

Supporting The Foundation



By Cindy Seel, CAE, Executive Director, PMA Education Foundation

There's certainly consensus on the primary challenge facing the produce industry today: food safety.

Food safety is what keeps industry leaders up at night, and the discussions I've had with industry executives across the supply chain over the past year have more than confirmed it. It's the most pressing issue on everyone's mind. What isn't commonly recognized, however, is that solutions to food safety and other industry challenges all hinge on one thing: an educated, well-trained, dedicated staff.

Think for a moment about your own business. The safety of your products is an overriding concern, and that safety relies on your people doing their jobs properly. Further, the cost of doing business is increasing almost exponentially, and your people will be the ones who find more efficient and cost-effective ways of doing business. And it's your people who will be involved in developing and executing plans for increasing consumption of your products.

It's often said that produce is a dynamic and ever-changing industry, built by people with a passion for its products and the benefits those products offer. However, until now there's never been an organized, nationwide effort to convey that excitement to people outside the industry. Our plans for the Foundation's work will allow us to convey that passion as we strive to recruit the best and brightest people and help to ensure the future of the industry.

Over the past few months, I've talked about the vision industry leaders have for PMAEF and shared key elements of our business plan. Now, we're in a critical development phase that will make the Foundation's plans reality. For the past few months, we've asked industry companies and individuals to partner with us to help fund PMAEF's initiatives. The response has been gratifying and exciting.

As people are key to industry challenges, so also are they key to finding and implementing solutions. If you were at Fresh Summit last month, you may have seen acknowledgment of the visionary people and companies who have made significant financial commitments to support Foundation programs. Every one of them sees tremendous value in making this commitment, and every one of them would encourage others to join them.

"There are a lot of things about our business we can't control," said Dan'l Mackey Almy of DMA Solutions, Inc., "from Mother Nature to the economy and so many others. We can have a significant impact on our human resources though. The Foundation is a positive effort and its purpose is so actionable. My contribution was an easy decision and I believe collectively we can make a positive impact on the industry's future."

Jay Pack has supported the industry for several years

through the Pack Family/PMA Career Pathways Fund. He is continuing his support of the Foundation because, "I believe in investing in the future of this industry by attracting bright, young minds who will be our next leaders. The Education Foundation is a natural extension of the student program we initiated several years ago and there is still so much more we can and need to do."

Regarding his decision to support the Foundation, David Gill, Gills Onions, says, "Our company believes the health and future of the industry is in the hands of the people who work in it, and to the extent we can attract new and talented people, we think it's worth the investment. We are committed to the industry and what we expect the Foundation will do is a bit of a leap of faith that we are willing to take — that something positive will happen and new people will be attracted to the industry."

Margaret D'Arrigo-Martin, D'Arrigo Brothers Co. of California, has been in the industry all her life. "We need to get the word out that produce is fun, interesting, dynamic, fascinating," she told us recently. "We need to attract the best people, and Foundation programs like the partnerships being established with universities will make more inroads than any of us could alone. Be part of what's happening — join us!"

Everyone involved with the Foundation to date will tell you that there is great satisfaction in being part of a centralized effort to make the vision of a thriving, growing produce industry a reality. It's not too late to add your voice — there are a variety of levels and ways you can contribute. To find out more, contact me at cseel@pmaef.org. If you'd like an industry perspective on why you should contribute, contact these Foundation leaders:

Steve Barnard, PMAEF chair
Mission Produce
805-981-3650
sbarnard@missionpro.com

Bill Schuler, PMAEF vice chair
Castellini Company
859-442-4650
bschuler@castellinicompany.com

Perhaps Don Harris, recently with Wild Oats Markets, Inc., summed it up best when he said, "If you believe in the industry and you believe in the success of your own business, you have to back the Foundation's efforts."

Solutions to food safety and other industry challenges all hinge on one thing: an educated, well-trained, dedicated staff.