



## CLASS OF 2013 Young And Smart Leaders On The Rise

### Mason Arnold, 34 Co-founder and CEO Greenling Austin, TX



Arnold has been a sustainability pioneer and serial entrepreneur since graduating from The University of Texas at Austin in 2001. In 2005 he co-founded Greenling, an award-winning local and organic grocery delivery service which has reached over 55,000 customers and supports hundreds of local farms in Texas. As co-founder and CEO of the company, he spends most of his time moving the company forward and helping his teams excel. Since its inception, Greenling has grown significantly in Austin, and now has branches in San Antonio since 2008 and Dallas since February 2012, and has just launched Houston.

An advocate for organic and sustainable growing practices, Arnold drafted the legislation that created an Organic Advisory Board to the Texas Department of Agriculture. He also helped create Slow Money Texas — the statewide chapter of Slow Money, an undertaking to connect farmers, entrepreneurs, investors, philan-

thropists and activists to build local and national networks to catalyze the flow of capital to small food enterprises and local food systems. He also helped create the Sustainable Texas Investment Club, which focuses on local farms and local food. He served on multiple community organization boards, including the non-profit organization, Sustainable Food Center.

Greenling's customers aren't the only ones who noticed Arnold's passion for Sustainability. He and the company have been recognized with more than 20 awards. He was recognized in Slow Money's 2010 National Gathering Showcase as an entrepreneur who is "rebuilding local food systems, one small food enterprise at a time."

Working directly with local, sustainable farmers is truly inspirational for him. He explains, "Growing food the right way, without chemicals and additives, is also the hard way, and our local vendors are some of the most hard-working individuals you'll ever meet. My mission is to help those local farmers spend more time actually farming, rather than worrying about distribution and whether they'll get a fair price for their hard work. This in turn helps consumers too, because local, sustainable food is more accessible,

and eating local becomes more attainable than ever."

Arnold has seen his fair share of challenges. "Had I known anything about produce when I got started in this business, I probably would have gone another way," he quips. "Creating inventory management, storage and distribution processes that maintain produce quality from the farm to the doorstep was quite a challenge, but we like to think we've perfected it. While most grocery retailers experience spoilage of up to 30 percent, we maintain less than 2 percent spoilage with our just-in-time inventory system. We partner with local charitable organizations in each market to use the produce that isn't perfect enough to send to our customers, but is still edible. And the rest becomes compost to feed our local soil systems."

His mission now, and for the future, is to change the way people source their food. "We aim to continue to grow and make it easier for local producers to grow in a sustainable way, and also for consumers to get local and organic food on their tables," he says. "And, to do this in a way that fits their busy lifestyle and doesn't break the bank. We believe our model can work anywhere people eat food!"

His love for what he does is not

hard to spot around Greenling's operational areas, not only because of his passion but also because he drives a Prius with a six-foot banana on top.

### Josh Auerbach, 30 Sales and Marketing Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc. Secaucus, NJ



Auerbach executes a multitude of responsibilities including managing a number of customer accounts as the primary representative, managing the lime category as commodity manager/buyer, assisting in purchasing and procurement of several other commodities, and participating in maintaining accurate product inventory on his own commodities as well as others. He helps set product pricing on a daily and weekly basis and is one of the people who coordinate outbound transportation for orders.

He began his career humbly as a sales assistant and spent a great deal of time interacting with warehouse and packing room staff. Gradually, he proved himself and became the primary sales contact on several customer accounts.

Because of his drive, he plays an active role in the procurement of product, culminating in his managing the lime category, and assisting in other special projects.

Auerbach spearheaded the business development with a national foodservice distributor from selling one division to now selling seven divisions in two regions as a corporate vendor. During his management of the lime program, he and the sales team reached many new customers. "I am particularly proud of the growth in our lime program and proud of our sales team," he says. "I applaud their efforts. The category has expanded and increased in volume, and our customers include some of the finest retailers, foodservice distributors and wholesalers in the marketplace."

He worked closely on accounting for costs and charges on products and transactions to analyze profitability of products and business. He revived "dead" customer accounts that had not worked with Auerbach in several years and have returned as regular business. He championed successful new items and lines for the company such as peeled pearl and cipolline onions and baby bok choy.

His responsibilities spill over to future investment. He initiated and managed Auerbach's first-ever recruitment of new talent from a major business school's food marketing program, including creating job descriptions and interviewing candidates for the positions. He also contributed ideas and feedback in the planning and construction of Auerbach's state-of-the-art facility, which opened in December of 2011.

As much as he loves his job, he credits his love for his family as strongest inspiration. "I am truly fortunate for the love and friendship of my wonderful wife, Michelle Auerbach, and our new beautiful baby daughter, Lily Harper," he shares. "And, I would not be here were it not for the constant love and support of my parents, Paul and Randy Auerbach. I work with them and we STILL like seeing each other outside of work!"

In the future, he hopes to see the company and the industry develop further. "The public's increasing recognition of the value of fresh, safe, healthy and delicious fruits and vegetables is and will continue to be a driver for more innovation," he states. "Who knows what great idea, what underappreciated or undersupplied product lies around the corner?"

Chief among his mentors is his

father, Paul. "He has been in the produce industry since before I was born," he explains. "His knowledge, compassion, and work ethic have been crucial in my personal and professional development. We have always been close, but since we have been working together, I feel the relationship has taken on additional depth, and I cherish the time we spend together in all capacities."

Though everyone at the company has been uniquely influential, Auerbach also recognizes Jeff Schwartz, Ian Zimmerman, Bruce Klein, and Jim Maguire as indispensable mentors.

**Ben Batten, 32**  
**Account Executive**  
**Des Moines Truck Brokers, Inc.**  
**Norwalk, IA**



Batten has been instrumental in the growth and success of Des Moines Truck Brokers (DMTB) during his nine year tenure with the company. Throughout that time, the company experienced record growth in the fresh produce division and, last year alone, handled logistics for nearly 3,000 loads of produce.

Starting in dispatch, Batten worked his way up the ranks. Currently he plays a critical role in both sales and marketing, directly resulting in the company's growth and visibility as a respected player for Midwest-bound produce loads. His leadership and expertise in the produce supply chain helped the company win numerous local and national awards. He was responsible for a 13 percent increase in company revenue during his first year as account executive and provided invaluable oversight on the company's new operations training program.

Batten earned the professional designation of CTB (Certified Transportation Broker) from the top industry association, TIA (Transportation Intermediaries Association), in March 2010. Although he holds a Bachelor of Science in Transportation Logistics, he augmented his knowledge with TIA-sponsored workshops on Temperature Controlled Transport, Marketing and Partnership in the Supply Chain. In September, he will graduate from Iowa Motor Truck Association's (IMTA) Leadership Class. He was responsible for nominating

DMTB for two recent awards: The *Des Moines Business Record's* 2010 Best Kept Secret and 2012 Iowa Business of Integrity Award for small businesses.

Batten is active in the industry and his community. He traveled to many growing regions and shipping locations across the country, met with shippers, and worked closely with buyers. Within his community, he's active in volunteer programs that help local families in need as well as arranging donations of fresh produce to various walks and triathlons. He recently directed his company's donation of freight charges associated with moving a piece of steel beam from the World Trade Center to a local fire department.

His inspiration comes from those around him involved in day-to-day produce buying and selling. "I learn a lot by listening to buyers put together loads and deal with growers," he states. "I'm truly inspired when our customers succeed and continue to grow. It shows me that what we're doing here at DMTB has a positive effect on their business."

He notes the challenging nature of the industry. "I'm sure most would agree that it takes a different breed of person to be successful in the produce industry," he says. "Being able to juggle customer price pressures with changing markets and unpredictable weather requires skill. On our end of the business, we must adapt to rapidly changing situations. Product availability can shift without much notice, and if our customers are on ad, the difference in freight can mean being profitable or taking a loss. Truck availability also plays a large role in buyer decisions. My job is to ensure we have the capacity to move fresh loads quickly and efficiently."

Another recent challenge is the CA CARB requirements. "These new laws have potential to hurt the produce industry in California by decreasing the supply of trucks that can haul the loads," he says. "We have to stay on top of these regulations and fight them whenever possible."

His goal is to increase stability in freight pricing. "I plan on working closely with our produce customers to more accurately match supply of product with spikes in demand," he reports. "Additionally, we intend to add expedited freight service for

those times when quick on-time delivery is needed."

He attributes his growing knowledge to the Comito family of Capital City Fruit in Norwalk, IA, as well as James DeMatteis, owner of DMTB. "At 70 years old, Joe Comito has been a wealth of information and insight into the produce business," he says. "His son and current CEO, Christian Comito, has been another mentor to me, helping me develop a broader understanding of how growers, shippers, re-packers, and distributors work together. Jimmy DeMatteis has always been central to our business and played a huge role in developing my decision-making and leadership skills."

**Laura Berlanga, 34**  
**Product Innovation**  
**and Research Manager**  
**Ocean Mist Farms**  
**Castroville, CA**



Berlanga is known as an intelligent, energetic emerging leader who rose through the ranks from sales coordinator to marketing assistant to now leading its organization in her current position. She is credited as being innovative in her thinking and approach to operational challenges and excels in creating something new.

She was promoted to her current position in January 2013. Prior to this, she worked in the sales office, where she assisted the artichoke commodity manager on key accounts. She later transitioned over to the marketing department. As a marketing associate, she managed print, digital, and pay-per-click ad campaigns for the trade and consumer, consumer affairs, and trade show events. Part of her responsibility was management of the "Where to Find Artichokes on Sale" program, which allows consumers to find retail artichoke ads on the company web site or mobile site as well as providing e-mail blasts to Artichoke Club members during the spring months.

Berlanga is active in the community and has been a board member of Ag Against Hunger for three years. She is currently the second vice president and also on the PR committee and Special

Events committee. "I truly enjoy being part of an organization that helps alleviate one of our country's biggest problems, hunger, and provides fresh produce to those in need," she states.

She is a past president of the Hispanic Business Association and is a member of California Women in Agriculture. She is actively involved with children's education and is part of the Lagunita Parent Teacher Committee and the Pacific Coast Christian Academy Parent Teacher Committee.

She is motivated by the challenges of the industry. "Every day is a new challenge, that is how the produce industry is, and that is what I love about it," she says. "I like working in the fresh produce business, knowing that I play a small part in providing healthy, nutritious vegetables to the consumer. That is a good feeling."

In the future, Berlanga aims to continue to grow and innovate. "I want to keep learning more and creating innovative products to meet consumer demands," she says. "Eventually, I look to move up even more in the company."

She credits many great people at Ocean Mist who influenced her career and singles out Rosa and Ed Boutonnet. "Rosa has always been a steady rock," she says. "She is fair, giving and has core work ethics and values that I admire. I respect Ed for his strong balance, calm control, and perspective on the produce industry. He has taught me to see things in different ways and recognize the opportunities."

## Ed Bertaud, 40

**Director of Business Development  
IFCO (Pallet Management  
Services Division)  
Houston, TX**



Bertaud has served the industry for nearly 20 years, beginning in 1994 when he worked for Pallet Recycling Associates of North America. He became vice president and managing partner of Pallet Exchange Inc., in 1997, general manager with IFCO in 2000 and regional business development manager in 2008 before being named to his current position in 2011. That year, IFCO recognized Ed's exemplary perform-

ance with the IFCO "Hero of the Year Award" for top incremental revenue. Though he served many industries in his career, Bertaud has always been particularly focused on the needs of the produce industry.

He is known as an industry activist and for getting involved to help whenever possible. He has worked on numerous issues on the industry's behalf at the local, state and federal levels. Bertaud helped lead the Texas International Produce Association's (TIPA) evolution from the Texas Produce Association to its current focus on international trade and was also instrumental in driving the association's Border Issues Management Program.

He is currently chairman of the board of the Texas International Produce Association and previously served as vice chairman, secretary treasurer, and director-at-large for the same organization. He also serves as a member of the United Fresh Logistics & Supply Chain Council and the United Fresh North American Transportation Working Group. He was presented with the America Trades Produce Conference 2013 Rising Star Award.

In his community, Bertaud is active with America's Second Harvest, Feeding America, Wounded Warrior Project, North Texas Food Bank, South Texas Food Bank, Houston Food Bank, Ryan Palmer Foundation, and the Christian Fellowship Church. In 2011/2012, he worked with events to raise money for salad bars in Houston Schools.

The people in the produce industry are his greatest inspiration. "Many work in family-owned businesses, some with generations of history behind them, and none are averse to plenty of hard work," he says. "I grew up in a family-owned business and know that the lessons I learned during that time have been invaluable to me in my career."

In the future, Bertaud will strive to stay involved in key organizations. "I want to maintain the organizational relationships I have developed and further drive value to their memberships," he says.

He names John McClung of TIPA, Trent Bishop of Lone Star Citrus Growers in Mission, TX, Mike Martin of Rio Queen Citrus in Mission, TX, and Will Steele of Frontera Produce in Edinburg, TX, as the many mentors he has in the industry.

## Joseph Bunting, 36

**Produce Business Manager  
United Supermarkets  
Lubbock, TX**



Bunting practically grew up at United Supermarkets, celebrating his 20th year this past year and having worked as produce assistant manager, sacker, checker and stocker. After working the retail side of the business during school, Bunting was snatched to full-time employment by United on completion of his college education at Abilene Christian College. The company was in the infancy of building its self distribution, having left Fleming in 2000, and Bunting, along with Darvel Kirby and Tommy Wilkins, developed the procurement partnership lineup into one the company is proud of today.

In 2011, he moved into the Business Manager role, where he took the lead in data analysis, ad preparation, SKU analysis, and performance reporting. He is responsible for creatively driving sales and analyzing data to set retail pricing for all categories in produce.

In 2012, Bunting was named to the Southeast Produce Council Step Up Program and traveled the Southeast learning and building his company's partnerships. He serves on the Retail and Food Service Board of the United Fresh Produce Association, the Board of Directors of the Southeast Produce Council, and is active in the Produce Marketing Association. He has received numerous Positive Impact Awards from United Supermarkets for various activities, including creating guest solutions and achieving record sales.

He and his wife, Amiee, are very involved in raising their three children in a Christian environment as well as supporting them in many youth events. He helped in providing a BBQ dinner in appreciation for United's partners the night before its annual Charity Golf Event, hosting over 100 partners each year. He served the community through Meals On Wheels for the past seven years.

Bunting is motivated by the fast-paced environment of the industry. "Each day may seem basically the same but always presents a new

challenge of its own, which makes it fun," he says. "I have learned to be ready for change and depend on the partnerships we have to help us through tough situations. The people in the produce industry also motivate me. So many good people in the industry make the work enjoyable and fulfilling. I love visiting growers and seeing first-hand their passion for what they do."

In the next decade, Bunting's goal is to become the Produce Director for United. "Since I started at the bottom, I have gained valuable experience through the years that will help me lead in the future," he says. "The retail market has become increasingly competitive and for a small retail chain to survive, it will require leadership. My goal is to lead our produce department in this changing environment, as well as develop the next generation of leaders who will succeed me both at United and in the produce industry."

His mentors include United's Jacky Pierce, Darvel Kirby and Tommy Wilkins. "Jacky was a legend in our company," he explains. "He was instrumental in the development of our company and produce department with great passion and vision. He gave me a shot at a career in produce even though I lacked the experience at the time. Darvel is a great leader who leads by example. He has taught me do what is right and always keep our guests in mind with every decision we make. Tommy has taught me about the value of relationships in the produce business. He has helped me in my development as a buyer and a leader. His ability to cultivate and build relationships within the industry is admirable, and I strive to achieve this in my career as well."

## Michela Calabrese, 32

**Stakeholder Director  
Interrupcion Fair Trade  
Buenos Aires, Argentina**



Calabrese has been a pioneer in the organic/fair trade arena and a partner with Interrupcion in its Brooklyn, NY, office for eight years. As stakeholder



director at Interrupcion, she has taken a leadership position within the produce industry, helping to launch Taste Me Do Good fair trade and organic items with some of the largest retail and distribution organizations in the U.S. and Canada. These are key drivers of Interrupcion's growth over the past five years.

Calabrese came into the produce industry from the development world. She has a background in socio-economic empowerment strategies and experience working with The World Bank and UNICEF on numerous poverty alleviation plans. She educated hundreds of high-level management, produce personnel, and retail managers on the concept of fair trade and its necessity to any Corporate Social Responsibility plan. She assisted companies with strategies on how to convey this concept to shareholders, community stakeholders, and consumers in order to aid sell-through, build sales, and better align with positive brand image.

She was one of two sales people from 2005 to 2010 who assisted in growing company revenue tenfold and is now one of three sales people witnessing 100 percent growth year after year. She created and executed the company's Responsible Consumption Campaign, an in-store educational marketing program encouraging consumers to learn how their purchase has power. The campaign used food products as tools to educate and empower customers to make positive change in producing communities through the food they buy. This included training hundreds of "Agents of Social Change," who have "interrupted" hundreds of thousands of consumers at the point of sale in supermarkets across America.

Calabrese is inspired daily by the Interrupcion community. "We are joined by the common desire to build a better world through more productive and positive systems," she says. "We achieve results everyday through responsible consumption, sustainable community development, organic farming and fair trade processes. Our industry is becoming more and more relevant as we see growing obesity epidemics, hungry populations, food deserts and fewer opportunities to access capital and economic opportunity

for those most marginalized in society. Through innovation, strategic incentives and will-power, we can work together to solve collective problems."

Her future goals focus on expanding the reach of fair trade. "I want to increase the percentage of fair trade organic food in the marketplace, build consumer awareness and empower consumers," she explains. "I also want to increase access to healthy food for all (despite geography or social class) and raise the bar for the way food should be made by creating higher environmental and social standards necessary to compete in the produce industry. We are a stakeholder community because all those involved, from field laborers to consumers, have a stake in the success of the supply chain, and most importantly, benefit from its existence. I strive to help grow this community."

She names mentors Victor Savanello and Dean Holmquest of Allegiance/Foodtown in Iselin, NJ, Jim Whitler of Vernon Produce in Winston-Salem, NC, Terry Romp of Heinens in Cleveland, OH, and Dave Graf of Buehlers in Wooster, OH. "I will be forever grateful to these gentlemen," she says. "I entered the produce industry with no produce background. I learned lessons, often times the hard way, but frequently from friends such as these. I have had so many mentors in this industry, from close clients to colleagues to friends. They have given Interrupcion a chance and have guided me over the years."

**Lucinda B. Clark, 28**  
**Founder and CEO**  
**Space Girl Organics, Brewers**  
**Organics, and Georgia Girl**  
**Organics**  
**La Belle, MO**



Clark epitomizes the rags-to-riches story, going from living in a town of 600 on a struggling family farm to running multi-million dollar companies in three different states. She is a pioneer in the organic industry, traversing the nation and raising organic awareness, promoting and aiding small local farmers, and making high-quality organic fruits and vegetables

accessible to people across the U.S.

She is founder and CEO of Brewers Organics, Georgia Girl Organics and Space Girl Organics, home delivery services offering organic fruits and vegetables. The companies operate in Florida, Georgia, and Wisconsin. She is also the founder and former owner of Clark's Organic Market, Kansas City's original organic produce home delivery service, and Arch City Organics, St. Louis' original organic produce home delivery service.

Clark has leveraged technology to set up an online market place, removing the need for a traditional storefront, achieving less produce shrink, providing a market for local farmers and artisans, and ultimately offering organic produce at a reasonable price for consumers with the added convenience of delivery to their doorstep. She harnessed the power of communication and social media to connect with customers, building a sense of community by sharing stories from the fields, coordinating local events, and encouraging customers to blog on the company web site.

She created a logistics process to move product in and out of her warehouses within 24 to 48 hours, yielding less risk, since the produce has a home before it is out of the field. Clark's efforts resulted in farmers, wholesalers and brokers contacting her when they have produce that doesn't fit their traditional customers.

Clark took her business success beyond commercial borders. She implemented a successful item-of-the-week campaign to benefit the homeless. Customers may donate an item each week, such as toothbrushes or toothpaste, which the company picks up when the customer's delivery is dropped off. The items are then distributed to the homeless via local shelters in the market area. She also created a cooperative program allowing customers to pool their buying power to raise money for schools and charities.

She is motivated by the desire to help small farms find a marketplace for their produce and to help families gain access to high quality organic fruits and vegetables. "I grew up on a struggling family farm, so I know firsthand the challenges our farmer's face," she says. "The way I see it, more farmers in the U.S. do not choose to grow produce over

row crops because of economics and logistics. Farmers can't afford to take the risk of not being able to sell 100 percent of their yields. I want to change that. I am creating market food hubs for farmers to sell their products. I am trying to fix logistics so farmers can farm and people can eat."

Looking toward the future, she aspires to set up additional markets and to participate in more community involvement. "I want to find creative ways to help educate consumers and lend a helping hand to those in need," she says. "At this point, all of my businesses are in major metropolitan areas. In the future, I want to expand to more rural areas like my hometown in Missouri. I think everyone should have a choice, an option and availability of fresh foods."

Clark counts herself blessed to have been mentored along her journey by some of the best people in the industry. She specifically names Pat and Frank Gallo of Central Produce in Kansas City, MO, Rodney Scaman of Goodness Greenness in Chicago, IL, and Tom Stromolo of New York City Green Market. "Pat and Frank rented me my first warehouse space. They have been very generous with their knowledge of produce and how the industry works over the years," she explains. "Rodney has become not just a mentor but a friend. He generously made a special trip to Florida just to introduce me to farmers when I got started there. Although I only speak to Tom a few times a year, he is quite an inspiration and is always available to swap stories of how the industry really works."

**Marcus Isaac Cutler, 29**  
**Director of Field Operations**  
**Race-West Company**  
**Clarks Summit, PA**



Cutler is part of a fourth generation company established in 1973. He has been working in the produce business since 2005, but started learning about produce from trips he took with his father when he was a child. He would go through supermarkets and learn proper ways to stack and display produce.

He held many roles at the Race-West Company. He brings his knowledge in field practices of potatoes to the office, taking on the title of director of field operations. He used his degree from Syracuse University in engineering and computer science to revamp the company's computer systems. He also improved the company's efficiency in order-entering, invoicing, and inter-office networking. He sees himself as a steward of the 35-year-old business that his father built. He is committed to advancing the opportunities afforded by previous generations and building the business for future generations.

One of his most meaningful experiences in the industry occurred in January of 2007 with his father, Harris Cutler, and brothers, Geoffrey and Joseph. "We took a cross-country road trip from Clarks Summit to Seattle, WA, stopping to see customers and farms all along the way," he explains. "Once we arrived in Seattle, my father told me that he

was starting a new Produce University and that I was going to be the first graduate of the Harris Cutler Potato Grad School. I was then given instructions to visit as many potato and sweet potato sheds as possible between Washington and Pennsylvania. I ended up visiting over 45 sheds and packinghouses in Washington, Idaho, Colorado, Wisconsin, New York, North Carolina, Maine, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island."

From a very young age, Cutler has been involved with community service. For 13 years he helped lead services for all Jewish holidays at Elan Gardens, an assisted living facility in Clarks Summit, PA, and at the Jewish Home of Northeastern Pennsylvania. "During this time, I learned the true meaning of respecting one's elders through serving the elderly," he says.

One of his greatest inspirations in the industry is meeting and working with people who are excited about what they do. Cutler

considers himself privileged to work alongside his younger brother, Geoffrey. "We work together every day constantly feeding off of each other's energy," he says. "Geoff's level-headedness and business savvy helped me grasp higher concepts in the business."

His main future goal is to build upon the vision of his great grandfather, Philip Ball, his grandfather, Philip Cutler, and his father, Harris, to help distribute produce efficiently from the farm level to dining room table. "I want to focus on discovering new avenues for fresh produce for the company," he says. He plans on expanding his growing partners and continuing to develop the family business so that his children's children can serve the industry for generations to come.

His father is his greatest mentor in the industry. "His 35-plus years of experience helped me through many trying times in the business," he says. "He is responsible for teaching me

everything I know in business, and has groomed me for success. I'm grateful to be a part of one of the greatest success stories of a father and a son working together in business."

**Charlie J. DiMaggio, 37**  
President/ Owner  
FresCo LLC  
Bronx, NY



DiMaggio has been in the industry his entire life. As a child, he ventured to Hunts Point Market accompanying his father, Vincent, who had

retail stores in Manhattan and was a purveyor to fine restaurants. Upon adulthood, he worked with his father's retail business and in food-service for a while. However, feeling drawn to Hunts Point, he eventually took a position at another company as a floor salesman for M&R Tomato.

Two years ago, DiMaggio opened FresCo on the Hunts Point Market. It is



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the youngest company on the market, yet in an era where many terminal market businesses are closing doors, FresCo has experienced significant growth. Within two years, FresCo has grown to over 100 vendors and over 500 customers. Its import division started in Fall 2012 and already has a product range of over 25 different items from three different countries. In January 2013, DiMaggio led FresCo to create a foodservice division, which is reaching its stated goal of taking in no more than 15 and no less than 10 customers per month.

DiMaggio is involved in every aspect of FresCo on a daily basis. Within the first two years of creating the business, he taught himself how to be a buyer, create long lasting relationships, and be a principal of a vast company that branched out in many different areas of the industry. Fresco is well on its way to not just being a terminal market distributor, produce purveyor and importer but to one day expand into retail, develop exclusive product lines and broker.

DiMaggio works with many non-profit associations, such as City Harvest and Food Bank, and he serves on the board of the New York Produce Trade Association. He emphasizes the need for community involvement. "When I created FresCo, community was a key value for me," he explains. "From lowering the carbon footprint as much as possible to being directly involved in community programs, I wanted to ensure the company and I contributed back."

He has always been motivated by his strong passion for the industry and especially terminal market business. "It always intrigued me to go into Hunts Point Market with my father because of the hands-on action, the vast volumes of produce being distributed, and the endless amounts of knowledge there," he says. "This led to my dream of creating a company to serve the current needs of the industry but also to pioneer in the changing times coming ahead."

His father was his first mentor and he also credits his close friend and now partner, Sal Restivo, as an influence. "My father taught me the original basics about produce," he shares. "He always expected me to know more than what he would

teach. This kept me striving for more and cultivated the hope that one day I could succeed at building a business on my own. Sal Restivo may not have known much about the produce industry before joining us, but he taught me some fundamental values of business and I continue to value his input."

**Rebecca Eckblad, 35**  
**Director of Floral**  
**Roundy's Supermarkets**  
**Milwaukee, WI**



Rebecca Eckblad is known for her dedication, work ethic, and contagious passion and enthusiasm for the floral industry.

Her love of flowers was realized early on in her career, when first employed as a floral clerk during high school and a floral department manager through college. "It was in those positions that I decided working in retail and with flowers was more than a job to me; it was going to be a career."

In her seven years with Roundy's Supermarkets, a \$4 billion publically held company, Eckblad progressed from floral merchandiser to category manager to her current role as director of floral. She is currently responsible for the procurement, retail sales and merchandising of Roundy's high quality floral programs at 160 stores.

As director of floral, Eckblad developed and implemented several successful programs focused around driving floral sales with incremental units and creating excitement for the customers. Recently, she helped the company expand into the Chicago market with 10 new Mariano's stores, which have sparked a buzz in the industry. The floral program she directed in Mariano's can be considered a best-in-class in the country. Roundy's floral department and team at Mariano's Lakeshore location earned honors as Chicago's Top Ten Florists in 2012.

Eckblad completed the Master Gardener certification program and speaks at local garden clubs, educating flower enthusiasts on floral design, care and handling. Her competitive spirit shines in

**"...it takes just as much planning to build a million-dollar program as it does a thousand-dollar program."**

— Rebecca Eckblad,  
Roundy's Supermarkets

her after-work activities, coaching and playing on five softball teams, as well as playing in a volleyball and kickball league. She proudly reports having been a former University of Wisconsin Madison mascot Bucky Badger, only the second girl in school history to wear this coveted costume.

Eckblad's motivation to sell flowers is overwhelming. "Working with beautiful and amazing product is my inspiration," she says. "Creating programs that excite employees and customers is also inspiring, as is watching flowers travel from the farms through the supply chain in to the consumers' hands. Receiving complements at annual sales meetings from store directors who say they were most inspired by my floral presentation, or hearing floral managers repeat something I taught them provides the best daily motivation!"

Her ongoing goal is to maintain differentiated and unsurpassed floral programs in Roundy's markets, offering the freshest product at the best value. "Getting more flowers in more carts will forever be my goal. I hope to help the technologically-challenged floral industry more by fully integrating social media and digital communication into our floral marketing and to develop floral consumer insight," she says.

Kathy Hession, vice president of bakery and floral at Roundy's Supermarkets and Eckblad current supervisor, is a tremendous mentor in her career. "I admire how highly regarded she is in the industry and the respect she commands for floral in the grocery business," she explains. "Although floral may be a small percentage of total store sales, Kathy didn't allow me to feel small and reminds me that it takes just as much planning to build a million-dollar program as it does a thousand-dollar program. Build a great plan, and after that, it's just a matter of scale. Kathy taught me

the relentless pursuit of the best quality, the great value of loyal vendor partnerships, and how to build successful programs."

**Dan Ehrenstein, 31**  
**Vice President, Sales & Marketing**  
**Sunshine Bouquet Company**  
**Miami, FL**



Since taking over the responsibilities of sales and marketing almost four years ago, Ehrenstein helped double the size of

the company with respect to sales, employees and farms. Today it does over \$125 million in sales, has over 4,000 employees between the United States and Colombia, and over 700 acres of farms. This year's projections are for the company to grow and sell over 300 million stems of fresh-cut flowers.

Ehrenstein manages all of the sales efforts for the company. His responsibilities oversee sales to major national and regional supermarket chains across the country, including Kroger, Wal-Mart, Sam's Club, Safeway, Ahold, Food Lion and many other large retailers. His specific duties include pricing, marketing, product design and constantly traveling the country to visit customers and see how products perform at store level. He oversees and works with a great sales team of over 30 people.

He is inspired by the challenge of growing the floral category for each of the company's supermarket customers. "When compared to other mature manufacturing or farming industries, the floral industry in the U.S. is still relatively young and fragmented," he explains. "Just as the supermarket industry continues to mature and consolidate through mergers and acquisitions, so too will the floral industry, especially as it pertains to mass market retail sales. We have some fantastic growth opportunities in the future, and this keeps me excited and motivated every day."

His future goal is to increase floral consumption. "Through a combination of having the best quality, value and design, I want to help each of our customers double their fresh-cut flower sales over the next five to 10 years," he says.

His primary mentor throughout



his career has been John Simko, Sunshine Bouquet president. "He taught me a tremendous amount about sales, production, farming, strategy and human nature," Ehrenstein says. "Without his guidance and leadership, I most certainly would not have progressed both professionally and personally in life as quickly as I have. I have also learned a tremendous amount about retail from our customers, and how important a small number of details can be in making the difference between success and failure."

**Stiaan Engelbrecht, 36**  
**Managing Director**  
**Everseason**  
**Citrusdal, South Africa**



Engelbrecht holds several key positions for the South African citrus industry — any one of which might be enough for any one

person. He is managing director of Everseason, an export company he founded. He is responsible for the day-to-day running of the business and growing shareholders' equity. Under his leadership, Everseason has grown from 9,000 tons of export to 34,000 tons in 2012. The company serves markets around the world, including Europe, U.K., U.S.A., and Canada, nine countries in the Middle East, Asia and Russia.

He is also chairman and director of Icon Produce, a company he helped co-found. It was established to be one of South Africa's leading export companies to the Middle East. It trades in all fresh produce and has grown from 3,000 tons to 11,000 tons. Engelbrecht's responsibility currently with Icon Produce is to manage current clients, identify market trends and keep the clients on the cutting edge of those trends. Also, he is responsible for the fruit supply and assures that all suppliers can respond quickly to markets' demands. As chairman, he is responsible for financial operations.

Engelbrecht is a director of logistics company Freight Logistics4u, another company he co-founded. At the time the company was established, he managed the business side to develop shareholder agreements. As the company grew, he has managed expansion and profitability by selling shares and

expanding the supplier base. Currently, his focus is on negotiations with shipping lines and overseeing financial operations of the company. It has grown from 25,000 tons to 80,000 tons.

Recently, Engelbrecht was named director of Ocean South Fresh, one of the largest exporters to Russia. His role there is to structure the company so that it is able to handle larger volumes at better profit margins. Closer to home, he was recently elected to the board of Citrus Juices, the largest orange juice plant located in the Western Cape region of South Africa.

As a director for the Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF), Engelbrecht helps determine the direction of the successful and growing South African industry. His principal role is managing the finances of the WCCPF as well as serving on the operational committee of the WCCPF to manage the day-to-day operations of the export program to the United States.

His boyhood, as one of 10 children, was spent working on the family's sub-Saharan desert farm. Some 130 miles from the nearest town and 30 miles from the nearest neighbor, his family relied on a generator for electricity and bore holes to collect rain for water. He credits athletics, strong family ties, and long hours working on the farm and in a citrus packinghouse as key contributors to his leadership style and vision for South Africa's place in the world market.

He knew that he would one day become a business owner in South Africa. "I believe in the 10,000 hour rule — if you really want to make something work, you need to put a lot of time in," Engelbrecht says. "Through youth athletics, I learned how to win, lose and deal with injury — all factors in my management style. Then my early days in the packing industry taught me negotiating skills and a deeper understanding of people, collaboration and entrepreneurship."

In his current roles, Engelbrecht empowers his employees to see their roles and responsibilities in South Africa's economic future. "I know I can make a difference in the lives of 25 growers in Citrusdal who will again influence the lives of more than 1,000 workers and their families in Citrusdal," he said. "From here, it just spreads wider. The biggest difference you can

**"I believe in the 10,000 hour rule — if you really want to make something work, you need to put a lot of time in. Through youth athletics, I learned how to win, lose and deal with injury — all factors in my management style."**

— Stiaan Engelbrecht,  
Everseason

make is at home. Over the past 10 years, the real opportunities started for entrepreneurs and now, looking ahead, our children will make or break the future. We must grasp those opportunities, make them available to all, and make them secure."

He is inspired by and committed to his family and to building a better future for South Africa. "The minute you see making time for your family as a compromise you have missed the boat," he says. "That is why the Everseason offices close for lunch every day and all employees go home for lunch. Ten days of a holiday does not make up for one hour missed at the school play. I feel a great deal of responsibility working in the citrus industry. Citrus is by far the biggest fruit export commodity for South Africa. Our industry gives work to thousands of people in South Africa. We must remain informed individually and collectively, stay up to date with new trends and to drive and improve."

**Pamela A. Fierman, 31**  
**Vice President of Marketing & Business Development**  
**Fierman Produce Exchange, Inc.**  
**Hunts Point Terminal Market**  
**Bronx, NY**



Fierman entered the business as a fourth generation member of a 75-year-old company with high expectations. Though "born" into the business, her career didn't begin there. She first worked at the New York Mercantile

Exchange (NYMEX) for over four years before coming back to the family business. Drawing on her experience and drive, she helped the company achieve efficiencies on an expense side and push creativity in new business development ventures to add incremental revenue streams.

Her position in the company has evolved from the day-to-day operations to a far more strategic and comprehensive one. Realizing that inventory control and management had room for improvement, she pushed to create a new inventory system and implemented it into the everyday routine. She was effective in decreasing the loss of product and revenue due to lost, broken, and mis-picked items. Fierman's inventory includes over 500 SKU's. The new system allows for determining when produce is about to turn and it also integrates into product traceability.

On the business side, she started a new inside sales, business development venture that grew exponentially in the past six months. She put together a sales team to focus on untapped resources and increase the customer base. She successfully initiated the usage of social media, in all its forms, to further market products and services. On a daily basis, she updates customers with prices based on market, takes orders, and makes sure orders are placed properly and in a timely fashion. She is responsible for ensuring customers are satisfied with product, quality and pricing.

Fierman has also been instrumental in recommending new product lines both domestically and internationally to target a wider array of customers. She introduced a product line of produce snack items to the marketplace, looking to embrace a customer base in a society where healthy snacks are becoming more prevalent. Her newest venture is on the buying side of the business. She traveled to various growing regions to build relationships with shippers. She intends to utilize the knowledge and insight gained to improve handling and distribution of the various types of produce the company supplies.

She gained significant inspiration at the start from melding her experience at NYMEX with her Hunts Point work. "The parallels

between the two industries gave me the insight and knowledge I needed to thrive in a volatile market such as Hunts Point," she explains. "Upon my arrival here, I made it a point to learn every aspect of the business, from office work to selling on the street to buying product."

She continues to be motivated by new experiences. "Whether it's traveling to see shippers or attending different conferences, the experience I gain is monumental in achieving goals both professionally and personally," she states. "This year, I played an active part in setting up and working our company booth at the New York Produce Show. Following the show, I hosted a dinner for over 20 shippers, family and employees to attend. Through organizations such as City Harvest and hurricane relief funds for Sandy, I have seen the importance and benefits of being able to help and assist the community in need."

Her greatest mentor is her father, Joel Fierman. "None of what I've done would be possible without his guidance and support," she shares. "Being able to travel with him and

**"I made it a point to learn every aspect of the business, from office work to selling on the street to buying product."**

— Pamela A. Fierman,  
Fierman Produce Exchange, Inc.

learn from his experience has provided me with the foundation I needed to move forward and continue in a successful manner. He encourages me to attend the weekly PR meetings for the Hunts Point Market, which he chairs. It is not only important to be involved in my own organization but also the market as a whole. I hope to one day follow in his footsteps and become a member of the Co-Op Board. It is important to be instrumental in the decision-making process that not only affects my business but the market as a whole. My father's knowledge and passion for the business taught me how to be a respected leader in this industry and within our company."

**Chelsea Ariana Fiss, 29**  
Retail Program Manager, San Diego and Imperial Counties  
Network for a Healthy California,  
UC San Diego Center for Community Health, Division of Academic General Pediatrics, Child Development and Community Health  
San Diego, CA



In her current position, Fiss facilitates partnerships between neighborhood stores and community health agencies to help increase the consumption and purchase of fruits and vegetables among food-stamp-eligible Californians. Through Retail Program activities and promotions, retailers show their commitment to customers' health, which increases loyalty and even helps drive sales.

In 2011, Fiss took the lead on a local demonstration project funded by the Centers for Disease Control. The aim of the project was to bring fruits and vegetables to an urban

food desert, by placing fresh produce grown by local farmers in four corner stores within a redevelopment district of Western Chula Vista. The project required her to market and educate four local liquor store owners to parcel out a portion of their store's merchandising area for the sale of fruits and vegetables. The project was incredibly successful, as it demonstrated a significant portion of sales for the store owners and increased access to fresh produce for the local community. This project received the 2012 PRODUCE BUSINESS Marketing Excellence Award for the adaptation and implementation of the project.

With Fiss at the lead, this model is currently being used locally to guide more conversion projects to distribute local produce to diverse communities, including rural and Native American populations in coordination with San Diego County's "Building Better Health" long-term strategy.

As part of the Healthy Eating team on Kaiser Permanente's Lemon Grove Healthy Eating and

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Active Living (HEAL Zone) grant with Childhood Obesity Initiative, Fiss offers technical assistance and guides the group's efforts to increase healthy food access.

Last fall, she participated in two popular Food Day events. The first included over \$1,000 in donations for farmer-led market tours with professional chefs facilitating healthy recipe demonstrations to over 150 low-income elementary school students and their families plus free cookbooks and fresh produce give-a-ways. The second was the "San Diego Food Day School Passport Challenge". A co-led group effort that was recently selected by the Center for Science in the Public Interest as one of its top five most replicable Food Day models in the nation.

Fiss is inspired and challenged by the need for greater education on, and access to, healthy produce. "From a young age, I was taught the importance of caring for your body with healthy foods and exercise," she explains. "When I began working in the school system, and joined the kids for lunch, I took note of their eating habits, general low knowledge of produce, and lack of nutrition education. I realized that our food system is being driven by pop-culture. Things as simple as broccoli and blueberries were foreign to most of the kids. From that experience, I knew I wanted to be part of a group making systematic changes to support nutrition education through the consumption of fruits and vegetables."

Funding for projects is a difficult challenge. Fiss combated this issue by creatively introducing partners to leverage the capacity of projects and developing plans sensitive to a minimal budget. In 2012, she received one of 100 nationally awarded mini-grants from Share Our Strength Shopping Matters to conduct store tours to low-income and Women Infant and Children (WIC) eligible families. In March of 2013, she obtained over \$4,000 in produce and material donations enabling network programs and projects to function at their highest potential while making a difference in the lives of low-income San Diegans. "My approach to business partnerships has significantly enhanced the services offered to our low-income audience," she relates.

One of Fiss's current project

**"Our food system is being driven by pop-culture. Things as simple as broccoli and blueberries were foreign to most of the kids. From that experience, I knew I wanted to be part of a group making systematic changes to support nutrition education through the consumption of fruits and vegetables."**

— Chelsea Ariana Fiss,

San Diego and Imperial Counties Network for a healthy California

goals is a design to improve the local economy through the sale of local produce by joining farmers, community, retailers and nutrition education. "As the creative designer of the concept, I am collaborating with colleagues to create the San Diego Harvest of the Month Calendar Initiative. This is a comprehensive toolkit of resources and curriculum for multiple venues and community organizations based on San Diego's local harvest."

Her mentors include San Diego's local growers, farmers' market managers and retail owners and managers who are on the forefront of changing communities through produce sales and nutrition education. She also credits Larry Brucia of Sutti & Associates and co-workers Blanca Melendrez and Michelle Zive. "Larry has contributed technical assistance and consulting on projects. I value his insight, stories and guidelines for success. My supervisors Blanca and Michelle saw that my diverse experience was a great foundation to improve our community and help create a food system for San Diegans — particularly low-income families."

**Dean G. Gibson, 40**  
Controller  
Magic Valley Produce  
Paul, ID



Gibson owns and operates a successful grower/shipper operation along with his brother, Jeff. Since joining Magic Valley Produce in 1999, the size of the family farming operation has more than doubled. Magic Valley grows and packs Idaho Potatoes as well as grows grains and hay. Gibson has experience in other related businesses directly involving the potato and produce industry, including a custom application busi-

ness and a logistics company.

Graduating with an MBA from Idaho State University, he worked in public accounting before starting his career in the produce business at Magic Valley Produce as the Controller.

Gibson has been a board member with the Idaho Grower Shippers Association (IGSA) for six years, the National Potato Council (NPC) for five years, the Idaho Eastern Oregon Potato Committee (IEOPC) for six years, and the Magic Valley Ground Water District for several years. He served as Chairman of the IGSA during the 2011/2012 packing year and on the executive committee of the IEOPC for the past two years. He often takes on additional tasks such as being chairman of the annual IGSA convention. He participated in the Potato Industry Leadership Institute in 2007 and the Business of Potatoes Leadership Program sponsored by Syngenta in 2005.

Gibson's involvement in community activities led Magic Valley Produce to become a leader in supplying potatoes to the Idaho Food Bank and other Food Kitchens around the State of Idaho. He, his wife Renee, and his two boys are volunteers at the Mini-Cassia Christmas Council, providing gift baskets of food and Christmas gifts for needy families in the area during the holiday season. He is also a member of the Rotary Club, an international charitable organization.

Gibson is a third generation family member of the business and is inspired by his family's commitment to the Idaho Potato industry and their business. "The produce industry is a challenge, even in the good times, but working with family toward the common goal of producing a quality product and running a sustainable business is rewarding," he says. "I am motivated to ensure that my children

are given the opportunity to join the family business."

In the future, Gibson is interested in serving as a commissioner on the Idaho Potato Commission and on the U.S. Potato Board. "Both organizations' missions are to promote potato consumption in the United States and internationally," he says. "Each organization is instrumental in the continued success of the potato industry. I'd also like to become more involved in the National Potato Council. What they do is important, especially their ability to shape the regulatory and political environment in which we operate."

Gibson was mentored by his family, especially his grandparents, Costa and Ruth Delis, who founded Magic Valley in 1965. "Their dedication to the produce industry and their family business has always been evident," he says. "I always admired the hard work and determination they had in building the business and the values they instilled in their children. The entire family worked to make the business a success."

Dave Beesley of Snake River Plains Potatoes in Idaho Falls, ID, is another mentor. "While working with Dave on the IGSA board of directors, I always admired his intellect, wit and overall understanding of the potato industry," he says. "He has become a very good friend as well as a colleague in the produce business."

**David M. Hahn, 34**  
Director of Procurement  
Four Seasons Produce, Inc  
Ephrata, PA



Hahn began his buying career with Four Seasons in 1998. He was an intern while attending Millersville University.

His responsibilities included watermelon buying as well as focusing on the company's locally grown program, which at the time was in its infancy. In 2002, after four successful summer seasons, he took a full time position in buying value-added products. Over the years, he worked with a multitude of commodities including watermelons, cantaloupes, eastern and western vegetables, tomatoes and fall ornamentals.

Hahn has been instrumental in the success of Four Seasons' locally grown program. Its grower network saw extraordinary growth over the past couple years. Hahn personally takes time each year to meet with the growers to review the current year as well as plan for the upcoming season. In 2008, he initiated a major change in the company's tomato program. Leading an internal team, he designed and developed a new label, "Chubby Cheeks," now the tomato program label. He began working with growers in Florida and Pennsylvania to have the label packed at source. This change alone eliminated a significant amount of shrink, and ultimately improved the overall profitability of the program.

In 2009, he was elected to be on the Board of Directors with the Ephrata Public Library, including a stint as treasurer in 2011 and 2012.

Working directly with small growers within the community inspires him. "I believe it is critical to support our local economy, and knowing that you play such a vital role in their overall success is humbling," he says. "Food Safety has become crucial in the produce business, and it's much harder for smaller growers to stay in tune with new laws, or the demands, by large retailers or wholesalers. I've addressed this challenge head on. This year we provided all our local growers with the opportunity to join us at a Food Safety Seminar led by the Penn State Extension. Our goal is to support all of our growers in developing their Food Safety Plan and work at becoming GAP-certified for the upcoming 2013 season."

In the future, he hopes to focus on organics. "I hope to have the opportunity to expand our grower base by adding new organic growers to our locally grown program," he says. "This is definitely a top priority."

Hahn names Rick Stauffer of Seminole Produce Distributing in Sanford, FL, and Jason Hollinger at Four Seasons as mentors. "Rick was my direct supervisor throughout my summer internships and through 2005," he explains. "Rick always stressed the importance of having good information, but more importantly, how to act on it. I worked for Jason for the past three years, and he has been an excellent coach. He knew the right questions to ask,

which allowed me to make my own decisions, whether they were right or wrong. He had the confidence in me that while my decision might have been wrong, I'd ultimately learn from the results. His passion for success was evident as he initiated quarterly one-on-one meetings, set goals, and challenged us to achieve them."

**Alberto Harfush, 37**  
**Produce Director**  
**Wal-Mart Stores Inc.**  
**Bentonville, AR**



Harfush is known for his passion for selling produce and growing categories as well as his ability to leverage the expertise of growers to the benefit and advantage of his work. He is strategic in his thinking and makes time for joint business planning with suppliers. He is innovative and challenges his vendors to strive for the same goal. He is always looking for ways to improve his operation and drive sales.

He is responsible for major orchard categories such as apples, citrus and stone fruit, and manages billions in produce sales for his organization. As director and CTL (Category Team Leader) responsible for citrus, apples and pears for Wal-Mart U.S., he coordinates sourcing, planning, replenishment and merchandising teams to ensure the operation provides fresh produce at low prices to customers.

Harfush has brought together every piece of the company's cross-functional team with one common goal in mind: to save consumers' money so they can live better. When last year's regional apple crop was decimated by weather events, he provided direction for specific partnerships that needed to be in place to keep local growers relevant for as long as possible while having transition plans to service all customers without interruption. By mitigating the expected heavy inflation on last year's apple category, the company increased the velocity of its apples and volume growth close to double digits on a very mature category.

In citrus, he shared the strategy of capturing a disproportionate amount of volume while main-

taining low prices for customers allowing his team to capitalize on growing categories like clementines. He partnered with one of the biggest domestic growers in California, which provided invaluable input about the crop. He then connected with leadership on the operations side of the business to promote citrus at store level with no historical precedent, showing consistent double-digit growth for the duration of the season in both dollars and volume. In the month of December 2012 alone, the company doubled volume compared to the previous year.

While many in his position would develop an ego, Harfush is known for his humility and is said to exemplify Sam Walton's credo for respect for the individual. He is interested in giving back to the produce community. As of November 2012, Harfush became a member of the PMA's PLU Assignment Committee. He also supports the company's community and charity initiatives on a regular basis.

He has been inspired by passionate people with strong beliefs and vision. "I have been blessed to come across a lot of industry leaders matching this description," he says. "One challenging aspect of our industry is the duality of the here-and-now versus building-future-business. We have found that a healthy combination of both is required while always staying open to learn. Learning is something our industry provides on a daily basis."

In the future, Harfush aspires to even better tune the relationship between demand and supply. "I feel passionate about the dynamic nature of our industry," he explains. "I strive for a better understanding of our crops and demographics so we can provide the right combination of produce attributes to our broad customer base and provide all growers equal growth opportunities. Clear and open communication is crucial."

He credits Ignacio Cifuentes in Wal-Mart's Global Food Sourcing in Santiago, Chile, as a significant mentor, as well as other suppliers he's worked with during his career. "All of our apple, pear and citrus growers have been important to my development," he says. "Their guidance and patience have been invaluable."

**Joshua Knox, 37**  
**Strategic Category**  
**Manager - Melons**  
**C.H. Robinson**  
**Eden Prairie, MN**



Working out of Davis, CA, Knox is in his 13th year at C.H. Robinson. He is known for his passion around developing relationships and processes that result in improved flow from the grower to the customer.

Knox played an integral part in the development of C.H. Robinson's Pink Ribbon Watermelon Program in 2007. Launched then with one customer and a minimal donation to breast cancer research, the program today involves retailers across the United States and Canada to bring Pink Ribbon to their stores. This resulted in over \$680,000 donated to local breast cancer research. Not only has this program had a positive financial impact to breast cancer research, but it has helped educate consumers on the healthy benefit of watermelons.

In addition to his development of the Pink Ribbon Watermelon program, Knox is very involved with mentoring employees. Supervisors and co-workers credit him for looking at the business through a different lens and seeing the bigger picture via his mentoring activities. Knox is constantly challenging fellow employees on a daily basis, and also guides them through difficult times.

His main inspiration comes from his family. "I want to teach my children the fundamentals that hard work pays off and nothing comes for free," he explains. "I want to make sure my daughters grow up with a great work ethic, ability to build relationships, to take pride and responsibility in what they do, and understand where our food comes from. Besides my family, I'm deeply motivated by innovation. Although the products we bring to market are centuries old, I enjoy working to find the next generation of seed, packaging and ultimately improving our supply chain."

His future goal is to be a part of the development of the next set of leaders within the produce industry. "This is a very challenging

business, and in order to have a sustainable career, you need to surround yourself with good people who push you but also guide you," he says. "I'm always striving to improve supply chains and grow business, but ultimately, the legacy I want to leave behind is the development of others."

His mentors have been the different teams he's been a part of in his CHR career. "I've been surrounded by new and tenured employees who view our business through different lenses, which always challenges status quo," he states. "This diverse group of people makes sure you are constantly improving yourself to ensure you are challenging them on a daily basis, but also be there to guide them through difficult times."

**Victor A. Lopez, 39**  
General Manager  
West Coast Tomato Growers, LLC  
Oceanside, CA



Lopez is known as a young enthusiastic entrepreneurial spirit with a successful career track in the produce and seed industries in both the U.S. and Mexico. After graduating from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo in 1997, where he also completed an internship with Pybas Vegetable Seeds of Santa Maria, CA, he was recruited by Keithly Williams Seeds of Holtville, CA. In 2000, he finished his Masters in International Business from National University in La Jolla, CA. During his 10-plus years in the vegetable seed industry, Lopez excelled in seed variety evaluations, basing them on key factors like shelf life, uniformity and marketability.

His experience and education formed his vision of the future for the industry. He realized the need for a seed distributor to invoice and deliver directly in Mexico. His vision led to the creation of Keithly Williams de Mexico. As co-manager, he helped with intense product development and sales resulting in tremendous growth in less than a year.

In 2002 Lopez left KW to start Integro Seeds S de RL, where as a partner he succeeded in making several seed varieties standard in the industry. This success attracted

other investments, and in 2004 Gowan Semillas SA de CV, part of Gowan Group LLC, was founded. He became the general manager for the new partnership and drove the company to a full line of distribution in Mexico.

In 2008, he transitioned directly into the produce industry, supplying peppers for fresh and processing markets. He concentrated on developing relationships and evolving to supply an array of produce (including peppers, tomatoes, onions, papayas, watermelon, and oriental vegetables) and working in the different markets of Nogales, San Diego, Phoenix and Los Angeles. Now as GM at West Coast Tomato Growers, one of the industry's largest vine-ripe tomato growing operations, he is meeting new challenges head-on. He assists in cost analysis and reviewing projects for special packing and value added from a production, financial, marketing and logistical point.

Lopez lists many angles the industry has to face as a particular challenge. Lopez explains, "From governmental compliance, to industry compliance, food safety, workers' comp, transportation, and more, we face multiple hurdles. I see the business as a whole system. All parts must work to succeed. From the many hats that I have worn in my career, I have always tried to help close the gap between field, grower, distributor and final consumer."

In the future, Lopez plans to become more involved in the different agencies so that he can be an active force and voice in the industry. "The produce industry is challenged directly with issues concerning agriculture," he states. "Having hands-on experience will be beneficial, and as a member of the various organizations representing our industry, I would be able to present firsthand experience on relevant issues and help to make a difference."

His mentors include Harry Singh Jr. and Dick Keim of West Coast Tomato Growers, Greg Emi Muranaka of Muranaka Farm in Moorpark, CA, and Kelly Keithly of Keithly Williams Seeds in Holtville, CA. "Mr. Singh inspires me with his persistence in the industry, facing challenges, and an unyielding focus to his goal and vision," he shares. "I admire Dick's strong mind and

purpose. I learned from Greg the power of patience and good planning. Mr. Keithly is always an inspiration for his gentle firmness, common sense, and long term perspective. I learned from him to 'walk the talk'."

**Omar Losolla, 37**  
Sales Manager  
SunFed  
Rio Rico, AZ



Losolla is credited by associates as being an extremely bright and charismatic individual who is able to make tough calls and balance the needs of all with a smile on his face. In his short time with SunFed, he rose through the ranks to occupy a heavy load of responsibility for the company.

In his current position, Losolla advances prices to all retail/chain store customers on all commodities. He is responsible for product allocation, handling all the eastern wholesale terminal markets, and handling Canadian retail customers. He advises all commodity managers to set daily pricing on commodities, manages and schedules product ad commitments, and gives direction to the packing shed as far as what needs to be packed on a daily basis. He manages sales department personnel and the timely and proper sale of all commodities.

He started his career as an inspector for the Department of Agriculture in Arizona in 1997/1998. Then he was hired by Wilson Batiz to do Quality Control in the warehouse in 1998 and worked there until 2005, also handling its Food Safety program and Food Security program. He played a key role in getting the company CTPAT-certified. In 2005, he left Wilson Batiz to work for Coastal Marketing Service out of Fort Myers, FL. In 2010, he left Coastal and was hired by SunFed as an FOB salesman. Just one short year after his debut with SunFed, he was promoted to the sales manager position.

He has been coaching coed soccer in the AYSO soccer league for the past two years and was involved in coaching little league baseball in Rio Rico, AZ. He is extremely active in his church, First

Baptist Church of Nogales, where he serves as a Deacon and has been a Sunday School teacher for the past five years. He works closely with middle school boys and girls, mentoring them and providing a positive role model. He is involved in a ministry that takes food and other much-needed supplies, such as clothes, hygiene products, school supplies, etc., to the mostly indigenous workers of the greenhouse industry in Imuris, Sonora, Mexico.

Losolla is inspired by the people in the industry. "I have had the honor to meet, work and trade with wonderful people," he says. "I'm challenged to be the best at what I do and to perform at the highest level every day. It's about never settling for doing just enough to get by but going far and above the call of duty to help maintain the company I represent as a major leader in the industry."

In the future, Losolla intends to continue in the sales/management side of the business. "I enjoy getting into the trenches and getting things done," he explains. "I definitely want to be part of something that is unique, regardless if it belongs to me or not. I always want to be associated with something that is known for being top of its class. I also believe that longevity and consistency are the mark of individuals who do things right. I would be honored to perform at a high level for the next 30 years just to walk in the path of other great produce people, nurturing friendships and building relationships with other great individuals."

He names Rudy Batiz of Frank Donio, Charles Fox of Coastal Marketing Service and SunFed's Danny Mandel as mentors. "Rudy gave me my first job in the produce business and was always there to give me great advice in critical time of my career," he shares. "Charles has been one of the most important men in my life. He was a father figure and modeled the most important aspects of the business for me. He was extremely encouraging and loving. He cared about my family and me in a sincere and special way. He recently passed away in 2012, and I greatly miss him. Danny has been key in shaping and instilling in me a mindset of excellence and a clear vision. Having built a very successful company, he embodies the characteristics of a person who never



settles for mediocrity but is always striving to be the best at what he does. He has a relentless work ethic, always thinking a step ahead of the competition."

**Scott Mabs, 39**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Homegrown Organic Farms  
Porterville, CA



Mabs was hired by Homegrown Organic Farms six years ago as director of sales and marketing. Since that time, he

orchestrated and led numerous changes to redefine what the company is and how it operates. During his tenure, he changed the name of the company and the branding of all items from Sierra Heights Marketing to Homegrown Organic Farms.

He changed the company culture from individualistic to team-oriented through the example of service-based leadership. He replaced over half of the staff with team members who support the new culture and vision for the future. He doubled the sales of the company during his time there and transitioned the customer base from 30 percent retail business and 70 percent wholesale business to 75 percent retail business and 25 percent wholesale business.

Mabs implemented a quality control program with the utilization of iPad applications and technology to create real time quality control data throughout the organization. He consulted with Suntreat Packing on the development of Sumo Citrus in the U.S. market and helped make Homegrown the exclusive supplier of Organic Sumo Citrus. He launched a new marketing campaign focused on making the company's growers into superstars with the people who buy their product. This included the release of a new web site, grower videos and biographies, and the development of Facebook and Twitter pages.

He is an active part of the industry and has participated in organic citrus round table discussions at the Citrus Research Board Annual Conference. He is a former alternate board member on the California Blueberry Commission and a member of the ACP Organic Industry Task Force, seeking to find

**"Simply, I want the organic produce industry to double in size over the next five years. Sustained, consistent growth is what is needed for more people to have access to organic produce. The produce industry must stay relevant to the consumer base it serves."**

— Scott Mabs,  
Homegrown Organic Farms

solutions for organic citrus growers dealing with the Asian Citrus Psyllid in California. He worked two years for the California Citrus Mutual, a grower-based advocacy association dealing with the industry issues that affect growers in California.

In his community, Mabs is an active in his church's youth ministry, small group and worship ministries. He led a seminar for the Ag Pathways Program, which helps local high school students understand opportunities that exist through choosing a career in agriculture.

He is inspired by the dynamic nature and the people of the produce industry. "The produce industry is best summed up with one word – perishable," he says. "It shapes and influences our business in so many ways. The culture and fabric of why our industry does what it does is based in this reality. Once you understand this, the pieces that don't seem to make sense in our industry begin to come together. Anyone who has spent many years in the produce industry can't help but be inspired by the people who make up who we are. So much of our industry is founded on the values of families and relationships based on a hand shake — TRUST!"

His future goals are both simple and complex. "Simply, I want the organic produce industry to double in size over the next five years," he explains. "Sustained, consistent growth is what is needed for more people to have access to organic produce. The produce industry must

stay relevant to the consumer base it serves. Homegrown will continue to tell the farmer's story despite the challenges. It is about the growers and we must not forget that."

Mabs credits his grandfather, the late Gordon Keith Patterson, who served as CEO of Early California Foods in Lindsay, CA, and his father, Don Mabs of AgriCare in Strathmore, CA, as providing exemplary mentorship. "My dad has been an incredible example of excellence in growing crops and caring deeply for the people who work for him," he shares. "I have never questioned his integrity in business and relationships. My grandfather was an amazing man who touched the lives of many. His legacy lives on through our farming generation."

He also names Tom Avinelis of AgriCare in Strathmore, CA, John France of Homegrown Organic Farms in Porterville, CA, and Vern Peterson of Peterson Family Farms in Kingsburg, CA, as mentors.

**Anton J. Marano, 38**  
Vice President Sales  
Anthony Marano Company  
Chicago, IL



Marano grew up in his family's fresh fruit and vegetable distribution company founded by his grandfather 60 years ago. He joined the company full time in 1997 after graduating Loyola University Chicago with a Bachelors Degree in Business Finance. Prior to taking on leadership responsibilities, he learned every job in the company, including packing tomatoes, pulling orders, driving customer deliveries and selling.

The hallmark of Marano's work is his mastery of information technology and promoting its use throughout the organization. A decade ago, every sales order was handwritten and inventory was kept on a paper ledger. Since then, he has promoted sales and fulfillment automation and directed the design, definition and implementation of robust custom software solutions. The entire process has been refined with the introduction of real-time inventory and immediate customer feedback.

He led a core team to address software requirements and modi-

fied the priorities of sales staff, maximizing benefits to the company. He expanded and led various business process improvements over the past few years. Using best practice management techniques, in conjunction with information technology, he redesigned operational processes throughout the company. This has included staffing and succession planning. As the company has grown, Marano resisted growing the organization in a linear way. Instead, he imbedded himself for months at a time in targeted departments to plan the right hires through a review of work flow.

Marano notes the complexity of working with family when leading business process improvements as well as the challenge of responding to a fast-paced industry. "Not only do I encounter the common, 'We've always done it this way' response to change, but I also have to negotiate and compromise with family members who've known me my entire life," he explains. "The world of fresh produce moves at light speed compared to any other enterprise. Balancing customer needs and vendor relations, in a competitive market like Chicago, requires 100 percent focus on the pace of business."

He actively supports the Chicago Food Depository with donated fruits and vegetables. "This charity distributes 64 million pounds of food, including more than 21 million pounds of produce, to 650 pantries, soup kitchens and shelters in Cook County," he says.

His future goal for the produce industry is developing better packaging solutions for customers. "Emerging food traceability requirements as well as convenience attributes are challenges answered by well designed solutions," he suggests. "The ideal container protects the product as well as enables effective labeling. The challenge is ensuring consistent product quality."

Marano is inspired and mentored by the work ethic of his family. "My father has been my mentor in life and business," he relates. "Sometimes his advice is unsolicited, but I never felt ignored. Fresh produce distribution is not an industry you can learn in a book. The relationships and business knowledge is passed on from one generation to the next."

**Antonia Mascari, 31**  
Marketing Manager  
Indianapolis Fruit Company  
Indianapolis, IN



Mascari is known as a self-directed, articulate, and enthusiastic young woman who brings a freshness and passion to the industry. She was raised in the industry. Throughout her teen years and college, she often worked in various roles at Piazza Produce and its parent company, Indianapolis Fruit. Mascari joined the company on a full-time basis over three years ago in the foodservice division of Piazza Produce as a sales and marketing consultant. After a few years on the foodservice side, she was promoted to her current position as marketing manager for Indianapolis Fruit Company.

As marketing manager, Mascari is responsible for establishing marketing goals to ensure profitability of products and services. Since starting with Indianapolis Fruit, she has successfully revamped its advertising efforts through the development and execution of a new marketing plan. By doing so, she has played an instrumental role in improving customer relationships. She has also worked on various committees and projects to shape the future direction at Indianapolis Fruit Company.

Mascari currently resides on the United Fresh Nutrition and Health Council, where she channels her personal interest in combating childhood obesity and increasing nutritional awareness. In her community, she has served as a mentor to young girls as a basketball coach. She has actively raised money and volunteered at Handi-Capable Hands, Inc., and the local Italian Street Festival Fundraiser.

She is inspired by her peers and the by industry's dedication to increase produce consumption while promoting health and nutrition to adults and children. "I couldn't see myself working in any other industry," she says. "I am challenged by the complexity of marketing the vast array of our produce offerings, including perishability, unpredictability, consumer demands and progressive marketing tools. I enjoy the chal-

lenge and opportunity of educating customers on how to incorporate our offerings and make their department a produce destination."

**"It's important to nurture young, intelligent and determined people for future growth. Our industry is ever-changing, and if you don't evolve to meet these changes, you will ultimately fail."**

— Antonia Mascari,  
Indianapolis Fruit Company

Her future goal is to continue cultivating the family business with other young family members. "It's important to nurture young, intelligent and determined people for future growth," she says. "Our industry is ever-changing, and if you don't evolve to meet these changes, you will ultimately fail. It is my goal, along with future generations, to carry on a successful legacy — not only to grow our company but to shape the future of our industry."

Mascari notes having had many influential mentors preparing her throughout the years, but particularly mentions her father, Michael Mascari, president of Indianapolis Fruit, and Lisa McNeece of Grimmway Farms in Bakersfield, CA. "Since I was a young girl, I always knew I wanted to be a part of the family business," she explains. "I saw the dedication from my father at an early age and the importance of hard work, dedication, honesty and integrity. When I think of key leadership skills, I put his name next to each. Lisa McNeece is an impeccable example and role model for younger members of the industry, especially women. She truly cares about others and shows this by the time she spends mentoring young people. Her high level of involvement in a multitude of industry boards and committees demonstrates her dedication to spreading the word of fresh produce."

**Raquel Mello, 32**  
Sales Manager  
Hapco Farms  
Riverhead, NY



Mello started her produce career with Ahold in 2003. As a produce buyer for Stop & Shop, she oversaw the citrus, apple/pear, tropicals and watermelon categories. She quickly excelled at learning the importance of working closely with growers and anticipating consumer demand. In 2010, she left the procurement side to switch to strawberry and watermelon sales, joining Hapco Farms. Over the past two years, she and her team have grown Hapco's business significantly.

Mello is inspired by the exciting and challenging nature of the produce industry. "We are challenged daily with availability affected by weather, increasing fuel costs and seasonal demands, but it's these challenges that make my job and our industry so fulfilling," she explains. "I'm inspired when faced with these challenges and being able to still provide my customers with exceptional service. There's no better feeling than overcoming these daily obstacles and having quality fruit delivered to our retailers."

In the future, Mello looks forward to partnering with new growers. "I want to build commodity sales under the Fresh From the Start label," she reports. "Having the ability to build a program from the ground up is a great feeling, and I look forward to adding acreage thus increasing sales for new commodities over the next few years."

She notes particular mentors she worked with early in her career including Dominic D'Antuono and Gary Kosofsky from Stop&Shop in Freetown, MA. "Under their tutelage, I was able to build on my procurement and industry knowledge," she relates. "Since working with Hapco Farms, I have had the benefit of learning the other side of the business from Eric Scannelli, who has 20-plus years on the sales desk. I have been able to gain an immense amount of guidance in sales. Each of these gentlemen has instilled in me the importance of

communication and customer service. They have constantly reminded me how building relationships is key. Whether we are working with growers, truckers, buyers or consumers, we need to be diligent in our communication and service."

**Luke Miller, 28**  
Regional Sales Manager  
Value Added/Business Development Manager Value Added  
Litehouse Foods  
Sandpoint, ID



Miller's understanding of multiple aspects of the value-added channel and his ability to participate across various disciplines has been instrumental in the healthy growth of Litehouse's business within the produce industry. At Litehouse, he assists in numerous responsibilities, ranging from internal margin management to marketing to project management to business development. His role has been cross functional within the company's internal team and touches all aspect of the business.

During his career at Litehouse, one of Miller's greatest accomplishments was launching the company's Varietal Apple Cider into the produce department. This product line added excitement to the produce department and displayed how important innovation is at Litehouse. The seasonal line peaked at over \$12 million in just two years' time and has been in high demand ever since.

In his role as a regional sales manager in value-added channels, he has been able to integrate marketing flavor trends in Litehouse items offered to value-added partners. He has also made strong flavor recommendations that have proven successful and have helped grow the total produce category.

Soccer has been a passion of Miller's since he was five years old, and he was part of the varsity soccer program at Gonzaga University during his studies. "Through the years, I developed a lot of knowledge and skill around the sport," he relates. "This has allowed me to give back and coach in the small community of Sandpoint, Idaho. I've coached ages 10 through high

school and really enjoy being a part of something that meant so much to me growing up."

The people at Litehouse are an inspiration to Miller. "Being an employee-owned company, everyone takes so much pride in their day-to-day work," he says. "Hearing from Edward and Doug Hawkins is so inspiring. They are full of passion for the company and are really a true 'rags to riches' type story. The quality of our products and the pride we take in our customer service is inspirational to me. Not only does it make it fun to work for a company that values these things, but it makes it a place I hope to stay at for a long time."

A future goal for Miller is to grow his knowledge and experience at Litehouse and in the produce industry. "I want to continue to be an asset to the company and contribute everything I can to make the company an even bigger success," he says. "I want to be a leader in the company and make sure it is successful to give back to the employees as it is an ESOP (employee stock ownership program) company. Their families rely on Litehouse, and I want to make sure I can be a positive piece in growing the business to further success."

Miller names Allen Wright, a Board Member and long-time employee at Litehouse, as an influential mentor. "He is the one who inspired me to get into the sales side of the business," Miller states. "He has always had great advice and has generously shared his experiences with me, something I value and appreciate."

**Lynn Perry, 34**  
**Procurement Manager**  
**Ahold USA**  
**Carlisle, PA**



Perry manages and oversees the procurement of several produce categories, including apples, pears, watermelons, dried fruit, peanuts/pistachios/nuts and organic packaged salads. She manages ordering, code-date tracking, and logistical information to ensure shipments for all Ahold USA retail divisions. She is responsible for

cost negotiation, price and overall inventory management in these categories. She is directly accountable for cost of goods to ensure overall financial goals, manage service levels, and maximize inventory turns to optimize working capital.

Perry develops strong vendor partnerships to ensure fresh, quality product is being sourced at all times. She works closely with the sales and merchandising team on pricing, promotions, merchandising and seasonal changes. She ensures that the stores receive product on time to satisfy customers and is considered an asset to the produce team by co-workers.

After graduating from Bentley College, she worked at Stop & Shop in 2003 as a coordinator in the logistics department. In 2004, she transitioned to the meat procurement department as an administrative assistant. Shortly after that had the opportunity to become an assistant produce buyer. In 2010, Perry was promoted to procurement manager during the transition of the buying offices to Carlisle, PA.

While working in Freetown, MA, at the Stop & Shop Distribution Center, she was part of a small group that organized charity events in the community, helping children, seniors and those in need of winter coats, Thanksgiving dinners, food and Toys for Tots. She played an active role in organizing office sample sales to raise money to support the community. In the five years that she was part of the group, they were able to donate over \$70,000 to the community.

The produce industry and the associates she works with inspire her on a regular basis. "Our focus is making sure customers have what they need, when they need it. When it comes to produce, I find the pace and ever-changing variables to be two of the most fascinating and challenging things about the business. I enjoy the daily challenges that have a direct effect on the end user. I continuously look for new and innovative items that ensure a lasting relationship between our produce items and our customers."

Her future goals include growing her knowledge of the industry. "I want to expand the variety of commodities I am responsible for procuring and broaden my knowledge of the merchandising side of

the business," she says. "I hope to eventually have a well-rounded understanding of both procurement and merchandising that allows me to make a difference in the customer shopping experience."

She notes having had the privilege to learn from some of the best people in the industry. She specifically names Domenic D'Antuono, Gary Kosofsky and Doug Williams of Stop & Shop, as well as several Ahold associates. "Domenic's, Gary's and Doug's years of experience, commitment and high level of integrity still motivate me on a daily basis," she shares. "In my recent years at Ahold, I have looked to Brian Fleming and David Lessard as mentors in my current position as a procurement manager. Brian guides and supports my decision-making by allowing me the freedom to come to solutions to the daily challenges. He encourages all of us to work together as a team and support our corporate initiatives collectively. David demonstrates dedication to consumer trends by creating and executing strategic, result-driven merchandising plans. Dave's high energy management style keeps the entire office on task. One of his best motivational quotes is 'You can't steal second with your foot on first'."

**Jesse Prater, 29**  
**Purchasing Associate**  
**Global Organic Specialty**  
**Source, Inc.**  
**Sarasota, FL**



Prater has been in the industry for over 13 years, starting as a produce clerk at E.W. James & Sons Supermarket in Camden, TN. From there he moved to Chicago where he worked at Wild Oats (before Whole Foods Market acquired them) and eventually became a sales representative at Goodness Greeness, one of the Midwest's largest suppliers of organic produce.

He has been with the Global Organics for almost six years and is an integral part in the growth of the company. He started in sales and was consistently one of the top sales representatives, even serving as interim sales manager at one point. Four years ago, Prater jumped

at the opportunity to expand his talents and was given the position as head fruit buyer at Global Organics, where he has excelled.

The biggest challenge he sees in the organic produce industry is meeting the ever-increasing demands. "Growers are recognizing this shift, so there's a lot of opportunity for new growers and vendors out there," he says. "It's inspiring when you're able to make a connection."

In the future, Prater dreams of having his own working organic farm. "Whether it is just for fun or for revenue, I love the idea of that kind of lifestyle," he shares.

His principal mentor is his father, Allen Prater, a produce manager for Dominick's in Chicago for almost 20 years and now with E.W. James & Sons. "He taught me almost everything I know, especially merchandising and the art of really just caring for the produce," he says. "Besides my father, our purchasing director here at Global Organics, George Caldwell, has definitely been influential for me and the way I approach the industry. George has such a passion for organic produce that it is infectious. He is like family to me."

**Gary M. Redner, 35**  
**Executive Vice President**  
**Procurement**  
**Redner's Markets**  
**Reading, PA**



Redner represents the third generation of Redner's Markets, a family retail business started in 1970 by his grandparents and now operating with 43 stores. He has been involved in the operation at some level since he was a kid. His first job was cleaning toilets at the company's warehouse facility. He worked part-time through high school and then college. He became full time in 2002, one week after graduating from college.

Five years ago, a tragedy threw Redner into a greater role. In March 2008, his father, who oversaw procurement for all the company's departments and its two distribution centers, was the victim of a homicide. His family approached him to undertake fulfilling his father's role. "I wanted to honor my



father and carry on his legacy," Redner remembers.

His first priority with the transition was visiting the large growers and packers with whom Redners had directly worked with for years to assure them that the partnership would remain intact. Redner maintained and built these relationships. His efforts paid dividends in the level of quality Redners offers and that its customers have come to expect.

Redners' second priority was to develop new relationships and opportunities for various commodities or seasons the company had been missing out on — for example, a direct California cherry program. Over the past three seasons, the company significantly increased sales through this partnership. In addition, the company did not have a strong winter berry program. It has been able to see significant increases as a result of Redners' efforts and truly lifted overall produce distributions as a result during the off-peak winter months. The same can be said for the Chilean import program on several commodities as the company under Redners' direction has formed stronger relationships in this area.

**"People want to know where their produce came from and that growers and packers stand behind what they are producing."**

— Gary M. Redner, Redner's Markets

Redner is motivated by serving as a link between growers and customers. "This past season I invited each of our partner growers for a picture event," he explains. "The goal was to get family pictures and be able to utilize them in our stores and our ads. We wanted customers to identify with the products they were buying and be assured not only of local sourcing, but that each farmer was committing to quality and stood behind their products. This year we plan to open it up more to other departments in our stores."

In the near future, Redner is building greater links with customers. "People want to know where their produce came from and that growers and packers stand behind what they are producing," he says. "We are just about to launch a Facebook page and are planning to utilize some of our partnerships to tell a story about the products we offer to our consumers. We plan to use the long standing partnerships within our perimeter departments to draw on with their products to help create a niche for us as we are trying to attract the next generation of shoppers."

While Redner has many family influences in the business, his prime mentor was his father. "My father built solid relationships within the produce, meat, deli, and seafood community," he says. "He was well respected and known for his blunt honesty as well as humor. He is my mentor and anything I do, I always question if I am representing the family and the company the right

way. I not only want to make him proud, but want the same for the next generation."

**Serafin F. Ruiz, 38**  
**Harvesting Manager**  
**Ocean Mist Farms**  
**Castroville, CA**



Ruiz grew up in the agriculture environment of the Coachella Valley. During his adolescent and teenage years, he worked alongside his family harvesting a variety of crops like citrus, grapes, raisins, pears and other stone fruit commodities. During these years he migrated with his family throughout California and Arizona following the harvest of the crops.

He graduated from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo in 1998 with a degree in Agricultural Engineering Technology and began his career as production supervisor for Paramount Citrus in Delano, CA. In 2000, Ruiz started working for Ocean Mist Farms as the harvesting manager for its signature commodity, artichokes. He developed a keen ability to forecast over 5,000 acres of artichokes in different regions of California and Mexico.

In his present position, he spearheaded the development of a piece rate program to compensate and motivate the harvesting crews. This contribution allowed Ocean Mist Farms to retain skilled employees in California, even in an extremely tight labor market. On a daily basis, Ruiz effectively leads and manages over 250 people. Additionally, Ruiz is recognized for his energetic work ethic and capability of communicating with employees. These positive traits have contributed to the success of Ocean Mist Farms and its strategic goals.

Ruiz is currently an active member of the Toast Masters club. He also enjoys volunteering on his daughter's softball and running teams. One of his enjoyments is mentoring young individuals who want to learn and be part of this industry. He successfully completed the Leadership Development Program (LDP) through the Center for Creative Leadership.

The people in the agriculture industry inspire him. "I have a tremendous respect for those people who work from early in the morning to late at night," he says. "They are passionate about agriculture despite the many challenges they face every day. In an environment where farming practices are complicated due to government regulations and labor shortages, constant communication is key to being successful."

One of his future goals is to develop and work on projects to help maximize the best return for the Ocean Mist Farmers' growers and produce the safest and best quality for the customers.

At Ocean Mist Farms, some of his mentors include Ed and Rosa Boutonnet, Dale Huss, Philip Taluban and Art Barrientos. "They taught me to be confident and be patient in our challenging industry," he relays. "Additionally, in working with Joe Michelli Jr. and others, I have learned how to

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work as a team in making decisions that are in the best interest of the company. Chris, Drew and Adrian Zendejas are great peers and have been a great inspiration as young leaders.”

**Brianna Shales, 28**  
**Communications Manager**  
**Stemilt Growers**  
**Wenatchee, WA**



Known as highly organized, hard-working and adaptable, Shales developed Stemilt's consumer marketing program that includes press, advertising, social media, bloggers and outbound marketing. These efforts helped Stemilt develop a stronger brand as well as a new product development community.

Under her responsibility for Stemilt's corporate communications and social media, Shales grew the company's social community on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and, most recently, a new corporate blog (The Stem). She partnered with Stemilt's owners in meetings with the State governor to bring agriculture to the forefront with the State business community.

Shales is a lead member of the Stemilt Responsible Choice Council, which strives to catalog and devise new sustainability initiatives to implement throughout operations as part of the company's long-standing Responsible Choice program. She created a catalog and corporate social responsibility report showing the depth of the program, and she helps to calculate the company's economic savings and sustainability impact. Shales also serves on Stemilt's Corporate Social Responsibility Committee, which decides how the company gives back to the community through sponsorships, donations, and participation in community events.

Her participation in national campaigns that advise on consumer initiatives is very impressive. She is Stemilt's representative on the USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion National Strategic Partners committee, which works to promote the MyPlate guidelines and messaging to consumers. She also serves on the

Produce for Better Health Marketing and Communications committee. Recognized for her outstanding ambitions, she was selected as an Employee of the Quarter in 2011, as well as Sales/Marketing Employee of the Month twice in her five years with Stemilt.

Shales is motivated by the interchange and people involved in her work. "It's so fun to see the dialogue between fans about our fruits," she says. "It really highlights the fact that people want to know where their food comes from and how it is grown. The stories from our growers, the people who work so hard to get healthy foods into people's mouths around the world, inspire me each day. It's an honor to be able to share their story to our various audiences."

**“I want to raise consumption levels of fresh fruit and fresh produce as a whole.”**

— Brianna Shales,  
Stemilt Growers

In the future, Shales hopes to continue working to build the Stemilt brand at both trade and consumer level. "I want to raise consumption levels of fresh fruit and fresh produce as a whole," she states. "In my current role, there are so many opportunities to help do that! Down the road, I'd love to take on a deeper leadership role both here and within the industry groups. I feel like I've barely scratched the surface and look forward to getting more involved as my career evolves."

She names Stemilt marketing director, Roger Pepperl, and president, West Mathison, as mentors. "Roger is a great boss, and I'm fortunate to work alongside him each day," she says. "He challenges our team to look for innovative ways to take our product to market and has deep knowledge of the vast produce industry. The knowledge he is able to pass to me will certainly guide me as I continue my career. West holds the weight of the entire company and the tree fruit industry on his shoulders, but he is always a calm and collected leader making intelligent and thoughtful decisions. The fact that he is leading a large organization

like ours at such a young age is very inspiring to me!"

**Amit Kumar Shee, 39**  
**Sam's Produce Buyer**  
**Sam's Club**  
**Bentonville, AR**



Shee made the most of his five years in the produce industry holding a significant position with one of the world's leading players in produce retailing. In his current position at Sam's Club, he works with purchasing of the greenhouse category for all U.S. Sam's Clubs. Prior to joining Sam's, he worked with Wal-Mart Global at the beginning stages of Wal-Mart's global produce initiative.

He successfully developed and increased several categories of produce by concentrating on educating customers on mangos, helping promote produce, and achieve double-digit growth for several consecutive years. Having found grape tomatoes to be the fastest growing tomato category, he conducted a statistical analysis to define what customers are looking for and worked with growers on grape tomato varieties.

Under his initiative, the company introduced newer varieties to its customers, capitalizing on the current trend and providing the customer with an excellent eating experience. These examples are just a few of the many illustrating his ability to find the essential attributes of a produce item and utilize numbers to tell the story and build sales.

As a Sam's Club produce buyer, he is responsible for the tomato, potato, pepper, onion, cucumber and pumpkin categories. Shee possesses a keen ability to source and identify new items and trends then devise marketing strategies to capitalize on opportunities. He plays an important role establishing and maintaining supplier relationships and driving the execution of multiple business plans and projects for merchandising. Shee remains focused as an active leader supporting the company's strategy, vision and growth of the categories.

In his community, Shee contributes to the Fayetteville Boys and Girls Club. As a buyer, he is able

to aid local churches, the Salvation Army and various food banks. Last year, around Thanksgiving, he participated in a cookout at Youth Bridge in Centerton, AR, by donating all the pumpkins for the pumpkin carving activity.

His motivation stems from his propensity for science and numbers and how they relate it to the industry. "The produce industry has evolved and is continuing to evolve," he explains. "As an engineer by trade, numbers and science are my forte. Seed and soil selection, production and planning, harvesting techniques, packaging and shipping options, merchandising, and customer education and perception are some of the elements that inspire me to look beyond the basics. My educational background helps me to take all the aspects together and look for better solutions rather than just fix one piece of the puzzle."

In the future Shee hopes to share his knowledge with other countries to secure future growth and help promote greater sustainability and quality. "There are countries like India where farming practices need improvement and the whole produce industry needs a revamp," he says. "I also want to look at sourcing and selecting future produce items that are ecologically balanced, economically sound and excellent. Lastly, it must be an outstanding eating experience; quality is the key to success."

"Tammy Roberts, formerly with Sam's and now consulting in La Plata, MD, and Loren Green at Sam's Club in Bentonville both helped me in understanding the basics and intricate details involved in the produce business," he says. "The late Jerry Hull of Sam's Club, as well as Michael Cochran of Wal-Mart and Russell Mounce of Sam's Club, have all constantly guided me throughout my career as a Sam's produce buyer."

**Chad Street, 31**  
**Purchasing Coordinator**  
**Indianapolis Fruit Company**  
**Indianapolis, IN**



Street is known for his exceptional passion and dedication to the produce industry. In his current position

with Indianapolis Fruit, he is embraced for his forward-thinking and expanding ideas for the company. His creativity extended category growth and profits over 38 percent.

A third generation produce person, he witnessed his mother work her way up through the ranks of the business. He started in produce as a buyer with Foster-Caviness in Greensboro, NC. In his three years there, Street learned all he could about the produce business. Soon he became product manager and helped the company see their best years of sales to date.

After his time with Foster-Caviness, he moved to FreshPoint in Raleigh, NC, as buyer. This experience chronicled one of the biggest accomplishments in his career. Street helped the company achieve record sales by creating metrics to achieve a cultural shift within the company to a more "progressive mentality". Then he moved to the company's top sales office in Hartford, CT.

In the community, he works with The Children's Museum of Indianapolis and Reilly's Children's Hospital, Little Sisters of the Poor to feed the homeless, and he coaches elementary-age basketball.

Street is motivated by the relationship and family aspects of the business. "My grandfather had deep roots in the Central California citrus agriculture, and my mother paved her own way to success," he shares. "However, I also want to ensure success based on my own effort. That pushes me to always strive to do better. In this business, personal relationships are what matter most, and it drives me to be the best I can every day."

Street sees a bright future within our industry. "We have great opportunity, from creating new excitement for the next generation to become a part of agriculture, to providing quality, flavorful, safe fruits and vegetables to our consumer," he says. "I want to focus on these objectives that will one day give me the chance to be in charge of day-to-day operations and even run my own company."

Street notes his fortune in being surrounded by phenomenal individuals who helped mold him both personally and professionally. "These men and women lead daily by example, expressing their passion for the industry," he says. "I

especially recognize my first mentor, Bruce Baker with Foster Caviness. He taught me everything I needed to know about the produce business and always had time to listen to the opinions of others. Another mentor is Lee Woodham at FreshPoint, who took me under his wing and showed me the ropes. Lastly, Joe Corsaro of Indianapolis Fruit, whom I have known for 15 years, has treated me like a son and taught me the power of integrity while working well with others."

**Mike Swiatkowski, 32**  
**Vice President of**  
**Sales & Marketing**  
**Hickory Harvest Foods**  
**Akron, OH**



Swiatkowski is in charge of Hickory Harvest's in-house salesmen and brokers in the Eastern half of the United States.

Under his direction, the team works to achieve a goal for stores to have four percent of total produce sales in the snack-food category via large everyday sets and seasonal promotions. In the past three years, the company has added more than 15 new regional chains.

Since he took over sales in 2004, the company has tripled in total sales, adding over 30 employees. He guided sales efforts and successes (made by his brother, Joe Swiatkowski), developed an internal sales force and a small broker network.

He is inspired to create the best snack food program in the industry. "Convincing a produce buyer to switch to my program is only the beginning," he says. "Showing them an over 100 percent sales increase in the snack category during the first year is what drives me. Maximizing the sales of my customers is beneficial for both parties. The challenge is to consistently come out with new items, packaging, new specials, and display vehicles."

In the future, Hickory desires to have every produce department in Eastern U.S. do business with Hickory Harvest Foods. "I want them to consider us a long-term supplier because of our business practices and the quality product

we produce," Swiatkowski says. "I also want to see us become a manufacturer and innovator of more items. For the chains we don't sell everyday programs to, I want to supply the re-packer with our quality bulk products. We plan on candy flavoring and panning chocolates in the near future."

Swiatkowski names his father, George Swiatkowski, as well as buyer interaction as having served as mentors. "My dad remains my mentor even though he passed about 10 years ago," he explains. "He started selling snacks in produce in Northeast Ohio back in the 1990's before anyone else focused on this opportunity. I look at him as a pioneer in the industry selling bulk and pre-packed. Many of the buyers I met have been mentors throughout the years reading what it takes to sell and become a good partner supplier."

**George Szczepanski, 28**  
**Sponsorship/Exhibit Sales**  
**Manager**  
**Produce Marketing Association**  
**Newark, DE**



A graduate of the Food Marketing Program at St. Joseph's University, Szczepanski was one of the first participants in the PMA Foundation's Pack Family Career Path Program in 2004. Recognizing the great potential of this industry, he went to work for Jac Vandenberg, Inc., where he was in sales for two years managing the kiwi category. In his second year, he was handed a large client and was able to double its box and dollar sales from the previous year, bringing the client into the company's top customer list. He was known to be an integral part of the sales force and a fun person to work with.

After completing a Masters in Agricultural Economics from the University of Delaware and interning in agricultural lending with Met Life, he came to work with PMA in 2010. He used his experience in the industry to develop a close rapport with the exhibitors of the PMA Fresh Summit and Food-service Conference. He currently manages the sale of the Fresh Summit Expo floor, the single

largest revenue-generating activity at PMA. As part of the team, he helped the expo grow year after year, even in a time when budgets where tight and tradeshow saw a decrease in sales in general.

Szczepanski has been a key part in developing innovative ways to increase recognition for exhibitors. He helped design and then implemented a new booth assignment system, involving personal communications with more than 900 exhibitors. He was instrumental in creating a new area to give first-time exhibitors distinct visibility as well as developing a new Floral Pavilion to be featured at the 2013 PMA Fresh Summit.

He was inspired to work in the produce industry because of the energy of the people he met at industry events early in his career. "The people and the unique qualities of the products we bring to market really motivate me," he says. "The challenges of the produce industry are what keep me interested and excited. Seasonality, perishability, early- and late-season varieties, sourcing from different regions, logistics, competition and all the other unforeseen issues make creative problem solving a necessary part of the job."

His short term goal is to continue to refine the process of reserving booths at Fresh Summit and to bring the show to a broader audience of exhibitors and attendees. "In the longer term, I see myself moving to a more strategic role," he says. "I hope my background in the produce industry and contact with so many people in different parts of the industry can be leveraged to drive PMA to find better ways to serve the industry."

Szczepanski credits Al Murray, assistant secretary of agriculture for the state of New Jersey, Professor Jerry Bradley from St. Joseph's University, and Jamie Hillegas, PMA director of tradeshow, as mentors. "Al Murray was my boss at my first industry job working with the Jersey Fresh campaign and is still someone I go to for advice," says Szczepanski. "Jerry brought me to my first Fresh Summit, as part of the first Career Pathways Program. We still get together every year at Fresh Summit and any other industry event we can both find our way to. Jamie encouraged me to work hard, gave me advice on how to succeed in our organization, and



worked with me on many of my biggest projects. She's been a mentor and friend, and my successes have come with the help of her guidance."

**Krystal Thomsen, 34**  
**Retail Sales &**  
**Customer Service Manager**  
**Driscoll's**  
**Watsonville, CA**



Thomsen has been with Driscoll's for 11 years, starting as a sales coordinator and working her way up. As a collaborative leader of the retail sales team, she guides and oversees the team's long range goals, fulfilling annual business plans, and works with her team colleagues in achieving them.

Her commitment to customer service has led to unsurpassed growth in national and regional accounts in both domestic and Canadian markets. She led Strategic Initiative Projects, achieving more efficient processes while maintaining and exceeding customer expectations.

Thomsen manages a select group of Driscoll's top customer accounts. The company relies on her for insight and trusts her with the most complex situations. She is passionate about career development, as demonstrated in her management of the eight retail sales coordinators. She completed the very rigorous Driscoll's Leadership program as well as Leadership Salinas Valley and Core Selling Skills for Sales Professionals. She has been awarded the Central Coast Young Farmers & Ranchers Member of the Year and the Star Award from the California Young Farmers & Ranchers.

Thomsen regularly participates in the fundraising and community events as well as events that are created by her customers for their communities. In the past, she has been very involved with the Monterey County Young Farmers and Ranchers Association. She is known for her tireless and passionate fundraising for cancer research — a cause near to her heart. She also spearheads an annual campaign to provide backpacks and a multitude of other school supplies for underprivileged

children in the Salinas Valley.

She is inspired by her colleagues in the agricultural industry. "I draw insight and motivation from the committed and creative industry professionals with whom I interact with on a daily basis," she says. "I understand the importance of agriculture's far-reaching effects, knowing that my daily work has an influence on the choices people make when feeding their families. Though consumer education can be an overwhelming undertaking, it is an area I strive to constantly improve. A great number of consumers do not know or understand where their food comes from. I recognize the need for thoughtful, honest, and easy-to-understand consumer information, and I welcome the challenges this area may pose."

**"A great number of consumers do not know or understand where their food comes from. I recognize the need for thoughtful, honest, and easy-to-understand consumer information, and I welcome the challenges this area may pose."**

— Krystal Thomsen,  
Driscoll's

In the future, Thomsen looks to expand her leadership role not only within Driscoll's but also within the industry. "With berries being the Number One category in produce, I want to lead the continued expansion of the Berry Patch in the marketplace," she explains. "Driscoll's global initiatives and strategies are the foundation of my future growth within the industry. I see the importance of the development, guidance, and mentorship of young people in our industry as vital to its continued success. I intend to continue being one of the industry's most stalwart advocates, most visibly as a consumer educator and liaison."

Thomsen credits two Driscoll's people, Tim Youmans and Randy Benko, with her success and continued development. "Since my

first day on the job, Tim has been a driving force in my career," she states. "I respect and emulate his ability to lead by example, to provide clear and concise direction, and his ability to share a vision. His value of customer service, dedicated work ethic and exceptional sales skills are traits that I strive to achieve. Randy was instrumental in my first years in the agricultural industry, sharing valuable career wisdom and coaching me. His industry knowledge and understanding of the grower proved to be key skills for me."

**Claudia Pizarro-Villalobos, 37**  
**Sales Specialist**  
**D'Arrigo Bros. Co., of California**  
**Salinas, CA**



Pizarro-Villalobos' wide range of experience from politics, education, and health to agricultural sales has led to creative success at D'Arrigo. She began her career after graduation from Cal Berkeley, working as director of programs at Hartnell College. She was selected as a Ford Fellow Scholar for the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, DC, and then returned to Salinas and formed the new Monterey County Health Consortium.

She also was co-owner of Chapala Family Mexican restaurant with her mother. She participated in marketing as a consultant for Hartnell College and also served as the executive director for Partners for Peace. She was hired by D'Arrigo five years ago due to her tenacity, energy, focus, enthusiasm and love for the community.

Pizarro-Villalobos works as a sales specialist focusing on the Andy Boy specialty commodities like Fennel, Rabe, Cactus Pears and Nopalitos. She is a commodity manager for Cactus Pears and Nopalitos. She also assists with an array of marketing projects and organizes company events.

Four years ago, she took the lead at D'Arrigo to establish a culinary program for kids and adults to showcase all the commodities — something never before done at the company. She created two class formats for each age category that

would keep audiences engaged and learning while having fun. This "Kids Cooking in the D'Arrigo Kitchen" has been a big hit among families with every class sold out and a waiting list. The class entails a lead chef and five sous chefs to teach a class of 20 kids. The program worked with an array of local chefs such as: Chef Dory Ford with Aqua Terra, Chef Kevin Hincks and Celebrity Chef, Todd Fisher.

As an active community volunteer and member of California Women in AG (CWA), Pizarro-Villalobos served as the 2012 Chair of the Progressive Dinner to raise scholarship funds for young women in the tri-county area pursuing studies in agriculture and viticulture in high school and in college. She also sits on the CWA scholarship committee that distributes the funds. For the past two years, she has been an active board member of HELP (Healthy Eating Lifestyles Principles), whose mission is to promote healthy eating, physical activity, and the increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables among youth and adults. Through her connections in the non-profit sector, she was able to secure \$75,000 from the California Endowment for two consecutive years, assisted with a fundraiser at D'Arrigo that raised \$50,000 and approached Taylor Farms to sponsor the event for three years at \$35,000.

She is motivated by her love for what she does and the challenge of overcoming obstacles. "When I started with D'Arrigo, I was the only female sales person and one of three women in the sales office," she shares. "At the onset, I endured derogatory comments and worked through games played by some industry buyers. The daily obstacles that confronted me at times were draining and made me wonder why I continued in the job. The simple answer always was that I love what I do!"

Her mentors include Margaret D'Arrigo Martin of Taylor Farms and Tonya Antle, formerly with Earthbound Farms in San Juan Bautista, CA, and now teaching at CalPoly San Luis Obispo. "Margaret has been a mentor since we became friends over 10 years ago," she says. She continuously motivates me through her spirit of service as a philanthropist, business leader and produce activist. Tonya's knowledge

of, and passion for, produce is invigorating. She is such a genuine, intelligent and fearless person. Her innate characteristics make her a savvy seller and leader in the ag industry. Both Margaret and Tonya have taught me that passion, persistence, relationships and balance are key factors to success in the industry."

**April Ward, 35**  
**Communications Director**  
**California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (LGMA)**  
**Sacramento, CA**



Ward leads the communications team responsible for presenting the LGMA food safety program to the leafy greens

industry's vast audience of regulators and buyers. She collaborates with fellow LGMA staffers, outside agencies and industry volunteer leaders on initiatives and is responsible for crafting all of the LGMA's communications efforts. Her skills and leadership have helped establish the LGMA's reputation as an innovative food-safety program that institutes healthy practices for farms in the leafy greens industry.

Ward manages the LGMA's emerging social marketing program and is an online advocate. She oversees the annual update of the LGMA's rapid response plan, manages the LGMA's strategic planning process, and coordinates LGMA's "Golden Checkmark" award program. Ward orchestrates media training for industry spokespeople and marketing efforts to buyers and customers. She also partners with LGMA's advertising and PR consultants to develop targeted and incisive advertising, direct mail, and Internet marketing campaigns. In 2012, she managed LGMA's first consumer-outreach program test in Canada.

To stay active with women who have similar interests, Ward is a member of California Women for Agriculture and an annual participant in industry charitable efforts like 5K runs.

Ward reveals how working with the California Leafy Greens industry is a real inspiration. "The LGMA was created in response to a crisis, but the individuals who built this organ-

ization handle themselves in the most respectable and inspiring manner," she says. "Every chance I get, I share with others the opportunities that lie ahead for hard workers within this important and inspirational industry."

Working as part of a small staff is both challenging and empowering. "We work together to make sure that everything gets done, however we often have to complete tasks that normally wouldn't fall under the responsibilities of our position," she explains. "There is a real sense of community within our organization and the whole California Leafy Greens industry."

In the coming year, Ward will be working to expand the LGMA's blossoming social networking program. "Online outreach presents unlimited opportunities and is an affordable way to share your message," she states. "I would also like to attain my master's degree in communications. Continuing education is a high priority for me and will enhance my career choices moving forward."

Working with LGMA board and committees—especially industry leadership—provided numerous mentors for her. "To see how they think and make decisions led me to grow as a professional," she says. "From day-one, Scott Horsfall, the organization's CEO, gave me the utmost respect and opportunity. Having a supervisor who is supportive and allows for career growth is really all that one can ask for, and I've found it in the produce industry working for the LGMA."

**David White, 31**  
**President & CEO**  
**Providence Produce Markets, Inc.**  
**Matthews, NC**



Over the past 10 years, White has steadily and aggressively built Charlotte, NC's foremost retail produce experience. With

signature road-side open-air markets, he created a distinctive brand for his customers and an exceptional work place for his employees. He started his company as a road-side produce stand in 2002. Though he had little startup money, he had a clear idea of the concept and a brand he wanted to

create. He took his only asset at the time (his car) and traded it in for an old refrigerated truck. His first location was built by his father, a friend and himself. During that first year, he started the company of Providence Produce Markets, Inc., and he worked hard to keep the concept simple: providing produce to the community and sourcing local when in season.

Since then, the company has grown into a much larger line of products and services. It currently has four retail locations and a warehouse to serve its retail outlets and wholesale customers. Its unique and simple farm-fresh style has created a strong following. White promoted change and helped amend the zoning laws in Charlotte, NC. These laws had previously restricted open-air produce markets, but now embraces and encourages these types of businesses in the city. He has also helped people and young entrepreneurs create businesses and successfully launch into the industry.

White believes strongly in giving back. "My community has always been so supportive of my business. I feel an obligation and passion when it comes to returning the favor," he says. "Providence Produce donates thousands of pounds of fruits and vegetables every year to those in need. We partner with philanthropic organizations and charitable causes to distribute to those who are less fortunate. We also sponsor community events, fundraisers, and make in-kind contributions to schools and camps."

He is motivated by the challenges created by the incredibly dynamic industry. "My dedicated team continuously works on new ways to do things, meeting new growers and working with new vendors," he states. "No day, week, or season is the same. I am most challenged by finding the products that no one else can, whether it is from a local farmer or a far-off region. The reward is bringing premium produce to the customer and creating the 'wow factor!'"

In the future, White aspires to expand his company's brand, quality standards and logistics. "We are not trying to be the next franchise hit or finding someone to help us open 100 new stores," he explains. "We are focused on the quality of what we are doing to

our customers' needs, listen to them and grow in the direction they steer us. I believe there are tremendous growth possibilities for small retailers and produce distributors like us. We don't worry about the big box retailers and mega food distributors of the world. Our local market share is small but, as I tell people, I would rather have a small market share and amazing growth potential than large market share and only trying to hold ground."

He names Mike Severt of Severt & Sons Produce in Columbia, SC, Todd Gates of VB Hook & Co. in Columbia, SC, and John Mackey of Whole Foods as particular influencers for his career. "Mr. Severt taught me hard work is not an option in the produce industry; it's a way of life," he shares. "Todd Gates displays strong professionalism and industry knowledge. John has taken a concept from small to huge. I admire how he has really put some strong values into the industry, subsequently passing them down to the employee, vendors and growers of that company."

**Adrian Zendejas, 38**  
**General Manager**  
**Desert Mist Farms**  
**Coachella, CA**



As GM at Desert Mist, a farming operation for Castroville-based Ocean Mist Farms, Zendejas manages over 3,400 crop

acres on 2,600 land acres for an operation of 22 field employees, two field supervisors and two office staff. He reviews budgets, farming agreements, planting schedules and monitors farm labor contractor, Valley Pride, with 35 field employees. Since he began working for Desert Mist, assets have doubled in size.

The son of migrant farm workers, Zendejas was the first in his family to earn a college education and eventually begin his farming education with Sea Mist Farms, another farming operation of Ocean Mist, in Castroville, CA. It all started with a college field trip to the Salinas Valley, where he met Ocean Mist's Ed Boutonnet and was eventually hired for summer work. From 1995 to 1997, he worked in various roles for Ocean Mist during

winter and spring breaks. In June 1997, he was hired full time by Sea Mist Farms, as an IPM specialist and was eventually promoted to assistant production manager for Sea Mist. In April 2006, he became general manager of Desert Mist Farms in Coachella, CA.

In 2011, Zendejas was awarded Agriculturist of the Year 2011 by the California Women for Agriculture-Coachella Valley Chapter. He enjoys giving tours of the farming operation to elementary children and senior citizens with the mission of helping them better understand where their food comes from. He is vice-president of the Farm Bureau in Riverside County and is on the Coachella Valley High School FFA Advisory Board. He is actively involved with the 4-H Desert Sand Blasters and in coaching girls AYSO soccer. He loves spending time and traveling with his wife, daughter and son.

Zendejas grew up in the east end of the Coachella Valley, and like many during that time, his family was directly involved in

agriculture. He explains, "Most of my holidays and weekends were spent in the grape orchards picking up rocks, pruning grapes, replacing broken stakes, thinning bunches, tying vines or harvesting grapes in over 100-degree temperatures. It is difficult work but rewarding as well. My parents always preached to me the importance of an education."

During this time, he would occasionally see a white pickup truck pull up, talk to the foreman and leave. "I thought to myself, that's what I want to do," he says. "Not because I wanted to get out of the heavy work, but because that guy seemed to have a lot of responsibility and knowledge to grow beautiful grapes and make a difference in the farming community. From that moment on, I knew I needed to study hard to fulfill my dream of being a farmer."

One of Zendejas' goals is to help educate and encourage people to continue the great farming traditions. "We need to keep farming in the U.S. for everyone's benefit and not

depend on others to feed us," he says. "We need to be leaders in food production, quality and safety."

His mentors include Ed Boutonnet and Dale Huss of Ocean Mist in Castroville, CA, and Jeff Percy of Desert Mist in Coachella, CA. "Mr. Boutonnet gave me my first opportunity and encouraged me to seek him out for work even though he didn't personally know me," he says. "Dale gave me my

first chance to become a grower. He guided me through my career path and goals that eventually led to my promotion and transfer to the Coachella Valley. Jeff mentored me in developing crop planting schedules for all three desert areas of production. He has also helped me create annual budgets, contracts and land leases. These skills have helped me develop my leadership responsibilities and become a better manager." **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](http://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, 2014 (born after March 1, 1974).

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