Flavor Experience Goes Virtual But Remains Essential to Foodservice Program

The Flavor Experience is a flavor and trend-forward conference that connects culinary, marketing and purchasing contacts from commercial foodservice operators with supplies and commodity boards. Flavor Experience fills the pipeline with foodservice contacts the Watermelon Board works with and often leads to new or extended watermelon menu usage. The Flavor Experience shifted to a virtual format on December 1 and 2, 2020. Although a new format, the attendee list and energy was on par with the exciting and lucrative event which typically takes …

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Flavor Experience Continued

place in August in Southern California. The agenda was packed with delicious and insightful presentations looking ahead into 2021 - with watermelon included multiple times! Although a tough time for restaurants, they cannot afford to skip menu ideation.

The Board had multiple opportunities to inspire with watermelon throughout the event. The Watermelon Board page featured year-round information, menu ideation, the Supplier Database, and research. The feature was a 5-minute solutions-themed video highlighting watermelon as a solution on salad and beverage menus. The Board also had a live demo presentation. First attendees were asked when they use watermelon throughout the year and why, and then the demo featured recipes highlighting the flavors of source regions throughout the year: Grilled Watermelon Mexican Caesar Salad, Watermelon Aqua Fresca (with chilies!), Watermelon BBQ Ribs with Watermelon BBQ Sauce and Watermelon Rind Slaw and a Watermelon Blueberry Lemonade. In addition to highlighting global flavors, these dishes highlight trends such as immunity and comfort. A live comment from a contact at Olive Garden said, “So many uses for the delicious watermelon.”

Finally, the Board had 5-minute “speed dates” with some operators in attendance. Meetings included Cooper’s Hawk, The Cheesecake Factory and Buffalo Wild Wings, to name a few. As in previous years, the Flavor Experience has provided the Board with a strong list of potential foodservice partners and provided the platform to reach them with valuable watermelon education and inspiration. The virtual event met those goals and more.
New Campaign Launches to Support Wintertime Watermelon Consumption

The National Watermelon Promotion Board recently launched a consumer social campaign to promote watermelon consumption in the wintertime. Representing both U.S and imported product, NWPB is responsible for strengthening the demand for watermelon 12 months a year, something this new initiative is well-positioned to do in this year’s virtually focused climate.

Using “WINTERMELON” as a verb, the Watermelon Board is asking consumers to post #HowDoYouWintermelon on social media to win weekly prizes in the form of Winter Survival Kits. While this sounds like a simple ask, this project combines several over-arching winter strategies including leveraging partnerships, serving as a resource, educating about watermelon’s health and versatility benefits, and maximizing social platform engagement.

Focusing on key purchase drivers, the “How do you WINTERMELON?” promotion will target consumers in the areas of the country that receive snow and freezing temps, however the contest is open to everyone nationwide.

- Watermelon is a sweet superstar at home and family events – it’s a centerpiece feature for holidays and get togethers
- Watermelon is nutritious and healthy – a hydration source second to none which is just as important in wintertime, and is an excellent source of Vitamin C to support immunity
- Watermelon’s versatility creates zero food waste and has endless creative and delicious uses in the kitchen, from rind smiles for your snowman to holiday cookie cutouts of Christmas trees and candy canes
- Watermelon is available year-round, predominantly in fresh cut and personal size in the winter

Tactics for the program include a toolkit of social media assets that connect watermelon to winter activities like skiing, snowmobiling, building forts, snow days, and ice fishing. They also include promoting recipes for cold play day treats and frozen watermelon delights, activating influencer partners for engagement and amplification across social platforms, and capturing UGC (user generated content) to share in winter seasons to come.

For more information about how you can WINTERMELON, visit https://www.watermelon.org/wintermelon/. To receive social media graphics for winter health, winter recipes, Did you know, or Don’t forget to add watermelon to your shopping list categories for posting online, please contact Stephanie Barlow, senior director of communications, at sbarlow@watermelon.org.
Argyle Public Relationships developed a digital-focused program for NWPB in 2020, taking into consideration COVID-19 related restrictions and opportunities, as more consumers spent time online. The program included online media partnerships as well as a social media and ambassador program. The program targeted primary Canadian shoppers in Ontario, BC, Alberta and Quebec. There was also collaboration with the Foreign Agricultural Services Canada office on appropriate "Prenez goût aux États" digital program opportunities targeting the French-Canadian audience. As a result of these efforts, the program achieved over 10.7 million social media impressions, exceeding 2019 results (9.3 million) by 15% and 2020 goals (3.5 million) by 205%!

**West Coast Produce Expo Goes Virtual**

In November, NWPB's Juliemar Rosado and retail account manager Katie Manetti virtually attended the 6th annual West Coast Produce Expo, originally scheduled in May in Palm Desert, CA. The weeklong event included educational sessions about consumer trends and research, a retail panel, networking receptions, as well as expo hours with a virtual booth. NWPB also sponsored a virtual Farm Tour where visitors of the page could view a video on watermelon cultivation. This event is hosted by The Packer and Farm Journal Media, Inc. and connects the produce industry with the West Coast buying community. The event was a great opportunity to discuss the board’s latest foodservice, retail and communications programs.
Sharing Watermelon Messages Through Culinary Institute

After years of partnering with the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) on their multimedia program featuring one of their educators, the Board shot new recipe videos with Chef Mai Pham of Star Ginger Asian Grill and Noodle Bar. The recipes highlight Chef Mai’s unique experiences with watermelon adding some exciting new content to the collection. The five new recipes and videos are live at ciaprochef.com/watermelon, the Board’s CIA page which helps to expand the digital presence. The content will be marketed through the Culinary Institute’s websites, social media and newsletters. These outlets have reached culinary professionals with watermelon messages more than a million times so far this year.

The videos were used as commercials during the virtual Worlds of Flavor conference in November. The 22nd annual event, although the first done virtually, the event’s theme was World Kitchen, World Tables: A Celebration of Chefs and Community. As 2020 Worlds of Flavor Webcast Premier Presenting Sponsor, watermelon video content was played 13 times during the November 10 - 13, 2020 conference:

- Icy Spicy Thai Watermelon Mojitos x 3
- Watermelon Ice Pop x 3
- Watermelon Sushi with Fried Shallots, Red Perilla and Thai Spices x 3
- Shrimp and Watermelon Poke Bowl x 2
- Shaking Beef with Wilted Watercress and Watermelon x 2

Content was also shared via CIA social channels and Worlds of Flavor website. With nearly 20,000 views, results continue to roll in since it is now available on-demand. Lastly, the recipes created by the CIA are used with media throughout the year and help garner great PR coverage in addition to the CIA distribution.

Connecting with Ross Chastain

In November, NWPB Executive Director Mark Arney and staff met virtually with Industry Partner Ross Chastain to review the 2020 NASCAR season. Watermelon is thrilled to ride along with Ross on his continuing journey in the fast lane.
New Educator Content on Watermelon.org

**J. Slice and Friends**

The Watermelon.org website hosts an Educator section in the Audiences pages and for years has offered a wide array of Teacher Toolkit activities and lesson plan worksheets, coloring educational recipe and health worksheets, and other fun crafts for teachers to do with their students. This year many parents have taken on the role of educator at home for their virtual learning students, with some returning to in person learning and some not. NWPB has invested in two ways to bring more new and exciting free content to educators to help this resource-starved audience. First, the update and revision to the 50+ J. Slice and Friends worksheets in the Teacher Toolkit section, with PDF activities ranging from Language Arts and Science to Geography and Math, using watermelon parts and pieces as teaching tools, such as “Count with Watermelon, Math for Grades 1-2.” Find those activities and more at [https://www.watermelon.org/audiences/educators/teacher-toolkits/](https://www.watermelon.org/audiences/educators/teacher-toolkits/).

**Jump with Jill**

Newly launched is the Jump with Jill Multimedia Lesson Plan Portal. Jump with Jill brings the excitement of the live show into the classroom and home with new standards-matched lesson plans and activity sheets. Over the many years we’ve partnered with Jump with Jill, we’ve developed many of their songs into videos. With so much of the work educating kids going online, this new project aims to provide teachers – or caregivers facilitating the work of teachers – with important curriculum objectives and explosively entertaining videos through applications to healthy foods and exercise. All the lesson plans are developed using the EATS instructional model:

- Essential questions
- Activating prior knowledge
- Teaching
- Summarizing/Assessment

The five lessons available range in target grade level and subject areas so all elementary students can benefit from Jump with Jill’s virtual lessons. Experience the portal here: [https://www.watermelon.org/audiences/educators/jump-with-jill.lesson-plans/](https://www.watermelon.org/audiences/educators/jump-with-jill.lesson-plans/).
Wakefern/ShopRite Virtual Dietitian Seminar

NWPB director of retail and international marketing Juliemar Rosado and retail account manager Cece Krumrine participated in a virtual expo for all Wakefern/ShopRite supermarket dietitians on November 12th. Wakefern is the largest retail cooperative in the US and services nine states with over 300 stores. There were three presentations given over the morning with a question and answer period. Rosado presented the latest watermelon nutritional information and consumer research findings, recipe usage suggestions and included links to the watermelon retail and dietitian toolkits. In addition to the expo, year-round promotions are offered through ads, videos, social media, and posts on the ShopRite website.

USAEDC Annual Conference

NWPB’s Juliemar Rosado virtually attended the United States Agricultural Export Development Council (USAEDC)’s annual conference November 17-20. The meeting consisted of a robust program agenda around global agricultural topics for 2.5 hours each day. Roundtable discussions occurred on the last day to provide a more interactive experience.

Individuals with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations and or alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, LEP, etc.) should contact: Juliemar Rosado at jrosado@watermelon.org within three days of event. The National Watermelon Promotion Board is an equal opportunity provider and employer.
In Japan, US watermelon promotions ran in eight foodservice establishments in Kanagawa, Miyazaki and Osaka prefectures for the month of August. These restaurants offered menu items that ranged from cocktails to gelato. Combined, the promotion resulted in over 2.6 million yen (approximately $25,000 USD) in sales!

Communications Coaching Session

NWPB executive committee members and staff attended a development session to address key communication topics on how to answer transparent and uncomplicated questions on behalf of the watermelon industry, improving overall Board dynamics and effectiveness. Currently, the biyearly crisis communications session is dedicated to preparing the Board for potential scenarios that could negatively impact the watermelon industry; this was the first spokesperson/advocate communication training on how the NWPB works and what the NWPB does.

Carmine and Vanessa Gallo of Gallo Communications conducted the communications coaching session on November 18th. The group worked to create loglines and message maps about three relevant topics, using the rule of three and collaborating in teams to establish the strongest responses on behalf of the industry. Those in attendance will be tapped for future media opportunities having completed this training session.
On Monday, November 30 a photoshoot took place to create an image library of staff photos working with watermelon to portray in the virtual business world what it’s like to work with members of Team Watermelon on programs of NWPB research, promotion and education. These photos will be incorporated into the Watermelon.org website and can be individually used when developing new working relationships with potential partners, whether via virtual tradeshows and conferences or via LinkedIn and other media platforms. We are sure to see return on investment as the world continues to be digitally focused and virtually networked.

Watermelon on the Menu

Modern Southern-inspired Hamilton’s Kitchen at The Alfond Inn is currently featuring “Anne of Green Gables” Compressed Watermelon including watermelon, red current ricotta, toasted sunflower seeds, fresh mint and Heavens to Betsy jam drizzle. The dish was also featured on this year’s Thanksgiving Menu (pictured right), and according to NWPB staff member Dolores Oroian, was a “delightful sweet treat!”

Great American Teach-In

On November 18th Megan McKenna, senior director of marketing and foodservice, participated in the Great American Teach-In to share information about her career and of course, watermelon! Throughout the day, McKenna met with more than 100 students virtually. From the gasps about the largest watermelon ever grown, to the interest (or maybe skepticism!) on pickling rinds, the Great American Teach-In was a great way to share the joy watermelon brings to the staff everyday.

Upcoming NWPB Connections

New York Produce Show Virtual Conference – December 9 – 11