Bite-Sized Info for the Produce Industry

the SNACK

ISSUE 79 SEPT 2023

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HIGHLINE MUSHROOMS PG 76

MULTIVERSE of MUSHROOMS

From the creators of
AndNowUKnow and *Deli Market News*

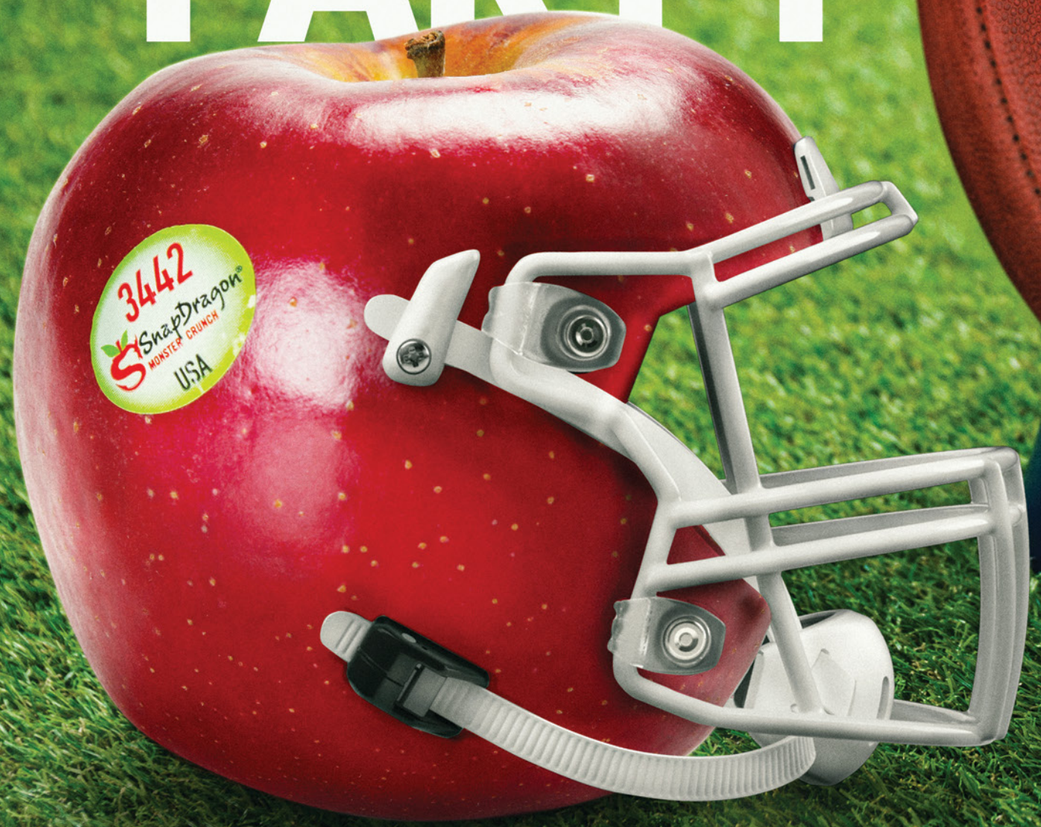
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WTF DO I DO WITH ?!

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SEE RECIPE ON PAGE 44

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My favorite time of day coincides with early morning sunlight. Its rejuvenation, healing coolness, the way it subtly begins to reveal the edges of my day. Sitting with my daughter, Niko, as she stirs, watching her little fingers move as if grasping for that last little bit of sleep, I am already thinking of what kind of world she is waking up to. She changes with each blink it seems, as does the world.



I wonder whether my daughter will lift the earth in her hands or see the world through a screen. Whether she will find climbing trees and swimming 'til sundown a most worthy pastime, or if she will rather put on virtual reality goggles and jump from floating island to floating island in the air. I often need to course correct from my all-or-nothing attitude to remind myself that it does not have to be one or the other, yet I do feel that my generation sits perched on an evermore flexible fenceline, balancing on the edge of such questions.

All I can think about in these moments is the tension of opposites, a concept I learned about in college—being pulled between two desires, paths, decisions, or experiences. The conflict is everywhere around us: the beautiful advances of technology, but also the traditions it tampers with. Multigenerational farming families with one hand rooted firmly in the field and the other branching off toward an easier, softer way of living; the nuance or polarization in politics—it is all there.

As a company, we walk this line between digital and print: between the physically tangible and tactile and the immersive screen experience. For now, we find that our value greatly comes forward in our ability to straddle this tension, this conflict—as a collaboration of opposites. We create a holistic understanding of the lives we all bridge, no matter the paradox.

We see it more and more in our industry today. I have had many conversations about this in the past few years since COVID inspired us to the extremes. Some have become remote communicators, multitasking their communications with text and email. Others prefer a shake of hand, a hug, a phone call, eye contact, and sitting at a table giving each other the gift of time.

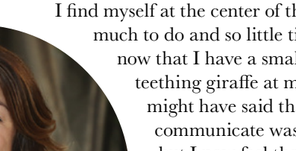
I find myself at the center of this tension. There's so much to do and so little time to do it, especially now that I have a small human tossing her teething giraffe at my ankle. At one time, I might have said that the split in how we communicate was strictly generational, but I now feel that there is a renaissance in relationships occurring. Seasoned and young alike are more often picking up the phone, reaching across the table, meeting in cities across the country to reinvigorate, rejuvenate, and heal the divide between us.

One of the first things I learned when I came into fresh produce was that it was a people industry. Relationship-driven. Passionate. I think that is why I kept at each challenge that came my way in the early years, and what keeps me here now.

As I look at Niko, her hands wrapped in my hands, I hope she finds the joy in these tensions she will know. I hope she embraces change and also holds true to the roots of human relationships. I love the idea of preparing the child for the path instead of the path for the child.

I say it at this moment with a smile.

Ask me again in a few years.



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

DID YOU KNOW?

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FEATURES



BEE SWEET CITRUS
AN ALCHEMY IN ARCHITECTURE

A plan well executed is akin to magic. After five years, this new facility is demonstrating such power for a specific citrus variety. Find out how from Joe Berberian, Joe Ruiz, and Tommy Marderosian…



RAINIER FRUIT COMPANY
KEEPERS OF A WASHINGTON LEGACY

How do you navigate a century-plus-long legacy, innovation, and the connections in between? Mark Zirkle discusses five generations of independence, ownership, and more…



FOX PACKAGING
PACKAGED WITH A PROMISE

In this exclusive, Aaron Fox explores the ins and outs of a dynamic offering. Discover how the produce ally helps its partners enhance their brands while zeroing in on convenience and efficiency…



FIRSTFRUITS FARMS
OPAL® OF THEIR EYE

How does this coveted and unique fruit become "More Than An Apple?" Marketing Manager Emily Autrey knows the secret and is here to reveal a recipe for success through the ingenuity behind the brand…



WEST PAK AVOCADO
ON THE PATH TO PROLIFIC

Luck is fleeting, but determination can build lasting success. Just ask Galen Newhouse and Randy Shoup, who founded the avocado supplier 40 years ago. Now, they are passing the reins to Mario Pacheco, who is looking to take the company to global heights…



NEW YORK APPLE ASSOCIATION
BRANDISHING THE BOLD

With emphasis on flavor, nutrition, and more, the organization embraces both familiarity and creativity to elevate New York-grown apples and the trailblazers that produce them. Cynthia Haskins tells all…



HIGHLINE MUSHROOMS
MULTIVERSE OF MUSHROOMS

The days of this unsung hero hiding quietly behind its bag are over if the company's new Chief Executive Officer has anything to say about it. Meet Jose Cambon, his vision-creator Devon Kennedy, and the latest strategy on mushrooms...



the SNACK

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PRIME TIME
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WTF DO I DO WITH DOLE® Strawberries, Blueberries, and Raspberries ?

{ what the fork }



OVEN-DRIED FRUIT LEATHER

INGREDIENTS

BERRY-PINEAPPLE

½ DOLE® Lemon, juiced (about 2 tbsp)
1 cup DOLE Strawberries, chopped
½ cup DOLE Pineapple, chopped
½ cup DOLE Raspberries or Blueberries
¼ cup maple syrup

APPLE-BERRY

1 DOLE Red Apple, peeled, cored, and chopped
1 cup DOLE Strawberries, Blueberries, or Raspberries
¼ cup honey

Prep Time: 15 min
Cook Time: 8 hrs
Servings: 16

DIRECTIONS

1. Set oven to lowest baking temperature (about 170° F). Line a rimmed baking pan with a silicone baking mat or parchment paper and lightly spray with nonstick cooking spray.

2. Purée Berry-Pineapple or Apple-Berry Leather ingredients in a food processor on high for 1 minute, or until smooth. Pour into prepared pan and spread to ⅛" thick with a spatula.

3. Place pan in oven. Crack the oven door open and bake for 8 hours, or until fruit mixture is dry and no longer sticky. Transfer mat with leather to a cutting board and cut into 16 (4½" x 2") pieces.

4. Store leather between parchment paper in an airtight container for up to one week. Enjoy!

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California Table Grapes SNAPSHOT

By Chandler James

As the autumn leaves begin to turn, busy hands are at work harvesting flavorful table grapes in California. With the domestic season in full steam, we thought there would be no better time to refamiliarize you with some of the many varieties* that decorate the table grape segment throughout the year—from early to late season. So, get lost in those reds, greens, and blacks as we categorize them for you here on the pages of *The Snack*...

Princess

Season: JUL–NOV

Color: Green

Shape: Cylindrical

Seedless



Sweet Globe®

IFG TEN

Season: JUN–DEC

Color: Green

Shape: Round–oval

Seedless



Stella Bella®

Season: JUL–OCT

Color: Green

Shape: Elongated

Seedless



Pristine®

BLANC SEEDLESS

Season: JUL–DEC

Color: Green

Shape: Elongated

Seedless



Great Green®

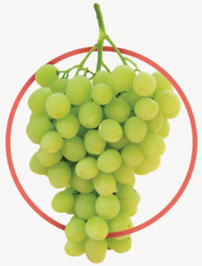
SHEEGENE-17

Season: AUG–DEC

Color: Green

Shape: Oval

Seedless



ARRA Honey Pop™

ARRATHIRTYTHREE

Season: JUN–AUG

Color: Green

Shape: Oval

Seedless



Sweet Carnival®

Season: AUG–DEC

Color: Golden

Shape: Elongated

Seedless



Autumn King

Season: AUG–JAN

Color: Green

Shape: Cylindrical–oval

Seedless



Autumn Crisp®

SUGRATHIRTYFIVE

Season: JUL–DEC

Color: Green

Shape: Oval

Seedless



Ivory®

SHEEGENE-21

Season: JUN–NOV

Color: Green

Shape: Round to oval

Seedless



Arra Sweeties™

ARRAFIFTEEN

Season: JUL–OCT

Color: Green

Shape: Elongated

Seedless



Midnight Beauty®

SUGRATHIRTEEN

Season: JUN–NOV

Color: Black

Shape: Elongated

Seedless



**Disclaimer: This snapshot represents just a slice of the California table grape pie. These varieties, attributes, and timeframes differ for each ranch and operation in California. For company- and brand-specific varieties, please reach out to your table grape partners for their detailed portfolios. Information in this snapshot is sourced from an array of California table grape companies and contributors.*

Sweet Sapphire®



IFG SIX

Season: JUL–NOV

Color: Black

Shape: Elongated with dimple

Seedless

Flame Seedless



Season: MAY–DEC

Color: Red

Shape: Round

Seedless

Sweet Celebration®



IFG 68-175

Season: JUL–DEC

Color: Red

Shape: Round

Seedless

Allison®, Fall Bliss™



SHEEGENE-20

Season: AUG–JAN

Color: Red

Shape: Oval

Seedless

Arra Mystic Dream®



ARRATHIRTYTWO

Season: SEP–DEC

Color: Black

Shape: Oval

Seedless

Passion Fire™



ARRATWENTYNINE

Season: JUL–OCT

Color: Red

Shape: Oval

Seedless

Cerise



SHEEGENE-13

Season: JUL–JAN

Color: Red

Shape: Oval

Seedless

Scarlotta Seedless®



SUGRANINETEEN

Season: OCT–JAN

Color: Red

Shape: Oval–elongated

Seedless

Autumn Royal



Season: AUG–JAN

Color: Black

Shape: Oval–elongated

Seedless

Sparkle™



Season: JUL–OCT

Color: Red

Shape: Elongated

Seedless

Holiday®



90-3618

Season: SEP–DEC

Color: Red

Shape: Round

Seedless

Crimson Seedless



Season: SEP–DEC

Color: Red

Shape: Cylindrical

Seedless

Krissy®



SHEEGENE-12

Season: JUL–JAN

Color: Red

Shape: Round

Seedless

Scarlet Royal



Season: JUL–JAN

Color: Red

Shape: Oval

Seedless

Jack's Salute®



IFG NINE

Season: AUG–DEC

Color: Red

Shape: Oval–elongated

Seedless

Red Globe



Season: AUG–DEC

Color: Red

Shape: Round

Seeded

Sources: Information from The Snack and AndNowUKnow Table Grape Grower Contributors





SEPTEMBER MVP

WEST PAK AVOCADO INC.

HIGHLIGHTS

Joe Nava

Vice President of Sales and Business Development, West Pak Avocado

TIME AT COMPANY: **4 Years**

With Jordan Okumura-Wright

Talking to Joe Nava is truly like stepping into an adventure. As he walked me through the sights and scenes of his life, I couldn't help but feel an overwhelming sense of pride for the industry we live and work in every day. His passion is contagious, his generosity boundless, and his humility immediately establishes a sense of trust and familiarity that I believe those around him feel as well. When I think of those deeply rooted and dedicated people who ground and inspire fresh produce excellence, I consider how Joe is a model for each of them—and now for me as well...

WHAT YOUR ROLE IS REALLY LIKE

"It is very common to hear 'Every day is different, no day is the same,' but it is true. My role today has evolved so much since I started out as an intern at Driscoll's in 2006. It is more about being a leader and a mentor—my goal is to nurture new talent and give them the opportunities they need to succeed in our sink-or-swim industry. Today, I am able to coach them to make better decisions and do what's best for the customer, and also what's best for the company. My role has given me the opportunity to be the person that others were for me in the past."

HOW SALES BECOMES A LIFE LESSON

"One thing that has helped me manage my personal and professional life, day to day, is pulling the emotion behind my decisions. I extract out emotion and try to approach decisions as clear-minded and sound as I possibly can. Ensuring emotions don't persuade the way I think allows me to pivot my choices with more clarity. This industry has a lot of passion and you start caring so much; that passion builds into very strong emotions. You have to remember to check the emotion at the door and make those sound business decisions that have the highest benefit to the company and the customer. This works in my personal life as well and allows me to see what is important when it comes to my wife, my kids, my friends—everyone."

SURPRISE US

"I love to travel with my family. We call them our Nava Adventures. I travel so much for my job, it only makes sense to have my family with me whenever possible. Also, we love going on weekend getaways, camping, hikes—you name it. We even travel internationally. I love when I get to ask, 'Hey, where are the Navas going next? Where is the next Nava Adventure?' One thing that a lot of people will know is that I'm a planner. So, I'm that dad that people might say, 'Don't go with Joe,' because I have every couple of hours planned to a T. If you're going to go on a Nava Adventure, it's pretty mapped out and we make the most out of it."

A MENTOR MENTORED: THOSE WHO HAVE SHAPED JOE

Ross Wileman, Retired, Mission Produce™: "He was my first mentor who helped sharpen my sales pitch and showed me how to be humble."

Mike Angelo, Retired, Calavo: "He really invested in me and coached me on how to not only develop new business, but how to honor your word and how to follow through."

Heather Hammack, President, Famous Software: "I interned at Famous Software when I was at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo; her passion and dedication to the industry and investing back into young talent clearly ignited my passion."

Mario Pacheco, Chief Executive Officer, West Pak Avocado: "He is leading West Pak to the next level, and to be able to be with him and a part of that, I can't ask for much more."

VALUES AT THE CORE

AUTHENTICITY

TRANSPARENCY

HUMILITY

COMPASSION

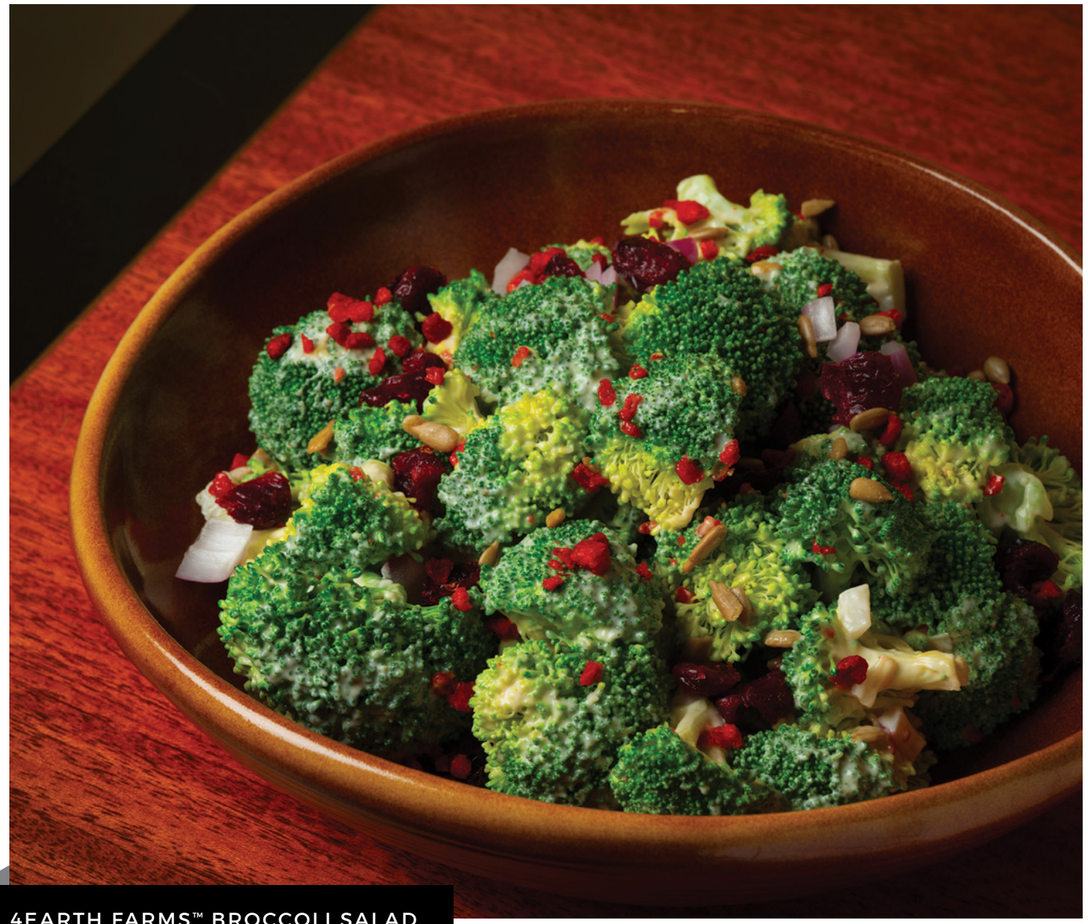
FAMILY

WORDS OF WISDOM FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

"Don't be afraid to take a risk. Don't be afraid to dive in because, within this industry, we have a wealth of people that want to see you succeed. I've always lived off the quote 'Learn by doing,' which is similar to sink or swim. More often than you realize, you're going to swim. You're going to develop the skills that you need, but you have to take that risk."

WTF DO I DO WITH 4Earth Farms™ Broccoli Florets ?

{ what the fork }



4EARTH FARMS™ BROCCOLI SALAD

INGREDIENTS

SALAD

8 cups 4Earth Farms™ Broccoli Florets, cut into bite-sized pieces
⅓ cup red onion, diced
½ cup dried cranberries
¼ cup sunflower seeds
½ cup bacon bits

DRESSING

1 cup mayonnaise
3 tbsp apple cider vinegar
2 tbsp sugar
Salt and pepper, to taste

Prep Time: 20 min
Chill Time: 1 hour
Servings: 8

DIRECTIONS

1. Whisk together dressing ingredients in a medium bowl. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, combine broccoli, onion, cranberries, sunflower seeds, and bacon bits.
3. Pour the dressing mixture over and mix well. Enjoy!

To learn more about 4Earth Farms™, visit *www.4earthfarms.com*

Rainier FRUIT

KEEPERS OF A WASHINGTON *Legacy*



Rainier Fruit Company's patriarch Bill Zirkle (far left) stands alongside grandkids Nick and Emily, and his son Mark Zirkle

BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ

Ours is a culture in perpetual motion.

If you are on time, you're late. If you aren't ahead, you're behind. Even as I write, economical and environmental pressures are working to push our industry into a new chapter of merging and consolidation, making every year a milestone. Constant change in the name of what is new has formed a trench between the current and the long-established. Gazing across the gorge with nostalgia for days many of us are only connected to through story and cinema, there is a new level of awe for what has stood the test of time.

The Zirkle family is one of the few with a sturdy bridge still weaving its way across this space between



now and then, with Rainier Fruit Company standing independently five-plus generations strong, 100 percent family-owned and operated.

The significance of such a long-term stake—how it impacts the entire operation and, ultimately, the final product—was something I was eager to discuss with Mark Zirkle, Chief Executive Officer and keeper of a Washington legacy.

Q1



MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ: Amid a crowded space in our industry, Rainier has a unique approach to execution and change. Can you elaborate on that for me, Mark?



MARK ZIRKLE, Chief Executive Officer, Rainier Fruit Company: Execution: To us, that is simply doing the job right. No excuses. If you can't execute, you have failed your customer. If you do this often enough, you lose the trust and foundation of the relationship, endangering the business. We constantly strive to improve our performance through consistent innovation and investments throughout the company, which, in the long term, improves our profitability and ensures our growth for the good of our growers, employees, and their families.

Q2

MDC: With trust being such a valuable commodity, both for the buy-side and consumers, I assume having such a strong and deeply rooted foundation helps! How does the circle of establishing and maintaining trust work for the Rainier team?

MZ: Because the company has its three tenets of growing, packing, and marketing, we have a deep understanding of the balance between the farmer and the customer or consumer. Rainier takes a long-term view of customers and strives to partner with the market leaders. When the company delivers consistent quality, pricing, and volume to its customers year after year, a trust develops which, in turn, means repeat business. A strictly grower perspective may not subscribe to this holistic, long-term approach. But over the years, Rainier has benefited from some amazing relationships based on trust.

…you should take the best of what the previous generation represented. For our company, that is the culture of growing the best fruit while treating our employees and the land in such a way that both relationships are long-lasting, sustainable, and something to be proud of."

Mark Zirkle,
Chief Executive Officer,
Rainier Fruit Company

Q3

MDC: Rainier is now in its fifth generation with roots dating back to the 1800s; what does it mean to uphold a legacy while keeping in front of rejuvenation and innovation?

MZ: What I feel about legacy is that you should take the best of what the previous generation represented. For our company, that is the culture of growing the best fruit while treating our employees and the land in such a way that both relationships are long-lasting, sustainable, and something to be proud of. My forefathers would not be happy seeing the company clinging to old, inefficient, and unprofitable planting and packing operations. Demand, technology, and resources are in constant change, so we don't get caught up in preserving legacy plantings or systems; thoughtful innovation is key to survival.

Q4

MDC: I remember a Rainier quote about being "a family of families" regarding the company's focus on circular repercussions of care and service for both people and the land. Can you tell me a bit about that cycle and what it means to be a family of families?

MZ: Family is a very important component of our culture. That is not only in regard to the obvious legacy of the Zirkle family but the generational aspect of our shipper members, who can count themselves four to six generations strong of complete ownership and management for their enterprises as well. Our family of families also represents our employees, of which a large number have decided to make their careers at the company. Many who started right after school are now enjoying watching their children and relations work at our big family of families.

I could spin yarns over pages about Rainier's numerous acts in sustainability and regeneration; how an experienced and long-term foundation has cultivated expansive and deep roots; the circular and cohesive decision-making; and the support, trust, and value of the people. In each is a story itself, which holds a stone in that bridge spanning the distance from Mark's ancestors to his children and the company that represents them all. As Mark pointed out, the structure does not depend on one end to uphold the other. It leans on the value each piece brings to the integrity of the whole.

With change as our only true constant, I offer the assurance of that archway. If only time will tell of success, it is already singing the praises of Rainier Fruit Company.



WTF DO I DO WITH Pure Flavor® Cloud 9® Bite-Sized Fruity Tomatoes ?

{ what the fork }



WEEKNIGHT GREEK CHICKEN

INGREDIENTS

2 dry pints Pure Flavor® Cloud 9® Bite-Sized Fruity Tomatoes
12 chicken thighs, boneless and skinless
1 lb green beans, ends trimmed and halved
1 cup feta, crumbled
Salt and pepper, to taste
Lemon slices, for garnish

MARINADE
⅓ cup olive oil
⅓ cup lemon juice
1 tsp dried thyme

Prep Time: 15 min
Cook Time: 30 min
Servings: 6

DIRECTIONS

1. In a small bowl, combine all the marinade ingredients. Put chicken into a resealable bag with the marinade and let it marinate while you prepare the other ingredients.
2. Preheat oven to 425° F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Place chicken thighs and green beans on the baking sheet and roast for 20 minutes.
3. Remove pan from oven. Add tomatoes to the pan and season with salt and pepper. Cook for an additional 10 minutes.
4. Remove pan, sprinkle feta on top, add lemon slices, and serve. Enjoy!

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MUSHROOMS

snapshot

By Lilian Diep

Are you wanting to bring some fun to the produce aisle? Then look no further than these fungi. Mushrooms are known for their depth of flavor and rich addition to any cold or hot plate. So be sure to highlight these woodsy warriors with some tips and suggestions to bring in those Bella babes and give your shoppers the chance to tame the Lion's Mane for National Mushroom Month…



White/White Button

Appearance: Varies in color from creamy white to off-white

Flavor: A fairly mild and woodsy taste; flavor intensifies when cooked

Uses: Very versatile and equally tasty fresh or cooked; use raw in salads, with dips, sautéed with side dishes, breaded, or as an ingredient to enrich sauces, soups, stuffings, or entrées; excellent for blending with ground meat

King Oyster

Appearance: Thick, white flesh that is firm-textured and meaty, with a blunt cap

Flavor: Very savory, with a chewy texture

Uses: Best sliced and sautéed





Portabella/Portabello

Appearance: Tan or brown caps; measure up to six inches in diameter

Flavor: A deep, meat-like flavor, with substantial texture

Uses: Serve whole or sliced, grilled, baked, deep fried, or as a burger or sandwich patty; a delicious vegetarian alternative as a meat substitute in stir-fry dishes, sautées, and sauces



Shiitake

Appearance: Tan-dark brown with broad, umbrella-shaped caps, wide open veils, tan grills, and curved stems

Flavor: Rich and woodsy when cooked; they add a meaty flavor and texture to stir-frys and pastas

Uses: Cook before eating; excellent cooked in soups, stir-fry dishes, and traditional sushi plates



Beech

Appearance: Petite in size, with either all-white or light brown caps

Flavor: Mild, sweet, and nutty, with a crunchy texture

Uses: Best enjoyed cooked, either whole or sliced; add to stir-fry dishes, soups, stews, or sauces

Lion's Mane

Appearance: Large, white, shaggy mushrooms that resemble a lion's mane as they grow; also called Hedgehog, Bear's Head, Old Man's Beard, Bearded Tooth, Sheep's Tooth, and Pom Pom Mushrooms

Flavor: Hearty, slightly sweet, with a meaty texture

Uses: Can be enjoyed raw, cooked, dried, or steeped as a tea





Baby Bella/Cremini

Appearance: Light tan to rich brown cap; same variety as traditional Portabellas/Portabellos, differing only in size

Flavor: A deeper, earthier flavor than whites and firmer in texture

Uses: An excellent addition to beef, wild game, and vegetable dishes; sauté, broil, microwave, or cook almost any way

Oyster

Appearance: Can be gray, pale yellow, or even blue, with a velvety texture

Flavor: A very delicate flavor

Uses: Sauté with butter and onions to bring out their flavor



Sources: The Mushroom Council, The Snack, and AndNowUKnow Mushroom Grower Contributors

WTF DO I DO WITH Bako Sweet® Sweet Potatoes ?

{ what the fork }



SWEET POTATO CHEESE DUMPLINGS

INGREDIENTS

1 lb (4 medium) Bako Sweet® Sweet Potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
2 tbsp butter or plant-based spread
1 medium onion, chopped
⅓ cup sharp Cheddar or Gouda cheese, shredded
¼ cup milk
¼ tsp dried thyme
⅛ tsp salt, or to taste
5 large dumpling wrappers
Fresh chives, snipped
Sour cream (optional)

Prep Time: 20 min
Cook Time: 40 min
Servings: 5

DIRECTIONS

1. Melt butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add onion and cook for 10 minutes, stirring frequently. Reduce heat to low and cook for 20 minutes more, or until soft and golden brown.
2. While onion is cooking, place sweet potatoes in a microwave-safe bowl and add ½" water. Cover with plastic wrap and pierce to vent. Microwave on high for 7–8 minutes, or until potatoes are tender.
3. Carefully drain excess water and mash. Add onion, cheese, milk, and thyme. Season with salt. Place dumpling wrappers on a board in a single layer and place equal amounts of potatoes into the center of each.
4. Brush the empty part of the wrapper with water and pull up one corner into the center of the dumpling. Carefully pleat the wrapper by folding over in ½" increments until the potato is fully enclosed. Press gently to seal and twist slightly to make a slight pinwheel pattern.
5. Place several inches of water in a large skillet with a lid and bring to a boil. Carefully place dumplings in water and cover skillet. Reduce heat and let steam for 10 minutes.
6. Transfer to a plate and sprinkle with chives. Serve with sour cream, if desired. Enjoy!

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WTF DO I DO WITH G&R Farms® Sweet Onions ?

{ what the fork }



SWEET CHILI SHRIMP AND ONION STIR-FRY

INGREDIENTS

1 G&R Farms® Sweet Onion, sliced
2 tbsp vegetable or sesame oil
2 bell peppers, cored and sliced
½ cup matchstick carrots
¾ cup pea pods
1 lb raw jumbo shrimp, peeled
3 tbsp green onions, sliced
Steamed rice

SAUCE
½ cup soy sauce
2 tbsp sweet chili sauce
1 tsp ginger paste
1½ tbsp rice vinegar
1 tsp hot chili garlic sauce
1½ tsp cornstarch
1 tbsp fresh lime juice

Prep Time: 10 min
Cook Time: 15 min
Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large rimmed skillet, add oil and heat over medium-high heat. Add peppers, onion, carrots, and pea pods.
2. While veggies are cooking, prepare the sauce. Whisk together soy sauce, sweet chili sauce, ginger paste, rice vinegar, hot chili garlic sauce, cornstarch, and lime juice.
3. Once the veggies are tender, add shrimp and stir. Add the sauce to the skillet and continue stirring. Simmer until the shrimp is pink and the sauce has thickened, about 5 minutes.
4. Top with green onions and serve with rice. Enjoy!

To learn more about G&R Farms®, visit *www.grfarmsonions.com*

G&R FARMS® SINCE 1945



MY FAVORITE THINGS

RANDI CHURCH

Marketing Manager, Windset Farms®

With Anne Allen

It's easy to feel a kinship with someone who adores dogs, cooking, and cherry tomatoes. I found this kindred soul in Randi Church, who, outside of crafting a winning marketing strategy for Windset Farms®, knows when to stop and smell the tomatoes. It's this appreciation for the little things in life that help her connect the dots for consumers and buyers alike on the benefits of greenhouse growing. To see how Randi walks on the vine side of life, let's dive into her favorite things...



windset FARMS®

1. My Dog
2. Cameo® Cherry Tomatoes on the Vine
3. Walks With My Family
4. Cooking With My Daughter
5. Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, Canada
6. Strolls Through the Greenhouse
7. Iced Americanos
8. Running
9. Completing Projects

WTF DO I DO WITH SnapDragon® Apples ?

{ what the fork }



GAME DAY SLIDERS

INGREDIENTS

1 SnapDragon® Apple, thinly sliced but not peeled
8 oz roasted turkey breast, sliced
3 pieces cooked bacon, sliced in half
3 thin slices extra sharp Cheddar cheese, cut in fourths
6 slider rolls

Prep Time: 10 min
Cook Time: 5 min
Servings: 6 sliders

SnapDragon® MONSTER CRUNCH

DIRECTIONS

1. Slice each of the rolls in half horizontally, creating a top and bottom bun.
2. Place both halves on a baking pan with the cut side facing up. Place one quarter slice of cheese on each piece.
3. On the top halves, add the turkey, dividing it equally among the six rolls. Then, place two half slices of bacon in an X on top of the turkey.
4. On the bottom halves, place one slice of apple on top of the cheese.
5. Place the pan on a center rack in the oven and broil for 5 minutes, or until the cheese is melted.
6. Remove from the oven. Using a spatula, place the top halves of the rolls on the bottom halves. Remove from the pan and serve at your next tailgate!

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Packaged WITH A PROMISE

A Q&A With Aaron Fox, Executive Vice President, Fox Packaging

BY PEGGY PACKER

Onion—an aromatic, versatile vegetable with a distinct flavor that has been harnessed by the cuisine of countless cultures.

Sweet potato—a consumer-favorite root veg that finds itself in a variety of creative dishes, whether it be in the middle of a family dinner table or centered in a simple, healthy snack.

Citrus—from grapefruit to limes, lemons, and oranges, it's a category that knows no limits in terms of application. Salads, proteins, cocktails, and more have all benefited from the addition of high-quality citrus varieties.

At this point, you may be questioning, "Peggy, why are you listing out the alluring qualities of these high-traffic produce categories?" Better yet, "What do they all have in common?"

This is where Fox Packaging comes in. Each of the aforementioned categories is being uplifted by the innovator's Fresh Mesh Wicketed® packaging, which establishes a platform for increased efficiency and convenience while paving the way for aesthetic brand enhancements.

From the information I've gleaned from Aaron Fox, Executive Vice President, I can assure you this is a fresh produce game-changer.



Peggy Packer: Let's start from the beginning! When Fox Packaging first developed its Fresh Mesh Wicketed packaging, what was the primary goal?



AARON FOX, Executive Vice President, Fox Packaging: Our main objective was to create a bag design that would add convenience and efficiency to packing on standard poly bag-filling equipment. Slightly different from our Fox Fresh Mesh counterpart, the wicketed bag design incorporates a horizontal band that wraps around the middle of the bag. It features wicket holes on the lip for automatic packing on our Fox Solutions Wicketed Bagger in the single or double model. This packaging application maintains ample print space to brand your products with custom graphics and messaging.

One of the primary benefits is that it extends shelf-life by letting the product breathe better. Because moisture and air can easily pass through the bag, products can be misted or iced with no negative impact on the material. Once packed, the Fox Fresh Mesh Wicketed bag offers a structured design that showcases products in an upright, customer-front-facing application that enhances the look and feel of a brand.

PP: Convenience, productivity, and visibility all seem to be key draws for the bag. What has been the overall market response to this cutting-edge packaging development?

AF: The response to the Fox Fresh Mesh Wicketed bag has been impressively positive. This bag has increased sales and customer satisfaction for our clients—including major retailers and fresh produce growers—due to its automation compatibility. Another bonus is the ability of the Wicketed bagger to run multiple configurations such as the Fox Fresh Mesh Combo, Fox Combo Ultra Shield, and Fox Poly bags.

PP: Complementary to driving sales in the produce department, how does this innovation boost functionality and convenience for fresh produce providers and retailers?

AF: First, it can speed up the packing process by using automated or semi-automated machines that hold the wicket and fill the bags. It can also reduce the cost of packaging by using simple and lightweight materials, including the polyethylene materials we use to build our packaging application.

PP: Packaging is a crucial factor in optimizing the return on investment (ROI) of both the suppliers and buyers of a product. What role does this innovative offering play in increasing ROI?

> "This [Fox Fresh Mesh Wicketed®] bag has increased sales and customer satisfaction for our clients—including major retailers and fresh produce growers—due to its automation compatibility."
>
> **AARON FOX,**
> **Executive Vice President,**
> **Fox Packaging**

AF: Ultimately, packaging is designed to extend ease-of-use to each of the touchpoints within the produce supply chain.

On the supply-side, packaging development can reduce the costs of production, transportation, and storage by using efficient materials and designs. It can also enhance the quality and safety of a product, as well as its shelf-life and the overall appeal of the application itself.

For buyers, packaging development can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty by providing convenience, functionality, and information. Beyond that, it can influence the purchasing behavior and preferences of consumers by establishing a distinctive brand identity and value proposition.

PP: The Fox operation is clearly geared toward innovation and elevation. How do technology and other industry advancements play into the strategies and successes of Fox Packaging?

AF: Automation is important for flexible packaging because it offers many benefits for the industry and the environment. Among these advantages is the improvement of quality and consistency by reducing human errors and ensuring precise measurements and alignments—all while increasing the production speed and efficiency of flexible packaging by minimizing downtime and maximizing output.



Be it top-quality onions, flavorful sweet potatoes, or a curated selection of grapefruit, lemons, limes, and oranges, this ingenious packaging holds more than fresh produce. Inside the Fresh Mesh Wicketed bag is an ambitious operational promise—one that Fox Packaging intends to keep.



HISTORY IN THE MAKING

The year was 1974; the era of bell bottom pants and Fleetwood Mac was in full swing. Lester E. Zirkle and his son Bill were successfully growing and packing apples in Selah, Washington, but found that their relatively small crop volume limited their market opportunities. They decided to partner with a group of fellow family growers to sell fruit under a single label an arm's length from their own farm—and Rainier Fruit Company was born.

1 AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH

Before the advent of the dedicated sales desk, Washington treefruit growers packed, marketed, and shipped under their own labels. The Zirkles realized they could gain access to better business by working together with other growers under a unified brand built on the promise of quality and service. While this represented a foundational shift in how growers marketed their product, the centralized model guaranteed more consistent business.

2 MANY LESSONS LEARNED

This spirit of innovation influenced many ventures and adaptations over the years—some successful, and others not so much (anyone remember a certain grape-flavored apple?). Through constant trial and error over the years, Rainier Fruit learned and adapted thanks to the dedication of passionate individuals brought together under a common goal. The pursuit of top-notch customer service directed all things, a key foundation in the often chaotic and intensely demanding fresh fruit industry.

3 GROWTH FOR GOOD

Ask Bill Zirkle—still keeping a watchful eye on orchards and packing lines at age 82—if he ever imagined what Rainier Fruit would become 50 years later, and he'll give you a firm "No!" Growth for the sake of growth was never the goal, but rather out of necessity to maintain the high standard that customers came to expect. This mission of shipping the best fruit that brings consumers back for more holds true today as a core tenet of Rainier Fruit, a half-century later.

Rainier FRUIT

RAINIER FRUIT COMPANY INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT represents individuals and ideas making a positive impact in the community through their work, volunteer efforts, sustainability, or health and wellness initiatives.

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WTF DO I DO WITH Sweet Onions from Shuman Farms ?

{ what the fork }



BREAKFAST SKILLET WITH SWEET ONIONS

INGREDIENTS

1 medium Sweet Onion from Shuman Farms, diced
1 lb sweet Italian sausage
24 oz frozen, Southern-style diced potatoes
2 cloves garlic, minced
½ cup water
4 eggs
½ cup sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded
½ tsp salt
½ tsp pepper
Scallions, for garnish (optional)
Drizzle of olive oil

Prep Time: 10 min
Cook Time: 20 min
Servings: 4

SHUMAN FARMS
GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER

SHUMAN FARMS REAL SWEET SWEET ONIONS

MR. BUCK'S FARM FRESH

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large skillet, brown sausage until cooked through. Remove sausage and set aside, leaving drippings in the pan.
2. Add onion and sauté until translucent.
3. Add frozen diced potatoes, garlic, and water. Cover and cook over medium heat for 5 minutes.
4. Uncover and continue cooking for 10 minutes, stirring once. Add a drizzle of oil if potatoes begin sticking to the bottom of the pan.
5. Add sausage back to the pan.
6. Using a spatula, clear four small spaces for the eggs. Crack eggs into the pan over high heat and sprinkle shredded cheese, salt, and pepper onto the potatoes in the skillet.
7. Once the edges of the eggs set, turn heat down, cover, and cook 8–10 minutes, or until eggs are cooked to your liking.
8. Serve immediately. Garnish with scallions if desired. Enjoy!

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

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MENTORS IN THE MAKING

Blair Butterworth

BY LILIAN DIEP

THE TIME IS JANUARY 2016.

With eyes wide open, Blair Butterworth bids farewell to California State University, Fresno. Specializing in Agriculture Business, she looks to build her expertise in marketing, for the world is her oyster. Or rather, her salad bowl.

"I've always been in produce; it's where I began my career. My whole family is in this industry, and it felt natural to me. As I walked the stage for my degree, I got a call from Grimmway Farms; later, I started my career as a Sales and Merchandising Specialist for its Los Angeles, California, territory," Blair, now the Marketing Manager for Local Bounti, shares. "Since I entered fresh, I've met so many people and have learned so much. My time has been fabulous so far."

Through Grimmway, Blair came across the Fresh Produce & Floral Council (FPFC). As she puts it, the association has been a huge contributor to her growth, along with connecting her to some key mentors in her career.

"FPFC introduced me to some lifelong friends through its Apprentice Program. Even if our companies compete, you want to see each other grow," Blair says. "I'm a produce lifer, but if it weren't for Michelle Allen-Ziegler and Don Gann, my network wouldn't have grown as quickly."

Michelle has been a steady guiding hand for Blair, and continues to be so. The National Accounts Manager, Agriculture, for Pactiv Evergreen is an influential mentor for the marketing maven in addition to being a great friend. Not only was Michelle a driving force for Blair during her time in the Apprentice Program, but she promotes future apprentices as the program's incoming Chair.

"I've gotten to know Michelle a lot over the years, and we always make time to chat. I spontaneously call her up all the time with questions and asking for feedback," Blair continues.

Through FPFC, Blair got to know Don as well. With over 38 years in the industry, Don played his own prominent role in Blair's career. The President of FPFC may not have known Blair long while she was in the program, but he did provide opportunities for her to build her strengths and introduced her to several associations, many of which she is now a part of.

"Without Don, FPFC wouldn't be what it is now! He's watched me grow so much, and I can't give enough gratitude to him for instilling in me those foundations," shares Blair.

After serving Grimmway for five years, Blair then joined Dulcinea Farms/Pacific Trellis Fruit. There, she met Corrie Hutchens. Corrie now holds the Vice President of Marketing position for Local Bounti, and she is the reason Blair joined the controlled environment agriculture company.

"Corrie is an inspiration. She's such a strong woman in business and has a deep wealth of knowledge in marketing," Blair says. "Not only does she know my strengths, but she helps me improve upon my weaknesses. We don't have just a boss-colleague relationship; she lifts me up and is always by my side, whether in the meeting room or on the trade show floor. Corrie is an honest and amazing businesswoman, and she inspires me both in my work and as a person."

Now that Blair has settled at Local Bounti, one more mentor she can count on within the company is Vice President of Sales Baltazar "Balta" Garcia.

Baltazar may not be within the marketing team, but the two sides are intricately intertwined, and he has proven to be a pillar of support for Blair. With the inside scoop Baltazar gained through his nearly decade-long tenure with Pete's, now Local Bounti, Blair was able to rely on a treasure trove of expertise to bounce ideas off of.

"I knew Balta before I came to Local Bounti. He was with the company since it was Pete's, and I would meet with him often at trade events," explains Blair. "We actually went through the Apprentice Program together, so it felt like I was working with my best friend when I joined Local Bounti. He's my ride-or-die, but I also look up to him."

The trailblazer takes charge to bring awareness and industry members together to accelerate fresh produce, all with a smile and an idea at the ready. Everywhere Blair goes, it's hard to imagine her not making friends. The young mentee is already a leader, as she currently has a plethora of responsibilities on her clipboard of committees. In addition to representing Local Bounti on retail shelves and at industry events, the marketing extraordinaire is the Chairwoman of FPFC Dinner Dance and is helping our industry's apprentices take charge of fresh produce marketing.

I would say make an appointment to catch Blair's attention, but as she likes making spontaneous phone calls to her mentors, I'm sure a friendly ring would be equally welcomed.



Blair Butterworth,
Marketing Manager, Local Bounti

THE MENTORS

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



Michelle Allen-Ziegler,

National Accounts Manager, Agriculture, Pactiv Evergreen

"I've been in the industry for over 25 years. When I started in the '90s, there were two female leaders I really looked up to: Jan DeLyser, formerly of the California Avocado Commission, and Marty Craner of B & C Fresh Sales. My passion today is to coach, mentor, and show up for our future leaders, to build them up to shine in this agriculture space. Blair is one up-and-comer, and I am so honored to be named a mentor of this strong woman.

I adore her, and I value her thoughts and contributions. As the incoming Chair of the Fresh Produce & Floral Council Apprentice Program, I couldn't think of anyone better than Blair to take on the 2023 Chair position for the FPFC Dinner Dance. She is confident, willing, and always advocating for our industry.

When I see Blair, I'm watching another woman walk through the doors of this beautiful ag business and change everybody forever. She is a rising star."



Corrie Hutchens,

Vice President of Marketing, Local Bounti

"In the dynamic world of produce marketing, I have had the privilege of working alongside Blair for several years. She has, without a doubt, left an indelible mark both professionally and personally.

Blair has an unwavering authenticity, is unapologetically herself, possesses an innate drive, and has exceptional networking prowess. Her natural charisma is infectious. What truly sets her apart is her fearlessness in seeking guidance and support.

As I reflect upon our journey together, I am confident that she possesses all the qualities necessary to become an outstanding mentor in the future. With her unyielding passion for personal growth and dedication to helping others succeed, she is poised to influence the lives she touches.

In her, I see a mentor who will not only guide others but also empower them to embrace challenges, seize opportunities, and achieve greatness."



Don Gann,

President, Fresh Produce & Floral Council

"Blair is an ambitious leader! She entered the FPFC Apprentice Program in 2017, and I knew then she was going to have a prosperous career. Blair has a great way of communicating with individuals on every level, whether they are up-and-coming, seasoned executives, or veterans of the produce industry.

What I most admire about Blair is she wants to give back as she paves her produce career path. She is now on the apprentice taskforce, the very program she was once a student in, and is the Chair for our Dinner Dance committee. Being recognized as one of Blair's mentors is such an honor for me because I have learned just as much from her. I can't wait to watch Blair's career blossom, because with all her skill sets, the sky is the limit!"



Baltazar Garcia,

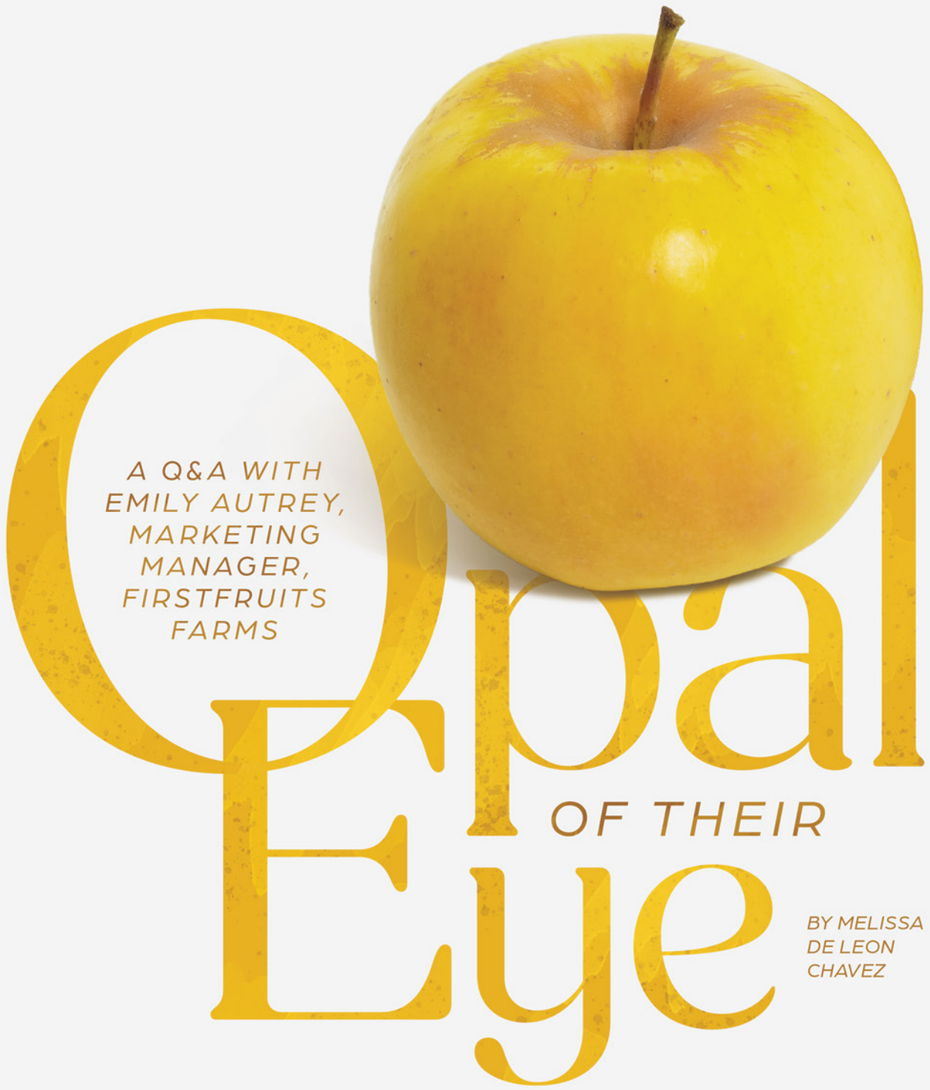
Vice President of Sales, Local Bounti

"What an honor to be in this category for Blair.

I met her seven years ago in the FPFC Apprentice Program. It was then that I noticed her passion for the produce industry; with time, I appreciated her hard work and dedication. She is natural at her job. Blair is always willing to accept feedback, both good and constructive. Blair isn't afraid to get guidance from her extended industry friends—I am simply happy I am one of those. We have connected on many topics, and her willingness to learn and drive new projects is superb.

Trust me, Blair is already a mentor, as I personally have learned a few things from her. This has been a two-way street for us that has allowed us to become dear friends."

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A Q&A WITH EMILY AUTREY, MARKETING MANAGER, FIRSTFRUITS FARMS

Opal OF THEIR Eye

BY MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ

The changing of the colors: heralding our transition into the cooler months of hot ciders, cozy blankets, candles, and baked goods. The reds, golds, oranges, and yellows of autumn are an annual treat many chase up and down the East and West Coasts just to make the vibrant hues last.

That is the eye candy you can capture in your apple displays, so long as you have the colors—the reds, the greens, and the golden yellows.

I can't help but think of Opal® apples, bright as a turning leaf yet historic in their natural resistance to turning themselves, when I consider this time of year. With Opal season upon us—and the sweet golden fruit on my mind—I thought I knew all there was to know about the naturally non-browning offering. I was wrong.

FirstFruits Farms is the sole proprietor of this singular variety, and everything that goes into its promotion—from purpose-driven initiatives to the consumer following expanding around it—promises to solidify Opal's place in the apple sector as strongly as yellow hues are in the colors of autumn.

So spread out a cozy blanket, sip a hot beverage, and listen with me as Emily Autrey, Marketing Manager of FirstFruits Farms, explains how Opal is "More Than An Apple."



MELISSA DE LEON CHAVEZ: Emily, I didn't realize how much I didn't know about this proprietary variety. What are some key aspects of this apple retailers can lean into, and what would you say is important for buyers to keep in mind?



EMILY AUTREY, MARKETING MANAGER, FIRSTFRUITS FARMS: We continue to see high levels of engagement with the brand online and in-store. Shoppers love Opal apples. Not only does the bright golden yellow make apple merchandising and displays fun, exciting, and eye-catching, but it can be useful for color breaks in the sea of red and bi-colored apples. It's hard to believe Opal has been on the United States market since 2010, but the reminder can be found in how it has gained loyal fans since that launch.

Of the retailers who report to Nielsen across the country, conventional Opal is the No. 4 bulk club variety, accounting for 6 percent of sales, and the No. 3 pack club variety, capturing 11 percent of sales. Organic Opal is the No. 2 bulk club variety, capturing 38 percent of sales, and the No. 7 pack club variety of those reports.



> “Not only does the bright golden yellow make apple merchandising and displays fun, exciting, and eye-catching, but it can be useful for color breaks in the sea of red and bi-colored apples.”
>
> *EMILY AUTREY,*
> *MARKETING MANAGER,*
> *FIRSTFRUITS FARMS*





MDC: You’ve also mentioned promotions for Opal depart from the norm or expected. How so? How does this further strengthen awareness and potential sales?

EA: Since it debuted in 2010, Opal has built an impactful and provocative brand that consumers love. For example, Opal is the apple that gives back: Every time consumers purchase Opal, they are supporting the Youth Make A Difference initiative, through which grants are awarded to youth-led organizations across the country. We also have National Opal® Apple Day on December 9, a prime time for apple buying and sampling events.

Consumers who have not tried Opals are always pleasantly surprised to learn they are naturally non-browning. Together, the high-flavor, crisp eating experience, and extended freshness drive shoppers to purchase. Not to mention, Opal is extremely versatile across the ways you can eat or prepare them.

MDC: Interesting! Is this what you mean when you say Opal is “More Than An Apple”?

EA: We say this for several reasons. In addition to the difference it is making for youth leaders across the country, Opal represents a lifestyle that many people can relate to, one that emphasizes health, playfulness, versatility, and flavor. Opal fits in with the whole family, from busy parents to school kids of all ages, and everyone else around the dinner table. It is a fresh snack that is naturally non-browning, and a healthy ingredient that fits well into numerous recipes for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and dessert.

MDC: Speaking of versatile solutions, how would you say Opal answers a need for the buy-side, and how can they maximize that potential solution?

EA: The fact that Opal is a high-flavor club variety means more margin at the register to drive sales. Opal can be marketed as a premium apple that is quickly becoming a staple for many shoppers, and retailers can maximize this by pushing seasonal promotional activity.

Grocers are often differentiated in the minds of consumers because of their produce departments. Opal apples enhance their produce department and draw the eye of the shopper, and that is magnified through smart merchandising and prominent displays. When buyers partner with Opal, we provide robust marketing support and category management services to make their lives easier. FirstFruits is a vertically integrated one-stop shop; when buyers partner with us, not only are they able to access Opal apples, but we also have a full manifest for their convenience. We are a single-grower system, giving us the highest degree of control over the quality of our fruit, a practice unmatched in the industry.

MDC: I would love to end this with a surprise twist—can you share anything fun or unexpected to know about Opal?

EA: Opal has been a part of a few pop culture moments that I always have fun sharing. In 2015, Opal apples were sent to the International Space Station for NASA astronauts to enjoy as nutritious snacks; in 2020, Rachael Ray cooked up several Opal apple recipes on her cooking show; and, in 2021, celebrity Chef Wolfgang Puck featured Opal apple spring rolls on the menu for Paris Hilton’s wedding.

The pattern here is this is a standout variety which has only furthered some memorable moments in current events, both fun and historic. Such as the fact Opal was the first club variety in the nation to be verified by The Non-GMO Project, doubling down on the natural aspect of its non-browning. Without the need for lemon juice or even salt water to save pre-sliced apples, I don’t think it can be emphasized enough how Opal apples are THE apple for prepping ahead. They are lunchbox heroes—13 years running!

> “Consumers who have not tried Opals are always pleasantly surprised to learn they are naturally non-browning. Together, the high-flavor, crisp eating experience, and extended freshness drive shoppers to purchase.”

Opal season is upon us, with many exciting plans for retailers as the colors in nature shift. With this proprietary variety available October through May, it’s fair to say that the chilled months should have you convincing consumers to see the Opal of their eye as you bring the passion for fall to the apple department as well.

WTF DO I DO WITH Del Rey Avocados ?

{ what the fork }



DEL REY AVOCADO TOFU BOWL

INGREDIENTS

1 large Del Rey Avocado, quartered
1 cup sushi rice
Sushi seasoning, to taste
3 tbsp preferred oil
Tofu
2 carrots, peeled or shredded
2 cucumbers, thinly sliced
Snow peas, to taste
Edamame, to taste
¼ nori sheet, finely shredded
Wasabi peas, to taste
Soy sauce, to taste

Prep Time: 10 min
Cook Time: 20 min
Servings: 2

DIRECTIONS

1. Place the rice and 1½ cups of water in a saucepan over medium heat and bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Reduce the heat to low, then cover and cook for 10–15 minutes, or until the water is absorbed. Set aside, covered, for 5 minutes.

2. Transfer the rice to a large bowl. To your liking, drizzle the sushi seasoning over the rice and use a large spoon to fold until well combined. Set aside to cool.

3. Heat a few tablespoons of oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add your preferred amount of tofu to the pan in a single layer. Allow tofu to cook for about 4–5 minutes or until the underside is golden brown and crispy. Meanwhile, clean and prep the veggies.

4. Divide the rice among serving bowls. Top with avocado, tofu, carrots, cucumber, snow peas, and edamame.

5. Sprinkle with shredded nori and wasabi peas and pour a little soy sauce into the avocado. Enjoy!

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

Bee Sweet Citrus

An Alchemy In ARCHITECTURE

By Melissa De Leon Chavez



The pride I feel when our magazine hits my doorstep has not dulled with time. Seeing a plan realized, from the screens of our computers to a real book in my hands, is an alchemy I get to experience nearly every month.

Similar to the creation medium I know so well, but on a scale that defies comprehension if I think on it too long, I cannot imagine seeing blueprints become buildings. Yet, in Fowler, California, Bee Sweet Citrus' Tommy Marderosian, Joe Berberian, and Joe Ruiz are living this magic.

During the summer of 2023, lights turned on and wheels began to spin for a Mandarin facility that broke ground in April 2022 after five years of intense planning.

"I think seeing the result of everything come together has been my favorite aspect of the whole process. Everything is so much faster and more efficient," Tommy, Bee Sweet's General Manager, reflected. "We can get everything done during the work day and run more loads a week. The technology we've implemented in the new facility does a better job of grading the fruit, so our pack will be more consistent."

The newest state-of-the-art grading equipment delivering these capabilities not only grades out stem pulls, clears rot, and more with better precision, it detects defects of the fruit more dependably for a higher percentage of accuracy overall.

"In addition to all this, the process is much faster because we've implemented a new wash line in our facility too. Prior to the



opening, our washing capabilities were holding us back. A new wash line that's used strictly for Mandarins has allowed us to keep up with the demand of packing," Tommy shared.

Keeping apace is critical. Changes in Mandarin demand, Joe R. said, were clearly written on the wall, even years ago when the facility was but a storyboard discussion. The Vice President of Production assured me that trajectory has only continued to prompt such an investment.

"Mandarins have become a household necessity," Joe R. pointed out. "When you go grocery shopping, you see them in every third or fourth cart—you wouldn't have seen that in the past."

Joe B., Sales, echoed this, helping me understand the drive propelling the change.



Joe Berberian,
Sales, Bee Sweet Citrus

"Over the last decade, the citrus industry has seen exponential growth in Mandarin demand. More and more people are consuming them, not just here in the United States, but worldwide. It's a good piece of fruit; it's easy to eat, and the quality makes it easy to ship overseas. Our new facility helps us meet that growing demand by being able to handle the volume coming off our trees and by packing high-quality fruit more efficiently," Joe B. told me.

Doubling down on this, Tommy said this is not just a help but the conception point of the new facility.

"The main reason we built the facility is because, to meet that demand, Bee Sweet Citrus planted more Mandarins. Now, this facility allows us to process and pack that volume," he shared. "We outgrew our older facility. Our original packing line wouldn't have been able to handle the volume of Mandarins we planted in the ground. A facility specifically for Mandarins was the clear solution."

When I asked the trio to quantify the speed with which the new structure has improved the Mandarin process, I was not prepared for the accuracy of their reply. But it is in such details that the critical awareness and fine planning of this strategy are made clear.

"In terms of efficiency, the facility has more than doubled our previous capacity. The same amount of people that were running the original line are running the new one and are doing it more than twice as fast," Tommy said.

This highlights another valuable return on the supplier's investment, one in social sustainability.



"This facility eliminates our need for a night shift in packing, an impact that was felt immediately. We're excited to look to the future and are implementing these projects to support a healthy work-life balance," Joe R. reflected.



"Mandarins have become a household necessity. When you go grocery shopping, you see them in every third or fourth cart—you wouldn't have seen that in the past."

Joe Ruiz,
Vice President of Production, Bee Sweet Citrus

Now, Tommy pointed out, the only night shift in existence for the Bee Sweet operation pertains to shipping.

"In the past, night shifts would run long. Now, we can do everything within a normal work day. Employees are happier, and we are seeing a nice jump in morale," Tommy noted, understandably.

Doing so much more in far less time saves on labor and energy use (both human and environmental) and, perhaps most excitingly, the company is only just beginning to discover the capabilities.

"We have yet to hit our peak in how many loads we can run per day, which is really fun," Joe R. shared. "What we used to do in two shifts, we can now do in one. When the season really gets under way, it will be exciting to see how we can deliver even better to our customers."

Knowing the important role logistics plays in that—pardon the pun—*delivery*, both assured me the Mandarin-specific facility does not add any stops to customer orders, but simply furthers the capabilities.

"The loading dock attached to the facility is specifically for Mandarins, allowing for much easier delivery and faster load times. Because the facility sits on the same property as our original facility, drivers don't have to go to another location to pick everything else up," Tommy concluded.

Watching it all come together is a highlight Joe B. couldn't help but pause on.

"Seeing the whole operation come together, from start to finish, has been incredible. The technology we've implemented in the building is nothing short of impressive, and we're excited to see how it will continue to help us better serve our customers," he said. "Retailers can be certain that our Mandarins are of the highest quality. The enhanced technology we've implemented has allowed our team to grade the fruit more meticulously, ensuring customers a better-quality piece of fruit every time they turn to our brand."

It is a beautifully orchestrated machine, so intricate in the construction that when you step back to see the architecture as a whole, metal becomes gold. No wonder it is Tommy and Joe B.'s proudest moment after five years of planning. Which begs the question: From groundbreaking to present, what is the standout for Joe R.?

"Mine," he said definitively, "has been the ability to show the state-of-the-art building to our visitors. People will often drive by and ask what's going on, and I get to explain to them what we are doing and share the exciting news."

Not dissimilar to the joy I experience when the alchemical process of images and words yields a book of stories for our industry. Thinking back on the magic of a plan realized and shared with the world, I can't help but smile with the three gentlemen and agree.

"In terms of efficiency, the facility has more than doubled our previous capacity. The same amount of people that were running the original line are running the new one and are doing it more than twice as fast."



Tommy Marderosian,
General Manager, Bee Sweet Citrus





WTF DO I DO WITH Jasmine Vineyards Red Seedless Table Grapes ?

{ what the fork }



GRILLED GRAPE AND PEACH BURRATA SALAD

INGREDIENTS

1 cup Jasmine Vineyards Red Seedless Table Grapes
1 peach
2 cups arugula
2 cups spinach
½ cup radicchio
½ English cucumber
½ large Heirloom tomato
1 ball of burrata
½ cup walnut pieces
Fresh basil, to taste
Vinaigrette of choice
4 skewers, for grilling grapes and peaches

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

DIRECTIONS

1. Soak skewers in water for at least 30 minutes prior to grilling to prevent burning.
2. Cut peach into quarters, removing the pit. Skewer grapes and peaches and grill on high for 2–3 minutes per side. Set aside and allow to cool.
3. Roughly chop arugula, spinach, and radicchio. Using a vegetable peeler, shave half of the English cucumber into thin ribbons. Cut tomato into thick half-moons.
4. To assemble the salad, place burrata in the center of a wooden salad bowl. Surround the burrata with greens, radicchio, and torn basil so that it covers the bottom of the salad bowl. Add grapes and peaches to one section, walnuts in the next, tomatoes in another, and cucumbers in another.
5. Garnish with additional basil, to taste, and serve immediately with a simple vinaigrette. Enjoy!

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

Jasmine VINEYARDS Est. 1947

ALC
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Transportation Brokers

"September has arrived. California produce shippers can relax just a bit as the summer volume slows. Not so for the Allen Lund Company. **NOW** we will ramp up to provide transportation as the fall harvest begins across the country. Whether it is pumpkins in Pennsylvania, apples in Washington, or sweet corn in the Carolinas, ALC starts moving locally grown produce to markets. You can trust the Allen Lund Company to respond to these seasonal challenges. Wherever you need your transportation, you can count on **ALC NOW**."

- David Lund, Chairman of the Board, Allen Lund Company

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BACK-TO-SCHOOL SnackChat



By Lilian Diep

Pack your backpacks and grab your brown paper bags! The bell is ringing, and these supply-side savants have just the study guides to make your produce aisles pass with flying colors. From the quintessential apple for the teacher to dippable cucumbers for the students, these selections are more than just the star pupils in the fresh produce department...



Brianna Shales,

Marketing Director, Stemilt

"Back-to-school time is full of excitement, and also trying to get back into routines. The produce department is poised for a back-to-school promotion focus because of all the fresh, ready-for-lunchbox snacks that fill it. We think the Rave® apple is a perfect fit for merchandising during this season. Not only is it fresh off the tree in the August and September timeframe, but this year it is THE apple to take back to school. The brand is teaming up to purchase school supply kits in several key United States markets, all while bringing awareness to consumers of the ease of packing the outrageously juicy and refreshing apple into lunchboxes. We're excited to donate to schools while building little Rave fans one school lunch or snack at a time."



Zanelle Hough,

Senior Director, Sales, Nature Fresh Farms

"Retailers can maximize their back-to-school earnings by following the trends and delivering on what consumers are seeking. Now more than ever, we are seeing consumers gravitate to healthy, convenient snacking options—this trend is also being carried over by parents and caregivers who are seeking these same, healthy, flavorful snacking options for children's lunches as opposed to traditional sugary snacks. Nature Fresh Farms Snack Supplies™ are the perfect offerings for this back-to-school trend. Available in varieties including Medley Tomatoes, Tiny Cocktail Cucumbers, and Mini Sweet Peppers—all of which include collectible stickers and a game on each pack—these kid-friendly offerings make healthy snacking the go-to option for kids and parents alike."



Emily Murracas,

Director of Marketing, Mucci Farms

"Back-to-school means back to packing lunches every day! As a parent myself, I remember packing lunches for my kids and would always be on the lookout for nutritious, easy items that were convenient and perfectly sized for the lunchbox. Making food fun and exciting is key to getting the little ones to eat healthily and reinvent the wheel for lunch. Just like us, kids eat with their eyes first, so whether it's using veggies to create animal characters or utilizing cut-outs to form shapes, there are always ways to make lunch fun and colorful! We have seen many trends posted on social media that show many 'mom-fluencers' building lunchboxes for their kids to provide inspiration to spruce up lunch offerings. It's imperative that parents have options on store shelves when shopping for their kids' lunches, which is why we have a full snacking lineup featuring our bite-sized CuteCumber™ Poppers that are perfect for back-to-school!"



Steven Ware,

Vice President and General Manager of Value Added Fresh, Naturipe Farms

"Back-to-school is such an exciting time of year, and snacks should reflect that too! When it's time to shop for lunches, parents and students will be looking for an easy grab-and-go snack that is both delicious and healthy. Products like Naturipe Snacks™ Boost and Bliss Bentos are a fantastic way to incorporate fresh fruit into anyone's daily diet. They feature convenient packaging and are packed full of fruit, nuts, and other delicious snack foods with key nutrients. Retailers can capitalize on shopper demand for convenience by separating refrigerated snacks like this in a special back-to-school section that promotes their nutritional benefits and the delicious flavor combinations of the snacks."



WEST PAK AVOCADO, INC.

"We are ***extremely proud*** of the company we have built from the ground up and the people who helped us get there."

- Galen Newhouse, Co-Founder, West Pak Avocado

On the Path to Prolific

By Jenna Plasterer





Since founding West Pak Avocado in 1982, Randy Shoup and Galen Newhouse have been evolving the company to meet the booming avocado category demand

One in 400 trillion.

That is the probability that each of us would be born. You have already defied immense odds by sitting here today. Call it luck or determination; whatever it is, it lives in us all.

Harnessing this inner power, the Co-Founders of West Pak Avocado, Galen Newhouse and Randy Shoup, chose to defy even more odds by starting a business in this ever-evolving industry. Now, the company is ringing in its 40th anniversary and looking back on what it has accomplished since 1982.

After putting it all on the line four decades ago, what does it feel like to celebrate such an impressive achievement?

"In a word: everything!" Galen says with a gleam in his eye. "It's exciting to celebrate this milestone. The past 40 years have been an amazing journey. We are extremely proud of the company we have built from the ground up and the people who helped us get there."

Back when West Pak started, both Galen and Randy had yet to learn how the avocado sector would blossom to become the powerhouse it is today. The industry was small, with imports not even allowed in the United States.

"As a company, West Pak started very modestly by sourcing locally and working out of an old metal building in Fallbrook, California, that was only about 5,000 square feet. Today, our California facility in Murrieta, California, spans over 114,000 square feet and doubles as our corporate headquarters," Randy details. "The road to becoming one of the largest suppliers of avocados in the world has been hard work, but West Pak has emerged as a respected global leader in the produce industry."

Thanks to the successful promotion of avocados over the years, the category received a significant boost that, in turn, bolstered West Pak's popularity. Before organizations like the Hass Avocado Board shared the healthy attributes of avocados, many people didn't realize their benefits. Since then, the category has become what Galen aptly refers to as "prolific."

Stemming from the industry's evolution, West Pak saw a surge in demand that led to its entry into Mexico. During the 1990s, the grower expanded efforts into Michoacán as a sourcing region and opened a packing facility.

"Having operations in Mexico is a strategic advantage to us. The top U.S. retailers want to buy avocados from someone who has control of their supply chain, as opposed to through a broker," explains Randy. "West Pak knows the market and marketplace, has assets, and can deliver the quality and volume our customers want directly."

Today, Grupo, West Pak's sister facility in Michoacán, is over 125,000 square feet and provides a large percentage of the volume to the U.S. and the company's European and Asian markets.

"The road to becoming one of the largest suppliers of avocados in the world has been hard work, but West Pak [Avocado] has emerged as a ***respected global leader in the produce industry.***"

- **Randy Shoup,** Co-Founder, West Pak Avocado



"Every company at some point faces a ***fork in the road,*** a point in which the next level of performance and growth must be identified and decided on."

- **Mario Pacheco,** Chief Executive Officer, West Pak Avocado



"West Pak is one of only three U.S. packers in Mexico with its own operations and employees," adds Galen. "Without our Michoacán facility, the company would not be what it is today."

Thanks to this operation and more, West Pak has become a strong retail partner, offering a resilient year-round supply of high-quality avocados. This has earned the trust of its customers, along with its exceptional service, value-added offerings, and logistics, which have propelled its growth.

Overall, West Pak has nearly tripled in size over the past decade alone.

"Every company at some point faces a fork in the road, a point in which the next level of performance and growth must be identified and decided on. One of those moments for West Pak was our decision to make strategic investments in independently owned avocado ranches and packing houses in Mexico and Colombia, then supplement the supply by supporting local growers," states **Mario Pacheco,** Chief Executive Officer, West Pak Avocado. "We believe that our investments, including our relationships with growers, will significantly enhance our value to our customers and solidify our leadership in the industry."



West Pak is on track for growth and moving full steam ahead, which has allowed Randy and Galen to step back from daily operations over the past few years, giving Mario the chance to take the reins. Both Founders sit on the Board of Directors and are involved as shareholders.

With Mario and other emerging leaders at the helm, West Pak remains dedicated to doing business with respect and integrity. The company's current focus is on growing its network of distribution centers in the States, having recently opened its latest facility in New Jersey, with plans for substantial expansion into the Southeast as well.

The avocado maven is also looking to widen its footprint in its current sourcing regions while further developing its grower partnerships. Mexico, California, Colombia, Peru, and Chile are all in its sights moving forward.

"In the next 40 years, we look to deliver our premium avocados to more parts of the world," concludes Mario. "We will continue to expand existing operations and cultivate new sourcing regions, doing so with sustainability and ethical business and labor practices in mind."

Fortune favors the bold, and the odds have remained on West Pak's side throughout its four-decade journey. With so much already accomplished since its inception, there is no telling where fate will guide these fearless leaders next.



BRANDISHING THE *Bold*

By Peggy Packer

Think back to your first encounter with an apple.

The mere mention of the fruit conjures up distant memories of childhood. Maybe you envision snack time on the playground at your daycare. Or, maybe you see a vibrant flash card in front of you as your kindergarten teacher walks your class through the alphabet for the very first time.

It's a phenomenon sure to spark some form of recollection, and the category's unrivaled flavor has equal power. As New York Apple Association's (NYAA) Cynthia Haskins will devotedly tell you, there is something so comforting about biting into a classic New York apple.

"New York is big on flavor!" the President and Chief Executive Officer tells me as we explore the organization's carefully mapped-out plan for category growth. "Enjoying a classic, New York-grown apple during the fall season brings a sense of nostalgia and reminds consumers of special moments in life."

I can already visualize myself standing in the kitchen of my grandparents' home on a warm October morning, slyly munching on the caramel apples my grandpa placed on the counter just minutes prior.

Such a strong and sentimental connection can only be generated by decades of consistency, quality, and flavor.

NYAA is a key player in helping the category maintain its "staple" status, all the while elevating New York growers for their spectacular apple-producing abilities. Wielding the flavor of many beloved varieties, NYAA is setting out to introduce reimagined apple pairings, bringing the familiarity of the classics together with something unexpected. In the words of Cynthia, it's about uncovering "bold and unconventional pairings for an unforgettable noshing experience."

Complementing a classic apple variety with something unexpected paves the way for consumers who want to enjoy their favorite apple varieties while experimenting with new flavors.

"New York apple growers are continuously reinventing their operations in search of what's next in providing tasty and healthy apples," Cynthia imparts. "Newer varieties include SnapDragon®, RubyFrost®, and New York-grown SweeTango®, EverCrisp®, and WildTwist®. Each of these has a distinct flavor profile and texture that consumers have come to love. Shoppers will always reach for their favorite classic apples and are often in search of an additional favorite. The flavor is what brings them back to the store to purchase again."

With flavor serving as the primary driver for category success, NYAA is optimizing multiple creative strategies to further build consumer awareness. Brandishing the power of social media, the association is setting out to inform shoppers about different apple varieties, their flavor profiles, and when they are being harvested.

Short videos and images have hit social media platforms to tell the story of the apple's journey, and NYAA has also harnessed them as an opportunity to widely distribute the stories of New York apple growers.

"From the way apples are planted to how they are grown and harvested, we want to pass along stories that demonstrate the dedication and passion our growers have for driving sustainability and







"Enjoying a classic, New York-grown apple during the fall season brings a sense of nostalgia and reminds consumers of special moments in life."

Cynthia Haskins, President and Chief Executive Officer, New York Apple Association

growing some of the best-tasting apples in the world," Cynthia explains. "New York apple growers are multigenerational. They are driven to meet the demand for flavor and do so by working hand-in-hand with Mother Nature. Consumers want to know where their food comes from, and we want to share that story with them, starting with the growers who make it all happen."

Other elements of this complex marketing strategy include content for NYAA's retail partners' websites, newsletters, blogs, and in-store signage. The comprehensive blueprint is further supported by eye-catching packaging that stands out in the produce department and convenient, high-graphic poly totes, poly bags, and pouches designed to encourage grab-and-go purchases.

NYAA is also generating momentum for New York-grown apples through the kickoff of its Apple Ambassador program. This ingenious program invites dietitians to post about the health benefits of New York State apples, further amplifying awareness for the delicious fruit and the region it hails from.

It is efforts like these that have ceaselessly transformed the apple category from simply a destination in the produce department to a well of opportunity and consumer loyalty.

So the next time you hold a New York-grown apple in your hands, know you are holding a memory, a legacy, and above all, a labor of love.



Breaking Bad Habits:

Lessons for Job Seekers

By Editorial Contributor Rex Lawrence, Founder and President, Joe Produce Search℠

As you might imagine, I have conversations all the time with folks who are seeking new career ventures. Laid off, downsized, fired, quit, aged out, closed doors, pushed out, retired and returned...you name it, we see it. It's such a gift to help these folks at this stage in their lives and careers. Sometimes it's a very strategic conversation about their direction, criteria, and resume. For others, it's about their mindset and emotions. Let me tell you, it's a traumatic experience for many folks to change jobs. It can be much like a divorce or death for some. Many—MOST—of us identify ourselves and our self-worth with our jobs.

Before I go further with this story, let me say right here: **You are not your job or job title!** You're not the first to lose your job, and surely not the last. S*** (stuff) happens. Move on! You're lucky—you're in produce. This is a great business. Furthermore, demand exceeds supply for people in our industry. This too shall pass. Really.

The ironic thing is many of these folks devastated by job loss were not happy with the employer—usually the management and/or culture, by the way.

I digress, as usual. Let's look at what one can do to move ahead.

TIP: We can't often control our circumstances; we can control our perceptions, mindsets, and actions.

Success is not solely determined by skills and qualifications, but also by one's habits and behaviors. In his insightful article, "10 Bad Habits You Must Eliminate from Your Daily Routine," renowned author and psychologist Dr. Travis Bradberry sheds light on the detrimental impact of bad habits and provides valuable lessons for professionals.

I read this and thought about how the lessons can be particularly beneficial for those who are job seekers, perhaps particularly for those of us who find ourselves out of a job and did not plan on it. What follows here are eight of Dr. Bradberry's 10 lessons* job seekers may want to keep in mind as they navigate this challenging period.

Lesson 1: Self-Control Is Key to Success

Dr. Bradberry emphasizes the importance of self-control in achieving success. He reveals that self-control is twice as important as IQ in earning a high GPA. This habit holds profound implications for job seekers, emphasizing the need to develop self-control as the foundation for a healthy and productive job-seeking period.

Lesson 2: Unplug to Boost Productivity

One prevalent bad habit highlighted by Dr. Bradberry is the use of electronic devices before bed. He explains how the blue light emitted by smartphones, tablets, and computers disrupts sleep patterns, affecting both mood and productivity. This lesson serves as a valuable reminder for job seekers to establish healthy boundaries with technology, ensuring restful sleep and increased focus during job search activities.

Lesson 3: Embrace the Power of Focus

In today's hyperconnected world, it's easy to succumb to the temptation of multitasking and constant distractions. Dr. Bradberry introduces the concept of flow, a state of heightened productivity that results from uninterrupted focus. By resisting the urge to impulsively surf the internet or check notifications, job seekers can cultivate an environment conducive to achieving their goals and making significant progress in their job search.

Lesson 4: Nurture Meaningful Connections

While technology has made communication more accessible, it has also given rise to detrimental habits such as checking phones during conversations. Dr. Bradberry stresses the importance of immersing oneself fully in conversations, emphasizing that meaningful connections lead to more effective and enjoyable interactions. Job seekers should prioritize active listening and engagement, fostering strong relationships that can open doors to new opportunities. Do NOT look at emails or texts while speaking with employers. Be fully engaged! In fact, leave your cellphone in your car or turn it off.

Lesson 5: Say "No" to Overcommitment

Learning to say "no" is a valuable skill, as demonstrated by Dr. Bradberry's discussion on the detrimental effects of overcommitment. He explains that difficulty in saying no leads to stress, burnout, and eroded self-control. Job seekers must prioritize their time and energy by setting boundaries, avoiding overextending themselves, and honoring existing commitments. This enables them to maintain a healthy work-life balance and preserve their ability to be both productive and happy.

Lesson 6: Cultivate a Positive Mindset

Toxic people and negative thoughts can derail a job seeker's progress and dampen their enthusiasm. Dr. Bradberry advises redirecting thoughts toward gratitude for positive influences in one's life, rather than fixating on individuals who drain energy and create negativity. By focusing on the positives and surrounding oneself with supportive individuals, job seekers can maintain motivation and resilience throughout their career journeys. Life's journey is tough enough, "drop the rocks** from your backpack," and move on up the path!

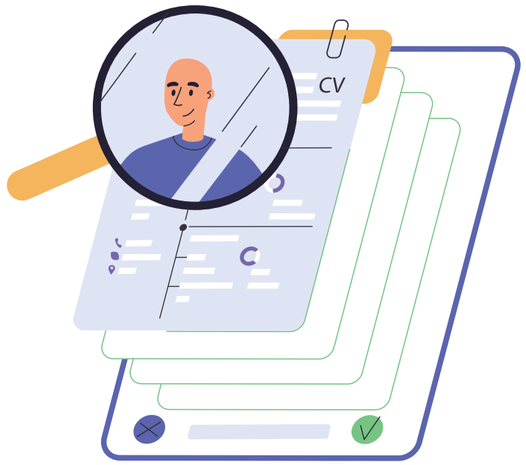
***Anger, guilt, embarrassment, and other negative emotions which are like you taking poison and waiting for the other person to die. Move on—chances are they have!*

Lesson 7: Embrace Imperfection and Take Action

Perfectionism can be paralyzing, preventing individuals from taking the necessary steps toward achieving their goals. Dr. Bradberry encourages people to overcome this barrier by recognizing that progress comes from action, even if it means starting with imperfect ideas. By understanding that perfection is an unattainable goal, individuals can unleash their potential and take meaningful steps that propel them forward in their careers.

Lesson 8: Celebrate Your Uniqueness

In a world that often encourages comparison, Dr. Bradberry reminds people to resist the urge to compare themselves to others. Seeking validation from external sources can diminish one's self worth and hinder personal growth. Instead, he encourages individuals to recognize their own accomplishments and embrace their unique qualities. By focusing on personal development and nurturing individual strengths, job seekers can carve their own path to success, fueled by self-confidence and authenticity.



Embracing these lessons and integrating them into daily routines will not only enhance those job-seeking periods, but they also help us all as we navigate life's challenges and opportunities.

QUOTE: "What we conceive and believe, we can achieve." ~ Napoleon Hill *

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

MULTIVERSE OF MUSHROOMS

By Melissa De Leon Chavez

Jose Cambon appreciates a good pop-culture reference almost as much as a good P.O. The new Chief Executive Officer of Highline Mushrooms has the experience and intellect to lead, with the charisma that inspires others to follow. But Jose himself will distill all of these attributes down to a fundamental desire, grounding each in a singular purpose.

Pragmatism is the root system from which everything else fires for Jose, and if he has his way, the days of calling mushrooms humble are numbered.

"As an industry, we know we have a great product, but we've failed to explain to the consumer why they should eat fresh mushrooms," Jose boils down for me. Simple and to the point, a mushroom is the answer to so many societal needs from bettering gut health to sustainable practices and whole-food eating. But, North Americans eat up to five times less mushrooms than other parts of the world.

Rather than looking at this as a challenge, Jose sees a script for success and plenty of growth to be gained for Highline and other growers.

The enigmatic mushroom is poised for its time in the hero's role. Polarizing, mysterious, magical, and healthy—these are the makings of the protagonists that drive media today on the page and the screen, and they can all be found in the round-capped characters in your fresh departments.

"Previous to coming to North America, I worked for a large agricultural group called the Costa Group. We had a range of segments, including berries. Blueberries tracked pretty well for a little while, but then something happened and they spiked," Jose explained.

That "something" was antioxidants—a word that was said and spelled out to consumers so often it became blueberries' superpower without further explanation.

"It's not about a whole bunch of different messages, it's that same message resonating all the way through," Jose drew on this when looking across categories. "In the mushroom industry we've said, 'They're really good for you. Just trust us.' So, what we are working to accomplish now is to get that clear message across to consumers. ____ is the reason why."

While that blank might seem a realistic conundrum, brought on by having so many reasons to entrust our health to mushrooms, Highline hears chance knocking. Vitamin D, gut and brain health, a stronger immune system, take your pick! But choose the industry must, as has been shown not just by blueberries, but avocados, celery, kale, and more fresh items that have surged to star status.

If the new leader of Highline Mushrooms is the Director bringing this show to light, Devon Kennedy is the Producer who knows it will take more than a unified message to bring them to the world stage.

"I've worked in all areas of the produce industry, so when I walked into grocery stores and started really looking at the mushroom shelf…it's just brown and



- Jose Cambon,
Chief Executive Officer,
Highline Mushrooms



white," Devon, National Marketing Manager, observed. Like Jose, this screamed potential to her. "I see a huge opportunity to engage with consumers and get them to put more mushrooms in their cart at every visit. There is also the chance to tell the benefits of mushrooms, whether they're nutritional benefits or new ways to eat mushrooms. Mushrooms go with almost everything at any time. They complement meat or they can replace meat, and they are on the menu with breakfast, lunch, and dinner."

Also drawing on existing scripts by other categories, Devon navigated me from mushrooms to lettuce.

"When you look at the lettuce five deck and how much fun they've had, mushrooms have the same versatility that retailers could be maximizing. They are very approachable and they're, jokingly, the fun-gi (read: fun-guy). We can have a great time with mushrooms and get them on everybody's plate at every meal," she commented.

In echoing Devon's sentiments with respect to the parallels between lettuce and mushrooms, Jose had some definite thoughts on the presentation of mushrooms.

"We are not reinventing the wheel, but following how mushrooms and most fresh packaged produce are presented in other markets. Fundamentally, we should be putting all product in a clear pack. Just doing that, we the mushroom grower can almost guarantee our plastic will be recycled and not end up in the landfill. That change alone is a huge opportunity for North America," Jose said.











"IT'S NOT ABOUT A WHOLE BUNCH OF DIFFERENT MESSAGES, IT'S THAT SAME MESSAGE RESONATING ALL THE WAY THROUGH. IN THE MUSHROOM INDUSTRY, WE'VE SAID, 'THEY'RE REALLY GOOD FOR YOU. JUST TRUST US.' SO, WHAT WE ARE WORKING TO ACCOMPLISH NOW IS TO GET THAT CLEAR MESSAGE ACROSS TO CONSUMERS."

- Jose Cambon,
Chief Executive Officer, Highline Mushrooms





Highline tackled this with the recent launch of its clear till, which showcases the product, and gives room for branding and education, plus the convenience of shelving options for retailers.

"Clear tills are important from a sustainability and an environmental perspective and crucial from a sales perspective, but it's also going to make some of our team's jobs harder," Jose acknowledged, adding that good people who care about the mission—especially those handling product every day—are the most valuable assets a business can have. "Part of the reason I came to North America is I speak a little Spanish, the primary language of most of our workforce now. I think there's a huge opportunity in being able to connect with your workforce and explain to them in their language why whatever you're trying to calculate is important, asking them whether they are packing mushrooms they would like their family to eat. That's the barometer by which we should all measure what we do, and the almost 2,000 people that we have across our farms harvesting are the most crucial part of that."

With this recent launch of Highline's clear tills, which showcase the product, enhance branding opportunities, and offer the convenience of shelving options for retailers, continuous innovation and sustainability align with a goal of increasing mushroom consumption.

"We want to help our retail partners delight their customers. Clear packaging achieves this by giving them more space for branding and an opportunity for story-telling," Jose pointed out. "This is exactly what the lettuce guys have done: The bag is fully branded, it's telling lots of stories on the front, and if someone actually wants to look at the product, it's fully visible. You look at berries, grapes, and salad kits; none of it is covered up. Customers pick it up and look at what they are buying—they can see the product clearly and that's an opportunity."



Clear tills, he and Devon explained, are going to raise the bar for the entire industry, and the team anticipates it will attract customers to the display, resulting in increased sales at check-out.

"So it's pretty logical," Jose summed up. "Fundamentally, the customer needs to be at the center of your decision-making process. When you are answering their needs, they will return the favor and make what you are doing a success."

Highline has big plans in the works and a new pack presentation is just the beginning of the mushroom movement. The logical foundation that drives Jose's process has laid out a number of steps to an overarching vision of true change and continued expansion across the North American landscape.

"I genuinely believe in climate-smart agriculture. Mushroom farming is just that: smart and a key contributor to the climate change solution," he said. While the goal is a grand one, Jose is quick to point out he is a parent, not an environmental warrior. He wants to see his children breathe clean air, drink water, play outside, and sees the wonderful potential our industry has to help ensure this.

"The idea that the current generation of people are going to live for less than previous generations just because they're not eating properly and because of the way the climate is changing is incomprehensible. I am a proud parent. I am a proud farmer. We as an industry can make a real difference," said Jose.

This brings us to the most critical point of the master plan Highline is executing: The team will not, can not, do this alone.

"We want to share our strategy for change across the industry," Jose told me. "This should not be a Highline initiative; we genuinely believe in mushrooms, and everyone who grows them needs to communicate this as a whole. One message, one voice. Want to be healthy? Want to be sustainable? Want to be regenerative? Just eat a mushroom."

Simple and logical. With consumers today seeking a way to make a difference inside-out, from their physical health to the health of the world around them, give them the answer in this unsung superhero.

PRODUCE PULSE

Gifting Experience

BY ANNE ALLEN

Giving a gift is about as human as it gets. Tying together the traditions of hospitality and appreciation, giving someone a present speaks of care and love in a way that words often can't.

I think there is a natural connection between fresh produce and this gift-giving language, one that our industry can better utilize to market the products we offer and capture the hearts of the buying community we serve.

The definition of experiential gifting lies in the name—rather than giving someone a present, you're offering them an experience.

As Chandler James wrote in a previous article, "Immerse Your Senses," the idea of experience has long been utilized at foodservice to drive diners into restaurants. How, then, can we utilize an experience to connect with consumers while they shop?

We have an obvious backdrop for the experiential gift: the produce department. It's a world unto itself, and I don't mean this as hyperbole. The produce department offers so many tactile experiences on its own; imagine coupling that with produce managers running pickling stations or an interdepartmental demonstration on how to make the perfect crust for berry pies.

For the marketers behind fresh operations, the idea of gifting experience can already be seen in ad campaigns and sweepstakes marketing. The product itself is central to the promotion, but the experience is what makes it successful.

Another opportunity for experiential gifting comes at little to no cost for companies: simply going live on social media platforms. Inviting consumers into your world with interactive sessions like mixing a new drink or preparing an easy recipe not only shows them the companies they buy from are approachable, but ready to engage with them at their level.

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WTF DO I DO WITH Progressive Farms Jalapeños ?

{ what the fork }



SWEET AND SPICY SMASHED BURGER WITH FRIES

INGREDIENTS

2–3 Progressive Farms Jalapeño Peppers, thinly sliced (remove seeds and ribs for milder heat)
1 large Mayan Sweets® Sweet Onion, thinly sliced
4 medium Pacific Gold® Russet Potatoes
1 lb ground beef
4 hamburger buns
4 slices American cheese
2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
Vegetable oil, for frying

"SECRET" SAUCE

¼ cup mayonnaise
2 tbsp ketchup
1 tbsp yellow mustard
1 tbsp pickle relish
1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
½ tsp garlic powder
Salt and pepper, to taste

Prep Time: 40 min
Cook Time: 25 min
Servings: 4

DIRECTIONS

1. In a small bowl, combine the secret sauce ingredients. Stir, then set aside.
2. Cut the potatoes into ¼" thick fries. Soak the fries in cold water for 30 minutes. Heat a couple of inches of vegetable oil in a deep, heavy pot to 325° F.
3. In three or four batches, cook the fries for 4–5 minutes per batch (you want the potatoes to be soft at this point, not browned). Using a slotted spoon, remove each batch of fries from the oil and drain on paper towels. Increase the temperature of the oil to 400° F. Cook the fries again, in batches, until they are golden brown. Remove from the oil and drain on paper towels. Sprinkle with salt.
4. Preheat a large skillet or griddle over medium-high heat. Divide the ground beef into four equal portions and shape them into balls. Season each with salt and pepper. Add oil to the preheated skillet or griddle. Once hot, place the meat balls onto the surface, leaving space between them.
5. Using a sturdy spatula, smash each ball down until it reaches about ¼" thickness. Continue pressing down to create a good sear. Add onion slices on top and cook for 2–3 minutes until the bottoms are browned and crispy. Flip the burger patties and cook for an additional 1–2 minutes. Add a slice of cheese and cook until melted. Remove from the heat and transfer to a plate.
6. In a separate skillet, heat some oil over medium heat. Add jalapeño peppers. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the jalapeños are slightly tender, about 4–6 minutes.
7. To assemble the burgers: Spread a generous amount of the secret sauce on the bottom half of each bun. Place a patty on top. Add a spoonful of jalapeños. If desired, add another patty, then cover with the top bun. Serve the burgers immediately alongside the fries. Enjoy!

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

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The Avocado REVOLUTION



By Editorial Contributor Steve Barnard,
Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer,
Mission Produce™

Back in 1983, the year Mission Produce™ was founded, the avocado industry was mostly California-based, and several varieties were used to fill up the calendar. The dominant Hass variety was only available from spring to fall in California, so greenskins filled in the gaps. With heavy consumption in California and Texas[1], many states didn't even seem to know about it.

In 2022, per capita consumption was 8.2 lbs in the United States[2], 19.8 lbs in Mexico[3], 3.5 lbs in the E.U., and the U.K. 2 lbs (and those numbers are coming from customs data and other industry sources). With a huge opportunity in China as the younger generation starts to drink "avocado smoothies," and China avocado imports increasing—up by 25 percent from 2020 to 2022[2]—a long runway is ahead globally.

How did we get here from 1983? There were three key things that make up what I call the "avocado revolution." Combined, they have catapulted the industry to what it is today around the world.

The first was the opening of the U.S./Mexican border for Hass avocados to enter the U.S. in 1997. Mexican fruit is mostly harvested in the winter months, which complements the California source, so a year-round supply of Hass avocados became available. As a result, consumption started to grow.

[1] *USDA. Economic Research Service*
[2] *CIRAD. FruiTrop Magazine May-June 2023*
[3] *Rabobank. Global Growth Far from Over. May 2023*
[4] *Avocado Intel Survey. December 6, 2022*

The second part of the "avocado revolution" was the selling of ripe fruit. Avocados can be a spontaneous purchase, but ripeness is what consumers are looking for[4].

Gil Henry, of Henry Avocado in Escondido, started the preconditioned program for avocados in the early '80s, which started the ripening process. Consumers would only have to wait a couple of days for the fruit to ripen, rather than a week or so.

This process contributed to increasing consumption, as fruit was consumed faster, and consumers returned to the store to buy more.

In the late '90s, Mission started testing a modified atmosphere box with a graduate student from the University of British Columbia. Following the trials, we would put the various boxes out to give to the crew to take home. We had preconditioned fruit, hard fruit, and ripe, ready-to-eat fruit. The crew would always take home the ripe fruit. I asked one of the ladies one day why they did not take the harder fruit. She said, "I'll get that next week when it is ready."

So, we thought we should try this at retail. I went down to the local Ralphs in South Oxnard, California, and discussed with the Produce Manager what we would like to trial. He said we were crazy—that it would be a big mess. I assured him I would clean it up, if necessary, and that we would give him the fruit and he could keep the money. He reluctantly agreed, so I brought 10 cases of ripe fruit to the store the following Friday morning. The display had a ripe sign, and the fruit was displayed two-deep on the shelf, next to a tall mound of hard green fruit. We even put a higher price on the ripe fruit compared to the hard fruit. I told him I would be back on Monday to see the results, good or bad.

When I went back on Monday, there were oranges where we had put the ripe fruit. I asked the manager where the 10 boxes of avocados were, and he said, "I sold out at noon on Saturday, so I had to fill the space with oranges."

Later that year, Ralphs agreed to a one-year trial on a ripe program, and its avocado sales rapidly increased. A short time later, I called Reggie Griffin, who was with Kroger at the time, and I had known from sitting on the Produce Marketing Association Board (now the International Fresh Produce Association). I asked him if he had seen the avocado results from Ralphs, and he said, "Yes, I have. Let's keep this simple. You build them, and we will fill them."

He was referring to ripe centers.

The third part of the revolution was driven by the avocado industry boards and associations, specifically in Mexico, California, and Peru. Through their research, they found that avocados don't have cholesterol, which was a long-time myth, and are full of vitamins and nutrients. Now, consumers call avocados a superfood.

That was the start of the "avocado revolution" in the U.S. and Canada. Today we see a similar opportunity to drive consumption in Europe, the U.K., and Asia.

With that growth ahead, Mission needed to position itself to have enough supplies at the right time of the year. So, we invested in Peru, Guatemala, and South Africa to fill in supply gaps for specific destinations and during certain windows.

So, stay tuned, as this amazing fruit has more to come.

BIO:

Steve Barnard founded Mission Produce™ in 1983 with fellow produce industry veteran Ed Williams. For 40 years, Mission Produce has invested in people, state-of-the-art technology, and avocado-specific infrastructure to expertly serve customers, growers, and partners. Sourcing from eight premium origins with 12 ripening facilities to serve 25 countries, Mission Produce offers a year-round supply of avocados.



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Mission Produce's avocado-specific ripening rooms are managed by Ripe Masters in every facility



Mission Produce was a pioneer of the "Avocado Revolution" with ripe, ready-to-eat avocados



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WTF DO I DO WITH DelFrescoPure® Organic Mini Cucumbers ?

{ what the fork }



HUMMUS AND VEGETABLE ORGANIC MINI CUCUMBER BOATS

INGREDIENTS

1 package DelFrescoPure® Organic Mini Cucumbers
1 container preferred hummus flavor
1 pint G.R.EAT! Grab Rinse and EAT!® Orange Tomatoes, diced
1 package Red Sweet Rainbow Peppers, diced
¼ cup shredded carrots
5 slices avocado, halved
1 package microgreens

Prep Time: 10 min
Servings: 5

DIRECTIONS

1. Cut cucumbers in half and scoop out some of the flesh. Discard the flesh, then turn cucumbers upside down over a paper towel to drain any excess liquid.
2. Place 1 tbsp of hummus inside each of the cucumber halves and spread evenly.
3. Garnish the hummus-filled cucumber halves with diced tomatoes, diced peppers, shredded carrots, avocado slices, and microgreens. Enjoy!

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Libations
FOR ALL OCCASIONS:
A FRESH CONCORD

By Lilian Diep

Photography by Craig Wheeler

I don't drink many grape-inspired libations. However, I wanted to change that.

Wine is a great option if you want the traditional experience, but I wanted to go beyond the surface and see what spirit pairs best with this amazing year-round fruit—especially when it comes to table grapes.

After many trials and testing (and a couple of internet searches), I've found that table grapes are best accentuated by some sweetness in the form of a mint-infused syrup. Purely muddling herbs with them produced overpowering herbal notes, and grapes need a strong flavor profile to fully come through. The Concord grape is one variety I leaned toward, and imagine my surprise when I spotted Manischewitz while perusing the aisles.

It's sweet, easy to drink, and has that complete, concentrated, Concord experience. The spirit pairs perfectly with a few frozen table grape garnishes, and it makes for an easy way to cross-merchandise with bags in the aisles.

Give it a few spins around a handful of crushed ice, and you've made yourself an easy-sipping drink.

INGREDIENTS

COCKTAIL INGREDIENTS

- **1 oz** gin or white rum of choice (we recommend The Botanist or Captain Morgan, respectively)
- **½ oz** sweet Concord wine, such as Manischewitz
- **½ oz** mint-infused simple syrup
- Crushed ice
- Frozen red or green table grapes, for garnish

MINT-INFUSED SIMPLE SYRUP

- **½ cup** sugar, Turbinado preferred
- **½ cup** water
- **Small handful** of fresh mint

Time: 10 mins
Freeze time: 30 mins
Servings: 1

DIRECTIONS

1. Rinse your table grapes, and pat them dry before placing them in the freezer. If using a cocktail skewer, skewer first to make for easy garnish.
2. Make a mint-infused simple syrup by stirring sugar, water, and mint over medium heat. Dissolve the sugar and continue stirring until the mixture comes to a gentle boil. Turn the heat off and let it cool.
3. Pour gin or white rum, concord wine, and simple syrup into a glass. I prefer the white rum base, but please feel free to experiment!
4. Top with crushed ice and stir.
5. Garnish with frozen grapes and enjoy!

Note: If you want a less-watered-down version, replace crushed ice with frozen grapes to keep the drink nice and chilled.

WTF DO I DO WITH Farm2You® Peaches ?

{ what the fork }



PEACHY CROSTINI WITH WHIPPED MASCARPONE

INGREDIENTS

PEACHES
4–6 Farm2You® Peaches, halved, pitted, and diced
1 tsp lemon juice
2 tbsp sugar

WHIPPED MASCARPONE
1 cup mascarpone, softened
½ cup powdered sugar
1½ cups heavy whipping cream
1 tsp vanilla extract

CROSTINI
1 baguette, sliced and lightly toasted
Honey, to taste
Mint, chopped (optional)

Prep Time: 15 min
Servings: 10–12

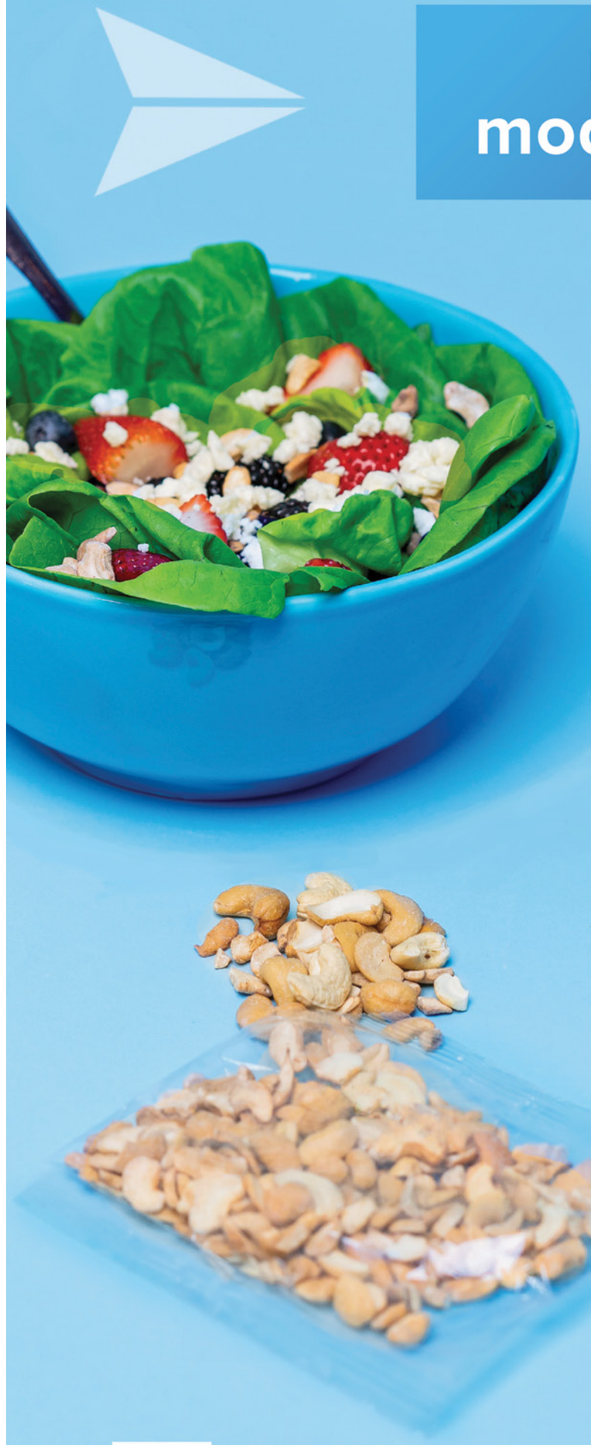
DIRECTIONS

1. Place diced peaches in a bowl and toss with lemon juice. Add sugar and toss until peaches are well coated. Set aside.
2. Place mascarpone into a large bowl. Using an electric mixer, beat briefly to soften.
3. Add the powdered sugar and mix well.
4. Add in the heavy whipping cream and vanilla extract and mix until combined. Store in refrigerator until ready to use.
5. Spread mascarpone on each crostini and top with peaches. Drizzle with honey and sprinkle with freshly chopped mint, if desired. Enjoy!

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