



Watermelon Update

NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD



Watermelon Showcased at SEPC's Southern Exposure

NWPB once again participated in the Southeast Produce Council's annual "Southern Exposure" expo March 6 – 8 in Orlando, FL. This year, along with retail and foodservice workshops and networking events, NWPB's Juliemar Rosado and Stephanie Barlow were joined by National Watermelon Queen Elanie Mason and promotions coordinator Kerri Wiggins at the booth to provide retail and foodservice attendees with information on how to keep watermelon top of mind on menus and in grocery stores. Among other events, NWPB's Megan McKenna attended the SEPC Foodservice and Arnold Palmer Children's Hospital (APCH) Committee meetings, of which she is a member. She is the 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.

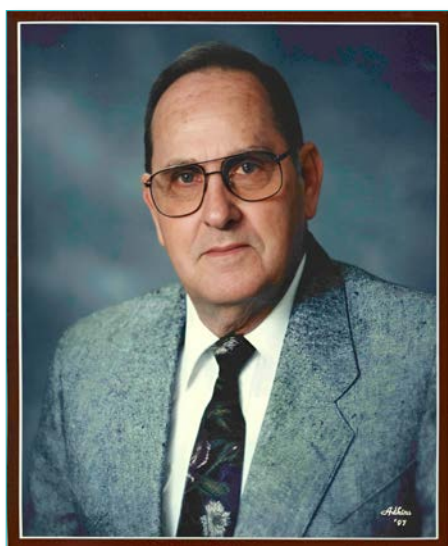
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Mark Arney Presents to USDA Researchers on Watermelon Industry Challenges and Research Priorities

Mark Arney, an industry stakeholder representing the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) on the CucCap2 project, delivered a presentation to researchers at the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) facility in Charleston, South Carolina. His presentation focused on **aligning agricultural research with the real-world challenges faced by watermelon growers**.

As part of the CucCap2 initiative, which seeks to advance disease resistance and crop management strategies for cucurbit crops, Arney emphasized the critical role of scientific research in supporting the watermelon industry. He highlighted how advancements in disease resistance, pest management, and improved cultivation techniques can not only enhance production but also strengthen marketing and promotion efforts.



In Memoriam – Buddy Leger

The National Watermelon Promotion Board mourns the passing of Charles M. "Buddy" Leger, who passed away on February 28, 2025. A founding member and the first president of the NWPB, Buddy's vision and **leadership helped shape the watermelon industry as we know it today**. His dedication to agriculture left a lasting impact, inspiring generations of growers and industry leaders. We honor his legacy and extend our deepest condolences to his family and friends.



Industry Spotlight – Get to Know Chad Chastain

Company: J.D.I. Farms

Time in the Industry: Full time on the farm for 10 years

Time on the Board: This is my 5th year on the board

What's your favorite thing about Watermelon? Watermelons are such a fun crop to produce because everyone gets excited when they are brought up in conversation!

What's your favorite piece of technology? Social media, specifically X for me, is a great tool to learn how others are accomplishing the same end goal but using a different method to get there. I have learned a ton by watching other farmers online and how they tackle a problem on their own operation.

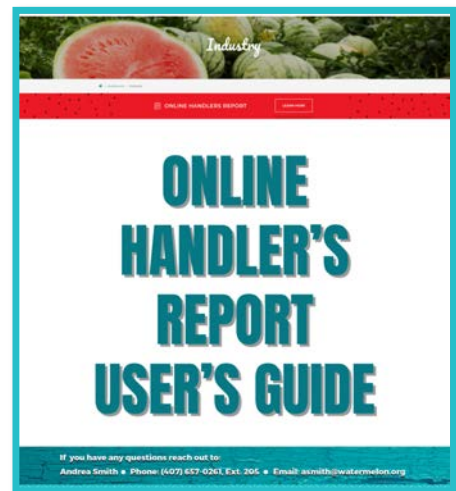


2025 Assessment Due Dates

Please note the following **due dates for 2025**:

- Product handled in March, must be postmarked by April 30, and received by May 12, 2025
- Product handled in April, must be postmarked by May 30, and received by June 9, 2025
- Product handled in May, must be postmarked by June 30, and received by July 10, 2025

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](#).





2025-2026 Department Overviews: Foodservice, Communications, Retail, International Marketing Research & Industry

Foodservice

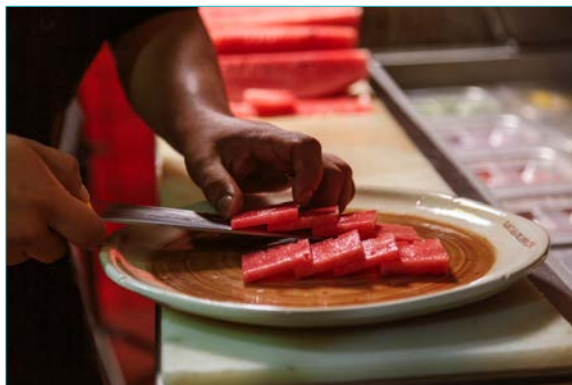
In 2024, Board research found that **62% of consumers are highly interested in trying fresh watermelon in innovative foodservice dishes**. The program's goal is to increase watermelon's presence on menus by educating and inspiring foodservice decision-makers. Key messaging highlights cultivation, cutting, yield, health benefits, value, and year-round availability. Watermelon's versatility in flavor pairings, recipes, rind usage, and beverages helps it stand out in foodservice trends.

Earned and paid media ensure watermelon remains top-of-mind for operators. A **new year-round paid media initiative** will complement earned media by delivering continuous watermelon education and inspiration. The Board's digital partnership with the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) at ciaprochef.com/watermelon promotes watermelon's versatility with new recipes, photography, and video content.

Sponsored events expand reach across foodservice segments. The "Watermelon Welcome" campaign targets K-12 and college foodservice to greet students with watermelon each August and September. The Board will sponsor the International Fresh Produce Association's K-12 Foodservice Forum and the National Association of College and University Food Services. To engage noncommercial and foodservice distributors, the Board will support an American Culinary Federation (ACF) webinar, participate in the Southeast Produce Council's Southern Innovations, and sponsor CIA's Worlds of Flavor.

For regional and national chains, the Board will again sponsor the Flavor Experience and Kinetic 12 Emergence. At the National Restaurant Show, watermelon will be featured in multiple activations, a satellite brunch for operators, a dinner for foodservice editors, and menu activations on the show floor. A new initiative co-sponsored with USA Potatoes and Lentils.org will create a hands-on learning experience for high-value operators.

To engage foodservice educators and students, the Board collaborates with the ACF and the Center for the Advancement of Foodservice Education to promote the Watermelon Culinary Curriculum. New student-focused initiatives include CIA-sponsored culinary competitions and expanded Watermelon Welcome programs.





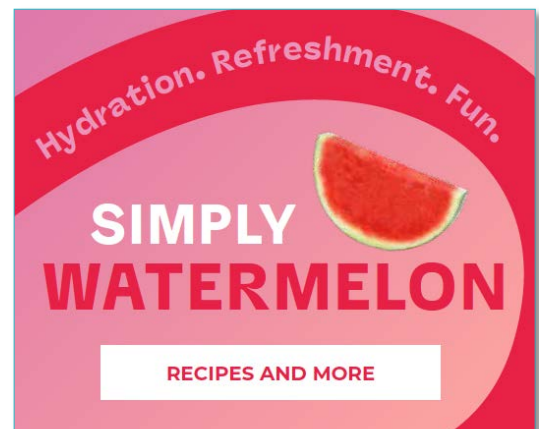
The Board also supports operators with **ideation and promotional initiatives, assisting those who don't yet use watermelon or helping expand its menu presence** through education and on-site sessions. Promotions often support limited-time offers with funding to drive sales and consumer engagement. A new program, StarChefs Discovery Week, is an on-premise promotion in eight markets featuring exclusive watermelon menu placements. The campaign includes a dedicated landing page, e-newsletter promotion, and social media amplification.

Expanding the foodservice program will enhance brand awareness, drive lead generation, and boost watermelon's presence in kitchens and menus, ensuring it becomes a staple in foodservice moving forward.



Communications

The Communications program will leverage the success of last year's "**Simply Watermelon**" consumer marketing campaign by extending the approach through 2025. This initiative aligns with the program's mission to inspire, educate, and engage consumers through digital platforms, in-person events, and influencer collaborations. Focusing primarily on Millennials and Gen Z, social media campaigns will feature vibrant and engaging content that highlights watermelon as a healthy, refreshing, and sustainable choice. By emphasizing its natural hydration benefits and rich nutrient profile, the campaign aims to capitalize on emerging health trends, secure media coverage, and create meaningful engagement through in-person events.



Some program initiatives for this year include:

- **Influencer Partnerships & Storytelling:** Collaborations with influencers and grower stories will amplify watermelon messaging, ensuring year-long consumer education. Past high-performing partners, such as Ross Chastain, alongside new influencers, will continue sharing the watermelon story, driving consumer enthusiasm and demand.
- **Immersive In-Person Events:** Participate in key events, including dietitian-focused activations, fitness community engagements, and the annual Marine Corps Marathon.
- **Dynamic Content Creation:** Engaging digital assets such as simple snacking solutions, vibrant photography, and trend-forward UGC style social videos will inspire and educate consumers.
- **Targeted Digital Advertising:** Spring and Fall digital ads that drive traffic and deepen consumer engagement across multiple platforms.
- **Press & Media Outreach:** Programmatic advertising through podcasts and OTT video, paid news releases, and media monitoring will ensure widespread visibility.

- **Consumer Communications:** Partnerships with youth sports advertising via the TeamSnap app, targeted nutrition and health professional outreach, and experiential campaigns like run club sponsorships will enhance our reach.
- **Website & Digital Enhancements:** Watermelon.org will serve as a hub for social media marketing, email campaigns, and paid media placements to engage consumers/watermelon fanatics, educators and industry professionals.



Key performance indicators (KPIs) will include social engagements, video views, website traffic, and community growth metrics, ensuring that every campaign activation delivers impactful results. By integrating digital innovation, media outreach, and consumer engagement, we will continue to solidify watermelon's position as a must-have staple for consumers nationwide.

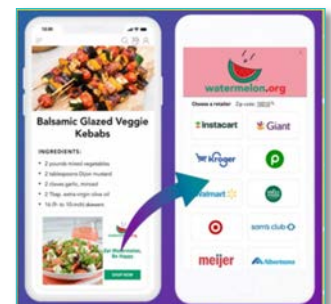


Retail

The National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) is set to elevate its retail marketing strategy for the 2025/2026 season with expanded outreach, enhanced digital engagement, and stronger industry partnerships. The goal is to drive watermelon sales, increase consumer awareness, and support retailers with innovative promotional programs.

A key component of this strategy is **increased support of the national, state, and regional association programs** through their popular watermelon queen and promotional ambassador initiatives. These programs play a vital role in engaging consumers and promoting watermelon at the retail level. Additionally, the national retail merchandising contest will run from June through August, tapping into peak summer demand and encouraging stores to create eye-catching displays that boost sales.

To further support retailers, NWPB is **strengthening its digital marketing efforts**. The board is deepening its partnership with Chicory, a leader in shoppable recipe technology, allowing consumers to purchase ingredients directly from Watermelon.org. Additionally, NWPB is exploring opportunities with



DoorDash, leveraging its delivery network to reach more customers. Grocery TV is another key partner, providing in-store digital advertising to capture shoppers' attention at the point of purchase.

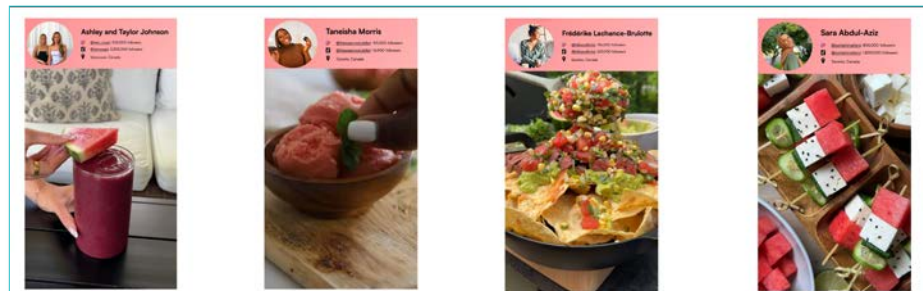
Retailer education remains a priority. NWPB is **launching a quarterly retail** newsletter in collaboration with Fusion, providing valuable insights, industry trends, and best practices to key stakeholders. The Watermelon Learning Lab, an online training tool, will continue to equip retail employees with the knowledge they need to educate consumers and drive sales.

Through a combination of **in-store promotions, digital innovation, retailer support, and industry engagement**, NWPB is positioning watermelon as a must-have item for consumers year-round. By leveraging these initiatives, the board is committed to growing the category, enhancing retailer partnerships, and ensuring a successful season for the industry.



International Marketing

NWPB is **actively working to expand the presence of U.S. watermelons in international markets through strategic promotional efforts**. With funding secured through the Regional Agricultural Promotional Program (RAPP) as well as from the Market Access Program (MAP), NWPB is set to enhance trade relationships and consumer awareness in Canada, Japan, and the Caribbean.



In Canada, NWPB plans to work with major supermarket chains and independent retailers to boost in-store displays and educate consumers about the benefits of U.S. watermelons. Trade representatives will engage key industry players to ensure consistent messaging on quality, value, and best handling practices. Digital and social media campaigns will drive consumer awareness, while collaborations with the foodservice industry will encourage more restaurants and culinary professionals to incorporate watermelon into their menus. Participation in major industry events, such as the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) expo, will further strengthen retailer engagement.

In Japan, NWPB plans to work with select retail chains to introduce effective merchandising strategies, including in-store demos and



promotional materials. Digital outreach will target younger consumers through social media and an official Japanese-language website. Additionally, NWPB is planning to engage with the foodservice sector to highlight watermelon's versatility.

In the Caribbean, NWPB is leveraging trade shows and direct retailer outreach to increase market penetration. Participation in key industry events, such as the Americas Food and Beverage Show and the Taste of the Caribbean culinary expo, will showcase the quality and versatility of U.S. watermelons. Retail and foodservice partnerships will drive visibility, while strategic trade meetings in Miami and the Caribbean will build lasting relationships with regional buyers.

Through these initiatives, NWPB is hoping to ensure that U.S. watermelons remain a preferred choice for consumers worldwide.



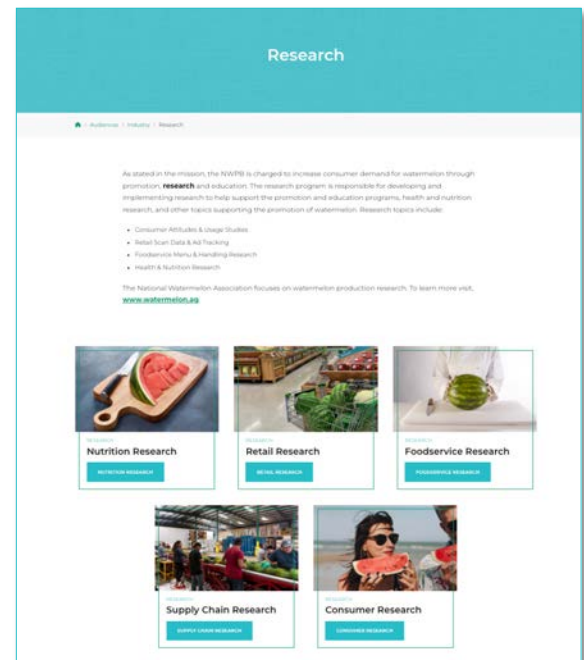
Research

Research is the foundation of the Watermelon Board's programs, shaping marketing, communications, and outreach. It **measures success and guides initiatives in promotion, education, and health research, ultimately supporting the industry.**

Expanding consumer, retail, and foodservice research will provide valuable insights to help the Board and industry. The High-Value Watermelon Shopper Study, in partnership with Fusion Marketing, will identify key shoppers, their demographics, and purchase behaviors. The Watermelon Baseline Report will analyze retail trends, including sales, pricing, and distribution, setting performance benchmarks for marketers and retailers. Key findings will be available for trade communications and sales strategies.

Circana's retail scanner data offers a national and regional retail snapshot, tracking whole, mini, and cut watermelon sales over 52 weeks. While free USDA-AMS resources and team analysis cover the Retail Ad Report and Watermelon Market Report, custom reports will still be generated for industry needs.

In foodservice research, Menu Matters will explore watermelon's presence on menus, highlighting trends, innovation themes, and consumer preferences. An online survey will uncover opportunities and barriers to consumption, while social media tracking will analyze chef and consumer engagement. Additionally, research across various operator segments will provide qualitative and quantitative insights.

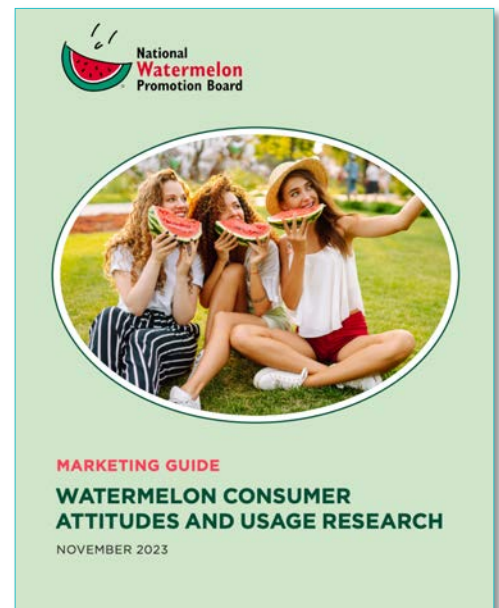




With the assessment increase, **more human nutrition studies will enhance watermelon's health messaging.** Wild Hive, the Board's nutrition research partner, will oversee research initiatives, updating engagement strategies and ensuring industry relevance. Key studies include:

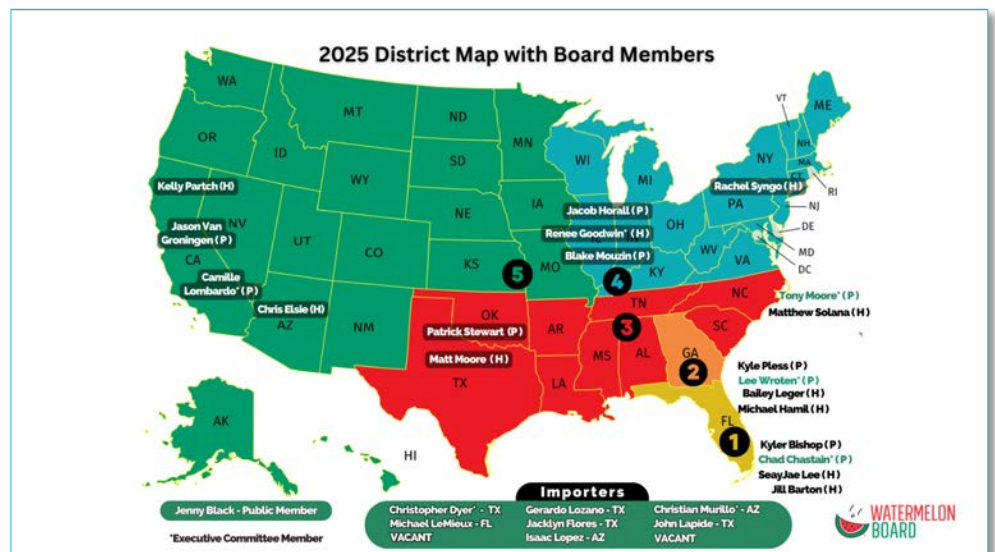
- Clemson University: Examining watermelon flesh versus juice consumption and its impact on cardiometabolic outcomes in individuals at risk for Type 2 diabetes.
- University of California, Los Angeles: Studying watermelon's effects on cardiometabolic risk factors and antioxidant capacity in postmenopausal women with prehypertension and obesity.
- Indiana University: Analyzing NHANES data to assess the relationship between watermelon consumption and cardiometabolic health.

These research efforts will strengthen industry knowledge, provide actionable insights, and enhance watermelon's position in the market.



Industry

Communicating to the industry about tools and resources available as well as program results is a priority. When reviewing tactics of recent years, 67% of the leadership believe the Board is communicating effectively and the funds should go to programs. **Similar Industry Outreach is planned for 2025/2026** as prior years, including but not limited to: monthly Watermelon Update E-newsletter (budgeted in Communications), ongoing LinkedIn posts, website section dedicated to the Industry, state/regional/national association convention attendance, presentations and sponsorships, quarterly NWA Vineline article and other miscellaneous activities throughout the year. For those interested in serving on the Board, Districts 4 and 5 are working through the appointment process in 2025 and District 1, Importers, and a Public Member will be up for appointment in 2026.





NWA Nook – New Legal Resource for NWA Members: JPH Law Firm Partnership Launched

The National Watermelon Association is excited to announce a new partnership with JPH Law Firm, offering NWA members trusted legal guidance on critical labor and employment matters. This exclusive member benefit is designed to help members navigate the complex landscape of H-2A policies, labor laws, and regulatory compliance.

◆ Expert Guidance on H-2A & Labor Compliance

JPH Law Firm specializes in H-2A visa requirements, employment law, contracts, and workplace regulations—helping NWA members stay compliant while protecting their businesses.

◆ Assistance with Audits & Investigations

Members facing DOL audits, wage disputes, or compliance challenges can receive expert legal insight and support. JPH Law Firm will help members understand their rights and obligations to mitigate risk.

◆ Contract Review & Employer Protections

From worker agreements to employer liability concerns, JPH will assist NWA members with drafting and reviewing legal documents to ensure strong protections for their operations.

◆ How to Engage

This new legal resource is available exclusively to NWA members. To access these services, contact George Szczepanski, and he will connect you with JPH Law Firm for expert legal assistance. This partnership underscores NWA's commitment to providing members with the resources they need to thrive in an ever-changing regulatory environment. Reach out today to take advantage of this valuable member benefit!

◆ Not a Member Yet? Join Today!

If you're not yet an NWA member, now is the perfect time to join. Membership gives you access to exclusive benefits like this legal support, advocacy, industry insights, and networking opportunities. Visit www.watermelon.ag to learn more and become a member today!

Stay connected with NWA at www.watermelon.ag for more updates.



North Carolina Watermelon Association Convention

NWPB Executive Director attended NCWA's annual convention in March, where he presented program updates for the 2025-2026 year. **Congratulations to new queen Elizabeth Steinlage!**



Spring Banner Ads

This spring we're bringing back our digital banner ads – programmatic and remarketing – launching with **all new creative under** the “Simply Watermelon” umbrella campaign. Our digital ads consistently perform well-above industry average by targeting individuals interested in recipes, healthy living and of course – watermelon! Look for campaign results in an upcoming issue of the Watermelon Update!



Watermelon on the Menu

Chef Art Smith's Homecomin' in Disney Springs in Orlando, FL features a Moonshine Mash on their **year round menu** that includes **watermelon-infused moonshine, fresh watermelon, lime juice, simple syrup and a watermelon cube garnish.**



NWPB Connections

Watermelon Queen/Ambassador Training – Charleston, SC – April 3

CPMA Montreal – Montreal, Quebec, Canada – April 8 – 10

MKA Horizons – Kansas City, MO – April 9 & 10

Viva Fresh – Houston, TX – April 11 & 12

Florida Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics (FAND) – Orlando, FL – April 25 – 27

Kinetic 12 – Chicago, IL – April 29 & 30

Today's Dietitian Spring Symposium – San Antonio, TX – May 4 – 6

