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Fall 2023

Official Newsletter of the NATIONAL WATERMELON ASSOCIATION

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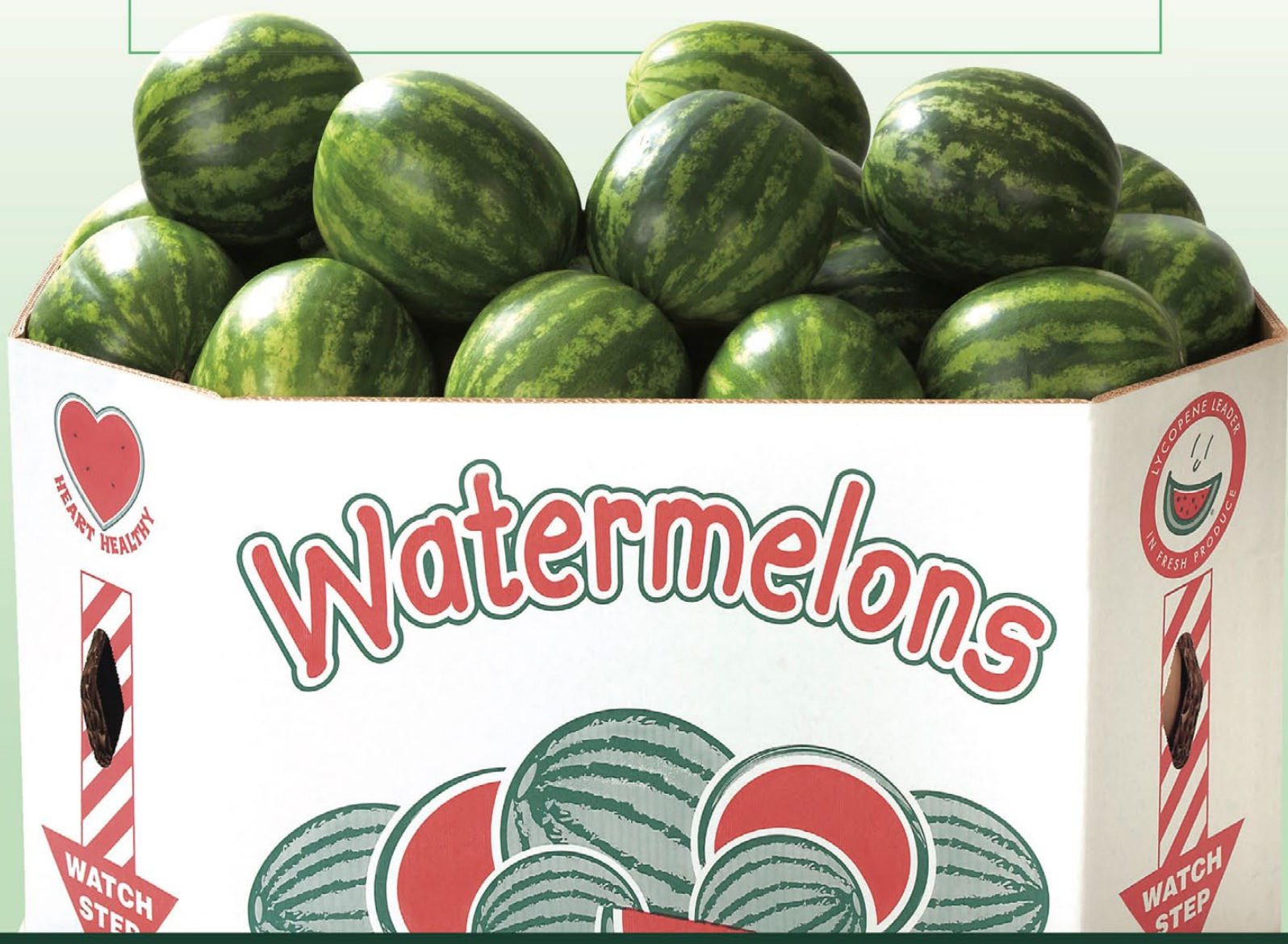

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Thanks for picking up this issue of the Vineline, and welcome to Fall!

Fall means many things for us, in our fields, homes and families. For the watermelon industry, in a big way it means we're moving beyond the heart of our domestic season, with fall harvest and late season deals in front of us. Fall is certainly a time for celebrating the harvest, giving thanks, but right now, for many, this is also Back-to-School season, and we're celebrating that here on the Vineline.

With back-to-school comes a lot to learn! In this issue, we'll spend a lot of time looking at how our Watermelon Queens have been representing us and promoting our products over the past few months, during a hot, busy Summer. The National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) will take us "back-to-school" by teaching us about trends in foodservice, and challenging us to think differently about how we take advantage of what's happening in that space. We'll travel around the country to a few of the Universities that are doing research on watermelons, and check in on the progress they're making as a result of grant funding from NWA. In our advocacy section, we'll take some time thinking about how back-to-school season is also back-in-session for Congress after their August recess, and this session will include a very busy Farm Bill negotiation. In a NEW section in this edition of the Vineline, we'll shine a light on some of the philanthropic work that our members are engaged in, and how they've been able to give to worthy charities through the NWA auction- and how that is positively impacting the lives of members of our extended Watermelon Family. There's a lot to be proud of, and we hope to continue this section in future issues.

We're proud to bring you this next edition of the Vineline (myself, and the NWA Staff team, Monica, Tami, Kerri and Queen Olivia). The content we've compiled for this issue of the magazine is a chance to cover a lot of subjects, learn something new, and to take the time in-between harvests to learn something and grow, not unlike the beginning of a new school year. We know that this is a unique time for our members. Maybe a chance to slow down (although we know that's not the way in this industry), a chance to head home for some, and a chance to begin planning for many. For us in the Watermelon Association side of things, we're gearing up for the season of meetings, conventions, and engagement with the membership- and in many ways, it reminds me of starting at a new school- full of possibility, excitement, and that feeling in the pit of your stomach that something big is about to happen.

Thanks for coming on this journey with us here at NWA, and we hope this issue of the Vineline brings you something to learn this back-to-school season.

Sincerely,

George F. Szczepanski
Executive Director
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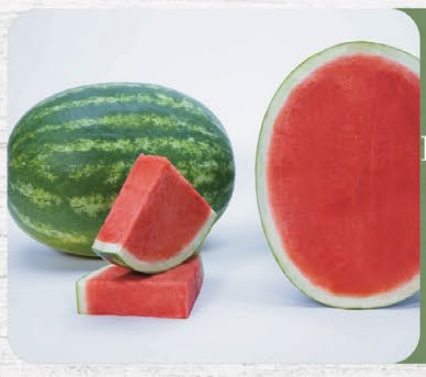

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National Report

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 9-13

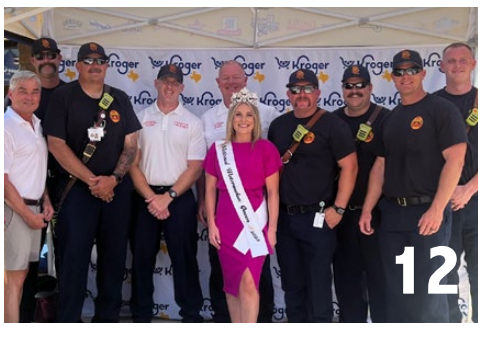
o Thank you for this sponsorship!
- ☐ National Watermelon Promotion Board

• Kicking off the Georgia Tours in 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 14-21

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 Szczepanski 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, 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.



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National Report

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 22-31

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 32-40

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 41-43

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 44-46

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 47-49

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

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National Pictures

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. Pics 51

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 51-57

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 Co.
- ☐ 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 Szczepanski 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 organized 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

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National Pictures

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 Mrs. Terra Eby for a wonderful week promoting watermelon. Pics 58-67

o Thanks to the MarDel Watermelon Association for sponsoring this event!

☐ MarDel Watermelon Association
☐ Mr. and Mrs. Trey Miller with Melon 1
☐ Mr. Chuck Elam and Mr. Chris Hogg of Seedway
☐ Mrs. Heather Raulerson of International Paper

• 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 68-70

• 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 71-81

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

☐ HM Clause
☐ BASF
☐ Hazera
☐ Sakata
☐ Enza Zaden

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Vineline Research News

Introduction

In this edition of Vineline Magazine, we've decided to continue our back-to-school theme by spotlighting a few of the university research supported by N.W.A. We've had the privilege of funding research projects in universities across the country, and this school year promises to be just as transformative. Dive into the latest updates on the impactful research initiatives we proudly supported in the past year. Keep reading to get updates from the researchers that are shaping the future of the watermelon industry through their innovative work!

Grafted Watermelons in California

Zheng Wang, PhD, Vegetable Crops Advisor

UC CE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA Agriculture and Natural Resources UC Cooperative Extension

As a Vegetable Crops Farm Advisor for the University of California Cooperative Extension, I cover the California's northern San Joaquin Valley, including San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Merced Counties. These three counties constitute 40% of the state watermelon acreage attributed to the Mediterranean climate with a wide swing of day-night temperature. A few large-scale producers (each produces between 900 and 1,500 acres) as well as numerous smaller ones with an average acreage between 100 and 200 contribute to the total 4,000 acres of seedless watermelons. The overall goal of my applied research and extension with watermelon is to evaluate and implement existing and innovative production practices to sustain fruit yield, quality, plant health, and increase grower's profit potential. Among a variety of production practices, grafting is my main focus.

Grafted watermelon production has attracted noticeable attention from watermelon growers, seed suppliers, and researchers in the US. In California, the planted acreage of grafted watermelons increased from less than 200 in 2018 to more than 2,000 in 2022. Majority of the grafted acreage locates in the northern San Joaquin Valley. Growers reply on grafting to combat soil-borne diseases, especially fungal pathogens, save pesticide application to cope with sustainable production, extend the harvest period for greater yields, and enhance fruit quality against certain physiological disorders. As the practice being widely implemented, questions on how to maximize the effects of grafting and manage differently from the traditional system emerge. Therefore, my applied research directions focus on three aspects: 1) explore the BMP for growing grafted watermelons and identify differences from the conventional system, 2) test various rootstock-scion combinations to meet production needs, and 3) control soil-borne fungal pathogens with grafting and bio-based preventive pesticide.

Since 2019, I have been collaborating with the NWA, local growers, grafting and transplant nurseries, federal and state funding agencies, university academics, and seed industry to identify the best in-row spacing for growing full-size grafted seedless watermelons, assist growers to implement smart irrigation tools for effective irrigation and fertilization management, recommend additional rootstocks to improve production, and maintain watermelon yield under high pathogenic pressure with the use of grafting and biofungicide. With the support of NWA, I implemented rootstock variety trials to evaluate horticultural parameters of various rootstock-scion combinations, explore the best irrigation and nitrogen fertilization practices using decision-support tools, and identify the differences of cultural practices from non-grafted plants. In 2023, the total acreage of grafted watermelon in California has exceeded 2,300. Currently, most grafted fields in this area yield 15-25% more than the traditional system, and growers are benefitting from the economic potential after learning to reduce costs for grafted transplants, irrigation, and fertilizers.

UCDAVIS AGGIES

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Increasing Pollinator Activity in Watermelon with the Use of Fake Flower Lures

Xavier Martini, Thomson Paris

Seeded watermelons require a minimum of eight bee pollination visits for fruit set, but this number may change for different cultivars. Although still needing verification, estimates of the number of bee pollinator visits required to produce seedless watermelons range from 16 to 24. The pollen of seedless watermelon plants is inviable because they are triploid. As a result, they require pollen from a seeded diploid pollinizer flower of a seeded melon that is interplanted among the seedless watermelons. However, the female flower will abort if bees do not adequately transfer seeded watermelon pollen, resulting in fruit production delays and yield decline. Therefore, fields growing seedless watermelons must have approximately 20 to 30% seeded watermelons to ensure fruit set.

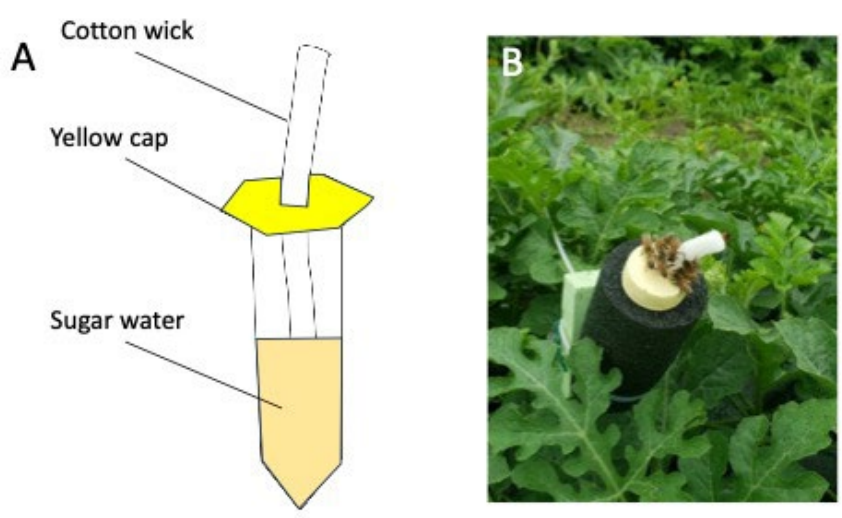
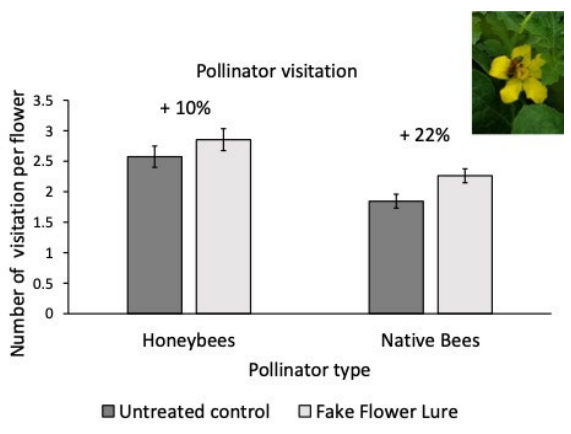
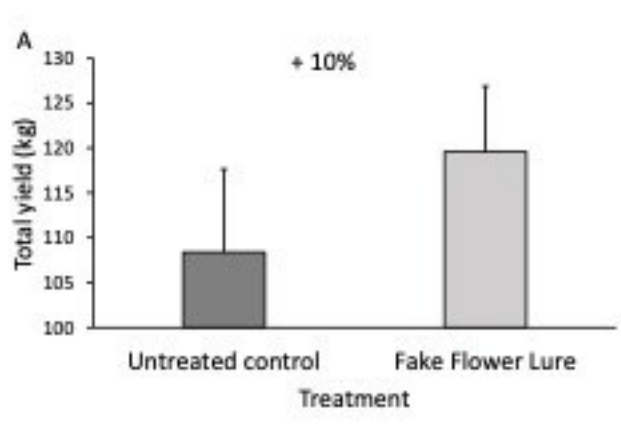
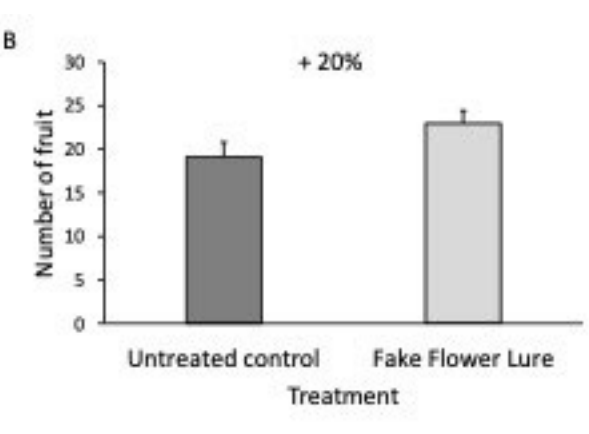


Figure 1: (A) schematic diagram of the fake flower lure, (B) aggregation of honeybees on the lure.

Considering the importance of pollination to watermelon production, growers face several issues. First, the limitedly managed bee populations and declining native bee populations will also visit the competing floral blooms of weeds, native vegetation, and other commercial crops instead of the watermelon blossoms. Second, some researchers have suggested that the seedless watermelon blossom is less attractive than seeded watermelon blossoms based on the number of pollinator visits to seedless and seeded watermelon blossoms.







This year, our laboratory was awarded funding from the National Watermelon Association. We experimented with a new technique to increase the pollination of seedless watermelons using an inexpensive, easy-to-build, fake flower lure. The lure comprises a container filled with sugary water, a yellow cap, and a long cotton wick dived into the container and the sugary water (Fig. 1A). As the cotton absorbs the sugar water, it becomes available to the bees. The yellow cap acts as a visual cue to attract the bees. We observed a significant attraction of honeybees on the lures (Fig. 1B). We also noticed an increase in watermelon flower visitations when the lures were placed in proximity to the watermelon plot. We found that in the presence of the fake flower lures, the number of visits to watermelon flowers increased by 10% for honeybees and 22% for native bees (Fig. 2). This resulted in an increase of 10% in total yield per plot (Fig. 3A), and an increase of 20% in the number of fruits per plot (Fig. 3B). The experiment will be repeated this fall to confirm our results. Still, this method could be a simple and inexpensive way for growers to increase pollinator visitation significantly.

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Bhupinder Jatana

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College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences

Fusarium Wilt Defense in Watermelons using Arbuscular Mycorrhizae Fungi and Grafted Carolina Strongback

Watermelon (Citrullus lanatus) is America's favorite melon with the harvesting of 101,800 acres of watermelon crop valuing $535 million US dollars in 2021. Four states, Florida, Georgia, Texas, and California account for 80% of the total watermelon crop in the US. In 2022, a total of 3100 acres of watermelon crop was planted in South Carolina, valued at 31.37 million US dollars. The South Carolina watermelon season begins with planting in March and April and lasts until June in some areas. Watermelon is a warm-season crop that grows best at average air temperatures between 70- and 85 degrees Fahrenheit. This year was especially devastating for watermelon growers due to fusarium wilt, the infection of which is favored by this year's lower-than-normal temperatures and higher than normal precipitation in South Carolina. In 2023, an on-farm experiment was conducted to evaluate the utilization of arbuscular mycorrhizae fungi (fungi that live in symbiotic association with plant roots) for fusarium wilt management in watermelon. The watermelon nursery was innoculted with arbuscular mycorrhizae fungi culture and innoculated nursery was transplanted in the field. Carolina Strongback grafted nursery was also evaluated for fusarium wilt management. Even though there are reported literature that shows that arbuscular mycorrhizae fungi can help lower the fusarium wilt severity in watermelon, in our experiment we did not see that this year. However, this could be due to comparatively cooler and wet environmental conditions this year, which can be favorable for the fusarium wilt infection in watermelon. Arbuscular mycorrhizae fungi inoculated nursery had higher tissue phosphorus content, which is as expected as arbuscular mycorrhizae fungi are known to aid plants in phosphorus uptake from soils. Carolina strongback grafted nursery performed best with respect to fusarium wilt management. Approximate marketable fruit yield of 40,000 pounds per acre was observed in Carolina Stringback grafted plots and fusarium wilt disease severity index of less than 10% as compared to control plots which had fusarium wilt disease severity index of more than 95%. Even though Carolina Strongback grafted nursery is effective against fusarium wilt, the grafted nursery is more expensive as compared to a regular watermelon nursery. This study needs to be repeated for more years to draw any conclusions.

Acknowledgements: This research was funded by National Watermelon Association.

Vineline NWPB News

Big Changes in Foodservice and What it Means for Watermelon on Menus

The National Restaurant Association's foodservice sales forecast for 2023 is $997 billion. That's not a small opportunity when America's favorite melon was on 14% of menus in 2022. Just like the 2007 to 2009 recession, 2020 was a major re-set for the foodservice industry. Many shifts (can we not say pivot anymore, please!) are starting to reverse, such as the increase of third-party delivery and the introduction of ghost kitchens, but many others are continuing to drive change and growth in the industry.

The 2023 Q3 Kenetic 12 Emergence research fielded input from more than 100 emerging and growing foodservice chains from across the country. What bubbled to the top are 10 big changes underway in foodservice now:

- Simplification: Phase II
- Focus on Operational Execution & Consistency
- Consumers' Definition of Value
- Evolution of Supplier Support
- Smarter Kitchen Equipment
- Focus on Driving Traffic
- Demand for Customization
- Making it Easier to Order, Pay & Pick-up
- Upscaling of Take-out Packaging
- Cohesive Staff Engagement

National Watermelon Promotion Board

But what do these have to do with watermelon in foodservice? Looking at those that are focused on operations, quite a lot. After years of scaling menus back, simplification is not just about the menu now. Business models, store design and innovation cycles are all being fine-tuned, allowing more space for menu growth. The Watermelon Board offers foodservice operators custom culinary support that fits their innovation cycle, to place more watermelon on menus.

For example, the Board can remotely review pantry lists and build menu items, adding only watermelon to the chain's SKUs. Taking it a step further, the Board can visit foodservice test kitchens, find the perfect spot on the line back of house, and talk through the right delivery packaging (upscaling packaging is an understatement with some chains) for the menu item. From a training perspective, there are resources highlighting cutting and yield, including moving between watermelon sizes, to nail the operational efficiency and consistency operators need for the consistent quality that's key to remain a favorite with their customers.

These elements play into the evolution of supplier support. Although not a foodservice supplier, the Watermelon Board offers not only product training and innovative inspiration but also research. This helps tell the story of why watermelon should be on more menus. After all, the Board's consumer at foodservice research in 2022 highlighted, 72% of consumers agreed "Fresh watermelon is under appreciated, and restaurants should be doing more to use fresh watermelon in new and interesting ways." In addition to training back of house staff, the Board can excite front of house employees with sales contests, watermelon themed giveaways and, of course, fun facts about watermelon. When both sides of the house are engaged in watermelon menu items, customers notice and order more.

What about restaurant customers? The Board invests in foodservice as another way to reach those customers and grow demand. As mentioned above, the growth of watermelon on menus is likely driven and supported by consumer interest. Most consumers believe watermelon can be an on-trend ingredient, and operators agree. Of consumers surveyed in 2022, 60% believe watermelon is a healthy fruit option. Watermelon does not lack customer accolades! It can help drive traffic into restaurants. The Watermelon Board offers custom menu promotion support that can drive more purchases through social media, individual chain apps, and payment systems. All of these can be platforms for watermelon messaging, giveaways, and contests. Once in the restaurant, signage can include the Board's website logo, nutrition information and more.

Ultimately foodservice is another way to increase demand and reach consumers. Nearly 70% of consumers told us foodservice experience has an impact on retail purchase. Although there is little the industry can do about AI advancements in kitchen equipment, the Watermelon Board continues to see the opportunity to increase watermelon on foodservice menus and will continue to reach this audience through education and inspiration, year-round.

Vineline Advocacy News

Back in Session

Advocating for the Farm Bill via the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance

Sticking with our back-to-school theme, the fall in America means back in session. Around the country, schools are back in session, but on Capitol Hill, Congress is back in session. Even with the divided Congress, there are a number of pieces of must pass legislation that are considered. Each session, that includes appropriations and defense spending, that fund the government and military respectively. Once every five years Congress must pass the farm bill, a critical piece of legislation that allocates funding for America's agricultural sector. This fall, we are in a critical phase of Farm Bill negotiations. NWA is a vocal advocate in Farm Bill negotiations, primarily through our seat on the Steering Committee of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance.

The Farm Bill

The Farm Bill, a cornerstone of U.S. agricultural policy, is a comprehensive piece of legislation that shapes and governs various aspects of the nation's agricultural, food, and rural policies. Passed by Congress approximately every five years, the Farm Bill addresses a wide range of issues beyond traditional farming practices, reflecting the interconnectedness of agriculture, nutrition, conservation, trade, and rural development. The Farm Bill encompasses multiple titles, each focusing on distinct areas such as crop insurance, commodity programs, nutrition assistance programs (like SNAP), conservation initiatives, rural development, research funding, trade promotion, and more. This legislation holds a significant influence over the livelihoods of farmers, the health of rural communities, and the well-being of consumers across the country.

At its core, the Farm Bill seeks to balance the needs of agricultural producers with those of consumers, while also addressing environmental concerns and promoting sustainable practices. It aims to provide a safety net for farmers during times of market volatility, ensure access to nutritious food for vulnerable populations, support land and water conservation efforts, and encourage innovation within the agricultural sector. The Farm Bill reflects the evolving landscape of agriculture and society, responding to emerging challenges and opportunities. As it undergoes periodic renewal and amendment, the Farm Bill is a product of complex negotiations, reflecting the diverse interests of stakeholders ranging from farmers and ranchers to environmentalists, nutrition advocates, and trade partners. Ultimately, the Farm Bill stands as a testament to the intricate interplay between agriculture, economics, policy, and the well-being of the nation as a whole.

The Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance

Established in 2006, the SCFBA emerged as a collaborative effort among a multitude of agricultural stakeholders, including grower associations, trade groups, and industry representatives. United by the shared goal of elevating specialty crops to the forefront of agricultural discourse, these organizations recognized the need for a consolidated voice to address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by their respective sectors. Through collective action, the SCFBA facilitates a platform for dialogue, negotiation, and advocacy, ensuring that the interests of specialty crop producers are effectively represented in the policy-making process.

Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance Priorities and Recommendations

The work of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance is handed to congressional leaders through a set of recommendations that are prioritized according to a set of core principles that were crafted by the members of the alliance:

• Healthy Americans: Expanding access and availability to safe, wholesome, healthy and affordable foods, as well as trees, flowers and plants, will encourage lifelong healthy eating habits, mental and physical well-being, and help address national priorities such as obesity, heart disease, and food and nutrition insecurity.

• Competitiveness and Sustainability: In recognition of its significance to American agriculture, the American food supply, and the communities it supports across the United States, a proportional share of Farm Bill resources and mandatory spending should be allocated to specialty crop priorities.

• Trade and Foreign Competition: Establishing a competitive playing field for American specialty crop producers includes assisting American producers with unfair foreign competition, promoting American specialty crops in foreign markets and eliminating trade barriers that discriminate against American specialty crop exports.

• Research and Innovation: A sustained federal investment into research and innovation must be of a meaningful scale to catalyze opportunities for the industry, alleviate existing challenges and propel the U.S. specialty crop industry to a new level of global competitiveness.

• Natural Resources and Climate: Recognizing the diverse nature and unique challenges involved in specialty crop production enhances the ability of specialty crop producers to participate fully in all USDA conservation programs as well as any initiatives to address global climate change.

While many of the recommendations have the potential to benefit the Watermelon industry some of the most correct and relevant can be found in the Title VII Research recommendations. Among these recommendations are requests to secure and increase funding to the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) and Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP), which may be familiar to this group. SCRI funds support researchers at the US Vegetable Laboratory (that we have featured in previous editions of the Vineline) who are investigating solutions to plant pathogen challenges for the watermelon industry. SCBGP funding supports state level programs that support some of our own members. While these are traditional programs, the alliance is also supporting novel projects, like a recommendation to create new, standalone programs that prioritize mechanization and automation for specialty crops- building a long-term strategy to address rising labor and input costs for our industry.

Vineline Charity News

Giving Back with NWA

The National Watermelon Association takes great pride in partnering with member companies dedicated to making a positive impact on society. Through the generosity of NWA Members, we have had the privilege of supporting vital philanthropic organizations. In this issue of the Vineline, we'll dig a little deeper into support of two of the organizations we've been able to support via member donations at our annual convention: the Moffitt Cancer Center and the Global Foundation for Peroxisomal Disorders.

Our commitment to these causes aligns seamlessly with our values as a Watermelon Family, to not only cultivate and promote the watermelon industry, but also to nurture the well-being of the communities we serve. The Moffitt Cancer Center's groundbreaking research and treatment advancements in the fight against cancer resonate deeply with our members, as they recognize the importance of supporting the quest for a cancer-free future. Similarly, the Global Foundation for Peroxisomal Disorders holds a special place in our hearts, as it strives to improve the lives of those affected by rare, life-altering disorders. Our member companies are proud to contribute to their efforts and make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who need it most.

Together, the National Watermelon Association and our dedicated members are honored to support these philanthropies, fostering a culture of giving and compassion within our industry. We look forward to continuing these partnerships and creating a brighter, healthier future for all.

Watermelon for Warriors: Support for the Global Foundation for Peroxisomal Disorders

"A few weeks after Molly Kate was born (October 2021), she was diagnosed with a rare Genetic disorder, Zellweger Spectrum Disorder (ZSD), a type of Peroxisomal disorder. We were given a limited life expectancy immediately for our new baby girl, which was scary for us as first-time parents. Soon after, we found the Global Foundation of Peroxisomal Disorders (GFPD) and they provided us with resources for Molly Kate and a loving group of parents of other ZSD children to help us navigate our new challenges. Through the GFPD, we have access to scientist and doctors who are working daily to find a cure for Peroxisomal disorders, support groups for parents and extended family, as well as the opportunity to participate in advocacy for at the local, state, and federal levels for our children and individuals affected. I am so grateful to see two things I value so much, The GFPD and The Watermelon industry, come together to bring awareness of this rare disorder." -Sarah Heath, Robinson Fresh

Cancer Research, Care and Outcomes: Support for the Moffitt Cancer Center

"10 years ago, my Mema (Becky Chastain) was diagnosed with incurable Melanoma cancer. Shortly after our family was introduced to the Moffitt Cancer Center. The team there has saved her life, and offered solutions when others couldn't. In her honor, and in honor of all of our friends and family that Moffitt has since treated, Melon 1 is so proud to partner with the NWA to donate to them each year." -Rachel Syngo, Melon 1

The NWA is proud to support these organizations through our members. If you'd like to learn more or find information about giving, we encourage you to visit their website:

- **Moffitt Cancer Center: moffitt.org**
- **Global Foundation for Peroxisomal Disorders: thegfpd.org**

Texas Report

Hello to all our watermelon family. I hope everyone is well and getting some reprieve from the heat this summer. As I write this, the Rio Grande Valley and some parts of south Texas are finally getting much needed rain. I pray that everyone has been able to have enough good weather to have a great harvest season and a profitable year.

Queen Savannah and I have been busy this summer with quite a few in-store promotions with our wonderful friends at HEB. One was in Belton, Texas, then we also did some in Kerrville, Spring, and Houston. Savannah has done a great job educating customers in how to pick out a watermelon and she is wonderful with the kids who love to have their picture taken with her. We also had an invitation from a Kroger store in Prosper, Texas for an event that they called their "Freshtival". It was a great day where Queen Savannah and our National Watermelon Queen, Olivia, got to do things like pass out samples, educate consumers, and pass out recipe cards and coloring pages to the kids. They also helped with the watermelon eating contest, put on fun games with prizes for the kids, and did an on-camera interview with the local news. The mayor and others also showed up to meet our queens and say "Hello". We certainly look forward to going again next year and maybe visiting a few more Kroger stores along the way.

Another invitation we received was from the Froberg Family in Alvin, Texas. They had their first ever watermelon festival on the weekend after July 4th. Savannah and I enjoyed meeting the Froberg family and all the wonderful people of Alvin and the surrounding areas of Houston while we helped the customers in their market. At the festival, which was a two-day event, there were plenty of watermelon games, a watermelon eating contest, a rind throwing contest, and there was a concert one afternoon. There were also plenty of delicious watermelon treats and good food from the local food trucks. We'd like to say a special "thank you" to Kristin Warner and Syngenta for helping sponsor this and for introducing us to this wonderful family.

We were very grateful to have received an invitation from Mrs. Warner to visit the men and women who are a part of Camp Hope in Houston. It is run by the PTSD Foundation of America. Camp Hope provides alternative housing and programs for over one hundred combat veterans suffering from PTSD. We had the privilege of serving the veterans and staff lunch in honor of Rob Warner. Thank you to DiIorio Farms for providing the delicious watermelon.

Finally, we truly look forward to seeing everyone at our Texas Watermelon Convention in Ft. Worth, Texas on November 9th-11th. Go to our website (https://www.texaswatermelons.com) to register or you can email me for help or information.

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

Customers love the watermelon samples.

Two beauties in Belton, TX.

We loved getting to know the Froberg family.

Happy Kroger customers

Kids are excited to receive the stickers.

Queen Savannah and National Queen, Olivia, loved the Kroger promotion.

Queen Savannah enjoyed meeting this young gentleman, Dusty Froberg.

Meeting the Mayor, David Bristol.

Queen Savannah had fun with this customer at HEB.

A very hot day, but a fun watermelon eating contest

Some of the sponsors with Queen Savannah at Camp Hope.

Queen Savannah with the employees at the Kerrville HEB.

Having a great time at Froberg's Farm Watermelon Festival.

Queen Savannah, Tony Muro, and Kristin Warner at Camp Hope.

South Carolina Report

What a busy season the South Carolina Watermelon Association has had. May included field days for Rudolph Gordon Elementary, Mitchell Road Elementary, Southside Christian School, Monarch Elementary, and Oakview Elementary in the Upstate.

June and July included over twenty in-store promotions for Food Lion, Ingles, and Harris Teeter stores in Greenville, Simpsonville, Columbia, Hilton Head and Charleston.

Queen Ansley welcomed National Queen, Olivia Johnson and National Coordinator, Kerri Wiggins for SC farm visits on June 21-24. These visits included: Melon 1 in Barnwell, Jason Still Farms in Denmark, Williams Farms in Islandton, Willis Produce in Islandton, Coosaw Farms in Fairfax, Delk Produce in Blackville, Sandifer & Sons in Blackville, and Kinard Farms in Lodge. We were treated to a delicious luncheon at Still Farm and also at Kinard Farms during the tour. Kendra Kennedy treated the group to a dinner at Low Country Seafood after a long day of farm visits. The girls also enjoyed the Hampton Watermelon Festival and Parade in Hampton.

The SC Farmers Market hosted a watermelon cutting in Columbia, SC, on June 30th. Red and yellow melons were served.

On July 1st, NC Queen Gracy Peterson, and NC Coordinator, Sharon Rogers, met us in Duncan, SC, for the annual Watermelon Crawl Festival. Executive Director of the SC Watermelon Association, Blakely Johnson Atkinson, joined us for this event and transported the bin of watermelons that were cut and served to the visitors. Live music, rides, vendors, and watermelon eating contests were a huge success. Gracy, Sharon, and Blakely joined us again in Black Mountain, NC, for a staff appreciation day at Ingles Corporate Office. Will Willis of Willis Produce provided the melons for this function.

Blackville Field Day at the Clemson Extension Office in Blackville was held on July 13th. Gilbert Miller provided another very informative session and field experience with Queen Ansley driving a tractor and laying plastic in the field. A delicious meal was served after these events.

The Pageland Watermelon Festival and Parade was held on July 23rd, and Queen Ansley was driven in the parade by Rick Nicholson. Rick has been our driver for many years for this event and we want to extend our thanks for his time each year.

Melons were cut at the River Dogs Baseball Game in Charleston on July 25th. Queen Ansley was honored with throwing out the first pitch.

The month of August has been filled with College Football Teams. Melons have been served at practices for the following teams: Clemson Tigers, USC Gamecocks, SC State Bulldogs, Furman Paladins, and The Citadel Bulldogs.

The Fireflies Baseball Team had melons served on August 20th, in Lexington. Queen Ansley again was honored with throwing out the first pitch.

To say that this summer has been packed is an understatement. Melons have flown out of the bins and into consumer hands on every level. We are looking forward to the promotions that are left and hope that all of our watermelon family has enjoyed a successful season.

Sincerely,
Ann Bryant
SC Promotions Coordinator
864-303-3995
abryant028@charter.net

Successful year for school cuttings.

Jason Still Farms, Denmark, SC.

Harris Teeter!

Delk Produce, Blackville, SC.

Food Lion!

Sandifer & Sons, Blackville, SC.

Ingles Corporate Office staff cutting, Black Mountain, NC.

Willis Produce, Islandton, SC.

SC Farmers Market, Columbia, SC.

Melon 1, Barnwell, SC.

Watermelon Crawl Festival, Duncan, SC.

Kinard Farms, Lodge, SC.

Field Day, Blackville, SC.

Coosaw Farms, Fairfax, SC.

River Dogs Baseball, Charleston, SC.

Williams Farms, Islandton, SC.

North Carolina Report

What a busy summer, filled with watermelon promotions and special events! Queen Gracy has covered North Carolina from the coast to the mountains sharing her love of watermelon. In-store promotions, farmers markets, festivals, farm tours, youth camps, consumer events, and great media coverage have kept her very busy.

Our two favorite retail partners, Ingles and Food Lion in-store promotions gave Queen Gracy an opportunity to help customers learn more about selecting the very best melon for their family. She even made a stop at the Ingles Corporate offices along with Willis Produce and the South Carolina Watermelon Association to meet all the employees behind their great stores.

Our partnership with the Carolina Mudcats baseball team helped to keep watermelon top of mind with their fans during the season. Queen Gracy threw out the first pitch at two games, and we celebrated watermelon day at a game by sharing watermelon slices with fans and hosting watermelon themed games between innings. The High Point Rockers baseball team also had Gracy throwing out the first pitch at their Ag Night game.

Working with the NC Department of Agriculture, Gracy hosted "Watermelon Day" at several state farmers markets where she shared watermelon slices, met market customers and answered all their watermelon questions. Festivals kept her traveling, the Fair Bluff Watermelon Festival was lots of fun and the 38th Annual NC Watermelon Festival in Murfreesboro, NC was a true celebration of everything watermelon! For the July 4th holiday, Queen Gracy had the pleasure to work alongside South Carolina Queen Ansley, at the Duncan Watermelon Festival. Both ladies were very busy sharing watermelon samples and helping to host contests during the event.

We had a visit from the National Queen Olivia Johnson and Kerri Wiggins. Queen Gracy and Queen Olivia toured seven farms, met with several industry representatives, and enjoyed interacting with consumers at the State Farmers Market Watermelon Day. Thank you to all the sponsors that made this trip possible.

Gracy enjoyed being a part of several youth summer camps this season and interacting with all the young people to teach them about the NC watermelon industry. Howling with the Pack at North Carolina State University, Deans Farm Market Watermelon Camp and the Lenoir County Cooperative Extension Watermelon Day camp.

Television and radio appearances allowed Gracy the opportunity to inform thousands of consumers about watermelon. In a segment on Queen City@3 in Charlotte, Gracy and host David discussed the steps in selecting the best watermelon and prepared a watermelon salad. On Star TV, Queen Gracy was a guest on the At the Table series where she and host Sydney prepared several sweet and savory watermelon recipes on two episodes. To highlight NC watermelon season, Gracy was interviewed by WPTF radio in Raleigh, NC.

We have more events on our calendar, see all the details in the next issue!

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

Queen Gracy and Sydney filming the At the Table – TV Show

Queen Gracy and Kaitlin Glover of Rob's Fresh Produce at the Midtown Farmers Market Watermelon Day

WBTV Queen City@3 television show hosts with Queen Gracy

Watermelon fun at the High Point Rockers baseball game

Ingles Market in-store promotion in Asheville, NC

Carolina Mudcats mascots, Muddy and Lil Muddy, helping Queen Gracy celebrate watermelon day

Ingles Market Corporate Office Watermelon Day

Queen Gracy and the North Carolina Watermelon Association President, Frank Howell with his family at the Carolina Mudcats watermelon day

Food Lion in-store promotion in Raleigh NC

The State Farmers Market biggest watermelon contest winner, 182 pounds grown by Andrew Vail!

Queen Gracy and South Carolina Queen Ansley sharing watermelon at the Duncan Watermelon Festival on July 4th

Tour of Fresh Pik Produce with James Sharp in Wilson, NC

38th Annual North Carolina Watermelon Festival in Murfreesboro, NC

Fann Farms tour in Salemburg, NC

Joe Jones with Seedway escorted Queen Gracy in the Fair Bluff Watermelon Festival parade

Our stops at Jackson Farming Co. in Autryville, NC are always lots of fun.

Mar-del Report

Another watermelon season is in the books and we have some awesome promotions to show for it! Queen Brielle has been very active this Summer at local fairs, day camps, queen tour week, grocery stores and many other local events.

Mar-Del watermelon season started off on the hottest week of the Summer. Queen Brielle visited the Delaware State Fair. She participated in the Governor's day and presented a demonstration on how to make a watermelon pizza.

The Mar-Del Association proudly sponsored Chad Chastain in the Poconos Race. Queen Brielle had a great weekend serving watermelon and supporting Chad.

One of our favorite events of the year is the Wright's Market Watermelon Festival. A day filled with watermelon games, a Watermelon Princess contest and of course, WATERMELON.

August brought us right into Queen tour week and hosting state and national watermelon queens. It was a busy week with the Rotary Crab feast, Baltimore concert in the park and Rehoboth beach boardwalk.We appreciate all the support and donations of watermelons.

Queen Brielle was able to attend the New York "Protect your Melon" race campaign. She passed out watermelons and attended a grocery store promotion with Ross Chastain.

One of the last bigger promotions of the Summer was serving a meal at the Ronald McDonald house. The Mar-Del Watermelon Association was honored to serve the families who were staying in the house. Watermelon was on the menu and a favorite.

We try to hold onto Summer as long as we can. Queen Brielle will be hosting the 5th Annual Watermel Run Walk 5k in September. We can't wait to hand out watermelons to all the finishers!

Queen Brielle and the Governor at the Delaware State Fair.

Wrights Market watermelon festival and crowning the 2023 Princess.

Growers tours are our favorites!

Nothing says Summer like the beach and watermelon!

National, South Carolina and Mar-Del Queens presenting a watermelon demonstration at the DC Farmers market.

Serving watermelon at the Rotary Crab feast.

A Summer favorite! Riding in the Blessing of the Combines parade.

A fun weekend promoting the "Protect your Melon" campaign in New York.

Hosting a watermelon eating contest at the Wicomico County Fair.

Queen Brielle and board member Caitlin Givens prepare bags for all guest at the Ronald McDonald house.

A grocery store is always the best place for a promotion!

Illiana Report

Greetings from Illiana!

As our growing season winds down, it is nice to take a few moments to reflect on the wonderful experiences Queen Abby was given this summer. The Watermelon Queen program is truly something special and it is exciting to see a queen embrace it so naturally!

Queen Abby began her summer tour by visiting grocery stores in both Indiana and Illinois. The first stop was visiting multiple Kroger locations throughout the Indianapolis area. It was a great way to kick off the watermelon season by educating consumers on how to pick the best watermelon and spread the word to the local watermelon industry! In July, Abby headed north to Chicago to promote Jones and Jones watermelon at Caputo's Markets. Huge thanks to Matt and Jennifer Jones for coordinating such a wonderful weekend. Their team, including our very own Gabby German (2022 Illiana Watermelon Queen), brought the watermelon excitement to two Caputo's locations with a spinning wheel where customers could win wonderful watermelon-themed prizes. Abby also spent time at both the Vincennes and Princeton, Indiana Walmart locations, and Needler's Grocery stores in Indianapolis. It's safe to say, spotting a watermelon queen in the produce section always garners a smile from customers!

She's also spent the past few months attending numerous community events to raise awareness of the Indiana and Illinois watermelon industry, including the Vincennes Fourth of July parade, the 18th Annual Red Skelton Parade, and the Knox County Watermelon Festival. Whether passing out watermelon slices or handing out candy in a parade, Abby will surely promote the watermelon industry with a smile on her face!

Our biggest promotion this year was the Indiana State Fair where Queen Abby gave out 1,150 pounds of diced watermelon to fairgoers. Everyone raved over the Wonning Farm's watermelon, and they loved to hear that Indiana is a top watermelon-producing state.

Of course, no watermelon queen's summer would be complete without farm tours! Queen Abby had the pleasure of visiting numerous farms both during planting and harvest. Thank you to Renee Goodwin of Frey Farms, Kent Williams of Williams Produce, Toby Smith of Schmieding Produce, Whitney Horrall of Melon Acres, and Brandon and Chelsey Cardinal of Cardinal Farms for sharing your industry expertise with our queen!

Last but not least, Queen Abby got the opportunity to attend a NASCAR race at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway to cheer on Ross Chastain. Special thanks go to Ross and the whole Chastain family for providing Abby with such an amazing experience!

Queen Abby looks forward to more sweet adventures this fall!

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

Promoting locally grown at Kroger

Princeton Walmart promo

Thank you, Kroger, for having us

Red Skelton Parade

The best in-store promos have IWA watermelons in-stores

Knox County Watermelon Festival

Look, Lift, Turn

Indiana State Fair fun

Thank you, Jones and Jones, for arranging the Caputo's promo!

Thank you Wonning Farms for feeding fairgoers!

With Mr. Matt Jones at Caputo's

With the Melon Man himself

Customers loved the fresh slices of Jones and Jones Watermelons

Team Watermelon

At her hometown Vincennes Walmart

With Kent Williams and Toby Smith

Gulf Coast Report

Happy Almost Fall!

What an amazing year our Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen continues to have! Julianna is an outstanding spokesperson for our industry.

Picking up where we left off, Julianna has been busy promoting the industry from farm tours, festivals, and lots of farmers markets.

A few of Queen Julianna's promotions this summer season are listed below:

• Bogalusa International Paper Box Plant hosted Queen Julianna where she had the opportunity to learn more about packaging in our industry.

• We spent the day at Charlie's U-Pik visiting their farm stand, packing house, and self-picking fields.

• Farmers Markets - including Auburn, Enterprise, Sessions Farm Market, Cassabaum Farm's, Poplar Head, Headland, and Pepper Place.

• Julianna had the opportunity to educate students during their summer reading program in Valley Head, Alabama.

• The Panhandle Watermelon Festival, Franklin County Watermelon Festival, and Fireworks at the Dothan Fairgrounds where she served watermelon slices to over 10,000 patrons.

• She had farm tours with Shelley Farms, Frey Farms, and Fitch Farms.

Thank you to each person who contributed to the success of these promotions. It sure is making an impact to the industry.

We are sad to share that Mrs. Marti Smith will be retiring from her position as secretary/treasurer of the Gulf Coast Watermelon Association. We cannot thank her enough for the time and dedication she has put forth to the association over the years.

Queen Julianna hopes you join her for a fun-filled weekend at the Gulf Coast Watermelon Convention. It is being held on February 9th and 10th, 2024 at the Beau Rivage Resort and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Registration will open in the coming months. Be sure to check it out and keep up with our queen on the Gulf Coast Watermelon Association's Facebook and Instagram pages to see all of our watermelon promotions.

Many Blessings,

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

Queen Julianna at the Bogalusa International Paper Box Plant.

I ended up taking out photo 6

Queen Julianna with the Eubanks family.

Queen Julianna visiting with the Fitch family and Mr. Terry Parrish.

Queen Julianna and Sarah Jane at the Panhandle Watermelon Festival with Easton Corbin.

Queen Julianna with the Cassabuam's granddaughter enjoying a slice of watermelon.

Queen Julianna with 3 generations of Session family farmers.

Queen Julianna posed with a child at the Poplar Head Farmers Market.

Queen Julianna at Shelley Farms with Mr. Todd Shelley and his two grandkids.

Queen Julianna helping serve watermelon to patrons at the Russellville Watermelon Festival.

Georgia Report

Happy Fall from Georgia!

The Georgia Watermelon Association has had an awesome year promoting our favorite, sweet summertime fruit. The 2023 Queen Tour has been a great success, and we are so fortunate to have had the opportunity to visit so many wonderful places! We can't think of anything better than promoting sweet Georgia watermelon!

Queen Charley began her summer of promoting watermelons with retail visits just as Georgia watermelons were hitting the stores across our state! Thank you to Leger and Son for supporting these retail visits! Thank you also to Mitch Mitchell, International Paper, for joining us at Food Lion, Albany Georgia and treating us to lunch!

Thank you to Ross and Chad Chastain and Melon 1 for inviting Charley to attend the Protect Your Melon/Buckle Up campaign promotions in Wilkesboro, North Carolina, Cordele, Georgia, and Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee! Charley was excited to collaborate with Ross to raise awareness for safe driving as well as attend a couple of Xfinity races this summer to hand out watermelon to the drivers and fans!

Charley visited many producers in South Georgia and learned first-hand about their operations and the hard work our growers put forth to ensure a quality product is getting to market. Thank you to Jim Rash Inc., Don Wood, Ben Hilliard, Herschel Durrence, Gibson Produce, Rawls Neville, Daly Glenn, Lee Wroten, Seedway, Melon 1, and Leger and Son for spending time with Charley and educating her on the requirements needed to run a successful farm business.

Other promotions included a trip to St. Simons Island Sunshine Festival and 5K run to hand out watermelon to all the runners and festival goers. Thank you to Herschel Durrence, MHD and Sons, for donating the watermelon for this event!

Queen Charley joined the Georgia Bulldogs at Dooley Stadium in Athens, GA on August 19 to celebrate the end of their scrimmage practice with the annual watermelon tasting. While the temperatures hovered around 96 degrees during the afternoon workout, Queen Charley was able to help them cool down and rehydrate after practice with freshly cut Georgia watermelon provided by the Coggins' family from their farm in Franklin County. The 20-year-old tradition continues with the Queen joining the Bulldogs for team pictures before leaving the stadium.

As we move forward, Queen Charley is gearing up to attend IFPA's The Washington Conference in mid-September to engage with industry leaders and legislative staff to learn more about advocating for the important issues facing the produce industry. She is excited to return to Washington, DC at the end of October to support the runners and athletes with some cool, hydrating fresh watermelon at the finish line. Thank you, National Watermelon Promotion Board, for sponsoring us to attend our Nation's Capital and help serve watermelon for this great event!

Would you like to schedule a date for our Georgia Watermelon Queen to visit your location? Please call Dawn Cheplick at 706-845-8575 or dcheplick@asginfo.net to book the queen.
Sincerely,

Dawn Cheplick, Promotions Coordinator
706-845-8575 | dcheplick@asginfo.net

Queen Charley teaches Ag class to ALL grades at NW Laurens Elementary

So thankful for our sponsors who support the Queen Tour!

Spending the day with these watermelon-loving Dawgs at Dooley Stadium.

Protect Your Melon/Buckle Up with Ross and Chad Chastain at Columbia University. Thank you, Melon 1!

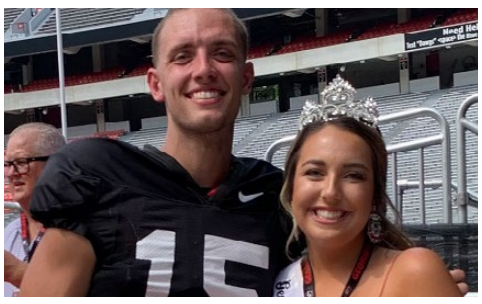
Queen Charley at the home of the UGA Dawgs!

Thank you to Food Lion for letting us share Georgia watermelon with your consumers and thank you to International Paper for Lunch!

Prepping watermelon for all the runners and spectators on July 4th at the Sunshine Festival 5K.

Visiting with Don and Brad Wood and their families.

Spreading the watermelon love with the farm animals at NW Laurens Elementary


Queen Charley shares our special treat with Carson Beck, UGA Quarterback

Thank you MHD & Sons and Gibson Produce for letting us visit your operation!

How about this Heisman move?

Retail visit to Kroger…thank you Leger and Son!

Florida Report

Greetings from the Sunshine State of Florida!!!

As August quickly rolls along, I sit here in disbelief that it has almost been a year since I was announced as your 2023 Florida Watermelon Queen. The last ten months have arguably been some of the best, and most life-changing, ones of my life. It has been an absolute honor being able to represent the hard-working individuals and families that make up our Florida Watermelon industry!

Having the opportunity to be the Florida Watermelon Queen has been one of my biggest blessings in life, and I thank God every day for this once in a lifetime experience. I truly couldn't have done this without all of the love and support I've received from both inside and outside of the industry. Thank you to each hand that played a role in my year, and an especially big thank you to each sponsor who has made every promotion happen, and to the Florida Watermelon Association for making my dreams become a reality.

My heart is so incredibly full! I have had the opportunity to help bridge the gap between the consumers and our growers, getting to teach the public not only where their watermelon comes from and why it's such an amazing commodity, but also about the families behind our Florida Watermelons, Getting to share "Slices of Happy" across Florida and beyond has changed my life exponentially and given me a newfound family. Thank you, Jesus, for this beautiful life and for each and every individual in our Watermelon Family!

I cannot wait to see each of you at this year's Florida convention!

2023 Florida Watermelon Queen Alyssa Armentrout

These past few months has been amazing promoting Florida Watermelons in our retail grocery stores throughout the State of Florida and Canada. Thank you to Publix, Winn Dixie, Longo's, Sprouts and Detwiler's Farmers Market for making this all possible. A special thank you to NWPB for sponsoring us for all of these retail grocery stores. We were able to cover many stores throughout the State of Florida and Canada. Please take a look at our Captions of this summer's promotions that we did.

Hope everyone had a safe and prosperous summer. As our summer ends, our fall begins with promoting Florida Watermelons. Remember to pick up your Florida Watermelons at your local grocery stores this fall.

Hope to see everyone at our 55th Annual Florida Watermelon Convention being held at Rosen Shingle Creek Resort in Orlando, Florida on October 12-14, 2023! President Trey Miller and First Lady Katelyn Miller would like to invite everyone to attend this year convention. Look for more details on our Florida Watermelon Association Website (www.flfwa.com) on this year's convention theme "Roll the Dice and Take a Slice. Betting on Watermelon".

Until next time!
Debra Harrison - Florida Watermelon Promotions Coordinator
Email: debra@flfwa.com
Cell: (863) 633-8306

Queen Alyssa promoting Watermelons in our Publix Grocery Stores Memorial Day Weekend.

Enjoyed seeing and visiting Mr. Adam Cook and his family in Trenton, Florida. A fifth-generation farmer.

Can you show us your "W" for Watermelon.

A Summertime treat on the last day of school at Bayshore Elementary School these young ladies enjoyed having slices of watermelons and popsicles.

At Winn Dixie in Fort Myers at the Community Cookout for the Folds of Honor.

Queen Alyssa reading the book "The Watermelon Seed" was enjoyed by all the kids at the Christ Academy Daycare.

All smiles with these Little League players at Publix in Gainesville with our first runner-up Reagan Hudson.

Queen Alyssa assisting Chef Justin with Fresh from Florida at the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association Summer Meeting held in Sarasota, Florida.

Thank you Nick Yeatman and your staff with "Longo's" for all of your hospitality in Canada.

Starting off with an early morning on the Fourth of July for the Watermelon 5K Run with Fresh from Florida.

at the "20th Annual Watermelon Eating Contest" at Longo's in Toronto, Canada.

In Winter Park, the Watermelon 5K Run with max attendees' of 2500 runners.

A huge thank you to Murray Tillis and Bob Gibson for all you do for Florida Watermelon Association Queen Program.

Enjoyed our day being "the National Watermelon Day" at the Florida Gulf Coast University with everyone.

Queen Alyssa visiting with Mr. and Mrs. Doug Simpson, Jr. along with Mr. Terry Parrish. Thank you, Mr. Terry, for being our chaperone for the day to visit farmers.

Queen Alyssa handing out watermelon slices on orientation day at Florida Gulf Coast University. Thank you, Ashlynn Dunn, for inviting us.

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