

Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

the
xxxx

SNACK



ISSUE 97 SEPT 2025

"Once
I got into
Produce
I fell in
Love"



★
"TRUE
GRIT"



"I Love
WHAT I DO"

Fresh
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WHATEVER
IT TAKES



RYAN SANCHEZ



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RIGHT BEFORE THE BOULDER ROLLED DOWN THE ROCK FACE AND BLEW OUT MY RIGHT FRONT TIRE, I THOUGHT, “WELL, HERE WE ARE.”

I am constantly reminded to trust the Universe. If we leave enough of our mind and spirit open to the vast possibilities in front of us, the unexpected can happen.

Despite my best efforts to control the cosmos around me, I have had so many moments where I've had to surrender—to let go of the wheel, metaphorically and sometimes literally.

“No one gets caught in a rockslide.” I still laugh at that.

It was a Friday afternoon, just before dusk. The sun had punched a hole in the spring clouds and turned the day into bluebird skies. The runs at Sierra at Tahoe were near empty, the snow sticky enough to toss you over the front of your skis or board—your choice. Still in my gear, my snowboard wedged between the driver and passenger seats of my white 2000 Eclipse, I was riding the high of spring turns. That rare, fleeting window of snow and sun and sore hips that marked the season's end.

Then Nature reminded me of her power. The warmer weather had turned snow into streams, which froze and thawed in a constant rhythm, cracking open rock faces along Highway 50.

A rockslide hit my car just between Strawberry and Kyburz—an idyllic stretch of road without phone service and barely a shoulder. As the light faded and the quiet settled in, I sat in my car, unsure of what would happen next.



Then, like a scene written by the Universe itself, I heard the hum of gears and diesel. A reefer truck rounded the bend and slowed. The driver rolled down his window: “Do you want a ride?”

I did. I needed one. And off we went, back toward civilization, back to safety. He dropped me at the Strawberry Post Office just as the Postmaster was locking up.

The point of this story isn't the ride or the rockslide. It's the reminder: trust the Universe.

In an industry where our personal and professional lives are guided, steered, or forced into a ditch, into safety, or even wonder, I find this belief paradoxical but beautiful in the sting of its solace.

We are on the cusp, at the beginning and end of many changes in our businesses and industry. We control what we can.

And then we trust. 🍅

Jordan Okumura-Wright
Editor in Chief
AndNowUKnow, *Deli Market News*,
and *The Snack Magazine*

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ALBERTSONS COMPANIES WHEN THE STAKES ARE HIGH

Ryan Sanchez merges NFL-level intensity with produce sales mastery, proving passion, resilience, and people-first leadership fuel enduring success...



LANGE COMPANIES

NEXT STOP: THE FUTURE

Rolling out a comprehensive rebrand to the wide-reaching operation, leader Greg Reinauer introduces us to the next chapter...



PURE FLAVOR®

BRANDING WITH PURE INTENTION

Transformation happens on many levels, with an outcome unique to each who walks its path. Julia Shreve shares the journey the greenhouse operator embarked on for its own evolution as it executes a 2025 dynamic brand refresh...



OCEAN MIST® FARMS

BRAVO—A STANDING OVATION

Industry maven Rick Bravo announces that he is taking his final bow on the produce stage. As he prepares to retire, walk with us down the aisle of this incredible career...



FOWLER PACKING COMPANY WHERE THE PAST MEETS THE PRESENT

When wisdom meets innovation, there is no limit. As the Fowler, California-based operation celebrates 75 years, Justin Parnagian shares the tenets of the company and the fruits of its labor...



GIUMARRA VINEYARDS

BREEDING RESILIENCE

Randy Giumarra and Nomi Karniel-Padan discuss this recent partnership and how it is shaping the future of table grape breeding...



WESTFALIA FRUIT NORTH AMERICA

ROOTS TO RECOVERY

As this produce region continues to navigate the aftermath of a natural disaster, Marissa Maples, Raina Nelson, and Christina Ward take us through an industry effort worth remembering...

Something good is growing

BRAND REFRESH DROPPING 10.17.25



Your sneak peek starts here: [PURE-FLAVOR.COM/GPFS](https://pure-flavor.com/GPFS)
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FRESH FOLK



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**RAINIER FRUIT COMPANY
INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT**
GROWING FRUIT,
GROWING PEOPLE



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VERSATILITY:
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TRUE TO TASTE

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Scan Me



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WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Shuman Farms
Sweet Onions

?



ALL-AMERICAN SWEET ONION DIP

INGREDIENTS

1 cup Shuman Farms Sweet Onion,
finely chopped
½ tbsp butter
2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
8 oz sour cream
½ cup mayonnaise
½ tsp salt
½ tsp pepper
8 oz cream cheese, softened

Prep Time: 10 mins

Cook Time: 5 mins

Servings: 8

DIRECTIONS

- 1 In a medium skillet, heat butter over medium-high heat until melted.
- 2 Add onion and cook, stirring frequently for 3–5 minutes or until tender and lightly browned.
- 3 Remove onion from heat, stir in Worcestershire sauce, and let cool completely.
- 4 In a bowl, combine onion mixture, sour cream, mayonnaise, salt, pepper, and cream cheese.
- 5 Mix until blended and refrigerate at least one hour before serving to allow flavors to blend.
- 6 Enjoy with your favorite chips, crackers, or vegetables.



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EXCLUSIVELY FROM



A Closer Look at Josie’s Organics Sweet & Smoky BBQ Salad Kit

By Peggy Packer


Deliciously unexpected. This is the phrase that immediately came to mind when I stumbled across the words “Sweet & Smoky BBQ” in the produce department. While it may be a staple across a variety of center-store items, the mouthwatering flavors of a smoky-yet-sweet barbecue sauce rarely find their way into produce.

That’s where Braga Fresh comes in.

The supplier has pulled back the curtain on two premium Josie’s Organics salad kit varieties, one of which perfectly blends organic leafy greens with crispy onions, white Cheddar cheese, and dried corn, topped with a sweet and smoky barbecue-flavored vinaigrette. Washed and ready to enjoy, the value-added offering presents organic shoppers with flavor-packed, clean ingredients in one convenient kit.

The packaging draws consumers in with a clear view of the crisp leafy greens inside, along with a depiction of this unique creation in its final form. High in vitamins A and K, this product is packed with shopper appeal.

Bringing more innovative flavor profiles to the salad kit sector, the Sweet & Smoky BBQ variety joins the Josie’s Organics portfolio alongside the new Berry Balsamic salad kit, which combines organic crisp leafy greens with sliced almonds, dried cranberries, Bing cherries, and blueberries, topped with a raspberry balsamic vinaigrette for a wonderfully flavorful bite.

With game-changing SKUs shaking up this high-demand category, now is the time to wow shoppers with items that are deliciously unexpected—and these varieties are the perfect place to start. 

UP
CLOSE



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lange™

NEXT STOP: THE FUTURE

A Q&A with **Greg Reinauer**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Lange Companies

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

There are some voices that stick with you over the years, resonating and coloring your perspective. One that I draw upon any time I need a little more produce passion, or a wise perspective on the strides made by the generation before, without a doubt, I hear Rock.

Phil “Rock” Gumpert was one of the key figures who laid the foundation for what we now know as Lange Companies. Before his retirement, I had the honor of hearing from Rock himself how he began his produce career on the railroad before joining up with Co-Founders Farrell “Dutch”

Gay, Paul Biser, and Tom Lange, taking me through the timeline to the contemporary company.

Now, Lange Companies embarks on a new chapter that both leads it forward while recognizing its evolution. Bringing its accomplishments under a comprehensive, communicative umbrella, Lange Companies is achieving a brand revitalization. Greg Reinauer, who has led Lange Companies as President and Chief Executive Officer for over a decade, takes up the torch with me in carrying this dynamic story forward.



Melissa De Leon Chavez:
Greg, as we explore this new chapter for Lange Companies, I would love to know more about how you stepped into your role. Will you tell me a bit of your own background and history with Lange Companies?

Greg Reinauer, President and Chief Executive Officer, Lange Companies:

My career in the produce industry has traversed multiple sectors. This has provided me with a wealth of experience and knowledge, from growing to distribution and into the retail and foodservice businesses. My mentors, colleagues, and industry friends, who have been part of my journey, have all contributed to my growth in the industry, preparing me to lead Lange Companies.



MDC: Lange Companies has a rich and flavorful history. How long has the rebrand been in the works, and what was the ultimate goal of the team as it undertook the opportunity?

GR: After more than 65 years in business, we felt it was time to refresh our brand to better reflect the full scope of Lange Companies' vertically integrated services. Over a year of thoughtful work from multiple stakeholders across the company went into the development of this new rebrand. The result encompasses a new visual identity, updated website, and refined narrative.

We're proud of the result and encouraged by the positive response from both our team and the industry.

MDC: That makes a lot of sense considering the complexity and unique structure of Lange Companies as a whole. Can you tell me about the rebrand's approach and what buyers should know about this new direction?

GR: The rebrand was a natural step forward, shaped by the steady growth of our organization over the years. As a company that grows, packs, procures, and manages logistics for multiple segments of the produce industry, we knew it was time for a refreshed identity that clearly communicates the strength of our vertically integrated system to the industry.

This new look better supports our internal alignment and helps customers more easily understand the full scope of what we offer.



“After more than 65 years in business, we felt it was *TIME TO REFRESH* our brand to better reflect the *FULL SCOPE OF LANGE COMPANIES*’ vertically integrated services.”


-Greg Reinauer, President and Chief Executive Officer, Lange Companies

We're still the same company our employees and customers have come to know and trust, just with a more unified presence that better reflects our continued growth and future goals.

MDC: How far does this new brand reach, and what does it represent for the team?

GR: For over 65 years, Lange Companies has proven to be an organization capable of effectively reacting and pivoting in an ever-changing marketplace. At its core, produce is unpredictable. Our ability to remain nimble, supported by forward-thinking leadership and team members, has been the foundation that has driven our continued success.

That entrepreneurial spirit remains at the heart of Lange today. We're still moving mountains for every customer while honoring our roots and keeping our focus firmly on the future. Our refreshed brand reflects who we are across every part of the business, built on follow-through, driven by ambition, and grounded in adaptability and respect.

While it's true we cannot stand still even in a vocation as steadfast as fresh produce, we also can't know where we are going until we recognize where we have been. With a foot on each side of its timeline, but both facing forward, Lange Companies continues to evolve with the entrepreneurial spirit of its founding fathers, taking the brand beyond the imaginings of those initial days by the railroad. Next stop: the future. 

WTF DO I DO WITH

Naturipe®
Avocados, Strawberries,
and Blueberries ?
{ what the fork }



BERRY GUACAMOLE

INGREDIENTS

2 ripe Naturipe® Avocados
 ¼ **cup** Naturipe Strawberries or
 Blueberries, finely chopped
 1 **small** clove garlic, minced
 Juice of 1 lime
 2 **tbsp** red onion, finely chopped
 Salt to taste
 Optional: chopped cilantro, Jalapeño
 for kick

Prep Time: 10 mins
Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Scoop avocados into a bowl and mash until smooth but still a little chunky.
- 2 Stir in lime juice, garlic, onion, and salt.
- 3 Fold in chopped strawberries or blueberries.
- 4 Serve with tortilla chips or use as a taco topper!

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► MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀

JACKIE NAKASHIAN
BRAND MANAGER, TRINITY
FRUIT COMPANY

With Peggy Packer

Two things have the undeniable power of brightening anyone’s mood: a good laugh and some even better music. This is why I know—without ever venturing to the Trinity Fruit Company headquarters in Fresno, California—that Jackie Nakashian knows the formula for a perfect day. Whether she’s chuckling in the crowd of a local stand-up comedy show or sipping a seasonal latte after a grueling pilates class (if you know, you know), the Brand Manager is constantly seeking all the joy and adventure life has to offer. We only hope that this fun-filled list of her favorite things will inspire you to do the same...



1 STAND-UP COMEDY

Laughter is my love language; I follow stand-up the way others follow football.



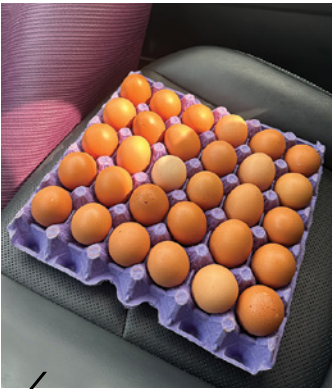
2 PILATES

There’s nothing like a workout class to clear my head, manage stress, and feel my best.



3 A SEASONAL LATTE

I love visiting new and familiar coffee shops to try different flavors.



4 EGGS

Nothing beats a farm-fresh egg. Scrambled, poached, or fried, they’re my comfort food in every form.



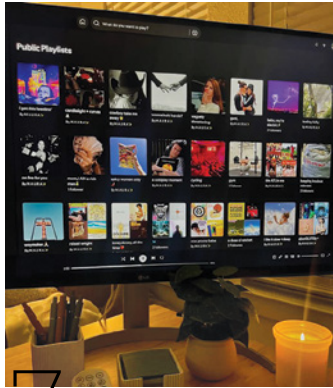
5 TRINKETS

Tiny treasures from my travels, thoughtful gifts from friends, and family keepsakes—my shelves and fridge are a museum of memories.



6 SHAVER LAKE, CALIFORNIA

Skiing in the winter, lake days in the summer, and the best sunsets year-round.



7 BEING THE DJ

I’m always the one with the aux cord curating the perfect vibe, whether it’s a road trip, a party, or just chilling with friends.



8 SQUEEZED JUICE POWER

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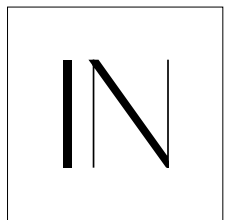


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Branding with Pure Intention

By Jordan Okumura-Wright



an industry where the smallest details and decisions occur under a microscope, it is no wonder that change is to be revered and feared. The bold see change as a worthy challenge, harnessing the power of transformation, while others may change only when they have to.

Two paths with markedly different journeys.

The beauty of transformation is that it underscores our continuous evolution, bringing about new opportunities where others might find their paths determined by reaction instead of proactivity.

Pure Flavor® is of the dynamic type, always in search of the industrious route, the one that will reveal new possibilities for itself and its customers. With such passion, Pure Flavor has composed a new map for its brand this year, one that recognizes where it has been and where it is going.

“We are on a rocketship path of growth, and we have a ton more in the pipeline. We want to ensure our brand supports that growth by appealing to the right target consumer with the right messages,” Julia Shreve, Director of Marketing, shares with me.

Starting down this path, Pure Flavor had a goal in mind, yes, but one that was less limiting in its scope, driven instead by the process of discovery.

“We approached this with a fairly open mind, willing to hear what the



consumer had to say and then working to understand how that should shape our strategy and to what degree we needed to evolve,” Julia describes, telling me how the steps toward execution were very measured, but also flexible. “The entire leadership team here was open to change and also a part of the entire discovery process. That has been incredibly empowering and supportive as we undertook this important journey for the company.”

Led by Jamie Moracci, Chief Executive Officer; Matt Mastronardi, Executive Vice President; and Jeff Moracci, President, Pure Flavor has been a service-focused, humble, trusted, innovative, family-operated company that treats growers, employees, and customers as integral partners in its strategy for growth.

While always remaining adaptable, Pure Flavor is deeply committed to foresight, ensuring each step along its journey is primed with intention and meaningful work.

“While we are open to new ways of thinking, executing, and building our

“We are on a rocketship path of growth, and we have a ton more in the pipeline. We want to ensure our brand supports that growth by appealing to the right target consumer with the right messages.”



Julia Shreve,
Director of Marketing,
Pure Flavor®



brand, we’ve also been very careful not to just change for the sake of change—everything we’ve built that is new has been grounded in and supported by insight and learning,” Julia expresses.

This detail is something I admire about Pure Flavor. Navigating the challenges of today’s terrain must be studied and internalized on a multitude of levels. Today’s consumer is faced with an onslaught of messages, and so must be interacted with from a sensory aspect, but also an emotional one.

“Our first mission was to find those nuggets of insight through research that would help us form emotional connections with our consumer and also set us apart from the competition,” Julia explains. “Once we had those, it was important to use the resulting strategy as the North Star that guides every aspect of our brand. To achieve that, the strategy had to be clearly and succinctly articulated, so we spent a lot of time making sure we had the foundation really well hammered out before extending it across the different brand touchpoints like messaging, tone, personality, and visual identity.”



From left to right: Jeff Moracci, President; Jamie Moracci, Chief Executive Officer; and Matt Mastronardi, Executive Vice President


“There’s always a commercial goal with any brand refresh. In produce, we are incredibly fortunate that increasing the sales and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables also benefits our end consumer with a healthier diet.”

At this point in our conversation, I am itching for the reveal, the deeper details, the dynamic refresh that Pure Flavor promises, but Julia reminds me that the debut is strategic too.

“While we’re not ready to share too many details just yet, the team is jumping out of their seats with excitement to unveil it! The minute we saw the visual design territory, we knew it was exactly right,” she says. “I always try to assess design first, based on how it makes me feel. I try to shut off the logical part of my brain and let the emotional part take over. And the emotions we felt when we looked at the new design were exactly the emotions we want our consumers, employees, and partners to feel when they interact with our brand. It’s unique and different in the category, and it directly addresses some of the things we learned about our consumer—their pain points, their pressures, and the things that bring them joy.”

Now the suspense is palpable, so I ask Julia to throw me a bone. How will this brand refresh impact value on the shelf and in the shopping basket, I wonder. Her answer: By entering through the heart.

“There’s always a commercial goal with any brand refresh. In produce, we are incredibly fortunate that increasing the sales and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables also benefits our end consumer with a healthier diet,” Julia replies. “By creating a stronger emotional connection between the consumer and the Pure Flavor brand, we are not only benefiting our own business and the category as a whole (which is far from saturated), but we’re also positively impacting the lives of people. I can’t think of a more motivating purpose than that!”

And with purpose comes the most amazing opportunities for transformation. After all, a brand refresh for Pure Flavor is not about reinventing who they are, but revealing more of who they have become. 

Something good is growing.

BRAND REFRESH DROPPING 10.17.25



The Allen Lund Company continues to grow domestically and has expanded to provide exceptional service in international markets

“

We focus on how we handle the large accounts with more of an enterprise-like approach. Our team is called the National Account Management Team (NAM). The strategic partnership with our large shippers is a two-way communication. We’re helping them; they’re helping us. Our customers know they are working with a company that cares, and that we are following what Allen always said - Be Good.

”



Braden Goodere



Kat Ball



“

Cross-border freight movements are a big piece of our business; we leverage ALC’s unparalleled service and value by providing expertise, support, and assistance with customs brokerage processes, border clearance, and paperwork. I never knew Allen Lund personally, but I am familiar with his legacy - that grit and perseverance through challenges, that’s how you set yourself apart.

”

“

Allen Lund understood technology and that it would be a huge component for our growth. So our technology provides better service to our customers, both shippers and carriers. To support this growth, we developed two divisions in India: one for software development and one for shipper and carrier support. We have grown to 90 employees at ALC India.

”



Chetan Tandon



ALLEN LUND COMPANY
Transportation Brokers

In 1976, Allen Lund launched our company, with the goal of providing quality service in transportation. Even after he passed in 2018, the company remains focused on our relationships and delivering the same superior customer service.

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BACK ^{TO} SCHOOL

SNACKCHAT

By Chandler James

The back-to-school season is a time when students reboot their brains and prepare for another year of learning and achievement. Our minds could not accomplish all they do without the nutritious fuel we fill our bodies with, and the fresh produce sector offers a wide array of brain-powering fruit and vegetables. Here to tell you about the fresh benefits are a handful of industry experts...



NICHOLE TOWELL

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

"As back-to-school season ramps up, shoppers are seeking quick and healthy snack solutions for lunchboxes, afterschool bites, snack time, and more! Our fresh-cut celery sticks offer crisp, convenient, nutritious options thanks to our proprietary Duda Generations varieties—the crispiest, sweetest celery available. Cross promotion at the retail level can further boost this refreshing snack's popularity when paired with single-serve dips like hummus, ranch, or almond butter, creating easy grab-and-go pairings that are perfect for lunchtime, work breaks, or on-the-go snacking."



BRIANNA SHALES

Marketing Director, Stemilt

"The back-to-school season is timed with the transition to new crop apples and pears at Stemilt. With a full crop of pears returning, we encourage retailers to utilize our popular kid-size fruit brand, Lil Snappers®, to highlight the convenience and snackability of new crop Bartlett and Starkrimson pears. Pair that pouch bag promotion with bulk Rave® apples to create a well-rounded ad that hits on seasonality and flavor, while driving dollars to two key categories come fall."



GARY CLEVINGER

Managing Partner, Freska Produce International

"Late summer usually finds produce buyers scrambling for color after stonefruit peaks. Enter the Keitt mango—Mexico's giant, green-skinned cultivar that ripens just as backpacks come out of storage. Freska's Los Mochis groves sit along the fertile Sinaloa coastal plain, where warm days and cool Pacific breezes stretch the growing window and let Keitts size up impressively without sacrificing texture. The result is a mango that can weigh nearly a pound, with almost zero fiber and a custardy bite that wins over kids and diet-minded parents alike."



GEOFF KOSAR

Vice President of Marketing, Mastronardi Produce®

"The back-to-school season brings excitement, and we aim to channel that energy and joy into healthy snacking with our SUNSET® teeny-tiny tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers. Sprinkles™ Tomatoes, Qukes™ Cucumbers, and Peppy's™ Peppers are easy to fit into lunchboxes and perfect for little hands to snack on. The growing demand for this line reflects the consumer desire for fun, flavorful fruits and vegetables in the snacking category. The 'cute factor' drives impulse purchases that evolve into loyal favorites, thanks to their outstanding taste. We're excited for kids and adults alike to enjoy these fun snacking offerings this back-to-school season."



STEVE WARE

Vice President of Value-Added, Naturipe Farms

"We hear from parents all the time about the challenge of balancing fresh and convenient snacks—but with Naturipe Farms, they don't have to choose. This back-to-school season, we're highlighting our snack packs made with fresh berries, a differentiator we are proud of. Fresh fruits are lower in sugar, more hydrating, and packed with essential vitamins. As an added bonus, pairing fresh fruit with other kid-friendly snacks—like pretzels, cheese, cookies, or even mini pancakes—is a great way to get even the pickiest of eaters to enjoy berries. Give them a try and taste the difference for yourself!"



WILLIAM GOLDFIELD

Director, Corporate Communications, Dole Food Company

"For every new school year, Dole wants to make fresh fruit the easy, nutritious, and fun choice for every student's routine. Throughout our social media channels, we share creative recipes, lunchbox tips, and parent-friendly hacks for convenient ways to fuel young minds with wholesome produce. Our back-to-school campaign will highlight bananas, pineapples, mangos, and other fruits as smart, packable options that support energy, focus, and wellness throughout the day. We see a return to school as an opportunity to also instruct on how to build better food habits—one snack, one lunchbox, and one student at a time."

Industry Spotlight

GROWING FRUIT, GROWING PEOPLE



Blake Belknap
VICE PRESIDENT,
RAINIER FRUIT COMPANY

"Growing a healthy tree takes faith and patience. As the adage goes, the true meaning of faith is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit. That would be an apt metaphor for Rainier Fruit Company's belief in a bright future. Our tree started with the Zirkle family six generations ago. However, Bill and Mark Zirkle are quick to point out that it's the strength of our teammates from the field to the loading dock that makes us excellent every day. As I look back over my time here, I smile as I see the branches of this tree grow.

Those branches extend in many directions. It's people like Nora Garcia, a third-generation leader in production planning whose parents picked Rainier apples 30 years ago. Or Bill Zirkle's granddaughter Emily, who sifts through data and helps support planting decisions based on consumer trends for our Business Development team. And our field team, led by Mark and Marvin Record, who are continually challenged to do the hard things others won't that set the Rainier bar of quality out of reach for many. Our sales team has rewired old mantras and challenged our veteran feelings by listening to new (young!) ideas. Within daily conversations, it's our team's ability to deal with 'healthy friction,' as Mark likes to put it, that helps us grow in our decision making.

It is truly a privilege to be able to share the faces of fabulous teammates that span the 50 years of Rainier. May we continue to empower and trust our people, which will allow our tree to grow for many more years to come."



Skyler McFeeley



Gilbert Camarillo



Angelle Sampson



Teah Smith



Ralph Garcia



Osbaldo Mejia



Jeff Gill



Martin Prado



Tyler Johnson



Bill, Mark, Emily, and Nick Zirkle



Nora Garcia



Austin Olson



Marvin Record



Shawn Santomassimo



Allie Perrault



Jorge Mireles



WTF DO I DO WITH 4Earth Farms™ Organic Zucchini ?

{ what the fork }



ZUCCHINI PATTIES WITH TZATZIKI

INGREDIENTS

ZUCCHINI PATTIES

2 cups 4Earth Farms™ Organic Zucchini, grated
¼ cup onion, finely chopped
¼ cup Parmesan cheese
¼ cup flour
2 large eggs
2 tbsp mayonnaise
¼ tsp oregano

¼ tsp salt
Dash of black pepper
2 tbsp olive oil

TZATZIKI SAUCE

½ cup cucumber, finely chopped
1 cup whole milk Greek yogurt
1 tbsp fresh lemon juice
½ tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

1 garlic clove, grated
¼ tsp sea salt
1 tbsp fresh dill, chopped
1 tbsp fresh mint

Prep Time: 30 mins
Cook Time: 30 mins
Servings: 8

DIRECTIONS

- 1 For the zucchini patties, mix together all ingredients in a medium bowl, except for olive oil.
- 2 In a medium frying pan over medium heat, heat the olive oil. Drop a ¼ cup of mixture in oil and cook until browned on both sides.
- 3 For the tzatziki sauce, combine the ingredients in a medium bowl. Chill until ready to use.
- 4 Drain on a plate lined with paper towels and serve immediately. Top with tzatziki sauce and enjoy!



To learn more about 4Earth Farms™, visit www.4earthfarms.com



A Forward-Thinking VISION

BY CHANDLER JAMES

When writers of *The Snack's* future interview Gem-Pack Berries, its leaders will point toward a recent three-year period of growth in which the supplier focused its efforts on strategic mergers and acquisitions.

Now, my friends, is the closing of that chapter, making way for the company's next phase of development alongside two formidable partners: Red Blossom Sales and Well-Pict Berries.

"The past three years have been a journey," Michelle Deleissegues, Senior Vice President of Marketing, began telling me in a recent

discussion. "We had to cover a lot of ground, both literally and figuratively, to stay operational during the growth spurts. Throughout the process, our goal was to take the time to honor and respect all the decades of berry knowledge and history each partner brought to Gem-Pack."

Internally, Gem-Pack spent a considerable amount of time listening, watching, and learning from one another. The grower's teams have been in the furrows for the past couple of years, diligently reorganizing the operational and administrative processes to accommodate the company's growth.

“...our goal was to take the time to honor and respect all the decades of berry knowledge and history each partner brought to Gem-Pack [Berries].”

“We are confident we have a strong grasp on the assimilation and restructuring, and can lift our gaze beyond the daily and seasonal work at hand to look forward. Our focus is now on Gem-Pack’s future and cultivating a path for the company we intend to become. We are on the brink of a new era for Gem-Pack, and it’s inspiring,” Michelle continued.

In terms of branding, Paul Kawamura, Chief Revenue Officer, explained that Gem-Pack is currently working to integrate all three companies. Well-Pict, especially, he said, has a very loyal base. Gem-Pack is now in the middle of a large branding project that will help retain its roots and legacy while also looking toward the future.



Michelle Deleissegues,
**Senior Vice President of Marketing,
Gem-Pack Berries**

“With the assimilation of three great companies and almost total vertical integration, we have the unique opportunity to challenge ourselves and create the best practices throughout the entire chain,” Paul stated. “Everything we do has to have purpose and only the highest expectations. Whether it’s new varieties from breeders, plants from our nursery, growing practices, cold chain, selling, etc., we need to be first-in-class on everything we do.”

Gem-Pack has a clear path of evolution and growth, Michelle pointed out. This past year, she, Paul, and the sales and marketing team have been actively researching Gem-Pack’s brands and overall company strengths and weaknesses.

“It was a good point in time to review our progress, from both an internal and external perspective, and we have been listening and noting our strengths and weaknesses. We clearly have a strong foundation,

and our goal with the Gem-Pack brands is to cultivate a clear vision of a position based on our greatest assets,” Michelle expressed. “We want our brand to tell a story—our story.”

Throughout the growth and restructuring, she added, Gem-Pack’s genuine and strong connection with its customers has been inspiring, and her team wants to build on that connection and make sure it’s carried through to the consumer as well.

“Our goal at retail will be to unify our brands and messaging. We are working on packaging that will communicate not only the joy of berries, but also our story of connection: our connection with farming, our connection with customers, our connection with a fresh, healthy lifestyle,” Michelle explained. “There is a lot of investment in our brands, and we will always respect where we came from, but we also want to honor the role the newly formed Gem-Pack has in the future of berries.”

Paul shared a similar sentiment in looking toward the next phase of Gem-Pack’s growth.

“We will continue to improve and innovate every year,” he said. “Whether that’s new varieties and better-tasting fruit, technology-driven farming practices, or a stronger surety of supply, retailers and consumers can trust Gem-Pack to keep getting better and challenging the industry. It’s easy to maintain the status quo, but difficult to be changemakers, and we decided years ago to buck the system. We hope our partners and customers come on the ride with us to build a better category.”



Gem-Pack has always been farmer- and family-focused, Michelle noted. That perspective continues to inspire the team, and they want to maintain authenticity without letting it hold the Gem-Pack brand back.

“What we’ve consistently heard is Gem-Pack bridges the gap between the single-family farm and large corporate entity. We’re a unique presence in the berry category, with executives who farm with thorough expertise in berry science. Yet, our depth and vertical integration position us to be a large-scale supplier with the attitude and agility of a family-run enterprise. Our goal is to make the most of this unique position by continuing our vertical integration and asset development,” Michelle elaborated.

In that vein, Paul made the important distinction that there is a lot of status quo in our business—a lot of accepting, “This is how it is.”

“We have learned to challenge these notions and set extremely high goals and standards for the future and make the impossible possible,” he stated firmly.

On a final note, Paul reiterated that Gem-Pack will continue to innovate

“...we have the unique opportunity to challenge ourselves and create the best practices throughout the entire chain...”

on varieties. For example, the grower is increasing its footprint in mixed berries in a bid to become everyone’s favorite one-stop shop.


“We intentionally partner with progressive, forward-thinking vendors, growers, and customers that inspire us and push us to be innovative,” Michelle concluded. “We continue to grow our product line with new varieties and more organic products. We also have some amazing sustainable packaging initiatives in development, as well as innovative farming technologies. As we’ve been building new teams internally and externally, we



Paul Kawamura,
**Chief Revenue Officer,
Gem-Pack Berries**

encourage learning, innovation, and experimentation to nurture a culture of continuous evolution. We build connection through our roots, but our vision is always forward-thinking.”

I can picture it: Five years from now, there will be a colorful *Snack* spread adorned with Gem-Pack’s newest berry offerings and an article that highlights operations steeped in tradition, yet going far beyond the boundaries of what was previously thought possible.

With any luck, I will be able to tell the remarkable story once again. 





Brooke Becker

Senior Vice President of Sales,
Mission Produce®

Time at Mission Produce®: 15 years

With Chandler James

Few people in this world possess the dedication and drive exhibited by Brooke Becker. She has spent well over a decade pioneering sales tactics for Mission Produce®, leaning on her pure grit to get the job done. In work and in life, Brooke relies on her levelheadedness and problem-solving to conquer what some might view as challenges, but she views as opportunities...

» What is a metaphor for your day-to-day work life?
“Sales is a marathon, not a sprint. It’s fast, unpredictable, and full of curveballs—but that’s part of the fun. You’re constantly pivoting between internal priorities and customer needs, solving problems in real-time. Every win counts, no matter how small, because they build into something big. It’s about staying calm in the chaos, showing up with a can-do attitude, and being someone people enjoy working with.”

» Did you come to your role by accident or design? How so?
“I got my start in produce at Cal Poly SLO where I studied agri-business, which led me to an internship with Kroger. I worked across buying and selling for grapes, melons, vegetables—you name it—and quickly fell for the pace and the people. At a campus career fair, I met the Mission Produce team, landed an interview, and was hired on the spot. I loved the energy, the people, the hustle—it just clicked.”

» What is one talent, interest, or skillset people might not know you have?
“By day, I’m a produce powerhouse—by night, I’m a juice-box-carrying supermom to two amazing girls. When I get home, a different kind of busy begins, and balancing both worlds takes focus, flexibility, and a whole lot of heart. Family is everything to me, and I bring that same care and commitment into my professional life. I serve two families: my team at Mission and my family at home.”

VALUES
AT THE CORE

PASSION
—
CONNECTION
—
LEADING BY EXAMPLE

» If sales were an animal, what would it be?

A horse. Sales requires stamina, focus, and heart. It's about training, patience, and pushing forward when things get tough.

» What is the best advice you’ve received about your career?
“Steve Barnard, Chief Executive Officer of Mission Produce, once told me, ‘Don’t be afraid to fail.’ It sounds simple, but it’s powerful. Sales is all about taking calculated risks. Not every idea unfolds exactly as planned, but the wins are worth it.”

» Is there a lesson in sales you’ve seen help in life?
“When it comes to the value of relationships—whether it’s a customer, competitor, or teammate—kindness and integrity matter. Things change fast, and your relationships are everything. Lead with respect. Operate with humility. Treat every interaction like it counts, because it does.”

» Fill in the blank: “The next generation of produce professionals should ____.”
“Know that technology will never replace real connection. Tools can help you organize and analyze, but they’ll never replace a handshake or a face-to-face conversation. My advice: Pick up the phone, show up in person, make people laugh, and be memorable. Relationships drive this business. Invest in them. Protect them.”

» Who are the important mentors who have had a huge influence on your life?
“Steve Barnard has been an instrumental mentor in my career—he’s always supported my growth and provided me with a platform to succeed. Additionally, my day-to-day motivation is my family. My husband inspires me constantly—he’s goal-driven, and we challenge each other to keep evolving personally and professionally.”

WTF DO I DO WITH { what the fork }



ZESTY HERB ROASTABLES

INGREDIENTS

1 Ocean Mist® Farms Zesty Herb Roastables Kit

Prep Time: 5 mins
Cook Time: 20–25 mins
Servings: 4



To learn more about Ocean Mist® Farms Roastables, visit www.oceanmist.com/products/roastables

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 450° F.
- 2 In mixing bowl, combine broccoli florets and seasoning packet contents with 1–2 tbsp of preferred cooking oil (olive oil recommended). Toss until coated.
- 3 Transfer florets onto ungreased baking sheet and roast for 20–25 minutes, until lightly browned and tender.
- 4 Transfer to serving bowl and sprinkle with crispy garnish (packet #2). Enjoy!



Make it a complete meal or your own culinary masterpiece:

Pair with: Grilled chicken, teriyaki beef strips, citrus grilled shrimp, or garlic sesame tofu.

Starch pairings: Veggie fried rice, lemon garlic butter pasta, or couscous with pine nuts and lemon zest.

► MENTORS IN THE MAKING ◀

KELSEY WEINGART

BRAND MANAGER, PERI & SONS FARMS®

BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ

Kelsey Weingart’s path to produce is a winding one, consistently weaving around and alongside the industry long before crossing into it.

“It’s definitely not everyone’s story,” Kelsey laughs as we reflect on her becoming Peri & Sons Farms® Brand Manager. “It is a little like playing Candy Land—we circled around and met in the middle.”

“We” refers to Kelsey’s initial connection to fresh in her mother, Teri Gibson, Director of Marketing and Customer Relations at Peri & Sons Farms, who has been with the company for nearly 16 years. She is, first and foremost, Kelsey’s favorite footsteps to follow.

“She’s the best as a mom and a boss,” Kelsey tells me. “I have always taken jobs as they came, and so have been



in many industries that way, working almost backwards toward landing beside my mom.”

While Kelsey has explored hospitality, real estate, and a number of other

vocations, the common thread that binds them all together is a love of graphic design and digital branding. Anywhere Kelsey went, she found a connection with those who needed the skills she had and enjoyed.

“Friends and family would ask for help, and I would do marketing for them. Similarly, I would do small jobs here and there for my mom when she needed help. It was after about a year that a position opened up. Interestingly, neither of us started out in marketing. My mom’s background is strong in graphic design and production, and hearing her approach in applying these tools in a multitude of ways was amazing for me,” Kelsey shares of the decision to settle into a permanent role.

Before the long-term opportunity at Peri & Sons, Kelsey was able to pick up valuable outside perspectives both in experience and companionship while she

carved her way out and back to produce.

“When working in healthcare, I had a wonderful manager, Nicole Watson,” Kelsey shares. “She has a vineyard growing wine grapes, and I was able to build her a website.”

Reflecting on the multifaceted relationship and key takeaways Kelsey still carries, she tells me how Nicole is a strong and very personable leader.

“Nicole gets to know her employees on a different level and is respected by everyone. She is very good at her job, but brings everyone along, raising everyone together. She cares about the people, the company, and doing a good job,” Kelsey explains.

Likewise, while Kelsey was working on an elder care council working with seniors, she connected with and learned from Bess Lindahl.

“I also did all the marketing for Bess’s care business, and she is always excited to celebrate everyone’s wins. So watching her business grow has been very fun! Bess is a quiet strength in leading. She is very honest and caring. Bess helps seniors find their next community, ensuring they are settled in the right fit, while at the same time being President of multiple senior organizations in our area,” Kelsey

points out. “What she does is inherently stressful; many coming to her have to leave a home they have been in for decades, but she has a calming presence, and after everyone has finished working with her, they feel they should have done it sooner. It is an impression I would love to leave as well.”

I can easily see how these tools would be key assets in the high-stress, fast-energy world of fresh produce. Yet even as this may seem like a clearly written way for Kelsey, one sweet twist she and Teri have both enjoyed is how many people don’t even realize they are a mother-daughter duo.

“Peri & Sons is a family organization with a lot of relationships like ours. However, surprisingly, many within our company didn’t realize the connection. My mom had worked here for 15 years before I joined, so worlds collided in a lot of fun ways with each side having heard about the other but not having a face to put with them!” Kelsey laughs.

Settling into the mix, she tells me how, together, the two complement each other with their different strengths.

“It is great to work with her; she’s a wonderful mentor and mother. I’ve learned so much from her. Because she has been in the industry for so long, she’s

familiar with the technical aspects of packaging and its needs. I know a lot of the computer graphics, digital media, and those aspects,” Kelsey explains.

Candy Land, eat your heart out on this colorful adventure! With many characters on the board from all walks of life, Kelsey tells fellow mentees not to be afraid of opportunities that come along.

“I ended up in marketing from multiple yeses. Changing jobs or industries is scary, but being open to taking risks as opportunities made this all possible,” Kelsey points out. As for what she sees for our industry at large: “After I went to the Global Produce and Floral Show, seeing how big the produce industry is left such an impact. There are so many opportunities, so many places you could wind up. But even when I explain to people what I do, they still only think of a little farm at the end of the street. We are needed and necessary, and with that is the importance of marketing.”

One thing is certain, regardless of what cards Kelsey is dealt, she will turn each move into a new experience of her own making. What more could you ask for in a potential mentor? 🍷

POWERED BY
JOE Produce®



TERI GIBSON,
Director of Marketing
and Customer Relations,
Peri & Sons Farms®

“Having watched Kelsey’s entrepreneurial career path for years, I was excited when we had a project that matched her expertise. Although she had never worked with an ag company before, we were very impressed by her work and demeanor. It was pure serendipity that a position opened at Peri & Sons Farms right at a time she was looking for a change—I doubt she had ever considered it. I have a feeling only those working in or coming from families in agriculture understand how exciting the field is and the immense variety of opportunities available.

It’s been wonderful watching Kelsey enthusiastically embrace and support Peri & Sons Farms and its place in the market and community. I’m excited to see her becoming passionate about ag and its impact on people, communities, and the planet. It’s a passion she’s sharing, especially across social media, and in doing so, she’s helping others understand the immensely important role that ag plays in our daily lives as well as shining a light on the fabulous career opportunities the industry has to offer.”



NICOLE WATSON,
Owner/Operator, Bishop
Scott Ranch

“I have always known Kelsey to lead her personal and professional life with integrity. This was evident from the day I first met her, and confirmed through daily interactions. She is quiet and purpose-driven. She is willing to take risks and dig in, so long as they align with her values. She has a wonderful way of learning from each experience and applying that knowledge in useful yet creative ways, and her curiosity often results in vast improvements while still honoring past efforts. Kelsey develops strong, intentional relationships built on a foundation of trust and loyalty, and her quick wit brings charm to every interaction. Kelsey brought tremendous value to her work and our workplace, and I have no doubt she will continue to excel as she moves through her career.”



BESS LINDAHL,
Owner, Care and Keeping

“When I first met Kelsey, I instantly liked her. She’s down-to-earth, easy to talk to, and confident in her abilities without taking herself too seriously. We began working together as members of a local nonprofit organization, and it was immediately clear we’d make a great team. As young female entrepreneurs launching businesses around the same time, it was reassuring to have a peer like Kelsey. She jumped in with fresh ideas to help grow the organization and dedicated significant time to learning the skills needed to support me on the Board of Directors.

Starting a business can be intimidating, but we believed in each other wholeheartedly and offered the kind of support that made success feel possible. Over the years, our collaboration has only strengthened. Whenever I share an idea, Kelsey knows exactly how to bring it to life. I have no doubt that incredible opportunities will continue to find her—and that she’ll make the most of every one.”

“CHANGING JOBS OR INDUSTRIES IS SCARY, BUT BEING OPEN TO TAKING RISKS AS OPPORTUNITIES MADE THIS ALL POSSIBLE.”

KELSEY WEINGART,
Brand Manager,
Peri & Sons Farms®



BRAVO

—A Standing Ovation

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

There's a familiar saying in our industry: Produce gets into your blood. And perhaps one of the hardest parts of this business is knowing when it's time to say goodbye. This month, the fresh produce industry bids farewell to Rick Bravo—a well-known and respected leader in the fresh vegetable industry.



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

Rick, who has worked with some of the most prominent names in the fresh vegetable industry, will officially conclude his remarkable 43-year career this month. Interestingly, his path to produce wasn't a straight one.

Though raised in Hollister, California—surrounded by fruit and vegetable farms—his early aspirations were in criminal justice. He pursued a degree in Administration of Justice at San Jose State University with hopes of becoming a probation officer; however, after completing an invaluable summer internship with the San Benito County Probation Office, Rick realized that wasn't his passion.

Having spent many summers working at Mayfair Packing, a local dried fruit company, Rick returned there after college to work full-time as a fruit buyer. After three years, recognizing limited growth in the dried fruit sector, he shifted gears and accepted a sales desk position with Bud of California. That decision in August of 1983 marked the beginning of his journey into the world of fresh produce.

Rick's career with Bud of California—which would soon evolve into Dole Fresh Vegetables—began to take shape. Two years in, he relocated to the company's Chicago office, where he expanded his understanding of regional markets and developed strong relationships with customers. After two years in the Midwest, Rick returned to Dole's Salinas office and steadily rose through the sales ranks.

He spent a total of 20 years with Dole before taking on a new opportunity at Tanimura & Antle, where he spent five years as Vice President of Sales and Marketing. In 2008, Rick returned to Dole for another decade, this time serving as Director of Commodity Sales and continuing to make his mark in the industry.

Although Rick thought he would likely finish his career at Dole, a new opportunity came knocking in 2018.



Chris Drew,
President and Chief
Executive Officer,
Ocean Mist® Farms

“Rick was recruited to join the Ocean Mist® Farms family as Vice President of Sales and Marketing. He saw the move as a fresh start—and a chance to help shape and lead a high-performing sales team. For the past seven years, he has been an

“
For the past seven years, [Rick] has been an integral part of the Ocean Mist® Farms organization, bringing his extensive experience and steady leadership to the company's sales efforts.”

Chris Drew,
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Ocean Mist® Farms

”

Over the course of his 43-year career, Rick gained a wealth of knowledge and perspective. Before his retirement, we had the opportunity to capture a few of his reflections on how the produce industry has evolved during his time.

integral part of the Ocean Mist Farms organization, bringing his extensive experience and steady leadership to the company's sales efforts,” Chris Drew, President and Chief Executive Officer, shared.

During his tenure at Ocean Mist Farms, Rick brought invaluable structure, focus, and strategic vision to the sales organization. Under his leadership, the team secured new customers, expanded contract business, and drove significant growth in the company's value-added segment.

“It's been a remarkable experience to work for a 100-year-old legacy company—not many businesses reach that milestone,” Rick noted, reflecting on his time at Ocean Mist. “The company and the sales team embraced me from the very beginning. My hope is that I've made a meaningful and lasting contribution.”



“

I’ll miss working in this incredible industry—and I’ll especially miss the people.

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

”

“The industry has changed a lot over four decades,” he shared. “In the early days, there were no cell phones or laptops—there were desktop computers and pagers. Communication was primarily by phone, which meant always knowing where the nearest payphone was!”

Rick continued, saying, “There also wasn’t any value-added produce back then—just commodities and a small foodservice business. I remember in the late ’80s, we introduced a 3 lb bag of Iceberg salad mix to retailers at virtually no cost just to get them to try it—but they weren’t interested. Retailers didn’t know how to merchandise it, and consumers didn’t know what to do with it.”

Although over the next several years, he pointed out, value-added items proved they were here to stay.

Rick also highlighted one of the most meaningful industry shifts he’s observed: “Another major evolution has been the increased presence of women in produce. Early on, there were only a handful of trailblazing women in leadership roles,” he said. “That has been one of the most significant and positive changes I’ve witnessed over the past 40 years.”

When asked what wisdom he would like to impart to the next generation coming into produce, with heartfelt intention he responded, “Be curious! Never be afraid to ask questions or volunteer to learn new things. The fresh produce industry is multifaceted with many opportunities. Find mentors. Find them early in your career and then become one later in your career. Build bridges, don’t burn them. Say yes to opportunities; this is how you grow and get noticed. I’ve also learned that success is a collaborative effort. No one succeeds alone, and I’ve had the privilege to work with so many talented people who have contributed to my career.”

In sharing some final reflections as he winds up his career, Rick thought first of his family.

“It’s incredibly rewarding to see both my daughter, Emily, and son, James, pursuing careers in the fresh produce industry—essentially following in my footsteps,” he said.



Rick also expressed appreciation for the companies that helped shape his professional journey.

“I’ve had the privilege of working for three exceptional companies in this industry, and I still have close friends at all of them. It’s been an amazing opportunity to meet and work with so many great and talented people, including growers, colleagues, customers, and suppliers. I’m truly thankful for the rewarding career I’ve had,” he remarked.

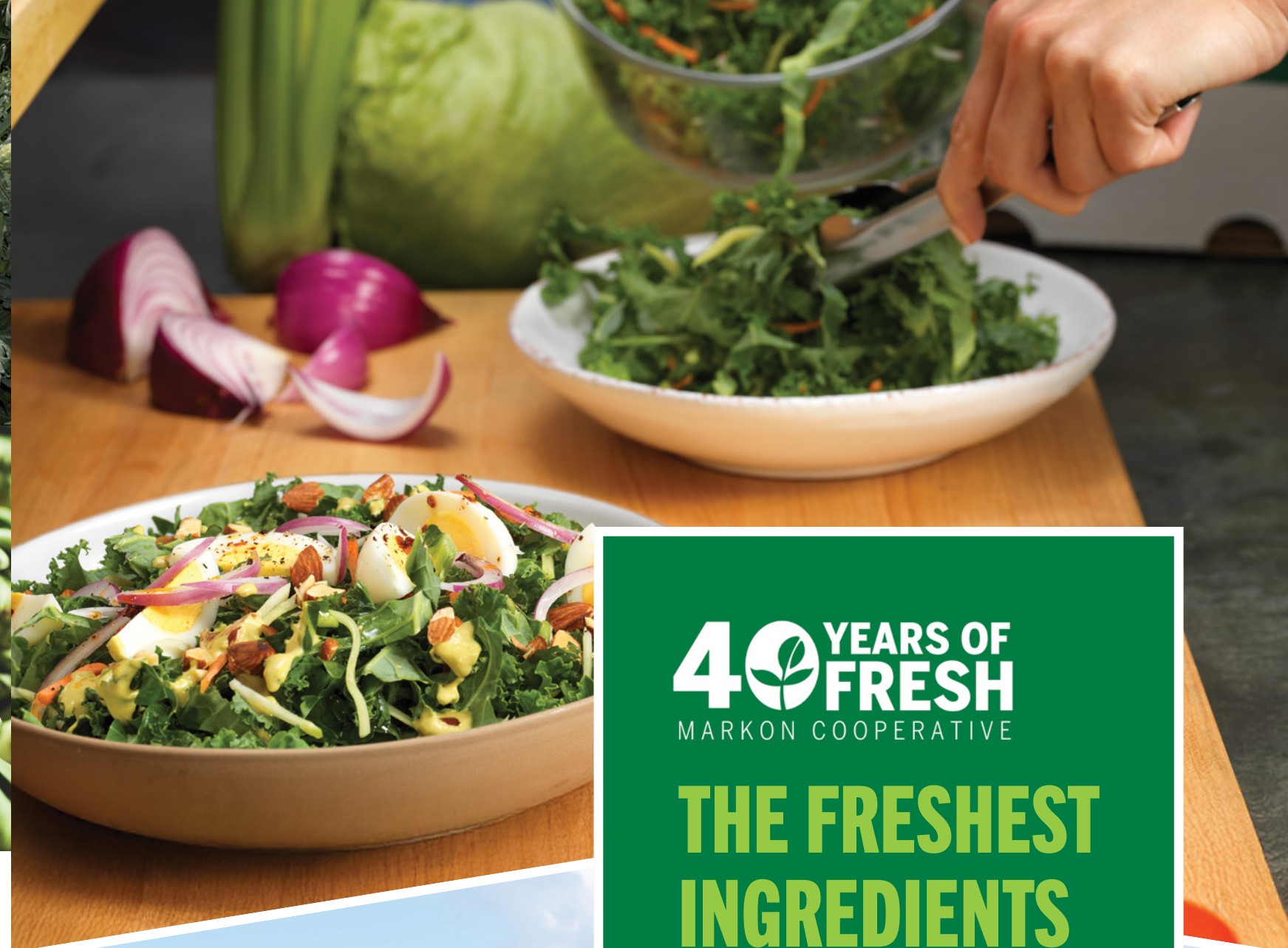
Rick shared that a bit more time on the golf course may be in his future, along with travel adventures with his wife, Joanne. But one of the things he’s most looking forward to in retirement is spending more meaningful time with his parents—both now in their 90s.

“It’s my time to give back to them. To be there for them,” he expressed.

On a final note, Rick shared that while retiring feels like the right decision, it’s also a deeply sentimental one.

“It’s hard to say goodbye, so I’m planning to go out quietly,” he said. “I’ll miss working in this incredible industry—and I’ll especially miss the people. But I’ll absolutely stay in touch.”

Here’s to you, Rick, and your outstanding career. Thank you for the gifts of your wisdom. 🍷



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WTF DO I DO WITH Giumarra Companies Lemonade™ Apples ?

{ what the fork }



LEMONADE™ APPLE "DONUTS"

INGREDIENTS

3–4 Lemonade™ Apples, cored and sliced into 1/4" rings
 Juice of **1** lemon
 1/2 **cup** nut butter of choice
 1/2 **cup** mixed nuts, seeds, trail mix, or granola

Prep Time: 5 mins
Servings: 12–16 slices

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Slice the cored apples into 1/4" rings to form "donuts."
- 2** Rub lemon juice over the slices to keep them from browning.
- 3** Spread nut butter on top of each apple ring.
- 4** Sprinkle with your favorite crunchy toppings, like nuts or granola, and enjoy!

To learn more about Lemonade™ Apples, visit www.lemonadeapples.com



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**Snack Bright,
Stay Bright!**



VERSATILITY²: SUPERCHARGING CELERY

BY ANNE ALLEN

There's a beguiling power to word association. When I hear the word "apple", I see not only the fruit, but the shining icon that glows on the back of my laptop as I type.

Obviously, the stronger the word association, the more power that word holds.

While it would be fair to say Duda Farm Fresh Foods and its Dandy® lineup are strongly associated with concepts like fresh innovation, it is the company's supreme work in the celery category that immediately comes to the forefront of my mind when the company's name is evoked.

Why, you may ask? Because Duda has cemented the green stalks as permanent fixtures in produce departments.

Over the past decade, the company's celery program has undergone significant evolution. By leveraging the value-added segment and the versatility of celery as an ingredient, the supplier has cultivated customer loyalty around its Dandy celery brand.

There's more to this story than meets the eye, as **Nichole Towell, Senior Director of Marketing and Packaging Procurement**, is quick to tell me.



It's a strategic play years in the making.

"Dandy Duda Generations® proprietary celery varieties are bred for sweeter flavor and fewer strings. Our flavor profile is key, as consumers can taste the difference," Nichole says. "We also pack ready-to-eat celery sticks that are convenient and are ready to consume right when you pick them up off the store shelf. Of note, Duda Farm Fresh Foods stands out with these washed and ready-to-eat products, as some of our competitors are packing celery sticks that have not been washed before they can be eaten, which can be seen as a hassle for the consumer."

Developing a vast array of product options to meet the demands of modern consumers has kept Duda competitive and its brand top of mind.

Over the years, the company has introduced its Snack Packs, Celery Sticks, Celery Stick Bags, and the new celery dippers™ to the market.

To achieve this feat, Duda has invested heavily in agricultural best practices, including soil health, water conservation, and cover crops.

Utilizing compost on celery fields enhances soil health, which in turn boosts moisture retention, weed suppression, and erosion control.

Water conservation has been even more successful for the supplier.

"For the last several years, we have continued to access local California Irrigation Management Information System (CIMIS) data and other data-driven dashboards, so that the applied amount of water daily to the crop is commensurate with daily ETo (evapotranspiration). This has resulted in advancements in irrigation practices, including the complete elimination of furrow water, a substantial reduction in the use of sprinkler pipes, and continued research into enzymatically induced plastic for drip tape,"

Nichole shares. "This has led to a 50 percent decrease in applied water to a single celery crop today, meaning half the amount of water is being used during production and harvest."

With approximately 500 acres of its production fields planted in cover crops in 2025 alone, Duda is working to increase its organic crop, protect its soil, and bring chemical-free celery to consumers.

"Essentially, any time we have fewer inputs into a crop, it's more sustainable overall," Nichole adds.

In the last five years alone, Duda Farm Fresh Foods has done a tremendous job at cementing celery as a popular item.

"The celery consumer has always skewed toward the older generations. However, the juicing trend that took off a few years ago brought the younger shopper in to experience celery in a new way," Nichole notes. "That craze brought celery to the forefront of their shopping carts, and we are pleased to say that we've noticed for some that it's stayed there."

Traditionally, celery buyers tend to live in the Eastern United States and along the Eastern Seaboard. They might be middle-aged with children aged 6 to 17 at home or empty nesters, but they typically earn \$70,000 or more and live in more affluent urban areas.

"Duda Farm Fresh Foods STANDS OUT with these washed and ready-to-eat products, as some of our competitors are packing celery sticks that have not been washed before they can be eaten, which can be seen as a hassle for the consumer."

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

"The No. 1 barrier to purchasing more celery is that it goes bad before consumers can eat it all," Nichole says. "Another top barrier: Consumers don't know how to use it."

The top factors that drive incremental purchases are as follows: if the product lasts longer, recipes and/or usage ideas, and smaller package sizes.

If you haven't been paying attention, Duda offers all three across its product portfolio.

However, to maintain celery's presence in consumer consciousness, it employs several strategies.

"Old-fashioned cross-merchandising strategies still work really well with celery," Nichole shares as we discuss best practices for retailers looking to increase traffic in their produce departments. "Displaying things like hummus, peanut butter, or ranch dip by celery displays inspires usage ideas for busy shoppers hurrying through their list and needing easy ideas on the fly."

Recalling the importance of fresh-cut options, Duda employs 360-degree marketing efforts to ensure its portfolio is engaging and properly communicates the versatility of celery.

"We provide content and recipes to inspire consumers to eat celery in a variety of ways outside of the traditional snacking, which allows us to penetrate the market even further," Nichole emphasizes.

Duda also utilizes influencer partners to generate recipes and engage with shoppers on a different level. Through the influencers' loyal list of followers, Duda is able to reach consumers that may not be as familiar with the brand, casting a wider net of exposure for the company. Furthermore, Duda's use of influencers enables the creation of unique and home-cook-friendly recipes that are shared across both influencer platforms and the brands themselves.

With so many strategies deployed, it's easy to see how Duda Farm Fresh Foods brought celery back from being a diet-fad food to a nutrient-rich vegetable that stands on its own.

Nichole left me with these parting words.

"Keep an eye on Duda Farm Fresh Foods and Dandy in the coming months," she says with a hint of mystery I can't help but want to follow up on. "We have some exciting news we are waiting to share!"

Knowing what Duda is capable of creating, we eagerly await what's next on the horizon for the company. 🥕

A Closer Look at Index Fresh AvoTerra Rebrand


By Anne Allen

A brand revamp in fresh produce is undertaken with care. Delivering the right message to retail partners and consumers is challenging, and it's crucial to strike the right visual tone.

For Index Fresh and its flagship AvoTerra brand, the perfect balance was struck. Through comprehensive brand and packaging consumer research, the company assessed product perception, brand appeal, and purchase intent before unveiling its new packaging.

An already recognizable line, the updated look enhances the company's messaging: that shoppers can have creamy and delicious avocados throughout the year. With its global sourcing network, Index Fresh and its AvoTerra brand can supply Hass avocados from orchards in California, Peru, Mexico, Chile, and Colombia.

Available in both conventional and organic options, either in bulk or bagged, the new packaging is made from #2 recyclable materials. The new packaging is also part of a wider rollout across the company's marketing materials. Backed by its new and improved website, Index Fresh aims to strengthen relationships with its partners and bridge any information gaps between supplier and seller.

Backed by 100 years of legacy, this bold new look is one to watch. 

Learn More 



UP
CLOSE



WHERE THE PAST
1950
MEETS THE PRESENT
2025



A Q&A WITH JUSTIN PARNAGIAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
FOWLER PACKING COMPANY

BY JORDAN OKUMURA-WRIGHT

Seventy-five years is a remarkable milestone. Neither too young to lack experience, nor too old to lose agility. Carrying these two advantages of time, Fowler Packing Company stands in a rare and powerful moment—a bridge between legacy and innovation, where the past informs the future, and the future is met with strength, heart, and commitment.

Justin Parnagian, Chief Executive Officer of Fowler Packing, grew up in the business, coming to work with his dad and uncles. That early exposure shaped not just his career, but his philosophy. For the past 25 years, Justin has played an integral role in building on the legacy of his family—anchoring the company's progress in the principle that people come first. It's a mindset he continues to champion from the top down.

From farming to retail strategy to the growth of standout programs like Samsons, Justin leads with an approach that honors the past, inspires the present, and paves the way for a people-powered future.

As Fowler enters its 75th year, Justin reflects on the vision that guides the business, the team that powers its progress, and the strategy behind its success.

“WHAT’S NEVER CHANGED, AND NEVER WILL, IS OUR PEOPLE-FIRST MINDSET. FROM THE BEGINNING, MY FAMILY BELIEVED THAT WHEN YOU INVEST IN PEOPLE, YOU BUILD A BUSINESS THAT LASTS.”

JUSTIN PARNAGIAN,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
FOWLER PACKING COMPANY



Q1



JORDAN OKUMURA-WRIGHT: Congratulations on Fowler Packing Company's 75th anniversary. In an industry where the days are long but the years are short, I imagine there is a rich history there informing an incredible future ahead. What is one aspect of the company's founding vision and intention that is still alive today?



JUSTIN PARNAGIAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, FOWLER PACKING COMPANY: What's never changed, and never will, is our people-first mindset. From the beginning, my family believed that when you invest in people, you build a business that lasts. That principle has powered Fowler Packing from day one, and it's what drives me every single day.

Seventy-five years in, we've scaled dramatically, but our core remains the same. We lead with purpose, operate with integrity, and stand behind both our fruit and our people. That's not legacy thinking, that's future building. Everything we do is for tomorrow, and we're only getting started.



Q2

JOW: A 75th anniversary is a beautiful thing to reflect on. How does Fowler Packing plan to commemorate it in 2025?

JP: This milestone isn't about looking back, it's about recognizing the people who keep us moving forward. We're celebrating the individuals who've shaped Fowler into what it is today: a company defined by talent, drive, and shared belief in our mission.

Yes, it's about honoring the work but more importantly, it's about momentum. Our team shows up every day with grit, pride, and vision. That's what this anniversary symbolizes for us. It's a springboard, not a bookend.

Q3

JOW: Fowler Packing's Samsons grape program is just one way that the company infuses its wisdom into its fruit. These grapes are a testament to the passion and dedication of a committed team, as well as a progressive strategy. How does the Samsons program bring differentiation and success to Fowler's retail partners?

JP: What Samsons is all about is execution. It reflects our obsession with getting the fundamentals right: farming with precision, packing with consistency, and delivering fruit that earns its place on the shelf. Every person involved, whether they're in the field, the packing house, or on our sales team understands what it takes to uphold that standard. They take it personally.

For our retail partners, Samsons means reliability. It's a program they can count on year after year for flavor, presentation, and performance. That consistency builds trust, reduces variability at store level, and keeps the consumer experience strong.

We support Samsons with thoughtful in-store tools and a clear message: this is fruit shoppers can rely on. No gimmicks or noise. Just excellence, delivered.

Q4

JOW: Speaking of moving the needle, Samsons' Sorbet grape is getting a lot of attention. Through meticulous farming and operational practices, a strategic sales team, and innovative marketing, varieties like the Sorbet grape are driving excellence for Fowler Packing. Can you tell me more about the features, advantages, and benefits of this variety?

JP: Sorbet has become one of our most talked-about grapes. It's a limited time variety with a shorter window, but every year the demand grows. It hits the mark in terms of flavor and crunch, but what really

sets it apart is how people respond to it. We hear stories all the time from shoppers who try it once and go back to buy three more bags. That kind of reaction tells us we're doing something right.

The fruit looks great, holds up well in transit, and delivers a consistently strong experience at shelf. It's clean, bright, and well-sized, which gives it real shelf appeal and makes it easy to merchandise. But the crunch is what people remember. It's firm, crisp, and satisfying in a way that catches people off guard in the best way.

Sorbet also holds a strong shelf-life and performs well across different markets, which helps our retail partners reduce shrink and keep the product moving. It's the kind of variety that doesn't just make a splash one season. It keeps building momentum because it delivers, plain and simple.

— Q5 —

JOW: What marketing and merchandising collateral will accompany the Sorbet grape program? And how about for the overall Samson program?

JP: We're focused on storytelling and brand engagement this season. For Sorbet, we're building out a suite of support materials, including in-store POS (point of sale) displays, digital banners, and lifestyle imagery that captures the grape's premium, indulgent experience.

Our goal is to help our partners maximize their shelf space by providing tools that foster consumer connection and drive repeat purchases. While packaging hasn't changed this year, our messaging is fresh, modern, and designed to spotlight what makes these grapes stand out. Whether it's through a dynamic in-store setup or a digital feature, we're working to ensure every asset tells the Fowler story.



Fowler Packing Company was founded by Sam Parnagian in 1950 after his return home from service in World War II

“OUR GOAL IS TO
HELP OUR PARTNERS
MAXIMIZE THEIR
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— Q6 —

JOW: Your Peelz® program has also undergone significant reinvestment as of late. Bold, inventive, intriguing—these are just a few of the words that accompany a portfolio with this brand status. How does it fit into your overall vision for today and the future?

JP: Since our launch in 2019, we've set out to build something bold, modern, and memorable. We wanted a brand that could disrupt the norm and genuinely connect with people. That connection creates trust, and trust builds loyalty. We've continued to invest in Peelz because it reflects how we think about growth. It's not just about selling world-class fruit; it's about creating something that stands for more and brings real value to our partners and our consumers.

Looking ahead, Peelz is a big part of our vision for the future. What began with Mandarins has grown into a full citrus portfolio with a distinct identity and real momentum. We're scaling what works through stronger retail presence, smarter storytelling, and deeper engagement wherever the brand shows up. Peelz is a clear example of how we lead by connecting with people, thinking long term, and building with purpose.

Fowler Packing has never been in the business of standing still. Seventy-five years in, the company is more energized than ever—growing with intention, leading with purpose, and putting people at the center of everything it does. This milestone is not a reflection point, but a launchpad. Fowler is raising the bar for what leadership looks like in produce, pushing past convention, and building toward a future defined by bold ideas and enduring values. With a team as committed as the day the company was founded; the future of Fowler is just getting started. 🍌

PLANTING here, THRIVING there

THE GLOBAL
PRODUCE
& FLORAL
SHOW

OCT. 16-18
ANAHEIM, CA



REGISTER NOW





Breeding Resilience

By Chandler James



From left to right: Jeff Giumarra, Nomi Karniel-Padan, Rafi Karniel, Randy Giumarra, Vered Karniel, Adi Karniel, Mimi Corsaro, Shachar Karniel, and Joe Giumarra

60

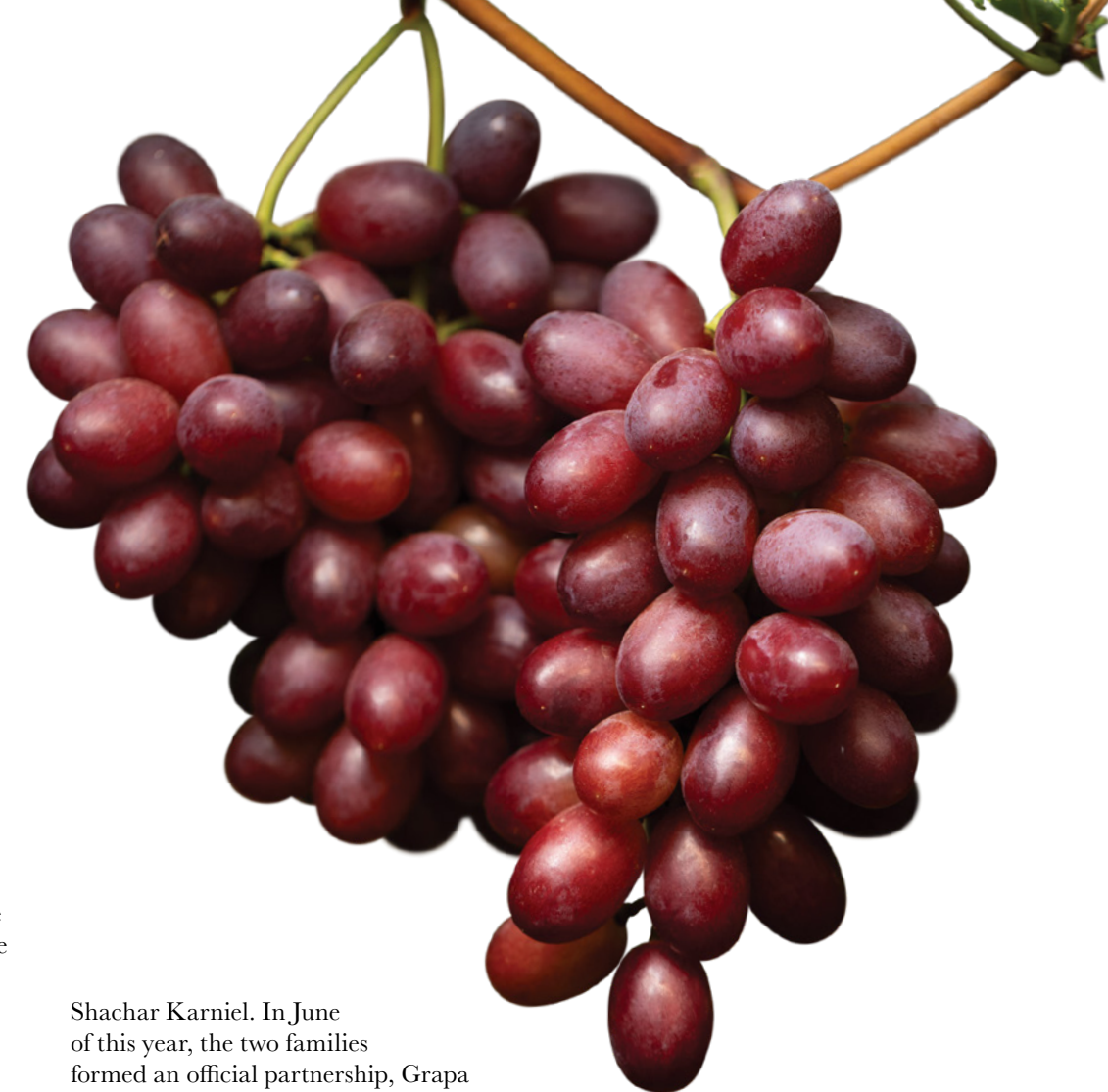
I recently learned that even when they are seedless, each and every table grape has an embryo inside.

This soft-shelled nugget nestled into the heart of the berry acts as a sort of barometer for the fruit, kickstarting the maturation process when conditions are just right.

In a way, fruit breeders mirror this relationship. They are, like this tiny nucleus of a table grape, the source at the center of the industry.

These research and development experts provide growers with all of the components they need to bring a premium product to market: short production cycles, tolerance to adverse weather, long shelf-life, and, of course, excellent flavor and eating quality.

Take ARRA™ varieties, for example, which have exploded in demand due to their ideal growing qualities. These grapes are the fruit of a partnership between the Giumarra and Karniel families, headed by industry pioneer



Shachar Karniel. In June of this year, the two families formed an official partnership, Grapa Global LLC.

“We are two farming families that have joined together based on a common mindset: Founded by a Farmer for the Farmer. Our deep connection to farming inspires us to prioritize the grower’s needs throughout the development process including crop performance at harvest time,” says Randy Giumarra, Vice President of Sales for Giumarra Vineyards. “It is worth mentioning that the ARRA Breeding Program remains privately owned by the two families, which sets it apart as the only one among the three leading table grape breeding companies.”

This uniqueness carries significant meaning for the Giumarra and Karniel families. The company is not driven exclusively by ROI; its focus lies on the people with whom it works and the sincere care it has for colleagues and partners worldwide.

In speaking with Nomi Karniel-Padan, I learn that this mission is at the core of everything the Grapa Global team does.

“The Grapa international teams are like extended family. They provide support in their designated areas and share their



“Our deep connection to farming inspires us to prioritize the grower’s needs throughout the development process including crop performance at harvest time.”

Randy Giumarra,

Vice President of Sales, Giumarra Vineyards

knowledge of what they have learned with one another. It's a dynamic process that keeps our licensed farmers with the most updated growing guidelines and results for each of the varieties, both in their own growing region, and across the globe," Nomi, Grapa Global's Commercial Director, explains.

The marketing teams are also key pieces of the Grapa puzzle. They are busy promoting the varieties not only to potential licensees, but also to the retailers who distribute and

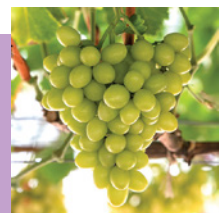
promote Grapa's varieties around the world. Tasting panels introduce the buyers to the characteristics of each variety while learning which regions are producing them to help with continuity of supply. They also build excitement within their buying team for the delicious new varieties that are available for their customers.

"As Early as ARRA" was one of Grapa's first slogans. In addition to producing early-season varieties, the company's current and future breeding efforts

are concentrated on proven genetic profiles, which have achieved conclusive resistance to both rain and to drought and desert conditions. Grapa continues to develop grapes for different segments, including a line of unique, multi-sensory varieties, which are already showing very promising results, plus some new main-line introductions from their breeding pipeline. These new varieties created some very palpable excitement for the attendees of the early ARRA field day in mid-July of this year.

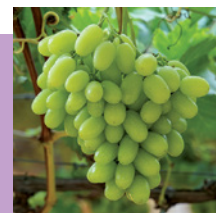


Some of the most successful current commercial ARRA varieties produced by Grapa include:



ARRA Honey Pop™

The perfect example of a short cycle variety that has it all—a green grape variety that stands out for its unique very early ripening time and extreme ease of growing. This variety is known for its firm and meaty berries with a burst of mild honeydew flavor and an excellent shelf-life.



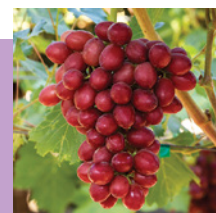
ARRA Sugar Drop™

A unique green variety that has been performing exceptionally well in the market. It boasts an elongated shape and offers a delightful combination of sweetness and crunchiness.



ARRA Fire Kiss™

This variety possesses exceptional eating qualities and the remarkable ability to self-color. It stands as a classic example of the true essence of being "As Early as ARRA," as it is an exceptionally early red grape variety.



ARRA Fire Crunch™

This variety stands out with its exceptional bright pinkish-red color, large, crunchy berries, and outstanding flavor profile. An advantage of this variety is its high fertility, making it easier for growers to achieve a bountiful harvest.



ARRA Mystic Charm™

The earliest black variety that exists in the market, which ripens at the same time as ARRA Honey Pop, making it an ideal choice for growers looking to diversify their harvests. One of the key advantages of this variety is its ease of cultivation and is known for its sweet flavor and crunchy eating quality.



ARRA Cherry Crush™

Distinguished by its bright red-to-burgundy, elongated berries, and a rich, deep sweet flavor reminiscent of a Bing cherry. It has exceptional storage ability, making it a top choice for commercial growers who require long-distance transportation. It is also renowned for its full rain resistance, allowing it to withstand wet conditions during the growing season.

"Our first obligation as breeders is to the growers.

We must provide growers with varieties that enable them to maintain production levels and ensure consistent quality to ultimately satisfy consumers."

Nomi Karniel-Padan,
Commercial Director, Grapa Global



One of the main advantages of having very early varieties, as Nomi tells me, is the shorter production cycles, enabling earlier harvests and thereby further reducing the risk of exposure to unfavorable conditions. This approach to table grape breeding meets growing sustainability requirements as well.

"Grapa's short cycle varieties allow growers to harvest their crops earlier in the season, which further enhances sustainability by requiring less water, fewer pesticides and fungicides, lower emissions, and reduced labor," Nomi adds. "This leads to a decrease in the overall environmental impact of grape cultivation. ARRA varieties that are more tolerant and robust in the face of a changing climate and extreme conditions can provide a solution that will benefit growers and minimize risk."

ARRA Sweeties, ARRA Cherry Crush, and ARRA Fire Crunch have demonstrated their ability to flourish and endure substantial rainfall, both in humid climates, and in growing regions where unprecedented levels of precipitation have occurred. In California, Tropical Storm Hilary validated the resilience of the ARRA varieties to increasingly difficult weather conditions and changing weather patterns.

By breeding these grape varieties with long-term goals in mind, Grapa is proactively preparing for future challenges. The company has proven that understanding the growers' needs and listening to consumer preferences is of paramount importance.

"Our first obligation as breeders is to the growers. We must provide growers

with varieties that enable them to maintain production levels and ensure consistent quality to ultimately satisfy consumers," Nomi concludes. "Our varieties distinguish themselves through their utmost reliability, profitability, and consistent crop performance. They are easy to cultivate, possess a great shelf-life, and exhibit excellent cold storage capabilities—these are all unique defining characteristics of the ARRA varieties."

While not much is promised in fresh produce, one thing is for sure: Change is constant. Like the embryos hard at work inside each and every table grape, the experts at Grapa Global will continue to keep a watchful eye on the changing climate of the table grape industry. And new, advantageous varieties are sure to follow. 🍇



CALIFORNIA TABLE GRAPES

Snapshot

ANTICIPATION AND EXCITEMENT SURROUND ANOTHER SEASON OF TASTY, HEALTHY, AND HAPPY CALIFORNIA TABLE GRAPES!

Strong sales of California table grapes can drive the entire fresh produce category as consumers across the globe are eager to add grapes to their shopping basket.

Once again, the California table grape industry provides shoppers with a wide breadth of exciting flavors, textures, and sizes among the over 80 varieties of table grapes grown in California. And the California Table Grape Commission is ready to share a wealth of research, promotions, and incentives to help retailers target this segment aggressively and creatively!

Stocking and promoting Grapes from California directly impacts the tens of thousands working in the California table grape industry—some for generations.

It also enables California grape growers to continue awarding scholarships to help students from the growing regions attend college. Since 1985, over 200 scholarships have been awarded, opening the door to a hopeful future for workers, families, and communities.

California
**COMMANDS THE
MARKET**

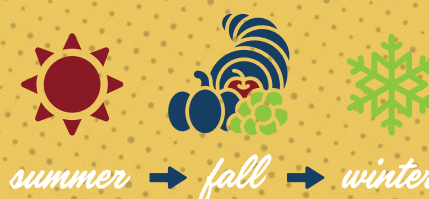


Over 99%
of grapes commercially
grown in the U.S. come
from California



California is
home to over

80
Varieties
of table grapes



**California table grape
season runs from
May through January**



Strategies FOR SALES SUCCESS

★ HIGHLIGHT FLAVOR

Table grape purchasers ranked flavor as what matters most followed by color, texture, size, and shape.



★ EXPAND DISPLAY SPACE

A 30-40 sq. ft. display can increase grape sales volume by 26% and grape dollars by 25%.



★ OFFER MORE VARIETIES

Increasing California table grape varieties from 3-4 to 6 or more lifts grape volume by 40% and grape dollars by 38%.



★ CREATE SECONDARY DISPLAYS

Adding 3 or more display locations highlights unique varieties. It also boosts grape volume by 26% and grape dollars by 13%.

SOURCE: California Table Grape Commission



Family-Owned, California-Grown.

Enjoy delicious, seedless grapes through December!



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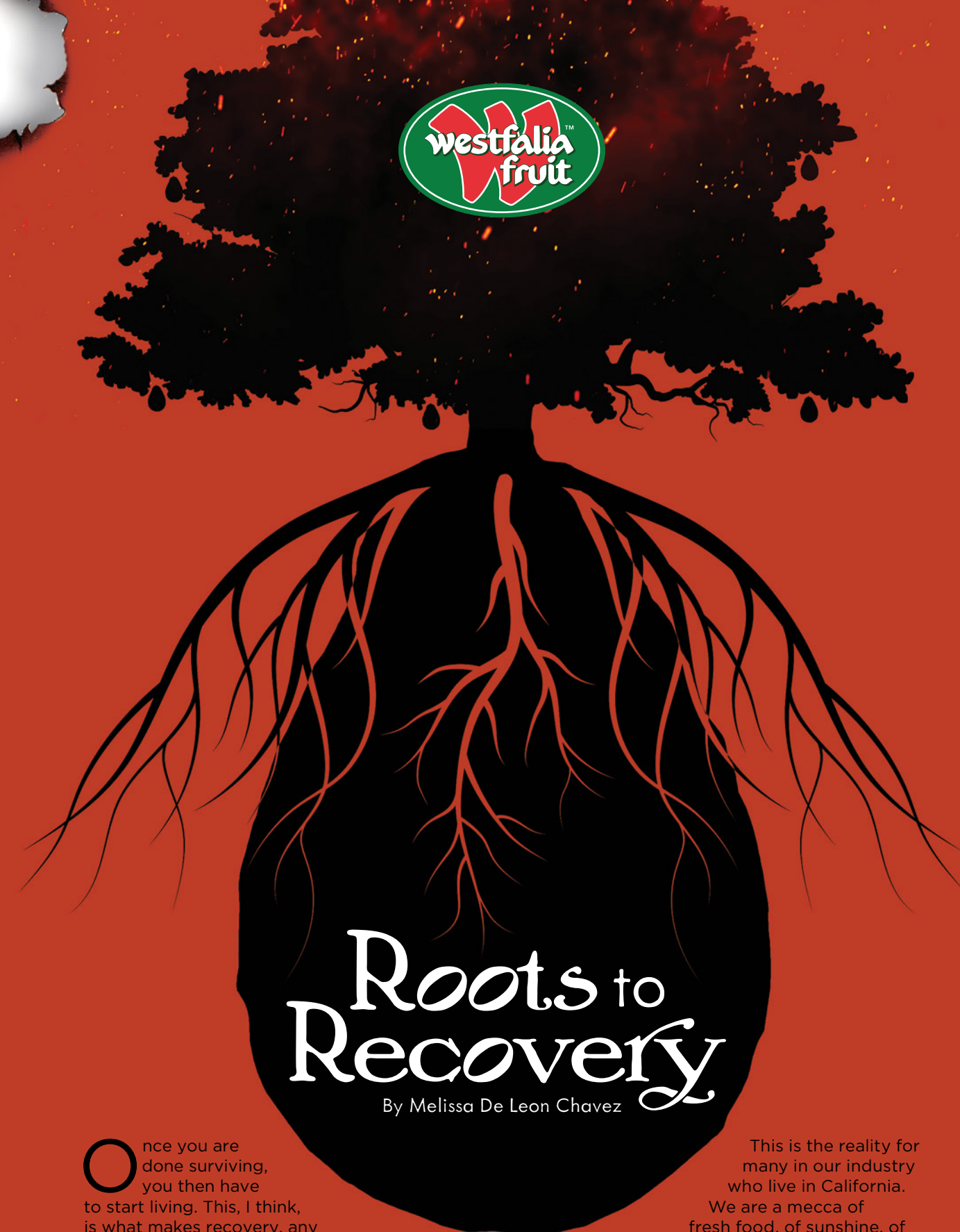
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Roots to Recovery

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

Once you are done surviving, you then have to start living. This, I think, is what makes recovery, any recovery, so challenging.

I live in a place that has a season of fires. As the weather warms, we look to mountains that still have a dusting of snow and hope there is enough to keep the flames at bay. We have an evacuation location where we keep important documents and, for much of the year, an emergency bag packed in the entryway closet—just in case.

This is the reality for many in our industry who live in California. We are a mecca of fresh food, of sunshine, of beaches, of temperate days. Except when we are on fire.

It is a rising concern for all. But, for many just 40 miles north of me, January 2025 made it a terrifying reality. Yet landscapes turned to ash make way for stronger seeds to take root. In the case of Westfalia Fruit North America, the fires that heralded 2025 gave rise to the Tree of Gratitude.

"The Tree of Gratitude stands for everyone who shows up when it matters most—firefighters, community members, business owners, our friends in produce, and more—who came together in those early days with courage and compassion," Raina Nelson, President of Westfalia Fruit North America, shared. "It also honors the quiet heroes who continue the work long after the flames are gone—the ones rebuilding, sustaining, and showing up day after day to help their neighbors heal. Their resilience is the root of this movement, and a reminder that true recovery takes time, heart, and all of us."

In the middle of it all was Westfalia, a company that calls the very area home that many watched burn in horror. Amid surviving, a turning point galvanized Raina and her team into action.

"Raina recognized a clear and urgent need—first responders and community members affected by the Los Angeles fires didn't just need food; they needed fresh, nourishing produce. She mobilized our team at Westfalia Fruit, our Topanga community leader Marissa Maples, and our dear friends in produce immediately, leaning on deep industry relationships and our core belief that fresh fruit can be a form of healing," Christina Ward, Director of Marketing and Product Brands, told me, giving a particular shoutout to industry maven Jill Overdorf, Founder and President of The Produce Ambassador. "Food Forward was our first call and an incredible partner. Our first delivery was made to the Will Rogers Staging Station on January 15, 2025, and from there, we continued to activate drop points and establish partnerships."

Those early handheld boxes were simple but powerful, with citrus, mangos, berries, and packets of yellow mustard. A fun, random fact that Christina imparted

"Their resilience is the root of this movement, and a reminder that true recovery takes time, heart, and all of us."

~ Raina Nelson,
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Westfalia Fruit North America



● Marissa Maples, Raina Nelson, and Christina Ward take in the recovering landscape after the January 2025 fires in Southern California



to me: yellow mustard is helpful for relieving muscle cramps, so Westfalia added this in initial deliveries to first responders.

"The feedback was immediate and deeply moving. People shared that it was the first moment of normalcy they'd had in days," she reflected.

Marissa Maples, Chief of Staff for Westfalia, took me back to those early moves.

"We mobilized an increased influx of fresh produce to support the distribution site, but it quickly became clear that limited refrigeration was a barrier to sustaining the effort," she remembered. "Within days, Golden Eagle Trucking delivered a refrigerated trailer to the Pasadena Job Center—and it's been there ever since. That trailer became a lifeline, repeatedly filled with fruits, vegetables, and cold water for the volunteers and families most impacted by the Eaton Fire."

Marissa added, "We wanted to make a difference by supporting the efforts of organizers already engaged with the community. National Day Laborer Organizing Network does incredible work every single day and



was immediately at the forefront of the recovery efforts. It has been an honor to partner with them."

Not only is recovery its own battle, but it is one waged after the attention and—often—aid have moved on. There is only so much a public on the outside can take of an experience that is not theirs. Understandable as this is, it does not alleviate the vacuum of recovery.

"As the fires were extinguished and communities began searching for a new sense of normalcy, it became clear our work had only just begun," Raina pointed out. "Recognizing the passion and positive impact of the individuals already embedded in the recovery efforts, we sought strong, purpose-driven partners. When we saw the scale and heart behind NDLON's distribution at the Pasadena Job Center—where more than 12,000 volunteers have supported over 45,000 people affected by the Eaton Fire—we knew we wanted to be part of that momentum. Marissa was instrumental in making these lasting partnerships happen."

It cannot be emphasized enough the power these actions have as families are working to find each other, pets, places to sleep, and (for many) more than a day's worth of supplies, which could include everything from clothing to food. Life is distilled

"The feedback was immediate and deeply moving. People shared that it was the first moment of normalcy they'd had in days."

~ Christina Ward,
Director of Marketing and Product Brands,
Westfalia Fruit North America

to its most basic needs, yet the wheels of our industry kept turning so smoothly many had no idea several of our own were also in this position. Even Raina herself.

"What moved me most was learning that Raina had been evacuated from her own home on the very first day of the fires—she was displaced for weeks," shared Christina. "Yet, in the middle of her personal uncertainty, all she could think about was the safety of our team, the health of our communities, and how we could give back. Even while navigating so much behind the scenes, she never lost focus on keeping our avocado world turning. Her leadership is the embodiment of our purpose to do good."

That purpose, Raina pointed out, continues to guide her and her team beyond recovery and into rising up.

"Gratitude is the first step," she said. "The Tree of Gratitude is putting down deeper roots and spreading out farther. The refrigerated trailer was our initial way of showing gratitude. We're also planning a heartfelt thank-you event for our partners and first responders,



- Together, these leaders of Westfalia Fruit North America and a number of community and industry members helped the area on a road to recovery, planting the Tree of Gratitude

which we are excited to execute soon. It's more than just a celebration; it's a reflection of the connections that were formed through the crisis. For our team, it symbolizes commitment. For the community, it's a tribute to strength and solidarity. It's also a chance to pause and recognize the many hands that made this work possible."

None of this, Raina emphasized, would have been possible without collaboration. From Food Forward and NDLON to the Pasadena Job Center, a network came together quickly and without hesitation.

"This truly is a celebration of the ecosystem that came together to pull this off," added Raina. "David Sherrod at Southeast Produce Council and Mike Casazza, Sr. at FreshSource made the refrigerated trailer and expansion of clean energy to the frontlines possible. RMNG Hunger also shared our passion for getting nourishing fuel to the athletes of the front lines. The list goes on."

Not only does the list of support continue, the range in which it serves the community does as well.

"Golden Eagle Trucking's donation of a refrigerated trailer was a game-changer. Volunteers—over 12,000 of them—stepped up to support brigade work, sorting, distribution, and donations. It was a true community effort, powered by purpose. In the earlier days of the fires, we also donated fresh avocados to restaurants, including Lola's Mexican Cuisine in Bixby Knolls. They have partnered with the World Central Kitchen for years, and we were honored to be able to support their teams with Westfalia Fruit avocados, naturally, but also Peelz® Mandarins," Christina recounted. "Many thanks go to Maile Devers for bringing this donation to life."

The most important lesson, the team concurred, is one Maya Angelou said best: Do the best you can until you know better. Then, do better.

"Food is medicine. Fresh produce is healing. Our industry can meet basic needs and elevate the human



experience. That's our focus today and always," Christina stated.

This experience showed us the power of fast, purposeful action—but also the need for systems that allow us, as an industry and the communities we call home, to respond even better in the future.

To everyone in Westfalia Fruit's wide-reaching web who showed us how, I sit in awe and in gratitude. Here is to you, known and unknown, who demonstrate what it means to be not just champions, but warriors. 🍌

“These crunchy sweet peppers were such a pleasant surprise. Crisp, refreshing and flavorful. Definitely a keeper!”

– Alejandra Ramos, Chef & TV Personality
from "Good Housekeeping Names Best Produce Snacks of 2025"



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When the
STAKES
Are
HIGH

By Jordan Okumura-Wright

“Every game means so much,” Ryan Sanchez tells me. “In a season where you only have 17 games, each win and loss matters. Every decision is critical. In baseball, you have 162, and in basketball, there are 82 games. So, you lose a few, and it is no big deal. In football, every move gives you an edge or takes it from you.”

You cannot walk away from a conversation with Ryan without feeling the intensity of his concentration, dedication, and passion for the things he loves. Be it the Las Vegas Raiders or fresh produce. As he speaks to me about the NFL team he has been following relentlessly since he was eight years old, it is easy to forget that he is speaking of sports, and it is perfectly reasonable to believe he is talking about produce. An industry where every single decision matters.

"I love the competition of football. I'm very competitive. Some people consider me intense, and I am naturally hyper," Ryan, Produce Sales Manager for Albertsons and Vons, shares. "I am not sure exactly where it all started. I grew up in Los Angeles when the Raiders were here, so I naturally started following them. By the mid-90s, I just fell in love."

This fascination with the Raiders is a perfect fit for Ryan, a man who drinks freshly squeezed celery juice each morning instead of coffee and who wakes up at 3:30 in the morning when the sunrise is still a distant hum. While most people are rolling over in bed to get in one last REM cycle, Ryan is visualizing the day ahead. He sees the field and all its players, anticipates as much as one can in an industry like this, and builds a strategy for not only understanding what obstacles may arise but also how to proactively handle them differently.

He considers himself a very simple person when it comes to the things he loves. I would argue that this simplicity allows an unyielding focus, relentless dedication, and unrivaled passion for elevating and honoring each of his treasured priorities.

Hours later, on the northern side of the state in Sacramento—later than 3:30 a.m. but not by much—I sift through my interview with Ryan. I find his words like a black cup of coffee; their passion rising from the page, bringing together the pieces of his mythos, awakening this story.

“I love what I do and who I work with, and I feel that’s what drives me to work an endless amount of hours and what helps me be successful. Part of that joy and love comes from having fun at work. I take what I do very seriously, but



you also have to have a balance, and that balance helps you get through the challenging times. And it makes the great times even better,” Ryan shared with me before discussing a mindset that has allowed him to maneuver nearly 30 years in fresh produce. “Focus on things you can control: Work hard, be punctual, listen, remain open-minded and a team player, and, most importantly, remember that this is a people business. Therefore, treat people right internally and externally as you will create lifelong relationships in this industry without knowing it.”

While Ryan is confident in this advice, he is quick to tell me that his way of living has come from many lessons learned in



both success and failure. Some days you wake up on the five-yard line, other days you are on the 80.

Ryan’s game started early in his youth, right out of high school.

Every produce path begins with a first step. For some, it is a calling, and for others, it is a road that takes shape through wins and losses, passion and grit. For Ryan, it was both.

“I got into produce during the mid-90s because it was ‘the job’ in the grocery store to have,” Ryan says with a smile. “While bagging groceries, I was offered numerous promotions into other departments, but I was

holding out for produce. Once I got into produce, I fell in love with it—the colors, merchandising, seasonality, ever-changing nature of the business, competitiveness, the people, importance to the overall store success, all of it.”

As Ryan gained experience and knowledge, he advanced to Albertsons, where he now holds the position of Produce Sales Manager for Albertsons and Vons. During his time at the company, Ryan has skillfully introduced innovations without disrupting the status quo. His unique ability to balance the introduction of new ideas with the stability of existing systems is truly remarkable, and it reassures us about the industry’s future.



Ryan Sanchez is a family man through and through; here with his wife, Sandy, and children Melanie, Emily, and Ryan Raider

In a space like fresh produce, some qualities contribute to the propensity for success. Agility. Fastidiousness. Foresight. Mental acuity. Leadership. As a lifelong Raiders fan, I can see why these qualities resonate with him, and perhaps why the

for fresh produce is something Ryan loves to strategize.

“I love merchandising. I feel it’s what separates you from your competition. Everyone is going to have the majority of

that responsibility and take pride in the fact that my company trusts me with it. There is intense competition throughout the grocery business, and I am a very competitive person who will do whatever it takes to succeed.”

As Ryan carved out his route in fresh produce, he was blessed to have mentors who provided invaluable guidance along the way.

“I have been fortunate to have multiple mentors and people that I’ve looked up to during my career,” Ryan begins. “First off, my dad, who was a store director for Safeway, Pavilions, and Vons, showed me that hard work pays off and proved it by providing a good life for my brother, sister, and me.”

Enrique Mesa, who was Ryan’s Produce Manager, taught him everything there is to know about produce, and he continues to share knowledge with Ryan when needed.

“Robby Cruz, who is the Vice President of Produce and Floral for Target, and was my supervisor when I became a Floral Merchandiser, has also helped me

“Focus on things you can control: Work hard, be punctual, listen, remain open-minded and a team player, and, most importantly, remember that this is a people business.”

Ryan Sanchez,
Produce Sales Manager, Albertsons and Vons

underdog mystique, rich and rebellious legacy, and no-nonsense approach to the game suit him.

And much like the planning and pregame of football, navigating the lay of the land

the same items; it’s how you merchandise the product to capture customers’ attention and help drive the business,” Ryan shares. “I have a responsibility not just to produce but to the overall business as produce is a big piece of the pie. I own

become the leader I am today,” Ryan expresses. “He has always had a hands-on approach. No matter what role he has

Ryan Raider (15), and Emily (10) are the reasons why I wake up at 3:30 a.m. to go to work every day, work in the evening

“I love merchandising. I feel it’s what separates you from your competition. Everyone is going to have the majority of the same items; it’s how you merchandise the product to capture customers’ attention and help drive the business.”

had in a company, I have and still look up to Robby!”

Without a doubt, the most significant influences in Ryan’s life are his family and friends.

“My first passion in life is my family. My wife, Sandy, and kids, Melaine (18),

hours, weekends, holidays, etc. It is my job to provide a good life for my family, just like my dad and mom did for my siblings and me,” Ryan explains.

When I ask Ryan what pivotal or defining moments have shaped his career, along with those of his mentors, he shares a surprising and impactful story.

“Back in 2009, when I was a Produce Merchandiser, the company had cutbacks, and I had the lowest amount of seniority on the team. I had to go back to the store level as a Produce Manager,” Ryan reveals. “I have a lot of pride, so that was tough for me, but I didn’t let that stop me from being successful. After nine months back as a Produce Manager, I was approached about becoming a Floral Merchandiser, and my initial response was, ‘Are you crazy, I don’t know anything about floral except that the product comes on the produce load!’ After thinking about it, I knew I could do the job. I was a leader of people, and I would learn the floral piece of the job in a timely manner, as I am driven to be successful. I ended up working as a Merchandiser and Sales Manager in floral for 11 years and loved every minute of it. I truly believe my time in floral helped me become a better leader. I proved to myself and others that I could make this change and be successful in doing so. I have always told myself, sometimes you have to do things you don’t want to get where you want to go.”

In 2020, there was an opening for a Produce Sales Manager in the Southern California Division, and Ryan knew this was his chance to get back into produce.

“I had to make a tough decision: to pursue Produce Sales Manager or stay in my current Floral Sales Manager position and continue to prepare to go into a national floral position, which one day would lead to the Vice President of Floral,” Ryan shares. “Obviously, I chose to pursue a dream of mine and lead the So Cal produce division. If I weren’t in produce, I would definitely be in floral.”

Through the wins and the losses, Ryan attributes his success, resilience, and love of the industry to the people who participate in its wild and crazy ride.

Ryan Sanchez, joined by team members Mark Salahi, Susie Matteri, and Andrea Rose



“It’s all about people. I cannot stress enough how important building relationships and partnerships is, as those partnerships truly come into play when either the vendor or retailer needs a little help with cost and/or volume to make something happen,” Ryan says. “This industry is challenging, and we are in it together. Knowing you have partnerships to rely on when needed is priceless! I can’t keep track of how many times a grower, vendor, or broker has been there for me when needed, and I will always pay it back. That is true partnership.”

Whether you are just beginning to map your own route in fresh produce or finding your foothold in leadership, Ryan shares some beautiful touchstones that can help guide your way.

“Listen, listen, and listen some more! There are so many smart people in the produce industry, and I learned early on that I don’t know everything,” he says, pausing to gather his thoughts. “If you truly listen when having conversations with people, you will always learn something, and it will help you create ways to get better every day. I will probably take some grief for saying

“This industry is challenging, and we are in it together. Knowing you have partnerships to rely on when needed is priceless! I can’t keep track of how many times a grower, vendor, or broker has been there for me when needed, and I will always pay it back. That is true partnership.”

this: I enjoy vendor/grower meetings, as I always learn so much. These professionals are skilled in their craft, and they have a passion for what they do that is contagious. Listen, listen, and listen some more!”

Ryan ends this thought by telling me to be willing to take chances; know that not every idea will be successful, but you will never make a shot you don’t take.

“Change is always going to happen in the produce industry, and we need to

be ready to adapt to the change. Don’t fight it, change is inevitable,” Ryan says. “Lean into it.”

When every game, conversation, negotiation, and comeback is high-stakes, Ryan knows that you don’t work against your industry; you work with it.

We are listening, Ryan. We are definitely listening. 🗣️



WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Bako Sweet®
Sweet Potatoes

?



GRILLED SWEET POTATO AND CILANTRO LIME CHICKEN KEBABS

Recipe credited to Andy Mathis,
Beautiful Eats & Things

INGREDIENTS

3 large Bako Sweet® Potatoes, peeled and chopped
1 lb boneless, skinless chicken breast, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 green bell pepper, chopped
1 red bell pepper, chopped
1 yellow bell pepper, chopped
½ red onion, chopped
¼ cup fresh cilantro, finely chopped
¾ cup lime juice
1 tbsp honey
2 tbsp olive oil
½ tsp paprika
 Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
 Oil, for grill grates
 Skewers

Prep Time: 15 mins
Cook Time: 10–20 mins
Servings: 6

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Set the grill to medium heat. Once hot, clean and lightly oil grates. Whisk together cilantro, lime juice, honey, olive oil, paprika, and Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste in a large bowl; transfer half to a small bowl, reserve about 2 tbsp for basting.
- 2 Add in the vegetables and chicken to the remaining marinade and toss to coat; let stand for about 5 minutes.
- 3 Thread chicken and vegetables onto skewers and discard the marinade. Place the kebabs on the grill, turning occasionally, and brush once with the marinade until chicken is cooked through and the sweet potatoes are tender. Depending on the type of grill, this may take anywhere between 10 to 20 minutes.
- 4 When done, garnish with cilantro if desired, and serve. Enjoy!

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visit www.bakosweet.com



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PEACHY SCREAM ICE CREAM

INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups** fresh KFM Peaches, sliced and seeded
- 4 tbsp** fresh lemon juice
- 1 ½ cups** granulated sugar, divided
- 1 ½ cups** whole milk
- 2 ¾ cups** heavy cream
- 1 ½ tsp** pure vanilla extract

Prep Time: 14 mins

Mixing Time: 2 hours 30 mins

Total Time: 4 hours

Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1 In a bowl, combine the peaches with lemon juice and ½ cup of sugar. Stir gently and allow the peaches to macerate in the juices for 2 hours. Strain the peaches, reserving the juices. Mash or purée half of the peaches and chop the remaining half in small bite-sized pieces.
- 2 In a medium mixing bowl, use a hand mixer on low speed to combine the milk and remaining 1 cup of granulated sugar. Mix for about 1–2 minutes or until the sugar is dissolved. Stir in the heavy cream, vanilla, reserved peach juice, and mashed peaches.
- 3 Remove your ice cream freezer bowl from the freezer. Place freezer bowl in the center of the base and place the mixing arm in the bowl. Place the lid on the base and turn the machine on so the freezer bowl begins to turn.
- 4 Pour your peach mixture into the freezer bowl and mix until thickened, about 20–25 minutes. Five minutes before the mixing is complete, add the reserved bite-sized peaches and mix in completely. The mixture will have a soft, creamy texture. If you would like a firmer consistency, transfer the ice cream to an airtight container and place it in the freezer for about 2 hours.
- 5 Scoop and enjoy!

To learn more about Keystone Fruit Marketing, visit www.keystonefruit.com



SHIFTING PHILOSOPHIES

By Anne Allen

When I hopped on a call with Jose Cambon, Highline Mushrooms' Chief Executive Officer, to discuss the company's new farm in Ontario, Canada, I wasn't expecting to think about the expansion in philosophical terms, or even about the very future of farming itself.

But such is the nature of any conversation held with Highline. Well-versed in forging its path, the supplier isn't afraid to think outside the box, and this project is a prime example. In collaboration with several other robotics partners, Highline's new farm

seeks to bring automated harvesting to the mushroom category.

Utilizing the latest in controlled environment agriculture, visual and sensor technology, combined with its 'know how,' Highline is concocting what it hopes will be the future of mushroom farming.

This requires a shift in thinking, one that many of us might struggle to comprehend. As many agricultural companies face concerns regarding labor and the

implementation of technology, we're looking at a future unknown to us.

A scary place to be, for some.

For Highline, it's a space to dig into and explore.

"In my view, if you want to automate harvesting, we have to stop moving the humans," Jose begins, perhaps anticipating my puzzled follow-up question with an example. "In a Ford plant, the humans don't go to the car, the car comes to the humans. With this facility, the humans won't go to the mushrooms; the mushrooms will come to them."

As close as Jose is to Detroit, Michigan, the Ford plant is an apt analogy.

"The person screwing in the bolts doesn't decide how tight they are," he adds. "The piece of equipment they're holding does. With visual technology in place, the system will tell the harvester which mushrooms are ready to be picked and which are not. That way, you're getting mushrooms to consumers at the peak of their quality."

Mushrooms double in size every 24 hours, Jose reminds me, and as the mushrooms go past a central point, a visual system is counting every single pin. By knowing the temperature of the compost and its configuration, the system can now calculate how fast each individual mushroom is going to grow.

"That way, we can forecast our farms exponentially more accurately to supply our customers with the products they want when they want them," he notes.

With the new system in place, the difference between in-spec and out-of-spec is minimal.

Another crucial factor is the speed at which the mushrooms are harvested and cooled.

"For every hour a mushroom spends outside the cold chain, you lose an entire day of shelf-life," Jose explains. "Mushrooms are what I'd call a hyper-fresh product. Typically, they reach retail shelves within 48 to 72 hours after harvest. Consumers may not notice much difference in freshness at home day one or two in the fridge—but by day five or six, that early handling makes a clear difference. The quality still holds up."

To support its hyper-fresh position, Highline has invested approximately \$10 million in cold chain solutions over the past 24 months.

"This is about delivering a product that is as good on day seven or eight as it is on day two, three, or four," Jose says.

The abilities of the new farm extend beyond consumer satisfaction, which, of course, is important. It also takes into account supply forecasting and customizing specs with partners.

"We have partners using AI to forecast their sales today; if we can connect our AI data position with theirs, then we can start to close the loop," Jose adds.

The new farm will increase Highline's footprint by 13-14 million pounds per year and is a scalable model, one that Highline hopes to expand across the North American market.

"We're not claiming we've got it solved just yet, but we're building the base that enables us to be in the best position to solve it," Jose says with a grin. "The guy who invented the intermittent windshield wiper didn't invent anything new; he just took existing parts and put them together in a new way. And that's exactly what we're doing."

Highline is currently turning soil on the facility, which it expects to start harvesting from in June of next year, and people are starting to see it take root.

With retail partners already excited about the farm's capabilities, I have to ask Jose what this milestone means for Highline as a whole.

"Technology more often than not doesn't fail because of the technology itself, but due to the people adapting it. For us, having great mushroom people, then giving them the best technology, positions us to lead the industry," Jose asserts.

Outside of scaling up its distribution footprint, Highline has updated its branding in an effort to drive consumption of mushrooms across North America.


"We know mushrooms are good for you, but as an industry, I think there is a huge opportunity around *why* they are good for us," Jose notes. "The best way to solve that is to have a clearer message and back it up with high-quality product."

Recalling the hyper-fresh position from earlier, I'd say that Highline's combination of branding and tech-driven quality is a winning strategy for bringing more customers into the mushroom fold.

"I'm hoping that this will be another example of Highline leading the way, and people are standing on the sidelines, saying, 'Those guys are a little bit crazy,'" Jose shares. "The work we did with the clear till, which was controversial to begin with, is something I expect will become more and more mainstream across North America. It's now fairly mainstream in Canada, so I expect the same evolution in the U.S."

As familiar as Highline is with forging its own identity, a controversial risk is actually a calculated move backed by expertise and partnership.

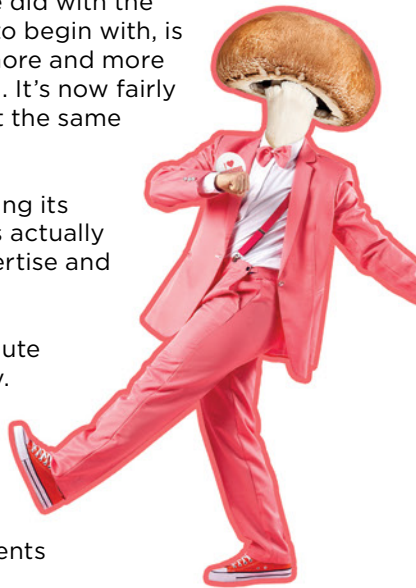
"I'm not telling you this is the absolute solution. We will pivot if necessary. But at the end of this, I think we'll have the world's leading facility," he says honestly.

As the winds of change continue to blow, Highline is riding the currents into a hyper-fresh future. 



"WITH VISUAL TECHNOLOGY IN PLACE, THE SYSTEM WILL TELL THE HARVESTER WHICH MUSHROOMS ARE READY TO BE PICKED AND WHICH ARE NOT. THAT WAY, YOU'RE GETTING MUSHROOMS TO CONSUMERS AT THE PEAK OF THEIR QUALITY."

— Jose Cambon,
Chief Executive Officer, Highline Mushrooms

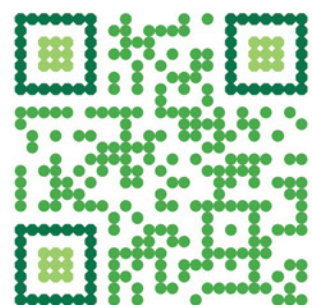


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A Closer Look at North Bay Produce RÉSERVE® Blackberries

By Chandler James

All it takes is one look at North Bay Produce's newest product for consumers to feel they are living a life of luxury.

The recently debuted RÉSERVE® Blackberries are carefully packaged with maximum transparency through an inviting top seal window. Complete with an elegant white typeface contrasted by the deep purple of the blackberries inside, it is little wonder how these berries will make their way to the shopping cart.

Not only are the blackberries visually stunning—with high quality evident

at first sight—but they also offer an excellent taste and texture that will leave shoppers wanting more. The exclusive RÉSERVE label uses only premium genetics that have superior taste even to North Bay's standard varieties.

These stand-out blackberries are the result of North Bay's significant investment in varietal development, complemented by the RÉSERVE Blueberries, which sport the same luxurious packaging and high-quality appearance.

Further proving the stardom of this recent release, the ERANDY® blackberry variety, packaged as North Bay RÉSERVE, has received the Superior Taste Award from the International Taste Institute in Brussels, evaluated by over 200 taste experts worldwide.

As consumers peruse the berry patch of their favorite grocery store, any deviation from the typical clamshell will immediately draw the eye. Plus, with packaging as sleek and attractive as the RÉSERVE label, retailers would be remiss not to add these beauties to their set. **\$**

UP
CLOSE



Learn More



Getting the Most Out of Your Job Postings

By: **Samantha Hart**, Online Marketing and Content Specialist, and **Leslie Lawrence**, Customer Experience Specialist, Joe Produce®



As fall hiring season heats up, your job ads must do more than list qualifications—it's crucial that they make a strong impression to attract top talent who will thrive in your organization. Crafting compelling job ads and marketing them effectively are essential to building a strong talent base in today's competitive job market.

Know Your Audience—And Where to Find Them

To effectively advertise a job, you must understand where your ideal candidates are looking and how your job marketing site reaches the right audience. The approach isn't one-size-fits-all; the best places to post your ad depend heavily on the location and industry of the role. By strategically choosing your advertising channels, you'll maximize reach and attract the right talent.

Quick tips for employers:

- **Choose Your Platform Wisely** - While general-purpose job boards cast a wide net, they can also lead to a flood of unqualified resumes. To get the best results, post your job on an industry-specific site where professionals in your field are actively looking. A platform like Joe Produce or Natural Industry Jobs, for example, connects you directly with industry specific talent
- **Connect with University and Alumni Networks** - Identify colleges and universities with strong programs that cultivate the skills you need, such as Agribusiness, Food Science, Supply Chain Management, or Agricultural Business Management. Reach out to their career services departments and tap into their alumni association websites
- For higher-level roles, consider using recruiters who will do the legwork to find you the perfect candidate. As the Executive Search division of



Joe Produce®, Joe Produce Search leverages experienced consultants and a vast candidate network across North America to fill roles from middle management to C-level

Activate Your Internal Network

Often an overlooked strategy, this approach broadens reach and generates high-quality referrals. Consider diversifying your job marketing efforts with these methods to effectively utilize your existing team:



- Encourage your team to share your job postings on their social media platforms and via email. This broadens reach beyond your direct followers and job boards. If you use an internal ATS or Careers page, ensure employees know how to access and share it
- Implement a referral rewards program. Your best talent often comes from within your team's network. Offering incentives for successful hires significantly expands your applicant pool with high-quality candidates who already fit your company culture

Craft the Ad—Don't Just Post a Description

Job descriptions are internal, often reading as overly technical and comprehensive HR documents. In contrast, job ads are marketing tools designed to sell the position and your company, enticing candidates to apply. When posting online, focus on the ad to attract top talent.

DOs and DON'Ts of Job Ads:

- DO start the ad by introducing your company, giving candidates an immediate sense of who

they'd be working for. Injecting personality can also help convey your company's unique vibe and culture

- DON'T make trainable skills hard requirements. Research shows demanding 100 percent qualification can deter diverse candidates, particularly minorities and women. Avoid alienating talent for a teachable skill, like software proficiency
- DON'T clutter your ad with excessive legalese or compliance details. Instead, focus on clearly highlighting the job's essential aspects, such as required skills, specific responsibilities, and necessary education
- DO proofread and spellcheck rigorously, ideally having others review it as well, to avoid a poor first impression from obvious errors
- DON'T make it too long. Keep the ad concise; streamline the information to keep busy candidates engaged and more likely to complete their application



Showcase Your Employer Value

Including specific company details will help sell the role and attract candidates. These details are crucial for candidates when evaluating jobs. Omitting them can deter applications and signal a lack of transparency. Here are some examples:

- Why is this a great place to work? Share what it is about your company that makes it stand out. Think retention, culture, and values. Promote elements like a positive and inclusive work environment, transparent leadership, and diversity
- WIIFM (What's in it for me?) Candidates want to know: What does your company offer? Do you encourage work-life balance? Are there career growth opportunities? Do you prioritize internal promotions? Share these details! They'll definitely land in a prospective employee's "Pro" column
- Compensation and benefits: Compensation is a top consideration for job seekers and

pay transparency benefits everyone. Studies show that listing compensation improves the candidate experience, allowing applicants to quickly assess if a role meets their financial needs, saving time for all. This openness also builds trust and attracts a higher-quality, genuinely interested applicant pool

Pay Transparency Considerations

Many states have enacted Pay Transparency laws requiring employers to include a compensation range in job postings. It's important for employers to be aware of and follow their state's specific requirements, as noncompliance can result in penalties.

As recruiters, we encourage companies to post transparent and realistic compensation ranges that align with their actual hiring budget. Overly broad ranges can discourage qualified applicants and may not meet the standard of "reasonable expectation" required by some regulations.

Mind Your Communication

In today's competitive job market, many job seekers face frustrating silence after applying. Providing a positive experience, even with a "No, thank you," encourages future applications and creates a good impression of your hiring practices.



Prioritize following up with all applicants in a **timely manner**. While direct contact is ideal, it can be impractical with high application volumes or a lack of personnel. If using an automated system, a blurb should be

included in the ad that politely alerts candidates they will only be contacted if chosen to move forward. Ensure your response reflects respect for applicants' time. Add personalized touches or your unique voice to avoid generic replies.

At Joe Produce, we actively track engagement and do our best to boost applications. Come see how we can help you find your next great hire! 📞

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Joe Produce is an Online Job Center for produce, Ag, and related companies and produce people across the entire food chain—from seed to store and a whole lot more!

We make it easy and cost-effective for employers to reach the perfect talent to meet their needs. We utilize the latest technology, media and social media to connect agricultural employers and thousands of qualified job seekers.



Samantha Hart
Online Marketing and Content Specialist



Leslie Lawrence
Customer Experience Specialist



▶ MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀

MASON GOOLSBY
MARKETING MANAGER,
SHUMAN FARMS

With Anne Allen

You'll find many kindred spirits in the produce industry. We thrive on making personal connections, so it's little wonder that I immediately clicked with Mason Goolsby's illustrious list of her favorite things. Not only did I get a glimpse into the creative mind behind Shuman Farms' marketing program, but I also discovered our mutual love for a trusted Kindle and spicy margs...



1 **MY DOGS**
Ollie (black and white) and Remi (the lab) are constant sources of love and entertainment.



2 **MY HUMBLE LITTLE CONTAINER GARDEN**
I'm slowly but surely finding my green thumb.



3 **A SPICY MARGARITA**
A Tajin® rim is non-negotiable!



4 **THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA**
I'm a proud alumna and lifelong Dawgs fan.



5 **MY KINDLE**
I never travel without it and keep it stocked with easy beach reads.



6 **LONG WALKS**
They're the best way to clear my head after a long day, and my dogs always appreciate the opportunity to stretch their legs too.



7 **TIMELESS TV**
Gilmore Girls, *Friends*, *The Golden Girls*, and *I Love Lucy* are my go-to comfort shows.



8 **PEANUT BUTTER CUPS**
Trader Joe's Dark Chocolate PB Cups are unmatched.

Sources: *Warner Bros.

FROM GRASSY-EARTHY



TO MILD BITTER-SWEET

WE HAVE A TASTE FOR VARIETY



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Produce

MAKING THE INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE MAINSTREAM

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

I'll never forget when an influential voice in our industry told me they did not like seeing the word "trend." Whether you are setting them, ahead of them, or chasing them, "trend" has evolved into one of those buzzwords that reflect the peaks and valleys of the consumer mindset. It may be only a compass arrow, a general direction a category is becoming or headed toward.

Pop culture embodies trends in an infinite hourglass, distilling grain by sociological grain, prevailing public favorites. As this world is often the one informing our smaller producesphere, it is jarring to see the glass tipped the other way.


"An orange has gone from being a treasure obtained at great risk to being simply a product," Aaron Mahnke, Founder of podcast production company Grim & Mild, observed on his show *Cabinet of Curiosities*.

The episode, "Citrus at Sea," hit close to home on several levels. Here, someone outside of produce had voiced a sentiment that our industry is working tirelessly toward: making the insider produce perspective mainstream. What shoppers and patrons now expect to find in produce departments and on menus all times of the year was once a prized possession only the wealthiest could afford to obtain. The constant, then and now, is the people who bring these products to market. Those who do so with great risk and amid constant challenges.

That struggle being acknowledged in pop culture is always gratifying, but will it tip the scales?

Unlike a TikTok video or a LinkedIn post, podcast episodes do not showcase their impact via public downloads or impressions. What I can tell you is this little show has been given a 4.6/5-star rating by over 8,000 listeners. That it has published 732 episodes and is still running strong amid a crowded space, holding its own and influencing a corner of the virtual world, is no small feat.

And the more of these channels we can inspire, the closer we will be to Mahnke's vision of shifting the consumer mindset so that an orange, and the world of fresh at large, "can be a treasure again."

If we can see ourselves in the pop culture hourglass, making the insider produce perspective mainstream, then the consumer will see what we see in every fresh item that makes it to market: a true treasure. 

EPISODE SOURCE:



Your vision, our solutions



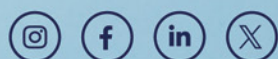
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