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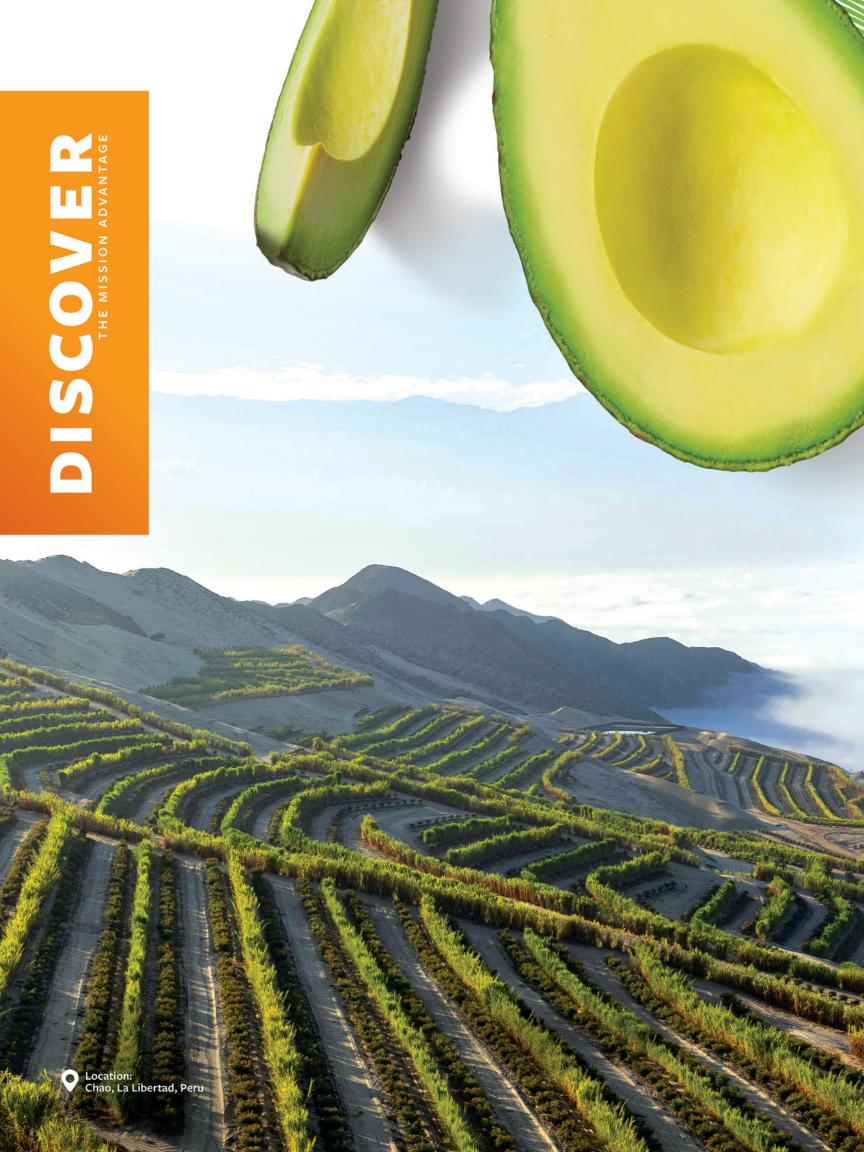




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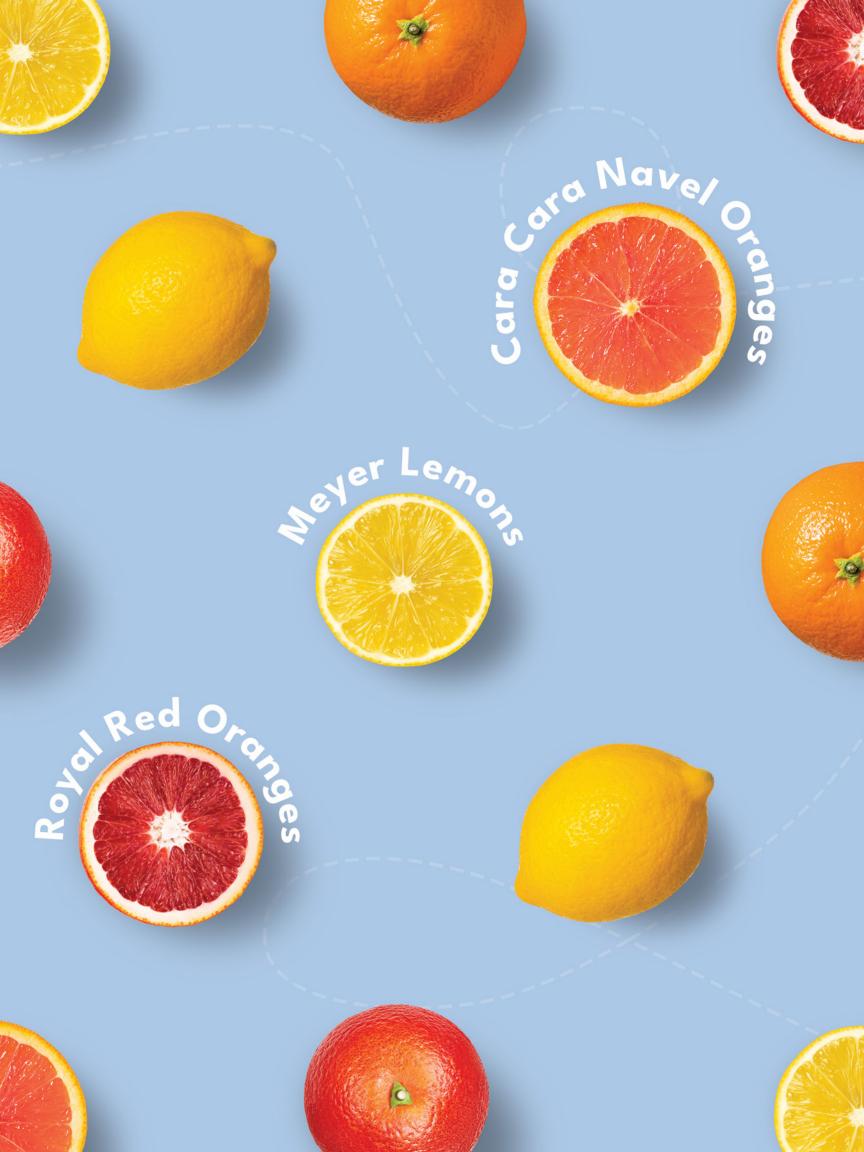
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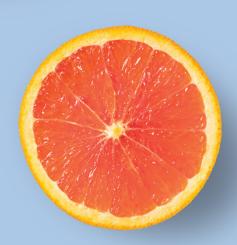




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E ARE BEING Mac

E ARE JUST ONE PHONE CALL FROM BEING BROUGHT TO OUR KNEES.

Mac Riggan told me this one early morning in late November of 2023 as we talked about

apples and his 30 years in the industry. The vulnerability of the human condition is what he was referring to, beautiful and terrifying in its precariousness, but also its resilience. How one moment we can be smooth sailing and the next, a storm brings us to our knees.

The lesson for me that morning was the importance and impact of reaching across the larger void of disconnect still prevalent after the pandemic, and seeking to connect with another human. Inevitably, this is where conversations go with Mac. There is always the business of it, but his ability to create meaningful relationships is what makes him an amazing human and also an amazing professional. Lucky for him, a connection does not take much effort—he is simply himself.

As we hung up the phone, I opened a page on my laptop and let my mind pick up where the conversation left off. Leaving me once again in awe of our industry—which is even more susceptible to the high-stakes gambling tailored to a clock that never stops ticking. That possibility of a single phone call—more frequent among these friends. Fresh produce is full of those weathering elements: favorable and unfavorable market conditions—depending on who you ask—natural events, financial gains and losses, and costs that seem to hold many companies on a razor's edge.

I am sure, if you ask Mac, he did not mean to send me down this path of thought—but I thank him nonetheless.

We have had a year of tremendous loss but also unprecedented strides for many companies.

New faces and old friends grace this issue, and I feel like it is the sum of a perfectly imperfect year. Now, as we open February and the call of 2024, I read through these pages of *The Snack* in a new light. Far from effervescent but full of hope. Liken it to a harvest, buoyed by successes and also graced by challenges. Is there a season without them?

Despite the hurdles that attempt to bring us to our knees, and because of the outcomes that bring us great joy—we meet often and with purpose.

Let's raise our glasses to the successes of the day, and the stories that make each of us stronger.

We welcome you, 2024. S

Jordan Okumura-Wright

Editor in Chief

AndNowUKnow, Deli Market News,
and The Snack Magazine

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## **FEATURES**

#### WAKEFERN FOOD CORP.

A GENEROUS HEART: REMEMBERING MARIANNE SANTO

While 2023 felt the heaviness of loss with Marianne Santo's passing, her friends came together to strengthen the vibrant fire that remains and share the memories and stories that made her a guiding light for so many...





#### RON LEMAIRE AND SAM SILVESTRO

A REFLECTION OF CHANGE: READING THE FUTURE IN THE PAST Whether on the curb enjoying Scotch and a cigar or a stage in front of hundreds, CPMA's Ron Lemaire and retail consultant Sam Silvestro know how to have a stirring discussion. Let's reflect on a key conversation...



#### **WALMART**

EMBRACING THE JOURNEY:
A Q&A WITH CARRIE MACK
From what keeps her up in the morning
to the challenges of remaining authentic
with today's exceedingly accelerated
pace, the Senior Sourcing Manager
shares a few of the insights that remain
her compass rose and what lies ahead for
her future goals...



#### **BAKO SWEET®**

SWEETENING THE DEAL
As these national celebrations open up
unique opportunities for sweet potatoes,
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latest category-driving strategies...



#### THE GIANT COMPANY AND FRIEDA'S BRANDED PRODUCE

SENSORY AWAKENING

A partnership traverses thousands of miles to help revive a powerful, often neglected sense that individualizes the fresh department. Chris Keetch, Alex Jackson, and more discuss...



#### SHUMAN FARMS

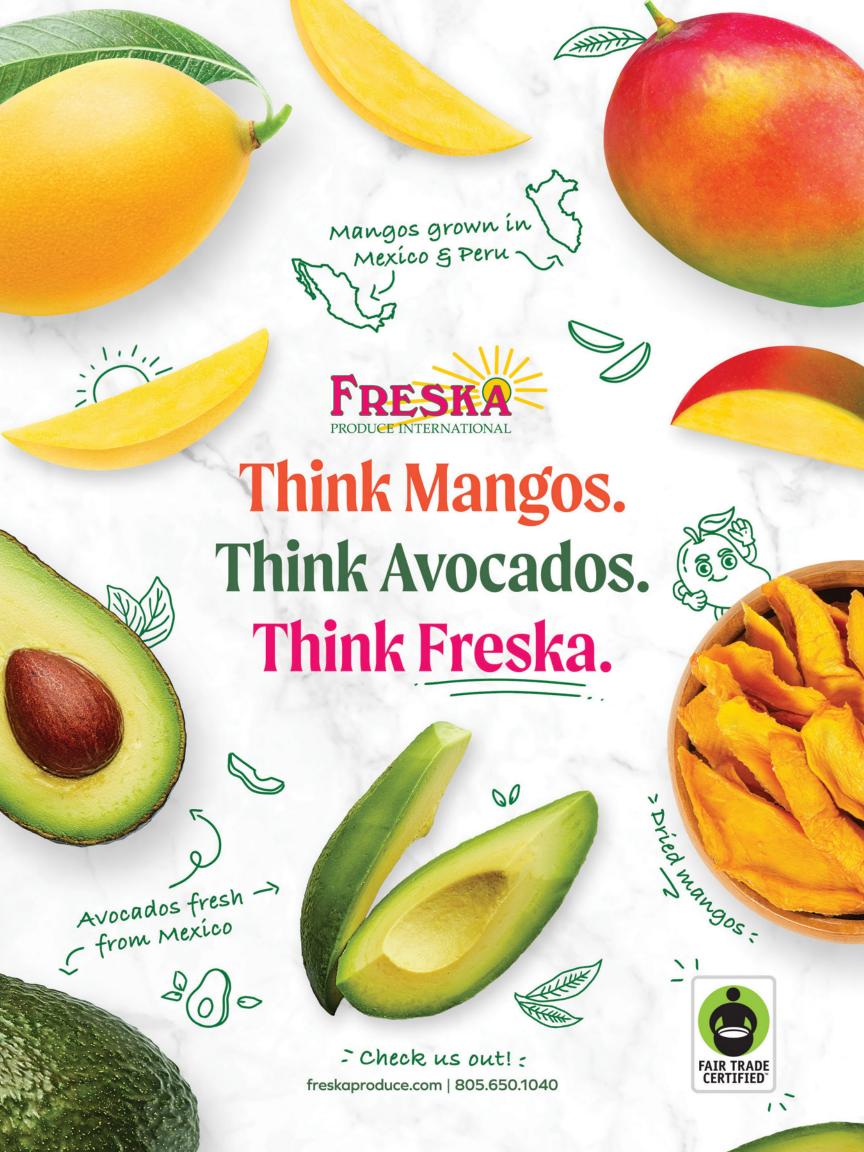
ENTERING A NEW ERA

With the ability to bridge generational divides, food is a powerful tool that can be passed down through the ages. Find out from John Shuman what the grower is doing to tap into a new era of shoppers and build brand loyalty...



#### **VALLARTA SUPERMARKETS**

A CULTURE OF CELEBRATION Lizette Gomez lays out the blueprint before us, describing the progressive road traveled and the one ahead as the unique grocery operation tunes its format to the delight of the changing consumer basket...



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#### **FEBRUARY 2024**

ISSUE 83

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## A Closer Look at Pure Flavor® Tiki Tomatoes™

# **UP**CLOSE

#### By Anne Allen

oes sink into white sand. A tropical breeze flutters across your hair. The sun beats down rays of warmth as you listen to waves gently crashing on the shore.

This is the transportive power of good branding.

Pure Flavor® knows exactly how to evoke a feeling through its packaging, as evidenced in its latest launch, Tiki Tomatoes™. The earthy color palette is a near-exact match to the tomatoes within, a nice touch

that assumes a natural cohesion between product and brand. Rounded, swooping letters and a palm tree draw the eye and continue to draw upon consumers' desire for visual appeal.

You may be wondering, why do shoppers need packaging to make a narrative declaration? With February upon us, a story needs to be told in order to keep consumers interested in their New Year's resolutions. Long winter days and leftover holiday fog might make healthy eating less appealing, but a tropical vacation for your tastebuds? That will cut through the fatigue like butter.

Don't just take my word for it: Stock up on Tiki Tomatoes and watch your customers do the talking for me. §





# GENEROUS Heart:

REMEMBERING MARIANNE SANTO

BY JORDAN OKUMURA-WRIGHT

urpose is contagious. People are drawn to it, infused with it, and led by it.

To say that Marianne Santo was a person of great influence is both an understatement and the perfect way to understand her, to grasp the impact her incredible heart had on those she met and knew. The phrase is an understatement because Marianne did not just touch lives, she was oxygen for them, a home lit by unconditional love and light. It also perfectly defines Marianne as well, because her impact was staggering, passionate, and personal—infinite and immortal.

Marianne will be in our hearts, memories, and actions forever.

"Marianne dedicated her life to produce. She didn't plan it, but once she became involved in the industry she put forth her commitment to the industry which became her passion. Marianne worked tirelessly in her quest for knowledge of the industry and to promote it with vigor. She most revealed her dedication with a passion toward promoting other women in the industry and would act as a mentor to so many throughout her life," Carmine Santo, Marianne's husband, shared.

Ever since I met Marianne back in 2017, working with her on a *Mentors in the Making* story for *The Snack*, I have been deeply affected by her deep purpose to uplift and inspire others and help those in need. During the short years we knew each other, I was under the impression that this purpose of hers was not something she consciously chose, but an innate part of who she was.

Many mornings I would wake to a message from her, sharing words of wisdom and encouragement she found on Instagram or pulled from her own experiences, or a note of gratitude for something that was written on our pages.

Marianne shared many of these reflections with me in a story she graciously allowed me to write about her personal experiences and about her passion to help others succeed and grow.

After a career spent learning the produce business at Wakefern Food Corp., she found herself in a position to be a teacher as a Senior Category Manager and one of the first

"Marianne worked tirelessly in her quest for knowledge of the industry and to promote it with vigor. She most revealed her dedication with a passion toward promoting other women in the industry and would act as a mentor to so many throughout her life."

CARMINE SANTO, CHIEF OF STAFF, APL LOGISTICS LTD. AND HUSBAND OF MARIANNE SANTO







Top: Marianne Santo with her husband, Carmine Santo Middle: Marianne at dinner in New York City Bottom: Marianne, Carmine, and Kelly Davis

female Category Managers at Wakefern, before becoming the first woman President in the history of the Eastern Produce Council (EPC).

"I try to honor those who had the patience and generosity to mentor me by paying it forward. Of equal value is what my fellow employees teach me—my relationships with them are based on the sharing of all our individual skills. I am

motivated in life by feeling blessed to do what I love for as long as I have, and being married to someone who has always supported my career and the very demanding hours that this business requires," she told me.

It seems strange to let these words settle on the page in the present tense. But, it feels right—a way to honor the echo she will forever illuminate with those she touched.

"Marianne was the biggest cheerleader many of us have ever known. She guided and encouraged not only in her professional life, but in her personal life as well," Tina Santo, Marianne's sister-in-law, expressed. "She believed in us and made us believe in ourselves. I hope to pay that forward always."

Echoing that beautiful way she cared for those in her personal life, Carmine shared that Marianne shined most with and when doing anything related to her nieces Tara, Emily, and Abby.

Marianne had, what she called, her Girl Gang—a circle of women and family that was an extension of her heart and influenced how she moved through the world. Carmine shared this with me as we spoke on a cold morning in

January. It was Marianne's birthday. But, in the middle of such a conversation, I could not feel the chill. The love he had in his voice for her was that immortal kind. And in that moment, she was in that conversation with us both.

Marianne touched many, beginning when she first stepped into the produce division at New Jersey-based Wakefern more than 30 years ago. As one of the largest retailer-

> owned cooperatives in the U.S., Wakefern's flagship supermarket brands, including ShopRite, Price Rite Marketplace, The Fresh Grocer, Dearborn Market, and Gourmet Garage, found a home in Marianne's heart, as did the people who worked in them.

I remember Marianne laughing as she shared with me how she interviewed with Wakefern for a position in the Produce Store Services Department because she wanted to work for a company that valued a college degree—one that felt akin to my heart, as she had been an English Literature major at Douglass College.

"Within my first year, the Procurement Manager asked me if I would like to get involved with produce buying, and the rest is

history," she told me. "It didn't dawn on me at the time that what I was being offered and pursuing was relatively uncharted territory for women on the buying side."

Marianne added that, when she started attending the Eastern Produce Council meetings 30 years ago, she was one of maybe five women in attendance.



"Marianne taught

me, through her

AND PROCUREMENT, FRIEDA'S BRANDED PRODUCE





Left: Karen Caplan, Advisor, Former President, and Chief Executive Officer, Frieda's Branded Produce, with Marianne Right: Marianne, Loreto Lara, Commercial Manager, Subsole; and Mayda Sotomayor-Kirk, Chief Executive Officer, Greenyard USA/Seald Sweet

"Marianne's impact on my life, both personal and professional, was profound. She took me under her wing and mentored, cheered, encouraged, and enriched my life."

JAMI ESPINOSA, CATEGORY MANAGER, PRODUCE, WAKEFERN FOOD CORP.





Top: Jami Espinosa, Category Manager, Produce, Wakefern Food Corp., and Marianne in New York City Bottom: Marianne and friends celebrating, produce-style

"I would never have imagined back then that we would at this point represent close to half the room and that I would become the first woman President in 52 years! It is a role I am very respectful of and humbled by. When other women in this business express their gratitude to me for doing this, it is all the motivation I need," she said.

Often referred to as "The Watermelon Queen" among her peers, reflecting her strong love for the category, Marianne also managed and influenced every category in Wakefern's produce program over her 38 years at the company.

During her time at Wakefern, she polished and paid forward her mastery of procurement systems, her ability to work through the complexities of warehouse buying and domestic and international sourcing, while mentoring those around her. Marianne shared these reflections with me back in 2020, and they are still as true today as they were then: "When I started, everything was done over the phone or by fax. Emails and texts didn't exist. While those methods have streamlined communication, I believe that personal interaction is still a very vital part of this business. Retail has obviously undergone tremendous change with the advent of shopping from home, in-store pickup, and home delivery, as well as competition from club stores and online retailers. Our stores need to be all of those things while maintaining our history as family-owned businesses that value customer loyalty on a personal level."

Marianne always kept her heart present in conversations, able to manage the demands of the work with her desire to elevate others and invest in philanthropic initiatives as well. Marianne found this balance in Wakefern's year-round hunger-fighting initiative, the ShopRite Partners In Caring program, among many others she participated in over the years, including Dress for Success, the Food Bank, and God's Love We Deliver. The industry veteran was also the 2017 TWIN winner of "Tribute to Women and Industry."

Marianne leaves behind her beloved husband, Carmine, two loving sisters, Lisa Walsak and Eileen Kennedy, Eileen's husband Richard, and adored nieces and nephews: Tara, the late Amanda, Emily, Jacob, Adam, and Abby. As an obituary read, it is important to mention her other sisters in Marie Moss, Kelly Davis, and Tina Santo.

The Eastern Produce Council is honoring Marianne, posthumously, at its Annual Gala on April 6, 2024. You can visit the EPC's website at *easternproducecouncil.com* to learn more.

Somehow putting a period at the end of this text feels unnatural. But Marianne's heart beats through all of us, in the memories and words shared by those she loved endlessly and with that beautiful magnitude of purpose.

#### **WORDS ABOUT MARIANNE:**

Gabriela D'Arrigo,
VICE PRESIDENT OF
COMMUNICATIONS AND
MARKETING, D'ARRIGO NEW YORK

"Marianne Santo, or 'Mare' as some of us called her, was not only my mentor, but she was my dear friend. From the first moment we met at a women's conference years ago, we just clicked. This business can be really harsh and tough, and can run you through the gauntlet at times. Mare was one of those people I knew who had the innate ability to always see the positive. She was my first call whenever I felt like I was ready to give up and quit. She always knew the right thing to say and do in any situation and always handled herself brilliantly.

Over the years, Mare shared different experiences she has had in this industry, both good and bad, and I truly admired her for how she handled each and every situation. I would joke with her, 'You need to write a handbook for this' or 'Yeah, that would have been helpful before I did that.' In the end, we would always have a laugh about it, and she would keep my energy and spirit up. I still think of her all the time, especially when I'm faced with a difficult decision, whether it be at work or just in life. I miss being able to call my friend and ask for her opinion, guidance, or just to tell her a funny story and listen to her infectious laugh. Her impact on not just me, but others in this industry will live on and be passed down. I know she would be thrilled to know that. Who knows, maybe someday I'll write her handbook for her."

Jami Espinosa,

CATEGORY MANAGER, PRODUCE,

WAKEFERN FOOD CORP.

"Sometimes, there's a person at your job who becomes so influential that the lines get blurred between colleague and friend. For me, that person was Marianne Santo. Our friendship and work relationship even defied location. I'm based in Florida, where I spend a lot of time in fields and farms sourcing produce for Wakefern, and Marianne was based out of our offices in New Jersey. Despite the distance, Marianne's impact on my life, both personal and professional, was profound. She took me under her wing and mentored, cheered, encouraged, and enriched my life. I don't think that a single day went by without some form of communication between us, whether it was a phone conversation, email, or a text from Marianne to check in—sometimes even a silly GIF to make me smile. I've come to realize that she was that person for a remarkable number of people within the industry. It has been bittersweet to hear from so many whose lives were impacted by Marianne. She believed in me and taught me so much about the produce business. She would laugh at my elaborate Excel spreadsheets and tell me to, 'Just go with your gut.' I'm still working on that and will keep her voice in my head and heart as I remind myself to always go with my gut."

Alex Jackson,
VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND
PROCUREMENT, FRIEDA'S BRANDED
PRODUCE

"Marianne taught me, through her actions, love, and passion, what kind of mentor I want to be, and I was honored to call her my mentor. She was fun, passionate, unabashedly herself, and not afraid to say what everyone else was thinking. I knew I needed mentors who were different from me and brought out the best parts of me. Who made me feel confident to be myself and work through imposter syndrome. Marianne was the best at that.

When *The Snack* featured me for *Mentors in the Making*, Marianne called me a force of nature, complimenting my poise, energy, and sales expertise. She recognized my hard work, perseverance, and understanding of customers' needs. But, what meant the most to me was when she said I inspired her to reach higher and do better professionally and personally. I will never take for granted all the times Marianne reminded me how naming her as my mentor for that article was a turning point for her in how she viewed herself and the role she played for other women in our industry. Marianne didn't see herself as others saw her, but I know that, since her passing, Marianne is finally believing everything we've told her about how inspiring she has been to everyone she met."

Karen Caplan,
ADVISOR, FORMER CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER AND PRESIDENT, FRIEDA'S
BRANDED PRODUCE

"I first met Marianne more than 30 years ago, when she was promoted to become a Wakefern produce buyer. Needless to say, she was the only female produce buyer I knew, and we naturally developed a friendship. But, it was in the last 10 years that we became super close; she turned to me for advice on accepting a bigger leadership role in the Eastern Produce Council, I enjoyed being her cheerleader and one of her biggest supporters, and, in turn, she joyfully took on the assignment of being my daughter, Alex Jackson's, mentor when Alex joined our sales team more than eight years ago. Both Alex and I were honored to give the eulogy at Marianne's funeral and we miss her greatly."

Jackie Caplan Wiggins, FORMER VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER, FRIEDA'S BRANDED PRODUCE

"I first 'met' Marianne in the late 1980s. Our communication occurred over the phone, as in-person interactions—aside from annual conventionswere rare. At the time, I was on the sales desk at Frieda's and Marianne was my buyer at Wakefern. To say that she was a tough buyer is an understatement. Frankly, she was a badass and I was kind of afraid to speak with her. However, in 1991, I saw a different side of Marianne—one that was sweet and caring. This happened when I gave birth to my son, Frankie. Marianne sent him a Purple Vermont Teddy Bear to welcome him into this world. The last time I saw Marianne was several years ago at the Washington Conference hosted by United Fresh. It was her first time attending, and we shared a dinner, during which she expressed her excitement about engaging in advocacy. It was a delightful evening. Marianne, I miss you, and I will forever treasure those special moments."

Mayda Sotomayor-Kirk, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, GREENYARD USA/SEALD SWEET

"I met Marianne for the first time in her office. She was the most knowledgeable, stern, and intimidating buyer I had ever met. I soon found out that if Marianne did not know you or you had the misfortune of her not liking you, it was game over. Time and effort provided me the opportunity to know her and I thank the stars above that we became friends. We always would joke about that day, how I told her she made grown men cry. As years went by and we traveled for work and I got to know her better, I quickly learned about Marriane's fierce heart and unwavering loyalty. She loved her family deeply and unconditionally. If you were fortunate enough to be part of her chosen family circle, consider yourself winning life's lottery. During my most difficult times, Marianne literally picked me up from the floor and held me. I have no words to express the loss that this world will have without her in it. I just know that my world will never be the same without her in it.

As we navigate the future, let's make sure that her legacy lives on, not just in our hearts but in the positive impact we bring to the world around us. Let's honor her memory by carrying forward the strength, loyalty, and genuine care she shared."

Susan McAleavey
Sarlund,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EASTERN
PRODUCE COUNCIL

"As Executive Director of the Eastern Produce Council (EPC), I had the great pleasure of working alongside Marianne as our President for the past six years. She was a prized mentor and a caring friend. One of the people Marianne was introduced to on the council and the EPC Board was my father, John McAleavey, who served as the council's Executive Director for 25 years prior to his passing in 2015. I always remember him saying what a great addition she was to the board and how capable she was! Like all of us, he would be so proud of how she developed and, ultimately, became the first female leader of our organization. Marianne was passionate about the produce world, committed to developing its future leaders, and truly treasured and respected the importance and value of relationships. This outlook connected us while working together at the EPC. Marianne will forever be in my heart and will continue to guide me in my role."

Kelly Davis,

FORMERLY WITH WAKEFERN AND
ALLEGIANCE RETAIL SERVICES

"My great friend Marianne was probably one of the most awe-inspiring women I have ever known. She inspired, championed, and wholly supported me (and countless others—both men and women) in the produce industry. Marianne will always be remembered as a passionate spokesperson for the produce industry and strove to develop and improve industry standards.

Her family was especially dear to her, and the pride she had for them was evident whenever she spoke of them or shared their stories. My friend had a huge heart and the sharpest mind ever to be bestowed upon a human being. My favorite memories will always be of her and me traversing this globe for the produce industry we loved, and meeting/networking with some of the greatest men and women in our profession. I say with great admiration that Marianne was a global force and will be remembered as such!"

## A Closer Look at Calavo Growers AvoFresco Rebrand



#### By Anne Allen

bring two lessons to you in this segment:

- 1. Love for guac is not all talk.
- 2. Simple is striking.

To the first point, folks in North America turn to avocados for both nutrition and flavor, and guacamole is the perfect vehicle to deliver on both. Retailers and foodservice operators need the proper products in line to meet the demand for this avocado-centric side dish. That's where Calavo Growers' AvoFresco brand comes into play.

The brand was revamped last year, with new packaging to match. Here's where simplicity is utilized: The rebranded look isn't flashy—but is incredibly effective. The new concept relies upon the clear sealed top, which shows off the vibrant green of the guacamole inside. Vegetables imparting flavor to the recipe adorn the bottom of the logo. I spied that jalapeño and garlic right away!

When combining the love of guac and the striking simplicity of its packaging, Calavo delivers a fresh look that lets consumers know immediately what they're getting. The line also offers convenient squeeze pouches for those wanting some guacamole on the go. I know I would slip those into my lunch box.

If you take the two lessons above to heart, you've got a recipe for success, every time.





here are few threads between dishes bearing the California name as distinct and influential as the avocado. Seemingly synonymous with the Golden State, the green fruit appears in everything from the classic California Roll to the California Club Sandwich and beyond. This has created a strong association for consumers between the state and the category, and for a good reason: the West Coast region is known not only for movie stars but also for growing high-quality avocados. As the season gets into gear, find out how these experts say retailers can tap into this mental connection to boost basket share...

"In the golden orchards of California and the vibrant fields of Mexico, avocados ripen under the same sun, embodying a shared heritage that yearns to be in the Super Bowl. Come Big Game time, avocados take center stage, transforming into the irresistible allure of guacamole—a green touchdown on every game-day table, uniting fans in the joy of good food and great company."



GARY CLEVENGER,

MANAGING PARTNER, FRESKA PRODUCE INTERNATIONAL



CALIFORNIA

CHRISTINA WARD,

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND PRODUCT BRANDS, WESTFALIA FRUIT USA "February is game time for Westfalia Fruit's creamy and delicious avocados with multiple countries of origin in play, California-grown innovations, and key promotional events for avocados—Super Bowl, Valentine's Day, Heart Month, and more. About 50 percent of shoppers across age groups say healthy eating is their top priority. The excellent news is that avocados are heart-healthy, according to the American Heart Association. This creates opportunities to educate shoppers on the health benefits of avocados, in-store and online. To meet shoppers where they want to buy, we recommend the best ripe stages for promotion, cross-merchandising, and consumer education. When retailers work with Westfalia Fruit, they can expect partners in avocado success. This is part of the 'Westfalia Difference.'"



DIANA MCCLEAN

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS, MISSION PRODUCE®

"Avocados are a staple in my household, so they're always on my counter or in the fridge, depending on when I want them ripe and ready to eat! With all the delicious ways to incorporate the nutrient-packed superfood on the menu, avocados rightfully can take center stage in the produce department. I love it when my local grocery store offers a variety of sizes and ripe stages so that I can buy my avocados for toast, salads, or even brownies! And when avocados are cross-merchandised with complementary ingredients, such as tomatoes, onions, and cilantro, my shopping is that much easier. This season, I look forward to seeing our Mission Minis bags in stores and at check-out to drive incremental purchases."

"During the California season, retailers can support local growers with one of their most popular produce items. It's the perfect time to create an avocado destination, placing bags with multiple fruit sizes near bulk so shoppers have a choice. Get creative with merchandising with exciting private-label California call-out bags, West Pak's California Gold bag, or customize Lil'Cados or the jumbo Party Pak with Golden State fruit. The bags are bright, seasonably festive, and easy to grab and go—ideal for displaying in the produce aisle, highlighting in heavy traffic areas, or at the register for last-minute impulse buys."



JOE NAVA

VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, WEST PAK AVOCADO



PATRICK LUCY.

PRESIDENT, DEL REY AVOCADO "The greatest thing about California avocados is their consistent quality and versatility. California avocados are consistently a star year in and year out and are so versatile that they can be used in so many different ways. Versatility gives retailers a great opportunity to cross-merchandise with other items from all over the store: center aisle, meat/seafood, and, of course, other produce. We truly feel California avocados will continue to be a star in the produce category in 2024."

"Our customers tell us they love California avocado season because the fruit is reliably consistent. Research studies confirm that avocado shoppers and avocado lovers are willing to pay more for locally grown and California origin. Many of our customers know the premium value of the California brand and call it out on displays and menus during the season, but not all, and there's room to add value throughout the supply chain. So, my two recommendations to customers are to ask your packers to call out 'California' on the fruit, bags, and boxes in season and trumpet the origin on shelves, displays, and menus."



TERRY SPLANE.

VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

# $\sqrt{T} = \frac{\text{DOIDOWITH}}{\{\text{what the fork }\}}$



#### **INGREDIENTS**

3 Ocean Mist Farms® Artichokes

1/2 cup white wine

2 thyme sprigs

2 rosemary sprigs

1/2 stick butter

2 tsp garlic, minced

1/2 tsp thyme, minced

½ tsp rosemary, minced

Lemon wedges

**Prep Time:** 5 mins Cook Time: 20 mins

Servings: 3



#### **DIRECTIONS**

- Cut the top third of artichokes off and trim bottom stem flush with base. Trim thorns off each leaf with kitchen shears. Rub cut lemon over artichoke to prevent from browning.
- Add wine, thyme sprigs, and rosemary sprigs to Instant Pot®. Add rack to Instant Pot® and place artichokes on top. Cook on high pressure for 20 minutes.
- Remove artichokes and set aside. Remove rack and whole herbs.
- Add butter, garlic, minced thyme, and rosemary to the Instant Pot and turn on sauté mode until butter is melted and sauce is aromatic.
- Pour butter sauce over artichokes and serve with lemon slices and remaining sauce for dipping. Enjoy!

To learn more about Ocean Mist Farms, visit www.oceanmist.com



## A WILDTWIST®

n apple of many dualities, the WildTwist® variety was born of Honeycrisp and Cripps Pink—two household names with loyal followings. This apple's parentage isn't the only twist; it's grown on both the East and West

Coasts through a partnership between Hess Brother's Fruit Company and Rainier Fruit Company to maximize regional availability. With endless potential for brand growth, this apple variety is just getting started.



#### SUGAR AND ACID

WildTwist® exemplifies the best of its genetic parents: the crispy sweetness of Honeycrisp with the delicate acidity of Cripps Pink. Combined, an intricate flavor profile bursts from crunchy flesh with an exceptional fracture. Among a sea of red bi-colored apples, WildTwist's pink blush and bright speckles atop a golden background help the variety stand out on the shelf.

#### **2** EAST AND WEST

There's no denying that an old rivalry exists between Eastern and Western American apple growers, but when it comes to sharing WildTwist®, it's all teamwork between Hess Brother's Fruit Co. of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and Rainier Fruit of Selah, Washington. The multi-generational family-owned shippers are strongly aligned as partners. They believe in the variety's potential to trade consumers up to a high-flavor apple that brings them back for more.

#### **3** WINTER TO SUMMER

Harvested late as temperatures begin to drop, the variety finishes flavor development in storage and reaches perfection as the new year begins. WildTwist® is available from January to June, reinvigorating the category's post-holiday doldrums with new flavor.



#### RAINIER FRUIT COMPANY INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

represents individuals, products, and ideas making a positive impact in the community through their work, volunteer efforts, sustainability, or health and wellness initiatives.



# All natural, 100% wild.

Two legendary apples have come together in a WildTwist\*. The explosively juicy crunch of Honeycrisp combined with the intricate flavor of Cripps Pink creates an experience you won't want to miss. Two favorites. One great apple.



#### ► MENTORS IN THE MAKING ◀

#### **BRIDGETTE WEBER**

#### TRADE MARKETING MANAGER, BARD VALLEY NATURAL DELIGHTS®

ome of us are blessed to learn our calling right away. Books have been my companion since I was very small, a harbinger of my career in writing before I knew the definition of the word. I mumbled stories under my breath before I could even read, sensing the inherent magic locked away in the symbols on the page.

Bridgette Weber has a similar story. The Trade Marketing Manager for Bard Valley Natural Delights® toiled in the garden alongside her parents and grandparents, learning the powerful life lesson that food grown and shared from your own hands creates a bond with the land that is impossible to break.

"Throughout my life, my central motive has been to help people live better lives by feeding them wholesome and delicious food," Bridgette shared.

**BY ANNE ALLEN** 



She studied Food Science and Human Nutrition at the University of Illinois, College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES), delving into the intricacies of where our food comes from. After that, Bridgette's career journey began to take off.

"I started with jobs focused on quality assurance for various nuts, applying my technical knowledge to ensure top-notch product quality. While I enjoyed the analytical aspects of those roles, I found my true passion lies in working more closely with consumers. This realization prompted a shift into marketing, where I've now spent over five rewarding years," she told me.

This shift was propelled forward by her first mentor, Chad Hartman, who worked alongside Bridgette at Tropical Foods but is currently the Vice President of Business Development for Bridgewell Agribusiness.



CHAD HARTMAN, Vice President of Business Development, Bridgewell Agribusiness

"I was told very early in my own career that having the right people on your team is critical to success. Bridgette is a perfect example of the right person. Bridgette brought a unique skill set to the table when I started working with her, a positive attitude, zero quit, and a desire to learn. At times, I could not keep up with her. There was no task or project that was too big or small, she stuck with it until completion. If our marketing team needed something done that was not in anyone's wheelhouse, Bridgette would take it on and figure it out. Very quickly, Bridgette became a key player on our team and developed great marketing competency; her positive attitude was infectious. I expect to see great accomplishments from Bridgette in our industry."



**BETH KEETON,**Founder and Chief Executive
Officer, Elephant House PR

"Bridgette is a shining example of professionalism and kindness. Working with her during her time at Natural Delights has been an absolute pleasure. In just two short years, Bridgette's growth has been nothing short of remarkable—a testament to her curiosity and eagerness to learn. Fearlessly challenging the status quo, she brings fresh ideas to the table, always exploring new opportunities. Bridgette's resourcefulness is incredible; give her a challenge, and she not only conquers it but makes it look easy. As someone who's been an extension of the Natural Delights team for a significant stretch, I can genuinely say that these last couple of years, with Bridgette on board, have been among the best. I'm grateful to be a mentor on her journey and to witness the positive impact she's making. Looking ahead, I see Bridgette becoming an invaluable resource and mentor to others in the industry. I can't wait to see how she continues to grow and make a lasting impact."

"I owe much of my career growth to him. He took a chance on me, hiring me onto his marketing team at a time when I had the hunger to learn but minimal direct marketing experience," she said. "Over the years, Chad poured his decades of marketing and sales experience into me, equipping me with invaluable knowledge and skills. His mentorship not only kickstarted my career, but also instilled in me a deep appreciation for the art of marketing."

Another person who catapulted Bridgette's love of marketing was Beth Keeton, the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Elephant House PR.

"Beth has had a profound impact on my journey," Bridgette gushed. "As our public relations expert at Bard Valley Natural Delights, she is not just a leader in her field, she is a role model to me personally and professionally. Her insights into the rapidly evolving produce industry have been a guiding light in navigating its intricate nuances."

In her current role as Trade Marketing Manager for Bard Valley, Bridgette developed connections to further her ability to understand the company and its role within the industry as a whole—giving her the sort of insights that propel her status as a mentor in the making.

"Alan Asbury, our U.S. Director of Sales, brings a wealth of experience to the table. With a background that spans the brand, broker, and retail sides of the produce industry, he has provided me with a holistic view of how things work," Bridgette explained. "What's truly remarkable is Alan's willingness to share his vast knowledge and, as a relative newcomer to the industry, introduce me to industry peers he's known for decades. The connections he's facilitated have been invaluable in broadening my perspective."

David Baxter, Bard Valley's Director of Marketing and Business Development, similarly took Bridgette under his wing, further developing her marketing skills.

"He stands as a guiding force in my career," Bridgette said emphatically. "David leads our marketing team by constantly challenging us to think deeply about our consumers, messaging, and products. His mentorship has been instrumental in helping me overcome imposter syndrome and has encouraged me to take extreme ownership of my trade marketing efforts. In a

constantly evolving industry, David ensures I'm always in the loop, fostering a culture of growth and innovation."

Bridgette's contributions to the industry can already be seen in her marketing efforts at Bard Valley, but one of the places where I see her truly shining as a future mentor is her mindset.

"Working in fresh produce feels like sharing a well-kept secret that can make the world a better place," she affirmed. "Dates, in particular, are not just delicious but also incredibly nutritious. I'm genuinely excited to share them with others. Whether it's helping buyers or consumers, it's a joy to be part of this industry and contribute to making the world a healthier, tastier place."

Peace of mind can be found in knowing your purpose, and Bridgette Weber knows exactly how she wants to carve her influence upon the world.

### POWERED BY JOE Produce



ALAN ASBURY, U.S. Director of Sales, Bard Valley Natural Delights®

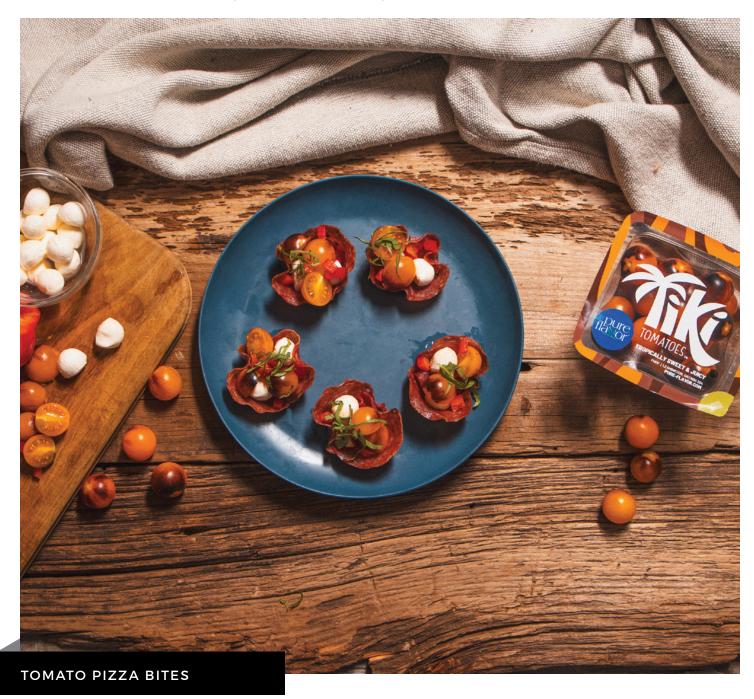
"Bridgette is a valued member of the Bard Valley team and has made some significant and positive contributions to achieving our goals. Her positive energy, commitment to personal and professional growth, and accomplishments on the marketing team have made her an important part of the team. She is always open, inquisitive, and a natural collaborator. This gives her a unique ability to connect with people and recognize their value, a trait that has supported a positive work environment. She is always encouraging and finds opportunity in every situation to create a contagiously positive environment and leave a lasting impression on those around her. I am excited to see her continued growth within the company and the industry and to support that growth and professional development. It is always rewarding to work with individuals who not only excel in their roles, but also contribute positively to the workplace culture."



DAVID BAXTER,
Director of Marketing and
Business Development, Bard
Valley Natural Delights®

"Bridgette is the kind of employee a manager dreams of. She is always eager to learn and hone her craft. Being relatively new to produce, she has taken it on with enthusiasm and curiosity, always asking intelligent questions to better understand how the work she is doing is making an impact on the broader business. She has grown in her role with Bard Valley and is a go-to resource for the sales and marketing team when they need a fresh perspective on a problem, and she is always happy to provide her valuable insights. I can't wait to see all that she will accomplish in her career and how she will evolve into a mentor and leader in the industry she is so clearly passionate about."

# $\sqrt{T} = \frac{\text{DOIDOWITH}}{\{\text{what the fork }\}}$



#### **INGREDIENTS**

- **1 dry pint** Pure Flavor® Tiki Tomatoes<sup>™</sup>, halved
- 1 Pure Flavor Red Sweet Bell Pepper, thinly sliced

**24 slices** salami

**4 oz** mini bocconcini cheese balls

2 tbsp fresh basil, sliced

Prep Time: 10 mins Cook Time: 5 mins

Servings: 4

#### **DIRECTIONS**

- Preheat oven to 400° F.
- Press two slices of salami overlapping into each muffin cup of a muffin tin.
- Bake for 5 minutes or until the salami is crisp.
- Remove from oven and fill each salami cup with tomatoes, peppers, and cheese.
- Top with fresh basil to serve. Enjoy!

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







# The IF List « Cole Mucci

Operations Manager-Bell Peppers, Mucci Farms

With Jordan Okumura-Wright

ole Mucci is the perfect blend of an old soul and a modern mind. This is the sentiment I took with me after recently reading through the industry up-and-comer's fascinating *IF List*. As the next generation in Mucci Farms' legacy, Cole has his feet firmly planted in the ever-evolving greenhouse produce industry. And with a passion to rival as well. As we make our way through these first months of 2024, I can't help but feel like many of his *IF*s are just reality in the making...

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

I would choose the '80s. I think there were fewer distractions back then. Today is all about instant gratification, so we're constantly moving onto the next thing without taking the time to enjoy the present.

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

That's an easy one. My Nonna's pasta, made with Mucci Cherto™ Tomatoes.

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

Elon Musk because he dreams big and is obsessed with the future. I'd love to pick his brain.

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

As a grower, just give me some vegetable seeds, LED lights, and diffused glass!

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

l'd love to go visit my late Nonno in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, again. It's a trip I always looked forward to.

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

An elephant, because of their steel-trap memories that never forget a face. I meet so many people that I sometimes forget faces!

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

Black jeans, comfy Nike's, and a Mucci Farms vest.

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

Mark Wahlberg. He can do so many different kinds of roles, which is important in my line of work.

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

This is a layup. Mucci Farms veggies, of course!

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

Jimmy Buffett, because "It's 5 O'Clock Somewhere."

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

The first day I visited my grandparents' hometown in Italy—it gave me a real sense of my family history.

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

I can't choose one person, but I'd like to give that money to the Make-a-Wish Foundation to grant a special last wish to as many kids as possible.

IF you had to choose one song to be the soundtrack of your year, what would it be? "Eye of the Tiger" by Survivor, because of the Rocky movies. They tell a great story about

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

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

A cure for all forms of cancer. 9

overcoming the odds.



#### **INGREDIENTS**

VINAIGRETTE

**2 tbsp** Bee Sweet Citrus Royal Red Orange juice

1/2 Bee Sweet Lemon, juiced

1 tbsp shallot, finely minced

**1–2 tbsp** champagne vinegar

**1–2 tbsp** honey

3 tbsp olive oil Salt and pepper

**3** Bee Sweet Citrus Royal Red Oranges

2 Bee Sweet Navel Oranges

**3–5** Bee Sweet Mandarins

Handful of arugula

3 Avocados, thinly sliced Fresh Mint

Chopped Pistachios

**Prep Time:** 15 mins Servings: 2-3

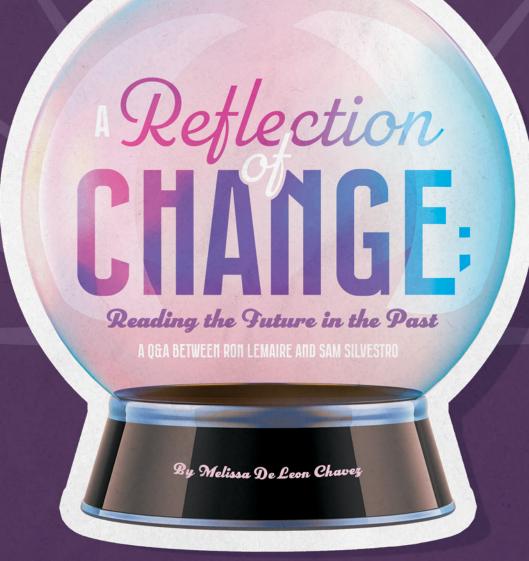
#### **DIRECTIONS**

- Whisk together the Royal Red orange juice, lemon juice, shallot, vinegar, honey, salt, and pepper. Mix in the olive oil until emulsified or shake in a mason jar.
- Assemble the salad. Place arugula down on the plate, arrange the citrus and avocado over the top, and garnish with mint and pistachios.
- S Drizzle the dressing over the salad prior to serving or serve on the side. Enjoy!



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





espite being the definition of a changemaker during his 40-plus year career, it is not the massive reset to our industry that made Sam Silvestro light up amid a Q&A with Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) President Ron Lemaire. Upon receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award, it was recalling a time he and Ron found themselves sitting on a curb with some great Scotch and a couple of cigars that made Sam's face brighten. With nowhere else to sit and savor, the two men enjoyed a premium experience with their heels kicked up on the curb.

While our achievements may be what leave our mark, our relationships carry the magnitude of that impression. It is how our stories are shared and spread.

So, it was fitting for Sam and Ron to again find themselves seated together, this time reminiscing on a stage. Just a year ago, I sat with attendees of CPMA's 2023 expo, absorbing banter in one ear and wisdom in the other. What follows is a conversation that captured us all.

Ron Lemaire, President, Canadian Produce Marketing Association:
Sam, you previously held senior roles at Sobeys and Walmart
Canada, overseeing drastic innovations that are regular practices today. You saw the opportunity for us to support the industry through food safety. What else have you seen really drive advancements amid challenges?



Sam Silvestro, Retail Consultant: It's funny to say, "Everything's changed, but nothing has really changed," but it's true, the produce business is the produce business. Logistically, things are different. There's far more variety now than from the time my career first started. But I think the biggest change I've seen, and this room proves it, is diversity. Honestly, 40 years ago, there would not have been many women in this room, and if you take a look around, it's not like that anymore.

RL: Agreed. We also see diversification represented by some of the young professionals in the room, as well. We just saw Loblaw's Greg Palmer, recipient of our Young Professional Award, give some great words of advice about getting this group engaged. What advice can you give a young professional coming down the pipe?

SS: First, congratulations Greg! If there's any advice I can give to any of the young people out there, it's don't be afraid to ask questions. We all think we have the answers, but nobody knows everything, so ask the question. It's amazing the amount of things you'll learn. I learn every day from people. As Greg said, excellently, we really do have to give young people a chance and we need to engage more young people in this business. It's such a vibrant business, but it's not an easy one. For example, at six o'clock in the morning, everything might be good, but by 6:15 a.m., the whole world could change. The more we can engage a diversity of people, including young people, in this business, the better it is.

RL: Yes. I want to go back to the supply chain discussion because we talked a lot about the challenges in our industry. When you started, you were going to the terminal at 4:00 a.m., four days a week. Product diversity wasn't quite at the level it is today—are there any other differences you've seen, and are they good? Bad? Could we improve?

**\$5**: When I first worked at the food terminal, it wasn't anything out of the ordinary to see all the major retailers down there buying things at the same time.

Logistics have changed so much and we are now able to get things a whole lot quicker. Not a whole lot cheaper, but a whole lot quicker. You see everybody going more direct; to fly stuff in at one time, well, that was ridiculous! But now, Ron, you see we have stuff from all over the world. You walk the CPMA show floor and there are people from Belgium, Spain, and Mexico. That and getting product to North America were the biggest changes in logistics—now, it's commonplace and it's allowed us to expand the variety that's available for our customers year-round.

RL: You've mentioned it'd be nice to have a crystal ball for a range of different things; you've navigated a wealth of different experiences. What does the future hold in your mind? What opportunities do we have?

**\$5**: The future is in the young people. It is making sure we can get more people involved. Labor and having qualified people to help in this industry is the biggest opportunity that we really need to continue to grow and continue to work on. CPMA and associations do a wonderful job of that, but we all need to get engaged to bring more people in.

R: Let's talk for a moment about an industry that's been supporting you over a lifetime—for which you're still working! **\$\$**: You meet lots of people in 45 years. When you get a Lifetime Achievement Award. you reflect on the ups and downs-all the good people I've met and all the wonderful associations and friendships we make in this business. All of the good times I have had. I want to thank the CPMA and all of the staff. They work above and beyond for all of us. And Ron, I want to thank you very much. We've become friends. Our families have become close, and you build memories with that. We sat on a curb in Florida and smoked a cigar and had a drink. These are things you don't forget.

ometimes the crystal ball can be found in our rearview mirror. As the past helps to inform us about what the future might hold, it has been a joy to look back on the wisdom and friendship of these two industry leaders while we prepare for what lies ahead.

# $\sqrt{T} = \frac{\text{DOIDOWITH}}{\{\text{what the fork }\}}$



#### **INGREDIENTS**

1 Peelz® Mandarin Orange, juiced

2 tbsp honey

**4** (**6 oz**) salmon filets

2 tbsp white miso paste

1 tbsp mirin

2 tsp soy sauce

1/2 tsp sesame oil

Green onions, for topping

Sesame seeds, for topping

Rice, broccoli, or bok choy (optional)

**Prep Time:** 30–60 mins to marinate, 5 mins to arrange Cook Time: 10-12 mins

Servings: 4

#### **DIRECTIONS**

- In a large bowl, mix together miso paste, mirin, Peelz® Mandarin orange juice, honey, soy sauce, and sesame oil. Add in salmon filets and gently mix until filets are well coated with the miso marinade.
- Marinate salmon for 30–60 minutes, but no longer as the miso will make the salmon taste quite salty.
- Preheat the oven to 425° F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Remove salmon filets from marinade and evenly place onto the baking sheet. Top with a few Mandarin slices and bake for 10-12 minutes or until the salmon flakes off easily.
- Top with sliced green onions and sesame seeds. Serve with rice and sautéed broccoli or bok choy. Enjoy!



To learn more about Peelz Citrus, visit peelzcitrus.com





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# Sharing the Williams of the Wi

HELPING LEADERS BETTER SUMMIT CAREER PEAKS

A Q&A WITH JULIE KRIVANEK, FOUNDER, KRIVANEK CONSULTING

#### By Melissa De Leon Chavez

t's a long journey from the valley to the peak and the air at the top is thin. But the view is often worth the struggle—a sight few might see, amplified by the knowledge you had the fortitude to be one of them.

Julie Krivanek has seen novices become leaders for more than 25 years and has coached and developed them to find the strength to climb the mountains of their careers. Now, the Founder of Krivanek Consulting and mentor of every leadership class from the former United Fresh Produce Industry Leadership Program is refocusing and rebranding her skill set for those who have made the climb and may need an anchor—or just someone to share the view.



Melissa De Leon Chavez: Julie, what first inspired you to develop this new direction—coaching leaders and executives—to your produce industry services?

Julie Krivanek, Founder, Krivanek
Consulting: The catalyst was,
frankly, the pandemic. Executives
kept calling me for dilemma
decisions and what to do in
such circumstances. Everyone
was so isolated and seeing many
unprecedented challenges. When it
came to making decisions, even though
it was about business, it was often very personal
underneath the surface.

The network from the United Fresh leadership classes is now over 300 people in decision-making positions, and I went to them with what I was seeing. What I found was that these instances of leaders lacking a sounding board were frequent. As a gift of service, I offered each of them an hour, which ended up being nearly two months of phone calls. Nearly everyone took me up on the offer, and I realized, looking at my business model, this was a need I could answer. To give leaders, who are usually isolated and making decisions in a vacuum, an opportunity not to be.

**MC:** What are the benefits—even necessities—of leadership having an external resource?

**JK:** There is always a vacuum. When I do feedback reports, the top level is often the last to know of many underlying things in terms of leadership style and culture. It is lonely at the top. Then the isolation is even heavier with what they have to manage.

In terms of peers, there really are no peers. The mistake some people make is to treat a confidant at work as their "sounding board" instead of acknowledging why that can't work. That person, unless there's something really unusual about them, will fall into the trap of telling the top-level executive what they want to hear. If the feedback can't be depended on, and if it is not external, then they don't get fresh air in terms of new ideas.



...LEADERS WHO HAVE A
SENSE OF BEING UP SO HIGH
CAN BREATHE GOOD AIR
INTO THEIR ENVIRONMENTS,
THEIR BUSINESS, AND THEIR
TEAMS TO CREATE GROWTHPOSITIVE MINDSETS.

JULIE KRIVANEK, FOUNDER, KRIVANEK CONSULTING



**MC:** On that note, we have talked before about how the air is thin at the top—figuratively and literally. Could you expand on that?

JK: I live at a high altitude and hike at over 10,000 feet where the air is literally thin. Every breath you take is purposeful and important. You don't waste it when you're at that kind of altitude. To that point, leaders who have a sense of being up so high can breathe good air into their environments, their business, and their teams to create growth-positive mindsets. They focus on making connections, solutions, purpose, and vision. That is taking that thin air at the top and making each breath count. Do not get fixated on the negative—the culture gossip, finger-pointing, and blame, in other words. The question is, are you bringing good oxygen into your corporation and into your teams? Because if it's toxic, that spreads.



**MC:** Is this why you think it is more important than ever for leaders to have these opportunities available? Why is it usually lacking?

**JK**: Often, we think that by the time you get to those top jobs we will have mastery of hard and soft skills. That we come as a ready-built package. I will say many do, but not the awareness of how to execute. Often it's about being yourself, only better.

A new Chief Executive, for example, we're not teaching how to budget. We are looking at their leadership style and attitude. Are they visionary? Are they strategic? Do they have people skills? Can they grow a business? Are they collaborative? Do they have emotional intelligence? From the years I've worked in our industry, particularly with the board and investor level, if an executive derails, it is due to a single flaw. The person isn't visionary; the person doesn't grow the business; the person doesn't act or is too controlling. You look backward and you see the impact of decisions that should have gone a different way. That is why true support and honest feedback are vital even, or especially, at the top.



MC: This makes sense Julie, yet I know a lot of businesses are currently in survival mode. As you said, each breath needs to be intentional. How do they make space for something like this?

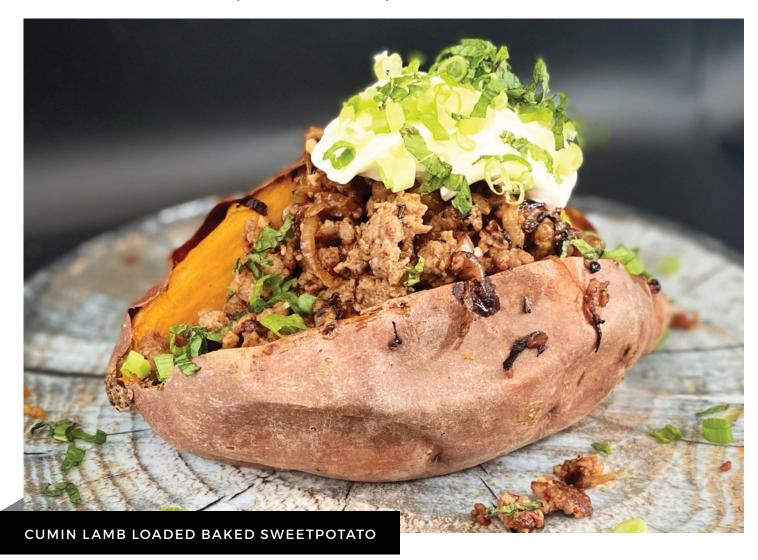
JK: My services are not canned. I enter where I am needed and create an executive coaching program that can include assessments, feedback, my own insights, and/or planning. Everything from a one-and-done to a longer assignment based on what the person needs to happen, I'm very curated and customized.

The biggest questions are: Why are you calling me? What is it you hope to accomplish by working together? How can you be yourself but better? What does that look like? I had 10 years as an executive in a Fortune 100 company, where I was developed through their high-potential program. So, I had extraordinary skill training, which I took into the produce industry. I have a broad scope to draw from, from other industries and big businesses to working with family businesses, and can see "Well, this is a possibility."

I want to be helpful and to provide value. At the end of the day, isn't that what we all want? To have an experienced straight-shooter who helps us become our best self? That is what I want to be, and if you feel it is what you need it is always worth asking.



he rigors of any climb are lessened when shared. You can have the skills and mental stamina to get to the top, but sometimes need an extra voice to remind you that you are able to. Leadership, even at the highest peaks, is no different. And while it's true the most challenging summits are worth the climb, the view and the journey are often better when shared.



#### **INGREDIENTS**

- 4 North Carolina Sweetpotatoes
- 1 lb ground lamb
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 2 shallots peeled, halved, and thinly sliced
- 1 (4.9 oz) can tomato paste
- 1 tbsp Szechuan chili crisp
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- 4 tbsp crème fraiche or sour cream, divided
- **4** scallions, thinly sliced at an angle
- 1/4 cup fresh mint leaves, roughly chopped

Prep Time: 15 mins Cook Time: 45 mins

Servings: 4



#### **DIRECTIONS**

- Preheat oven to 350° F. Pierce sweetpotatoes with a paring knife or fork. Bake for 45 minutes until fork-tender.
- Meanwhile, in a large sauté pan, heat olive oil over medium-high heat.
- Add cumin seeds and toast until fragrant, about 30 seconds.
- Add shallots and sauté until fragrant and translucent or lightly brown, about 3 minutes.
- Add tomato paste and lightly brown, about 2 minutes.
- Reduce heat to medium and add chili crisp, salt, and ground lamb.
- Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until lamb is cooked through, about 7 minutes.
- To assemble, slice sweetpotatoes lengthwise <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> through and press open. Top each sweetpotato with 1/4 of the sauce mixture, 1 thsp crème fraiche, 1/4 of the sliced scallions, and 1/4 of the chopped mint leaves. Enjoy!

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

## A Closer Look at Naturipe Farms Sweet Selections Berries



#### By Peggy Packer

ould life get any sweeter?
February already has
consumers feeling the rush
ahead of Valentine's Day dates and
celebrations, and if you ask me,
fresh produce has earned its spot as
the sixth unspoken love language.
Further harnessing consumers'
devotion to the berry category,
Naturipe Farms is sweetening the
pot with the rollout of its new Sweet
Selections line.

The alluring collection of limited-availability blackberries draws consumers to Naturipe's

newest, high-flavor proprietary varieties. Promising an inventive, mouthwatering bite and top quality, Sweet Selections have been meticulously bred and selected for their exceptional taste and overall eating experience.

New, clear labels bring a simple yet inviting look to the flavor-forward portfolio, which lets these expertly grown blackberries speak for themselves as consumers gain a full view of the delight packed within. With other blackberry—as well as blueberry—varieties joining the Sweet Selections repertoire,

the lineup is offered in a range of packaging sizes depending on the berry type.

Sweet Selections berries also complement Naturipe's robust offering of Greenhouse Strawberries. The retail opportunities for such an exclusive product line extend throughout the month of February and beyond, with consumers generating more adoration for the beloved varieties by the day.

Why not fuel your shoppers' passion for produce with this extra-sweet addition to the berry set?







By Melissa De Leon Chavez

umans have a profound relationship with the shades of blue. From the blue calm of the water to its lead as one of the most popular colors, we are even in constant pursuit of "the blue of distance," as observed by author Rebecca Solnit. It can soothe or catch the eye, and when it's in a bowl, it can do both. In this month of love, football, festivities, and beyond, let the shades of blue tie everything together in your fresh departments with the help of a few friends of ours who specialize in—bluest of all—the blueberry...



Ryan Fronke,
Blueberry Category Manager,
Homegrown Organic Farms

"Blueberries are often celebrated as a superfood and for good reason! These delicious berries are packed with health benefits and are a delightful addition to any diet. Pound for pound, they rank among the healthiest foods to consume. Blueberries are a grocery essential and should be in every shopping cart. Unleash your culinary creativity with these vibrant berries-savor them fresh, in desserts, or blended into a refreshing smoothie! Beyond their delicious flavor and health-boosting properties, Homegrown Organic Farms' blueberries are grown with care for the land and people, marked by our commitments to the Equitable Food Initiative and Bee Better® certifications. Retailers can elevate displays by showcasing these certifications, empowering consumers to make a choice that's beneficial to their health, the lives of farmworkers, and the environment."



**Frances Dillard,**Vice President of Marketing, Driscoll's

"Driscoll's recently emerged as one of America's top 10 retail grocery brands. We attribute much of our success to our mission of delighting our consumers and aligning with the needs of the customer. Our shopper marketing priority is a branded berry patch destination of strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries—all merchandised in a refrigerated case. While 85 percent of shopping still happens in-store, brands and retailers must also focus on e-commerce and capture the full shopping experience. The most efficient way to get new berry consumers into the category is to cross-sell within the berry patch."



Marissa Ritter, Marketing Manager, Naturipe Farms

"During the new year, many people are focused on their health and keeping resolutions. Fortunately, this is also a time when Naturipe Farms sees a huge increase in imported blueberries from our growers in Mexico, Chile, and Peru. This, coupled with consumers thinking about healthier lifestyles, means this is a great time for retailers to promote blueberries. At Naturipe, we highlight our abundance of blueberries with FeBLUEary, an annual campaign focused on the peak of import blueberry season. Retailers can put their own spin on FeBLUEary by calling attention to all the health benefits of the superfood, especially during the winter months. Retailers can also showcase coldweather recipes that include blueberries—we're partial to a warm, freshly baked batch of Naturipe's very own blueberry muffins!"



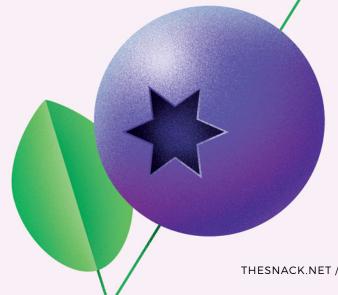
Michelle Deleissegues, Vice President of Marketing, GEM-Pack Berries

"Blueberries are little powerhouses, low in calories and high in nutrients. Encourage sales by promoting their well-known health benefits: Blueberries are touted to lower blood pressure, prevent heart disease, as well as aid memory and exercise recovery. They are bursting with antioxidants. Don't let these mini dynamos get lost in the produce department. Promote larger packs alongside the 6 oz pack, and be sure to include them in berry patch displays. Blueberry promotions boost strawberry sales and vice versa, boosting the department's overall eye and flavor appeal."



Director of Sales, California Giant Berry Farms

"As cold and flu season continues, we suggest that merchandisers emphasize blueberries' health benefits to attract customers seeking an immunity boost! Create a visually appealing display with signage highlighting the berries' ample antioxidants and vitamin C content, essential for supporting the immune system. Consider leveraging educational materials that showcase the role of blueberries in benefitting overall health—including information from the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council's #BoostofBlue campaign. Incorporate recipe suggestions and simple ways for consumers to get their daily #BoostofBlue that fit all lifestyles!"



# $\sqrt{TF} \frac{\text{DOIDOWITH}}{\{\text{what the fork }\}}$



#### **INGREDIENTS**

1 cup diced Progressive Produce Russet Potatoes (about 2 small potatoes)

½ lb (225 g) chorizo sausage, diced

1/2 cup diced onion

½ **cup** diced bell pepper (any color)

6 large eggs

1/4 cup milk

½ cup shredded Cheddar cheese

Salt and pepper to taste

Cooking spray or butter for greasing

the muffin tin

Jalapeño (optional)

Fresh chives (optional)

Prep Time: 25 mins Cook Time: 45 mins

Servings: 6

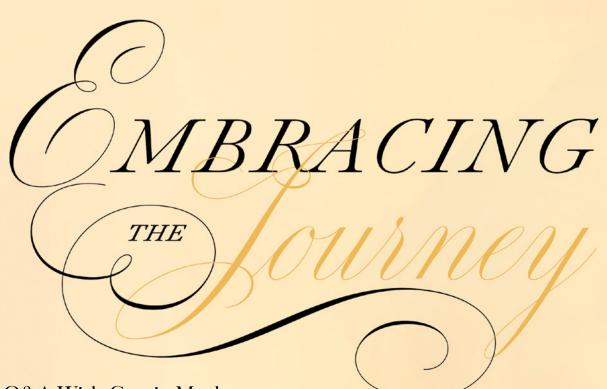


To learn more about Progressive Produce, visit www.progressiveproduce.com

#### **DIRECTIONS**

- Preheat your oven to 350° F (175° C) and grease a 12 cup muffin tin with cooking spray or butter. This will prevent the egg bites from sticking.
- In a skillet over medium heat, cook the diced chorizo until it's browned and slightly crispy, about 5-7 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to remove the chorizo from the skillet and set it aside on a plate lined with paper towels to drain any excess grease.
- In the same skillet, using the remaining chorizo grease, add the diced potatoes. Cook for about 5-7 minutes, or until they start to become tender and browned. Add the diced onion and bell peppers to the skillet and continue to cook for another 3-4 minutes until the vegetables are softened.
- In a bowl, whisk together the eggs and milk until well combined. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
- Divide the cooked chorizo evenly among the greased muffin cups. Spoon the cooked potatoes, onion, and bell pepper mixture over the chorizo in the muffin cups. Pour the egg mixture over the ingredients in each muffin cup, filling them about 3/4 full. Sprinkle shredded Cheddar cheese over the top of each egg bite and add a slice of Jalapeño for spice.
- Bake in the preheated oven for 20–25 minutes, or until the egg bites are set and lightly golden on top. You can check for doneness by inserting a toothpick into the center of one; it should come out clean when they're ready.
- Allow the potato and chorizo egg bites to cool in the muffin tin for a few minutes before carefully removing them with a fork or knife. Garnish with fresh parsley, chives, or cilantro if desired.
- 😤 Serve your potato and chorizo egg bites warm as a delicious breakfast or brunch option. Enjoy!





A Q&A With Carrie Mack, Senior Sourcing Manager, Walmart

By Jordan Okumura-Wright

"Complete from for others."

Without knowing it, Carrie Mack has given me a gift with these words—one sought after so often that it can seem elusive for those like myself in the middle of their journeys: strength of purpose.

When our own Managing Editor, Melissa De Leon Chavez, first interviewed the Senior Sourcing Manager of Walmart—responsible for all apples and pears—for an *IF List*, I could not help but feel the gravity in her words, both thoughtful and deeply genuine.

What intrigued me then and still does now, is her ability to balance the scales of truth and compassion in an ever more competitive space like retail—which demands a 25-hours-a-day, eight-days-a-week work ethic. My advice is to lean in when people like Carrie speak. Her words are chosen wisely and naturally, with both warmth and spirit.

Since the questions we asked her before only created more questions for myself, Carrie was more than happy to share her time with us as we dug a little deeper into the way she sees the world.



#### **Q**I

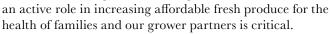


#### Jordan Okumura-Wright:

Carrie, thank you again for joining us on your journey and for giving us the gift of your time. To start, what gets you up in the morning?

#### Carrie Mack, Senior Sourcing Manager, Walmart: CONSUMPTION! I

believe that if you work in the fresh produce industry, you have a responsibility to be driving the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Taking





#### Q2

**JOW:** I feel like that response could easily be the answer to this question as well. What keeps you up at night?

CM: Labor. 100 percent.

The availability of labor, cost of labor, and the policies surrounding labor are a constant concern. Automation and technology continue to evolve, but the solution is not readily available.

#### *Q3*

**JOW:** That is no small issue, if not the nightmare keeping most folks' sleep at bay. Despite the challenges, what inspires the work that you do today and the way in which you hope to evolve in the future?

**CM:** I have a strong belief that the produce industry is fundamentally a people business. Building strategic partnerships benefiting customers, retailers, and vendors is the goal. I am grateful for the strong relationships that I have developed with growers and suppliers over my career, partners that contribute to feeding the country. My hope is that increased curiosity about food sources and connecting consumers with growers, farmers, and ranchers will move the needle on consumption.

Witnessing the rise of produce influencers fills my heart.

#### **Q**4

**JOW:** What advice do you have for the up-and-comers in the industry, or anyone looking for direction at a fork in the road—self-imposed or otherwise?

**CM:** For those entering the industry, remember we are all individuals, and everyone's journey is unique—a mix of sprints, hurdles, and detours. Be authentic, empathetic, and curious. Embrace risk, own your mistakes (we all make them), and learn from them. Stay attentive, and when you earn a seat at the table, make room for others.

#### Q5

**JOW:** How do you create balance in your life between the work and the personal?

**CM:** Taking all tips, tricks, and advice on this topic! My New Year's resolution for 2024 is saying "no" more often. Also, prioritizing meaningful projects over quantity is my big attempt to strive for more balance. #workaholic.





**JOW:** As a woman striving to find her identity in this industry and in life, I tend to struggle with which parts of myself to amplify and which to temper. Do you have any advice on how to navigate this kind of space or process?

CM: I struggled for years—my mouth was both my best and worst asset. Over time, I surrounded myself with supportive women, my "shoulder buddies." I am not the best with formal mentors. They helped me develop the art of using my voice more effectively. My advice is to stay true to yourself. Embrace and amplify the qualities that make you unique and confident. Be open to learning, adapting, and growing, but never feel the need to compromise your authenticity. Finding your identity is a journey, and it is okay to evolve along the way.

#### Q7

**JOW:** Maybe a little random, but I love a good pivot. What is your favorite color, sound, or word (or all three) and why?

**CM:** My kids are grown and out of the house, so I am a total dog mom! The welcoming sound of the Mack Pack, their excited pitter-patter and enthusiastic panting, is my favorite. The symphony of snoring, maybe not so much.

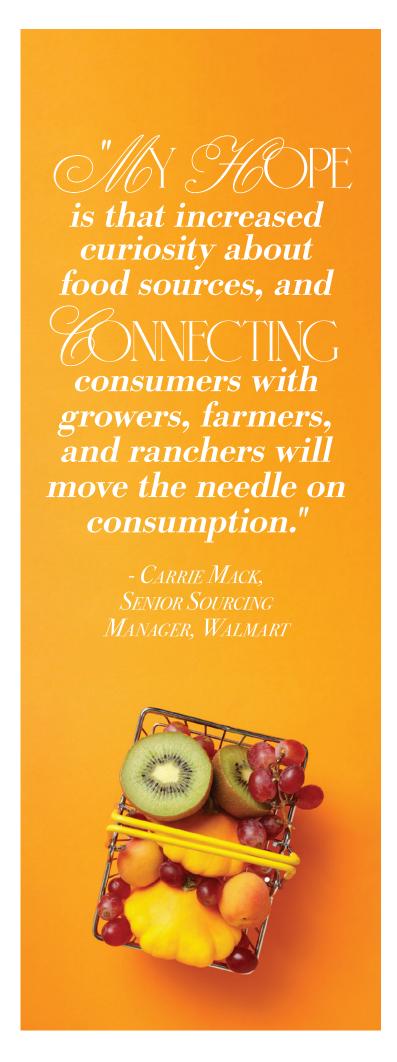
#### **Q8**

**JOW:** I often wonder if those in fresh produce are born with a specific set of instincts and motivations or if the industry shapes them. Maybe a little bit of both. What inspires your love of fresh produce and the greater industry?

**CM:** There are so many reasons why I love produce, but one would be the constant challenges it presents.

Each day is unique with no two crops being exactly alike. Dealing with perishable commodities brings hiccups, hurdles, and continuous learning, and is an environment I thrive in. The shared goal of increasing fresh produce consumption fosters a natural camaraderie within the industry. If we are not all moving toward that shared goal, it might be worth reviewing our priorities.

ome people navigate the path ahead in such a manner that it gives others license to walk a little taller, a little further, and to the beat of their own drum. I see Carrie Mack as one of these beacons, evolving the spirit of produce with each step.



# NEW YEAR'S SHOUTOUTS

#### **BY JENNA PLASTERER**

here's power in numbers. In this case, I am talking about one in particular: 2024. Although nothing inherently magical takes place when the clock strikes midnight on January 1 of each year, a feeling of revitalization hits everyone like a wave, giving us hope and strength for new beginnings, seemingly washing away whatever hurdles we harbored in the 365 days prior. Join us to discover how some of our industry friends are channeling this energy as we move through the first part of 2024 and the year to come...





### VICE PRESIDENT OF PRODUCE, TARGET

"One of my favorite quotes from Kobe Bryant, which works for both your personal life with family and friends or with your work family, is 'The most important thing is to try and inspire people so that they can be great at whatever they want to do.' Let's bring energy and inspiration in all we do in 2024."



## **Garrie Mack**, SENIOR SOURCING MANAGER, WALMART

"Sticking to a resolution is not a strength of mine. I am going to try something a little different this year, and maybe it will stick! My New Year's resolution is to work toward achieving a better work-life balance. Practice saying 'no' more often. Choose impact projects, quality over quantity. As always, keep rooting for others on their journey."





#### Chris Keetch.

#### DIRECTOR, PRODUCE AND FLORAL, THE GIANT COMPANY

"When it comes to my family, I want to ensure that love and caring are embedded in everything we do and say. I hope to spend more quality time together, nurturing the kids but also allowing them to spread their wings and find their way. Staying in touch with long-distance family members will also be a priority so they know we're still here!

Professionally, I want to take even better care of our teammates; I'm here to support and elevate them. Taking even greater care of our customers is on my list, too, by meeting them and providing shopping value wherever and however they want in order for all to be able to gather around the table and enjoy a meal with their families. I also want to strengthen existing and build new relationships with our suppliers as we recognize there's not product on our shelves without them."





#### Thomas Dunnum,

#### SENIOR CATEGORY MANAGER OF NATIONAL PRODUCE, SPROUTS FARMERS MARKET

"Sprouts Farmers Market is dedicated to growing alongside our vendor partners. Our ability to deliver fresh, high-quality produce is supported by our strong grower relationships, and we look forward to continuing to flourish these connections into next year. On a personal note, my New Year's resolutions include embracing healthier eating habits and dedicating more time to family and friends."





#### Jami Espinosa,

#### CATEGORY MANAGER, PRODUCE, WAKEFERN FOOD CORP.

"My hope is to embrace the promise of a fresh start by committing to the things that will make me a better version of myself while simultaneously working to enrich the lives of others wherever I can. I want to nurture positive habits and cultivate a resilient mindset. I'd like this year to unfold new chapters of personal growth and self-empowerment. Oh, and of course, I would like to eat more fruits and vegetables!"



#### Paul Kneeland,

#### SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, SALES AND MERCHANDISING, GELSON'S MARKETS

"New Year's resolutions are usually filled with big goals, big dreams, and big plans to improve yourself or your situation. More reachable are the little things we can do every day to improve ourselves and our teams that will help us all grow together. Little things like taking a few minutes to ask how someone is doing—not just a drive-by. A smile, a real, true hello, costs nothing but can make a big difference in your world and someone else's. Small things make a big difference. That's my resolution and my challenge to all!"





#### **INGREDIENTS**

3 lb LIV Produce Organic Yellow Onions, peeled and sliced

4 tbsp olive oil

2 tbsp butter

1 tsp sugar

11/2 **tsp** salt

4 cloves garlic, minced

1/2 cup red wine

**8 cups** vegetable broth

1 tbsp Worcestershire Sauce

2 bay leaves

1 tbsp fresh thyme

½ tsp black pepper, freshly ground

4 slices French bread, cut into thick slices

1 cup Gruyère cheese, freshly grated

Prep Time: 15 mins Cook Time: 1 hr 25 mins

Servings: 4

#### **DIRECTIONS**

- In a large pot, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Once hot, add onions and caramelize. Stirring often, cook for about 20 minutes or until onions soften.
- Add butter and cook for about 15–20 minutes or until onions begin to brown.
- Stir in sugar and salt, and continue cooking for another 15 minutes or until the onions are well browned. During the last couple of minutes, stir in garlic.
- Mix in red wine and scrape any bits and flavors from the sides and bottom of the pot with a wooden spoon. Add in the broth, Worcestershire sauce, bay leaves, thyme, and black pepper. Bring the mixture to a simmer, cover, and cook for 30 minutes. Stir every few minutes.
- 5 While the soup is cooking, preheat the oven to 400° F. Brush the slices of bread with oil and place on a baking sheet. Toast for 10 minutes, flipping halfway through. Remove from heat and set aside.
- Season soup to taste with additional salt and pepper. Ladle the soup into bowls, top with toasted bread, and sprinkle grated cheese. Place the bowls on a large baking tray and broil in the oven until the cheese melts and bubbles. Serve immediately. Enjoy!

To learn more about LIV Produce, visit www.livorganicproduce.com



# The 10 Rules of Work

By Editorial Contributor Rex Lawrence, Founder and President, Joe Produce Search⁵™

recently had the opportunity to take an Uber ride with my wife, Leslie, on my way to the airport. It started just like any other rideshare experience as we made small talk with the driver and anticipated the day's travel and destination.

Quickly, I realized we had an extraordinary driver who had fantastic people and communication skills, and, more importantly, a zest for life. Within 15 minutes, we discovered that we shared a few things in common: Sallie was a roller skater, happily married, and had invested in his health throughout his life. That was encouraging—he was in his 70s and looked great!

How often do you take an Uber ride that inspires you to be a better person?

This driver made an impression. He had such a positive outlook and a happy disposition. Ironically, he was retired from a multi-decade tenure at the

county coroner's office. (Now if that doesn't make you cheery, what will?!)

As a surprise parting gift, Sallie handed us a 4"x6" piece of paper with his "10 Rules of Life" on it. Now, I'm sharing it with you.

Want to be a better employee, team member, or employer? Think of the list on the back page as the "10 Rules of Work." Clip it out to keep with you and, hopefully, you feel as inspired as my little paper makes me.

The power of positivity cannot be overstated. You are in control of your perspective, and you can also have a significant impact on your environment and the people around you—you'll get back what you put out. This is a daily decision and practice, which will become less and less effort as you go along.

Let's make 2024 an *uber*-great year and pass the positivity forward!

Joe Pro Resumes™ 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

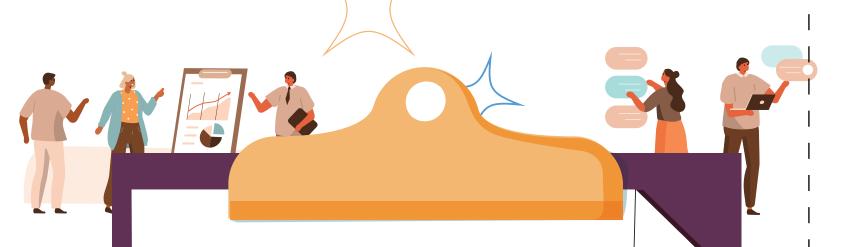
JOE Pro Resumes: Joe Pro Resumes.com in addition to various related sectors. We begin with the end in mind.

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





Rex Lawrence, Founder and President, Joe Produce Search<sup>5M</sup>



# 10 Rules of Life

- **1.** Make peace with your past: Focus on the present and on creating a better future.
- **2.** Avoid negativity: Surround yourself with positive people.
- 3. Give it time: Time heals almost anything.
- 4. Don't compare your life to others, and don't judge people: Everyone is on a different journey.
- **5.** Stop thinking too much: It's all right to not know the answers.
- **6.** Before you criticize someone, take time to get to know them: You might be surprised at how much you have in common.
- 7. Only you are in charge of your happiness: Be strong and move on.

Take it with you

- **8.** Be kind: You have the power to make people feel good.
- 9. Life is short: Enjoy it while you can.
- **10.** Smile: A smile is a curve that sets everything straight.

POWERED BY



FAM US

#### **► MY FAVORITE THINGS ◄**

#### **NATALIE KAITA**

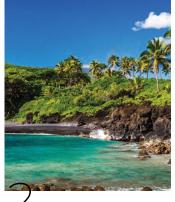
#### DIRECTOR OF SALES AND MARKETING, FAMOUS SOFTWARE

With Jordan Okumura-Wright

o hold the title of Director of Sales and Marketing for a company like Famous Software demands more than skill. It takes dedication, relentless commitment, and a passion and patience reserved for experienced fly fishers. Yes, you heard me. This is one of the amazing things I learned about Natalie Kaita on this trip through her favorite things. Prepare to be surprised and overjoyed as the produce professional walks us through some of the things she holds most dear...



Going on adventures and making new memories with my son and husband.



MAUI, HAWAII

I have a special place in my heart for Maui because it is where we got married.



I have had the opportunity to work with so many amazing people in produce for over 20 years.

SOFTWARE

COMMUNITY



FLY FISHING
My husband is a great guide!



It's not only my birthday but also the meaning of my name.



I love to visit new places!



My mom cooked the best, but my sister's egg rolls are a close second.



I graduated from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, in Agribusiness, with a minor in Viticulture.



he prized sweet potato needs no introduction. Each year, the all-natural superfood continues to amass a more expansive fan base—and with good reason.

To truly reach the heart of this category, we must first venture into Bakersfield, California, known affectionately as "California's Sweet Spot." Living true to the name, this rich growing region is home to an experienced team of farmers who passionately nurture their crops to bring the best-quality sweet potatoes to market. You guessed it: We're talking about Bako Sweet."

Country Sweet Produce's highly popular brand has played an integral role in accelerating the sweet potato's overall success, solidifying its status as a produce department staple.

Susan Noritake, Director of Sales, took us behind the scenes to explore just how this goal has been—and continues to be—achieved.

Peggy Packer: Susan, I know the month of February sparks a host of opportunities to promote sweet potatoes. How does this advantageous time frame lend itself to increased consumption?

Susan Noritake, **Director of Sales, Bako Sweet**<sup>®</sup>: February is National Heart Health Month and National Sweet Potato Month. Both of these celebrations give retailers an opportunity to enlighten shoppers on the benefits of sweet potatoes and engage with consumers in creative and unexpected ways. We have been pitching special Valentine's Day-themed shippers with a large focus on educating consumers about sweet potatoes and their advantages, including how to incorporate them into everyday meals. This inspires shoppers to pick up Bako Sweet and sweeten their

Additionally, Bako Sweet carries the American Heart Association's (AHA) Heart Check Certification on our value-added packaging, which directly communicates to consumers the heart-healthy benefits of sweet potatoes.

everyday lives.

#### "What's really important

#### is for grocers to find fun ways to engage customers throughout the year, whether it's a heart-healthy February, Easter celebrations, or summer grilling."

- Susan Noritake, Director of Sales, Bako Sweet®

**Q**2

**PP:** What a prestigious distinction to have! How does the year-round inclusion of the organization's logo elevate the Bako Sweet brand?

**SN:** When consumers see the highly recognizable logo on the packaging of our Bako Sweet value-added offerings, they are opened up to the positive impact that sweet potatoes can make in terms of heart health.

Retailers can capitalize on this boost by spotlighting the category's other attributes, like being a good source of potassium and fiber, as well as vitamins A and C. Our website features a recently developed Sweet Potato Facts page, which dives into each of these advantages and more.

Q3

**PP:** As health benefits and flavor contribute to the category's continued success, what are some of the company's most recent advancements, and what sparked these strategies?

**SN:** Currently, Bako Sweet has a full line of convenient packages, from microwavable singles to microwavable family bags. We also offer 3 lb. bags great for families or 4 count trays for larger, more uniform portion sizes. While our orange-flesh sweet potatoes are the most popular, we have other unexpected varieties such as Reds, White Sweets, and Purple Japanese, allowing us to offer a range of flavors.

In addition, we broadened our merchandising and consumer education efforts in 2023. In June, we announced the rollout of a new website. The goal of this launch was to bring consumers more useful information about sweet potatoes while ultimately driving people to their local retailer to find our products. As we continue to grow, Bako Sweet plans to analyze user data and feedback to further enhance the website and meet the evolving needs of its consumers.

Strategic partnerships like our collaboration with DreamWorks Animation's *Kung Fu Panda: The Dragon Knight*, were also forged to captivate shoppers and inspire increased sweet potato purchases.

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**PP:** It seems several winning strategies are playing out for the Bako Sweet operation. As you look to stimulate more category growth, what rising trends have you witnessed at retail?

**SN:** Sweet potato season really kicks off with the holidays as a star of the November and December months, and consumers are finding ways to incorporate this versatile vegetable into a variety of eating occasions. What's really important is for grocers to find fun ways to engage customers throughout the year, whether it's a heart-healthy February, Easter celebrations, or summer grilling. To help with this, Bako Sweet is arming our partners with eye-catching shipper displays to spark impulse buys, as well as creative promotions, engaging contests, and newly developed recipes.

**Q**5

**PP:** While we're on the topic of retail support, are there any other tips you can share for grocers seeking to boost sweet potato purchases?

**SN:** This season, we've developed many inspiring creations and will likely lean into some sweeter treats like heartshaped sweet potato cookies to compete with chocolates and other holiday fare.

Having enough product on shelves is another key to shopper engagement, along with secondary displays in shippers. Cross-promotions pushing out to unexpected areas of the

produce department will grab attention and drive sales. For example, almonds, apples, or pears all offer a great pairing with sweet potato recipes. Merchandisers can also branch out to center-store items like oatmeal or s'mores.

A slice of sweet potato is delicious and really amps up the health value of any treat!

ith an already massive consumer base to tap into, it doesn't take much to harness the momentum of this rapidly rising category.

In fact, all you need is Bako Sweet's robust portfolio of sweet potatoes, hailing directly from California's Sweet Spot. §



# **Libations**For All Occasions

#### SOME LIKE IT HOT WINTER MULE



**By** Melissa De Leon Chavez **Photography by** Reid Monsma

ne of the many life hacks I have learned from our own Jordan Okumura-Wright is that temperature should not stop you from enjoying your favorite things all year long—such as her famous "hot salad." When it was cold out, she would heat her salad up in the office kitchen, and I have been requesting she write about it for years now.

Such was the case with my adoration for a good mule. Not only has this drink endlessly evolved from its vodka-based Moscow roots, it can also deviate from its copper vehicle and be served hot. Yes, a hot mule. Because, as I will henceforth call it, Some Like It Hot.

With the Lunar New Year this month as well, it seems fitting to sip on something that may have you breathing a little fire for this Year of the Dragon. Likewise, the holiday has some fun traditions about a few fresh items you'll find in this steaming mug: Oranges are said to bring happiness, prosperity, and good financial fortune (not a bad garnish, if I say so myself!); apples are believed to provide peaceful and harmonious life; and pomegranates represent longevity, fertility, and prosperity.

So cheers to a bright new year! May your cup overflow with these gifts in abundance! §



Here's how to make it...

**Prep Time:** 5 min **Cook Time:** 10 min

Servinas: 1 muc

#### **INGREDIENTS**

1 oz rum or whiskey
½ oz fresh lime juice
1 dash cinnamon syrup
Spicy ginger beer
½ apple, sliced (set
aside a few extra-thin
slices for garnish)
Pomegranate arils,
as desired
Orange wedges
(for garnish)

**1 dash** cinnamon (for garnish) Tea mug

#### **DIRECTIONS**

Slowly heat the liquor of your choice, lime juice, cinnamon syrup, and spicy ginger beer. Once it starts to steam, add apple slices and pomegranate arils and stir continuously on low heat, sipping periodically for your preferred flavor.

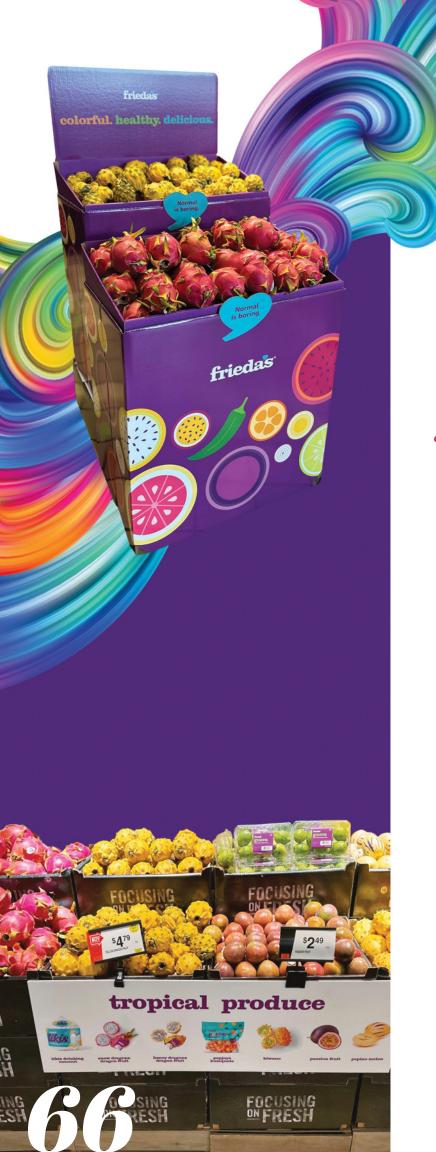
Pour the hot drink into a heat-tolerant glass. I like to keep with the "mug" mule theme by using my favorite tea mugs.

Garnish with orange slices, fresh (unsteeped) thinly cut apple slices, and a dash of cinnamon.

Tips: The longer you steep, the stronger the flavors! Swap the liquor for your favorite maple syrup (I highly recommend bourbon barrel-aged maple syrup!) to make this a non-alcoholic indulgence.







# Sensory Awakening

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

**GIANT** 

Fouch.

It is one of the most potent of our five senses, driven by nerve endings that can react more strongly the longer they are ignored. Our world is increasingly removed from this human need, encouraging us to see and hear more than to taste and touch.

Amid the remoteness, the fresh department still calls to all five senses. Squeezing avocados and mangos, smelling the navels of watermelon or cantaloupe, and even tasting the grapes or berries you are shopping for. Creating sensory connections and driving emotional ties.

One partnership went a few extra thousand miles to deepen such associations by creating an in-person opportunity for the team of a The GIANT Company fresh produce department.

"Frieda's and GIANT have always had the type of partnership where we have challenged each other to do more to bring GIANT shoppers an unforgettable experience while shopping for specialty produce. This year, I asked myself, 'What can we do to bring an unforgettable experience for the produce buying team to make their lives easier?' That is when I pitched the Specialty Showcase to Chris Keetch,"

Alex Jackson, Vice President



Alex Jackson, Vice President of Sales and Procurement, Frieda's Branded Produce

of Sales and Procurement at Frieda's Branded Produce, recalls. "Before I knew it, Chris and his team were in. We designed a custom showcase in GIANT's Camp Hill store where we worked our Frieda's magic throughout the entire department. We walked the produce category management team through our top-selling merchandising strategies, discussing and adjusting as we went to bring ideas to life in a way only Frieda's knows how to."



Ghris Keetch,
Director of Produce,
The GIANT Company

It was an experience, I have no doubt, that will now permeate through their day-to-day interactions with shoppers. Helming the venture on GIANT's side was Director of Produce Chris Keetch, who helped me realize the magnitude of such a move.

"Looking back on the event, what was the most successful to me was seeing the displays come to life, versus a phone

call and presentation simply conceptualizing it. Instead, we saw how engaging they were to customers. Some of the displays were props due to seasonality, and customers were still picking them up to see what it was!" Chris declares.

Thinking back to my own recent experience of seeing an industry outsider's first encounter with a dragon fruit, I can't help but smile at Chris' enthusiasm. Caught up in the challenges of the day-to-day, it's easy to forget that many of the items our industry provides look fantastical—particularly in the specialty category Frieda's commands so well.

"We knew that The GIANT Company produce category management team would be excited about what we had in store (pun intended) for them. I could not believe how quickly we aligned on the strategies to drive more sales in this category, all by focusing on the consumer's shopping experience," Alex shares. "Since our walk-through, we have brought three of the programs to life and have already slated programs for this year. We at Frieda's pride ourselves on the way we build mutually beneficial partnerships with our clients. This showcase exemplified that."

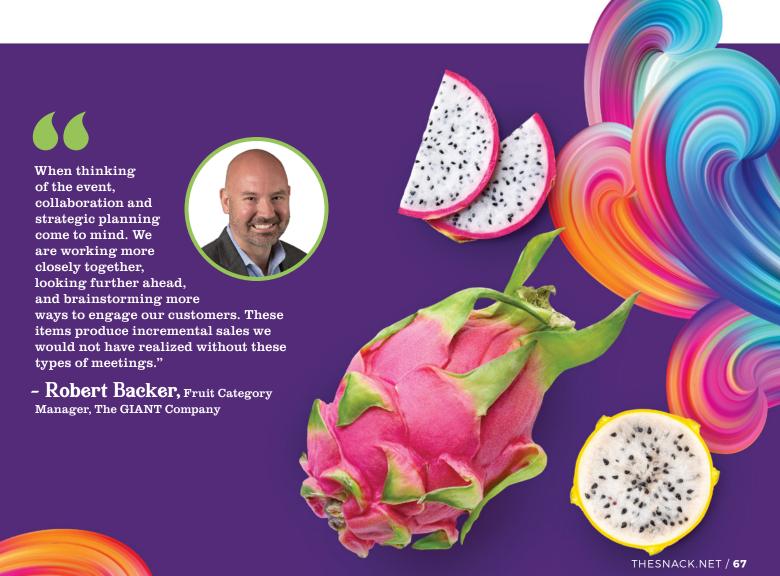
Echoing that knack for driving sales and increasing produce consumption, Megan Klemz, Account Manager for Frieda's, says keeping the execution effortless had a significant impact.

"Collaborating with The GIANT Company on this specialty showcase has brought our partnership to the next level. We have been able to bring big selling events to



Megan Klemz, Account Manager, Frieda's Branded Produce

life that were easy to execute for produce department staff and increased sales velocity for GIANT," Megan shares.





- Josh Geyer, Vegetable Category Manager, The GIANT Company

Likewise, the team-up also highlighted what helps GIANT stand out in the increasingly competitive grocery space.

"We pride ourselves on our relationships with suppliers, and there are learnings we can apply across many categories: Bring the suppliers into a store and put our best collective thinking together around not only the product, but the best way to display and educate about the products," Chris says. "As Alex noted, Frieda's has been a long-standing partner in the specialty and tropical sections of The GIANT Company's produce departments. I wouldn't say it's a different approach, rather more of a refreshed approach to showcase variety and inspire our customers to try something new."

Joining the specialty produce maven on strategically planned dragon fruit promotions, including Snows, Fires, and Honeys, led to GIANT increasing summer volume sales by 36 percent over the previous year, as well as selling 35 percent more units per store per week\*, even without decreasing the retail price.

"Partnering with Frieda's on the right items at the right stores at the right price and the right time of year can increase velocity and volume, a winning combination for any retailer," Alex points out.

Alex walked down memory lane with Chris on how the partnership has stood the test of time. Ten years ago, the two worked closely to launch the "exotic set" for all AHOLD banners pre-Ahold Delhaize USA (ADUSA).

"A lot has changed since then; consumer preference, Frieda's go-to-market strategy, and The GIANT Company standing as its own entity in the ADUSA family of companies. The focus of the store level," Alex reflects. "To bring excitement to specialty merchandising without cluttering the department with items that don't sell proved again to be the key to success to drive sales in this category. It was an honor to do this with Chris and his team. We can't wait for the plans we have this year."



#### By Melissa De Leon Chavez

here is a two-word sentence with the power to move a conversation away from the screen:

Call me.

When asking mavens and veterans how to succeed in this industry, they often say to pick up the phone. This advice is critical in both the tangible and the abstract.

On the practical side, you can clear up in five minutes what several emails—maybe over a few days—might need to achieve. If there's time, a few tangents might get explored during the conversation. In the abstract, two minds, playing off one another, wind away and back again to the matter at hand. Colored with tone and nuance, a phone call provides an experience that might otherwise have been lost in the fissures along the cyber network. That five-minute call may have become 15, but connection makes the time valuable and the work enjoyable.

Why, then, is the advice to pick up the phone needed? Every education session, or, for our team at *The Snack*, retiring interview, the same lesson is imparted. Because, simply, it's not happening.

I understand why the masters of our industry advise not to get trapped in the inbox. Yet even I, someone whose energy is recharged by connection, have faltered when it's come time to dial. For my part, a memory of a text message replays any time I pick up the phone: a snapshot of an industry member's schedule with multiple overlapping meetings and no visible business hour constraints to stop the chaos.

They intended for me to find a window for us to connect after months of back and forth via emails, but what I saw was humbling. In the face of a barrage of meetings,

Zooms, and more, it can be hard to justify a call over the convenience of a text or email, which effectively puts the communication ball out of my court and into the hands of what I perceive to be the more hectic calendar. Imagining the power to disrupt an entire day in a single, unplanned conversation is remarkably easy. But, experiences tell me the opposite is true. The real worst case is that they simply don't answer.

Though mine is one of a million experiences of how we can get trapped in the digital, it is also a mirror: Any conversation, no matter the medium, is a two-way

street. Alleviating as it is for my anxiety when the other party is the one to initiate the "call me" sequence, I too can send a message asking to call and let the management of their time remain theirs.

Speaking to those in my generation or newer to the workforce who might text more than talk, personally and professionally, it's easy to forget calling is even an option. Whether it's a sticky note next to your desk or an alarm asking "Have you called them?" we can make more of an effort to ensure we hear our contacts' voices outside of

trade shows and industry events. And if, like me, you're worried about disrupting a decision-maker's day, it never hurts to ask amid a lengthening email chain, "Can I give you a call?"

Personality and golden nuggets emerge in between talking shop that you will never gain over email. While at first glance it can seem to grate against the gears of efficiency (something newer employees in particular fear on a fundamental level) we are meant to connect. To do so does not halt the wheel we are all a part of—it elevates it. §







#### It's National Sweetpotato Month!

Celebrate with hundreds of recipes

+ mealtime inspiration:







₫ JOHN SHUMAN, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, SHUMAN FARMS

By Jenna Plasterer

#### Food is one of the greatest uniters.

I realized this coming out of the holiday season. Looking at my Thanksgiving and Christmas tables, I noticed they are perfect microcosms for generational divides bridged by mouthwatering meals.

My grandfather was born in the Great Depression, my dad is a baby boomer, my mom falls between the boomer years and Gen X, I am a millennial, and my brother is a member of Gen Z. If you can't tell by reading that list, discussions are fascinating, and debates run rampant.

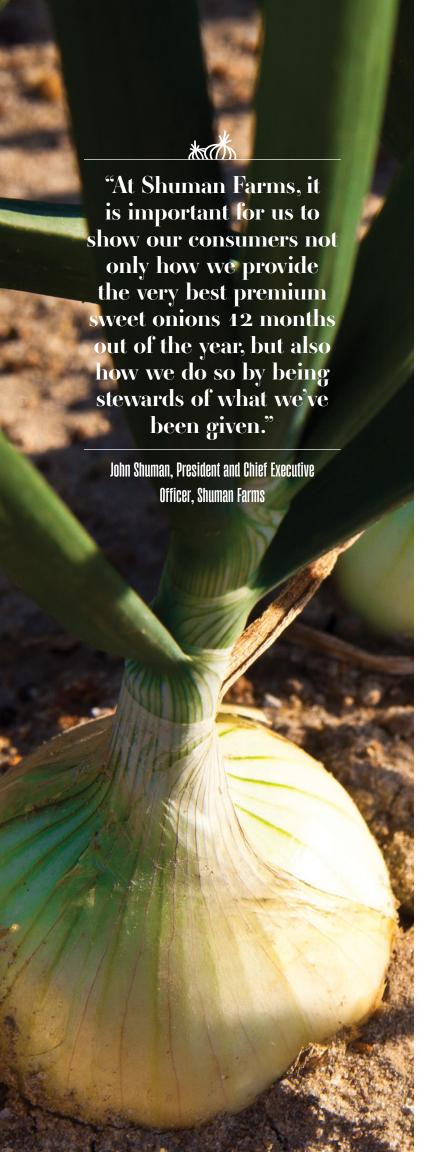
However, as soon as the food hits the table, the confusion dissipates, and the disputes fade into loving care as we ensure plates are full and mouths are fed. In a world of divisiveness, quality products—especially produce—hold the power to bring us together, regardless of the era that claims us.

Over the years, companies like Shuman Farms have tapped into this idea and perpetuated it. Now, the onion

expert is turning attention to the next generation of consumers—Gen Z and beyond—sharing this message and helping them understand the value of purchasing products from brands they can trust to support their ideals.

"Younger generations prioritize knowing the story about where their food comes from. They are concerned with environmental impact, supporting local economies, and searching for fresher and more sustainable options," explains John Shuman, President and Chief Executive Officer. "At Shuman Farms, it is important for us to show our consumers not only how we provide the very best premium sweet onions 12 months out of the year, but also how we do so by being stewards of what we've been given."

Headquartered in the center of the Vidalia® growing region in Southeast Georgia, family-owned Shuman Farms has been in the sweet onion industry for two generations. The grower began in the mid-1980s with a small family farm in Reidsville, Georgia, and today is an industry-leading, year-round grower and shipper of premium sweet onions.



Throughout the years, Shuman Farms has earned a reputation for tradition and history in the Southeastern United States. Just as consumers and buyers have evolved throughout the years, so too has Shuman, growing along with them, fostering a constant connection between its partners and their shoppers.

As millennials and Gen Z make their way into grocery stores across the country, Shuman Farms is committed to showcasing its dedication to generational stewardship. In other words, the company is passing down sustainable and environmentally responsible practices and values to each generation of Shuman Farms, and they are using innovative, modern-day marketing tools to share this message.

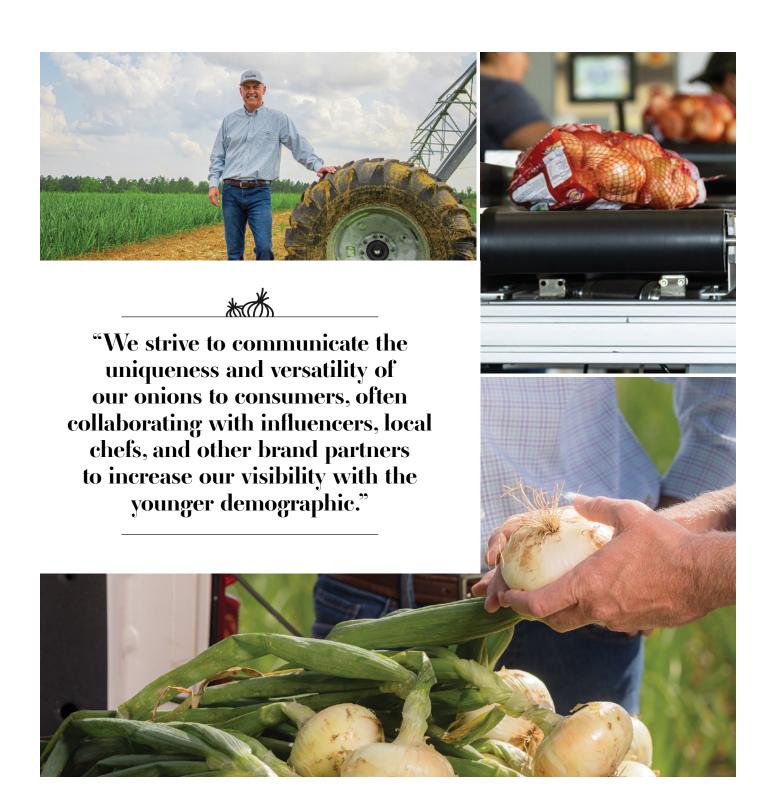
"It is our honor to be named the Official Sweet Onion Grower of the Georgia Bulldogs and the Georgia Southern Eagles—two universities vital to their communities and the Southeastern U.S.," John imparts as an example. "Partnering with these two athletic programs will help us drive education to new shoppers about healthy eating while promoting sweet onions as an essential ingredient, especially on game day."

The grower is also going beyond the borders of Georgia, taking its premium onions to the virtual world as it utilizes digital marketing strategies that strike a national chord.

"We curate our content to make sure we are answering the most asked questions about sweet onions and the produce industry in general. Engaging content such as recipes, farming stories, and initiatives helps to make the next generation aware of what we are doing," John details. "Younger generations tend to be adventurous with their food choices, seeking out unique varieties, driven by their desire to learn more about the food they are eating. The Vidalia onion has a rich history, helping to elevate an otherwise simple category: onions. We strive to communicate the uniqueness and versatility of our onions to consumers, often collaborating with influencers, local chefs, and other brand partners to increase our visibility with the younger demographic."

"As a U.S. farmer based in Georgia, our Vidalia and Peruvian sweet onion programs not only yield high-quality produce but they also empower us to provide jobs that significantly contribute to the economic growth of the Southeastern United States," John continues. "This impact is particularly important to the next generation of shoppers as it aligns with their increasing emphasis on supporting businesses that prioritize community well-being."

Through its messaging, Shuman Farms has managed to engage a new generation of shoppers and successfully promote its initiatives that give back. With the efforts of its team at Healthy Family Project®, Feeding America® bag promotions, and supporting breast cancer awareness every October, the company has been able to provide funds and resources to those in need, including the more than 34 million people—9 million of those children—that face food insecurity in the United States.



"As farmers and food producers in America, it is our responsibility not only to shed light on this crisis but also to do something about it. Through our various charitable projects, Shuman Farms and Healthy Family Project have donated 18 million meals to Feeding America, supporting initiatives that help get food to families and children who face food insecurity," John enlightens me.

Shuman Farms' Healthy Family Project team also plays a vital part in helping share the value of nutritious eating and aiding families with all aspects of health: nutrition, physical, and mental. Moving forward, this concept will continue to serve as a valuable aspect of its next-generation marketing strategy.

"Educating online and in-store consumers about the health benefits of eating a nutritious diet filled with fresh produce is important to our mission," adds John. "We will focus on making this content engaging so consumers don't feel like they are being talked at about eating healthier. Some 'edutainment' will go a long way as we continue to curate our content to ensure it is inspiring and useful."

As we get older, it is said you can either get with the times or fall behind. With all that it has left to give and achieve, Shuman Farms is one company that refuses to be left in the dust. Instead, the grower and its products will be part of the unification across the dinner table for decades to come, building generational bridges one sweet onion at a time. §



With Chandler James

think Julie DeJarnatt set a *Snack* record for speed in sending over *IF List* answers! I quickly learned that this category savant is true to her heart. With a soul steeped in delicious foods, relatable movies, and the deep blue sea, we were immediately taken with this list of "What *IF*s." Hear how Julie channels her inner Meryl Streep to take on the world one role at a time...

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

Mmm, breakfast! A Southern pecan waffle, country ham, and hot coffee with cream and sugar.

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

Meryl Streep. I see various versions of myself in her roles. My favorites being Margaret Thatcher, Donna Sheridan, and Miranda Priestly—but only for her wardrobe!

» IF you could imagine yourself in a different industry, what would it be? Marine biology. I am most at peace when I am surrounded by water.

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

All four of my grandparents, who have passed. I would ask all of the questions I never had a chance to ask.

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

Comfortable shoes—Saysh is my current brand of choice.

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

A chameleon. I wear a lot of different hats and need to smoothly transition throughout the day while being a woman, wife, mother, daughter, friend, and business professional.

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

Wall-E hits all of the emotions, and it has a message for every generation. We get one body to live in and one world to live on—treat them well!

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

Sushi.

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

Dolly Parton, and we would sing "Jolene." It wouldn't be pretty, but I would love every second of it.

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

My wedding day—we were really young and it was all a blur. I would slow down and savor every moment.

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

Teleportation. It takes too long to get anywhere from my neck of the woods.

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

"Fight Song" by Rachel Platten. This has been a season of change which brings personal doubt and external challenges. But we made it!



## ACULUICOF CELEBRATION



By Jordan Okumura-Wright



love when a produce department feels like it is welcoming you home. You step across a threshold and feel taken care of. A warmth draws your feet forward, the comfort of each intention is both subtle and

obvious. It is spaces like these that make fresh produce departments such an inventive and personal space. For me, it is the home of a grocery store—its heart.

This is achieved in many ways, but most often because a retailer listens to the needs of its communities and its employees. Who is the parent shopping for their family, and what kind of meals will be set on their table? What do their employees buy for themselves and how does it speak to the overall preference for flavor and cuisine for all its shoppers? What level of care should go into such choices made by the retailer?

All these questions are just the beginning of a desire to care for produce in the same way we care for our own families. This foresight may begin with the retailer, but it traverses all the way to the seed.

As buy-side organizations evolve to make the produce department a sensory experience—bringing consumers the taste, touch, smell, and stories behind fruits and vegetables—one company is relishing in welcoming its shoppers home and expanding its fresh concept as it looks to 2024 and beyond: Vallarta Supermarkets.

With new locations popping up across Central and Southern California, I connected with the company's Director of Marketing, Lizette Gomez, to learn more about the new developments from the progressive format.

"Vallarta celebrates its roots and its communities. We celebrate food, culture, colors, and the vibrant energy of Mexico and Latin America," Lizette shares with me. "We like to say that Vallarta offers a feast for all your senses. You can shape the consumer's shopping basket by the aromas that float through the store, by the rhythms of the music playing, and the different languages spoken all around you."

With my own passion already invested in her first few words, I turned my curiosity to the makeup of its supplier program and what strategy has fueled its vast sourcing blueprint.

This produce vision has been identified as a desire to connect with local growers, as well as those across the United States and around the world. These regions include Mexico, Chile, Canada, Peru, Guatemala, and New

Zealand. With such a wide global network, I also wanted to know how Vallarta chooses its vendors and cultivates its relationships.

"It is an exciting time for Vallarta Supermarkets and maintaining high-quality standards is part of the execution," Lizette begins. "We select vendors based on a mix of quality, sustainability, reliability, and consumer demand. The process involves rigorous quality checks, ensuring that the produce meets certain standards. For cultivating relationships, we focus on long-term partnerships that involve regular communication and collaboration, including visits to the growers' farms and facilities. This

helps in understanding the growers' practices and ensuring they align with our standards. Additionally, we have a system to regularly review vendor performance and make sure vendors meet standards."

With 55 stores throughout California, including Ventura, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, Kern, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Tulare, Orange, and Fresno counties—the 8,000-member team has its boots firmly planted on the ground, ensuring the drive for excellence prevails across the state.



Lizette Gomez,
Director of Marketing,
Vallarta Supermarkets

"We like to say that Vallarta [Supermarkets] offers a feast for all your senses. You can shape the consumer's shopping basket by the aromas that float through the store, by the rhythms of the music playing, and the different languages spoken all around you."







"For cultivating relationships, we focus on long-term partnerships that involve regular communication and collaboration, including visits to the growers' farms and facilities. This helps in understanding the growers' practices and ensuring they align with our standards."

Lizette continues to tell me how Vallarta's produce team also tries to cater as best as possible to the needs of each unique community, but with 55 stores it can be a bit challengingwhich is why they are so intent on listening to the trends and desires that echo across their entire consumer base.

"We do our best to work with our internal team and vendors to assist in a specific produce mix to make sure we accommodate our customers," Lizette reflects.

Lizette is the embodiment of the Vallarta customer as well, which only fuels her cause.

"I am not just a Vallarta team member, I am a consumer as well," she says. "My industry knowledge, skills, vision, and strategic thinking have brought me to where I am now. I have worked in the grocery industry for many years—10plus actually—so I've learned a thing or two along the way. This is where I tell my friends and family to shop. That says something about my own dedication and belief in this company. Our company values mirror my personal values as well."

To get to the heart of the matter, Lizzette shares those core values with me.

### Customer Service

Extraordinary customer service is the key to success in our business. Treat each customer as if they are the most important person in the world, because they are.



### Respect

Respect is shown to everyone, especially our customers. We believe that everyone is important and treat them that way.



### Commitment

Commitment is essential to reach any goal in life. Stay focused and have the will to do what others are not willing to do.



**Integrity**Integrity builds trust between customers, coworkers, and vendors. Practice high moral and professional principles and do the right thing at all times.



### Humility

Humility allows us all to work together as one. Always keep an open mind and make time to help others.



### Teamwork

Teamwork makes every aspect of our day more productive and more enjoyable. Believe in and support each other at all times.











"We emphasize local and regional products to support local communities and reduce the environmental impact associated with long-distance transportation. This focus also allows us to offer fresh and seasonal items, enhancing the quality and variety of produce available to our customers."

While the heart and soul drive Vallarta's network of vendors, trends, and that demand Lizette spoke about also form a driving force in how the company builds its produce department.

"We see several trends, and not just in produce, that fuel our decision-making process," Lizette reveals. "We see how our consumers are price conscious and are always looking for the best deals but without compromising quality. Many are willing to pay a little more to feed their families the best food."

Already taken in by Lizette's passion for the process and the relationship with growers, the conversation naturally turns to focus on how local and regional products as well as seasonal items play their unique and important roles in the company's strategy.

"We emphasize local and regional products to support local communities and reduce the environmental impact associated with long-distance transportation. This focus also allows us to offer fresh and seasonal items, enhancing the quality and variety of produce available to our customers. This purpose is communicated to the shopper, who then makes it their own," Lizette shares. "Take Vallarta's La Fruteria department in Carson, California, which was conceived as an opportunity to empower our customers

with the ability to create their own dishes using a selection of fresh ingredients from our produce. This initiative aimed to provide a personalized experience, catering to individual preferences and tastes."

Vallarta's La Fruteria concept offers customers the opportunity to create personalized fresh fruit bowls in-store. Customers can select from a variety of fruits, including watermelon, cucumber, pineapple, mango, cantaloupe, honeydew, and more. Additionally, they can customize their bowls with toppings like Tajín®, Chamoy, lime juice, and salt, adding a delightful twist to their fruit selections. These recent changes to the Vallarta strategy are only the beginning.

"Looking ahead to 2024 and beyond, Vallarta is focused on expanding its presence by opening new stores in areas that are currently underserved. A key aspect of this expansion is maintaining our core company values, especially in terms of product quality and consistency, across all locations," Lizette reveals, excited for the new year ahead.

With so much change across retail, Vallarta is continuing to close the gap between the vendor and the consumer, ensuring that the stories its suppliers share, become the shoppers' kitchen table tales as well.



## SOUTHERN EXPOSURE... \*PRODUCE: \*THE \*\*UNSEEN \*\*HEROES

March 7-9, 2024 - Tampa, Florida

### Heroes, we salute you!

Join us as we celebrate not only the men and women who serve in camouflage but also the men and women who serve our industry by plowing fields, harvesting crops, sorting produce, loading trucks, stocking shelves, and prepping meals.



### **KEYNOTE**

KURT WARNER,

NFL Quarterback & Analyst, Founder of First Things First Foundation



### **SOUTHERN ROOTS**

KRISTEN HADEED,

Motivational Speaker & Author, Founder of the Human Leadership Program

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### $\sqrt{\frac{\text{DOIDOWITH}}{\text{what the fork}}}$



### **INGREDIENTS**

1/2 Sunkist® Blood Orange, juiced

- 4 Sunkist Blood Oranges, peeled and supremed
- 1 (17 oz) package store-bought puff pastry (2 sheets)

8 oz cream cheese, room temperature

1/2 **cup** heavy whipping cream

½ cup powdered sugar

1/2 tsp vanilla extract

**Prep Time:** 20 mins Cook Time: 20 mins

Servings: 8



### **DIRECTIONS**

- Preheat oven to 400° F. Combine cream cheese, whipping cream, powdered sugar, vanilla, and Sunkist® Blood Orange juice in a bowl. With a hand mixer, beat until light and fluffy. Set aside.
- Unfold puff pastry and roll out slightly with a rolling pin. Use a large heart-shaped cookie cutter to cut 4 tarts from each sheet of pastry. Place hearts on a parchment-lined baking sheet and use a fork to prick holes all over.
- Bake for 15-20 minutes until puffed and golden brown. Allow to cool to room temperature.
- 4 Use the back of a spoon or your fingers to press down the centers of each tart to make room for filling. Spoon filling into tarts, filling up the indentations generously.
- Place Sunkist Blood Orange supremes on top of filling in a heart-shaped pattern. Enjoy!

To learn more about Sunkist Growers, visit www.sunkist.com





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