



Watermelon Update

NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD

Inside this issue:

- Watermelon at Marine Corps Marathon
- Fresh Connections at the IFPA Global Show
- 2025 Retail Merchandising Contest Winners
- Industry Spotlight – Get to Know Kyle Pless
- Watermelon Board Engages Dietitians during FNCE Week
- Partnerships Build Better Understanding of Emerging & Growth Foodservice Chains
- NWA Nook - From the Fields to the Future: Outcomes from NWA's Fall Meetings
- The Results Are In: Watermelon Takes the Spotlight at Toronto Chef Lunch
- Team Watermelon Adds a Burst of WOW to Markon's 2025 Chef Summit!
- Watermelon Board at GroceryShop 2025
- Audacy Streaming Advertising Campaign: Final Results
- Nutrition Research Program Update
- Supplier Database – Help Buyers Find Watermelon!
- Watermelon on the Menu
- NWPB Connections



Watermelon, Milestones & Marines: NWPB Marks 12 Years at Marine Corps Marathon

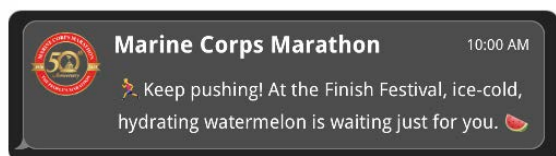
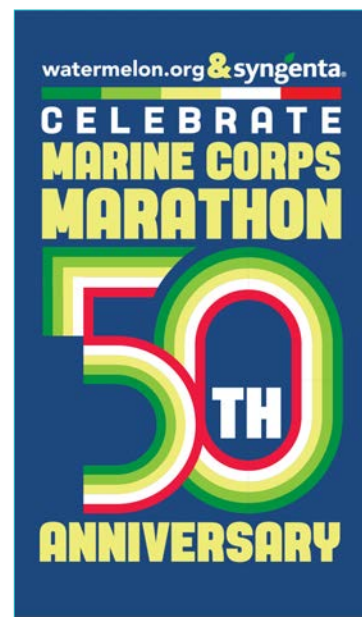
Few finish-line rewards are as refreshing as a slice of ice-cold watermelon, and for 12 years NWPB has made that moment possible for thousands of runners at the Marine Corps Marathon. This year's event, which took place October 26, carried extra meaning as the marathon celebrated its 50th anniversary, drawing participants from across the country and around the world to take part in the sold out race. Team Watermelon, made up of NWPB staff, and national and state watermelon queens and coordinators, continued a beloved tradition by distributing 10 pallets of fresh watermelon at the Finish Festival.

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Marine Corps Marathon Continued

For runners, the bright red cubes offer more than just sweetness, they provide natural hydration, quick recovery, and a well-earned taste of joy after months of training and hours of determination on the course. The NWPB's ongoing support of "The People's Marathon" highlights a shared spirit of perseverance, pride, and community. This year, **Syngenta Vegetable Seeds joined the celebration as a sponsor**, helping to bring the goodness of watermelon to runners and reinforcing a shared commitment to everyday nutrition and wellness.



Fresh Connections at IFPA Global Show

Directors Megan McKenna, Stephanie Barlow, and Juliemar Rosado represented the National Watermelon Promotion Board at the IFPA Global Show in Anaheim, California, this October.

The team reconnected with industry peers and partners, including Katie Manetti, the Board's Retail Account Manager, and contacts from Curious Plot, one of the Board's key agencies. Highlights included Cathy Burns' "State of the Industry" address and sessions from the Education Festival exploring consumer insights, produce growth, and the Food as Medicine movement.



It was an inspiring and productive event strengthening partnerships, sparking new ideas, and celebrating another successful year for both IFPA and NWPB.

2025 Retail Merchandise Contest Winners

NWPB is proud to announce the winners of its 17th Annual Watermelon Retail Merchandising Contest, recognizing outstanding retailers who delivered creative, vibrant, and effective watermelon promotions across stores and digital platforms.

Each year, the contest celebrates retailers who use imaginative merchandising and marketing to boost watermelon sales and inspire consumers to enjoy the watermelon's many health, value, and versatility benefits. This year's participants truly raised the bar, with eye-catching displays, excellent cross-merchandising, and fun social media tie-ins that brought watermelon to life in fresh and exciting ways.



This year's winners included:

- **Grand Prize:** Heritage Co-op – Brandon, Manitoba
- **Second Place:** Common Market – Frederick, MD
- **Third Place (tied):** KJ's Market – Hephzibah, GA; Borderland Co-op – Moosomin, Saskatchewan
- **Honorable Mentions:** Grocery Outlet – Shelbyville, TN; Tops Friendly Markets – Dunkirk, NY; Little Wagon Produce – Greenwood, DE; Freson Bros – Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta

"Retailers really stepped up their creativity this year," said Juliemar Rosado, Director of Retail and International Marketing of the National Watermelon Promotion Board. "From dynamic in-store displays to new and different ways to engage with the customer, we saw fresh approaches that showcased watermelon's many benefits while making it easy and fun for shoppers to enjoy."

"The Produce Team at Federated Co-operatives Ltd. is so thrilled our Member Co-ops across the Co-operative Retailing System continue to show such excitement in the National Watermelon Promotion Board merchandising contest each year," said Joshua Hubert, Senior Manager, Produce Operations for Federated Co-operatives Limited. "We continue to see exciting and award-winning displays that highlight everyone's summer favorite of watermelon, and delight our guests. A big congratulations to Tyler and his team in Heritage Co-op, and Kim and her team at Borderland Co-op. We look forward to participating again next year!"

More than \$10,000 in cash and prizes will be awarded to winners, including \$5,000 for Heritage Co-op as the grand prize winner. The second place winner will receive \$2,500, each third place winner will receive \$1,000 and each of the four honorable mentions will receive \$500.

A complete list of the winners with images can be found [here](https://www.watermelon.org). For more information, contact Juliemar Rosado at jrosado@watermelon.org.

Industry Spotlight – Get to Know Kyle Pless

Company: Pless Farms

Time in the Industry: 7 years

Time on the Board: 4 years

What's your favorite thing about the Watermelon Industry? The sense of community and the friendships made

What's your favorite item piece of technology? As a grower, I love the fact that technology in the equipment has come so far. The tractors are so much more comfortable and the precision of gps systems allows such accuracy.



Watermelon Board Engages Dietitians During FNCE Week

As thousands of registered dietitians gathered in Nashville for FNCE—the nation's largest nutrition event—the National Watermelon Promotion Board was there to energize, educate and inspire! As well as walking the expo floor, NWPB ensured watermelon was spotlighted by participating in satellite events that took place outside of the trade show and conference.

On Saturday, Watermelon Board sponsored *Energize & Thrive*, a media-dietitian event hosted by Maggie Moon, MS, RD. The 75 invited guests kicked off their day with a refreshing **watermelon lemonade** before diving into a mix of mind-body activities and educational sessions led by brand sponsors. It was a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with long-time watermelon supporters and build **new relationships with nutrition experts** who help share watermelon's health benefits.



Then on Sunday, Watermelon Board joined *Healthy Family Project's Trivia Night*, a fun-filled networking event designed to educate and inspire with watermelon wellness messaging and resources. Both events served as vibrant touchpoints to reinforce **watermelon's role in fueling an active, healthy lifestyle**—while keeping smiles on every face!



Partnerships Build Better Understanding of Emerging & Growth Foodservice Chains



The Watermelon Board continues to educate, inspire, and build strong relationships with **restaurant leaders** through partnerships like Kinetic12 Emergence. This year's sponsorship includes two regional events featuring **one-on-one roundtables with 20–30 operators and four quarterly Insight Reports** offering real-time intelligence on operator challenges and opportunities.

Q3 Key Insights Driving the Industry:

1. **Traffic is the Top Concern:** Seventy-five percent of operators now cite guest traffic as their primary challenge, surpassing costs. Suppliers (or Boards!) that deliver traffic-driving promotions and operational tools earn priority with growth-focused brands.
2. **Profitability & Growth:** Operators are investing in strategies that lift both traffic and margins, 60% increased social media campaigns, outpacing menu and loyalty initiatives. Boards can stand out with plug-and-play marketing kits and scalable activations.
3. **Customer Engagement:** Seventy-four percent say genuine hospitality is the No. 1 driver of loyalty. Boards can help by supporting menu and service innovations that enhance human connection and community.
4. **Innovation Under Pressure:** Operators are balancing excitement with efficiency through disciplined LTO programs, bold flavor innovation (sweet heat leads), and streamlined menus. Watermelon naturally complements these flavor and menu trends.
5. **Evolving Supplier Expectations:** Operators now seek collaborative, flexible partners who contribute to marketing, culinary, and menu development, reflecting a move toward integrated teamwork. The Watermelon Board offers onsite ideation opportunities to be a solution for operators.
6. **Operational Alignment:** Understanding how supply chain, culinary, and marketing functions connect helps Boards tailor their approach for maximum impact.



NWA Nook - From Fields to the Future: Outcomes from NWA's Fall Meetings

The National Watermelon Association's Executive Committee gathered in Dallas for its fall meetings, joined by several volunteer committees for two days of discussion and planning. As the harvest season winds down, this is when NWA turns from fieldwork to strategy—mapping out how to drive the industry forward. The group reaffirmed agricultural labor reform as a top priority, building on momentum from recent meetings in Washington, D.C., and ongoing collaboration with The Redding Firm to push for practical H-2A improvements.



The meetings also marked a milestone for NWA's Research Grant Program, which received a record number of proposals for 2026 funding. The Research Committee reviewed submissions spanning both traditional plant pathology and emerging technologies like AI, computer vision, and automation tools that improve efficiency and reduce labor demands. Funding announcements will be shared soon.

As the Association plans for the year ahead, the focus remains clear: strengthening the industry through advocacy, research, and collaboration—ensuring watermelon's future grows even brighter.



The Results Are In: Watermelon Takes the Spotlight at Toronto Chef Lunch

Back in September, NWPB hosted an exclusive Chef Lunch at Abrielle in Toronto's Sutton Place Hotel, **showcasing watermelon's versatility in modern cuisine**. From appetizers and entrées to cocktails and mocktails, the custom multi-course menu featured watermelon in every dish, inspiring chefs to explore new possibilities for this refreshing fruit.



The event brought together 20 leading chefs, restaurateurs, and culinary creators, achieving a social media reach of more than 446,000 impressions. A post-lunch survey printed on menus encouraged real-time feedback, with 80% of attendees planning to use more watermelon on future menus.

Each guest left with educational materials and menu inspiration, extending the event's impact beyond the day. Through creativity, collaboration, and engagement, NWPB successfully strengthened its connections in Canada's foodservice community, one watermelon dish at a time!



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 within three days of event. The National Watermelon Promotion Board is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Team Watermelon Adds a Burst of WOW to Markon's 2025 Chef Summit!



Held annually in California's Salinas Valley, **Markon's Chef Summit celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2025**, bringing together culinary leaders from distribution and operators across the country, for a hands-on journey through the fresh produce supply chain, from field to fork. The three-day event featured field tours, focus groups and the *Taste of Markon* dinner.

As part of this year's celebration, the National Watermelon Board added a refreshing twist by sponsoring a custom **Watermelon Ideation Discovery Tasting**, led by one of the Board's consulting chefs. The tasting highlighted both watermelon flesh and rind, showcasing their **versatility across four global flavor themes: American, Mediterranean, Latin American, and Asian**. Chefs attendees sampled creative watermelon pairings featuring dry spices, sauces, syrups, nuts, cheese, and even fermented black beans, each designed to spark new menu ideas. The tasting wrapped up with a **bonus bite: Watermelon Carpaccio**, demonstrating an easy, flavor-packed way to bring watermelon to the plate.



The session received great feedback from attendees, "This was my favorite one. They came prepared, were informative, and were open to questions on the spot. They were able to **shed light on a great product and inspired us to want to use it more often on our menus**." The Chef Summit was a great way to inspire foodservice operators while also influencing their distributor partners.



Watermelon Board at GroceryShop 2025

The National Watermelon Promotion Board's **Stephanie Barlow and Juliemar Rosado (pictured, right)** joined the industry's leading retailers, brands, and solution providers at GroceryShop 2025 in Las Vegas in late September. The event served as a hub for innovation and connection in the grocery and retail space, offering a first-hand look at emerging consumer trends, digital media advancements, and evolving shopper behaviors.

At the event, our team explored opportunities to expand watermelon's presence by meeting with retail media partners and exploring collaborations that can strengthen promotional reach and shopper engagement. From keynote sessions on the future of grocery to interactive exhibits showcasing cutting-edge retail technology, GroceryShop provided valuable insights that will help shape upcoming retail and consumer campaigns.



Watermelon was on the radar in conversations about health, value, and shopper experience—positioning our commodity as a fresh, fun, and versatile product that aligns with today's customers. The event reinforced the importance of keeping watermelon top of mind year-round while opening new doors for retail partnership opportunities.



Audacy Streaming Advertising Campaign: Final Results

Our national streaming ad campaign wrapped up with solid results that highlight strong engagement and smart optimization throughout the run. Spanning OTT video, streaming audio, and podcasts, the campaign successfully connected consumers to watermelon-focused content across Watermelon.org in an effort to drive awareness, educate, and inspire.

The campaign delivered an **4,071,799 total impressions**, generating broad exposure across multiple digital platforms including:

- OTT Video: 39% of total impressions
- Streaming Audio: 55% of total impressions
- Podcasts: 7% of total impressions

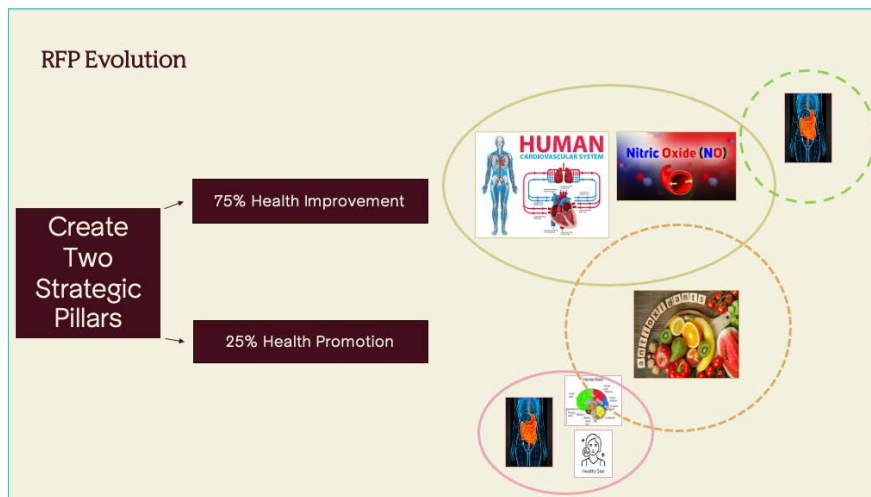


Altogether, the campaign drove 6,953 total website visits, including traffic across Recipes, Watermelon 101 and Nutrition landing pages. This was a high-performing campaign from an attribution and engagement standpoint. Continuous optimization throughout the flight ensured efficient spend and maximized impact.

Nutrition Research Program Update

Through partnerships like Kinetic12 Emergence, the Watermelon Board continues to **position watermelon as a versatile, trend-forward ingredient** that inspires creativity, drives traffic, and strengthens profitability across the restaurant industry.

The National Watermelon Promotion Board's nutrition research program continues to move *full speed ahead*, advancing **scientific understanding of watermelon's potential role in supporting human health**. From ongoing clinical trials to new research collaborations, the program is building a strong foundation of evidence to help explore how watermelon may help contribute to wellness across a variety of areas.



This year's research portfolio reflects significant progress across several studies. Human clinical trials presented at national conferences such as ASN Nutrition and IFT FIRST highlighted emerging areas of investigation into **how the nutrients in watermelon may relate to factors such as heart health, inflammation, joint mobility, mood, and skin health**. Multiple manuscripts are in development or under peer review, with publication updates anticipated in the coming months.

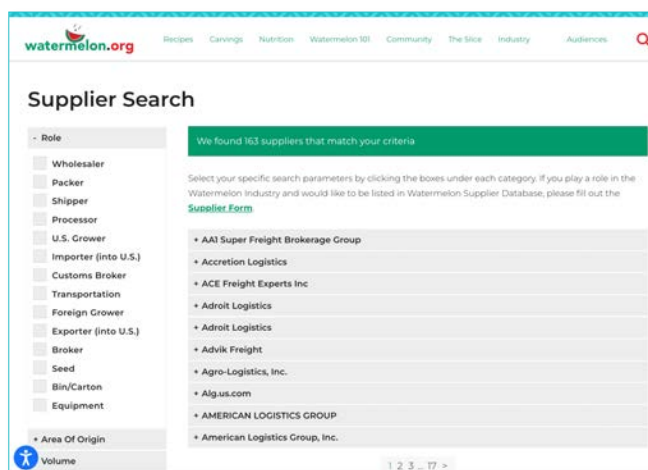
In parallel, newly launched projects are examining how nutrients found in watermelon may contribute to or influence cardiometabolic and antioxidant measures among key populations — including postmenopausal women and adults with prediabetes. These studies represent the next generation of research designed to **explore potential connections between watermelon consumption, overall dietary patterns, and markers of well-being**.

This year also marked a thoughtful shift in program direction. Following a comprehensive review of prior studies, the Board refined its research priorities around **two strategic pillars: health improvement (focusing on measurable outcomes that may be impacted by dietary patterns including watermelon) and health promotion (focusing on lifestyle and perception-based benefits such as hydration, mood, and enjoyment)**. This approach allows the program to balance scientific rigor with real-world relevance to consumers' health and wellness goals.

Looking ahead, the next phase of the nutrition research program will emphasize longer-term and larger-scale studies, more sophisticated dose-response designs, and expanded collaborations across research institutions. These efforts will continue to **advance credible science exploring how watermelon may play a role in nutrition, health, and overall well-being** — supporting the Board's mission to share evidence-based information across food, nutrition, and culinary communities.

Supplier Database – Help Buyers Find Watermelon!

Join more than 160 companies in the Supplier Database! This exclusive resource connects growers, shippers, and industry partners with retail and foodservice buyers seeking watermelon. Get listed at watermelon.org/supplierdatabase, email supplierdatabase@watermelon.org, or call 407-657-0261 to learn more.



Watermelon on the Menu

Enzo's Hideaway Tunnel Bar at Disney Springs in Lake Buena Vista, FL is currently offering a mocktail called the Desert Bloom which includes Aplos Calme, **salted watermelon juice**, hibiscus mint syrup, lime juice, ginger shrub and cardamom bitters.



NWPB Connections

Taste of the Caribbean – Bridgetown, Barbados – November 16 - 18

New York Produce Show – New York, NY – December 2 – 4

Suwannee Valley Watermelon Institute – Fanning Springs, FL – December 4

