

Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

the SNACK

ISSUE 77 JUNE 2023



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AndNowUKnow and Deli Market News



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SWEET

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TART

Growing Nature's CANDY

Table Grapes by Divine Flavor

What if there was a way to eat candy, but still be healthy? What if this candy was actually a fruit with a tropical, candy-like flavor? Well, this is the world we live in, and it is exactly what is happening with Divine Flavor's candy line of table grapes. All the flavors of gummy bears, grape jelly, and even cotton candy are precisely what the grape company is doing—producing candy-flavored fruit straight from Mother Nature.

It's summertime, and for Divine Flavor, that means table grapes from Sonora, Mexico, are being harvested and sent to retailers across the nation. What started out as a 60-hectare project of table grapes in the early 90s has turned into one of the largest grape growing companies in the industry. Divine Flavor is a family-built and -operated company that specializes in an array of produce items such as bell peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, melons, and, especially, table grapes. The produce company is an avid believer in taking care of its people, which is why it implements the best social programs for all its collaborators. All of the produce it grows is certified non-GMO, grown sustainably, and grown primarily organic. Its founders believe the best way to achieve flavor is in the way it treats the land, but also its people.

How do these grapes taste like candy?

The short answer is experience, passion, and commitment to growing the healthiest grape vines in the right conditions.

Divine Flavor's principal grower, Grupo Alta, alongside a handful of first-class partner growers, are those responsible for producing the brand's specialty, candy-type varieties. Those varieties include Gummyberries™, a red seedless grape whose flavor resembles tropical candy; Jellyberries™, which is a black-purplish grape with flavors closely related to the taste of grape jelly; and, of course the fan favorite, Cotton Candy™, whose flavor tastes like, well...cotton candy.

One might ask, "How do these grapes taste like candy?" The short answer is experience, passion, and commitment to growing the healthiest grape vines in the right conditions. Divine Flavor and its farms have been producing table grapes for more than 30 years. The produce brand works with the best breeding companies across the world, giving it access to exclusive and flavorful "candy" varieties. Its secret to flavor is simple though. Commit to excellent-quality fruits and vegetables and never sacrifice the potential of flavor for any reason. Each bunch of grapes is carefully handcrafted—knowing exactly how many bunches per vine and exactly how many grapes per bunch. It's a grape art form, and this is how Divine Flavor produces the best table grapes in the world.

Expect to see Candy grapes from Divine Flavor in stores now until the later part of July.

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#Experience The Flavor

I RECENTLY BECAME OBSESSED WITH THE CONCEPT AND FRUITION OF CREATIVE SOURCE.

During my time as a writer, I've come across many philosophies articulating this idea of origin as it oscillates between the spiritual and the academic. What is voice? Can it be taught? Where does inspiration and creation come from? Is the excavation of ideas internal or external?

This has been the knife's edge on which I walk as an artist, constantly mesmerized by an inspiring world and also fearful that the source will run dry for me eventually—a restrictive form of thinking that feels archaic but fundamental to my writing history.

This spring, I had the pleasure of reading two texts simultaneously, Rick Rubin's *The Creative Act: A Way of Being*, and Issue 76 of *The Snack*. It's an issue which I had little-to-no interaction with, except to write this letter, as I made my way through maternity leave and the disorientation and rediscovery of what I hold dear, boundless, and finite. And what a gift this series of events has been.

As I read through these *Snack* stories, lines of banter, turns of phrase, poetic license, and technical and creative prowess, I'm reminded that we live the creative life simply by interacting with the world around us—boundless and circular. Fear is only caustic to this idea.

Rick Rubin writes:

"To live as an artist is a way of being in the world. A way of perceiving. A practice of paying attention. Refining our sensitivity to tune in to the more subtle notes. Looking for what draws us in and what pushes us away. Noticing what feeling tones arise and where they lead."

Attuned choice by attuned choice, your entire life is a form of self-expression. You exist as a creative being in a creative universe. A singular work of art."



In many ways, this is a letter to our friends in fresh, but also to our *Snack* creatives who are themselves works of art, creating art.

Watching this issue unfold, I can't help but feel like a kid again, watching the lines in an Etch A Sketch appear seemingly out of nowhere as my mother turned the dials. Watching both the subjects of our stories and the writers themselves unfold on the page reminded me that the way we live our lives is a creative act, and the results of such an effort can become the story, the painting, the sculpture, the song.

What I am trying to materialize on the page is how joy, sensitivity, curiosity, and awareness are not the symptoms of source, but tools to tap its raw material. Stepping away from the page these past few months has allowed me this new perspective—which seems like such a given now—that the source is dependent upon us individually, even as we find inspiration and ideas outside of us, floating in an infinite rhythm.

Maybe it's the relentless lack of sleep that these early days of motherhood have bestowed upon me that leave me uncommonly raw and self-conscious, but I'm acutely aware of how our lives are immediate pathways to source and subject. Story creation is merely the way we journey to reveal the light.

So, friends and colleagues, live your art and let us articulate it.

As Rubin says, "No matter what tools you use to create, the true instrument is you." 🍷

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

DID YOU KNOW?

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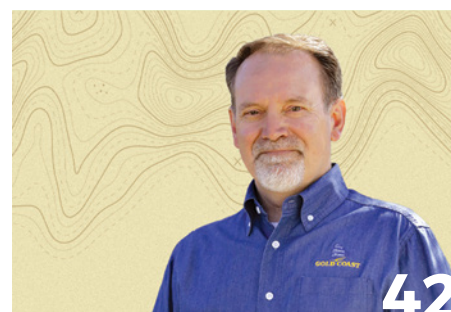
4EARTH FARMS™ THROUGH THE EYES OF A LEADER

Learning from experts like his wife and Co-Founder, Deborah, is just one of the methods David Lake has tempered for success over his decades in produce. Discover the vital characteristics he seeks in others and more...



SAKATA SEED AMERICA A PREMIUM GIFT

Specialty tomatoes isn't a new category for the industry, but it is a specialty the seed breeder takes great pride in. We dive into the makings of an internationally known company and how Bryan Zingel, Iwamoto "Moto" Hiroyuki, and Tyler Hoopes bring Eastern culture to Western palates...



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GWILLIMDALE FARMS INHERITING GREATNESS

Over a century of generational expertise catalyzes the grower's leading legacy, and its success knows no bounds with mother-daughter duo Cristina and Alexa Hamblly at the helm...



EARTHFRESH FRESH TO THE CORE

Jessica Hughes pulls back the curtain on the supplier's newest line of value-added products. Hear how the potato provider is making big moves to take over additional vegetable categories...



LOCAL BOUNTI FINDING INNOVATION IN DEVIATION

When it comes to deviating from the norm, the indoor growing innovator knows a thing or two. Just take it from Brian Cook, who shares how the grower followed the road less traveled to cutting-edge concepts...

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

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Managing Editor
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Cover Design
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SALES

Vice President of Sales
WHIT GREBITUS

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BRIAN LAFORCE
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CRAIG WHEELER

The Snack
2005 Capitol Ave.
Sacramento, CA 95811
United States

DEPARTMENTS

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{ what the fork }



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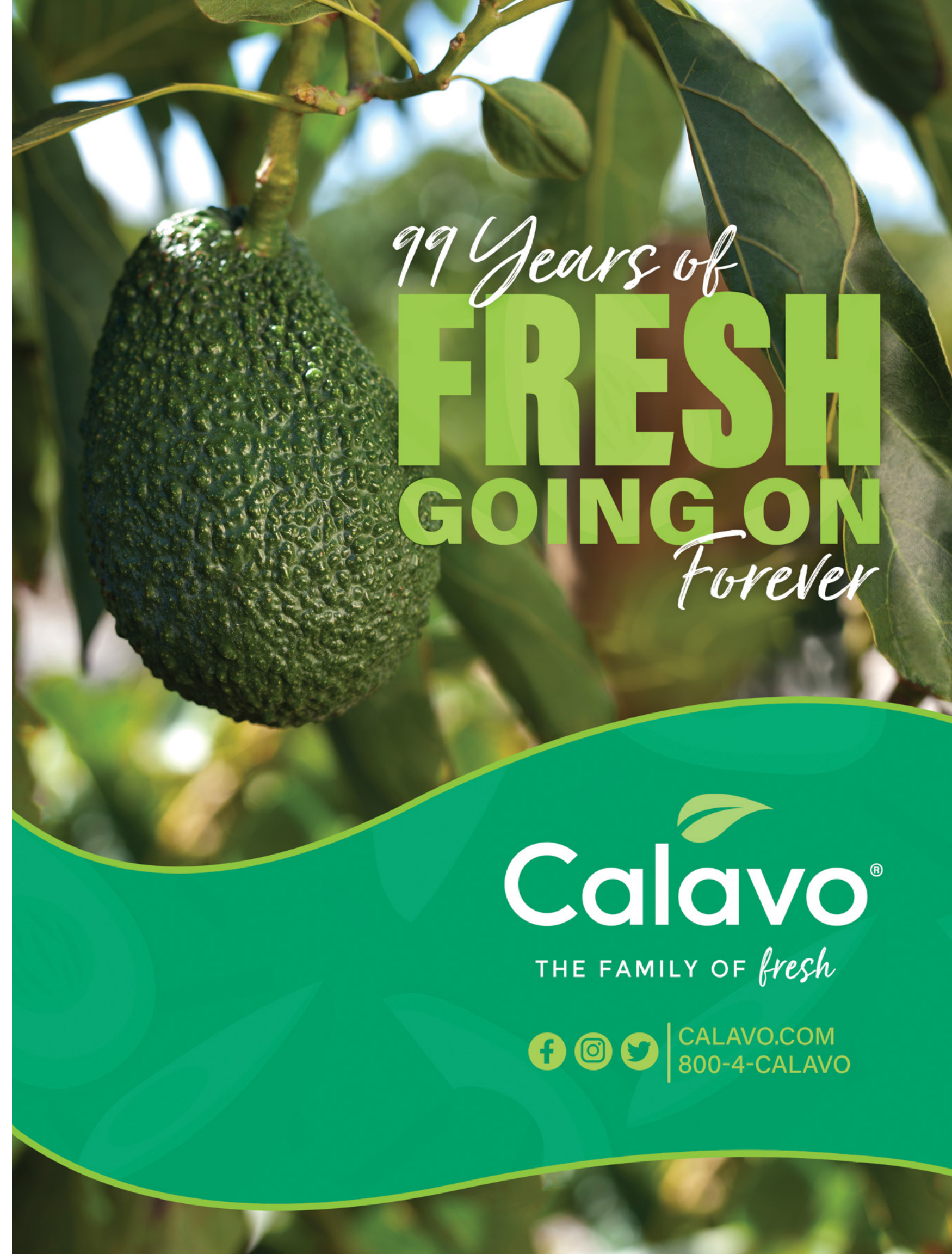
1 lb Bobalu Strawberries, quartered
2 cups cucumbers, chopped
1 small red onion, chopped
8 oz feta cheese, crumbled
1/3 cup fresh mint, minced
3 tbsp olive oil
3 tbsp balsamic vinegar
Dash of sea salt

Prep Time: 20 min
Servings: 1 bowl

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Combine all ingredients except oil, balsamic vinegar, and salt in a large bowl. Mix well.
- 2 In a separate small bowl, mix together olive oil, balsamic vinegar, and salt.
- 3 Pour oil and vinegar mixture over salad and toss. Serve immediately and enjoy!

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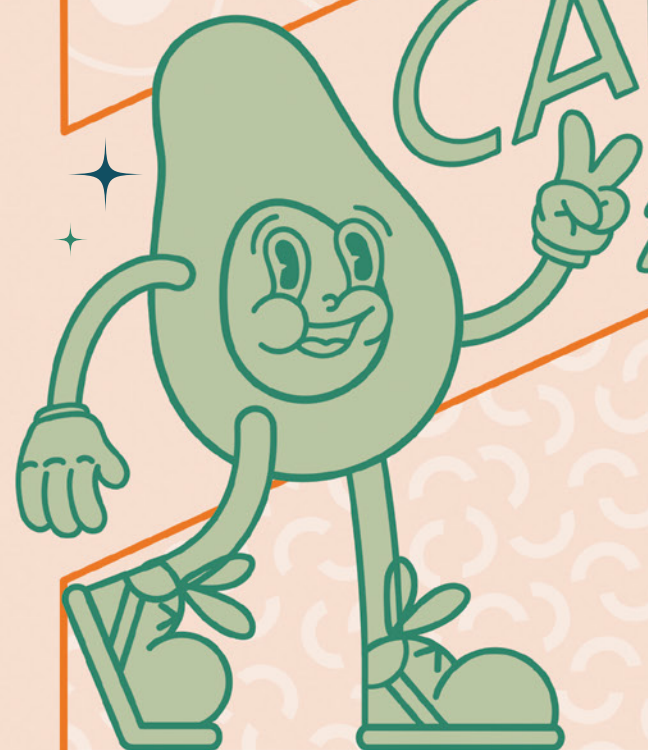
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Green gold, creamy goodness, healthy fat. Avocados have become a shiny representation for Instagram-worthy brunches and snacks, but the humble fruit was in the spotlight long before avocado toast. Whether shoppers are curious to try out the trendy item or they are repeat customers, it can't hurt to enlighten your patrons with bite-sized insights to keep them interested. We dug up some noteworthy facts to keep your aisles fresh this season and ensure your sales match the fiery temperatures outside...

DID YOU KNOW?



CALIFORNIA Avocados

BY LILIAN DIEP

SNAPSHOT

1 The Mother Hass Tree was planted as a seed in La Habra Heights, California, in the late 1920s by postman Rudolph Hass. All Hass avocados in the world can trace their heritage to this one tree that lived for 76 years

2 The Hass is the **most popular** California Avocado accounting for about 95% of crop volume; **Lamb Hass and GEM are the next two most popular varieties**

3 California Avocados are grown by about **3,000 growers** — **ON** — **50,000 acres** throughout Central and Southern California

4 California Avocado Season is usually *from spring through summer*. Peak availability this season is expected to be April through July

5 **70%** of avocado shoppers in the United States say they are somewhat or very willing to pay a slightly higher price for avocados grown in California*

6 Over the past four years, the California season saw an average volume lift of **+7%** compared to when California Avocados weren't available in stores**

7 *June is* **California Avocado Month!**

8 **ALMOST 60%** of consumers believe that a menu item with California Avocados has a somewhat to significantly better value***

9 The California Avocado industry **CREATES MORE THAN 14,510 JOBS** on a full-time equivalent basis as a result of its business activities****

*2022 California Avocado Tracking Study

**IRI California and West Region during the California Season (2019-2022)

***2020 Menu Matters Patron Preference for 'California' and 'California Avocados'

****2020 The Economic Impact of Avocado Growers and Handlers in the State of California

Source | California Avocado Commission

A Closer Look at DelFrescoPure® New Heirloom Tomato Tray

By Chandler James

Good things come in threes. Sure, you've heard this phrase before. But what context am I applying it to here in the pages of our latest issue? None other than the newest Heirloom tomato tray from DelFrescoPure®.

The cardboard tray houses three different Heirloom tomatoes sporting unique sizing, flavor, and color. Like all of DelFrescoPure's packaging, the new tray clearly displays vibrant and clean branding that makes the products found inside that much more appealing.

Doubling down on these highly coveted factors of any good produce packaging, DelFrescoPure's new Heirloom tomato tray is 100 percent recyclable and complete with a clear flow wrap. This eco-friendly differentiation is in line with the grower's continued sustainability goals—a value many consumers hold close to their hearts and wallets.

Display this new packaging prominently near complementary items throughout the grocery store. Shoppers would be remiss to pass up a display with fresh herbs merchandised alongside the

Heirloom tomato pack. Or, take shoppers on a flavor vacation and place the pack beside some Italian pastas and cheeses to let the imagination run wild.

No matter how you slice it, DelFrescoPure's new tomato tray is a hat trick on the shelf and in the kitchen. 🍅

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MENTORS IN THE MAKING

Brianna Shales

BY CHANDLER JAMES

TO GET AHEAD IN LIFE, you have to advocate for yourself. Make the most of every opportunity, because they often come once in a lifetime and could easily change your trajectory for the better.

This is not to say that you should only rely on yourself, or that leaning on others is a weakness. In fact, it is the opposite.

I was reminded of this while speaking with Brianna Shales, Marketing Director of Stemilt. Not only has she been advocating for herself from an early age, but she has allowed others to help her sharpen her skills and reach new heights.

It all began with an internship during her senior year at Washington State University's College of Agriculture and Natural Resource Sciences. Honing her skills as an interviewer and writer, Brianna fell in love with the ag industry. When she decided to move to Wenatchee, Washington, in 2008, the organization connected Brianna with folks in the treefruit sector—Stemilt being one of them.

"I applied, interviewed with the Marketing Director at the time, Roger Pepperl, and received a call that I had the Communications Specialist job one day before I walked in the graduation ceremonies," Brianna told me. "It has been such an amazing experience since then, and I now tell every college kid I come into contact with to do an internship. It was a life-changing choice for me!"

As Brianna put it, Roger was her boss first, then became a mentor and friend. As a former retail buyer and merchandiser, Roger taught her about produce, the finances behind it, the importance of the consumer and point of sale, and all about storytelling.

"When I think of what he taught me, it's more like what didn't he teach

me?" she recalled. "He is a coach first and foremost and would give you all the time in the world to ask questions. He also took it upon himself to bring me along on travel experiences and pushed me into continuing education opportunities."

In late 2020, Roger announced his retirement, and Brianna stepped up to succeed him.

"Now, two full years into this role, I still have a ton to learn. But I am so humbled by the confidence the Stemilt leadership and the amazing team I get to work with have in me," she noted.

On one of the many trips Brianna took with Roger in those early days, she crossed paths with Chris Veillon, now Chief Marketing Officer of Pure Flavor®. These days, the two try to connect every few months to catch up and dive into a certain topic they are both facing, or sometimes Brianna is simply seeking some advice.

"Chris is a natural promoter of other people. He finds the quiet one (ME!) in the crowd and makes it a point to connect with them," Brianna explained. "About a year into my current role, I asked Chris to mentor me. I needed a sounding board who understood marketing, but would also offer honest advice and resources. It's been such a fun experience, and I'm thrilled Chris was willing to take time with me."

See what I mean now? Brianna took fate into her own hands when she asked Chris to be her mentor, and that is not

the last time she did so. Now 15 years into her career, Brianna continues to connect with produce peers in hopes of gaining a better understanding of the industry she calls home.

Enter Vivian Page, Stemilt's Vice President of Human Capital. Vivian is one of Brianna's newer connections, as she recently asked the food and beverage industry expert to be her mentor as well.

"Vivian is a gifted coach. She challenges me and is helping remove paradigms that I have built over 15 years in the industry," Brianna outlined. "She also has a great strategic mind and is super creative. I am looking forward to learning more from her."

Like so many of us in this industry, what Brianna values most about fresh produce is the people. Feeding the world and encouraging healthier habits for future generations is what it's all about for her, and that is something worth being passionate about.

"I'm also finding myself coming into my own as a catalyst for those I



Brianna Shales,
Marketing Director, Stemilt

work with, and others coming up in the industry," Brianna stated. "I'm not a young one anymore (even though I like to think I am), and feel it's important that I pay it forward to others, like many did for me. I want to help people grow and learn."

One thing that struck me about Brianna's telling of her own story is that she is "looking forward to moving farther, faster." With eyes trained steadily on the goal set in front of her, there is nothing standing in the way of Brianna and her greatest potential.

Lucky for us, this is one mentor with plenty of road left ahead of her. 🍏

THE MENTORS
Here is what they have to say about Brianna...



Roger Pepperl,
Retired Industry Marketer

I could tell Brianna was going to be a great addition to Stemilt from her first interview. She was fresh from Washington State University, had a resume, and was prepared for the interview. She came on board as an entry-level Marketing Assistant as I wanted to discover her best skills before narrowing her focus. Her abilities were endless and, initially, her communication skills were put to work. Brianna was never scared of a challenge, and her job constantly evolved to put her skills further to work. I gave Brianna many challenges that she lacked experience in, knowing she would need these various skills to grow and thrive. She never flinched at a challenge. She became an expert at sales data, video, digital marketing, social media, trade shows, new product development, and so much more. Brianna quickly became a great leader with no ego, great kindness, and passion to be in first place. Brianna is a very special person who taught me as much or more than I taught her. I am grateful I had the privilege to work with her and also call her a friend.

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Chris Veillon,
Chief Marketing Officer,
Pure Flavor®

Following in the footsteps of Roger Pepperl is not easy, but Brianna Shales was groomed for it over the last 10 years at Stemilt. She is a savvy, knowledgeable, and engaged strategic marketer who is a people person by nature—the smile says it all! When she's not planning her next apple road show, retail merchandising plan, or trade show, she's off to the soccer field with her boys as a youth coach.

Never afraid to ask questions, we connect bi-monthly via Teams to talk big ideas, the pulse of the industry, and how product and brand marketing is evolving. We ping pong topics back and forth, but what is clear is that Brianna is always listening and thinking about how to create impact and move more product. Brianna is a talented storyteller and is passionate about her role, team, and company. There is no doubt that Brianna has a very bright future ahead in the fresh produce industry; she's out to increase consumption, one apple, pear, or handful of Half Mile High Cherries at a time.



Vivian Page,
Vice President of Human
Capital, Stemilt

In the 18 months I have been working at Stemilt, I have found Brianna to be a person that wants to expand on her knowledge and that takes the steps to do so in a decisive way. Brianna and I have collaborated in various initiatives that allowed me to see that she's structured in her thinking, analytical, and deliberate. Recently, she led the selection of a new PR firm; during the process, I also observed Brianna's professionalism and ability to make an informed decision quickly. I can see Brianna has a lot of potential in becoming a strong leader within the Stemilt community, and, of course, within the community at large if she desires. The most exciting thing I have observed is that Brianna is well regarded by her team and the leadership. She's a trusted contributor, peer, and leader and has the interest of taking her team to a new level. Brianna is vulnerable enough (a quality that many leaders lack) to express with clarity where she thinks she's at when it comes to her career trajectory and, at the same time, she's completely willing to take on a challenge and show that she's here to help Stemilt transform.

SUMMER SHOULD “BEE” SWEET

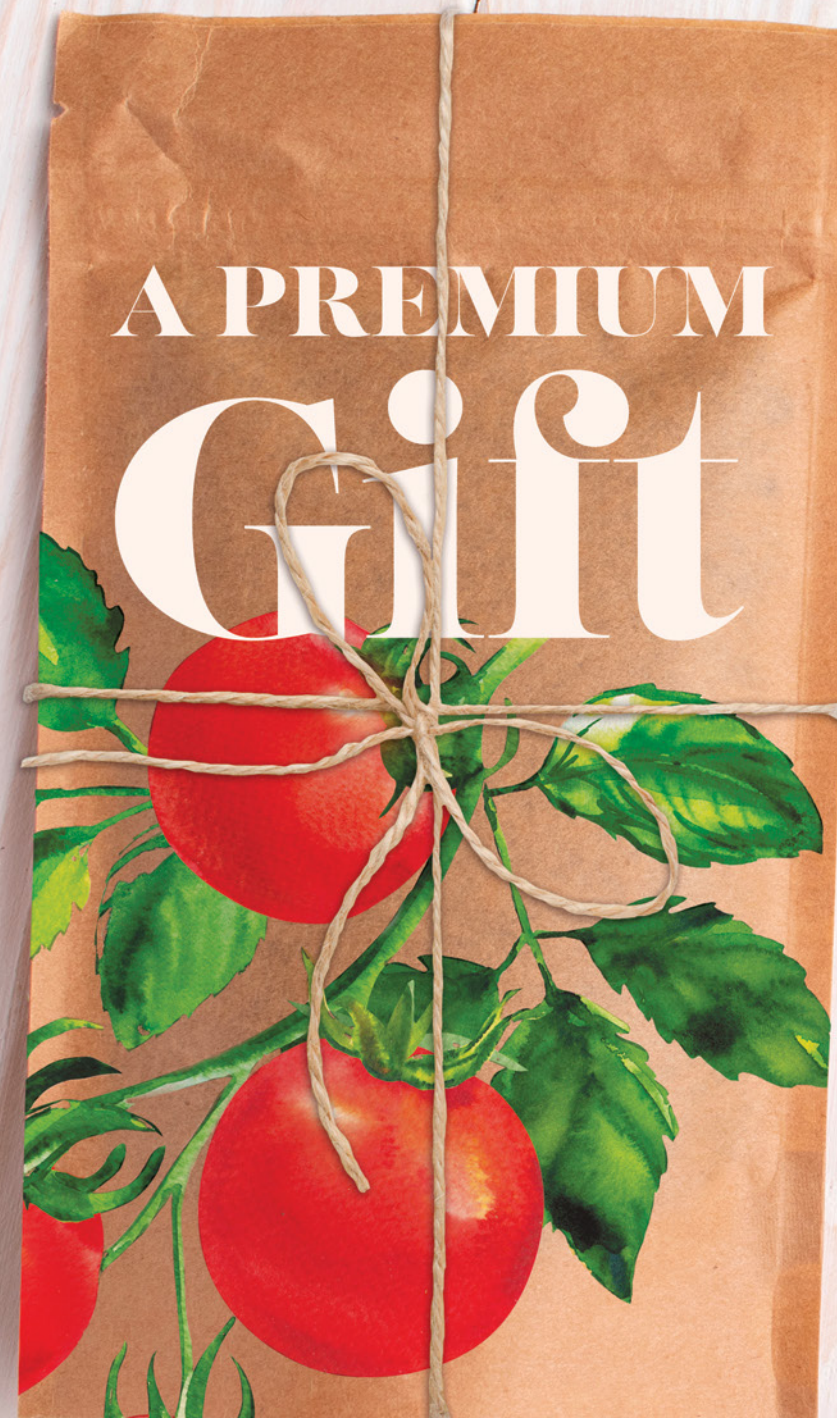
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SAKATA®



By Lilian Diep

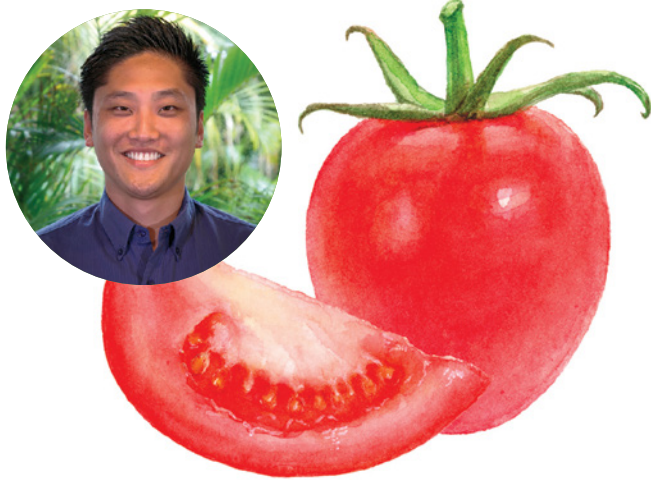
You bite into a perfect tomato and get a burst of flavor unmatched by any other fruit—a culmination of tastes that challenge and delight the palate. It's an experience I imagine people look forward to no matter which country they live in. That sensation I'm talking about is called *umami* (essence of deliciousness), the elusive fifth taste.

Umami comprises salty, sour, sweet, and bitter flavor notes and was discovered as the new fifth flavor on the tongue to give a dish or product a rounded taste. Although only recently recognized in the science world, the word has been in the Japanese lexicon since 1908, deriving from the term *umai* (delicious).

An innovative pioneer of this tasty phenomenon is Sakata Seed Corporation, a company with a long record of experts dedicated to perfecting the delicate balance of flavor and quality of food right from the source—the seed. I can feel this intent when speaking to Sakata's Specialty Tomato Team as they lead me through the company's rich history. While discussing the seed breeder's past and present, I see their eyes are set on its bright future.

Tomatoes are considered one of the most popular crops in the world. When it comes to fresh flavor and taste, each prominent country has great candidates. In our opinion, one of the very best tomatoes hails from Japan.”

IWAMOTO “MOTO” HIROYUKI,
International Sales Manager, Sakata Seed America



“Sakata Seed Corporation began in Yokohama, Japan, in 1913, when Mr. Takeo Sakata founded the company as Sakata Noen. In 1931, our specialty tomato program was introduced with the debut of our first tomato. By 1962, Sakata was well-known for tomatoes that were both flavor-centric and resistant to multiple diseases.”

BRYAN ZINGEL,
Sakata Seed America’s Senior Product Manager for vegetables, tells me. “With a strong foothold in the market with traditional cherry tomatoes, we started

breeding specialty grape shapes in the ‘90s. Through our mission to provide exceptional taste, texture, and color, we now offer a large number of outstanding flavored tomatoes in a full color assortment.”

Sakata’s reputation in the North American market as a leader in tomato flavor began with the introduction of the red grape Sweet Hearts in the early 2000s. Since then, the company has continued to uphold its traditions of seeking out and delivering excellent flavored varieties.

Since Professor Kikunae Ikeda coined the term umami in 1908, this flavor profile quickly became desired and recognized in the specialty tomato market. Former Sakata Seed Corporation President Mr. Hideo Takahashi understood this need, bringing critical knowledge and insight toward achieving the perfect tomato while catering to the Japanese palate.

“Our rich Japanese history makes us a leader in developing varieties where the signature umami flavor, texture, and color are at the forefront. This holistic approach makes for unique and outstanding products in the American market,” Iwamoto “Moto” Hiroyuki, International Sales Manager, shares. “Japanese consumers want beautifully prepared food and dishes with great attention to detail—aesthetically pleasing with exquisite qualities. Expectations of excellence are high because Japanese culture is oriented around taste and presentation. Mr. Takeo Sakata believed that to be the best way to impact consumers; he sought to provide that experience. Tomatoes are considered one of the most popular crops in the world. When it comes to fresh flavor and taste, each prominent country has great candidates. In our opinion, one of the very best tomatoes hails from Japan.”

In order to achieve this desired demand, the product must be premium. Plant

breeding is a painstaking and lengthy process, to which one has to be passionately dedicated to their craft, appreciating the effort that goes in, and eager to please the end consumer—much like a chef. However, this daunting process is no foreign concept to Sakata’s teams.

“We marry our Japanese heritage with passion in our seed breeding programs to bring forth the flavor and aesthetics of a perfectly crafted dish. It sets us apart from the competition as we continue our tireless quest to create the absolute best components of a culinary masterpiece,” Tyler Hoopes, Greenhouse Specialist, chimes in. “The best qualities start with high technology equipments and genetics in order to get the best outcome. One significant component of that formula is high-tech growing environments. Protected culture helps us utilize and control various growing conditions and inputs to improve flavor, yield, and shelf-life in a radical way.”

We marry our Japanese heritage with passion in our seed breeding programs to bring forth the flavor and aesthetics of a perfectly crafted dish. It sets us apart from the competition as we continue our tireless quest to create the absolute best components of a culinary masterpiece.”



TYLER HOOPES,
Greenhouse Specialist, Sakata Seed America

Growers need to yield as much product as possible with the best flavor benchmark, so Sakata strives to provide the highest quality seeds that feature premier Japanese flavor to reach their targets. It’s a delicate balance; each variety still has to have the best taste,

and protected culture makes it easier to achieve this standard.

As Sakata’s reputation continues to grow in North America, so does its portfolio. High-flavored cherry and grape tomatoes come in an array of colors, including Chocostar, Lemonstar, Fonzi’s Pinky, Crimson Star, and Rising Star. An early variety, known as *Osama* (king) tomato, is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. This bountiful program continues to grow as the innovator recently announced a brand-new variety: Murastar.

“Murastar is a striking purple grape tomato that is elite in its class,” Tyler continues. “This is a really special product with a supercharged umami flavor. It is perfect for a medley program or can hold its own easily as a stand-alone item. Shoppers and diners always seek flavor and experience because that makes food more enjoyable, and we strive to provide that!”

Savoring the moment means relishing the present, and that is an umami-filled experience Sakata thrives in providing. It’s no wonder Sakata has become a well-known global entity. The innovative pioneer has a long history of experts dedicated to perfecting that delicate balance, both in its current offerings and new varieties yet to be discovered.

Relishing a premium first bite is an experience Sakata will continue to replicate, both presently and in the bright and colorful future to come. 🍅



HANDLED WITH CARE

Rainier Fruit Company employs a small army of several thousands of people to pick its fruit. They head to the fields each year from the first organic cherry pick in early June to the last Pink Lady harvest in November. Each and every piece of fruit is hand-harvested by dedicated and hard-working individuals who brave early mornings in the elements to help put tasty and nutritious fruit on store shelves and tables.



1 APPLES BY HAND

For some, apple picking is a fun fall-time tradition with the family. For Rainier, it's serious business. Thousands of hands are required to harvest roughly 1 billion apples per season. Though automated picking robots will likely become a viable option in the future, today there's no machine that can truly match the skill and grace of the human touch. Many varieties even require every single stem to be clipped during harvest to avoid punctures in their fragile skin.



2 INDIVIDUALLY PICKED BLUEBERRIES

Though much of the domestic industry utilizes machine harvesters for fresh blueberries, Rainier is an exception as a 100 percent hand-picked blueberry producer. Why go the extra mile? Hand-picking blueberries preserves more of the light blue dusting called bloom, a naturally produced coating that protects the fruit and increases longevity—similar to the wax produced by other fruits. In tandem with using the best genetics available, this produces a tasty, premium pack.



3 SKILLFUL CHERRY TRAINING

Cherry harvest is an early morning sprint to beat the Washington summer heat, which can reach 90° F before 10 a.m. This must be balanced with selecting only properly ripe cherries to keep consumers coming back for more. The most skilled pickers can harvest nearly 1,000 pounds of fruit per day—as long as a stray summer rain shower doesn't shut down the whole operation. Some would call cherry harvest an art, and others would call it a rodeo!



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.

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► MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀

TERI GIBSON

Director of Marketing, Peri & Sons Farms®

With Lilian Diep

To know Teri Gibson is to know tranquility. Every conversation sounds like she's known you your entire life, and you're just catching up again after a short trip away. Her humor is infectious, and her dedication knows no bounds. Teri believes in the art of giving her all to accomplish even the most difficult tasks with grace and a smile. And if you take a peek below, you'll also learn a few tips and tricks to channel your own marketing inspiration...

1

My two girls grew up to be my best friends and confidants. I used to teach them, now I find myself learning!

2

In my experience, there's no better team builder than humor. Not to mention, it feels plain good.

3

"I head to the coast as much as I can."

4

"I'm sure professional chefs would cringe at my knife technique, but I like being spontaneous and creative."

5

Borderline coffeeholic or coffee addict? Not sure, but a fresh, unadulterated hot coffee artfully brewed is steaming goodness.

6

Hardcover, paperback, digital, audio. Love them all.

7

I'm fortunate to have several "forever" friends in my life. That level of intimacy and emotional connection is priceless.

8

When you breathe it all in, it's truly magical and invigorates your soul.

9

"As you sit back and take in nature's immensity, everything else seems trivial and insignificant in comparison."



- | | | |
|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1 Daughters | 2 A Good Laugh | 3 The Ocean |
| 4 Cooking | 5 Coffee | 6 Books |
| 7 Gal Pals | 8 Forest Hikes | 9 Camping |

WTF DO I DO WITH 4Earth Farms™ Rainbow Carrots and Green Beans ?

{ what the fork }



SAUTÉED RAINBOW CARROTS AND GREEN BEANS

INGREDIENTS

12 oz 4Earth Farms™ Rainbow Carrots
12 oz 4Earth Farms Green Beans
2 tbsp olive oil
½ tsp dried oregano
 Kosher salt to taste
 Black pepper to taste

Prep Time: 10 min
Cook Time: 10 min
Servings: 6

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Bring a pan of water to a boil.
- 2 Add carrots and green beans and boil for about 3–5 minutes, or until tender-crisp.
- 3 Remove from heat and drain. Immediately plunge into an ice bath to stop the cooking process.
- 4 In a large pan, heat olive oil over medium heat.
- 5 Add the carrots and green beans. Toss well and sauté for about 2–3 minutes.
- 6 Season with dried oregano, Kosher salt, and black pepper. Serve immediately. Enjoy!



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PACIFIC NORTHWEST

CHEER

RIES

SNACKCHAT

BY JENNA PLASTERER

From sun-kissed gold to deep, rich scarlet, there is no shortage of splendor coming from the cherry orchards of the Pacific Northwest. As consumers begin flocking to the produce department like rockhounds in search of gems, let these category connoisseurs share how to make the hunt rewarding for your bottom line...

DAVID ARMENTA,

SALES MANAGER,
RAINIER FRUIT COMPANY

"Retailers, rejoice! The summer season has nearly arrived, and with it comes the abundant harvest of one of nature's most delicious and nutritious fruits: cherries. These small, juicy, crunchy orbs are packed with vitamins, antioxidants, and anti-inflammatory compounds supporting a healthy lifestyle. But it's not just about the health benefits; cherries are a celebration of the season—a symbol of warm weather and carefree days. From their bright, cheerful color to their sweet, refreshing taste, cherries embody the joy of summertime. Whether snacking on them as a refreshing treat, adding them to favorite recipes, or savoring them in a juicy pie, cherries are versatile and delightful. So, let's raise a glass to cherries, the ultimate summer fruit bringing us all together for a joyous celebration of the season."

CATHERINE GIPE-STEWART,

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, SUPERFRESH GROWERS®

"Cherries are a harbinger for summer pool parties, road trips, and sitting on the porch, competing to see who can spit the cherry pit the farthest. Cherries mean summer is here, from Memorial Day to Labor Day. One of our favorite summer drinks is a Red, White, and Blue Seltzer. We skewer a pitted cherry, a few blueberries, and a star cutout of a pear and put them on top of a glass of our favorite seltzer. Another favorite dish is cherry-swirled brownies. Just pit and halve 1 cup of cherries and mix with 2 tablespoons of cornstarch, then fold them into your favorite brownie recipe. Voilà, you just became the party star!"



ROCHELLE BOHM,

VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, CMI ORCHARDS

"Cherry season is fast and furious, and retailers eagerly anticipate the sweet sales lift each season. With the largest selection of specialty cherries, CMI has more tools than ever to boost sales and give customers new and exciting options to fall in love with. Along with our signature Nature's Candy® Sweet Red and Rainier cherries, CMI offers exceptional varieties, brands, and promotions to dish up new ways to promote cherries and capture incremental sales. Skylar Rae® cherries continue to grow in popularity and demand, delivering a crisp, juicy experience bursting with flavor. For retailers looking to add innovations to the category, CMI's Strawberry cherries stand out with unique, creamy pale flesh and light speckling—deliciously sweet with a hint of strawberry flavor. Our newest program celebrates the largest prized cherries we grow—hand-selected for superior size and sweetness: XXL cherries, available in both Red and Rainier options. CMI's American Dream program is a wonderful way to promote cherries around Independence Day, using patriotic branding tied to a cause. With impactful branding that stands out and CMI's premier varietal selection, brands, and promotional innovations, you'll have all the tools you need to enjoy the fruits of a successful cherry season. Our cherry website offers a one-stop shop for retailers to explore all of our offerings."



MAC RIGGAN,

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, CHELAN FRESH

"This coming cherry season, Chelan Fresh will begin shipping Dark Sweet and Rainier cherries in our new Joyfully Grown™ branded pouch bags. The new branding will be supported with in-store merchandiser bins and targeted social media campaigns. QR codes on the packaging and the merchandisers will allow shoppers to access our story via their cell phones. The Joyfully Grown brand tells the wonderful story of the joy our farming families experience growing great apples, pears, and cherries and resonates well with retailers and consumers."

BRIANNA SHALES,

MARKETING DIRECTOR, STEMILT

"Cherries are the most coveted produce category during the summer months because of their high register ring and ability to drive dollars to the department during peak promotion times like Memorial Day and the Fourth of July. The seasonal fruit is an impulse purchase, so focusing merchandising on prominent display space, fantastic fresh product, and a full lineup of cherry SKUs will help retailers win with cherries. Quality is key when it comes to delighting consumers and driving repeat purchases."



CHUCK ZEUTENHORST,
PRESIDENT, FIRSTFRUITS FARMS

“There’s nothing as sweet as the summer cherry season, which consumers look forward to every year. At FirstFruits Farms, our cherries offer endless possibilities for cooking, baking, and snacking—a concept that should be pulled into the store display to help promote food creativity and exploration. The Dark Sweet and Rainier varieties are not only sweet and delicious, but also hold nutritional value as they are high in fiber and vitamin C. Whether shoppers are searching for a sweet or nutritional treat, we know they are looking for the highest-quality fruit available. In the retail space, these tasty fruits naturally add a pop of contrasting color to the produce section that catches the consumer’s eye and encourages impulse purchases. For storage and handling time tips, visit our website.”



KEVIN MCCARTHY,
SENIOR MARKETING
STRATEGY MANAGER,
HAZEL TECHNOLOGIES

“As a sure sign that summer is on its way, United States shoppers are always excited to see cherries show up on their grocery store shelves. With a surge of domestic supply hitting displays from May to late summer, shoppers have the ability to be choosy about what they put in their cart. When searching for the freshest pouch of cherries, vibrant green stems are often seen as the biggest indicator of quality and driver of a purchase. Thankfully, Hazel Technologies has a solution for cherries that protects their stems from browning, while also reducing the chances of decay and pitting. By using just one Hazel sachet per box, growers can provide the best possible product, while retailers can offer their customers a superior eating experience. This results in higher sales and customer satisfaction all around.”



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NAVIGATING MARKETS



A Q&A WITH ROBB BERTELS,
VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND MARKETING, GOLD COAST PACKING

BY LILIAN DIEP

Cast your eyes up to the vast universe that covers our fields. The expansive sky holds the many mysteries that philosophers have pondered for centuries, whether it's of life, love, or the future. Fast-forward to now, beneath that same sky are thought leaders and initiators looking to make a difference, both in the community and around the world.

For Robb Bertels, Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Gold Coast Packing, those leaders served as his guiding stars as he made his journey throughout the produce and floral industries—and it all started with the stroke of a pen.



**“BROAD EXPOSURE
CONNECTED ME TO
MANY INTERESTING
PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES,
AND VERY FEW DAYS
GO BY WITHOUT THE
OPPORTUNITY TO
LEARN SOMETHING
NEW.”**



ROBB BERTELS,
VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND MARKETING,
GOLD COAST PACKING



LILIAN DIEP: Robb, you started your career straight out of the University of Kansas with your Journalism degree. From one journalist to another, has the floral and produce industry always called out to you?

ROBB BERTELS, VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND MARKETING, GOLD COAST PACKING: My first job out of college was in trade news media. I began selling advertising for a floral magazine for about a year before I was recruited to Salinas, California, to handle advertising sales at another trade publication; I've been around produce for most of my career.

LD: Since your entry into produce over 30 years ago, what has kept your interest in this industry?

RB: I used to say my knowledge of produce was a mile wide but only an inch deep. Produce isn't just one industry: it is seeds, soil, water, and farming; processing and distribution; packaging and transportation; and wholesale, retail, and foodservice. Each segment and each commodity has its own unique personality and challenges that are infinitely fascinating. Broad exposure connected me to many interesting people and businesses, and very few days go by without the opportunity to learn something new.

LD: Staying on that trajectory, you've continued to grow your mastery in sales and marketing. Why do you think this field plays an important role in expanding the reach of fresh produce?

RB: One of my first mentors at *The Packer*, Bill Coon, used to say, “Sell the sizzle, not the steak.” Slightly ironic for a produce publication, but the point is valid: Everyone knows produce is good for them (the steak), so sales and marketing's main priority is to tell the story behind the product (the sizzle).

Some consumers are focused on learning the story behind their food, which includes the farmers, how it's grown, if it's sustainable, and how it got to their plate. But most shoppers are interested in how good the product tastes, how to use it, and whether it is net positive for Mother Earth.

Consistency is key. The real trick sales and marketing departments have to master is weaving that message through the full production system until they hit home—all while maintaining the personality and identity of both the product and company.



“THERE ARE SO MANY FACETS TO THIS BUSINESS; EMBRACE LEARNING SOMETHING EVERY DAY, AND YOU WILL BE SUCCESSFUL. THERE IS NO WAY TO KNOW IT ALL, SO WELCOME THE JOURNEY AND BE OPEN TO THE POSSIBILITIES.”

LD: I'm sure you've met a lot of leaders who have left an impression on you, whether it's through life skills or career development. What are some techniques or advice that keep your gaze focused?

RB: When things get hectic and challenging, it's easy to overreact. I try to keep a calm demeanor and approach things analytically to find solutions that solve problems. From time to time, I also take a page out of my old mentors' and friends' playbooks.

I might over-analyze at times. But sometimes, it's just best to “rip that Band-Aid® off” and face the pain and move on (Justin Davis, Director of Sales and Marketing, Sakata Seed America). At other times, it's best not to react until absolutely necessary (Ross Wileman, retired Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Mission Produce). Figuring out what to do and when to do it comes from listening far more than talking (Bill O'Neill, retired Vice President and Publishing Director, *The Packer Publications*), and reading the situation and setting a course of action (Steve Barnard, Chief Executive Officer, Mission Produce). Basically, trial and error seasoned with experience (Gary English, National Accounts Manager, *The Packer Publications*).

And spreadsheets. I love a good spreadsheet.

LD: Spoken like a true sales guy! With so much foundation and advice to build on, what are some key nuggets of wisdom you would like to pass on?

RB: “Be curious, not judgmental.” A quote from *Ted Lasso* I resonate with.

You should always be open to learning by listening, exploring, and being interested. There are so many facets to this business; embrace learning something every day, and you will be successful. There is no way to know it all, so welcome the journey and be open to the possibilities.

With his own quill poised, a map laid out, and the industry's hand on his shoulder, it's no wonder that this VP already has a firm grasp of navigating his own space in the industry. For if we all look up at those stars, we see plenty of inspiration to draw from and fields of green to rush through. And Robb still has the wide-eyed wonder to keep exploring. 🍄

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WTF DO I DO WITH Red Sun Farms™ Tomatoes and Peppers ?

{ what the fork }



FRIED TOFU WITH MANGO SALAD AND RICE

INGREDIENTS

MANGO SALAD

½ **cup** Red Sun Farms™ Cherry Tomatoes, quartered
 ½ Red Sun Farms Red Pepper, diced
 ½ Red Sun Farms Orange Pepper, diced
 ¼ **cup** small red onion, diced
 1 **medium** mango, diced
 ¼ **cup** chopped cilantro
 2 **tbsp** sesame oil

ENTRÉE

14 **oz** firm tofu
 ¼ **cup** cornstarch

½ **cup** vegetable oil
 Chopped scallions, for garnish
 Sesame seeds, for garnish
 Rice, cooked

SAUCE

¼ **cup** soy sauce (low sodium if available)
 ¼ **cup** water
 2 **tsp** honey
 1 **tsp** minced garlic
 ½ **tsp** rice wine vinegar
 1 **tbsp** cornstarch

Prep Time: 25 min
Cook Time: 10 min
Servings: 2



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

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Drain tofu and squeeze out excess liquid by placing it between two plates with some weight on it; a cast iron pan will work fine. Let sit until most liquid has drained.
- 2 Cut tofu into cubes approximately ¾" in width. Toss with cornstarch.
- 3 Preheat pan on stovetop to medium-high heat and coat bottom with ⅛" oil.
- 4 Place tofu into pan with hot oil, but do not crowd the pan. Cook for 2–4 minutes on each side or until the tofu has a golden crust on each side.
- 5 Combine sauce ingredients. Once tofu is cooked, add sauce and gently toss until it is warmed through, about 2 minutes.
- 6 Remove and add scallions and sesame seeds.
- 7 For the mango salad, mix ingredients together gently and season with salt and pepper.
- 8 Serve with your favorite rice and mango salad. Enjoy!



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- Jim McGuire, Executive Vice President



We're always looking for great people



Optimizing Change

By Anne Allen



The world of agriculture can certainly be unpredictable. Ask any producer in this sector, and they'll be wont to agree. Despite the challenges—or perhaps due to—resilience is a key aspect seen and felt throughout the produce industry.

Dole plc is a testimony to this. What began as an entrepreneurial enterprise has grown into a business that moves the needle on progress, embracing new technologies, introducing revolutionary new varieties to market, and even developing its own fleet.

On this journey of innovation, Dole has made a clear commitment to changing the world for the better. As the industry faces uncertainties in the wake of large-scale climate change, the grower acts as a guiding light.

A beacon toward which advancement moves.



“Dole’s evolution as a grower and distributor of tropical fruits took the company into rural, more isolated locations with limited infrastructure. Growing our business in these areas presented both a necessity and an opportunity to do much more than planting and picking fruit,” begins **Xavier Roussel, Chief Marketing and Sustainability Officer**. “It meant our presence could make a big difference to local economies and that we could make an even bigger difference by directly supporting employees’ and communities’ health, education, and other needs. Going beyond the normal expectations became an integral part of Dole’s way of doing business. That continues to define how we go about our work today.”

This quite literally translates into The Dole Way, a firm commitment to provide safe, high-quality fresh produce that’s good for people, for nature, and for food.

“It paves the way for further improvements in areas where we believe we can make the biggest positive impacts,” Xavier adds.

These impacts stretch across the globe. Employing a staggering 38,500 people, Dole plc is committed to being an employer of choice, supporting local communities and protecting human rights across its supply chains. By committing to the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi), the company places climate action at the forefront of its priorities, along with water stewardship, biodiversity, waste management, and packaging reduction and innovation.

“One of our key environmental challenges is climate change. This includes carbon reduction, water availability, and loss of biodiversity. The world is currently on a path toward significant global warming, and to maintain a safe operating space for society and business, general scientific community consensus is that we must limit it to 1.5° Celsius, in line with the Paris Agreement,” remarks **Laura Bagnasco, Corporate Sustainability Analyst**, before breaking down the potential effects of global warming on ag operations. “Global warming will cause more frequent extremes like temperatures, precipitation and flooding, stronger hurricanes, agriculture droughts, and sea-level rise.”



Most, if not all, of these phenomena will impact our industry. When speaking to Xavier and Laura, it’s obvious they understand the responsibility and role that companies can play in working to prevent this.

“Although already robust, we are continually placing more attention and efforts on reducing impacts within our own operations and those over which we have influence,” Xavier notes with vigor. “We invest in renewable energy projects, we are modernizing our shipping fleet, and investing in research and innovation for new farming techniques.”

Dole already achieved a 4 percent reduction in carbon emissions for 2021 over 2020 in scopes 1 and 2 due to its investment in new and more efficient vessels to transport produce from Latin America to the United States Gulf Coast.

“Our two newest vessels, Dole Maya and Dole Aztec, use the latest in sustainable technology, including hydrodynamic efficient hulls and best-in-class main and auxiliary engines. These ships utilize exhaust scrubbing technology, reducing sulfur oxide emissions, and the propulsion and power plant engines are all certified TIER III compliant,” Laura explains. “We have also been replacing our fleet of refrigerated containers, which reduce energy usage and leakage of refrigerants resulting in a decrease in greenhouse gas emissions.”

Wherever it operates, Dole is enacting change. From its wind turbines in Soledad, California, to its fresh water initiatives in Colombia and Ecuador, one thing is certain: If there’s a better way to do something, Dole will explore it.

“In our Fresh Vegetables division, two GE 2.8 Megawatt wind turbines were installed at our Soledad salad processing plant. Both turbines are projected to produce over 19 million kWh of clean electricity and reduce carbon emissions by an estimated 14,000 tons per year,” Laura lays out. “At our Belfast site in the United Kingdom, we installed a new solar panel energy system with a capacity of 120 kWp that will generate 20 percent of the site’s annual requirements, reducing grid reliance and reducing carbon emissions by an estimated 30,000 kt per year.”

Dole’s new developments in improving water management continues to make steady progress.

“We are proud to be a member of the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) as we invest in the responsible management of water. In total, 20 farms have been recognized for their sustainable water management practices across Colombia and Ecuador, including Dole-owned and Dole independent producers,” Xavier says. “AWS certification is widely respected and includes a legal framework, promoting best practices around optimization, discharge and sanitation

of water, and encouragement of collaboration with others that address needs and challenges within the watershed.”

Continuous agricultural science and technology innovations help growers increase yields and produce fruits and vegetables more efficiently, and these revelatory ways of approaching ag are often better for the planet and for society.

“Not the least of which can mean using less water, energy, and land to produce nutritious food to help feed the world’s growing population,” Xavier affirms.

Facing a rapidly changing Earth is daunting, to say the least. As the company looks toward the future, it has outlined several goals across nature, people, and food.

“Going **BEYOND** the normal expectations became an integral part of Dole [plc’s] way of doing business. That continues to define how we go about our work today.”

- **Xavier Roussel, Chief Marketing and Sustainability Officer, Dole plc**

For “Nature’s Health,” Dole is committed to setting near- and long-term company-wide emission reductions in line with Science Based Targets. By 2030, the company intends to reduce water usage by 10 percent in high-risk areas on all Dole-owned farms, and make 100 percent of Dole packaging across divisions recyclable or compostable by 2025.

For “An Equitable Future,” Dole continues to track and publicly report diversity, equity, and inclusion metrics across the company. In Dole Latin America operations, the company hopes to significantly reduce poverty in households by 2030 and impact at least 20,000 people by 2040.

For “A Healthier World,” Dole commits to donating 2,500 tons of fresh fruit and vegetables to communities by 2025, as well as implement a social standard in 90 percent of Dole’s fruit and vegetable suppliers from high-risk countries. By 2030, Dole aims to implement technology such as blockchain product tagging or other advanced solutions.



“
Change can only
happen if it happens
at the system level. It’s
not dependent on one
company; it takes an
entire supply chain
to change. It can
only be achieved by
PARTNERSHIP.”

- Xavier Roussel

“Dole’s mission is to make the world a healthier place. This promise encompasses both our environment and the communities we serve. We are committed to a healthy lifestyle through nutrition education as well as inspiring and encouraging people to adopt a healthier diet to include more fresh fruit and vegetables,” Xavier expresses, touching on another key aspect of the company’s ongoing efforts.

In 2022, Dole renewed its national partnership with Share our Strength’s *No Kid Hungry* campaign to help end childhood hunger in America. This partnership delivered donations to cities as well as nutrition education, wellness events, and retail initiatives to ensure all children have access to three healthy meals a day. Dole is also the presenting sponsor of a series of livestream wellness and fitness sessions called Get Fit, which helps raise funds to provide healthy food to children.

Some within the industry may wonder: Why? Where’s the return on investment? To which Xavier’s response is simple.

“There is a misconception that investing in these efforts negatively impacts the bottom line. We have found the opposite to be true. These changes make our business stronger. Data shows consumers care about sustainability and reward companies who share similar values. Consumers want transparency,” he asserts.

Dole is committed to action, but it can’t change the future alone.

“Change can only happen if it happens at the system level,” concludes Xavier. “It’s not dependent on one company; it takes an entire supply chain to change. It can only be achieved by partnership.”

Our industry is faced with great challenges. To make light of this fact would do an injustice to the thousands who have dedicated their lives to ensuring that, a hundred years from now, the world will be a better place.

To be optimistic is to change, and in the case of Dole, it’s to change things for the better. 🍒



100

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CERRY CRAFTSMANSHIP



100 years. 100% cherries.

We’ve dedicated a century to producing the best-tasting, most beautiful cherries in the world in a special spot perched on the banks of the Columbia River. It’s been a labor of love for four generations in The Dalles, Oregon—working, learning, and growing together while staying true to our art has enabled us to become “100% cherries” at Orchard View—steadfast in our pursuit of the perfect cherry.

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California TABLE GRAPES SNAPSHOT



BY JENNA PLASTERER

In the produce aisle, the sight of table grapes alone activates shoppers' imaginations. Whether picturing themselves luxuriating with a refined charcuterie board or sharing smiles with their families over a bowl of colorful berries on a warm spring day, the beauty of the category lies in its versatility. Find out how you can tap into the wonders of the vine in-store by broadening your Golden State table grape knowledge...



80+ Varieties

Research indicates consuming grapes may increase resistance to sunburn and decrease markers of UV damage in skin cells as well as contribute to immune, brain, colon, and eye health, making grapes from California the ultimate healthy snack for any season.

330+

There are more than 330 growing operations in California that not only provide healthy and delicious table grapes for shoppers around the world, but also support the lives of families who work there, as well as the communities in which they operate.

49%

49% of table grape consumers said they plan to purchase before going to the store. 21% said they bought grapes on impulse.

40%

40% of table grape shoppers said they purchased grapes at least once per week or more in the past three months.



¹ COACHELLA VALLEY

The California table grape season begins in late spring when the first grapes are harvested in the Coachella Valley

Average Days of Sun Annually

350

Average Annual Temperature

81°

² SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

In the San Joaquin Valley, the California table grape harvest starts in late June or early July

Average Days of Sun Annually

270

Average Annual Temperature

70°

Fresh Grapes from California Availability



MENTORS IN THE MAKING

Matt Quiring

BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ

AS MATT QUIRING RECENTLY TOLD ME, it's easy for a person who is passionate about what they do to bring someone under their wing. Those who are doing things for the right reasons are easy to follow.

"I knew I wanted to be part of my dad's business in high school," Matt says confidently. Now Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Nature Fresh Farms, he recalls watching Peter Quiring hard at work. "He has a really strong work ethic I've always been inspired by. We were raised on humble beginnings, and I think that is what led me to follow in his footsteps—watching him grow something from nothing into a rising empire. He's done a great job dedicating himself, and it's been inspiring to watch."

What Matt would do within the expanding business remained undetermined until Pete challenged him to launch a completely new aspect of what is now Nature Fresh Farms.

"The sales and marketing side was born on something of a whim," Matt shares to my amazement. "I was running the packing line one day and my dad called me. He said he was tired of not getting the right feedback from an outside marketer. 'Here are 10 numbers, call everyone on this list, and sell everything you can.' I was 19 years old, we had 67 acres of product, and I had literally no experience."

Ten numbers and the guts to say yes. That's how the now-thriving sales and marketing division of Nature Fresh began.

"A mentor is someone who leads by example and is easy to rally behind. Somebody with the right mindset and characteristics to inspire a team and move things forward, which I saw in my dad even before I was working for him. Witnessing the effort he put in every day was easy to get behind," Matt recalls. "He's had to teach me some lessons

along the way. I've been fired by my dad, which was hard but a good experience. I learned my job wasn't there because I was my dad's son. In fact, I should work harder because I share his name and earn people's trust by working my way up."

It's a trait Matt admires in Pete and other mentors he would come to know—seeing potential and pushing someone off the deep end.

"Sink or swim, you figure it out!" Matt assures me. He was far from sinking when our own paths first crossed in 2015, thanks in no small part to a pair of coaches who knew the waters quite well: Jay Colasanti and Ray Wowryk.

"When we met, I was just starting to get my feet wet in sales working under Jay," Matt remembers of the past Owner and President of Red Zoo USA. "Jay is somebody I owe a lot of my career to—he knew the industry and everybody in it, had his own marketing company, and was responsible for bringing the mini cucumber to the North American market."

Quite the resume in a role model!

"Jay was and still is a master trader. He understands what it means to be fair and held accountable for your decisions. Lessons I still follow every day—build partnerships and relationships that go beyond transactional, follow up, be on task, think creatively—are ones I learned from Jay Colasanti," Matt says.

With so much experience already under his belt, I found myself wondering at the pitch that brought Jay on board.

"Jay loves to share—something I think resonates with any mentor," Matt answers. "He previously brought a company up from nothing and took the opportunity for a second kick at doing that for a new business. A mentor has a passion they want to share, to see things improve, and Jay is one of those people."

That same fire can be found in Ray Wowryk, Nature Fresh's Director of Business Development, who also brought multiple careers' worth of knowledge to the fledgling marketing and sales operation.

"Ray has never lived within our town—he is actually across the country—but you would never know that. He is as dialed in as the person sitting next to my desk. It's a different level of passion that was always inspiring," Matt tells me.

Ray came in as a consultant and remains in that capacity for Nature Fresh because to do so gives him joy. How can one not want to follow such a lifestyle?

"He really has taken initiative helping to bring me up, and many others. He's a mentor with Passion



Matt Quiring,
Senior Vice President
of Sales and Marketing,
Nature Fresh Farms

for Produce within the Canadian Produce Marketing Association. He works with various boards across North America. I think Ray is inspired by bringing the next generation up. He's guided me, pushing me into different areas of both comfort and discomfort...he just doesn't ever quit," Matt observes. "Ray is a gentleman that loves, lives, and breathes this industry. He says when he stops having fun is when he'll hang it up."

Which is a perfect way to sum up Matt's own experience with mentorship, and what he hopes to pass on to those that might follow him: "It's simple to get behind something you love. Doing things for the right reasons makes it easy to do well at them. Each person I consider my mentor does well because they love what they do."

A mindset I see many willing to follow as this mentor in the making spreads his own wings.

THE MENTORS
Here is what they have to say about Matt...



Peter Quiring,
Founder and Owner,
Nature Fresh Farms

Someone who wants to be better and learn a lot would have much to benefit from Matt. He's got patience at the same time as passion—patience for the industry and people working in it, more so than me, I'd say.

We have been close since he was born, really, and he has always been the kind of guy that would jump in with both feet. He has a real breadth of knowledge, including terminal market, wholesale, and retail. There are not very many who have had the opportunity to be taught by various seasoned members of the industry, and not all who are as willing to learn as Matt is. Even today, when Matt doesn't know he doesn't pretend to know. He puts the effort into learning, and I think that's a really big part of his success. I taught him what I could, but it's gone beyond that with many others and it has served him well. If you have a passion for this industry and the people in it, if you're willing to learn, you'd benefit greatly working with Matt.

POWERED BY JOE PRODUCE



Jay Colasanti,
Past Owner and President,
Red Zoo USA

I really appreciate that Matt has suggested myself as a mentor to his success. Matt was fresh out of school and very impressionable when I was brought in to bestow education and my past experience to the new marketing arm of Nature Fresh Farms. Perhaps because it was a family business, or because he had a natural passion for this new part of it, Matt brought a fresh energy to the sales office.

The first and most important lesson I preached to all on the sales team was the need for respect for every type of customer, and to understand the values each kind brings to the company. We often discussed what the values were of the terminal vendors as compared to foodservice vendors, as compared to large retailers. Every distributor that purchases products we are growing is important—we must learn how to communicate with them and manage supply with each, when it is in abundance as well as short. Don't get beat up by the customer, and do not beat them up. You need to partner, work with, and communicate with your customer. The other most important item to deal with is collecting money. The produce business is built on trust, but not blind trust. Use the credit directories that have been around for 100-plus years to keep your sales with customers that perform well, with good credit ratings.

I know that Matt will succeed with fresh produce sales management as he truly understands this business.



Ray Wowryk,
Director of Business
Development,
Nature Fresh Farms

Mentorship is about jumping on the journey side by side with someone, helping them set their sights, so to speak. I was brought into the organization to encourage new business with retailers across Canada and throughout the USA, and Matt was new to that side of business. We are opposites in many ways and challenge each other. In those moments it's very important to understand the other individual. To give them that space to either show why they see things that way or to make their own way and learn over the process. Matt has been a very good student in that way, and in helping me with what I'm not seeing. I think a mentee needs to teach the mentor as well.

Matt is constantly wanting to learn and do better. One way he has set himself up for greater success in years to come is his growing interest in participating in committees and with leaders in our industry—a great way for personal development while helping provide more healthy opportunities for consumer access to fruits and vegetables. I've had a great experience with Matt and the team as a whole since I started with Nature Fresh.

A Closer Look at The Little Potato Company's Packaging Rebrand

By Peggy Packer

I still remember the first time I laid eyes on The Little Potato Company's new branding and packaging. Both modern and colorful, the features of the bag have a unique pull on consumers—and I am confident no potato lover could walk past this inviting little offering.

Creatively designed to inspire shoppers to celebrate the little moments with their loved ones, this strategic launch embraces convenience and connection by offering a quick and healthy meal solution that allows consumers to

minimize prep and maximize time at the dinner table with family and friends.

How does The Little Potato Company achieve this, you ask? With the power of Little Potatoes!

A cute and carefree tater graces this bag of Little Yellows™, providing heartfelt inspiration to "Enjoy the little things." Even the busiest of shoppers will be drawn in by these friendly faces paired with playful color palettes and

a window view of the high-quality potatoes found inside.

Such lovable features are also driving traffic to the rest of the supplier's bagged potato lineup, as well as its microwave-ready and roast or grill-ready kits, which are accompanied by a flavorful seasoning pack.

This brilliant rebrand is maximizing the category's potential with a playfully positive strategy. After all, what's more approachable than an adorable Little Potato? 🥔

UP
CLOSE



FAMILY,
QUALITY,
SUSTAINABILITY



WTF DO I DO WITH Calavo Avocados ?

{ what the fork }



AVOCADO EGG BAKE

INGREDIENTS

1 Calavo Avocado, sliced in half
 2 large eggs
 ½ tsp red pepper chili flakes
 ½ tsp poppy seeds
 ½ tsp dried basil leaves
 Sprinkle of sea salt to taste

Prep Time: 5 min
Cook Time: 15 min
Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 450° F.
- 2 Place avocado halves on sheet tray and crack an egg in each half.
- 3 Bake for 15 minutes until desired doneness.
- 4 Top each half with seasonings and serve. Enjoy!

To learn more about Calavo,
 visit www.calavo.com

Calavo[®]
 THE FAMILY OF fresh



Happy
**NATIONAL
 PINEAPPLE DAY!**
June 27th

Dole has *Loads Of Recipes* and fresh usage ideas to celebrate—whether fresh from the farm, on the grill, or in a beverage.



Talk to your *Dole Pineapple* sales rep to see how we can help your pineapple program.

Scan For Recipes



INHERITING GREATNESS

BY PEGGY PACKER

My parents taught me how to overcome heartbreak. My dad taught me how to drive a car. My mom taught me a chili recipe so delicious that it used to have all of my friends lined up outside the forest-green front door of my childhood home, waiting promptly with a bowl and spoon in hand.

As a typically permanent fixture in our lives, it can often be easy to overlook the many contributions our parents make to our happiness, personal triumphs, and overall livelihood.

I believe there are some things only a mother or father can accomplish. Certain lessons only a parent can teach.

Alexa Hambly's parents—while teaching the value of work ethic, how to overcome adversity, and the importance of caring for others—gifted their daughter with the blueprint for leading a vertically integrated grower-packer-shipper operation spanning a variety of popular produce categories.

“Our vision is to leave a legacy of always providing high-quality products, giving back to our community, and being innovative within the industry,” says Cristina Hambly, General Manager, Owner, and the matriarch behind the highly regarded Gwillimdale Farms name. “Gwillimdale Farms has generational knowledge, meaning fundamental and critical expertise in the farming industry is continuously being passed down to the next generation. This adds a competitive edge for our company and fosters greater passion, care, and sustainability across our operation.”

This operation Cristina speaks of includes a series of year-round fresh produce programs that provide the supplier's retail partners with superior-quality carrots, potatoes, onions, parsnips, and beets. The legacy began as a dairy farm operating under the watch of Jack Hambly, before John Hambly, current Owner and fourth-generation farmer, planted the first root vegetables in 1995.

The Ontario, Canada-based supplier is owned and operated by the dynamic duo that is Cristina and John, two supply-side aces that have led the company to become one of the region's largest grower-packer-shippers of fresh root vegetables. Building on this powerful legacy, their children have happily joined the effort as fifth-generation farmers, backed by all of the other members who make up the strong Gwillimdale Farms team.

“Our main farm operation is based in Bradford, just north of Toronto, and is located on over 2,000 acres of land. We have also recently expanded to New Liskeard in Northern Ontario,” Alexa, Business Operations Manager, explains. Immediately, it becomes obvious that she has the same undeniable penchant for produce as both of her parents. “This robust growing acreage is supported by three cutting-edge packing lines, a fleet of Gwillimdale Farms-owned transport trucks to optimize delivery, and our passionate team of exceptional produce experts.”

Gwillimdale Farms' onions, carrots, potatoes, parsnips, and beets are harvested sustainably at its farms before being cleaned and packed in one of its state-of-the-art facilities and then shipped directly to stores. By investing in the full supply chain, Gwillimdale Farms is able to ensure consistent, premium-quality offerings in each of these categories, even amid industry hurdles like inflation, rising production costs, transportation challenges, and more.

“

2020 created a challenge that we took as an opportunity to improve our facilities for our employees for generations to come.”



CRISTINA HAMBLY,
General Manager and Owner,
Gwillimdale Farms



The Gwillimdale Farms legacy is now upheld by current Owner and fourth-generation farmer John Hambly, his wife Cristina, and their three children, who have joined the effort as fifth-generation farmers



Not to be taken lightly, the producer’s ceaseless momentum in the vegetable space is also guided by generations of knowledge and experience that spread from its deeply ingrained roots to each and every branch of the family tree.

With these formidable family ties and end-to-end control over its product portfolio, Gwillimdale Farms brings quite a few coveted perks to its partners. One of the advantages the longstanding, generational grower gains from being vertically integrated is its ability to tailor each of these programs to meet the varying needs of its different retail allies—an aspect Alexa fills me in on with enthusiasm.

“Being a grower-packer-shipper allows us to have control of our product from seed to distribution, therefore guaranteeing high quality, consistency, and reliability,” the fifth-generation leader shares with me. “Beyond that, we are continuously committed to aligning with our partners to elevate root vegetables with promotional support and creative retail strategies.”

Alexa goes on, outlining how the provider seeks various strategic improvements to ensure growth is always on the horizon.

“At Gwillimdale Farms, we are constantly working to improve our business and our programs,” she says. “This includes investing in innovative technologies that promote program growth, such as diverting food waste and developing environmentally friendly packaging.”

One demonstration of these continuous investments is the recent expansion of Gwillimdale Farms’ carrot and potato lines, in addition to the introduction of new facilities for its employees.

The Hambly family truly cares about their team, which is a key aspect of the Gwillimdale Difference.

“2020 created a challenge that we took as an opportunity to improve our facilities for our employees for generations to come,” Cristina tells me, perfectly exemplifying the principles her daughter so proudly highlighted just moments before. Along with innovation and sustainability, Gwillimdale Farms inherently values unity and excellence. “Our goal with these expansions is to increase our productivity, packaging capacity, and efficiency. This operational growth also grants us greater consistency with consumer packaging, as well as more specialized potatoes like reds, whites, and Fingerlings.”

Boosting its advantage in having control of the quality of its product from seed to shelf, Gwillimdale Farms is also backed by a large land base spanning several growing regions. With the help of its supply-side partners, the family-owned company solidified a year-round operation that allows retailers to retain its products even during off-seasons.

“Being a grower-packer-shipper allows us to have control of our product from seed to distribution, therefore guaranteeing high quality, consistency, and reliability.”



- ALEXA HAMBLY,
Business Operations Manager
and Fifth-Generation Farmer,
Gwillimdale Farms




“We are proud to work with our Mexico grower partners who uphold the same values and practices as our own operations,” Cristina continues. “We are confident our customers will receive high-quality products year-round, and we work closely with retail partners to create in-store promotions that bring awareness to both businesses while also giving back to the community.”

Sharing her mother’s optimistic view on what is to come for this supplier, Alexa lays out a few plans for further evolution.

“Gwillimdale Farms is highly focused on investing in quality land to ensure we have nutrient-rich soils to grow our vegetables,” Alexa assures. “As we look to the future, we are setting a core focus on improving our business processes and structures, as well as always innovating and ensuring our employees have a wonderful place to work.”

While penning this article—after absolutely obliterating a bowl of Gwillimdale’s crunchy carrots paired perfectly with some homemade ranch, I might add—I realize that Gwillimdale Farms has reached such awe-inspiring achievement through its unique aptitude for balancing tradition and innovation.

Embracing over a century of generational expertise does not mean abandoning the need for growth and transformation, just as chasing industry innovation does not equate to leaving behind the skills passed down by those before you.

At the heart of this beloved root vegetable brand is a loving family of farmers, and its greatness is driven by both the legacies and lessons gifted from the minds of a magnificent mother and father. 

WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Orchard View Cherries ?



CHERRIES "AL FRESCO"

INGREDIENTS

- 2–3 **handfuls** Orchard View Cherries
- 1 **quart** cold tap water
- 1 colander
- 1 comfortable spot, ideally on a patio with a gentle breeze

Prep Time: 100 years of cherry craftsmanship

Servings: For one, or with a friend if you're feeling generous

Eating Time: One precious moment

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Place deliciously sweet Orchard View Cherries in colander.
- 2 Run tap until water is cold to the touch, place colander underneath, and gently rinse cherries for 10–15 seconds.
- 3 Let drip dry and place in a serving bowl.
- 4 Find a quiet spot to sit and thoroughly enjoy!

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



To learn more about Orchard View Cherries, visit www.orchardview.com



Proud avocado partner
of the San Diego Padres

For over three generations, the Del Rey Avocado brand has stood for quality, taste, and our California growers. Del Rey's hands-on approach to working with growers ensures the highest quality organic and conventional avocados are delivered to our customers. Del Rey Avocado's 2023 California season is here.

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WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }



MIXED BERRY, BURRATA, AND CARAMELIZED ONION FLATBREAD

INGREDIENTS

- 1 handful** California Giant Berry Farms Blueberries
- 1 handful** California Giant Berry Farms Blackberries
- 1 handful** California Giant Berry Farms Strawberries
- 1 (16 oz)** pizza/flatbread dough
- 1 ball** burrata, ripped
- 1 handful** arugula
- ½ small** yellow onion, sliced into very thin pieces

TOPPINGS

- Olive oil
- Sea salt
- Chili flakes

Prep Time: 15 min
Cook Time: 25 min
Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Roll out the dough and cook as the packet instructs. In the meantime, add a drizzle of olive oil to a medium-sized sauté pan. Sauté the onions with a pinch of sea salt on medium-high heat. Cook for about 15 minutes or until the onions caramelize; add a splash of water when the pan dries out.
- 2** Once the flatbread has cooked in the oven, place it on a very hot grill pan and cook on one side until it has charred grill marks. Remove and add cheese.
- 3** Top with berries, arugula, onions, a drizzle of olive oil, sea salt, and chili flakes. At this point, you can enjoy as is or pop in the oven for the cheese and berries to warm for about 5–8 minutes on 375° F.
- 4** Cut into pieces and enjoy!

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



A Closer Look at Windset Farms® SONATA™ Tropical Mini Peppers

By Jenna Plasterer

The rhythmic lapping of waves on the sand, the smell of fragrant tropical blooms wafting through the air, the feel of a warm breeze on sun-tanned skin, and the taste of a fruity drink quenching an afternoon thirst.

Your shoppers will be transported to this island wonderland with Windset Farms® SONATA™ Tropical Mini Peppers awaiting them in your produce department.

While tropical getaways are a luxury for some, experiencing the taste of a summer getaway doesn't have to be with these striking, deep orange SONATA Tropical Mini Peppers. The variety has few seeds and a sweet


crunch with notes of fresh herbs and fruit to finish.

The mouthwatering variety is sized between a blocky and snack pepper, making it perfect for stuffing, roasting, or presenting on a charcuterie board for a little “stay-cation” relaxation.

These fantastic attributes are on full display for shoppers as they reach for the clear packages adorned with colorful monstera, fern leaves, and a bright pink hibiscus flower, solidifying the island vibes.

Retailers too can enjoy the vacay energy with the eye-

catching display bins and other unique merchandising opportunities Windset offers. Cross-merchandising with other tropical fruits and veggies can give these peppers—and your sales—an added boost. Even cocktail mixes will inspire impulse purchases as consumers look for an inexpensive way to experience the thrill of summer vacation through a quick snack.

Spread the Aloha and make your produce department the must-visit vacation destination all year round with SONATA Tropical Mini Peppers. 





Through the Eyes of a Leader

A Q&A With **David Lake**, President, 4Earth Farms™

By Jenna Plasterer



There is something so exciting about getting to pick the brain of executives in the produce industry. I think it's the countless years of knowledge and stories that can be distilled into a single inspiring conversation, leaving both parties more connected by the thread of understanding.

Today, I am eagerly awaiting a discussion with David Lake, President of 4Earth Farms™.

The last time we interviewed him for *The Snack*, he told us about his experiences in the produce industry of the 1990s, which he affectionately compared to the Wild West.

Now, David and his wife, Deborah Lake, Co-Founders of Commerce, California-based 4Earth Farms, are celebrating their 30th year in business. The company started its enterprise as a mixer, but has evolved into a leading grower, packer, shipper, and co-packer of organic, conventional, and specialty produce.

Eventually, I hear the ambient sound of the line connecting, and David's voice greets me on the other end of the phone. I thank him for taking time out of his hectic schedule to talk with me, and his response sets the tone for the rest of our conversation. "It's my pleasure," David imparts. "My door is always open."

This openness gives me the first glimpse of the many sides beneath the focused face of a leader that could be missed upon a cursory glance at his headshot laid out on the table in front of me.

With a new image of David in mind, we get down to business, discussing the concepts, values, and people who have shaped his career.

Q1

JENNA PLASTERER: David, I know you don't like to put yourself on a pedestal, but you have been doing this for a long time and have accomplished some amazing feats. What advice do you have for those looking to succeed in produce?

DAVID LAKE, PRESIDENT, 4EARTH FARMS™: First, learn to listen. It is the most important thing you can do in any business and what good leaders must instill in their people. Only by listening to the needs of your customers, consumers, and your people can you make good decisions from the information you collect.

Second, give your people a voice. Your people are out there battling every day on the frontline. When you provide them with a voice, you'd be surprised by the results you can achieve. We are not successful because of a couple of people; we are successful because of everyone along the chain.

Lastly, work hard. Success is never given to you; it is something you earn through grit and determination.



Q2

JP: David, to discuss your success in this business, it's key for us to define what that term means to you. How would you define success on a personal level and a company level?

DL: That is a sage question. I think what applies to me personally is the same as what I have tried to do in our business: Make a positive impact.

I think it is essential to respect the lives we affect. With great pride, I can tell you stories of many of my team that started out packing on a line or working in a field. With experience and initiative, they have grown their careers and are now supervisors, managers, and quality assurance inspectors, holding positions of responsibility. I can say that part of my success can be measured by the accomplishments of the people I work with.

...give your people a voice. Your people are out there battling every day on the frontline. When you provide them with a voice, **you'd be surprised by the results you can achieve.**

David Lake,
President,
4Earth Farms™



From the fields and warehouses to the boardroom, David Lake believes that success is attributed to everyone along the supply chain, not just a few individuals

Q3

JP: With the idea of success in mind, what are some of the things you consider before getting involved in a new venture?

DL: Who and why.

More specifically, who's involved in the project, and why are we doing it? Is it to do good? It doesn't always have to be about profit. Sometimes it is more important what that project will bring. It could be cost savings, freshness, better products, or help to those in need. You have to really look at those factors when deciding if you want to be involved and if your values align.

Regarding the "who" part of the equation, ethics matters—culture matters. Again, we're all imperfect. If you dig hard enough, you'll find we all make mistakes, but you have to identify the potential in the people behind the idea.

As a leader, I listen and learn from experts in the field I'm looking at because they have spent years working on and studying aspects of the industry that I may not have as much knowledge of. It's vital to collect information and then decide whether or not to get involved.

Q4

JP: Moving from projects to people, over the years, you have witnessed and helped others hone their skills to become leaders. What are some of the characteristics that differentiate great produce operators from average ones?

DL: It starts with the truth.

Could I stand up and defend this person for the way they work? For their behavior? What it comes down to is, do they stand behind their word and their work. Are they willing to lean in when they need to?

Produce is part of your life. The people that I'm looking for take it home with them, they're still dreaming about what's in the field, what's on the truck, and what's getting to the consumer when they go to sleep at night. We don't get to check out of this business.

Emotional intelligence is another key differentiator that is incredibly hard to teach but is a big thing. Leadership is hard decisions, and some of them are not popular. Some are downright painful, so you must know what's appropriate when approaching them.

In the end, you hope you're on the right side of all those decisions and have more good than bad ones. I've got stacks of both. Successful people can reflect on what they did right, what they did wrong, and how they can do better. My team spends a lot of time doing that.

Q5

JP: On the subject of people, who are some industry members that have impacted your career?

DL: The first person that comes to mind is Tim York, Chief Executive Officer of the California Leafy Green Marketing Agreement, who recognized our ability and potential very early in 4Earth's history.



Back when we first met, Tim was the President of Markon Cooperative, and we were working in a little warehouse around the corner from the market. He and



Mark Shaw, Vice President of Operations, came to visit because the company was looking to move its business in Los Angeles somewhere new. Despite our size, he believed in our abilities, and we've been evolving with Markon ever since.

They led the charge in food safety, and we learned from them and believed in it. So, we always feel like we've been a little bit ahead for a company our size.

I'm also a big fan of Grimmway Farms' Vice President of Foodservice and Industrial Sales, Lisa McNeece. I value her knowledge, intuition about the produce business, and friendship. Although considered part of the foodservice sector, she crosses the lines into almost all aspects of the industry. Everybody knows her. She's able to talk produce with anybody, and not to mention, she's always on the go and pretty tireless.



Q6

JP: Speaking of industry experts, your wife, Deborah, is a Managing Member of 4Earth Farms with a deep financial and industry background. What have you gleaned from her in your time working together?

DL: Deb is more than a Managing Member. As the majority shareholder of 4Earth Farms, she was instrumental when Fred McConnell and I first started the business and continues to provide critical leadership daily.

Before 4Earth Farms began, Deb was named Chief Financial Officer of a multi-million-dollar company at 27 years old. She is smart, and she runs a very tight ship on finance with our company, which has enabled us to weather many storms our industry has been subjected to without taking on a bunch of debt.

Deb's financial prowess is truly unique, enabling us to invest in essential aspects of the business. In the last 30 years, we've reinvested with a passion for our people, processes, and facilities.

She understands how we're budgeting, where we're going, and what we're investing in and why. Our different skill sets complement one another. Looking to her for guidance in these areas has reinforced my belief that you have to trust in experts to be successful.

Q7

JP: As we wrap up, I can't help but wonder what concepts, trends, and challenges you see on the horizon for the industry. Which ones intrigue you the most?

DL: All in all, I am positive about the future of fresh produce. People need to eat, and they need people like us to make that possible.

That said, I am slightly concerned about the effect private equity funds and their recent food company buying binge has had on our industry and their use of debt. Traditionally, produce is a low-margin business, and debt on produce is tough. It will be interesting to see how this will continue to affect the food system.


Consolidation is another topic that intrigues me. I think there is a real opportunity in it, but the devil is in the details. Companies will need to be careful with the use of monetary instruments because, again, debt in produce creates a lot of pressure that is hard to sustain in this industry.

Last but not least, social responsibility is a topic that must stay in the spotlight. We, as an industry, will have to keep pushing the agenda. Sustainable growing practices, lowering of our carbon footprint, recyclability, use of pesticides, water usage, and human resources are all critical topics we will need to continue to focus on in our industry.

Produce is part of your life. The people that I'm looking for take it home with them, they're still dreaming about what's in the field, what's on the truck, and what's getting to the consumer when they go to sleep at night. We don't get to check out of this business.

With our final question, my interview with David comes to a close.

The eagerness I experienced at the start of our discussion has transformed into curiosity and inspiration.

When hearing leaders like David speak, it is near impossible not to feel like you just got insights into something bigger, beyond what you see on the industry's surface. In other words, I got to take a peek behind the curtain, or in this case, the determined eyes of a leader that holds the secrets to success in the palm of his hand. 

WTF DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }



GRILLED BANANA-BERRY S'MORES

INGREDIENTS

- 4 ripe DOLE® Bananas
- ¼ cup DOLE Blueberries
- ¼ cup DOLE Raspberries
- ¼ cup gluten-free mini marshmallows
- 3 tbsp gluten-free dark chocolate chips

Prep Time: 15 min
Cook Time: 5 min
Servings: 4



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Prepare outdoor grill for direct grilling over medium heat. Carefully cut a slit lengthwise down the center of each banana.
- 2 Fill bananas with marshmallows and chocolate chips. Place bananas, filling-side up, on hot grill rack; cover and cook 5 minutes or until marshmallows are lightly browned and chocolate melts.
- 3 Serve bananas topped with blueberries and raspberries. Enjoy!

Tip: For easier cleanup, wrap filled bananas filling-side up in aluminum foil and cook for 10 minutes.

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

» The IF List « Mike Casazza

President of South/Southwest Divisions, FreshSource

With Anne Allen

Decades of experience color this industry expert's career. Throughout the years, Mike Casazza has honed his expertise to continue building the bridge between buy and supply, utilizing tried-and-true sales and merchandising tactics. Having laid the groundwork for some serious ag operations, it made me wonder what makes the FreshSource Division President tick. I can't be the only one curious to know what he does with a handful of IFs...

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

Well, given my age, I was almost born in another century. I never really thought about it and focused on enjoying what I had in the moment.

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

Tom Hanks.

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

The day I met my wife. I would have all of our wonderful memories with me in that one moment.

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

Construction.

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

A panda.

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

A bible, a picture of my family, and a lighter.

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

Never Let Anyone Walk Through Your Mind With Dirty Feet.

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

Cast Away. Chuck Noland was a survivor.

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

A good loaf of sourdough bread.

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

To be able to go back in time.

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

Andrea Bocelli.

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

How to avoid traffic in Los Angeles, California.

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

The birth of my children. 🐼



WTF DO I DO WITH { what the fork } Pure Flavor® Alonna™ Canary Melon ?



MELON AHI TUNA

INGREDIENTS

1 Pure Flavor® Alonna™ Canary Melon
 1 Pure Flavor Long English Cucumber, thinly sliced
 1 lb sushi-grade tuna
 2½ **tbsp** soy sauce
 3 **tsp** fresh lime juice
 1 **tbsp** grapeseed oil
 1 **tbsp** sesame oil
 1 **tsp** honey
 1 **tsp** garlic, minced
 ½ **tsp** fresh ginger, minced
 ¼ **tsp** red pepper flakes, divided
 Shallot, thinly sliced, for garnish
 Cilantro, for garnish

Prep Time: 10 min
Chill Time: 50 min
Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1 With a sharp knife, trim away any skin from the tuna fillet. Cut the tuna and melon into ¼" cubes. Place tuna in a bowl.
- 2 In a medium bowl, whisk soy sauce, lime juice, grapeseed oil, sesame oil, honey, garlic, ginger, and ½ teaspoon of red pepper flakes.
- 3 Pour over tuna and marinate for at least 50 minutes in the refrigerator.
- 4 To serve, arrange tuna, melon, and rolled cucumber slices onto a platter.
- 5 Garnish with shallots, cilantro, and remaining red pepper flakes. Enjoy!

To learn more about Pure Flavor®, visit www.pure-flavor.com



FRESH TO THE GOOD

BY CHANDLER JAMES

STEPPING INTO THE PRODUCE AISLE FEELS LIKE HOME.

I do the bulk of my shopping in the perimeter departments of a local Safeway store, starting in specialty and ending in produce. For the most part, I stick to the tried and true products I buy every trip, but usually add a few new items to my cart as well.

Working in the trade has made me hyper-aware of the merchandising tactics deployed within the grocery store. Recipe inspiration can be found everywhere I turn. I like to think it has made me into the ideal consumer for retailers—one who loves some beautifully packaged fresh produce.

Sometimes those experiments translate to repeat purchases, and my heart is easily captured by products that marry quality, flavor, and functionality.

Enter EarthFresh.

Not only has the supplier mastered the art of value-added potatoes, but it has made its foray into other vegetables as of April 2023. At the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) Convention and Trade Show earlier this spring, EarthFresh introduced an exciting expansion to its Fast. Fresh. Gourmet.™ line: microwavable steamer bags.

I had the pleasure of writing an *Up Close* feature in our November 2022 issue shortly after EarthFresh initially launched the line, comprising three flavored potato kits in oven/grill-ready trays. Now, the brand is introducing six flavors of potatoes, four flavors of Brussels sprouts, and four flavors of carrots in microwavable bags.

“We are thrilled to debut our new value-added line of fresh vegetables,” Jessica Hughes, Director of Innovations, told me. “Fast. Fresh. Gourmet. will provide customers with an amazing taste experience while focusing on freshness, health, and convenience. It features a microwaveable bag that holds fresh vegetables in the bottom and a fresh sauce in the top of the package.”

How do you make a product pop while it sits next to the wide array of offerings that occupy the produce department? If you are EarthFresh, you take that challenge literally.

All consumers must do is heat the bag in the microwave for 3–6 minutes, depending on the vegetable. The vegetables will steam in the bottom of the bag, and the sauce will heat separately in the top until it reaches the proper temperature, at which point it will “pop” open and coat the vegetables.

“It is as simple as it sounds—a one-step fresh veggie dish made in minutes! All of our sauces are made with fresh, clean ingredients, and are gluten-free, refined sugar-free, and dairy-free,” Jessica added.

Quality, flavor, and functionality. What more could a consumer ask for? And at the core of it all—in the middle of the product’s name, in fact—is fresh. Of course, this is a key differentiator for a consumer like myself. While I am looking to liven up my menu with new flavors in a convenient package, I am also aiming to benefit my health.



EarthFresh’s new products deliver on all those demands, making for a produce department full of happy shoppers. And trust me, they will come running when they see these beautifully colored bags in the veggie set.

“Our Fast. Fresh. Gourmet. packaging and promotional materials are all designed to pop off the shelf! By using a simple design in a rainbow of bright colors, we have created a fun, fresh vibe that will attract consumers,” Jessica agreed.

Not only did the team narrow in on the outside of the package, but it applied cutting-edge technology to make the functionality of the products truly stand out from the rest.

“Our microwavable bag is one of a kind,” Jessica continued. “This innovative patent-pending design is truly unique. Combining this breakthrough technology with high quality, healthy flavors, and the finest fresh vegetables ensures there will be nothing else like it.”

Behind every great innovation is a team of experts combining their knowledge to create something never seen before. The research and development team at EarthFresh brought every consumer demand into consideration.

“The name says it all: Fast. Fresh. Gourmet. Our innovation team, composed of industry professionals, packaging specialists, and food scientists, set out to develop a product that offers a fresh, tasty, healthy experience to time-starved consumers,” Jessica explained. “Nothing but the best would satisfy our team.”

And the line has done more than just satisfy the EarthFresh team.

“So far, we have received rave reviews from anyone who has tried the Fast. Fresh. Gourmet. products,” she stated. “When we debuted the new line at CPMA in April, everyone was excited for the official launch. In-store trials will begin in July, with launch dates starting in September 2023.”

Fourteen different offerings are quite the additions to make to such a successful lineup, especially when many of those are new categories. Of course, EarthFresh is not one to stop innovating. I was delighted to learn that it plans to release additional flavors in the future.

“We will extend the line even further to continue meeting the growing consumer



“**FAST. FRESH. GOURMET.**™ will provide customers with an amazing taste experience while focusing on **FRESHNESS, HEALTH, AND CONVENIENCE.**”



JESSICA HUGHES,
DIRECTOR OF INNOVATIONS,
EARTHFRESH

demand for healthy, flavorful, and convenient fresh produce,” Jessica remarked.

I began this story in the produce aisle, so I will end it there as well.

In the future, I will pay closer attention to the value-added vegetable selection. And, if I spot the Fast. Fresh. Gourmet. line on the shelf, it will be the first thing I add to my cart.

Isn’t it amazing how a fantastic product and careful retail placement can secure a purchase? I am one consumer who is happy to be influenced by such a strategy. I think yours will be too. 🍷





Raspberries

BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ

SNACKCHAT

Lovely as a rose, tasty as a berry, the delightful raspberry puts the “red” in redolent. On the rise in demand and appreciation among the snacking fruits of our time, it is an item worth its space here in *The Snack*. Let your eyes take a walk through the patch among these pages to see why this is a key category to include among your department stars.



RYLA OBERMAN,

Director of Marketing,
California Giant Berry Farms

“Raspberries are alluring! Their sweet and tart flavor profile is undoubtedly a draw to consumers who are craving a refreshing option—whether eaten as a fresh snack or used as an ingredient item. To ensure consumers receive the berry best raspberry experience, promote the gentle handling of the fruit and educate consumers about proper storage, including the importance of maintaining cold chain and washing just prior to use. When merchandising fresh raspberries, always include them in a larger berry display along with strawberries, blueberries, and blackberries. Because raspberries have a multitude of uses, encourage a variety of consumption by cross-merchandising them with complementary products.”



FERNANDO AGUIAR,

Director of Business
Development, Naturipe

“June and July will bring us a new season of delicious summertime raspberries where we’ll continue to offer our customers some amazing varieties. Our proprietary raspberry program is available year-round, and this summer is no exception. Consumers will be able to enjoy raspberries as part of their favorite meal or snack! We expect a healthy market for this summer with steady volumes and strong demand for these berry beauties.”



DEAN BARBIS,

Category Director of
Berries, Oppy

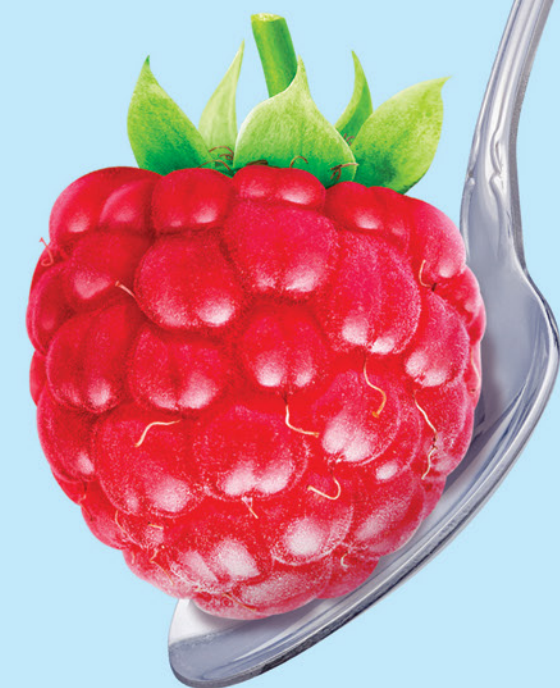
“With raspberries increasing in both dollar sales and volume since pre-pandemic levels and growing steadily, label pollution is fierce, so look to Ocean Spray®. Harnessing 96 percent brand awareness and high purchase intent, the Ocean Spray label stands out on the shelf because it’s been recognized as high quality for decades. We have been able to build the Ocean Spray fresh brand very quickly due in part to consumer awareness and trust that crosses from center store into produce—it’s ultimately a winning combination because retailers reap the benefits, and so do consumers. Ocean Spray Family Farmer Owned™ raspberries continue to grow in Central Mexico, the Baja peninsula, and California. This branded line is an exclusive partnership with Oppy, so be sure to reach out to our team today!”



WILLIAM GOLDFIELD,

Director of Corporate
Communications, Dole
Food Company

“Merchandise raspberries alongside blackberries. This not only offers an eye-appealing color break for consumers but also positions the two higher-end berries together as the more premium products in the berry category. Additionally, whenever possible, utilize POS (point of sale) and display signage to showcase well-recognized brands in the category as a trusted sign of quality and differentiation for shoppers.”





FINDING INNOVATION IN DEVIATION

By Jenna Plasterer

The best road to innovation is deviation.

As poet Robert Frost once poignantly wrote, “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— / I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference.”

Whether it be turning an accepted way of thinking on its head, tweaking processes, or utilizing new tools, straying from the ordinary course of action is what leads to evolution.

Take it from Local Bounti, which has made it its mission to

reimagine the concept of fresh with its local, sustainable farming methods. Through these practices, the greenhouse trendsetter is delivering a new standard of quality focused on supporting people, produce, and the planet, along with providing a 365-day growing season.

“Transporting produce across large distances can put a strain on resources and reduce the quality of the product that people have access to buy. We know locally grown produce lasts longer, reducing food waste and, in consequence, making the food more affordable and available,” Brian Cook, President, explains from behind his desk. As



BRIAN COOK,
President, Local Bounti

the former Chief Executive Officer of Pete’s and now in his role with Local Bounti, Brian has overseen countless cutting-edge moves, so his connection to innovation runs deep. “We are typically able to reach retailers within 400 miles, dramatically reducing food miles and waste while increasing shelf-life. Most produce spends weeks in transport on the way to the produce aisle, but we believe there is a better way.”

Bucking tradition, the supplier utilized its advanced proprietary technology to help usher in a new era in ag, offering its partners and their shoppers benefits that

go beyond the plate while still delivering nutritious, high-quality products that are sought after in the produce department.

At the heart of the grower’s development is a fierce dedication to establishing a network of local roots that can feed national expansion. This concept also serves to meet increased consumer demand for locally produced offerings while minimizing the environmental impacts of transportation.

Harnessing this concept, Local Bounti used its distinct strategy to scale its business tremendously, proving that acting on a local level

creates the basis for nationwide expansion. The greenhouse innovator’s offerings are available in over 10,000 retail locations in 35 of the United States and Canadian provinces.

While this idea of acting locally and thinking globally seems simple on the surface, there is complex technology at play behind the scenes.

“Our proprietary Stack & Flow Technology™ allows for numerous crop cycles per year and makes it possible for us to deliver locally grown produce throughout the U.S.,” says Brian. “As we grew, we



We know locally grown produce lasts longer, reducing food waste and, in consequence, **making the food more affordable and available.**”

- Brian Cook, President, Local Bounti



knew the only way to gain market share was to continue pursuing the best unit economics in the industry. Local Bounti is unique in that we introduced the efficiency of vertical farming—the stack—but we also benefit from Mother Nature and established proven greenhouse—flow—technology. We can increase yield by 1.5-2 times and produce 26 crop cycles per year versus 13-17 at other traditional controlled environment agriculture greenhouse facilities.”

In other words, Local Bounti is continuing to innovate and accelerate its hybrid approach to growing that combines the yield advantages of vertical farming with the efficiency of greenhouse cultivation. Its cultivation uses an average of 90 percent less land and 90 percent less water than comparable alternatives.

As its technology progresses, so too does the company’s need for a greater number of facilities. In addition to Local Bounti’s flagship facility in Hamilton, Montana, the grower also completed the construction of a facility in Byron, Georgia. It is now expanding the

operation’s footprint from three to six acres while implementing its Stack & Flow technology.

To top it off, the company has more developments in the works.

This includes the creation of two new facilities that will give Local Bounti a leg up in several bustling U.S. regions that can benefit from its local model.

“Currently, we are moving forward with construction on a new facility in Mount Pleasant, Texas, which is slated to be operational by the fourth quarter of 2023,” Brian details. “We are also continuing construction on our 3-acre facility in Pasco, Washington. This cutting-edge facility bolsters our Pacific Northwest reach with our leafy greens products. When both are fully operational, they will be key in increasing our presence in the Pacific Northwest, South-Central, and East Coast markets.”

But the expansion does not end there.

With greater capabilities and a larger footprint, Local Bounti is unleashing a series of unique items to continue building its incredible brand loyalty.

“Over just a few years, we have successfully increased our SKU count exponentially and added innovative value-added items like salad kits and heat-and-eat lettuce wraps,” Brian tells me. “Following our 2022 acquisition of Pete’s, we are ramping up new product innovation and focusing on elevating the Local Bounti brand. This has resulted in greater affinity with consumers, which we continue to prioritize as we see more and more repeat customers interested in our products.”

Just recently, Local Bounti entered the heat-and-eat category that Brian mentioned with its new Asian Style Chicken Lettuce Wrap Kits, which answers a rising call from consumers—and, therefore, retailers—to include more flavorful, value-added meal kits in the produce department. And, in the case of Local Bounti, shoppers can feel even better about their purchase decision because the products are fresh, healthy, and sustainable.

Further answering the call for convenient, better-for-you offerings, Local Bounti is planning to expand its Grab & Go Salad Kit

line with the addition of two new SKUs: Artisanal Chicken Caesar and Memphis BBQ Chicken. And while Brian isn’t spilling the details, there are more items in the works.

One thing is for sure, though, as Local Bounti continues its mission, the grower will stay true to its values for the sake of people and Mother Nature.

“Since founding Local Bounti, we’ve continued to deliver on our promise to increase produce shelf-life, reduce waste, conserve water, address food scarcity in local communities, and lower greenhouse gas emissions,” Brian proudly states. “As we continue to grow, we are committed to exposing more consumers to this new standard of fresh.”

Although the word “disruption” can have a negative connotation in some cases, Local Bounti has shown that when it comes to the status quo, a little bit of disturbance can, in fact, lead to large-scale positive changes.

The next time you’re facing diverging paths, think of Local Bounti and its innovative prowess and take the road less traveled. In the end, it not only makes a world of difference, but it makes the world different. 🌱

Most produce spends weeks in transport on the way to the produce aisle, but we believe there is a better way.”

WTF DO I DO WITH Del Rey Avocados ?

{ what the fork }



CAPRESE-STUFFED AVOCADOS

INGREDIENTS

2 ripe Del Rey Avocados, seeded and halved
 ½ **cup** grape or cherry tomatoes, halved
 4 **oz (120 g)** baby mozzarella balls (Bocconcini)
 2 **tbsp** basil pesto
 1 **tsp** minced garlic
 ¼ **cup** olive oil
 2 **tbsp** balsamic glaze reduction, to drizzle
 2 **tbsp** fresh basil, sliced
 Salt and pepper to season
 Fresh basil leaves

Prep Time: 10 min
Servings: 4 halves

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Combine tomatoes, mozzarella balls, pesto, garlic, olive oil, salt, and pepper in a bowl to make filling. Toss well to evenly combine all of the flavors.
- 2 Arrange prepared avocado halves onto a plate with fresh basil leaves.
- 3 Spoon the Caprese filling into each avocado half and drizzle with balsamic glaze.
- 4 Top with sliced fresh basil. Serve immediately and enjoy!

To learn more about Del Rey Avocado, visit www.delreyavocado.com



The Latest Additions to the 4Earth Family

DISCOVER MORE AT
4EARTHFARMS.COM



Organic & Conventional
FRENCH BEANS
 Conventional
RAINBOW CARROTS





SIMPLE STARR RANCH® CHERRY GALETTE

INGREDIENTS

FILLING

3 slightly heaped cups
Starr Ranch® Cherries, pitted
3 tbsp cornstarch
½ cup plus 2 tbsp sugar
1 lemon, zested and juiced
1 tsp vanilla extract
Pinch of salt

PASTRY

1 cup flour
½ tsp fine salt
1 tsp granulated sugar plus
extra for garnish
½ cup cold butter, slightly
softened and cut into
small cubes

¼ cup full-fat sour cream
1 beaten egg, to brush pastry

Prep Time: 20 min
Chill Time: 2 hr
Cook Time: 45 min
Servings: 6–8



To learn more about Starr Ranch® Growers, visit www.starranch.com

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Make dough by whisking dry ingredients together in a bowl until well-combined. Use fingers or forks to lightly work butter into mixture until it starts to clump together. Mix in sour cream until you have a dough. Sprinkle in more flour if it is too wet, or add a dash of sour cream if it's too dry.
- 2 Bring dough together on a lightly floured surface, making sure not to overwork it. Flatten it with hands to make a disk about ½" thick. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap and let sit in the fridge for 2 hours, or overnight.
- 3 Preheat the oven to 400° F. Take dough out of fridge and place on a lightly floured surface.
- 4 Make the filling by placing all the ingredients into a bowl and stir to coat.
- 5 When the dough has softened a little, roll it out evenly into a large circle about 10" in diameter. Gently lift this over your rolling pin and place it on a large baking sheet lined with baking paper. Pile fruit in the middle of the galette so that it has a wide rim and mound it up. Fold the edges into the middle and overlap the dough where necessary. Brush edges with egg wash and lightly sprinkle with sugar.
- 6 Bake for 10 minutes before covering loosely with foil to prevent over-browning.
- 7 Bake for an additional 30–35 minutes, or until golden brown and the fruit is bubbling.
- 8 Serve warm or at room temperature with vanilla ice cream. Enjoy!

A Closer Look at Mucci Farms Savorries Strawberry Tomatoes

By Chandler James

All it takes is one impulse buy to capture the attention of hungry consumers. Curiosity can translate to category sales in a split second, and it all depends on the product's uniqueness and presentation. With a name like Savorries Strawberry Tomatoes, I am confident Mucci Farms' newest product will soon be flying off the shelves.

Yes, you read that correctly. Strawberry tomatoes. What more could a consumer ask for than to have two of their favorite fruits

combined into one? I know I am one tomato fanatic that is chomping at the bit to have these babies in my home kitchen. The little red globes will be popped straight out of the tray and into shoppers' mouths once they spot the vibrant packaging on display.

Using the hashtag #berriedtomato, Mucci Farms wields its differentiated branding to make this offering truly stand out from the rest. As consumers go in search of mini tomatoes to add to their favorite recipes, the Savorries

Strawberry Tomatoes will provide them with a unique option that elevates any dish. And that one-of-a-kind flavor will keep them coming back for more.

Double the intrigue by merchandising this new item alongside an assortment of cheeses, fresh basil, and even some Smuccies™ Sweet Strawberries to hint at the gorgeous Savory Tomato and Strawberry Tart pictured prominently on the pack. After all, there is no better place to spark inspiration—and sales—than in the produce aisle. 🍅

UP
CLOSE



Libations

FOR ALL OCCASIONS:

CHERRY LIME ZINGER

By Chandler James

Photography by
Craig Wheeler


Picture this: You step out onto the porch and into the soft evening air. Your arms are bare for the first time since last summer, and the sun hangs low enough to cast a beam of golden light across your face. The aroma of cherry blossoms drifts through the breeze, and the effervescence of a cold beverage bubbles in your hand.

What are you sipping on? Well, let me introduce you to the Cherry Lime Zinger of your dreams.

This spring, I vowed to indulge in the finer things in life. The warm California weather woke my bones from a long and frigid winter and, suddenly, the whole world was a bit brighter. Now, if you know

me, you know “the finer things in life” almost always include a thirst-quenching beverage within arm’s reach.

And, if I’m being honest, there’s a good chance the Cherry Lime Zinger will be filling my pitcher long after spring has ended. This light and airy beverage encapsulates everything we love about produce: fresh, wholesome goodness.

Take it from me—this is one springtime beverage that spells increased sales in the produce aisle. Plus, it is easy to prepare a non-alcoholic version that is perfect for in-store sampling. Once shoppers catch wind of the libation, they will be running toward your stores faster than you can say Cherry Lime Zinger. 

INGREDIENTS

1½ cups pitted fresh cherries
⅓ cup water
2 tbsp sugar
½ cup freshly squeezed lime juice
½ cup vodka
2 cups cold lime seltzer water
Crushed ice for serving
Lime wedges and fresh cherries for garnish

Time: 1 hr 15 min
Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

1. To make the cherry syrup, combine fresh cherries, water, and sugar and cook over medium-low heat. Simmer until the cherries are soft and bursting, about 6–8 minutes.
2. Pour the mixture into a blender, covering with a towel to prevent hot liquid from escaping. Blend until the mixture is puréed and let cool.
3. Combine ⅓ cup of the cherry syrup with the lime juice and vodka. Refrigerate the mixture for at least 1 hour.
4. To serve, pour the mixture into four glasses over the crushed ice. Finish with a splash of seltzer water and garnish with a wedge of lime and a fresh cherry. Enjoy!

Inspired by How Sweet Eats





Imagine you just walked through the door after a draining workday, weak with exhaustion. All you want to do is put on comfy clothes, plop on the sofa, and turn on your favorite show. Before you can do that, your stomach grumbles, signaling it's time to eat. The thought of preparing a meal is excruciating; however, do you want to go to bed hungry? Instead, you open your fridge, and there sits your saving grace, a meal kit that can be prepared in minutes. Hallelujah! This, my industry friends, is why fresh-forward meal kit offerings have risen.

On top of the labor that goes into making meals from scratch, there is a balancing act that health- and budget-conscious consumers must perform. As they dodge obstacles like inflation, they must consider cost versus convenience and flavor versus nutrition factors.

Luckily, suppliers across the produce industry are taking on these challenges, working to create innovative products that take the stress out of whipping up delicious, healthy meals.

Think companies like Dole plc with its Sheet Pan Meal Starter Kits, Local Bounti and its Asian Style Chicken Lettuce Wrap Kits, and Mann Packing Co. wielding its Nourish Bowls®, to name a few. These suppliers have seen the rising demand and are putting their


research and development skills to good use to take advantage of it.

Value-added products made up 14.6 percent of produce sales in 2022, the 2023 FMI *Power of Produce* report stated. That is equal to \$10.9 billion, for a better understanding of how lucrative the category is.

During the pandemic, shoppers opted for home-cooked meals instead of eating out. And while many are returning to their favorite haunts, giving a welcome boost to the foodservice sector, consumers have continued to enjoy meals prepared at home to cut costs and spend more time with loved ones.

According to data from Circana*, despite inflation being up 13.2 percent in Q4 2022, perimeter sales were up 6.3 percent, showing shoppers' penchant for fresh foods to prepare at home.

Of shoppers polled by FMI, 68 percent said they were interested in the produce department carrying more value-added offerings, while 32 percent wanted access to more meal kits specifically. For retailers, this means there is a gap to fill in the aisles that could boost register rings while upping consumer loyalty.

Now, with this knowledge in your back pocket, go forth, and take advantage of meal kit momentum! 



WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

The Original
Baby Potatoes

?



BABY POTATO PIZZA BITES

INGREDIENTS

1 package (1.5 lb) Baby Potatoes
Avocado oil or olive oil, spray
Salt and pepper, to taste
Pizza or marinara sauce
Mozzarella cheese, shredded
Parmesan cheese, grated

Optional pizza toppings: basil, cilantro,
bell peppers, choice of onions,
mushrooms, pepperoni, chicken
breast, pesto sauce, BBQ sauce

Prep Time: 20 min

Cook Time: 30–40 min

Servings: As many as you can eat!

The Original
Baby
POTATO

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Place washed Baby Potatoes in a medium saucepan with enough water to cover. Bring to a boil, then simmer until potatoes can be pierced with a knife but are not completely tender, 10–12 minutes. Drain well and set on a flat surface to slightly cool.
- 2 Score potatoes in a crisscross pattern using a small sharp knife. Cover the potato with a small square of wax paper or parchment paper, and press down with the bottom of a glass to flatten. The paper will help prevent the glass from sticking to the potatoes. Flatten them as much as you can without destroying them.
- 3 Spray smashed potatoes with some avocado oil or olive oil and add pizza toppings of your choice.
- 4 There are many ways to cook your mini potato pizzas, such as:
 - Cook in conventional oven at 425° F for 20 minutes or until golden and crispy.
 - Cook in air fryer at 400° F until melted and golden.
 - Barbecue with a preheated pizza stone on direct medium heat with the lid closed for 10–12 minutes.
- 5 Serve hot or at room temperature. Enjoy!

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