

Meet the class of 2015

JACOB ABRAMSON
PETE AIELLO
DEAN ANDES
MATTHEW V. BLACKWELL
ADRIAN CAPOTE
NICK CHAPPELL
ALEX COTO
JOSEPH J.
RYAN
ANDREW
F. SCOTT FEIN
TRISH JAMES
PATRICK ANDREW KELLY
BLAIR GREENHILL
KRISTA JONES
LYNSEY KENNEDY
NICK LANGEL
BRIAN MAGUIRE
STACEY MILLER

DANIEL
MOZNETT
JOSH J. PADILLA
THOMAS PADILLA
JENNIFER PIERCE
BRANDON RANKIN
GIUSEPPE S.
EMMANUEL
NICHOLAS
JOHN
LESLIE
YOUYE (LOLA)
JASON
MICHAEL STROCK
CHRIS THOMSEN
SCOTT VANDERVOET
JOB VILLANUEVA
JAMIE VOSEJPKA
JENNIFER WESTERHOFF
MEGAN ZWEIG
RUBINO
RUIZ
JOSHUA RUIZ
SCHERPINSKI
SIMMONS
SONG
STEMM
MELISSA SYLTE

UNDER FORTY

*Listed alphabetically by last name.



Jacob Abramson, 32
Product Manager
Markon Cooperative
Salinas, CA

Hometown: Salinas, CA

Hobbies: Golf, tennis, traveling, cooking, working out, snowboarding, hiking

Personal: Married

Community: Gives to YMCA each year; practicing Judaism; assists in his temple's annual fundraiser; Central Coast Young Farmer and Rancher meetings; Corral de Tierra Country Club member

Motto in Life: You cannot have a million dollar dream with a minimum wage work ethic.

Professional Accomplishments: Abramson started his produce career as a quality inspector roughly eight years ago with Salinas, CA-based Markon Cooperative. In this role, he inspected fields as well as visited processing plants and coolers. His main responsibility was ensuring Markon's stringent private label specifications

were met at the field and packing level. Just before the end of his first year, he was offered a buying position in the Markon office. He started buying citrus, melons, bell peppers, squash, chili peppers and avocados. After two years, he moved to buying Northwest items such as apples, potatoes and onions. A year later, he moved to his current role, purchasing Salinas and Yuma vegetables (also known as the lettuce and leaf desk). He currently manages approximately 25 percent of Markon's business as well as buying fresh produce for more than 70 distribution centers throughout the U.S. and Canada. His duties include developing category knowledge and expertise, building and maintaining relationships as well as creating and managing processes. Major duties entail negotiating and settling prices, communicating current markets, supply, quality, forecasting markets, seeking price deals to offer the membership and ensuring 100 percent fill of orders in Markon's private label.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: In the next five years I hope to hold an upper management or director role where I am making bigger, overall decisions for the company. I hope to continue learning from my peers and those above me. I look forward to gaining respect from industry leaders as someone who understands the industry, is motivated in my career and has something to teach as well.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: Over time, you realize how important relationship building is in the produce industry. You count on strong relationships to get you through tough challenges that arise.

Q: What advice would you give to someone new to the produce industry?

A: My advice would be to learn, establish and

build strong relationships through your journey. One of Markon's key motives is "People Matter." It really goes back to the Golden Rule: Treat others how you would like to be treated. Communicating effectively and working well with people will get you a long way. I was told very early in my career by a highly respectable veteran in the produce industry to never "lose your temper" and "keep cool" as your reputation is always on the line. Those words have always stuck with me and in tough situations are in the back of my mind. I would also tell them to learn as much as possible and not just your own job duties. Stay current with the news and trends within the industry and know what other departments do and how they operate within your company. Knowing more about your customers and your competitors doesn't hurt either — in fact you should always know what your competitors are doing and what the customer expects.

Q: How has the industry changed in your tenure?

A: I started in 2007 right before the economy crashed, which I believe created a dramatic change for the industry. Pricing became the focus more than ever. During this time, we saw many companies having to let go of employees and some even went out of business. This made obtaining competitive pricing, capturing more units, cutting cost and a strong will to succeed even more important for our company's existence. Today, companies are expanding their roles and products, are becoming more versatile, more innovative and diverse and I am seeing a stronger focus on customer service. Business is a right that is earned not a privilege, and that became apparent more than ever since 2008.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: A couple big trends on the horizon are technology and the movement to organic/local growers. Technology is opening the door for innovation. Drones are entering the agricultural world for food safety and monitoring quality and harvesting equipment and processing facilities are becoming more productive and efficient because of technology. Mechanical harvesters requiring far fewer people than traditional ways of harvesting produce are now being used due to labor shortages. Consumption of organic fruits and vegetables is growing, and I believe it will continue to grow due to increase of health concerns and their hesitations of conventional growing methods with respect to pesticides and GMO's. Supporting local and small farmers is a strong movement today. Buying fruits and vegetables from your local/organic farmer implies the

produce is fresher, healthier, and better for the environment leaving a smaller carbon footprint.



Pete Aiello, 40
Owner/General Manager
Uesugi Farms, Inc.
Gilroy, CA

Hometown: Morgan Hill, CA

Hobbies: Snowskiing, ice hockey, skeet/trap shooting, attending professional sporting events

Personal: Father of two children

Community: Founder and principal of Michael Aiello Memorial Agricultural Scholarship Fund; Santa Clara County Farm Bureau board member and past president; Central Coast Groundwater Coalition board member; Heritage Bank of Commerce advisory board member.

Motto in Life: No matter what adversity or challenges await you when you wake up in the morning, get up, dress up, show up, and never give up.

Professional Accomplishments: Since the age of 7, Aiello had his impact in the business his father started in 1979. From working with the Napa cabbage harvesting crew, to picking peppers, to forklift driver and shipping receiving manager, he worked in every position at Uesugi Farms. Now as general manager and co-owner, he helped engineer a 365 percent growth in revenue since taking over in 2002. During this time, he's pushed Uesugi Farms into new growing areas (Brentwood, Holtville, Maricopa) and pushed acreage expansion in Gilroy and Mexico. He's helped advance efficiency in growing practices and harvest, and implemented new innovative packs and products.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I was born into this wonderful industry and fell in love with it at a very young age. I remember riding along with Dad in his pickup helping him check fields, count rows, fix sprinkler heads, turn pumps on and off. He even taught me how to weld and operate various kinds of equipment, such as forklifts and tractors. I loved being outside, active, and playing in the dirt. I specifically remember many sunrises and sunsets out in the fields.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: I want to see Uesugi continue to prosper by adding acreage, increasing production, developing new business and by growing our portfolio of commodities and products. While we already have a year-round operation with our various

growing areas, I see a lot of potential in Mexico. There is a lot of business to do there. It is my goal to fill this supply gap in the next five years. Also, I want to see Uesugi get involved in the value-added business at the retail level, which means new products, and specialty packaging. The modern-day consumer demands this kind of convenience and innovation, and there is a ton of growth coming in this sector. One last focus I have is to increase our presence in the organic sector. There is a quickly growing demand for organic products, so we need to be there and provide the supply.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: How to be more political and diplomatic. When you're a young professional with all kinds of fire in your belly, sometimes there is a tendency to charge ahead full speed without regard for side effects or consequences. It's important to think and act quickly and decisively, but you need to be cognizant of humanity, personalities, egos — there is a ripple effect with every decision you make and you need to be aware of where those waves are going.

Q: What accomplishments are you most proud of in your career?

A: Besides the company's growth and increased efficiencies that have taken place during my watch, I designed and oversaw construction of our new cold storage facility, photovoltaic solar system (which offsets 100 percent of our energy usage at our company headquarters) and retail store (where we sell our products directly to the public, along with products from other local farmers).

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Urban/indoor farms, organic production and boutique/hobby farms are thriving. But, there will always be a need for the larger, conventional and outdoor growing operations. We simply cannot sustain the growing population of our planet without these big players in the game.



Dean Andes, 30
Produce Buyer
Four Seasons Produce Inc.
Ephrata, PA

Hometown: Lockport, NY

Hobbies: President of the Reading Rugby Football Club; riding motorcycles

Personal: Married with one child

Community: Volunteer to build the sport of rugby

at the youth high school level. This program (Exeter Rugby) has won multiple tournaments and placed very well in its league since the program's inception.

Motto in Life: It is impossible to excel at something you don't enjoy.

Professional Accomplishments: Andes has worked his way up through the ranks at Four Seasons Produce Inc. He began at Four Seasons Produce in 2006 as a ripening associate and worked full-time while finishing a bachelor's degree from The Pennsylvania State University — Berks campus. During this time he learned a lot about how the company worked from the operations side and worked hard to lay the foundation for strong relationships within various areas of the company. Upon completing his college coursework in 2009, he transitioned into a buying position and hit the ground running. He essentially took over and expanded the organic department at Four Seasons and was promoted to handle the full line of potatoes, onions, tropicals, bananas, and value added products. Through relationship building, he has effectively managed conventional and organic fruits and vegetables, growing these business relationships and understanding the variables that impact market trends and pricing. During the last 12 months, he has been charged with helping a team select a new ERP software system that will drive the way the company does business; he currently sits on this team as a subject matter expert for procurement. He has also been recognized for exemplifying the company's core values by Four Seasons' chief executive.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I moved to Pennsylvania in 2006 and applied with Four Seasons Produce. At first, I was attracted to the beautiful facility, the nice cool warehouse in the hot-humid summer, and the vast array of friendly faces as you walked through the facility. However, it didn't take me long to realize I had started working for a company that is truly best in class at what they do. It is very humbling for me to be part of the food supply chain.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I really found my passion for produce in buying and building the relationships with the people I work with. I love working with the growers and farmers directly and the opportunity to make a difference in their lives with every purchase made. The passion growers put into the ground and their crop is contagious and inspiring. Simply put, my job isn't a job because I am passionate about it — I guess that's the best part.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: The future is now. Organics are a huge trend and will continue to be a huge trend in the industry in the near future.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Soak the knowledge and experiences in like a sponge from the people around you. Take every opportunity you can to learn about product, growing, retailing, and any other aspect of this industry because it's truly fascinating; and it will come in handy.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: I think the industry needs to showcase how much fun and how dynamic the produce industry can be. I have met some of the most interesting and fun loving individuals that absolutely love what they do in this industry. Really showcasing this side could be very contagious and attractive for a recent college grad. Who wants to go buy car parts where the market changes quarterly or yearly when you can be involved in markets that are changing by the hour or even minute — now that's dynamic.



Matthew V. Blackwell, 34
Vice President
Aurora Products, Inc.
Orange, CT

Hometown: Monroe, CT

Hobbies: Brewing, playing guitar, auto racing

Personal: Married with two children

Community: Annual donor to Paws, a no-kill animal shelter

Motto in Life: Set realistic goals, and achieve them. Be a shark only when necessary, always moving and constantly trying to better yourself.

Professional Accomplishments: Blackwell started his career as a research analyst at ACNielsen BASES in Parsippany, NJ. After a few years working on the Colgate-Palmolive and Bayer accounts, Blackwell decided to transition into his family's business, Aurora, as operations manager, and later, as director of operations. In his current position as vice president, he oversees every step of the production process — including purchasing, receiving, quality control, shipping, sales and marketing.

His biggest accomplishment may be the oversight and management of the company's relocation from Stratford, CT to Orange, CT. The company consolidated the contents of two leased facilities and bought a custom-built

100,000-square-foot facility. The move allowed Blackwell to design the new production floor and facility layout in a way most conducive to efficient and intuitive production. His next big challenge will be overseeing the addition of a 40,000-square-foot warehouse to the existing building.

Q: How did you get started in the produce industry?

A: I grew up in the family business. My father and mother started Amalgamated Produce Inc. when I was a boy and so I've been able to follow the development and evolution of the company. In a way, Aurora and I grew up together. I remember spending weekends with my mother packing dried apples and cranberries for Aurora. The following weekend, my Dad would have us assist in packing sprouts for Amalgamated Produce. Literally and figuratively, we survived off of produce.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Finding work-home balance. After a stressful day, it is tremendously difficult to not bring some of that stress and frustration home with you. However, a 2-year old daughter has no idea (nor does she care) about your issues. She just wants a hug.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: The Food Safety Modernization Act was a great start, but the implementation of it has not been as seamless as it could be. I know from personal experience that the FDA is severely underfinanced. While it would prefer to be a proactive entity, is more reactive. At the same time, I believe the recall process needs to be re-evaluated. I read all too often of companies closing up shop because of a recall that has not harmed a single individual. We need a safety net of sorts, particularly for our smaller and/or newer companies.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Attend the shows and stay active in our community — it is smaller than you may think. Always understand what your competition is doing and never sit still.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: For today's consumer, it is no longer enough to just consume the food and judge it on its cost and taste. Now, consumers want to know everything about where and how that food was

grown, whether the people picking it were fairly compensated, whether or not it is a genetically modified product, organic, kosher, free trade certified, carbon neutral, etc. (The trend is toward socially responsible, symbiotic plants that care as much about the environment and the end consumer as they do about the bottomline.)



Adrian Capote, 38
VP Of Sales/Owner
J&C Tropicals
Miami

Hometown: Miami Beach

Hobbies: Diving, fishing, boating, hunting

Personal: Married with 3 children

Motto in Life: Wake up every day and be thankful for another day. Be happy, enjoy life to the fullest. Family is critical to how we operate. Live a healthy life, so I can live another day. Control my own destiny. I don't allow materialistic things to get in the way of my life. Everything has a solution, and don't have any regrets.

Professional Accomplishments: With 20 years of experience in the industry, Capote is a top producer in tropical produce sales. He leads a team of eight to exceed monthly sales goals and is dedicated to his customers. Agriculture and farming has been in Capote's family for many generations. Shortly after graduating high school in 1985 he realized college wasn't for him and that he instead wanted to immediately become engaged in the family business. He started from the bottom, in the repack department, moved on to being a picker, loading trucks, and then to shipping manager. In 1997 he was brought into the sales department. After analyzing the business and realizing that 100 percent of the business was in the hands of terminal markets wholesalers, he undertook a change in the sales department culture. In 2004 he took on the role of vice president of sales and focused all efforts on revamping the clientele base — a risky proposition. The company immediately went from a 100 percent wholesale customer base to 50 percent retail and 50 percent wholesale with continuous overall growth.

Q: How did you end up in the produce industry?

A: My father and grandfather were farming in Cuba since the early 1900s. My father came to the land of opportunity in 1959 as a political refugee and established J&C Tropicals. At an early age I was exposed to the farming and sales world. In the summers my father would take my brothers and me to avocado fields to harvest. We would pack the fruit and head to

the market the following morning to sell our products. It was during those days that I realized I wanted to be in the family business.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: I go to my customers and also to my mentors who helped me get to where I am. Most importantly, I go to my family.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: How important it is to be in front of your customers and growers — less time in the office. I realized more quality time with customers and suppliers and gaining a better understanding of their needs is what drives the business forward.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: Continue to educate upcoming generations. Also, have better government support. Many industries like the automotive industry have tremendous support from our government. Farmers have the highest risk factor of any industry. We depend on so many unforeseen variables, such as weather and crop threats from diseases and insects.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Farm to table, locally grown, health and freshness. In the past five years the largest growth in sales and demand we have experienced has been in our locally grown programs. Consumers want fresh and organic. We all want healthy lives and healthier produce.



Nick Chappell, 33
Sales Representative
California Giant Berry Farms
Watsonville, CA

Hometown: Watsonville, CA

Hobbies: Hunting, Fishing, Snowboarding, Boating, Softball, Golf, and being with his family

Personal: Married with one daughter

Community: Spring Lamb Annual BBQ Committee and Event benefitting the American Cancer Society; Annual California Giant BBQ to benefit local foundation, Jacobs Heart; supporting kids battling cancer; various other Santa Cruz County charitable organizations.

Motto in Life: If there's a will, there's a way.

Professional Accomplishments: Chappell began working at California Giant Berry Farms straight out of college 10 years ago as a coordinator. Now in sales, he works with some of the company's

largest accounts. In his role at Cal Giant, he strives to exceed quarterly sales goals, build strategic relationships with key customers and generate new business growth through industry networking.

For the past seven years, he has posted the highest sales in the office. He develops and implements annual and weekly strategic sales plans to accommodate corporate goals, and partners with field personnel to ensure accurate forecasting and inventory. Chappell maintains strong client relationships through face-to-face interaction and delivers tailored sales presentations to key accounts. He also monitors market trends, product innovations and industry competition, manages the sales support team and contributes to marketing efforts.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Currently the water situation here in California is a concern. Additional challenges within our business include the decreasing availability of labor; rising costs to the farmer with material and fuel prices; and, of course, the daily challenge provided by Mother Nature.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see more personal interaction with our customers. With increased advances in technology, EDI, and electronic communication I am concerned we are getting further and further away from those valuable relationships with our customer. We spend less time across the desk or across the furrow learning about each other's business.

Q: What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of in your career?

A: Being part of industry networking and educational opportunities like the Emerging Leaders through the PMA, being selected as one of four recipients of the 2014 United Fresh Caplan Family Scholarship, having the highest sales in our office for the past seven years, and most recently forming Chappell Farms, LLC starting with a ten acre ranch of blackberries.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Have a "yes" attitude, seize every opportunity that will allow you to continue to learn, take initiative, and put your career first. Be a leader in your own way — you don't have to be in a leadership role to be a leader.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: Stay up to date with technology, including social media, apps, etc. Reach out to those who are not directly connected with a close friend or family member who is already in the produce business. Also, I think the produce industry trade associations need to keep developing new programs targeting young people into produce.



Alex Coto, 39
Senior Sales Executive
Robinson Fresh
Eden Prairie, MN

Hometown: McKinney, TX

Hobbies: Exercise and sports

Personal: Married for 14 years with 2 children

Community: Part of both St. Gabriel Catholic Church and St. Mark Catholic Church; supports St. Jude Children's Hospital

Motto in Life: Treat others as you would want them to treat you.

Professional Accomplishments: Coto has been involved in the produce industry since his father worked for Dole Pineapples in Honduras for more than 30 years. He grew up between pineapple fields and working summers at the Dole offices in La Ceiba, Honduras. After graduating from college at Louisiana State University (LSU), he took a position with C.H. Robinson Worldwide (CHRW) in New Orleans. In less than three years he became the sourcing manager for the New Orleans branch. Internal changes in the company moved him to Houston and finally to Dallas. In his 17-year career with CHRW, he has held many positions including key account manager, produce manager, sales manager and now his current position as senior sales executive.

In his current position, he manages a team that has been instrumental in diversifying and expanding the business portfolio from primarily wholesale based to include major retailers. He provides complete supply chain solutions leveraging product, service centers and transportation solutions to meet customer's needs. His flexible nature builds winning relationships. He has earned several "Produce Vendor of the Year" awards from his retail accounts. He is a graduate of Robinson's Key Account Sales Program (KASP) and is a recipient of the Sourcing Performance Excellence Award. He spends a good deal of time attending regional food shows and touring customer groups through major growing regions worldwide — connecting retailers to growers.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: Growing up in the Dole Pineapple operation in La Ceiba, Honduras, I always had pineapples

around my house and that is where the love for the land started. I pursued this natural passion for the industry by getting my first degree in Agricultural Studies and a second degree in Agribusiness at LSU. The people who knew me from the start, know it hasn't been easy since English is my second language. However my knowledge of farming and crops helped compensate for that. I had the pleasure of working for a veteran in the industry, Duane Leier at CHRW, who pretty much took me under his wing and taught me as much as he could.

Q: What accomplishments are you most proud of in your career?

A: I'm very proud of reviving our Chilean Welch's program — of being an integral part of the creation of our Welch's strawberry program and starting several small new niche programs for our customers. But my greatest accomplishment has been to learn to balance my personal and professional life and to keep my beautiful wife and two kids together as a strong family.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Knowing our industry is so global now, I would love to see more uniformity in the way business is conducted across borders so all countries have the same playing field and risks are minimized.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: How to listen and delegate.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Hispanic items are going to be the next big thing. I see a huge trend in incremental sales on Hispanic-oriented items. Also, as global markets open up more and more, we'll see many more new specialty items try to gain traction in our marketplaces.



Kelly Craner, 34
Sales/Marketing,
Vice President, Partner
B & C Fresh Sales Inc.

Orange, CA

Hometown: Orange, CA

Hobbies: Family, golf, music/guitar playing

Personal: Married with one child

Community: City of Hope Food Circle Produce and Floral Committee; Walk for Hope/Team Produce Committee

Motto in Life: Be me. Be only me. Be the best

of me.

Professional Accomplishments: Craner's adventure into produce began when he went to work for family owned and operated B & C part time while finishing school. He has been with the company ever since and followed the company through several changes during that time. Because B & C is a small company, he is required to know everything there is to know about how the company operates and manages its customers and sales. His daily duties focus on dealing directly with customers and shippers and logistics infrastructure. He also manages inventories of customized products and ensures customers' category and quality needs are being met, while striving to drive sales and category growth. He handles all sales and purchases and oversees all marketing projects. Craner serves on the board of directors for the Fresh Produce & Floral Council (FPFC). He served as co-chair of the FPFC task force for the creation of the Apprentice Program and was instrumental in developing the program as the newly formed Apprentice Program, serving as co-chair. He also serves on the FPFC luncheon committee and the FPFC website task force. He has graduated from the PMA Emerging Leaders program and will be attending the PMA Mid-Management Course.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: At B & C Fresh Sales we make it our purpose to have all of the issues that can, and do arise throughout the supply chain be of negligible impact (at worst) to our customers. Of course our customers know what is going on in the category, in the industry, but we strive to handle all the headaches of these issues so they don't have to.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see the industry as a whole embrace the components of psychological marketing that the 'junk food' industry so expertly implements. Consumers buy so many things that at the very least aren't as good for them as the things we sell and market. As an industry we can and should better embrace their marketing tactics and tools. Certainly differentiation from so-called junk food is good, but we can utilize tactics that have worked for them in the process. Doing so industrywide can effect change for generations to come.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Well I see a mega trend starting to arise, and that is the move to outside. For years and years it has been common to see folks growing

bigger with things as they grow in their lives. Families grow, thus house sizes grow, and then car sizes and count per family grow. However I am sensing a shift in this mentality. People are downsizing their houses or at least willing to live with less these days. Some with regards to carbon footprint, some for the sake of being green. Smaller cars or no cars, smaller dwellings must mean that people are, or are considering spending more time outside; less car time, less in-house time. Porches, outdoor kitchens and outdoor living spaces are becoming a new trend also; these are creating more ways to spend more time outside. Technology is constantly developing more and more ways to "cut the cord." I see this mega trend of embracing outside with a renewed and modern vigor compared to generations past. The produce industry can and will be affected by this. A great challenge for the produce industry of my generation will be figuring out how to re-imagine the cold chain. Can the cold chain be mobile with the consumer? Can the 'cords of the cold chain' be cut?



Joseph J D'Amico Jr., 35
Vice President/Co-Owner
To-Jo Mushrooms, Inc.
Avondale, PA

Hometown: Landenberg, PA

Hobbies: Fishing

Personal: Married with one daughter and twin sons

Community: March of Dimes: served as the Ambassador Family for the organization to help spread the nonprofit's appreciation for its business partners and key donors; volunteer at the Annual Mushroom Festival held in Kennett Square, PA.

Motto in Life: Farming is like any other job — except you punch in at age 5 and never punch out.

Professional Accomplishments: D'Amico, Jr. owns and operates To-Jo Mushrooms, Inc. and leads the management team along with his brother Tony. He earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Delaware Valley College in 2002 where he studied Ag Business, and was captain of the football team his Junior and senior years. D'Amico grew up on the farm with his brother Tony and sister Anita.

D'Amico leads a team of skilled harvesters and industry leaders and has seen To-Jo emerge as one the leading mushroom farms in the country. To-Jo currently has more than 325 workers in five business units. He has been an integral part of the strategic growth of the business, and under his leadership the company

has more than doubled its sales since taking over for his father in 2007. He is credited for putting the needs of his employees before his own and fostering a family-centric work environment promoting trust and efficiency among the workers. His unwavering commitment to growing the highest quality mushrooms and ability to think outside of the box is evident in the company's accelerated growth, which has doubled in size since he assumed full responsibility of To-Jo's growing operations. He currently sits on the board of directors of the American Mushroom Institute. In addition to his regular responsibilities on the board, he participated on the Executive Director Search Committee.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I was born into this industry. It is in my blood. I love farming, and I could never imagine doing anything else in my life. I began like most in our industry: learning the business from the ground up. I watered houses, picked mushrooms, ran tractors/compost turners, etc. As the years went on, I was rewarded with more responsibility. My dad instilled the family culture and values into me at an early age, and I try to carry on that legacy. I learned early on that hard work and dedication were the cornerstones of any successful business.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: I am excited to be designing and building a new state-of-the-art growing facility. Utilizing the best technology available, it will enable To-Jo to increase productivity, efficiency and greater consistency of quality. It will be one of the biggest projects To-Jo has undertaken.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see more automation at the harvesting level. As labor shortages continue to rise, the industry is going to need to adapt and find solutions through new technology.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: I am very fortunate to have my brother, Tony, as a partner. Tony and I collaborate on many decisions and we continually look to participate in leadership programs that enable us to develop our skill set. Every month, I participate in an executive peer advisory group hosted through an organization called, Vistage. Also, my Uncle, John D'Amico, has played an integral part in my life and I would not be the farmer I am today without his guidance and advice over the years.

Q: What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

A: One of the biggest personal accomplishments in my career is starting a compost operation with my uncle from the ground up. We started with one bale of hay and a compost turner from the 1960s. Today the compost wharf produces 130,000 cubic yards of compost per year.



Ryan Easter, 28
Regional Marketing Director
Sage Fruit Company
Minneapolis, MN

Hometown: Springfield, MO

Hobbies: Basketball, watching the Kansas Jayhawks, going to Timberwolves and Twins games, fishing, exercise, traveling, spending time with friends and family, spending time outdoors.

Community: Volunteer at the local YMCA as a youth basketball coach, combining his love for kids and passion for basketball while coaching 8 to 10 year olds.

Motto in Life: While a senior on his high school basketball team, he advised underclassmen to "play every game like it is your last." The evolved version more relevant to his career today is: "Approach every opportunity as if it might not arise again."

Professional Accomplishments: Easter has been with Sage Fruit his entire career. He joined Sage as a trainee and spent his first year in Yakima, WA, learning the apple business. From there, he was quickly promoted to regional marketing director and was moved to Minneapolis. Easter has made great progress building his customer base and strong relationships throughout the country. He was promoted again in December 2013 to a bigger territory with more responsibilities and customers. In his current position, Easter is responsible for the upper Midwest and Southeast territories and travels to meet with current customers to develop sales and marketing programs to grow business. He is also responsible for new business development within his territory. Along with sales and marketing responsibilities, he also handles category management for key accounts and manages one of the largest accounts for Sage Fruit Company. His service to Target does not end with simply constructing sales programs, but he is often actively in the stores, conceptualizing and constructing displays. Easter has also been instrumental in the success of private label programs between Sage Fruit and Target.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce

industry?

A: Produce is in the blood of the Easter family. My great grandfather was in produce at Dillon's in the 30s. My grandfather was in produce for Dillon's and Fleming for several years and was also on the board of the PMA and my dad was a produce director for 25 years at Dillon's. Through networking, I learned of a career opportunity with Sage Fruit Company. After learning about Sage Fruit and what the job entailed, I accepted the position.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: My biggest challenge is also the biggest opportunity. When I meet with a potential new customer, the first thing they see is my age. Sometimes my age creates a barrier and potential new customers are less willing to open up and give me an opportunity to help them grow their business. For others, it does not take more than a few minutes for them to recognize my passion for produce and they realize I want to do a great job for them.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I enjoy discovering new opportunities to grow sales within my territory. I enjoy trav-

"Sometimes my age creates a barrier and potential new customers are less willing to open up and give me an opportunity to help them grow their business."

— Ryan Easter

eling throughout the upper Midwest and Southeast, meeting new people and customers and discussing apples. The growers of Sage Fruit apples place their trust in me to be the face of Sage and it's not a responsibility I take lightly.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: My dad has vast experience in the produce industry and he is usually the first person I go to. Within Sage, I feel like I can go to my boss, Chuck Sinks, and my counterpart in Ohio, Kevin Steiner. They have both been great mentors since I came on board at Sage.

Q: What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

A: I am most proud of the relationships I have been able to build throughout the country with my customer base. In my five years at Sage, I learned great relationships with customers are the key to long-term partnerships.



Andrew Engles, 31
Commodity Manager
Markon Cooperative
Salinas, CA

Hometown: Pacific Grove, CA

Hobbies: Golf and exercise

Community: Middle school girls' basketball coach

Motto in Life: What we do in life echoes in eternity

Professional Accomplishments: Engles has been with Markon for nine years. As a manager, he oversees the purchasing of Northwest commodities including apples, onions, and potatoes. In this role, he is ultimately responsible for growing produce sales by establishing markets, providing commodity updates, servicing customers and suppliers, and fostering relation-

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U.S. Patent Nos. 6,024,489; 6,030,120;
6,190,044; 7,163,339; 7,798,715; 8,550,717

ships and building new ones. He graduated from Saint Mary's College in Moraga, CA in 2006 and started at Markon in the role of sales coordinator. Though starting in this support role, he successfully took the lead in a high-volume purchasing position and in 2007 became produce manager. Persistence and tenacity along with integrity has contributed to his success in purchasing. Last spring, Engles graduated from the Produce Marketing Association's Emerging Leadership Program.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: Although I grew up near the "salad bowl of the world" in Salinas, CA, I never considered working in produce until I was on the brink of graduating from college. A friend of my father worked in the industry and commented to him how I would be ideal for produce because I was "good with people and always on the phone." Humbled by the compliment, I researched the business by connecting with people who had worked in the industry for a number of years. Through this research, I liked what I heard, went for an interview at Markon Cooperative, and thankfully got the job.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Remaining stuck in similar routines. We tend to become creatures of habit and to keep this industry alive and progressive, it is important to not fall into the everyday, mundane cycle. Like great athletes are constantly looking to improve their craft, the same applies to the workforce. There needs to be a strong sense of urgency and continuing implementation of evolving change.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Walking in the door every day; not knowing what to expect. The industry remains fast-paced and ever evolving. Whether Mother Nature wipes out a berry field or the department of transportation puts a hold on trucks hauling fresh produce, we always need to react and problem solve to sustain the food chain supply.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: Expanding my leadership role within my current organization and within the community as well. Teaching others to not make the mistakes I've made and learning from young professionals.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: The growth of food safety and the impor-

tance of eating healthier. When the First Lady of the United States shows up on the Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon to promote healthier eating habits at home and in schools, there certainly appears to be a cultural shift with what we are putting into our bodies. Further, the marketing of new products through social media applications (i.e. Instagram and Twitter) will separate organizations from their competitors.



F. Scott Fein, 39
Supply Group Manager,
Northeast Region
Robinson Fresh

Eden Prairie, MN

Hometown: Philadelphia, PA (Northeast section)

Hobbies: Family, work, lawn, Penn State athletics

Personal: Married with two daughters

Community: Member of Board of Trustees for Amherst Farms HOA since 2010, currently serving as president (since 2011).

Motto in Life: Do something and do it with passion.

Professional Accomplishments: Fein served in various capacities in his more than 17-year career at C.H. Robinson/Robinson Fresh giving him a unique background in account management, supply management, systems development and leadership. Fein has been instrumental in helping Robinson Fresh expand its presence locally. Over the past three years, he has been working to support multi-generational farmers in 15 different states along the East Coast from Florida to Connecticut. The program covers seven different commodities. He is an ambassador for business to the state governments and works directly with the New Jersey Ag Department and Delaware Ag department to promote state programs.

In 2014, he received the Phillip Alampi Industry Marketing Award by the New Jersey Agricultural Society. He was voted an "All Star" in a Robinson Fresh division-wide contest to recognize a peer that embodies the attributes of a winner, motivator, cheerleader and game changer. He received a "key" for outstanding performance in the Robinson Fresh Key Account Sales Program.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: There is an opportunity to improve the supply chain, specifically the shipping and receiving process. As capacity becomes a scarce resource, a more efficient process would go a long way to distinguish oneself as a grower/shipper/receiver of choice.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: First, focus on the solution not the problem. Pointing fingers never feels as good as celebrating a victory, especially one that didn't seem likely. The time for accountability is after the issue is resolved or has reached a conclusion. Second, never stop learning and striving to develop your skills and behaviors. Success is a journey, and you'll need every tool you pick up along the way.

Q: What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

A: The 2014 Phillip Alampi Marketing Award for my work with New Jersey agriculture. Being honored for doing something you take such pleasure in doing was a very special feeling and something I did not expect.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: This is an industry where your words matter and your actions define you. Focus on developing relationships not sales and make sure you are proud of every interaction you make. Sales are a result of a healthy relationship.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

A: The expectations of the customer have changed. No longer will sharp prices and/or a friend as a buyer sustain your business. You need to have a three- to five-year plan for growth and constantly focus on innovating their supply chain with solutions and analytics to support.



Blair Greenhill, 38
Director of Purchasing
Nickey Gregory Company
Atlanta, GA

Hometown: Born in Oakville, Ontario, Canada; grew up in Charleston, SC

Hobbies: Following Clemson Tigers especially in football, basketball, and baseball, golfing, and watching movies with his wife

Personal: Married for eight years with three children

Community: Helped with Save it Forward (a program to help needy families with school-aged kids); No Longer Bound (a men's ministry for overcoming addictions); and St. Vincent DePaul Society to help feed the hungry. Also starting to get involved with Upward Soccer leagues for children.

Motto in Life: To quote Dr. Charles Stanley, "Trust in God and leave the consequences to him."

Professional Accomplishments: Skills in

problem solving and negotiating led Greenhill to start as a produce sales rep with C.H. Robinson in 2002 after graduating from Clemson University with a BS in Economics. He became the veg/value-added category manager for the Southeast Region (Atlanta, Tampa, Miami, and Puerto Rico) after only a few years. He transferred to the Miami office in 2005 learning other aspects of the company and then made the move back to Atlanta in 2006 as the produce site manager at age 29. He led the produce division of the Atlanta office for eight years. During that period he managed the company's largest accounts and rebuilt the team. In addition to being at the forefront of the C.H. Robinson/Robinson Fresh evolution to grower shipper, Greenhill also served as regional category manager for melons (working closely with Timco, the CHR acquisition) and helped to manage MelonUp! and Pink Ribbon sales/inventory at multiple shipping locations.

Currently, as director of purchasing for Nickey Gregory Company, a family-owned wholesaler, he has consolidated purchasing for Atlanta and Miami, reviewed and subsequently added/subtracted grower/shippers where necessary, and set up contracts. He oversees both the company's DC's and buys Western vegetables/

fruit. He is known as being a "good produce man" and is widely regarded as honest and hard working.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: Trading has been a part of my life since I was young when I honed my negotiation skills collecting and trading baseball cards. There's something about making a deal and negotiating between two different parties that I really enjoy. I graduated from Clemson in 2002 when the economy was still reeling. At that point I had seen C.H. Robinson at two career fairs. They represented their company and jobs as requiring heavy problem solving, which I like and excel at. I ended up starting with C.H. Robinson as a produce sales rep in the Atlanta office in 2002.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: The produce industry needs to make USDA guidelines more understandable. There are also terms like "price after sale" that the industry uses but they are not recognized by governmental entities. Let's reduce the amount of gray area and streamline communication standards to make things easier for all.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: Soak it all in. I was a sponge when I started but could have been even more so. I'm still learning everyday and will never stop. I really thought that was a cliché but it's definitely not.

Q: What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

A: I'm probably most proud of not letting the Atlanta Produce office of CHR fail through tough times and ultimately growing the office. When I took over as produce site manager I knew we were on the verge of losing most of the business from our biggest account. I wasn't prepared for the employee attrition we experienced soon after but with the help of the rest of the crew — most notably Jody Newberry at the time — we persevered, rebuilt, and ended up growing the office.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Convenience trends will continue. Time is a scarce commodity. Healthy trends at QSRs like "kale probably coming to McDonald's" and "Chick-Fil-A adding more produce items to its menu" will gain even more traction.



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Trish James, 35
Vice President
Produce for Kids
Orlando, FL

Hometown: West Grove, PA

Hobbies: Reading, photography, watching her kids' sports

Personal: Married with two boys

Community: Co-chair of Children's Formation Board and Sunday School Teacher at Episcopal Church of the Advent; EPC Women's Leadership liaison to Girls Scouts of Southeastern PA; former Shoes That Fit corporate liaison; former Big Sister for Big Brothers/ Big Sisters.

Motto in Life: Life is short, and we do not have much time for gladdening the hearts of those who are traveling with us. So be swift to love and make haste to be kind. (Adapted quote of writer and philosopher, Henri-Frédéric Amiel)

Professional Accomplishments: James started working in the grocery industry in 2004, holding various operations, marketing, and merchandising positions for several years. In 2010, she began working in the produce department at ACME Markets. From there, she moved to retail merchandising and marketing consultant for an international grower. In her current position as vice president of Produce for Kids, she is responsible for overseeing the Produce for Kids staff, managing day-to-day organizational operations and budget, as well as coordinating the strategic development and creative positioning associated with brand development, consumer outreach, and in-store campaigns. She is responsible for developing relationships with sponsors and supermarket retailers as well as generating new opportunities for brand awareness and partnerships. She manages the overall P&L for Produce for Kids along with the financial impacts of each campaign and program. She leads the Produce for Kids' team with both its B2B and B2C branding. Initiatives include several in-store marketing campaigns in retail markets across the country.

After joining the Produce for Kids team in 2013, she has been able to establish the groundwork to not only raise funds for children's nonprofit organizations, but also drive produce sales through Produce for Kids flagship campaigns and new programs. She led the organization to and past \$5 million raised for children's charities and forged a new primary charity relationship with Feeding America for donations starting in 2015. Leading the launch of the new Produceforkids.com in 2014, her team was able to drive an overall website traffic increase of 145 percent and increased mobile visits to the new mobile

friendly site by 235 percent. In August 2014, she led the team in their first digital campaign with the launch of PowerYourLunchBox.com. Through this new program, Produce for Kids was able to engage an active community of moms, bring additional awareness to the participating brands, and drive incremental donations to Produce for Kids' children's charities. Finally, Produce for Kids launched their first e-cookbook, Festive Flavors in November 2014. Along with its robust social media campaign.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: To continue to lead Produce for Kids as an industry-leader and a recognizable brand for consumers. Under my tenure at Produce for Kids, I hope to reach the \$10 million raised for children's charities and make an impact on kids (and families) eating nutritious foods.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I think the produce industry can do a better job speaking to consumers where they are today, and where they will be in five years. Mobile technology isn't going away, and today's shoppers spend more time on their phones and tablets than ever before. This will only continue. It is important that produce brands think like CPG brands in order to promote produce consumption to families and kids. Social media (not just Facebook) and mobile-friendly website marketing must be an important part of your marketing strategy. In store, it is important for retailers to make the shopping experience quick and easy. Offer solutions for customers to pick-up easy (but healthy) dinner ingredients, lunchbox items, or sport snacks.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: Sometimes it's really hard to see the forest from the trees. Have confidence that hard work will pay off and just relax.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Study! The produce industry is complex and always changing. It is important to know your commodities and consumer trends.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: More pre-packaged, pre-cut fruits and veggies making healthy snacking easier; solution-oriented sales (think Blueapron.com, but at a retail level); home delivery of groceries (including fresh produce); continued focus on

increasing produce consumption and marketing to children and young adults.



Krista Jones, 39
Director Brand Marketing
and Product Innovation
Crunch Pak

Cashmere, WA

Hometown: Wenatchee, WA

Hobbies: Fishing, hiking, playing outdoors with my boys

Personal: Two children

Community: Cashmere Chamber of Commerce; Greater Wenatchee Technology Association Social Media Speaker; Washington State Apple Blossom Festival; Vale Elementary; Wenatchee Valley College; Cashmere High School (career mentor); Entiat High School (career mentor); FBLA Regional Judge

Motto in life: Don't Worry, Be Happy

Professional Accomplishments: Jones is a strategic part of the sales and marketing team at Crunch Pak and her integrated marketing communications programs are driving business results and have won national awards. She manages advertising, public relations, special events and social media, as well as directs new product development efforts. She is known for working effectively with people inside and outside the company and juggling multiple tasks, priorities and demands. She manages productive relationships with external vendors and marketing partners such as Disney, Marvel and the NBA and has secured product placements at several high-profile entertainment events including the Academy Awards, Superbowl, AT&T ProAm Golf Tournament and the American Academy of Country Music Awards.

After graduating from Washington State University, she held positions in the apparel industry at Nordstrom and Cutter Buck; in those roles she traveled internationally assisting with social compliance and quality inspections at garment industry manufacturers overseas. After having children, she wanted to return to her hometown of Wenatchee and was referred to a marketing position at Crunch Pak. In the span of just three years, she has now become director of brand marketing and product innovation.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: Since I grew up in Wenatchee, I always had a high degree of respect for the agricultural industry and the economic impact it made on our community. My first job was working in the warehouses during cherry harvest every

summer. It wasn't surprising then for me to end up at Crunch Pak. Tony Freytag brought me into the company and has been a generous mentor.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: We eat a lot at home; I try to teach my boys to eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables and build that into their everyday eating habits. I have my own mini test market for Crunch Pak's new products.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: It's like fashion — there are trends and consumer demand changes on a regular basis. I really enjoy promoting healthy eating to consumers of all ages.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: That distribution into new channels would be easier for fresh products. For example, most convenience stores don't offer healthy grab-and-go options due to the lack of being able to get products into their stores via the current supply chain vehicles.

Q: Whom do you go to when in need of advice?

A: Crunch Pak's Tony Freytag.



Patrick Andrew Kelly, 29
President
Kelly Brothers, Inc.
Exeter, CA

Hometown: Orange, CA

Hobbies: Basketball, golf, hiking, overall Cross Fit competition running such as Spartan Beast, decorating his house, pogonotrophy (cultivation of beard growing) and traveling the world with his family.

Personal: Married with two children

Community: California Citrus Mutual; International Pineapple Organization; Central California Blood Drive Center; The Well Community Church; Grace Community Church; Visalia Sports and Recreation; guest speaking at local college in entrepreneurship and leadership.

Mottos in Life: The only way to create value is to care, believe, and be fair. Expect excellence of yourself not others. Always want to be No. 1, but know you are your biggest competitor, and above all never give up. Promote your passion through your mind and your heart. Follow your own path no matter what society thinks. Go ahead and do your best toward everything, success starts with one thing — a dream.

Professional Accomplishments: Kelly entered

the produce industry as young boy picking oranges in the fields of California and Florida for local processors and packers. He officially started his produce career at the age of 21 with LoBue Brothers, Inc. a subsidiary company of Sun Rapt Foods, LLC in 2007. In 2009, he and four partners who were local growers and packers in California's Central Valley formed Jasmine Marketing, LLC with the purpose of increasing grower returns. In 2010 he partnered with a separate investor after the sale of Jasmine Marketing, LLC and started All Seasons Fruit Supply, Inc., selling grapes, stone fruit, and citrus. In 2010, he left All Seasons Fruit Supply and started Kelly Brothers, Inc. focusing on processing citrus for juice and cut fruit, stone fruit, grapes, watermelons, and pineapples. The company operates under the vision statement: "Fresh premium produce with quality and integrity you can trust." He currently manages the P&L and the financial structure of the organization along with the sale and marketing.

During his produce career, he has developed trademarked brands for the pineapple industry. He also completed his bachelor's in Entrepreneurship while starting Kelly Brothers, Inc. from 2009 to 2012 and completed an MBA in Executive Leadership and International Business from 2013 to 2014. He received support and leadership awards from the International Pineapple Organization (IPO) and lobbied for the citrus industry. He is currently a part of California Citrus Mutual Legislative committee and a committee member of the IPO.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: My father, Kenneth Kelly from Sun Rapt Foods, has been in the industry for more than 20 years. I always had a passion to follow my father and soon followed him to the industry. During my life, I helped my dad with many parts of his operations when needed. I loved the connection with all different types of people from different demographics, culture, and ethnicity. It is great to be able to learn about the places where people come from along with the fruit we purchase from different countries. Some things you just can't learn in college.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: I envision my career leading to multiple international brands for my organization, along with a growing presence through the global economy.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Communication, quality of buyers, more Millennials and Baby Boomers working together. Change is a good thing!

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: The industry would attract more Millennials if the struggle for power with the Baby Boomers was not so tender.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

A: I have seen things change with food safety drastically along with multiple problems such as huanglongbing (disease) in our citrus and the economy closing down packing houses. The industry's people are changing rapidly. Gaining respect and loyalty is getting harder and harder in today's changing world.



Lynsey Kennedy, 31
International Marketing
Manager
Pear Bureau Northwest

Milwaukie, OR

Hometown: Milwaukie, OR

Hobbies: Reading, going to the movies, cooking, travel, running, watching sports

Personal: Single

Motto in Life: "If you work really hard and you're kind, amazing things will happen." (from Conan O'Brien)

Professional Accomplishments: Kennedy studied Spanish and business in college, and received her MBA from Oregon State University, where she frequently worked in teams with international students. She started her career at a small marketing and design firm, working on brand strategy and project management for clients consisting of industry associations and non-profits. She has been with Pear Bureau Northwest for almost seven years. She works with a small team near Portland, OR, coordinating with 15 international marketing representatives to manage USA Pear promotion programs in 33 countries around the world. The Pear Bureau represents more than 1,500 growers in Oregon and Washington that make up 84 percent of the fresh pears grown in the U.S. and 92 percent of U.S. fresh pear exports.

She coordinates a wide range of both trade and consumer activities for the Pear Bureau, including managing its international trade show participation and reverse trade missions, bringing foreign buyers to visit the growing region and meet with USA Pear shippers. Each year she plans a trade reception co-hosted with other fresh

fruit industry groups in conjunction with PMA's Fresh Summit. More than 400 people typically attend, including industry members, importers and retailers from top markets including Latin America, Russia, India, China, and Southeast Asia. Much of her work is also behind the scenes, coordinating grant funding compliance and reporting requirements, including the Bureau's participation in the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service's Market Access Program.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I was initially drawn to the actual position at Pear Bureau rather than the industry specifically. The job description fit well with a lot of aspects of my experience — marketing, working with people internationally, and the opportunity to speak Spanish since Mexico is the top export market for Northwest pears and Latin America overall is a big growth market for the industry.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: I eat a lot of produce — it's where I spend the bulk of my grocery dollars. Since joining the industry, I've enjoyed trying new items and definitely pay more attention in the produce department to what's available and where it comes from.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Working on a small team to manage a promotional program in more than 30 countries around the world definitely keeps me busy — good time management is important to stay on top of everything to make sure that we are not only conducting good promotions that benefit the Northwest pear industry, but also meeting all of the requirements of our grant programs.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I love working with people all over the world, as well as traveling and seeing the differences between markets, their supply chains, and how pears ultimately end up in the consumers' hands.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I like the discussions going on about the importance of women and the role that they play in the industry; I would like to see these discussions continue to draw attention to the issue so women can be as equally considered as men for leadership opportunities. Women bring a lot of experience and complementary skills to the table, and it's wonderful to see them given the chance to step out of supporting

roles and making what has traditionally been a male-dominated industry more well-rounded.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: I wish I had had more confidence in myself starting out to overcome the uncertainty at the beginning of my career — a little bit of confidence goes a long way, and if you work hard, you'll gain the confidence and experience for a strong career path.



Nick Langel, 30

**Senior Product Manager -
Refrigerated Products
Union Pacific Railroad**

Omaha, NE

Hometown: Norfolk, NE

Hobbies: Golfing, traveling, volunteering, being with family

Personal: Single with one son

Community: Active member of the Omaha Junior Chamber of Commerce; Development Committee for Youth Emergency Services in Omaha; Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Midlands; Pancreatic Cancer Research Foundation; Joslyn Art Museum Young Art Patrons; the Food Bank for the Heartland; Creighton University Jaybacker; member of St Cecilia's Parish in Omaha.

Motto in Life: Make the very best day of your past the very worst day of your future.

Professional Accomplishments: After five years working on grain products for Union Pacific Railroad (UP), Langel began his career in produce by applying for and obtaining a position on UP's food team. His current responsibilities are to manage UP's refrigerated products portfolio, a \$400 million annual revenue piece of business. He is responsible for the strategic direction setting, forecasting, rate making, capital acquisition, program development and management, logistics monitoring, and business development efforts in UP's temp-controlled sector. In produce, he helps prepare for and manage the shipment season for many products. He is currently working on establishing new expedited transportation options for moving Mexican produce into the U.S. and distributing to the East Coast. One of his most notable and pertinent accomplishments for the produce was the work to secure necessary capital for new refrigerated boxcars for the produce industry. He was successful in securing more than \$385 million in new capital needed to build roughly 375 new refrigerated boxcars.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I grew up in small-town Nebraska that was heavily dependent upon agriculture to drive our economy. I learned how important agriculture is to not only our region of Nebraska but also our nation and the rest of the world. It was fun to learn about the various grains we grew and the commercial uses for those products. After I graduated college and started working for UP, a position on our food team opened up to manage our refrigerated products portfolio. Since I grew up around agriculture and had some experience with grain, I wanted to push out past my comfort zone and learn about a completely different part of agriculture.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: I take pride in eating as much produce as I possibly can. From picking/eating mulberries off the tree in our back yard to standing at the end of our driveway selling green beans and zucchini from the family garden, I have been a big advocate (and consumer of course) of produce ever since I was a young child. This year, my family decided to buy into a CSA (community supported agriculture) program here in Omaha, and we'll get one whole bag of various fruit and vegetables grown locally, per week, through the summer. I think this will be a lot of fun as it will nudge us to try a lot of various new types of produce that we typically do not use in our normal diet.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like to see a reinvigorated expedited rail network for shipping produce from the West Coast to the Eastern markets. One thing we are working very aggressively on here at UP is to re-establish an expedited coast-to-coast rail program that our produce customers can utilize. The focus is to get from the fields and factories to the distribution centers at destination as quick and consistently as possible. This is going to change a lot of the way we do business today with our customers but overall is going to create the best long-term and sustainable rail shipment program possible.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry?

A: The inspiration for my work and care for the produce industry is further investment in refrigerated boxcar assets, which are a 50-year usable life asset. I want to be able to look back when I retire and see UP-owned refrigerated boxcars moving on our lines and know I had a hand in acquiring the capital, building the car, and implementing them into our network. The produce market is in dire need of long-term

sustainable transportation capacity and that is something UP can help out with. Being able to see the fruits of our labor is a very motivating factor for me.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: The availability of new types of produce is going to continue to grow. The recently developed technology for the temp-controlled freight sector is very cool. The ability to remotely monitor and resolve issues with refrigerated boxcars and containers, the establishment of expedited transit programs, and the life-extending applications on many goods is really helping to bring new types of produce to the consumer. Things that have never been able to be done due to perishability and damage concerns are now completely irrelevant. I think we'll continue to see this type of diversity in our grocery stores and restaurant chains continue, especially since the demand from the consumer for these new and traditionally unattainable types of fruit and vegetables continues to rise.



Brian Maguire, 33
**Account Executive/
Commodity Sales**
JOH

Billerica, MA

Hobbies: Golf; huge sports fan

Personal: Married and expecting first child

Community: Volunteer at The Travis Roy Foundation for more than five years now, in that time his group has raised more than \$100,000 dollars for the foundation.

Motto in Life: Don't talk about it, be about it.

Professional Accomplishments: Maguire started working for the JOH sales desk in 2006 calling on many large retail stores and learning the produce business. In 2008, he was given the opportunity to represent some growers and was introduced to the commodity business. Seven years later, this has become a substantial and growing piece of JOH's business that he is proud to be a part of. JOH currently represents 25 grower/packer/shipper clients and is doing business in the New England and New York markets. His current responsibilities at JOH include managing more than 45 clients at three large retailers for value-added products and presenting new items and programs. He also manages the 25-grower/packer/shipper commodity clients in New England and New York.

Q: How did you get into the industry?

A: I have a lifelong knowledge of the produce

businesses. I started working at the Market Basket produce warehouse unloading trucks during my summer breaks in high school. In college I worked for JOH doing retail store checks for companies like Fresh Express, NatureSweet and Apio. I graduated from Plymouth State University and two days later I was a full-time JOH associate.

Q: What is the biggest challenge about your job?

A: My biggest challenge also happens to be what I like most about my job. In this business, it is all about building relationships and trust. Each client and customer I manage has a different set of expectations, business plan, strategy and tactics. It is my job to not only understand what the goals are but to know how my clients and customers want to execute to attain those goals. I have to know my clients inside and out to build the trust and knowledge necessary to make them successful.

Q: Where do you go to seek advice?

A: I consider myself very fortunate to be surrounded by so many outstanding industry leaders. There are two people, however, that I continuously turn to for advice and guidance. Tom Casey, executive vice president and regional director of Produce at JOH, is truly an amazing person who thinks outside the box when it comes to the brokerage business. The other person is my father, Mike Maguire, director of produce operations at Market Basket. He has been in the business for more than 40 years, working his way up the "food chain." He has helped guide me through the ups and downs but if there is one thing he has taught me it is "if you work as hard as you can, people will notice."

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: I wish I knew it was all right to deliver bad news in this business. I have a very vivid memory of one of my first ads with a major customer on TOVs. The grower called to tell me he would not have the two truckloads of tomatoes for the weekend's arrival. I thought I was going to faint. The buyer was out that afternoon so I had to wait until the next morning to call him. I did not sleep a wink that night worrying about letting down a customer. The next day, I called the buyer and he said, "Don't worry about it. There isn't a TOV to be had in the country. Move the orders out and deliver when you can." I learned that sometimes things are out of my control in this business. When a market is tight, it's tight. So just deliver the news as soon as you know and be proactive with solutions.



Stacey Miller, 29
Senior Brand Manager
Litehouse Foods
Sandpoint, ID

Hometown: Sandpoint, ID

Hobbies: Hiking, competitive horseback riding (jumping/dressage), bicycling, anything outdoors, playing piano, traveling, reading

Personal: Married; 2012 Executive MBA; 2008 Graduate University of Idaho

Community: Leadership Sandpoint; Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce involvement; 4-H (youth development program) horse leader; Association for Dressings and Sauces, volunteer horseback instructor, Relay for Life, community fundraising campaigns

Motto in Life: If your dreams don't scare you, then they're not big enough.

Professional Accomplishments: Miller has been with Litehouse Foods for six years, starting out as an assistant product manager and working her way to her current position. During this time, she has excelled in many aspects of the business ranging from national promotions, project management, business analysis and financial analysis. She started the company social media platforms with great success. Within the company, she is known as a leader and is valued for her can-do attitude. She has a leadership role on many cross functional teams with R&D, operations, finance and sales to bring new products to market and manage existing SKU's. She also was instrumental in creating a Quality Assurance board across all departments to proactively bring awareness and drive quality throughout the entire company.

Miller managed the company's Freeze-Dried Herb line since 2010. Under her lead, sales have sustained annual double-digit growth by repositioning the line to educate consumers about the Instantly Fresh benefit, by transitioning the label to communicate more effective messaging, and by supporting the line with advertising, digital presence, and marketing promotions. The product line won several consumer awards over the years, including the prestigious Prevention Magazine's "Cleanest Packaged Food Award" and the "Clean Eating" award from Clean Eating magazine. As the previous national promotions manager, she executed successful promotions with many companies in the industry in both the U.S. and Canada, increasing sales and awareness in the produce category through these partnerships. She collaborated with Mann's, Fresh Express, Fresh Gourmet, Taylor Farms, Nature Sweet, and numerous retailers, as well as companies from the meat, dairy, deli and wine

industry to create campaigns bringing consumers to the produce department from other areas of the store.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: One of the biggest challenges of my job is continuous innovation — bringing something new to the industry that is healthy for our consumers and will drive more sales to our retailers. Innovation is extremely important and necessary to grow as new consumer trends are constantly evolving. Being two steps ahead and knowing what our consumers want before they do is an exciting challenge to overcome.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: Though I had several mentors throughout the years, the one who stands out the most is Roxie Lowther. She has been with Litehouse for 33 years, currently the director of marketing communications. She has always provided great insight and advice when I needed it the most. Not only is she one of the ones who hired me, she has been a constant encouragement and supporter throughout my career at Litehouse.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: General education on the produce industry would have been helpful and would have given me a quicker understanding into the industry itself. As for specific skills, more education in cross-functional management would have been beneficial since this is a critical part of many positions in business.

Q: What accomplishments are you most proud of in your career?

A: As a senior brand manager, it's exciting to be able to lead our Brand Team and drive quality products and innovation to the consumer. I had an opportunity to manage almost every retail product line at Litehouse, which helped me have a greater understanding of business and to help my team grow. I went back to school full-time to get my EMBA while continuing to work at Litehouse full-time. It was a challenge juggling life, school, and work, but was well worth the effort and knowledge I received from it.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: Work with educational institutions. The biggest challenge is educating people in the industry at a younger age and showing the opportunities available in the produce industry. As more awareness is brought to food and nutrition,

I believe more people will become passionate and want to be involved.



Daniel Mozzett, 39
Director of Marketing
Grower Direct Marketing
Stockton, CA

Hometown: Linden, CA

Hobbies: Coaching youth sports, cooking

Personal: Married with three children

Community: March of Dimes Celebrity Chef Auction; Presentation School Charities

Professional Accomplishments: Mozzett came to Grower Direct Marketing, LLC after having produced cooking shows with celebrity chefs for nearly 15 years. In this role, he energized the company's product marketing group and demonstrated outstanding sales acumen. In addition to produce marketing and company branding, he took over fresh sales in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Dubai and major European destinations including Switzerland and the United Kingdom. He won an Emmy Award for a television series and has a James Beard Award Nomination. He produced 300 cooking show episodes for PBS, ABC and CBS. He created the World's Largest School Lunch tray for California Ag Day and created Frito-Lay Flavor Kitchen atop Times Square broadcasting, which reaches millions of people every week.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I grew up on farms and orchards in the vibrant Linden, CA fresh fruit industry, picking and delivering tree fruit and ultimately selling fruit for Linden Associated Growers before I left for San Diego State University (SDSU). After attending SDSU, I was fortunate to enter TV food show production. This led to several international trips to uncover the best in fresh, work with chefs from national and international destinations and understand the culture of food production around the world. After this amazing experience, I decided to enter the produce industry and work with my local network of family growers.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: We have a distinct group of leaders here at Grower Direct. Our managing director, Jim Hanson and our founder Del Gotelli, who is now in his 80s and continues to define our industry, are my primary sounding boards for new ideas and advice.

Q: What accomplishments are you most

proud of in your career?

A: Having produced more than 500 episodes of television shows, some in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Tasmania and Europe, are experiences I treasure. I have been nominated for coveted James Beard Awards, Telly and multiple Emmy nominations. It was a very exciting time.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Ask questions, find a mentor you can trust and learn as much as you can and explore. There are amazing people in this business.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: We need to underscore the camaraderie in this business. The industry is comprised of many great people willing and interested in teaching new industry talent.



Josh J. Padilla, 34
Coordinator of Produce
Merchandising & Operations
Krasdale/Alpha 1 Marketing

White Plains, NY

Hometown: Weehawken, NJ

Hobbies: Going to theaters, trying out new restaurants, wine tastings

Personal: Single

Community: Coached Little League baseball for 10 years before finally retiring in 2010

Motto in Life: "Success is going from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm."

— Winston Churchill

Professional Accomplishments: Padilla started in produce almost 16 years ago as a part-time produce clerk for Pathmark Supermarkets. He assumed different roles and responsibilities going from a second shift produce supervisor, to assistant produce manager, to a produce manager. In early 2011, he joined Whole Foods Market as part of their Leadership in Training program, and after a couple months was promoted to produce assistant team leader. In 2012, he became a produce team leader at their Ridgewood, NJ store. In March of 2013, he left Whole Foods and joined Weis Supermarkets as an assistant store manager mostly in charge of perishable departments.

Later in 2013, Joe DeLorenzo, produce director of Krasdale Foods and Alpha 1 Marketing recruited Padilla to join his team as a produce specialist and merchandiser for this coop of more than 250 independently owned stores in the New York metro area and Florida. His responsibilities included visiting stores, identifying areas

of opportunities for improvement in their produce department, and educating and mentoring store owners, managers and department managers on produce industry standards, food safety, shrink, gross profit, new products and merchandising. He also created produce planograms and reset produce departments, and assumed the director's responsibilities on his days off. In July 2014, he temporarily assumed the responsibilities of the produce director, which entailed directing the produce operations of the company, writing ads, managing the merchandising team, and building partnerships with industry trade associations and growers. He also identified opportunities to help grow the company's sales either by expanding product mix-up or through marketing strategies. After the death of the produce director in November 2014, Padilla was tapped to lead the produce operations as coordinator of produce operations and merchandising.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would like the industry to label GMO produce. It is right for consumers to know what products contain genetically modified organisms. With Americans overwhelmingly supporting such labeling, the food industry should drop opposition and be more transparent about GMOs.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: I was very skeptical of cut fruit/veggies, to the point that I did not commit a lot of my labor dollars into producing the cut varieties. I asked myself: "Who would pay \$5.99 per pound when I can cut it myself for cheaper?" But over time, I was able to realize from an operational standpoint, it helped with margin, product rotation, and sales and also fulfilled a consumer need: convenience. Now I never short change the category.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Hold tight, and be patient with Mother Nature, she causes havoc on the industry and your plans.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: One of the allures the produce industry should emphasize, to attract young talent, is to emphasize that the work in this industry is meaningful and will help make a difference in the world. But it doesn't just stop there, the industry must demonstrate they have the willingness to invest in the leadership development and career progression.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Food waste and addressing it should be an industry focus, the selling of ugly fruit/vegetables will be a big trend for retailers and wholesalers. In addition, with consumers' concern about helping the local farmer and wanting to experience great taste, local will become even bigger.



Thomas Padilla, 39
Asia Export Sales
Mission Avocados
Oxnard, CA

Hometown: Fillmore, CA

Hobbies: sports, fishing

Personal: Engaged to be married in October 2015; one adult daughter on active duty U.S. airforce.

Community: active member San Buenaventura Mission Church

Motto in Life: Never let being good stop you from becoming great!

Professional Accomplishments: Padilla has been with Mission Produce going on five years. Prior to Mission, he worked in the flavor and spice industry for eight years. At the start of his career at Mission, he was given the task to grow the company's export business in Asia. His experiences allowed him to travel throughout Asia and learn the cultures and the import export business. During his time at Mission, he has been a part of growing the avocado category in Asia and seeing the new and creative ways the avocado has been incorporated in to Asian diets. Over the past five years, he travelled to China, Singapore, Japan, and Korea several times — marking triple digit growth across the boards. He has been able to work with several key retailers to develop avocado sales promotions as well as how-to-eat promotions.

Q: How did you end up in the produce industry?

A: Mission was looking to develop an export program and it worked well with my experience.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: Exporting Avocados to greater Asia

Q: Who do you see when in need of advice?

A: Senior Management at Mission have been a big influence in my career at the company.

Q: What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

A: Seeing the avocado category grow in China and Southeast Asia and being a big part of that growth. During the past three years, I have been a part of educating consumers throughout Asia on what an avocado is. When I first started traveling to Asia, it was rare to see an avocado display in a retail store or even at the wet markets. Today the avocado has become a staple item for many Asian markets. In the U.S., we take for granted how an avocado should be eaten. In many Asian countries they have never see an avocado. This category will continue to grow throughout Asia, and I am looking forward to being a part of it.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Keep an open mind to new ideas and how fast our industry is changing.



Jennifer Pierce, 39
Sales & Marketing
Giro Pack, Inc.
Vadalia, GA

Hometown: Bryan, OH

Hobbies: Traveling, DIY crafting and home projects, youth coaching, spending time with family and friends

Personal: Married with two children

Community: Volunteering through church, 4-H (a nonprofit youth organization), school and various sporting and community activities.

Motto in Life: Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.

Professional Accomplishments: Born and raised in the country, Pierce has always been around agriculture and developed an affection for the ag community through 4-H. She has been an avid part of sales, product development and designing in the produce and floral industry for over 14 years. In her current position with Giro Pack Inc. as a sales and marketing representative of mesh packaging solutions, she gained respect from colleges, clients and upstanding executives in the industry for her commitment to promote great products. Her passion is to develop healthy environmentally focused packaging with reduction of environmental footprints and her work yields consistent packaging with environmentally safe, fully traceable solutions. She is known for her desire to drive relationships and the ability to overcome obstacles with continued sales increases year after year, as high as 76 percent and as low as 3 percent, and an increase in client base of 10 to 25 percent year after year. Prior to Giro, she was a Regional Sales Manager for more than nine years selling floral upgrades,

fruit basket supplies/accessories and pre-made fruit baskets. She is a graduate from The Defiance College and holds a bachelor's degree in marketing. She also studied Agriculture at The Ohio State University.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: My initial start was through a company in my hometown that offered floral upgrades, fruit and gift basket supplies and pre-made fruit baskets. I actually never expected to be doing what I'm doing, but I love it. I thought I'd be an ag leader or work in 4-H extension, but those dreams changed when I was offered a college internship at a local bank as a marketing associate. I developed a love for promotion and design at the bank. After a few years in banking, lots of mergers were happening, and I was a displaced worker. One of the ladies I worked alongside mentioned a position open with her husband's company. I landed the job and would then be re-connected with the ag industry by selling floral and produce items.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Meeting and working with many different organizations. Each relationship is the foundation of a web of networks within the produce industry. No matter who you meet, everyone can make an impression on your career and life. Each relationship allows further ability to learn, understand and continue to grow within the produce industry.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: I envision a fully launched program of our convenience style sustainable packaging solutions to all grocery and convenience store sectors.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I'd love to see more produce offerings in place of all of the starchy, sugary options at the convenience store and checkout lanes. When I travel, I am always shopping at the grocery store for healthier solutions. If our industry could tackle ease and convenience, we would be living in a healthier country. Eat Brighter! and Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools have helped promote and offer more produce to kids. I would also love to see a kid-focused program allowing kids the opportunity to see, touch and taste produce. When I share current, new and unique produce with family and friends at gatherings, sporting events, potlucks, and playdates, it's amazing how much they enjoy various produce items.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: Acknowledge mistakes and learn from them as soon as it occurs. Everyone makes mistakes and most people are willing to work through an honest mistake.



Brandon Rankin, 34
Director of Exchange Interruption*
Brooklyn, NY

Hometown: Hanover, NH

Hobbies: Mountain sports, writing music, gardening

Personal: Married

Motto in Life: You never know if you never try.

Professional Accomplishments: Rankin joined interruption* seven years ago after meeting the fair trade company's chief executive, and now close friend, Rafael Goldberg. He oversaw domestic logistics and made great strides before he soon took over the management of international logistics operations. In 2011, he took his experience into the sales office to help grow fair trade organics as a category. Now five years and counting, Rankin built an impressive portfolio of clients from independents to multinationals, spanning North America to Europe. During his time at interruption* he has seen farming operations expand from a handful of Argentine offerings to now encompass nine countries throughout South, Central, and North America across dozens of sustainably grown, ethically produced, fair trade and organic certified healthy fruits and vegetables under the Taste Me, Do Good* Brand.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: I'm a bit of a fresh juice fanatic. The amount of produce you can condense into a glass is astounding. I try to keep my food ratio of vegetables+fruit to meat+dairy at 4:1.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: I get tremendous satisfaction from the way we're changing this food system for future generations. There is a strong culture here at interruption* where the farmer comes first. Each interrupter fights tirelessly to make the most positive impact possible so we as consumers can have more responsibly sourced, healthier food options available at our favorite grocery store. Our work helps to evolve the current food system structure, and provides the opportunity to support small and mid-sized family farms, building cooperatives that share best farming practices and market condition feedback, and

empowering growing communities to make dreams become reality.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Better food safety initiatives and more labeling transparency to help consumers know the full picture of what they're putting into their bodies. Making more direct connections between shoppers and farmers and helping to educate people about better eating habits.

Q: What inspired your work in the produce industry?

A: Seeing the positive change of workers and growers who left conventional farms in order to follow the fair trade organic path, hearing how we helped transform livelihoods and strengthen the communities we support, reading quotes from our workers' assemblies that show at the end of each harvest everyone involved democratically decides how to invest the premiums generated during the season: building healthcare programs, afterschool clubs to keep children safe and off the streets, offering vocational education to further people's careers, building materials to improve working conditions and housing in the community, and emergency relief support systems. We experienced overwhelming support from shoppers, and lots of praise from retailers. There is so much gratitude.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Global community supported agriculture, supermarket rooftop gardens, juice bars in grocery stores to minimize shrink, and biodynamics.



Giuseppe S. Rubino, 37
Director of Purchasing/Packaging
Mastronardi Produce Ltd.

Kingsville, Ontario, Canada

Hometown: Leamington, Ontario

Hobbies: Foodie, classic cars, kids sports (soccer, swimming, karate), motorcycle enthusiast, working out, family

Personal: Married with two boys

Community: MS Society (the top individual fund raiser in the area for the past five to six years at Mastronardi); Autism Ontario/Windsor Essex County Society; Southwestern Ontario Gleaners Chapter of Leamington, which is a nonprofit organization that dehydrates local fresh fruits and vegetables and packs and ships them to developing countries; local Italian Association.

Motto in Life: We're not here for a long, but here for a good time! What this quote means to me is don't take anything for granted, appreciate what you have, and cherish time spent with your family and friends.

Professional Accomplishments: Right out of completing a four-year business program with honors in marketing at the University of Windsor, Rubino landed a sales representative position for a master distributor in London, Ontario. He was given a territory generating approximately \$300,000 in sales, and he quickly became the specialist in the greenhouse sector and jumped to the Top 3 sales representatives generating the most revenue for the distributor. His territory grew from \$300,000 to \$3,500,000 within five years with a focus primarily on agriculture/greenhouse supplies and packaging materials. During his five-year tenure, he also completed courses at the Richard Ivy School of Business, continuing his education and further expanding his skill set.

In 2005, Rubino took advantage of an opportunity at one of his largest greenhouse customers, Mastronardi Produce (MPL), and was hired as a packaging/production manager. His role emerged to focus strictly on packaging materials, and he was responsible for procuring all

materials, managing a budget of approximately \$15 million. In 2008, the company merged the packaging department and marketing department within the same office. Rubino became the director of purchasing with the responsibility of purchasing all non-produce materials and negotiating service and labor contracts. The purchasing team grew to four people with a budget of approximately \$35 million. His responsibilities now included sourcing and procuring materials worldwide via travel and trade shows, product development/R&D, packaging material sales, and customer support with product launches.

During his 10 years with MPL, he has been recognized by key customers as a packaging specialist and consulted on packaging outside of MPL's core product offerings as well as speaking at top yearly client meetings to provide his outlook on packaging trends. With his team's support, his department has made some great achievements including: the 2010 PMA Impact Award, 2012 United Fresh New Product Award, 2012 FTA Gold Award, 2013 PAC Leadership Award, 2014 United Fresh New Product Award; the 2015 PAC Food Waste Package Award and 2015 PAC Sustainable Packaging Award. This past March, MPL selected Rubino to attend a PMA

Emerging Leader program in partnership with Thunderbird School of Global Business.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: In five years I still see myself here at MPL. The company is growing and expanding in different areas of produce. I know there is plenty of opportunities here at MPL, so I am just now skimming the surface of my potential.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: The nice thing about working at MPL is there are many key passionate people with a ton of experience. Over the years, the company endorsed an open door policy and still remains true to that. From a fourth generation president and chief executive to any mid level manager/supervisor, the people in those positions are very personable and approachable. They are always willing to advise or help.

Q: What accomplishments are you most proud of in your career?

A: I think I'm most proud of how I remained true to myself. Since my start in produce I have always been in a management position. Being able to lead and gain the respect of those around me has



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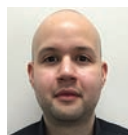
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had its challenges; however I have been able to overcome them in a proactive and professional manner. Being able to reach my organizational goals is also gratifying.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Always be factual and learn from any shortcomings. Remain true to yourself, and you will find you will always have the support of those around you.



Emmanuel Ruiz, 28
Senior Sales & Operations
Manager – Miami Office
World Class Flowers

Doral, FL

Hometown: Miami, FL

Hobbies: Music, Running

Charity Involvement: Actively gives back to his native country of Nicaragua; participates in charity supported half marathons.

Professional Accomplishments: Ruiz has been a leader at World Class Flowers, running all Miami operations. He acts as the farm liaison and has recently seen success in sales. He has grown his sales accounts more than 50 percent within a six-month period. He is known as being one of the hardest working individuals in the industry. His team surrounding him feeds off of his desire and motivation. Ruiz has been with World Class Flowers for more than nine years. He began as a buyer of consumer bunches, bouquets and bulk in 2006. In 2010 he became operations manager for the Miami Office. In 2013, he took on the added position of senior sales account manager. He has been involved for the past five years at PMA and IFE events and World Class was awarded booth of the Year at the 2014 IFE Show.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: My hometown environment led me to the produce/floral industry. At a very young age, I needed to work to help support my family. Luckily, I grew up in the hotbed of Colombian imports. As a junior in high school, I started working nights and weekends moving product in the cooler and loading trucks.

Q: What is the biggest challenge about your job?

A: The floral industry itself is a huge challenge. To strategize, cultivate, harvest, and ship take months of preparation, and any unforeseeable turn of events may dramatically change everything. There are simply not enough hours in

the day, or days in the week to get everything done precisely.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: I still see myself in the floral industry and it playing an intricate part of my lifestyle. It is something I love doing and have a strong passion about. There is never a dull moment when you have an endless amount of work, improvements and creative opportunities ahead of you.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: I wish I knew that most scenarios never go as initially planned, and that the real feeling of success and accomplishment come from being able to adapt to and grow from the new challenges you face. Dealing with a perishable and highly sensitive product like flowers has many factors you simply do not have 100 percent control over.

Q: What has inspired your work in the industry so far?

A: The World Class Flower team. They have been the biggest group of mentors I have ever come across. They operate as an exceptional team and strive for perfection in everything they do. I have been privileged to work with individuals that have the right attitude and mindset. It starts with the president of our company, Robert Gravitz; he continually reminds us that the customer always comes first, and that the phone ringing off the hook is a very good problem to have.



Nicholas Joshua Ruiz, 35
Innovation Manager
Church Brothers Produce
Salinas, CA

Hometown: Salinas, Ca

Hobbies: Starting and operating a small family winery, Twisted Roots Wine. Since the first year, the company has grown to include four full-time employees, and two regional sales people within California. The wines have won many awards as well.

Personal: Married

Community: Supporting, teaching, and giving to youth interested in Agriculture: Chairman of the North Salinas FFA Advisor Board (10 years); Member of the North Salinas Ag Boosters; Young Life Pumpkin Patch; Monterey County Farm Bureau; MeEarth; Ag Against Hunger; California ALS Foundation; Peace of Mind Dog Rescue.

Motto in Life: Never ask someone to do some-

thing that you have not already done or are not willing to do yourself.

Professional Accomplishments: Ruiz started his professional career at River Ranch as an intern while he was an undergraduate student at California Polytechnic State University. During that time, he consolidated 20 years of planting history into a usable database. After graduating from Cal Poly, with a bachelor's degree in Agribusiness and Crop Production, as well as a master's degree in Agribusiness, Ruiz returned to Salinas and River Ranch, first as a planting schedule and crop planning assistant, then was promoted to broccoli supervisor where he helped develop an iceless broccoli program. He was one of the first people who found, through trial and error, an iceless broccoli product that when handled, harvested, and cooled correctly could be successfully shipped across the country. He was then promoted to broccoli crop manager.

After about two years there, he went to work for Tanimura & Antle, where he began a career as a production analyst. After about two years as an analyst, he was promoted to director of harvest when he developed and refined cauliflower harvest equipment for the company that saved 25 percent of the labor costs and increased efficiencies and crew capacities. He ultimately became the general manager of harvest for iceberg lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower; and celery. He also helped integrate the printed Kwiklock sealers into the iceberg lettuce program. At the start of 2014, he began a new career with Church Brothers, where he was named innovation manager. In this position with Church Brothers, he is responsible for the new broccoli floret harvesting method and is an integral part of the agriculture operations team. He is constantly thinking about the next generation of harvest, growing, and methods to improve current operations.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I wanted to be a farmer and feed the world. I started working on a farm during high school, and then worked into more of the shipper side of the business later on. Agriculture started and stopped at the grocery store for my family, but being born and raised in the Salinas Valley, ag was all around me growing up. So one day in high school, I decided I should find out more about this stuff growing all around me. I drove out to the first field I could find, asked the farmer if I could ride with him, and just see what it was all about, and the rest is history. I instantly fell in love with the idea of feeding the world, and the people that were in the business, and made my mind up right then.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would really like to see more automation in my lifetime with the produce business. The rest of the work has adapted and changed to allow technology to fit into their business or industries, and the produce business has been one of the last to do that. Over the past five years there has been a lot of improvement, but I think we have a long way to go yet. I would really like to see the day when our delicate, specialty crops, are machine harvested.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: This one is simple for me, when I need advice, either in business or in my personal life, Pat Staffard has been the guy I go to. Since the first day of work at River Ranch when I met Pat as his intern, he has always been there to help me, and more importantly teach me, which has been invaluable in my career. I also had the great fortune to work for Bob Antle, and that time was such a great experience, as Bob truly taught me a lot about the produce business.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce business?

A: That this is a tough business to be in, and that if agriculture is not your passion, and is not in your heart, it won't be easy. You have to want to get up early, work late, and struggle, simply because you love going through it, and because you want to succeed.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

A: Today, as compared to when I started, there are far more rules and regulations, both on the farm and with labor. Today the rules and regulations make it increasingly difficult for everyone involved in the produce business, from the field staff, to companies that employ them. The overall quality standards have changed a lot as well since I started in the business. The basics of what we do have changed very little, while the regulations and or guidelines have changed significantly.



John Scherpinski, 32
Director of Sales
D'Arrigo Bros. Co.
of California

Salinas, CA

Hometown: Salinas, CA

Hobbies: Golf, triathlons, camping

Personal: Married for seven years with two daughters

Professional Accomplishments: Scherpinski started working at D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of California in July of 2005 after graduating from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. Prior to being hired full time, he worked as an intern for four years holding various responsibilities within the shipping facility (receiving/cooling/shipping). After his graduation, he was offered a sales coordinator position. From this initial position nine years ago, he has gained much perspective on the diverse industry. Currently, as the director of sales, he is in charge of guiding the sales programs in the retail sector. He also manages a commodity list including Romaine, Green Leaf, Red Leaf, and Butter and is responsible to mentor and guide the company's junior sales associates.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: The fluidness of the day and adapting to an ever-changing environment. Also, in terms of my current job, the part I respect most is that once trained you are empowered to make decisions. With that, there is a freedom of ownership of that decision. This autonomy demands accountability, and thus I have become a more thorough decision maker in the process. The best part is getting to pick your own path and to foster that relationship with a customer. Now we certainly have to answer to every level regarding performance of both accounts and commodities, but the day-to-day execution is up to you.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: Develop and lead strategies that will enable the Andy Boy brand to expand its presence specifically in retail and wholesale marketplaces. Learn to guide and motivate our young team to increase our company successes.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: I received much of my sales guidance from Chad Amaral and Dave Martinez as they are my direct bosses. Fortunately, because of the structure of our company, I have also had the opportunity to gain perspectives from Steve DeLormier (vice president of operations-Salinas), Alan Luke (vice president of operations-Yuma), along with gaining valuable insight from our president John D'Arrigo.

Q: What has guided your work in the produce industry so far?

A: I like to believe I have a strong work ethic and moral base that guided me through the early stages of my career. I hope to inspire, motivate, and guide others on our team so that they continually see the potential they have to grow and share in the bright future of this

great company.

Q: What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

A: In becoming a trusted/respected source for information that does not only pertain to Andy Boy specifically, but also the industry as a whole.



Leslie Simmons, 32
Marketing Manager
Dave's Specialty Imports
Miami, FL

Hometown: Grew up in Cincinnati, now lives in New York

Hobbies: Making all things homemade, natural household and beauty supplies, baking and cooking, and various crafts

Personal: Married with one child

Community: PMA volunteer; Women's Fresh Perspective Advisory Board

Motto in Life: Leave everything more beautiful than how you found it.

Professional Accomplishments: After graduating from the University of Tampa with a bachelor of arts in communications and being awarded the communication department's prestigious Visual Aesthetics award in 2004, Simmons worked as an event planner in the Tampa area. After moving to New York City in 2005 she began to build a career in marketing and advertising, working her way up to account supervisor in a Manhattan agency. Her efforts focused on strategic, tactical, and media planning as well as finance, and client services. She joined Dave's in 2011 to become the third generation in the family business. She is currently focusing on new business development, branding, strategy and general marketing efforts for the company; and she also works closely with the company's food safety, traceability and sustainability programs.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: As the third generation in my family's company you might expect my career in produce was arranged from an early age, but that wasn't the case. It was only after building a career in marketing and advertising in New York that I decided to make the switch. I gained a broad understanding of strategic planning, client services, and brand development and I reached a point where I was ready for a new challenge. At the same time my grandfather was looking to lighten his workload and my father was taking on a bigger role in our company. So, I entered the family business and the world of produce and I haven't looked back.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I would love to see more women taking leadership roles throughout the associations and in their individual companies. The industry seems to be moving in the right direction but there is definitely room to grow.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: Foremost, I seek my father's advice. But I think it is important to look outside of our company and to bounce ideas off of other industry friends, colleagues, and anyone I consider a mentor. Getting an honest opinion from a range of people you trust can make a big difference when it comes to the tough choices.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: I am inspired by my grandfather's story and the name he created for himself. My daughter Ruby also inspires me. At only a year old she eats an enormous amount of produce and I know that it is really making a difference in how she will grow-up. I want every child to not just eat, but to really love and understand the beauty behind all of our fruits and vegetables.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Take a chance. Be the one who starts the conversation even if you don't have all of the answers. Show up to a meeting and be the only person you know in the room. You aren't going to know everything or everyone but you have to start somewhere. When I began my career in this industry I was often on my own and it has challenged me to reach out of my comfort zone. It has also allowed me to create some of the most rewarding relationships I have today and I'm constantly learning from those around me. Stay open and true to yourself, and don't be afraid to say, "I don't know the answer, but I am happy to find out for you."



Youye (Lola) Song, 26
Asia Account Executive
Mayrsohn West Company,
a division of Mayrsohn Inter-
national Trading Co., Inc.

Miami, FL

Hometown: Harbin, China

Hobbies: International travels, languages and cultures, dancing, marketing

Personal: Single

Community: Shanghai Young Professional Group Founder and Key-Coordinator, Institute of Food

"I would love to see more women taking leadership roles throughout the associations and in their individual companies."

— Leslie Simmons

Technologists (IFT) Second award winner at IFT 2013 graduate student poster competition; Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) Network; Cornell Alumni Association of Northern California; Cornell Women's Network

Motto in Life: Work hard and be kind. Amazing things will happen.

Professional Accomplishments: After studying Agriculture and Business at Cornell University and receiving a marketing strategies certificate at Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management, Song worked briefly in a Germany-based company as a food safety researcher. In 2013, she had the great honor to become one of the 40 award winners in the Pack Family Career Pathways Program and attended PMA's Fresh Summit. At the show, she connected with current employer Mayrsohn. Promoted from sales associate to Asia account executive, Song changed work locations from the headquarters in Miami, FL to Moraga, CA. In California, she managed a range of responsibilities from client acquisition and servicing, export sales and logistics to general business strategic planning. In September 2014, Song was relocated to Shanghai, China to start a new division for Mayrsohn in Asia. She is now managing all Asian accounts in real time and also actively developing new business.

Shortly after she joined the company, her team revised its logistics and sales strategies and as a result witnessed a 50 percent increase in Asia export business. In early 2014, she flew to Mainland China for two weeks and resolved a claim situation with another senior colleague at the company. Her multicultural backgrounds allowed her to not only speak both English and Chinese fluently, but to understand the two cultures at a very profound level and lessen the misunderstanding causing the business problem. Her other efforts at the company include marketing and technology upgrades. She started introducing B2B and B2C marketing strategies to the company and started building digital data by utilizing customer relationship management (CRM).

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: My biggest challenge as an international produce trader is to keep the work up and always stay alert. Mother Nature is unpredictable and perishable foods like fresh fruits and vegetables can be very unforgiving if there are any mistakes in shipping. Dealing with U.S. fruit going on water for weeks to the Far East takes not only experience but also unyielding dedication toward details.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: I envision a huge growth in business in Asia where I am most active. I would love to see our West office double sales every year and grow in size to a team three times bigger. I want to supervise as many young people as I can, because I believe in the potential of fresh minds and fearless spirits. I also envision Mayrsohn getting so much bigger in Asia Export that our name becomes a brand and a legend, and I can proudly state that I contributed to that.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: I wish I knew I was going to become a produce trader when I was in college. I could use a bit more education on international laws regarding agricultural product trading.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: Branding. I feel growers and packers in produce are just starting to realize how powerful marketing can be for their products. More efforts will be put into marketing research, advertising, packaging innovations and brand differentiations.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: Go and recruit in universities and colleges! I was in one of the best agriculture schools and had no idea this industry needs people like me. I thought all they needed were plant engineers and farmers.



Jason Stemm, 39
Vice President
PadillaCRT
Minneapolis, MN

Hometown: Normal, IL (yes it exists)

Hobbies: Cooking, traveling, teaching his 5-year old daughter to ice skate, swim and play tennis

Personal: Married with one daughter

Community: Traveled to Florida, South Carolina, Alabama and Mexico to build houses and help communities recover from natural disasters

through St. John's Lutheran Church in Bloomington, IL; volunteers at New York-area food pantries; helped coordinate fresh produce donations in New York City following Superstorm Sandy; served as president of IFEC (International Foodservice Editorial Council) and volunteered on numerous conference committees and its five-year strategic planning team.

Motto in Life: The harder I work, the luckier I get.

Professional Accomplishments: Stemm aided industry members and produce associations for more than 16 years to help grow consumption and give value back to producers for specialty crops. Over the years at Lewis & Neale and now PadillaCRT, he worked with the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council, Avocados From Mexico, North Carolina Sweet Potatoes, Florida Sweet Corn and Tomatoes, and leading shippers such as Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Del Monte Fresh Produce and Country Fresh Mushrooms. He managed multiple award-winning campaigns honored by the Produce Business Marketing Excellence Awards and the International Association of Culinary Professionals, as well as awards from leading public relations trade publications, PRWeek Awards and the Holmes Group SABRE Awards.

As a 14-year-old boy, he worked at Kroger,

spending most of his days tray packing sweet corn and restocking bananas. His career in marketing fresh produce began at 23 when Anita Fial at Lewis & Neale hired him, assigning him to the North American Radish Council and the Southern Supersweet Corn Council. His marketing work in fresh fruits and vegetables included fully-integrated programs incorporating public relations, advertising, promotions and social media. Through research-driven strategy, comprehensive industry knowledge, and a commitment to clients, he worked on accounts that helped to more than triple blueberry consumption, double avocado consumption, significantly increase sweet potato consumption, and helped Florida sweet corn growers reach record May shipments in the past two May periods.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Less fearful communications about fresh fruits and vegetables. Whether it is organic versus conventional, pesticides or GMOs, we should avoid trying to scare consumers about our competitors and grow produce consumption across the board.

Q: What are some of the most exciting

moments in your career so far?

A: When we introduced Duda's red celery during a PMA Fresh Summit to a group of media (mostly produce trade) at the opening. Before the end of the day, it had been picked up by AP and Reuters, Dan Duda had interviews with CBS Radio and NPR and it culminated in the *ABC World News Tonight with Diane Sawyer's* national broadcast covering it with images of the product and the seed developer that I supplied. Currently we are executing an ambitious and one-of-its-kind digital push for Florida Sweet Corn that includes a number of innovative social engagements, digital advertising and database building elements to help be competitive with the big boys of packaged and fast food.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Talk to everyone, and listen more than you speak. Never stop learning.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: Dispel myths of agriculture and engage them in new ways/places. It's great to take them to the farm but how about taking the farmer to the store, restaurant or kitchen?

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Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: More transparency and connection to the source of our fruits and vegetables.



Michael Strock, 28
Director of Business Development
S. Strock & Co.

Boston, MA

Hometown: Wakefield, MA

Hobbies: Ice hockey, golf, automobiles and the Boston Bruins

Personal: Married

Motto in Life: Eat better, think better, and dream big!

Professional Accomplishments: Strock was born into the industry and began his produce career with a broom in his hands during summer vacations. As the years went by he progressed through various jobs including picking orders and loading trucks. During his college years, he spent time in the office learning the business inside and out. After graduating from college, he was looking to make his mark within the produce industry. His job at Strock entailed bringing in new business ventures and ideas for the company, so he took on the challenge of creating an organic business. Almost seven years later, it's now a multi-million dollar part of the company's business.

Q: How did you get started in the produce industry?

A: I was born into it. Sam Strock, my grandfather, is a legend in the business, and my other grandfather Louie, owned a successful produce retail store. This is also how my parents met.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: My wife would say the hours. I am so consumed by the job and tend to fall asleep with my phone in my hand on the couch most nights.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Hands down, the people I am privileged to work with day in and day out, including co-workers, vendors and customers. It's the people who make this industry great.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: To continue waking up bright and early every morning with the same relentless goal: to make myself a better leader and the company a better organization.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: Sam-pa (Grandpa). His 85-plus years of experience is an invaluable resource on life lessons and expertise in the produce business. Google is no match for Sam Strock.



Melissa Sylte, 31
Marketing Manager
RPE, Inc.
Bancroft, WI

Hometown: Plainfield, WI

Hobbies: Spending time with family and friends, camping, hiking, home improvement projects, helping on family farm, scrapbooking and cheering on the Wisconsin Badgers.

Personal: Married

Community: Wisconsin FFA (Future Farmers of America) Alumni Association; co-chair of Rally to Fight Hunger for Wisconsin FFA since 2009; co-chair of Day of Service for Wisconsin FFA since 2009; judge for FFA speaking contests; volunteer for local Public Museum Development Committee since 2013; volunteer for ThedaCare Foundation Annual Fund Drive since 2010 and event chair since 2014; Junior Achievement volunteer from 2010 to 2012; member of local church.

Motto in Life: The key to happiness is having dreams. The key to success is making those dreams into realities.

Professional Accomplishments: Growing up on a farm, Sylte started her own successful agribusiness at age 10, raising and selling chickens, and demonstrated her passion for marketing. During her time at RPE (Russet Potato Exchange), she created a professional internal marketing department for the company and its partners; successfully launched multiple consumer brands; and planned and executed successful integrated marketing campaigns to support and sell those brands. The addition of RPE's Tasteful Selections baby potato brand, along with Sylte's knowledge and zeal for marketing, has refreshed and reinvented the entire potato category.

In addition to infusing excitement into the potato category, she developed strong internship and community outreach programs. Prior to her position at RPE, Inc., Sylte served as development director at a regional non-profit organization and as an assistant director of marketing at Indiana University.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: As the world becomes more connected through the means of technology and social media and consumers ask for more and more transparency about the origin of their food. It's

important for the industry to continue to make strides to tell the produce story to consumers through education and marketing.

Q: What do you know now that you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: There will be challenges you won't see coming, and projects you don't expect. However, taking these in stride, and learning from each step along the way, you will accomplish new things for which you never planned.

Q: What accomplishments are you most proud of in your career?

A: At Indiana University, I was able to help my team win six creative excellence awards for our marketing campaigns. It was definitely a milestone for my team and me. At RPE, the greatest accomplishment was helping create our Tasteful Selections bite-sized potato line, which changed the landscape of the entire potato category. Additionally, I worked hard to inspire future generations of young professionals by developing an internship program and working with youth organizations like FFA to encourage students to hone career development skills.

Q: What does the industry need to do to attract more talent of your generation?

A: Don't underestimate the experience and talent people can bring to the table based on their age or their time within the produce industry. There are a lot of talented young professionals from other industries that would be great fits within the produce industry.

Q: What are the next big trends on the horizon?

A: As consumers become more connected through technology and social media, the more important it will be for us to tell our story and educate consumers where their food comes from, telling the story from field to fork. Producers marketing directly to consumers will become more and more important as the Millennial generation steps into the role as the largest demographic of consumers in history.



Chris Thomsen, 37
Head Grower
Mushroom Farms Inc.
(Monterey Mushrooms)

Watsonville, CA

Hometown: Fresno, CA

Hobbies: Avid mountain and road bike rider; enjoys building and flying remote control planes, including a model with a jet turbine; actively

involved with the local homebrew community, having won awards for beer brewed with the mushrooms he grows.

Personal: Married with two children

Community: Involved with the Monterey Bay chapter of Team In Training and Leukemia Lymphoma Society. In 2010 he was motivated to fundraise as an athlete training to ride 100 miles around Lake Tahoe. In the years since, he has been a mentor helping new athletes meet fundraising and physical goals. Also involved with the Monterey and Santa Cruz chapters of Young Farmers & Ranchers. On the Santa Cruz Farm Bureau Board of Directors for two years. California Leadership Farm Bureau program graduate. Leadership Salinas Valley program graduate.

Motto in Life: Don't worry about the small stuff, and it's all small stuff.

Professional Accomplishments: Thomsen hails from a family farm in Nebraska and his dad has worked in the agriculture chemical industry as a pest control advisor for more than 40 years. Through his time at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo he was afforded the chance to work with companies spanning from the ag chem industry to working on electric tomato sorting equipment. These internships allowed him to realize he wanted to be involved with production agriculture. Following graduation, Thomsen worked in the breeding department at Sensient Dehydrated Flavors in the dehydrated onion, garlic and chili powder industry. He then pursued an interest in the precision irrigation industry with Jacobsen Consulting where he helped improve growers' irrigation efficiencies, which helped them improve crop quality.

Thomsen joined Monterey Mushroom as a quality assurance and food safety manager where his understanding of cropping systems and aptitude for integrating technology lead to more development in the growing department. Later this year, he will begin a new chapter as production manager at Monterey Mushrooms' sister company, Amycel Spawnmate.

Q: What Industry improvements would you like to see?

A: I believe the produce industry needs to be more visual. Just being on the supermarket shelves is not enough. There is a strong effort to educate the population outside of our industry, but I think we have just scratched the surface.

Q: Who do you seek out when you need advice?

A: I am fortunate to have mentors within Monterey Mushrooms whom I can rely on for advice. Wayne Bautista, general manager of Monterey Mushrooms, is someone I seek out

"I believe the produce industry needs to be more visual. Just being on the supermarket shelves is not enough."

— Chris Thomsen

for guidance and who taught me about the mushroom industry. David Ghiglione, operations manager of Monterey Mushrooms, has helped provide me with perspective on best-growing practices. And, when life and career interchange, I have yet to run into an issue my wife or parents could not help me figure out.

Q: What accomplishments are you most proud of in your career?

A: I am most proud of the team effort to convert our farm to organic production. Within Monterey Mushroom, this is only the second time that this had been done, so best practices had to be established, developed and implemented. Outside of Monterey Mushrooms, my proudest accomplishment was representing California Agriculture through Leadership Farm Bureau in Washington D.C.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Don't paint yourself into a corner. There are endless opportunities in agriculture. Allow yourself the freedom to explore and find your true calling.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

A: In my short career, I have seen the industry mature and refine. A once male-dominated industry has become an industry with women driving positions of great leadership and influence. My grandfather had a notebook, and now we are using advanced technology and management tools. I look forward to seeing how the industry further develops and changes in the coming years.



Scott Vandervoet, 35

**Sales
Vandervoet and Associates,
Inc.**

Nogales, AZ

Hometown: Tubac, AZ

Hobbies: Hiking, mountain biking, gardening,

spending time with family

Personal: Married with one daughter

Community: Board President of local nonprofit, Friends of the Santa Cruz River

Motto in Life: Ignorance is more expensive than education.

Professional Accomplishments: As is common in a small, family-operated company, Vandervoet wears many hats, and is known to embrace challenge with skill, a curiosity to learn, and a desire to improve things. He is responsible for the buying and selling of fresh produce for spot market and contractual movement. He is also responsible individually or as a team member for grower relations, publicity, food safety, accounting, strategic initiatives, GHPs, GMPs, traceability, and pretty much anything else that can go on in a small company. From sales to food safety, he is not afraid to learn the skills and new information he needs to help his company succeed.

In addition to working in his own business, Vandervoet understands the importance of working on issues impacting the greater good. He has been closely involved in an ongoing international agreement between the United States and Mexico concerning cantaloupe and food safety protocols. Additionally, he spent countless hours working collaboratively with others in the cantaloupe industry to develop the National Cantaloupe Guidance document, bringing to the table the perspective of his cantaloupe growers in Mexico and representing other FPAA members involved in the importation of cantaloupes. These are initiatives impacting cantaloupe growers across North America.

He volunteers a significant amount of time to the FPAA and is also deeply involved in local issues of water quality, water infrastructure improvements, and environmental concerns. Those activities include monitoring water quality of the upper Santa Cruz River, advocacy of securing and improving water quality and quantity in the upper Santa Cruz River, supporting waste water infrastructure improvements in Nogales Sonora and working with local land owners to support riparian habitat in Santa Cruz County.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Keeping the big picture in mind, while still focusing on the details. There is a phrase in Spanish used in this region in respect to the weather that says, "Febrero loco, Marzo otro poco," which translates as "February is crazy, and March even more so." Understanding the effect of seasonal climate variability on open field spring crops, and translating that for production estimates and marketing purposes is one of our

most difficult tasks.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: Creating stronger relationships and better information sharing and projections between growers and sales offices.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: More fluid movement through ports of entry, both at land and sea.

Q: What inspired your work in the produce industry?

A: Growers who take risks related to weather and markets to provide consumers with healthy foods.

Q: What accomplishments are you most proud of in your career?

A: Representing interests specific to Nogales, AZ, importers in both Washington, DC, and Mexico City, as well as actively carrying-on dialogue with state-level politicians in an effort to improve the image of border communities and commerce in the eyes of Arizona legislators in Phoenix.



Job Villanueva, 37
Organic Sales Manager
The Giumarra Companies
Los Angeles, CA

Hometown: Nogales, AZ

Hobbies: Sports (basketball & boxing), music, family activities

Personal: Married with two children

Community: Sacred Heart Church: religious education instructor and middle school retreat program minister; youth basketball coach; Boy Scouts volunteer.

Motto in Life: Put God first, and the rest will fall into place.

Professional Accomplishments: Although Villanueva started at The Giumarra Companies by sweeping and scrubbing floors, he didn't limit himself. He learned how to work the forklift and pallet jack and was soon loading and unloading trucks. Eager to learn, he helped in the dispatch office and worked there for quite some time. He educated himself by studying the various commodities received at Giumarra including all aspects of color and ripeness, quality, condition and descriptive characteristics. Management then recommended him as the new, official (one member) Quality Control Department. As the company began reducing rejections and

minimizing quality issues on arrivals, demand for product grew substantially. As volume expanded, he was ordered to build a real QC team and hired two people and trained them. To this day, they are team leaders and trained many others. As his interest in more of the Giumarra operation grew, the company noticed and offered him the opportunity to sell. For the next three years, while still managing the QC department, he worked the sales desk. Though the company reached a point where they were contemplating focusing solely on conventional product, he convinced them to give the organic category one last shot. He was given one year to make it work. He started with only 15 acres and over the past five years the operation expanded to 330 acres with a full line of organic commodities. Its rate of growth is still climbing as growers and customers now look to Giumarra as an industry leader in the organic arena.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I grew up in a small border town sustained by the produce industry. That influence, along with my family's economic difficulties, led me to start a new journey in the produce business. I just started college, when my family began going through financial duress, my priority at the time was to help my parents, as I am the only male of 10 siblings. To my parents' dismay, I made the difficult decision to leave college and come home. I quickly found employment at The Giumarra Companies, where the only position was in the maintenance department.

Q: What do you envision for your career within the next five years?

A: Achieving even more diversity in regard to the organic product line. I'd like to expand our presence beyond retail to institutional, having a real impact in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers and health-minded restaurants.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: An enhanced way to educate consumers on the health benefits of fresh produce, focusing especially on our kids eating healthier — enlightening the next generation.

Q: Where do you go when in need of advice?

A: When I was struck with the aspiration of becoming a salesman, I put it in God's hands, and in prayer — I was guided by Him. I always go to Him with my doubts and concerns.

Q: What do you know now you wish you

knew when you first started your career?

A: I would not change anything I experienced so far in the produce industry. What I know now has been gained by trial and error and training in the field. Had I known then what I know now, the learning experience I now treasure so much may have been jaded.

Q: What advice would you give someone new to the produce industry?

A: Listen to the voice of experience, learn from your surroundings, and have an open mind to the endless possibilities.



Jamie Vosejka, 39
Category Manager – Melons,
East and Central Regions
Robinson Fresh

Eden Prairie, MN

Hometown: Lonsdale, MN

Hobbies: Reading, landscaping, gardening, auto racing

Personal: Married

Community: Involved in a program called "Compassion International" sponsoring children in economically depressed areas

Motto in Life: Fail to plan, plan to fail. Think differently.

Professional Accomplishments: Vosejka is known as the cornerstone of Robinson Fresh's East/Central regions melon programs. Over the years, he maintained and developed strong grower and customer relationships.

He was a driving force behind C.H. Robinson's locally grown program in the early 2000s. Vosejka began working with Robinson Fresh in 2001 in peppers and tomatoes. After one year, he was promoted to a category manager role over sweet corn, cabbage, and greens programs, as a result of working with a grower in Illinois to develop a sweet corn program in an unorthodox growing region in Mississippi. At its peak, the program was producing 1,600 acres of sweet corn and greens. He also sought out small, local growers in an effort to help bring their products to market while helping retailers attain their goal of increasing local sales. Over the years, the program provided more than 4 million cartons of locally grown produce to customers across North America, working with several universities, and in some situations, bringing products back to growing regions that hadn't grown those products in decades. He took what was started in Mississippi and brought it to Arkansas helping a tomato grower diversify products by adding greens, cabbage, and hot peppers. Thus beginning what

was considered a new model of marketing crops rather than cultivating a procurement strategy.

When C.H. Robinson acquired Timco Worldwide in 2012, a watermelon shipper in Davis, CA, Vosejka was presented with the opportunity to manage the integration of the office as their business model of marketing crops matched what he had been doing in Arkansas. He moved to California and spent two years working with Robinson Fresh's mini and seedless watermelon crop. Recognizing how the organization lacked leadership on the East Coast, he moved to Charlotte, NC in 2014 to manage East and Central region melon crops. As category manager, his current responsibilities include strategically planning crop acreage, varieties, and growing locations, as well as tactically managing sales during peak season.

Q: How did you get your start in the produce industry?

A: I grew up in a very small town about an hour south of the Twin Cities, and spent a lot of time on my grandfather's dairy farm. It taught me a strong work ethic, and an appreciation for the farmer. I carry those philosophies with me every day, and I still talk to my grandfather weekly. I guess you can say that agriculture is in my blood. I was looking for an opportunity for a career change, and an individual I was working with in my previous job had a friend working for C.H. Robinson in logistics. When I explored the company, I saw they were also engaged in agriculture, which intrigued me to apply for a position.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: We work with several customers by making an effort to proactively plan for crops. Our motto is often to "plant for the PO" rather than "pray for the PO." I would like to see more of that from customers. Farming is risky enough without having knowledge of where you are going to bring the product.

Q: What do you know now you wish you knew when you first started your career?

A: I had no idea the amount of work it takes to get a piece of produce from the field to the shelf. The planning, land preparation, financial investment, weather, harvesting, and packing. The moment you pick that melon out of a field, you are on the clock to get that product packed and on a truck, and delivered in time. A million things can go wrong, but when the process is done correctly, it is truly a feeling of accomplishment.

Q: What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

A: There was a situation where I received a phone call from a farmer in Mississippi who planted 500 acres of sweet corn with no knowledge of the product, how to harvest it, or who to sell to. I met with this farmer and C.H. Robinson immediately jumped in to ensure trucks were on-site to get the product to market. This project eventually turned into a major production region where we worked with Dr. Lester Spell, the secretary of agriculture for Mississippi and representatives from Mississippi State University, to help build a cooler and three hydro coolers in the middle of what was a cotton field in the Mississippi Delta.

Q: How has the industry changed during your tenure?

A: I have been in the industry long enough to see the pendulum swing from a transactional, daily procurement model, to a more focused, program planned business, with food safety and social responsibility being the driving factors behind these changes.



Jennifer Westerhoff, 39
Executive Vice President /
Owner
Classic Harvest Produce
Paramus, NJ

Hometown: Colusa, CA

Hobbies: Shopping, gardening, painting, cooking, crafts, music, spending time with family

Personal: Married with three kids

Community: Cub Scout leader; Sunday school teacher; youth group leader; volunteer at Tulare County office of Education Theatre.

Motto in Life: The struggle you're in today is developing the strength you will need for tomorrow.

Professional Accomplishments: Westerhoff joined the produce industry as a sales assistant at Perricone Farms working with the regional sales manager setting up several national account programs. After five years at Perricone, she moved to Sunkist Growers National Accounts office. She set up and managed a major national account program, which proved to be a hugely successful account for Sunkist. After about seven years, she was recruited to Paramount Citrus to begin and manage many major national retail accounts. The move to Paramount brought her to work with many different types of retail accounts and expanded her expertise in marketing. She then joined Alliance International/Capespan North America where she was hired to help

develop a California citrus program and improve the import citrus program on the West Coast. About a year ago, she linked up with her now two partners, Adam Behar and Linda Cunningham and formed Classic Harvest Produce officially in May 2014. Working from Visalia, CA, she is now owner and executive vice president at Classic Harvest Produce, providing California with import citrus, grapes, and all varieties of tree fruit year-round. Her current duties include grower relations, managing production and harvesting plans at two California packinghouses, category manager for California citrus, managing several food-service, wholesale, and retail accounts, export sales, inventory management, and creating and implementing new marketing concepts and go-to-market strategies.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: I eat produce every single day both fruits and vegetables. We grow some fresh vegetables in our backyard garden at home as well, which has been very enjoyable for my family over the years.

Q: What's the biggest challenge about your job?

A: Understanding the risks of farming, and helping our growers and customers to become as successful as possible. To do this, you must develop trust, and developing trust means consistently performing for both our growers and customers, day after day which is not always easy to do, but I strive very hard to achieve this goal.

Q: What do you envision for your career in five years?

A: Within our company, we are innovative, forward thinkers so it is always exciting to see what we will be pushing ahead with next. Currently, we are putting together new go-to-market strategies we'll be rolling out over the next few years. We also have expansion plans in motion on our harvesting side that will significantly increase our California citrus production and tree fruit production over the next four years. We will be continuing to grow our import offerings on both the West and East coast. We will continue to strive to be the best we can on sustainability for our agricultural future and continue efforts with social responsibility.

Q: What has inspired your work in the produce industry so far?

A: During my 17 years in this industry, I have really had the opportunity to work with many strong leaders. Each of them pushed and challenged my thoughts, taught me new concepts

that added to my success and encouraged me to grow and want to learn every aspect of the produce business.

Q: What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

A: Where I am today. I had no idea the path I would be on in the produce industry, but I would not change anything about it. There is no doubt I do have stressful days, but I am honestly having the time of my life. I am very proud of the relationships that have developed and the customer and grower trust and respect I earned over my time in the industry. I definitely have a passion for the business and put a lot of focus on the needs and goals of my customers and business partners.



Megan Zweig, 39
Strategic Marketing Director
DMA Solutions
Irving, TX

Hometown: Plano, TX

Hobbies: Cooking, swimming, iPhotography,

laughing with friends and family

Personal: Married 13 years with one son

Community: Gives time and resources to various charities throughout the year.

Motto in Life: Be the best you can be in the present...and never stop dancing!

Professional Accomplishments: Zweig began in the fresh produce industry eight years ago as a new mom, when her present boss, Dan'l Mackey Almy, offered her a job opportunity that allowed her to keep a flexible schedule. Previously, she worked for a large multinational corporation, starting at the bottom and working her way up, and then at a public relations and marketing firm in Dallas. She is known for her passion for promoting fresh produce to the masses. She is considered an innovative thinker with the ability to get produce companies to think outside the box when marketing to consumers. She is a member of the United Fresh Marketing Committee and PMA Exhibitor Advisory Board.

Q: How much produce do you eat?

A: A lot! Over the years, fresh produce has become such a big part of my professional and

personal life. And since I'm the head chef of my home, I get to make all of the decisions relative to menu items, which most of the time involve a combination of lean proteins, fruits and vegetables. My family loves it. Why? They don't really have a choice. For my son, this is all he knows, so he adapted well to foods that traditionally, kids are opposed to eating, like kale and spinach. He loves it. My husband is just grateful to have a wife that loves food and knows how to cook.

Q: What do you like best about your job?

A: Are you kidding? I get to promote fresh fruit and vegetables every day. As far as I'm concerned, I'm the luckiest marketer on the planet.

Q: What industry improvements would you like to see?

A: Marketing, marketing, marketing. From my perspective, almost everyone working in the fresh produce industry, whether in the field or behind a desk, is a marketer because we're typically developing or pitching our products or services to an audience with specific needs, whether business to business or business to consumer. If we're not honing our sales and marketing skills and growing by practice along the way, we might find ourselves getting behind in the ever-evolving and highly competitive marketing environment today. The bottom line is, if we want to sell more fresh produce, we need to be thinking about our end buyer or consumer and delivering the products and information that are most helpful to them on a daily basis. Marketing and communication is the path to relevancy with these audiences so understanding how that works as a company and an industry is of the utmost importance.

Q: Who do you go to when in need of advice?

A: I'm so lucky to have five people in my life that I turn to when I need sound advice: my husband, Aaron; my mentor and boss, Dan'l; my mom; and my two best friends.

Q: What accomplishment are you most proud of in your career?

A: I am most proud of the people I've been able to establish working relationships with and friendships I've developed over the years. While I am in a position to consult from a marketing perspective, each person I've met has taught me something new about the industry, farming and the impact that we are able to make as professionals in this industry. It has been a joy to be part of this amazing team of fresh produce professionals and is by far my biggest accomplishment.

pb



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