



# Watermelon Update

NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD



## Inside this issue:

- NWPB Celebrates 10 Years Supporting Marine Corps Marathon
- Reaching Foodservice Decision Makers through Foodservice Media
- Suwannee Valley Watermelon Institute
- Texas Watermelon Association Meeting
- USAEDC Annual Conference
- Understanding the Watermelon Buyer & Other Insights from 2023 Consumer Research
- Consumer Thanksgiving Digital Promotion
- Curious Plot Visit
- 2023 Foodservice Research Highlights Menu Opportunities
- CTV Advertising – Fall Update
- Watermelon on the Menu
- NWPB Connections

## NWPB Celebrates 10 Years Supporting Marine Corps Marathon

In late October, the Board sponsored the 48<sup>th</sup> Marine Corps Marathon (MCM) in Washington D.C., marking a decade of support for this iconic event. This year's event witnessed an astounding turnout with over 20,000 dedicated runners finishing the challenging course. As the third largest marathon in the country, the event drew athletes from every corner of the U.S. and 63 countries, truly living up to its reputation as "The People's Marathon."

*Continued next page*



## Marine Corps Marathon Continued

This year, Team Watermelon made a triumphant return to the marathon by distributing a whopping **17 pallets** of crisp, hydrating watermelon to both runners and supporters.

NWPB President Christian Murillo and National Watermelon Association Executive Director George Szczepanski joined Team Watermelon in the Board's **largest promotion of the year** which also included watermelon queens, coordinators, and Class Produce representatives, in delivering the refreshing fruit to participants. Despite the unseasonably warm weather in Washington D.C., the runners were thrilled to be greeted with hydrating watermelon, a testament to the fruit's popularity and its vital role in promoting a healthy and active lifestyle.

According to Senior Director of Communications Stephanie Barlow, who spearheads the effort each year, "One of the unique aspects of Team Watermelon is the collaborative effort of every queen from every watermelon association, along with dedicated staff, coming together to promote our favorite fruit. This collective endeavor not only **strengthens the watermelon community but also underlines the fruit's significance in promoting health and wellness.**"

**Terra Eby, the 2012 MarDel Watermelon Association Queen and current promotions coordinator, added an extra layer of excitement to the event by running the marathon and showcasing the enduring legacy and dedication of watermelon queens in promotion and education.**

In a new addition to this year's promotion, NWPB distributed complimentary Tajin® packets, a perfect complement to the naturally sweet and juicy watermelon. The response from attendees was overwhelmingly positive (see a few comments from social media below!), further highlighting the synergy between watermelon and popular flavor enhancers.



**Melissa Dillman**

The best watermelon I ever had was at the finish of the MCM.

4d



**Susan Sheerin Muller**

This was probably the best thing ever! I didn't know there would be any but OMG watermelon never tasted so good!!!!

4d





## Reaching Foodservice Decision Makers Through Foodservice Media

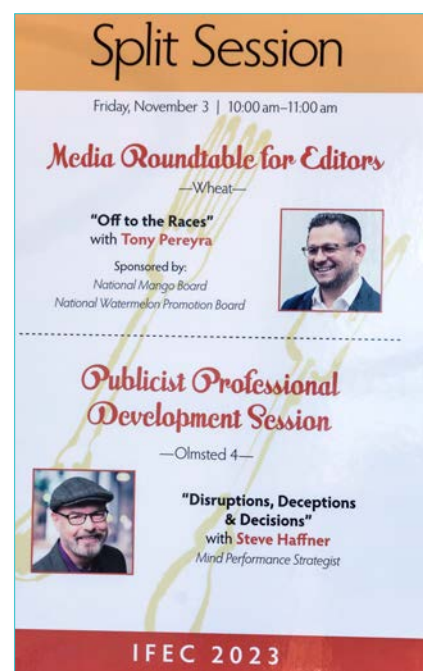


The International Foodservice Editorial Council's (IFEC) Annual Conference took place at the beginning of November in Louisville, KY. IFEC is **the event to reach foodservice editors with watermelon education and inspiration**. This year the Board partnered with the National Mango Board to co-host the Editor Roundtable. This session at the conference focuses on the influencers the Board wants to reach so the session was action-packed. We worked with mixologist Tony Pereya, of Spirits in Motion, to highlight watermelon in the appropriate "Kentucky Watermelon Lemonade" and non-alcoholic beverage, "Back in the Saddle." Trends highlighted included fall/winter spices and the presence of a spiritless cocktail. In addition to the delicious beverages, the editors worked in teams on a beverage garnish competition. One garnish was lit on fire, another highlighted all the ingredients offered ... but the winner took inspiration from a Kentucky Derby hat. All of the conference attendees got to try the "Back in the Saddle" drink during brunch on the last day of the conference.

In addition to the sponsorships, **Megan McKenna, sr. director of marketing & foodservice, met with editors from various foodservice publications to pitch watermelon for earned media placements in 2024**. These media outlets represent K-12 foodservice, regional and national chains, healthcare, foodservice educators and more. Finally, the NWPB co-sponsored an editor reception with California Avocados Commission, National Mango Board, Idaho Potato Commission, Barilla and True Aussie Beef & Lamb. The opportunity to connect with editors one-on-one was at a new level at IFEC 2023!

Lastly, **Megan McKenna served as IFEC's president for 2023** so with all of the watermelon activations and her leadership obligations, watermelon wasn't far from anyone's mind throughout the three day conference!

*All photos from IFEC article, including cover image, from Buzz Orr Multimedia.*



## Suwannee Valley Watermelon Institute

In late November, **NWPB Vice President Lee Wroten and Executive Director Mark Arney** attended the Suwannee Valley Watermelon Institute meeting in Fanning Springs, Florida. Wroten presented an update of current NWPB activities and showcased highlights from Communications, Foodservice and Retail & International Marketing departments. The meeting had the **highest turnout to date with 183 watermelon producers, handlers, and allied industry representatives** and included educational sessions, industry trade show and lunch. .



## Texas Watermelon Association Meeting

In November, the NWPB presented at the Texas Watermelon Association Convention in Fort Worth, TX. **President Christian Murillo** presented an update on the programs and other timely topics. **Consultant Jason Hanselman** presented *2023 Texas Production, Retail Volume and Retail Ad Analysis*, reviewing the past year and showcasing some of the custom tools available to the industry. **Mark Arney, executive director**, was also in attendance. The staff is looking forward to all of the association conventions to kick off 2024!



## USAEDC Annual Conference

**NWPB's Juliemar Rosado** attended the United States Agricultural Export Development Council (USAEDC)'s annual conference on November 14-15. The meeting consisted of a robust program agenda around global agricultural topics. Some of the topics included 2024 ag and trade outlook, global programs update and update from FAS Administrator Whitley. USAEDC also **celebrated their 40 year anniversary by hosting an 80's themed reception where NWPB was able to network with other MAP program cooperators as well as USDA marketing specialists in the global programs.**



*Individuals with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations and or alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, LEP, etc.) should contact: Juliemar Rosado at [jrosado@watermelon.org](mailto:jrosado@watermelon.org) within three days of event. The National Watermelon Promotion Board is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*



## Understanding the Watermelon Buyer & Other Insights from 2023 Consumer Research

Each year the NWPB invests in consumer research. In 2023, the Board partnered with Fusion Marketing. Fusion, founded in 1997, was named a top 10 retail marketing service company by *Retail Tech Insights* in 2021. Fusion works with many fresh produce companies.

The goal of the research was to **provide key insights into the watermelon consumer**, which will aid in building consumer demand, provide direction for marketing, merchandising and organizational decisions, including help industry stakeholders develop targeted marketing programs and messages, and use the research to further develop the established benchmark of consumer trends to measure the progress of marketing goals and objectives. Although similar goals to previous years, Fusion brought fresh ideas to the research, leading to innovative findings.



One key finding was better understanding the watermelon buyer. Defining characteristics include having a positive outlook, family being important, adventurous but appreciating structure, and self-motivated. Demographics include a female, averaging 48 years old. In addition to the traditional **presentation with the rest of the findings**, this year the project also offers a **Marketing Guide** industry members can easily use in their businesses. Find both resources, as well as past studies in the **Consumer Research** section of the website.



## Consumer Thanksgiving Digital Promotion

Over the Thanksgiving holiday, the Board hosted a giveaway on Facebook **to thank all our watermelon fans and followers**. The giveaway post featured a special edition watermelon-themed Stanley cup and asked consumers to comment on their favorite way to enjoy watermelon in the Fall months. Of the **614 comments**, many people said they enjoyed eating watermelon plain or with a topper like salt or TAJÍN®.



## Curious Plot Visit

In November NWPB staff including **Stephanie Barlow and Summer Walker** visited longtime agency partner **Curious Plot** at their headquarters in Minneapolis, MN. The two day meeting consisted of brainstorming and ideation sessions for 2024, as well as key learnings from 2023. In addition to strategizing and campaign planning, the team was able to determine priorities for next year as well KPI (key performance indicators) all in the name of watermelon!



## 2023 Foodservice Research Highlights Menu Opportunities



In 2023, NWPB invested in foodservice operator research. This is the second year for what is now the NWPB's benchmarking study, which will **allow the Board and industry to better track opportunities, gains, and engagement in foodservice**. The June 2023 online survey was fielded to operators across all commercial, noncommercial and retail segments with 400 operators qualifying based on purchase responsibility.

Most operators feature fresh watermelon on the menu, **up from 38% in 2020 and 50% in 2022**, with noncommercial operators more likely to use fresh watermelon. Watermelon use continues to grow, but at a slower rate as operators move past post-pandemic recovery. Pureeing remains the most common fresh watermelon prep. Spring and summer are most common menuing seasons, though year-round menuing does occur. Seasonal availability is part of watermelon's appeal for most operators, both users and nonusers.

Watermelon is featured across the menu, but lags in entrées. Menu items are driven by salads or similar applications. Watermelon is even more versatile in beverages but there is less watermelon innovation within desserts. If watermelon is on the menu, it is almost always also included on off-premise (take out) and kids' menus. Although not many operators are familiar, many are interested in pickled watermelon rind. Education focused on increasing shelf life and reducing waste are of interest. Lastly, operators are **interested in a broad array of trending flavors paired with fresh watermelon as it can work in trend-forward applications**.

Visit the [Foodservice Research](#) section of [watermelon.org](http://watermelon.org) to learn more or view the [full report](#). Reach out to Megan McKenna at [mmckenna@watermelon.org](mailto:mmckenna@watermelon.org), with further questions.

## CTV Advertising – Fall Update

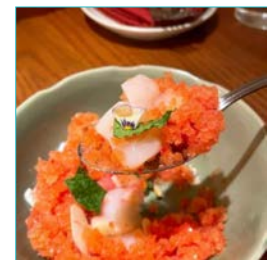


To coincide with the changing of the seasons, the Board updated the creative for our CTV Streaming Media campaign for October. The revised ad shows fall foliage imagery while **continuing to focus on watermelon wellness**. The cost per view was \$0.04, which is right in line with the previous months. The ad had a total of 85,313 views with Sunday being the most popular day. **Top performing markets by views included Charlotte, NC, Dallas, TX and Phoenix, AZ** on various networks including FOX news, CBS News, AMC and the Food Network.



## Watermelon on the Menu

**Bangkok Supper Club**, a brand new Thai restaurant based in New York City, is currently offering Hokkaido Scallop Ceviche which includes Sashimi grade Hokkaido scallop, pickled watermelon rind, diced watermelon, mint and garlic, topped with chili watermelon granita. The dish was recently featured by *The New York Times* where writer Pete Wells called it “dessert, essentially...”



## NWPB Connections

**Kinetic12** – Dallas, TX – December 5 & 6

**New York Produce Show** – New York City, NY – December 5 – 7

