Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

the SNACK

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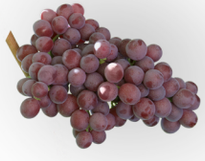

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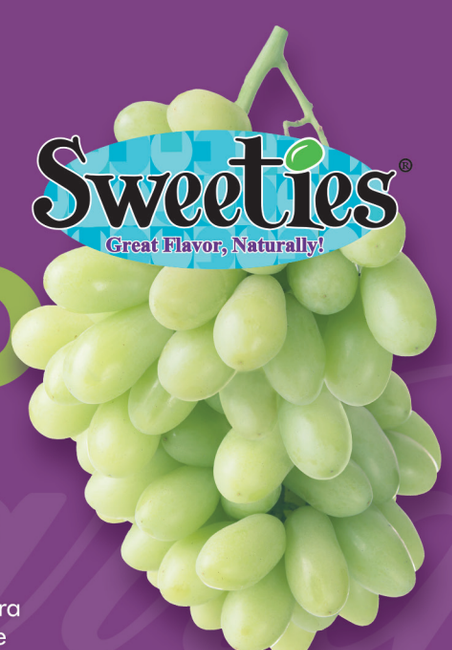

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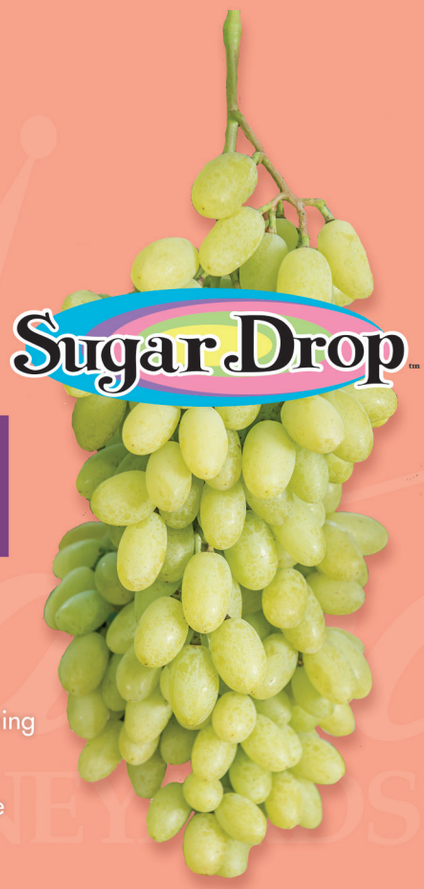

Our family shares the wisdom of three generations of farming experience, coupled with the constant evaluation and implementation of innovative and sustainable farming practices. Currently we farm 5,000 acres of premium table grapes in California's Southern San Joaquin Valley.

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Art theorist, painter, poet, and writer **John Berger said,** "If every event which occurred could be given a name, there would be no need for stories."

This resonates with me especially in this space, and by this space I mean the fresh produce industry. Our passion lies in elements that are grown, nurtured, and life-giving. What better origin from which to tell our stories? And like Berger's sentiment, stories evoke and precipitate life and lives untold. We should look at each individual and company in that way. More and more people come to us not only to tell their stories but to help them find them. I think we may have the best job in the world.

On a recent visit to Dallas, Texas, I sat down with Dan'l Mackey Almy and the DMA Solutions team to talk shop, and what was originally deemed as a strategy meeting turned into a passion project for me.

"Our industry is full of stories with that Hero's Journey, full of character arcs, calls to adventure, conflict, mentorship, resolution, but also that constant struggle," Dan'l shared. "We need to take advantage of that."

Writing stories bleeds genuine affection for the people I work with. Dan'l and her team spark inspiration and breed passion, which I hope comes through in the piece in this issue of *The Snack Magazine*.

Of course, our passion projects do not stop there.

A handful of years back, I met Paul Kneeland when he was working at Kings Food Markets. His love of fresh produce and hockey rounded out what was one of my favorite stories to write. Now, the industry vet has gained momentum and made his way to Gelson's Markets, where I can see the wheels turning as he is not only in charge of produce, but of all the Gelson's fresh departments. We sat down together to bring a new story to the industry, and you will find that here.

The Tom Lange Family of Companies also graces this 39th edition of *The Snack*, as Chase Tatham and Trevor Powell join us to talk legacy and the business model that has set them apart in the industry. The team flies quietly under the radar, but packs an immense impact, making them even more of an industry leader in our book.

Additionally, West Coast Tomato Growers joins us to share its goal of constantly evolving its culture, work ethic, and, inevitably, its presence in the market. That all starts with the people. For years, West Coast Tomato Growers has been investing in its culture, and part of that has been by bringing military veterans into its fold. Nestled near Camp Pendleton in California, the company couldn't help but look into its own backyard to elevate its passionate team.

Howard Nager of Sun Pacific jumps on board *The Snack* in this issue to wax poetic about marketing and merchandising. How can you not have an insight or two to give when you work with iconic brands like Cuties® and Mighties®?

There is so much more to share and so little space to do it. But I will let Sysco's Nancy Johnston and Dawn Gray of Dawn Gray Global Consulting share that with you—and in their own words. These pinnacles of produce strength join us to talk about a life lived in produce and what they see as the future of the game.

You have all been a gift to us and have had an amazing role in our growth here at *AndNowUKnow* and *The Snack*. We can only hope to give back to you what you have given us.

Jordan Okumura
Editor in Chief
AndNowUKnow and *The Snack*

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FEATURES

GELSON'S MARKETS
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What does "specialty grocer" even mean anymore? If you are Paul Kneeland, Executive Director of Fresh Operations, it means exclusivity, unique value, and competitive edge. And it is not just a set of missions and values—it is a mindset. Paul has seen the retail space taken to task as the demands of the consumer experience require the space to evolve. What's next for Gelson's? The industry leader shares his insights, starting from the inside out…

TOM LANGE FAMILY OF COMPANIES
RUNNING IN THE FAMILY

After nearly 60 years of company success, newly-minted Vice Presidents of Sales Chase Tatham and Trevor Powell discuss a legacy of excellence and a sea of opportunity as the Tom Lange family grows and grapples with seamlessly providing produce from seed to shelf…

SYSCO
ENSURING PRODUCE'S FUTURE

It's the constant question as our industry looks to pass the torch: How do we ensure there is a reliable generation to give it to? Nancy Johnston, Sysco's Senior Manager of Produce Sales, dives into this question in her own words as one of this issue's contributors…

SUN PACIFIC
PIQUANT PROMOTIONS: A Q&A WITH HOWARD NAGER

From grapes to kiwifruit, apples to oranges, this Vice President of Business Development has overseen some of the biggest brands across many of produce's most popular categories. We take a deep dive into merchandising, assortment, and marketing campaigns nationwide and store-narrow…

CANADIAN PRODUCE MARKETING ASSOCIATION
THE INFLUENCE OF CORPORATE CULTURE ON BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

While oft-overlooked, corporate culture has the power to increase commitment and loyalty and decrease employee turnover. Can your organization afford to ignore the benefits of establishing distinct customs and ethos? Ron Lemaire talks building and implementing corporate culture, the advantages thereof, and more…

WEST COAST TOMATO GROWERS
THE PRIDE AND SOUL OF OCEANSIDE POLE

From the front lines around the world to tomato vines in coastal California, Neville McGillvery, Derrick Platz, Andino Beniquez, and Orven Zaragoza are showcasing what it means to be produce strong. General Manager Priya Singh gives thanks to his team and details the values that West Coast Tomato Growers has added to its arsenal since making the commitment to welcome veterans onto its staff…

DMA SOLUTIONS
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Dan'l Mackey Almy is taking the gloves off and proving that marketing shouldn't go down in the last mile of a produce program's execution—it should be the lens through which we view the future of our industry. Dan'l is always one to speak freely, and there is no exception here. Join us for this glimpse into the mind of a maven, and where fresh produce needs to pivot next…

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THE TOM LANGE FAMILY OF COMPANIES

Left to right: Trevor Powell, Vice President of Sales, Lange Logistics-Atlanta, and Chase Tatham, Vice President of Sales, Tom Lange Company-Atlanta

Running in the Family

The Tom Lange Family of Companies

By **Robert Schaulis**

"Our approach is not to reinvent the wheel, but to refine it," Chase Tatham, Vice President of Sales for Tom Lange Company-Atlanta, tells me as we work toward identifying the focal point of the strategy that drives the team behind The Tom Lange Family of Companies. "We want to provide the highest level of service to our customers and pass along the benefits of the relationships with our growers and freight carriers for generations to come."

This is a company on a mission. The Tom Lange Family of Companies has made it the team's purpose to simplify fresh food for its customers, provide full-circle service, and complete the entire production, distribution, and logistics ecosystem when it comes to produce. The company has been working hand-in-hand with customers through Lange Logistics, Seven Seas, and Tom Lange Company to offer customized programs to customers around the globe.

Trevor Powell, Vice President of Sales for Lange Logistics-Atlanta, and Chase are two of the leaders emerging to steer the six-decades-old family of companies as it grows to offer impeccable service.

Both Trevor and Chase are relatively new to their VP positions. Chase came to his current role after longtime executive and board member Eric Hoffmann announced his retirement from the day-to-day operations of the company last year.

"Since the transition from Eric's retirement, the sales approach continues to focus on procurement with an

Trevor and Chase inspecting produce at a terminal outside The Tom Lange Family of Companies' Marietta, Georgia, office

"Our approach is not to reinvent the wheel, but to refine it."

–Chase Tatham, Vice President of Sales, Tom Lange Company-Atlanta

emphasis in foodservice and wholesale," Chase shares with me. "The foodservice industry is ever-changing with many different buying groups managing costs for corporate concepts."

The company provides value by working with each contracted program to create efficiencies in loading and to maximize the drive time each day. Additionally, Tom Lange's commodity managers are well posted and use volume to bring down the costs for each customer.

And Trevor is heading into uncharted territory as Lange Logistics' first Vice President of Sales in Atlanta. And though the position, almost by definition, offers an unprecedented challenge, Trevor tells me it is one that is not at all out of step with his 18-year career with Lange Logistics.

"There hasn't been a VP for Logistics in Atlanta, so I really don't have a model to work from, but I never have in my whole career," Trevor explains. "Lange Logistics was my first job out of college 18 years ago. We have built up a successful business based on hard work, honesty, and following through with what we have promised. I want to send a message to my office that we are a team, not a collection of individuals. I feel if we all help each other, we can build a better base of customers and drivers, all while improving our quality of life."

The idea that Tom Lange is more than just a collection of employees is something that both Trevor and Chase emphasize.

"Tom Lange is not only a family of companies but a family of people. When working here you feel a certain respect and responsibility to every associate involved with this company," Trevor says. "It's about more than yourself. I have close friends in every office in this company. You remember that notion when you are put in the position to 'do the right thing' even when it is the more difficult option."

Chase echoes those sentiments.

"Tom Lange's company culture doesn't solely focus on its business values; it also emphasizes the importance of community and generosity," says Chase. "Our annual Charity Golf Tournament allows us to raise money for great causes and enjoy a few days with our peers from across the country. Each year, I feel a sense of gratitude by seeing the impact we have on children's lives, and I thoroughly enjoy a couple of days spent socializing with suppliers, customers, and other coworkers."

It's an ethos that has effects throughout the company culture. Those effects are felt in the industry at large and the communities in which Tom Lange operates.

"We work together, we are involved in charities together, and we play off-hours together," Trevor adds. "It's a great company to work for, and I only hope my kids could be so lucky."

That comradery is at the origin of the Tom Lange Family of Companies' story.

In 1960, the Tom Lange Company was founded by Partners Tom Lange, Farrell "Dutch" Gay, and Paul Beisser.

Four years later, Phil "Rock"

Gumpert, Tom Lange's current Chairman and CEO would join the company, eventually taking over for Paul when he retired in the early 1970s. It was this trio of Tom, Dutch, and Rock who would take the Tom Lange Family of Companies from humble roots on the St Louis Produce Market to international success. Described alternately as a "fierce trio" and "three wise men," the team would usher in a six-decade-long trajectory of continual growth and achievement.

They did so with aplomb, expanding operations, leaping hurdles, and surpassing milestones at every turn. In 1981, the company adopted its first employee stock ownership plan (ESOP)—becoming entirely employee-owned by 1987.

Around this same time, Tom Lange Company adopted the role of produce distributor, taking title of its produce and working to make the purchase, sale, and distribution of product a single seamless process.

In 2000, Tom Lange would further expand by acquiring Seven Seas—a move that would both cultivate Tom Lange's presence abroad and broach the growing side of the industry.

A couple of years later, recognizing the need for greater vertical integration, Tom Lange would launch a full-service, multimodal, non-asset-based transportation company specializing in over-the-road through the U.S. and Canada. The project was dubbed Lange Logistics, and it began operation in 2002.

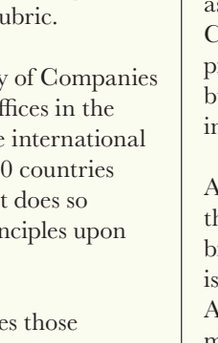
Tom Lange Company grew into the Tom Lange Family of Companies, at one point operating as many as 12 separate entities under the Tom Lange banner. In 2016, following a comprehensive rebrand spearheaded by President Greg Reinauer, Tom Lange united its various parts under three divisions—Tom Lange Co., Lange Logistics, and Seven Seas—all operating under the Tom Lange Family of Companies rubric.

The Tom Lange Family of Companies currently operates 18 offices in the United States and three international offices, servicing over 30 countries around the globe, and it does so guided by the same principles upon which it was founded.

Rock Gumpert describes those principles as such: "When I came to work for this company 55 years ago, Mr. Tom Lange made it very clear to me there was a code of ethics in the industry. Your word is your bond, and when you tell a customer or shipper something, you had better honor that commitment and damn well do it. The same holds true today, just as it did then. Tom Lange Family of Companies continues to honor those principles of trust, honest ethical business dealings, and service to the industry."

"We work together, we are involved in charities together, and we play off-hours together."

–Trevor Powell, Vice President of Sales, Lange Logistics-Atlanta



And while the sense of camaraderie that Trevor and Chase describe is a big part of Tom Lange, the company is not without its competitive edge. A sales office might relish its team mentality, but you would be hard-pressed to find a sales office in this fast-paced industry that isn't without a sense of competitive drive.

"The uniqueness of the Tom Lange Family is derived from the autonomy given to each employee to better themselves within the company," Chase tells me. "Each account manager sees the fruition of their labor daily. The competitive spirit keeps everyone on their toes and creates a unique environment that balances teamwork and friendly competition."

It's with a passion both cooperative and competitive that the company forges ahead, building a familial environment and a team of leaders that can operate and excel in our competitive industry.

Fresh apples at a produce terminal outside The Tom Lange Family of Companies' Marietta, Georgia, office

Wholesome Heroes represents individuals who are making a positive impact in their community through their work, volunteer efforts, or health and wellness initiatives.

WHAT MAKES RANDY A *WHOLESOME HERO?*

Randy has been involved with Scouts BSA for years, first as a Cubmaster, then as a Scoutmaster. Both of Randy's sons are Eagle Scouts, and now his grandson has started Cub Scouts. Randy helps teach the troop map skills, compass skills, teamwork, problem solving, time management, and more through competitive orienteering events. He's also involved in helping the scouts build pinewood derby cars, and they'll be racing them in the pit at the Texas Motor Speedway!

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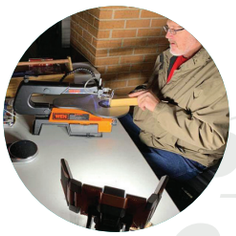
39	*34*	*Stuffed mushrooms*

"For boys and girls, Scouts fills an area and offers guidance about things not taught through school or sports, areas like: real-life skills, planning meals, following a budget, thinking ahead, and being self-sufficient—not to mention respect, responsibility, and leadership."

"There's nothing like giving back to the community. A lot of my work with Scouts is in teaching people how to volunteer. Sometimes people think it's going to be too difficult, and they're hesitant to get involved. But the biggest thing I try to teach people is that when you see a problem, you should go fix it. Don't wait for someone else to fix it. That's what volunteering is all about: seeing the opportunities to make your community better."



"The day-to-day chaos! You never know what's going to happen. Whether it's a cab driver strike in Guatemala that is keeping you from selling melons, or a storm in California that's taking out your citrus supply, you never know what kind of new challenge the day holds."

"There's nothing better than seeing a scout reach the rank of Eagle. At the Eagle Scout ceremonies, there's a moment when the scout gives pins to their parents. Seeing the pride in the parents' eyes is priceless."

"The definition of honor is doing the right thing, no matter if anyone knows you're doing it. That applies to anything you're doing. It's how I try to live, and the biggest thing I try to instill in the Scouts."

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UP CLOSE

A Closer Look at Freska Produce Organic Dried Mangos

By Maggie Mead

Unsweetened, unsulfured, and undeniably delicious, Freska Produce Organic Dried Mangos bring the taste of summer year-round. The delectable, freshly-dried fruit snack is a chewy treat consumers can feel good about eating, and though these dried mangos are unsweetened, they're naturally as sweet as it gets! Mangos are prized not only for their ambrosial taste, but also for their wealth of vitamins, dietary fiber, and antioxidants. These dried mangos provide all the flavor and benefits of fresh mangos with none of the added sugar or preservatives found in other "fruit" snacks.

These mouthwatering mangos are the perfect snack for the health-conscious shopper on the go, providing nutrition, taste, and convenience. And with record numbers of consumers clamoring for organics, these dried mangos fit the bill. Freska Produce Organic Dried Mangos entice with its prominent pink packaging and friendly cartoon mango on the bag. Who could resist such an eye-catching package, with taste and health benefits to back it up? The tasty dried slivers are poised to sell quickly, with more and more consumers looking for both nutrition and convenience in their snacks.

Few fruits deliver the taste of sunshine quite the way that mangos do, and with a long shelf-life for this snack, that taste can be on grocery shelves throughout the year. Customers will have a hard time putting down these tropical treats, as the vibrant aesthetic and dazzling flavor make for an enticing combination.

FRESKA PRODUCE INTERNATIONAL

Ensuring Produce's FUTURE

By Snack Editorial Contributor

Nancy Johnston

Senior Manager Produce Sales, Sysco

Two of my biggest passions within produce are lifting up the women in our industry and ensuring that we find the right people to do the job in the next generation.

To do a job that is 24/7 rather than nine-to-five, you have to have passion. In produce, there is an opportunity not just to welcome a new generation to the industry, but also to help create this passion in people. And there is an even greater opportunity to foster growth in women: by meeting them with support. Existing programs looking to do this are the Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) Career Pathways Program and Women's Fresh Perspectives Conference, as well as Southeast Produce Council's (SEPC) Southern Roots Women's Luncheon.

I love participating in Career Pathways because I get to challenge prospective produce professionals to find what they love in our industry. I wanted to be a produce broker because my grandfather was a produce broker, and my dad worked in the industry through college. But what about winning over both the younger adults who come from agriculture and the ones who don't? How do we as an industry come together to entice people joining the workforce to be a part of our companies?

One of the things I do when I get a student through Career Pathways is give them four or five questions to ask different suppliers like: What is the company? Where is it based? What are the products they have? What do they

see when they look at where they are going next?

Career Pathways does a great job of this in my opinion, and I think we could see even more success if we looked to increase our presence on campuses for ag-related schools as well as non-ag. I come from a produce background and learned from several mentors at a number of companies before I came to work for FreshPoint, which was then acquired by Sysco. And here I am 19 years later, having done sales, procurement, and seeing my job move into marketing and business development for Sysco produce, which I love. I love my customers and working with all of our companies. My journey is just one way to help take our industry to the next level, and I'm really excited to see where it goes next!

One of the newest things I've seen during my role in foodservice is how much more daring the new generations' palates are. My son, who is also in the industry, making him a fourth-generation produce professional, has been a much more adventurous eater than I ever was, and now the children of millennials are asking for the Brussels sprouts we hated as kids. How do we keep that momentum going?

Lastly, wouldn't it be great to bring prospective hires into a room and have them shaking hands with powerful men and women? Bringing female students to events like Southern Roots and the Womens Fresh Perspectives Conference could be an even bigger step in bringing more passion and more women into our industry.

One of the things that excites me when I come home to Salinas, California, is when all the produce trucks are there reminding me of my role in feeding the world. If we weren't there to answer the phone on Labor Day when a shipment didn't arrive, people wouldn't eat. And finding those who not only recognize that, but also take pride in it, is the next thing we have to task ourselves with to see where produce can really go.

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» The IF List «

Mimmo Franzone

DIRECTOR OF PRODUCE AND FLORAL, LONGO BROTHERS FRUIT MARKETS

With **Melissa De Leon**

For those of you who have not yet had the delight of knowing Mimmo Franzone, you are in for a treat. The passion he brings to the produce and floral departments of Longo's is just one facet of his many loves and interests. Dying to know more, I asked Mimmo one of the most fun questions of all: What IF? True to form, it was worth asking. Pour yourself a beverage—per Mimmo, probably something with tequila—and enjoy.

» IF you could have been born in another century or decade, which would it be and why?
Hands down the 22nd century, just because I don't think I'll make it there, and it's going to be a pretty cool time to be on Earth.

» IF you had to choose now, what would your last meal consist of?
People who know me would assume I'd say tacos, but I'm going to go with tequila…and tacos. One braised short rib, one pork belly, one baja fish, and two ounces of extra Añejo. Salud!

» IF you could have any actor play you in a movie, who would it be?
Has to be Denzel Washington…have you ever watched a Denzel movie you didn't enjoy?

» IF you could imagine yourself in a different industry, what would it be?
Definitely the music industry. I've been known to spin a record or two.

» IF you could have dinner with anyone, dead or alive, who would it be?
The options are almost endless…but one of them would be Bobby Flay. I grew up watching all his shows and he seems like a pretty cool cat. Oh, and he'd cook, and it would be a kick-ass dinner, too!

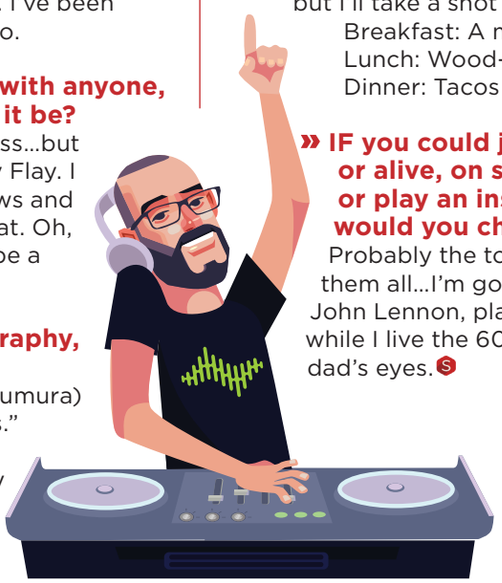
» IF you wrote an autobiography, what would be the title?
Going with a J.O. (Jordan Okumura) throwback: "Beats and Beets." Describes my passion for music and food, which pretty much sums me up.

» IF you had to wear the same thing every day what items of clothing would you pick?
Jeans, a retro graphic tee, and a pair of sneakers. Oh wait…and a hoodie—it's cold up here in Canada!

» IF you could make everyone watch a movie of your choosing, which movie would you want them to see?
Rudy, despite the 7.5 IMDb rating. It's more about the lessons learned… determination, overcoming odds, and fulfilling dreams. Pele said it best: "Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice, and, most of all, love of what you are doing." The words I live by.

» IF you had to eat the same thing every day for the rest of your days, what would you eat?
For someone who loves food, this question shouldn't have made the list… but I'll take a shot at it:
Breakfast: A mango
Lunch: Wood-oven pizza
Dinner: Tacos

» IF you could join a musician, dead or alive, on stage to sing along or play an instrument with, who would you choose and why?
Probably the toughest question of them all…I'm going to have to say with John Lennon, playing an acoustic set while I live the 60s and 70s through my dad's eyes.



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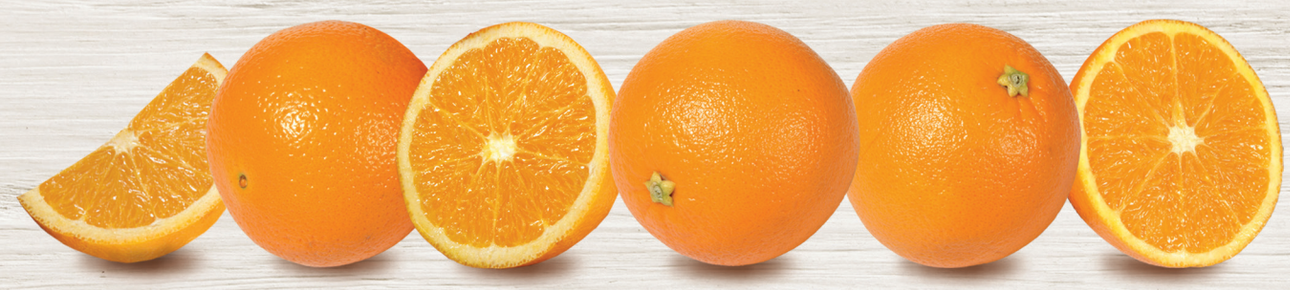

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UP CLOSE

A Closer Look at Jacobs Farm Del Cabo Organic Hot Pepper Medley

By Kayla Webb

Abandon all wimps, ye who enter here. The produce aisle has gone catawampus, and there's no turning back. Jacobs Farm Del Cabo is bringing the heat and shaming the devil with its new Organic Cabo Diablo Hot Pepper Medley, despite what the newest pepper pack might suggest.

For those retailers who have been to a rodeo or two and are thinking their produce aisles are as full as a tick, I have one thing to say, and one thing only: This pepper pack is too pretty to pass up! The Organic Cabo Diablo Hot Pepper Medley is a brilliant kaleidoscope of yellows, reds, oranges, and greens—the medium-to-hot pepper gang's all here!—which shoppers can feast their eyes on in a see-through, organic, and Fair Trade-certified 8 oz retail bag.

Lauded as containing some of the hottest peppers known to man (habaneros, Brazilian starfish, serranos, and more), with legend and lore depicting even the foulest of beasts cowering to its flames, the Organic Cabo Diablo Hot Pepper Medley is fixin' to take only the bravest, and most deviant, of shoppers' taste buds through all nine layers and back again.

The devil doesn't wear Prada, but yellow, orange, red, and green, and is making the produce aisle its stomping grounds with one Jacobs Farm Del Cabo organic medley. Spice-heathens, you've been warned!

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CERTIFIED ORGANIC
Healthy Soils, Healthy Plants, Healthy People®

PIQUANT PROMOTIONS:

A Q&A WITH HOWARD NAGER

By Robert Schaulis

As the Vice President of Business Development for Sun Pacific®, Howard Nager is responsible for some of the most popular brands in produce. From the iconic Cuties® mandarins and category-transforming Mighties® kiwifruit to Air Chief® grapes, it's Howard's job to oversee on-point presentation, piquant promotions, and to grow the scope of an already star-studded family of brands.

After more than 35 years in fresh produce marketing, guiding popular brands throughout many of the most popular categories, it's safe to say Howard is an expert at pushing produce. So we asked him a handful of questions. From store-level strategy to nationwide campaigns, Howard weighed in…

Howard Nager, Vice President of Business Development, Sun Pacific

ROBERT SCHAULIS: *Are there any constants that retail merchandisers can apply, regardless of the product in hand, to help drive sales?*

HOWARD NAGER: My past experience has been across a number of high-volume categories: tropicals (bananas and pineapples), apples, cherries, pears, and now citrus, kiwifruit, and grapes. I would say that across all of those products there are a number of constants and similarities that merchandisers can apply.

Promote the crop, not the calendar. Retailers should be focused on wanting to be 'best to market' and not necessarily 'first to market.' If the crop is a week or two late, don't force your ad and settle for inferior product.

Be flexible on sizing and look to promote what the crop is offering. Sometimes this might mean being flexible on your specifications in order to take advantage of the next size larger or even smaller. Most times this is where the best promotable deals will be found.

There are many "non-traditional" time periods that product can be promoted. Sure, apples are a great

"PROMOTE THE CROP, NOT THE CALENDAR. RETAILERS SHOULD BE FOCUSED ON WANTING TO BE 'BEST TO MARKET' AND NOT NECESSARILY 'FIRST TO MARKET.' IF THE CROP IS A WEEK OR TWO LATE, DON'T FORCE YOUR AD AND SETTLE FOR INFERIOR PRODUCT."

—HOWARD NAGER, VICE PRESIDENT OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, SUN PACIFIC®

back-to-school or fall item, and citrus is great for promoting during the winter months of cold and flu season. Every month presents an opportunity to structure a promotion or themed event. Mandarins are extremely versatile as a snack and can be promoted just about any time. Navels are great around the holidays, Chinese New Year, cold and flu season, and Lent. Juicing Valencias for a refreshing and healthy beverage during the hot summer months is a great opportunity as well. And don't forget to cross-promote all these items with other produce items and departments in the store.

RS: *What would you like to see more retailers do to take better advantage of marketing opportunities provided by companies like Sun Pacific?*

HN: When you are working for a grower/shipper, there is a huge responsibility to the grower to maximize returns back to the land. What that means is that it is our responsibility to sell all the fruit that comes off the tree—not just the prime sizes, but the small sizes as well as the larger fruit. It is important to have a wide range of customers that can handle the different sizes and quality grades.

That being said, one way for a customer to take advantage of promotional opportunities is to be flexible on sizing, packaging options (meaning bulk, bags, or packaged), and to have better communication with the grower/shipper on supplies and availability, promotional opportunities and pricing, sales volumes, and ad planning.

RS: *Which metrics do you find most telling in terms of the efficacy of a marketing tactic in-store? How does one take a different/similar approach when assessing the effectiveness of a much broader marketing approach like a nationwide consumer campaign?*

HN: In looking at a metric, I find that the most widely used and reliable is a year-over-year sales increase. Stores are traditionally graded on this metric within their own internal systems. For instance, a display contest can be coordinated with a group of stores—with an award provided, usually for some combination of creating and building an attractive display, use of POS material, use of tie-in products or display shippers, etc. Without a metric, this type of contest usually would be won by the larger stores. When using the metric of year-over-year percent sales increase, a smaller store can compete on a more level platform with the larger stores.

Nationwide campaigns pose a little different set of circumstances. There generally is a greater message that is being conveyed by the national campaign. For instance, we are running a national promotion with Disney for Cuties in February and March of 2019. This includes store-level execution of a display contest with display shippers to merchandise the product. In addition, it also involves social media, consumer prizes with the grand prize of an all-expenses-paid trip to Walt Disney World® in Orlando, Florida, a National FSI coupon, billboards in major markets, and the use of Ibotta couponing, as well as in-store radio. With so many layers, we are targeting a push/pull strategy of driving consumers into the stores looking for Cuties, and the stores' displays will hopefully provide the pull by stocking up and purchasing additional volumes of product. An additional benefit of a national program is it works to further align our brand with both the consumer and retailer, building trust and consumer satisfaction.

RS: *What are some of the in-store marketing tools that you find most successful in creating excitement for specific items in the produce aisle? Do these vary widely between different items like a clamshell for kiwifruit and bulk offerings of a branded apple?*

HN: There are many similar tools that are used to successfully promote different items in the produce department. There are some nuances, however, depending on if the item is bulk or packaged. For instance, for our Mighties kiwifruit, which is packed in a clamshell, the package plays a critical role in the

"CATEGORY MANAGEMENT IS A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF ANALYZING AND ASSESSING A SUCCESSFUL PRODUCE DEPARTMENT."

promotion of the product, whether it be conventional Mighties or organic Mighties. Because there still is a lot of opportunity to teach consumers about kiwifruit—how to eat it, nutritional benefits, as well as key attributes—we actually use a band around the clamshell to provide this information. In addition, the banding also affords us an opportunity to clearly differentiate the conventional and organic fruit by use of color and package graphics. In the case of Cuties, the package provides us the opportunity to promote the Cuties name, which can stand on its own in telling the consumer about the item. In addition to the package, display shippers, display contests, and demos that allow consumers the opportunity to touch and taste the product are all quite successful. Social media posting of blogs, recipes, and contests also work well across multiple product lines.

RS: *What are some of the challenges associated with creating an ideal assortment? What are some of the "intangibles" that contribute to a well-merchandised produce department?*

HN: Category management is a critical component of analyzing and assessing a successful produce department. Many retailers are able to completely address these issues, while others rely on a 'Category Captain' or some of their larger and trusted suppliers to provide intelligence and specifics on the commodities that they sell. That being said, there are some key areas to look at, such as the amount of retail shelf-space given to an item. For instance, some items in the specialty citrus area such as cara cara, heirloom, minneolas, and blood oranges should not be given the same amount of retail space as the mandarin category or even navel oranges, but there are times that they do warrant additional space on a side stack or incremental display. There are times of the season when these specialty citrus items can be promoted and given their time in the spotlight, and additional space should be allocated. This is also true for other categories, such as apples, with many of the proprietary varieties being given varying amounts of shelf-space depending on seasonality, promotion, and regional preferences.

Some other challenges might be competition from neighboring stores and formats. You might need to use more bulk versus bags in one store and more bags (value) versus bulk in others.

RS: *At what point does the need for variety trump the profitability of any one produce item in terms of shelf-space?*

HN: There is a fine line that is drawn in this area. In many instances, retailers must make up their mind as to how much space to allocate new items, specialty items, or those that come in and out during the season. Consumers generally are the final decision maker as to if and when a retailer carries certain items and how much space is provided. The case for variety is amplified by a retailer's need for positioning in the marketplace. By this I mean if they are the price leader or present a value proposition versus an organic or full-service retailer; all of these things play an important role in how much variety is carried in the store. Not to disparage any item, but stores might not carry jackfruit, kiwano melon, or Hatch chiles because they do not have the customer clientele for those items. On the other hand, another store might have a display of all of those items and more because they want to present that image to the consumer—that the store can supply shoppers with all of their needs.

No two produce categories are alike, but some insights are so penetrating that they—ideally—shed light on the whole lot, and Howard's thoughtful answers may be just the ticket to illume your next marketing move—be it store-level or writ large.

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The VIDALIA ONION

Oh, the sweet smell of April always inspires the consumer to do a little produce department hunting for the famous Vidalia onion. Demos are key, as well as merchandising the category front-and-center. Want a little extra pep in your educational step? Here are some fun facts to help motivate those sweet onion shoppers to become repeat customers throughout the season, and bring in the new shopper who may not have tapped into the vibrant and unique flavor of this onion.

1 GROWING REGIONS

Vidalia Onions can only be grown within a 20-county growing region in South Georgia: Appling, Bacon, Bulloch, Candler, Dodge, Emanuel, Evans, Jeff Davis, Jenkins, Laurens, Long, Montgomery, Pierce, Screven, Tattnall, Telfair, Toombs, Treutlen, Wayne, and Wheeler counties.

2 SO SPECIAL

This famous sweet onion can only be grown within a **6,000-SQUARE-MILE AREA** in a state occupying **60,000 SQUARE MILES**, in a country composed of **3.8 MILLION SQUARE MILES**.

It's all in the SOIL & CLIMATE

Once revered for its healing properties, today it is one of the sweetest onions in the world and Georgia's state vegetable. It is more than just a cornerstone of southern barbecue; the Vidalia onion is a way of life…

3 CITY OF VIDALIA

Vidalia onions are named for the city in Toombs County where they were first sold. But, they can, in fact, be grown outside of the city limits.

4 LOTS OF ONIONS

The largest volumes of Vidalia onions are grown in the Toombs and Tattnall Counties.

Did You KNOW?

APPROXIMATELY 11,000 TO 11,500 ACRES

of Vidalia onions are planted each year.

5 TRANSPLANTING

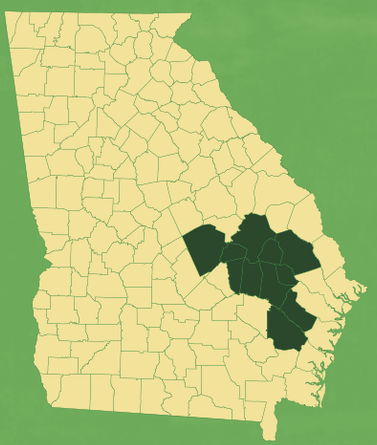
Many people are unaware, but transplanting is a part of the Vidalia onion growing process. This is done to protect plants.

VIDALIA ONION FARM GATE VALUE*

County	Acres	Value
Tattnal	5,206	$62,472,000
Toombs	4,123	$51,537,500
Wayne	1,095	$16,425,000
Candler	624	$7,798,750
Bulloch	306	$4,360,500
Montgomery	237	$2,346,300
Long	120	$780,000
Treutlen	90	$720,000
Evans	510	$637,500
Emanuel	55	$386,610
Laurens	2	$7,875
Totals	**12,368**	**$147,472,035**

*Farm Gate Value represents the dollar amount for the industry when Vidalia onions leave the farm.

Source | Vidalia Onion Committee



6 NEW FIELDS

The plants are moved from seed beds into new fields **once they've grown to about the width of a pencil.**

7 HAND-PICKED LABOR

Vidalia onions are generally transplanted and **harvested by hand,** a labor-intensive process from beginning to end.

APPROXIMATELY 50 GROWERS

are registered to cultivate this regional specialty

THE SWEET, MILD FLAVOR OF VIDALIA ONIONS WAS ORIGINALLY A FLUKE THAT WAS STUMBLED UPON BY THE FARMERS WHO PLANTED THEM DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION.

ONION SIZING

Generally recognized sizes*

SMALL
1–2¼ Inches

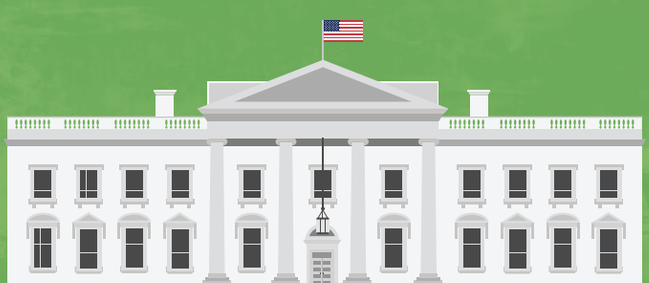
MEDIUM
2–3¼ Inches

JUMBO
3+ Inches

**Additionally, sizes include Colossal (3 ¾ inches and up)*

8 STATE VEGETABLE

In 1990, the Vidalia onion was named Georgia's official state vegetable.



FORMER PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER, A GEORGIA NATIVE, USED TO GIVE THEM TO VISITING DIGNITARIES AS WHITE HOUSE GIFTS.

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Finding the Luxury in Our Food

AN OP-ED BY MELISSA DE LEON

At first glance, the realization that the majority of my spending was going toward food made me feel ashamed. But one glass of wine later with my inner circle proved that not only was I not alone, I was justified.

Part of that justification was in the amazing way circumstances can change the value of a dollar. In my two-bedroom apartment with my to-the-tee Gen Y friends, we ask, "What's an extra dollar twenty-five?" when choosing food, but refuse to get gas at Chevron over Costco for a similar margin. Because why wouldn't we spend a little extra to feel good about what we are eating?

That brings me to the other part of our debate between what we want and what our parents taught us was "reasonable" to spend on food: Cars can be replaced, but we only get one life. So why would I spend money on food with ingredients I have to look up, even if it made the item cheaper to buy and last longer in my kitchen, when I know not one person who would put generic parts in an Audi?

I do have to wonder how much of my willingness to pay extra for an heirloom tomato salad is due to my behind-the-scenes advantage on production value. While our industry is well aware that the story of a brand is important, growers still struggle to produce safe, healthy food within a low margin because neither retailers nor shoppers will eat the cost.

A few experts in foodservice have shared with me how consumers want kale, Brussels sprouts, and arugula in their salads—even on fast-food menus—but don't want to pay an extra dollar or two to have it. It's only when they add chicken and other traditional "proteins" that consumers will accept a price increase. Knowing all this could influence me subconsciously, granted. I am not all consumers, but I am still part of the group caught between the fast-food and the organic superfood generations.

Spending more on food may not yet be the norm, but I can see it becoming so as we inch toward helping consumers understand why a fresh produce item would cost more than an item off a dollar menu. Younger friends and acquaintances don't balk at salads that restaurants price in the double-digits, for example, and one of my most relatable moments with the generation following me into the market was when I read that teenagers are spending more on food than clothes.

While this is a lot of *want* I'm speaking to, my livelihood—and that of those reading this—does depend on this shift. So the big question is: How can we help it along? How do we convince those still in the "quick-fix" state of mind instilled by the post-Depression and fast-food ages that it's not only reasonable, but necessary to pay more for natural, healthy options?

Perhaps the key is in showcasing it as an experience. "Treat yourself" should encompass your eating habits as much as any other indulgence. Because, let's face it, my payday is a bi-monthly holiday not for some new outfit, but for the lunch I'm about to buy myself. And for the sake of our industry, and those we serve, that should be celebrated.

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Live Deliciously™

Is There A Time when Boring is Good?

By Snack Contributor Rex Lawrence,
Founder & President, Joe Produce Search

"As a tennis player and uber-fan, I find the sport produces some great analogies for life and business. Now, before I go any further, let me say that I find very little that is ever boring about tennis, especially Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, and Roger Federer (three of the best players to ever play the game.) That being said, the word *boring* does come up, on occasion, with all three players.

Over the years, when Nadal and Federer play one another, some people haven't liked that Nadal does—or did—the same thing over and over and over for hours. Nadal would hit his high-looping topspin forehand to Fed's backhand over and over and over. And guess what? It worked!

Two lessons here:

1. Nadal found a winning strategy and stuck with it. He still has a winning record over Federer to this day.

2. Federer, for years, would stubbornly stick with his game—which, by the way, beat everyone else on the planet most of the time, and Nadal every once in a while. "Why should I, the G.O.A.T., (greatest of all time) change for this guy?" is what I imagine Fed to think to himself. Guess what? He changed! I imagine that Fed, after about 15 years or so, decided that, "By golly, I am the G.O.A.T. and I have to change this losing strategy."

I have to go back to Nadal for a moment here. As you might guess, his *boring* strategy is not working that well any more. Does he take his $100-plus million and run off to play golf? No way! He is changing his game, working on a new serve overall, and on different point patterns when playing Fed.

Okay, so I've "geeked out on tennis" here too much. What are some lessons here?

1. Boring can be great. Enjoy it while it lasts.

2. "If you have a winning strategy, stick with it. If you have a losing strategy, then change it," to quote famed tennis-player-turned-commentator and tennis-philosopher, Martina Navratilova.

3. Watch out! Did you see Djokovic coming? Novak Djokovic is the world's current #1 player...again. I have had some of my fellow tennis fanatics call this guy's game "boring." His patterns, precision, balance, and speed can make the game seem too easy and not as exciting as some other players. Week after week he can win, collect his check, and jet off to the next tournament. *Boring!* But he has a 53 percent winning record against BOTH Fed and Nadal!

I think about years ago when a friend of mine was working for his dad's business—a very successful

"Success does not require drama, but does require discipline... If you find yourself winning, then stick with the strategy."

–Rex Lawrence, Founder & President, Joe Produce Search

produce-related business—and he complained to his dad that they needed to make changes. It was boring: year after year they produced product, kept their customers happy, and experienced double-digit growth. *Boring!* Or so he thought. "Dad," he said, "we need to make some changes!" His dad's response was, "Son, we made more money than General Motors last year. Let's stay on this path."

At times, when we believe that things are going well, we feel the need to pivot and change things up. We hear it all the time: "If it's not broken, then break it. Make it better! Improve it before your competitor does! Cannibalize yourself first."

The list goes on, and in certain scenarios all those quotes make sense. However, in tennis, and often in life, you should stick with what is working and just keep on winning. I can't tell you how many times I have had to resist changing a usually successful strategy and then won the game. When that happens, I am almost always amazed that the other guy did not, or could not, do anything to change the momentum.

Conversely, I have been on the receiving end of the situation. I'm getting my tail kicked and refuse to change my game to adjust to my opponent's winning ways. I'm losing, but gosh darn it I KEEP ON WITH THE SAME LOSING PLAY!

I could now take this story and the lessons of it in so many relatable directions for produce, but I'll let you think about your business and applicable scenarios.

In wrapping up here, let me say that I'm now okay with a *boring* win in tennis and business. Success does not require drama, but does require discipline...especially when I could make the really cool "TV shot," but have already committed myself to a winning strategy. Go in with a plan and strategy, including a plan B. If you find yourself winning, then stick with the strategy.

Boring can be good.

Joe Produce Search (JPS) is the Executive Search division of Joe Produce®. Joe Produce Search is comprised of experienced search consultants and produce professionals. Our placements range from middle management to C-level positions, throughout North America, covering a wide range of produce and produce-related businesses.

Rex Lawrence
Founder & President
Joe Produce Search℠

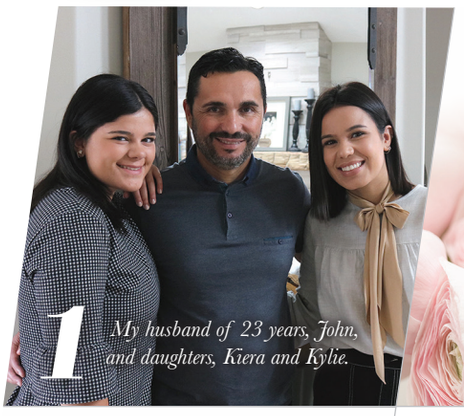
JOE PRODUCE SEARCH℠

MY FAVORITE THINGS

EMILY MURRACAS

Director of Marketing, Mucci Farms

You may know this marketing superstar from her role promoting greenhouse-grown veggies, but did you know she used to own her own custom stationary and personalized gift store? That she's unabashedly chips-over-chocolate? These are just a few of the interesting things we learned when we asked Emily to tell us about some of her favorite things…



1 *My husband of 23 years, John, and daughters, Kiera and Kylie.*

2 "*Favorite flower—Ranunculus for its simple beauty.*"

3 *Love a great conversation over a tapas-style dinner.*

"*…at my favorite tea shop: Teacups & Crowns.*" 4

Our Bichon-Yorkie. 5

All things apple—apple pie, strudel, crumble… 6

7 *I am all about the personalization and presentation.*

8 *I still try and keep it up with summer and indoor leagues.*

"*I always seem to turn every project into an event…*" 9

Mucci FARMS

1 My Family
2 Fresh-Cut Flowers
3 Charcuterie
4 Tea Time
5 Roxy
6 Dessert
7 Gift Giving
8 Playing Volleyball
9 Special Event & Party Planning

Chef *Snack Chat*

Learn how to inspire your patrons and consumers from the culinary muses themselves. Since eating trends start with the experts, *The Snack* asked US Foods' team to share a few springtime favorites to get shoppers asking how they can try these at home.

US. FOODS®

Chef Kathleen Hoffman

Senior Culinary Manager, US Foods

"While most ingredients are available year-round, diners still want produce that is local, in season, and responsibly grown. It's an important trend that chefs, operators, and diners alike want to see reflected on restaurant menus. At US Foods, we have several programs, like Serve Good® and Serve Local, that allow us to work more closely with local farmers and communities to deliver fresh and seasonal products."

Asparagus

"Asparagus is the power green we all need in the spring. Not only is it in season, but it delivers both delicious flavor and health benefits. I love asparagus in hot or cold applications. One of my favorite ways to serve it is wrapped in US Foods' all-natural prosciutto and topped with a lemon zest aioli."

Artichokes

"Artichokes are at their peak from March through May, so spring is the perfect time to experiment with an artichoke-centric treat. Chefs love to find ways to incorporate them on their menus. Try an artichoke 'awesome blossom' by pulling tender leaves from the flower and dipping them into a smoked, salted chipotle crème."

Ramps

"Ramps are a farmer's market treasure, and they shine in the spring! Those who are familiar with this goodie love its fresh onion and garlic flavor. Ramps are harvested through spring and early summer, so you can find them between April and early June. Cooking mellows out the strong taste of a raw ramp, so I love using them to create a ramp pesto sauce served with three-cheese ravioli and a simple salad with mini heirloom tomatoes."

Baby Spinach/ Arugula Blend

"We're continuing to see chefs combine salad favorites to create versatile spring recipes. In fact, we recently launched a new organic Baby Spinach and Wild Arugula Blend by Cross Valley Farms®. It features tender leaves of spicy arugula and slightly sweet spinach. This blend works served hot or cold, so try them in salads, on sandwiches, or baked into a savory egg dish."

Fennel

"Fennel bulbs are a spring favorite that offer a unique licorice flavor that diners love. I like to dress raw, shaved fennel with an acidic liquid like lemon or vinegar to complement its bold taste. Fennel pairs well with smoked fish and mussels, as well as cold salads. My favorite way to eat it is served on a baguette topped with smoked trout, spring chives, and cream cheese."

Mariela Bolaños

Food Fanatic Chef
US Foods

Green Garlic

"When spring comes around, it's time to start playing with all of the fun produce that we're not able to get during the winter—especially in Chicago! My favorite produce ingredient in the spring is green garlic. It has an awesome flavor and texture. I love using it to make mojo sauce, but there are endless ways to cook with it. Try it as a steak sauce, dressing, dip, drizzled over hummus, or baked with fish."

Foster B. Deadman

New Business Manager and Food Fanatic Chef Alumni
US Foods

All Things Spring

"Spring is truly a time to recenter ourselves and our palates as we prepare for a new look at culinary delights! After a long winter of root vegetables and roasted meats, I especially look forward to spring produce. It brings back childhood memories of my mother's sweet and tangy strawberry-rhubarb bread and captures the essence of everything spring! As a chef, I love taking something as simple as pickled green strawberries to liven up a fresh, beet green salad. My absolute favorite dish to make is a chilled green pea puree with braised garlic morels."

CPMA CORNER

THE INFLUENCE OF CORPORATE CULTURE ON BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

BY EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTOR RON LEMAIRE, PRESIDENT, CPMA

Corporate culture is a hot-button term. Most companies know that it is important, but what exactly does the term mean for your business? Corporate culture, or organizational culture, encapsulates the beliefs and ideas that a company has, the way in which it affects how it does business, and how its employees behave. The culture of your organization can have a great effect on your employees' perception of their jobs and the atmosphere they work in, which, ultimately, impacts business performance.

A company's culture can be defined by its core identity, external image, and employee value, which all work hand-in-hand. Internally, culture should follow the organization's mission, vision, and values, in that it is used to guide employees' actions, creating goals and alignment. Externally, the attitudes and behaviors of staff, especially while interacting with customers and the general public, broadcast an image of the organization's culture. Employees are the building blocks of every organization. They want to be appreciated for their work, a simple—yet often forgotten—practice that defines attitudes and shapes culture. Together, these factors work jointly, similar to relations in a Venn diagram, to influence and establish corporate culture.

The benefits of a strong organizational culture are wide-ranging when best practices are in place. A clear identity leads to strong direction, allowing employees to better establish their roles within their company. A sense of value felt among staff members increases their commitment and loyalty to the organization, fosters team chemistry, and results in less employee turnover—meaning fewer resources expended to hire and train staff. Furthermore, customers can easily recognize when they're doing business with an organization with exceptional culture by the attitudes of employees and overall clarity in business transactions. This forms customer loyalty and the brand's identity. All of these factors working together create a snowball effect of culture enhancement.

"A COMPANY'S CULTURE CAN BE DEFINED BY ITS CORE IDENTITY, EXTERNAL IMAGE, AND EMPLOYEE VALUE, WHICH ALL WORK HAND-IN-HAND."

-RON LEMAIRE, PRESIDENT, CPMA

Culture shifts can be difficult and take time, but the benefits of undertaking culture exercises sooner rather than later will help a company to obtain return on its investment more quickly. Research findings have shown that building a winning culture requires five key steps: setting expectations, aligning leaders, creating accountability for delivery, implementing organization-wide consistency, and communicating and celebrating.

Successful corporate cultures tend to display six key behaviors: high aspirations for professional development, fulfillment, and successes; a focus on customer satisfaction and superiority over competitors; a sense of ownership in the work they do; a propensity to act quickly; valuing collaboration across all levels of the company; and striving for the exceptional.

To this end, the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) has partnered with Waterstone Human Capital to offer our members the opportunity to assess their corporate culture at a heavily-discounted rate through a fully confidential process. The Waterstone Culture Dashboard™ is an employee survey that is designed to help organizations identify and articulate their culture and benchmark it against the behaviors that drive winning cultures—specifically, those of Canada's Most Admired Corporate Cultures™.

All CPMA member organizations, including those outside of Canada, are able to take part in this process and have the opportunity to win the CPMA Corporate Culture Award by completing their assessment with Waterstone. The organization with the top performing culture will be named CPMA's first annual Corporate Culture Award winner at the 2019 CPMA Convention and Trade Show in Montreal, Quebec, from April 2nd through 4th. CPMA looks forward to fostering winning corporate cultures in the produce industry and celebrating successful cultures.

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"GRATITUDE FOR VETERANS GROWS AT WEST COAST TOMATO GROWERS."

The Pride & Soul of OCEANSIDE POLE

by KAYLA WEBB

(from left to right) Field Manager Derrick Platz, Transportation and Logistics Coordinator Neville McGillvery, Specialty Packaging Manager Andino Beniquez, and Safety and Regulatory Compliance Manager Orven Zaragoza

What does it mean to be a good steward? As an industry of growers, stewardship evokes our call to care for the land, water, and air that produce so relies on. But, as an industry of people, many have come to understand stewardship as the process of standing alongside our fellow man for the betterment of all—a process that the team behind the Oceanside Pole brand not only integrates into its company operations, but embodies to an extent that suggests there is simply no other way.

"At West Coast Tomato Growers, we value hard work, dedication, and commitment," Priya Singh, General Manager, tells me. We are talking about the company's commitment to hiring military veterans, which—like most work that accomplishes inclusion—boasts obvious benefits, yet is still outside of the norm. "It's really important to our family to hire veterans because we are immensely grateful to them for the sacrifices they—and all members of the U.S. military—make so the rest of us can enjoy everyday freedoms."

West Coast Tomato Growers currently employs three military veterans, with a fourth in the wings. In addition to welcoming veterans onto its team, the grower collaborates with nearby Marine Corps Camp Pendleton on an internship program that provides civilian work experience for soldiers leaving the military.

"Our values are really demonstrated by the people with military experience who have joined our team. We have a lot of respect for veterans and the work they put into coming back to society, which isn't always easy for many," Priya says. "They're looking for a sense of drive and belonging, and we feel compelled to support that process any way we can."

The Singhs, the family behind the Oceanside Pole brand of tomatoes and Brussels sprouts, are one of the last remaining pole-grown tomato growers in Southern California. In 1939, as Harry Singh, Sr. began laying the groundwork for the company now known as West Coast Tomato Growers, he established a relationship with the military by leasing farmland from Camp Pendleton. A year later, Harry Singh and Sons was born, which continued to lease farmland from the Marine Corps base until early 2011—the year that

West Coast Tomato Growers has been on a mission since 1939 to offer consumers Oceanside Pole-branded tomatoes and Brussels sprouts

General Manager Priya Singh (left) with his father Harry Singh, Jr., (right) who took over his own father's business and transformed it into West Coast Tomato Growers.

Harry's son, Harry Singh, Jr., restructured the company as West Coast Tomato Growers. Today, the third generation of Singhs, including Priya and his siblings, run the farm.

While it is an obvious accomplishment to still be operating their grandfather's business 80 years later, it is, of course, not without growing pains, which Priya notes have been eased by the military veterans on staff.

"Having veterans like Neville McGillvery, Derrick Platz, and Andino Beniquez and veterans' family members like Orven Zaragoza ensures we do a better job. The first veterans we hired over twenty years ago are now managers dedicated to doing everything the right way," Priya says. "Not to mention, veterans bring an immense structure from their time spent in the military, which, as a result, has helped improve our structure."

One of the first, if not the very first, military veterans the Singh family hired was Neville in 1996.

"Neville works hard and embodies exactly what we want to achieve as a quality grower," Priya remarks.

Neville served in the military for eight years, starting as a Private and finishing as a Sergeant. He is one of the few recipients of the Navy Marine Corps medal. While it's an honor that Neville is proud of, he also reveals to me that it was an honor earned not without trauma and, ultimately, what led him to retire from the military.

"Toward the end of my time in the military I worked at the jail, which gave me a lot of free time," Neville begins his story. "So, I joined the police force as an undercover cop. But, when it came time to join the police academy I wasn't hired, which really messed with me mentally and financially. I felt like a failure, and I didn't know what to do. While I could have stayed with the military, and was in a position for a promotion, I was ready to retire. At the time, I learned about driver training for Harry Singh and Sons, so I went and was hired."

Neville worked his way up through the ranks and today mans the helm as the Transportation and Logistics Coordinator. When I ask Neville what has kept him working alongside the Singh family for the last 20-plus years, he answers before I finish the question.

"If it was terrible, I wouldn't be here," Neville jokes. "These guys have been nothing but excellent to me and are truly top-notch human beings. I have no problem saying that because it's true. I've watched the third generation grow and learn how to run things on their own, which is amazing. This is like my family."

Another crucial member of the West Coast Tomato Growers team is Derrick, a former military man who served as Platoon Sergeant, Staff Sergeant E6, and Point Vehicle Commander for Light Armored Reconnaissance.

"I went into the military straight out of high school. During my service, I went on four combat tours. After I left in 2012, I wondered how I was ever going to be that great again. But I found that purpose yet again when I got into agriculture. We're growing food for everyone, and so I found that purpose once more because we're not just working for ourselves," Derrick tells me. "Being with the team at West Coast Tomato Growers feels like being back in the service, razzing each other out in the field. It's fun."

Derrick started off helping Priya monitor and evaluate tractor usage and labor. For four years and counting, Derrick has contributed to building the company's field management program—all while going back to school to work on nursery management, crop production, business, and kinesiology degrees, and earning licenses like CCA and PCA. Today, his title is Field Manager.

"Derrick was brand-new to operations when we brought him on in 2015. He worked very hard seven days a week and went to night school to study on his own. Derrick showed the same drive as Neville and the others, which began showing us the true work ethic and drive of our veterans on staff," Priya explains.

Andino is West Coast Tomato Growers' newest veteran addition after he joined the company in 2017. He started as a Packing Shed Manager and now serves as a Specialty Packaging Manager. Over the last 12 years, Andino has also worked as a Field Radio Operator, a Marine Corps Radio Chief, a Safety and Environmental Manager in Japan, and a Staff Sergeant for the military.

"I was going to school when Priya asked if I wanted to come help out in the summer temporarily, and the rest is history," Andino reveals to me.

Priya readily confirms that Andino has already left his mark on the company, stating: "Andino came on to do logistics and warehousing. We put him in charge of special pack operations, keeping track of our inventories and making sure customers are getting what they ask for. On his first day, he wrote everything down and it didn't take long before he'd made significant improvements to our system. He also helps our customer relationships and, thanks to him, we're never late."

I've said it once, and I'll say it a thousand times more: The power of produce is nothing without community—which many of West Coast Tomato Growers' staff can attest to. Orven is one such employee willing to bear witness to the strong community that West Coast Tomato Growers, and the produce industry at large, has built to benefit its employees, both veterans and civilians.

While not a veteran himself, Orven grew up in

Priya Singh (center) is flanked by family members (left to right) Sattish Singh, Personal Assistant to Harry Singh, Jr.; Tajma Singh Kim, Office Manager; Jehan Singh Marshman, Accounts Payables; Omar Singh, Packing Shed Supervisor; and Mercedes Singh. David Singh, Director of Human Resources, is not pictured

a military family, with his father serving in both the Marines and the Air Force. He tells me that he still learned a lot from the military growing up, including acquiring skills that help him relate to the veterans on staff.

"Growing up in a military family gave me a mindset of meeting expectations of hard work and determination. Working at West Coast Tomato Growers was a natural transition from how I was raised. Many vendors and peers have a mutual understanding because they also grew up in military families but didn't enlist," Orven says.

Orven worked as a land planner for the city of Oceanside, which eventually led him to West Coast Tomato Growers, where he started on the Safety and Land Use team in 2012. Today, he serves as the Safety and Regulatory Compliance Manager, improving efficiency on the farm by navigating, reviewing, and negotiating land leases and regulations at the state and local levels.

"Since joining the company, I have helped West Coast Tomato Growers get ahead of the curve in food safety, particularly in 2015 when food safety policies changed," Orven explains to me. "I'm still learning a lot. Every season is different, and I continue to learn."

Over the course of our conversation, it becomes clear that the respect between West Coast Tomato Growers and its veterans on staff is mutual.

"The family business makes you feel like part of the team and helped me adjust to an environment that felt similar to the military," Andino says. "At West Coast Tomato Growers, it's a team effort, not an individual effort; it's everyone's job to work together just like it is in the military."

Orven adds, "The experience of working at West Coast Tomato Growers is very rewarding. The scope of work I get involved in covers almost every aspect of our operation. With that, challenges are ever-evolving, but fortunately company resources and support are in place to ensure we develop solutions."

Over the years, with the help of its veterans, the company has cultivated a reputation for high-quality tomato and Brussels sprouts flavors. The Oceanside Pole brand, offered exclusively by Oppy, is the result. Last year, Oppy and the Singhs introduced new brand positioning, "On a Mission, since 1939," to further articulate this commitment to the land and its community.

Our nation is a proud one, and after speaking with veterans and veterans' relations like Neville, Derrick, Andino, and Orven, it is easy to see why. Not only do they exemplify what it means to be good stewards, but also what it means to work in produce, which is pretty interchangeable if you ask me.

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Making the Jump

INDUSTRY MEMBERS WHO WENT FROM BUYING TO SUPPLYING

Mike O'Brien

Now: Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Monterey Mushrooms | Then: Vice President of Produce and Floral, Schnuck Markets

HOW DOES YOUR EXPERIENCE ON THE SUPPLY-SIDE NOW INFLUENCE YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON THE BUY-SIDE?

"I have a much better understanding now about how difficult agriculture is. I always knew it was tough to be a grower, but I had no clue how hard it is. Weather, water, rising costs, regulations, transportation, lack of labor—these are difficult industry issues that all produce grower/shippers are dealing with today. Fresh produce is a miracle."

WHAT DO YOU *NOT* MISS ABOUT THE BUY-SIDE?

"Mondays."

Chris Ford

Now: Organic and Food Service Categories Manager, Oppy | Then: Global Produce and Floral Purchasing Team Leader, Whole Foods Market

WHAT ADVICE MIGHT YOU GIVE THOSE ON THE SUPPLY-SIDE CONTEMPLATING MAKING THE JUMP TO THE BUY-SIDE?

"Be nice to people. We are all working hard to establish relationships, and often those relationships travel with you throughout your career. That part of the business is invaluable. Nobody's job is more important than anyone else's. Without everyone across the supply chain doing their best to deliver, none of this would work. Everyone has an important role to play.

Also, communicate clearly and be respectful even—and especially—if the answer is no. I have found that "no" is better than "maybe," especially if you know that, ultimately, the answer is no. Be honest; respect people's time."

Tommy Wilkins

Now: Director of Sales, Grow Farms, Texas | Then: Director of Produce Procurement, United Supermarkets

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO RETAIL/FOODSERVICE OPERATORS CONTEMPLATING MAKING THE JUMP?

"As a retail buyer, you control the conversation. There are many choices to retail today, so earning your chance is difficult. You can't be everything to everyone, so what is your niche? Things are rapidly changing with curbside and online, so how can you be the solution? It's a different stress, probably less, but it comes down to sales and production. It takes time and whether the group you work with is patient with you, seeing a direction toward profitability. It can be very rewarding, but it was a very difficult move for me to know that I had what it took to make the transition."

Mickey Owens

Now: Sales Manager, Veg-Fresh Farms | Then: Produce Buyer, The Kroger Co.

WHAT IS ONE OF THE MOST REWARDING PARTS OF MAKING THE JUMP TO THE SUPPLY-SIDE?

"I spent 35 years at Kroger, and so I have been able to acquire a lot of produce experience and knowledge. It's rewarding to now be able to bring that to the supply-side and be able to "think outside the box" in an ever-changing field. To help the supply-side grow with those changes and compete in an ever-evolving, fast-paced, technology-driven, and competitive industry."

Roger Pepperl

Now: Marketing Director, Stemilt Growers | Then: Buyer/Merchandiser, Meijer

WHOM WOULD YOU SAY HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST INFLUENCE IN YOUR CHANGE FROM ONE SIDE OF THE INDUSTRY TO THE OTHER?

"On the buy-side, Bob Summers was my first boss at Meijer and was such a smart person and a mentor to me. He helped me to actually really "get it" regarding the procurement through the promotion cycle, which gave me the coaching to understand what it would later take for me to transition. He taught me the simple lesson that you can't procure it if the consumer doesn't want to buy it. Seems simple, but it is amazing how many people don't really understand the teaching Bob gave me. The economics of the consumer was a lesson Bob could have written a book on. There will never be another person at retail quite like him.

Tom Mathison, the Founder of Stemilt who has since passed, was the person who helped me on the supply-side. Like Bob, he understood the economics of the consumer: Tom felt if he grew flavors that customers loved, he would be successful and sustain a great business. Tom also coached me on his relationship with retail as a grower/marketer, and was the first real storyteller I experienced in business. Tom Mathison was a real icon on the supply-side of the business."

Jane Rhyno

Now: Director of Sales and Marketing, Highline Mushrooms | Then: Produce Category Manager, Sobeys

WHAT IS THE MOST VALUABLE THING YOUR BUY-SIDE BACKGROUND BROUGHT TO YOUR SUPPLY ROLE?

"Understanding the goals, the pressures, and the challenges of the buy-side really helps when we are trying to find a way to help our retail partners be successful and make their lives a little easier.

The knowledge I gained in category management and in seeing both successes and failures of such a variety of items and programs has really been invaluable. It's a perspective I would not have gained otherwise and has certainly helped me identify opportunities and strategies to help drive the mushroom category and innovation."

UP CLOSE

A Closer Look at B&W Power 4™ Blend

By Maggie Mead

Springtime is upon us, ushering in a season of shoppers who will need to look no further than B&W's Power 4™ blend for fresh and flavorful produce. The nutrient-rich mixture includes watercress, arugula, baby red leaf kale, and baby spinach, and will surely satisfy customers.

Power 4 delivers four vibrant beneficial greens in one convenient bag. Packed to the brim with 20 essential vitamins and minerals—including vitamins A and C, calcium, protein, potassium, and fiber—this potent blend of greens serves up a one-two punch of health benefits and flavor. Baby red leaf kale brings a sweet, nutty element; watercress adds a peppery zing; arugula touts a tangy taste; and baby spinach rounds out the mix with its mild earthiness.

The ready-to-eat mixture is triple-washed, gently air-tunnel dried, and packed to reduce spoilage and preserve the freshness and flavor that B&W is known for. The Power 4 blend comes in 1.5 and 3 lb bags and is available to patrons at retail in a newly redesigned 4 oz bag.

Shoppers should have no problem finding uses for the blend, as there are a plethora of applications for the invigorating greens. While salads are the first to come to mind, Power 4 is easily blended into smoothies or hummus for a splash of color and nutrition, sautéed with eggs or meat, or even nestled atop a slice of pizza! The combination of taste, nutrients, and practicality makes Power 4 a no-brainer for consumers.

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THE NEWS ON THE STREET IS THAT THESE BERRIES ARE GAINING TRACTION, BUT DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT. WE DOVE IN WITH THE EXPERTS TO HEAR ABOUT BLUEBERRIES' RISING POPULARITY AND HOW SELLERS CAN USE IT TO THEIR ADVANTAGE...

BLUEBERRIES SnackChat

Steven Ware

VP OF VALUE-ADDED FRESH, NATURIPE FARMS

"With more consumers looking for healthy snacks, spring and summer bring great opportunities to merchandise and promote blueberries. Naturipe Snacks™ offer several blueberry products that are portable and convenient. Our eye-catching snack products are great to place in grab-and-go store sections for consumers who are looking for a quick, healthy, refreshing snack."

Amber Maloney

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, WISH FARMS

"When it comes to blueberries, there's nothing "blue" about them! Whether I am adding them to pancakes on a Sunday morning, mixing them up in a green power smoothie, or eating them by the handful, I always have a smile on my face knowing I am fueling my body with the nutrients it needs to power through the day. As a working mom of two under two, days can be hectic. Finding food options that provide countless health benefits AND taste delicious is always a plus. This little superfood is so versatile. Blueberries are a natural sweet treat that add a "pop" to any meal."

Frances Dillard

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND GLOBAL BRAND LEAD, DRISCOLL'S

"Consumption rates of blueberries have increased significantly over the last five years—not only in the U.S., but globally. The opportunity for the produce industry is to focus on great taste and ensure consumers have an optimal eating experience every time they purchase any berry. At Driscoll's, we continue to expand our proprietary varieties and select new growing regions that deliver on a year-round supply curve. We strive to keep our brand promise of Only the Finest Berries™ across the world. We've recently introduced new Jumbo Blueberry varieties as a limited-edition offer. In addition, as an organic berry leader, we are committed to growing this important consumer segment."

Cindy Jewell

VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, CALIFORNIA GIANT BERRY FARMS

"Blueberry consumption increases every year as they grow in popularity with all ages, translating into year-round promotional opportunities and add-on sales. This is the time berries should be prominent in the produce department, with blueberries helping to create color breaks in the display space. Offering a choice in berry type and in package size will help capture impulse sales as they appeal to individual shoppers and those shopping for a family. We offer multiple pack sizes on a year-round basis and are excited about the growth of this berry type."

Andy Tudor

VP OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, RAINIER FRUIT COMPANY

"Rainier's organic blueberry program continues to grow thanks to increased availability and varieties that provide a great eating experience. Emphasizing organic blueberries with special signage can be a big factor in successful blueberry merchandising. Blueberries are a popular smoothie staple for both their flavor and color, and they also pack an antioxidant punch. Cross-merchandising with other smoothie favorites like yogurt, bananas, greens, and protein powders gives shoppers a one-stop smoothie shop and appeals to a health-conscious, on-the-go demographic."

Cherie France

MARKETING MANAGER, HOMEGROWN ORGANIC FARMS

"The Homegrown organic blueberries that consumers have come to know and love have been most successful when retailers tell the story behind them, along with a fresh take on cross-merchandising. Homegrown seeks to make our growers the rockstars of the produce department. We love to feature them in-store and/or across digital media platforms, telling their stories and bridging the gap between consumers and farmers. Similarly, cross-merchandising with other healthy, on-the-go items helps consumers to think outside the box on ways blueberries can add value to breakfast, lunch, and dinner."

Carrie Robertson

MARKETING, VEG-FRESH FARMS

"Blueberries are the ultimate snacking item! You just can't help but pop them in your mouth. We know consumers feel the same way. For that reason, we created Handy Candy Blueberries, which are now triple-washed and ready to go, so consumers can just grab a container and eat them wherever you go—no additional washing required. We recommend merchandising these little 4 oz guys in a grab-and-go section, not competing with your regular blueberry and strawberry displays in the produce section. They are a fun, healthy, and convenient produce option to add to your grab-and-go mix!"

Marco Nuques

WEST COAST SALES MANAGER, BERRY DIVISION, GIUMARRA COMPANIES

"I like to eat fresh blueberries straight-up by the handful and experience the full flavor profile: sweet, tangy, crisp, and juicy. I have been known to eat a full clamshell in one sitting. They are a great pre-workout snack due to their naturally low-sugar content and vitamin and antioxidant boost. Among all the fruits and vegetables out there, blueberries are one of the highest in antioxidant content. My sons, ages four and five, love to snack on them as well. We eat them all year long, at any time of day."

WTF DO I DO WITH Mucci Farms' Smuccies™ Sweet Strawberries ?

{ what the fork }

STRAWBERRY SMOOTHIE BOWL

INGREDIENTS

2 cups Mucci Farms Smuccies™ Sweet Strawberries
150 g vanilla dessert tofu or same amount of silken tofu
¼ cup Greek yogurt
⅓ whole banana
¼ cup fresh blueberries
1 tbsp whole chia seeds
2 tbsp toasted coconut chips
Mint, for garnish

Prep Time: 5 min
Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

1. Wash, hull, and slice strawberries.
2. Blend 1 cup strawberries, tofu, Greek yogurt, and banana until smooth.
3. Split between two bowls, and top with remaining strawberries, blueberries, chia seeds, and toasted coconut chips. Add a sprig of fresh mint for garnish, if desired, and serve.

For more delicious, healthy, & easy-to-prepare recipes visit *www.muccifarms.com*

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SENSORY EXTRAORDINAIRE

BY JORDAN OKUMURA

The first drops of rain are sifting down from the sky in Manhattan Beach, California, with a winter storm just on the edge of rolling in, inching me closer to the wide-open doors of the neighborhood Gelson's Market. Paul Kneeland, the new Executive Director of Fresh Operations for the company, is bent over an apple display with a keen eye on the day's presentation, adjusting handle bags and sizing up the quality as he speaks to his team of produce aficionados that helps the department run and thrive.

It takes a few hellos to pull him away from his work, and while some may take this as a dismissive gesture, I can't help but smile at the laser-focus and calm collectedness with which he goes about his work.

"I love this business," Paul shares with me. "And fresh produce cuts across all demographics. There is literally something for everyone. I think to myself, 'How interesting is it what the different generations like and eat? How can we bring a fresher product to the stores? What is the balance of price that makes produce move? How do we create displays, promotions, contests, and more, to elevate our world?' I want to make selling fresh produce easy for our teams and a great experience for our customers."

PAUL KNEELAND, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FRESH OPERATIONS, GELSON'S MARKETS, IN MANHATTAN BEACH, CALIFORNIA

Add the fact that Paul is a very competitive individual who revels in being pushed to be a better person and professional every single day, on top of his inquisitive mind, and you have the cornerstone of a great fresh retail concept. *Evolution* is a good word to describe it, but at a more aggressive pace, he adds.

Much has changed in Paul's 38 years in the business. When he entered the industry, it was a pure commodity business and every customer seemed to know how to cut their own produce.

"However, the industry got smart and figured out how to get more people to enjoy fresh produce by cutting butternut squash first, I believe, then getting into cut fruit, packaged salads, and cut veg," Paul reflects. "That is the way that I remember it, and it really was an amazing transformation looking back. But it wasn't all this market research—it was consumer-driven. They consistently told us that they loved produce, but just couldn't deal with preparing it. The value-added industry truly started grassroots and built up to be over 30 percent of the business."

Consumers drove it, and still are driving it today. The only way to stay ahead of the game? Listen.

Listening is something that Paul does well and often, even back during his days at Roche Brothers in Boston, Massachusetts, where the produce exec was born and raised. In 1981, Paul started as a grocery bagger at Roche Brothers, which would put him on a 26-year path with the grocer that then took him to Kings Markets before joining Ahold as the Lead Fresh Merchant for Fresh Formats.

Now, with fresh eyes and two years in with Gelson's, Paul is reflecting on the old as he prepares the company for the new.

"The produce department has discovered itself in new and exciting ways over the years," Paul says. "That value-add trend I speak about has changed the design of the store—cases and displays needed to change, marketing changed. I challenge you to find an ad that doesn't have a cut or prepared item in it! Retailers started using it as differentiation and it grew rapidly."

But sometimes the more things change the more things stay the same. I guess that is why we call them staples, right? They have earned their long-lasting space as the foundation of a produce department.

"One thing I believe has not changed as much is the relationship part of this business. Everyone knows everyone. It is very clear that suppliers understand retailing better than ever, and they should! They know their customer,

(RIGHT) COLORFUL ORGANIC PRODUCE IS A HIGHLIGHT OF THE FRESH DEPARTMENT; (BELOW) PAUL KNEELAND TAKES GREAT PRIDE IN GELSON'S FRESH PRODUCE

"...FRESH PRODUCE CUTS ACROSS ALL DEMOGRAPHICS. THERE IS LITERALLY SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE."

PAUL KNEELAND, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FRESH OPERATIONS, GELSON'S MARKETS

understand what it takes to get from field to shelf, and are largely brought in the loop on a retailer's strategy. This creates a unique 'skin in the game' scenario—suppliers buy into the strategies and retailers need to work to convince suppliers to jump in," he tells me.

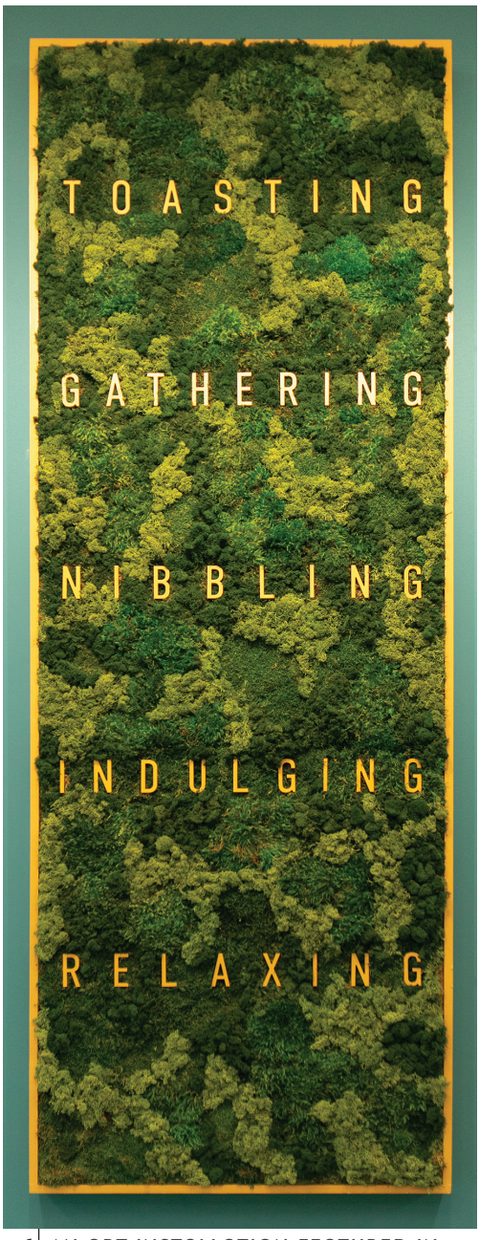
With Paul running all that is fresh for Gelson's, he has brought in a right-hand man to target and elevate the fresh produce spread, and that individual is Senior Director of Produce and Floral John Savidan.

John started his industry career with Ralphs Grocery Company while he was in high school as a box boy bagging groceries. He was promoted into the produce department and quickly made his way up the ranks to become a produce department manager where John spent the next 15 years. John then made the leap to Bristol Farms, where he held the positions of Produce Manager, Produce Merchandiser, Buyer and Produce Director before stepping onto a new path with Gelson's.

"I have an incredibly strong passion for the wellbeing of the fresh produce and floral industry and an overwhelming aspiration for personal growth. The Gelson's approach to fresh produce is all based on quality and the customer experience," John shares with me. "It's what the company was founded on some 65 years ago. There is absolutely zero deviation from providing the very best for our customers. Our buyers work diligently to find the ripest and best-tasting fruits and vegetables available within the marketplace. Our long-standing supplier partnerships allow us to accomplish the highest quality specifications that make us different from our competitors."

Side by side, the two are mapping out the future for Gelson's.

Paul describes the Gelson's philosophy as a drive to have the best produce in California. Being so close to the source across the state's growing regions makes the strategy particularly engaging and strong—especially when you are a



AN ART INSTALLATION FEATURED IN MANHATTAN BEACH, CALIFORNIA'S GELSON'S MARKET

company that prides itself on freshness. The model starts with the grocer's buyers sourcing from the best growers, then flows all the way to the store teams that are very picky about what goes on display. To the discerning customer who expects the best from Gelson's, what they see is what they get.

"Our departments are merchandised to show product, to show freshness, to make fresh produce the hero of the store. As soon as you walk into one of our produce departments you know there is something special here," Paul notes. "Our stores have a few themes going on right now based on where they are located. The first theme is Spanish-style and the Mediterranean. The second one is beach-style and outdoor living. Both have Mediterranean concepts as Southern California is considered the Mediterranean of the United States. We like to promote outdoor cooking and living. We love when people enjoy the food they buy from us! The store atmosphere certainly adds to that."

Gelson's is a growing company with so much to offer its neighborhoods, customers, and teammates. The company loves to promote from within, and Paul loves that their store teams are connected with their customers.

"We will continue to grow that culture store by store, person by person. We will grow our fresh business, attract new customers, and get our customers to shop and buy more. 'Life Tastes Better at Gelson's,'" he smiles.

Founded in 1952 by brothers Bernard and Eugene Gelson, the company came on the scene as an extraordinary grocery shopping experience for discerning consumers and called Burbank, California, its home. Fast-forward more than 65 years later, and the retailer has 27 stores in California from San Diego to Santa Barbara to Rancho Mirage—the Golden Triangle, if you will.

Gelson's is recognized for its superior architecture and fresh concepts, including its diverse range of produce items, highest quality meat, seafood and deli, an unmatched selection of wine and liquor, and exceptional service. While working directly with suppliers to ensure the best of the best graces the prime real estate of Gelson's' shelves, Paul also adds that organic items have had more of an impact on the stores' buying decisions. The inventory across Gelson's has upward of 30 percent of its items in its organic portfolio, including fresh produce, which is its mainstay as the ambassador of fresh when you walk through the front doors.

And believe me, the store leads you by the senses—sight, smell, sound, touch, taste. Your eyes pull you into the store with its abundance of fresh produce flowing out into walkways, wet racks that are vibrant with fresh produce discoveries and traditional gems. Your

GELSON'S MARKET IN MANHATTAN BEACH, CALIFORNIA

nose leads you to the juice bar and then around the store to the mecca of prepared foods, made in-house and with their own fresh produce. The music lulls you into calm confidence as you maneuver around and through items that may grace your basket. And taste... well, taste is there in all its definitions, from ready-made pasta, a salad bar, and sandwiches to sushi, nigiri, and an array of recipes tucked freshly behind the glass. Also, taste as in class—Gelson's is overflowing with that. And Paul makes all the senses sing with delight as we wind around the store.

> "IT IS SO EASY TO GET DOWN, SO EASY TO JOIN A COMPLAINT GROUP—BUT NOT FOR ME. TEAMS NEED TO LOOK THROUGH THE FIRE AND SEE THE LIGHT AHEAD."
>
> PAUL KNEELAND

His excitement is palpable, and he radiates with optimism and enthusiasm, adding that he is very positive, even when times are challenging.

"It is so easy to get down, so easy to join a complaint group—but not for me," Paul laughs. "Teams need to look through the fire and see the light ahead. Encouragement. I like to encourage our teams to see the big picture and not miss the details! Coaching. I love to mentor. I love to see others succeed. That is what excites me. Every generation that I see move into their careers, find their way, and grow and prosper is really awesome."

Outside of produce, Paul's passion does not die down, but continues to inspire—a lot of that comes through volunteering his time and participating on a few boards of directors in the industry. In a nutshell, he loves to give back.

"I have been blessed to be invited on panel discussions and to events to help young leaders grow. I love food, love to cook, and love to create new meals," Paul shares with me. "I really love it when my food and cooking makes others happy. Living near the beach now, I have found great appreciation for the beauty of California and the amazing sunsets. I am very active in our local church and find a great sense of community and love there."

While he sits over the stove or deep in concentration with a full cutting board in front of him, he meditates on the future.

"Fresh produce has already made its way to other departments in the store. I think foodservice and plant-based protein is a next big wave, but how do we highlight gluten-free as a lifestyle versus a health issue? How do we cater to all the other allergen sensitive customers? Fresh produce must take the lead in menu creation for this group. We hit all the conditions that make us the products of choice for dietary needs. Think about it. One department you can go to in the store that satisfies every age group and any health disparity is produce," Paul shares.

Paul is a man of endless questions and a dynamic enthusiasm to match. If all the world is a stage, as Shakespeare would tell us, then may the "fresh" suit up, because Paul is writing the next act.

WTF DO I DO WITH Pure Flavor® Luna Sweets Cocktail Tomatoes ?

{ what the fork }

BAKED CHEESE-STUFFED LUNA SWEETS

INGREDIENTS

1 pint Pure Flavor® Luna Sweets Cocktail Tomatoes
4 oz Gruyère cheese, grated
1 clove garlic, finely diced
1 tsp Dijon mustard
1 tbsp of chopped fresh basil, plus more for garnish
Pinch of cayenne
Salt and pepper, to taste
Baguette, bread, or crackers (optional)

Prep Time: 25 min
Cook Time: 15-25 min
Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375° F. Cut a small slice off the stem end of the tomatoes. Hollow out with a melon baller or teaspoon, reserve insides, and dice. Salt hollowed-out tomatoes and turn upside down for 20 minutes.

2. Mix grated cheese with garlic, mustard, cayenne, basil, tomato insides, and a grinding of fresh black pepper.

3. Fill hollowed-out tomatoes with mixture. Place in a shallow oven-proof dish, or individual dishes, and bake for 15 to 25 minutes, until cheese is melted and bubbly. Serve with slices of toasted baguette, fresh bread, or crackers. Garnish with a chiffonade of basil.

For more delicious, healthy, & easy-to-prepare recipes visit *pure-flavor.com*

Libations
FOR ALL OCCASIONS:
ROSEMARY-GRAPEFRUIT GIN COCKTAIL

by Melissa De Leon

Is anyone else a sucker for a floral touch to their libation? A sprig of lavender or rosemary that ties in something fruity, tangy, or all of the above is guaranteed to be ordered by me and—once they glimpse it—the rest of my brunch party. So I had to try the Rosemary-Grapefruit Gin Cocktail I recently came across. Then, as you might have guessed, I had to write about it.

Foodservice members, please consider adding this to your offerings for any patron that crosses your threshold. Retailers, if you don't already have gin in your produce section or rosemary and grapefruit baskets in the liquor aisle, I highly recommend some rearranging. And if you have the means, maybe a tasting table for the gin-wary. It's one potent spirit, but the grapefruit juice (preferably freshly-squeezed but bottled will do in a pinch) makes this one smooth beverage to sip as we start looking ahead to days outdoors.

The recipe is perfect for all generations looking to turn their kitchens into the Pinterest boards and Instagram posts they follow. It includes fresh, picturesque ingredients and challenges consumers or mixologists to make their own syrup.

Bottom line, both literally and figuratively, it's *fun* and it encourages cross-merchandising.

Whether you're helping your shoppers broaden their bartending abilities in time for party season, or looking for something new to produce and floral-up your menu, this is a concoction we'll all want to clink our glasses to. Cheers!

Recipe Source: Better Homes & Gardens

INGREDIENTS

5 oz freshly-squeezed grapefruit juice
5 oz dry gin
¾ cup sugar
¾ cup water
¼ cup snipped rosemary
Ice

Servings: 2 cocktails

DIRECTIONS

1. In a small saucepan, bring the sugar and water to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally. Add the rosemary and cook 1 minute. Remove from heat and let cool. Strain syrup through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl.
2. Fill a cocktail shaker three-fourths full with ice. Add grapefruit juice, gin, and ¾ oz (1 ½ tbsp) rosemary syrup. Shake 10-15 seconds. Strain into glasses. If desired, serve with rosemary sprigs.

GRAPE SNAPSHOT

We heard it through the grapevine, and so has the consumer: California table grapes are coming. Coveted for their quality, flavor, and excellence, this category drives traffic into the produce department and across the store—not to mention, table grapes impact the ring at the register and the diversity of the consumer basket. Interested in drilling down into the category a little bit more? So was the California Table Grape Commission. Let's see what it found out...

GROWS 99%

of the commercially grown table grapes in the United States

420

table grape operations

GROWING 90 VARIETIES

GRAPE SEASON: May through January

TOP SHOPPING RESOURCES AMONG GRAPE CONSUMERS*:

(These are tools shoppers say they use to help prepare for purchasing or while shopping at the store)

- 46% In-store sales or coupons
- 44% Printed circulars (net)
- 44% Social Media (net)
- 33% Mobile phone apps (net)
- 31% Websites (net)

*Consumers are primary shoppers in the house who have purchased grapes in the last six months

FREQUENCY OF fresh GRAPE PURCHASE:

13%
several times per week

30%
about once per week

26%
about once per month

19%
a few times in the last 6 months

12%
daily or almost every day

of table grape purchasers have used an ONLINE GROCER to purchase FRESH FRUIT

86% of grape purchasers would prefer to buy fresh grapes from California versus fresh grapes that were imported from another country if the price of both were the same.

68% of grape purchasers would prefer to buy fresh grapes from California versus fresh grapes that were imported from another country if the California grapes were priced higher.

Source | California Table Grape Commission for the season spanning May 2018 - Jan 2019

Becoming A CATALYST

By Snack Editorial Contributor Dawn Gray, Founder, Dawn Gray Global Consulting

This year marks 40 years that I have been privileged enough to participate in this fabulous fresh fruit and vegetable industry, and it truly has been a privilege. I have often said of this industry, "It's not a career: it's a disease!" Because once you catch it, you cannot imagine doing anything else. It's full of change and challenge and the people...oh, the people you will meet. The cast of characters I have been privileged to know and learn from are novel-worthy.

This past year, I was honored by the Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) Center for Growing Talent with the first Women's Catalyst Award. Winning this meant a great deal to me for a number of reasons. First, I love the very word *catalyst*. A catalyst incites activity and prompts change—it spurs on action. When I think about my career alongside the word *catalyst,* it just feels right, and it brings to mind the many people who have supported me along the way—and the opportunities I have had to make an impact on this industry.

One of my first catalyst moments was back when I was with Sunkist Growers Inc. I had started working for the company in 1979, when the industry was certainly male-dominated. But I had this amazing manager, Mark Tompkins, who stuck his neck out to support and really mentor me. In 1984, I was the first—and only—woman to ever be nominated for the company's Man of the Year Award. As I understand it, Mark, along with some other great mentors of mine like Larry Beston, Dave Bernstein, and Russ Hanlin, had a couple of choices: give the award to one of the men nominated and not worry about it, change the name to "Person of the Year," or reinvent the award to make it inclusive for all employees. The last is exactly what they did, and I am proud to say I was the first recipient of the President's Award for Marketing Excellence.

Another catalyst moment came when I worked with Robert Autenrieth at The Autenrieth Co., who gave me the incredible opportunity to prove to myself—and to the industry—that an American woman can do business in Japan and Southeast Asia, something that was pretty rare at the time.

In those days, we did business by phone or fax and, yes, even teletype! There was no Skype or FaceTime. I was planning my first-ever solo trip to Japan and Southeast Asia—yikes! Because of my deep voice and non-gender specific name, we got a lot of faxes saying, "We are so excited to welcome Mr. Gray," and I remember thinking, "Uh-oh...I'd better let them know before I arrive!"

Always hungry to learn from the masters, I later had the good fortune to work for a group of catalysts when I joined Frieda's Inc. Frieda's is a specialty produce company that was founded, owned, and operated by smart, caring, and inspirational business owners since 1962...who just happen to be women. Dr. Frieda Caplan, along with her daughters Karen Caplan and Jackie Caplan-

> **I was the first—and only—woman to ever be nominated for the company's Man of the Year Award.**

Wiggins, blazed many trails on their own and always inspired me to do the same.

Fred LoBue and the Board of the Central California Orange Growers Cooperative were the next catalysts in my life when they brought me on as President—my first time with that job title! And David Smith at BC Hot House Foods soon followed, forever searing into my brain the mantra, "Know thy numbers."

Next up was one of the craziest, yet most rewarding, experiences of my career. I left everything I knew in North America to take on the role of General Manager of ENZA, part of the Turners and Growers Group (T&G), in New Zealand after having visited the country only once before. It's funny how we do some of our best work when terrified—and there is nothing like being 12,000 miles away from home and driving on the wrong side of the road to scare you into excellence. It was John Anderson who offered me another catalyst moment when he brought me back to North America to work with the marvelous team at Oppy. Later, Brenda Thomas at Orchard View Farms followed when she invited me to become the first "Outside Director" on its board in 2012.

That's a lot of names, but it only covers a few of the folks who have supported, inspired, and pushed me to be the best I can be. We are part of each person we have met...and I am one truly blessed amalgamation of greatness.

I've had people ask me whether I ever felt that being a woman in this industry meant that I had to overcome barriers. My short answer is: absolutely not. In fact, I've always found it to be a great advantage. Being a woman in the boardroom or in a warehouse meant I was very visible. So visible, in fact, I often got recognition that a male counterpart may not have received. I also think I got through doors because of the curiosity factor. I saw being a woman, then and now, as a great advantage if you approach it with the right attitude, the right confidence, and have the receipts to back it up.

Dawn Gray, Founder of Dawn Gray Global Consulting, has over 36 years of global industry experience. She has worked with some of the top companies in the world, including The Oppenheimer Group, Turners and Growers ENZA International, Frieda's Inc., Vanguard International, The Autenrieth Company, World Wide Fruit (UK), ENZAfruit Continent (Belgium), BC Hot House Foods, Central California Orange Growers Cooperative, and Sunkist Growers Inc.

Dawn's hard work and outside-of-the-box thinking have earned her the respect of industry leaders. She has helped companies all across the supply chain increase sales, reduce market-based and operational costs, create operations savings, and zero in on how to go to market with a cost-effective and targeted plan.

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Living Your Story

By JORDAN OKUMURA

DMA SOLUTIONS' MANAGEMENT TEAM (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) JESSICA SCHNEIDER, MEGAN ZWEIG, LESLIE LORIS, DAN'L MACKEY ALMY, MARISSA BAURYS, MARCI ALLEN, AND MACKENZIE WORTHAM

DMA SOLUTIONS' MARKETING EXCELLENCE IS BRINGING FRESH PRODUCE COMPANIES TO THEIR FEET. THE RALLYING CRY? MARKETING IS NO LONGER AN AFTERTHOUGHT, IT IS A SOLUTION. FIND OUT MORE HERE...

THE DMA SOLUTIONS TEAM AT THE DALLAS, TEXAS, OFFICE (TOP ROW FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) KENDRA KNIERIEM, MACKENZIE WORTHAM, WANDA LIGHTBODY, MARIAH DEMERY, JESSIE DONLON, MARISSA BAURYS, MEGAN ZWEIG, JESSICA SCHNEIDER, AND LESLIE LORIS; (BOTTOM ROW FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) MARCI ALLEN, KELLY OLIVIERI, DAN'L MACKEY ALMY, LEXI CASSIDY, VANESSA JIMENEZ, AND SARAH CLINTON

"When it comes to marketing, it is not about what we *are* doing; it is about what we are *not*." Dan'l Mackey Almy needs no introduction. She is a presence, a force, the lighthouse in the storm for the future of fresh produce marketing. Calling her company, DMA Solutions, a niche marketing agency exclusively for the fresh produce industry does not quite detail the impact that the company has made and will prove to make. Here, language falters a bit, stretches to define the essence of DMA. But the company, in its truest form, is a pure expression of Dan'l, her evolution as a leader, and, most importantly, the team she has surrounded herself with during the past 15 years.

"When I decided to start the business I committed to serving fresh produce solely, because I knew otherwise our clients and the industry would not receive the laser focus and the thought investment that would be required to elevate marketing. I don't want to be distracted by other industries. And let's be honest, they're not as sexy anyway," Dan'l smiles and says. "Before DMA, I had been boots on the ground on the supply-side for 10 years, in sales with companies like Standard Produce and Fresh Del Monte, and I recognized that selling more produce was not a barrier, but rather the lack of marketing—the lack of story, of a voice and a face—of a message. 'Marketing' as a term, may carry too narrow of a connotation for some, maybe even some scrutiny. For me, it is what will change fresh produce from commoditized and transactional products into trusted and demanded food brands."

We all take pride in what we bring to market—now let's give it a voice.

Produce marketing is full of nuance, made even more dynamic by the distinct and characteristically lively, even—dare I say—*provocative* space which it occupies. For the longest time it has been an afterthought. Marketing is, by its very nature, proactive, and our industry can live in a seemingly reactive environment—reacting to policy, food safety measures, market fluctuations, retail demands, consumerism...Hey, even feeding your family. We won't knock you there.

So what does it take to shake loose the barriers to more investment in marketing? If a reaction is a reflex, then marketing is a mindset—an idea, but unlike just any idea, marketing for DMA is an asset that creates equity for a company in the long- and short-term. Marketing is not compartmentalized and singular; it buoys up the whole; elevates all aspects of a business, and it does not "potentially" drive sales, it does drive them. A product without marketing, as the DMA team tells me, is a commodity. And the fate of a commodity is that yes, it will sell, and there is your bottom line. Produce will sell without marketing, but the result is merely a transaction. There is no opportunity for creating and fostering a connection that will lead to a meaningful relationship or purchase. So, if that is your safe space and you want to watch others get bloody breaking through the wall, then stop reading now.

If you are interested, let's bend the ear of the DMA team a little bit more.

"Marketing can seem nebulous, but we ground it in action. What does it really take to develop a brand? That question is never stagnant and does not sleep, which means we don't sleep much either," Dan'l tells me. "Both the challenge and the opportunity is that the discipline itself has accelerated tenfold, along with digital and social, and the reality is marketing is a team sport. The resources that were required 15 years ago to achieve results from an investment in marketing are far from that reality today."

Dan'l admits, "Our work is for a still somewhat skeptical industry when it comes to marketing, so regardless of performance, our work can accelerate or decelerate seemingly on a whim. It can be very scary, but the good outweighs the risk. Because when fresh produce marketing wins, good things happen."

DMA has an interesting ethos. Right out the gates, the team is about the *why* not the *what*. Now, what does that mean?

"All the nuances of our industry add up to something much bigger and braver than we can even know yet. We see that as an opportunity to pivot the perspective within our industry and to respond to the already established desires of the consumer for fresh produce," Dan'l reflects. "Our *why?* We do what we do because we believe there is the opportunity for a connection and the potential to build a relationship that transcends price and trend; it responds to the chance that someone might be inspired to think about food in a different way. We exist because of this work, and the positive impact on society. If it is not about our belief first, our *why*, then we are just what we do."

DMA's goal is to evolve marketing from a series of activities into a long-term, strategic plan and an integrated part of the business, with the ability to drive sales, reach a larger audience—consumer and buyer—and bring new opportunities to measure success in unprecedented ways.

The dial won't move on its own. Let's move it.

> **"... I recognized that selling more produce was not a barrier, but rather the lack of marketing—the lack of story, of a voice and a face—of a message."**
>
> DAN'L MACKEY ALMY,
> PRESIDENT & CEO, DMA SOLUTIONS

"We continually get asked, 'What's the ROI.' I think a more prevalent question is, 'What about *this* ROI; the risk of inactivity?" Dan'l questions.

If companies stick to the same narrative they have had leading up until now, that risk of inactivity becomes detrimental. The consumer has changed; the retailer requires a new level of value and engagement—it is only inevitable that the supplier must change along with the times. The risk? Becoming insignificant.

DMA is not all talk. The team is heavily invested in being able to produce data to show the results of their marketing activities. The company utilizes performance metrics, equipped with insights that build a stronger bond and more impactful value proposition to generate increases in engagement, and inevitably sales, for both the supplier and the

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OUR WINNING Company Culture

buyer. Clients receive monthly reports on goals and progress, which means the goal and the results are always front-and-center.

The company's 360-degree approach to elevating its clients go-to-market strategy is an integrated methodology that drives the success of the business as a whole. DMA's services also include content marketing, brand creation, promotions, public relations, social media, graphic design, website development, trade marketing and advertising, trade show management, strategy and budget planning, the promise of longevity—and the team brings the heat with strength in numbers.

The DMA team offers a range of perspectives, generations, educational backgrounds, and schools of thought. And the woman-owned and driven company strikes a chord with today's consumer, retailers' demands, and the sales-driven fresh produce team. Dan'l describes the tenure of her company as a testament to the industry's evolving understanding that marketing is a fundamental aspect of business and that she attributes the company's success to the team's continuous quest for producing results.

"Marketing usually happens in the last mile—we are trying to change that. Fresh produce marketing can no longer be an afterthought," Dan'l shares with me. "The barriers that we now face are within our own industry. We already have the solution to much of what the world needs—hunger, disease, obesity—and we already see produce moving to the center of the plate. The vehicle for success is right in front of us, now let's grab the bull by the horns."

> ***...when fresh produce marketing wins, good things happen.***

(FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) MACKENZIE WORTHAM, DAN'L MACKEY ALMY, AND MEGAN ZWEIG

(FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) JESSICA SCHNEIDER, MARIAH DEMERY, AND VANESSA JIMENEZ DISCUSS STRATEGY

DMA is a catalyst, an engine for change. The message is clear: the company is not in a place of taking before they give. One of the core values that guide the DMA team is "Helpful First." DMA has long offered services and tools to the industry because the team believes in their *why* and put the industry first before a contract is signed. This isn't to say that financial health for DMA goes by the wayside, but the team believes when they put their values first, business will come.

DMA is fully committed to supporting fresh produce marketers, whether they are a client or not. The company's free resources include *The Core* blog, which constantly shares marketing best practices, insights on new food and business perspectives, and ways to address the shifting dynamic of the fresh produce industry's need for a more proactive nature. Couple that with the numerous resources the team publishes—annual food trend guides, social media calendars, produce marketing calendars, and more.

At the end of the day, what is your story? How do you not only define yourself in a commodity-centric space, but create an authentic narrative that consumers and retailers can see themselves inside of? Do you know why that *why* matters, or the reason it should? Maybe the barrier to progress is what you are not doing. Don't stand in your own way.

Marketing is at its best when it changes people's values and minds. And a winning new and committed mindset will grease the wheels every time.

If you ask me, the writing is on the wall.

BRIDGING THE FRIDGE

BY JORDAN OKUMURA

These days, the forms of, rituals around, and vehicles by which food is presented are changing. And the new game is fun. Whether that be in your favorite haunt, traditional brick-and-mortar store, pop-up restaurant, food truck, or vending machine—yes, vending machine—the scene can be as elaborate as a six-course spread or as compact as a mason jar packed at home in your own fridge.

But, if you are doing it fresh and on-the-go, the set of challenges are not only great opportunities, they are spaces to create innovative solutions. One company putting fresh convenience to the test is Farmer's Fridge, a concept that is showcasing public and private automated smart fridges in locations from hospitals and colleges to corporate headquarters and airports across Illinois and Wisconsin. Not only am I racing down the C terminal at Chicago O' Hare trying to catch a flight, but I am putting a chef-curated meal or snack in my hands in seconds.

What a concept, if you ask me. While I am sitting patiently out in California waiting for the program to expand, I thought I would ask the company's Founder, Luke Saunders, what origin story set the wheels in motion for this clever platform, and what motivated his team to create such a unique and delicious way to bite on-the-go.

"I founded the company back in 2013 as I was regularly challenged by finding fresh food on the road during my years as a traveling salesman," he shares with me.

Farmer's Fridge provides everything from salads, wraps, and soups to bowls, sandwiches, proteins, snacks, and drinks

Luke Saunders, Founder, Farmer's Fridge

Applying his entrepreneurial mindset to problem-solving, Luke arrived at the concept for Farmer's Fridge: Good health starts with what we eat, and eating well shouldn't be hard.

Luke set out to build a disruptive yet simple way to make fresh, healthy food as accessible as a candy bar. And with better options—from salads, wraps, and soups to bowls, sandwiches, proteins, snacks, and drinks—I guess you could have that six-course meal after all.

Convenience has become such a necessity in today's culture, yet at times that desire comes into combat with access to healthy options. So, I definitely understand his ethos.

"For Farmer's Fridge, there's no compromise," Luke tells me. "We understand convenience is key, so we set out to make fresh, healthy meals more convenient than unhealthy alternatives."

Again, as a California girl who mostly experiences the Midwest these days during my trade show travels, I lean into the question of expansion. Even with the competition between retail, foodservice, and meal kits, I still value my choices.

"Currently, we have 200 locations across Chicago and Milwaukee, and counting. It is an exciting time to be bringing something new to the marketplace with a unique strategy to ensure quality and differentiation," Luke says with a pause. "The company is currently working through expansion plans, with the ultimate goal of having a national presence to make fresh, healthy food accessible to all."

> **"WE ADAPT OUR MENU BASED ON THE SEASONS AND SOURCE ACCORDINGLY."**
> -LUKE SAUNDERS, FOUNDER, FARMER'S FRIDGE

One of the big questions out there when it comes to unique fresh formats is what that company's supply chain looks like, and how they build those relationships. Farmer's Fridge works directly with suppliers to source high-quality ingredients, with an emphasis on local products whenever possible, including Mighty Vine Tomatoes, Carr Valley Cheese from Wisconsin, and fruit from Michigan.

"We adapt our menu based on the seasons and source accordingly. We also partner with small purveyors and large distributors to ensure we source the best ingredients that meet our rigorous food safety standards," Luke adds.

Farmer's Fridge is also a customer-centric company, so the team continues building its value and presence with feedback—everything starts with customer requests and open dialogue. The company also has a skilled culinary team that digests the feedback and develops delicious, nutritious recipes. The recipes are then tested and continuously improved to provide the best experience possible.

A perk to warm you as we enter the new year? Unpurchased food is regularly donated to community members in need.

If you ask the team behind Farmer's Fridge what brings them great joy to the tummy, heart, and soul, they will tell you that happiness starts in your stomach.

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UP CLOSE

A Closer Look at Crescent Fruit and Vegetable Golden Crush® Melons

By Jessica Donnel

When it comes to making a daring statement in the produce industry, we at *The Snack Magazine* know it takes a lot of work and even more trial and error. Sometimes, though, when conditions are just right, a product is born that represents a bold difference in answering demands made by both consumers and retailers alike. Enter the latest new cantaloupe variety from Frontera Produce's sister company—Crescent Fruit and Vegetable—Golden Crush®.

Though a traditional cantaloupe is straw-colored on the outside, Golden Crush is unique. As the melon matures, its exterior transforms into a deep gold, telling harvesters when it is ripe for the picking. Having an easy harvest indicator not only helps optimize time and labor for the grower, but consumers will know just by looking if their melon is sweet and ready to eat. Golden Crush also boasts higher-than-average sugar content for consumers looking to satisfy their sweet tooth, consistently topping a count of 15 brix.

Though this is the first season Crescent Fruit and Vegetable will be offering the Golden Crush melon, the company is already touting it as a foolproof option among cantaloupes. Golden Crush is disease-resistant while being non-GMO and a non-ethylene producer, which means it stops ripening further after harvest. Those attributes, plus Golden Crush's firmer-than-traditional flesh, allow for packing and harvesting in bins and a less stringent cold chain and refrigeration process. Goodbye, shrink!

Domestically grown Golden Crush melons will be available from Crescent Fruit and Vegetable from the end of April until December 1st, offering an extended timeframe for cantaloupes grown strictly on U.S. soil. This means more time for consumers to share their newfound crush and more opportunities for retailers to cash in on what's sure to be the next big craze in melons.

Crescent FRUIT & VEGETABLE

MENTORS IN THE MAKING

Adam Brady

BY JESSICA DONNEL

WHAT DO ONIONS, ADAM BRADY, AND SHREK ALL HAVE IN COMMON? Lots and lots of layers, it turns out. If you know Adam, you know there is plenty to this Director of Marketing for Shuman Produce: creativity, enthusiasm...and dad jokes. But what I have come to learn about Adam is that, deep down at his core, there is passion.

Adam started out his career as a journalist, writing and editing for different outlets around the Georgia Southern University campus from which he graduated in Statesboro, Georgia. Though he didn't stay in journalism long, a seed was planted, so to speak, that would grow into a full-blown passion for storytelling—a passion he'd soon learn how to apply to his career in the food industry from his first boss in fresh: John Shuman, President and CEO at Shuman Produce.

"John was the individual who brought me into the produce world when he hired me to join the Shuman Produce team as its Marketing Coordinator in 2010. He took a lot of time to walk me through the sweet onion business and the produce business as a whole," Adam starts to tell me when I ask him to share a few words about his first mentor in the industry. "It was also at Shuman Produce where I developed my passion for the industry, the people, and the stories behind the products. John and the Shuman story as a part of a Vidalia story fascinated me, and I was immediately hooked. I think, as a former journalist, the narrative of how our food comes to be on grocery store shelves grabbed hold and still hasn't let go."

Beyond showing Adam that he could use his skills as a raconteur to not only grow his career but his passion, John helped introduce him to key industry players on the retail and supply sides of the business. One of those people was Wendy Brannen, the then Executive Director of the Vidalia Onion Committee.

"Wendy was one of my first contacts outside of my immediate world of Shuman Produce. She gave me the opportunity to join a marketing subcommittee at the Vidalia Onion Committee to help determine the path forward for the Vidalia onion industry's consumer programs," Adam explains.

Wendy says that after the Vidalia Onion Committee decided to capitalize on that famous line in the 2001 film—"Onions have layers, ogres have layers. Ogres are like onions. End of story."—Adam wasn't intimidated by the silliness of the idea and instead jumped on any opportunity to keep the momentum of the Vidalia industry going forward.

"Working with Wendy encouraged me to consider the effects of an industry-wide approach in growing a brand and how important it can be to maintain a sense of consistency across your messaging even if it comes from many different sources," Adam continues. "Wendy has since become a valuable sounding board for helping me to think through marketing concepts and the direction of my career path in the industry."

This lesson in a well-rounded approach to lifting up the produce industry would serve Adam well in his next position as Senior Marketing Manager for Golden Sun Marketing. There, Adam was tasked with leading marketing efforts for clients in all realms of the fresh produce industry—a feat he said he would not have been able to do without the guidance of Golden Sun's Founder and President, Don Goodwin.

"Don is easily one of the most knowledgeable and innovative thinkers in the industry and having the opportunity to work with and learn from him was a crash course in managing relationships and expectations from seed to serving dish," Adam says with obvious reverence. "I had very little insight into categories outside of sweet onions when I started at Golden Sun Marketing, and Don provided me with the opportunity to learn more through a very collaborative team environment. While giving me the opportunity to think and act creatively, he led me to focus strategically on how to effectively grow brands and drive sales."

Adam Brady
Director of Marketing
Shuman Produce

Of course, Adam made his way back to his home at Shuman Produce, where he once again took up the role of Director of Marketing for the RealSweet® brand. In fact, as I'm interviewing him, he's just in his first weeks back at the company that kicked off his produce career.

"As you can imagine, it's been a busy few weeks getting reacquainted with my old compatriots and the new faces here on the team. We have a lot to do to prepare for Vidalia!" he mentions off-hand. With these three mentors at his side, I don't doubt he's working on big things to come.

THE MENTORS

Here is what they have to say about Adam Brady...

Don Goodwin

Founder, Golden Sun Marketing

I had the pleasure of having Adam on our team for three years. Adam is very creative and has a great understanding of how various marketing tactics can influence sales. He is always positive with a great sense of humor. Though we cringe and laugh simultaneously when he tells another 'dad joke,' he is a passionate marketer!

I think one of the most successful things Adam and I worked on together was applying a marketing strategy that works for the uniqueness of the produce industry. Adam really understands the specific nuances of marketing fresh produce and how to invest marketing dollars effectively. I always encouraged him to build his marketing strategies by making the largest investments in tactics that will deliver the best results. Many marketers today focus more intently on the least impactful tactics. I also challenged him to measure everything he does in marketing and not be afraid to admit that something doesn't perform. Marketing tactics are changing rapidly with the development of digital technologies. We always want to look at everything—compare costs for clients and be willing to test. One of Adam's core strengths is his eternal optimism and willingness to try new things. It has been a real joy to watch Adam grow even as I endured his many silly jokes.

John Shuman

President & CEO, Shuman Produce

It has been a pleasure to see the growth in Adam's career over the past few years. He was new to the produce industry when he first joined Shuman Produce almost 10 years ago, and it has been exciting to see him develop his unique skill set that enables him to adapt and grow in a rapidly changing industry. Over the last few years, Adam has really come into his own—his knowledge across multiple categories and consumer trends combined with his creativity allows him to see opportunities that we can build on. The experience and knowledge he has gained can be attributed to his enthusiasm, strong work ethic, and dedication to the produce industry. We're glad to have Adam on our team.

Wendy Brannen

Director of Policy Communication, American Soybean Association

Adam consistently brings a big helping of enthusiasm and creativity to the table. Add to that a side of adaptability. Whatever new position or project he is working on, Adam flexes based on his previous responsibilities and adapts those skills to the new situation. He is thoughtful—as in both kind and full of thought for what he and his organization are trying to accomplish—and has always exhibited a solid work ethic. Part of that strong ethic is rooted in pride for his job. He enjoys the work he chooses to pursue and always looks for new ideas and solutions—again, serving up something besides meatloaf and mashed potatoes day after day.

I especially enjoyed working with Adam when he was leading marketing at Shuman Produce and I was Executive Director of the Vidalia® Onion Committee. The Committee facilitated a series of promotional partnerships with DreamWorks Animation and Universal Music Group that involved everything from consumer radio spots to retail point-of-sale, and working with people like Adam who embrace the 'rising tide lifts all boats' philosophy was what made those campaigns so successful. No matter what the crazy idea of the year was (Shrek seemed pretty far-fetched for peddling onions until you peeled back the layers!), Adam was not only willing to entertain it but brainstorm ways to make it even bigger.

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LIVING

BY MAGGIE MEAD

In the lush land of Hawaii there lies a flavor so unique and regional, that it's almost a secret from Mainlanders. I speak of li hing mui, which is a Chinese salty dried plum with a flavor so ubiquitous in Hawaii that nearly everyone has some in their home. Directly translated, li hing mui means "traveling plum," though the name is often shortened to just "li hing" and is also known locally as "crack seed" and "see mui." The local treat has a complex flavor profile—definitely salty, but not overly; sweet, but still has a savory element; and a little bit sour as well. Described as "addicting" and "distinct" by those in *The Snack's* office, li hing mui answers the call of consumers for more global options at retail.

Li hing mui comes in so many shapes and forms—red or white, salty or sweet, wet or dry, seedless or shredded, and very often powdered. Traditional li hing mui is a shriveled, dried plum that consumers suck on and eat the flesh. But warn your shoppers not to bite down; there's a seed inside! The powdered form, however, is where li hing mui gets really versatile. It can be sprinkled over fresh and dried fruits like mango or pineapple, and added to candy, popcorn, ice cream, and, my personal favorite, margaritas! This is far from an exhaustive list, however, as restaurants, bars, and Hawaii residents continue to find new and creative ways to feature the flavor.

Most everyone in Hawaii knows that li hing mui is not native to the island, but was brought over in the late 19th century by Chinese plantation workers who moved to the islands. The best way to experience this flavor is to take a trip to an authentic crack seed shop. For me, trips to the crack seed shop were a childhood treat. Neat rows of large glass jars lined the walls of the shop, filled to the brim with different varieties of li hing mui. The friendly li hing mui purveyors carefully doled out bags by weight. As children, we, of course, overindulged. With fingers stained bright red and tongues lacerated from the salt content, it was a lesson in moderation.

But not everyone is lucky enough to have access to the magic of crack seed shops, so why not be a flavor pioneer and bring the crack seed experience to your stores?

While plentiful in Hawaii, li hing mui is rarely seen in Mainland retail locations—usually only in international markets. Online retailers are currently the best place to find these regional treats, giving brick-and-mortar retailers a unique opportunity. Now is a good time for retailers to jump on board the li hing mui train to discover and share the flavor before everyone else does, so you can spout the age-old hipster phrase that you "knew about it before it was popular."

RETAIL RUNWAY

*Sometimes, looks **do** mean everything...*

Check out what packaging concepts and products we believe pop on the shelf and can help drive traffic through the produce department.

1 J&J FARMS *Stop Light Bell Pepper Packs*

Stop right there, bell pepper enthusiasts, and get ready to have your socks knocked off! Primary colors have to be some of the most pleasing colors to the eye, but don't quote me on that. Not only does J&J Family of Farms have eye-catching stop light packaging for its bell pepper line, the bright colors and see-through bag are sure to be a hit with consumers. After all, it's a feast for the eyes and the stomach, and what more could you really want?

5

PACKAGING CONCEPTS THAT DID IT RIGHT

By ANDREA ALLEN

2 SUNKIST *Delite™ Mandarins*

Blue and orange will be the color palette at my wedding, I'm just that married to it (See what I did there?). And if I could, I'd be marrying Sunkist Delite™ Mandarins, because we'd make such a pretty pair. Although I can't—and won't—attest to my own level of beauty, I will hands-down sing the praises of these orange beauties. The giro bag shows off the goods while the branding shows off the fact that these mandarins are grown in California. Citrus aficionados, unite!

3 4EARTH FARMS *Mini Cucumbers*

If someone had told five-year-old Andrea Allen that she could one day purchase a pouch of miniature produce, she would have jumped for joy. Enter twenty-seven-year-old Andrea, who's still just as delighted by 4Earth Farms' Mini Cucumber bag. The recyclable zipper pouch bags are a no muss, no fuss approach to packaging. The bright green graphics highlight the goods inside, making the mini cukes the star of the show. Honestly, how could you walk past these little guys and not want to place them in your basket?

4 HELLO FRESH *Meal Kits*

Meal kits in retail? Long gone are the days when we might think such a thing impossible. Now, consumers can waltz down the aisle and be enraptured by the brightly-packaged kits. The front is emblazoned with the company's logo and showcases the various recipes available. The packaging is—pardon the expression—a recipe for success. Not only can you see all of the ingredients, but also what they'll look like in their final form—before you devour it, that is. Will these new kits become a staple for retailers? Only time will tell.

5 GIORGIO® FRESH *Stuffed Mushrooms*

Okay, I think I need to stop the presses and alert everyone to this magnificence. Stuffed mushrooms that I can heat in the oven? Right in the packaging? Am I dreaming?! I hope I never wake. Not only do consumers get a sneak peek at the flavors available to them—Artichoke, Spinach & Cheese, Fiesta Cheese, and Cheese & Imitation Bacon Bits—they offer the ultimate convenience in being able to use the tray that these bad boys come in.

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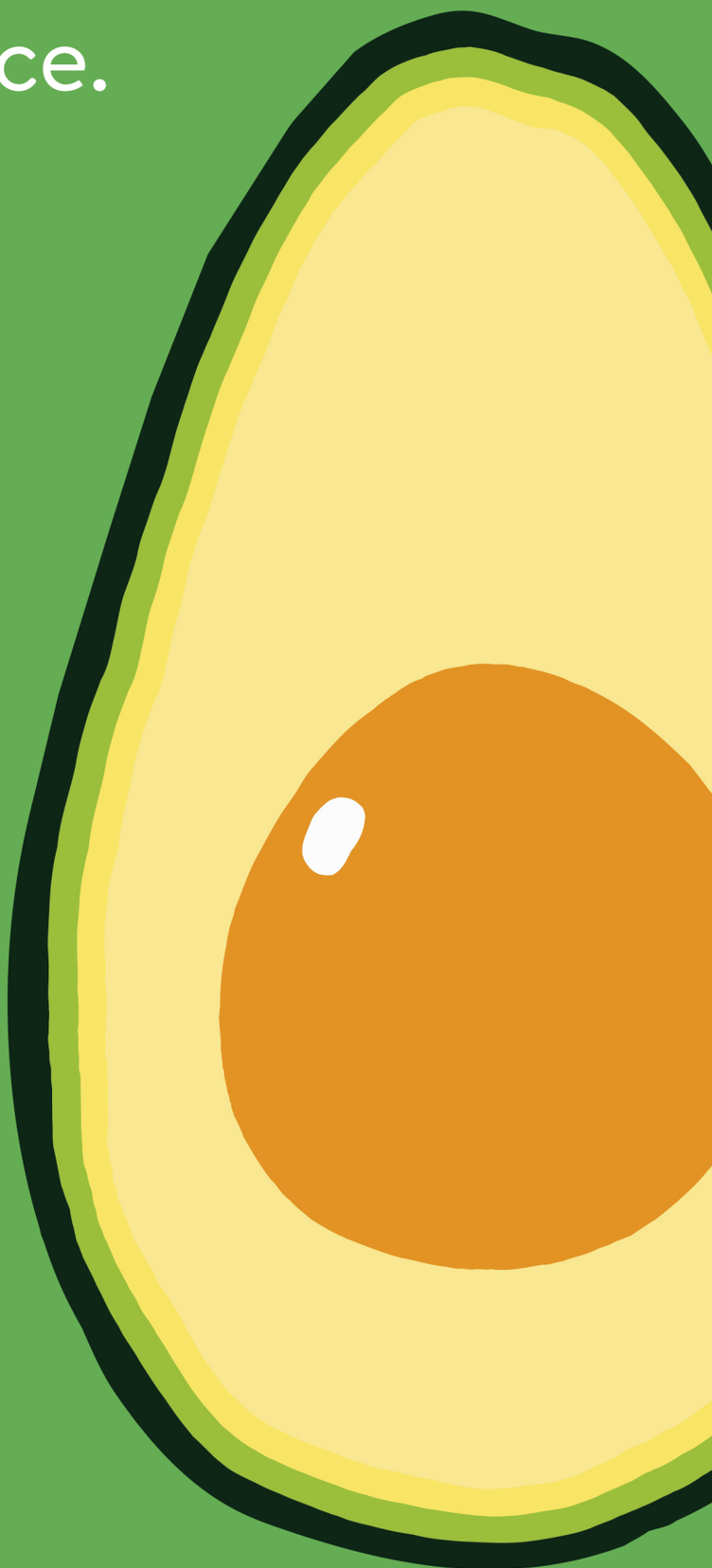

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