

Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

the SNACK

ISSUE 98 OCT 2025

LIVING *on* PURPOSE

Angela Hernandez, Pg 78



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THE OTHER DAY, AS I WAS DRIVING WITH MY HUSBAND, MATT, I FOUND MYSELF ADJUSTING THE EQUALIZER IN OUR CAR, TRYING TO AMP UP THE BASS. He smiled and pointed out that I didn't actually

have to keep adding more bass. As a lifelong musician and writer, he had dealt with normies like me constantly trying to muscle the nuanced and complex aspects of technical sound. Instead, he said, I could just turn down the treble a little, adjust the other elements, and that would bring the balance I was looking for.

It hit me in that moment: This is a perfect metaphor for our lives and, indeed, for our industry.



We're so used to piling on more—more hours, more effort, more of the same old strategies—in the belief that this is the only way to get results. But sometimes, what we really need is what musicians call a remastering—a practice that producers and sound technicians use with modern tools to bring older music back to life; a chance to rebalance and rethink rather than just add more of the same.


In the fresh produce world, we stand on generations of tradition. That tradition is our strength, but if we rely solely on it without adapting, we risk becoming stagnant. Just as remastering an old song with new technology allows us to take what we know and love and give it a fresh spin, we can do the same with our knowledge and experiences in fresh produce. That means exploring new tools and technology, new conversations, and new relationships, all while still honoring where we came from.

Because where we come from matters. As the generations in fresh produce turn over, the new faces, ideas, minds, and

hearts that shape where we go next must first gain their balance standing on the stones laid before them.

You may hear the phrase “audio archaeology” at times when referring to remastering. I do believe that we will leave a legacy of tradition, stories, and gifts in our industry's wake. You are each stewards not just of crops, but of culture—of regional wisdom, generational knowledge, family-held practices, and the relationships that root this work in meaning.

But I also believe that we are greater than our artifacts. *How* we evolved, and *that* we evolved at all, may leave the most enduring lessons to be learned by those who come after us.

The reality is that we are lost if we remain static. Produce is attuned to motion, reading the land, the weather, and the market in anticipation of what is to come. The courage to remix, to reevaluate, to respond to a changing world—that's where the real legacy lives. In the end, it's not about throwing out the bass or the treble. It's about finding an equilibrium that makes the whole piece of music—and our industry—come alive. 

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

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SUNVIEW MARKETING INTERNATIONAL

THE SUNVIEW EXPERIENCE

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RAINIER FRUIT COMPANY

TRIAL BY ACRE
Through partnerships and failing forward over more than half a century, the company has stuck to the highest bar for its customers. Blake Belknap gives us crucial insights...



SPROUTS FARMERS MARKET

MY FAVORITE THINGS
Enjoying both the calm and the rush in any situation, Danielle Hudgick has a keen mind and energy that goes beyond her industry savvy in this list of faves...



MASTRONARDI PRODUCE®

A PEEK AT THE FUTURE OF FLAVOR
The month of industry innovations and debuts is upon us, and the greenhouse grower is maintaining its place leading the charge. Geoff Kosar shares what to expect at produce's biggest global event...



NORTH BAY PRODUCE

INNOVATION YOU CAN TASTE
Paul Driscoll, Director of Business Development, details how blackberry varietal development has changed over the years, and how the company is utilizing innovation to produce berries consumers love...



TRINITY FRUIT COMPANY

LIVING ON PURPOSE
Angela Hernandez shares how faith, adversity, and deep reflection reshaped her leadership—fueling a more present, purposeful life and redefining what it means to lead with heart...



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WTF DO I DO WITH Gwillimdale Farms Carrots ?

{ what the fork }



HONEY-BALSAMIC ROASTED GWILLIMDALE CARROTS

INGREDIENTS

2 lbs fresh Gwillimdale Farms Carrots
2 tbsp olive oil
2 tbsp balsamic vinegar (divided)
2 tbsp honey (divided)
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 tsp dried thyme (or fresh, if you've got it!)
½ tsp salt
¼ tsp black pepper
 Crumbled goat cheese, for serving

Prep Time: 15 mins
Cook Time: 30 mins
Servings: 4



Recipes

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 425° F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper—easy cleanup means more time to eat!
- 2 Grab those gorgeous Gwillimdale Carrots, give them a rinse, pat them dry, and peel if you feel fancy. Trim the ends and slice into chunky diagonal bites (about 1½ inches). If one carrot looks like it's been hitting the gym, slice it in half so it roasts evenly.
- 3 In a little bowl, whisk olive oil, 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar, and 1 tablespoon honey. Pour it over your carrots like a flavor shower. Add garlic, thyme, salt, and pepper. Toss, dance, coat.
- 4 Spread the carrots across your baking sheet like they're sunbathing—no overlapping. Save that extra marinade for later. Roast for 20–25 minutes until fork-tender (bigger chunks might need 30 minutes).
- 5 Midway to deliciousness, brush on the leftover marinade. This step makes them glossy and irresistible.
- 6 When they're done, mix another tablespoon of balsamic vinegar and another tablespoon of honey, then drizzle it all over. Toss gently. Bonus points: Sprinkle with goat cheese crumbles before serving. Enjoy!

To learn more about Gwillimdale Farms, visit www.gwillimdalefarms.com



Recipes for your
Thanksgiving Table

www.gwillimdalefarms.com



The Sunview Experience

By Peggy Packer

Mitch Wetzel,
Vice President of Sales and Marketing,
Sunview Marketing International

In the heart of Delano, California, a remarkable experience emerges in the produce department as Sunview Marketing International elevates table grape excellence to new heights.

“With four generations of dedicated grape growing, Sunview combines heritage with forward-thinking practices, investing in both time and resources to offer our partners the finest table grapes,” Mitch Wetzel, Sunview’s Vice President of Sales and Marketing, shares on a sunny afternoon from his office in Delano. Even as we look back over decades of company growth and evolution, Sunview’s historic legacy is upheld just outside these walls. “Dedicated to and driven by excellence, Sunview brings a mastery to the craft of grape growing. Our roots run deep. Each season is shaped by generations of evolving knowledge, time-honored practices, and a relentless pursuit of perfection. It’s this legacy that sets our grapes apart, delivering a flavor experience where quality isn’t just ‘premium’—it’s unparalleled.”

With a sharp focus on elegance, exclusivity, and personalized customer service, the grower is transforming retailers’ produce departments and redefining consumers’ idea of a “premium eating experience.”

Sunview has delivered first in class grapes for four generations, including numerous highly coveted proprietary varieties. Decades of unparalleled expertise, exceptional harvesting systems, and innovative sustainable practices elevate the brand far beyond “premium” to a distinctive, pinnacle status.

Through its Single Source™ strategy—prioritizing vertical integration and positioning Sunview as a one-stop shop for all table grape needs—the supplier has strengthened its market position through in-depth research and the development of exclusive varieties. With continuous innovation, the grower is committed to elevating “excellent” to “extraordinary.”

“Sunview has been breeding grape varieties since the ’80s, and we’ve conducted extensive customer and consumer research to understand today’s demands,” Mitch adds. “As a result, we can hone in on the experience consumers prefer. We oversee every aspect of



When a customer gets an exclusive variety from us, there’s a distinct expectation. It’s not simply ‘premium’—a term now found on almost every box—it’s distinctly Sunview.

With four generations of dedicated grape growing, Sunview [Marketing International] combines heritage with forward-thinking practices, investing in both time and resources to offer our partners the finest table grapes.

Mitch Wetzel,
Vice President of Sales and Marketing,
Sunview Marketing International

the grape journey—from breeding to the nursery to maintaining our own production with no outside growers—which translates into real value at retail. Our varieties are exclusive to us, not farmed out worldwide. They maintain their strength, integrity, and appeal.”

Every load of Sunview grapes meets the highest standards, delivering consistency and flavor that retailers can count on every season.

“We have the volume to supply the market from the first week to the last week of the season. We excel throughout the season, even when choices are abundant. By putting our exclusive varieties front and center, we’ve developed a unique position in the marketplace,” Mitch says. “Where innovation comes in is our ability to create strong momentum for the entire season. This gives our partners the confidence to plan for our grapes from the first day to the last. When they partner with Sunview, retailers know they’re getting a product that performs.”

“Having an exclusive breeding program and staying in touch with consumer

behavior as it has changed over the last 40 years has allowed Sunview to remain at the forefront of the table grape category,” Mitch explains. “When a customer gets an exclusive variety from us, there’s a distinct expectation. It’s not simply ‘premium’—a term now found on almost every box—it’s distinctly Sunview.”


Sunview’s vertical integration is vital in achieving this, granting the operator complete control over its crop and the exclusive varieties in its portfolio. This, as Mitch explains, builds on the foundation of a longstanding blueprint for company growth.

“This is an extension of our Single Source™ strategy: one family, one grower, one-stop shop,” Mitch says, noting how this concept has been central to Sunview’s success for over 50 years.

One crucial component of this differentiation strategy is the amplified level of customer service Sunview provides its partners. Above all, Sunview prioritizes unwavering service and attention to detail to ensure partners see the best results.

“This is where the service comes in, setting the standard and giving our customers the comfort of knowing we will deliver excellence even in the toughest times,” Mitch continues. “We have a whole team committed to connecting with our customers on multiple levels, integrating ourselves into the entire category process. We take the responsibility of getting fruit into their stores seriously and are dedicated to doing the work and providing expertise. As today’s retail associates become busier, we aim to take as much pressure off them as possible.”

With unparalleled service, a deluxe portfolio, and an exemplary eating experience at the center of its focus, Sunview is further solidifying its reputation as the go-to choice for unmatched table grapes.

As Mitch emphasizes, “It’s about creating a real and emotional connection.” Retailers can sit back, relax, and watch their grape category thrive—knowing consumers are enjoying an unmatched grape eating experience. 

WTF DO I DO WITH Kings River Packing Grapefruit ?

{ what the fork }



VANILLA GRAPEFRUIT YOGURT CAKE

INGREDIENTS

- CAKE**
½ cup Kings River Grapefruit juice
1 tbsp Kings River Grapefruit zest
2 cups flour
2 tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
3 large eggs
½ cup Greek yogurt
1 tsp vanilla paste
1 cup sugar
½ cup vegetable oil

- GLAZE**
1 tsp Kings River Grapefruit zest (optional, for extra flavor)
2 tbsp Kings River Grapefruit juice
1 cup powdered sugar
½ tsp vanilla extract

Prep Time: 10 mins
Cook Time: 45–50 mins
Servings: 9

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Juice grapefruits and set aside.
- 2 In a large bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt.
- 3 In a medium bowl, whisk eggs. Once eggs are whisked, whisk in the Greek yogurt, sugar, oil, grapefruit juice, grapefruit zest, and vanilla paste.
- 4 Pour the wet ingredients into the dry mix with a rubber spatula, being careful not to overmix.
- 5 Pour the batter into the prepared loaf pan. Bake for 45 to 50 minutes, testing cake to make sure it's finished. Remove and let cool on a wire rack. Cake needs to completely cool before glazing.
- 6 In a small bowl, combine all of the ingredients for the glaze. Whisk until smooth. Remove cake from pan, pour glaze on top, and enjoy!



Scan for more
grapefruit recipes



To learn more about Kings River Packing, visit www.kingorange.com



By Peggy Packer

If you listen closely to the sounds of the season—the leaves crunching, the wind blowing, the loud chorus of crickets as the sun sets—you may find just what it is that draws consumers to the citrus category as autumn rolls around. While it is a year-round staple for most, the fall months position citrus a bit differently than the sunny merchandising strategies adopted in the summer. Cool weather and seasonal cravings call for increased demand for varieties that can be incorporated across Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas festivities and all the gatherings in between.

Sharpen your expertise with this variety snapshot, and let nature do the rest...



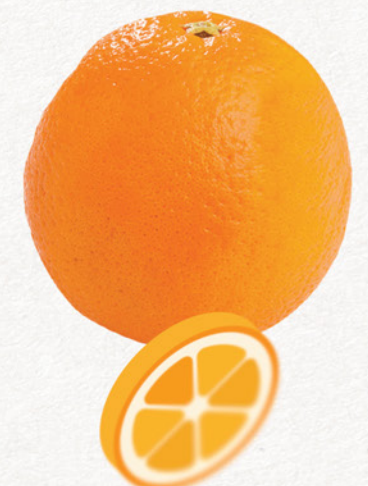
Blood Orange

- Attributes** Deep maroon interior with very few seeds and orange-red blushed exterior; easy to peel
- Aroma** Mildly floral with an earthy, papaya-like fragrance
- Flavor** Rich, plum-like flavor with hints of tart cherry and raspberry undertones



Cara Cara Orange

- Attributes** Rich pink pulp with orange exterior; seedless
- Aroma** Pleasingly tropical
- Flavor** Extremely sweet with a kiss of cranberry and cherry undertones



Navel Orange

- Attributes** Small navel formation on the blossom end; easy to peel and seedless
- Aroma** Sweet, floral
- Flavor** Refreshingly sweet with rich vanilla finish and cherry undertones

Valencia Orange

- Attributes** Differentiated from other orange varieties by a thin, slightly pebbly rind and occasional seeds
- Aroma** Orange blossom
- Flavor** Perfect balance of sweet and tart flavors; high juice content



Satsuma Mandarin

- Attributes** Varying in shape from flat to necked; easy to peel and segment; seedless
- Aroma** Sweet honeysuckle aroma
- Flavor** Refreshing with warm, tropical hints

Ojai Pixie Tangerine

- Attributes** Small with a pebbly, light orange skin; seedless, easy to peel, and grown only in the lush Ojai region of Southern California
- Aroma** Sweet citrus aroma with floral undertones
- Flavor** Candy-like sweetness



Page Mandarin

- Attributes** Prominent circle on blossom end
- Aroma** Crisp citrus scent
- Flavor** Rich flavor

Clementine, W. Murcott, and Tango

- Attributes** Uniquely rounded middle, flat top and bottom, medium-sized fruit with deep orange, smooth, glossy skin; seedless and easy to peel
- Aroma** Sweet, wildflower, pomegranate-like
- Flavor** Crisp, apricot-like or candied nectar flavor with a rich aftertaste

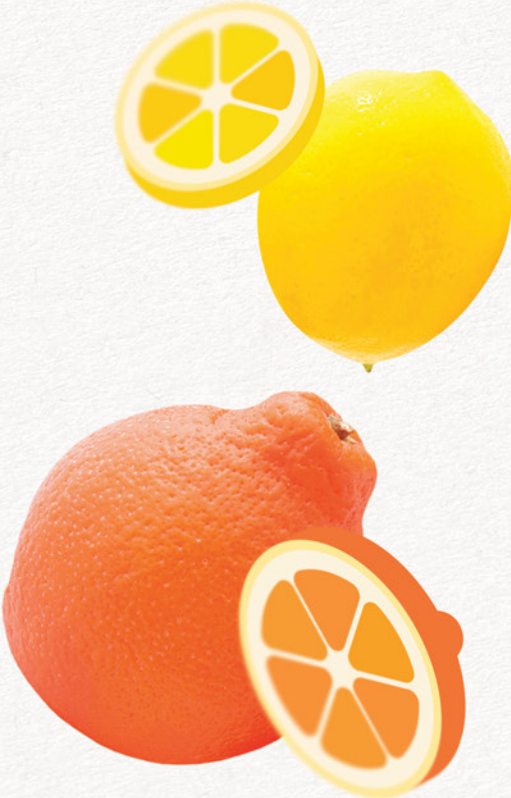


Gold Nugget Mandarin

- Attributes** Bright and slightly bumpy rind; seedless, sweet, and easy to peel
- Aroma** Candy citrus
- Flavor** Rich and sweet, juicy flavor

Eureka and Liabon Lemon

- Attributes** Two different types that are virtually indistinguishable from each other; bright yellow with medium to slightly pebbly skin; popular citrus fruit used in cooking today
- Aroma** Crisp, floral smell
- Flavor** Distinct tangy flavor that complements both sweet and savory foods



Minneola Tangelo

- Attributes** Cross between a grapefruit and tangerine; a deep orange with a knob-like formation at the stem end and few, if any, seeds; peels easily
- Aroma** Robust, tart-orange aroma
- Flavor** Bold, tangy flavor and bursting with juice

Meyer Lemon

- Attributes** Cross between a regular lemon and a Mandarin orange; bright yellow or rich orange-yellow color
- Aroma** Rich lemon blossom; floral, sweet lime, lemon, and Mandarin scents
- Flavor** Zesty sweet citrus flavor



Grapefruit

- Attributes** Yellow skin with a pink blush, flesh varies from light pink to deep red
- Aroma** Subtly sweet, sour cherry
- Flavor** Perfect balance of sweet and tart flavors, occasionally super sweet; extremely juicy

Pink Variegated Lemon

- Attributes** Pink on the inside with a yellow-and-green-striped rind
- Aroma** Bright, crisp
- Flavor** Slightly less acidic than conventional lemons



Texas Rio Red Grapefruit

- Attributes** Overall blush on the exterior peel with a deep red interior color
- Aroma** Bright and floral
- Flavor** Surprisingly sweet with a hint of zing

Oro Blanco and Melo

Attributes Oro: Slightly larger than grapefruit with a thick green-yellow rind

Melo: Larger than Oro with a thinner rind

Aroma Sweet

Flavor Oro: Juicy and sweet with bitter membranes

Melo: Sweet, but less sweet than a Pummelo

Pummelo

Attributes Largest of all citrus fruit; thick, dark green peel that fades to yellow as season progresses

Aroma Zesty; slightly tropical with a hint of jasmine and lime

Flavor Sweet with a candied aftertaste



Persian Lime

Attributes Typically sold while still dark green in color, gradually turns light green as it ripens; virtually seedless

Aroma Spicy, floral

Flavor Distinctive lime flavor

Key Lime (Mexican or West Indian Lime)

Attributes Generally round with straw yellow flesh and a thin, leathery skin; ranging from light green to yellow

Aroma Highly crisp aromatic attributes

Flavor Fresh, tangy taste

Finger Lime

Attributes Not related to a lemon or a lime; considered a micro-citrus with tiny fruit pearls in a wide range of colors

Aroma Unique, refreshing lime

Flavor Similar to a lemon-lime-grapefruit combination

SOURCE: *The Snack* and *AndNowUKnow* Citrus Grower Contributors



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WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

California Giant Blueberries
and Strawberries ?



BERRY BAKED OATMEAL CUPS

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup** California Giant Blueberries
- ½ cup** California Giant Strawberries, chopped
- 1 cup** soy milk (or your milk of choice)
- ⅓ cup** pure maple syrup
- 2 large** eggs
- 2 tbsp** avocado oil
- 1 tsp** vanilla extract
- 1 ¾ cup** quick-cooking oats
- ½ cup** pea-based plant protein powder
- ¾ tsp** baking powder
- ½ tsp** fine sea salt
- 2 tbsp** chia seeds

Prep Time: 5 mins

Cook Time: 20 mins

Servings: 12 Oatmeal Muffin Cups

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Preheat oven to 350° F and grease a 12-cup muffin pan.
- 2** In a large bowl, whisk together milk, maple syrup, eggs, oil, and vanilla. Add in quick oats, protein powder, baking powder, salt, and chia seeds. Stir gently, then fold in blueberries and chopped strawberries.
- 3** Evenly distribute oatmeal mixture into the greased muffin pan, filling each about ³/₄ way full.
- 4** Bake for 18–22 minutes, or until tops are lightly golden.
- 5** Allow oatmeal cups to cool in pan for 5 minutes before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.
- 6** Store oatmeal cups in the fridge for up to 5 days. Enjoy!

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► MENTORS IN THE MAKING ◀

JAMES CAMERA

VEGETABLE CATEGORY MANAGER, FOUR SEASONS PRODUCE

BY PEGGY PACKER

James Camera gives credit where credit is due.

With a career extending back to his high school years, James does not hesitate to point out the friendly faces who have offered words of wisdom or a helping hand along his professional journey. An experienced leader who does not take his role in feeding the world lightly, James has expertly woven his ambition with the guidance of the industry mentors on his path.

After gaining experience working for a local grocery chain at 15, James found his way back to produce before his final semester of college, when he decided to make a life-changing pivot and join Weis Markets, eventually taking on the title of Produce Manager.

Seeking more stability than the demanding hours of retail, James joined Four Seasons in 2017. Within a year, he



was elevated to Pricing and Ads Analyst. When a procurement position opened up in 2019, James stepped into the buyer role and was eventually promoted to Vegetable Category Manager in 2024. Since then, his wealth of experience has

only deepened, building on the elements of the industry that attracted him from the beginning.

“The industry is ever changing,” says James. “Each day is a blank sheet of paper, and it keeps you on your toes. On top of that, this industry has some of the best people I’ve ever met. You truly work with these people and get to know and care about them.”

Among those great people is one of James’ most influential mentors: David Hahn, Director of Procurement at Four Seasons.

“Dave is one of the best human beings I’ve ever been around. In my younger days, I wore my emotions on my sleeve. Everyone in the building knew if I was upset about something,” James laughs. “Over the years I’ve reported to Dave, he’s demonstrated that it’s okay to be upset, but it’s more about how you manage those emotions. He has always



DAVID HAHN,
Director of Procurement,
Four Seasons Produce

“James’s passion for fresh produce was evident the moment I joined him on a grower trip to California in 2019. Whether walking the fields or engaging with growers, his curiosity, professionalism, and respect for the industry stood out. He asked thoughtful questions, listened carefully, and consistently sought insights that could enhance our ability to serve our customers.

From the beginning, James showed a strong commitment to the produce industry beyond his role. Over the years, his dedication and work ethic have only strengthened. He has consistently turned that commitment into results, helping to build strong supplier relationships and support steady category growth. His career path clearly exemplifies how dedication and consistent effort lead to long-term success.”



FRANK CAMERA,
Vice President of Sales, Marketing,
and Business Development, Delta
Fresh Produce

“It is always nice to watch new industry talent grow into leaders. James could have easily entered the industry and remained in the shadows of other family members; however, having known him his whole life, I knew he would build his own path. From early on, James has always wanted to learn all the aspects of the industry. He has surrounded himself with the right people to mentor him, created relationships, and asked the right questions to solidify his reputation as a future leader. He is personable and gets to know his business partners quickly to see how he can accommodate them while supporting his coworkers’ needs. I am honored that James considers me his mentor, and it’s my honor to see my brother become a successful industry leader. I look forward to seeing James’s role expand and seeing him guide and teach others over the next few years.”

been an open ear when I needed to talk to him about anything, and he has continuously been interested in helping me get to the next steps in my career.”

Frank Camera, James’ older brother and Vice President of Sales, Marketing, and Business Development at Delta Fresh Produce, is responsible for several key lessons throughout his life.

“I am the youngest of four. Growing up, I was always Frank’s brother, George’s brother, or Phil’s brother—never James,” he jokes. “I knew when I got into this industry that I may be setting myself up to continue to walk in the shadow of one of my brothers. As I furthered my career, I’ve leaned on Frank in many situations. He’s been able to step out of the ‘brother’ role and become more of a professional mentor. Through it all, he has always respected my wishes to keep our brotherly relationship out of the industry, understanding that I want to make a name for myself.”

Tony Colonna, a Four Seasons vet and current Senior Category Manager at Dole



TONY COLONNA,
Senior Category Manager,
Dole Diversified North America

“I met James back in 2017 at Four Seasons. He had just started in a sales role, and I was a buyer. From the start, he made a point to reach out and ask thoughtful questions. That curiosity has stuck with him ever since. As I’ve moved to different roles in different companies, James has consistently been someone I could rely on. In many ways, we’ve helped each other grow. His most recent promotion to Category Manager says a lot about his leadership, the respect he has earned, and how well he understands the industry. James’ journey is just beginning, and I have no doubt he’ll keep making a big impact in our industry.”

Diversified North America, has also been a consistent sounding board for James.

“Over our years of working together, I’ve bounced many ideas off of Tony,” James recalls. “In the more formative years of my career, he taught me how to be sure I was making confident decisions that were right for the company. To this day, I still bring ideas and challenges to him, and it helps to know I have someone looking out for my best interests.”

Four Seasons Produce Sales Manager Wes Jones is also part of the dynamic team of leaders who have shaped James as a professional.

“From the time I joined Four Seasons, I can remember Wes rooting for me and helping me grow,” James says. “Working closely with him showed me how to carry myself regarding internal relationships. I always knew I could go to his desk and talk through anything, and he would encourage me to think about things I hadn’t yet considered. He’s a great friend who has helped me get to the role I am now.”



WES JONES,
Sales Manager,
Four Seasons Produce

“It’s been gratifying to watch James grow from a curious, driven new employee into a thoughtful and strategic leader. From day one, he showed a real commitment to learning—not just the nuts and bolts of produce, but also the importance of building strong, lasting relationships.

His humility and eagerness to learn have always stood out. He asked thoughtful questions, listened more than he spoke, and always looked for ways to improve—not just for himself, but for the team around him. His leadership is rooted in integrity and empathy, and he has a natural ability to uplift others. James embodies the kind of leadership our industry needs more of, and I couldn’t be prouder to see the mentor he’s becoming.”



ANAIS BEDDARD,
President, Lady Moon Farms

“James is one of the most dependable and grounded professionals I know. What I’ve always appreciated most is his commitment to long-term partnerships. He’s not in it for quick wins—he understands the value of building trust over time and shows up with that mindset daily. Whether it’s a bumper crop or a tough season, James never flinches. He takes challenges in stride, always staying calm and focused, and works with us to find workable solutions.

He knows that consistency matters—not just in quality, but in relationships. That kind of collaboration is rare in this industry, and it’s made a huge difference in how we do business together.”

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Rainier
FRUIT

Trial *by* Acre

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

The path to success is forged by chances taken and mishaps turned into motivations.

“Based on our earliest trials, we didn’t believe that variety was going to work. So, thinking we’d need to wait six years after planting to see results, we chose not to invest in it,” Blake Belknap recalls of one trial and error.

Treefruit is not for the faint of heart, as Blake, Vice President of Sales, Rainier Fruit Company, illustrates when speaking

to the initial trial of what our industry now knows as Cosmic Crisp®. “A couple of years later, the trees around the state matured. The variety is delightful, crunchy, and has good yield. And we were like, ‘oops.’”

What could have been a miss for Rainier has instead been a meet-cute for one of the company’s latest additions to its network of growers, Olympic Fruit.

“That is how the industry goes,” Blake shares with a grin. “It’s hard to pick the right variety, especially with a limited



amount of money to make mistakes spanning a thousand acres or so. Now, having Olympic Fruit come on with a couple of million cases of Cosmic fits like a glove. So, yeah, old dogs and new tricks!"

It is a candid and crucial glimpse into the world behind any fruit that has miraculously made it to market.

"Bill and Mark Zirkle often say that this certain plot of land is perfect for the fruit that will come out. Simple, but then we'll invest deeply to make sure it's trellised, covered, watered, and it turns out to be a win most of the time," Blake says, his tone a balance of wonder and fact. "Some don't have the stomach for pruning and spending all this money to make sure the fruit is extra flavorful. That's costly; in the moment, it is challenging to see the ROI."

I've often heard others, and even Rainier itself, compare the company to the very trees it cultivates. I can see the poetic alignment, and it is tempting, but the challenge Blake touches on reminds me less of its orchards and more of its mountain.

Specifically, I'm reminded that the goal isn't the next summit, but to be a better climber.

"We set a high bar, which requires a disciplined approach and aligning our entire network of warehouses. It's that discipline that our customers count on us for," Blake points out. "We're not easy to work with and pretty demanding because our customers have high expectations of us. It's a

precedent established generations ago by the Zirkle family, rooted in decades of cultivating exceptional fruit. That bar is unwavering."

As such, Rainier has found its endurance not necessarily in the fruits of its labor, but in the hands accomplishing that labor.

Partners and new members of the network join what has come to be known as the company's 'family of families,' ensuring that the legacy of doing things the right way remains paramount.

"We are blessed to have great customers who keep us turning on the line in the morning. We know we're packing for somebody, we have good partnerships that we take care of through thick and thin, and both Olympic Fruit and our latest addition, the Congdon Group, are ready to meet that challenge with us," Blake observes. "I think it might be harder to grow people than grow fruit, actually, but it's more rewarding."

Congdon Orchards' roots reflect a perfect symbiosis with this. Founded by a family that pioneered the area's agriculture over the last couple of hundred years, Rainier is not just adding a partner; it is welcoming a historic pear grower.

"It all comes back to having the right people. The majority of our labor force is dedicated to picking fruit, and the same people return year after year. Throughout our operations, we are grower-based with a focus on having the fruit that eats right and is picked



the right way, all of which raises costs. We see 95 percent retention year after year because we take the necessary steps to train and invest. And when we bring in thousands of people every year, it's so neat that they're the same people that have been here for six, seven, eight, nine, or even 10 seasons," Blake shares.

Just as Rainier has nurtured its fruit, it has nurtured a multigenerational commitment—with employees now working alongside the legacy of parents and grandparents who once picked for the same team.

"It's a rewarding return for doing things the hard way through the entire system. It's not easy to see day after day, week after week, but when you get into year after year, you begin to realize you've become a part of something greater," Blake reflects. Again, he and I look metaphorically to the mountain. "As Bill and Mark have said, if anyone wants to follow us, they can try."

Yes, others may watch the route you climb up a sheer cliff face; it doesn't mean they'll be able to follow. Taking a moment to reflect on the next summit, Blake and I take a look at some sharp turns the treefruit category has taken in recent years—specifically apples.

"Over the last 20 years, anytime you sat down with a retailer, the first thing they'd say is 'What's new?' They would ask what we were seeing and what new varieties we were working on. That started to wane two or three years ago, and we started to hear, 'There are too many apple varieties. I'm so tired of all these apple varieties!' Trying new things when it was demanded has been an expensive lesson," Blake observes.



With the explosion of branded apples, retailers have reported a key challenge: keeping up with consumer education and clarification for each variety. Rather than staying the course, Rainier decided to deviate.

"We thought, 'You know what, let's major in the majors.' We doubled down on organics, such as organic Honeycrisp, and we've been conscientious about partnerships—the Cosmic Crisp story is a great example, and so far it's been a great success," Blake smiles, knowing to keep an open mind.

Majoring in the majors, or what Rainier has come to call "the right mix," focuses less on what is new and more on what is resonating with its customer base.

"The right mix consists of being really good and consistent where the top 90 percent of the sales are, and doing it all year 'round," Blake explains. "By not making our customers go offshore and staying in





"We set a high bar, which requires a disciplined approach and aligning our entire network of warehouses. It's that discipline our customers count on us for."

- BLAKE BELKNAP,
Vice President of Sales, Rainier Fruit Company

branded products we have helped them develop, we're able to keep expenses down, which is an added value."

With overproduction in both branded and standard varieties, now is a challenging time for the apple scape. Something Blake helps me realize is that sometimes the way forward is the way back.

"We just celebrated 50 years last year for Rainier Fruit Company. When you think of how it all started, it was Bill Zirkle selling to only a few customers back in the day, being consistent, having a high bar, and just staying the course," Blake reflects.

Mapping out the Rainier Fruit Company network, Blake tells me orchards go from around Mount Hood all the way up to the Canadian border. In total, from wine grapes to blueberries and everything in between, it's somewhere around 28,000 acres of permanent crops. But this is hardly the summit.

"To look after this land, it takes a lot of really good people with the same outlook and attitude," Blake sums up, finding his way back to the Zirkle mantra. "Do it right—at the end of the day, it's the motto that's got us through 50 years."

In the end, moving mountains isn't about sheer force—it's about cultivating change with care, patience, commitment, and stewardship. One plot at a time. 🍏



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DANIELLE HUDGICK

SENIOR CATEGORY MANAGER,
AVOCADOS, CITRUS, AND STONEFRUIT,
SPROUTS FARMERS MARKET

With Melissa De Leon Chavez

The key to being a road warrior is knowing when to put the pedal to the metal and when to enjoy a scenic pace. From a handful of conversations, I know Danielle Hudgick not only travels these transitions smoother than 007, but finds true joy in both. As easily pleased by the adventures found in a good book as in a new city, Danielle is someone who navigates all scenarios with ease. It's no wonder she excels as Senior Category Manager for multiple Sprouts Farmers Market categories. Let's explore the favorites that fuel this retail road warrior...



1 MY FUR BABIES
Furry, four-legged, and full of personality—they run the house!



2 MEXICAN FOOD
Authentic Mexican food is my love language.



3 ARIZONA SUNSETS
Nothing beats the magic of an Arizona sunset.



4 A GOOD BOOK
A strong plot and a cozy spot!



5 TRAVELING
In 2024, we went to Chichen Itza.



6 BEING AN AUNT
My family means the world to me.



7 ICED COFFEE
Life's too short for hot coffee in Arizona.



8 CHICAGO
I lived there for five years; the city will always have a special place in my heart.

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GRAPE CHEESECAKE

INGREDIENTS

FILLING

35 Castle Rock Vineyards Green Grapes

16 oz plain cream cheese

1 cup sugar

¼ tsp vanilla extract

1 cup heavy cream, chilled

2 tbsp sweetened condensed milk

CRUST

2 cups graham crackers, crushed

2 tbsp unsalted butter, melted

Prep Time: 10 mins

Cook Time: 15 mins

Chill Time: 4 hrs

Servings: 8

DIRECTIONS

- 1 For the crust: Combine cookie crumbs and melted butter in a small bowl. Sprinkle into a 9" tart pan or pie plate, spread into an even layer, then compress firmly with a flat-bottomed drinking glass or measuring cup; this will naturally push the crumbs up the sides of the pan. Keep pressing until the crumbs are in a compact, even layer across the bottom and sides of the pan. Refrigerate until needed.
- 2 For the grapes: Boil grapes for about 15 minutes. Chop grapes in a food processor with 2 tablespoons sweetened condensed milk. Place it in the refrigerator to cool.
- 3 For the filling: Combine cream cheese, sugar, and vanilla extract in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment. Mix at low speed to form a thick paste, then increase to medium speed until soft and smooth.
- 4 Scrape down the sides of the bowl and beater using a flexible spatula. Attach the whisk, then add the cream. Mix on low speed to combine, then increase to high speed and whip until stiff peaks form, about 3 to 5 minutes depending on your mixer's power. Gently fold in the grape mixture.
- 5 Transfer the filling into the prepared crust, then smooth it into an even layer. Use the back of a spoon to create gentle swoops and swirls in the filling's surface. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until firm and chilled, about 4 hours. Enjoy!



To learn more about Castle Rock Vineyards, visit castlerockvineyards.com



A Peek at the Future of Flavor

A Q&A With Geoff Kosar,
Vice President of Marketing, Mastronardi Produce®

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

Christmas comes a bit early for the produce industry.

As we are constantly looking for what will give fresh fruits and vegetables the next edge, October is when many companies from around the world unveil what they have been working on all year long.

And some of us can't help but peek through the proverbial keyhole to see what might be under the tree.

One operation that consistently holds an industry-leading position is Mastronardi Produce®. With a legacy spanning over 70 years, this company has been showing that age is just a number when it comes to innovation for decades. But with the skill and patience of time, it also knows how to carefully guard a secret or two until the timing is right.

Allowing me a glimpse is Geoff Kosar, Vice President of Marketing, and one of the keepers of such revelations. Settle in with your favorite steaming mug, and see what early treats the executive unveiled.

Melissa De Leon Chavez: Geoff, change is certainly in the air—but this feels as though it goes beyond the unveiling of innovations at this time of year.

Messaging and marketing are reaching new heights for fresh produce, and Mastronardi Produce plays no small part. Could you tell me a bit about that position and focus?



Geoff Kosar, Vice President of Marketing, Mastronardi Produce®:

Mastronardi has always been one of the first, right? From the introduction of Campari® Tomatoes over 30 years ago to creating the SUNSET® brand, which has built great recognition in households across the United States, we continue to innovate across all our categories—whether that be tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, berries, or lettuce. From an innovation standpoint, we examine dynamic categories, but we also consider different industries and trends affecting consumers. There are opportunities for brands to differentiate themselves through packaging, varieties, and formats. These areas have been where we've always successfully differentiated ourselves.

“..we've taken several steps to ensure we are in tune with our demographic, consumer demands, and trends. We are embracing not just what is happening within the produce industry, but also other industries.”

Geoff Kosar,
Vice President of Marketing,
Mastronardi Produce®



MDC: In alignment with this, you bring a more diverse background than most on the produce side. From your perspective, having been up close and personal with some brands doing more in marketing than we might typically see in produce, what are some new steps you are helping the team take?

GK: One of the things I've done since I started with Mastronardi Produce is focusing on that consumer-led approach. The team has unpacked a lot in talking to our consumers. Mastronardi conducted a large-scale research panel across North America last year, and we've taken several steps to ensure we are in tune with our demographic, consumer demands, and trends. We are embracing not just what is happening within the produce industry, but also other industries. It is a purposeful approach to our innovation going forward.

MDC: Digging further into crossing industries for inspiration, what are some of the results you are looking for and already seeing?

GK: I think there are brands in the produce industry that are household brands, and we're continuing to work and progress on having SUNSET be a household name. We're encouraged by the progress that we're making on several fronts. You're going to see a lot more consumer-facing marketing activities from our brand in the future. Trade marketing activities remain critical, but we've made a big investment in online and digital, with a number of different omnichannel marketing approaches lined up to keep our brand top of mind with consumers.

MDC: And of course, we can't talk about innovation around October without talking about the International Fresh Produce Association's Global Produce & Floral Show. Am I right to guess that Mastronardi Produce has a few things up its sleeve?

GK: Absolutely. We're unveiling some new things at the show for Campari as we approach the tail end of celebrating its 30th anniversary. Even if we saw you at the Canadian Produce Marketing Association Convention and Trade Show earlier this year, I promise there will be something new for everybody to see at the booth regarding Campari Tomatoes this fall. We've launched a couple of other really unique tomatoes over the last couple of months. Our new strawberry-on-the-vine tomato, called Secilia™, will be prominently featured at our booth, and we have our brand-new Mastronardi™ Tomato Branch.

MDC: I'm intrigued—tell me more about the Mastronardi Tomato Branch.

GK: The Mastronardi Tomato Branch is a unique cluster of tomatoes on the vine that is really beautiful and unlike anything else you've seen in the category. It is a high-flavor, on-the-vine, micro variety, perfect for different usages and occasions, whether you put it on our charcuterie board or you eat it straight from the vine. The visual appearance is also special—when you see it, it has a very nice premium feel to it.

If you look across what's happening in the industry, you see a lot of these premium offerings becoming available across a number of categories. We're starting to play a lot more in that space, and we're excited about the launch at the show.

We've also got our latest Bomb that's going to be launching, Umami™ Bombs. The Bombs line has been a runaway success for the company over the past few years. We launched Flavor Bombs just over 10 years ago now, and it has been a tremendous success. Umami Bombs, the latest, has a unique red hue and a bold, juicy flavor. With umami being the fifth taste, it provides us with the opportunity to play with a variety of different flavor profiles. It's both sweet and savory, and it's another cherry-on-the-vine tomato offering from the already-successful Bombs lineup.

There are a few other new additions, if you can believe it, but it is too soon to put details in print. Readers will have to just come by the booth and see!

MDC: Speaking of the booth, it sounds like the stage setting for these new introductions will have a fresh twist as well?

GK: That's right—again, I can't give too many details yet, but we are doing some new things with the booth that will definitely be worth a visit. I can say we're going to be doing something different this year from a sampling point, with different trialing for attendees. Our varieties and our flavor are truly what set us apart. I encourage everyone to come by and have the opportunity to try some of our unique flavors.

Half the fun of any surprise is the anticipation.

Few understand this—and how to festively pull away the wrapping—like Mastronardi Produce.

As the clock to our industry's innovation holiday ticks down, let us appreciate that excited buzz before all is revealed. 🍅



WTF DO I DO WITH Giumarra Companies Do You Fuyu™ Persimmons ?

{ what the fork }



SWEET & SAVORY PERSIMMON BITES

INGREDIENTS

2 Do You Fuyu™ Persimmons,
top leaves removed
4–6 slices of prosciutto
12–16 fresh basil leaves
12–16 Manchego cheese slices
Olive oil and/or balsamic
glaze, to serve (optional)

Prep Time: 15 mins
Servings: 12–16 bites (serves
4–6 people as an appetizer)

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Slice the Fuyu persimmons into wedges to yield approximately 6–8 bite-sized wedges per fruit. Use food-safe kitchen scissors or a knife to trim each slice of the prosciutto into three long strips lengthwise.
- 2 Like making a sandwich, stack each wedge of persimmon with one slice of Manchego and one basil leaf. Wrap tightly with a strip of prosciutto.
- 3 Serve immediately. Optionally, serve with olive oil and/or balsamic glaze on the side to drizzle with. Enjoy!

For more delicious Fuyu persimmon recipes,
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WTF DO I DO WITH Giorgio White Button Mushrooms ?

{ what the fork }



GIORGIO MUSHROOM MARINARA RAVIOLI

INGREDIENTS

SAUCE

8 oz Giorgio White Button Mushrooms, sliced
4 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
1/4 cup yellow onion, diced
2 garlic cloves, minced
28 oz can of crushed tomatoes
1 tbsp sugar
2 tsp dried basil
1 tsp dried oregano
1 1/4 tsp fine sea salt
1/4 tsp crushed red pepper (optional)
1/2 tsp fresh parsley, chopped
 Salt and black pepper, to taste

RAVIOLI

8 oz Giorgio White Button Mushrooms, chopped
1/4 cup Parmesan, freshly grated
1/2 cup packed basil leaves
4 garlic cloves, chopped
8-10 fresh oregano leaves
2 tbsp panko bread crumbs
1/4 tsp fine sea salt
1/2 tsp ground black pepper
40 wonton wrappers
 Grated Parmesan and chopped herbs

Prep Time: 30 mins

Cook Time: 30 mins

Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Start the sauce: Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onion and garlic; cook for 3 minutes, until the onion begins to soften. Reduce heat to medium and stir in crushed tomatoes.
- 2 Add sugar, dried basil, dried oregano, 1 teaspoon of salt, and crushed red pepper (if desired). Bring to a simmer, partially cover with a lid, and stir occasionally while you prepare the ravioli.
- 3 Make the ravioli filling: In a food processor, combine chopped Giorgio mushrooms, Parmesan, basil leaves, garlic, and oregano. Process on high for about 30 seconds, until nearly puréed. Transfer to a bowl and stir in breadcrumbs, salt, and pepper.
- 4 Assemble the ravioli: Bring a large pot of water to a boil. On a flat surface, lay out 20 wonton wrappers. Place a generous teaspoon of mushroom filling in the center of each. Brush edges with water and top with remaining wrappers. Press edges to seal. Optional: use a biscuit or scalloped cutter for decorative edges.
- 5 Boil ravioli in batches for 1 minute, until they float. Remove with a slotted spoon and transfer 5 ravioli to each of 4 serving plates.
- 6 Finish the sauce: In a medium skillet, heat remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil over medium-high heat. Add sliced Giorgio mushrooms and cook for 5 minutes, until tender. Stir in remaining 1/4 teaspoon of salt, pepper, and parsley.
- 7 Spoon sauce over ravioli, top with sautéed mushrooms, and garnish with Parmesan and chopped herbs. Enjoy!

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INNOVATION

You Can TASTE

A Q&A With
Paul Driscoll,
Director of Business
Development,
North Bay Produce

By Anne Allen

Once, biting into a blackberry was a gamble. Now, it's a promise. Consumers probably have no idea how much varietal development—and sheer determination—has played into creating the flavorful berries they purchase today.

North Bay Produce's RÉSERVE® label is a premium example. Under the label are the company's ERANDY® Blackberries, which have set new standards for premium fruit in the industry. After receiving the Superior Taste Awards ribbon for this product, the provider is ready to highlight the specifics of this exclusive program.

Turning to Paul Driscoll, Director of Business Development, I found the industry expert eager to share more about this milestone.



ANNE ALLEN: First of all, I have to extend congratulations to you and the team on receiving a prestigious recognition like the Superior Taste Award. What has the win meant for North Bay Produce?

PAUL DRISCOLL,
Director of Business
Development, North Bay
Produce: Validation. The North Bay Cooperative and its grower-owners understand that the industry, and the berry category specifically, are



undergoing a transition toward incredible taste. This transition brings significant optimism for all elements of the supply chain with the potential of higher yields, better eating, increased consumption, and a joyful eating experience overall. This is a win for the consumers, producers, and retailers alike. Having our RÉSERVE blackberries recognized by the Taste Institute is exciting and is leading us to double down on genetics and the varietal transitions that are taking place across the category.



“Having our RÉSERVE® blackberries recognized by the Taste Institute is exciting and is leading us to double down on genetics and the varietal transitions that are taking place across the category.”

Paul Driscoll,
Director of Business Development, North Bay Produce

AA: From that answer alone, it's obvious that the quest for better fruit continues to drive North Bay Produce forward. Could you speak a little more about the importance of varietal development in today's market?

PD: Consumers have several choices on where they're going to spend their money. With such an incredible assortment of fresh fruits and vegetables available, we're focused on thrilling them with incredible eating experiences that lead to repeat purchases. This primary goal of creating experiences is a cornerstone of varietal development in the berry category. We, as North

Bay Produce and as an industry, have an incredible opportunity in front of us as we bring innovation to the market.

Over the next few years, even more choices will be given to buyers and consumers. Being at the forefront of varietal development is crucial for producers to ensure long-term viability. Across our operation, we understand this and will continue to search the world for the wow factor that drives sales. RÉSERVE ERANDY blackberries are a great example of this.

Our agronomists and team are fortunate enough to travel the world,

searching for and tasting innovation. It is pretty exciting to think about what is to come!

AA: Knowing what North Bay Produce is capable of, I can't wait to hear what those plans are! For now, can you walk me back through the success of the RÉSERVE brand?

PD: With North Bay's drive for varietal development, we found ourselves with a pipeline of exceptional fruit that needed a brand that measured up to the experience we were bringing to market. Given the exceptional appearance of the fruit we had coming, the simplistic nature of the RÉSERVE premium packaging was born. The first thing to draw consumers in is the eyes. When the fruit looks this good, and eats as great as it does, why not let the fruit do the talking?

AA: I've heard that ERANDY Berries need to be tasted to be believed—how do retail partners and consumers react to these berries?

PD: The first reaction is typically to the appearance and size. Erandy is the original RÉSERVE blackberry, and they tend to be quite large! This initial look brings you in, then, as consumers taste them, the comments go to the smooth texture, low level of seeds, sweetness, then the complexity of the finish. The balance of flavor leaves you wanting more; I've experienced many a drive home from my weekly shop only to find an empty clamshell on the passenger seat!

The reaction at retail has been very positive. Growth is on the horizon, thanks to all retail partners who have put their confidence and support behind the RÉSERVE brand and its quality.

The pride North Bay Produce carries for its RÉSERVE brand is palpable, and as the cooperative continues to grow and innovate, I'll be picking up a package—or three—and cheering them on. 🍓

WTF DO I DO WITH { what the fork } Highline Mini Bella Mushrooms ?



MUSHROOM AND SWEET POTATO GRAIN BOWL

INGREDIENTS

- 16 oz** Highline Mini Bella Mushrooms, sliced
- 1 cup** mixed grains, cooked according to package instructions
- 2 tbsp** olive oil
- ½** white onion, finely chopped
- 4 cloves** garlic, minced
- Salt, to taste
- 2½ cups** sweet potatoes, diced
- 10 oz** cherry tomatoes
- 3 tbsp** tomato paste
- 4 sprigs** fresh thyme
- 1 tbsp** za'atar seasoning

TOPPINGS

- 1 cup** slivered almonds, toasted
- 1 tbsp** honey
- 3 tbsp** fresh parsley, chopped
- 3 tbsp** fresh mint, chopped
- 4 oz** goat cheese, crumbled

Prep Time: 30 mins
Cook Time: 30 mins
Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- Heat 2 tbsp olive oil in a large pan over medium heat. Add in the mushrooms and sprinkle with salt. Cook for 5–6 minutes until golden brown and tender. Set aside.
- In the same pan, cook the chopped onion for 5 minutes, then stir in the garlic for another minute. Add the diced sweet potatoes and let them cook for 2 minutes, until browned.
- Pour in the vegetable broth. Add the cherry tomatoes and tomato paste. Stir to combine everything well. Add in thyme. Let it all simmer on low for 20 minutes, until the sweet potatoes are soft.
- While the veggies are simmering, toast the almonds in a dry pan with honey and salt. Set aside to cool.
- Remove thyme sprigs from the pan. Add in your cooked grains and sautéed mushrooms. Mix together.
- Spoon into bowls and top with the almonds, crumbled goat cheese, and fresh herbs. Enjoy!

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Industry Spotlight

HONEYCRISP APPLES

In produce, we all strive to grow and sell products that consumers want to come back for time and time again. Known by consumers and buyers alike, Honeycrisp apples are a poster child for this endeavor. As we know, the best things in life don't always come easy, and that is certainly true for this apple variety. Who better to speak on this than an industry legacy like Rainier Fruit Company's Mark Zirkle?



Mark Zirkle,
PRESIDENT,
RAINIER FRUIT COMPANY

"Growing and packing Honeycrisp undoubtably brings a greater range of emotions than any other apple variety, from the highest heights when an orchard produces a big crop of sweet, glowing fruit that delights consumers, to crushing lows when that same block might offer up a small harvest with big losses the following year. Suffice it to say, even after 30 years, we are still learning lessons with this diabolical yet rewarding variety. Developing a strong organic Honeycrisp program with the legs to last a full calendar year was another great undertaking—one we've maintained for six seasons straight now. We're proud of what we've accomplished with this variety over the years, growing Rainier Honeycrisp to stand apart from others in the category with quality, quantity, and service."



All Hail the King!



WTF DO I DO WITH { what the fork } Ocean Spray® Premium Fruit ?



OCEAN SPRAY® SNACKLE BOX

INGREDIENTS

Ocean Spray® Raspberries
Ocean Spray Mandarin slices
Ocean Spray Red Grapes
Ocean Spray Green Grapes
Ocean Spray Blueberries

Ocean Spray Blackberries
Ocean Spray Strawberries
(cut into bite-sized pieces)
Cubes of cheese (Cheddar, gouda,
or your favorite)

Salami
Crackers
Pretzels
Your favorite chips

Prep Time: 10 mins
Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Grab a food-safe divided container like a lunch box, bento, or mini tackle box.
- 2 Fill each section with a different snack, mixing colors, textures, and flavors.
- 3 Store chilled until ready to enjoy, or pack with an ice pack if you're taking it on the go.

Tip: The “snackle box” is the must-try trend of the season—and this one’s bursting with bold, fresh flavor thanks to Ocean Spray’s premium fruit lineup. Whether you’re packing a school lunch, heading out on a fall road trip, or fueling up for an afternoon at the pumpkin patch, this colorful combo is your go-to grab-and-graze option.

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WTF DO I DO WITH 4Earth Farms™ Organic Yellow Squash?

{ what the fork }



ORGANIC PARMESAN BAKED YELLOW SQUASH

INGREDIENTS

2 medium 4Earth Farms™ Organic Yellow Squash
Garlic salt and black pepper, to taste
½ cup Parmesan cheese, grated

Prep Time: 10 mins

Cook Time: 5 mins

Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Preheat the oven to 425° F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
- 2** Wash and dry the yellow squash and cut each one into ½" slices. Arrange the squash rounds on the prepared pan. Lightly sprinkle the squash with garlic salt and freshly ground black pepper. Use a small spoon to spread a thin layer of Parmesan cheese on each slice of squash.
- 3** Bake for 15–20 minutes, or until the Parmesan melts and turns a golden brown.
- 4** Serve immediately and enjoy!

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By Editorial Contributor Julie Marcik, President and Managing Director, Joe Produce SearchSM

Your next trade show is poised to be your most strategic investment of the year. It's a rare chance to elevate key relationships and gather priceless market intelligence, all in one place. The difference between leaving with a powerful return and simply making an appearance lies in a deliberate plan to make every conversation count.

In the produce industry, where every deal is built on a bedrock of personal trust, your team is your ultimate asset. They are the living embodiment of your reputation, turning handshakes into the headway that will define your success for the coming year.

For leaders who want to ensure that investment pays off, here are three critical areas to focus on to turn your next trade show from an obligation into a decisive win.

1. The Blueprint: The Real Work Happens Before the Show

A great show isn't about having the fanciest booth; it's the result of thoughtful preparation. As a leader, your most important work is setting the stage long before anyone steps on the floor.

Define What a "Win" Looks Like: Your team needs a clear destination. Get specific about what success looks like, and set meaningful, concrete goals. One common misstep is simply showing up and hoping for the best. In an industry with thin margins, hope is not a strategy.

Assemble Your A-Team: The people you bring send a powerful message. Choose them with intention.

Consider:

- **The Grower/Operations Lead:** The Soul of the Company. This person speaks with unshakeable authenticity about the crop, the land, and how you do things. They build instant trust.
- **The Senior Sales Rep(s):** The Relationship Keeper. They know the buyers, their families, and their business challenges. They can turn a quick "hello" in the aisle into a real conversation.
- **The Leader (You):** The Strategist. You're the one who can talk big-picture programs, logistics, and long-term vision with retail execs and owners.
- **The Food Safety/Quality Assurance Expert:** Your Secret Weapon. In today's market, having an expert present to answer tough questions about traceability and safety protocols confidently builds incredible confidence.

Master the Off-Floor Game: The most important conversations rarely happen in a loud expo hall. They happen over a steak or a morning coffee. Pinpoint your top 10 most important contacts and reach out months in advance to book a dinner or a quiet meeting. Don't leave your evenings to chance. The hours between 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. are often when handshakes become partnerships.

2. Owning the Floor: Presence, Professionalism, and Personality

This is where your preparation pays off. Your role as a leader is to set the tone and keep your team focused and engaged.

Lead from the Front: Make your booth feel like your own office—welcoming and open for business. Stand at the front, make eye contact, and greet people by name. Avoid huddling in the back with your people or being glued to your phone.

Keep Your Team's Spirit High: A trade show is a marathon on a concrete floor. Acknowledge the grind by ordering a round of good coffee, insisting on breaks, or scheduling a team dinner to celebrate the day's wins. An energized person can have the thoughtful conversation needed to strengthen a key relationship. An exhausted person can't be sharp, and that's when opportunities are missed.

The Huddle and Debrief: Before the doors open, gather the team to review the day's key appointments and who you're looking to connect with. After the floor closes at the end of the day, circle up while conversations are still fresh. What's the buzz on the floor? This is priceless market intelligence.



3. Bringing It Home: Turning Talk into Traction

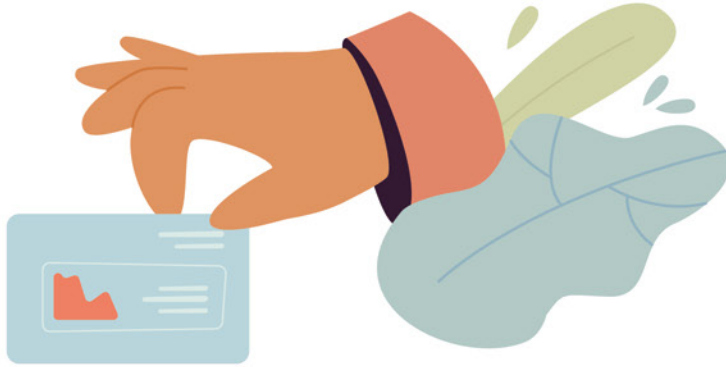
The show ends, but the most important work is just beginning. This is where you prove you were listening and lock in the value.

The Personal Follow-Up: Within 48 hours, send a personal note. Mention something you talked about that wasn't business-related. Then, follow up with a phone call—the old-fashioned way—a week later to talk business. It shows you see them as a person, not a purchase order.

Sending a generic email blast can be viewed as lazy and erases the personal connection you just spent three days building.

Hold a Real-World "Post-Mortem": Go deeper than just counting the business cards you brought back. The goal is to evaluate the quality of the conversations, not the quantity. What did we learn that will help us serve our customers better? What was the real ROI when you factor in new business and solidified programs?

Acknowledge the Grind, Build the Loyalty: When you return, thank your people publicly and privately. Acknowledge the long hours and time away from their families. Let them know they represented the company with class. People who feel appreciated will always go the extra mile next time.



With the heart of the trade show season on the horizon, the most important work is happening now. Success on the show floor isn't about luck; it's about the deliberate strategy you build and the trusted team you deploy.

Here's to a profitable season filled with meaningful connections for you and your team! 💰

Julie Marcik leads the JOE Produce SearchSM team, leveraging more than 20 years of experience in executive search. Produce is not a job, it's a lifestyle. Once you "check the boxes" on skills and experience, the real job becomes matching the people with the culture of the business and leadership. This takes time, expertise, and a robust process Julie and the JOE Produce SearchSM team know well. JOE Produce SearchSM is composed of experienced search consultants and produce professionals. Placements range from middle management to C-level positions throughout North America, covering a wide range of produce and produce-related businesses.



Julie Marcik,
President and Managing Director
JOE Produce Search

» The IF List «

Fabian Pereira

Vice President of Marketing, Innovation, International, Fresh Express
With Peggy Packer



In an industry as vast and dedicated as that of fresh produce, one does not need to look far for a source of inspiration. In fact, you'll find it right here on this page.

When it comes to leaders like Fabian Pereira, there is much to be admired. A forever student, insightful mentor, and firm believer in the power of patience and taking risks, Fabian approaches his role as Vice President of Marketing, Innovation, International with a fiercely optimistic mindset. What more could we ask of the nine-year Fresh Express vet—besides these 12 fun-filled questions that venture far beyond his executive title?

» IF you had to choose one word to describe yourself, what would it be?
Curious.

» IF you had to distill your personal definition of success into one sentence, what would it be?
Creating value while staying true to your values.

» IF you could imagine yourself in a different industry, what would it be?
Education—there's nothing more world-changing than unlocking minds.

» IF you had to be roasted by one comedian, who would it be?
Ricky Gervais. Brutal, but hilarious.

» IF you had a crystal ball and could see into the future regarding one thing, what would it be?
Whether I'll look back and be proud of how I lived.

» IF you were another species in the animal kingdom, what would you be?
An eagle, built to soar but grounded in clarity.

» IF you wrote an autobiography, what would be the title?
Unfinished, On Purpose.

» IF you could enhance one aspect of your intelligence, what part would you want to improve?
Emotional intelligence. It changes relationships, leadership, and legacy.

» IF you had to wear the same thing every day, what items of clothing would you pick?
Black T-shirt, jeans, and the illusion of control.

» IF you could re-experience an awesome day in your life, what day would you choose and why?
The day I took a risk, and it worked. Proof matters.

» IF you could choose one song to be the soundtrack of your year, what would it be?
"Don't Stop Believin'." Cliché? Yes. True? Absolutely.

» IF you could give your younger self one piece of advice, what would it be?
Everything doesn't have to happen now; patience is power. 🍌



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LIVING ON PURPOSE

By Jordan Okumura-Wright

Angela Hernandez,
Vice President of Marketing,
Trinity Fruit Company



Some stories open wounds while others heal them.

This story does both. Coming undone has a way of rebuilding you—simplifying your faith while expanding it, holding a mirror up to the world and reframing it, settling all the matters that once unmoored us.

And for Angela Hernandez, this process unfolded not in silence or solitude, but in the very environment that helped shape her.

“I didn’t know if I’d ever have the courage to share such a personal part of my life in a professional setting, but I’d be lying if I said this industry wasn’t a part of the strength that helped me at such a challenging time of my life,” Angela, Vice President of Marketing, Trinity Fruit Company, shares with me.

Angela’s story is a reminder that while this industry helped shape her strength, its ever-moving current doesn’t just carry us forward—it sometimes takes the reins and sweeps us into its momentum, whether we’re ready or not. Yet in that motion, we often find our purpose.

She knows this rhythm intimately.

“Life can get very busy in our industry, and it can go very fast. From being at trade shows, in meetings, at a dinner, having a cocktail, or on a plane, it can almost seem never-ending,” she acknowledges. “And, for some of us, it’s even more than that. The momentum is fueled by new product launches, design strategies and changes, packaging innovations, new plantings, weather changes, inflation, you name it.”

But even the most agile among us are not immune to disruption.

Or what might feel more like a reckoning.

“”

Being a strategist is being proactive and planning what you can control. It’s having a plan in place and a plan if that plan doesn’t work. In this case, I had no plan but to trust in a God who knew every detail of every plan that involved my health and care.

Angela Hernandez,
Vice President of Marketing, Trinity Fruit Company



› Top: Angela Hernandez was supported in treatment by friends and family, including Trinity Fruit Company’s Jackie Nakashian and Jeri Elsasser
› Bottom: Ricarda Moya, a dear friend, made Angela’s recovery warm and loving

statistics, overstated technical implications—flattened into something clinical, like the pages of a medical journal. But, despite it all, Angela didn’t feel shelved.

The oncology team moved fast, and Angela found herself in a role reversal. She suddenly identified with the product she had so often manicured, strategized, and shaped—and everything around her was moving fast to fix this issue.

Where she once had exercised so much control, she now had to surrender it.

“Being a strategist is being proactive and planning what you can control. It’s having a plan in place and a plan if that plan doesn’t work. In this case, I had no plan but to trust in a God who knew every detail of every plan that involved my health and care. Again, I was walking the talk. I didn’t know what each day held, but I knew who held each day,” Angela emphasizes. “This realization changed my life and is a wonderful reminder to me today that amid the day-to-day, we ultimately have no control. Being the focus of strategy taught me to ask the questions I was afraid to ask. That being weak is a great strength, and that being vulnerable is what humanity seeks. We live in such a tough world today. You never know what someone else is going through. But, if you can remain real, maintain a heart that is raw, you might just meet the needs of others around you and yourself.”

With that Angela energy we all so cherish, she leaned into her spiritual foundation, recognizing there was much

another follow-up appointment, and I was given the news that would be the most shocking of my life so far: ‘We found that you have breast cancer.’ I was with my mom while my father waited outside, walking my dog, Miles. At that very moment, all the words were just noise, and everything blurred.”

Moments like these can fragment the self. We can feel foreign to ourselves—reduced to medical terms, layered definitions, and oncology jargon. We risk becoming understated emotional

“In 2023, I was in New York for the International Fresh Produce Association’s Produce Executive Development Program, hosted by Cornell University. I received a call asking if I could come in to further look into a scan I had just taken,” Angela begins. “The week after my return home, I did just that. Within three days, I had



› Angela (centered), pictured with Jasmin Gonzales, Cristal Jones, Jennifer Rossotti, Ricarda Moya, and Amy Wilkins, who have brought years of close friendships, comfort, and laughter into her life

she didn’t know. So, she turned to what she did: her faith and her power.

“After receiving the surprising news, I did what I knew best. First and foremost, pray, because that’s what I do,” Angela remembers. “Second, strategize. Because that’s also what I do. I’m a planner, I’m pretty organized, and I usually tackle things, and I am a force to be reckoned with when I’m on a mission.”

Angela took a seat at the table for her own treatment plan, taking into account the medical, emotional, and physical journey ahead of her. If you let it, fear can eat away at our choices till there is only one left. Angela would not let it.

“Building a support system was my next move, both personally and professionally. After discussing it with my family and very close-to-home friends, I reached out to about 10 women in our industry and shared the news,” Angela reflects. “I did

this with the intention of having a team to help me as I was about to embark on the fight of my life. If you’re going to go to battle, you need an army, and that’s what I had. Not only in my personal life, but professionally.”

“”

I was about to embark on the fight of my life. If you’re going to go to battle, you need an army, and that’s what I had. Not only in my personal life, but professionally.

Angela was blown away by the community that formed around her. What you put into the universe comes back to you, and Angela’s dedication to the industry, friends, and family she so cherished came back tenfold.

“I learned more about our industry and the company I worked for during this challenging time than at any other point up to this. The support was amazing, and I never fought alone,” Angela recalls. “Trinity Fruit’s Owners, David and Lisa White, stood with me every step of the way. I always hear from people about how great the company I worked for is, but this was the all-knowing part. They didn’t skip a beat with me, and bald as an eagle, they gave me the freedom to do what made me and my life more comfortable, allowing me to improve.”

During the course of Angela’s treatment, she underwent 16 rounds of chemo (five months), 25 rounds of radiation, six surgeries, and, as she tells me, more God running through her blood than she had ever experienced.

In April of 2023, I received an invitation to join a support group on Facebook that Angela had formed. It was managed by

Angela and her family and kept us all informed about her journey. She shared her most joyful and vulnerable moments in this safe space she created. Drawing us close to her, you could feel the love, the dynamic ecosystem that breathed life into Angela and that she, in turn, inspired for us.

In the face of our mortality, even in life, we tend to avoid many of these crucial conversations, often relegating them to the realm of the taboo. We hide to protect, but in a way, isolate ourselves from the solutions that help us heal.

In this case, Angela's community reckoned back. And so did her faith.

"My heart is overflowing with love for this industry! I experienced an overwhelming amount of love from so many people during my journey, and still do today," Angela tells me before expressing her gratitude for her professional family. "First off, our Trinity Fruit family. Not too many owners pray with you and stand with you in the trenches, but ours do. There wasn't a week (sometimes only a day or two) that went by without David and Lisa reaching out. I'm grateful to them as leaders and mentors, but most importantly, prayer warriors. They were a HUGE part of my journey. Also, Levon Ganajian, who we recently lost, would FaceTime me at every trade show so I could see my friends. I never got to tell him how much that meant to me. I would sometimes hang up and cry—not sad tears, thankful tears. Thankful that he took the time to think about how I may have felt being away."

In addition to her immediate work family, many people who worked with



“”

Trinity Fruit's Owners, David and Lisa White, stood with me every step of the way. I always hear from people about how great the company I worked for is, but this was the all-knowing part. They didn't skip a beat with me.

Trinity also reached out to Angela, about the progress of her health, and they still do.

"I was very surprised to have had a retailer ask if I was receiving the proper movement in my care and, if I wasn't, they would love to donate on my behalf to the health care providers to get them to move," Angela describes. "My cup runneth over!"

fight for her life and for the family she had built.

A special group of women in the industry also created a healing space for Angela during her treatment. Those special individuals became lifelines, gifts that emerged from her already broad circle of friends, as well as from unexpected places.

Between her faith, her community, her medical team, and a home full of flowers, Angela could not have found more sustenance to

"Those reading this will know in their hearts who they are. Our marketing posse at the time, Jeri Elsasser and Jackie Nakashian, were and are amazing," Angela starts off. "They taught me that I can do even harder things, and I don't have to do them alone. They were always there and never skipped a beat. I have always been a control freak, but they taught me that I could trust them with many moving projects. They held the fort down, and they always made me feel a part of the team even when I was so disconnected. They came with me to one of my chemo appointments and played a huge role in my support system. There was a time that I had to spend some nights in the hospital, and I still remember Jeri rushing to see me after work. This taught me that sometimes

› Right Top: Angela Hernandez leaning into her metamorphosis
› Right Bottom: Trinity Team in full support with Jeri Elsasser, Angela, Anna O'Brien, and Jackie Nakashian

you get to work with such wonderful people, but other times you have the privilege to do life with them."

Angela recently added Anna O'Brien to the Trinity squad, a teammate who joined the company in the fourth quarter with her own amazing and unexpected gifts.

"She fits in perfectly. Anna met me while I was having fun playing with blonde pixie hair and completing a sixth surgery. She has been a blessing to our team. What they each have taught me is that in order for others to grow, we can't hold on so tight. We have to allow our teammates to make wins too. Collectively, we are the best team there is!" Angela expresses.

Lastly, and far from the least, there is Michele Visser, Vice President, Clean Works.

"Michele and I go back 20 years before this industry was a thing to us. We met at a coffee and candy shop where we both worked, and since then, we have not just been friends, but sisters at heart," Angela remembers. "Michele was a lifeline, and I love her and her family dearly. I won't go into the details for the sake of privacy, but the fact that she stood with me and how she did it was remarkable."

What you learn quickly, speaking with Angela, is that the hard way home is the most beautiful, and for Angela, it was a journey of survival, reevaluation, gratitude, and shifting perspectives.





› Michele Visser walked Angela through many milestones and memories

all my doctors, nurses, and surgeons that I attribute to my faith. To me, they were just vessels being used that I was praying for. I prayed for my doctors all the time and still do.”

Angela recalls asking her oncologist, “If I were your daughter, what would you do?”

“When you personalize your care, you get the heart. I did that with all my doctors, and not just prayed for them to help me, but for their families or the care of others,” she says.

That kind of empathy—thinking beyond herself even in the hardest moments—has been a constant in Angela’s story. It didn’t just shape how she faced treatment; it shaped how she emerged from it.

Much has changed for Angela since her cancer diagnosis and the many surgeries she experienced, as well as the chemo, radiation, and recovery. Each phase reshaped her, not just physically, but spiritually and emotionally. The way she moves through life now is different—more intentional, more present, more luminous. It’s not just a new chapter; it’s a beautiful reimagining of who she is and how she chooses to live.

“It changed me in the best ways and continues to shape me every day. It slowed me down to see the blessings that were right in front of me all along. It has allowed me to lead with intention and purpose. To continue to develop relationships to not only make the connection, but to connect personally,” Angela observes. “We have no idea how blessed we all are to work in an industry that embodies the essence of the world’s healthiest lifestyles, one that brings connection to the land, food, and humanity. I hope that my role as a leader inspires others to live a life that encourages and inspires them to live—on purpose.”

Cancer affects more than just one person; it affects a community, and so can one person’s story. May Angela’s story inspire us all. 🍏

“I didn’t know the strength I had even existed. I was raised in the church and grew up believing that unfathomable strength did, in fact, exist. That belief turned into knowing. It’s not until you have to ‘walk the talk’ that you learn what that even means,” Angela says, stilling herself for a moment before she continues. “The strength I knew that I had was to never give up, to press into something until it happened, to not let anyone get in my way. A cousin of mine, Cristal, who is very artistic, once drew me a well-known quote by William Shakespeare, ‘Though she be but little, she is fierce,’ that still hangs in my guest bedroom. It’s the strength I knew as well as the strength others knew of me.”

If you approach Angela from across a trade show floor, a cocktail party, or a fall afternoon, you know she glimmers. It

is just a part of her DNA, her presence in the world, her energy. She is a fighter, but also full of love. Her compassion is boundless, and is only surpassed by her light—quiet, steady, and unmistakably hers.

“The faith I have is like the strength I didn’t know I had. It’s greater. To sum up my faith in this experience, I have these words: The joy of the Lord is my strength. I was so full of joy. In the midst of what looked like tragedy on the outside, I was filled with joy, peace, strength, and an abundance of love,” Angela shares. “I was blessed at every chemo appt. I got to meet and pray with some of the bravest women I’ve ever met. I’ll never forget the sweetest words I’d hear from the nurses when they had no idea how awful I was feeling inside. I developed such special relationships with

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WTF DO I DO WITH { what the fork }

LIV Produce Organic
Sweet Potatoes

?



SWEET POTATO BAKE

INGREDIENTS

4–5 LIV Produce Organic Sweet Potatoes (skin on)
4 tbsp unsalted butter, melted
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for brushing the skillet and basting
1 tbsp fresh rosemary leaves, finely chopped, plus more for garnish
 Salt and black pepper, to taste

Prep Time: 15 mins
Cook Time: 50 mins
Servings: 6

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Preheat oven to 350° F. Brush skillet base and sides with olive oil.
- 2** Slice sweet potatoes 3–4 mm thin. A mandoline will make short work of this.
- 3** Place slices in large bowl and toss with butter, garlic, olive oil, rosemary, salt, and pepper.
- 4** Layer potato slices in skillet in a circular pattern, overlapping the slices.
- 5** Cover skillet with foil and bake for 30 minutes, or until potatoes are soft. Bake uncovered for another 20 minutes, until the tops are golden.
- 6** Garnish and serve immediately. Enjoy!



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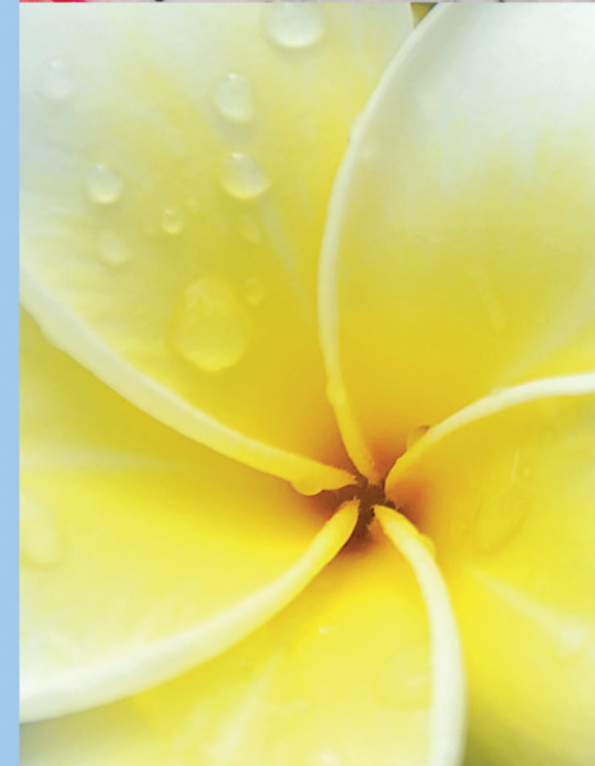
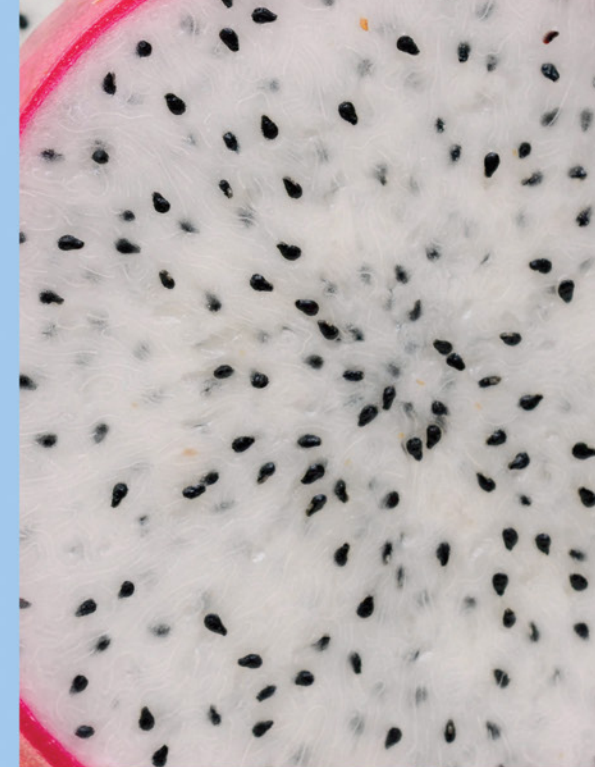
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WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Crystal Valley
Asparagus

?



LEMONY PASTA SALAD WITH ASPARAGUS

INGREDIENTS

PASTA SALAD

½ lb Crystal Valley Asparagus,
cut into 1" pieces, woody ends
trimmed and discarded

8 oz Crystal Valley Fresh English
Peas (frozen, if fresh peas are
not available)

1 pint Crystal Valley Baby
Heirloom Tomatoes, halved

½ medium red onion, diced
2 cups penne pasta (any small
pasta shape can be used)

8 oz crumbled feta cheese
1 handful baby spinach leaves,
coarsely chopped

½ oz pine nuts, toasted
Salt and pepper

LEMON VINAIGRETTE DRESSING

¼ cup olive oil
⅓ cup fresh lemon juice
1 garlic clove, minced

1 ½ tsp Dijon mustard
1 tsp salt
¼ tsp pepper

1 ½ tsp honey

Prep Time: 15 mins

Cook Time: 10 mins

Servings: 3

DIRECTIONS

- 1 To make the lemon dressing, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, garlic, Dijon mustard, salt, pepper, and honey. Set aside.
- 2 Wash and prepare your veggies. Bring a large pot of water to a boil and add salt. Add the pasta to the boiling water and cook according to the directions on the packaging (al dente). When there is about 2–3 minutes left of cooking time for the pasta, add the cut asparagus and English peas to the boiling water. Cook together for another 3 minutes. The veggies should be bright green and tender, but still a little crisp.
- 3 Once the pasta mixture is cooked, strain and quickly rinse with cold water. In a large bowl, combine the drained pasta and veggies, baby heirloom tomatoes, red onion, feta cheese, baby spinach, and dressing. Add salt as needed.
- 4 Top with toasted pine nuts and chill for at least 3–4 hours. The longer it chills, the better. Enjoy!



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the category velocity.

WTF DO I DO WITH DelFrescoPure® Organic English Seedless Cucumber ?

{ what the fork }



LOGAN SALAD

INGREDIENTS

1 DelFrescoPure® Organic English Seedless Cucumber
¼ cup red onion, sliced
3 tbsp whipped cream cheese
1 tbsp capers
3 oz smoked salmon
¼ cup dill, chopped
½ tsp MSG seasoning
1 lemon, juiced
 Everything Bagel seasoning, to taste
 Salt, to taste

Prep Time: 15 mins
Servings: 1

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Grab an entire cucumber and slice it thinly on a mandolin.
- 2 Add the sliced cucumber to your deli container.
- 3 Add in a hefty dollop of cream cheese, sliced red onion, capers, chopped smoked salmon, and chopped dill.
- 4 Season with everything bagel seasoning, salt and pepper, and a pinch of MSG.
- 5 Pop the lid on your container and shake until everything is well-distributed.
- 6 Take the lid off and dig in—enjoy!

To learn more about DelFrescoPure®, visit delfrescopure.com

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Stop by Booth #3993 at the Global Produce & Floral Show in Anaheim, California, on October 17–18 to try this out and meet Logan!

Recipe credited to @logansfwd

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VEGETARIAN FRIENDLY



A Closer Look at WINDSET FARMS® BRAVO® Grape Tomatoes on the Vine

By Peggy Packer

Bravo! At the first glimpse of the newest tomato offering from WINDSET FARMS®, I can already hear the cheers of excited shoppers.

Introducing a fresh, new tomato variety to the market, Windset Farms is broadening its On-The-Vine lineup with an applause-worthy addition: BRAVO® Grape Tomatoes on the Vine. Hand-picked at peak ripeness, BRAVO's

natural sweetness, satisfying crunch, and balanced flavor make it a standout SKU. Packaged in recyclable lidding film that supports the greenhouse grower's commitment to reducing plastic while enhancing shelf visibility, the variety's vibrant hue and alluring presentation bring increased visual appeal to the produce department.

BRAVO joins Windset's popular On-The-Vine collection, which includes

the classic CAMEO® Cherry Tomatoes on the Vine and the recently released AMORE® Plum Tomatoes on the Vine. This evolving lineup offers a unique taste experience that drives produce purchases and tomato demand, from everyday snacking to special occasions and holiday gatherings.

Three cheers for a high-quality offering bringing more praise to the produce department! Bravo, indeed. 🍅

UP
CLOSE



“I don’t normally get personal,” a few recent LinkedIn posts in my feed have stated.

The professionals sharing did have a business-related point, but the photo or inspiration for the post was sparked by their kids, significant others, or pets.

It reminded me of a recent session I attended by a social media influencer, where I foolishly assumed I wouldn’t gain much. I was incredibly wrong in the best way possible, and my largest takeaway amid multiple gems of wisdom was that business is personal. That in order to engage your audience, no matter who your audience is, you have to lift the veil a bit on your side.

People respond when they identify, feel seen, or feel connected.

“But Melissa, business is business.” Cue Julia Roberts’ Erin Brokovich shouting, “That is my work! My sweat, my time away from my kids. If that’s not personal, I don’t know what is!”

Granted, there should always be guidelines. The line that landed most with me back in that social media session was that we have the power to decide what is personal and what is private. One can be shared in order to connect, but one stays in the box.

It is a fine line between healthy boundaries and recognizing that one-third of our lives (about 90,000 hours according to Gettysburg College*) will be spent at work.

Business is personal.

That is why posts about kids, travel, and “can I be honest for a second?” see far more engagement and recognition than the savviest articles ever will. I love text, and I write because I believe in what I am sharing, but a picture is worth a thousand words. This industry is paid for by produce, but it’s worth doing because of the people.

It is personal.

If it isn’t, you’re in the wrong business. 🍅



WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Sweet Onions from Shuman Farms ?



PUMPKIN, CHORIZO, AND SWEET ONION PIZZA

INGREDIENTS

- 1 small Shuman Farms Sweet Onion, sliced
- 1 naan flatbread or pizza crust of your choice
- 2 tbsp pizza sauce or favorite red pasta sauce
- 1 cup roasted pumpkin, cut into cubes
- ½ cup mozzarella or Cheddar cheese, grated
- 3 oz chorizo, sliced
- 1 small red chili pepper, sliced (optional)
- 1 cup arugula
- Pumpkin seeds, for garnish (optional)

Prep Time: 30 mins

Cook Time: 20 mins

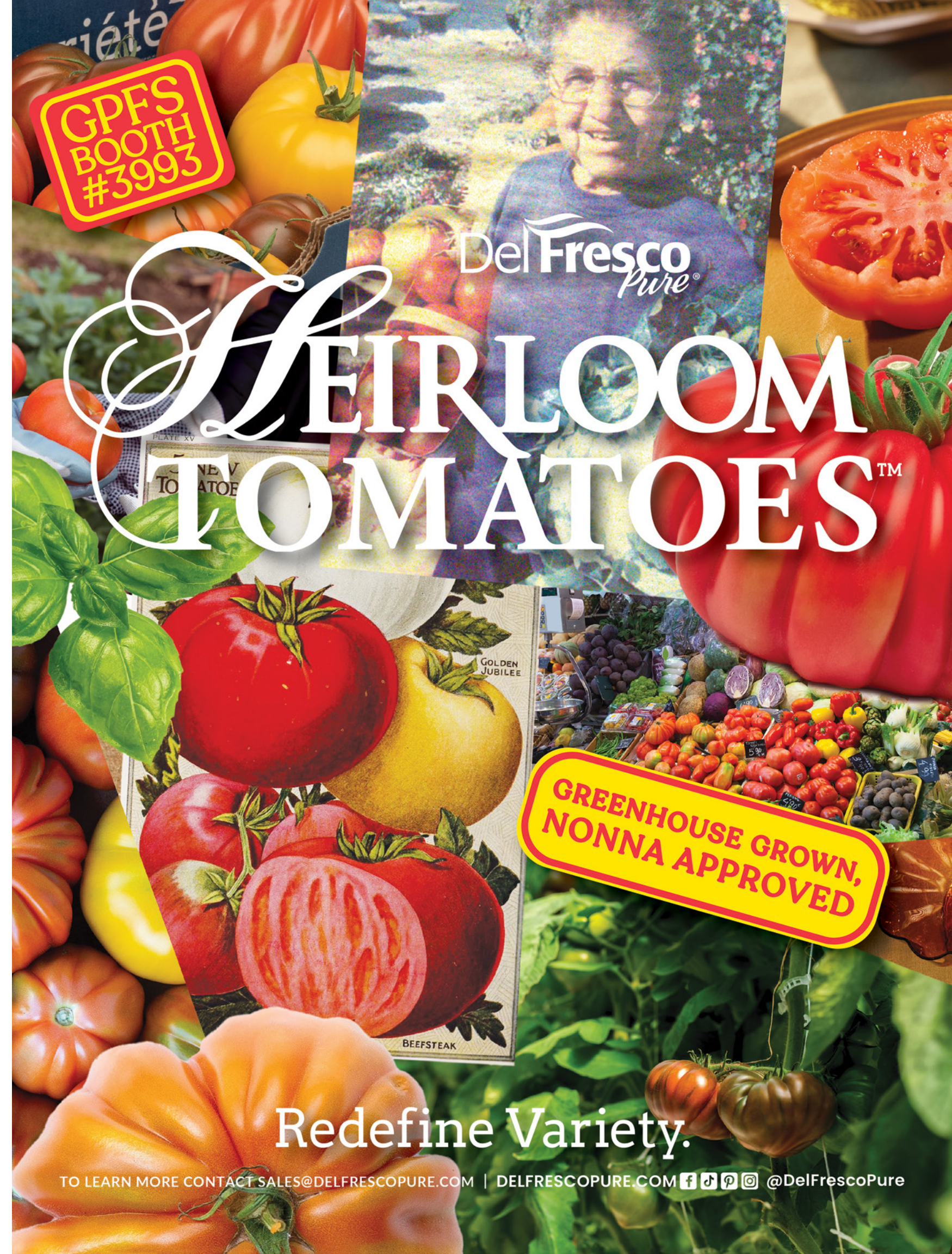
Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 350° F.
- 2 Spread sauce evenly over the naan flatbread. Sprinkle on the cheese.
- 3 Top with roasted pumpkin cubes and slices of chorizo, pepper, and sweet onion.
- 4 Place on a baking sheet and bake for 15–20 minutes until cheese is melted.
- 5 Top pizza with arugula and pumpkin seeds. Enjoy!



To learn more about Shuman Farms, visit www.shumanfarmsga.com



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WTF DO I DO WITH Bimi® Baby Broccoli ?

{ what the fork }



BIMI® BABY BROCCOLI HARVEST SALAD

INGREDIENTS

10 oz Bimi® Baby Broccoli, chopped
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 shallot, thinly sliced
3 tbsp apple cider vinegar
½ tbsp spicy brown mustard
1 tbsp pure maple syrup
2 cups faro, cooked and cooled
1 Granny Smith apple, diced
½ cup dried cranberries
4 oz feta, crumbled
 Salt and pepper, to taste

Prep Time: 15 mins
Cook Time: 10 mins
Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Add the chopped Bimi® Baby Broccoli to a hot steamer pot and steam for 4–5 minutes or until tender. Remove from the pan and let cool completely.
- 2 Add the olive oil to a small saucepan and place over medium-low heat. Add the sliced shallot and cook, stirring frequently for about 2–3 minutes or until the oil just begins to simmer. Remove from the heat and whisk in the vinegar, mustard, maple, and a pinch of salt and pepper (to taste) until combined.
- 3 In a large bowl, add the cooked and cooled Bimi® Baby Broccoli, cooked faro, apple, cranberries, feta, and the warm shallot dressing.
- 4 Toss until everything is well combined. Serve immediately or refrigerate to cool completely if desired. Enjoy!



To learn more about Bimi® Baby Broccoli, visit www.bimibaby.com

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Built on *Trust,* Driven by Innovation



*I*nnovation, partnerships, and trust.

These are just a few of the markers that define LGS Specialty Sales' 35 years in business. In the ever-changing world of fresh produce, few companies have stood the test of time quite like LGS. The importer has spent this milestone year reflecting not only on how far it has come, but how it has stayed true to the values that built it. Five key pillars continue to define the LGS team and its success: innovation, customer partnerships, trust, growth, and a founder mentality.

As Luke Sears, President, tells me, the story began in 1991 when LGS became one of the first to introduce clementines to the United States market. At the time, this was a bold idea considering few American consumers knew what clementines were.

"We recognized an opportunity in the market and moved quickly to capitalize on it," said Luke. "That willingness to act—to take a calculated risk—still drives us today."

Innovation led to the expansion of its year-round citrus program as well as the creation of the Darling Clementine brand, which helped set a new standard in citrus packaging, marketing, and sourcing. LGS was among the first to introduce the 5 lb consumer boxes before transitioning to bagged clementines. Over time, LGS expanded into avocados and other products, applying the same forward-thinking mindset across its portfolio.

"Thirty-five years have taught us a lot about striving for excellence. By working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and trusted partners in key countries, we were able to establish a year-round supply of clementines and avocados. This consistency has fueled growth in both commodities, and with growth comes new opportunities for innovation," Luke told me. "We're constantly seeking ways to improve efficiencies, explore new technologies, and better serve the needs of both our customers and suppliers."

At LGS, rewarding innovation has helped foster a founder's mentality across the entire team. This mindset keeps the company adaptable, creative, and relevant in today's ever-evolving market.

"Identifying an area for improvement led us to open our own facility, S&L Cold Storage, which allowed us to achieve true

vertical integration," Luke continued. "Operating our own warehouse unlocks even more opportunities to lead with innovation and stay on the cutting edge of new technologies. The next phase of automation at our warehouse is automatic palletization and AI grading. Looking ahead, we'll continue exploring additional AI solutions to drive great efficiency. Our goal isn't just modernization—it's to create lasting value for growers, retailers, and consumers alike."

At the core of LGS' success is also its commitment to building and sustaining deep-rooted grower relationships, some of which date back decades.

In bringing clementines to the United States, LGS relied on some key partners to introduce and build its clementine business. Two of those partners were Javier and Juan Arnal, who were instrumental in growing the business.

"Juan believed in the growing consumption of clementines in the U.S. market and guided us in the early years, drawing from his experiences in developing the market in Europe," Luke relayed. "His faith in the success of clementines is what drove us to successfully grow the U.S. demand for clementines."

Another important relationship was with Tamaya. In 2005, LGS and Tamaya planted some of the first W. Murcott variety of Mandarins in Chile, beginning a very important partnership to their shared success. Based on customer demand for this variety, LGS later expanded in 2012 with another partner, Jorge Schmidt, who is now the largest W.



Thirty-five years have taught us a lot about striving for excellence.

Luke Sears,
President, LGS Specialty Sales

Murcott grower in Chile. As this was going on, LGS was also developing relationships in Uruguay, South Africa, Argentina, and Peru.

“We consistently anticipated which countries would receive U.S. import approval and then did the groundwork of identifying top growers in those regions. It was a lot of forward thinking,” Luke explained. “We educated ourselves on the best varieties by country through visits with growers and by sharing market insights that helped them decide what to plant. We consider ourselves students of the business—constantly observing trends and developments in other markets.”

That same mindset carries through to LGS’ retail partnerships. Transparency, communication, and education are non-negotiable.

“Education, listening, and relationship growth are at the forefront of this business. It is crucial to understand others’ challenges in order to succeed and be able to find solutions together, which is why we emphasize a people-led focus today,” Lucio Rainelli, Director of Sales at LGS, pointed out. “The buy-side is eager to gain grower transparency and know where the fruit is coming from. This in-person relationship allows LGS to align with them on packaging, timing, and pricing.”


Luke added, “There is a huge integrity element to the customer service side. It is inevitable that there will be problems, but the company has developed systems and protocols that identify challenges with quality and timing so that they can work with their partners quickly to identify the best options.”

As Luke pointed out, relationships of this caliber do not happen overnight.

“We grow with our partners,” he said. “It’s never a one-sided relationship. Once the success starts to build, the trust begins to build; the true relationship builds from there. It’s the people behind the produce that keep LGS running efficiently and maintaining trusted partnerships.”

By gaining the trust of so many partners early on, LGS developed a positive reputation in the industry. It is a reputation that only comes from the team showing up and spending time with growers, retailers, and other partners.

“Growers want us to visit their farms and packing houses, listen to what we have to say about their fruit, what is going



Education, listening, and relationship growth are at the forefront of this business.

Lucio Rainelli
Director of Sales, LGS Specialty Sales

Our goal isn’t just modernization—it’s to create lasting value for growers, retailers, and consumers alike.

Luke Sears



on in the market from our perspective, and what retailers are saying,” Lucio noted. “We even send our in-house agronomists to give advice they might not get from their local agronomists.”

At the end of the day, LGS maintains the mindset that they are all in this together. Luke, Lucio, and their team remain educated on what the U.S. market wants and listen to their partners’ challenges and thoughts.

“People in the industry know our experienced network and look to us during challenges because of it. The LGS team is always involved in the conversation,” Luke continued. “Our partners trust us during challenging times due to the open, honest, accurate communication channels we have developed, and that our resources and opinions are informative.”

As LGS looks toward its next 35 years, the team will ensure the business continues to stay competitive by maintaining its position at the forefront of innovation and forward-thinking. LGS will continue to grow, maintain its stellar reputation with both growers and retailers, and develop its amazing team.

“Our legacy is the relationship we have built with suppliers, customers, and dedicated staff at LGS and our newest facility, S&L Cold Storage. This includes our partners in country who are crucial to our success and competitive advantage,” Luke concluded.

There are many aspects of the produce industry that are constantly in flux. However, one thing that always holds steady is the people who make this industry so great. With a produce-loving team and arsenal of partners in its pocket, LGS Specialty Sales is sailing straight toward its next 35 years. 🍊

WTF DO I DO WITH SnapDragon® Apples ?

{ what the fork }



SNAPDRAGON® APPLE SALSA WITH CINNAMON TORTILLA CHIPS

INGREDIENTS

SNAPDRAGON® APPLE SALSA
2 cups SnapDragon Apples, chopped
1 cup tomato, chopped
½ cup Jalapeño, chopped
½ cup red onion, chopped
1½ tsp salt
1 tsp pepper
1 tbsp cilantro, chopped
2 tbsp lime juice

CINNAMON TORTILLA CHIPS
1 bag of tortilla chips
1–2 tbsp cinnamon
3 tbsp butter, melted

Prep Time: 15 mins
Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

- 1 In a food processor, combine the tomato, Jalapeño, red onion, cilantro, lime juice, salt, and pepper. Pulse a few times until just combined—be careful not to over-blend, as the salsa should retain a chunky texture.
- 2 Add the chopped SnapDragon® Apples to the processor, reserving about ⅓ cup. Pulse a few more times until the apples are incorporated but still visible in chunks.
- 3 Transfer the salsa to a bowl. Stir in the reserved apples by hand for added texture. Add more salt, pepper, or lime juice to taste.
- 4 In a large bowl, add your chips, melted butter, and cinnamon together and toss until the chips are well coated. Enjoy!

To learn more about
SnapDragon® Apples,
visit www.snapdragonapple.com



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PRODUCE PULSE

WASTE *Not* WANT *Not*

By Anne Allen

Cross-utilization is an art form I hope more Americans can rediscover. Our ancestors were adept at using as many parts of the product as they could, knowing that it might not be so easy to come by later on down the road.

As an industry, we struggle to wrest shoppers’ attention away from consistently affordable CPG alternatives. We watch as fresh food spoils, forgotten in fridges, and see the reports from the U.S. Department of Agriculture that estimate food waste accounts for between 30 and 40 percent of the food supply.*

To compound the challenge, earlier this year, the producer price index (PPI) went up somewhat significantly**, bucking economists’ previous forecasts and suggesting potential cost hikes on the way for shoppers.

So, what’s the industry to do? Inflation, unfortunately, is outside of our control,

but we know the cross-utilization of the fruits and vegetables we grow better than anyone. If we’re able to effectively convey that buying a bag of potatoes is better than buying the CPG alternative, we’ll have won half the battle.

Suppliers have done a great job of integrating QR codes into their packaging to direct shoppers to recipes, usage tips, and more, but it will take an effort at the retail level to effectively convey the message that buying a bag of potatoes is better than buying the CPG alternative.

For example, potatoes can be used to make homemade gnocchi, potato bread, and croquettes, which won’t tire anyone’s palate, and shoppers can even save the potato skins for use in a vegetable stock.

Cross-utilization can become a fixture of American life once more, if only we do our part to help it along. 🍟



A Closer Look at Pure Flavor® Organic RedRoyals® Sweet Cherry Tomatoes

By Jordan Okumura-Wright

How do you raise the bar within the snacking on-the-vine segment? Bring in royalty. Showcasing its Organic RedRoyals® Sweet Cherry Tomatoes to retail and foodservice operators in 2025, Pure Flavor® is driving consumer loyalty with diversification and a depth of flavor the greenhouse company is known for. These crown jewels stand out in produce departments with their

distinctive brand packaging and deep ruby red color, backed by a vibrant sweetness and crisp bite. Call it rich, call it savory—the attributes are most certainly there. With their uniform size and jewel-toned appearance, Organic RedRoyals are an ideal choice for snacking straight from the pack, tossing into salads, or adding a regal touch to a wide range of recipes. Advanced greenhouse technology and a long-standing commitment to sustainable agriculture bring

quality, consistency, and consumer satisfaction to shopping baskets, menus, and school lunches. The launch of Organic RedRoyals supports Pure Flavor’s long-term strategy to expand its organic portfolio with distinctive, flavor-forward products that raise the bar in the category. Majestically sweet? I am intrigued. And I can comfortably say, with a royal “we,” everyone will be too. 🍅

UP
CLOSE



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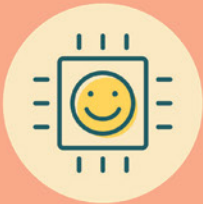
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Libations For All Occasions

TALKING PUMPKIN TODDY



By Chandler James


Photography by Reid Monsma

October is reminiscent of cool winds tussling my hair and fallen leaves caught in the threads of my sweater. It is a month that makes me feel equal parts chilly and alive. The color orange spreads across every corner as consumers young and old find refuge in the humble pumpkin.

The flavors of this colorful gourd pair perfectly with a cozy blanket and a crackling fire. Thus, I bring you the Talking Pumpkin Toddy.

One sip of this warming drink will send your senses down a trail of enchanting spices backed by the

heartly reassurance of fresh pumpkin. Though this pumpkin has no mouth, the sweet, earthy flavors speak volumes. Complemented by bright lemon juice and apple brandy, this take on the classic Hot Toddy is the perfect way to ring in October.

Shoppers may require some buy-side education, but once they realize how simple it is to purée fresh pumpkins and add them to their falltime libations, you just might have trouble keeping those displays stocked. I would suggest merchandising alongside seasonal spices and dark liquor to make the shopping list complete. 

Here’s how to make it... *Prep Time:* 1 hour *Servings:* 1
Cook Time: 45 mins

INGREDIENTS

PURÉE
2 small orange pumpkins

DRINK
1 oz apple brandy (Laird’s recommended)
½ oz rye whiskey (Rittenhouse recommended)
½ oz fresh lemon juice
½ oz Grade B maple syrup
1 tsp pumpkin purée
2 dashes Angostura bitters
5 oz boiling water
Cinnamon, for garnish



DIRECTIONS

- TO MAKE THE PUMPKIN PURÉE**
1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
 2. Cut the pumpkins in half lengthwise and scoop out the seeds. Place each half face down onto a lined baking sheet. Roast for 45 min or until the pumpkins are tender.
 3. Once cooled, peel the skin off the pumpkin halves. Add chunks of the pumpkin flesh to a food processor (in batches if needed) and purée until smooth.
 4. Set aside 1 tsp per serving and freeze the excess for later use.
- TO MAKE THE DRINK**
5. Combine all the drink ingredients, except the water, in a preheated mug. Stir to combine.
 6. Top with 5 oz of boiling water and stir.
 7. Garnish with cinnamon and enjoy!

Inspired by The PDT Cocktail Book



WTF DO I DO WITH { what the fork } Topline Farms™ Roma Tomatoes ?



FRESH PICO DE GALLO

INGREDIENTS

- 6 ripe Topline Farms™ Roma Tomatoes, diced
- ½ **cup** red onion, finely chopped
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and finely diced (leave seeds in for extra heat)
- ½ **cup** fresh cilantro, roughly chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- Juice of 1 lime
- ½ **tsp** salt (adjust to taste)
- ¼ **tsp** black pepper
- ¼ **tsp** oregano

Prep Time: 15 mins
Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1 In a medium bowl, combine the diced tomatoes, onion, jalapeños, cilantro, and garlic.
- 2 Add lime juice, salt, black pepper, and oregano.
- 3 Stir gently until well mixed.
- 4 Let sit for 10–15 minutes before serving to allow the flavors to come together.
- 5 Serve chilled with tortilla chips, on tacos, or alongside grilled dishes and enjoy!

Tip: Best enjoyed fresh but can be stored in the fridge for up to 48 hours.

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WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Westfalia Fruit
Avocados

?



PICKLECADO

INGREDIENTS

1 underripe Westfalia Fruit Avocado
½ cup white vinegar
(or apple cider vinegar)
½ cup water
½ cup sugar
2 tbsp salt
½ tbsp yellow mustard seeds
½ tsp black peppercorns
½ tsp dried chili flakes (optional)
Zest of **¼** lemon, peeled

Prep Time: 10 mins

Cool Time: 30 mins or up to 3 hrs
for full flavor

Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

- 1** In a small pot, bring vinegar, water, sugar, and salt to a boil, stirring until dissolved. Remove from heat.
- 2** Slice Westfalia Fruit Avocado and place into a clean jar. Add mustard seeds, peppercorns, chili flakes, and lemon zest.
- 3** Pour warm pickling liquid over Westfalia Fruit Avocado.
- 4** Cool, seal, and refrigerate. Enjoy!

Tip: Ideal on burgers, cheeseboards, or salads.

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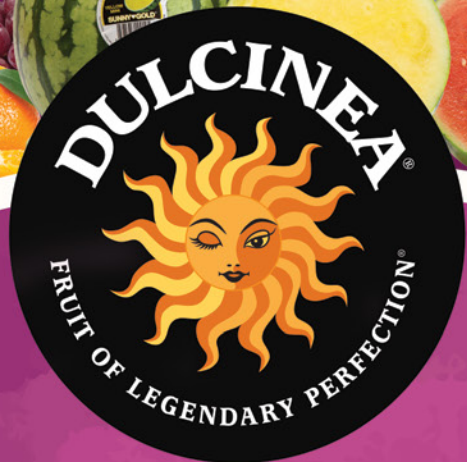
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