The National Watermelon Promotion Board won not one but TWO Marketing Excellence Awards from *Produce Business Magazine*! The 32nd annual award covered campaigns that took place between June 2019 and June 2020.

Watermelon: Plant-Forward Menu Solution

program’s goal was to position watermelon in new applications on menus in response to the plant forward macrotrend. The results included educating and inspiring distributors and operators on watermelon’s versatility, a regional chain highlighting roasted watermelon in an LTO (continued on next page)

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Marketing Excellence Awards Continued

and great foodservice media coverage highlighting the LTO. **Fit Foodie Runs**’ goal was to celebrate the Fit Foodie lifestyle with bites from local restaurants and sponsors such as the Watermelon Board, plus culinary demonstrations and mini workout classes from talented chefs and professional trainers. The first event was on National Watermelon Day, August 3, 2019 in Denver, and on October 12 in San Diego. The results included combined media outreach, consumer messaging and in-person sampling. Watermelon finisher medals and runner bibs were seen across all four of the runs nationwide (Austin and Fairfax, VA, in addition to Denver and San Diego). National exposure included magazine ad placement in Cooking Light and Health magazines. This award program is a great opportunity to highlight the work the Board is doing to increase watermelon demand year-round.

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**CucCAP Project Grant**

NWPB Executive Director and CucCAP Advisory Board Member Mark Arney recently received official notification that CucCAP was awarded the CucCAP2 project grant. The project, a $7.1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Specialty Crop Research Initiative, extends the project that began in 2015 for four years. The goals of CucCAP are to harness genomic resources for disease resistance and management in cucurbit crops.

The last CucCAP meeting was virtual (Zoom) on June 4 and 5. At that meeting, USDA-ARS Charleston scientists including Drs. Levi, Kousik, Ling, McGregor, Wechter, and Wehner, reviewed projects specific to watermelon. This revolved around genomic-assisted breeding introducing disease resistance into cucurbit cultivars for Fusarium, gummy stem blight, Phytophthora, powdery mildew, GCMMV, and PRSV-W.

Arney has been on the advisory board since its inception, and states that “it is very gratifying to see how this project has evolved.” For more information about the project please contact Mark Arney directly at marney@watermelon.org.
Published in the Federal Register on September 14, 2020, the rule realigns the representation on the National Watermelon Promotion Board (Board) under the Agricultural Marketing Service’s (AMS) regulations regarding a national research and promotion program for watermelons. This rule reduces the number of production districts and the number of importers on the Board, accordingly. This rule also makes administrative changes to other provisions of the Watermelon Research and Promotion Plan (Plan) and will go into effect on October 14, 2020. For further information please contact Stacy Jones King, Agricultural Marketing Specialist, Promotion and Economics Division, Specialty Crops Program, AMS, USDA, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Room 1406–S, Stop 0244, Washington, DC 20250–0244; telephone: (202) 720–4140; facsimile: (202) 205–2800; or electronic mail: Stacy.JonesKing@usda.gov.
Retail Promotions

The Giant Company Promotion a Success!

For the first time ever, Giant Foods partnered with NWPB to do a display and sales contest. The contest was held over a two-week period at the beginning of August. Special ads they ran promoting National Watermelon Day and secondary displays had a huge impact on this promotion’s success. As a result, net sales increased an average of 19%!

Lowes Foods “Pick & Prep” Promotion

Lowes Foods also conducted a “Pick & Prep Cut Watermelon” sales contest from Memorial Day to Labor Day, resulting in sales increasing by 44%! The retailer even created a “How to Pick the Perfect Watermelon” stanchion sign that is still being used in stores.

Healthy Bites Magazine (Weis Supermarkets)

Watermelon was also featured in Weis Supermarkets’ July/August issue of their Healthy Bites Magazine, distributed to shoppers in their highest volume stores and shared on social media to their more than 145,000 Facebook followers. As an added value, the Supermarket RD also did an Instagram Live video making one of NWPB’s recipes!
Summer 2020 Consumer Research Findings

Each year the NWPB measures consumers’ attitudes and usage of watermelon and compares it to year-over-year results. The research delves into topics such as:

- Purchase behavior
- Food safety
- Quality
- Health and nutrition

**Consumer research** helps to focus consumer outreach and findings are used to educate retail and foodservice contacts to understand consumers’ attitudes toward watermelon. This survey took place in August. Click here to see the full report.

**Key Findings**

- Taste and watermelon’s refreshing quality are the main reasons watermelon is purchased.
  - Watermelon is on par with other non-melon fruits in terms of taste and freshness while outperforming other melons (cantaloupes and honeydews).
- Bananas, oranges, apples, and blueberries are viewed as better values and healthier than watermelon.
  - Lower value ratings may be driven by the perceived waste with watermelon. Perhaps providing more advice on cutting to maximize usage will reduce perceived waste.
  - Being good for hydration is the key health benefit of watermelon. There is an opportunity to expand knowledge of other health benefits. In fact, consumers would like to see health benefits displayed at the point of sale.
- Key barriers of watermelon purchase include being too big/inconvenient and messy.
  - Fresh cut watermelon is one potential way to overcome these barriers. However, consumers also perceive fresh cut as costing more, not tasting as good, not being safe, and not being truly fresh.
- Although many claim they know how to pick a watermelon, other data suggests a need and desire for assistance.
  - A third have experienced a quality issue and just over half want information on picking at the point of sale.
  - There may also be an opportunity to provide guidance to pick-up and delivery shoppers on how to pick a good watermelon.
- COVID-19 is likely impacting a few measures versus Summer 2019.
  - More washing of watermelon before consumption.
  - More pick-up/delivery grocery shopping.
  - Differences in how one might consider consuming watermelon in restaurants.
Announcing Recipe & Carving Contest Winners

On May 18th, NWPB launched a new watermelon recipe and carving challenge inviting consumers to sharpen their knives, warm up their blenders and get ready for tasting and sharing by taking the Watermelon.org Recipe Challenge.

This year’s summer contest garnered nearly 200 entries by encouraging followers to put their spin on any recipe or carving found on Watermelon.org. Contestants searched the website, recreated recipes, and submitted them for wonderful watermelon prizes.

The judging was a mix of the unique spin, visual presentation and appearance. There were so many amazing entries, judges had a tough time coming up with their favorites and – in addition to three winners in each category – awarded five watermelon recipes with Honorable Mentions. Those entries, along with the winners, include:

Carvings
1st Place - Watermelon Sea Turtle by Chris Emerling
2nd Place - Watermelon Penguin by Julie Beckwith
3rd Place - Watermelon Flip Flop Cake by Kari Wright

Beverages
1st Place - Watermelon Coconut Froth by Maddie Reich
2nd Place - Watermelon Slushy by Elicia Polacek
3rd Place - Watermelon Grape Fizz by Daniellee Buonforte

Food
1st Place - Watermelon Pizza by Tracy Kaifesh
2nd Place - Watermelon Dippers by Carmell Childs
3rd Place - Watermelon Mozzarella Salad by Michael Sabella

Honorable Mentions
Watermelon Rind Stir Fry by Ronna Farley
Zesty Chicken Salad Cups by Hidemi Walsh
Coconut Ice Cream Sandwiches by Dani Lebowitz
Watermelon Greek Salad by Lauren Wyler
Blended Margarita by Cynthia Padovani

A big thank you to all that entered and congratulations to all our winners!
Operator Omnibus Survey

The National Watermelon Promotion Board conducted an operator omnibus survey with Datassentials to gauge operators preferences regarding watermelon on menus. The method was an online survey of 410 operators. Of the 410 surveyed, 254 currently offer or used to offer fresh watermelon and 156 have never offered fresh watermelon. Objectives were to measure watermelon penetration on menus and assess usage and interest for various watermelon applications, gauge operator readiness to include watermelon items on takeout and delivery menus, understand what types of support would motivate operators to menu more watermelon items. This research will be used to drive key messages with operators.

Research Highlights

- **Fresh watermelon works best in slices or as a salad ingredient.**
  - Smoothies, salsas, and desserts are also promising watermelon applications.
  - Watermelon is a good fit at on-sites, while restaurants (especially chains and QSRs) are less willing to adopt it.
  - However, restaurants are likely to use watermelon in alcoholic beverages.

- **Operators are open to including watermelon on their takeout menu.**
  - Roughly half of those who serve watermelon are already doing so.
  - Though being takeout-friendly is not a top attribute associated with watermelon, many operators can see themselves offering watermelon items on both their dine-in and takeout menus. This is especially true for watermelon salads and condiments (sauces, salsas, glazes).

- **Recipe ideas can help boost positive perceptions of watermelon.**
  - Watermelon is already viewed as affordable, easy to prep, and readily available from distributors.
  - However, some operators believe it’s too seasonal and would not fit the menu or sell well.
  - New recipes that showcase watermelon’s versatility would motivate operators to purchase.
  - Operators would also appreciate more consistent availability, although watermelon generally performs well in this area already.
Fexy Media Summer Campaign Wrap Up

Fexy media is a collection of millennial-focused food media and recipe websites that act as a top of the funnel for path-to-purchase technology. Relish is the path-to-purchase technology platform for food purchases and other products. Fexy and Relish continue to grow the purchasing funnel with millennial consumers, citing 48 million unique visitors per month. For the first time ever, NWPB partnered with Fexy Media for a recipe round-up on the SeriousEats website.

Serious Eats curated it’s top Watermelon recipes and put them in a recipe roundup article. The featured recipes were sponsored by the NWPB throughout the campaign duration, and watermelon was highlighted as the featured product within the Relish technology. The roundup was also promoted across social media channels and to Serious Eats email newsletter subscribers.

NWPB received high visibility throughout the two-month campaign duration totaling:

- 2.26MM impressions
- 61.8K page views across branded content (editorial and custom)
- 73K email newsletter opens
- 145.7K social media impressions
- 81% Viewability

User engagement across all campaign elements were on par or exceeded benchmarks on the platforms:

- Pageviews on the recipe roundup was nearly double Fexy’s benchmark, with users spending 5 minutes with the information
- Social media engagement rates were very high, with over 5K engagements across the 3 posts
- The email newsletter promoting the roundups also received very high engagement, with an open rate of 29%
- The “add to shopping list” CTR and shop rate across the featured watermelon recipes were well within our benchmarks
- The featured recipes also received 3K views of the print versions, inferring users intent to shop for and make the recipes at home.
Influencer Partnership with Snacking & Sneakers - TikToks

This summer, we partnered with Chrissy Carrol - the RD behind Snacking in Sneakers - about not only watermelon’s health benefits, but it’s versatility as well. Chrissy is our first partnership that included TikTok – and it was a resounding success! Those highlights include:

- 11 total videos shared
- 49,691 total views across all videos
- Approximately 95 hours of total watch time
- 63 video shares

In addition, Chrissy created two recipe blog posts including a Citrus Watermelon Pie and Watermelon Hot Sauce. The Hot Sauce post has more than 1K views with an average on-page time of more than 5 minutes. It is currently ranking #1 on Google for that keyword!

Chrissy also cross-posted to Twitter, Instagram Stories and Pinterest, receiving more than 33,000 impressions in Pinterest alone!
Ross Chastain

In NASCAR, when the world went virtual so did they. You may remember iRacing on TV, the only live sport. Racing has since returned, and Melon Man Ross Chastain has over-delivered on his promotion posts educating about watermelon (24 contracted posts vs. 41 actual posts). Across his platforms including Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, Ross had nearly 800,000 impressions, a **160% increase from last year**.

Canada Concepts Meeting

NWPB’s Juliemar Rosado and Canadian retail trade representative Brad Brownsey attended the Canada Concepts meeting, held virtually September 15-17. Canada Concepts is an **annual strategic planning summit** with Market Access Program cooperators, state regional trade groups, and state departments of agriculture that is hosted by the Canada offices of the Foreign Agriculture Services. The two-day program included **updates on major policy and economic developments** along with a recap report on global-based initiatives.

Upcoming NWPB Connections

PMA Fresh Summit – October 13 – 15

Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo – October 17 – 20

Commodity Roundtable – October 21

NWPB Board Meeting – October 23

International Foodservice Editorial Council – October 27 - 30