

Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

the **SNACK**

ISSUE 67 MAY 2022



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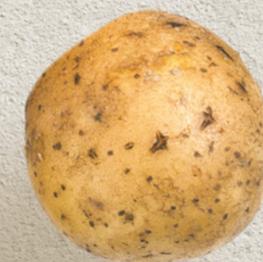
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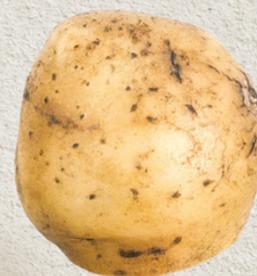
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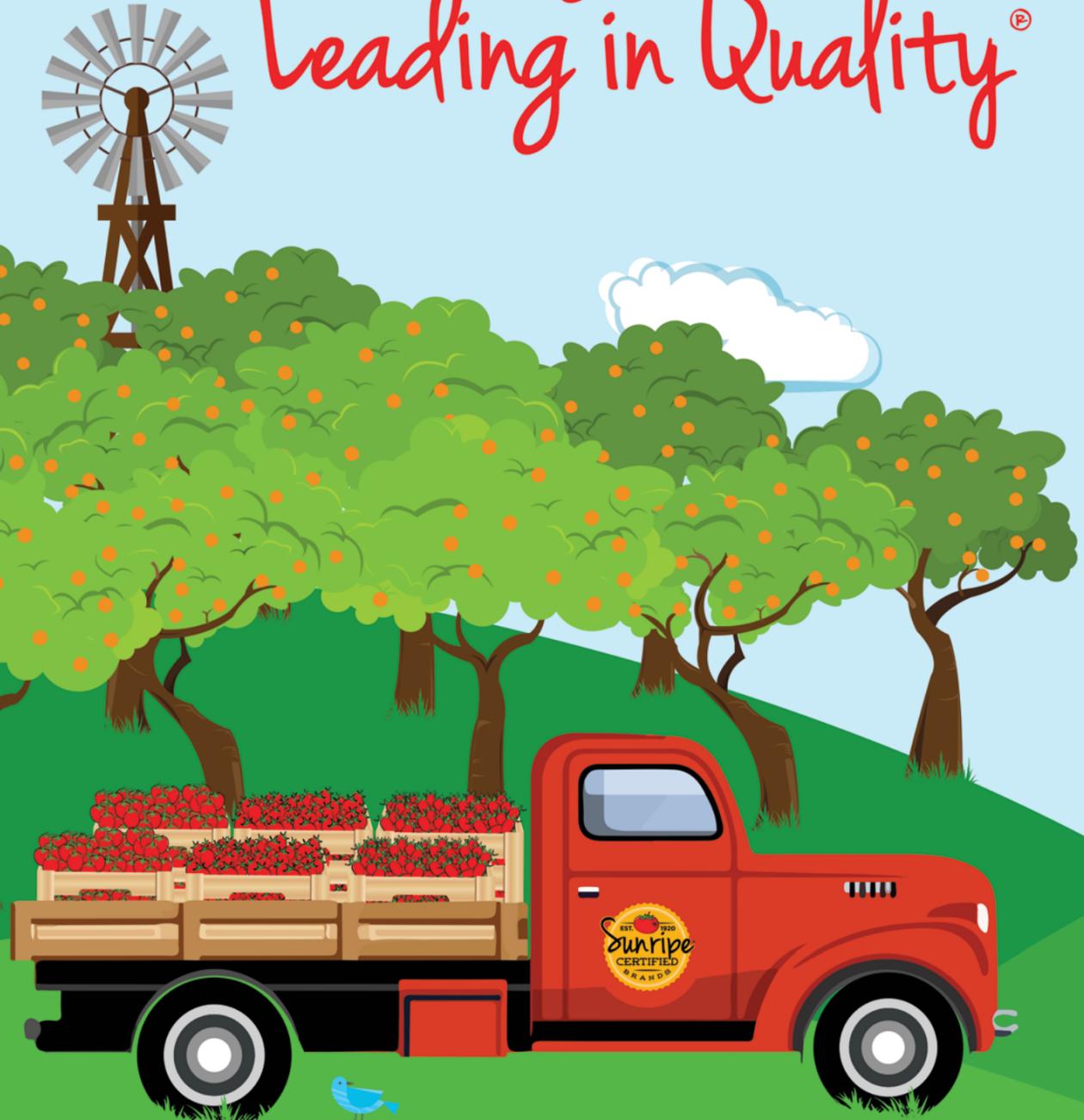
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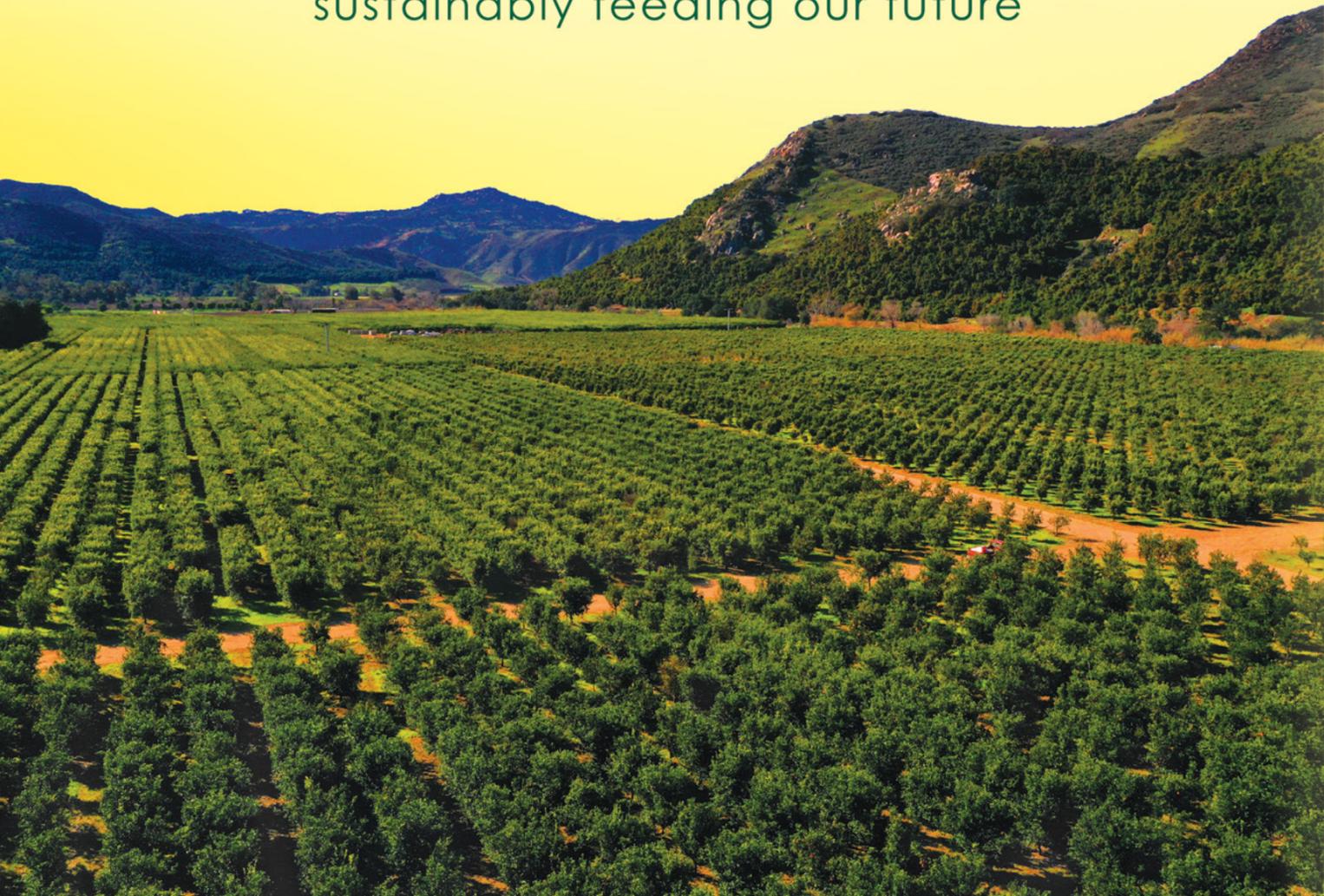
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IN EVERY STORY PENNED BY OUR EDITORIAL TEAM, there are more than a handful of lines that climb off of the page, walk across the table, and take on a life of their own for the reader. Those lines are different for each person, but they are the gems of the story, the precious stones that light up from the depths, the curvature of marble to which we have taken our narrative chisel.

You know these lines because they transform some part of your understanding from static to movement. Sometimes you have heard them a quarry of occasions, but now they seem to hold up a mirror and catch the light.

Speaking to Steve Junqueiro about his contributor article for our May issue of *The Snack*, a line surfaced for me in such a way.

When you arrive, that is when things actually start to happen.

He said this to me on a phone call one morning this past winter, at the end of a long work week. It is easy in these moments to let good conversation lull you away from the idea that you are working at all. The industry mentor was speaking about leadership, of course. He is, after all, Steve Junqueiro, Founder of Steve Junqueiro Associates, and former President and Chief Operating Officer of The Save Mart Companies. But you never get the sense that he speaks to you from higher ground. His words lift the energy in a room, carving away at the idea that leadership is not just about expectations and action, but about energy and intention.

In such a goal-oriented system and society, it is refreshing and inspiring to hear this forever-student speak about what he has garnered from 40-plus years in the industry, as well as what he is still learning today.

Speaking for myself, I can spend so much time investing in the perceived achievement or completed task that I forget a big part of the goal is the path. I speak from the foothold of a young 10 years in the industry and 40 years

on this Earth, but I think what Steve said speaks to all of us. Achievements and stakes are necessary, especially in the pursuit of excellence, and they are a measure of success. But, success—like leadership—as many of our friends tell me, is not an inanimate object to be prized on the mantle.

It's a verb. It's a living, breathing state of rising to the challenge.



We get the chance to listen to many leaders in our position as a trade news company—industry veterans and up-and-comers who inspire and support, who see leadership as a pursuit and a gift, and who live the idea instead of assuming the label. Such teachers we are lucky to be surrounded by. Becky Wilson of Tom Lange Family of Companies and David Lake of 4Earth Farms™ are members of such great company here in this issue.

All make this edition feel like a welcoming classroom, especially when I read John Shuman's words as he spoke to our writer Anne Allen about the gravity of reputation, stating, "It will walk in the door two weeks before you do..."

The surprise and wisdom that come with such gifts are experiences we hope you will share with us here.

And, if our reputation precedes us the way in which we hope it does, you will already trust that these words were laid on the page with a deep appreciation for you, and all that you share with us. 🍷

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

DID YOU KNOW?

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

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FEATURES

RAINIER FRUIT COMPANY

A TREEFRUIT TESTAMENT

While Emily Zirkle has a lineage in fresh produce, it has been her own personal discoveries that have kept her dedicated and invested in the goals at hand. Finding her own path as she cuts her teeth has been a challenging but rewarding adventure, and we got a peek at the map she is creating, one on one...



TOM LANGE FAMILY OF COMPANIES

FORGED THROUGH FIRE

Rebecca Wilson shines as the star of an illustrious three-decade career with the distribution company, taking us back to the screen-worthy moment that started it all and setting the scene for what the future holds...



HAZEL TECHNOLOGIES

COSMIC INNOVATIONS: A GALACTIC DIFFERENCE

With its sights on the stars, the innovator brandishes extensive expertise and state-of-the-art solutions to achieve astronomical advancements for the table grape category...



MEASURE TO IMPROVE

SUSTAINING THE BOTTOM LINE

Timing is all that stands between whether you are taking the wheel or just going along for the ride. Nikki Cossio and her team want to see the industry in the driver's seat when it comes to crucial sustainability decisions, but the clock is ticking...



SHUMAN FARMS

RAISING A BUSINESS

There's nothing quite like a conversation about leadership to tip your worldview on its head, but we'd expect nothing less from John Shuman. The grit needed to turn a business into a legacy is only one of the concepts the President and Chief Executive Officer dives into...



MICHIGAN ASPARAGUS ADVISORY BOARD

PASSION WITH A PURPOSE

Learn how Executive Director Jamie Clover Adams wields time spent at the head of the United States Department of Agriculture and two Michigan ag departments to navigate the produce world and fulfill her purpose...



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Sometimes life happens for a reason, and chance shows up when you least expect it. For Teri Gibson, her career path's blueprint was only envisioned when she picked up the drafting pencil and drew it herself...



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**LIBATIONS FOR ALL
OCCASIONS**
PRETTY IN PINK PUNCH

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Dedicated to the details.

Moving product from farm to table?
We're all over it.

D'ARRIGO
NEW YORK



» The IF List « David Lake

President and Chief Executive Officer, 4Earth Farms™

With **Melissa De Leon Chavez**

If getting to know David Lake has ever felt like “runnin’ down a dream,” you are not alone. President and Chief Executive Officer of 4Earth Farms™ and industry veteran of more than 30 years, here is a leader who loves to keep busy, but knows where to put his time and energy. As shown by a fun batch of possibilities found in our latest *IF List*. Travel through time, space, sound, and scenarios with someone who is a savant of more than fresh produce...

» **IF you had to wear the same thing every day, what items of clothing would you pick?**

Tennis shoes, jeans, and a T-shirt.

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

Grilled salmon and broccoli—healthy, and I like it.

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

Barbecue from Eli’s.

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

My wife, wine, and an iPad.

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

A hawk.

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

Jared Keeso.

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

You Have No Idea.

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

Tom Petty. I’d be playing the guitar.

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

“Runnin’ Down a Dream”—Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers—because spring is a big bet, and Mother Nature keeps you on your toes.

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

The ‘60s. I was born in the ‘60s, but I don’t remember it.

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

Tagging elephants and lions in South Africa with my family—why not?

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

My dad.

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

Superintendent of the National Park Service.

» **IF you could give your younger self one piece of advice, what would it be?**
Buy more ag land. 📍



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WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Divine Flavor Cotton Candy Grapes ?



COTTON CANDY GRAPE SANGRIA

INGREDIENTS

- 1½ cups** of Divine Flavor Cotton Candy Grapes
- 1 bottle** white wine
- ¼ cup** good quality triple sec
- 1** orange, sliced
- 1** lemon, sliced
- 1** lime, sliced
- 1 cup** sparkling water (preferably citrus for more popping flavor)

Prep Time: 5 min
Servings: 4-6

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Wash grapes and gently pat dry. Put to the side.
- 2 Combine wine, triple sec, sliced orange, lemon, and lime in a large pitcher. Refrigerate until chilled or combine ingredients into cocktail shaker with ice and shake until chilled.
- 3 Once ready, place about ¼ cup of Cotton Candy Grapes in the bottom of the glass. Lightly muddle to release some of the grape juices.
- 4 Pull out chilled wine mixture and give it a good stir.
- 5 Fill a glass with the wine mixture.
- 6 Top off glass with a splash of sparkling water. Enjoy!



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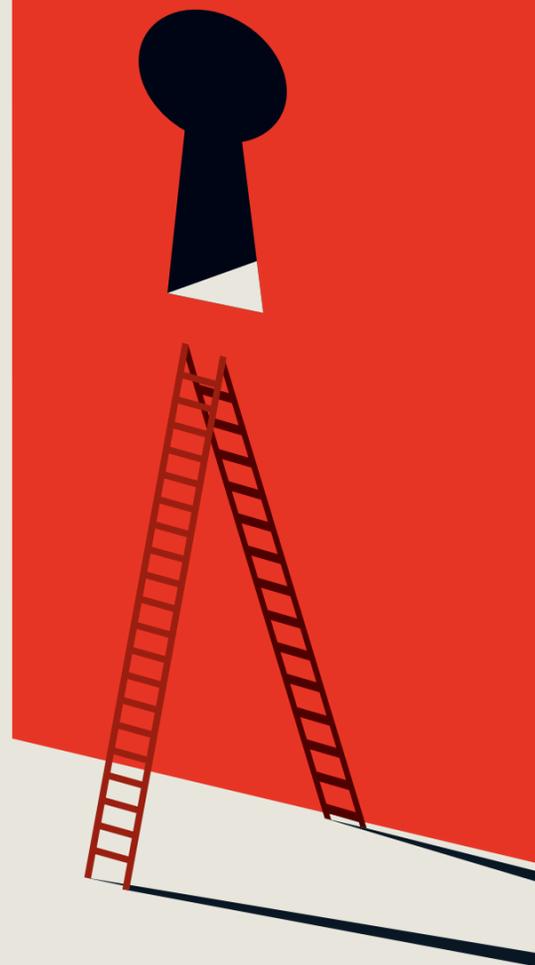
By *The Snack* Editorial Contributor Steve Junqueiro,
Chief Executive Officer, Steve Junqueiro Associates

Being a leader means living as a constant student. I believe one of the most common misconceptions is that when you arrive at the leadership role you have been seeking, you automatically become a leader. That idea is false, and that false sense of confidence can hinder a person's growth and opportunities. I would revise that statement to say: When you arrive, that is when things actually start to happen.

I love growing; it keeps you relevant and self-aware. During my time in leadership, and now in consulting and coaching, I have found there are very specific and consistent areas where a leader—upcoming or established—can truly hone their skills, time investment, and evolution. These areas can be encapsulated in four tenets which are really for anyone at any level to explore; from those looking to build a business and professionals seeking to incorporate more leadership values

into their lives to individuals already in leadership who are hungry for the next stage in how they approach achievement and success.

The four tenets, or issues, of leadership that I speak of are teamwork, execution, excellence, and sticking to your values and guiding principles. I learned these from my own personal mentors and from experiences navigating my way through retail operations, fresh produce challenges, and the human politics that make us great—but can also get in the way of that greatness. I hope they can do as much for you as they have done for me and those I have worked with over the years. Let's take a look.



“There’s been a philosophy I’ve always incorporated: Brilliant execution of a flawed plan will always outperform the flawed execution of a brilliant plan.”

STEVE JUNQUEIRO,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
STEVE JUNQUEIRO ASSOCIATES

TEAMWORK

One of the values I really strive to incorporate in business and in life is teamwork. I think it's important to consider, no matter the business or the project. Great teamwork can never be overstated. At the end of the day, I believe those who execute the best win. It's always been that way, and it always will be. I will expand on execution a bit more next, but for now, teamwork is key.

We're all in this thing together. You have to understand that no single job is more important than another—we all just do different things, right? If everybody enacts their role's responsibilities with excellence and passion, then the team wins and is successful. Every task and each responsibility builds toward success, and if you deem one more important than another, the ship falls apart and, suddenly, you realize the screw was just as important as the sail.

This leads me to execution, which teamwork really helps to define and support.

EXECUTION

There's been a philosophy I've always incorporated: Brilliant execution of a flawed plan will always outperform the flawed execution of a brilliant plan. This belief has played true every time, and I think that's important to remember. Put simply, those who execute the best win. And that holds true in business and life. I think great execution is something for everybody to strive for, not only personally, but also when you're working with your team and developing the business.

The means to the end matter. The project or business is never only about the outcome, and that kind of

thinking is a short game. You want to exist for the long haul.

With great teamwork and execution, you can achieve excellence—a goal I believe we all aspire to.

EXCELLENCE

I was fortunate to be brought up in an environment that really strived for excellence, and I was also very fortunate to, at an early age, go to work for a company where it was part of the culture. Working for The Save Mart Companies for 43 years was such a gift, and I find it is now my role to bestow those teachings I learned with those around me.

Save Mart and I strived to be excellent in everything we did. Please know that you cannot be perfect, but you can be excellent. I try to live up to that, even today, and instill that in people I work with, and also my kids and grandkids.

Excellence is about holding a very high standard in whatever you do, say, or think. I think it's in that striving, that effort, in which excellence really happens. If you are able to execute with excellence, you're likely to be successful in whatever you're presently working on, as well as life in general.

Excellence can be more than just a tenet of the workplace. Over time, it can be an essential piece of who you are. Your personal and professional values strongly come into play here and can coexist in any environment. If you are lucky and dedicated, those values are even the same.

STICKING TO YOUR VALUES & PRINCIPLES

I've always preached to my teams that you should and must embrace

change. But, also, cling dearly to your guiding principles and values. This is so important. In the trials and tribulations of management, you find out your intuition is pretty darn good if you know what your values are. If you maintain and really make decisions based on your values and your guiding principles, things will always turn out better.

For me, these tenets are my guiding principles.

Overall, if you negatively approach leadership, you probably won't be a leader for long.

Leadership is always just the beginning; it is not something to hoard and become territorial over. Leadership is not something you are owed; it is something you gain and continue to gain over time.

When I look back, I know I have always wanted to lead. And it was when I was a Director of Produce and Floral for Save Mart interviewing with the President to become the Vice President of Operations for the entire company that I realized this. This promotion was unheard of—for somebody out of the produce or fresh departments to take on that responsibility.

I remember he asked the question, "What do you think? What's the most important part of this job you're applying for?" It just came out of my mouth, and there it was, "to lead people."

I wanted to lead my team—my crew—to greatness. I want that for you, too. 🙌



Steve Junqueiro is passionate about the grocery business. As The Save Mart Companies' retired President and Chief Operating Officer and current Chief Executive Officer of Steve Junqueiro Associates, Steve brings more than 47 years of produce industry experience to his position in industry leadership. He has remained actively involved in the company by maintaining his position on The Save Mart Companies' Board of Directors and The Save Mart Companies' C.A.R.E.S. Foundation Board of Directors. Throughout his career, Steve has served and held leadership positions on many industry and charitable Boards,

including Chairman of the Board of the Produce Marketing Association (now the International Fresh Produce Association), Produce for Better Health Foundation Board of Directors, and was the 1998 Produce Marketing Association Convention Chairman. He served on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee for two terms and was an expert speaker at an international level assisting the USDA Foreign Agriculture Service. As CEO of Steve Junqueiro Associates, Steve provides consulting, mentoring, and coaching excellence.

POLLINATORS

From the food we eat to the fresh flowers we enjoy, our world turns with the help of Mother Nature's smallest workers. Pollinators help bring fruits and vegetables to our plates, provide the delicious honey we seek, and help our ecosystems and environment prosper. At Rainier Fruit Company, bees are essential workers as they play a critical role in the pollination of its fruit. But, what exactly do they do?



1 BEES NEED A COLORFUL DIET, TOO

All bees require a wide range of plants and flowers for a diverse diet and habitat to reside in. Rainier currently has 150 acres of Bee Better Certified™ pollinator habitat—equivalent to 113 football fields. This helps attract some of the 3,600 species of bees in North America to pollinate Rainier Fruit.

2 BUMBLES VERSUS HONEY

Honeybees are slender, smaller, and are often kept in domesticated colonies by beekeepers for honey production and orchard pollination. Bumblebees, on the other hand, are round and fuzzy. Rainier has both of these bees on its ranches. In early spring, the bumblebees are braving the colder gusts while the honeybees come out to work once it's warmed and the spring winds have died down.

3 ATTRACTIVE BLOSSOMS

What attracts a bee to a certain blossom? The tree or bush needs to do its best to attract the bee so that it is pollinated. The shape, nutrition, and ultraviolet range affects the attractiveness of the blossom! The more attractive the flower, the more times the bee will visit, leading to larger and more uniform fruit.



RAINIER FRUIT COMPANY INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT represents individuals and ideas making a positive impact in the community through their work, volunteer efforts, sustainability, or health and wellness initiatives.

\\ ALL THE \\
FLAVORS OF SUMMER
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APPLES, PEARS,
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WTF DO I DO WITH Nature's Partner® Green Seedless Grapes? { what the fork }



GREEN GRAPE & MIXED FRUIT SANDO

INGREDIENTS

- 1 small bunch** Nature's Partner® Green Seedless Grapes
- 8 slices** white bread
- 1 cup** heavy whipping cream
- 8 oz** mascarpone cheese
- 2 tbsp** sugar
- 2-4 pieces** additional fruit of choice (mandarins, kiwifruit, etc.)

Prep Time: 1 hr 30 min
Servings: 4



DIRECTIONS

- 1** Wash grapes and pat dry. Peel additional fruit as needed and slice in half length-wise.
- 2** Whisk heavy cream and sugar into soft peaks. Add mascarpone and continue to whisk until firm peaks form.
- 3** Spread an even layer of whipped mixture on 4 slices of bread.
- 4** Top cream with fruit. Arrange them along where you will cut the sandwich so that the fruit shows up neatly.
- 5** Fill in gaps between fruit by spreading a second even layer of cream over the top. Cover sandwiches with remaining four slices of bread.
- 6** Freeze sandwiches for 1 hour. Before serving, trim off the crust, and slice into halves or quarters. Let it sit for 15 minutes until it comes to room temperature, and enjoy!

To learn more about Nature's Partner®, visit www.naturespartner.com

STRAWBERRY BERRY

SnackChat

By Peggy Packer

There is something about the strawberry set that lures shoppers in, tugging at their taste buds with the promise of sweet satisfaction that only fresh produce can provide. As the springtime sunshine causes retail opportunities to sprout, look to this top-dollar category to see your produce sales grow. While there are a million ways to maximize merchandising success for the coveted crop, you won't want to miss these tips from this group of strawberry savants...

Anthony Gallino,

Vice President of Sales, Bobalu



“May is strawberry month! It’s perfect timing to capture sales as shoppers are excited about spring and summer peak season berries. Strawberries are always in demand at this time of year as consumers enjoy the change in weather, graduations, events, and holidays ahead. Retailers have so many opportunities to draw shoppers into the store by making their large strawberry displays a destination. At the same time, Bobalu is building demand with influencer support, new and easy usage ideas, and rebate offers for fresh strawberries, supported by peak volume for the next several weeks. Shoppers tell us that because of the great flavor and quality we offer, they will keep putting strawberries in their cart every time they shop. The key is to ensure retail displays are prominent, full, and inviting to capture those sales every time.”

Jason Fung,

Vice President of Categories and Strategy, Oppy



“There’s a new, sustainably sweet concept on the market—Ocean Spray Happy Berry™ hydroponic strawberries. This unique offering allows us to provide a high-quality, high-consistency, great-eating piece of fruit. Grown on chest-high tabletops to ease labor, Happy Berry strawberries from Oppy yield more beautiful berries per acre, use 20 percent less plastic in production, reduce chemical inputs, eliminate the need for ground fumigation, and delight consumers. It’s an item that is better for our workforce and uses resources, water, and land more efficiently, at a time when people could use a little Happy Berry in their lives.”

Kyla Oberman,

Director of Marketing, California Giant Berry Farms

“Merchandising a full berry patch beautifully showcases the vibrant, contrasting colors of fresh berries and catches the shopper’s eye. We know that today’s consumer is placing a greater emphasis on healthy eating and different pack sizes are in demand—offering 1, 2, and 3 lb packs of strawberries is a great way to satisfy this. Supporting a well-maintained primary berry patch with a secondary display is a great opportunity for added visibility to in-store shoppers. Finally, e-commerce representation is critical. How, when, where, and why we shop has evolved in recent years, and e-commerce is not to be forgotten.”



CarrieAnn Arias,

Vice President of Marketing, Naturipe Farms



“Strawberries are a healthy and delicious snack all year long, but summer is an exciting time to merchandise them for maximum sales success! We encourage cross-merchandising strawberries with complementary items. Think dipping chocolate to appeal to a shopper’s sweet tooth, or angel food cake and whipped cream for a delicious summer strawberry shortcake treat.”

Nick Wishnatzki,

Public Relations Manager, Wish Farms



“Strawberries are the superstar of the produce aisle! So, it is always a great idea to highlight recipes and beverages that feature these red gems. However, I am also a big believer that we need to do more to build loyalty and trust with consumers. Nothing connects more with the modern, conscious shopper than a photo and short bio highlighting the actual farmer behind the brand. The more we get to share our stories with berry consumers, the better. We have great stories to tell! Many berry growers are passionate people with multi-generational businesses. Connecting these friendly faces with shoppers shows them there are real, hard-working people bringing delicious berries to market.”

Grant Garbinski,

Product Marketing Manager, Driscoll’s



“Driscoll’s offers two high-flavor specialty strawberries that will elevate your consumer’s summer strawberry snacking—Sweetest Batch™ and Rosé Berries™. These two strawberries go above and beyond delivering on the consumer’s number-one purchase driver of flavor. Packed with proprietary varieties exclusive to Driscoll’s, Sweetest Batch™ strawberries are not your average strawberries. Carefully selected, these cream of the crop strawberries are extra-juicy and extra-rich, which will leave your consumers asking how something so small can pack a punch so sweet! Perfectly ripe and naturally pink, Driscoll’s proprietary Rosé Berries™ offer subtle and refined sophistication. Sweet, peachy flavors give way to delicate floral notes—similar to what you might find in your favorite glass of rosé bubbly! Both of these Driscoll’s specialty strawberry products are available across the country and throughout the entirety of the summer!”

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MAY MVP



HIGHLIGHTS

Anthony Gallino

Vice President of Sales, Bobalu

TIME AT BOBALU: 2.5 Years

By Jordan Okumura

A name like Anthony Gallino's is synonymous with berries and sales prowess. When all three unite, you get a powerhouse produce competitor like that of Oxnard, California-based Bobalu. As an industry member passionate about and invested in how berries arrive in the consumer basket, you know that this industry vet does not just work in produce, he lives it.

WHAT YOUR ROLE IS REALLY LIKE

"I am utilizing my 28 years in the industry to help mentor our team here at Bobalu and provide the leadership to build the company into an industry leader in the berry category. We have an incredible leadership team in place to take us from just a grower to a fully sustainable and vertically integrated grower, shipper, and processor."

SURPRISE US

"I consider myself a coach as well as an industry member. The two complement each other greatly. I enjoy coaching and building teams. This has been a passion I learned from my dad and have found great pride in over the years—from coaching high school sports to cyclists aiming to compete at the pro level, and now serving on the Board for First Tee of Monterey County, which is a youth development organization. Throughout it all, I try to keep things simple and enjoyable and to make sure people laugh."

HOW SALES BECOMES A LIFE LESSON

"One of the great things about the ag industry is that every day is different, and the ebb and flow of fresh produce always has the ability to put a smile on

your face. This mindset is something present not just in my industry work, but in how I live my life. I love seeing that smile on the consumer's face when they purchase our product."

A MENTOR MENTORED: THOSE WHO HAVE SHAPED ANTHONY

His parents, Ron and Janine Gallino

Don Montgomery, Junior College Football Coach

The late Pat Riordan, Partner, California Giant Berry Farms

Steve John, Chief Executive Officer, Monterey Peninsula Foundation

WORDS OF WISDOM FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

"Be patient, ask as many questions as you can, and don't be afraid to work every day. Ag isn't a job—it's a lifestyle, and you need to adapt your life to it. If you want a 9-5 job, don't get into ag!" 🍓

VALUES AT THE CORE

HONESTY

—
INTEGRITY

—
LEADERSHIP

—
K.I.S.S. - KEEP IT SIMPLE, STUPID



By Lilian Diep

The sweet scent of peaches, the slight give of plums, and the stream of juices of pluots. These and more are what shoppers yearn for when they seek out stonefruit this season. Consumers and foodservice operators have given rise to blending sweet with savory applications, and this category is no exception. Give ground for these must-have varieties, and your shoppers will keep coming back...



APRICOT

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

Color: Soft yellow and orange tones, red hints

Season: End of Apr–Mid-Aug



APRIUM*

*60%–75% Apricot, 25%–40% Plum

Flavor: Hearty flesh with abundant nectar

Color: Soft yellow and orange notes

Season: End of Apr–May, Jul



DONUT PEACH

Flavor: Similar to white peach

Color: Varies

Season: May

RED AND BLACK PLUMS

Flavor: Juicy and sweet

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

Season: Apr–End of Nov



PLUOT (PLUMCOT*)

*60%–75% Plum, 25%–40% Apricot

Flavor: Fusion of flavor by variety

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

Season: May–Oct



WHITE NECTARINE

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

Color: Red and orange, with white and beige coloring

Season: May–Mid-Sep



WHITE PEACH

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

Color: White with a red or pink blush

Season: May–End of Oct



YELLOW NECTARINE

Flavor: Bright, sweet-tart with a smooth nectar

Color: Yellow with a red and orange blush

Season: End of Apr–Sep



YELLOW PEACH

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

Color: Red and orange with yellow undertones

Season: Apr–End of Oct

Source: Information provided by *AndNowUKnow* and *The Snack* stonefruit contributors

WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Mucci Farms Naked Leaf™ Living Butter Lettuce ?



PICKLED VEGGIE LETTUCE CUPS

INGREDIENTS

2 heads Mucci Farms Naked Leaf™ Living Butter Lettuce
12–15 Mucci Farms Blended Flavours™ Tomatoes, halved
Mucci Farms Naked Leaf Living Basil leaves, to garnish
3 grilled chicken breasts, cut into thin strips
3 tbsp tahini
Salt and pepper, to taste

QUICK PICKLES

4 Mucci Farms Sweet-to-the-Point™ Mini Pointed Peppers, thinly sliced into rings
1 Mucci Farms CuteCumbers™ Snack-Sized Cucumber, thinly sliced crosswise
1 small skin-on yellow beet, shaved or thinly sliced crosswise
3 radishes, thinly sliced crosswise
¾ cup white wine vinegar
½ cup water

¼ cup lime juice
2 tsp kosher salt
1 tsp sugar
½ tsp dried oregano

Prep Time: 20 min
Cook Time: 15 min
Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1 To make pickles, place sliced peppers, cucumbers, beets, and radishes in a mason jar or tall heatproof glass. In a small saucepan, combine vinegar, water, lime juice, salt, sugar, and oregano. Bring to a simmer, stirring over high heat. Pour over vegetables and let sit 10–15 minutes.
- 2 To build lettuce cups, place 2–3 strips of chicken on each medium or large lettuce leaf. Drizzle lightly with tahini and top with tomatoes and pickles.
- 3 Garnish cups with basil and season with salt and pepper to taste. Enjoy!



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MENTORS IN THE MAKING

Nicole Hulstein

BY CHANDLER JAMES

RECENTLY HEARD A FITNESS COACH SAY that anyone who actively exercises is considered an athlete. I've thought myself a non-athlete since I hung up my soccer cleats in high school; but, from this new perspective, jumping on the Peloton® every day after work certainly counts.

It was one of those rare moments when you become aware of a narrow-minded thinking pattern and see the world in a new light.

Athleticism, in fact, can be applied to many forms of fitness—mental fitness being one facet of this industry that continues to amaze me. In that vein, I cannot think of a more exemplary athlete than Nicole Hulstein, Produce Category Manager at Food Lion.

“Being an athlete from a young age taught me many lifelong skills, like courage, teamwork, integrity, and humor,” Nicole tells me. “I am innovative and bold; very open-minded and drive change; and lead my team with encouragement, care, and collaboration. I also manage to keep my competitive nature in check by exhibiting humbleness and the ability to not take myself too seriously.”

When it comes to her role at Food Lion, Nicole relays that many of the company's core values align closely with her own. She began her professional career at Food Lion right out of college when she landed an assistant buying role in the produce category.

“My mother worked for Food Lion for years, so I was very familiar with the organization,” says Nicole. “I knew that I needed a job, but was so fortunate to find an industry instead! It was fast-paced—which matched my temperament—and clearly there was much to be learned, so I was hooked. I

progressed from Assistant to Buyer, a role I held for many years.”

Though Nicole did take on a Category Analyst position for the snack category for about 18 months, her heart longed for the produce world, and she jumped at the opportunity to return. On her way back to fresh, she has held roles as Assistant Category Manager, Merchandising Analyst, and Category Manager at Food Lion. She also briefly managed the fruit category for The Fresh Market from 2016–2017.

During her many years with Food Lion, Nicole grew close with the company's Chris Dove, Vice President of Produce Category and Merchandising, working for him in different roles over the years.

“Chris helped me find my place in this industry by believing in my ability to do more. With each role progression, he was very honest with the assessment of my existing skill sets as well as those that will benefit me as I grow professionally,” Nicole explains. “Even when faced with my decision to leave his team for another, he remained a steadfast supporter and leader that I admire.”

Outside of the retail walls, Nicole has been eager to connect with those bringing fresh produce from the field to the shelf. She found a steadfast mentor in Craig Casca, Chief Marketing Officer at GEM-Pack Berries, with whom she has worked closely for many seasons.

“Craig is a remarkable thought partner and encourager. I got

to know him first as a business partner when I was buying at the berry desk, and was immediately impressed with his ability to know exactly what was going on in the industry and his unwavering honesty,” Nicole notes. “Craig was patient with me and has always been an incredibly dependable partner. We create programs together and strategize to develop opportunities. We are still business partners, but have also become wonderful friends. His support has been paramount as I've navigated my career.”

Teri Miller, Senior Category Manager at The Fresh Market, took Nicole under her wing many years ago by providing a developmental opportunity to work with her on the Produce Traceability Initiative. Later, she invited Nicole to serve on the Southern Roots Female Leadership Committee of the Southeast Produce Council.

“Teri has been a constant in my professional career. She has been my manager, my teacher, my peer, and my friend! She was a sounding board when I was facing career choices and a proponent behind closed doors. I'm thankful for Teri and the role she has played in my life,” Nicole outlines.



Nicole Hulstein,
Produce Category Manager,
Food Lion

That flame of a young athlete still burns bright within Nicole. As she continues to grow in this industry, she strives to learn as much as possible. Though she has been doing this for quite some time, she believes there is still much to learn.

“I am so thankful for these mentors and many others for the roles they have played in shaping my personal and professional life,” Nicole concludes. “I am humbled to be featured in this segment; it is my honor to help support those coming after me as so many have done for me. I have not thought of myself as a mentor, but rather as someone who has a kind word or experience that can make someone else's path a little clearer.”

Based on the overwhelming adoration provided by her mentors, I'd say Nicole is fulfilling that vision tenfold. Like the captain of a team, she is leaning on her mental fitness to lead her fellow players to victory, and it is a beautiful thing to watch unfold. \$

THE MENTORS >
Here is what they have to say about Nicole...



Chris Dove,
Vice President of Produce
Category and Merchandising,
Food Lion

“I have had the pleasure of working with Nicole for about 10 years. When we started working together, the first trait I noticed about her leadership is that she always brings a positive approach, no matter how challenging the situation. Fast forward to today, her positive leadership style has been a blessing to our team during these difficult times brought on by the pandemic. Nicole never meets a stranger. She's established relationships across our business that helped grow her knowledge and mature into what I think of as a produce industry expert. She graciously gives her time to serve in our communities and our industry. Examples range from support of local Food Lion Feeds events to serving on the Southeastern Produce Council committee Southern Roots. What I am most excited about for Nicole is seeing her continue her journey on growing both personally and professionally along with the positive impacts she will have on others around her.”



Craig Casca,
Chief Marketing Officer,
GEM-Pack Berries

“I met Nicole in 2007 when she came to California to tour our strawberry fields. At the time, she was the buyer for Food Lion. Nicole was learning from the ground up and, as we did our field tour, she asked some great questions. We were friends right away because she listened and wanted to work together to be successful in selling strawberries. Since that day, we have discussed many issues, and each time we come up with a solution that is good for both production and retail. We have put together many successful promotions by communicating constantly. I am honored to be included as one of her mentors. The produce industry is better with Nicole in it.”



Teri Miller,
Senior Category Manager,
The Fresh Market

“Anyone who knows Nicole knows she is extremely passionate about produce, but just as passionate about doing the right thing. Watching her grow into her own has been a pure joy; she is a produce professional, tough negotiator, and, at the same time, fun to be around. Nicole cares deeply that all around her have the opportunity for success. She listens intently. That is a huge skillset—investing time to listen and then provide the feedback or guidance that is unique to the person and the situation. Nicole will tell you that I'm her mentor, but truth be known, she helps me a great deal to see through situations. My advice to others is, don't be fooled by her smile nor her laugh; her words and heart are very powerful.”

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SWEET MANGO SALSA

Recipe adapted from Cookie & Kate

INGREDIENTS

- 3 mangoes, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- ½ cup red onion, chopped
- ⅓ cup cilantro, chopped
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and minced
- 1 large lime, juiced
- ¼ tsp salt

Prep Time: 15 min
Chill Time: 10 min
Servings: 3 cups

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Combine mango, bell pepper, onion, cilantro, and jalapeño.
- 2 Drizzle with lime juice.
- 3 Season to taste with salt and stir.
- 4 For best flavor, let the salsa rest for 10 minutes or longer. Serve and enjoy!

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USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture

F O R G E D
T H R O U G H
F I R E

By Jenna Plasterer

FADE IN:

INT. TOM LANGE FAMILY OF COMPANIES - DAY - 1991

Smoke fills the room as men sit around desks, the cacophony of their negotiations and discussions flooding through the open doorway.

A young Rebecca Wilson, Becky, as she's known to those in the industry, walks through the doors of Tom Lange Family of Companies for the first time. The overwhelming crescendo of activity strikes her, but a gleam of inspiration flashes in her eyes as she takes the first steps, unbeknownst to her, toward a three-decades-long career.

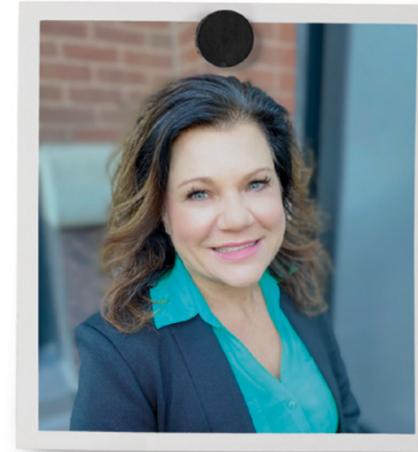
FADE OUT TO THE PRESENT DAY...

Becky narrates her first day on the job at Tom Lange Family of Companies, and it is like a movie scene playing out before me. Now the Vice President of Operations, back in 1991, she was a college student and temp worker assigned to fill in at the distribution company she would someday help lead.

"I walked into a loud room with these men that had two phones to their ears working as if they were racing to the finish line," she adds. "I had no idea where I had landed."

The answer is where she would find her stride, working the next 30 years to hone her skills and make a name for herself in produce. But first, she worked as an Administrative Assistant as she finished her education, learning the ropes and taking on the hurdles of a demanding, fast-paced industry.

"I remember crying several times after being yelled at by angry drivers or customers. I had to be a quick study because you were told something once, and then it was up to you to get things done. I learned problem-solving early on. Either I was a glutton for punishment or I had caught the produce bug because,



Rebecca Wilson,
Vice President of Operations,
Tom Lange Family of Companies

after six months, I joined the company full-time," Becky quips.

After receiving her degree, Becky found herself entranced by the world of fresh produce and decided to keep working her way up through Tom Lange Family of Companies. From her inaugural role as Administrative Assistant, she became PACA Claims Coordinator, then Marketing Coordinator, followed by Assistant Vice President, each rung of the ladder taking her one step closer to where she stands now.

In her current position, Becky has a crucial stake in the company's daily operations. Not only does she play a part in the strategic planning of its branding efforts on a national and international scale, but she also represents the distribution maven at industry events, handles public relations and marketing initiatives, acts as corporate liaison to its sales offices, oversees food safety, and is Chair of the Tom Lange Charitable Foundation. In other words, she has come a long way from her first day walking into what seemed like chaos.

Besides taking on new responsibilities, Becky says the past 31 years at Tom Lange Family of Companies have transformed her into a more decisive leader and person.

"I have thicker skin than I did when I walked through that door in 1991," she says. "I am comfortable in my decisions, and I realize addressing problems when they arise creates a stronger workplace. I also quickly learned to be an active listener, which has helped with my interoffice relationships and strengthened my communication skills."

Harnessing these sharpened talents and applying them to her everyday life,

"Our industry has some of **the most passionate people**, many of whom I consider friends. When I speak about this to family and friends, it is foreign to them because they aren't part of the trade, but those of us that are understand that, at the end of the day, **the produce industry always comes together.**"

Rebecca Wilson,
Vice President of Operations, Tom Lange Family of Companies



“When I started with the company, I always heard there wasn’t room for ‘middlemen’ such as Tom Lange Family of Companies. However, through the years, we have continued to fill the void in the supply chain. **That approach has served us well for over 60 years,** and I think it will continue to drive us forward.”



Becky also imparts how she continues to roll with the quick punches the industry can often deliver, constantly evolving her approach to whatever needs to be done with a can-do attitude, a lot of elbow grease, and a little bit of humor.

“I start every week with my to-do list; however, regardless of the day, I walk into some other fire that has been set and needs to be put out. Some days, I cannot believe the issues that arise,” Becky laughs. “But, when everything settles down, I smile and think, ‘Tomorrow is another day; maybe I can tackle that to-do list then.’”

With this newfangled mindset and dedication to Tom Lange Family of Companies, as well as the industry itself, Becky has made a name for herself and has the accolades to prove it.

In 2007, she earned a *Produce Business* 40 Under Forty Award and over the years has been named to a plethora of Boards and advisory committees, including the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee, United Fresh Produce Association Distributor Board, United Fresh Leadership Alumni Board, and more.

While serving on these Boards and committees, Becky experienced some of the proudest moments in her career.

“Being a member of the USDA Fruit and Vegetable Advisory Committee, we ensured government programs offered fresh fruits and vegetables to those in need, and it was very fulfilling. Also, while working with United Fresh, I was able to help promote Salad Bars to Schools throughout the state of Illinois, guaranteeing that kids had access to nutritious meals. Visiting those schools was so rewarding,” Becky imparts. “To top off my list of treasured achievements, I became the first female Board Member of Tom Lange Family of Companies.”

In addition to these monumental successes on her resume and building her repertoire of talents, Becky’s tenure with Tom Lange Family of Companies has enabled her to discover the unique relationships fostered in the fresh produce industry through a shared

mission to nourish a nation. Despite the snags and possible frustrations that may pop up, she has developed an admiration for her role and the connections she has forged through the fire.

“Knowing the benefits of fresh produce, it is gratifying to realize you play a part in delivering fruits and veggies that nourish consumers across the country,” reflects Becky. “Our industry has some of the most passionate people, many of whom I consider friends. When I speak about this to family and friends, it is foreign to them because they aren’t part of the trade, but those of us who are understand that, at the end of the day, the produce industry always comes together.”

However, it is not only the people in fresh produce that keep her going. Her family also continues to refresh and inspire her.

“I love spending time with my children,” she joyfully explains, showing pictures of them on a trip to Nashville, Tennessee. “When they were younger, work/life balance was unheard of, and I missed some of their childhood. Now that they are adults, I prioritize things a bit differently.”

And when Becky is not with her family, she travels the world in search of the best concerts.

“I love all genres of music, but alternative music tops my list—U2 is my favorite band, and I have followed them everywhere,” she describes. “In December of this year, I will see The Cure in Dublin, Ireland, which promises to be epic. While I have traveled near and far to listen to music, seeing a show at Red Rocks Amphitheatre is number one on my bucket list.”

I can already imagine the soundtrack for a movie made of Becky’s life in fresh produce. And, as we cut from the present day to the future of Tom Lange Family of Companies and her career, Becky offers up some ideas of what those scenes might look like.

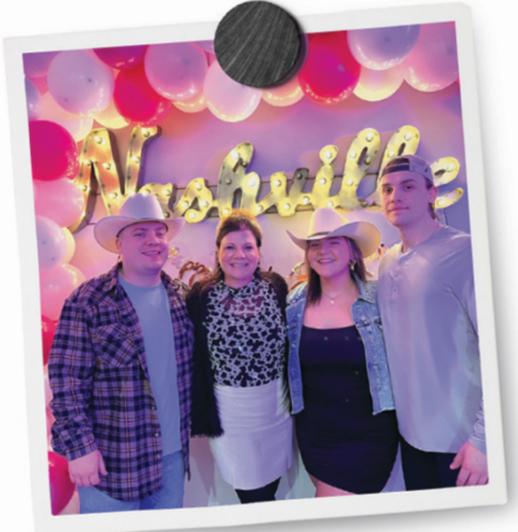
“When I started with the company, I always heard there wasn’t room for ‘middlemen’ such as Tom Lange Family of Companies. However, through the years, we have continued to fill the void in the supply chain. That approach has served us well for over 60 years, and I think it will continue to drive us forward,” states Becky. “As for me, I hope to keep bringing something to the organization until I can’t, and then you will find me living a quiet life listening to music on a beach somewhere.”

Can’t you picture it?



Top: Becky with her sister Amy Dickerson who has worked alongside her at Tom Lange Family of Companies for 25 years

Bottom: Becky spending quality time with her children Tommy Wilson, Grace Wilson, and Connor Holliday in Nashville, Tennessee



EXT. TOM LANGE FAMILY OF COMPANIES - SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE

The camera pans to Becky Wilson as she opens and walks through the door of Tom Lange Family of Companies for the last time. This is but one of many doors she has opened in her tenure.

Instead of pausing in wonder at the people she finds inside as she did all those years ago, they all turn to look at her as she makes her way to her office, respect and admiration in their eyes for the woman who has continually defied the status quo. As she takes a seat at her desk, the frame shifts to a close-up of her face as her mind wanders back through her career, tracing a legacy that all began with a noisy, smoke-filled room and a tenacious woman who dared to step into it. A playful glimmer lights up her eyes as she pictures what’s next.

FADE TO BLACK - ROLL CREDITS





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COSMIC A GALACTIC DIFFERENCE

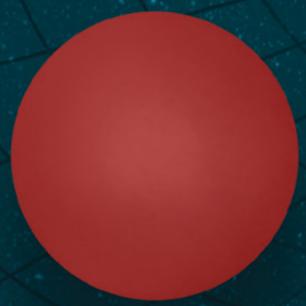
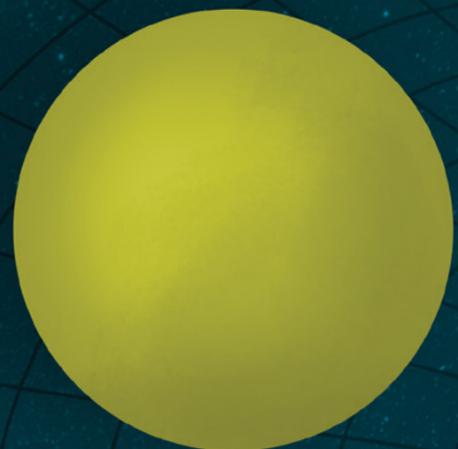
By Peggy Packer

There are not many who would confidently say they have already touched the stars, let alone held an entire galaxy in one hand. As a trade news writer blessed with the opportunity to see the world through the eyes of innumerable ag aficionados, I would argue that anyone who has picked up a package of grapes in the grocery store has, at that moment, clasped the cosmos.

Hear me out for a second.

Similar in spherical shape to the planet that we currently occupy, the table grape is its own petite little globe—and, in itself, a profound representation of the expertise and diligence it takes to bring the fruit to the hands of the many who hold it sacred.

SUNSHINE



19

When you look at a table grape through this lens, you can see the weight the beloved category holds, and the galactic advantages afforded to it by Hazel Technologies.

“Hazel Tech® has invested in building a large data set to document how our technology performs with different varieties, production regions, and seasonal timing,” says



Patrick Flynn,
Chief Marketing
Officer and
Co-Founder,
as he clues
me in on
the solutions
provider's
cutting-edge

approach to optimizing its allies' table grape operations. “This helps give our partners peace of mind that extensive research supports the use of Hazel Tech.”

Utilized by table grape purveyors like Jasmine Vineyards, Illume Agriculture, Oppy, and many more, Hazel 100™, the company's flagship technology, provides a host of benefits to growers—the primary being the ability to retain greener stems for longer. In addition, recent trials analyzed how the solution reduces shatter, which occurs when the grapes fall off of the stem prematurely, with positive results proving reduced shatter in key varieties like Autumn King and Autumn Royal.

In turn, the use of Hazel's technology also presents a massive advantage to the buy-side, allowing retailers to provide their customers with a better quality product, increasing repeat purchases while reducing waste and creating a more efficient supply chain.

“Hazel Tech is focused on building the next generation of quality-protecting technologies for the produce industry,” Patrick notes, emphasizing Hazel's products' positive impact on growers, grocers, and consumers alike. “We know the solutions we develop need to be easy to use and increase profits for our customers. With Hazel Tech products, the end consumer receives a better quality product with no added ingredients or residues.”

Though the mission may seem vast, Hazel Tech has already achieved astronomical progress for table grape suppliers. As many of its partners witness these advancements playing out in real-time, the company helps its customers remain on the leading edge of both the grape sector and the fresh produce industry as a whole.

“At Jasmine Vineyards, we emphasize elevating the quality of our fruit, and our experience with Hazel's product has allowed us to do just that,” notes

Luis S. Katsurayama,
Operations and Food
Safety Manager,
Jasmine Vineyards.



“It is helping us keep greener stems, which, in turn, leads to better arrivals. When we trialed Hazel with our Flame variety, we exported product to a customer in New Zealand. The customer called us to tell us how amazed they were to see color still in the stems. With the length of time it takes to arrive at overseas destinations, the stems usually arrive brown—but not with Hazel.”

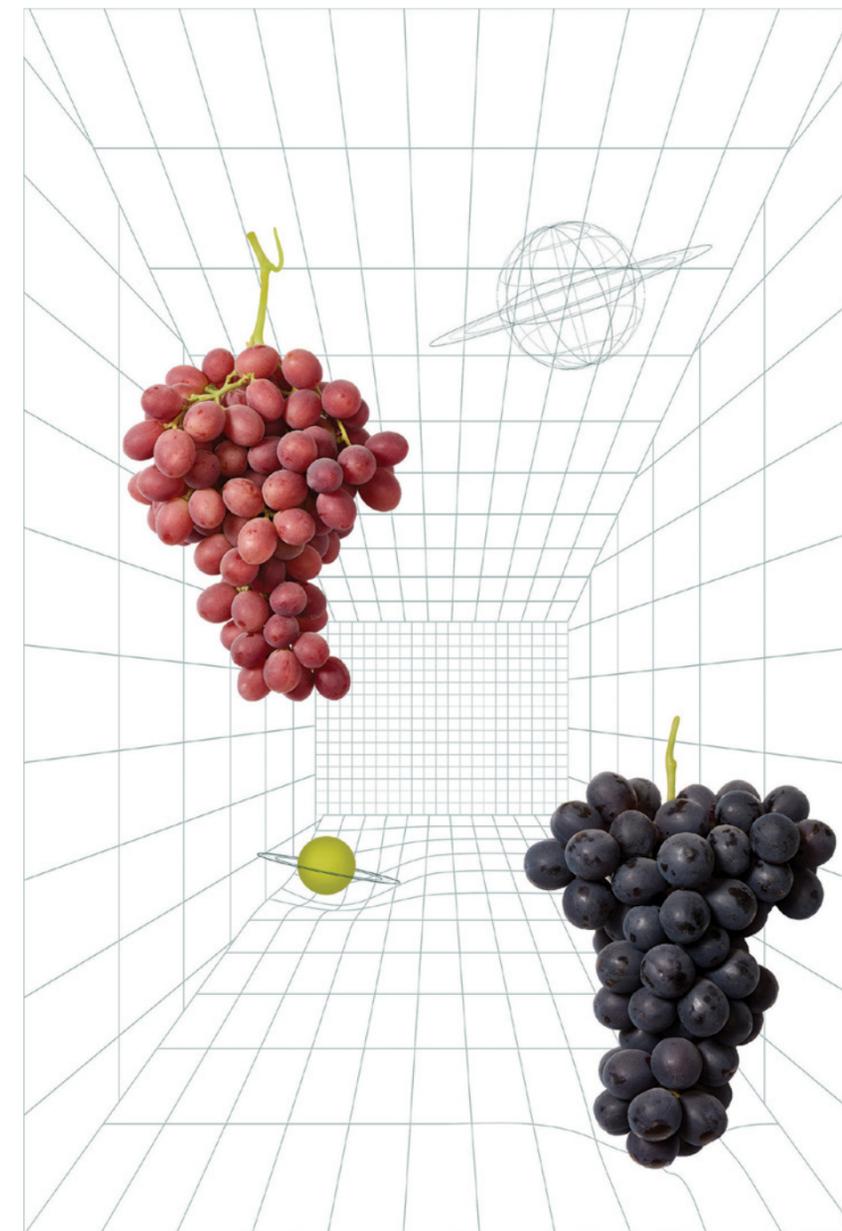


**Kevin Andrew, Senior
Vice President
of Table Grape
Operations, Illume
Agriculture,** also
weighed in on
the immense
benefits
provided by
Hazel Tech.

“In 2020, we trialed Hazel 100 on some of our highest demand varieties like Sweet Globe™ and Autumn Crisp™ and saw truly promising results. The biggest benefit we've seen is overall stem condition—it's a night and day difference after 45 days,” Kevin divulges. “This year, transportation has been a large hurdle to overcome. It's a huge benefit when partnering with Hazel because it allows us to have more confidence in the condition of our grapes upon arrival. Anything we can do to preserve the freshness of our produce is a big advantage.”

While its proprietary Hazel 100 technology continues driving advancements for the table grape industry on a cosmic scale, I have to ask Patrick what else the innovator has up its sleeve for the category and beyond.

“Ensuring quality in the fresh produce industry involves a lot of variables, so we need multiple technologies to maintain quality



Using its proprietary solution, Hazel 100™, Hazel Technologies brings key advantages to its grower partners and the buy-side by optimizing quality in the table grape category

“HAZEL TECH IS FOCUSED ON BUILDING THE NEXT GENERATION OF QUALITY-PROTECTING TECHNOLOGIES FOR THE PRODUCE INDUSTRY.”

PATRICK FLYNN, CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER AND CO-FOUNDER, HAZEL TECHNOLOGIES

and reduce food waste to the best of our ability,” Patrick notes. “Our plan at Hazel is to develop several independent technologies, all of which contribute to ensuring the best quality for the table grape category.”

With its sights set on the stars and innovation at the forefront, this industry trailblazer is

launching the sector to a cosmic level, wielding out-of-this-world results from the hands of the grower to the consumer.

That's one strategic step for Hazel Technologies. One giant leap for those who bring these delicious galaxies into our grasp. 🍇

The Fine Art of Follow-Up

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

As executive recruiters, we spend days, weeks, even months finding, engaging, and matching great companies with strong candidates who are a fit for one another. The process is extensive, and the work is filled with many ups and downs. Don't get me wrong, it's incredibly rewarding, and we enjoy it 95 percent of the time.

So, what makes the 5 percent less enjoyable? Truth be told, there are all kinds of surprises in the recruiting journey that make one want to pull their hair out—and no, that's not what happened to my hair, so don't laugh! This story is inspired by a few occasions and observations where both job seekers and employers could have helped their situations and our mutual objectives.

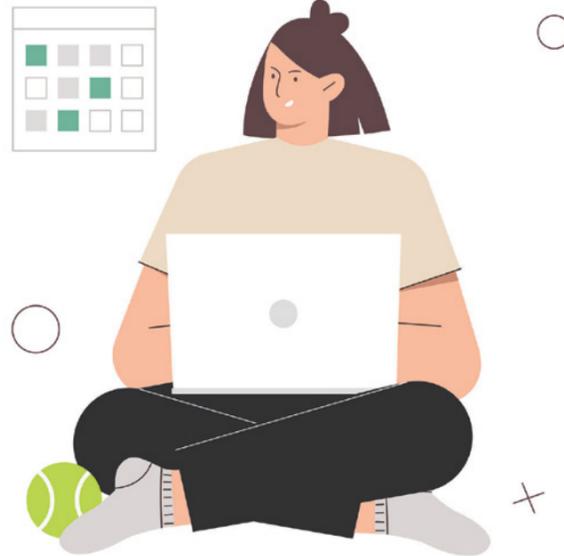
The title says it all: "The Fine Art of Follow-Up." Salespeople know this is Sales 101 when calling on customers, in the context of interviewing and/or hiring, and what's next. But even they need to read this.

Before I get into more details, let me share the most essential message right up front: When you meet with someone, **you should follow up within 24-48 hours max!**

Job Seekers/Interviewees:

Don't overthink the follow-up, and do not think you're showing weakness by showing interest. Here are a few tips to get these follow-ups sent like a pro.

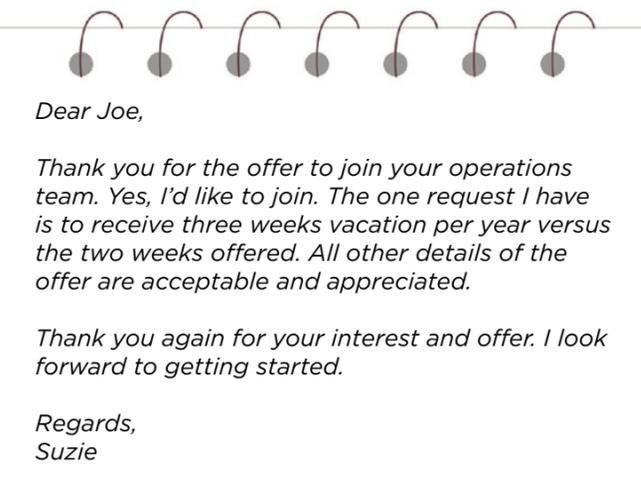
1. Take good notes, both in the interview and afterward. Your notes will help you with your follow-up
2. Be sure to get contact information (ideally an email address) from your interviewer(s)
3. Be professional and personal, meaning do not let your follow-up read like a canned template
4. Components of this include:
 - Thanking them for their time and consideration
 - Authentically mentioning or referencing at least one thing from the interview
 - If applicable, answer or respond to an issue discussed that was not completed or resolved
 - Letting them know you're interested and looking forward to the next step(s)
 - Making one to three points in your follow-up
 - Don't oversell
 - If you're working with a professional executive recruiter, ask for their advice. Perhaps even pre-send and ask them for a review of your follow-up
 - Review your follow-up before you click send
 - Unlike my writing here, keep it to two to four short paragraphs



Receiving Offers:

When you receive an offer, there is typically a time frame in which the employer would like an answer. This usually ranges from one to five business days.

If you know your answer and/or have a question or request, don't let time drag on. If the answer is yes, then let them know as soon as possible that you're excited to join their team. If the answer is yes with a "but" or an "and," again, let them know as soon as you know and communicate carefully. For example:



Employers:

This applies to you too. Perhaps past labor markets allowed you to let the candidate follow up and show interest, but those days are behind us. It's perfectly acceptable to send the candidate a nice note and thank them for their time and interest. And if you know there will be a next step, such as another interview or an upcoming offer, let them know.

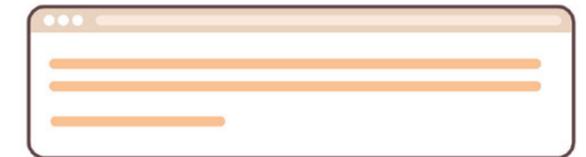
If a professional recruiter is involved, please communicate and collaborate with them before responding to an offer.



Making Offers:

Again, communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with your recruiter if one is involved. If there is not a recruiter involved, then follow these steps:

1. Begin with the end in mind. The offer starts in the interview process. Ask good questions. Try to understand the candidate's wants, needs, must-haves, and priorities. Listen. Take good notes. Write an offer that is compelling and geared toward that candidate
2. Sharing the offer with the candidate is not just an email. There should be a prefacing call rooted in authenticity and sincerity. Let the candidate know the offer is coming after the call and you're excited about the prospect of having them on your team
3. Follow up the offer to answer any questions or clarify any details



Interest, Appreciation, and Authenticity:

Interest, appreciation, and authenticity can make a positive difference at every stage of the interview and offer journey.

Employers, PLEASE do not email an offer and simply wait for a response. It's an impersonal and distant way to convince someone to join your team. Would you email your love a marriage proposal? Of course not.

Not the same? Perhaps not 100 percent, but accepting a new job is a big deal to people and a new life chapter, just like marriage!

Whether you're an employer or a candidate, please remember there are steps in this journey, and follow-up and follow-through are important. This includes the times when you've decided not to proceed further.

Close the loop. Show appreciation and let the prospective employer or employee know you're a thoughtful professional. Make a great impression at every opportunity.

The science in the follow-up is using a strategy; the "fine art of the follow-up" is tailoring the approach to the situation and the people involved. 📧

Joe Pro Resumes™ is a professional resume writing service. Our approach to resumes is based on decades of studying the resume audience and how best to communicate throughout the review and decision sequence. We have written hundreds of resumes for professionals in the produce business in addition to various related sectors. We begin with the end in mind.

JOE Pro Resumes™
JoeProResumes.com

Joe Produce Search™ is the Executive Search division of Joe Produce. Placements range from C-level to sales and middle management throughout North America, covering a wide range of businesses and departments. Share your needs and objectives, and we'll share our process and solution.



Rex Lawrence,
Founder and President,
Joe Produce Search™

WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

4Earth Farms™ Broccoli
and Cauliflower Florets ?



BROCCOLI & CAULIFLOWER CASSEROLE

INGREDIENTS

- 1 (12 oz bag)** 4Earth Farms™ Organic Broccoli Florets
- 1 (12 oz bag)** 4Earth Farms Organic Cauliflower Florets
- ½ medium** 4Earth Farms Organic Onion, diced
- 1 clove** 4Earth Farms Organic Garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp** flour
- 3 tbsp** extra virgin olive oil
- 1¼ cup** low sodium chicken broth
- 2 oz** cream cheese, room temperature
- ⅛ tsp** salt
- ¼ tsp** black pepper
- 3 tbsp** panko breadcrumbs
- 1 tbsp** unsalted butter, melted
- ¾ cup** Monterey Jack cheese, grated

Prep Time: 5 min
Cook Time: 30 min
Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 375° F.
- 2 In a large skillet over medium heat, add olive oil and sauté onion and garlic for 3 minutes. Sprinkle flour on top, whisk to combine, and cook for another minute. Add in broth, whisking constantly until sauce thickens. Reduce the heat to low and add the softened cream cheese, salt, and pepper. Stir to combine and keep warm.
- 3 In a small bowl, mix together panko breadcrumbs and butter. Set aside.
- 4 In a small casserole dish, layer half of the broccoli and cauliflower florets. Pour half of the cream sauce over florets and sprinkle half of the Monterey Jack cheese on top. Repeat with another layer of florets, the remaining cream sauce, and Monterey Jack cheese. Add the breadcrumbs over the top.
- 5 Loosely cover with aluminum foil and bake for 10 minutes. Remove aluminum foil and continue baking for an additional 10–15 minutes, until breadcrumbs are golden brown and cheese is bubbly. Enjoy!

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



Growing for a kinder future.



We see beauty in ingenuity. When we can grow better and care more for our plants and our planet, we can nourish all of us with the plumpest, crunchiest, and freshest produce. It tastes better because it's grown better.

Learn more at naturefresh.ca

GREENHOUSE GROWN.



SUSTAINING The Bottom LINE

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

We are in a race against time.

Tired of watching our industry react rather than lead in the climate crisis, Nikki Cossio and her team at Measure to Improve, LLC (MTI) have mapped out a strategy to put produce back in the driver's seat.

"At MTI, we believe that you must start with a good business case that translates into environmental and social benefits. The core of what we do depends on data collection, analysis, and review," she begins.

As a fourth-generation farmer's daughter, Nikki was born and raised in the produce industry. Today, she is the Chief Executive Officer and Founder of a sustainability consulting firm that has become one of the fresh produce industry's go-to sustainability experts.

"When I started on my sustainability journey 15 years ago, sustainability

was a relatively new area that didn't come with a road map or directions to help me navigate my way through," Nikki tells me. "I will never forget the day I first heard the word sustainability."

Seven years before establishing MTI, Nikki founded the sustainability department for her family's processing and farming operations, Gill's Onions—one of the nation's largest onion processing facilities—and Rio Farms.

"I was in a meeting, sitting around a conference table when the moderator mentioned the idea of sustainability initiatives. I immediately leaned over to the Owner of the company—who happened to be my dad—and said, 'What does that even mean? Sustainability?' His reply was, 'I am not sure, but why don't you go

figure it out, because some of our major customers/buyers are asking us about it."

That day, Nikki saw an exciting challenge and opportunity to find her role within the organization. Little did she realize, it would become her role and future in the produce industry in its entirety.

"When I first started trying to identify what it meant for Gill's Onions, there were not a lot of examples to turn to within the produce industry. I had to look outside of fresh produce to understand how to define and implement it in a way that was meaningful to our organization," says Nikki. "What I quickly learned was this was going to require us to set goals, collect data to support our progress, and to be able to communicate what we were doing in a way that resonated with buyers

and consumers—because they wanted to know."

With some marketing experience, Nikki initially saw this as a way to differentiate the Gill's brand and appeal to customers.

"Over time, as the sustainability program developed, we quickly discovered some benefits that we hadn't anticipated. Our company morale increased and employees were excited about working for a company that was winning awards for our efforts. We were also finding new ways to save money and resources, and the sustainability program started creating win-wins across many different operations," Nikki dishes.

Bringing clarity, hard data, and customizable steps to sustainability—an area that sorely needs all the tangibility it can get—became a calling Nikki could not ignore.

"After seven years with the family business, I decided to venture out. I saw the need to help a larger audience and recognized that sustainability was going down the same path as food safety, which was consistently stuck in a reactive cycle of mandates, regulations, and audit fatigue," Nikki points out. "I knew if we didn't move quickly and position ourselves proactively, sustainability, too, would become dictated in a way that isn't meaningful and is cost-prohibitive. There is a narrow window of opportunity to lead the way."

The resounding message from this visionary support crew is that the future is coming, whether we like it or not. The science crystallizing the reality of climate change means urgency is warranted and required.

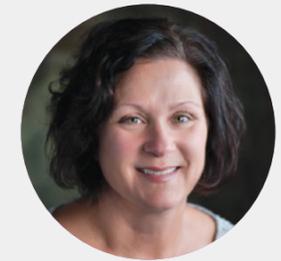
"To some extent, everyone is still trying to figure out sustainability," Nikki explains. "Just like how audits proliferated in food safety, the same thing is happening in sustainability with buyer requests for data—this probably doesn't come as a huge surprise to many of you receiving them, but it is a big challenge right now."

As we have all come to realize over the last decade, sustainability is multifaceted, and each facet, Nikki passionately agrees, is incredibly important to a comprehensive

program. But reporting this information in a meaningful way is just as complicated, with little opportunity to offer explanations.

"Multiple buyers individually request information, each focused on a different topic of sustainability—water, energy, social compliance, sustainable packaging, greenhouse gas emissions, and on-farm practices. These requests are for data, different metrics, requirements, and have different priorities from each customer. Each topic is essential and can become its own comprehensive program, but reporting information on every aspect to multiple buyers every year is becoming time- and resource-intensive. There needs to be collaboration and communications up and down the supply chain to harmonize the approach of requests," Nikki insists.

Knowing this is a challenge pressuring the industry, MTI has developed a service to help called the Sustainability Buyer Survey Solutions™ service. Initiated to help clients prepare credible responses to Walmart, Whole Foods, and other buyer sustainability surveys eight years ago, this has become a comprehensive program growers or



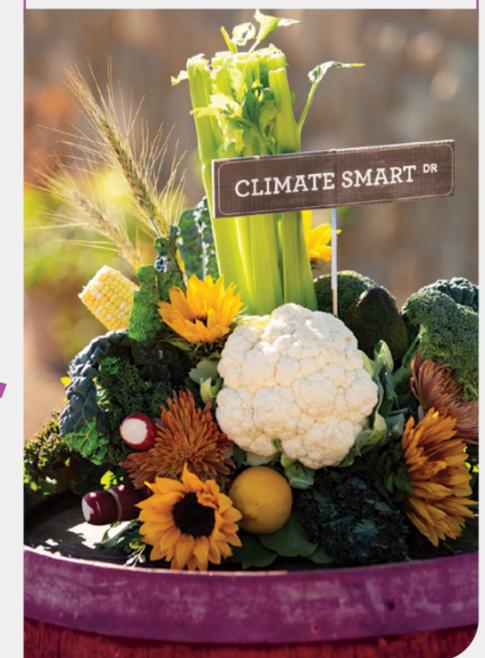
"Duda Farm Fresh Foods partnered with Measure to Improve in 2019 to continue the company's sustainability efforts and better serve the industry as well as the environment. We began implementing sustainable packaging initiatives with Walmart in an effort to meet our goal of 90 percent recyclable, reusable, or industrial compostable primary packaging by 2025. MTI has been an instrumental partner in these endeavors, and we look forward to continuing our work together to better our communities!"

Amy Duda-Kinder,
Vice President, Food Safety, Worker Safety, and Sustainability,
Duda Farm Fresh Foods



The core of what we do depends on data collection, analysis, and review.

-Nikki Cossio,
Founder and Chief Executive Officer,
Measure to Improve, LLC



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"At MTI, our differentiator from a typical consulting firm is our intimate understanding of the fresh produce industry, our ability to bring the industry together, and to collaborate on sustainability."

-Nikki Cossio



product, but they are also trying to mitigate risks, satisfy their consumers, and achieve their own sustainability goals."



"We were introduced to Nikki and the team at Measure to Improve several years ago when we began getting customer requests on various sustainability initiatives. They quickly became our go-to resource in the journey to fully understand, standardize, measure, and report key sustainability components across our business. MTI continues to help us as we endeavor to improve our sustainability footprint."

Bruce Knobloch,
Vice President, Marketing and Product Development,
Monterey Mushrooms

processors seek from MTI as buyer requests stack higher year over year.

"What we have developed with Buyer Survey Solutions is an adaptive service to address different companies' needs. We have a Trained Sustainability Consortium (TSC) Certified advisor on staff and use our proven four-phase approach to ensure a verifiable reporting approach," Nikki explains. "For the industry, this means something that is an annual burden can be leveraged as a tool to enhance the sustainability of your operations and take ownership of the sustainability narrative. But everything can't be tackled at once, so we help companies prioritize responses based on what is most meaningful to their organization."

The value of sustainability is rapidly increasing for both the supply- and buy-side, Nikki shares, and it's becoming the cost of doing business.

"More and more buyers are listing sustainability data amid their buying requirements, and it's primarily consumer-driven," Nikki states. "Not only are buyers trying to ensure they are purchasing sustainably sourced

In other words, we all need to come together to conquer the inevitable necessity sustainability compliance is becoming.

"It's important that the entire supply chain collaborates to identify common metrics and goals, and recognizes that this isn't only the responsibility of suppliers," Nikki observes. "There is a cost to gathering data and providing information. When one buyer asks for something similar to another but different enough to require a whole new system or process, it sinks more resources into something only to produce a slightly different answer. Unfortunately, retailers up to this point haven't been willing to pay more for products that have additional sustainability characteristics. No one individual, company, or part of the supply chain should be responsible for solving the industry's challenges in this area. We need to come together and hold ourselves accountable to take responsibility to do our part across the supply chain."

Ours is a very competitive industry, so it is important to recognize that banding together on best practices is possible without revealing

proprietary information. Moreover, it is necessary to avoid duplicative efforts on our path to moving forward, and MTI is more than ready to light the way.

"At MTI, our differentiator from a typical consulting firm is our intimate understanding of the fresh produce industry, our ability to bring the industry together, and collaborate on sustainability. While MTI works with individual companies to identify starting points to improve the sustainability of their operations, we have also taken on unique projects centered around bringing the industry together," Nikki says. "I cannot say enough about the team I have around me and how necessary they are to everything we have done and will do. This company has grown from a regional firm to a force to be reckoned with, which is necessary to accomplish what we have set out to tackle. Our team has cohesiveness to it. We're a group that truly believes in our mission and that the industry's best work comes out of collaboration and strategic partnerships."

Every tool is crucial in this space, especially because it is a moving target that promises to change shape as more methods of economic and ecologic friendliness emerge.

"Sustainability will continue to evolve," Nikki promises. "The industry will need to keep pace

because sustainability isn't going away. New topics such as regenerative ag are rising to the top, and with that comes an entirely new set of metrics, practices, and buyer requests. In the near term—because this is urgent—I hope we can move away from one-upping each other. We have to roll up our sleeves and get to work because there is value with these programs. But, like food safety, it's not instantaneous gratification."

The name Measure to Improve is no accident. Nikki clearly lays out the path her team has paved for our industry guided by the system spelled out in its title head.

"To improve and make progress, you need to measure—in other words, you need good data as a foundation to build off of. You must be willing to set goals and communicate your progress internally and externally. Our name is about being transparent in an effort to build trust," she says, her voice a hammer. "You have to start your sustainability journey somewhere. Sitting idle is a sure way to be left behind. Over the years, I've taken the scenic route to achieve success. Now, my team and I have a map."

The engine is running, with Measure to Improve keyed into the navigation.

Now, it is on you to get in the driver's seat. 🚗



"Nikki Cossio and her team at Measure to Improve have been incredible partners for the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). MTI supported WWF's food loss metric project implementation with passion, expertise, and gusto in working with our key stakeholder groups. MTI is one of our most trusted partners when it comes to having 'boots on the ground' in areas of primary production for fruits and vegetables. It is evident that MTI is at the forefront of both practical and impactful sustainability measures, setting the stage for producers in clear and actionable ways."

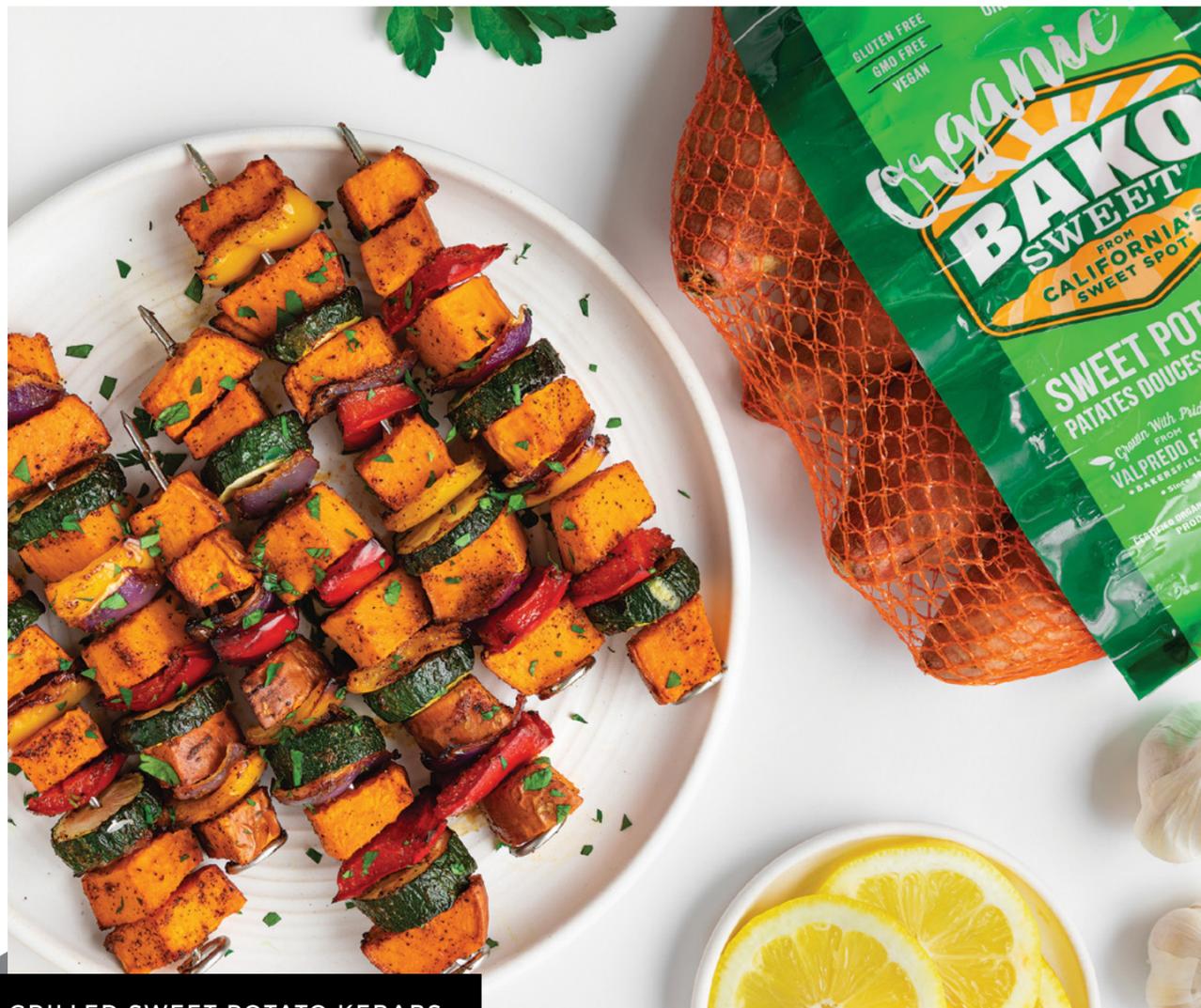
Leigh Prozkop,
Senior Program Officer,
World Wildlife Fund



WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Bako Sweet® Organic Sweet Potatoes ?



GRILLED SWEET POTATO KEBABS

INGREDIENTS

- 5 Bako Sweet® Organic Sweet Potatoes
- 1 small red onion
- 1 zucchini
- 1 yellow bell pepper
- 1 red bell pepper
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp maple syrup
- 1½ tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper

Prep Time: 20 min
Cook Time: 15 min
Servings: 10



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Chop sweet potatoes into 1" cubes.
- 2 Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add cubed sweet potatoes and boil for 5 minutes. Immediately drain potatoes and rinse with cold water. Set aside.
- 3 Slice red onion, zucchini, and bell peppers into small pieces.
- 4 In a small bowl, combine olive oil, lemon juice, maple syrup, garlic powder, paprika, salt, and black pepper to make a glaze.
- 5 Preheat grill to medium-high heat.
- 6 Thread partially boiled sweet potatoes and sliced vegetables through 10 metal skewers, leaving a small gap on both ends. Brush potatoes and vegetables with the glaze.
- 7 Transfer skewers to grill. Cook for 10 minutes, or until vegetables are tender. Remove from grill, serve, and enjoy!

To learn more about Bako Sweet®, visit bakosweet.com/recipes

FowlerPacking

the Pull of Produce

By Peggy Packer

A Q&A With Scot Sanders, Vice President of Farming, Fowler Packing Company

Destiny a predetermined course of events often thought to be **AN IRRESISTIBLE POWER** or agency*.

As a child, the word "destiny" held infinite promise—that of fairy tales and fated happy endings. In adulthood, my attitude toward the idea changed, communicating that the circumstances of life are beyond our own influence. That we must throw caution to the wind and look only to fate.

That was until I happened upon a story that brought the idea of kismet into a new light: the story of a young visionary and a gravitational pull so strong that defying it would be a disservice to the universe's plan.

It is a pull that many of us have become familiar with today: the unwavering pull of produce.

When given the opportunity to pick the brain of Scot Sanders, Vice

President of Farming at Fowler Packing Company, I witness my own vision changing in real-time. Destiny becomes not a forceful wind sweeping us in whichever direction it so desires, but rather a faint calling and a gentle guide to the center of where we were always meant to be.

For Scot, the tug of the produce industry was inescapable. In 1994, Fowler Packing Company tapped the might of this dedicated leader, who has helped guide its farming operation to substantial growth for 28 years and counting, all the while standing strong upon the values the company was built on in 1950.

Though I pride myself on being a storyteller, Scot recounts the tale so much better himself.

*<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/destiny>



Q1

Peggy Packer: Scot, I am sure you have tons of stories to share from your decades in the produce scene. Take us back to the beginning of your journey. I'd love to know more about your first dip—or plunge—into the produce industry. What were some of the aspects that initially roped you in?

Scot Sanders, Vice President of Farming: My start in the industry came when I moved from Northern California to Fresno, in the state's Central Valley, to start college. While in school, I became friends with someone whose family was involved in agriculture and owned a packing house. I needed a job for the summer, and I started working there stacking boxes, driving a forklift, and doing quality control. I was drawn to it and really enjoyed the work because I wasn't confined to an office. It was physical work, and no two days were ever alike.



Q2

PP: Well, I'd say that surely beats my college summers spent sweeping floors and rolling burritos. At what point did you realize you were fully engulfed in the world of fresh produce? Was there a specific moment that tipped the scale?

SS: I found myself completely immersed in the industry when I officially made the decision to move back to Fresno. I had returned to Sacramento, California, to obtain my degree, and came back to the region shortly after finishing school. Once I settled in, I began working for Fowler Packing, and I have been fully engaged in the industry since my very first day with the company in 1994.

Q3

PP: So, now that you've had the chance to watch the company evolve for nearly three decades, what are some of your goals for Fowler's operations, and how do you see the industry innovator achieving those goals in the future?

SS: My goal for the operation at Fowler Packing Company is to keep the principles that have made us successful for 70 years in place. Our Peelz® and Samsons® brands have seen tremendous success, and we want to continue that upward trajectory without compromising what we have always stood for.

Growth can sometimes put a strain on a company's core values. At Fowler Packing, we have always taken a great deal of pride in being an industry leader in quality and innovation, all while maintaining a strong moral compass as a whole. It is at the forefront of my mind every day when I come to work.

Q4

PP: Scot, it's easy to see you have a deeply rooted devotion to the industry and its people. What are some of your other passions, and how do they align with your current role at Fowler Packing Company?

SS: I am extremely passionate about family and community. Over the years, I have done a lot of volunteer work in my area. My passion for my immediate family, my wife and two boys, also extends to our ever-growing Fowler Packing family. We have increased our acreage dramatically in the past few years, and with that acreage comes a lot of new people to welcome to our team. Ensuring all of our employees are treated right and have a job they can be proud of is something I care deeply about. The way I see it, our team is one huge family.

Q6

PP: These principles and high operational standards definitely elevate Fowler Packing Company as both an employer and a supplier. In addition to these aspects, what sets the company apart as a purveyor in the fresh produce space?

SS: What sets Fowler Packing apart from others in the industry is the combination of our size and the fact we are a family-run company. There is no corner of this company in which an Owner is not involved—and I don't mean involved from afar. The Parnagians are hands-on Owners who understand the fine details of our company and have a strong grasp on what our employees need to be the best in the industry.

In fresh produce, it takes hard work and a hyper-focus on detail to be successful. The Parnagians have been there, shoulder-to-shoulder with our employees for 70 years.

Q5

PP: I couldn't agree more, and I think that idea wholly reflects Fowler Packing's deeply committed value system. Can you tell me a little bit more about the pillars on which the company stands?

SS: Our values have always been based on our most treasured assets. Without question, our most valuable asset is our people. It is something that will never change.

Regardless of your role within the company, you should always be treated fairly and with respect. Providing a work environment for our employees that creates the path to their success is our number one priority. We want to build a culture and a company they can be proud of.

I feel we have been successful in achieving that goal. We do not have a high turnover rate in our staff, and we have a lot of people who have been here for 30- to 40-plus years.



As we unfold the timeline of Scot's produce journey, it is evident to me that destiny is not a title we obtain, a single moment in time, nor an individual achievement.

If you are quiet long enough, you will hear an inner voice; it serves as our own personal guidepost, drawing us in the right direction with a magnetism as subtle as the moon's constant pull on the Earth.

Such is the tale of trailblazers like Scot and the many before him. And in the name of fate, the story goes on, bringing new opportunities to those bold enough to give in to the pull of produce. 🍊



PRODUCE PULSE

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH

By Chandler James

FERMENTATIONS?



My first introduction to fermentation came one day during lunchtime in third grade. Sitting knee to knee with my classmates on a bright blue, netted picnic table, I popped a few ruby red pomegranate arils into my mouth and began to chew. Quickly, I realized that the taste was different than I was used to. The arils had been in a Ziploc® bag leftover from my lunch the previous day—likely sitting out in the sun for hours before I remembered to bring my lunchbox back into the classroom.

When I explained this to my mom later that day, she laughed and told me, “It probably tasted like alcohol!” explaining that the fruit had likely begun to ferment. While I could not fully wrap my young mind around the concept, I remember feeling amazed that fruit could transform itself so completely within a matter of days.

Like me, you may be asking, “So what’s the difference between pickling and fermenting?” When pickling vegetables, the brine base

includes an added acid such as vinegar to achieve a sour flavor. This differs from fermenting in that the acid is created naturally by a chemical reaction rather than added in during the fermentation process. For this reason, fermented vegetables tend to be healthier as they are closer to their raw form*. Ever heard of probiotics? You can thank fermentation for that as well.

You may have also noticed that fermented vegetables are found more commonly than fermented fruit. That is because the high sugar content tends to promote the growth of yeast when deprived of oxygen, which converts the sugar into alcohol quite quickly**. Hence why fruits like grapes and berries are used to make wine, and why some beverages like kombucha have a low alcohol content.

In the case of fermented vegetables—think kimchi, sauerkraut, and cucumbers—the food is often submerged in a simple brine made of salt and water and left to sit within

a sealed container for a number of days. Natural bacteria within the vegetables multiplies and helps to inhibit the growth of microbes, ultimately transforming into acid that serves as a preservative for the food***.

Alternative preparations for vegetables, such as fermenting, often serve as a way for suppliers to diversify their offerings while potentially cutting down food waste for items that are not shelf-ready. Retailers can also build out their fresh selection by bringing refrigerated fermented vegetables to the perimeter of the aisles.

While the trend has definitely taken off in recent years, fermentation has been used for millennia. Humans have utilized the metabolic process to preserve and enhance foods since 10,000 BCE****.

And, as different cultures continue to influence the eating experiences of North Americans, fermentation is one trend here to stay. 🍷

* <https://wildbrine.com/pickling-versus-fermenting/>

** <https://homekitchentalk.com/how-does-fruit-ferment-naturally/>

*** <https://www.thekitchn.com/whats-the-difference-between-pickling-and-fermenting-229536>

**** <https://stacker.com/stories/23704/history-fermentation-around-world>

Onioning

A BUSINESS By Anne Allen

I didn't consider what it meant to be a leader until I landed in the produce industry. The highest position of authority I'd obtained in my scant 25 years of life was a Shift Lead at Starbucks—not a position to scorn but certainly one that did not serve to inspire me.

At the time, my definition of leadership was relegated to: How many fires do I need to put out today? (Not literal ones, don't worry.) It rarely, if ever, landed on the definition of leadership that is prolific in this industry, one that intersects with the future and longevity of a company.

John Shuman knows that leadership extends beyond the actions of the day to day. At one of the earliest points in our conversation, he breaks down what leadership means to him, and it's a

moment that resonates. It's a moment I wish I had when I first entered the working world, because it centers a necessary element we all seek in our careers: inspiration.

"A lot of people think leadership is tied to the title on their business card. It has nothing to do with that," John, the President and Chief Executive Officer of Shuman Farms, tells me. "It's more about inspiring people to become passionate about a vision, to create a team that moves in step with each other toward a common goal."

This level of inspiration has been a companion to John all his life, and it began close to home. Growing up watching his father, Buck, farm, John's connection to the business was instilled in him from a young age. When he

returned home from college, he knew immediately that getting into ag was what he wanted to do.

"My dad was primarily the one who inspired me to get into the business," John shares, detailing that he started the operation that would become Shuman Farms from the ground up.

Dogged determination kept him pushing forward, initially meeting with and selling crops for Vidalia® onion growers he came to know through his dad. John recalls the first five years of Shuman Farms with both fondness and a gritty realism. He's able to look back on this time with appreciation because of the growth since then, growth that has created a company able to vertically integrate from seed to shelf.

"I was so unsure it was going to work that I started taking real estate classes at night," he admits with a bit of a grin. "That was Plan B. But the turning point came in 2000 when that light bulb went off in my head. I remember thinking 'this might just work.'"

John explains how the potential for success came in the realization that he did not need to have his hands on every detail of Shuman Farms, he could create a team to support his vision.

"When you start building a business, you're micromanaging every piece of it because it's basically your child. You're watching it grow up. And as it grew, I was blessed to be able to build a team that cares about the business just as much as I do," he recalls.

This is a striking testament to the qualities of John's leadership, especially as part of our conversation revolves around the importance of teamwork and finding people who buy into the vision of what you're striving toward.

"You don't force people—you lead them forward. Around here, we always say that we fall on the sword every day. In other words, things can always go wrong, but we do whatever it takes to make business happen for the customer the right way," John notes.

Reputation is everything in this industry, a sentiment that John echoes.

"It will walk in the door two weeks before you do, that's for sure," he says with a laugh. "So, it's important that you do what you say you're going to do in this business. Over time, people begin to know and trust that."

Trust comes easily for those who partner with Shuman Farms, for the company has worked tirelessly to communicate its four pillars of value to the industry. These include superior quality, excellent customer service, innovative marketing, and giving back. These pillars are not simply a motto—they are the very cornerstones of the organization, and ones by which the team lives by.

Everyone at Shuman Farms knows how important these pillars are, and the

respect that John has instilled in them as representatives of the company.

"Each person in the organization cares deeply about how we go to market," John comments.

Without these pillars, brands like RealSweet® and Mr. Buck's Farm Fresh® would not exist, a thought that seems unfathomable given that they've become hallmarks of the sweet onion category.

"In the early 2000s, I developed the RealSweet brand to communicate the product's attributes to the consumer. Since then, it's become our primary focus for 20 years," John imparts. "We saw the need to develop another brand to put in various places in the marketplace, and I wanted to create something that went back to my roots and honored my dad. My way of doing that was coming up with the Mr. Buck's brand."

Conveying his father's warm smile, love of the land, and work ethic, John wanted to ensure his passion came through.

"Each bag of Mr. Buck's has my signature," John remarks, highlighting his own attention and care to a line that represents so much to him. "One of the most important lessons my father ever taught me was to treat others how you would like them to treat you. This has guided both my life and the company, as we've always taken that attitude to market."

Throughout our discussion, one of the central threads that pull the story along are the elements of leadership that kicked us off. Leadership, as John noted at the beginning of our conversation, is a funny thing, one that supplants the needs of your own for the good of others.

This connects to the final pillar of Shuman Farms: giving back, and it is one that drives the future of the company, the category, and the industry.

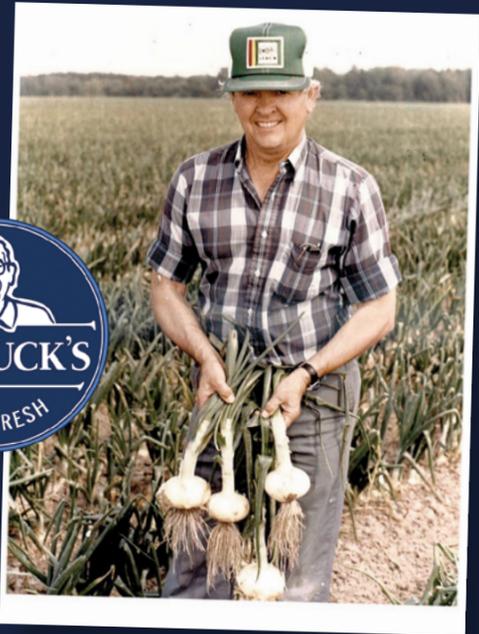
In this case, I speak of Healthy Family Project, a program that John tells me is how he honors the communities in which he works.

"I've always wanted to do more than just build an onion business," he expresses. "We've been given resources, and I think

“A lot of people think LEADERSHIP is tied to the title on their business card. It has nothing to do with that.”



JOHN SHUMAN,
PRESIDENT AND CHIEF
EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
SHUMAN FARMS



Buck Shuman, father and mentor of John Shuman, is the inspiration and driving spirit for Shuman Farms' Mr. Buck's brand



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it's our responsibility as a people to give back into the communities that support our products. I think that's at the heart of our giving back initiatives. And when all is said and done, I want to leave a positive impact on the industry."

This desire to give back lies at the core of Healthy Family Project, a concept that John tells me is the heartbeat of the initiative.

"This program has been a blessing, and I'm truly inspired and honored that Healthy Family Project, and its flagship retail program Produce for Kids, have become a platform for the produce industry to give back. Over our 20 years, we've had hundreds of companies across North America embrace and buy into this mission. They've made it their own, and I'm humbled by the fact that retailers can promote Healthy Family Project as a grassroots, in-house program, because all of the benefits are going back into their local communities," John expounds.

Cause marketing initiatives have existed for a while, as John further details, but when he started Healthy Family Project back in 2000, all were in the center of the store. He rarely, if ever, saw a produce-centric program.

"We looked around and noticed that a cause marketing program in the produce department would be a natural fit. Through the Healthy Family Project initiative we have been able to innovate the space to center fresh," John says. "If you look at the health crisis in America, the produce department is on the right side of the issue. We're competing with the center of the store, but that doesn't negate that we're standing in the right position because we have the natural healthy products."

The future of the industry hinges upon this positioning, and Healthy Family Project is a key prong in Shuman Farms' long-term mission for furthering the consumption of fruits and vegetables both in its backyard communities and across the United States.

"I think that leaving something better than you found it is a key part of this program, and a key aspect of any sustainable effort, too," he declares. "We're connecting consumers to fruits and vegetables, and also telling them the story of how they got to their plates. The more we can educate the consumer, the better off we are as an industry."

It's important to note that John not only considers the future of Shuman Farms when we discuss the importance of

centering fresh produce. It's a wide-lens focus for him, looking at how those who come after us will be able to pick up where we left off because we made that future possible for them.

"At the end of the day, we manage the crop the best we can," John considers. "Somebody's going to be here after us. It's like I said earlier: How do we leave a space better than we found it? That kind of thinking goes all the way to the farm."

Shuman Farms' sustainable efforts echo this reverence for the future as the company has spearheaded farming practices to better its soil conservation, lowered the use of fertilizer, and updated its irrigation systems to reduce water waste.

The next generation of farmers and produce lovers should be emboldened by the actions taken by Shuman Farms, and they should look to its President and CEO as a fundamental example of what it means to carve your passion into a vision that others will follow.

At a crucial juncture in our industry, we need leaders like John who will leave the industry better than they found it.

Luckily, John is here to both inspire and lead the way. 🍅

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WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Progressive Farms
Jalapeños ?



“SOME LIKE IT HOT” CHIP-CRUSTED JALAPEÑO POPPERS

INGREDIENTS

- 8 Progressive Farms Jalapeños
- 48 oz avocado oil for frying
- 6 oz cream cheese
- 6 oz Cheddar cheese, shredded
- ½ tsp onion powder
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 4 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 (8½ oz) bag of fiery hot chips of your choice
- 1 (9¼ oz) bag of nacho cheese chips of your choice

Prep Time: 20 min
Cook Time: 2–3 min
Servings: 8



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Heat oil in a deep, heavy skillet to 375° F.
- 2 Bring a large saucepan of water to a boil over high heat. Add jalapeños and boil 2 minutes. Transfer jalapeños to an ice bath to cool for about 3 minutes, then place them on a plate lined with paper towels.
- 3 Slice jalapeños lengthwise, careful not to cut all the way through, then slice at the top from side to side to create a T-cut. Open the peppers and remove seeds and veins from jalapeños.
- 4 Using a food processor, pulse the chips of your choice until crushed into fine crumbs, then place them in a shallow bowl. Place flour in a second shallow bowl and the beaten egg in a third shallow bowl. Using the same food processor, combine cream cheese, Cheddar cheese, onion powder, and garlic powder. Pulse until smooth.
- 5 Stuff jalapeños with cheese mixture, careful not to over stuff so peppers will close at the cut.
- 6 Coat each jalapeño in flour, dip in the beaten egg, then cover with the crushed chip crumbs. To double coat, dip back in the egg and then back in the chip crumbs to cover. Repeat this process for each jalapeño popper.
- 7 Fry the coated peppers in oil for 2–3 minutes, or until crust is golden brown. Drain on a wire rack or paper towels.
- 8 Serve with a favorite side like ranch or sour cream and enjoy!

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

Rainier
FRUIT

A treefruit Testament:

A Q&A With **Emily Zirkle**, Business Development, Rainier Fruit Company

By *Jordan Okumura*

The next generation of produce professionals will define and ignite who we are tomorrow as they lay the groundwork for their own personal and industry greatness today.

As much of the veteran agricultural workforce begins to retire in fresh produce, they are looking to those with a fire and a passion for people and food to carry the banner forward in a way that has rarely been done before.

This call to action is being answered by many, from legacy trailblazers to fresh faces in ag and everyone in between, including individuals like Emily

Zirkle. As a member of Rainier Fruit Company's Business Development team, Emily supports the company's growth while working alongside the treefruit operator's best and brightest with a singular goal in mind: living, breathing, and doing business in a way that is wholesome to the core.

With her eye on the horizon and feet firmly planted in the orchards of Rainier, Emily opened up to me about her entry into the industry, the gravity that pulled her here, and what she sees as the staying power of fresh produce as a business and as her own road to passion and fulfillment.

Q1



Jordan Okumura:

Emily, I get the strong sense that you had your sights set on fresh produce for a while, and I am sure having family in the industry

also provided a potential guidepost. So, let's start at the beginning. How long have you been with Rainier, and what drew you to the company when you first began?

Emily Zirkle, Business Development, Rainier Fruit Company:

I spent middle and high school summers working in different parts of the cherry and blueberry warehouse operations. Time in fresh produce is different from other industries and has just flown by. This May marks two years at Rainier Fruit Company.

In addition to learning the basics, working in production gave me a sense of ownership and deep pride in the business. Seeing and hearing how much people genuinely love working for Rainier really moved me and solidified my desire to get involved. These experiences influenced my journey, and I am so glad I followed my instincts.



Q2

JO: There cannot be enough said about being a part of an amazing work culture. I think about how much of our waking lives revolve around our hours at work, and any chance we have to create congruency between our personal and professional values is ideal. I see you have found a great balance. What keeps you at the company now that you have grown to be part of it?

EZ: Diving into the world of growing and selling fruit on a large scale is pretty intimidating, even as someone "raised" in the industry. Fortunately, I enjoy

challenging myself and being part of a team that cares deeply for growing and shipping great fruit.



The cornerstone here at Rainier is to treat people right. This is the foundation on which my grandfather built the company we know today, and it is definitely my guiding principle as well. To me, if you aren't doing that, then what are you accomplishing?

Another mindset that feels right at home to me is the constant pursuit of improvement. In both the orchards and the warehouse, Rainier is always looking for ways to do things better. I think we're known for being perfectionists, but I believe caring a lot about what you do is key.

Q3

JO: I love that Rainier is in a constant, if not relentless, pursuit of improvement. It is both inspiring and standard-setting. Rainier's fruit is truly a testament to that passion. So, what personally makes you passionate today about the industry we work in?

EZ: A LOT. I'm honored for the opportunity to continue a multigenerational tradition of providing accessible and nourishing sustenance. Call me a hippie, but food is a rare thing that unites us, after all.

I've thought a lot about our place in the world as food providers. Tastes and languages vary; food is one of the very few things that all people need. It's something we share with one another, and it is something we can put a lot of our love and connection into.

I'm pretty sentimental, as you can tell.



The cornerstone here at Rainier is to treat people right. This is the foundation on which my grandfather built the company we know today...

Emily Zirkle,
Business Development,
Rainier Fruit Company

Q4

JO: I think that the sentiment you bring to your role is really beautiful, and what you bring of yourself will absolutely continue to impact your success. On the flip side of what you bring to this space, how has fresh produce changed, shaped, and influenced who you are personally and professionally?

EZ: Understanding the sheer amount of logistics and coordination it takes to bring a seemingly simple item such as an apple or pear to market definitely changes how one looks at the world in general. I've learned to appreciate the supply chain even more and be grateful for the opportunity to be involved.

The industry has also shown me how much the consumer needs to know about what we do, and I am happy to see that the consumer does crave to learn more. On the other side of that coin, though, as much as I personally wish more people would learn about how things like the supply chain work, I'm hesitant to say it would significantly impact consumer loyalty. I put myself in both industry and consumer shoes all the time.

While I think some people out there would sympathize with the challenges our industry faces, I'm not sure most would care, unfortunately. It's possible, especially with the increase in branding within produce, but I also think it goes against the positive feelings toward all things local, small, farm-to-table, etc. We should focus on the things we can control and the messages that promote produce in a positive light.

"Tastes and languages vary; food is one of the very few things that all people need. It's something we share with one another..."



Q5

JO: That is really interesting and a great way to think about the situation. Does it keep you up at night? Or rather, what does keep you up at night?

EZ: Ha! I feel like any millennial or Gen Z-er would ask: What doesn't? In all seriousness, the treefruit industry has been anything but stable in its history, but many challenges and unknowns lie ahead. Consumer preferences are changing quickly, and the world is addressing our impact on the environment. I believe in our teams here at Rainier, who are no strangers to staying ahead of the curve.

What I prefer to concentrate on is what gets me up in the morning. As cliché as it is, my greatest motivator is our people. From the crews in the fields to packers in the warehouse and everyone in between, the people of Rainier are what set us apart. I am constantly humbled by the dedication and passion that each person puts into this operation. It's a pretty good reason to get out of bed every day!

I love how every conversation I have in this industry is another candle lit, which illuminates how powerful its people and its impact truly are. As Emily moves into her third year in the company, I am sure she will have even more wisdom to share and more insight to bestow. And, with a vision to live wholesome to the core, Emily and Rainier are sure to enlighten us all. 🍓



► MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀
LARA GROSSMAN

Director of Marketing, Ippolito International

With **Peggy Packer**

When you combine a humorous charm, a humble appreciation for the little things, and a wildcat-like vigor, the result is someone like Lara Grossman. Hailing from the hot Phoenix, Arizona, desert, this strategic and long-standing marketing pro brings vast expertise to her role as Ippolito International's Director of Marketing. Look beyond that, and you'll find there's even more to love. What are you waiting for? Cozy up and uncover the individual pages that comprise Lara Grossman's inspiring story...

1 Now that our two daughters are older, it's been rewarding to discover some things I have wanted to try for years, like crafting small-batch bar soaps.

2 I'm a cat person! Having a cat on my lap at the end of the day is comforting and relaxing.

3 Reading a book and being oblivious to everything around me is one of my favorite ways to recharge.

4 When I was growing up, my grandmother would make them fresh, from scratch.

5 My dad is first generation in this country. I'm very patriotic and am grateful to be born in the U.S.A.

6 Our pet ducks, Dash and Violet, are very much loved and fawned over.

7 Antique porcelain, Victorian jewelry, older homes, vintage style... timeless over trendy.

8 Advising the local college sorority chapter brings me back to my own formative Greek college experience.

9 Go Wildcats!

- 1 Free Time
- 2 Cats
- 3 Reading
- 4 Pierogies
- 5 United States of America
- 6 Ducks
- 7 Old Things
- 8 Giving Back
- 9 University of Arizona



IPPOLITO INTERNATIONAL

CALIFORNIA FRUIT ON THE HORIZON

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Libations

FOR ALL OCCASIONS:

PRETTY IN PINK PUNCH

By Peggy Packer

Pull out your parachute pants and all of the colorful prints. We're going back to the '80s!

Sure, as a '90s baby I may not have been alive at the time, but today I'm taking the journey through film—and the fulfillment of this sweet-but-dangerous libation.

As someone with an affinity for creative clothing and all things pink, *Pretty in Pink* is well worth the money I periodically spend to rent it, and enjoying the time with a fruity cocktail makes the occasion that much better. If you're looking to the iconic movie for more than just some eccentric outfit inspo, I raise you a delicious delicacy that stands out in terms of sweetness, and is fabulously pleasing on the visual front, of course.

The delightful drink plays perfectly into shoppers' search for a nostalgic moment, unleashing a prime merchandising tool for retailers on the hunt for unique opportunities to drive produce sales.

A tasty handful of raspberries serves as a succulent base for this creation, and that alone should send you into the kitchen to get a-mixin'. If you really want to complete the experience, tap into your inner Duckie, turn on some Otis Redding, and let this libation inspire your fancy footwork.

However you choose to enjoy it, this drink is sure to please. I'd tell you more, but I'm "off like a dirty shirt" to make one myself. 🍷

INGREDIENTS

6–8 fresh raspberries
 1 oz fresh lime juice
 ½ oz agave
 ½ oz raspberry liqueur*
 1½ oz vodka* of your choice
 Sugar, for garnish
 Extra raspberries and a toothpick, for garnish

Time: 5 min.

Servings: 1

**For a mouth-watering concoction without the buzz, substitute club soda or lemon-lime soda for the alcohol.*

DIRECTIONS

1. Begin by muddling the fresh raspberries, lime juice, and agave together in a cocktail shaker. Be sure to save a couple of raspberries for garnish!
2. Once the ingredients are mixed well, add raspberry liqueur and vodka to the shaker and shake well with ice.
3. Now it's time to prepare your glass: Wet the rim of a cocktail glass of your choice with the remainder of the lime and dip it in sugar to coat. Strain the mixture into the glass.
4. Skewer 1–3 raspberries on a toothpick and place the toothpick across the top of the glass as a garnish.
5. Enjoy!

Inspired by @bevsnbybeverly on Instagram



Photography by Craig Wheeler



BAG TO DIFFER

A Q&A With **Jan DeLyser**, Vice President of Marketing, California Avocado Commission

By **Melissa De Leon Chavez**

Real estate prices are skyrocketing. I don't mean in terms of housing, but an even more dominating space for the likes of our industry: the produce shelf.

Here, both buyers and growers are working with limited square footage, where location is the keyword—literally and figuratively.

Between what consumers say they want and what the most current buying behaviors show, there is so much information and so little room to utilize it. Meanwhile, produce suppliers and retailers alike are sitting around the table trying to find out how to deliver the right combination and to seal the deal on

the hot market that is fresh produce real estate. And, with premium categories like avocados, there are even more stairs to climb on the way to top sales. The key, California Avocado Commission (CAC) is sure, is a versatile selling strategy with bagged avocados as an important component.

Bags, dear readers, are the dream house if you want consumers to have the information and the convenience they so desire. With room to spare for anything from origin to recommended eating, not to mention an inherent boost in purchase, this is the strategy Vice President of Marketing Jan DeLyser assures me any Produce Director can hang their hat on.



Q1

Melissa De Leon Chavez: Jan, I know you and the team have been especially focused on what bags can do for California avocado sales. Can you give me an idea of the growth the bagged portion of the category has seen?

Jan DeLyser, Vice President of Marketing, California Avocado Commission: Bagged avocado sales

have been climbing for several years, and we believe the pandemic may have accelerated that success. The latest year for which we have a full year of retail sales data is 2020, which was a huge year for the avocado category with 22 percent dollar-sales growth. By comparison, bagged avocado sales increased 50 percent across the country, and in the huge California market, the growth rate for bagged avocados hit nearly 87 percent. Some of the markets in the Western region showed a triple-digit boost in bagged avocados, and volume share of the category ranged from 10 percent to 32 percent, depending on the market. So, while bulk avocado sales still represent the majority of category sales, retailers and suppliers have to pay attention to bagged avocados as well.



Q2

MDC: What makes bags such a strong selling strategy, and what are some creative ways the boundaries of this merchandising approach could be pushed even further?

JD: Many factors are coming into play for this growth. Bagged produce sales, in general, spiked during the pandemic. Avocado consumers have evolved from buying avocados as a specialty item for occasionally making guacamole to using them to elevate sandwiches, salads, and more. The avocado toast phenomenon—which truly is phenomenal—helped push the category to a whole new level.

Marketing from the California Avocado Commission and importer organizations, including dissemination of positive nutrition messaging, continues to spur demand and has allowed the category to absorb significant increases in supply without price declines. All of this means that avocado shoppers are buying, eating, and serving avocados more often, which makes bagged avocados a convenient choice. We are seeing bagged avocados displayed on the shelf, in display bins, and on hanging racks; there's an opportunity to push these displays outside of produce with complementary products and even near checkout to encourage impulse purchases.

The produce industry knows that the locally grown message continues to resonate with shoppers, and those shoppers want to know where their produce comes from. Bags that prominently showcase the California avocado origin can attract even more consumers than those that do not. Some packers are doing an outstanding job of using the real estate on the avocado bags to communicate origin in a very appealing way.

...AVOCADO SHOPPERS ARE **BUYING, EATING, AND SERVING** AVOCADOS MORE OFTEN, WHICH MAKES BAGGED AVOCADOS A **CONVENIENT CHOICE.**

- Jan DeLyser, Vice President of Marketing, California Avocado Commission





Bags make for a convenient and versatile option in-store to boost visibility and fresh sales

Q3

MDC: In light of those moves and how invested suppliers are in evolving their marketing strategies, will you tell me a bit about the challenges bags are up against and what both suppliers and retailers can do to overcome them?

JD: Surprisingly, not all retailers carry bagged avocados, or only carry them during select periods. Sales tend to rise during California's avocado season, and we encourage retailers to merchandise both conventional and organic avocados, as well as bulk and bagged avocados. As long as demand keeps growing and velocity is high, there's an opportunity to expand the number of avocado SKUs the way other produce categories, such as apples, have.

One challenge that bags could help overcome is identification of origin for online sales. Because the bags carry a UPC code, retailers can more easily highlight specific avocado bag SKUs and promote them on their online platforms.

Q4

MDC: That is an application I had not connected to bags specifically. What a great way to keep up amid the increased importance of tracking online purchases. In addition to bags, can you tell me about a few other tools in the selling toolbox, as well as what retailers should know about CAC and about the California avocado season?

JD: The California Avocado Commission works directly with retailers to customize programs that work for them. This can include displays, sales contests, social support, nutrition programs, and more. Our store locator tool helps consumers find where California avocados are merchandised when in season, and we can put programs together that help push shoppers toward our retailer partners' stores.

Q5

MDC: With how complex the produce department landscape has become, it seems like you can never have enough tools, let alone too many! Looking forward, what are you most excited about this year, and what can you tell me about what might be in store next?

JD: I'm very excited to continue our advertising campaign, *The best avocados have 'California' in them*. It resonates very well with our target market, and we are able to link our retail programs with the campaign effort. I'm most excited about retailer programs that call out California avocado origin or locally grown at the shelf, on display, or on the product itself.

Similar to finding California in the best avocados, there is most certainly a PO in every opportunity. With such a hot market ready and knocking, it's safe to say that this category has premium location in the bag. 



OUR TOP-SELLING BRANDS UNDER ONE UMBRELLA YEAR-ROUND CLUBS AND ORGANICS

PASSION *with a* PURPOSE

BY CHANDLER JAMES



How do we define our purpose?

I've asked myself—and others—some form of this question many, many times over the years. Life can sometimes feel like an aimless outward spiral, with new complexities uncovered at every turn. As such, I've found that this question can be answered in many ways, and the explanation will be different with each person you ask.

After nearly 25 years on this planet, one thing I can say for sure is I was born to be a writer. I penned my first book in elementary school and wrote down "Dreams of Being Editor in Chief" by sixth grade. From a young age, I truly did not see any other path forward.

Is writing "my purpose?" The jury is still out on that one; but, I know without a shadow of a doubt that I am on the path I was meant to be on.

I can say the same for the Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board's (MAAB) new Executive Director, Jamie Clover Adams, who was appointed to the position last April. I identify with the purposeful role Jamie plays, as each of our careers tap into our innate talents while serving the produce industry at the same time.

"A mentor of mine once told me that luck is when opportunity and preparation meet. That was my path to serving Michigan asparagus growers," Jamie told me. "We have a robust production research program in partnership with Michigan State University, which was built by my predecessor, John Bakker, and continues to this day. The asparagus industry, however, is at a juncture where policy and marketing have taken center stage—areas where my background can help the industry grapple with the impact of imports and the cost of labor on producer bottom lines."

Prior to joining the MAAB team, Jamie spent nearly three years as the United States Department

of Agriculture's (USDA) Chief of Staff for Farm Production and Conservation. She served as a fierce champion of farmers and ranchers in the U.S. and worked with an outstanding team of both political and career professionals. As an example of her impact, Jamie remotely led the end-to-end launch of the organization's \$16 billion Coronavirus Food Assistance Program.

"At the USDA, we accomplished a lot for America's farmers and ranchers by focusing on the customer, working with a sense of urgency, and delving into the operational infrastructure to make things work more efficiently. From my position as the de facto operational leader of an organization with nearly 25,000 employees in 2,500 offices across the U.S., I learned what it takes to run a large, bureaucratic organization, how to strategically focus on what really matters, and the importance of listening and bringing people together to solve problems," Jamie said.

I like to think that one's purpose runs deep within their veins. Without knowing it, we often make decisions that guide us in the direction of our destiny. Before Jamie even stepped



Jamie Clover Adams,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
MICHIGAN ASPARAGUS
ADVISORY BOARD

"The asparagus industry, however, is at a juncture where policy and marketing have taken center stage—areas where my background can help the industry grapple with the impact of imports and the cost of labor on producer bottom lines."

foot in fresh produce, she recognized an opportunity to strengthen the industry's standing at the government level.

"I learned there is not a significant understanding of the produce industry inside the USDA, except for at the Agricultural Marketing Service. I am hopeful we laid the groundwork for a greater understanding going forward," she added.

With this unique perspective in her back pocket, Jamie will be forging a path toward increased awareness of Michigan asparagus. Her professional experience prior to her current role opened the doors to a new level of understanding, allowing Jamie to tackle any challenges that may come her way.

Jamie's roots are lovingly intertwined with those of Michigan's agricultural sector. In early 2012, she worked as the Director of Policy, Quality of Life Group at the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. Later that year, she took on the position of Director at the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, a role which she held until joining the USDA in 2018.

"My work leading two state agriculture departments as well as my time at USDA provided wide-ranging experiences and learning opportunities across many different issues," Jamie explained. "I've also met and worked with many talented people through the years—folks I can call on when working through issues that face our industry."

In the past year that Jamie has manned the helm as Executive Director, she has already fostered a deep appreciation for the asparagus sector and its purveyors. As she told me, MAAB was formed by a group of growers in the 1980s, and the organization's main purpose is to fund asparagus research and promotion.

"I am a one-person show working with a marketing firm on our promotion programs and with Michigan State University coordinating important production research," she

stated. "I have been laser-focused on improving our growers' bottom line in multiple areas: cost and availability of labor, as asparagus is a hand-harvested crop; promotion of a crop that is available as fresh for eight weeks a year and in stiff competition with imports from low-wage regions of the world; and addressing ever-increasing weed and disease pressures."

Jamie relayed that by working with industry partners, her goals are to secure more sustainable harvesting costs for MAAB growers through wage rates and/or mechanization and find ways to increase grower returns at retail.

"I have been laser-focused on improving our growers' bottom line in multiple areas..."

From left to right: Isao Asakura, Steve Carroll, Steve Packer, Jamie, and Glenn Rogers at Honee Bear Canning, which cans a large variety of Michigan vegetables including pickled asparagus



"My biggest challenge so far has been determining how to tell the Michigan asparagus story in a way that resonates with retailers and consumers. I continue to look for more information and ideas to refine and improve my pitch," she noted. "The biggest personal reward has been meeting and getting to know asparagus growers. They are a group of very strategic and forward-thinking business people who are continually looking for opportunities to innovate. They keep me on my toes."

On top of this, Jamie informed me that the team provides a fantastic and truly one-of-a-kind product.

"Michigan asparagus is a flavor-filled, nutrient-dense, low-calorie

vegetable. It is great on the grill and as a side dish to your favorite protein (in my case, beef) or included with a breakfast quiche or cooked in an air fryer," Jamie said. "Michigan asparagus is sustainable. It's one to four days old when purchased and is watered by Mother Nature. Michigan's asparagus growers are reliable suppliers with decades of expertise raising the crop."

Having grown up on a farm, Jamie has the unique ability to elevate and spotlight what is most important to the fresh produce growers she represents. Similar to my own early writings, the catalyst to her career as an ag advocate began when she was just a child. Her boots-on-the-ground understanding of a farm bloomed into a life led by purpose.

"The personal values instilled in me by my folks track with the growers and Board Members I serve. Asparagus growers must provide customers with a safe, nutritious product, or they will turn to someone else. Integrity and commitment to the product keep consumers coming back for Michigan asparagus," Jamie continued.

As our conversation wound down, I couldn't help but revisit my own definition of purpose. Is it possible to map out an entire path forward by taking one simple step? Jamie's

journey to produce puts the proof—or purpose—in the pudding.

"My new role aligns nicely with a fundamental concept articulated and practiced in the Administration of my former boss, Michigan

diets. It's gratifying to be a part of an industry that produces a product that can truly make a positive difference in people's lives."

I cannot think of a more perfect way to sum up the produce industry's

"The produce industry is complex, with many moving parts, challenges, and problems to solve. It's fun to get up every day and work relentlessly to solve the problems my growers face and to work collaboratively with others to address challenges."

Governor Rick Snyder: relentless positive action. The produce industry is complex, with many moving parts, challenges, and problems to solve. It's fun to get up every day and work relentlessly to solve the problems my growers face and to work collaboratively with others to address challenges," Jamie concluded. "I am passionate about telling the asparagus story—our forward-thinking growers and our tasty and nutritious product—and being part of the larger effort to increase vegetables in American

mission statement. You could even argue that this positive action Jamie speaks of is the very purpose of our beloved fresh produce industry—but that is a musing for another day.

Let us find comfort in the fact that even though our own definitions of "purpose" may differ, we are all inarguably leading purposeful lives simply by chasing after our passions.

Writer, Executive Director, or otherwise, we are on the right path. 🍷



WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Sunripe Roma Tomatoes ?



PICO DE MAYO

INGREDIENTS

- 4 large** Sunripe Roma tomatoes (1 lb), diced
- 1 medium** jalapeño, seeds and membranes removed, diced
- ½ cup** white onion, finely diced
- 1 tsp** garlic, minced
- ¼ cup** cilantro, chopped
- 1** lime
- Salt and pepper, to taste

- Prep Time:** 10 min
- Chill Time:** 30 min
- Servings:** 1 bowl

DIRECTIONS

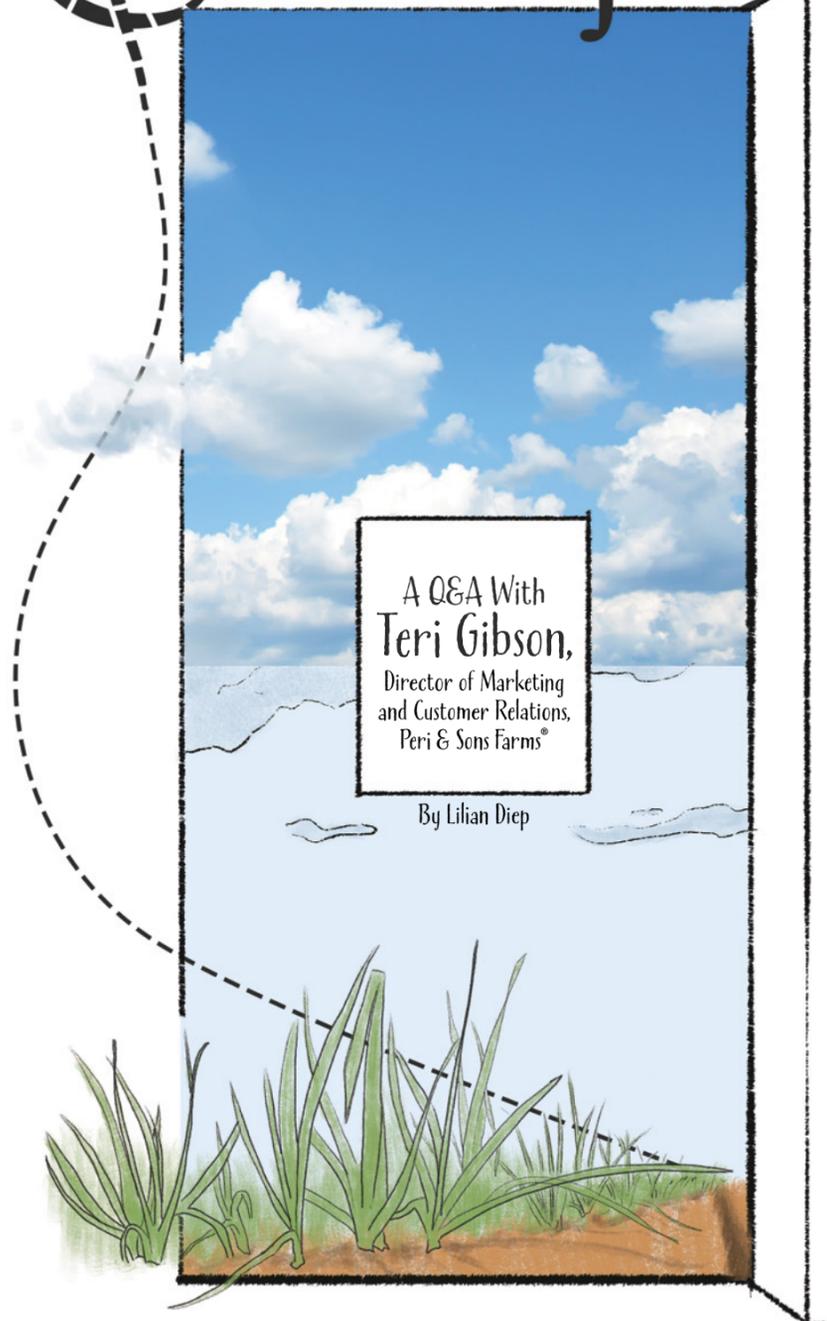
- 1 Add diced ingredients and minced garlic to a medium size bowl.
- 2 Squeeze lime juice over ingredients. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Taste and add more lime, salt, and pepper as desired.
- 3 Cover and let sit in the fridge for at least 30 minutes. Mixture will chill and flavors will meld together. This also lets the juices release from the tomato and soften the jalapeño and onion. Enjoy!

Storage: Refrigerate in a sealed container for up to 5 days.

To learn more about Sunripe, visit www.sunripecertified.com



Sweet Serendipity



A Q&A With
Teri Gibson,
Director of Marketing
and Customer Relations,
Peri & Sons Farms®

By Lilian Diep

It can be a gentle pull or an abrupt push, but in life, we have all experienced it.

Sweet serendipity occurs when you find yourself traveling down an unexpected hallway and a door appears. It isn't on any established blueprint you've drawn for yourself, but a feeling pulls you forward to turn the knob. For through that door, you will find the path that you were destined to take—either to your dreams or to a valuable life lesson. The road may look rough, but a framework, materials, and solutions start to emerge once you've stepped through. Nothing a little elbow grease can't smooth out.

For Teri Gibson, that door was opened when she picked up the phone in 2009.

Back then, Teri's plans didn't involve Peri & Sons Farms®. In fact, the now Director of Marketing and Customer Relations hadn't dreamed of becoming part of the fresh produce industry at all. If it weren't for a phone call from Pamela Peri, Executive Vice President, the strings of fate wouldn't have been tied, bringing this explorer onto a new road to travel down and create for herself.

When Teri made the switch from graphic design and advertising to marketing, it was a jump into a new industry. However, Teri has found her niche in marketing what she says is the best product in the world: fresh produce. Fresh produce consumption is a common necessity, but as our industry continues to evolve and adapt, the need for unique and relatable content to generate renewed energy to be healthy is at an all-time high.

Finding ways to encourage shoppers and diners to consume more produce is even more important now as our everyday becomes increasingly hectic. In fact, it was for this reason that Teri was first brought onto the scene.

Q1



Lilian Diep: Advertising as well as designing non-perishable products are different from marketing fresh produce, but the advantages one finds in those experiences have helped you create and emerge in your role uniquely. So, Teri, how did your career path lead you to align yourself with a company like Peri & Sons Farms?

Teri Gibson, Director of Marketing and Customer Relations, Peri & Sons Farms: My career path into the produce industry was anything but straight.



Advertising was my professional passion. I had developed an eclectic skill set from disciplines such as graphic design, creative direction, media, printing production, product development, project management, client relations, and marketing management.

But, in 2009, the economic upheaval led me to look for a new opportunity outside of the advertising world. Out of the blue, I received a call from Pamela Peri, the sister of a friend. Pam and her husband, David Peri, own Peri & Sons Farms. She heard I was in transition and was hoping I had time to take on a project.

Q2

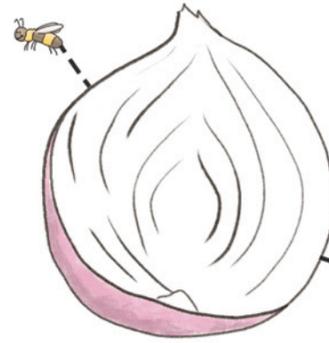
LD: I imagine this must have been like a twist of fate, especially since you weren't involved with the fresh produce industry at the time. What did Peri & Sons have in mind with your skill set?

TG: Serendipity is what I would call it. The company was experiencing tremendous growth at the time. As EVP, Pam had her hands full, and Sales, under their daughter and now Retail Sales Manager Jessica Peri, was taking off rapidly. The Peris felt that marketing was the next step in their growth plan, and Pam wanted me to help create that blueprint.

In preparation for this project, I immersed myself in Peri & Sons' farming operation and the produce industry. I was surprised and, frankly, amazed by the size and sophistication of the family's farm and the scope of the industry in general. I was very excited to propose a plan and provide a general marketing job description, in addition to suggestions for entering the digital and social media realm. The plan was well-received, and I truly enjoyed working with them.

When Pam called me again a couple of weeks later, I was happy and surprised that she actually wanted to offer me that marketing position at the farm. My initial reaction was that I couldn't accept because a move—or even the commute out—to Yerington, Nevada, was 90 miles away from me. But Pam, being the visionary she is, suggested that I try working remotely. Remote working is common practice now, but 12 years ago, it was a leap of faith.

Obviously, I was thrilled to accept, and the arrangement has worked well for us ever since.

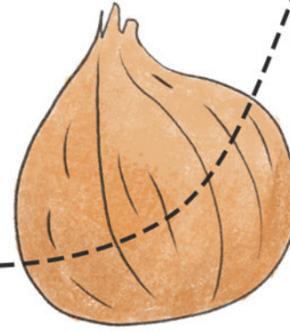


Q3

LD: A visionary and leader that can spot your underlying talent, if I may say! Given your background in advertising and graphic design, and what we have talked about so far, how do you think these skill sets give you an edge in marketing fresh produce?

TG: Graphic design was the entry point for me as a creative person. Over time, I came to understand that you can use your creative energy in all kinds of ways—not just in creating art. Creative problem-solving can help develop new ideas and solutions. It is the ability to think differently and come up with original ideas and strategies that aren't conventional. When you think creatively, you can do more with less and bring out the best in other people.

Fresh produce is volatile, dynamic, and perishable. In other industries, most products go through development and are vetted; usually, you would get around two-plus years to allow adjustments. Fresh produce is always evolving, and it is always changing. So, when you're marketing a product like onions, which is labeled "conventional" by the industry from the start, you need to be creative to stand out in a crowded market.



Q4

LD: With a market that's crowded with choice, the need for something different or out of the norm does catch my eye. So, what makes Peri & Sons stand out in the industry, and how does your unique role contribute to that?

TG: Before Peri & Sons, the idea that "food is medicine," especially fruits and vegetables, as arguably the most important thing you can control when it comes to your health was very appealing to me. And different.

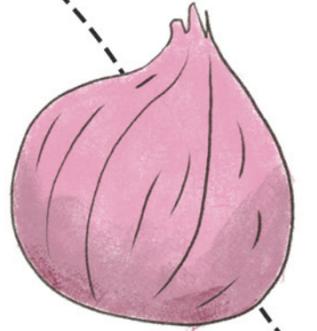
Skyrocketing healthcare costs are a significant burden on our economy, so keeping people out of the health system longer is an economic necessity. Working with Peri & Sons, I can help spread the general message that a diet rich in vegetables—especially onions— and fruits can help reduce, even prevent, many diseases, including diabetes. These diseases are an enormous problem in the U.S.

Produce's role within the larger topic of climate change is becoming more widely understood as well. As a Certified Sustainable Farm operation by SCS Global, Peri & Sons Farms is working to reduce food waste as part of our larger sustainability mission. We're systematically monitoring and improving every aspect of the farm operation so that in the end, we're reducing food waste—anywhere along the line from the fields to the consumer's kitchen. These efforts align with Peri & Sons Farms' and our customers' desire to care for the planet.

"...I immersed myself in Peri & Sons' farming operation and the produce industry. I was surprised and, frankly, amazed by the size and sophistication of the family's farm and the scope of the industry in general."

-Teri Gibson,

Director of Marketing and Customer Relations, Peri & Sons Farms®



Q5

LD: There is a great pride I feel I can hear in your voice as you describe the impact you and Peri & Sons have. Now that you have more than settled into our industry, what are some joys you've found from working with fresh produce?

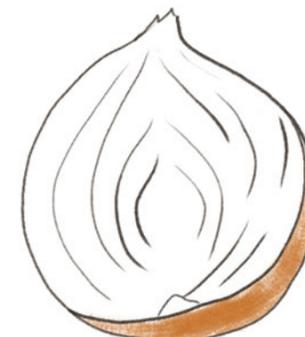
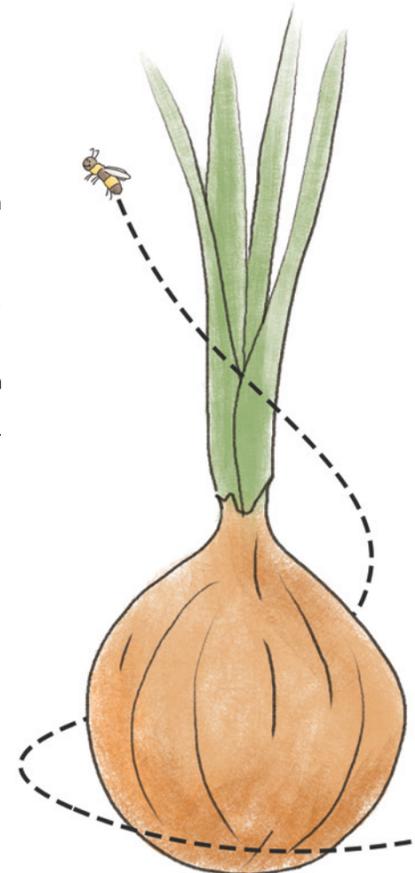
TG: My first Produce Marketing Association—now International Fresh Produce Association—show was mind-blowing. Produce had always "just been there," and I never thought much about it. Nowadays, I think about produce all the time, especially onions. During this process, my family and friends have also become produce savvy. What a dream job this has turned out to be.

The Peris are wonderful people, and the company they've built reflects their spirit, tenacity, intelligence, innovativeness, and appreciation for the talents of others. And, as a marketer, honestly, can you ask for a better product than fresh produce?

Now that I have a better understanding of what it takes to be an American farmer, my heart and soul are filled with appreciation for those who meet the challenges from seed to store every day so that we can all enjoy fresh produce. It's awe-inspiring.

We all start out on the same journey, bumbling along what we perceive as the right path to take. However, as many can attest, we feel like our hearts are pulled in a different direction. For a select few, like Teri, their paths have led them to their calling. They just need a few tools to get started.

For those still traversing across the many hallways of opportunity, destined to land in fresh produce, serendipity is sure to mark the way. And, as we know, our industry awaits with eager arms for those looking to find their homes. 🍅





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SCAN TO LEARN MORE



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Weekly Dollar Sales increase by 10%, a lift of nearly \$800K per week¹



In the West, 70% of avocado shoppers with a preference would choose California Avocados²



Increased sales velocity of 4% means more dollars for retailers³

Avocado Sales Grow When California Avocados are in Season!

Your shoppers anxiously anticipate the California season because of the consistent quality, freshness, and homegrown taste of fresh California Avocados. They value the California difference and spend more when California Avocados are available. You can give them what they're asking for and benefit from California season's higher sales velocity, increased dollar sales, and shopper preference.



Keep up with demand, carry California Avocados. Contact us for customized marketing programs and POS material.

¹California Season (26-wks ending Aug '21) vs. non-California Season (26-wks ending Mar '21)
²2021 California Avocado Tracking Study Q9. If given a choice, which avocados would be your preference? Answers: Avocados grown in...
³Sales Velocity = Dollar Sales per Million ACV. California Season (26-wks ending Aug '21) vs. non-California Season (26-wks ending Mar '21)

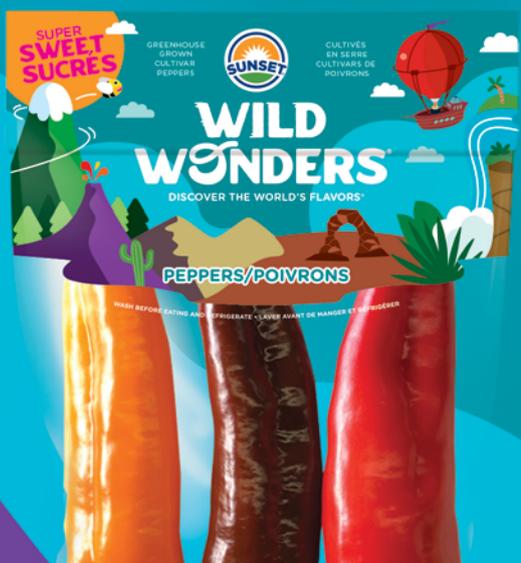


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