

Fresh Digest

A Publication of the Fresh Produce & Floral Council

Summer 2022

CALIFORNIA
AGRICULTURE CONTINUES
TO FIGHT THE CHALLENGES

RETAILER PROFILE:
RALEY'S
HEATHER BUTTS



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EDITOR'S VIEW

By Tim Linden



Is California Ag at Its Breaking Point?

Recently, a *New York Times* reporter wrote an excellent article on California agriculture. He explored the shortage of labor and the impact it is having on specialty crop production in the Golden State. The gist of Eduardo Porter's story is that lack of labor, especially undocumented workers, is causing California to turn toward mechanization and greatly reduce the acreage of labor-intensive crops, such as asparagus. Largely because of lower wages, the article points out that growers in Mexico have increased their acreage of these same crops.

Coincidentally, I have been working on a coupler of stories recently also exploring the viability of California agriculture. One such story appears in this issue and is part of the ongoing collaboration between the Fresh Produce & Floral Council and the California Grocers Association. The article, in a slightly different form, is being published in the Summer issue of CGA's publication to give those members a snapshot of our industry.

In researching the topic, I did run across some skepticism about the future of California agriculture. This is not a brand new topic for me. Over my decades-long career in this industry, I have read and written many obituaries for this industry. In fact, history is full of them. In the early 1960s, before my reporting career was hatched, the end of the Bracero Program was said to be

the death knell for production agriculture, especially the processing tomato industry. The mechanical tomato harvester saved the day. In the late 1960s and throughout the '70s, unionization of farmworkers was going to be the nail in the coffin. California's ever-increasing minimum wage, especially measured against a stagnant federal minimum wage, has always been listed as an obstacle too large to overcome. In the mid-1980s when California voters considered Proposition 65, which required labels to be attached to products warning about toxic chemicals, California ag campaigned diligently to stop the passage and the subsequent end of the industry. Prop 65 passed and the industry survived.

There are many more of these examples but suffice to say that the demise of California agriculture has continually been overexaggerated.

But that is too flippant of a response to the current challenges. Lack of labor, extended drought conditions, intense devastating fires, inflationary costs and supply chain issues are just a few of the seemingly endless concerns that growers are facing today.

There are some innovative solutions that are coming to the forefront to mitigate some of these issues. California is moving ahead like never before on mechanizing many of its cultural practices. From weeding to spraying to harvesting crops in the field, machines

with robotic arms are increasingly doing the job. Seed scientists are helping by building plants that are easier to harvest mechanically. It is inevitable that mechanical harvesting will make giant leaps forward in the next decade, which will positively address the labor shortage issue.

Supply chain issues appear to be abating and inflationary pressures are worldwide and cyclical in nature. While those two issues are currently very worrisome, neither of those problems appear to be insurmountable over time.

Drought, extreme weather events and fire are not as easy to address. California has had the driest decade in recorded history with more fires than ever before. Climate change is unquestionably the villain. Many want to debate the cause of climate change, but that's irrelevant to this discussion. We are drier and more prone to fire. And farmers have to deal with both of those issues on a continuing basis, with no solutions in sight.

So has California reached the breaking point as one of the top specialty crop producing regions in the world? I'd like to think the ingenuity of the entrepreneurs who farm the land will scale these mountains of challenges as they have done so many times before during my nearly half-century of having a front row seat to the action. But it does feel different this time. Only time will tell. 🌱



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EXECUTIVE NOTES

By Don Gann, FPFC President



A Big Thank You Is in Order

We've had a great line-up of spring events and we couldn't do it without the support and sponsorship of our members.

Every year for the past four decades, one of the most important events for the Fresh Produce & Floral Council has been its Expo. It has had different shapes and form, but at its core it is a great opportunity for suppliers to share their new and existing product lines with the buying community.

The event had to be postponed in both 2020 and 2021 because of COVID, but we came back strong this year with the Anaheim Convention Center being the venue for the 2022 FPFC Expo. More than 400 retail individuals walked the floor from many different supermarkets. In total, the crowd numbered more than 1,000.

Lisa Leslie and Todd Linsky did a marvelous job as keynote presenters, and the Expo Committee Chair Dave Howald of Pear Bureau Northwest and FPFC Chair Kori Martin of Oppy did an excellent job in their respective roles to make sure it all worked. A special shout

out to Michael Schutt of Raley's, who was a great asset in securing sponsors that were forthcoming and generous.

I don't mind saying this event was an artistic and a financial success. This was the first time Emma McBride-Taylor and I put together such an ambitious event. We took away a lot of knowledge that will help us improve! We have already started planning to make it bigger and better in 2023. On the facing page, I have listed all the retailers that attended. We all know that it is retailer participation that drives the engine, and we are grateful for their support.

The spring also featured a great Northern California luncheon and the return of the FPFC Dinner Dance. Both of those events, the March luncheon and the Expo, are featured elsewhere in this publication with photos and sponsor thank yous. Please reach out to our sponsors when you get the opportunity. They make these events happen. Thank you to our Luncheon Committee Chair Rachelle Schulken of Calavo, who also stepped in as a panelist, and was terrific! Another

special shout out to Lynnje No-jadera of Great West Produce Co., who was the Chair of the Dinner Dance Committee. Much of our work is accomplished through our volunteer network and no one is more representative of that spirit than Lynnje. Another special shout out to Jacob Cadwallader and Brian Sahargun of Stater Bros. Markets for taking the lead in raffle sales again this year.

The success of all these events is propelling us forward with great plans for the rest of this year and into 2023. We have several more events this year, including two golf tournaments, the FPFC's City of Hope Luncheon, our second annual FPFC Luau and our traditional Holiday Charity Luncheon.

We are working on initiatives to redo our website and update our data base. We are also reimaging our sponsorship program and reinvigorating our social media presence.

Thanks to all of you for coming with us and ushering in a brand new bright day for the Fresh Produce & Floral Council. 🌱



THE FPFC WELCOMES THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS

Baja Son Growers
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Rodrigo Garcia

Magic Sun Farms/Global Mex
Tommy Tran

West Pacific Orchard
Rey Jimenez

2022 FPFC EVENTS

July 19th
FPFC SoCal Golf Tournament
Tustin Ranch Golf Club, Tustin, CA

August 17th
FPFC Membership Luncheon - City of Hope
Sheraton Cerritos, Cerritos, CA

September 24th
FPFC Luau
Newport Dunes, Newport Beach, CA

October 5th
FPFC NorCal Golf Tournament
Wente Vineyards, Livermore, CA

December 7th
FPFC Membership Luncheon - Charity
Southern California - Location TBD

LIST OF RETAILERS AT THE FPFC EXPO

99 Cent Only stores	Raley's Supermarkets
Albertsons Companies	Seafood City
Bashes	Smart & Final
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Northgate Gonzalez Markets	Whole Foods
Northstate Grocery	Yuri's Night/BIL Conference
Pavilions	SK Market
Produce Alliance	Super King Market

FPFC MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Fresh Produce & Floral Council is to connect members to the information, education and professional network they need to increase knowledge, grow their businesses and collectively advance the industry.

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CAC CELEBRATES JUNE AVOCADO MONTH

Ten years ago, the California Avocado Commission first observed June officially as California Avocado Month and is enthusiastically promoting this long-standing tradition. As an ode to the past 10 years, the commission enlisted the culinary talents of Southern Californian native Chef Nyesha Arrington to create two delicious and seasonal recipes that prominently feature California avocados, which are grown by about 3,000 California avocado growers with groves from San Diego to Monterey.

“June is in the heart of California avocado season when there is peak availability,” said Jan DeLyster, CAC vice president marketing. “We’re proud that this is our tenth year celebrating California avocado month and working with Chef Arrington and others to help push the incremental avocado sales that accompany the season.”

By integrating flavors and techniques from around the world, Chef Arrington has been able to create a style both personal and unparalleled, drawing inspiration from art and her African American and Korean background. Arrington also has been celebrated throughout her career for using farm fresh, locally and responsibly sourced ingredients, which made her the perfect partner to craft customized dishes for this celebratory anniversary.

“It’s hard narrowing down the recipes when California avocados have countless possibilities! However, I love when they are paired with complementing flavors. These California avocados definitely hold their own by leveling up any dish and giving an extra wow factor, making it a California chef’s key ingredient,” Arrington said.

Inspired by how the bountiful flavor and nutrition pair perfectly, Arrington developed two new produce-rich recipes starring California avocados, perfect for the summer season.

First, Arrington’s California Avocado Crab & Tuna Stack features a beautiful, layered stack of California avocados, crab and ahi tuna, which are combined with heirloom tomato, English cucumber and spices. For a fresh and light salad featuring summer produce, Arrington also prepared a Grilled California Avocado & Peach Salad. The grilled fruits are combined on a bed of arugula and crispy quinoa, then paired with a tangy and delicious pistachio-arugula vinaigrette.

In addition to advertising and consumer public relations activities, the commission activity in June includes email outreach to nearly 200,000 dedicated California avocado fans as well as social media support. Dietitian activities that promote avocado nutrition information and feature the California avocado brand complement the program. Mascha Davis, MPH, RDN, has an Instagram story with a giveaway on her channel that also will feature her new recipe for Avocado Goat Cheese Truffle Pops. Manuel Villacorta, MS, RDN, created five delicious California avocado smoothies recipes. Via his channels on YouTube, Instagram and Facebook, Villacorta posted a series of three videos featuring the avocado smoothies and how they can be used as part of one’s weight management.

Customized retailer promotions for California Avocado Month in June include use of California avocado display bins, sales contests, digital advertising, social media tie-ins and more. 🌱



Jan DeLyster of the California Avocado Commission checking out some harvested fruit during a spring grove tour.

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Answering the Bell Each Time Propels Career

Heather Butts
Associate Category Manager,
Raley's Companies

By Tim Linden



Heather Butts methodically improved her career by accepting each challenge as it was presented to her during her 40-year run and now finds herself as the top floral person at Raley's after serving her employers in many different roles and cities.

"I was always happy to try something new," she explains. "That's the beauty of retail...there is always something different you can do."

Heather was born and raised in Oakland, CA, the daughter of a mechanic for a waste management firm and a receptionist/office worker for Safeway. While attending Oakland High School, she first joined the ranks of supermarket employment. "At age 16, I got a job at Safeway #58 in Alameda in the bookkeeping department. My first day on the job was Cinco de Mayo."

By 1982, when she graduated from high school, she had designs on becoming a court reporter or

working in floral. Heather remembers being dissuaded from pursuing the court reporter path so instead she enrolled in the Retail Floristry program at City College of San Francisco. She continued to work as a bookkeeper at Safeway #58 while she earned her two year Associate Arts degree in Floristry, which she received in December of 1984.

Safeway did make Heather a floral manager in 1985, where she stayed for two years. But in the fall of 1987, her superiors asked her to return to the realm of bookkeeping. She recalls that her position was "booth clerk" but in essence she was head of bookkeeping for that same Alameda store for the next nine years.

In the late 1990s, Heather was solicited by her district manager to be a customer greeter for a couple years. Next, she moved into Safeway corporate where her bookkeeping talents were utilized to train other bookkeepers. Starting in 2001, Heather served at the





Pleasanton headquarters as a check authorization specialist. She traveled throughout the 272-store division, including to Hawaii, reviewing returned checks and helping stores implement better cash practices.

In January of 2006, Safeway went to a centralized buying model and Heather applied for a job in corporate floral as a category analyst. “I wanted to get back to my first love and it was time for a change.”

She did get that role and served in the position until October of 2009.

But again, she sensed it was time for a change and joined Grocery Outlet as a floral buyer as part of the produce team, serving under Don Murphy and Scot Olson during her four-year stint.

Again, always eager to try something new, Heather moved to the East Coast as a senior buyer for a wholesale grocer but the position wasn't right for her and she came back to the West Coast to try her hand on the vendor side of the business for the next half dozen years. She was with Matsui Nursery in Salinas from 2014 to 2018 and then spent two years with B-Fresh Floral in Ventura County. Heather reports that she appreciated her time on the vendor side but when

the opportunity presented itself to go back to the buy side of the equation, she jumped at it.

“I applied for the floral position and was hired by Raley's in December 2020,” she said. “I am happy to be back working in retail, developing programs and giving merchandising tips to the floral managers.”

Michael Schutt, who became director of produce and floral for Raley's just a month before Heather came aboard, is especially proud of hiring her. During the interview, he said she checked all the boxes and was exactly what they were looking for.

Heather is equally happy that she connected with Raley's and is back living her teenage dream. “My job is never boring,” she said. “We are dealing with a perishable product and the job changes daily.”

She added that the floral department speaks to her creative side and she loves the inherent message when a customer purchases a floral product. “It's like giving yourself a hug,” she quipped.

Heather noted that floral sales have done very well during the pandemic as consumers are spending a lot more time at home and so they are more often buying floral products to beautify their surroundings.

The Raley's executive was being interviewed just a few days after Mother's Day, one of the busiest times of the year for Raley's floral department. “Holidays make it fun,” she said. “Mother's Day is our biggest time of the year. That is when we sell the most units. For Valentine's Day, customers spend more money per purchase, but they buy more items for Mother's Day.”

Heather is also happy to be back in Northern California. She enjoyed Ventura, taking walks on the beach as well as in the valleys and hills of Ojai. “This is home. Getting back to Northern California was good. There is definitely a difference between Northern California and Southern California,” she said, without getting deep into the comparison.

Discussing her hobbies, Heather said she is a “modern quilter” and also loves cars. “My dad had a ’38 Chevy.” She owns no vintage cars at this point but did just get a new Chevy Blazer to haul around her 80-pound dog, Morgan. Her favorite thing about cars is “the long pedal on the right. I like speed.”

She also enjoys spending some time around the stove. “One of the other things I like to do in my spare time is bake...especially pies. I have made cakes or pies for team members’ birthdays.”

Heather has traveled quite a bit including all over the Caribbean, Europe, Canada and Hawaii. “Italy is my favorite place...the food is so good. I also like going to Napa. I love my wine,” she said singling out Justin Cabernet and Estancia Meritage as her two favorites. And she now lives in a new wine region, Lodi, where she is learning to like Zinfandel, that region’s signature wine. 🍷



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Bill Brooks, Rene van Rems Honored at FPFC Expo

By Tim Linden

Two longtime Southern California produce and floral veterans – Bill Brooks of Westlake Produce Company and Rene van Rems of Rene van Rems International – were awarded the prestigious annual achievement awards for their respective industries by the Fresh Produce & Floral Council at its annual FPFC Expo on April 6.

The awards were presented at the opening breakfast of the event, which was being held for the first time since 2019 because of the coronavirus cancellations in 2020 and 2021. This year's show featured 125 booths with almost 1,000 attendees, which included more than 400 retailers from produce vice presidents to buyers to merchandising executives to front-line personnel from the retail produce community. Supermarket representatives, mostly from the various regions of California and including chains and many independents, roamed the aisles bringing a sense of normalcy to this in-person show. As has traditionally been the case, exhibitors donated about 8,000 pounds of food to the Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County at the close of the show.

Lisa Leslie, an outstanding basketball player who was one of the top stars in the Women's National Basketball Association at its outset, gave an inspirational talk about her story and how she has been able to achieve so much on and off the

court over the past 30 years. She talked about all the people and events that inspired her throughout the years, but it clearly came down to her belief that she has outworked her peers throughout that time frame. She called herself a “goal-setter” who has methodically written down where she wants to go and what she wants to achieve and then set about to accomplish those goals. Besides having extraordinary basketball success since taking up the sport at age 12, the 6-foot, 5-inch superstar also towers over her peers in the business world. Currently, she is excelling in the real estate investment world helping other athletes invest their money wisely.

The show also featured an opening presentation by Todd Linsky, who is a consultant and produce podcaster. Linsky, who also had a long career in produce sales, told the audience that now is the time to capitalize on the events of the day to reinvigorate the sales and consumption of fruits, vegetables



Keynote Breakfast speaker, former WNBA Player and Olympic Gold Medalist, Lisa Leslie.

and flowers. He said concerns over health during the COVID-19 pandemic gave produce and floral products a boost and it is incumbent on all members of the industry to prevent sales from sliding back, as they have done at other times of rising inflation. He said all sellers of these items should be constantly promoting fresh produce and flowers and coming up with new ways to increase consumption.

Kent Kuwata of the Smart & Final supermarket chain made the presentation to Brooks and called out his unending service to the industry, though he always accomplishes that effort in an understated way. Brooks has been in the industry for more than 50 years and can always be counted on to land a hand and lead by example. Kuwata said “Bill has a track record of giving

THE FPFC EXPO



Floral Achievement Award Winner, Rene Van Rems of Rene Van Rems International with 2019 Winner, Jason Kendall of Kendall Farms.



FPFC President Don Gann with the Best of Show Produce Winners, Kent Beasley and Mike Krage of Idaho Potato Commission.

back both financially and with his time.”

Brooks accepted the Norman H “Buz” Bolstad Award via a live video from a boat in the Virgin Islands where he was vacationing with his family.

Van Rems has been a mainstay at FPFC floral events for decades teaching hundreds of floral designers about the latest trends and newest tricks in presenting flowers in the best possible light. He has written books on the subject and continues as a sought-after consultant in the flower world. Previous winner Jason Kendall of Kendall Farms presented the FPFC Floral Achievement Award to van Rems calling him “a world renown floral ambassador.” Van Rems, who hails from the Netherlands and its well-known leadership role in flowers, came to the United States many years ago to lend his floral expertise to this country’s suppliers and retailers. 🌻



FPFC President, Don Gann with the Best of Show Floral Winners, James Laitipaya and Jose Magna of BJ Orchids.



Matt Mariani and Darryl Bollack of Mariani Nut Co. with Michael Patterson and Valerie Solorio of Stater Bros. Markets.



Erin Wagner, Erika Decoust and Robert Tomson of Wonderful Sales at the Exclusive Tuesday Night Out.



Brian Cook of Local Bounti with WNBA Player and Olympic Gold Medalist, Lisa Leslie at the Idaho Potato Commission booth.



Dave Howald of Northwest Pear Bureau with Greg Corrigan, Jeff Kyer of Advantage Sales and Michael Schutt of Raley's Supermarkets.



Debi Orrin and Michele Haveles of Edge Sales & Marketing with Mark Bucek of RPE.



Jeff Kyer of Advantage Fresh with Myisha Nathaniel of Raley's and FPFC Apprentice, Sandra Aguilera of Calavo.



Brian Sahargun and Jake Cadwallader of Stater Bros. having fun bowling with Tracy and Henry Cadwallader at the Exclusive Tuesday Night Out!



Caitlin Tierney, Rodrigo Padilla, Andrew McGregor and Chris Campion of Sprouts Farmers Market with Jeff Davis of Eco Farms.



Kraig Loomis and Dan Acevedo of GreenFruit Avocados with Carol Upton of Ralphs at the Exclusive Tuesday Night Out at Splitsville.



Victoria Kovacevich, Suzette Overgaag and Andrea Gonzalez of North Shore Living Herbs + Greens.

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Thank you to our 2022 FPFC EXPO

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FPFC EXPO Chair, Dave Howald of Northwest Pear Bureau, 2022 FPFC Chairwoman; Kori Martin of Oppy; with Vicki and Kent Kuwata of Smart & Final at the Expo's Keynote Breakfast.



Rachelle Schulken of Calavo poses with Dan Acevedo of GreenFruit Avocados.



Alex Kim and Danny Goforth of Robinson Fresh with Ruben Ponce from Fresno State.



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ANNUAL FPFC DINNER DANCE

Saturday, May 21, 2022

Hotel Langham, Pasadena

The Fresh Produce & Floral Council held an elegant 2022 Dinner Dance, the Speakeasy at the Langham on Saturday, May 21. With more than 230 members present, the FPFC celebrated the incoming and outgoing Board of Directors and the passing of the gavel from the 2021 Chair Sean McClure of Professional Produce to 2022 Chair Kori Martin of Oppy.



2022 Chair Kori Martin of Oppy and 2021 Chair Sean McClure of Professional Produce "Passing the Gavel" from one Chair to the next.



2022 FPFC Board of Directors, Michael Schutt of Raley's; Bryan Presley of Albertsons; Brian Cook of Local Bounty; Sean McClure of Professional Produce; Brad Martin of Perimeter Sales & Merchandising; Andrew Bivens of Westlake Produce Co., Jacob Cadwallader of Stater Bros.; FPFC President Don Gann; Veronica Rodarte of Progressive Produce; Rachelle Schulken of Calavo; Debi Orrin of Edge Sales & Marketing; Kori Martin of Oppy; Lynnne Nojadera of Great West Produce Co.; Michelle Ziegler of Pactiv; Kristen Reid of MIXTEC Group.



FPFC's 2022 Executive Committee, Bryan Presley of Albertsons; Kori Martin of Oppy; Michael Schutt of Raley's; Kristen Reid of MIXTEC Group and Sean McClure of Professional Produce.



FPFC's Past Chairs, Brian Cook of Local Bounty; Sean McClure of Professional Produce; Karen Caplan of Frieda's; Andrew Bivens of Westlake Produce Co.; Brad Martin of Perimeter Sales & Merchandising.

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Bill Coombs of DLJ

\$2,000 Winner:
Bill Coombs of DLJ

\$1,000 Winner:
Mike Nunez of Sonora Farms

**CONGRATULATIONS
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Bill Laliberte of WJL

Matt Burnett of NatureSweet

Veronica Rodarte of Progressive Produce

Brad Martin of Perimeter Sales & Merchandising



Bryan Presley of Albertsons with Daren and Cindy Van Dyke of Five Crowns Marketing.



Alex Jackson and Frank Abbate of Frieda's; Ryan Fukuda of Avocados from Mexico; and Robert and Reena Hughes of Ralphs.

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Great West Produce Co

By Tim Linden

For decades, California specialty crop farmers have been facing and surmounting challenges, which have allowed them to continue to grow about 40 percent of the fruits, vegetables and nuts this country produces.

The list of historic challenges is long, including urbanization, regulation, and consolidation. Today, lack of water and labor, supply chain problems and inflation have been added to the pile. The state's farmers have long taken great pride in being able to face the concerns and come out on the other end with a continually improving product that is profitable.

But that resolve is being challenged like never before. Clearly there are fewer growers and the small family farms are fewer and farther between. But the industry is still lead by entrepreneurs who tend to be larger in scale than the generation before but still mostly devoid of public and corporate ownership. And there are some who think the glory days are in the past...or at least will be very difficult to recreate.

A.G. Kawamura, who served as California Secretary of Agriculture for eight years under Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, owns Orange County Produce in Irvine, CA, with his brother. They are third generation farmers and the fourth generation has joined the fold. "We are in a sea change," he said, noting that major crop shifts are currently taking place in California.

Several decades ago, Kawamura noted that fresh asparagus was a California crop with tens of thousands of acres throughout the state, and there were close to 30,000 acres of table grapes in Coachella Valley alone. Now there are only about 2,000 acres of table grapes in Coachella, and less than that many acres of asparagus in the entire state. "It wasn't lack of water that caused us to lose those crops," Kawamura said. "It was high costs that made those California crops non-competitive."

He said there are countries all over the world competing against the United States and winning market share through lower costs of production.

Kawamura said farmers have survived, and sometimes thrived, by getting better and better at what they do. Increased yields have helped tremendously. But recently lack of labor dissipated that advantage. Orange County Produce invested in mechanical harvesters for its green bean crop in 2019, "which has

allowed us to stay in the green bean business." Five machines reduced the number of field workers needed by 50.

But Kawamura said very few crops generate enough income to justify farming in Orange County. "The last three crops viable down here are avocados, strawberries and bell peppers," he said.

Orange County Produce is still a traditional grower-shipper and is surviving but the company is doing it by employing new strategies. Long a strawberry grower-shipper, the firm has become part of a larger operation, which has production from Baja California to the Watsonville district in Northern California. Kawamura said increased volume and year-round supply helps you compete. "The mid-sized regional producer can't survive," he added.

The company has also dedicated ground to the local food bank, which is purchasing its production with donations to help guarantee supplies for the disadvantaged communities it serves. Orange County Produce is providing about 40,000 pounds per week of cabbage, celery and other fresh vegetable giving it a doable return on its investment.

Kawamura said that fits into the company's long standing strategy "to make sure it is sold before you grow it."

The veteran farmer, and former temporary bureaucrat, believes technology can be a difference maker, if government doesn't get in the way by regulating it to death. "Shame on us if new technology is held back by EPA or Cal OSHA regulations."

Paradoxically, Stephen Patricio, who founded Westside Produce almost 30 years ago in Firebaugh, said he has had two of the most profitable years of his career, but he is afraid that in terms of agriculture "California is coming to the end of our story."

He added that it is precisely because it is so much harder to survive as a producer that he has had two great years back to back. The challenges of producing in California have reduced his competition during the summer peak of his season, while the pandemic has created a great market for his signature crop, melons.

But before expressing a bit of pessimism about the future, Patricio did marvel at the resiliency of California farmers. "It's never been easy, but the California farmer has always done too good a job navi-

gating an incredibly difficult task. They have made it seem easy.”

Over the years, he said farmers have been able to overcome lots of roadblocks to continue to produce at a highly efficient level and remain profitable...for the most part. “But the pressures are getting too great and there are many new challenges out of our control.”

He said the current supply chain issues defy logic. “Even though we have product that we need to export, the shipping lines are shipping out empty containers to customers that can pay more. And in California, we are putting \$10,000 worth of melons on a truck that is costing another \$10,000 to send across country.”

He continued: “Fertilizer has gone up 300 percent and we can’t get it.”

He added that farmland prices have skyrocketed with investors paying top dollar and not even planning to farm.

Patricio is currently thriving largely because of his own business model. When he started Westside Produce Company 30 years ago, he established it as a distributor. He owns no crops. Instead, his business strategy was to become the best processor/distributor/shipper of fresh melons for those who did farm. That strategy has kept his company nimble.

Patricio believes the volume of crops that are grown in California will continue to decrease, which might paint a bleak picture for the state’s agricultural community. “Oddly enough, we do have a lot of new young people getting into the business (including his own two sons),” he said. “What

we are missing is the 35-50 years olds. They didn’t come back to the farm. We have a lot of farmers in their 60s and 70s and young ones, but no one in the middle.”

If California does survive these current challenges, Patricio said it will be with technology. “It is the only way to exist,” he said.

The veteran agriculturalist takes a pragmatic view of the future. He said there is no problem relying on foreign production...until there is. He added that the war in Ukraine illustrates what can happen when the unforeseen does occur. The war has severely limited grain shipments from Ukraine and Russia causing a huge spike in feed grain prices worldwide. What happens, he wonders if California loses its ag production, and the country must rely on foreign producers for most of its food supply?

John D’Arrigo is president of D’Arrigo California, which has roots dating back more than a century. His grandfather and father ran the company before him, and the next generation is involved and working



throughout the company.

D'Arrigo acknowledges the challenges facing California agriculture and knows they are difficult "but I am a glass-is-half-full-kind-of-guy. I have to think that we have a future in continuing to farm this land and I'm doing everything I can to figure that out."

The family-run company farms on thousands of acres and has thousands of employees and their dependents that rely on D'Arrigo maintaining a profitable business. About six or seven years ago, John D'Arrigo looked at the issues he was confronting and determined that lack of labor would become the dominant issue of the day. The idea of launching a mechanical engineering division was hatched. Today, D'Arrigo is at the forefront of bringing automation to the farm. The company has a mechanical romaine harvester and another one for broccoli. The machines are beyond the beta stage and are currently in the field being employed, albeit on a relatively small scale. Within the next three to five years, D'Arrigo expects the machines to be harvesting a significant portion of the company's romaine and broccoli, and lighting the way for other innovative automation.

But he says its more than just building a machine. The effort will help change the face of agriculture. Automation brings better jobs to the industry, which he believes will attract workers that can see a future in ag rather than just a starting point for a better career in another industry. D'Arrigo is constantly selling this concept to ag universities asking them to create technology-related curriculums to educate the ag workers of tomorrow.

He said that while it is true California has mounting challenges, it also has the best soil and climate in the world to grow the crops that he and his fellow agriculturalists produce. He knows solutions have to be found but is intent on making it work because the state has too many inherent advantages to not succeed. D'Arrigo is planning for a bright California future for the farmers that are coming behind him. "We have to figure out how to keep California viable," he said.

Bill Coombs has been running DLJ Produce, a Southern California produce distributor, for more than a quarter century. Like the others interviewed, he is very familiar with the issues that make California a difficult place to do business. But that is not where he affixes his gaze nor expends his energy.

The company represents growers and commodities from all over California and the world. DLJ has a

full line of domestic and imported fruits and vegetables, and a robust organic and conventional produce program. "The thing about the produce industry is that it operates at light speed," Coombs said. "You have to be willing to adjust and recognize the trends. We embraced organics early on and established our own "Eat Well" organics brand."

It is this ability to pivot that Coombs believes has allowed DLJ to thrive. He also notes that he was a retailer for many years, and he understands that side of the business. In fact, the DLJ executive team has decades of grower and retailer experience. "You have to understand the needs of both the growers and the retailers," he said.

Coombs noted that DLJ's philosophy is best illustrated by its table grape program. With producers all over the world vying for the U.S. market and California's substantial grape industry producing on all cylinders, the industry was in a bit of a crisis several years ago. Oversupply created a race for the bottom in terms of price. He recalls it was commonplace to see table grapes being sold at retail for 99 cents a pound. "At that price, growers are losing money and so are retailers."

Coombs and DLJ devised a program to reverse the trend. He enlisted growers in California, Peru, Chile and Mexico to provide the company with year-round supplies of a top quality product, picked and packed to DLJ's specifications and marketed under a new brand. "Razzle" is the brand for red grapes; "Dazzle" is the name for green grapes; and "RazzleDazzle" is utilized in a bi-color pack. DLJ demanded a premium pack and asked retailers to pay a premium for it.

"We are now three years into the program and it is working better than I could have imagined," he said. "Initially, we had trouble signing up growers but now they are knocking the doors down to pack for our label."

At the retail end, DLJ concentrated on regional markets and independents throughout the country, who are as nimble and fast-reacting as the produce suppliers that service them. Over time, he said the RazzleDazzle brand took hold. "You can't believe the number of letters we get from consumers talking about our brand," he said. "And the produce people working in the stores love it too."

Coombs believes this strategy can work for many other produce items and help California producers, and others around the globe, prosper. Quality does sell. 🌱

Northern California Growth Prompts Recent Expansion of Henry's Milpitas Center

By Rob Bryant

Henry Avocado's distribution center in Milpitas has grown into the prominent role predicted for it when the facility was built and opened in 2013, and expanded in 2015.

Located midway between San Jose and San Francisco, the Milpitas facility replaced Henry's original entry into Northern California in San Jose, which was a much smaller center opened in 1995. San Jose, at the time, was the second distribution center Henry opened outside of the one at the company's original headquarters in Escondido. The center in Phoenix preceded it by a year.

Early this year, Henry doubled the capabilities of the Milpitas facility to where it can now process at least 2 million cartons annually. The expansion increased the number of ripening rooms from 13 to 25, and cold storage capacity from 220 pallets to 334.

In addition to serving retail and foodservice customers in the Bay Area population centers of Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose, the Milpitas location ensures fresh deliveries as far south as Monterey, as well as east to Modesto and northeast to Sacramento. To optimize the fresh chain and minimize delivery time, Milpitas has eight loading docks and five refrigerated delivery trucks that assure proper fruit temperature for loading until offloading.

According to Humberto Arteaga, manager of the Milpitas center, Henry's emphasis on quality and freshness prompted the expansion, and was all part of the five-year plan. "We're in the 'fresh' business," Arteaga explains. "We promise 'Always fresh, Always on time,' so we expand our capabilities as the market increases."

Company President Phil Henry prefers the term "fresh chain" to "cold storage" as it reinforces the precise logistics the company has established since its founding in 1925, to minimize the time from harvest to customer delivery. Corporate personnel keep a discriminating eye on Henry's supply chain and will invest as required to maintain product excellence as any market expands.

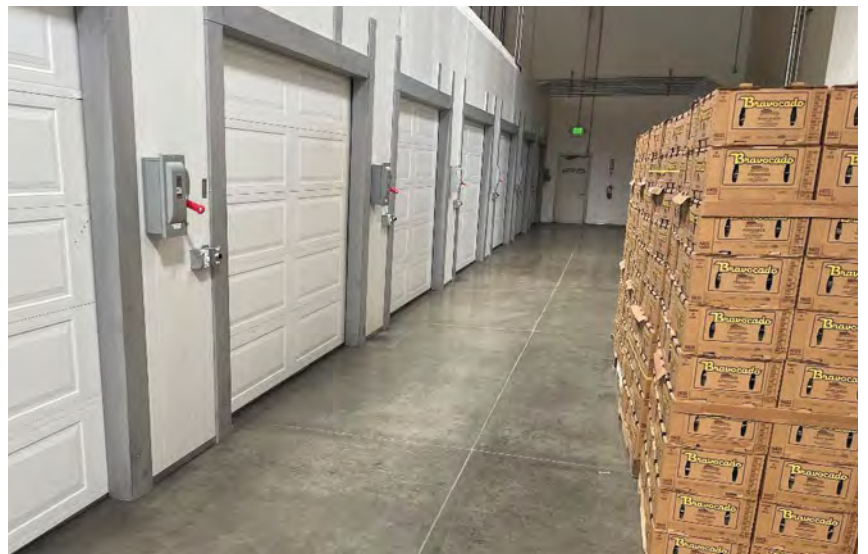
Earlier this year, Andrew Flores joined the headquarters office of Henry Avocado to serve as supply manager and market analyst. A graduate of California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, he brings extensive experience in production, sourcing, lo-

gistics, and sales to the company's commitment to expand custom-ripened fresh avocado distribution in select U.S. markets.

Each of Henry's seven distribution centers are Primus Labs certified and meet or exceed federal, state and industry Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) guidelines. Two are located in Escondido, CA, and one each in San Antonio and Houston, TX; Phoenix, AZ, and Charlotte, NC. All seven also have Oxyion air purification systems to reduce bacteria, viruses and mold to keep the safest, most sanitary fresh chain environment possible.

A one-page Hass Avocado CustomRipe Ordering Guide, a marketing fixture in the industry for almost two decades, is available from any of Henry's marketing and sales offices. The guide has helped inform a generation of avocado buyers about the five separate and distinct stages of ripening that are available from Henry's distribution centers. The favorable impact of custom-ripening can't be overstated. Henry's commitment to the process assures its retail and foodservice buyers that they will receive the desired stage of product ripeness to meet their individual needs

A grower since its founding in 1925, Henry has been a year-round distributor since 1990. The California packing house in Escondido recently upgraded its Aweta Optical Sorter, which improves the speed and accuracy of grading, sizing and packing. 🍃



Henry Avocado increased the custom-ripening capability of its Milpitas distribution center to handle at least 2 million cartons annually.



FPFC Meets in Northern California

By Tim Linden

The Fresh Produce & Floral Council's returned to Northern California for the first time in two years for its May 11 luncheon at the Crow Canyon Country Club in Danville, with about 200 guests attending.

FPFC Chair Kori Martin of Oppy welcomed the crowd updating the attendees on some FPFC activities. The day before the luncheon, the organization held a volunteer day in Salinas in conjunction with Brighter Bites and sponsored by The Wonderful Company's sales team. Donated produce was assembled and packaged at the Andrew Smith Company cooler with the resulting 350 boxes being delivered to kids and their parents at La Gloria Elementary School in nearby Gonzales.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the FPFC had not held a membership luncheon in the northern half of the state since February of 2020.

The keynote presentation featured a women's panel with moderator Wendy Reinhardt Kapsak of the Produce for Better Health Foundation and panelists Amy Snyder of FreshPoint, Rachelle Schulken of Calavo Growers and Tristan Simpson of tristan michele marketing.

The panelists discussed their own career paths and ways they help increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables, with Kapsak sprinkling in PBH market research data as she led the discussion.

The PBH executive indicated that industry members have to take a more active role in growing the fruit and

vegetable category. She noted that most American consumers only eat vegetables during one eating occasion a day, while fruit consumption occurs, on average, less than one time day. Kapsak said the difference between "high frequency" produce consumers and others is that they have made consumption a habitual behavior. She argues that if we want consumers to eat more, we must make it easy and make it an emotional decision.

She said that when consumers approach food they first have a lust for what they are eating, but to increase consumption, they need to move beyond lust to the love stage. Kapsak added that behavioral scientist point to this "cultivated enjoyment" relationship that leads to increased consumption. She noted that fruits and vegetables have different personalities, comparing fruit to the excitement of your first child and quipped that vegetables are like the second kid, indicating they take a little more work.

The panelists discussed their own relationship with the industry but also talked about their careers and ideas for increasing use of produce and inspiring greater consumption.

Schulken believes the industry should capitalize on the plant-based craze arguing that fruits and vegetables "are the original plant-based diet". She added that she is "walking the talk" with her own eating habits and indicated that setting a good example is an important step.

Simpson believes marketing "food as medicine" is a winning strategy which



FPFC 2022 Chair Kori Martin of Oppy

plays to the increased awareness of health and wellness that is prevalent today.

Discussing the role of women in the produce industry, Snyder said one of the best ways men can help foster the growth of their female employees is to proactively put them in leadership roles. She indicated that most companies probably have a treasure trove of talented women needing to be discovered. On that same topic, Simpson concurred. She said women do have a different perspective and they bring baked-in diversity to the decision-making process. She also offered that the role of women in the produce industry has improved greatly during her career in the business. She implored men to use their voices as influencers and part of the power team to advocate for the talented women that surround them. "Words do matter," she said. 🌱



FPFC Panelists: *Tristan Simpson of tristan michele marketing, Amy Snyder of FreshPoint, Rachelle Schulken of Calavo and Wendy Reinhardt Kapsak of Produce for Better Health Foundation*



In coordination with Brighter Bites, the 350 boxes of produce were filled and delivered to La Gloria Elementary School in nearby Gonzales, CA.



A group of FPFC volunteers met at the Andrew Smith Company facility in Salinas on May 10 to package donated produce for needy kids and their families.

**Thank You
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Wonderful Sales



FPFC Volunteer Day with Brighter Bites (Back) Lynnne Nojadera of Great West Produce Co.; Don Gann of FPFC; Ashley Rue; Jessica Orozco and Alicia Blanco of Brighter bites; Gregg Borchart; Jon Zimmer; Cathy Sereno; Tamara Cascarano and Jeric Tadios of Wonderful Sales.



Scot Olson of FreshSource with Brian Bartlett and Rick Breeden with Natalie's Orchid Island Juice



Jesse Lopez of Ocean Mist with Charles Andress of Edge Sales & Marketing



FPFC Apprentices: Jared Bernardi of Bonduelle Fresh Americas, Kathleen Ezell of Wonderful Citrus, Katie Gagnon of Grocery Outlet, Bailey Slayton of Country Sweet Produce, and Charles Rowland of Fowler Packing



Bruce Britt of Perimeter Sales & Merchandising with Bob Freeman of Modi Apples



Lynnje Nojadera of Great West Produce and Kori Martin of Oppy with Natalia Toccoli of Bard Valley Date Growers.



FFPC President Don Gann with Kevin Trisko of Taylor Farms and Michael Schutt of Raley's.



Shawn Dagen and Nannette Anderson of HS&R Fresh with Mark Klein of NatureSweet

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Zespri's SunGold Kiwifruit kicked-off the season with new display shippers, customized programs, and an integrated consumer campaign.

Zespri Kicked-Off Kiwi Season in May

Zespri's first-ever charter vessel to the United States arrived in the Port of Los Angeles on May 9 delivering SunGold Kiwifruit to meet growing consumer demand. This shipment kicked-off another season as more and more consumers look for delicious and nutritious options to add to their basket. Zespri's integrated consumer campaign is designed to communicate the benefits of SunGold and drive traffic to retailers carrying the #1 selling kiwi brand.

"Our SunGold Kiwifruit continues to be on-trend and is driving the category," explains Susan Noritake, Zespri's head of sales for the North American market. "Zespri is the #1 fastest growing fruit in the fruit bowl, outpacing total fruit by 12 points. SunGold Kiwi accounts for 63 percent of the category's growth. We have a lot of marketing resources available for retailers, including customized programs and free shipper displays, to help them capitalize on the increasing demand."

To drive brand awareness and purchases, Zespri's "Go Sweet. Be Bold" consumer campaign includes digital media, social media, and influencer market-

ing along with mass sampling efforts at major events. The campaign encourages shoppers to break from the mundane and shake up the contents of their fruit bowl with Zespri's sweet and refreshing SunGold Kiwifruit. Zespri wants to help health-conscious consumers ignite their zest for life and make the most of every day. Zespri is using high-reach digital channels including Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube. And to entice shoppers to buy in-store, Zespri's new shipper displays feature bright, eye-catching graphics highlighting the sweet taste and nutrition messages from the integrated campaign.

"Retailers can increase their sales more than 200 percent by placing our display merchandisers in their produce section," explains Noritake. "Kiwi is also a basket builder in the fruit department. Just by adding kiwi to the basket with other fruit items, the basket size increases +\$34 on average."

In addition to the high-volume crop globally this year, the exceptional weather conditions have Zespri positioned for another season of great tasting kiwifruit. 🌱

FPFC SOCIAL MEMBERSHIP LUNCHEON



March 16, 2022

Hotel Langham, Pasadena



The 2021 FPFC Apprentice Chair, Rachele Schulken of Renaissance Food Group with the 2021 Apprentice Class, Cassidy Davis of Robinson Fresh, Elsa Salazar of Bard Valley Date Growers, Tawne Haynish of Supreme Berry Farms, Anjali Bonfante of Bolthouse Farms, Bobby Hunt of Great West Produce Co., 2022 FPFC Chairwoman, Kori Martin of Oppy; Pebbles Johnson of Grocery Outlet, Alexandra Molumby of Country Sweet Produce, Gisel Arenas of Westlake Produce Co., and Sean Quintero of California Endive Farms.



Guest Speaker, Tom Stenzel of the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA).



FPFC 2021 Apprentice class speaker Pebbles Johnson of Grocery Outlet gave her testimonial of the value of the FPFC Apprentice program.

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