



# Watermelon Update

NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD



## Watermelon Board Wows at Tastemaker Conference

In March the Watermelon Board sponsored the Tastemaker Conference, the largest food blogger, influencer and creator conference of its kind in the U.S., with 441 impactful and influential attendees. Stephanie Barlow and Summer Walker traveled to Chicago to network with and meet potential watermelon influencer partners.

### Inside this issue:

- Watermelon Wows at Tastemaker Conference
- CucCap2 Meeting
- Industry Member Spotlight: Get to Know Chris Dyer
- Southern Exposure
- NWA Nook: The Work of the Association
- Board Nomination Forms Due April 15
- 2024-2025 Department Overviews: Communications, Retail & International Marketing, Foodservice and Research
- Watermelon Workshop for Chefs
- Assessment Increase Update
- Mentorship with Graduate Marketing Students from University of Tampa “Reaching Younger Audiences with Watermelon”
- 2024 Assessment Due Dates
- Retail Review Corner
- Educate and Inspire Restaurant Menu Planners
- Consumer Trade Research Trade Release: Key Strategies for Merchandising Watermelon
- Watermelon on the Menu
- NWPB Connections



## Tastemaker Continued

As a snack bar sponsor, watermelon tastings were provided in the booth space over two days, changing up the offering each day. Day 1 was **“Use the Whole Watermelon/Zero Food Waste”** with watermelon flesh, juice and rind in the **Watermelon Rind Pickles** tasting along with watermelon wedges and fresh watermelon juice. Day 2 teed up the new **“Simply Watermelon”** theme with a **flavor pairings bar** that offered watermelon skewers and slices with the following flavor pairings:

- Ginger, sesame and soy sauce
- Lemon zest and salt
- Cinnamon and vanilla
- Tajin (a must!)
- Yellow mustard, to offer up the TikTok trend from 2021

The look and feel of the Watermelon Board’s booth space was an engaging and inviting “Slice of Happy Project” vibe with a floral backdrop selfie wall and different watermelon slice neons to bring light and color to a traditional sponsor floor. The soundtrack was the Slice of Happy Playlist on Spotify, so visitors experienced sight, sound, taste, color, feel and the fresh, juicy crunch of watermelon. Additionally there was a spinner wheel of watermelon goodies including spa face masks and eye gels, watermelon straws, nail files, tote bags, clutch wallets and of course the “I Love Watermelon!” stickers for all. A QR code sign directing bloggers interested in partnering with the Watermelon Board directly went to the Watermelon Friends Sign Up page at [watermelon.org](http://watermelon.org), so in addition to dozens of one on one connections and meetings, more applications are on deck for partners of all audience sizes, niches and specialties for everyone who loves watermelon!

The total combined audience reach of attendees is an impressive **148+ million!** Many posted pictures of tasting watermelon or in front of the watermelon neons and floral backdrop to their social media, mostly on Instagram, Instagram Stories and TikTok, **creating a huge earned media bump and amplification for watermelon in mid-March.**



## CucCap2 Meeting

In March, NWPB Executive Director Mark Arney participated in the CucCap2 Zoom meeting which was hosted by USDA-ARS Salinas. The group of attendees included a group of highly dedicated cucurbit scientists, USDA personnel and NWA Executive Director George Szczepanski. Arney updated the group on current and upcoming organizational activities, focusing on the **reasons the promotion board voted to move forward with the assessment increase.**





## Industry Member Spotlight: Get to Know Chris Dyer

**Company:** Growers Select Produce Inc.

**Years in the industry:** 12 years (plus a bunch of time as a kid!)

**Years on the Board:** 4 years

**What's your favorite thing about Watermelon and/or the Watermelon Industry?** I take great pride and am very humbled to be a part of my family's business. It is a tremendous blessing to have the opportunity to carry on the legacy set before me, and to be able to work alongside family every day. When you look around the industry, you will find many similar stories and families taking on that same journey. It is a privilege to be a part of it all.

As for watermelon itself? It's a delicious, refreshing fruit that is a symbol for fun and family and so many positive things in our culture. It is always great meeting someone, telling them I work in watermelon, and hearing them say "Man I love watermelon!"



**What's your favorite item on your bucket list?** Watch the Fightin' Texas Aggies win the National Championship in Football one day!



## Southern Exposure

NWPB once again participated in the Southeast Produce Council's annual "Southern Exposure" expo March 7-9 in Tampa, FL. This year, along with retail and foodservice workshops and networking events NWPB's Mark Arney, Juliemar Rosado, Megan McKenna (pictured) provided retail and foodservice attendees with information on how to keep watermelon **top of mind on menus and in grocery stores**. The NWPB also sponsored a watermelon-filled breakfast for the STEP-UP Foodservice class on their field tour day ahead of the conference. Megan attended the SEPC Foodservice and Arnold Palmer Children's Hospital (APCH) Committee meetings, of which she is a member. She has recently been named co-chair of the APCH Committee.

Every year, the expo attracts more than 2,500 attendees, continually setting records for overall attendance as well as for participation by the retail and foodservice sectors of the fresh produce industry.



## NWA Nook: The Work of the Association

As the National Watermelon Association looks to the year and season ahead, our work is guided by a strategic plan that is the outcome of the work of our Executive Committee. The pillars of that **Strategic Plan** include:

- Public Policy: pursuing the political agenda that supports the needs of our industry, and actively works for positive impacts on policy
- Research: expanding research on production methods that aid our members and finds solutions to our challenges
- Economics: rethink the economics of our industry from all aspects of the value chain
- Food Safety: continue our focus and research food safety as it relates to our industry
- Growth: supporting the work of the association to expand membership and our reach in the industry

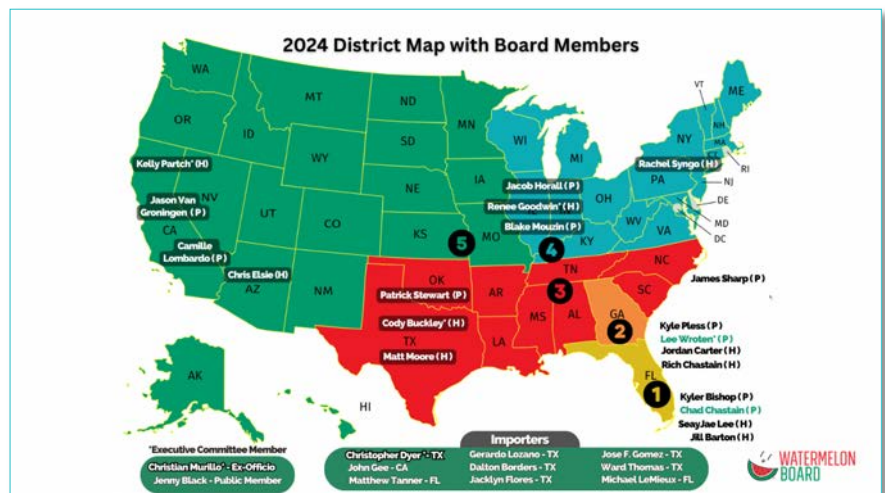


In support of these goals, NWA has member committees that inform and guide the association's work on these critical topics. If you are a member and are interested in participating in one of these committees, or if you'd like to become a member, reach out to NWA membership coordinator, Tami Robinson Campano at [tami@nwawatermelon.com](mailto:tami@nwawatermelon.com). We'll have a call for volunteers later in the Spring, but we'll take your information now as the work of these committees continues.



## Board Nomination Forms Due April 15

The Board conducted successful Nominations Teleconferences on February 14th for Districts 2, 3, and Importers, resulting in complete slates. If you are a nominee, kindly **submit your nomination forms by April 15th**. These forms will be sent to the USDA for the Secretary of Agriculture to appoint board members from these districts to serve from 2025 to 2027. If you have questions or comments regarding nominations, please contact Rebekah Dossett at [rdossett@watermelon.org](mailto:rdossett@watermelon.org) or Andrea Smith at [asmith@watermelon.org](mailto:asmith@watermelon.org).



## 2024-2025 Department Overviews

### Communications

The communications program works with three objectives: first, to increase awareness, interest and consideration of watermelon to drive consumer demand; secondly, to educate audiences on key purchase motivators while driving down negative perceptions and purchase barriers; and thirdly, to collaborate with social influencers to amplify messages, engage audiences and foster authentic watermelon connections in the digital landscape.



Conveying watermelon's benefits, messaging of happiness & health, value & convenience, versatility and sustainability to consumers happens with paid, earned, owned and shared media. Delivering inspiration and snackable content that positions watermelon as a kitchen staple and developing community-backed content with influencer partners informs the Watermelon Board digital channels and keeps watermelon top of mind year-round with primarily Millennial and Gen Z consumers.

This year's **"Simply Watermelon"** consumer marketing campaign is strategically designed to resonate with consumers by focusing on simplicity, visual appeal, and timely content delivery. Supported by media and food trends, this approach positions watermelon as an essential and versatile kitchen staple, fostering increased interest, demand, and loyalty among consumers. With simplicity being front and center in a visual and experiential content strategy, interest and demand will be driven through:

- Simple snacking and recipe solutions (no-recipe recipes)
- Scroll-stopping photography and on-trend social video
- Foodie content partners who educate followers on other key messages (101 selection and cutting, nutrition and sustainability)
- Targeted digital ads driving traffic (and cravings)
- Timely content delivered onsite and inbox
- All supported through additional tactics and foundational activities featuring Simply Watermelon messages:
  - Website homepage sliders and blog posts on The Slice
  - Seasonal consumer eNewsletter promotion via What About Watermelon
  - Head content calendar editorial across @WatermelonBoard social channels

Social media content, influencer partnerships, TikTok video summer campaign, grower stories and a national podcast ad campaign will combine collaboratively to boost message amplification and awareness building consumer education all year long, including a return to Marine Corps Marathon in the fall and our Melon Man in the fast lane, Ross Chastain in NASCAR!



## Retail & International Marketing

The Marketing Committee is responsible for developing and implementing an effective retail and international marketing campaign. This includes retail, trade and consumer promotions.

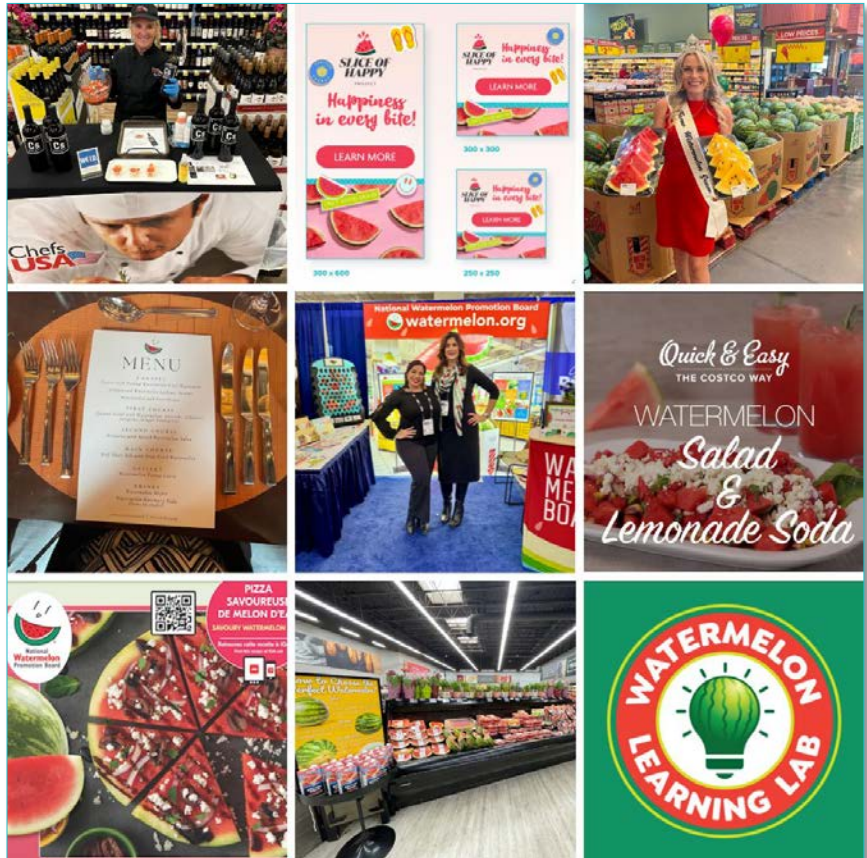
The purpose of this department is to energize domestic and international retail markets to create continued, year-round awareness. Getting watermelon into the hands of consumers of all ages, including gen-z shoppers, requires NWPB to **build and maintain relationships with retailers domestically as well as in international markets.**

Promotional opportunities at retail include in-store, digital, and social media marketing components, providing customer reach for product and nutrition education as an extension to the brick and mortar element that is coming back into focus. NWPB will continue supporting retailers by contracting with merchandising representatives that manage various retail accounts across the US and Canada. Throughout the year, this team aims to keep watermelon top of mind every day of the year while also establishing new connections. They are also a direct line to retailers' needs as it pertains to watermelon information, promotional opportunities and education.

The retail merchandising contest encourages retailers to incorporate social and digital media marketing efforts in addition to in-store experiences. The contest starts in July to honor National Watermelon Month and runs throughout the month of August to encourage and identify retailers who are showcasing watermelon's benefits including health, value and versatility.

NWPB plans to continue working with mobile media company Genesis to provide immersive storytelling and guaranteed engagement at retail. These opportunities track with current and future shopper habits that continue to shift heading into 2025 and 2026. This campaign can also be used as a tool NWPB can offer to retailers to provide in-store. NWPB also plans to continue outreach to independent retailers.

In the retail education space, NWPB's Watermelon Learning Lab tool will be promoted to retailers via our retail account management team and at conferences, events and regional produce shows.



Again this year, NWPB was fortunate to be awarded Market Access Program funding by Foreign Agricultural Services (FAS) to continue promotional programs and outreach efforts in international markets. This includes continued retail, communications and foodservice programs in Japan and Canada. Additionally, NWPB received funding through FAS's Emerging Markets Program (EMP) to do a market assessment for U.S. watermelons in the Mexico market. NWPB has also applied for a new program FAS just announced called the Regional Agricultural Promotional Program (RAPP) geared towards promotion of specialty crops.

*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](mailto:jrosado@watermelon.org) within three days of event. The National Watermelon Promotion Board is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*

## Foodservice

With 16% menu penetration in 2023 (up from 8% in 2012), there is plenty of room for more watermelon on menus! The program's ultimate goal is to **place more watermelon on menus**. Foodservice key messages focus on educating and inspiring foodservice decision makers, including cultivation, cutting and yield, health messages, value, versatility (flavor pairings, inspiring recipes, rind usage, beverage) and year-round availability.

Earned and paid media keep watermelon top-of-mind with operators throughout the year. The International Foodservice Editorial Council helps to connect foodservice editors with innovative watermelon menu items primarily in the spring, summer and early fall when watermelon is on more menus. Paid media in the fall and winter continue watermelon messages throughout the year. The Board's continued digital partnership with the Culinary Institute of America at [ciaprochef.com/watermelon](http://ciaprochef.com/watermelon), helps spread the message of watermelon's versatility.

Sponsored events reach many audiences in foodservice. To reach noncommercial, the Board will invest in learning more about the opportunity in K-12 Foodservice with presence at the IFPA Foodservice Show focused on the K-12 Foodservice Forum. The Board will also sponsor an American Culinary Federation (ACF) webinar and have a presence at Southern Innovations to reach more noncommercial and foodservice distributors.





The Board will again sponsor the Flavor Experience and Kinetic 12 Emergence focused on regional and national chains. New this year is watermelon’s presence at the National Restaurant Show Brunch, also focused on commercial operators. Additionally, the Mise Conference is focused on foodservice at hotel and lodging. To reach foodservice educators and up and coming chefs, the Board works with the ACF and the Center for the Advancement of Foodservice Educators to promote the Watermelon Culinary Curriculum.

Lastly, the Board offers ideation and promotional support to both commercial and noncommercial operators. The Board engages with operators who do not use watermelon or help those who do, to expand watermelon menu items through education and ideation sessions, on and off-site. Promotions often support LTOs with funds to move more of the menu item and place watermelon messages in front of consumers.

## Research

The Research Committee is responsible for developing and implementing research to help the promotion and education programs, health and nutrition research, and other topics supporting the promotion of watermelon.

**New in 2024, the Watermelon Segmentation Study with Fusion Marketing will establish a shopper segmentation of watermelon purchasing households.** Study will answer the questions: Is there a group of buyers that purchases a disproportionate amount of watermelon? If so, what impact does that group have on category purchase trends and growth? Metrics will include: penetration, spend per buyer, spend per trip, trips per buyer and equivalent volume metrics.

Circana provides a snapshot of the retail scene using retail scanner data. The report produced from the research includes national and regional data for whole, mini and cut watermelon over the past 52-week period and how it compares to the prior time period. Not in the budget due to utilizing free USDA-AMS resources and team analysis, is the Retail Ad Report and Watermelon Market Report. Custom reports are created for internal and industry use.

Foodservice Research with Menu Matters will focus on consumer behavior at foodservice and qualitative foodservice operator insights. Building on the work from the last two years, Menu Matters will also conduct an analysis of key trends as well as one month of analyzing consumer behavior across all critical social media platforms to identify ethnographic trends in awareness, perception and engagement.

On the health and nutrition research front, the Board will finalize the investment in Watermelon Rind Nutrition Analysis with the goal of including watermelon rind in the USDA Foundational Foods Database as a part of Food DataCentral. This will allow the creation of a nutrition facts panel. Additionally, the Board will invest in the Effect of Daily Fresh Watermelon Consumption on Gut and Cardiometabolic Health in Young Adults with Overweight and Obesity with Florida State University. Lastly, Wild Hive continues to support the team from the Nutrition Research RFP to leveraging the results of published research studies through targeted media relations.







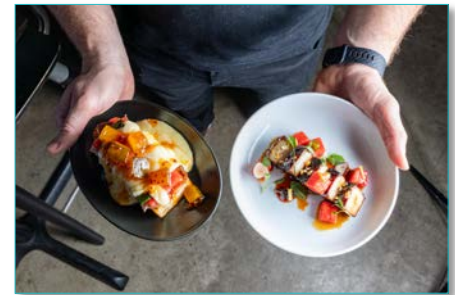
## Watermelon Workshop for Chefs


To close out the 2023/2024 fiscal year and kick off the next, we partnered with StarChefs (a community, resource and digital platform for restaurant pros who have an intense passion for food, beverage and industry trends) to host a virtual workshop for its members that focused on **different ways to use the whole watermelon and inspire chefs to do the same at their restaurant locations.**



New Orleans Chef Michael Gulatta, who owns three restaurants in NOLA, featured two dishes that he created to showcase and explore his own discovery around the versatility of watermelon flesh and rind. To educate about how versatile watermelon is, Chef Michael developed recipes with inspiration from the type of food that's served at his restaurants: classic Southern-Asian with a New Orleans twist, Vietnamese fare with a Creole influence, and Italian with flavors of Louisiana and the coastal cuisines of Sicily and Liguria.

- Watermelon Caramel-Glazed Pork Belly – Watermelon Nuoc Cham, Watermelon Caramel, Watermelon Seed Crust, Coconut Crème Fraiche, Fresh Herbs
- Roasted Caciocavallo Focaccia – Compressed Basil Watermelon, Watermelon Rind Mostarda, Puffed Watermelon seeds, Speck-Sourdough Focaccia



Chef Michael's innovative recipes are posted on the StarChefs [website](#)  for the attendees and foodservice pros who visit their site.

Digital impressions around the watermelon workshop totaled 176,280 and 150 chefs signed up and 71 chefs attended the virtual demo and discussion about watermelon. Attendee comments include, "Chef Mike did such a great job. It really opened my eyes to different ways you can use watermelon other than just in a feta salad." The Board will leverage these resources in programs moving forward and reach out to target foodservice companies who attended.



## Assessment Increase Update

Each month we will update the industry on the progress of the Assessment Increase. The Justification for Rulemaking document and necessary back up has been sent to the Board's Marketing Specialist at USDA. The associated work plan has been elevated to management to move the Rulemaking Process along which includes a 60-day comment period. During the comment period, industry members are encouraged to share their opinions on the potential assessment increase. More to come in May!

## Mentorship with Graduate Marketing Students from University of Tampa “Reaching Younger Audiences with Watermelon”

Senior Director of Communications Stephanie Barlow is mentoring a Marketing Strategy graduate class who is **using watermelon as the topic of a group project**. Working through some of the issues watermelon faces in reaching a specific audience, in this case the college-aged target market in Gen Z, the group has presented their first research report, which included interviews conducted with industry members (NWPB President and Vice President and NWA Executive Director) as well as triad interviews with cohorts of students on campus, including international students, athletes and general American consumers.



The students’ report with this niche perspective covered the 5 C’s in key learnings: Consumer, Customer, Category, Channel and Competitor. The most interesting (but not surprising to me!) takeaway? College students **want watermelon in the winter!** A strategic proposal, including more takeaways and implementation recommendations, will be the final element of their report. Understanding diverse watermelon consumer perspectives enhances our ability to effectively market to them across platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, meeting their preferences for where to get information.



## 2024 Assessment Due Dates

Please note the following **due dates** for 2024:

- Product handled in February, must be postmarked by March 30 and received by April 9, 2024
- Product handled in March, must be postmarked by April 30 and received by May 10, 2024
- Product handled in April, must be postmarked by May 30, and received by June 9, 2024

The full calendar can be found [here](#). At the same link, handlers can file their online Handler’s Report. Never used the online Handler’s Report? Check out the step by step [Online Handler’s Report Users Guide](#).





## Retail Review Corner

### *C&S Wholesale Grocers In Season Magazine*

NWPB once again partnered with C&S Wholesale Grocers' summer issue of "In Season" Magazine. The magazine featured a watermelon treat board as well as a two-page spread featuring a grilled fish taco recipe with watermelon pico de gallo that included a video on how to make the recipe. In total, 175,000 copies were printed for stores in addition to the digital magazine. Additionally, companion Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest pages were shared across C&S store zip codes.



### *Sprouts*

For the first time, NWPB partnered with Sprouts for a corporate sales contest promotion that ran for one week in early



August. The contest was based on sales of seedless, seeded and minis. Additionally, Sprouts promoted NWPB's Watermelon Learning Lab to their employees. Overall, the contest increased sales versus the previous year and many employees completed the learning lab as an added incentive!

### *Food Lion*

NWPB ran a custom e-commerce campaign with Food Lion that ran from August 16<sup>th</sup> to October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Tactics included e-commerce product collection, keyword search and boost, digital flyer insert, email banner and a Pinterest post driving to any current watermelon recipes. Overall, the campaign resulted in almost 60K pageviews, 992K impressions and 3,600 add-to-carts. More specifically, the weekly ad flyer and specials email resulted in 57,186 shopping list adds, resulting in a significant sales increase for the duration of the campaign!



### *Jewel Osco*

Jewel Osco orchestrated a fresh-cut watermelon sales competition, spanning from August 2<sup>nd</sup> to August 22<sup>nd</sup>, aimed at determining which stores could achieve the highest volume of fresh-cut watermelon sales. In a bid to excel in this challenge, participating stores meticulously curated captivating fresh-cut displays, enticing patrons with visually appealing arrangements and enhancing the shopping experience for its customers by elevating the aesthetic appeal of its fresh produce offerings.



# Educate and Inspire Restaurant Menu Planners

Watermelon on restaurant menus continues to grow, and one of the ways the Board works to keep that momentum going is **paid media or advertising to reach the foodservice audience**. For this year's campaign, one of the goals was to push out new ways for menu teams (culinary, marketing and purchasing) to think about using watermelon. Placements reinforced messages about the year-round season for watermelon, educated about ways to use the whole watermelon, and showcased its versatility by featuring watermelon recipes from some of the Board's chef partners. Paid placements ran throughout the fiscal year with the majority of ad placements in the last two quarters. The campaign is projected to reach **more than a million foodservice decision makers that represent thousands of the 1.5 MM restaurant locations across the U.S.**




watermelon.org

**FEATURED PRODUCT**

**Refresh Menus with Watermelon**

During spring and summer, watermelon is grown in more than 30 states. Of consumers surveyed in 2022, 72% agree "Fresh watermelon is under-appreciated, and restaurants should be doing more to use fresh watermelon in new and interesting ways."

*Sponsored by National Watermelon Promotion Board*

plate | recipes

Win with Watermelon

Delight your customers with the versatility of watermelon on your menu.

watermelon.org

BE INSPIRED



**5 doughy recipes from our latest issue**

Our Dough issue is here! From flaky gluten-free rolls filled with tomato, spinach, and feta to Italy's most festive holiday cake, sweet yeasted buns shiny with vanilla glaze, ravioli bursting with an oozy golden yolk, and pizza topped with Japanese-inspired roe and canned corn, these recipes were made to bring in the dough.

**Flaky Tomato-Spinach-Feta Rolls**  
Chef/Partner Monica Glass | Vervaine, Cambridge, Mass. [RECIPE](#)

**Mentaiko and Corn Pizza**  
Chef Katsuya Fukushima | Tonari, Washington, D.C. [RECIPE](#)

**Panettone Classico**  
Owner Nicola Olivieri | Olivieri 1882, Veneto, Italy [RECIPE](#)

**The Original Crumble-Bun**  
Chef/Owner Angela Garbacz | Goldenrod Pastries, Lincoln, Neb. [RECIPE](#)

**Raviolo al Uovo**  
Chef Vincent Cortese | Bar56, New York, N.Y. [RECIPE](#)



Sponsored Recipe

**Watermelon Ups Your Salad Game**

Healthful and delicious describe Burmese Watermelon Salad that features cubes of juicy, crisp watermelon tossed with lentils, shredded coconut, toasted peanuts, sesame seeds, green beans, mint and soy dressing. [Be inspired by other ways to use watermelon on your menu. >>](#)


Sponsored by



watermelon.org





It's Always Watermelon Season



BE INSPIRED

# Fast Casual 2.0

February 21, 2024

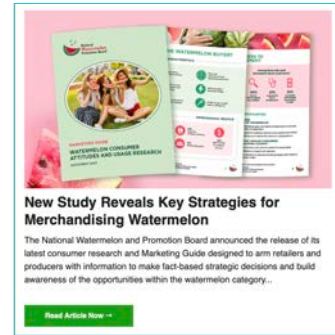
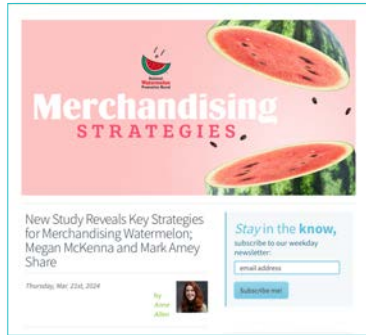



BE INSPIRED

National Watermelon Promotion Board  
watermelon.org



# Consumer Trade Research Trade Release: Key Strategies for Merchandising Watermelon



In December, the 2023 Consumer Research was featured in the Watermelon Update but just this last month the research was featured in a trade media release and LinkedIn post. It received **great pick up** and hopefully the **industry will take advantage** of this valuable resource!



## Watermelon on the Menu

**MC's Tap House** - a “burgers and brews” restaurant with locations in Brooklyn Park and Lino Lakes, Minnesota - is currently offering a **Watermelon Salad** with mixed greens, red onions, bleu cheese crumbles tossed in champagne bleu cheese vinaigrette and topped with **fresh diced watermelon** and grilled croutons.



## NWPB Connections

**IFPA Women’s Fresh Perspectives Conference** - Orlando, FL - April 7 - 9

**Texas International Produce Association Viva Fresh Expo** - Houston, TX - April 12 & 13

**Watermelon Queen Training** - Orlando, FL - April 20

**CPMA Convention and Trade Show** - Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada - April 23 - 26

