SEPTEMBER 2026

Watermelon Update

NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD



Watermelon Brings 2027 Menu Trends to Life at The Flavor Experience

The NWPB brought watermelon to the forefront of emerging foodservice trends at The Flavor Experience in August in Newport Beach, CA. The annual event brings together high volume food and beverage menu developers, including professionals responsible for menu innovation across restaurant chains and other large scale foodservice operations, for three days of trend forecasting, culinary inspiration and conversations about what is next on menus. This year, watermelon had a role from the very beginning. During the opening trends session, watermelon was used as a vehicle for attendees to taste new and emerging flavors firsthand, reinforcing its ability to pair with unexpected ingredients and adapt to evolving to consumer tastes.

Continued next page

Inside this issue:

- The Flavor Experience
- Call for Importers
- Fourth of July 2026 Market Recap
- Industry Spotlight: Get to Know Patrick Stewart
- CoolDown Run Club Watermelon Week: Amplifications & Results
- In-Store Selection Tips Drive Produce Sales: GroceryTV Returns 9.3x Ad Spend + Produce Business Marketing Excellence Award
- Association Events Program Update
- NWA Nook: NWA Helps Members Navigate New H-2A Wage Uncertainty
- Watermelon Board Connects with Produce Industry in New England
- More than 100 Watermelon Concepts Inspire Innovation Through Kitchen Collaborative
- August Media & Influencer Highlights
- NWPB Partners with Canadian Culinary Federation to Drive Foodservice Growth in Canada
- 2025-2026 NWPB Annual Report Available
- Watermelon on the Menu

The Flavor Experience Continued

Other event sponsors incorporated watermelon into their dishes, further demonstrating its relevance as an ingredient across the broader foodservice innovation landscape.







Team Watermelon continued that story through a series of chef driven concepts designed around trends expected to influence menus in 2027 and beyond. The Watermelon Chicken Tikka Pakora combined tikka spiced fried chicken and a chickpea flour waffle with watermelon rind pickle, fresh compressed watermelon, watermelon, date and tamarind chutney, and watermelon rind raita, showcasing global inspiration and multiple applications of the whole watermelon. The Grilled and Chilled Watermelon Salad in a Jar paired fresh watermelon with charred cabbage, grilled watermelon rind and rainbow carrot slaw, Calypso beans, green peas, pepitas and a creamy lemon Hawaii cashew dressing, bringing together plant forward ingredients, protein, fiber and whole product utilization. Watermelon also moved into the snack space with a Watermelon Snack Box featuring kombucha soaked watermelon balls with ginger and star anise alongside the 3 C's of Watermelon, fresh watermelon paired with chocolate, chili and cacao nibs. Together, the concepts explored fermentation, functional ingredients, global flavors, better for you applications and unexpected flavor combinations while **keeping watermelon at the center**.

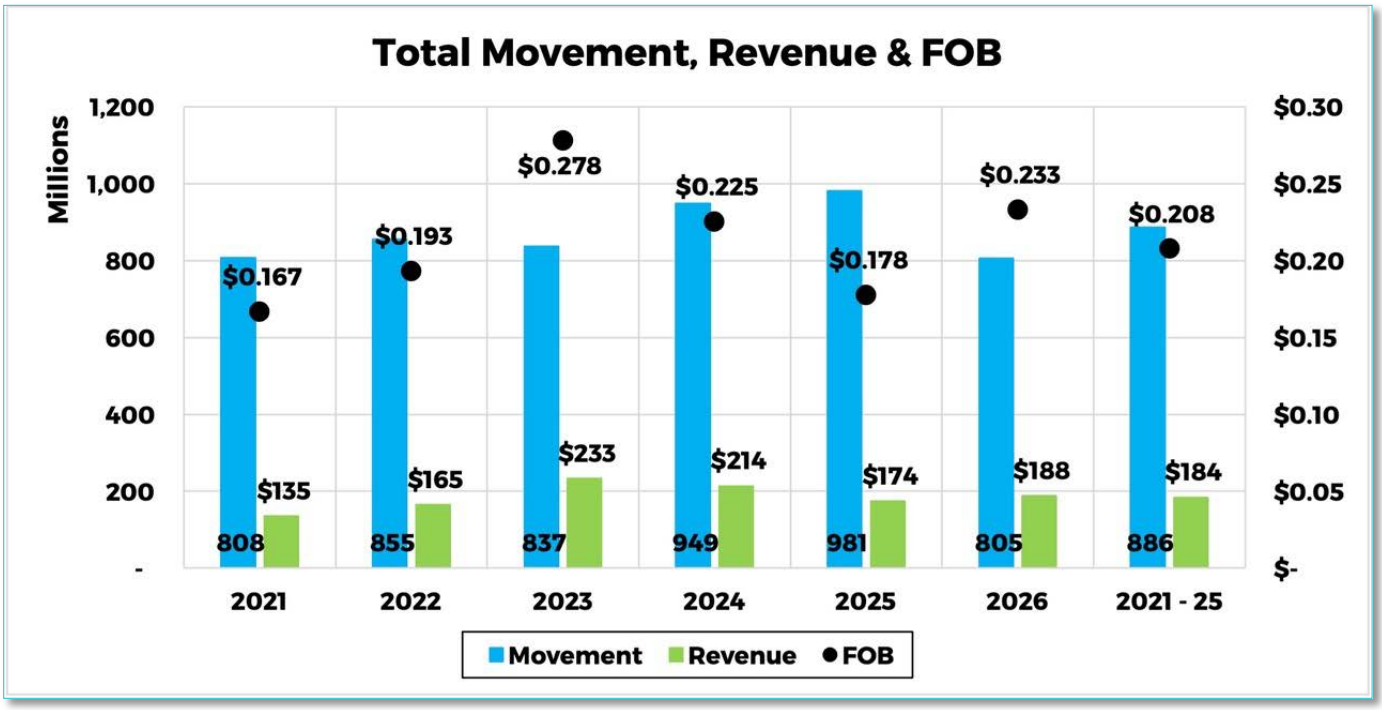
The work continues beyond the event as the Board follows up with targeted **high volume operators to identify opportunities for one on one ideation sessions and culinary collaboration**. These sessions can move inspiration from Flavor Experience into operator kitchens, where NWPB can work directly with menu development teams to explore new watermelon applications or expand existing watermelon menu items. By moving from trend exploration to operator collaboration and ultimately menu development, NWPB is creating a path toward increased watermelon usage in foodservice and more opportunities for consumers to enjoy watermelon away from home.

Calling all Importers! Your Voice. Your Opportunity.

We still have **positions available for qualified watermelon importers** to serve as Board directors — and we want YOU to consider getting involved! Serving on the NWPB is an opportunity to represent your industry, help shape industry programs, and have a voice in initiatives that promote watermelon and support the entire industry.

If you're a qualified watermelon importer interested in serving — or know another importer who would be a great fit nominate them today! We need a full slate of names for the nomination packet to be moved forward. For information about the nomination process, contact the Industry Affairs Department at (407) 657-0261.

Fourth of July 2026 Market Recap



Fourth of July remains the most voluminous time of year for watermelon movement. Data from the AMS My Market News Portal shows that from 2021 to 2025, the two weeks leading into the holiday and the week following averaged roughly 886 million pounds shipped. Movement in 2026 was 9% lower at 805 million pounds. Seedless FOB prices have averaged 20.8 cents per pound during the prior five years with 2026 coming in 2.5 cents higher at 23.3 cents. This year's pricing was 12% above average and 31% higher than last year.

Ad-tracking data from USDA shows retail ad activity in 2026 was relatively lighter than recent years at 19% below the prior five-year average. Per each seedless prices ($5.22) were higher than all but 2023, another lighter promotion year. Regional prices varied from a low of $4.93 in Midwest to a high of $5.90 in Northwest. Per each price for mini watermelon ($3.75) was highest of the reviewed years and around 11% higher than average. Compound annual growth rate on seedless prices has paced at 3% since 2021, while minis pushed higher this year to 5.1%.

Circana retail scan data provides insight on sales at retail where total volume was down 6.5%. Wholes represented 86% of pounds sold and were a slightly lower 6.1% below average. Mini pounds were down 3.9%, while cut pounds were down 13.8%. Most tracked states west of the Mississippi saw double digit percentage decrease on total pounds sold, while price for all segments was up double digits. The range of change was smaller in the east where most states were +-5% from average for total volume, while price generally showed similar small levels of change.

View the full report **HERE** to find regional breakdowns for each of the primary shipping regions, as well as state-level comparisons for sales at retail. For further analysis or if you have any questions or comments, please **contact Jason Hanselman**.

Industry Spotlight: Get to Know Patrick Stewart



Company: Stewart Farms, LLC.

Time in the Industry: 33 years

Time on the Board: 3 years

What's your favorite thing about Watermelon? Growing and eating watermelons.

What's your favorite piece of technology? App – X.

CoolDown Run Club Watermelon Week: Amplifications & Results

CoolDown Run Club's Watermelon Week brought runners together from July 19-25 across 12 cities in the U.S., with estimated attendance of nearly 1.2K people. The week generated strong social momentum through a mix of static posts, Reels/TikToks, and multiple Story reshares, driving 1K total likes, 44 comments, and 207.3K video views.



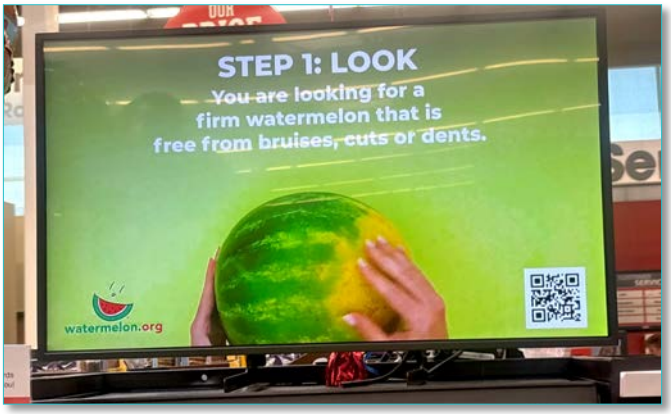


Two of July's highest-engagement posts came directly from ambassadors who attended their local Run Club events: Tanvi's Run Club Reel (pictured, right) generated 66.2% engagement, while Lydia's Reel generated 52.5% (pictured, left). Their authentic, firsthand content resonated especially well within their individual communities.

To build on that momentum, we **whitelisted the top-performing creator posts, allowing us to run paid media directly through the creators' social handles so the content appeared as posts from the creators themselves**. This strategy helped extend the reach of authentic ambassador content and connect Watermelon Week with an even larger audience.

In-Store Selection Tips Drive Produce Sales: GroceryTV Returns 9.3x on Ad Spend





The Watermelon Board's May/June digital in-store video campaign with Grocery TV proved that the right message at checkout can make a big difference in grocery aisles. Running across 12 states in Hy-Vee, Smart & Final, and Giant Eagle stores, the campaign generated over 31 million views. A sales study focused on 160+ Hy-Vee locations showed an impressive 9.3x return on ad spend.

The secret to success was keeping the video creative practical and helpful. By sharing quick selection and preparation tips, the videos in-store gave consumers the confidence they needed right before making a purchase.

While overall the campaign led to a **4.8% sales increase across the entire watermelon category**, the easy-to-follow tips directly boosted sales. Specifically, the Hy-Vee study tracked a 5.8% increase in whole watermelon sales, showing that the quick advice on how to pick and cut whole fruit encourages shoppers to drop a full watermelon into their carts.

These results further demonstrate how simple, friendly video tips delivered right in the store can serve as a powerful way to lift retail sales.

Last Year's GroceryTV Campaign Wins Produce Business Marketing Excellence Award!

The 2025 GroceryTV retail campaign was selected by *Produce Business* magazine to receive a Marketing Excellence Award. These annual awards recognize the top campaigns across the produce industry based on their creativity, consumer engagement, and ability to drive sales. We are pleased to have our campaign highlighted!



Read about the awards here.

Association Events Program Update



Just a few months into the Association Event Funds Program, watermelon is showing up in communities across the country in new and engaging ways. Since April, **43 events** have been funded, with all 10 associations approved to put some or all of their available funds to work.

Supported events have included youth camps, minor league baseball games, theme parks, food festivals, agricultural education events for students and more, all creating opportunities for queens and ambassadors to connect directly with consumers through watermelon education, sampling and experiences. The result is a growing collection of local touchpoints bringing watermelon education, inspiration and, of course, plenty of fresh watermelon to consumers!

NWA Nook: NWA Helps Members Navigate New H-2A Wage Uncertainty



A recent federal court ruling has created renewed uncertainty around the H-2A program and the Adverse Effect Wage Rate employers must pay. The court found that the Department of Labor's 2025 AEWR methodology was unlawful and directed the department to develop a revised approach.

Current Situation: The court did not immediately vacate the rule, meaning the current wage rates remain temporarily in place. However, employers could face potential back-pay obligations once a new methodology is established. H-2A employers should follow developments closely and seek advice about how the ruling may affect their individual operations.

The ruling reinforces why agricultural labor and AEWR reform remain among NWA's highest advocacy priorities. NWA has consistently pushed for a wage system that is more workable, predictable, and reflective of the realities facing specialty-crop employers. We continue working with our national partners and lawmakers to advance meaningful reforms that provide stability for growers while protecting the domestic workforce.

NWA members also have access to experienced guidance through Shawn Packer, the association's attorney for agricultural labor issues. Connecting with Shawn for initial advice on H-2A compliance, the implications of this ruling, or other labor questions is an important benefit of NWA membership. Members interested in connecting with Shawn should reach out directly to the NWA team.

As the Department of Labor responds to the ruling, NWA will continue monitoring developments, advocating for the watermelon industry, and helping our members navigate what comes next.

Watermelon Connects with Produce Industry in New England



The NWPB joined produce industry partners at the **New England Produce Council's** annual conference and trade show in August. As an exhibitor, NWPB connected with retailers and produce peers while showcasing watermelon's versatility and year-round appeal.

Attendees got a taste for themselves with samples of refreshing Watermelon Limeade and a Red, White & Blue Watermelon Parfait, demonstrating easy ways to enjoy watermelon beyond the slice. NWPB also participated in NEPC's first-ever Women's Luncheon, an opportunity to connect with and celebrate women across the produce industry.

Events like NEPC provide valuable opportunities to strengthen industry relationships, share watermelon resources and inspiration, and keep watermelon top of mind with the retail community.

More Than 100 Watermelon Concepts Inspire Innovation Trough Kitchen Collaborative

For the 2026 Kitchen Collaborative, watermelon was put into the hands of some of foodservice's most creative culinary minds, and the results demonstrated just how much opportunity remains for the fruit on menus. The annual *Flavor & The Menu* and Summit F&B program challenges 100 high volume foodservice chefs and menu developers to create original concepts using products from participating sponsors. This year, more than 100 watermelon concepts were submitted, exploring the fruit across cuisines, techniques, menu categories and occasions.



Among those concepts, Chef Lisa Feldman of Sodexo was selected as the National Watermelon Promotion Board winner for her Thai Inspired Root to Rind Watermelon Panzanella. The dish layered compressed watermelon and pan fried watermelon rind with crispy lentil panisse croutons, kaffir lime leaves and fresh herbs, tossed with a hot honey lemongrass watermelon chili crisp jam. Pineapple teriyaki watermelon rind relish, chimichurri flatbread crumbs, fried shallot, garlic and roasted peanuts completed a dish built around contrasts of fresh and crunchy, soft and crispy, sweet and spicy, and cool and hot.

KITCHEN COLLABORATIVE | FLAVOR & the menu + SUMMIT F&B MARKETING COLLABORATIVE

Feldman conceived the dish around **total utilization of the watermelon**, experimenting with different techniques to give every part a purpose. Fresh flesh was compressed, which firmed its texture while releasing juice that was reduced into the chili crisp jam. Watermelon rind was pan fried until golden, developing a texture reminiscent of fried squash, while another portion was grated and pickled. Even the panzanella format supported the dish's waste conscious approach, using leftover flatbread to create seasoned crumbs. The result demonstrated how whole watermelon utilization can move beyond simply reducing waste and instead create new flavors, textures and components that add value to a finished dish.

Beyond the program, the submissions give NWPB insight into how professional chefs and menu developers naturally approach watermelon when challenged to innovate with it, revealing new techniques, flavor pairings and potential menu applications. At the same time, the program provides ongoing exposure through *Flavor & The Menu*, reaching the broader foodservice industry throughout the program, from the initial call for chef participation and concept development to editorial coverage and winner announcements. Together, this combination of hands-on chef engagement and sustained industry visibility keeps watermelon part of the menu innovation conversation over an extended period of time.

August Media & Influencer Highlights

August delivered a strong mix of broadcast and digital exposure for watermelon, with media and influencer partners highlighting watermelon across **key markets and platforms.**



Broadcast media segment highlights included:

- Paul Zahn - KTLA 5, Los Angeles, in-studio segment on August 3
- RD Whitney Stuart - KING 5 *New Day Northwest*, Seattle, summer entertaining segment on August 6
- Jerry James Stone - GoodDay Kitchen, which is a part of GoodDay Sacramento, as a result of his long-form YouTube content featuring “40 Ways to Enjoy Watermelon” on August 21

Influencer activity included:

- The Produce Moms - Watermelon shaved ice and “Pup Day” content
- Dietitian Chelsea Shafer - Three Instagram and TikTok videos featuring hot yoga and recipes including Pork Tacos with Watermelon Rind Slaw from Watermelon.org, totaling nearly 85k impressions
- Chrissy Carroll - Pinterest content featuring watermelon carvings, skewers and rind recipes



Together, these placements extended the Board’s reach across broadcast, YouTube and social platforms while reinforcing watermelon’s versatility and relevance during the summer season.









NWPB Partners with Canadian Culinary Federation to Drive Foodservice Growth in Canada







The NWPB made its debut partnership with the Canadian Culinary Federation at their 2026 National Conference in Waterloo, Ontario, connecting directly with over 250 Canadian chefs, culinary educators, and foodservice decision-makers. To demonstrate the ingredient's **culinary versatility**, the campaign featured a daily watermelon yogurt parfait at the official conference breakfast buffet, an interactive trade show booth offering recipe booklets and chef tips, and broad digital exposure. The promotion extended across multiple media channels, including print ads in Canadian Foodservice News Magazine, feature placements in the Hot Off the Grill newsletter, a RestoBiz digital advertorial reaching 30,000 readers, and over 14,300 social media impressions.

The initiative successfully established new industry relationships and positioned U.S. watermelon as an adaptable, cost-effective option for menu innovation. One-on-one conversations revealed strong chef interest in utilizing watermelon beyond traditional fruit slices, particularly in savory dishes, beverage programs, and zero-waste preparations that utilize the rind. Additionally, strong engagement with female culinary leaders sparked potential plans for a future "Women and Watermelon" event, reinforcing the success of NWPB's expanded foodservice outreach across Canada.



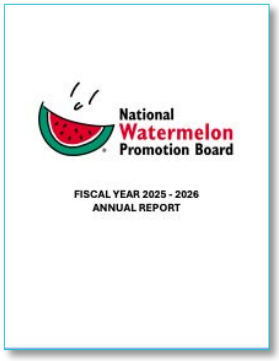
Individuals with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations and or alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, LEP, etc.) should contact: Juliemar Rosado at jrosado@watermelon.org within three days of event. The National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

2025-2026 NWPB Annual Report Available

The Board has released its 2024-2025 Annual Report, highlighting the work completed over the past year to promote watermelon and support industry growth.

The report provides updates from each department, including marketing initiatives, research developments, and community outreach efforts. It reflects both the progress made and the direction ahead for the industry.

We encourage stakeholders to **review the report** and share feedback, as continued collaboration remains vital to advancing the watermelon industry.



Watermelon on the Menu

The Miller House, an upscale casual restaurant in Owensboro, KY, is currently offering **Fried Green Tomatoes and Watermelon Salsa**. In addition and on select nights, they are also offering a **Watermelon Smash** cocktail on select nights.



NWPB Connections

Southern Innovations – Nashville, TN – September 9 – 11

CIA Greystone Student Event – St. Helena, CA – September 10

America's Food & Beverage Show – Miami, FL – September 14 – 16

Kinetic 12 Emergence Group – Charlotte, NC – September 29 & 30

Markon Chef Summit – Salinas, CA – October 1 & 2

