



OCTOBER 2025

# Watermelon Update

NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD



## NWPB Fall 2025 Board Meeting

The National Watermelon Promotion Board convened its Fall 2025 meeting on September 25 at the Hyatt Orlando Airport in Orlando, FL. Board members, importers and industry stakeholders gathered for a full day of updates, research insights, and strategic discussions designed to guide the Board's work into 2026. After opening items including USDA, Executive Committee and NWA updates, the focus shifted to the future of watermelon demand.

The meeting featured a strong research track designed to equip the industry with actionable insights. Jason Hanselman and Mark Arney shared the latest Market Update, followed by Howard Goldstein of Wildhive presenting a Nutrition Research Update. Matt Schraut of Fusion Marketing then delivered findings from the High-Value Watermelon Shopper Study, providing a closer look at consumer behaviors, preferences, and opportunities to drive incremental growth. Mauve Webster of Menu Matters shared insights on watermelon menuing and innovation trends, highlighting opportunities for culinary growth. Together, these sessions reinforced the importance of using data to strengthen watermelon's position across the marketplace.

### *Inside this issue:*

- Fall Board Meeting
- Realignment of Districts
- 2025 Labor Day Market Analysis
- Fall CRCEO Meeting
- Watermelon Board Brings Innovation to Southern Innovations
- Communications Midyear Report
- NWA Nook: Labor Reform Front and Center in Washington
- Watermelon Selling Events at Harris Teeter
- A Gentle Reminder to Pay Your Assessment
- ChefLab Denver Showcases Watermelon Versatility
- Watermelon Booth Makes a Splash at Americas Food & Beverage Show
- Influencer Partner Roundup
- Don't Miss Out – Subscribe to the Retail Newsletter Today!
- Costco Quick & Easy Watermelon Recipes
- Team Watermelon at MCM Design Preview
- Watermelon Featured in Weis Healthy Bites Magazine
- Latine Heritage Month
- Watermelon on the Menu
- NWPB Connections



## Board Meeting Continued

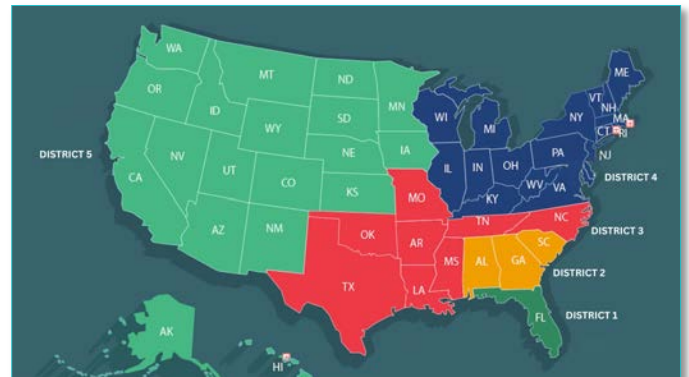
Following research presentations, the spotlight turned to Board programs and industry engagement. Stephanie Barlow led the Communications Update and Input Session, while Juliemar Rosado provided a comprehensive Marketing Update and Input Session, both inviting feedback from members to help shape upcoming initiatives. The day concluded with Megan McKenna's Foodservice Update and Input Session, which emphasized new strategies and partnerships to keep watermelon top of mind with foodservice.

From consumer research to communications and foodservice, the Fall Board Meeting **showcased the Board's continued commitment to aligning programs with industry priorities and ensuring watermelon's year-round success.**



## Realignment of Districts

Published in the Federal Register on September 19, 2025, 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 proposal invites comments on realigning the Board by adjusting several production districts under the Plan for producer and handler representation on the Board and proportionally reducing the number of importer seats on the Board from nine to seven. This is intended to more equally represent the average annual percentage of assessments paid by importers. These changes were recommended by the Board after a review of the production volume and assessments paid in each production district, as well as the assessments paid by importers. The Plan requires that such a review be conducted at least every five years. These changes would help facilitate program operations, and the full Board unanimously voted to recommend these changes to the Secretary at their meeting on October 15, 2024, in Atlanta, Georgia. After consideration of all relevant material presented, including the information and recommendations submitted by the Committee and other available information, AMS has determined that this rule is consistent with and will effectuate the declared policy of the Act. For further information, please contact William "Harrison" Hodges, Agricultural Marketing Specialist, Mid-Atlantic Regional Branch / Market Development Division, AMS, USDA, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Suite 1406, Washington, DC 20250; telephone: (443) 571-8456; facsimile: (202) 205-2800; or electronic mail: [William.Hodges2@usda.gov](mailto:William.Hodges2@usda.gov). The comment period ends October 20, 2025. To leave a comment visit: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/09/19/2025-18232/watermelon-research-and-promotion-plan-realignment>

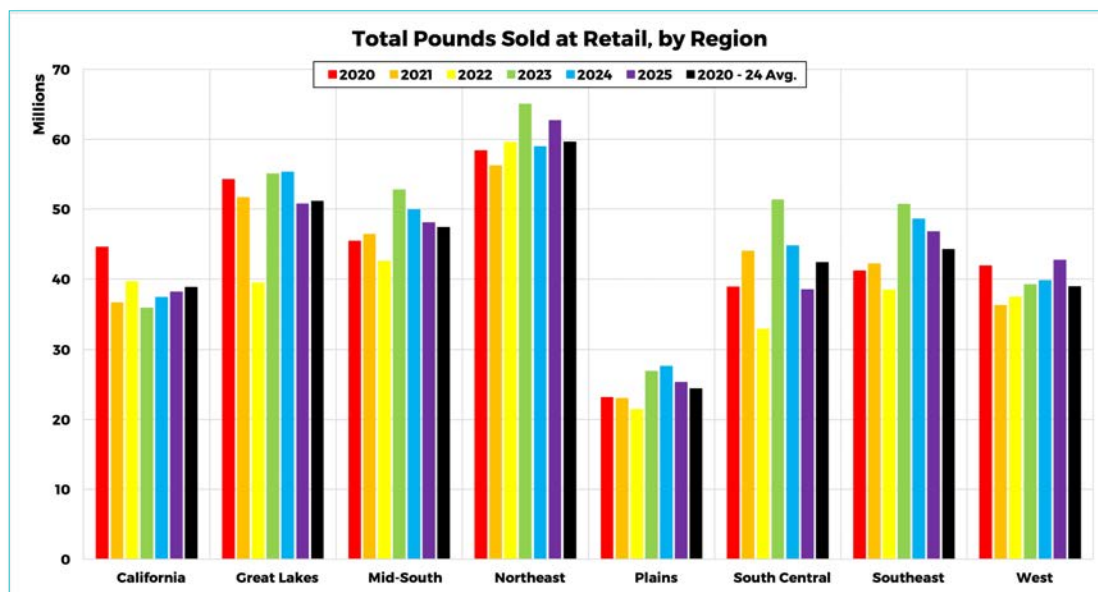
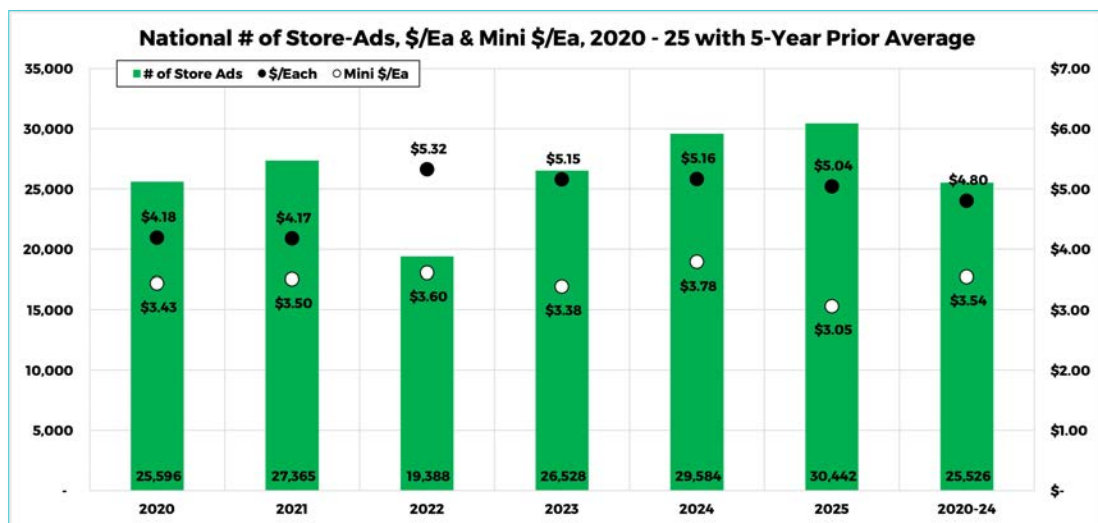




## 2025 Labor Day Market Analysis

### Labor Day weekend continues to drive strong demand for watermelon.

Retail ad data from USDA-AMS shows that the number of store-ads this year was highest going back to 2020. Advertised prices, meanwhile, were slightly lower than recent years for Seedless at \$5.04 “on ad.” Minis saw a larger discount at roughly fifty cents lower than average and lower than any year reviewed. Retail data from Circana from 2020 through 2024 for the two weeks preceding the holiday and the week that followed averaged roughly 347 million pounds. In 2025, retail pounds sold was 1.7% higher at 353 million pounds ranking third highest since 2020 and trailing the past two years. Whole watermelon retained a share of 81% of pounds sold, while Mini and Cut moved together at 9% and 10%, respectively.



Nationally, Wholes averaged \$5.56 per each, around a nickel lower than the past two years. Mini watermelon averaged \$3.49 with savings of 20 to 30 cents compared to past two years. Cut per pound prices increased dramatically from \$2.30 last year to \$3.21 this year, which may have played a role in Cut sales being down 15% from average. The Mini category was up 27% on pounds sold, and Wholes up a more modest 1.9% on heavier volume.

Please see [the full report here](#) for more information.

## Fall CRCEO Meeting

NWPB Executive Director Mark Arney attended the CRCEO's Fall meeting held in Washington, D.C. last month. One of the highlights of the meeting was when **USDA-AMS Administrator Erin Morris joined the group to discuss several topics of importance to group's members.**

Although newly appointed to the role—succeeding former AMS Administrator Bruce Summers, who recently retired—Morris brings with her a wealth of experience, having served in multiple leadership roles during her long tenure at the agency.



## Watermelon Brings Innovations to Southern Innovations

The Watermelon Board joined the Southeast Produce Council in Charlotte this September for **Southern Innovations**, SEPC's annual tradeshow and conference spotlighting fresh ideas in produce, from new products and technologies to bold branding strategies. In 2025, the event welcomed nearly **1,500 attendees**, with close to a third representing retail, foodservice, and wholesale buying.

Networking and education were front and center, including the "What's New" session on **emerging retail trends and generational shifts**, highlighting how Gen Alpha is beginning to influence household purchases more and more. The Brunch Keynote, delivered by technology and leadership expert **Erik Qalman**, offered especially valuable insights into the intersection of innovation and leadership.

The Board had a strong presence throughout the event. **Megan McKenna** attended multiple committee meetings, while retail account manager **Sheila Carden** and foodservice committee chair **Rachel Syngo** helped welcome attendees to the Board's booth. There, visitors sampled **Watermelon Rind Pickles**, underscoring watermelon's 100% edibility ahead of upcoming rind nutrition research, and **fresh watermelon with a new dried kimchi spice blend**, showcasing watermelon's versatility.

All in all, Southern Innovations was two days full of **watermelon wow** in Charlotte!



# Communications Midyear Report

Communications partner-agency, Curious Plot, has provided a mid-year report with activity highlights and KPI measurements for the activities under the consumer communications outreach including social, and digital media as well as influencer partnerships. Some key highlights include:

- Social Media Impressions: 19.9 million (annual goal: 26.7 million)
- **Social Media Engagements: 2.6 million (annual goal: 1.2 million)**
- Website Pageviews: 641,000 (annual goal: 1.02 million)
- **Social Media Video Views: 8.4 million (annual goal: 3.5 million)**
- Watermelon Social Media Community: 324,500 (annual goal: 322,000)



This year's campaign has two primary objectives, including (1) Increase awareness, interest and purchase of watermelon among key target audiences by focusing on purchase motivators and (2) Increase proficiency with watermelon (uses, occasions and handling) to grow demand among primary and secondary audiences. It is highly integrated, creating a cohesive brand experience across all channels. Key channels include social media platforms like Meta (Instagram and Facebook), TikTok and Pinterest, as well as digital platforms like the website, blog, and newly renamed e-newsletter "The Monthly Slice."

Social media content has driven significant engagement, with platforms like TikTok and Pinterest showing strong performance. TikTok delivered 5 million total video views, while Pinterest generated 4.3 million impressions. The Simply Watermelon campaign has been a cornerstone, leveraging assets like influencer-style videos and user-generated content.

With strong engagement and growth across multiple channels, the focus on flavor, value, and versatility, combined with strategic community and influencer partnerships, has positioned watermelon as a beloved and versatile fruit. The Board will continue to invest in social-first content, community management, and wellness-focused messaging. Our goal is to **offer watermelon as the solution, and keep watermelon at the forefront through education and inspiration.**



## NWA Nook: Labor Reform Front and Center in Washington

The National Watermelon Association continues to make agricultural labor reform our top priority in Washington, D.C. Earlier this month, NWA leaders met face-to-face with Members of Congress, USDA and DOL officials, and White House staff to advocate for meaningful changes to the H-2A program. These conversations built on recommendations from the bipartisan Agricultural Labor Working Group (ALWG), and we urged policymakers to incorporate those ideas into upcoming legislation.



We are encouraged that lawmakers and Administration officials are listening. Recent developments — including a federal court ruling rolling back expanded Adverse Effect Wage Rates, House appropriators advancing a freeze of AEWR to 2023 levels, and USDA’s decision to discontinue the outdated Farm Labor Survey — signal momentum for change. Meanwhile, Chairman GT Thompson has expressed intent to introduce new legislation this fall to advance ALWG’s recommendations.

At the same time, the policy landscape remains complex. Tariff shifts with Canada and Mexico, upcoming Farm Bill negotiations, and the 2026 review of USMCA all carry potential impacts for our industry. NWA is gathering member input to guide our positions, ensuring that watermelon growers are represented as trade and farm policy evolve.



“Our meetings in Washington gave us reason to believe that further action is possible, but the message remains clear: without urgent reform, American growers are being pushed to the breaking point,” said NWA Executive Director George Szczepanski.

NWA’s work in Washington is daily and ongoing, supported by our dedicated lobbying team at The Redding Firm. We remain committed to securing affordable and reliable labor solutions that protect the future of watermelon farms across the country.



## Watermelon Selling Events at Harris Teeter

In May and June, Harris Teeter shoppers across four states experienced the freshness and versatility of U.S. watermelon through a series of three-hour “selling” events led by ChefsUSA.

**Hosted in 69 stores, the demos brought watermelon front and center—paired with a wine company partner for added impact.**

At each event, shoppers sampled a refreshing Watermelon Basil & Feta Salad, discovered creative watermelon slushie recipes on wine bottles, and picked up free recipe cards, brochures, and stickers near both cut and whole fruit displays. The interactive approach gave shoppers inspiration for summer meals and celebrations, while keeping watermelon top of mind as the season kicked off.

The promotion was further amplified with a Memorial Day ad. By combining chef-led tastings, cross-promotion with wine, and shopper-friendly take-home tools, these selling events proved to be an effective way to engage consumers, drive trial, and boost watermelon sales.



## A Gentle Reminder to Pay Your Assessment

This is a friendly reminder that if you are a handler and have not paid your watermelon assessment, the deadline has passed or is approaching.

### How to Pay Your Assessment

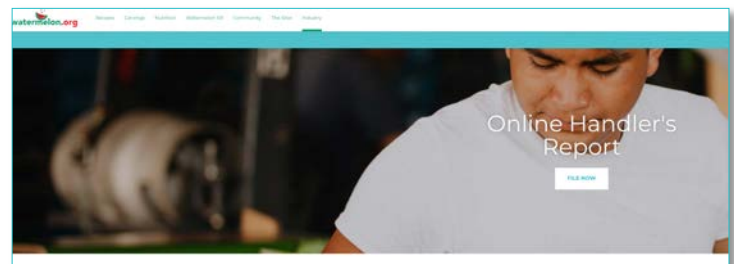
For your convenience, there are two ways to pay:

1. Mail: Send a check and handler's report to the National Watermelon Promotion Board at 1321 Sundial Point, Winter Springs, FL 32708.
2. Online: Visit the NWPB website at <https://www.watermelon.org/login-portal/> to pay securely online.

### Questions?

If you have any questions about the assessment or need assistance with your payment, please don't hesitate to contact the NWPB directly at (407) 657-0261 or by email at [industry@watermelon.org](mailto:industry@watermelon.org).

Thank you for your cooperation and continued support of the watermelon industry!



# ChefLab Denver Showcases Watermelon Versatility

The National Watermelon Promotion Board partnered with Potatoes USA, Lentils.org, and Menu Matters to host ChefLab Denver at the Potato SpudLab. Focused on quality time with operators, the event brought together **nine influential culinary leaders representing more than 1,500 foodservice locations** across quick service, fast casual, hotels, and polished casual dining. Brands represented included Chicken Salad Chick, Firebirds Wood Fired Grill, First Hospitality, Artistry Restaurants and Sharky's Woodfired Mexican Grill, creating a strong platform to showcase **watermelon's menu potential**.

Education and immersion were central to the program. Participants began with consumer insights from Menu Matters, followed by marketing and product information on watermelon, a **flavor pairing exercise and a live demonstration** on how to break down a watermelon. Attendees sampled a variety of applications, from bruschetta and stir-fry to compressed and grilled watermelon, all **tied directly to the cuisines of their brands**. Beyond the kitchen presentations, a culinary immersion tour across Denver provided inspiration from Native American, Mediterranean, and Asian cuisines, reinforcing **watermelon's adaptability in diverse global menu** styles.

Innovation came to life through a product ideation session that introduced chefs to AI platforms like Claude and MidJourney for content and concept creation. This forward-thinking approach gave participants **new tools to pair with culinary creativity**. Throughout the event, watermelon stood out as a versatile, premium, and sustainable ingredient proving **watermelon delivers on flavor, innovation, and whole-product value**.



## Watermelon Booth Makes a Splash at Americas Food & Beverage Show

NWPB recently exhibited at the Americas Food and Beverage Show from September 9-12 in Miami, Florida. This event proved to be a major success for our efforts in exploring opportunities in the Caribbean, as our first-time exhibitor booth drew strong interest from buyers, importers, and attendees alike.

Over the course of the event, **NWPB met one-on-one with about 25 importers and buyers, creating valuable opportunities to discuss U.S. watermelon's quality, versatility, and availability.** Sampling was a standout highlight, with more than 800 samples shared—including refreshing juice, zesty limeade, fresh-cut cubes, a classic watermelon feta salad, and even sweet watermelon pizza. The limeade and pizza caught attendees by surprise and generated buzz, while the watermelon feta salad delivered a familiar, well-loved option. Visitors were especially engaged by the “whole watermelon is edible” message, which highlighted creative ways to use every part of the fruit. A watermelon cocktail was also featured in “A Taste of the States” chef demonstration hosted by the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture.

Beyond the tastings and demonstrations, our booth presence and promotional materials delivered a strong impact, capturing attention and sparking meaningful conversations. For a first-time exhibit, the response exceeded expectations.

*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.*



## Influencer Partner Roundup

Halfway through 2025, the Board has teamed up with 12 dynamic influencers, a blend of lifestyle voices, registered dietitians, parenting creators, and even NASCAR's own Ross Chastain!

Our influencer marketing strategy brings watermelon-inspired content into non-Board social channels. We also capture the value of organic, non-sponsored watermelon content, which many of our partners are sharing on their own.



Featured partners include parenting creators like Bianca Dottin, Amanda Scarlati, and Cook at Home Dad; registered dietitians Kim Rose, Lauren Manaker, and Chrissy Carroll; Latina RDs Gisela Bouvier and Diana Mesa; and Ross Chastain, who engages NASCAR fans that already see him as an authentic watermelon advocate.

Beyond these 12 “Watermelon Friends,” the Board also partnered with six additional content creators for our summer Run Club series, further strengthening our reach and engagement across audiences.

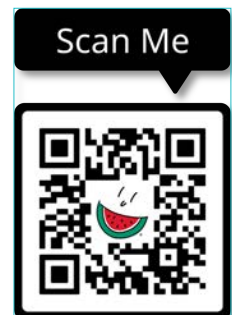
Together, these partnerships have **generated 2.8M impressions and more than 300,000 engagements. Our engagement rate is nearly 11 percent.** For context, industry benchmarks typically land between 1 and 5 percent depending on influencer audience size. These results highlight not just strong performance but the authentic enthusiasm our partners bring to promoting watermelon.

Know of an influencer that might be interested in becoming a “Watermelon Friend”? Send them to our [online application portal!](#)



## Don't Miss Out – Subscribe Today!

Our **quarterly retailer newsletter** is designed to give you a competitive edge, with insights, data-driven research, and fresh ideas to drive sales. It's also a **great resource you can share directly with clients.** With 29% of subscribers already actively engaging, the momentum is building—and you can be part of it. Scan the QR code to subscribe now and be in the know!



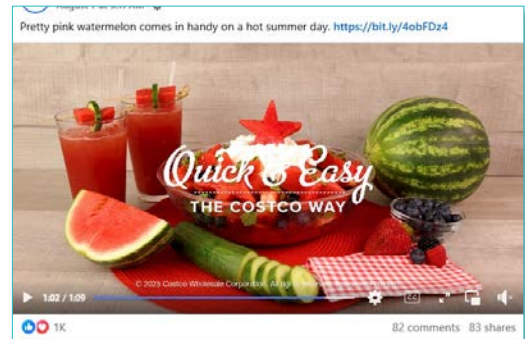
## Costco Quick & Easy Watermelon Recipes

The Costco Quick & Easy program is one of the ways Costco brings fresh, simple recipes to millions of shoppers through their website and social media. Here's how it works: Costco asks NWPB for recipe recommendations, and recipe options on our website are reviewed, keeping in mind both difficulty and what's available in-store.

This round, Costco selected two refreshing favorites: the Cucumber Cooler and the Berry Watermelon Cottage Cheese Salad. The video went live on August 7th and is still running across Costco's channels. The response has been incredible:

- 1.2 million views
- 1,100+ likes/loves
- 82 comments

This feature proves once again that watermelon-based recipes not only engage shoppers but also drive real results at retail.



## Team Watermelon at MCM Design Preview

Team Watermelon is currently gearing up for the 50th Marine Corps Marathon, which is less than a month away. Taking place Sunday, October 26, NWPB is giving away 10 pallets of fresh watermelon to 40,000 runners. Here's a sneak preview of the designs that Board staff, along with National and state watermelon queens and coordinators, will be wearing.



## Watermelon Featured in Weis HealthyBites Magazine

This summer, watermelon made a splash in the July/August issue of HealthyBites Magazine—Weis Markets' free in-store and online magazine. Our full-page ad featured a refreshing Watermelon Margarita Mocktail, complete with a QR code so readers could grab the full recipe on the spot.

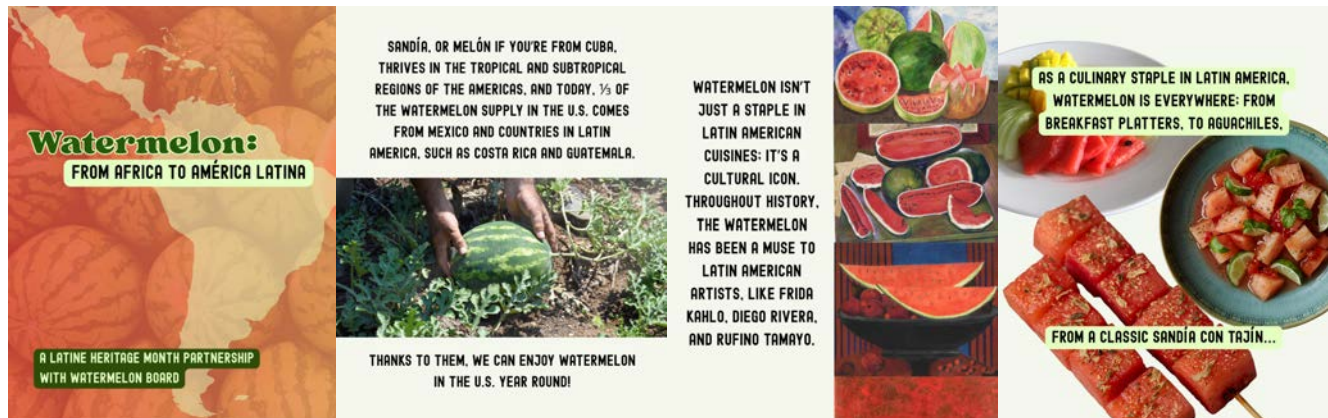
The issue was available in all 201 Weis stores with 80,000 printed copies in circulation—and shoppers took notice. A simple ad with a recipe tie-in proved to be the perfect way to inspire shoppers and boost watermelon sales across multiple formats.





## Latine Heritage Month

The Board recently partnered with Diana Mesa RD/LDN, CDCES of En La Mesa Nutrition to create a social post in honor of Latine Heritage Month, which runs September 15 – October 15. The carousel post (a few slides pictured, below) educated followers on [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#) and [LinkedIn](#) post about the history of watermelon in Latin American cuisines.



## Watermelon on the Menu

ZENTRL Kitchen + Bar - a restaurant that is a unique blend of California, Asian, and Mexican cuisines in La Jolla, CA is currently offering a Tomato & Watermelon Salad with avocado, cucumber, cotija cheese, basil oil, watercress, gazpacho, crispy shallots.



## NWPB Connections

**Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo** – Nashville, TN – October 10 – 13

**IFPA Global Produce & Floral Show** – Anaheim, CA – October 16 – 18

**Marine Corps Marathon** – Arlington, VA – October 26

**Florida Watermelon Association Annual Convention** – Charlotte Harbor, FL – October 30 – November 1

**Culinary Institute of America Worlds of Flavor** – Napa Valley, CA – November 5 – 8

**Texas Watermelon Association Annual Convention** – San Antonio, TX – November 6 – 8

