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the **SNACK**

ISSUE 80 OCT 2023

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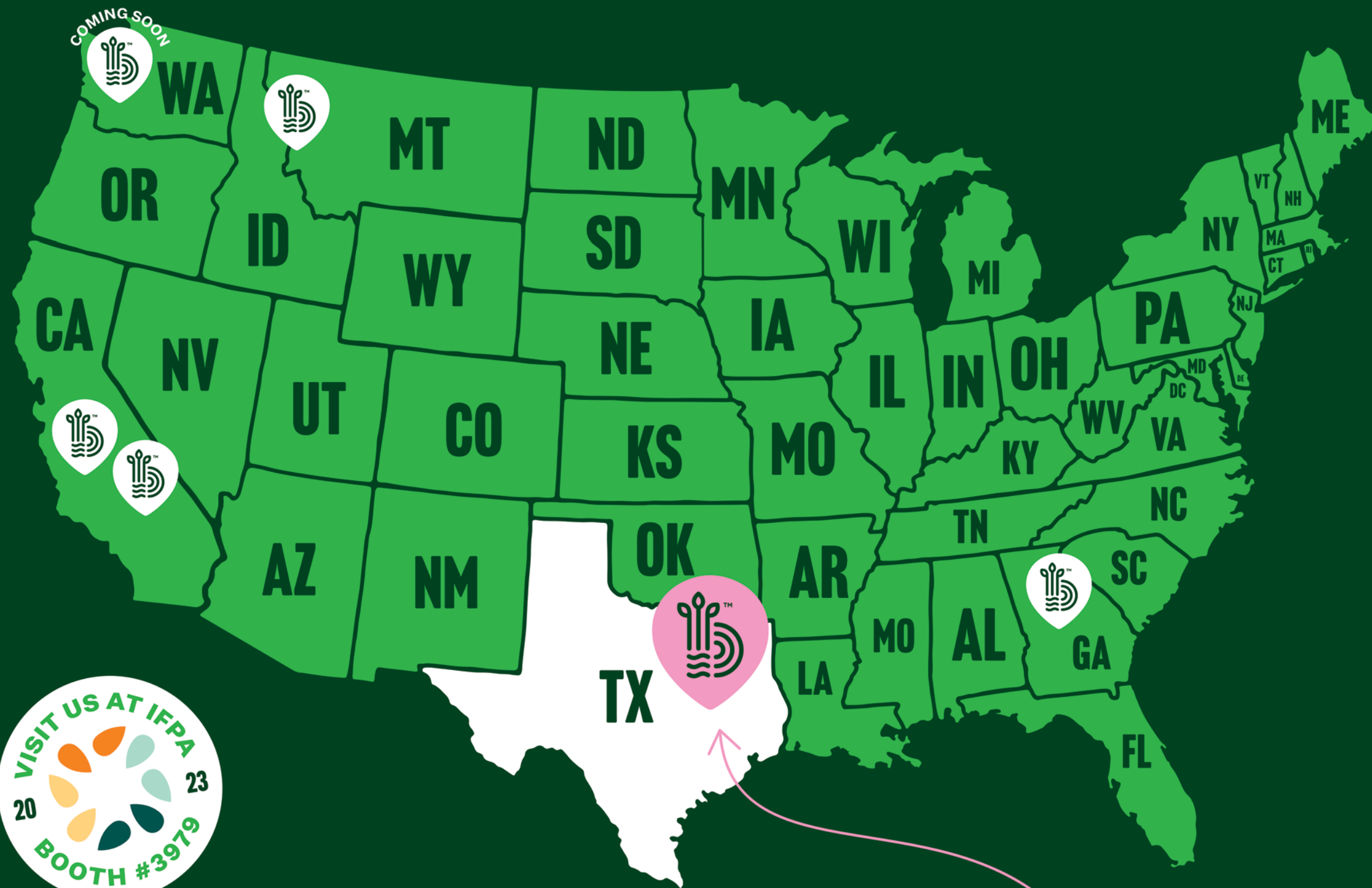


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“EVERY NIGHT MAKES SOMEBODY’S DAY... YOU ASKED ME HOW I CAN DO THIS AND THAT’S HOW I CAN DO THIS.”

This uncomplicated reflection amid a sea of dynamic writing stuck with me. I love its simplicity and also its magnitude.

For anyone who is familiar with working in foodservice, the television series “The Bear” captures every insane, magical, tormenting, tyrannical, tortuous, and beautiful aspect of the restaurant industry. Now, I have never worked in a place like Chicago’s Michelin-starred Ever Restaurant, but I did my fair share of serving and bartending during my college years.

The quote above is spoken by the restaurant’s expediter, Jessica, during episode seven of “The Bear.” This dialogue opens when Ritchie Jerimovich asks Jessica how she does what she does. Ritchie, the abrasive and struggling cousin of Carmen ‘Army’ Berzatto—the protagonist and young fine-dining chef who comes home to Chicago to run his family sandwich shop, Beef—has been sent by Carmy to spend a week working at one of the best restaurants in the world.

While the storyline, dialogue, manic movement of scenes, and family dynamics keep me teetering on a razor’s edge, I am deeply drawn to this production. The pace, a familiar one.

When applied to our own storytelling work here at *The Snack*, “Every night makes somebody’s day” perfectly sums up one of the main reasons we do what we do.

We love making someone’s day. And, sometimes, when we have no juice left—when thousands of words have flown out of our fingers and minds—it is this idea that refills our creative tank. This taps the passion that we fear may end but never truly does.



I love it when I see a story our team has written or a press release we’ve reimaged posted or shared by someone who felt important, seen, heard, or even validated by it. Sometimes it is a buyer who sends it to the supplier where the story’s journey concludes in a PO. Other times, it is a daughter sending it to her parents because her company has just been featured front and center for our audience.

We are an industry of heart. Of sweat equity and shared golden hours. Of risks without the promise of reward. Our team does what we do so that the people and companies in our stories matter. So that the industry matters—heart, heavy head, passion, and all.

That maybe, just maybe, each story we write may make someone’s day. 🍷

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

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2005 Capitol Ave., Sacramento, CA 95811

A Closer Look at Taylor Farms Snack Packs

By Jordan Okumura-Wright

The name of the game for me today is refueling. On the go. With a healthy option. Snickers® is no longer a trick of my trade. Well, maybe sometimes.

With companies continuing to make strides in the healthy and convenient food arena, my quandary has become a much easier game to compete in. Taylor Farms is one such large, family-owned operation inspiring my pocketbook with its snack innovations and, I guarantee you, other Apple Wallets as well. The company recently launched its newest Snack Packs, bringing versatile flavors to the fresh space with delicious, nutritious, packaged, and ready-to-eat fuel for retailers.

Pairing fresh fruits and vegetables with dips that taste like they were homemade, Taylor Farms’ line includes Chicken Salad—a mix of baby carrots, celery bites, crisp crackers, and Taste of the South chicken salad—and Veggies & Guacamole with carrot chips, celery bites, radish, chips, and Good Foods Chunky Guacamole Dip. The line also features Pimento Cheese with baby carrots, celery bites, crisp crackers, and Taste of the South Pimento Cheese Dip, as well as Dill Pickle featuring carrot chips, celery bites, a Cheddar cheese stick, crisp crackers, and Taste of the South Fried Pickle and Ranch Dip. Last but not least is Roasted Hummus, offering baby carrots, celery bites, grape tomatoes, and Fresh Cravings Roasted Red Pepper Hummus.

The Dill Pickle option has my ticket. Salty and tangy with an added crunch and texture that satisfies my ear and tummy, you know consumers will be drawn to this product and the entire line for its unique and flavorful take on traditional snacking treats.

Consider me refueled. 🍷

UP
CLOSE



FEATURES

RANDY SCOTT RETURNING HOME

After more than 40 years across retail giants Food Lion and Sprouts Farmers Market, this produce veteran retires. Randy Scott shares his story in these pages...



ATLAS PRODUCE

DO WHAT MAKES YOU DIFFERENT
For Founder Robert Dobrzanski, a continued dedication to family is what makes the date maven stand apart from the competition. Find out how the provider has tapped into its roots to drive 20 years of development...



BASHAS' FAMILY OF STORES THE IF LIST

Hailing from industry giants Sal Amato Produce Company, Lucky's Market, Sprouts Farmers Market, Safeway, and now Bashas', produce aficionado Patrick Mills has cut his teeth at the best of the best. With the imagination and flare that has marked his success, see what he does with a handful of IFs...



TRINITY FRUIT COMPANY AND CULTIVATE

MENTORS IN THE MAKING
Angela Hernandez has a passion and an energy that are contagious, giving her a gravitational pull in any room in which she walks. With such a presence, we had to know who influenced her career path as she becomes her own mentor and inspiration...



DUDA FARM FRESH FOODS SWEAT EQUITY & FIELDWORK

President Mark Bassetti was born and raised in the thicket of California agriculture. Hear from the leader on how this inspired his passion for produce and influenced his commitment to implementing cutting-edge initiatives in order to propel company evolution...



NATURE FRESH FARMS™ MENTORS IN THE MAKING

We trace the growth of Stephanie Myles' exciting career across controlled environment agriculture (CEA) operations and the mentors who shaped her journey...



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PROJECT PHOENIX

As flames ensure the mythical bird is reborn, so too has this program galvanized a produce rebirth that makes fresh the epicenter of a grocery chain's growth strategy. Amanda Labuckas shares how...



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LESLIE LAWRENCE

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Do What Makes You

DIFFERENT

A Q&A With Robert Dobrzanski, Founder, Atlas Produce

By Jenna Plasterer

What makes you different?

Whether asking that of yourself or being asked by someone else, it's a powerful question, with answers spanning from straightforward to an immensely complicated plundering of one's soul. Regardless of what form the response takes, getting there can be challenging. Finding the truth forces you to hold a mirror up to yourself and do that dreaded thing we're always told not to do: Compare yourself to others. For comparison is the thief of joy.

Ironically, in the business world, the same rules do not apply. Companies must constantly compare themselves to those around them because competition inspires development. In our industry, suppliers are consistently working to evolve their products to not only provide the best offerings possible to buyers and shoppers, but also to stand out in a sea of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Throughout my time in produce, I have asked countless providers to tell me what distinguishes them from their industry counterparts. When I recently posed this question to Robert Dobrzanski, Founder of Atlas Produce, his answer came quickly: family, a loyal customer base, and the Atlas Produce team. Proving that in the business world, sometimes comparison doesn't rob us of joy, but actually shines a light on the things that inspire happiness and connection.

Celebrating two decades in business, the California Medjool date and table grape provider remains dedicated to being family-owned, which, over the years, has become a key differentiator for the company and for the consumers choosing which brands to add to their baskets.



Jenna Plasterer: First of all, congratulations on 20 years in business, Robert! That is a huge milestone. What does this achievement mean to Atlas Produce?

Robert Dobrzanski, Founder, Atlas Produce: Atlas

Produce proudly celebrates our 20th anniversary and the journey we have taken to become category leaders in the California date and table grape industries. Twenty years is a testament to the passion for what our family-owned business grows and provides worldwide and the hard work of our dedicated team. To ring in this momentous occasion, we will release some new items that hit the market this fall.



Q2

JP: What has helped Atlas stand out from other date brands to remain successful in business for this long?

RD: Being a family-owned business is a point of pride for us and something we have seen consumers respond positively to, as only some are left. We care greatly for the quality of fruit we grow and the customer service we provide.

Q3

JP: Backed by this dedication to being family-owned, how has the company and its portfolio evolved over the years?

RD: One evening, I asked my wife, Nicole, to try a Medjool date from Coachella, California, and her immediate response was, "It tastes like natural caramel!" Thus, Caramel Naturel was born. Fast-forward 14 years, and the Caramel Naturel brand has transformed into our Fresh Energy™ brand, which offers over 20 SKUs of conventional and organic date offerings. Atlas Produce has also become a champion of premium California table grapes under the Wild Flower label. And lastly, we launched our newest brand, Sunnies Energy Bites, last year and are excited to release three more SKUs this year.

Q4

JP: What is on the horizon for Atlas as you plan for the next two decades, Robert?

RD: We are looking forward to the coming 20 years, which will include bringing the next generation of the family into the business. Atlas is also focused on growing the date market even more. So there's a lot more to come as we enjoy this significant chapter.

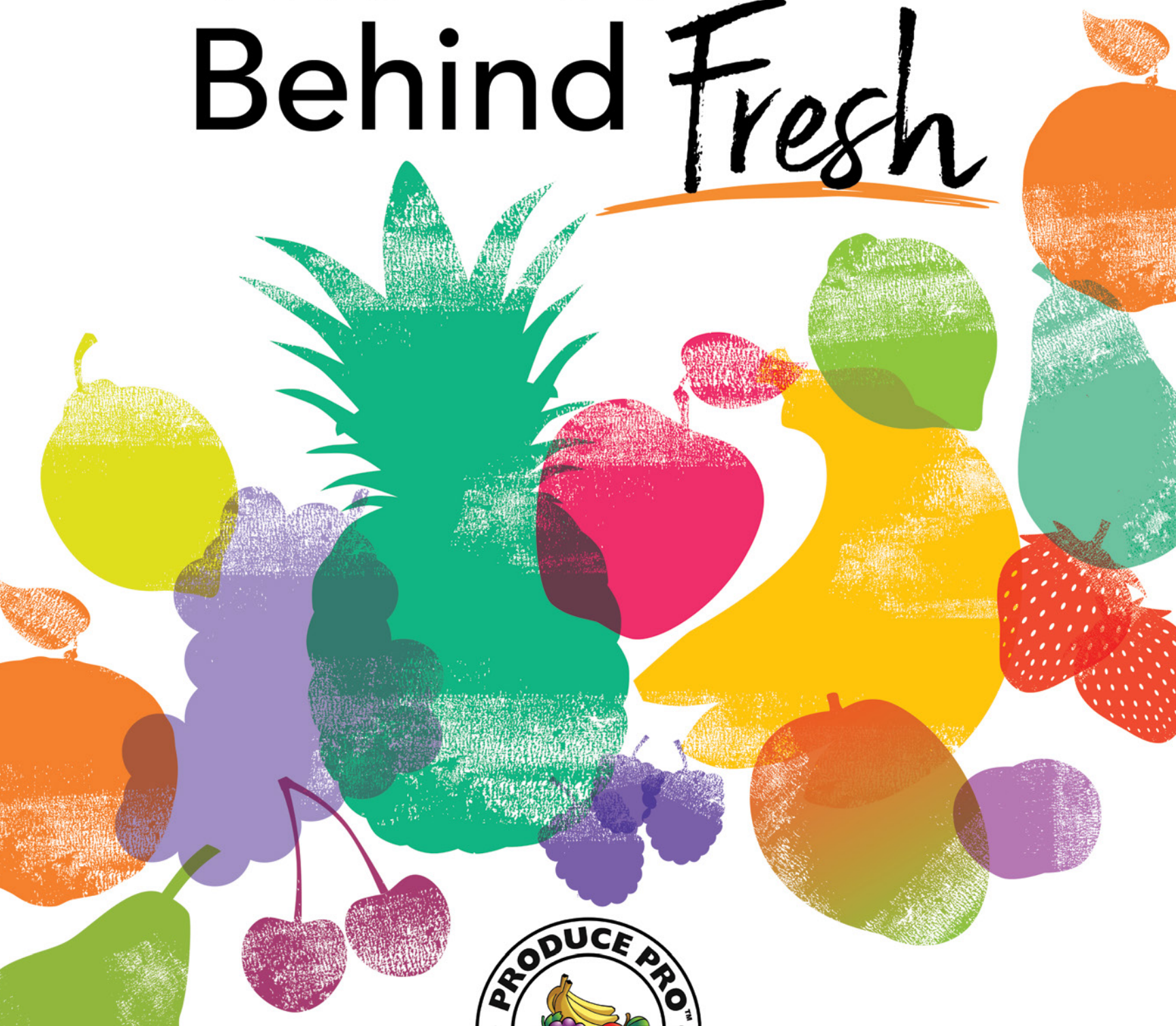


Over the last two decades, Robert Dobrzanski and his wife Nicole have grown Atlas Produce into a thriving California Medjool date and table grape provider

Self-assurance is one of the greatest tools a person can have, and for a company like Atlas, knowing what separates its business from competitors is where it finds strength. Harnessing the power of family, there is no telling where the next 20 years will take the date maven because, as Atlas has proven, comparison can have the power to inspire wonderful growth. **S**

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Citrus snapshot

BY PEGGY PACKER

The citrus sector is synonymous with opportunity. From applications in food, health, household cleaning, and much more, the category extends itself into nearly every corner of a consumer's lifestyle. With shoppers already grasping for the undeniably refreshing flavors the citrus segment has long been known for, now is the time to truly harness the versatility of this staple produce offering. Read on as *The Snack* brings you some exclusive insights to back a season of citrus sales...



Blood Orange

Attributes Deep maroon interior with very few seeds and orange-red blushed exterior; easy to peel

Aroma Mildly floral with an earthy, papaya-like fragrance

Flavor Rich, plum-like flavor with hints of tart cherry and raspberry undertones

Cara Cara Orange

Attributes Rich pink pulp with orange exterior; seedless

Aroma Pleasingly tropical

Flavor Extremely sweet with a kiss of cranberry and cherry undertones



Navel Orange

Attributes Small navel formation on the blossom end; easy to peel and seedless

Aroma Sweet, floral

Flavor Refreshingly sweet with rich vanilla finish and cherry undertones



Valencia Orange

Attributes Differentiated from other orange varieties by a thin, slightly pebbly rind and occasional seeds

Aroma Orange blossom

Flavor Perfect balance of sweet and tart flavors; high juice content



Clementine, W. Murcott, and Tango

Attributes Uniquely rounded middle, flat top and bottom, medium-sized fruit with deep orange, smooth, glossy skin; seedless and easy to peel

Aroma Sweet, wildflower, pomegranate-like

Flavor Crisp apricot-like or candied nectar flavor with a rich aftertaste

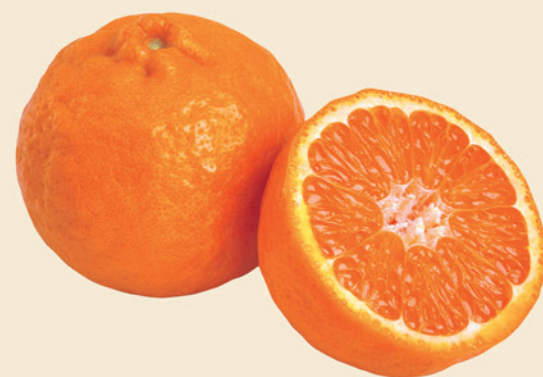


Ojai Pixie Tangerine

Attributes Small with a pebbly, light orange skin; seedless, easy to peel, and grown only in the lush Ojai region of Southern California

Aroma Sweet citrus aroma with floral undertones

Flavor Candy-like sweetness



Page Mandarin

Attributes Prominent circle on blossom end

Aroma Crisp citrus scent

Flavor Rich flavor



Satsuma Mandarin

Attributes Varying in shape from flat to necked; easy to peel and segment; seedless

Aroma Sweet honeysuckle aroma

Flavor Refreshing with warm, tropical hints



Gold Nugget Mandarin

Attributes Bright and slightly bumpy rind; seedless, sweet, and easy to peel

Aroma Candy citrus

Flavor Rich and sweet, juicy flavor



Meyer Lemon

Attributes Cross between a regular lemon and a Mandarin orange; bright yellow or rich orange-yellow color

Aroma Rich lemon blossom; floral, sweet lime, lemon, and Mandarin scents

Flavor Zesty sweet citrus flavor



Eureka and Lisbon Lemon

Attributes Two different types that are virtually indistinguishable from each other; bright yellow with medium to slightly pebbly skin; popular citrus fruit used in cooking today

Aroma Crisp, floral smell

Flavor Distinct tangy flavor that complements both sweet and savory foods



Pink Variegated Lemon

Attributes Pink on the inside with a yellow-and-green-striped rind

Aroma Bright, crisp

Flavor Slightly less acidic than conventional lemons



Grapefruit

Attributes Yellow skin with a pink blush, flesh varies from light pink to deep red

Aroma Subtly sweet, sour cherry

Flavor Perfect balance of sweet and tart flavors; extremely juicy

Texas Rio Red Grapefruit

Attributes Overall blush on the exterior peel with a deep red interior color

Aroma Bright and floral

Flavor Surprisingly sweet with a hint of zing



Oro Blanco and Melo

Attributes Oro: Slightly larger than grapefruit with a thick green-yellow rind
Melo: Larger than Oro with a thinner rind

Aroma Sweet

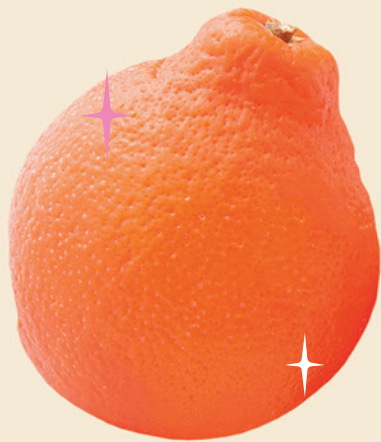
Flavor Oro: Juicy and sweet with bitter membranes
Melo: Sweet, but less sweet than a Pummelo

Pummelo

Attributes Largest of all citrus fruit; thick, dark green peel that fades to yellow as season progresses

Aroma Zesty; slightly tropical with a hint of jasmine and lime

Flavor Sweet with a candied aftertaste



Minneola Tangelo

Attributes Cross between a grapefruit and tangerine; a deep orange with a knob-like formation at the stem end and few, if any, seeds; peels easily

Aroma Robust, tart-orange aroma

Flavor Bold, tangy flavor and bursting with juice

Persian Lime

Attributes Typically sold while still dark green in color, gradually turns light green as it ripens; virtually seedless

Aroma Spicy, floral

Flavor Distinctive lime flavor



Key Lime (Mexican or West Indian Lime)

Attributes Generally round with straw yellow flesh and a thin, leathery skin; ranging from light green to yellow

Aroma Highly crisp aromatic attributes

Flavor Fresh, tangy taste

Finger Lime

Attributes Not related to a lemon or a lime; considered a micro-citrus with tiny fruit pearls in a wide range of colors

Aroma Unique, refreshing lime

Flavor Similar to a lemon-lime-grapefruit combination



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» The IF List « Patrick Mills,

Director of Produce and Floral, Bashas' Family of Stores

With Jordan Okumura-Wright



As a harbinger of fresh in the retail space, Patrick Mills takes his role at Bashas' Family of Stores to heart, bringing a deep commitment to making the department a world-class destination. Hailing from industry giants that include Sal Amato Produce Company, Lucky's Market, Sprouts Farmers Market, and Safeway, you can begin to see how this produce aficionado has cut his teeth at the best of the best. These days, Patrick resides as Bashas' Director of Produce and Floral, dreaming and then executing the company's vision for all things fresh. Between such important duties, Patrick took a moment to tell us what's what in other areas of his imagination, and we were more than happy to bring them to you...

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

The future—what is next?

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

A cheeseburger.

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

Robert Duvall.

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

I couldn't imagine. There have been five generations of produce in my family—it's our life. Maybe farming!

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

Bill Gates.

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

A satellite phone, seeds, a knife, and a compass.

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

Letting go of sports when I had the opportunity to extend my playing into later years.

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

An eagle.

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

Produce Is My Heritage and Life.

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

"Seven Days in Utopia."

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

Eggs.

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

Patience—more patience, yes!

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

The birth of my child. Hands down.

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

Pay attention more and listen.

» IF you could invent anything, what would you invent?

A cure for cancer. 🙏



WTF DO I DO WITH 4Earth Farms™ Organic Squash ?

{ what the fork }



4EARTH FARMS™ ORGANIC SQUASH SUCCOTASH

INGREDIENTS

- 1 4Earth Farms™ Organic Zucchini Squash, diced
- 1 4Earth Farms Organic Yellow Squash, diced
- 3 strips bacon (optional)
- 1 tsp olive oil
- ½ cup corn kernels
- ½ cup fresh tomatoes, diced
- ½ cup black beans, cooked
- 1 tbsp pesto
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Prep Time: 10 min

Cook Time: 15 min

Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Optional ingredient: In a large skillet, cook bacon until crisp. Blot bacon with paper towel, crumble, and set aside.
- 2 In the same skillet, heat olive oil over medium-high heat.
- 3 Add zucchini, yellow squash, and corn. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
- 4 Cook, stirring occasionally, for about 10 minutes.
- 5 Stir in the tomatoes, black beans, and pesto and remove from heat.
- 6 Place in a large bowl. Garnish with the crumbled bacon, if desired.
- 7 Serve immediately. Enjoy!

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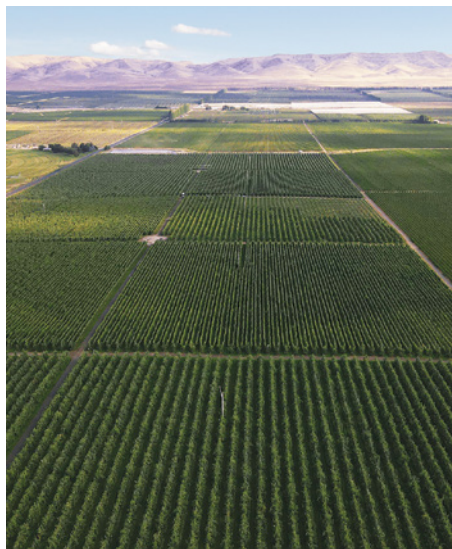
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1 A RISING STAR

Many apple varieties have come and gone as consumer preferences evolve. In such a highly competitive sector, only the fittest survive—and only the best rise to the top. Envy earned a top 10 spot in total United States apple sales dollars less than 10 years after entering the market, a position held for four seasons and counting, according to NielsenIQ scan data for Total U.S. as of June 2023. Availability continues to grow for the year-round apple in all formats, organically and conventionally.

2 THE APPLE LOVER'S APPLE

Envy represents everything one could want in an apple—flavorful, crunchy, juicy, versatile. Eaten fresh out of hand, the variety yields a deeply fruity aroma that's hard to forget. Dark red stripes adorn a golden background, giving way to a firm, snappy crunch. Additionally, Envy slices naturally stay whiter for longer, making them perfect for charcuterie boards and lunchboxes.

3 HIGH STANDARDS

Envy shippers must adhere to strict growing and packing standards to assure premium quality. The Zirkle family, represented by Rainier Fruit Company, has made Envy a significant portion of their varietal portfolio, reflecting their belief in the apple and its potential. The multigenerational supplier employs the latest growing practices focusing on sustainability to deliver consistent products, driving repeat purchases and incremental category growth.



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WTF DO I DO WITH { what the fork } Lipman Family Farms® Monet Reds Tomatoes ?



TOMATO CONFIT

INGREDIENTS

2 pints Lipman Family Farms® Monet Reds Tomatoes
1–2 heads garlic, cut in half
1 tsp salt
¼ tsp pepper
1½–2 cups olive oil
 Fresh basil, thyme, and oregano

Prep Time: 10 min
Cook Time: 40 min
Servings: 1 large mason jar

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat the oven to 400° F.
- 2 Place tomatoes in a baking dish and drizzle olive oil, almost fully covering tomatoes. Nestle in the heads of garlic and sprinkle salt and pepper over all the tomatoes.
- 3 Roast for 40 minutes, stirring halfway through or until the tomatoes have begun to brown on top and are starting to burst. The garlic should also be quite soft.
- 4 Remove garlic and set dish aside to cool slightly. When cool enough to handle, squeeze the garlic cloves out into the tomato-oil mixture. If serving immediately, top with a mix of fresh herbs.
- 5 Alternatively, cool fully and add fresh herbs before storing in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 2 weeks. Enjoy!

Note: Try on baked pastries, on toast, with whipped feta or goat cheese, and on top of tomato soup or salad.

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A Closer Look at Bee Sweet Citrus Mandarin Point-of-Sale Line

By Jordan Okumura-Wright

The potential a pop of color can bring to a produce department cannot be overstated. Combined with distinctive messaging and a brand built on consumer loyalty, retail operators are finding a fruitful bottom line and vibrant look for their Mandarin destinations this year—all with the help of Bee Sweet Citrus.

While Bee Sweet Mandarins are themselves an eye-catching beacon of taste, the company is also bringing point-of-sale (POS) solutions to level up the retail citrus game. Presented with high-graphic bins, standing signs, and bee cutouts, the produce department can tease the eye, the palate, and the basket for citrus customers of every age group.

Each bin can hold either ten 3 lb mesh bags or six 5 lb mesh bags of Bee Sweet Mandarins, making them an easy grab-and-go addition to shoppers' grocery lists. Messaging is key for Bee Sweet as well, with a program tailored to representing the home of its growing operations in Fowler, California.

Mandarins are a snack that's filling, packed with nutrients, and taste great. With their easy-to-peel and incredibly versatile qualities, Bee Sweet Mandarins are suitable for the entire family! Get your customers to #eatmorecitrus this year, and keep coming back for more. 

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A Closer Look at Soli Organic™ Packaged Bunches

By Chandler James

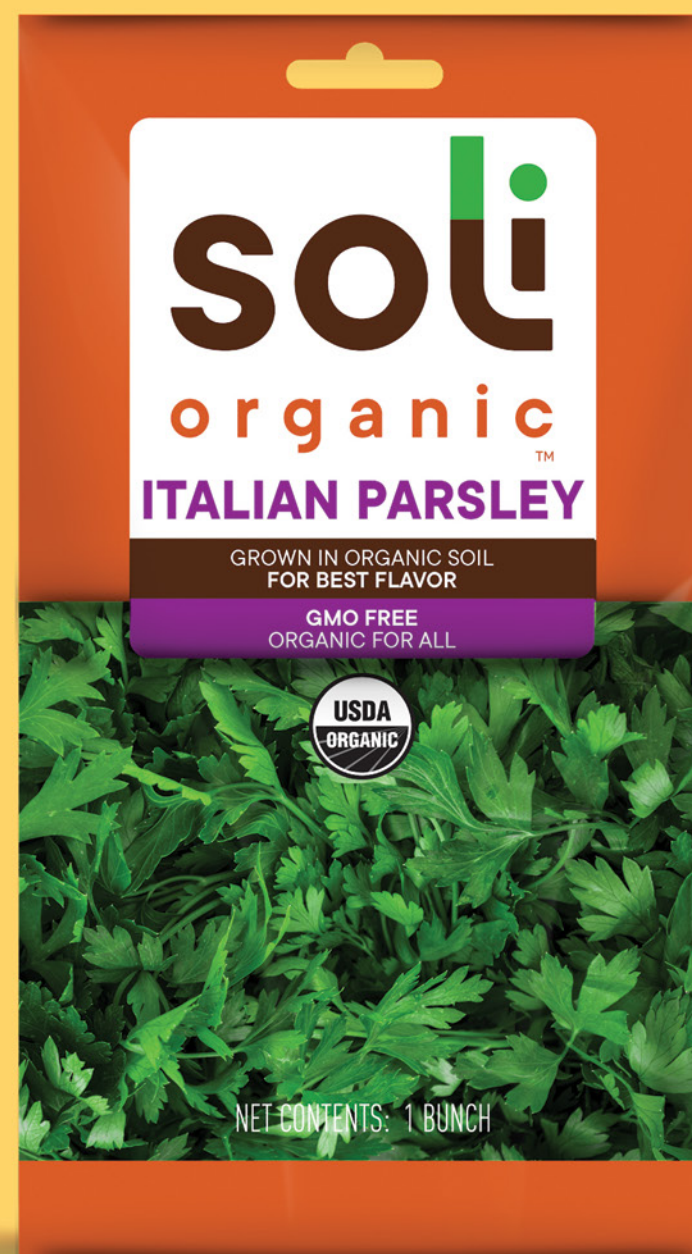
Come a little closer—I won't bite! Now that I've got your attention, let me introduce you to the latest Soli Organic™ product to hit the market: Packaged Bunches.

With this release, the supplier has taken its expertise in Living Herbs and Fresh Cut Packaged Herbs and applied it to an all-new format. Italian parsley and cilantro are the first two herbaceous additions joining the lineup; they each offer an elevated eating experience that considers freshness to be the key ingredient. Perfectly housed bunch by bunch in high-graphic packaging, Soli's new Packaged Bunches not only provide a punch of flavor, but an added layer of convenience in the kitchen.

Did something else catch your eye? I bet you were quick to notice that Soli's new products are sporting a strategic brand refresh as well. The grower's distinct, newly redesigned packaging is all about communicating the most important messages to consumers: that the products are organic, GMO free, and grown in soil for best flavor.

Plus, the new Packaged Bunches offer you peace of mind from a food safety point of view. As we learned from the pandemic, packaged products offer an added layer of protection—a point of differentiation that will have shoppers adding Packaged Bunches to their carts in no time. 🍋

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WTF

DO I DO WITH

LIV Organic™
Russet Potatoes

?

{ what the fork }



CHEDDAR & ROSEMARY HASSELBACK POTATOES

INGREDIENTS

- 4 LIV Organic™ Russet Potatoes, washed and patted dry
- 2 tbsps butter, melted
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 4 tsp fresh rosemary, chopped
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp pepper
- ¼ tsp garlic powder
- 1 cup mild Cheddar cheese, shredded

Prep Time: 15 min
Cook Time: 1 hour
Servings: 4



DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 425° F.
- 2 Place a potato in between two wooden spoons. Using a sharp knife, slice the potatoes crosswise about ⅛" thick. The spoons will prevent the knife from cutting through the potato completely. Continue slicing the entire length of the potato. Repeat slicing the remaining potatoes.
- 3 Set potatoes on a baking sheet. Set aside.
- 4 In a small bowl, combine butter, olive oil, rosemary, salt, pepper, and garlic powder. Brush the tops and sides of each potato slice with the butter mixture.
- 5 Bake potatoes for 1 hour or until tender with crisp tops. Brush the remaining butter mixture, and sprinkle cheese over the top.
- 6 Bake for a few minutes or until cheese has melted. Serve immediately. Enjoy!

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



▶ MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀

LESLIE LAWRENCE

Operations Manager, Joe Produce

With **Jordan Okumura-Wright**

From furry friends to swimming and hot yoga, this industry advocate has a love and passion that extends beyond fresh produce—but, lucky for us, she adores her fruits and veggies. Working at Joe Produce has allowed her the gift of getting to know people from all walks of life. So, we had to ask Leslie Lawrence, could we turn the tables and have the chance to get to know her just a little bit more?

1

I cherish them all. Life is short; in the end, these are the greatest treasures.

2

Exploring new places and countries with my husband, Rex. We both love Paris and Maui.

3

Finding new (to us) coffee houses with my daughter, Jordan, is one of life's little pleasures.

4

Love the game! People are surprised how I can turn it on when competing—I get that from my dad.

5

I'm always wearing some kind of beaded bracelets; most with sentimental value.

6

From our pets at home to SPCA volunteering, there is often at least one dog in the Joe Produce office.

7

I'm always cooking. Must be the Italian in me! I learned from my Nana!

8

Feels so good to sweat and stretch! I will get my teaching certificate someday.

9

A great low-impact workout.



- 1 Family and Friends
- 2 Travel
- 3 Coffee
- 4 Ping Pong
- 5 Beads
- 6 Animals
- 7 Cooking and Food Prep
- 8 Hot Yoga
- 9 Swimming



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WTF DO I DO WITH Castle Rock Vineyards Green Envy® Table Grapes ?

{ what the fork }



MINI AUTUMNAL FRUIT TARTS

INGREDIENTS

TOPPING

1 XL bunch of Castle Rock Green Envy® Table Grapes
1 peach
1 punnet of blueberries
9 strawberries

PASTRY CREAM

2 tbsp cornstarch
3 egg yolks
2 cups milk, divided
1 tsp vanilla powder
½ cups sugar
½ tsp salt
1 tbsp butter

1 Pillsbury sugar cookie dough roll

Prep Time: 30 min
Cook Time: 15 min
Chill Time: 1 hour
Servings: 12

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to package directions.
- 2 Grease a mini-muffin tin or cupcake tray. Slice the sugar cookie dough into thin slices (about ¼") and press them into the sides of the tray. Bake for 10 minutes, or until firm and edges are golden. Be careful not to underbake. Let the cups cool completely.
- 3 Meanwhile, make pastry cream by mixing cornstarch, egg yolks, 1½ cups of milk, and vanilla powder in a bowl. Set aside.
- 4 Add sugar, salt, and ½ cup of milk to a pot over medium heat; stir until mixed. Be careful not to boil the mixture. Add the egg mixture to the pot and whisk continuously until the pastry cream has thickened.
- 5 Turn off heat, add cold butter, and whisk until combined.
- 6 Peel the peach then slice all fruit into even sizes. Top the crust with pastry cream and garnish with each fruit.
- 7 Refrigerate for 1 hour, or until pastry cream is set, before serving—and enjoy!

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WTF DO I DO WITH Fuyu™ Persimmons ?

{ what the fork }



SPICED PERSIMMON BREAD

INGREDIENTS

6 Do You Fuyu™ Persimmons
 ½ cup milk of choice
 1¼ cups all-purpose flour
 ½ tsp kosher salt
 1½ tsp baking soda
 1½ tsp pumpkin pie spice

1 cup sugar
 2 eggs, at room temperature
 1 tsp vanilla extract
 ½ stick butter, melted
 ¼ cup vegetable oil

Prep Time: 20 min
Cook Time: 40–50 min
Servings: 1 loaf

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Do You FUYU™

To learn more about Fuyu™ Persimmons, visit www.doyoufuyu.com

DIRECTIONS

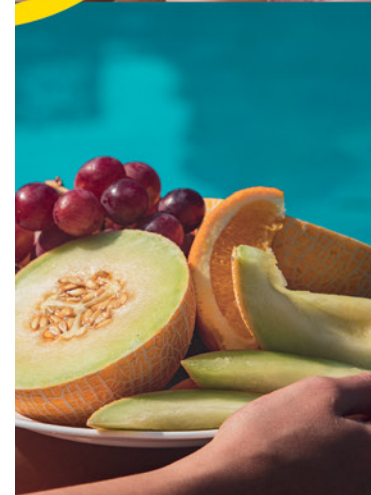
- 1 Prepare persimmon pulp by roughly chopping three small persimmons. Blend with milk until it forms a purée. Measure out one cup of purée for the recipe. Reserve the rest for another use, such as smoothies.
- 2 Prepare remaining persimmons by thinly slicing one persimmon into rounds, either with a knife or mandolin. Dice last two persimmons.
- 3 In a medium bowl, combine dry ingredients: all-purpose flour, kosher salt, baking soda, pumpkin pie spice, and sugar.

- 4 In another bowl, lightly beat eggs with a fork and combine with remaining wet ingredients: vanilla extract, melted butter, vegetable oil, and persimmon purée. Whisk until well combined.
- 5 Add wet ingredients to dry ingredients and use a spatula to fold everything together until flour is no longer visible. Fold in diced persimmons.

- 6 Grease and line a standard 9" x 5" x 3" loaf pan. Pour batter into the pan,

smoothing out the top and ensuring even distribution in the corners. Place the thinly sliced persimmons on top of the batter.

- 7 Bake at 350° F for 40–50 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the middle comes out clean, without any raw batter. Enjoy!



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MENTORS IN THE MAKING

Angela Hernandez

BY JORDAN OKUMURA-WRIGHT

> **SOME OF US STEEL OURSELVES AGAINST THE DAY.** Others open and step into the fog or fight willingly, despite the promise of challenge or reward. This is the kind of mindset mentor-in-the-making Angela Hernandez occupies. Her contagious kindness and boundless passion generate a gravity not limited to fresh produce, but, luckily for us, influence it.

Sitting in her home in Fresno, California, Angela takes the temperature of our industry in her role as Director of Marketing for Trinity Fruit Company and as President and Co-Founder of Cultivate. From her seat on the sell-side and from the position as the visionary of a marketing agency providing a 360-degree perspective on go-to-market strategies respectively, Angela is a powerhouse produce professional creating a destiny on her own terms. With the help of mentors whose gravity has helped shift her destiny, Angela has paved a path that others are sure to follow.

“My mom, Delia, worked in the office at Sun Valley Packing. The wonderful parents that they were—and still are—instilled in me and my siblings a drive to work for what we want,” Angela tells me, casting a line back to her roots and the foundation of her strong will and dedication. “My mom would say they’d get me what I needed, but if I wanted something I had to learn the value of money and work for it.”

This lesson became a seed that sprouted the determination and passion that Angela is known for. So, there she was at 15 years old, working summers at the packinghouse. Angela remembers packing fruit one day and looking up at the catwalk and seeing a saleswoman walking a retailer down to show them the process.

“I thought to myself, ‘I could do her job one day,’” Angela reflects. “Little did I know at the time that words and manifestation are so powerful. That exact thought played out in my life and I’m so thankful!”

After high school, she started out in Ag Business at Fresno State University thinking that’s what she would get her degree in. A year into it, Angela changed her major to Special Education.

“I figured if there was something I’d need my degree in it was teaching. I learned a lot during that time that helps me to this day, although the gravity of fresh produce drew me back to the industry. With the companies I have worked for, I’ve always operated like a sponge and took everything in, using them as stepping stones to learn more and more. I gleaned this mentality from Special Education and it has been life-changing,” she describes.

A hop, skip, and a jump into the near-present of 2018, and Angela joined Trinity Fruit Company as Brand Manager and was promoted to Director of Marketing a year later. Here is where she met President David White—an incredible mentor, friend, and guiding light.

“David has grown to be a mentor to me since I started working for Trinity. David is very inspiring and his mind runs non-stop, which is why I believe he has always been so successful. He had humble beginnings and, even in his successes, has

retained that humility. That in itself is inspiring. David has been very supportive of my growth and his ‘chess player’ mentality taught me something essential: You always have to be three steps ahead of him because you know he already has every solution thought out. Those are always the fun challenges!”

One of the most treasured aspects of her mentorship with David is how he allowed Angela to be authentic and unintimidated by knowledge or success.

“One of the things that David said to me once was, ‘Take the high road, Hernandez, you can see better from up there.’ I’ll never forget that,” Angela shares.

Angela’s next mentor came at a very valuable fork in the road. In 2022, Angela decided to take her expertise and apply it to an industry-wide goal to change the way that fresh produce companies go to market. She founded the ag-based marketing firm Cultivate, which she runs alongside her role with Trinity



Angela Hernandez,
Director of Marketing,
Trinity Fruit Company and
President and Co-Founder,
Cultivate

Fruit. Angela brought in a four-person, all-female team of Co-Founders, including Michele Visser, Vice President of Business Development; Brianne Adams, Vice President of Operations; and Jane Olvera Majors, Vice President of Strategy.

“Jane and I clicked immediately when we realized we were born on the BEST DAY, January 6!” Angela tells me. “We met by way of business. I had hired Jane’s marketing agency to do some design work for a company I was working for at the time, and as time took its course, we became business partners in launching Cultivate. Jane has been a mentor and guiding light even before the launch, and she still holds that presence for me. Jane has built a multi-million-dollar agency and I have always admired the tenacity our fellow Capricorns inhibit! With her profound knowledge in the marketing sector and our existing partnership, she has grown to be a mentor for me in owning and growing a business.”

With such inspiring mentors, I ask Angela how these amazing relationships inform and fuel her passion.

“I believe food is one of the greatest forms of communion and that’s why I love it—my mentors have helped me see this in a beautiful way. It’s relational and that’s what I believe God created us to do. The fresh produce space allows me to do that,” Angela shares.

While I came to Angela with this project in search of her mentors and lessons learned, I find myself very much mentored by her words and the legacy she is building. Her open heart and ability to step into the unknown is something I find refreshing, courageous, and unique.

I believe other mentees will too. 🍷

THE MENTORS >

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



David White,
President, Trinity Fruit Company

“Angela brought a diverse level of great produce experience to Trinity Fruit when she first started with us. From the beginning, she was excited to take on new product lines and opportunities as they came up. When I first started working on a game plan for a new fresh juice line in 2019, she immediately got behind the project and helped me develop the architecture of the launch.

She has shown an eagerness to learn new things and to help update our presence in the marketplace where we needed that as well. Everyone here can tell she loves to work hard and has become a great manager of her team. As our Director of Marketing, she has a lot of different commodity lines and opportunities thrown at her, and she has never complained. We are all about follow-through and execution, and that is her wheelhouse. The company was founded by my wife Lisa and I on family values, faith, and hard work. Angela has shown the character and drive to help us be the best company we can be.



Jane Olvera Majors,
Co-Founder and Vice President
of Strategy, Cultivate

“Angela is an absolute firecracker in the best sense of the word. The first thing you will notice about Angela is her boundless energy and upbeat attitude—it’s truly authentic and completely magnetic. Her love for her work and her desire for continuous growth is evident in how she approaches life and those around her. Angela is clearly focused on her personal and professional goals and is extremely driven to achieve them, but not at any cost. She also truly cares about her personal ethics and the people she loves—and will defend both no matter what.

The first time we met, we discovered we were both Capricorns and even share the same birthday! It was an instant connection point that is a running theme between us. However, I’m not sure it was by chance that this connection was created. As I’ve grown to know her more, I realize this is just Angela. She can find a genuine connection point with you the moment you meet, and then you are drawn into her energy, her ideas, and her passion for the ag marketing business.

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WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Sweet Onions from
Shuman Farms ?



HAM & CHEESE SLIDERS WITH CARAMELIZED SWEET ONIONS

INGREDIENTS

3 medium Sweet Onions from Shuman Farms, caramelized
4 tbsp salted butter, melted
2 tbsp honey mustard
1 tbsp dried parsley
1/8 tsp garlic powder
1/4 tsp poppy seeds
1 package (24 ct) Hawaiian rolls
3/4 lb cooked deli honey ham, thinly sliced
1/2 lb Swiss cheese, thinly sliced

Prep Time: 15 min

Cook Time: 22 min

Servings: 24

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 350° F and spray a 9" x 13" baking dish with nonstick cooking spray. In a small bowl, stir together the melted butter, mustard, and seasonings.
- 2 Do not pull the rolls apart. Use a large serrated knife to slice the rolls in half, separating the tops from the bottoms. You may have to do one half at a time depending on the size of your knife.
- 3 Place the bottom layer of rolls into the prepared baking pan.
- 4 Layer half of the ham onto the rolls, then layer the cheese and the caramelized sweet onions. Top with the remaining ham slices and replace the slider bun tops.
- 5 Spread the butter mustard mixture all over the top of the sliders.
- 6 Cover the pan with aluminum foil, and bake for 12 minutes. Then, remove the foil and bake uncovered for an additional 10 minutes. Enjoy!

Tip: You can make this ahead of time! Once your sliders are prepared and buttered, cover and refrigerate for up to 4 hours.



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WTF

DO I DO WITH

{ what the fork }

Sunripe™ Heirloom Medley
Grape Tomatoes ?



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INGREDIENTS

10 oz Sunripe™ Certified Brand's
Heirloom Medley Grape Tomatoes
24 fresh basil leaves
8 oz Mozzarella balls
2 tbsp balsamic glaze
2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
24 short skewers (3 1/2") or toothpicks
Salt and pepper, to taste

Prep Time: 20 min
Servings: 24 skewers

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Wash all fresh produce items and pat dry.
- 2 Add one grape tomato, one basil leaf, and one Mozzarella ball to each skewer.
- 3 Place on serving platter.
- 4 Drizzle skewers with balsamic glaze and olive oil.
- 5 Salt and pepper to taste. Enjoy!

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SWEAT EQUITY *and* FIELDWORK:

The LIFEblood of CALIFORNIA

By Jenna Plasterer

◀ MARK BASSETTI, PRESIDENT,
DUDA FARM FRESH FOODS



“When asked how I got into produce, I joke that was all I knew, and, in reality, I never considered anything but ag.”

MARK BASSETTI, PRESIDENT, DUDA FARM FRESH FOODS

Beautiful beaches freckled with sun-tanned surfers; perfect weather; palm tree-lined boulevards; and the Hollywood sign. I’m sure many of you thought of sunny California without me even having to say it. Or at least what the Golden State is synonymous with.

For native Californians, especially those who grew up in an agricultural town like Mark Bassetti and me, there is a different side to the West Coast region

that many tourists don’t see but all benefit from, whether they know that or not.

In these essential pockets, the entertainment industry and its glamor are replaced by sweat equity, long days in the fields, and 100-year-old companies with a national brand presence like that of Duda Farm Fresh Foods. The pristine ocean is swapped with drip irrigation systems. Surfers transform into sun-tanned farmers and

workers who rise before daybreak to beat the arid valley heat. The palm trees are switched with rows of crops, and the luxury cars cruising the boulevards are exchanged with rambling pickup trucks and tractors that occasionally crawl through town, holding up traffic.

These locales are the lifeblood of California. And Mark was lucky enough to spend his childhood in one such area—Soledad, California, to be specific—where he gained an

appreciation for the produce industry. A passion that would eventually lead him to his new role as President of Duda Farm Fresh Foods.

“I was fortunate to be raised on my family’s vegetable farm, where we grew the typical Salinas Valley, California, crops,” Mark says with fond reminiscence. “My family has farmed in the Salinas Valley for nearly 100 years, and I am the third generation in the business. We have a big extended family, and everyone was in the ag business on some level. When asked how I got into produce, I joke that was all I knew, and, in reality, I never considered anything but ag.”

Carrying a torch for agriculture, Mark attended the University of California, Davis—in my hometown of Davis, California—where he earned a degree in Ag Science and Management with a Viticulture Option. From there, he worked in California, landing his first job as a Produce Inspector and Buyer outside his family business with Kroger-Wesco Foods in Fresno. After that, he transitioned to Klein Bros. International in San Francisco, where he was a Salesperson and Trader for its dried fruit and nut division.

Through both roles, he explored different ag regions across the United States and Central and South America, where his love for the industry only deepened. In this phase of Mark’s career, his understanding of the global landscape also grew—something that would benefit him when he came to Duda.

Wanting to get back into the hustle and bustle of fresh produce, Mark



left Klein Bros. and made a fateful move to Florida in 1991, where he began his journey with Duda in sales at its Belle Glade, Florida, farm.

“It seems like just yesterday that I went from a 16-story office overlooking the Bay Bridge in San Francisco to the muck of Florida,” Mark relays with a laugh. “Duda provided me with a great opportunity to learn the Eastern vegetable and Florida citrus business and still have ties back to the West Coast.”

As he worked his way up the ladder and was able to lean into other areas of the business, Mark played an instrumental role on the Duda team when they first began implementing reusable plastic containers (RPCs) as a key sustainability initiative.

“I’m aging myself, but at the time, we were still floor-loading some products; we had product shipping in wire-bound crates that fit poorly on pallets. Taking on the challenge of implementing a more sustainable solution gave us the capability to provide better quality to consumers and drive change across all packaging, which was a win for everyone,” recalls Mark. “With us being the leader in celery, RPCs provided a great alternative to eliminate wax in cartons, which was a hot topic back then. Looking

back, I see how embracing RPCs helped drive other alternative packaging solutions that are now mainstream.”

Mark has always had a keen eye for viewing the produce supply chain from new angles, which developed his passion for produce traceability and led him to a more recent role with the Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI) Governance Committee. Backed by this unwavering belief in the need to establish an industry-wide approach to tracking

“Taking a leadership role in this process has further strengthened our business and protects the products we strive to make safe and reliable.”

and tracing products, it was paramount to Mark that Duda became an early adopter of PTI.

“By embracing PTI early on, we played a critical role in protecting consumers and our industry by narrowing the impact of potential recalls or other issues, which is crucial,” Mark explains. “I feel Duda was an industry leader in the early days of implementing and advancing PTI.”

Based on Mark’s background, it makes sense to me why implementing PTI was so important: his desire to safeguard the industry, people, and products that have played such a pivotal role in his history. For him, the effort paled in comparison to the reward of upholding the standards of the sector.

“As we know, our industry is a slim-margin, highly volatile business, so an initiative that could be perceived

as ‘yet another cost’ requires time and preparation,” Mark articulates. “It gave us a wonderful way to educate our partners and establish stronger relationships by proving how to use the initiative to increase efficiency. Taking a leadership role in this process has further strengthened our business and protects the products we strive to make safe and reliable.”

And when it comes to moving forward? For Mark, he sees technology like Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags as having unlimited potential to help suppliers stand out on store shelves. Innovations over recent decades, like RPCs and RFID tags, have served as stepping stones to the developments of the future.

“This hasn’t become a reality yet, and I most likely won’t see it in my career, but with labor challenges, product signage, and traceback opportunities, we will see affordable technology in the future that will change how we deliver information to shoppers,” he continues. “This is

a great opportunity to engage and further educate consumers on our offerings.”

Based on Mark’s focus at Duda over the last 31 years and his vision of the future, it is clear that innovation is always lingering at the front of his mind, informing his decisions. When I ask him about it, the leader tells me that progressive development is more than just a motivation—it has been one of the sources of the company’s continued success in the industry.

“Technology is imperative to meet the needs of our industry and the growing population. We are fortunate to have resources like the Western Growers Center for Innovation and Technology and strong partners worldwide that provide us a great platform to share key learnings and accelerate testing and executing on new technologies,” Mark imparts. “In my opinion, to stay at the forefront, you have to be willing to engage in and embrace technology and, more importantly, be open to testing new opportunities and accepting change.”

One of Duda’s central operations, its Celery Breeding and Research and Development program, is a prime example of evolving with technology. The program embraces innovation to ensure the supplier brings the best quality and flavor profile to its customers and their consumers. Through technology, Duda can accelerate its speed to market, which continues to position the company as a progressive solutions provider.

This concept of innovation applies not only to the processes and equipment that Duda uses but also to its range of products, including its coveted value-added offerings.

“Our value-added program has gone through an evolution. The key to advancement is realizing you can have a failed product, but that doesn’t mean you have failed. In some cases, we were ahead of consumers; in other cases, items just required minor adjustments,” Mark lays out. “Our first value-added celery stick retail item was unsuccessful, but we engaged with our customers, learned as much as possible about what appealed to consumers, and where we failed to ‘wow’ shoppers. After tweaking

our approach, we reintroduced our current washed and ready-to-eat Dandy® celery stick product line, which changed consumers’ perception of celery, grew the category, and increased the purchase frequency.”

In his newly appointed role as President, Mark sees excellent opportunities to continue bringing unique value-added products to market. In the last few years, Duda has put time and energy into improving its product development processes and is excited to introduce new options to increase fresh produce consumption.

With all of these achievements under his belt, what does Mark see for the future of Duda? The answer comes in the form of a four-part goal.

“First and foremost, I’m committed to continuing to drive our business with true partnerships,” begins Mark. “Second, we are challenging ourselves with a continuous improvement culture; we will remain relentless at embracing

change and providing the best products, insights, and services. Third, we will continue improving our market position through focused strategic planning. Last, through our R&D and Duda Generations Celery varieties, we will continue bringing the best products to market and provide our customers sustainable growth.”

When listening to a leader like Mark, it’s hard to ignore the passion for fresh produce that lives in his heart.

Growing up in a farming town, I recognize the origin of this commitment. It becomes instinctual when surrounded by devoted individuals who spend sun-up to sundown in the fields, working tirelessly to feed their neighbors near and far. It is a trait born from true dedication to something bigger than yourself, and one that Mark has in spades. 🍷

“In my opinion, *to stay at the forefront*, you have to be willing to engage in and embrace technology and, more importantly, be open to testing new opportunities and accepting change.”

WTF DO I DO WITH RubyFrost® Apples ?

{ what the fork }



RUBYFROST® APPLE CRUMB BARS

Recipe and photo credited to Morgan @nomaste.hungry

INGREDIENTS

FILLING

3 RubyFrost® Apples
4 **tbsp** butter
¼ **cup** brown sugar
Apple pie spice (nutmeg, ginger, cinnamon, and clove) to taste
1 **tsp** arrowroot

CRUMB TOPPING

6 **tbsp** butter, melted
½ **cup** cane sugar
½ **cup** brown sugar
1 **cup** flour
1 **tsp** cinnamon

CRUST

6 **tbsp** butter, melted
1¼ **cups** graham crackers
¼ **cup** sugar

Prep Time: 60 min
Cook Time: 30 min

Cooling Time: 2 hours
Servings: 9

RubyFrost
Pretty. Delicious.

To learn more about RubyFrost® apples, visit rubyfrostopple.com

DIRECTIONS

- 1 In a food processor, pulse graham crackers and sugar together until very, very fine. Pour melted butter over graham cracker mixture in a large bowl, and mix together until it forms a thick mixture. Press graham cracker crust into a 9" x 9" pan and let sit in the fridge for 40–50 minutes or until fully set.
- 2 Meanwhile, finely chop apples and add to medium frying pan with melted butter. Sauté apples until soft, then add brown sugar, apple pie spice, and arrowroot. Reduce the heat to a simmer, and let cook until thick.
- 3 Preheat oven to 350° F.
- 4 For topping: combine melted butter with cane and brown sugar. Mix flour and cinnamon in until it becomes a "crumble."
- 5 Once graham cracker crust has set, pour apples into crust. Spread apples around to distribute evenly. Sprinkle crumb on top of apples then bake for 30 minutes. Let cool for 1 hour on counter, then an additional hour in fridge to let bars set before slicing. Enjoy!

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WTF DO I DO WITH { what the fork } Crystal Valley Foods Asparagus ?



AIR FRYER ASPARAGUS FRIES

INGREDIENTS

1 lb Crystal Valley Foods Asparagus
(12–16 spears)
2 large eggs
1 cup Panko breadcrumbs
½ cup Parmesan cheese, grated
1 tsp paprika
1 tsp garlic powder
¼ tsp salt
¼ tsp pepper

Prep Time: 10 min

Cook Time: 8 min

Servings: 4



DIRECTIONS

- 1** Preheat air fryer to 400° F. Wash asparagus spears and trim the ends (about 1"–2"). Pat spears dry with a paper towel.
- 2** Beat eggs in a shallow dish or bowl that is big enough to fit asparagus. In a separate shallow dish that will fit asparagus, combine breadcrumbs, Parmesan cheese, paprika, garlic powder, salt, and pepper.
- 3** Lightly spray air fryer basket/tray with non-stick oil. Dip asparagus in eggs one spear at a time, then coat with breadcrumbs. Repeat until all asparagus is well coated. Place coated asparagus spears on air fryer tray in an even layer. You may need to cook in multiple batches.
- 4** Spray asparagus spears lightly with oil. Cook for about 8 minutes, flipping halfway through.
- 5** Serve with a dipping sauce of choice. Enjoy!

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A Closer Look at SUNSET® Umami Bombs®

By Lilian Diep

Make way for a delicious explosion. Mastronardi Produce® launched a flavor bomb into the tomato category, and your shoppers will not be able to resist this sweet and savory beauty.

Dubbed Umami Bombs®, the tomatoes-on-the-vine provide an easy way for consumers to access the delicious and savory umami profile, also known as the fifth taste. The new snacking tomato, the fifth item in the Bombs lineup, complements the company's current range of sweet flavors and brings a rich diversity to the tomato category.

A vibrant, unique red hue is shown through a clear package to provide shoppers ease of mind when it comes to quality, and the contrasting deep teal label is sure to draw gazes. Once patrons get closer to the striking color display, they'll notice the whimsical nod Mastronardi Produce paid to the flavor's Japanese origin, providing a fresh feeling with a cherry blossom motif.

Sweet, savory, and juicy. With this engaging SKU on the shelf, taste buds will sing and registers will ring. 🍅



UP
CLOSE



By Melissa De Leon Chavez

It is time! Time to put the corn in candy corn; the harvest in harvest moon. Trick your shoppers into seeing the treats in the fresh produce aisle, whether it's in their decorations or the delicious rewards of spooky costumes and paths well-beaten. Need a spell or two? We went to the experts on bewitching consumers into following the howl of fruits and vegetables as we seek to bolster sales by shaking up the expectation of Halloween...

KATE WATSON,
Business Development Representative, Oppy

“Oppy offers a range of exciting solutions for Halloween snacking, from berries and citrus to grapes and greenhouse produce. But, the *It’s BOO time! JAZZ™* apple campaign stands out with its big and beautiful displays using high-graphic boxes, creating excitement and jump-starting sales. In October, JAZZ apples are the perfect choice for promotions as consumers eagerly anticipate seasonal snacking and baking with the family, making it a great opportunity to drive fall sales. With eye-catching point-of-sale material and Kwik Lok tags that feature fun recipes, the campaign effectively captures attention and reinforces the brand’s presence in the marketplace—especially appealing to kids who gravitate toward our spooky yet healthy ‘Monster Fangs’ creation. Oppy provides an engaging and memorable way for consumers to celebrate Halloween while enjoying the delicious and nutritious benefits of its key fall items.”

CHARIS NEVES,
Director, Innovation and Product Management, Taylor Farms

“Apples and spice and everything nice! Halloween is when the fall season is in full effect. Warm, sliced apple pie and apple cider are on holiday menus and, for us, that means enjoying our seasonal apple salad kits, including our newest Apple Bourbon chopped kit—made with fresh apples—or our Apple Feta salad kit with crispy cinnamon spiced apples over delicious baby greens. These kits join our fan-favorite Spiced Apple Chop Kit with smoked Gouda cheese. Bring bold color to the dinner table by adding cranberries or pomegranate seeds.

Through social and retailer media, our team is driving salad inspiration for your customers by sharing beautiful and savory autumn recipes that include seasonal produce like roasted squash and pumpkin, figs, persimmons, and pomegranates.”

MONIQUE MUELLER,
Director of Communications, Bee Sweet Citrus

“This Halloween, we encourage retailers to showcase the versatility of Bee Sweet’s Mandarins and Navel oranges! These citrus varieties are an excellent source of vitamin C and couldn’t be more perfect for the fall season! Their vibrant orange hues and smooth rinds make them a perfect addition to festive Halloween décor, and their sweet taste makes them an excellent alternative to traditional Halloween treats. In addition to being flavorful snacks, Mandarins and Navel oranges are great visual alternatives to pumpkins and Jack-o’-Lanterns—making them ideal for indoor crafts or rainy-day projects.”



PEPPE BONFIGLIO,
Vice President of Sales, Mastronardi Produce®

“We love engaging consumers in seasonal themes that inspire healthy living! This time of year, we bring our fall-themed Wild Wonders® Harvest Medley™ pack to retail for a limited time. Our unique, leaf-shaped top seal clam is a fun way to embrace the spirit of the season while leveraging the popularity of the Wild Wonders brand, which continues to lead the mixed medley segment. Inspire your consumers to add this treat to their Halloween party spread for a snack that’s as sweet as it is healthy.”

BRIANNA SHALES,
Marketing Director, Sternilt

“Apples are in full swing in October (and have their own month-long celebration called National Apple Month), and that makes Halloween a worthy time for apple promotions. Dipped apples are widely popular during Halloween, and many schools revert to healthier holiday celebrations that apples can fit nicely in. Halloween is a great opportunity for creativity and cross-merchandising in the produce department. Bring together fall items like pumpkins, squash, apples, cider, and dips into one impactful display and match in-store or digital promotions with the theme to ensure shoppers gravitate to fresh produce during this spooky time of year.”

STEVE ZACCARDI,
Senior Director of Sales, Mucci Farms

“October is an exciting month at Mucci Farms. Our winter program is just about ready to kick off with locally grown fruits and vegetables, thanks to Canada’s largest acreage of lit culture in the CEA industry! With football season in full swing and Halloween parties approaching, retailers can rely on Team Mucci for quick and easy ideas for consumers to reduce the amount of time spent in the kitchen. We offer a wide range of snacking varieties of tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and strawberries to power the season. Not to mention, in a month that’s loaded with sugar for the kids, we’re focused on some healthy candy to help parents out. No matter the event, we’ve got you covered across the board!”

MICHAEL DUPUIS,
Quality Assurance and Public Relations Manager, Divine Flavor

“October is the perfect time of year for Divine Flavor, as most of our vegetable and melon product line is in season. Halloween is not only about tricks or treats and candy or sweets. For those shoppers who enjoy celebrating the Halloween spirit and want to do some fun and healthy recipes, produce is the way to go. We totally recommend stuffed bell pepper Jack-o’-Lanterns oozing with delicious fillings. Or, if you want something on the sweeter side, another good option is watermelon Jack-o’-Lanterns with mixed fruit inside. Spooky, festive, and the kids will love it! My personal favorites are cucumber slices with dill pickle spread and black olives on top shaped like a spider. My recommendation to retail: bring more spooky to produce!”

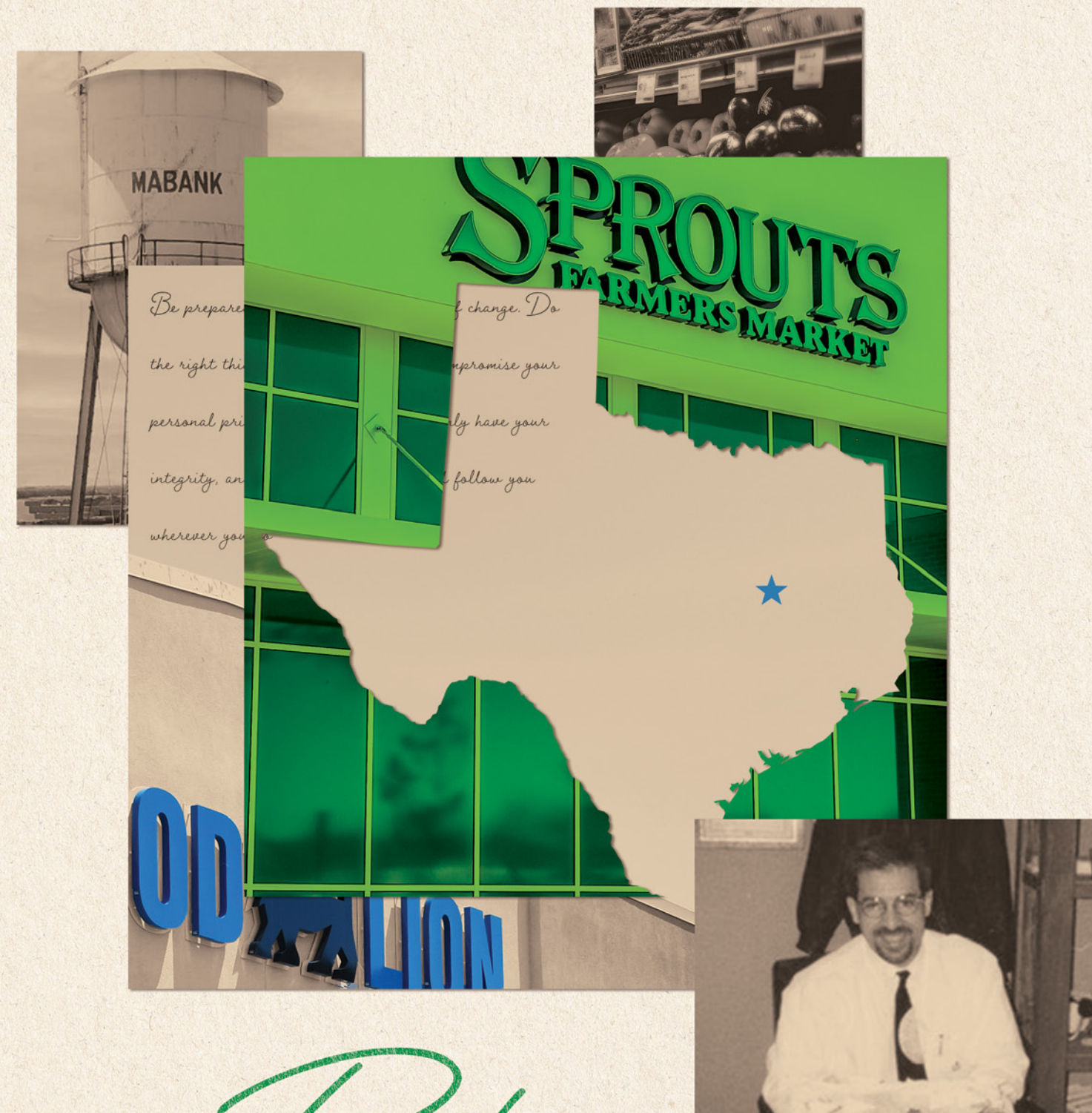


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Returning Home

A Journey with Randy Scott

By Jordan Okumura-Wright



“It happened by accident and it stuck.”

Randy Scott lets this sentiment sit in the air between us when I ask him where the draw to fresh produce came from. The story he tells me feels more like a tug from fresh produce itself, a desire for the universe to tailor Randy’s path to a predetermined arrival. And thankful we are.

I could also argue that these doors that opened for Randy were no accident, but a perspective that Randy holds—an innate ability to perceive more “accidents” as opportunities rather than roadblocks. Paths to be traveled where some might have seen walls to sequester this now 40-plus-year industry veteran.

“I have no regrets. Zero,” Randy tells me. “Every move I’ve made—and more than a couple of them were risky—I was happy with. Each of those decisions led to something else that profoundly changed the course of my career and my life. It is hard to sum up in words how to sign off from such a journey. Thank you to thousands of friends, colleagues, and industry members who have impacted me and helped me along the way. It has been an amazing run and I wish each of them the best.”

Randy retired from his post as Senior Category Manager of Produce at Sprouts Farmers Market this past August, completing a career legacy that touched the lives of so many and left an indelible impact on the way fresh produce makes its way to market.

When I ask Randy to start at the beginning, the conversation goes quiet. I appreciate these meaning-filled silences from him—an element of conversation so difficult to find these days.

“I grew up in a little small town in Texas called Mabank. In fact, that’s where I just moved back to three months ago. We built a house on our old family farmland, and I literally came back home after being gone for 45 years,” Randy reflects. “We have had the land since the early 1900s. My dad was born here. Grew up here. I grew up here, and then I left when I graduated high school and was ready to get to the big city. I swore I would never come back, but here I am,” he says, letting a smile linger before exploring the rest of his journey with me.

Randy graduated from high school in 1978 and explored a little bit of college here and there, but knew right away what kind of student he was: one of the real world in action.

“I needed to work more than I needed to learn,” he tells me. “I got married soon after that and my kids were born. In 1983, I needed a better-paying job than what I had. Affiliated Foods, Dallas Division, had just built a new warehouse in Keller, Texas. I got a job in the warehouse unloading and checking in trucks. A couple of years down the road, I began to learn how to look at and receive produce.”

Around the time that the company went bankrupt, a little company called Food Lion came to Texas. Randy was one of the first 10 employees hired there in that warehouse where he worked as a supervisor and an inspector managing quality control.

“I learned a little bit about the buying side of the industry after that, handling some of what we call local buying, short buys, fill-ins—things like that. I got a little feel for it. The passion began to sink in,” he recalls. “When Food Lion closed the Texas division in ’97, I got a call from Mike Agostini, who had been Food Lion’s Director of Produce and Floral at the time, and he suggested I move out to North Carolina to join the corporate office.”

Randy always thought of himself as a Texas guy—so the move took some time to sink in.

“I figured I would stay a couple of years, and I stayed 18; 24 years total with Food Lion,” Randy says, smiling to himself.

In 2015, Randy received a call from Cory Oliver, who was with Sprouts Farmers Market and asked, “Hey, you ready to move home? I have a spot open in Texas with Sprouts.”

Randy’s response: Let’s do it.

During Randy’s time with Sprouts—where he began as Senior Manager of Produce Sourcing before assuming the title of Senior Category Manager of Produce—he managed the day-to-day operations that helped to build the company into the amazing and dynamic retail space it has been over the past eight years. In the middle of his stay with Sprouts,



“Every move I’ve made—and more than a couple of them were risky—I was happy with. Each of those decisions led to something else that profoundly changed the course of my career and my life.”

- **Randy Scott**, Senior Category Manager of Produce, Sprouts Farmers Market

he also did his own food brokering and explored other avenues of growth before returning to the company just a few years ago.

During his final tenure with the organic-focused grocer, Randy leaned heavily into all the knowledge and expertise he had gleaned over 40 years, pulling together contracts, determining what Sprouts was going to carry, who the organization was going to buy from, and what it was promoting—all in all, Sprouts’ retail strategy.

“Sprouts was a great organization to work for and an amazing way to wrap up my retail career,” Randy shares. “I am so thankful for these rare opportunities that came my way. This has always been a people business and I think that is why I have been able to thrive here.”

This brings us back to our previous discussion about how lucky accidents led Randy to his path on the road to and in produce.

“Really, I just needed a job and they were paying good money in the warehouse. That was all I knew; I was still in my early 20s then. The more I got connected in produce, the more I realized how fast-paced and fun it was. There was always a lot going on and it stuck,” Randy expresses. “Not everybody’s cut out to be in produce. It’s going to take you a year or two to figure out if you love it or if you hate it. If you love it, then you’re going to have a really good career. My advice to others in the industry and those looking to join it has always been: Stand by your word. Keep the people part of it in place. Don’t hide behind emails. Don’t hide behind texts. Pick up your phone and take in-person meetings.”

We sit here for a moment, looking out over the grand story of Randy’s life in fresh produce. I imagine what alternate road may have appeared if all of those small forks in his journey and telephone calls never happened. So, I asked Randy what pivotal moment on his path really cemented him in the industry.

“It was probably when I had to make a decision of moving to North Carolina, because that meant my route—and my home base—was going to change forever,” Randy remembers. “I had never worked in a corporate office in my life at that point and I was going to move across the country and help run what were nearly 1,200 stores at the time. Sure, I had done a little bit of buying and warehouse management—but this was a huge shift in not only my day-to-day but the expertise I was going to need to strengthen. The question became: Is this really what I want to do?”

As the tale tells, Randy took to that new path, which took him from Produce Buyer to Procurement Manager, then Category Manager at Food Lion.

“Ever since I made the decision to leave Texas, I’ve had an interchanging of various roles over the years,” Randy says.


With that reflection, Randy ties together the length of path he has laid out before us.

“When I came back to Sprouts, I didn’t have a lot of years left. I was about to be 60, and I had always insisted that 65 was my max number,” he says, wrapping the exclamation in a kind laugh. “I wasn’t going to be that guy who worked until they put the first dirt over my head and buried me. I always knew that it was not going to be a long-term deal.”

Andrew McGregor, Vice President of Produce and Floral for Sprouts, and Robby Cruz, the Director of Produce at the time, both had asked numerous times, “What are you thinking? How long are you going to stay around?” and Randy always told both of them, “I’m going to do it ’til it’s not fun. And oh, by the way, the caveat is fun ends at 65.”

This time, it is my laugh that creates a pause in his story.

While most people would say that this is Randy’s chance to turn the page to the next chapter, Randy tells me “No, it’s not the next chapter.”

As Randy puts it, this is actually the next book. 

... Be prepared to take on the challenge of change. Do the right thing ALWAYS. Do not ever compromise your personal principles and beliefs. You only have your integrity, and your character, that will follow you wherever you go.

Randy J. Scott 6/25/15



Words About Randy Scott



Jim Corby,
Retired, The Fresh Market and Food Lion

“When I started working at Food Lion in 1999, it didn’t have a very strong produce department. I was pleasantly surprised to meet Randy and so encouraged with his knowledge of the produce industry. It was an honor to work beside him for 14 years. His sense of humor and Texan demeanor always kept things hopping in the office. I so admired his knowledge in both the buying and supply-side of produce. He was always the problem solver on the team and fixed things fast and did it right. I know Randy will love retirement as he becomes a full-fledged cowboy, and I will always consider him my good friend.”



Jamey Friedman,
President, Freshhouse

“Randy and I have known each other over 30 years and have been friends for roughly 20. Randy, back then, was a tough nut to crack. We spent 10 years earning each other’s trust in our vendor/buyer relationship. All great friendships are earned and I’m so appreciative to call him a friend. Over the years, we would sit for hours deep in produce conversations, me mostly as the student. The flood gates of knowledge would come pouring out based on his experience of boots on the ground rather than a spreadsheet. I remember recently at a food show listening to him speak details of varieties and specifications of the whole melon category. I hung on every word. He was this industry’s professor, and we all were his students. Most importantly for retirement, he’s a single-digit handicap. Another impressive skill.”

“Randy is my dear friend. It didn’t start out that way. OMG! We had heated arguments over how systems should work, how produce is different from everything else in the grocery store, etc. But those arguments made me think about his perspective and how we could address the issues in front of us. Randy taught me a great deal, not just about produce but about people. We didn’t always think alike but we both wanted the best outcome no matter the situation. Almost 20-plus years later, Randy still teaches me. I’m not sure how my career would have looked without those arguments. Randy, you are so very dear to me and I thank you for the lessons and trust you gave me. You deserve this time. Enjoy Tammy and your family, but don’t forget us in North Carolina.”

“Randy hired me to work for him right out of college, and I have him to thank for a career in grocery retail. I knew very little about the produce industry but was eager to learn and he was a willing teacher! Randy expanded my industry knowledge and became a trusted confidante as our careers matured. He has worked hard to create the life that he has, and I wish him a retirement full of joy! Congratulations my friend—embrace every moment!”



Teri Miller,
Business Analyst, Freshhouse



Nicole Hulstein,
Loyalty Campaign Manager, Food Lion



Rex Lawrence,
Founder, Joe Produce

“Randy informed me at this year’s Organic Produce Summit that he’s ‘hanging up his spurs’ after nearly four decades. It’s hard to believe I’ve known him for more than half that time. There is no doubt that he’ll be missed by many. Randy is a fair buyer and a solid produce professional. He understands and enjoys the breadth and depth of his relationships, and at the same time knows how to make the tough calls that are best for his employers’ businesses. On a more personal note, he’s just a great guy; fun to be around and his million-dollar smile makes one feel welcome. No doubt his golf game will get even better in retirement, and his family will enjoy seeing more of him. Randy, thank you for your friendship and professionalism over the years, my friend!”



Tom Stenzel,
Principal, The Stenzel Group

“Randy came on the United Fresh Board in 2012 when he was at Food Lion, and immediately showed a leadership role. He had already served on our Retail-Foodservice Board, where he always supported strong partnerships between retailers and their suppliers. Randy became Chairman of the Retail-Foodservice Board in 2014, which brought him onto the United Executive Committee. As an Executive Committee member, he helped develop an overall strategy for the association on everything from public policy issues to trade shows and conventions. More than just work, however, I always enjoyed Randy’s company and positive spirit more than anything else. Whether in the boardroom or often on the golf course, Randy was a positive force, always smiling and supporting his peers. He was clearly the best golfer on the Board, but he welcomed playing with us ‘amateurs.’ Now that he’s retiring, I hope Randy will give me another golf lesson soon.”

“Randy Scott’s retirement is emblematic and represents a generation of hard-working and dedicated produce leaders that are marking a distinguished and transformational era in our industry, while passing the torch to the next generation of leaders. As a Category Manager for both Food Lion and Sprouts, Randy was very strategic, while unyielding in his pursuit of quality and service. Randy’s collaborative support and guidance have been instrumental in shaping me professionally and strengthening my trust that the buyer/seller can have a common and mutually shared mission and vision together. I will always be grateful for his impact and friendship. Randy was a mentor to many and his legacy will continue to inspire and shape the future of our industry.”



Dave Russell,
Retired, Vice President Sales - North America, Fresh Del Monte Produce

“Randy is a tremendous supermarket leader and one of the most knowledgeable people I know when it comes to fresh produce merchandising and marketing. A lot of this has to do with his desire to always learn about what’s happening with consumers and applying those insights to go-to-market strategies and tactics. Beyond his grocery expertise, what I will always appreciate about him is his humility and genuine kindness as a colleague, family man, and friend. I wish he, his wife, Tammy, and their family nothing but continued happiness as Randy enjoys a well-deserved and -earned retirement.”



Cathy Burns,
Chief Executive Officer, International Fresh Produce Association

WTF DO I DO WITH DOLE® Pineapples and Sweet Potatoes ?

{ what the fork }



PUMPKIN SPICE SWEET POTATO DOLE WHIP

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup** DOLE® Sweet Potato, peeled and chopped
- 1 3/4 cups** DOLE Pineapple, frozen and chopped
- 2 tbsp** maple syrup
- 2 tbsp** unsweetened, refrigerated coconut milk
- 3/4 tsp** gluten-free pumpkin pie spice, divided
- Chopped pecans and/or coconut chips, for garnish (optional)

Prep Time: 15 min
Cook Time: 3 min
Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Heat sweet potato and 2 tbsp water in a medium microwave-safe bowl—covered with plastic wrap with one edge slightly open to vent—in a microwave oven for 3 minutes or until very tender. Drain sweet potato; cool completely.
- 2** Purée pineapple, syrup, milk, 1/2 tsp pumpkin pie spice, and sweet potato in a food processor on high until smooth, scraping down bowl occasionally (makes about 2 cups).
- 3** Divide pineapple mixture into 4 bowls; sprinkle with remaining 1/4 tsp pumpkin pie spice, and top with pecans and/or coconut chips, if desired. Enjoy!

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SCAN TO LEARN MORE



MENTORS IN THE MAKING

Stephanie Myles

BY ANNE ALLEN

STEPHANIE MYLES IS PRECISELY THE TYPE OF PERSON YOU WANT IN YOUR CORNER. Brimming with enthusiasm and warmth, she knows how to make people feel instantly at ease—a rare gift that does wonders in our relationship-fueled industry.

Tracing her journey into produce takes us through Canadian greenhouses and across categories. For 10 years, Stephanie has been charting a course of excellence—and it's one that began in Leamington, Ontario.

“My first role in the produce industry was with Mastronardi Produce®/ SUNSET® as a Marketing Assistant. Over the course of five years, I was able to ingrain myself in its marketing department and learn from a group of talented peers, eventually taking on the role of Marketing Coordinator,” she shares with me.

Early in her career at Mastronardi Produce, she met Nancy Pickersgill, now International Fresh Produce Association's Trade Show Coordinator. Stephanie explains that Nancy's perspective and style of mentorship helped shape her career.

“Through her guidance, I learned all aspects of putting together and being a part of a successful show or event. She highlighted project management and focused on delivering the outcome—her teachings were and continue to be lessons that still help form my successes,” Stephanie notes.

Stephanie's next role would be at Highline Mushrooms, where she initially started as a Marketing Specialist before rising up to Marketing Manager.

“As the Marketing Manager, I was able to be a part of all aspects of the marketing business, which allowed

me to identify areas that were of true passion for me,” she remarks.

Finding that source of excitement was how she came to make her latest career move to Nature Fresh Farms, where she currently works as the Marketing Events Manager.

Before she made the jump to Nature Fresh Farms™, Stephanie worked closely with her second mentor, Highline's former Vice President of Marketing and Nature Fresh's current Vice President of Marketing and Category Development, Jane Rhyno. Jane's positive influence and guidance are some qualities Stephanie can rely on to this day.

“Her passion lies in mentorship, and this is evident in the time and care she takes with all her employees to help get them to where they want to go in their careers. I was no exception. From the day Jane hired me to work with her at Highline, she has always been an avid supporter—someone whom I respect greatly—and the model of leadership I aspire to achieve,” Stephanie adds.

Throughout her entire career, one person has been her constant cheerleader: Joe Sbrocchi, Senior Vice President of Business Development at Pure Flavor®. They met when she first started working at Mastronardi Produce, and under his tutelage, Stephanie learned the hallmarks of marketing that have remained with her.

“He has always been my loudest supporter and is there to listen no matter

what,” she says with a smile. “If I have a problem I need help working through, Joe is there. If I need advice or words to push me to do more to set myself up for the most success in my career, he is there. He always believed in me and saw the potential I could bring to the table.”

One of the ways in which Stephanie excels in this industry is her knack for relationships and building a solid network of supporters, innovators, and up-and-comers.


“Fresh produce is a community I am proud to be a part of. Though vast, and, at times, competitive, in the end, we are a community that stands beside one another to push toward the collective good, and that is something to be admired,” she asserts.

When I first met Stephanie at the Organic Produce Summit in 2022, I was immediately struck by this thought: She gets it. The simplicity of this sentence might be a bit misleading, but for those of us in fresh, you understand. A produce mentality cannot be taught, and for Stephanie, it's as natural as



Stephanie Myles, Marketing Manager, Nature Fresh Farms™

breathing. She could be asking you about your weekend plans in one breath and then discussing a marketing strategy in the next.

With her fresh journey only getting started, I know I'll be turning to Stephanie for her take on driving consumption across the realm of fresh, all while eagerly waiting to learn more about the Stephanie of tomorrow. 

THE MENTORS

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



Nancy Pickersgill, Trade Show Coordinator, International Fresh Produce Association

“Mentoring someone is a wonderful journey shared between people that are passionate about what they do, eager to learn from each other, and a real natural fit. You cannot force someone to learn or to do things one way. You must teach, share, be patient, and let go. When I first worked with Steph I didn't understand everything about managing a team until I learned more about how individuals interpret instructions. This was a valuable insight for me, it sounds simple but treating everyone as an individual is important when building that trusting work relationship, we need to rely on each other.

To say Stephanie is flexible is an understatement. With a deep breath and a smile, she switches gears in a heartbeat without hesitation—we all know the produce industry needs people like this. She is passionate about the industry, always gaining knowledge by taking the time to know the people and products around her. People want to spend time teaching her because of her eagerness, and her non-aggressiveness gets things done. She has a creative mind and outstanding work ethic, the perfect fit for marketing in the produce industry.



Jane Rhyno, Vice President of Marketing and Category Development, Nature Fresh Farms™

“When I first hired Stephanie, I could see her passion for the job and also her desire to learn more and grow in her career. Over the past five years I've watched her as she continually puts her time and effort behind that. She not only is someone you can count on to step up and get things done, but she's also developed into a really vibrant member of this industry: gaining knowledge, making connections, and is now the Chair of the Young Professionals Network (YPN) where she shares her knowledge with the new generation in produce.



Joe Sbrocchi, Senior Vice President of Business Development, Pure Flavor®

“While I appreciate the kind accolades, I really believe that Stephanie simply brought the right ingredients to the table. Those being a ‘wonderful attitude’ and a sincere unadulterated ‘ability to learn.’ She always brought a smile to everything she did. At that point in her career, her work meant that she was the junior ‘Miss Everything’ and many so-called insignificant tasks fell to her. I grew to feel that my role relative to Stephanie was to be her sounding board when it appeared her efforts were going unrecognized, acknowledge them, empathize when the multiple tasks seemed to be getting too much, and then remind her that all those so-called menial tasks would add up to a book of knowledge that could be the foundation of a promising career. And voilà, here she is! I'm very proud of her, but mostly because she never fails to bring her purpose and passion. Now she pays it forward every single day!

POWERED BY 

WTF DO I DO WITH Jasmine Vineyards Seedless Table Grapes ?

{ what the fork }



JASMINE VINEYARDS GRAPE MARGARITA

INGREDIENTS

1 bag Jasmine Vineyards Black Seedless Table Grapes

1-2 oz tequila
Fresh lime juice
Splash of club soda
Ice
Salt
Extra grapes and lime slices, for garnish

Prep Time: 10 min
Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Purée 1 qt of grapes in a blender or food processor. Use a colander and spatula to strain out the skins.
- 2 Shake together tequila, grape purée, and a squeeze of lime juice in a shaker with ice. Shake until well chilled.
- 3 Pour in salt-rimmed margarita glass and add a splash of club soda.
- 4 Squeeze additional lime and serve with grapes and a lime wedge. Enjoy!

**Optional: Pour over ice cubes in a salt-rimmed rocks glass for a long-lasting chilled recipe!*

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



WTF DO I DO WITH DelFrescoPure® G.R.EAT! Grab Rinse and EAT!® Red Tomatoes ?

{ what the fork }



LOADED MEDITERRANEAN DIP

INGREDIENTS

1 pint DelFrescoPure® G.R.EAT! Grab Rinse and EAT!® Red Tomatoes, cut in halves
1 tray DelFrescoPure Organic Mini Cucumbers, diced
1 DelFrescoPure Yellow Sweet Rainbow Pepper, diced
 ½ red onion, diced
1 cup curly parsley, chopped
1 small can chickpeas
1 cup mixed Kalamata and green olives (optional)
1 cup crumbled feta
1 lemon, juiced
 Extra virgin olive oil
1 container hummus (your preferred flavor)
 Smoked paprika
 Salt and pepper, to taste

Prep Time: 20 min
Servings: 1 bowl

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Combine cut tomatoes, cucumbers, pepper, onion, and parsley in a medium bowl. Add chickpeas, optional olives, and crumbled feta.
- 2 Add lemon juice and drizzle olive oil into the bowl of vegetables. Add salt and pepper to taste. Mix well.
- 3 On a platter, spread one container of hummus to cover the platter.
- 4 Top with salad mixture. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle smoked paprika on top.
- 5 Serve with warm pita or crackers.
- 6 Make it a complete meal by adding protein of your choice. Enjoy!

Come and visit us at IFPA Global Produce & Floral Show, booth #489!

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FRESH CO



**PROJECT
PHOENIX**
 BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ

99

Sometimes you need to break something to build it back stronger. Or, in the case of an entire grocery culture, set it aflame in order to rise from the ashes anew.

Project Phoenix, a pilot program that lives up to its name, has fanned the flames of a transformative call to action for Sobeys-owned FreshCo.

“This was a rebirth in how we approached produce. We took 20 steps backward to understand who we wanted to be, what we wanted to be known for, and the risks that we were willing to take to differentiate ourselves from our competition. Just like a phoenix rising from the ashes,” Amanda Labuckas, Director of Fresh Category Management and Merchandising, shares with a smile.

Understanding the importance of the produce cold chain and that, in many cases, the product travels long distances, FreshCo has focused on enhancing what the customer will purchase, its freshness, its taste, and key seasonality to drive incremental sales.

“Fresh is a constant race of just-in-time, and then when product gets to the store our teams need to know how to revive and bring it back to life,” Amanda says with resolve.



AMANDA LABUCKAS,
Director of Fresh Category
Management and Merchandising,
Sobeys' FreshCo

Selling great produce doesn't stop there: The fixtures, signage, and ways in which the product is displayed are critical aspects of how produce is reborn. It is a process Amanda has seen and been a part of for over two decades; she knows firsthand that produce execution can make or break consumers' perception of and loyalty to the store as a whole.

In the rebirth of produce strategy, she saw another opportunity rising from what was—that of FreshCo's entire produce culture.

“Phoenix is about value, quality, seasonality, and culture. We want to build loyalty through the fresh department, and we are confident

that we will so long as we are hitting each of those targets. A well-executed produce department will drive customer loyalty as well as create a halo effect on the total store,” Amanda points out. “Great produce creates impulse purchases and naturally impacts the total shop—customers will put more in their basket when they see quality produce at great prices! It is the most important department from a customer perspective, and you will win or lose the total shop based on the appearance and quality of that department.”

Launched in 2020, the tenets that are the tinder to the initiative's flame—value, quality, seasonality, and culture—are really steps to one foundational mission in pursuit of loyalty. First in fresh produce, then store-wide.

“Value doesn't mean the lowest price,” Amanda points out right off the bat. “As a discount banner, historically we'd focus on price almost entirely. We have evolved to best value as we have learned so much on this journey.”

Exploring what value specifically meant to FreshCo's customers and stakeholders, boiling it down to an attainable concept, then building a strategy around it, helped crystallize Project Phoenix and provide a guiding torch for the rest of the pieces that would build its foundation.

“We had an opportunity to improve the experience in our stores in the produce department by shifting our whole mentality,” Amanda recalls. “Understanding what value means to our key stakeholders, our customers, began with reviewing the sizing of product we want to sell in our stores, matching that with what we could provide at great prices and with quality. That created value.”

So, of course, quality is key. Setting that expectation—good product at an affordable price does not mean the cheapest option—with the sourcing and buying team, as well as communication of expectations with suppliers, has made for a customized and capable formula for value that Project Phoenix can execute.

“Understanding our strategy, understanding how important it is to ship to the specification, and how that equates with the value proposition that FreshCo has established, is critical,” Amanda explains. “That's what's going to sell. People will buy with their eyes in produce like no other department. If it offers value and is of great quality, they will 100 percent put it in their basket and pay that price at the register.”

As anyone in our industry knows, a crucial part of that quality is seasonality. But, Amanda points out, it's not just

“THIS WAS A REBIRTH IN HOW WE APPROACHED PRODUCE. WE TOOK 20 STEPS BACKWARD TO UNDERSTAND WHO WE WANTED TO BE, WHAT WE WANTED TO BE KNOWN FOR, AND THE RISKS THAT WE WERE WILLING TO TAKE TO DIFFERENTIATE OURSELVES FROM OUR COMPETITION. JUST LIKE A PHOENIX RISING FROM THE ASHES.”

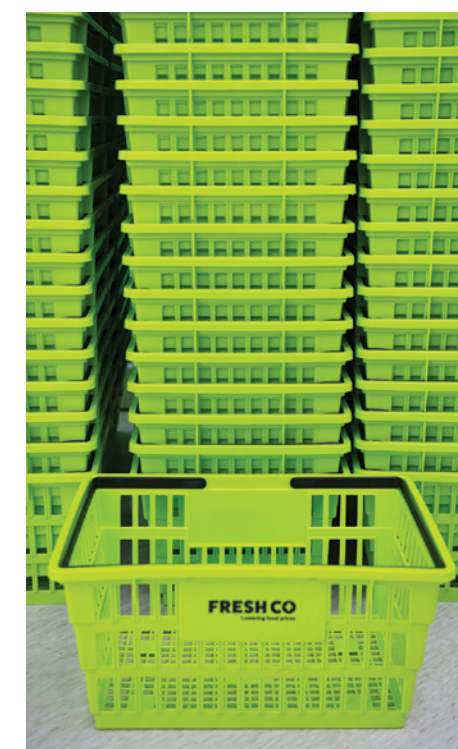
AMANDA LABUCKAS,
Director of Fresh Category Management and Merchandising, Sobeys' FreshCo

knowing and showing the season's offerings—it's celebrating them.

“At FreshCo, we had the same items in the same spots throughout the whole year. We had little change and we knew we had to shift that mentality and how we approached in-store produce merchandising. The impulse shop and the value offered is heightened when we merchandise seasonally relevant items in a prime location of the department at the key selling time of the year. Stonefruit is a great example: Understanding the peak time frame to sell and putting that category front and center creates excitement and

demonstrates that our FreshCo stores are proud of the quality and value they can offer on these key seasonal items. Customers are looking for peaches and nectarines in the summer months, and we are passionate about how important it is to focus on leveraging the seasonality of these items, bringing them to life with great displays. Now, we have our stores changing what those departments look like at least four times a year,” she reflects. “Seasonality now plays a big part in what is front and center and, when merchandised the right way, we can compete with a structure that defies the typical discount structure.”

VALUE
CULTURE
QUALITY
SEASONALITY



A crucial thread tying all these components together is the final, and arguably most pivotal, change Project Phoenix has demanded. Throughout our discussion, Amanda speaks to training, leadership, team mentality, and the actions of employees in the field and on the floor.

“None of what we are trying to do will be accomplished if we don’t have the right culture,” she impresses upon me. “We had to look at and refine our store processes from what we perceived as value and where we placed seasonal items to how our teammates order and handle product.”

Project Phoenix called for a radical shift in cultural mentality from the top down in a franchised structure—an enormous undertaking made grander still under the proximity restrictions of COVID.

“This was about inspiring the passion for produce in franchisees by helping them understand the halo effect the produce department would have on their total store. And that was just the beginning. Then, how do we take those principles and make sure they work their way through the rest of the store?” Amanda reflects.

Part of that produce culture enhancement was a unified vision throughout FreshCo. To ensure all leaders were spreading the same

message so every single individual in the organization might buy into the produce-focused vision.

“We needed to build a produce-first culture. We have a lot of franchisees that were typically grocery managers in their pasts, with no produce experience. So we needed to not only educate the teammates, the part-time staff, and the department managers in our stores, but we had to build a produce-first culture with our franchisees,” she says. “We set the expectation that, in the produce department, the customer that comes in at 9:00 p.m. is going to have the same shopping experience as the customer that comes in at 9:00 a.m.”

This transformation is no small shift, nor is it static. Whether it’s an ember or an inferno, the fire for this produce-first culture needs constant tending. One way the FreshCo team is doing this is through recognition of those championing Project Phoenix.

“We started celebrating Produce Ambassadors. Each of our districts can nominate either a produce manager, a part-time clerk, a franchisee, an assistant produce manager...anyone with a story of how they support the culture change that we’re trying to bring to life. We have found that this really means something to team members, to be recognized,” Amanda shares with me.

It’s a wonderful incentive, and one Amanda says perpetuates another cultural shift she’d like to see industry-wide. “We have to stop and celebrate the wins. There are great examples of people bringing this to life every day. There’s greatness in something that everyone does, and I’ve learned over the years that the littlest recognition from one side can have a huge impact on another. And I think that’s pretty cool.”

The true foundational shift that brought Amanda and the FreshCo team to this point is a perfect demonstration of the idea’s magnitude. In just three years, the driving force behind one of the largest grocery divisions in Canada has evolved to illuminate fresh. Now, Amanda says it is spreading beyond the produce department.

“Project Phoenix at its core is about total fresh. It started with produce, but our ultimate goal is to be leaders in total fresh from a discount perspective. We can’t take our foot off the gas,” she says with a grin. “What does meat look like for discounters? What does total fresh look like? Now, we’re taking Phoenix and some of the things that we’ve built into it and bringing that into the meat department. Next, we’ll touch bakery, and we’ll touch deli.”

Once a rebirth for discount produce, Project Phoenix is now spreading its wings and fanning the flames of all fresh. 🍷

“PROJECT PHOENIX AT ITS CORE IS ABOUT TOTAL FRESH. IT STARTED WITH PRODUCE, BUT OUR ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO BE LEADERS IN TOTAL FRESH FROM A DISCOUNT PERSPECTIVE. WE CAN’T TAKE OUR FOOT OFF THE GAS.”

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WTF DO I DO WITH Giorgio® Mushrooms ?

{ what the fork }



AVOCADO AND FARRO HARVEST BUDDHA BOWL

INGREDIENTS

½ lb Giorgio® Shiitake
Mushrooms, stems removed
and sliced
½ lb Brussels sprouts, halved
¼ cup olive oil, divided
¾ tsp salt and pepper, divided
1 tbsp fresh thyme, finely chopped
3 tbsp lemon juice

2 tbsp tahini paste
⅓ cup plain Greek yogurt
1 clove garlic, minced
1 tsp lemon zest
¼ tsp ground cumin
1 cup farro, cooked according to
package directions
1 ripe avocado, halved and sliced

1 cup alfalfa sprouts
⅓ cup pumpkin seeds, toasted
2 tbsp fresh parsley, finely
chopped
Prep Time: 15 min
Cook Time: 25 min
Servings: 4



To learn more about
Giorgio Fresh Co., visit
www.giorgiofresh.com

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 425° F. Toss together Brussels sprouts, 2 tbsp olive oil, and ¼ tsp each of salt and pepper. Transfer to parchment paper-lined baking sheet. Roast for 18–25 minutes or until tender and lightly charred in spots. Set aside.
- 2 Meanwhile, heat remaining oil in large skillet set over medium heat; cook mushrooms, thyme, and ¼ tsp each salt

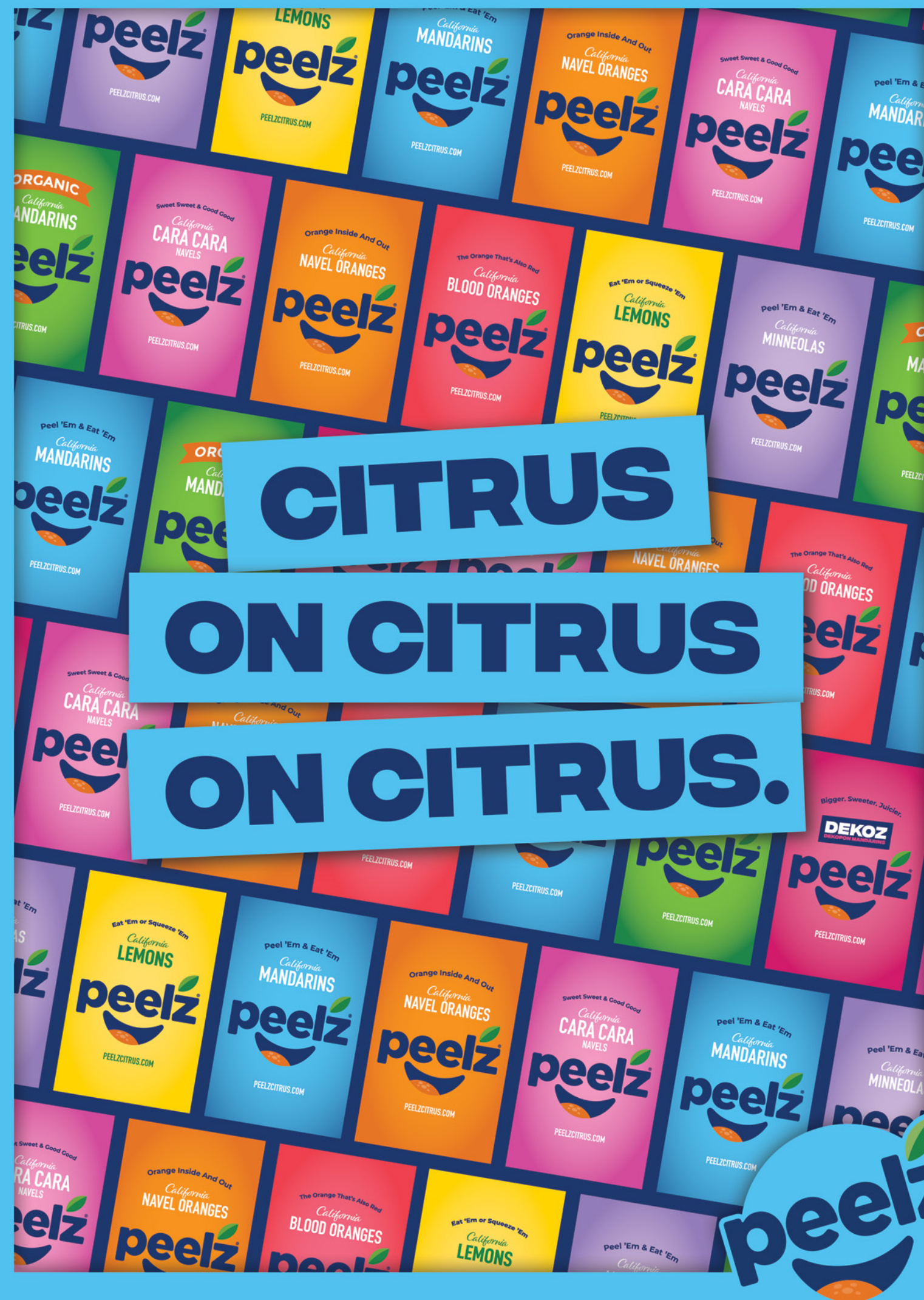
and pepper (cook in batches if needed). Set aside.

- 3 Whisk together lemon juice, tahini, and 1 tbsp water until smooth. Stir in yogurt, garlic, lemon zest, cumin, and remaining salt and pepper.

- 4 Stir together farro and Brussels sprouts. Divide among 4 bowls.

- 5 Arrange mushrooms, avocado, and alfalfa sprouts on top. Sprinkle with pumpkin seeds and drizzle with tahini sauce. Garnish with parsley. Enjoy!

Notes: Use Shiitake stems to flavor vegetable broths and stocks. If desired, substitute broccoli, cauliflower, or romesco sauce for Brussels sprouts.



Thanks, But No Thanks:

How to Say It and Hopefully Have a Happy Recipient

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



At one time or another, we all have to say no—or no, thank you—as my mom taught me. It’s often not easy, and sometimes downright hard. Most of us don’t enjoy letting people down. And as situations evolve, expectations elevate.

Executive search consultants have to face this situation quite often. And, before I get into the plant-based “meat on the bone” (vegetarian humor) of delivering this message, let me first say that by supporting the offering party early on, you help them set realistic expectations. Sometimes even the most sophisticated people need to be reminded to not get overly emotionally invested in an opportunity.

The Delicate Art of Turning Down Job Candidates

How people and organizations handle the delicate task of rejecting candidates can have long-term consequences. A poorly executed rejection can leave individuals with a bitter taste, prompting them, in some instances, to seek legal recourse. A well-crafted conversation and/or letter can leave a very positive impression. So, how can a company ensure its rejection process strikes the right chord?

Eight ways to help you create a polite, professional, and personal rejection:

1. Practice the Golden Rule

Or, better yet, treat people the way you would like your loved ones treated. It’s simple, tried, and true. If you require more motivation, then consider karma and the fact that there is a

good likelihood that this person will pop up in your future someday.

2. Act Swiftly to Alleviate Anxiety

Promptly notifying people of your decision shows respect for their time and effort. If you felt a connection, a phone call says a lot. Everyone you touch is a potential new friend, and you may look to hire this person in the future or vice versa. Don’t laugh; I’ve seen this firsthand.

3. Avoid Specifics About Other Candidates

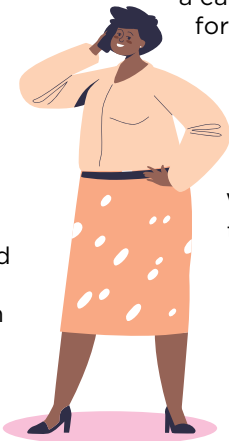
While it may be tempting to explain that another candidate was chosen due to superior qualifications, it’s fine to share that the company decided on someone who was a better fit at this time. Don’t get into details or names.

4. Refrain from Promising Future Consideration

Be honest and authentic. Experts suggest not talking about future considerations. Of course, if you aren’t going to follow through with getting back to them, don’t do it. However, it’s fine to let a candidate know you’d like to keep them in mind for future consideration. Give them the option to follow up with you in the next few months.

5. Provide a Neutral, Nonspecific Reason(s)

While no law explicitly mandates disclosing the reasons behind a candidate’s rejection, it is helpful to provide a neutral and nonspecific explanation. This is a great time to pay a compliment, but you have to be authentic.



Example: Doug, our team really liked you, your skills, and your experience. You were a little light in the _____ area, which we really need right now.

6. Be Direct and Polite

Brevity and clarity are key. Keep the tone gracious, direct, and polite, ensuring that your message conveys appreciation for their interest in the organization.

Note: If this is a situation where you and/or your team really got to know the candidate, as I mentioned earlier, a phone call goes a long way. Here at Joe Produce SearchSM (as executive search consultants), we do everything we can to deliver the message verbally.

7. Express Gratitude and Good Wishes

Begin your letter by expressing sincere gratitude for the candidate’s interest. Demonstrating appreciation for their time conveys professionalism, respect, and warmth. Close the letter or call with a sincere thank you. In writing, a sign-off such as “sincerely,” “best wishes,” or “thank you.”

8. Choose Words Wisely

Avoid using phrases like “I’m sorry” or “unfortunately,” as they may intensify the candidate’s disappointment. Strive for a balanced and neutral tone throughout the letter or call.

Bonus Tip - If someone responds to a job posting, such as on JoeProduce.com, and there is a rejection: At the very least, have someone in your office send them a “Thanks, but no thank you” form email from a noreply@company.com email address. They’ll be grateful for the communication.

Bonus Tip - Tired of the recruiting, vetting, and rejection process? Hire a professional executive search firm like Joe Produce Search. We know how to navigate these waters and represent your employer brand at every step.



Reach out anytime.

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

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Sample Rejection Letter:

Dear [Candidate’s Name],

Thank you for investing your time in meeting with us to discuss the [Position Title] at [Employer]. I want to personally reach out and inform you that, after careful consideration, we have extended an offer to another candidate.

It was a genuine pleasure to meet you and to learn about your exceptional accomplishments and skills. We appreciate your interest in our organization and wish you the utmost success in your career.

Thank you,

[Interviewer’s Name] [Job Title]

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INTERACTION WITH
POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES
IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO
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ORGANIZATION’S
VALUES AND BUILD A
POSITIVE REPUTATION
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Rex Lawrence,
Founder and President,
Joe Produce SearchSM

WTF DO I DO WITH North Carolina Sweetpotato Commission Sweetpotatoes ?

{ what the fork }



SWEET SOUTHERN LADY

Recipe credited to Sam Etheridge of Ambrozia, Asheville, North Carolina

INGREDIENTS

1 North Carolina Sweetpotato
1 candied sweetpotato skin slice
¼ of a lemon
½ oz sorghum vanilla syrup
5 fresh sage leaves
1 oz rye whiskey
¾ oz brandy

Prep Time: 5 min

Cook Time: 20 min

Servings: 1

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Juice sweetpotato (with skin on) and lemon (with rind off). Add juice to a pot and bring to 185–190° F for about 20 minutes.
- 2 Add sorghum vanilla syrup to pot, then remove from heat to cool.
- 3 Muddle four sage leaves and place in a small strainer. Place strainer over mug and pour whiskey and brandy over the sage through the strainer. Repeat for the sweetpotato juice.
- 4 Garnish with one candied sweetpotato strip and one expressed sage leaf. Enjoy!

To learn more about North Carolina Sweetpotato Commission, visit www.ncsweetpotatoes.com



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WTF DO I DO WITH Progressive Farms Oranges, Lemons, and Limes ?

{ what the fork }



DRACULA'S ELIXIR

INGREDIENTS

2 Progressive Farms Oranges
2 Progressive Farms Lemons
1 Progressive Farms Lime
2 Honeycrisp apples
1 bottle (750 ml) dry red wine
1 cup orange juice
½ cup dark rum
1 cup seltzer water
Ice

Prep Time: 10 min

Chill Time: 4 hours

Servings: 1 large pitcher

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Thinly slice the oranges, lemons, and lime.
- 2 Core the apples and make sure to remove all the seeds. Then cut up the apples into large chunks.
- 3 Place all the ingredients, except the seltzer water, in a large pitcher or container.
- 4 Cover and refrigerate for at least 4 hours.
- 5 When you are ready to serve your guests, add ice and seltzer water.
- 6 Stir and enjoy your transition to immortality.
Please bite and drink responsibly.

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



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AND THE NEXT GENERATION OF PRODUCE

AN OPINION BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ

I learned about Type 2 fun from a group of cyclists I know who are the best kind of crazy—the produce kind. The kind that will do what others won't; who break through a challenge headfirst and immediately turn around to charge the next one.

The group had all just completed 100 miles on bicycles, were covered in dirt, drinking a well-deserved beer as though it was the only thing keeping them going. In all fairness, it probably was.

I sat in wonder as they each flinched with even the slightest movement, discussing probable blisters and definite bruises. For me, it wasn't even the fact they had all willingly put themselves through so much, it was that they had paid to do so. The entry fee for the ride had been \$124.

These are the ones who taught me about the principle of finding the fun in something you swore in the moment you would never do again. Your muscles are aching, your body is stressed, sweat is pouring down your face, and you're wondering why you are here.

Type 1 fun is what we all associate with the word. These are the gatherings with friends, the joyful adventures, the moments in which you are grinning ear to ear from start to finish. There is no question of its glory, but when it's over, that is it. It's a memory. A moment you might recall wistfully that may come with some good calories and great conversations.

Type 2 fun is not this way. There is anticipation and excitement when it approaches, along with—probably—some apprehension. Yet, when the “fun” takes place, you wonder what you were thinking. Not until the challenge is over and the pain and/or strain begins to ebb does Type 2 set in. That is when you begin to recall the experience with fondness and, yes, fun. You can't wait to do it again, despite promises in the moment you wouldn't.

It will be hard, and you know it will be hard. But, to quote *A League of Their Own*, “The hard is what makes it great.”

Likewise, the battered and bruised cyclists who were cursing themselves and the friends who supported this ridiculous habit were inevitably going to spend the next days—nay, months—recounting every curve, every climb, every fall. They would go over every detail and the agony of the moment while grinning and signing up for yet another ride.

Something in the pain, the heat, and the sweat gives them a lasting joy that surpasses any Type 1 fun. It carries them through to the next big ride, where the cycle will inevitably start again.

In this, I see the people of fresh produce.

Admittedly, I've only heard of Type 2 fun in the world of sports and exercise, usually from the insane breed of people who have themselves told me they like to feel the pain of pushing their muscles a little too far.

If I turn these moments into fields of vegetables, trees of fruit, and the apprehension of what Mother Nature has in store for both, I see those who also sign up again and again for the rush of the hard that makes life great.

I have no doubt this sounds familiar—I'm sure you, too, are drawing parallels to the produce life, just as I did. It's one riddled with challenges; trying to control what many argue is untamable. But those who have chosen this calling not only take on this struggle every day, they are some of the kindest, most interesting people I've ever known, who are experts at having a great time!

How many times has a boss, a buyer, or even I called to see if the latest weather report is about to mess with everyone's plans? I assure you, there is a trade news graveyard in which many stories rest in peace because the winds of change rendered them defunct.

Yet, when next we meet, we'll talk about how much we still love the job. We've never been bored and couldn't fathom the feeling of predictability. Bitten by the produce bug, as it were.

In this struggle, we all see the rewards. We recall the challenges as making the wins that much greater. And we worry that the generation following us won't understand how to sit in this discomfort necessary to attain the prize of our career path.

One of the most frequent questions I hear buzzing around the industry is about who will carry it all next. Who will the torch pass to in a generation more immersed in technology, farther removed from tangibility, and promised instant gratification at nearly every turn? How can we show them why we love this hectic, high-demand, no-set-hours vocation?

The answer, I truly believe, is in Type 2 fun.

The above dynamics influencing Gen Z and beyond are true, yet there is no shortage of up-and-coming climbers, skydivers, or even cyclists despite the challenges of these sports. Maybe even because of those challenges.

While some studies show attention spans getting shorter, the up-and-coming workforce is also a generation obsessed with experience. With adrenaline. With accomplishment. With the daring side of life.

Type 2 fun, like produce, is an immersive experience—it calls to the blood and transcends generations, getting under the skin to become part of the whole. As it did for any one of us, all that is needed is to take that first bite.

Gen Z and beyond understand Type 2 fun. It is a language we all speak. If we as an industry can show them how our chosen lines of work align with the joy and challenge of the athletic world's term for hard-earned gratification, the call for adventure will be heard and answered. 🍌

WTF DO I DO WITH WP Rawl Sweet & Tangy Collard Greens Simple Sauté ?

{ what the fork }



SWEET SOUTHERN GREENS

INGREDIENTS

1 WP Rawl Sweet & Tangy Collard Greens Simple Sauté

1 tsp vegetable oil

1½ cups + 2 tsp water, separated

Prep Time: 10 min

Cook Time: 15 min

Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Mix included drizzle packet with 2 tsp of water in a small bowl. Stir in 1 tsp of vegetable oil. Set aside to drizzle.
- 2 In a separate bowl, mix 1½ cups of water with the included stock, beans, and flavor pouches to create the cooking sauce. Set aside.
- 3 Heat a medium-sized skillet on high heat to 400° F. Add shredded collard greens and stir continuously for 2–3 minutes until the greens start to wilt.
- 4 Add in cooking sauce and stir well. Reduce to medium heat (250° F) and cover pan; cook for 5 minutes. Remove collard greens cover and stir well. Replace cover and cook for an additional 5 minutes.
- 5 Place cooked greens on a plate, and drizzle sauce on top. Serve warm and enjoy!

Note: Add sliced chicken or a cube of warm cornbread on the side to bring the Southern feel home!

To learn more about WP Rawl, visit www.rawl.net



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FOR ALL OCCASIONS:

ORANGE CRANBERRY LIMEADE

By Peggy Packer

Photography by
Reid Monsma

One of my favorite things about the fall season is hitting the fair. While the local fair in my hometown of Buckeye, Arizona, is quite humble in appearance, it is the grounds for a host of core childhood memories that could never be erased. One of those key recollections? The first sip of a fresh, classic fair lemonade.

You can guess by the title of this article that we didn't come here to make any regular ol' lemonade. Instead, we're giving a fan-favorite drink another citrus-centric twist. Inspired by the delicious fairground staple, this Orange Cranberry Limeade taps into a sweet-but-sour sensation that

will transport you right back to the county festival. And if you really want to commit—I'm willing to bet it pairs perfectly with a fried turkey leg, crispy corn dog, or fluffy funnel cake.

Hear the rush of roller coasters around you as fresh oranges and limes converge to create more than just a classic beverage. If you truly embrace the thrill, this creation can be the conduit to an invigorating experience or a fun-filled memory.

So, sit back, keep your hands and feet inside the vehicle at all times, and let fresh produce take you on a ride. 🍷

INGREDIENTS

- 1 fresh orange
- 1 fresh lime
- 2-3 tsp sugar (optional)
- 2 oz 100 percent cranberry juice
- Fresh strawberries, halved
- Prosecco (optional)
- Ice
- Additional orange slices, for garnish

Time: 10 min
Servings: 1

DIRECTIONS

1. Squeeze as much juice as possible from the orange and the lime into a cocktail shaker. If you prefer your indulgence on the sweeter side like I do, now would be a good time to sprinkle in that sugar as well.
2. Add cranberry juice and ice to the shaker and shake vigorously.
3. Pour the mixture into a highball cocktail glass and add more ice if needed. Sprinkle in a few halved strawberries and add an orange slice for garnish.
4. If desired, top the glass with your favorite Prosecco and enjoy!

Note: To truly tap into the carnival energy, skip step one and cut the orange and lime into slices. Add sugar and muddle the citrus in the bottom of an empty jar or deli container. Add cranberry juice, orange slices, and Prosecco to the container and sip leisurely with a silly straw!





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