



# Watermelon Update

NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD

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## Elevating Watermelon’s Visibility Through GroceryTV

New in 2025, NWPB partnered with GroceryTV to deliver digital video content directly into grocery stores. Thirty second no-sound videos ran in high traffic areas such as front end entrances, or pharmacy sections of grocery stores, putting watermelon right in front of household decision-makers. The campaign featured NWPB’s watermelon limeade recipe and selection videos all of August and September across Hy-Vee, ShopRite and Cardenas grocery stores in 11 states. In total, the campaign received a total of over 82 million impressions and exposure to the in-store campaign drove a 12% increase in overall sales of watermelon within stores. The results underscore the impact of reaching shoppers where purchase decisions happen most.

## Reaching College & University Foodservice Through NACUFS

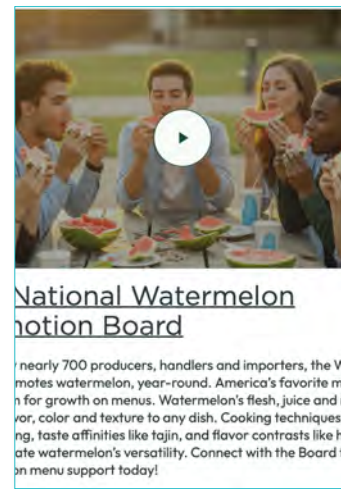
This year, the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) expanded its college and university (C&U) foodservice outreach through a strategic Annual Champion sponsorship with the National Association of College & University Food Services (NACUFS). The partnership

**provided year-round visibility with campus dining decision-makers and reinforced watermelon's versatility**, nutrition benefits and role on menus well beyond summer.

NACUFS represents more than 370 institutional members, encompassing over 8 million enrolled students and more than \$6.5 billion in annual foodservice revenue. Through the Annual Champion sponsorship, watermelon messaging reached collegiate dining leaders across conferences, digital platforms and educational resources used throughout the year, keeping watermelon top of mind during menu planning and program development.

As part of the sponsorship, NWPB introduced the “Watermelon Welcome” campaign, designed to help campus dining teams kick off the academic and calendar years with energy, color and student appeal. The campaign highlighted watermelon as a food students already love while reinforcing its performance on campus menus—from hydration and nutrition to creativity and visual impact. By pairing nutrition credentials with menu inspiration and practical resources, the NACUFS partnership supported operators looking to balance wellness goals with student satisfaction.

The NACUFS Annual Champion sponsorship **reflects NWPB's continued investment in reaching influential foodservice audiences** with relevant, operator-driven messaging. By engaging campus dining leaders where they learn, collaborate and plan for the year ahead, the partnership helped strengthen watermelon's presence in college and university foodservice and connect the fruit with the next generation of consumers.



## iHeart Media Partnership for February

In support of American Heart Health month, NWPB is **running podcast ads** through iHeart Media's cohorts of podcasts throughout the month of February. The ad highlights watermelon's health benefits, including hydration, and encourages making it a part of a winter workouts to rehydrate, refuel and recover. The :30 ad will run on a variety of podcasts, point back to [watermelon.org](http://watermelon.org), and garner more than **2.5M impressions nationwide**.



# NWPB Presents at Industry Conventions

NWPB staff were happy to attend Suwannee Valley Watermelon Institute and annual conventions in Illiana, South Carolina, Georgia and Western Watermelon Association.

## Suwannee Valley Watermelon Institute



NWPB President Lee Wroten and NWPB Executive Director Mark Arney.

## Illiana Watermelon Association Convention



Industry Analyst Jason Hanselman presenting.



Illiana Queen Coordinator Lana Brothers, NWA Queen Coordinator Kerri Wiggins, NWPB Director of Retail Juliemar Rosado, Mar-Del Queen Coordinator Terra Eby and Gulf Coast Queen Coordinator Sarah Jane Levine.

## Georgia Watermelon Association Convention



GWA President Lee Wroten, GWA Brand Ambassador Katelyn Lindsay, NWPB Senior Director of Communications Stephanie Barlow and NWPB Executive Director Mark Arney.

## Western Watermelon Association Convention



Outgoing WWA President Tashi Zouras, NWPB Executive Director Mark Arney and new WWA President Christian Murillo

## South Carolina Watermelon Association



SCWA President Brad O'Neal and NWPB Executive Director Mark Arney.

## New York Produce Show

Presented each December by the Eastern Produce Council and Produce Business, the New York Produce



Show brings together retail, foodservice, and supply-chain leaders for four days of networking, education, and a one-day trade show. NWPB's Juliemar Rosado, Stephanie Barlow and Katie Manetti (pictured, right) were on site engaging directly with retail and foodservice decision-makers, sharing promotional tools and retail education resources available to support watermelon sales. **As a new addition to the booth, NWPB provided recipe sampling of watermelon and feta skewers and watermelon limeade.** Both were a hit with attendees and sparked strong conversations around usage ideas and menu inspiration. In addition to booth engagement, Megan McKenna participated in the Foodservice Forum the following day, further extending NWPB's presence and visibility with key industry audiences and foodservice decisionmakers from distributors and operators.



## Kinetic 12 Emergence Dallas Connects Foodservice Buyers with Watermelon

In December, the Board sponsored the Kinetic 12 Emergence meeting in Dallas, Texas. Emergence meetings spotlight **new and growing foodservice brands, creating direct opportunities to engage with decision makers shaping future menus.**

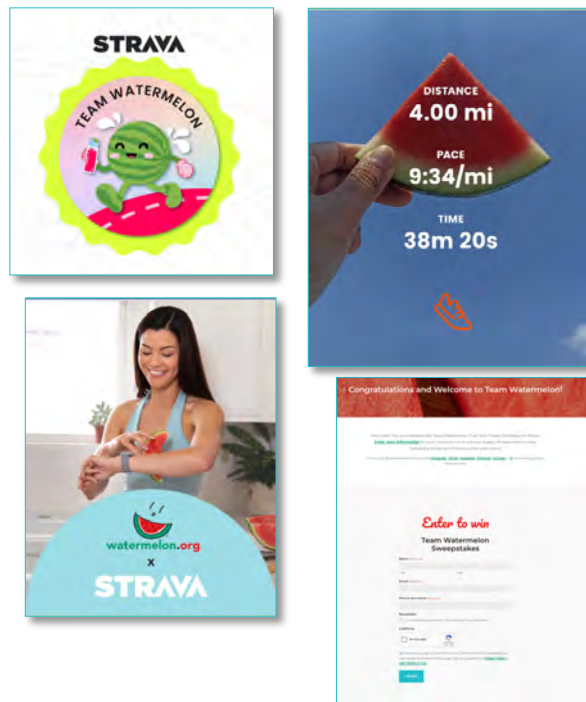
During the event, the Board held 10-minute meetings with 21 brands representing more than 3,200 restaurants nationwide. Conversations focused on watermelon's versatility and year-round availability, encouraging expanded usage among brands already featuring watermelon. For brands not currently using watermelon, these same messages were tailored to align with each concept's menu and operational needs.



Post-event follow-up will provide back of house support for menu development and utilization, as well as marketing support for new watermelon menu items, helping operators translate inspiration into execution.

## Strava Team Watermelon Challenge Update

On January 22, the Board launched a two week movement challenge on Strava, an app and online platform for athletes to track, analyze, and share their physical activities. The challenge encouraged participants to complete 100 minutes of activity during the two week period. The Board partnered with three influencers to help support and amplify the campaign, including Danielle Terra from Cool Down Run Club, CJ Sanders and Katherine Freiburg. Those that complete the challenge get a special watermelon-themed in-app badge (pictured, top left) and are able to enter to win a one year supply of watermelon and opt-in to The Monthly Slice, our consumer monthly e-newsletter. The campaign highlights watermelon’s place in healthy, active lifestyles. So far, **more than 85K members have signed up for the challenge, and as of this mailing, more than 10,000 users have completed the challenge and entered to win.**



## 2026 Call for Nominations

The NWPB will hold videoconferences on February 11th to nominate producers and handlers to serve as district 1 and importer directors. Board members are nominated by their peers, and nominations are submitted to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, who makes final appointments to the Board. To be eligible for nomination, producers must grow 10 or more acres of watermelon, and handlers must be the first handler of watermelon. Importers must import watermelon into the United States.



At 11 a.m. (EST) all watermelon producers and handlers in District 1 are encouraged to attend and vote to nominate their representatives to the NWPB. At 1 p.m. (EST) all watermelon importers are encouraged to attend and vote to nominate their representatives to the NWPB. NWPB will allow proxy voting for Board nominees. More information can be found linked in the [District 1](#) and [Importer](#) press releases.

Additional information regarding the elections and nomination procedures may be obtained by contacting NWPB Director of Operations & Industry Affairs Rebekah Dossett (rdossett@watermelon.org) or Industry Affairs Manager Andrea Smith (asmith@watermelon.org).



# Research Reveals Growing Interest in Watermelon on U.S. Restaurant Menus

New 2025 foodservice research provides a data-driven analysis of watermelon menu trends in U.S. restaurants, **highlighting growing menu penetration, evolving consumer perceptions, and new opportunities for menu innovation.**

The research shows that watermelon menu penetration has increased 30% since 2021, with broader adoption across restaurant segments and particularly strong engagement among younger consumers. While beverages continue to account for much of watermelon’s menu presence (37%), the findings also highlight significant opportunity to expand and innovate around fresh, savory and nontraditional applications across additional menu categories and dayparts.



Key insights reveal that younger consumers associate watermelon with joy, energy, adventure, and inspiration, signaling strong potential for menu innovation and flavor-forward positioning. While nostalgia remains a meaningful emotional driver, the research suggests that emphasizing watermelon’s more dynamic and experiential attributes may better support differentiation and consumer engagement. The research showed that nearly 75% of consumers strongly or somewhat agree fresh watermelon is under appreciated, and restaurants should be offering or doing more to use fresh watermelon in new and interesting ways.

As part of the Board’s ongoing effort to better understand consumer preferences and foodservice operator behavior, the research delivers practical, actionable insights to support menu development and innovation strategies. For example, the research revealed that salads, drinks and desserts offer excellent innovation opportunities for consumer appeal, which serves to confirm the strong tie consumers have between watermelon and refreshing.

Detailed overviews of the 2025 Consumer at Foodservice Quantitative Research and the 2025 Menuing & Innovation Research, including actionable takeaways, are available on the [NWPB Foodservice Research](#) webpage.

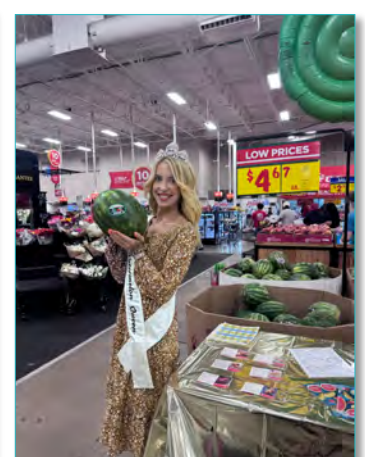


## Supplier Database – Help Buyers Find Watermelon!

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](http://watermelon.org/supplierdatabase), email [supplierdatabase@watermelon.org](mailto:supplierdatabase@watermelon.org), or call 407-657-0261 to learn more.

## Queen and Ambassador Programs Shine at Retail

Every year, NWPB gives funding to support associations to help make a bigger impact at retail during each of the associations' marketing seasons. NWPB supported approximately **96 promotions in 2025**, a significant increase from the previous year! Consisting predominantly of grocery stores with some consumer-facing events in sports and schools, these supported promotions strengthened in-store presence while creating meaningful connections with shoppers beyond the store.



## NWA Nook: Education Highlights at the 2026 Convention

The 2026 National Watermelon Association Annual Convention will be packed with signature events—from the Arnold Mack Memorial Golf Tournament to the Auction and Queen Competition— but **this year’s educational sessions are shaping up to be a major highlight of the convention.**

The education program begins Thursday morning with the a morning workshop series, powered by NWA sponsors partner, QIMA. This morning will feature a pair of in-depth sessions focused on *Social Responsibility and Food Safety Readiness*. Led by experienced compliance professionals, this half-day workshop will walk attendees through lessons learned in social responsibility audits, emerging expectations, and what to know as the industry prepares for PrimusGFS Version 4.0. Designed to be practical and interactive, this session offers tools attendees can take straight back to their operations.



Friday morning will feature the third installment of our annual Women’s Leadership Session, “*Mentoring vs. Sponsorship: The Secret to Elevating Women’s Career Trajectories in the Watermelon Industry,*” which will be presented by Dr. Lauren Ledbetter Griffith. This session will focus on leadership development, career advancement, and building strong professional networks—continuing NWA’s commitment to supporting and growing leadership across the industry.

Another highlight of our morning of education on Friday is our panel discussion: *Agricultural Labor—Policy, Compliance, and Innovation*. This panel brings together perspectives that span advocacy, legal expertise, and technology. Bob Redding, hired in 2025 as NWA’s lobbyist with *The Redding Firm*, will share insight into the current policy landscape and the work underway in Washington on agricultural labor reform. Shawn Packer of *JPH Law Firm*, a trusted legal resource for NWA members, will address compliance realities and regulatory considerations facing growers and employers. Rounding out the panel, Mike Jacob of *TerraForce* will offer a technology-forward perspective, including his work developing a proof-of-concept machine designed to help address labor challenges through innovation.

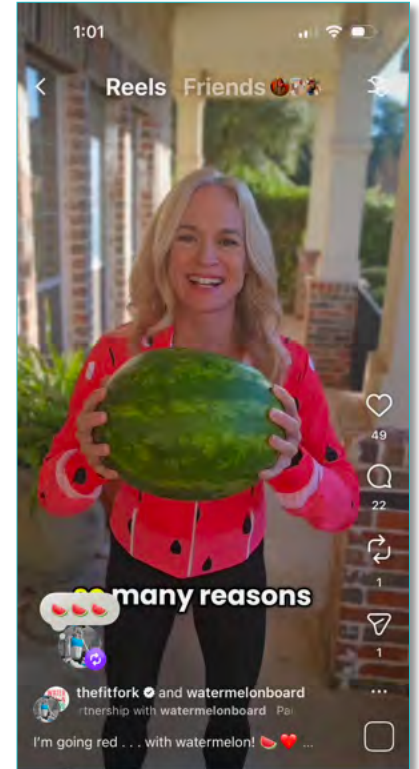
Together, these sessions reflect the depth and relevance of this year’s education program—grounded in real-world experience and focused on the challenges and opportunities facing the watermelon industry today.

Additional details and updates will continue to be released, so be sure to visit [www.watermelon.ag](http://www.watermelon.ag) to register and plan your convention experience.

## Influencer Highlights: Winter Watermelon Partnerships

This winter, the Watermelon Board teamed up with a dynamic group of creators to show that **watermelon shines well beyond summer**.

Chrissy Carroll focused on post-run hydration, pairing watermelon's natural benefits with four nourishing recipes designed to fuel your body for 2026. Jen Fisher from The Fit Fork blogged about watermelon benefits in relation to February and American Heart Health month. On the culinary side, in December, Sara Haas brought seasonal flair with the creation of new recipes including a Winter Watermelon Margarita, Watermelon Aperol Spritz, and Brûléed watermelon, all of which are live on [watermelon.org](http://watermelon.org).



## Tajin + NWPB In-Store Signage Activation

During June and July, NWPB partnered with Tajín on a **co-branded in-store signage activation that placed the Watermelon.org logo alongside Tajín messaging near whole watermelon bins and fresh-cut fruit displays**. The signage reinforced the watermelon-and-Tajín pairing at the point of purchase. The activation was confirmed in a range of major retailers, including Raley's, Save Mart, Safeway, Jewel-Osco, Walmart, H-E-B, Kroger, Cárdenas, Vallarta, Northgate, Sedano's, and Stop & Shop, extending reach across both conventional and Hispanic-focused grocery banners.





## Krasdale Retail Engagement Recap

NWPB worked on a digital activation in partnership with Krasdale, which operates **several supermarket and grocery banners including CTown, Bravo, Aim, Market Fresh, Shop Smart Food Markets, and Stop 1 Food Mart**. Working with Krasdale’s marketing arm, Alpha 1 Marketing, the promotion ran from July 25 through August 7 and generated more than 1.3 million impressions. The integrated activation exceeded industry benchmarks, delivering a 2.41% click-through rate and a 14.5% engagement rate. Tactics included website banners, recipe blogs, targeted Facebook and Instagram ads, weekly ad promotions, and in-store radio ads, all driving shoppers to watermelon content. Overall, the promotion delivered strong results.



## New Segment Promoting Watermelon Snacks for the Big Game

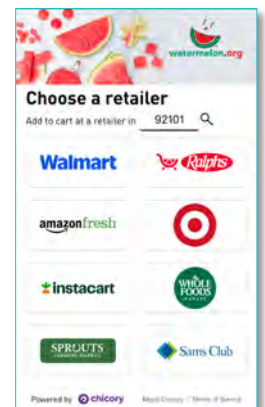


New 2026 partner, sports and media dietitian Umo Callins, featured watermelon during a TV segment in Oklahoma City on snacks for the big game, in collaboration with the Oklahoma Pork Council, **highlighting watermelon’s versatility for game-day spreads**. This traditional media opportunity is both timely for consumers and viewers excited for the season and supports the year round watermelon message of health, hydration and use in recipes from sliders, to salsa and a mocktail drink. [Check out the segment here.](#)

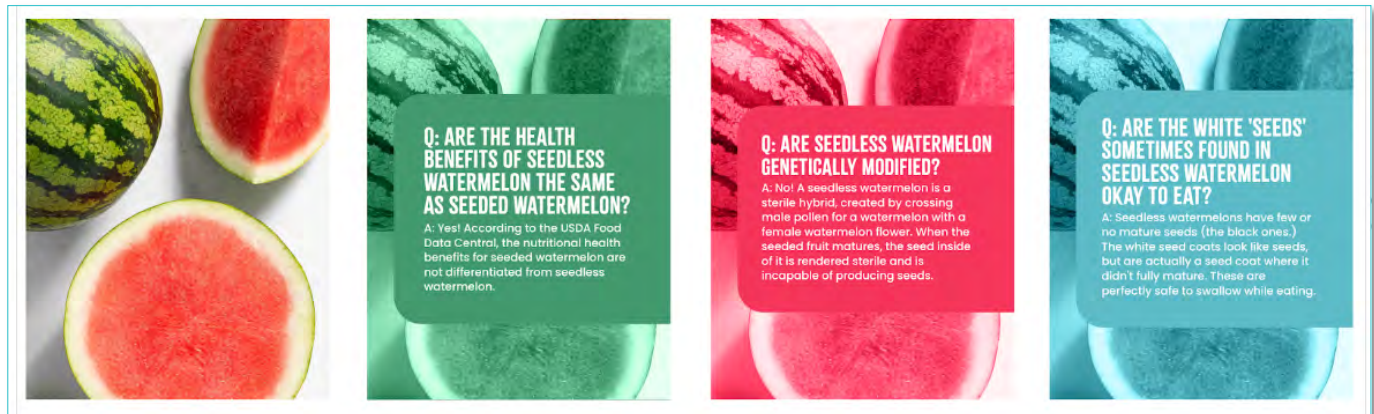


## Chicory-Powered Summer Success

NWPB once again partnered with Chicory from July–September 2025. The campaign leveraged Chicory’s multi-retailer shoppable media to drive peak-summer demand and turn inspiration into action. The program delivered more than 5.1 million impressions and strong engagement, including a 0.12% click-through rate and a 71% add-to-cart rate, exceeding benchmarks. Recipe-driven and seasonal creative content performed particularly well, resonating with shoppers seeking healthy meals, grilling inspiration, and quick, easy options. This engagement translated into measurable sales impact, with **a 6.2% overall sales lift across measured markets**.



# EdCal Highlight: Where Do Seedless Watermelon Come From?



This month's EdCal highlight explores a popular question: *Where do seedless watermelons come from?* A **trending topic is featured each month** on the watermelon.org homepage and amplified across the Board's social channels. Content is driven by what audiences are curious about, offering clear, research-based insights that reflect the Board's point of view and spark conversation.



## New Watermelon Nutrition Infographic

We've launched a new watermelon nutrition infographic designed to **deliver engaging, audience-specific insights** for registered dietitians and health professionals. The infographic will be shared across social channels and made available for industry use.



## Watermelon on the Menu



Gato Exotico, a new Mexican restaurant in Cambridge, MA is currently offering a **Watermelon and Jicama Salad**, which was recently featured in Eater Boston. The watermelon in the salad is marinated in lime and tossed with pumpkin seeds, cotija cheese, arugula and a tequila vinaigrette.

## TeamSnap Ads – New Creative for Winter

After a one month reprieve this winter, the Board's partnership with TeamSnap, the #1 nationwide youth sports platform, is **back with new creative to support year-round messaging**.



The creative design, which still champions watermelon as the way to Snack Duty Success, shows kids in long sleeves and will reach families while they manage their practices, games and snack duty assignments. The design which also includes fresh cut watermelon slices will be showcased across TeamSnap's most visible placements, including Home Screen Spotlights, App Banners and Interstitials.



## 2026 Assessment Due Dates

Please note the **following due dates for 2026**:

- Product handled in January, must be postmarked by March 2, and received by March 12, 2026
- Product handled in February, must be postmarked by March 30, and received by April 9, 2026
- Product handled in March, must be postmarked by April 30, and received by May 12, 2026

The full calendar can be found [here](#). [Click here](#) to file your online Handler's Report. Never used the online Handler's Report? Check out the step-by-step [Online Handler's Report User's Guide](#).



## NWPB Connections



**MarDel Watermelon Association Annual Convention** – Cambridge, MD – February 5 – 7

**Gulf Coast Watermelon Association Convention** – Point Clear, AL – February 13 & 14

**North Carolina Watermelon Association Convention** – Wrightsville Beach, NC – February 13 & 14

**National Watermelon Association Annual Meeting & Convention** – St. Pete Beach, FL – February 18 - 21

**NWPB Spring Board Meeting** – St. Pete Beach, FL – February 21

**Southeast Produce Council Southern Exposure** – Orlando, FL – February 26 - 28