

# Fresh Digest

A Publication of the Fresh Produce & Floral Council

Summer 2023



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**2023**

**FPFC APPRENTICES**

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**2023 FPFC**

**EXPO**

**DELIGHTS & INFORMS**

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# Fresh Digest

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## EDITOR'S VIEW

By Tim Linden



# A Thoughtful Look at Produce Education

Oscar Guzman, who is director of marketing and sales at Progressive Produce in Los Angeles, is a bit worried about the future of the fresh produce industry. The 41-year-old looks around at his colleagues in the industry and he sees many aging baby boomers that are taking a lot of knowledge with them into retirement.

The aging of the ag community has long been a subject of concern in the United States as there seemingly are not enough young people following the path that was commonplace for their ancestors. Much has been written about the average age of farmers, which is approaching 60, with more than one-third over the age of 65.

This worries Guzman, but he is also concerned about the situation closer to home. In fact, Guzman recently received a doctorate in education from Pepperdine University. His dissertation was laser focused on the Southern California produce industry and his concern that new members of our industry don't have the opportunity to access the knowledge embedded in the industry. The knowledge gained through experiences and on-the-job learning that goes beyond what can be found in textbooks.

The title of his 210-page dissertation is "Growing the Future of Agriculture: An Examination of Knowledge Sharing and Community Building in the Fresh Produce and Floral Council." Dr. Guzman, a title he has now earned, graduated from Pepperdine in May with an Ed.D in education after a 20-year journey that saw him receive three degrees (bachelor's, master's and doctorate) while working fulltime in the industry.

With his doctorate in hand, Dr. Guzman's new goal is to help the industry develop educational programs that allow many people in the industry the opportunity to learn from the veterans among us. He applauds the few apprentice programs that exist in the produce industry, including the FPFC's annual effort.

"The FPFC program is great but it only reaches 12 apprentices each year," he said. "We need something for all newcomers and the rest of us that are constantly still learning."

He is just in the beginning stages of taking his research and turning into a tangible product. He is reaching out to others, especially in the association sphere, to figure out the best way to apply what he has learned, and expose more people to the power of knowledge-based learning.

"I plan to collaborate with orga-

nizations that share my concern, working together to develop a comprehensive plan that establishes an accessible knowledge base for the implicit knowledge crucial to the industry's future," he said. "I don't think I discovered anything new but I do want to help figure out a more accessible, centralized and uniformed body of knowledge for all produce professionals."

It is a noble and worthy goal and one that deserves thoughtful consideration at all levels of the produce industry.

Guzman revealed that a doctorate degree does not become official until the dissertation is published. His work is currently going through a peer review and will be published this summer on ProQuest, an online publishing house that focuses on scholarly work. Once published (proquest.com), it can be freely accessed through the site. It sounds like an important read. 🌱

## FPFC MISSION STATEMENT

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

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\*Source: IRI California and West Regions during the California Season (2019-2022)

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# EXECUTIVE NOTES

By Don Gann, FPFC President



## FPFC in Action Mode

**W**e are super busy and moving ahead quickly. We are launching our updated website. We're putting the finishing touches on a couple of new events this year. And we have some new activities being planned for 2024.

These are exciting times for the Fresh Produce & Floral Council... and the word is getting out. Since the first of the year, we have welcomed 55 new members to the fold. I don't think we have kept records as to member growth in such a short period of time but this has to be our strongest showing in that regard in decades. Welcome aboard.

Providing a better member experience is the driver for our new website as well as our new events. The ultimate goal of the website is to allow members to sign up for events and interact with the FPFC with a click of the mouse. We are working toward that goal and we will get there sooner than later.

We had a great FPFC Expo with great attendance and feedback but we have no time to rest on those laurels as it is full steam ahead on our next activities. By the time this magazine is published, a Northern California membership luncheon and cornhole tournament will be in the books. Next up, the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Southern California FPFC Golf

Tournament will be held in July, followed by the Annual City of Hope Luncheon in August, which has had a similar run.

We like these traditional events that are well-received by our members, but we also like to sprinkle in some new activities and networking opportunities. On September 14, we will hold the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Topgolf Outing in Ontario. Sign up soon. It promises to be very popular.

October will feature our 17<sup>th</sup> Annual NorCal Golf Tournament and the following month we will again try something a little different by holding a golf tournament in Arizona at the Phoenician Golf Club in Scottsdale on November 10. That event is generating lots of enthusiasm, so again sign up soon!

Our final event for 2023 will be the Annual Membership Luncheon and Charity Auction on Dec. 6 at the Sheraton in Cerritos.

We are already planning for 2024 and you will get a heads up on all the activities soon, but I do want to draw attention to a couple of notable events to make sure you save the date.

We are greatly expanding our traditional dinner-dance into a "Weekend with the FPFC" at the Balboa Bay Resort in Newport Beach, Feb. 23-25, 2024. Friday

night will offer a sponsored event featuring specific retailers on Duffy Boats tooling around the Bay. Saturday night, Feb. 24, we will hold our Casino Night and Dancing party, similar to 2023. We are also securing special rates for playing golf at the resort on Saturday and getting a spa treatment on Sunday.

This is going to be a great weekend. Put it on the calendar.

And while you have that calendar open, make sure you put a star on May 1, 2024. That is the date of the 2024 FPFC Expo, which will once again be held at the Anaheim Convention Center and is sure to feature a dynamite speaker.

Remember check back often on the FPFC website ([fpfc.org](http://fpfc.org)) to get updated on the latest happenings of your Fresh Produce & Floral Council. 🌱

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## THE FPFC WELCOMES THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS

The Fresh Produce & Floral Council has had a tremendous first half of 2023 in terms of new member signups. We have listed all new members that have joined us since the first of the year. Thanks to each of them, as well as to all of you, for your support.

**68 Produce**

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**Better Booch**

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Rob Ybarra

**Category Partners Classis Harvest Produce**

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**Moxxy Marketing**

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Cesar Garcia

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**Pairwise**

Neil Merritt

**Plant Grow Harvest Potatoes**

Matt Middleton

**Plasqad USA**

James Vangelos

**ProducePay**

Ryenne Rask

**RA Foods, Wild About Sprouts**

Antonio Ortiz

**RJ Produce Distributors**

Ryan Dunham

**RMD International Farms****Romas R Us, Inc.**

Jorge Estrada

**Seven Seas Fruit**

Brent L. Scattini

**South Mill/Champs****Splendid by Porvenir LLC**

Cindy Schwing

**Sun Fresh International, LLC**

Ignacio Morales

**Sunfresh USA**

Rey Jimenez

**Sweet Seasons**

Ignacio Gonzalez

**Tabletree Montana LLC**

Rick Breeden

**Treto's****West Coast Refrigerated Trucking Inc.**

Albert Cabral

# Jon Holder Happily Fell into Produce Career

By Tim Linden



Jon Holder, vice president of produce and floral at Superior Grocers, readily admits that his career came about by happenstance rather than following a planned path.

"I didn't choose a career, it chose me," he quipped.

In fact, during his close to 40 years in the retail grocery business, almost all of it in produce, he has hardly ever needed to apply for a job.

"My parents instilled my work ethic," he said. "My dad always told me it doesn't matter if you are a lawyer, a doctor or a ditch digger, when you leave work at the end of the day, make sure you did the best you could. If you do that, you will never be out of work."

Holder followed that philosophy and it has served him well.

He was born in Medford, Oregon in 1959, the son of a forestry laborer and a mom who worked in a pear packing facility. "My dad was a logger in Southern Oregon and Northern California," he said.

Unfortunately, his father was involved in a logging accident that left him partially paralyzed for life. That ended his logging career but Mr. Holder didn't let it end his journey. "He went back to school and became a high school math teacher," Jon said.

That caused the family to move to Orland, CA, about 20 miles west of Chico. His dad taught at the local high school and his mother worked at an olive packing shed before settling in for an extended career

with Cal West Seeds, first as a secretary and eventually managing their production facility.

When Jon was 16, he was offered two different jobs by locals; he might have started his work life in a local ironworks factory or driving a tractor for a farm company. Instead, his next door neighbor, who was managing the local Holiday Market, made him an unsolicited offer. "In those days – it was 1975 – I had pretty long hair and I always wore a hat. My neighbor said, 'Hey Jon, do you think you can cut your hair and get rid of the hat? If you can, you can come work for me.'"

Holder knew the retail grocery job paid more than either of the other two, so he did cut his hair, retired the cap and took the position. Over the next two years, as he also attended and graduated from high school, Holder was promoted to courtesy clerk and then cashier.

He took a year away from education after high school as he contemplated his future, but was pointing toward a college degree in one of two different disciplines. "I liked the idea of being an architect and I also was a bit of a rock hound, so I thought being a geologist was also possible."

He still considered his retail work to be temporary employment, but he continued to get promotions and bigger paychecks. "I was one year out of high school and making \$25,000 per year," he said.



“It didn’t make any sense to go to college for four years with the prospect of not making any more than that when I graduated.”

He was a journeyman clerk when he was pulled into the produce department of that Orland Holiday Market as the number two man.

It was 1979 and Holder decided he was on his career path. The journey was just beginning.

A year later, Holiday transferred Jon to the company’s newest location in South Sacramento as produce manager. “They asked me if I was ready and I said I’m as ready as I’ll ever be,” he joked, knowing now that his produce education was in its earliest stages.

Next, he moved about 20 miles west to the Woodland store as assistant store manager and moved to that community as well. Eight months after that, he was made the store manager in the far northern reaches of California in Susanville. He was still only in his early 20s and had already worked in four different markets across several hundred miles of Northern California geography.

Soon thereafter, a colleague who he had worked with at Holiday Market recruited him for a position at a Raley’s in Antioch on the eastern end of the greater Bay Area. Six months later, he moved to Raley’s



Pittsburg location and then in another six months he was promoted to assistant produce manager in Raley’s Redding store, which is about 150 miles north of the Bay Area.

Those two moves were very significant in Holder’s life and career. “At the Pittsburgh store, I met my future wife,” he said. “We got married about five months after I moved to Redding.”

And Redding was the first step in which he was able to put down roots. He stayed at that Redding store for 16 years, serving as produce manager for the last decade of that tenure.

During that time, Jon and his wife, Yvonne, added four children to their family: Renee in 1985, Stephanie in ’86, Curtis in ’89 and Ryan in 1992.

His next big opportunity came in 1999 when the Albertsons/Lucky merger required the resulting company to divest some stores in Las Vegas. Raley’s



purchased many of those stores and Holder was offered a position as the produce supervisor for the Las Vegas division of Raley's. He and his wife discussed the opportunity and decided to accept the position, with Holder making a commitment to his two daughters that the family would stay in Vegas at least through their high school years

"We opened 19 stores in 30 days," he recalled. "But three years later, Raley's sold the stores to Kroger."

True to his word, Holder stayed in Vegas, which required him to leave Raley's. But he did find a position as a produce specialist for Food 4 Less. "I did the right thing," he added.

In June of 2004, when Stephanie graduated from high school, the Holders left Las Vegas and moved to Reno, NV, where John became a produce supervisor for Raley's once again.

Two years later, Greg Corrigan was promoted to the vice president of produce and floral in Raley's corporate office in Sacramento and he quickly offered Holder the senior merchandiser slot. "We moved to Sacramento and I stayed in that position from 2006 to 2015."

At this point, the Holders were interested in a new challenge. "We knew a lot of people that had gone through the Grocery Outlet program to become owner/



operators and it sounded like an interesting opportunity," he said. "I was fortunate to be able to take early retirement from Raley's and we started that journey."

Grocery Outlets' model is focused on training husband/wife teams to own and operate each store. Jon and Yvonne trained at an Atascadero store for 12 months before acquiring their own store in Vallejo, CA, in 2016. They were getting the hang of it and doing well. "We were able to increase weekly volume by 50 percent," he said.

But then tragedy struck as their daughter Renee, who was a college professor in Washington, D.C., was diagnosed with Stage IV Lung Cancer. "We lost her two months later," Jon said.

It became a reflection point for the couple. "When you are building sales at a store like Grocery Outlet, it really is a 12-hour a day/7 day a week job," Jon said. "At that point in our lives. We just didn't want to do that."

Scot Olson, who was vice president of produce for the chain, offered Jon a produce buyer position, which would be a bit less stressful and time consuming. Jon became the produce buyer for the Pacific Northwest and East Coast division in the middle of 2017.



“In 2019, I was recruited by Superior Grocery Company to come down to Southern California and run their produce office by Richard Wardwell (Superior’s president & CEO), who I had worked with at Raley’s in 1999.”

Jon expects Superior to be his last stop as he is 64 and loves the action the chain provides. Superior Grocers was launched as a one-store outlet in 1981 by Mimi Song, who is now chairman of the board. Today, he said it has 49 stores under that banner and 21 under the Numero Uno moniker. “We have aspirations to be a 100-store chain by 2025,” Holder said

He described Superior as a multi-ethnic chain with about 60-65 percent of its business coming from the Hispanic community, though it has stores in neighborhoods dominated by other ethnic customers. “We are self-distributors of our fresh produce though we utilize a distributor in our more northern stores for logistical reasons,” he said. “We do have a set schematic and a weekly planner for all stores, though we do have some exceptions. “We are not 100 percent cookie cutter...probably 90 percent.”

The company is experimenting with a new format, which Holder said is a 17,000 square foot, limited SKU outlet that is called “The Market by Superior.” He added that the typical Superior is 32,000 square feet and has a full assortment of offerings. “In The Market we focus on fresh and have a limited assortment of center stores SKUs,” he said. “It has been very successful and we are in the process of transitioning another store to that format.”

Hispanics tend to overindex on fresh produce and Holder says the typical Superior produce department accounts for 10-12 percent of store sales. “We dabble in organics but it is not a big part of our offering,” he said, noting that most stores have a four-foot set.



Jon with his grandson, Cillian.

The company’s produce buying team tends to work with about three suppliers for each category and also works directly with brokers. “I am a big believer in ‘spot buys’. If we can take advantage of a good buy and pass those savings on to customers, that’s great. I believe our customer experience is a bit of a treasure hunt.”

On the other hand, Holder does not believe in sacrificing quality for price. The company has a pyramid approach to its produce buying department with one lead buyer, three assistant buyers, six produce specialists and two floral specialists. “Floral is much more important to our customers than I thought when I got here. We have built a pretty good floral program over the last few years. We have been growing that business together with our supplier.”

Holder admits to being a relatively simple guy away from the office. “I enjoy deer hunting, camping, gardening and most of all spending time with my two young grandsons, Cillian 3½ and Caffrey 1½.” 🌱

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# MEET THE 2023 FPFC APPRENTICES

The 2023 Apprentice Class of the Fresh Produce & Floral Council has been named and the apprentices have begun their program. To introduce the FPFC membership to these potential future leaders, *Fresh Digest* asked each apprentice to answer a few questions about themselves and their personal journey to this place on their path.

## Alexis Storms

Sales Executive

### JLZ Produce

Salinas, CA

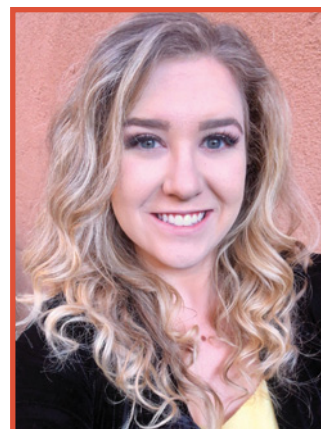
**Background:** I grew up in a suburb of Milwaukee, WI, and moved to Virginia when I joined the Navy. My husband, who was also in the Navy, is originally from New York. At the end of our enlistments, we moved to Wisconsin, and both went back to school and started our family. I have a bachelor's degree in education and an MBA in business & organizational leadership. I currently live in Northern Wisconsin on a small hobby farm with my husband and sons. We have four sons who are 21, 18, 17 and 12. Our oldest son is on active duty in the Navy, stationed on the West Coast. Our second oldest will enter the University of Montana this fall. Prior to coming into the produce industry, I spent many years working in the promotional products industry. My team handled all government accounts including local, state, federal and all military organizations. Primarily, I worked with Navy, Army, Marine, and Coast Guard and their licensing teams on their branding, artwork, and printed merchandise.

**FPFC Connection:** What brought me to the produce industry was a passion for people and food. I have always been fascinated with all things natural, healthy and nutritious. When I came into the produce industry about a year and a half ago, I started following a variety of organizations and individuals who regularly spoke about and on behalf of the produce industry on social media. I did this to learn as much as I could and to begin networking. It was through these organizations and individuals that I found the Fresh Produce and Floral Council on LinkedIn. Initially I was hesitant to apply as I figured I would be one of the few who worked in Southern California but lived elsewhere. When I proposed the idea of applying to my supervisor, the founder/owner of our company, he was very supportive and encouraged me. This year, I was able to attend the FPFC Expo in April, and I am looking forward to attending the Organic Produce Summit in July, as well as the IFPA show in October.

**Fun Fact:** I enjoy traveling, gardening, reading, and playing sports. We started the hobby farm to have more control over the food we were feeding our family. We have a variety of animals including cows, chickens, pigs and bees. In addition, we have built an aquaponics greenhouse, an orchard, many gardens, and berry patches and are currently working on a small vineyard. We enjoy making maple syrup in the spring and collecting honey through the summer. Our long-term goal is to continue to become more self-sufficient.



**Courtney Ludford**  
Associate Marketing Manager  
**Wonderful Citrus**  
Bakersfield, CA



**Background:** I was born and raised in Bakersfield, CA, and stayed there to go to college. I have an AS degree in Agricultural Business, a BS in Business Administration with a concentration in Marketing, and I also received my MBA from California State University, Bakersfield in 2021. I am the first person in my family to attend college. My dad was a spa salesman, and my mom was an ice cream maker at Dreyer's, so I did not have any familial ties or exposure to the produce industry.

I started my career in marketing within the oil and gas industry, which, alongside agriculture, is one of the major sectors in the area. After nearly three years, I realized my desire for greater career growth and a role that aligned more closely with my passions. Transitioning into the produce industry presented its challenges, particularly when I started my journey in March 2020 amidst the onset of the pandemic. Not only was I navigating a new job, but I also faced the additional complexities brought about by the rapidly shifting social and work landscape.

Despite the initial turbulence, I have been proudly working for Wonderful Citrus for three years, having progressed from a marketing coordinator to my current position as an associate marketing manager.

**FPFC Connection:** Through my marketing role with The Wonderful Company, I became aware of the FPFC. The company has a longstanding connection to the council and participates in its annual Expo. In previous years, I have been involved in coordinating Wonderful's involvement at the event. However, this year was my first time actually attending the event. I learned about the Apprenticeship Program through a coworker, Kathleen Ezell, who had participated in it the previous year. Impressed by her experience, she recommended that I apply. My intention in joining the program was to expand my professional network and deepen my understanding of the produce industry. As someone still new to this field, I recognize the massive amount of knowledge I have yet to acquire, and I am genuinely excited about the educational curriculum offered by the Apprenticeship Program.

**Fun Fact:** Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my fiancé and our seven-pound Morkie puppy. I also love hanging out with my adorable 5-year-old niece and 1-year-old nephew. Traveling is my favorite hobby, and I've been to more than 20 countries, including solo backpacking trips in Europe. One interesting thing about me is that I have dual citizenship in the U.S. and the U.K. because my dad was born in Hebburn, England.

Congratulations to all of the  
**2023 FPFC Apprentices!**



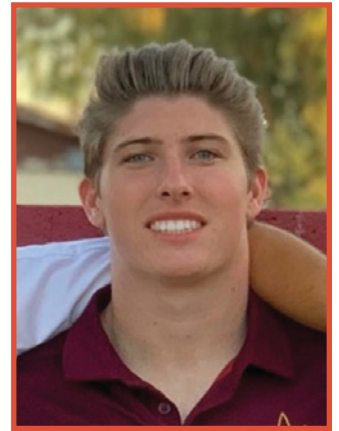
**Wonderful citrus™**

**Noah Lines**

Sales

**Westlake Produce**

Vernon, CA



**Background:** I was raised in Yorba Linda, CA and currently live in Anaheim CA. I attended the University of Nebraska Lincoln for college, but after just a year of school, I realized college wasn't the route I wanted to take. The summer prior to entering college, I was fortunate enough to receive an internship at Westlake Produce as a sales assistant. I genuinely enjoyed the entire experience and felt comfortable immediately in an industry I knew absolutely nothing about. Although I was extremely content with my place at Westlake and the produce industry, I had already committed to continuing my college education, so I had to stick with it. When I returned from Nebraska, I bounced around a few different jobs such as welding and personal training before being recruited to come back to Westlake as a full-time employee. I was informed I needed to complete at least one full year as a warehouse receiver and forklift operator to familiarize myself with the products and get a better understanding of the shipping and receiving process before being promoted into a sales role. Succeeding one year on the warehouse floor I was promoted into sales for our citrus department which is the role I currently hold today.

**FPFC Connection:** I have been fortunate enough to attend many Fresh Produce and Floral Council events in the last couple of years because of Westlake's large support of the organization. Westlake also has had four previous employees graduate from the FPFC Apprentice Program who have all informed me about the many benefits the program has to offer. I applied for this program so I could increase my leadership skills, knowledge of supply chain, and network with like-minded individuals with a passion for produce.

**Fun Fact:** When I'm not at work, you can most likely find me in the gym either working out or personal training clients. I love helping people better themselves to become healthier and more confident in their own skin. I also really enjoy playing golf with my family, friends and coworkers. I find it to be a great excuse to enjoy the outdoors and engage in a competitive yet friendly event. Something interesting about me is when I was growing up, I played on one of the best Pop Warner football teams in the country. I played in televised championship football games at Disney World in Florida. It was such an awesome experience I will never forget because it was with all my best friends who I am still close with to this day.



**Jackie Nakashian**  
Brand Manager  
**Trinity Fruit Company**  
Fresno, CA



**Background:** I was born, raised, and currently live in Fresno, CA. I attended Fresno State where I received my BS in Business Administration with an emphasis in Marketing. During my last semester in college, I snagged a great internship at a marketing agency. There, I was an account manager and eventually became their first ever ag specialist. I took a quick liking to agriculture and loved building connections with old and new ag clients. Among my clients was Trinity Fruit Company, which eventually offered me the brand manager position which I gladly took. My dream was to work in-house at an ag company, so everything worked out perfectly for me.

**FPFC Connection:** Being relatively new to the produce industry, my supervisor recommended this program to me as Trinity Fruit has been a supporter of the Fresh Produce & Floral Council for years. I personally had not attended any FPFC events until being accepted into the Apprenticeship Program. I applied to the Apprenticeship Program to grow my professional network and learn more about the industry as a whole.

**Fun Fact:** Outside of work, I love any activity that gets me outside and around people I love. Every Tuesday, I am part of a team that attends a Pub Quiz full of trivia, beers and laughs. I love traveling to new places and getting lost in the streets of new cities. I love being active, joining workout classes, and taking long walks and hikes outdoors.

## CONGRATULATIONS, JACKIE NAKASHIAN!



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## BEST OF LUCK IN THE 2023 FPFC APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

**Abigail McPherson**  
Account Manager  
**Frieda's Branded Produce**  
Los Alamitos, CA



**Background** – I was born and raised in Ohio. I attended Cal Poly Pomona. I found a passion for health and wellness and began working in the natural food and beverage space as a brand ambassador and field sales rep for multiple brands. My first sales role was for a cold-pressed juice company called Juice Served Here. From there I became a regional account manager for Beecher's Handmade Cheese and eventually found my way to UNFI where I was a Southern California account manager. I continued to follow my heart and found a role at Frieda's. I loved the legacy of Frieda and immediately connected with the Caplan family members: Alex, Jacki and Karen. They have all been extremely supportive.

**FPFC Connection** –I was introduced to FPFC by Karen Caplan and Alex Jackson. I have attended most of the Southern California luncheons and events and try to attend the Northern California luncheons when possible. Alex and Karen recommended that I apply for the Apprentice Program to learn all sides of the industry. They are strong supporters of FPFC and the Apprentice Program. I have been inspired by both of them.

**Fun Fact:** A couple interesting facts about me are I have a large family- 5 sisters and 2 brothers. I love yoga and I was the first female to participate in a 350 km charity bike ride for the Baan Dada Children's home in Western Thailand.



**we're fired up! congrats, abby mcpherson  
on becoming an FPFC apprentice.**

**love, your frieda's fam**



Frieda's Fire Dragons® dragon fruit



**Dan Addiego**  
Director of Sales & Insights  
**FreshSource**  
Pleasant Hill, CA



**Background:** I was born and raised in San Ramon, CA where I lived until I attended San Jose State University and was a part of their D1 mens soccer team. I was a 4-year starter, scholar athlete, and earned team captain honors. I graduated with a BS in Business Administration and concentration in Management. I started in the produce industry as a contractor for Safeway Corporate Produce and moved my way from support roles to a category analyst supporting many categories in the produce department. I took a step away from work to travel and experience different parts of the world. Upon return, the produce industry came calling again and it's where I've been ever since. Since returning, I have spent this portion of my career on the broker side of the business and building meaningful relationships between manufacturers, growers and their retail partners. I have worked in category management, account management and am currently in sales. I love the people in the industry, how every day presents a new challenge, and the fast-paced nature of produce and perishable products.

**FPFC Connection:** I learned about the FPFC when I first started my career with Safeway. I attended a few luncheons and Northern California Expos prior to leaving and assisting our brands with participating in the events. I learned about the program closer to the start of my career. I knew I wanted to become more involved in the industry but had to find the right time. The hybrid approach this program has implemented has allowed me to become more involved while still managing my work and family life. I'm very excited to learn from my fellow apprentices, mentors and industry leaders and be introduced to aspects of the industry I may not have the chance to experience in my day-to-day responsibilities.

**Fun Fact:** Outside of work, most of my time is spent with my family. My energetic kids always keep me on my toes, and there is never a dull moment. I love introducing them to new things, taking them to new places and attempting to get them to try new foods. My hobbies revolve around spending time outside and being active. When I do get the time, you will find me hiking, golfing, on the soccer field or in the backyard barbecuing and listening to music with friends and family.



**Elyse Seiler**  
San Diego, CA



**Background** – I am a Bay Area native now living in San Diego. I came from a small town, Martinez, where the martini originated! I grew up in the East Bay area and eventually moved to Petaluma in the North Bay and went to Sonoma State, eventually graduating with a bachelors in business. At the time I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, but knew I loved food. I have worked in the food and beverage industry my entire life and couldn't imagine working in any other industry. I've worked for a gelato manufacturing plant (running heavy machinery), specialty mushrooms, sashimi grade seafood and Japanese appetizers, and fresh Hawaiian seafood. There is nothing quite like working in produce. The connections and friendships you make are incredible. It's a very supportive community.

**FPFC Connection:** I had heard about the FPFC but didn't know too much about it. I learned about the Apprentice Program from my previous employer. I applied because, while I can talk all day about some items, I know little about others. I have had so many customers that bring up other commodities and issues, and I wanted to expand my knowledge and have something to contribute to the conversation.

**Fun Fact:** When I am not working, I enjoy going to the beach with my dog and just being outdoors in nature. I love to cook and also love growing my own food. I have been a foodie my whole life and love exploring food from different cultures. I am lucky to have a farmers' market nearby that offers lots of new things for me to try.

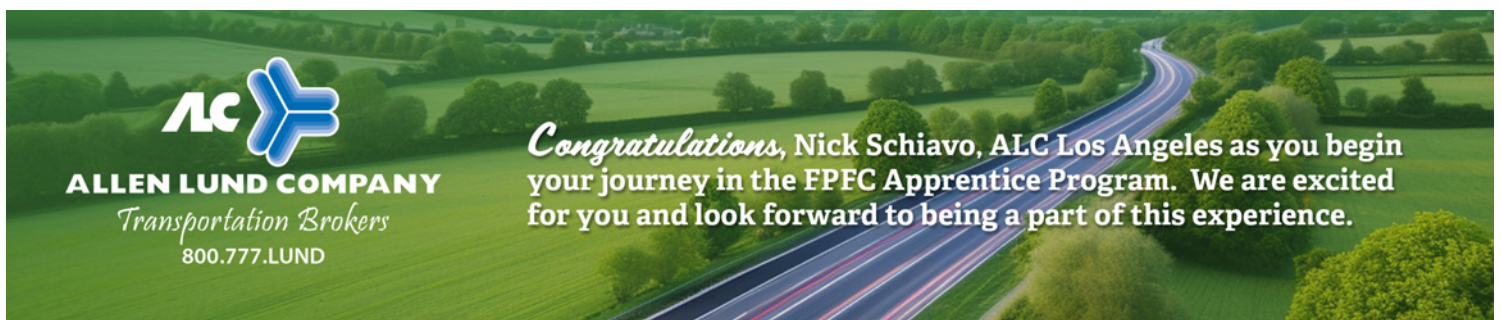
**Nick Shiavo**  
Transportation Broker  
**Allen Lund Co.**  
Los Angeles, CA



**Background:** I was born and raised in the small town of about 13,000 people called Marshall, MN. I lived there until I graduated high school and went off to play football at Moorhead State University. I studied secondary education while in school. While in college, I worked as a retail manager at a company called Finish Line. This was my first look into the sales world, and I really grew to enjoy it. After college, instead of jumping into the education field, I decided to pursue a career in sales. I started working for an independent insurance agency shortly after graduation. I sold property and casualty insurance for about two years prior to moving to Minneapolis. Moving to the big city I wasn't able to find the right fit for me in the insurance industry so I quickly began exploring other options. I leaned on the support of friends and family which led me to my first experience in logistics. I had a friend in the industry who allowed me to come and shadow him for an afternoon. I watched him and his co-workers for a few hours and quickly realized that this was something I feel like not only I would enjoy doing but also would excel at. I have spent the past four years in this industry and am really enjoying the different avenues I'm able to explore and the different opportunities that this industry allows.

**FPFC Connection:** I asked my boss during a monthly meeting if there were any educational programs that he knew about that would give me insight into the produce industry. He mentioned that we've had members or our company attend or be involved in this program before and had great experiences. I really am excited to learn from some of the industry experts!

**Fun Fact:** I am the only one in my family who has ever lived outside of Minnesota.

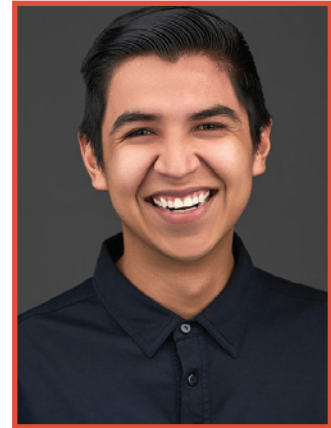


**Fernando Tellez**

National Sales Account Manager

**Veg Fresh Farms**

Corona, CA



**Background:** I am a first generation U.S. citizen, born and raised in Mission Viejo, CA. I graduated from Cal State Fullerton with a BA in Business Management. I worked full-time in the produce department at Pavilions while being a full-time student. After graduating and applying to different industries, I realized my career was in front of me the entire time. I decided to switch my focus and began to search within the produce industry. I came across Veg Fresh Farms in 2019 and have been a part of this amazing company ever since.

**FPFC Connection:** My first exposure to the FPFC was at the Anaheim Expo while working at Pavilions. I experienced firsthand what the produce industry has to offer. It's not just about fruits and vegetables but how the industry can further progress in this ever-changing climate. I first heard about the Apprentice Program through Mark Widder, one of the partners of Veg Fresh Farms. He highly encouraged me to apply as it would help me grow within the industry. Not only do I believe this program will help me grow within the industry but as a person as well.

**Fun Fact:** I have always had a passion for cars, specifically '90s era Japanese imports. I routinely attend car shows and casually window shop for cars daily. I hope to one day own a garage where I can store imported vehicles that were never offered in the U.S.



## Jake Beggin

Sales Operations Lead

### Local Bounti

Missoula, MT



**Background:** I am originally from Minneapolis, MN, and came to Montana to attend the University of Montana, which I graduated from with a Bachelor's degree in Communications. I am very close with my family and they all still live in Minnesota. I fell in love with cooking as well as sourcing my vegetables and learning about different farms and the way they grew their produce. This led me into a passion for sustainable agriculture. I already had a passion for people and sales, so I decided to combine the two and go for a job in produce sales. I found a place called "Local Bounti" that was starting construction an hour away from Missoula in Hamilton, MT. I drove down and asked if I could potentially help sell some product. At the time, they didn't have a developed commercial team, so I started in the harvest room to learn the process. I then moved into a greenhouse, then transplant, then nursery and seeding. I tried every position I could so I could better learn the business and subsequently add more value when I eventually was on the sales team. After about six months, I got a position on the sales team, and I was able to get my foot in the door and join the commercial team as member number 3!

**FPFC Connection:** I learned of the FPFC through various members of Local Bounti and through its magazine. I saw a posting for the Apprentice Program and decided I would love to gain as much knowledge as possible and thought it was a great avenue to do so. Before being a part of the program, I had attended the FPFC dinner dance which gave me a great opportunity to meet some of the previous year's apprentice class and ask some questions. I decided to apply because I have a passion for learning. This is a great opportunity for me to increase my knowledge in several areas of the produce space, connect with some like-minded individuals and eventually give back to the community that has poured so much into me and my career.

**Fun Fact:** I grew up playing hockey and still love to play. I am in three leagues and our winter team just won the division championship! I also have a passion for cooking, specifically BBQ. I have several smokers and cater for various events.

## Morgan Bahri

Sales Coordinator

### Awe Sum Organics

Salinas, CA



**Background:** I was born and raised in Salinas, CA. I attended and graduated from California State University Monterey with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Marketing. My career in fresh produce began almost three years ago when I landed an internship in my junior year at Giddings Berries USA. During my internship, I discovered my passion for the produce industry. Since the beginning, I have been inspired and uplifted by the intelligence, dedication, and genuine love the people in this industry have for its success. Currently I am a sales coordinator at Awe Sum Organics and am continuing to learn more about the produce industry. I truly love what I do. Knowing that my daily contribution helps put fresh produce in the hands of people around the country is incomparable and motivates me every day. Working with perishables can be unpredictable. I've grown to love the excitement and element of uncertainty that comes with every new season.

**FPFC Connection:** I first learned about the Fresh Produce & Floral Council when I began working at Giddings Berries USA. My first FPFC experience was attending a luncheon in May 2022. I had such a wonderful experience listening to the panelists and keynote speakers. Since then, I've attended many luncheons and have enjoyed the close-knit community of industry professionals. My former boss Helena Beckett supported my desire to apply to the program. I applied because I'm passionate about the fresh produce industry and would love to learn about the different facets of it. Through the Apprentice Program, I hope to grow my network base, learn more about the supply chain, connect with like-minded industry peers, and work towards increasing the demand and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. I am looking forward to this upcoming year with my fellow apprentices!

**Fun Fact:** I have a dog named Sophie, who I rescued in 2016. I love spontaneous moments. I enjoy random outings with my girlfriends, unplanned hikes, or movie dates with my fiancé. I am a foodie, and my favorite dish is my grandma's chicken curry. I enjoy traveling and experiencing different foods and cultures. Summer is my favorite season, and I love going to the beach!

## Holly Gonzales

Account Manager

### Offshoot Brands

Bow, WA



**Background:** My story started in the small town of Conway, Washington, in the heart of the rich, fertile agriculture community of Skagit Valley where I grew up. While in college at the University of Washington, I pursued a degree in Environmental Studies with a focus on sustainability. The knowledge I gained in this field of study led me to develop a passion for environmental change in our society. After graduating college, my husband and I started a family and put down roots in the same small town that I grew up in – Conway. The next 10 years I worked to nurture my family as a mother and partner and harnessed an opportunity to become a business owner of a coffee shop in my community. In the spring of 2022, a family friend reached out to me asking if I would be interested in a position with their company, Offshoot Brands. I felt excited about the opportunity to grow my career in a new way, but also hesitant to sell my business and begin something completely new. I took the leap and welcomed the opportunity for growth. As of today, a little over a year later, I am working on the sales team for Offshoot Brands as an account manager feeling gratitude and enthusiasm.

**FPFC Connection:** During my first year working for Offshoot Brands, I had the opportunity to attend a couple of the FPFC luncheons. I enjoy attending these luncheons to connect with others in the produce industry as well as listening to the keynote presentations. My supervisor told me about the Apprentice Program and how they believed I would be a great candidate for it. After hearing about it and reading through the information, I agreed that it would be a great opportunity for me. I applied with hopes to learn more about the complexity of the supply chain, gain confidence and exposure in the produce industry, and build lasting connections with others.

**Fun Fact:** When I'm not working at my desk and the sun is shining, I take any opportunity to get out under those glorious rays of sunshine for a mountain bike ride, walk, or hike. Here in the PNW, any ray of sunshine I can get does not go to waste! In the dark days of winter, I like to slow things down by working on jigsaw puzzles and doing Yin Yoga.

## Shane Aldrich

Sales

### Gardikas Produce



**Background:** I was born and raised in Scottsdale, AZ and currently live in Rancho Mission Viejo, CA with my wife Paige and dog Biggie. I graduated from Arizona State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering. After college I started in fire sprinkler design in the greater Phoenix area before transitioning into produce sales. My father, Tim, has been an industry veteran for 25 + years and works alongside me at Gardikas Produce as we both help run the watermelon program at Gardikas. Tim spoke to me about a position at Gardikas, and I immediately took interest and was moving out to California to work for Gardikas before I knew it. I was unsure if this position was going to be a long-term career at first, but it has slowly turned into a career I truly enjoy and am passionate about.

**FPFC Connection:** Gardikas Produce has been a long-tenured supporter of the FPFC over the years. I have been involved in multiple events involving the FPFC over the last 5 years (City of Hope Golf Tournament, FPFC luncheons, FPFC Expos, etc.) We have had past employees of Gardikas be selected to participate in the FPFC Apprentice Program and that is how I heard of the opportunity to be a part of the FPFC Apprentice Class of 2023. I applied for the program to expand my knowledge of the industry outside of my normal day-to-day work life. I also wanted to meet more industry professionals to seek guidance and advice in regards to reaching all my desired goals.

**Fun Fact:** Outside of work I have multiple hobbies I thoroughly enjoy and participate in frequently (golfing, running, cooking). I also enjoy watching any and all UFC events that are aired as well as going skiing any opportunity I can get. I love traveling around the world with my wife (Hawaii, New York, London, Paris, etc.) I also love walking my dog at the beach every chance I can get.

# THE FPFC EXPO

## DELIGHTS & INFORMS

By Tim Linden

**A**n amazing keynote talk by a woman trailblazer in the National Football League, along with an engaging retail panel, and the presentation of this year's produce and floral achievement awards were the highlights of the 2023 FPFC Expo.

The Fresh Produce & Floral Council held its annual event at the Anaheim Convention Center in Southern California on April 27 after an invitation-only event the night before for scores of retailers at the nearby House of Blues.

Keynote Speaker Sarah Thomas, who was the first woman referee in the National Football League, delighted the crowd with an entertaining and inspirational talk tracing her path to her NFL debut in 2015, which began after attending a referee conference with her two brothers in 1996. Thomas didn't aspire to be a pioneer, but circumstances and talent led her to the limelight, where she excelled.

After attending the referee conference, she began working club and high school games, eventually moving on to college football before getting her big break at the professional level. She became the first woman to referee in an NFL playoff game in 2019 and worked the Super Bowl the following year.

Thomas noted that her father taught her to never depend on a man for anything and she has lived that mantra well as she has raised three kids and continued her career. She told the FPFC audience that there are no road blocks merely speed bumps and said a successful person is self-motivated rather than motivated by outside influences or the desire to be famous.

Todd Linsky, a produce industry veteran who currently is associated with his ag-themed podcast called Todd-versations, was the moderator of a retail panel that featured California produce retailers Daniel Bell of Grocery Outlet, Jon Holder of Superior Grocers and Jacob Cadwallader of Stater Bros. Markets.

Linsky began the conversation discussing California's new food waste law. The bill was passed in late

2021 with increasingly stricter rules as time goes by. At its core is the goal to significantly reduce land-fill waste. The panel agreed that the goal is a good cause but it will impose hardships on retailers. Cadwallader called future compliance "a daunting task" adding that all segments of the supply chain will be impacted. He indicated retailers will be doing an exercise in SKU rationalization with the goal of cutting down on waste.

Holder said Superior already has an aggressive program to reduce shrink by repurposing older product in different ways. For example, produce that cannot be displayed in its whole commodity form, often is used in its cut veg program or in the deli as an ingredient in a prepared meal.

Bell noted that Grocery Outlet's business model involves most of its 246 stores being individually owned and operated. He said that means there will be 246 different solutions to the issues presented by the new law. He said the costs of compliance will have to be absorbed by the consumer in higher prices. He did call it a "noble idea" but complicated and difficult to achieve.

Linsky called the new law "a game changer for the industry" indicating that compliance will be very difficult.

Another subject tackled by the group was ag technology including indoor farming. Holder noted that growers and shippers are searching for ways to cut costs and innovations in growing and packing is an important element in that goal. Cadwallader said indoor farming has the added advantage of greatly reducing food recall incidents, which he wholeheartedly endorses.

The three retailers agreed that increasing produce consumption is a great goal and might best be achieved through education. Bell said social media offers an excellent opportunity to get the healthy eating message to consumers. Holder said for his team of buyers and in-store personnel, he advocates field



*Best of Show, Floral Winner, Mountain View Nursery, John Debruyn, Dawnyel Debruyen and Jake Debruyen with FPFC President, Don Gann.*



*Best of Show, Produce Winner Melissa's John Luevanos, Carlos Preciado, Julie Talancon, Danelle Zapien, Kyle Petersen, Orlando Lopez, with FPFC President, Don Gann.*



*2023 Norman H. "Buz" Bolstad Award Winner, Marvin Quebec of Quebec Distributing.*

tours to get the staff more knowledgeable and excited about fresh produce and flowers. "Nothing says fresh like a fresh floral bouquet or arrangement," he said.

Cadwallader said there are three strategies that could work to increase consumption: an educational effort to teach consumers how to pick, choose and prep fresh fruits and vegetables; larger pack sizes, such as 18-ounce blueberries and two-pound clamshells for strawberries, which offer the consumer a better value and encourages them to buy more; and new tastier varieties.

The morning breakfast session of the FPFC Expo kicked off by the awarding of its top two honors to well known industry veterans. Erin Caird of Por La

Mar Nursery was presented the Floral Achievement Award, while Marvin Quebec of Quebec Distributing earned the Norman H. "Buz" Bolstad Award.

Caird pointed out that her mother, Pat Caird, was the fifth recipient of the award when she was so honored in 1992. The younger Caird was clearly thrilled by the honor and dedicated the award to her mother. She also noted that her father was a floral visionary when he started the company with his wife in 1972. She added that the third generation is now well on its way to running the operation.

Quebec was equally moved by his presentation. He revealed that when he told his father he was going into the produce business, his dad approved noting that "everyone has to eat." 🌱



Keynote Breakfast retail panel, moderated by Todd Linsky of Todd-Versations Podcast joined by Daniel Bell of Grocery Outlet, Jacob Cadwallader of Stater Bros. Markets and Jon Holder of Superior Grocers.



Tracy Ramirez, the 2007 Floral Achievement Winner, presenting the 2023 Winner, Erin Caird of Por La Mar Nursery.



2023 FPFC Chairman Michael Schutt with FPFC President Don Gann; Keynote Breakfast Speaker, Sarah Thomas and Ross Johnson and Kent Beesley of the Idaho Potato Commission.







FPFC Board members, Jacob Cadwallader of Stater Bros. Markets and Kori Martin of Oppy, with Panel host, Todd Linsky of Todd-versations Podcast.



Ryan Sanchez of Albertsons with Keynote Breakfast Speaker, Sarah Thomas.



Robby Cruz of Target with Juan Carlos, Bob Echter, and Todd Ingham of Dramm Echter Farms.



Susie Rea of IndexFresh, Kent Beesley of Idaho Potato Commission with Shonna Williams of Cardenas Markets.



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# FPFC SOCIAL MEMBERSHIP LUNCHEON

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

Langham, Pasadena, CA



Guest speaker, Chef Nyesha Arrington and Fireside Chat Host, Myisha Nathaniel of Raley's.



2023 FPFC Chair, Michael Schutt.



FPFC 2022 Apprentice, Joseph Cowle of B&C Fresh Sales was voted to represent his class to membership and share his experience in the FPFC Apprentice program.



*Cesar Valenzuela of Pavilions with Jessica Gagel of organicgirl and Parker Nishi of Melissa's.*

*2022 FPFC Apprentices Back row: Joseph Cowle of B&C Fresh Sales, Katie Gagnon of Grocery Outlet, Charles Rowland of Fowler Packing, Bailey Slayton of Country Sweet Produce, Kyle Morris of Albertsons, Daniel Rosinski of Progressive Produce, Kyle Lane of Westfalia, 2023 FPFC Chair, Michael Schutt; Front row: Apprentice Taskforce Chair, Rachelle Schulken, Jared Bernardi of Bonduelle Fresh Americas, Sandra Aguilera of Calavo, John Grecco of Consentio, Kathleen Ezell of Wonderful Citrus, and Luis Gonzalez of SunFed.*



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Westfalia  
Wonderful Citrus



*Jeff Oberman of California Avocado Commission, Alexandra Molumby of Country Sweet Produce, Chef Nyasha Arrington, Troy LeCheminant and Phil Lopez of Westlake Produce Co.*



*Ignacio Morales of Sun Fresh International, Steve Hattendorf of Chilean Fresh Fruit Association with John Fuji of Gelson's Markets.*



*Cesar Valenzuela, Ryan Sanchez, and Mark Salahi of Albertsons, Vons, Pavilions.*



*Mike Reed and Natalie Tegerdal of 68 Produce with Matt Steinbrick of Melissa's.*



# SHIFTING PRIORITIES





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