

Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

the

SNACK

ISSUE 70 SEPT 2022

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NEW YORK APPLE ASSOCIATION
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Generations of Growth

WE ALL STAND SHAKILY AT MANY THRESHOLDS IN OUR LIVES. Our periphery tightens, chest constricts, heart beats with a primal desire for safety or surrender. Large or small, personal or professional, these crossroads define us—they deepen us.

I was talking to an industry friend recently about these kinds of moments. The doorways we pause before, the ones that seem to stick a bit more than others, warped by time and expectation. I often forget when standing in front of one of these moments that we all have more shared experiences than not; we all cast a hand up to block the same torrential weather over and over again. We all hold someone tight or wish we did. We are all, at times, a five-year-old child standing on the edge of the dark, unwilling to paint our first step into that shaded other.



This letter is often a threshold. The cursor teeters on the edge of either spilling over into pure emotion or reining back into the thickness of neutrality and self-consciousness. The only thing that gets easier is knowing there is something—for better or worse—on the other side. A becoming, an exhale, a cyclical horizon we step toward—whether we like it or not. Stringing together these moments is the story of our lives, each step and stumble a revelatory beginning to a new moment. Even something as small as this 9 x 12 white page straddles four decades of fears, love, trauma, celebrations, grief, and metamorphosis. This letter is a doorway. And, I admit, some days I have a hard time walking through it.

These emotionally loaded moments look different on different days—and certainly in different decades. Vulnerability has a different texture and temperature than it did at five years old. Our personal narratives can confine us, but more often than not, they can connect us.

Some friends tell me, “It’s 40!” And that makes a lot of sense. I spent my first 10 years finding my footing—quite

literally—and the next decade grinding that footing to a halt. I plowed through my 20s without care or concern, fleeting immortal moments, but with a deep desire to write it all down. Then I spent my 30s trying to figure out the first three decades and what these moments all meant, deepening the holes and summing hills I thought were profoundly unnavigable.

But there is always the other side.

As an industry, I find us in a space like this. The thresholds today, the ones we all stand before, require individuals to step through, but in order to effect change, we need the many—a community—to walk through together. We need to be allies and allied, we need to be uncomfortable and we need to be at peace inside our discomfort.

Some of those thresholds that mark our path today are equitable and safe work environments, equality, diversity, and inclusion—all ideas shifting into movements and inciting change. Some may call them a revelation and some may call them a reckoning, but they are all thresholds that will define the way people are able to walk through them moving forward. Some of us are, simply, finding our voice.

I hope that you come to trust, over time, that we are here to hear both your experiences and your reckonings, your stumbles and triumphs.

Let your story be a threshold. Now, walk through it.

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

DID YOU KNOW?

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

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SPROUTS FARMERS MARKET

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DEPARTMENTS

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**LIBATIONS FOR ALL
OCCASIONS**
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Cherry Tomatoes on-the-Vine
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UMAMI
Top Flavor
Trend of
2022

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At Local Bounti, we're on a mission to nourish humankind and protect our planet. Using state-of-the-art technology, we grow the highest-quality, longest-lasting, pesticide-free greens available while drastically reducing land/water use and food waste.



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WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Sweet Valley Citrus
Satsumas ?



SATSUMA BURRATA CAPRESE

INGREDIENTS

4 Sweet Valley Citrus Satsumas
3–4 ripe tomatoes
2 (4 oz) Burrata cheeses
3 **tbsp** basil pesto
Sea salt and pepper, to taste
Basil leaves, for garnish

Prep Time: 10 min
Cook Time: 10 min
Servings: 4



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Slice tomatoes into rounds.
- 2 Peel Satsumas and cut horizontally into wheels.
- 3 Arrange tomatoes and Satsuma wheels on a platter.
- 4 Cut one Burrata to add to the center and use the other around the rest of the platter.
- 5 Sprinkle with sea salt and freshly cracked pepper and drizzle with basil pesto. Garnish with basil leaves and enjoy!

To learn more about Sweet Valley Citrus, visit www.sweetvalleycitrus.com

WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Jasmine Vineyards
Table Grapes ?



SUMMER'S NOT OVER MOCKTAILS WITH FROZEN GRAPE GARNISH

INGREDIENTS

INFUSED SYRUP

4 **tbsp** dried juniper berries
4 **oz** water
4 **oz** sugar

COCKTAIL

6 Jasmine Vineyards Green, Red, and Black Table Grapes (2 per color), for garnish
3 **oz** sparkling grape juice
3 **oz** plain carbonated water
1 **oz** juniper syrup
Orange bitters
Orange twists, for garnish

Prep Time: 10 min
Cook Time: 20–30 min
Servings: 2



DIRECTIONS

- 1 To make infused syrup: combine 4 oz of natural sugar and 4 oz of water over medium-high heat and bring to a simmer. Stir occasionally to avoid scorching the sugar. When the sugar has melted, add 3–4 **tbsp** of dried juniper berries that have been crushed or roughly chopped. Allow the mixture to continue simmering for an additional 20–30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and allow mixture to cool, then strain for use.
- 2 Put three grapes, one of each color, on a short bamboo skewer and freeze until solid. Keep in the freezer until you're ready to place on the finished drink.
- 3 Cut a twist of orange peels for each drink you are making and set aside for later.
- 4 Over ice, stir together 1.5 oz sparkling grape juice, 1.5 oz plain carbonated water, 0.5 oz juniper syrup, and a few dashes of orange bitters.
- 5 Strain the mixture into a frozen cocktail glass.
- 6 Remove the grape garnish from the freezer and add an orange twist to each one before resting it horizontally over the top of the glass. Enjoy!

To learn more about Jasmine Vineyards, visit www.jasminevineyards.com



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CALIFORNIA
**TABLE
GRAPES**
SNAPSHOT

By Lilian Diep

Red, green, black—all colors grown under the sun. Shoppers gravitate to these juicy globes as soon as they land on the shelf. With the California Department of Food and Agriculture naming grapes as one of the top sales crops for the state, what better way to rack up seasonal promotions than with some of the Golden State's finest? Take a peek to see how to best maximize your table grape merchandising strategies...

**Summer
Royal**

Season: MAY-early OCT
Color: Black
Size: Medium
Shape: Round to slightly oval
Seeds? No



**Midnight
Beauty**

SUGRATHIRTEEN
Season: JUN-SEP
Color: Blue-black
Size: Large
Shape: Elongated
Seeds? No



**Sweet
Sapphire**

IFG SIX
Season: AUG-SEP
Color: Blue-black
Size: Medium-large
Shape: Elongated with dimple
Seeds? No



**Arra Mystic
Dream**

ARRATHIRTYTWO
Season: SEP-DEC
Color: Black
Size: Large-extra large
Shape: Oval
Seeds? No





Autumn Royal

Season: AUG-JAN
Color: Black
Size: Large
Shape: Oval, elongated
Seeds? No

Scarlet Royal

Season: JUN-JAN
Color: Red
Size: Large
Shape: Oval
Seeds? No



Arra Passion Punch®

ARRATWENTYEIGHT
Season: SEP-OCT
Color: Pinkish-red
Size: Large-extra large
Shape: Oval
Seeds? No

Crimson Seedless

Season: AUG-JAN
Color: Red
Size: Medium
Shape: Cylindrical
Seeds? No



Flame Seedless

Season: MAY-OCT
Color: Red
Size: Medium
Shape: Round
Seeds? No

Sweet Celebration®

IFG 68-175
Season: JUN-DEC
Color: Red
Size: Large
Shape: Oval
Seeds? No



Jack's Salute®

IFG NINE
Season: SEP-OCT
Color: Soft red
Size: Large
Shape: Elongated
Seeds? No

Red Globe

Season: JUL-JAN
Color: Red
Size: Very large
Shape: Round
Seeds? Yes



Passion Fire™

ARRATWENTYNINE
Season: JUN-AUG
Color: Fiery red
Size: Large-extra large
Shape: Oval
Seeds? No

Sweet Scarlet

Season: AUG-NOV
Color: Vibrant pink
Size: Medium-large
Shape: Oval
Seeds? No



Sheegene-20

Allison®, Fall Bliss™
Season: AUG-JAN
Color: Red
Size: Large
Shape: Oval
Seeds? No

Arra Sugar Drop™

ARRATHIRTY
Season: JUN-JUL
Color: Creamy green
Size: Large
Shape: Elongated
Seeds? No



Sparkle™

Season: JUL-AUG
Color: Red
Size: Large
Shape: Elongated
Seeds? No

Holiday®

90-3618
Season: SEP-DEC
Color: Red
Size: Very large
Shape: Round
Seeds? No



Scarlotta Seedless®

SUGRANINETEEN
Season: SEP-JAN
Color: Red-dark red
Size: Large
Shape: Oval, elongated
Seeds? No

Superior Seedless®

SUGRAONE®
Season: MAY-OCT
Color: Green
Size: Large
Shape: Oval, elongated
Seeds? No



*SOME FRUIT SOLD UNDER LICENSE AS SUPERIOR SEEDLESS



Sheegene-21

Ivory®, Sugar Crunch®, Summer Crunch, and more

Season: JUN-NOV

Color: Green

Size: Large

Shape: Round to oval

Seeds? No

Arra Sweeties™

ARRAFIFTEEN

Season: JUL-SEP

Color: Bright green

Size: Exceptionally large

Shape: Elongated

Seeds? No



Princess

Season: JUL-OCT

Color: Green

Size: Large

Shape: Cylindrical

Seeds? No

Sweet Globe™

IFG TEN

Season: JUN-NOV

Color: Creamy green

Size: Medium-large

Shape: Cylindrical

Seeds? No



Stella Bella®

Season: JUL-OCT

Color: Green

Size: Large

Shape: Elongated

Seeds? No

Pristine®

BLANC SEEDLESS

Season: JUL-DEC

Color: Green

Size: Very large

Shape: Elongated

Seeds? No



Sweet Carnival®

Season: AUG-DEC

Color: Golden

Size: Large

Shape: Elongated

Seeds? No

Autumn King

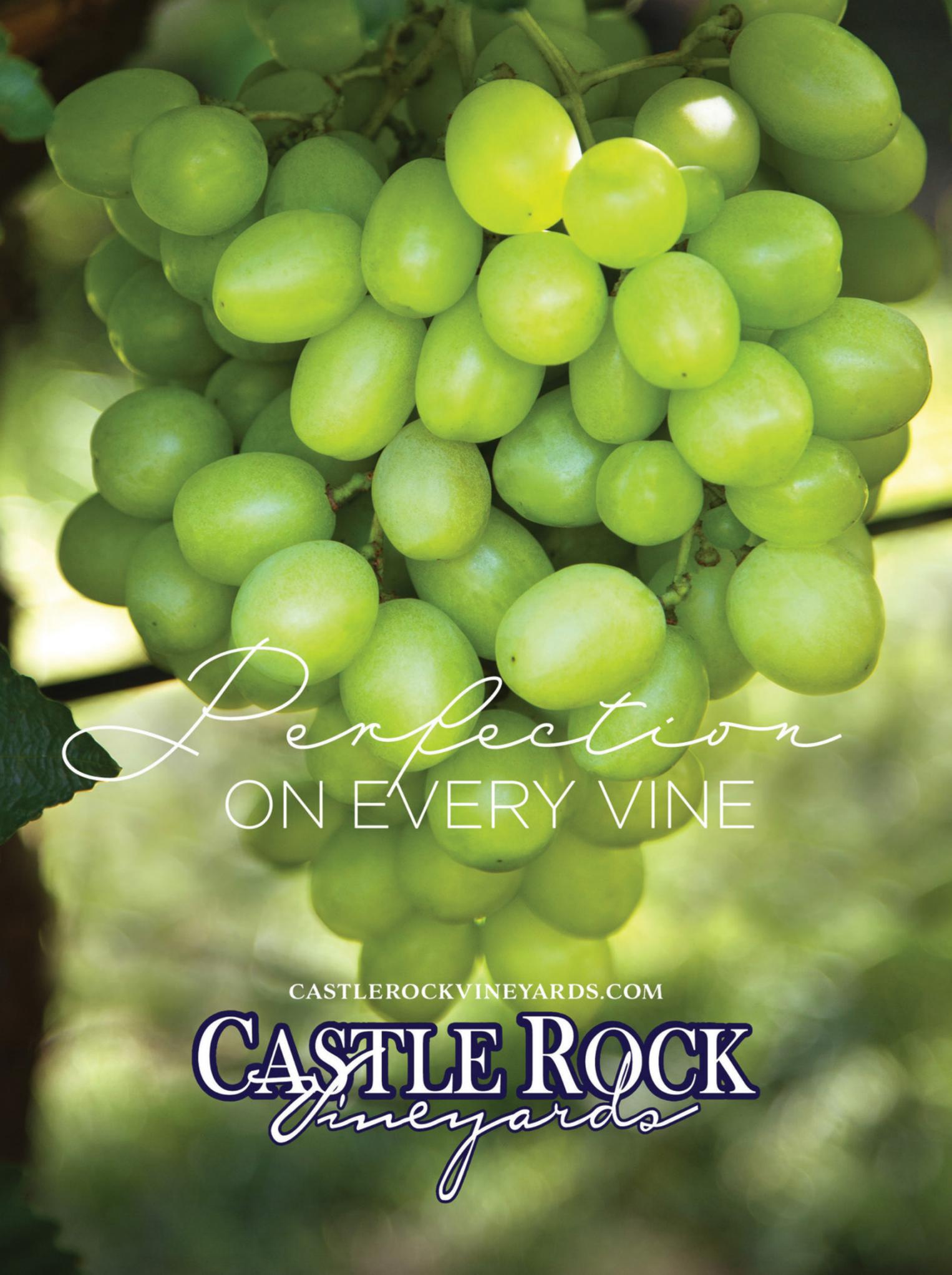
Season: AUG-JAN

Color: Green

Size: Very large

Shape: Cylindrical to oval

Seeds? No



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ON EVERY VINE

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CASTLE ROCK
Vineyards

Sources: Information from California Table Grape Commission and The Snack and AndNowUKnow table grape grower contributors
Some of these variety attributes and availability windows may vary depending on company and growing program

WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

4Earth Farms™ Organic
Cauliflower Rice ?



ORGANIC CAULIFLOWER RICE PIZZA CRUST

INGREDIENTS

1 lb bag of 4Earth Farms™ Organic Cauliflower Rice
1 egg
3/4 cup mozzarella cheese, shredded
1/4 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
 Pizza toppings

Prep Time: 10 min

Cook Time: 30 min

Servings: 4



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 400° F.
- 2 Cook 4Earth Farms Organic Cauliflower Rice as indicated on the package. Drain the cooked cauliflower, press out as much of the moisture as possible, and transfer to a mixing bowl. Add the mozzarella cheese, Parmesan cheese, and egg. Stir until well-blended.
- 3 On a prepared baking sheet or silicone baking mat, form mixture into a pizza crust, about a 12" circle.
- 4 Bake crust about 20–25 minutes until crust is golden brown and crisp.
- 5 Top with your favorite pizza toppings and bake another 10–12 minutes. Enjoy!

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

A Closer Look at Gwillimdale Farms Conscious Consumption™

UP
CLOSE

By Lilian Diep

Natural. Conscientious. Innovative. These words and more are the benchmarks of Gwillimdale Farms as it pursues a repeat spot within shoppers' homes. The idea of the Conscious Consumption™ line is driven by both the growers' and consumers' desire for higher standards atop retailers' shelves, and what better way to meet their expectations than by going to the root of the demand?

Packaging is one of the first platforms suppliers look to reinvent and re-establish their stance as a sustainable company. By hitting shoppers' emotional appeal, eyes-first, Gwillimdale grounds itself as an eco-friendly company. The grower is able to achieve this with the paper-based packaging in its Conscious Consumption line, all while giving number-two white potatoes an eco-friendly spot on the table.

Harnessing artificial intelligence alongside the company's desire for sustainable agriculture, Gwillimdale is helping divert 20 percent of edible food waste from landfills while offering an environmentally friendly solution to plastic packaging. The bags are simple, informative, and include air holes to help the precious tubers breathe and have a longer shelf-life, further preventing potential food waste once they leave stores.

Compostable. Recyclable. Nutritious. These are the new words your shoppers will leave with as they make their way through your aisles, a bag of consciousness tucked in their arms. 



LEARNING LOCAL

A Q&A WITH **MEGHAN DIAZ**, SENIOR CATEGORY MANAGER OF LOCAL IN FLORIDA, SPROUTS FARMERS MARKET

BY **CHANDLER JAMES**

As a trade news writer in the produce industry and a resident of Sacramento, California, my consumer radar is finely attuned to the availability of local products. Almost as soon as I set foot in the grocery store, my eyes are scanning the produce displays for signage pointing to local fare, especially those with additional information about where the food was grown.

Though Sacramento is considered to be the Farm-to-Fork Capital of the United States, we are not the only advocates for buying local. For Sprouts Farmers Market, one bustling hub for local programs is Florida, where the retailer employs a dedicated team of leaders who are eager to increase visibility.

One such leader is Meghan Diaz, Senior Category Manager of Local in Florida, who shared with me the ins and outs of this inspiring operation.



Q1 CHANDLER JAMES: Meghan, I know Sprouts Farmers Market is focusing intently on bringing local to the forefront in terms of sustainability, educating consumers, creating flavor-centric programs, and supporting communities. Can you tell me about your overarching strategies when it comes to promoting local products?

MEGHAN DIAZ, Senior Category Manager of Local in Florida, Sprouts Farmers Market: At Sprouts, we believe good food comes from good people, and we remain committed to investing and partnering with growers and producers who intentionally curate responsibly and locally source their products. Over the years, we've built incredible relationships with local farmers and companies to bring goodness into each of our communities.



Locally grown, organic locally grown, and innovative varieties and flavors are all leading our growth in the Florida market. Our customers have an adventurous palate as they leverage existing strengths in a unique assortment of better-for-you, quality products steeped in innovation. With organics representing more than a third of our produce business in Florida, we know shoppers across the state are interested in fresh, affordable organics, especially local varieties.

Q2 CJ: It seems Sprouts has long had a history of championing local foods, and that has only continued to increase as time goes on. How has Sprouts' local program evolved over the years, and what are the company's long-term goals, both in Florida and across the country?

MD: Now that Sprouts operates over 380 stores in 23 states, our focus and dedication to local and sustainability have become top priorities. Our sustainability strategy pushed forward the opening of two critical distribution centers recently in Florida and in Denver, Colorado, allowing us to drive efficiencies and increase access to a fresher, more local assortment. Additionally, the creation of the Local and Innovation Teams across the country has given Sprouts the ability to have experts in each market dedicated to building strategic partnerships and buying the freshest, most regionally relevant mix of items.

Our current success is the result of years of planning, leadership support, and investment.

Looking forward, we plan to grow our programs nationwide, focusing on innovation, expanding partnerships, and building out our assortment across conventional and organic offerings. Similarly, in Florida, we are ecstatic to grow our assortment, and we continue to focus on expanding our organic and innovative selection. I believe our combined efforts and dedication to local and innovation are what differentiate us and are the driving force of our long-term strategy.



OVER THE YEARS, WE'VE BUILT **INCREDIBLE RELATIONSHIPS** WITH LOCAL FARMERS AND COMPANIES TO BRING GOODNESS INTO EACH OF OUR COMMUNITIES."

MEGHAN DIAZ,
Senior Category Manager of Local in Florida,
Sprouts Farmers Market



Now that Sprouts Farmers Market operates over 380 stores in 23 states, the company's focus and dedication to local and sustainability have become top priorities

Q3 CJ: From what you're telling me, Florida appears to be somewhat of an incubator for the local movement at Sprouts. How does this market serve as the perfect locale for you to trial new products and innovations while educating the consumer?

MD: Florida has been an exciting market to utilize as a testing ground for various items, ideas, and marketing strategies. Due to the bountiful offerings grown within the state, diverse population, and our current store count (now at 34 Sprouts stores in Florida), it gives us the ability to test and measure new ideas. This is speaking to all sides of the business that help bring local to life, including supply chain efficiencies, store support and education, marketing, and merchandising.

With all the great innovation happening in sustainability, from a sourcing and product perspective, we are proud to tell the educational story of our local partners through signage around local and unique products and share how they promote value. We don't want sustainability and our local programs to be just another symbol on the front of a package or sign; we want to tell a story that connects with our audience.

Q4 CJ: Outside of the Florida market, how does Sprouts work to tailor its local programs to the regions each of its stores reside in?

MD: We have a local/regional team in each major market accountable for finding and curating the freshest assortment of local, organic, unique, and seasonal produce at affordable prices.

Geographically, Sprouts has a wide reach, and we understand that local and regional relevance is not one-size-fits-all. Being relevant requires us to be present, with a boots-on-the-ground approach and shaking hands with the growers, which allows us to have that hyper-local understanding of what our customer in each specific market wants. From pack style to assortment, each market is unique, and we dedicate the time, effort, and resources to ensure authenticity.

WE DON'T WANT SUSTAINABILITY AND OUR LOCAL PROGRAMS TO BE JUST ANOTHER SYMBOL ON THE FRONT OF A PACKAGE OR SIGN; WE WANT TO TELL A STORY THAT CONNECTS WITH OUR AUDIENCE."

Q5 CJ: You mentioned earlier that flavor-centric programs have been essential to the expansion of your local assortment. How have you and Sprouts placed this at the forefront of your strategy?

MD: Our local teams are engaging with growers at the farms, sampling varieties, walking the fields, doing active cuttings, and participating in tastings of everything from apples to yucca!

We work very closely with our growers, flexing when needed to ensure the eating experience is exactly where we want it. Flexibility is a necessity; allowing the crop to tell us when it's ready instead of our demand dictating it, like a true farmer's market. Outside of varieties and freshness, we also prioritize working with growers who understand the stress of the supply chain for perishable commodities. It is really important that we work with growers who have strong technical knowledge of their product to avoid missteps that can negate the eating experience or flavor.



Q6 CJ: Not only are you engaging with growers at Sprouts, but you are getting involved with the community at a local level. How has this fostered a better understanding for the consumer, and what is Sprouts doing to ensure it remains a cornerstone of the community?

MD: At Sprouts, we do business in a way that fosters goodness for our communities and planet. Not only are we focused on sustainable sourcing through working with local and regional growers and sharing their stories with our customers, but we are also heavily committed to the communities we serve through Sprouts Healthy Communities Foundation. This organization proudly serves our local neighborhoods through nutritional education and access to fresh and healthy foods and financial assistance. Founded in 2015, the Foundation aims to inspire, educate, and empower individuals, especially children, to live healthier lives.

With a focus on nutrition education and fresh food access, our nonprofit partners teach children both how to grow and prepare fresh foods.

In addition, Sprouts donates all unsold but edible groceries to Feeding America® and its local affiliate hunger relief agencies through our Food Rescue program. We work with over 400 food rescue organizations from coast to coast, distributing fresh, wholesome, and nutritious foods to those in need. In 2021, this equaled more than 32 million pounds of food, or more than 26 million meals donated.

Q7 CJ: As consumers look to the produce aisle for inspiration during the fall season and surrounding holidays and celebratory eating occasions, how will Sprouts continue to accelerate its local programs?

MD: Due to our geographic stretch across 23 states, we have local programs in action year-round! As we progress through the summer months, we have some exciting programs in specific regions starting up. Our local teams have been working throughout the off-season, planning meticulously to ensure we put our best foot forward. This year, we expect to see over a 100 percent increase in local sourcing over last year. Additionally, we have invested heavily in our marketing and merchandising efforts, creating destinations within the store to capture the customer's attention in telling that local story.



Q8 CJ: On a more personal note, Meghan, how does bringing local to the forefront of sustainability align with your own personal values?

MD: It feels good to do good. It is a beautiful thing when you can combine your passion for produce, create and foster lasting relationships, and be proud of your accomplishments. Our industry is fascinating and vital to our survival; pushing local to the forefront gives me the opportunity to contribute in a positive way and have a lot of fun doing so!

One thing I have learned while working for Sprouts is we are committed to unique product innovation. We continue to build an innovation network by cultivating partnerships with up-and-coming vendors in the food industry, so there's always something new our shoppers can discover!

FLEXIBILITY IS A NECESSITY; ALLOWING THE CROP TO TELL US WHEN IT'S READY INSTEAD OF OUR DEMAND DICTATING IT, LIKE A TRUE FARMER'S MARKET."

As consumers peruse the produce aisle in search of products that are both flavorful and ethical, anyone shopping at Sprouts Farmers Market will certainly have their eyes peeled for that local label, and Meghan and her team are ready and waiting with fresh produce in hand. 🍌



ASIAN FUSION MELON SALAD

INGREDIENTS

SALAD

- 2 Pure Flavor® Solara™ Melons
- 4 Pure Flavor Poco Bites® Cocktail Cucumbers, ribboned
- 1 pack rice noodles, cooked
- 1 cup snow peas, blanched and chopped
- 2 scallions, chopped
- ¼ cup peanuts, chopped, for garnish
- ½ bunch cilantro, chopped, for garnish

Sesame seeds, for garnish
Chef tip: Add Tajín® Clásico Seasoning for garnish

Prep Time: 15 min
Cook Time: 0 min
Servings: 4

DRESSING

- 4 tsp light miso paste
- 2 tbsp rice vinegar
- 2 tbsp sesame oil
- 2 tbsp rice syrup
- Salt to taste

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Halve melons and scoop out the seeds. Using the melon baller, scoop out pieces of melon.
- 2 In a bowl, combine all dressing ingredients. Mix together noodles, cucumbers, melons, and snow peas with the dressing. Add scallions.
- 3 Arrange salad on plates and garnish as desired. Enjoy!

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PEARS AND PEOPLE

Growing pears at a high elevation can be tricky, but our industry has this category in hand with legacy growers at the helm. Fourth-generation farmer Erica Bland knows a thing or two about growing the best pears. She comes from a family that's been growing pears in Washington State's Cashmere Valley for Rainier Fruit since the 1950s. When it comes to expertise, Erica has it in spades...



1 BEING OF SERVICE

Outside of growing pears, Erica likes to grow her community. She enjoys spending her time giving back, being active, and providing support for the next generation. A “pear” of opportunities she’s had the pleasure of performing was coaching the high school tennis and basketball teams. Giving back to the community her family has been a part of since the 1950s feels good to her core.

2 ELEVATED VALUES

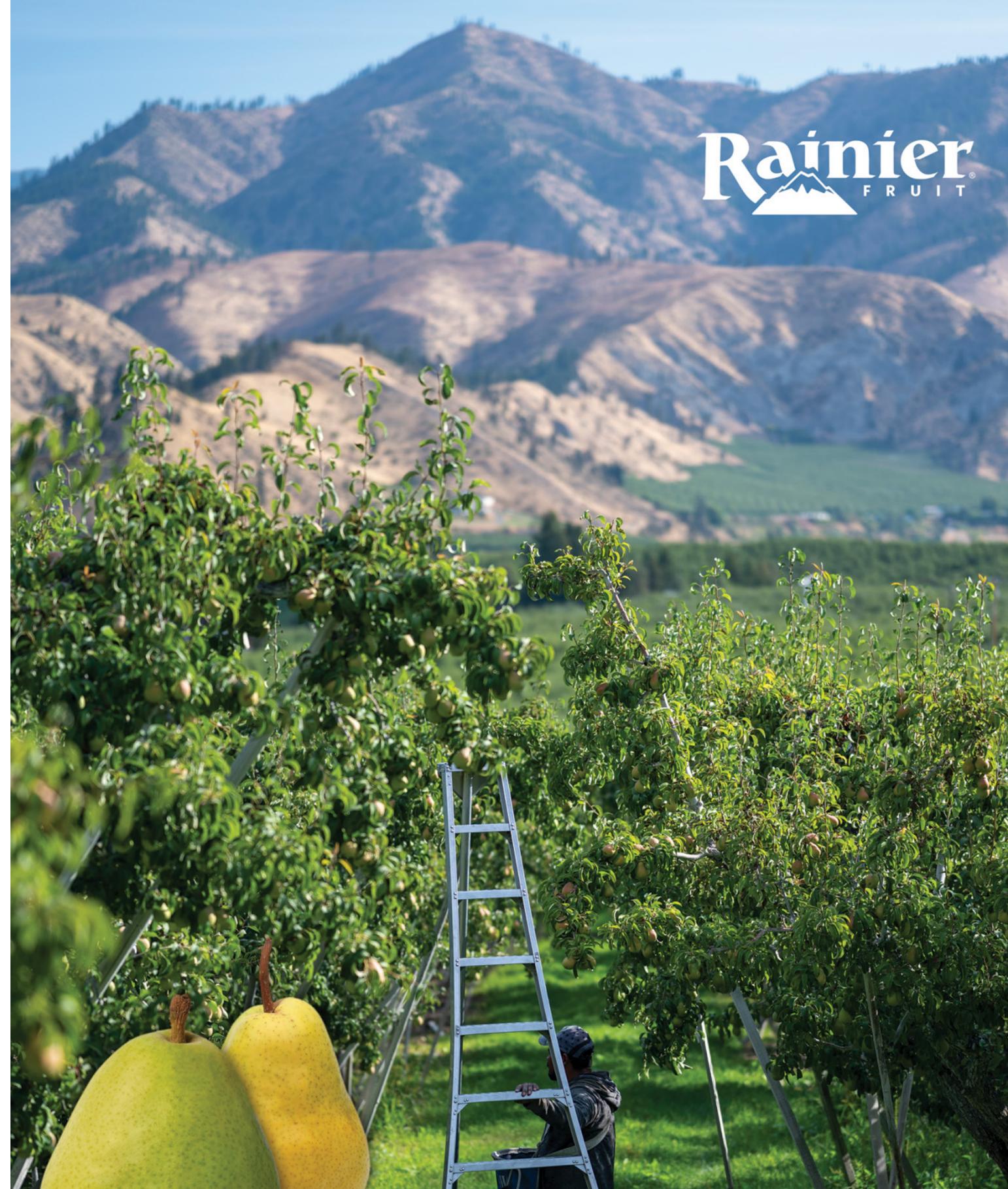
Rainier’s pears grow at high elevations to provide the best quality on the shelf. Elk and bears are a constant presence, but this is where pears love to grow. Erica and the Bland family nurture the trees to create high-quality fruit, all while protecting them from the wildlife eager to get a nibble. In doing so, the trees produce some of the best and most flavorful fruit in Washington State.

3 RIPE AND READY

As the protectors of the pear trees, Erica and the Blands also have a hand in preparing the fruit to be retail-ready. Rainier’s state-of-the-art ripening rooms are like its growing area. The ripening rooms serve as a critical component of the supply chain. That way, when product hits the shelf, shoppers have flavorful, ready-to-eat pears.



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.



Natural pearfection.

APPLES, PEARS, CHERRIES & BLUEBERRIES

MENTORS IN THE MAKING

Christina Ward

BY LILIAN DIEP

▶ **NOT EVERYBODY WAS BORN IN THE PRODUCE INDUSTRY,** but there are people who were born to be a part of it. Christina Ward, Senior Director of Global Marketing for Sunkist Growers, is one such person, walking along the path as familiar as the back of her hand. While she has only been with the California-based crew now for four years, it feels like Christina has always been in produce. It also helps that she's a native Californian, giving her the drive and incentive to promote the grower-owned cooperative so near and dear to her heart.

And it all started with a once-in-a-lifetime journey.

"When I was in college, I won a trip to Japan that was put on by a rock band. I had a sublime experience, and I learned so many things while unearthing some passions of my own," Christina recalls fondly. "After it all, I knew I wanted to pursue a career in marketing because it was the promotions team that gave me an adventure of a lifetime. I immediately realized that's what I wanted to do—create memorable experiences and impact people's lives for the better—and that has been my guiding star ever since."

Having discovered her newfound passion for advancing brands through the art of storytelling, Christina embarked on what would be a 20-year-and-counting career in marketing when she returned Stateside. She spent time with companies such as Air Methods, Griffin Communications Group, and SK + G honing her skills.

Christina built her repertoire around creating marketing programs for a variety of business sectors—which included food, lifestyle, entertainment, and aviation. After nearly two decades of developing her craft, it was then that she

pointed her compass back home and rediscovered Sunkist.

"Sunkist has been a sales and marketing co-op since 1893. I was pretty familiar with the iconic brand and fell head over heels when I later learned it was a grower-owned cooperative," Christina tells me. "As the longest-standing agricultural cooperative in the nation, Sunkist was also one of the first to brand produce and the originator of so much that speaks to realness and innovation."

To this day, there are two principles that resonate with Christina: think differently and have fun. This roadmap to finding solutions and celebrating successes has driven Christina throughout her fresh produce career, and the mentors she's met along the way serve as the guides steering her forward.

"I've been fortunate to be surrounded by stellar leaders and role models throughout my career. I get to work with and learn from some of the best in our industry," she recounts. "I've learned so much from our executive leadership team. Throughout my journey, they've inspired me to cultivate my abilities by asking the right questions and being patient and present when it comes to change—this is extra important to staying innovative and evolving alongside market trends."

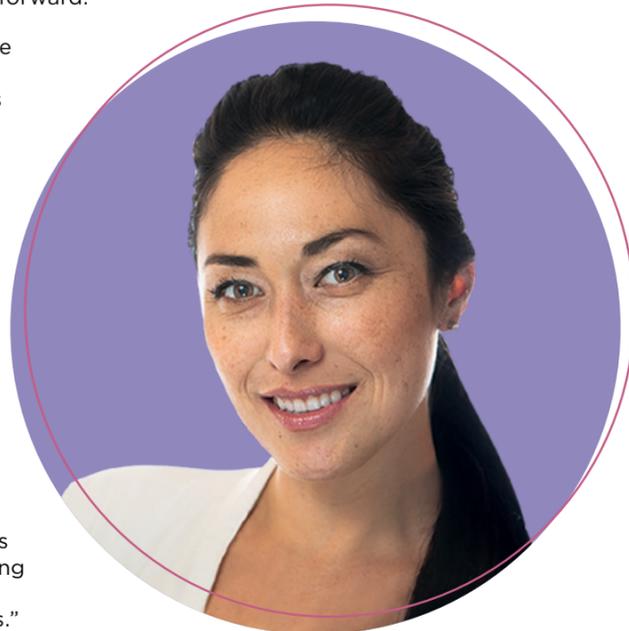
As Christina grasped the reins of her fresh produce career, she relied on her faithful leaders to guide her: President and Chief Executive Officer Jim Phillips,

Sunkist's steadfast leader; Chief Operations Officer Christian Harris, who challenged Christina to think differently; and Vice President of Global Licensing and Marketing Mark Madden, who encouraged Christina to extend her proverbial wings.

Another guide Christina met along her produce journey was Cassie Howard, Sunkist's Director of Category Management, who has been inspirational and instrumental in grounding Christina as she navigated fresh produce.

"Working with Cassie has given me a whole new outlook and perspective on value-added marketing," Christina shares. "Through our partnership, we have been able to create engaging marketing strategies thanks to the data and shopper insights she delivers daily."

As one knows while working in our industry, no two seasons are the same, especially in the citrus category. This constant change is what keeps this Senior Director of Global Marketing on her toes, which makes collaboration between departments essential to maintaining Sunkist's innovative prowess.



Christina Ward,

Senior Director of Global Marketing, Sunkist Growers

"So many of our growers are third-, fourth-, and even fifth-generation. Each one of them brings their own unique knowledge to make our company thrive, and I view mentorship similarly: personal and

professional growth also comes with sharing that knowledge with others," she imparts. "The mentors I've met have shaped me into who I am today, and I am eternally grateful."

It is a road well-traveled, but far from over, as Christina continues to forge her own path with the mentality of a California native and a heart now tied to fresh produce. 🍌

THE MENTORS ▶

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



Jim Phillips,

President and Chief Executive Officer, Sunkist Growers

“I met Christina almost four years ago at a Shipper and Sales Operations meeting. She had just started with Sunkist, and I was the President of one of Sunkist's largest shipper and grower representatives. After the meeting, Christina walked up and introduced herself, and I was instantly impressed. She was eager to understand the industry, the connection between the shippers and Sunkist Sales and Marketing, and, most importantly, our growers and who Sunkist represented.

Christina views every challenge as an opportunity, approaching them with the same gusto she had four years ago, and has become highly valued and respected by everyone. To be mentioned as one of her mentors is humbling and an honor—one that I don't take lightly. Her future is bright, and it's going to be fun to watch her grow and achieve her objectives. We're lucky to have her!



Christian Harris,

Chief Operations Officer, Sunkist Growers

“It may be fairer to say that we mentor and guide each other. Christina is a very important part of our leadership team and brings a wealth of knowledge, experience, and some soft skills that I would be the first to admit exceed mine.

When you are lucky enough to work with someone like Christina, the most important thing is to be available, offer advice and support when needed, and let her run. As she develops her leadership skills, we often talk about what can work and sometimes learn from other mistakes. Christina is great at communicating across the organization and finding solutions and results. She is a wonderful sounding board, has fantastic attention to detail, and has that tenacious personality you want to have alongside you.



Mark Madden,

Vice President of Global Licensing and Marketing, Sunkist Growers

“Christina has a great balance of knowledge, passion, fun, excitement, curiosity, and ability to succeed. She has taken flight since her arrival, continuously looking for opportunities, building our brand, supporting our sales efforts, and benefiting our growers in addition to working on self-improvement and being a better leader. When she first started at Sunkist, her instant ability to understand the world of citrus, the marketplace, our customers, consumers, and our growers told me she was going to achieve great things. I appreciate my opportunity to work with Christina.



Cassie Howard,

Director of Category Management, Sunkist Growers

“It has been great working alongside Christina the past few years and getting to know her better. She has introduced a fresh, new take on brand alignment, which has helped lead Sunkist to best-in-class recognition. I admire Christina's ability to jump into any situation and make connections wherever she goes. I value her partnership—the collaboration between Marketing and Category Management has never been better, which, ultimately, benefits our Sales team, our growers, and consumers.

POWERED BY **JOE PRODUCE**

WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Stemilt d'Anjou/
Bartlett Pears ?



STICKY PEAR PUDDING

INGREDIENTS

CAKE

- 1 Stemilt d'Anjou/Bartlett Pear, peeled, cored, and cut into 1/2" cubes
- Softened butter for greasing
- 1/2 cup dark brown sugar
- 1/4 cup salted butter, melted
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup half and half
- 1 cup flour
- 1 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp kosher salt
- 6 dates, finely chopped

"SAUCE"

- 1 cup dark brown sugar
- 3 tbsp cold salted butter, cut into small pieces
- 1 3/4 cup boiling water

Prep Time: 20 min

Cook Time: 15–18 min

Servings: 6

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat the oven to 375° F and generously butter six 1/2 cup ramekins. Place the buttered ramekins on a sheet pan.
- 2 In a medium-sized bowl, whisk together the melted butter and brown sugar. Add the egg and vanilla extract and whisk until the egg is incorporated, then add the half and half and stir until well-combined.
- 3 Add the flour, baking powder, and salt and stir until smooth. Fold in the dates and pears.
- 4 Transfer the batter to the prepared ramekins and divide evenly.
- 5 For the "sauce," sprinkle the brown sugar over the top of the batter and dot with the small pieces of butter evenly between each ramekin. Pour the boiling water over the top of the butter and sugar evenly between each ramekin. Leave 1/4" of room at the top.
- 6 Transfer the sheet pan of ramekins to the preheated oven. Bake 15–18 minutes, or until the top of the cake springs back when lightly touched.
- 7 Serve warm with vanilla ice cream.

To learn more about Stemilt, visit www.stemilt.com



APPLES SNAPSHOT

BY CHANDLER JAMES

The weather is cooling down, the leaves are beginning to turn, and consumers are looking to the apple category for all of their upcoming fall needs. The produce aisle abounds with a whole host of tantalizing varieties, but which ones are right for you? See how these red, yellow, and green beauties may play to your advantage...



RED DELICIOUS

FLAVOR Subtly sweet
TEXTURE Crisp and juicy
SIZE Medium-large
COLOR Scarlet red
SEASON Year-round



COSMIC CRISP®

FLAVOR Juicy with ample sweetness and subtle tartness
TEXTURE Firm and crisp
SIZE Large
COLOR Rich red color that almost sparkles with starburst-like lenticels
SEASON Year-round



SUGARBEE®

FLAVOR Intense notes of honey, caramel, and molasses with a complex finish
TEXTURE Extremely crisp
SIZE Medium-large
COLOR Mostly red blush
SEASON Oct-Aug



ENVY™

FLAVOR Refreshingly sweet; clean, fruity finish
TEXTURE Extraordinary crunch
SIZE Medium-large
COLOR Stripy red over a yellow background
SEASON Year-round



RAVE®

FLAVOR Outrageously juicy with a refreshing snappy zing
TEXTURE Crisp with the same Honeycrisp fracture but more juice
SIZE Medium-large
COLOR Fuchsia to red with a yellow background
SEASON Aug-Oct



FUJI

FLAVOR Sugary sweet
TEXTURE Firm, fine grain; very crisp
SIZE Medium-large
COLOR Reddish stripes; slight red blush over yellow background
SEASON Year-round



ROCKIT™

FLAVOR Crisp, sweet, and delicious
TEXTURE Always crisp
SIZE Miniature
COLOR Red blush
SEASON Year-round



SNAPDRAGON®

FLAVOR Sweet with a hint of spice and undertones of vanilla
TEXTURE Maximum crunch; often called MONSTER
SIZE Small-medium
COLOR Red with some yellow
SEASON Late Sep-May



KORU®

FLAVOR Sweet yet complex, subtle vanilla flavor
TEXTURE Incredible crunchy texture
SIZE Large
COLOR Unique, orange/red color with yellow undertones
SEASON Year-round between U.S. domestic season and New Zealand



PINK LADY®

FLAVOR Zippy and tart
TEXTURE Crisp and firm
SIZE Small-medium
COLOR Reddish-pink blush with yellow background
SEASON Year-round



AMBROSIA

FLAVOR Sweet, honey-like
TEXTURE Crisp, light, and refreshing
SIZE Varies
COLOR Blushing red over a creamy yellow background
SEASON Year-round (Domestic), May-Aug (Import)



MCINTOSH

FLAVOR Cider-like sweetness with a slight tang
TEXTURE Fine grain; extra juicy and crisp
SIZE Medium-large
COLOR Red with a green background
SEASON Sep-Jul



EVERCRISP®

FLAVOR Sweet and juicy with Honeycrisp and Fuji parentage
TEXTURE Moderately firm, packing a loud crunch
SIZE Large
COLOR Light red with yellow flecking
SEASON Nov-Mar



SWEETANGO®

FLAVOR Juicy and sweet with hints of fall spices and citrus notes
TEXTURE Crisp, thin-skinned apple with a loud crunch
SIZE Medium-large
COLOR Bright red on yellow background
SEASON Aug-Feb (Domestic), Apr-Jul (Import)



GALA

FLAVOR Mildly sweet with floral aroma
TEXTURE Crunchy
SIZE Small-medium
COLOR Pale golden yellow, with stripe-like to full red blush
SEASON Year-round



SMITTEN™

FLAVOR Perfectly balanced with refreshing sweetness
TEXTURE Crunchy and firm
SIZE Medium
COLOR Yellow background with red striping
SEASON Sep-Jun (domestic), Jun-Aug (import)



KANZI™

FLAVOR Sweet, tangy, and intense flavor; Gala and Braeburn parentage
TEXTURE Fine grain; extra juicy and crisp
SIZE Varies
COLOR Red with yellow hues
SEASON Year-round



AUTUMN GLORY®

FLAVOR Sweet with caramel and cinnamon notes
TEXTURE Crunchy with firm flesh
SIZE Medium
COLOR Yellow background with red stripes and blush
SEASON Oct-Jun



HONEYCRISP

FLAVOR Honey-sweet
TEXTURE Firm, fine grain; very crisp
SIZE Medium-large
COLOR Reddish stripes; slight red blush over yellow background
SEASON Year-round



KIKU®

FLAVOR Super sweet with Fuji characteristics
TEXTURE Crisp and juicy
SIZE Varies
COLOR Ruby-red with distinct yellow stripes
SEASON Year-round



JAZZ™

FLAVOR Sweet, tart
TEXTURE Dense, crunchy; refreshing bite
SIZE Varies
COLOR Bright red with subtle yellow under-striping
SEASON Year-round



LEMONADE™

FLAVOR Bright, tangy-sweet flavor with a hint of effervescence
TEXTURE Fine, crisp texture; firm yet juicy crunch
SIZE Medium
COLOR Golden yellow with occasional orange blush
SEASON May-Aug (New Zealand)
 Oct-Dec (United States)



OPAL®

FLAVOR Sweet, tangy
TEXTURE Distinctively crisp, naturally non-browning
SIZE Medium-large
COLOR Bright yellow
SEASON Oct-May



GOLDEN DELICIOUS

FLAVOR Sweet and mellow
TEXTURE Silky and crisp; thin skin
SIZE Medium
COLOR Golden yellow to white background
SEASON Year-round



ARCTIC® GOLDEN

FLAVOR Sweet and refreshing
TEXTURE Crisp and juicy
SIZE Medium; sold in slices and diced
COLOR Sunset yellow
SEASON Year-round



ARCTIC® GRANNY

FLAVOR Deliciously tart
TEXTURE Crisp and juicy Honeycrisp fracture but more juice
SIZE Medium-large; sold in slices and diced
COLOR Warm green
SEASON Year-round

WTF DO I DO WITH DelFrescoPure® Ombra™ Brown Tomatoes ?

{ what the fork }



CANAPÉ GRILLED SANDWICHES

INGREDIENTS

- 4 Ombra™ Brown Tomatoes
- ½ package LivingCube™ Basil Microgreens
- 8 thin slices of fresh baguette
- 2 tbsp store-bought basil pesto
- 5 mini mozzarella balls

Prep Time: 10 min
Cook Time: 5 min
Servings: 10

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Cut the tomatoes into slices and cut each of the mini mozzarella balls in half.
- 2 Place your bread slices on a baking sheet. Spread the pesto on each slice of toast and top with a tomato slice, then add a piece of cheese to each.
- 3 Broil on low until the cheese begins to melt.
- 4 Remove from the oven, top with microgreens, and serve immediately. Enjoy!

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





SEPTEMBER MVP



HIGHLIGHTS

Michele McNeece

National Director of Business Development, Ippolito International

TIME AT IPPOLITO INTERNATIONAL: 14½ Years

With Anne Allen

Trying to pin down the charm of Michele McNeece is an impossible task, but it's one I'll take to gladly. A blend of candor and competitive spirit, the National Director of Business Development for Ippolito International has been in the produce game for nearly four decades—and she's garnered a drive I consider synonymous with the industry itself. Clocking 14 and a half years with Ippolito, Michele shares with me her takeaways from working in the sales department and the advice she'd pass on to the next generation. A fair warning: The next generation has some pretty big shoes to fill.

WHAT YOUR ROLE IS REALLY LIKE

“Col-lab-o-ra-tor (noun) - a person who works jointly on projects, building business, and relationships.”

SURPRISE US

“I have a big love for animals. I currently have three English Labradors; Oliver, Charlie, and Emie; a 3 lb Yorkie, Piper, who is The Boss; and two cats that I rescued, Milo and Sixie, named of course because she has six toes! I am in the process of training Emie as an emotional support dog so that I can take her around to hospitals and senior living facilities. The unconditional love and companionship that animals provide have taught me the importance of patience, compassion, and commitment to both myself and others.”



VALUES AT THE CORE

- FAMILY
-
- FAITH
-
- PASSION
-
- COMMUNICATION

HOW SALES BECOMES A LIFE LESSON

“I have always been fiercely competitive by nature—just ask my sister, Lisa! I love to challenge myself in both my personal and professional life, which means never taking no for an answer. It may not always end the way you hoped it would, but you never know unless you give it 100 percent. Sales has provided me the opportunity to travel to many destinations, create relationships, and build the passion that is necessary to grow and improve oneself.”

A MENTOR MENTORED: THOSE WHO HAVE SHAPED MICHELE

My Mother - A single parent who raised four children on her own. She instilled the independence and drive in me and my siblings to succeed in life and fulfill our dreams.

Charlie Watts, Retired Owner, Cream of the Crop - He believed in me and gave me my first job in the produce industry.

Dave Adrian, Retired Owner, Coastline; Founder, Sunsation - He gave me my first Sales job. He was an exceptional role model. I watched and learned and was truly inspired.

Butch Corda, Retired General Manager, Growers Express and Ippolito - Such a wealth of knowledge. He provided me with so much insight at the field level and much, much more!

WORDS OF WISDOM FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

“Don't allow technology to take over the necessary communication to customers. Building relationships is imperative in this industry and life in general. In other words, pick up the forking phone!” 📞



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Allen launched his company based on building solid relationships. We are proud to be a part of the vibrant and always evolving produce industry. With offices strategically located across the country, we are poised and ready to work with growers and shippers to continually arrange transportation to provide the necessities that keep the USA fed and clothed.



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WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Live Oak Farms Roma Tomatoes ?



FARM BOY CAVIAR

INGREDIENTS

- 5–6 Live Oak Farms Roma Tomatoes, diced
- 1 Live Oak Farms Red Bell Pepper, seeded and diced
- 1 Live Oak Farms Green Bell Pepper, seeded and diced
- 1–2 Live Oak Farms Jalapeño Peppers, seeded and finely diced

- 1 medium red onion, finely diced
- 2 avocados, diced
- 1–2 cooked cobs of sweet corn (or 15 oz can corn, drained)
- 15 oz can black beans, well-rinsed and drained (or make your own)
- ½ cup cilantro, chopped
- Tortilla chips

DRESSING

- ¼ cup lime juice (about 3 limes)
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp ground black pepper
- 1 tbsp honey
- ¼ tsp chili powder

Prep Time: 30 min
Servings: 10

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Place the dip ingredients in a large bowl. Toss to combine.
- 2 Mix the dressing ingredients. Pour dressing on top and toss to coat evenly.
- 3 Serve immediately or refrigerate until ready to serve. Serve with tortilla chips and enjoy!

To learn more about Live Oak Farms, visit www.liveoakfarms.com



► MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀ CYNTHIA HASKINS

President and Chief Executive Officer, New York Apple Association



With **Peggy Packer**

It is all the small things added up that make life so grand, and Cynthia Haskins has an affinity for the simplicities of the journey. Embracing the moments of relaxation and inspiration in her day-to-day life, this apple whiz has an undeniable knack for creativity and self-care. Whether she's hitting the snooze button on a Sunday morning or donning an old pair of blue jeans and a T-shirt to enjoy the outdoor breeze, Cynthia sets out to uncover the beauty of the everyday. Read on to find out a few of the things most cherished by this admirable industry expert...

1 I love visiting a local art gallery or festival.

2 You can't beat a little getaway to recharge and experience something new.

3 I have adopted four in my life—so far. I have loved them all the same, just differently.

4 I lean toward self-help books, but now and again, a paperback romance hits the spot.

5 Need I say more?

6 Sometimes, you just have to crank it up with "Born to be Wild," or mellow it down with some Sade.

7 This is very meditative for me—it is my zen.

8 A cold one or a hot one.

9 I love a good view.



- 1 Art
- 2 Day Trips
- 3 My Dog
- 4 Books
- 5 The Spa
- 6 Music
- 7 Painting on Canvas
- 8 A Slow-Sipped Coffee
- 9 Mountains

Underneath *the* Spotlight: The Year of Growth

By Peggy Packer



Mucci Farms makes annual investments in grow light technology to maximize local and regional production 365 days a year



“Labor challenges are commonplace in food production, and in this competitive landscape, **we believe the growth of our team says a lot about our work environment.**”

- Joe Spano, Partner and Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Mucci Farms

Like Cher rocking sold-out stadiums or Serena Williams gracing the tennis courts at the US Open, the most exceptional stars often occupy the grandest stages. This is one of my first thoughts as I stroll through long rows painted with green leaves, smelling the alluring aroma of fresh vegetables grown under lights so bright it becomes obvious they are setting the stage for something amazing. If you can't tell by now, I'm taking you on a walk through a vast, state-of-the-art greenhouse facility.

While Ontario, Canada, is just short of 2,000 miles away from the coffee shop I have settled in to pen this piece, I mentally traversed time and distance to reach one of the largest networks of greenhouses in

North America—and the home of Mucci Farms.

When it comes to producing high-quality, greenhouse-grown products that fully deliver on flavor, Mucci Farms brings a lot to the table in the most literal sense. The distinguished grower-packer-shipper boasts a diversified portfolio of common greenhouse items such as tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers along with a number of specialty items, wielding its expertise in each of these categories to ensure the needs of its partners and consumers are met.

“At Mucci Farms, we are innovators from seed to retail and we consistently add new product offerings year after year to meet

consumer demand. This includes specialty items such as lettuce, eggplant, as well as greenhouse-grown strawberries, which we were the first to grow indoors at scale for the North American market. In fact, we are doubling our current strawberry acreage from 72 acres to 144 to maintain our leadership in the berry space. With this expansion, there will be a full assortment of berries under glass, including blackberries and raspberries,” explains Joe Spano, Partner and Vice President of Sales and Marketing, as we explore the ongoing elevation of the Mucci Farms portfolio. “Our growth and expansions are exclusively guided by our customers. Everything we do starts and ends with a commitment to finding the best solutions for

them and their customers. This can be seen in the dramatic growth of our strawberry operation, which started out as a 36-acre project.”

There is a multitude of elements that harmonize to comprise the Mucci Farms operation, but some of the star players of the company’s portfolio can be found center-stage underneath a set of bright lights. This innovation itself represents a pivotal development that allows the provider to supply top-tier offerings year-round.

“Bolstering supply across the continent has always been of premium importance to Mucci Farms,” Joe assures. “We undergo major expansions and commission new builds on an annual basis, but a major key to our expanded supply lies in our lit-culture grow light program that extends our season to 365 days a year.”

Over 80 percent of the supplier’s acreage can be found under these lights, demonstrating a key investment made by Mucci Farms to ensure its retail partners can rely on the company to provide consistent, high-quality products all year long. Further enhancing its reliability and production capacity, the fresh produce provider also expands its network of grower partners on a yearly basis, building on its 2,000-acre greenhouse footprint in North America. This includes establishing formidable partnerships with support growers in Canada, the United States, and Mexico.



“With our industry-leading grow light program, we can produce many varieties 365 days a year, with up to 10 times more production than traditional farms.”

- Dan Branson, Senior Director of Product and Business Development, Mucci Farms

In fact, strong alliances like these have rolled out the red carpet and helped position Mucci Farms in the industry spotlight. As a result, the grower continues to establish valuable relationships while uncovering new opportunities to expound upon its success. In 2021, Mucci Farms checked off a key milestone and established a new marketing agreement with Houweling’s in California and British Columbia, employing the company to market all products grown out of its facilities in Oxnard, California, and Delta, British Columbia.

“This partnership was our first major move out West to officially offer fresh produce from coast to coast in both Canada and the U.S.,” Joe points out. “In a very short time, we have onboarded several new clients, expanded our business with national retail partners, and increased our product offerings.”

The grower-packer-shipper’s commitment to growth through partnership is also demonstrated by a recent investment from Atlanta, Georgia-based Cox Enterprises, which will be optimized to strategically advance Mucci Farms’ operations.

“The investment from Cox Enterprises will support our aggressive growth plans and provide us with many resources to keep

us at the forefront of controlled environment agriculture,” Dan Branson, Senior Director of Product and Business Development, notes. “This strategic partnership is also the next phase of building out Cox’s multi-billion-dollar sustainable agriculture footprint. Retailers and consumers will benefit a great deal as we dramatically increase our production capabilities using world-class innovative solutions and expand into more regions across the continent.”

As this recent contribution generates expanded development opportunities, Dan makes it clear that Mucci Farms isn’t closing the curtain on its portfolio evolution anytime soon. Seeking to maintain this momentum, the greenhouse titan is also bolstering its product trial program, building a dedicated research and development (R&D) facility to increase variety output in addition to experimenting with new growing processes.

While Dan breaks down some of the details for me, I sip my coffee and take this insight as a gentle reminder of how Mucci Farms has been able to gain such high recognition in an incredibly competitive arena—and with a massive fan base at that.

“At any given time, we are trialing hundreds of new varieties and testing new growing processes to advance the industry and our capabilities. In the interest of improving efficiencies and maximizing the finite space in each of our greenhouses, we thought it would be best to build a dedicated facility where we can concentrate exclusively on our trial program,” explains Dan.

Though its crowd-pleasing portfolio is highly responsible for Mucci Farms’ outstanding reputation amongst consumers, in this industry, I know the real magic tends to happen backstage. Not to be confused with the backup singer or a single member of the band, the supplier’s team is as imperative to its success as any innovation or well-executed expansion strategy.

“Our growth has come from multiple directions, especially from our team. So far this year, we have promoted dozens of team members as our

needs and expertise continue to grow and expand,” Joe says, regaling me with some insight on the people behind the powerful portfolio. “Labor challenges are commonplace in food production, and in this competitive landscape, we believe the growth of our team says a lot about our work environment. It speaks volumes about the trust our employees have in the company and the efforts we put in to build and maintain a positive work culture rooted in family, teamwork, and growth opportunities.”

This year, the provider expanded its team to over 2,000 members, bringing on over 500 new hires to back its continuous growth as a company. They proudly recognized over 150 team members that reached 5, 10, 15, 20, and 25 years of service and launched the Mucci Excellence internal rewards program to recognize exemplary employees

on a monthly basis. Similar to how a great production relies on the teamwork of the band, the light crew, stage-hands, backup dancers, audio engineers, and many more talented individuals working toward a singular performance, it takes a vast network of industry experts to achieve what Mucci Farms does on the day-to-day.

Another element of Mucci Farms’ operations worthy of a standing ovation is its sustainable processes and countless efforts to grow quality produce without negatively impacting the environment. This dedication is showcased by the supplier’s adoption of clean technology and reduced plastic use.

“Sustainability is a key focus for us because we are committed to a greener future. Our investments in lit-culture grow light technology



Another element of Mucci Farms’ success is the growth of its team, which has expanded to over 2,000 members to back the provider’s continuous growth

allows us to dramatically reduce our dependence on foreign-grown product," Dan shares. "We have reduced food miles and our carbon footprint by maximizing winter production that services local and regional retail partners during the heaviest import seasons."

With investments in automation, robotics, and technology, Mucci Farms maximizes its efficiencies to reduce shrink and extend shelf-life, in addition to making substantial progress toward reducing plastic with a wide variety of award-winning sustainable packaging options. Additionally, growing in substrates such as mineral wool and coconut husk, as well as using up to 80 percent less water than field farming, also contributes to the company's goals to reduce its environmental impact.

"The obvious and greatest advantage of clean tech is that it supports sustainability at all ends of the supply chain, starting at the ground level with our high-tech glass greenhouses. In cold climate regions, there's typically a very short growing season lasting two to three months. With our industry-leading grow light program, we can produce many varieties 365 days a year, with up to 10 times more production than traditional farms," Dan adds.

As both a trade news writer intrigued by sustainability strategies and a consumer singing my praises for eco-friendly offerings, I can't

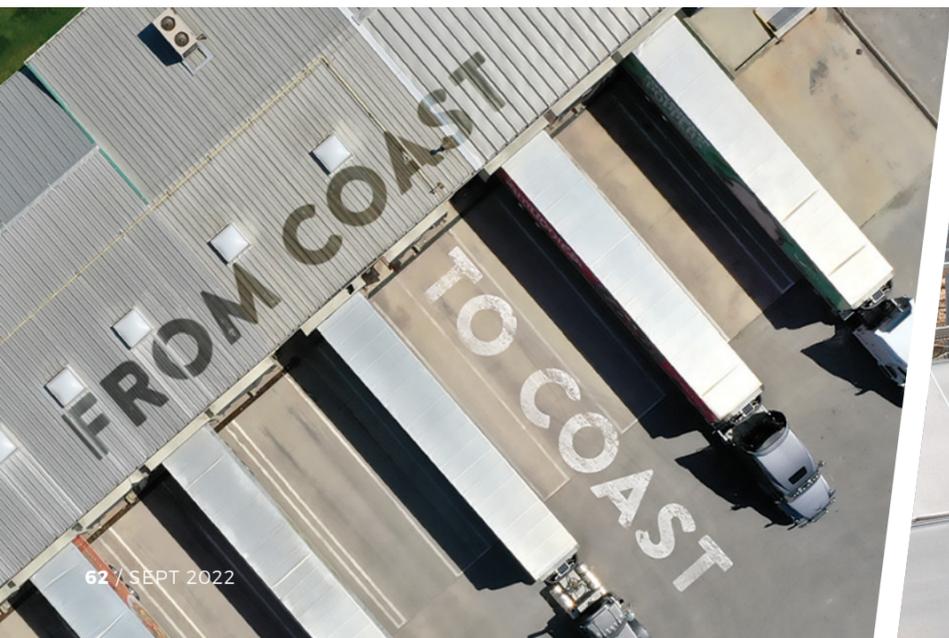
help but applaud Mucci Farms on its efforts to protect and support Mother Nature. This is but one of the many things that boost the company's already impressive standing in the greenhouse sector and the fresh produce industry at large. Mucci Farms has honed its skills to achieve a competitive advantage, and it is demonstrated by the extreme depth and breadth of its operation. The metaphorical crowd roars so loudly in my ears that I forget I am not in a packed stadium witnessing this awe-inspiring performance in real-time.

"What sets us apart in the industry is our commitment to executing with excellence at all levels," Joe concludes. "We are forward-thinking innovators looking for the world's best varieties and then executing on the back end with consistent scale, supply, and delivery. Mucci Farms has the means to accommodate customers of all sizes across the continent, and our experience and passion for growing fresh produce are evident in all that we do. We don't believe in transactional relationships—we believe in partnerships and treat each of our customers as such."

In my mind, these final insights from Joe are followed by an emblematic mic drop. And as the fog fades out to the symphonies of Mucci Farms' success in the fresh produce arena, something tells me we won't be waiting long for an encore. 🎤



Mucci Farms has formed multiple key partnerships to further expand westward and offer fresh produce from coast to coast in both Canada and the U.S.



A Closer Look at Giumarra Companies Fuyu Persimmons

Peggy Packer

Do You Fuyu™? Just those three words were enough to pique your interest, at least long enough to make it to the end of another sentence in this article. Giumarra Companies is no stranger to the effects of its branding, as this signature tagline graces the top of the supplier's Fuyu persimmons bags, directly communicating with the shopper via a direct and intriguing call to action. While this phrase has become a mainstay on the produce provider's persimmons packaging, it continues to hook consumers who are unfamiliar with the captivating offering found inside.

Encompassing the Kaylee™ brand from the provider's California persimmon grower, this convenient grab-and-go bag turns simplicity into sales, as its transparent and sleek look gives shoppers the opportunity to see the quality persimmons perfectly presented inside. The vibrant fruit and brightly colored branding lend well to large retail displays and encourage shoppers to purchase persimmons in volume.

A closer look at the bag will reveal notes on flavor and texture, educating consumers on what to expect when they pick up one of Giumarra's mouth-watering Fuyu persimmons. I mean, what attracts a shopper's taste buds more than "sweet," "crunchy," and "ready-to-eat?"

Giumarra Companies begins shipping Fuyu persimmons in September, and the supplier offers strategic merchandising and marketing support to help its partners drive sales, including eye-catching signage and display materials.

So, now that you understand the hype over this lucrative offering, I'll ask once more: Do You Fuyu? I sure do. 🎤

UP
CLOSE



Giumarra
nature's
partner

WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Dole® Chopped BBQ Ranch Salad Kit ?



BBQ CORN AND POTATO CHOWDER

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pkg** (14.4 oz) Dole® Chopped BBQ Ranch Salad Kit
- 1 medium** Dole Russet Potato, peeled and diced
- 1 large** Dole Onion, chopped
- 2 ears** corn, kernels cut from cob (about **2 cups**)
- 2 tbsp** olive oil
- 2** garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tsp** ground cumin
- ¼ tsp** smoked paprika
- 4 cups** water
- 1 cup** milk
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Shredded sharp Cheddar, as needed

Prep Time: 15 min
Cook Time: 25 min
Servings: 5

DIRECTIONS

- Heat oil in large soup pot over medium-high heat. Add onion, garlic, and potato and sauté for 2 minutes. Add cumin and paprika and continue to cook for an additional 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add salad greens from kit to pot and continue to cook an additional 2 minutes or until lettuce is wilted.
- Add the corn and water to the pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer gently for 10 minutes. Add the milk and dressing packet and season to taste with salt and pepper. Simmer uncovered for an additional 5 minutes. Ladle into bowls and garnish with shredded cheese and chips packet.

To learn more about Dole, visit www.dole.com



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IT'S OUR FOCUS & OUR HISTORY.

Get year-round freshness with Westfalia, the market leader in avocado growing, shipping, ripening, handling, and distribution.



WESTFALIAFRUIT.COM

WTF DO I DO WITH Farm2You® Peaches ?

{ what the fork }



ROASTED PEACH ICE CREAM

INGREDIENTS

ROASTED PEACHES
8 cups Farm2You® Peaches, unpeeled and chopped
3 tbsp lemon juice
1 cup light brown sugar
1 tsp cinnamon

ICE CREAM
1½ cup roasted peaches
4 eggs
1½ cups sugar
1 cup sweetened condensed milk
2 tbsp good-quality vanilla extract
4 cups milk

Prep Time: 15 min
Cook Time: 1 hr 30 min
Servings: 10



DIRECTIONS

- 1 To make roasted peaches, place the chopped, unpeeled peaches in a large bowl. Add the lemon juice, brown sugar, and cinnamon, and toss to combine.
- 2 Spread the peaches in a single layer on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake at 375° F for 30–40 minutes, stirring every 15 minutes. Peaches should be softened, and juice will begin to thicken.
- 3 Remove the peaches from the oven, scrape peaches and the syrup into a bowl, and allow to cool.
- 4 To make ice cream, in a large mixing bowl, beat the eggs together for a minute or two, add sugar and continue mixing for another minute until eggs and sugar are completely combined.
- 5 Add vanilla, milk, and condensed milk. Mix until all ingredients are completely combined.
- 6 Add mixture to ice cream machine and follow manufacturer’s directions.
- 7 A few minutes before the ice cream is complete, add the roasted peaches and let the machine mix them into ice cream. Enjoy!

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

BACK-TO-SCHOOL



SNACKCHAT

By Peggy Packer

With an embarrassing nickname and a simple smiley face scribbled across the front in black sharpie, the brown paper bag lunches my mom used to pack me (well into my senior year, I might add) were one of the highlights of my school experience. Nothing carves out a need for healthy snacking options like the back-to-school season, and there is no better way to meet that demand than with the many flavorful products that make up the produce department. Delivering on quality, convenience, and taste is what our industry does best, so I tapped a few fresh produce greats to find out what opportunities lie in wait for this lucrative season...



BIL GOLDFIELD,
DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS,
DOLE FOOD COMPANY

“An often-overlooked category that can be merchandised during back-to-school season is salad and meal kits, and not just for dinners in households trying to adjust to the busy fall routine. We’re increasingly seeing salad kits as a base for wraps, sandwiches, and small bites in school lunches. We recently introduced a series of kit-based recipes based on our new DOLE® Sheet Pan Meal Starter Kits—a blend of farm-fresh, washed-and-cut vegetables, spices, and seasoning designed to be combined with a favorite lean protein to create nutrient-dense wraps, burgers, soups, and other back-to-school recipes even picky kids will like. As a fresh produce marketer, I like this idea since it places vegetables at the center of the meal, which is exceedingly rare for a kid’s lunch. But as a parent, I appreciate it even more since it encourages creativity and healthier eating while still making it fun.”



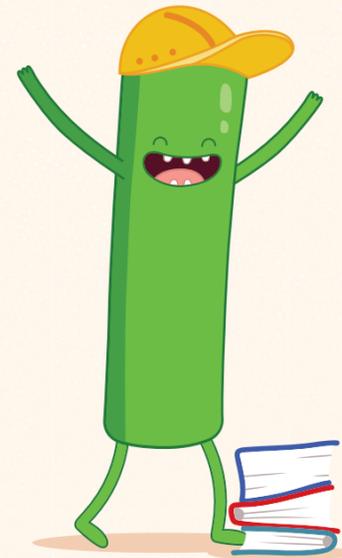
CHRIS VEILLON,
CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, PURE FLAVOR®

“Back-to-school can be electric on many levels with so much activity from getting kids ready for the day itself to after-school activities and sports and other family commitments. Healthy snacking needs to play heavily into everyone’s game plan. Convenience and, more importantly, flavor are going to be key with nutritious grab-and-go options for parents. Our Pure Flavor® Cloud 9® Bite-Sized Fruity Tomatoes, Uno Bites™ Nano Cucumbers, and our popular Mini Munchies® check all the boxes—packed in formats that are perfect for lunch and after-school snacks!”



ANGELA HERNANDEZ,
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING,
TRINITY FRUIT COMPANY

“You don’t need to think much out of the lunchbox when it comes to back-to-school snacks, especially with Trinity Fruit’s products. Packing a piece of fresh fruit is always an easy, healthy, grab-and-go snack option for kids—and really anyone! Our grab-and-go pouch bag is a great packaged offering for the shopping parent to quickly add to their cart. We also have our in-store Stone Fruit Age point-of-sale material available to catch the shopper looking for a snack that’s been around since the dawn of time! These pouch bags display amazingly on our Farm2You® display bins, making the produce section a fun experience for the shopper.”



NICHOLE TOWELL,
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND
PACKAGING PROCUREMENT,
DUDA FARM FRESH FOODS

“Back-to-school is the perfect time to promote fresh-cut, pre-packed items such as celery. Parents are looking for easy and nutritious snacks to throw into their kids’ lunchboxes, so it would be wise to capitalize on this with in-store promotions and cross-merchandising. Retailers can display single-serve hummus or almond butter cups in the produce section to encourage shoppers to purchase these items together. Dandy® offers a variety of different fresh-cut options, including a 1.6 oz celery pack that is ideal for any lunchbox!”



EMILY AUTREY,
MARKETING MANAGER,
FIRSTFRUITS MARKETING

“Kids genuinely look forward to back-to-school shopping—picking out new clothes, finding a backpack and lunchbox combo with their favorite character on the front, and grabbing a crayon set with every color imaginable. We want kids and their parents to be just as excited about selecting the nutritious and brain-boosting food that fills their lunchboxes each day. That’s why growing exceptional fruit for families is our mission here at FirstFruits Farms. Your family is important to us, and we’re here to make back-to-school time even easier with our high-flavor, versatile apples, perfect for snack time, school lunches, or the working parent’s lunch break. Retailers can capture this season’s excitement in the produce department by displaying a rainbow of options to cut or slice and tuck away into lunchboxes. Our Opal® apples are naturally non-browning, so they can be sliced ahead of time and still be crisp and delicious by lunchtime.”



PABLO RIVERO,
VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, FRESH DEL
MONTE PRODUCE INC., NORTH AMERICA

“When we think of back-to-school, we think of convenient and packable lunches that give children the nutrients needed to power through the school day. Prepared fruits and vegetables are a great option for parents as they require minimal prep time and meet all food safety standards. Fresh Del Monte® Produce offers a wide range of fresh-cut, ready-to-eat produce including our Del Monte Gold® Extra Sweet pineapples, melons, table grapes, citrus, apples, mangos, kiwifruit, and much more. Bananas are also a go-to choice for parents and kids, as they are an affordable and portable snack option. Additionally, Mann Packing Co., a subsidiary of Fresh Del Monte, recently partnered with Mezete® to launch On the Go Hummus packs, which make the perfect savory snack. Mezete hummus contains 100 percent natural ingredients with no preservatives but is long-lasting and doesn’t require refrigeration. These hummus packs come pre-packed with breadsticks, making them even easier to add into a lunchbox.”





SHIFTING THE
**Umami
 Paradigm**

By Anne Allen

70



Our industry sits at the center of health and wellness. It stands apart from pharmaceutical companies, fad diets, and gimmicky products like weight-loss teas. A what-you-see-is-what-you-get mentality runs through the heart of those in fresh produce.



Michael Stephan,
 Sales Director,
 Monterey Mushrooms

I can't stress enough the importance of transparency in a world where consumers rarely know—and trust—where their products came from. We have that home field advantage—we can bring them to fields, sit them down with farmers, walk them through a production line, and the list goes on! It's no wonder that products in which shoppers see how they get to market are some of the most important figures in the fight for health.

Knowing that fruits and vegetables are at the epicenter of the health movement is one thing; seeing them in action is something else entirely. I'm prone to personifying even the smallest concepts, so I can't help but imagine a data table's satisfaction when presented with steady category growth.

For years now—in fact, for over five decades—Monterey Mushrooms has nurtured, developed, and tracked the climb of brown mushrooms—a climb that is becoming more of an acceleration with every passing day.

“The brown mushroom segment, which includes Baby Bellas, Crimini, and Portabella, has consistently led the mushroom category in unit share and dollar sales growth for the past 20 quarters,” Michael Stephan, Monterey Mushrooms’ Sales Director, explains to me. “Brown mushrooms represent over 40 percent of the dollar sales, with ‘Best in Class’ retailers seeing dollar sales over 50 percent of the total category.”

As Michael and I chat, he tells me brown mushrooms drive sales even with a smaller share of the shelf. It's an impressive bit of merchandising maneuvering—as well as testimony to the importance of educating shoppers—that even with fewer retail-facing products, brown mushrooms can still dominate consumer consciousness and make it to the basket.

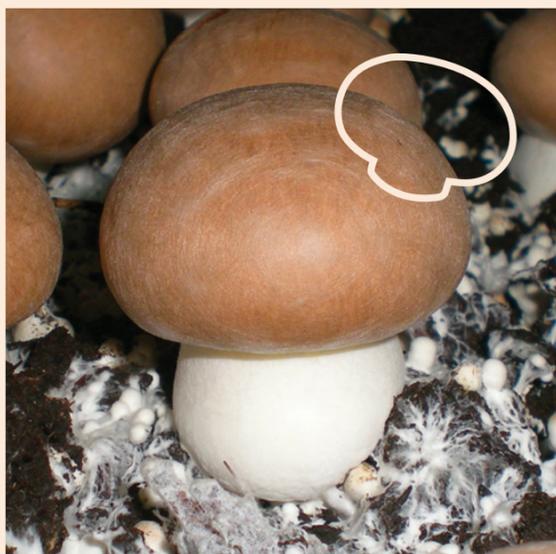
Admittedly, I'm a late convert to the mushroom allure—although their taste and health aspects have made me more prone to adding them to my cart than before. Overcoming product hesitancy is easy for brown mushrooms, especially with the way Michael talks about them.

“Flavor, taste, and mouthfeel all set these mushrooms apart from others. In general, brown mushrooms are a more engaging mushroom that has a higher umami taste,” he shares, before making a comparison that gives me a momentary pause. “Let's compare the growth of brown mushrooms to, say, apples and beer. Baby Bellas are to white mushrooms as the Honeycrisp is to Red Delicious, and Portabellas are to white mushrooms as craft beer is to Budweiser®.”



The brown mushroom segment, which includes Baby Bellas, Crimini, and Portabella, has consistently led the mushroom category in unit share and dollar sales growth for the past 20 quarters."

Michael Stephan,
Sales Director, Monterey Mushrooms



Now, there's nothing wrong with a Red Delicious or a Budweiser—they've set a standard for a reason. But as Michael walks me through the comparison, I know exactly what he's conveying; in striking out for new innovations, Monterey Mushrooms is improving upon the standards those category-leading items have already set. Brown mushrooms not only have a distinct flavor, but they also speak to the inherent foodie that many shoppers are becoming.

Speculating on consumer buying behavior can sometimes feel like grasping water: The data might be there, but holding onto it long enough to enact operational change? That's the challenge.

"Just 15 years ago, we were growing a mix of 90 percent white mushrooms and 10 percent brown mushrooms," Michael notes. "Today, we grow over 40 percent brown mushrooms, and I predict that our mix of whites to browns will be 50/50 by the end of the year."

Alongside changes in production, Monterey Mushrooms has added new SKUs to meet the needs of its retail and club customers.

"We now grow an equal share of conventional and organic mushroom packages. We have added the larger 16 oz and 24 oz packages for Baby Bella mushrooms, because, as you know, 'those who like mushrooms, actually love mushrooms!'" Michael comments.

He also tells me mushrooms are an expandable consumption category, just like strawberries, meaning the more consumers buy, the more they will use. Mushrooms "own" versatility, and versatility allows consumers to use up any extra mushrooms in their next recipe and meal.

Monterey Mushrooms is not only adapting to the category change, but ensuring it stays ahead of the curve.



"Our sister company, Amycel, has bred two strains of brown mushrooms called Brawn and Heirloom that currently enjoy a 90 percent global market share of the brown mushrooms grown throughout the world," Michael reveals, and the number takes me aback for a moment. "Spawn development—like a seed for a plant, remember we belong to the larger fungal kingdom—is essential in growing a mushroom that appeals to the consumer in terms of appearance, freshness, and taste. It also needs to appeal to the growers with yield, quality, and consistency."

On the operational front, Monterey Mushrooms makes sure to plan effectively and strategically to meet the needs of its buy-side partners.

"For our fresh farms, the operations team constantly adjusts the weekly square footage planted to ensure we grow enough Baby Bellas for our customers," Michael adds.

Aside from making changes to its overall program, Monterey Mushrooms is looking down the road to where mushrooms situate themselves in the American diet—and how the company can be there to answer for both on-trend and unforeseen changes.

"Mushrooms have landed on several Hot Food Trends lists in recent years, but, most importantly, they're the answer to many consumer questions. Mushrooms are the only natural, non-animal source of vitamin D," Michael asserts, pointing out the importance of vitamin D for many Americans is why the FDA changed its nutritional labeling in 2020 to list it as a required nutrient. "Mushrooms are also the answer to a low-sodium diet. The inclusion of umami in mushrooms, the fifth category of taste in food (besides sweet, sour, salt, and bitter) results in a lower need for sodium to get that satiation desired in many foods. Essentially, we're the answer for plant-based or plant-forward meals, as mushrooms can blend in with any protein to make a healthier version of that protein."

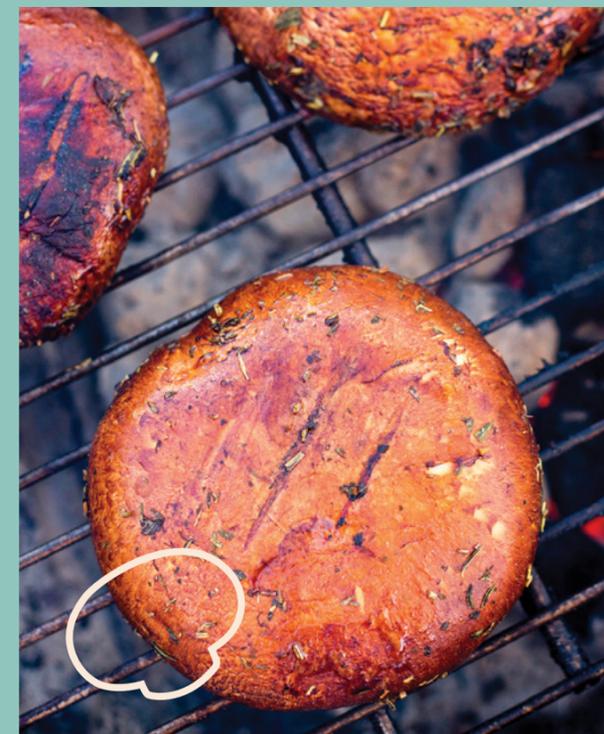
Michael pauses for a moment, looking for just the right example.



...brown mushrooms are a more engaging mushroom that has a higher umami taste."



Without sounding like an overly proud parent, mushrooms are on top of everything good."



"For instance, if you blend in 25 percent of diced mushrooms with ground beef, you've just lowered the fat, cholesterol, and sodium by 25 percent. Without sounding like an overly proud parent, mushrooms are on top of everything good," he says.

Category growth can sometimes feel like category upheaval, but in the fight for wellness, this isn't necessarily a bad thing. If anything, the popularity of brown mushrooms accounts for a paradigm shift in the eyes of consumers—and that only spells out a boon for our industry. We're seeing the savviness of shoppers in real-time, and those of us able to meet and roll with the change will thrive.

Monterey Mushrooms, as you can tell, is doing just that—enhancing people's lives one mushroom at a time. 🍄



PEPPER POPPER STUFFED SWEET ONION RINGS

INGREDIENTS

- 2 Progressive Farms Chili Peppers of your choice, seeded and diced
- 3 large Progressive Produce Mayan Sweet Onions
- 8 oz cream cheese
- 1 cup Cheddar cheese, shredded
- ½ lb bacon, cooked and crumbled
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp pepper
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 5 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 bag of chips of your choice
- 48 oz avocado oil, for frying

Prep Time: 30 min
Cook Time: 2-4 min
Servings: 4



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Heat oil in a deep heavy skillet to 375° F.
- 2 Peel and slice sweet onions into ¾" to 1" thick slices and carefully pull apart rings.
- 3 In a medium bowl, combine diced peppers, cream cheese, Cheddar cheese, crumbled bacon, garlic powder, salt, and pepper. Mix until smooth.
- 4 Place onion rings on a metal tray lined with parchment paper. Fill each ring with the pepper mixture and place tray in freezer for at least 2 hours so the stuffed rings become firm.
- 5 Using a food processor, pulse the chips of your choice until crushed into fine crumbs. Place crumbs in a shallow bowl. Place flour in a second shallow bowl and the beaten eggs in a third shallow bowl.
- 6 Coat each frozen stuffed ring in flour, dip in the beaten eggs, then cover with the crushed chip crumbs. To double coat, dip back into the beaten eggs and then back into the chip crumbs to cover. Repeat this process for each stuffed sweet onion ring.
- 7 Fry the rings in oil for 2-4 minutes or until crust is golden brown. Be careful not to fry too long because the cheese could ooze out.
- 8 Drain on a wire rack or paper towels. Enjoy!

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

By Anne Allen



SNAPSHOT

E arthy, woody, and savory all at once, the flavor profile of the mushroom is impossible to replicate outside of the source. From a Button to a Portabella and everywhere in between, it's essential to know the ins and outs of this category to not only drive sales this fall, but keep your produce departments looking and feeling fresh. Ready to take a walk into the metaphorical mushroom forest? Let's hike through the category now...

White/ White Button



Appearance: Varies in color from creamy white to off-white

Flavor: A fairly mild and woody taste; flavor intensifies when cooked

Uses: Very versatile and equally tasty fresh or cooked; use raw in salads, with dips, sautéed with side dishes, breaded, or as an ingredient to enrich sauces, soups, stuffings, or entrées; excellent for blending with ground meat



Beech



Appearance: Petite in size, with either all-white or light brown caps

Flavor: Mild, sweet, and nutty, with a crunchy texture

Uses: Best enjoyed cooked, either whole or sliced; add to stir-fry dishes, soups, stews, or sauces



King Oyster



Appearance: Thick, white flesh that is firm-textured and meaty, with a blunt cap

Flavor: Very savory, with a chewy texture

Uses: Best sliced and sautéed



Lion's Mane



Appearance: Large, white, shaggy mushrooms that resemble a lion's mane as they grow; also called Hedgehog, Bear's Head, Old Man's Beard, Bearded Tooth, Sheep's Tooth, and Pom Pom Mushrooms

Flavor: Hearty, slightly sweet, with a meaty texture

Uses: Can be enjoyed raw, cooked, dried, or steeped as a tea



Baby Bella/ Cremini



Appearance: Light tan to rich brown cap; same variety as traditional Portabellas/Portabellos, differing only in size

Flavor: A deeper, earthier flavor than whites and firmer in texture

Uses: An excellent addition to beef, wild game, and vegetable dishes; sauté, broil, microwave, or cook almost any way



Portabella/ Portabello



Appearance: Tan or brown caps; measure up to six inches in diameter

Flavor: A deep, meat-like flavor, with substantial texture

Uses: Serve whole or sliced, grilled, baked, or deep fried; a delicious vegetarian alternative as a meat substitute in stir-fry dishes, sautéed, and sauces



Shiitake



Appearance: Tan-dark brown with broad, umbrella-shaped caps, wide open veils, tan gills, and curved stems

Flavor: Rich and woody when cooked; they add a meaty flavor and texture to stir-frys and pastas

Uses: Cook before eating; excellent cooked in soups, stir-fry dishes, and traditional sushi plates



Oyster



Appearance: Can be gray, pale yellow, or even blue, with a velvety texture

Flavor: A very delicate flavor

Uses: Sauté with butter and onions to bring out their flavor



Sources: The Mushroom Council, The Snack, and AndNowUKnow Mushroom Grower Contributors

Changing the Narrative

By Lilian Diep

Miles Kington once said, “Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit; wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.” Yet, we as an industry continue to defy the norms, breaking preconceived notions. Just because things have always been a specific way doesn’t mean they have to stay as such.

Like our produce professionals, consumers want to maintain an open-minded approach when viewing the whole produce aisle, punctuating de facto meals with innovative spins for the dinner table.

With that same mindset, industry pioneers, too, are continuing to change a narrative that states growers and farmworkers can thrive on low margins, that they are helpless against the damage natural disasters cause, and that sustainability is a passing phase.

Jacobs Farm del Cabo (JFDC) is one such producer picking up the quill of change, rewriting the story for a more optimal outcome for not only its own workers but the end consumer as well—and JFDC’s ClimateLab is just one chapter the quill has penned.



“...our goal is really twofold: How do we provide the right tools, insights, and guidance to help smallholder farms adapt? And, as growers, what other steps can we take to collectively mitigate our contributions to climate change?”

Aaron Brookes,
Director of Sales and Marketing,
Jacobs Farm del Cabo



“Since Larry Jacobs and Sandra Belin founded JFDC, farmers have always been the first and foremost priority for the company. Our mission has been to improve the quality of life for the people in our smallholder farming organization, and we’ve been very successful at doing just that. Whether it’s helping them build up their organic farming operations or increasing their access to customers, at the end of the day, it’s really been about farmer livelihoods,” Aaron Brookes, Director of Sales and Marketing, informs me. “ClimateLab was built with the goal of keeping those farmers at the forefront of our minds when considering what’s at stake amidst climate change. You can imagine what impacts such as heat, drought, storms, or soil health have had on their communities. So, our goal is really twofold: How do we provide the right tools, insights, and guidance to help smallholder farms adapt? And, as growers, what other steps can we take to collectively mitigate our contributions to climate change?”

Jacobs Farm del Cabo’s story began in 1980 when Jacobs Farm—a small organic family farm in California—dedicated itself to growing fresh, high-quality, delicious food without damaging the environment. Five years later, a trip to Mexico brought kindred spirits

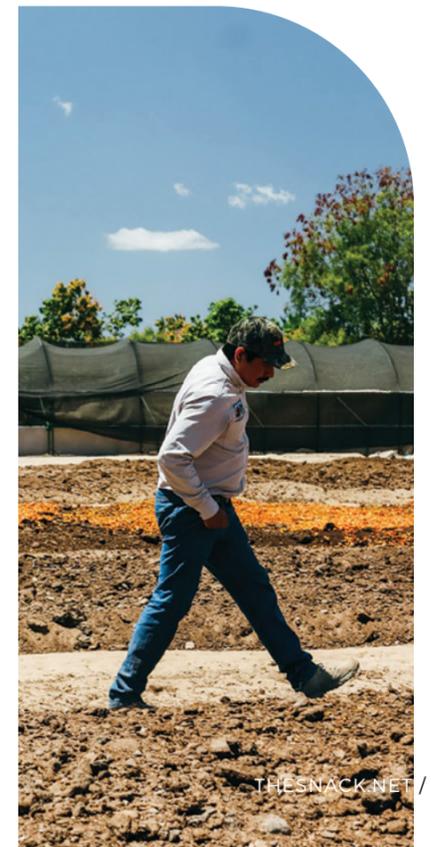
together and, alongside a small group of farmers, Larry and Sandy founded the del Cabo grower collective. Today, del Cabo represents the hard, hands-in-the-soil work of more than 1,250 farming families across 14 communities.

Over the years, JFDC has observed how many of its small producers have found it difficult to maintain their production volumes and financial resilience. In many cases, the challenges are environmental, including the depleting quality of soil, significant rises and falls in temperature, destruction of infrastructure from fire and flood, and more. However, there was a plot twist: The company also identified some producers who maintained productivity and financial resilience, despite going through the same environmental changes and natural disasters as those who were struggling.

“At JFDC, we believe that a sustainable future is possible only when producers can be economically sustainable,” illustrates Maricela Adrian, Certification Manager and ClimateLab Program Manager. “These observations inspired the idea of creating an internal standard to document and implement sustainable practices that have been proven and effective by these small producers for more than 40 years, with all JFDC producers in Mexico and the U.S. We are improving productivity at all our ranches; reducing our environmental footprint generated by agriculture; and maintaining healthy soils and prosperous communities, which all leads to happy workers.”

Jacobs Farm del Cabo refined its focus with the novel establishment of its ClimateLab program in 2020, reemphasizing its triple bottom line of profit, people, and planet across production areas in Mexico and the U.S.

ClimateLab has a centralized leadership group to drive the initiatives across all of JFDC’s farming operations. The program is designed to collect data from all farms and apply the learnings to each unique need, sharing knowledge and insight across each community.





Jacobs Farm del Cabo is changing the narrative of sustainable farming, and it is doing so with its ClimateLab program

“There may be a particular soil issue in one farm, or there may be extreme heat swings in another, but the more data we collect, the more help we can give to each farmer,” explains Aaron. “We are developing a broad set of tools to address all these issues as we dig down into each microclimate our farmers exist in. And, in this way, we can drive general awareness to what’s happening in and around them. We’re excited to continue our sustainability efforts with our growers in mind—the same way we have done it for 40 years and always will.”

In doing so, JFDC positions itself as a company that works hand-in-hand with its growers in its own unique way,



“We are improving productivity at all our ranches; reducing our environmental footprint generated by agriculture; and maintaining healthy soils and prosperous communities, which all leads to happy workers.”

Maricela Adrian, Certification Manager and ClimateLab Program Manager, Jacobs Farm del Cabo

creating standards that meet real needs. By keeping the soil healthy and learning how to grow economically, Jacobs Farm del Cabo can help its farmers mitigate the impacts of climate change.

“Compared to other industries that have sustainability programs, JFDC does not want to *just impose* international rules,” Maricela notes emphatically. “We truly want to help our growers, gain recognition from our customers, end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure all enjoy peace and prosperity. Through our ClimateLab program, we are creating—and maintaining—a standard that our products are ‘made by small producers, for small producers.’ JFDC focuses on meeting their producers’ needs in terms of social responsibility, financial resilience, and environmental sustainability.”

For those looking to create their own program to align with these environmental goals, some tips these experts share are to get active and listen to your growers.

“A lot of the things we talk about are what farmers face every day in terms of managing their resources and trying to project and predict what’s going to happen,” says Aaron. “Even as a smallholder, you can take steps to progress your farm forward and set yourself up for success down the road

Jacobs Farm del Cabo focuses on meeting its producers’ needs while also working with Mother Nature to maintain sustainability

and become a more successful operation. We have seen some good results come out of it.”

Listening to these needs is essential to JFDC. Without their vital input in the creation process, their story wouldn’t have a happy ending. And, as we know, the pen is mightier than the sword. For hard workers like Maricela, working for JFDC is as inspiring as any hero story.

“Working for a company like JFDC is refreshing. It has a strong conviction to create social and environmental awareness. In my last 14 years of professional experience, I have worked with numerous agricultural companies. To date, I have not met any other company for which its sincere objective is to create abundance in every way for small producers and communities,” Maricela asserts. “The love and desire to help that Larry and Sandy have for their producers are incredible. It’s for this reason I have stayed for so many years. I hope to continue to do my part so that this sentiment can grow within ClimateLab and continue to be replicated.”

Larry and Sandra began the story of JFDC with an open-minded approach, and that intent is still alive today. In the course of 40 years, the company has established the precedent that growers should be the foremost priority, that

there are ways to work with Mother Nature instead of fighting her, and that sustainability is evergreen.

The ClimateLab chapter is far from over, and the results of the company’s work are written for the world to see. When shoppers see the labels ‘Jacobs Farm’ and ‘del Cabo’ on retailers’ shelves, they’ll know that they’re buying a product built on sustainability and equity. Jacobs Farm del Cabo is a supplier that is breaking the status quo, continuously rewriting expectations, and creating the happily ever after we all seek. 🌱





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» The IF List « Chris Miller

Produce Director and Meat and Seafood Coordinator,
MOM's Organic Market

With **Chandler James**

These are the makings of Chris Miller, Produce Director and Meat and Seafood Coordinator at MOM's Organic Market. The industry savant lives life to the fullest and takes every chance he gets to make the grocery aisles shine. Outside of the retail walls, he takes the time to appreciate what matters most to him in this life: great food, family memories, and epic music. When asked a list of "what IF's," here is what he had to say...

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

Blue Crabs, Pistarro's Pizza (Frederick, Maryland), a thinly smashed burger, cochinita pibil tacos, and a Caesar salad.

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

Parks and Rec-era Chris Pratt.

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

Landscaping.

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

My grandparents. I would love to share with them about how much influence they have had on me and my kids through me. Positive influence lives on longer than we can appreciate.

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

Jeans and a flannel.

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

An Australian Kelpie or some other herding dog. I think best when my legs are moving.

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

Cool Runnings. Feel the rhythm, feel the ride, get on up, it's bobsled time!

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

Ledo Pizza. Great hot for dinner, and perfect cold for breakfast. If you know, you know.

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

Joe Kwon.

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

Any of the days I skipped school and went hiking on the Billy Goat Trail (Potomac River, Maryland, side) with some of the folks who are still my closest friends to this day.

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

To make aphids and fruit flies disappear.

» **IF you had to choose two songs to be the soundtrack of your year, what would they be?**

"Backwards With Time" by The Avett Brothers and "Own Light (What Hearts Are For)" by Brother Ali. 🎧



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WTF DO I DO WITH G&R Farms® Peruvian Sweet Onions ?

{ what the fork }



SHRIMP CEVICHE WITH PICKLED SWEET ONION

INGREDIENTS

PICKLED VIDALIA ONIONS

- 2 G&R Farms® Peruvian Sweet Onions, sliced thin
- ½ **tbsp** whole black peppercorns
- 1½ **cups** apple cider vinegar
- ½ **cup** water
- ½ **cup** sugar

SHRIMP CEVICHE

- ⅓ **cup** pickled Peruvian Sweet Onions, chopped
- 1 **lb** raw shrimp, peeled
- 4–5 fresh limes
- 1 ripe avocado
- ½ **cup** tomato
- 1 small jalapeño
- 2 **tbsp** chopped fresh cilantro
- ½ **tsp** salt
- ½ **tsp** black pepper

Prep Time: 4 hrs
Servings: 6

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Start with the pickled onion. Make these at least a day in advance for best results. Place onions and peppercorns in a sealable jar or container. Mason jars work the best.
- 2 On the stove, bring the vinegar, sugar, and water to a boil. Stir to dissolve the sugar and set aside. Allow the mixture to cool to just above room temperature. Pour over the onions. Seal and store in the fridge. (The onions keep for 3–4 weeks in the fridge.)
- 3 To make the ceviche, chop the raw fresh shrimp into small pieces and place in a bowl. Juice the limes over the shrimp. Toss to coat. Make sure you are liberally covering the shrimp because it needs the acid from the lime to “cook.” Put the shrimp in the lime juice in the fridge for 2–3 hours.
- 4 Just before the shrimp is done “cooking” in the lime juice, chop the remaining ingredients.
- 5 Stir the avocado, tomato, jalapeño, onions, and cilantro into the shrimp. Season with salt and pepper.
- 6 Serve with tortilla chips or over a salad. Enjoy!

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THE CIRCULE OF PRODUCE

BY CHANDLER JAMES

86

As writers, we are trained to look for recurring themes. We sometimes read with the intent of getting a look inside the author's mind—mining for stylistic gold that unlocks a new level of human understanding.

In life and in literature, a recurring theme I often run into is this: Every ending is a new beginning. This is especially true in the fresh produce industry, a community of people who start anew multiple times each year. The calendar follows the sun, as do the millions of acres of farmland that cover the United States.

As does Bee Sweet Citrus.

"We begin our domestic season with Satsuma Mandarins in October, followed by Clementine Mandarins in November, Page Mandarins in late November, and W. Murcott/Tangos during January and February," Monique Bienvenue, Director of Communications and Compliance, told me at the tail-end of the California summer. "Our season usually runs until the end of May."

With Mandarin programs continuing to grow at retail, this eight-month-long domestic season is key to Bee Sweet's partnerships. Of course, one ending is simply a new beginning, and Bee Sweet offers up its summer program with domestic grapefruit, lemons, Meyer lemons, Valencia oranges, and Chilean Mandarins, Navel oranges, and lemons.

"Over the last few years, Mandarins have become a household staple for many families, which is why we've made it a priority to provide our customers with a 12-month citrus program," Monique



"Over the last few years, Mandarins have become a household staple for many families, which is why we've made it a priority to provide our customers with a 12-month citrus program."

Monique Bienvenue,
Director of Communications and Compliance,
Bee Sweet Citrus



continued. “In addition to supplying domestic Mandarin varieties, we also work closely with two growers in Chile that allow us to provide Mandarins, lemons, and oranges year-round.”

Now, as we make our way through September, the supplier is ready to begin its domestic Mandarin season once again, and Monique relayed it should be an improvement over last season.

“California’s citrus industry had a historically small Mandarin crop during the 2021–2022 season. The season ended earlier than usual, but we expect the crop will be back to average for the 2022–2023 season. Quality of the fruit will also be excellent,” she explained.

Bee Sweet harvests most of its domestic Mandarins on the east side of California’s Central Valley, specifically Kern, Tulare,

and Fresno counties. These areas see hot summers and cold winters, which is perfect for bringing out the fruit’s brix levels when they’re in season.

While the growing season may last eight months in these growing regions, Mandarins are in demand year-round, making them a recurring theme in consumer shopping carts as well.

“No matter what holiday or event a shopper may be preparing for, they can always count on Mandarins to deliver. In addition to being an amazing snack for work or school, they can also be used for parties, holidays, and gatherings,” Monique told me. “It’s important to note that as consumer curiosity about produce and the ways they can incorporate it into their diet increase, so, too, do the ways Mandarin usage grows. Gone are the days that limit Mandarins to just a snack; now, they’re often used for cocktails, desserts, and more.”

As you tear back the layers, the sweet smell of citrus bursts out of a Mandarin peel—a sure sign of a simple snacking occasion without the prep. Instead of spending time washing, chopping, and preparing snacks for children to eat, parents can simply toss a Mandarin in a lunchbox and be done. Because they’re seedless, easy-to-peel, and sweet, they’re a hit with children and they save parents time in the kitchen.

“Mandarins are also incredibly nutritious. With health top of mind for many families, incorporating foods that are an excellent source of vitamin C into their diets is extremely important,” Monique noted. “Fortunately, one medium-sized Mandarin can provide you with approximately 45 percent of the recommended daily intake of vitamin C.”

Shoppers’ year-round affinity for the fruit has not been developed without the conscious efforts of marketing acers like Monique. Bee Sweet deploys multiple strategies that have helped elevate this produce item to retail fame.

“We believe the best way to market Mandarins is to appeal to the unique needs of the shopper. Mandarins are great for families on-the-go because of their portability and excellent health attributes, but they’re also great for foodies looking for new ingredients to include in their winter salads, or bakers looking for a sweet ingredient to include in their desserts,” Monique stated. “Bee Sweet has honed in on the power of social media to supplement our marketing strategies for all of our commodities. We know different platforms serve different audiences, which is why we tailor our messaging on each platform.”



Before we even get to the marketing stages, another familiar theme is played out: the behind-the-scenes farmworker that uplifts thousands of pounds of fruit. California’s citrus industry is set to collectively harvest approximately 57,000 acres of Mandarins throughout the 2022–2023 citrus season. With demand continuing to rise, Bee Sweet decided to implement a new Mandarin packing line in Fowler, California, that allows the company to upgrade and leverage some of its existing space to run certain varieties more efficiently.

“With state-of-the-art weighers, graders, baggers, and automatic palletization, this line will decrease our overall production costs, which will in turn increase returns to our growers,” Monique divulged. “In addition to making the line as efficient as possible, we’ve also made it a point to keep environmental and social sustainability at the forefront of this project. Not only is the line being engineered to reduce water consumption, it will also be adorned with solar panels, and we plan to include lithium-ion charging stations in the facility for our forklifts. The new line will also eliminate our need for a night shift, which will allow for our employees to work during the day, and possibly explore new opportunities in different positions.”

Monique explained that Bee Sweet has the horsepower to grow, pack, and ship Mandarins at a low cost. Since the company opened its doors in 1987, the team has made it a point to not only meet, but exceed, its customers’ needs, and the new Mandarin line solidifies that commitment.

In addition to household staples like oranges, Mandarins, and lemons, Bee



Top: Mandarin facility in development
Bottom: Plant Manager Martin Guzman and President Jim Marderosian

Sweet also harvests specialty citrus varieties such as Cara Cara Navel oranges, Blood oranges, Meyer lemons, Minneola Tangelos, Star Ruby grapefruit, Pummelos, and Melo Gold grapefruit.

“Over the past few years, we’ve completely revamped the Bee Sweet Citrus brand to strategically represent all of our varieties,” Monique outlined. “If you place the packaging of our varieties right next to each other, you’ll notice they all share one cohesive look. This was done intentionally to remind customers that we have the ability to grow, pack, and ship approximately 10 different varieties throughout the year.”

This vast program allows Bee Sweet to maintain its position as a leading citrus supplier in the United States—akin to what many would call an industry titan in literature.

“Simply put, the diversity of our program allows us to meet consumer demand year-round. Shoppers can conveniently



pick up any one of our varieties at one central location, and can rely on our brand regardless of the occasion,” Monique concluded. “As consumer trends continue to evolve and shift, our varieties will be there to supplement their needs.”

We end this story upon a new beginning. Domestic-grown Mandarins will soon be coming off of the trees for Bee Sweet Citrus, ready to meet the increasing consumer demand that we see across this category.

Some might say year-round beginnings are a disruption, but for Bee Sweet, they are what keep the company in motion. Monique and her team continue turning straight lines into circles, wielding the cyclical nature of fresh produce to ensure the consistency never ends. 🍊

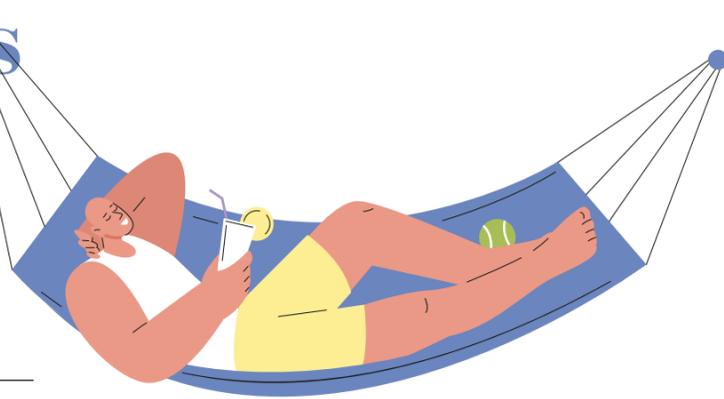
“Simply put, the diversity of our program allows us to meet consumer demand year-round. Shoppers can conveniently pick up any one of our varieties at one central location, and can rely on our brand regardless of the occasion.”



How Radical is a Sabbatical?

Part 2: ROI on Sabbaticals

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

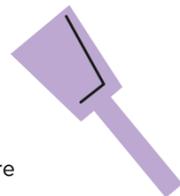


On the surface, the proposition of a sabbatical may sound one-sided—all in favor of the employee and all cost to the company. Honestly, that was my first impression (along with envy) when one of my tennis friends from Intel told me of his sabbatical. As time went on, however, I started thinking about how I might stretch my own career another decade—can I hit the restart button after 35-plus years on the go...when I'm not ready to consider retiring?

A sabbatical may be the answer for others wondering that same thing, and possibly for companies wondering how they can keep great people longer.

Building off of last issue's start to the conversation, *How Radical is a Sabbatical?*, I have decided to list the possible value points of a sabbatical leave for a business:

- ▶ Retain and extend the productive contribution of your experienced people
- ▶ Attract, train, and mentor the next generation
- ▶ Enhance ability to compete outside of produce for top talent
- ▶ Give your people a break and hit the refresh button
- ▶ Provide a "second act" to long-term, valued, and experienced employees
- ▶ Fully leverage experience and tribal knowledge, while at the same time preparing the organization for the future
- ▶ Get an early jump on succession planning, training, and cross-training
- ▶ Stress test the organization—before they leave for good



Of course, there are also potential financial costs to the business. Do the benefits outweigh the challenges?

There are three types of sabbatical compensation plans: fully paid, partially paid, and unpaid. The costs just start there, as there are more direct and indirect costs to take into consideration. Interestingly enough, only four percent of United States companies offer a paid sabbatical program and 16 percent offer an unpaid sabbatical program, as shared by the Society of Human Resource Management.



A radical idea for produce companies?

Is the sabbatical too radical for our industry? Or, perhaps the more important question is: Could some companies implement a sabbatical policy and create a competitive advantage?

One argument in the "pro" column is that employees have an extended amount of time to relax and rejuvenate, so when they return to work, they are ready to dive in with renewed energy and new ideas.

Like most employer programs, sabbaticals are viewed, defined, structured, and offered in a variety of ways. The typical policy includes a break after a number of years of full-time employment. For example, at or after 6, 8, 10, 12, or 15 years, workers are rewarded with an extended break to rest and to pursue interests that refresh them and may even enhance their work.

At one time, this benefit was associated only with academia (Harvard was the first to institute sabbaticals in 1880). Now, sabbatical leave is becoming popular in the corporate world too. For example, HubSpot* offers a paid four-week sabbatical, plus \$5,000 spending money to employees who stay five years. Salesforce** rewards its workforce with one week of unpaid sabbatical for every year of full-time employment, while Adobe*** gives four weeks of paid sabbatical to workers who have completed five years of continuous employment.

We all know the benefits of breaks and vacations, but what about longer periods of time? Do sabbaticals really improve productivity or creativity?

As employees put more emphasis on work-life balance, some companies are catering to their needs and wants by offering "concierge services," such as massage therapists, in-office gyms, and other nifty perks. While these amenities make the work day less stressful, they don't truly acknowledge the need for people to fully escape from the office and their work life to completely renew. That's where the employee sabbatical program may come in.

Some believe that taking a sabbatical from work should not be the same as taking a really long vacation. They believe it's an extended break that should be utilized for one to pursue a project and come back with new research, ideas, or inventions that will enrich their career and company.

Where to start?

If you choose to implement a sabbatical program for your employees, there are many factors to consider in regard to what happens before, during, and afterward. Here is a brief list:

- ▶ What kind of sabbatical? E.g. four weeks paid or unpaid after 10, 12, or 15 years of service, and again at 20 or 25 years of service
- ▶ Pre-sabbatical: A structured training/cross-training program and detailed hand-off plan
- ▶ Pre-sabbatical: With certain employees, establish a plan for their return in a new capacity, which may include:
 - ▷ As a mentor or in-house consultant
 - ▷ A less stressful role
 - ▷ An all-new role
 - ▷ A reduced time commitment each week
 - ▷ Active participation in succession planning, training, and mentoring
- ▶ During the sabbatical: The employee will be accessible if only truly needed
- ▶ Post sabbatical: A planned meeting to discuss the time off, benefits of the sabbatical, and the post-sabbatical plan
- ▶ Second Acts: Planning the post-sabbatical stretch when the time comes



The Second Act

Coincidentally, I recently spoke with yet another person who retired—and loved it for a couple of months—until he ran out of things to do, not to mention starting to drive his wife crazy.

"Rex, I've got all this knowledge locked up in my head and I want to share it. I want to give back and mentor. I still want to contribute to a company's success," he shared.

I replied, "So, Jeffrey, you kinda went on a sabbatical, and now you're back working again?" I shared with him this story I'm working on and the whole concept. In his new job, he's a Director and no longer a Vice President. He does not have the same stresses and is not the person "where the buck stops," or gets the late night or weekend calls. He could not be happier, making less money, dealing with fewer headaches, and having the ability to support and mentor those below and above him. He's fulfilled.

I wonder if his past employer of 25 years is kicking itself knowing that a competitor is benefiting from all his knowledge and experience at a discounted rate?

Do you see where I'm going with this? Keep your people healthier and happier longer. Have them actively participate in their "down-sizing" while at the same time bringing those up around them, and leveraging everyone's assets. This idea may help solve a few challenges we're facing in the workforce today.

I started writing this series with the intention of weighing the pros and cons of sabbaticals. If you've made it this far, you know I ended up writing a pro-sabbatical story. I do believe a company has the prerogative and responsibility to structure a sabbatical program that benefits both the employee and the company. While the company is not obligated to provide balance and rejuvenation, it may be in their best interest to model and support it. It will take some planning and disciplined execution to fully realize the ROI to the fullest extent.

Perhaps, like most decisions, start small and conservatively with careful planning.

Enjoy the journey! 📍



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Rex Lawrence,
Founder and President,
Joe Produce SearchSM

WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Shuman Farms
RealSweet®
Sweet Onions ?



SWEET ONION CORNBREAD

Recipe credited to Jodi Danen

INGREDIENTS

1 large RealSweet® Sweet Onion, coarsely chopped
¼ cup butter
1 cup unbleached flour
1 cup yellow cornmeal
1 tbsp baking powder
1 egg, beaten
1 cup milk
1 cup sour cream
1 cup Cheddar cheese, grated
Salt and pepper, to taste

Prep Time: 5 min
Cook Time: 45 min
Servings: 9



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat the oven to 450° F and spray an 8" square baking pan with cooking spray.
- 2 In a medium saucepan, melt the butter and sauté the sweet onion until tender—but not browned—for about 3 minutes.
- 3 Remove the pan from the heat.
- 4 In a large mixing bowl, combine the onions, flour, cornmeal, baking powder, egg, milk, sour cream, ½ cup of the cheese, and the salt and pepper.
- 5 Stir well to combine.
- 6 Pour the mixture into the pan and top with the remaining ½ cup of cheese.
- 7 Bake for 30 minutes and check for readiness with a toothpick inserted into the center of the cornbread. If it comes out clean, the cornbread is ready!
- 8 Allow the bread to cool slightly before cutting it into squares. We suggest serving it warm. Enjoy!

To learn more about Shuman Farms, visit www.shumanfarmsga.com



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A Slice of PARADISE

A Q&A With Tiffany Sabelli, Director of Sales, Pure Flavor®

By Chandler James

The Latin origin of the word Solara translates to “of the sun”—a fitting name for the newest greenhouse grown offering from Pure Flavor®.

The Solara™ Mini Melon is a category game-changer in its own right. Launched this past summer, these vibrant green beauties truly grow toward the sun, with vines climbing vertically under the rooftop of a Pure Flavor greenhouse. It got me thinking, so many of us stand our ground as stewards of the land, but who are the stewards of the sun?

I see no better fit than greenhouse growers, combining the power of

a controlled environment with the irrefutable benefits of what is arguably one of our galaxy’s most important celestial bodies. Pure Flavor ventured to introduce Solara to the melon category, bringing forth a single-serve option fit for produce aisles worldwide.

While Pure Flavor’s Tiffany Sabelli, Director of Sales, is well-versed in the language of consumers, this melon practically sells itself—serving up shoppers a personal slice of paradise. I had the chance to hear from the woman herself on how this melon brings us closer to the sun.



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Q1



Chandler James: Tiffany, you and I have been discussing Solara melons for some time now, and it only continues to build excitement for our readers. I am captivated by their differentiation in the market. Can you tell me more about how these melons will stand out on the shelf?

Tiffany Sabelli, Director of Sales, Pure Flavor:



Solara, also known as the “Me Melon,” is an industry first that uses forward-thinking technology to grow sustainably. There are a variety of melons in the marketplace that Solara will compete against, but when you look at size, quality, flavor, sustainability, and availability, it’s clear to see it has a very strong value proposition. We see this variety in comparison to other large melons that can feed a small family for a week—that is if you don’t forget about all the leftovers in the back of your fridge.

We need to be innovating to increase consumption; removing seasonality and ensuring food safety is key. By producing melons in a controlled environment, we are contributing to sustainability with a recycled growing medium and dedicated irrigation and plant nutrition. Our crops receive the perfect amount of heat and light and are pollinated by bumblebees while being protected from the external environment. This way, we are able to bring forth a consistent product in terms of size, quality, availability, and flavor.

Q2

CJ: As someone cooking and preparing food for just myself, I can definitely see the value in a single-serve option; the struggle to consume an entire melon before it goes bad is real. In your eyes, what are the most revolutionary aspects of this variety?



TS: Solara melons are the first of their kind, offering a personal, handheld eating experience that puts paradise in your palm. What makes these gems so unique is that you can eat them in one sitting. They can easily be used as an on-the-go snack; all you have to do is cut them in half, scoop out the small seed cavity, and get snacking!

From a foodservice perspective, Solara melons provide the opportunity for unique recipe creation that minimizes waste. They can serve as personal, healthy menu

items that operators do not need to overstock.

We did endless sensory testing to ensure we were pairing Solara with the right items to ensure the juicy sweetness of the melon was always the hero and the accents were complementary to the main product. The product pairings are out of this world. We suggest pairing with herbs like mint, basil, lime, and cardamom, and with foods such as Camembert cheese, prosciutto, grilled sausage, strawberries, and oatmeal.



Q3

CJ: How is Pure Flavor positioning this product in the market from a branding and marketing perspective?

TS: We combined the pillars of imagery, messaging, and use to ensure we effectively communicated a clear value proposition for this new item. It’s not just a melon—it’s an experience.

Not only did we create lifestyle-themed content to show how and where the product can be consumed, but we also worked with our content creators throughout North America to get their perspectives on how Solara Mini Melons fit into their lifestyles and ongoing content they create.

By using imagery to position the product, we clearly show the size and ease of use.

Since the melon launched in May, we were able to create more than 37 recipes over just two months’ time, and we fully expect to surpass 50 this year. Many might think they are just for a fruit salad, but given the product pairings our team—both internally and with content creators externally—have created, we are demonstrating a creative prowess to bring out the key features, benefits, and product characteristics that enhance the eating experience.

Q4

CJ: Imagine I am a consumer picking up a Solara melon for the first time. Explain to me what my experience would be like from the shelf to the plate.

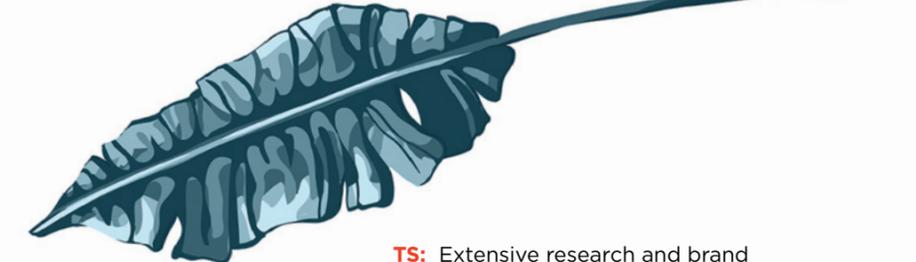
TS: First off, you would find a personal-sized mini melon, approximately 500-550 g per piece, that is beige in color with a netting-like pattern on the outside. Once sliced open, a light, tropical aroma and vibrant emerald green flesh are revealed, with little seed pulp.

Bite into the Solara melon and you would experience an explosion of juiciness and fresh flavor right off the bat. This is where the consumer gets hooked—immediately finding



“WE NEED TO BE INNOVATING TO INCREASE CONSUMPTION; REMOVING SEASONALITY AND ENSURING FOOD SAFETY IS KEY.”

- Tiffany Sabelli, Director of Sales, Pure Flavor®



themselves associating the melon with warm, beachy weather that brings a paradisiacal experience year-round.

Ultimately, our hope is that consumers find their own slice of paradise, however they choose to enjoy Solara melons. Even in the cold days of winter, our melons will be providing the same taste and quality shoppers enjoy in the summer months. We want to know, what is YOUR paradise?

TS: Extensive research and brand planning was conducted to ensure the positioning of the product had a strong kickoff at launch, fueled by an extensive promotional trade and consumer strategy that was digitally driven across North America. We needed to understand how we could penetrate the product space with an innovative new item like greenhouse grown melons.

After eight years of R&D to bring Solara to life, we are developing a complete line of melons that will be complementary to the Mini Galia variety. The key is to be able to take items and develop them in a greenhouse setting and scale the production. More to come on that!

Q5

CJ: Hearing you dive deeper into this item’s advantages, I am impressed by Pure Flavor’s ability to combine research and development (R&D) with your extensive greenhouse prowess. What did it take to get to this point, and what are your plans for the future?

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My brain is teeming with excitement at the thought of more single-serve melons hitting the market. The possibilities are seemingly endless in the hands of Pure Flavor’s team. There is no telling where these staunch stewards of the sun will go next, but if the present day is any indication, I am sure each innovation will bring its own slice of paradise. 🍉



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A Closer Look at HMC Farms® Compostable Packaging

By Chandler James

Precious gems can be carried in the most luxurious of vessels, why should fresh produce be any different? HMC Farms® latest packaging innovation elevates this idea and the already-strong value proposition of its stonefruit and table grape programs, with sustainable differentiation to boot.

The family-owned and operated supplier introduced its new compostable packaging last March, featuring a cardboard base with a recyclable band—ultimately reducing plastic use by over 80 percent compared to traditional clamshells. Measuring at 7.75" x

4.45", this packaging builds on HMC Farms' impressive dedication to longevity within the market. Plus, the company is always looking for new ways to sharpen its sustainable edge, especially when it comes to reducing single-use plastic.

Years of research and development went into these attractive packs, maintaining HMC Farms' dedication to "doing what tastes right." The grower's high-quality peaches, plums, nectarines, and table grapes become beacons of an environmentally friendly future, fueled by over a century of category prowess and continued curiosity.

**UP
CLOSE**

Demand for sustainability is not going anywhere, and I will be the first to admit that a cardboard clamshell will win me over every time. As offerings of this nature continue to be integrated into produce departments across the country, that demand will grow exponentially. In a way, consumers are looking to us for guidance in the fight for a more sustainable future, and HMC Farms is championing the cause every step of the way.

With these newly introduced packs on your shelf, you, too, can be leading the charge in this industry evolution. **S**



**HMC
FARMS.**

Libations

FOR ALL OCCASIONS:

PINEAPPLE PEPPER PICK-ME-UP



By Jenna Plasterer

Peter Piper poured a pitcher of the perfect Pineapple Pepper Pick-Me-Up. Say that five times fast!

Luckily, you don't have to. And, instead of leaving you tongue-tied, this concoction has just the right pucker power for a tasty treat.

Now, you might be thinking, "Bell pepper lemonade, Jenna? Really?"

I promise it's not the autumn chill already getting to my head; it's a delightful combination of sweet, sour, and thirst-quenching that will have you and your shoppers letting out a refreshed "ahhhhh" all year long.

The greatest thing about this recipe? You can easily modify it to add or subtract ingredients to meet your flavor fancy. That

means it is a great recipe to build produce aisle displays around. All you have to do is cross-merchandise lemons, yellow bell peppers, mint, and pineapple, and the unique combination will surely attract consumers on its own.

For added convenience, you can also sub in pre-made lemonade, giving you the power to feature this mouth-watering creation in the beverage aisle. For those looking to imbibe, a nip of gin, vodka, or liquor of your choice can elevate the Pineapple Pepper Pick-Me-Up from a family-friendly party staple to a cocktail hour mélange for those 21 and over.

So, what are you waiting for? Follow in Peter Piper's lead and pour yourself up a pitcher. 🍹

INGREDIENTS

LEMONADE:

2 cups pineapple juice
1 yellow bell pepper
1 cup lemon juice, divided
2 cups water

MINT SYRUP:

½ cup water
½ cup sugar
½ cup mint

Time: 5 min

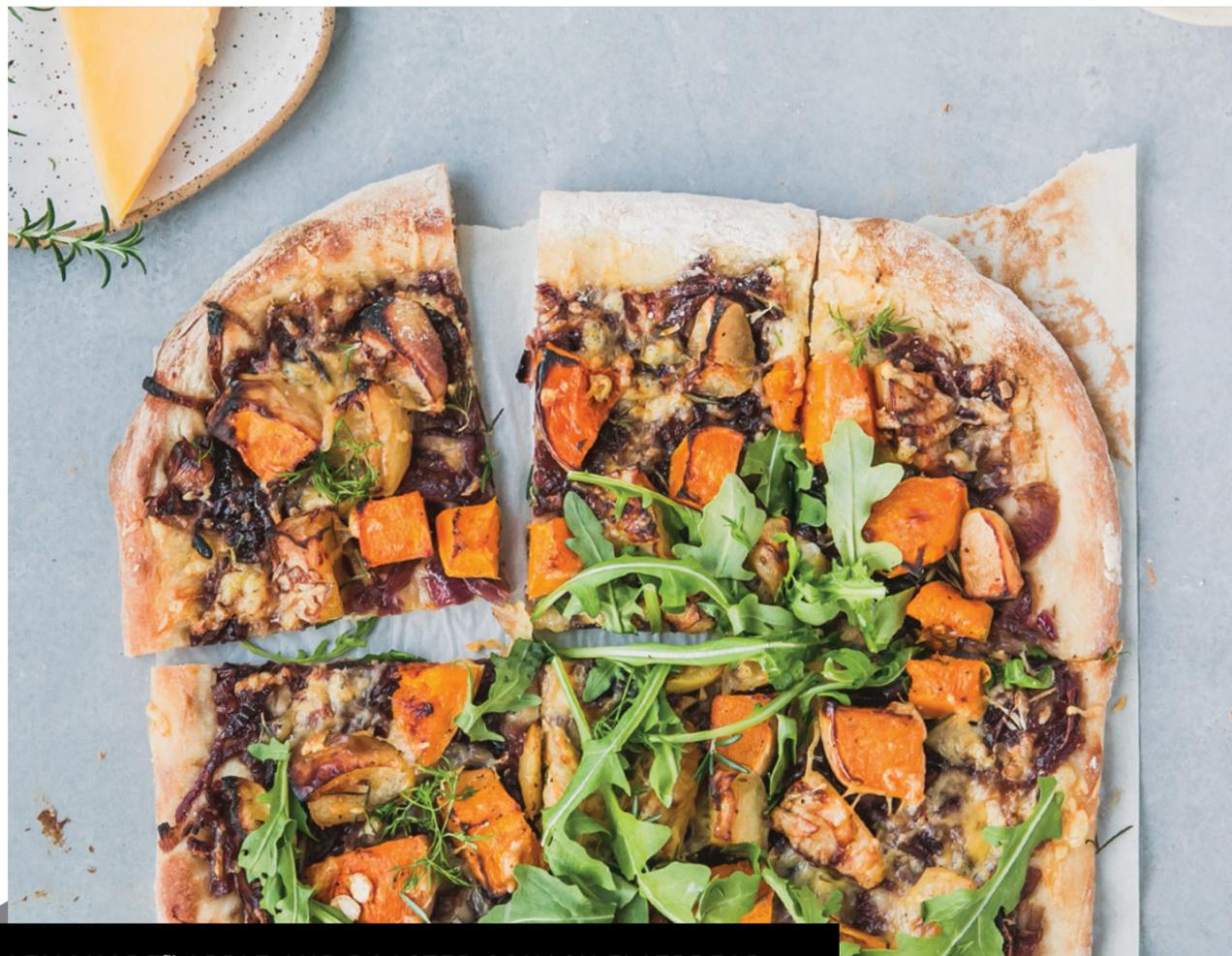
Servings: 1 drink

DIRECTIONS

1. Add granulated sugar, water, and mint leaves to a saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a boil and stir until sugar dissolves. Lightly muddle mint leaves with a wooden spoon. Simmer for 1 minute, then remove from heat. Allow to steep until room temperature, about 15-20 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, add pineapple juice, 6 oz of lemon juice, and water to a pitcher.
3. Add 2 oz lemon juice to a cocktail shaker and muddle in bell pepper. Strain out the liquid and pour it into the pitcher.
4. When cooled, pour simple syrup mixture through a sieve to remove mint leaves. Add to juice mixture and stir until well-combined.
5. Pour over ice in a glass and garnish with sprigs of mint or bell pepper cut-outs made with a cookie-cutter.

WTF DO I DO WITH Lemonade™ Apples ?

{ what the fork }



LEMONADE™ APPLE AND ROASTED SQUASH FLATBREAD

INGREDIENTS

- 2 Lemonade™ Apples, cut into chunks
- 4 **tbsp** olive oil, divided
- ½ butternut squash, cut into chunks
- 2 red onions, thinly sliced
- 1 **tbsp** balsamic vinegar
- 1 **tbsp** brown sugar
- 1 **large** pizza dough base
- ½ **cup** Gruyère cheese, grated
- A few stems of rosemary
- Handful of arugula, for garnish
- Salt and pepper

Prep Time: 20 min

Cook Time: 15–20 min

Servings: 4–6

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 400° F.
- 2 Toss the Lemonade Apples and butternut squash chunks with 1–2 **tbsp** olive oil on a sheet pan. Season with salt and pepper and roast for 20 minutes in the oven, until almost tender. Remove from the oven and increase the oven temperature to 475° F.
- 3 While the apples and squash are roasting, heat 1–2 **tbsp** olive oil in a medium-sized pan over medium heat. Sauté onions for 5 minutes. Add the balsamic vinegar and brown sugar and continue to cook until the onions are soft and caramelized, adding more water as needed if mixture becomes dry.
- 4 Roll out the pizza dough on a lined baking sheet. Top with the caramelized red onions, roasted apples, butternut squash chunks, grated cheese, and rosemary.
- 5 Bake for 15–20 minutes, until the crust is golden brown. Top with arugula. Slice and serve immediately. Enjoy!



To learn more about Lemonade Apples, visit www.lemonadeapple.com



The Story Behind The Sale

Experience is a precious commodity all its own—better grown fresh than manufactured.

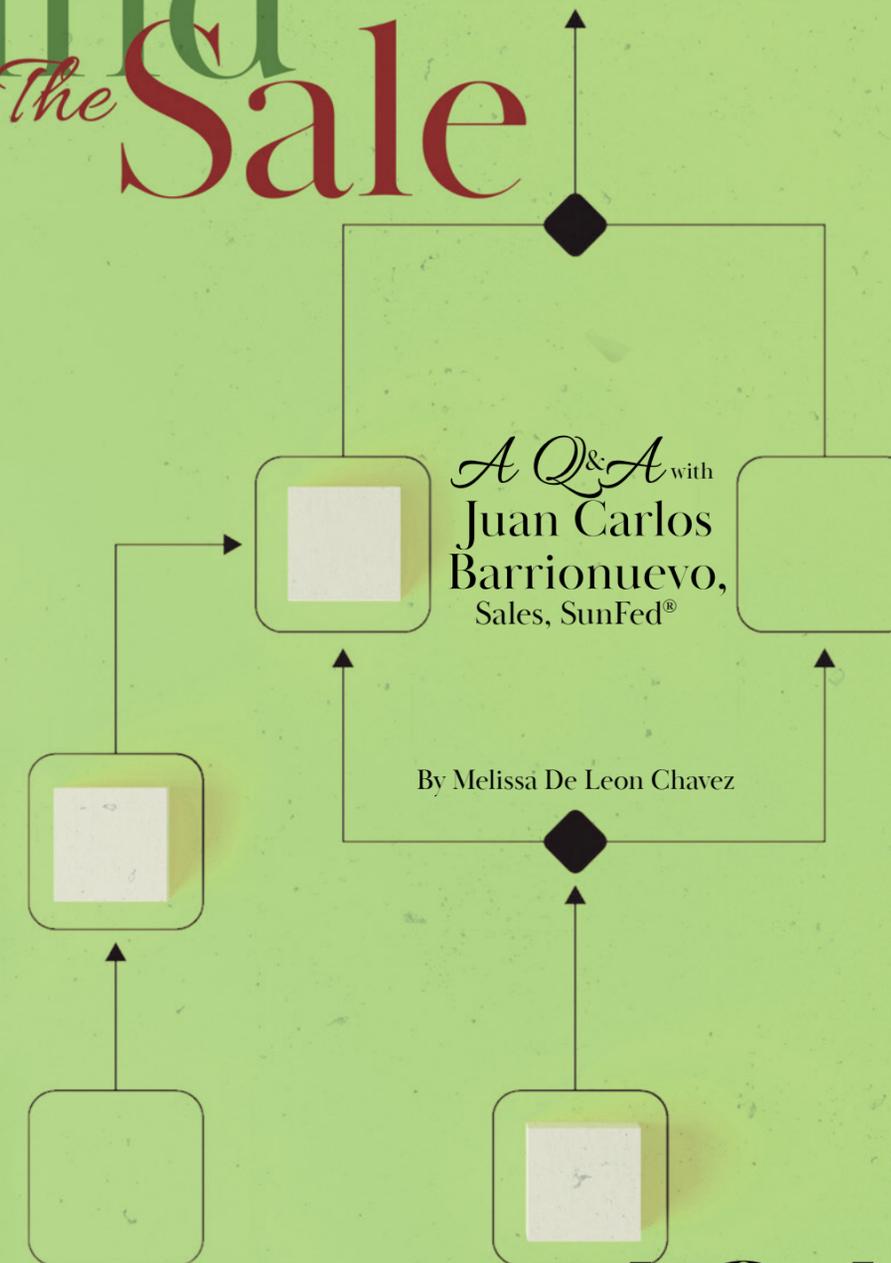
In a world that craves efficiency, convenience, and instant gratification, experience is made richer by the time it has been cultivated. The deeper the roots, the stronger the stalk, and the more flavorful and plentiful the crop.

To raise experience takes patience, opportunity, and time.

Juan Carlos Barrionuevo knows about building out an intrepid career path. When he began in the SunFed® shipping department in a Nogales, Arizona, warehouse in 2012, there was no knowing the journey he had begun. But thanks to hard work, opportunity, and recognition from leadership, he has seen himself go from that foundational beginning to McAllen, Texas, as a Regional Manager, then the Sales desk overseeing SunFed's organic categories back in Nogales, all the while cultivating his knowledge into a flavorful signature of the SunFed portfolio.

A Q&A with
Juan Carlos Barrionuevo,
Sales, SunFed®

By Melissa De Leon Chavez





Q1



Melissa De Leon Chavez: Juan Carlos, I guess I should start off by congratulating you on a big anniversary! It sounds like it was a great path that taught you a lot as you went. Tell me about what has continued to draw you to SunFed—what keeps you there and excited about the company?



Juan Carlos Barrionuevo, Sales, SunFed: Yes, in November it will be my 10th anniversary working for SunFed! This company has always looked for new talent internally, so it gives us the chance to apply for new positions within the company and grow within new roles. The leadership team really invests time into helping their employees grow in their professional careers. Another big aspect that draws me is how SunFed never stays in a comfort zone. It is always looking for ways to innovate or evolve in all aspects of the industry from farm to table, so there is always growth to experience and new things to learn.

Q2

MDC: Definitely a favorite part of the industry for me as well—I haven't been bored since 2014! In the time you've been with SunFed and watching it grow, what key changes or milestones stand out in your mind while growing with it over the past decade?

JCB: The biggest milestone we've seen as a team over the past few years has been developing into a year-round supplier for our customers in some of our most important items.

Nogales has always been the main focus, as most of our Sinaloa and Sonora, Mexico, production comes through here from September to June. By adding McAllen, Texas, and San Diego, California, as some of our shipping points, we have grown our customers' confidence in our ability to provide from different areas, especially during the summer. They can count on us for volume and for quality.

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SunFed® has always been looking for ways to innovate or evolve in all aspects of the industry from farm to table, so there is always growth to experience and new things to learn.

”

—Juan Carlos Barrionuevo, Sales, SunFed®

Q3

MDC: That pretty much covers the entire Southwest, and strategically it seems like that growth has been incredibly organic. Speaking of which, can you tell me a bit about the growth of SunFed's organic program? What should buyers know?

JCB: SunFed has always been looking to add more items into our line, both conventional and organic. Organics, particularly, has always been a top priority for new items, long before the segment became as popular as it is now.

It is important to remember that even before I joined the team 10 years ago, SunFed was actively involved in organics. Since our organic program was introduced, we have continued to develop by adding a range of categories from dry vegetables to melons. This range means that when something is not available, we are able to offer alternatives—organic melons are seasonal, while customers can count on us having summer squash and cucumbers year-round.

This is another important part of why SunFed is great at developing our talent—I am not necessarily in charge of just one category overall. The goal of my role is to learn and adapt to the needs of my customers and attend to those needs. SunFed has made sure I have access to the experience I need to do that.

Q4

MDC: I feel like that is the perfect note to come back to, and a motivating factor you have continued to find at SunFed over the years. As we close the back-to-school season and head into the busy autumn/winter window, do you have any market tips for us?

JCB: As we move into mid-October and into November, supply should be plentiful and promotable, and the market will start to stabilize on prices. New items will be available, such as organic eggplant, green bell peppers, and more, as we move into the season and we get Sinaloa going on production, so be on the lookout.

There is no substitute for experience. A stop along an unbeaten path yields a networking connection those on the fast-track may not have, and an unforeseen route could just weave its way into a conversation that clinches the deal.

Speaking to Juan Carlos, it is immediately clear he is a doer whose knowledge and professional pride are deeply ingrained, his energy sparked by the action of the task itself. He shines most when discussing the product at hand; the supply is the story, and it is one he is thrilled to tell for 10 years and counting. It is a winding way that has afforded him that precious commodity we all seek in a produce sale: experience. 🍆



Brain

THE
BOX

PRODUCE PULSE

By Jordan Okumura

When I first started working at *AndNowUKnow* and *The Snack Magazine*, our President and Chief Executive Officer, Robert Lambert, used to send me home with homework—which he still does to this day; watch this documentary on the advertising world in New York, check out that film about Jimmy Iovine and Dr. Dre, look at how Aston Martin shapes their messaging around that new model of luxury vehicle...

At first, I was confused. Where does produce fit into all this? Can you please connect the dots for me? Then, it hit me. The dots were there to be made—fresh and new. He could make a palette of eyeshadows relevant to strategy and innovative thinking in fresh produce.

This kind of thinking and movement is an essential behavior for the leadership of many businesses in our industry. The net of inspiration can be cast as wide as you want it to be; it only takes a willingness to create a line of relevancy and then test its efficacy.

Now, this does not always pan out the way I expect, but if you frame the expectation in a learning capacity, you always find a gold nugget. When reading a book on neurology, survival, and human behavior, I may not discover the next packaging phenomenon, but I learn about the way people think, how they move under stress, and how their mental models of the world can block out and maintain a false reality even in the face of life-threatening challenges.

On a larger or smaller scale, this applies to how any human functions, especially in challenging situations like the ones presented to us today. It helps me interact with people, their bias, expectations—which is a huge part of my job.

In the *Harvard Business Review* article “To Find Creative Solutions, Look Outside Your Industry*,” Bill Taylor cited such an example of thinking outside the box. Taylor shared this insight from a text by Christopher E. Bogan and Michael J. English, who detailed a case study that reveals how observations from one field can transform another industry.

“In 1912, a curious Henry Ford watched men cut meat during a tour of a Chicago slaughterhouse,” Bogan and English write. “The carcasses were hanging on hooks mounted on a monorail. After each man performed his job, he would push the carcass to the next station. When the tour was over, the guide said, ‘Well, sir, what do you think?’ Mr. Ford turned to the man and said, ‘Thanks, son, I think you may have given me a real good idea.’ Less than six months later, the world’s first assembly line started producing magnetos in the Ford Highland Park Plant.”

All of this is to use the overused phrase: The world is your oyster. How will a new fashion line influence your packaging prowess? How will the map of a city center change the way you build the traffic map of your brick-and-mortar store?

Take a tip from Driscoll's who took inspiration for its Berry Patch Sensory Wheels™ from other categories like the coffee and wine industries. These sectors have created the true discipline and accuracy of a consumer's eating experience through the art and science of sensory and flavor wheels.

Maybe we come with more questions than answers, but, for those who know me well, it is always about the search. 🍷

*Source: <https://hbr.org/2022/02/to-find-creative-solutions-look-outside-your-industry>

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