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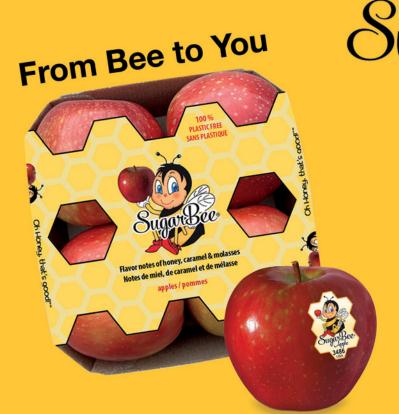








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S A KID, I TREASURED A CONCH SHELL MY PARENTS GAVE MY BROTHER AND ME ON ONE OF OUR ANNUAL TRIPS TO **OREGON.** Some summers we would head inland to Bend, spending mornings and evenings fishing along the riverbanks and playing in the woods with our friends. Other trips took us to the coast near Lincoln City, where we chased the outgoing tide and climbed sea stacksrocks eroded into little islands for the imagination...and for great fishing.

This is one of my first memories of putting a shell up to my ear and hearing the ocean. What a beautiful thought, to feel like you had, somehow, captured a swath of ocean to carry with you back into your life—whispering to you all the secrets of the sea.

I was reminded of this memory while in Washington State this year. We travelled through the rich microclimates of Yakima and Wenatchee, visiting our friends as apple harvest built in momentum. Over dinner one evening, a friend shared a story about the benefits but even more so, the risks—of investing too deeply in an echo chamber, where the only voices you hear are those similar to your own.

Her point was powerful: With a new generation entering the produce industry, shifting business models that prioritize price over relationships and data over connection risk eroding a foundational element of who we are under the weight of disconnection. It is the way this industry has built and treasured relationships that gives us our fundamental resilience. Fresh produce is the highest-performing department for many retail operators, and we need to treat suppliers with the same level of priority.

Immediately, I thought of that conch shell. What I had believed to be the ocean was, in truth, just the ambient noise around me, amplified by the shape of the shell and reflected back into my ear. Not quite as magical as the myth I'd held onto.

That conversation sent me down a path of reflection about our industry—how easily we can surround ourselves with too many familiar opinions. Too

> many ideas recycling the drought of narrow vision rather than reviving innovation. Too many voices echoing sameness instead of disruption, leaving us stuck, heads in the sand, while a world of possibilities passes us by.

This happens to all of us, whether we're growing a business, shifting strategies, or reaching for the idea that feels too wild to work—or too different from our own to be attainable.

We are living in a time of rapid change. While the conch shell lulls with its soothing rush, the echo chamber has a limited place at the table of innovation.

Safety can comfort us, but it cannot answer every challenge we face.

We must all, at some point, put down the ocean in favor of the horizon.

**Jordan Okumura-Wright** 

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

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

All issues of *The Snack Magazine* are 100 percent recyclable. Only AQ coatings are used as opposed to laminates, allowing our magazine to be reused as fresh paper in its next life. The protective bag is also accepted by bag recycling centers. Please find the nearest available location if you wish to recycle this issue's bag. Keep it green!

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## **FEATURES**

### **LIV PRODUCE**

### CALIBRATED FOR CONTINUITY

Anthony Innocenti knows operational excellence like the back of his hand. With geographic strengths and surety of supply guiding his decisions, Anthony is bringing a fresh commitment to retailers—supported by Aaron Leeming, Ken Rutledge, and Justin Cruz, whose complementary strengths are helping redefine the retail partnership experience...





### SEV-REND STAYING AHEAD OF THE PACK Being able to turn on a dime is at the core of the packaging innovator's strategy. Nathan Wise explains how tackling operational challenges is where

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RISING TO THE OCCASION
We sit down with Felix Peralta and
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before he ever arrived in produce.
Cutting his teeth ranching and exploring
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brings a unique perspective to his role
and to the changing face of retail...



MARKON COOPERATIVE
FORGED IN SERVICE,
GUIDED BY VISION
A powerhouse team, including Andy
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celebrating a milestone anniversary by
pulling back the curtain on a legacy of
service, consistency, and unwavering
vision built to cultivate value...

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**NOVEMBER 2025** 

ISSUE 99

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**DESTINY BUCCIERI** 



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THE GRATITUDE SUPPLY CHAIN

**FRESH FORMULAICS** THE NEXT WAVE OF INNOVATION

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CHEF'S CORNER SNACKCHAT





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### **INGREDIENTS**

1 Ocean Mist® Farms Spicy Buffalo Roastables Kit

### MAC AND CHEESE

- 1 box mac and cheese (such as Kraft or Annie's)
- 1 cup sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded **2 tbsp** Buffalo sauce (depending on
- your preferred heat level)

### GARNISH (OPTIONAL)

1/4 **cup** green onions, chopped Blue cheese crumbles or Cheddar cheese, shredded Buffalo sauce

Prep Time: 10 mins Cook Time: 30 mins Servings: 4

### DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 450° F.

### ROASTABLES

Follow bag preparation instructions for cauliflower and place on a baking sheet. Roast for 20 minutes until golden and tender.

### MAC AND CHEESE

- Cook mac and cheese according to directions on the box.
- 4 Fold in Cheddar cheese, Buffalo sauce, and cooked Roastables Spicy Buffalo Cauliflower florets.

### ASSEMBLY

Portion mac and cheese into four bowls and garnish as desired with green onions, cheese, and a drizzle of Buffalo sauce. Serve and enjoy!

To learn more about Ocean Mist® Farms Roastables, visit www.oceanmist.com/products/roastables



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# 

reach for exceptional™







- **3 lbs** Bako Sweet<sup>®</sup> Sweet Potatoes, peeled
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 3 tbsp butter
- 3 tbsp shallots, minced
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 11/2 tsp dried sage
- 3/4 tsp sea salt

Freshly ground pepper, to taste Snipped fresh sage, optional garnish

**Prep Time:** 10 mins Cook Time: 30–35 mins Servings: 6-8

### **DIRECTIONS**

- Preheat oven to 425° F and line a large rimmed baking sheet with heavy-duty foil or
- Cut sweet potatoes into 1" cubes and place on a baking sheet. Drizzle with olive oil, toss well, and spread in a single layer on prepared pan.
- Roast in center of oven for 30–35 minutes, stirring once or twice.
- 4 While potatoes are roasting, melt butter in a small saucepan. Add shallots, vinegar, sage, and salt. Let simmer for a minute or two, then toss with hot sweet potatoes.
- Transfer to a decorative bowl and garnish with fresh sage, if desired. Enjoy!



To learn more about Bako Sweet®, visit www.bakosweet.com



# The Sweet Side OF THE SEASON!



Contact: sales@countrysweetproduce.com or visit www.bakosweet.com

## Bee Sweet Citrus Bee Sweet Citrus Golden Gem Grapefruit ? { what the fork }



### **INGREDIENTS**

- **2 oz** Bee Sweet Citrus Golden Gem Grapefruit juice
- 3 oz Prosecco
- **2 oz** Aperol
- Splash of soda water (~1 oz)
- 1 sprig rosemary, optional for garnish

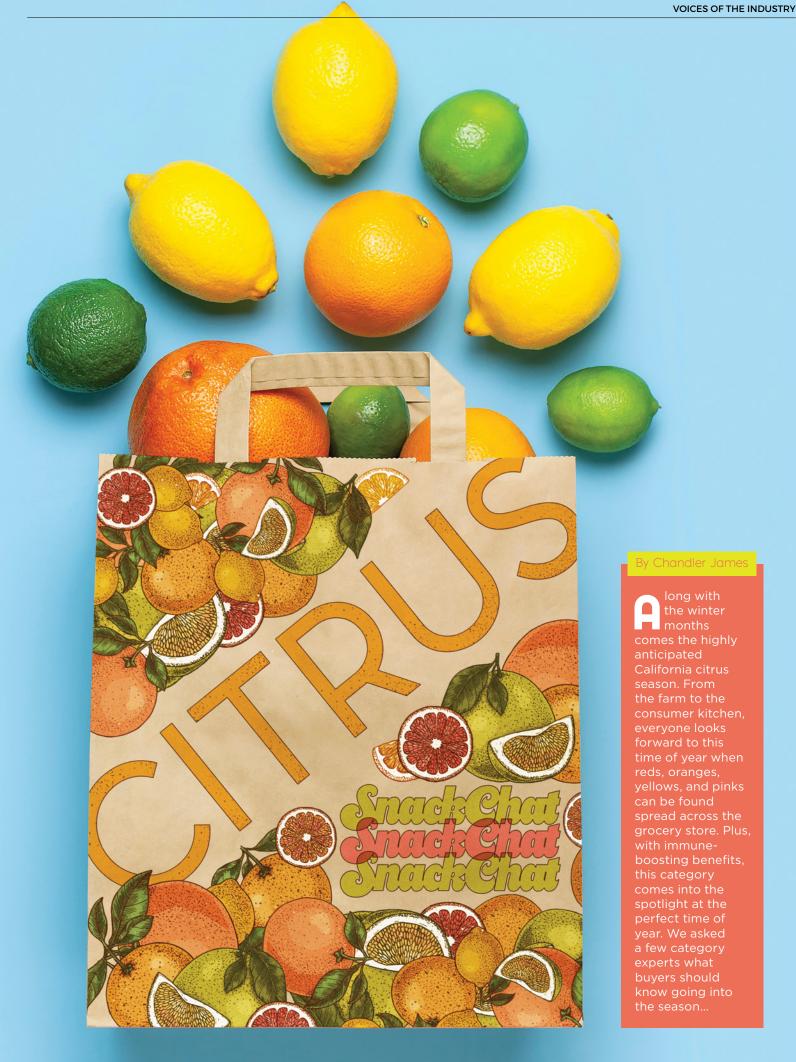
**Prep Time:** 10 mins Chill Time: 30 mins Servings: 1

### **DIRECTIONS**

- Chill your glass. Run a slice of Golden Gem Grapefruit around the rim and dip it in sugar.
- Add the Prosecco, Aperol, Golden Gem Grapefruit juice, and soda water to the glass.
- Gently stir the mixture to combine, garnishing with a slice of Golden Gem Grapefruit and a sprig of rosemary.
- Add ice if desired. Enjoy!

To learn more about Bee Sweet Citrus, visit www.beesweetcitruscom





VOICES OF THE INDUSTRY

VOICES OF THE INDUSTRY

### Cassie Howard,

Senior Director of Category Management and Marketing, Sunkist Growers

"With California citrus back in season, we're giving retailers new tools to bring the category to life. From our refreshed merchandising suite and grower bins to the return of our *Power with the Pink Orange™* campaign and holiday programs, it's all about helping shoppers connect with citrus in meaningful ways. Whether it's bold displays, vibrant packaging, or storytelling that inspires, we're creating a path to purchase that's fresh, flexible, and full of flavor."



Managing Partner, LIV Produce

"We've recently added two key industry veterans to our citrus team who are really shaking up the deck. Plus, our grower base and our supply chain going to market is the best it's ever been this year. We're coming into the season super strong on quality, which is bolstered by our growers who produce premium fruit. We also have new growers under our umbrella that we're really excited about. We hope this will be our best year ever in citrus."

### Monique Mueller,

Director of Communications, Bee Sweet Citrus

"Winter is peak season for citrus, and Bee Sweet's winter lineup is ready to complement the holiday season! All our varieties are packaged in eye-catching bags and cartons, and our matching point-of-sale material is perfect for drawing attention to the produce aisle. Our display bins provide additional shelf space for customers interested in marketing the citrus category, while our header cards offer a call-to-action for shoppers interested in learning more about specific varieties. In the digital space, we offer vibrant recipes for consumers, as well as fun, informative videos that are perfect for those looking to learn more about our product line."

### Kiah Ruvalcaba,

Vice President of Marketing and Business
Development, Fowler Packing Company

"Citrus season is always a big moment, and this year we're making it bigger than ever. You'll see *Nothing Peelz Better* come to life across streaming, bold billboards, and sampling events that put fruit directly in shoppers' hands. By showing up in every channel, we're keeping citrus top-of-mind through the busiest shopping months of the year. What makes it different is that we're not just promoting citrus—we're growing, packing, and delivering it with the quality and consistency Fowler Packing is known for. That combination of bold marketing and trusted quality is what makes our program stand out and keeps citrus driving sales all season long."

### Michelle Alo,

Vice President of Marketing, Kings River Packing

"At Kings River Packing, we see the end of the year as a time to celebrate citrus. Our family has always believed in sharing fruit that speaks for itself—fresh, flavorful, and dependable. As shoppers gather for the holidays, citrus naturally brightens tables, makes thoughtful gifts, and adds freshness to winter meals. Retailers can take advantage of this season by leaning into the versatility of citrus—promoting it for entertaining, healthy snacking, and gifting. We're here to support those efforts with dependable supply and insights that help connect citrus to what matters most: people and moments."

### George Neves,

California Citrus Sales Manager, Giumarra Companies

"We continue to offer a 52-week citrus program inclusive of imported and U.S.-grown fruit. Our domestic California season is steadily underway, and this year, we are introducing a Stem & Leaf Mandarin program, available in both branded clamshell and bulk packaging. The premium packaging is a festive red design that lends itself well to creative displays. Stem & Leaf Mandarins are as sweet, juicy, and easy to peel as your favorite Mandarins. They're excellent for holiday and gifting promotions, particularly for Lunar New Year. The fresh green leaves create an eye-catching destination in retailers' citrus sets. We look forward to partnering with our customers and supporting them with personalized merchandising on this exciting new offering from now through March."

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### Krista Beckstead,

Director of Marketing, Mountain View Fruit Sales

"At Mountain View Fruit Sales, we're excited to share the fresh, sweet taste of our California citrus this season. Our citrus is grown with care by families who love what they do, and that quality shines through in every piece of fruit. We strive to make it easy for our retailers to showcase fruit that looks beautiful, tastes amazing, and brings a burst of California sunshine straight to the produce aisle."

### Craig Morris,

Citrus and Grape Category Director, Homegrown Organic Farms

"Homegrown Organic Farms is proud to offer a year-round organic citrus program that delivers both core varietals like Navel oranges and lemons as well as specialty items such as Blood oranges and pummelos. As we head into the holidays, citrus is a perfect category for retailers to highlight, bringing shoppers vibrant, organic fruit that is Grown with Care. We've been growing organic citrus since 1998, and that legacy resonates with consumers at the shelf. By leaning into organic and seasonal citrus promotions, retailers can inspire trust, drive sales, and connect with consumers looking for healthy, flavorful options to brighten their celebrations."







# STAYING



**NATHAN WISE.** 

Director of Sales. Sev-Rend

### **BY ANNE ALLEN**

n today's rapidly changing environmental landscape, adapting quickly is not enough. You need to evolve. Partners who understand how packaging decisions impact the lives of businesses and consumers alike, and can turn those pain points into innovative solutions, are the wielders of such solutions.

That's where Sev-Rend comes in.

At the heart of its approach to high-quality packaging, the company embraces a collaborative, flexible—but most importantly, fast—strategy that puts packaging solutions into the hands of those who need them most.

To walk me through the advantages of partnering with Sev-Rend in today's market, I turned to Nathan Wise, Director of Sales.





Anne Allen: First off, Nathan, I'd love to know a little more about how you came to the industry and Sev-Rend. How does your background support Sev-Rend's next chapter?

Nathan Wise, Director of Sales, Sev-Rend: I've spent the majority of my career in the packaging, CPG, and manufacturing space, with a focus on improving operational efficiencies, sustainable innovation, and strategic growth. I've always heard that once you get into the grocery industry, you will never get out, and I think I just love that it is always evolving.

Joining Sev-Rend felt like a natural fit in that the company has a strong foundation built on great quality, speed to market, and customer relationships that go above and beyond. My background helps us build on that while expanding into areas like sustainable materials, automation, and improving supply chains by providing better ways to move product. The world of packaging and supply chains is always changing, and I'm excited to help lead that

### AA: How is Sev-Rend positioned as an advantageous partner in the packaging space?

**NW**: Partnering with a domestic manufacturer offers real, tangible benefits, especially in today's climate. With Sev-Rend, our customers get a partner that is nimble and flexible to meet their needs, and a level of supply chain control and transparency that's hard to achieve with import partners.

We're able to quickly respond to demand changes, reduce lead times, and provide hands-on support that leads to faster solutions. There's also a strong value in collaborating with a team that understands the complexities of the North American grocery market and can pivot with you as consumer expectations and retail requirements evolve.

With Sev-Rend. our customers get a partner that is nimble and flexible to meet their needs, and a level of supply chain control and transparency that's hard to achieve with import partners."

**NATHAN WISE,** Director of Sales. Sev-Rend AA: Packaging changes can come with a somewhat hefty price tag. Can you tell me more about the price-versus-returns trade-offs for post-consumer recycled (PCR) film?

NW: PCR content is a meaningful step toward more sustainable packaging, but it does come with tradeoffs. PCR films can have slightly different properties compared to virgin materials. With that said, we've made significant progress in optimizing our PCR materials to perform well in real-world applications and continue to improve.

The cost can be higher, but many of our customers are finding the environmental benefits and alignment with sustainability goals retailers have put into place justify the investment.

The key is clear communication to the consumer. It's all about balancing sustainability, performance, and cost, and we work closely with each customer to find the right fit for their needs. Each product has to be a win for all involved.

AA: What packaging innovations have you made to both educate the consumer on important topics and answer industry pain points and opportunities?

**NW**: In the world of sustainability, we focus on providing functional solutions with consumer education. One example is our development of key print designs and messaging areas on our film that help brands communicate their messages. Those messages are sustainability stories like recyclability, reduced plastic use, or local sourcing, which can resonate with their consumers.

We're also investing in digital tools like QR code integration to link consumers directly to sustainable content about the product or grower. This allows those consumers to connect on a whole different level. On the industry side, we've engineered solutions that improve operational efficiency, such as films and tags that run better on high-speed equipment, hold up better through the supply chain, and reduce waste during the packing process. Ultimately, innovation for us means looking at the full life cycle and how Sev-Rend can make packaging that works better for the packer, the retailer, and the planet.

ackaging is perhaps among the most vital parts of getting our goods to the market. and innovations drive trial and excitement. Sometimes, new packaging means the difference between your products getting in the door of a beloved retailer or losing out on that chance.

Packaging makes new product launches possible, keeps consumers engaged with fresh produce, and connects us as an industry to the people we love to feed. It's an element of your business in which you need a trusted partner like Sev-Rend to have your back along the way. 9

# 



Recipe credited to The Life Jolie, www.thelifejolie.com

### **INGREDIENTS**

1/2 SnapDragon® Apple, thinly sliced **12 mini** phyllo cups

1 small wedge Brie cheese

1 tbsp lemon juice

**3 slices** bacon, cooked and crumbled

**2 tbsp** honey

**Prep Time:** 5 mins Cook Time: 15 mins Servings: 12



### **DIRECTIONS**

- Preheat oven to 350° F. Line sheet pan and spread frozen phyllo cups so they aren't
- Fill each phyllo cup with Brie cheese.
- Toss SnapDragon® Apple slices with lemon juice. Gently press slices into each phyllo cup and sprinkle crumbled bacon.
- Bake for 10–15 minutes to melt cheese. Remove from oven and drizzle each cup with honey. Serve immediately. Enjoy!

You can find ready-to-use phyllo cups in the freezer section of your local grocery store, located near frozen phyllo dough sheets and frozen puff pastry.

To learn more about SnapDragon® Apples, visit www.snapdragonapple.com

## A Closer Look at **Earthbound Farm Plant-Based Packaging**



By Jordan Okumura-Wright

oday's consumer is educated and curious, investing more and more in the sustainability story behind the products they buy. With innovations in packaging and progress in thought-leadership, companies across the fresh food space are embracing this new consumer perspective. One standout is Earthbound Farm with its plantbased tray. The sustainability benefits are strong and clear: 95 percent less plastic packaging and a recyclable, PFAS-free tray made from over 50 percent recycled materials with no plastic liner.

The tray maintains the freshness of these greens while utilizing easy peel-and-reseal technology-offering convenience and ensuring produce stavs fresh and delicious longer. With perishability always a challenge—and the push for sustainable, practical solutions growing stronger—retailers can now promote eco-conscious living without sacrificing freshness or convenience.

Consumers can take their leafy green dreams to new heights with Baby Spinach, Spring Mix, Spinach+Butter, and Supergreens with Wild Red Arugula—all in 5 oz retail packs. When I saw Baby Spinach pop up on my radar, I immediately began imagining the possibilities this coveted component could bring to my daily dishes. Smoothie? Check. Salad? Check. Sandwiches and wraps? Check and check.

With strong consumer response fueling the success of this launch, retailers can be confident their shoppers' baskets will be filled with choices that serve the greater good.







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# Section 1987 And 1987 April 1987

Geographic Strength in Motion

By Jordan Okumura-Wright

n the hands of LIV Produce, continuity is a discipline—a system of interlocking parts designed to perform in both the harshest conditions and the most promising environments. At its core is a network of geographical strengths, trusted growers, boots-onthe-ground expertise, and finely tuned processes. Together, they function like the precise mechanics of a watch, built to withstand disruption and steady an unsteady industry. Where time is money, LIV delivers the assurance of supply and quality that sets one company apart from another. For retailers, that assurance translates into confidence: citrus arriving when promised, sweet potatoes holding

through peak demand, and staple

crops like potatoes and onions

moving through the system with reliability rather than risk.

"In produce, the promise of supply chain efficiency and consistency is nothing if you don't have the structure and boots on the ground in place to execute that

commitment," says Anthony Innocenti, Managing Partner. "That success isn't the work of one individual but a team constantly fine-tuning our well-oiled machine. It's the result of a collaborative foundation built with our partners and reinforced daily by our team."

This evolving team of boots-on-the-ground professionals has delivered measurable benefits for growers and retailers alike, making the company a trusted partner across the supply chain. Anthony is very much the architect of this vision—this watch, as it were—building LIV around a diverse framework of opportunities and execution, carrying that structure forward in unison with his colleagues.

"LIV's 52-week availability for core commodities such as citrus, sweet potatoes, onions, potatoes, and hard squash, positions us as a dependable partner," Anthony explains. "In a market prone to extreme price swings, predictable supply and stable operations are essential to protecting grower and retailer interests. We move in stride with our grower partners, delivering strong





returns and enabling them to secure a competitive edge through execution."

That 52-week distribution capability is another brick firmly placed in the company's foundation. LIV's ability to execute national distribution has enhanced s reach, enabling produce to move anywhere in the country. This scalable logistics network helps temper the economic pressures and supply chain challenges that can slow momentum from field to shelf.

Our Los Angeles hub creates a central loading point that streamlines logistics and drives efficiency across LIV's network. With reduced friction in the supply chain, retailers benefit from fewer disruptions, faster turns, and

lower operational strain," shares Aaron Leeming, Sales Director of Citrus. "Combine that with a team bringing decades of experience particularly in citrus—and LIV delivers both geographic strength and category depth. The result is a system designed to move product from the right place at the right time."

By consolidating core items into single truckloads, LIV also offers retailers a logistical edge in convenience and efficiency.

"One of LIV's biggest advantages is the ability to deliver product consistently, 12 months a year. Our core items are always available. That reliability not only helps retailers manage seasonal spikes but also strengthens their ability to plan promotions and maintain shelf consistency," Aaron adds.

With facilities located at the crossroads of major growing regions, freeways, and markets, LIV ensures

an efficient, reliable supply of both organic and conventional produce. Increased acreage with grower partners and more in-field personnel support daily quality control—all while staying true to foundational roots.

"Continuity is one of the most pressing concerns for retailers, and LIV addresses it by being proactive rather than reactive," Anthony says. "The buyers a clear picture of supply. If a tight

This forward-looking approach builds

will deliver uninterrupted coverage year-round.

"LIV's network stretches across regions with staggered seasons, creating strength in continuity. From Canada and Washington down through California, Oregon, Nevada, Arizona, Texas, and Colorado, product is constantly in motion," says Ken Rutledge, Grower Relations-Northwest. "For example, Washington's early potato and onion crops flow into Pacific Northwest storage crops, which last through spring—right when California, Texas, and Arizona crops come online."

This broad footprint enables LIV to manage seasonal fluctuations while keeping shelves stocked. Smaller growers remain central to LIV's network, but relationships with medium and larger suppliers ensure demand is met. Ken emphasizes his role as bridging the expectations of growers with the needs of LIV's sales team, negotiating on quality, harvest schedules, packaging, transportation, and pricing—while coordinating logistics across multiple states and into Mexico. The result is a well-oiled machine moving product directly into key markets.

Daily field checks reinforce that machine, as Justin Cruz, Grower Relations-Northern California, tells me.



"LIV's network stretches across regions with staggered seasons, creating strength in continuity. From Canada and Washington down through California, Oregon, Nevada, Arizona, Texas, and Colorado, product is constantly in motion."

- Ken Rutledge, Grower Relations-Northwest LIV Produce





"For sweet potatoes, I work closely with three core sheds and 10–15 growers, maintaining weekly or bi-weekly communication," says Justin. "By collecting acreage and crop projections early, I help consolidate volumes into concrete supply forecasts year-round. This disciplined process balances grower capacity with LIV's operational needs and creates stability in a volatile category."

That vigilance ties directly back to the retailer. Justin works hand-in-hand with LIV's retail teamanticipating demand even before the season begins—and adjusts plans as crops develop.

"Every decision, from acreage commitments to shed allocations, is made with the retailer in mind. By staying embedded in the fields and aligned with the office, I help ensure LIV can make promises to customers and keep them," he says.

As a long-term investment, LIV Produce's recent momentum reflects its commitment to consistency, reliability, and strong grower

relationships. These efforts position the company for sustained growth and resilience while ensuring that the inclusion of new talent and fresh perspectives remains central to its vision.

"From day one, our goal has been to create a foundation that feels both strong and personalrooted in family farms and strengthened by facilities

that let us deliver quality without compromise," Anthony shares. "What excites me most is how our team continues to expand that vision together, building a program growers trust and customers can rely on year after year."

Anthony's own history in produce underscores this ethos. He began his career with organic

growers at a distributor, collaborating on crop planning and long-term sustainability strategies. With over 20 years of industry experience, he has cultivated deep and earned a reputation for delivering sustainable growth. That experience continues to shape LIV today, balancing operational rigor with the human side of farming trust, resilience, and

"Consistent relationships with retail partners are vital," Anthony reflects. "There is an essential need for deeper connection, mutual partnership, and tangible support to create long-term value in the supply chain. With LIV, you can be sure every challenge is under a

for our customers."

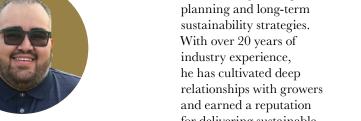
Pressure, risks, and those industry challenges Anthony refers to are inevitable—sharp, relentless, and as constant as time itself. With the right company, they don't weaken the industry; they become the roots of its strength.



"By collecting acreage and crop projections early, I help consolidate volumes into concrete supply forecasts year-round. This

disciplined process balances grower capacity with LIV's operational needs and creates stability in a volatile category."

- Justin Cruz, Grower Relations-Northern California, LIV Produce



shared success.

microscope, and our people are always looking out



### **INGREDIENTS**

- 1 cup North Bay Produce Apples (Honeycrisp, Fuji, or Cripps Pink), peeled, cored, and diced
- 21/4 cups gluten-free old-fashioned rolled oats, divided
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- **2 tbsp** honey
- 1 large egg plus 1 egg yolk
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1½ tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 **tsp** salt
- 1/2 cup walnuts or pecans, chopped
- 1/2 cup golden raisins (optional)

**Prep Time:** 20 mins Cook Time: 10 mins Servings: 12

### **DIRECTIONS**

- Preheat oven to 350° F (175° C) and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
- In a food processor or blender, take 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> cups gluten-free oats and pulse until it becomes like coarse flour. In a bowl, combine rolled oats, oat flour, cinnamon, baking soda, baking powder, and salt. Stir until thoroughly mixed and set aside.
- In a large bowl, beat together softened butter, brown sugar, honey, and granulated sugar until creamy and light in color. Mix in egg, egg yolk, and vanilla extract, until well-blended.
- 💪 Add dry ingredient mixture to wet ingredients, stirring until just combined. Gently fold in diced apples, nuts, and optional raisins.
- Using a spoon or cookie scoop, drop heaping tablespoons of dough onto prepared baking sheet, leaving at least 1" between each cookie.
- Bake in preheated oven for 10–12 minutes or until the edges are lightly golden. Let cookies cool on baking sheet for five minutes before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.
- Keep cookies at room temperature in an air-tight bag or sealed container for up to 3 days, or freeze in freezer bags for up to 3 months. Enjoy!

To learn more about North Bay Produce, visit www.northbayproduce.com



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### By Anne Allen

f you've cracked open *The Snack* a time or two, you've seen the recipes featured in our What the Fork (WTF) series. It's the spot where fresh produce takes center stage most clearly, and it helps retailers and suppliers connect shoppers with new ways to experiment. It's another place where collaborations between suppliers and chefs come to light. These recipes create opportunities for trial, driving growth for retailers' premium perimeter department. To learn more about these collaborative efforts, let's dive in...



**MICHELLE** DELEISSEGUES. Senior Vice President of Marketing,

> **Berries** "I always look forward

Gem-Pack

to working with a chef as an opportunity to experience berries through a fresh perspective and energy. Working with Chef Dan Reighn of Reighn World Entertainment and the TV series, Bringing It to the Table, was just such a learning collaboration, from the ingredient prep to the final presentation. I enjoyed watching his enthusiasm for working with berries shine through in all types of dishes and settings. Dan is creative, adventurous, and bold, which inspires me to take risks and be unafraid to approach berries with an irreverent or unconventional twist."



Officer, Reighn World Entertainment

"Chef Wendy Brodie and I loved working with Michelle Deleissegues and the team at Gem-Pack Berries, creating fun, unique, and eye-appealing dishes using the most incredible strawberries harvested and hand-picked by their hardworking teams. From a spicy strawberry margarita to a strawberry tomato gazpacho, finished off with a classic strawberry shortcake, it was a night to remember where Wendy and I could share our passions by creating a sumptuous feast for the Kawamura family and their friends. While filming our TV show with the talented team at Gem-Pack, we learned to have a new appreciation for the passion and heart that goes into each tray of berries and how they give back in such a significant and impactful way to their community and those in need."







GEOFF KOSAR, Vice President of Marketing, Mastronardi Produce®

"Working with Chef Ray and Chef Ashlee of Simply A&R for our sampling and trade show events is always a pleasure.

Through a deep understanding of flavor, a dose of creativity, and a dash of style, they're able to bring our produce to life in unique ways that inspire and delight. Over years of collaboration, we've seen firsthand how our produce can be transformed across cuisines and formats—showcasing its versatility, quality, and ability to elevate any dish. Our partnership celebrates innovation and a shared passion for flavor."

### RAY ZAIDAN AND ASHLEE SINAMBAN,

Owners and Personal Chefs, Simply A&R

"Working with SUNSET® has always felt like a natural extension of our culinary philosophy. Its greenhouse-grown produce is consistently fresh, flavorful, and reliable—qualities that make it perfect to work with in the kitchen. Whether we're crafting something bold and unexpected or leaning into simplicity, its produce gives us the freedom to explore and innovate. It's a partnership built on trust, creativity, and love of food."







President and Chief Executive Officer, Shuman Farms

"Chef partnerships
help us inspire more
people to eat more
produce, more often.
Chef Matt McCarty has

become an ambassador for our premium sweet onions—showing their versatility on *Good Day Atlanta*, energizing our retailer community at International Fresh Produce Association's Global Produce & Floral Show, and even helping us share our sweet onion dip with Atlanta Braves fans over the summer. When I tasted his Vidalia® Onion Flatbread, I couldn't stop raving. It was one of the most delicious ways I've ever experienced our sweet onions."



Chef, Murphy's Kitchen

"Sweet onions are incredibly chef-friendly—sweet, consistent, and versatile. With Shuman Farms, I can explore different cuts, cooking methods, and build layers of flavor that resonate with guests, from comfort food to elevated plates. It's also a lot of fun working with the Shuman Farms team—whether at a produce show or at a ball game—because I get to put these dishes directly in front of people and then invite them back to Murphy's to enjoy them again."







# A/TE DOIDOWITH

### SUNSET® Campari® Tomatoes

what the fork }



### **INGREDIENTS**

- 4 SUNSET® Campari® Tomatoes 2 tsp salt
- 1 **sheet** frozen puff pastry, thawed
- **150 g** goat cheese, softened
- 1 tbsp milk
- 3 tbsp mixed herbs, finely chopped (parsley, dill, chives, thyme, tarragon) ½ cup mozzarella cheese, grated Salt and pepper, to taste

**Prep Time:** 30 mins **Cook Time:** 30 mins **Servings:** 12



To learn more about Mastronardi Produce\*/SUNSET\*, visit www.sunsetgrown.com

### DIRECTIONS

- Preheat oven to 375° F.
- 2 Slice tomatoes into 3 slices, 12 slices total. Place tomatoes on paper towels and sprinkle with 1 tsp salt. Let stand 15 minutes. Flip onto dry paper towels and salt again. Let stand for another 15 minutes. Dry top side of tomatoes with paper towels for any remaining moisture.
- While tomatoes are draining, prepare the pastry. Roll out onto a lightly floured surface. Using a 3" cookie cutter, cut 12 circles from sheet of pastry. Be sure to use all of the pastry.
- Place pastry circles into a non-stick muffin pan. (Don't worry about getting them tucked into the pan too securely. Just make sure they have a flat bottom so they stand level.) Place in refrigerator to keep cold.
- In a bowl, combine goat cheese, milk, herbs, mozzarella, and seasoning. Set aside.
- Place one slice of tomato in each muffin cup, on top of the puff pastry. Follow with 1 tsp goat cheese mixture. Repeat the layer, ending with goat cheese mixture.
- Bake for 30 minutes, rotating pan at 15 minutes.
- Remove from oven, place remaining Campari® slices on top of tarts.
- Serve immediately or at room temperature, garnish with fresh herbs. Enjoy!

## A Closer Look at Soluna™ Apples

By Anne Allen

o stand out in the competitive market of apple varieties, you need an edge. With deep burgundy skin, exceptional crunch, and a unique, refreshing flavor, the Soluna™ apple has what it takes to capture the imagination of United States consumers. Available in the U.S. for the first time, could the Australian-bred variety be the next apple to take the industry by storm?

With a launch closely supported by Oppy, this expansion into the United States comes after successful campaigns in Asia and the Middle East, markets in which the variety has built a loyal following among premium retailers.

The tagline, Something Real™, generates a message of dependability and honesty. It's one that I think will resonate with Millennials, Gen Z, and even Gen Alpha. Although they might not yet have the purchasing power of their parents, they can certainly influence their purchasing decisions!

With plans to scale distribution across key metropolitan areas in the 2026 season, this is one variety you'll want to keep a close eye on.

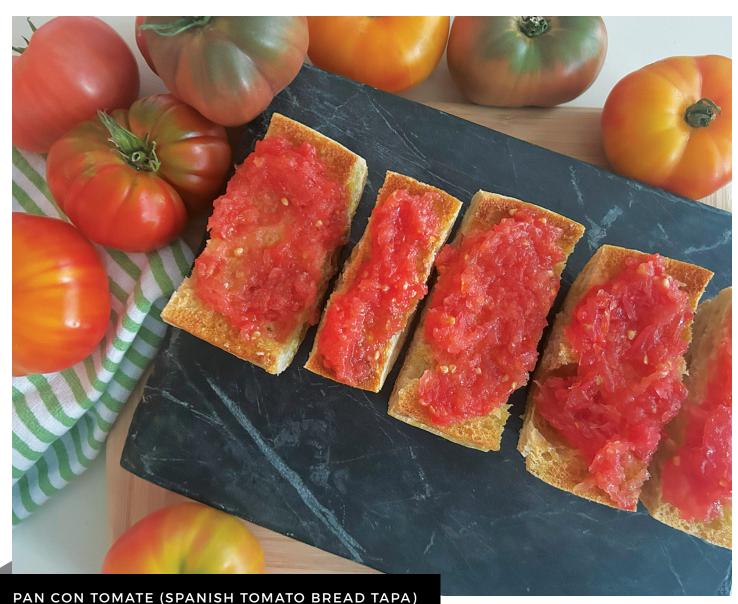








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- 4 large, ripe Crystal Valley Foods Heirloom Tomatoes
- **2–3 large cloves** garlic, peeled 1 loaf ciabatta, sourdough, or
- other artisan-style bread Extra-virgin olive oil Sea salt

**Prep Time:** 5 mins Cook Time: 5 mins Servings: 10



### DIRECTIONS

- Slice a small piece off of the bottom end of each tomato. Using a box or handheld grater with larger holes, grate tomatoes into a large bowl. Discard peels.
- Drizzle tomato purée with olive oil and season with salt. Set aside.
- Slice ciabatta loaf in half lengthwise. Cut each half into 2" wide slices.
- Arrange sliced bread on a sheet pan so that they do not overlap and brush bread with olive oil.
- 5 Turn on broiler function of oven and toast bread until slices are golden brown.
- Remove toast and rub garlic cloves over hot bread.
- Top toast with the tomato purée and enjoy!

To learn more about Crystal Valley Foods, visit www.crystalvalleyfoods.com



# ACTS OF KINDNESS

Philanthropy is a core principle at the Allen Lund Company, strengthening our shared values and creating a strong sense of purpose. We are committed to giving back to our communities through our time and talent. In 2016, we launched ALC's Acts of Kindness initiative, where every year, all offices and departments complete an Act of Kindness within their community. It's not about writing a check, it's about giving of one's time, energy, and support. It's what Allen would do. We continue this initiative into our 50<sup>th</sup> year in 2026.







Contact sales@allenlund.com



**8 oz** Giorgio® White Button Mushrooms, sliced

16 oz green beans, rinsed, trimmed

- **2 tbsp** olive oil
- 4 tbsp unsalted butter, divided
- **2 tbsp** all-purpose flour
- 1 cup whole milk
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 tsp smoked paprika
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- **4 sprigs** fresh thyme
- **1 cup** store-bought fried onions Salt and pepper, to taste

**Prep Time:** 15 mins Cook Time: 40 mins Servings: 8

### DIRECTIONS

- Preheat oven to 375° F. In a large pot, boil green beans in salted water for 3–5 minutes until tender, yet crisp. You may have to do this in batches. Drain, then transfer to a 9" x 13" baking dish. Set aside.
- In a large skillet, heat olive oil and 2 tbsp butter at medium heat. Add mushrooms and cook until golden brown, about 4–5 minutes. Transfer to a plate. Set aside.
- In the same skillet, heat remaining butter at medium heat. Once melted, whisk in flour to form a roux, about 2-3 minutes. Whisk in milk and cream. Stir in smoked paprika, garlic powder, thyme sprigs, salt, and pepper to taste. Cook for 3–5 minutes until sauce thickens.
- Add mushrooms back in and stir to combine with sauce. Simmer for 1–2 minutes. Taste and adjust seasonings as needed. Pour mixture over green beans in baking dish.
- Cover baking dish tightly with aluminum foil. Bake for 25–30 minutes, then remove baking dish from oven, remove foil, and bake uncovered for another 10 minutes. Top casserole with fried onions. Serve and enjoy!

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





### **▶ MY FAVORITE THINGS ◄**

### **DESTINY BUCCIERI,**

MARKETING MANAGER, YERECIC LABEL

With Jordan Okumura-Wright

rom championing women to embracing sustainability, Destiny Buccieri finds inspiration in both her work and her everyday passions. Her journey at Yerecic Label has been one of growth and dedication, and her vibrant energy shines through in all she does. With her creative spirit and commitment to connection, this Marketing Manager took our My Favorite Things column to heart, and we adore her for it...



YERECIC

LABEL

**EMPOWERING WOMEN** 

Supporting other women creates strength in life and work.



\_ SUSTAINABILITY More than a practice, it's a

responsibility guiding every decision.



**FACILITY VISITS** Soaking up the sun while deepening team connections.



**TRAIL TIME** Fresh air and open trails bring

me peace.



**CROCHET CREATIONS** 

Unwinding by making handmade gifts for people I love.



**AUDIOBOOKS** 

Learning on the go.



Travel opens my eyes to new cultures and perspectives.



**THERAPY** 

Cooking and baking help me relax and share joy.

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- 2 Shuman Farms Sweet Onions, finely chopped
- 1 loaf French or Italian bread, cut into 3/4" cubes
- 1 lb (12 slices or one package) bacon, coarsely chopped
- 6 stalks (about 21/4 cups) celery, cut into 1/4" pieces
- **6 sprigs** fresh thyme
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
- **7 cloves** garlic, finely chopped
- 3/4 cup dry white wine
- 2½ cups reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1 stick butter, cut into ½" cubes
- **8** green onions, thinly sliced
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten

**Prep Time:** 30 mins Cook Time: 50 mins Servings: 10



### **DIRECTIONS**

- Preheat oven to 200° F. Spray a 9" x 13" baking dish with cooking spray and set aside.
- Spread bread on two large baking sheets. Bake for about 15 minutes, or just until dried but not browned. Set aside to cool.
- Prep all produce and bacon.
- Spray a large deep skillet with cooking spray (or add ½ tbsp butter) and heat over medium-high heat. Once bread is out of the oven, preheat oven to 350° F.
- 5 Add sweet onions to skillet and cook, stirring occasionally, for about 3 minutes, or until tender. Add celery, thyme, and rosemary and cook, stirring occasionally, for about 4 minutes, or until onions are translucent. Stir in garlic and continue cooking, stirring often, for about 6 minutes, or until vegetables begin to brown.
- Stir in wine and cook for about 4 minutes, most of the wine will be evaporated. Don't let the vegetables dry out. Add bacon. Add broth and butter, bring to a simmer, and simmer for about 8-10 minutes. Liquid will be reduced to about half. Remove and discard thyme and rosemary stems.
- Carefully transfer the broth/veggie mixture to a large bowl and allow to cool slightly. Stir green onions into mixture. Add bread cubes, 1/2 tsp of salt and pepper, and mix well. Add in eggs. Stir.
- Spread stuffing in prepared baking dish and cover with aluminum foil. Bake for 50 minutes, or until stuffing is heated through. Enjoy!

To learn more about Shuman Farms, visit www.shumanfarmsga.com







# TO THE

A Q&A With Felix Peralta, Vice President of Operations, and David Encinas, Director of Production, SunFed

> elix Peralta and David Encinas are not ones to shy away from a new opportunity. Though they draw from different backgrounds, the two industry aces have carved out unique spaces for themselves in the industry—spaces that both reside under the SunFed® roof.

Earlier this year, SunFed promoted Felix to Vice President of Operations and David to Director of Production, recognizing each of their dynamic skillsets and identifying how they can better serve the company. In an industry that is particularly focused on bringing up the next generation of produce leaders, their enthusiasm and passion are irreplaceable.

Since their recent appointments, each executive has risen to the occasion and then some. But I will let Felix and David tell you the story themselves.

Chandler James:
Congratulations
on entering your
newest leadership
roles, Felix and
David. Can you
both tell me about how
you found your way to the
produce industry?



Felix Peralta, Vice President of Operations,

SunFed®: I began my career in 2006 with Eurofresh Farms after graduating as an Industrial Engineer. Over the years, I advanced through multiple roles across packing, harvesting, shipping, warehousing, transportation, and logistics, building a strong foundation in produce operations. My last role with Eurofresh was as Shipping and Logistics Manager, where I oversaw regional transportation routing, inventory management, lean manufacturing initiatives, equipment maintenance and control, internal logistics, and continuous improvement projects. Following Eurofresh's acquisition by Naturesweet in 2013, I continued in this capacity until 2014.

### **David Encinas, Director of Production,**

SunFed®: I began working in greenhouses and seed companies at IS Invernaderos Sierra and Sierra Seed as a Controller in 2018. Those early experiences sparked a genuine passion for the sector and gave me hands-on exposure to both financial management and day-to-day operations. In 2021, I joined Wholesum in accounting, where I deepened my expertise in finance and internal processes for growers. Along the way, I've expanded my skills in grower relations, negotiation, and leadership, learning not just how the industry works, but how it touches people's lives every day. Every step of this journey has reinforced my belief that agriculture is more than business—it's about supporting communities, nurturing growth, and creating real impact.



it's expected. Every day, I see how dedication, collaboration, and passion make a real difference..."

**David Encinas,**Director of Production, SunFed®

CJ: Can you provide a brief overview of your journeys to SunFed and these new roles?

FP: I joined SunFed in 2014 as Director of Logistics and advanced into production and grower relations. In that role, I designed and implemented a supply/demand planning program that improved operational efficiency and strengthened grower-sales communication. I also oversaw procurement across domestic and international markets, negotiated grower agreements, and developed production forecasts to support strategic decision-making.

**DE:** My journey with SunFed began in 2022. I started as Accounting Supervisor, ensuring financial processes ran smoothly, and quickly grew into the role of Director of Finance and Grower Accounting, where I managed budgets, financial planning, and nurtured relationships with our growers. Today, as Director of Production, I lead production that connects the farm to the market, ensuring efficiency, quality, and consistency at every step. What makes SunFed truly special is that it's a place where growth is not just encouraged—it's expected. Every day, I see how dedication, collaboration, and passion make a real difference, from our team to the growers we work with, and ultimately to the communities that enjoy our produce.





CJ: Each of you has gained diverse experience thus far, which I'm sure brings a unique perspective to your roles. What are some of the skills you bring to these new positions?

**FP:** During my time in the industry, I have gained experience in warehouse, logistics, and shipping protocols. I am well-versed in SOPs, engineering expertise with operational leadership to drive efficiency, and support sustainable business growth.

**DE:** I bring strong communication and relationship-building skills to this role. I also have a problem-solving mindset and the ability to adapt quickly, which helps me navigate the fast-paced and ever-changing nature of the produce business.

"...my goal is to create processes and systems that not only support today's business but also prepare us for the future."

Felix Peralta.

Vice President of Operations, SunFed®

CJ: What are you most excited about as you both look toward the future of your roles with the company?

FP: What excites me most is the opportunity to continue elevating SunFed's operational excellence. My focus is on driving efficiency across our facilities, strengthening supply chain resilience, and leveraging datadriven planning to align production with market demand. I see a tremendous opportunity to scale our capabilities while reducing costs and ensuring consistency in quality and food safety. Equally important is developing our people and building high-performing teams that embrace continuous improvement. As we grow, my goal is to create processes and systems that not only support today's business but also prepare us for the future. By combining operational efficiency, strong grower partnerships, and innovation in technology and forecasting, we can position SunFed for sustainable growth and long-term success.

**DE:** I'm excited to grow alongside SunFed, building strong connections with our growers and customers. I'm truly grateful to be part of a team that values innovation, quality, and long-term commitment. What excites me the most is the opportunity to keep learning every day, contribute, and be part of a company that strives to make a positive impact across the industry.

ith industry professionals like Felix and David steering the ship, the fresh produce industry is well poised for growth long into the future. It is our joy and honor to watch them as they rise to any occasion they face.

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Marketing Director, Stemilt

"It's that time of year when apple displays are front and center, and the full mix of varieties is becoming available again. This crop brings larger volumes of conventional and organic Honeycrisp, and increases in organic apples like Gala, Fuji, and Cosmic Crisp®. Honeycrisp is a highly sought after apple by consumers and can sell at higher price points on promotion. The best merchandising strategy for apples during the winter and spring season is to run multiple varieties on ad, and do so consistently each month to move the whole category forward in volume and dollars. Stemilt has Lil Snappers® kid-sized fruit and sustainable 4-packs of apples for additional sales boosting options."



Rochelle Bohm, Vice President of Marketing, CMI Orchards

"CMI is delivering a larger apple crop this season, with strong promotable volume across the board. America's favorites— SugarBee®, Envy™, Ambrosia Gold®, and more Honeycrisp—are ready to shine, while Cosmic Crisp® has stabilized into a reliable promotional powerhouse. Kanzi® takes center stage as the star of holiday baking, and KIKU® offers a refreshing sweet start to the New Year. Retailers can drive sales with American Dream, pairing impactful packaging with charitable tie-ins, and energize younger shoppers through our new Apple Crush app, which helps them find their perfect apple match, encouraging trial and trade-ups."



Tyler Johnson, Sales Manager, Rainier Fruit Company

"It's November, and Rainier is wrapping up our long harvest season! We're excited for the year to come, full of premium Honeycrisp, year-round organics, and crunchy Cosmic Crisp® and Envy™ apples! As a family-owned and run business, we spent the last growing year obsessing over the details to produce a full menu of crunchy, tasty fruit. We encourage retailers to lean into peak apple-selling season and to please ask Rainier sales how we can support!"





Emily Cox, Marketing Manager, FirstFruits Farms

"With value, flavor, and nutrition all in one, apples are the perfect choice for budget-conscious shoppers. It's important to educate consumers on the versatility, flavor profiles, and health benefits. Consumers are now offered more varieties than ever, which is not only overwhelming for them but also for retailers. Approaching the category holistically can be challenging for buyers and category managers when suppliers are too focused on promoting single varieties. At FirstFruits Farms, we not only offer the best varieties from Washington and Michigan, but we also partner with retailers on category strategies that keep apples easy to shop and profitable across the board."

Mac Riggan,

Vice President of Sales and Business Development, Chelan Fresh

"Keep your apples refrigerated as much as possible and displayed prominently at the front of the department. Shoppers often buy produce on impulse, so you want to capture their attention right away. It's also important for retailers to take the time to offer descriptions on the different varieties to give shoppers an idea of what the apples taste like. You can't assume that people will know what a Rockit™ or a SugarBee® or even a Honeycrisp will taste like. You have new consumers entering the produce department every year, and these new shoppers are increasingly experiential. It's essential to have at least a QR code that directs users directly to a landing page with information on the eating qualities of the apple and how to use it. You want to take all of the 'purchase' mystery out of an apple experience."



### Catherine Gipe-Stewart, Director of Marketing, Superfresh Growers®

"Education remains one of the biggest barriers to apple purchases. Many shoppers don't realize that three bi-color apples on the shelf next to each other may all be different varieties—or that apples are full of health benefits often overshadowed by 'too much sugar' myths. In today's fastscroll world, simplicity is everything. Clear tools like quick help take the stress out of choosing, making it easy to wade through an ocean of choices, allowing consumers to enjoy apples with confidence."





### Jon Kiley,

Business Development Manager, T&G Global

'ENVY™ apples are more than just apples—they're an indulgent experience meant to be savored. As one of America's leading premium apple brands, ENVY continues to outperform, achieving strong growth once again during the 2024-25 season, marking five consecutive years of upward momentum. This sustained success reflects the brand's premium positioning and the growing demand from shoppers who aren't just reaching for any apple—they're reaching for something better. Something exceptional."



"Fall in New York cannot be beat—first and foremost, it's apple season, but it's also football season! At Crunch Time, we've combined two fall favorites with SnapDragon® being the official apple of the Buffalo Bills, making fall even better! I love sharing SnapDragon apples with the Bills Mafia at every home game; watching fans experience the flavor, juice, and Monster Crunch for the first time reminds those of us who work the games why we work so hard to grow and market our apples! I also coach our local high school cross country team and absolutely love the excitement of the athletes when I bring apples to practice or a meet—they truly cannot get enough SnapDragon apples!"



President and Chief Executive Officer, New York Apple Association

"Fall harvest brings a bounty of apples, cider, caramel-dipped treats, and crisp air that stirs warm memories. Today's shoppers want more from their shopping experience—they want inspiration for on-the-go snacking, creative pairings, and easy enjoyment at home. Highlight apple varieties so consumers know which are sweet, tart, or somewhere in between. Offer choices with bulk, poly bags, pouches, and totes to make shopping fun and convenient. Share recipes like hot cider with cinnamon, apple muffins, or apple crisp—complete with ingredients—to spark simple fall moments. New York State apples deliver a full spectrum of flavor. Discover them at ApplesFromNY.com."





# Create the Pear Rush with FLAVOR, QUALITY, & RIPENESS!





Pear shoppers eat pears within 2-4 days of purchase, making RIPENESS THE #1 OPPORTUNITY to grow sales.

## A Closer Look at Misionero Crispy Harvest Blends

UP CLOSE

By Chandler James

hoppers seeking out texture, freshness, and plate appeal will be overjoyed to find Misionero's new Crispy Harvest Blends on retail shelves. Available in both conventional and organic varieties, these recently launched lettuce offerings are sure to capture the attention of consumers.

I, for one, am immediately drawn to the Crispy Green and Red Harvest Blend, as the varying colors and textures would bring new life to my produce-packed fridge. However, I could see the Crispy Green Harvest Blend becoming a kitchen staple just as easily.

Washed and ready to eat, these high-quality blends consist of whole leaf lettuces and 100 percent usable product in each package. While they obviously serve as an excellent base for any salad, they are also perfect for topping sandwiches and burgers, rolled up in wraps, or even used as lettuce cups for a healthier take on many different meals.

If the product name didn't give it away, other key differentiating qualities of these products are their crisp texture and vibrant colors. The texture of fresh produce can make or break any product, and it is clear in this case that the fresh crunch provided by Crispy Harvest Blends is sure to satisfy. Plus, they are visually pleasing on the plate. Say no more.







VOICES OF THE INDUSTRY

VOICES OF THE INDUSTRY



# The Gratitude Supply Chain

### How Appreciation Fuels the Journey from Field to Fork

By Editorial Contributor Julie Marcik, President and Managing Director, Joe Produce Search<sup>sм</sup>

s November arrives, the produce industry enters its busiest season—a time when our work helps bring people together around the table. While we carefully protect the cold chain to preserve freshness and quality, there's another chain that deserves equal focus: the gratitude supply chain.

This "people chain" connects harvest crews, packing teams, sales desks, and everyone in between. When each link feels valued, the results ripple outward—boosting morale, strengthening quality, and enhancing the customer experience at a time of year when it matters most.

### Why Gratitude Matters

When employees feel appreciated, they perform at a higher level. Recognition fuels motivation, strengthens engagement, and creates psychological safety—the foundation of collaboration and problem-solving. These drivers lead directly to measurable outcomes: higher productivity, better quality, lower turnover, and stronger customer satisfaction. Gratitude isn't just seasonal—it's a business strategy.

### The Chain Reaction in Action

Take the example of a Crew Leader in the orchard:

**Step 1: Appreciation builds ownership.** A simple acknowledgment like, "Your crew's picking quality is excellent; there's almost no bruising on this fruit," instills pride and responsibility.

**Step 2: Ownership sparks proactive action.** Instead of just assigning tasks, the Crew Leader coaches a new picker or organizes bins and ladders for a smoother start the next morning.

**Step 3: Proactive action creates quality.** Skilled crews deliver fruit with fewer bruises, less damage, and greater consistency—exactly what the packinghouse needs to produce a premium product.

**Step 4: Valued leaders strengthen operations.** A respected Crew Leader becomes a vital link, sharing field insights with the Farm Manager and identifying workers ready for more responsibility.

That single layer of appreciation sets off a chain reaction that improves quality, strengthens operations, and builds profitability.



The holidays are a natural time to express thanks, but lasting impact comes when appreciation is woven into everyday culture. Leaders can:

- > Make it personal by tailoring recognition to the individual
- > Be consistent in appreciation, which should be part of daily operations, not just annual reviews
- > Empower managers and supervisors with tools to recognize their teams
- > Ask for input in order to learn what types of recognition matter most—time, flexibility, rewards, growth opportunities, etc.



Practical approaches include handwritten notes, team shoutouts, small bonuses or gift cards, extra time off during the holidays, team meals, or opportunities for professional development. The most effective gestures are those that show genuine respect and investment in an employee's future.

The holiday season reminds us of the power of gratitude, but in the produce industry, it should not be reserved for a single time of year. Just as the cold chain protects freshness, the gratitude supply chain protects and strengthens the people who make everything possible.

When employees feel valued, they deliver their best work—from the field to the fork. That makes appreciation one of the smartest investments any leader can make.

### **Extending the Chain**

The effect doesn't stop in the orchard. Packing shed teams handle fruit more carefully when their attention to detail is recognized, ensuring cleaner packs and better arrivals at retail. Sales teams stay motivated when appreciated, building stronger customer relationships and representing the brand with confidence. Retail partners notice fewer claims and rejections, rewarding reliable farms with long-term contracts. Finally, consumers ultimately enjoy better produce at their holiday tables, and that positive experience builds loyalty that lasts well beyond the season.

Julie Marcik leads the JOE Produce Search<sup>SM</sup> team, leveraging more than 20 years of experience in executive search. Produce is not a job, it's a lifestyle. Once you "check the boxes" on skills and experience, the real job becomes matching the people with the culture of the business and leadership. This takes time, expertise, and a robust process Julie and the JOE Produce Search<sup>SM</sup> team know well. JOE Produce Search<sup>SM</sup> is composed of experienced search consultants and produce professionals. Placements range from middle management to C-level positions throughout North America, covering a wide range of produce and produce-related businesses.



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# A LONG STEP STREET OF THE STREET STRE

By Anne Allen

hroughout my years of reporting on the fresh produce industry, I've encountered a central theme: the importance of simplicity. Not simplicity of thought, of course, but simplicity in promise and execution, in knowing that a handshake still means a deal struck.

"The mission at Jasmine Vineyards has always been straightforward: grow exceptional grapes and recognize the people behind our success—our team in the field, our staff, our partners, and the consumers who bring our fruit home," begins Jon Zaninovich.

Jasmine Vineyards' President is happy to walk me through the ways in which the company's approach remains relatively unchanged over the 78 years it's been in business.

"We stay focused on the work in the field, rely on our team's experience, pick at the right time, and make sure what goes out reflects our standards," Jon adds.

This commitment to behind-the-scenes success is one Jasmine Vineyards has always had, but it's an angle it's playing up even more in recent years.

"Our favorite way to do this is still the old-school way: onsite visits," Jon says. "We host buyers the same way my father did—over good food, good wine, and sometimes a long lunch outdoors right here at the ranch."

The company's *Trade Toolkit* is another way it keeps its partners informed.

"The 2025/26 issue offers a closer look at what it really takes to deliver consistent quality—from spring budbreak in the Flame Seedless fields to shoot-thinning Scarlet Royals in April and temperature-tracked shipments bound for long-distance markets like New Zealand. It's packed with the kind of practical, field-level detail buyers rarely get to see—like how winter mulching improves moisture retention and helps us conserve water here in California's San Joaquin Valley," Jon explains.

On the digital side, Jasmine Vineyards utilizes its weekly Fresh Alerts<sup>™</sup> newsletter, as well as social media, to provide real-time updates on what the company is harvesting—including virtual quality inspections that highlight size, color, and brix levels.

"That kind of behind-the-scenes access—seeing our crews in the field, what's being picked, how it's looking, and what's coming next—helps our partners make confident decisions and keep shelves stocked with fruit that moves," Jon remarks. "We also share our own daily quality control reports, so buyers aren't guessing at what's coming—they can see it for themselves."

Three years ago, Jasmine Vineyards celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a milestone that was as much about honoring its Croatian grape-growing roots as it was about those doing the steady work behind the scenes—the team members dedicated to Jasmine's success, season after season, year after year.



"It was also a chance to recommit to the values that got us here: consistency, care, and pride in what we







what's being picked, how it's looking, and what's coming next—helps our partners make confident decisions and keep shelves stocked

with fruit that moves.

JON ZANINOVICH,
President, Jasmine Vineyards





grow," Jon adds. "Hitting 75 years gave us a moment to pause and reflect—not just on how far we've come, but on all the people who've been part of the journey. That includes longtime employees and field crews who put in a full day's work, and live right here in Delano, California, and throughout the San Joaquin Valley—where agriculture isn't just a job, it's a way of life. It also includes retail partners who've been with us for decades. At the end of the day, it's those relationships that stand out."

After farming for nearly eight decades, Jasmine Vineyards knows that consistency matters; that, in fact, this element can be the make or break behind a new partnership, behind a customer coming back to the same brand, over and over.

"It's how we honor our roots while keeping the business moving forward," Jon says.

Vice President Damian Zaninovich is a key element in ensuring consistency across the table grape provider's products.

"He has spent a lifetime walking the vineyard and knows exactly when to pick. His expertise plays a major role in making sure our fruit hits the market at its best," Jon says. "That, combined with strong field management and a deeply experienced crew, helps us stay in step with what's happening on the ground each day. We don't rush fruit to market before it's ready. That steady approach makes a real difference when shelf space is tight and shoppers are looking for fresh fruit they can feel good about putting in the cart."

Consumers today are looking for both flavor and value, and they're not afraid to switch brands to find it.

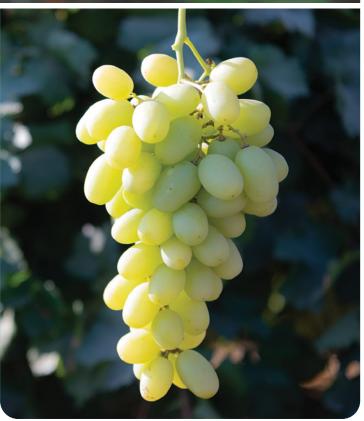
"That's a challenge—but also an opportunity," Jon notes. "When the grapes deliver on both, people come back. We see that in the testimonials we receive every week."

Jasmine Vineyards views driving category growth as a collective effort, with organizations such as the California Table Grape Commission and the California Fresh Fruit Association playing a key role in research, education, and promotional work.

Campaigns like California Grown, Nature's Candy, and The Natural Snack have also helped position California table grapes as a trusted, premium option—both here at home and in international markets.

"As growers, we're proud to support and promote those messages, and we see firsthand the demand they help generate," Jon tells me. "At Jasmine Vineyards, we contribute by staying focused on what we know works: delivering consistently great fruit and making it easy for our partners to do the same. That means reliable supply, flexible pack styles, and clear communication throughout the season."





The company's new M&V label clamshells were well-received this year, with retailers in key export markets reporting strong results.

"It's a clear example of how thoughtful packaging, backed by consistent quality, can help fruit move. At the end of the day, what keeps shoppers coming back is simple: grapes that look great and taste even better. If we can help our retail partners deliver that experience, week after week, we're doing our part to grow the category," Jon concludes.

Jasmine Vineyards is living proof that clear-cut strategies and honest thinking drive momentum, especially in an industry where trust is everything.



and Avocado Oil



### INGREDIENTS

**3 tbsp** Westfalia Fruit Avocado Oil 1 ripe Westfalia Fruit Avocado, diced or sliced

**10 oz (280 g)** spaghetti 3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced ¹/₂−1 tsp red chili flakes (adjust to taste)

½ lemon, juiced Salt and freshly-cracked black pepper, to taste Fresh parsley, chopped (optional) Grated Parmesan or Pecorino (optional)

Prep Time: 10 mins Cook Time: 15 mins Servings: 2-3

### DIRECTIONS

- Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook spaghetti until al dente. Reserve ½ cup pasta water before draining.
- In a large skillet, heat avocado oil over medium heat. Add sliced garlic and cook gently until golden and fragrant. Add chili flakes and stir for 30 seconds.
- Add drained pasta directly to skillet with oil. Toss to coat, adding a splash of reserved pasta water if it looks dry.
- A Gently fold in diced avocado and a squeeze of lemon juice. Season with salt and black
- Top with fresh parsley and, if desired, a sprinkle of Parmesan. Serve warm. Enjoy!

To learn more about Westfalia Fruit, visit www.westfaliafruit.com





### **▶ MY FAVORITE THINGS ◀**

### KIRA NAVISON,

### DIRECTOR OF MARKETING. SCATTAGLIA GROWERS & SHIPPERS

With Jordan Okumura-Wright

rom a cool treat to an even cooler fashion find, Kira Navison embraces fulfilling experiences in everything she does—and shares that spark with everyone around her. It's no surprise that her contagious spirit resonates throughout the fresh produce industry as well. When we think of our My Favorite Things column, this Director of Marketing fits the bill perfectly...



**AND FRIENDS** Good company makes everything better.



I love being out on the water; fun and relaxing all at the same time.



I'm a big fan of sunny days, so summer is naturally my favorite season.



Nature is the best; whether I'm in the mountains, at the beach, or anywhere in between.



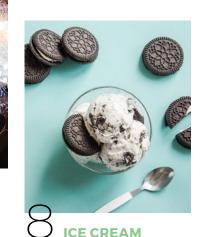
**STONEFRUIT** Anyone could probably have guessed this one!



I fall in love with nearly every shirt, dress, purse, and pair of shoes I see.



Good vibes and great music; pretty much all that's needed!



Nothing beats a sweet treat, specifically a bowl of Cookies and Cream ice cream.

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# $\begin{array}{c} \text{DOIDOWITH} \\ \text{what the fork} \end{array}$

Homegrown Organic Farms Lemons and Berries ?



### INGREDIENTS

CRUST

1 cup crushed graham crackers

**1 cup** crushed pretzels

**6 tbsp** salted butter, melted

2 tbsp honey

FILLING

1/3 cup honey

2 tbsp Homegrown Organic

Farms Lemon zest ¹/3 cup Homegrown Organic

Farms Lemon juice

1 tsp vanilla extract

TOPPINGS

**1 cup** fresh Homegrown

Organic Farms Blueberries 1 cup Homegrown Organic

Farms Blackberries

1 tsp Homegrown Organic Farms Lemon zest (optional) **Prep Time:** 10 mins Cook Time: 15 mins Chill Time: 1 hr Servings: 8

### **DIRECTIONS**

- Preheat oven to 350° F. Add graham crackers and pretzels to food processor and pulse until crumbly. Add butter and 2 tbsp honey, then pulse until mixture holds together like dough.
- Press into an 8" or 9" tart pan with a removable bottom. Bake for about 8 minutes until lightly toasted.
- In a large pot, heat heavy cream,

remaining 1/3 cup honey, and lemon zest over high heat until boiling. Boil for 5 minutes, then remove from heat and whisk in lemon juice, vanilla, and a pinch of salt. Let cool for 10 minutes.

Pour lemon cream into crust, cover, and chill for 1 hour or until set. Before serving, carefully remove tart from pan and top with fresh berries and lemon zest. Enjoy!



To learn more about Homegrown Organic Farms, visit www.hgofarms.com





Vice President of Berries, Mastronardi Produce®

"November marks an exciting shift in the berry category as premium varieties take center stage. WOW™ Strawberries return with their signature quality, elevating the category from fall through spring. Meanwhile, WOW Joyberry® Blueberries, exclusively featuring the Sekoya variety, offer a standout flavor experience for consumers seeking something special. The upcoming launch of the Organic Joyberry will further expand premium options. Retailers should spotlight these modern varieties, as shoppers are increasingly choosing berries

based on taste and size. We're also looking forward to the launch of the Summer Blast™ Blueberry snacking cup, perfectly timed for lunchboxes and holiday gatherings. The snacking cup includes bite-sized bursts of our popular blueberry varieties in a convenient grab-and-go format. As we look ahead to 2026 and shifting global supply dynamics, it's more important than ever for retailers to curate berry assortments that reflect both quality and consumer preference."



Vice President of Sales, California Giant Berry Farms

"November is a great time of year for fresh berries to bring a vibrant pop of color to the produce aisle. Raspberries, along with their berry patch companions—strawberries, blueberries, and blackberries—present a prime merchandising opportunity for stores. By creating inviting displays, retailers can show customers that berries are a delicious and easy addition to their holiday menu.



For chefs and home cooks, berries offer a refreshing contrast to the rich, savory flavors of a traditional Thanksgiving meal. A simple, elegant side of fresh raspberries and blueberries, or a beautiful topping for a cheesecake, adds a bright note. They also make a festive and wonderful base for dressings and sauces or a garnish for holiday cocktails. By showcasing the versatility of these berries for both sweet and savory uses, retailers can inspire customers and boost sales."

### JIM ROBERTS, President, Naturipe Farms

"Berries aren't just for summer—they're showstoppers all year! November is the perfect time to spotlight strawberries and raspberries. These vibrant, mouthwatering berries bring a pop of color to produce departments and an easy sales lift for retailers. Shoppers love discovering how well they pair with fall favorites, whether topping pumpkin pancakes, mixing into apple crisps, or adding a fresh twist to holiday spreads. Place berries front and center, crossmerchandise with bakery or dairy for seasonal inspiration, and don't be afraid

to showcase them in multiple locations. When retailers position strawberries and raspberries as must-haves for fall meals, holiday entertaining, and healthy snacking, they not only drive impulse purchases but also remind shoppers that berries are a category they can count on year-round.

Naturipe's Sweet Selections premium berries deliver the quality shoppers expect and the flavor they crave. And keep an eye out—Naturipe's Mighty Blues, our jumbo blueberries, are set to be big, bold, and delicious, capturing shopper attention and driving repeat sales. At Naturipe, we know berries bring the flavor, inspiration, and excitement retailers need to keep produce departments fresh and shoppers coming back for more."





JORGE AMBRIZ, Ranch Manager, Bobalu

"Our highest priority is quality here at Bobalu. While the No. 1 variety for production in winter is known as Lassen Canyon, Bobalu experiments with other varieties in the winter, such as BG367 to increase production speed. There are three things we strive for to have a successful strawberry business: treat employees well, pay them well, and have good production. My best merchandising tip for retailers would be to focus on an abundant and captivating display. Display strawberry clamshells with a top view to showcase our uniquely beautiful packing technique. California berries specifically are held to a high standard, and ours are simply the best!"



Vice President of Sales and Procurement, North Bay Produce

"November is a great month to promote blueberries from Peru, especially the Sekoya™ varieties of Pop® 'FCM14-052' and Beauty® 'FCM12-097' from North Bay Produce. These varietals are a perfect fit for the Jumbo 9.8 oz pack and provide a premium eating experience in texture and flavor. November is the month these berries will be in abundant supply and readily available—both in organic and conventional presentations. Look for North Bay's RÉSERVE® branding to ensure your premium eating experience."



TRENT ETCHANDY,
Vice President of Sales, Gem-Pack Berries

"Berries are expected to be stocked on the shelves for consumers year-round, but especially as we go into the holiday season. Historically, the month of November has proven to be one of the shorter supply months of the year for strawberries. However, as one of the fastest-growing shippers in the industry, Gem-Pack strategically supports continuing demand by incorporating innovative and flavorful proprietary varieties across several growing regions and berry types to ensure year-round availability. We hold quality, taste, and

and berry types to ensure year-round availability. We hold quality, taste, and consistent deliverability as our top priorities, even during the slower months leading into peak demand, to maintain consumer loyalty and buying consistency."

### RYAN FRONKE,

Blueberry Category Manager, Homegrown Organic Farms

"Berries continue to be one of the most reliable basket builders in the produce department, and the opportunity for retailers this November is to lean into programs that deliver both volume and eating quality. At Homegrown, we've launched a new import blueberry program from Peru, available in both organic and conventional, with promotable supply throughout the month. This is a prime time to feature blueberries in prominent, colorful displays, crossmerchandised with seasonal items to encourage multiple purchases.



We've also expanded our organic blackberry program with the premium 'Erandira' variety, known for its consistent flavor and quality. Secondary organic displays or callouts at point-of-sale are excellent ways to capture shoppers who prioritize taste and trust in the organic label. Looking ahead, we'll soon add strawberries and raspberries to the Homegrown berry patch, each chosen with our flavor-first philosophy. In a competitive category like berries, great flavor paired with thoughtful merchandising is what keeps the category strong year-round."

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Mucci COX FARMS®





### A TRILOGY

three-fold approach is one that proves itself across disciplines from mathematics to linguistics. In communication, the Rule of Three promises structure, rhythm, and completeness—a critical message wrapped in ideological sugars and spice. In storytelling, there is the before, the arc, and the after: A status quo accepted by the characters but in need of change; a disruption that upturns the comfortable; the new and promising direction that brings closure as the hero rides off into the horizon.

Disruption makes for a great page-turner, but it is a twosided coin. You have to be willing to break a few eggs to make an innovation omelette, and one ready to get cracking is Cox Farms. But to upend the normal will take more than itself.

"Retailers need a steady stream of items at a low price point; they also want to have differentiated products on the shelf to drive consumers into their stores. We can offer both," Steve Bradley, President of Cox Farms, explained of the task he and a trilogic team have undertaken.

Cox Farms. BrightFarms. Mucci Farms. Three prongs branching out in a unified vision to bring necessary changes to the North American food system. Three brands completing a trilateral approach to a fresh idea of produce business.

Cox Farms' infrastructure investment strategy and owner/ operator status ensure a unique level of control in a traditionally unruly business environment. Finding strength in the power of three, the company prepared to dislodge the norm by acquiring different brands to match different needs, bringing a fresh lift to the food system.



STEVE BRADLEY, President, Cox Farms

"Our vision for the Cox Farms Family of Businesses is to offer a comprehensive, year-round produce solution by uniting the strengths of Mucci Farms and BrightFarms. Together, we bring the best in greenhouse-grown vine crops, leafy greens, and salad kits under one umbrella. We empower our retail partners to become true produce destinations with a consistent supply of fresh, clean, and flavorful products 365 days a year,"

Steve summed up. "We are growing the largest greenhouse farm operation in North America. That is important because it allows us to offer efficiencies in price, consistent supply, and to ship more local produce so we reduce the number of miles fresh food is trucked from farm to table."

### LOCATION, TRACEABILITY, **TECHNOLOGY**

**LOCATION:** Being as close as possible to minimize travel time to distribution centers and population centers, giving time back for shelflife in-store and at home

TRACEABILITY: Modern-day shoppers and retailers are curious about where food is grown, ensuring produce quality and reliability of supply

**TECHNOLOGY:** Consistently fresh and great-tasting produce from first bud to first bite happens within advanced greenhouses

So, how do the pieces fit together? Complementary companions in a woven network of resources and strategic support, Steve begins to navigate.

"As the parent company for both Mucci Farms and BrightFarms, Cox Farms' goal is to ensure a consistent and sustainable food supply for generations to come. We bring together the most technologically advanced greenhouses, the best performing consumer brands, and the strength and ingenuity of the Cox Family of Businesses, fortifying a defense against modern-day farming challenges and consumer demands," Steve stated when describing the bigpicture goal uniting three names into one vision.

As part of the Cox Farms leadership team, Abby Prior, Chief Commercial Officer, will bring together the strength of three into one powerful offering to level-up fresh produce to benefit retailers, consumers, and the planet.

"With Mucci Farms and BrightFarms now coming together more clearly under the Cox Farms banner, our goal is to show customers the strength of a united approach," Abby said. "Each company brings unique strengths to the table, and together we offer a more complete solution for fresh produce grown in controlled environments."



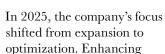
**ABBY PRIOR,** Chief Commercial Officer, Cox Farms

**CHAPTER TWO** 

### MUCCI FARMS

024 was a landmark year for Mucci Farms, defined by bold expansion and strategic acquisitions. Not only did the team proudly welcome Hacienda Farms and Greenhill Produce into its portfolio—contributing a combined 310 acres to its bell pepper program—but it celebrated solidifying its position geographically.

"We achieved having the largest owned acreage of bell pepper farms in the North American greenhouse industry. We also grew our indoor strawberry acreage by 33 acres, bringing our total to 105 acres, further cementing our leadership in controlled environment berry production," Joe Spano, Managing Partner and Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Mucci Farms, observed.



operational efficiency and turning inward to build on what it accomplished, the team committed to refining internal systems, investing in infrastructure, and leveraging scale to drive even more value for partners and customers.

"It's not just about growing more. It is about growing in a smarter and more efficient way," Joe clarified. "As part of the broader Cox Farms family, Mucci Farms is growing with a stronger focus on collaboration, innovation, and operational efficiency. Being aligned with a larger vision gives us access to new capabilities in areas such as supply chain, data systems, and research and development. This connection enables us to serve customers across North America with a wider range of products, a more consistent supply, and deeper expertise. By working together, we are creating new opportunities in controlled environment agriculture and looking to be at the forefront of nontraditional approaches to finding efficiencies."



### **BRIGHTFARMS**

ibling similarities stretch to the BrightFarms banner, which drove growth and scaling efforts to ensure consistent, reliable delivery of high-quality greens and expansion into new markets.

"Our newest facility marks a major milestone in both scale and reach. With this expansion, we can now deliver our pesticide-free leafy greens to nearly two-thirds of the U.S. population," Jessica Soare, Vice President of Marketing for BrightFarms, shared. "It also allows us to enter new markets across the South Central, Southwest, and Southeast regions while expanding our capacity to support existing partners along the East Coast and in the

This year, the BrightFarms network spans 27 acres under glass, nearly double the 14 acres it had last year. Each greenhouse is state-of-the-art and fully automated, with touch-free technology to ensure safety and quality. More importantly, Jessica emphasized that every facility reflects a long-term commitment to the communities BrightFarms and its family of companies serve, with the ability to triple capacity as demand continues to grow.

"As a brand, we've continued to evolve our packaging to meet consumers where they are, educating them on the unique value of the category while using bold,



Marketing, BrightFarms

curiosity and invite them to learn more," Jessica explained. "BrightFarms is committed to giving consumers the freshest, tastiest, most responsibly grown produce, and we believe greenhouse-grown is the best way to deliver on that promise. As more shoppers embrace greenhouse-grown food, it has become closely associated with freshness, value, longer shelf-life, and local sourcing."

In the interest of bringing freshness and purpose to the forefront of its retail presence, BrightFarms' new packaging features a Freshness Guarantee that highlights extended shelf-life, a clearly visible best-by date on the top of the pack, and messaging that reinforces the benefits of greenhouse-grown produce for people and the planet.

"Looking ahead, our strategy is straightforward: We will go where the demand is," Jessica assured me. "Wherever consumers are seeking greenhouse-grown leafy greens, that is where we plan to expand. This includes growing our footprint in the regions where we have recently established greenhouse hubs, with plans to add more modules and more acres in key areas like Georgia, Texas, and Illinois."



### THREE-FOLD

he foundational message from all these voices is simple: We are stronger together.

"We are committed to delivering more value through a shared vision, innovation, and collaboration. We have a unique capability in greenhouse growing," Steve observed, explaining that access and understanding are the true rewards of this sprawling new CEA family. "We are now able to trace a product back to its originmeaning, the state, greenhouse, and even the plant it came from. Our geographic footprint from East to West enables us to be sharp on price, while providing consistent quality 365 days a year and the ability to bring transparency, technology, and product innovation to the next level."

We all know a story that doesn't change is stagnant. Disruption, though complicated, even uncomfortable, is necessary to turn the page. Cox Farms and its collective brands, through collaboration and innovation, bring the story forward—closer to a new horizon. So that a new story may begin. 6









JOE SPANO,

Managing Partner and

Vice President

of Sales and Marketing,

Mucci Farms



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

4Earth Farms™ Organic Jalapeño Peppers



#### INGREDIENTS

**12** fresh 4Earth Farms<sup>™</sup> Organic Jalapeño Peppers

8 oz full-fat brick cream cheese, softened to room temperature

½ cup Parmesan cheese, grated 1 cup Cheddar cheese, shredded

1 clove garlic, chopped

1/2 tsp smoked paprika

12 slices bacon, cut in half

**Prep Time:** 20 mins Cook Time: 25 mins Servings: 24



#### **DIRECTIONS**

- Preheat oven to 400° F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or silicone baking mat and set aside.
- Cut Jalapeño peppers in half lengthwise; remove seeds and center membrane, set aside.
- Using a handheld or stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat cream cheese, Cheddar cheese, garlic, and paprika together until combined.
- Spoon fill each Jalapeño half with mixture.
- 5 Place a piece of bacon on prepared Jalapeño and secure with toothpick. Place each on the baking sheet and bake for 25–28 minutes until bacon is cooked to your liking.
- Turn oven to broil for the last minute or two to get them extra crispy. Enjoy!

To learn more about 4Earth Farms<sup>™</sup>, visit www.4earthfarms.com

#### A Closer Look at **Monterey Mushrooms Umami Stir Fry Blend**

**UP**CLOSE

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

dventure is just a blend away That is the message retailers can convey to their shoppers with the inspirational new Umami Stir Fry Blend from Monterey Mushrooms.

Transparently top sealed but communicative, the combination of pre-sliced Shiitake, Oyster, and Baby Bella mushrooms is ready to help consumers tap into the fifth taste, going beyond the standard sweet, sour, bitter, and salty flavors found in the fresh aisles. Minimalist-styled text tells prospective shoppers that this ready-to-cook blend is great not only for stir-fries, as implied by the name, but also for soups and roasts.

Is it just me, or can you almost smell this blend already filling the house as autumn and winter cooking begin?

Available in a 6 oz pack, the Umami Stir Fry Blend brings not just a new flavor to the fridge and pan, but a great introduction to multiple mushroom varieties and how they can play together.

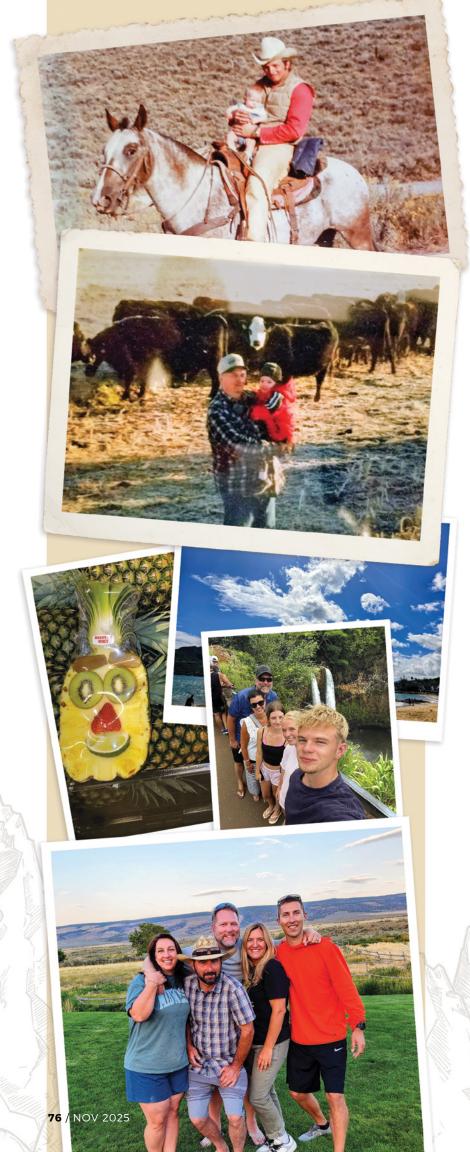
We who are in the know are aware that Umami describes the savory

notes a diner's palate picks up in their food, but it is still a concept being solidified for the average consumer. As a natural flavor enhancer found in ingredients like aged cheese, broths, and, of course, mushrooms, cross-merchandising can help further enhance shoppers' experience and broaden their flavor horizons-likewise diversifying their spend in the produce department and beyond.

Help get your customers out of their comfort zones and onto the umami train with this tastv. convenient opportunity. §







here are few retailers who can genuinely lay claim to being stewards of the land; to having dug their hands into the dirt of a home ranch as children, or ridden horseback with their father as he mended fences and tended cattle. For Chris Keetch, Director of Produce and Floral at The GIANT Company, the mystique often surrounding the retail buying community simply doesn't fit. He is as much at home walking beneath the trellises of a grape vineyard in California as he is at a desk—both roles required, both carrying their own weight. His personality is big, his presence magnetic, but it's his dedication—and his commitment to hard work—that ground him. Chris is fluent not only in the language of produce, but also in the language of people.

That fluency was seeded early.

Speaking with Chris, he tells me how growing up in a farming family in Southern Idaho gave him a natural affinity for fresh produce. While the conversation flows back and forth, he homes in on the reason behind his love for the industry and all it produces.

"For me, 'family' is the keyword here," Chris begins. "I have participated in many interviews and panels, but haven't put enough emphasis on the impact of that word as it applies to me personally and professionally. I look at growing up in a farming family as a privilege. In addition to engraining the 'you have to work hard for what you get' mentality, I learned early on that farmers feed the world, and to be a part of that in every stage of my career thus far is mind-blowing. When I went off to college, I had the opportunity to start as a part-time Produce Clerk at the local Albertsons store. As I progressed through my store experience from Clerk to Manager, my upbringing influenced how I interacted with customers and leadership, and ultimately shaped how I coached, trained, and developed those with whom I worked. My work family was and is my new farm family."

Family and farming shaped his worldview, and they also shaped his leadership philosophy. Chris speaks of passion in this industry as an extension of himself, but what also comes to mind when I speak to him, even more so than that beautiful word, is devotion—an enduring loyalty, a deep-seated duty, and a deliberate desire to pull those around him into the fray.

From growing up on a ranch, tending the work with his grandfather and father, to time spent with his siblings and family, Chris Keetch has a diverse range of experiences, lessons learned, and stories that inform the way he leads and lives "Whenever I have the opportunity to speak to a group, I preach about approaching the business with passion. Everything else can be taught, but admittedly, I cannot teach the passion it takes to have a long and successful career in produce. I believe that is why we see 50-plusyear produce veterans and those just coming in who know they will stay from the onset—its contagious and lasting," Chris describes. "Produce can be a very complex and demanding field, with everything that goes into planting a field and delivering the harvest to a store, and ultimately the customer's fridge. I love that aspect of the end-to-end. Give me somebody with the passion to learn and embrace the business, and I will teach them all the in-betweens."

Just as others once guided him, he now pours that same devotion into the next generation. This conviction and drive to fill the paths of his colleagues and the next generation of produce professionals with experience, guidance, and also freedom, is something that was gifted to him throughout his time in the industry.

"There were so many key turning points as I was coming up and finding my way. Some were course corrections, others were reaffirmations of the direction I was headed—even if I didn't know it early on! Although experience can teach you what or what not to do, much of my journey is tied to leaders who guided and supported me and others along the way," Chris says. "I know I'm leaving numerous people out, but key influences started with my father. Jim Frank and Keith Hahn at Albertsons were two early advocates who championed my growth. At The GIANT Company, John Ruane, Dave Lessard, Rebecca Lupfer, and Brian Lorenz have been pillars of support and advice. Every word has influenced me in some way."

Each piece of advice has been sustenance for his growing appetite for knowledge, wisdom, clarity, and direction. And as you might expect, the table he sets for this meal of experience and devotion has an endless number of seats.

Leadership, for Chris, is lived as much as it is spoken. I tell him he has built a reputation for being hands-on and deeply committed to his team, suppliers, and customers. He smiles when I ask him if he can tell me a story that paints the picture of his leadership.

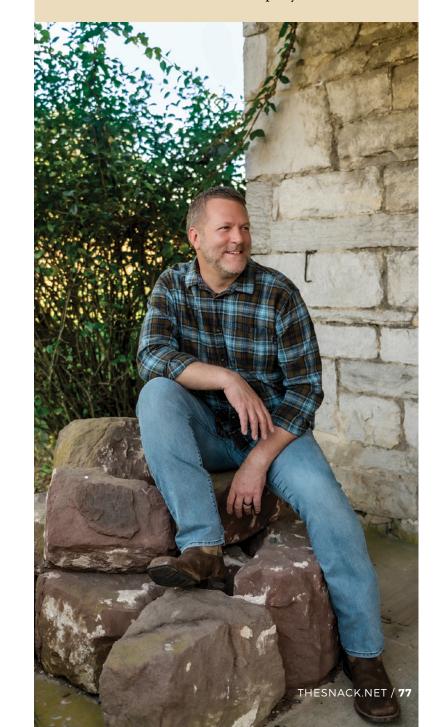
"That's a tricky question, as hands-on can be confused with micromanaging. Our business is built on promises to our team, to our customers, and to our suppliers," he starts. "In short, I encourage my team to deliver what we say we're going to deliver—quality, value, assortment, and consistency. If there is any break in that chain from the field to the fridge, we have failed."

Chris then takes me back five years to when COVID made its debut in our lives. No one could have anticipated the global repercussions, let alone the community impacts that rippled through each household of each team member.

"I look at growing up in a farming family as a privilege. In addition to engraining the 'you have to work hard for what you get' mentality, I learned early on that *FARMERS FEED THE WORLD*, and to be a part of that in every stage of my career thus far is mind-blowing."

CHRIS KEETCH,

Director of Produce and Floral, The GIANT Company





Chris Keetch attributes The GIANT Company's continued success to the strength of the team and its differentiating and innovative vision

"Although there are daily and seasonal challenges with Mother Nature, the pandemic really tested our commitment to all four of our promises. It was a time of uncertainty, and things were changing constantly, but I am proud of the level of service we provided despite the circumstances," he reflects. "The GIANT Company's produce department did not cut assortment, in addition to strengthening standing relationships, we also stepped up to help suppliers in the traditional foodservice business to move the product they needed to."

That season of trial became another touchstone, another lesson etched into his career. With over three decades in the industry, Chris has witnessed a great deal. Each of those experiences gave Chris' path shape, with many of these gifts remaining compass points along the way.

"Never stop learning, surround yourself with a great team, teach and coach vision, connect with other experts and leaders, break boundaries, and be yourself. Always find a way to be yourself. People will gravitate toward you if they know you are being authentic. Even if it's hard," Chris says. "I am very driven, sometimes to a fault, to ensure everything and everyone is in a good place. 'Coach, train, develop' was something I learned very early on, in life and in business. Do those three things correctly, then trust that everything comes together with positive results. I am passionate about ensuring 'bench strength' or the 'next person up.' There's not much difference between managing and putting your child on a bike and watching them ride, or sending them off to college and knowing they'll be okay."

The "live it, love it, and embrace it" philosophy that continues to pay dividends in Chris' journey can be seen not just in his professional life, but also in his personal life.

"My wife, Tanya, and six kids—Christian, Ethan, Aspyn, Sydney, Aydan, and Taylor—are my rocks and the reason to get up and face every day with vigor," Chris says with such love and humility that it stops you in your tracks. "From home life to work life, I have the privilege to work with and lead a team that supports a very large business—194 stores and 35,000-plus team members. I am blessed—I would call it lucky—to have this career. To have so many leaders who chose me, coached me, and stuck by me; to meet so many people; to visit so many stores and interact with customers and team members alike. To see so many farms and operations."

With such a high level of energy and adoration focused on the people in his life, it's hard to believe he has time for anything else. But he is Chris, so, of course, he does.

"I love dirt bikes, 4x4'ing through the sagebrush, skiing, mountain biking, and boating. As my older knees and back started screaming, those calls to the great outdoors turned more into travel, which was new to me. I had never been east of Colorado before I moved to Pennsylvania, never had a passport until I met my wife from Canada!" he laughs. "Now, Caribbean cruises, Virginia Beach, and Hawaii are my and my wife's 'happy places.' All are on our annual list of vacation destinations. The rest of the bucket list includes places like Ireland, Australia, and, maybe, some place where I will actually not have cell service."

In the end, Chris' story comes full circle. From riding beside his grandfather, father, and other family on the ranch to walking the rows of vineyards and guiding a team that serves millions of families each week, his path has always been rooted in the same soil. For him, produce isn't just a business—it's a birthright, a responsibility, and a privilege. And whether in the field, at the desk, or with his family, Chris remains what he has always been: a steward of the land, grounded by hard work, authenticity, and devotion.



OFF THE SHELF OFF THE SHELF

# THE By Peggy Packer



Store #354

Cashier: 07

RECEIPT # 656788014

t seems 2025 may be the year of "the budget shopper." With concerns about inflation and potentially rising prices reshaping consumers' mentalities around spending, changes to shoppers' traditional grocery lists are bound to occur, even as the pressures continue to ease. In fact, 87 percent of American consumers have reported a change in how they shop to manage expenses, whether that be seeking lower prices (82 percent), reducing overall spending (67 percent), switching products or brands (66 percent), changing stores (56 percent), or adjusting product sizes (50 percent)\*.

With this shift in consumer behavior comes an opportunity for retailers to appeal to the budget shopper, continuing to maximize produce dollars amid this low-spending era.

This does not mean we simply need to offer fruits and vegetables at a lower price; it's still vital that we support our suppliers' and their grower partners' bottom lines if we want to maintain industry growth. However, various key strategies can be implemented to keep dollars in the fresh department at a time when shoppers are looking to lower or maintain their average grocery spend.

How we achieve this varies by strategy, region, and retailer. In the International Fresh Produce Association's (IFPA) 2025 State of the Industry Report, promotions, discounts, and pricing tiers are just a few ways to ensure produce is front and center for all consumers, including those who are looking to be more frugal in 2025\*.

#### APPROVED

\* THANK YOU FOR COMING \*



#### PRODUCE PULSE DEPOT

OPEN 8AM TO 9PM DAILY

LANE: 08

CLERK: AVI

SALE TRANSACTION

Beyond pricing plays, retailers can use simplicity in their merchandising strategies to cater to the budget-conscious shopper. This includes promoting or crossmerchandising items that together make a simple, cost-effective, and healthy meal. One example of this is Raley's recent *Easy* Eats campaign, which points consumers to pre-prepped produce and other freshforward dishes with the promise of value and convenience\*\*. Even sharing simple yet produce-packed recipes on social media can help maintain strong demand, reminding consumers that they don't have to compromise on nutrition to keep some extra money in their pockets.

As more consumers embrace this momentary shift, the value-added sector continues to hold weight due to its convenience and price point, especially when it can minimize a shopper's list by removing other ingredients like sauces and seasonings. As the IFPA report noted, "value products within produce and floral can lure consumers to purchase new and different products," serving as a gateway for new customers.

While the strategies for doing so vary widely, meeting consumers where they are while grocery budgets may be running a bit slimmer, is a long-term investment in consumer loyalty. When their budgets inevitably rise again, those same shoppers will continue to return with a much bigger basket and more dollars to spend.

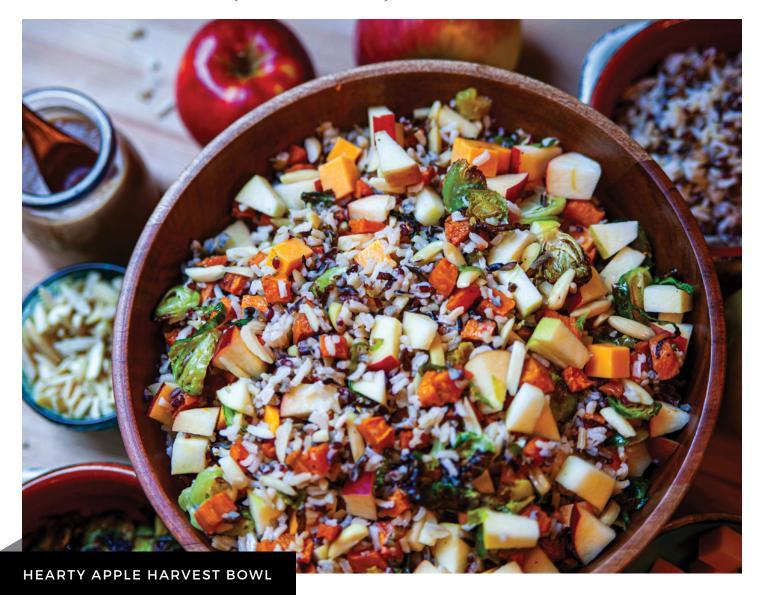
\*\* THANK YOU \*\*





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Rice Fruit Company Apples



#### **INGREDIENTS**

**3** Rice Fruit Company Apples of choice (we love a mix!), cored and cubed

1 cup wild rice, cooked

**3 cups** sweet potatoes, roasted

1 cup Brussels sprouts, roasted

1/2 cup Cheddar cheese, cubed

1/2 cup slivered almonds

#### DRESSING

½ cup oil

1/4 cup balsamic vinegar

2 cloves fresh garlic

**2 tbsp** honey

1 tbsp Dijon mustard

Salt and pepper

\*blend together

**Prep Time:** 20 mins Cook Time: 30 mins

Servings: 8-10

#### DIRECTIONS

- Preheat oven to 400° F degrees.
- Cook wild rice according to directions. Typically, it is a 1:2 ratio of rice to water (or broth). Fluff with a fork and set aside to cool.
- While rice is cooking, peel and chop sweet potatoes. Toss with oil and desired spices. Place on a greased baking sheet. Roast for 15–20 minutes, or until sweet potatoes are fork-tender, stirring halfway through. Set aside to cool.
- 4 Toss Brussels sprouts with oil, salt, and pepper and roast for 8–10 minutes. Set aside to cool. The sweet potatoes and Brussels should be ready around the same time as
- Mix rice, sweet potatoes, Brussels sprouts, apples, cheese, almonds, and dressing in a bowl. Enjoy!



To learn more about Rice Fruit Company, visit www.ricefruit.com



The Journey of

## **NREADYCYCLE®**

sustainable packaging



### WTT DOIDOWITH Hunnyz™ Apples ? { what the fork }



#### **INGREDIENTS**

SALAD

**2 medium** Hunnyz<sup>™</sup> Apples, thinly sliced (leave skin on for color)

**6 cups** fresh baby spinach leaves, washed and dried

1/2 cup walnut halves, lightly toasted

½ **cup** dried cranberries

1/3 cup crumbled feta cheese or goat cheese

#### DRESSING

**3 tbsp** extra-virgin olive oil

**2 tbsp** apple cider vinegar

**1 tbsp** pure maple syrup or honey

1 tsp Dijon mustard

1/4 **tsp** ground cinnamon Salt and pepper, to taste

**Prep Time:** 10 mins Servings: 2



To learn more about Gee Whiz<sup>®</sup>, visit www.GeeWhizfruit.com

#### **DIRECTIONS**

In a small jar or bowl, whisk together olive oil, apple cider vinegar, maple syrup, Dijon mustard, cinnamon, salt, and pepper until smooth and emulsified.

Assemble the salad by placing the spinach in a large salad bowl. Arrange Hunnyz™ Apple slices over the greens. Sprinkle with toasted walnuts, dried cranberries, and crumbled feta.

S Drizzle dressing over the salad just before serving. Gently toss to coat or serve with dressing on the side. Enjoy!





Homegrown Organic Farms was created nearly a decade after our founders transitioned their family farm to organic practices in 1989. They were early pioneers among California's citrus growers as they embraced organic methods, driven by their commitment to care for the land and people. Today, we carry forward the same passion, representing more than 100 organic growers covering over 8,000 acres of organic fresh fruit.



he breadth and depth of cooperative strength is revealed through execution, foresight, and the ability—both innate and hard-earned—to read a shifting landscape in ways that make the foundation not only solid, but also nimble. Such strength requires a community of like minds as well as diverse perspectives with a unified vision and common values. And it takes leadership with the clarity to see the forest for the trees while honoring the strength of each individual root.

This blend of prowess and stability has defined Markon Cooperative, which—through market challenges, a pandemic, and shifting policies—has learned to behold the eye of the hurricane and harness it.

Now, as Markon marks its  $40^{\rm th}$  anniversary, the story of its legacy is one of industry firsts, unwavering commitment to transparency, and a cooperative model that continues to set the standard for resilience and innovation in produce.





Our membership is made up of privately held, familyowned, multi-billiondollar broadline distributors across North America. Unlike publicly traded or private equity-backed companies, our members bring with them an extraordinary legacy..."

Andy Hamilton, Chief Executive Officer, Markon Cooperative

"It has been an unbelievable first 40 years for Markon. Our company stands apart by taking a holistic approach to our program—one built around consistency and quality," Andy Hamilton, the cooperative's Chief **Executive Officer, shares** with me, diving into Markon's fundamentals. "Our name itself

comes from 'marketing consistency,' which reflects our commitment to delivering excellence not just occasionally, but every day. True greatness in produce doesn't happen by chance; it begins at the very start of the supply chain. That's why our boots-in-the-field inspectors play such a critical role, working directly in the fields to proactively manage harvests. Their expertise builds industry-leading specifications, which help maximize yields, ensure food safety, and guarantee that our members' customers receive produce that is consistently fresh, safe, and of the highest quality."

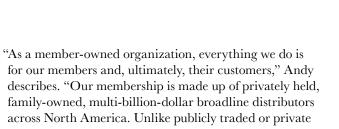
To achieve such strengths takes a collective approach, one Markon has built into its cooperative structure to benefit its members and their customers. Everything Markon takes to task is meant to achieve success and set it apart in meaningful ways; this includes the company's cooperative architecture.

for our members and, ultimately, their customers," Andy describes. "Our membership is made up of privately held, family-owned, multi-billion-dollar broadline distributors across North America. Unlike publicly traded or private equity-backed companies, our members bring with them an extraordinary legacy—on average, each company has been in business for more than 100 years."

by all at the table and fosters a long-term perspective. Rather than focusing on quarterly earnings or the next potential sale, Markon and its members prioritize what service to customers.

**Matt Collins, Director of Purchasing** for the cooperative, breaks down the Markon advantage for me perfectly and it starts with a cohesive, value-driven membership.

"Markon maintains strong relationships with its member distributors through a highly collaborative structure, the Markon Action Committee



This kind of longevity Andy speaks of is cherished truly matters: consistently delivering value, quality, and and fostering trust." Like many things in fresh produce, the relationship is at the heart of the trust factor and emblematic of how its members go to market. "What truly sets the relationship apart is that it goes beyond

(MAC)," he begins. "This committee brings together produce leadership teams from each of our members and

Markon monthly to ensure alignment on strategy and execution. Additionally, we meet in person three times a year, which is crucial for strengthening personal connections

a traditional vendor/buyer dynamic," Matt describes. "While Markon technically serves as a supplier, we are also owned by our members, which means our goals are fully aligned with theirs. We operate with their best interests in mind, fostering a sense of unity that has been instrumental in our long-term success. This shared ownership and commitment to collaboration have enabled us to maintain strong relationships and better serve the membership with their produce needs."



That element of shared ownership goes a long way in building a legacy company. As Mark Shaw, **Vice President of Operations,** reflects, Markon was founded by like-minded foodservice distributors who established that collaborative foundation from its inception in 1985.

"Over our 40-year history, we've maintained that mindset to consistently deliver on quality, food safety, and innovation through our strategic relationships and internal expertise," Mark details. "In 1986, we launched the Markon First Crop brand, the first branded produce for foodservice with measurable quality metrics, setting the new industry standard. Significant advancements in food safety, notably the introduction of stringent grower specifications in 1992 and the comprehensive 5-Star Food Safety® program in 1996, continued to position Markon as a leader. The development of proprietary brands, such as the pre-cut, table-ready Ready-Set-Serve® in 1996, demonstrated our strong commitment to packaging innovation that helps operators reduce labor and waste. The foundational building blocks have let us build our reach and our value."

Today, the company's continued focus on sustainability, technology, and building strong relationships with broadline members and core suppliers further solidifies its reputation for delivering fresh, safe, and convenient produce.

Taking on the food safety imperative, Mark highlighted, was a natural progression for Markon. The operation ensures food safety and traceability from field to fork. And while the process is complex, it is necessary.

"Our team conducts weekly traceback exercises with our suppliers wherein they're expected to provide growing and harvesting data elements; the grower, ranch name, harvest date, pack date, and more, within a two-hour time limit to demonstrate their readiness in the event of an actual food



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Matt Collins, Director of Purchasina, Markon Cooperative

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Over our 40-year history, we've maintained that mindset to consistently deliver on quality, food safety, and innovation through our strategic relationships and internal expertise."

Mark Shaw, Vice President of Operations, Markon Cooperative



safety event," John Galvez, Senior **Director of Quality Assurance** and Food Safety, states. 'We're able to do this because all products sourced through Markon must have lot codes visible to consumers, and branded suppliers must utilize GS1-128 labels that contain lot codes."

Traceability, transparency, food safety...all of these initiatives are not just vehicles for success and achieving long-term vision, they are at the heart of differentiation. Another aspect that sets Markon apart is how the operator works with growers and suppliers to maintain consistent quality and build value for customers.

"We've always made it a priority to have strong relationships with our suppliers. That starts at the field level with growers and field crews, and extends to coolers and value-added processors. The daily interactions our QA inspectors have with all the hard-working people who grow, harvest, and ship Markon products have been the cornerstone to building and maintaining a brand that customers can rely on," John adds.

There is a specific grow-and-supply DNA that Markon draws in with its gravity. The fit must benefit all teams and takes on a multidimensional—if not multidisciplinary effect. Come strong winds, storms, or rough seas, the cooperative's standards hold strong.

"Markon seeks partners who are category leaders in their product arenas and who meet stringent performance expectations across multiple areas, including food safety, quality, and innovation," Mark says. "A successful partner must demonstrate respect toward their own staff and Markon's employees, reflecting Markon's commitment to ethical and responsible practices. Operational excellence is also critical, with suppliers expected to achieve a high fill rate, offer competitive pricing, and maintain a superior service level. Markon also values partners who are proactive and possess market intelligence, staying ahead of industry trends regarding quality, supply, and market swings."

To have such high expectations of its partners, you can only imagine what it expects of its employees and workplace. But that, like most things about Markon, starts at the top.

"At Markon, we believe that People Matter—in fact, it's our very first core value," Nelia Alamo, Vice **President of Marketing, tells** me. "With a close-knit team of around 60 employees, we focus on building a strong, collaborative culture where every individual feels valued. We actively recruit and mentor young

the organization lives this experience."



People matter, and if you benefit from Markon's immense sphere of influence, its distributors and operators do too.

"Supporting foodservice distributors and operators starts with understanding their unique business needs. While our top priority is procuring safe, high-quality produce, we also focus on finding models that fit the foodservice segment. Because fresh produce can be a challenging category for broadline distributors, we emphasize education and collaboration," Nelia describes. "One key initiative is our annual Markon Produce Sales Summit, where we bring sales teams to California's Salinas Valley to meet supplier partners, tour fields and facilities, and gain first-hand

knowledge of the effort that goes into producing fresh, premium products. This experience empowers sales teams to better communicate value and support their operator customers."

With such reach and accountability, Markon is able to benefit not only its family of employees, distributors, partners, and operators, but also its Salinas, California, community.

"Our largest fundraiser, A Taste of Markonnow celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary—raises more than \$30,000 annually for

Rancho Cielo. This effort reflects our core value of Doing the Right Thing and supports the Drummond Culinary Academy, helping train the next generation of chefs in our industry. Beyond this flagship event, we also participate in local initiatives including back-to-school drives and holiday gift programs, reinforcing our commitment to giving back,"

Expanding Markon's legacy into the future incorporates this element of community into its strategic fold, but it is more a matter of the heart at the end of the day, as Andy would say. With such appreciation for how far the company has come firmly in place, Andy pivots the conversation to the next

Supporting foodservice distributors and operators starts with understanding their unique business needs. While our top priority is procuring safe, high-quality produce, we also focus on finding models that fit the foodservice segment."

Nelia Alamo. Vice President of Marketing, Markon Cooperative

next decade. "At Markon, we are always looking ahead to anticipate how the foodservice industry will evolve and how we can deliver the next wave of customer solutions. One area of

steps in Markon's path—

more specifically, where the

company is heading in the

investment we have spoken of is traceability," Andy remarks. "Looking further ahead, we see tremendous opportunity in the use of analytics in agriculture. By connecting operator data back to the field, we can help drive smarter decisions that boost sales and deliver the products customers

want most. At the same time, our internal operations will continue to become more efficient, but never at the expense of our people. Developing talent has always been a cornerstone of Markon's success, and we take great pride in cultivating the next generation of leaders—individuals who are hungry, humble, and smart."

Looking beyond 40 years, the true limits of Markon's growth are impossible to define. What is certain is that, under the guidance of today's leadership and the strength of its cooperative vision, both the forest and the trees are poised for continued growth—deepening roots while reaching toward new horizons.



TRUE TO TASTE TRUE TO TASTE

#### Libations For All Occasions

#### APPLE BOURBON FALL PUNCH



By Melissa De Leon Chavez Photography by Reid Monsma

nyone who has followed my turn at the libations column likely knows by now that I become a bourbon girl as soon as nature's colors start to change. As I was looking for inspiration, my social media feed alighted upon a new twist to my beloved bourbonhot apple cider combo in the form of Apple Bourbon Fall Punch.

Hot in a steaming mug or cold and garnished with a smoking cinnamon stick, this beverage is punch perfection. Borrowing a little summer wisdom and utilizing our industry's hard work to provide berries year-round, I also recommend muddling fresh apple slices and berries as desired to make this even more fresh-forward! Citrus, apples, berries, and bourbon truly craft the ideal treat to embrace shorter days and longer nights without forfeiting sales in the fresh department.

Encourage shoppers to take their produce experience further by adding whole produce to their cups or complementing the drink with a fruit plate of the remaining cut on the side, adding a dash of cinnamon to really bring out the flavor notes. As I seek to stay on the healthy side of indulgence, but indulge nonetheless, I look forward to curling up with fresh fruits on the plate and in the cup thanks to this autumn delight.



Here's how to make it... Prep Time: 10 mins Cook Time: 10 mins

#### **INGREDIENTS**

- **1.5 oz** fresh apple cider 1 oz fresh-squeezed lemon juice
- 2 oz bourbon (Melissa's preference is Buffalo Trace)
- ½ oz maple syrup (Melissa shares WhistlePig® Rye Whiskey Barrel-aged Maple Syrup is a nostalgic favorite) ½ cinnamon stick



#### **DIRECTIONS**

- 1. If hot, combine ingredients—except bourbon—into a saucepan and bring to a boil. Then lower to a simmer for 7-10 minutes. If cold, add all ingredients into a cocktail shaker.
- 2. For hot punch, add bourbon to your favorite mug before pouring in the simmering punch. For cold, set aside a highball glass with desired amount of ice. Add 2-3 ice cubes of ice to cocktail shaker and shake well before pouring into your highball glass.
- 3. Add a couple of pieces of sliced fruit to beverage and garnish with a cinnamon stick. Light cinnamon stick for smoking effect if desired. Enjoy!

Tip: For that extra produce push, consider muddling ½ an apple and a handful of mixed or preferred berries, such as blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, or a combination when mixing ingredients.



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#### A Closer Look at West Pak Avocado Country-of-Origin Bags



By Anne Allen

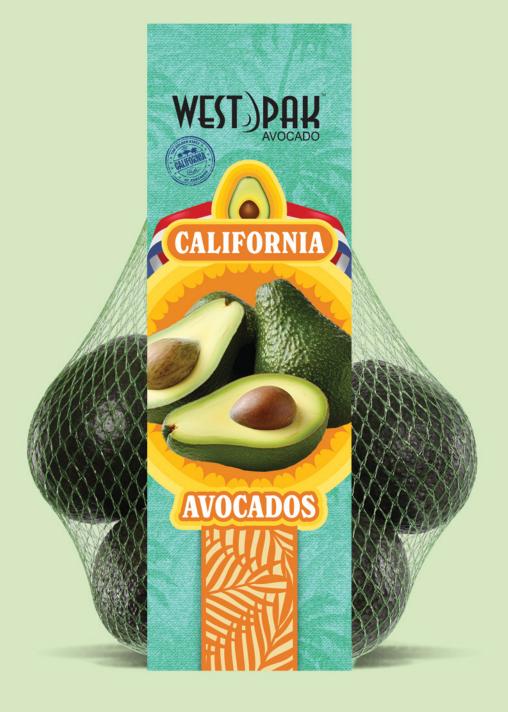
est Pak's new countryof-origin bags are a perfect blend of form and function. They highlight the supplier's belief that they're more than just packaging; they're an extension of West Pak's sourcing and merchandising solutions.

With options from Mexico, California, and Colombia available, retailers can better manage crop transitions while maintaining the freshness that shoppers demand. Additionally, the flexibility of the bag lets buyers align their purchasing behaviors with ever-shifting consumer preferences.

Each bag is colorful and striking in design, paying direct homage to its country of origin. A brief summary of the growing region resides on the back, as well as helpful information regarding the avocado's characteristics and seasonality.

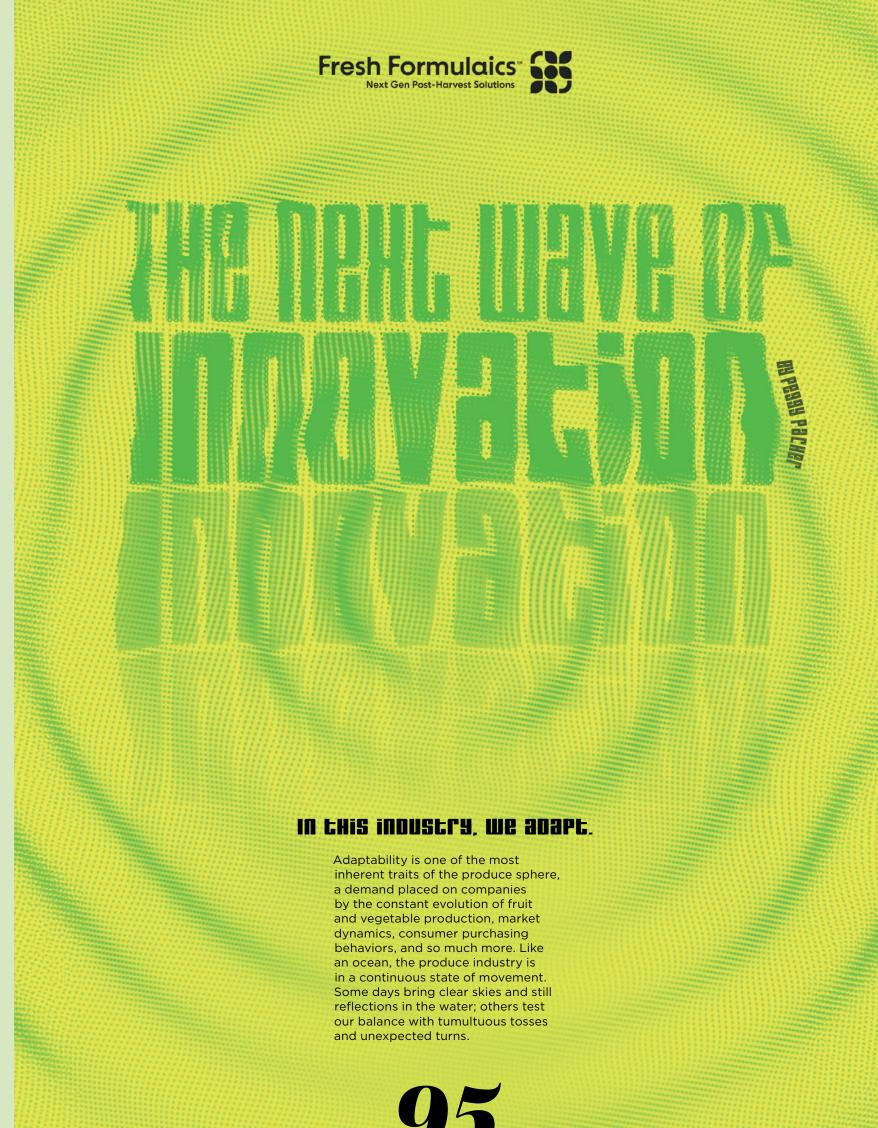
Not only do the bags showcase a global sourcing strategy in action, but they also help consumers gain a clearer understanding of where their fruit originates, promoting trust between retailers and shoppers.

Innovations in packaging like this are what keep the avocado category a dynamic player. §









supply chain?" says Jeff
Kammermeyer, Vice
President of Commercial
Operations. "The supply
chain is extremely complicated,
and there are varying degrees
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within that. One of the things we've
accomplished over time is narrowing
down who exactly our customer is and
focusing on their needs and most prominent
supply chain challenges."

As expected, the tides continue to change, and the industry's needs have shifted year after year, resulting in a new set of challenges and demands. As each wave of innovation passes, another arises shortly after, incentivizing companies to explore more developments in quality, efficiency, sustainability, food waste, and beyond.

"Food waste is experienced differently at each step in the chain, and the solutions you need for that waste vary," adds Peter Allen, Vice President of Product Strategy. "We chose to secure the quality at the front end, as close to the source as possible, and tailor our formulations specifically to the needs of grower/packer/shippers to address food waste from the start of the supply chain."

Through its adept navigation of rising supply chain demands, a partnership with Fresh Formulaics sees a three-to-one return. The company's portfolio not only offers solutions that improve growers' and shippers' bottom lines but also adds to their top lines and provides a useful sustainability metric.

In order to identify the points where Fresh Formulaics' support is needed the most, the company has adopted a more consultative approach to working with its customers. This includes constantly identifying its partners' latest operational challenges to see how they align with its solutions on the market.

"We've been looking at these products through

the lens of attacking and addressing daily needs,

our partners' long-term needs." Peter continues.

tremendously in the long run."

minute to minute, but also the benefit of supporting

"Fresh Formulaics' products provide a sustainability

metric and key indicators that can benefit suppliers

"It's not just showing up once or twice a year to sell a product. It's about how we can better understand your operations and leverage some of our internal expertise to help you think through challenges," Jeff adds, building on this shift in company mentality. "We're taking a more hands-on approach than we've operated in the past. Our business exists to add value to our customers, so we wanted to ensure we could drive meaningful partnerships and adoption within the key categories we're operating in today."

Fresh Formulaics currently supports the citrus and avocado categories, with developmental work beginning in the stonefruit sector. As it further extends the scope of its portfolio, the company is setting out to redefine traditional post-harvest products with next-gen plant-based solutions and smart science.

Fresh Formulaics' collection of plant-based products is designed to balance business needs and performance expectations while providing its partners with a direct pathway to a cleaner and more sustainable supply chain.

"Our mission remains the same: reducing waste and enhancing quality. What has evolved is how we are tailoring our products to address supplier-specific demands and creating value for the supplier while helping their operation run more effectively and efficiently," Peter points out. "We have tailored our solutions to our company mission and the varying needs of our customers."

Committed to being a formidable partner, the provider has submerged itself in supply-side operations to understand its role in making the entire process more efficient and cost-effective.

"Innovation isn't as common in the post-harvest space, and new tools are not often brought forward," Peter continues. "What separates us is our strong and deep innovation pipeline. We're just starting to bring new products to market in a significant way. They're safer, smarter, and more effective. That's the tagline of Fresh Formulaics, and it's true."

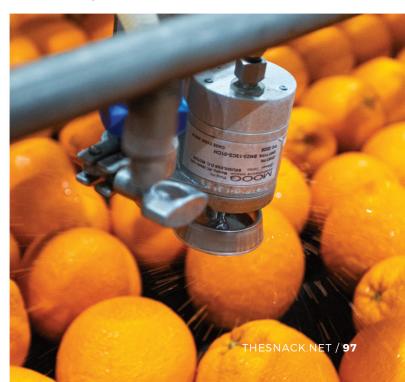
This effort is backed by a team boasting an impressive blend of experience within agriculture and the food



"The supply chain is extremely complicated, and there are varying degrees of touchpoints and priorities within that. One of the things we've accomplished over time is narrowing down who exactly our customer is and focusing on their needs and most prominent supply chain challenges."

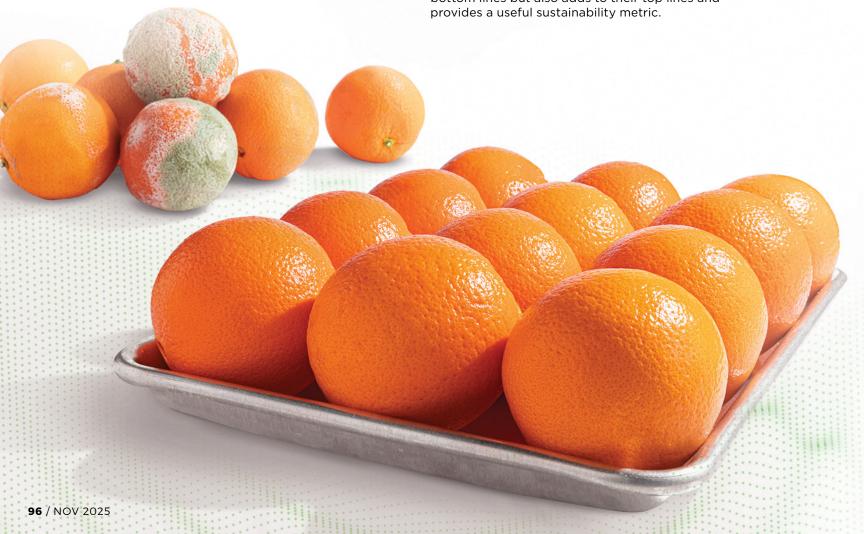
#### - Jeff Kammermeyer.

Vice President of Commercial Operations, Fresh Formulaics



Transforming steadily alongside its partners, Fresh Formulaics is among those pivoting to secure its position before the next massive wave. With a portfolio of plant-based post-harvest formulations designed to reduce spoilage, extend shelf-life, and improve product appearance, the industry innovator harnesses its scientific strength to help growers, packers, and shippers enhance their supply chain efficiency.

"The development of Fresh Formulaics started with a simple goal: How do we create commercial solutions to solve real-world problems in the





- PELET ALLEN, Vice President of Product Strategy, Fresh Formulaics

supply chain. Fresh Formulaics' collective wealth of expertise drives ongoing post-harvest innovation, while the company's commitment to customer centricity forges a path to uncover the next set of industry challenges.

"We are looking at building products that will matter to the customer," adds Jeff, explaining how collaboration is crucial to this goal. "We work hand in hand with customers in their pack houses during the development process, allowing us to solve more problems than we even knew existed because they were often

the quality at the front end, as close to the source as possible, and tailor our formulations specifically to the needs of grower/ packer/shippers to address food waste from the start of the supply chain."

Our operation has become much more customercentric because we're listening, identifying those pain points, and exploring how we can use our plantbased innovations and scientific know-how to create a cleaner, safer, smarter, and more effective product for the industry."

Rounding out our deep dive into the solutions provider's bustling innovation pipeline and reinvigorated approach to customer service, Jeff and Peter perfectly describe Fresh Formulaics' blueprint as a simple balance of expertise and humility.

"We're excited about the products and solutions we can deliver, but at the same time, we must show enough humility and intellectual curiosity to ask the right questions to better understand our business partners' challenges. If one doesn't fit the other, we're not offering the right solutions," Jeff says. "That's a big focus for us as we think about how we interact and engage with our customers."

If there's anything we know about the journey ahead, it's this: Change will be constant. That continuous current of evolution may very well be the source of the challenges our industry must overcome in the future. Simultaneously, it may be the wind in our sails, purposefully pushing us to be better partners, innovators, and fresh trailblazers as we prepare for the next big wave.







# GRAE NGO!

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Grab N' Go grape tomatoes now come in convenient multi-pack options, perfect for quick snacking, stocking up, or sharing.







#### **INGREDIENTS**

#### ROASTED CHERRIES

- 4 cups fresh Dayka & Hackett Dark Sweet Cherries, pitted and halved
- 1 tsp Dayka & Hackett Lemon zest
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp pure maple syrup

#### LEMON RICOTTA

8 oz whole milk ricotta ½ lemon, juiced Zest of **1** lemon Freshly ground salt and pepper, to taste

1 French baguette, cut diagonally into 1/2" slices

#### GARNISH

Fresh basil ribbons

**Prep Time:** 15 mins Cook Time: 30 mins Servings: 18

#### **DIRECTIONS**

- Preheat oven to 350° F. Line baking sheet with parchment paper.
- Add pitted and halved cherries to pan, then drizzle with olive oil, maple syrup, and lemon zest. Toss together, then spread cherries into a single layer. Bake for 25–30 minutes until cherries are nice and juicy.
- In a medium bowl, mix together ricotta, lemon juice, lemon zest, salt, and pepper. Set aside.
- Meanwhile, preheat grill to 400° F or medium-high heat. Grill each side of the crostini for approximately 2 minutes, or until slightly golden brown, watching carefully so the crostini do not burn. Set aside onto a platter. Alternatively, bake crostini for 5–7 minutes at 400° F in oven.
- Once crostini are cool enough to safely handle, top each one with a dollop of lemon ricotta, followed by a spoonful of roasted cherries and their juices. Finish off crostini with a sprinkling of torn basil and a little extra lemon zest. Crostini are best served immediately. Enjoy!

To learn more about Dayka & Hackett, visit www.daykahackett.com





## FRESH ITALIAN Chestnuts







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