



Watermelon Update

NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD

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New Executive Committee at Watermelon Board

The NWPB marked a historic milestone at its Spring 2026 Board meeting by electing an all-female team of executive officers for the first time in the time in the organization's history. Jill Barton (District 1) was elected president, with Renee Goodwin (District 4) as vice president and Camille Lombardo (District 5) continuing as secretary/treasurer. The leadership team reflects deep industry experience and a shared, forward-thinking vision for watermelon promotion and growth.

The executive committee also includes Bailey Leger (District 2), Tony Moore (District 3), Chris Dyer (Importer), and ex-officio member Lee Wroten (District 2), who will support the Board's strategic priorities and national initiatives in the year ahead.

NWPB Spring Board Meeting

The Spring 2026 Watermelon Board Meeting was held February 21 in conjunction with the National Watermelon Association (NWA) Annual Convention in St. Pete Beach, FL. NWA shared updates on new initiatives and partnerships. Presentations from NWPB’s Research, Foodservice, Marketing, and Communications programs were then presented and the Board approved the 2026/2027 fiscal year budget. Additional details will be included in the April Watermelon Update. Board members also sampled recipes that represented each program:



- Research: Watermelon, Turmeric & Orange Wellness Juice highlighting hydration and antioxidants.
- Foodservice: Fresh and compressed watermelon with global salts, showcasing culinary versatility.
- Marketing: Holiday Watermelon Cutouts demonstrating year-round retail merchandising creativity.
- Communications: Watermelon Feta Bruschetta featuring watermelon, feta, mint, and balsamic to inspire consumer engagement.

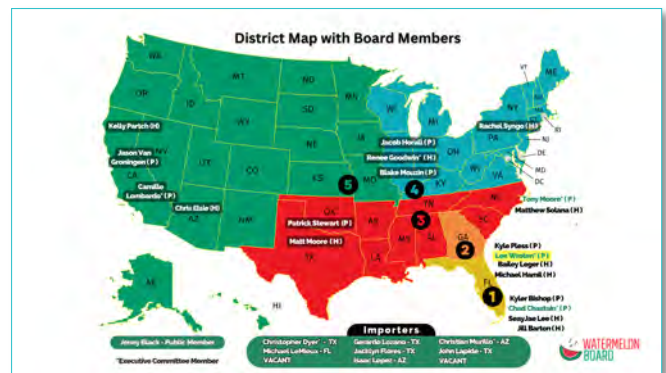


Together, the programs reflected a unified effort to continue the board’s mission of increasing watermelon demand. The next meeting is set for October 12–13, 2026, in Orlando, FL.



2026 Nominations Meetings

On February 11, 2026, the Board hosted nominations meetings for District 1 and Importers. The meetings led to a full slate of nominees. If you have been nominated, please submit your forms as soon as possible. If you have any questions, please reach out to Andrea Smith, asmith@watermelon.org.



Watermelon Surpasses 3.5 Billion Pounds at Retail, New Research Highlights Growth Opportunities

Watermelon continues to gain retail momentum. In 2025, the category surpassed 3.5 billion pounds sold at retail, reinforcing its strength as both a volume and dollar driver nationwide. The National Watermelon Promotion Board has completed its [2025 State of the Category research](#), providing the industry with fact-based insights to support sustained retail growth.

Whole Watermelon Drives Seasonal Volume

Whole watermelon remains the primary driver of annual retail volume, accounting for 77 percent of total pounds sold and contributing more than 41 million incremental pounds year over year. During peak spring and summer months, whole fruit reaches as high as 86 percent share in June and July.



Promotional performance data underscores additional opportunity. Whole watermelon delivered a 75 percent volume lift and 50 percent dollar lift on promotion, outperforming cantaloupe and honeydew while requiring smaller average discounts. The findings suggest continued opportunity to expand promotional support beyond traditional holiday windows to capture incremental gains.

Cut Watermelon Sustains Dollar Growth

As availability shifts in fall and winter, cut watermelon becomes the category's primary dollar driver. It represents 49 percent of annual dollar sales and reaches a 70 percent dollar share in December.

Approximately 30 percent of cut volume is sold on promotion during fall and winter, generating efficient lift at a time when overall category promotion softens. This reinforces cut watermelon's role in sustaining sales outside peak summer months.

Regional Insights Reveal Additional Potential

The research also highlights opportunity across regions. The Plains led national performance with a 17 percent increase in volume versus 2021, demonstrating continued expansion in developed markets. In the Great Lakes region, cut watermelon is priced up to 835 percent higher than whole fruit, illustrating differences in value perception and merchandising strategies.

Whether markets are mature or emerging, the research provides actionable insight to refine marketing, optimize distribution and tailor promotional strategies to accelerate watermelon growth nationwide.

The accompanying State of the Category Marketing Guide will be released to the produce trade media and added to the website in the coming month.

Kitchen Collaborative Reaches National Foodservice Brands


Kitchen Collaborative is a **menu ideation program** designed to spark creativity and collaboration among high-volume foodservice decision-makers. Created during the pandemic through a partnership between Flavor & the Menu and Summit Group, the program began as a small chef assignment model. Today, it has evolved into a competitive platform where national brands ideate with sponsor products and compete to be named a sponsor winner.

Participants, 100 national foodservice chefs, received curated boxes of sponsor ingredients, along with inspiration in the form of videos and product handouts. Over a six-week period, chefs developed original concepts featuring one or more of the sponsor items. While the Board was guaranteed six concepts, more than 80 watermelon-forward ideas were submitted!

Two of the 12 winning dishes featured watermelon, including the Board's selected winner: *Togarashi-Crusted Watermelon with Hoisin-Honey Chili Crunch and Pickled Watermelon Rind* by Chef Christopher Delissio, Corporate Executive Chef at Intermountain Health. Throughout the program, social and digital content amplified watermelon messaging to a national foodservice audience.

Each sponsor winner earned a trip to Gulfood in Dubai in January 2026, with Board representation included. The event provided valuable networking opportunities with chefs and decision-makers from Amazon, Applebee's, Maggiano's, Sodexo and major hospitality groups, representing thousands of foodservice locations nationwide.

Kitchen Collaborative expanded watermelon's reach with influential operators, generated strong menu innovation concepts and kept watermelon top-of-mind with commercial foodservice brands throughout the year.



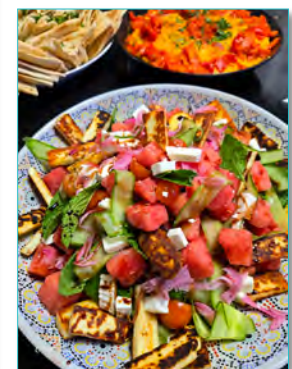
KITCHEN COLLABORATIVE | **FLAVOR & THE MENU** | **SUMMIT GROUP**

CHRISTOPHER DELISSIO
INTERMOUNTAIN HEALTH

KC FLAVOR CHAMPION: CHRISTOPHER DELISSIO
Sponsor: National Watermelon Promotion Board

Christopher Delissio's *Togarashi-Crusted Watermelon with Spicy Hoisin-Honey Chili Crunch Sauce & Pickled Watermelon Rind* has its roots in two other concepts the chef crafted. "Separately, I was working on a togarashi-crusted salmon, as well as a Tajin-dusted watermelon," recounts the corporate executive chef at Intermountain Health. "I decided to mix and match from the two to create one more plate."

READ ON




KITCHEN COLLABORATIVE | **FLAVOR & THE MENU** | **SUMMIT GROUP**

INTRODUCING THE 2025 KITCHEN COLLABORATIVE CHAMPIONS

Since its debut in 2020, Kitchen Collaborative has served as a celebration of flavor innovation, and its all-new 2025 iteration has raised the culinary bar even higher. Chefs submitted more than 500 wildly creative menu concepts, and now, the time has come for the big reveal: the seven dishes deemed best of the best. Please join Flavor & the Menu, Summit F&M and the 2025 Kitchen Collaborative Sponsors in congratulating these 12 talented chefs for their inventive, flavor-forward dishes. Selected through a blind review by each sponsor team, these chefs will embark on an unforgettable flavor expedition to Dubai, including a visit to the world-famous Gulfood Show in January 2026. Congratulations to the 2025 Kitchen Collaborative Champions and may the creativity of this project spark fresh inspiration across the industry.

Industry Conventions

Gulf Coast Watermelon Association Convention



North Carolina Watermelon Association Convention



MarDel Watermelon Association Convention

National Watermelon Association Convention



SEPC Southern Exposure



Southern Exposure is the Southeast Produce Council’s flagship annual conference and trade show, dedicated to bringing together growers, retailers, and foodservice professionals. The 2026 event took place Feb. 26–March 1 in Orlando, FL and featured educational sessions, networking opportunities, and the theme “From Fields to Families.” NWPB once again participated as exhibitors in the expo where more than 2,500 retail and foodservice professionals gathered. **NWPB’s Juliemar Rosado, Megan McKenna and Summer Walker were joined at the booth by Retail Account Manager Sheila Carden to share resources and strategies for keeping watermelon top of mind** in grocery stores and on menus. Sweet watermelon pizza and watermelon limeade tastings were offered in the booth to feature watermelon’s versatility. **Megan also attended the SEPC Foodservice and Arnold Palmer Children’s Hospital (APCH) Committee meetings, serving in her role as member and co-chair of the APCH Committee** while supporting the organization’s ongoing charitable efforts.



Confidential Reporting Portal

The [Confidential Reporting Portal](#) is in response to the Board collecting approximately 90% of available assessments. If you know of someone out of compliance, this is the confidential portal to help make it an even playing field for the industry. Please visit watermelon.org/industry to access the portal. Thank you for your commitment to a fair and prosperous future for the watermelon industry and National Watermelon Promotion Board.



Fresh Success: Watermelon x DoorDash Campaign Recap



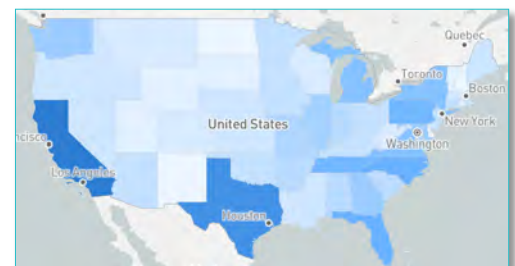
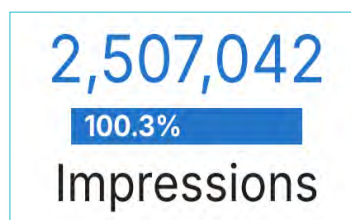
The Watermelon x DoorDash campaign kicked off 2026 by successfully capturing the attention of a high value, modern audience. By leveraging both broad reach sponsored products and precision targeting for existing produce buyers, the initiative generated over **67,000 total clicks** and facilitated **29,000 attributed orders** in just one month. Most notably, the campaign excelled at brand discovery, with **51% of shoppers being entirely new to the brand**. Insights show that these shoppers represent a premium demographic, consisting primarily of high earning, full time employed Millennials and Gen Z who are highly active on social platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

Overall, these results prove that this partnership is a perfect fit for reaching the tech savvy grocery shopper.



Final iHeart Media Podcast February Campaign Results

In February, NWPB ran a :30 ad, across a variety of iHeart Media podcasts in honor of American Heart Health Month. The campaign **delivered 2.5M impressions nationwide**, positioning watermelon as functional winter workout fuel by highlighting its health benefits, including hydration and recovery support.



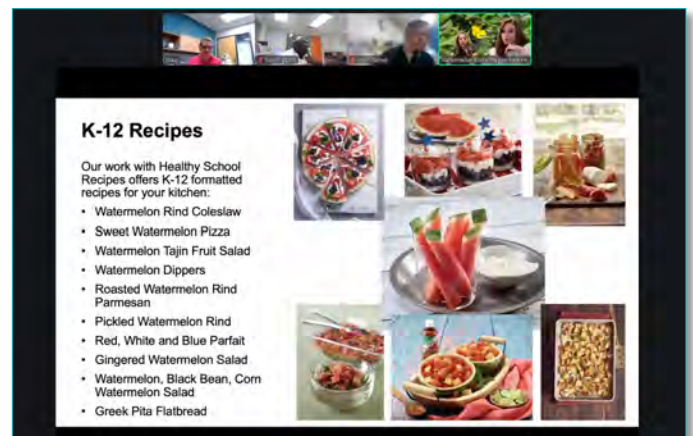
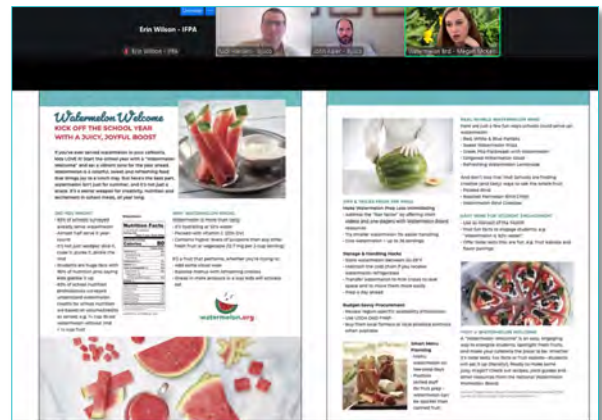
Watermelon Connects with K-12 & C&U Leaders at IFPA Speed Dating Meetings

In February, the Board participated in the International Fresh Produce Association’s (IFPA) virtual Speed Dating meetings, connecting suppliers/boards with K-12 school districts and college and university dining leaders nationwide. **Board members Chad Chastain and Bailey Leger joined NWPB staff in the meetings.**

Over two days of 15-minute sessions, major school districts, university programs, a national contract management company and a produce distributor education team shared menu planning timelines, procurement processes and produce priorities. Collectively, these **organizations serve millions of meals annually, creating meaningful opportunities to position watermelon within school nutrition programs.** Timed between IFPA Foodservice Conferences, the meetings provided a strategic mid-year touchpoint as operators plan for the upcoming school year. Discussions centered on cost per plate, distributor engagement, fresh cut utilization, and labor considerations across breakfast, lunch, and Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

Watermelon’s versatility and promotional potential resonated strongly with operators focused on efficiency and student appeal. Follow-up conversations with multiple districts and university programs are already underway. Strategic engagement during key planning windows strengthens watermelon’s position across school meal occasions.

For industry members seeking to expand into school foodservice, IFPA’s recent webinar on [selling into K-12 schools](#) is available on the IFPA website. The recording offers practical guidance on procurement cycles, distributor relationships and effective positioning within school nutrition programs.



International Programs Recaps

Japan Retail & Foodservice Promotions Report



As domestic supplies began to wind down, unseasonably warm weather drove continued demand for high-quality, refreshing fruit, allowing U.S. watermelons to stand out as a premium late-summer essential. Through a mix of retail availability and creative culinary applications, the campaign effectively boosted brand awareness and delivered a memorable "taste from abroad" to consumers in Tokyo and beyond.

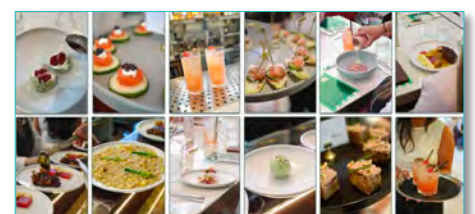
The retail campaign at 11 FarmDo stores proved that U.S. watermelons are a vital item for the Japanese market in September. US watermelons were in demand due to unseasonably high temperatures following the end of the domestic season in Japan. While initial concerns existed regarding the large size of whole watermelons, they sold well at larger stores with parking facilities where bulk purchasing is more common. Beyond standard fresh fruit, watermelon-themed sweets were so popular that production teams struggled to keep up with the high demand. Additionally, interactive "watermelon splitting" activities at BBQ and campsites provided a memorable hands-on experience that was a significant hit with first-time participants.

In the foodservice sector, partner restaurants and cafes successfully positioned U.S. watermelon as a premium, high-quality ingredient. Innovative menu items like "Watermelon Gelato" were praised for their natural sweetness and authentic flavor, with many customers noting it tasted just like eating fresh fruit. Specialty desserts such as the return of watermelon tarts and parfaits also drove strong engagement, attracting repeat customers who visited specifically for these seasonal offerings. Diners appreciated the "taste from abroad," and the combination of artisanal techniques with imported fruit created a unique and refreshing atmosphere that resonated with affluent consumers.

Overall, the promotion demonstrated that U.S. watermelon is an ideal seasonal attraction for the transition from late summer to early autumn. Feedback from both consumers and store staff highlighted the fruit's exceptional freshness and deep sweetness as its standout qualities.

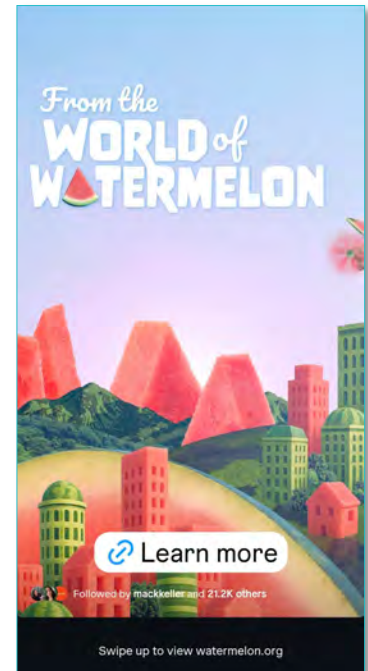
Canada Report

The 2025 Canada campaign executed a multi-faceted communication strategy aimed at increasing the export, awareness, and culinary use of U.S. watermelon. Primary objectives included educating Canadian consumers on the fruit's versatility and nutritional benefits, with a heavy focus on the peak season from June through September.

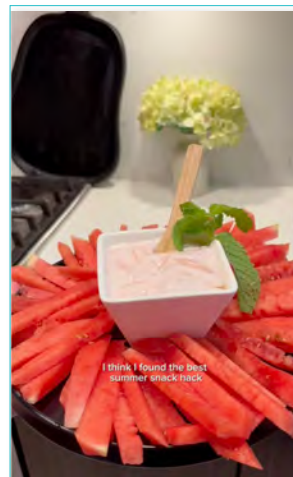


The program targeted three core demographics: Gen Z (ages 18-28), Millennial and Gen X men, and family households.

Consumer engagement was largely driven by the "World of Watermelon" paid social media campaign on Instagram and TikTok. This initiative successfully generated over **11 million impressions** and **770,000 engagements** by utilizing visually appealing, seasonally relevant content. To amplify this reach, the NWPB partnered with diverse Canadian influencers who showcased unique recipes and wellness tips to their respective audiences, further establishing watermelon as a trendy and versatile ingredient.



The strategy also prioritized the foodservice and trade sectors to ensure professional-level adoption. A key highlight was a "watermelon lunch" in Toronto, where influential chefs and industry contacts were served a custom menu featuring watermelon in every course, including beverages. This event was highly effective, with **80% of attendees** reporting plans to incorporate more watermelon into their menus. Additionally, the NWPB partnered with Canadian Restaurant and Foodservice News (RestoBiz) to deliver targeted digital advertisements and industry insights to foodservice professionals across Canada.



Trade relations were further strengthened through participation in the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) Annual Convention and Trade Show, the largest event of its kind in Canada. By exhibiting at this trade show, the NWPB connected with 210 industry stakeholders, including retail buyers and distributors. Overall, the 2025 campaign successfully integrated social media, influencer partnerships, and professional trade tactics to bolster the market presence of U.S. watermelon in the Canadian market.

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.

NWA Nook: Convention Wrap-Up from St. Pete Beach

Thank you to everyone who joined us in St. Pete Beach for the National Watermelon Association's 2026 Annual Meeting & Convention. From meaningful connections and celebrations to the traditions that make this event feel like a true Watermelon Family reunion, this Convention was a strong reminder of what we can accomplish when our industry comes together.

A New National Watermelon Queen

We're excited to welcome Georgia Watermelon Ambassador Katelyn Lindsay as the 2026 National Watermelon Queen. Congratulations as well to Jocey Wible of Illiana, who was named 1st Runner Up, along with Maci Cross of the Gulf Coast (2nd Runner Up) and Elle Steinlage of North Carolina (Miss Jubilee) for an outstanding competition. We also extend our sincere thanks to outgoing Queen Elanie for a year of dedicated service representing the industry with professionalism and heart.

New Leadership for the Year Ahead

The Convention also marked the installation of NWA's new officer team. Bob Gibson moves into the role of Chairman, Jordan Carter begins her term as President, and Lee Wroten will serve as Vice President. Notably, Jordan becomes only the second female president in NWA's history, a meaningful milestone for our Association.

Honoring Leadership and Legacy

At our Hall of Fame Lunch, we inducted the late Jay Nichols into the NWA Hall of Fame. His son, Steve Nichols, accepted the honor on his behalf and shared meaningful stories from Jay's life in the watermelon industry, as well as his service to our country, including fighting in the Battle of the Bulge.

Recognizing the Next Generation and Outstanding Service

We were proud to present the Dan Thomas Future Watermelon Farm Leader Award to Colton Barton, and the Outstanding Service Award to Ray Vincent for his years of leadership, guidance, and continued dedication to NWA.

A Strong Year for the Annual Auction

Our Annual Auction delivered another incredible and meaningful afternoon, with increased support through both traditional items and our signature auction loads. Creative items—like logo placement in the sand sculpture at convention, and a U.S. flag flown over the Capitol on National Watermelon Day—kept the bidding lively, led by auctioneers Ray Vincent and his son Jonah. We were also proud to include charity loads benefiting Moffitt Cancer Center and Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep.



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Thank You to Sponsors, Exhibitors, Attendees, and Staff

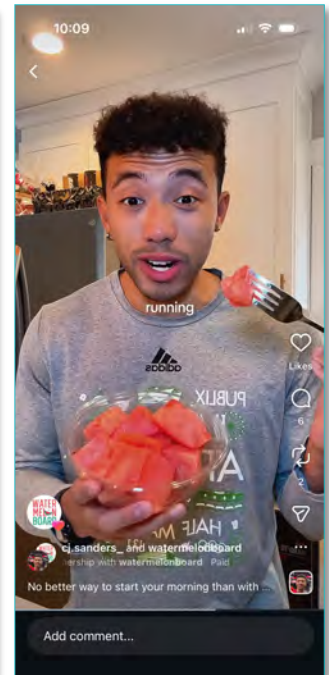
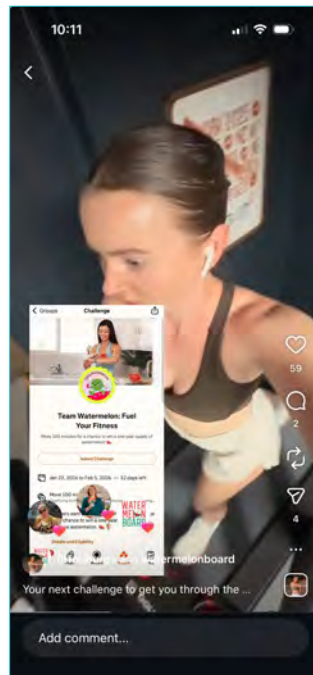
This Convention succeeds because of partnership. Thank you to our sponsors and exhibitors, and to every attendee who brought energy and engagement to meetings, sessions, and conversations throughout the Convention. We're also grateful to our volunteers and NWA staff for the behind-the-scenes work that makes it all run smoothly. Higher-level sponsors should also keep an eye on their mail for a small token of appreciation coming soon.

We're grateful for a successful Convention and even more excited for what comes next—we'll see you next year at Planet Hollywood in Las Vegas!



The Importance of Influencer Support During Strava Team Watermelon Campaign

Influencer partnerships played a critical role in amplifying the Board's two-week movement challenge launched January 22 on Strava. To spark participation and extend reach within active communities, the Board teamed up with three trusted fitness voices including Danielle Terra of Cool Down Run Club, along with CJ Sanders and Katherine Freiburg, to promote and bring credibility to the challenge.



Through authentic content and direct engagement with their highly active audiences, the influencers encouraged followers to complete 100 minutes of movement over the two-week period, reinforcing watermelon's role in healthy, active lifestyles. Participants who completed the challenge earned a custom watermelon-themed in-app badge and the opportunity to enter to win a one-year supply of watermelon, while also opting in to receive *The Monthly Slice* consumer e-newsletter.

The influencer-driven approach helped fuel strong momentum and visibility for the campaign. While final results are still pending, **their amplification led to more than 3x the number of expected participants, driving awareness of watermelon in the fitness space and demonstrating the power of influencer support in supporting engagement.**

Foodservice Trade Media Keeps Watermelon Top of Mind Year Round

New this year, the Board invested in foodservice media year-round to compliment earned media and also own the message on watermelon year-round. From availability to versatility, media helped to influence foodservice decisionmakers with education and inspiration.

THINK OUTSIDE THE
(Watermelon) **RIND**



Be inspired.

watermelon.org

Recipe Roundup




Watermelon khichdi | Chef Heena Patel's Gujarati comfort food


Chef Heena Patel from Besharam restaurant in San Francisco describes her dish of watermelon khichdi as the "mac n' cheese of Gujarat," her home state in India. That's because this dish is the quintessential comfort food of her childhood, and a staple in many Indian households. Khichdi is a healthy and hearty Indian dish made with rice and moong lentils. Pureed watermelon flesh, as well as the rind is used to add flavor and texture to make the khichdi. Topped with pickled garlic, mango, onions, chilies, peanuts and cubed watermelon, this one-pot meal is deeply savory, delicious and comforting. [Get the recipe.](#)



FS Insider
FEBRUARY 11, 2026
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A Legacy BBQ Chain Hits its Stride
The family-led chain is setting its own pace.



Delivery Sales Grew in 2025. Here's How Restaurants Responded

We continue our state of the industry dive with takeout and delivery trends. There's no shortage of challenges ahead.

NEXT WEEK: How to Conference Like a Pro (Without Losing Your Sanity)


Conferences can be inspiring... and exhausting. How do you show up, make meaningful connections, and leave with more than just a stack of business cards?

FSR

Reimagine Your Menu with Watermelon

REFINE, REFRESH, REINVENT WITH Watermelon

Be inspired.
watermelon.org



Watermelon appeals to all of the senses, so get to know watermelon's versatility. Enjoy the crunchy flesh in sweet and savory globally-inspired food and drinks; and the crunchy rind fresh, pickled or roasted, to add some WOW to menus. Watermelon peaks in summer, but it's available mid-spring to early fall from 25+ U.S. states, and fall to spring from Central and South America—perfect for year-round menus. Refresh your menu with Watermelon!

Discover Menu Opportunities with Watermelon

WTWH
Media LLC

This email was sent to susan@susan-hughes.com
Address: 1111 Superior Avenue E, Suite 1120 - Cleveland, OH 44114
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REFINE, REFRESH, REINVENT WITH Watermelon

Be inspired.
watermelon.org



Brighten Beverage Menus with Watermelon

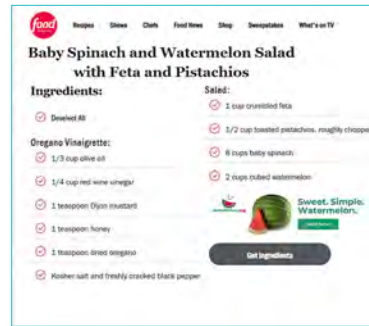
Watermelon resonates with younger consumers (and adults) as a flavor of joy, energy and exploration. Create memories with Woju Salted Watermelon Juice.

[See Recipe](#)

2025 Chicory Campaign: Driving Year-Round Demand

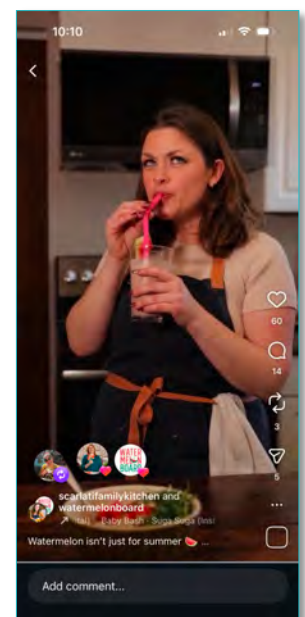
The Watermelon Board’s 2025 digital campaigns achieved significant impact and consumer engagement across both summer and fall seasons. The summer campaign ran from July to September and resulted in a **6.2% sales lift**. The strategy maintained momentum in the fall campaign that ran from October to November, achieving a higher overall **sales lift of 7.9%**.

The media performance was consistently strong, with ad units like Premium In-Lines and Pairings meeting or exceeding engagement benchmarks. The "Watermelon Cooler" creative led engagement with a **0.15% click-through rate** (CTR) in the summer, while the "Watermelon Owl" and "Fall Salad" visuals resonated most with shoppers in the fall campaign, suggesting a successful transition to seasonal fall and holiday-themed messaging. Overall, the year showed that with the right recipes and timing, watermelon stays a fan favorite through every season!



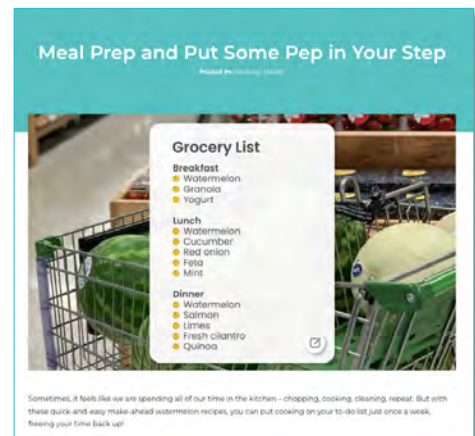
Influencer Partner Posts

In early February, Amanda Scarlati from Scarlati Family Kitchen shared three unique ways to use watermelon in the winter, inspiring creative applications of the fruit, including a smoothie, winter salad and grain bowl during colder months. Later in the month,, long-time partner The Produce Moms created a **Watermelon Flight**, with six different flavor pairings, for their audiences. This trend-forward content showcases watermelon’s versatility with classic flavors like mint and new, innovative ideas like hot honey or chili lime seasoning. In a value add post, Healthy Family Project, used watermelon to create Valentine’s Day inspired “lollipops.”



Meal Prepping Made Easy – EdCal Highlight

This month's editorial calendar feature is [Meal Prepping Made Easy with Watermelon](#). This blog features a grocery list and recipes to make the most of your watermelon making delicious breakfast, lunch and dinner.



Watermelon on the Menu

A menu highlight of Glass & Vine, located in Miami, FL, is the **Watermelon Tomato Salad** with watermelon, tomato, feta, red onion, pomegranate molasses artisan greens, extra virgin olive oil and micro mint.



NWPB Connections

Watermelon Queen Training – Orlando, FL – March 13 & 14