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Welcome to 2024, here on the Vineline, and in your fields!

As we move into a new year, much of the focus for NWA staff is on our annual convention, the "Watermelon Family Reunion," an event that most of the people reading this magazine look forward to year in and year out. But as the new year is upon us, we have an opportunity to think about our mission, the work we do, and how we can serve the industry moving forward.

The good work that our industry does through the Association takes many forms. In this edition of the Vineline, we're able to see some of that work that will directly give back to the industry through our 2024 Research Grants, officially announced in this magazine. These grants are given to a diverse set of researchers, in different regions, focusing on different industry challenges. We'll also include a highlight on the National Watermelon Promotion Board's proposed assessment increase and how this investment in the industry pays off in growing consumption and supporting the industry. We'll also continue our series on the charities we support, as a tradition of supporting our armed services continues through the generosity of NWA members.

We're proud to bring you this next edition of the Vineline. The content here reflects the Association in general – looking to serve the industry and drive us forward – into the new year, 2024, and beyond.

We'll keep working hard for you through this year... and the next and the next! The staff (Monica, Tami, Kerri, and Queen Olivia) and I are so grateful for the chance to be a part of this work for you and the watermelon industry.

Thank you for a great 2023 – my first as a part of this great organization. We're looking forward to the ways we can continue the good work and push it further in this year.

Sincerely,

George F. Szczepanski Executive Director National Watermelon Association

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National Report

Following the VINE Into Fall

- On May 26, 2023, Queen Olivia headed down to the local Brookshire Brothers in Center, Tx to educate and promote our #sliceofhappy to consumers. She had some very special supporters including her sister, uncle, daddy and granny. From there she visited the Brookshire Brothers located in Lufkin, Tx. She was in her element selling and educating! Pictures 1-4
- o Thanks to our sponsor! □ National Watermelon Promotion Board
- San Augustine Heritage Days was Queen Olivia's next stop! A day filled with vendors, a tractor show, hayrides and so much more! She handed out watermelon slices, played watermelon spin the wheel and passed out stickers to all the littles. An absolute honor to be able to promote her favorite fruit in East Texas. Pics 5-8
- o Thank you to our sponsors.
- ☐ San Augustine Motors
- ☐ San Augustine Chamber of Commerce for sponsoring
- Freshtival of Watermelon at Kroger Marketplace in Prosper, Tx with Texas Watermelon Association Queen Savannah was day filled with all thing's watermelon! Slices of red and yellow deliciousness were shared with all the shoppers. Games and stickers for the kids and recipe cards and educational information for the adults. Thank you to the team at Kroger DFW for inviting the queens to assist in this fun event for your local community. Pics 9-14
- o Thank you for this sponsorship! □ National Watermelon Promotion Board
- Kicking off the Georgia Tours in Glennville, GA by visiting Mr. Ben Hilliard of B & H Farms and Coastal Packing and Storage at their shed. Visiting sheds allows us to view the process between the field and store. Mr. Hershell & Jayla Durance of MHD & Son along with Mr. Rob Gibson of Gibson Produce took us to one of their beautiful and fruitful fields. The next day we were joined by Georgia Watermelon Queen Charley. We were able to watch farm video, visit a packing shed and sample melons straight from the field. We want to thank Enza Zaden and Seedway for the delicious meals on this tour! Also Mr. Chris Hogg and his daughter, Caroline, for being such wonderful hosts and tour guides! Farm tours are a great way to truly connect with the industry and become better advocates for the people who make this role possible. Pics 15-24
- o Thank you so much to the sponsors for this Georgia Tour. We are so grateful for the opportunity to promote the watermelon industry.
- ☐ Mr. Bobby Barton of Jim Rash Company
- ☐ Mr. Ben Hilliard of B & H Farms
- ☐ Mr. Brad Jones of Sunstate Produce
- ☐ Mr. Rob Gibson of Gibson Produce
- ☐ Mr. Chris Hogg of Seedway ☐ Leger and Son Co.
- ☐ Browning and Sons Co.
- ☐ Mr. Lee Wroten of Global Produce
- □ Enza Zaden
- The Watermelon Tours in the Palmetto State was a huge success! Queen Olivia was joined by SCWA Queen Ansley and NWA Director George Szcezepanski and together they visited Delk Produce, Phil Sandifer & Sons Produce, Jason Still Farms and Mr. Hammy Dicks of Melon 1. Additionally, they were joined by Mr. Will Owens of Seedway, Mrs. Blakely Atkinson of the SC Department of Ag and Mrs. Kendra Kennedy of International Paper who provided us with a delicious meal to finish the day! As they wrapped up the South Carolina Farm Tours they visited Willis Produce, Kinard Farms and Coosaw Farms. Ms. Sue Colucci,

















































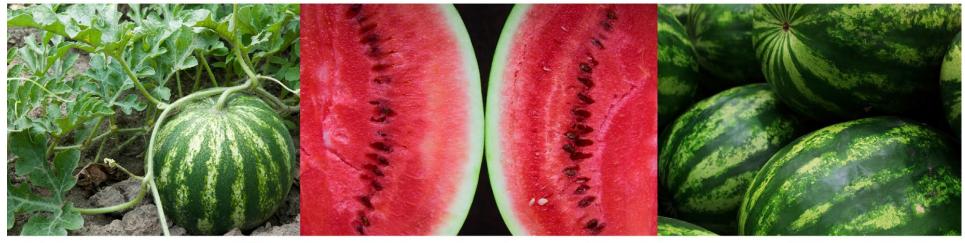
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National Report

Mr. Kyle Tisdale of Stokes Seeds and Ryley Zunica of Enza Zaden joined us on this tour and we all enjoyed a delicious lunch provided by Mr. Rusty Kinard. Queen Olivia and Queen Ansley rode in the 81st Annual Hampton County Watermelon Festival and this year's focus was on the Past, Present & Future of Education in Hampton County. Such a phenomenal end to my time in SC and we want to thank Ms. Ann Bryant for being such a great host and for making all this possible. Pics 25-37

- o Thank you to each and every sponsor for making this promotion possible!
- ☐ Mr. Hammy Dicks of Melon 1
- ☐ Mr. Rusty Kinard of Kinard Farms
- ☐ Mr. Scott Hendricks of Tri-Est ☐ Mr. Will Willis of Willis Produce
- ☐ Mr. Bradley and Louise O'Neal of Coosaw Farms
- ☐ Mr. Will Owens of Seedway
- ☐ Mrs. Kendra Kennedy of International Paper
- ☐ Ms. Sue Colucci of Clifton Seed
- ☐ South Carolina Watermelon Association
- JULY 4TH celebrations would not be complete without watermelon! Queen Olivia visited Patrick's AFB commissary and several grocery stores, including Winn Dixie in Cocoa Beach, FL and three Sprouts locations in Orlando, Valrico and Brandon, FL. So many consumers walked away with delicious USA watermelons for the holidays and a vast education on all thing's watermelon. Pics 38-48
- o Thank you to our sponsor! Your support of the NWA Retail Promotions does not go unnoticed.
- □ National Watermelon Promotion Board
- Queen Olivia enjoyed spending the day at the Dyess Air Force Base as she helped many consumers walk away with a delicious watermelon, recipe cards and knowledge of their very own #sliceofhappy! Thank you to the Texas Watermelon Association for this invitation! Pics 49-51
- o Thank you our sponsor for making this retail promotion possible
- □ National Watermelon Promotion Board
- Lufkin HEB loves watermelon, and a great evening was had by all visiting consumers by enjoying watermelon samples, stickers and spinning the wheel for a watermelon prize! Many consumers left the store with our favorite fruit, watermelon! Thank you, Mr. Jeff Plopper, for the invitation.
- o Thank you to our sponsor!
- □ National Watermelon Promotion Board
- Touring the farm where Queen Olivia's journey first began. Mr. Shelby Johnson of Johnson Produce took time to share his knowledge of all the vegetables and fruits that he grows on his farm. He is a 6th generation grower and has shared a wealth of knowledge over Queen Olivia's lifetime concerning the Agricultural industry. Pics 52-54
- o Thank you to our sponsor!
- ☐ Johnson Produce
- Canada Promotions 2023 for Freson Bros. was the first trip to Canada since 2019. Queen Olivia and I were accompanied by Ms. Juli Onyshchenko and Mr. Daniel Pazder of Freson Bros. They had scheduled a series of Watermelon Fest visits at three of their locations. The first was in Drumheller, the second was in Hanna and the last stop was in Sundre. There were watermelon eating contests for everyone of all ages, watermelon bowling, coloring competitions, watermelon face painting and a game of guessing the weight of the watermelon. Thank you for this invitation to the Freson Bros. family! They pride themselves on being such a large part of making their community a better and friendlier place to live. Pics 55-57



































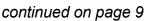














National Pictures

- o Thank you to our sponsor!

 ☐ National Watermelon Promotion Board
- Queen Olivia was blessed again by her hometown community by an invitation to speak at the Lunch & Learn About Watermelon! The invitation was made by SC Chamber President, Deborah Chadwick. She was able to educate Shelby County Residents on the health benefits of watermelon and all things watermelon queen at the Chamber of Commerce Health Care Committee July Lunch & Learn. Pic 58
- o Thank you to her sponsors for allowing her to help her spread her love & knowledge of watermelon to her community!
- ☐ Thank you to Shelby Chamber of Commerce.
- ☐ Wiggins Farms, LLP
- The next stop on Queen Olivia's schedule was to North Carolina where she was accompanied by NCWQ Gracy and hosted by Mrs. Sharon Rogers. The queens attended the State Farmers Market Watermelon Day where they participated in passing out watermelon samples, stickers, recipes and making a lot of pictures with consumers. They also helped MC the largest watermelon contest where the winner was Mr. Andrew Vial who grew a whopping 181.8 lb. watermelon. On their first day of touring the queens were off to visit many farms by some of the NC growers. Mr. James Sharp of Fresh Pik Produce, Mr. Richard Brantley of Brantley Farms and Mr. and Mrs. Rob Glover of Rob Glover Farming Co. were so kind and so informative when they taught on the process of growing melons, tobacco, cantaloupes and honey dews. On the second day of visits the queens expanded their watermelon knowledge by visiting NCWA president, Mr. Frank Howell of Howell Farming CO., Mr. and Mrs. T. C. Smith of T. C. Smith Produce and their store. Next visit was with Mr. Tony Moore of Tony Moore Farming Co., Clifton Seed, Mr. Robert and Britney Fann of Fann Farms and Mr. Hammy Dicks of Melon 1. Jackson Farming Co was the last visit of the day, and they provided us a vast education of the sales/shipping portion of the industry and allowed us to do a Brix test on their watermelons, cantaloupes and honey dews. Pics 59-68
- o Thank you so much to our devoted sponsors of the NCWA.
- ☐ Mrs. Sue Colucci of Clifton Seed
- ☐ Mr. Mitch Mitchell of International Paper
- ☐ Mr. and Mrs. Howell of Howell Farming Co ☐ Mr. Josh Rowe & Mrs. Jane Jennings of Greif/CorrChoice
- ☐ Mr. Joe Jones of Seedway
- ☐ Mr. Dave Yeager of Schmieding
- ☐ Mr. Clegg Smith of Gowan Seed Company
 ☐ North Carolina Watermelon Association
- Mar-Delicious Farm Tours kicked off with visits to Mr. Bob and Rob Gibson of Gibson Select where they showed us around the old auction house and packing shed. Next, Queen Olivia and MDWQ Brielle were greeted by the Collins family at DMC Farms. The queens then went to visit Mr. and Mrs. Kevin Evans and their children at their produce stand and ice cream shop! Mr. Travis Hastings of Coastal Growers and Mr. Mike Johnson of Atlantic Produce were the next stop for the day and were joined by Mr. Chuck Elam and Mr. Chris Hogg of Seedway. They all shared their extensive watermelon knowledge with our group. The next morning, prior to their radio interviews, Queen Olivia was joined by SCWQ Ansley and MDWQ Brielle where they competed in a seed spit competition at Froggy 99.9 where Mr. Randy, their host, took first place with 18 ft! Later in the day the queens visited Rehoboth Beach Boardwalk where they were joined by NWA Director George Szcezepanski and courtesy of DMC Farms, they passed out slices of watermelon to consumers to help them replenish and refresh at the beach! MDWA promotions coordinator, Mrs. Terra Eby orga-

















































National Pictures







Mrs. Terra Eby for a wonderful week promoting watermelon. Pics 69-82

o Thanks to the MarDel Watermelon Association

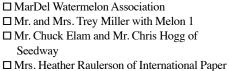
nized a visit to a grocery store that was next door to Rehoboth Beach. And how can you say no to

three beautiful girls in a crown? You can only imagine how many watermelons were sold with three queens in the store! They greeted countless consumers with stickers, recipe cards and informed them of their local MarDel growers. As we wrapped up our MarDel Tour with the Washington, DC Farmers Market & Rotary Crab Feast the queens were able to showcase watermelon recipes and discussed how to properly store watermelon and discuss the process of growing watermelon. At the 78th Annual Rotary Crab Feast the queens were able to pass out two entire bins of watermelons to visitors of the world's largest crab feast. Thank you to MarDel Watermelon Association and









for sponsoring this event!







□ After landing in Dallas from our MarDel Tour, Queen Olivia celebrates Texas agriculture at the 5th Annual Watermelon Day at the Dallas Farmers Market! There were over 15 varieties of watermelon present and 100+ vendors. The day was filled with watermelon carvings by Mr. Earl Caters, recipe demonstrations by Farm Table Health owner Mr. Eric Salome, face painting, live music and watermelon eating contests! Queen Olivia is beyond grateful for her mother, Renee Johnson of Johnson Produce for the phenomenal set up! Pics 83.85

☐ 2023 California Field Days were a SUCCESS! Queen Olivia kicked off her first day in California with wonderful customers, breeders and colleagues of HM Clause. As vegetable seed producer, they































are innovating everyday for diversified, sustainable and environmentally friendly agriculture. They showcased their newest variety of seedless watermelon which was named after Mrs. Eleanor Bullock. We concluded the first day with a visit to BASF Vegetable Seeds to check out their new varieties for their NUNHEMS brand! Altogether, they sell around 200 different watermelon varieties across the globe. After tasting and learning about their new varieties, Queen Olivia was able to film multiple videos to promote their newest variety NUN 32126! Hazera Field Day uses the concept, "Quality all the Way." Hazera focuses on adapting their varieties to various environmental conditions, multiple disease resistance, and all the other aspects to create the perfect mini watermelon for each grower! Commercial Operations Manager, Mrs. Limor Golan, invited Queen Olivia to join "The Winning Team" lead by CEO Mr. Nicolas Tinel, as they showcased their most popular variety Ocelot! As Queen Olivia toured the fields in Woodland, California the effort put in by every employee of Sakata shined! Sakata strives to quickly and efficiently meet the industry expectations for quality seed, strong performance and excellent yields while providing retail and consumers with delicious watermelon! Mr. Jeffrey Watkins explained how their company focuses on providing a specialized watermelon for each region, given that weather conditions and diseases vary throughout the United States. As grafting becomes a more popular growing method to prevent diseases, Sakata is developing innovative ways to perfect taste, texture and sustainability while using grafted plants! The last morning of our tour we visited Enza Zaden Field Day and with an entrepreneurial spirit, long-term vision and focus on innovation has pushed this 3rd generation independent family business to develop over 1,200 vegetable varieties with 100 more varieties added annually! One of their greatest strengths is that they are not only a family business, but also a family as a business. And what could be better than watermelon for breakfast? We were able to taste and learn about the upcoming varieties such as E181 and E212. E212 is a yellow meat watermelon with amazing texture and sweetness! Pics 86-96

o Thank you to all our sponsors who made this possible!

□ HM Clause
□ BASF
□ Hazera
□ Sakata
□ Enza Zaden



Vineline Research News



Welcome to the forefront of innovation in the watermelon industry! In this quarter's Vineline magazine, we unveil a glimpse into the future as we introduce the cutting-edge research projects set to receive funding in 2024 through the National Watermelon Association's esteemed Research Grant program. These grants, spearheaded by the diligent NWA Research Committee under the leadership of Mr. Lee Wroten from Global Produce in Florida, empower university researchers to delve into novel approaches addressing plant pathologies and production concerns, ultimately shaping the trajectory of the watermelon crop. Join us as we explore the transformative endeavors that promise to propel the watermelon industry into new realms of success and sustainability.

Filling the gaps for informed and economical adoption of Carolina Strongback grafted nursery to combat fusarium wilt

Lead Investigator(s): Dr. Bhupinder Singh Jatana **Research institution: Clemson University -Edisto Research & Education Center**



Fusarium wilt, a destructive disease in watermelon caused by a fungus, has led to yield losses. Current management involves strategies like field rotations and grafting watermelon plants with resistant rootstocks. However, grafted nurseries are more expensive, and farmers face challenges, such as delayed fruiting and higher vigor in grafted plants. This project aims to address these concerns by evaluating the best transplanting time, transplant density, and boron application for economical adoption of grafted nurseries, potentially saving farmers \$500-700 per acre. The research will involve close collaboration with growers to ensure practical and effective solutions for managing Fusarium wilt in watermelon.

The Role of Fusarium Wilt and Abiotic Stresses in Watermelon Vine Decline in Indiana

Lead Investigator(s): Dr. Dan Egel **Research institution: Purdue University**



The project aims to explore the factors that cause Mature Watermelon Vine Decline that has plagued watermelon production in Indiana for years. We will explore the interaction of Fusarium wilt and abiotic stresses in causing watermelon vine decline. Understanding the driving factors will be essential in developing management strategies to help watermelon production in Indiana and beyond.

Investigating the Rindworm Complex Responsible for Damaging Watermelon Fruits in Commercial Fields

Lead Investigator(s): Dr. lan Kaplan Research institution: Purdue University



Department of Entomology

This project focuses on addressing a significant issue faced by watermelon growers – the damage caused by rindworms, which leads to reduced marketability of the fruit. Rindworm damage, characterized by surface blemishes, is poorly understood, and current insecticide strategies may not effectively control it. The researchers plan to work with watermelon growers in Indiana and Illinois to assess the extent of rindworm damage, identify the responsible insect pests, and evaluate insecticide regimes to improve marketable yields. The ultimate goal is to provide practical insights and management recommendations to help growers minimize rindworm-related losses and enhance the quality of their watermelon crops. continued on next page...

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Assessing the threat of insect-transmitted viruses to the production of watermelon (Citrullus lanatus) in Georgia and identifying resistance against them. (NEW)

Lead Investigator(s): Dr. Sudeep Bag Research institution: University of Georgia Department of Plant Pathology



This project aims to address the challenges faced by watermelon growers in Georgia due to increased whitefly populations and the transmission of viruses. Specifically, the researchers plan to identify the diversity of viruses affecting watermelons, investigate the transmission modes of certain viruses (WCLaV-1 and WCLaV-2), and identify watermelon lines resistant to whitefly-transmitted viruses. The information gained will help develop better management strategies, diagnose virus diseases, and enhance the profitability and sustainability of watermelon production in the region. The research will be conducted through surveys, sample collection, and molecular assays at the Virology Laboratory, Department of Plant Pathology, UGA-Tifton GA.

Suppression of Fusarium Wilt of Watermelon by Mycoviruses

Lead Investigator(s): Dr. Akhtar Ali

Research institution: The University of Tulsa



This research project focuses on combating Fusarium wilt, a disease affecting watermelon crops and causing significant economic losses. The disease is caused by a soil-borne fungus called Fusarium oxysporum f. sp. niveum (FON). The researchers aim to use mycoviruses to control FON and have identified two mycoviruses showing promising effects on reducing the severity of the disease in preliminary experiments. The proposed objectives for 2024-2025 include collecting and screening additional FON isolates, characterizing the mycoviruses, and conducting pathogenicity tests on various watermelon cultivars. The project aims to develop a biocontrol strategy that is environmentally friendly, efficient, and economical for combating Fusarium wilt in watermelon crops.





Vineline NWPB News



Supporting the Promotion of Watermelon: National Watermelon Promotion Board Assessment Increase

Following the 2017-2021 Econometric Evaluation executed by Armada Corporate Intelligence, Inc., some Board and industry members started a discussion regarding the need for an assessment increase for the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB/Board). President Christian Murillo and 1st Vice President Lee Wroten included Assessment Rate on the monthly agenda for the Executive Committee starting in April 2023 and presented The Case for the Assessment Increase at the September 2023 Board Meeting. After Board input, the updated presentation was shared at the National Watermelon Association Executive Committee Meeting, Florida Watermelon Association Annual Convention, Texas Watermelon Association Annual Convention, and Suwannee Watermelon Institute in the last months of 2023.



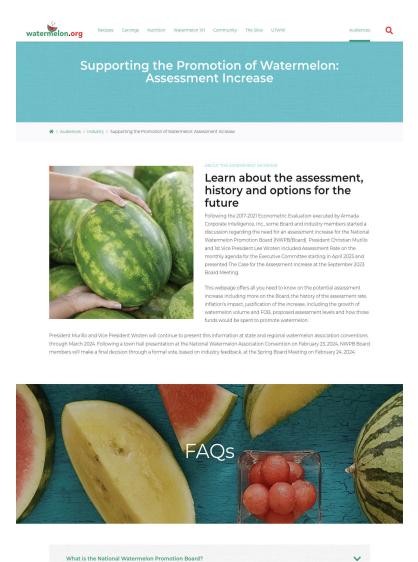


A new webpage, watermelon.org/assessment, is the hub to learn about the proposed Assessment Increase. There is more on the Board, the history of the assessment rate, inflation's impact, justification of the increase, including the growth of watermelon volume and FOB, proposed assessment levels and how those funds would be spent to promote watermelon. Take time to explore the rest of the website and experience how the NWPB promotes watermelon year-round.

President Murillo and Vice President Wroten will continue to present information at state and regional watermelon association conventions up until March 2024. Following a town hall presentation at the National Watermelon Association Convention on February 23, 2024, the NWPB Board members will make a final decision through a formal vote, based on industry feedback, at the Spring Board Meeting on February 24, 2024.



If you have questions or would like to discuss this potential increase please reach out to info@watermelon.org.



How does the NWPB promote watermelon?



Vineline Charity News









"Heart of a Lion Foundation: NWA and Syngenta's Generosity Fuels Support for Veterans"



In a remarkable display of generosity, the National Watermelon Association (NWA) has joined hands with industry partners, including Syngenta, to support the Heart of a Lion Foundation. This foundation, founded by Major Ed Pulido and golfing legend John Daly, is on a mission to provide mental, physical, and wellness support to the nation's children, first responders, and veterans.

The 19.91 Story: John Daly's Impactful Victory

At the heart of the foundation's recurring donations lies the significance of John Daly's historic 1991 PGA Championship victory. Daly, known for his colorful personality, not only claimed the title as the ninth alternate but also showcased a compassionate side by immediately donating \$30,000 to a scholarship fund for the daughters of a fan who tragically lost his life at the event. The choice to donate \$19.91 reflects the memorable year of Daly's victory.

Major Ed's Personal Journey

Major Ed Pulido, the co-founder of the Heart of a Lion Foundation, shares a personal connection to the cause. A U.S. Army retiree, Major Ed's life took a drastic turn in 2004 when he was hit by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in Iraq. His commitment to the patriotic duty of never leaving a fallen comrade behind has fueled his dedication to supporting veterans, children, and first responders through the foundation's initiatives.

Mission and Impact

The foundation's mission is clear: to provide comprehensive support to the nation's children, first responders, and veterans. Since its inception in 2020, the Heart of a Lion Foundation has conducted various events nationwide, offering funding through grant applications and partnerships with local organizations. The organization prides itself on an 84% funding ratio through internal and external programming.

The Heart of a Lion Foundation's 84% funding ratio comprises external grants and internal programs and services. In 2022, an impressive 53.4% of the program expenses directly funded external grant programs for local and national organizations. The remaining 46.6% contributed to internal scholarship funding, enabling veterans, first responders, and children to participate in diverse



continued from previous page...

programs such as golf, hunting, clay shooting, and fishing. The foundation not only allocates funds but actively involves those it serves in its programming and connects them with national initiatives. Notably, in 2022, the foundation employed veterans and their dependents as part of its internal team, creating opportunities for meaningful engagement and support.

As we commend Syngenta and other industry partners for their commitment to the Heart of a Lion Foundation, we're grateful for the individuals and businesses alike in our association who are able to join the cause. Supporting initiatives that provide vital assistance to veterans, first responders, and children is a shared responsibility, and we're proud to be a part of this incredible Watermelon Family- a group who enriches the community we're a part of, not only through providing the literal fruits of our labor to the country, but also directly giving back to help those in need. Through collaborative efforts, we can contribute to a positive impact on the lives of those who have dedicated themselves to serving our nation.

The Heart of a Lion Foundation stands as a beacon of hope and support for those who have sacrificed for our freedom. The partnership between the Foundation and watermelon industry demonstrates the power of collective action in making a difference in the lives of veterans and their families.





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Texas Report

Hello from Texas! We hope this letter finds our watermelon family having had a wonderful holiday season and a Happy New Year.

Queen Savannah has been busy visiting various states and having some great experiences. Her first trip in September was to Washington, D.C., for the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA) Washington Conference. It started off with a very informative advocacy boot camp that prepared the queens for the events on Capitol Hill. This included speeches and mock interviews. After this, the ladies went to Rayburn Garden where Savannah and the other queens passed out watermelon samples and spoke with people about the importance of supporting our growers and the agriculture industry as a whole. The next day, the ladies were put with teams to head to Capitol Hill where the groups spoke with five congressional representatives or staffers from their state. They discussed labor, water supply, food safety, and nutrition. It meant so much to Savannah to be able to explain the importance of getting help in these areas for the agriculture industry.

Savannah next went to the Florida Watermelon Convention where she was welcomed by the wonderful people of the Florida Watermelon Association. She had a great time at the queen contestant's reception and the Casino Night where she had fun interacting with members and playing blackjack and poker. The last day she enjoyed seeing the contestants' speeches, then taking part in the seed spit, auction, and dinner where she congratulated the new 2024 Florida Watermelon Queen, Miss Elanie Mason.

In October, there was another trip to Washington, D.C. where Savannah took part in one of our favorite events, the Marine Corps Marathon. Before the big day, we were treated to a wonderful, relaxing dinner at Sarah Jane Levine's parents' house. Then the next morning, Savannah and the other queens cheered on the runners and handed out watermelon to anyone who wanted it. The runners are always so grateful to get a sweet, hydrating treat. The girls also got to support a member of the watermelon family, Mrs. Terra Eby, the Mar-Del coordinator, as she ran and completed the marathon.

Last, but not least, Savannah did a great job at the Texas Watermelon Convention in Ft. Worth. The Texas Watermelon Association president, Mr. Luke Brown, and his wife, Kendall, made sure everyone had a wonderful time. The first night members enjoyed the president's reception at Billy Bob's. Attendees watched a bull riding show and had great food, drink, and fellowship. Friday began with speakers and breakfast, then later in the day, we had the seed spit and auction. On the final day, Savannah introduced the contestants who gave their speeches and answered the impromptu question, then they took part in the promotion wear competition. Later in the morning, contestants had their interviews with the judges, then in the evening, there was the evening gown competition. Savannah gave a beautiful farewell speech, then crowned the 2024 Texas Watermelon Queen, Miss Amelia Dineen. Congratulations to Amelia. We hope the year ahead is fun and memorable.

May all the watermelon family have a great 2024.

Best regards, Barbara Duda TWA Coordinator bcduda62@gmail.com







Savannah with the Texas contingent is ready to go to the Capitol



New friends and old at the International Fresh Produce Association conference.



Lovely queens and Mr. Givens are ready for fun in Florida at their casino night.



NWA Queen Olivia Johnson, Bethany Barfield, Kerri Wiggins, Queen Savannah, and Kendra Kennedy.



Savannah congratulates the 2024 Florida Watermelon Queen,



Cheering on Mar-Del coordinator, Mrs. Terra Eby.



Making runners happy!



We love watermelon



Fun at Billy Bob's with Jared, Ashlyn, and Zayde Wiggins.



Ride 'em cowgirl



Beautiful auction helpers.



The contestants: Amelia Dineen, Haylee Eaves, Jacqueline McClendon, and Mariela Elizondo.

South Carolina Report

We are hoping that this correspondence finds everyone well and that you all enjoyed a blessed and joyous holiday season with family and friends. We are looking forward to the new year ahead and hope that you all can join us for our South Carolina Convention on January 19-21, 2024, in Hilton Head, South Carolina.

I would like to take this time to thank Ansley Grace Still for the time given to the association as the 2023 South Carolina Watermelon Queen. It was a very busy year with in-store promotions at a high along with 5k/10k races, elementary schools, colleges, and miscellaneous appearances across the state. I would also like to thank her parents, Jason and Jan Still, for attending some appearances and supporting their daughter in her endeavors.

We are looking ahead to a new year with more promotions and appearances for the new 2024 Queen. Our hope is to promote our farmers, friends and associates with the sale of many watermelons in the years to come.

Wishing all of the states a successful convention and growing year.

Warmest Watermelon Wishes, Ann Bryant SC Promotions Coordinator Abryant028@charter.net 864-303-3995







North Carolina Report

Gracy's watermelon promotions have been keeping her busy with events throughout North Carolina and the nation. Over the fall season, Queen Gracy attended many exciting events, including the International Fresh Produce Association's Washington Conference, where she had the opportunity to learn about the political climate surrounding the produce industry and to meet with the staffers of many NC Senators and Congressmen to discuss issues important to the NC watermelon industry. Thank you, National Watermelon Association (NWA), for preparing the Queens to be a part of this conference.

Another successful event was the Marine Corps Marathon, where watermelon was once again a favorite among the runners. Gracy, the other state Queens, the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) staff and board, Don Hiller, and the coordinators worked together to distribute thousands of watermelon cups to the runners. It's always a thrill to hear the runners declare, "Watermelon is the reason I run this marathon." Our last summer festival was the Winterville Watermelon Festival, where Gracy interacted with hundreds of consumers and talked about everything watermelon. She hosted four watermelon eating contests and introduced the evening entertainment.

Gracy's love for watermelon extended to her favorite football team, North Carolina State University, where she shared watermelon with the players to help them rehydrate after practice. She attended the NCSU College of Ag and Life Sciences fall tailgate with several NCWA members. The opening ceremony of the NC State Fair is a fun event to see old friends and make some new ones. Queen Gracy and NCWA Executive Director, Cathy Horton, were a part of the ribbon cutting to officially open the 2023 fair. The Raleigh Chamber of Commerce's fall festival allowed Gracy the opportunity to teach the Triangle area business and industry elite all about the importance of NC agriculture.

Most recently, Gracy attended the Texas Watermelon Convention, where she toured Fort Worth and made lots of new friends from the Texas Association. Several more state conventions are on the horizon, and the Southeast Fruit and Vegetable Expo is coming up soon.

See you in Arizona!

Sharon Rogers NCWA Promotions Coordinator 336-583-9630 ncwatermelonqueen@gmail.com



Sharing watermelon with North Carolina State University football players and training staff.



Queen Gracy enjoying the Winterville Watermelon Festival.



Distinguished judges for the watermelon eating contest at the Winterville Watermelon Festival.



Watermelon eating contest winners from the Winterville Watermelon Festival.



International Fresh Produce Association – The Washington Conference – Queens getting ready for the Joy of Fresh reception on Capitol Hill.



Gracy sharing watermelon at the Joy of Fresh reception.



North Carolina Congresswoman Deborah Ross and Gracy meeting during The Washington Conference.



North Carolina State University College of Ag and Life Sciences Football Tailgate, The Howell Family, and Gracy.



North Carolina State University College of Ag and Life Sciences
Dean Garev Fox and Gracy at the annual Tailgate.



North Carolina State Fair Opening Ceremony Ribbon Cutting.



NC Senator Brent Jackson and Queen Gracy at the North Carolina State Fair Opening Ceremony.



Queen Gracy and Julie Mar hard at work during the Marine Corps Marathon.



Getting ready to meet runners at the Marine Corps Marathon



Gracy enjoyed sharing watermelon with runners and the Marines at the marathon.



State Queens enjoyed exploring Fort Worth, TX.



Texas Watermelon Convention banquet and crowning of their 2024 Queen.

Mar-del Report

As the 2023 Watermelon Promotion season comes to a close, we can't help but smile looking back on a successful year! Queen Brielle was able to finish out her promotion season with a few events.

The Delmarva Chicken festival is a staple event in Delmarva, and Queen Brielle was honored to be asked to judge the 100th Anniversary Delmarva Chicken Festival pageant. We spent the afternoon learning all about the poultry industry on Delmarva.

Some of our favorite watermelon events involve simply spending time with our watermelon family at a state convention. The Texas Watermelon Convention did not disappoint. Thank you to the Texas Watermelon Association for sponsoring a wonderful weekend and welcoming Queen Brielle and the Mar-Del Association.

Queen Brielle had the awesome opportunity to attend the Fresh Produce Association Conference in Washington D.C. It was a great experience for Brielle to learn about current agricultural topics and how to advocate for our farmers. Queen Brielle went back to D.C. to cheer on the Marine Marathon runners! Always a fun weekend put on by the Watermelon Promotion Board. Thank you for sponsoring such an impactful event.

We are excited to welcome everyone to our 2024 Mar-Del Watermelon Convention, kicking off the weekend of fun with the theme "Watermelon the Winner Circle." Hope to see you there. Wishing you and your family a safe and happy holiday season!



When in Texas! Enjoying a little sightseeing in Fort Worth, TX.



Congratulations to the 2024 Texas Watermelon Queen



Thank you to the Texas Watermelon Association for sponsoring a beautiful weekend!



Queen Brielle congratulating Mar-Del Coordinator at the finish line!



The Queens made signs to support Mar-Del Coordinator during the marathon.



Ready to hand out watermelon at the Marine Marathon in D.C.



Queen Brielle congratulating her parents in completing the 10k



Awesome group of ladies ready to pass out watermelon at the finish line



Queen Brielle attended the 100th anniversary of the Delmarva Chicken Festival.



Queen Brielle posing with one of the chickens after judging the 2023 Delmarva Chicken Festival pageant.



Conference in D.C.



Shaping the future of fresh with other state watermelon queens

Illiana Report

Greetings from Illiana!

We have kept Queen Abby busy these past few months as our growing season wrapped up, and we have started to prepare for the new year!

In August, Queen Abby had the opportunity to speak at the Latino Festival in Vincennes, Indiana. On behalf of Indiana and Illinois growers, she spoke in Spanish, thanking those who work on our operations and letting them know how much we value their hard work! She finished off her speech by sharing delicious Mouzin Brothers watermelon slices with the crowd!

Abby also had the honor of serving watermelon at the Indiana Military Museum Labor Day weekend. Each year, the museum puts on WWII battle reenactments, exhibits, and guest speakers to honor and thank our veterans. Everyone looks forward to a slice of locally grown watermelon after enjoying the museum festivities and conversing with the queen. It is truly an honor to be a part of the museum's Labor Day event each year and to serve those who risked their lives for our country.

Her final grocery store promotion of the year was a late August trip to Needler's Markets in Indianapolis, Indiana, to promote Mouzin Brothers watermelons! Special thanks to Brady Mouzin for organizing this promotion each year.

Thanks to the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB), Queen Abby had the opportunity to visit Washington, D.C. for the Marine Corps Marathon. Standing beside the other state queens and the NWPB, Abby helped pass out over 33k cups of watermelon to runners after crossing the finish line. This is many of the runners' first marathon, and it is a privilege to be a part of their celebration! Special thanks to Ms. Stephanie Barlow and Ms. Juliemar Rosado for organizing this monumental event every year and to Carrie Smith for accompanying Abby on her trip. The Marine Corps Marathon is truly a highlight of their reign!

Next on the agenda is preparing for our convention followed by the National Convention!

Please mark your calendars to attend the 34th Annual IWA convention on January 18-21, 2024 at the beautiful French Lick Springs Hotel in French Lick, Indiana. Visit illianawatermelon.com to register today!

Kind Regards, Lana Brothers (314)724-6305 iwapromocoordinator@gmail.com



Needler's Market in Indianapolis





Sharing a slice of

Thank you, Mouzin Brothers!



Exploring Washington D.C.



The White House watermelon style



Marine Corps Marathon.



Team Watermelon





Reign highlight, promoting in Washington, D.C.







Thank you National Watermelon Promotion Board!



A highlight of the finish festival is receiving watermelon from these smiling faces!

Gulf Coast Report

Hello watermelon friends!

We hope this message greets you with many blessings this holiday season. Julianna has had many wonderful opportunities to spread the knowledge of watermelons this season.

Julianna traveled to Washington D.C. to attend The International Fresh Produce Association's (IFPA) Washington Conference. During this trip, she advocated for the needs of the watermelon industry, including reforming H2A, prioritizing food safety, building a better Farm Bill, and improving nutrition and fresh produce education. While on Capitol Hill, Julianna met with Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith, Senator Tommy Tuberville, Senator Katie Britt, Senator John Kennedy, Representative Steve Scalise, Representative Barry Moore, and Representative Mike Rogers. All of these members of the U.S. Congress represent Alabama, Mississippi, or Louisiana.

Julianna attended The Marine Corps Marathon hosted by the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB). During this event, she passed out over 10,000 pounds of precut watermelon to over 30,000 runners. The MCM is the 3rd largest marathon in the country. Thank you, NWPB, for all your hard work in planning and executing such an incredible way to advocate for the industry.

She attended both of our border states conventions, Florida, and Texas. Julianna traveled to Orlando, Florida, for the Florida Watermelon Association Convention and Fort Worth, Texas, for the Texas Watermelon Association Convention. During this time, Julianna learned more about the wide impact each state has during their farming season. It is always a treat to spend time with other associations.

During the holiday season, many cities that have hosted Julianna for promotions invited her back for their Annual Christmas Parades. She continues to greet many watermelon fans in Enterprise, Auburn, and her hometown of Wicksburg, Alabama.

We hope you join us on February 9th and 10th, 2024, at the Beau Rivage Resort and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi. Our theme for this year's convention is Mardi Gras. With special events, our annual auction, and entertainment, we hope to see members and non-members join us for some sweet fun to support the Gulf Coast watermelon industry! Please visit our website https://www.gulfcoastwatermelon.org/ to register for our convention.

Queen Julianna is looking forward to representing the Gulf Coast Watermelon Association at the 2024 National Watermelon Association Convention and competing for the title of 2024 National Watermelon Association Queen. Thank you, Julianna, for your hard work and dedication to promoting the Gulf Coast Watermelon Association and the entire watermelon industry.

Many Blessings,
Sarah Jane Levine
Gulf Coast Watermelon Association
Promotion Coordinator
(337) 348-4465 gulfcoastwatermelonqueen@gmail.com



Queen Julianna standing in front of our Nation's Capital.



Senator Katie Britt - AL posing for a picture with the advocacy team.



Kendra Kennedy and Heather Raulerson at the Florida Convention at the International Paper booth.



Julianna pointing to the 18-wheeler filled with precut watermelon



Queens at the Marine Corps Marathon with Marines who are contributing to the race's success.



Texas, National, and Gulf Coast queens at Billy Bob's for an evening of entertainment.



Julianna and National Watermelon Association President, George, at the Texas Watermelon Convention.



Julianna riding in the Enterprise Christmas Parade with over 1,000 parade bystanders.

Georgia Report

Happy New Year and Greetings from Georgia!

The Georgia Watermelon Association (GWA) is hoping all of you will be joining us soon as we come together for the Georgia Watermelon Association Conference and Annual Meeting to be held on January 26-28, 2024, at the King and Prince Beach and Golf Resort on St. Simons Island, GA. Fellowship, education, and fun – that's what the GWA Convention is all about! The three-day event offers exhibits, networking, and educational sessions to help growers and allied industry members make plans for the upcoming season and maximize production and revenues. Please call our office to register at (706) 845-8575 or register online by visiting the GWA website.

Charley, our 2023 Ambassador, has had an impactful year promoting watermelon. She has embraced every opportunity within the program to increase sales and awareness for the watermelon industry. Charley's career skills in marketing, communications, social media, and business have equipped her to meet many people and help them find new ways to enjoy watermelon and learn more about it.

The 2023 Ambassador tour wrapped up with Charley joining Georgia producers and industry partners at the Tift County Agriculture Appreciation Day at the Georgia Museum of Agriculture, where she had the opportunity to spend time in conversation, hearing about their year of production and harvest. Just before the Christmas holidays, Charley was invited to join the Seedway and Enza Zaden Vegetable Team at the Annual Crackerjack Clay Shoot and lunch in South Georgia. Thank you to these companies for hosting this event and feeding us a delicious catered seafood lunch! Thank you to the National Watermelon Promotion Board for another well-organized and successful Marine Corps Marathon promotion!

Charley also attended and served watermelon at Camp WINGS, put on by Georgia Hospice for elementary-aged children who have recently lost a loved one. Other agricultural events she attended included judging the Mr. ABAC competition and the Georgia Ag Labor Forum, where she learned about the most recent rules and regulations facing our growers. As an ABAC Sigma Alpha Sorority past member, Charley arranged a meeting with their members of over 75 young women in attendance to speak with them about the GWA Brand Ambassador Scholarship opportunity and how they can apply to be the next 2024 Brand Ambassador.

We are just a short time away from traveling to Scottsdale, Arizona, where Charley is looking forward to representing the GWA at the 2024 National Watermelon Association (NWA) Convention. She has been busy preparing for the competition and is excited about the opportunity to compete for the title of the 2024 National Watermelon Association Queen.

The GWA is thankful for Charley's hard work and dedication during the last year! She is admired for her composure, work ethic, and, most of all, excellent ambassadorship representation throughout the 2023 GWA promotional year. Charley has been the perfect role model as the GWA is excited to embrace the new Brand Ambassador program, bringing positive innovation and a refreshing change in 2024!

We hope you are making plans to join us at the GWA Annual Meeting on January 26-28, 2024, in St. Simons Island, GA!

Wishing everyone a healthy, happy, and prosperous New Year!

Sincerely,

Dawn Cheplick, Promotions Coordinator Georgia Watermelon Association



Charley addresses over 75 Sigma Alpha members at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College and unveils the new Georgia Watermelon Association Brand Ambassador opportunities.



Charley at the Marine Corp Marathon getting ready for the runners to run in for watermelon!



Serving watermelon to the children at Camp WINGS certainly put a smile on these faces!



Sister Queens take a moment for a selfie at the MCM.



Charley and the newly appointed 2023 Mr. ABAC Such an honor to be a judge for the evening.



Charley tours the city and stops for a pose in front of the Washington Monument in D.C.

Florida Report

Greetings from the Sunshine State of Florida!

These past few months, Queen Alyssa and I have been really busy promoting something we all love: Florida Watermelon!!

On the first of October, we partnered up with Chef Justin from "Fresh from Florida" cutting and handing out watermelon at the Rock 'n' Roll Running Series Marathon Run in Clearwater Beach, Florida. An estimated crowd of over 8,000 people attended this two-day event. Everyone enjoyed a fresh slice cut of watermelon during this event. A huge "Thank You" to Veg-Keg for donating the bins of watermelons for this event.

The next week, Queen Alyssa and I traveled to Orlando, Florida, for our 55th Annual Florida Watermelon Convention. President Trey Miller and his wife, Katelyn, thank you for being a wonderful President and First Lady; we are so grateful for your dedication and passion these past few years for our association. We had seven beautiful young ladies this year competing for the 2024 Florida Watermelon Queen Title. Congratulations to Elaine Mason of Gainesville for being crowned the 2024 Florida Watermelon Queen. The first runner-up was Caroline Schapansky from Gainesville, Fla., and the second runner-up was Kayden Strickland from Fort Myers, Fla. Our Jubilee Award went to Caroline Schapansky. Also, congratulations go out to Mr. Adrian Land for being selected as our Second Vice-President. Congratulations to Rob and Kelly Gibson for receiving the "Outstanding Achievement Award" and our former executive director, Debbie Johnson, for receiving the "Lifetime Achievement Award." A special thank you to everyone that donated to purchase Queen Alyssa a watermelon necklace at the auction. It was a fun-filled weekend for everyone who attended.

The last weekend of October, Queen Alyssa and I headed to Washington, D.C. for the 48th Annual Marine Corps Marathon. Over 30,000 runners participate in this event each year, along with the support of their family and friends from all over the country. Thanks to the National Watermelon Promotion Board for organizing this event each year, allowing us to come and hand out cups of watermelon. This year, we handed out over 10,000 pounds of pre-cut watermelons to all the runners and their families and friends.

Then, the first week of November, we had a two-day promotion, first educating students about the Ag Industry from Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers to 4th graders at Ag Fest Day in Wauchula. Each day consisted of over 400 students enjoying a slice of Fresh from Florida Watermelons. Thanks to Rachel Chastain Syngo with Melon 1 and Scott Henderson. A big thank you to Melon 1 for providing the watermelons for each of these two-day events.

The Florida Watermelon Association and I would like to wish Queen Alyssa "Good Luck" as she competes for the 2024 National Watermelon Queen Title, being held in Scottsdale, Arizona. Queen Alyssa has done a wonderful job as our Florida Ambassador, promoting Florida Watermelons. Queen Alyssa is looking forward to seeing and visiting with everyone at the upcoming conventions this year in the next few months.

Until next time!

Debra Harrison
Florida Watermelon Promotions Coordinator

Cell: (863) 633-8306 Email: debra@flfwa.com



A fun morning at the Dog Run at the Rock 'n' Roll Event in Clearwater Beach, Florida.



In Clearwater Beach at the Rock 'n' Roll Running Series Event with Chef Justin, along with his assistant Rachel Rossi. Thanks for all of your help.



Queen Alyssa along with our seven beautiful contestants.



Congratulations to Phil and Amy Turner for winning the grand prize "The Traeger Grill" on Friday Casino Night



Queen Alyssa and our Florida Watermelon Association officers or Saturday morning.



"Outstanding Service Award."



On behalf of ASG receiving the "Lifetime Achievement Award" in memory of our Executive Director Ms. Debbie Johnson.



Congratulations, second runner-up Kaydan Strickland, 2024 Florida Watermelon Queen Elanie Mason, and first runner-up Caroline Schapansky.



Our 2024 Florida Watermelon Queen Elanie Mason with our Florida Watermelon Association Officers: Jenna Brown – Executive Director, Debra Harrison – Queen Promotions Coordinator, Trey Miller – Chairman of the Board, Rob Gibson – President, Carrie Thomas – 1st Vice-President, Adrian Land – Second Vice-President.



Our newly crowned 2024 Elanie Mason and our beautiful Florida Watermelon "Has-Been's."



All smiles with Queen Alyssa at the Marine Corp. Marathon in Washington, D.C.



An honor to get to chat with these "Marines" in Washington, D.C



A huge thank you to the National Watermelon Promotion Board and everyone there that handed out 17 pallets of watermelon, which consisted of 10,000 pounds of watermelon.



Queen Alyssa visiting with the new National Watermelon Association Executive Director, George Szczepanski.



Queen Alyssa spending the day attending the 5th Annual "Ag Forum" at the Florida Gulf Coast University. Thank you to Melon 1.



"Ag Fest Day" in Wauchula at the Hardee County Cattleman Arena. Thank you, Scott Henderson for having us and sharing Fresh from Florida Watermelons with all the students.



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