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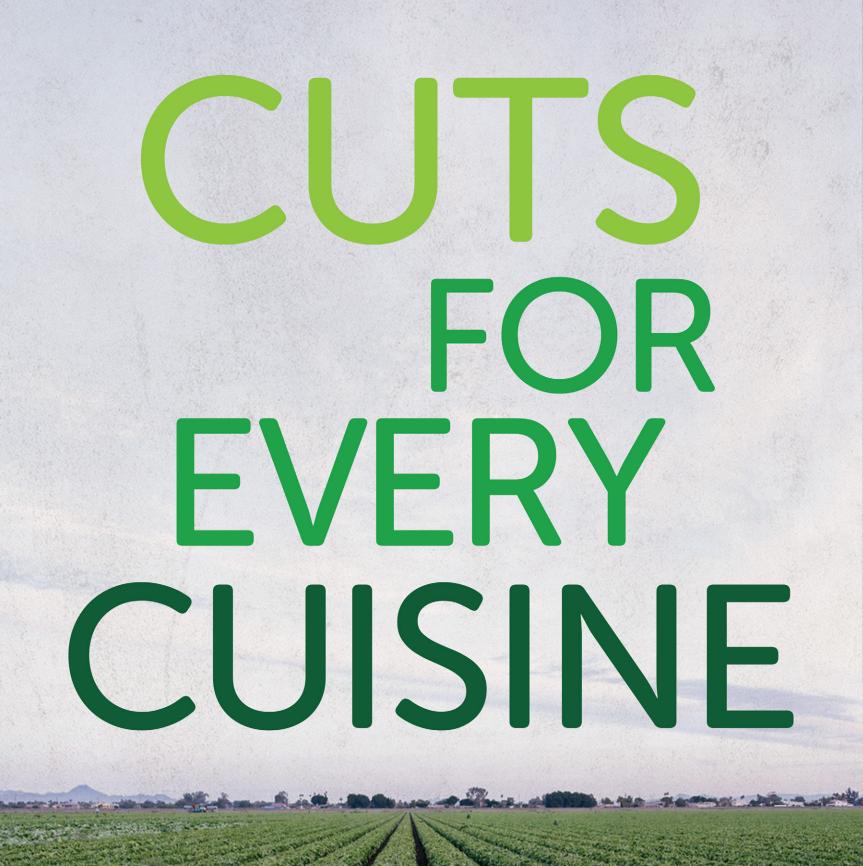
Soft, creamy cheeses will pair well with the sweet juiciness in the cherries. Try a mild goat cheese, or BelGioioso's fresh mozzarella mini cheese snacking balls—they are the perfect size for a picnic!

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everything a cherry should be.





EADING OVE
Snack at 4:30
California has
I liken it to a
experience s

EADING OVER THE LATEST ISSUE of The Snack at 4:30 in the morning here in California has become a beautiful ritual.

I liken it to a kinship with those who experience starlit mornings and the heavy steam of coffee before

the world erupts into sound. That moment when you can actually hear what a story is telling you, before you put on the glasses of competitive perspective or analysis or dissimilarity. Before you can taste the commotion of the day.

Sometimes, in these moments of forgetting the beginnings and endings of things, we actually find our center—our clarity. Forgetting in order to remember. Remember that, at the center of everything we do in this industry is a will to perpetually become our best selves.

As we pull together the material for June and I read over stories from Tom Lange Company to GR Fresh and more, I sense that familiar echo that happens when we acknowledge the synchronicity of things:

It takes nerve to be in this industry.

I hear the strong intimations of the likes of Mission Produce's Steve Barnard as he told our Section Editor, Anne Allen, in this issue, "We're different because we're daring."

I listen to these words like a prelude to the day, like an opening to these stories and so many that have come before them.

Daring is the marker; the requisite for innovation, for fresh thought, and new thinking, for risk and for reward. If there is nothing at risk, how can we be brave? We are an industry that simultaneously bucks and honors tradition, and I would assert the ability to hold that

paradox is one of many ways courage is in the marrow of our leaders.

And, like many we talk to in this industry, the act of being daring is contagious. When I read stories about the metaphorical jet-setting Baloian Farms and LIV Organic

Produce's success magnified by a trailblazing upward trajectory, I can't help but want to step into the

ring, answer the bell, and experience what it must be like to be those boots on the ground.

Even daring to be personal is a feat I find can be rare in any space, let alone a business. Yet, friends like FreschCo's Mike Venton and June's Wholesome Hero Juan Mendoza share their depth and their humor with a spotlight firmly focused in their direction.

In this space, the team and I are both witnesses and mapmakers. We listen and look for the collective spark just at the surface, and we amplify it with storytelling.

We mine the vein at the center of your stories.

We find the risk that makes the dare,

the dream,

the hope,

that much more worth it. §

Jordan Okumura

Editor in Chief

AndNowUKnow and The Snack Magazine



FEATURES

DRISCOLL'S

A BERRYFUL MIND

We see a twist to the tale of art and science as Frances Dillard walks us through how these two hemispheres of creativity ensure berry discoveries of our time are celebrated on both sides of the register...





LIV ORGANIC PRODUCE

AS SURE AS THE SUNRISE Look into the near future with us as we set the stage for summertime retail programs. Anthony Innocenti gives us a taste of what produce departments could look like come July, and why buy-side partners had better get a head start...



WISH FARMS

SPARKING A LEGACY

How does your business change when you spend every day working in a pixie forest? Gary Wishnatzki, Nick Wishnatzki, and James Peterson tell us as they open the door to the berry maven's new headquarters and a legacy 100 years in the making...



TOM LANGE COMPANY

DOWN A LOCAL ROAD

Bridging the gap between local growers and retailers, the company's newest program is a lesson in bringing the farm to the buyer. Chase Tatham dives deep with us here...



BALOIAN FARMS

FROM THE SOIL TO THE SKY
The future is an endless runway and an open sky when performance is your fuel.
With growth on the radar and a candid honesty as propellers, Richard Cowden tells us why this is one company to train your eyes on...



MISSION PRODUCE

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT Steve Barnard and Denise Junqueiro discuss the avocado supplier's Peruvian program, and why taking risks and embracing differences has made it an industry frontrunner...



GR FRESH

TIES THAT BIND

Exponential growth across its operations, team, and product portfolio isn't the only thing characterizing this industry stand-out. Tony Incaviglia and other key team members share why the vertically integrated company is one to watch...



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JUNE 2021

ISSUE 59

FRESH FOLK





WHOLESOME HEROES
JUAN MENDOZA



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straight from THE FIELDS





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We reveal ourselves in the details.

As a family of growers and shippers, D'Arrigo New York focuses on the little things.

D'ARRIGO NEW YORK



A Closer Look at Superior Fresh Packaging Refresh



By Melissa De Leon Chavez

ess truly is more, especially when it comes to one of the latest packaging innovations to hit the salad case.

While it is important to communicate to consumers the impact a purchase can have, this can be a difficult picture to paint in the few seconds taken to choose a product. In clarifying the savings of its newly launched, more sustainable line of salad mix clamshells, Superior Fresh is sticking to an easy number: two.

Two repurposed water bottles have given vibrant life to a clamshell that stands at 40 percent *less* plastic from its typical counterparts. Meanwhile, spenders get *more* from their purchase in the form of modified atmosphere packaging, which allows the leafy greens to breathe, ultimately extending product shelf-life.

The new packaging applies to all eight eye-catching baby leaf varieties including the Organic Citrus Splash, with Superior Fresh also offering one-head lettuce in a traditional clamshell as well: Organic Living Butter Lettuce. A salad can truly go with anything, not just on the plate, but in the pack, whether it be cool turquoise, royal purple, hot pink, or any of the other shades specifically chosen to turn heads in the grocery aisle.

They might come for the color, but consumers will stay for the clearly marked catches on each clamshell, which communicate that it is resealable, family-farmed, organic, non-GMO, and securely grown, with the location pictured via a star placed on the U.S. map. All while still providing a window to the product itself, and less plastic than the line has ever been made with before.

Did you ever think you could get so much more out of 40 percent less? Neither did I. §





Red Sun Farms Sweetpops Tomatoes? what the fork }



INGREDIENTS

- 6 Sweetpops Tomatoes, diced, liquid removed
- 2 large Russet potatoes (or gold/ white potatoes)
- ½ red pepper, diced small
- 1/2 orange pepper, diced small
- 1/2 yellow pepper, diced small
- ½ **cup** Gruyère cheese
- 1/2 cup chives or green onions, freshly chopped
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- **3 strips** crispy bacon, optional

Prep Time: 10 min Cook Time: 1 hr 20 min

Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

- Preheat oven to 400° F.
- Wash potatoes and bake in oven for 45 minutes or until tender inside and let cool.
- Cut potato lengthwise and scoop out insides leaving 1/4" for stability. Season inside and out with salt and pepper and brush with olive oil. Bake for another 10 minutes per side.
- Reserve some diced peppers for topping and combine the rest with the scooped potato insides, tomatoes, cheese, and (if desired) bacon. Season mixture with 1 tbsp olive oil and salt and pepper to taste.
- 5 Top potatoes with remaining peppers and cheese and place on baking tray in the oven for 15 minutes.
- Remove from oven and add a dollop of sour cream and fresh chives or green onions. Serve and enjoy!

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





As Eluce as the Sum 180

Λ Q&Λ With *Anthony Onnocenti*, Managing Partner and Co-Founder, LIV Organic Produce

By Chandler James

The day is July 1.

Sunlight radiates across Southern California as the earthy aroma of freshly harvested produce wafts around a grocery store at 7 a.m.

An unsuspecting shopper walks through the doors and is immediately pulled to a bountiful display placed front and center. They are met with a fantastic showcase of LIV Organic Produce's newly harvested supply of onions and potatoes, practically begging the consumer to indulge. It is not by chance occurrence that this happens, but, rather, by careful intention.

I am not a fortune teller. But, as I begin penning this story in mid-April, I can see no other version of reality

coming to fruition. Perhaps it is due to the nearly two years I've spent in this industry, which have been jampacked with immeasurable produce insights. However, I would argue that my certainty primarily comes from the unwavering confidence I hear in Anthony Innocenti's voice.

The Co-Founder and Managing Partner greets me with a zest I can only assume is powered by true enthusiasm for his role at the helm of this team. We begin our conversation with sights set on LIV Organic's new crop organic onions and potatoes. But, as I've learned is characteristic of revealing so much more.

23







CJ: LIV Organic Produce has most definitely earned its name as a leading organic supplier, and I'm sure consistency of supply contributes significantly to this. As your new crop onions and potatoes hit the market, what can your retail partners expect?



Anthony Innocenti,

Managing Partner and Co-Founder, LIV Organic Produce

AI: We rolled out our new crop onions in April and will continue to push the program in the coming months. As of June, we are full steam ahead on our new crop potatoes and will soon have premium supplies available to buyers. This season, we added a very experienced team member to help oversee all growth across these crops.

Quantity and quality control are central to our process, allowing us to bring unrivaled consistency and value to our partnerships. Despite the historic unpredictability of spring and summer, we currently anticipate a strong season.

Acreage for both categories is up, which will likely lead to larger volumes for our partners.

For our onions, we offer bulk 40 lb boxes with PLU stickers, as well as product in 3 lb and 2 lb bags. Our potatoes are available in bulk 50 lb cartons as well as in 2 lb, 3 lb, and 5 lb bags.





CJ: There is always demand for the onion and potato categories, as they have long been considered produce aisle staples. Even so, we can always do more in order to capture consumers' attention. What suggestions do you have for retailers when it comes to merchandising your products?

AI: I think the key is to ensure you do not oversaturate the department with too many SKUs. Retailers should look for quality selections over the quantity of options. When there are too many varieties on the shelf, it can start to look a bit unorganized and overwhelming to the consumer. And, on top of this, it often leads to greater overall shrink and higher labor costs in the stores.

Committing to full displays is also absolutely essential. If displays are too small, they can be easily overlooked. From my experience, this also shows a lack of commitment to the consumer, which, in turn, can create a lack of freshness and visibility for the products.





CJ: Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither was LIV Organic's expertise. How has the company continued to evolve in order to stay at the forefront of industry competition?

AI: We are a year-round supplier that moves from region to region, providing our buy-side partners with consistency of supply not just from season to season, but every month of the year. Sustainable growth with our farmer partners has allowed us to maintain this position. We have the right personnel in place, which has led to exponential acreage expansion.



"...we have managed to create a program that both maintains efficiency across our operations and maximizes ROI for buyers."

Anthony Innocenti,

Managing Partner and Co-Founder, LIV Organic Produce





CJ: As you know, creating the consistency you speak of is dependent upon a myriad of supply chain factors. Between Mother Nature, shifts in the market, and consumer buying trends, it is nearly impossible to make predictions. Yet, LIV Organic seems to be doing so for its partners. What makes this possible?

AI: One of the biggest challenges in fresh produce is making sure everyone in the supply chain understands the variables in growing depending on the region and time of year. Knowing this, we have managed to create a program that both maintains efficiency across our operations and maximizes ROI for buyers.

Not only do we have expertise in the fields, but across other supply chain operations as well. We are very nimble in shipping, distribution, and consistent ad planning; updates such as these are key to driving units.



CJ: LIV Organic's relationship with buyers is a unique one. I see a sense of trust in your partnerships that is not always apparent throughout the supply chain. How has this played an integral role in LIV's success, and why do you believe retail relationships should be at the center of supplier strategies?

AI: First of all, as organics continue to evolve at a steady rate, we could not have achieved the current market visibility of organics without the assistance of retail programs. The further we educate the consumers, the more emphasis this sector will have, and retailers are essential to that process.

We need each other to achieve maximum success, and our buy-side partners know this as well as we do. I believe that excellent buyers are those who look at you as a partner for success as a whole and vice versa.



CJ: It seems as though there is some other magic at work behind the scenes of LIV Organic's successful operations. At the end of the day, what does it mean to truly commit to the craft of bringing fresh produce to market?

AI: It is imperative that you really believe in what you are representing and truly have passion for what you do. In fresh produce, you can't look at our products as just another commodity to sell. You must truly believe in the power of produce in order to make the world believe in it, too.

I have been involved in produce and farming my whole life. Fortunately, I have had many unique opportunities for growth and continue to have great mentors. You always learn something new on this journey we call fresh produce!



– Does it feel like *July* yet? -

As someone living in the 100-degree heat of Sacramento. California, I can assure you that, yes, it certainly does. I may have taken an early venture onto the page, but buyers should absolutely be planning ahead to take advantage of these seasonal opportunities.

Because, as sure as the sunrise, you can bet that LIV Organic produce will be basking in summer's glory soon enough. §





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» The IF List « Mike Venton

With Jordan Okumura

hen I think of retail in Canada, Empire Company Limited is one of the companies that immediately comes to mind. Reaching far and wide in both footprint and innovation, the parent company of banners like FreshCo and Sobeys has made a legacy of shopping experiences that fulfill the needs of regional and national demographics across the diverse landscape of Canada's consumer base. Mike Venton, General Manager, FreshCo, Empire Company Limited, has been an impactful retail veteran in this space, and one who has watched the buy-side shift and evolve to meet today's changing buying behaviors. While we often seek him out for insights in grocery and fresh produce, we decided to throw him a few questions to tease his imagination and pull back a different curtain of sorts. And so, let the games begin, as Mike joins us to share the responses to a few of our favorite what IFs...

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

Ancient Greece. I'd love to witness warriors like Alexander the Great and live in the era of Aristotle, as examples.

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

A ribeye steak, lobster tail, asparagus, rice, and fresh fruit paired with the finest Napa Valley Cabernet.

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

Michael Douglas in Falling Down.

» IF you could imagine yourself in a different industry, what would it be? I would love to be a musician.

>> IF you could have dinner with anyone, dead or alive, who would it be? My mother.

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

The decision to delay going to university.

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

A wolf.

» IF you wrote an autobiography, what would be the title? Tenacity.

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

The Shawshank Redemption.

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

Smoothies.

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

Memory.

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

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

The day my first child was born.

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

Either a person or an organization that I thought could cure cancer.

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

To speak all languages.

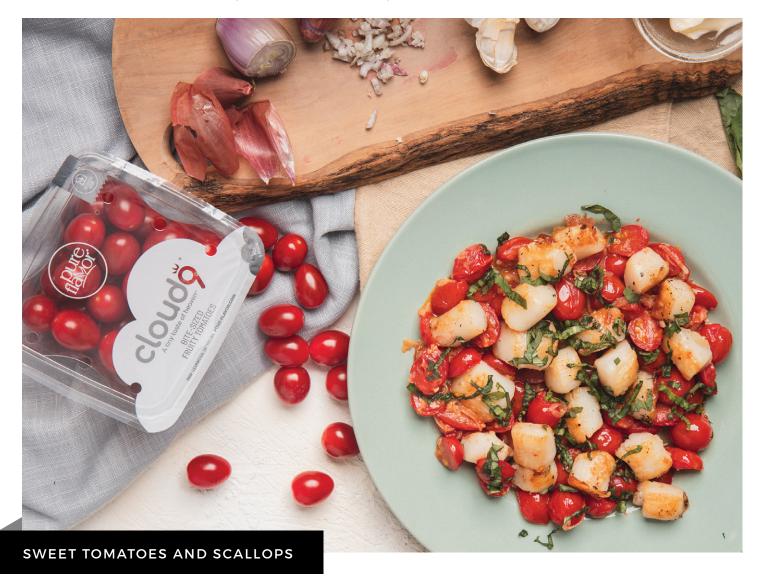
» IF you had to choose one song to be the soundtrack of your summer season, what would it be?

Lose Yourself by Eminem.

» IF you could give your younger self one piece of advice, what would it be? Never settle for second best. 9



Pure Flavor® Cloud 9® DOIDO WITH Bite-Sized Fruity Tomatoes? { what the fork }



INGREDIENTS

1 pint Pure Flavor® Cloud 9® Bite-Sized Fruity Tomatoes, halved

16 large sea scallops

½ cup shallots, thinly sliced

1/4 cup dry white wine

1 lemon, halved

2 cloves garlic, minced

3 tbsp butter

2 tbsp olive oil

Salt and pepper, to taste Fresh basil, julienned, for garnish

Prep Time: 5 min Cook Time: 20 min Servings: 4





DIRECTIONS

- Heat a large skillet over medium-low heat and melt butter. Add the shallots and cook, stirring occasionally for 3-5 minutes until tender, but not browned. Add the garlic and cook for 30 seconds to 1 minute until fragrant.
- Next, add the wine and cook until half the liquid has evaporated. Add the tomatoes, salt, and pepper. Cook over medium-heat, stirring occasionally, for 10-12 minutes until the tomatoes have released their juices. Transfer the tomato mixture to a small dish, then wipe the skillet.
- Pat the scallops dry. Add oil to the skillet and turn the heat to medium-high. Add half the scallops, spacing them evenly in the pan and season with salt. Cook without moving for 2-3 minutes, until golden brown on the bottom. Flip and cook for 1 more minute. Transfer scallops to a plate and repeat with the rest of the scallops.
- Return the tomatoes to the skillet and squeeze lemon into the pan. Return the scallops and top with basil, more salt, and serve. Enjoy!

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From the first bite, you know this will be memorable: it's a fresh snacking experience that comes from an unwavering commitment to quality. Our family of growers hand-select a limited quantity of the most vibrant tomatoes so you can enjoy bold, balanced flavor that sweetens any snack or homecooked meal. With a blast of fruity sweetness in every bite, Cloud 9° tomatoes are the everyday treat you've been looking for.





By Jenna Plasterer

'd like to ask you a favor when you start this story—one that may be a bit more difficult if you've gotten used to your virtual workspace. Take a minute and imagine what a traditional office is like.

Can you hear the distinctive din of a mouse scrolling across the page, the faint tick of a clock in the background, or the humming of the overhead lights that cut through the silence? Do your fingers feel

the satisfying click of your favorite pen or the clack of the keyboard as you type an email?

If I let my mind drift, I can almost smell the warm pages fresh out of the printer just as the ink begins to settle—a familiar scent to those who've ever manned a copier.

Now, erase all of that, take a step back, and imagine if those sounds were

cloaked with laughter as your coworkers took turns riding a slide from the second story of the building instead of using the stairs. The scent of printer ink becomes faint under the aroma of fresh tree bark that permeates the building. Instead of the foamboard tiles of the roof, there were clouds and blue skies. And rather than taking your meetings in a boardroom with identical chairs encircling a Formica® table, you were perched in a treehouse watching the



"...we worked pretty tirelessly over the last handful of years to grow into all four berry commodities, year-round. And I hope that the building and the warehouse are the stamp showing that we've arrived."

-James Peterson, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Wish Farms

world pass outside the windows as you sat above the rest of the Earth.

While these may seem like things imagined in a childhood dream, for Wish Farms, it is a reality.

As the grower approaches its 100th anniversary next year, Wish Farms was faced with a pivotal milestone and the opportunity to prove that a century old is more like 100 years young if you are of the Wishnatzki clan. With that mindset, the brood set out to further weave itself into the fabric of the fresh produce industry, staying at the forefront of buyers' and consumers' consciousness with the unveiling of its unparalleled new headquarters.

What all started as a desire to create a new office space turned into a workplace wonderland where Wish Farms' associates come to not only take on their daily duties, but enjoy themselves while doing them.

The original need for this new Plant City, Florida, headquarters stemmed from Wish Farms' rapidly evolving team that was running out of area as the company continued to grow over the years.

"Well, we were out of space. There were almost people in closets, and they were taking up conference rooms. It was people on top of people. So, we needed this four years ago," Gary Wishnatzki, third-generation Owner, tells me with a slight laugh in his voice as he reminisces on the company's old digs.

Wish's search for the perfect location started back in 2015, and the task of finding the ideal spot was not one that was taken lightly. From the start, this project was a labor of love and of legacy. Meeting all of the right criteria was essential before Gary and the team at

Wish Farms decided to plant their roots, the most important being the locale.

"Number one, overall, our team wanted to have good proximity to our Plant City growers," Gary explains, emphasizing the importance of remaining connected to all aspects of Wish's business and its partners. "We wanted to stay inside city limits, so we'd have a Plant City address. This is where my grandfather came in the 1920s, and we've been here ever since."

Eventually, they did find a Plant City location. And let me tell you, folks, it is something to behold! Far from the closets and conference rooms where Wish's employees were making magic happen just years before, they are now inhabiting a magic space all their own. The office has been transformed into what Nick Wishnatzki, Public Relations Manager and Gary's son, so lovingly

describes as a pixie forest, playing off of the company's signature pixie character, Misty, that adorns its packaging.

"The foundation of the project was the brand, and we wanted the building to reflect the brand," says Nick. "The pixie forest was the dream child, and it just grew from there. It is a fun, exciting place. And we also want it to be a recruitment and retention tool for employees."

Once I hear Nick evoke the imagery of a pixie forest to delineate the elements of Wish's headquarters, everything around them takes on an enchanted air. I can't help but see the dedication to the brand in every aspect of the building, down to the smallest details like the reclaimed wood conference table where everyone is seated. For every tree that was cut down during the build, a new one was planted, and the remnants were put to good use



Guests are met with a wooden slide as they enter the pixie forest-themed lobby of Wish Farms' new headquarters



Inside the treehouse, Wish Farms holds meetings and hosts guests

as tables throughout the office, the stairs, and the massive slide that greets guests as they enter the front doors. You read correctly: I said a slide.

It is at this point in my interview with Gary; Nick; Elizabeth Peterson, Gary's daughter; and James Peterson, Vice President of Sales and Marketing and Gary's son-in-law, where we all get a little giddy—like five kids recounting a spellbinding fairytale.

"From the get-go, you always said this building is going to have a slide. That was non-negotiable. You were going to make that work," Elizabeth says to her dad.

"Then I said, 'If we have a slide, we need a treehouse!" Gary retorts.

Gary, this includes his employees—the most special experience possible.

Gary and the Wish Farms team didn't stop there though—they went above and beyond, creating a cross between a pixie forest and the innovative tech campuses of California's Silicon Valley, but as Gary reminds me, none of the offices in Silicon Valley have a treehouse (sorry, Google, but Wish may have one-upped you).

From the noise-reducing ceilings painted to look like clouds and a state-of-the-art fitness center to a walking track encircling a lake and a café with a full-time chef making lunches for employees in the works—this space has

While it may all seem like a fun project to create a fresh office

space, the completed headquarters serves a deeper purpose for those at the company.

"From where I sit, this space just solidifies what we've built over the last handful of years. I think when people see the office and the warehouse, it puts us on the map," comments James. "We're most known as being a Florida strawberry shipper, but we worked pretty tirelessly over the last handful of years to grow into all four berry commodities, yearround. And I hope that the building and the warehouse are the stamp showing that we've arrived."

Extending the company's reach into the retail market as well, the new headquarters, in addition to the recently built warehouse, will further enable Wish Farms to form deeper connections with its buyer partners.

"I think this has given us the ability to centralize, specifically regarding our quality assurance and our whole quality control team," explains James. "All of our blueberry packing and strawberry processing is under one roof at our warehouse, so it's really allowed us to unify and improve on our quality, which is a vital part of growing with all of our retailers."

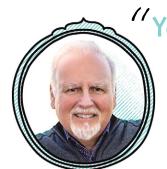
The need for strong buy-side relationships will stay a prevalent part of the company's future growth as Wish Farms remains a company in constant motion. As a trade writer, I want to share the exciting details of the brand's upcoming plans, but I have been sworn to secrecy. (And we all know that promises made in a treehouse are binding.) However, let's just say that innovation will be at the forefront of whatever comes next from Wish Farms.

"Moving forward, we're going to be looking for innovative ways to engage our employees, asking them, 'What ideas do you have?' No idea is too crazy. Let's consider it, put it on the table, and see what forward-thinking idea or product we might have," Nick tells me concerning Wish's new Innovation



We've always talked about the cycles of business and how you have to reinvent yourself. Businesses constantly have to grow, especially a generational business.

-Nick Wishnatzki, Public Relations Manager, Wish Farms



"You need to have something that sparks, and I'll be quite honest, all the sparks that we've had over the years, they weren't intentional, but they just happened. We've been lucky in that respect. " - Yary Wishnatzki, Owner, Wish Farms

Center, where it is developing the latest products and where these ideas will live.

Nick's comment that "no idea is too crazy" spurs a little bit of laughter across the room as he and James turn to look at Gary, a leader that has been known to push the boundaries beyond what was thought possible. And, as this will help Wish continue to grow its portfolio and its footprint, it has also established a legacy for Gary that will remain an integral part of the Wish Farms history.

"We've always talked about the cycles of business and how you have to reinvent yourself," Nick says to me and Gary at the same time. "Businesses constantly have to grow, especially a generational business. You can get stuck in a rut and continuously do the same thing. But I feel like, when you got on the fresh



The company plans to open a new café inside the headquarters where chefs will prepare freshly made meals for employees



The outside of the treehouse specially designed for Wish Farms

produce scene in the seventies, Dad, you kind of pushed the envelope."

Gary then goes on to elaborate on Nick's sentiment.

"You need to have something that sparks, and I'll be quite honest, all the sparks that we've had over the years, they weren't intentional, but they just happened. We've been lucky in that respect," he explains, bringing the pixielike imagery synonymous with the brand to the conversation, as sparks resemble fireflies zipping through the air.

With the fire lit and blazing for the next generation of Wish Farms leaders, Gary hopes it will include his lineage continuing the family legacy.

"I would love to see the next generation coming into the business, my grandkids, and their kids beyond them, but I know this business isn't for everybody," he finishes.

And then, as if the Universe seemingly mustered all of its poetic abilities to deliver me my own spark and the perfect ending to this story, through the glass window of the new conference room I see a small figure toddling its way down the hall toward the door. Down the corridor comes one of Gary's grandchildren, part of the next generation of Wish that had been threaded throughout our entire conversation.

As he beckons his parents from the room, I can't help but wonder if one day he will be sitting at this exact table made from the trees that stood decades before his birth and embrace a legacy that came into being more than a century earlier.

Everything comes full circle before my eyes as if a pixie materialized from the very trees, granting me this magic moment. 8

A Closer Look at Giumarra Companies DulceVida™ Nectarines



By Peggy Packer

s day gradually shifts toward dusk, the beauty of evolving colors in the sky is something I once believed could never be truly emulated—until today. Now, you can bring these striking visuals to the produce department, as Giumarra Companies' premium DulceVida™ brand nectarines are finally making their highly anticipated return to retailers.

Encompassed in vibrant, starry packaging that reflects the lure of the night or early-morning sky, the sweet trio of nectarines will draw in any shopper, whether they classify as a night owl or an early bird.

Each of the limited edition DulceVida nectarine varieties features a distinct appearance that keys shoppers in on its availability this summer. The Midnight Edition, which showcases yellow flesh nectarines with a dark and speckled exterior, is available mid-June through early August and is comparable to the dark hues that glisten at midnight. The Twilight Edition, available June through mid-August, holds white flesh nectarines with an alluring fuchsia skin, while the Sunrise Edition features yellow flesh nectarines with a rosy-red skin and is available July through mid-August.

Giumarra offers these amazing California-grown nectarines in 2 lb plastic-handled bags and 2.5 lb or 4 lb corrugated consumer boxes.

Encourage shoppers to take their eyes off of the clouds and take in the beauty of the produce department with these breathtaking offerings. §







The best avocados have California in them.



Shoppers anxiously anticipate the California season because there is a California difference. In fact, 80% of avocado shoppers said it's important that the avocados they buy are grown by California farmers. They value the care our nearly 3,000 growers put into nurturing each avocado to ensure they get that creamy California avocado taste with every slice.

Keep up with the demand and give your shoppers the consistent quality, freshness, and homegrown taste they anticipate—all season long.



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 JUAN A WHOLESOME HERO?

With our industry as complex as it is interesting, it's no surprise to find curious souls like Juan who find the smallest cogs in our ecosystem both fascinating and incremental to the success of growing fresh produce. His dedication to the world's smallest creatures is what makes Zirkle Fruit Company and our industry thrive. Through this, he brings harmony between the produce we eat and Mother Nature's "workers" that make it possible. It's through his dedication that organic programs succeed and the seeds of interest can be planted in the next generation.

- 1 PASSION
- 2 LOVE TO NURTURE
- 3 LEGACY ADVOCATES
- 4 INITIATIVE
- LOVE OF NATURE



RAINIER® FRUIT CELEBRATES WHOLESOME HEROES

Juan Mendoza

Entomologist, Zirkle Fruit Company

YEARS AT ZIRKLE FRUIT COMPANY:

11

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

11

FAVORITE PRODUCE ITEM:

Blueberries



First starting off as a general laborer for Zirkle 11 years ago, Juan found his passion for entomology while working at the ranches. During this time, Juan discovered the relationship between bugs and the production of fruit was vital and inspiring.



Juan's nurturing spirit can be seen while he's working out in the ranches. As ladybugs crawl up his arms, he takes great care of his charges and shows the same enthusiasm to learn their needs. His nurturing spirit is evident as he beams with pride talking about his own children, who have expressed interest in

following in his footsteps.



"I have a son who wants to be a farmer like me, and we talk about it all the time. I hope he gets the opportunities that I have had to find what he's passionate about. It really doesn't matter what my children end up doing for a profession, I will be proud of them."



After he decided to go back to school to study entomology, Juan kept working in the orchards, eventually rising to lead the team in the southern territories of Zirkle's ranches as the in-house entomology expert—and he hasn't looked back.



"I love what I do. The smallest details make all the difference when working with bugs. For instance, when I release ladybugs on our organic blueberries, I have to release them on the ground. They have the instinct to crawl upward, so it is important they have their destination in front of them, otherwise, they'll fly off never to be seen again. This is important because our organic blueberry crops are reliant on these early protection practices."



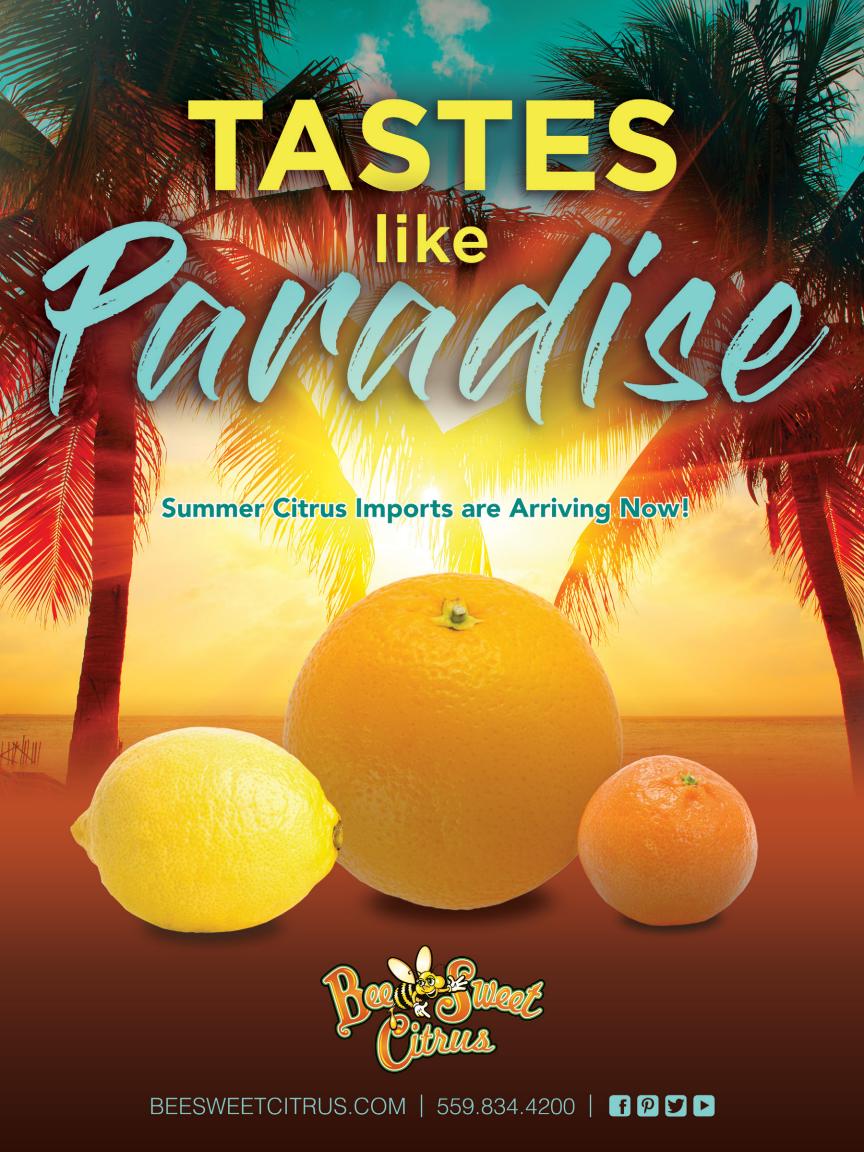


Apples, Pears, Blueberries, and Cherries



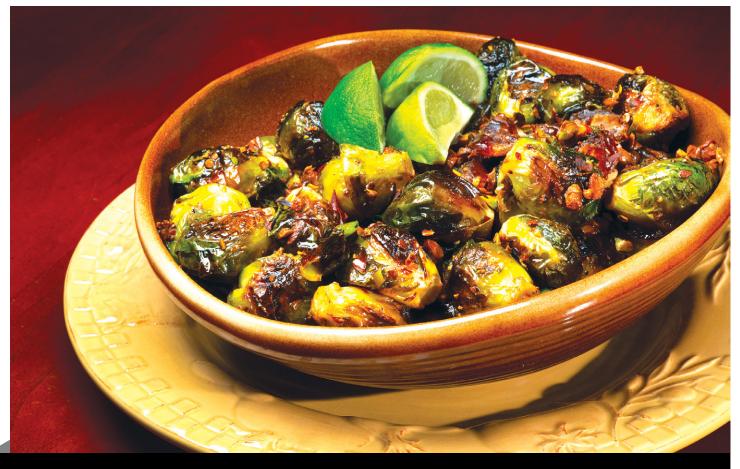






Sweetness worth SharingTM





4EARTH FARMS™ ORGANIC BRUSSELS SPROUTS WITH PISTACHIOS, MEDJOOL DATES, AND LIMES

INGREDIENTS

- **2 lb** 4Earth Farms[™] Organic Brussels Sprouts, trimmed
- 3 4Earth Farms Medjool Dates, pitted and coarsely sliced
- **3 tbsp** lime juice from 4Earth Farms Organic Limes

Zest from 1 4Earth Organic Lime

- 4 tbsp vegetable oil
- 3 tbsp unsalted butter
- 3 tbsp raw pistachios
- 3 tbsp full flavor molasses
- 3 tbsp honey

1 tsp crushed red pepper flakes

Kosher salt, to taste

Fresh ground pepper, to taste

4Earth Farms organic lime wedges, for garnish

Prep Time: 20 min Cook Time: 45 min

Servings: 8



DIRECTIONS

- Lower rack to the bottom third of oven and preheat to 450° F.
- Place trimmed Brussels sprouts in large bowl and toss with vegetable oil until evenly coated. Season with salt and pepper.
- Spread prepared Brussels sprouts evenly on a cookie sheet, roast for about 15 minutes. Shake sheet to reorient them and roast for another 5–10 minutes until deep brown.
- Reduce heat to 350° F, shake sheet, and roast until fork goes through sprout easily, about 5-10 minutes. Total cook time is about 45 minutes.
- 5 While Brussels sprouts are roasting, melt butter in large skillet over medium heat. Add pistachios and a little salt. Stir often until nuts and butter are brown. Remove from heat, remove nuts with a slotted spoon, and drain on paper towels. Cool, coarsely chop, and set aside.
- The same large skillet, bring molasses, honey, and lime juice to a simmer over medium heat. Stir until thickened. Add Brussels sprouts and toss.
- Place coated Brussels sprouts in a large bowl, toss with dates, pistachios, lime zest, and red pepper flakes. Salt to taste.
- Serve with lime wedges as garnish. Enjoy!

To learn more about 4Earth Farms, visit www.4earthfarms.com

A Q&A WITH Chase Tatham, VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES, TOM LANGE COMPANY-ATLANTA

By Anne Allen



IT'S NEARING SUMMER.

The chirps of cicadas act as soundtrack to my trek through the backroads of Georgia. Wind whips through my hair and the sweet, bright smell of grass flutters through the car window.

Can you claim a memory you've never had?

Because I'm not there, not really. Not in the flesh anyway. In spirit, perhaps, for I'm listening to Chase Tatham, Vice President of Sales for Tom Lange Company-Atlanta, talk about the company's most recent program—and I drift miles away from home.

Right from the Farm. Just the simple intonation of the program's name evokes simplicity and trust. Designed to simplify procurement from regional and local growers, Tom Lange Company's newest program is increasing access to locally grown produce for the benefit of the buy-side. It's a tether from one end of the supply chain to the other, one that Tom Lange has spent years perfecting.

Chase and I walk down a proverbial road in this Q&A, one that bridges the gap between retail and grower. We might even both be outside of the car at a roadside produce stall. That's how local it feels.





Anne Allen: Chase, I'm going to hop right in because this sounds like such an exciting program. How did Right from the Farm begin? What are the roots of this idea?

Chase Tatham: Myself and Diana Earwood [Managing Member of plain.stated. LLC] have been doing business together for 15 years, and we used to run a program for organics here in Atlanta, Georgia, through a wholesale distribution site. About a year ago, the two of us got together and started this concept. We wondered, what

could we do to utilize local and regional growers with an emphasis to go into retail?

VICE PRESIDENT OF

SALES, TOM LANGE

COMPANY-ATLANTA

There are many growers in the Southeast that have been negatively impacted by larger growers and the lack of distribution and procurements. If you, as a supplier, are off the beaten path, it's very challenging for companies to be able to procure from you, the growers.

What Diana and I have done since September—when we started this—is we've gone on a lot of field trips to meet face-to-face with these companies. We've been working with them to ensure the local farms qualify for all of the food safety requirements necessary for business nowadays. We're creating a network of local growers and initiating conversations and meetings with retailers across the Southeast.



AA: How has your professional experience in procuring West Coast products helped bolster this program's beginnings, Chase? And how has Tom Lange Company's own business model helped bring it to fruition?

ct: As you know, my background has been in the procurement of West Coast products, but the best part has been the application of my logistics and supply chain knowledge. That's where I'm really going to come into play, to make things efficient and cost-effective by mixing and matching freight to be able to accommodate the deliveries.

We're starting Right from the
Farm in the Atlanta office, which
is where Tom Lange Company
handles our Southeast business.
Our hope is that in the future,
based on our success, we'll be
able to take this program and move
it to where we have other offices.

The benefit of my experience happens when we're looking to connect growers across different locations and match them with appropriate buyers. So, for instance, if we have one grower in Augusta, Georgia, that might only have four to six pallets of product this retailer needs, I can also partner it with other growers in Claxton, Georgia, or Savannah, Georgia.

That requires a lot of work within the supply chain, to handle whether or not it's a full truckload for a retailer or less than a truckload, and then matching it up with other freight. That's where I really bring the benefit to the program: being able to keep the costs down for the retailer by filling up the truck on products that they might not buy for a full truckload





FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: ACCOUNT MANAGER, CHARLEY WOOD, TOM LANGE COMPANY; VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES, CHASE TATHAM, TOM LANGE COMPANY-ATLANTA; STEPHEN MCMILLAN, OWNER, SOUTHERN GRACE FARM; AND DUKE LANE III, PARTNER, GENUINE GEORGIA

WE'RE CREATING A NETWORK OF LOCAL GROWERS AND INITIATING CONVERSATIONS AND MEETINGS WITH RETAILERS ACROSS THE SOUTHEAST.

- Chase Tatham, VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES, TOM LANGE COMPANY-ATLANTA



AA: Each question brings me more joy in regards to this program. What would you say are some of the most important aspects of Right from the Farm?

CT: A lot of the people we've been working with, some of them are hothouse-type growers, others are in vertical farming growing commodities that are generally grown off the U.S. West Coast—but they can offer products that are grown here locally. And it's allowing us to bring products to market without having to use a truck to deliver them from 2,500 miles away.

If we're providing local products here in the Southeast, we're skipping over a lot of weather challenges that could stop up supply for our retailers.



AA: As you've noted, Chase, the industry is constantly shifting. So how does Tom Lange Company look at these shifts and see opportunities for partnerships flourishing with this program?

CT: The changes are going to be the challenges. For instance, we're seeing an increase in fuel costs right now. We need to address labor shortages and transportation issues. There's also the disruption of the supply chain from the East Coast to the West Coast and back, as every state operates differently both in their economies and how they're handling their lockdowns.

With the Right from the Farm program in place, we don't have to rely as much on factors that we can't control.

The focus here is on the grower. We're promoting them, especially on the shelves. When shoppers go to a local retailer, we hope they'll have an appreciation for that retailer supporting local companies. In a nutshell, that's what the program consists of. The last six months have been the creative stages, and we've got everything in place for success.



emories are made in the middle of things. They're the connection between passion and ingenuity—the makeup of a company occupying new territory. A space Tom Lange Company works well in.

And it isn't always a matter of going big.

Sometimes it's all about going home. §







By Lilian Diep

'm usually the one who hosts gatherings, be it large or small. When we want to get together, there is one drink my friends request time and time again: Very Berry Pucker.

The beauty of this recipe is that most of the ingredients are easy to stock up on, making for a cool, refreshing sipper during the hazy heat of summer here in the States. With berries at the height of demand this season, you and your shoppers can get on board with the best Mother Nature has to offer by crushing the fresh fruit right in the bowl. Or, if you're looking for a convenient twist, freeze the berries ahead of time and substitute for ice to keep your libation chilled and more concentrated. I personally like using blackberries and blueberries to add a rich color to the glass.

A picture is worth a thousand words, so display a glamour shot of this drink next to your berry display and shoppers will stop in their tracks.

This sweet lemonade is quick and convenient. I personally like serving it in a large bowl or pitcher to make for easy replenishment throughout the night—or week—for whenever anyone is in the mood for a berry-filled beverage.

Because there is alcohol, be sure to properly label it so as to not confuse it with other non-spirited drinks! The lemonade does a great job of masking the vodka, so advise anyone you share this with to imbibe with care, and cheers to fresh produce. §

INGREDIENTS

6-9 oz of your favorite vodka

2 cans frozen pink lemonade concentrate

2-3 oz elderflower cordial

16 oz blackberries and blueberries, frozen or fresh

1 liter club soda lce, as desired

Time: 10 min Servings: 6-8

DIRECTIONS

- 1. Leave pink lemonade concentrate cans out to melt for about 10 minutes prior to making the drink.
- 2. Empty 16 oz of berries into a large punch bowl. If using fresh berries, crush them to release the juice.
- 3. Crack open the cans of pink lemonade concentrate and empty contents into the bowl.
- 4. Pour in 6 shots (about 6-9 oz, depending on the type of jigger used) of vodka, or to your liking, and about 2 shots (2-3 oz) of elderflower cordial. Then, add 1 liter of club soda. If desired, add ice for a cooler beverage.
- 5. Mix well and serve.



$\sqrt{TF} \frac{\text{DOIDOWITH}}{\{\text{what the fork}\}}$



STRAWBERRY, SHISHITO, AND SHALLOT SALAD WITH WHITE BALSAMIC AND AGAVE NECTAR

INGREDIENTS

1 lb California Giant Berry Farms Strawberries

5 Shishito peppers

1 large shallot

3 tbsp white balsamic vinegar

11/4 tsp agave nectar

1/2 tsp minced garlic

1/2 tsp flat leaf parsley

Kosher salt, to taste

Prep Time: 10 min Servings: 6-7



DIRECTIONS

- De-stem and quarter strawberries. Thinly slice Shishito peppers and shallot. Cut flat leaf parsley into a chiffonade, or long, thin strips.
- Combine all ingredients in a mixing bowl and toss well to combine. Adjust seasoning, if necessary, to taste.
- Refrigerate up to 24 hours.
- A Serving suggestion: serve atop your favorite grilled salmon with heirloom carrots and enjoy!

To learn more about California Giant Berry Farms, visit www.calgiant.com

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4EARTH reflects our commitment to environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

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SnackChat By Melissa De Leon Chavez

trawberries wear their seeds on their sleeves for all to see. Perhaps that is why they continue to drive premium purchases in the produce department, or perhaps it's the tender love and care that has gone into spotlighting this category in flavor, color, and messaging. Whatever the reason, these showstoppers are a summertime dream. Here are a few experts to share how you can turn that sunshine into sales...



Anthony Gallino,

Vice President of Sales, Bobalu Berry Farms

"Summer is here, and so are endless opportunities to promote our fresh strawberries at retail. Families and friends are finally getting outside, getting together, and sharing all those experiences they have missed over the last year. The June timing is perfect for peak strawberry season, which has been a little late to the party this year. Now is the time to promote plentiful summer strawberries and feature larger pack sizes to make shopping easier for those picnics and parties, which also provides a larger ring at checkout. We are providing inspiration for shoppers to include strawberries on every summer menu from brunch to dessert and, of course, cocktails."





Kyla Oberman,

Director of Marketing, California Giant Berry Farms

"I love seeing the bountiful buffet of fresh fruits in the produce section during the summer. Strawberries make for the perfect centerpiece to this display with their gorgeous color and delicious scent, inevitably grabbing the attention of shoppers—whether that be an intentional or impulse purchase. Keep them engaged by including blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries in that same display and consider adding colorful signage that reinforces their many health benefits. QR codes featuring easy and unique recipes is another great way to increase shoppers' baskets and encourage consumption of peak of season fresh berries."

CarrieAnn Arias,

Vice President of Marketing, Naturipe Farms

"To merchandise strawberries for maximum sales success, we encourage retailers to display a full berry patch presentation with strawberries alongside blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries. When consumers see multiple berry options, they are more likely to pick up more than one type. Want to up the ante? Stir up some competition by creating a strawberry display contest amongst multiple stores and incentivize Produce Managers with fun summer-themed prizes. We have also seen great success with cross-merchandising strawberries with complementary items such as angel food cake and whipped cream for a delicious summer strawberry shortcake treat. BOGO in-store promotions also help retailers increase shopper baskets."



Kiana (Wilkinson) Amaral,

Business Manager, Blazer Wilkinson

"While putting strawberries front and center in your store is always the best option, pairing them with merchandising options such as champagne, chocolate, and shortcakes is sure to drive sales. Recipe cards and photos are also a great way to encourage shoppers to pick up an extra clamshell or two!"





TJ Wilson,

Brand and Key Account Manager, Oppy

"Despite the supply challenges experienced in the first half of 2021, strawberries continue to demonstrate growth, validating the importance this berry has to a retailer's overall category. Oppy and Ocean Spray® recognize that our family of farmers are key to our continued success. We recommend retailers help connect their shoppers back to the fields and farms in which their berries were grown whenever they can. This can be done in a variety of ways, including the construction of creative and eye-catching farm stand displays, point-of-sale signage, spotlights in their circular ads, as well as digitally across both their e-commerce and social platforms, which have grown significantly since the start of the pandemic."

Amber Maloney,

Director of Marketing, Wish Farms

'Bright, vibrant, and, oh, so sweet. Whether you're at the beach, on a boat, or hanging out in the backyard watching your kids run through the sprinklers, biting into a fresh, juicy strawberry is the ultimate summertime staple. Wish Farms is always looking at trends for new creative ways families are enjoying fresh berries. #PrettyWater is a trend we are following and absolutely love! Consumers are mixing fresh strawberries with other berries, citrus, and herbs to create 'pretty water' flavor combinations. Berry lovers are even slicing and blending strawberries into ice cube trays to create frozen treats that mix perfectly into summer cocktails and mocktails. Social media not only creates trends, but it also drives consumption. It's inspiring to see the creativity and Instagram-worthy photos shared by moms, fitness lovers, health experts, influencers, and Gen-Zers alike. This summer, Wish Farms has plans to highlight this popular use of strawberries with recipes and promotions of our own."



A Closer Look at PureFresh Simmis Fuyu Persimmons



By Lilian Diep

hen it comes to introducing new products to consumers, the packaging is key. Not only is catching shopper interest an important factor, but the messaging has to be front and center to push those incremental impulse buys.

PureFresh has nailed this concept down with its award-winning design for Simmis, a ready-to-eat Fuyu persimmon brand.

With a Silver Addy Award under its belt, Simmis have already enjoyed double-digit sales growth. And, with its season lasting from October to December, now is the perfect time to strategize opportunities and maximize visual presence.

The persimmon is a quintessential fall fruit, yet there are many consumers who have never tried this delectable treat. In our industry, things change pretty often, so take this opportunity to think ahead of the curve with a well laid-out strategy!

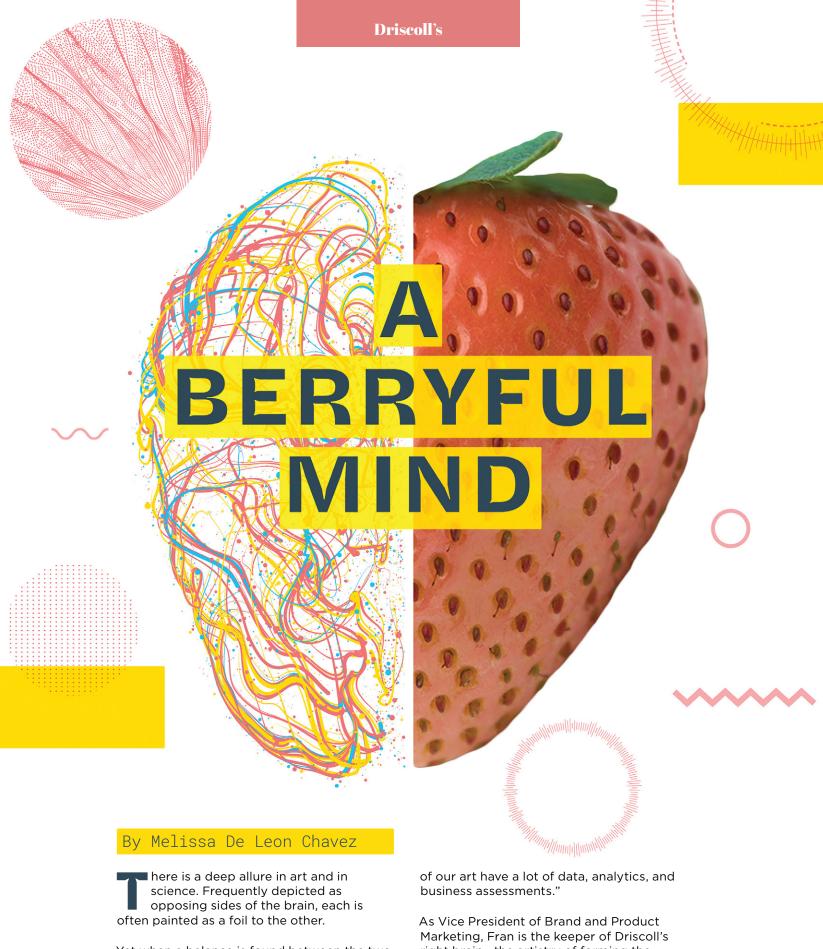
To better engage your shoppers, PureFresh and its marketing partner JP Marketing created a captivating brand to capture interest with fun, unique packaging during the company's short domestic persimmon season alongside exclusive social media merchandising.

Using contrasting tones of purple, red, and orange, PureFresh exemplifies the simplicity of persimmons while purveying the company's story across bags, bins, boxes, and toppers. The bag is eyecatching and appealing to consumers looking for packaged produce, as it comes with a handle that shoppers can grab and add to carts without any safety concerns.

Lift autumn sales and cash in with this ready-to-eat, seasonal favorite, and shoppers are sure to run back for more. §







Yet when a balance is found between the two, magic will be born. Or, in this case, blossom.

"The art of our business would not be possible without the science, and I find that very beautiful," Frances Dillard tells me. "In fact, the art itself comes from science. Aspects

As Vice President of Brand and Product Marketing, Fran is the keeper of Driscoll's right brain—the artistry of forming the company's vision into its image. While some might think that means she is often at odds with the left, research-and-development (R&D) side of the brain, she is quick to tell me that science is, in fact, the most fascinating hemisphere of the brand.







"The art of our business would not be possible without the science, and I find

Frances Dillard,

Vice President of Brand and

that very beautiful."

Product Marketing, Driscoll's

"More than half of what I initially perceived as my job, to instill faith in our brand, was achieved by being backed by our science. I have always been so impressed with the power of our intellectual property (IP) and how it can set apart our product from the interchangeability fresh produce, I think, can fall victim to. So, my role has typically been to spark that magic, but at Driscoll's, I have always felt that it was already poised to be struck," she shares.

In fact, that magic proved more powerful than Fran and her team could have known as they set out to enchant the market with Driscoll's latest proprietary high flavor varieties: Sweetest Batch™ and Rosé Berries™.

While it was fairly intuitive to market Sweetest Batch berries to a premium-berry-seeking crowd, the Rosé Berry had actually been in the confines of Driscoll's R&D department for years, Fran tells me.

"Previously, we ran into issues with consumers perceiving a different berry color as not being ripe enough to eat," Fran explains. "Millennials, though, didn't have to be convinced. When we did our research, this group always wanted something new and didn't care about preconceived notions and hurdles berries have seen with other generations. Instead, it was a perfect storm of open-ended demand and having something unique to offer consumers that happened to align with, of all things, the 'rosé all day' trend!"

There is a tale as old as the mind: someone makes a discovery too ahead of their time to be recognized during their life.
Then, long after they are gone, the discovery is lifted to the prominence it deserves.

Thanks to the branding side of the business' right brain, produce doesn't have to suffer this tragic fate.

The proprietary varieties of Sweetest Batch and Rosé Berry were "discovered" and championed by Driscoll's Joy Makers—an integrated team of breeders, sensory analysts, plant-health scientists, entomologists, and agronomists that collectively work together to uncover unique varieties that can disrupt the marketplace with exceptional flavors.

"There are several aspects of the Marketing Department, from Branding and Omnichannel to Product Marketing, led by Naomi Sakoda," Fran details. "One of our responsibilities is to understand the needs of the consumer, today and in the future, and then translate those trends into meaningful business implications. Marketing works collaboratively with Global R&D and the Berry Flavor Center."

Phil Stewart, officially known as Global Plant Breeding Director of Strawberries but better known as Driscoll's strawberry guru, has been honing the flavor of the Rosé Berry for a number of years while Henry Yeung, a Sensory Analyst, captures the flavor insights.

"The millennials brought us the 'aha!' moment signaling it was finally the right time to launch the Rosé Berry and how," Fran concludes.

In June 2019, Driscoll's introduced Sweetest Batch and Rosé Berry with a select group of retailers who, Fran explains, were enthusiastic about in-store and online cross-promotion with this new consumer segment.

"Our volume was limited during

the launch, so dedicated retail programs were important to drive awareness and trial. By February 2020, the segment was expanded and Driscoll's was one of the first companies to market a complete berry patch premium flavor offering of Sweetest Batch across strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and blackberries," she shares.

Since the debut, participating retailers in the program have driven excitement and awareness with dedicated branded destinations, utilizing clear merchandising and signage that promoted the high-flavor promise.

"The goal was to send a clear message to shoppers as to why they were paying a bit more for the berries versus the core product line," she outlines. "The challenge and the opportunity was how to keep the excitement and sell-through going when COVID-19 hit during our peak summer of 2020. As things began to settle down post-lockdown in the U.S., retailers were once again back on track, welcoming shoppers back in-store with appropriate safety measures in place."

While it might have seemed counterintuitive to offer a premium-priced product, Fran hypothesizes that people wanted new delights and reasons to smile, and food became a perfect opportunity for both.

"I think consumers wanted small treats for themselves. We're talking about something that they can splurge on without being truly expensive, that they felt they deserved, and were willing to pay for the flavor. Likewise, retailers wanted these products in-store. So, it's been really nice to see a traditional consumer packaged goods (CPG) premiumization strategy actually take off and be rewarded in sales. As a result, consumers found a good program and value," she points out.

Another key component made clear over the past several months was ensuring that value translates not just in-store, but online as well.

"We're seeing how consumers behave e-commerce-wise, so investing in a few programs that we normally would not have in the past, like Instacart, Shipt, and Ibotta, make more sense than ever," Fran shares, confirming that this is a very new direction in Driscoll's artistic flow. "We had to double down on such cyber investments to ensure consumers could order from home. Then we had to ensure they were looking for simple recipe solutions. Providing those, I think, was a way that we could make everything easier for customers."

In short, it is a balance between brick-and-mortar and e-commerce, keeping in mind that the food sector continues to evolve.

"Our biggest challenge is ensuring that online retailers and retail partners treat produce as it deserves to be treated, presenting it with the same pride and crossmerchandising efforts we see in the store," Fran observes. "We had some interesting discussions with Instacart on category management, giving the team some insight on the success produce has brought to physical stores. We pointed out that there's a high-value consumer associated with the purchase of fresh produce and what that means to the shopper basket."

While I perceived a big risk in Driscoll's continued commitment to a premium-priced strategy, Fran looks

The intellectual property fueling Driscoll's innovation made possible proprietary brands like Sweetest Batch™ and Rosé Berries™





to the science-steeped left brain that has emboldened her entire berry journey.

We were confident in seeing what berries have been able to do for the category over the last 10 years. We have been explosive in trying to meet the consumers' needs, and berries have continually increased their value in produce. We really do say it is because of the flavor, which brings us back to the art and science of both product and marketing," Fran says. "In the end, people are going to buy what tastes good. We feel fortunate to have seen an explosive rise in berries based on people enjoying the flavor they like with the health halo as a bonus."

The science of flavor is the core reason to believe Driscoll's has a differentiated, branded offering, Fran says, adding how it certainly makes her job that much easier. Yet I can only imagine what it has been like for her to learn how to bring a new kind of life to an entirely different world from where she began.

Fran made the jump to Driscoll's with an already shining portfolio of consumer brands, including

LeapFrog Enterprises, Mattel, and Disney—perhaps the largest embodiment of making an algorithm of art. But she is quick to tell me they are different points on the same brain board, and her influence can be seen not only in Driscoll's conscious shift from a commodity-majority perspective to one of inspiring brand loyalty but in setting the stage for a launch.

Introducing Rosé Berry, in particular, Fran says, was an artistic understanding of macro consumer trends combined with sharing a clear story. To achieve this, Fran and her team launched a "free" earned media campaign.

"This was such a huge success," Fran smiles. "Everyone's top publication covered the 'new news,' from Good Morning America to Late Night with Seth Meyers. Based on product samples sent for tasting, we were featured in over 13 high-profile publications and even won a few PR awards. As a result, the marketplace rewarded flavor-forward innovation."

The strategy may be complex, but her reasoning is simple.

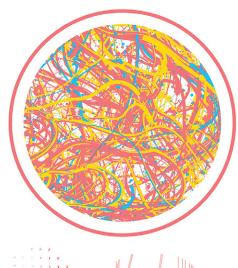
"People buy from the heart—thus, brands and brand loyalty matter,"

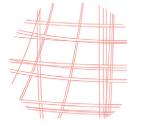
◆ Rosé Berries™, with their distinct color and appearance, are cultivated with
passion, care, and the latest in innovative research and development practices





Driscoll's remains committed to inspiring brand loyalty in an artistic manner backed by the science of its cutting-edge R&D thanks to Henry Yeung, Frances Dillard, Naomi Sakoda, and Phil Stewart, among others





she points out. "Our marketing strategy is consistent throughout: Put the consumer's needs first and understand how we can uniquely meet their needs for brand differentiation. As such, we wanted to own the highest promise of berry flavor, giving way to the new segment of Sweetest Batch and Rosé Berries."

When I ask about Driscoll's commitment to helping retailers disrupt the marketplace, Fran points not to such layered plans but to the products themselves.

"The Sweetest Batch and Rosé Berries are our commitment, and that cannot be met to the fullest without a meeting of the minds between the science and the art of what we do. Certainly, this is a business, and you have to make money. But, in the end, if you're only focused on yield, you're not going to sell the next clamshell," Fran says firmly, quoting Chairman and Chief Executive Officer J. Miles Reiter. "The purpose of the first clamshell is to sell the second clamshell.' If you prioritize yield over flavor, you're not going to last. That has been the North Star and the singular focus of our mission at Driscoll's. And I think that's why we've been so successful."

Thus balance between both sides of the mind driving Driscoll's is necessary to the realization of its vision.

"Marketing budgets are really tight in the produce industry, so I am reminded that our R&D investment in the science of flavor is a critical part of the brand's growth and development. The R&D investment is what allows us to bring to market what matters to our customers and consumers," she shares.

If not for that dedication, there would not have been the discovery of the berries that, today, are signatures of the brand. But science alone could not have helped them ascend—for that they needed the vision of the right brain.

"I'm here to understand what's happening in the marketplace, to bring my understanding back home, and to readjust our strategy by allowing the magic of the science to take off with what I gave it. And it really is magic," Fran says with a smile.

For behind this bright-eyed artist is a team of mad scientists and, together, they form one beautiful, berryful mind.









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Into the SPOTLIGHT



By CHANDLER JAMES



ometimes, I forget which industry I am working in.

Today, the supply chain transports my mind to the streets of Hollywood. The struggle-to-success stories, the small stars making it big—it is all so reminiscent of life amongst lights, cameras, and action. At least, I assume.

I doubt, however, that the Good Foods team's end goal was to be standing on produce's metaphorical red carpet. But, here I find them nonetheless.

"We're so grateful for the recognition we've received," Kurt Penn, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, tells me. "Our goal is to get Good Foods' products into the hands of more shoppers, and the

receiving and working toward will only continue to set us up for success."

brand awareness we're

Recognition, though, feels like an understated term for the immense

starpower that Good Foods has garnered over the past year. The brand has effectively stolen the supply chain's attention, nabbing the title for *Taste of Home's* Best in Show Guacamole; being selected as one of the Nation's "Best & Brightest" Companies to Work For; earning the title of *Good Housekeeping's* Best Vegan Products of 2021; and being featured in *Prevention's* Healthy Snack Awards, to name just a few of its achievements.

Good Foods also earned the esteemed titles of Research and Development Team of the Year and Processor of the Year from other publications within the retail and food industries. Of course, gaining national recognition such as this is only one fraction of what it takes to expand basket share in the grocery store. Having turned the heads of both consumers and industry operators, the company needed to set the stage for an influx of demand.

On the industry-facing side of its operations, Good Foods implemented two major developments, one of which included the launch of its first-ever Board of Directors.



"Our Board members
were selectively
chosen through an
expansive search
of candidates to
leverage the personal
and professional
experiences of this
diverse business
team..."

Kurt Penn,Founder and Chief Executive Officer,
Good Foods



"We were proud to establish a Board of Directors in 2020 to grow our family-owned brand as objectively and strategically as possible. Our Board members were selectively chosen through an expansive search of candidates to leverage the personal and professional experiences of this diverse business team to help with our next chapter of growth," Kurt continues. "The Board of Directors will offer strategic direction on our current business, as well as help shape the future around Good Foods' capabilities, team, and innovative focus."

In fact, utilizing its Board of Directors' industry and business experience is a key aspect of Good Foods' long-term growth strategy. As Kurt explains, one of the Board's most integral roles will be in fortifying the supplier's buy-side relationships.

"We also launched a complete foodservice channel to better serve our customers. We work with operators of all shapes and sizes to bring made-from-scratch flavor directly to your kitchens, be it from our existing product lines or as a new custom creation. Our commercial and non-commercial partners come from every segment of the foodservice industry, from chains to healthcare to education and everything in between," Kurt outlines. "We're a family business, so we treat every one of our partners like they're part of the family. We want to help you succeed by offering the best products made from the best ingredients."

The billboards of growth do not end there, though, as the consumer-facing side of Good Foods' operations has also seen an onslaught of innovation in the past year, continuing to build up the company's toolkit of added value brought to the buy-side. These rapid growth initiatives cover everything from the development of Good Foods' brand image to the expansion of its user profile.

"In April 2020, we rebranded our guacamole and plant-based dip packaging to be more on-trend and cohesive with our other products," comments

Mandy Bottomlee, Director of Content Marketing. "We conducted focus groups and research to update our packaging with new, bright purple

labels and lids to strengthen brand visibility."

Another on-shelf innovation included the launch of Good Foods' new single-serve plant-based dip options, now available in Queso, Buffalo, and Tzatziki varieties. Each of these unique products is seeing its name in lights—literally. Good Foods' newly launched e-commerce website was designed specifically to guide users straight to the product that best suits them.

"Visitors will be able to easily see and learn more about our lines as well as find relevant recipe suggestions on each product page as we've fully integrated our blog," Mandy reveals. "Our new product renderings, along with the recipe and lifestyle content, will better reflect the new brand personality we've created. We've also improved our navigation within the website and responsive design to be more user-friendly."

To onlookers, it may seem as though Good Foods was practically handed a golden ticket when it came to capturing consumer awareness. Even I am quick to admit that I'd be first in line for such a captivating performance. However, this is not the narrative of Good Foods' success story.

Instead, picture artists—actors, writers, directors—at the drawing board. In other words, picture Good Foods' research and development (R&D) team.



'We work with operators of all shapes and sizes to bring made-from-scratch flavor directly to your kitchens..."

Kurt Penn





Good Foods' rapid growth initiatives cover everything from the development of its brand image to the expansion of its user profile

"We are driven by innovation. Our R&D team meets regularly each week to collaborate, conduct taste tests, troubleshoot, and revise new products," Kurt says. "Working within the manufacturing plant allows the team access to fresh ingredients and the High-Pressure Processing technology that all of Good Foods' products are sent through to maximize nutrition and shelf-life without adding preservatives."

Good Foods has leveraged its awardwinning R&D team to get ahead of innovation and category expansion initiatives. The company relies heavily on identifying trends, market data, and customer collaborations, and is always looking for new opportunities to bring better value-added products to meet consumer needs.

Not surprisingly, Good Foods' R&D team has new products in the works as we speak.

"We are currently exploring nut-free innovations to further set Good Foods apart as an allergen-free company," Kurt teases. "We also are close to releasing our Plant-Based Spicy Queso Blanco, which our research proved would be a successful addition, to continue expanding our popular plant-based line."

The supplier's R&D efforts have clearly paid off, as its plant-based dip line has seen growth not just in terms of sales, but through features with additional publications like *Rachael Ray In Season* and *Eating Well*.

"We're always looking to meet consumer needs and provide them with additional flavors they might enjoy," Kurt expresses. "Another one of our goals at Good Foods is to continue our rapid expansion while maintaining an emphasis on innovation and development. We'll continue striving to be the trusted, delicious brand consumers know and prefer, both within our current categories and future ones."

I'd say that goal has already been met. But, as is characteristic of our industry, the process of evolution is never-ending. Good Foods' ambitions were clear from the start. Despite having its sights set among the stars, the company still managed to land on the moon.

So, what is it that truly sets Good Foods apart from the rest? I hope Kurt's response delights you as much as it does me.

"Our products are as they should be: natural. We don't use any chemicals, preservatives, artificial ingredients, colors, flavors, or additives," Kurt tells me. "Our recipes are made from fresh, simple ingredients that are preserved with the power of cold pressure to keep them pure. All of our guacamoles are made from fresh, hand-scooped avocados, so shoppers are experiencing the real deal."

What a fitting line for us to end on.

"The real deal" may be hard to define in some industries. Especially in one as volatile and subjective as showbiz. But, in ours, the substance is as clear-cut as it gets.

Fresh, healthy produce.



▶ MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀

MELINDA GOODMAN

President, FullTilt Marketing

With Jenna Plasterer

When marketing powerhouse Melinda Goodman speaks, she exudes a vigor that could inspire even the meekest of personalities to go in search of great adventure. Raised on a ranch in North Dakota and constantly drawing inspiration from nature, this industry ally is a force to be reckoned with. That is why I had to find out what makes her tick...





- 1 Watermelon
- Chocolate Chip Cookies
- 3 Statement Jewelry

- 4 Skydiving
- **5** Teddy Roosevelt
- 6 The Greatest Showman

- 7 Atlas Shrugged
- 8 Agriculture
- 9 Personal Notes

CALIFORNIA SNAPSHO



DID YOU KNOW?

THE HASS AVOCADO

variety is a California native. The seed of what would become the mother Hass tree was planted by Rudolph Hass in 1926 in La Habra Heights, California

This season's California avocado crop is estimated to be 292 MILLION POUNDS

California avocados are grown on approximately 54,000 ACRES through central and southern California

California avocados are grown by nearly

3,000 GROWERS in the Golden State

Videos from the 2021 California Avocado Commission ad campaign, The Best Avocados Have California in Them, had more than

on YouTube in just one month, and 2020's videos surpassed 11 million views

In California, shoppers buy avocados more often during

CALIFORNIA AVOCADO SEASON (up from 4.26 purchase occasions to 4.87)*

JUNE IS CALIFORNIA AVOCADO MONTH— this is the 10th year for this California

Avocado Commission program

Almost

of consumers believe restaurants with California avocados on the menu feature fresh and high-quality ingredients**



If given a choice,

of avocado shoppers in the West would prefer California avocados***

When avocados are in a shopper's grocery basket, the overall basket ring increases nearly

(from average \$31.85 to \$67.80)*

*2020 California Avocado Commission Market Basket/Affinity Study, IRI Consumer Network $^{\text{TM}}$, in California during California season

**2020 Menu Matters, "Patron preference for 'California' and 'California Avocados'"

***2020 California Avocado Tracking Study

Source | California Avocado Commission





BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ



B LUE ANGELS WOULD FLY A BALOIAN.

"Think about a plane or jet that delivers performance. You're thinking of something incredibly fast and reliable, with impressive engines and enticing colors and graphics. That's us. We're a performance-driven organization here—we like to take action," Richard Cowden, Sales and Business Development, tells me, detailing Baloian Farms in a vivid image that immediately has me in the copilot seat, ready for takeoff.

"On the service and performance side of things, we take our orders very, very seriously," he explains. "We have a high level of responsibility when it comes to our consistent customers, planning for them even when they haven't placed an order. We pre-place anticipated orders so that when they do make their call, we are ready, even if it's for a really tight item."

In essence, Baloian puts the relationship before the potential sale to ensure a smooth experience every time. Getting the throttle up too quickly can make or break a new partnership, but the way this company operates tells me it would rather be straight jet fuel than everyone's cup of tea.

The fourth-generation family-owned operation started in 1917, founded by Armenian patriarch Charles Baloian. The importance of hard work, honesty, and humility were ingrained at home and in the business, building a concept that has been molded and shaped into a multi-national operation that stays true to two things: its founding faith and growing premium-quality vegetables.

"Ours is ultimately a story of a family coming together. Not only are we a multi-generational farm, but we have many employees spanning multiple family generations, too. Not to mention that our employees themselves are an extension of our Baloian family, and that's very important to our corporate culture," Richard shares.

Baloian Farms also works with other farming families in its California growing areas in Coachella, Bakersfield, Stockton, Oxnard, and Hollister, as well as in Mexico.





This combination of honesty, transparency, and collaboration gives the buyer the confidence that when we come back later and say we have the most beautiful organic green bell peppers right now, they'll know they'll be

getting diamonds in a box. That's what helps to build real trust.



Qichard Cowden, Sales and Business Development, Baloian Farms

"These are all families that are just like ours, and we all grow and produce the same commodities during our growing seasons under one label with specific quality standards. Working together as a family of families, we're able to provide a consistent product year-round to our customers," he tells me.

Spanning so many regions, I wonder how involved the Founders' descendants can be. After all, family ties stretch far, but at what point might they snap?

Richard understands and is quick to point out a unique component to the Baloian model. "The family involvement is active, and not just in one area," he shares. "Our Chief Executive Officer, Tim Baloian's daughter, Emily Baloian-Martinez, is in the field every day working with President Yosh Kamine and our people on the ground. She immediately communicates with the rest of us about what the observations and expectations are going forward at field-level. Tim's nephew, Peter Baloian, does food safety and is in charge of the expansion of our facility, and other improvements that we're making in various departments. He is absolutely hands-on and a road warrior."

In fact, Richard points out that as we are speaking, Peter is headed to Coachella for some audits for PrimusGFS, while another of Tim's nephews, Jon Baloian, is in charge of packing and production, overseeing the packing operation, equipment, and materials at the company's Fresno facility.

"And even though our other hardworking employees may not be family by blood, they are an extension of the Baloian family in all other aspects," Richard concludes.

In other words, the Baloian family is a perfect microcosm of the diversity of opportunities available in fresh produce, each part placed perfectly to ensure the engines are running smoothly. Not only are several members helping the company, but they are all pursuing a very different day-to-day experience than each of their kin.

"It's very diversified," Richard affirms. "A variety of people are working in different departments that are all bringing the company together under one common

vision. That's important for our longterm planning, survival, and growth."

For example, Richard points out, growth cannot be achieved if innovation is halted in the pipeline. Ensuring diversity and versatility keeps the company's headings and waypoints on course when it comes to decision making.

"It's a very tight chain of command, and if you have a question, a request, or a need, it is addressed immediately. That type of responsiveness is something that keeps us strong," Richard tells me.

Another aspect Richard speaks to in maintaining the company's strength ties directly back to one of its founding values: honesty.

Honesty, to its core, ensures that you can count on what you are being told as the truth. It builds trust, promises communication, and guarantees you will get to your final destination.

"There's an expectation that when a buyer places an order, it's going to get done as they ordered it. Trust means if something doesn't quite go according to plan, the communication will be there to give them some options for recovery or alternatives so their needs are met. To communicate that takes the courage to pick up the phone and be honest with the customer," Richard says.

He acknowledges that digging into that courage when it comes down to it is tough. But perceiving and addressing a sticky situation in advance, Richard says, does not damage a relationship. Quite the opposite.

"If I can describe to a buyer in advance the potential for an issue, we can collaboratively work together with what we have or look for alternatives. This combination of honesty, transparency, and collaboration gives the buyer the confidence that when we come back later and say we have the most beautiful organic green bell peppers right now, they'll know they'll be getting diamonds in a box. That's what helps to build real trust," he shares.



In time, those irregular production waves will flatten out, and by looking ahead you can turn a challenge into a successful solution, but it takes the flexibility of the customer to achieve those results together.



Top: When they are not on the farm, the Baloian family will literally take to the sky

Bottom: Aerial view of one of Baloian Farms' many operations that customers look to for trust, collaboration, and value





Richard knows firsthand about building trust from both sides of the board, having been inspired to make the jump from the buy-side to the supply-side by the commitment and passion he came to know in working with the Baloian team.

"I really had no idea what to expect," he laughs, looking back on the decision he made 15 years ago. "I came over from working as a Produce Manager for Food 4 Less. I was completely unaware of the incredibly hard work it takes to plan, nurture, harvest, pack, and ship fresh produce. That was the experience I wanted when I joined the Baloian team, and I was amazed at how much planning, effort, and teamwork it takes to achieve success in this business."

He understands now the decisions going into each box and appreciates that Baloian Farms will not let the contents be a surprise.

It circles back to the trust that honesty inspires and, in turn, purchase orders (PO).

"Over time, during annual meetings with buyers, I have heard many times, 'We really appreciated when you called us in advance of shipment. You saved me.' It's reassuring to know that my company had the foresight to protect them. And that protection comes in multiple ways, not just in alerting a buyer of a potential supply issue, but about being true stewards of their PO book," he points out. "If they entrust us to provide them with a year-round supply of bell peppers, we're going to do everything we can to supply them and keep them insulated from shortages. Likewise, they are encouraged to purchase other commodities from us knowing we can be trusted for their needs for quality, consistency, and steady supplies."

In return, Richard emphasizes, flexibility on the part of the retailers and wholesalers is a huge boon to reinforcing a cycle of transparency and ensuring performance remains top-notch.

"We really appreciate and respect those customers that are flexible. Typically, you have what they normally use, and occasionally an opportunity arises to promote sizes or grades which are non-traditional. In time, those irregular production waves will flatten out, and by looking ahead you can turn a challenge into a successful solution, but it takes



Beyond ensuring Baloians remain in the family business, each member follows their passion within the reaches of fresh produce, from field, to R&D, and beyond



We'll get through the changing dynamics of the restaurant industry. We'll find new collaborative ways to get through transportation issues. **Because we care.**



the flexibility of the customer to achieve those results together," he imparts on me.

At the end of the day, though, Baloian Farms never forgets its true purpose—the pulse behind its passion and the reason for its success.

"If we can help and give customers what they need, that's our duty. The amazing thing is, along the way in accomplishing this, we're employing people and helping our community. I think that's what makes us strong. We care," Richard reflects.

It's a small phrase that sums up the core of what has become a vast network. Richard points out that it might be easy to say, but the continued success of Baloian is a testament to its truth.

"This is a very passionate industry.

Emotions run high. I think the more
we respect and care for each other, the
better off we'll be as we get through
this pandemic. We'll get through the
changing dynamics of the restaurant
industry. We'll find new collaborative
ways to get through transportation issues.
Because we care," he sums up.

A true understanding of what's running the industry's engines keeps Baloian navigating over clouds of uncertainty and through turbulent markets, with great connections still left to be made in the future.

"We have some of the best produce being harvested and distributed right now. We have new products in development and some new members joining our team as we continue to build out our offerings to our customers," Richard shares, giving me a glimpse of what is approaching on radar.

As we discuss navigating everything from changing markets over the years to the gnarly diversions of 2020, Richard reminds me it is when the runway finishes that airplanes take to the sky—none so quickly as those in the Blue Angels' hangar. Thus, with a sleek, aerodynamic body style connected to the past, and something under the fuselage engineered for the future, Baloian Farms might just be the vehicle we thrill-seekers have been waiting for.

So buckle up. It looks like it is going to be an awesome flight. §



INGREDIENTS

1 head Pacific or Pure Pacific Organic Petite Romaine

1 orange

1/2 blood orange

¹⁄₂ Fuji apple

1 tbsp pine nuts

1/2 **oz** Asiago cheese

Fresh Pacific or Pure Pacific Organic

Parsley

Fresh marjoram

CHAMPAGNE VINAIGRETTE

8 oz orange juice

2 oz champagne vinegar

4 oz granulated sugar

1/2 **oz** salt

½ tsp ground black pepper

8 oz vegetable oil

2 oz olive oil

Orange zest

Prep Time: 15 min

Servings: 1

DIRECTIONS

- Add a small amount of olive oil in a sauce pan over medium heat along with the pine nuts to toast. Remove from pan when light browning occurs and set aside to cool.
- Remove Petite Romaine leaves from head, rinse, dry, and set aside.
- Peel and slice orange and blood orange. Then, halve and slice the apple. Set aside.
- Place Petite Romaine leaves on your serving dish or plate, add both oranges, add apples, and sprinkle pine nuts over the top.
- Pluck leaves from the fresh parsley and marjoram and sprinkle over the top of the salad.
- To make the dressing, add the orange juice, champagne vinegar, sugar, salt, pepper, and zest from one orange to a blender and blend until mixed completely.
- Add the oils to the blender and blend until all ingredients are combined.
- Drizzle dressing to your liking over the salad.
- Shave the orange zest and Asiago cheese over the top, to taste. Enjoy!

To learn more about Pacific International Marketing, visit www.pim4u.com



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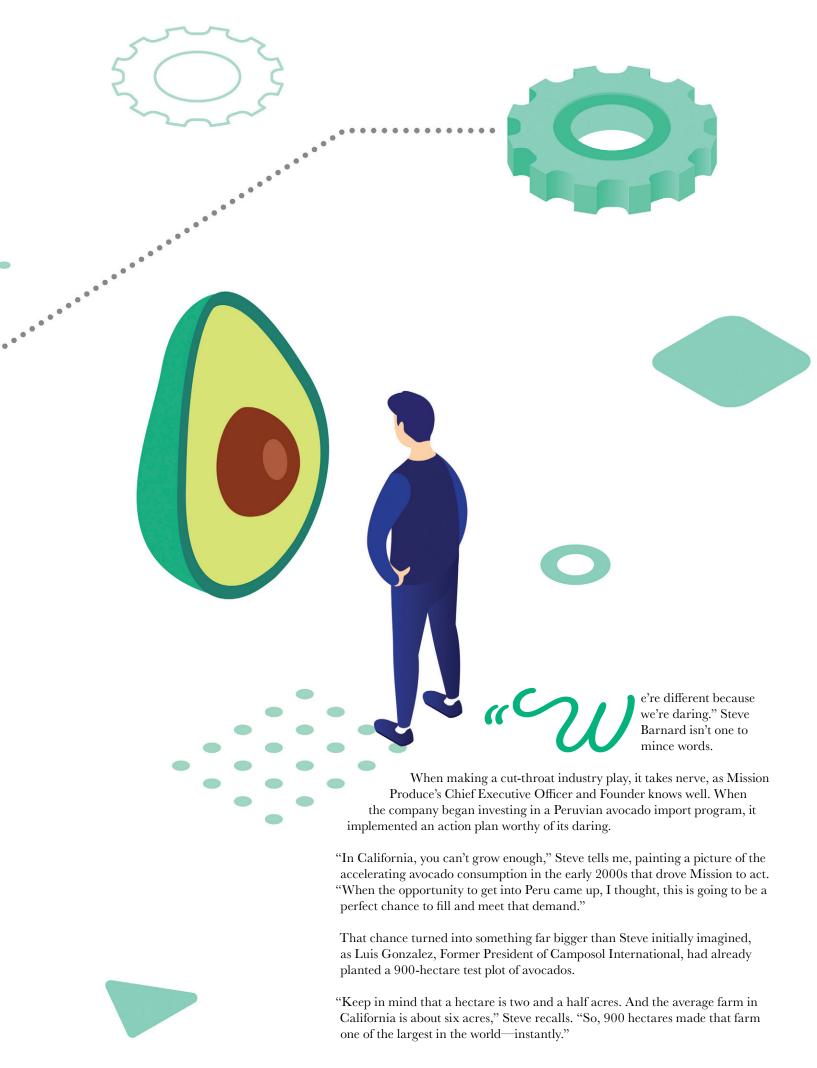
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Steve immediately put together a group of investors and started outlining a contract to market the avocados. Eventually, as a non-compete agreement aged out, Steve called up Luis again, asking, "You ready to go back to the sandbox and start playing?"

Suffice it to say, Luis said yes.

By the end of 2011, the stage was set to actualize an 1,800-hectare plan. Today, Mission controls over 4,000 hectares—or roughly 10,000 acres.

"We're arguably the biggest avocado grower in Peru," Steve proclaims. "And really, it's like the Garden of Eden there."

Coupling the premium growing region with a new supply source has indeed made Peru akin to near-mythic proportions. As Mission sought to cement surety of supply for its partners, the seasonality of the Peruvian program became paramount.

"It's not competing with California—it's supplementing California's season. The weekly average for avocado consumption in the United States is 60 million pounds a week. A big week in California alone could be 15–20 million pounds. Consumption just keeps going up, and we as a supplier need to be able to meet that demand."

Denise Junqueiro notes that this is one of the program's biggest selling points.

"What's really great about the Peruvian program is that it fills that demand. It's

become a crucial source in both the United States and globally. Without this import program at the ready, U.S. consumers wouldn't have the avocados available. And the number-one thing for us is being a source of supply surety so that our customers will not fail," says the Senior Director of Marketing and Communications.

That's an essential part of this story, I realize, that Steve already had the vision to combat increasing demand.

"To Steve's credit, he saw the opportunity to grow and build infrastructure that complemented the infrastructure we already had in the States," Denise adds. "And, because we've built that infrastructure to support us, we have learned to manage this product like no one else."

The Peruvian fruit itself is relatively new, meaning that it produces avocados with thicker, bumpier skin. This appearance plays a role in how to judge ripeness, which, as you may have guessed, Mission Produce has down to a science.

"We've done a lot of research on this fruit," Denise imparts. "I'll go so far as to say that we've partnered with it. From planting to harvesting to ripening, we've been there every step of the way and worked through any issues that arose. Our people are experts in these avocados. We've got the appropriate ripening rooms, where we don't ripen them with other products. The amount of detail, research, time, and effort that we put into this avocado ensures that



Senise Junqueiro, Senior Director of Marketing and Communications, Mission Produce

our customers have the information necessary to succeed."

Partnering with its customer base, Mission also began offering resources to support produce departments so that retailers knew precisely how to market the fruit coming in. The *Thick Skin* campaign was designed specifically with this in mind.

The willingness to dive headfirst is part of Mission's mettle, and one of the reasons why it isn't hard to imagine the team getting their hands dirty to ensure a high-quality product.

"We don't shy away from feedback," Denise shares. "We don't want to ignore that the fruit is different: We want to embrace it."



When Mission Produce began its Peruvian avocado program, it hoped to supplement California's domestic supply





Mission Produce embraces the difference of its Peruvian avocado program all while helping retailers market the fruit

"Consumption just keeps going up, and we as a supplier need to be able to meet that demand."

Steve Barnard,

Chief Executive Officer and Founder, Mission Produce

Another key part of Mission's Peruvian program is its experience in shipping the fruit.

"Dry matter is so crucial to the avocado experience. One of the things we're really great at is shipping the fruit at those optimal times. Not everybody understands that," Denise explains, adding that dry matter is the solid content of the fruit, minus the water, and can be an indirect indicator for ripeness. "Shipping the fruit when it has a lower dry matter doesn't create as good an eating experience and then people start to compare this variety to others. So, if it's early season fruit and it's too early, people are going to automatically

compare it to Mexico and feel that it's an inferior piece of fruit. And that's because somebody wasn't managing it properly. When Mission brings this fruit to market, we have the advantage of our knowledge."

Steve also notes that there are challenges in presenting Peruvian avocados to the U.S. market, which he sees as primarily programmed to favor Mexican imports.

"It's a cultural change, but we're going to keep pushing," he asserts.

With Peru providing 12-15 percent of the world's avocado supply, both Steve and Denise take it very seriously that

Mission is a conduit for that supply. And, as my conversation with both of them bobs and weaves to a conclusion, it's not hard to imagine that Steve's little market push will work to his favor.

Dare to be different? Dare accepted. §

WTF DOIDO WITH Foxy Strawberries? { what the fork }



INGREDIENTS

TOPPINGS

1 package (2 lb) Foxy Strawberries, hulled and sliced

2 tbsp granulated sugar

1 tub (16 oz) ricotta cheese

1/4 cup 35% heavy cream

1/4 cup honey

1 tbsp lemon zest, divided

1 tsp vanilla extract

Icing sugar, for dusting

CREPES

1 cup all-purpose flour

1½ cups milk, at room temperature

3 eggs, at room temperature

3 tbsp melted butter, divided

1/4 **tsp** salt

Prep Time: 20 min Chill Time: 30 min **Cook Time:** 15–20 min

Servings: 4



DIRECTIONS

- To make the crepes, mix together flour, milk, eggs, 2 tbsp of melted butter, and salt in a blender until smooth. Strain, cover, and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes, but up to 12 hours.
- Heat 8" crepe pan or nonstick skillet set over medium heat. Brush with some of the remaining melted butter. Pour a scant 1/4 cupful of batter into pan, swirling to coat the bottom. Cook for about 1 minute or until crepe begins to curl around edges. Flip over; cook for about 30 seconds or until set. Repeat with remaining batter to make 12 crepes, brushing pan with remaining butter as needed.
- Toss sliced strawberries with sugar; let stand for about 10 minutes or until strawberries are softened slightly.
- 4. In food processor (or using electric mixer with whip attachment on high speed), mix together ricotta cheese, heavy cream, honey, 1 tsp of the lemon zest, and vanilla until smooth and fluffy.
- 5 For each serving, arrange 2 crepes on each plate. Fill each crepe with 1/4 cup of ricotta mixture and ½ cup sliced strawberries. Garnish with remaining strawberries. Sprinkle with remaining lemon zest and icing sugar. Enjoy!

Tip: For a healthier option, substitute Greek yogurt for cream.

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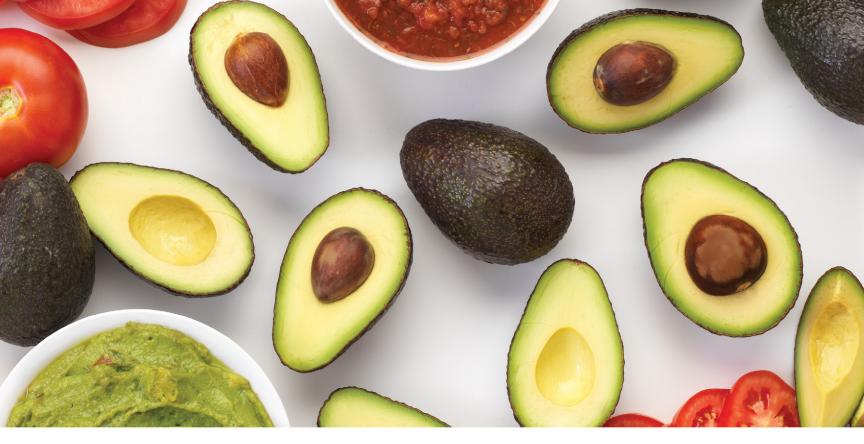






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A FAMILY OF FRESH FOOD







FOUND FAMILY.

This is a unique connection—and one you can most certainly discover in this industry if the place you work for values you as one of its own.

While you can find this popular trope in books and stories across literature and industry, found family denotes a group of individuals who come together to carry out a common goal. It often represents hope, belonging, but it's also a dynamic I find easily applies to business.

My own experience with the produce industry is, admittedly, limited, especially when I'm in talks with people who have known this arena since they were born. But, my expertise lies in the stories behind these individuals, finding the connection at the center of their passion. This is why, after ending a

Zoom call with GR Fresh, I knew that the company's members had this unique bond.

Valuing its own? Well, this found family certainly does.

Given its start as a family company in 1943, the association isn't hard to make. Founded by Juan González Reyes almost 80 years ago, the company boasts both third-generation family members and newcomers who have helped propel GR Fresh to excel in the domestic market.

For over seven decades, GR Fresh has been consolidating as a company, expanding its vision across Mexico and the United States. Currently, it has production units in Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Sonora, Coahuila, and Durango, Mexico; as well as distribution centers (DC) at the main national supply



Miguel Ángel González, GR Fresh Chief Executive Officer (left); his brother, Juan Fernando González, Chief Executive Officer of Growing Operations, Grupo GR (right); and their father, Juan González Reyes, who founded the company

markets and on borders like McAllen and San Antonio, Texas, as well as Nogales, Arizona.

But what has truly made the grower/ packer/shipper a stand-out in the produce industry is its connection to its people. Innovation has been the driving force behind the team, and its drive for success is shared by all.

"When I got here in 2014, we were quite a different company than we are today," Tony Incaviglia, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, begins. "When the core of the team at McAllen, Texas, really took shape, the path for growth in sales, category development, and facility expansion was set."



When the core of the team at McAllen, Texas, really took shape, the path for growth in sales, category development, and facility expansion was set. ")

Tony Incaviglia,
Vice President of Sales and Marketing,
GR Fresh















"Good agricultural practices, such as sustainability, food safety, and social responsibility—those are the three pillars that GR Fresh rests on."

Juan Fernando González, Chief Executive Officer of Growing Operations, Grupo GR

The team he refers to is Miguel Ángel González, Chief Executive Officer; Juan Fernando González, Grupo GR Chief Executive Officer of Growing Operations; Antonio Villalobos, Executive Vice President; and Luis Webb, Vice President of Operations, all of whom proverbially sit across the table from me as we discuss just how much the company has grown in such a scant amount of time.

This group has been essential to building out GR Fresh's operations in the United States.

"In 2016, we started to see some real growth on the sales side, and by the next year, we were further developing those relationships that were going to help us grow," Tony says. "Conversations surrounding our new warehouse in McAllen, Texas, began to happen, and

our team grew from roughly seven or eight to over 50."

The new distribution center Tony alludes to is nearing completion as I write these words—and should be concluded by the time you read them—and is a project crafted in the GR Fresh vision. Headed up by Luis, the final



Luis Webb, Vice President of Operations, GR Fresh

warehouse will feature 110,000 feet of cold storage and sales offices to ensure that the company's customers receive the freshest produce.

"It's a very important goal for us because it increases our operating capacity, improves our efficiency to market, and continues our mission of guaranteeing high-quality products," Tony notes.

Team-wise and operation-wise, GR Fresh has scooped up a veritable bounty of growth. Over the years, the company has further diversified its offerings, laying the groundwork for category expansions that have made it an even more valuable supply-side partner.

One such expansion is its recent Western-veg program, which has taken root over the last two years. Adding categories such as lettuce, celery, broccoli, cauliflower, and carrots, GR Fresh is building out new programs the same way that it builds relationships with retail partners: through trust. It's this element of the GR Fresh operation that immediately called to mind my idea of family—that mutual respect and value will win out. Family begets family, either way.

"Two thoughts enter my mind when talking about building customer trust, and that's offering a level of customer service that is second to none while remaining transparent," Tony imparts, noting that the level of customer service a company provides has a major impact on loyalty and retention. "Those customers are true partners with us, and they're the only relationships that are going to allow us to build that



program. As a company, we need to grow with purpose and commitment and develop the right relationships with the right partners. As we develop those relationships, all our commodity categories, along with the Western-veg piece of our operations, will expand along with it."

Miguel interjects to recall how, roughly 10 years ago, GR Fresh was only distributing its own products and has since branched out to include a family of growers that allows for this product portfolio expansion.

"We saw the necessity of yearround supply and why we needed to offer more items that we didn't already have—like our Western-veg line. Through



Miguel Ángel González, **Chief Executive Officer,**

our grower partners, we've been able to secure year-round programs and provide a wider variety of items to our clients. On the selling side, that has made us even closer to the end-user and eliminates middlemen. That has allowed us to become an appealing supplier to retailers."

GR Fresh's commitment to its retail and foodservice partners is not only to be appealing, but to be the best option overall. With year-round programs that it controls from the ground up, GR Fresh has expanded from its core list of products—tomatoes and dry veg—to introduce fruits, such as avocados, limes, and pomegranates to its list of programs.

"With our new facility, we're also able to handle a variety of different packaging needs for our customers, like valueadded packs and custom packs. The other piece of that is the logistics and transportation, a division we started a little over a year ago. This has allowed us to provide service to deliver to

selected retail and foodservice DCs or retailers within the U.S. and Canada. We have control over the whole logistics piece of the puzzle," Miguel remarks.

As Tony had mentioned at the beginning of our call, it's not all about being the best possible solution for clients—but also for the company's growers.

"We do all of this to be cost-effective and profit-effective for our growers. At the end of the day, if we don't have the growers, we're not able to do everything else. If it's something that doesn't make sense for the grower, then we won't do it," Miguel says emphatically.

Across the board, the team members have more than just produce industry drive running through their veins. It's determination and love for what they do.

"We have skin in the game," Tony adds, and it's this grit that drives the point home. "It's our blood and our sweat that's in that ground. For my job, the return back to the grower families is the most important element of what I do."

Growing practices have allowed GR Fresh to up this commitment to its grower partners, a point that Juan Fernando speaks to.

"Good agricultural practices, such as sustainability, food safety, and social responsibility—those are the three pillars that GR Fresh rests on," explains Juan Fernando. "Our main social responsibility focus specifically regards our temporary workers. We are focusing on better living conditions, access to health services, and encouraging personal growth by providing education and the opportunity to finish high school."

Perfecting its growing systems has come in the investment of protected agricultural systems such as shade houses, hydroponics, and advanced nutrition electronics to provide the effective use of fertilizers.



Another element that adds to GR Fresh's commitment to protecting its people is Agro for People, the company's own internal social responsibility program that aligns with the United Nations Global Compact.

"We are proactive and monitoring ourselves. We're constantly asking ourselves how we can improve the lives of our workers. As Juan Fernando mentioned already, we have the high school education element, and



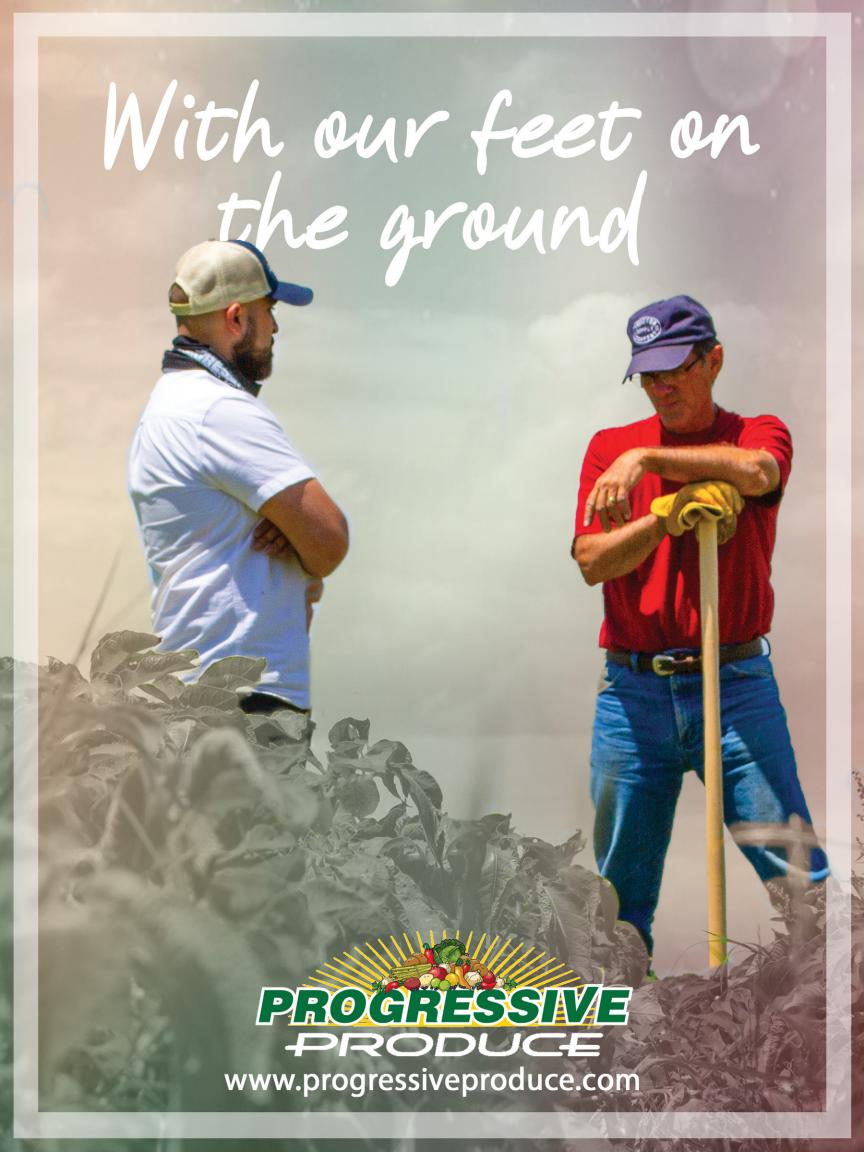
Antonio Villalobos, **Executive Vice President,**

we've added programs for best driving practices within our own transportation companies in Mexico and the U.S., and providing extra sources of income for our temporary workers to take with them back home," notes Antonio. "If we don't have growers picking our products, we don't have an operation."

Juan Fernando adds that sustainability makes sense not only for its people, but for GR Fresh as a company.

"The other piece of sustainability is the importance that we grow using practices that are sustainable in the long-term. We need to make sure we take care of our ground and our water so that our environmental impact is effective for future generations," he explains.

GR Fresh has multiple pieces that back its continued expansion. As a fully integrated company with a strong research and development (R&D) program, a mind on sustaining the future, and a host of grower partners, the McAllen-based operation has made its growth a family affair. This isn't just an outcome of the organization itself, but an intention to bring value to both its people and its customers. 6



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By The Snack Editorial Contributor Rex Lawrence, Founder and President, Joe Produce Search⁵

WE'RE BACK!

With the return of trade shows, conventions, expos, and meetings, excitement is in the air!

I'm writing this in late April, and recently received my second vaccination. This means I'm getting back on the road, along with most everyone else, shaking hands, kissing babies, and networking. Okay, so maybe no baby kissing, but you get the point.

My last plane trip was in March 2020. Since then, meetings on Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, phone, text, etc. have been my only means of communication. All of these platforms are great, and I'm sure our world has changed forever in many ways because of them. But there is no replacement for in-person interaction. I love attending events, seeing my old friends, and making new ones. Personally, engaging with our "produce family" has always been essential to success, and, quite frankly, a favorite part of my produce life.

Back in 2017, I wrote a story about preparing for inperson events such as trade shows, and then how to maximize our experiences once we're there. I'd love to take credit for this "2.0" version of that story, but the truth is that John Pandol, the Director of Special Projects at Pandol Bros as well as a friend and fellow "road warrior" who attends events across the globe, suggested it. Thank you, John!

To refresh, a little preparation goes a long way. This is a lesson I have learned the hard way a few times over the years.

In the over 200 industry events I've attended, I have seen that if you come adequately prepared, you can do more than just survive, you can actually THRIVE.

In planning and preparing for conventions and trade shows, where does one begin?

The end is a good starting point. Know your organizational and personal desired outcomes, and work

backwards from there. How are you, your boss, and your company going to measure return on investment (ROI)? What are the key performance indicators (KPI) for the show? If your company doesn't have a formal strategy, get in the habit of developing your own.

And above all, keep a checklist.

Strike that, keep a few checklists.

Business

While the fine folks of our industry provide a rip-roaring time at these trade shows, they are still, at the core, business events. Planning begins well in advance, and these are just a few of the things you can do to make sure you have crossed your t's and dotted your i's to get the most ROI from attending.

Checklist #1

- Make dinner reservations: Do this a few months in advance. People often make the reservations then fill them as they make appointments
- Marketing materials: Make sure all branded material is current
- Business cards: Bring plenty, and consider a nonmatte version so people can write on them. If someone doesn't want to take your business card due to possible germs, have them take a picture of it. Another option is to set up a contact in your phone with your business information only. Then, you can easily text your contact to those who you interact with
- Identify target companies and/or people and set appointments, if possible
- Bring tons of pens and a notepad. Always be ready to take notes



Packing and Personal Preparation

While appearance is by no means the most important facet of your performance, it is the factor you have the most control over. Be prepared to look and feel your best to set the foundation for a successful event.

Checklist #2

- Get a teeth cleaning and/or white strips. A dazzling smile between masked moments is a positive way to be memorable
- Make sure clothes are pressed and shoes are polished. Get items updated, tailored, or dry-cleaned, and map out your outfits beforehand. You will thank me for the time it saves
- Be well-groomed. Get a haircut and make sure your nails are trimmed and clean
- Pack at least one outfit for exercise—the endorphins will help with the long hours
- Stock up on toiletries and accoutrements. Bring insoles for shoes and Band-Aids® for blisters
- Bring nutrition bars, vitamins, and a first-aid kit. Don't let stomach issues, a headache, or a hangover take you
- Check online for other time savers. For example, I can't live without my garment folder, since I hate ironing. Bose® Noise Cancelling headphones are one of my favorite investments for traveling on planes

Event

You've made it to the trade show in one piece! Congratulations. Now, it's "Game Time."

Checklist #3

- Stay hydrated, nourished, and healthy
- Stay sharp, know when to stop—and when to sleep
- In maskless moments, remember to smile and be approachable
- Know your elevator pitch. Have your two/three-minute pitch and questions ready
- Keep cards on hand
- If shaking hands, make sure it's solid: Keep eye contact and actively listen
- Always have a pen and notepad accessible
- Hit your targets. Treat everyone courteously, but prioritize those who you are most eager to meet with
- Keep moving, keep it brief
- Be available. Don't hide in your booth, don't stare at your phone, don't flock with coworkers, and don't look bored
- Keep cards safe and organized, take notes about who you've met to follow up
- Be realistic in per-person objectives and time-frames
- Set time at the end of each day to review, take notes, and organize and prioritize for the next day

Remember, you are always working at an event. Prepare to be your best self at all times, as chance meetings in elevators or lobbies can be the best. Be realistic with your goals, and make sure to set a follow-up with your contacts.

And, of course, have a great time!

Safe travels!

For our fastidious friends in the era of COVID-19:

As we all adjust to new COVID-19 precautions, be sure that you are prepared to take all necessary steps to make yourselves and your fellow attendees feel safe.

- Carry a small hand sanitizer with you—and use it
- Bring masks
- Be safe and don't feel out of place if you're more cautious than those around you
- Bump elbows over hugs and handshakes right now
- Safety first always, including the plane, hotels, airport, Uber/taxis, convention halls, etc.
- Be aware of hotel cleanliness. TV remotes are the number one germ collectors. Hair dryers and bedspreads are not always super sanitary either

While hotels generally clean between guests, there is a difference between cleaning and disinfecting. Guests who want to remain vigilant about coming in contact with germs should travel with disinfecting wipes. But the most practical piece of advice is to wash your hands frequently and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth after touching a foreign surface.

Friends, we're on our way! I'm looking forward to seeing you all ASAP!

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JORDAN OKUMURA: At the very center of the LGS Specialty Sales' origin and founding vision is a love story—a love of the Earth and the fruits of its labor. Luke, can you talk to me about the beginnings of such a romance?



FOUNDER, LGS SPECIALTY SALES: LGS was born out of a love for fresh produce and a desire to bring the world's freshest citrus to U.S. shoppers. This is deeply ingrained in everything that LGS does. We imported our first shipment of clementines from Spain in 1990, and one year later the Darling Clementine brand

I met Javier Arnal and Juan Arnal, his uncle, who came from a fourth-generational citrus family from Valencia, Spain. Together we pioneered the clementine business in the U.S. It started with just a few containers and before I knew it, we were shipping full boatloads of Darling Clementines. Currently, Javier is our Director of Procurement for the Northern Hemisphere and is essential to not only LGS' foundation, but to our current team today.

It's incredible—while so much time has passed, it feels like only yesterday that we took our first steps as a company. I remember George H. W. Bush was the U.S. President, the New York Giants were about to beat the Bills and win the Super Bowl in 1991, and I was 33 years old, married for one year with no kids, and living in Manhattan, New York. There were no cell phones, computers were slow, and there was no e-mail, Slack, WhatsApp, text—you name it. I did have a fax machine though, and most orders were called in and handwritten. I had to wait 17 years to buy my first iPhone.

It was a different world then!

Jo: I can only imagine how seismic those shifts must have felt between pivoting technologies and how the means for doing business have changed. How has LGS evolved in the world to adapt to, let's say, changes with the consumer?

LS: As clementine demand and popularity increased over time, we adapted our sourcing and pioneered the development of clementines in the Southern Hemisphere. We did this by partnering with the best growers and importing best practices from Spain to ensure our retail customers had the best-tasting citrus year-round. This allowed us to grab opportunities like branching into other categories. LGS has been importing avocados since they were approved to come to the U.S. first from Chile, then from Mexico back in 1997, followed by Peru, and now Colombia.

We have very strong relationships with our partners in each country, some going as far back as the beginning of our import program more than 20 years ago. Our team at LGS works very closely with each partner, visiting their fields regularly throughout each season to monitor crop condition and fruit quality, as well as ensuring our growing and safety standards are never compromised. In addition to Javier, we have our Southern Hemisphere Director of Procurement, Gonzalo Bertran. Gonzalo is a key employee in building our grower relationships abroad, and has helped us as a company evolve and adapt to new sourcing

"As clementine demand and popularity increased over time, we adapted our sourcing and pioneered the development of clementines in the Southern Hemisphere. We did this by partnering with the best growers and importing best practices from Spain to ensure our retail customers had the best-tasting citrus year-round."

- Luke Sears, President and Founder, LGS Specialty Sales



A boots-on-the-ground approach, with team members like Gonzalo Bertran, is how LGS Specialty Sales stays at the head of the pack

strategies and new products over the past decade. Today, we are able to provide U.S. shoppers with not only freshtasting clementines and avocados year-round, but also supply Navels, Cara Cara oranges, lemons, minneolas, table grapes, and persimmons.

Jo: I love the deep passion that the company has for its partners and its team members. Over the course of getting to know LGS, I have gotten a strong sense that you are all rowing in one direction, that everyone is on board with the company's vision, and that seems to always come through in LGS Specialty Sales' go-tomarket strategy. What is your main goal in terms of messaging and translating

LS: There are three things that make LGS successful: hardworking and dedicated team members, long-term innovative suppliers, and great retail customers. Each of these relationships is symbiotic. One element does not thrive without the other, and that has truly put the "together" in the "we are all in this

your passion to the industry?

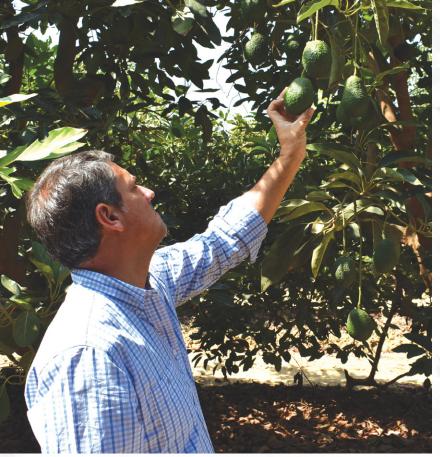
together" over the past 18-plus months. But, we have always felt this way.

We aim to be a leader that can provide value, resources, and solutions to the trade and the consumer. We accomplish this with an industry-wide reputation for innovation and excellence in produce, quality packaging, service, and food safety. Our goal is to share life's sweetest moments with shoppers by providing the best-tasting fruit from all over the world.

Jo: Speaking of partnerships and relationships, tell me, as we look to the summer citrus season, what are some of the key initiatives that LGS will be engaging in with retail partners and potential customers?

LS: We're so proud of our Darling Citrus line and the opportunity to supply our customers with the best citrus grown around the world. Our summer citrus growers have provided us with premium quality and volume for the season, and we're excited about all the different citrus varieties we're able to provide our customers. During the summer citrus season, LGS sources lemons, Navels, minneolas, mandarins, and Cara Cara oranges to the U.S. for our Darling Citrus line, along with clementines. Along





Gonzalo Bertran shows how the success of LGS Specialty Sales' avocado program is a testament to its desire to bring value, quality, and differentiation to its buy-side partners

with our citrus line, we are excited for our upcoming Peruvian avocado season along with pioneering avocado sourcing from Colombia.

With the impact of the pandemic, the industry has faced challenges, of course. LGS strategized and enforced all safety rules and regulations in order to have an uninterrupted supply chain through these difficult times to ensure we were able to provide the highest quality, flavorful, fresh produce to consumers. We plan to hold to these strict standards as we always have, and we always will. Our customers have come to expect this commitment and our loyal consumers are loyal because of it.

- Jo: LGS is a company that seems to always be evolving, keeping its ear to the ground and finger on the pulse of fresh. What are some of the key tenets of LGS's go-to-market strategy, and how are today's changing consumer behaviors influencing the evolution of that game plan?
- LS: As shoppers have a heightened awareness of the nutritional value of the food they're eating, we anticipate citrus sales to continue to be steady. Tapping into the vitamin C that citrus provides, we're looking to educate shoppers and promote the nutritional value of our fruit.

We have noticed shoppers tend to shift to bagged items when making the purchasing decision, and as a result, we have strategized to offer more bagged items and source product to fit this need.

"There are three things that make LGS successful: hardworking and dedicated team members, long-term innovative suppliers, and great retail customers."

- JO: With so much to look forward to as the temperatures rise here in the Northern Hemisphere, how will LGS be sharing the love?
- LS: This summer, we'll be partnering with Brighter Bites to give back to the community. To support students over the summer who typically rely on school meals, we'll be donating bags of Darling Citrus to Brighter Bites to distribute and educate students on the importance of consuming fresh produce.

Looking past the summer and toward the fall, LGS is also investing in its annual support of the Susan G. Komen Race for a Cure. Our passion for the fruit runs deep, and we're even more passionate about encouraging our community to care for their bodies through movement, nutritious food, and creating more balance through fresh produce consumption as well.

ith the trials and tribulations of the past year and a half strengthening our resolve, a 30-year span seems the ideal swath of time in which to reflect and intuit LGS' achievements and hurdles in all its perseverance and glory. As a love story goes, hurdles provide opportunities for growth and cohesion—so can be said about the LGS story and its passionate roots and resulting reach.

With a vision firmly planted, Luke and his team seem more driven than ever to peel back the layers of purpose and integrity—one citrus slice at a time.

WTF DOIDOWITH { what the fork }



INGREDIENTS

1 large Sweet Onion (Mayan, Vidalia®, or Walla Walla), sliced

2 lbs Pacific Gold Russet Potatoes, scrubbed clean, peeled, and cut into 1/4" fries

Peanut or avocado oil, for frying

4–5 slices American cheese

1 tbsp butter

Salt

FRY SAUCE

2 tbsp plus 2 tsp mayonnaise

1 tbsp ketchup

2 tsp sweet pickle relish

1/2 tsp sugar

1/2 tsp white vinegar

Prep Time: 40 min Cook Time: 25 min

Servings: 4

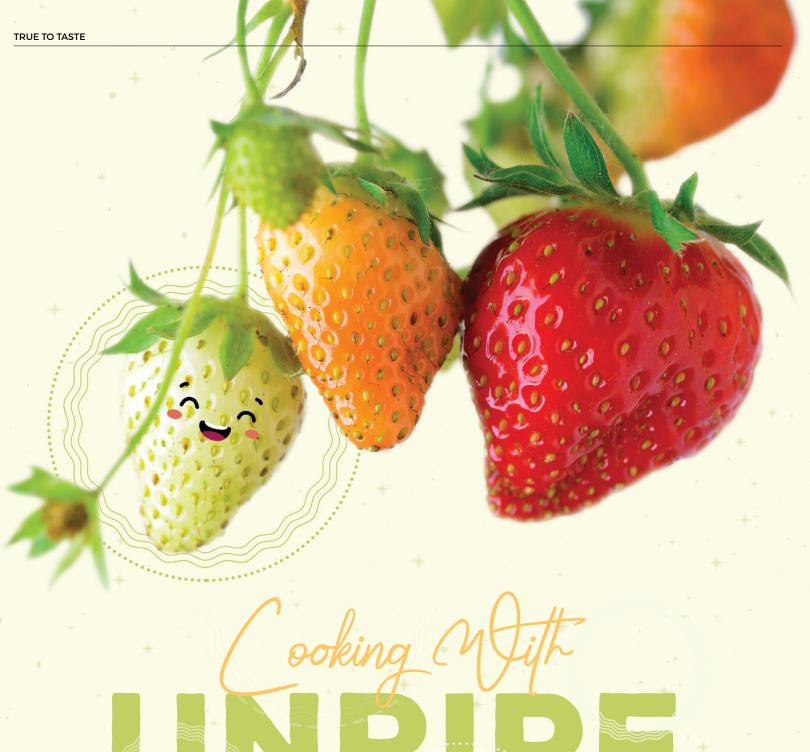


DIRECTIONS

- Heat a couple of inches of oil in a deep, heavy pot to 300° F.
- While preparing other ingredients, soak cut fries in cold water to keep from browning and to break down excess starch.
- Meat 1 the of butter in a skillet over medium-high heat until melted. Add onions and reduce heat to medium-low. Stirring occasionally, cook for about 20-25 minutes until soft and golden brown. Set aside.
- 4 In a bowl, whisk together mayonnaise, ketchup, relish, sugar, and vinegar. Set aside.
- Remove fries from water and place on paper towels, blotting to dry.
- 6 In 3 to 4 batches, cook the fries for 4–5 minutes per batch until soft, not browned. Using a slotted spoon, remove each batch of fries from the oil and drain on paper towels.
- Increase the temperature of the oil to 400° F. Cook the fries in batches again until they are golden brown. Remove from the oil and drain on paper towels. Sprinkle with salt.
- Place some freshly cooked fries on a plate and cover with an American cheese slice. Top with fry sauce and caramelized sweet onions and serve alongside your favorite burger. Enjoy!

Tip: We also topped our favorite burger with the extra caramelized sweet onions and fry sauce...so delicious! Sweet Onions are a year-round item from Progressive Produce. Choose from Mayan Sweet Onions, Vidalia Sweet Onions, or Walla Walla Sweet Onions depending on the season.

To learn more about Progressive Produce, visit www.progressiveproduce.com



ooking Milh

- Havor Trend BY CHANDLER JAMES

n another life, my inability to determine the ripeness of fruit may have been detrimental. But in a time when invention never seems to stop, I dare say this so-called "flaw" of mine is nothing more than a passageway into flavors untold.

All poetics aside, the recent months spent in my kitchen have been filled with experiments and taste testings. As to whether those experiments were successful—you'll have to ask my fur children. I was pleasantly surprised, however, by one implementation that turns my broken ripe-omoter on its head: cooking with immature fruit.

Though the trend has long been put into practice across various eating experiences, getting crafty in the kitchen with unripened fruit has gained significant ground in recent years and can be tapped across multiple buy-side platforms. But, I had to ask myself, why eat something before it has reached its fullest

potential? Then again, how does one define such potential?

And poof! I had a culinary epiphany. Rather than defining a cultivar by its expectations, we have the capability to invent its definition by the way we bring it to the plate. In the traditional sense of ripeness, fruit fanatics like myself are searching for a succulent, sweet profile. But that is only one end of the spectrum.

In utilizing unripened fresh fruit in the kitchen, chefs are highlighting a firmer texture and milder flavor which is not typically associated with some categories. Take the strawberry, for example—well-known for its luscious red juice and seasonal applications. When plucked prematurely, these beloved berries sport a pale green color, and their firm texture and fresh flavor can be used in a wide array of savory recipes.

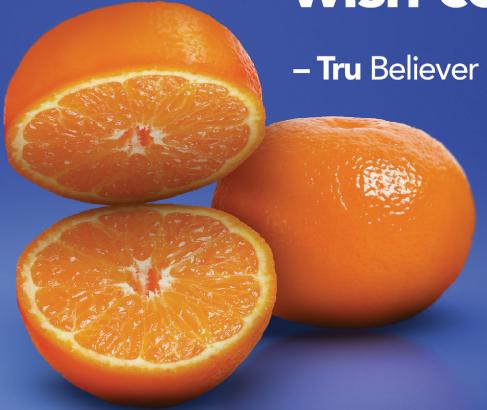
It doesn't stop there, though, as fruits from papayas to plantains to plums can present different taste and texture profiles depending on when they are harvested. Interestingly enough, many of the characteristics taken on by fruit in the early stages of its life are more closely aligned with popular vegetables like cucumber and zucchini.

Buyers—you can think of this as an untapped opportunity for driving up fresh produce purchasing and mitigating food waste. Not only should foodservice operators consider adding immature fruit to their menus, but the concept could be a boon for cross-merchandising at retail as well. With time, the strategic promotion of this experience may even open up an all-new avenue for demand.

Regardless of where you set your own ripe-omoter in the kitchen or on the shelf, it is worth considering how we can diversify the plate through unexpected fresh produce applications. We do produce some of the greatest food in the world, after all!



"As mandarins go, I'm your wish come Tru."



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