

Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

# the SNACK

ISSUE 76 MAY 2023



## To Mom, With Love



From the creators of  
AndNowUKnow and Deli Market News





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## GRILLED MUSHROOM COBB SALAD

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 red bell pepper, cut in 2-inch pieces
- 4 portabella mushrooms, sliced
- 4 cups chopped romaine lettuce
- ¼ cup prepared vinaigrette salad dressing, or more to taste
- 6 hard-boiled eggs, coarsely chopped
- 4 ounces crumbled blue cheese

### INSTRUCTIONS

- Preheat grill or skillet on medium-high heat.
- In a small bowl, whisk together oil, salt, and pepper
- Brush mushrooms and red pepper slices with mixture.
- Assemble red pepper slices on skewers and place the skewers and mushrooms on a grill or skillet for about 10 minutes, turning once.
- Toss lettuce with prepared vinaigrette (or dressing of choice) and arrange on a shallow serving platter.
- Place mushrooms, roasted peppers, eggs, and blue cheese crumbled in four "rows" across the bed of lettuce.
- Serve chilled and enjoy!

PREP TIME:  
5 MINS  
COOK TIME:  
10 MINS  
SERVES: 4







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with a posse of DulceVida™ super fans*



*A test orchard tree bearing fruit*



*A DulceVida™ nectarine with  
signature "sugar spots"*

**Giumarra**  
PRESENTS

# Savor the Sweet Life

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**I**NSIDE MANY OF OUR STORIES IS THE STORY OF A MOTHER. May she be the one we are, one we've loved, one we've known, or one we have cherished. The word "mother" itself is a transcendence in language—home to a sound, a shape, a rhythm of living. Housing a circle, a geography, the bones that came before you, an idea, and a memory—completing a cycle while simultaneously breaking it. Leaving the lines to loosen into our own paths.

What to do with a beautiful month like May, one that cradles such a day when we celebrate mothers?

For me, the dialogue of love and transformation between my mother and me, which has filled my own story since I was a child, spills across pages of sticky notes, thank you cards, art books, memory trunks, Blue Monday jars, text messages, stamped letters, and silences.

It collects in corners and gets swept into the light, finding new ways to settle into my relationship with my mother—the human and the word.

Here she sits always, filling the lacuna, bringing me back to center. Transitive. I love her for these things and for the life she has built out of decades and decades of adventures, upheavals, growth, and mothering.

There is a picture of my mother, head slightly cocked, a bleached streak of blonde in her black shoulder-length hair, her shoulders hot with the day, leaning against the front fender of a sea-green Chevy. The sun is high; I can tell by her half-squint.


That look of resistance on her face may not be from the sun, but from the gravity through which she has

always walked through her life. The lace in her brow, the strong grin, the unwavering sense of self.

In such a moment, I see the woman she is and continues to be, and the woman she gave to me as a divining rod, a book of translations, and warm skin to wrap around the skin of this world. While the home of this moment, caught 40-some-odd years ago, is bent and burrowed in the range of a photograph, I feel it breathe with life every time I look at it. Every time I look at her now. And I thank her for capturing all that she is and giving it to me with such a furious love, that I may now know how to be such a mother.

May is for thank yous and celebrations. For honoring the mothers of our lives both past and present. May is for creating a little more space than we may do in our years, to point toward the heart of a mother we love. And maybe love ourselves a little bit more.

With my hand on your heart, blood-mothers, chosen mothers, and mother memories, I thank you.

And, to Linda Susan Alameda—mother, grandmother, storyteller, warrior—I love you. 



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

### DID YOU KNOW?

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# FEATURES

## RED SUN FARMS™

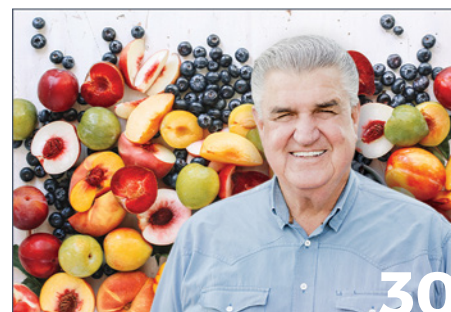
### UPHOLDING A TRADITION

In this exclusive with Carlos Visconti, we uncover how the greenhouse grower effortlessly balances adaptability and tradition to the benefit of both its vast network and its buy-side allies...



### DEL REY AVOCADO UNITED WE STAND

Working his way through the trenches, this leader is no stranger to the demands of the industry. Linked arm-in-arm with long-time partners, President Patrick Lucy divulges the strengths and visions brought to the table as he helps lead a new generation...



### FAMILY TREE FARMS THE QUEST FOR FLAVOR

Over 20 years ago, Founder and Owner David Jackson sought out the makings of an operation where flavor would always come first. Wind through adventures old and new as the company looks to its future...



### SHUMAN FARMS SUSTAINING CHANGE

Sustainability is more than a trend, it's a way of living for John Shuman. As the industry continues to figure out ways to become more sustainable, the onion provider is already on the pathway to making a difference...



### STARR RANCH GROWERS LIVING IN THE ART OF GROWING

Jim Thomas and Dan Davis know how to ensure products stand out in a sea of increasingly competitive varieties. Read how the leaders work to be an answer to retail challenges and the longevity of a company all at once...



### DIVINE FLAVOR THE RIGHT DIFFERENCE

Where does passion lie? For the pioneers behind the Divine Flavor brand, it's within its people, waiting to take to the open skies and bring invaluable treasures to those they meet. And Carlos Bon, Jr. is continuing to take flight...



### CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

WHEN OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS Jeff Oberman knows how to strike while the iron is hot. In this exclusive interview, we unpack how he wound up as President of the organization and where he plans to go from here...

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- Kenny Lund, Executive Vice President

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# A Closer Look at Local Bounti's Asian Style Chicken Lettuce Wrap Kit

UP  
CLOSE


By Melissa De Leon Chavez

Is pink the new green? A color inherently associated with fresh, and with return on investment, it's no wonder why green is a veritable blanket across the produce department. So, when I first saw a bright—and I mean bright—pink box amid products being showcased, my eye was drawn like a moth to flame.

It was radiant, clean, and complemented a blooming green head of butter lettuce remarkably well. It was Local Bounti's recently launched Asian Style Chicken Lettuce Wrap Kit.

Kits are among the latest and greatest in the expanding convenience sector. Yet Local Bounti is upping the ante not just with premium, delicious fresh items ready for consumers to enjoy in just a few minutes, but by ensuring the pack doesn't get lost in the grocery aisle, let alone the fridge.

I could go on about the low 120 calories per serving; the easy-prep nature of the kits containing sustainably greenhouse-grown living butter lettuce, chef-inspired chicken and veggies, and a tangy sauce; the reduction of waste and boosted access to healthy food... but great features are lost if the package isn't picked up. This box, amid a sea of innovation, stood out to me.

This debut to the heat-and-eat category is a commanding one for Local Bounti, and I am eager to see what else the supplier has up its sleeve. Meanwhile, next time I'm shopping for a healthy meal, I'll be looking for a pink box. 



# AVOCADOS

The best avocados have California in them.

Although shopper profiles change over the years, California Avocados continue to be the gold standard for quality and consistency. That's what makes the California Avocado season, from spring through summer, one of the most anticipated. Your shoppers want the creamy California Avocado taste that can only come from avocados grown in the ideal coastal climate of California and nurtured by California Avocado growers.

After all, there's no secret as to why the California Avocado season generates higher average weekly retail avocado volume. Over the past four years, the California season saw an average lift of +7% compared to when California Avocados aren't available in stores.\* Partner with California Avocados for a customized retail program developed exclusively for your generational shopper demographic.



To learn more, scan the QR code or visit [CaliforniaAvocado.com/Retail](https://CaliforniaAvocado.com/Retail)



\*Source: IRI California and West Regions during the California Season (2019-2022)

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# WTF

## DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Mucci Farms Savorries Sweet Strawberry Tomatoes ?



SAVORY TOMATO AND STRAWBERRY TART

### INGREDIENTS

**2 cups** Mucci Farms Savorries Sweet Strawberry Tomatoes, halved  
**1 cup** Mucci Farms Smuccies™ Sweet Strawberries, halved or quartered  
**1 cup** mini pretzels, plus more for garnish  
**1 cup** raw pecans  
**1½ cup** fresh grated Parmesan  
**1½ cup** feta  
**¾ cup** ricotta cheese  
**¼ cup** feta brine  
**20 large** basil leaves, plus more for garnish  
**8** pitted green olives, sliced  
 Salt and pepper, to taste  
 White balsamic vinegar

**Prep Time:** 15 min  
**Cook Time:** 15 min  
**Servings:** 8–10

### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven at 375° F. Place pretzels, pecans, and Parmesan in the bowl of a food processor and process to a fine crumb. Transfer mix onto a 9" tart pan and pack into an even layer using the bottom of a glass.
- 2 Bake in pre-heated oven for 10–12 minutes. Let cool before gently transferring onto a serving plate.
- 3 In the bowl of a food processor, combine feta, ricotta, feta brine, and basil. Process until smooth, stopping to scrape down sides as needed. Season with salt and pepper.
- 4 Spread feta mix evenly over nut crust and top with tomatoes, strawberries, olives, light drizzle of white balsamic vinegar, broken mini pretzels, basil, and pepper. Enjoy!

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# UNITED

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By Lilian Diep

# WE STAND

## "DIVIDE AND CONQUER."

Once used as a military tactic to divide the enemy and create dissent, making it easier for the fighters to conquer a split group, modern times have taken a twist to this old adage. The fighting army can now be thought of as a dynamic group or organization—and that's where my interest is piqued.

In today's more positive rendition, a group splits tasks that play to their strengths, thereby reaching a common goal. Irrespective of the phrase's original military meaning, building the bigger picture can be more easily attainable if it's done in parts—much like how a business is run. One section focuses on sales, the other on research and development, and another on growing produce.

Leadership works in very much the same way, so why not have multiple leaders take the reins?

In February 2022, the Del Rey Avocado leadership team passed the torch to the next generation, leaving room for Patrick Lucy, Donny Lucy, and Jessica Hunter to shape the company for new heights. And what better way to learn about the inner workings than from one of the generals themselves, Patrick Lucy?

## Q1

**Lilian Diep:** Patrick, you had been with the company for 18



years before ultimately becoming President. How has the transition been, and what does your role look like now?

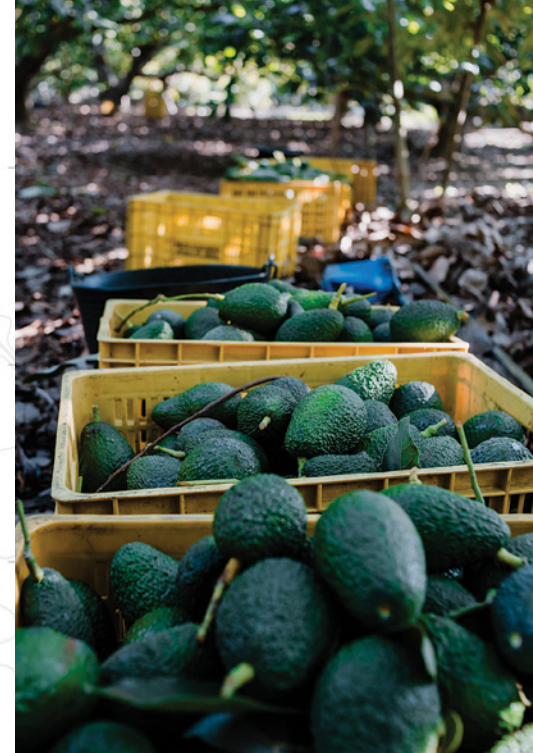


**Patrick Lucy, President, Del Rey Avocado:**

The nice thing about being partners with Jessica, daughter of previous Owner Bob Siemer, and my brother Donny is that

we're all children of agriculture—we understand how it works. We all own the company now, and we each focus on different parts while keeping the others informed.

Donny and I have a background in sales, and Jessica was a California Field Rep. Now that I'm President, Jessica is Chief Executive Officer, and Donny is Vice President, we're able to divvy up responsibilities, keep each other accountable, and continue doing the jobs we started with. We all felt it was important



"The nice thing about being partners with Jessica [Hunter], daughter of previous Owner Bob Siemer, and my brother Donny is that **WE'RE ALL CHILDREN OF AGRICULTURE—we understand how it works.**"

- Patrick Lucy, President, Del Rey Avocado

to still be involved in the day-to-day operations of selling and purchasing fruit and be involved with every section, so we aren't disconnected from our customers, growers, and employees.

## Q2

**LD:** It's been a little over a year since you took on the role of President; I want to know how it began. Have you always been in produce?

**PL:** I actually didn't start working at Del Rey Avocado until the summer of 2005. My father, Bob Lucy, always liked being in the industry. I had just finished playing baseball and was unsure of what to do next, so I was interested in joining. However, the company wasn't in need of a salesperson at the time. I decided to gain some sales experience in the meantime to ensure it was something I really wanted to do. I had a brief stint in the medical field doing sales, and after about eight months, a position at Del Rey opened. By then, I felt ready, and I have been here ever since.

## Q3

**LD:** Growing up, I imagine you had an inside look before joining, so what drew you in? What made Del Rey enticing for you?

**PL:** One of the unique things about Del Rey Avocado is that we understand the struggles growers go through and consistently keep that in mind. We are a packer and importer of avocados, but we are also growers. This is a huge benefit because we are aware and can roll with the punches Mother Nature or the supply chain throws at us.

## Q4

**LD:** I see that you're comfortable with your new title. So, with the year nearly halfway over, what can we expect from the team as 2023 continues to build out?

**PL:** For the first time ever, the industry is in the process of moving 3 billion pounds of avocados through the system, creating some great opportunities for retailers to get creative and aggressive on prices. We expect a very good supply of avocados to carry us all the way through summer.

With all the rain we received earlier this year, our early-season harvest was really limited. That being said, it will most likely push the California crop into August and early September in a down year in volume for growers. We can also look forward to a condensed California harvest, which will make volumes feel larger than they are.

We can also look forward to new packaging for our California avocados and strong partnerships, such as our collaboration with the San Diego Padres as their Official Avocado Supplier for the 2023 Major League Baseball season.

**T**rust and accountability are some of the key fundamentals for a strong team. A well-thought-out battle plan can be drawn up by strong tacticians, but it can only be executed by those well-versed in the field. As Del Rey Avocado is poised for growth, the grower and packer is positioned to conquer any challenge that comes its way. 🥑



# WTF

## DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Nature's Partner®  
Grapes

?



FRESH GRAPE AND LEMON CREAM TART

### INGREDIENTS

#### TART

**1 lb** of Nature's Partner® Grapes,  
washed and sliced in half (any color  
as long as seedless)  
**9"** ready-to-bake pie crust  
Powdered sugar, optional for dusting

#### LEMON CREAM CHEESE FILLING

**2 (8 oz) blocks** full-fat cream cheese,  
softened to room temperature  
**½ cup** granulated sugar  
**1 cup** heavy whipping cream  
**1 cup** store-bought lemon curd

**Prep Time:** 4 hr, 15 min

**Cook Time:** 30 min

**Servings:** 6–8

### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 350° F.
- 2 Press prepared pie crust onto the bottom and all sides of a 9" pie pan. Use a pie weight to prevent the crust from puffing up during baking. Bake until golden, about 30 minutes. Let the crust cool completely.
- 3 While the crust is cooling, add the cream cheese and sugar to the bowl of a standard mixer. Using a paddle attachment, mix together on medium speed until smooth. Switch to a whisk attachment. While adding the heavy cream, whisk on high speed until the mixture is thick and stiff peaks form. Add in the lemon curd and whisk until smooth.
- 4 Spread the lemon cream evenly into the cooled crust and top with sliced grapes, arranging in a circular pattern. Chill the tart in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours. Dust with powdered sugar just before serving. Enjoy!

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# CITRUS

## SnackChat

By Jordan Okumura-Wright

### Buy-Side

Packed with nutrients, versatility, flavor, and potential, the citrus category remains a lighthouse in the produce department and on the plate, drawing consumers in with its bright, beckoning glow and culinary nuance. Whether you are designing a menu, driving foot traffic at retail, or supplying the best of the best to buy-side businesses, this category remains one to be coveted and procured as a testament to operational standards...

**Julie Olivarria,**



Vice President,  
Produce, Sysco

"Every year, citrus claims the top spot in our fruit category. It is a great feature item that is highly represented on restaurant menus year-round, due to both its ability to add a bright, fresh flavor profile as well as its versatility. You can juice it, use it as an ingredient, as a garnish, or just eat it out of the hand. From staple items like lemons, oranges, and Mandarins to exotic citron, there is a citrus item for nearly every palate and plate."

"Citrus is unique in that it has competitive advantages over other produce categories. It remains a staple sales-driving category that offers flexibility in value positions and remains versatile in merchandising. A great example is strategically offering value to the consumer by optimizing assortment with peak crop sizes utilizing bags or bulk. The citrus category can bring the produce department to life when merchandised well and offers variety for almost every shopper. The evolution of great eating varieties such as Dekopon Mandarins, Juicy Crunch tangerines, and Calamondin oranges have brought excitement and innovation similar to how consumers were excited about Clementines years ago."

**Daniel Spivey,**



Category Manager,  
Sprouts Farmers Market

**Nelia Alamo,**



Vice President of  
Marketing, Markon  
Cooperative

"With all of the recent California rain this year, groves are full of extremely juicy lemons, limes, grapefruits, and oranges. The beverage category—specifically cocktails and mocktails—is hot this year, and health-targeted drinks using bright, refreshing juices, pulp, and rinds are go-to ingredients. Emphasizing their excellent shelf-life and consistent price points, incorporate citrus across bar menus as well as in other recipes for vinaigrettes, sauces, dips, seafood, and desserts, making them a sustainable, healthy kitchen workhorse."

"Citrus has become a really stable category for retailers. It's a stalwart of the produce department because it's very promotable and also easily accessible. In terms of seasonal sets, citrus plays a major part of what produce departments lean on. In terms of innovation, the packaging of citrus is where we've made major inroads. The 2 lb, 3 lb, 5 lb, and the different configurations that come with it have made picking up citrus easy for retailers and customers alike. Shoppers are able to grab what they need, and it's made labor easier for the stores. I think that's been a win for everybody."

**Jeff Fairchild,**



Produce Buyer, New  
Seasons Market

**Michael Schutt,**



Director of Produce  
and Floral, Raley's

"When the calendar turns to a new year, that comes with a variety of California-grown citrus. Traditional Navel oranges are wrestled from the spotlight and joined by a supporting cast of interesting characters such as Cara Cara Pink Navels, Ojai Pixie Mandarins, Pink Variegated lemons, Moro Blood oranges, Meyer lemons, and Finger limes—to name a few. The citrus category is a cornerstone of the late fall to early spring business. Expanding the wide assortment of mainstays by highlighting some of the lesser-known varieties above is a great way to drive sales. Bags can provide a value for customers for high tonnage items, and bulk displays encourage customer trial of items that may be newer to the market. At face value, the category provides convenient on-the-go vitamin C. The real zest of these offerings is the culinary applications and the growing use in mixology. The theater of the category is only outdone by the plethora of flavors."



# The QUEST for FLAVOR

By Anne Allen



**A**s great stories often do, this one begins with a quest.

The definition of quest runs the gamut of possibilities, most centering around a hunt, a search, something to seek out. We infuse the word quest with a certain type of hunger, an adventure we cannot turn away from.

Some of our greatest stories involve quests, whether it is for truth, treasure, or, occasionally, a bit of both. For one family, a quest became a mission.

It became a search for flavor.

"I founded Family Tree Farms in 2001 alongside my sons, Rick and Daniel, and my son-in-law, Andy Muxlow," begins David

Jackson, Founder and Owner. "Our strong dedication to faith, family, and farming has been the foundation for a thriving vertically integrated farming operation."

The four of them launched the company with one goal in mind: to "Consistently Produce, Package, and Market the Most Flavorful Fruit in the World."



**David Jackson,**  
Founder and Owner,  
Family Tree Farms

"We believed that providing people with sweeter, ripier, and more flavorful fruit would create genuine demand and the kind of long-term customer loyalty that would build our family's farming operation for generations to come," David shares.

Family Tree Farms is a grower, packer, and shipper strategically





Alongside his sons, Rick and Daniel, and his son-in-law, Andy Muxlow, David Jackson founded the operation that became Family Tree Farms



“In the coming years, we have many plans to expand to be able to provide even more of the world’s most flavorful fruit.”

“I don’t believe in the precedent that every quest ends in success. However, if one has the courage to keep moving forward and, as I like to say, climb sunshine mountain, one has the power to succeed.”

- David Jackson,  
Founder and Owner, Family Tree Farms

located in the heart of the Central San Joaquin Valley of California. The family-owned and operated company grows a wide array of specialty stonefruit, citrus, kiwifruit, mangos, and berries in California, Africa, Mexico, and Peru.

“It’s a privilege for me and my family to come to work every day. We truly believe a meaningful and fruitful life is built on a foundation of faith, hard work, and integrity,” David shares.

As Family Tree Farms has progressed over its 22 years, David offers insights into what made the company what it is today.

“We have a zeal for flavor, and our customers know us for that,” he notes. “With exclusive genetics, cutting-edge agri-technology, and an impressive research and development team, we’re able to bring high-quality products to market.”

Not to mention a world-class marketing team that has cemented the company’s name as a farming company worth watching.

Family Tree Farms uniquely includes yearly replantings of large amounts of acreage to remain on the cutting edge with new varieties. One such introduction was of jumbo blueberries, Jumboz™, which boast enormous flavor and crunch—and which Family Tree Farms has the exclusive rights to grow.

“We also offer a high variety of Plumcots, which are an exceptional fruit,” David tells me, pride evident in his voice. “We have more than 20 varieties to offer and are always adding more to keep our portfolio ever-expanding.”

Every quest is not without its challenges—those moments that test the mettle of its players. Inflation, shifting geopolitical conditions, consumer demand, access to water, and the high

cost of labor have affected Family Tree Farms just like many other farming operations.

“I don’t believe in the precedent that every quest ends in success. However, if one has the courage to keep moving forward and, as I like to say, climb sunshine mountain, one has the power to succeed,” David says.

This is why Family Tree Farms’ innovative spirit is central not only to the company’s success, but to its value system as a whole.

“Our flavor-first approach has taken our team literally around the globe,” David reflects. “Today, we have exclusive agreements with many of the world’s top breeders, and this allows us to seek out the best-tasting varietal selections and assess them at our very own R&D center, which we established in 2005. Varieties being evaluated at our facility represent nine countries and 28 varietal programs.

Ten acres of test plots are used to grow 1,000 varieties annually, only one to three of which will be commercially successful.”

It’s obvious that the value of flavor cannot be stressed enough. Family Tree Farms rests its laurels upon taste and customer satisfaction.

“We determine which varieties are successful through weekly tastings, each including as many as 20 different varietal selections to our team,” David goes on to explain. “Participants score each selection based on flavor, visual appearance, firmness, and other criteria. Table favorites are extensively reviewed, evaluated for cultural performance, and only the best-of-the-best are planted for commercial use.”

The growers also work diligently to care for the land they sow. Since the early 2000s, Family Tree Farms has been converting its farm operations to micro-drip irrigation systems, automated precision irrigation systems, and soil moisture monitoring technology.

“As a result of these efforts, we’ve developed sophisticated irrigation schedules and eliminated excess water waste. For energy efficiency, we’ve installed solar panels and energy-saving lighting in our production facilities,

while training our staff on sustainable initiatives that reduce emissions. We also take a holistic approach with our Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program to maintain the health and quality of our plants and soil. Our IPM program enables us to be methodical, strategic, and targeted, resulting in

education benefits, the company works hard to care for people as it does its fruit.

“We’re poised for the future and serious in our commitment to flavor, even past what we already produce,” David emphasizes as we begin to close our conversation. “In the coming years, we have many plans to expand to be able to provide even more of the world’s most flavorful fruit.”

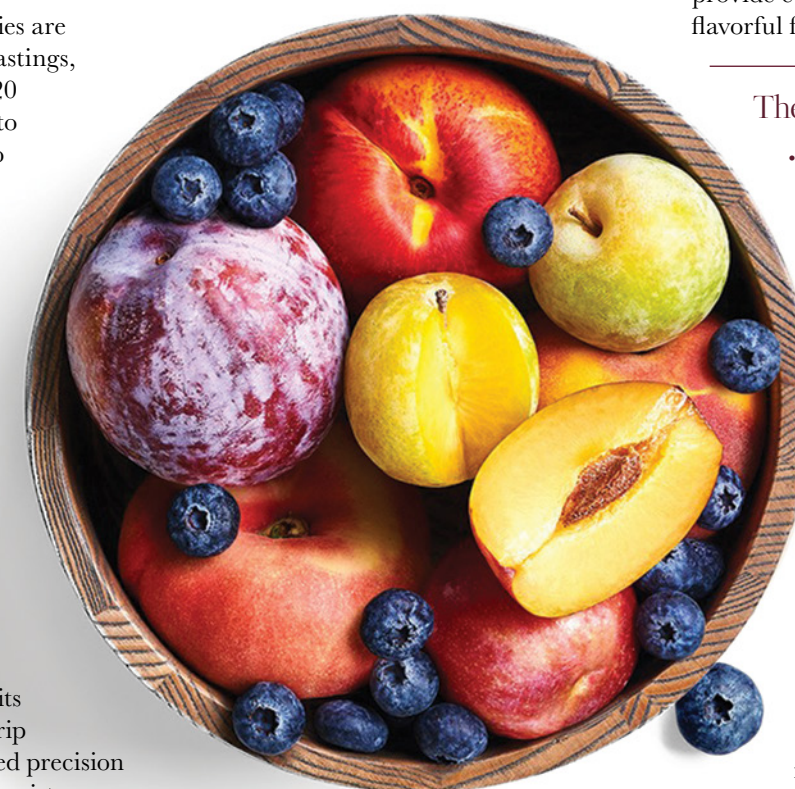
These plans include:

- 2023: Growing blackberries, blueberries, and raspberries in Mexico
- 2024: Developing further apple operations in California and Washington
- 2025: Importing mangos from Mexico
- 2026: Importing kiwifruit from Africa

Family Tree Farms isn’t stopping there, as additional plans include varietal trial programs in other countries as well as a blueberry expansion in Mexico and Peru.

All in the name of searching for the best possible flavor. The quest can take us by surprise sometimes, but for companies like Family Tree Farms and leaders like David Jackson, the adventure is always purposeful and fun.

The quest is always worth it. 🍓



reduced pesticide use and increased soil and plant health,” David adds.

The attention to the land is extended to the communities that make up Family Tree Farms. With medical aid on the ranches, safe working conditions, and



MENTORS IN THE MAKING

Tom Smith

BY CHANDLER JAMES

SOME FOLKS IN THIS INDUSTRY, like myself, ended up falling into their fresh produce careers. Call it destiny, luck, or coincidence—we somehow found ourselves here and fell in love.

But, for Tom Smith, his foray into fresh was filled with purpose.

In spending some time with Tom at the 2022 California Giant Berry Farms Chef Invitational, I saw firsthand how his passion for the produce industry has opened new doors to the foodservice world for fresh berries.

The Director of Sales took his career into his own hands in 2011 when he moved across the country from Springfield, Missouri, to Salinas, California, to pursue a career in fresh produce. In the 12 years since, Tom has carved an impressive path, utilizing his skills as a communicator to make connections along the way.

“I worked as Commissary Manager for a concessions company, which serviced several Missouri sports venues before landing a role as Produce Buyer for Reinhart Foodservice,” Tom outlines. “I soon figured out one of the best places to be in the produce business was in Salinas, California. I moved out there to fill a transportation position at C.H. Robinson, but was soon hired by PRO\*ACT as a Berry Buyer, where I spent five years.”

At PRO\*ACT, Tom came to know one of his first mentors in the industry—Joan Daleo, now the President at Ole Tyme Produce. A fellow St. Louis Cardinals and Blues fan, she became quick friends with Tom. This grew to become a mutually respectful business relationship that would play a large role in Tom’s career.

“I have always had respect and admiration for Joan and her business acumen, wit, and ability to find solutions to problems,” Tom tells me. “Joan is a force to be reckoned with if you are standing between

her and what she believes is right or necessary. That’s what I love about her. While she is a ‘no nonsense’ kind of person when it comes to getting the job done, she is a fun character when times are light. Joan is a great example of what leadership looks like!”

One of the berry suppliers Tom became closest with during his time at PRO\*ACT was California Giant. It was a company he respected highly in the sector, and soon grew even closer with as his career progressed.

“It was a brand and shipper that represented quality while building out a year-round supply of all four berries,” Tom explains. “Those things made a lot of difference to the foodservice business and how we programmed everything.”

After collaborating with California Giant on how it could implement year-round contracting for its foodservice business, Tom was asked to join the team as the head of the company’s foodservice program. Now, six years later, Tom has played a major role in growing California Giant’s foodservice business and continues to find new ways to raise the bar in berry excellence.

As Tom highlights, one prominent leader within California Giant’s structure who made an impact on him was Founder and Chief Executive Officer Bill Moncovich. He says that while California Giant has evolved over 40 years from a sales office in a single-wide mobile home to a global berry company, Bill has not changed.

“‘Monc,’ as those who know him well refer to him, truly cares about people. Whether it’s our growers, customers,

employees, or the communities we grow and work in, people matter the most to him. One of the many reasons I was attracted to working at California Giant was the philanthropic work and community involvement that has always been a priority to Bill,” Tom relays. “Because Bill has always been focused on people, it’s allowed us to attract and maintain a grower base that continues to grow and supply the highest quality berries in the industry. He’s treated them with respect, allowing them to grow and partner over many years and build livelihoods together.”

Outside of California Giant, Tom has been involved extensively in the industry through various networking events, volunteer opportunities, and more. One industry organization he often worked with was United Fresh—now part of the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA)—which is where he met his third mentor, Michael Muzyk, President at Baldor Specialty Foods.

From his Bronx, New York, accent to his louder-than-life approach to business, Michael made a large impression on Tom, and the two have been working closely ever since.



Tom Smith,  
Director of Sales,  
California Giant Berry Farms

“As Chairman of United Fresh, there was a big agenda in front of him, and he was motivated and ready to tackle it. Everyone knew he was laser-focused and was going to own the position and responsibilities that came along with it,” Tom expresses. “I once toured Baldor’s Bronx facility with Michael. He made his daily rounds, greeting each employee by name and asking them about their family, an event from the previous weekend, or something specific to that individual. Within a year or so, we started doing business with Baldor, and I really got to know him

when he emceed our 2022 Chef Invitational.”  
  
I promise you, Tom had plenty more to say about each of the three impactful mentors that I could not fit onto these pages. It is clear in hearing Tom speak that he values strong character deeply. Between Joan’s get-down-to-business attitude, Bill’s passion for people, and Michael’s dedication to great leadership, Tom has been molded by each of these mentors along his journey.

In the short time I have known Tom, he has proven himself more than worthy of the title “industry expert.” His penchant for berry innovation married with a knack for foodservice excellence is what makes him a stand-out in this industry. The way I see it, any produce up-and-comer would be lucky to call Tom their mentor.

Now, watch closely as Tom takes to the berry fields with his mentor cap on.

THE MENTORS

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



Joan Daleo,  
President, Ole Tyme Produce

“I first met Tom Smith when he was working for PRO\*ACT. He was a very approachable young man who listened intently, was incredibly observant, and seemed to be always learning and acquiring skills. When Tom went through PRO\*ACT’s emerging leaders program and I saw part of his presentation, it confirmed how special he was and how big his future would develop. Tom is genuine and he cares about people and the products he represents. I recently posted about my mother transitioning into assisted living and how tough it was for me and my family. Tom took the time to send me a note, letting me know he was thinking of us. It meant a lot to me, as I believe it would to anyone. That says a lot about the character and compassion of Tom. I believe Tom Smith is the kind of leader young people desire to follow and emulate.”



Bill Moncovich,  
Founder, California Giant  
Berry Farms

“Tom has a great passion for the berry industry. He cares about both the customers and the growers—two segments that are hard to balance—and he does it with grace. Tom is a great asset for California Giant.”



Michael Muzyk,  
President, Baldor  
Specialty Foods

“While I haven’t known Tom for long, I’ve been really impressed with his approach and ideas. When we met, Tom was Director of Foodservice Sales at California Giant Berry Farms, a company that was well known in retail but not as much in foodservice. Many grower-shippers ignore the potential of foodservice, but Tom saw an opportunity for California Giant to be a challenger brand. He took a few of the larger foodservice accounts, including Baldor, into his own hands. Through his engaging, positive manner, he won our business—and leveled up California Giant’s foodservice sales.”

We met in person at our Baldor BITE event. Seeing my presentation there, he asked me to emcee an event for customers that he was holding in Monterey, California. He curated an unforgettable experience including tours of the farms, a culinary competition, and winery visits complete with pairings. I love Tom’s creativity and can-do spirit. Along the way, I shared with him some of the leadership lessons I learned through Baldor and the International Fresh Produce Association—things like never taking no for an answer and never accepting mediocrity. It’s an honor to know Tom thinks of me as a mentor, and I look forward to continuing to watch him grow.”

POWERED BY



# WTF DO I DO WITH Del Rey Avocados ?

{ what the fork }



## GREEN GODDESS AVOCADO TOAST

### INGREDIENTS

1–2 Del Rey Avocados  
 2 **cloves** garlic  
 4 **oz** feta cheese  
 1 **cup** basil  
 ¼ **cup** chopped chives  
 ¼ **cup** tarragon leaves  
 2 **tbsp** Greek yogurt  
 1 **tsp** lemon juice  
 ½ **tsp** kosher salt, plus more for serving  
 ¼ **tsp** ground pepper, plus more for serving  
 ½ English cucumber, sliced  
 Toasted mini naans, or slices of your favorite bread  
 Olive oil  
 Lemon wedges

**Prep Time:** 5 min  
**Cook Time:** 5 min  
**Servings:** 2–3

### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Pit, peel, and slice avocados.
- 2 In a food processor, process garlic until minced.
- 3 Add the feta cheese, basil, chives, tarragon, Greek yogurt, lemon juice, salt, and pepper. Process until well combined and smooth. If you desire more creaminess, add more Greek yogurt.
- 4 Toast mini naan or slices of bread.
- 5 Spread the feta green goddess spread over the naan/bread.
- 6 Top with slices of cucumber, followed by avocado.
- 7 Drizzle with just a touch of olive oil, season with salt and pepper, and serve with a wedge of lemon. Enjoy!

To learn more about Del Rey Avocado, visit [www.delreyavocado.com](http://www.delreyavocado.com)



## A Closer Look at Nature's Greens® Recyclable Film Solution


By Anne Allen

**W**hat are consumers really after? It's a question that will likely puzzle us for years to come, especially as shoppers' needs evolve from year to year. But one thing we can count on in 2023 is the value of sustainable products.

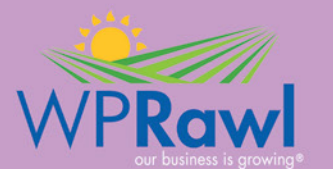
Insert WP Rawl's recyclable film solution for its bagged leafy greens. Marketed under the Nature's Greens® brand, this line of convenient and easy-to-prepare greens is triple-washed and ready to cook and serve. The visual appeal of the packaging immediately draws in the eye, with a bold stripe of color paired with the cut-out silhouette of the variety within the bag. It's a simple approach to design that works wonders on holding the shopper's attention.

The packaging also features user-friendly tips on preparation, ensuring consumers aren't at a loss for incorporating more greens into their diets. As someone who didn't know how to properly cook collard greens, this is a much-appreciated addition—and one I know busy folks like me will love.

Outside of the striking graphics and helpful tips, the packaging is 100 percent recyclable. The back of each package clearly communicates how to recycle it via store drop-off with a simple process from How2Recycle®.

With sustainability becoming a core value for many shoppers, you'll want to have this line at retail to draw them in. 

UP  
CLOSE







# » The IF List « Gary Clevenger

Managing Member, Freska Produce International

With Jenna Plasterer

The IF List strikes again—this time, giving us crazy-cool insights into the life and mind of industry ace Gary Clevenger. For instance, did you know he played Major League Baseball? I sure didn't! I also uncovered connections I never guessed I would have with the Freska Produce International Managing Member, but that is the beauty of this delightful feature. So, sit back and read on to learn how Gary is equal parts produce expert, comedian, athlete, and fun-loving family man. You won't be sorry...

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

Onion soup, an Iceberg wedge salad, a New York strip steak, and a hot fudge sundae with candied pecans.

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

George Clooney—just a good double. 😊

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

A sports agent. My younger self was in the sports industry, and I've always been interested in it.

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

President Ronald Reagan. I would love to pick his brain and listen to him talk.

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

A big knife, an inflatable raft with oars, and a fishing net.

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

The day I got drafted by the California Angels (now Los Angeles Angels) in 1978—I would've held out for more money!

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

Better Your Odds to Get Lucky!

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

North by Northwest. I love Alfred Hitchcock movies.

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

All the days my kids were born, so it would be three days—sorry!

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

The American Cancer Society, because cancer sucks!

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

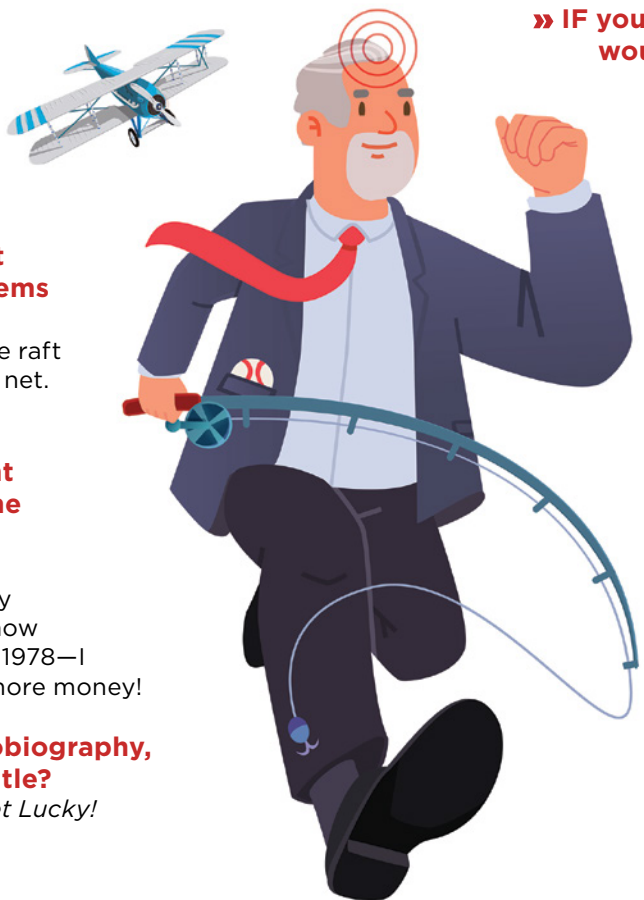
Precognition.

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

"Huntin', Fishin' and Lovin' Every Day" by Luke Bryan.

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

Work hard; take smart risks; know that nobody is perfect; don't burn bridges; listen more than you talk; and get to know and appreciate your friends. 💪



# A Closer Look at Fresh Prep Green Fork Salad Kits

By Lilian Diep

When I think of something healthy, my mind immediately conjures up a bowl of salad. It's not a boring bowl slathered in dressing, mind you. The salad I see is exciting, crunchy, flavorful, fresh, and oh-so-delicious. What is this drool-worthy offering? Why, it's none other than Boskovich Fresh Food Group's subsidiary Fresh Prep's new Green Fork products—the Everything But The Burger™ salad kit, to be exact.

Featuring vegetables chopped to bite-sized perfection, each green bag includes a hefty serving with a delicious secret burger sauce dressing to complement the farm-fresh flavors found within. The salad's packaging is brightly colored and inviting, bringing curious eyes closer. And, once the bag is picked up, I'm willing to bet my big spork it'll go straight into the basket.

Talk about easy mid-week meals! The new salad kits are a healthy solution for busy lifestyles and are packed with flavor. With a variety of healthy veg and accoutrements, it'll be hard to pass up the taste of a burger sans the burger bun carbs.

Everything But The Burger and All Hail Lemon Kale™ are the newest additions to the Green Fork brand, and hungry shoppers will be eager to try out Marvelous Mediterranean™ and Slammin' Sesame™ as well once they polish off their first bag.

Be sure to stock the whole range of Green Fork salads for the ultimate satisfying shopping trip, and you'll see repeat shoppers coming back for more. 🍴



UP  
CLOSE



# GAMBLER'S



A Q&A WITH MIKE RUBIDOUX,  
Director of Sales Strategy, Hazel Technologies

BY JENNA PLASTERER



## THREE YEARS.

That is how long it can take for a grapevine to begin producing fruit.

For farmers, it's an extensive investment. From planting to harvesting, everything is a labor of love that has the potential for a significant payoff or a loss of 1,095 days of work. But our industry comprises educated gamblers willing to place big bets to win an even bigger jackpot for themselves, their customers, and the future of fresh produce.

With such high stakes, the rewards of such intensive labor must be shared when they are at their best. In other words, consumers should taste table grapes at their pinnacle of freshness and quality.

Enter Hazel Technologies and its proprietary Hazel 100™ solution.

This unique offering, just the size of a salt packet, has the power to extend the shelf-life of table grapes, minimizing shrink for retailers and providing an even larger window of time to boost category sales.

To truly understand Hazel's innovative technology, Director of Sales Strategy Mike Rubidoux took a beat to detail the opportunities that exist for its partners.



### JENNA PLASTERER:

Hi, Mike! Many in the industry know about Hazel 100 and how it slows the aging process of grape stems to keep them fresher longer, but can you share an overview for those who may not have seen the packet up close or don't fully understand how it's used?

**MIKE RUBIDOUX,**  
Director of Sales Strategy, Hazel Technologies:  
Of course!

How it works is simple: The packet—or sachet—once dropped into the package of post-harvest grapes, starts to emit a gentle, gaseous, active ingredient that floats around the fruit and ultimately targets just the ethylene receptors on the grape stems. When the active ingredient binds with the ethylene receptors on the stems, it prevents the stems from releasing or absorbing ethylene. This natural hormone initiates the decomposition process in plants.

When ethylene is blocked, the stem's aging process is delayed, browning is inhibited, and green stems and stem hydration are maintained for longer.

**JP:** I always find the science behind these solutions so fascinating! Besides its proprietary nature, what else makes Hazel 100 so unique?

**MR:** It's the only product on the market that addresses what might be the number-one grape consumer pain point: "ugly" brown stems.

Whether or not they're an actual indicator of quality and freshness, shoppers want to see green stems at the grocery store and in their fridge. That expectation influences the entire supply chain. It carries a hefty weight at the docks, where imported grapes are evaluated. A greener stem is going to give way to better prices on arrival.



Hazel 100™ gives  
grape exporters  
more time to ship,  
which translates  
to a cushion in the  
face of delays and  
an opportunity  
to reach new,  
profitable markets."



- **MIKE RUBIDOUX,**  
Director of Sales Strategy, Hazel Technologies







By consistently keeping their stems greener, we're allowing exporters to maintain quality and mitigate the risk of rejections."

**JP:** You mentioned a potentially higher valuation for fruit with green stems. What other benefits do exporters anticipate from utilizing Hazel 100?

**MR:** Hazel 100 gives grape exporters more time to ship, which translates to a cushion in the face of delays and an opportunity to reach new, profitable markets.

Managing risk is another big one. We know supply chain challenges are still a genuine concern for our customers, so every good shipment matters. By consistently keeping their stems greener, we're allowing exporters to maintain quality and mitigate the risk of rejections.

A third, more specific, benefit relates to new varieties. Many of the innovative varieties gaining massive popularity in export markets have an Achilles heel: a genetic inclination to dehydrate, degrade, and brown quicker than traditional varieties. We're meeting with a lot of Latin American growers/exporters who are excited about the potential of Hazel 100 as a safeguard to their investment.

**JP:** With that many benefits, what has the response been so far from those using the solution?

**MR:** Domestically, we are partnering with several of the biggest growers in California, and they love it because it's so easy to implement and provides more flexibility for their inventory.

Depending on our partners' strategic priorities that season, our solution can help them reduce waste and sell more, regardless of whether they will export or store more to cover late-season contracts or variety shortages.

Now, we're finding that our United States customers are spreading the word to growers and shippers in other countries. It's fascinating to see all the international inbound and trials that are coming of it.

**JP:** Word-of-mouth recommendations are indeed a sign of success. How does Hazel Tech want to drive this positive momentum forward? Are you focusing on any other categories outside of grapes?

**MR:** Grapes are among the world's top eight most wasted fruits. The more reach we have, the more significant difference we can make in reducing food waste.

Our goal for the future is to bring Hazel 100 to every major grape market and grower around the globe. The next big step in that direction is expanding into key growing countries like Chile and Peru. We're already cleared for using Hazel 100 on avocados in Peru and currently have an entire team stationed there, ready for when grapes get the green light. We expect to begin a fun new chapter at Hazel when that happens.

Hazel 100 also plays a unique role in the apple market. 1-MCP has been ubiquitous in the apple industry for over 20 years but has been out of reach for the majority of U.S. growers who lack the facilities and labor required to implement the treatments. However, now with Hazel 100 for apples, mid- to small-sized growers are finally experiencing all the quality and financial benefits of 1-MCP without needing big, airtight, controlled atmosphere rooms.

So, you went all in on the gamble of grapes and won. Now is the time to protect your earnings with Hazel 100. After all, part of the fun of being a high roller is showing off your jackpot. 🍷



# WTF DO I DO WITH Driscoll's Raspberries ?

{ what the fork }



## RASPBERRY TOAST WITH NUT BUTTER

### INGREDIENTS

**1 package (6 oz)** Driscoll's Raspberries  
**2 slices** seeded or multigrain bread  
**4 tbsp** nut butter  
**2 tbsp** honey  
**2 tbsp** pumpkin seeds  
**1 tbsp** hemp seeds

**Prep Time:** 5 min  
**Cook Time:** 2–5 min  
**Servings:** 1–2

**Driscoll's**  
 Only the Finest Berries™

### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Toast 2 slices of seeded or multigrain bread to desired doneness.
- 2 Spread 2 tbsp nut butter over each toast slice.
- 3 Divide Driscoll's Raspberries evenly between toast slices.
- 4 Drizzle each toast slice with 1 tbsp honey.
- 5 Sprinkle each toast slice with pumpkin seeds and hemp seeds.
- 6 Serve immediately. Enjoy!

To learn more about Driscoll's, visit [www.driscolls.com](http://www.driscolls.com)



# CHERRY CHAMPIONS

**B**oasting a low glycemic index and an increased level of antioxidants, cherries are consistently identified by shoppers as one of the healthiest produce items. They are also a flavorful source of potassium and bioactive compounds. While there are many different types of cherries to choose from, Rainier Fruit Company continues to invest in high-flavor varieties grown in the best locations. This nutritious fruit requires a lot of protection and planning to make its way to the shelf, and Rainier employs multiple cutting-edge advancements to achieve this goal.



## 1 HYDROCOOLING

Rainier's cold chain starts directly in the field and is unique to the industry. Immediately after the cherries are picked, they are put into hydrocoolers and washed with cold water to extort the heat left in them from the orchard. The cherries are then loaded onto refrigerated trucks and taken to the warehouse, where they are washed again in cold water and packed in cold temperatures to ensure the customer gets the freshest cherry possible.



## 2 SHADE CLOTH NETTING

One method Rainier optimizes to protect its cherries is shade cloth netting. This netting helps keep the orchard cooler on warm days, protects from bird damage, and mitigates wind in the field. Hot summer days can cause stress to plants and slow the growth of cherries. Shade cloth netting lowers the temperature around the plant by blocking out radiant heat. The shade cloth also helps keep Rainier's employees cool, all while creating better conditions for the fruit.



## 3 MICROCLIMATE

Diversification of growing locations is necessary to protect the supply and quality of Rainier's cherry program. That is why Rainier has orchards extending from the Oregon border all the way to the Canadian border, giving the grower an advantage when it comes to potential impacts from Mother Nature. Rainier carefully picks the location of each of its ranches to ensure they have the best microclimate for growing cherries—some factors include soil health, water access, and timing of harvest. All of this careful planning in association with the right microclimate creates the best-quality cherries!



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.



APPLES, PEARS, CHERRIES & BLUEBERRIES







## EXPERIENCE THE Gwillimdale *Difference*

### GROWER | PACKER | SHIPPER

Investing in the full supply chain enables Gwillimdale Farms to ensure consistent, premium quality carrots, potatoes, onions, beets, and parsnips.



[gwillimdalefarms.com](http://gwillimdalefarms.com) | 905.775.2889



# SUSTAINING CHANGE

By Lilian Diep

**W**hat leaves more of an impact: money, power, or change? If you're John Shuman, you would go for the last.

Money comes and goes. Power is fleeting. But change? Societal, environmental, even nutritional can leave an impact felt for generations. And, coming from a second-generation farmer, those roots run deep.

"How can we use the resources we've been entrusted with and improve them to grow the business, so it is sustainable for the future and the next generation can come in and continue to have access to these resources? We don't want to deplete our finite properties," John shares with me on a bright Friday morning. "That's why it's a focus for Shuman Farms: because we are farmers, we are growers, and we're on the farm every day."

This desire stems not only from the need to create a change within the industry, but to do so for the communities depending on fresh produce. For John, President and Chief Executive Officer, change comes from the need to be more sustainable in our industry.

"I see sustainability in a much bigger, broader way because it impacts every part of our business," he says, a thought I find myself nodding along to. "Sustainability in and of itself is how we can preserve the resources we've been entrusted with. They can be natural resources or human ones,



**“WE’RE KNOWN FOR OUR PRODUCTS, ESPECIALLY OUR PREMIUM SWEET ONIONS; IT’S WHO WE ARE, AND IT PERMEATES EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES.”**

— JOHN SHUMAN,  
*President and Chief Executive Officer, Shuman Farms*



but our business is in preserving and conserving them both, being able to manage and empower them to grow our business in a way that’s generational.”

It’s a stance and legacy that’s already in the making.

In an industry full of innovation and advancements, Shuman Farms believes in the preservation of our Earth as well as its inhabitants in order to enact a positive change that will be beneficial for years to come. In fact, sustainability is a core tenant of Shuman Farms. This mindset leads back to the company’s four pillars: **SERVE, SUSTAIN, INNOVATE, AND GIVE BACK.**

“Our four pillars came to be over a 20-year process. I looked around and realized that delivering a load of Vidalia® onions is not a competitive difference,” John chuckled. “So, I sat down one day and looked at some of our core strengths, and I came up with customer service. To **SERVE** is to treat our customers like family and to provide consistency. That is the heart of customer service: consistency.”

Customer service can be the dealbreaker when it comes to loyalty, both for buyers and shoppers. Our industry does its best to predict weather and plan for demand, but knowing what to expect when interacting with another business is essential.

To provide that service, the people have to be a part of the equation. As one of Shuman’s values, **SUSTAIN** is applicable to both the workforce and the produce.

“We look at sustainability from the enterprise, and we start with our people. How can we empower them, build a culture, and enable them to grow?” John ponders. “I believe in helping our people improve, both personally and professionally. Just being healthy, mentally and physically, is a very important focus for us and helps our business grow.”

Sustainability is a two-point value, as the grower also believes in being good stewards of the land. The best products are grown from the best resources, and Shuman Farms’ renowned onions come from some of the best farmland in the southeastern United States.

“Managing our soil and water resources are always top of mind and a huge part of our sustainability pledge. We’re known for our products, especially our premium sweet onions; it’s who we are, and it permeates every aspect of our lives,” John continues. “So, we endeavor to grow products that are safe, healthy, and clean. And that leads to **INNOVATION.**”



Innovation is a skill Shuman Farms has in spades. Onions are a healthy addition to any diet, but keeping the category exciting is a challenge every sector feels. Shuman keeps the creative juices flowing for its sweet onions as it employs innovative marketing, helping retailers build successful programs and engaging with shoppers to fill up the basket.

“At the end of the day, if our customers are successful and the category is growing, we look at ourselves as a fruit hanging on their tree,” John observes, a point we both chuckle at. “The retailer would be the tree, and we’re the fruit. If the tree’s healthy, it stands to reason we’re going to be healthy. We all want to grow the category, so we spend a lot of time with innovative marketing. That’s what we all get up and go to work every day for, right?”

It was through this innovative marketing viewpoint that John came up with a program called Produce for Kids in the mid-2000s. Now, it is known as the Healthy Family Project. The company’s first cause marketing program was created to give back to the communities—an initiative we here at *The Snack* have watched bloom and expand for many years now. The program helped build an umbrella organization for the produce industry to come together and support retailers and their cause marketing efforts throughout their communities.



**“VIDALIAS® ARE SO SPECIAL AND UNIQUE. IT WAS THE FIRST NATIONALLY MARKETING SWEET ONION IN AMERICA, AND NOW IT’S ALSO KNOWN TO GIVE BACK TO THOSE IN NEED. IT’S IN OUR VERY FOUNDATION.”**

**“GIVING BACK** has always been a central focus for Shuman Farms, and we’ve been doing it for over 20 years. It’s something we continue to grow and spend a lot of time and resources on each and every year,” John explains. “We wanted to give back to the communities that support our products. In doing so, we are doing one of the most sustainable things we can as a company; it pairs nicely with our efforts to support Feeding America®.”

And it is a program I personally love seeing advertised every summer. Shuman Farms is a year-round supporter of Feeding America, a nationwide group of food banks that help combat food insecurity. As a food producer, John feels it’s his and the company’s responsibility to support this initiative, whether through food donations, volunteering time, or financial aid. Another way the company sheds light on this important program is by branding its premium 5 lb Vidalia onion bag with the Feeding America logo as part of its summer promotions.

“We’re excited about the summer, as Vidalia onions are coming out of storage. Throughout June, we partner with Feeding America because it’s an especially tough time for people with food insecurity, particularly with children who get their meals at school,” John says. “Vidalias are so special and unique. It was the first nationally marketed sweet onion in America, and now it’s also known to give back to those in need. It’s in our very foundation. Shuman Farms has become known as a leader in the Vidalia sweet onion industry. From innovation to our reputation for producing a consistent, high-quality product, our core values have shaped everything we do.”

From the tiniest change comes the biggest impact, a ripple effect along the strands of time. It’s inherent in our industry to protect our precious resources, but it takes a few certain individuals to stand up for the most challenging ideals and follow through to the end. And that’s a lesson we can all take to heart. 🍅





# Proud avocado partner of the San Diego Padres

Del Rey Avocado is proud to be recognized  
as the Official Avocado Partner of the San  
Diego Padres for the 2023 MLB season.

"We are so excited that this collaboration has come to fruition. We have so many similarities across the board—from the confidence in our teams to constantly aiming to be successful every time we step on the field," Patrick Lucy, President of Del Rey Avocado, states.

Fans can enjoy Del Rey Avocado's brightly colored neon signs during ball games and learn about California avocados through sampling demos during select games at Petco Park this season.

"Our goal at the food demos is to introduce new varieties of avocados and the benefits that avocados have for all ages to the best baseball fanbase in the U.S.," says Patrick Lucy.

**Del Rey Avocado, San Diego Padres—  
hitting it out of the park since 1969.**

Connect with us

@delreyavocado



delreyavocado.com



## UPHOLDING *A* TRADITION

*A Q&A With Carlos Visconti,*  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CANADA AND  
UNITED STATES OPERATIONS, RED SUN FARMS™

*By Peggy Packer*



## FADS COME AND GO.

From automation to unique growing methods, packaging innovations, and more, fresh produce players are known for staying on their toes, ready to pivot in any direction as evolving demands generate a need for adaptation. While advantageous and necessary, it's worth admitting that always following the latest and greatest craze can be risky.

This is where the differentiation for Red Sun Farms™ begins. For the greenhouse grower, sustainability and operational excellence are much more than a fad; they are two values woven into its very essence. Red Sun Farms' sustainability initiatives are not solely guided by dollar-driving shifts impacting consumers and the buy-side. Instead, they are the result of profound expertise that allows the company to easily distinguish between a business-savvy move and one that merely looks good on paper.

Standing at the helm of this powerful greenhouse network, Carlos Visconti, Chief Executive Officer, Canada and United States Operations, can tell you himself why sustainability is a necessity—and not a phase—for this producer.



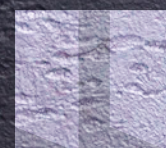
**PEGGY PACKER:** Carlos, the last time you sat down with us at *The Snack*, you discussed your journey to leadership in produce and the formidable greenhouse operation that is Red Sun Farms. Since then, it has been obvious sustainability ranks high on your list of priorities.

How does Red Sun Farms work to guarantee operational sustainability from end to end?

**CARLOS VISCONTI, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CANADA AND UNITED STATES OPERATIONS, RED SUN FARMS™:**

Red Sun Farms has built sustainability into the fabric of our operation, and sustainable business practices have become a key element in creating efficiencies. Our approach has been to look at sustainability holistically, so each division has an important contribution to providing the best technology and solutions to our consumers.

In the past six to seven years, we have challenged our packaging suppliers to push sustainable technology while maintaining excellence in food safety and quality. This resulted in the commercialization of new film technologies and increased recycled content in clamshells, fiber punnets, compostable PLUs, and labels with washable adhesives. Our high-tech greenhouses have also been uniquely designed to maximize the use of our resources and minimize food waste.



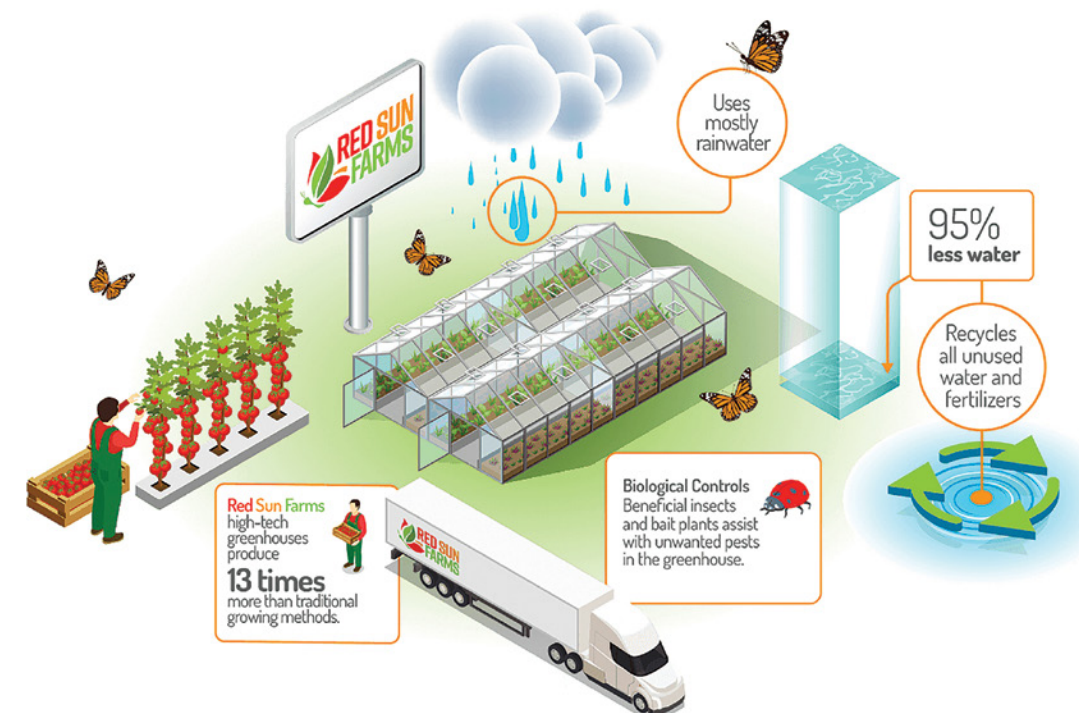
OUR APPROACH HAS BEEN TO LOOK AT SUSTAINABILITY HOLISTICALLY, SO

EACH DIVISION HAS AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION

TO PROVIDING THE BEST TECHNOLOGY AND SOLUTIONS TO OUR CONSUMERS."

*Carlos Visconti,*

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CANADA AND UNITED STATES OPERATIONS, RED SUN FARMS™



**PP:** As each of these strategies sees impressive success, have you reached any key milestones across these programs?

**CV:** Red Sun Farms' sustainability commitment focuses on our product innovations, investments in technology, and doing our part to improve sustainability from the farm to the finished product.

Our greenhouses collect 85 percent of the water consumed at our farms. This is treated for use in the greenhouse, and any unused water is re-treated and fed back to the plants. The result is a 90 percent reduction compared to conventional growing methods.

We are currently in season with our pepper crop that will supply peppers year-round. We've also acquired additional property for future expansion, increasing our production capacity for tomatoes.

**PP:** Each of these initiatives clearly has numerous benefits for both Red Sun Farms' operations and Mother Nature. Turning our attention to the retail sector, what are some of the advantages these programs create for buy-side partners?

**CV:** Our packaging initiatives were built to support our customers in their goals to reduce single-use plastics, increase PCR content levels, and provide compostable options, as well as remove black pigments from the polymer base and mitigate the use of Styrofoam materials.

Reinvention and adaptation are constant at Red Sun Farms. We are fortunate to have solid supply partners and excellent retail allies to collaborate with to help drive efficiencies through our respective areas of expertise.


REINVENTION AND ADAPTATION ARE CONSTANT AT RED SUN FARMS™. WE ARE FORTUNATE TO HAVE SOLID SUPPLY PARTNERS

AND EXCELLENT RETAIL ALLIES TO COLLABORATE WITH TO HELP DRIVE EFFICIENCIES THROUGH OUR RESPECTIVE AREAS OF EXPERTISE."

**PP:** In its relentless pursuit of innovation, I have no doubt Red Sun Farms will stay true to its longstanding vision and continue delighting retailers with high-quality products. As you look forward, how do you plan to bolster these already vigorous efforts?

**CV:** Our team will continue to explore technologies within the greenhouse sector to improve our environmental footprint and efficiencies. Additionally, we will continue to work with our supply partners to identify new packaging material innovations and support the development of these materials through validation trials and commercialization.

The team prides itself in owning every step of the process—seed selection, propagation, greenhouse operations, harvesting, packing, and distribution. Our master growers have selected varieties of tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers that will delight and exceed customers' expectations. Red Sun Farms is committed to supporting our partners, and we're looking forward to satisfying their needs with amazing flavor, quality, and year-round supply.

When it comes to a supply-side powerhouse like Red Sun Farms, sustainability is an integral component of its brand identity. Embracing such a level of operational achievement is not simply adopting a craze. It's upholding a tradition. 



# WTF

## DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

4Earth Farms™ Organic  
Broccoli Florets ?



ORGANIC BROCCOLI AND CHEESE QUICHE

### INGREDIENTS

**12 oz** 4Earth Farms™ Organic Broccoli Florets  
**9"** prepared pie crust  
**5** eggs  
**1 cup** half & half  
**1 cup** shredded sharp Cheddar  
**2 cloves** garlic, minced  
**½ cup** sun-dried tomatoes  
**½ tsp** oregano  
**½ tsp** basil  
**½ tsp** salt  
**½ tsp** black pepper, freshly cracked  
Dried beans or baking weights

**Prep Time:** 10 min

**Cook Time:** 1 hr

**Servings:** 6

### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 375° F. Prepare broccoli florets by cutting apart larger heads into smaller pieces. Set aside.
- 2 Line a pie pan with the pie crust. Trim the edges and then crimp. Poke holes in the bottom of the crust with a fork. Place parchment paper on crust and fill with dried beans to hold the crust in place during baking. Bake for 10 minutes.
- 3 Remove the parchment and beans. Bake for another 10 minutes or until the crust starts to brown.
- 4 In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, half & half, Cheddar, garlic, tomatoes, oregano, basil, salt, and black pepper. Stir in broccoli. Fill the partially baked crust with the broccoli mixture in an even layer. Bake for 20 minutes, covered loosely with aluminum foil. Remove foil and continue baking until the crust is brown and the center is set, about another 20 minutes.
- 5 Serve warm or at room temperature. Enjoy!

To learn more about 4Earth Farms™,  
visit [www.4earthfarms.com](http://www.4earthfarms.com)



STARR RANCH®  
growers

# Living Growing

IN THE ART OF



By Melissa De Leon Chavez



What we do in fresh produce is greater than art, because we live our lives in it.

I borrowed this line from Stanley Tucci, true, because it aligned perfectly with another line I heard closer to home.

“Whenever I would see a person eating an apple I would think to myself, ‘I wonder if that apple was off a tree in one of our orchards.’” In one sentence, Jim Thomas captures my imagination and drives home the magic of what he does.

While his title says President and Owner of Starr Ranch Growers, Jim is more. He’s a thinker, an innovator, a scientist, a son, and a grandson.

“As far as growing up in the industry, I would oftentimes travel with my father, Dalton Thomas, learning the business—the farming and growing practices,” Jim tells me of those first days. “Like anything in life, it’s about the journey and being part of something. To look back 90 years to when the company was founded, I see how much things have changed and how

*Jim Thomas,*  
President and Owner, Starr Ranch Growers

“We have a team dedicated to new variety development that is serious about all aspects of developing the *perfect apple*; we are striving for the very best so the final product stands out in the sea of varieties.”

*- Jim Thomas*

the industry has evolved from the way we farm all the way to how our fruit is displayed at retail. To be a part of this industry, this legacy that has left its stamp on so many parts of the world, is very gratifying. But more than anything, it is to know that I have carried on a dream of my grandfather’s. I’ve been able to grow and prosper our business with hopes of continuing to pass it down through the family.”

Jim has certainly leaned into the idiom “leave it better than you found it” in terms of what he will be passing down—from an in-house research and development process and proprietary brands to wider acreage and distribution, this is no longer just Grandpa Thomas’ farm.

“When I first started in the business full-time, I had a small truck I could drive down the middle of the orchard rows. I’d look up and see all the apples hanging in the trees,” he recalls, and the love he has for every fruit in his care is palpable. “Nowadays, we can barely fit a tractor down the rows and 80 percent of the fruit is harvested from the ground.”

To help me understand the pivotal points of that growth, Dan Davis, Director of Business Development, tells me how Starr Ranch dove headfirst into variety development and its potential to differentiate the operation.

“We’re always looking for ways to invigorate and make our category more vital. Our entry into varietal development is exactly that. Trying to get to the best offer for the consumer is to meet their needs and get them eating as many apples as possible. It’s all about making sure consumption is all that it can be,” Dan explains.

While he certainly speaks reason, I can’t help but think, even with my inside track to the industry, how overwhelming the number of new apples can be.

“New varieties are being developed every year, and the apple category continues to grow, which makes it a very competitive area,” Jim agrees. “What makes Starr Ranch Growers’ proprietary apples special is that each one is developed in our in-house research center and test orchards. We have a team dedicated to new variety development that is serious about all aspects of developing the perfect apple; we are striving for the very best so the final product stands out in the sea of varieties. The story of each apple has to be unique and intriguing to the consumer.”

Perfect examples of this are Starr Ranch’s proprietary JUICI® and Karma® apples: each delicious but with something singular to ensure they hold their own in that sea.

“Our JUICI apple is our ‘lifestyle apple,’ making it perfect for everyone, everywhere, every lifestyle—a wonderful balance of sweet and tart flavors with an amazing crunch. Its thin skin, dimple texturing, vibrant red hue, and unique physical characteristics make it a standout apple on the shelf,” Jim tells me, and the scientist in him begins to glimmer.

Jim is incredibly involved in the variety innovation process, dabbling and experimenting with the rest of the team. And while the Rookie of the Year, Karma, is also described with gorgeous bicolor skin, impressive floral aromas, abundant juiciness, and crisp texture, there is a unique step in sustainability that makes its name more than just a title.





“It is a difficult time in agriculture—there are barriers everywhere. How we find ways to keep our growers *healthy, vibrant, and prosperous* is what our life is all about.”

— Dan Davis



“Our newest proprietary apple, Karma, is just being launched this year to our core retailers and has gained a lot of momentum and attention because of the story behind it. For every Karma sold, a slice of the proceeds goes toward promoting healthy eating for children. This variety keeps you wanting the next bite while doing good in the world at the same time,” Jim says with a broad smile. “We ensure each apple we develop is truly perfect from all angles: taste profile, quality, and sustainable growing practices, which have all become very important attributes to the end consumer.”

While I don’t doubt there is a strong element of fun in these creations, I understand there must also be a bottom line. So, coming back to the increasing competitiveness of the space, Dan is quick to tell me that this is more than just mad science—it is Starr Ranch’s way of ensuring it is a solution to retail obstacles.



*Dan Davis,*  
Director of Business Development,  
Starr Ranch Growers

“We honestly want to be the answer to anything that challenges the retailer. Whether that be logistics, varietal offerings, or promotional needs, we can help as part of a holistic solution. As the gatekeeper to the consumer, we need to engage ourselves in all their issues and be part of the solution while making life for the retailer friction-free,” Dan shares.

This mandate does not stop at pleasing the customer though. As far as Starr Ranch has come from Founder Paul “Tommy” Thomas’s first plantings, it is still very much a family operation. And families take care of one another.

“Our growers’ long- and short-term wellbeing is what keeps me awake at night and motivates me in the morning. It is a difficult time in agriculture—there are barriers everywhere. How we find ways to keep our growers healthy, vibrant, and prosperous is what our life is all about,” Dan assures me. “We exist because they’ve had the faith to work the dirt for generations and, above all else, we have to keep them going.”

The people feed the apples that feed the people. It is a cycle, sometimes fluid, sometimes chaotic, always beautiful.

“As trying as life is, we always are looking to the future,” Dan concurs. “We’ve existed for nearly 90 years with that philosophy, and that positivity for the next crop is what continues to carry us today. We’re always growing that next crop and, with that, hope springs for the future.”

His comment brings me back to the innocent awe of Jim’s first words—the ones that drew me in and painted so clearly the art of growing: “Whenever I would see a person eating an apple I would think to myself, ‘I wonder if that apple was off a tree in one of our orchards.’”

What a wonderful way to move through the world. 🍏



“The family is only part of the whole equation of Sambrailo Packaging; our team who provides the service to our customers is what makes us so valuable.”

— Mark Sambrailo



831-724-7581 | [sales@sambrailo.com](mailto:sales@sambrailo.com) | [sambrailo.com](http://sambrailo.com)

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





► MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀

**STEPHANIE CANTERO**

*Communications and Marketing Coordinator, The Nunes Company*

**With Jenna Plasterer**

Whether she is gallivanting through wine country, journeying through foreign lands, or escaping into the world of literature, Stephanie Cantero has a wanderlust that keeps life exciting. But, every traveler has precious things and people that keep them grounded and inspired. To find out the special individuals, items, and, of course, food that make this intrepid industry member excited for everyday adventures, read on!

1 “Always an adventure. Most recently, Singapore in January.”

2 A time to tune out the daily stressors. It's therapy for the mind and body.

3 I can't get enough of the season of sweaters and pumpkin spice.

4 I enjoy all types; there's something for every mood.

5 “My go-to dessert. If it's on the menu, I'm ordering it!”

6 It's easy to get swept up in a good book and not leave the comfort of my couch.

7 Clothes, shoes, and accessories; when the outfit comes together, it creates a vibe.

8 Being out with friends to learn and try different wines with a beautiful vineyard backdrop is a great way to spend a weekend.

9 “My support system and biggest fans.”



- 1 Traveling

4 Music

7 Fashion
- 2 Working Out

5 Tiramisu

8 Wine Tasting
- 3 Fall

6 Reading

9 Family



# Category Scientists

By Peggy Packer

## Ethereal.

It's a word you may have heard in reference to a graceful woman or a vast, fictional universe. But what about the world of retail and the fresh produce categories that make it so grand?

It only took one email from **Kathleen Triou**, President and Chief Executive Officer of Fresh Solutions Network, to reshape the way I view the constant ebb and flow of trends in the produce department and what it means to truly tap into the potential of a consumer-favorite category.

“I'd love to talk about the importance of defining the potato category of the future, and how to work toward manifesting it,” Kathleen tells me as I pick her brain for the focus of this article. Immediately, I'm as intrigued as I hope you are at this point in our tale.



Upon writing this story, I discovered the word “ethereal,” like many words in the English language, holds a variety of definitions—one of which is tied to chemical science.

I sometimes liken our industry to the subject of chemistry—some may even say it is just as complex. Before we can create compounds or study mixtures, we must first understand the atoms and molecules at work. In the same manner, redefining success for the potato sector requires a firm grasp on its extensive scope and scale.

The fresh potato category is fundamental to the performance of the produce department. Over 80 percent of United States households buy them annually\*. For comparison, that's higher than frozen vegetables at 75.9 percent or frozen pizza at 66 percent\*\*. Shoppers spend approximately \$3.1 billion a year on fresh potatoes, which is equivalent to nearly 4 billion lbs sold.

“Taking into account the potato category's importance to the performance of the produce department and its popularity with consumers, it seems a smart business decision to refine the assortment based on the shoppers in the store,” Kathleen explains. “Category core offerings always include bagged and bulk varieties in Russet, red, yellow, and white potatoes, where available. Beyond that, we've traditionally seen an assortment that includes organic, petite, and convenience-oriented offerings like microwaveable potatoes. This segment keeps potatoes on the dinner table, kitchen islands, coffee tables, and office desks when a wholesome snack, light meal, or savory side dish is needed.”

As Kathleen emphasizes, the potato category of the future will also include increased fresh-cut options, taking advantage of an array of small kitchen appliances as well as oven and stove-top preparations.

“Real change happens slowly,” she assures. “Fostering innovation that targets changes in consumer

\*2021 Kantar Insights Total Score Study and IRI Unify Sales Data  
\*\*Statista 2019, HH Penetration Rate for Frozen Foods



**"Fostering innovation that targets changes in consumer behavior will evolve not only the potato category, but all of produce."**

**- Kathleen Triou,**  
President and Chief  
Executive Officer,  
Fresh Solutions  
Network

behavior will evolve not only the potato category, but all of produce. We need to be asking ourselves, 'What will the potato category of the future look like, and how do we evolve to get there?' From my point of view, the category will be dominated by what I call 'pre' items."

What is a 'pre' item, you ask? Think pre-cut, pre-cooked, pre-seasoned, or pre-sorted offerings.

"Items that make potato consumption easy, flavorful, nutritious, and quick to cook will be winners in the category in the future. As we look into the crystal ball here, I also see continuing needs for small bags—5 lbs and less—for people who see an inherent value in cooking from scratch or need to make their food dollars go further," Kathleen shares, laying out a viable hypothesis for the category's evolution. "Convenience in the form of smaller packages and quick-to-cook items with a range of popular seasonings will drive category growth."

This is one space where Fresh Solutions Network's Side Delights® brand already flexes its prowess. With a powerful portfolio of Steamables™, Bakeables™, Grillables™, Flavorables®, A Cut Above® fresh-cut potatoes, and more, the brand harnesses electromagnetism as its superpower.

Creating an undeniable physical phenomenon in which consumers are drawn to its impressive lineup,

the provider's newly designed Side Delights packaging brings a unified look and feel to its popular bags and premium Petites. This approach pulls the category together as a cohesive offering for shoppers, guiding them across each segment to easily find exactly what they are looking for time and time again.

"Almost 50 percent of consumers repurchase potatoes after having a positive experience. Highlighting the features and best uses for each type of potato ensures consumers keep coming back for more," Kathleen adds. "Our new Side Delights bag leverages this learning by highlighting a 'best use' recipe on the back of every bag. With simple 1, 2, 3 cooking instructions on the pack, a positive potato experience is just a few steps away!"

Sharing more observations for the potato sector, Kathleen also points to the importance of consumer education and tapping into shopper trends. Some of the trends currently impacting retail sales include an emphasis on waste reduction, the return to convenience, a shift toward functional food consumption, and sustainability—each providing a unique opportunity to capitalize on this distinct set of demands.



Side Delights® newly designed packaging brings a unified look and feel across its portfolio, which includes Side Delights Organic, Side Delights Petites, Steamables™, Bakeables™, Grillables™, Flavorables®, and more



Fresh Solutions Network is made up of a formidable team of growers, including Basin Gold Cooperative, NoKota Packers, Michael Family Farms, Serman Masser Farms, and Mack Farms

"Education can take several forms: how to cook, recipe inspiration, nutrition information, meal solution ideas, and more," lists Kathleen. "Inspirational messaging could excite shoppers about the versatility of potatoes, ease of preparation, or the fact that they can please the whole family. This can be done through seasonal secondary displays in conjunction with promotional ads, at-table point-of-sale materials with convenience tips or nutrition messages, or by linking the fresh potato table with the bulk options in the refrigerated section via merchandising and signage."

These efforts expand beyond the physical grocery store, as retail e-commerce sites and brand websites should be adorned with insights into preparation, recipes, nutrition, and the growers who produce their potatoes.

"A majority of consumers are visiting retailers' websites even if they are shopping in-store. Since using potatoes as a key ingredient

**"Items that make potato consumption easy, flavorful, nutritious, and quick to cook will be winners in the category in the future."**

is important, highlighting recipes on grocery websites is a must," advises Kathleen. "Side Delights has hundreds of inspiring recipes available for use on our website."

There are no test tubes and beakers necessary when it comes to Fresh Solutions Network's method of innovation—just skillful insights from timely and relevant consumer and category data and a formidable brand creating healthy, fresh, and

flavorful products set to ignite category consumption and generate shopper affinity and trust in the potato category.

And, as Kathleen lays out this intricate, data-based blueprint for catalyzing the category, it's not hard to picture the Fresh Solutions Network team donning their lab coats and goggles, wielding the elements of retail to spark category alchemy. 🍟





# Southeast-Grown Blueberries

A  
GROWER  
OWNED  
COOPERATIVE

Available Now  
northbayproduce.com



MAY MVP



HIGHLIGHTS

## Mike Preacher

Vice President of Marketing,  
Superfresh Growers®

TIME AT COMPANY: 15 Years

With Jenna Plasterer

To say Mike Preacher is a breath of fresh air is an understatement. In actuality, he's a massive gust of fun that almost knocks you off your feet laughing, leaving you smiling from ear to ear. But don't mistake his light-heartedness for a lack of prowess, because this marketing whiz knows the biz and is sharing some of his insights, inspiration, and advice so we can better understand how his sales mind works. And, of course, he's doing it with flair...

### WHAT YOUR ROLE IS REALLY LIKE

"Our job is to encourage people to eat our fruit. To that end, I strive to be a mash-up of Ted Lasso and Julie McCoy from *The Love Boat*. Cruise Director Julie is all about customer service, punctuality, organization, and responsibility. Ted is competitive. He understands that success requires teamwork, optimism, collaboration, and honesty. He plays people to their strengths, challenges them to take chances, celebrates successes, and eases losses. A team that thinks like Julie and Ted—and injects some quirkiness and humor along the way—will sell fruit!"

### HOW SALES BECOMES A LIFE LESSON

"Many things necessary to marketing fruit are also important to nurturing meaningful relationships with family, friends, and coworkers: listening, negotiation, argument, concession, patience, resilience, and empathy. I am not perfect at these things, but I'm fortunate to practice them daily."

### SURPRISE US

"Since elementary school, I have been able to stand on my head longer than anyone in the room. Try me on the show floor!"

### A MENTOR MENTORED: THOSE WHO HAVE SHAPED MIKE

**A.B. Preacher, Jr.:** a.k.a Pops

**Tim Lane:** President, Sales and Marketing, Superfresh Growers®

**Rachel Ruggeri:** Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, Starbucks Coffee Company



## VALUES AT THE CORE

RESOURCEFULNESS

PERSEVERANCE

GENEROSITY

GRATITUDE

COURAGE

LOVE

### WORDS OF WISDOM FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

"Listen more than you speak; don't fear the pregnant pause. Join your local non-profit Toastmasters Club. Practice; get to know your mirror. Never stop learning; ask questions. Show interest; what are your customers' favorite things?"





# The Right Difference

By Lilian Diep

As I sit nestled in a plush, purple swivel chair close to the window across from Carlos Bon, Jr. in his deep green armchair, I hear spring's heralds singing in the air. Birds fly by, grabbing ideal twigs, various colorful strings, and shiny objects to build their nests, hard at work to grow a nurturing world—much like the Divine Flavor team does year-round.

What began as a 10-hectare farm of table grapes in Sonora, Mexico, under the name Viñedos Alta is now a multinational growing operation. It boasts an expansive portfolio and an ambitious mission as sturdy as the nest a bird would call home.

“Our motto is ‘Better Food for a Better World,’ and we stand by this each day,” the Vice President of Sales voices from across the desk. “This falls in line perfectly with our mission to continuously improve, be transparent with our consumers, and offer the best customer service throughout the supply



chain. It's hard work, but it's worth it. We want the world to know our story, and we feel we have a responsibility for the wellness of the people through our produce that is grown for good.”

Viñedos Alta, now Grupo Alta, began in 1989 as a farming company with Don Enrique Camou, Carlos Bon, Sr., and Alán Aguirre leading the charge. The company consistently fought to make its founding vision come true: to be different from what was in the industry and what was offered on the market. The Founders knew they had a compelling story to tell from the time they planted the very first seed.

It was a story strongly built upon hard work and determination.

The company continued to grow and expand, both in its offerings and operations. But that need to share a unique story never went away. In fact, it inspired the creation of Divine Flavor in 2006. The business was formed as a bridge, communicating between its customers and farms while offering transparency along the chain. From there, Divine Flavor has flourished.

“Divine Flavor evolved to represent not only our own farms but growers around the world who share our passion for flavor. We believe in our social and environmental responsibility, and we are dedicated to growing fresh

Carlos Bon, Jr.,  
Vice President of Sales,  
Divine Flavor





produce items. Every day, we're inspired to head out to the fields because our products contribute to the health and well-being of our customers—and we take great pride in that,” Carlos explains. “We will always continue to improve our practices and the lives of our workers across the board. Safe products, exceptional service, and amazing flavor are our core values. It's what drives us to identify the best varieties that currently exist or will be bred soon, which then provides the best eating experience for our consumers.”

Safe, exceptional, and amazing. Core components of the Divine Flavor team, much like the bird nest forming under Mother Nature's blue sky—a simile Carlos can't help but laugh at.

“I think what really sets Divine Flavor apart is our passion. We have a drive to do the right thing, and we accomplish this by providing the right products, doing right by our people, and employing the right practices,” Carlos picks up. “It's the root of all the things we do, so it makes sense that we invest in our people to ensure the best success. That is where the passion nests and fosters.”

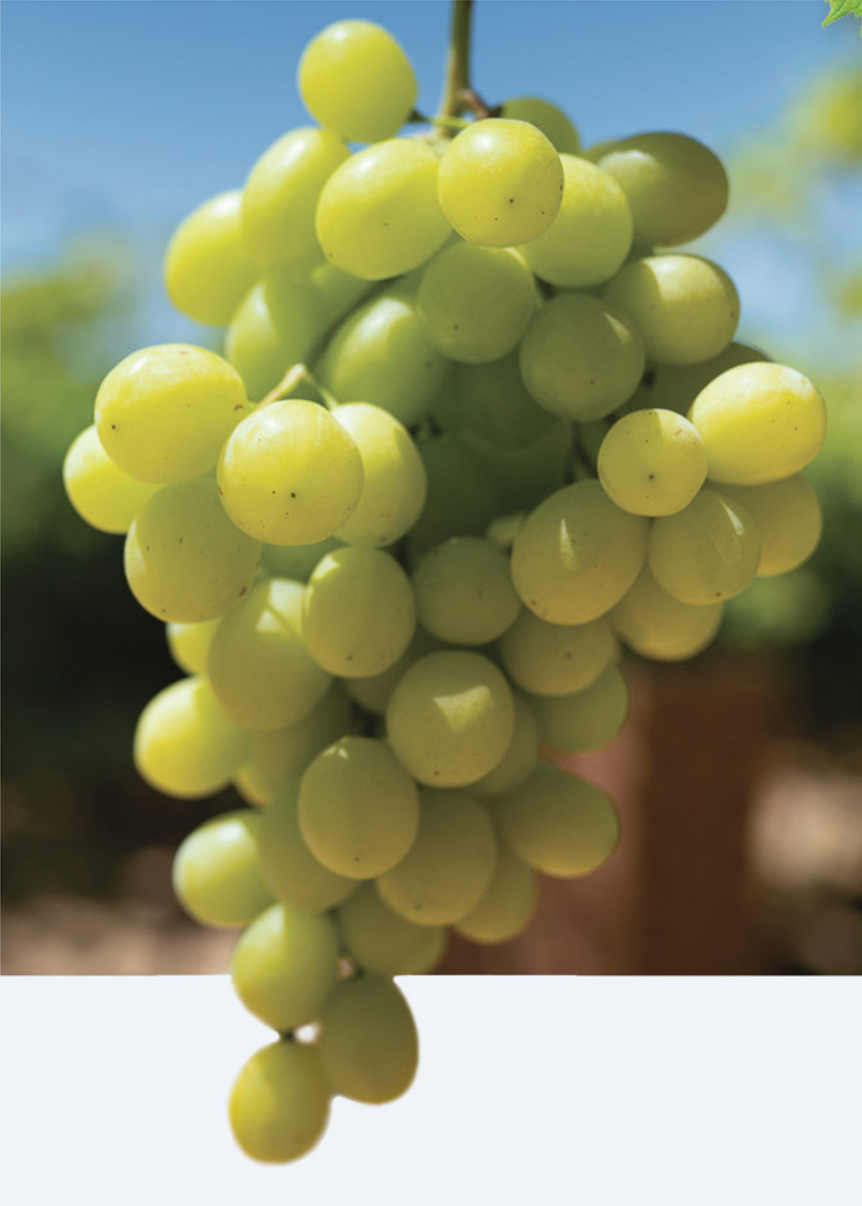
This passion is the healthy root of Divine Flavor's success, for without it, there would be no ambition to be the best nor the need to tell a compelling story. Divine Flavor gathered top varieties, prime locations, and aggressive goals to build its nest. As the operation grew, dedicated workers were needed to help the company thrive.

“Without passion to improve our world, we would not care for our workers the way we do. Without passion to feed the world safely, we would not be pioneers in social responsibility. Without passion for health, we would not grow as many organic items as we do. Without passion for flavor, we would not search relentlessly for the best varieties of grapes. Without passion, we would not be growing at the pace we currently are,” Carlos tells me.



“Every day, we’re inspired to head out to the fields because **our products contribute to the health and well-being of our customers**—and we take great pride in that.”

- **Carlos Bon, Jr.**,  
Vice President of Sales,  
Divine Flavor



From Viñedos Alta to Grupo Alta to Divine Flavor, the company has formed a communicative bridge between its customers and its farms while offering transparency along the chain

Michael DuPuis, Quality Assurance and Public Relations Coordinator (left) and Carlos Bon, Jr. (right) both have a passion for doing the right thing, providing the right products, and employing the right practices

Divine Flavor saw a necessity to improve, conducting a SWOT analysis to meet strategic and management goals, leading to investments in its workforce



Divine Flavor saw a necessity to improve and conducted a SWOT analysis, which focuses on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This strategic planning and management technique saw everything the company had to offer. A conclusive takeaway Carlos shares with me is that one of Divine Flavor's main assets is its people. As he tells me, some of the company's latest investments have been into its workforce, providing its employees with improved working conditions and care both on and off the field. This compassion for its workers also translates to the consumers Divine Flavor feeds.


“Of course, we have our challenges—we work in agriculture; challenges and threats are the name of the game,” Carlos explains before taking a short pause. “But it's because of these challenges, the care we have for our people, and our need to make the world a better place through produce that keeps our will strong. Our main asset is our people, and our main differentiator is our passion.”

This willpower is evident throughout the company, straight down to its foundations. Over the past few years, our industry has faced a myriad of hurdles, such as a lack of labor, current political and economic impacts, and waning water resources, which is always a major topic of discussion. However, the industry has collectively become stronger in the face of adversity, and Divine Flavor is a shining example of this.

Along with investing in the growth and development of its workers, the company also added expansion initiatives to its portfolio. Divine has established its bases in Mexico with its Jalisco vineyard operation, expanded its reach in South America, and grown its hothouse programs. Judging from the twinkle in Carlos' eye, the company has many more projects in store.

“From talks out in the field, inside our walls, and with everyone in our company, we all agree that passion is what sets us apart,” Carlos tells me. “Because we all have a passion to be the best, we will overcome any and all challenges that come our way, no doubt. Our biggest project—which is the most ambitious of what I already mentioned—is to improve our world through produce. We want to feed the world and make it a better place, one fresh item at a time!”

Divine Flavor laid the foundation, stick by stick, to build a sturdy operation well-known for its grapes, hothouse peppers, greenhouse-grown tomatoes, squash, and melons. Through this passion for growing, Divine Flavor has become that much stronger.

It's this dream to make the right difference in our industry that led the company to soar through all the unknowns and reach new horizons, discovering sturdier and better pieces. To always come back and build a stronger nest. 





By Editorial Contributor Rex Lawrence, Founder and President, Joe Produce Search<sup>SM</sup>

**E**mployers, times are a-changin'. The produce world and the mentality I grew up in—grinding it out from 6 a.m. (or earlier) to 5 p.m. and then answering calls until 1 a.m.—is, for the most part, not desirable to the younger generations. Being in the office all the time so your boss knows you're working is not as accepted with the incoming workforce. People are coming from other geographical regions and verticals, and not just the small ag areas. They have skills, experience, and yes, sometimes other interests that provide options outside of ag.

In some cases, the younger professionals grew up watching Baby Boomers and Gen Xers grind it out, live it large, and chase "the Joneses," and they want something different. Traditional media

and social media are showing them lifestyles that are obtainable for the regular person, which was rarely imaginable 25 years ago—how I wish I knew I could be a "digital nomad" back in my 20s!

I'm not suggesting we have to acquiesce to the wants, whims, fads, and newfangled workplace options that we see in social media and California's Silicon Valley.

As executive recruiters, we're having conversations with employers and professionals (a.k.a. "job seekers") all the time.

Part of our job is to understand the wants, needs, must-haves, wishes, and all the criteria related to each party. Most importantly, we want to make sure that the candidate and the company are an ideal fit.

**A job seeker's dream job could include:**

- \$240K per year with great benefits
- A company car and gas card
- Supportive management
- Great company, culture, products, team, and future
- Remote or hybrid work availability
- Flexible hours
- An overall great lifestyle
- Five weeks of vacation

**An employer's dream employee could be someone who is:**

- Smart, honest, loyal, and a great cultural fit
- A hard worker who cares and is accountable
- Willing and able to do what it takes to get the job done
- A solutions provider
- Hyper-focused
- Happy with a reasonable salary and bonus program
- Happy being in the office and traveling when required

Over the past two to three years, I've seen both parties evolve at a faster rate than in the years previous. For example, there are more employers hiring people on a remote or hybrid basis. With professionals, we've noticed more people who still want to make a good living while also placing greater value on "quality of life" factors, such as time out of the office.

So, what's my point?

I am suggesting we all have to continue to be aware of what is important to job seekers and what our competitors—including other industries that are attracting talent—are providing them.

Understand you have to play the balancing act and how it can work positively for you and the other party.


For the incoming generation and other job seekers out there, know what is really important to you. Have your priorities clear before you go into interviews and speak with potential employers. If lifestyle and balance are super important, then there is a possibility you won't be earning at the top of the scale. Conversely, if your number-one priority is to perform at a high level and "make bank," then know that maybe 60-plus-hour weeks are part of the price you pay.

Likewise, employers, if that's the case, make it known how you support balanced lifestyles and that the equation of hours, efforts, responsibilities, accountabilities, and results have to be balanced with the reasonable expectations of both parties.

It's important that each party is open about their respective wants and needs, and both parties might have to give and take. As executive recruiters, we gather this info early and help work toward a match. For us, success also includes NOT matching a candidate and company when the fit is not there.

If you're an employer and doing this on your own, I encourage you to clearly share your expectations, needs, and wants and to also listen closely for the direct and indirect clues from candidates.

Success and happiness are more achievable when expectations and priorities are discussed upfront. That way, there are mitigated odds of surprises or failures to meet expectations that pop up down the road.

When all parties **find that balance**, the future is that much brighter—both for the employer and professional. 



Joe Pro Resumes<sup>TM</sup> 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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# WHEN Opportunity KNOCKS:

A Q&A With Jeff Oberman,  
PRESIDENT, CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

BY CHANDLER JAMES

When fate comes knocking at Jeff Oberman's front door, he invites it in for a cold drink. The two have danced to the tune of industry growth for quite some time now, and with each year that passes, Jeff identifies new opportunities to exceed his own expectations.

It all began when he moved to Washington, DC, to pursue a career in line with his Political Science degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia. He eventually found his way to the produce industry, working at the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, subsequently named United Fresh Produce Association and currently the International Fresh Produce Association.

Today, Jeff mans the helm as President of the California Avocado Commission (CAC). He is focusing on the core mission of the commission—maximizing California avocado grower viability in today's environment. To accomplish this task, he and his team have put forth a plan that will increase efforts at trade (point of sale) as well as continued messaging to ensure the brand occupies an exclusive position in the minds of consumers, retailers, and foodservice operators.

Before we get too far ahead, let's take it back to the beginning.

Photo Credit: California Avocado Commission





**CHANDLER JAMES:** You've tried your hand in several different areas of the industry! What were some of the lessons learned in your various roles that have contributed to your leadership style today?

**JEFF OBERMAN, PRESIDENT, CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION:** Every job provides great learning opportunities.

Bartending and foodservice positions earlier in my career offered insight into the value of customer service. Working in Washington, DC, was unique in that most of the workforce is there for the long haul and committed to their work. United Fresh provided me with a multitude of learnings—from providing value for clients to fighting the good fight on legislative efforts.

In 2018, I joined PRO\*ACT as Vice President of Strategic Programs. I was able to set up deals in retail, foodservice, and alternate channels buying, selling various commodities, and navigating challenging freight markets.

In the produce industry, you can learn something new every day. When I meet someone new and let them know I work in the produce business, they are quick to share their thoughts on fruits and vegetables. We truly impact lives through good nutrition.



**“With household penetration of avocados hovering around 60 percent and many consumers only purchasing occasionally, there’s still tremendous opportunity for category growth.”**

**Jeff Oberman,**  
PRESIDENT, CALIFORNIA  
AVOCADO COMMISSION



**CJ:** And now here you are, a highly influential member of the CAC leadership team. It certainly sounds as though those past experiences led to new opportunities for you to grow your experience and find the right fit. What about working for CAC keeps your passion aflame?

**JO:** I'm honored to lead the dedicated team at the California Avocado Commission. During my first several months on the job, I've enjoyed the opportunity to meet growers and stakeholders throughout the supply chain, gaining valuable insight into their unique backgrounds, operations, and expectations for my role and direction for the Commission. My travels have included visits to all five growing districts in addition to regional and national trade events.



Charley Wolk, Jeff Oberman, and Leo McGuire (left to right) are three leaders at the helm of California Avocado Commission's team

Photo Credit: California Avocado Commission



**CJ:** Enough with the technical talk, let's get to the tasty aspect of your job: California avocados! I can say I have quite an affinity for the green gold myself. In your opinion, what are the most coveted aspects of this category?

**JO:** The fruit works well with sweet, savory, and neutral flavor profiles and can be a carrier for spicy ingredients or a cooling contrast to them. The creamy mouthfeel makes it a great fat substitute, and its green hues add appetite appeal. More than 75 percent of the fat in avocados is good fat, and yet they have no sugar, no salt, and no cholesterol. They also are a good source of fiber and have nearly 20 vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients.

Another uniqueness of the avocado category in the U.S. is sourcing. Fortunately, there is enough worldwide supply for avocados to be available here year-round, mainly from Mexico. California avocado season generally occurs from spring to fall, with peak availability in spring and summer. Supplies from South America and green skin avocados from Florida complement the deal. With household penetration of avocados hovering around 60 percent and many consumers only purchasing occasionally, there's still tremendous opportunity for category growth.



**CJ:** Opportunities are aplenty! As you continue in your first year with CAC, what is your vision for the commission's evolution?

**JO:** CAC is at a unique point in our history. We have a strong and committed Board of Directors and, with new leadership, the opportunity for evaluation of where we are today and where we can go are at the forefront. My visits with stakeholders have provided some insight into the current and future needs of the commission. Many have shared that California avocado growers potentially face a challenging year like no other.

An analysis of the feedback I received on industry issues led to three topics rising to the top of the list: a renewal of the focus on varieties, the need to address key issues that impact grower profitability, and the desire to research the value of sustainability programs. We are taking these challenges and turning them into opportunities to maximize California avocado grower value.



**CJ:** You clearly have a lot to say about CAC and your passion for the avocado segment. Is there anything else you'd like our readers to know?

**JO:** Jan DeLyser, a produce industry icon and mentor to so many, retired earlier this year, but her legacy and efforts remain instilled within our team. While these are big shoes to fill, we are excited to announce that the California Avocado Commission has hired food industry veteran Terry Splane to be the organization's new Vice President of Marketing. Meanwhile, 2023 marketing programs are well into development and will launch concurrently with the California avocado peak harvest.



Jeff has long been an advocate of the produce industry, stemming from his degree in political science and extending to the fields where fresh fruits and vegetables are planted. His experience is wide-ranging, making him the perfect candidate to lead CAC and the California avocado industry into its next era of growth.

Because, as we learned here today, when opportunity knocks, Jeff Oberman answers. 🥑



Jeff Oberman met his wife, Kyla Oberman (pictured above), once he found his way to the produce industry



# Libations

FOR ALL OCCASIONS:

## NOT YOUR TYPICAL MANHATTAN




By Melissa De Leon Chavez

Photography by  
Craig Wheeler

Welcome, dear guests, to this very exclusive bar. At *Libations For All Occasions*, we look to live up to our name, ensuring top-shelf tips and sips. Nothing but the best for patrons and purveyors of the produce industry. Tonight’s menu is a special one indeed—a signature beverage from a signature figure on both sides of the bar: Anthony Innocenti.

With our proverbial drinks in hand, we sit and mull over the journey to finding the perfect mix. That moment in a bar, restaurant, or some nice hotel, where the craft menu is original, the bartenders are slick, and you first taste that perfect blend that will now forever be your go-to drink. For Anthony, who collects bourbon

when he isn’t innovating ingredients as Managing Partner of LIV Produce, it’s a very specific take on what will now be called Not Your Typical Manhattan.

In a voice echoing, yet countering, James Bond, Anthony deeply implores that you do NOT ever shake a Manhattan. If cocktails are an art, this is one whose colors are stirred for the correct blend. That is a law you can add to Newton’s list, our expert says. From there, getting this libation just right is all about ensuring you find your favorites of each component. This search, Anthony and I both promise, is as wonderful as that memorable first sip. Because the drink that is Not Your Typical Manhattan is all about the journey. Enjoy it. 

### INGREDIENTS

- 3 oz** Colonel E.H. Taylor Bourbon, or your favorite bourbon or rye whiskey
- ¾ oz** Cocchi Storico Sweet Vermouth, or your favorite vermouth
- A chilled Manhattan, martini, or preferred glass
- Bitters, Scrappy’s preferred
- An orange wedge
- All-natural Woodford Reserve Bourbon Cherries
- Ice

**Time:** 5 min  
**Servings:** 1

### DIRECTIONS

1. Chill the glass—Anthony recommends doing so with water and ice before pouring.
2. In a separate mixing glass, add your favorite bourbon (or rye whiskey, but Anthony’s top recommendation is E.H. Taylor Bourbon), your favorite sweet vermouth—per Anthony, he cannot recommend enough Cocchi Sweet Vermouth—and bitters with ice. Stir gently until well-chilled. Do NOT shake.
3. Empty your now-chilled martini or cocktail glass. Squeeze a fresh orange wedge around the rim.
4. Use a strainer to pour the beverage in.
5. Finish with one or two all-natural Woodford Reserve Bourbon Cherries and an orange wedge (if desired).





# A Closer Look at Mann Packing Co. MANN™ Air Fryer Veggie Kit

By Lilian Diep

Air fryers. Whether you love them or hate them (are they really just glorified toaster ovens?), this trade news writer was excited when she got her own. Many a dish has been made, and the next one will be a MANN™ Air Fryer Veggie Kit.

Mann Packing Co. is no stranger to the value-added scene. With an endeavor to meet trends and appeal to shoppers' needs for an easy midweek meal, the company rolled out these simple packages made specifically for the air fryer.

Healthy chicken sauté on the menu? Just pop in the Broccoli with Lemon Herb for a delicious side to adorn the plate. Not your fancy? Cauliflower with Parmesan Peppercorn and Green Beans with Charred Onion and Bacon also grace the product range. The kits are a simple open, pour, and cook, and the veggies will be done before the entrée is. Now that's convenience.

We as consumers can't help but be drawn to versatility, so you know your shoppers will be delighted to hear that the kits also work in the microwave. Be sure to hit their visual senses by stocking all three varieties next to each other for a bigger impact, for once they've tried one, they'll be back to grab two extra bags next time.

Turn impulse into intention, and your shoppers will thank you. 💰



UP  
CLOSE



## ► MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀

### JENNIFER WAGNER SANCHEZ

*Vice President of Marketing, Sun World*

With Anne Allen

The first time I met Jennifer, her warmth and exuberance made a then-green produce professional feel right at home. Since then, her industry knowledge and incredible drive have helped me connect the dots across marketing, innovation, and fresh vision in ways she probably can't even imagine! Naturally, I wanted to know more about what makes this produce maven tick, and she did not disappoint in this list of her favorite things...



- |                |                |                     |
|----------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 1 Sunflowers   | 2 Mexican Food | 3 Spotify           |
| 4 LEGO® Pieces | 5 Drum Lessons | 6 Family            |
| 7 Cooking      | 8 Dogs         | 9 Spontaneous Trips |



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# WTF

## DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Progressive Produce  
Jalapeño Peppers ?



CHOC-LAPEÑO CHIP COOKIES

### INGREDIENTS

**4–5** Progressive Farms Jalapeño Peppers, diced  
**1 cup** olive oil margarine  
**1 cup** brown sugar  
**½ cup** white sugar  
**2 tsp** vanilla extract  
**2** eggs  
**2 ¼ cups** flour  
**1 tsp** baking soda  
**½ tsp** salt  
**2 cups** dark chocolate chips

**Prep Time:** 20 min  
**Cook Time:** 10 min  
**Servings:** 4–6

### DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat the oven to 375° F.
- 2 In a large mixing bowl, cream your margarine, brown sugar, and white sugar. Add vanilla and eggs and beat until the mixture is nice and fluffy.
- 3 Add the flour, baking soda, and salt to the mixture. Stir in the dark chocolate chips and diced jalapeños.
- 4 Drop by teaspoon on an ungreased cookie sheet. To make cleaning up easier, line the sheet with parchment paper.
- 5 Bake for 8–10 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and allow the cookies to cool on a wire rack. Enjoy!

To learn more about Progressive Produce, visit [www.progressiveproduce.com](http://www.progressiveproduce.com)







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