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HAPPY NEW YEAR! Welcome to 2017. With all of the year’s potential ahead and constant investments in our people, content, design, and culture, our team is bringing you the first issue of 2017. While we have already hit the ground running for the new year, we wanted to thank you all for the support you have given us, the innovation you have contributed to a growing industry, and the stories you have shared with us. As you can see from our February cover, we have so much to be thankful for.

Kicking off The Snack’s 22nd edition, we bring to you Mauricio Revah, CEO and General Director of greenhouse company United Farms. Nestled in Querétaro’s famous Agropark, Mauricio shares with us the challenges and also the growth opportunities of the evolving Mexican greenhouse industry.

Also joining us in this issue is Reggie Griffin, Kroger’s former Corporate Vice President of Produce & Floral Merchandising and Procurement. Reggie took to the page as a contributor this month to share the next evolution in buy-sell relationships, and how building a better rapport between the buy-side and supply-side is key.

Speaking of individuals who, time and time again, continue to bring leadership and incredible insights to our industry; we spoke with Lisa McNece Miceli, Grimmway’s VP of Foodservice and Industrial Sales, about the mentors who have impacted her career and her life.

With 2017 already having our taste buds a’ tingling, we were joined by Toronto Chef and Restaurateur Mark McEwan about his passion for food, what he values on the plate, and how produce plays a role throughout his culinary vision.

As the Mexican protected agricultural sector continues to grow more of its market share in North America and abroad, SunFed’s VP of Operations, Matt Mandel, sat down with us for a Q&A on the company’s growth in organics, what defines and differentiates the company, and what retailers might look for in a produce partner.

In 2017, we are also continuing our industry-wide mission to increase fresh produce consumption, and Bee Sweet Citrus has a story to tell. With a new, full-scale, digital campaign, the vision to help consumers #EatMoreCitrus, and the goal of bringing additional value to the retailer, the company is hitting the ground running this year.

We truly hope this 22nd issue teases your palate for the exciting year ahead. As ANUK, the creator of The Snack Magazine, celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2017, we will continue to bring you the latest trends, advancements, profiles, and a few more surprises as the new year progresses.

Cheers,

Jordan Okumura
Senior Editor
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IT KEEPS MAKING WAVES

Piñata® apples were displayed in over 7,000 supermarkets in the U.S. last season. Make waves in your produce department this season with Piñata® - the tropical apple.
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Here at The Snack Magazine, people are our thing. Check out this short list of some of the names we’ve featured, from the produce industry and beyond.

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Hello, 2017! I remember my mother telling me how fast time will fly when I get older, and well, here we are. If you’re anything like me you’ve been working for the past six weeks or so, in addition to all your regular responsibilities, to batten down the hatches on 2016 and get things prepared for this year.

With the new year underway, and to help you move from that “prep mode” for 2017 to execution, we’ve prepared a couple checklists, from the perspective of an Executive Search Agency—aka recruiter. Since there are two sides to our equation, we thought that we would address them both—Employer and candidate.

**LET’S START WITH THE EMPLOYERS’ CHECKLIST**

1. **SWOT your team.** No—don’t hit them; review your team’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Where does your team need developmental help and/or direction? Where do you need to make more serious changes? Where are the opportunities to add or improve? What threats exist that could result in you losing top performers?

2. **Evaluate your compensation program.** Does your bonus and/or commission structure appropriately reward performance? Are you in line with the industry, your area, and your category?

3. **Do you have the “bench” for succession?** Are your people cross-trained? Can everyone take a REAL vacation, or get sick, or quit, and the company won’t miss a beat?

4. **Publish your 2017 holiday calendar.** Encourage your people to take vacations and plan them early. Vacations are great “stress tests” on the organization’s ability to operate without certain people. And they’re a great excuse to cross-train. Use them!

5. **Rules, regulations, compliance, etc.** Sit down with HR and make sure that your t’s are crossed and i’s are dotted. It’s a litigious world out there!

6. **Mission and values.** It’s a whole new year! A great time to review your mission and values, and discuss them with your team. Cultures are greatly directed by a company’s mission and values. Now is a great time to recalibrate and invigorate!

7. **Commitment.** I’m not fond of “resolutions,” but I like commitments. Great people are not easy to find or hire. It’s easier to keep them and help them improve. Commit to helping your team succeed and be happy. Happy people stick around longer and do better work.
CANDIDATES AND EMPLOYEES CHECKLIST

1. Prepare. If you’re employed and going to be moving on soon, make sure that you’re prepared. Get that resume in order. Have your list of references ready, and make sure that everyone on that list knows that they could receive a call at some point.

2. Relationships are vital. Treat those around you well and do what you can to help them. Those with the strongest networks always seem to land on their feet.

3. Take care of your health. Eat right…perhaps some of this stuff we sell. Drink water, get sleep, and exercise. If you’re employed you’ll be happier, more productive, and better equipped to handle stress.

4. Have perspective. For those employed, the grass is not always greener. If you’ve had three jobs or more in ten years, then you may be the common denominator. Either you choose employers poorly and/or you have another flaw that prevents you from sticking around. Build your resume and show that you’re stable and consistent. It may be just your perspective that needs to change. For those currently unemployed people, firstly, read #1 through #4 above. If you’re looking for a job, stay positive and be patient. I realize that it’s easier said than done. I have bills too! If it’s possible for you, be choosy, and don’t take a job offer from a company that you don’t see yourself staying in for five years or more.

5. Make a friend. Recruiters are great people to know. You never know when you’ll need us or a friend will need us. We do what we can to help our clients and our network of industry friends.

6. Develop your own missions and values. For those employed or not, this is key. I mentioned companies’ missions and values in the first section. Having a clear and distinct view of your own mission and values can be very helpful in gaining perspective on your personal and professional life. Your mission is your “why,” and your values provide you a compass of sorts. If you have a goal, a desired destination, it’s so much easier getting there with a destination, reason, and a compass. On a professional level, it becomes easier to follow your employer’s direction or decide that it’s just not the right fit. And if you’re looking for a job, it’s easier to evaluate opportunities as they compare to your mission, values, and goals. I wish that I would have figured this one out 20 years ago.

So, here we are, 2017! Carpe diem! I hope to see you at one of the industry events soon.

Rex Lawrence, Founder & President of Joe Produce® was born & raised in Salinas, CA. His 30 years in the produce industry include positions in senior sales, marketing & management for some of the industry’s leaders. Rex and his team truly understand that finding the perfect “fit” is about more than matching a skill set with specific job requirements.
Cultivating new strategies and marketing programs that resonate are only a small part of what makes Alecia such a memorable force in our industry. Beyond a fiery passion for horticulture and ag, what keeps this Senior Marketing Manager at the top of her game? Find out, as Alecia shares a few of her favorite things…

1. Garden Veggies

2. Infinite Gold Cantaloupe Margaritas

3. Sunflowers

4. Outdoor Fire Pits

5. Monterey, CA

6. Dachshunds/Wiener-Dogs

7. Country Living

8. John Steinbeck

9. My Family
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During my 40-plus years in the retail grocery business, I have experienced the changing dynamic of relationships between the buy-side and the supply-side of the industry. At a point during my tenure, it became essential to me to promote more of a collaborative relationship between the buyer and the seller.

The natural power struggle remains, but a lot more can be accomplished if we acknowledge a few truths, address some fundamentals that we should all consider the norm, and promote a dialogue about the future of the business—instead of playing the game of the past. Here are a handful of axioms I have gathered, that I believe will drive us toward success and strategically position both sides of the produce transaction to thrive.

“Promote a dialogue about the future of the business instead of playing the game of the past.”
THREE AXIOMS

1. THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A HEALTHY TENSION, AT BEST, IN ANY NEGOTIATION...

Whether it is a business negotiation, one I have with my wife, or one you have with a friend, you can count on a healthy tension in any negotiation. What this means is that I am going to try and get the best deal for me, and you will try and get the best deal for you—which always creates a little push-pull or a healthy tension. At worst, it can go sideways and will become contentious, demanding, and even prickly. A healthy tension can create more space for opportunities, because it will require both sides to create better terms and more creative strategies. But, when one side refuses to relinquish any power, the relationship will always seek to fracture and will not be supported on all sides. For example, many companies have retained big consulting companies who have them “bidding” their purchases, which is the opposite of building relationships. They may feel they are getting a better price, but what about the quality, the freshness, the long-term cost when maybe all their manifests aren’t filled?

2. “SURETY OF SUPPLY” SHOULD BE A KEY COMPONENT OF THE BUY-SIDE STRATEGY...

When I was at Kroger, I didn’t worry so much about cost as much as about whether I had the right product in supply at the right stores; so that when fifty-five million customers came through the doors every week, they got what they wanted. That is where supply contracts make sense, and both sides should acknowledge that. This helps the supply-side make sure the right crops and quantities are planted so that they aren’t just growing on speculation. And it commits the buy-side to being a partner. I think most big players are concerned with “surety of supply,” because the consumer doesn’t care whether a storm in Costa Rica is affecting banana supplies; they just want a banana when they visit your store.

3. AS CONSOLIDATION CONTINUES, BOTH BUY-SIDE AND SUPPLY-SIDE COMPANIES SHOULD HAVE BOTH A LONG-TERM STRATEGY, ALONG WITH THEIR TYPICAL SHORT-TERM, BUY-SELL TACTICS...

This one is for the buyers. What is your long-term strategy? Let’s say, just for example, there are five main growers in a commodity that you are buying. If the buyer rejects even a handful of those negotiations, or those suppliers, you run the risk of not having product or being in short supply. So, what is your strategy long-term, and what short-term buy-sell tactics will you implement to achieve that?

Reggie Griffin has over 40 years of experience in the retail grocery business, both in Merchandising and Operations with the last 10 years as the Corporate Vice President of Produce & Floral Merchandising and Procurement at Kroger. Kroger’s team was responsible for both produce and floral sales for one of the largest traditional supermarket chains in the U.S., with a floral operation that is still one of the largest in the world. Reggie has been active in the produce industry, serving as the 2011-2012 Chairman of the United Fresh Produce Association (UFPA), past Board Member of Produce Marketing Association (PMA), and past Chairman of Produce for Better Health Foundation in addition to serving on several industry-advisory panels. He now owns Reggie Griffin Strategies LLC, a business committed to “Growing the Ultimate Customer” and working with clients both nationally and internationally. Reggie’s dedication and passion is to drive positive growth for his clients, coupled with long-term marketing insights.
“Taste—that is your last memory, and your most lasting memory, of a meal.”

-Mark McEwan, The Toronto Chef, Restaurateur, & retail store Owner
his business exists on a lovely level of complete chaos. It suits me,” Mark McEwan, Toronto Chef, Restaurateur, and retail store Owner, tells me when I ask him why he chose this industry, of all the possible professions. Mark laughs, “If there is anything I have learned, and really harnessed, it is how there can be control within that chaos. I’d like to believe that this is where you find passion.”

Mark loves maintaining this balance in the eye of the storm—combining the visual and artistic side of culinary creativity, with the tactile element that you can touch and feel with every bite that you create. This is where Mark lives—inside a profession that is a living, breathing thing.

Simply put: Mark was never going to sit behind a desk. “But really, I am a simple creature. At the end of the day it is about the taste, the flavor, and the stories you build around food. Taste—that is your last memory, and your most lasting memory, of a meal,” Mark shares when he talks about his vision for the plate and how he engages his guests with flavor.

When Simplicity Meets Style

A dish both creates a story and tells a story. I love this idea of flavor creating a narrative. And like any narrative, the story speaks to its creator as well.

“When I love a humble but sophisticated plate, in terms of quality of ingredients. A bit like me,” he smiles. “Fewer ingredients speak greater volumes than too many. But, within that philosophy, you need to be precise, focused, and strive for perfection.”

From main course entrees, sandwiches, and prepared foods, to retail and catering, this is a philosophy that carries throughout Mark’s culinary agenda and beyond. And that strong appreciation for relaxed, beautiful food is what has set him apart from the pack and helped him to lead it.

“I am not a big proponent of 20-course tasting menus or overly-stylized food. I like a more rustic, natural approach—but a perfect product,” Mark says.

As a classically trained chef, Mark has perfected the art of simplicity on the dish while pairing flavors, protein, and produce, to delight the palate time and time again. For Mark, the most important things are how fresh his fish is, if the scallops are 24 hours old, if the produce that came in that morning has the flavor to hold up a dish, and if the wine he is cooking with has dimension. It is all about the fundamentals. The ingredients that bring the dish together, then elevate it.

Fresh Produce: The Big Play

I asked Mark how he sees the role of produce changing on the menu and how it fits into his personal style. He tells me that he now creates a meal with less protein and more of a vegetable-base than he ever has before.

“Produce for me is the big play on the plate as a general rule, and it is the one that really defines the character of the plate in most cases. That is the way that I like to eat and I find it much more satisfying, interesting, and a much healthier approach,” he says. “I think that this is a mindset that is really taking hold across demographics and dishes, as well.”

Mark likes a pretty diverse ingredient list when it comes to what he is cooking and what he is eating. But I think it is what he does with defining a dish and cooking with simple ingredients that really speaks to his artistic skills.
Take Brussels sprouts, Mark sets the stage. Shred them on a mandolin and make a chiffonade salad. Thinly slice Brussels sprouts into steamed and sautéed shallots with bacon lardons and you create a hot, fall-type slaw. Serve that with braised pork shoulder and pair with spiced Riesling apples, and you have a huge winner of a plate.

“You take these really humble ingredients and you elevate them into spectacular finished products,” Mark says. “And there are so many wonderful produce items to choose from that can provide the foundation for a dish.”

When I inquire about a few of Mark’s favorite fresh produce ingredients, he tells me he can’t decide. I think, more-so, it’s that he refuses to confine himself to a list. I can appreciate that. But, he does drop in a comment that heirloom carrots and heirloom tomatoes are some of his go-tos.

“I think what defines a retail store is its selection of tomatoes,” Mark shares. “So, I really pride myself on our amazing and diverse selection of tomatoes at my retail store, McEwan. I look at retail and product diversity through the eyes of a chef, and that really motivates me to mirror produce with that same vision in my store.”

ROOTS

Mark was born and raised through his early teens in Buffalo, New York, which made me ask the question, what drew him to Toronto? To start, Mark’s entire family is Canadian. But in the early 1950s, his father took what Mark now calls “a long business trip,” to Buffalo where Mark was born. In 1975, the family moved back to Toronto based on work.

In 1976, Mark started his culinary career, going through the traditional course of apprenticeship—as well as schooling—at George Brown College from 1976 to 1979, with a short stint in Europe.

“Back in those days you really had to make your own map,” Mark shares. “What you really need to understand is that there wasn’t this pervasive internet we have now, or the cooking channel, and even much media and trade. And there was not nearly the conversation about food and chefs in the industry that there is today.”

Fresh out of school, Mark’s personal map took him first to Toronto’s Sutton Place Hotel, where, at 25 years old, Mark became the youngest Executive Chef to traverse an upscale Canadian kitchen. And one of few in North America.

In 1985, Mark became a Co-Owner in his first business, Pronto Ristorante, and after gaining the experience he needed from that first venture,
he took to the road alone and began building his Toronto empire.

Mark is a man of many accomplishments who rarely sits still. His portfolio includes North 44, Bymark, and ONE, trendy resto-bar Fabbrica, and upscale gourmet food retail store McEwan at The Shops at Don Mills. Mark also added McEwan TD in 2015 to the mix, and took over Diwan in 2015 as well. If you couldn’t tell, Mark is creating his own map within the topography of Toronto.

Want some inspiration at home? Mark has a best selling cookbook *Great Food At Home* and also *Fabbrica*, to tease the palate.

“I was fortunate enough to haphazardly fall into a trade that really suited my skillset,” Mark tells me, when I ask him how he found his way to food. “I was very good at it, and enjoyed the passion that it brought out in me.”

Mark pauses again and smiles, “At 19, what do you really know? I probably knew a quarter of what I do now. But, those first years in the kitchen were an amazing incubator, and I never questioned it.”

And that turned out to be a very good career choice.

“Life is simpler than you actually think it is. I believe in working hard and exceeding expectations. Go to work and have a great attitude. I hire attitude, I don’t hire resumes, and it has always brought me success,” he says. “Over-deliver. Take that expectation in life—and I don’t care what business you are in—over-deliver to your clients, do an amazing job for them, and they will always gravitate towards you. One of the best ways to grow is by emulating successful people—how they make decisions and how they define their vision.”

For Mark, one of those successful people was Chef Joseph Vonlanthen. While Mark was working on his career and studies at the Regal Constellation Hotel and George Brown College, he worked under the tutelage of Executive Chef Vonlanthen as an Executive Sous Chef.

“Joseph was a character,” Mark says. “He taught me the practical numbers side of the business, along with the artistic side. I was writing financials when I was very young, and from a chef’s perspective back in the 1980s, that was not very prevalent. It was a big leg up for me to not only learn how to cook, but to write schedules, manage people and supply volumes, as well as product orders. Joseph taught me that in addition to building my culinary ideology, I could also create a life and a business around it.”
When I ask Mark why he has grown his business in Toronto and what keeps him here, he tells me that he sees himself as an oak tree: Deep roots and ties.

It only adds to the city’s allure that Toronto is an incredibly competitive market in which to be a restaurant owner. Restaurants are prolific and real estate development is huge, creating even more space and opportunities for retail and foodservice locales to be established.

“Toronto has seen a restaurant growth rate of which few other cities in North America have seen, and with no signs of slowing,” he adds. “From that standpoint it can be a little challenging as an operator. You have to really stay on your toes all the time. Having said that, the market cleans out the deadwood, and has a way of challenging and spurring-on the people that are really good. It is a win-win from the customer’s side.”

You can imagine that with Mark’s strong background, range of experiences, and way with words, he can host one hell of a dinner party.

Ask him to create precision on the plate with the most humble of ingredients, and he brings a table to life. So, it is not a surprise when Mark tells me that if the end was near, and he had to choose a last meal, that he would keep it simple and elegant.

“An amazing can of caviar and a double martini,” Mark laughs. “That would be it.”

And I can see him, sitting maybe, in his Georgian Bay cottage where he does much of his personal cooking, planning the possibilities of another exquisite Brussels sprouts dish as another cold Canadian winter wraps around the home in February.

Then again, from Mark’s passion and drive, I believe he may conceive of every meal like it’s his last.

So, cheers, Mark. For this gift to us.
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“All of us, in the end, are trying to deliver the best quality, because pleasing the customer is how you will drive consumption.”

unFed Vice President of Operations Matt Mandel brings both professional and personal experience to the business of the company that has registered the term “Perfect Produce,” having grown up in and coming back to the industry.

Now he has helped lead SunFed Produce, as well as grown awareness and connection for the Mexican-American produce bridge as the Past Chairman of the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas.

What does this produce expert have to say on the rapidly-growing organic sector and how his company looks to help optimize the opportunity for retailers? Here’s what I learned.
How can retailers benefit by not only having a grower/shipper partner, but finding the right partner?

**MM:** The right partner is a direct link to the grower, meaning you have that much less room for errors. In produce, we understand that the margin for error is slim-to-none, and finding that partner to link you directly to the field not only makes for better, clearer communication, but that anything happening between the field to the shelf is caught more quickly and efficiently.

What’s important to understand is that, ultimately, we aren’t looking to replace the “middleman,” for the sake of replacing it, we are looking to eliminate the need for one to exist. In other words, when partnered with the right companies, you don’t need a bird dog to select the best lots or a broker to coordinate those activities for you. By having the direct link to the farm, you can cut product age as it moves through the supply chain and by doing so, you would by default end up with fresher, better product.

This is what we should be looking for at the end of the day: to ensure that you are partnered with the right people; focusing on quality, consistency, and improving the supply chain. In doing so you improve the offering, which pleases your customers, creates value, and brings them back for more.

What can eliminating the need for a “middleman” mean for a buyer and its shoppers?

**MM:** The need for a middleman inevitably boosts cost, age, or both to your product, taking away freshness and shelf-life. This ultimately leads to poorer displays on the shelf and has a detrimental effect on shrink; things we on either side of the industry want to avoid.

All of us, in the end, are trying to deliver the best quality, because pleasing the customer is how you will drive consumption.

Different companies choose different models, what is important is to try to maintain the strongest link to the farm, which is the one tied to the growing of the product. Our trademark is “Perfect Produce” which is a huge promise to our customers, and one that we painstakingly work at living up to every single day. We try our best to ensure that we are that strong link our customers can rely upon and consistently keep that connection. It builds freshness and quality into our DNA, into everything we do.
As a consistent partner to your customers, where are SunFed’s current investments focused?

**MM:** In a move to be closer to the customers we partner with, we are in the process of constructing a facility in Pharr, TX. This facility will handle our continued growth and allow us to better service our customers in the Midwest and back East. This will also help to support the growth we are seeing during the times when we are counter-seasonal to our production we receive in Nogales, AZ. We have made key investments in growth for both our conventional and Perfect Organics® lines of product to improve our own out-of-stocks and ensure we can meet the needs of our partners on a year-round basis.

Operating in organic is no passing fancy; it takes true, consistent investment (both time and money) to research and be a player in this part of the industry. We are consistently focused on organic growth, having just expanded on our offerings with new lines of organic produce that we launched in December. This has been very well-received, and we continue to look at other opportunities to continue that.

We’re also enhancing our organic labeling as a direct response to feedback from our retail partners. Better shelf displays, better brand recognition, and most importantly for our partners, a higher ring-through on the front end.

What should a buyer know about organic shopping and utilizing a company like SunFed?

**MM:** We always listen to our partners and do our best to meet those needs, and that is true across everything we offer, including organics. With room for growth in the organic sector, this is the latest area where we are bringing our commitment to Perfect Produce. We are looking to help alleviate any pain points our partners might have while minimizing or eliminating issues within the supply chain.

One of the ways we have actively looked to help partners capitalize on that growth and capture sales was looking to help clarify organic produce for cashiers in-store. Retailers were seeing an increase in organic demand and product, but not organic sales because it turns out about 40 percent of organics are mis-rung at the register.

What we brought to our retail partners to help resolve this was the organic band, which shows the name of the product, the PLU, and the scan bar. Will it ultimately cure all the problems? Of course not, but we are confident it will improve the ring-through on the front end and help customers take advantage of organic sales. It’s through small things like this that we try to be the perfect partner.

Matt Mandel in the field.
A CLOSER LOOK AT NATURIPE’S BERRIES

It is not often you hear about a company reaching its first century of growth with the level of innovation, leadership, quality, and diversity that Naturipe brings to the table. Over the past 100 years, Naturipe has brought dedication, commitment, and premium quality berries to the produce industry through its unique partnership of fresh berry growers. To commemorate its centennial celebration in the berry business, Naturipe is proud to showcase a special edition 100-year retail label that can be found on Naturipe products throughout 2017.

Since 1917, the company has been cultivating fresh fruit with the care and unwavering sustainability efforts in farming that have made the Naturipe brand a leader in the industry. This milestone has been achieved by Naturipe’s generations of family farmers across the globe, whose unyielding tenacity, passion, and integrity goes into producing every delicious, vibrant berry—the “Naturipe Way.”

Now, 100 years strong, Naturipe continues to bring value and diversity to the industry by producing healthy, delicious, and fresh berries, with the promise of a century-old name and vision. Its diverse grower base and focus on innovation, sustainability, and social responsibility ensures year-round availability of only the best “locally-grown” and “in-season globally” conventional and organic berries from Naturipe, for many years to come.
Baked into confections, mixed into drinks, or eaten by themselves, strawberries are synonymous with sweetness. Consumer demand for outstanding tasting fruit is one of the top contributors to buying behavior, and this, paired with a seemingly-insatiable desire for strawberries year-round, has driven innovation and year-over-year sales of the always-popular fruit to new heights.

On average, Americans ate 7.9 lbs of strawberries in 2014.

U.S. VOLUME SALES (BY THE PACKAGE)

-2.3% vs. YAGO
542.8 Mil Packages

2014

+5.4% vs. YAGO
593 Mil Packages

2012

+2.7% vs. YAGO
557.8 Mil Packages

2015

-6.3% vs. YAGO
555.7 Mil Packages

2013

The top strawberry-producing regions in North America are California, Florida, and Mexico.

SOURCE | Nielsen Perishables + California Strawberry Commission
IN THE U.S. IN 2016*

3,964,474 IMPRESSIONS +3.8% VS. YAGO

(Impressions measure the unique number of items selling for a product on store shelves)

U.S. TOTAL $ SALES

2016* $2.03 BIL +3.3% VS. YAGO

2015 $1.59 BIL +3.2% VS. YAGO

2014 $1.54 BIL +2.5% VS. YAGO

2013 $1.50 BIL -0.6% VS. YAGO

2012 $1.51 BIL +8.2% VS. YAGO

2011 $1.40 BIL

= $75,000,000

*Total U.S. 52 Weeks Ending 10/29/2016

(Impressions measure the unique number of items selling for a product on store shelves)
California's Strawberry Growing Regions

1. Watsonville + Salinas
2. Santa Maria
3. Oxnard
4. Orange County + San Diego

88% of the Nation's Strawberries are California-grown

1,800,000,000 ibs. OF FRESH STRAWBERRIES WERE HARVESTED IN CALIFORNIA IN 2016

4,046 acres ORGANIC ACRES
AS OF 2017 TOTAL ACRES PLANTED

1 ACRE \( \times 36,142 \)

140% DAILY VALUE VITAMIN C IN 1 CUP OF STRAWBERRIES

196,828,485 TRAYS OF FRESH STRAWBERRIES WERE HARVESTED IN CALIFORNIA IN 2016

1.8 BILION LBS. OF FRESH STRAWBERRIES WERE HARVESTED IN CALIFORNIA IN 2016

*Infographics not to scale*
Florida’s Strawberry Growing Regions

1 Hillsborough County
2 Manatee County
3 Citrus County (Floral City)

10,000+ Acres of Strawberries

Plant City, Florida, is known as the Winter Strawberry Capital of the World

Mexico’s Strawberry Growing Regions

1 Michoacán
2 Jalisco
3 Guanajuato
4 Baja California

In Mexico in 2015, 10,151 hectares of strawberries were planted.

Source: Aneberries + Florida Strawberry Growers Association
A new look for a new year—this is how Ready Pac Foods elevÂte™ brand salad line is kicking off 2017. With an upcoming program full of revamps, new products and campaigns, this premier producer of convenience fresh meal solutions, salads, and fresh-cut produce has rolled out a packaging renovation to its elevÂte™ line of organic and superfood salads. This new design brings the fresh ingredients and flavors to the forefront of each salad by increasing the visual impact and reinforcing the brand’s positioning and Ready Pac Foods’ promise of value, quality, and differentiation—along with the line’s organic focus.

A recent study by Hanover Research confirms that consumers shop by flavor and variety first and foremost, prompting Ready Pac Foods to address the salad-lover who looks for clear and concise messaging when traversing the produce department. Additional studies share that organic messaging and superfoods messaging both have a huge impact with shoppers. To top that off, recent research by AcuPoll graded the new elevÂte™ brand look with an Outstanding Rating of an A+ average overall, by consumers who noted purchase probability, uniqueness, and price value as key benefits—all making it a win-win right out the gates.

The elevÂte™ salad line comes in a range of offerings including Spinach Salad with Chicken; Spring Mix, Cranberry, and Nut Salad; Sunflower Caesar Salad with Chicken; Baby Greens and Ancient Grains Salad; Southwest Veggie Salad; Kale and Goji Berry Salad; Kale Caesar Salad with Chicken; and Sweet Greens and Chia Seed Salad.
JUICING NUGREENS
Nutritional Greens for Smoothies and Juicing

MAKE YOUR HEART SING!

A WAVE OF NUTRITION!

KICK UP YOUR IMMUNITY!

POW!!

SAN MIGUEL PRODUCE, INC.
805-488-6461
sales@cutnclean.com
**AUTUMN GLORY® SALAD WITH PROSCIUTTO & CRISPY SHALLOTS**

**INGREDIENTS**

- 2 large shallots
- ⅔ cups olive oil
- 8 cups mixed greens
- 1 Autumn Glory® apple
- 3 oz prosciutto
- 1 orange, juiced
- 2 tbsp brown butter ghee
- 1 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- Salt & pepper

**SERVINGS:** 1-2

**DIRECTIONS**

1. For the shallots, line a dish with a paper towel and set aside. Heat the olive oil in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Once the oil is warm, add shallots. Cook, stirring frequently, until deep golden brown. Using a slotted spoon, remove the shallots to the plate and let cool.

2. For the dressing, melt the brown butter ghee over low heat. Pour into bowl and whisk in apple cider vinegar. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Keep warm to drizzle on salad.

3. For the salad, core and thinly slice the Autumn Glory apple. Dip the slices in the orange juice and set aside. Place mixed greens into a bowl. Top with apple slices, prosciutto, and crispy shallots. Serve with warm dressing, and enjoy!

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This delicious recipe was developed by Christi Lazar for Domex Superfresh Growers®. Visit [www.bazaarlazarr.com](http://www.bazaarlazarr.com) and follow her on Instagram (@bazaarlazarr).
MENTORS IN THE MAKING
Lisa McNeece Miceli
By Jordan Okumura

Most of us think of Lisa McNeece Miceli as a mentor. Lisa’s is a name that carries weight across categories—someone from whom we can glean knowledge and gain insights, someone who can help shine a light on a potential path or shape its direction. And while Lisa has been a mentor to many, she too has had those relationships which have influenced her career. Whether they are words of advice at a fork in the road, or an impression that inevitably left a mark on her career, she remembers each and every one of them.

As we launch into 2017, I am joined by Lisa, Vice President of Foodservice and Industrial Sales for Grimmway Farms, who graciously shares a few of the many mentors who have had an impact on her journey.

“This industry is about relationships and respect for one another,” Lisa tells me. “I have been so fortunate to have been embraced by so many of our industry’s finest. When I think of the people who have guided me along the way, I think of so many wonderful friendships.”

Among these are Frank Padilla, Costco’s Vice President and General Merchandise Manager for Produce and Meat; Jan DeLyser, California Avocado Commission’s Vice President of Marketing; and Lisa Strube, Strube Celery and Vegetable Company’s Director of Finance and Administration.

For the man, the mentor, Frank Padilla—Lisa is lucky enough to have been impacted by him personally as well as professionally.

“Frank, aka Frankie P., is another of my closest and dearest friends,” she tells me. “When I think of Frank, knowing he is a valued customer for Grimmway, I first and foremost think of him as a wonderful friend; someone who has been there for me throughout the years. Having Frank’s support has helped me navigate my career and mold me into the person I am today.”

Lisa met Jan early in her career. As Lisa laughs, she shares with me that it was 20-plus years ago, but then, who is counting?!

The mentors

Frank Padilla
Vice President, GMM Produce & Meat, Costco Wholesale

I first met Lisa some 25 years ago when I learned that Grimmway carrots were utilized as a key component of a Mann Packing vegetable medley mix. Little did I realize that we would become lifelong industry friends. Lisa has always excelled at building relationships, both personally and professionally. I would deem her to be a ‘master networker,’ which has served her well throughout her career. She cares deeply for people, both inside and outside of the trade. When she asks you how you’re doing, she really, really means it.

I was impressed during those times when Lisa would come to me to ask my professional opinion on how to present an item or a program to a customer. She allowed me the opportunity to teach her how a buyer thinks and what is relevant at that moment in order to make that item or program successful for both parties. She possesses boundless energy to promote the produce industry, starting with her own company and then advocating in a bigger way through participation on boards and trade shows. She gives selflessly of both her professional and personal time and talent, which is evident in her commitment to the Center for Growing Talent by PMA (CGTbyPMA).
"Jan was truly a woman I admired and one that I wanted to emulate. She has always been deserving of the admiration and the respect of her peers," Lisa says, reflecting on those early days, and the journey till now. "Jan welcomed me into her inner-circle and we became good friends, each of us supporting one another on industry boards and councils. She has always been there to give me guidance when needed."

When "this" Lisa talks about the other Lisa, she smiles and you can tell she has a deep reserve of memories to pull from.

"Lisa is a sister. We are often referred to as Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam," she says, and this time it is me that laughs. "Millennials will have no idea who that is! I first met Lisa some 10-plus years ago and we became fast friends. Whether we are serving on industry boards, or traveling the country together. The two of us are always there for one another, often leaning on each other for support when needed. She exemplifies the true act of kindness. Having her as a positive role model has made me a better person."

While these three may have accompanied Lisa on the road less-traveled and the one she walks now, Lisa shares again that each and every day she is reminded of how lucky she is in her career, and how it is the people that make it so.

I have so many fond memories of Lisa McNeese Miceli over the years, and admire greatly her commitment to our industry. Lisa is one of ‘those’ people who has a special talent for making a difference, she excels at connecting people, she is both fun and caring. She successfully relates with people personally on a professional level, and gets the job done while making the journey enjoyable. Lisa is a person of her word, she gives more than she takes and there’s not a city in the U.S. where she doesn’t have exceptional restaurant recommendations. When I think of what mentor means to me; Lisa nails it…counselor, teacher, guide, advisor, supporter, pupil.

Lisa McNeese Miceli came into my life first as an industry icon that I had heard about for years. By the time we actually met, she quickly became one of my best and dearest friends. Lisa has the biggest heart of anyone I know, and is even more beautiful on the inside than she is on the outside. She is genuine, intelligent, and caring…she embraces everyone around her and does her best to give guidance and help whenever she can. She mentors everyone she meets without even realizing she is doing it. I know many people in this industry, especially women, who would put Lisa as a top influencer on their career paths.

One of my fondest memories was when she was named Produce Woman of the Year, and I looked around an overcrowded room filled with people wearing orange in support of her award. It showed me how many people she has touched over the years in our industry. She is, and will always be, my favorite ‘carrot’ friend.
#EAT MORE CITRUS

The Digital Approach.

by Jessica Donnel
Megan Stone, Food Safety & Compliance Manager (left), and Monique Bienvenue, Director of Communications (right), walking the orchards.
With the able hands of Director of Communications Monique Bienvenue and Sales Manager Joe Berberian at the helm, the company is meeting its 30 year anniversary head on with a new, full-scale, digital campaign. Through the use of online platforms, social media, interactive packaging, and beyond, Bee Sweet Citrus is heading into 2017 with a full offensive on how its citrus marketing has been done in the past.

“There are numerous ways for consumers to learn about a new product, but the way people learn new information today is through online platforms,” Monique tells me when I ask her why the company decided to take the campaign on at this stage in Bee Sweet’s history. “Research shows that social media is one of the most influential tools in today’s marketing industry, so we thought it would be a shame not to utilize its comprehensive components to educate consumers on what we’re all about—citrus!”

It all comes down to #EatMoreCitrus. This is not only the hashtag Bee Sweet uses in its popular social media campaigns across Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest, to name a few—#EatMoreCitrus aims to become a way of life. In a way that’s almost deceptively simple, Bee Sweet has found a way to go beyond just getting consumers to demand more citrus fruit at retail—which the campaign certainly does—but also ties each consumer the campaign touches back to a commitment to a healthier lifestyle. The goal is to infatuate the shopper with the Bee Sweet Citrus brand, while also promoting to a consumer who will continue to buy more citrus over their lifetime.

BEE SWEET’S MARKETING TEAM IS DEDICATED TO PROMOTING OUR PRODUCT IN A WAY THAT’S BOTH BENEFICIAL FOR THE CONSUMER AND THE RETAILER.
- MONIQUE BIENVENUE

“In the produce industry—one that’s been a long time coming. While giants in the consumer packaged goods industry have long intertwined their campaigns with technology and digital avenues, for some reason, the same strategy is slow to take hold in our industry. In fact, until very recently, the connection between produce marketing and technology has been suspiciously scarce. So, you can imagine the trepidation a company might have undertaking not just a digital campaign for the very first time, but one that is multi-faceted across several different tech arenas. Bee Sweet Citrus, however, is undaunted.

Bee Sweet’s marketing team is dedicated to promoting our product in a way that’s both beneficial for the consumer and the retailer.
- Monique Bienvenue

Monique Bienvenue (left), and Megan Stone (right), in the Bee Sweet Citrus orchards.
“The #EatMoreCitrus campaign focuses primarily on educating the consumer and the retailer as to why citrus should be a staple in a consumer’s diet, as well as how its versatility can cater to an eater’s culinary needs,” shares Monique as we talk about the strategy behind the campaign. “Bee Sweet’s marketing team is dedicated to promoting our product in a way that’s both beneficial for the consumer and the retailer. By helping to create a loyal customer base, we can help drive sales towards our retail partners.”

But Bee Sweet is not on this formidable mission alone, thankfully. One of the cornerstones of the #EatMoreCitrus campaign comes by way of a little help from friends at Produce For Kids (PFK), which is exactly what it sounds like—a company dedicated to the mission of getting children eating healthier via marketing fresh produce. Here you may be starting to see the natural connection.

Since it joined forces with PFK in early August of 2016, Bee Sweet Citrus has been one of the fundamental member’s of the “Power Your Lunchbox Pledge.” Through the partnership, Bee Sweet has incorporated the Power Your Lunchbox logo on all its social media platforms and certain packaging. In return, PFK has helped take up that digital marketing charge by highlighting the company’s healthy meals and tips on its website, social media platforms, and through influential food bloggers. And yes, that #EatMoreCitrus hashtag is a major part of the success on both sides of this ever-growing coin.

“Working with [Produce For Kids] is great because they’re just as passionate about health as Bee Sweet Citrus.”
- Monique Bienvenue

“I was on Twitter one day when I came across some information that Produce for Kids had shared; the content I saw promoted the health benefits associated with fruits and vegetables, so naturally, I immediately began to research the organization and what they do for the community,” Monique recalls about her first experience with PFK.

“Being that the #EatMoreCitrus campaign had just begun, I was curious to see how the company promoted items and gave them a call the second I read about their Power Your Lunchbox Campaign. I wanted to see if there was a way for Bee Sweet Citrus to get involved in the project and, fortunately for me, there was!”

In just the short time of the campaign, between August 8th and September 23rd of 2016, more than 21,600 families and classrooms took the pledge to pack a healthier lunchbox. This more than doubled the 2015 count of 10,000 pledges.

“Working with PFK is great because they’re just as passionate about health as Bee Sweet Citrus,” Monique continues. “During the campaign, PFK provided us with registered dietitian approved recipes that were later shared on all of our social media outlets and even on Valley Delicious, a live television program that showcases recipes utilizing products from the Central Valley.”

That Valley Delicious mention brings me to another point: Did you know Monique moonlights as a television star? A Fowler, California business through and through, Bee Sweet and Monique have partnered up with Central California news station, KSEE 24, for its foodie-focused segment, Valley Delicious. Valley Delicious was created as a way to give California’s Central Valley consumers a more well-rounded understanding of where their produce is grown, providing both delicious recipes and an educational platform for viewers in line with California’s farm-to-fork movement.
Valley Delicious is the one show that connects consumers with local farmers,” explains Monique as we talk about this key part of #EatMoreCitrus. “Informative, educational, and a reminder to support our local economy, this of course ties back to encouraging consumers to learn more about their food, and reminds them to keep grocery dollars close to home.”

What I think is so unique about #EatMoreCitrus, is that it not only educates the consumer, it inspires them as well. By promoting recipes that require specialty varieties and educating the consumer on the numerous health benefits associated with citrus, Bee Sweet is encouraging consumers to be more creative in the kitchen. And that brings me back to the question that all produce marketers have at the back of their mind: What advantage does this return to the retailer?

Once that creativity begins, chimes in Joe, consumers can then demand these varieties at retail, instantly making Bee Sweet invaluable to both retailer and consumer.

“Being that Bee Sweet Citrus is a one-stop-shop for ALL California citrus commodities, we really wanted to show consumers that there’s more to citrus than just your everyday orange; there’s Cara Caras, Blood Oranges, Pommes, Meyer Lemons, etc.” Joe tells me. “While our marketing team has plenty of information regarding these exotics and could communicate that in more traditional ways, we wanted to make sure that the consumer and retailer alike had easy access to this information. The #EatMoreCitrus campaign provides consumers with comprehensive information regarding citrus varieties, allowing for a more pleasant shopping experience and sparks inspiration in the kitchen, and giving consumers a reason to continuously shop at their preferred retailer.”

In order to help consumers differentiate between varieties such as Cara Caras and Navel Oranges, Bee Sweet also plans to introduce new language on its packaging that will help ease the confusion between varieties with similar appearances. These talking points will also help educate consumers on the health benefits associated with citrus, which is the foundation of the #EatMoreCitrus campaign.

“While the #EatMoreCitrus campaign is a digital campaign, it has spearheaded some of the projects we’ve been working on in terms of marketing to the retailer,” Joe notes. “Just as #EatMoreCitrus highlights the health components and versatility of citrus, so too do the POS sheets and any additional material we provide to our retail partners to help promote our product.”

At the end of the day, the expertise from Bee Sweet’s campaign lies in this: consumers are more willing to buy product that they are familiar with, and retailers can better sell product that does well with the consumer. By making sure each member of the buying chain is educated, the Bee Sweet brand is well on its way to becoming a go-to citrus brand for everyone. ☺️
A CLOSER LOOK AT THE CRIMSON TOMATO™

Fresh for the New Year, Lipman Family Farms is ramping up its 2017 promotions with the company’s ever-popular Crimson Tomato, featuring a new campaign and a new look. The Crimson variety has been specially bred for its signature deep red color and unique flavor. The flavor of the Crimson Tomato is more intense than other varieties in the marketplace and offers higher lycopene content than standard tomatoes. The variety also presents a juicy homegrown eating experience and a solid center that holds firm when ripened. All of these characteristics have helped Lipman drive demand across the country.

This unique, eye-catching look for the Crimson Tomato reflects a company-wide refresh spanning across its entire produce portfolio which includes a redesigned logo, packaging, and a website that boldly enhances the visual identity for consumers. The key messaging promotes an authenticity that communicates “The Best of Nature” across platforms, as well as Lipman’s “family farms” heritage dating back to the 1930s for the Immokalee, Florida-based grower.

With a robust R&D team that is constantly analyzing feedback from customers and developing products that meet their needs, Lipman is also generating excitement around its tomato program by adding the favorable attributes of Crimson Tomatoes into all of its varieties—round, roma, grape, and heirloom.

Always keeping the tomato category on its toes, Lipman has even more to come as the new year gets underway.
From United Supermarkets, Brookshire’s, and H-E-B, to Ahold and Whole Foods, the Viva Fresh 2017 program is well underway, bringing in a breadth of retail formats from independents to national chains as the 3rd annual trade show and convention returns to Austin, Texas. Slated for April 20–22, 2017 at the Austin Convention Center and Hilton Hotel, this event cultivates an intimate trade show environment with a buyer-to-supplier ratio that has lifted the Viva Fresh event to the top of the convention list. In just two short years, the expo has catered to sold out exhibitor space and hotels, and increased buyer attendance by over 70 percent.
Keith Durham, Certified Category Manager, Fresh Foods, Brookshire’s, spoke to me about the draw of the Viva Fresh Expo, noting, “What I like about this regional show is that it is like a mini PMA. Even though it’s getting larger every year, you can still walk the show floor and spend time with companies that can add to your business,” Keith said. “The educational sessions are quick and easy to attend; not to mention, the content is very good. With our company being based in Texas, Viva Fresh gives us an opportunity to find new vendors to expand our ‘Local Grown’ community.”

Back by popular demand, the theme for the Viva Fresh Expo is again celebrating the “Gateway to the Americas.” It’s no secret that Texas and the Rio Grande Valley play an important economic role in the distribution of fresh produce. From 2007-2015, fruit and vegetable imports from Mexico through Texas have grown an eye-popping 107 percent, according to the Texas International Produce Association (TIPA), and in 2015, Texas crossed 210,000 truckloads, with that number expected to grow to as much as 358,000 by 2023, according to analysis by the Texas A&M Center for North American Studies.

Joseph Bunting, Produce Business Director, The United Family®, joined me and discussed his excitement around 2017’s Viva Fresh, “I am again looking forward to attending the Viva Fresh show in 2017. With the show moving back to Austin, it should be a great venue right in the heart of Texas. This will be the third year United Supermarkets has attended the Viva Fresh show and we are looking forward to another great show with the opportunity to strengthen our current Texas and Mexico partnerships while developing new ones.”

It is easy to see why Austin is such an ideal locale for the event. Not only is Austin known as the live music capital of the world, but it’s also a great foodie city. In fact, Travel & Leisure named Austin one of America’s Top Cities for Foodies as part of the magazine’s reader’s survey. Downtown Austin includes a vibrant shopping, dining, and entertainment scene. The famous 6th Street Entertainment District, Warehouse District, and 2nd Street District are all located within walking distance of the Austin Hilton Hotel and the Austin Convention Center.
Tommy Wilkins, Director of Sales for Grow Farms Texas and member of the Expo Steering Committee, added that the return to Austin and the entertainment options the city provides should produce some good times, as we all well remember from 2015. This year, he noted that Viva Fresh is committed to educational sessions and speakers that challenge the status quo and excite participants to drive healthier choices while promoting consumption of the crops that are grown or travel through this corridor.

“Produce buyers have lot of choices battling for their time,” Tommy said. “We want to offer retailers an event that will give all involved a wonderful experience that is well-worth the investment. Feedback from both the buy-side and supply-side of the industry tells us that this event is the place to be.”

Bret Erickson, TIPA President & CEO, shared, “We know we’re doing something right when buyer attendance has nearly doubled from year-one to year-two, and nearly 100 percent of those retail and foodservice attendees report they are satisfied or very satisfied with the event, with many commenting this is one of the best events they’ve attended. Additionally, over 90 percent of all attendees report that they plan on coming back to join us again in 2017.”

So, what are some highlights that attendees can look forward to at Viva Fresh 2017?

The Viva Fresh committee is planning several exciting educational seminars on Friday, April 21st, with a wide range of relevant industry topics and expert speakers. This will include developing more hands-on experiential learning with actual produce displays, sampling, and showcasing products for review.

The Friday Night Welcome Reception on April 21st, will be held at Maggie Mae’s. Serving up tunes since 1978, Maggie Mae’s is a local legend in Austin with the largest rooftop view on 6th Street and the entertainment district. This venue is also within walking distance from the Hilton Austin Hotel.

Because everything is bigger in Texas, expect more big ideas and big flavors at the 2017 Viva Fresh Expo. Mark your calendars now, as the show is already filling up fast!

See you all at Viva Fresh 2017 in Austin, Texas!
Maroon Carrot
The Healthiest Carrot in the World

Did you know Maroon Carrots have 40% MORE beta carotene and antioxidants to prevent cancer?

Excellent for juice
Great in salads
Sweeter & crunchier

Honey Sweet Onions
Guaranteed Mild!
Enjoy raw or grilled
Perfect for Burgers, Salads, and More
Year-round supply

J&D PRODUCE is thrilled to introduce limited quantities of our Honeysuckle Reds, a truly sweet red onion everyone can enjoy. Honeysuckle Reds don’t overpower the palate and have consistently tested well below the pungency of other sweet red onions currently on the market. With a more enjoyable eating experience and less pyruvic acid, Honeysuckle Reds provide the ideal balance whether enjoyed on their own or in recipes.

J&D Produce, Inc
Edinburg TX, 78540  P.O. Box 1548
(956)-380-0353
By Melissa de Leon

“By using robot technology, we can eliminate the need for a lot of hand labor,” Dr. Richard Hassell says as he shares with me the story of a technology he developed; taking a big idea and turning it into a strong, concise summary.

Robotic hands are unfolding as technology’s grip on produce becomes ever-more efficient. Now, a process that has helped to build stronger plants and deliver more durable produce is taking a bite out of that cutting-edge. This new technology, developed by Dr. Hassell, Clemson Cooperative Extension’s South Carolina’s State Vegetable Specialist, is the robotic method of plant grafting.

“We’ve been looking at grafting now for about five or six years,” Dr. Hassell explains. “Overseas they have such limited ground that they’ve always had problems with soil-born diseases, so they have been grafting for years. The whole idea of grafting is to combat soil-born diseases by using two types of rootstock.”

Here in the U.S., the grafting method is still relatively new in our industry, and Dr. Hassell has a very good explanation as to why.

“In the United States, we’ve always had the opportunity of rotating land, plus the use of soil fumigation. But both of those are now becoming a major concern to our growers because they are running out of land to rotate. So, they are running into soil-born diseases because they can’t fumigate their ground,” he shares.

But plant grafting is both labor-intensive and time-consuming, translating to a high expense for U.S. growers. Dr. Hassell and his team set out to change that as our resources shift.

“The whole objective of our grafting procedure was to reduce the cost in the United States. Grafting is normally done all by hand, and it can be very expensive. So one of the aspects we were looking at was how to reduce cost for our growers overall,” Dr. Hassell elaborates.

And that is what the team achieved. Quicker, consistent, and automated, this plant grafting robot offers a cost-saving solution...
for growers looking to naturally strengthen categories susceptible to soil-born diseases.

To give you some idea of how many categories in the produce industry could be affected by such technology, some of the plants grafting is used on include key categories like watermelons, cantaloupes, tomatoes, and peppers; all susceptible to their roots collapsing as they work to grow in the soil.

So, what does the robot do to help? Well, in just seconds, the metal “hand” grasps, slices, and pushes together the rootstock of the fruit and a gourd, grafting a hardier, resistant rootstock.

Once the robot has done its work, the plant is placed in a “high-humidity healing chamber.” The environment encourages the graft to heal, sending out new roots to the plant as it mends over one week, strengthens, and is then planted again.

All to make a stronger, better product, as naturally as possible.

“Overseas there are robotic machines to help grafting, but the problem is you have to recalibrate them almost on a daily basis, which takes a lot of time,” Dr. Hassell shares when I ask about the robot’s inception. “The robot itself doesn’t cut off enough of the rootstock each time, so you get a lot of regrowth occurring. We developed a process and patented it here to eliminate that regrowth.”

With a method that Dr. Hassell explains as “blinding” the root, he and his team were able to keep plant roots from growing any further. Then, after getting a hold of a bot to play with, the team was able to make modifications that birthed its now-patented technology.

“This new process we developed helps graft the plants at
a very high rate, so we eliminated any regrowth problems they were having with the plant in addition to cutting down labor,” Dr. Hassell shares.

The robot can produce between 300 and 600 plants per hour, depending on the speed setting, with a take rate of about 98 percent. This is a consistency Dr. Hassell says growers are hard-pressed to find in the U.S. because long-term hires for the job can be difficult to keep.

“The initial cost of the robot is about $30,000, but finding and keeping consistent labor to do this job in the United States is nearly impossible,” he elaborates. Dr. Hassell has seen human hands that can keep up with the technology overseas, but the road it takes to get there seems to be both an economic and cultural separation.

“To see laborers keep up with the robot, like some can overseas, it has taken them 20 to 30 years of doing this eight hours a day for a very low minimum wage,” Dr. Hassell shares. “Here in the United States, where minimum wage can range anywhere from $12 to $15 an hour, it’s difficult enough, and an even greater problem is getting them to stay and do so consistently. This is an art that you have to do correctly each time, something a robot can do successfully without error.”

So, while the initial cost for the bot with Dr. Hassell’s technological modifications can cost around $30,000, it is an investment that could see a long-term payoff for some, and short-term for others.

As he tells me about some of the advantages grafting offers, it occurs to me that the technology could offer something to the organic industry as well. Dr. Hassell confirms my hunch enthusiastically.

“The organic industry doesn’t use any fumigation at all, so the grafting procedure is all organic certified,” he says, adding that Mexico and Canada, both with sizeable greenhouse operations, use grafting frequently as well.

“When I ask about room for growth with this technology being introduced and spreading, Dr. Hassell is quick to respond.

“We hope!” he says with a laugh. “Currently, there are no watermelon cultivars, for example, that are resistant to soil-born disease, and we don’t see it happening in the next several years. And there are tomato soil-born diseases that they cannot combat by breeding. Grafting has been able to bring back a lot of heirloom tomatoes because they are susceptible to soil-born diseases, exciting many of the organic industry who can now develop and grow those tomatoes through grafting and developing resistant rootstock.”

Still extremely new, Dr. Hassell explains that the technology has only been available for about a year, but has been very well received.

“I have a lot of growers with smaller acreage already using this technology for their own grafting, but the larger they get, the more it makes sense to go with operations that do grafting exclusively,” he shares. “Right now grafted plants are being produced by several large outfits. Currently, there is one out of California and one out of North Carolina.”

So, what is next for the robot doctor? This project in particular was funded the last four years by a federal grant—the specialty crops grant—and the team is reapplying to take its craft to the next step.

“Because we are continuing to develop our own type of technology to make our own rootstock material in the United States, instead of it coming from overseas, we are currently embarking on another grant through the same agency,” he says.

It seems as though a scientist’s work is never done.
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From scouring to find solutions, to basic growing dilemmas, to embarking on the next chapter of greenhouse-growing in Mexico, this company is making a lot of waves as it hits its first decade in what could be considered the country’s capital for glass house agriculture.

Revah-Lutionary

The Rise of a
Glass City

BY MELISSA DE LEON
Querétaro, which I am quickly beginning to know as Mexico’s “city of glass,” may be one of the country’s smallest states, but also one of the more mighty forces in greenhouse innovation in Mexico.

Sitting amongst them and quickly climbing to the top is United Farms, which operates five different locations within the technologically-advanced Agropark.

“We are one part of the many different types of projects that operate independently,” Mauricio Revah, the company’s Chief Executive Officer/General Director, tells me, calling United Farms one of the larger of the 10 to 12 companies that make up the Agropark. And the company has an eye on growing even further, with 150 productive hectares of protected agriculture projected to be built by 2026 for the Energy Greenhouse Park, 15 of which should be built by 2017.

While the company is currently focused on tomatoes and cucumbers as its flagship products, Mauricio tells me that he and the team are eager to grow, with many other opportunities on the radar.

“We are certainly open to other options that we have not done yet, but we don’t currently have anything solid in the works. Some things we are looking into are organics and strawberries to see if we can develop those in the near future,” he shares, which piques my interest in what else the company might be zeroing in on.

Last February, United Farms was awarded 5th place amongst the top 100 growers in the world, only ten of which were nominated for the Tomato Inspiration Award for 2015 in the field of Crop & Process Technology. And with state-of-the art tech platforms that are well-known in the ever cutting-edge of the Agropark collective, it’s no wonder that Querétaro is said to be one of the highest tiers in glass house tech for Mexico.

“It is the people behind the collective,” Mauricio tells me when I ask how the area has come to be such a force to be reckoned with. “The background of the people here fuels our production. In order to be more complex and more integrated into the market, we need to expand on what we know. Experience from people with state and educational training, to those who have grown up working in ag, gives us more knowledge to be more innovative.”

Mauricio himself has held the position of Chief Executive Officer since United Farms’ inception in 2007, bringing with him experience in assessments, operations, and in the design of agroparks and other greenhouse projects—with a focus on high-tech.

He offers not only an impressive portfolio in the glass city of Mexico, but also a mix of education from Cornell University, including a Bachelor’s in Economics and a Masters in Ag Economics.

“After Cornell, I started with a lettuce project and realized the overall challenge in ag was water,” he tells me, explaining how he set out to provide a more consistent source of the elixir of life, as well as electricity and gas.

“Mexico’s water operations are a complex process,” Mauricio continues, giving me a lesson in Mexico’s ag history that ended up with a need for farms to have their own wells.”
Experience from people with state and educational training, to those who have grown up working in ag, gives us more knowledge to be more innovative. —Mauricio Revah

rules and regulations are not very transparent, making it a challenging situation for growers.”

And so, with engineering knowledge and determination to better this situation for the country’s industry, Mauricio set out with a team and was able to make a structure that gave them more control in growing.

Tracking down the right materials to put the perfect formulas together turned out to be quite an undertaking, prompting the team to get creative. “We ended up having a contest to search for a piece of glass,” he laughs as he explains one part of finding the right pieces to the puzzle. The winner of that contest then became the “glass” in glass house growing, helping to develop the now Mexico powerhouse Agropark.

Mauricio moved through a number of technology-driven ag projects—from controlled environment, to a hydroponic deep flow project, then venture capital farms, and solar—before finally landing in United Farms’ lead seat.

But if there is anything I have learned in this industry, the people matter just as much as the product, and
But of course, it always comes back to culture. And that is something Mauricio tells me was key in crafting United Farms.

“We want to be different in things like organic, but if we have the wrong culture, greenhouse, or operation... we want to make sure we collaborate with another group of greenhouses,” he explains, calling Agropark and United Farms’ role more of a cooperative.

So, what is next for this ever-growing network?

“We are taking the experience of the last ten years to make the energy for a greenhouse park that generates electricity to conserve energy and use its own engine to produce in the greenhouse,” Mauricio shares, calling it an energy project similar to the construction of the Agropark.

On a broader scale, the greenhouse designer and leader says it is trying to learn and adapt to changes in the U.S.

“We are always looking to refine what’s going on down here,” he says, giving just enough for me to be curious of what else might be in store.

For the man who helped create a city of glass, what more can we expect?
Spring is just around the corner, and the winter weary are dreaming of warmer weather in days to come. Thankfully, this year you can bring the heat back early with the Smoky Citrus cocktail from Sunkist.

This fiery libation starts subtly sweet, builds to a smoldering crescendo, then finishes with a peppery kick in the pants. Bold, spicy mezcal takes center stage while blood orange juice elevates the smokiness in this zesty beverage. And, if you’re like me, you will take liberty with the jalapeño flavor, and need to wash it all down with a Zantac®.

The sanguine citrus offers a smooth, velvety alternative to more acidic orange juice as the foundation of this flavorful cocktail. Known for its unique flavor, the deep red juice contains sweet overtones akin to raspberries or cherries. As you make the recipe, ensure the juice is freshly squeezed, as it tends to become more bitter the longer it is exposed to air. It’s the perfect drink to get your blood pumping, reminiscent of a campfire on a summer night.

**Ingredients**

- 1 oz freshly-squeezed blood orange juice
- ½ oz jalapeño-infused tequila
- ½ oz mezcal
- ¾ oz Italian apéritif
- ¾ oz Italian digestif
- Pinch of salt
- Dried blood orange wheel

**Directions**

1. Measure the blood orange juice, jalapeño-infused tequila, mezcal, Italian apéritif, Italian digestif, and salt into a cocktail shaker.
2. Fill with ice, cap, and shake.
3. Pour into an old fashioned glass.
4. Garnish with a dried blood orange wheel.
No one knows how to inspire the full meaning of these words quite like the Southeast Produce Council (SEPC), especially considering the near-constant bustle inherent in each facet of our industry.

As attendee registration begins to fill for this year’s upcoming Southern Exposure conference and trade show, the SEPC has infused our penchant for innovation with the same inclusive vibes that keep the produce-minded coming back year after year. And, with a mystical new theme—“The Magic of Produce”—to animate the event, long-time veterans and first-time attendees alike will be sure to glean some glimmering produce nuggets from the three-day span.

Guaranteed to add to the sparkling allure of this year’s show, is the reputation SEPC has built amid some of our industry’s leading retail and foodservice operators. Amongst those estimated 450 buy-side attendees, comes US Foods—steward of culinary trends and lasting innovations.

"US Foods is planning to attend Southern Exposure in Orlando this year, as we have every year since the inception of the Southeast Produce Council. The Southeast region has always been an important part of the US Foods organization and this event, therefore, has been extremely beneficial for our produce team. This year is no different as we are planning meetings, tours, and meals to complement the events the SEPC has planned to take place during Southern Exposure," Frank Swanson, Senior Manager of Produce Procurement at US Foods, assures me.

So, first off, what’s new? To the industry’s delight, SEPC is bringing produce straight to the “most magical place on earth,” Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. Directly inspiring Southern Exposure’s enchanting theme, “The Magic of Produce,” this new locale promises to fulfill all your adult and child-like tendencies at once.
The conference, accommodations, and subsequent activities will all be hosted at the Walt Disney World Dolphin Resort to give attendees an extensive and centralized experience as they navigate the best and brightest offerings in fresh produce, cultivating meaningful relationships along the way.

As Charlie Eagle, Vice President of Business Development at Southern Specialties and Southern Exposure veteran, tells me, he is proud to attend the show on its home turf, but in new digs with even furthered opportunities. “Southern Exposure is our favorite show of the year. The event attracts retailers and foodservice distributors from across the nation to enjoy the Florida sunshine, and see the bounty of the Southeast and what is new in the industry,” he says. “Having the show in our home state also gives us an opportunity to invite attendees to enjoy some ‘Southern Specialties Exposure’ at our Pompano Beach headquarters.”

Southern Exposure is also increasing the number of booths to boost the luster of its show floor. This year’s event will boast 283 booths under one roof, a slight jump up from last year’s 275 stops. The increased number is one that future event-goers can continue to expect, as SEPC has announced a cap on its featured booths. This solidified amount will both give attendees a plethora of booths to frequent while still maintaining the same visceral connectivity for which Southern Exposure is known.

Putting an interesting spin on the magical possibilities the event offers, comes a new keynote speaker to the event. Willie Robertson, star and Executive Producer of famed reality TV show Duck Dynasty, will now round out the event with his colorful takeaways on entrepreneurship and building an empire.

Expect even further opportunities for fun as SEPC continues to run with the fanciful nature of its magical theme throughout the exposition.

“

We can’t wait to welcome our members to Southern Exposure in Orlando this year. The people are what make the SEPC such an impactful organization, and it’s those same people that make Southern Exposure a best-in-class conference and trade show. We are so grateful to our sponsors, as well as this year’s retail and foodservice attendees, who make Southern Exposure the unique and friendly conference that it is.

”

Teri Miller
SEPC President & Category Manager for The Fresh Market

“

This year’s Southern Exposure is shaping up to be one of the most quality shows the produce industry has seen. It will offer more networking with a manageably-sized show room floor, and more educational opportunities that will provide our membership with a clear vision of where the industry is, and also where it is heading.

”

Steve Pinkston
SEPC Secretary, Southern Exposure Chairperson & Senior Sourcing Manager for Walmart
Southern Exposure promises to be an exciting event as our industry comes together to gain the latest insights and promote our businesses while enjoying the warm Florida weather. Shuman Produce is looking forward to building stronger relationships and sharing our story of family, farms, and legacy.”

SEPC assures that while change will occur every year for Southern Exposure—inspiring and emulating the very innovation it seeks to showcase from its attendees—these progressions will be in unconventional ways rather than just size. As always, from the very roots and foundation of SEPC itself, Southern Exposure is once again encouraging not only new connections to catalyze industry members forward in their business-minded endeavors, but to provide unlimited chance rendezvous that can extend beyond just the professional world into meaningful lifelong associations.

So, with some Florida sun as a winsome backdrop after a long winter, and new opportunities to marry a Mickey Mouse vacation with business, who would want to miss out on this bewitching fun?

“Southern Exposure will imbibe the possibilities of magic with the possibilities of produce throughout the duration of the event. From its expanded workshops and activities all the way through to a certain number of secretive surprises, this event is sure to leave a memorable mark.

But, as always, the top of the docket for SEPC and Southern Exposure will be the continued focus on treating the event, and the produce industry at-large, as a diverse and intricate family. A multitude of networking events, paired with the innovative nature of the varied workshops offered, will provide attendees with endless moments to touch base and connect with each other—both personally and professionally.

“The SEPC’s Southern Exposure event is one of the most important annual traditions for our family-owned business,” John Shuman, President of Shuman Produce, tells me when I ask him what makes the expo a premiere event for fresh produce leaders. “As a long-standing member of the council, I have always held its goals of networking, education, and community in high regards. The 2017

PROJECTED ATTENDANCE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Retail &amp; Foodservice</th>
<th>Booth Spots</th>
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<td>450+</td>
<td>283</td>
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Overall

2,500+

So, with some Florida sun as a winsome backdrop after a long winter, and new opportunities to marry a Mickey Mouse vacation with business, who would want to miss out on this bewitching fun? 

Schedule of Events

MARCH 2017

9th Thursday

Tom Page Golf Tournament

10th Friday

Educational Workshops

- Fresh from the Farm Field Trips: featuring Red Sun Farms, Southern Valley, L&M Companies, and The National Mango Board
- The Commissioners Corner
- David Sax: Author and Food Trend Specialist

Southern Roots Luncheon

featuring Alison Levine

Opening Gala

11th Saturday

Keynote Luncheon

featuring Willie Robertson

Exposition

Gator Moon Closing Reception

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There's nothing quite like asparagus. Often associated with the fresh flavors of spring, the plant's delicately flavorful, supple-yet-crisp spears are the product of a demanding process.

Though asparagus plants are tremendously hardy and capable of being grown throughout much of North America, the plant's tender, edible stalks can quickly become woody and their natural sweetness begins to break down immediately once harvested.

Fresh asparagus has had a slew of outspoken admirers throughout history—from Julius Caesar, to John and Abigail Adams, to Charles Lamb—who once remarked: “Asparagus inspires gentle thoughts.”

Steamed, simmered, roasted, battered, grilled, or raw, this versatile vegetable is sure to tip scales in produce departments and satisfy in kitchens across the country.
During the latest 52 weeks, value-added asparagus accounted for 1.3% of total value-added vegetable dollar sales and increased dollar sales compared to the previous year. During this period:

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<tr>
<td>Average Retail % Change vs YAGO</td>
<td>-3.6%</td>
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Major Growing Regions

Largest growing regions in the Western Hemisphere:
1. Peru
2. Mexico
3. California
4. Washington
5. Michigan
6. New Jersey

- Caborca, Baja, San Luis, Irapuato

Washington (Late April–July)
California (April–May)
Baja California (October–December)
Baja California, Sur/Constitution (October–December)
Irapuato (July–September)
Peru (September–December)

Source: Most statistics attributed to Nielsen Perishables
Total U.S. 52 Wks Ending 10/29/16
INGREDIENTS

2 lb fresh asparagus
1 tbsp high-quality olive oil
1 tsp Kosher salt, for sprinkling
½ tsp freshly-ground black pepper
2 oz shaved Parmesan cheese, to taste
¼ tbsp chopped toasted walnuts (optional)

SERVINGS: 1-2

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Break off the tough ends of the asparagus.
3. Place the asparagus on a baking sheet lined with parchment or foil.
4. Drizzle with olive oil, then toss to coat the asparagus completely.
5. Spread the asparagus in a single layer and sprinkle liberally with salt and pepper.
6. Roast the asparagus for 25 minutes, until tender but still crisp.
7. Shave Parmesan cheese onto asparagus, and top with toasted walnuts, to taste.

For more delicious, healthy, & easy-to-prepare recipes visit www.growerdirect.net.
If you eat Thai food as often as I do, or simply stay apprised of culinary trends, you’ve probably encountered a dish colorfully titled “Drunken Noodles.”

Drunken Noodles, or Pad Kee Mao as it’s called in Thai, can certainly make an eater euphoric. Though the dish’s boozy name may be misleading—no alcohol is used in preparing Drunken Noodles—it can be intoxicatingly good. A heady mix of flavors and textures await the diner who orders this dish—and it regularly comes packed full of produce as well!

This range of differing tastes means no two orders of Drunken Noodles are quite the same. It also means that an ingredient as well established as soy sauce can be a source of contention.

Sweet or savory soy sauce varieties? Or both? A pinch of sugar to aid caramelization? Basil is a must, but there’s very little agreement about the variety of basil. Holy basil is supposedly preferable; other Thai basil varieties are acceptable, and Italian basil varieties can be used in a pinch—though you might incur the wrath of purists.

Rice noodles are typical, but some versions of the dish even feature instant noodles or Italian pastas; fettuccine, linguine, or spaghetti may form the base of some more eclectic versions of Drunken Noodles.
Theories on the origin of the name “Drunken Noodles” abound. Some conjecture that the entrée’s spiciness may prompt diners to drink conspicuously. Another plausible account says the noodles simply appeal to a tipsy palate. Another: It’s great hangover food.

Perhaps the most vibrant origin story suggests that the recipe was cooked up by a reveler who, after a night’s debauch, drunkenly combined all the ingredients he could gather together in an epic, one-wok dish.

Though a staple in Thai restaurants, it’s thought that Drunken Noodles have their origins in Chinese street-food and were popularized by Chinese immigrants to Thailand and Laos.

Thai influences eventually found their way into the dish. The fragrant herbs and sweet, piquant peppers that we associate with Thai food staples elevated the satisfying everyday fare into an exemplar of the possibilities of “fusion cuisine.”

A heady mix of flavors and textures await the diner who orders this dish.
INGREDIENTS

1 small butternut squash
(peeled, seeded, and cut into 1-inch pieces or 3 cups pre-peeled squash)
2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
½ tsp ground cumin
Pinch red pepper flakes
Salt and freshly-ground black pepper
½ cup greek yogurt
2 tbsp tahini
1 tbsp lime juice
1 ½ cup halved Mystic Treat™ grapes
¼ cup coarsely chopped cilantro

SERVINGS: 4

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Line sides of a cookie sheet with parchment.
3. On the sheet pan, toss the squash with the oil, cumin, red pepper flakes, and salt and pepper.
4. Spread into a single layer and roast until tender and browned, 25–30 minutes. While squash is roasting, whisk together the yogurt, tahini, and lime juice.
5. Remove from oven and let cool 15 minutes.
6. Season with salt, pepper, and 1-2 tablespoons of water.
7. Mix the grapes and cilantro in with the squash, and transfer to a serving dish.
8. Drizzle with the dressing and serve squash with the remaining dressing on the side.

For more delicious, healthy, & easy-to-prepare recipes visit www.naturespartner.com.
DECONSTRUCTING TRENDS

by Eva Roethler

with Karen Caplan
Why has vegetable-centric cooking and eating suddenly become a trend?

**KC:** Actually, it isn’t “all of a sudden.” Like all other food trends, the veg-centric trend has been gradually simmering for years. It has just now reached the boiling point.

A food or cuisine reaches “trend” status at the confluence of media attention, chef attention, and supermarket or CPG attention. But with fresh produce, a trend rarely happens overnight. Take kiwifruit, for example—it took 18 years to trend. Although our company, Frieda’s Specialty Produce, brought it to the U.S. from New Zealand in 1962, it wasn’t until the 1980s that it really took off, with the help of Wolfgang Puck and Alice Waters, who put it on their menus.

I have witnessed the ebb and flow of produce trends over the past 55 years. It took kale almost 20 years to achieve its celebrity status, starting in 1996 with a poem in the Los Angeles Times called “Oh, Kale.” Turmeric is another “gradually, then suddenly” trend example. Frieda’s has been marketing fresh turmeric root since 2003, and only in the past year or so has it reached a tipping point as the next superfood, appearing everywhere from Google’s Food Trends Report to Parade Magazine.

Could you give an example of what backlash against a trend looks like?

**KC:** When kale was a unique menu item, or made popular for juicing, consumers welcomed and seemed “surprised” to see kale featured. But when kale shows up at your local fast food restaurant (e.g. Chick-fil-A, Wendy’s, or McDonald’s), consumers react with kale backlash! “Kale…really?” When Kale became ubiquitous, consumers got kale fatigue.

How would you define a trend versus a movement?

**KC:** Some trends are like fads, are fickle, and may die out by the end of the year. Some longer lasting trends suffer a backlash like kale has. Luckily, I believe that putting more vegetables on our plates is not just a flash in the pan, but our new way of living.

More specifically, I would equate a true trend to the beginning of an ocean wave. It starts low and slow and gains momentum. As the wave swells… it becomes a movement. An example would be Meatless Monday, which started as a campaign to reduce meat consumption and save water. But really, it was indicative of the underlying trend of eating vegan or vegetarian. Now, nobody blinks an eye if you go vegetarian once a week, and the movement has become the norm. Root-to-stem cooking really started with the trend of chefs wanting to make their vegetable dishes look more rustic and to be unique. That trend ended up merging with the movement around reducing food waste.
This year alone, Forbes picked turmeric as the item to watch. Baum + Whiteman called out vegetarian and vegan “butchery.” Pinterest noted the rise in jackfruit pins over the course of 2016. Whole Foods pointed to purple food, particularly purple vegetables like cauliflower, asparagus, and Stokes Purple® sweet potatoes.

Interestingly, back in 2013, Frieda’s declared it “the year of purple produce.” So, you might say we were a bit ahead of our time.

What are the reasons behind this produce-centric movement?

KC: Almost ten years ago, Michael Pollan told us to “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.” Today we are finally heeding his call with veg-centric eating.

Here are three reasons for this focus:

1: Vegetables are Photogenic
Health benefits aside, we eat with our eyes first, and our eyes are attracted to vibrant colors. Food Instagrammers are using fresh, colorful fruits and vegetables in their compositions, because—let’s face it—produce is just prettier to look at than meat or grain. Brilliant purple sweet potatoes dotted with bright red pomegranate arils. A crudité plate featuring gorgeously-red beet hummus and a rainbow variety of radishes like Easter egg and purple ninja. In this social media world we live in now, one great photo can boost a trend.

2: Vegetables Make You Look Good
We’re an image-conscious culture of instant gratification. Sure, we can preach about how eating more fruits and vegetables will make us live better longer. But honestly, we are not all eating healthy to extend our lives—we’re doing it for the now. When you eat well, you feel well. And when you feel better, you look better. So, we want to look good now, to feel good now. We’re going to eat fruits and vegetables now to look good in our selfies.

Just look at the recent report from NPD Group: Millennials and Gen Zs are driving growth in fruit and vegetable consumption. They probably do it because they are supposed to, but they also eat more veggies because they want to look good—whether in their swimsuits, or on Snapchat.

3: Vegetables Are Comfort Food
Speaking of eating well and feeling good, comfort food is still a popular trend although the focus has shifted to include more fruits and vegetables. Spiralized vegetables are replacing pasta for a lighter, yet still comforting, dish. Vegetable-loaded soups are more satisfying than sipping bone broth by itself. And more people are discovering that vegetables like hard squash, celery root, Sunchokes®, and sweet potatoes are hearty, comforting, and filling.

How do you keep your “ear to the ground” on produce trends and movements?

KC: Read, read, read! Everyone at our company is empowered to share what they notice. And it’s not always about ingredients. For example, we noticed the popularity of “bowls” as main dish meals a few years ago, and began to integrate this into our recipe development. Funny thing, though, anyone remember the fast casual restaurant Yoshinoya from 30 years ago? That’s probably when the “bowl” trend first started!

How can retailers and restaurateurs utilize this information?

KC: It really depends on the philosophy of the enterprise. If a retailer or restaurateur creates a culture that respects and appreciates innovation and creativity, then they can more easily utilize this information and make it actionable.

So, as we move through the next year with a focal point of fresh, keep your eyes towards the horizon.

And if you take a page from Karen’s book, be sure to set your sights a little farther.
New Absorbent Mini Containers
Over 10 day shelf-life for fresh-cut fruits and vegetables

Fresh-R-Pax Food Safe Absorbent Packaging technology is used to improve the freshness and extend the shelf life of fresh-cut products such as celery, peppers, onions, cucumbers, sliced and diced tomatoes, and a full variety of fresh-cut fruit items including watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew melon, and pineapple.

- Ideal for school lunches — kids love them
- Great for convenience stores and schools
- Tamper evident — peelable lidding film
- Fun to eat — no dripping
- Available in 2.5 oz., 4 oz. and 6 oz. sizes
- Excess fluid is collected in the absorbent pad sealed to the bottom of the container

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A BRAND FULL OF FLAVOR

Every flavor provides a sensory experience that distinguishes itself. A tomato’s flavor is a consumer’s most immediate and visceral experience with the variety. NatureFresh™ Farms developed its TOMZ™ Snacking Tomatoes to meet consumer expectations that when they enjoy a snacking tomato in July, October, or February, that the flavor is plentiful and consistent each and every time. Why? Because the same grower produced that same tomato from the same farm regardless of the season.

The cherry tomato is an impressively versatile tomato – eat raw, cooked, grilled, sauced, shrilled in salads or as a snack. Makes an ideal lunch companion! A salad and cooking mainstay. NatureFresh™ red cherry tomatoes are layered little delights. Always bursting, savory the flavor that takes you through subtly sweet to briny, to a tangy burst.

This winter season, give your customers flavors that will renew interest in the category, reduce shrink, and build confidence in consistently flavorful Ohio greenhouse grown tomatoes 12 months a year.

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CPMA - Booth 107, Toronto, ON, May 10-11
UNITED FRESH - Booth 3231, Chicago, IL, June 14-15
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