

Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

the **SNACK**

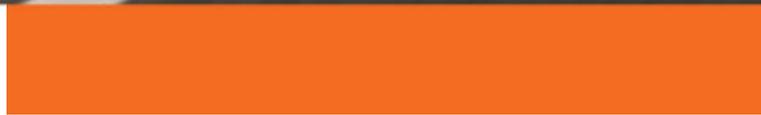
ISSUE 49 MAY 2020

ANSWERING
THE CALL



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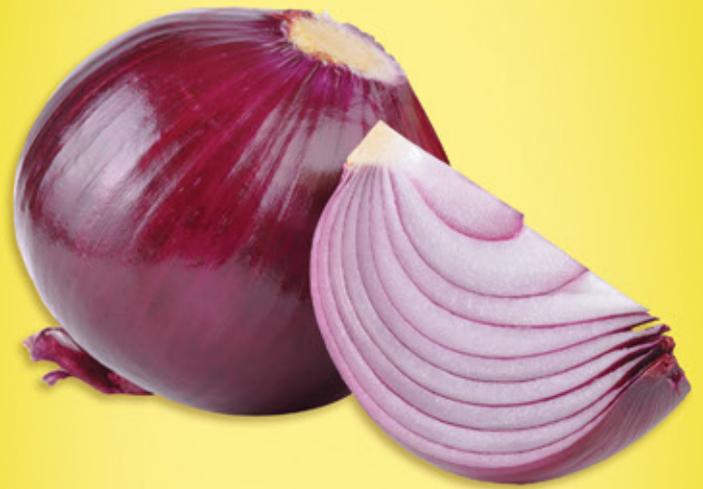
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Red Onions



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Yellow Potatoes



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and one of the most admired CEOs in the world, joins *Morning News Beat's* Kevin Coupe on-stage for a provocative and insightful conversation about the future of food retailing and evolving consumer behavior.



Moderated by **Kevin Coupe**, Founder, *Morning News Beat*

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O P S S P O N S O R S



I**N MY HOME, I WAS RAISED TO LEAD BY EXAMPLE.** “Be a person of action,” my father would tell me. During times like these, I hear his voice loud and clear, resonating through the lens in which I view the world. In an industry like ours, that voice materializes. The sentiment reigns. And in an industry like ours, we hold and maintain a very unique space in which we can ignite intention and turn it into action. We can be the axis on which the compass needle swings.

Our ability to feed the world is no small feat as the recent COVID-19 pandemic has shown us. As history repeats itself, as the crises that impact us as a global community grow, you have all been able to take the lead and drive solutions home. Even within our industry, I realize there is not always an even playing field, and it is my hope that these new issues at hand compel us to find new solutions to benefit the whole.

One thing is for sure, the impact of fluid and dynamic communication is at the top of everyone’s mind. As our industry becomes more dependent on email, online information, as well as editorial platforms that generate value and cohesion, *The Snack Magazine* and *AndNowUKnow* hope to be both your asset and your ally.

Doing our part means creating the space and the capacity to tell your story through our eyes. As your advocates, we have learned to listen intimately to your concerns and mirror your courage and your passion. Because, while the issues of the day need to be addressed, the solutions need to be engaged with even more. Sometimes the solution comes simply by reading stories of strength or legacy, a desire to innovate and overcome.

Ever heard the old adage, “How you do anything is how you do everything?” If you apply that perception here, then we have a whole lot of strength to offer.

Companies like J&D Produce and individuals like Markon Cooperative’s Tim York are echoing that passion we need

as each new year brings new headwinds and more moments of uncertainty. And we bring you their stories here in the 49th issue of *The Snack Magazine*. Take the tales of operations like BlazerWilkinson and Always Fresh Farms and you can see innovation is a state of mind and a movement forward.

Sometimes, in the midst of flux and maybe even chaos, we want a steadying vision and a hand to help move the needle. Mission Produce and Babé Farms are keeping their eye on the prize for everyone, each with a vision to persevere the troubled waters and bring growth to their categories in a rising tide.

The message here and across our publication has always been that despite the struggles, the show must go on. What better way to do that than to map the journey forward in a story?

Equitable Food Initiative (EFI) takes us on one of those journeys as the organization celebrates its fifth anniversary. Young in industry age, but wise in vision, companies like EFI will break the barriers of what we can expect from change in this decade and beyond.

There are many more voices to raise hope and steer resilience in this issue, and as time passes, we may look back on these stories for their steady hope—like we do to many in our industry. For now, just sit back and let your eyes listen. 🍷



Jordan Okumura
Editor in Chief
AndNowUKnow and *The Snack Magazine*



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As part of a family of growers and shippers, D'Arrigo New York looks at produce with a unique point of view.

DARRIGO
NEW YORK

FEATURES

J&D PRODUCE

A TWIST OF FATE

The love shared between Jimmy and Diane Bassetti radiates through the industry, permeating every piece of produce they offer. Laying the foundation for an unparalleled legacy, the Bassettis spin a tale as old as time...



BLAZERWILKINSON

THE STRAWBERRY PEOPLE

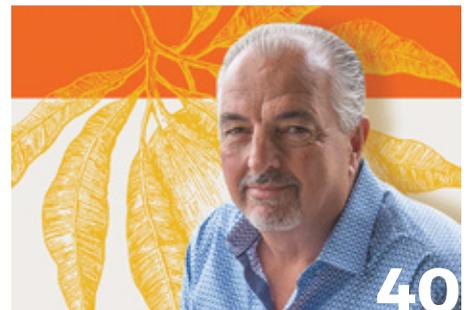
Think you know all there is to know about berries? Kiana Wilkinson Amaral, Scott Blazer, and Kevin Gee take us on a walk through the “strawberry fields forever” and detail partnerships, new packaging, and so much more...



MISSION PRODUCE

MISSION POSSIBLE

Setting itself apart from the rest isn't risk enough for this challenge-seeker, which is why the Mission Produce team is on a *mission* to help its retail and foodservice customers differentiate their avocado offerings...



FRESKA PRODUCE INTERNATIONAL

SET YOUR COURSE BY THE MANGO

Managing Principal Gary Clevenger has his eyes set to the mango stars as he charts a course toward category takeover, sharing why this program bolsters the importer's expansion plans...



ALWAYS FRESH FARMS

ON THE BLUE HORIZON

Between several years of retail expertise and a fruit category bustling with opportunity, Northeast Sales Manager Greg Kosofsky is poised to lead this grower into category domination. Find out how Always Fresh Farms has become one of the industry's leading blueberry growers...



EQUITABLE FOOD INITIATIVE

CREATING COMMON GROUND

Like a knight in shining armor, the Equitable Food Initiative is riding in to fill critical gaps in the supply chain. With unmatched leadership and insight, you and your growers, too, can take your offerings to new heights through this innovative program...



TIM YORK

EVERY END IS JUST A BEGINNING

The role of President for the Markon Cooperative is only one stone that paved this produce leader's path. As he looks to retirement, we can be sure of two things: First, the door never truly closes for a man like Tim. And second, an end is full of beginnings...

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President & CEO of Shuman Farms

President & CEO
ROBERT LAMBERT

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MAY 2020
ISSUE 49

FRESH FOLK



WHOLESUME HEROES
THE GROCERY INDUSTRY



MY FAVORITE THINGS
NICHOLE TOWELL



IF LIST
DAN CANALES



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OFF THE SHELF

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PAST MEETS PRESENT: 25 YEARS
OF LEADERSHIP

TRUE TO TASTE

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The Calavo logo features the brand name in a bold, green, serif font with a leaf-like flourish above the 'o'. It is set against a bright yellow background with a green border. The entire logo is centered at the top of the advertisement.

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SOLVING THE FRESH PRODUCE RUBIK'S CUBE

PART 1

By *The Snack* Editorial Contributor Julie Krivanek,
President, Krivanek Consulting Inc.



This year marks the 30th anniversary of Krivanek Consulting. Known for our strategic thinking and planning niche, I'm obsessed with helping clients solve the Rubik's Cube of business: how to achieve long-term value and profitable growth.

Sizing Up the Industry

We've all seen the industry become more and more complicated. At the same time, the sheer level of talent and brain power needed to meet the challenges has also grown. People and teams are developing strategies, investors are attracted to the promise of fresh, and there are examples galore proving that organizations are

breaking out of commodity mindsets and the conventional thinking of the past.

So, what have I learned in my last 30 years about the winners and losers? How do the winners achieve long-term value and profitable growth, and where do the losers fall short? The answer is surprisingly simple: The best of the best get the same three things right, and the companies that struggle or fail get one or more of the same three things wrong.

That's right—success or failure pivots around only three things:

- The right strategy.
- The right CEO.
- The right Board.

The Right Strategy

This is the first part of a two-part series starting with strategy and the planning process used to create it. Next issue, I'll focus on the people that make all the difference in success or failure: the CEO and the Board.

As I've said, leaders and companies have a wide range of expertise in strategy development. So, instead of hitting the basics, I'm going to share the most common pitfalls I've seen in my consulting practice that derail even the smartest and best in the business.

Pitfall #1: A deer in headlights

Business owners and executives often debate where to start. You may have a strategy that needs to be fueled by the right people or you may need the right people to create the strategy and plan. Just accept that work is complicated and messy. Don't overthink it—or you'll freeze. The most important thing is to just start.

Pitfall #2: Strategy for dummies

In the past few decades, "strategy" has been dumbed down to a list of activities that basically detail how to get from point A to point B. This is not a strategy, this is a to-do list. A business can check off all the tasks on its list and still fail to create long-term value and profitable growth. This tactical approach is called "operational excellence," and may create efficiency but not advantage in a marketplace that has become a battleground for price and value.

Pitfall #3: 'Ready, aim, fire?' or 'Ready, fire, aim?'

Fresh produce is definitely a "ready, fire, aim" industry. It may be due to our personal DNA, the nature of a perishable product, or a little of both. The key point here is the need to get ready—or "think strategically"—before jumping right into tactics and goals.

Gathering information about trends that help or disrupt customer feedback, company culture, competitive intel, industry shifts, and consumer dynamics is fairly simple. But what separates the winners from the losers is being able to swim in data and trends while asking the question, "What does this mean?" Think Sears, think Kodak...what might they look like today if they thought strategically about their future?

Pitfall #4: Vision or hallucination?

This is so easy to get wrong—the worst businesses have no sense of the future, the best businesses are hardwired for it. Taken a step further, a vision is not some perfectly wordsmithed sentence floating in the ether of a hopeful tomorrow. A company vision is inspirational and aspirational. It is meant to be a future the business works to achieve. When a company believes in their future, they resource it, speak of it constantly, and use it as a selection tool for everything.

Pitfall #5: The elephants in the room

Every process must identify strategic issues critical enough to derail the company from achieving its vision. Issues can be inside the business or outside in the marketplace. The point remains that not having the courage and fortitude to endure uncomfortable conversations and solve difficult problems will stop a business dead in its tracks.

I've worked in and consulted for public and private corporations in industries that include energy, mining, fresh food and produce, transportation, technology, and media. I can unequivocally state that no industry is as unique and has as many moving parts as fresh produce—and solving the Rubik's Cube for a produce business can feel like trying to get to shore while swimming in a tsunami. Yet these guidelines hold true, so stay tuned for Part 2 next month on the importance of the right CEO and the right Board. 🍌

❖

“I’m obsessed with helping clients solve the Rubik’s Cube of business: how to achieve long-term value and profitable growth.”

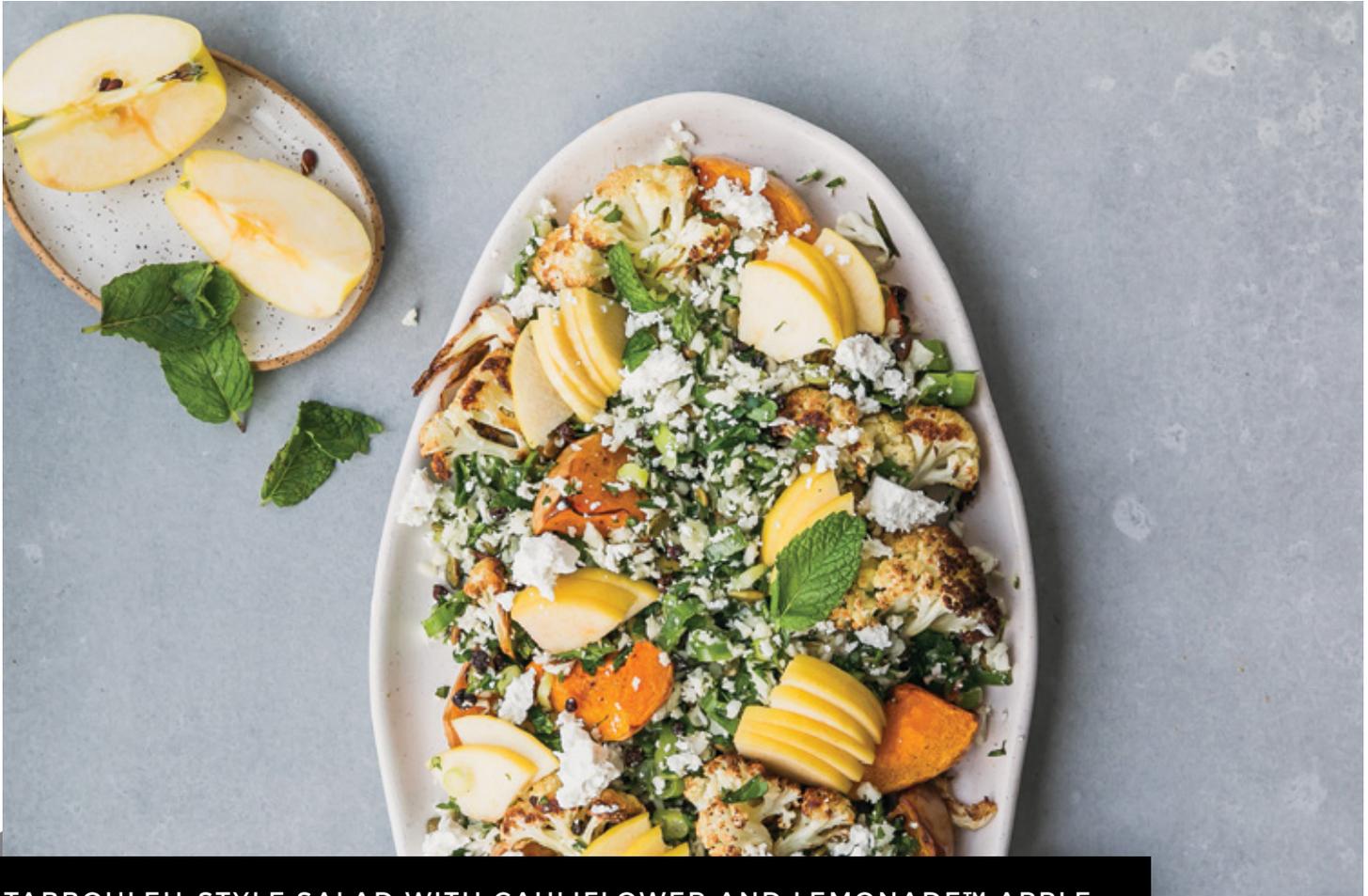
❖



Julie Krivanek is a strategic plan and process advisor to Boards, CEOs, and Executives in the fresh food and produce industries. She also serves on advisory boards and is a member of the National Association of Corporate Directors.

WTF DO I DO WITH Lemonade™ Apples ?

{ what the fork }



TABBOULEH-STYLE SALAD WITH CAULIFLOWER AND LEMONADE™ APPLE

INGREDIENTS

TABBOULEH SALAD

1-2 Lemonade™ apples, quartered and finely sliced

1 large cauliflower

½ of 1 butternut squash

1 tsp ground cumin

½ cup green onion, thinly sliced

½ cup fresh flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped

½ cup fresh mint, finely chopped

¼ cup raisins

¼ cup pumpkin seeds, toasted

⅓ cup crumbled feta cheese (optional)

Olive oil, for drizzling

DRESSING

Juice of **1 large** lemon

2 tbsp pomegranate molasses

Salt, to taste

Freshly-ground black pepper, to taste

Prep Time: 20 min

Cook Time: 20-30 min

Servings: 6-8 servings; one cup per

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat the oven to 400° F and line a baking tray with parchment paper.
- 2 Cut the cauliflower in half and remove the leaves. Cut one half into florets and place the florets with the leaves on the baking tray. Cut the butternut squash into chunks and place on the same baking tray. Drizzle the vegetables with olive oil and sprinkle with cumin, then roast for 20-30 minutes until golden brown and tender.
- 3 Meanwhile, roughly chop the remaining cauliflower and place in the bowl of a food processor. Pulse until finely chopped. Combine the chopped cauliflower in a large bowl with the green onion, parsley, mint, sliced apple, raisins, and pumpkin seeds.
- 4 Mix all the dressing ingredients together in a small bowl and pour it over the cauliflower bowl, tossing to fully combine. Add in the roasted cauliflower and butternut squash and top with feta, if desired. Optional to garnish with extra apple slices. Serve immediately.

To learn more about Giumarra and Nature's Partner, visit giumarra.com



The **STRAWBERRY** people

BY ANNE ALLEN



**BLAZERWILKINSON
TAKES US THROUGH ITS
"STRAWBERRY FIELDS
FOREVER," DETAILING
PACKAGING, PARTNERSHIPS,
PEOPLE, AND MORE...**

◆ Kiana Wilkinson Amaral, General Manager of BlazerWilkinson, and Kevin Gee, Vice President of Farming and Operations for Santa Maria, walk through the strawberry rows in one of BlazerWilkinson's farming operations on the California Coast



From seed to berry, BlazerWilkinson ranks quality and people as its top priorities

U

p close, a strawberry is speckled with hundreds of tiny seeds, a perfect mosaic of fresh. Take a few steps back and it becomes a category staple, bedecking produce aisles across retailers nationwide. Step farther

still, and you might find yourself in the fields of BlazerWilkinson, where farmers like Scott Blazer and John Wilkinson envisioned a strawberry operation that would highlight quality first.

Although they were longtime colleagues and industry veterans, John and Scott never could have imagined that the strawberries they began farming in 2003 would soon grow into a business that would stretch over 2,000 acres across the United States.

“We built out our purpose-driven business with one goal in mind: to produce the best quality strawberries on the market. Period,” explains Scott. “And to do this, you have to invest in the best land, the

best people, and you have to implement only the best practices.”

In the heart of that land stands daughters, sons, and siblings, all of whom make up the BlazerWilkinson extended family.

“Because we are family and this is our livelihood, we are so involved in the day-to-day operations. That helps us keep up the quality in product, in people, and in practices,” Scott comments.

As farming in California’s Santa Maria Valley became an important piece of BlazerWilkinson’s business, the company tapped Kevin Gee, Vice President of Farming and Operations, Santa Maria, and his family to pursue growth in that region. Together, Kevin and the BlazerWilkinson team—alongside the Foxy brand—have garnered a great deal of attention from the industry.

One such reason is simple: the farms that Scott recalled earlier. Over the years, BlazerWilkinson has



acquired more and more farms and today owns all—or large portions of—its farming operations from California to Florida.

“This is exceptionally important to us because quality doesn’t just come to you—you have to work for it. And we are meticulous across all facets of our operations, from farming to packing to sales. That way, we completely control quality, enabling us to produce only a superior product,” Kiana Wilkinson Amaral, General Manager, expresses. “Markets and trends change all the time: Weather is unpredictable, events occur that you can’t account for—as we’ve seen with COVID-19—but because our families are so involved, and have their finger on the pulse, we are able to react quickly to most changes that occur.”

Keeping a finger on the pulse of the industry is key, and that pulse jumps when it hears two hot buzzwords: sustainability and people. Both have greatly impacted the way BlazerWilkinson conducts itself—throughout its past and as it looks into the future.

“What many people don’t realize is that farming, in general, is quite a sustainable industry. Strawberry farming, in particular, has embraced sustainable growing practices for quite some time. The plants are watered through drip irrigation systems, which allow for water and nutrients to be applied precisely where they are needed, saving hundreds of thousands of gallons of water per year,” Kevin shares. “Additionally, at the end of the crop season, the plants are tilled into the earth and a rotation crop, such as green vegetables, is planted in its place. The complementary rotation adds back nutrients and further conditions the soil with what it needs to create another flourishing crop.”

Driven by its own efforts to be more sustainable, as well as the demands of its customer base, BlazerWilkinson has increased its organic acreage by 100 percent over the last three years—no easy feat!

The most important sustainable action being taken? This is where BlazerWilkinson’s plan to

**“STRAWBERRY
FARMING...HAS
EMBRACED SUSTAINABLE
GROWING PRACTICES FOR
QUITE SOME TIME.”**

Kevin Gee,

**VICE PRESIDENT OF FARMING AND
OPERATIONS, SANTA MARIA,
BLAZERWILKINSON**



● BlazerWilkinson’s berries are represented under the Foxy brand label

"HONEST, HARDWORKING PEOPLE WHO ALWAYS DO THEIR BEST ARE AT THE CENTER OF EVERY SUCCESSFUL OPERATION."

Kiana Wilkinson Amaral
GENERAL MANAGER, BLAZERWILKINSON



◆ Above: Honest, hardworking people make the BlazerWilkinson operation go round
◆ Left: Kevin Gee and his family have made a name for themselves as one of the most talented farming operations in California's Santa Maria Valley



roll out the use of 100-percent-recyclable clamshells comes in.

"We are proud to announce that over the course of 2020 and into 2021, we will transition to the use of fully recyclable packaging. Besides growing organically, the largest area where we can assist in reducing our carbon footprint is by modifying the types of packaging that we use," says Kiana. "BlazerWilkinson has always pushed its packaging vendors towards testing out new technologies in recyclable plastics—independently, we have invested in companies that support such initiatives."

As I hear both Kiana and Kevin passionately express themselves about the company and the superior product it produces, I'm transported once more to the fields in which we walked at the beginning of this story and understand why Kiana, Kevin, and their families are so dedicated to the business—and why finding the right team is critical to growing a farming operation.

"The people are the heart of every business," Kiana remarks. "Honest, hardworking people who always do their best are at the center of every successful operation. And yes, these people are hard to come by. As a company grows, it has to seek out and capture the right people for its team. Treating

our employees kindly and fairly, offering steady work, and a great environment in which to do their job develops a sense of pride in the company they work for. Encouraging the employees to also assume the family passion of producing amazing strawberries has allowed us to create a really great team dedicated to making BlazerWilkinson, and the berries that we ship, the best that we can be."

This has never rung more true for BlazerWilkinson and the industry than it does now, as the world has succumbed to the health concerns and economic upset associated with COVID-19.

"As food producers, we take this very seriously," asserts Kiana. "Agriculture is an essential industry, and thus we, and the people who work for us, need to stay working throughout this situation. And we have been so pleased with the extent to which our family and employees have stepped up and continued their dedication to the work of feeding the world. We couldn't be more proud of them and the product that we are all producing together."

It's impossible to step away from what's truly at the heart of this strawberry operation: people. So, when I hold a Foxy strawberry in my hand I realize that the fruit itself is simply a part of the whole, and I've been lucky enough to see it firsthand. 🍓

STRAWBERRY



SNACKCHAT

The image of the strawberry is as iconic as its flavor profile. Add the strawberry category's amazing versatility and you have the triple crown of fruit-forward value. But, we dare not spout this berryful ballad on our own. We join a chorus of strawberry lovers in this 49th issue of *The Snack Magazine*...



Frances Dillard

Senior Director of Brand and Product Marketing
Driscoll's

"Now, more than ever, families and friends are seeking ways to strengthen emotional connections with each other and create lasting happy memories. The incredible sweet taste of a fresh strawberry has the power to bring more than a little joy into everyone's lives. For generations, Driscoll's strawberries have been a part of everyday moments for millions of families. Our investment to improve flavor through proprietary varieties has garnered us market leadership. The category growth for strawberries continues to have a strong upside as Driscoll's leverages the opportunity to innovate new segments such as our introduction of Limited Edition Rosé Berries™."

Fiona McLean

Marketing Manager
DelFrescoPure®



"Our strawberries are greenhouse-grown in a controlled microclimate that allows the DelFrescoPure® strawberry to grow as a uniform product at a larger harvest yield. Our berries grow in long white gutters set at chest height for easy harvesting, their roots fed by nutrient-rich water. They're also nourished by the sun and special lights that make year-round production possible. YES!Berries® strawberries are available year-round, with production launching in November and running through to October to provide strawberries during our winter in the Northern Hemisphere and all season to our retail partners. Having local strawberries available during the winter season for snacking certainly is a taste of summer all year long."

Anthony Gallino

Vice President of Sales
Bobalu Berries



“May is one of the best months for consumers to find strawberries front and center in every retail produce department, and hopefully this year they will have more reasons to celebrate. Our retail customers typically kick into high gear during this time period and having two holidays helps to keep shoppers coming back for more all month long. Our districts will overlap during May, providing us great quality and volume to support our key partners. I snack on Bobalu berries at my desk every day after my 10 o'clock walk out to the field, which I can see from my window. People ask all the time my favorite way to eat them—my answer is always the same. They are best straight out of the container and I never get tired of them.”

Blake Wilkinson

Production Manager
BlazerWilkinson



“The agriculture industry is in such volatile times. We as a strawberry grower remain grateful for our continued work to provide a fresh and safe product. We consider it a duty to do so, and it is a passion. These beginning months of the California strawberry season typically are the most exciting. But as the immediate future remains a bit unknown, we continue to push forward farming the safest most ultimate strawberry.”

CarrieAnn Arias

Vice President of Marketing
Naturipe Farms



“Summer is one of the greatest opportunities of the year to remind shoppers of the peak season fruit available to them—especially strawberries! With robust volumes of fruit, our growers depend on us to inform shoppers of not only the burst of flavor strawberries have, but also the health benefits. One cup of strawberries provides you with 99 percent of your daily vitamin C. Promoting these benefits with prominent front-of-department displays supports our growers, the health of our consumers, and our retailers' bottom line. We also encourage retailers to keep berry products properly refrigerated for improved shelf-life and a positive eating experience for their shoppers.”

RAINIER® FRUIT CELEBRATES WHOLESOME HEROES

The Grocery Industry

Wholesome Heroes

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



WHAT MAKES THE GROCERY INDUSTRY A WHOLESOME HERO?

Wholesome Heroes has always been about people helping people. The global coronavirus outbreak has shined a light on the powerful role retailers and frontline food workers play in our everyday lives. We've seen countless examples of how millions of workers are meeting the consumer demand and keeping stores stocked. Retailers across the country deserve our deepest gratitude—not just now, but every day. Thank you, *Wholesome Heroes!*

- 1 EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION
- 2 MASS HIRING
- 3 CUSTOMER CARE
- 4 SAFETY STRATEGIES



Retailers on both coasts acknowledged their employees' improved efforts to keep groceries stocked during this time of crisis by **giving associates raises on top of their regular hourly and overtime pay.** In addition, many companies are offering bonuses to full- and part-time employees.



Everyone from local and regional chains to national grocers **allowed senior citizens to shop an hour before opening to the regular public.** 60 and over shoppers were able to buy their essentials at times when there were less people and less exposure in the stores.



Amid the pandemic, **some grocers hired thousands of additional employees to provide consumers across the country with fresh food and needed supplies.** These jobs provided new opportunities to displaced foodservice and retail workers.



A growing number of grocery retailers across the country **installed protective plexiglass barriers in order to safeguard both associates and customers alike.** These were placed in high-contact areas such as at check out, pharmacies, and customer service desks.

ALWAYS
REFRESHING



Apples, Pears, Cherries, and Blueberries

RAINIERFRUIT.COM

WTF DO I DO WITH

Mission Produce
Avocados

?

{ what the fork }



CHICKEN MIGAS FRITTATA

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Mission avocado, sliced
- 3 **tbsp** olive oil
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 green bell pepper, diced
- 1 onion, diced
- 4 corn tortillas, cut into ½" strips
- 1 **cup** shredded chicken
- 2 **tbsp** butter
- 8 eggs, beaten
- ½ **cup** heavy cream
- 1 **tsp** salt
- ½ **tsp** chili powder
- 1 **cup** grated pepper jack cheese
- Optional toppings:* Cotija, cilantro, pico de gallo

Prep Time: 10 min
Cook Time: 20 min
Servings: 6



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 350° F
- 2 In a large, 10" non-stick skillet over medium heat, add olive oil. Add bell peppers and onions and sauté until just tender. Add corn tortillas and cook until soft, stirring often. Add butter and shredded chicken and cook until chicken is warm, and butter has melted.
- 3 In a small bowl, whisk eggs, heavy cream, salt, and chili powder together. Once the filling is prepared, add the eggs and cook, stirring with a heatproof rubber spatula until the ingredients are evenly distributed and the eggs start to set on the bottom. Add cheese and continue stirring another minute longer until the eggs are halfway cooked but still very wet on top.
- 4 Place entire pan on center oven rack and bake for 8-10 minutes or until eggs are completely set.
- 5 Top with sliced avocado, Cotija, cilantro, and pico de gallo as desired. Enjoy!

To learn more about Mission Produce, visit worldsfinestavocados.com

AVO DOS

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There is a difference with California Avocados! That's why your shoppers anticipate the California season. From the consistent quality, freshness and homegrown taste, they want that delicious California Avocado satisfaction with every bite. It's a tradition of excellence to pass the plate with California Avocados—bringing family and friends together for nearly a century—especially during the American Summer Holidays.

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For Customized Marketing Support:
CaliforniaAvocado.com/Retail

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Mission Produce

MISSION



possible

~~PARADISE~~

BY KAYLA WEBB

34



If avocados were mountains, their paths would be well-traversed, the trails soft with time and tread. But if avocados were mountains, the team at Mission Produce wouldn't be hiking those well-trodden routes with the rest of the crowd. Instead, Denise Junqueiro and the Mission team would be leading a summiting expedition to the highest peaks and encouraging all to jump.

“Don't be afraid to try it,” Denise, Mission Produce's Director of Marketing, urged when I sat down to chat with her one afternoon. It was this conversation that made me first think of the avocado/mountain metaphor, in part because of Denise's insistence that retailers, foodservice operators, and marketers practice fearlessness when merchandising avocados.

In Mission Produce's world, the word 'fearless' knows no bounds. To me, marketing the avocado seems an easy feat—especially since the fervency for

the fruit remains just as strong as it was years ago. To Denise, marketing the avocado is an opportunity to take a risk—*especially* since the fervency for the fruit remains just as strong as it was years ago.

“We encourage retailers to be unafraid to try something new and employ Mission Produce's merchandising programs—because the consumer is out there and looking for more than one type of avocado,” Denise continued, before listing Mission's programs, including AvocaDOs and DON'Ts, Size-Minded, Ready, Mission Minis, Small but Mighty, and Emeralds in the Rough as excellent starting points for retailers to fearlessly merchandise avocados.

Mission Produce itself first took this risk when it decided to switch up its

marketing strategy to one almost no one else in produce was doing.

“Consumers want avocados, when and how they want them, but no one is servicing that—except for us,” noted Jenna Rose Lee, Marketing Associate.

This mindset led to the creation of Mission's programs. Specifically, different consumers want different pieces of fruit—from ready-to-eat to not-quite-ripe-yet fruit (Ready); small, on-the-go to jumbo varieties (Mission Minis, Small



"...WE'RE FOCUSING SOLELY ON WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS NEED AND HOW WE CAN HELP THEM. WE ARE A RESOURCE."

Denise Junqueiro

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, MISSION PRODUCE

but Mighty, and Size-Minded); and those that help to eliminate food waste (Emeralds in the Rough). With this diversity in consumer demand comes a tangled web that Mission Produce is helping to unweave for its retail and foodservice customers.

"Our programs aren't built off of what we *think* will work, nor are we saying 'here, try our new scheme.' Instead, we're focusing solely on what our customers need and how we can help them. We are a resource," Denise emphasized.

While Denise was the first to introduce me to the fearlessness that has become characteristic of Mission Produce, she dates the unique strategy back to the company's origins.

Mission Produce has long been unique in the avocado category—even before the inception of its merchandising programs. Denise detailed a national ripe program, avocado-specific ripe rooms, a hydro-cooling process, food safety initiatives, and vertical integration in Peru as key strategies the grower has implemented

to ensure its avocados—available year-round—are more than just fruit for retailers to sell and shoppers to buy. In fact, all of these differentiators helped give Mission Produce legs to stand on—and to trek avocado mountains with—as it developed more ways of being a valuable partner for its customers.

"We decided to create our merchandising programs because we had a lot of data from our Avocado Intel program and expertise from being in business as avocado experts for 36 years. This data came from handling practices and researching what was going to give our customers the best advantages in increasing consumer access to high-quality avocados," Denise explained. "From there, we began working to educate the industry on the reality of avocados—like how color is not always an indication of ripeness—in order to provide a better retail and foodservice experience."

As Denise filled in the backstory of Mission Produce's merchandising practices, I began to piece together a different linchpin behind the strategy: the addition of Denise to the team. It was this moment that gave Mission Produce an extra push in the right direction, as Denise was the one who spearheaded the merchandising programs that turned into a labor of love shared by the whole company.

"I started at Mission four years ago as the Customer and Marketing Manager. In my first quarter, I worked with the sales team on how to provide the service of marketing to our customer base. I would sit in meetings where our customers would say, 'It would be really great if we



MISSION PRODUCE ADDRESSES THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF THE CONSUMER BY DEVELOPING A WIDE ARRAY OF PRODUCTS

had this or that,' and ask questions like 'Are we providing the most value?' and 'What's on the forefront of the category?' The merchandising programs came about from these conversations because we realized we needed an educational tool," Denise said. "Our customers were looking to support the avocado category with their staff and needed to know the best decisions to make. We decided we'd be the ones to help them."

From there, Mission Produce dove into the data to examine what promotions and SKUs were working on-shelf and what was missing from the current programs. The team began gathering the basis of what then became its merchandising programs, uncovering ways to add value that could be as simple as retailers offering two bulk sizes rather than one or even providing displays of beautifully blemished fruit.

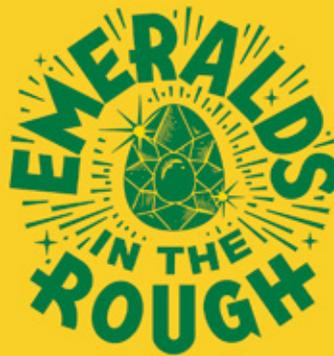
It was at this point in time that Mission Produce laid the foundation for another of its unique characteristics: its goal of helping customers grow the avocado category as a whole. With this goal, the grower has set itself apart as an important asset for retail and foodservice operators.

Again, I'd argue this difference in Mission Produce was only strengthened by Denise and her background and experience. She comes from the commission world, where she worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, among others. She then made the jump to marketing, running programs for the fig, treefruit, and California olive industries before joining Mission. Through it all, Denise developed a service-oriented viewpoint that has given her the necessary groundwork for her problem-solving and solutions-providing skill set. With Denise and the team as its trailblazers, creating new trailheads for the company to follow, Mission was able to build its educational programs to what they are today: easy to digest and eye-catchingly attractive.

"Mission Produce comes from a place of solving problems, education, data, and utilizing the whole tree. Our merchandising programs based on our business intel built up our marketing as a whole. Immediately we set ourselves apart because we aren't trying to create a brand for ourselves. Rather, we are helping our customers grow the avocado



AVOCADOS AND DON'TS



"WE ARE HELPING OUR CUSTOMERS GROW THE AVOCADO CATEGORIES AND GET THE FRUIT INTO MORE SHOPPERS' HANDS."

Jennifer Anazawa,
CATEGORY MANAGER, MISSION PRODUCE



Denise Junqueiro
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING



Julianna St. Geme
MARKETING MANAGER



Jennifer Anazawa
CATEGORY MANAGER



Jenna Rose Lee
MARKETING ASSOCIATE

"AT THE END OF THE DAY, WE'RE HERE TO HELP, AND WE'RE NEVER GOING TO STOP."

Julianna St. Geme,
MARKETING MANAGER, MISSION PRODUCE

categories and get the fruit into more shoppers' hands," Jennifer Anazawa, Category Manager, expanded.

Mission Produce started its merchandising overhaul with the very informational AvocaDOs and DON'Ts program. The company then expanded its offerings by creating the Mission Minis and Small But Mighty bags, which Denise disclosed have gone through the roof. When the data showed that this unique program was servicing an important customer base, Mission then introduced Emeralds in the Rough, a program built out of consumer demand for food waste elimination.

"Emeralds in the Rough was something not seen before, since it was utilizing the whole tree while still growing the category," Denise noted.

After hearing Denise and the team throw out the goal of growing the category ad nauseam, I interrupted to ask what this means for Mission Produce.

"For Mission, it means providing the highest level of service and value to our buy-side customer base," Denise answered. "The category is becoming more and more developed in the U.S. Avocados used to be very niche, but now are used in everything. So, we at Mission Produce ask, 'How can we continue to develop, grow, and drive sales?' We review what's going on in the category and build programs based on customers' needs. We've even built a program for foodservice to help with the size curve change. We've helped our customers in the sector be flexible while still meeting demands—that's growing the category."

Denise also disclosed that retailers who have taken the risk and picked up Mission Produce's programs have experienced fantastic results.

"While we don't recommend our programs to every retailer, the ones who have ran with them and taken the risk have seen double-digit growth," Denise shared. "And they've received great

feedback. We're helping our customers meet their consumers where they are at, and it's working."

While Mission Produce has seemingly reached a crucial avocado mountain peak with its successful merchandising programs, Denise makes it very apparent that the trek isn't over for the company and its team. In terms of what's next, she couldn't yet say, but there's no doubt in my mind that it will involve another risk, maybe even a cliff jump or two.

"At the end of the day, we're here to help, and we're never going to stop. So, retailers and foodservice operators, don't be afraid—give us a call. The customers that have taken on our programs have seen huge success, and that's been the best part. They're getting the benefit of what we created," Julianna St. Geme, Marketing Manager, concluded.

The avocado mountains are calling, and Mission Produce must go. The question remains: Will you? 

WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Bako Sweet® Organic Sweet Potatoes ?



ORGANIC SWEET POTATO TOAST

INGREDIENTS

1 large Bako Sweet® organic sweet potato
1 tsp olive oil
Salt and pepper, to taste

Optional toppings:

1 avocado
1 tsp Trader Joe's Everything but the Bagel Sesame Seasoning Blend
3-5 sliced cherry tomatoes
2 tbsp of arugula
Green onion slices
Crushed red peppers

Prep Time: 5 min

Cook Time: 25-30 min (dependent on method)

Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Use a large sharp knife to slice the sweet potato lengthwise, about 1/3" thick.
- 2** Coat sweet potato halves with 1 tsp of olive oil and season with salt and pepper.
- 3** To bake, line on a large baking sheet and bake 425° F for 25-30 minutes. Or insert slices into a toaster and toast on high until tender.
- 4** Serve with your favorite toppings like sliced avocado, arugula, tomatoes, sesame seeds, green onion slices, and crushed red peppers.

To learn more about Bako Sweet, visit www.bakosweet.com



Freska Produce
International

SET YOUR COURSE
BY THE
MANGO



BY ANNE ALLEN

40

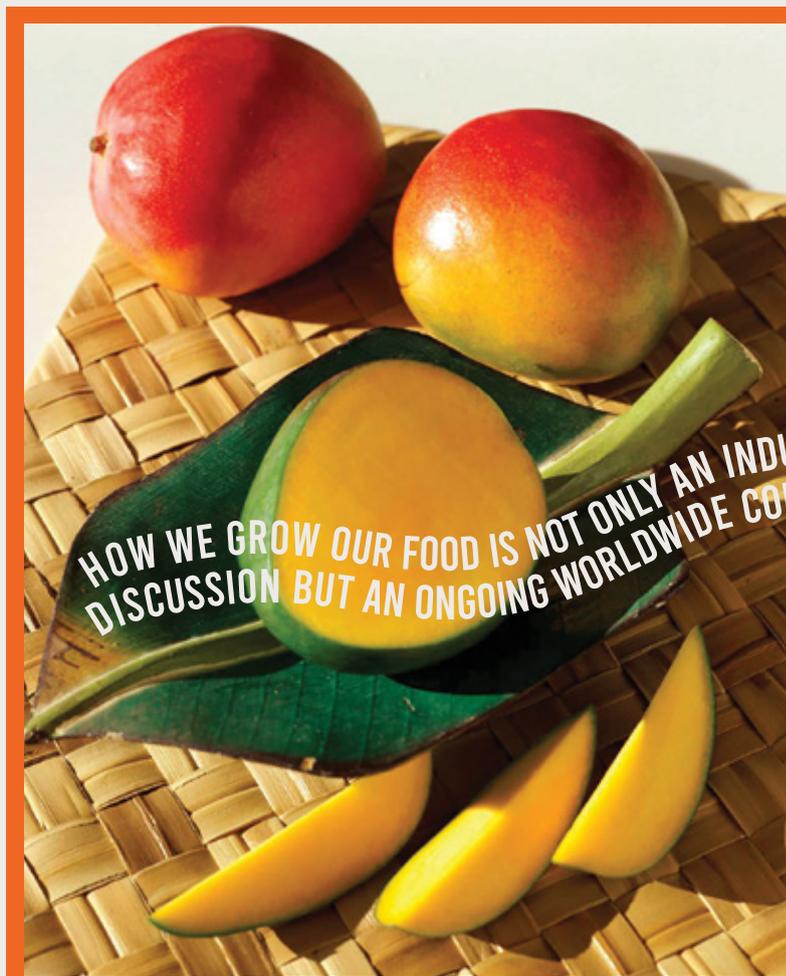
Trends, like seasons, come and go. A hot summer one year does not foretell a hot summer the next. What may be the star of one chef's menu may never appear on another's. While we as an industry take stock of trends, we are not, however, under their spell. We, like Freska Produce International, chart our own course.

But charting a course is not as simple as it seems. It requires foresight, dedication, and the ability to shake up one's entire operations—and be ready for any challenges that come along the way. For Freska, plotting coordinates on the mango map meant reinvigorating a category that until only recently had captured the widespread adoration of consumers. It meant procuring the best growers from around the world, harnessing talent from Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and Mexico. It meant putting together a team of quality control experts to travel to those regions and ensure only the best quality mangos were being brought to market. And it meant looking to the future and achieving Fair Trade Certification.

“Fair Trade Certification is something that we are very passionate about as we have seen how it changes people's lives,” Gary Clevenger begins. “We get a lot of workers that want to come work for us because we pay a higher wage—meaning that we have a constant supply of good, dependable labor as we continue to grow our Fair Trade program.”

Consumers are no longer just looking at whether or not an item is tasty, priced affordably, and convenient. They're looking at the overarching effect of the company on the world, such as its social and ethical impacts on the communities in which it grows. For those companies that bear the Fair Trade seal, it communicates several important elements of social responsibility to both retailers and shoppers. The Fair Trade Certification ensures that rules are followed to create a better workplace

“FAIR TRADE CERTIFICATION IS SOMETHING THAT WE ARE VERY PASSIONATE ABOUT AS WE HAVE SEEN HOW IT CHANGES PEOPLE'S LIVES.”



environment and protect workers' rights. Some elements it investigates are the use of under-age labor, fair treatment and wages for employees, and the availability of a direct phone number to call Fair Trade if workers feel they are being mistreated in any way.

However, becoming a certified Fair Trade company is not as simple as being presented with a certificate. Rather, it requires innovating business practices from the ground up.

“These certifications are very demanding and have a long list of items that we need to perform both socially and food safety-wise,” Gary continues. As Freska's Managing Principal, he's more than aware of the necessary steps to take. “This is what makes the Fair Trade symbol one that consumers

can be confident in, where they know that business practices are being done differently than other companies.”

How we grow our food is not only an industry discussion but an ongoing worldwide conversation. Denoting one's products as being fairly sourced is just one way that companies like Freska have differentiated themselves from others. As both consumers and buyers have changed their approach to mangos in recent years, it's critical to highlight the importance of these programs in capturing market share.

“Through the efforts of mango shippers and the National Mango Board, consumption of mangos has grown



GARY CLEVENGER,
MANAGING PRINCIPAL,
FRESKA PRODUCE INTERNATIONAL

INVESTING IN THE BUSINESS MEANS INVESTING IN THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE IT WORK EVERYDAY—THE FRESKA PRODUCE FAMILY



tremendously in the last few years. This is due to a number of factors, including just how popular the fruit has become across the retail and foodservice sectors. Everything from dried mangos to fresh-cut mangos appears on restaurant menus and at fast-casual smoothie chains,” Gary explains. “The mango flavor has been trending everywhere, which has driven sales of fresh mangos because everyone is chasing after that flavor. I am positive this will do nothing but increase over the coming years, even double over the next five.”

“NOT EVERYBODY SEES THESE PARTS OF OUR BUSINESS, BUT WE DO IT OUT OF A PERSONAL NECESSITY AND RESPONSIBILITY.”

With such intense category expansion on the horizon, Freska and its grower-partners are working at double-speed to ensure that their mango programs have the infrastructure necessary to deliver for increasing demand.

“We have been selling dried mangos to retailers in the United States, and at this point, demand is growing to the extent that it exceeds supply. We are working as fast as possible to get more supplies so we can grow this commodity as it’s a wonderful product that has huge growth potential for us,” Gary remarks.

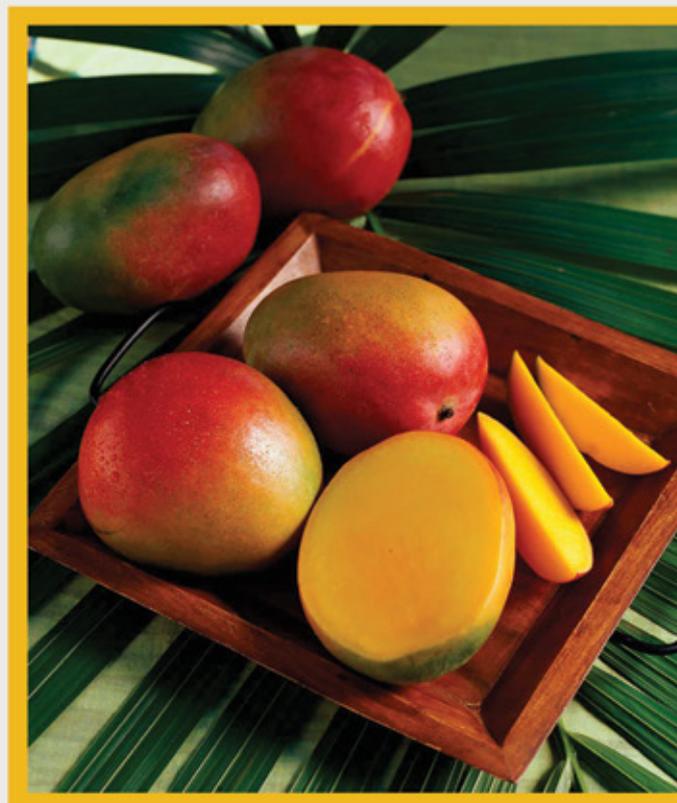
Alongside its Fair Trade certification, Freska has worked to become a more sustainable company overall. This kind of commitment does not come as a shock when Gary explains it to me, but it’s heartening to see where the company’s ship is headed nonetheless.

“Recently, Freska’s headquarters in Oxnard, California, began using 100 percent renewable energy with our solar energy installation, meaning that we now have retrofitted lights with LEDs. We feel it’s our responsibility to teach sustainability to our employees

in ways that show them that the little things we do amount to big changes overall—and a higher standard for our company. Not everybody sees these parts of our business, but we do it out of a personal necessity and responsibility,” Gary reflects. “We work hard to recycle cardboard and other materials so we don’t add to landfills. And in the rare case of having to get rid of product, we repurpose it as cattle feed rather than add it to the trash.”

It’s these seemingly small changes that encompass the overarching culture of a company. Each change puts a pin on the map until the course becomes clear to all who look at it.

And as I look back at the plotted course, the message of Freska’s efforts rings clear: The long-standing trend doesn’t fall far from the mango tree. 🍌





One of the Kings of Fruit resides in a class of its own, raising the prowess of the fresh produce department to new levels and engaging the consumer's interest on the flavor, differentiation, and value fronts. As the category experiences a boost as demand drives purchasing power, we thought we'd check in on some of the stats defining the mango madness we all relish in...

Mango Stats



\$325 Mil.

Whole Mango Retail Dollars 2019, Up 8%

346 Mil. lbs

Whole Mango Retail Volume 2019, Up 2%

\$79.6 Mil.

Fresh-Cut Mango Retail Dollars 2019, Up 10.5%

4.35 Mil. lbs

Organic Mango Retail Volume 2019, Down 5%

119.5 Million Boxes (4.0kg)

Total Mango Volume
Imported in 2019

3.25 lbs per Person

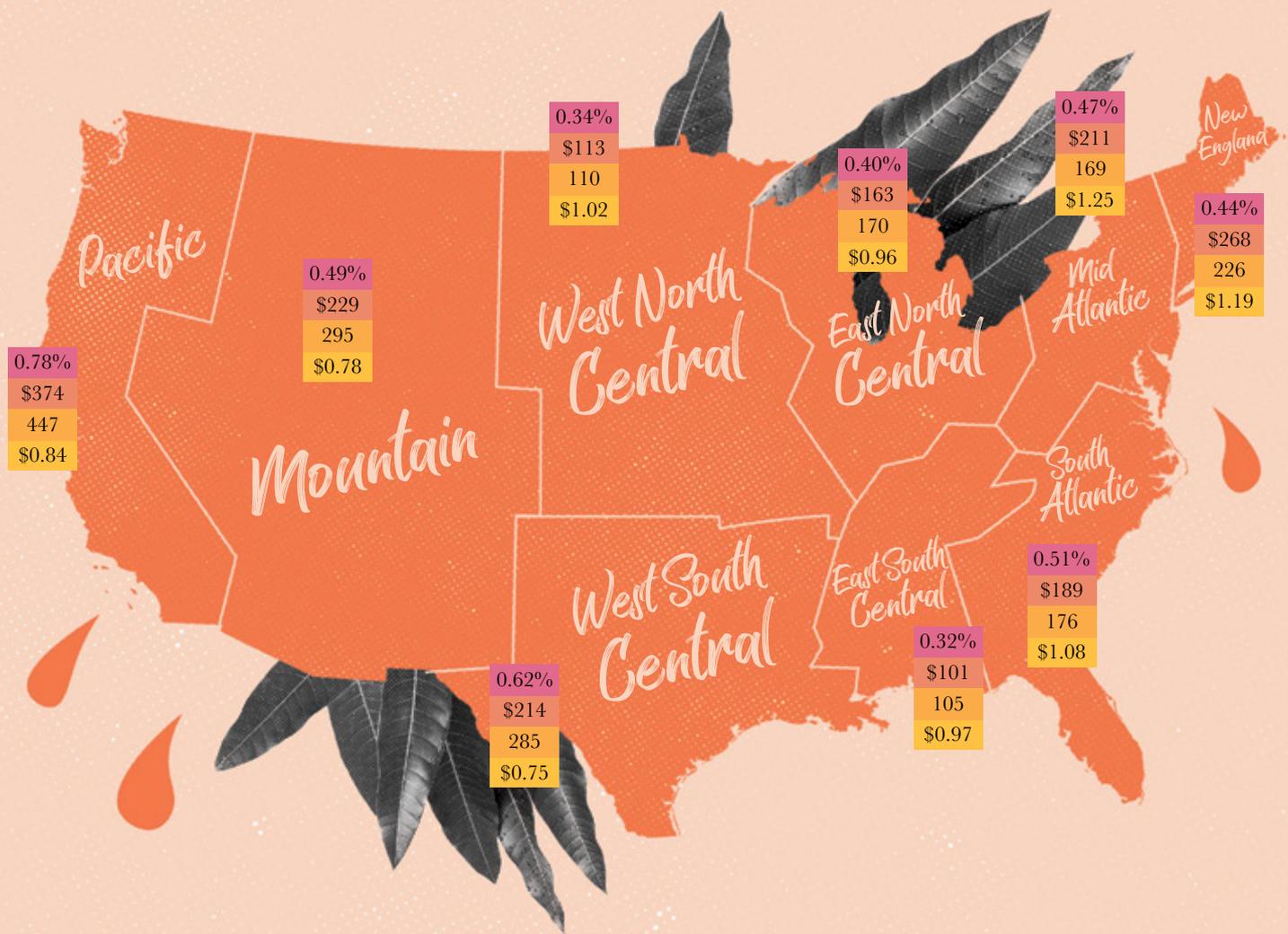
Mango Per Capita Availability
In 2019, Up 2.5%

\$635 Million

Total Mango Value
In 2019



Performance by Region



Legend	Total U.S.
Dollars Contribution	0.52%
Dollar Velocity	\$212
Volume Velocity	227
Average Retail Price	\$0.94



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▶ MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀

NICHOLE TOWELL

Senior Director of Marketing, Duda Farm Fresh Foods

With **Jordan Okumura**

You know this industry marketing maven well, but you might not know that she loves her college ball and kitchen accoutrements. When she isn't taking Duda Farms Fresh Foods' marketing platform to new heights, Nichole is enriching her life as an intrepid traveler and much, much more. Find out what makes this industry member one of our dearest friends as we check out some of her favorite things...

1 *This is a Gator household (University of Florida) but just for fun, I throw in Ole Miss and the Running Rebels. Don't confuse college football season with professional.*

2 *From show tunes, opera, and country to rap and my favorite, Dave Matthews Band, I love it all.*

3 *I love my three furbabies: Samantha, 14, Molly, 13, and their big sister Hattie Lee.*

4 *Planning family parties with the best themes and favors, china and crystal to paper plates—there is always a bridal, birthday, or baby shower to plan.*

5 *I have about 250-plus. Most cherished are the small regional school or women's club published cookbooks.*

6 *Crock-Pot, Sous-vide, Juicer, Instant Pot, Mixer, Food Processor, galore! I love to spot the new kitchen gadget to try it out.*

7 *Experiencing culture through history, food, music, and shopping is the best!*

8 *Always on the hunt for the best new flavor combination and brands.*

9 *Love spending time with nieces, nephews, cousins, sisters, and large extended family.*



- 1** College Football
- 2** Music
- 3** Dogs
- 4** The Art of Entertaining
- 5** Cookbooks
- 6** Kitchen Gadgets
- 7** Traveling
- 8** Sparkling Flavored Waters
- 9** Family

WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Mucci Farms
SUN DROPS™ and SUN
BLISS Grape Tomatoes

?



SWEET GRAPE TOMATO SALAD WITH HALLOUMI CHEESE AND ASPARAGUS

INGREDIENTS

1½ cups Mucci Farms SUN DROPS™
red grape tomatoes, halved
1½ cups Mucci Farms SUN BLISS
orange grape tomatoes, halved
1½ lb trimmed asparagus
2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus more
for baking sheet
4 oz halloumi cheese, sliced into **½"**
thick squares
15 basil leaves, torn
Salt, to taste

VINAIGRETTE

¼ cup white wine vinegar
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
1 clove garlic, minced
Salt and pepper, to taste

Prep Time: 10 min

Cook Time: 20-25 min

Servings: 6

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Preheat oven to 400° F.
- 2** Place asparagus spears on a large oiled baking sheet. Sprinkle with salt. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil (toss to coat and spread asparagus in one layer). Roast 15 to 20 minutes until tender. Remove from heat and let cool slightly.
- 3** In a large nonstick skillet, heat 2 tbsp olive oil on medium heat until shimmering but not smoking. Pat cheese squares dry and fry in batches for 1-2 minutes, turning once with a spatula. When the cheese turns golden brown, remove from heat and set aside (rest on paper towel to drain excess oils).
- 4** To make the vinaigrette, whisk together the vinegar with extra virgin olive oil, garlic, salt, and pepper.
- 5** In a mixing bowl, combine SUN DROPS™ and SUN BLISS tomatoes with the fried halloumi and toss together with the vinaigrette.
- 6** Assemble roasted asparagus on a serving platter and top with the tomato and halloumi mixture. Add basil leaves. Enjoy.

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



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The Gift OF VULNERABILITY

By *The Snack* Editorial Contributor Rex Lawrence,
Founder and President, Joe Produce Search

If there is anything that we have been reminded of here in 2020, it is that we are all human beings. I hope this is not too inappropriate, but I can't help but think about a book that we read to our daughter when she was just a little girl—*Everyone Poops*. Yeah, I know...but it's true! Camels poop, dogs poop, cats poop, and people poop, too—so goes the children's book. Doubt it? I'm assuming you didn't have to hunt down toilet paper this past March.

It's a very basic message that is freeing in its own "level-playing-field" way.

This darn pandemic has reminded us all, on a global scale, that at the end of the day we're all humans, sharing one planet. And we're all vulnerable to even a tiny little germ that we cannot see.

As I write this story, I'm reminded that we have no certainties in our world, country, state, county, town, industry, or Joe Produce. The obvious occurred to me the other day—we have no guarantees. As the saying





goes, “We’re only guaranteed death and taxes,” and now some of our businesses even get to hold off on some taxes! I hope to hold off death for another 50 years or so, too!

So, while I no longer believe in guarantees, here is what I do believe...

I believe we are blessed to be in this industry. We are growing, selling, shipping, and feeding people all over the world the healthiest stuff on Earth! We’ll get through this, and the fundamentals of our industry and businesses that existed in February will be here when this is over. Perhaps not instantaneously, but we will recover.

THIS TOO SHALL PASS.

In the meantime, we’re working with job seekers who are looking for jobs and/or having their resumes written. We’re working with some employers who are forced to make excruciatingly tough decisions, such as laying people off or reducing hours. We’re also working with employers who are hiring and need people. It’s really all over the board.

As I struggled to share another of our business’ lessons, I started thinking in the direction of life’s lessons being gifted to us all right now. Gifts, you ask? Yes! I’ve seen more people walking their dogs, washing their cars, playing with their kids, and holding the hands of their loved ones than I can ever remember at this scale. Perhaps learning that those little things that worried us in January are not important at all is a gift. Perhaps this being the first day of the rest of your career is a gift. Spending more time with our families is a gift. Having our health is a gift. And being reminded of what is most important is a gift.

BEING GRATEFUL FOR WHAT WE HAVE IS A GIFT.

Without a doubt, our greatest gift here at Joe Produce is our opportunity to help people. We work every day to find a path for those who seek it, and spread insight where it is needed. I am truly grateful for these gifts. In return, we hope to continue providing you the gift of our support. Pandemic or otherwise, we’ve got your back. So let’s hold tight to hope as we weather this storm together. 🍎

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 and President
Joe Produce SearchSM

JOE PRODUCESM
SEARCH

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J&D Produce

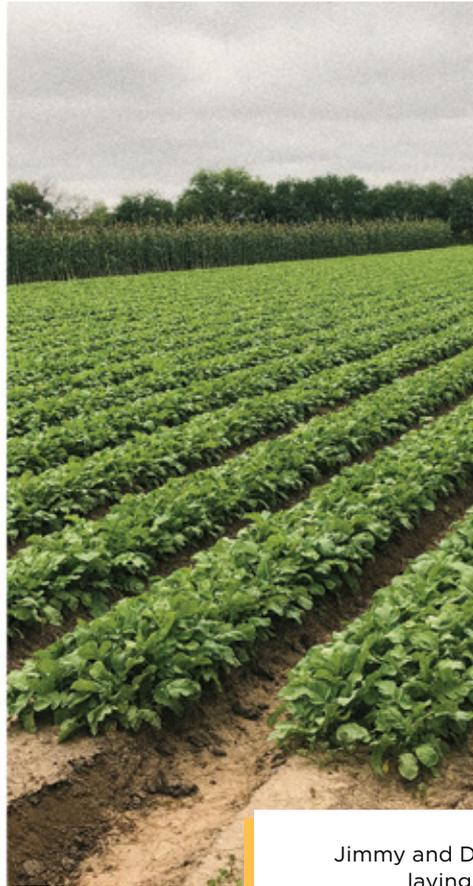
A TWIST of FATE

BY LILIAN DIEP



Jimmy and Diane Bassetti

52



Jimmy and Diane Bassetti flew to South Texas in 1984, laying the foundation for their American Dream

For Jimmy and Diane Bassetti, it was love at first sight.

It feels like a fairy tale to start off a story with such light. However, as writers, we let the story take us where it leads. Both hailing from produce families in Vineland, New Jersey, love was only a stone's throw away. Jimmy was from R&B Produce and Diane from Ralph Dauito and Sons. Even before they made family the centerpiece of what would become J&D Produce, the values of blood, kinship, and relationships were evident in their bones. How could they not be drawn toward each other?

Jimmy's father, Jim Bassetti, was well-known as 'The Bear' amongst the industry, revered for his quality, service, and integrity while running R&B Produce. His customers came to expect an exceptional relationship at R&B Produce, and it was from that example Jimmy set out to fulfill his American Dream. Learning the tricks of the trade early on, Jimmy and Diane began their story when they crossed paths in high school, and that tale built toward the horizon in the most unlikely of ways.

In 1984, the two newlyweds faced a simple twist of fate, as Jimmy would say, when they ventured to South Texas on a mission that would inevitably impact everyone's lives.

"My father's customers were looking for a 12-month supply of produce, and the closest area that could provide this was in South Texas. We flew down to scout the area in the late fall of 1984, and while we were there, a strong Nor'easter blew in through New Jersey that left my father scrambling for product. We found great quality in Texas—we shipped back two trailers' worth of produce to New Jersey, and my father's customers loved them!" Jimmy, now President and Chief Executive Officer of J&D Produce, recounted.

Following that successful trip to Texas, he and Diane, Vice President of J&D Produce, returned home to Jersey to pack up their little bit of belongings and head back south, dedicating themselves as buying brokers and making South Texas their home.

"We spread our wings and began to live our version of the American Dream as J&D Produce," Jimmy said.

In the summer of 1986, Jimmy and Diane bought a packing shed in Edinburg, Texas, and started running the business as a grower/packer/shipper. The Bassettis had found a life in South Texas and were creating a family of their own. Jimmy and Diane's first child, James, was born in 1987. With a new baby on top of starting a business, the high school sweethearts continued to expand J&D Produce's operations.

Jimmy and Diane decided a label was needed to market their product, which was representative of who they were and what they stood for: quality, service, and, above all else, integrity. So, the two fittingly named it Little Bear Produce, an homage to The Bear himself and the legacy that was already being formed. Soon after, bear cubs Stephen and Danielle followed to make the Bassettis a family of five.

When I asked what it was like to raise their three children while building a business, I was met with a resounding answer from Jimmy and Diane—challenging.

"Both Diane and I love the produce business. There were a lot of long

“...I can’t help but *marvel* at what they were able to achieve.”

James Bassetti

Chief Operating Officer, J&D Produce



Left: Little Bear Brand’s HoneySweet® Onions are one of J&D’s year-round crops

Bottom: J&D Produce bought its first packing shed in 1986 and created the Little Bear Brand as an homage to Jimmy’s father, Jim “The Bear” Bassetti



hours most days, but it was all worth it. Now, there is a lot of gratification, appreciation, and great rewards. We were both over 2,000 miles away from our family, so having a newborn was tough in the beginning. There were a lot of sacrifices. But, it was a great reward having a family of our own,” Jimmy continued. “Wherever we went, our three kids were with us.”

Hearing Jimmy narrate the struggles and challenges of running a new company reminded me of how I grew up. My parents would often bring me to their restaurant because I was born right before their business opened, and I viewed the workers around me as if they were my own family. When James, Jimmy’s oldest child, tells me his family and the company would all frequently spend engaging moments gathered at the lunch table, I caught myself smiling because that was how it was in my family, too.

“When I think about what my parents started 36 years ago, I can’t help but marvel at what they were able to achieve. I think about being in my mid-twenties, packing up my life, and moving away from everything and everyone that I’d ever known to start something from scratch—that’s a pretty scary thought,” reflected James, now Chief Operating Officer. “Those humble beginnings, a relentless work ethic, and a belief in what their own parents had instilled in them were the pillars on which my parents built their version of the American Dream. And when you think of it like that, what child wouldn’t be proud of what their parents accomplished?”

For the past ten years, James has been learning the ins and outs of the family business. From toiling out in the fields to managing human resources, leading the production floor, and engaging with customers, he is the embodiment of the work ethic and passion that Jimmy and Diane have instilled in their children.

James and his grandfather were the inspirations behind the Little Bear Produce brand, and now James will pick up the mantle to ensure his parents’ vision lives on.

“Something unique I feel for those of us with parents in the produce industry is that we were always served a healthy dose of vegetables at the dinner table. They believed that ‘food is medicine.’ My parents wanted to ensure we were all sitting together around the table, sharing a healthy meal and the experiences of our day,” James continued. “That is something that we are striving to accomplish now as a company—how do we educate our consumers on the health benefits of fruits and vegetables? How do we pass on simple and tasty recipes they can then share with their families so we can unify more families at the dinner table?”

A few answers to that challenge lie in current technological advancements

and partnering with like-minded and passionate collaborators. A critical foundation Jimmy and Diane built J&D Produce upon centered around showcasing how produce can be the frontline defense for a healthy lifestyle. Diabetes and obesity are ongoing concerns in our society, and Jimmy and Diane believed J&D Produce could serve as a catalyst, spreading fresh produce awareness alongside industry allies at Texas A&M University.

For over 30 years, J&D Produce has collaborated with some of Texas A&M University's leading professors from the Vegetable and Fruit Improvement Center (VFIC). Some of the fruit and veg that have come out of the center— thanks to innovators like Dr. Leonard M. Pike, Director Dr. Bhimu Patil, and Vice Chancellor and Dean of Agriculture Dr. Patrick J. Stover—were Texas 1015 Sweet Onions, Beta-Sweet maroon carrots, and various tomato varieties. In fact, Jimmy hired Dr. Carlos Lazcano, a student of Dr. Pike, to head up Research and Development at J&D. It is through this incredible work that Jimmy and Diane are able to arm families with the freshest and most nutritious produce possible, all while carving out precious quality time.

“Growing up, my mom and dad instilled in me and my siblings that family stays together, and Diane and I are carrying that message on,” Jimmy elaborated. “It’s essential to be together. Time is a precious commodity; if we don’t take time to build family, love, and security, we’ll lose it. That’s another reason why I feel so good about being in the business we’re in—we have the ammunition to allow families to sit around the table and enjoy themselves together.”

As the business grew and expanded, Jimmy and Diane have always made time for their three children, regardless of the demands of running a business. This effort and message was not lost on them either, passing on to not just James, but Stephen and Danielle Bassetti as well.

“I’ll never forget this one day in middle school, my teacher asked how many of us eat dinner with our family all together, and I was shocked when I was the only one who raised my hand,” Stephen shared. “Even though my mom and dad worked a tremendous amount of hours, they still made sure that we all ate dinner



Diane and Jimmy Bassetti on their wedding day

“The *love* we shared for each other and that we shared for produce made our *dream* a reality.”

Diane Bassetti

Vice President, J&D Produce

together every night. Things like that showed me the importance of having a loving family at home and the success that might come of it.”

Fresh produce may be at the heart of bringing a loving family together, but it’s the time spent together that serves as a life source, continually beating to provide the necessary values to enrich a lifetime with memories.

“My parents are the two most wonderful people I know. They’ve taught me to live fully, love deeply, and give more than you take. My mom and dad instilled this in my brothers and me not simply through teachings but by example,” Danielle recalled as she shared her memories with me. “What separates my parents then and now is their passion. My parents always told us they ‘didn’t want to be the biggest, just the best.’ Since J&D’s conception, they’ve

done just that. The company was built around the shared passion of my parents and continues to thrive because of it. I couldn’t be more proud of everything they’ve achieved and continue to achieve.”

With ample growing regions, sturdy foundations, and boundless love, Jimmy and Diane cultivated their own world of fresh produce—one in which family was at the core—allowing consumers all over to come together around the table and nurture relationships.

“It was challenging most times, however, having Jimmy as my partner at work and at home made it possible. We knew the long hours and hard work it entailed, but we were blessed to grow up in the produce business,” Diane conveyed to me. “The love we shared for each other and that we shared for produce made our dream a reality.”

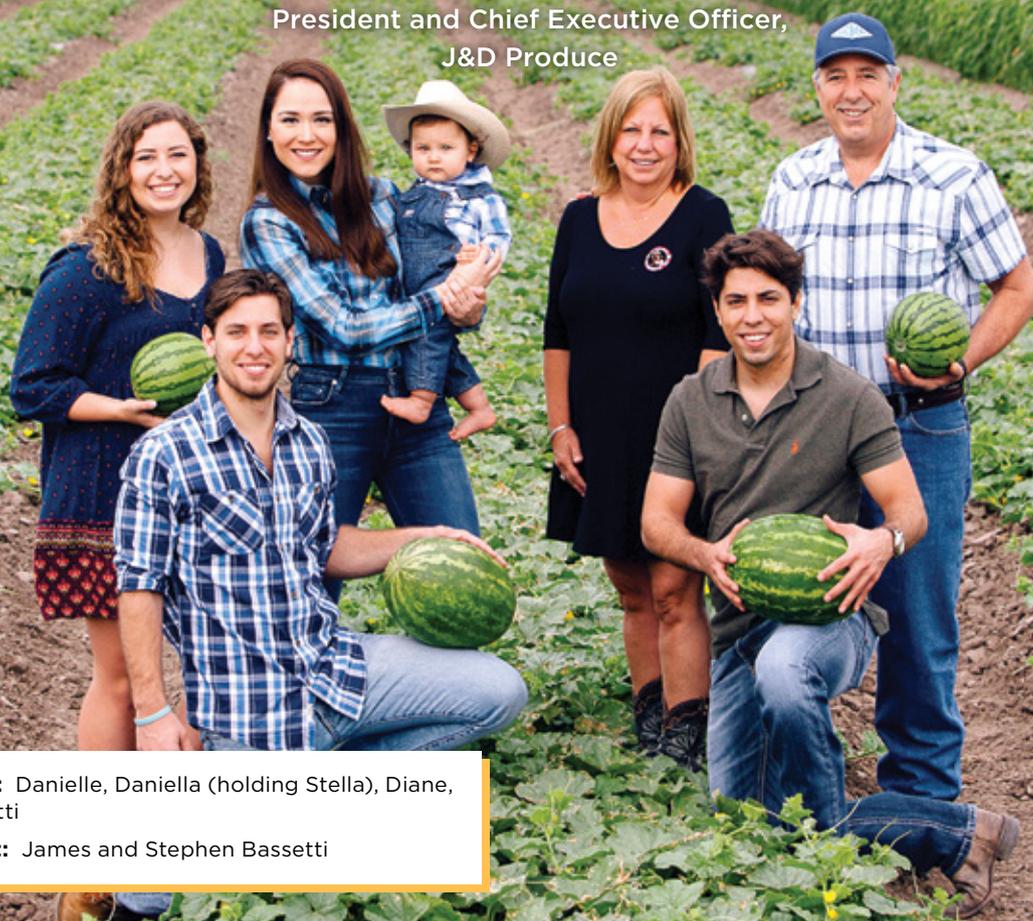
Whether it’s the one that we were born into or the one we made along the way, family is what drives most people’s day-to-day life. Family is who you fall back on during times of need or the ones you turn to to celebrate victories, big or small. They’re also the ones that cheer you on, giving you a reason to help the world be that much better than you found it. The love, support, and foundation one relies on can easily be found in a family dynamic, and we look for that familiarity when we’re out in the world forging our own path, our own family to take care of. For without family, J&D Produce and the Little Bear Produce brand wouldn’t have been born.

As J&D Produce spreads its love for family and fresh produce, I’ll look forward to seeing what the future holds for a stronger and healthier industry with Jimmy and Diane at the wheel. 🍓

“We spread our wings and began to live our version of the *American Dream* as J&D Produce.”

Jimmy Bassetti,

President and Chief Executive Officer,
J&D Produce



Back left to right: Danielle, Daniella (holding Stella), Diane, and Jimmy Bassetti

Front left to right: James and Stephen Bassetti

A Closer Look at Pete's® Butter Stuffers™

By Jordan Okumura

This is how my grocery list is prioritized no matter the season, the trend, or the sale: fresh produce, protein, and something sweet. When Pete's Butter Stuffers™ arrived on the trade show scene, I knew that grocery lists everywhere—including mine!—were going to see something special. The California-based produce company specializing in hydroponically-grown living lettuce and cress varieties has combined fresh and innovative to inspire retailers to add more convenience to the produce aisle. Everyone loves an opportunity to drive that share of the wallet.

This new line, which is available in West Coast-area retailers, encompasses three delicious recipes: Asian Style Chicken, Southwest Style Chicken, and California Style Chicken. I am always drawn to Asian-inspired flavors and I set a high bar on what engages my fork and knife. So, thank my lucky tastebuds the Asian Style Chicken did not disappoint, and neither have the other flavor unions which challenge consumers to lean into new formats for treasured flavor unions. Not enough can be said about flavor as a driving force for building shopper loyalty—for both the brand and the buy-side operator.

Each Butter Stuffer Lettuce Wrap Kit delivers 4.5 to 5 servings (or about 6 tacos) per kit and comes in a 100-percent recyclable plastic container composed of 70-percent post-consumer recycled material. In addition, each kit features a Pete's hydroponically greenhouse-grown butter lettuce head as well as premium, all-white meat chicken raised without antibiotics, a variety of fresh-cut produce slaws and toppings, and Hak's Brand Organic Dressings.

Grocery list updated? Check!
Retailers on-board? My fingers are crossed. 🍴



A Closer Look at Continental Fresh Water for All Box

UP CLOSE

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

Blue is one of the most communicative colors. The hue of wisdom, loyalty, and trust, it is a shade that taps into—even awakens—emotion.

It is also synonymous with water, and the multiplicity of meanings that come from this are what I like to think inspired the newest box from Continental Fresh, which features two newly released labels: Water for All and Food for Humanity.

Playing on the soft, enticing blue of a calm cerulean, this new box not only serves as an eye-catching vehicle for the company's fresh mangos but also helps fund clean water projects in Latin America. Clean water is the most basic human need, and Continental Fresh is seeking to make a difference for the 780 million people that lack access to it around the world. Having partnered with BLUE Missions to serve rural communities, the company is looking to bring faucets into each family home.

Now more than ever, consumers seek not only to be attracted visually to their purchase, but also to spend with purpose. Retailers can help them share the wealth of water while stocking up on the increasingly popular mango. This packaging approach means your shoppers can support a cause that will consistently give. A campaign that has no season. A need that has no end.

How's that for a refreshing shade of blue? 





ART À LA CARTE

A Q&A with **Ande Manos**
Director of Sales and Marketing, Babé Farms

By Kayla Webb

Imitation may be considered the highest form of flattery, but it's hard to imitate an experience—which is really what Babé Farms is selling.

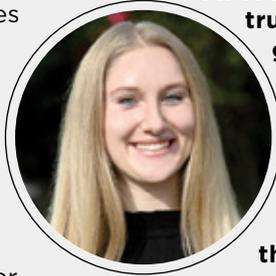
Specialty vegetables, by default, are an *expérience*—pardon my French. Merely glimpsing any of the items in Babé Farms' rainbow of a collection is enough to elicit an odyssey for the eye. Vegetables like kohlrabi, frisée, ruby ro-minis, purple ninja radishes, and Romanesco are idylls in and of themselves, whether in the produce aisle or a chef's pantry. The variation in psychedelic colors, textures, and forms is evocative of the luxuries of fine dining: opulence, decadence, indulgence—much to the advantage of Babé Farms.

Though you'd think a product lineup as extraordinary as Babé Farms' wouldn't be in need of a novel marketing platform, Ande Manos is quick to assure me otherwise. In fact, as an Instagram-proclaimed trendsetter of gourmet produce, Babé Farms isn't cutting any corners when it comes to serving its



primarily foodservice-focused clientele. And that includes marketing.

I had the privilege of volleying Babé Farms' very own Director of Sales and Marketing a couple of questions on how the grower is capturing a typically under-marketed sector. Like Babé Farms' product lineup, her answers were full of surprises—which Ande explains is the Babé Farms way.



KAYLA WEBB: Babé Farms is truly one of the most unique growers on the supply-side, in part because of what it's growing but also because of how you and the team interact with the market. Can you describe what sets Babé Farms apart and how this has led to the company's success?

ANDE MANOS: We lead from the front. Babé Farms is somewhat the envy of the industry—our biggest compliment is imitation. We set the trends and create the community for other growers to copy. We're always looking for the next "it" vegetable.

KW: How is Babé Farms' marketing strategy different from others, especially in the boutique/specialty categories?

AM: Being well-positioned, our petite and specialty vegetables aren't a fit for every marketplace. We've aligned ourselves with top-end distributors in regions that cater to fine-dining chefs and well-stocked retailers.

In addition, there's a consistent focus on highlighting the uniqueness and beauty of the vegetable—a sort of beauty over practicality mindset. Our end-users are often looking to create "art on the plate," a visual pleasure that delights and intrigues their foodie audience on Instagram or other social media platforms.



"WE'RE AUTHENTIC TO OUR ROOTS, KNOWN AS THE INNOVATORS AND PIONEERS OF SPECIALTY VEGETABLES."

-Ande Manos,
Director of Sales and Marketing,
Babé Farms

KW: I recently took a scroll—get it?—through Babé Farms' Instagram page and this was very much reflected on your company feed. To me, this showcases how much Babé Farms understands its customer base and what foodservice operators and chefs are trying to achieve. But not as many growers are vocal about their marketing work in the foodservice sector. I'm curious, what are some of the key differences between marketing for foodservice versus retail?

AM: Babé Farms is really a chef's brand over a consumer/retail brand. Our product and packs are geared for foodservice. In the earlier days, marketing to our customer base was a challenge. However, now we live in a social media-driven space. Thanks to Matt Hiltner, our Marketing and Social Media Coordinator, we're on every major platform providing real-time photos and information to our customers, chefs, bloggers, and foodie followers.

KW: From your experience, what is the foodservice sector looking for from fresh produce marketing and how has Babé Farms pivoted its strategy to meet these expectations?

AM: Distributors are looking for more engagement from their suppliers, including food show participation, demos, samples, and sales presentations. This means that at industry trade show events, our presentation of our vegetables is key. Artistic arrangements, bright colors—Babé Farms is the peacock of the industry!

We also market directly to chefs via social media. When we do, we're looking through the lens of the chef. They are the culinary experts who can take it to the next level, creating moments and excitement on the plate using decorative gourmet vegetables, and we want to help tap into that imagination.

KW: How do all of these aspects come together to create a program that you and the team describe as marketing “the Babé Farms way?”

AM: We're authentic to our roots, known as the innovators and pioneers of specialty vegetables. Cultivating talent from within, our team is multifaceted. It's often a collaborative culture here—we all contribute to the success of the products we grow and market. We keep our marketing spicy and relevant through real-time photos at all levels.

KW: Though Babé Farms pulls much of its uniqueness from the vegetable varieties it grows, I also can see how having people like you, Ande, on its team help keep the company's marketing spicy. But, was your goal always to work in the produce industry?

AM: Growing up in the Salinas Valley of California, it was a natural progression. All roads led me to a career in the produce industry. At Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, I majored in Ag Business, enabling me to land a sales position with Babé Farms in the state's Santa Maria Valley. I've always enjoyed sales but quickly gravitated toward marketing. I find great inspiration from the natural beauty of our colorful specialty vegetables.

And with a collection as riveting, inimitable, and extravagant as Babé Farms', it's not hard to agree with Ande. After all, many of Babé Farms' vegetable varieties are an invitation for chefs to create palatable paeans for the plate. 

WTF DO I DO WITH Limoneira® Lemons ?

{ what the fork }



GRILLED ARTICHOKE WITH TANGY LEMON VINAIGRETTE

INGREDIENTS

3 tbsp lemon juice from Limoneira® lemons

4 large artichokes

2 tsp champagne vinegar

1/3 cup olive oil

Kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper, to taste

Sliced Limoneira lemons, for garnish

Prep Time: 15 min

Cook Time: 40 min per batch

Servings: 8

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Whisk together the lemon juice, champagne vinegar, olive oil, and season to taste.
- 2** Clean and trim the artichokes and cut in half. Remove the choke.
- 3** Boil a large pot of water with a steaming basket inside. Be sure that the water level doesn't touch the bottom of the steaming basket. When water boils, place as many artichoke halves as you can fit into the basket in a single layer, exposed side down. Steam artichokes for around 25 minutes. You should be able to easily pierce the artichoke heart with a knife after it's been steamed.
- 4** Once steamed, remove from the water, brush some of the vinaigrette over the exposed parts of the artichokes and then transfer to a heated grill. Grill for 15 minutes over medium-high heat until charred.
- 5** Serve with remaining lemon vinaigrette drizzled over the top or served on the side.

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» The IF List «

Dan Canales

Senior Vice President of Sales, Marketing, and Processing, Ippolito International

With **Kayla Webb**

It's not often that we swoon over anything other than fresh fruit and veg in this industry, but Dan Canales, per usual, is an exception. When we asked him a handful of *IFs*, it became apparent that there's more to this produce aficionado than meets the eye—namely his heart, which he wears on his sleeve. Hold your loved ones tight as you indulge these answers sure to tug at the heartstrings...

» **IF you could have been born in another century or decade, which would it be and why?**

The 1940s. Things were much simpler then. Strong values were much more prominent and the country seemed more unified.

» **IF you could be a character in any book, who would it be?**

Jack Reacher.

» **IF you had to choose now, what would your last meal consist of?**

Polenta with stew that my grandmother used to make. Sounds simple, but there's a lot of good memories sitting around the table with family having this meal.

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

Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson.

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

I'd be a custom home builder, or a professional musician if I had the talent.

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

Leon Panetta.

» **IF you were stranded on a desert island, what three items would you bring?**

Satellite phone, water purifier, and a really good lighter.

» **IF you could redo one moment or event in your life, which one would you choose and why?**

The moment I saw my soon-to-be wife walking down the aisle on our wedding day. She was so beautiful.

» **IF you were another species in the animal kingdom, what would you be?**

A lion.

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

"The Sandlot."

» **IF you had to eat the same thing every day for the rest of your days, what would you eat?**

Steak and lobster with a nice caprese salad.

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

The ability to learn new languages.

» **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?**

I'd love to play the drums with Carlos Santana. His talent spans so many decades and his songs bring back a lot of memories.

» **IF you had \$10 million that you had to donate to someone else, who would you choose and why?**

My wife—she would know what to do with it. Seriously, though, there is a local program called Rancho Cielo. It was the vision of a retired judge who was tired of seeing a lot of young, misguided youths getting caught up in gang activity. Rancho Cielo provides them a safe environment and teaches them accountability and responsibility while learning a trade.

» **IF you had a superpower, what would you want it to be?**

The ability to heal. 🦋



ON THE BLUEBERRY HORIZON

BY CHANDLER JAMES

DEMAND IN THE BLUEBERRY CATEGORY HAS BEEN RISING EXPONENTIALLY IN THE LAST COUPLE OF DECADES, AND ALWAYS FRESH FARMS IS RIGHT THERE WITH IT. THROUGH VARIETAL INNOVATION, CALCULATED RETAIL STRATEGIES, AND AN UNMATCHED TENACITY, ALWAYS FRESH FARMS HAS POSITIONED ITSELF AS A LEADER ON THE FRONTLINES OF BLUEBERRY SALES. FOLLOW ALONG WITH US AS WE TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS BURGEONING PROGRAM...

The blueberry is a humble fruit—a small, deep-colored globe packing the nutrition consumers love with the flavor that keeps them coming back. These berries have maintained their status as a staple on shopping lists and are known for consistent quality that bulks up the average purchase order. Aside from its stardom in the produce aisle, this little fruit has also had unexpected influences on our culture as a whole.

2020 is referred to as The Blue Year, with Pantone naming “classic blue” as color of the year and Firmenich naming “classic blueberry” as flavor of the year. Needless to say, blueberry innovations are ripe for the picking and demand is exponentially rising. That’s what makes blueberries a key sales driver over at Always Fresh Farms (AFF), where the category continues to lead the pack in produce departments.

“Product, service, innovation, commitment. These are the four pillars of Always Fresh Farms. Our recent growth might have just put us on the radar of some, but we have a very experienced team that has been marketing berries for over 20 years,” began Greg Kosofsky, Northeast Sales Manager. “The Always Fresh team and its growers are some of the hardest working people in the industry, which ultimately sets us apart. Much like blueberries, you can expect AFF to continue to grow and improve year after year.”



GREG KOSOFSKY

Northeast Sales
Manager, Always
Fresh Farms

Greg is a fierce advocate for these little produce powerhouses. Having spent significant time working on the buy-side before earning his supply-side stripes at AFF, Greg has a unique aptitude for driving retail sales in this category. With Greg on its team, the grower has seen blueberries continue to rise in the market and is positioning itself for long-term domination as one of the world’s leading blueberry suppliers.

As a trade news writer whose consumption of blueberries is practically a personality trait, I was extremely eager to sit down with Greg and learn about AFF’s dynamic program. I just had to uncover how this legendary fruit has helped Always Fresh Farms achieve such unprecedented growth.

According to Greg, it was the rising popularity of blueberries that prompted AFF’s Founder to pivot from the citrus category. Though the company has been wildly successful since it expanded its lineup to include blueberries, Always Fresh Farms broke onto the fresh produce scene just as the category was already gaining speed.

“Always Fresh Farms originally started as Florida citrus broker Westlake Miller,” he explained. “Then the Owner, Wayne Giddings, started integrating the company and saw the popularity of blueberries. He transitioned mostly out of citrus into the berry category and was on the forefront of Florida blueberries. From there, we have grown into Florida strawberries and other year-round berries.”



While the grower has continuously expanded within the past two decades, Always Fresh Farms is still seeking out new ways to maintain, and even accelerate, demand.

“We anticipate demand will continue to rise as better varieties come to market. Consumers are looking for new varieties that provide a crunchy-but-sweet taste. We feel the category still has room to grow, and higher-quality varieties will keep consumers coming back week after week,” Greg said. “A lot of shippers are expanding their brands with clever advertising to describe the fruit and make it stand out on-shelf. This trend should continue to grow as well.”

With the market constantly changing, Greg’s confidence in the blueberry category is a testament to his years of industry expertise. Unlike some supply-side operators who grew their careers by selling produce, Greg has accrued his intersectional insights by kicking off his career on the buy-side.

“I started in the fresh produce industry about 10 years ago as a Buyer for C&S Wholesale, and then I went to Shaw’s Supermarkets on the retail-side,” he explained. “I’ve been here at Always Fresh Farms for three years now. I’m pretty well-rounded between wholesale, retail, and now sales on all our produce.”

To that note, I was curious to find out what Greg thinks retailers can do to better market the blueberry category. While he said it all comes down to knowing when to press the pedal to the metal for blueberry promotions, he suggested maintaining supplier relationships are integral to the equation.

“Continue to work closely with your suppliers, follow the old school strategy of supply and demand, and keep the lines of communication open,” Greg said. “Blues are as volatile as any piece of fruit—when it’s time to push, it’s really time to push. Blueberries are probably the most stable berry, but Mother Nature can still cause havoc. It’s important to stay nimble and provide feedback to your suppliers. We are always looking for

feedback and ways to improve to be the best partner we can. In the end, we are all in this together.”

Another way for retailers and growers to stay ahead of the curve is to work closely with marketers to keep up with the latest trends. Consumers have very high expectations, and it’s the industry’s duty to keep them coming back for blueberries week after week. One of the most accessible ways to market directly to consumers is through innovative packaging.

“Club packs and organics have been around for a long time now, but we have seen accelerated growth recently. Retailers want more fruit in attractive packaging, and the blueberry category still has room to grow with marketing. You can now find ‘jumbo blues’ or ‘sweetest batch’ blues packed in a variety of different new sizes,” Greg reflected. “Retail partners are expressing that this new-wave packaging is reaching a new consumer, so this trend looks like it’s here to stay. Blueberry opportunities continue to grow each year, and retailers are looking to capture every sale possible in the category.”

But even more than the diverse packaging and retail strategies, the very fruit that represents this category is what has inevitably won over the hearts of consumers across the globe. So, what is it about this little berry that continues to be a driver in the produce department?

“It’s simple: Blueberries are a superfood!” Greg told me enthusiastically. “Year after year, blueberry sales are becoming more essential to our business. The health benefits align perfectly with the current health trends and smoothie craze in the U.S. True gaps seem to be a thing of the past. Consumers are looking for quality blueberries year-round at aggressive pricing.”

As someone whose enthusiasm for the category is on par with my own, Greg has become a verifiable advocate for blueberries since his move to the supply-side. Therein lies the Sales Manager’s transition from grocery to growing. It was an



**“MUCH LIKE BLUEBERRIES,
YOU CAN EXPECT AFF TO
CONTINUE TO GROW AND
IMPROVE YEAR AFTER YEAR.”**

GREG KOSOFSKY,
Northeast Sales Manager, Always Fresh Farms



**“ WE ARE ALWAYS
LOOKING FOR
FEEDBACK AND WAYS
TO IMPROVE TO BE
THE BEST PARTNER
WE CAN. IN THE END,
WE ARE ALL IN THIS
TOGETHER. ”**

opportunity to widen the scope through which Greg views fresh produce, and an opportunity that was not wasted.

“While working at Shaw’s, I reached a point in my career where I decided to take a chance and go to the other side of the business,” he said. “I saw a good opportunity with a growing company and worked a long time with Matthew Giddings, our Chief Operating Officer. He had become a good friend, and I really respected him in the industry—the timing was just right for me to take that leap. It’s worked out really well, and we’ve grown tremendously since.”

And, so it seems, this tremendous growth has yet to reach its peak. Always Fresh Farms entered into a strategic partnership with Giddings Fruit South America last year. Together, the two have successfully launched proprietary bush berries with the potential for more new varieties down the line.

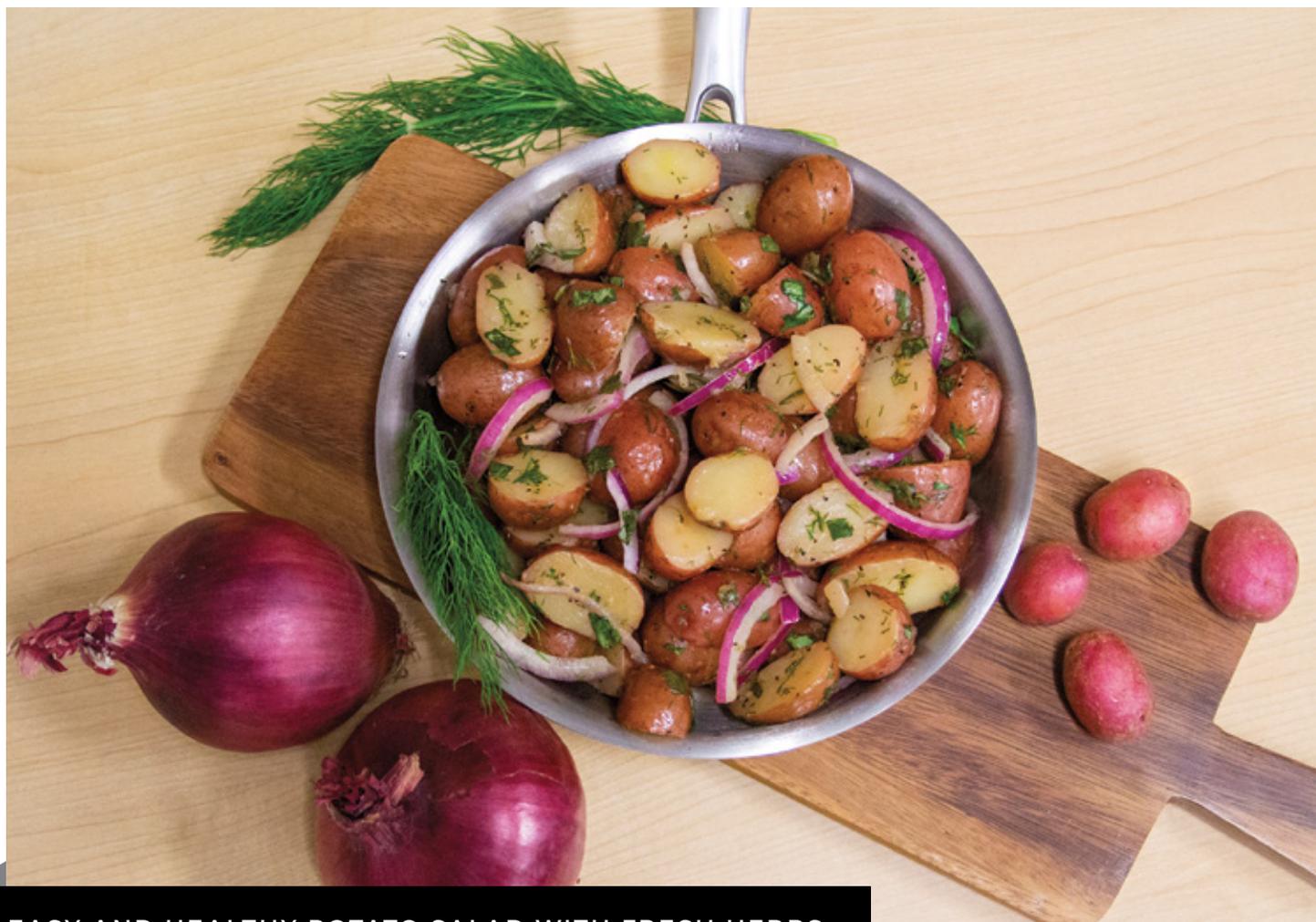
Expansion comes naturally to Always Fresh Farms, and tapping into the lucrative, fast-paced blueberry business was truly just the beginning. As Greg so lovingly notes of the ag industry, no day is the same. This is one reason he is so infatuated with the supply-side and perhaps another reason why consumers continue flocking to the blueberry category.

It’s this constant pursuit of innovation that is the fuel for our industry and, in turn, it’s what sets us apart from any other in the world. 🍷

WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Nature's Bounty Organic®
Baby Red Potatoes ?



EASY AND HEALTHY POTATO SALAD WITH FRESH HERBS

INGREDIENTS

3 lbs Nature's Bounty Organic® baby red potatoes
5 tbsp red or white wine vinegar, divided
½ cup extra virgin olive oil
2 tsp Dijon mustard
½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
1 cup Nature's Bounty Organic red onion, sliced
2 tbsp fresh Progressive Farms dill, minced
2 tbsp fresh Progressive Farms basil, minced
Kosher salt

Prep Time: 20 min

Cook Time: 20 min

Servings: 8

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Place the uncut potatoes in a medium saucepan and cover with cold water. Bring to a boil over high heat, add 1 tbsp of kosher salt, and cook the potatoes until tender, about 15-20 minutes or until easily pierced by a fork. Drain well.
- 2 Once the potatoes are cool enough to handle, cut them in half and place them in a large mixing bowl. While the potatoes are still hot, sprinkle them with 3 tbsp of vinegar and let cool to absorb the vinegar.
- 3 In a small bowl, whisk the olive oil, remaining 2 tbsp of vinegar, Dijon mustard, kosher salt, and pepper.
- 4 Drizzle the dressing over the potato mixture and gently toss. Add the sliced onion and minced herbs and toss again. Season with more salt and pepper to taste. Serve warm, at room temperature, or chilled. This recipe will keep in the refrigerator for 3-4 days.

Tip: Swap herbs for any of your favorites such as parsley, cilantro, tarragon, marjoram, or thyme, to customize the dish.



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Creating COMMON Ground

By Chandler James

When it comes to fresh food, transparency is of the utmost importance. There's a seemingly endless amount of variables to consider between the time that seed hits the dirt and produce hits the plate, making clear communication a paramount value for the buy- and supply-sides alike. Nonetheless, there are holes in our supply chain that inherently open up. But, as we produce the very thing that keeps people thriving, it is our duty to fill those holes with the truth.

That is the mission of the Equitable Food Initiative (EFI)—to identify where we have fallen short and provide innovative, preventative solutions. It is a labor of love that few are privy to but could be an integral part of our industry's evolution.





“At the early stages, we thought of EFI as a certification program, but we began to recognize that we were bringing workforce development programs to the fresh produce industry—something that hadn’t been done previously,” began Peter O’Driscoll, Executive Director. “As evaluation data came in, it became clear that we were delivering assurance while simultaneously driving business performance. To me, this is a total game-changer. If we are asking growers to make changes for social responsibility in order to fulfill the *Ethical Charter on Responsible Labor Practices*, then we have to give them the tools to do this while improving their bottom line and marking them as an employer of choice in a tight labor market.”

This spring, the nonprofit is celebrating its five-year anniversary by recounting the vast array of accomplishments that have taken place since its founding. EFI’s services reach many in the industry, both individually and on a global scale.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, EFI has evolved its standards to keep pace with important industry developments. The organization has set forth food safety and social standards that align with the Food Safety Modernization Act, the Global Food Safety Initiative, and the *Ethical Charter on Responsible*

Labor Practices. In 2020, EFI also plans to update its integrated pest management standards to reflect shifting buyer and consumer demands around environmental stewardship.

“EFI wasn’t created in a bubble. It was a market-driven solution for a number of pressing labor and food safety issues in the fresh produce industry,” Peter commented. “It is interesting that EFI’s multi-stakeholder dialogue began well before the 2018 release of the *Ethical Charter on Responsible Labor Practices*, which essentially elevates labor concerns to the same level as food safety for the produce sector.”

The nonprofit began as a conversation among stakeholder groups in the fresh produce industry who wanted to create more assurance around food safety and improved working conditions for farmworkers. The conversation began in 2009, and by 2011 the group agreed to launch a skill-building and certification organization, initially incubated as a project within Oxfam America, until EFI was incorporated as an independent nonprofit social enterprise in 2015.

Founding EFI board members included Costco Wholesale, Bon Appetit Management Company, Andrew & Williamson Fresh Produce, NatureSweet Tomatoes,

“ AS WE CONSTANTLY STRIVE TO INNOVATE, LEARN, AND INCLUDE PERSPECTIVES FROM ACROSS THE SUPPLY CHAIN, OUR GROWER AND RETAIL PARTNERS BENEFIT FROM OUR FLEXIBILITY, PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACH, AND WHOLISTIC THINKING. ”



—Peter O’Driscoll,
Executive Director, Equitable Food Initiative

Top: GoodFarms’ Don Chema holds a box of strawberries
Middle: A Houweling’s Tomatoes employee moves a cart of tomatoes
Bottom: An employee cuts an English cucumber for NatureSweet Tomatoes



More than a certification

A Houweling's Tomatoes employee picks tomatoes from one of its many greenhouse facilities

Center for Science in the Public Interest, Consumer Federation of America, Oxfam America, Pesticide Action Network North America, Farmworker Justice, FLOC, PCUN, and United Farm Workers.

"EFI is more than a certification. It offers workforce development programs, unlike typical certification programs, which require training but don't provide it. EFI's focus is on transferrable communication and problem-solving skills that can be applied as easily to compliance issues as to bottom-line business challenges," said Peter. "We have a team of certified facilitators who train labor-management leadership teams through hands-on, interactive learning, which is a compulsory first step to becoming certified. This is a holistic, systems-based approach that seeks to improve the culture on farms, making them healthier and more collaborative places to work."

According to LeAnne Ruzzamenti, Director of Marketing Communications, the real magic behind EFI is the creation and training of leadership teams. These are cross-level, cross-department teams at each farming operation that receive training in communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. Each team is responsible for bringing the farm into compliance with the EFI standards but can also be used to solve a myriad of business performance issues.

On top of these customizable leadership teams, EFI is the only certification that covers three key areas—labor practices, food safety, and pest management—in a single audit, helping growers eliminate the time-consuming process of undergoing multiple audits. To that same effect, a growing number of retailers now accept EFI as a certificate in lieu of other social responsibility audits.

"EFI IS MORE THAN A CERTIFICATION—IT IS A CHANGE-MANAGEMENT PROGRAM. INTRODUCING THE SKILLS AND CONCEPTS FROM THE EFI PROGRAM INTO OUR WORKFORCE ENABLED US TO BRING EVERYONE TOGETHER TO STRIVE FOR THE HIGHEST STANDARDS. I HAVE GREAT CONFIDENCE THAT THE WHOLE TEAM UNDERSTANDS AND IS WORKING TOWARD THOSE STANDARDS IN EVERYTHING THEY DO."



-Kevin Doran,
**Chief Executive Officer,
Houweling's Group**

"As we constantly strive to innovate, learn, and include perspectives from across the supply chain, our grower and retail partners benefit from our flexibility, problem-solving approach, and holistic thinking. As a certification, we have defined standards that need to be met, but we remain flexible. As problems or new opportunities arise, we work

with our partners to figure out the best way forward," Peter continued. "Our commitment to continuous improvement means that we can bring the right people together, facilitate a process, and figure out what the next best step should be. If it doesn't work, we will try something else."

In addition to the operational ease that goes hand in hand with EFI, growers who implement the program have found it easier to recruit and retain employees in a tight labor market. As workers are engaged to define and solve issues in the industry, they feel respected, and women in particular feel safer through the zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment.

"Growers who participate in EFI do so because they recognize an opportunity to catalyze positive change, improve their business, and attract and retain good personnel in a tight labor market. Participating retailers recognize that worker verification of compliance improves assurance and continuity of supply," added Peter.

In the same vein of creating solutions through disruptive design, EFI has pursued its vision of becoming an equilibrium for the fresh produce industry. A cornerstone of this goal is engaging with stakeholders across the supply chain, teaming up to search for a solution that works for everyone.

"We recognize that no certification is a guarantee of perfection and, sometimes, things can still go wrong on EFI-certified farms," Peter

explained, noting that program participants come into the fold with the knowledge that this is a learning organization. “There is a commitment to continuous improvement, and as long as the grower can show they are committed and they’ve maintained a functional EFI leadership team, we stand by them in the face of crises.”

“FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, EFI IS IN A CLASS OF ITS OWN. IT’S THE GOLD STANDARD, AND WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE EVERYBODY DOING THAT. I DON’T WANT TO HAVE A CERTIFICATION THAT JUST CHECKS THE BOX; THAT’S NOT GOOD ENOUGH. EFI DOES MORE THAN CHECK A BOX—IT BRINGS DEEP CREDIBILITY TO THE PRODUCE INDUSTRY.”

-Jeff Lyons.
Senior Vice President of
Fresh Foods, Costco
Wholesale

This philosophy of continuous improvement is a fundamental value at EFI. According to Peter, the staff embraces innovation and encourages one another to act boldly and broaden perspectives. The strength of this program lies in creating a common ground for everyone in the supply chain to identify their intersecting interests. By returning value to everyone in the supply chain—

consumers, retailers, growers, and workers—EFI has positioned itself as an operational beneficiary whose resources can strengthen relationships across the industry.

“The fresh produce industry is built on relationships and many years of personal history. When EFI first entered the space in 2011, we were met with a skeptical eye,” said Peter. “Thankfully, there were a few brave companies who helped develop our certification program. Their positive experiences, and willingness to talk about them, built greater trust within the industry so that more folks began to seek us out to discuss our services.”

EFI suggests that today’s successes are a direct result of overcoming the challenges of yesterday. Building on its continuous expansion, the organization now needs to scale up and is doing so by investigating different operational models and technologies to provide training and guidance to its partners.

“EFI began through years of dialogue and building consensus. We spent our first five years in operation launching and adapting the program while engaging partners. In October 2019, we released the Responsible Recruitment Scorecard to respond to retailer concerns, and we will continue developing tools and resources like this,” Peter concluded. “Stay tuned, because in 2020 you’ll be hearing more about new retailer partnerships that will bring many

more growers into the EFI Program and address the critical issues of ethical sourcing, responsible recruitment, and food safety.”



“SINCE INTRODUCING EFI ON OUR FARM, WE HAVE HAD A MUCH EASIER TIME RECRUITING WORKERS. WORD HAS SPREAD QUICKLY OF THE POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT THAT GOODFARMS IS OFFERING, AND WE’VE SEEN A MARKED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF WOMEN JOINING THE TEAM BECAUSE OF THE RESPECTFUL ENVIRONMENT WITH ZERO TOLERANCE FOR HARASSMENT.”

-Jackie Vazquez.

Director of Operations, Andrew
& Williamson Fresh Produce/
GoodFarms

Aiming to reinvent the supply chain through continued collaboration, evaluation, and investment, EFI has set forth a monumental blueprint for the fresh produce industry. This program asks grower and retail partners for their trust in exchange for an unmatched profile of resources that will only continue to improve.

The consumer in me is brought back to this idea of transparency—an idea that is so painfully obvious and yet seemingly impossible to achieve.

I am brought back to a long-standing question: How can fresh produce operators grow and scale their businesses when their success is tied to a very personal, hands-on intervention? It is a question that may not yet have an answer. But even so, it is an answer that EFI is committed to providing.

Both the consumer and the trade news writer in me know honesty is sometimes synonymous with transparency. And that is all any of us are after, right? 🍎



A commitment to improvement

Employees on the EFI team for Central West Produce’s Mexican operations undergo training to implement the EFI standards

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Past Meets Present:

25

YEARS of LEADERSHIP



By *The Snack* Editorial Contributor
Ben Massoud, Communications Manager,
United Fresh Produce Association



“The relationships that we formed within our class are still strong today, 25 years later.”

Robert Gordon, President and Chief Executive Officer, FreshPoint



For students, graduation marks the culmination of hard work and dedication. For the fellows and alumni of United Fresh’s Produce Industry Leadership Program, the same rings true.

“I’ll always cherish the experience of addressing the General Session audience on behalf of my class during our graduation,” shared **Claudia Pizarro-Villalobos**, Class 23 alum and Director of Marketing and Culinary at D’Arrigo of California.

Class 25’s graduation this year will also mark the 25th anniversary of a program that has developed more than 250 up-and-coming industry professionals into established leaders.

Just as our industry has evolved, so has the program. Tom Stenzel, President and CEO of United Fresh, spent a week with Class 25 on their spring trip to Florida, where he sat down with **Stephanie Pharris**, Senior Supervisor of Supply Chain Management at Duncan Family Farms and Class 25 fellow, as well as one of the trip’s hosts, **Robert Gordon**, an alum of Class 1 and today’s President and CEO of FreshPoint. One thing Tom learned has not changed is the strength of the bonds formed among each class. In episode one of United Fresh’s podcast “Fresh Bites,” Tom asked Stephanie to consider her most memorable experience from the program thus far. She was quick to emphasize camaraderie.

“I really didn’t think you could connect with a group of strangers this quickly,” Stephanie said. “We have gotten to know each other so well during the program, including during the fun bus rides, but also while staying in touch between class trips.”

A truly special quality about the program is the opportunity to continue making connections outside of your own class after graduation.

“The relationships that we formed within our class are still strong today, 25 years later,” Robert noted on the podcast episode. “Similarly, as a graduate of the program, I’ve had the privilege to meet fellow alumni from other classes throughout the program’s history and those connections have been invaluable to advancing both our business and the industry.”

Established in 1995, the United Fresh Produce Industry Leadership Program selects a dozen up-and-coming produce industry professionals for a year-long journey providing solid foundational knowledge about the challenges facing the produce industry, as well as practical tools to help class members improve leadership skills at a formative stage in their career. Whether touring lettuce fields in California, exploring citrus groves in Florida, or learning about the latest produce regulatory issues

in Washington, DC, class members are exposed to a variety of industry experiences.

Since the inaugural Class 1, the program has been fully funded and made possible through the sponsorship support of Corteva Agriscience.

“We are so proud to have supported the industry’s premier leadership program since its inception, investing in the future of hundreds of industry leaders as well as the fresh produce industry as a whole,” said **Joe Kelsay**, U.S. Food Chain Manager for Corteva Agriscience.

Graduates of the program have gone on to become executives of major produce businesses, leaders of prominent organizations, and some of the most well-known people in the industry. Many serve on the boards of directors and organizational committees of successful companies as well.

In 2006, graduates of the program formed the United Fresh Produce Industry Leadership Alumni Organization as an opportunity for



Leadership Fellows on Capitol Hill



Part of the Leadership Program curriculum is participation in advocacy efforts during the United Fresh Washington Conference. This is Class 23 in Washington, DC, in front of the Capitol Building dome

Class 24 in the field



fellows to continue their leadership journeys and give back to the produce community.

“Through the Produce Industry Leadership Alumni Organization, graduates like myself are able to stay in touch with a vast network of leaders—from our own classes as well as alumni from other classes—during our many networking events throughout the year,” said **Kristen Reid**, Executive Vice President at MIXTEC Group, Chairman of United Fresh’s Leadership Alumni Board, and a Class 18 alum. “The events also allow alumni to develop fresh ideas to keep pace with the ever-changing industry demands of leadership development.”

The next quarter-century of the program will kick off with the announcement of Class 26. That is a wrap for now! Stay tuned for what’s next as we look to our next highlight in *The Snack Magazine*. [S](#)

MENTORS IN THE MAKING

Lori Taylor

|| BY CHANDLER JAMES ||

➤ **THEY SAY NOTHING VENTURED, NOTHING GAINED**, and though that may be one of life's toughest lessons, it's one that breeds immeasurable determination. Learning this lesson means pushing aside doubt and taking a leap of faith, welcoming criticism and coming out stronger on the other side, wading through a long list of "nos" until finding that vindicating "yes." It's a lesson that Lori Taylor, champion, Founder, and Chief Executive Officer of The Produce Moms® (TPM), has come to know well.

Lori's path began when she was studying Spanish in college, which was where her love for fresh produce took root. She reached out to Indianapolis Fruit Company in 2005, emphasizing her passion for the Spanish language, as well as fruit and veg alike. Lori was hired to start the Hispanic Market Sales Division and worked for 10 years in wholesale distribution, focusing on sales and marketing. There, she met Danny Corsaro, the mentor who first put her on a path toward becoming an industry leader.

"Every morning started with a procurement meeting where Danny often said, 'I'm not looking for more problems, I am looking for solutions.' Danny was in the room in 2012 when I pitched the original blog, 'The Produce Mom,'" Lori says of her now wildly successful platform. "Thereafter, he became my direct boss and taught me so much about profit, loss, accountability, and the best business lesson: how to find and execute solutions. No one knows the battles I fought to keep 'TPM' alive better than Danny."

With that first job opportunity, Lori was just getting started in the produce industry. While her dream of running 'The Produce Mom' blog began with Indianapolis Fruit, she continued taking that dream to new heights by building her network. Sarah Frey-Talley, Founding Farmer of Frey Farms, became part of Lori's circle in 2013 when Indianapolis Fruit partnered with Frey to launch the Tsamma juice line. The two found their way to each other and quickly formed an unshakeable bond.

"To know Sarah Frey is to be in awe of Sarah Frey. There is no better rock and role model for me than Sarah. She built an empire from what most considered a failing business. She works with vision, passion, and has an enviable level of comfort in taking risks. Sarah is an innovator; the type of gal that keeps the world wondering 'What will she do next?' What I love the most about my relationship with Sarah is how I can lean on her for my mental health in this entrepreneurial journey and the work-family balance," Lori reflects.

Lori's mentors have true grit. As she puts it, honest feedback made her work on TPM more valuable and sustainable. When I ask Lori what she loves most about this industry, she is quick to sing high praises for the people—our industry's passion and purpose, she says, are unrivaled. These

are attributes that her mentor CarrieAnn Arias, Vice President of Marketing at Naturipe Farms, holds near and dear. Lori and CarrieAnn are kindred spirits, first linking up at a United Fresh Produce Association Marketing and Merchandising Council Meeting in 2017.

"CarrieAnn is usually the smartest person in the room. When I met her, I was absolutely intimidated by her knowledge and confidence," Lori says. "A mutual friend, Elena Hernandez, told me, 'You can learn a lot from CarrieAnn.' I leaned into that advice and asked CarrieAnn to be one of my mentors. CarrieAnn has helped me understand the value that my business brings to growers and our industry. We work hand-in-hand on the Naturipe and TPM brand partnership. She has been a catalyst for TPM's evolution and the heightened value we deliver to our grower partners. No one has lifted me up more in my professional life than CarrieAnn Arias."



Lori Taylor

Founder and
Chief Executive Officer,
The Produce Moms®

Through the help of her mentors and her own determination, Lori has sustained and grown TPM since she purchased it from Indianapolis Fruit in 2015. Lori Taylor plans to continue partnering with some of the biggest names in produce to bring fact-based stories about specialty crop agriculture to the forefront of consumer media. When an opportunity crosses her desk that serves this mission of inspiring people to eat more fresh produce, Lori evaluates it. Because, as she knows, if there is something to be gained, there is plenty to be ventured. 

THE MENTORS 

Here is what they have to say about Lori...



Danny Corsaro
*Retired Owner,
Indianapolis Fruit Company*

“ The thing that stands out to me the most about Lori Taylor is that she has an insatiable desire to learn and grow personally and she takes incredible joy from sharing her knowledge with others. Lori came to Indianapolis Fruit Company from a job as a Spanish teacher and became an inside salesperson focused on the Hispanic grocery market. She is fluent in Spanish and did a great job immersing herself in the produce industry and learning all about the products. We frequently talked about the importance of growing the consumption of fruits and vegetables and how to reach everyone in the family. This really captured Lori’s passion and she ran with the idea of becoming the authority or the ‘go-to person’ who could bring the enthusiasm, the energy, and the knowledge to educate and inspire people about produce. Lori built the persona of ‘The Produce Mom’ initially at Indianapolis Fruit Company and then launched it as her own business and brand. Lori proved that she could be a great networker, an inspirational figure, and a solution provider in the produce industry.

POWERED BY **JOE PRODUCE**[®]



Sarah Frey-Talley
*Founding Farmer,
Frey Farms*

“ Lori Taylor is a dear friend and someone I am so proud of because of the impact her life has made on others. Having watched her career grow and knowing how hard she works to achieve a work-life balance, I have seen how Lori’s life is committed to helping all families make better eating choices and lead healthier lives. Having worked in almost all aspects of the fresh produce industry, Lori is enthusiastically committed to helping everyone eat more fruits and vegetables. As a working mom herself, she knows the day-to-day challenges of families and why it is important to make sure fruits and vegetables are a part of all daily eating choices. As an advocate for families, she also helps consumers develop relationships with producers directly. This helps all producers and holds them accountable to the highest of ‘mom’ standards. Personally, she emulates the best of all moms and women. Committed to others, supportive, loving, and respectful, she is an exceptional role model for others. I’m proud to have played a role in Lori’s life through sisterhood and mentoring.



CarrieAnn Arias
*Vice President of Marketing,
Naturipe Farms*

“ When Lori and I met, it was immediately clear that her vision of what ‘could be’ was so close to being realized. Her belief in The Produce Moms platform has never wavered even when it would have been easier to give up and let Hollywood tell our industry’s story. We have many ambassadors in produce, but none connect with consumers on such an authentic level. Lori is a mom who has worked in our industry, knows our growers, and challenges us all to try something new, right alongside her. Her inspiring vision knows no bounds, and I always tell her that one day I know I will say, ‘I knew you when...’ Lori’s passion for our industry and its mission is truly infectious and she won’t stop until she’s made a produce lover out of everyone.

WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

DelFrescoPure®
Ombra™ Brown Tomatoes ?



OMBRA™ CAPRESE PLATTER

INGREDIENTS

1 package Ombra™ Brown Tomatoes
1 package fresh basil
½ cup Balsamic vinegar
¾ cup chopped almonds
Fresh mozzarella cheese

Prep Time: 10 min

Cook Time: 5 min

Servings: 1 platter

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Slice up the tomatoes and mozzarella cheese into ½ inch slices.
- 2** Arrange slices in rows on a platter alternating ingredients from tomato, basil, then cheese.
- 3** Pour ½ cup of balsamic vinegar into a sauce pan on low and stir frequently until it thickens like maple syrup. Remove from heat and set aside.
- 4** Drizzle the balsamic vinegar over the platter then sprinkle with chopped almonds.

Tip: Substitute the almonds for any topping of your choice.



To learn more about DelFrescoPure®, visit www.delfrescopure.com

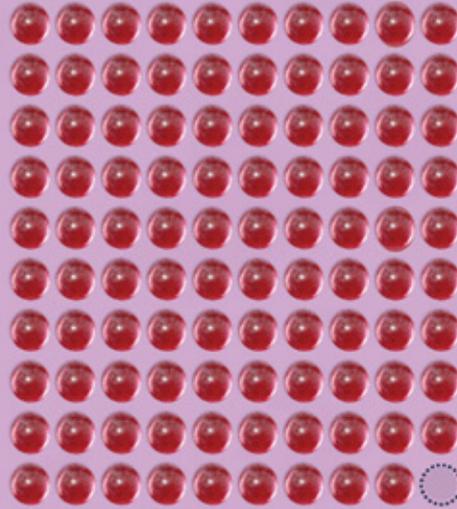


Green, red, black, and beyond, grapes are a produce aisle mainstay that have transcended time, trends, and tradition. With category gusto aplenty and innovation always on the rise, consumers are in love with these vine-ripened beauties. Shoppers on a constant quest for the fruit's dreamy crunch become instant fans when they uncover the perfect bunch of grapes. To find out where the robust category falls in the market today, check out these table grape stats from our friends at the California Table Grape Commission...

CALIFORNIA GROWS

99%

OF THE COMMERCIALY GROWN TABLE GRAPES IN THE UNITED STATES



80

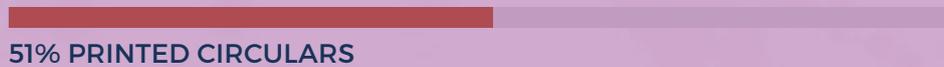
VARIETIES OF GRAPES ARE GROWN IN CALIFORNIA

MAY-JAN

TABLE GRAPES SEASON RUNS MAY THROUGH JANUARY

TOP SHOPPING RESOURCES AMONG PRIMARY SHOPPERS*

(TOOLS SHOPPERS SAY THEY USE TO HELP PREPARE FOR PURCHASE OR WHILE SHOPPING AT THE STORE)



*CONSUMERS ARE PRIMARY SHOPPERS IN THE HOUSE WHO HAVE PURCHASED GRAPES IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS

FREQUENCY OF FRESH GRAPE PURCHASES:



92%

OF GRAPE PURCHASERS WOULD PREFER TO BUY FRESH GRAPES FROM CALIFORNIA VERSUS GRAPES THAT WERE IMPORTED FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY IF THE PRICE OF BOTH WERE THE SAME.

73%

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

Every End Is Just A Beginning

By Jordan Okumura

**A JOURNEY, BY ITS VERY DEFINITION,
MEANS THE ACT OF TRAVELING FROM
ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER—AND
ANOTHER IMPLIES NO END...**



Values drive everything. Never lie, cheat, shade the truth, or hide your mistakes, and you can go far in this world.

Tim York shares these words with me as we sit back and chronicle his days in fresh produce. As Tim approaches his retirement from his seat as President of Markon Cooperative, a tale begins to take root. To some, he may appear as the polished executive behind a broad oak desk peering over steepled hands. To others, he is the energetic advocate planting the vision of where we can be in order to reinvent who we are today. Above all else, Tim is, at his core, all heart—with an unwavering passion that resides in his expressions, his relationships, and his hopes as much as his fears. Undoubtedly, he has built a legacy that comes through in his actions and his contributions—offering a profound pool of knowledge that will keep on giving.

“This is a relationship-driven business, and what others think of you is critical. Your

values are your brand, and they will be put to the test time and time again,” Tim says, letting a pause linger in the air for a moment before his thoughts take flight again. “With as much money as there is flowing into the business from venture capital, one might think the produce business is more about numbers, but it’s really about working with others who want to do business with you, and know that your word is your bond. I believe core values, common sense, and street smarts will take you further than any MBA.”

And doesn’t this industry visionary know it. Tim carries more than three decades worth of stories in his back pocket—nothing less than a tome would suffice to cover this journey. Yet, we try to allow the pen to take its course, letting memory drift back to the origins of a career that started long before his tenure at the Markon Cooperative, kicking off on the sandy beaches of Southern California.

“While I was going to school at San Diego State University (SDSU), during a summer break I worked on the dock at Dave Walsh Co.



From left to right: Incoming PMA Chair Bruce Peterson with Tim, 2002; Tim with Bryan Silbermann in Capetown, South Africa, PMA International Council Meeting, 2001; Gordon Food Show with Todd Koons, Tim, and Greg Gattis

and Stewart Packing Co. My uncle, Howard Hall, was the General Manager for Walsh, and I had called him looking for a job,” Tim says, adding that after graduating from SDSU, he didn’t know what he wanted to do. So, off he went back to Salinas, California, where he worked for Uncle Howard for another eight years.

Tim spent the winters working the vegetable deal in Oxnard, California, and in 1985, heard about a job at Markon that sounded, well, “interesting,” as he puts it. With Tim knowing nothing of foodservice distribution, I would have thought that he would be skeptical, a young man with reservations, but he was ready for a change. Tim interviewed and was hired as a Purchasing Manager, eventually taking over as President in 1990 when CEO Dave Eldredge moved on.

And Tim has been there ever since—the definition of a hop, skip, and a jump, I’d say.

Running one of the first produce procurement cooperatives founded in the U.S. for restaurants, cafeterias, and other foodservice operations, Tim was taking on a significant amount of responsibility in a very short time, but the man was game. If perspective means everything, then Tim excelled.

The roots of Markon itself are as energetic and driven as Tim is, founded by a handful of the

largest regional broad-line food distributors in the nation who were tired of receiving retail’s “seconds” in quality. The team’s mission became synonymous with excellence during Tim’s career, giving their foodservice customers access to the best-of-the-best in fresh produce, which became a key point of differentiation for Markon member companies.

“ THIS IS A RELATIONSHIP-DRIVEN BUSINESS, AND WHAT OTHERS THINK OF YOU IS CRITICAL. YOUR VALUES ARE YOUR BRAND, AND THEY WILL BE PUT TO THE TEST TIME AND TIME AGAIN ”

— Tim York,
Retiring President,
Markon Cooperative

The pace of change is a measurement of time, and Tim took each challenge and hurdle in front of him as chances to pivot his heart and mind and find a better way to do business. In his element, he is always on his toes, seeing

roadblocks as opportunities to find new ways of refreshing old beliefs.

“Understanding and staying a step ahead of change, issues, trends, competitors, and even Markon owners, is part of my DNA. That’s why I often start out meetings with a look at emerging issues. It’s also why I join groups like Food Foresight, which is a trends intelligence group put together by Nuffer, Smith, Tucker of San Diego,” Tim reflects. “This group of uber-smart people helps me look for opportunities to differentiate Markon and make the industry better. Food safety, sustainable products and practices, reimagining the produce culinary experience at restaurants or cafeterias, food waste, hunger, and food bank initiatives are just a few of the priorities I’ve identified by being part of Food Foresight.”

You would think that the man had it all planned out but, like many of us, the curves in the road were, at times, more valuable than the path laid out ahead. When I ask Tim about some of the key moments in his life that changed the course of his journey or forever changed the way he moved through the business, he gives me another one of those introspective pauses.

“I was being asked to make customer presentations and feared public speaking, so I took the Dale Carnegie course to learn more about getting up in front of



Field shot of Markon staff, 1992



“ UNDERSTANDING AND STAYING A STEP AHEAD OF CHANGE, ISSUES, TRENDS, COMPETITORS, EVEN MARKON OWNERS, IS PART OF MY DNA. ”

people and presenting a point of view. Carnegie recruited me as a graduate assistant and I spent many years driving from Salinas to San Jose, California, to teach weekly classes,” Tim says, noting that great rewards come from lots and lots of effort. “Practice, practice, practice. What I took from Carnegie was the ability to think on my feet and make impromptu adjustments to any presentation.”

For Tim, this was a period of time that helped steer his course and change the way he faced the world. Another life-changing experience happened for Tim back in 2010.

“In 2010, as Chairman of the Center for Produce Safety, I interviewed Dana Dziadul, a young woman who, as a child, had been sickened by an outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes*. She put a face to the food safety movement and why our work is so important. This was a defining moment for me because I had been working to improve food safety for many years, and Dana made my work real and important,” Tim reflects.

Markon was among the first ventures to act strategically in 1998 with the initiation of food safety requirements for brand suppliers, Tim reveals. A year later, the

company introduced its branded Five Star Food Safety program. By 2001, all suppliers were required to have, at minimum, a third-party passing grade food safety audit. By 2002, Markon eliminated 25 percent of its supplier base because they had no foundational food safety program.

“Later, with the help of our public relations counsel along with the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) and University of California, Davis, we focused on founding the Center for Produce Safety (CPS). To date, CPS has funded 22 million dollars to address food safety vulnerabilities in produce. I am proud to have served as its first, and third, Board Chair,” Tim shares with me.

Tim’s deep appreciation for the work our industry does for food safety, the supply chain, and the retail conversation between growers and buyers cannot be overstated.

This appreciation has motivated him in the work he does both as President of Markon and as an industry leader. Tim has had great examples to follow throughout his journey and people who have helped shape his gratitude for each experience and challenge along the way.

“ I DON'T KNOW WHAT MY FUTURE IN PRODUCE LOOKS LIKE, BUT I'M EXCITED TO FIND THE OPPORTUNITIES. ”

Uncle Howard, who we spoke of as we began to tread down memory lane, was one of Tim's first guiding lights who told him early on that the family was going to run the business as if his mother—Tim's grandmother—was at his side.

“This meant we would run it with integrity, honesty, pride, and civility,” Tim expresses. “Being taught to fix these ideals in my core before I had formed other less gracious value systems and unbreakable habits made me a great fit for Paul Gordon, President of Gordon Food Service and Markon's first Chairman. Paul was a strong Christian with integrity and a sense of service. Paul was a phenomenal innovator and leader, and what a wonderful opportunity it was to work for the food industry's greatest company.”

Tim also had the opportunity to be on the PMA's boards throughout the years and work alongside Bob Carey, who served as the Chief Executive Officer of PMA for 38 years, and Bryan Silbermann, who also served as Chief Executive Officer for the association.

“I am truly grateful for what I learned from Bob and Bryan about running a member organization, as well as Bryan's mentorship over the years,” Tim adds. “My biggest

takeaway from all of these people was a focus on core values and the expectation of these great leaders that their organizations would live out these values.”

Tim loves this business and how it is always changing.

“Just when you think you have it figured out, you get a big surprise. I thrive under pressure, so this is a great business for me,” Tim says. “And thinking about next steps—I don't know what my future in produce looks like, but I'm excited to find the opportunities.”

Smooth sailing is for the faint of heart, and the produce industry is definitely not the breeder of such individuals. Our industry bolsters the courageous, the intrepid, the strong spirited. So, does Tim see retirement as a course set to cruise control? I think not. Then again, Tim is not the type to get tied up in the semantics of retirement, anyway. For Tim, retirement is a bridge to cross, a chance to find a new opportunity waiting in the wings.

And maybe, just maybe, we will pick up the pen again much sooner than we think. 



Dave Eldredge, Annie Harris, and Tim hold down the Markon office in 1985

Top to Bottom: PMA Foodservice Conference: Ed Casel and Ed Scurich circa 1993; Joe Stubbs, SunKist, Tom and Nan Wasson from Sysco, Tim's ex, Lisa; PMA Board meeting, Mexico, 2002

WTF DO I DO WITH SunFed Calabacitas ?

{ what the fork }



HERBED SQUASH, POTATO, AND SAUSAGE CASSEROLE

INGREDIENTS

2 SunFed Perfect Grey Squash
2 SunFed Perfect Zucchini
2 SunFed Perfect Yellow Squash
2 red potatoes
2 yellow potatoes
1 red onion
1 lb ground Italian sausage, cooked
1 package keilbasa
2 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
¼ cup olive oil
1 cup mixed fresh herbs, finely diced
Salt and pepper, to taste

Prep Time: 20 min

Cook Time: 1 hr+

Servings: 4-6

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 400° F. Grease a 9" x 13" glass casserole dish.
- 2 Cut squash, potatoes, onions, and keilbasa into ¼" rounds of similar diameter. If necessary, cut squash on angle to achieve wider slices.
- 3 Line vegetables in rows in the casserole dish, alternating between vegetables and keilbasa. Sprinkle cooked Italian sausage crumbles around the squash and in gaps.
- 4 In small bowl, mix olive oil, garlic, herbs, salt, and pepper. Brush over squash, peppers, onions, and sausage to completely glaze.
- 5 Bake covered for 30 minutes. Then cook uncovered for additional 20 minutes or until potato is tender and slightly golden brown. Serve immediately, garnished with extra fresh herbs if desired.

Tip: Remove keilbasa and Italian sausage to make this recipe Whole 30/Vegan friendly

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STONEFRUIT

SNAPSHOT

From those increasingly sought-after apricots to the blushing nectarines and everything in between, stonefruit brings such vibrant colors to the fresh produce department that hail summer's long-awaited approach. As we take a bite out of this category, as bold as it is beautiful, see what stonefruit has to offer in our latest snapshot...

WHITE PEACH

Flavor: Very sweet, ranging from sugary to more mild with herbal notes

Color: Red and orange

Season: May - end of Oct





RED AND BLACK PLUMS

Flavor: Juicy and sweet

Color: Ranging from dark purple to deep red/
yellow blends

Season: Apr - end of Nov

DONUT PEACH

Flavor: Similar to white peach

Color: Varies

Season: May



PLUOT (PLUMCOT*)

Flavor: Fusion of flavors by variety

Color: Purple, red, spotted white, green, and yellow

Season: May - Oct

**60%-75% Plum, 25%-40% Apricot*

WHITE NECTARINE

Flavor: Very sweet, ranging from sugary to more mild
with herbal tones

Color: Red and orange, with white and beige coloring

Season: May - mid-Sep





APRICOT

Flavor: Tangy and sweet, develops a richer sweetness as it ripens

Color: Soft yellow and orange tones, red hints

Season: End of Apr - mid-Aug

YELLOW NECTARINE

Flavor: Smooth, sorbet sweetness

Color: Yellow flesh

Season: End of Apr - end of Sep



YELLOW PEACH

Flavor: Sweet, tangy, and bright, with aromatic nectar

Color: Red and orange with yellow undertones

Season: Apr - end of Oct

APRIUM*

Flavor: Hearty flesh with abundant nectar

Color: Soft yellow and orange notes

Season: End of Apr - May, Jul

**60%-75% Apricot, 25%-40% Plum*



WTF DO I DO WITH Farm2You™ Apricots ?

{ what the fork }



SPRING PASTRY CUPS WITH APRICOT COULIS

Adapted from a recipe by Vicki DeFrancesco

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups** Farm2You™ fresh apricots, pitted and halved
- 1 package** frozen puff pastry shells
- 8 oz bar** cream cheese, softened
- 1 cup** sugar, divided
- 1 tsp** vanilla
- ½ cup** seasonal berries
- 1 tbs** amaretto, may be substituted with water

Prep Time: 15 min

Cook Time: 10 min

Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Remove pastry package from freezer and prepare according to directions. Let cool completely.
- 2 Blend together cream cheese, ½ cup sugar, and vanilla. Set aside.
- 3 To create the apricot coulis, combine apricots, ½ cup sugar, and amaretto, in a saucepan over medium heat, until sugar is completely dissolved and apricots have softened, approximately 8-10 minutes.
- 4 Allow mixture to cool slightly then transfer to a blender or food processor and blend until smooth.
- 5 Fill each pastry cup with cream cheese mixture then drizzle with apricot coulis. Top with seasonal berries. Enjoy!

To learn more about Trinity Fruit, visit www.trinityfruit.com



A Closer Look at Cal-Organic Farms® Rainbow Carrot Chips

By Jordan Okumura

They have crunch, texture, flavor, and nutritional sustenance—not to mention prime real estate in the fresh produce department. Of course, I am talking about carrots. With the help of Grimmway Farms, the carrot category is offering differentiation and draw this year with the company's all-new, year-round Cal-Organic Farms® rainbow carrot chip program. Addressing the retail need for vibrancy that carries its weight in flavor, these carrot sets come in Cal-Organic's 12-oz eye-catching, resealable packs and in 5-lb bulk bags for foodservice.

Organic carrot chip category growth demands vision and Cal-Organic's eye for innovation brings value to produce aisles one package at a time. It's easy to "eat the rainbow" with each pack featuring an array of purple, orange, white, and yellow slices that are pre-washed, cut, and ready-to-eat with an excellent source of vitamin A to boot.

Recipe cards and POS materials are available to retailers upon request and help to drive the ring at the register as well as traffic through the fresh produce department.

To bolster Grimmway's program, the company also expanded its organic operations at its Southeast facility in Lake Park, Georgia—promising to meet demand as it continues to rise. It goes without saying, but here we go: Cal-Organic is continuing to slice and dice its way to the top of the carrot category! 🥕

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