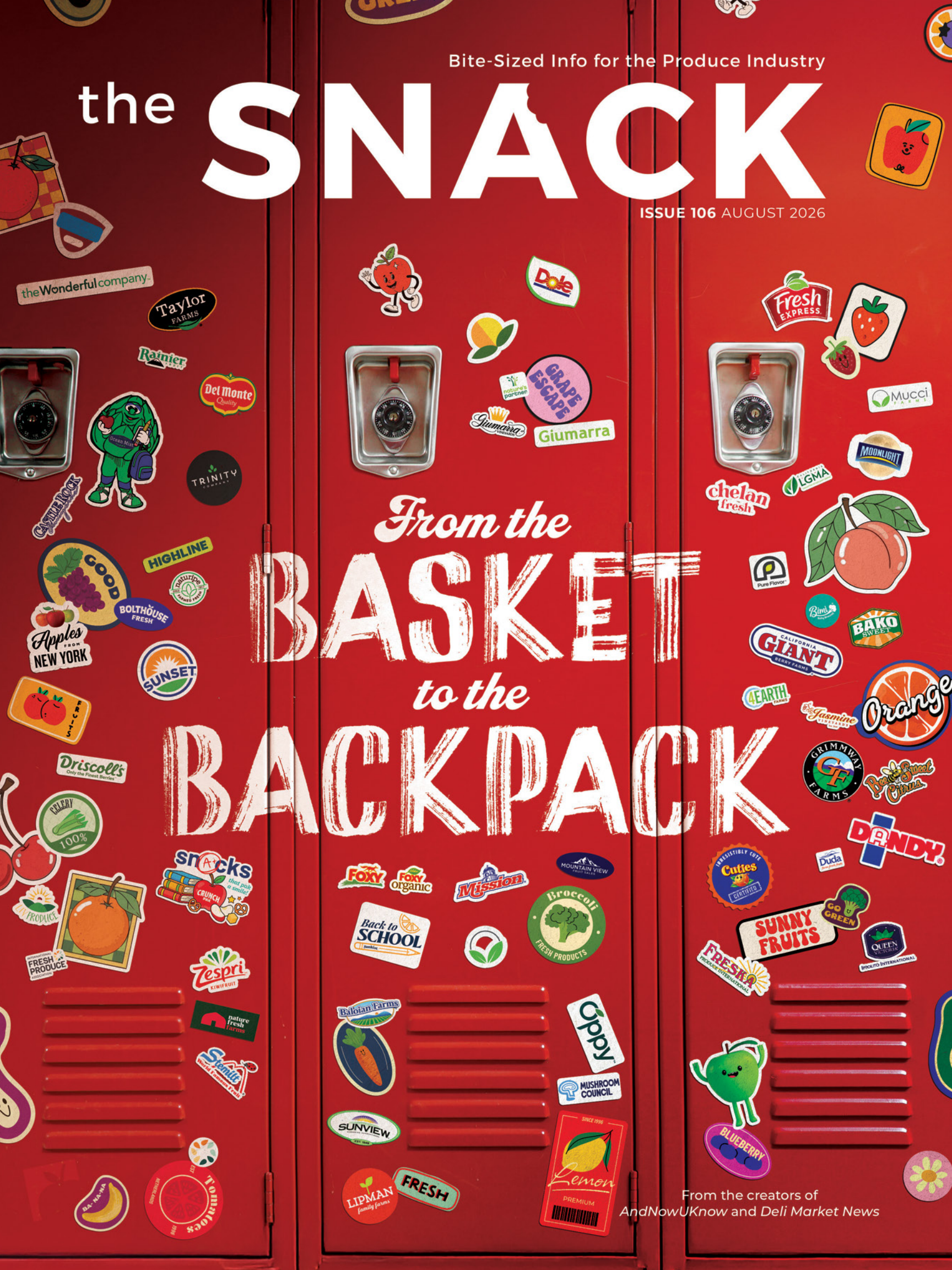


Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

the SNACK

ISSUE 106 AUGUST 2026

From the BASKET to the BACKPACK



From the creators of
AndNowUKnow and Deli Market News

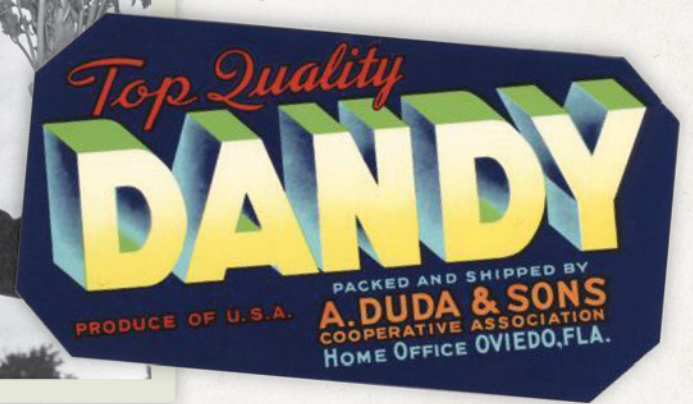


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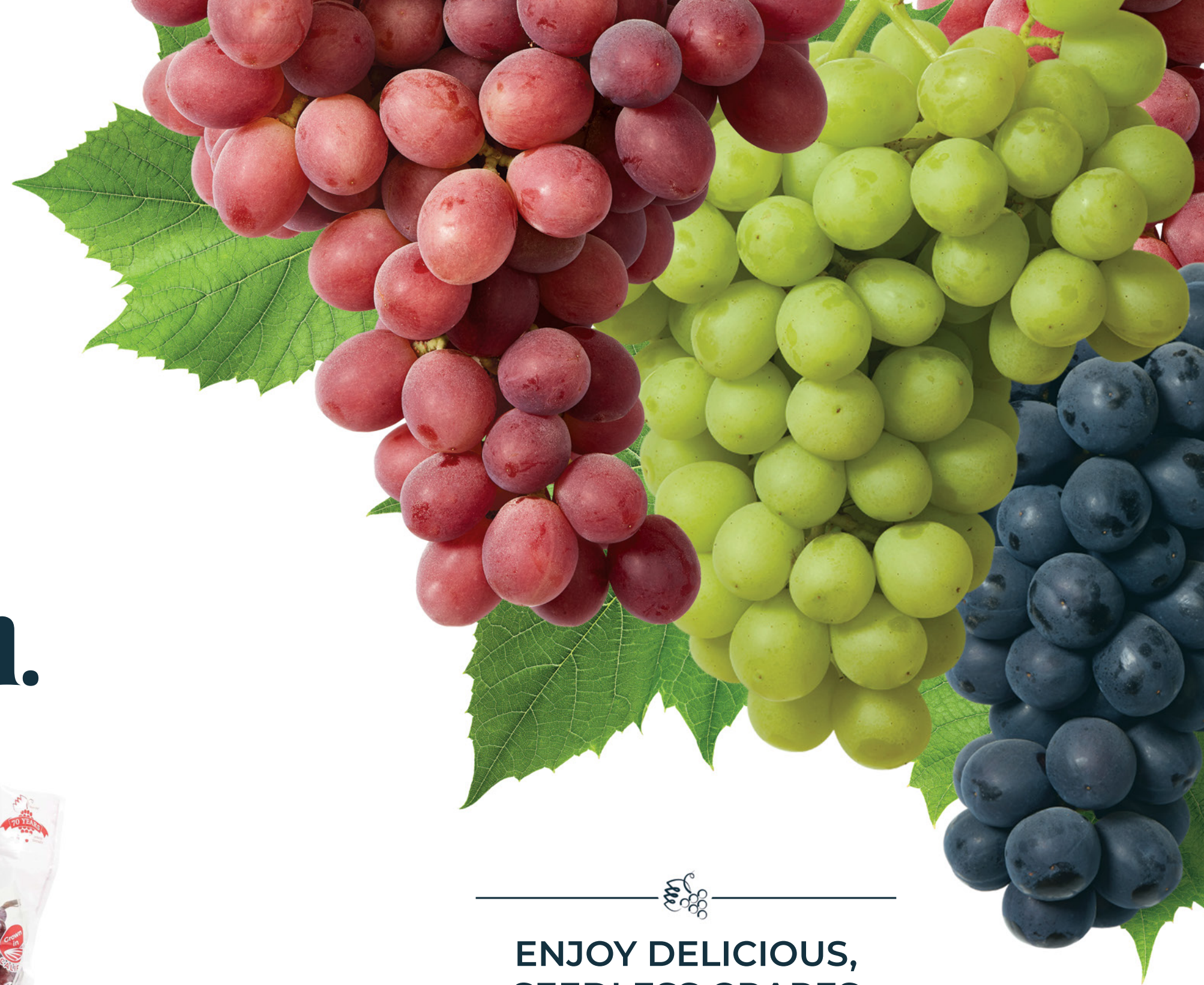
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BECOMING A MOM MEANT BECOMING MORE AND MORE LIKE MYSELF.

Don't get me wrong, there are so many changes that came with becoming a parent. From the physical to the spiritual to the routine. The internal rearrangement in my body and the outward rearrangement in my life became a mirror of acceptance and surrender—both beautiful and staggering in their incongruence and sheer velocity. But somehow, stretched as thin as I am at times, I am more full than I have ever been.

My husband, Matt, and I turned our home into one built around little hands, waist-high humans, curious eaters of all animate and inanimate objects, sleepless wanderers, and climbers—oh, how they climb. Our sunroom became a playroom, our bedroom became a fort, our stairs became an obstacle course, and the kitchen table became the island of misfit toys.

If you knew me before and after the feral children arrived, you would most noticeably see a change in my menu. Thank the stars for the industry I work in. The growers, the packers, the marketers, all up past midnight some days and moving the day forward before the sun rises. They get so much of the credit for the world they build for us.

As we move through the powerful period of back-to-school and all its destinations, curricula, locations, and ages, I can't help but think how lucky our company is to arrive each morning in an industry that puts food on a plate, in a package, or on a menu that amplifies the little and big brains that look to us. Nutritious, creative, and oh so beautiful, fresh produce and its passionate growers, marketers, and innovators have made life for a mom like me, for the colleagues I get the honor to work with every day, students of all ages, and just those looking for more



health, flavor, and vibrancy in their lives, such a more joyful experience.

And I do mean joyful, because when you feel good on the inside, you are stronger, faster, and smarter on the outside.

I tell this to my daughter, Niko Blue, every day as she explores the fridge and picks out the berries from your fields and adds them to her meal. She then shows this to my son, Beckett—raising a bowl of julienned carrots that will make him jump higher.

From little apples that fit delicately in their hands to Mandarins that peel into a turtle shell that my kids love, there is a delicate balance that is maintained when it comes to food and play—and fresh produce does it so well.

From this mom to everyone who casts their shadows in fields and orchards each day, who walk the packing line to ensure the fruit is at its best, to the marketer who stays up late into the night designing a graphic to be remembered and adored, and to the next generation coming in who will light up this industry with their own experiences, journeys, challenges, and innovative thought—I thank you.

Niko and Beckett, thank you. 🍎

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

DID YOU KNOW?

All issues of *The Snack Magazine* are 100 percent recyclable. Only AQ coatings are used as opposed to laminates, allowing our magazine to be reused as fresh paper in its next life. The protective bag is also accepted by bag recycling centers. Please find the nearest available location if you wish to recycle this issue's bag. Keep it green!

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PEEL and RESEAL for FRESHNESS

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JASMINE VINEYARDS FROM THE ROOTS TO THE TRELLIS

Jon Zaninovich dives into the secret behind so much loyal consumer feedback, why innovation should be carefully navigated, and more...



IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION BEYOND THE BRAND

Patrick Mills has a buy-side background to sharpen his sell-side edge, making him and the vast organization of relationship-driven professionals ones to raise a glass to...



IPPOLITO INTERNATIONAL FULL CIRCLE, FULL HEART

Heather Fuller leads with heart, guides with principle, and has walked in the shoes of many different roles. In this feature, she shares what she has been given, and it's a gift to all...



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FASHIONABLY LATE
How has the company brought rays of summer into the fall-time produce array? Michael Thurlow tells of helping retailers bridge the seasons and being a strong partner...



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**SENSORY SIMPLIFICATION:
TRANSFORMING GROWTH INTO
BETTER RETAIL EXPERIENCES**
Diving further into this pivotal strategy, the company satisfies a critical need for simplification in the produce department. Julia Weber and Jamie Moracci take us behind the scenes...



CALIFORNIA TABLE GRAPE COMMISSION

INDUSTRY STEWARD
The commission's new President and Chief Executive Officer reflects on his first year in office and what steps are being taken to grow the table grape market...



BURNAC PRODUCE THE IF LIST

Leaving no stone unturned is a phrase Anthony Bisogno uses often, and so we decided to take him up on the philosophy with our fun set of curious questions and his revealing answers...

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DEPARTMENTS

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ISSUE 106

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SNACKCHAT



PARENTS' BACK-TO-SCHOOL FUEL



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SnackBites has elevated better-for-you snacking with real ingredients, rich flavor and protein aplenty. It's the perfect snack for parents keeping pace with their students' energy all school year long.

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 We're bursting with insight.
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WTF

DO I DO WITH

Bee Sweet
Citrus Lemons ?

{ what the fork }



LEMON CHEESECAKE BARS

INGREDIENTS

- FILLING**
¼ cup Bee Sweet Citrus Lemon juice
1 tbsp lemon zest
24 oz full-fat cream cheese, softened
1 cup sugar
½ cup sour cream, room temperature
1 tsp vanilla extract
3 large eggs, room temperature
Lemon curd

- CRUST**
15 sheets graham crackers
2 tbsp sugar
6 tbsp melted butter

- Prep Time:** 25 mins
Cook Time: 75–80 mins
Chill Time: 1 hr–overnight
Servings: 3–4



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat the oven to 350° F. Line a 9" × 9" pan with parchment paper and set aside.
- 2 Pulse graham crackers in a food processor until crumbly. Then add in sugar and stream in melted butter. Press crumbs into the prepared pan and bake for 8–9 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool completely.
- 3 Beat the cream cheese with the paddle attachment on medium speed for 4–5 minutes until light and fluffy. Then add the sugar and beat again for another 3 minutes. Add in the sour cream, Bee Sweet Citrus Lemon juice, zest, and vanilla. On low speed, add the eggs one at a time just until the yolk disappears. Do not over-beat.
- 4 Pour filling on top of cooled crust. Add a few dollops of lemon curd on top and swirl into the cheesecake with a butter knife.
- 5 Bake for 65–70 minutes or until the cheesecake is set. Cover the cheesecake with foil in the last 10 minutes of baking. Once it's done, turn the oven off, open the oven door just a little, and let the cheesecake cool in the oven for 1 hour.
- 6 Remove from the oven and refrigerate overnight. Add additional lemon curd on top, and place back in the fridge until mostly set. Slice and enjoy!

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

From the Roots to the Trellis

By Melissa De Leon Chavez



Sometimes advancement is a steady flow, providing enough excitement to prevent complacency. But when it becomes an ever-expanding range of choices, that current can sweep the consumer into overwhelm.

“There is a lot of noise in table grape breeding right now, and it’s easy to get distracted by the latest novelty. For a new variety to make the cut at Jasmine Vineyards, it has to check three critical boxes: one for the eater, one for the retailer, and one for the grower.”

Jon Zaninovich’s words hit home. In a consumer market where it seems like you should bet on whatever is newest, the **President of Jasmine Vineyards** tells me he and his team focus their evaluation of new varieties with a clear, high bar for any new grape to make it to a program.



One look at Jasmine Vineyards’ digital footprint will show you the company’s choice is paying dividends. Jon and his team consistently receive unsolicited consumer testimonials praising the fruit—an unusual flow of front-facing communication for a grower brand.

“It’s definitely unique in fresh produce for a consumer to look at a bag of grapes, find the grower’s contact info, and take the time to write an email,” Jon agrees. “We cultivate that loyalty by intentionally pulling back the curtain. Through our social media channels, we invite consumers to step right onto our beautiful California ranch with us. We bring them alongside our hardworking field crews, let them inspect the fruit in our receiving room, and show them the forklifts zooming around the loading docks for that final step of shipping our grapes all over the world.”

Beyond immersive videos, Jon reinforces that communication means an open channel.

“We personally read and respond to every single testimonial. We also share these stories in our Trade Toolkit to affirm our core philosophy to our retail partners: Consumer trust and exceptional quality go hand in hand,” he explains. “Ultimately, connecting the hands that picked the fruit directly to the family enjoying it thousands of miles away creates an incredible feedback loop of pride and dedication across our entire team.”

Which brings us back to the “eater, retailer, grower” philosophy that Jon opened with.



First, the eater.

“It has to have a satisfying crunch and a memorable flavor profile. If it doesn’t have that audible snap when you bite into it, it doesn’t stay,” Jon assures me. “For the retailer, it needs incredible post-harvest legs. A grape can taste phenomenal on the vine, but if it shatters off the stem during transit or has a short shelf-life, it’s a liability for our retail partners. Third, the grower: It has to be agronomically viable for our area. Is it resistant to powdery mildew? How does it handle a sudden San Joaquin Valley heat dome? We evaluate test rows for four to five years before committing to a commercial block.”

Ultimately, he says, Jasmine Vineyards is not in the business of chasing a two-season novelty grape. His team is looking for generational staples. Yet even deeply rooted generational thinking does not make a grower immune to the urgencies of a single season.

The biggest challenge the industry is navigating in California, Jon tells me, is the rising cost of production. To counter this without losing the artisanal touch consumers take to the feedback channels to praise, Jasmine is leaning heavily into precision agriculture.

“We’re deploying advanced soil moisture sensors and targeted canopy management tech to make sure every drop of water and ounce of input is highly optimized. It’s about farming smarter, down to the inch,” Jon shares. “On the market side, we are incredibly focused right now on perfecting our late-season programs. Retailers have

“*For the retailer, it needs incredible post-harvest legs. A grape can taste phenomenal on the vine, but if it shatters off the stem during transit or has a short shelf-life, it’s a liability for our retail partners.*”

- Jon Zaninovich, President,
Jasmine Vineyards



For a new variety to make the cut at Jasmine Vineyards, it has to check critical boxes for the eater, retailer, and grower

made it clear they want that high-brix, premium California eating experience pushed as deep into the fall as possible before they transition to imports. By fine-tuning our late-season viticulture practices and focusing on robust late-season varieties like Autumn King and Allison, we are ensuring there’s absolutely no flavor gap for the consumer when November rolls around. We want Jasmine Vineyards’ fruit finishing the California season just as strong as it started.”

It is a desire and a philosophy that has seen the company through three generations. Now in its 79th season, Jon tells me this has been one for the books.

“Being several weeks into our 79th harvest right now, the biggest highlight is the sheer vitality of this 2026 crop. We had fantastic chill hours this past winter, and the canopy health is translating into some of the most vibrant color, sizing, and brix development we’ve seen in years. Walking the blocks right now is incredibly rewarding,” he assures me.

Picturing both the day-to-day and the future of the practices and traditions Jon and those before him have laid, I can’t help but wonder about the next generation and what the company President hopes to pass along—not just in growing, but in philosophy.

“For the next generation—our fourth—the message I’m passing down is that farming is no longer just about knowing the soil; it’s about adaptability,” he reflects. “I want the kids coming up to understand that true sustainability isn’t just environmental, though water stewardship and soil health are absolute prerequisites to survival. It’s also social. It’s about taking care of our workforce and the Delano community. Without the people, the land is just dirt. You aren’t just inheriting a farm; you’re inheriting a responsibility to the people who work it.”

Distilling his hopes into a single motto, Jon leaves me with a phrase I will carry beyond this page: Respect the roots, but don’t be afraid to change the trellis. 

A Closer Look at Sun Belle Craveabelles® Blackberry Label

By Chandler James

The elegance of a blackberry is undeniable. Infuse that blackberry with premium eating qualities, and the consumer perception becomes even more impactful. Sun Belle, a subsidiary of Frutura, introduced its new Craveabelles® brand in February 2026—an offering ready to elevate eating experiences for the berry-curious.

The Craveabelles blackberry label has quickly become known for its exceptional flavor, appearance, and shelf presence. The program debuted with varieties from Sun

Belle Mexico's breeding program, packed in 6 and 10 oz clamshells. The company saw exciting, high-performing numbers from the offering in its premiere season.

Sun Belle's vertical integration under Frutura enables consistent supply, strong quality control, and dependable deliveries that retail customers have come to expect from the company. The Craveabelles name is more than just catchy and memorable—it reflects berries that are not just craveable to the consumer, but also craveable by Sun Belle standards.

UP
CLOSE

Equally important is the consistent flavor provided by the Craveabelles label. These blackberries boast higher-than-usual brix levels, glossy appearance, and 360-degree color. With such a premium product beneath the deep purple and gold logo, consumers are sure to add this offering to their basket over and over again. All that's left is to incorporate Craveabelles into the perfect merchandising display, and retailers have a winning produce aisle strategy. 🍷



NEW LOOK. MORE STORES.
MAJOR GLOW-UP.

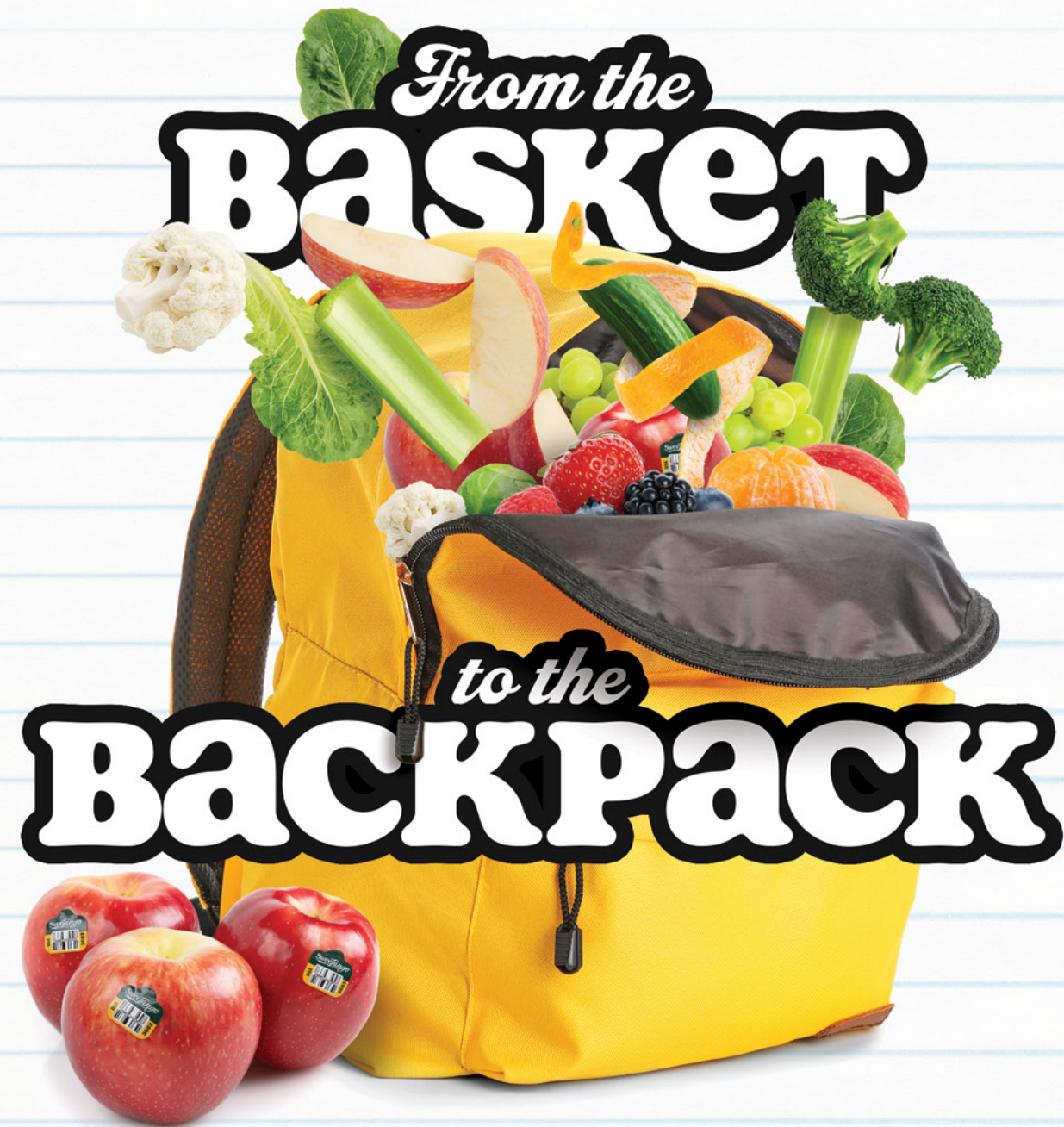
I'm Bimi® baby broccoli and I'm growing in all the right ways. Fresh new threads (have you seen this packaging?!), popping up in more places, and riding a wave of love from fans who just get me. I'm landing in more carts, sizzling in more kitchens, and stealing the spotlight in cravings everywhere.

What can I say? When you've got flavor, versatility, and that little something extra, people keep coming back for more.



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By JORDAN OKUMURA-WRIGHT

The beauty of produce is that the opportunities are, quite literally, limitless. We are an industry of problem solvers and creative thinkers, of close-knit partnerships and storytellers—people who take a challenge and find the opportunity inside it, who find a path where others see only absence. As schedules tighten and time grows scarce, those are the seasons that belong to this industry. The ones where the shopping cart feels the love instead of the pinch.

Back-to-school is that kind of season. It arrives with an agenda: schedules that snap back into place after summer's looseness, kitchens that have to answer for a family again, dorm rooms getting stocked for the very first time. The college student navigating their first real grocery run. The professional who needs lunch to be faster and better than the drive-through. The parent who wants dinner to come together in 20 minutes without giving anything up.

These shoppers aren't looking for a different kind of food. They're looking for a different kind of experience: the right product in the right place at the right time. Fresh produce is the obvious answer.

Suppliers and retailers are the gateway to that moment; the industry has never been better equipped to deliver it.

In this issue, we gathered voices from across the category: greenhouse produce, treefruit, berries, fresh-cut, citrus, snacking solutions, and versatile staples built for the busy week ahead. Each is speaking to the same goal: elevating the season's promotional opportunities and meeting shoppers exactly where they are.

The products are there. The window is open.

Join me in my journey as I speak with industry leaders about the hallmarks of this moment and how they are rising to the occasion.

Taylor Farms

At any given time, I have Taylor Farms salads stocked across the fridges at home and at work. Depending on the day, the pace, the mood, the work, I might want a Creamy Dill Pickle or Thai Chili Mango or Sweet Kale. My three-year-old daughter, Niko, loves Mexican Street Corn—pouring all the ingredients into a glass mixing bowl, directing me on the order and the preparation. Then she mixes it with excitement and makes sure to give her stamp of approval before the forks dig in. Start them young.

Taylor Farms is one of the many companies in this feature not only doing it right but creating new possibilities in the fresh produce space. And back-to-school is brimming with inspiration.

"At Taylor Farms, our chopped kits fit the real rhythm of back-to-school life. The on-campus college student can pull together a fresh, satisfying meal between classes with our Mini Chopped Kits, while the parent running from school pickup to sports practice gets that same quality on the go," Christina Barnard lays out. "Once the family is back home, our Protein Chopped Kits become a fast, protein-packed dinner everyone can feel good about. Our *Get Your Salad Together* campaign brings this to life, working with social media creators across multiple platforms to celebrate the parents who keep



CHRISTINA BARNARD,
Vice President
of Marketing and
Ecommerce,
Taylor Farms

it all running and to make fresh eating feel easy and inspiring all season."

Taylor Farms is great at meeting its shoppers where they are, and today's consumer is everywhere.

"At retail, we suggest updating the digital shelf with back-to-school creative and optimized product content, then backing it up in-store with cross-merchandised kits in grab-and-go plus themed 'weeknight meal' endcaps," Christina suggests.

So, go ahead, *Get Your Salad Together*.

Sunkist Growers

Few brands carry the weight of memory the way Sunkist® does. Its name, its logo, its presence in the produce department: all of it connects consumers to something familiar, and to something still growing. Back-to-school is one of those moments that made Sunkist a fixture in the fresh produce department.

"Back-to-school is one of the biggest fresh snacking opportunities of the year because shoppers are looking for products that fit into busy routines without sacrificing quality or nutrition," Sarah Matejowsky explains. "Whether it's a college student heading to class, a parent packing lunches, or a professional looking for an afternoon pick-me-up, citrus delivers convenience, portability, and great flavor."

Sunkist Cali™ Mandarins in particular are an ideal grab-and-go option: easy to pack, easy to peel, and appealing to shoppers of all ages.

"For retailers, this is a great time to merchandise citrus around lunchbox solutions, healthy snacking, and wellness-focused routines. As we move through the fall season, citrus continues to offer a simple, approachable way to meet consumer demand for fresh foods that



SARAH MATEJOWSKY,
Senior Director of Sales,
Sunkist Growers

fit today's lifestyles. Valencia oranges also provide a versatile option for breakfast occasions, fresh juice, and everyday family routines," Sarah reminds me.

The beauty of citrus these days, is how leading-edge providers are bringing the versatility of the category to a market that craves their value.

Duda Farm Fresh Foods

Nichole Towell doesn't hesitate when asked what back-to-school means for fresh produce.

"Back-to-school is one of the most important times of year for fresh produce because it brings renewed focus on routines, health, and convenience for every type of shopper, from college students to busy families and individuals managing life on the go. Fresh vegetables offer a unique advantage in that they deliver real nutrition and great flavor while fitting seamlessly into fast-paced lifestyles," she tells me.

For Duda Farm Fresh Foods, that advantage has a name.

"We see celery as a true healthy halo product for the season. It is clean, crisp, naturally refreshing, and incredibly versatile, whether it is packed in a lunchbox, paired with a favorite dip, or enjoyed as a quick snack between classes or meetings. What sets Duda apart is our proprietary celery varieties, developed over decades to deliver a sweeter, crisper eating experience that consistently delights consumers and keeps them coming back," Nichole shares. "And, this year, we are excited to share that the Dandy® 8 oz Celery Snack Packs were recently named a winner in *Good Housekeeping's* 2026 Snack Awards."

The product story, she explains, is only half of it.



NICHOLE TOWELL,
Senior Director of
Marketing and Innovation,
Duda Farm Fresh Foods

"For retailers, there's an opportunity to make fresh produce easy to find and easy to choose. Highlighting value-added, ready-to-enjoy formats and creating solutions-based displays can inspire shoppers and drive incremental sales. At Duda, we are focused on delivering consistent quality and fresh-cut innovation that meets shoppers where they are, making us a reliable and convenient reach as routines reset this fall," she adds.

The season rewards intention; across the category, the call to remove friction, make fresh easy, and meet shoppers where they are has never been louder.

Mastronardi Produce®

Mastronardi Produce® has always led with artistry and ingenuity. For back-to-school, that translates into greenhouse-grown solutions built for every type of shopper.

"Back-to-school is really about removing friction—nobody has time to prep. That's where greenhouse-grown snacking shines. SUNSET® Pop Its™ cucumbers are bite-sized, crunchy, and ready for snacking on the go. Perfect for a parent packing lunches, a college student who wants fresh without the cutting board, or anyone reaching for something better at their desk," Peppe Bonfiglio shares. "Because we grow in a controlled environment, retailers can count on consistent quality and reliable supply all season long. Fresh produce is one of the few categories that delivers on health, convenience, and flavor at once, which makes it a natural anchor for back-to-school promotions."

That portability story carries right into packaging.

"Our SUNSET Angel Sweet® tomatoes are launching in a new oval container that's easy to grab and simple to



PEPPE BONFIGLIO,
Vice President of Sales,
Mastronardi Produce®

merchandise, landing just in time for back-to-school. For retailers, the opportunity is to build a dedicated grab-and-go snacking set: Cross-merchandise Pop Its and Angel Sweet near lunch and breakfast staples, and you give shoppers an easy yes," Peppe reflects.

Convenience is the season's defining ask. From the greenhouse to the fruit aisle, the industry has its answers ready.

Sun Pacific

Back-to-school is all about convenience, nutrition, and value. It's also where Sun Pacific's family of brands feels most at home.

"Whether it's a college student looking for a quick, portable snack between classes, kids' fuel to get through all the homework, or parents seeking wholesome grab-and-go options, fresh produce plays an important role in everyday routines," Sarah Deaton shares. "Cuties® Mandarins offer a portable, easy-to-peel and eat snack that's convenient to take anywhere, while Famous Vineyards® grapes provide a sweet, flavorful, no-prep option that appeals to all ages."

Then there's Mighties® Kiwifruit: nutrient-dense, vibrant, packed with vitamin C, fiber, and great taste—another compelling reason for shoppers to add variety to their snack routine.

"Together, these brands offer retailers a powerful produce destination built around flavor, convenience, and feel-good nutrition," Sarah continues. "To maximize the season, retailers can create dedicated back-to-school displays, merchandise branded produce near lunch-packing essentials, and highlight snackable fruit solutions through digital and in-store promotions. Cross-merchandising opportunities can help shoppers discover easy ways



SARAH DEATON,
Director of Marketing,
Sun Pacific

to incorporate fresh produce into busy schedules."

The portfolio spans multiple fruit categories. That range, Sarah says, is the advantage.

"These advantages give retailers trusted, recognizable brands that meet a range of shopper needs while delivering consistent quality, strong consumer appeal, and healthy snacking solutions during an important time of the year," she adds.

California Giant Berry Farms

There are few things more versatile and well-loved across the produce department than berries. Just ask these berry experts.

"For college students building independent routines, busy families needing fast fuel, or individuals seeking simplicity, fresh berries are a simple solution—no peeling or chopping, with nutrient-dense, antioxidant-rich benefits straight from the clamshell. With our year-round grower network supporting a consistent four-berry program, California Giant helps retailers drive consistent berry sales into the fall," Kyla Oberman shares.

Carrying summer berry demand forward, she adds, means shifting from single-ingredient merchandising to showing how berries fit into the everyday meals and snacks that already anchor shoppers' routines.

"We recommend building high-impact cross-merchandising destinations within the produce department that target specific morning and afternoon shopping needs. Retailers



KYLA OBERMAN,
Director of Marketing,
California Giant
Berry Farms

can capture early-day breakfast sales by creating displays that pair blueberry and raspberry clamshells alongside yogurt, granola, and overnight oat containers. To drive afternoon and evening basket growth, secondary displays should position high-volume strawberry and blackberry packs adjacent to grab-and-go cheeses, nuts, and school lunch staples," Kyla continues.

By positioning berries as an easy, no-prep way to support a healthy routine, retailers can transition summer sales into consistent fall category growth. What a sweet idea.

Giumarra Companies

The most genuinely successful and progressive marketers are those that put themselves in the shoes of the consumer. Because, in reality, they are the consumer. Just look to Giumarra Companies and its expansive outlook on back-to-school engagement.

“At Giumarra Companies, we approach consumer marketing from a place of shared experience: We are all grocery shoppers. A guiding philosophy is that fresh produce belongs at every eating occasion, from celebratory moments to everyday routines. For packed lunches and healthy snacks, that translates to easy, nutritious options that are both delicious and quick to prepare,” Megan Gorgisheli begins. “As a mom, I rely heavily on grab-and-go staples like berries, grapes, and bananas. Fun-sized vegetables like baby carrots, mini sweet peppers, and mini cucumbers make healthy snacking fun and approachable. Even simple additions, like adding fresh avocado to a bagged salad kit, can elevate convenience.”

Produce departments have a clear opportunity to merchandise fresh produce for back-to-school with the same intention as backpacks and school supplies at major chain stores: front and center, solution-oriented, and easy to shop.



MEGAN GORGISHELI,
Vice President, Marketing
Administration and Brand,
Giumarra Companies

“Giumarra partners closely with retailers to bring creative ideas to life, including strategic cross-merchandising, engaging in-store and online promotions, and colorful, high-impact displays. Additionally, our back-to-school toolkit includes printable activity sheets and recipes both kids and adults can enjoy,” Megan assures me.

And we both know that’s fun for all ages, demographics, and walks of life.



Stemilt

The portable joy that is treefruit always keeps my basket full, and Stemilt has this fruit in spades.

“Back-to-school is a key moment to showcase apples and pears as reliable, ‘no prep’ snacking solutions for busy shoppers. They deliver portable nutrition, easy lunchbox staples for parents, and fresh, fast options for anyone on the go. Retailers can maximize results by positioning apples and pears as essentials through secondary displays near deli and lunchbox items, while highlighting high-flavor varieties like Gala and Honeycrisp to drive repeat purchases,” Auna Lundberg shares.

Stemilt leads with snacking solutions like Lil Snappers® 3 lb pouch bags, designed with convenience at the core. Featuring kid-size apples and pears in both organic and conventional varieties, Lil Snappers simplify shopping and usage: Right-sized fruit minimizes waste, fits easily into lunchboxes, and offers consistent portions parents can rely on. The resealable pouch keeps fruit fresh, visible, and easy to grab, reinforcing everyday usage and repeat purchase.

“For flavor-forward shoppers, seasonal standouts like SweetTango® apples deliver a craveable experience



AUNA LUNDBERG,
Senior Marketing
Manager, Stemilt



that builds excitement in the category—similar to how pumpkin spice signals fall. Their bold, sweet-tart profile and limited availability create anticipation and drive trial, helping retailers capture incremental sales while keeping the category fresh and engaging,” Auna reflects.

An apple a day ensures shoppers will stay.

Ocean Mist® Farms

Ocean Mist® Farms arrives at back-to-school season with a portfolio built for it.

“As families settle into school-year routines, time becomes an increasingly precious commodity. Whether a college student learning to cook in a dorm kitchen, a busy family juggling homework and activities, or an individual seeking nutritious meals without sacrificing quality, solutions that deliver ease, efficiency, and great flavor become more important than ever,” Lori shares.

Combining flavor and ease is something the company does well.

“We’ve seen growing demand for fresh produce options that help consumers prepare healthy meals without sacrificing taste or freshness,” Lori Bigras notes. “That’s what inspired innovations like Roastables and our first-to-market Heartichokes. Roastables are oven-ready vegetable kits featuring washed and trimmed vegetables (Brussels sprouts, broccoli, or cauliflower florets), paired with a chef-crafted seasoning blend and a crispy topping. The result is a fresh, flavorful side dish ready in 15 to 20 minutes.”

Heartichokes take the same approach to fresh artichokes: trimmed, quartered, ready to roast,



LORI BIGRAS,
Communications
Manager, Ocean Mist®
Farms

sauté, air fry, or microwave in about 20 minutes. Available in Lemon Butter, Savory Parm, and Unseasoned.

Fresh produce remains a strong retail opportunity during the fall season as consumers seek healthy, fresh meal solutions that fit busy schedules. Retailers can capture demand by prominently merchandising value-added products, highlighting convenience and cooking times, and cross-merchandising with proteins and meal solutions.



Crunch Pak

A cold slice of apple appeases all: my one-and-a-half-year-old, my three-year-old, my husband. And the list goes on. The company doesn’t need me to make the case for its fresh-cut ways.

“Value-added snacking works because it truly meets shoppers where real life happens. For a college student, ‘fresh without the fuss’ means something they can grab between classes without thinking twice. For busy parents, it’s about making lunchboxes easier while still feeling good about what they’re packing. And for anyone on the go, it’s a fresh, satisfying option that delivers convenience without sacrificing quality,” Danelle Huber tells me.

That’s where Crunch Pak stands out.

“Our lineup is designed to flex across any occasion. From sliced apple bags and Multi-Paks to Mini Snack Paks, Snack Paks, and Lunch Paks, there’s something that fits every kind of shopper and every moment. At shelf, our new look is clean, modern, and easy to shop, helping consumers quickly find what works for them while creating strong brand recognition. It’s a lineup that balances fun, fresh, and functional!” Danelle continues.

Convenience, portability, flavor, nutrition: It is all there.



DANELLE HUBER,
Marketing Director,
Crunch Pak

“From a merchandising standpoint, simplicity wins. Keeping value-added apples in high-traffic, grab-and-go areas helps capture those everyday decisions. Lunchboxes, road trips, quick snacks, and everything in between. Color-blocking and clear segmentation go a long way in helping shoppers navigate the set quickly and confidently. For us, ‘fresh without the fuss’ is all about making it easy to choose something wholesome, craveable, and ready whenever life gets busy,” Danelle wraps up.

The fuss is optional. The fresh is not.



Chelan Fresh

The apple is one of produce’s most enduring back-to-school staples. Chelan Fresh’s Rockit™ variety brings a fresh take to a familiar favorite.

“Back-to-school demand is rooted in everyday needs. Families shift their focus from summer day trips and vacation to lunchboxes and after-school fueling. Professionals seek fresh options that fit into busier schedules. College students look for nutritious study break options,” Lorinda Oscarson shares.

Here is where an item like Rockit™ apples really shines. This variety is available year-round and their attention-grabbing, bright yellow back-to-school packaging creates engaging displays that stand out in the produce department.

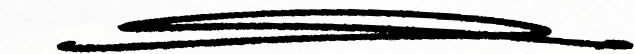
“Across every demographic, Rockit™ apples check all the boxes—portable, nutritious, and ready to eat. Apples move easily from snack to meal solution while supporting healthier routines. They contain soluble and insoluble fiber and are full of hydration which makes them the perfect meal addition or on-the-go snack. Rockit’s miniature size provides a portable healthy snack



LORINDA OSCARSON,
Marketing Manager,
Chelan Fresh

and portion control, making them the perfect addition to any occasion,” Lorinda concludes.

From the largest bulk display to the smallest apple in the set, every company arrives at the same truth: fresh, fast, and made for real life. The season doesn’t ask for more than that.



If you stock your grocery stores with the wares of these amazing companies and follow the map well-written by their innovative thought, insight, and wisdom, you would be ahead of the pack. Luckily, with an industry as forward-thinking as ours and a back-to-school season full of opportunity, your vendors are never more than a call, click, or chat away.



» The IF List «
Anthony Bisogno

Managing Director, Burnac Produce

With Jordan Okumura-Wright



When I think of the conversations I’ve had with Anthony Bisogno, my memory always returns to a single living, breathing idea that surfaces in all he does: Leave no stone unturned. At Burnac Produce, the Managing Director frames it as a commitment, but I believe it’s the natural result of his curiosity, his hunger for wisdom, and his eye for seeking out the biggest opportunity in the smallest detail. In a relationship business, these elements make a company’s bedrock that much stronger. So when handing him an IF List, I knew he could leave no IF unturned. Or, as you read on, a soccer ball...

» IF you were to find yourself in a zombie apocalypse, what would be one talent you have that would help you survive?
Kick a soccer ball with “deadly” accuracy.

» IF you could invent anything, what would you invent?
TV remote for “time” so I could pause, fast forward, or rewind.

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

» IF you could see one movie or read one book for the first time again, what would it be?
Rocky.

» IF you had to choose now, what would your last meal consist of?
Pasta with my mother’s sauce.

» IF you had to choose one personal artifact to leave behind after you are gone, what would it be?
A quilt made up of all my soccer jerseys from my childhood.

» IF you had to be roasted by one comedian, past or present, who would it be?
Robin Williams.

» IF you were stranded on a desert island, what three items would you bring?
Speaker for music, soccer ball, and cleats.

» IF you had to wear the same thing every day, what items of clothing would you pick?
A pair of jeans, Adidas® Gazelles, and a white T-shirt.

» IF your phone could only have three apps, which would you keep?
Spotify, WhatsApp, and Photos.

» IF you had \$10 million to donate to someone or something else, who would you choose and why?
The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids), because they do amazing things for the most important people.



▶ MENTORS IN THE MAKING ◀

JENNA AGUILERA

MARKETING CONTENT AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, MISSION PRODUCE®

BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ

The future is unknown, yet the way you face it can make all the difference in the outcome.

Jenna Aguilera recently helped me realize this as we spoke to the guidance and wisdom of a network that has helped the burgeoning mentor in front of me realize the potential she stands strong in today.

“Denise Junqueiro brought me into produce and introduced me to the industry,” Jenna says when I ask how she joined the world of fresh produce. “I am really grateful for that. She always made it a job that felt exciting while encouraging curiosity and creativity.”

That leadership empowered Jenna to take on projects with real impact, such as producing the Mission podcast and writing the company’s first sustainability report. Denise’s trust, Jenna reflects, allowed her



to hone in on her talents and apply her skills to a new industry with open eyes and determination to put forth her best work.

“She was my first boss in the industry. To this day, I credit her with teaching me the

foundations of B2B marketing in produce,” she states.

Jenna is among the new age of up-and-coming mentors in our industry. Hired in the midst of the COVID pandemic shutdown and shortly after Mission Produce® went public, she hit the ground running when Denise—then Senior Director of Marketing and Communications—handed her the NASDAQ IPO marketing agreement.

“As part of the company’s IPO with NASDAQ, there was a marketing partnership that included sponsorship and promotional opportunities to elevate the company’s visibility. One of them was the bell-ringing ceremony,” Jenna smiles. “Being able to coordinate that event with the NASDAQ and IR teams was an exciting project—especially with our investors, analysts, and executive team in attendance. I saw my face on the Times Square tower and thought, ‘How is this real?’”

Sitting back and thinking on that assignment, Jenna shakes her head in wonder at the fast track such an environment can offer if you’re willing to rise to the occasion. She explains that Denise practiced progressive team-building with personality assessments, specifically through Tess Cox and Associates.

“Denise had connected Tess to Mission for professional development and leadership coaching, and she worked hands-on with our marketing team,” Jenna explains. “Since then, working with Tess on my professional development has greatly improved how I present myself in the workplace and how I communicate with my team. I’ve come to her about challenges I’m facing and we’d break down the situation, to reframe it and communicate in a way that could lead to more understanding and collaboration.”

Learning different ways to work with different types of people is what Jenna points to as one of Tess’ greatest lessons. As Jenna steps into leading her own team for the first time, Tess has also become a sounding board—validating approaches outside her comfort zone as much as navigating the hard ones.

“Tess has been instrumental in guiding me through times that tested my growth.

Challenges are never easy, but having the right tools—navigating the storm with a little bit more direction, better, stronger sails—can make a big difference in the long-term,” she says.

Another way Jenna is deepening her knowledge of leadership is through the International Fresh Produce Association mentorship program. She went to the Women’s Fresh Perspectives Conference in 2025, and was paired with her third mentor, Beth Atkinson of Elephant House PR.

“Beth quickly became someone I greatly admire for her entrepreneurial spirit, her eloquence, and her ambition. I could tell she really wanted to help bring others up in the industry,” Jenna shares. “Beth has been a grounding—and real—voice with valuable perspective. She has shared really thoughtful advice on how to lead myself and make decisions to propel my career forward. With all of her experience, she’s been a mentor who can help me through any and all of it.”

As she sits before me, Jenna has just completed communications on Mission’s acquisition of Calavo Growers. Reflecting on this accomplishment, she projects a beautiful balance of assuredness and awe of the opportunities she’s accomplished so far—many of which have come from being in the produce industry.

“This acquisition has been one of the biggest career moments for me—leading the communications of an M&A of a \$430 million deal for a billion-dollar company,” Jenna shares. “When I first joined Mission, I never thought I would have been a part of all of these milestones—to be able to lead in these milestones even.”

For someone who walked in with open eyes, the view is everything promised, and then some.

“I’ve seen nothing but results from the relationships I’ve built with my mentors. The benefits are really in the relationship and what you learn from the relationship—then how you apply those learnings to yourself and to your work going forward,” she tells me. “It takes a village to raise someone, and I think the same is true professionally. All my mentors played a very special part in raising me up in this industry and helping me move forward in my career.”

For future up-and-comers, Jenna says not only to take the wins and the challenges of the day-to-day, but find a mentor to go through them with—you’ll get more out of the journey that way. Stepping into the role herself, she leaves us with a valuable truth: No one can tell you what lies ahead, but they can provide the tools to navigate with greater perspective, more confidence, and a deeper understanding. 🍏



DENISE JUNQUEIRO,
Director of Customer and Business Development, Westfalia Fruit

“Jenna came to the industry during COVID and took to produce so quickly. She stood out against all the other candidates when we were interviewing for a communications role. She had all the components and still does. She is ambitious, smart, and always strives for excellence. I’ve enjoyed watching her take on new challenges and grow not only in her craft, but in her career. She has the juice and a fruitful career ahead of her. Mission and the produce industry are lucky to have her.”

“IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE SOMEONE, AND I THINK THE SAME IS TRUE PROFESSIONALLY. ALL MY MENTORS PLAYED A VERY SPECIAL PART IN RAISING ME UP IN THIS INDUSTRY AND HELPING ME MOVE FORWARD IN MY CAREER.”

JENNA AGUILERA,
Marketing Content and Communications Manager, Mission Produce®



TESS COX,
Leadership Coach, Tess Cox and Associates

“Jenna demonstrates a positive and growth-oriented mindset in her approach to mentoring others. She is committed to learning and growing alongside the individuals she mentors while supporting the continued development of their professional skills, knowledge, and confidence. As a communicator, Jenna is articulate, supportive, and thoughtful in the feedback she provides.

Through her mentorship within her team, Jenna builds trust through consistency, commitment, and a strong focus on collaboration. Accountability contributes to achieving meaningful and successful outcomes for all. At the foundation of who Jenna is, she understands the importance of ‘Leading Herself, FIRST.’ This principle aligns closely with the focus of leadership coaching: leading with intention, taking responsibility for the quality of work, applying knowledge with purpose, and supporting the growth and development of others. Jenna leads with the understanding that the best outcomes are achieved when the strengths of individuals come together to create something far greater than what can be accomplished alone.”



BETH ATKINSON,
President and Owner, Elephant House PR

“Jenna is exactly the kind of emerging leader our industry needs more of: sharp, thoughtful, intentional, and deeply committed to the people around her. What makes her such a strong mentor is not just that she has valuable expertise to share, but that she genuinely cares about helping others grow. She approaches her work with a rare combination of confidence and humility; she is willing to take on challenges, ask good questions, receive feedback, and figure out the path forward, even when something is new to her. Jenna has become a go-to leader within her company and continues to invest her time in meaningful industry initiatives, which speaks volumes about both her capability and her character. She is respected because she does the work well, but also because people trust her to show up, support the team, and lead with intention. Jenna sees the best in people, calls them up to their potential, and helps them believe they can get there.”

WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }



HEARTICHOKES, SKIP-THE-PREP KITS

INGREDIENTS

1 bag Ocean Mist® Farms Heartichokes, Lemon Butter, Savory Parm, or Unseasoned Flavor (up to **5** artichokes in each bag)

Prep Time: 5 mins

Cook Time: 15–20 mins

Servings: 4



For more ways to enjoy
Ocean Mist® Farms Heartichokes,
visit www.oceanmist.com/products/heartichokes

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 450° F.
- 2 In a bowl, mix artichokes with 1–3 tbsp of your preferred cooking oil. Stir until all pieces are evenly coated.
- 3 Add seasoning packet—or your own seasonings—and stir until pieces are covered.
- 4 Evenly spread artichoke quarters on ungreased baking sheet.
- 5 Pop in the oven for 15–20 minutes or until golden brown to your preference. Enjoy!

Heartichokes are trimmed and quartered tender artichokes, ready to cook right out of the package. Try them roasted, sautéed, air fried, microwaved, or grilled!



Learn about
this product



► MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀

KRISTEN REID

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT,
MIXTEC GROUP

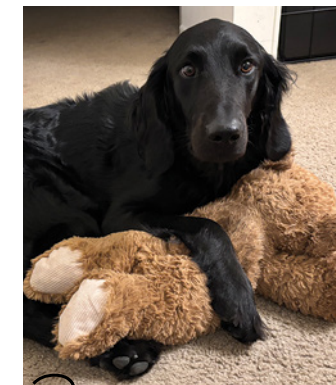
With Chandler James

Kristen Reid's favorite things revolve around family and friends, and she wouldn't have it any other way. The Executive Vice President of MIXTEC Group indulges in everything from food and beverage to rest and relaxation, all while maintaining a sense of exploration. Her professional relationships translate to true friendships in her personal life—just one example of her ability to connect. Learn about some of Kristen's favorite things here...



1 MY BOYS

Ken (10) and Will (7) are the best part of my life. They are kind, smart, and funny.



2 MY DOG

Milo is a three-year-old goldendoodle that is the perfect dog for me.



3 JERRY BUTT AND EMILY FRAGO

We have worked together for 19 and 12 years, respectively. They make work fun, and I love the way we support each other.



4 TRAVELING

My boyfriend, Jesse, and I love to travel domestically and internationally.



5 BEING ON THE WATER

My family shares a boat; seeing dolphins and sea lions is amazing.



6 CRAFT COCKTAILS

Especially ones that are complex and a little bitter. My current favorite: Love and Murder.



7 READING

I will read anything, but my favorite genres are science fiction and historical fiction.



8 MEXICAN FOOD

I was born and raised in Southern California; nothing beats SoCal Mexican food.



Sensory Simplification:



Transforming Growth into Better Retail Experiences

By Peggy Packer

In today's day and age, overstimulation can be found at almost every turn.

From the abundance of billboards that line a city's highways and the never-ending to-do list to the constant ping of notifications from our various smart devices, being human in 2026 means there is always an outside source demanding your attention.

The produce department is not immune to this sensory overload.

Battling the over-complexity that may be causing decision fatigue as consumers shop for fresh produce, Pure Flavor® has refined its approach to brand visibility and category growth around one central principle: simplicity.



Julia Weber,
Vice President of Marketing,
Pure Flavor®

Today's consumers feel increasing pressure to make the "right" food choices for themselves and their families. They want fresh produce, but are often navigating busy schedules, competing priorities, information overload, and crowded departments where competing packaging and product messaging make it difficult to differentiate options.

“

When simplification is well executed, it improves navigation and supports more confident decision-making.

Julia Weber,
Vice President of Marketing,
Pure Flavor®

”

The challenge, Pure Flavor realized, is making shoppers' choices feel simpler, easier, and more enjoyable.

The brand's new Simple is Good™ tagline reflects this principle—and it is one Pure Flavor has always believed in. At its core, it speaks to a long-standing focus on helping consumers cut through the noise with quality produce, convenient formats, trusted flavor, and inspiration that makes fresh eating feel effortless. Pure Flavor's evolution, category approach, and retail programs continue to be guided by this consistent philosophy.

“This starts by streamlining the product mix to reduce overlap and repetition, along with clearer product roles, consistent packaging formats, and a stronger visual hierarchy at shelf,” Julia Weber, Vice President of Marketing, explains. “When simplification is well executed, it improves navigation and supports more confident decision-making.”

By reducing visual noise and creating a clearer structure, retailers make the shopping experience easier and more efficient for consumers. Shoppers are able to make quicker decisions with greater confidence, while also discovering products more easily within the category. For retailers, this supports stronger category performance by improving how efficiently the department functions at shelf.

“Over time, the category has become increasingly crowded with bold colors and busy graphics, making it harder for shoppers to quickly differentiate products and recognize quality,” Julia shares. “In greenhouse-grown segments like tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers, many options appear similar without clear separation on shelf.”

For retailers, this can result in competing merchandising and a weaker brand. For the consumer, it can lead to hesitation and decision fatigue at the point of purchase.

As an expression of its Simple is Good strategy, Pure Flavor underwent a strategic brand refresh in 2025, unveiling a unified packaging system that brings consistency across its entire product line. The design introduced a consistent structure, clear hierarchy, and a clean, restrained visual language across clamshells, bags, and trays.



“The objective was simple: Modernize the identity and make shopping easier for busy families who often face decision fatigue in the produce aisle.”

Julia Weber



The updated design was built to improve how shoppers process information at shelf, prioritizing quick recognition and clearer visual cues while keeping the produce at the center.

This consumer-driven strategy creates immediate shelf impact in today's crowded and color-heavy produce aisle. The result is reduced visual fragmentation, stronger brand blocking, and a more navigable shopping experience for consumers.

“The increasing complexity in fresh produce directly shaped Pure Flavor's decision to revitalize its brand across North America. The objective was simple: Modernize the identity and make

shopping easier for busy families who often face decision fatigue in the produce aisle,” Julia notes. “The goal is to bring space to the shelf so the freshness, uses, and benefits of the produce become the focal point.”

As a greenhouse grower, Pure Flavor also elevates its partners' produce departments by delivering consistent supply and quality, supporting a more reliable and cohesive retail presentation. This combination of production consistency and unified design creates a stronger, more organized shelf environment for retail partners.

“The same principles that guided our brand refresh continue to shape how we

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



grow,” Julia adds. “Clarity, consistency, and purpose are built into every aspect of the business, from product presentation and merchandising to consumer communication. By staying focused on simplicity, we can expand in a way that strengthens both the brand and the shopping experience.”

This approach is reflected across the broader business, with packaging, merchandising, and messaging aligned to ensure consistency and reduce unnecessary complexity as the Pure Flavor product portfolio expands. It extends into product innovation, retail partnerships, digital engagement, and consumer communication, with the same

principles guiding portfolio expansion and category development moving forward.

“Growth will continue to be driven through intentional expansion, ensuring every new product strengthens the overall product portfolio strategy while supporting clear positioning at shelf,” says Jamie Moracci, Chief Executive Officer. “At retail, Pure Flavor will continue working closely with partners to strengthen merchandising programs, improve category organization, and build a stronger, more recognizable presence that helps shoppers make confident decisions.”

Beyond its impact at shelf, Pure Flavor continues to strengthen consumer connections through its website, digital storytelling, social media, and educational content, actively building awareness and long-term brand loyalty.

This ongoing approach reflects a deeper focus on clarity and intention across how the brand shows up for consumers, from communication to fresh produce presentation.

For the greenhouse grower, simplicity stands above overstimulation, quieting the noise and letting every tomato, pepper, cucumber, and berry stand on its own. 

IT'S NOT MAGIC.
IT'S MUSHROOMS.

TURN DEMAND INTO DOLLARS

STOCK SMARTER. KEEP DISPLAYS FRESH. SELL MORE MUSHROOMS.



◆ GET THE DATA ◆ GET THE TOOLS ◆ GET THE CAMPAIGN ◆

GET THE MUSHROOM
MARKETER'S TOOLKIT

MUSHROOMCOUNCIL.ORG/RETAILERS



IPPOLITO INTERNATIONAL

— FULL — Circle — FULL — Heart

By Jordan Okumura-Wright



Heather Fuller and her husband, Jason Fuller, are both industry veterans who know fresh produce in and out

No two people cut their teeth in fresh produce the same way. Some arrive with a map already drawn, the course laid, the terrain marked, the checkpoints clear. Others make the path as they go, dreaming the latitude and executing the longitude in the same breath. No matter the course, those who leave the deepest mark are the ones who absorb what the path teaches and turn it into something they can give back. That is a rare thing. When I think of Heather Fuller, I think of exactly this.

With Heather, what we're given, we eventually give back. And for her, these gifts take shape as bridges built, wisdom absorbed, and a foundation that holds—regardless of the road you took to find it. And Heather's path has been anything but straight. That is precisely what makes it rich. From Markon Cooperative, then her family's real estate business in Carmel, California, years raising her kids, and back to produce through Cal-Organic Farms, Braga Fresh, and now Ippolito International; full circle has become a beautiful thing.

But what draws her back—and keeps her there—needs no map to find.

"Relationships are the foundation of our business, and I think they should always be protected," Heather, Vice President of Business Development, begins. "The business is dynamic and ever-changing. We experience volatility, the effects of Mother Nature, global politics, and a complicated supply chain every day. It's the relationships we forge as we solve problems



Michelle Story, Heather Fuller, and Allyson Huntington

“Relationships are the *foundation* of our business, and I think they should always be *protected*.”

- HEATHER FULLER, Vice President of Business Development, Ippolito International

together, the collective experience we gain as we navigate difficult markets, and the ideation that takes place between companies that make this industry so resilient. A spreadsheet will never replace that.”

Her convictions are, in this way, a mirror of the industry itself. Complicated and diverse in its needs, but simple in its passion and its perseverance.

Heather is clear-eyed about what

protects that resilience—and equally clear about what must change.

“We need to attract new and young talent to the industry. Not just from traditional, expected sources like ag schools, but from different departments and different universities,” Heather says, drawing from the detours of her own path. “New perspectives will be needed as we move into the next decade. Which brings me to the next

point. Technology and AI are moving swiftly. Our industry needs to embrace technology both at the field level and in our offices, at retail, and in foodservice to improve our processes and take us to the next level in decision-making. Technology will never replace people, but we need to master it to take our people to the next level. I say this knowing that this is going to be a challenge for many of us who have been in the business for a long time, including me. It’s necessary, and why the infusion of new ideas is so important.”

The most honest leaders know that surrounding themselves with varied strengths lets a company hold two views at once—the ground beneath their feet and the horizon beyond it.

“I believe in collaboration and how that breeds ideas and new leaders. I never want to ask someone to do something that I haven’t or wouldn’t do myself. I think it’s important to build trust and respect between colleagues. I have been very lucky to have several fantastic mentors in my career, and each has had a different style. One commonality was trust,” Heather reflects. “They trusted me to make decisions, gave me room to grow, and room to make mistakes. They were all supportive but tough, not afraid to hold up a mirror when I may be moving in the wrong direction. They challenged me while guiding me. I always felt heard and supported, even if things didn’t always go my way. I strive to be that kind of leader. And I hope my team feels supported in that way.”

The source of that conviction, it turns out, is the same thing that called her back to this industry in the first place.

“The people. It’s always the people. We have the most dynamic, passionate, and driven group of people in this industry that thrive on connection and change. It’s hard to find that in other industries. The produce industry is fast-paced, ever-changing, and requires stamina that not everyone enjoys. Those who do are special.



Family time with Brody Fuller, Alexandra White, Heather Fuller, Jason Fuller, and Samantha Fuller

Working away from produce both in my home and in the real estate industry taught me to appreciate the power of connection and shared vision. I learned to look at problems in different ways and to present ideas to different audiences. I think it sharpened my communication skills,” Heather shares.

have needed and wanted both through the years. I have three beautiful and successful children and a very supportive husband who has built a business in his own right,” Heather reflects. “We worked hard through the years to put the kids first. This meant a lot of give-and-take at work and at home. I would not have been able to build such a beautiful family or

And for those still finding their footing—the next generation watching from behind—Heather has a message she wishes someone had handed her.

“You have what it takes. Don’t give in to someone else’s vision, but create your own. When it gets hard, and it will, dig deep, stay the course, and keep pushing



“Every twist and turn in your career shapes and prepares you for the next. *You won’t regret taking that risk.*”



That same instinct—to tend to the people around her—runs just as deep at home. Family and work are both huge parts of who Heather is. She has lived chapters where each one took the lead, and she is honest about what that balance has required.

“This is a big one for all of us in the industry, I think. We all work long hours, in stressful situations, and our ‘work family’ becomes a big part of our family. I think I

a successful career without the support of both my children and my husband. We all work together as a family to get things done and have a little fun along the way. It’s a balancing act, really, and having a workplace that promotes family life and a family that supports my love of my work has given me the confidence and the drive to do both. I have to remind myself to do both, and not let one get out of balance with the other.”

ahead. You never know what opportunities lie ahead. Every twist and turn in your career shapes and prepares you for the next. You won’t regret taking that risk,” she says.

Heather leads with heart and head in equal measure, treating every step—the ones already laid and the ones she made herself—as preparation for what comes next. Both student and teacher. The mirror, held for all of us. 🍷

A Closer Look at Mucci Farms Revamped CuteCumber™ Poppers

By Jordan Okumura-Wright

Dip, crunch, repeat. The cool cucumber has gone from being a summer treat to a year-round love affair. With back-to-school buying and promotions underway, retailers are looking for ways to hand busy students, families, professionals, and all walks of life a snacking treat to satisfy and quench. Mucci Farms' revamped CuteCumber™ Poppers is answering that call.

The growing demand for portable, convenient, and fresh options for on-the-go snacking has been paired with a portioned ranch dip in one package, offering an option ideal for any event, meal, or timeframe.

The packaging is a 1.5 lb bowl with a top-seal lid, paired with two of the 1.5 oz custom-designed ranch dip cups.

The CuteCumber Poppers Double Dipper launch will include multiple marketing resources, such as in-store displays, P.O.P. materials, and in-store demonstrations at participating retailers.

Demand is on the side of the cucumber these days, and that is not just a trend but a behavior worth noting. If your fridge looks like mine, it just isn't up to par without the classic cucumber flavor and portability holding down a spot. 🥒

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COX FARMS

INDUSTRY STEWARD



A Q&A with Ian LeMay,
*President and Chief Executive Officer,
California Table Grape Commission*

By Anne Allen

To anyone outside of the industry, it's difficult to understand the level of dedication seen by our nation's farmers. But for those of us in fresh, we know how much it fundamentally shapes a person, how it can reach inside of us and not let go.

Growing up in California's San Joaquin Valley, Ian LeMay has only ever known a deep appreciation for farmers and the land they work. Throughout his career, he's tirelessly advocated for the industry, previously as the former President of the California Fresh Fruit Association, and now as the California Table Grape Commission's (CTGC) President and Chief Executive Officer.

More than a year into his new role, Ian contemplates the future of the California table grape industry, the commission's role, and how to steward the land for the next generation.





Anne Allen: Ian, what takeaways have you learned from your first year as President and Chief Executive Officer of CTGC?

Ian LeMay, President and Chief Executive Officer, California Table Grape Commission: Over the course of my first year as President and CEO of the California Table Grape Commission, one of my greatest takeaways has been the tremendous strength and support that exists throughout California's table grape industry. I've been incredibly encouraged by the engagement and confidence shown not only by our growers and shippers, but also by our commission board and industry partners. There is a genuine shared commitment to the long-term success of Grapes from California, and that level of support creates a strong foundation for leadership and progress.

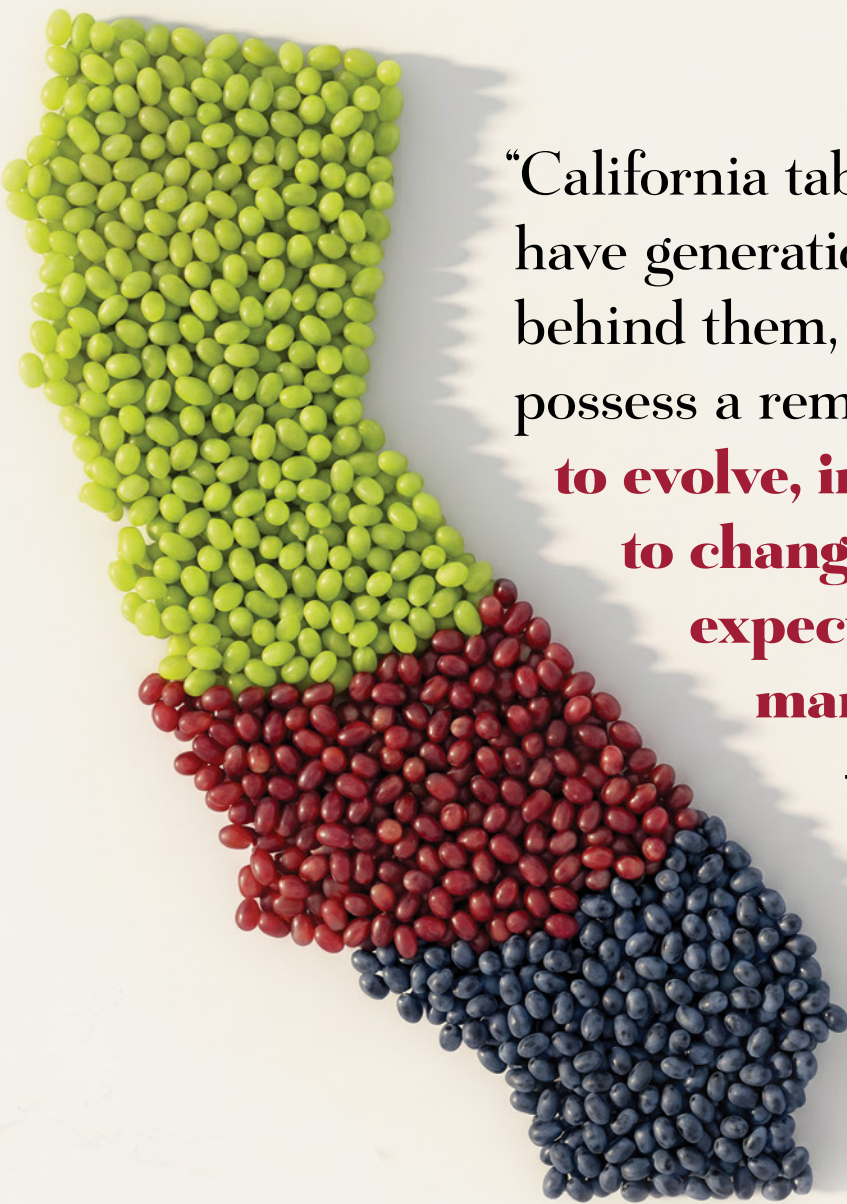
I've also come to appreciate even more deeply how our industry is rooted in legacy while consistently embracing constant improvement. California table grape growers have generations of history behind them, but they also possess a remarkable willingness to evolve, innovate, and adapt to changing consumer expectations and global market conditions. That mindset has reinforced for me the importance of honoring the traditions and relationships that built this industry while continuing to push forward with new ideas, new strategies, and a long-term vision for growth.

AA: Can you speak a little more about the recent strategies CTGC has implemented? How are they beneficial to the industry at large?

IL: The California Table Grape Commission is excited to be promoting Grapes from California through an updated marketing campaign. The campaign introduces a cast of superhero characters consisting of Captain Cluster, Much, and Glow, who together form the Lunchbox League. Members of the Lunchbox League originate from California, where tasty fuels healthy, and healthy makes happy, and their status as superheroes links directly to grapes being considered a superfood. The Lunchbox League will champion Grapes from California globally and appear in in-store, digital, and social media promotional materials.

Introducing this cast of characters gives personality to a product consumers know and enjoy, and personifies the health benefits, taste, and quality of California grapes for consumers of all ages.

The commission was also recently awarded funds through the America First Trade Promotion Program (AFTPP) to support retail and consumer promotion initiatives in Australia, Mexico, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Funding from this award will further reinforce California's position as a global supplier of healthy, delicious, and high-quality table grapes.



“California table grape growers have generations of history behind them, but they also possess a remarkable **willingness to evolve, innovate, and adapt to changing consumer expectations and global market conditions.**”

-Ian LeMay,
President and Chief Executive Officer,
California Table Grape Commission

AA: Where are you most excited to lead the commission in the future?

IL: Looking ahead, I'm especially excited about the opportunities in front of us through the America First Trade Promotion Program and the additional resources it provides to strengthen the global position of Grapes from California. Those investments create meaningful opportunities to expand our presence in key international markets, deepen relationships with trade partners, and tell our story to consumers around the world in new and impactful ways.

I'm equally excited about the team leading that work at the commission. We have an incredibly talented, dedicated, and motivated staff that genuinely believes in this industry and its future. Their passion to grow California's position in the global table grape trade is evident every day, and I have tremendous confidence in our ability to continue building momentum together. The future of the California table grape industry is bright, and I'm honored to help lead the work ahead.



Threaded into the DNA of those who till the soil is the desire to leave a better future behind. It's a recurring theme in fresh produce, and one lovingly supported by Ian and the team he leads at the California Table Grape Commission. 

STONEFruit

SNACK
CHAT

By Anne Allen

From late-season cherry varieties to unique offerings of plumcots and apriums, summer stonefruit is truly a feast for the senses. To make the most of this limited window of opportunity, we connected with industry stalwarts to learn about merchandising tricks, seasonal insights, and more...



Miguel Beltran,

Sales Manager, California Stonefruit and Exotics, Giumarra Reedley

"This summer delivered an early yet sweet California stonefruit season, with a delicious mix of peaches, plums, and nectarines that delighted shoppers. Our DulceVida® premium nectarines led the lineup with their signature aromatic sweetness, and we look forward to expanding the program with increased volume next year. As we transition into fall, California's flavor story only gets stronger with the arrival of tree fruit favorites, including our core Do You Fuyu™ persimmon program. With vibrant color and unique sweetness, persimmons create new opportunities to drive sales. We look forward to supporting our retail partners with customized programs designed to capture consumer attention and build excitement for the fall fruit season ahead."



Angela Hernandez,

Vice President of Marketing, Trinity Fruit Company

"Stonefruit performs best when it is displayed front and center with abundance and color. Large, full displays create excitement and encourage impulse purchases. We recommend color blocking peaches, nectarines, plums, and pluots to help shoppers easily navigate the category. Secondary displays near high-traffic areas, strong POS signage, recipe inspiration, and health-focused messaging also help drive sales. Sampling during peak flavor windows is another great way to create trial and encourage purchases."



Brianna Shales,

Marketing Director, Stemilt

"Stemilt's A Half Mile Closer to the Moon® cherries arrive each August, helping retailers extend the cherry season with outstanding flavor and freshness. Grown at higher elevations, these cherries are harvested daily to deliver strong volumes throughout August, even as supplies taper off in other regions. This late-season availability helps retailers capture premium rings when demand remains high. Distinctive moon-themed packaging creates eye-catching displays, while exceptional fruit quality keeps 'Moon cherries' top of mind—encouraging repeat purchases and return shopping trips."



Jason Morris,

Category and Sales Specialist, Oppy

"For over 50 years, Oppy has helped shape the stonefruit category. Today, we offer a mix of trusted favorites and unique varieties. Currently, we're featuring Oregon prune plums—an eagerly awaited summer item with a loyal following in the Eastern U.S. and Canada. We're looking ahead to the import season with the largest and longest-running Southern Hemisphere plum program, supported by strong grower partnerships in Chile and South Africa, late January through May. Our Blushing Farms brand continues to grow, with newer South African varieties adding fresh excitement. Strategic winter promotions will help customers drive strong results across the category."



Ryan Howard,

North American Sales Director, Family Tree Farms

"For Family Tree Farms, the summer stonefruit season is always especially rewarding. August showcases the very best of the season, with an exceptional range of varieties that deliver on both flavor and quality. Our retail partners and their customers can expect California's sweetest, most refreshing stonefruit at its peak. This includes our industry-leading white-flesh program, featuring standout varieties such as Pink Moon white peaches and Pearlicious white nectarines. In addition, unique offerings of Plumcots and Apriums, such as Flavor Gator, Plum Cherry, and Rose, continue to drive excitement across the category. As sugar levels rise and colors deepen in the summer heat, we remain focused on delivering what we proudly call The World's Most Flavorful Fruit™."



Kevin Steiner,

Director of Business Development, Mountain View Fruit Sales

"Mountain View Fruit Sales is proud to be a family-owned company for over 30 years and represent multigenerational family growers located in the Fruit Basket of the World. Stonefruit is one of the few seasonal items left in the produce department, so utilize the seasonality to take advantage of impulse purchases and make displays special in the produce department to increase excitement."

We focus on growing high-flavor varieties that fit into our harvest plan and have expanded our early- and late-season Autumnripe program. With the early start to the season, we have had more promotional windows in the spring and early part of the summer. Continue to push stonefruit as varieties continue to be harvested earlier than normal. Mountain View offers a full complement of point-of-sale materials, merchandising bins, digital images, and recipes to help drive impulse purchases. Our goal is to understand our partners' strategies and goals and tailor our sales and marketing tools to help them achieve success."

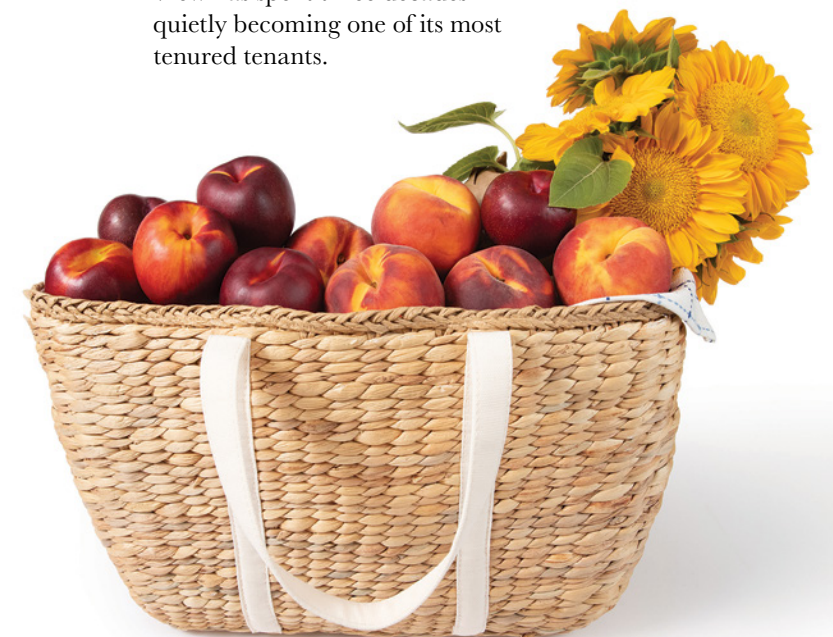
FASHIONABLY *Late*

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

As something of a time-keeper, I admit the best experiences are often late but worth the wait. Born and raised in California, that wait is usually for cooler weather and rainfall. But for one company, it is about finding the right fruit to bridge two seasons.

I've written a fair amount about the Salad Bowl of the World, but as the summer sets prepare for an autumnal shift, let me wax poetic about the Fruit Basket of the World.

Nestled in Reedley, Dinuba, and Wheeler Ridge, California, Mountain View Fruit Sales lives up to the name of a family of farmers established in 1994. Set against the Sierra Nevada foothills, the San Joaquin Valley's sun-drenched growing conditions have long made it among the most coveted addresses in stonefruit production, and Mountain View has spent three decades quietly becoming one of its most tenured tenants.



“Our motto is ‘we’re more than just a box of fruit,’ and we stand by that! We are proud to have been working closely with many long-term customers and have built long-standing relationships through the years,” shares Michael Thurlow, son of Owner Mike Thurlow, meeting me with enthusiasm and energy about the company he has grown up with.

To me, the mountain range logo is a familiar one among fruit providers, but in an industry where relationships are crucial, I have to admit I know very little about the hands and minds behind the Reedley-based company. Michael is happy to bring me up to speed, explaining that when it comes to supporting its retail partners,

loyalty is a cornerstone of Mountain View Fruit Sales.

“We are dedicated to our customers and consumers, excited to work with retailers, and loyal to the core,” he says, detailing an image of a committed company culture, but also one that knows and thrives in the trenches of



“We are dedicated to our customers and consumers, excited to work with retailers, and loyal to the core.”

Michael Thurlow,
Mountain View Fruit Sales

growing. “We believe relationships are the key component to building partnerships and loyal programs. If our customers don’t succeed, then we don’t succeed.”

That conviction is not merely a company philosophy; it shows up in the day-to-day. When a retail partner faces a gap in supply or an unexpected shift in ad programming, Mountain View’s team is already anticipating the call. This kind of muscle memory, the result of years of close-knit collaboration, is arguably harder to build than any new variety.

Support in our industry often looks like anticipation—of a phone call, a



“Our Autumnripe brand is derived from having a transition from our summertime fruit to our late-season fruit available in autumn.”



need, or a pain point. Not clairvoyance, but something more aligned. A hive-mind understanding deep enough that one side recognizes the opportunity in the other’s challenge before it becomes an obstacle.

The most common of these is the inevitable transition between seasons. As nature’s colors and temperatures shift, our industry holds its breath, waiting for the shoe to drop. Will there be a gap? Will a last unexpected weather event stutter established ad plans? Amid such a climate, Mountain View’s Autumnripe was born.

“Our goal is always to sell the highest-quality, best-tasting fruit while maintaining the close relationships we have developed with our retail partners,” Michael says. “Our Autumnripe brand is derived from having a transition from

our summertime fruit to our late-season fruit available in autumn. The brand and name were created with a fall theme in mind that would bring it to life.”

With a moniker and fall-palette branding across all the packaging and marketing materials, Autumnripe is an ideal bridge from picnic-basketting summer fruits to cozy slices that might adorn baked goods or steaming beverages.

“Our late-season peaches and nectarines have been growing all season long and are ready for harvest come fall-time,” Michael shares. When it comes to factors like flavor and differentiation that the retail side should keep in mind, he doesn’t hesitate. “The time spent on the tree growing longer than other varieties makes them some of the most special of the year. Very sweet and juicy, our late-season peaches bring peak season flavor!”

That extended hang time is the kind of detail that separates a good stonefruit program from a great one. While the rest of the category winds down and promotional energy begins migrating toward fall staples, Autumnripe quietly arrives with something retailers rarely have at their disposal in September: peak-quality stonefruit that does not feel at all like a remnant. It is that last bright bite as a season falls away.

Autumnripe is a brand that knows its moment, and at a time when so much of the industry is already looking ahead to staples like apples, pears, and winter squash, Mountain View Fruit Sales is giving its retail partners one final reason to linger in the rays of summer.

Just a little late—and absolutely worth the wait. 🍑



BEYOND THE BRAND

By Jordan Okumura-Wright

58



“WE’RE BRINGING RETAILERS AND OPERATORS CATEGORY INSIGHTS, PROFITABILITY TOOLS, MERCHANDISING SUPPORT, PROMOTIONAL IDEAS, AND REAL PEOPLE THEY CAN CALL WHEN THEY NEED HELP.”

-PATRICK MILLS,

Western United States
and Canada,
Idaho Potato Commission

After 40 years in this business, I can tell you trust doesn’t happen because somebody shows up once a year with a sales deck and a handshake,” Patrick Mills tells me.

Trust happens when you consistently help people win.

This is something that the Idaho Potato Commission (IPC) does as a core tenet. By seamlessly interlocking the greater potato supply chain with the retail and foodservice companies it serves, IPC has made the category a

stalwart in the market—and continuously, a destination for innovation and partnership.

IPC has built something rare in this industry: a legacy that retailers and operators genuinely trust and lean on. This is all distilled into IPC’s approach to its partnerships, which has allowed those relationships to endure for decades.

“What’s made IPC unique is that we’ve always approached partnerships like a long game. We’re not just saying, ‘Here are some Idaho potatoes and good luck.’ We’re

bringing retailers and operators category insights, profitability tools, merchandising support, promotional ideas, and real people they can call when they need help,” Patrick, Western United States and Canada, says. “We constantly ask ourselves, ‘How do we help move more product, drive margin, and create a better customer experience?’”

If there is anything I have learned from Patrick, it is that there’s a difference between a retailer who carries Idaho potatoes and one who really builds a program around them. I ask Patrick: What does that look

like when it’s done right—and what does IPC bring to the table to help get a partner there?

Patrick does not hesitate.

“Anybody can stock potatoes. Building a real Idaho potato program is different,” Patrick launches. “That’s where IPC comes in. We bring tools retailers can actually use: quarterly category reports, retail ad guidance, point-of-sale materials, merchandising inspiration, promotional kits, downloadable creative assets, and dedicated representatives, like

me, who help tailor ideas to their market. We like to say: We’re not here to tell you to sell potatoes; we’re here to help you sell more potatoes, more profitably.”

Detailing the differentiation IPC brings to the table, Patrick dives into the fact that foodservice and retail are two very different conversations. This is another area where relationships become further tailored, and never one-size-fits-all.

“Retail and foodservice speak two different languages. Retail asks, ‘How do I drive basket size?’

Foodservice asks, ‘How do I drive profit and keep guests coming back?’” Patrick starts. “For retail, IPC focuses heavily on merchandising, shopper behavior, category growth, promotions, seasonal activation, and helping stores create displays and programs that convert shopper recognition into sales. On the foodservice side, it becomes much more operational: yield, consistency, portion sizing, menu profitability, recipes, labor considerations, and performance on the plate. IPC

offers calculators, recipe support, menu inspiration, and tools that help operators understand the economics of serving premium Idaho potatoes.”

Patrick puts a question to me—and answers it. What is the biggest untapped opportunity? Premiumization.

“Consumers already recognize and trust the Idaho name. Operators sometimes underestimate how much that matters. Calling out Idaho potatoes on a menu or in an ad elevates consumer perceived value and helps drive stronger margins. People notice quality, and Idaho farmers have spent generations

owning that recognition.”

He expands on where that trust actually lives—not in the brand alone, but at the point of purchase, where equity either converts or disappears.

“The beauty of the Idaho brand is that consumers already walk in with trust. They know the name, they know the quality, and frankly, Idaho potatoes have earned a little celebrity status over the years. But that brand equity only works if you bring it to life where buying decisions happen,” Patrick says. “At retail, that means effective signage, strong displays, seasonal merchandising, recipes, promotions, meal inspiration, and making Idaho

potatoes visible. IPC provides point-of-sale materials, retail creative, advertising guidance, recipes, and promotional assets to help retailers turn a commodity purchase into a basket-building experience. In foodservice, it’s about menu language, highlighting Idaho potatoes on menus, building craveable applications, and reinforcing quality cues for guests.”

Patrick pauses to let it all sink in, then gives me the short long of it—though I know his strategy is far from basic.

“I joke sometimes: If consumers already know and trust the brand, our job is simply to stop Idaho potatoes from playing hide-and-seek,” he says. “Though I do wish more people realized IPC isn’t just a logo on a bag; we’re a business partner. A lot of buyers think of us only when they need signage or a promotion, but IPC offers much deeper support.”

IPC brings the full toolkit: market insights, profitability reporting, merchandising guidance, seasonal planning, foodservice calculators, recipe development, creative assets, promotional support, shipper directories, and direct access to experienced representatives who understand regional opportunities and challenges. That is no short list.

“After four decades in this industry, I’ve learned one thing: The best partnerships happen when people pick up the phone early, not when there’s a problem. If you’re a retailer or operator and you’re not tapping into the IPC as a strategic resource, you’re probably leaving opportunity on the table. As somebody representing 600 Idaho potato farmers, our team is pretty passionate about helping partners win,” Patrick says.

Like Patrick has done many times as a retailer and now as a champion for 600 Idaho farmers. Pick up the phone, reach across the table—the partnership is only as powerful as its participants. 



PLANTING *here,* THRIVING *there*

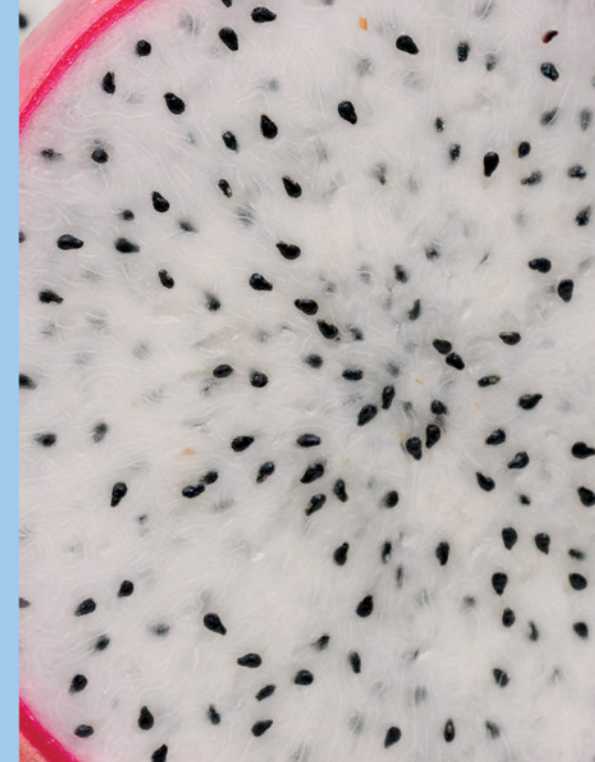
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CIRCULAR

by **DESIGN**

By Peggy Packer

Some go where the demand leads them. Others dare to create opportunities and let the demand follow. Westfalia Fruit is one of the latter.

Brandishing category expertise that extends back to before the 1950s, the longstanding avocado maven is a master at forging new channels of demand in the produce department.

Dr. Hans Merensky planted the first Westfalia trees in 1949, a reflection of his sixth sense for what the land needed. This instinct and dedication are still woven into every avocado Westfalia

Fruit brings to market, and the company's deepened knowledge of the tree that produces its fruit continues to provide an incredibly unique advantage for the supplier and its retail partners.

"We know the avocado because the majority of all commercial avocado trees are grown on our rootstocks, a strong foundation for the perfect Hass avocado," explains Denise Junqueiro, Director of Customer and Business Development. "Others built a network around the avocado, but Westfalia Fruit designed the avocado tree—so we know the fruit."

Westfalia Fruit is a global leader in avocado rootstocks, all developed in-house for higher yields, disease tolerance, and resilience across diverse growing conditions.

"That science travels with the fruit into every origin we operate in, so balanced nutrition tailored to each orchard, precision irrigation and climate monitoring, dry matter tracking against tighter standards than the industry norm, and traceability at every stage are not origin-specific advantages but a single discipline applied everywhere we grow," Denise adds. "The same cultural



"Others built a network around the avocado, but Westfalia Fruit **DESIGNED the avocado tree—so we know the fruit."**

Denise Junqueiro, Director of Customer and Business Development, Westfalia Fruit

playbook practices run across our Latin America origins and beyond, which is why a U.S. buyer gets the high quality and eating experience desired regardless of which origin the fruit comes from. For retail partners, that consistency is what drives category growth, because consistent eating quality drives repeat purchase, and repeat purchase builds the avocado category on shelf."

Sourcing from more than 20 avocado-growing regions across both hemispheres—including the five most integral to the U.S. market: Mexico, Peru, Colombia, California, and

Chile—Westfalia Fruit offers American retailers surety of supply built on one of the most diverse avocado footprints in the industry.

This expansive sourcing network is what makes year-round surety of supply possible for Westfalia Fruit's partners.

"California brings domestic spring and summer fruit, and the 'grown in America' story buyers value. Peru opens in March and runs through September on the conventional side, with organic peaking March to July, drawing on Westfalia-owned farms and a wide

network of trusted partner growers across 13 regions from Lambayeque down to Arequipa, shipping through Callao and Paita," Denise explains, offering an overview of the company's impressive footprint. "Colombia delivers near year-round availability with two visible peaks, drawn from Westfalia-owned farms and partner-grower orchards across seven regions, with packhouses in Sonsón and Guarne and shipments through Santa Marta and Cartagena. Chile rounds the picture out by extending counter-seasonal supply and adding flexibility."

Another operational advantage for Westfalia Fruit is the company's whole-tree approach. Each part of the crop is utilized, from fresh avocados to convenient avocado solutions and premium avocado oil. Seeds and skins return to the orchards for soil conditioning, and are used in a wide variety of industries, including cosmetics and packaging. By optimizing each and every part of the beloved avocado tree, the grower continues to unlock value in the supply chain, allowing the fruit that leaves the farm to give something back to the land.

"For Westfalia Fruit and our growers, the whole crop carries economic value, which stabilizes returns across grade and size variability and supports long-term investment in the orchard," Denise adds. "For retail partners, it converts what would otherwise be category waste into incremental SKUs across produce, oil, and plant-based formats, opening adjacent shelf space beyond the avocado bin. For consumers, it means premium avocado-derived products made by a company that is also an award-winning ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) champion, with reforestation and pollination programs restoring the natural ecosystem around every farm."

One of the ways Westfalia Fruit guarantees quality and consistency across very different growing environments is through its dedicated research body, which runs an industry-leading R&D and Disease Control Lab in origin, owns nurseries and rootstocks in both Peru and Colombia, and maintains a continuous pre- and post-harvest research pipeline.

"We own the largest privately funded subtropical research center. Our professionals create disease-resistant trees to enhance tree health and productivity, and our Dusa® rootstocks form the majority of all the commercial avocado trees globally," Denise continues. "The research reaches the orchard through technical training programs for growers, so the science does not stop at the lab door. Looking forward, the same pipeline is what



Westfalia Fruit's constant innovation positions the supplier to continue advancing the avocado category by improving the complex processes required to maximize quality, consistency, and supply surety

allows Westfalia Fruit to extend harvest windows, improve dry matter and shelf-life, and protect against emerging climate and disease pressures, all of which protect the year-round surety of supply we promise U.S. retailers as the category grows."

Technology and innovation are also key factors, extending from the nursery to the warehouse, end-to-end. This constant innovation positions the supplier to continue advancing the avocado category by improving the complex processes required to maximize quality, consistency, and supply surety.

"In the orchard, balanced nutrition is tailored to each block, precision

irrigation and climate monitoring keep trees in the right condition, and dry matter tracking is held to high standards. With Dusa alone selling more than 1.5 million trees worldwide every year, Westfalia Fruit has reshaped what is possible commercially, and ongoing varietal work continues to push yields, disease tolerance, and resilience," Denise explains. "In the supply chain, strict loading temperatures, full cold-chain control, minimized days in transit, and traceability at every stage protect quality from packhouse to port. In the product itself, the whole-tree approach is an innovation in its own right, turning what other suppliers treat as a by-product into convenient solutions and circular returns to the orchard."

"The whole-tree approach is an innovation in its own right, turning what other suppliers treat as a by-product into convenient solutions and circular returns to the orchard."



Further laying out an ambitious growth path, Westfalia Fruit's blueprint follows the same Roots to Retail thread that defines the business today. The company's Roots to Retail campaign rolled out across American retail, foodservice, and trade channels in 2026, welcoming consumers into the world of avocado production with exclusive origin-by-origin stories following the season.

"Beyond the campaign itself, we are deepening the footprint in the five U.S.-facing origins, particularly Peru and Colombia, where the partner-grower networks are still expanding, and using regional diversification to extend seasonality and bring fruit closer to market," Denise concludes. "We are building the whole tree approach commercially, rolling the premium avocado oil range further into U.S. retail alongside fresh and convenient formats. In addition, we are continuing the research pipeline, both pre- and post-harvest, with new varietal and rootstock work designed to lift yields, eating quality, and resilience against climate and disease pressures. Last but not least, we are strengthening the ESG record, building on the award-winning sustainability platform and the reforestation and pollination programs that restore the natural ecosystem around every farm."

Behind every farm on the Westfalia Fruit map is a grower, a packhouse team, a research scientist, and a logistics partner working to the same standard—a vital thread from rootstock to retail shelf. Together, each team member makes the 77-year-old company's innovative whole-tree approach possible, resulting in a powerful avocado portfolio that continues to drive category growth.

With decades of expertise, an unparalleled understanding of the avocado tree, and a team that never wavers in its commitment to quality and innovation, Westfalia Fruit has effectively mastered the art of creating demand.

What pivotal category opportunities will the grower forge next? You'll just have to wait and see. 🍷

LESSONS LEARNED & STANDARDS STRENGTHENED

Nearly 20 years ago, a tragic foodborne illness outbreak linked to fresh spinach caused consumers to question the safety of their food.

A lot has changed since then.

The LGMA was formed as a direct response to this crisis and has since evolved into a robust, science-based system focused on prevention, verification, and continuous improvement.

Today, food safety practices are standardized, data-driven, and rigorously enforced across the industry. We have built systems that did not exist before—and we work to continuously strengthen those systems—all with the goal of providing the safest serving of leafy greens.



20 Years of Commitment and Continuous Improvement.

lgma.ca.gov



FamilyTree^{FARMS}

FRUIT *Connects* US ALL



By Anne Allen

Starting a business is never easy, let alone one in agriculture. It requires strength of character that David Jackson, Owner/Farmer of Family Tree Farms, possesses in spades.

He founded the company 25 years ago with his sons, Daniel and Rick, and son-in-law Andy Muxlow. Since its inception, dedication to flavor and innovation has helped Family

Tree Farms blossom from a humble Central California operation to a global network, with farms in the United States, South America, and South Africa.

As Family Tree Farms celebrates its 25th year in business, the founding vision continues to inform each decision the company makes as it builds a generational legacy.



Q1 —
Anne Allen: David, congratulations on such an enormous milestone! What does this 25-year anniversary mean to you and the company?

David Jackson, Owner/Farmer, Family Tree Farms: Reaching 25 years is incredibly meaningful for our family. Farming is never easy, and every season brings new challenges. This milestone really represents the hard work of so many people—our growers, employees, partners, and customers who have believed in what we’re building.



“What began as a small stonefruit venture has expanded into a global farming company with strong *blueberry* and *stonefruit* programs and trusted partnerships around the world.”

— **DAVID JACKSON, Owner/Farmer, Family Tree Farms**

For me personally, it’s also about family. Farming runs deep in our roots, going back eight generations. Seeing the next generation involved and helping to lead the company forward is something that I’m very thankful for. This anniversary is not just about looking back at what we’ve accomplished, but about continuing to build something that will last for years to come.

Q2 —

AA: In order to look forward, you have to look back! In what ways has Family Tree Farms grown over its 25 years?

DJ: When we started Family Tree Farms 25 years ago, our goal was simple: grow great fruit and take care of the people around us. Over the years, that vision has grown into something much bigger than ever imagined. What began as a small stonefruit venture has expanded into a global farming operation with strong blueberry and stonefruit programs and trusted partnerships around the world.

The biggest growth has come from our commitment to flavor and innovation. Early on, we made the decision to invest heavily in research and development (R&D), working with breeders and testing varieties from around the world to find fruit that truly stands out. That focus has helped us build programs that retailers and consumers trust for quality and taste.

Q3 —

AA: In what ways does the company continue to grow and expand?

DJ: Family Tree Farms continues to grow both domestically and internationally. Our blueberry program has expanded significantly, with farming operations in Peru and Mexico, along



Alongside his sons, Rick and Daniel, and his son-in-law, Andy Muxlow, David Jackson founded the operation that became Family Tree Farms

“Whether it’s new varieties of stonefruit, berries, or other fruits, our focus remains the same: finding the *best-tasting fruit* possible and delivering it to families everywhere.”

with development work in Ecuador and Chile. This allows us to provide a more consistent, year-round supply while maintaining the quality standards we are known for.

At the same time, we are continuing to explore additional commodities and opportunities around the world. Whether it’s new varieties of stonefruit, berries, or other fruits, our focus remains the same: finding the best-tasting fruit possible and delivering it to families everywhere.

Q4 —

AA: To bring us back to a moment of reflection, what have been some challenges and successes in the company’s tenure?

DJ: Farming teaches you humility very quickly. Weather, labor, logistics, and changing market conditions are challenges we face every year. But those challenges are also what push us to keep improving and adapting.

One of our biggest successes has been staying committed to flavor and innovation. The research and development work we’ve invested in over the years has allowed us to bring new varieties to market that truly differentiate themselves. Watching customers and consumers respond to those varieties is incredibly rewarding and reminds us why we do what we do.

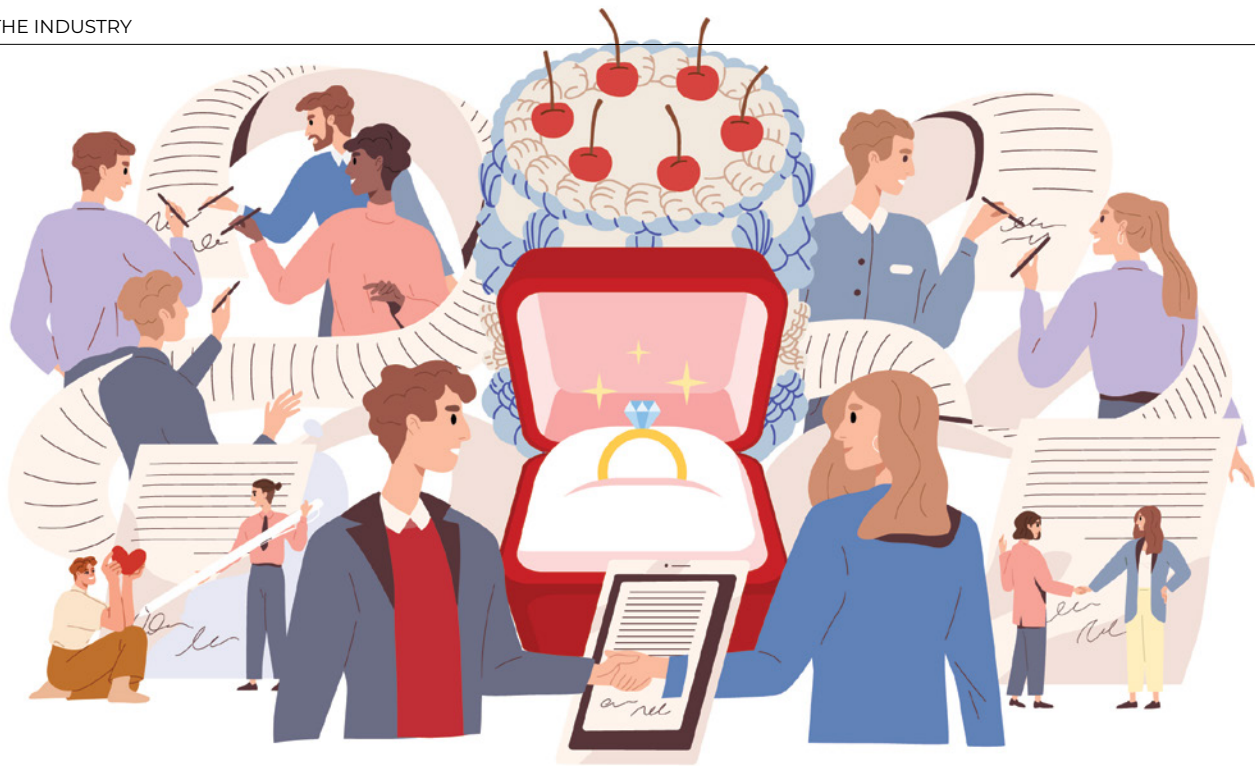
Q5 —

AA: Before we sign off, what can you tell me about recent updates to your blueberry program?

DJ: Our blueberry program continues to be one of the fastest-growing parts of the business. We’re expanding acreage, improving our variety mix, and strengthening our global growing regions to support increasing demand. The goal is always the same: to produce blueberries with exceptional flavor and quality while ensuring a reliable year-round supply for our retail partners. By investing in new genetics and expanding our international footprint, we’re positioning ourselves to continue growing significantly in the years ahead.

Humility is as much a part of David’s character as it is for everyone employed at Family Tree Farms. The company’s vision to bring delicious fruit to people around the globe is made possible by these individuals, each making a choice to grow fruit that benefits my family, your family, and theirs.

And that might be what David is most proud of: that the fruit connects us all.



The Executive Proposal:

Why a Job Offer Is a Lot Like a Marriage Proposal

By Editorial Contributor Julie Marcik, President, Joe Produce SearchSM

In executive search, we know we are nearing a successful match when we reach one crucial milestone: both sides genuinely want each other. The company is excited about the candidate. And just as important, the candidate is excited about the company.

At Joe Produce Search, we often compare the hiring process to dating. The early conversations and interviews are where both sides get to know each other, test the chemistry, and decide whether there is enough there to keep going.

Eventually, the process has to move beyond interest and into commitment.

That is where a job offer starts to feel a lot like a marriage proposal. In both cases, one side is stepping forward to say, “We see a future with you. We value you. And we hope you choose us, too.”

Just like a proposal, a great job offer should never feel random, rushed, generic, or uncertain. It should feel thoughtful and should reflect what has already been discussed. By the time it is presented, both sides should feel confident about what comes next.

Interestingly, the timing lines up, too. Engagement season typically peaks between Thanksgiving and Valentine’s Day, with December being especially popular. In the produce executive search world, we also tend to see strong hiring activity in the fourth quarter. So, if the goal is to have the right person in place by the holidays or the start of a new year, September is a smart time to begin the process.

How a Job Offer Mirrors a Marriage Proposal

It should not come out of nowhere.

- The exact moment of a proposal may be a surprise, but the intent should not be. The same is true with a job offer. Before an offer is extended, both sides should have already discussed interest, expectations, timing, and what it would take to move forward.

It balances emotion with real-life logistics.

- A proposal may be romantic, and it also affects finances, lifestyle, family, and future plans. A job offer is similar. It can be exciting, and it also impacts a person’s identity, schedule, family dynamic, security, and long-term career path.

It requires alignment around the future.

- Marriage requires shared values and a shared vision. A key hire requires alignment around leadership style, company direction, success metrics, culture, and career growth.

It needs to feel personal.

- A generic proposal falls flat. So does a generic offer. A candidate wants to feel seen. They want to know the company understands what matters to them and that the opportunity reflects those priorities.

Trust matters more than the terms.

- Trust is what makes someone comfortable saying yes. If there are hidden concerns, vague answers, or pressure tactics, doubt starts to creep in.

Timing is everything.

- Move too quickly, and it can feel rushed. Wait too long, and the candidate may wonder whether the company is serious or may move forward with another opportunity. Good hiring requires momentum and care.

The “yes” is only the beginning.

- A proposal leads to the wedding and the marriage. A job offer leads to onboarding, integration, performance, and retention. The real success happens after the acceptance.



The Real Question Behind the Offer

A marriage proposal asks: “Will you build a life with me?”

A job offer asks: “Will you build this future with us?”

That is why the offer stage deserves so much care.

The Money Conversation

In executive search, the goal is to help both sides get to the finish line in a thoughtful, informed, and respectful way. If the process has been handled well, there should not be major surprises when the final offer is made.

Compensation expectations, career goals, relocation needs, family considerations, leadership fit, and timing should all be discussed well before the offer letter is drafted.

Of course, both parties still have to hold up their end of the process. And because we are dealing

with people, careers, families, timing, and big decisions, anything can happen. That is also why this can be more challenging when a company is managing the process on its own.

For employers, the compensation conversation needs to happen early and directly. That means understanding what a candidate truly needs in order to make a move, including both compensation and the non-monetary factors that matter to them.

For candidates, it means being honest and realistic about priorities, expectations, and what would make an opportunity worth leaving their current role.

Executive compensation is rarely just about base salary. A strong offer may include bonus potential, equity or long-term incentives, health benefits, PTO, relocation support, vehicle allowance, flexibility, lifestyle considerations, and long-term career growth.

Why Pre-Offer Alignment Matters

A declined offer, especially for a senior-level role, can be costly in time, money, momentum, and reputation. Employers may have to restart or extend the search, absorb additional recruiting costs, leave a critical role vacant longer, and risk damaging candidate trust if the process or offer feels misaligned.

The best offers are not thrown over the wall with the hope that they land. They are built through listening, qualifying, clarifying, and confirming. By the time the offer is presented, the company should already have a strong sense of the answer.

The Bottom Line

The confidence to say yes to a marriage proposal is built over time. It comes from trust, alignment, honest conversations, and a shared belief in the future. A great job offer works the same way.

At its best, a job offer is not just a transaction. It is an invitation to build something meaningful together. And when the process is handled with thoughtfulness, clarity, and care, both sides can step into that next chapter with confidence. 🍷

Julie Marcik, is President of Joe Produce, the go-to job platform for the produce industry, connecting employers and professionals across the food chain, from seed to store. With more than 20 years of executive search experience, Julie understands that produce is more than a job it’s a lifestyle. Joe Produce combines powerful technology with real human expertise to help companies find the right talent and professionals discover new opportunities. Through Joe Produce Search, Julie and her team also provide executive search services for key leadership and management roles across North America.



Julie Marcik,
President
JOE Produce Search

Libations

For All Occasions

SOUTHERN STRAWBERRY NICE TEA



By Ryann Howard

Photography by Reid Monsma

As the resident Georgian here at *The Snack*, there really was no other choice for my first libation. When the weather turns warm, and the air starts humming with cicadas, there is exactly one thing that belongs in your hand: a tall glass of sweet tea.

Now, the only real decision left was how exactly I'd present it. I've had it just about every way possible, but today I'm sharing my personal favorite: Southern Strawberry Nice Tea.

It's bright, refreshing, and just fruity enough to feel fancy without messing with the integrity of a good Southern tea. The strawberries bring a burst of natural sweetness while still letting that classic tea flavor shine through.

And when it comes to sweetness? Look at the sky. There's your limit.

This is the part that people who don't regularly make sweet tea sometimes get wrong. Imagine going to a restaurant, ordering sweet tea, and the server asks if unsweetened tea is okay because they can bring sugar packets to the table.

Deep sigh. They've already misunderstood.

The magic happens while the tea is hot. Sugar dissolves, transforms, and becomes part of the tea itself. If you try to sweeten it after the fact, you're just drinking tea with crunchy regret at the bottom of the glass.

So yes—this drink requires heat.

Burn baby burn. 🔥



Here's how to make it... Prep Time: 15 mins Servings: 4-6

INGREDIENTS

1½-2 cups fresh strawberries, about
10-14 med strawberries
5-7 standard black tea bags
8 cups water, for brewing
2-4 cups cold water, to dilute after steeping
¾-1¼ cups granulated sugar, adjust to taste
Pinch of baking soda
Ice



DIRECTIONS

1. Wash, slice, and mash or blend the strawberries to release their juice. Set aside.
2. Steep tea bags in hot water with a small pinch of baking soda. This keeps the tea smooth and balanced.
3. While the tea is still hot, stir in sugar until fully dissolved.
4. Stir the fresh strawberry juice into the tea until combined.
5. Chill and serve! Refrigerate until cold, then pour over a tall glass of ice. Garnish with fresh strawberries if you're feeling fancy.



A Closer Look Monterey Mushrooms Stuffed Baby Bella Mushrooms

By Anne Allen

Imagine yourself as a hungry shopper looking for a simple mealtime solution. You need a product that doesn't judge, that gets the job done with no prep. You want something nutritious too, something you can feel good about bringing home to your family.

Enter Monterey® Stuffed Mushrooms. These 8.5 oz packages of whole Baby Bella caps filled with a savory cheese blend come in three bold flavors and are ready in as little as

eight minutes. Available in Garlic Parmesan, Spinach Artichoke, and Everything Seasoning, there's a flavor combination for everyone.

What really makes this product stand out are the whole Baby Bella caps. Underneath colorful labels that demarcate each flavor, the Baby Bellas are truly the stars of the show. These mushrooms have a firm, meaty texture and earthy flavor that pairs beautifully with the cheese blends. No filler or breading needed; they

soak up the flavor and bring depth to every bite.

Designed for the fresh mushroom set or the prepared foods section, this ready-to-bake dish is versatile in many ways. It can serve as a side, appetizer, or plant-forward main. Best of all, there's no recipe required.

When you want to be the answer to your shoppers' needs, this product surely fits the bill. **S**



UP
CLOSE



A Simple Way to Snack Organic

Made with organic apples and packed for everyday life, Crunch Pak Organic Apples bring simple, feel-good freshness to every bite. From ready-to-enjoy sliced bags to family-friendly 5-packs, they turn ordinary moments into something a little more special at home, on the go, and everywhere in between.

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