

Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

the

SNACK

ISSUE 103 MAY 2026

A GIANT STEP FOR FRESH

BERRIES WITH BENEFITS

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BOSS

California Giant Berry Farms, pg 68

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AndNowUKnow and Deli Market News



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ONE MORNING, I WAS TALKING TO JAY SCHNEIDER ABOUT HIS RETURN TO ALBERTSONS, and we both reflected on how wonderful it was to catch up, to hear each other's voices and learn what had unfolded in one another's lives over the past several years. Before long, we were talking about the industry—because how could you not?

At the heart, Jay said, it is still the same. It is still founded on a deep sense of partnership. On showing up when times get tough. On celebrating the victories when they come. The fundamentals haven't changed, even if the pace has.

He used the words of a past colleague to describe today's experience: We are in an "informational blizzard." That phrase struck me as so appropriate. At times, the very resources and tools designed to make our lives easier and more efficient can leave us isolated in a storm, unable to see more than a foot in front of our faces. Data flying. Messages pinging. Dashboards updating. In the middle of it all, we can lose sight of the person on the other end.

That blizzard can keep us from picking up the phone. From walking down the hall. From meeting a coworker, a partner, or a customer face-to-face. Jay told me he still loves to pick up the phone—even though texts, emails, and other digital platforms often try to make phone calls feel obsolete.



I do believe today's technology carries incredible advantages and benefits. It has expanded our reach, sharpened our insights, and streamlined our operations. But perhaps one of its greatest unintended outcomes is this: It has made human connection more premium, more intentional, and more treasured than before.

Maybe that's what a return to connection really looks like. Not abandoning the tools, but remembering the foundation. Not resisting progress, but reinforcing partnership. Because at the heart of this industry—still—is the relationship. And no information blizzard, no matter how intense, can replace the power of hearing someone's voice on the other end of the line. 📞

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

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MOON
and
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FEATURES

ALBERTSONS

THE IF LIST

Shawn Peery is a steadfast cheerleader and champion of the industry, bringing a dynamic personality to his role as National Vice President of Produce. Sneak a peek into this creative mind with our latest “What *IFs*”...



RED SUN FARMS™ BREEDING THE FUTURE

The greenhouse grower is serious about reinvigorating categories and securing volume for the North American supply chain. Find out what's to come from Harold Paivarinta, Leona Neill, and Paul J. Mastronardi...



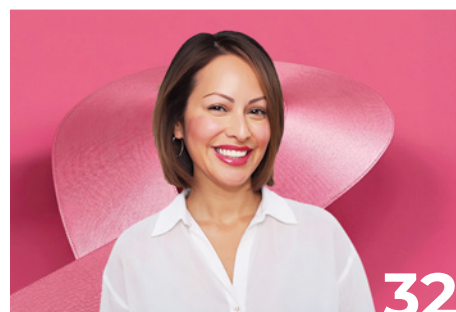
PERI & SONS FARMS® LAYERS OF FLAVOR

Jessica Peri pulls back the layers of a multifaceted onion program that prioritizes flavor consistency and environmental responsibility, and why other industry operators should be doing the same in 2026...



CALIFORNIA GIANT BERRY FARMS

A GIANT STEP FOR FRESH
The supplier lives up to its name as it seeks to shift the fresh paradigm with an offering that takes “superfood” to a whole new level. Joe Barsi, Kyla Oberman, and Markus Duran discuss...



TRINITY FRUIT COMPANY A PEACH WITH PURPOSE

Angela Hernandez brings both purpose and passion to all that the operation does, including telling the story of how *Peaches for Pink* transforms summer stonefruit into a purpose-driven retail experience...



NORTH BAY PRODUCE A FARMER-FOCUSED TRANSFORMATION

Divulging the details of the first-ever brand transformation in its history, Brian Klumpp shares how the company's refreshed approach leans into consistent feedback from consumers and retailers...



FRESH EXPRESS TRANSFORMING AN AISLE INTO A DESTINATION

Globally inspired salad kits deliver category growth, margin opportunities, and shopper engagement. Fabian Pereira underscores innovation, velocity, and retail performance...



NEW PROTEIN CHOPPED KITS



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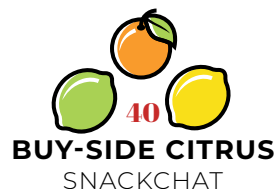
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ISSUE 103

VOICES OF THE INDUSTRY



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ALWAYS SWAMPED: IS IT YOU, THE ROLE, OR THE SYSTEM?

SNAPSHOTS



TRUE TO TASTE

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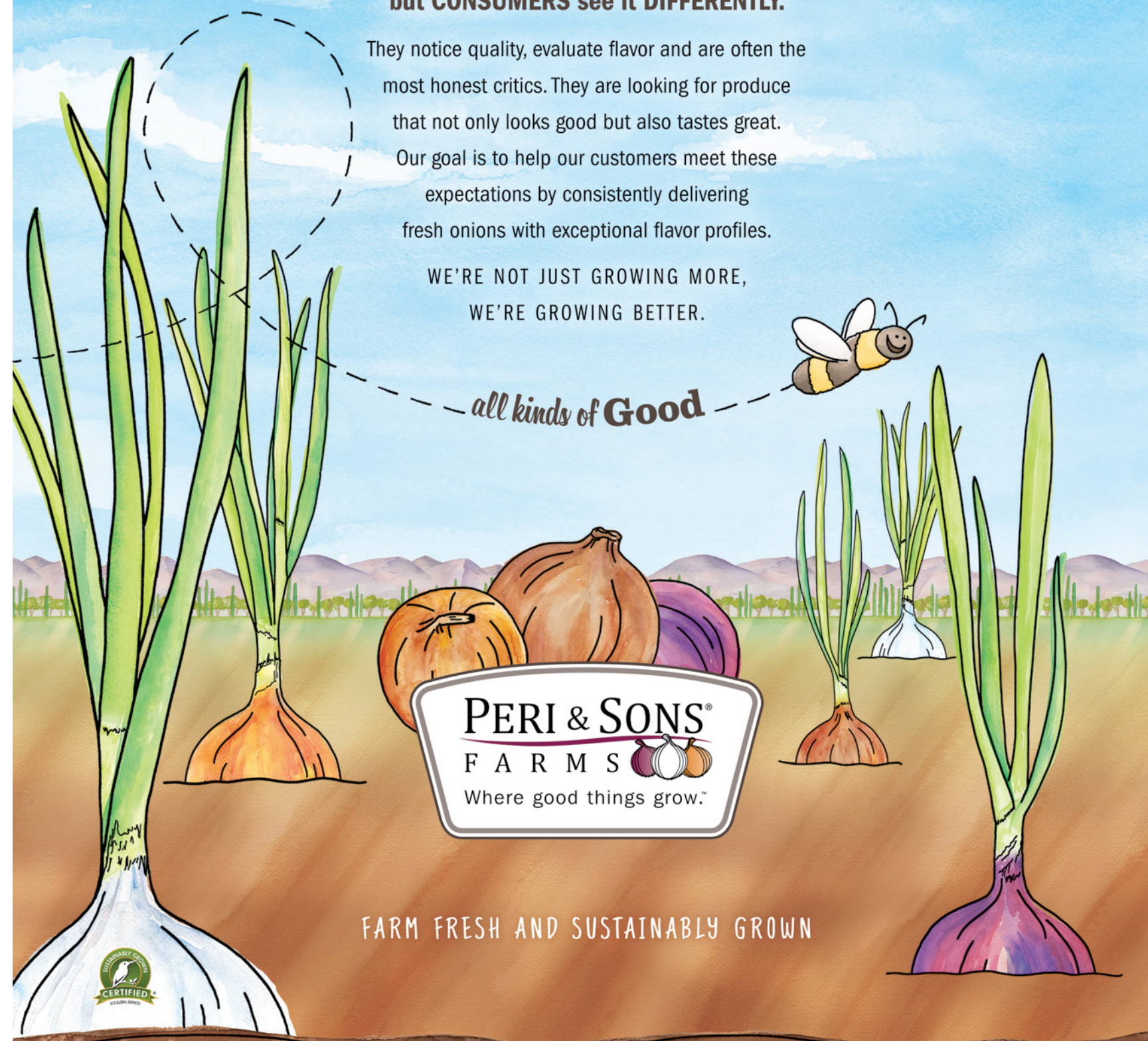
FOCUSED on FLAVOR

It's **EASY** to THINK of an **ONION** as just an **ONION**, but **CONSUMERS** see it **DIFFERENTLY**.

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» The **IF** List «
Shawn Peery
 National Vice President of Produce,
 Albertsons Companies

With Melissa De Leon Chavez

As the creator of the “Perfecting the Art of Fresh” social media appreciation series and National Vice President of Produce for Albertsons Companies, Shawn Peery is a steadfast cheerleader and champion of the industry. Especially of those behind the scenes, from the soil to the shelves, who make it all possible. With such an adoration for the produce life, I was excited to pitch him a few “What IFs,” and Shawn kindly obliged...

» **IF you could have any actor play you in a movie, who would you want?**

Sean Connery (as I was named after him).

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

I can't imagine myself in another industry—I love produce, from our growers to our produce departments.

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

Jesus—although I would not be able to eat dinner.

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

The Chosen; I know it's not a movie, but a series. It is life-changing.

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

Remembering names.

» **IF you could join a musician, dead or alive, on stage to sing along or play an instrument with, who would you choose and why?**

Paul Stanley, as he's one of the greatest frontmen in rock and roll.

» **IF you could have one perfect skill, what would it be?**

Playing guitar.

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

The birth of my children. Each day had a huge impact on my life and who I am today.

» **IF you had to choose one song to be the soundtrack of your year, what would it be?**

“These Days” by Jeremy Camp.

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

Spend more time with your family and strive for a true work-life balance.

» **IF you could bring one mythological creature to life, what would you choose?**

A unicorn—very majestic animal.

» **IF you were to open your own business, what would be your specialty or trade?**

I would have a local produce stand. 🍎



The Latest Additions
 to the 4Earth Family



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Breeding the Future

By Anne Allen

To create something worthwhile requires effort.

Taking shortcuts to success could delay or even hinder innovations, and I think the team at Red Sun Farms™ would be apt to agree with me.

For the past year and a half, two important projects have been budding to further distinguish the greenhouse grower: relaunching the Chef's Collection™ mixed medley tomato line and pioneering strawberry genetics research and development.

These projects are monumental in scope and design, a testament to the passion that Harold Paivarinta, Vice President, Sales and Business Development; Leona Neill, Director of Marketing and Packaging; and Paul J. Mastronardi, Business Development and Account Manager, bring to reinvigorating categories and securing volume for the North American supply chain.



“...we wanted to innovate and create a mix with intent.”

Harold Paivarinta,
Vice President, Sales and Business Development, Red Sun Farms™

Innovating with Intent: Chef's Collection™

When the Tomato brown rugose fruit virus (ToBRFV) first appeared, seed and genetics companies focused on varieties that were ToBRFV-resistant. This led to flavorless varieties and ultimately, as Harold explains to me, low-quality medley packs. But with ToBRFV in the rearview mirror, the focus has once again shifted to breeding for positive traits that enhance the eating experience.



Harold Paivarinta,
Vice President, Sales and Business Development,
Red Sun Farms™

“We’ve seen the medley category become a catch-all,” Harold illuminates. “There was no rhyme or reason. We conducted enough market research to know there was no real pattern in that mixed tomato clamshell. For example, whatever someone was surplus at a specific time could end up in a mix. For Red Sun Farms, we wanted to innovate and create a mix with intent. Theoretically, we’re not sweeping the floor and throwing a random mix together.”

As Chef's Collection germinated in the minds of Harold and Leona, the two dove into varietal exploration with breeders across the globe. Important data flowed in, as Leona and Harold sought to find the tomatoes that delivered on flavor, color, and eating experience.

“How can we best utilize these varieties that are bred for attributes that deliver?” Leona posed this important question early on in



Leona Neill,
Director of Marketing and Packaging,
Red Sun Farms™

the process of varietal selection. “How can we elevate this category and give it a purpose?”

As the two watched how certain varieties performed in the ramp-up to commercialization, narrowing down the variety selection was no easy feat. Harold pauses here to point at a rendering of his desk from last April. Open pallets sit on top, showcasing tomatoes that range from neon-yellow to deep red. Not a single inch of his desk is visible. Not a grain of table unused. This image was more than a rendering; it was a metaphor of their commitment to the process and to Red Sun's customers.

The Value of Partnership

Perhaps one of the most unique aspects of the creation of Chef's Collection has been the level of input from retail partners. In fact, they've been on the ground floor in creating this line.

“Every opportunity we had to see our retail partners, samples were always in tow,” Harold shares. “We saw enough momentum that by the time mid-summer came, we made the commitment to create our interactive booth just to highlight these varieties at Southern Innovations last year.”

In the early stages of trialing, opinions were sought from between 15 and 20 retail partners. By the end of Southern Innovations, the team had received over 100 retail survey responses.

“It was pretty daring for us to go out there and have an exhibit space where no product was visible at all. Literally just us in our lab coats, inviting people back to evaluate products,” Harold says, chuckling. “But the industry gave us tremendous feedback that we could use as actual data.”

The company took a bold approach to understanding which

tomato characteristics and attributes appealed to attendees. Before they even tasted the product, they were asked to do a blind taste test that posed a simple question: What are you expecting to taste based on sight alone? After the blind taste test, attendees tried the tomatoes and shared their impressions.

The data collected at the show provided tremendous feedback, confirming the project's direction.

"We assembled that data to outline what consumers visually expect from these tomatoes and the actual tasting results, and shared that with our partners. For example, 'These are the characteristics you're looking for, and this is what you actually tasted.' We also validated what our retailer partners are asking for. It ensured we were on the right track," Leona adds.

Storytelling in Action: When Packaging Takes Flight

With confirmation that they were headed in the right direction, the team decided to give the tomatoes in the Chef's Collection medley personalities.

"Our first foray into giving a tomato personality was Sweetpops, and I think Sweetpops was a home run," Harold tells me. "So, we had established that template. These tomatoes might be genetically linked, but they still have their own characteristics and attributes that make them stand out."

The first step in giving them personalities was to name the tomatoes in the Chef's Collection. To do so, Harold and Leona gathered team members and asked them to individually write biographies for them.

"It was shocking to see how closely everybody's biographies aligned with mine and Harold's vision," Leona notes. "At that point, we knew we'd nailed down the personalities based on the flavor attributes and the pack."

After finalizing the character design with a trusted partner, each Chef's Collection tomato personality came to life. Ranging from bright and bubbly to sophisticated, each Chef's Collection tomato in the assortment is a burst of flavor:

- *Turn Up the Tasty!*
- *Taste the Sunshine!*
- *I Don't do Ordinary!*
- *Go ahead! Try Me!*
- *Next Stop: Delicious*



One of the elements that makes the Chef's Collection relaunch even more exciting is the packaging partner Red Sun Farms secured a deal with. As Leona explains, typical printing is restricted within a set of plates, but this new printer utilizes digital technology.

"Before, we didn't have the capability to create multiple impressions without creating multiple plates. With the capabilities of this packaging supplier, we can now run multiple prints on Top Seal, labels, and bags," she emphasizes. "We've developed 11 images in total, so when these packs run in a sequence, every case that goes out to our customers will end up with a different combination of those 11 impressions. It will never be the same."

The goal of this packaging design is to drive consumer engagement and highlight the intentionality of each variety.

"When it gets to the shelf, the idea is pretty simple. If you're a consumer that resonates with SweetPops, then you're going to gravitate to the SweetPops key focus," Leona outlines. "If you're all about the yellow tomato or her personality, you might gravitate there. We were trying to create a collect-them-all feel."

And Harold emphasizes one final point.

"There are no losers in this pack," he says. "Only winners."

Strawberry Breeding Program: A Greenhouse Solution

Red Sun Farms' interest in reinvigorating categories extends beyond medley tomatoes. For two years now, it's been developing a strawberry program to answer the growing demand to find a strawberry variety suited to North American greenhouse cultivation and supply chains.

To do so, Red Sun Farms is working with Heritable, a Google Moonshot spin-out company, and CIV, the second-largest strawberry breeder in Europe, which is based in Italy.



Paul J. Mastronardi,
Business Development
and Account Manager,
Red Sun Farms™

"We went and embarked on the project of breeding a strawberry for the North American market, for high-tech greenhouse cultivation. With climate change, a few degrees change could render a field-grown strawberry production kaput," Paul explains. "We have to find a solution quickly, and we have to do it with the entire supply chain in mind."

Breeding a strawberry that holds up to the rigors of the North American supply chain is no easy feat. Paul notes that the berry has to work for growers and retailers.

For Phase I of this process, Red Sun Farms turned to its retail partners for valuable feedback.

"Eight retailers from across North America joined us at a test greenhouse in Niagara. They represented 14,000 stores, and they participated in the first breeder trials for strawberries with us. To stress the importance of this, this is the week prior to Thanksgiving in America, and we're asking some U.S. retailers to join us. We knew we'd hit a hot button because we got that much of a reply during an impossible time," Paul notes.

In a full-circle moment, the Phase II trials for this program occurred at SEPC's Southern Exposure, hosted from February 26 to March 2, 2026. Retailers walked an entire room of strawberry samples. Addressing everything from color, texture, sweetness, and sour properties to the size and consistency of the fruit and the seeds—no leaf was left unturned.

"We're leveraging our veg partners to come on this strawberry journey with us, and the results have been excellent. We've already found some clear winners," Paul says. "Traditional breeding is 10 years; with Heritable, we've gotten it down closer to four. So, four years from now, we'll be narrowing down the variety and getting it into production. Between the germplasm, the propagator, the cultivator, the sales/marketing agency, and the retailer, you have all the legs of the stool. You get a program that's geared to this market, and it fills a need."

The challenges and pressures of the North American market can't be overstated, but companies like Red Sun Farms are reinventing categories and spearheading research with the potential to preserve them. 5



UP
CLOSE

A Closer Look at Ocean Mist® Farms Heartichokes

By Anne Allen

It's safe to say that shoppers are feeling the pressure when it comes to cooking healthy meals at home. Mindful of the ways in which consumers are showing up at store, Ocean Mist® Farms unveiled its Heartichokes line last December. Inspired by the award-winning Roastables line, Heartichokes delivers tender baby artichoke quarters, ready to cook right out of the package.

Versatile and delicious, each package contains the equivalent of roughly five trimmed artichokes, delivering on the promise of virtually no prep, no mess, and no cleanup. And the packaging emphasizes this, with cheeky phrases emblazoned on the front that promise "All Heart, No Hassle" and "Less prep and more chill!"

The artichoke hearts peek through a clear window in the packaging, giving shoppers a glimpse of the premium product inside, and a Skip-the-Prep Kit outlines what work has already been taken out of the equation. No need to wash, trim, or season these 'chokes!

The line features three items: two varieties with chef-crafted seasoning packets—Lemon Butter and Savory Parm—and one unseasoned option for artichoke fans who prefer to create their own signature spices.

Suffice to say, this time-conscious shopper will certainly be adding these to my grocery cart. **\$**



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BBQ SNACKCHAT

By Anne Allen

Backyard barbecues will soon be lighting up with everything from melons to mushrooms, and knowing how to merchandise is key to pushing product and driving sales. When it comes to grilling, the versatility of fresh produce is endless, which is why we've connected with several category captains to hear their insights on bringing the heat this summer, and why barbecuing isn't just for meat anymore...



JOHN SHUMAN,

President and Chief Executive Officer, Shuman Farms



"Vidalia® onions are a summer cookout staple, prized for their versatility and flavor. Mild enough to enjoy raw on salads, burgers, and hot dogs, Vidalias are an obvious choice to enhance these summer BBQ favorites with little to no prep work. Because they also grill or roast beautifully alongside peppers, mushrooms, summer squash, and potatoes, retailers can utilize Vidalia onions to anchor displays in the produce department. We recommend merchandising Vidalias in meat department displays as well to inspire and create meal solutions for shoppers. No matter how you slice it, Vidalia onions are a key seasonal ingredient sure to sweeten every cookout."

ANTHONY INNOCENTI,

Managing Partner, LIV Produce



"Fire up the grill with LIV Produce's organic sweet potatoes and tender acorn and butternut squash—smoky-charred slices that caramelize to sweet, creamy perfection. Toss wedges with olive oil, sea salt, and cracked pepper, grill until char lines appear, then finish with a squeeze of lemon or a sprinkle of fresh herbs. Add slow-caramelized LIV Produce yellow and white organic onions for a buttery, sweet-savory topper that elevates every BBQ plate."

DAVE HEWITT,

Vice President of Sales, 4Earth Farms™



"When the grills come out, shoppers look for more than just burgers. Give your customers the premium, organic crunch they crave with 4Earth Farms™. On the grill, shoppers can elevate the main course with the perfect smoky char. Stock our organic chiles, mini sweet peppers, zucchini, and green onions, all essential for bringing bold, flame-kissed flavor to the backyard. Stock up on 4Earth Farms this season and turn your produce department into the ultimate barbecue destination!"

NICHOLE TOWELL,

Senior Director of Marketing and Innovation, Duda Farm Fresh Foods



"Our tray-pack sweet corn delivers a sweet, healthy, and fresh option that's ready for shoppers—no prep required. Cross-merchandise with fresh herbs, citrus, marinades, and grilling seasonings to inspire easy summer meals. Add recipe cards or signage featuring ideas like street corn, smoky corn salsa, or charred corn salad to drive engagement. Convenient and colorful, tray-pack sweet corn makes it simple for customers to create flavorful dishes while boosting basket size."

Sweet, Fresh, and Ready to Grill—We've Done the Prep for You!"

SUSAN NORITAKE,

Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Bako Sweet®



"Bako Sweet® will once again offer retailers BBQ-themed, in-store promotions to help shoppers sweeten their everyday® by providing them with creative ways to utilize sweet potatoes. Bako Sweet's sweet potatoes can be cross-promoted with other summer grilling products including onions, bell peppers, and zucchini for Grilled Sweet Potato Kebabs or adding a fun twist on classic s'mores with chocolate squares, marshmallows, and graham crackers. Sweet potatoes are an excellent healthy and nutritious choice for grilling due to their flavor and versatility. By showcasing our Bako Sweet four-pack trays and colorful bags of sweet potatoes, along with other ingredients, it reminds shoppers how easy it is to integrate our sweet potatoes into easy-to-prepare meal and dessert dishes."

KELSEY WEINGART,

Brand Manager, Marketing, Peri & Sons Farms®



"Barbecue merchandising shouldn't stop at the meat counter. Build the experience by cross merchandising onions and garlic next to rubs, briquettes, and marinades, where shoppers are already planning the grill. Put flavor front and center by highlighting the distinct taste profiles of onion varieties. Sweet onions for caramelizing burgers, cipollini for rich char on skewers, crispy shallots for a savory finishing crunch. When onions are merchandised for flavor rather than just function, produce becomes a true driver of barbecue inspiration."

JEFF CHURCH,

Chief Operating Officer, Church Brothers Farms



"I'm still chasing the perfect burger, which is frustrating because I can't even replicate my own favorite one. Everyone argues about the meat, but the real failure is usually the lettuce. Too big, too floppy, no crunch... tragic. Stack Pack from Church Brothers Farms fixes that. Perfect size, perfect bite, consistently clean, and no drama at your prep station. If your burger is worth doing right, the leaf should be too. Otherwise you're just eating a sandwich with commitment issues."

BRYAN SHELTON,

Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Giorgio Fresh



"With BBQ season here, mushrooms may not be the first thing you think of—but we're changing that. Our rich, hearty mushrooms are the perfect addition alongside your favorite proteins or as a satisfying vegetarian option. We've made BBQ season even easier with our Grill Packs, complete with seasoning packets and three bold flavors: Steak Seasoning, Smoky Honey Habanero, and Brown Sugar Bourbon. Just toss them on the grill and enjoy. Perfect for meat lovers, vegetarians, and everyone in between, these mushrooms bring something special to every barbecue table."

MEGAN GORGISHELLI,

Vice President, Marketing Administration and Brand, Giumarra Companies



"Whether it's on the grill or in vibrant side dishes that complement grilled proteins, fresh produce is a must at any BBQ. Perfectly charred asparagus is a classic favorite, offering a subtle sweetness and a crisp-tender bite. Bell peppers and eggplant are also excellent on the grill, making flavorful additions to kebabs. For more adventurous grillers, may I suggest fruit? Pineapple and nectarines, for example, develop beautiful caramelization on the grill, which enhances their natural sweetness and adds depth of flavor. We have several BBQ-friendly DulceVida™ nectarine recipes in our toolkit, and our team is always ready to collaborate with retailers on in-store or online promotions that inspire consumers with fresh ideas for grilling season."

WTF

DO I DO WITH

Peri & Sons Farms®
Sweetie Sweet® Onions ?

{ what the fork }



CRISPY BAKED ONION BLOOM



INGREDIENTS

- 1 large** Peri & Sons Farms® Sweetie Sweet® Onion
- 3 tbsp** all-purpose flour
- ½ cup** milk
- 2 large** eggs
- ¾ cup** Panko breadcrumbs
- 2 tsp** Cajun seasoning
- 1 tsp** paprika
- ½ tsp** kosher salt

DIPPING SAUCE

- ¾ cup** Greek yogurt
- 2 tbsp** ketchup
- 1 tbsp** chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tsp** Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp** paprika
- ½ tsp** garlic powder
- ½ tsp** kosher salt

Prep Time: 20 mins
+ 30 mins–24 hrs brining
Cook Time: 18–20 mins
Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Use a large knife to cut the top off the onion, leaving the root intact. Peel off the skin. Lay the cut-side of the onion flat on a cutting board and use the knife to cut the onion into 12 sections for a smaller onion or 16 sections for a larger onion.
- 2** Once all cuts have been made, add the onion to a large bowl of water with 4 tbsp of salt (cut-side down) and allow the onion to brine for 30 minutes to 24 hours (if brining for longer than an hour, place the bowl of water and onion in the refrigerator). Remove the onion from the water, shake off excess water, and pat dry.
- 3** Preheat oven to 400° F.
- 4** In a tall measuring cup or bowl, whisk together milk and eggs.
- 5** Combine Panko, paprika, Cajun seasoning, and salt in another bowl.
- 6** Dip the onion, cut-side down into the milk and eggs mixture till all the sections are coated. Then dip the onion into the panko mixture. Use your hands to press panko mixture in between all the onion petals.
- 7** Flip the onion over and place on a baking sheet. Press panko mixture onto any spots that are not covered.
- 8** Bake for 18–20 minutes or until golden brown.
- 9** Combine the yogurt, ketchup, parsley, Worcestershire sauce, paprika, garlic powder, and salt for the dipping sauce. Serve the onion immediately from the oven with the sauce and enjoy!

To learn more about Peri & Sons Farms®, visit www.periandsons.com



fresh that fits

real life



A Peach With PURPOSE

By Jordan Okumura-Wright



In produce, a story often begins with a dream planted in an orchard. These dreams take many forms, shaped by lineage, experience, and a desire to grow something lasting. Yet, their true impact is measured at the shelf and in the communities where their roots reach outward; when the work of growing food reflects the values of the people behind it.

This kind of alignment is something Trinity Fruit Company and its long-standing partner, Sun Valley Farming, know well.

For them, the aspiration is not abstract but realized—demonstrating how leadership in the field can shape outcomes across the entire supply chain. Together, the two operations are bringing values larger than themselves to retail partners across North America.

For retail partners, that alignment matters. When the people guiding growing practices share a clear vision for quality, transparency, and long-term stewardship, it translates into consistency in the box and confidence at the shelf.

This spring and summer, that philosophy takes shape through Trinity Fruit's *Peaches for Pink*—a 2026 summer peach program developed in partnership with the Breast Cancer Research Foundation® (BCRF). BCRF is the largest private funder of breast cancer research in the world, funding the science that impacts the full spectrum of the disease from prevention and treatment to survivorship and metastasis. The initiative will debut during the 2026 California stonefruit season in June and will feature pink ribbon-inspired packaging on Trinity's Farm2You 2 lb peach pouch bags, pairing peak-season fruit with a purpose-driven campaign.

As part of the program, Sun Valley Farming—Trinity's primary stonefruit grower—and Trinity Fruit Company have committed a \$100,000 donation to BCRF, independent of peach program sales. As a majority women-owned, family-run company, Sun Valley Farming views the initiative as an opportunity to help raise critical funds and awareness for breast cancer research.

Each *Peaches for Pink* 2 lb peach pouch bag will also feature a QR code, allowing consumers to make additional direct donations to BCRF online and further support life-saving breast cancer research. Eye-catching turnkey display bins and in-store point-of-

sale (POS) materials will also feature a QR integration for customer engagement, allowing consumers and retail partners to contribute beyond the initial commitment and amplify the impact.

"On a personal level, this campaign has been a meaningful goal of mine over the past two years. For many of us, breast cancer awareness is 365 days a year. Breast cancer disproportionately impacts women, but this program truly works in unison for us all," Angela Hernandez, Vice President of Marketing for Trinity Fruit, shares. "Having the opportunity through my role at Trinity to build a purpose-driven program that aligns business growth with meaningful impact makes this initiative especially powerful."



Tricia Jones, Shailey Schmidt, Danzie Cuen, Jennifer Rossotti, Walt Jones, Makela Cuen, Julie Jones, and Jamie Visser of Sun Valley Farming

As always, Trinity remains nimble and is happy to collaborate with retailers on expanded or custom display programs to drive visibility, engagement, and incremental movement throughout the promotion. Participating retailers will have the opportunity to activate custom display programs during the June stonefruit kick-off and sustain visibility throughout the promotional window.

Rather than existing as a standalone cause promotion, the campaign connects orchard leadership with a purpose-driven retail program that resonates with shoppers. The result is a rare kind of synchronicity—where the values guiding the people growing the fruit reinforce the story retailers can tell in-store.

In a competitive stonefruit category, that kind of congruence creates more than a compelling narrative. It creates differentiation, shopper engagement, and a partnership model built to grow both the category and the communities behind it.

Combining women in leadership with a breast cancer awareness campaign that utilizes the visual, the tangible, the healthful, and the philanthropic, this program brings a story of deep passion and commitment. Since purpose is contagious, I could not help but pick up this story where it took root: in the orchard.

Speaking with Angela, you get a strong sense of how such alignment and purpose are not just a strategic initiative

Top: Jamie Visser, Shailey Schmidt, Jennifer Rossotti, and Makela Cuen, granddaughters of Irene and Walt Jones of Sun Valley Farming

Below: Irene and Walt Jones



“Sun Valley Farming and Trinity Fruit Company have shared a strong, long-standing partnership for over 17 years. As the Sun Valley family has evolved, so has its grower base.

Today, 71 percent of its stakeholders are female.”

Angela Hernandez, Vice President of Marketing, Trinity Fruit Company



Danzie Cuen, Julie Jones, and Tricia Jones of Sun Valley Farming



“From a category standpoint, working toward shared goals—exceptional fruit, increased consumption, and stronger merchandising—drives incremental sales and long-term growth.”



Donate to Support the Breast Cancer Research Foundation*

but a shared system of beliefs that manifests in the company’s stonefruit program—actions that translate into quality and consistency for retail partners.

“Sun Valley Farming and Trinity Fruit Company have shared a strong, long-standing partnership for over 17 years. As the Sun Valley family has evolved, so has its grower base. Today, 71 percent of its stakeholders are female. While grower relations roles continue to guide strategic direction, these female stakeholders help shape the future of the business,” Angela tells me.

Sun Valley Farming was founded in 1983 by Walt Jones, who continues to play a significant role in the growers’ ongoing success. Irene Jones, who was the matriarch of the family and Walt’s wife, was instrumental in setting the tone and shaping the story of how Sun Valley found its footing, became known for its compassion and family values, and is led today. Before they had any money for a packing house, Irene packed the fruit under their walnut tree that still stands on their property. They had a very small circle sizer that they would use. She was very instrumental in hiring the floor ladies and would also feed them. Having recently passed in December 2025, she is deeply missed but in every root and bloom of the company’s legacy. Irene was and is the backbone of the family.

Today, Casey Jones, the grandson of Walt, serves as Chief Executive Officer, leading the operation with a commitment to family values and collaborative growth that remains at the core of the company’s culture.

At Trinity Fruit Company, President David White works closely with Casey and Lance Shebelut, Vice President of Grower Relations, to strategically align efforts and proactively bring the highest-quality stonefruit to retailers and consumers’ tables. Together, the partnership is built on trust, shared vision, and a commitment to excellence from orchard to table.

Stonefruit is more than a fruit category with innovative leadership to create a sales lift for its retail produce departments. It is a provocative symbol of the fruits of the industry’s labor—quite literally mimicking the sunrises and sunsets that track the days of our lives.

Yet behind the symbolism and seasonality lies a very practical outcome for the marketplace.

Trinity’s partnership creates measurable value—for retailers, for the category overall, and for the communities they operate in. This is because it is grounded in trust and stewardship.

“Transparency around who grows the fruit and where it’s produced builds trust and differentiation at shelf. While Trinity grows its own stonefruit, this aligned partnership also strengthens supply consistency, quality standards, and operational agility,” Angela reflects. “From a category standpoint, working toward shared goals—exceptional fruit, increased consumption, and stronger merchandising—drives incremental sales and long-term growth. For our communities, it reflects inclusive leadership and sustained investment in family farming. Ultimately, the value is in alignment: shared vision, shared accountability, and better fruit for everyone. These goals are manifest in the *Peaches for Pink* campaign.”

Angela tells me how *Peaches for Pink* goes beyond a seasonal promotion—it adds purpose to the June campaign kick-off in a way that strengthens brand equity and drives incremental movement.

Peaches for Pink is both a market initiative and a celebration of agriculture—a campaign which highlights that influence while driving consumer and retailer engagement. Combining purpose and product—promoting delicious stonefruit and showcasing the power of farming—is not just an aspiration for these two companies, it is the harvest of the season. 🍑

WTF DO I DO WITH ^{SUNSET®} Angel Sweet® Tomatoes ?

{ what the fork }



ANGEL SWEET® GRINDER SALAD

INGREDIENTS

2 cups SUNSET® Angel Sweet® Tomatoes, halved
1 head Iceberg lettuce, shredded
6 slices salami, sliced
4 slices prosciutto, sliced
4 slices black forest ham, sliced

5 slices provolone cheese, sliced
¼ cup pepperoncini peppers, chopped
¼ cup red onion, sliced
3 tbsp mayonnaise
¼ cup red wine vinegar
3 tbsp olive oil

1 tsp Italian seasoning
 Salt and pepper, to taste
¼ cup parsley, chopped

Prep Time: 15 mins
Servings: 4-6

DIRECTIONS

- 1 In a very large bowl, combine the lettuce, salami, prosciutto, ham, provolone, pepperoncini, Angel Sweet® Tomatoes, and red onion. Use tongs to toss and set aside.
- 2 In a small bowl, combine mayonnaise, red wine vinegar, olive oil, Italian seasoning, salt, and pepper. Whisk until combined.
- 3 When ready to serve, pour the dressing over the salad and toss with tongs to coat.
- 4 Garnish with chopped parsley and serve immediately. Enjoy!



To learn more about Mastronardi Produce®/ SUNSET®, visit www.sunsetgrown.com

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WTF

DO I DO WITH **Arterra™ Rainbow Carrots** ?
{ what the fork }



RAINBOW CARROT TARTE

INGREDIENTS

2 lb Gwillimdale Farms
Arterra™ Rainbow Carrots
4 eggs
1 sheet of puff pastry
1 garlic clove
200 g cream cheese
2 tbsp olive oil
1 tsp paprika
Salt and pepper, to taste

Prep Time: 20 mins
Cook Time: 30 mins
Servings: 8

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Wash and peel the carrots. Using a vegetable peeler, slice them lengthwise into thin ribbons.
- 2 Line a tart pan with puff pastry. Starting from the center, roll and arrange the carrot ribbons in a spiral pattern, forming a rose.
- 3 In a bowl, whisk together the eggs, cream cheese, garlic, paprika, olive oil, salt, and pepper until smooth.
- 4 Pour the filling evenly over the carrot rose in the tart shell. Bake at 200° C (390° F) for about 30 minutes, until the filling is set and the carrots are tender.
- 5 Let cool slightly, then slice and enjoy warm or at room temperature!

To learn more about Gwillimdale Farms,
visit gwillimdalefarms.com



THESE MANDARINS MOVE



SUMMER PEELZ BETTER

BUY-SIDE CITRUS

SnackChat

By **Jordan Okumura-Wright**

In produce, citrus remains a powerful category driver—but success doesn't happen alone. Strong partnerships between retailers and suppliers, combined with thoughtful category management and dynamic merchandising, help citrus reach its full potential. Leading buyers share how collaboration and smart strategy keep citrus thriving in today's produce department...



Shanán Cox,
Senior Director, Merchandising, Sam's Club Produce

"Consumer demand for fresh citrus continues to grow as shoppers look for flavor, quality, and year-round availability. Meeting that demand takes strong partnerships across growers, suppliers, and retailers. When the industry works together, we can bring consistent quality, innovation, and value to the shelf. Citrus is a category where collaboration truly drives better outcomes for both retailers and customers."

Chris Keetch,
Director of Produce and Floral, The GANT Company

"Citrus is a year-round anchor in the department and makes up a significant part of fruit sales. With that in mind, it's very important to partner with suppliers who can satisfy that strong customer demand with the highest quality fruit. When challenges arise in the supply chain, it is important to have a supplier you can come together with and find solutions that better the category. Strong collaboration also opens the door to better merchandising strategies and promotional planning that keep citrus top of mind for shoppers. When retailers and suppliers align on the bigger picture, the entire category benefits."



Lauren Anderes,
Senior Sourcing Manager, Walmart

"Citrus is a global category, and the strength of the supply chain ultimately determines the strength of the program. By building partnerships across multiple growing regions, we can manage seasonality and keep quality citrus on shelves year-round. But behind every piece of fruit is a network of people—from the growers and pickers in the orchard to packinghouses, logistics teams, retailers, and merchandisers. We are all working together to deliver a nutritious, affordable product to families across America and that is something I am extremely proud to be a part of."



Vincent Balistrieri,
Senior Produce Buyer, Redner's Markets

"Citrus isn't just a staple in the produce department. When it's done with confidence and excitement, your room feels like a party happening all over the world. Building trust can be a long, slow process, and it can be destroyed quickly. So it's CRITICAL to invest time with people who share your ambitions for quality, consistency, and variety, and stick WITH them to navigate the perpetually turning world together. Slot machines are not made to be a team sport! Conversely, it can be a real blast to take colorful risks with a true partner."



Danielle Hudgick,
Senior Category Manager - Avocados, Citrus, and Stone Fruit, Sprouts Farmers Market

"Citrus is a high-impact category for our customers, where demand is driven by flavor, freshness, and consistency. To truly differentiate, it takes more than supply; it requires strategic partnerships with suppliers who can deliver quality, drive innovation, and execute with precision. That collaboration is what allows us to deliver standout quality and create real differentiation on shelf."

Jon Greco,
Senior Director, Produce Sourcing, Sysco

"At Sysco, we remain committed to working alongside both our supplier partners and our customers to navigate the challenges and opportunities that arise throughout every season. Crop challenges are commonplace across produce due to a variety of factors, including weather events. In recent years, we have experienced growing demand for citrus—specifically for oranges—just as supply is challenged. The majority of our supply is grown in the United States, and due to our size, scale, and our broad supplier base, we are able to supplement our offerings; especially during the transition from Navels to Valencias with product from South America to help meet demand. We are also able to offer customers other varieties of oranges, such as Cara Caras or Blood oranges, if there is a supply shortage in more popular fruit."



Mike Roberts,
Vice President of Produce Operations, Harps Food Stores

"Citrus continues to be one of the most dependable drivers of excitement and sales in the produce department. At Harps, our partnership with Sunkist® helps ensure we deliver exceptional quality, flavor, and consistency for our customers. When retailers and growers work closely together, we create stronger programs, better merchandising opportunities, and ultimately a better eating experience that keeps shoppers coming back to citrus year-round."

WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Bee Sweet Citrus Lemons ?



LEMON PEPPER BONELESS WINGS

INGREDIENTS

BUTTERMILK MARINADE

Juice of 1 Bee Sweet Citrus Lemon
½ tsp Bee Sweet Citrus Lemon zest
2 lb boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1½–2" pieces
1 cup buttermilk
2 tbsp Dijon mustard
1 tsp kosher salt
1 tsp garlic powder
½ tsp black pepper
Pinch paprika

CRISPY COATING

1¼ cups all-purpose flour
¾ cup cornstarch
2 tsp Kosher salt
¾ tsp onion powder
¾ tsp garlic powder
½ tsp paprika
~3 cups canola or vegetable oil, for frying

LEMON PEPPER BUTTER SAUCE

8 tbsp unsalted butter, melted
1 tsp lemon pepper seasoning
1 tsp Bee Sweet Lemon zest
1 tbsp Bee Sweet Lemon juice
Pinch of sugar or honey
 Fresh parsley and lemon wedges, for garnish

Prep Time: 30 mins
Cook Time: 20 mins
 + 30 mins–8 hrs for marinating
Servings: 6–8



To learn more about Bee Sweet Citrus, visit www.beesweetcitrus.com

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Toss cubed chicken with all marinade ingredients. Marinate in the fridge for 30 minutes to 8 hours.
- 2 Mix coating ingredients in a large bowl. Once the chicken has marinated, take a piece of the chicken out of the marinade (letting excess marinade drip off) and dip the chicken in the flour coating mixture, pressing firmly to stick the coating. Place on a parchment or Silpat-lined baking sheet and repeat with rest of chicken pieces. Allow the chicken 10–15 minutes to set before you fry it to also help the breading stick.
- 3 Heat the oil in a large, deep pan to 350–365° F. It's important to keep the oil at this temp for best results for your boneless wings.
- 4 While the oil heats, make the sauce. Melt the butter and stir in the seasonings and sugar. Taste and adjust seasonings as desired.
- 5 Carefully place the breaded chicken in the hot oil and fry in batches ~5–6 minutes, or until golden and cooked through (165° F). Drain on a wire rack. Note: the oil temperature will drop when the chicken is added, just monitor it and keep the oil somewhere between 325–350° F. Bring the oil temperature back up as best as possible between batches.
- 6 While wings are hot, toss gently or spoon lemon pepper butter over the chicken until coated. Finish with extra zest and another sprinkle of lemon pepper seasoned if desired. Feel free to serve with an aioli, buttermilk ranch, or hot honey. Enjoy!



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LAYERS OF FLAVOR



A Q&A With Jessica Peri, Sales Manager, Peri & Sons Farms®

BY CHANDLER JAMES

When a consumer scrapes the last bite from their plate, our hope is they will be left with a food memory to stand the test of time. There is a powerful tool in achieving this goal, one the produce industry has carefully nurtured in the past couple of decades: flavor.

The onion category, in particular, is ripe with opportunity. Jessica Peri, Sales Manager at Peri & Sons Farms®, shares this with me as we dive into a multifaceted conversation about the supplier's uniquely competitive edge.

Flavor consistency, she says, is the defining opportunity in the onion category this year. As prices rise, tolerance for tasteless produce disappears, and onions are no exception. Shoppers expect onions to deliver in the kitchen, not just look good under store lights.

Much to consumer delight, Peri & Sons meets that demand with a portfolio bolstered by flavor.



Chandler James: Jessica, you've mentioned that 2026 provides a prime opportunity to establish greater flavor consistency in the onion category. What is Peri & Sons Farms most focused on as we move through the year?

Jessica Peri, Sales Manager, Peri & Sons Farms: Peri & Sons Farms is approaching flavor as an operational discipline, not just a marketing claim. Every decision, from seed to shipping, is designed to maximize quality and eating performance.



Flavor starts in the field. Peri & Sons Farms works closely with onion seed breeders to ensure only the freshest, top-performing seed is planted. Seed companies partner directly with the farm to trial new varieties, giving Peri & Sons Farms early access to emerging commercial seed options that show strong flavor potential, consistency, and performance in real growing conditions. This close collaboration ensures the best genetics are brought to market first.

Our seeds are planted in nutrient-rich, carefully managed soils and supported with precise irrigation, balanced fertilization, and the time needed to fully mature. Allowing onions to reach proper maturity is critical for developing balanced sweetness, aroma, and texture.

Post-harvest handling is equally important. Onions are sensitive storage crops, and Peri & Sons Farms draws on 46 years of experience in curing, storage, and climate control to protect flavor, appearance, and shelf-life. Hand-harvesting onions into ventilated bins and curing them in food-safe, climate-controlled environments minimizes stress and preserves quality. Because all onions are grown, packed, and shipped within the United States, products aren't rushed to meet long-haul import timelines, resulting in onions that arrive consistently fresh and flavorful.



Peri & Sons Farms® works closely with onion seed breeders to ensure only the freshest, top-performing seed is planted.

Jessica Peri,
Sales Manager, Peri & Sons Farms®





“”
Flavor consistency is the fastest path to category growth and differentiation.

CJ: Why is now the perfect time for Peri & Sons Farms to hone in even further on flavor?

JP: Rising food costs have made shoppers far less willing to compromise. Sales data shows that 2025 experienced a -1.1 percent dollar decline and a -1.9 percent volume contraction, alongside reduced promotional activity compared to 2024. In this environment, ineffective promotions erode margins without driving loyalty.

The opportunity now is to protect margin by focusing on everyday value—right price and right quality. When onions perform well at home, shoppers return. When they don't, no amount of merchandising can rebuild trust.

Disappointment in the kitchen erodes confidence quickly. Today's consumers expect produce to justify its place in their cart, making flavor consistency essential for repeat purchases and long-term loyalty.

CJ: Peri & Sons Farms clearly has flavor consistency down pat. Why should providing flavorful produce be a top priority for everyone in the industry?

JP: Flavor drives satisfaction, and satisfaction drives repeat sales. Even the most elaborate merchandising strategies fail if the eating experience disappoints.

When farms prioritize appearance or transportability over maturity, crops can arrive fatigued and underdeveloped, and shoppers notice. Leaders who control variables across the supply chain, from seed health and varietal selection to harvest timing and storage practices, will win in 2026.

Reducing ineffective promotions and doubling down on consistent quality allows retailers to protect margins while rebuilding consumer trust. Flavor consistency is the fastest path to category growth and differentiation.

“”

Peri & Sons Farms® draws on 46 years of experience in curing, storage, and climate control to protect flavor, appearance, and shelf-life.

CJ: As we all know, the produce industry faces myriad challenges throughout the year. How does seasonality, especially for spring onions, factor into flavor and performance?

JP: Q2 is historically the weakest quarter for onions, as storage crops wrap up and fresh spring onions enter the market. Spring onions bring a unique opportunity but also an added risk.

Spring onions are more delicate, with thinner protective skins and higher sensitivity to handling and display conditions. They require the right growing practices, post-harvest care, and retail partnership to maintain quality. When managed well, spring onions offer exceptional eating experiences; they're crisp, fresh, and less pungent than storage onions, making them highly appealing to consumers.

However, if quality breaks down on the shelf, shoppers notice immediately. Poor-looking, defect-heavy displays can stop purchases altogether, robbing consumers of what should be a great eating experience. Partnering with the right supplier during this transition period is critical to maintaining clean displays, strong shelf presence, and onions that taste as good as they look.

CJ: With onions being Peri & Sons Farms' flagship category, how will developing consistent flavor remain a top priority for the company?

JP: Peri & Sons Farms believes that an onion isn't just an onion. Every crop is treated as a flavor-forward ingredient, and every decision from seed selection to irrigation, harvest, and packaging is made with both taste and environmental responsibility in mind.

By growing onions that are consistently flavorful while minimizing environmental impact, Peri & Sons Farms shows that delicious produce and sustainable farming go hand in hand.

As Peri & Sons Farms looks ahead to 2026 and beyond, the focus remains clear: The supplier isn't just growing more, it's growing better. Flavor drives satisfaction, satisfaction drives repeat sales, and consistency builds trust in a category that can no longer afford to disappoint. That is one value proposition that is worth its weight in gold. 🍷

A Closer Look at SUNSET® Pop Its Bite-Sized Cucumbers™

By Chandler James

I must confess, I have a new fresh produce obsession: mini cucumbers.

I cannot seem to stop eating this snackable, healthy, delicious offering, and I know many consumers are with me. The produce department has welcomed SUNSET® Pop Its Bite-Sized Cucumbers™ into the fold, giving consumers an even smaller option that delivers on the same satisfying crunch SUNSET cucumbers are known for.

Making their debut at the 2025 Global Produce & Floral Show, Pop Its have been met with great industry excitement. They offer the buy-side an opportunity to make healthy eating fun and accessible to shoppers. Greenhouse-grown, non-GMO, and available year-round, these new cucumbers will become a fast favorite in the produce aisle.

Crafted for convenience, flavor, and crunch, Pop Its cucumbers are perfect for dipping, and ideal for on-

the-go moments. As someone who will proudly state I am living in my convenience era, bite-sized options like Pop Its maintain a permanent place in my fridge.

Available in retail and club formats, Pop Its offer buyers a fresh advantage as more consumers prioritize ease in the kitchen while still desiring healthy and delicious options to power their days. The message to consumers is clear: Pop It, Dip It, Love It™. 🍴

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WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

DulceVida™
Nectarines

?



SPICY HONEY-ROASTED DULCEVIDA™ NECTARINES WITH HERBY WHIPPED GOAT CHEESE

INGREDIENTS

ROASTED NECTARINES

- 4 DulceVida™ Nectarines (mix of white and/or yellow), halved and cored
- 2 **tbsp** honey
- 4 **tbsp** salted butter, melted
- ½ **tsp** red pepper flakes

HERBY WHIPPED GOAT CHEESE

- 8 **oz** goat cheese, softened
- 4 **oz** full-fat cream cheese, softened
- 1 **tbsp** honey
- 2 **tbsp** fresh basil, finely chopped
- 2 **tbsp** fresh mint, finely chopped
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 **tsp** fresh lime zest, optional
- 2 **tbsp** chopped pistachios, optional

Prep Time: 15 mins

Cook Time: 20 mins

Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat the oven to 425° F (220° C).
- 2 Arrange the nectarine halves cut-side down in an oven-safe skillet or baking dish. Drizzle evenly with the honey and melted butter. Roast for 10 minutes. Flip the nectarines, sprinkle with the red pepper flakes, and return to the oven for another 10 minutes, or until tender and caramelized.
- 3 Meanwhile, combine the goat cheese, cream cheese, honey, basil, mint, salt, and black pepper in a food processor. Process until smooth and fluffy.
- 4 To serve, spoon about 2 **tbsp** of the whipped goat cheese onto each plate and top with two nectarine halves. If desired, garnish with lime zest, chopped pistachios, and a drizzle of the pan juices before serving. Enjoy!

California-grown DulceVida™ Nectarines are available exclusively from Giumarra Companies starting in June. Learn more at www.dulcevidafruit.com

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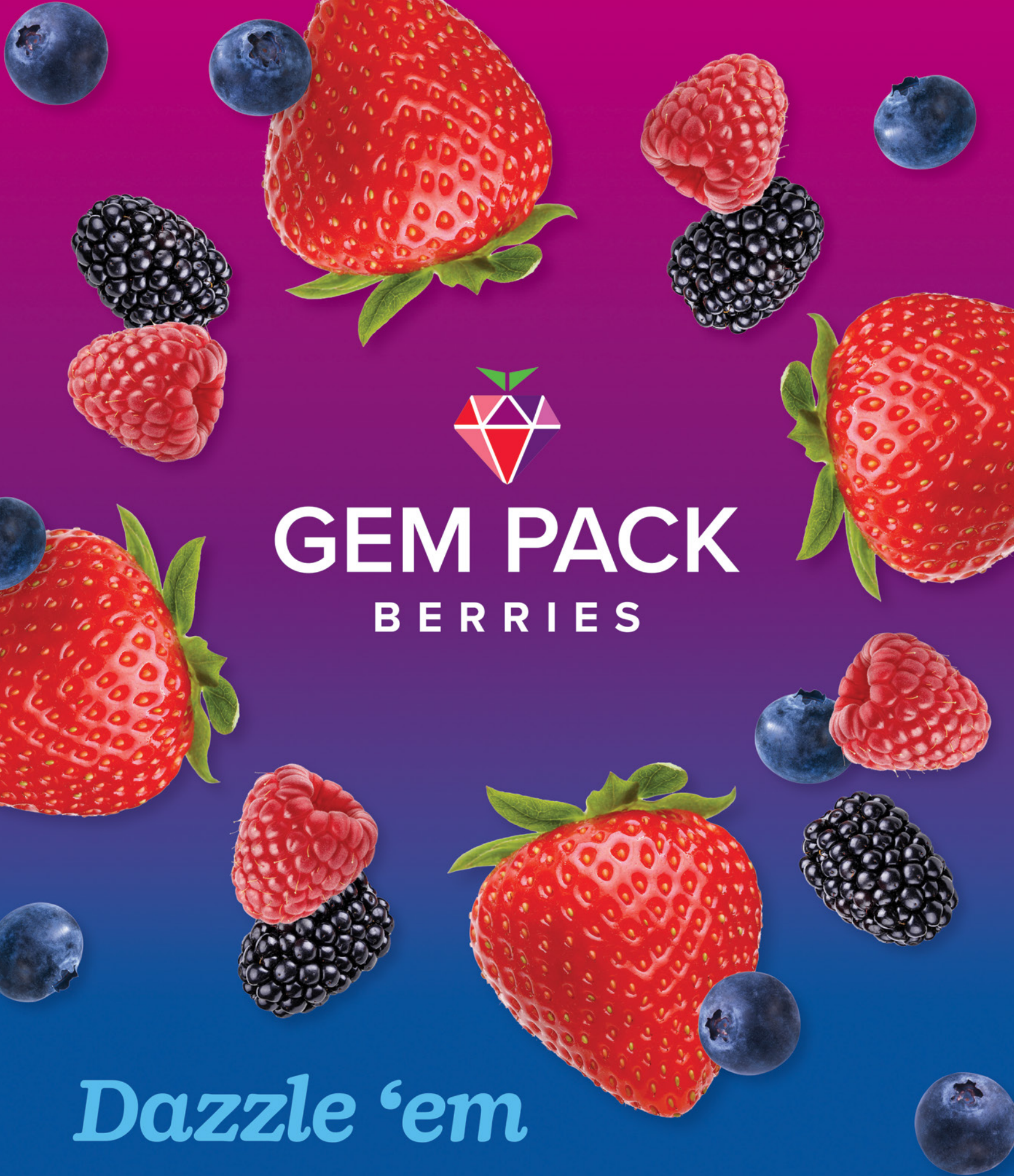
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WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Red Sun Farms™
Tomatoes ?



TOMATO SPINACH SALAD WITH RED PEPPER DRESSING

INGREDIENTS

TOMATO SPINACH SALAD

- 1 medium Red Sun Farms™ Tomato, cut into chunks
- 2 cups spinach
- 2 cups lettuce or baby greens
- 1 red pepper, seeded
- 1 orange, peeled
- 1 cup cucumber slices, cut in half circles
- ¼ cup sundried tomatoes
- ½ cup feta cheese, cut into small chunks

RED PEPPER DRESSING

- 1 roasted red pepper, cut in small pieces
- 1 tbsp white onion, chopped small
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1½ tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 tbsp fresh parsley
- ½ tsp mustard
- 1 tsp raw honey
- Sea salt (or table salt) and pepper, to taste

Prep Time: 25 mins

Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Place the spinach, lettuce, red pepper, and tomatoes into a bowl.
- 2 Peel the orange apart into wedges and cut the wedges into three pieces. Remove any seeds. Add to the bowl along with the cucumber slices, sundried tomatoes, and the feta cheese.
- 3 Make the red pepper dressing by placing all the ingredients in a blender and blend.
- 4 Pour the dressing on the salad and toss. Adjust to taste with sea salt and pepper, if needed. Serve and enjoy!

Tips: Hold off adding the dressing to the salad until serving.

To roast a red pepper: Cut the red pepper in half and remove the seeds. Flatten the two pieces of red pepper and place on a tray. Put the tray under the broiler and blacken the skin. Let cool and peel off the skin. Use as directed in the recipe.

To learn more about Red Sun Farms™, visit www.redsunfarms.com



A FARMER-FOCUSED Transformation

By PEGGY PACKER

A pivot in strategy does not always signal ineffectiveness of another. In some cases, it is a historic marker of the previous blueprint's unlimited success.

This immediately struck me as the case when North Bay Produce pulled back the curtain on a calculated rebrand spanning its dynamic portfolio of

berries, apples, asparagus, cherries, Brussels sprouts, and more.

Shortly after the announcement hit our desks here at *The Snack*, I connected with Brian Klumpp, Director of Marketing, to learn more about what sparked North Bay to roll out the first brand transformation in the company's decades-long history.





“OVER THE YEARS, CONSISTENT FEEDBACK FROM RETAILERS AND CONSUMERS HAS AFFIRMED THE VALUE THEY PLACE ON PURCHASING DIRECTLY FROM THE FARMERS BEHIND THEIR FOOD. WE LISTENED AND CHOSE TO PUT OUR FARMERS FRONT AND CENTER WHEN REPRESENTING OUR COMPANY.”

Brian Klumpp,
Director of Marketing, North Bay Produce

“Since 1984, our original logo has served us well, but as North Bay expanded beyond the Western Hemisphere and welcomed grower-owners from around the world, it became clear that our brand needed to evolve,” Brian notes, discussing North Bay’s fast-paced evolution. “The old map in our logo no longer reflected the global scale of our farms or the heart of our company: the farmers themselves. Recognizing this, we reimagined our identity to better represent who we are today and the people who make it possible.”

The brand’s reinvigorated identity sets out to clearly emphasize the integral roles of its people, who have remained at the center of the company’s success throughout its 42-year history. In addition to more clearly reflecting North Bay’s global scale and farmer network, this comprehensive refresh also aligns with a key point of interest for both retailers and consumers.

“North Bay’s global, grower-owned cooperative model is what sets us apart in the produce industry,” Brian continues. “Over the years, consistent feedback from retailers and consumers has affirmed the value they place on purchasing directly from the farmers behind their food. We listened and chose to put our farmers front and center when representing our company.”



One of the first visual cues consumers will notice on-shelf is the brand’s new logo with a distinct icon centering the farmer. Celebrating growers as North Bay’s greatest asset, the new branding reflects the heart and soul of the company, underscoring a foundational commitment to connection, cooperation, and global reach.

Meticulously designed to be timeless, the symbol pays homage to the generations of farmers that have upheld North Bay’s success throughout its history. The farmer gracing North Bay’s new packaging serves as a universal figure, representing the diverse men and women that make up its impressive global network.

“The farmer is more than the icon of our new logo; it stands for the foundation of our business,” Brian explains. “Our farmers grow world-class produce, and we are committed to connecting consumers with the people behind it. When scanned, our labels transform into 3D-animated stories that bring our farms to life. These experiences, along with our broader marketing efforts, highlight the individuals who grow the produce North Bay proudly delivers to tables around the world.”



North Bay Produce’s new brand identity emphasizes the importance of its people, who have remained at the center of its success since the beginning



The dedication and work ethic of North Bay’s farmers have been the driving forces behind the company’s sustained growth since its roots were first planted in 1984.

Shining a light on the efforts of these integral players, North Bay’s strategic rebrand effectively merges grower-focused storytelling with increased on-shelf visibility.

The global cooperative has taken a unique approach to connecting consumers with the people who feed their families and the world, bringing farmers and their individual stories to life through an augmented reality (AR) experience integrated into its new packaging. With AR labels, shoppers are welcomed into an exploration of a 3D farm diorama that tells the stories of the people who bring their produce to market.

The innovative AR technology presents the supplier—and concurrently, North Bay’s retail partners—with an avenue for storytelling that directly connects consumers to the grower, their practices, and the exciting varieties being produced.

“In our early years, the map symbolized our global footprint and year-round supply. Today, our industry partners already know North Bay as a worldwide operation,” adds Brian. “What consumers seek, however, is connection—an authentic link to the people who grow and stand behind their food. By combining elevated packaging with purposeful storytelling centered on our farmers, sustainability, and varietal innovation, we are uniting form and meaning. Our rebrand brings these winning themes together under one clear, compelling identity.”

By maintaining its focus on varietal development and expanding its global farmer-owner portfolio, North Bay Produce continues to elevate its performance, all while

sharing the compelling stories of its farmer-owners with the consumers who enjoy its fruit and vegetables. These will continue to be key pillars of focus as the company maps out its long-term growth strategy fresh off the momentum of a legendary rebrand.

“We remain focused on three core priorities: varietal innovation, sustainable farming practices, and reinforcing our grower cooperative,” Brian shares when I ask him what’s next for North Bay Produce now that the company’s strategic rebrand is complete. “By further nurturing and expanding these pillars, we will continue to drive superior produce quality and long-term company performance.”

Guided by the same central focuses that have upheld the company since 1984, North Bay Produce is excitedly marking the start of a promising new era. Rest assured: The global fresh fruit operation’s reinvigorated branding is not a reflection of altered values, but a reaffirmation of its commitment to our industry’s most central player—the farmer. 🍓

WTF DO I DO WITH Dayka & Hackett Mangos and Avocados ?

{ what the fork }



MANGO AVOCADO SALSA

INGREDIENTS

- 3 Dayka & Hackett Mangos, ripe and cubed
- 2 Dayka & Hackett Avocados, cubed
- 1 Roma tomato, diced
- ½ cup red onion, diced
- ¼ cup cilantro, finely chopped
- 1 lime, juiced
- 1 small garlic clove, grated
- 1 Jalapeño, minced with the seeds removed
- ½ tsp sea salt, plus more to taste

Prep Time: 10 mins
Servings: 5

DIRECTIONS

- 1 To make this salsa, start by chopping the mango, avocado, tomato, red onion, cilantro, and Jalapeño, and add them to a large bowl.
- 2 Next, add in the rest of the ingredients and toss until they're fully combined.
- 3 Finally, serve with chips and enjoy!

Tip: Store any leftovers in an airtight container, in the fridge, for up to three days.

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WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Pure Flavor®
Rocco Reds® ?



THE CHEF'S TOMATO® MARINARA SAUCE

INGREDIENTS

- 14 oz** Pure Flavor® Rocco Reds® Tomatoes, chopped
- ¼ cup** olive oil
- 1** yellow onion, diced
- 2 cloves** garlic, minced
- 1 tsp** dried oregano
- 1 tsp** salt
- ½ tsp** pepper

Prep Time: 10 mins
Cook Time: 20 mins
Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Heat olive oil in a saucepan over medium heat.
- 2 Add onion and sauté, stirring occasionally, until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook 30 seconds, stirring constantly. Stir in tomatoes and seasonings.
- 3 Bring to a gentle simmer, reduce to medium low, and cook 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- 4 Blend to desired consistency and enjoy!







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WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

California Crema™
GEM Avocados ?



CALIFORNIA CREMA GEM AVOCADO CAESAR KALE WRAP

INGREDIENTS

AVOCADO CAESAR DRESSING

- 1 California Crema GEM Avocado, peeled
- 1 lemon, juiced
- 1 clove garlic, peeled
- 1 tbsp capers
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tbsp Dijon mustard
- ¼ cup avocado oil
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

WRAP

- 1 California Crema GEM Avocado, peeled and sliced
- 1 bunch lacinato kale, washed, stemmed, and finely sliced
- 2 cups shredded chicken breasts
- 1 cup crunchy chickpeas
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 4 large flour tortillas

Prep Time: 20 mins

Cook Time: 10 mins

Servings: 4 wraps

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Add avocado, lemon juice, garlic clove, capers, Worcestershire, Dijon, and oil to a blender or food processor and blend until smooth, adding a couple tbsps of water if needed to loosen. Sprinkle the Parmesan into the blender and pulse until combined.
- 2 Transfer the dressing to a large bowl. Add the kale and chicken, and toss until coated. Sprinkle in the crunchy chickpeas and cheese and toss again lightly.
- 3 Heat a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Heat a tortilla in the skillet, for about 30 seconds per side, then transfer to a plate and cover with a clean kitchen towel. Repeat with the remaining tortillas. Leave the skillet on medium to keep warm.
- 4 Place ¼ of the avocado slices in the center of each tortilla and top with ¼ of the salad. Roll the wrap like an envelope with two sides tucked, then place in the skillet seam side down. Repeat with the remaining tortilla, avocado, and salad.
- 5 Once all the wraps are in the skillet, cook until both sides are nicely golden, about 2 minutes per side. Serve immediately and enjoy!



To learn more about California Crema GEMs, visit californiacremaavocados.com



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Peppers

SnackChat
By Peggy Packer

Peppers are a department mainstay that continues to draw more consumers in each year. Whether they star in a snack spread, seasonal salad, or sizzling atop an entree, the category has landed a spot on most shoppers' weekly—and even daily—menus, and for good reason. With so many colorful offerings bringing light to the sector, it's almost impossible to pass up. Dive into these exclusive category insights and discover all you need to know about the standout varieties and retail strategies currently taking peppers to the next level...



Geoff Kosar,
VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, MASTRONARDI PRODUCE®

"As consumers look for quick and easy meals and snacks with minimal prep, seedless mini peppers deliver on all fronts. These vibrant, bite-sized peppers are perfect for tossing into a salad, grilling alongside your favorite proteins, or adding to a snack plate with virtually no prep work. SUNSET® is a leader in the mini pepper segment, and we're experiencing increased demand for our seedless brands. With their convenience, versatility, and flavor, seedless mini peppers are a must-have for shoppers seeking healthy, hassle-free options this season. Retailers can take advantage of this trend and maximize sales by merchandising seedless mini peppers near grilling essentials or pairing them with dips and other snack foods to inspire effortless summer entertaining."

Tony Incaviglia,
VICE PRESIDENT, SALES AND MARKETING, GR FRESH

"Bell peppers are a cornerstone of any fresh produce department. They offer strong movement, bright colors, and year-round demand, and their flexibility makes them a popular choice for both healthy snacking and meal preparation. For merchandising, color is key. A display of green, red, yellow, and orange peppers together creates an eye-catching visual that helps drive incremental sales. Setting up near other veg items such as tomatoes, mini sweet peppers, and onions helps with meal ideas and volume purchases. Signage can also be used to highlight more ideas, such as creative recipes or price-saving options. However, nothing impacts sales more than a healthy, well-maintained, fresh produce department. Maintenance is critical—removing and rotating product as often as possible and displaying fresh quality at all times sells."



Matt Quiring,
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, BRAND, PRODUCTS, AND MARKETING,
NATURE FRESH FARMS



"Today's consumers want fresh produce that fits seamlessly into their lives—bold flavor, real convenience, and options that work whether they're prepping dinner or reaching for a snack. Peppers deliver on all three. Sweet S'NAPS™ was designed to give consumers a crave-worthy crunch that rivals their favorite chips, but with a clean, fresh appeal. Sweet Thrills™ Seedless Mini Peppers take convenience even further, eliminating prep for families who want great taste without the extra steps. Both products are creating new consumption occasions and expanding what peppers can be in consumers' lives. When we merchandise peppers as everyday snacking solutions, we help shoppers see peppers differently. That's how we grow the category and build the repeat purchase behavior that drives long-term value."



Emily Murracas,
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, MUCCI FARMS

"Peppers are a summer staple, and May is the perfect time to lean into grilling-forward varieties that bring both flavor and color to outdoor cooking. Mucci Farms Rustico™ Sweet Long Peppers are a standout with their firm texture, rich sweetness, and rustic shape. As consumers shift into 'grill mode,' they're looking for easy inspiration, so cross-merchandising Rustico Sweet Long Peppers with marinades, olive oil, fresh herbs, and grill-friendly proteins can drive impulse purchases and bigger baskets. Overall, the pepper category continues to benefit from health-driven choices, premium snacking, and culinary exploration—and grilling season is where those trends really heat up. With our full summer lineup, retailers will be able to attract shoppers looking for high-quality products that pack a true punch of flavor."

Patrick Cortes,
DIRECTOR OF SALES AND MARKETING, PRIME TIME PRODUCE



"At Prime Time, we specialize in a pepper for all occasions, and May is one of the most important months for the category. Consumer demand increases as shoppers look for fresh, colorful ingredients for grilling, entertaining, and snacking. Field-grown peppers play a key role by delivering strong value, bold flavor, and volume efficiency for foodservice and at-home slicing and dicing. At the same time, our vertically integrated greenhouse pepper program provides consistently shaped, high-quality fruit with vibrant color and dependable supply. Retailers that clearly differentiate field and greenhouse offerings can meet multiple price points while strengthening the overall pepper category. Strategic merchandising focused on color, convenience, and versatility helps drive engagement, increase basket size, and keep peppers top-of-mind throughout the spring and early summer."



JC Myers,
VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND MARKETING, SUNFED

"The fresh bell pepper category remains a vibrant, high-performing staple in the produce department, delivering year-round color, crunch, and nutrition that resonates with today's health-conscious shoppers. Key varieties to spotlight include the classic green bells—mild, crisp, and the top volume seller for everyday value—alongside sweeter, riper red, yellow, and orange bells that offer superior flavor and visual pop. The explosive growth of mini sweet peppers has been a game-changer, driving impulse purchases as convenient, kid-friendly snacks and lunchbox favorites. For retailers, effective merchandising is essential. I love old school, eye-catching rainbow or color-blocked displays, cross-merchandised with items that spark ideas for fajitas, salsas, and side dishes. Maintain freshness by properly misting, rotating, and controlling humidity. When done right, this colorful, versatile category consistently sweetens produce profits."

WTF

DO I DO WITH

Mucci Farms
Cherto™ Cherry
Tomatoes On-The-Vine ?

{ what the fork }



FRESH TOSTADAS 4 WAYS*

INGREDIENTS

MEXICAN STYLE

- 20 Mucci Farms Cherto™ Sweet Red Cherry Tomatoes On-The-Vine
- 4 tostada shells
- 1/2 cup refried beans, warmed
- 1/3 cup pickled red onion
- 1 Jalapeño, thinly sliced
- 1/3 cup cilantro leaves
- Pepper
- Lime wedges

ITALIAN STYLE

- 20 Mucci Farms Cherto™ Savoury Brown Cherry Tomatoes On-The-Vine
- 4 tostada shells
- 1/3 cup Boursin garlic and herb cheese
- 1/3 cup Romano cheese, freshly grated
- 1/3 cup candied walnuts
- 2 tbsps parsley leaves
- Pepper

Prep Time: 15 mins
Cook Time: 5 mins
Servings: 4

*Scan here to see
Greek Style and
Tex-Mex Style:



To learn more about Mucci Farms,
visit www.muccifarms.com

DIRECTIONS

MEXICAN STYLE

Spread refried beans equally between tostada shells. Arrange 5 red tomatoes on each shell and top equally with pickled red onion, Jalapeño, and cilantro. Season with pepper and serve with lime wedges.

ITALIAN STYLE

Spread Boursin cheese equally on tostada shells, sprinkle with Romano cheese. Arrange 5 brown tomatoes on each shell and top equally with candied walnuts and parsley. Season with pepper.



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A GIANT STEP FOR FRESH

By Melissa De Leon Chavez



68



Markus Duran, VP of Product Leadership, Kyla Oberman, Director of Marketing, and Joe Barsi, President and Chief Executive Officer

We are witnessing an expansion of what the fresh category can represent—a moment when whole produce begins to step into the broader conversation around function, wellness, and everyday health, reflecting a shift in how consumers think about the foods they bring home.

“Belli Berries represents a meaningful evolution in the grocery store, successfully bridging the gap between the produce department and the growing interest in functional foods,” Joe Barsi tells me of California Giant Berry Farms’ latest and truest innovation. This, he explains, is an evolution of the category rather than a simple varietal introduction. “As a first-of-its-kind innovation, our probiotic blueberries strengthen the produce Rx movement by delivering relevant health benefits through foods that people already eat, seamlessly combining food-as-medicine with whole food integrity.”

As the company’s President and Chief Executive Officer works to define a new genre of fresh, he shares that Belli Berries creates a “Produce 2.0” where fresh fruit acts as a new format for live probiotic cultures, created for people looking to support their digestive health and overall wellness through a nutrient-rich, whole fruit they already adore.

“For buyers, Belli Berries opens a new frontier of functional value-added produce that doesn’t just compete with other fruit, but provides a non-GMO, dairy-free, and vegan gut health option in its most natural form,” Joe says. “Ultimately, Belli Berries gives retailers a

differentiated product that meets the surging consumer demand for functional, whole foods.”

If you are wondering how these berries will look and taste, the answer is: just like ordinary blueberries.

“Instead of a coating or powder that can be rinsed away, the probiotics are gently misted and absorbed into the fruit after harvest,” Markus Duran, Vice President of Product Leadership, shares. “Belli Berries is

By framing the product as a familiar fruit with enhanced utility, partners can bridge the gap between everyday snacking and functional wellness.

Joe Barsi,
President and Chief Executive Officer,
California Giant Berry Farms





“”
 * Belli Berries is the same fresh blueberries people already love—now paired with live cultures in a fresh, whole-food format. It's a simple, approachable way to explore digestive wellness through real fruit.
 Markus Duran,
 Vice President of Product Leadership,
 California Giant Berry Farms

between everyday snacking and functional wellness,” Joe says. “The primary home should remain in the berry case to capture existing berry shoppers. Since this overall concept is new to the produce department, consumer education is key.”

As such, California Giant’s incredible team encourages additional point-of-sale signage focusing on education, as well as other attention-grabbing elements such as shelf-talkers and digital banners. The focus of these tools should be educating shoppers about this new value-added berry—specifically how Belli Berries offers a seamless, “zero behavior change” way to support gut health without compromising the fruit’s natural integrity or taste.

“During the pilot phase, our most significant learnings centered on how the product resonated with a broad audience. By conducting in-store testing and research across a variety of demographics, we found that a wide range of consumers are eager for a seamless blend of nutrition and familiarity. The true excitement for these shoppers lies in the ability to access functional benefits through a fruit they already know and love. Regardless of their specific background, consumers were consistently energized by the idea that supporting gut health could be achieved using a known, trusted fruit instead of an unfamiliar supplement,” Kyla says.

Likewise, as a mother of two, she points out how Belli Berries

the same fresh blueberries people already love—now paired with live cultures in a fresh, whole-food format. It’s a simple, approachable way to explore digestive wellness through real fruit.”

In fact, California Giant’s research confirmed that because the probiotics are absorbed into the fruit rather than sitting on the skin, Belli Berries maintains the exact same crunch, juiciness, and flavor profile as standard blueberries.

Furthermore, third-party lab tests showed that the misted-on cultures remained stable and active even after the berries were rinsed, frozen, or baked.

“Insights from a diverse consumer base validated our ‘zero behavior change’ goal, proving that

Belli Berries offers the added functionality people crave in a fast, familiar format that fits perfectly into their existing shopping habits and daily routines,” Kyla Oberman, Director of Marketing, assures me.

I am elated to hear it—Belli Berries looks and tastes just like ordinary blueberries!

And then I see the challenge: Belli Berries looks like ordinary blueberries.

“To stand out in a competitive landscape, trade partners should position Belli Berries as a fresh take on a trusted staple—offering added functionality while maintaining the same blueberry consumers already know. By framing the product as a familiar fruit with enhanced utility, partners can bridge the gap

BERRIES WITH BENEFITS

addresses the “daily negotiation” pain point—the struggle people face when trying to balance functional health with foods they or their loved ones want to eat.

“For too long, gut health has been synonymous with yogurts, fermented foods, and supplements. Belli Berries helps reduce this friction, offering a simple, effortless way to boost one’s gut health without changing a single habit. It transforms a staple everyone already loves—fresh blueberries—and offers a new functional twist on a familiar fruit, making it easier than ever to incorporate holistic wellness



“”
 * The true excitement for these shoppers lies in the ability to access functional benefits through a fruit they already know and love.
 Kyla Oberman,
 Director of Marketing,
 California Giant Berry Farms

Probiotic Power

through a snack that fits perfectly into a lunchbox, smoothie, or morning routine,” Kyla declares.

As Belli Berries rolls out, it is opening the door to a new era within the produce department.

“This innovation serves as a pilot for a broader long-term roadmap that could see other fresh fruits and vegetables transformed into functional delivery vehicles for specific health needs,” Joe says, broadening the vision and reach of what California Giant has begun. “By proving that live probiotic cultures

can be seamlessly integrated into fresh fruit, California Giant is setting a new industry standard: moving produce from a commodity to an everyday functional food.”

Belli Berries catalyzes a new era in which fresh, whole foods can bring nutritional, health-forward conversations—and the dollars they deliver—back to the produce department.

“The growth potential is strong; as consumers increasingly shift away from processed supplements and sugary functional snacks, Belli Berries is poised to lead a

fresh-forward shift—one where the produce department plays a growing role in everyday wellness,” Joe assures me.

In a way, this giant—pun intended—step forward is also one that brings us full circle.

Food should be the source of our sustenance rather than our deterioration. And while so many were debating between function and flavor, California Giant crafted an option that delivers both. 🍓

YOUR GUT SAYS THANKS!

WTF DO I DO WITH Del Rey Avocados ?

{ what the fork }



AVOCADO CAESAR SALAD WITH CRISPY CHICKPEAS



INGREDIENTS

CRISPY CHICKPEAS

1 (15 oz) can chickpeas, drained, rinsed, and very dry
1 tbsp olive oil
½ tsp smoked paprika
½ tsp garlic powder
¼ tsp salt
 Pinch of black pepper

SALAD

2 Romaine hearts, chopped
1–2 ripe Del Rey Avocados, sliced or cubed
¼ cup shaved Parmesan
 Cherry tomatoes or roasted corn, optional

AVOCADO CAESAR DRESSING

1 ripe Del Rey Avocado
2 tbsp fresh lemon juice
1 tsp Dijon mustard
1 small garlic clove
2 tbsp grated Parmesan
2 tbsp olive oil
2–4 tbsp cold water (to thin)
 Salt and pepper, to taste
1 tsp Worcestershire sauce or anchovy paste, optional

Prep Time: 15 mins
Oven Cook Time: 20–25 mins
Air Fryer Time: 12–15 mins
Servings: 2–3



Proud avocado partner of the San Diego Padres

To learn more about Del Rey Avocado, visit www.delreyaocado.com

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 400° F (or use an air fryer at 390° F).
- 2 Pat chickpeas completely dry (important for crispiness). Toss with olive oil, paprika, garlic powder, salt, and pepper.
- 3 Roast for 20–25 minutes, shaking halfway, until golden and crunchy. (Air fryer: about 12–15 minutes.)
- 4 Blend together avocado, lemon juice, Dijon mustard, garlic, Parmesan, olive oil, water, salt, pepper, and Worcestershire or anchovy paste (if using). Blend until smooth and creamy. Taste and adjust lemon and salt to taste.
- 5 Toss Romaine with enough dressing to lightly coat. Top with avocado slices, crispy chickpeas, and shaved Parmesan. Add any extras you like (tomatoes, corn, grilled chicken, or shrimp work great too). Enjoy!

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Always Swamped: Is It You, the Role, or the System?

By Editorial Contributor Julie Marcik, President, Joe Produce SearchSM

In the fresh produce and food industry, urgency is real. Chronic overwhelm doesn't have to be.

When "swamped" becomes a standing status update, it raises a bigger question: What is driving the overload, and what is it costing?

As President of Joe Produce and through my work in executive recruiting, I've learned that a 70-hour week isn't a badge of honor; it's a critical data point. From my perspective, being perpetually "underwater" often signals a misalignment between the complexity of the role and the systems, support, and decision clarity surrounding it.

If you're always swamped, it's time for a clear-eyed look: Is the company asking for the impossible, or is the role designed and resourced in a way that makes sustainable performance unlikely? Before we chalk it up to "that's just this industry," we have to look at the fit.

The Uncomfortable Truth: 70 Hours Is a Symptom

We all know that in our industry, some seasons require a sprint. We deal in perishable inventory, tight windows, and weather curveballs. But there is a massive difference between a temporary sprint and a life built around a permanent crisis.

When I hear an executive say, "I'm swamped," I don't think they're weak. I think: What is the root cause?

- Is the company under-resourced?
- Is the role a "catch-all" for everything that falls through the cracks?
- Is the leader carrying work that should be delegated, systematized, or automated?
- Is busyness being rewarded more than outcomes?

The Three Sources of Chronic Overload

While fire drills are part of the business, permanent 70-hour weeks usually stem from one of three structural failures:

- 1. Capacity Debt (The "Endless" Season)**
What happens when a "peak" lasts 52 weeks a year? This indicates capacity debt—too few people and a reliance on "heroics." If your organization requires constant heroics to function, it isn't high-performance; it's fragile.
- 2. The Hero Bottleneck (The Catch-All Role)**
When a leader owns results but doesn't control the inputs, they become the system. This creates a dangerous point of failure where the company depends on your endurance rather than good design.
- 3. The Adrenaline Trap (High-Effort, Low-Leverage Style)**
We have to own this part: Some leaders stay in the weeds because it feels safer. Responding instantly to every text feels like leadership, but it often just trains your team not to think for themselves.

A Quick Diagnostic: Is It You, the Role, or the System?

Ask yourself:

- Is this a 4-week sprint, or has it been this way for six months?
- What percentage of my week is true executive work—strategy, talent, and key customers—vs work my team should own?
- If I disappeared for two weeks, what exactly would break and why? (Be brutally honest.)



Julie Marcik is President of Joe Produce. With more than 20 years of executive search experience, she leads the Joe Produce team and oversees the company's strategy, growth, and service to the produce industry and adjacent sectors. Julie brings deep expertise in talent, leadership, and long-term organizational fit. Joe Produce is the go-to job platform and trusted recruiting partner for the produce industry and adjacent sectors.



Julie Marcik,
President



Ask about the company:

- Is the organization staffed for the business you have now or the business you had three years ago?
- Do we treat preventable emergencies—mis-picks, recurring order issues—as "normal"?
- Is "always available" considered the primary metric for leadership?

How to Reclaim the Clock

If you are the one clocking 70 hours, try these four shifts:

- **Run a "Time Truth" Audit:** Track your time for two weeks. What would you stop doing if you were forced to cut 20 hours? That list is a gold mine.
- **Separate "Perishable" from "Broken":** A weather delay is a real emergency. A recurring short-ship or late arrival is a process problem. Stop treating predictable failures with adrenaline; treat them with systems.
- **Redesign Your Availability:** Set clear rules for what requires an immediate escalation and what can wait for a daily briefing.
- **Delegate Outcomes, Not Tasks:** Stop handing off pieces; hand off ownership. It is slower at first, but it's the only sustainable exit strategy.

The Bottom Line: Overload Is a Business Risk

For those who lead companies, the 70-hour executive is a single point of failure. Chronic overload degrades decision quality, tanks retention, and threatens food safety culture. Fatigue is a liability.

In fresh produce, hard work will always be part of the job. But chronic overwhelm shouldn't be the price of leadership. The best executives aren't the ones who are always swamped—they are the ones who can sprint when it matters and still build organizations that don't require heroics to survive. 🍌

A Closer Look at Cal-Organic Farms® Bite-Size Potatoes

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

“Less is more” is about to receive a new definition.

Salted, peppered, buttered, with garlic, with cheese or sour cream, the potato is a category that, much like chips and salsa, I somehow manage to eat more of when presented with smaller portions.


Offering retailers and consumers a fresh, convenient addition to the organic potato category, Cal-Organic Farms, a brand within Grimmway Produce Group, recently rolled out its Organic Bite-Size Potato program.

Available year-round in six unique offerings—gold, red, and medley bite-sized and fingerling potatoes, plus the fun twist of “nibbles”—with range in variety and versatility, it is punctuated with convenience. The reach of colors in both pack and product is as long as the list of ways consumers can quickly and easily prep and serve them.

For retailers thinking that smaller bites mean less consumption, fear not. Firstly, and naturally, the eye-

engaging bags assure the category will still carry its weight to the register. Second, in regard to repeat customers, never underestimate potato lovers and their capacity to equate a smaller size with justification for “just one more.”

I’m calling it Potato Math, and I think Cal-Organic’s new launch will be the start of its rightful grip on modern foodie culture.

Because when smaller bites encourage bigger cravings, less is actually more. 

UP
CLOSE



Learn More 



TRANSFORMING AN AISLE INTO A DESTINATION

A Q&A with Fabian Pereira, Vice President of Marketing and Innovation, International, Fresh Express
BY JORDAN OKUMURA-WRIGHT

Today’s consumer is more curious than ever. In a world where personal narratives take shape in countless ways, few things hold as much power to build both our inner lives and outward identities as the food we choose. Every meal is an opportunity to express values, embrace new experiences, and connect with cultures beyond our own. Nowhere is this more evident than in the rapidly evolving produce aisle, where bold flavors and global inspirations are redefining what it means to eat well.

Fresh Express is at the forefront of this evolution. As a value-added leader, the company is transforming the produce department into a destination for shoppers seeking inspiration and new tastes. By working closely with retailers, Fresh Express unlocks greater possibilities—both in the produce department and at the register. Just ask Fabian Pereira, Vice President of Marketing and Innovation, International.





Q1



Jordan Okumura-Wright: Fabian, Fresh Express has consistently launched products that respond to what the consumer desires, but also steer that demand. Can you share with me one new product line that is providing an exclusive solution for retailers in this way for 2026?

Fabian Pereira, Vice President of Marketing and Innovation, International, Fresh Express:

Fresh Express has introduced four new globally inspired Chopped Salad Kits, which launched March 16, 2026. These flavor profiles consist of Creamy Mushroom Caesar, Tropical Mango Crunch, Zesty Hawaiian Crunch, and Italian Herb & Parmesan.



These kits bring menu-inspired flavors and culinary creativity into the produce aisle while maintaining the convenience and freshness shoppers expect from Fresh Express.

For retail partners, this represents high-impact innovation in one of the strongest-performing segments of the produce industry. The chopped salad kit category continues to drive growth through convenience and meal solutions, and Fresh Express is focused on delivering trend-forward flavors that encourage both trial and repeat purchase.

At a \$3.99 price point, these kits offer a premium yet accessible experience, helping retailers capture consumers looking for affordable ways to elevate everyday meals while driving category engagement.

Q2

JOW: That is amazing—and affordable. What consumer behaviors or category trends led to this development, and how does it help retailers navigate current pressures in the value-added salad space?

FP: Consumers want convenience, but they also want flavor and discovery. Millennials and Gen X in particular value bold taste, plant-forward meals, and quick prep.

Our new kits were inspired by global menu trends and emerging culinary influences, identified through our Fresh Express Innovation Center. There, we continuously track consumer preferences, culinary trends, and category performance to develop concepts that are validated with shoppers before they reach retail shelves.



Q3

JOW: From a retail performance standpoint, how does this program support velocity, margin enhancement, and overall basket growth?

FP: Chopped salad kits are among the most productive segments in produce, delivering strong velocity and consistent repeat purchases. These new globally inspired kits are designed to drive incremental category engagement by introducing new flavors that encourage shoppers to explore the aisle more frequently.

They also function as versatile meal solutions, pairing easily with proteins and other fresh ingredients, which helps expand the total basket.

By combining trend-forward flavors with a strong price-value proposition, Fresh Express is helping retailers increase category traffic, support premium trade-up opportunities, and drive overall basket growth.

Q4

JOW: Balancing the needs of today's consumer is no easy task. They are constantly bombarded with marketing from every direction. How are you helping the fresh produce department lead the wallet?

FP: This launch is supported by a fully integrated marketing campaign, including national press outreach, influencer partnerships, digital media, and broadcast exposure designed to drive consumer awareness and store traffic.

From a packaging perspective, Fresh Express uses our patented Keep-Crisp® breathable bag to maintain optimal freshness. This technology helps extend shelf-life, protect product quality, and reduce shrink at retail. Combined with strong brand recognition and consumer trust, these elements help retailers execute the program with confidence and differentiate within the produce aisle.



...FRESH EXPRESS IS HELPING RETAILERS INCREASE CATEGORY TRAFFIC, SUPPORT PREMIUM TRADE-UP OPPORTUNITIES, AND DRIVE OVERALL BASKET GROWTH.

FABIAN PEREIRA,
VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING AND INNOVATION,
INTERNATIONAL, FRESH EXPRESS

Q5

JOW: How does this initiative reflect Fresh Express' commitment to quality standards, operational consistency, and supply continuity?

FP: Food safety and product quality are foundational to everything we do. Fresh Express operates five manufacturing facilities across the United States, providing scale, operational consistency, and reliable supply continuity for our retail partners.

From seed to shelf, we maintain a strict cold chain and rigorous quality standards to ensure freshness and safety at every stage of production. Our innovation process is equally disciplined, combining culinary creativity with extensive consumer validation to ensure retailers receive products that deliver both quality and dependable performance.

Q6

JOW: As the category continues to evolve, how does this position retail partners for sustained, long-term growth?

FP: Value-added salads sit at the intersection of convenience, health, and flavor exploration, all trends that aren't slowing down.

Fresh Express remains deeply invested in growing the category through ongoing product innovation, national marketing support, and experiential consumer engagement throughout 2026.

For retail partners, that means working with a brand that combines strong shopper loyalty, category leadership, and a robust innovation pipeline designed to drive sustained growth beyond seasonal spikes.



Today's leading vendor partners offer far more than products that simply satisfy consumer demand. They deliver thought leadership, merchandising expertise, and strategic growth opportunities that help retailers thrive in a dynamic marketplace. Fresh Express exemplifies this approach, providing not only innovative products but also the support and vision needed for long-term success. As a consumer, I appreciate brands that bring intention and flavor to every offering—and Fresh Express delivers on both.

WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Highline Spinach and Artichoke Stuffed Mushrooms ?



SPINACH & ARTICHOKE STUFFED MUSHROOMS

INGREDIENTS

1 pkg Highline Spinach and Artichoke Stuffed Mushrooms

Prep Time: 5 mins

Cook Time: 15–20 mins

Servings: 6 mushrooms

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 350° F (180° C).
- 2 Remove from packaging and place on baking tray. Bake on middle rack 15–20 minutes, until slightly golden.
- 3 Use caution when removing from oven. Let stand 2 minutes before serving. Enjoy!

HIGHLINE
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To learn more about Highline Mushrooms, visit www.highlinemushrooms.com



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For All Occasions

BLENDED WATERMELON REFRESHER

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

Photography by Reid Monsma

Watermelon juice and I go way back as a summer treat, starting with following a group of cyclists covering one of my first Tour de Fresh rides.

When the heat of the day had cooled into summer nights, the music turned up, everyone relaxed, and the watermelon juice and vodka came out. The hydration and electrolytes found in the fruit were perfect after a day of exercise and sun, and the flavor still takes me back to the camaraderie and fun-loving energy that was my introduction to produce culture.

Now, one of my favorite complements to a sizzling BBQ

is what we'll call a Blended Watermelon Refresher.

Your shoppers may not have the same memories I do, but everyone has some summer fun associated with watermelon, and this drink pairs better with the grill than char lines and butter.

Position this recipe and its ingredients in-store alongside some veggie skewers, potatoes, onions, eggplant, and BBQ seasonings to ensure shoppers have the produce-fueled summer gatherings they deserve. And once you're off the clock, kick your heels up and enjoy a glass yourself! 🍷

Here's how to make it... Prep Time: 10 mins Servings: 1

INGREDIENTS

4 cups fresh watermelon
½ tbsp honey
¾ cup water
¼ cup vodka (Kettle One is my preference)
1 tbsp fresh lime juice
 Watermelon slice and mint, for garnish

DIRECTIONS

1. Combine the watermelon, lime juice, honey, and water in a blender.
2. Add your preferred vodka to the waiting glass before straining the watermelon juice mixture in, then stir.
3. Garnish with a watermelon slice and mint, if desired.



A Closer Look at Index Fresh Avoettes® Organic Mini Avocados

By Anne Allen

Eye-catching details and the promise of a single-serving I won't have to stress to consume? Count me in. Index Fresh's newest line, Avoettes® Organic Mini Avocados, delivers on avocados that are sized perfectly for individual meals, on-the-go lifestyles, and zero-waste mindsets.

The packaging itself is dreamy, with avocados gently encased in a purple plastic mesh bag. Made from #2 recyclable material, the color palette of the packaging makes it a stand-out on the shelf. With a lavender background and royal purple text, shoppers' eyes have no choice but to watch the gorgeous green avocados gently cascading down the pack. And if shoppers are in any doubt as to the organic quality of the product within, they can see the certified USDA Organic logo right on the front.

On the back, there are usage suggestions that highlight the unique size of Avoettes. Perfect for adding to a salad, wrap, or even just halving and eating with salt, Avoettes offer a variety of applications. There's also information about Index Fresh and how long the supplier has been in the avocado business—since 1914!—so shoppers will know they're in the hands of experts.

As part of Index Fresh's flagship AvoTerra® brand, this new line builds on the promise to deliver high-quality Hass avocados. And they've done so with packaging that I think reimagines what organic avocado packaging can look like. **S**

UP
CLOSE



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