



Watermelon Update

NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD

Inside this issue:

- Queen & Ambassador Training Recap
- Sponsored Media Segment: March National Nutrition Month
- 2026/2027 Department Overviews: Foodservice, Research, Retail & International Marketing, Industry and Communications
- IGA Partnership Delivers Juicy Results
- NWA Nook: Gearing Up for the Domestic Season
- TeamSnap Final Report: Campaign Delivers Strong Awareness and Engagement
- Upcoming Assessment Due Dates
- Watermelon ACF Webinar Offers Whole-Product Focus
- Partner Spotlight: Bill Roberts of Instagram
- GenAI APP<LESS Experience Promotes Watermelon in the Winter
- Food as Medicine Webinar
- Watermelon on the Menu
- NWPB Connections



2026 Queen & Ambassador Training Recap

In March, the 2026 Watermelon Queen and Ambassador Training was held in Orlando, FL, bringing together this year’s representatives for two days of hands-on learning and preparation. The event opened with a “watermelon 101 boot camp,” designed to equip participants with essential knowledge and skills. Sessions covered everything from nutrition to industry updates to media training and interactive role-playing scenarios, helping attendees build confidence for public appearances.

Continued Next Page



Queen & Ambassador Training Continued

Also on day one, South Carolina Watermelon Association Executive Director and former South Carolina Watermelon Queen, **Blakely Atkinson**, shared her personal perspective on the role. Her presentation highlighted the importance of strong public speaking skills, professionalism, and representing the title with authenticity and pride.



Day two began with an **in-depth presentation from Dr. Gilbert Miller**, who recently received South Carolina's highest civilian honor of the Order of the Palmetto for his contributions to South Carolina agriculture, who provided a comprehensive overview of watermelon production and the industry as a whole. **NWPB Ex-Officio Lee Wroten joined the session to offer a grower's perspective** and engage in a Q&A discussion with attendees. The group then traveled to EPCOT for the Behind the Seeds Greenhouse Tour, where they explored innovative agricultural practices and gained insight into the future of farming.



NWPB staff members Stephanie Barlow, Juliemar Rosado, Andrea Smith, Summer Walker, and Janelle Lee were also on hand throughout the event to support the program. With this training complete, the 2026 Watermelon Queen and Ambassador are well prepared for a successful year of watermelon promotion!



Sponsored Media Segment: March National Nutrition Month

NWPB partner and registered dietitian Gisela Bouvier hosted a National Nutrition Month television segment that aired on 3/24 on WFLA News Channel 8 Tampa Bay. The in-studio segment featured watermelon recipes that included Watermelon Rind Slaw showcasing sustainability and using the whole watermelon, Watermelon and Prosciutto Skewers and Watermelon Dippers. Gisela talked about nutrition, happiness, hydration and demonstrated versatility of watermelon to taste throughout the day. The segment reached a **viewership of 560K audience with syndication in 74 national markets**. Gisela also shared the segment experience and sponsorship on her Instagram.



2026/2027 Department Overviews

Foodservice Program Expands Chain Engagement & Innovation

The National Watermelon Promotion Board's 2026/2027 Foodservice Program continues with a **strong focus on direct engagement with national and regional foodservice brands, supported by media, culinary education, and innovation efforts to drive year-round menu presence.**

Guided by Board direction, grounded in research and aligned with trends, the program targets key decision-makers across culinary, marketing, and purchasing, with an increased emphasis on commercial operators. Industry events and partnerships remain central to this approach, creating opportunities to build relationships, inspire menu ideation, and advance toward menu placement. Key activations include The Flavor Experience, Kinetic12 Emergence and Collaborative Innovation, the IFPA Foodservice Conference, and National Restaurant Show.

Foodservice media and digital outreach continue to amplify key messages, with paid and earned media, Culinary Institute of America (CIA) partnerships, and year-round storytelling that position watermelon as versatile, valuable, and available across seasons.

Culinary education remains a priority, with engagement through the CIA, American Culinary Federation, and Center for Advancement of Foodservice Educators, ensuring future and current chefs are equipped with the tools and inspiration to use watermelon in new ways.

A key growth area is Foodservice Support and Promotions, providing customized ideation sessions, culinary support, and limited time offer promotions to help operators successfully bring watermelon menu items to life and reach consumers with watermelon messages.

New for 2026/2027, the program introduces a Foodservice Innovation and Development program area, this year centered on compressed watermelon. This initiative addresses operator challenges such as labor, consistency, and shelf life while unlocking new opportunities for menu innovation and expanded usage.

Together, these efforts strengthen the Board's ability to move from inspiration to implementation, positioning watermelon as both a creative ingredient and a practical solution for foodservice operators.



2026/2027 Research Program Advances Consumer Strategy

The National Watermelon Promotion Board's 2026/2027 research program continues to build an insight-driven foundation to support promotion, education, and long-term demand growth. Guided by Board priorities and external trends, the **program focuses on consumer, retail, foodservice, and nutrition research to deliver actionable insights across the supply chain.**

Updated research with Fusion Marketing includes a Consumer Attitude and Usage Study, with new focus on differences between heavier and lighter buyers, and a Path to Purchase Study to better understand decision-making, barriers, and in-store influences. Together, these efforts provide a clearer view of how consumers think about, shop for, and use watermelon.

Retail research with Circana continues to provide insights into category performance, supported by expanded work on value and trade response. These insights will help guide promotional strategies to strengthen retail performance. The Circana retail data plus free resources from USDA build the monthly Retail Scan Data Report and weekly Ad Tracking and Watermelon Market Report.

In foodservice, Menu Matters will build on prior work with distributor interviews, consumer research, and innovation tracking to identify new opportunities for watermelon on menus. Consumers continue to be inspired by watermelon's presence on menus.

The nutrition research program, managed by Wild Hive, will advance watermelon's role in health and wellness through a structured pipeline of studies and strategic promotion. Ongoing clinical and genetics-based research further explores connections between watermelon consumption and key health outcomes.

Research is the backbone of the promotion and education work of the Board. The research insights each year keep the programming on track and provide tools for the industry and their businesses.



Strategic Year-Round Retail Programming & Continued International Marketing Efforts

NWPB's retail program is focused on increasing consumer demand through **strategic retail partnerships, merchandising, and education.** A central component of this initiative is the use of a specialized retail account management team that serves as a direct link between the industry and major supermarket chains. These representatives provide on-the-ground support, helping retailers understand category insights and seasonal promotional opportunities to keep watermelon at the forefront of the produce department year-round.

Continued Next Page

To drive sales growth, high-impact activations such as the National Retail Merchandising Contest will continue. Now in its 18th year, the contest has historically helped participating stores achieve average sales increases of 36 percent. NWPB will also continue supporting state, regional and national associations primarily through the watermelon queen and promotional ambassador programs. These ambassadors are instrumental in increasing retail outreach, often participating in in-store activations to directly influence purchase decisions. By allocating specific funds to these programs, the NWPB helps strengthen each association's effectiveness in engaging both retailers and consumers during their primary seasons.



The NWPB also maintains a focused international marketing presence in key export markets like Canada, Japan, and the Caribbean. These programs are often supported by funding from the Foreign Agricultural Service and focus on tailored trade servicing, retail and consumer promotions.

All of these efforts are supported by educational resources, including the Watermelon Learning Lab—an online platform designed to train retail employees on all things watermelon. New this year, a Watermelon Retail Toolkit aimed at expanding sales beyond the peak summer season will be developed.

The program also leverages digital retail partnerships with platforms like DoorDash, Grocery TV, and Chicory to influence shoppers both online and in-store. By combining traditional in-store merchandising with modern digital tools and continuous retailer education, the program creates a seamless shopping experience that reinforces watermelon's relevance as a healthy, versatile staple for all households.

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.

Industry Outreach Keeps Watermelon Connection Year-Round

The National Watermelon Promotion Board continues to strengthen its connection to the industry through a **focused outreach program designed to inform, engage, and support stakeholders.**

Most important is the Board's annual nominations and appointments process. Nominations for District 1 and importers for 2026 are underway, and 2025 appointments are expected any moment, ensuring continued industry representation and leadership. The Secretary of Agriculture makes these appointments.

Continued Next Page

Looking ahead, the 2026/2027 outreach plan continues current efforts with a focus on digital communication and strong partnerships with national, regional, and state associations. Key outreach includes the monthly Watermelon Update newsletter, LinkedIn engagement, and a dedicated industry section on watermelon.org, complemented by in-person meetings and events especially in the fall and winter.



Together, these efforts keep the Board accessible and responsive while supporting the industry year-round.

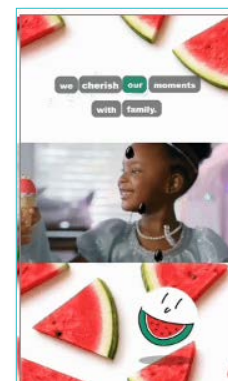
Driving Demand Through Connection, Culture & Consistency – Communications 2026/2027

The National Watermelon Promotion Board 2026/2027 Communications Program is designed to strengthen **consumer demand by reinforcing watermelon’s relevance, value and emotional connection in today’s evolving marketplace**. Grounded in the Board’s mission to increase demand through promotion, research and education, the program delivers clear, compelling messaging that highlights watermelon’s flavor, versatility, nutrition and simplicity across integrated channels.



Building on the successful “Simply Watermelon” platform, this year introduces “Simple Joys” as a unifying brand contribution: connecting watermelon to moments of happiness, nostalgia and shared experiences. This approach aligns with current consumer behaviors, particularly among Millennials and Gen Z, who are seeking simplicity, comfort and meaningful connection in everyday choices. At the same time, the program addresses key barriers such as perceptions of seasonality and ease of use by emphasizing convenience, value and year-round relevance.

Execution is highly integrated and performance-driven, ensuring consistency across press outreach, digital and social media, influencer partnerships, events and owned platforms like Watermelon.org and The Monthly Slice eNewsletter. Content will prioritize short-form video, authentic storytelling and user-generated content, supported by trusted voices including dietitians, growers and watermelon queens. Engagement, not just reach, remains the primary KPI, reflecting a focus on meaningful consumer interaction.



Key messaging pillars include flavor, Watermelon 101 education, value, happiness, grower storytelling, sustainability and nutrition, alongside an expanded focus on “Fuel Your Fitness” to position watermelon as a functional food for hydration and recovery.

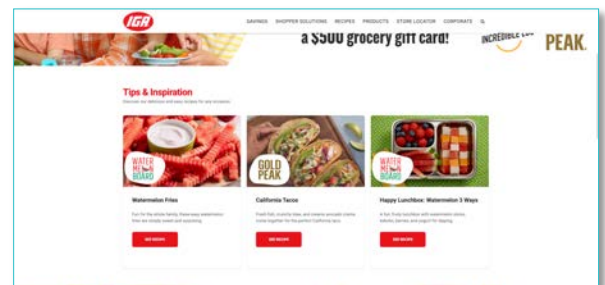
New and evolving tactics include programmatic media placements (CTV, gas pump video, YouTube preroll), immersive gamified mobile ads, a dedicated Watermelon Performance Hub, and expanded influencer partnerships. Additionally, a proposed Association Events Program will shift investment toward localized activations, increasing flexibility, relevance and community engagement.

These efforts aim to increase awareness, improve consumer confidence and usage, and inspire repeat purchase, supporting both immediate demand and long-term growth for the watermelon industry.



IGA Partnership Delivers Juicy Results

The 2025 partnership between IGA and NWPB delivered a highly successful second-half campaign, driving significant shopper engagement and sales growth. This omnichannel initiative, which launched in July 2025, **leveraged digital circulars, social media, and in-store promotions to position watermelon as a versatile, healthy staple for summer and holiday meals.** Across various promotional windows the campaign consistently generated millions of impressions and hundreds of thousands of store visits per flight. For instance, the "Coconut Watermelon Muffins" flight alone achieved over 4.3 million impressions and more than 590,000 store visits.



Beyond digital reach, the campaign focused heavily on shopper education and retailer support. Resources like the "Watermelon Learning Lab" and instructional "Look, Lift, and Turn" videos helped consumers select the best fruit, while "Category Insights" provided retailers with merchandising tips to capitalize on the fact that 71% of watermelon purchases occur in-store. These efforts culminated in a strong performance that resulted in 15.2% increase in sales from July to December. The campaign concluded with participation in IGA's annual "Ugly Sweater" sweepstakes in December, which alone garnered over 8.7 million impressions and 1.3 million store visits.



NWA Nook: Gearing Up for the Domestic Season

As we move into the domestic watermelon season, the pace and priorities begin to shift. Depending on where you are, that may mean planting, preparing, or preparing to harvest—but across the board, this is the time when plans turn into action. As an Association, we're focused on supporting our members through that transition and helping navigate the challenges that come with it.

◆ Labor Readiness for the Season

Labor remains front and center as the season begins. This is when questions around compliance, housing, wage rates, and audits move from theoretical to real—and often require quick, informed decisions. NWA is here to support members in those moments. Through our partnership with JPH Law Firm, we offer access to experienced legal guidance on H-2A and labor-related issues as a benefit for NWA members. If challenges arise, don't navigate them alone—reach out to NWA staff at george@nwawatermelon.com, and we'll help connect you with the resources you need.



◆ Advocacy Momentum in Washington

We continue to stay actively engaged in Washington, working alongside The Redding Firm to ensure the watermelon industry's voice is heard. As part of National Ag Day activities, NWA participated in celebrations with USDA leadership, Chairman GT Thompson, and other key policymakers and allies to reinforce the importance of our nation's food and fiber system. These conversations matter, and we're encouraged by the level of engagement and interest in our priorities.



◆ Moving from Planning to Action

Earlier this year, we aligned on key priorities for the Association, and now we're putting that work into motion. That includes continued coordination across committees, advancing our advocacy efforts, and supporting research that delivers practical value to growers—while keeping a close focus on what matters most during the season ahead.

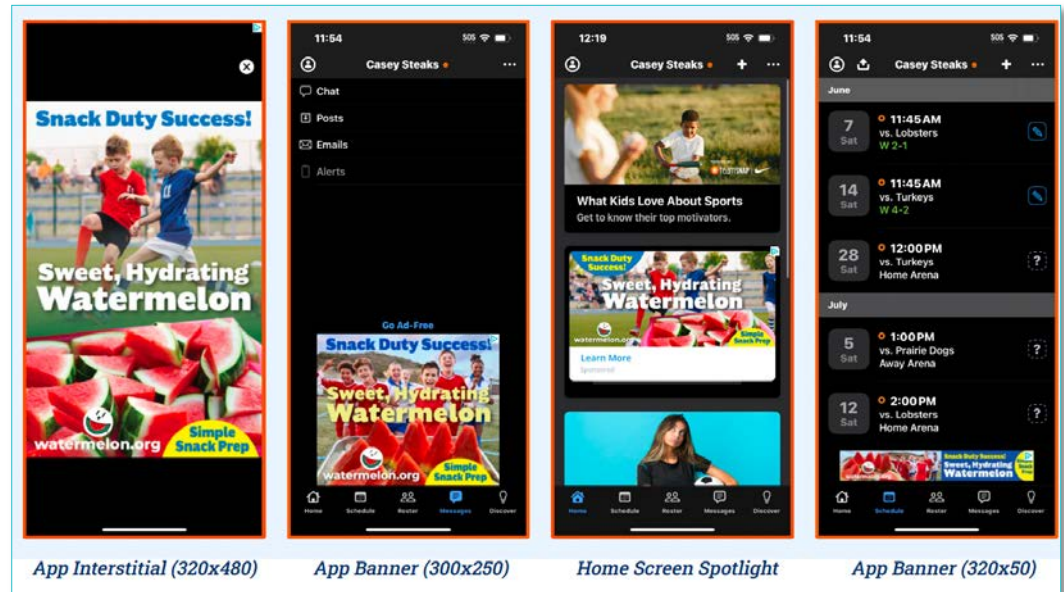
◆ Staying Connected This Season

As activity ramps up, we encourage members to stay in touch. Whether it's a labor question, a regulatory concern, or something you're seeing in the field, we're here to help connect resources and work through challenges together.

And as the season gets underway, so does the work of our queens and the National Watermelon Promotion Board—sharing the story of watermelon with consumers across the country and helping drive demand at retail.

TeamSnap Final Report: Campaign Delivers Strong Awareness and Engagement

The National Watermelon Promotion Board's recent TeamSnap digital campaign successfully delivered high-impact visibility and meaningful engagement with active families across the country. Running from August 15 through March 15, the campaign focused on driving awareness and encouraging consumers to explore Watermelon.org



through targeted, in-app placements, focused on a “Snacky Duty Success” visual implying fresh watermelon is a win for youth sports to refresh, replenish and rehydrate after practices and games.

In total, the campaign generated more than **6.09 million impressions** and **4,783 clicks**, reinforcing watermelon’s presence with a highly relevant audience of youth sports families. With a **0.08% click-through rate (CTR)** overall, performance aligned with, and in several cases exceeded, TeamSnap platform benchmarks.

Interstitial placements were the standout performers, achieving CTRs of **0.34% and 0.38%**, significantly outperforming the benchmark of 0.20% for this format. Home screen spotlight placements also delivered steady results, with CTRs ranging from **0.09% to 0.12%**, meeting or surpassing expected performance levels.

Daily delivery remained consistent throughout the campaign, with strong impression volume and steady engagement over time, demonstrating sustained visibility during key seasonal windows, including back-to-school and fall sports.

This campaign highlights the effectiveness of reaching consumers in-context by connecting watermelon with real-life moments like game days, practices and snack duty. By meeting families where they are already engaged, the TeamSnap partnership reinforces watermelon as a fresh, convenient and crowd-pleasing option for active lifestyles.

Overall, the results underscore the value of strategic digital placements in driving awareness and consideration, while supporting the Board’s broader goal of increasing demand through relevant, targeted consumer touchpoints.

Upcoming Assessment Due Dates



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

- Product handled in April, must be postmarked by May 30, and received by June 9, 2026
- Product handled in May, must be postmarked by June 30, and received by July 10, 2026
- Product handled in June, must be postmarked by July 30, and received by August 10, 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](#).



Watermelon ACF Webinar Offers Whole-Product Focus

The Board partnered with the American Culinary Federation (ACF) for a Chef's Table webinar designed to inspire culinary professionals with fresh ideas for using watermelon across the menu. As part of ACF's webinar series, the session reached a broad audience of chefs and operators, **reinforcing watermelon's versatility and year-round relevance**.

Led by Chef Rebecca Peizer alongside NWPB's Megan McKenna, the webinar focused on whole-product utilization, from fresh and compressed watermelon techniques to creative use of the rind. The content aligned with key foodservice trends, including global flavors, cross-utilization, and reducing food waste, while highlighting practical applications for operators.

This effort supports the Board's strategy to engage culinary decision-makers with education and inspiration. With both live and on-demand reach, ACF webinars extend the impact of this content and keep watermelon top of mind for menu innovation. By delivering actionable ideas through trusted industry channels, the Board continues to position watermelon as a solution for menus.



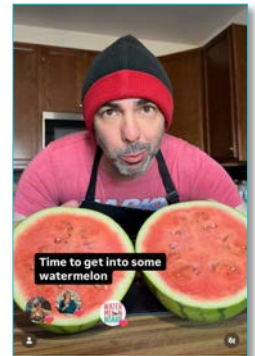
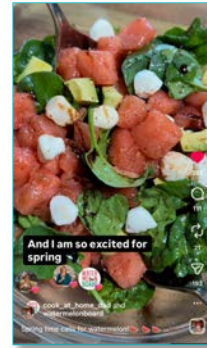
Partner Spotlight: Bill Roberts of Instagram

Over the past year, the Watermelon Board partnered with Bill Roberts of @CookAtHomeDad to bring approachable, family-friendly watermelon inspiration to life through engaging video content. Known for his relatable style and strong connection with home cooks, Bill created a series of Instagram Reels that showcased watermelon in fresh, seasonal ways.

Highlights included a festive Halloween watermelon carving that captured attention with creativity and fun, as well as a bright, spring-inspired salad that emphasized watermelon's versatility and ease. Each piece of content aligned with the Board's focus on simple, craveable ideas that fit seamlessly into everyday moments.

Through this partnership, Bill helped **reinforce watermelon as a go-to ingredient for both special occasions and simple meals**, reaching an audience that values practical inspiration and real-life application.

This collaboration reflects the Board's continued commitment to working with trusted creators who bring authenticity, creativity and meaningful engagement to watermelon messaging.



GenAI APP<LESS Experience Promotes Watermelon in the Winter

From February 12 through March 31, NWPB engaged a digital retail experience with partner Genesis. This campaign delivers guaranteed engagement with an **immersive “app-like” experience without the need for download and install**. APP>LESS is a pay-for-performance that ensures that the content connects with relevant consumers.

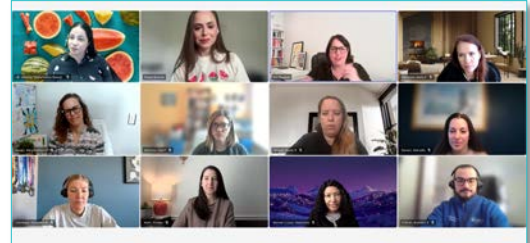
New this year, a 15-second AI generated video was created and the program targeted shoppers in and around Target stores. Once a consumer engages with the hyper-targeted, branded programmatic media, they are taken to a custom watermelon web experience, richly designed to deliver immersive and engaging information about year-round recipes and usage ideas.



As of March 15 the program reached a total of 18,918 delivered activations, which is counted when a shopper clicks on the ad, lands in the experience and completes the engagement. The hyper-targeting geo-based strategy allowed for direct engagement at retail with shoppers in/around the selected retail stores and had a total of over 1.1 million impressions so far.

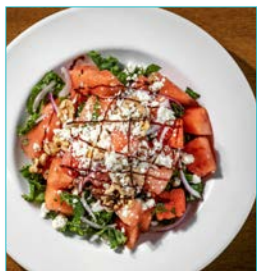
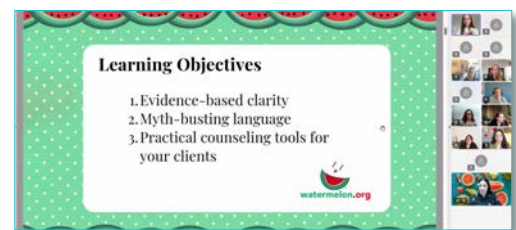
Food as Medicine Webinar

The "Food as Medicine" philosophy represents a powerful shift in healthcare, moving from restrictive dieting toward the strategic use of nutrient-dense foods to support the body's natural healing processes. A prime example of this approach in action is the collaboration between the NWPB and Kroger's Health team. On March 19th, NWPB sponsored a virtual webinar session for Kroger's registered dietitians and nutrition team. Presented by Registered Dietitian Gisela Bouvier, the NWPB was able to share essential science, consumer insights, and strategies that position watermelon as a functional health tool.



This engagement included a **30-day watermelon-focused campaign, utilizing the education and suggestions presented in the webinar to suggest watermelon during the dietitian and nutrition teams' consultation process.**

This initiative underscores the vital role of retail dietitians in bridging the gap between clinical nutrition and daily grocery choices.



Watermelon on the Menu

The 57th Restaurant & Lounge in Atlanta, GA is currently offering a **Watermelon Salad** with ripe diced watermelon, kale, feta, red onion, walnuts, tossed in poppy seed vinaigrette, topped with balsamic glaze.



NWPB Connections

Viva Fresh Expo – Austin, TX – April 16 - 18

Johnson & Wales Culinary Presentation – Providence, RI – April 8

Wellcomm Assets Photoshoot – Orlando, FL – April 28 & 29

CPMA Convention & Trade Show – Toronto, Ontario, Canada – April 29 & 30

Farm to Fork in the Field Tour – Lake Wales, FL – May 5 & 6

