled energy through the air, and kicking up a fine mist of realization that settles in its wake.

While it seems like an interesting, albeit random, fact to spark such deep contemplation in Jessica's passion for the animals, a new image of the Peri & Sons Farms® Sales Manager becomes clear.

Throughout history and across the worlds of storytelling, horses represent an array of noble characteristics, including intelligence, instinct, freedom,

connectedness with the Earth, strength, and loyalty. If I weren't the one writing these words, I might have thought you were describing Jessica herself.

These distinct traits become evident from the start of our conversation as she retells her own origin story, one that intertwines with her family. What began with immigrants who migrated from Italy to the U.S., planting the seed of a steadfast work ethic and dedication, would soon be infused into every generation thereafter, right down to Jessica.

"My great-grandparents immigrated from Italy and were farmers and ranchers outside of Reno, Nevada," Jessica begins. "My grandparents farmed





It is a very challenging business, from production problems, quality concerns, and truck issues to weather changes and labor matters—the list goes on and on. I have learned to roll with it, solve the problems, and move forward.

- Jessica Peri, Sales Manager, Peri & Sons Farms®

that same ranch, and I spent a lot of time with them growing up. I was always helping, sometimes driving a tractor to burn ditches or heading up the canyon on horseback to check on cattle. My dad also loved farming, so that is the direction he took. It's in my blood."

Having spent a short stint in Reno myself, I can easily picture a young Jessica saddling up her horse to ride through the sagebrush of the high desert, the wind whipping through her hair like a character from a Western as she climbs the small mountains that dot the otherwise flat plains. In this image of her childhood, I see how a love for nature and farming implanted itself in her and grew as she got older.

However, like many with a lineage rooted in fresh produce, joining her family's business Peri & Sons wasn't always the plan for Jessica. Instead, she had imagined herself transplanting to the big city to start her career in business.

"I knew I wanted to study business, and I always wanted to be a marketer. I just thought I would have some fancy job in a city," explains Jessica. "But marketing onions turned out to be much more

glamorous and rewarding than I ever could have imagined."

During college, a shift began to take place. It started slowly at first, then in one large jolt as she finished an unassuming assignment that would completely change her path.

the farm after he was too old to work, he simply said, 'I guess I will sell it,' and that was it for me," Jessica tells me about the fateful happening. "I couldn't let that happen. It was a few short weeks later that I asked if I could go to work for the family business after college."

With an upbringing imbued with fresh produce knowledge and a newly evolved education in business, Jessica officially began her career at Peri & Sons, taking the first steps in the career that would lead her to where she is today.

Although armed with unique talents and a penchant for the family business, Jessica faced some turbulent moments as she made her official foray into the industry—dealing with the wrinkles that many of us iron out as we grow into ourselves and our new environments. But, like riding a horse, it took patience, skill, and strength to overcome the challenges that she first faced.

"When I started, I was so emotional about everything. A quality rejection would have me in tears. Rejection from a target customer—anguish. But, I have learned to take everything in stride. I have become much more analytical and can take a step back to resolve issues," Jessica says.



In her time at Peri & Sons Farms®, Jessica has helped the company transition much of its packaging to be sustainable, compostable, and biodegradable

"I was given an assignment my junior year of college to learn about a company's succession plan, and I chose my family's company, Peri & Sons. At the time, I had not given any thought whatsoever to working for my dad, but after asking him what would happen to





When Jessica isn't working at Peri & Sons Farms®, she enjoys riding her horse and spending time with her family, including her daughter Juliette (left) and her father David Peri (middle), Founder and Owner of Peri & Sons

“My family instilled a tremendous awareness of the value of hard work. It was not that they hammered it into me; it’s something I learned by watching my family work hard their entire lives for what they have.”

Our industry is one that is constantly in flux with the possibility of seeing several small upheavals just before lunchtime, so Jessica’s sentiment immediately hits home. And so does her advice, a practice in self-awareness and reasoning.

“I used to shoot from the hip and pop off much quicker,” she explains. “I guess you can say I learned to relax and deal with the issues as they come, because they come often. It is a very challenging business, from production problems, quality concerns, and truck issues to weather changes and labor matters—the list goes on and on. I have learned to roll with it, solve the problems, and move forward.”

Through it all, one thing that has driven Jessica to make strides while striving for the best for Peri & Sons is a quality that takes some people a lifetime to hone. That quality—her work ethic—is another key facet of an upbringing that has guided Jessica throughout her career.

“My family instilled a tremendous awareness of the value of hard work,” Jessica elaborates. “It was not that they hammered it into me; it’s something I learned by watching my family work hard their entire lives for what they have.”

With a tenacity of spirit and an evolving handle on the inner workings of the

industry, Jessica learned to wield her abilities to advance Peri & Sons. After starting in sales in 2005, Jessica then began to develop a marketing program to take the company to the next level.

This was no easy feat.

With a mind set on creating a thriving marketing program, Jessica took to every single industry event to learn as much as she could about the fresh produce business. During that time, she formed as many industry connections as possible, and the hustle eventually paid off.

“I was running around like a crazy person,” she explains. “While it is still





“We are an industry leader, and we will continue to push our company with the highest standards possible.”

like that today, we have a much larger, very talented team to help carry out the vision. I light up every time I see our products at retail, which is often, because my own local grocery store carries our onions year-round.”

Providing products 365 days of the year is just one of the many accomplishments that have taken place during Jessica's tenure with her family's business. Since her official start, Peri & Sons has grown by over 300 percent and has established itself as an operation constantly pushing for evolution.

When Jessica begins talking about the grower's achievements, she refers to the business as a “company of firsts,” having become one of the first to be certified Pesticide Residue Free and to


be Food Safety, GLOBALG.A.P., and Sustainably Certified. But all of this is just the beginning, as Jessica sees nothing but open horizons for Peri & Sons.

“We are an industry leader, and we will continue to push our company with the highest standards possible,” she passionately voices. “I personally will continue to focus on new product innovation, production flow and efficiencies, sustainable packaging, sales programs, and marketing.”

As Jessica continues to make her mark on the industry by doing what she loves, every leader needs a little downtime to give their constantly churning minds a reprieve. Besides spending time with

her growing children, soaking in the memories, I bet you can guess her other response when I ask about her passions outside of the industry.

“Horseback riding,” she says with a smile.

Before my eyes, the young girl that I could so clearly picture trotting through the desert on her horse transforms into the woman before me, wiser and with a deepened passion for the industry that blossomed from the seed planted in her childhood. And just like the creature she rides upon in my vision, a symbol of instinct and intelligence cantering through the brush, Jessica has an intuition of her own—something drawing her toward the horizon that she alone has the ability to see. 





# WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

## Gold Coast Packing Broccoli Slaw ?



### TEX-MEX BROCCOLI SLAW

#### INGREDIENTS

- 1 (2 lb) bag** Gold Coast Packing Broccoli Slaw Blend
- 1½ cups** Gold Coast Packing Cilantro
- 1 cup** sweet peppers
- 2** jalapeños, veins and seeds removed
- 1 cup** black beans, rinsed
- 1½ cups** corn (fresh, frozen, or canned)
- 1½ cups** mayonnaise
- ½ cup** sour cream
- 4 tbsp** taco seasoning
- ¼ tsp** chili powder
- Dash** of cayenne pepper
- 3** limes, juiced

**Prep Time:** 20 min

**Cook Time:** 25 min

**Servings:** 12

#### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Heat a pan over medium heat. When hot, place corn in the pan. Let corn brown before flipping or stirring. When corn is browned on both sides, remove from heat.
- 2 While corn is grilling, chop cilantro and dice up the jalapeño and sweet peppers.
- 3 Place Broccoli Slaw, chopped cilantro, diced peppers, rinsed black beans, and grilled corn in a large mixing bowl. Stir to combine.
- 4 In a separate bowl, combine mayonnaise, sour cream, lime juice, and all the seasonings. Blend well.
- 5 Add creamy mixture to veggie mixture, stirring well to coat evenly. Enjoy!

To learn more about Gold Coast Packing, visit [goldcoastpack.com](http://goldcoastpack.com)





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Fowler Packing



*Becoming the*  
**CATALYST**

*By Anne Allen*





remember the first time I encountered the word *catalyst*. The notion straddled the line between poetry and science, an organic muse or a chemical kickstarter.

A catalyst does not just create greatness, it recognizes it. It assesses the existing parts and inserts itself when the timing is precisely right.

It shouldn't surprise you at all that a catalyst can also be a person.



*Sean Nelsen,*  
**VICE PRESIDENT  
OF SALES AND  
MARKETING,  
FOWLER PACKING**

Perhaps Fowler Packing's Sean Nelsen would not use this exact word. But when Sean joined the team, Fowler burst into mandarin stardom. As we begin our conversation one morning when the weather is so sweet—the wind is soft against the windows, the sun is just cresting over the trees—it almost binds our experiences together through the phone.

“When I became Vice President of Sales and Marketing, our conversations were centered around what the Peelz™ brand

meant. We wanted to make sure that we were putting something forward that added value to the shelf,” Sean

explains. “California does a great job growing a mandarin. Fowler had to bring the difference.”

As a necessity, the fresh produce industry thinks in the abstract and the hypothetical. Foresight and vision are essential not just for survival, but for success. As Sean considered that Fowler needed to bring this essential thinking to the buy-side, a light bulb went off.

“The health and wellness movement gives the produce industry a huge competitive advantage when we talk about competing for the shopper dollar, right?” Sean asks, further drawing me into the discussion. I find myself nodding. “We don't have the same external pressures and conversations with retailers as beverages or proteins do. What conversations we do have are centered around retailers who want shoppers to consume more produce. We have an end-consumer who *wants* to consume more. That's already a huge advantage.”

The messaging, Sean reasoned, was already built-in. Consumers were demanding the product; it was up to Fowler to make sure they got that product consistently and of high quality so they kept coming back.

“People will not eat healthy if the produce they're buying is an inconsistent quality. From the minute they purchase the product to the minute it's eaten, it has to look, travel, and taste amazing,” he comments, before adding with a laugh, “I mean, I never have a problem with Fritos® or Oreos® tasting the same every time.”

“  
**Fowler was one of the  
first growers to put  
mandarins in the ground  
in California, which  
means we have more  
experience in growing  
this category than almost  
anybody else.**  
”

*Sean Nelsen, Vice President of Sales  
and Marketing, Fowler Packing*



The bottom line is this: If shoppers don't trust a brand, they'll take their money elsewhere. And Fowler Packing has done a great deal in order to make sure that doesn't happen.

"Fowler was one of the first growers to put mandarins in the ground in California, which means we have more experience in growing this category than almost anybody else. That matters," Sean emphasizes. "We understand what every variety needs from a nutrient or watering standpoint. As stewards of the land, we've made capital improvements in water and irrigation practices, all of which equals higher quality fruit."

The company regards each season in turn, but it makes decisions in the present to impact the outcome of future seasons.

"That's why we are invested so heavily in social media," Sean asserts. "We want to make that connection now so retailers and shoppers will understand that the product they're buying this moment will still have the same quality three, four, five years from now."

Fowler Packing has also invested heavily in its packing facility, implementing automation technology that is, as Sean puts it, beyond what human eyes can give us.

Not to say that the human element of Fowler and its operations isn't profoundly important to the

company. In fact, it's only another testament to the grower's ability to consistently deliver quality to its partners and create a culture that thrives.

"We're also in the table grape business, and one example of our commitment to quality is that we pick grapes multiple times. That way, we get the best fruit off the vines while also letting the product behind it continue to grow in high-quality conditions. And that matters, you know? That extra cost matters, because doing things the right way at both the packing and farm levels will drive consistency. It's that cohesiveness that we strive for between growing and sales," Sean notes. "Because we talk with the people working the land about who our customers are, they know what they're working on. They know if it's a bag of grapes for a specific retailer, or if the citrus is being featured in a marketing campaign. They get behind it."

I can hear how much Sean loves the commitment from the entire team from just his voice. And this is what I mean when

I figure Sean as the catalyst in Fowler's growth. He already knew the greatness and potential of the company.

"It's been a joy to be a part of this growth," he says. "What we've achieved in the short-term is so amazing, but I'm even more excited about what's coming three to five years from now."



**We want to make that connection now so retailers and shoppers will understand that the product they're buying this moment will still have the same quality three, four, five years from now.**



“  
**We're innovative, yes,  
but we also have that  
family element. You're  
not farming for 72 years  
unless you're committed.**  
”

Notably, Fowler will be enhancing its farming practices and grabbing additional ground for further operational expansions.

“We've also brought organics and Dekopons to the Peelz brand. The organic mandarin is still an underdeveloped category that we want to help develop. And the Dekopon is a great variety that brings a premium ring, which is fantastic for our retail partners,” Sean imparts.

He further explains that Fowler hopes to up its organic production of table grapes, as well as rebrand its clamshells.

“You're going to see what we call the SamSonS shield,” Sean says, in reference to the new logo. “It's prominent across our grape packaging, and I think it speaks quality and confidence for the retailer. We put our best foot forward as a company because that SamSonS shield has been our legacy for the last 72 years.”


The name itself pays homage to the late Sam Parnagian, Founder of Fowler Packing, who, along with his four sons, became an essential part of the company's operations in the 1970s.

Past, present, and future have been distilled in the workings of Fowler Packing. The testimony to its legacy, I think, is how excited it is for the future.

“We're innovative, yes, but we also have that family element. You're not farming for 72 years unless you're committed. The Parnagians and the legacy they bring forward is, to me, one of our chief responsibilities now and in the future,” Sean reflects. “Who we are as a company, what we invest in, how we present ourselves to retailers—all of that connects to what we want to stand for.”

As I near the end of my notes as I write this article, I realize it is hard to follow the act of a catalyst. The whirlwind growth kindled by one such as Sean is experienced rarely, he would likely argue that, as a company, Fowler Packing brings that incendiary momentum wherever it goes.

And Sean is that spark,

Fowler, the fire. 



Top: Fowler Packing is expanding its mandarin program to include organics and Dekopons under its Peelz™ brand

Bottom: The SamSonS shield is prominent across Fowler Packing's table grape packaging and pays homage to the late Sam Parnagian, Founder



# WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Lipman Family Farms®  
Crimson™ Tomatoes ?



## CRIMSON™ TOMATO SUMMER SALAD

### INGREDIENTS

**2–3** Crimson™ Tomatoes, sliced 1/4"–1/3" thick  
**2** avocados  
**1** pint blackberries  
**1** red onion, sliced  
**3–4 oz** baby arugula  
**2–3 oz** crumbled feta cheese  
Chopped fresh basil  
Extra virgin olive oil  
Salt and pepper, to taste

**Prep Time:** 6 min  
**Servings:** 4

### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Lay a bed of baby arugula on a serving dish.
- 2 Layer sliced Crimson™ Tomatoes, blackberries, sliced avocados, and red onion on top.
- 3 Top with crumbled feta and lots of fresh basil, and season with salt and pepper.
- 4 Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and enjoy!

To learn more about Lipman Family Farms,  
visit [www.lipmanfamilyfarms.com](http://www.lipmanfamilyfarms.com)





# A Closer Look at Catania Worldwide's GO GUAVA Brand

By Chandler James

I want to be wowed in the produce aisle.


Perhaps it is because I write for the trade, and therefore have high expectations. On the other hand, maybe I am just another consumer gaining interest in unique and premium eating experiences. Either way, this duality makes me especially skilled at tracking down packaging that appeals to both the trade and the shopper, and Catania Worldwide's new GO GUAVA brand does just this.

With guavas being a relatively novel product at retail, Catania opted for education when adding them to its portfolio. Its packaging, in particular, highlights the stages of ripening and the optimal time for consumption, ensuring that each shopper can experience this fruit at its peak.

Above all, Catania is looking to make guavas a mainstream category. In addition to education through the GO GUAVA packaging, Catania has worked closely with its retail partners to integrate the product

through eye-catching displays and impulse-driven merchandising.

Catania's GO GUAVA brand is currently on shelves of eastern Canada-based Costco stores, but the supplier already has plans in place to expand the offering throughout Canada and the United States with all of its retail partners.

The tropical aroma alone will drive shoppers straight to your fresh fruit displays. Prepare for them all to be wowed once they arrive. 

# UP CLOSE







## THE VEGGIE RAINBOW KEBAB

### INGREDIENTS

**16 oz pack** of Monterey® Medium

White Mushrooms

**1** red bell pepper

**1** green bell pepper

**1** orange bell pepper

**1** yellow bell pepper

**1** small yellow squash

**1** small zucchini

**1** red onion

**10 oz** pack of grape or cherry tomatoes

**16** baby purple potatoes

#### ITALIAN VEGETABLE MARINADE

**½ cup** extra virgin olive oil

**¼ cup** lemon juice

**1 cup** Italian dressing

**2** garlic cloves, minced

**1 tsp** basil

**1 tsp** rosemary

**1 tsp** thyme

Salt and pepper, to taste

**Prep Time:** 20 min

**Cook Time:** 10 min

**Servings:** 8 kebabs

### DIRECTIONS

- 1** Bring a pot of water to a boil with a dash of salt. Place whole purple potatoes in and set a timer for 20 minutes.
- 2** Rinse your bell peppers, squash, zucchini, and tomatoes in cool water. Slice and cut bell peppers into 2" pieces. Slice squash and zucchini into flat circles. Leave your grape tomatoes whole. Peel and dice the onion into 2" pieces.
- 3** Do not rinse mushrooms, and leave whole so they skewer easily.
- 4** When potatoes are tender enough to be pierced with a fork, remove from heat and drain in a colander. Set aside to cool.
- 5** Mix together Italian vegetable marinade ingredients.
- 6** Soak ingredients in the marinade in a bowl or a Ziploc® bag for 20 minutes. If short on time, simply baste veggies with the mixture after skewering.
- 7** Preheat the grill to 375° F.
- 8** String your ingredients on your metal skewers, arranging them by color mimicking the pattern of a rainbow. Use the picture for reference!
- 9** Place kebabs on the grill over direct heat. After 2 minutes or once grill marks are established, move to indirect heat and grill for 3 minutes. Flip and grill an additional 5 minutes. Baste kebabs with remaining marinade between flips on the grill.
- 10** Serve as a delicious side with your other picnic favorites or as a stand-alone grilled snack.

To learn more about Monterey Mushrooms, visit [www.montereymushrooms.com](http://www.montereymushrooms.com)





**BLACK MISSION**



**BROWN TURKEY**



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# OUTSIDE *The Limits*

A Q&A WITH *Rick Bravo*,  
VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND MARKETING,  
OCEAN MIST® FARMS



BY ANNE ALLEN





I think the value in life is found in the learning.

And not just learning something new, but grappling with the fundamentals of ourselves, the pathways we've taken, the stumbling blocks we've overcome. Only through this level of introspection do we find a certain kind of peace.

But perhaps I'm getting ahead of myself.

There are those of us throughout this industry—companies and individuals alike—who learn our strengths immediately. For Ocean Mist® Farms, this strength came in the form of a formidable artichoke program nearly 100 years strong.

In crafting one exceptional program, Ocean Mist has learned what it takes to craft other programs like it, spanning multiple categories and growing regions. As I myself meander into this newfound knowledge, I find a guide in Rick Bravo, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, whose expertise spans years and whose own thirst for learning crosses miles.

After all, that's how I manage to find the words to pen this piece.

“We invest significant time and resources into developing our proprietary seed varieties and world-class growing practices.”

*Rick Bravo,*

Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Ocean Mist® Farms



**Anne Allen:** Ocean Mist Farms has built a name for itself with its flagship category, the artichoke. How has the team taken its expertise in this category and extended it to a variety of other vegetables?

**Rick Bravo, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Ocean Mist® Farms:**

Ocean Mist Farms has been growing artichokes for nearly a century and, over those years, our product line has grown to include several other commodities, including Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, celery, Iceberg, Romaine Hearts, and spinach, to name a few. We invest significant time and resources into developing our proprietary seed varieties and world-class growing practices. That commitment has made Ocean Mist Farms the Gold Standard in variety selection, cultivation, harvesting, cooling, consumer engagement, and eating experience.



Many may not realize that we are one of the largest bunch spinach growers and have a unique wire-bound wooden crate product offering that continues to be in significant demand.

---

**AA:** Essentially then, artichokes were just the beginning. What expansion plans do you have in mind for these specific programs?

**RB:** While our core items are artichokes, Iceberg, celery, broccoli, cauliflower, and Romaine Hearts, we have invested resources into expanding our award-winning value-added Season & Steam product line. Five new top-selling value-added vegetables were added to this line in fall 2020 to respond to consumers' demand for convenience and personalization.

---

**AA:** As the company has expanded and used its expertise to expand into additional categories, it also saw opportunities in the value-added sector. You've become a pioneer in this space as well, so how has the team responded to such seismic shifts in consumer demand?

**RB:** As with any company, innovation can be challenging—especially when it comes to product innovation. As trends come and go, it is important to not lose sight of your core competencies, but also find a way to be relevant on the store shelf. Our Season & Steam line is a great example of offering shoppers convenient meal solutions while





^In addition to its impressive artichoke program, Ocean Mist® Farms has gathered expertise across a variety of categories and growing regions

not limiting them to trendy flavor profiles. Season & Steam is one of the only steam-in-a-bag products on the market that lets shoppers open the bag, season to their liking, reseal, and microwave for a personalized dish that's ready in 5-7 minutes.

**AA:** We've already touched on the Gold Standard belief, but how does this idea and other growing practices help Ocean Mist's vegetables stand out on the shelf?

**RB:** We remain committed first and foremost to investing significant time and resources into developing our world-class growing practices. That commitment has made Ocean Mist Farms the Gold Standard in cultivation, harvesting, and cooling across all products available in our line. We emphasize telling the story of our growing regions to demonstrate our Gold Standard in artichoke production.

**AA:** Your commitment to quality is found beyond your handling of the products, in your dedication to a number of growing regions across California and Mexico. Can you tell me about the strategic value of these regions?

**RB:** Our spring Castroville, California-grown artichokes are the cornerstone of our artichoke

program, and Castroville is, in fact, where our very first artichokes were planted over nine decades ago.

The Mediterranean-like climate in this Central California area is ideal because of its similarity to this Italian vegetable's native home across the Atlantic. Castroville's mild, coastal temperatures are perfect for growing the Gold Standard artichoke! During the colder winter months, our farming experts have worked tirelessly to replicate the same quality, flavor, and eating experience of our Castroville artichokes in the warmer desert climate of Coachella, California, where our premier winter artichokes call home.

Ocean Mist Farms is unique in the fact that our growing locations are almost exclusive to California, with a few commodities grown in Mexico and Arizona. Location and soil quality are the driving factors for growing where we do and maintaining our commitment to producing only the very best quality and eating experience.

If there's anything I take away from my conversation with Rick, it's that learning shouldn't be stagnant. It should foster growth, push us to our limits, and, ultimately, make us the best version of ourselves.

For Ocean Mist Farms, that best version is honed to be even better. 🍷





## DALMATIAN CIOPPINO

## INGREDIENTS

**1 bunch** Jasmine Vineyards California Red Seedless Grapes, stemmed  
**4 tbsp** olive oil  
**1 medium-sized** yellow onion, chopped  
**1 clove** garlic, minced  
**½ tsp** crushed red pepper flakes  
**1** bay leaf  
**1 cup** dry white wine  
**1 can (28 oz)** whole tomatoes, with juice  
**2 cups** fish stock  
**24 small** little-neck clams, scrubbed  
**1 lb firm** white fish, such as halibut, sea bass, or snapper, cut into 2" chunks  
 Handful of chopped parsley  
 Lemon juice (½ a lemon)  
 Salt and pepper, to taste  
 Flaky bread, for serving

**Prep Time:** 20 min

**Cook Time:** 30 min

**Servings:** 4

## DIRECTIONS

- 1** In a large Dutch oven or a medium-sized pan on a medium-high heat stovetop, heat olive oil and add chopped onion, stirring and cooking until translucent, about 3 minutes. Add minced garlic, cooking 30 more seconds, stirring constantly.
- 2** Stir in the crushed red pepper flakes, bay leaf, and wine. Bring to a boil and cook for 2 minutes. Add the tomatoes with their juice, breaking the tomatoes up slightly with a spoon. Add fish stock and let simmer over medium heat for about 15 minutes (the broth can be made ahead at this point.)
- 3** Add the clams to simmering pot and cover to cook for 2 minutes, then add the fish and cover again. Cook until the clams have fully opened and the fish is just cooked through, about 3 minutes. *Tip: Discard any clams that do not open.*
- 4** At this point, stir in the red grapes and warm them up for one minute.
- 5** Remove from heat, add the chopped parsley, and stir in the salt and pepper to taste.
- 6** Sprinkle with fresh lemon juice and serve with fresh, flaky bread.

To learn more about Jasmine Vineyards, visit [www.jasminevineyards.com](http://www.jasminevineyards.com)



# Powered by Passion

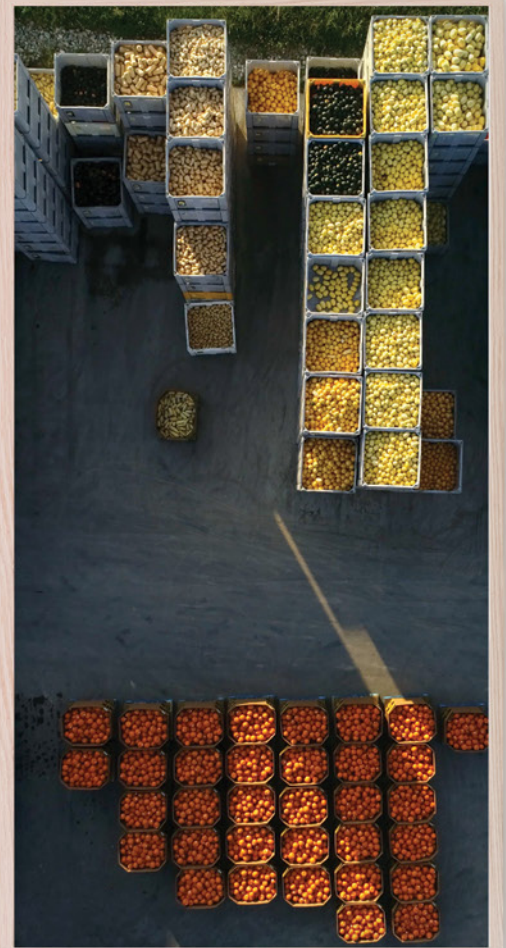
By Jenna Plasterer

**B**illie Jean King, 39-time Grand Slam champion; Beyoncé, winner of 28 Grammy Awards; and Toni Morrison, Nobel Prize in Literature honoree, Pulitzer Prize winner, and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

What do all of these talented individuals have in common, besides the fact that they are women? They have an unceasing passion that has driven them to innovate, break barriers, and earn a distinctive place in the fabric of their industries throughout their careers.







## Michele Youngquist,

Co-Founder and President,  
Bay Baby Produce

Weaving its way through generations of leaders, this fervor has made its mark on fresh produce. Blazing the trail through a predominantly male pool of owners and operators over the years, many impressive female leaders have harnessed their drive and penchant for produce to establish their own companies. Two such women were Michele Youngquist and Liz Mitchell, Co-Founders of Bay Baby Produce.

Just like the women named earlier that wielded their zeal for their respective art forms to launch themselves into the world of success, in 1999, Michele, now President, and Liz turned their flair for painted pumpkins into an agricultural business. Since then, the company has continued to grow, nourished by their unceasing enthusiasm.

As she describes the venture, Michele's deep excitement for Bay Baby shines through, showing exactly why this operation has only continued to thrive since its inception.

"Our mission is to be a consistently reliable source for high-quality painted pumpkins, long stem ornamentals, organic squash, and the value-added products grown on our farm. We strive for great customer service, superior quality, open communication, and, of course, fun!" Michele joyously explains. "Our team's commitment to collaborate and work together for the betterment of our company and retail partners means that everyone benefits through great solidarity."

Starting twenty years ago in Mount Vernon, Washington, with just a patch of dirt and a desire to bring a lively flair to its pumpkins, Bay Baby is now a sustainable, vertically integrated company that owns, grows, sells, packs, and ships 100 percent of its products.

Located in the U.S. Pacific Northwest, an area known for having one of the most diverse and fertile microclimates in North America, Bay Baby uses this ideal growing region to offer a vast array



of customized solutions for its customers, including more than 12 varieties of pumpkins and more than 10 types of organic winter squash.

“In the process of growing our business, we have accomplished much more than Liz and I initially envisioned,” says Michele. “We’ve developed a proprietary painting and production process that provides consistent, top-quality painted pumpkins; expanded our farming operations from 30 acres to a little over 600 acres; and we’ve added organic winter squash to our portfolio. From a business that was originally 100 percent decorative pumpkins, fresh-packed produce now accounts for over 50 percent of our production.”

Although Michele tells me the company is a perfect size—not too big, not too small—to maintain a close relationship with its partners and meet their needs, Bay Baby wants to continue to push the envelope on innovation. In other words, keeping its strong connections while also exploring new opportunities to offer its customers the best options possible.

Already turning a fun, creative concept into a fresh produce powerhouse, Bay Baby has not only widened its industry reach to include new products, but to evolve its original concept: painted pumpkins.

The product that sparked the creation of the business was the brainchild of both Liz and Michele, who wanted to add personality to pumpkins. Inspired by Liz’s passion for elementary school education and outreach, Bay Baby launched its Pumpkin Patch Pals®, serving as a way to inspire kids to eat healthily. Although Liz passed away in 2012, her spirit and memory live on through the products.

Each of the squash maven’s pumpkins is individually painted and hand-decorated. Because of their customization and uniqueness in the industry, the painted pumpkins have seen a boom in popularity as the category continues to grow.

Currently, Bay Baby produces close to one million pumpkins per year and, because of its interesting designs and

customization capabilities, the products have caught the attention of influencers and celebrities like comedian Laura Cleary and actress Candace Cameron Bure, as well as new partners throughout the industry who can’t get enough of Bay Baby’s products.

“Our customized merchandising options offer our retail partners variety and an instant display all in one unit,” effuses Michele. “The best feature for so many of our retail partners is the labor-saving advantage of having a quick focal point display that team members are easily able to build around by cross-merchandising with other fall items.”

Besides its artistic impact on the squash category, Bay Baby is also making a mark with its advancements across its operations. Showcasing the ability of female trailblazers to generate unique followings that drive demand, the company has seen unwavering success over the years. To answer the call for the grower’s offerings, Bay Baby has expanded its warehouse and other central facets of its operations.

**“From a business that was originally 100 percent decorative pumpkins, fresh-packed produce now accounts for over 50 percent of our production.”**

—Michele Youngquist, Co-Founder and President, Bay Baby Produce







“I’m so proud of our new updated warehouse that features innovative, sustainable automation as well as solar power—it is one of the largest solar-powered ag facilities in western Washington,” Michele tells me. “Additionally, we are working on streamlining and automating various aspects of our operation to better serve our employees, company, and retail partners. This will allow our team to get our products to retail efficiently, effectively, and in a timely manner.”

While the flame of Michele and Liz’s verve for the squash category lit the way for progress, the team at Bay Baby remains a crucial part of the company’s success and a focal aspect of the brand’s culture. Without the dedication of its Founders and those at every level of the business, Bay Baby may not have reached the heights of development it stands at today.


Michele mentions her wonderful team at every turn, simultaneously showcasing her enthusiasm for the products and the people that make them possible.

“This has been a balancing act between accounting, marketing, selling, maintenance, planting, human resources, harvesting, production, and shipping. Each aspect requires communicating effectively as a team, allowing each of our processes to flow seamlessly,” explains Michele. “The dedication and commitment of our employees working together has created healthy, invaluable, long-term relationships throughout the entire process of servicing our company and retail partners, and that is how we will continue to grow.”

Backed by the vivacity radiating from Michele, combined with the strength and passion of the company’s team, the potential for Bay Baby seems limitless. Looking ahead, the squash purveyor

plans to build on its success the best way it knows how: with vigor and a desire to keep expanding its wheelhouse.

“Moving toward the future, we want to increase our digital marketing capabilities to include things like eye-catching 360-degree images, videos, and more,” Michele describes. “We are also looking to create and offer unique business-to-business product features and information to our retail partners, as well as new cross-promotional opportunities online and in-store.”

With an inextinguishable flame of pure passion already lit, the future shines bright for the grower as it enters its next phase of evolution. Like the ranks of women whose ardor has left indelible marks on their industries, when Michele finishes speaking, I can’t help but feel that one day we will be saying the same thing about the women of Bay Baby Produce. 





# A Closer Look at Lipman Family Farms® Compostable Clamshell

By Peggy Packer


For many consumers, shopping is an equal collaboration between the eyes and the heart. While they may be drawn in by the visually appealing aspects of any packaging, what truly bonds shoppers to a product is the message it shares and the cause it supports.

Lipman Family Farms® new compostable clamshell is an eye-catching new symbol of its commitment to sustainable practices across the supply chain to benefit both the retailer and Mother Earth.

As more shoppers opt for packaging that has a minimal impact on the environment, Lipman has swiftly granted their wishes and offered the buy-side an innovative solution for today's conscientious consumers.

The unique, eco-friendly clamshell allows shoppers to enjoy the grower's delicious organic grape tomatoes without compromising their own dedication to sustainability, as it can easily be composted right in their own backyards in approximately six months.

Carefully designed to showcase Lipman's Grown True™ organic grape tomatoes, the new packaging also offers direct visibility of the fruit, giving the inviting variety an opportunity to mesmerize consumers from within the box and drive sales across the entire category.

As Lipman Family Farms expands this compostable packaging offering to meet growing demand from consumers, there is no better time to join the supplier and take a seat on the sustainability train. 

# UP CLOSE





# WTF DO I DO WITH Shuman Farms RealSweet® Vidalia® Onions?

{ what the fork }



CHEF SHANNEN TUNE'S VIDALIA® ONION RINGS

## INGREDIENTS

**2 large** RealSweet® Vidalia® Onions,  
cut into large rings  
**4 cup** all-purpose flour  
**1 tbsp** granulated onion powder  
**1 tbsp** granulated garlic powder  
**12 oz** craft seasonal beer, chilled  
Vegetable oil, for frying  
Kosher salt

**Prep Time:** 15 min  
**Cook Time:** 30 min  
**Servings:** 4

## DIRECTIONS

- 1 Heat oil to 350° F.
- 2 To prepare the batter, add the granulated onion powder, garlic powder, and salt to the flour. Then, add the beer and stir until batter reaches the consistency of pancake batter.
- 3 Dip onion rings into batter and then slowly add rings into fryer. Fry on both sides until golden brown.
- 4 Remove onion rings from fryer and place on paper towels to allow excess oil to drain. Season with salt and enjoy.

*Tip: Enjoy as part of a charcuterie board and serve with a spicy ranch dressing to take snacking to the next level!*

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







► MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀

## KARA BADDER

*Marketing Manager, Nature Fresh Farms*

With **Jordan Okumura**

Do you want to feel the wind in your hair, adventure in the air, and experience the unique spirit of a produce marketing up-and-comer? Then read no further than Kara Badder's list of her favorite things. I am equal parts tickled and inspired by this woman, and I think you will be, too. Take the leap, if you dare. I know Kara would...



1 Goats

2 Matcha

3 My Family and Fiancé

4 Boating

5 Adventure, Adrenaline, and the Outdoors

6 Baking (yes, those are cupcakes)

7 My Puppy

8 Salads

9 Lemons



FOR  
FRESH  
go

Nicholas DaCosta (left), President, Braga Fresh Foods and Rod Braga (right), Chief Executive Officer, Braga Fresh





# A PARTNERSHIP IN ITS PRIME

BY JORDAN OKUMURA

“Sometimes it’s the right person that makes progress possible.”

Rod Braga shares this with me as he sits in the century-old office on the Braga Home Ranch that his grandfather built nearly 100 years ago.

Talk about “if walls could talk.”

The desk cradles his elbows as the Chief Executive Officer of Braga Fresh leans forward to share with me his family’s origins in Soledad, California.

“In order to have successful growth, you need to find the right partner to help you plan for the future while maintaining the day-to-day business—feet firmly planted but with the capacity to anticipate and plan for far-reaching possibilities and challenges,” Rod tells me. “I always start by surrounding myself with talented people with differing ideas. We have always been primed for growth: an ongoing vision and the organizational ownership needed to allow us to control all aspects of the supply chain.”

So what’s next for Braga Fresh? Rod pauses to take us around the next corner in the conversation.

“My grandfather planned for the long term—for the next generation and the generation after that,” Rod shares. “Bringing Nicholas DaCosta on board—that exact right person—was our way of planning for the next generation and changing the way that we, and then our customers, were able to do business. Moving Braga Fresh products into a multi-brand, value-added program was the next step.”

From the periphery of the conversation, Nicholas enters the story and I immediately sense a kinship between the two

leaders. Kori Tuggle, Vice President of Marketing and Product Development, refers to these two like one would an old fable: The Farmer and the Salad Maker. I smile at this reference and listen to the conversation shift to their value-added chapter.

Rod explains Nicholas is a purpose-driven visionary capable of seeing what the value-added landscape can provide. At the same time, executing on those opportunities despite their complicated demands. Since joining the company in 2015 as President of Braga Fresh Foods—the fresh-cut, value-added program now within Braga’s umbrella of companies—Nicholas and his team have raised the operation to new heights.

“We have always been primed for growth: an ongoing vision and the organizational ownership needed to allow us to control all aspects of the supply chain.”

—ROD BRAGA,  
Chief Executive Officer, Braga Fresh



“This was something my grandfather believed as well, practicing both ‘sustainable’ and ‘organic’ farming before those two words were used. After all, farmers were the first environmentalists.”

—ROD BRAGA

“We have had the idea to move into processing for quite some time,” Rod reflects. “But it never felt like the right time, and the formula did not quite make sense until we met Nicholas.”

In partnering with Nicholas, the puzzle pieces begin to fall into place, and a story of deliberate choices and dedication starts to come together.

The puzzle has been a work in progress for Braga Fresh. In 2016, the Braga family took stock of their organic acreage, resources, and potential, and decided to move into the value-added sector with Braga Fresh Foods.

Rod tells me that the entire Braga team had to align to make the expansion into a new area of business. Though I can see it as a need to reconcile a paradox that can, at times, pit tradition against innovation, Rod does not see the tension.

“Nicholas and I share the same passion, work ethic, and ideas around what it means to grow in precisely the right way. You could say it comes from our common family backgrounds in dairy farming, which both of our grandparents first did when they came to California,” Rod says. “A big part of that vision

is to ensure that the soil on our home ranch today—tilled for the first time more than 90 years ago—will be in an even better condition for our children than when we started farming here. This was something my grandfather believed as well, practicing both ‘sustainable’ and ‘organic’ farming before those two words were used. After all, farmers were the first environmentalists.”

I laugh and nod in deep agreement. I have always loved this sentiment and those that carry it with such intention and honor.

For Braga Fresh, sustainability is more than a growing and harvesting concept. Rod frames sustainability in terms of creating careers that enable the Braga Fresh team to provide for their families and better the communities they live and work in. This mindset resonated with Nicholas.

“I loved the way that Rod and the team spoke about their family farming and intentions for the company when I joined. Only our people can get us to the next 10, 20, and 50 years. Rod and the team deeply believe in this foundation, and it is not something that I took lightly when he and I first started discussing an expansion of the business and me joining the team,” Nicholas says to me.

Nicholas and Rod on the Braga Fresh Home Ranch in Soledad, California





Rod explains how a big part of building the company's brand, Josie's Organics, and a processing arm was recognizing and acknowledging what the team didn't know.

"And value-added is a very complicated arena to step into," he adds. "Which is why we partnered with Nicholas."

Bringing close to 30 years of experience in the processing business with him, Nicholas understood the challenges facing the industry today and what it would take to start a new facility from scratch.

"I saw how building the value-added business could round out an already successful farming operation as a grower, packer, and shipper of core vegetable commodities so we could offer the full line of products which optimizes freshness for the retailer," Nicholas says.

To kick off this undertaking, the team built a state-of-the-art facility with an entire network of stainless steel machinery and fixtures, as well as a hygienically designed, open-channel system. It would allow the team to continue to update the operation as technology and harvest practices evolved. Between chopped salad, cut-veg, and baby leaf lines, Braga Fresh has a diverse product assortment in categories that process a little differently from one another. Braga made a commitment to invest in each unique process, to make each category's equipment tailored to the product and the needs of its retail partners.

"Even with all of the investments in technology and machinery, one of the most important things in building a processing company is having the right supply. Because the supply is already in-house with the Braga Fresh arm, we can assure the highest quality organic crops will go into the value-added lines," Nicholas shares. "This also gives us a unique position in California's Salinas Valley: We have the freshness, size, and scale to support a large program that could pivot on a dime, if needed. Our inventory is basically right there in Rod's fields."

Nicholas adds that there is no extra contracting and oversight needed—the company owns the raw materials already.

"Retailers need four things, in my opinion: One is a given in our industry now—food safety. Very, very important. And we knew that the Braga family had that in place and they hold it in the highest regard. The second is a surety of supply. Customers, as they're growing, need somebody that can consistently supply them," Nicholas adds. "They also need innovation, and then they need an operation-driven company that can support their growth. When it comes to our vision, we never cut any corners."

Braga Foods has now been processing for more than four years, but doing so with the prowess of a company that has been doing it much longer.

"Since we turned on the lights at the processing operation, our combined programs are closing in on around 500,000 cases a week," Nicholas gauged. "Maybe more by the time this article is published. It's been an exciting run, and it's great to market yourself as grower-owned and innovation-forward."



Top: Organic baby spinach at Braga Fresh Foods in Gonzales, California

Bottom: Retail clamshells of organic baby spinach







Nicholas and Rod standing on the surrounding ground of the existing facility in Gonzales, California, which was purchased for future expansion plans

“We have the freshness, size, and scale to support a large program that could pivot on a dime, if needed. Our inventory is basically right there in Rod’s fields.”

—NICHOLAS DAcOSTA,  
President, Braga Fresh Foods

From a full line of conventional and organic chop salads with expanding flavor profiles to organic- and conventional-cut vegetables, the one-stop shop descriptor is more than just apropos for Braga, it is the company’s vision.


“We are a company built to bring multiple solutions to market. Instead of major retailers having to pick up produce at five different coolers, they can make one stop and get the product to the distribution center (DC) and improve freshness,” Nicholas adds.

In total, Braga Fresh operates three processing facilities, growing product in both California and Arizona. On top of this, the company just launched three Josie’s Organics premium salad kits: Lemon Herb, Spring Blush, and Rustic Tomato, with plans to continue to grow the category.

“These are exciting times. Between new products and strategies for the future, there is a lot still to be done,” Nicholas tells me. “I know that Rod and I make each decision with the possibility in mind that our children may one day stand in our shoes.”

As we finish our conversation, I think of Rod’s grandparents, Josie and Sebastian, their farm, and a dream.

These two partners and the generations before them are not walled in by history, but fortified by it.

And primed for a future that is uniquely theirs. 





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# WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Fruit World Organic  
Thomcord Grapes

?



## ORGANIC FRUIT WORLD THOMCORD GRAPE SORBET

### INGREDIENTS

**2 lb** Organic Fruit World Thomcord

Grapes, washed and stemmed

**1/3 cup** honey

**2-3 sprigs** fresh rosemary

**2 tbsp** whole black peppercorns

**1** lemon, halved

**Prep Time:** 5 min

**Cook Time:** 20 min

**Servings:** 4

### DIRECTIONS

- 1** Purée the grapes in a food processor on high for about 45 seconds until slushy, in batches if necessary. Transfer the grape purée to a saucepan and add honey, rosemary, and peppercorns. Bring to a simmer over medium heat and then turn down to low heat for about 15 minutes, until slightly thickened.
- 2** Pour the mixture into a bowl through a mesh strainer in order to remove the rosemary, peppercorns, and trace seeds. Use a spoon to push any remaining grape mixture through. Squeeze the lemon into the bowl and mix well.
- 3** Distribute the liquid sorbet evenly into freezable cupcake or popsicle trays, or simply leave in a metal bowl. Freeze for 8-plus hours. Remove from the freezer whenever you're ready to enjoy this perfect summer dessert!



To learn more about Fruit World, visit [www.fruitworldco.com](http://www.fruitworldco.com)





# CALIFORNIA LEAFY GREENS

## SnackChat

By Lilian Diep

**W**hen I think of fresh summertime dishes, I often consider California's leafy greens as some of the key ingredients in warm-weather recipes. As we enter the peak of summer here in the States, many shoppers will be making their way to your refrigerated shelves to cool down with crisp, leafy greens. We got in touch with some of our fresh friends to gain insights on how you can make your retail shelves pop this season. For, as we all know, the best way to fight fire is with some fiery promotions...





## Jeff Hyosaka,

Sales Director, Pacific International Marketing

“We are looking forward to the growing season this summer with our petite Romaine being one of our star items! This product is the perfect leafy green to grab when looking for that cool crunch or to heighten summer dishes. It’s very versatile, and one of our favorite qualities is that the leaves hold up against heat—making it perfect for grilling. Because petite Romaine offers almost 100 percent usability, this lettuce just needs to be halved, drizzled with olive oil, sprinkled with seasoning, tossed on the grill, and added to a plate. Draw consumers in with a ‘field-fresh’ display or cross-display with grilling products.”



## Baltazar Garcia,

Sales Director, Pete’s

“With greenhouse-grown leafy greens in high retail demand, merchandising is a key component to help drive awareness with shoppers. Many retailers are even dedicating an entire four-foot section of greenhouse-grown leafy greens to locate us—a space in the fresh produce department—and are supporting it with compelling point-of-sale materials designed to highlight the benefits of greenhouse grown (e.g., year-round availability, clean greens, sustainability, etc.). In addition, they are leveraging promotions to help drive trials given that demos are not yet allowed back in stores. We know without question that greenhouse grown is the future of farming, and we look forward to the new standard being three dedicated sections of leafy greens in all stores soon—organic, conventional, and greenhouse grown.”



## Nichole Towell,

Senior Director of Marketing and Packaging Procurement, Duda Farm Fresh Foods

“Summertime is synonymous with salads and lighter dishes, making it the perfect time to cross-promote leafy greens in-store with items that pair well, such as dressings, freshly cut vegetables, and protein to add to your salad. Being able to provide the customer with everything they need right there at the end of or in front of the aisle is an easy way to offer both an idea and the tools to execute. Duda Farm Fresh Foods is proud to offer a variety of leaf lettuces to choose from with the option to have them packed with flip-top and resealable sleeves to protect and keep the product fresher longer!”





### **Ashley Pipkin,**

Director of Marketing, Tanimura & Antle

"Summer is for outdoor time with family, friends, and good food! Consumers are looking to explore new recipes with unique and versatile items like our Tanimura & Antle Artisan® Family of products to break them out of their repeat recipes and to bring home premium flavors and textures. Retailers can help consumers see the possibilities by sharing recipes in-store and online to spark ideas and introduce new items to their menu and shopping cart. One of my favorite summer recipes is a grilled Artisan Romaine wedge salad with blue cheese, tomatoes, and flank steak. Quick, easy, and healthy!"



### **Christina Barnard,**

Director of Marketing, Taylor Farms

"At Taylor Farms, we deliver differentiated experiences and develop salads consumers want to eat. Innovation has brought consumer excitement to the salad category through delicious flavor profiles, including our Everything, Dill Pickle, and, now, the Watermelon Crunch Chopped Kit. The rise in e-commerce accelerated our focus to ensure we published a best-in-class digital shelf and a frictionless online experience. We have a highly engaged online consumer network and we nurture those relationships with superior pre-purchase content and extraordinary post-purchase engagement to earn our consumers' trust and provide additional value beyond the products we supply."



### **Marliese McWherter,**

Creative Marketing Manager, Lakeside Organic Gardens

"As we approach the summer season, consumer demand for safe, healthy leafy greens will continue to be top of mind. Organic leafy greens are retaining consumer confidence. At Lakeside Organic Gardens, we carry a wide variety including organic Iceberg, red and green leaf, Romaine, red and green Butter, Little Gems, Romaine Hearts, and spinach. Retailers can help drive traffic by merchandising full lines, such as ours, to showcase color, freshness, and texture. The more visually appealing, the more likely they are to purchase your product, especially as the season starts to heat up."





**Calavo®**







Hood River  
Cherry Company

# A Garden Grove

By MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ

**My earliest memories  
are in gardens.**

My grandmother's long, elegant fingers, with mauve-polished nails, caressing baby strawberries as she showed me how to identify which were ready to eat. A great-aunt giving me and my sister each a basket and sending us toddling out to her wild range of melons, tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers to gather everything we could find ripe for the taking.



“  
We have always felt that **if we take care of the shopper at the store,** the person who puts the cherries in their shopping cart, that **Hood River Cherry Company will be successful.**”

**Kathryn Klein,**  
CO-OWNER, HOOD RIVER CHERRY COMPANY

The joy found in moments of unmanicured plots and twisting vines is unmatched. Synonymous with spring and summer, these are the ties that bind many of us to the story behind each fresh item we touch. It is why produce is the department I don't just shop—I explore.

“Over the years, we have been asked why we chose to grow and ship, on a fairly large scale, premium tree-ripened cherries packed by hand. The answer is ‘because of tomatoes,’” Brad Fowler says, and I do a double-take.

Brad is one half of the duo that first planted the seeds of Hood River Cherry Company, an Oregon-based grower that brings the care of home-toiled fruit stands to the store. With his wife, Kathryn Klein, he set out to prove that the care of backyard gardening can reach across acres and acres.

“I love home garden tomatoes almost as much as cherries—those dark red ones with a rich flavor that only come from a summertime garden. Why, then, are many tomatoes we buy at the

supermarket so dull and tasteless? And, why are many cherries on the store shelves usually as underripe and tasteless as well?” Brad asks, then takes me back as though he is still about to charge out into his own yard to find the answers. “I was sure we could do better! So, with stunning naiveté, we began to forge our path of tree-ripened cherries and, over the years, sharpened our focus and knowledge. We soon learned exactly why the rest of the industry didn't do it this way.”

That garden-tended flavor and feel we all adore, either by nostalgia or sheer imagination, is a Herculean effort. When the acreage of your backyard spoils can be meandered in a brief half-hour, it is more love than labor to put tenderness and time into each root and tendril.

As that acreage expands, the hands that touch each plant multiply by necessity, as does the amount of water, soil, time, and everything else that brings a single cherry to bear. But, to maintain the level of affection Kathryn and Brad began with meant knowing everyone they hired felt that same swelling in their hearts for every fruit that came off a Hood River Cherry tree.

While this might seem impossible to prove, Brad points out that its success shows in the moments he, Kathryn, and

Brad Fowler (left) strolls through the orchards of Hood River Cherry Company with his son, Kristoff







“  
Our challenge is to **always produce the cherry** that our customers expect, year after year, and that is hard.

**Brad Fowler,**  
CO-OWNER, HOOD RIVER CHERRY COMPANY

the team have seen their tenderness returned to them.

“The most satisfying part of our year is the customer comments that flow into our emails from people all over the U.S. who bought our cherries,” Brad remarks. “Last year, there were more than ever before—hundreds and hundreds. Of course, every once in a while we get a complaint, too, but that’s okay, we want to hear the truth and learn to be even better. We read every single email and try to respond to all of them.”

Kathryn echoes that this is not just a heartfelt sentiment, but a tested and rewarded business strategy.

“We have always felt that if we take care of the shopper at the store, the person who puts the cherries in their shopping cart, that Hood River Cherry Company will be successful. That is more true today than when we set out 32 years ago,” she shares.

It’s these moments, too, Brad and Kathryn share, that prove why a premium effort needs to wear a premium price tag as they fight to keep a precious piece of agricultural purpose in the marketplace.

“It is almost like ‘gravity is pulling us toward mediocrity,’ but we have to resist and stay true to our original goals of tree-ripened premium cherries. There is no way our cherries can be sold in the market at the same price as commodity cherries. Our challenge is to always produce the cherry that our customers expect, year after year, and that is hard,” Brad confesses. “Weather is the biggest

decider in our crop, and it is out of our control, but we work hard to control the things we can.”

In fact, what might have blown down a house made of these efforts for control only managed to further strengthen it. When COVID-19 became a global pandemic, Hood River and its leaders were not exempt from the fear of what consumers’ panic-saving would mean for the 2020 Oregon cherry season.

“At this time last year, the pall of uncertainty swept our company up just like everyone else in our nation. We weren’t sure if our customers would buy cherries. We didn’t know if we could get enough workers, but we did know one thing: This crop was coming regardless of the nightly news, and we had better get things figured out,” Kathryn shares with me.

Then, she and Brad add, a strange and heartwarming thing happened.

“People flocked to the store to buy cherries,” Brad smiles. “Almost as if Mother Nature provided some kind of reassurance that things were going to be okay, Americans ate more cherries than they ever had before.”

And as Mother Nature sent reinforcements, so did the employees who have helped make possible Hood River’s continued expansion. In the most uncertain of times, Brad tells me everyone proved to be even more committed than ever.

“It was very humbling to witness and be a part of. Our workers were more





One of the great joys for the Co-Owners of Hood River Cherry Company is sharing their passion for growing (and eating!) quality fruit with their grandchildren

## “ Little did we know then what *a long and wild ride* this would be. ”

Kathryn Klein

resilient and dedicated than we could ever have expected,” he says. “With the risks of COVID-19 exposure, masks, shields, social distancing, and a generally miserable experience in the summertime heat, our workers got it. They didn’t complain—they helped out in ways we had never seen before. They worked 42 days straight with twelve-hour shifts. Their faces were disguised from protective masks and gear, but they knew that we needed them.”

What was forged in the heat of that summer was an understanding of the culture Brad and Kathryn had both laid the groundwork for and inspired—one they continue to inspire in leading Hood River as an extension of their backyard garden and of their family.

“Every year, we plant new acreage as our company grows, and likewise, every year our family continues to grow,” Brad says with a smile. “Amid the challenges of the past 15 months or so, we have focused a

lot on the little joys, most of all are our five grandchildren, ages two to six.”

They, Brad and Kathryn tell me, are both the center of the world and the future of it.

Because if it takes a village to raise a child, then it takes a community to raise a garden the likes of which Kathryn and Brad have cultivated. Luckily, there is no place like Hood River for such a dream.

“Virtually all the farms in our Hood River Valley of Oregon were generational,” Brad recalls. “My parents were teachers. When we bought some bare land 32 years ago, we decided to plant fruit trees because, well, that’s what you do in Hood River. That’s just the way it is.”

Kathryn brings a similar testimony to the land which she and her husband have called home.

“My father was a carpenter. He and mom had a small hobby farm with apples and cherries, so we chose cherries because we like them more than any other fruit! Little did we know then what a long and wild ride this would be,” she shares, remembering how she would help her own parents as a small child. “Dad taught me how to drive a tractor when I was 10 years old, and I cannot wait to do the same with our grandchildren.”

As Kathryn tells me this, memories of sitting with my own grandmother in her garden shine through.

Every seed is an embodiment of all that came before it. Who’s to say which fingers will point out the next fruit to a child, and plant within them the passion to make a garden that feeds the world?

Sitting in front of these Co-Owners, gardeners, grandparents, I can think of a couple. 🍒



# A Closer Look at Jacobs Farm del Cabo's Paper-Based Clamshell

By Lilian Diep

Displaying the freshness of a product is one of the most surefire ways to capture the consumer's basket share. However, backing the produce with an Earth-friendly approach is the clincher. With environmental awareness becoming a hot topic in the industry, Jacobs Farm del Cabo is putting its money on the green sustainability column as the roulette wheel of innovation spins.


Made with 100 percent recycled paperboard, the new pack offers a clear view of the fresh produce inside as the plant-based window is made with a compostable cellulose film.

Whether it lands in the intended bin or is lost along the way, the pack will naturally degrade and never contribute to long-term plastic pollution, the company notes.

Jacobs Farm del Cabo is expecting to reduce its plastic waste by a half-million pounds this year with the switch to paperboard for its organic Sugar Plum Grape Tomatoes, Cherry Tomatoes, and Heirloom Medley Cherry Tomatoes, making the pot even more enticing to consumers.

The paper-based product is an alternative to the single-use plastic

clamshells. With this option now on the table as consumers continually opt for socially and environmentally safe packaging, the odds are favorably high for Jacobs Farm del Cabo's products and retailers to hit the purchase jackpot.

While we may not have flashing lights and bells chiming in the produce section to direct consumers, we do have innovators on the floor placing heavy investments on green over red and black—and shoppers are gathering around the table to see where the ball lands. 

# UP CLOSE



**JACOBS FARM • DEL CABO**  




# Heritage

## Flavor Trend



- sugar
- butter
- ground cardamom



# Cooking

By Anne Allen

Home is a difficult word to define. Its meaning ebbs and flows between people. But it's impossible to deny that food centers us, grounds entire cultures, and creates families in places you might never expect.

Like most consumers, I've been actively seeking out ways to make at-home cooking an experience, and embracing heritage cooking has helped me from within the confines of my home. My salvation came in the form of my grandmother's battered Swedish cookbook, offering up a challenge and a link to those who had come before me. Who knew how well I could make cardamom bread?

Heritage cooking is not exactly new, but it's becoming more and more prominent as consumers look to traditional recipes for comfort. It's the embracing of a culture through food, particularly of dishes passed down from generation to generation.


As humans, we have an innate drive to find comfort in our food. I think this drive comes from a

deeper place, though, one looking for connection in a world that became—seemingly overnight—unmoored.

Although most of us are still limiting our travel plans, we're traveling back to where we grew up or where our ancestors laid the table before us—setting foot on hallowed ground by picking up a knife and chopping up vegetables.

For the buy-side, you may see the effects of heritage cooking on your staple categories. Many of the recipes are tried and true, made with old-fashioned ingredients—think potatoes, leeks, onions, and carrots—and a whole lot of love.

I'd love to see retailers asking shoppers in their community which recipes have been in their family for generations. Could there be unforeseen cross-merchandising opportunities in our grandmothers' cookbooks?

Perhaps that's a dream for another time. For now, I'll be traveling back to Stockholm, Sweden, via the culinary express. 

*call mom!*





## LEMON-LIME LOAF CAKE

## INGREDIENTS

**Zest of 1** Progressive Farms Baby Lemon  
**Zest of 1** Progressive Farms Lime  
**2 tbsp** freshly squeezed Progressive Farms Baby Lemon juice  
**1 tbsp** freshly squeezed Progressive Farms Lime juice  
**½ cup** butter, at room temperature  
**1 cup** white sugar  
**3 large** eggs  
**6 oz** plain Greek yogurt  
**1½ cups** all-purpose flour  
**1½ tsp** baking powder  
**½ tsp** sea salt

## GLAZE

**3 tbsp** freshly squeezed Progressive Farms Baby Lemon juice  
**2 tbsp** freshly squeezed Progressive Farms Lime juice  
**1½ cups** powdered sugar  
 A pinch of salt  
 Lemon and lime zest, for garnish

**Prep Time:** 30 min

**Cook Time:** 40–60 min

**Servings:** 4–6

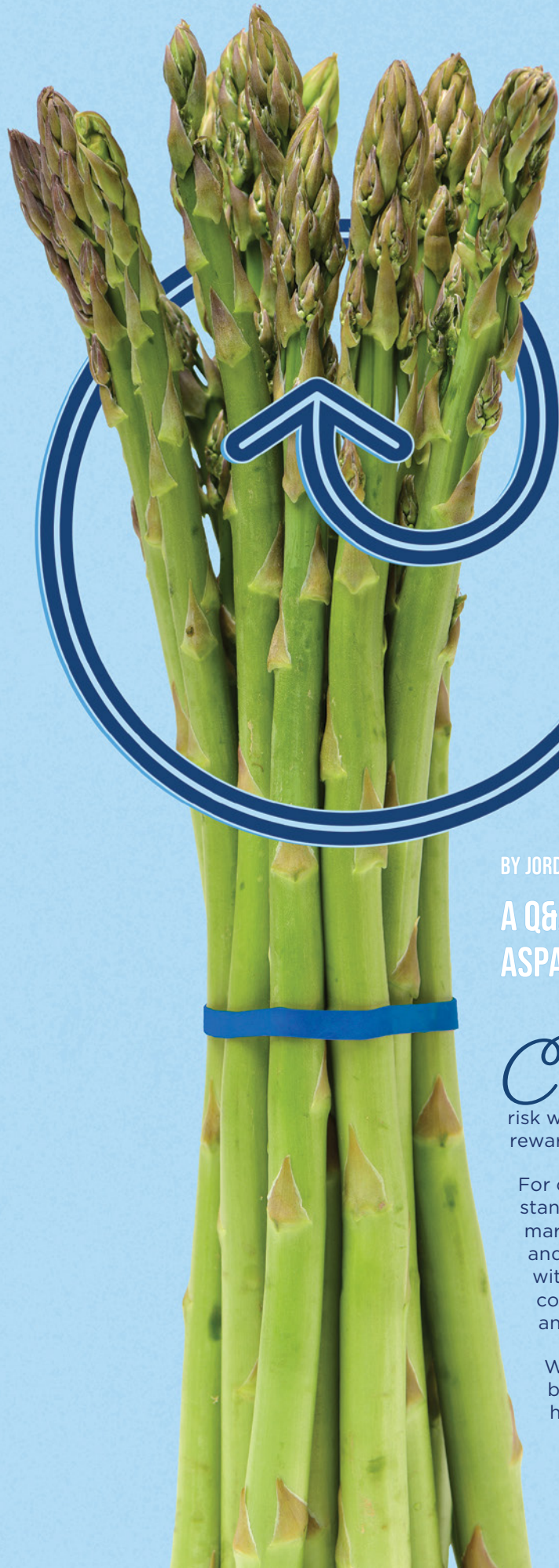
## DIRECTIONS

- 1** Preheat the oven to 350° F. Grease and flour the inside of a loaf pan.
- 2** In a large bowl, cream together the butter and sugar. Then, add the eggs and Greek yogurt, lemon/lime zest, and juice. Beat until everything is thoroughly mixed, about 30 seconds.
- 3** In a medium-sized bowl, mix together the flour, baking powder, and sea salt. Add it to the large bowl and beat the batter until well combined.
- 4** Pour the batter into the loaf pan and bake in the preheated oven for 40–50 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the loaf comes out clean.
- 5** Remove the loaf from the oven and let it cool in the pan for 10 minutes before carefully turning it out onto a cooling rack.
- 6** Meanwhile, in a small bowl, mix the powdered sugar, lemon and lime juice, and a tiny pinch of sea salt. If preferred, add a touch more powdered sugar to make the icing thicker.
- 7** Once the loaf is completely cool, pour ⅓ of the icing over the top and let it drip down the sides. Wait for the icing to begin to harden, about 10 minutes, then pour over another ⅓. Once the second layer has begun to harden, pour over the remaining icing.
- 8** As soon as you pour the third layer of icing on the cake, sprinkle the top with a little lemon and lime zest. Enjoy!

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







# THE TIP OF THE *pear*

BY JORDAN OKUMURA

A Q&A WITH *Lauren Brierly*,  
ASPARAGUS SALES MANAGER, PROGRESSIVE PRODUCE

Change is inevitable, but growth is not. Growth takes a meticulous approach and, at times, a painstaking drive and diligence that puts such an actor smack-dab in the middle of risk without the promise of reward. But, isn't that what makes the reward so sweet?

For companies like Progressive Produce, positioning a global stance as a year-round asparagus provider in an international marketplace as competitive as today's is akin to setting off to sea and designing the map toward your destination as you go. But, with the right tools, experiences, intuition, and partnerships, the course ahead is also more fit than many to weather the storms and achieve great discoveries.

When your ethos around expansion is a constant drive to be better, do better, and share better—the waves ahead do not hide peril, they reveal opportunities.





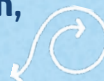
Asparagus is one category at the tip of the produce spear, helping to change the consumer palate at large with its vital role on the plate



"OUR ASPARAGUS IS NOT ONLY GROWN AROUND THE WORLD, AT PRESENT, BUT CONSUMED AROUND THE WORLD AS WELL."

*Lauren Brierly,*

ASPARAGUS SALES MANAGER,  
PROGRESSIVE PRODUCE



With consumer buying behaviors turning their collective nod toward the asparagus category, Lauren Brierly, Asparagus Sales Manager for Progressive Produce, shares with me how the once seasonal and holiday-specific vegetable is no longer a fair-weather friend in produce departments, it is a sales driver that is here to stay.

You could almost consider asparagus one of those categories at the tip of the produce spear. Pun intended. For our industry, and the consumer palate at large, asparagus plays a vital role in bringing flavor, possibility, versatility, and originality to the plate, Lauren expresses, and so much more. Find out the Progressive Produce vision, as Lauren points the way.



**JORDAN OKUMURA:** Lauren, I see that Progressive Produce is quickly approaching the 15-year mark on its asparagus program. What an exciting time for retailers, foodservice operators, and the company. Can you share with me how the program was founded and what motivated Progressive to expand into this category?

**LAUREN BRIERLY,**

**Asparagus Sales Manager,**

**Progressive Produce:** Our team at Progressive Produce and Keystone Fruit Marketing joined forces in 2008 to leverage our strengths with retailers across North America, along with our strong relationships with growers in Peru, Mexico, and the U.S. These resources allowed us to create an asparagus business which would generate value for the entire supply chain through partnership and performance. The Progressive Produce and Keystone Fruit Marketing partnership—both unique and special—was cemented even more in 2018, when our two companies formally merged all our businesses together.



Today, we carry forward our value-creating goal of year-round supply and logistics from the best growers in the world under our Progressive Farms branding; thus, creating a partnership for retail and foodservice customers that allows them to provide their consumers with high-quality asparagus grown from around the world 365 days per year.

**JO:** I love this meeting of the minds you speak of. I feel like it is more and more necessary these days to bring multiple perspectives to the table in order to open more doors for potential opportunities. Since the partnership, how has the program expanded in terms of growing regions, sourcing, varieties, and distribution footprint?

**LB:** Our partnerships have grown tremendously since inception. Today, we have Peruvian asparagus year-round, Mexican asparagus year-round, and we are the largest shipper of U.S.-grown asparagus. We have an asparagus portfolio that includes organics, white, purple, consumer bags, and customer-specific presentations.

Our asparagus is not only grown around the world, at present, but consumed around the world as well. One element which has not changed since the program's inception is our drive to evolve our operational standards, capabilities, and buy-side relationships. Through this desire to be better, we continue to get bigger.

**JO:** With growth as a choice in this situation, and not just an inevitable outcome of change, how does Progressive Produce tailor and shape its asparagus program to meet the needs of retailers and foodservice operators?

**LB:** Easily, it is our best-in-class global supply, retail and foodservice marketing knowledge, national and regional logistics, and a partnership mentality.



We have asparagus from our two main shipping points in Miami, Florida, and Los Angeles, California, the entire year, and we ship from all major seasonal FOB hubs. These ports of entry provide our customers with options for convenience or growing region pick-up locations for cost savings. We feel we have a viable asparagus solution for every customer's needs. We strive to deliver these key things to our partners daily—our business is successful when those around us are successful.

**JO:** Demand and pricing seem to be at a premium these days. How has the demand for asparagus ramped up in recent years and what new insights into consumer buying patterns can you share?

**Once a seasonal and holiday-specific vegetable, asparagus is no longer a fair-weather friend in produce departments, but a sales driver that is here to help evolve the diverse possibilities of fresh produce**

**LB:** Asparagus is consumed by every age demographic, which positions it well with baby boomers heading into retirement as well as with Gen Z—a demographic which is increasingly prioritizing healthy eating with their wallets—and everyone in between.

Asparagus is no longer just a holiday or seasonal vegetable. We believe asparagus is more commonly planned for on shopping lists than years past, but it still has a great impact on a produce department as an impulse buy. Placing asparagus in a high-visibility location, even when not promoted, leads to impulse buys which creates repeat customers.

A newer trend is national interest and consistent consumer demand for organic asparagus. Five years ago, organics were very seasonal. While not yet year-round, we offer organics 11 months a year in our Nature's Bounty Organics label, and that has translated to consumers knowing they can meal plan for it, raising awareness and driving consumption.

**JO:** How do timing and availability play a role in the advantages and benefits of the Progressive Produce asparagus program and how does the company differentiate from other asparagus programs in the marketplace?

**LB:** Our Progressive Produce family lives by our core values. One, in particular, has impacted our asparagus business greatly. "We do what we say we will do." It may seem simple, but this action has proven difficult at times with a crop so prone to challenges that need to be overcome quite regularly. However, this value is a difference-maker for us and is how we continue to gain the confidence and loyalty of our growers, retailers, and foodservice partners. This core belief is a part of the excellent customer service our team delivers every day.

No matter where or what time of year it is, Progressive Produce—under Progressive Farms and Nature's Bounty Asparagus—has a solution, and we are excited every day to make a difference.



**T**his idea of asparagus holding real estate at the tip of the spear truly speaks to the category's impact on the health of the globe, the dynamics on the plate, and the special place it holds in the hearts, taste buds, and yes, wallets, of consumers everywhere.

With such a triple threat in the toolkit of Progressive Produce, it is only inevitable that the demand for such premium supplier experiences will spread. **S**





# Libations

FOR ALL OCCASIONS:

## PINEAPPLE LIME FIZZ

By Peggy Packer

**A**t the height of July, the California summer leaves my skin with a feeling of warmth that immediately teleports me back to fun and relaxing family vacations in Hawaii. While these trips may have also consisted of the typical sibling bickering and maybe even a jellyfish sting or two, there is nothing better than laying out on the beach, sun-kissed and smelling the ocean breeze, with a refreshing cocktail in hand and no worries in the world.

While I'd love to overpack my suitcase and take off to the tropics, there are no beach vacations marked on my calendar just yet. Instead, I'm bringing the tropical escape to my kitchen with a Pineapple Lime Fizz—a delicious concoction that makes me forget I'm in my living room.

The sweet, citrusy drink is the perfect way to highlight the vibrant pineapples and citrus varieties that decorate summer's fresh produce displays. So, take this opportunity to cross-merchandise pineapples and limes, along with some fresh mint and a selection of rum, to boost sales throughout the produce department. Bright yellow and eye-catching, just the sight of this cocktail alone will be enough to pull shoppers in and have them stocking up on these fresh items.

Encouraging consumers to indulge in the produce department has never been easier. After all, I don't know many people who would willingly pass up a much-needed beach vacay. **S**

### INGREDIENTS

**1 large** pineapple  
**4 oz** fresh lime juice  
**3 oz** simple syrup  
**10 oz** fresh pineapple juice  
**10 oz** club soda  
**8 oz** light rum  
**5–6** mint leaves  
**1** lime, wedged for garnish  
Granulated sugar, as needed

**Time:** 5 min  
**Servings:** 5–6

### DIRECTIONS

1. Cut pineapple into 1" chunks and place in the freezer.
2. Pour lime juice, simple syrup, rum, and pineapple juice into a large pitcher and add ice. Stir thoroughly until chilled.
3. Moisten the edges of a chilled martini glass with lime juice and dip into granulated sugar.
4. Pour the mixture into the glass, leaving half an inch of space at the top. Add frozen pineapple chunks and top with club soda.
5. Garnish with mint leaves and a fresh lime wedge.

*This recipe can make up to six servings, so invite some friends over or save for seconds and thirds!*







Castellini Group of  
Companies

# Making History

By Anne Allen





Stories speak to me. Ever since I was little, I found that writing narratives came as naturally as breathing. If I stilled my thoughts and listened hard enough, the story would tell itself.

Of course, there are stronger stories than others, those that *whoosh* through me and take hold of the pen, demanding to be written. These are the stories that sync inside of me, align with the values I've learned in my time in the produce industry: ones of blood, passion, and greatness.

125 years ago, such a story began.

Such a span of time is incomprehensible for many of us. It's easier to think of this collapsing of the years when a person stands prominently in the center.

In our story's case, this man is Joseph J. Castellini, known widely as J.J., who left a small brokerage firm in Cincinnati, Ohio, to begin the Castellini Group of Companies. At the time, Cincinnati was a diversion point for the railroads and accommodated traffic from the Ohio River. The location would later enable the company to expand its distribution

status throughout the Midwest.

With only a few employees and a steadfast belief that the city's location was of vital strategic value, J.J. defied the odds and quickly built an operation recognized for its innovation.

One such marker of this was J.J.'s interest in machines and how he insisted that the company begin using dictaphones and other mechanical equipment. One of his own inventions, the celery washer, set a precedent for the company's subsequent efforts to provide value-added services to its customers.

"His spirit of entrepreneurship and industry leadership still flourishes throughout the Castellini Group of Companies 125 years later," **Bob Castellini, Chairman,**



tells me. "We have grown from a small purveyor into a large, multifaceted operation with hundreds of millions of dollars of revenues

that encompasses virtually every aspect of the produce business from wholesale distribution, brokerage, transportation, repacking, and ripening to light assembly for produce boxes and box meals."

Bob, who is sometimes referred to as Robert H. to differentiate from his father, Robert, is a third-generation family member, who succeeded the Presidency from his father.

Another industry innovator, Robert became President in 1927. He recognized the benefits of grower-cooperatives, and in 1935, he advised and encouraged more than 100 local produce growers to band together and organize the Cincinnati Produce Growers Association. For many years after, the Castellini Group of Companies was the sole distributor for these growers.

Robert's sudden death at the age of 48 shocked the entire company. At the time, Bob was only 10 years old. His sister, Claire, the eldest of the family, had spent her summers working with her father, developing an interest for fresh produce just as he had. With the mentoring of her uncles, Albert and Jack Castellini,



**"Over the past 125 years, the Castellini Group of Companies has survived the changing market dynamics of the industry with tenacity, perseverance, and focus on the customer."**

*Bob Castellini,*  
**Chairman, Castellini Group of Companies**





**“Castellini has pivoted and provided different solutions to the industry throughout our 125-year history.”**

*Brian Kocher,*

**President and Chief Executive Officer,  
Castellini Group of Companies**

and the loyal support of the sales force, she assumed a leadership role in a unique team effort that would become synonymous with the family name.

“That legacy of Robert Castellini’s determination and spirit carried the company into the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” Bob shares of his father. “That same spirit continues to dominate the operation today.”

The words *innovation* and *growth* are used quite often in the world of business, but it’s rare to meet a company that embodies these two words to its very core.

Bob took up the mantle of President in 1970, where he led the Castellini Group of Companies through an unprecedented growth spurt during the 1990s and into the 2000s.

“Combined with our affiliates, we are one of the largest wholesale distributors of fresh fruits and vegetables in the United States,” Bob notes with pride. “Over the past 125 years, the Castellini Group of Companies has survived the changing market dynamics of the industry with tenacity, perseverance, and focus on the customer. Those same qualities are foremost in this unique company today as it moves forward with confidence into the next chapter of service to the produce industry.”

The firm itself supplies the fresh produce needs of the foodservice and retail industries through a broad range of distribution services and value-added products. It employs over 1,400 people and has facilities throughout the Midwest and the East Coast.

Encompassing all the major segments of wholesale produce distribution including FOB purchasing, consignments, general wholesaling, service wholesaling, brokerage, ripening, repacking, and transportation, the company has also transformed itself into a full-service produce supply chain provider, from managing its partners’ entire distribution to complete inventory management.



This wouldn’t be possible without another industry leader, Castellini’s current **President and Chief Executive Officer, Brian Kocher**. Brian has been instrumental in the company’s most recent

strategy to position itself for the next two decades of growth. As part of this strategic plan, Castellini has introduced a new identity to the industry, bolstered







^ Castellini Group of Companies prides itself on being able to adjust to market demands and provide value to its partners

its offerings to feature complex supply chain services, and expanded its physical distribution assets and transportation fleet.

“Castellini has pivoted and provided different solutions to the industry throughout our 125-year history. Over the past two years, we realized that our tremendous supply chain network and our various supply chain solutions allow our partners to reach new markets or supply existing channels more frequently, and at a lower cost than before partnering with us,” Brian explains. “This is something we are very excited about, and we are continuing to streamline in order to optimize our offerings so we can continue to provide our partners with solutions that improve service to their customers and help them grow volume and profits.”

One such solution was the announcement of its new technology platform, which leverages Castellini’s capabilities to create an efficient solution to partner

with growers and shippers across the temperature-controlled supply chain.

“If you want to be a leader in the industry, you have to employ technology platforms that are state of the art,” Brian says adamantly. “Platforms that can handle the complexity of the modern supply chain, providing transparency and scalability for our customers, are essential. It was no easy task to simultaneously introduce a new supply chain management platform and a new warehouse management solution, but it was necessary, and we are well on our way to tackle the next chapter at Castellini. Weaving our people, our processes, and our technology into a solution for our customers allows us to quickly recognize trends and opportunities critical for growth.”

Streamlining its internal structure, Castellini optimized its physical footprint throughout the Midwest and the East Coast to make sure that its organizational structure was ready to

handle growth, all without impacting existing supply chain partnerships.

Throughout its 125-year history, Castellini has risen to prominence with the dedication of both its family and employees—many of which are one and the same.

“It means a lot to the company to have many members of the family working there over the years,” Bob expresses. “Many of our employees have been with us for 30–40 years, even some as long as 50 years. They are very, very proud of our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary.”

In order to celebrate this anniversary, the Castellini Group of Companies is thrilled about a charity fundraiser coming up later this year that it is calling the 125 campaign.

“During the second half of the year, we will introduce a fundraiser and raffle off a huge number of spectacular items during our industry events. For every



100 dollars we raise, we will contribute 25 dollars from Castellini,” Brian explains. “We are planning to donate the proceeds to a national foundation investing in produce talent, fighting food waste, and supplying produce to the food insecure in our community.”

Brian adds that, as one of the oldest wholesalers in the United States, Castellini is proud to honor its legacy in a variety of ways.

“That we were able to adjust to market demands yet again and provide value to our partners is very meaningful to us,” he says.

*Adjust and expand.* These are another two words that Castellini Group of Companies feel to its core.

“First and foremost, we want to expand with our customers. We have opportunities to help our current customers expand their offerings through our produce sourcing and value-added offerings to, in turn, better service their customers. Additionally, we experienced and will continue to see our supply chain service offering grow disproportionately to the rest of our business,” Brian concludes. “The produce supply chain has efficiency and service needs, and we have the ability to fulfill those needs. With one of our more recent customer arrangements, we now have the ability to broaden our cross-dock, case-pick, and delivery offerings in the Northeast so we will work hard to grow customer offerings in that geography as well, allowing us to efficiently service the entire Midwest and Eastern portion of the U.S.”

Over centuries and across generations, stories echo. They embed themselves into our everyday lives, waiting to be heard. By the end of this story, it’s easy to think that history makes legends of us all.

But really, it’s the legends making history. 🍎

› As it looks toward its next chapter of growth, the Castellini Group of Companies has over 125 years of industry experience to rely on



**“Weaving our people, our processes, and our technology into a solution for our customers allows us to quickly recognize trends and opportunities critical for growth.”**

*Brian Kecher*





# Apple Snapshot

by  
Lilian Diep

Apples bring both crunch and sales to the produce aisle all year-round, but the juicy bite of a crisp apple can transport any consumer to a peaceful, relaxing, and healthy getaway this summer. This annual category is bursting with opportunities thanks to its myriad of unique flavors and applications, so stock up on these popular favorites to tantalize taste buds and watch as foot traffic and profits soar...





**Envy™**

**Flavor** Refreshingly sweet; clean, fruity finish  
**Texture** Extraordinary crunch  
**Size** Medium-large  
**Color** Stripy red over a yellow background  
**Season** Oct-Mar



**Lemonade™**

**Flavor** Bright, tangy-sweet flavor with a hint of effervescence  
**Texture** Fine, crisp texture; firm yet juicy crunch  
**Size** Medium  
**Color** Golden yellow with occasional orange blush  
**Season** May-Aug (New Zealand)



**Sugarbee®**

**Flavor** Intense notes of honey, caramel, and molasses with a complex finish  
**Texture** Extremely crisp  
**Size** Medium-large  
**Color** Mostly red blush  
**Season** Oct-May



**Piñata®**

**Flavor** Crisp and juicy with classic apple flavors and a tropical twist  
**Texture** Firm with crisp skin  
**Size** Medium-large  
**Color** Red with yellow-orange background  
**Season** Oct-Jun (Domestic), Jun-Aug (Import)



**Autumn Glory®**

**Flavor** Sweet with caramel and cinnamon notes  
**Texture** Crunchy with firm flesh  
**Size** Medium  
**Color** Yellow background with red stripes and blush  
**Season** Nov-Jun



**Cosmic Crisp®**

**Flavor** Juicy with ample sweetness and subtle tartness  
**Texture** Firm and crisp  
**Size** Large  
**Color** Rich red color that almost sparkles with starburst-like lenticels  
**Season** Dec-Jun



**SnapDragon®**

**Flavor** Sweet with a hint of spice and undertones of vanilla  
**Texture** Maximum crunch; often called MONSTER  
**Size** Small-medium  
**Color** Red with some green-yellow  
**Season** Sep



**Opal™**

**Flavor** Sweet  
**Texture** Distinctively crisp, naturally non-browning  
**Size** Medium-large  
**Color** Bright golden yellow  
**Season** Oct-Jun



**JAZZ™**

**Flavor** Sweet, tart  
**Texture** Dense, crunchy; refreshing bite  
**Size** Varies  
**Color** Bright red with subtle yellow under-striping  
**Season** Oct-Jun (Washington), Jun-Sep (Southern Hemisphere)





**Rave®**

- Flavor** Outrageously juicy with a refreshing snappy zing
- Texture** Crisp with the same Honeycrisp fracture but more juice
- Size** Medium-large
- Color** Fuchsia to red with a yellow background
- Season** Aug-Oct



**Honeycrisp**

- Flavor** Honey-sweet
- Texture** Firm, fine grain; very crisp
- Size** Medium-large
- Color** Reddish stripes; slight red blush over yellow background
- Season** Year-round



**Sweetango®**

- Flavor** Juicy and sweet with hints of fall spices and citrus notes
- Texture** Crisp, thin-skinned apple with a loud crunch
- Size** Medium-large
- Color** Bright red on yellow background
- Season** Aug-Feb (Domestic), Apr-Jul (Import)



**KIKU®**

- Flavor** Super sweet with Fuji characteristics
- Texture** Crisp and juicy
- Size** Varies
- Color** Ruby-red with distinct yellow stripes
- Season** Oct-Apr (Domestic), Jun-Aug (Import)



**Kanzi®**

- Flavor** Sweet, tangy, and intense flavor; Gala and Braeburn parentage
- Texture** Fine grain; extra juicy and crisp
- Size** Varies
- Color** Red with yellow hues
- Season** Nov-May (Domestic), Jun-Aug (Import)



**KORU®**

- Flavor** Sweet yet complex, subtle vanilla flavor
- Texture** Incredible crunchy texture
- Size** Large
- Color** Unique, orange/red color with yellow undertones
- Season** Year-round between U.S. domestic season and New Zealand



**Smitten™**

- Flavor** Perfectly balanced with refreshing sweetness
- Texture** Crunchy and firm
- Size** Medium
- Color** Yellow background with red striping
- Season** Sep-Jun (domestic), Jun-Aug (import)



**Pink Lady®**

- Flavor** Zippy and tart
- Texture** Crisp and firm
- Size** Small-medium
- Color** Reddish-pink blush with yellow background
- Season** Year-round (Domestic)



**Rockit™**

- Flavor** Crisp, sweet, and delicious
- Texture** Always crisp
- Size** Miniature
- Color** Red blush
- Season** Year-round





### Arctic® Golden

**Flavor** Sweet and refreshing  
**Texture** Crisp and juicy  
**Size** Medium; sold in slices  
**Color** Sunset yellow  
**Season** Nov–Jun



### Arctic® Granny

**Flavor** Deliciously tart  
**Texture** Crisp and juicy Honeycrisp fracture but more juice  
**Size** Medium-large; sold in slices  
**Color** Warm green  
**Season** Dec–Jul



### Golden Delicious

**Flavor** Sweet and mellow  
**Texture** Silky and crisp; thin skin  
**Size** Medium  
**Color** Golden yellow to white background  
**Season** Year-round



### Fuji

**Flavor** Sugary sweet  
**Texture** Firm, fine grain; very crisp  
**Size** Medium-large  
**Color** Reddish stripes; slight red blush over yellow background  
**Season** Year-round



### Red Delicious

**Flavor** Subtly sweet  
**Texture** Crisp and juicy  
**Size** Medium-large  
**Color** Scarlet red  
**Season** Year-round



### McIntosh

**Flavor** Cider-like sweetness with a slight tang  
**Texture** Fine grain; extra juicy and crisp  
**Size** Medium-large  
**Color** Red with a green background  
**Season** Sep–Jul



### Gala

**Flavor** Mildly sweet with floral aroma  
**Texture** Crunchy  
**Size** Small-medium  
**Color** Pale golden yellow, with stripe-like to full red blush  
**Season** Year-round



### Ambrosia

**Flavor** Sweet, honey-like  
**Texture** Crisp, light, and refreshing  
**Size** Varies  
**Color** Blushing red over a creamy yellow background  
**Season** Year-round (Domestic), May–Aug (Import)



### EverCrisp®

**Flavor** Sweet and juicy with Honeycrisp and Fuji parentage  
**Texture** Moderately firm, packing a loud crunch  
**Size** Large  
**Color** Light red with yellow flecking  
**Season** Oct–Jun

SOURCE | INFORMATION PROVIDED BY ANDNOWUKNOW AND THE SNACK APPLE GROWER CONTRIBUTORS





### LEMON PIE

#### INGREDIENTS

**½ cup** Bee Sweet Lemon fresh-squeezed juice  
**1 (9")** pie crust, baked and cooled  
**3 large** egg yolks  
**⅔ cup** sugar  
**⅓ cup** cornstarch  
**1 cup** heavy cream  
**1 cup** milk  
**3 tbsp** unsalted butter, softened  
**1 tbsp** lemon zest  
**1 tsp** pure vanilla extract  
Lemon slices, for garnish

#### WHIPPED CREAM

**1 cup** heavy whipping cream  
**2 tbsp** powdered sugar  
**1 tsp** pure vanilla extract

**Prep Time:** 10 min

**Cook Time:** 15 min

**Cool Time:** 5–6 hrs

**Servings:** 8



#### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Place egg yolks in a medium bowl and whisk lightly, then set aside.
- 2 Combine the sugar, cornstarch, cream, milk, and lemon juice in a medium saucepan set over medium heat. Bring to a low boil stirring constantly for 2–3 minutes, until mixture starts to thicken.
- 3 Remove from heat and add about ¼ cup of the mixture at a time to the egg yolks, whisking quickly to temper the yolks. Return the mixture to the saucepan and return to a boil, cooking for another 2 minutes.
- 4 Remove from heat again and add in butter, lemon zest, and vanilla, stirring until the butter is melted.
- 5 Allow to cool slightly, then pour into the prepared pie shell. Let rest for another 15 minutes, then refrigerate until completely cooled and set (about 5–6 hours or overnight.)
- 6 In a cold metal mixing bowl, beat heavy whipping cream with an electric mixer. When cream thickens slightly, add powdered sugar and vanilla. Continue beating until stiff peaks form.
- 7 Pipe whipped cream onto the top of the completely cooled pie for a decorated effect or spread over the top of the pie in an even layer, then garnish with lemon slices if desired. Serve and enjoy!

To learn more about Bee Sweet Citrus, visit [www.beesweetcitrus.com](http://www.beesweetcitrus.com)



A full-page photograph of two men standing in a lush green field. The man on the left is wearing a white short-sleeved shirt under a dark green quilted vest and blue jeans. The man on the right is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved button-down shirt and blue jeans. They are both smiling at the camera. In the background, there are rolling green hills and a body of water under a clear blue sky. A dark blue rectangular box is in the top right corner, and a dark blue banner is at the bottom left.

## Smoky Mountain Family Farms

Gus Pappas, Co-Chief Executive Officer, Pete Pappas & Sons (left) and Jon Esformes, Chief Executive Officer, Sunripe™ Certified Brands and Co-Managing Partner, Smoky Mountain Family Farms (right)





# Summiting ◀ SUCCESS ▶

By Chandler James

*Eleven generations.  
Three families.  
One vision.*

**These are the cornerstones of a decades-long  
trek toward tomato category success.**



The Esformes and Heller families crossed paths in the 1920s, united by a shared passion for providing premium summertime tomatoes to North America. After many years of collaboration, the two founded Sunripe™ Certified Brands, and the rest, as they say, is history.

It wasn't until 2020 that these two ag powers joined forces with Smoky Mountain Family Farms, which was formed in 2016 by a prominent fresh produce distributor with sights set on vertical integration: Pete Pappas & Sons. And thus, the tomato trifecta was born.

"Even though we didn't officially team up until last year, Pete Pappas recently told me a story about how in the '40s, every July, his father, Gus Pappas Sr., would send him to the Greek grocery store in Maryland to buy food and wine so he could drive it down to my grandfather, Jack Esformes, on the state's eastern shore and play cards late into the night," said Jon Esformes. Today, Jon is Chief Executive Officer of Sunripe and Co-Managing Partner for Smoky Mountain Family Farms.

Clearly, ag roots run deep. And these particular roots have seemingly run parallel to each other.

While the Esformes and Hellers gained recognition on the growing side of the industry, the Pappas family was making

a name for themselves on the distribution side. The expertise gained by each led to a pivotal point in September of 2019, at which Jon and his now Co-Managing Partner Aris Pappas sat down for dinner and discovered identical goals.

To grow tomatoes in the Appalachians.

"It was the exact right time in each of our historical arcs, and I told Aris that I wanted to work with him at Smoky Mountain. A few months later, I got the call that he was interested in a partnership," Jon told me.

Just over a year after that conversation took place, Smoky Mountain Family Farms announced its acquisition of Triple C Farms in March of 2021. Combining eleven generations worth of fresh produce expertise, Jon and Aris took a chance on their shared vision, purchasing strategically located land that would put their plans into motion.

"When the Pappas family formed Smoky Mountain Family Farms in 2016, it was with the intention of building a first-class, 21<sup>st</sup>-century farming operation in the Appalachians. That vision continues as the foundation our partnership is built on," Jon began. "The Appalachians are

a difficult environment to farm, and we're coming at it from the perspective of Florida growing, where each of our farms is in excess of 4,500 acres. With smaller fields in the mountains, it gets complicated from a logistical standpoint. And, quite frankly, we love the complicated stuff. From our perspective, that creates an opportunity to meet that environment and make sure every farm is getting what it needs when it needs it."

Smoky Mountain learned to lean on local knowledge while incorporating its own operating platform. Last summer, the company tested its theories on 350 acres spread across multiple farms to see if it could meet the environmental challenge. I assume the team's confidence was quickly solidified, as the company made its momentous acquisition soon afterward and is tripling production for the summer of 2021. What ultimately started as a three- to five-year strategic plan was executed in one year. How's that for confidence?

"We are a science-based company, and we are very focused on making sure

"Tell us what you want, how you want it, and we'll make it happen."

*Jon Esformes,*

Chief Executive Officer, Sunripe™ Certified Brands and  
Co-Managing Partner, Smoky Mountain Family Farms







**Smoky Mountain Family Farms was formed in 2016 by prominent fresh produce distributor Pete Pappas & Sons**

that anecdotal information is as good as the data that backs it up. There's a reason why anecdotal information withstands the test of time: It's true," Jon said with a grin. "We are backing up this information with data and science to understand why, how, and when certain growing conditions are present, as well as what the impact will be on our crops."

This fierce dedication to the truth has played a key role in building out Smoky Mountain's customer base, as—at its core—is the promise of continuous supply. The grower now ensures year-round production, optimizing the combined logistical prowess of a supplier and a distributor.

"Our goal is to maintain a '12-in-12' operation, in which we are 12-month farmers within a 12-hour car ride from our southernmost farm to our northernmost farm," Jon added.

While this supply chain convenience sounds perfect in theory, another crucial aspect of successful buy-side

relationships is the ability to navigate the diverse needs of your partners, and the original alliance between Sunripe and Pete Pappas & Sons is founded on a model that can meet all needs in the tomato category. Having been created within the last ten years, Smoky Mountain brings a tech-forward value-added edge to Sunripe's operations—a match made in produce heaven, if you ask me.

"I always take the position that we're here for our customers. Our ultimate customer is the consumer, whether it's someone who goes into a restaurant or shops at a grocery store. In blending our wealth of experience and the technical capacity of Smoky Mountain Family Farms, we aim to meet every need of our buy-side partners," Jon emphasized. "Tell us what you want, how you want it, and we'll make it happen."

Given eleven generations and three strong-willed families, I doubt there would be many visions so unified as that of the Pappas, Esformes, and Hellers. If Smoky Mountain's clear logistical innovation alone does not convey

this, its partnership with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to Tennessee certainly does.

"Smoky Mountain Family Farms is the first Fair Food Program-certified farming operation in Tennessee," Jon relayed. "Our number-one priority is to ensure all our employees have access to a safe and fair workplace. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers is our partner in making sure that we're meeting and exceeding the highest standards of compliance, not just with the law, but with our moral and ethical responsibility as human beings."

Much like the farmers traversing the Appalachians, Smoky Mountain knew that all it would take to find success would be to put one foot in front of the other.

Creating this tomato legacy was not so much a singular venture as a lifelong journey, though, as there has always been one clear endpoint:

Summitting success. 🍅



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