



Watermelon Update

NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD

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Inspiring the Next Generation of Chefs at Johnson & Wales

In April, the Board brought watermelon innovation to nearly 300 culinary students at Johnson & Wales University. Presented by Megan McKenna and Chef Jason Hernandez, the session connected future chefs with real-world foodservice insights, techniques and inspiration to expand watermelon's role on menus year round.

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Johnson & Wales Continued

The presentation highlighted the latest foodservice research, **reinforcing watermelon's continued growth and opportunity across segments, while introducing students to emerging concepts like watermelon's versatility**. A strong focus was placed on whole product utilization, showcasing both flesh and rind through ideation and application.

Students explored a range of concepts through guided tasting and discussion, including fresh watermelon juice, watermelon rind pickles and globally inspired applications like watermelon sashimi, West African stew and spice-driven profiles such as berbere, Latin and Chinese blends. The hands-on approach brought cross-cultural flavor building to life in a way that resonated across skill levels and specialties.



The impact extended beyond the presentation, with one professor hosting a dedicated “watermelon day,” creating both savory and sweet applications in their lab. The Johnson & Wales University social team also helped extend the watermelon message beyond campus, sharing content across their platforms to further amplify student engagement and inspiration.

As culinary students prepare to enter the industry, experiences like this reinforce **watermelon's versatility and inspire new ideas that will shape menus and drive demand** from the kitchen to the consumer.



Watermelon Carvings Assets Shoot

In late April the Board collaborated with longtime partner Wellcom Worldwide (formerly known as Visual Cuisines) to create several Watermelon Carving assets including static images and video for use on social platforms. The videos will feature a quick step by step carvings “guide” for inspiration, including the Americana basket, Cascading basket, Shark, Football helmet, Salsa bowl. Additionally, the Board will reshoot a few static images for modernization. Both Carving inspiration vertical videos and updated still images will be **layered into the Board's social editorial calendar** throughout the year, while performance on both is monitored and optimized.



Industry Spotlight: Get to Know Matt Solana

Company: Jackon Farming Company of NC

Time in the Industry: 50 years total from growing up on S&G Cattle Ranch in Cocoa, FL where we ran cattle, had groves and grew watermelons to the Supermarket side of the business and then to Jackson Farming Company in NC for the past 21 years.

Time on the Board: 3 years all total counting past time on the Board.

What's your favorite thing about the Watermelon Industry? Family from beginning to end. Still remember them days on the back porch in FL with our family growing up and Dad putting a Charleston Gray in the freezer for just a couple of hours, then spreading out the newspaper to cut it up on and the whole family spending time together just enjoying what we had grown. Greatest memories ever! Then of course us kids having our own Seed Spitting Contest before there was such a thing. The days of future, now passed, but still remembered with fond affection and carried on with our children and grandchildren.



What's your favorite item on your bucket list? Any time our 3 children, spouses and 6 grandchildren can get together at one time. Nothing beats that, when the 14 of us are together! Then just add a great seeded watermelon!

What's your favorite piece of technology? GPS, sure does help to keep them rows straight!



Appointments

Congratulations to our **newly appointed and reappointed board members**, including:

- District 4 Producer: Caitlin Givens, Laurel, Del.
- District 4 Producer: Dennis Mouzin, Vincennes, Ind.
- District 4 Handler: Rachel Syngo, Punta Gorda, Fla.
- District 4 Handler: Renee Goodwin, Keenes, Ill.
- District 5 Producer: Camille Lombardo, Los Angeles, Calif.
- District 5 Producer: Jason Van Groningen, Mantera, Calif.
- District 5 Handler: PJ Colin, Woodland, Calif.
- District 5 Handler: Meagan Morgan, Scottsdale, Ariz.



They will serve three-year terms effectively immediately and will end on December 31, 2028.

Retail Merchandising Contest is Right Around the Corner!

NWPB is thrilled to bring back its **National Watermelon Merchandising Contest, running June through August 2026** — again this year, we’re offering over \$10,000 in cash and prizes as well as an additional incentive from Tajin® if you include them in your entry!

Here’s how retailers can enter:

- Build an eye-catching watermelon display in your store
- Share recipes, health tips, and selection advice
- Promote across print, in-store, and digital platforms
- Submit your entry and let your creativity shine!

Top Prizes Include:

- Grand Prize: \$5,000
- Second Place: \$2,500
- Third Place: \$1,000
- Honorable Mentions (3): \$500 each

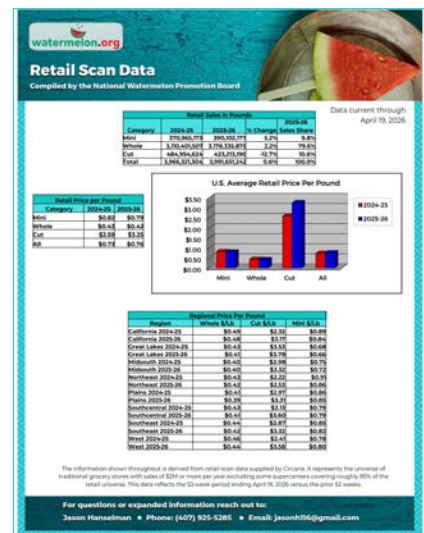


Whether you’re a produce pro or marketing guru, this is a retailer’s chance to stand out—and cash in. Know a retailer interested in participating? [Click here to get full contest details and enter!](#)



Retail Scan Data Report Update

The NWPB works with Circana to provide a snapshot of the retail scene using Point of Sale data. Circana receives produce sales data directly from 91% of retailers then projects the remainder to estimate total volume at retail. The Board is investing in a new platform, Liquid Data Go, that has shifted the data deliverables. The **Retail Scan Data** report **now includes regional, state and market-level data for whole, mini and cut watermelon**. The new platform provides data for 40 of the 50 states and represents nearly 320 million Americans. The focus of the report is on the past 52 weeks and how that compares to the prior period. [Click here to see the most recent report](#). Reach out to [Jason Hanselman](#) with any questions or requests for custom analysis.



NWA Nook: Investing in Research for 2026

The National Watermelon Association is proud to announce its 2026 research investments, continuing our commitment to funding work that delivers practical value for watermelon growers. This year's projects reflect both the industry's ongoing challenges and its future direction—balancing core disease management with emerging tools in technology and production efficiency.

◆ Technology and Production Efficiency

NWA is supporting forward-looking work led by Dr. Bridget McFarland, focused on integrating artificial intelligence into watermelon production systems. Additional projects at Mississippi State University are exploring hyperspectral imaging and precision mapping tools to improve weed detection and overall production efficiency. These efforts highlight the growing role of technology in helping growers make faster, more informed decisions



◆ Disease Management and Plant Health

Research led by Dr. Akhtar Ali at the University of Tulsa is advancing new approaches to managing Fusarium Wilt, including the use of mycoviruses to reduce disease severity. These projects build on NWA's longstanding investment in plant pathology, continuing to address some of the most persistent threats to watermelon production.

◆ Quality and Post-Harvest Innovation

Additional work, including multispectral imaging research at Clemson University, is focused on improving fruit quality assessment and post-harvest evaluation. These tools have the potential to enhance grading accuracy and better predict shelf life and marketability.

◆ Research Built for Growers

Across all projects, the focus remains on practical application—field-tested tools, measurable outcomes, and results that can be shared directly with growers. From disease management to AI-driven production tools, NWA's research program continues to evolve to meet the needs of the industry.

By investing in a diverse group of researchers and institutions, NWA is helping ensure the watermelon industry remains resilient, efficient, and forward-looking.



Watermelon on the Menu

Sip Fresh with **10 locations nationwide** is now offering a Cha Cha Chamoy® – Watermelon. It is a blend of watermelon juice and lemon juice with Tajín® and Chamoy served with a watermelon fan (all four Cha Cha Chamoy® offerings are served with a watermelon fan)!

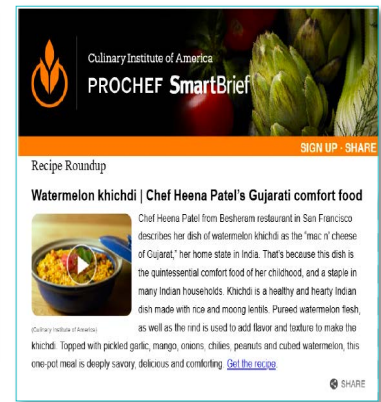
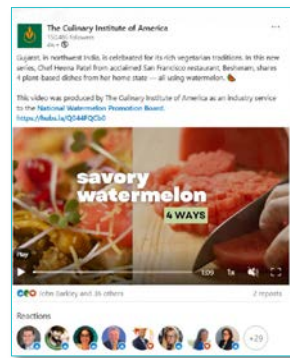
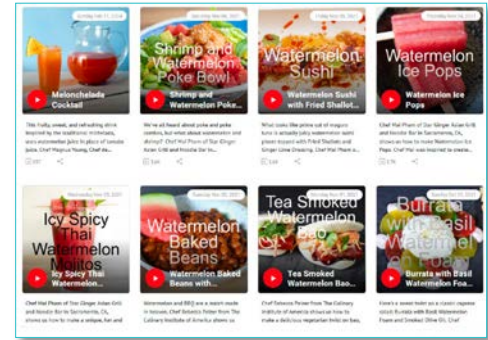


CIA Digital Media Results

NWPB collaborated with the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) to bring watermelon education and inspiration directly to chefs and foodservice professionals where they already spend time online. From YouTube and Pinterest to iTunes, Facebook, LinkedIn, and owned channels like SmartBrief, eblasts, and the CIA website, the program delivered a **steady stream of culinary-focused content across a wide digital footprint throughout the year.**

The results show that strategy paid off. Across all platforms, campaigns generated more than 159k video views and 1.8M impressions, boosted by targeted placements, strategic partnerships, and a standout email campaign with a 60% open rate. Social media played a key role in amplifying reach and connecting with a broader professional audience.

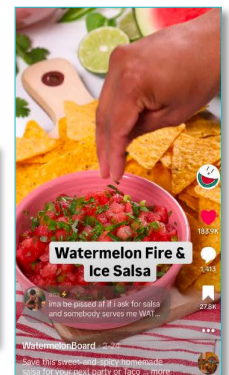
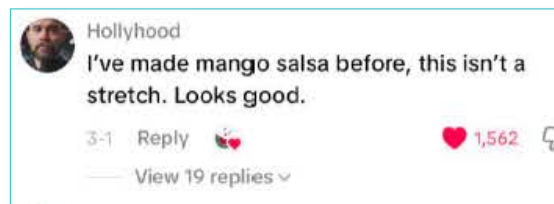
Top-performing content reflected both creativity and global flavor, from Watermelon Consommé with Scallop Ceviche leading on YouTube (34K views) to Watermelon Carpaccio, which continued to draw strong engagement on Pinterest (102K views + 3rd most popular “Pin” for CIA overall!), and Vietnamese Watermelon Boba Tea performing strongly across multiple platforms. The takeaway is clear: **demand for fresh, innovative watermelon content continues to grow**, setting the stage for even greater engagement in the year ahead.



Fire & Ice Salsa Goes Viral

In late February, the Board had a breakout moment on TikTok when its “Fire and Ice Salsa” post went viral. What set this video apart was not just the content itself, but the **lively conversation it sparked in the comments**. Engagement like this is key; when a post invites opinions and interaction, it signals to the platform’s algorithm to expand its reach even further.

The results of the post were significant, generating 6.5 million views, nearly 1,400 comments, more than 16,000 shares, and 28,000 saves demonstrating the powerful role that audience interaction plays in driving viral performance. The Board will continue to post content that features watermelon in simple, yet surprising ways to encourage audience dialogue.



Viva Fresh

Hosted by the Texas International Produce Association (TIPA), NWPB once again exhibited at the Viva Fresh Expo, held April 17–18 in San Antonio, TX. Representing NWPB were Juliemar Rosado and Retail Account Manager Katie Manetti. Throughout the event, the team engaged in valuable networking opportunities and educational seminars, while also spotlighting NWPB’s unique industry resources to **over 2,800 attendees, including retail and foodservice buyers.**

New to this year’s booth was a sampling of watermelon recipes. The watermelon limeade and sweet watermelon pizza allowed attendees to taste watermelon in fresh and innovative ways. The booth also featured the announcement of the upcoming retail merchandising contest, which drew strong interest, alongside the well-received educational and promotional materials the Board offers. These tools continue to provide vital “Watermelon 101” education, merchandising guidance, and insights into consumer research, handling, and cutting practices.

The NWPB team also had the opportunity to connect directly with industry professionals, gathering valuable feedback and fostering new relationships. With positive energy and strong engagement throughout the expo, the event was a success for all participants.



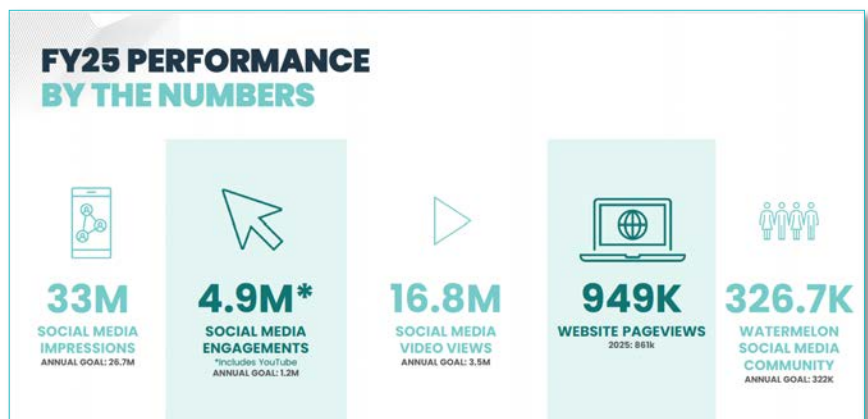
End of Year Social by the Numbers

The graphic highlights fiscal year 2025 social performance across our owned channels (with the exception of LinkedIn, which continues to be managed internally). Overall, the results reflect a strong year of growth and engagement.

Key goals were exceeded across several priority areas, including social media impressions, engagements, video views, and total community size. This momentum

underscores the effectiveness of content that resonates with audiences and **encourages interaction.**

Web page views, while not a primary focus in 2025, also saw an increase, signaling added value from our broader digital efforts and continued audience interest in our content.



Foodservice Support & Promotions Deliver Menu Impact

The National Watermelon Promotion Board's Foodservice Support and Promotions program continued to drive real menu adoption in the past year, helping operators turn inspiration into execution. Following engagement through events, media and direct outreach, the Board targeted support across purchasing, culinary and marketing to bring watermelon menu ideas to life.



Back of house **efforts focused on education and ideation with operators looking to introduce or expand watermelon on menus.** Through hands-on collaboration and tailored resources, partners like Divided Restaurant Group, Paradise Lagardère, Qdoba, Applebee's, American Airlines and Tropical Smoothie Cafe explored new applications that fit into their operations. Conversations with these brands are ongoing. At the same time, front of house promotions supported limited time offers, helping move product and place watermelon messaging directly in front of consumers. Partnerships with Restaurant Depot and Mendocino Farms are strong examples of how these promotions elevated visibility and drove trial.

Together, these efforts reinforced watermelon's versatility and year round relevance across commercial and noncommercial channels. Distributors and operators interested in back of house ideation or front of house promotional support are encouraged to connect with the Board to explore opportunities for the year ahead. To get started, reach out to Megan McKenna at mmckenna@watermelon.org.



CPMA

With the support of ChangeMakers representatives Alexandra Tushingam and Jinee Lee, NWPB once again exhibited in the Canadian Produce Marketing Association's (CPMA) Annual Convention and Trade Show, held April 28–30 in Toronto, Canada. This event brings together leaders across the fresh produce supply chain, offering a dynamic platform for business development through education and networking. CPMA consistently draws key decision-makers, category managers, government officials, and other influential figures from across Canada's fresh fruit and vegetable sector.



To generate excitement and boost booth engagement, NWPB featured a lively plinko game, inviting attendees to stop by for a chance to win prizes. The interactive setup attracted a steady stream of visitors, including Canadian retail merchandisers, foodservice professionals, and watermelon category managers. These attendees engaged with NWPB's educational materials and discussed year-round promotional opportunities for U.S. watermelon in the Canadian market. Exhibiting at CPMA continues to be a **valuable opportunity for NWPB to build relationships with retailers nationwide, encouraging watermelon consumption** while reinforcing the goals of our Market Access Programs that support U.S. watermelon exports.

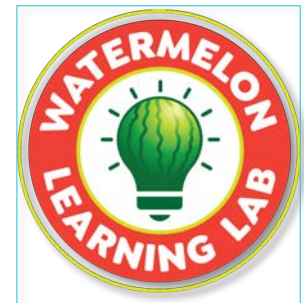
Individuals with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations and or alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, LEP, etc.) should contact: Juliemar Rosado at jrosado@watermelon.org within three days of event. The National Watermelon Promotion Board is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Retailer Tool: Brush Up on Watermelon 101 with the Watermelon Learning Lab

Whether you're a seasoned produce professional or new to the category, staying sharp on watermelon best practices can boost your confidence—and your sales. That's where the Watermelon Learning Lab comes in.

This **free, on-demand training tool is designed specifically for retailers and produce staff to help enhance their knowledge and build confidence in the watermelon category.** The Watermelon Learning Lab covers essential “Watermelon 101” topics such as:

- Selection and Handling
- Cutting and Storage Best Practices
- Health and Nutrition Information
- Tips for Engaging Shoppers



The modules are short and interactive —perfect for quick learning during the workday or pre-shift huddles. Upon completion, participants can even earn a certificate of achievement. For retailers looking to improve customer service, educate team members, and grow watermelon sales, the Learning Lab is a simple and effective tool to make it happen.

Retailers can start learning today at www.watermelon.org/retail-education.



NWPB Connections

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

Commodity Roundtable – Orlando, FL – May 12 – 14

SEPC's STEP-UPP Foodservice Class Farm Tour – Cordele, GA – May 12 & 13

Today's Dietitian Spring Symposium – Orlando, FL – May 17 – 19

Kinetic12 – Denver, CO – May 27 & 28

West Coast Produce Expo – Palm Desert, CA – May 28 – 30

