



Passion For Produce

The industry acknowledges these leaders of tomorrow for their passion and inspiration to others.



Nick Armano, 39
Sourcing Manager
C.H. Robinson Worldwide
Eden Prairie, MN

In his 15-year career with C.H. Robinson, Armano has developed unique and cutting-edge products that have impacted not only CHRW, but also the industry overall. From developing a nation-wide network of processors who produce apple slices, to advocating for regional growers in the Northeast, Armano has impacted the entire supply chain, from field to fork. Working from CHRW's Paulsboro, NJ, office, he is known for meeting the needs of industry partners by moving commodities from producer to end-user, helping growers market their products, and helping procure safe products for consumers. His work in helping to develop Mott's sliced apples and other products has helped lead to an increase in produce consumption with children.

Armano also continues to mentor the next generation of produce leaders. He dedicates a great deal of time and energy to new employee seminars at CHRW and Key Account Manager training. While Armano's individual accomplishments are noteworthy, as a direct result of his passion to educate and mentor, Armano's legacy will be evident in the accomplishments of others that he has coached and developed. He is active with the United Fresh GAP Harmonization Industry Committee and has participated in the Cornell Executive Leadership Program.

Working within every aspect of the supply and demand chain and being

able to gain an understanding of the complexities within it keeps him motivated. "I work every day to improve our supply chain and enhance the value that it brings to our world," he says. "I face challenges from product selection, to transportation of produce, to safety and traceability, to the merchandising of products. I stay inspired by our industry's lack of barriers to providing value and exercising the entrepreneurial spirit. I can't think of another industry that has the speed in which two individuals can connect for the first time and do business. I love that it is a true pure market built on a foundation of supply, demand and value. Watching others succeed also inspires me. Being able to be part of another individual's personal growth within our industry is amazingly rewarding to me. I appreciate that our industry provides these wonderful experiences to all of us."

"Being a CH Robinson employee gives me a unique ability to achieve my goals through matching up supply with demand and connecting with many people in our industry. This advantage of having a wide industry network leads to my ability to connect small to mid-size growers with consumers that the growers historically would have difficulty connecting with due to lack of time and technology."

He notes having had the fortune to learn from a number of individuals, but specifically mentions David Mostoller and Tim Gagnon of C.H. Robinson as mentors. "David and Tim have challenged me to continually develop myself and to use this development in order to further not only my career, but others' careers as well," he says. "Their real value to me is how they help me achieve my goals and help me develop my legacy. I want to be seen as a person that helped others grow as individuals, reaching their personal goals and reaching achievements that surpass their own expectations."



Vince Ballesteros, 38
Director Of Sales
Church Brothers
Salinas, CA

Ballesteros has earned his place as director of sales at Church Brothers with hard work, dedication and a vision for the future. He is known for his innate business acumen and a genuine love of the produce industry. He is a great motivator, inspiring others to succeed and always helping to think outside of the box. He has helped Church Brothers continue to evolve and develop into a nationally recognized company, expanding its commodity-based line into the value-added and fresh-cut areas.

He began his career out of high school at Church Brothers and has worked his way up to his current position, as a successor to Steve Church. Since becoming director of sales, there has been an overall sales growth of 20 percent. He has been responsible for the development of the food-service program, cultivating the relationships that are the bulk of the company's foodservice business. He manages a sales and marketing department with daily attention to detail, but also with foresight to consider the long term future of the business. He is fiercely loyal to the company, and has helped build its reputation and visibility to what it is today.

Within Church Brothers, he has created vendor management and consolidation programs. He saw the need for a delivered sales program that instigated the start of the company's own transportation entity. In addition to generating new business, he has strengthened key account relationships and expanded market share in the retail, foodservice and chain sectors.

He loves that produce is a constant learning process. "You can always learn more, do more, achieve more...the sky is the limit!" he exclaims. "I love the unpredictability of the industry, how every day presents a new challenge. External factors, such as changing industry standards, weather, food safety, locally grown produce, fuel costs and price pressure, create an everyday battle to align the right program with the right customer. Meeting these challenges head on is motivating for me, and creating solutions is a constant inspiration to learn more, work harder and strive to be the best."

In his community, Ballesteros volunteers his time coaching various youth sports, and is a YMCA volunteer coach for underprivileged children. He is active in various produce industry associations.

He credits his father, Carlos Ballesteros, and Tom and Steve Church as mentors. "My father has been a consistent and ongoing mentor for me," he says. "I have always valued his hard work ethic, and been motivated to follow in his footsteps. Tom and Steve Church have been my mentors and my role models for the past 20 years. What they have built and accomplished in the produce industry over that years has made me proud to work by their side. I strive to build my career with the same integrity, dedication and innovation that defines them."



Justin D. Bedwell, 33
President
Bari Produce LLC
Madera, CA

Bedwell has made produce his career since graduation in agricultural economics from the University of Arizona in 1999 but was brought up exposed to the business through his father and grandfather. He gained valuable experience in sales with local California marketing companies before opening his own firm in 2009. He has continually showed his commitment to the success of the produce industry while growing in his leadership skills.

Since forming Bari Produce in 2009 in order to market his grandfather's fruit, along with a select few outside growers, he has built the company into a successful marketer. In a short three years, not only have sales numbers and contacts increased each year, but the company's original grower base also remains committed to marketing their products with Bari.

Bedwell is known for taking pride in doing the best job possible for his growers. Building sales both domestically and internationally and standing behind the brand reputation with honesty and integrity has allowed further growth.

He is an active member of St. Columba Church in Fresno, as well as a Tree Fresno and Fresno Zoological Society volunteer. He is also a member

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— Vince Ballesteros
Church Brothers

of the fundraising arm for Fresno State Athletics, the Bulldog Foundation, although he didn't attend Fresno State — offering his support for hometown athletics. He is married with two young boys and coached his six year old in soccer this past year.

His inspiration comes from growers whom he considers the bloodline of the industry. "Growing up in an agricultural family and living in a region dominated by agricultural in one way or another, it is not hard to be inspired by all that around me," he says. "Growers work tirelessly day in and day out and yet they know there are factors they can't control; nonetheless they still give it their all to produce a quality product. You can't get much more organic in the general sense of the word, than that of a farmer."

Bedwell notes there are always many varied challenges in the industry. He explains, "Maybe Mother Nature wasn't too kind to our early peaches, or our grape harvest is late, or our new customer wants a special package. It's important to face these hurdles head on and then learn from them. I think anyone involved with perishables expects a certain amount of obstacles, but I think the successful people are the ones that not only deal with them, but use them to their advantage."

His future personal goal is to successfully market the Bari product lineup on a global level. "Our brand has been well received in North America and in the Asian markets for some time, but the time is right to introduce our products and brands in other areas specifically Europe and South America," he reports. "With current technology, we have the tools now to literary reach out to anyone, anywhere on the globe."

He credits his grandfather, Frank Logoluso, and his father, Barry Bedwell, for having taught him much and shaped the person he's become. "My grandfather is an extremely hard worker. Through hard work and a relentless drive, he has achieved so much," he says. "My father is also a hard worker and above all expects 110 percent effort from all around him. My father has the rare gift of really engaging the people around him. Together, they both made me see how great this industry was and created a desire for me to be a part of it. I am not only thankful for them being a part of my life, but also for them taking me under their wings so I can learn from two of the greatest."



James Blowers, 40
Produce Sales Manager
West Coast Distributing Inc.
Malden, MA

Working from West Coast's Monterey, CA, location, Blowers is known to take on any task given to him and do it bigger and better than anyone could ask or expect. He has a reputation for working tirelessly and relentlessly with no job or detail being too big or small. A coworker says, "James has produce in his blood, work boots on his feet and success in his mind!"

Growing up in Los Angeles, Blowers had no idea that he would end up diving head first into the produce industry. While attending Cal Poly San Luis Obispo on a football scholarship, he stumbled into a job as a produce inspector and the rest is history. He worked long hours learning growing patterns, varieties and quality control of both fruits and vegetables. This knowledge gave him a strong foundation in his next position as produce manager at the East Bay branch of C.H. Robinson. After nine years, he became the top salesman at CHRW and was promoted to sales manager of

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— James Blowers
West Coast Distributing Inc.

the Pleasanton office, where he oversaw both the produce and freight sales.

In 2003, his success at CHRW led to his recruitment by West Coast Distributing. He developed a highly successful vegetable program, and eventually changed the core business of West Coast from a buying brokerage to a grower/shipper business. He single-handedly developed a broccoli, cilantro, green onion, cauliflower and snow pea program for West Coast and handles the management of the product as well. As the grower liaison and sales manager at West Coast, he has developed valuable partnerships with growers and now represents multiple growers all over North America.

In his community, he is active with the California Rodeo Paddock Committee and serves as a Monterey County Farm Day guide. He is a Karate red belt, enjoys golf and is active at St. Josephs Catholic church.

Every day in the produce industry is both a challenge and an inspiration for him. “I come to the office excited for what the day will bring, looking forward to the fast pace and ever changing business,” he says. “I am constantly on my toes, with the need to be both aware of the changes and adaptable to them. Looking at ‘uncharted’ produce territory and determining how to conquer it is motivating and exciting, and I love the constant opportunity and challenges that the produce industry provides.

He names Joe Barsi, of Cal Giant, and Jim Lemke, of C.H. Robinson, as mentors. “Joe is the reason I am in the produce industry,” he says. “He is a great example of staying true to his beliefs, despite circumstances that make that a challenge. In a business where it is easy to compromise oneself and not take the high road, Joe always takes the high road. As I began my career at C.H. Robinson, Jim was an inspiration with his hard work and his vision. He showed me how to take a challenge and work toward it with focus, perseverance and creative strategy. He inspires me with his goal-oriented work ethic and I respect his determination and drive to succeed.”



Nina Brooks, 29
Brand Manager
H. Brooks and Company
New Brighton, NY

The fourth-generation daughter in a family produce business that has been operating since 1905, Brooks has worked in the family business since she was 16. In her current leadership role, as brand manager, Brooks has worked on a company-wide rebranding project and marketing campaign including logo design, weekly newsletter, sales kit and other marketing materials, and will be launching the new H. Brooks Web site soon. She has participated in the development of new business platforms greatly improving the distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables. She has focused on leading projects and process improvement within H. Brooks, including marketing communications and route efficiency, and serves as a liaison with the University of Minnesota and other area colleges for student projects and tours of facilities, and partners on projects with their supply chain experts.

She gained knowledge and experience in retail sales, wholesale sales, fresh-cut, quality control, inventory, shipping and accounting prior to working in sales and marketing at H. Brooks and Company. She has grown her leadership skills through collaborative relationships with growers, shippers, customers and others. She views herself as a counselor, rather than a salesperson. She is recognized for her ability to know the people she works with on a personal level and listen and guide them by discussing in-depth their needs and goals.

Brooks currently serves as a member of the United Fresh Membership Relations Taskforce. She is a member of the United Fresh Produce Industry

Leadership Class 16.

The produce industry inspires her because the opportunities and challenges are endless. “I develop personal relationships with growers from all around the world as we focus on finding great products for consumers,” she says. “I can be confident that the products I sell help people lead a more healthful lifestyle.”

In the future, she plans to continue to develop the skills needed to be a leader in the produce industry. “In addition, I hope to better understand the changing nature of the industry and prepare the company for the emerging business climate through responsible leadership,” she says. “Our industry is quickly evolving. It is important to seek what new strategies we can use to drive sales, to promote products, to support health and wellness, and look for innovative ways to bring the freshest produce to the marketplace and encourage consumers to eat more. It is imperative to embrace the changes in the market, while working to sustain traditional channels.”

Brooks notes having the honor of meeting and working with some of the sharpest people in the produce and food industries, and credits her father, Phillip Brooks, as a mentor. “Professors, customers, growers, suppliers and more have taught me some of the best lessons and are willing to share their advice,” she says. “The stories passed from generations before are still relevant to our business today. My father is always a mentor to me, personally and professionally, and my clients inspire and encourage me. They are always pushing me to the highest standards, to do better and be the best that I can be for them.”



Nivaldo J. Capote, 36
Executive Vice President
J&C Tropicals
Miami, FL

Capote is responsible for the day-to-day management of a dynamic executive team. Under his leadership, the company has seen a 20 percent growth in sales with a 400 percent growth in retail and foodservice. His recruitment of key management executives and staff has resulted in increased talent level across the company as well as a 30 percent increase in farming acreage under production. He has led a successful drive to implement an ERP software system and ongoing hardware system.

Under his direction, the industry has seen J&C lead the charge to create awareness and expand the knowledge base of over 70 different tropical fruits, roots and vegetables throughout the entire supply chain. This was accomplished through active partnership and work with the Caribbean and Central and South American vendor community, import logistics community, wholesale, retail and foodservice distribution channels.

He and his company have led the effort to develop locally grown produce programs for kids through work with Baptist Health Systems and Miami-Dade Public Schools. He has also partnered with the State of Florida in its Redland Raised promotional campaign of produce grown in Miami-Dade County. He notes that J&C Tropicals’ accomplishments both in produce and in the community are in large part due to sticking to one simple mantra: respect for the industry and passion for the category.

He describes his biggest challenge as his non-produce background. “I am an attorney by trade, and practiced at several major law firms in Miami for six years,” he explains. “I left the day-to-day practice of law to develop real estate in Florida and the Caribbean for four years and then joined the family business to assist in the growth and expansion, which was already underway when I arrived in 2007. Another major challenge has been in learning to manage employees, agents, representatives and partners in a supply chain that encompasses 18 different countries of origin, several packing house/distribution centers in the United States and abroad with 125 employees and a distribution network that spans the U.S. and Canada.

His main goals for the future include participating in the education and awareness of the tropical produce category and continuing to work with the worldwide grower community. He also aspires to lead a third-generation of the family business to reach its maximum potential and to create in-roads to attract young professionals to the produce industry.

He names Carlos Capote and Lazaro Garcia of J&C, as well as Harris Cutler of Race West as mentors. “Carlos, our CEO and one of my older brothers, has played the most important role in my development as a professional within and outside the produce industry,” he says. “His dedication to his trade, partners and employees over a 30-year career commands respect and admi-

ration. Lazaro, our farming manager for the company's South Florida growing operations has also been very influential. His hard work and consistency to get the job done no matter what obstacle presents itself is admirable and guides me on many occasions when I'm challenged."

He continues, "Harris has been a client for many years. He always takes the time to give me great advice and makes me feel included within his family and circle of friends."



Anthony D'Amico, 33
President
To-Jo Mushrooms, Inc.
Avondale, PA

D'Amico represents the fourth generation in his family to grow mushrooms in Chester County, PA. After his father passed away, D'Amico took the reins of the company and has subsequently excelled at operating the business. While he was

always involved in the business, taking over as president at the young age of 25 forced him to shift his focus to more strategic issues.

Working closely with his brother, D'Amico is always looking for ways to advance the company. Under his leadership, the company has grown stronger than ever and developed several new innovative products, one of which received a packaging innovation award from the Produce Marketing Association. To-Jo currently grows, packs, processes and ships approximately 55 million pounds of fresh and processed mushrooms annually.

D'Amico is known for placing a top focus on the company's employees and strives to ensure employee satisfaction. He holds a degree in Food Science from Delaware Valley College. He was appointed by the Pennsylvania mushroom growers to serve on the Mushroom Council for a three-year term and was elected as treasurer of the Mushroom Council for 2011. He also serves on the Board of Directors for the Southern Chester County Chamber of Commerce (2010-2013).

Continuing a legacy that his great-grandfather started in the 1930s, and his motivation to grow the business and develop great relationships with customers inspires him.

In the future, he wants To-Jo to be known as a company that delivers the best quality and service possible to its customers. He aims to have To-Jo be recognized as an industry leader when it comes to innovation and new product development.

His late father, Joseph D'Amico Sr., is one of his principal mentors, and he credits him for his great vision. "He could see where we wanted to be in 10 years and made decisions based on that," D'Amico says. "He was the most giving and caring person I have ever met. He always put others in front of himself. He always surrounded himself with the best talent in the industry and made a habit out of listening to them. My brother, Joe, and I, continue to lead the company utilizing the same family values our father felt so strongly about."

Other mentors include Bernie Ciuffetelli, vice president operations for To-Jo Food Products, and Mike "Woody" Wood, vice president operations for To-Jo Fresh Mushrooms. "Bernie is a great visionary with a keen feel for the next great thing," he says. "Woody will do whatever it takes to get the job done and satisfy a customer. I have learned from Woody that anything is possible."



Christopher Drew, 35
Production Manager
Ocean Mist Farms
Castroville, CA

Drew is known as a humble, polite, intelligent, articulate, accomplished leader. He is responsible for managing production of artichokes, broccoli, cauliflower, celery, cardone, fennel, head lettuce, mix lettuces, romaine, romaine hearts and spinach

on over 5,000 acres of land.

He chairs Ocean Mist's IPM team, which consists of 12 members that oversee production and is a steering-committee member of the Monterey and Santa Cruz County Farm, Food Safety, and Conservation Network. The Network provides a forum for the agricultural industry and local conservation agencies to co-manage agriculture and the natural environment. Additionally, he is a member of the Ocean Mist Farms Food Safety Committee and maintains the company's organic certification through Cali-

fornia Certified Organic Farmers.

In 2010, he was elected to the inaugural class of the Ocean Mist Farms Leadership and Development Program. He is an active member of the California Artichoke Advisory Board, a licensed California Pest Control Advisor, and a member of the Monterey County Agriculture Water Advisory Committee.

Challenges in the produce industry are part of the enjoyment of his job. "Whether it is pressure from insects, plant pathogens, poor weather conditions or low market prices, farming can be a demanding profession, especially when many problems hit at the same time," he relates. "Our production team is rich with great people and their efforts are truly inspiring. When times get tough or don't go quite as expected, everyone is willing to lend a hand or provide advice to get the task completed.

He sees a bright future ahead for the fruit and vegetable industry. "As people around the world become more interested in eating healthfully, it creates opportunities for the produce industry," he says. "Technological advancements in genetics and post-harvest handling, coupled with farming efficiencies and conservation efforts, will help our industry remain viable in the future. In my career, I have crossed paths with many individuals who have 40-plus years of experience in the agriculture business; I am honored that they have shared with me their many techniques for success.

Entering the produce business at the age of 18, Drew has enjoyed a wealth of mentors. "I have been privileged to work with many individuals who have mentored me over the years, but there are three that genuinely stand out: Steven Ray of Headstart Nursery, Dennis Sites of Ag-Business Management and Dale Huss of Ocean Mist Farms," he says. "These three gentlemen have been integral to my success. Without their ongoing support and direction, I would not be where I am today. I am very grateful for their help, expertise and guidance."



Izak Du Toit, 34
Director Of Export Sales
Booth Ranches LLC
Orange Cove, CA

Du Toit grew up on a farm in South Africa, and immigrated to the U.S. 10 years ago. Since then, he has rapidly expanded his responsibilities into sales and marketing, and is now responsible for managing the entire export department at Booth Ranches. He is known for being extremely enthusiastic as well as a fair and honest trader. He excels at relationship building and is passionate about customer service. He is a young and modern thinker, yet still embodies all the traits of a seasoned and mature produce professional. Prior to his current position, he was interim sales manager at Booth Ranches and oversaw all sales until a vice president of sales and marketing was hired.

Before coming to Booth Ranches, he worked as export sales manager for Seald Sweet West, where he was in charge of all West Coast procurement and trucking for one of the key accounts, in addition to being responsible for most of the export for the West Coast. He participated in various experiential training and exchange programs, including as domestic sales manager in citrus for Export Select, a field foreman for Chivers Farms in Cambridge, England, with strawberries, and a farm manager's assistant at Roodezandt in South Africa. Through the Ohio State University exchange program he worked at Valley Sweet Packing in Tulare, CA.

He is a family man with two young daughters. He is involved with the athletic development of young people throughout the community. Since 2005, he has coached the Fresno Rugby Football Club, leading them to regional playoffs in 2005 and 2009.

He is motivated by the challenges he faces in produce every day. "Challenge in and of itself is not good, but if you can overcome it you get a fulfilling sense of accomplishment," he says. "People have to eat and that inspired me to be in the produce industry — selling a nutritious produce that will help people stay healthy. Additionally, if our products also taste good it makes it easy. Knowing that a person halfway around the world can enjoy a Booth Ranches' orange that I sold is rewarding."

His future goal is to be successful at expanding Booth Ranches market share internationally. "I want to focus on being successful at selling the volume our company has coming in over the next few years," he says.

He credits his father, Izak Du Toit, Sr. of Kleinbaai Fisheries, and Dave Muse, formerly with Export Select, as mentors. "My father showed me how hard work and honesty with a little bit of luck is key in trading produce

and he emphasized the importance of having the right supplier and the right customer to be successful," he says. "In the United States, Dave was the one who introduced me to the citrus industry, showed me the ropes and gave me access to all the export customers. He taught me how it all works and how to deal with most of our challenges."



Jacquie Ediger, 36
Vice President
Pro Citrus Network Inc.
Visalia, CA 93277

Ediger has been highly instrumental in the creation and development of the Pro Citrus Network and the PCN Brands. First hired as director of new business development and marketing, she now serves as vice president. She has played a key

role in the development of company strategic plans and mission statements. Under her direction, the company has accomplished numerous strategic goals. In 2006/2007, the company witnessed growth in imported product and its foodservice business increased from 13 percent to 20 percent. By 2008/2009, grower product reached a goal of 33 percent of the business and the company imported product into the Houston Port for the first time. In 2010, the company began to grow its own product. It has averaged 10 to 15 percent growth annually. Ediger has been successful at managing, mentoring and developing staff from sales to new business development to accounting.

In the industry, she serves as PMA Food Service Conference Planning Task Force Member and has co-chaired the task force. She is a Planning Task Force Member of the Produce Solutions Conference and Industry Advisor for PMA FIT Career Pathways-Nucci Program. She developed Hunger Awareness Day in Tulare County with Visalia Rescue Mission as beneficiary. She is a member of the Mt. Whitney (local Visalia High school) Agribusiness/Agriculture Advisory Committee and participates in Mentor's Meeting for Mt. Whitney High School Agribusiness Academy.

Ediger is from an agricultural background, and confirmed her passion for the produce industry during a college internship for a local produce company. "From that point on I knew that a position in the produce industry was the path for me," she says. "I'm inspired by the dynamic and challenging nature of the industry. Plain and simple — it's fun! I'm also motivated by working with youth and young adults, with programs like 5-a-Day/More Matters and PMA FIT."

In the future, she aspires to be president of Pro Citrus Network. "It's a personal and company goal since other strategic goals can only be achieved if I take the role of president sometime in the future. From an industry standpoint, I would like to serve on more boards of the PMA. I think the organization is great for the industry as a whole."

She names two mentors who are not directly related to the produce industry, but have guided her during her career: her high school Ag teacher, Lynn Martindale, and college professor, Marianne Wolf. "Lynn was an amazing mentor to me from a young age," she states. "She encouraged, guided and pushed me to be the strong, goal-oriented person I am today. Marianne was not only a mentor, but an amazing teacher who taught me that there are many different types of people in this world and that is what makes the world go 'round. Her guidance has helped me to be successful in dealing with the multitude of different people I'm blessed to work with today."

She also credits Allan Dodge, president of Pro Citrus, as a great mentor. "He recognizes others' strengths and weaknesses at a glance," she reports. "He utilizes their strengths and helps them overcome their weaknesses. He has taught me a lot about the citrus industry, but most importantly he has imparted the gift of having balance in life."



Jennifer Fancher, 35
Category Development Manager
Driscoll's
Watsonville, CA

Working out of Broomfield, CO, Fancher brings a unique blend of skills in data management and fundraising to the category management field. When she started at Driscoll's in 2007 she immediately began working with some of the company's

top retail accounts. She also became the category management team point

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— Jennifer Fancher
Driscoll's

person for data providers, a key responsibility since accurate and timely data is critical to the company's success and the success of its customers.

She got her start in the food industry in 1997 at Information Resources Inc. (IRI) as part of the onsite data team for Hunt Wesson/Con Agra Grocery Products. After learning the ins and outs of data and the food industry, she took the position of Account Manager at Perishables Group (PG) in 2002. During her tenure at PG, she focused on consumer insights, data analysis and helping new clients start up their category management programs. In 2007 and 2008, she was the Driscoll's category manager for Wegman's, where she successfully worked with Wegman's Community Relations team to create a sales event that would also help support their local community. In 2007, the event was executed in Wegman's New Jersey stores and raised \$15,000 for the Children's Home Society in New Jersey. It was a huge success, and was expanded to additional cities in 2008.

In her local community, Fancher has participated in the Leukemia and Lymphoma Light the Night Walk for several years. She also supports A Precious Child, a charity that helps improve the lives of displaced and disadvantaged children in Denver, CO. "It has not only been rewarding to be able to give back my time and resources, but to also show my three boys the importance of giving back as well," she says.

Coming from a family that always bonded in the kitchen, she has always been fascinated by the dynamics of food and family. "As part of the produce industry, I am continually inspired to better understand consumers and their needs," she says. "Watching our customers fight through the economic downturn of the past several years and trying to find ways to support them and help them maintain and grow their sales has been a challenge. However, it is also exhilarating to see them succeed."

In the future, she wants to continue to find ways to help support all the people with whom she works. "I strive to support the Category Management team, Driscoll's as a whole and our growers in our quest to continually delight consumers," she says. "I want to continue to find ways to expand my knowledge and skill set so that I can be an even better resource for Driscoll's for years to come."

She names Chuck Sweeney at Driscoll's and Whitney Messens, formerly of IRI and currently at U.S. Nutrition, as mentors. "Chuck not only has an immense knowledge of category management, but also has helped me become a much more strategic thinker," she says. "He approaches his team with kindness and respect that you don't find everywhere. While not in the produce industry, Whitney Messens was an inspirational leader in my formative years in the food industry."



Ryan R. Flaim, 30
Co-Owner
R&R Flaim Next Generation Produce LLC
Vineland, NJ

At a time when small family farms are going by the wayside due to economic pressures and real estate development, Flaim, a fourth-generation farmer, fights to keep the family tradition alive.

Known for working tirelessly and endlessly from early morning until after darkness seven days a week, he is committed to the survival of the farm his family started.

One of his greatest accomplishments outside the survival of his family farm, is the assistance he provided his sister, Jessica Flaim, in raising over \$140,000 for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. At seven years old, she was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes and since that time, he has

“Over 75 percent of the world’s people are engaged in agriculture in some way. Of course our food supply is important to everyone who eats. These are two inspiring realities that challenge us to provide the best products to consumers, while making sure that we are being fair and responsible with those who grow our food, and the environment on which we depend.”

— Rafael Goldberg
Interrupchhion* Fair Trade

helped raise funds through a craft fair, raffle, and now through a yearly walk for the cure. In 2006, he even went to Washington, D.C. to address the need for more research funding.

He is inspired and challenged by the very nature of the industry. He explains, “Growing up in this business, I have noticed visible changes from my grandfather’s generation, to my father’s, and now to my generation. My grandfather dealt with a handshake or a nod and a man’s word could be trusted. He did not have to contend with produce being brought in from another country the same time as his, or the current immigration laws for seasonal workers, or third-party food safety audits. He worked hard, but in a less regulated and farm-friendly environment. Today, we, in the produce industry, face the constant competitiveness of selling our product, high overheads of running our operation, and trying to align our prices with those throughout the country. But I was born into this business and I love it. My inspiration is to try to help keep my business and our farm going strong so that it can be passed down to the fifth generation some day.”

He considers his father, Robert Flaim, Jr., and his grandfather, Robert Flaim, Sr., as his mentors. “My grandfather came to work on the farm every day, even when he was receiving radiation and chemotherapy for his cancer. He was a man who spent his entire life working seven days a week so that his children and grandchildren could have a better life. He taught me everything that I know about raising, packing and selling produce. It is also my grandfather who inspired me to run my business with mutual respect, honesty and integrity.”



Rafael Goldberg, 30
CEO
Interrupcion* Fair Trade
Brooklyn, NY

Goldberg is considered a leader in the industry in the growing trend of fair trade fresh produce. He began his vision eight years ago as he saw consumers’ desires to know more and more about where their food came from and how it was produced. His passion for sustainable supply chains that create lasting solutions for farmers and retailers alike fueled Interrupcion* Fair Trade, which has been seeing triple-digit growth the past couple of years. He marketed and distributed the world’s first fair trade-certified blueberries, kiwis, cherries, and the first apple and pears into North America.

After traveling to Argentina and meeting the founders of a new and far-reaching project in sustainable and fair trade, he graduated from NYU and founded Interrupcion* Fair Trade in New York in 2003. He immediately set about marketing and introducing specific fair trade produce items and concepts to the U.S. and Canadian markets.

Over the years, he has introduced multiple new certified Fair Trade items and has grown and influenced the U.S. market, bringing Fair Trade fresh produce items to many specialty, natural and mainstream retailers for the first time. His company’s marketing and educational initiatives have informed millions of consumers and helped them to understand the benefits of Fair Trade. He now works with over 40 items from Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Brazil and Peru and continues to expand

capabilities and offerings to retailers and consumers alike. His company currently works with over 12,000 rural farmers who benefit from sound employment, fair wages and participate democratically in deciding how to invest their ‘fair trade premiums’ every year.

He is inspired by the amount of positive impact the produce industry can make. “Over 75 percent of the world’s people are engaged in agriculture in some way,” he says. “Of course our food supply is important to everyone who eats. These are two inspiring realities that challenge us to provide the best products to consumers, while making sure that we are being fair and responsible with those who grow our food, and the environment on which we depend.”

In the future, Goldberg aspires to continue to shift production to more economically, socially and environmentally sound supply chains and to influence the industry through best practices and performance. “We strive to create produce sections filled with fair trade fresh product options,” he says. “These products that combine social, environmental, and product quality into our value proposition for customers and when we connect the consumers to fantastic food, it makes the world a better place.”

Goldberg considers just about everyone he comes in contact with as mentors. “My fellow ‘interrupters’ and team members who have explored the industry on all ends of the spectrum are mentors to me,” he says, “as well the buyers and marketers that gave our products and ideas a chance when we first began. There are so many people who let me teach them something about Interrupcion* Fair Trade and in return, taught me a thing or two about fresh produce. And I credit so many retailers and distributors who have not bought from us and have taken the time to tell us why.”



Michael A. Gonzalez, 39
Sales Manager
Sysco / BSCC-Florida
Houston, Texas

Gonzalez has been in the produce business for over 15 years and his passion and knowledge for produce is described as awe-inspiring. Working from Sysco’s Deerfield Beach, FL, location, he is known for doing everything he can to give back to

the industry he loves. He started as a forklift driver and has worked his way up through several positions to where he is today. He has partnered with many suppliers in the community to help them build programs that will best meet customers’ needs, and he leads several market discussion calls each week to help educate people in the industry.

In 2005, he became East Coast Sales Manager for Sysco, moving from merchandiser (buyer). Since becoming manager, he has created many programs and traditions that continue today. He started Sysco’s National Apple Program. The apple area was foreign to him given his background as an Eastern vegetable and specialty buyer. However, he rose to the challenge and after some recon on the industry, he and his staff were able to engineer a successful program for Sysco’s customers and vendors. In the past 10 years, they have created several popular promotions like March Madness, Michigan Celery Plus and Cabbage and Carrot, in addition to other internal systems later adopted in other divisions.

As sales manager, he is essentially the head of purchasing for BSCC-Florida (of Sysco Corp.) and directs everything that grows or originates on the Eastern Seaboard, including creation and management of contracts and promotions. He also manages the hiring and management of seven buyers and one coordinator for his division.

Gonzalez is an active board member of the Southeast Produce Council and serves on its Marketing and Membership committees. He has completed a Century Ride (100 miles in a day on a bicycle) with his son, and two triathlons. He is involved with raising money for the MRL (Masonic Research Lab) to find solutions for heart diseases. He also volunteers his time at several schools to educate children on the produce industry and has mentored several young adults into the produce industry. He has been married for 16 years and has two children.

His inspiration in produce remains the people and the relationships that are like no other industry. “I take great pride in providing service to an industry that feeds the world,” he mentions. “The challenges are daily as we are constantly adjusting to every changing market and growing conditions. I especially enjoy the problem-solving and the chance to serve and share knowledge with peers.”

He credits mentors Mike Heyer with Heyer Quality, Walter Perez with

“The challenges are daily as we are constantly adjusting to every changing market and growing conditions. I especially enjoy the problem-solving and chance to serve and share knowledge with peers.”

— Michael A. Gonzalez
Sysco/BSCC-Florida

Sun International Produce Co., Bob Costa with Sun City, Neil Mazal with J&J Farms, and Mike Hansen with Sysco. “Mike taught me about selling and making lasting produce relationships,” he says. “Walter informed me about business savvy, and Bob showed me the importance of buying on-time inventory. Neil has an encyclopedic-like knowledge and is a great role model on ethics. Mike Hansen has really helped me in people management.”



Jessica Harris, 29
Marketing Specialist
Earthbound Farm
San Juan Bautista, CA

In the past four years, Harris has been able to cut the Earthbound Farm exhibiting costs at PMA Fresh Summit by more than 50 percent. This allowed the company to save money on its largest marketing expense while upgrading branding and

imaging in the booth. Under her management, the Earthbound Farm booth won second place in the 2008 PMA Fresh Summit. She strives to create personal benchmarks for all of the Earthbound Farm exhibits. She participates on the PMA Foodservice Expo Committee and serves on the PMA Exhibitor Advisory Committee, to help meet the needs of all types of exhibitors at PMA's Fresh Summit and Foodservice Expo. She serves as the Co-President for the Salinas Valley Chapter of California Women for Agriculture, an honor elected by a group of her peers.

In her position, she works with the marketing and sales team to develop and execute the company's regional and national trade show program as well as customer-specific marketing projects. Each year, Earthbound Farm executes close to 50 trade shows around the country.

Harris works closely with the Earthbound Farm regional sales team and sales desk team to develop, evaluate and execute customer-specific promotions through the major retailers. She also works on all national promotions, including the successful Earth Day promotion, which usually achieves 10 to 12 percent coupon redemption and between a 7 to 10 percent sales lift for the month of April.

Working in organics and organic produce is inspiring for her. “Every day, we encounter consumers and retailers who are passionate about our products, our company and the organic way of life,” she says. “They inspire me to work harder on bringing more organics to the table.”

Her biggest challenge in the industry is also one of her favorite parts about it. “The produce industry is 24/7, no matter what sector you are in,” she states. “I live it, breathe it and promote it — but sometimes, turning off and winding down is a huge challenge. Creating a great work/life balance is something I strive for every day.”

In the future, she'd like to mentor younger people in the industry. “Mentoring is such an important role, especially in the produce industry, because it will help keep fresh ideas coming into the industry and help us keep up with consumer trends.”

She names Tonya Antle of Tanimura & Antle, Lorri Koster of Mann Packing, and Earthbound Farm's Sherry Parsons as mentors. “Tonya has been such an influence on my career and the way I conduct myself,” she explains. “She is an inspiration for me and the rest of the women in our industry for her style, attitude and perseverance. She was able to sell organics to all of the major retailers, making them mainstream, instead of just a niche market. Lorri's ability to balance work, industry commitments, family and community is an invaluable lesson that you can have a great work/life balance. Sherry helped me develop the project management skills it takes to be a trade show manager in the produce industry.”



Colin Harvey, 40
Commercial Director — Hero Supermarket Group
Indonesia
Dairy Farm International trades as
PT Hero Supermarkets
Jakarta, Indonesia

Harvey is known as an industry leader committed to the growth of produce in both Indonesia and Malaysia. As head of the business in Malaysia, he increased sales by more than 31 percent and his current charge of the total food business for Dairy Farm in Indonesia continues to post double-digit growth.

In Indonesia, he worked on remodeling structures within the organization, and focused on direct sourcing, both locally and on imports. This resulted in a produce growth of 47 percent for 2010.

Harvey has helped the company experience success in procuring product out of South Africa, Thailand and China. He helped drive an initiative to facilitate direct buys on Dragon Fruit and melon, resulting in providing farmers smoother access to market and better product to customers.

In Malaysia, where he worked from 2004 to 2008, he helped the company become the first retailer to import full container loads of avocados into Malaysia. This initiative dropped the price of avocados (previously imported by air) by a quarter, making this tropical fruit available to the everyday consumer. Previous to Malaysia, he held a position in South Africa as a retail produce buyer working with stores and producers to provide quality product at affordable prices. Under his leadership, his team accomplished launches of exclusive salad packs and exclusive mixed apple packs.

He is a member of the Indonesian British Chamber of Commerce Food and Agricultural Committee.

He is inspired by the drive to have an edge over the competition and satisfy customers by being first on shelf or better on shelf. He is challenged by the seasonality and unpredictability of the industry. “New markets and emerging markets all make for exciting times,” he says. “I am motivated by the networking necessary to build and maintain a relevant supply base — whether from local supply or imported product. I am also hugely inspired when I see associates with a passion for produce, and it is fantastic when that passion drives them up the ladder.”

His future goals are customer-oriented, and he plans to help the company maintain its position as an undisputed quality and price leader in Indonesia. He plans to do this through a focus on local sourcing, looking at export opportunities and investing even more in people and training. “Improving local sourcing will provide much needed employment, and of course, reduced pricing and reduced carbon emissions. With current expansion, and a vision to double produce sales within three years, training of fresh produce specialists and buyers remains key.”

He names Danie Kieviet of Freshworld (PTY) Ltd. in South Africa, Jim Prevor of PRODUCE BUSINESS and Bruce Peterson, formerly with Wal-Mart, as mentors. “Danie, essentially, created the foundation that is the distribution network for South Africa's largest retailer: Shoprite,” he says. “He tirelessly looks to drive efficiency in produce, fighting on behalf of the customer and the farmer. Jim Prevor is a produce guru and relentless educator and produce watchdog. Bruce is a man who understood that sustainable supply depends on sustainable long-term relationships with farmers and processors.”



Jamie Hillegas, 34
Director of Trade Shows
Produce Marketing Association
Newark, DE

In her 11 years with PMA, Hillegas has gone from meeting planner to director of trade shows. She is responsible for managing PMA's biggest revenue source — Fresh Summit and Foodservice Conference trade shows. Hillegas has put her own unique imprint on the shows, while working to continue their growth patterns. She works closely with the Member Exhibitor Advisory Committee to improve the show experience for attendees and exhibitors. In recognition of her work, PMA promoted her to director last year.

She is known for her drive to continue looking for ways to deliver more value to show participants, such as renegotiating expo services contracts

to lower and/or eliminate product handling costs and labor rates, being creative with sold-out expo space to find ways for more exhibitors to participate and for providing tools and support to exhibitors on how to maximize their opportunities through webinars and a comprehensive marketing toolbox.

Additionally, she organizes the single largest produce donation to a local foodbank each year following Fresh Summit. "I take great pride in organizing the food bank donations made at the conclusion of our expositions," she says. "At Fresh Summit, approximately 200 local volunteers come onto the show floor to collect product generously donated by our exhibitors. For most cities, our donation is the largest one-time contribution of fresh produce that any food bank receives, and I am honored to be part of such a worthy cause. I also take pride in the fact that the Fresh Summit Exposition continues to grow and is now the largest U.S. produce industry event and one of the top 100 trade shows in the country.

Outside of work, Hillegas and her husband volunteer and support a local foodbank and the Cancer Federation. She has been awarded Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) designation by the Professional Meeting Management Association and also awarded the Certified in Exposition Management (CEM) designation by the International Association of Exhibitions & Events.

In the future, she plans to continue to strive toward PMA's overall mission to connect, inform, and deliver business solutions that enhance members' prosperity. "In the future, I'll be looking for ways to deliver better results at lower costs, and ways to take advantage of new technologies to help them expand their reach, such as virtual expos and social media."

Her greatest mentors in the produce industry are Ted and JoAnn Dawson, who own a small farm in Northeast, Maryland. "When I was eight, my family moved to a house that was a 10-minute walk to their farm," she relates. "From that point on, I spent all my free time working at the farm helping to pick corn and other produce to sell at the end of the driveway, taking care of the animals and teaching horseback riding lessons. Ted and JoAnn taught me the value of a strong work ethic, creative thinking to accomplish any goal, and that you can have fun while you are working really hard. I am also very fortunate to work on a day-to-day basis with a group of very talented people at PMA."



Jay Kettle, 34
General Manager
Highline Produce Ltd.
Leamington, Ontario, Canada

Working from the Bloomfield, Ontario, location for Highline Produce, Kettle has moved from distribution manager to general manager in just eight years through his dedication, perseverance, professionalism and hard work. In 2009, his first year as manager, production at his location grew significantly more than it had ever grown before. Not only were more total pounds grown, but they were also produced more consistently and evenly than in the past. Production in his second year surpassed the first resulting in more mushrooms being grown than ever before, a feat some thought was nearly impossible. In this third year, the company is on track to break its record again.

He is motivated by trying to stay on top of market trends and shifts in attitudes. "We take great pride in the fact that our mushrooms are grown without pesticides of any kind," he says. "Being on top of the ever increasing demands of food safety is always challenging when dealing with such a grass-roots product. This being said, we are leaders in this regard and need to continue to work hard to ensure we stay leaders."

He is often challenged in the area of finding the right employees. "Harvesting mushrooms is hands on, hard work," he explains. "It's an imperative part of our commitment to quality. Without question, one of our more important positions within the company is our highly skilled harvesters. We have approximately 150 harvesters at my location and approximately 500 corporately."

In the future, he aspires to increase awareness about the health benefits of mushrooms as well as environmental benefits. "Mushroom growing at this level has always been challenging and will continue to be this way," he says. "Our people are our most important asset. I must continue to strive to ensure that every single person in our company feels needed and rewarded for the hard work they do every day."

He names Glenn Martin and Elizabeth O'Neil of Highline as mentors. "Glenn Martin has been with Highline produce for 30-plus years," he says.

"His business sense and management application provide guidance and strength of character. Elizabeth O'Neil has also been a major influence in my role in the produce industry. Her late father, Dr. Murray O'Neil, was the founder of Highline produce and was a role model for me. Elizabeth brings a part of her father as well as her own new perspective to Highline every day and it's a pleasure to work alongside of her."



Patrick Killiany, 38
Produce Category Manager
Ahold USA Retail
Carlisle, PA

With more than 20 years in the produce business, Killiany is an industry leader in the area of category management, category analysis and business process development and manages one of the largest fruit portfolios in the United States. He

started his path in the stores as a part-time produce clerk, and worked his way up to full-time clerk, assistant manager and department manager. Through this experience, he gained a great deal of knowledge that he continues to use today and teach to others who work with him.

As category manager for Ahold USA, he manages all the fruit commodities and develops the category plans to drive positive sales and units. Working with partners, he has implemented programs that donate funds back to charitable causes on behalf of the company, such as Produce for Kids, Children's Miracle Network and The Jake Gittlen Cancer Foundation. Giving back to the community is a major initiative he follows by supporting special events and local sports both at work and personally.

He is motivated by the excitement of facing continuous challenges and something new every day in the business, as well as working with new programs. "With corporate social responsibility being a huge part of the industry today, it is important that we are doing the right thing for the environment and for our consumers," he says. "Today's consumers want to know more about their produce and where it is grown while looking for convenience, healthful alternatives and natural and organic products.

In the future, he will continue to apply his knowledge and skill to build his programs. "In this business, everybody knows everybody and there are no secrets," he says. "If you have strong partnerships and put together the best quality programs, you will be successful in this industry and have the potential to grow. You must know what you want and stand behind your decisions no matter what people say. I practice all the fundamentals of category management in all the decisions I make everyday to keep up with the ever-changing trends and the usual demands in the fast pace industry."

He has learned a lot from many people, too numerous to name, but mentions in particular Dan McCullough, vice president of produce/floral for Ahold USA, as a mentor. "He gave me that opportunity in the temporary position and we are still working with our team to provide positive results for the company," he says. "I look to be a leader and provide the same knowledge to my team that I gained through the people I have had the privilege to work with in this industry. To be successful you need a strong team, and without my team I would not be where I am at right now.



Deb Kreider, 39
Produce Category Manager
Ahold USA Retail
Carlisle, PA

Kreider has successfully managed one of the largest desks in the United States. She has worked for Giant Food Stores LLC of Carlisle, PA, and Ahold USA Retail for 20 years and has held several positions within the company.

Her experience on the grocery side of the business provided valuable business insights with regard to data analysis, understanding market data and effective promotional planning. When promoted to produce category manager with Giant Food Stores, she managed the fruit desk for produce, which included 16 categories. As a category manager, she is responsible for completing indepth category plan development and plan implementation. She now handles the packaged categories, such as packaged salads, cut fruit and vegetables for all four divisions of Ahold USA Retail. She has participated in a USDA Produce Inspection Training, which provided insight on product specifications and the USDA federal inspection process.

She works with vendor partners in supporting the charities that Ahold

USA Retail champions including the Our Kids charity event benefiting the Children's Miracle Network and the Jake Gittlen Cancer Foundation.

Kreider is motivated by the way the produce industry is always changing and developing. "Since I started my career on the grocery side of the business and moved to the fresh side of the business, it has been interesting to learn and see daily the vast differences in the fresh versus non-perishable business," she explains. "From product seasonality to food safety to keeping an eye on the weather, there are always various challenges to face and learn from to better serve our customers."

Her future goal is to continue learning and developing in produce. "I have learned so much from my own experiences, but always look forward to learning from others in the industry," she says. "As packaged category manager, I look forward to developing the convenience side of the produce business. As customers' needs change and develop, we must stay ahead of these changes and be ready to meet their needs."

She credits Ahold USA retail vice president of produce and floral, Dan McCullough, and Todd Patti, Ahold USA retail vice president of dairy and frozen, as mentors. "Dan has extensive knowledge of produce varieties, growing regions, procurement and the overall produce industry," she says. "He has a true passion for the business and has shared so many of his industry experiences. Our entire department has strong knowledgeable people with many years in the produce industry. The produce team demonstrates an incredible work ethic and a drive for what they do. Additionally, I developed many category management skills from Todd Patti. He was essential in my career development and has encouraged me throughout my tenure. Todd has always provided me with valuable guidance and advice."



Gretchen Kreidler, 38
Sales/Marketing/Public Relations
Rio Queen Citrus Inc.
Mission, TX

Kreidler is known for her passion for the fresh produce industry. She got involved in the industry right out of college by working with wholesale and retail citrus buyers in their efforts to market Texas citrus. She also worked on public relations for the

same commodity. Her ability to establish relationships with the buyers and the general public quickly took her further in the industry.

In September, 2008, she joined the marketing department of Rio Queen's mail order branch called Crest Fruit, establishing and maintaining their first Web site, among many other duties. Her desire to become more involved in sales led her to her current position on the sales floor. She has quickly established herself as a valuable member of that team while she continues to handle the company's marketing and public relations needs.

She is a current class member of the United Fresh Leadership program. She has served as president of the Hidalgo/Starr County Texas A&M University Club, as a board member for The Museum of South Texas History in Edinburg, TX, and as a member of the McAllen, TX Junior Service League. She has volunteered for The American Cancer Society, The Vannie E. Cook, Jr. Cancer and Hematology Clinic, the Palmer Drug Abuse Program, the American Heart Association, the March of Dimes, and for her church, St. John's Episcopal in McAllen. She is currently serving as a Steering and Executive Board Member of the Leadership McAllen organization as well as being the current Class Chairperson.

Her inspiration comes from all of the incredible people she has met while working in the produce industry. "I have had the opportunity to cross paths with incredible leaders as well as the amazing support teams that have worked diligently to make the industry what it is today," she says. "I thoroughly enjoy the day-to-day contact with our customers. The beginning of each commodity's season continues to excite and motivate me!"

Many have served as mentors and inspired her during her journey through produce. "My first job out of college was with TexaSweat Citrus Marketing in Mission, TX," she says. "My first boss, Mary McKeever, taught me what I needed to know about citrus and how to talk with buyers and merchandisers. Anna Martin, who worked at TexaSweat at the time, took me under her wing and turned me into the young adult I needed to be to succeed in my job. When asked who influenced me the most, I always think of Anna, not just for her influence on my job at the time, but for the way she took me under her wing and helped mold me into who I am today. I would be remiss if I didn't also mention other people who have influenced me greatly like Mike Martin of Rio Queen Citrus, Dan'l Mackey Almy

"With corporate social responsibility being a huge part of the industry today, it is important that we are doing the right thing for the environment and for our consumers."

— Patrick Killiany
Ahold USA Retail

of DMA Solutions Inc., Jay Pack of Pack Group and Steve Grinstead of PRO*ACT, among many others."



Kelly C. Krutz, 37
Floral Category Manager
Ahold USA Retail
Carlisle, PA

Krutz has ten-plus years in the floral industry having held positions of merchandiser, buyer and category manager. She is known for her tremendous talent in the area of floral design and business process development. She is the sole

category manager at Ahold USA managing one of the largest floral departments in the United States.

Her first job out of college was as a manager trainee at a local floral shop, and during this time, she became certified as a floral designer while also learning the floral business. Her career path took several turns but eventually led her back to her passion in floral as a plant buyer at Giant Foods LLC. After holding several positions within the department, she was promoted to floral technical specialist, floral merchandiser and eventually, to floral category manager for Ahold USA.

In her current role, she has developed and implemented several successful category business plans, which are the platform for ongoing identical sales growth. From those plans, Ahold was one of the first companies to introduce Fair Trade products into its marketing area. Working with key vendor partners, she has also implemented programs that donate money back to charitable causes on behalf of the company, such as the Susan G. Komen and Alex Lemonade foundation.

Krutz is an accomplished runner, and has completed the Boston Marathon.

She is inspired by seeing ideas transpire from their initial inception to execution at the store level, and eventually into the customers' hands. "It is both fascinating and challenging to see how the flower travels from a field in South America to the many homes throughout the United States," she says. "The biggest challenge that I experience on a daily basis is managing floral in a grocery environment. Gathering the support of the operations team and the training of the associates to properly care for the product are crucial to the success of my business plan."

Krutz is working to enable Ahold to be viewed as the industry leader in floral category management in the United States. "Because of the limited amount of data available for floral, I have to use out-of-the-box thinking to come to my final analysis for building my business plans. Eventually, my long term goal is to hold a director position for a large company such as Ahold."

She mentions several mentors including her parents, along with Jodie Daubert and Charlie Pflug of Ahold. "My parents have always influenced me in my life to be open-minded and shoot for the stars," she says. "They taught me to create a goal and formulate a plan to get there. In addition, within the Ahold organization, Jodie has inspired me to aim for the highest goal. She supports me and the floral department as well. Charlie Pflug, floral director of Ahold, has helped me develop my management skills and stay true to my convictions. He has strengthened and supported me with my professional growth in a male-dominated industry."



Josh Leichter, 39
Vice President East Coast, Director Grape Category
The Oppenheimer Group
Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada

Working out of Newark, DE, Leichter's contributions at Oppenheimer have been focused on both sales and grower relations. He began working at The Oppenheimer Group in 2002, and has seen

“I want to carry on a successful legacy so future generations of our family can be a part of what I have experienced and have the chance to shape the future of our industry at that time.”

— Nicholas Mascari
Indianapolis Fruit Co.

his responsibilities continue to increase in the nearly 10 years he’s been with the organization. Starting with the company as a Los Angeles-based sales representative, he was promoted to East Coast director of sales and eventually became the director of Oppenheimer’s second largest category — grapes.

In January 2011, he became the East Coast vice president, overseeing business with customers in the Eastern U.S. and Canada. For several years, he was the company’s highest volume sales person, building important retail relationships with several key national and regional accounts, developing programs and expanding the business. As director of Oppenheimer’s grape category, he forged significant relationships with growers in Peru and Brazil, as well as strengthening ones in Chile, Mexico and California. In doing so, he helped solidify the company’s position as a preferred year-round grape marketer.

He believes strongly in being involved in the work of industry associations. In 2008, he was a member of the PMA Fresh Summit Committee, and has returned to work with this group as it prepares for the 2011 Fresh Summit. He emphasizes the importance of PMA FIT and volunteers to help in any capacity needed, including participating in the 5K at Fresh Summit in 2009 and 2010.

With respect to community involvement, Leichter and his wife support Christ Church Episcopal School in Greenville, DE, National Public Radio and the Delaware Nature Society.

He sees his future as continuing to grow with Oppenheimer. “Our brand promise is to expect the world from us,” he explains. “My part in that is to continue to serve our customers and our growers to the best of my ability. I would like to further facilitate the understanding by our grower and retail customers as to each other’s needs. This could provide stronger business relationships throughout the supply chain, which are even more critical now, given the challenging global economic conditions we are operating in.”

He names mentors Steve Battaglia of C.H. Robinson in Chicago, the late John Moyer of ATB Packing in Turlock, CA, and David Smith and John Anderson of Oppenheimer. “My first experience in the produce industry was an internship at ATB and from the first day, I was hooked on produce,” he explains. “The way John talked to his customers (and the things he got away with saying) was unlike anything I had seen in business before. I realized that this is a business where relationships matter most, and that appealed to me.”

“I worked for Steve during my first full time job in produce,” he continues. “He instilled many good habits in me. He taught me the right way to address issues, to treat each transaction as if I was dealing with my own money...and how to be successful in this business. When I came to David, he mentored me by teaching me how to work effectively within a large-scale, multiple-category company. He also helped me understand the important role that our growers play, and to create mutual success through collaboration. And, John Anderson’s executive leadership and strategic vision are unparalleled in the industry.”



Matthew Lyons, 38
Sales Manager
River Ranch Fresh Foods
Salinas, CA

During his 17-year tenure at River Ranch, Lyons has received continuous promotions demonstrating his dedication and success in his career. Working his way through dispatch, processing plant, distribution facility, field operations and sales has given him a comprehensive understanding of the business. In his current position as sales manager, he manages a group of eight people in

the sales office. He oversees the day-to-day sales operations, works with marketing on ads and promotions and assists in business development.

During the two years he has been sales manager, he has faced the challenges and opportunities presented by the company reorganization and sale of Taylor Farms. A majority of his time has been spent on customer and employee retention, office organization changes and assisting staff and customer base alike with the transition.

He has participated in the PMA Leadership Conference and is active in the Produce for Better Health organization. He has run the Relay for Life every year since 1997. He and his wife actively support California Rodeo, Leadership Salinas Valley, California Women for Agriculture and Golden Gate Lab Rescue.

He is inspired by the evolution of the industry and the potential in sales. “I have worked at River Ranch Fresh Foods in some capacity since high school and I have watched the industry, and our company, evolve a great deal over the past 20 years,” he says. “It’s exciting to use what I have learned in all of the other areas of our business to optimize our sales component here at River Ranch. There are just so many ways sales operations can be enhanced by our supporting business functions and by properly communicating within the organization. Because the dynamics of the produce industry are always changing, coming to work every day is always challenging and engaging.”

In the future, Lyons aspires to nurture a symbiotic relationship within the grower-shipper-receiver community. “Instead of viewing certain associations as parasitic, many diverse players could work together to achieve more for the industry as a whole,” he explains.

His admits mentors are too numerous to name. “I can’t really pinpoint just one person,” he says. “I’ve had the pleasure of working with a large group of industry leaders throughout the years and have absorbed a wealth of experience and knowledge.”



Retna Malar, 33
Owner
All About Fresh Produce
Malaysia

Malar started her career in fresh produce shortly after graduating from the University Science of Malaysia, joining Dairy Farm International’s Giant Hypermarket. Her first position was as a management trainee in the fresh produce section and the job took her from store operation to central purchase and the merchandising office. The volume per year when she started was roughly 15 40-foot containers a year. In a period of seven years, the business grew to over 450 containers with a turnover of around \$18 million a year.

She was awarded Buyer of the Year for 2009 in the Fresh Department: Meat, Seafood, Fresh Produce, Bakery, Ready To Eat category.

Even more telling is the result on the actual sales floor resulting from her work. Washington apples were performing badly when she took over the department in 2003. In the course of seven years, she grew the business to 11.5 times in sales. She changed the way apples were sold in hypermarkets, reducing loose apples and increasing bagged apples. She introduced co-branding of Washington apples together with the company’s house brand to ensure the produce operators stocked up and sold more.

In 2008, she landed the first container of avocados into Malaysia, backed by supportive superiors, and built the business to 15 containers in three years. The merchandising of avocados was completely changed from small displays in chillers to large bulk displays in open bins. Affordability for avocados set in as the average price of avocados was reduced by 50 percent. She also implemented a successful project on dates, dried fruits and nuts for Ramadan (Muslim fasting month), taking sales from \$100,000 to \$400,000. In three years, the category was churning more than \$1 million annually. During her tenure in the merchandising department, she grew the sales of the grape category while keeping a close watch on the perceived image of Giant being the best grapes seller in the country. When she started, the volume was estimated at 40 containers a year and it grew to more than 100 containers a year.

In June, 2010, she began her own company with the goal of assisting the produce industry worldwide to market their produce to consumers in Malaysia. This will be her second year representing the Northwest Cherry Growers in Malaysia. She has also done work for an Australian cherry grower and Chinese mandarin importer and will be actively involved in the

marketing of New Zealand apples and South African avocados.

She notes the importance of training the produce personnel in retail. "Many are passionate workers, but lack basic knowledge in handling and produce use," she says. "While marketing is important, I strongly believe training of personnel is symbiotic to achieving success."

She is married and counts reading and cooking among her favorite hobbies.



Nicholas F. Mascari, 31
New Business Development
Indianapolis Fruit Co.
Indianapolis, IN

Over the course of his career at Indianapolis Fruit, Mascari has played an instrumental role in creating new business, as well as building on existing customer and supplier relationships. He has been an integral part of committees and projects that have helped shape the future direction of the company. He has helped grow sales by working with the buying staff to bring on new programs and product offerings for their customers.

He is a 2009 Frieda Rapoport Caplan Family Business scholarship program winner and is a member of United Leadership Class 16. He is a member of the United Fresh Member Relations Task Force, part of the 2010 PMA FIT emerging leader focus group with the prestigious Thunderbird School of Global Management, a 2011 United Convention panelist for Wholesaler-Distributor Super Session and a certified HACCP manager. He participated in the 2009 Washington Public Policy Conference, and is a PMA GROW member.

In his community, he served as a mentor for the Youth Empowerment Program, was a teacher for Junior Achievement, and worked with the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation to personally raise \$11,300 for the Guys and Dolls Campaign in 2010. He volunteers every year for the Holy Rosary church Italian Street Festival fundraiser.

He has been inspired and challenged by United Fresh and its work with the industry and U.S. Congress. "Both have inspired me to get more involved and to be a voice for our industry," he says. "By collaborating with the government, the produce industry will strive to produce safe, nutritious products that will encourage consumers to maintain healthful diets."

In the future, he will strive to become a leader for his company and build upon the success that the current ownership team has achieved. "I want to carry on a successful legacy so future generations of our family can be a part of what I have experienced and have the chance to shape the future of our industry at that time," he says.

He names four principal mentors in the produce industry: his grandfather, Frank Mascari; his father, Mike Mascari; Lisa McNeece of Grimmway Farms and Lisa Strube of Strube Celery and Vegetable. "My grandfather and father both demonstrated and instilled in me at an early age the importance of hard work, integrity, dedication, honesty and pride," he says. "This not only made Indianapolis Fruit a very successful company over its 65-year history, but it has shaped the man I am today. Lisa McNeece and Lisa Strube embody the qualities that make this industry the greatest industry in the world. They have shown me the ropes and the importance of getting involved and being a positive force in the industry. They have really made a positive impact in my personal life and career, and I hope I have given back to them in some way also."

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Tanya Mason, 35
Vice President of Business Development
New Leaf Food Safety Solutions
Salinas, CA

Throughout her career, Mason has held various research and technical positions where she contributed significantly to developments and innovation in the food safety arena. Her work in pathogen research, as well as her role in developing and executing new solutions in the harvesting and processing of lettuce, has provided great value to the industry.

Mason grew up in Canada and holds a Bachelor's degree in Food Science/Chemistry from Acadia University in Nova Scotia. After graduating from Acadia, she joined the food microbiology lab at the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Research Station, in Kentville, Nova Scotia, where she continued her collegiate research on pathogens. In this role, she focused

"I am motivated by the strong relationships in the produce industry. It's amazing how families that have been in the business for generations with strong family values and dedication to the industry can also have the ability to be flexible in the ever changing industry."

—Megan McKenna
National Mango Board

on the effects that pathogens had on poultry and fresh produce.

She then moved to Toronto, Ontario, to work for Summersweet Fine Foods as a quality assurance manager, where she was instrumental in attaining HACCP recognition for the meat and seafood products produced at the facility. Mason also worked in an operational capacity for both Coca Cola outside New York City and Dole Fresh Vegetables in Yuma, AZ, and Salinas, CA. In 2003, she joined Taylor Farms as a product manager, where her initial focus was on designing and implementing improvements from seed to salad in Taylor's romaine and iceberg programs. Throughout her time with Taylor Farms, she played an integral part in developing and executing innovative solutions to harvest and process romaine and iceberg.

True to her innovative background, Mason accepted a position at New Leaf Food Safety Solutions LLC (Taylor Farms-owned company) as vice president of business development in July of 2010. Her role at New Leaf allows her to couple her extensive experience with microbiology and her operational skills to develop and implement practical solutions for companies in the produce industry.

Mason's position at New Leaf has been both challenging and exciting. "Food safety events in our industry have triggered Taylor Farms to evaluate the process and come up with necessary steps to reduce the potential for food-borne illness outbreaks," she says. "Working toward a day when outbreaks and recalls are rare events in the produce industry is truly inspirational to me."

"My short term goal is to educate the processors, consumers and trade about the risks that outbreaks and recalls pose to our collective business and to deliver effective and efficient solutions to the industry that mitigate these risks."

She notes having the pleasure of being part of and learning from several great teams on a variety of different projects. "I have learned from many people in this industry who have shared their knowledge and experiences with me," she says. "Seeing how different organizations operate gives me perspective on the industry and business in general, which helps me offer a unique perspective to our team at New Leaf."



Megan McKenna, 27
Marketing Manager
National Mango Board
Orlando, FL

McKenna demonstrates everyday that she is an incredibly versatile asset to the NMB and the produce industry. Colleagues cite her creativity in solving unique challenges and how putting things into context comes naturally. As marketing manager, her main goal is to increase the consumption of mangos in the United States. She is involved in the creation and execution of the consumer, retail and foodservice programs. She has been involved in creating the brand and key messages as well as establishing the NMB's presence in the industry. The 73 percent approval in NMB's continuance referendum last year was a great reward for this work.

McKenna has been responsible for driving the mango message through different foodservice sectors, and as a result, more foodservice operators around the country are using fresh mangos. With her leadership, the NMB has seen increased coverage in foodservice publications and is making a name for itself at foodservice events including PMA Foodservice, Culinary Institute of America, The Flavor Experience and the National Restaurant Association.

She was involved in the formation of Young Produce Professionals (YPP) with the Produce Marketing Association three years ago, an Under 30 produce professionals group focused on helping “produce newbies” network. She has served on the Professional Development Awards Committee of the International Foodservice Editorial Council (IFEC), responsible for awarding sponsorship money to members looking for financial support to continue their personal education in foodservice, publishing, etc. Last year, she was elected to the IFEC board, chaired the Meet the Press Committee and revamped the Meet the Press event and education. At the last conference she was elected vice president of IFEC.

The passion of the produce industry and particularly the mango industry inspires her to do the best work she can. “I am motivated by the strong relationships in the produce industry,” she says. “It’s amazing how families that have been in the business for generations with strong family values and dedication to the industry can also have the ability to be flexible in the ever changing industry.”

In the future, she plans to continue growing with the NMB. “I see a future for myself here at the NMB, possibly as director of marketing one day,” she says. “I love the product and the diversity of my work never leaves me bored or wanting more. Not a day goes by I am not challenged. Beyond the NMB, I hope to get more involved in produce organizations such as Southeast Produce Council, Produce Marketing Association and United. Being involved in these organizations is just another way to build strong relationships in the produce industry and understand the industry as a whole, outside of my mango bubble!”

She notes her success would not be possible without the training and continuous support from William Watson and Wendy McManus of the NMB. “They have provided me with more than four years of great learning opportunities and their wisdom with the board,” she says. “They have great relationships with people across the produce supply chain. Additionally, Jan DeLyser of the California Avocado Commission is another mentor of mine. She is highly respected in the industry and is always willing to help. She has accomplished a lot with avocados, but also gives back to the industry with her involvement with PMA, which I admire.”



Miriam S. Miller, 33
Senior Director, Membership
United Fresh Produce Association
Washington, DC

Miller joined the United Fresh Produce Association as director of membership in July, 2008, and was promoted to senior director of membership in August, 2010. Described by co-workers as passionate and brilliant, she has led United Fresh to highest levels of membership recruitment and retention in history. She frequently travels to regional events to meet with members on industry issues and share the value of United Fresh membership. In addition to her membership responsibilities, Miller serves as a staff liaison to United Fresh’s Wholesaler-Distributor Board and Member Relations Task Force, as well as for the Produce Excellence in Foodservice Awards program.

In terms of leadership in the industry, she is active in United Fresh’s Town Hall program and educational events where she discusses current topics such as food safety, nutrition and other legislative and regulatory issues impacting the industry. This past March, she participated in United Fresh’s Produce Executive Development Program as a fellow “student.” She is active in the American Society for Association Executives (ASAE) and served on the Membership Section Council from 2007 to 2010. She received her Certified Association Executive credential in January 2010.

She volunteers at a Washington D.C. Jewish Community Center’s (DCJCC) hunger relief program that provided meals for DC Central Kitchen. She has served as a team captain for the past four years for the DCJCC’s December 25 Day of Service (D25), which sends 1,000 volunteers into the community to work on charitable projects with more than 100 area organizations.

Miller is motivated by the legacy and passion of the produce industry. “It is a true joy for me to work with members whose businesses are very often their family legacy, and who are so passionate about delivering healthful food to plates around the world,” she says. “Health and nutrition, especially getting it to children who don’t currently have regular access to nutritious food, is a true passion of mine.”

She names Jeff Oberman, Victoria Backer and Tom Stenzel of United as mentors. She explains, “Jeff helped me dive right into the industry by taking

me all over California to meet our members in my first month of working for United. He took the time with me to help me really learn the industry and has been a terrific example in his dedication to our members and his work ethic. Victoria is always willing to discuss ideas and help me with challenging situations. Working with Tom has been a truly transformative experience for me. He challenges me in the most positive of ways and truly makes it possible for me to play a leadership role with our members.”



Jerry Moran, 30
Bush Berry Category Manager
California Giant Inc.
Watsonville, CA

As category manager, Moran has helped increase Cal Giant’s bush berry sales by 65 percent and takes his leadership of the sales team in building the bush berry program seriously. He is responsible for the overall sales operations execution, communication, planning and measurement of the company’s bush berry category. He manages and develops customer accounts in the retail, wholesale, food service and international markets to successfully achieve the company’s sales goals. Part of his role in the bush berry position is to collaborate with growers to coordinate supply forecasts throughout the Western Hemisphere in order to execute the program effectively with the sales staff.

Moran is a member of United Produce Industry Leadership Class 16.

He is inspired to instill consumer confidence in produce. “I believe the most important issues we face today are building consumer confidence with food safety practices and the ability to grow our industry on a global level,” he explains. “We have all witnessed over the past few years how catastrophic the effects of food safety scares on fresh produce can affect our entire industry. When one item is impacted, we all feel the effects of reduced consumer confidence. We must work together to ensure the consumer has confidence in produce as a whole, and not just domestically grown products.”

In the future, he aspires to be a mentor to others. “During my career in the produce industry, I have admired the strong leaders around me and know that one day I want to provide leadership to young people entering the industry,” he says. “Every day, I learn something new gaining experience and confidence in my abilities. I look forward to capturing every opportunity to meet people in the industry, visit face-to-face with my customers whenever possible and attend industry leadership conferences so I can stay involved and informed in the ever-changing landscape of the produce industry and contribute to its success in the future.”

He has difficulty in choosing specific mentors from the industry. “Because of my position at California Giant, I get to work with a variety of customers, growers, management and others on our sales team every day,” he says. “I really look to talents from each of these groups as being mentors to me in being a better employee, peer and supplier. Whether I learn improved communication skills, better understand the needs of the buyer, or provide valuable industry insights to our growers, I take my role very seriously.”



Sean Nelsen, 34
Director Business Development and Food Service
Sales, Manager Visalia Office
C.H. Robinson Worldwide Inc.
Visalia, CA

Nelsen has been a leader at C.H. Robinson for the past 13 years and has been instrumental in growing CHRW’s foodservice channel business by double digits since 2003. Personally responsible for managing some of CHRW’s largest customers, he has played an integral role in developing new sourcing and supply chain revenue over the past decade. He’s also led the development of CHRW’s sourcing and transportation services to the restaurant segment.

Nelsen has worked tirelessly to bring supply chain visibility tools to produce shippers, distributors and restaurant chains in the form of greater information in pricing, contract management and freight execution, which has saved customers tens of millions of dollars annually. His clients’ revenue has grown by double digits consistently for the past seven years as a result of his work.

He is a devoted husband and a father to four girls and gives back to

his community by coaching soccer and softball teams. He sits on the board of Tulare AYSO. He is a school board member serving Tulare Christian School and past chairmen of the Tulare First Baptist Finance Committee as well as current finance chairman for the Tulare First Baptist new multi-purpose building project.

His inspiration comes from solving problems for clients at C.H. Robinson. "The first challenge is always building the level of trust between me and the client, which allows us to have an honest conversation as to the opportunity and the desired solution," he states. "We have a strong culture of customer service at C.H. Robinson. Solving those challenges inspires me to continue to the next challenge."

In the future, he sees himself continuing to be at the front of C.H. Robinson in developing and executing solutions for customers. "At 34 years old, I feel my future is still bigger than my past. After watching the changes that have occurred the past 13 years, it would be hard to limit myself and say with certainty that I will be doing this or that. I can say that no matter where this industry goes I will be at the front of C.H. Robinson solving client and industry problems and enhancing the reputation of C.H. Robinson as a company that gets things done."

His mentors are his family members. "I am very blessed to come from a family that has a long history in the produce industry with my grandpa, Walter Nelsen (former executive at Lucky Stores), father, Steve Nelsen (Eagle Fresh Marketing), uncle, Joel Nelsen, (California Citrus Mutual) and brother, Chad Nelsen (Fowler Packing) all working in the industry," he says. "Lively conversations as I was growing up have given me a well-rounded perspective to the challenges and opportunity that various segments in our industry face. I think the biggest lesson I learned was that your word was your contract. I know a lot has changed in the 13 years I have been in the industry, but the value of honesty and integrity has not. Even in today's fast-paced world, people want to and will do business with people they trust."



Andrew J Pandol, 33
Safety Manager
Pandol Bros. Inc (PBI)
Delano, CA

Pandol, a fourth generation industry member, has significantly improved his company's safety and food safety culture. He has achieved this by strengthening educational programs and expanding the scope of what food safety means

by creating better standards for their operations. He developed and led a team of company employees and consultants to design, implement and monitor an efficient, comprehensive and continually improving food safety program for PBI's global produce supply network. He also oversaw worker and environmental safety programs. He has recently been appointed to the Board of Directors at PBI and participates in an active shareholder group that develops the strategic goals and direction of the company.

In the industry, he is involved in the Environmental Resource Committee at the California Grape and Tree Fruit League (CG&TFL) and the Membership Relations Task Force at the United Fresh Produce Association. He is a graduate of the United Fresh Produce Association 2009-2010 Produce Industry Leadership Program, Class 15.

Pandol is inspired by the culture of the produce industry. "The cooperation and camaraderie between different areas of the industry create a fast-paced, exciting environment that I enjoy working in," he says.

He is also inspired by his family's business and its tradition through the years. "Each generation and each individual have added and expanded the business in their own ways," he explains. "And I am, I hope, honoring that tradition. My current role in safety addresses an area where PBI needed improvement. Others have, throughout their careers, added value to our company and the produce industry for the past 60 or so years. My cousin, John Jr., has just started working, and it's exciting to see his optimism for what lies ahead in his career."

New challenges and learning more about the business are what inspires him. "I am interested in growing the business, both industry-wide and at PBI, in whatever role is best," he says. "Right now, that means food safety and providing the world with fresh, healthful products. Of course, the produce business is always changing, like any business, and most recently, government actions have been driving this change."

He points to his family as a strong source of mentoring. "I don't think one can escape a family business without a good amount of mentoring,"

he says. "My father, Steve, who doesn't work here day today but participates as an owner of the company, has contributed greatly to any success I enjoy. Michael McCartney of QLM Consulting, strongly guided, influenced and contributed an immeasurable amount to my development over the past few years. His approach to continuous excellence and eye for the opportunity in everything are influences that I'll carry with me throughout my career. Michael has a tremendous energy and passion for this industry."



Doug Pearce, 33
President
Pier-C Produce Inc.
Leamington, Ontario, Canada

Pearce has been involved in the produce industry since he was 16 years old, following in the footsteps of many family members. He is known as a highly motivated individual who loves his work and the industry as a whole. Upon graduating from high school, he started work full time in the family business.

Over the years, he gained a great deal of insightful information and experience that led to his development of his own produce company. His company now runs two packing facilities and several farm operations employing over 100 individuals. Pier-C has been able to successfully meet a steady increase of 10 to 12 percent annual growth.

His company now sells 5,400 acres of product in various regions of Ontario, offering year-round availability of onions, carrots, parsnips and beets. It is a seasonal supplier of peppers, pumpkins and cabbage. Pearce's leadership has pushed for development of markets in the United States, Canada and Mexico. In the past year, he has helped extend markets to Barbados, Trinidad, Costa Rica, Ghana, Puerto Rico and areas in the Middle East. Pier-C has been a supplier for Metro Stores in Ontario and Quebec for the past few years, as well as Sobeys stores in Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia. He credits these retailers as being tremendous businesses to partner with, while also being a great aid in the growth of his company.

He is a member of the Produce Marketing Association, National Onion Association, Quebec Produce Marketing Association, The Ontario Produce Marketing Association and The Canadian Produce Marketing Association. He is a strong supporter of the Ontario Association of Food Banks and provides up to a tractor trailer load of product to them on a weekly basis.

He names the rising freight costs due to fuel spikes and the rising minimum wages in Canada as major challenges to staying competitive. "Minimum wages in Canada are higher than any other country and that makes it tough for us to compete when exporting our product," he explains. "Our exchange rate against the U.S. dollar has definitely shrunk profit margins in a way that has forced us to more aggressively cut costs at our facility in order to stay competitive. Some of the things that inspire me to work in this industry are the new relationships that I have developed with customers, the traveling and the new challenges that arise daily to keep me on my toes."

Since he grew up in the produce industry, a lot of family members influenced and guided him to where he is today. He states, "One person in particular is my uncle, Ken Pearce, who is a huge part of whom I've become and where I am in life. He has been in the industry for over 30 years and has the kind of knowledge and experience that you cannot simply learn overnight. With his guidance, I have learned the fundamental aspects involved in the produce business and have witnessed the success that can come out of hard work and determination in this industry."



Kyle M. Reeves, 33
Senior Produce Buyer
United Supermarkets LLC
Lubbock, TX

Reeves is known as an intelligent, dedicated and eager person who strives to be the best possible at everything he does. He has his hands in all aspects of United Supermarkets' business, ensuring that things run properly from the buying

to trucking to training of those he manages. He works to develop relationships that not only better his company but the guests they serve. His willingness to go above and beyond what is necessary to get things done is noted by co-workers and managers. He is credited for being able to understand how important the relationships are with both growers and

consumers and the balance it takes to stay competitive and supplied.

He started in produce at United Supermarkets just under five years ago. In those five years, he has become the senior produce buyer for this 50-store grocery chain. He has received one of the company's mission statement awards, the Positive Impact Award, twice in those five years. He helped kick start the company's Wellness Initiative by his involvement on the Wellness Committee, created shortly after he began at United. He has since become the vice president of the United We Care board, comprised of team members that help distribute funds to fellow team members in emergency situations.

He is a Southeast Produce Council STEP UPP Program Scholarship Recipient, and is active with both PMA and United Fresh. He serves as a deacon in his home Baptist church, participates in mission trips to Peru and is active in various other church committees and teaching Sunday school.

He is motivated in that each day in the industry is completely different from the one before. "With every market changing frequently throughout each day, it makes it a challenge to get the best possible piece of produce to my shelf as possible at the lowest cost," he says.

In the future, he plans to continue his education in all aspects of this industry. "Knowledge cures many of the pains we go through and provides solutions to many of the problems we face on a daily basis," he explains. "I would like to continue to grow in my responsibilities in the position I am in and hopefully be positioned to take over for my boss as he draws closer to retirement. Another goal I have is to work close enough with all of my partners to say that I have visited each and every shed where we bring our trucks. This gives me and my team better understanding of the trials that each of our partners go through, which in turn allows me to help get my trucks loaded in a more timely manner."

He names Tommy Wilkins of United Supermarkets and Chad Allred with Kingsburg Orchards as mentors. "Tommy has been in this industry for over 30 years and has more knowledge than I could ever imagine grasping due to his exposure and the different scenarios he has been in throughout his career," he says. "He is willing to share that knowledge with those who are interested. The more I learn from him, the better I will be as I develop into the industry leader I hope to be. Chad has helped me quickly learn aspects of California stone fruit that I would not have been able to this early in my career. He is willing to share advice throughout the year, whether I am loading with him or not and is eager to share any helpful experiences."



Cary Rubin, 38
Vice President
Rubin Bros Produce Corp.
Bronx, NY

Rubin is a third generation family owner and has played an integral part in modernizing the company. He fully computerized the operations and brought Rubin Bros to the internet. He also streamlined the accounts receivable system to

minimize bad debt.

He has expanded the direction of the company leading to the pursuit of imported produce to satisfy the demands of Hispanic, Asian and other ethnic communities. Sensing the ever expanding Hispanic population in the Tri-state area, he worked to add a full tropical line to service this new trend in the produce business. He has helped expand the company's market share in the value-added business by constantly promoting and marketing the Dole and Organic Girl line of salads. As a supplier to small chain stores and bodegas, he has brought value-added items to parts of the Tri-state area that would normally not have access to them.

He takes pride in supplying the "small guy" as well as the larger chain stores, and helping to feed New York, especially those less fortunate areas that don't have access to fresh fruits and vegetables. He donates to City Harvest and Food For Survival.

He serves as first vice president of the Hunts Point Produce Co-op Board of Directors, as vice president of Hunts Point Produce Trade Association, and on the market's PR Committee. "We represent close to 50 firms and account for approximately \$2 billion worth of sales," he states. "This is where I hang up my hat as an individual business owner and act objectively on behalf of all the firms in our produce market. We are constantly working on bettering the industry."

Rubin takes pleasure in using the produce and trucks at his disposal to help the community. "Recently, we donated produce to a local charity that

"The cooperation and camaraderie between different areas of the industry create a fast-paced, exciting environment that I enjoy working in."

— Andrew Pandol
Pandol Bros. Inc.

used it for cooking demonstrations for low-income families to influence their diet with more fruit and vegetable intake," he explains. "In May, we're used our trucks to pick up sports equipment from a school on Long Island and deliver it to a school in the Bronx."

Employing a lot of people and contributing to their livelihood inspire him. "I like knowing that the fruits of my labor help many families live their lives," he says. "At the same time, it's challenging everyday to grow your business in our ever-changing industry. The challenge of increasing sales and growing profit to better my family's life as well as that of all my employees is what keeps me going every day."

His future goal is focused on expanding the business. "In order to do that, we need to stay relevant in an industry that is constantly changing," he says. "Being complacent is not an option."

He names his father, Marc Rubin, president of Rubin Bros Produce, as his biggest mentor. "I watched him take my grandfather's business and grow it to its current level," he says. "Seeing his drive everyday has inspired me to try to accomplish what he has in the business. He is one of the most respected men in the industry and I can only hope to be compared to him one day."



Julian Sarraino, 26
Sales and Marketing Manager
Fresh Taste
Toronto, ON

Sarraino has quickly become recognized as one of the top young industry leaders since joining Fresh Taste full time. Sarraino is known for his motivation and drive, even at his young age, which is reflected in his increased responsibility

both in the company and the industry. He has quickly become an integral component to Fresh Taste's success, providing increased sales and additional commodity lines. He introduced and implemented a number of procedures, which improved the speed and accuracy of everyday sales in a significant manner. He also implemented a set of standard procedures that have increased lot control capabilities, quality assurance and traceability. Sarraino is known for his creativity, as a co-developer and implementer of new packages and marketing labels for Fresh Taste's custom packaged products, with the latest design already demonstrating strong demand in its early stages. Interested in the future development of the business, he is also actively involved in employee recruitment, hiring and the training of new company employees.

Sarraino is currently the youngest person ever elected to the Ontario Produce Marketing Association (OPMA) Board of Directors, a non-profit organization with an objective to promote the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables within Ontario. In just his second year on the Board, his peers have elected him vice president.

In his community, he is a supporter of a number of initiatives that provide nutritional food to hungry children, as well as educational experiences for young children so they can learn and appreciate where fruit comes from and how it gets to their local grocery store.

He is inspired by the role the produce industry plays in the lives of diverse members of the community. "The expectations consumers have for our industry are understandably very high," he says. "I am committed to developing products and procedures that ensure the customer receives a safe, healthful, fresh tasting product."

He enjoys the challenge and unpredictability associated with product supply. He explains, "I've always been fascinated by the impact that weather conditions can have on product quality and general availability. Sourcing the best overall product and fulfilling the requirements of customers is the ultimate satisfaction."

In the future, he hopes to use his creativity to benefit consumers. "I will always try to remain creative and innovative, and to look forward and

“This industry epitomizes hard work, perseverance and integrity.

I am inspired by the resiliency and never-give-up attitude of so many people in the industry. The leaders within our industry who invest significant resources for continued innovation and other ‘game changer’ initiatives not only raise the bar, but most importantly gains the trust of consumers throughout the country.”

— Andrew Schultz
DRS

develop new programs and approaches that will benefit the end consumer,” he says.

He credits his family’s deep produce industry roots as having mentored him. “I’ve had the benefit of four generations of experience,” he explains. “I have been fortunate enough to have the best mentors and the opportunity to gain exposure to the produce industry from a very young age. I also hope to be able to pass on the knowledge I obtain.”



Andrew Schultz, 32
Vice President, Produce
DRS (Diversified Restaurant Systems)
San Diego, CA

When Schultz started with DRS in February 2004, there were approximately 13,000 Subway stores in North America. In seven years, the chain has doubled its size to more than 26,900 locations. This massive growth in such a short period provided an opportunity for demonstration of his leadership and commitment to excellence. He is now responsible for managing the \$350 million produce supply chain for Subway in North America. Some of his greatest accomplishments lie in forming and growing supplier relationships into partnerships upon which his success is contingent. Through this teamwork and collaboration of more than 23 different produce suppliers spread throughout the U.S and Canada, Subway has developed a very dynamic supply chain.

Thanks to the hard work of Schultz and countless others throughout the supply chain, they implemented a Produce Task Force and identified a few key “Big Play Goals,” which he helps lead. Over the past 12 months, he and his coworkers have truly raised the bar to reduce costs and lead-time, improve quality and bring further value to Subway franchisees everywhere. Another Produce Task Force initiative revolved around finding solutions to the many challenges in logistics and transportation.

He is a Board Member for a local charity that works with Children’s Hospital, and in particular, kids with cancer. He served on the Advisory Committee of last year’s PMA Joe Nucci Memorial Golf Tournament.

His biggest inspiration comes from knowing he works in an industry that feeds millions of people nutritious fruits and vegetables every day. “This industry epitomizes hard work, perseverance and integrity,” he says. “I am inspired by the resiliency and never-give-up attitude of so many people in the industry. The leaders within our industry who invest significant resources for continued innovation and other ‘game changer’ initiatives not only raise the bar, but most importantly gain the trust of consumers throughout the country.”

He views his future responsibility as helping out the younger generation and providing them the tools to succeed. “I was extremely fortunate to have such well-respected people show me the ropes when I first started in this industry. I feel an obligation to pay it forward in hopes of leaving the industry better than I found it.”

He also plans to continue working toward improving industry harmonization and standards. “The sooner we can come together as an industry

to implement objective and science-based benchmarks while referencing one set of guidelines, the better,” he says.

He names as mentors Brian Kocher of Chiquita, Garth Borman of Taylor Farms, and Jeff Klare of Club Chef. However, he credits Dan Spinazzola and Mike Spinazzola with DRS as being his most influential mentors. “They took a chance and hired me fresh out of college when not many others would,” he says. “Since Day 1 they have treated me like family, with utmost integrity, and always keeping an ‘open-door’ policy over the years making time for anything I needed. They taught me you can do the right thing and still be successful in life. They taught me the importance of giving back and helping those less fortunate.”



Kevin Steiner, 29
Marketing Director/Category Manager
Sage Fruit Company
Yakima, WA

Steiner started with Sage Fruit in June, 2004, after graduating from Miami University in Oxford, OH, with a marketing degree. During his time with the company, he has facilitated sales and marketing objectives and grew sales with national and regional accounts. He implemented category management strategies and contributed to the company’s earning Vendor Of The Year three times with a national retailer.

He served as a member of the PMA Exhibitory Advisory Committee in 2009 and 2010. He is currently a member of the PMA Membership Committee, which aids in mentoring/retaining current members and increasing overall membership. He participates as a volunteer speaker for Miami University’s marketing department in various lectures and panel discussions to help graduating students find jobs and provide them with real world situations that arise in sales. He also volunteers for an area school’s health fair organized by Catholic schools in Dayton, OH, to educate students about the health benefits of produce, the different varieties and its various uses.

Steiner has been inspired and challenged in the produce industry by the people he works with and the company’s partners. He says, “When I see a second or third generation farmer put maximum effort into growing flavorful fruit, it inspires me to go out and do the very best I can to work with our retail/wholesale partners to grow sales and meet their needs. The fast-paced nature of the business is inspiring and challenging. Each day is different and our industry seems to work with a sense of urgency, which keeps our jobs exciting and fresh.”

His future goals with respect to his work in produce industry relate to maintaining a positive attitude and giving his best effort each day. “I think good things happen when we are positive and work hard,” he says.

His mentors are his father, Craig Steiner, and his boss, Chuck Sinks. “My dad has been involved in the produce industry for 35 years,” he states. “I remember when he used to get up every single morning and buy produce from the Cincinnati market for his fruit market. He worked seven days a week and he instilled the importance of hard work to our family growing up. He encouraged me to work for the Castellini Group of Companies loading trucks in the summer when I was home from college. At the time, I didn’t know it would eventually lead to a job in produce, but working those summers eventually led to an opportunity to work full time in the industry upon graduation.”

He continues, “Chuck Sinks gave me an opportunity to work for Sage Fruit Company after graduating from college. He has been in the produce industry for 30 years and I feel like he is always available for advice and guidance. I think the one thing I respect most about Chuck is he wouldn’t ask us to do anything that he wouldn’t do himself. He is a tireless worker and cares about all of us at work and outside of work.”



Bryan Tate, 31
Corporate Category Buyer
Associated Wholesale Grocers
Kansas City, KS

Tate is said to embody many of the qualities that the industry needs in its rising stars. He is a self-directed professional who is articulate and enthusiastic. He is known for striving to learn as much as he can to put himself in a better place to

“It is my belief that we must make a conscience effort to work not only for the growth of the company, but the growth of the industry by striving tirelessly for the continual improvement of product and methods to go to market. With a happy consumers, all things are possible.”

— Russ Tavlan
Moonlight Companies

progress the direction of the industry. He spent 10 years with the Kroger Company, gaining exposure to all areas of retail store operations.

He joined AWG at a time when the Kansas City division was undergoing an effort to strengthen its team of buyers. He was hired as a retail counselor and was promoted to FOB buyer within a short time period. After two years of buying for the Kansas City division he was promoted to the corporate office. His efforts from the corporate level have been focused on the centralized procurement of identified key commodities.

Tate served as the key contact person for Country of Origin Labeling at AWG, attending various training sessions conducted by USDA and disseminating the information to division teams. He is the key contact person for the implementation of Produce Traceability Initiative (PTI) for AWG Produce, and works across the organizational departments to implement systems and practices that fall in line with the industry guidelines and milestones.

He is a graduate of FMI’s Future Connect 2011, a member of United Fresh Leadership Class 16 and a member of the industry PTI Implementation Working Group Committee.

He notes that every day in the produce industry can be challenging and inspiring. “Having a strong foundation in retail is a huge advantage because retail is where the rubber meets the road,” he says. “It becomes so critical that everything falls together in a way that makes the consumer want to buy more produce. The industry moves very quickly so it becomes challenging to keep up with current trends yet keep time-tested practices in place. I enjoying looking for new and better ways to improve the way we do business.”

He identifies Gary Myracle, Lucky Hicks and Dennis Flynn (all at AWG) as key mentors, along with a host of unnamed others. “Within 20 feet of my office door here at AWG, I have over 100 years of experience from people who have been buying and selling fresh produce,” he says. “When you are surrounded by that much knowledge, you’re limited only by the number of questions you can ask. Each person in our produce operation offers a unique perspective on a situation. Gary, Lucky and Dennis in particular have taken a personal interest in my career growth and have gone out of their way to see that I get the training and exposure I need. They all push for results, while at the same time give enough room to allow me to make mistakes and learn.”



Russ Tavlan, 39
President & CEO
Moonlight Companies
Reedley, CA

At the young age of 19, Tavlan started the company with the goal of bringing the best stone fruit, grapes and citrus to consumers. Two decades later, he holds the reins of a successful and prospering business, yet looks to continually improve the operation and raise the standard of excellence within the industry. He travels over 100,000 miles a year maintaining a high level of interaction with customers.

Tavlan has successfully grown the company with his brother from 200 acres and one employee in 1993 to several thousand acres and over 700 full-time employees. The company has maintained an average growth of 27 percent over 20 years of business. He has identified and directed

Moonlight ahead of farming and retail trends, and has implemented successful retail merchandising programs emphasizing Moonlight’s brand-building efforts with loyal customer partners. He and his team successfully manage a diverse farming portfolio with intense focus on operational efficiencies and quality. The company has designed and implemented proprietary software for enhanced quality assurance, food safety and empirical product traceability.

He has held board and committee positions for various industry organizations, including volunteering and mentoring international agricultural students for the PMA Foundation for Industry Talent, and has attended many leadership and retailer symposiums to develop a stronger knowledge of the industry from various perspectives.

He notes a rewarding part of his career is his involvement in philanthropy. In connection with retailer partners and other organizations, Moonlight has been able to assist various charities over the years such as The Children’s Cancer Foundation and City of Hope. His family’s foundations are also an important part of his life and include the Hollywood Museum, the official museum of Hollywood dedicated to celebrating the history and heritage of the area and industry, the Jose Iturbi Foundation, which provides a forum to showcase emerging classical musicians and singers through live performances and competitions, and the John Jay Tavlan Scholarship fund, which provides support to business students pursuing their MBA. Tavlan holds board positions with these charitable not-for-profit organizations.

Moonlight is a Silver Sponsor of the PMA FIT Foundation, supports local schools, organizations and charities as a way to stay active and involved in the community his family has called home for generations. Tavlan has also been a volunteer fireman for the city of Reedley for 20 years.

He has been inspired to succeed by being cognizant of the many challenges other companies in the industry have faced. “The challenge of positioning my company to consistently satisfy customer and consumer expectations was the impetus to operate Moonlight in a unique way,” he says. “We have always embraced and employed technology to meet the changing market and retail landscape with quick response. Of course, the never ending challenge to drive retail sales of our products collectively with our great customer partners is my passion.”

His future goal is to continue the growth trend Moonlight has experienced, and to maintain its quality reputation. “I hope the success of my company will do its part to strengthen the categories of produce we participate in,” he says. “It is my belief that we must make a conscience effort to work not only for the growth of the company, but the growth of the industry by striving tirelessly for the continual improvement of product and methods to go to market. With a happy consumer, all things are possible.”

His mentors are the farmers of California who he notes risk it all each and every year. “They battle inclement weather, forever increasing production costs and a global flat-world economy in hopes that a customer will purchase their products for above parity,” he explains. **pb**

Take Part In Selecting Next Year’s Nominees!

40 Under Forty is an annual feature of PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine. If you would like to nominate a young leader for next year’s edition, please visit www.producebusiness.com or fax your nomination to 561-994-1610.

Next year’s nominees must be under the age of 40 as of March 1, 2012 (born after March 1, 1972).