

Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

the

SNACK

ISSUE 74 FEB 2023

Strawberry Feels
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From the creators of
AndNowUKnow and *Deli Market News*



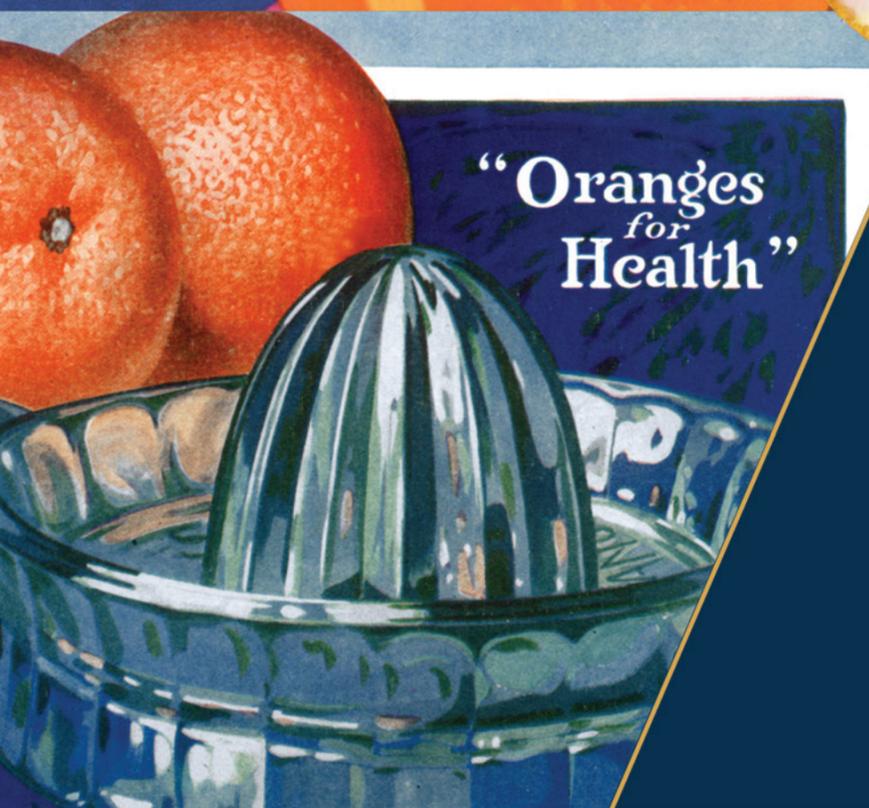
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MY FATHER-IN-LAW ALWAYS SAYS, “GET READY TO GET READY.” While I have lived so much of my recent life under this driving force, these words articulate it perfectly. In order to be ready, you need prep, forethought, and the ability to see downfield.

Or downlane.

I think of the many springs and summers spent in double practices for swim team. Testing paper suits, the right goggles, changing my dive, repeating start after start so I could nearly anticipate the gun or the buzzer. I remember lengthening each muscle so they collapsed distance. When you are trying to shave off hundredths of a second in order to beat a personal record or the competitor next to you, it truly is a game of inches and a psychology of reach. Of time so electric that it reckons with your sense of reality.

The end of the year always feels like this itch to get ready to get ready. And the beginning of a new year feels like a continuation of the mindset—with a zeal and intensity that are not spontaneous, but earned and planned. We can call this a reinvestment or the continuation of an old path on fresh terms. We can call this an occasion for New Year’s resolutions, or we can picture and understand it as a layering of strata deepening the way we exist in our lives. We can call the moment or these moments a crystallization of dreams, of hopes, of realizations, and even experiments.

I simply appreciate any juncture (custom or created) where I can reflect, let go, and find myself again in new ways.

Entering 2023, like many such threshold moments, felt like this to me. This coming year has the potential for many new moments but promises nothing—except that, one day at a time, we may be given the gift to live.

This year, I recommit to telling my own personal story inside and outside of the fresh produce universe, dusting off old manuscripts and seeing the mirror held up by the life I



have lived so far, the books that have painted it, the people who continue to color it.

I recommit to collapsing the distance between my personal and professional values to live more congruently and truly. This has always been a tricky feat as I am in a constant state of troubleshooting, problem-solving, and fixing while I work—personal relationships are not a space for such things for me, individually. It is a complicated relationship with necessary boundaries and values that traverse: compassion, listening, learning, courage, curiosity, and authenticity.

I will reinvest in looking, quite literally, at the ground beneath my feet more often. I live so rarely in the present moment and instead acutely in the future—a demand of my role and living strategically. A healthier balance, I think—a little, or a lot, of mindfulness—will do me good.

And patience, oh sweet, infuriating, beautiful patience. I hope to find more stillness inside the storm. I hope to create space, be that eye, be the witness at the center of the hurricane. Some call it neutrality, others patience, equanimity, or peace. I like to think of it as living within an inch of your life.

However you choose to mark this new year, I hope you do so with all of the heart and courage that you bring to the lives around you.

Happy New Year, my friends. 🍷

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

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SHOPRITE

AN ANATOMICAL UNDERSTANDING
Shaking up how typical tenets of sustainability are classified in order to define its fresh strategy, Tom and Dominick Cingari discuss groundbreaking partnerships, key observations, and other moves driving the company's goals to grow...



G&R FARMS
PRACTICE MAKES PATIENCE
Cliff Riner dives into the innovations and sustainability initiatives driving the onion supplier's growth. Find out how it stays ahead of the curve by turning hopeful thinking into a well-laid plan...



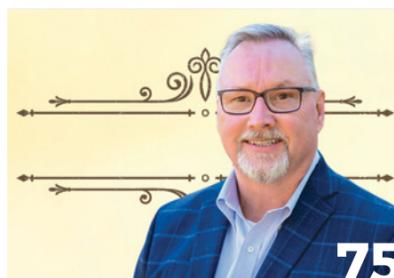
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We are all about taste, but make it fashion. In the case of Giumarra Companies' exclusive Australian mango provider, Manbulloo, and its fearless leader, these varieties are a true statement piece whether you sell, eat, or wear them...



NORTH CAROLINA SWEETPOTATO COMMISSION
GETTING IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME
Guided by its founding vision established more than six decades ago, the sweetpotato advocate uses its success to prove the old adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Michelle Grainger details...



SOUTHEAST PRODUCE COUNCIL
SPILLING THE SOUTHERN SWEET TEA
David Sherrod settles in with a mixture of Southern hospitality and invention, blending the old and the new with aplomb in the association's latest marketing strategy...



ORGANICS UNLIMITED
DESTINY BY CHOICE: CHARTING A NEW FAIRY TALE
Daughter-mother duo Daniella and Mayra Velazquez de León continue to add to a legacy of pioneering in the banana sector, with new categories in sight. Dive into a story that is a departure from your typical fairy tale...



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DEPARTMENTS

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» The IF List « Alexandra Rae Molumby

Director of Marketing, Bako Sweet®

With Jordan Okumura



To know Alexandra Rae Molumby is to adore her. Rae's passion, perseverance, and hunger to learn and grow is a way of life we admire here at *The Snack* and one we elevate any chance we get. Since joining Country Sweet Produce and its Bako Sweet® brand back in 2020, Rae has helped to evolve, sharpen, and refine the Bako Sweet aesthetic while creating a coveted connective tissue between the team, buy-side operators, and consumers with marketing prowess. With such feats already under her belt, we can only dream of what she will do next. In the meantime, we thought we would get a little personal (as we like to do) and see what would happen *IF* we asked her a few curious questions of our own...

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

The 1920s, so I could experience the 1940s. My grandma and grandpa met and fought during WWII. Afterward, they were in the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). They would tell us about their romantic love story and the war.

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

Anne in *Anne of Green Gables*.

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

Meg Ryan, from the movie *You've Got Mail*. I think she acts a lot like me in that movie, plus my husband and I met online.

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

Something to do with horses. I grew up horseback riding and now I ride every day on my cute little Quarter Horse, Maple. We just started showing in Ranch Riding this year and it has been really rewarding to see all of our hard work pay off.

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

C.S. Lewis.

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

A dolphin. I love to swim in the ocean and they live in pods, so I would always be surrounded by friends and family!

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

Harvest Joy—it's also the name of my Instagram handle.

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

About Time.

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

The day my husband, Erik, proposed. It is an amazing story, so please ask me about it for more details.

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

To talk to animals.

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

"Long Live Cowgirls" by Ian Munsick and Cody Johnson.

» IF you could give your younger self one piece of advice, what would it be?

Don't worry about being perfect, and don't worry about being liked. It's okay to be different because that's what makes people so special. Each person has a gift or a talent, and you can bless others by being yourself. 📩

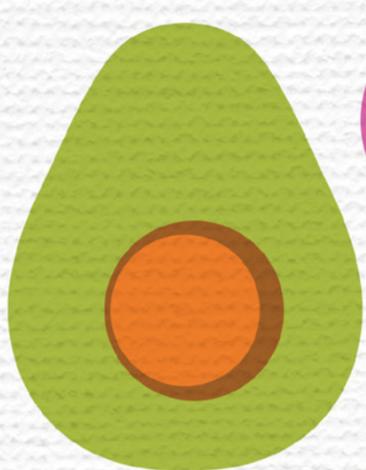




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CALIFORNIA AVOCADOS



CALIFORNIA AVOCADOS

CALIFORNIA AVOCADOS

SnackChat

By Jenna Plasterer

Domestic avocado season is upon us, and it seems only fitting that the Golden State would be one of the sources of the most recognizable green gold. After all, CA is right there in the name. To get the avocados of merchandising this category and maximizing basket share, read what these avo advocates have to say...

CALIFORNIA AVOCADOS



JAN DELYSER,
Retiring Vice President of Marketing,
California Avocado Commission



"Avocados continue to be a hot item to merchandise in retail stores and to feature in menu items. In spring and summer, which coincide with the peak availability of California avocados, we encourage retailers to add incremental displays of avocados to meet elevated consumer demand. Did you know that avocado consumption in California is more than double the national average? It's true, partially because we enjoy avocados in so many ways. Lately, my favorite has been enjoying plain avocados, just eaten with a spoon or eggs, because they taste so good."

GARY CLEVINGER,
Managing Member,
Freska Produce International



"California avocado farmers put a lot of care into growing avocados and take a lot of pride in what they do. This is why California avocados are requested by retailers all over the United States when they are in season. California avocados provide great merchandising opportunities, which can be customized around eating healthy and putting displays out for the major holidays. You can't go wrong because California avocados are great anytime they are in season and are the superior-tasting avocado from January to September."

GARY CALOROSO,
Regional Business Development Director,
Giumarra Companies



"California avocado season is such an exciting time for everyone—particularly for consumers! When they see beautiful, eye-catching displays of California's avocados in their local stores, it is a golden moment for California avocado lovers and our state. California avocados have a loyal, passionate fan base because this green gold is so tasty, nutritious, and useful for many great recipes. I love avocados on almost everything, but they have become a weekly requirement on Taco Tuesdays! At Giumarra Companies, it is our distinct pleasure to supply them every spring and summer from our two California-based avocado packinghouses in Escondido and Ventura."

GEORGE HENDERSON,
Senior Marketing Manager, West Pak Avocado



"As we kick off the California avocado season, our field experts anticipate a fruitful year, expected to extend from mid-April to late August. With the new season comes the opportunity to serve up more green goodness to our customers with Party Pak, our easy-grab bag of jumbo avocados. This four-bag lineup features festive seasonal packaging to entice the shopper and sports the coveted Heart-Check mark from the American Heart Association. On the back of each bag, a scannable recipe supports the seasonal theme and encourages healthy eating. The recipes are a great selling point for retailers and provide the opportunity to cross-promote other ingredients. Think end cap in the produce aisle with supporting items around the grab-and-go bags."

DAVID FAUSSET,
Business Development Director,
Westfalia Fruit USA



"California avocados are an iconic superfruit we look forward to sharing with our customers each year. Westfalia Fruit's California operations are nestled in the heart of Ventura County's avocado ranches, and we are inspired by their beauty all year long. As the crop peaks between the months of March through June, we are excited to bring some unique promotions to draw our beloved California sun-kissed avocados to consumers' plates!"

JENNIFER ANAZAWA,
Senior Category Manager, Mission Produce



"The California avocado season is always my favorite time of year—the trees are bountiful, and Mission Produce's packhouse is buzzing. It's no wonder 90 percent of California households buy avocados* when this delicious fruit is grown right in our backyards! As a native Californian, avocados have always been part of my diet. I have fond childhood memories of eating an avocado half with a bit of soy sauce! These days, I'm more likely to top my toast or dip some chips with delicious, locally grown avocados."

*Numerator Shopper Metrics, 52 weeks ending October 2, 2022

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A Closer Look at Lipman Family Farms® Compostable Packaging

By Anne Allen

Perfectly picked peppers in propitiously premium packaging? (I should submit that to the tongue twisters guild.)

To what does that insanely alliterative sentence refer, you may wonder! Why, none other than the compostable clamshells that make up the sustainable packaging line at Lipman Family Farms®.

My focus zeroes in on the peppers for a multitude of reasons. I adore

a snacking pepper, and I know that consumers like me want something easy to grab and delicious to munch. Add a sustainable option on top of that, and we're all racing down the aisle.

As a beautiful eco-friendly option, the packaging encasing the peppers has a bright burst of sunbeam across it—signaling sunny days ahead with this item in store. Whimsical outlines of the veggie inside—in my case, Organic Mini

Sweet Peppers—woo the shopper's eye. Each option of the lineup, which includes organic options for mini cucumbers, green beans, and grape tomatoes, feature this touch. Bright lettering also tells them they're about to eat a product that is Grown True and all organic.

You'll be a prickly Pete if you miss the chance to add this category-driving product to your shelves. 🌱

UP
CLOSE



×



NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

By JORDAN OKUMURA

SnackChat

For some, a New Year's resolution is a living, breathing thing that changes every year. For others, it is a constant which holds them true to themselves and anchors them, again, at the start of every January. With 2023 already underway, we share those thoughts, ponderings, and commitments from some of our dear friends in hopes that we can carry the promise of the New Year far into 2023 and beyond...



Steve Barnard,
FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, MISSION PRODUCE

“When it comes to my New Year’s resolutions, I use the same one every year, ‘Stay vertical and out of the way!’”



“This year, my New Year’s resolutions are many. Remember what is important! Recognize that we all have value. Breathe deep when around those who are utterly disrespectful, and maybe say a prayer for them. My wish and reminder for all in 2023 is while we all have a fiduciary duty to our business, in the end, we have a much larger duty to ourselves, our families, and our friends. To my family and friends, you are my greatest treasure!”



Teri Miller,
BUY-SIDE INDUSTRY MEMBER



Mike Venton,
GENERAL MANAGER, FRESHCO

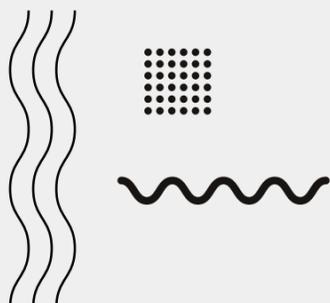
“My New Year’s resolutions for 2023 are incredibly important to me, and I am excited for the year ahead. One resolution is to change the work-life balance equation. Part of that is I want to experience some truly memorable adventures. I have many in the works already.”



“I resolve to dedicate time each day to working on becoming the best version of myself possible, regardless of my role. I want to be the best husband, father, brother, son, friend, teammate, leader, mentor, employee, and vendor partner I can be by maximizing all the tools I’ve been blessed with and developing the ones I lack. I also want to ask, ‘Why?’ less and say, ‘Why not!’ more. This one might sound evangelical, but I feel it’s applicable to everyone: Always behave like your mom is watching and perform every day like it’s audit day. I know, a little corny, but when you get north of 50, you realize that you have more time behind you than ahead.”



Harold Paivarinta,
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF SALES, RED SUN FARMS™



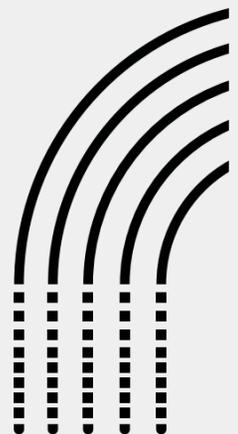
Tony Mitchell,
VICE PRESIDENT OF CORPORATE PRODUCE AND FLORAL, ASSOCIATED WHOLESALE GROCERS

“I am looking forward to 2023, and I have a few goals that made it into my resolutions this year. To start, I want to spend less time looking at my phone. Practice gratitude. Eat more produce. And, finally, just have fun and live every day to its fullest!”



Karin Gardner,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, OPPY

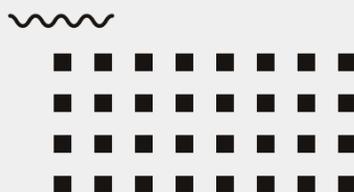
“My 2023 New Year’s resolution is to simplify my life a bit. I would like to do fewer things but do them better. Quality over quantity when it comes to personal and professional goals and life experiences. Be present and mindful, avoid getting caught up in superficial matters that distract from the things that really do.”



“I’m not traditionally big on resolutions. But, in 2023, I do have a goal to do more volunteering. I want to give more of my time to others where it will make a difference. Happy New Year, everyone!”



Dave McCary,
BUSINESS STRATEGIST, ZAG TECHNICAL SERVICES



“This year, Limoneira’s New Year’s resolutions include our continued hope for health and prosperity for everyone on the Limoneira team, all our valued grower partners, all our valued trade partners, as well as our valued customers. Also, we commit to furthering our growth in the global consumption of all the healthy products we produce and stabilizing the supply chains we serve. Additionally, we continue to dedicate ourselves to the continued advancement of our regenerative and sustainable agricultural practices for the betterment of our planet. Happy New Year, everyone.”



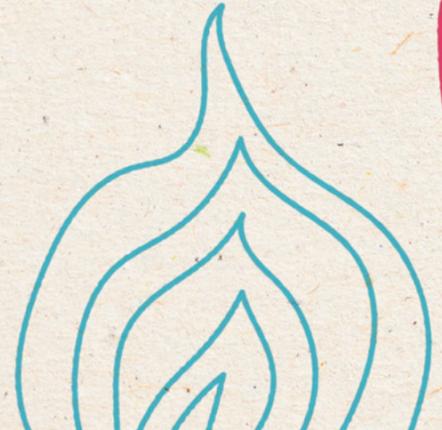
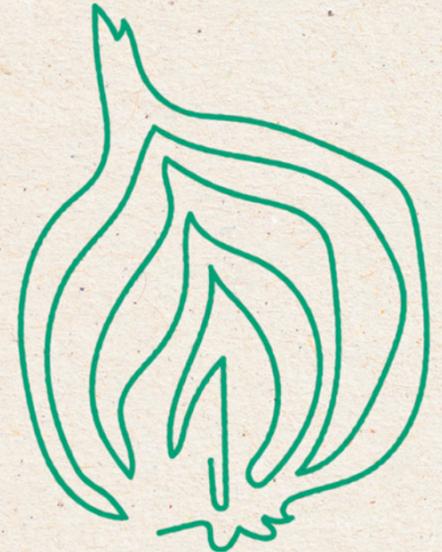
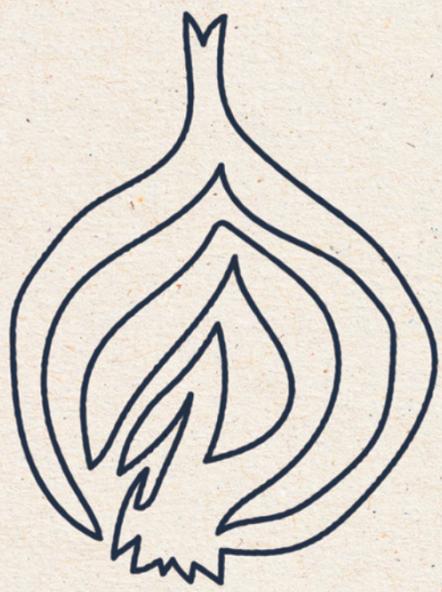
Harold Edwards,
PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, LIMONEIRA



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PRACTICE MAKES PATIENCE

BY CHANDLER JAMES

NOTHING IN LIFE IS PROMISED.

We are born into the world believing in this phrase wholeheartedly. From the moment the air touches our skin, we cry out in fear, as if warmth may never wrap its arms around us again. With time and the help of well-laid plans, the belief takes a back seat in our minds. We begin to form hopeful expectations despite the many challenges that threaten to derail our success.

While many may be busy dreaming up the possibilities of tomorrow, the challenges of today remain. And, as we've learned over the course of the past few years, those challenges sometimes come barreling toward us without warning and without mercy.





THIS FRESHLY PLANTED VARIETY TRIAL IS ONE EXAMPLE OF HOW G&R FARMS INNOVATES IN THE FIELD

Remaining flexible is a practice in patience. The understanding is that a wrench may be thrown into our plans at any time, and therefore we should remain proactive rather than reactive. I can think of no better example of this than those who operate along the fresh produce supply chain.

From unexpected weather events to rapid shifts in consumer demand, fresh produce suppliers are never at rest. Even with the most detailed strategies and careful planning, truly anything can happen from the time a seed is planted to the moment a product hits grocery store shelves.

G&R Farms knows this well.

The onion supplier has been staying on its toes—especially in recent years, which brought challenges from seemingly every possible angle. G&R knows that two of the main ingredients in its recipe for future success are innovation and sustainability, and it has set forth several initiatives that are poised to protect the provider from the supply chain's variability.



“We’re always looking ahead and planning for ways to be better,” **CLIFF RINER, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER**, began telling me. “As our country’s population grows, so does our need to supply more food globally and scale our business accordingly. We try to plan for these changes and be prepared to lead the industry into the next era of farming.”

At its Glennville, Georgia, packing plant, G&R recently installed new equipment that streamlines operations utilizing advanced technology and machinery. It is a state-of-the-art line that consists of a new grader, weigher, and sizer, while utilizing cameras, sensors, and smart technology to increase speed and efficiency to drive precise data.

“Our prior lines handled approximately 40,000 lbs per hour, while the new line nearly doubles that capacity at 72,000 lbs per hour,” Cliff continued. “The most important thing is that the

speed will not come at the cost of quality. Every detail has been addressed in this line, making sure quality remains our top priority and allows us to process more delicately, resulting in fewer process-damaged onions.”

The new grader carefully scans the surface of each onion, looking for defects it has been taught to identify in combination with infrared cameras that can detect defects just under the skin. Cliff explained that, by using a cup and a roller system, the equipment is able to weigh product with an accuracy within half a gram, even at high speeds.

“The system takes into account the weight drift of each cup caused by dust build-up during the day, and autocorrects guaranteeing the most reliable data,” he added.

The new sizer, on the other hand, uses software to detect the top, root, and center of gravity of each onion, so it knows which diameter to measure, while algorithms determine the orientation of the product. Diameter, length, curvature, and shape can all be determined in one fell swoop.

As Cliff mentioned earlier, the need for a consistent food supply is ever-growing, and making

“EVERY DETAIL HAS BEEN ADDRESSED IN THIS LINE, MAKING SURE QUALITY REMAINS OUR TOP PRIORITY AND ALLOWS US TO PROCESS MORE DELICATELY, RESULTING IN FEWER PROCESS-DAMAGED ONIONS.”

CLIFF RINER,
Research and Development
Manager, G&R Farms

upgrades like these to its packing facilities is one way G&R is staying ahead of the curve.

“Even eight years ago, when we began planning this expansion, we could not have foreseen the massive changes in the labor market or economy as a whole, and there is no doubt that these added efficiencies will pay dividends on that front,” Cliff relayed. “Furthermore, sustainability is always top of mind, and the new line improves quality and consistency while processing orders 80 percent faster and reducing overall waste thanks to the latest in cameras, sensors, and smart technology.”

The value of time only continues to increase with the impending threats of climate change and waning natural resources. We in fresh produce are uniquely positioned to address these challenges head-on.

“You don’t get to be a multi-generation family farm without a sustainable point of view that puts the land first. Our land is our most important resource, and protecting it is what guarantees our future. We achieve this through soil preservation that utilizes crop rotation, water and ecosystem conservation, zero-waste goals where possible, and integrated pest management to reduce pesticide and fertilizer use,” Cliff outlined. “This is not just in Georgia, but in all locations where we grow. In Peru, for example, we earned the Rainforest Alliance Certification on our sweet onion production.”

In addition to nurturing its close relationship with the land through onion farming, G&R also manages timber resources and plants over 1 million trees per year.

“From a socially sustainable standpoint, we focus on improving the lives of our farmworkers through fair wages and health and safety programs,” Cliff added.

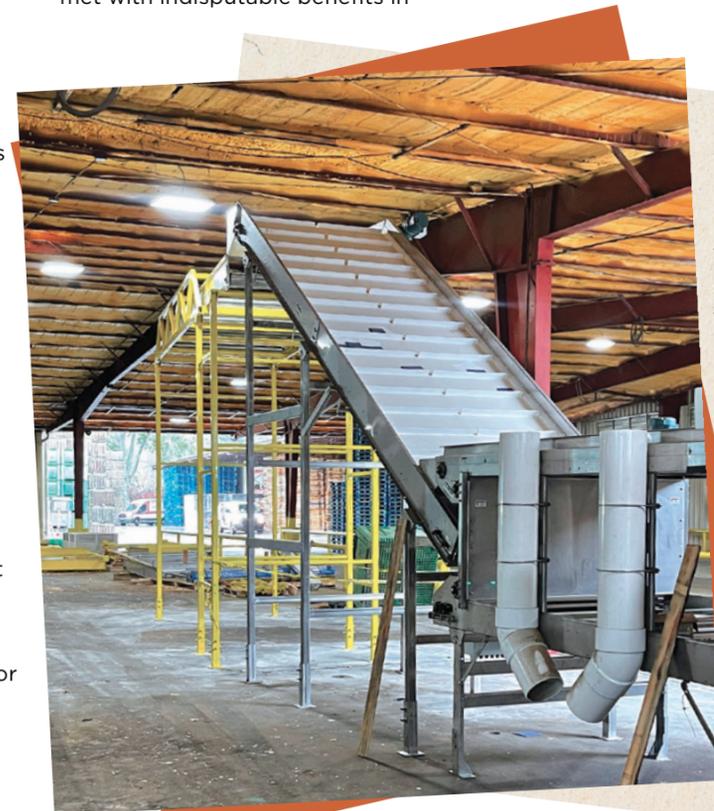
Packing equipment is not the only aspect of G&R’s operation that is getting an upgrade, as the provider also evolved its packaging to utilize more recyclable materials. G&R’s bag and box packaging are now 100 percent recyclable, and the plastic film and netting used on its bags are made from 20 percent recycled materials.

“Sustainability has long been a priority of ours, and we have an active program in place. Our sustainability program involves three main initiatives: protecting the land, improving farmworker livelihoods, and recycling,” Cliff emphasized. “Although we actively work on our sustainability program, our efforts go far beyond what we’ve outlined.”

For example, G&R recently replaced a fleet of propane gas forklifts with electric forklifts after running a test on-premises, Cliff said. The test was met with indisputable benefits in

differentiation. Cliff noted that the supplier’s sweet onion business is one area of focus that continues to grow.

“Our business is onions, and our future plans will always be about finding ways to continue to improve the quality of our sweet onion program. We manage one of the most extensive sweet onion trial programs in the industry, and you can expect that new and improved sweet onion varieties will be in our future,” Cliff concluded.



AT ITS GLENNVILLE, GEORGIA, PACKING PLANT, G&R FARMS RECENTLY INSTALLED NEW EQUIPMENT THAT STREAMLINES OPERATIONS UTILIZING ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY AND MACHINERY

reducing air pollution, heat output, noise pollution, man hours to refuel, and cost to fuel/recharge.

“This has all resulted in lower fuel costs, reduced energy bills due to lower heat output, more comfortable workers, and elimination of man hours used for refueling,” he continued. “As our Research and Development Manager, I also continually test the latest in varieties and production techniques to explore ways to grow and harvest a more sustainable crop.”

G&R Farms is also looking to sustain its relationships from the consumer standpoint, and one way to do so is through flavor and quality

Whether you believe in fortune-tellers or not, predicting the future is certainly not an exact science. Success stories like this one are built on a foundation of trial, error, and triumph.

Regardless of where you are at in your company’s journey, it would be wise to take a page or two from this grower’s playbook. While G&R Farms is a far cry from those early days when it was taking its first breaths, it was also essential in leading the way in big ideas as it delivered some of the first Vidalia® onions to a commercial grocery store. The hope that has evolved over time eventually turned into a plan that will carry G&R far past tomorrow to more firsts. **S**

PEAR-FECTION

The venerable pear has experienced many a renaissance over the course of its history, thanks to amazing growers that continue to nurture its variety, versatility, and juicy eating experience. Orchardists of Washington State's Cashmere Valley, in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains, have supplied the world with this fruit for generations. Long appreciated for its simple tastiness, research has also revealed the significance of the pear's nutritional makeup. Read on to discover what makes Rainier Fruit's pears stand out from the rest.



1 NUTRITIONAL CONTENT

It's widely known that fruits and vegetables provide essential nutrients, but did you know the humble pear packs a major nutritional punch? A medium pear contains about 21 percent of the daily recommended dietary fiber—a significant fighter against many illnesses, including heart disease. Add in vitamin C and phytonutrients, such as anthocyanins, and you've got an American Heart Association-certified heart-healthy food right off the tree.

2 PRERIPENED PEAR PROGRAM

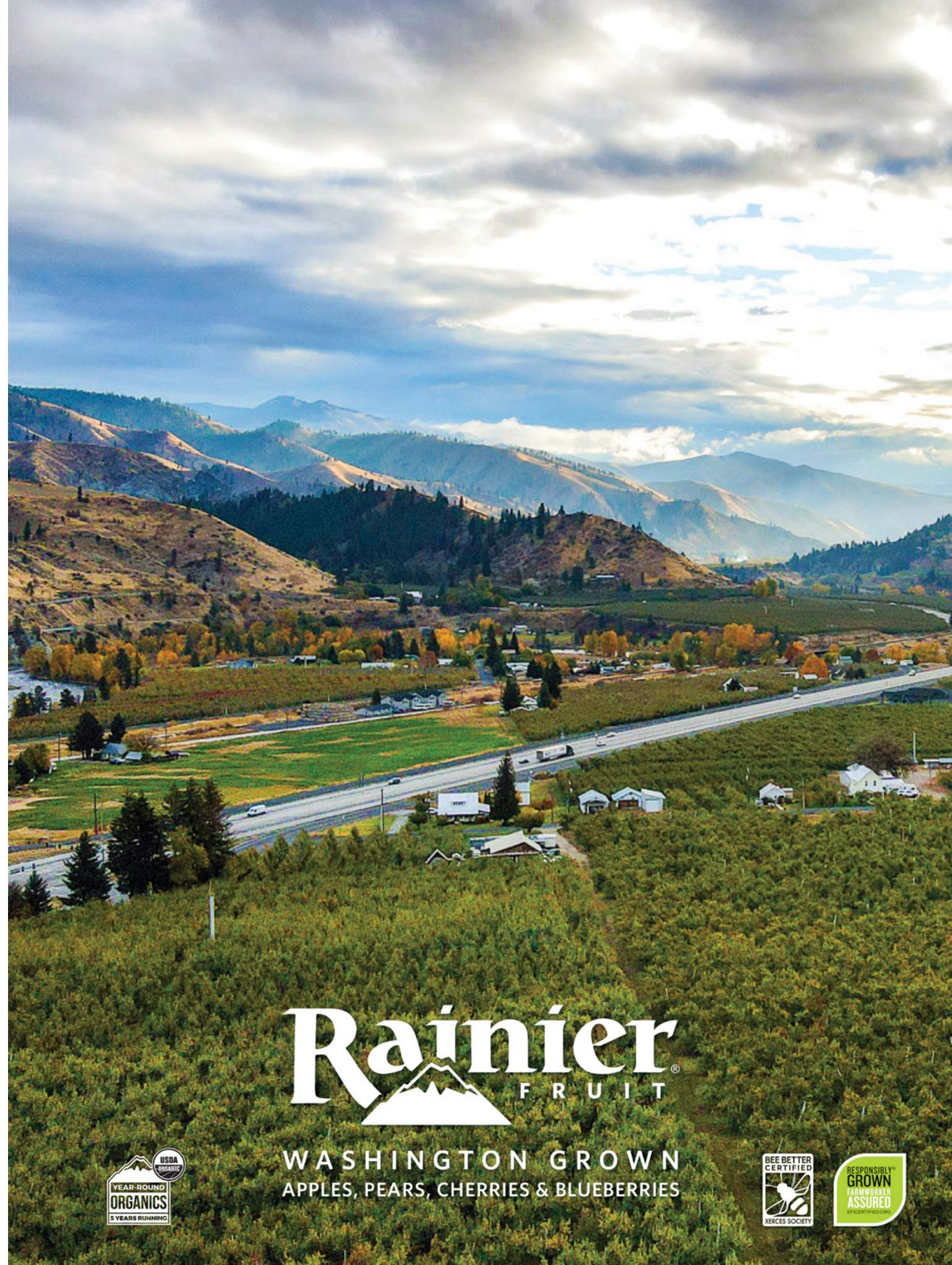
Rainier Fruit believes there's nothing quite like biting into a ripe, juicy pear. This belief is the guiding principle behind its ripening rooms, which utilize concentrated ethylene—the natural compound fruits produce when they ripen—to shorten the wait for that perfect, juicy bite. Less time to wait brings consumers back for more, sooner!

3 LOCATION AND GROWING LAND

If you've ever had the fortune of visiting the snug valleys of Cashmere, you understand why the region's fruits are so renowned. Plentiful snowmelt from the adjacent mountains perfectly complements the warm days and cool nights ideal for growing pears. Rich soils feed orchards tended by multigenerational family growers. Rainier Fruit believes this tradition of reciprocity is apparent in every piece of fruit—and invites you to give them a try.



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.



WASHINGTON GROWN
APPLES, PEARS, CHERRIES & BLUEBERRIES





Positioning

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

I recently read that Al Ries passed away on October 7, 2022, at the age of 95. Perhaps a few of the folks in marketing recognize his name. Back in the '70s and '80s, he and his then-partner Jack Trout introduced and popularized the concept of positioning. This at-the-time radical concept represented a departure from marketing brand and product benefits to marketers owning a fixed place for a brand in the consumer's mind.

"Success depends on finding an open hole in the mind and becoming the first to fill the hole with a brand," wrote Trout and Ries in a series of articles published in *Ad Age**

The article and its success led to the publishing of an impactful book, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*, the first of many books written by Ries and Trout.

I was working for Fresh Express in the early '90s, and the company was in a race—actually a war—to build our business and brand across the United States as fast as we could. We had a strong lead, and we had a competitor in Dole Food Company, who had an established consumer brand and more money.

**Ad Age*, October 17, 2022

"Brand" is the key word here. Was Fresh Express a brand in the '90s? Not yet, but we were working on it. Steve Taylor was reading this hot book—*Positioning*. He and the leadership team decided to hire Ries and Trout to evaluate our brand and strategy and give us their findings and recommendations.

Pinstripe suits, cufflinks, and shiny shoes. These guys looked like they shopped at the same store as Gordon Gekko from *Wall Street* (the movie). At the time, I was in my twenties and super impressed with these famous authors and New



York City marketing gurus. Steve and Bruce Taylor, who were owners of the company at the time, let me be a part of the meetings and process—it was quite the experience and education.

To make a long story short, they spent a few days with us in Salinas, California, and then headed back to NYC. After a couple of weeks, as I recollect, they came back to us with their conclusions. Fresh Express was not a brand name that garnered significant consumer recognition. I remember them giving us examples of strong brands, such as Kleenex®, Clorox®, and more. Fresh Express, they told us, was two generic words that could be knocked off, such as "Salad Express" or "Fresh This" or "Fresh That."

Their recommendation was to leverage the name of the family and the romance of the farm and farming lifestyle. Specifically, their naming recommendation was "Taylor Farms."

We agreed and we went right to work with graphic designers, who crafted some great logos and package designs.

Concurrent with all this brand strategizing, we were out selling salads and adding packaging equipment as fast as we could move and invest.

It was an exciting time for the company and for me—my "Salad MBA" program, as I've called it for years now.

At the 11th hour, we decided we could not risk our momentum in the salad war with Dole that we were winning. We imagined scenarios in which we were in the middle of rolling out the new brand with our competitors waiting for a "hiccup" in supply, and, of course, telling the customers that now is a great time to try another brand...if you're going to make changes anyway. So, Fresh Express is still here, over 30 years later.

Bruce Taylor left Fresh Express/Bruce Church, and less than a year later, he reappeared with a new company—Taylor Farms! That was in 1995.

As Paul Harvey used to say, "...and now you know the rest of the story."

I want to give a special thanks to Bruce Taylor, who said it was okay to tell this story, and thank you to Al Ries and Jack Trout for those early marketing lessons of positioning and marketing warfare. I still have the autographed books on my shelf. I sure wish that I had one of those Taylor Farms logo mashups that was taped to Bruce's wall at Bruce Church/FreshCo. I'm sentimental that way. 🍅



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

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



Rex Lawrence,
Founder and President,
Joe Produce SearchSM



WTF DO I DO WITH LIV Organic™ Onions ?

{ what the fork }



CARAMELIZED ONION AND GOAT CHEESE TOAST

INGREDIENTS

- 2 LIV Organic™ Onions, halved and sliced
- 2 **tbsp** extra virgin olive oil
- 2 **tbsp** unsalted butter
- 1 **tsp** fresh thyme, chopped
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 6 **tbsp** goat cheese, softened
- 4 **slices** of your favorite hearty bread
- Thyme leaves for garnish

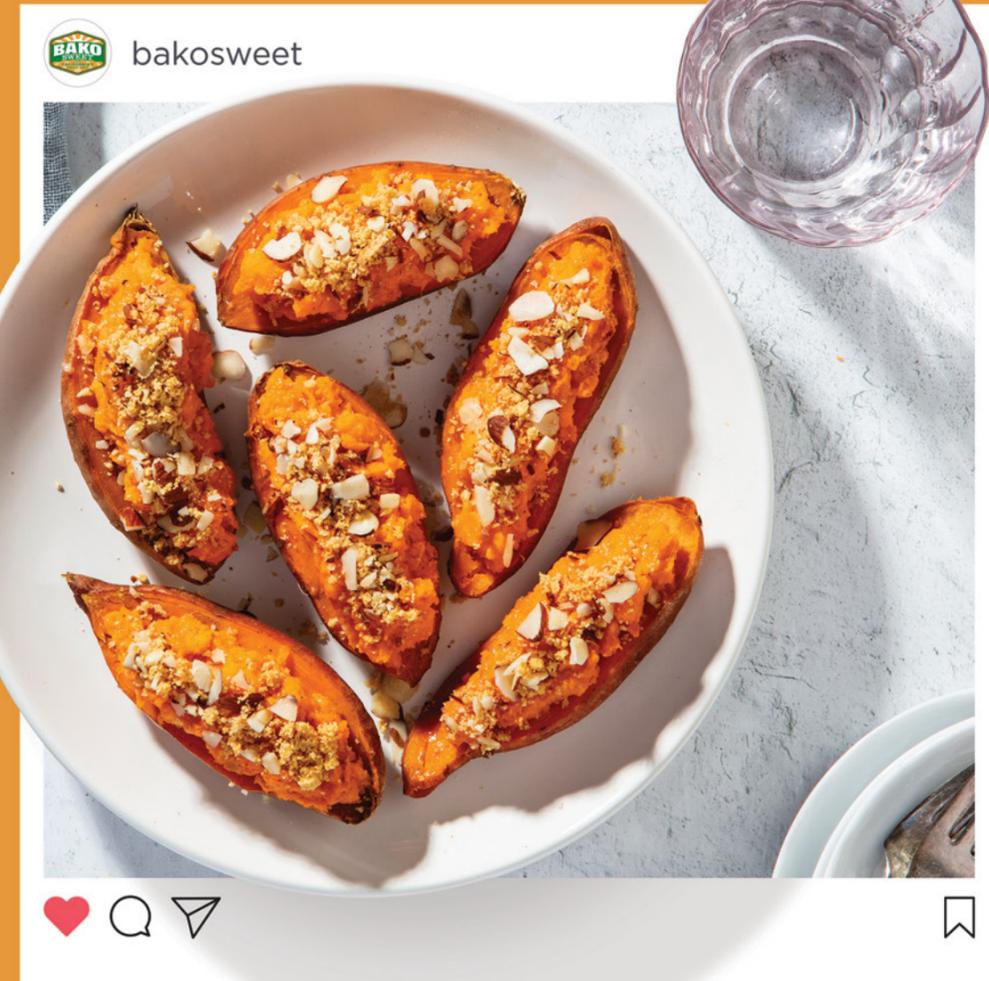
Prep Time: 10 min
Cook Time: 40 min
Servings: 4



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Coat a large, heavy-bottomed pot with olive oil. Melt butter over medium heat.
- 2 Add sliced onion and a pinch of salt. Let cook for about 10 minutes or until the onions become translucent, then add thyme. Bring the heat to low and let cook for about 20–30 minutes, or until the onions have a thick, sauce-like consistency. Stir occasionally. Add salt and pepper to taste.
- 3 Spread each piece of toast with the softened goat cheese. Top with onion mixture and garnish with pepper and thyme leaves.
- 4 Serve and enjoy!

To learn more about LIV Organic™, visit www.livorganicproduce.com



The Sweet Equation

A Q&A with Prescott Leyba, Director of Sales, Bako Sweet®

By Jordan Okumura

Timing is essential—priming the best and worst case scenarios for certain fate or uncertain likelihoods. In fresh produce, timing is everything.

The beginning of each year presents epic alignments and possibilities, especially in a space as pivotal as fresh. With New Year's resolutions abounding, thriving, or being revised or revitalized, February and the kick-off of 2023 bring together a passion for change and betterment—as well as National Sweet Potato Month. All these elements fulfill consumers' appetites for tasty solutions to healthy ambitions, and the retailer's desire to differentiate in the marketplace and be that meeting ground of solution and execution for the sweet potato lover.

Striving to meet the spud's sky-high endeavors, Country Sweet Produce and its esteemed Bako Sweet® brand present such allure and optimization, hosting an array of programs, benefits, tailored strategies, and category insights that make each customer both unique and coveted.

All these words are pointing in a direction that Prescott Leyba, Director of Sales, is already traversing with buy-side customers. As he tells me, action—along with timing—is everything, and Bako Sweet sets the path and walks it every day to address the needs of its retail relationships.



Jordan Okumura

Jordan Okumura: Thank you for taking the time to step away from what I imagine is already a whirlwind year for you and the Bako Sweet team. With National Sweet Potato Month falling so close to the New Year, how does this period inspire great promotional opportunities for sweet potatoes across these celebrations?

Prescott Leyba, Director of Sales, Bako Sweet®: February is a great time for National Sweet Potato Month because we're fresh off of January, a month many shoppers use as a "back-to-health" month after countless holiday meals and treats.



Prescott Leyba,
Director of Sales,
Bako Sweet®

February is also National Heart Health Month, Heart Healthy Month—and National Cook-a-Sweet-Potato Day is on February 22! Sweet potatoes are heart-healthy; we're certified by the American Heart Association's Heart-Check Food Certification Program and use the organization's logo on our packaging to educate consumers. This type of value creates a bridge between the retailer and the consumer, due to a symbol and household name that are recognized from the supply chain to the kitchen table.

Bako Sweet sweet potatoes are about as heart-healthy as a category can get. They are packed with fiber, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that can move consumers one step closer to a healthy lifestyle. We help communicate this to the shopper through point-of-sale (POS) materials and eye-catching packaging as well.

During the month of February, we plant our sweet potatoes in tunnels called "hotbeds." We plant sweet potatoes in hotbeds because it traps the heat and keeps them growing right on time for harvest in the fall. So, again, this is a prime time for us to plan ahead with a great season outlook.

JO: You were right about the opportunities available during this time, and it also seems like a great jumping-off point for messaging and building loyalty with the consumer throughout the year. Digging in a bit more to the current occasion, what is Bako Sweet's vision for National Sweet Potato Month and its own category excellence?

PL: Our goal is to use February as a month-long opportunity to educate consumers on two items: One, we want to generate excitement around the health and nutritional benefits of sweet potatoes; two, we aim to communicate how versatile an item sweet potatoes are. It's a good reminder that foods can be healthy and taste great!

This level of engagement creates brand recognition. Sweet potatoes = Bako Sweet = heart health. It is a formula that is as great for retailers as it is for us.



JO: Those are some amazing goals with truly promising results to be captured. What should retailers know about the category growth in recent years, and how can they tap into this data to generate more sweet potato sales on their end as well?

PL: We're long past the days when sweet potatoes were nothing more than a holiday staple. The category continues to grow year after year, and it's important to provide variety and assortment to shoppers who are more interested in sweet potatoes than ever.

The category perception that "sweet potatoes are healthy for you" is strong, with 92 percent of consumers agreeing with this*. You really cannot go wrong investing around statistics like this.

JO: I guess the more surprising result would be the answer to a question like: Who doesn't like sweet potatoes? But let's concentrate on the lovers, eh? How does Bako Sweet support and assist retailers in February and all year long to differentiate their sweet potato category?

PL: We remain committed to partnering with retailers to elevate the category with promotional support. It's important to make buying sweet potatoes as easy as possible!

We accomplish this goal in a myriad of ways. One is through targeted paid advertisements on social media as well as Instacart. To support social media investments, we also conduct giveaway contests, promote recipes, and make nutrition facts understandable and accessible. Additionally, our Bako Sweet website is an amazing resource for recipe creation, cooking information, and storage tips.

"Bako Sweet® sweet potatoes are about as heart-healthy as a category can get. They are packed with fiber, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that can move consumers one step closer to a healthy lifestyle. We help communicate this to the shopper through point-of-sale (POS) materials and eye-catching packaging as well."

Prescott Leyba,
Director of Sales, Bako Sweet®

Not to mention, we also drive interest through our email newsletter, press releases, media placements, and, of course, merchandising support. We bring an entire tool kit already prepared to the retailer.

JO: Speaking of merchandising, how does this tool kit set Bako Sweet apart from other growers in this space?

PL: Our support doesn't stop when the product makes it from our facility to the store. We support our partners through the entire process.

Our product packaging was designed from the start to be optimized for merchandising and shelf appeal. In addition to consumer-friendly packaging, we offer a suite of point-of-sale materials, including display bins, grower signs, shelf tags, and a variety of educational materials.

We shifted our focus to communicating to the consumer the flavor and health benefits of sweet potatoes on our packaging materials as well.

While timing is everything, innovative support and progressive thought leaders ensure the clock is ticking toward a common goal on the retailer's side: drive sales and consumption of sweet potatoes. In an industry where every move counts and moments cannot be gambled lightly, Bako Sweet is filling time with every advantage it can create. And the company is doing it with a sweet potato brand that is not just an echo of sweet potato excellence, but something that exemplifies its standard. 🍠

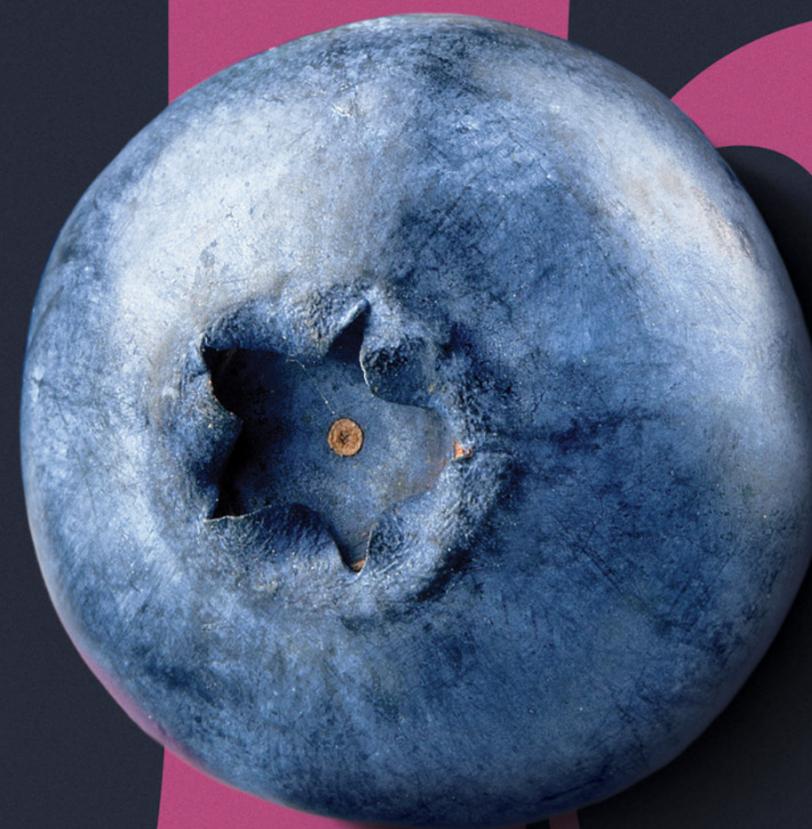
*Source 2018 Sweet Potato Buyer Attitude & Usage Study by The United States Sweet Potato Council

CELEBRATE FEBBLUEARY



IT'S PEAK SEASON FOR

BLUEBERRIES!



Blueberries SNACKCHAT

By Peggy Packer

A fruit-filled yogurt parfait on a Monday morning. A soft, sweet muffin on a Saturday afternoon. An aromatic pie at the center of the table at Sunday family dinner. Wherever you look, blueberries are present in some of life's sweetest moments.

With a regal deep-blue appearance and nutritious attributes that have earned it the title of "superfood," this little round berry carries a unique appeal for a majority of consumers. My advice to you this season? Paint your produce department blue and sing to the tune of increased register rings...

For more information, contact
sales@naturipefarms.com





CarrieAnn Arias,
Vice President of Marketing, Naturipe

“By February, most North American consumers are sick of the cold, gray winter and are ready for warm, vibrant weather—blueberries are the perfect way to get an early taste of summertime. Our diverse network of growers means that even in the dead of winter, Naturipe consumers can enjoy fresh, seasonally grown conventional and organic berries from Mexico, Chile, Florida, and California, from *FeBLUEary* through March.

People love to eat Naturipe blueberries because they know they’re juicy, delicious, and the perfect amount of sweet. Naturipe is more than berries. Our growers are innovative and popularize ideas that have a widespread impact, like on-the-go snack boxes and berry-filled yogurt parfaits. With new products and varieties, Naturipe’s growers continue to create delicious offerings consumers can’t wait to eat.”



Amber Maloney,
Director of Marketing,
Wish Farms

“Being two months into the new year, consumers are still focused on achieving their New Year’s resolutions of healthy living, and what better way to kick off February—also known as American Heart Month—than to promote all the bountiful health benefits of blueberries!

Blueberries are sweet pops of flavor that are not only healthy but extremely versatile. Carrying the encouragement and message of prioritizing health in the new year, Wish Farms will be sharing creative and simple ways to help shoppers incorporate blueberries into their daily routines. Tossing blueberries into smoothies, protein shakes, waffles, granola, or blueberry sheet pancakes can help kick-start the morning and provide the fuel to keep consumers going all day long.”



Kyla Oberman,
Marketing Director, California Giant
Berry Farms

“We’re seeing BLUE this time of year, with our blueberry grower partners in Chile and Mexico producing promotional volumes of fruit. We hope retailers will take advantage of the many customizable promotions that California Giant Berry Farms has to offer—from display contests and sales incentives to in-store and digital sweepstakes for shoppers—our promotions are ripe for the picking. Now is the time for retailers to call attention to the fact that everything is better with berries and encourage shoppers to grab their boost of blue!”



Stephen Paul,
Category Director, Homegrown
Organic Farms

“It only takes one taste to fall in love with blueberries. These berries are more than just a sweet treat; they are packed with superfood health benefits. Homegrown Organic Farms has been an industry leader in the organic blueberry category for more than 20 years. Our organic blueberries are responsibly grown in California and Oregon with Equitable Food Initiative and Bee Better certifications. Conscious consumers will love to check blueberries off their grocery list knowing they are grown with care.

The possibilities are endless with blueberries in the kitchen! A handful of berries make a delicious snack on their own but can also become a flavorful match made in heaven when paired with the right ingredients and foods. Personally, I love blueberries covered in dark chocolate for a sweet treat! There might be a new chocolate-covered berry helping consumers celebrate love this Valentine’s Day!”



Yasmin Pacia,
Marketing Director,
Trucco

“Can dogs eat blueberries? Yes, they can! According to the National Library of Medicine and the United States Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Research Services studies, dogs can eat blueberries. This amazing fruit contains nutrients that can help improve human health and that of our beloved pets. This means retailers have the opportunity to not only drive blueberry sales by appealing to the wants of consumers, but by pulling on their heartstrings and positioning blueberries as a fun, flavorful, and healthy treat for their four-legged friends. We suggest highlighting excellent recipes shoppers can make for their doggies, such as a hearty combination of blueberries with ground turkey, brown rice, and Butternut squash.”



Doug LaCroix,
Director of Sales and
Marketing, Family Tree Farms

“Blueberries have enjoyed so much momentum and growth in recent years. Consumers understand the health halo that blueberries offer and have grown to expect a quality product year-round. Consistent quality isn’t always available, which is why we are excited for 2023, which represents an exciting year for Family Tree Farms as we expand into new growing regions that allow us to offer 10–11 months of production with varieties that will knock your socks off. Along with an expanded offering, we are moving into our third generation of proprietary genetics—varieties that continually lead the industry and raise the bar for size, crunch, and flavor. We are obsessed with producing the most flavorful fruit in the world. These characteristics will be critical in driving the next iteration of blueberry demand.”

Libations

FOR ALL OCCASIONS:

THE BLUE MINT EXCURSION

By Jordan Okumura

Photography by
Craig Wheeler

I like my beverages how I like my winters: cool, adventurous, and rewarding. And nothing quite blends together these elements for me like mint and blueberries.

Besides harnessing my favorite colors to build bold and refreshing flavors, these two produce categories have quite a complementary relationship. Bringing nutritious sustenance and bright flavors to any dish or treat—savory or sweet—they make for the perfect components with which to charge your morning or transition softly into an evening event. Just think—produce cross-promotions for both health and wellness and holiday festivities.

Mint corresponds with tantalizing uniqueness for me, lighting up the palate with a connection to the Earth and vibrant,

breathable freshness. Build blueberries into the moment and you get the same connection, both grounding and flavorfully enlightening. Here at *The Snack*, we talk about produce like we talk about love stories, but it is in our repertoire to do so, and, we believe, yours as well.

As we kick off the new year and circle back into the seasons, our marriage of blueberries and mint strike a strong note in our first *Libations for All Occasions* in 2023, with what I like to call, The Blue Mint Excursion.

So, sit back (or rally up) and take a smooth but energizing journey through this ingredient list, as your eyes and your taste buds light up with this earthy ocean of greens and blues. 🍷

INGREDIENTS

½ cup blueberries
¼ cup fresh mint leaves or about
6-10 leaves
1 tsp puréed ginger or **1-3 coins**
 of fresh ginger
1 lime, sliced in half
12 oz seltzer water or club soda

Optional for heat: 1 fresh jalapeño, sliced into thin coins, seeds removed (or leave them for additional heat)

Additional option for heat: 1.5 oz gin or vodka of your choice

Time: 4 min
Servings: 1

DIRECTIONS

1. For this very produce-forward libation, combine all but 4-5 blueberries, approximately 6 mint leaves, the juice of half a lime, ginger to your liking, and as many sliced jalapeños as your tummy can (or wants) to handle in a highball or glass of your choice. Muddle away for 15 seconds.
2. If you choose to make your beverage boozy, add in 1.5 oz of your choice alcohol here.
3. Add ice to your glass till you have utilized about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the volume, then add in club soda or seltzer water.
4. Garnish with additional mint leaves, lime wedge, and blueberries and enjoy!



A Closer Look at GR Fresh 100 Percent Compostable Packaging

By Peggy Packer

Sometimes, just when you think something is so great it can't possibly get any better, life surprises you.

A perfect example of this is the grand GR Fresh portfolio, which leverages quality and sustainability in a balance so precise its mastery shines across several staple produce categories. Now, the supplier has struck gold once again with the rollout of its 100 percent compostable bag.

The beautifully minimalistic new packaging not only aptly demonstrates GR Fresh's strong commitment to sustainability and minimizing its impact on the environment, but also communicates its keen understanding of consumer trends and visual appeal. This 6-count, eco-friendly bell pepper bag grants shoppers a direct view of the premium-quality, Mexican-grown vegetables found inside while proudly boasting its unique ability to be easily composted at home.

The bag is made by utilizing all plant-based materials, which can be naturally degraded into the soil without leaving behind any harmful toxic residues. Gracing several key players in its lineup, GR Fresh's latest packaging development also houses its Roma tomatoes, mini sweet peppers, and avocados.

Today's consumer is demanding sustainable offerings that don't compromise on quality or value, and GR Fresh answers that call each day by bringing something extraordinary to the produce department. 🌱

UP CLOSE



MAKE IT

MANDATORY

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A Closer Look at New Mastronardi Produce® Angel Sweet® Snacking Cup

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

Anything new comes with an inherent risk—the unknown of whether the latest products will land in repeat purchases or pass quietly into the ventures of lessons learned.

Until now.

The new Angel Sweet® snacking cup from Mastronardi Produce® is as close to a guarantee as new launches can provide in fresh produce, born of a combination of data and design prowess from a company that has proven it knows what it is doing in the packaging space.

A grooved, cube-like shape makes the container grabbable and stackable, and a pop of color on a resealable lid grabs attention while the otherwise clear container gives a full view of the prized grape tomatoes inside. Then consumers can either reuse or recycle the pint-sized cup, utilizing these design features again and again.

Why does this hit all the marks consumers could ever ask for? Because, as Mastronardi Produce shared upon the product's unveiling at the International Fresh Produce Association's 2022 Global Produce &

UP
CLOSE

Floral Show, it was contrived based on what consumers reported to the company's research team were their wants, needs, and pitfalls with packaging.

While it's true that nothing is ever a sure thing, as the saying goes: A ship in the harbor is safe, but that's not what ships are made for. And neither are those of us in fresh produce.

But, I would put my money on Mastronardi Produce's new Angel Sweet pack being as close to surefire as we can bet. 



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MARCH 30-APRIL 1

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▶ MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀

DANIELLE LOUSTALOT

Marketing Manager, Jacobs Farm del Cabo



With Melissa De Leon Chavez

The best part about this *Snack* feature is reading an acquaintance's list and immediately feeling compelled to reach out to let them know that—as of this moment—the two of you are best friends. One commonality is a connection, two is a match, anything beyond is kismet. Such was my own takeaway when receiving the inspiring range of favorite things compiled by industry marketer Danielle Loustalot. These are the feelings we all pursue in produce networking—those that make business a pleasure. I have no doubt you will agree when you read the below...

1 *Homemade, on the rocks, with salt, por favor.*

2 *The only thing I couldn't live without.*

3 *“My favorite is Howl's Moving Castle.”*

4 *My Italian husband makes the best authentic carbonara.*

5 *“My dad is a landscaper and I inherited the passion—the handy gene!”*

6 *Sister and Blaze are the sweetest kiddos!*

7 *“I love escaping into stories during my drives and downtime.”*

8 *We went to the Warner Bros. Studio tour in London, England, New Year's Eve 2022.*

9 *Vietnam, Switzerland, and Italy top my list.*



- 1** Margaritas
- 2** Singing
- 3** Studio Ghibli
- 4** Pasta
- 5** Landscaping and Home Renovation
- 6** My Dogs
- 7** Audiobooks
- 8** Harry Potter
- 9** Traveling

WTF DO I DO WITH Sunkist® Citrus ?
 { what the fork }



CITRUS CHARCUTERIE BOARD

INGREDIENTS

- Sunkist® Minneola Tangelos
- Sunkist California Mandarins
- Sunkist Cara Cara Oranges
- Sunkist Blood Oranges
- Cheeses like Brie, aged white Cheddar, and goat
- Nuts
- Olives
- Sprouted or whole grain crackers
- Dips like hummus or guacamole
- Dry white wine

Prep Time: 10 min
Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

- 1** While there's no set recipe for putting together a beautiful citrus charcuterie board, there are a couple things that pair especially well. Here's how we make ours: Slice or segment each of the Tangelos, Mandarins, and oranges. If desired, slice the Cheddar, Brie, and goat cheeses as well.
- 2** Arrange each of the items on a platter to your liking, placing the nuts, olives, and dips into separate bowls if necessary.
- 3** Serve alongside a dry white wine, such as a sauvignon blanc, and enjoy!

Suggestion: Pair a slice of Brie with a segment of Tangelo for a buttery bite with a sharp finish or a segment of aged Cheddar with a Mandarin slice for a nutty, sweet bite.

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An Anatomical UNDERSTANDING

By Melissa De Leon Chavez



Nourishment transcends basic definition, from the literal fuel for biological function to the very replenishment of the soul. It is the subtext underlying the success of fresh—driving a primal instinct that fresher is better. When something is primordial, though, we often don't question how it permeates our most fundamental decision-making.

Why is it important to ensure yours is the freshest offering at retail? How do you ensure it is? It seems silly to ask because the knowledge, we think, is common.

"Oftentimes, when you have too much food, it leads to products that are past their prime," explained Dominick Cingari, Vice President and Supervisor of Pharmacy, Non-Foods, and Health and Beauty, at

Cingari Family ShopRite, a banner of the Wakefern Food Corp. family. "This drives our approach to finding solutions to food waste at all levels."

Sustainability is the metabolism of the retailer's fresh structure, nourishing both its bottom line and its position in each market where it resides. Broken down into an anatomical understanding of how the company is fueled and can fuel others, a sustainability strategy becomes about answering questions that are as complicated as they are simple.

"Aside from recycling and composting, Cingari Family ShopRite uses computer-generated ordering technology to ensure that the correct amount of goods is ordered and are in-store at the right time. If you're doing better upfront, you'll have less work to

do on the backend, which benefits our sustainability initiative in general and ensures space for a fresher turnaround," Dominick observed.

When you understand the cells driving your purpose, the pathway to success is clearly marked. In 10 years, the ShopRite chain reduced its waste contribution to landfills by over 60 percent while simultaneously opening stores.

"Even though our stores have grown dramatically in items and sales during this period, we're still down in waste," Dominick pointed out. "We have a process we call our 'Hierarchy of Surplus Food' that we follow; first we use non-sellable items in in-store recipes, then we donate to local food banks and charities. Lastly, we compost it. In locations like our Norwalk store, we've switched from a physical composting program to using Blue Earth Compost and Quantum Biopower during our renovation."

Quantum Biopower utilizes a team of engineers and constructors to tackle what it views as the final frontier of recycling: food waste. Identifying this sector as the largest portion of the United States waste stream and the least recycled, Quantum uses an anaerobic process to rapidly break down the food waste and turn it into nutrient-rich compost material.

"The benefit to using this process is that Quantum captures the methane gas that is naturally released during the composting process and turns it into energy to power homes and businesses in Southington, Connecticut," Dominick said, explaining how the technology recycles common organic waste, produces energy, and creates usable compost and soil-based fertilizers. "This differs from other composting methods that actually release methane and other greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere."

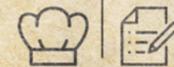
This, he shared, is a major upgrade for ShopRite, boosting the quantity of material composted in stores. For example, the retailer is expanding its floral department, and all discarded floral dirt and bags of mulch will now go to Quantum Biopower, along with anything else that's biodegradable.

"Cingari Family ShopRite has looked forward to sharing the new sustainable store offerings with our customers. A brand-new refrigeration and modern merchandising system are among the new renovations. Fresh-cut fruits and vegetables will also be prepared in front of shoppers as the department expands its organic and variety produce section," Tom Cingari, Jr., Vice President of the company, shared with me.

He explained, too, that the new refrigerated cases are far more energy efficient than what was previously installed, with all frozen and dairy products now behind closed doors to reduce energy consumption and lower emissions in the store.

"We're also excited to expand our partnership with Blue Earth Compost and Quantum Biopower, as all biodegradable materials from the store will now be taken by Blue Earth to Quantum," he concluded.

Hierarchy of SURPLUS FOOD



REPURPOSE IT INTO RECIPES INSIDE THE STORE



DONATE IT TO LOCAL FOOD BANKS AND CHARITIES



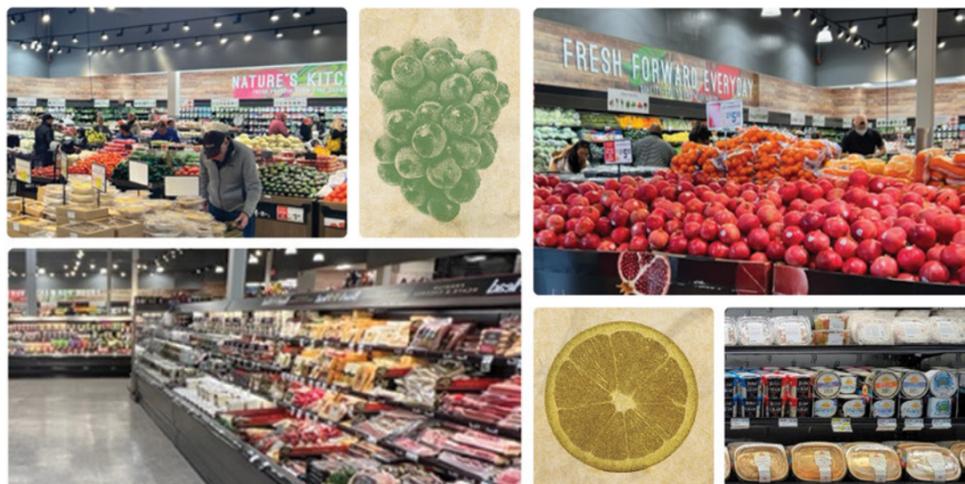
DIGEST IT THROUGH THE QUANTUM BIOPOWER PROCESS

“Cingari Family ShopRite has looked forward to sharing the new sustainable store offerings with our customers. A brand-new refrigeration and modern merchandising system are among the new renovations.”



—TOM CINGARI, JR.

Vice President,
Cingari Family ShopRite



The partnership, which began in just one store, has helped Quantum Biopower grow, and, in turn, serve more ShopRite locations.

“Eventually, the program expanded to all 12 of our stores as we’ve invested in and encouraged its success,” Dominick reflected, illustrating another beautiful aspect of sustainability: the circular nature of support within a community joined by a common goal.

While the technology and cutting-edge aspects of such an achievement are new, the ideas and values driving it are a point of the retailer’s core that is refined and well-practiced.

“Sustainability and support are aspects of our overall culture, and we have a long history of starting such initiatives before they were cool. We’ve been physically composting since before it was a ‘mainstream’ practice, launching our initiative for Earth Day in 2012. Additionally, Cingari Family ShopRite has been donating surplus food to local food banks and charities for over 50 years,” Dominick shared.

Rarely have I heard of donations and community support defined as a sustainability strategy, yet this new tag brings with it the clarity of the company’s understanding of its own foundation. Seeing how food waste in one area could help temper the threat of food insecurity in another, ShopRite founded the

ShopRite Partners In Caring program with Wakefern. Since the program began in 1999, it has reportedly donated nearly \$51 million to food banks that support more than 2,200 worthy charities.

Too often, though, such impactful moves fail to be celebrated. As a witness to our industry, I would say one of the greatest areas of potential growth is ensuring consumers know when everything they are asking for has long been a part of ShopRite’s DNA. Dominick said his family is well aware of this gap that can happen in the industry and consistently works to ensure shoppers know the positive impact their dollars support.

“To inform shoppers of all we do, we have signs hanging around the stores that emphasize ShopRite’s commitment to reducing waste by donating unsellable products to local food banks, along with information on our composting and recycling initiatives. For example, we have a sign in our Norwalk, Connecticut, store that showcases how we recycled over 8 million pounds of cardboard in 2021,” Dominick told me. “We compost or divert over 100 tons of organic material a month, saving what is equivalent to the weight of a Boeing 767 jumbo jet from the landfill.”

Sitting in my own seat and reflecting on how I make my 700-square-foot condo as sustainable as possible, I can imagine how daunting the task would seem

“To inform shoppers of all we do, we have signs hanging around the stores that emphasize ShopRite’s commitment to reducing waste by donating unsellable products to local food banks, along with information on our composting and recycling initiatives.”



DOMINICK CINGARI

Vice President and Supervisor
of Pharmacy, Non-Foods, and
Health and Beauty, Cingari Family
ShopRite

for a store, let alone a chain. But, Dominick pointed out, it all starts with the smallest steps. Seeking out disruptive partners, starting foundations—these are all points the grocer reached by putting one foot in front of the other. And that, he says, begins with a simple look at what is right in front of you.

“When we noticed that spent gift cards were being thrown into the garbage at our stores, we implemented a used card recycling program. Now, when a customer redeems a card, our cashiers separate it for recycling instead of throwing it in the garbage. We’re constantly looking for new ways to become more resourceful in-store, like repurposing equipment within our other stores and recycling what can’t be used,” Dominick observed.

Practices in sustainable opportunities are so embedded that store associates are a happy and active part of the process. While it helps that the banner relates its efforts to shoppers through signage in and around participating departments, it’s a desire by the people to know and share the story, I can’t help but think, that really gives life to ShopRite’s efforts.

“Increasing education and resources allows for everyone to be more sustainable, which is what we’re emphasizing in our stores. I was blown away by the support from the employees, who cheered me on when I first implemented the program,” Dominick said. “We do it because it’s the right thing to do. Sustainability is about people, planet, and profit. If you can’t be profitable and sustainable, you won’t be here long.”

As the Cingari Family ShopRite’s sustainability plan for repurposing surplus food continues to evolve, Dominick assured me there is always room to further improve.

“Our timeline is ongoing—we’re always working to reduce all types of waste by any means necessary,” he concluded.

It is a truth universally known: To be sustainable is to ensure success. Understanding the anatomy of this simple statement has revealed the ways it can perfectly nourish the Cingari Family ShopRite and its story, documenting for the rest of us key strategies in our industry’s pursuit to renew, recycle, and remain integral to feeding the world.

WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Pure Flavor® Alonna™
Canary Melons ?



SPICY BACON CASHEW MELON BITES

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Pure Flavor® Alonna™ Canary Melon, cut into cubes
- 1 lb bacon, cut into pieces
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 red Thai chili, finely sliced
- ½ cup cashews, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 lime, sliced for garnish
- Salt, to taste

Prep Time: 10 min

Cook Time: 15 min

Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Cook bacon in a large skillet over medium heat for about 10 minutes or until crisp. Transfer the bacon to a paper towel and pat dry. Remove all but 1 tablespoon of bacon fat from the skillet.
- 2 In the same skillet, cook garlic and Thai chili over medium heat, then add cashews and sauté until lightly toasted. Remove from heat and toss in the cooked bacon and brown sugar, then salt to taste.
- 3 Arrange the melon on a dish, top with the warm crumble, and add lime slices for garnish. Enjoy!

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- Mark Sambrailo



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Photo: The team of Chas Sambrailo Paper Company at our original shed in Watsonville, CA (1980)



MIM'S SWEET POTATO ICE CREAM

INGREDIENTS

- 1-1.5 lb bag** Mim's Famous Sweet Potatoes, scrubbed
- 1½ cups** heavy cream
- 1 cup** whole milk
- ¾ cup** packed brown sugar
- 3 large** egg yolks
- 1 tsp** cinnamon
- ¼ tsp** ground ginger
- ¼ tsp** nutmeg
- ¼ tsp** salt
- ½ cup** white chocolate chips (optional)
- ¼ cup** chopped pecans (optional)
- ½ cup small** marshmallows (optional)

- Prep Time:** 20 min
- Cook Time:** 12 min
- Chill Time:** 8 hours
- Servings:** 4 (2 scoops each)

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Preheat oven to 400° F. Prick the sweet potatoes all over with a fork. Place on a baking sheet and bake 30-40 minutes, or until very soft, then remove and discard the peel. Purée in a food processor or blender. Measure out 1 cup purée and set aside.
- 2** In a medium saucepan, heat cream, milk, and brown sugar over medium heat, stirring constantly. Remove from heat just before the mixture begins to simmer.
- 3** Lightly whisk egg yolks in a separate medium bowl. Slowly pour half of the warm cream mixture into the bowl with the yolks, whisking continuously. Then pour egg/cream mixture back into the saucepan with the rest of the cream mixture.
- 4** While whisking, continue to cook over low heat. Remove from heat when the mixture thickens enough to coat the back of the spoon, after about 4-6 minutes. Pour cream mixture through a strainer into a large bowl.
- 5** While mixture is still hot, stir in sweet potato purée, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and salt until completely blended. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap, allowing the plastic wrap to touch the top of the mixture; this prevents a skin from forming. Place in refrigerator and let cool for about 1 hour.
- 6** Once mixture is chilled, freeze in an ice cream maker according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- 7** When ice cream is almost frozen, mix in any optional ingredients like white chocolate chips, chopped pecans, or marshmallows.
- 8** When ice cream is frozen, move to an airtight container and place in freezer for at least 4 hours to allow it to continue to harden.

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



The

FAVORITE SHEZON

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

“My earrings are an entire education on mangos. They tell a whole story by themselves.”

Marie Piccone is a force to be reckoned with, from her business savvy and her Australian lilt, to, yes, her mango earrings displaying the cubed fruit in its bright flesh.

Golden and colorful as the category she loves, it is a joy to sit across from her and experience the fun energy that helped her company, Manbulloo Limited, rise to an Australian mango powerhouse.

of Flavor



MARIE PICCONE,
Owner, Manbulloo Limited

That energy, I have no doubt, is exactly what inspired Giumarra Companies to name Manbulloo the sole source of a mango venture that would become a differentiator for the legacy produce provider.

“We are the exclusive supplier to Giumarra Companies’ mango export program, and exporters in our own right because we believe in demand being driven by flavor,” Marie explains. As the Founder and Owner of Manbulloo, she recalls for me how the success of the quality of the fruit and a mutual dedication to excellence closed the oceanic distance between the two companies. Now, as demand in the United States for its premium mangos has grown, so has Giumarra Companies’ program, along with the grower single-handedly supplying it. “I signed the lease on three mango farms that needed fixing up in early 2005. Now, we have built up the brand to four times the production of what we started at.”

In a parallel that reads as kismet, Craig Uchizono saw potential for the category in the States, advocating and laying the foundation for what is now Giumarra Companies’ exclusive Australian mango import operation.

Giumarra Companies’ exclusive mango import partner, Manbulloo Limited, grows premium mangos in three different regions of Northern Australia for a highly anticipated five months of the year



CRAIG UCHIZONO,
Vice President,
Southern Hemisphere,
Giumarra Companies

“With open dialogue, complete trust in each other, awesome customers, and the fact that Australian mangos are unbelievably the best, how can you go wrong?” Craig, now Vice President for Giumarra’s Southern Hemisphere, reflects.

Ten years later, his statement has proven profoundly true, though Australian and U.S. markets both took some convincing.

“After our selection was secured, and even knowing this test program was going to be in very small volumes in the beginning, we put a full marketing campaign behind it,” Craig says. “This was to show all the Australian agencies and growers the market value the United States could offer. The hard work our sales staff and marketing team put toward this program, together with the openness we shared with everyone involved, allowed things to truly blossom.”



R2E2



KENSINGTON PRIDE



KEITT

Each season, Giumarra Companies continued listening to customer feedback, shared new ideas for packing, sizing, variety selections, and promotions with Australian growers, and, today, is proud to say the customer base and volume continue to expand beyond everyone’s expectations.

“Initially, we received push-back and refusal to believe these mangos would sell given they are set at a premium price. Well, with the right retailer and vision to make it happen, we proved them wrong,” Craig says.

One of the more antagonizing mysteries of the North American produce industry is why, despite being one of the world’s favorites, mangos have yet to see maximum success in the U.S. From where Marie sits, it’s because we don’t have the same variety of mangos in the U.S. that have wooed the rest of the world.

“When the U.S. opened the market to Australian mangos in September 2013, we were among the first imports between our two countries. We saw that potential in the U.S., where the variation in mangos is limited, knowing we have something delicious to offer,” Marie tells me.

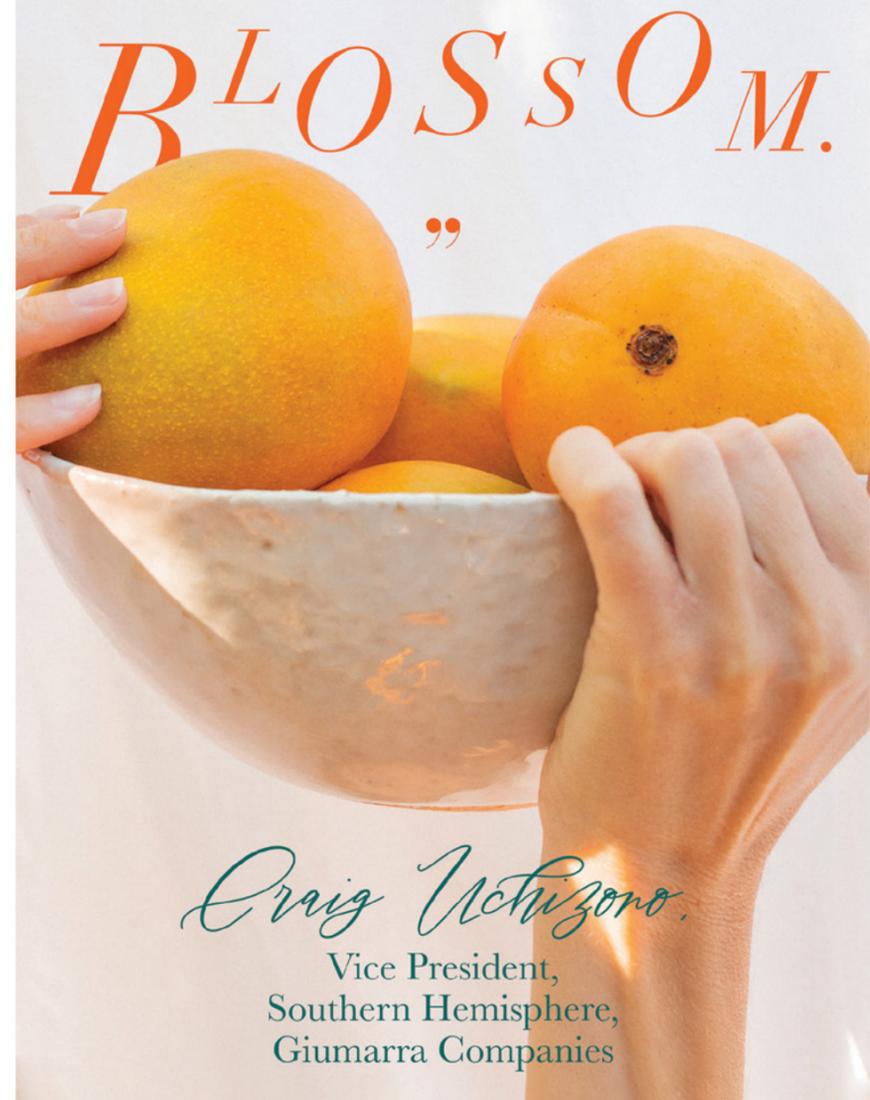
In fact, she is willing to bet 10 to 1 that if a consumer can taste an Australian-grown R2E2 or Kensington Pride, they will be hooked for life. And, while any retailer will tell you a new item is a gamble, she is quick to point out that this is a safe wager.

“Is it gambling if you know the outcome?” Marie laughs, all confidence because of how many times she has seen this challenge play out.

Joining Marie at the hottest table in this proverbial den is Gelson’s Markets, which is completing the circuit needed to see a premium offering like the Australian mango succeed. As it turns out, Gelson’s was the perfect fit to show the rest of the U.S. market what an amazing mango could accomplish.

The Australian mangos Manbulloo Limited and Giumarra Companies provide are described as a peach-like eating experience that differs from the typical North American varieties

“
The hard work our sales staff and marketing team put toward this program, together with the openness we shared with everyone involved, allowed things to truly



Craig Uchizono,
Vice President,
Southern Hemisphere,
Giumarra Companies



PAUL KNEELAND,
Senior Vice President of
Sales and Merchandising,
Gelson's Markets

“Our team and our customers look forward to the Australian mango season every year,” Paul Kneeland, Senior Vice President of Sales and Merchandising for Gelson’s, shares. “Gelson’s customers start asking about the fruit weeks before the season begins. This shows the popularity of the program and the success we have with our partnership with Giumarra.”

He explains excitedly how the produce managers in particular are always really enthused, ready to build amazing displays that draw the customer over.



KELLEE HARRIS,
Western Region Business
Director, Giumarra
Companies

“We receive photos of these awesome displays dedicating real attention and space to mangos—and it is working. These mangos are selling for \$7.99 each, and consumers are asking when they will be back. The flavor and quality, combined with such strong partnership from an active retailer like Gelson’s, are proving there is a percentage of mango lovers out there willing to pay a

premium,” Kellee Harris, Giumarra’s Western Region Business Director, agrees.

Not only are Gelson’s team members creating enticing displays, the company is cutting and prepping a value-added option in-house.

“We have provided cut Australian mangos to our customers who prefer convenience. Our kitchen team has included the Australian mango in a seasonal salad that was created by Gelson’s dietitians,” Paul explains. “It is amazing to work with a group that is so dedicated to providing an exceptional customer experience—it fits in perfectly with how Gelson’s goes to market! We couldn’t be more pleased with the grower support and the support of the Giumarra team in building this business and elevating our in-store customer experience.”

It’s a move that Marie and Kellee report typically sells double because consumers can’t help but snack on the contents as soon as they check out.

“We often hear U.S. shoppers saying they didn’t know mangos could taste this good. It’s a whole different eating experience and the only way we could demonstrate that was retail sampling. Now every time we enter a new market, we encourage demos that produce a huge return. I would say we see upward of a 90 percent try-and-buy success,” Marie shares.

It is never easy to bridge the gap to American consumers, especially one spanning from our West Coast to Australia. But, Marie insists, the product makes it simpler due to the loyalty it inspires.

“Australia mangos are derived from India mangos with a totally different flesh composition than what America is used to. Ours is more of a peach experience instead of a jackfruit experience, proving to a curious population that not all mangos are the same. You can truly taste the difference, and our American customers have proven they will wait. They even ask for the time of year when we are back in the market. Combined with gradual education on approach and prep, we are seeing a shift that we are confident will continue to create and sustain its own demand,” Marie explains.



This display of mangos by a Long Beach, California, Gelson’s Markets shows both bulk and cut fruit, which the store prepares proudly in-house

“Gelson’s [Markets] customers start asking about the fruit weeks before the season begins. This shows the **POPULARITY** of the program and the **SUCCESS** we have with our partnership with Giumarra [Companies].”

Paul Kneeland, Senior Vice President of Sales and Merchandising, Gelson’s Markets



It’s a network that has spread in both reach and voice, now encompassing support from the Australian Mango Industry Association (AMIA) and the North America-based National Mango Board (NMB).

Because mangos, Marie explains, inspire joy.

“Only happy memories are associated with mangos—where I come from, these fruits are associated with happy times and joyful experiences,” she says, her movements becoming even more energetic as she speaks.

The comment resonates with me as I think of how, no matter the variety, bright summer green or sunset red and golden yellow, they do look like a palm-sized joyful experience. Even as they continue to fight for a premier spot in the grocery basket, mangos are decorating cakes, topping sushi, and coloring salads.

“Many are using mango as the ultimate fresh treat. It is attainable, but definitely a bit decadent. And because it’s not here all year, those who know of them know they are worth enjoying before they are gone,” Marie smiles.



Manbulloo now grows in three different regions of Northern Australia to produce its addictive mango supply for up to five months in the year. With 100 percent air shipping to ensure absolute quality and freshness, retailers should plan for a two-week lead time, planning as early as April for the September seasonal kickoff.

“Not only are we providing a fruit that inspires such loyalty, even at high pricing, but we are ensuring that other important needs such as environmental and economic sustainability are met,” Marie explains, sharing how Manbulloo packaging is made of recycled materials and is recyclable in its own right, while the stickers on the product are edible.

“What we are most proud of is our work with Australia and South Pacific island governments in terms of labor. Those who work with us are going back to their homes and having a positive impact. With some having been a part of our workforce for a decade or more now, it’s a generational shift we are seeing. Employees are earning enough to send their kids to school, build houses for their families, and do great things in their



communities in their home countries. And we, in turn, couldn’t do what we do without them,” Marie assures me.

It is no wonder she and her team have been recognized with numerous accolades over the years, with Marie herself having received the 2015 Telstra Business Women’s Entrepreneur Award.

“It’s been an evolution, learning how to sell mangos in the U.S., then working with Gelson’s, which has been an ideal partnership. It offers a team of longstanding and educated produce managers that are passionate about product—having four produce managers in four years recognized is a testament to its program,” Marie observes. “Gelson’s commitment, in-house contests, and faith in us have made all the difference.”

It’s a difference Manbulloo and Giumarra Companies are proving U.S. consumers are ready for, with faith, partnership, amazing mangos, and just the right accessories. 🍌

A Closer Look at Ocean Mist® Farms Value-Added Broccoli Slaw

UP
CLOSE

By Jordan Okumura

The simple (but complex) act of slicing into a piece of fresh produce multiplies the range of its possibilities in both intentional and unexpected ways. While saving on labor and promoting convenience to boot, value-added fresh produce programs make it easier for consumers to eat, play with, love their favorite dishes even more, and generate new preparations for staple categories.

Ocean Mist® Farms is one company that knows the potential of the value-added well and continues to bring new and innovative items to retailers. These most recent moves include the debut of the company's Broccoli Slaw and 2 lb sizes of value-added products featuring broccoli florets, a vegetable medley, and Brussels sprouts.

While all these new options can truly round out the benefits of the fresh produce department for every retailer, I personally love the possibilities of Broccoli Slaw. The value-added gain has changed my ingredient spread for sandwiches, burgers, pasta dishes, salads—you name it. Adding texture, flavor, and nutritional value, Broccoli Slaw makes it more convenient than ever to up my produce consumption—which signifies to me that there are probably more consumers out there looking for such resources.

Personally, I love to see the quality of my value-added purchase presented front-and-center in packaging as well—a benefit that Ocean Mist Farms achieves with its window-to-the-slaw combo of broccoli, carrots, and cabbage. Eye-catching for all the right reasons.

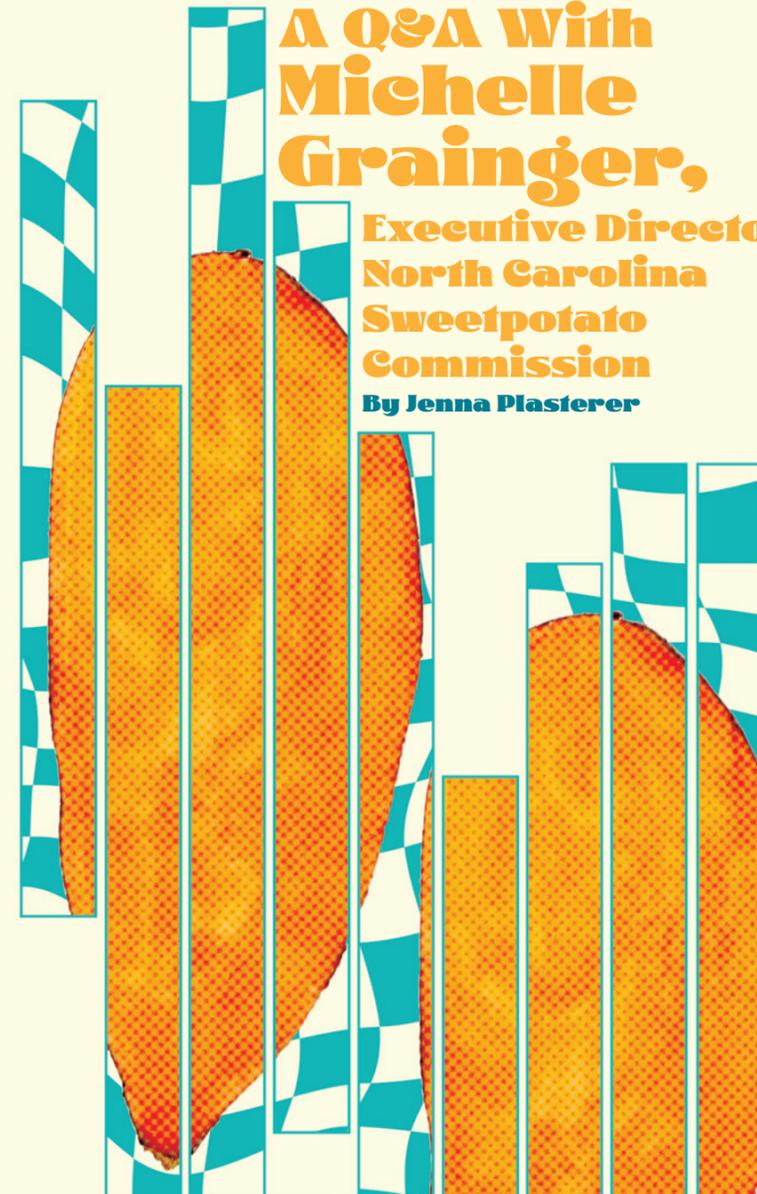
What more could a girl ask for? A couple more bags, I suppose. 🍷



Getting it Right the First Time

A Q&A With Michelle Grainger, Executive Director, North Carolina Sweetpotato Commission

By Jenna Plasterer



If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

It's a simple colloquialism we've likely all had spouted back to us at some point in our lives.

Most recently, I was on the receiving end of the phrase when I asked my dad to borrow a drill, only to be handed back a shining metal relic of the 1960s that looked like a cross between a blow dryer and a pistol. After inspecting the plug that looked like it wouldn't even fit into a modern outlet to ensure I wouldn't blow a fuse—or blow up my house—I asked him why he still had this thing. It's 60 years old, after all.

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it," was his only response.

And it wasn't broken; it was one of the best drills I've ever used. Not to mention, it looks cooler than any modern power tool I've yet to see.

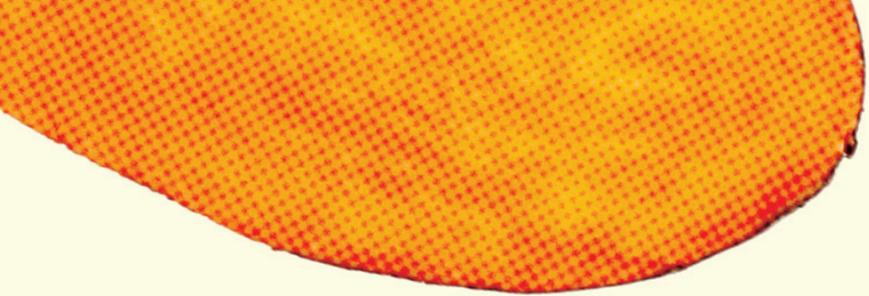
The point is, some things are worth hanging on to.

Just because something has been around for a while doesn't make it less relevant or useful than it was when it first came to be. In fact, when modern knowledge and experience are applied to these original creations, it can unlock unique perspectives that, in turn, lead to exciting developments.

In our industry, I found a shining example of this in the North Carolina (NC) Sweetpotato Commission and its successful, longstanding approach to promoting and supporting the state's sweetpotato growers.

Since 1961, likely when my dad's drill was also manufactured, the organization has been dedicated to using education, promotional activities, research, and honorable horticultural practices to increase sweetpotato consumption.

Overseeing the North Carolina Sweetpotato Commission is Michelle Grainger, Executive Director, known for her TEDx Talk on the impact of agriculture and the farmer on national security, who sat down with me to provide key insights into the history and future of the organization.



1
Jenna Plasterer: I did a little research and found that six farmers initially chartered the North Carolina Sweetpotato Commission over 60 years ago. What was their vision that inspired the organization's creation and evolution?

**Michelle Grainger,
 Executive Director,
 North Carolina
 Sweetpotato
 Commission:**

The NC Sweetpotato Commission was founded with the motivation to make North Carolina a leader in sweetpotato production and for the commission to be recognized as a trusted resource for all things sweetpotatoes. The initial mission of our organization was to increase NC sweetpotato consumption, and today, the objective remains the same.

With collective efforts of both the industry and the commission, North Carolina has become the number-one sweetpotato-producing state in the United States, growing over 60 percent of all sweetpotatoes in the country. This is thanks to more than 400 family farms and the packers, processors, shippers, and agribusinesses that support them.

The commission and North Carolina producers also take credit for supporting the research which led to the development of the Covington sweetpotato variety, representing over 95 percent of all North Carolina sweetpotatoes grown today. It is regarded for its excellent quality, consistent shape, and disease resistance, in addition to its quintessential orange sweetpotato skin and flesh color complemented by its smooth, sweet taste.



2
JP: Remaining committed to the founding mission, what practices and tenets have the commission implemented today to continue executing that vision, and what impacts have they made on the sweetpotato category as a whole?

MG: Over the last 61 years, we have not wavered too far from our original principles of education, promotional activities, research, and honorable horticultural practices.

Our members support our activities through acreage assessments that, in turn, support domestic and international marketing, amongst many other activities. These efforts include trade shows, social media, public relations, new recipe development, dispersal of nutritional information, cooking competitions, horticultural research, education tools, and more. Our audience is quite expansive, including dietitians,

teachers, students, retailers, chefs, consumers, healthcare professionals, and media.

Through our efforts, we now market sweetpotatoes in more than 34 countries worldwide and have seen the average U.S. shopper's consumption increase to more than seven pounds of sweetpotatoes each year, which is no small feat. But even more remarkable is the advances our research programs have led to in developing varieties, sustainability practices, disease and pest management, new products, and improved production and storage techniques.

In fact, the NC sweetpotato research program contributed to the commercialization of sweetpotato fries. The sweetpotato fry market has a value of more than \$3 billion today and is expected to grow at a rate of 5-10 percent per year.

3
JP: Forget Valentine's Day; February is National Sweetpotato Month! I have to know, how is the commission celebrating and generating awareness?

MG: Every month is sweetpotato month for us! But with February being National Sweetpotato Month, we want consumers to know that every day of the year is a good day to eat sweetpotatoes. Not just during the holidays, not just in February, and certainly not just as an ingredient in casseroles.

We are spending much of our efforts continuing to work with culinary professionals, including dietitians and online influencers, to spread the word about sweetpotatoes' versatility and nutritional value by

highlighting new recipes, videos, food hacks, and how-tos to get consumers cooking and eating! At retail, we are teaming up with retail dietitians to help us spread the message to their shoppers that sweetpotatoes are versatile, delicious, and healthy.

One way your readers can assist us in celebrating National Sweetpotato Month this year is to join us in signing the petition on our website to recognize the scientific spelling of sweetpotato—which is one word and not two! Many people think "sweet" is an adjective to describe "potatoes," but rather, "sweetpotato" is a noun and the name of a completely different botanical vegetable than an Irish/white potato.

4
JP: The more you know! As you're sharing knowledge, what should retailers and foodservice operators know about working with the North Carolina Sweetpotato Commission?

MG: Every retailer and foodservice company can benefit from working with us to better understand consumer product trends and leverage category opportunities to drive sales.

For example, we have a tool kit specifically curated by our registered dietitian of record for retail dietitians across the country. We put it together keeping in mind the retail chains that work to educate their customers and provide more value in their quick convenience sections and practices within the stores.

During National Sweetpotato Month, we will be working with various chains to further promote North Carolina sweetpotatoes through media segments, consumer contests, giveaways, and virtual classes, to name a few. This is a space we are working hard to expand, and we are excited about how we will continue to grow this program.

6699
 With collective efforts of both the industry and the commission, North Carolina has become the number-one sweetpotato-producing state in the United States, growing over 60 percent of all sweetpotatoes in the country. This is thanks to more than 400 family farms and the packers, processors, shippers, and agribusinesses that support them.

**-Michelle Grainger,
 Executive Director, North Carolina
 Sweetpotato Commission**



Just like my dad's trusty drill, the North Carolina Sweetpotato Commission and its mission are still going strong. A power tool in its own right, the organization will continue to build on its foundation laid back in 1961, strengthening the reputation of the North Carolina sweetpotato growers using the core tenets that have held fast over six decades.

As we know by now, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

PRODUCE PULSE

HOW THREE COGS FIT IN INNOVATION



BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ

A mind is like a diamond—multi-faceted, and so hard only itself or another like it can carve, cut, or change it.

Is it any wonder that swaying an audience toward something new is so challenging? Many of us, when shopping, love the adventure of what is new, but the inherent risk of unfamiliarity, or the burn of disliking something you did try, keeps us in our comfort zones.

Recently, I heard 210 Analytics President Anne-Marie Roerink evaluate innovations in fresh produce and ways to inspire consumers to partake in them. She mentioned cognitive distance and its potential to help shoppers make a detour from their typical habits so long as it doesn't swing too wide from what they are familiar with.

Here is where the three “cogs” come into play: cognitive association, cognitive distance, and cognitive dissonance.

These were terms that rested dormant in the back of my mind—oh, the irony!—since studying them in college. Psychology glossaries and studies define cognitive association as a bond or connection between two images, thoughts, or ideas brought to mind, while cognitive distance is the space between those two connections, either temporally or spatially. Cognitive dissonance is what we all want to avoid: two conflicting or inconsistent thoughts which produce tension or discomfort, which the person is then motivated to reduce, often as easily and quickly as possible. You could even, more simply, call cognitive dissonance the inability to hold a paradox.

Minds, like diamonds, are more challenging than carving out a new roadway, and trying to do so could create those paradoxes that might be intolerable. Instead,

using an existing route and familiar signage can become comforting guideposts leading consumers into unfamiliar territory. By labeling items “almond milk,” “cauliflower steak,” or, as Chandler James recently reported, “strawberry pepperoni,” we help reshape the diamond surface of the mind, opening an entirely new path to more fresh produce in the process.

Differentiation and uniqueness are highly valuable, but that value cannot reach its potential if the consumer doesn't understand your offer enough to give it a try—a new SKU of jackfruit next to shredded pork and labeled the plant-forward alternative; a cut of cauliflower or Portobello mushroom under the menu's steak section. While neither is a steak, which was previously defined exclusively as a cut of beef from the anatomy of a cow, it is closely associated enough to deliver what consumers need to know to give something a try, to understand how to use it, and to be open to even more after a positive experience.

Now, Merriam-Webster has expanded its definition of “steak” to include “a thick slice or piece of a non-meat food, especially when prepared or served in the manner of a beef steak.” By utilizing cognitive distance, we can navigate gaps between what we are trying to launch and what is familiar. And with cognitive association to bridge any gaps that may arise, we can avoid the third cog that makes trying anything new a challenge: dissonance.

Change can happen. Diamonds can be altered, and so can minds. 



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SPILLING
the **SOUTHERN**
Sweet Tea

*A Q&A With David Sherrod,
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Southeast Produce Council*

When I think of Southern hospitality, I think of iced sweet tea pressed into your hand as you lounge on someone's porch swing, the whir of cicadas and grass thrumming in the background. It's something that fills you with a depth of warmth and comfort you didn't think possible.

When I first attended a produce show hosted by Southeast Produce Council (SEPC), I was struck by this warmth, which has been further fostered by David Sherrod, President and Chief Executive Officer, ever since he began as a member of the council in 1999. It's something that has set SEPC apart from other associations, earning it a spot as a beloved regional trade show people in the industry look forward to all year long.

Grounded in authenticity, the association's roots are spreading even further with its latest marketing initiatives. Designed to offer behind-the-scenes insights, the upcoming campaign will give suppliers and buyers alike a chance to see SEPC for what it truly is: a thought leader in the industry.

Guiding me through this journey is none other than David himself, whose vested interest in the council is something I've long admired. He's a hearty mixture of Southern charm and fresh produce prowess, but don't let me put too many words in his mouth.

Let's have David spill the Southern sweet tea himself.



By Anne Allen



ANNE ALLEN: Southeast Produce Council continues to foster connections in such a genuine and meaningful way in our industry. How do you see this 18-24 month-long marketing campaign as further situating the association as a place for connection and networking?

DAVID SHERROD, President and Chief Executive Officer, Southeast Produce Council:



The Southeast Produce Council is eager to elevate the level of authentic inspiration and connection we already provide to our industry. Throughout the years, we have been known as the gold standard regarding networking events within the produce industry, and we have set the mark for fostering meaningful relationships that drive success. The purpose of this marketing initiative is to pull back the layers, relating to the industry that there is so much more to our organization than events.

We have done some preliminary work with our brand messaging and a gap analysis to identify the areas we need to increase awareness. We will be investing in social platform advertising and enhanced email marketing strategies. Of course, we will also continue to ramp up our onsite trade show marketing to convey the message.

We want to show the industry the heart and soul of SEPC with all the benefits of becoming part of our family. Networking, innovation, community, education, and applying fresh and creative approaches to build upon our strong foundation are key for our future and for our members. We want them to experience how we Source Globally but Serve Locally. Through our scholarship programs, leadership initiatives, educational opportunities, and community involvement, we are more than just a trade show.

AA: I think it's so important to highlight the heart of an organization, and I love learning more about the council. With some of those goals outlined above, where do you see yourself dialing down further?

DS: One of our goals is to create an emotional connection to our vision, mission, and values. Our marketing initiatives will bring value to all of our stakeholders. We want to strengthen our community, ensuring we are effective in sharing all the good we do inclusive of our Southern Exposure and Southern Innovations events.



Southeast Produce Council prides itself on fostering a strong sense of community in the produce industry and its communities



"We decided from the beginning to serve as a non-profit organization, so we could operate solely to further the advancement of our industry and community."

David Sherrod,
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Southeast Produce Council



Our board and volunteer leaders spend an immense amount of time and energy toward bringing our vision to life, and the number of lives we positively impact is amazing. We want all our members to understand the many facets of the council and how their membership value is much bigger than the events we host. We all rise by lifting others, and we intend to keep raising the bar.

AA: David, you've been with the council for nearly 25 years now. As you've watched it grow, can you think of some defining moments that shaped the association into what it is today?

DS: We've had many blessings throughout the years, and some defining moments that come to mind have one thing in common: the incredible people of this organization who are our past, present, and future.

Our Founders' vision of the council being actualized through so many amazing individuals throughout the years is front and center. Because the vision and mission of the council have been clear and pure in heart, people naturally want to be a part of it. Our volunteer leadership is unparalleled, and the level of contribution and commitment to the council is very unique to SEPC.

We were the first to offer benefit packages to buyers to attend our events. We decided from the beginning to serve as a non-profit organization, so we could operate solely to further the advancement of our industry and community. This includes some of our industry-leading programs such as STARS, STEP-UPP, and Southern Roots, and our charitable partnerships with fellow non-profit organizations through our SEPC Cares initiative.

AA: Southern Exposure is just around the corner, and I, for one, can't wait to hop back into the friendly networking that is the lifeblood of this event. Can you tell me what we should expect to see at the show?

DS: Southern Exposure: Produce - The Final Frontier is centered around incredible content, world-class speakers, and an extraordinary produce experience. SEPC Chairman of the Board Tim Graas chose Inspiring Innovation Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow as the platform of sustainability and a future-focus on our industry. It's absolutely aligned with the purpose of our marketing campaigns. We know we have to be freshly innovative and relevant to our future and ensure we're doing everything we can to provide solutions, awareness, education, and the means to a brighter tomorrow.

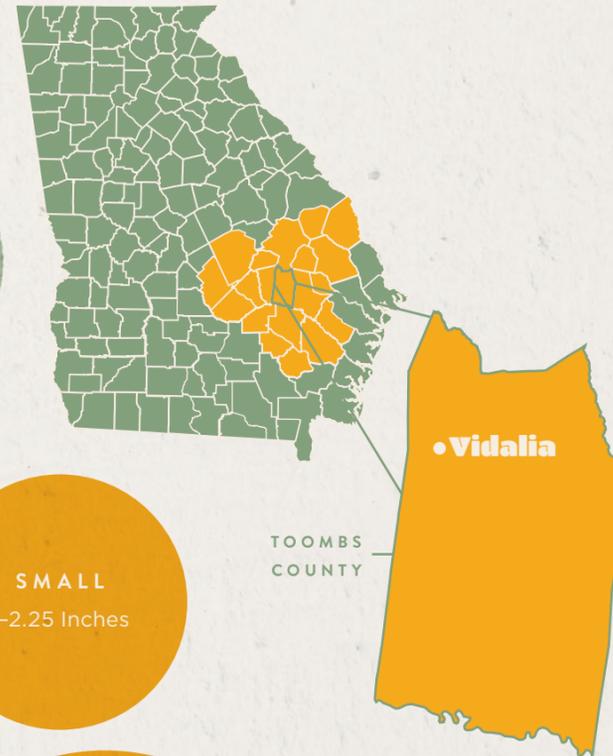


A lot of good can be found in the tenets of Southern hospitality: always being there for your neighbor, treating your guests with kindness and respect, and making sure everyone feels at home.

With the latest efforts on behalf of the Southeast Produce Council, my understanding of great hospitality has deepened. I know not all of us are sitting on porch swings during SEPC events, but the tranquility and good ol' fashioned connection certainly make it feel that way. **S**



Vidalia[®] Onion SNAPSHOT



By Lilian Diep

The sun is shining, the ideas are brimming, and the Vidalia[®] onions are coming out to play. It's a time we as industry members—and consumers!—look forward to, and this season is one we can all relish. Catch some stats and extra register rings as we bring you some pivotal points about the variety...

STATE VEGETABLE

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

32 REGISTERED GROWERS*

The number of growers registered to cultivate this regional specialty.

HAND-PICKED

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

SWEET, MILD FLAVOR

The signature taste of Vidalia onions was originally a fluke that was stumbled upon by the farmers who planted them during the Great Depression.

WHITE HOUSE GIFTS

Former President Jimmy Carter, a Georgia native, used to give them to visiting dignitaries.

APPROXIMATELY 10,000-10,500 ACRES

The amount of Vidalia onions planted each year.

5.3 MILLION (40 LB BOXES)

The equivalent shipped in 2022.

*Registered with the Georgia Department of Agriculture

Vidalia[®] Onion Farm Gate Value**

COUNTY	ACRES	VALUE
TATTNALL	6,427	\$90,382,901
TOOMBS	3,076	\$43,257,788
EVANS	138	\$1,940,694
WAYNE	42	\$590,646
CANDLER	353	\$4,964,239
MONTGOMERY	629	\$8,845,627
LAURENS	2	\$28,126
TOTALS	10,667	\$150,010,021

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

SMALL
1-2.25 Inches

MEDIUM
2-3.25 Inches

LARGE
3+ Inches

Onion Sizing



Note: Additional sizes include Colossal (3.75 inches and up)

DID YOU KNOW?

- MORE THAN AN ONION**
Once revered for its healing properties, today the "sweetest onion in the world" and Georgia's state vegetable is more than just a cornerstone of southern barbecue—the Vidalia onion is a way of life.
- GROWING REGIONS**
Vidalia onions can only be grown within a 20-county growing region in South Georgia: Appling, Bacon, Bulloch, Candler, Dodge, Emanuel, Evans, Jeff Davis, Jenkins, Laurens, Long, Montgomery, Pierce, Screven, Tattnall, Telfair, Toombs, Treutle, Wayne, and Wheeler.
- SO SPECIAL**
This 20-county growing region represents a 6,000-square-mile area, in a state occupying 60,000 square miles, in a country composed of 3.8 million square miles.
- CITY OF VIDALIA, GA**
Vidalia onions are named for the city in Toombs County where they were first sold but they can be grown outside of the city limits.
- ONIONS GALORE**
The largest values of Vidalia onions are grown in Toombs and Tattnall Counties.
- TRANSPLANTING**
Many people are unaware, but transplanting is a part of the Vidalia onion growing process. This is done to protect the Vidalia onion plants.
- NEW FIELDS**
The plants are moved from seed beds into new fields once they've grown to about the width of a pencil.

Source | Vidalia[®] Onion Committee

Sweetpotato is ONE word

Let's get back to our roots.

Sweetpotatoes are Root Vegetables

Meaning they are literally the root of the plant.

Potatoes are Tubers

Meaning they grow underground at the base of the root.

LET'S MAKE A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER.

Sign the petition to make sweetpotato one word.



HELP US
TEACH THE
WORLD!



WTF DO I DO WITH Kanzi® Apples? { what the fork }



DREAMY KANZI® APPLE AND ARTICHOKE PIZZA

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Kanzi® Apple, thinly sliced
- 1 pizza dough, premade
- 8 oz Alfredo sauce
- 1 cup mozzarella
- 1 jar artichoke hearts, chopped
- 1 chicken breast, cooked and shredded
- 1 cup arugula

Prep Time: 25 min
Cook Time: 13–20 min
Servings: 8 slices

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 350° F. Unroll premade pizza dough onto cookie sheet and cover with Alfredo sauce, making sure to leave about 1/4" uncovered around the edges.
- 2 Top with 1/2 cup mozzarella, chopped artichoke hearts, cooked chicken, and Kanzi Apple slices. Top with remaining mozzarella. Bake for 10–15 minutes, or until desired brownness is achieved.
- 3 Let sit for 3–5 minutes, then top with arugula and slice. Enjoy!

To learn more about CMI Orchards, visit www.cmiapples.com



A Closer Look at Pure Flavor® Alonna™ Canary Melons

By Jordan Okumura

A grouping of words I never thought I would see together: greenhouse grown melons. The phrasing itself inspires the imagination and, personally, reinvigorates the possibilities of a traditional field category that has experienced the ups and downs of demand's fair-weather fluctuations. Just leave it to an innovative and forward-thinking company like Pure Flavor®, and such challenges become the material of invention.

Enter Pure Flavor's Alonna™ Canary Melons.

Touting a vibrant, yellow flesh and creamy, lunar-like interior, the

Alonna was birthed into the category already equipped with stunning packaging. With an appearance that pulls at consumer curiosity, this melon variety, exclusive to Pure Flavor, should be merchandised front-and-center as a gateway produce item to not only steer traffic but create it.

Just imagine a slice of lunar heaven that can traverse multiple sections on a foodservice menu from breakfast and lunch to snacks, appetizers, and dinner. The versatility and differentiation of such an item can change the way we experience food through our eyes and our palates.

Alonna Canary Melons are personal in size and available in both bulk and multiple packaged formats for retail and foodservice operations. Weighing in at approximately 700-800 grams and showcasing a refreshing, crisp, and ambrosial experience, the Alonna variety is already becoming a showstopper across the Eastern United States and Canada.

Is that your produce display all aglow? Or plated dessert capturing the stars in consumers' eyes? Why, yes, thanks to Pure Flavor's Alonna Canary Melons. 🍷

UP
CLOSE



WTF DO I DO WITH Bee Sweet Citrus Heirloom Navel Oranges ?

{ what the fork }



CITRUS CHAMPAGNE MOSCOW MULE

INGREDIENTS

- Juice from** ½ Bee Sweet Citrus Heirloom Navel Orange
- Crushed ice
- 2 oz (¼ cup)** vodka
- 4 oz (½ cup)** ginger beer
- Champagne
- Orange wedge and fresh mint for garnish

Prep Time: 5 min
Servings: 2

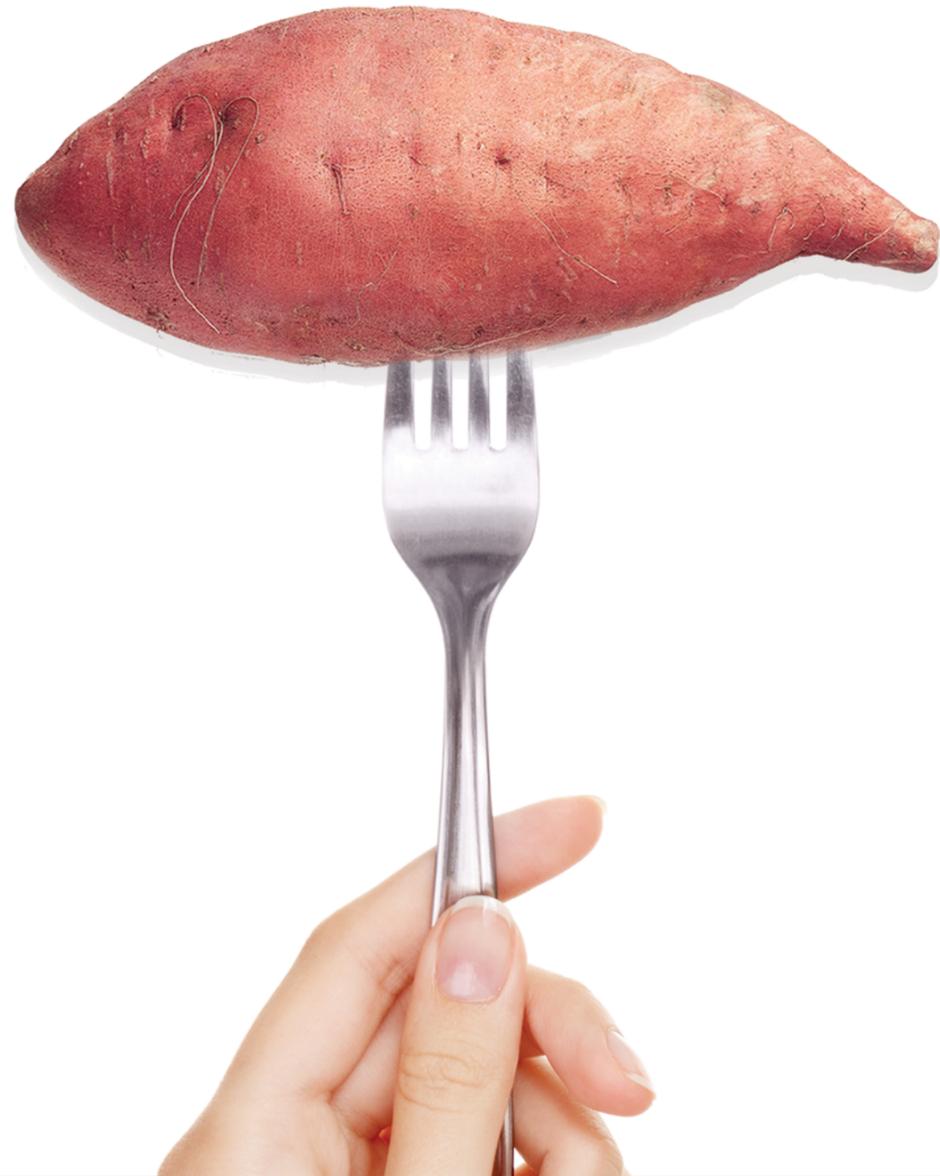
DIRECTIONS

- 1 Add ice to a copper Moscow Mule mug.
- 2 Add in the vodka, orange juice, and ginger beer. Stir.
- 3 Pour champagne on top and add an orange garnish and fresh mint. Enjoy!

To learn more about Bee Sweet Citrus, visit www.beesweetcitrus.com



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NEW ORGANIC MINI MEDLEY

VARIETIES MAY INCLUDE

ORANGE	MURASAKI
RED	PURPLE
WHITE	BEN YAGI



DESTINY CHOICE:

by
Charting
a New
Fairy Tale



By Melissa De Leon Chavez

Does mother know best?

In the warm south side of California, a baby sits in a bucket of bananas, giggling as they do, not realizing the moment could be emblematic of a destiny already charted before the child's even made a choice. Naturally, as many stories go, that child rebels against this, promising to find an adventure all their own and set a new course.

Trials and challenges certainly await, and while there are a few jabs exchanged across family meals, this tale is a departure from the typical.

Far from being disappointed by the prospect of her children not following her in leading the family business

Organics Unlimited, Mayra Velazquez de León explains how deviation is necessary to the success of a company, and of a family too.

“One thing I tell all three of my children is: Go work for someone else for five years,” she shares with me. “If they eventually did come to our business, encouraging this meant they would bring something new to the table.”

In her eyes is a knowing gleam I can only place in mothers. While she might not have been positive about where her eldest daughter, Daniella, would end up, she likely had an idea of how well-suited she'd be to the task.

“We are one of maybe two or three family-owned banana companies. It's very rare to see,” Daniella points out, immediately lighting upon the weight and reputation of Organics Unlimited.

As you may have now guessed, the organic banana supplier is far from new, with Daniella, now General Manager, and her siblings representing the third generation since her grandfather, Carlos Cortes, Sr., first distributed organic bananas in 1974.

“We were pioneers in the industry. My dad was the first one to bring organic bananas into the market,” Mayra, President of the company, tells me, stating simply that being organic, sustainable, and fair are ways of life for her family's business. “We've been doing this for generations, and, in this case, being a smaller company has worked for us as an advantage. We know what we are doing, we do it well, and when reaching out you can connect with us easily.”



Mayra Velazquez de León,
PRESIDENT,
ORGANICS UNLIMITED



Daniella Velazquez de León,
GENERAL MANAGER,
ORGANICS UNLIMITED



“We were pioneers in the industry. My dad was the first one to bring organic bananas into the market.”

Mayra Velazquez de León,
PRESIDENT, ORGANICS UNLIMITED

In fact, communication and transparency have been key to the company long before they were buzzwords.

“It has been important to us from day one that we do the right thing. We've been paying our workers fairly since our inception, sourcing ethically, and paying fair prices to our growers. As it's become more trendy to be socially responsible and to empower workers, a lot of people have gotten on the bandwagon. But, it's something we've been doing since the beginning and that we continue to do today,” Mayra shares.

When Mayra followed in her father's footsteps by founding Organics Unlimited, the family's banana legacy attained a new rarity in our industry, especially in tropical fruits: being woman-owned.

“Not only are we woman-owned and women-led, but that extends to our

farms and packinghouses. We are run by women,” Mayra points out, identifying how this has made the company incredibly detail-oriented while also harnessing a different perspective than those it works or competes with.

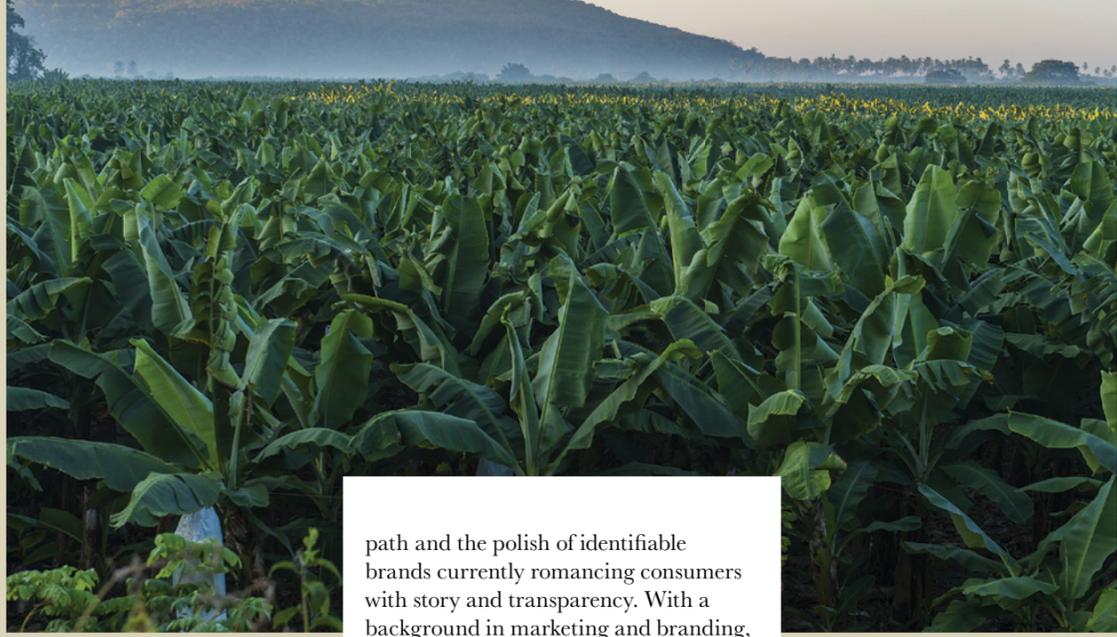
After ensuring it has done right by the banana sector for nearly 50 years now, the company is taking on a whole new challenge by branching out into new markets.

“Our intention is to diversify and go into other products. I'm not going to say what products those are,” Mayra holds up a hand as she catches my smile. “But, it's going to be little by little. We definitely want to launch at least a couple of products in 2023, because I think it's about time.”

I heartily agree, excited for the company to bring its signature and story to even more opportunities.

This, Daniella says, is an extension of a grander next chapter Organics Unlimited is stepping into, which is one of honing and sharing the message of who the company and the family behind it are.

“For a long time, we were pretty much the only players in the organic banana market, and now that's no longer the case. We're really good at what we do, especially with the GROW program and the impact it is having—something we need to be more vocal about,” Daniella says of 2023's potential. “These are tangible things. I have talked to scholarship recipients and even exchanged letters with them. This is the direct impact of what happens when you buy a GROW banana. Amid a sea of greenwashing, we can certainly do a better job of showing how we are walking the walk.”



path and the polish of identifiable brands currently romancing consumers with story and transparency. With a background in marketing and branding, Daniella has the experience to bridge the two sides and make this a key area of growth for Organics Unlimited.

The fire in Daniella's speech burns brighter in contrast to the possibility that she might never have joined the industry to begin with. Despite how naturally she seems to fit into her role, Daniella assures me that the plan well past college was not to join the family business, or even the industry.

"I always said that was not what I was going to do," Daniella laughs in regard to joining on. Now, not only did Daniella find her way to the company, but she has brought a valuable new perspective.

Fresh produce finds itself still in the throes of a big change: finding a balance between the grit of necessary commodities that forged the industry's

"I think bringing fresh blood in makes a big difference," Mayra observes even of her own trailblazing. "Sometimes we're stuck in that box and can't see any way out, because we've been doing things the same way for so long. Daniella would always tell me I'm very adventurous—and I am. I'm the kind of person where, if it feels right, I will go for it. I tell the team to do the same. But I think, with time, you inevitably fall into doing things the same way and you don't see a reason for change until you welcome someone who sees things differently."

Daniella, for her part, is happy to be that fresh perspective while still learning from her mom, crediting Mayra's adventurous spirit with new approaches, launches, and the fun of getting out of a comfort zone.

proven track record gives me the confidence to start doing it as well."

Now having been with the company for five years, Daniella's learned the rules and operations well enough that she is beginning to figure out what can bend... and what can break.

"My first year or two was about learning how things have been done. Recently, we've done some restructuring in our leadership, welcoming some new members. It is a mix of a younger and more seasoned crowd, and we're starting to do things a different way," she shares, touching on aspects like technology, different backgrounds, and deeper involvement in all aspects of produce.



"Now, we are ready to convey loudly that we are still here doing what my grandfather set out to do: work with integrity and treat people right. This banana option has always been here delivering on that, and it's something I am very proud of."

Daniella Velazquez de León,
GENERAL MANAGER, ORGANICS UNLIMITED

Recently, Daniella joined as the youngest member of the Organic Trade Association Board of Directors, bringing her and her family's company to the table in an entirely new way.

"Involvement is very important, I think it's going to help us move to the forefront and be more assertive about our position," Daniella reflects.

Ultimately, though, Daniella points out that this story is a homecoming, and being true to those roots is just as important to Organics Unlimited's success as anything new the team might explore.

"It's true we're doing some things differently now and we want this fresh perspective, but I'm really freaking proud of what my parents and grandparents have done. Not only have they consistently done their best to

ensure the company was doing things the right way, they didn't feel the need to shout it from the rooftops. Now, we are ready to convey loudly that we are still here doing what my grandfather set out to do: work with integrity and treat people right. This banana option has always been here delivering on that, and it's something I am very proud of," Daniella shares. Her passion is contagious, and it's little wonder why. With the freedom to explore her own way and choose her path, Daniella looks to have found her place in the family business. It was a process, Mayra assures me, as Daniella's chemistry with the company started out more sour than sweet, but that is a beloved trope of adventure stories for a reason.

"I will definitely own up to how tough it was to begin," Daniella confirms. "It was a process, but looking back on it now, moms are always right. I feel like there

was a lot I had to learn, and I'm very happy with everything I've been exposed to and everything she's taught me."

Mayra smiles and takes the compliment, acknowledging the work Daniella took on to see her way through the challenges.

"I'm very proud of Daniella. She's done a great job, and I think we still have a lot more to see from her," Mayra agrees.

It is far too soon to sign off with "happily ever after," which wouldn't do justice to the amazing potential still yet to be realized by this dynamic duo and the company they are leading forward.

One thing that is clear, however, is mother does, in fact, know best. **5**

"She thinks of something and goes for it," Daniella glows. "It's been great in teaching me to do things I might not necessarily feel the most comfortable doing. But seeing somebody with a





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