



**W**inners of our fourth annual *40 Under Forty* Awards Program should be truly honored because they were chosen by industry mentors. PRODUCE BUSINESS conducted an extensive, widespread search throughout the industry to elicit nominations for top young industry leaders under the age of 40. The search involved communication with thousands of executives, consultants, associations and universities.

This year's winners are exemplified by an outstanding array of community involvement. The winners have demonstrated an extremely high degree of giving back to the people and places that have helped them reach their current positions.

We had far more nominations than we could use. Individual candidates were contacted to highlight their key company, industry and community accomplishments, sharing meaningful examples of how they have been leaders in the industry, as well as their goals and aspirations.

If you were not chosen this year or if you nominated someone who was not selected, please understand that the process was highly competitive, and we encourage you to re-submit updated nominations for next year's competition. We encouraged everyone to alert PRODUCE BUSINESS of well-deserving candidates and to help praise and support future produce movers and shakers as we look forward to honoring *40-Under-Forty* leaders in 2009.

PROFILES BY JODEAN ROBBINS



**GREG ANDERSEN, 38**  
Senior Sales Representative  
Driscoll's Strawberry  
Associates, Inc.  
Watsonville, CA

From 2004 to 2005, Andersen led a customer satisfaction project team that enabled the company to take its satisfaction rating from 76 to 94 percent within a 2-year span. He successfully managed cross-functional departments to achieve a common goal.

Andersen is a graduate of the 2007 United Fresh Leadership Program, which he credits for helping him network with many other key leaders throughout our industry.

In 2003, he completed Leadership Salinas Valley, where he worked on a project called Tennis for Kids Day. It raised over \$5,000 to help at-risk kids on the Monterey peninsula learn tennis from local teaching professionals and purchased equipment for them. He is also on the board of directors for Ag Against Hunger, which distributes over 10 million pounds of fresh produce annually to help feed the hungry throughout California.

"We as an industry face many challenges such as transportation, land costs, consolidation and labor issues," he says. "Each of these is a great opportunity for us to overcome. We have faced these issues in our past and overcome them. However, it takes persistence and willpower to achieve solutions. My hope is to bring together my talents and drive to achieve great things in the produce industry, so consumers all over the world can enjoy the good, healthful products we produce."

He wants to continue his community work on the Ag Against Hunger Board and to develop Driscoll's berry customers. "I believe this program is essential to feed the one out of five people who go hungry in our communities. Additionally, I'm focused on continually developing Driscoll's berry customers. Providing fresh berries all over the country is such an exciting business. Another part of my job is developing people within the retail sales department. I view this as a critical piece of the company's future growth."

He names Michael Hollister, Driscoll's vice president of marketing and sales, as a mentor. "He's always been a great mentor and coach for me. He always displays great business practices and is always available to help you with anything."



**JOSEPH A. ANGE III, 30**  
Director of Purchasing  
Markon Cooperative, Inc.  
Salinas, CA

Ange, who joined Markon after graduating from Cal Poly in 2001, has learned how to lead by example and become an information source for people from other companies who call for information regarding market trends. Markon's 2002 Employee of the Year, he is known for his persistence, strong work

ethic and integrity.

He was featured in a weekly article in the *Salinas Californian's Ag Outlook* magazine showcasing a different industry professional and giving a background of his or her job and life outside of work. An Eagle Scout Award in 1996 provided values and leadership skills still applicable to real life experiences and of use to him in his daily life.

The history of Salinas Valley agriculture inspires him to preserve the integrity of the industry. "When food-safety issues hit the news, I was concerned about the negative image communicated by some media sources," he says. "I'm amazed by the amount of hard work people have put into making the Salinas Valley what it is today. I've been lucky enough to sit with some of those who have been around for 30-plus years and to listen to how they have seen companies come and go and why. My challenge is to operate within the industry, doing the right thing for the consumer as well as sustaining relationships with suppliers."

Ange aspires to be one of those who lead positive change in the ag industry. "I want to be viewed as someone who knows and understands his company and can influence changes that will benefit it. Our current leaders are cutting new trails in food safety, harvest/production/loading efficiencies and new and exciting products. It will be up to us to maintain and build upon those positive changes."

He credits Tim York of Markon for his foresightedness, Mark Shaw of Markon for his ability to build and maintain relationships with people, and Steve Church of Church Brothers for his ability to take a great idea and manage it from inception to make sure it is successful. "The unique qualities of each of these people inspire me to learn from them to become an effective leader."



**TODD BERNITT, 39**  
General Manager, Central Region  
CH Robinson Worldwide, Inc. (CHRW)  
Eden Prairie, MN

Bernitt is known for strong leadership abilities, desire to learn and willingness to take on new challenges. During his 15 years with CHRW, his expertise and sales talents in both produce sourcing and transportation have lead his team to success. His dedication to leading by example and his commitment

to doing the right thing have earned him the respect of management, peers and employees.

Bernitt, who works out of CHRW's Woodridge, IL, office, led efforts to develop a comprehensive value-added logistics solution for foodservice end users, created and implemented a National Account Management Center to manage national restaurant chains, became general manager of CHRW Central Region in February 2006 and implemented a restructuring program that reinvigorated CHRW's entire business segment (retail, foodservice, transportation, repack/warehousing facility and wholesale business divisions) in the Midwest. He assisted in the development and rollout of CHRW online ordering process at end user level.

He has received a Certificate of Recognition from the Institute for Supply Chain Management, developed and instituted complete distribution and sourcing produce supply chains for multiple national restaurant chains and assisted in the creation of CHRW branded and private-label repack and distribution programs for several Midwest retailers.

Since 2006, Bernitt has orchestrated CHRW Central Produce's participation in events for the March of Dimes, the Lustgarten Foundation for Pancreatic Cancer Research, Juvenile Diabetes and the Kyler Marshall Golf Outing, which raises funds for Kyler Marshall, a special-needs child. "Each of these foundations has been a source of support, information and comfort for some of our CHRW Central Produce employees," he says.

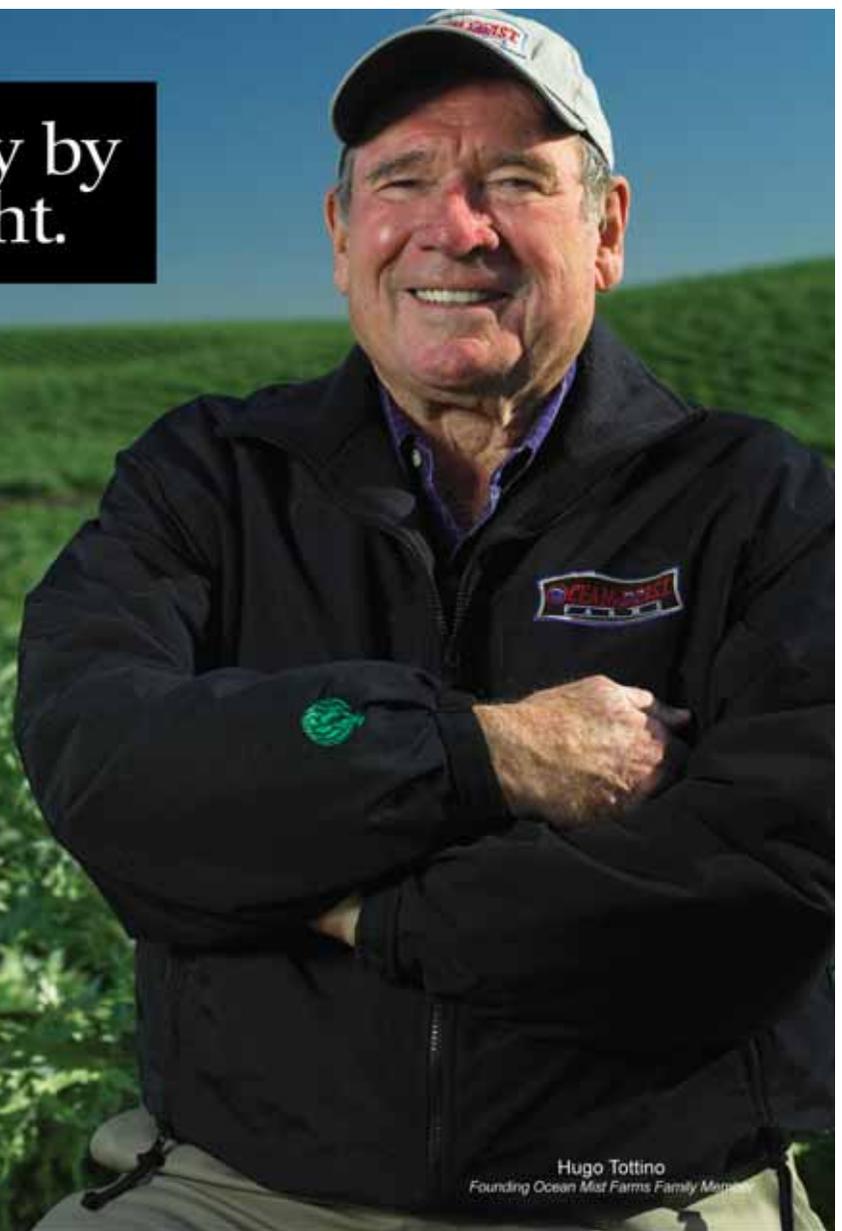
Among his greatest challenges to date have been streamlining and providing visibility to national restaurant chain produce supply networks, and standardizing (on many occasions fully building) food-safety programs for both distributors and national restaurant chains. The "rebirth" of the local or regional grower has proven an inspiration. "The challenge is getting those local or regional products grown and shipped safely with full traceability and finding the most efficient means possible to deliver those products to the consumer."

He wants to continue to develop customized distribution networks for national restaurant chains. "I want to develop unique, customized repacks and packaged goods for the retail consumer. I'm very interested in the development and implementation of local or regionally grown produce supply chains, utilizing certified, third-party food-safety standards, technology and flexibility for the grower and ultimately the consumer."

Nelson Griffin of Diversity, CBRL Group, Inc. taught Bernitt about the value of building a relationship on a personal level. "He has given me valuable insight from the customer's perspective as well as shown me the benefits of a true partnership when building out a supply chain from the customer perspective."

Jim Lemke, CHRW executive vice president, is another mentor. "Jim gave me an opportunity in this industry and has supported me in my per-

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Hugo Tottino  
Founding Ocean Mist Farms Family Member

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sonal and professional development throughout my career. Jim has led our company's produce division down the path of infusing technology into the everyday needs of the produce supply chain. He truly has vision for the future needs of the consumer and the industry and the development of the means to meet those growing needs."

United Leadership program, I saw a man who did everything with passion and got everyone around him involved and excited, too."



**RYAN T. BYBEE, 33**  
Sales Manager  
GPOD of Idaho  
Shelley, ID

Bybee started at GPOD of Idaho (General Potato and Onion Distributors) by proving himself in sales; he was promoted to assistant sales manager in 2003 and then to sales manager in 2005. He helped lead the sales department through a large expansion in which production and sales grew 30 percent.

His first major industry contribution was in 2001 when he began a 3-year stint on the Idaho Grower Shippers Association (IGSA) Transportation Committee. In 2003, he also served on the IGSA Convention Committee and was accepted into the United Fresh Leadership Program sponsored by Dupont. In 2005, he served on the United Fresh Convention Committee and he currently serves on the Idaho Potato Commission's Marketing Committee.

While serving on the IGSA Transportation Committee, he helped work with the Union Pacific and CSXT railroads to implement the popular Fresh Lane for perishables. This helped transit times for perishable commodities from the western United States to the East Coast.

He is very active in his church and spent three years as a leader for youth aged 14 to 18. He received his Eagle Scout Award from the Boy Scouts of America when he was 18 and a Rotary Club Scholarship his senior year of high school for his work with the Natural Helpers Society.

The people in the produce industry have been an inspiration. "The great leaders I have been around are always so enthusiastic and proud to do what they do and they just keep giving back," he says. "I noticed this the first time I met Tom Stenzel of United Fresh. He was so personable and passionate about the industry. Tom gave me great advice — 'Always give back and the industry will always give to you.'"

His biggest challenge right now is to continue to offer flexibility and options for customers in an increasingly competitive environment. "Since we do not actually grow our own produce, our challenge is to keep the customers and growers happy at the same time. Customers are demanding more options and better quality, and our grower base is slowly being swallowed up by larger corporate entities. If I can keep our customers happy and profitable, I can, in return, keep our growers happy and profitable."

He aspires to become a leader of change. "The industry is changing faster than ever. We have issues such as the environment, sustainability, food safety, profitability and so many others. I think change is good and I can adapt quickly to change, which is why I feel I can be a great leader for the future of the produce industry. With change comes fear and uneasiness. If I can help make the changes go smoother and in the right direction, I will know I accomplished something good."

Bybee names Bob Wilkins, the retired general manager of GPOD, and Kevin Searle, current GPOD general manager, as mentors. "Bob taught me to be patient and look at all sides of a situation. He also showed me how to be professional and learn in a business environment. Kevin taught me not to be afraid of trying something different and to look outside the box. He also showed me how to look ahead and plan for the future so it does not jump up and scare you at the last second."

Chris Puentes, president of Interfresh, and Tom Stenzel, president of United Fresh, are also mentors. "Chris is so genuine and professional. His actions taught me that going out of your way, being generous and treating everyone as if they are important are the true makeup of a leader. Tom is always very professional but at the same time very personable. He taught me whatever you do, be excited and passionate about it. He has never said it to me but his actions show it. As I worked with Tom in the



**GARY CALOROSO, 39**  
Vice President  
Sahlman Williams  
Tampa, FL

Caloroso oversees Sahlman Williams' new West Coast office in Westlake Village, CA, managing, directing, organizing and providing leadership on client account teams. He creates and executes short-range and long-range communications plans for clients and mentors, and motivates and leads

employees in supporting the account teams. He is known for his kind and generous spirit and being passionate about helping kids.

Caloroso has won numerous professional commendations including the Public Relations Society of America Los Angeles Chapter Merit Award for Community Relations and its Merit Award for Ethnic/Multicultural, and the Latino Marketing Award for Best Community Relations Program.

During his previous work with Porter Novelli in Los Angeles, he, along with other team members, managed the McDonald's Operators' Association of Southern California's McTeacher's Night program and all English- and Spanish-language media relations outreach for their McMariachi y Folklorico Juvenil program, receiving awards for this work.

He currently serves as communications director for Produce for Kids and is a member of the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) and the Southeast Produce Council, serving on the Southern Exposure 2008 committee. He delivered the keynote address at the 2007 Fresh Produce and Floral Council (FPFC) meeting about Marketing Produce to Hispanic Consumers and served as moderator of the Marketing Produce to Multi-Ethnic Consumers meeting at the United Fresh show in Chicago.

He is active with the American Youth Soccer Organization, Camp Ronald McDonald for Good Times, the Hispanic Services Council and the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southern California.

The people in the industry inspire him. "I have had the good fortune to work with a variety of industries, but I have chosen to work in the produce industry because of its great people and values," he says. "I'm inspired every day by their hard work, loyalty and strong commitment to do the right thing."

His goal is to serve as an industry leader for marketing and crisis communications. "A thoughtful and nimble approach to crisis preparedness and communications is needed as we face ongoing issues such as food safety and labor. I would also like to help the industry increase consumption of fruits and vegetables with general market and multi-ethnic consumers. Given our nation's increased desire for healthful and great-tasting food, I believe it's a ripe opportunity for us. I would love to see produce suppliers work more closely with supermarket and foodservice retailers in targeting consumers."

He names Dick Spezzano of Spezzano Consulting as a primary mentor. "He has great wisdom, honesty, integrity and ideas." He admires Phil Adrian of Coastline Produce as an innovator, researcher and marketer, and Dee Munson of the Food Professionals as a communicator and for her creativity and kindness. John Williams and Cheryl Miller, both of Sahlman Williams, are also mentors. "John is a great marketer with creativity and kindness. Cheryl is a great financial mind and has a lot of compassion and a strong desire to do the right thing."

"I have had the good fortune to work with a variety of industries, but I have chosen to work in the produce industry because of its great people and values."

— Gary Caloroso

**MARK CAMPION, 31**  
**Vice President Foodservice Sales**  
**Taylor Farms**  
**Salinas, CA**



In his 10 years with Taylor Farms, Campion has watched it grow from \$150 million in sales to over \$1 billion and has been a part of the team managing this growth. He has spoken on numerous PMA panels and was an inaugural graduate of the United Executive Development Program.

In his community he serves on the board of directors at Notre Dame High School, an all girls' Catholic school in Salinas, CA. Shortly after joining the board, he was elected secretary and chair of the development committee.

The speed the produce industry is a daily challenge. "Mother Nature gives short notice and you never know when she's going to be cranky," he says. "I believe my inspiration comes from a unique source. I was born and raised in Salinas and am thankful for the opportunities it's provided me. I've seen how the success of Taylor Farms impacts my community. If I perform well and Taylor Farms performs well, jobs are created and people live better lives. It's easy to be inspired if you feel responsible for 1,400 jobs."

His produce goals are simple — to keep customers happy and loyal. "If I take care of keeping loyal and happy customers, the rest will fall into place."

His original mentor is his late grandfather, Ed Campion. "He owned Merit Packing and claims to have invented bagged produce. Merit was the first company to put carrots into cellophane bags, something I'm sure Mr. Taylor and Mr. Goodman would argue. My grandfather encouraged me to work in produce because of the people. He always said produce people were different. He believed real produce people had great passion for their work. Ten years later, I concur with him. Bruce Taylor and Alec Leach have also been great mentors. Their experience and success in value-added produce is unsurpassed in the industry. I feel fortunate to have learned from them."

and healthful fruits and vegetables, such as Super Bowl avocados, Easter asparagus, Memorial Day strawberries and Thanksgiving cranberries. In September 2005, he was promoted to procurement manager, leading his team through a department restructuring that helped increase efficiencies, achieving higher levels of customer service and growing the business 9.9 percent. Since becoming director of procurement in October 2007, he has been heavily involved in supplier relations and contract negotiations. Under his direction, Pro\*Act successfully completed a banana program with Dole Fruit, started a tomato source program and hired a tomato product manager to help develop the business.

He has been involved with the Kinship Center in Salinas for several years, sponsoring less-fortunate families by making sure they have clothes, food, computers, school supplies and even toys for the children.

His inspiration comes from three previous generations of passionate

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**JOE CIMINO, 37**  
**Director of**  
**Procurement**  
**Pro\*Act, LLC**  
**Monterey, CA**



Cimino's drive and determination have led to his current role, managing over \$700 million in sales. He has

shown the leadership skills to manage the day-to-day responsibilities of procurement, quality control and transportation.

He began at Pro\*Act in December 2000 as a row-crop product manager, and in January 2003, Cimino helped start its retail category along with transitioning into melon product manager. In developing the retail category, he was involved in numerous holiday promotions to encourage the consumption of safe

produce people in his family. "My great-grandfather, Peter Martori, started his New York produce stand in the early 20th century and delivered door-to-door with a pushcart," he explains. "My grandfather, Frank Condello, moved the family to the Arizona desert to become a grower/shipper and eventually ended up in Salinas, starting P&R Brokerage, and my dad took over P&R and ultimately got back into the grower/shipper side of things with Cimino Brothers Produce. Seeing things change within the industry and being a part of the change while also realizing some things have held true from one generation to the next continue to inspire me."

His goals include helping each Pro\*Act distributor become the 'best in class' within its marketplace, enabling local, regional and national chains to utilize this distribution network to deliver fresh, safe and healthful fruits and vegetables nationwide. "I also want to help continue educating our children about the importance of eating fresh fruits and vegetables every day as they not are only our current and future consumers but are also heading down a disastrous path of health issues due to poor diets. While I absolutely support domestic suppliers, I also desire to help facilitate better relationships with foreign grower/shippers. I see an ever-increasing need to source product globally as weather patterns change and consumers' needs and demands transform the industry."

His dad, Armand Cimino, and Max Yeater of Pro\*Act, are mentors. "His passion and love for the business are second to none," he says of his father. "He has never forced any of us Cimino children into the business but has always been excited to pass on his knowledge. Although he is in his mid-60s, his hard work and dedication continue. He learned to speak Spanish at the age of 54 in order to build a grower base and form a produce company in Mexico. Max, who has been my boss since I started at Pro\*Act, has leadership, dedication and maturity far beyond his years. He continually sets a great example of what a true leader should be."



**CHRIS DALMARES, 39**  
**President**  
**Dalmares Produce, Inc.**  
**Chicago, IL**

All of Dalmares' life has been spent, in one way or another, in the produce industry. His father, a Greek immigrant, started distributing produce to restaurants in 1955. When he was a child, Dalmares worked with his father and eventually graduated to working as a salesman on Chicago's terminal market

during summer breaks from college. Upon finishing school, he entered the family business, which at the time consisted of two trucks — one of which he drove.

Fifteen years later and with the help of his brother Bill, Dalmares Produce, Inc. has achieved growth of at least 20 percent per year to become one of the largest produce distribution companies in the Midwest. Its customer base includes independent restaurants, institutions, and national multi-units. The company was honored by *Inc.* magazine as one of the fastest growing businesses in the nation in 2007.

Dalmares has participated in designing and implementing critical perishables distribution solutions for many of the largest restaurant chains in America. The rapid pace of change in the industry over the past decade and his company's ability to embrace and prosper through it brings him his greatest sense of accomplishment. "Whether it be our industry leading development of comprehensive food-safety practices and guidelines or forming mutually beneficial strategic relationships with our grower partners, the challenges have always been formidable, yet the rewards have been great," he says.

He is actively involved in his local parish and the company supports many local charities as well as The Make-A-Wish Foundation and The National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

He hopes to continue the managed growth the company has attained to this point. "Development of a new facility is in the works. It promises to be one of the most advanced perishables distribution centers in the nation. The company also seeks to become more vertically

integrated, with plans to seek out opportunities in production, processing and logistics."



**MICHAEL S. DAROSHEFSKI, 39**  
**Senior Buyer/Merchandiser**  
**Produce/Perishable**  
**U.S. Foodservice, Rosemont, IL**  
**Roanoke Division**

Daroshefski is credited with taking the division's produce sales from 2.5 percent of case sales to over 10 percent and growing. Working out of the Salem, VA, office, he has helped build relationships with key vendors and has helped the corporation achieve over

\$1 billion in produce related sales.

He is known for consistently looking for pricing and selling techniques that will benefit his company and strongly promoting the company's private-label Cross Valley Farms program. He has completed USDA training and is a strong proponent of field tours, processing plant tours and producer training.

He has coached and assisted with several t-ball and Little League baseball teams and has helped out with Cub Scouts. He is currently a middle school Catholic religious ED teacher. "It has been great to pass on my experiences," he says.

His most significant community accomplishment was on May 18 when he participated in a triathlon in Memphis, TN, as a member of the Virginia Chapter of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.

He has been inspired by the company's growth since he took over the program and everything he has learned in his seven years in his position. "My challenges would be the ever-changing would of produce. You just never know what is going to happen from day to day and what and how you will combat and communicate these things. An example would be an unexpected rainstorm that damaged 60 percent of the strawberries in Oxnard, CA. It's something different every day and why I keep at it. It's never boring and you never stop learning."

Daroshefski's goal is to grow the division's produce sales. "I would like to see us achieve 15 percent of the case and 9 percent of the dollars in produce sales. If we achieve these numbers, it would make us the top USF division in regards to produce sales. Also, I would like to develop some better training materials for sales reps so they have the understanding and knowledge to sell more produce."

He has had many mentors but four stick out: Pete Delzell of Eagle Eye Produce, Cyndy Dennis of ToJo Mushroom, Clark Fideler of C&D Company, and Al Yancey of Branscomb Produce. "They have all gone above and beyond what they needed to do to help me learn and grow. They have unselfishly taught and helped me to better understand how the industry works. I have learned a great deal about the different commodities each of them deals with. In turn, I have been able to better answer customer and sales reps questions. I also have been able to take all of this knowledge and teach it to our sales force to help them grow and ultimately sell more product."



**STEPHAN DOLBEC, 36**  
**President**  
**Patates Dolbec, Inc.**  
**Saint-Ubalde, QC, Canada**

Dolbec is president of the largest potato farm in eastern Canada. The company has grown 100-fold since he took the reins. Under his management, it developed the market in the United States as well as new markets in Montreal and Ontario. The farm has increased to 10,000 acres and put procedures in place for better yield and better quality.

Twelve years ago, he started Legubec, a fresh-cut processing company

that now processes over 400,000 pounds of potatoes a week plus other vegetables and has reached annual sales of around \$4 million. In 2003, he won Quebec Entrepreneur of the Year from Ernst and Young.

He is vice president of the Quebec Produce Marketing Association, serves on the board of directors for the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) and is vice president of the Quebec Growers Association. He is a sponsor for the 5-to-10-A-Day program, is a donor to the local Children's School and Community Centre and works in conjunction with Laval University to create new potato varieties. Over \$250,000 dollars in research and development is invested annually on the farm.

His father, Herman Dolbec, started the business over 40 years ago and is his inspiration. "He was involved in a tragic car accident 14 years ago, which left me with the huge responsibility and challenge to continue the business at a young age," he explains, "so I surrounded myself with a great team. Our challenge is to continuously try to stay ahead of our competition for quality and service to keep our customers happy. We are always looking for new ways and ideas to improve our growing techniques and packaging for our product, and better ways to market our products. It is a very competitive business today and will be even more so in the future."

His goals are to better educate customers about potatoes and to continue searching for new varieties. "Another goal of mine is one day for everyone to eat potatoes not only because they are good for you but also because they taste good."

He names three mentors. "My father introduced me to the potato industry and taught me to follow my goals and dreams as well as to believe in myself. Ghislain Perron with Metro in Quebec has given me guidance and knowledge in business as well as everyday life in general, and Claude Heber, now retired from Metro, has taught me how to approach business and to always listen to my customers needs."



**CHRIS DUGAN, 40**  
**Vice President Sales East**  
**Chiquita Fresh North America**  
**Cincinnati, OH**

Dugan has held various sales and management positions during his 12 years at Chiquita. In his current position in Norfolk, MA, he is responsible for the territory from eastern Canada down to Florida and manages the sales directors, managers and retail merchandising teams for the banana and salad business. Under his direction, the company has achieved Perishable Vendor of the Year Status at Giant Carlisle and successfully grown its business with new items to improve profitability, for example, Chiquita Minis and organic bananas. It has also been very successful in growing revenue through new business and improved business models.

Active in his community coaching kids' sports and giving time and donations to charities, he finds the Relay for Life cancer walk especially meaningful.

He is a graduate of the United Fresh leadership program. "It was a great learning experience and a lot of fun being part of a great group," Dugan says.

His inspiration was a desire to be part of a healthful and fun industry. "It is always rewarding when some of the charities I work with ask for donations and samples for events. It further validates the healthful aspects and positive view of produce."

He notes the industry's many exciting challenges. "One of the biggest issues we are facing today is working through the ongoing cost increases with respect to production and logistics. It has become very difficult to contain costs due to the volatility of fuel, fuel-related by-products, labor, etc. Additionally, exchange rates have played a role in the cost equation. Food prices are on the rise and consumers could potentially shy away from more expensive offerings."

He wants to continue to offer solutions for customers and consumers. "We need to constantly challenge ourselves to be innovative to



meet the consumers' needs. With the heightened requirements and expectations on packaging, food safety and quality, it is more important than ever to partner with our customers to achieve our common goals. The entire industry will win when we work together."

He lists Craig Stephen, vice president of finance and business for Chiquita Fresh North America, as a mentor. "Craig's industry knowledge is unsurpassed. I have spent a great deal of time learning the business from him and leaning on his extensive experience in the industry. Craig has worked internationally in various roles and in several cross-functional areas throughout his career. He brings tremendous value to our company and our customers. I've learned many things from him, but perhaps the most important is how he manages people. Craig is respected throughout our entire organization for his industry knowledge, interpersonal skills and overall leadership."

Jeff Beaulieu, vice president of produce at Giant Food Stores, LLC, is another influence. "Jeff taught me never to underestimate the importance of customer service and collaboration. We met many years ago, and his leadership brought our teams together to drive business results. We continue to work together to drive overall performance, and our teams support one another throughout the process. In the end, we create wins for each other and the consumer. Jeff is a person of great integrity, honesty and leadership. His influence has been instrumental in reminding me that business building begins with customer service."



**TODD EAGAN, 39**  
**Buyer (berries, avocados,**  
**asparagus and corn)**  
**Costco Wholesale**  
**Issaquah, WA**

Eagan, who works in Costco's San Diego, CA, office, has been responsible for the company's berry category since 2000. He has worked to improve packaging, specifications and vendor relations and has significantly grown the category. The betterment of Costco's strawberry packaging has improved the quality of fruit, maximized trucking per cube and reduced cardboard usage. Eagan's efforts have paid off not only for the company in reduced freight but also for the environment through less trucking.

He is a member of the United Fresh Leadership class of 2007/2008.

Eagan is both challenged and inspired by the dynamic of the industry. "The nature of produce makes every day a little different, which creates challenges and opportunities," he says. "I love the global aspect of what we do and how a change in weather on the other side of the world is affecting our orders today."

His goal is to continue to work with Costco's berry shippers to improve the eating experience of the different berry varieties. "By focusing Costco's demand for the better eating varieties, we can help influence future programs and send better eating berries home with our members. I believe this will lead to increased consumption, which is good for the industry and our members."

His mentors within Costco include Frank Padilla and Rich Wright. "They have created the vision of produce at Costco."

He credits many other mentors from the supplier community including Brian Bocock of Naturipe Farms, Fred Williamson of A&W, Greg Mixon of Sunnyridge Farms, Sam Gabriel of Westlake Produce, Walter Yager of Alpine Fresh and Dana Thomas of Index Fresh. "They have always been generous with their time and willing to teach me about their operations."

"The nature of produce makes every day a little different, which creates challenges and opportunities."

— Todd Eagan

**TIM FLEMING JR., 39**  
**Vice President**  
**Strube Celery and Vegetable**  
**Chicago, IL**



Fleming is a member of the fourth generation in his family's nearly 100-year-old produce business. He began at a very young age and after college joined Strube full-time. He now serves as a vice president and department head.

When Fleming took over as vegetable department head, the company had specific goals to streamline the department to make it more efficient and to increase gross profit of all its commodities. Within a year, it was able to adjust its buying and selling patterns to become more efficient and to hit — and maintain — its gross profit goals.

Fleming was a member of United Leadership class #10. Outside work, he enjoys coaching multiple sports for his children and donating his time and resources to hunger-based charity organizations.

The very nature of the industry inspires him. "I love the pace of it and how it's never stagnant," he says. "Change is also the constant challenge I am faced with as a wholesaler. It requires me to continually evaluate our role and be creative on how to best service our customers. Thus, it's very important for me to keep expanding my knowledge of the entire industry and not just my little corner of the world. Last year, I was selected to take part in an agricultural tour of Bari, Italy, which confirmed my belief in my need to keep learning and stay proactive."

His most influential mentor is his grandfather, Bob Strube. "He took over the struggling company from his father in the 1940s and under his leadership, Strube became the largest produce wholesaler in Chicago. We grew up hearing 'Work is a blessing.' He woke up at 2 AM every day with the mentality of being extremely lucky to be going to work. He modeled for me what it means to be not only a successful leader but also a leader with integrity. Eradicating hunger was also a passion for him. He co-founded the Chicago Food Depository to help get food to those who needed it. It has inspired me to remember 'to whom much is given, much is expected.' I feel extremely lucky to have learned work lessons and life lessons from him."

**MAILE SHANAHAN GEIS, 30**  
**Marketing Director**  
**Buy California Marketing**  
**Agreement (BCMA)**  
**or California Grown Campaign**  
**Sacramento, CA**



Shanahan Geis began her career in the produce industry directly out of college as a sales coordinator with Muranaka Farms. This position provided her a rapid education into the world of produce. She moved from

Muranaka to the marketing department at Apio where she implemented marketing tactics for its fruit and vegetable divisions as well as its fresh-cut vegetable business. As a member of the marketing team, she was responsible for new product launches, industry press relations, tradeshow coordination, sales support materials, market research and category analysis.

In 2004, she became director of trade relations for the *California Grown* Campaign with responsibility for maintaining relationships with the retail community and encouraging the promotion of California-grown products. In 2006 she was promoted to marketing director and is now responsible for all activities associated with the campaign including public relations, advertising, industry outreach and retail promotion. "One of my proudest achievements is being a part of a movement contributing close to \$1 billion in increased economic activity to the state of California," she relates.

Shanahan Geis is an active member of PMA, United Fresh, FPFC and California Women for Agriculture. She also is involved in volunteer

activities in her local community with Big Brothers Big Sisters and WEAVE, a crisis intervention and service provider for victims of domestic violence.

Her inspiration is educating the public about California agriculture and the importance of purchasing locally grown items. "Because so few Californians are directly involved in the production of our food supply, I believe campaigns such as *California Grown* play a vital role in telling the positive story of agriculture and the health benefits associated with fresh produce. We aim to keep fresh produce and other agricultural products in front of consumers and proactively seek out positive ways to interact with the public and educate them about agriculture. Working on behalf of California farmers, who supply the nation with a healthful assortment of fruits and vegetables, has continued to inspire me to support our campaign efforts having a direct effect on our nation's health as well as the economic viability of the state."

She looks forward to continuing the *California Grown* Campaign by finding unique ways to encourage the state's residents to seek out and purchase locally grown, healthful agricultural products. "I also strive to be an active member of the produce industry organizations by serving on committees and becoming an active advocate for industry causes."

As a successful woman in the produce industry, Jan DeLyster of the California Avocado Commission has been an inspiration to her. "As a past board member of the BCMA, she offered guidance and support. I believe she exemplifies the true qualities of leadership — being both effective and kind. I strive to model my career after hers."

Chris Zanobini of the California Pear Advisory Board has also served as one of her mentors in his role as BCMA chairperson. "I have looked to Chris for guidance and support often in my current role with *California Grown*. Most of all, Chris has encouraged an environment of autonomy, allowing me to develop into a leader within the organization as well as the industry."

**ELLIOTT GRANT, 36**  
**Founder & Chief Marketing Officer**  
**YottaMark, Inc.**  
**Redwood City, CA**



Grant has made news with his vision to give products a unique identity and thus help defend against counterfeiting, diversion and fraud, while creating a new channel for brand owners to deliver consumers more information. He founded YottaMark in 2003 to develop and commercialize technology to protect

consumers around the world from the threat of counterfeit and tampered products. Since then, YottaMark has become a leading developer of Secure Serialization solutions — a way of giving every item a unique identity a consumer can easily verify either online or with a cell phone.

Just after the 2006 spinach crisis, several produce companies approached YottaMark to explore whether the technology could bring cost-effective traceability to individual items of produce — especially field packed. The company ran successful field trials in strawberries, carrots, tomatoes, melons and grapes — and was recognized by PMA as a finalist for the Food Safety Award in 2007.

HarvestMark, the company's unit-level traceability solution for the produce industry, provides new opportunities for growers and retailers to enhance their brands, differentiate products in the store and improve customer loyalty. HarvestMark brings consumers traceability, transparency and assurance, and gives growers critical distribution-chain information and a powerful tool to respond to recall or foodborne illness events.

Grant has a passion for helping consumers make informed decisions that can keep them safe. "Whether this means enabling villagers in Africa to ensure their anti-malaria drugs are real and in-date with a cell phone or giving a mom the confidence to buy healthful, fresh produce for her family," he says, "I am inspired by our potential to make a positive difference."

The passion and commitment to food safety he sees in the produce

industry also inspire him. "I want to help growers and packer/shippers communicate the passion and all the hard work they're putting in through to the end consumer."

Grant's goals revolve around solving the innumerable problems in delivering cost-effective traceability to the produce industry and educating consumers about it. "Once traceability is in place, there are also as-yet untapped benefits to growers, packer/shippers and retailers — in the same way no one really knew how useful Google was going to be when it first began."

He has had help and encouragement from many forward-thinking individuals. He credits Devon Zagory, now with NSF Davis Fresh, as having been very supportive and helpful in early efforts and also finds JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT column a fantastic way to get some unfiltered insight into the industry.



and honors the fastest growing companies in Northeast Ohio during the previous year. The Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University has been in the top 10 percent of the world's business schools for decades.

His goal for Lakeside is to become known as the premier supplier to the salad manufacturing industry. "Through becoming a premier supplier, Lakeside will enjoy stable growth into the future for our customers, suppliers and employees," he says.

He names Bruce Taylor of Taylor Farms, Phil and Frank Gilardi of Freshway Foods and Keith Gustafson of Lakeside Produce as mentors. "Bruce's name is synonymous with salad manufacturing. He is one of the nation's largest and most respected foodservice salad manufacturers and has always been known to be one of the industry's sharpest minds, all while maintaining a reputation as one of the most desired employers in the field."

"Frank and Phil created Freshway Foods, which has become one of the most respected and fastest growing produce companies in the United States. No one has been a bigger influence or helped me more than my mentor and colleague Keith Gustafson. He has guided me through the highs and lows of our seasons and helped me mold Lakeside into what it is today and what we hope it to be in the future."



**TERRY GRANZIER, 37**  
**President**  
**Lakeside Produce Distribution, Inc.**  
**Westlake, OH**

Granzier anticipated the need for increased emphasis on food safety and product traceability. In 2002, after the green onion recall, he developed the industry's first Internet-based product traceability system, ProTrace, which is available to contract customers on a proprietary basis. Since he founded Lakeside Produce in 2002, the company has realized over a 1,500 percent increase in sales; it anticipates sales growth of over 30 percent for 2008.

In 2007, Lakeside was awarded the prestigious Number One Upstart Company rank in the Weatherhead 100, which acknowledges, supports

In 2002, after the green onion recall, [Granzier] developed the industry's first Internet-based product traceability system, ProTrace, which is available to contract customers on a proprietary basis.

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Reader Service # 59

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Reader Service # 51



**JON GRECO, 37**  
**General Manager**  
**BSCC Produce, A Division of Sysco**  
**Houston, TX**

In 2000, when Greco was appointed sales manager of Sysco Produce West Coast Procurement, he was the youngest sales manager of the Sysco Procurement Office. In an effort to better understand the shipping side of the business, he joined the sales team at Taylor Farms. He returned to Sysco, then titled BSCC

Baugh Supply Chain Cooperative, at the beginning of 2003 and was shortly thereafter appointed to sales manager again. In 2005, he was promoted to general manager, responsible for the oversight or management of just under 30 sales people and roughly 80 million cases in sales a year.

After the 2006 spinach crisis, he was heavily involved with a promotion to increase spinach sales. Run strictly out of Sysco's own budget, it offered \$5 per case off every case of Sysco Natural and FreshPoint's Finest spinach that companies could sell for a two-week period in February 2007. "To me, this was a huge sign of what our growers and suppliers mean to Sysco," he says. "We did this out of our own budget, we asked for nothing from the supplier community and did it simply to show our support of this valley and all its growers."

He has always been driven by challenges. "Over the years, we have had significant systems changes that created a need for further training to our group. Changes can be difficult for many people so the need to manage different people in different ways becomes increasingly important. Successful management of people is what has driven me in the past and continues to be a major driving force for me."

He is known for not being complacent. "I want to have more impact in various areas of our corporation as well as the foodservice industry itself. At some time in the near future, I would also enjoy the challenge of working at one of our operating companies in an effort to better understand their overall produce needs, thereby creating a more customer-friendly and efficient operation in my office."

He names Bruce Taylor of Taylor Farms as a mentor. "Although coming from an incredibly influential family in the produce industry, Bruce started up Taylor Farms, shipping only a few semi loads of value-added vegetables a week. Now, he is the industry leader as a value added shipper. However, he has remained an incredibly humble and easily approachable person."

Rich Dachman and Tom Wason, both of Sysco, are also mentors. "Rich has run his own foodservice distribution company, managed a buying or procurement office for foodservice and now serves as vice president of produce for Sysco Corporation. It is a career path I would truly appreciate to follow, not just for the experiences it would bring but also because he allows for upward movement in management based on performance. Tom served as the vice president of perishables for Sysco and was one of my managers. Over the years he has given me the opportunity to grow with this great company. He also rewards based on performance, as any good or strong manager should."



**ANDY HAMILTON, 37**  
**Director of Sales**  
**IFCO Systems, N.A.**  
**Tampa, FL**

Hamilton excels in his ability to collaborate with diverse teams. He previously managed Chiquita's innovations group when its Costa Rican packaging team needed to devise a pack for the North American market.

He approaches problems and opportunities from the perspective of his engineering degree. While working in sales at Chiquita for Wal-Mart, he developed a complex regression model based on nearly a billion transactions through Wal-Mart's Retail Link data to substantiate a critical change in farming practices. He could explain the multivariate regression in lay-

man's terms to everyone from farm quality-control managers to the COO, triggering a change and reversing a lagging performance.

Since joining IFCO two years ago, "I have taken the experiences from each farm and packing station I visit to expand my knowledge and ensure we tailor our message to help the growers, shippers and retailers with whom we do business," he says. "As a result of our efforts, we have transformed IFCO into the largest RPC [reusable plastic container] pooler in North America and we're one of the fastest growing businesses within the produce industry."

Since he travels over 100,000 miles per year for business, his main goal is to maintain a balanced lifestyle, caring for his wife and three young children while accomplishing as much as possible at work. He has coached youth basketball and baseball almost every year since he was a student at Georgia Tech.

"I always remember my family and being a good community role model is what is most important in my life. I firmly believe this balanced approach has also made me a better leader and manager at work. Too many people who are singularly focused on work quickly lose perspective. When you understand what is important by proper prioritization, you're in the right frame of mind to make rational decisions."

He is a graduate of the United Leadership program. "The best part of the program is learning from the other individuals within the group. I am most inspired by hearing the stories of the entrepreneurs in the program. Hearing their stories motivates me to make where I work more entrepreneurial and to focus on what makes the produce industry so special — the people who work in this dynamic industry."

In his current position at IFCO, he has the opportunity to expand the use of RPCs. "While RPCs are the predominant produce transport package in Europe and parts of Asia, the penetration of RPCs here in North America is relatively low. As a trained industrial engineer, I get the opportunity to show how to integrate the supply chain in a holistic approach. Through our work with some retail partners and many growers, we're demonstrating there is a cost at each step in the supply chain and we're showing how to look at what package works best from A to Z or from field to the shelf — not just from the farm to the warehouse. Challenging and changing decades of ingrained processes and mindsets aren't easy processes, but nothing worthwhile ever is."

Scott Owens at Paramount Citrus, his manager when he transitioned from engineering to sales, helped him develop despite his inexperience. He also credits Chris Dugan as a mentor. [Editor's note: Please see Chris Dugan profile on page 25.] "I watched Chris build relationships with customers and develop trust and rapport, which became invaluable in later negotiations and crises. Chris gave me a lot of confidence by selling my potential to others inside the organization and ingrained in my management philosophy the importance of being an advocate for others."

Bob Hartmann at Eurofresh was another key influence. "I worked extensively with Bob when I first started at Chiquita — he was my first real exposure to what sales is all about. Like Chris, Bob developed tremendous rapport with customers and he deftly managed a cerebral side with his affable personality."



**CHRIS HARRIS, 32**  
**Category Manager Produce**  
**and Horticulture**  
**Fresh & Easy/Tesco**  
**El Segundo, CA**

As produce point person for British retail giant Tesco's U.S. division, Harris is on the front lines of innovation. Last November, Tesco launched the first of its Fresh & Easy small-format stores with a quick turnaround focus. Estimates predict there could be over

200 Fresh & Easy stores in California and the Southwest by the end of the year.

Harris is renowned for his focus not just on customers but also on the supply side, for his relationship-building skills and for his philosophy of leading by example and his trust.

Harris, his team and their supply partners have designed and launched a successful consumer-focused produce range from scratch. Consumer feedback has been excellent and sales support the feedback. The team has accomplished this in an approach consistent with Harris' business philosophy of bringing the growers and packers into all discussions relating to their products. In only six months, they have made 75 additions or changes to the range led by consumer feedback and desire.

Harris is involved with the Los Angeles Children's Hospital, specifically its Elf program, which gives Christmas presents to families in need with seriously ill children. He also recently drove an effort to raise money inside Fresh & Easy for the Debbie Chisholm Memorial Foundation, a local make-a-wish foundation based in Riverside, CA.

Mother Nature inspires, frustrates and challenges him every day. "The consumer wants perfect product every time and we are continually challenged to deliver this," he says. "The very wet winter we saw a few years ago was the hardest I have ever experienced. It was a different crisis every day."

He wants to be part of delivering the unparalleled quality U.S. growers achieve every day. "Food safety is a massive focus and it is important to make the right decisions to protect the consumer without adding unnecessary cost. I strongly believe by working together and forming long-term relationships we can all invest in each other's future and have a stronger industry for it."

He has many mentors in the produce industry, including Mark Munger of Andrew & Williamson, as well as many in other fields. "Mark had helped me to pick through the industry and find the very best in the people involved in it. He shows me that giving back to the industry is important if it is to continue. It is also very useful to look beyond our walls to take lessons from other industries. I have friends and confidants in the finance industry, telecommunications, energy fields and Internet businesses."



**JULIA KNOTT, 27**  
Sales Representative  
and New Products Developer  
Oké USA  
Watertown, MA

Knott's career has delved deeply into the intersection of food, environment and social justice with a focus on how to create a food system that nourishes eaters and at the same time supports small family farmers and nurtures the earth.

She is the lead outside sales representative for Oké USA, a fair-trade tropical fruit company. Since Oké's ownership structure gives the farmers who supply its fruit a one-third ownership share of the company, her work benefits many small farmers. As a member of a small team in a startup environment, she is challenged daily to construct new systems and build the company's sales to where they can break even and, hopefully, soon have modest profits to share with its farmer co-owners.

She previously worked in consumer marketing at Equal Exchange, a fair-trade food company that handled dried fruit, nuts, coffee, tea, chocolate and sugar. She developed a fund-raising program enabling schools to raise money by selling Equal Exchange's healthful snack products while engaging teachers and students to learn about fair trade and farmer cooperatives.

She is inspired by the growing fair-trade awareness in the United States yet challenged by the lack of fair-trade produce items available. "It has been a real challenge — and one I relish — to build awareness among produce buyers and retailers about the opportunity to tap into a growing desire of consumers to support the family farmers who grow their fruit. So far, our results are pretty encouraging, with many of the retailers who carry our bananas seeing their banana sales increase by as much as 20 percent."

Visiting the farmer cooperatives that grow Oké's bananas and co-own its brand is an inspiration. "In Ecuador, our producer partners, El

Guabo, created a community clinic and pharmacy accessible to all community members at very low cost. In order to alleviate the costs of schooling, all co-op families with children receive a stipend for school supplies. Moreover, women benefit from fair trade by being included in the work force. In El Guabo, a cooperative of women has been employed in creating organic fertilizer for the crops."

Projects made possible by El Guabo's co-ownership of Oké have transformed the quality of life for many. "In Machala, El Guabo helped build the first school for mentally disabled children in the region. It donates bananas weekly to neighboring low-resource schools, feeding a total of 6,000 children within the region, and has donated soccer and basketball courts to neighboring schools. These contributions are a part of a holistic view of development that involves projects not only focusing on necessities but also giving kids the opportunity to be kids."

She is deeply committed to understanding how consumer choices here in the United States connect us to the well-being of producer communities. "I want to be an integral part of growing Oké USA into an agent of change within the produce industry. I have a lot to learn about the industry and look forward to continuing to expand the conversation about what it means to eat a banana — or mango or pineapple."

Her mentors in the industry include Jonathan Rosenthal and Rob Amsterdam at Oké USA and Kate Howell and Michael Rozyne at Red Tomato. "Jonathan's commitment to social and economic justice while at the same time promoting a very livable work/life balance for his team has been a major inspiration for me. Rob has really brought the spirit of the produce industry to our office and has been a great mentor in sharing his deep experience with domestic sustainable agriculture. Kate has been a great inspiration as a fellow saleswoman in the produce industry and Michael was instrumental in coaching me in the art of conversation in my first year in produce sales."



**CHRISTINE LOTT, 31**  
Merchandising Manager  
Stemilt Growers, Inc.  
Wenatchee, WA

Lott's ability to identify with a wide range of consumers and find the specific selling points relevant to them have brought her industry success. In her current position, she is responsible for direct account promotion coordination for Stemilt World Famous Fruits with major retail grocery chains throughout the United States and Canada. From her Sacramento, CA, location, she manages such activities as brand management, category management, ad planning and merchandising, and promotion tactics to generate sales and build partner relationships.

Previously, with the California Pear Advisory Board (CPAB), she was responsible for developing and managing marketing and promotion activities for all California Bartlett pears and domestic marketing programs for California Bing cherries. She developed and implemented retail promotion, advertising and public relations programs, industry communications and event coordination, managed a 5-member regional merchandising team and developed the California Pear Ambassadors program, enabling growers to participate in regional events and in-store demonstrations to represent and promote the California pear industry.

She is chapter treasurer for the California Women for Agriculture and the alumni chapter treasurer and past president the Sigma Alpha Professional Agriculture Sorority.

She grew up on a dairy farm and has always had a passion for promoting the farmer's bounty. "I have had the opportunity to represent many growers over the years and be their spokeswoman to the public," she says. "A farmer's job is not an easy one and educating the public on what it takes to bring their products to the family's table is something important to share."

She would like to continue being a spokeswoman and advocate for the grower, be it a private company of growers or an industry group.

She cites Chris Zanobini of CPAB as a primary influence. "While I

was working for the Board, he was always there as a mentor, pushing me to expand my knowledge and experience and guiding me into the roles I have served over the years. He has had an integral role in my development as a leader and industry advocate."

Another inspiration is Tom Mathison, founder of Stemilt Growers. "He is a man with a true passion for farming and a return to the land. He has a goal of providing high-quality, premium Stemilt fruit to customers. Even though he has retired and transferred the leadership of Stemilt Growers to his grandson West Mathison, he can still be seen visiting the orchards and keeping involved in the activities and programs the company implements."



**LEE MANNERING, 35**  
**Government Relations Manager**  
**Produce Marketing Association**  
**Newark, DE**

In an industry deluged with regulations, legislation and issues, Mannering holds an increasingly critical position with PMA. After joining in 1994 as a staff writer, he advanced to public relations coordinator, handling public affairs issues, managing media coverage for PMA events and evaluating and

improving member communications. In early 2005, Mannering became PMA's government relations manager, leading its efforts on immigration reform and especially getting AgJOBS passed, a critical step to solving the labor issues created by the crackdown on illegal immigrant workers in the industry. He serves as PMA's content expert in this area, participates and represents PMA in the overall ag coalition supporting AgJOBS, activates its grass-roots member network to contact Congress and keeps staff up to date.

He has also played a major role in PMA's efforts on country-of-origin labeling, forging legislative and regulatory efforts and developing compliance communications, and on transportation issues, including information delivery, coordination with PMA's Transportation Task Force and collaborative efforts with transportation organizations. He represents PMA and the industry in federal food-security efforts and creates and manages strong Web resources and communications efforts.

Mannering established and now manages GROW (Grass Roots Organized to Win), PMA's grassroots network. He builds its membership, manages external resources and technology, works one-on-one with members to enhance participation and manages the bimonthly GROW newsletter. "Government issues are more critical than ever as they affect each company's bottom line through increased costs, increased scrutiny and changes in business practices," says Mannering. "Recognizing this changing environment, PMA is more involved in issues management and government relations than ever before."

He is the No. 2 person in the department for many legislative and regulatory issues, food safety, food security, international trade and more. He participated in an agroterrorism assessment for produce and served on the PMA emergency response team during the spinach crisis. He was responsible for producing and distributing PMA member communications in an around-the-clock effort to keep members informed about what was happening. "While it was a very hectic time, it was rewarding to hear members report the information PMA was giving them was valuable."

Mannering is engaged and plans to marry this November.

Involved in Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, he has been to the Gulfport, MS, region four times to help families and communities rebuild. He is also a second-degree black belt instructor at the martial arts school

where he teaches kids and adults after work.

"It's often said the produce industry gets in your blood. When I started at PMA, I had very little experience with produce, but this is a business people are passionate about. I feel very blessed to have gotten to know and work with some of the brightest marketers in this business, as well as to have some of the best association professionals as colleagues. The produce industry is ever-evolving and being part of it every day is inspiring."

Mannering's switch to government relations after 11 years in public relations was a big challenge. "Getting up to speed quickly on the issues affecting this industry and developing a grassroots program of member advocates was demanding. One of the unique aspects about PMA's grassroots program is we're able to reach into urban areas through our foodservice and supermarket members and inform and educate them about industry issues."

He wants to continue to make PMA relevant and valuable to its members by giving them the information they need about legislative, regulatory and policy issues. "PMA research shows government relations is one of the most important services the association provides its members. Another goal is to help keep PMA in the pattern of growth and success it's enjoyed since the early 1990s."

Mannering considers PMA's Kathy Means, who hired him 13 years ago, as his mentor. "She has helped me grow tremendously over the course of my career and gives me freedom and creativity to develop PMA member resources. Kathy is always focused on providing member value, which is the cornerstone of association work, and I have learned a lot from her over the years. Every time I talk to members, I try to learn more about their business and issues."

"When I joined PMA, I wrote newsletter articles on topics completely new to me, so having a chance to talk to people such as Bruce Peterson and Bob DiPiazza really brought me up to speed on what was happening in the industry. Now that I am in government relations, having the opportunity to discuss legislative and regulatory matters with peers at Western Growers, American Nursery and Landscapers Association and other associations has helped me grow professionally."



**BRAD MATHIS, 32**  
**President**  
**BMI Produce**  
**Adel, Georgia**

As founder of BMI Produce, Mathis focuses on helping growers and shippers to maximize return on their crop. He brings his vast experience from previous positions to this new company, which has been in operation for almost one year, and is moving forward rapidly, already averaging around \$1 million

in sales per month. "The success of the company has been absolutely unbelievable and it is completely attributed to our ability to service customers the way they like to be serviced," says Mathis.

For more than 12 years, Mathis worked at Southern Valley Fruit & Vegetable, Inc., leading the company to the forefront in supplying produce from its organizations in Georgia and Mexico. His work in establishing relationships and building business greatly supported the two divisions. He has set up programs with major retailers and foodservice organizations worldwide and has given back to the industry by serving on the Southeast Produce Council board of directors.

Constant industry changes and improving business and relationships on a daily basis are his inspirations. His goals are to continuously strive to stay at the forefront of the industry by providing value to his customers with quality product, superior service and a food-safety standard above the rest.

Mathis enjoys talking with the older generations of the industry. "I value learning about the past. It's interesting to hear their opinions of the future and listen to how they achieved some of their accomplishments over the years in our business by using some of the tricks of the trade they have learned."

"It's often said the produce industry gets in your blood."

— Lee Mannering

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Reader Service # 2



**TATE MATHISON, 30**  
**Food Service Team Leader**  
**Stemilt Growers**  
**Wenatchee, WA**

Part of the fifth generation of Mathisons farming apples, pears and cherries, Mathison is the third generation in the warehouse and packing business. He grew up on Stemilt Hill, farming with his dad, brother and sister. He's done everything from picking up rocks to preparing the ground for planting to running a 350-person cherry harvesting operation.

In his current position, he heads Stemilt's foodservice sales department, accounting for over a million cases of whole apples, and is the business head for the value-added Applesweets division. He is known for his willingness and ability to jump in wherever needed. During high school and college, he ran the cherry harvest crew for his father. When he started, it picked around 1,000 tons with roughly 150 harvesters but by the time he finished, it was picking nearly 3,000 tons with 350 harvesters.

After college, he worked for Dole Fresh Fruit as a banana ripener and then as a tropical sales manager, seeing nearly every major retailer's supply chain from the port of entry to the retail shelf and helping troubleshoot any issues Dole customers were facing with their banana program.

He sits on the donation committee board for Stemilt and has been nominated for a position on the PMA Food Service Board of Directors. He played college football and was team captain for Pacific Lutheran University, which won national titles in 1999 and 2002.

He is challenged by the pursuit to return money to the land, and maximization of this end. "I want to build consumer demand for products that are good for people and good for the earth," he says. "My interest is to more closely integrate the land to the end consumer."

His goals include positioning Stemilt and Applesweets in a greater capacity. "My 3-year goal is to make Stemilt a leader in the foodservice segment of the market, both in whole and value added tree fruit. "My 5-year goal is to make Applesweets the leader in the sliced apple category."

His grandfather Tom Mathison, father Kyle Mathison and brother West Mathison have all served as his mentors. "My grandfather taught me the end goal of Stemilt is to return the money to the land. My grandfather's words made an impact on me. I can't imagine going to work every day with a goal any less admirable than what he has charged me with.

"Of all the things I have learned from my father, the one thing with the greatest impact is his vision. If our company is going to make it for another generation, we must have the vision to do so. My brother West has the staying power and the personal resolve to see tough situations to their end. He has shown me how a leader has to make the tough decisions. If you are humble and take advice from trusted advisors, you can be confident in their choices even when they are unpopular."



**JOE MERENDA, 39**  
**Director of Business Development**  
**FoodSource, a C.H. Robinson Co.**  
**Monterey, CA**

Merenda and the foodservice group at FoodSource have developed successful programs with distributors and suppliers across the country. His visionary abilities have helped create unique foodservice solutions for large-scale restaurant chains.

Merenda has successfully worked in start-up and entrepreneurial companies. He started the Fresh 1 Marketing division for CHRW in 1997, going from \$0 to \$60 million in five years, and developed its produce import division. He developed an \$80-million foodservice division for FoodSource and was instrumental in the successful launch of the Newman's Own Organics Fresh Produce line, a \$30 million business unit.

He has helped end users eliminate waste by offering transparency of

the supply chain, which has led to more trust and better service for all parties. He has continued to work on driving costs out of the supply chain through long-term partnerships in transportation, growing and distribution.

Merenda is very active in his community through recreational sports, YMCA and Pony Baseball. He coaches baseball, soccer and basketball, and he and his wife are very active in the PTA and school site council. He coordinates a multiple fund-raising event each year to benefit the Pacific Grove school system.

He is challenged and inspired by the rapid change and consolidation of the industry. "Change creates opportunities to provide new solutions to old problems and we have a lot of old problems in our industry," he says. "I worked in the beverage industry [Coca-Cola] prior to produce, and we have a long way to go in catching up to the dry-grocery industry in terms of technology, services and pricing stability. I love the challenge of taking on a seemingly impossible project and coming up with a solution that can be repeated and applied to other organizations."

Merenda would like to continue to build long-term relationships with grower partners and customers. "Strategic alliances are the future and the only way to be successful in our industry for the long run. There is a generational shift coming, and my goal is to grab as much knowledge from our industry leaders as I can and use it to create new solutions for the future. I would like to continue to work for all aspects of the supply chain to restore and build profitability for growers, distributors and end users."

He would also like to work on standardizing food-safety practices. "Food safety should not be a marketing tool — it should be about public safety. We need to adopt standardized practices we can all agree to. Millions are being spent and wasted on redundant practices no one can afford right now."

Mike Remppe, retired from C.H. Robinson, and Tom Minnich, owner of FoodSource, are two of his mentors. "Mike gave me my first job in produce. He taught me to always be honest, never take yourself too seriously and when you get into a bad situation, ask for help early. Mike gave me a chance to be successful, gave me more responsibility than I was ready to handle and helped me navigate the industry. Tom was one of the owners of FoodSource when I came over to Monterey in 2002 and he showed me the value of a good business plan. Tom really focused on not trying to be everything to everybody and always looking at things through the customers' or growers' eyes."



**DARREN P. MICELLE, 39**  
**Chief Marketing Officer**  
**Custom Pak/Six L's**  
**Immokalee, FL**

Micelle founded Custom Pak in 1994 and built it into a premier packaging operation specializing in distributing and repackaging tomatoes and dry vegetables. It currently has seven locations and over 750 key employees nationwide. With a vision to be a bi-coastal producer of fresh tomatoes servicing

customers throughout the country, he set up a joint growing venture with Six L's and CAB produce out of Mexico. He started a research and development program for Six L's that includes developing proprietary varieties and new product lines of tomatoes.

In his community, he is involved in youth sports and is the coach for the 10- to 11-year old Pop Warner League football and coaches 8- to 9-year old Little League Baseball.

His inspiration comes from growing up in New Orleans and being a third-generation tomato man. "It is a challenge keeping every customer satisfied daily with such a volatile product line of fresh vegetables," he says. "If it is not quality, then price or logistics challenges us. Every day is different in the produce industry and meeting this ever-changing environment, while keeping our client base satisfied, is the driving force behind what keeps me motivated to succeed."

Micelle wants to focus on getting kids to eat more vegetables and on

new varieties. "I want to continue to increase consumption of tomatoes and vegetables among children. They are the foundation of our future growth. If we get them started on vegetables earlier in life, it is one more customer we will have in the future. The development of new tomato varieties will stimulate increases in consumption with consumers."

A global brand is also on his wish list. "I'd like to develop a branded tomato program recognized globally. This will set our organization apart from our competitors and establish the increase in consumption we are all looking for. It can only be done with the production of a special product delivering freshness, appearance, flavor and shelf life all in one tomato."

Buddy Micelle, his father, is his principal mentor. "He taught me the essentials of making sure the customers made money before you make yours. He also taught me to treat everyone with respect, whether they are a customer, supplier or employee. You never know where they will end up in life."

Other mentors include his grandfather Sal Peraino of Dixon Tomato, Bill Lipman of Six L's and Jeff Gargiulo of Gargiulo Inc. "I admire the company Bill Lipman and his family built. He mentors me daily about his experience and how it can relate to current market situations. Jeff Gargiulo succeeded in the tomato business and then continued his success in other industry items like oranges, wine and melons."



**JOSH MITCHELL, 37**  
**Vice President of Technical Services**  
**Misionero Vegetables**  
**Gonzales, CA**

After graduating as valedictorian from McMaster University's Michael G. DeGroote School of Business, Mitchell joined Misionero as manager of the then new salad plant, which had one process line, one shift with 18 workers and total production of about \$3 million per year. Under his management over the next seven years, the plant grew to over \$70 million dollars in business per year with operations running 24/7. He was responsible for all operations, product development, quality assurance, organic certification, procurement and maintenance and engineering. Misionero was one of the first in the industry to fully implement a hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) program and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). One key aspect of this growth was developing two patented systems for Misionero's "Washed and Trimmed" line of whole-head lettuce products, sold under the Garden Cuts brand and several private brands. One of the two named patent holders, Mitchell notes he could not have done it without the close support of some key customers and personnel.

In 2002, he became value-added manager, continuing his responsibilities for the plant but focusing more on food safety, product/systems/process development and procurement. He also served as technical liaison to key co-manufacture partners as Misionero grew several private brand programs for some of North America's largest and most respected brands.

In 2007, with the effects of the spinach crisis still lingering and the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement (LGMA) looming, he became vice president of technical services, focusing on food safety, quality, sustainability and product development programs and initiatives. He represented Misionero at the United Fresh annual Washington Public Policy conference and was a member of United Fresh Leadership Program Class 11.

He is a member of the National Autosport Association, which allows him to take his car on some of the greatest tracks in the world, and is a member of the United States Sailing Association with a certification to captain bareboat sailing vessels up to 50 feet. He is an avid, sometimes competitive mountain biker and enjoys scuba diving and snow skiing.

He is a proud part of Misionero's local initiative with a group that improves on-farm water management and educational outreach to local schools. This group includes Ecology Action, Chualar School district,

Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation Districts and Life Lab under the auspices of the Model School Program and the State Water Resources Control Board. "This is a model community-based project to reduce runoff from the farms and allow the community, particularly the school children, to participate in conservation, food safety, and food security," he explains.

Being part of the industry at a time of rapid change and evolution has been inspirational. "While our industry accepts no subsidies, it provides some of the most economical, safest products that form one of the cornerstones of most retail offerings. Since my first day in this business, I have seen the competitive forces within this industry allow prices of certain items to fall to 15 percent of their former levels in some cases, while at the same time the level of sophistication in both food technology and safety have increased dramatically.

As for the future, "I look forward to helping our company and this industry meet the needs of this environment. Beyond this, I look forward to continuing to take on more responsibility with in this company and the industry as a whole."

Mitchell names Floyd Griffen, founder of Misionero, and Stephen Griffin, Floyd's son and current company president, as well as Javier Velasco of Sonora Packing, as mentors. "They have all been key mentors in helping me learn and develop in the various roles I have played. I have to thank both Stephen and Floyd for having the faith in me to allow me the opportunities they have, without which I would not be where I am today."



**DAVID NELLEY, 38**  
**Director, Pipfruit**  
**& Pineapple Categories**  
**The Oppenheimer Group**  
**Vancouver, BC, Canada**

Over the last dozen years, Nelley has become one of the most visionary members of his company, dedicating his expertise beyond New Zealand apples and pears to guide the entire pipfruit category, and since 2001, has built the pineapple business from the ground up.

At just 24, Nelley opened an office for Enza in Seattle, WA, and was responsible for marketing New Zealand apples in Mexico, Hawaii and west of the Mississippi. During this time he helped introduce the Braeburn and Pacific Rose apples and the Taylor's Gold Pear to North America.

In 1997 he became marketing manager for Enza North Asia, based in Singapore, with total responsibility for marketing the New Zealand crop of apples in Hong Kong, China, Taiwan and Philippines and he sold the first New Zealand apples into India.

He started working for Oppenheimer in 2001 with responsibility for its total apple and pear crop and has held bottom-line accountability for over \$550 million worth of business. He introduced Enza's Jazz and Pacific Rose apples grown in Washington state. Soon after, he took on responsibility for the company's pineapple category and has helped grow the business from \$7 million to over \$20 million.

He has participated in Food Leadership at Portland State and the PMA's produce leadership course in association with Cornell University.

His family has been involved in agriculture for generations in New Zealand. He explains, "Coming from a farm, I know what it's like to be completely vulnerable to weather, pour everything into your product, send it to market and then wait at the end of a dusty road for, hopefully, a check to arrive in the mail. I wanted to be involved at the other end of the agricultural market, and this has taken me around the world. Fruit is my favorite food and I do not want to be in another industry."

Nelley wants to focus on forming mutually profitable relationships between retailers and the growers he represents. "I also will continue to develop market penetration for the phenomenal Jazz apple."

John Anderson and James Milne at Oppenheimer are two of Nelley's mentors. "I admire John's ability to find a solution and his readiness to share his time with me. I have worked for and alongside James Milne at

the Oppenheimer Group for over 15 years and enjoy his energy.”



**MARK E. PETERSEN, 40**  
**General Manager**  
**CH Robinson Worldwide**  
**Eden Prairie, MN**

Petersen is a senior manager within the CHRW organization and responsible for one of its largest produce sourcing divisions, corporate procurement and distribution services (CPDS). He is responsible for shaping the way the company transacts business in the produce industry and for creating the structural framework that is now the model for all divisions and transportation departments within the produce division as a collective whole. He is known for challenging the status quo and not accepting the statement “That’s the way it’s always been done.”

Throughout his 16-year produce career, Petersen has turned challenges into opportunities. He has often demonstrated effective leadership by looking to diversify his business into segments designed to provide service and value to customers and vendors.

An encouraging mentor, he has contributed to many CHRW employee success stories. He was a member of the United Fresh Leadership Program Class 12. “This program is made up of great people and great content,” he says. “I was very fortunate to be involved and have appreciated a great deal what I learned and the people I had the opportunity to interact with.”

He has been a sitting board member of the American Trucking Association (ATA) Agricultural Transporters for four years, working to provide greater visibility to produce transportation; most ATA members have been in the livestock hauling or raw ingredients hauling sector. He has made positive change and reviewed contracts and legislation to ensure the produce haulers’ voice is heard within the transportation industry. Petersen is also on the Council for Supply Chain Management and the Culture Club at CPDS.

He sees produce as an industry that has a great history but really needs to change and adapt to a new way of doing business. “Specifically, we need this in the transportation sector. This is a challenge and an inspiration to me in because it’s an opportunity to make a difference.”

He wants to continue to network, communicate, interact, execute and actively drive positive change. “It’s a benefit to the industry, as well as my company, and it’s something we must do because it’s the right thing to do. I would like to see the supply chain reviewed as to terms, conditions and accountabilities of the parties. I want to see where things are outdated and lobby the parties involved to make the changes necessary to ensure long-term sustainability of the movement of our goods.”

Jim Lemke of C.H. Robinson, and Bob Fair, now retired from C.H. Robinson, are mentors. “Jim Lemke has always accepted and encouraged people to challenge the system, to be open to ideas other than his own or the industry’s and to foster and promote positive change. I have always appreciated the mentorship of my old manager from when I started with CH Robinson, Bob Fair, who really taught me additional business ethics and about doing the right thing, promoting your people, accepting responsibility and the value of teamwork.”



**ROBERT SCHUELLER, 34**  
**Director of Public Relations**  
**Melissa’s/World Variety Produce, Inc.**  
**Vernon, CA**

Schueller has been the voice/spokesman for Melissa’s for the past 10 years and has been quoted in leading consumer publications, including the *Washington Post*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Orange County Register*, *New York Times*, *Kansas City Star*, *Savueur* magazine and *Cooking Light* magazine,

and in leading trade publications such as *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, *Progressive Grocer*, *Grocery Headquarter*, *The Produce News* and *The Packer*.

Schueller is frequently asked to present at leading food and produce trade industry conferences including PMA, United Fresh, FPFC, Culinary Institute of America (St. Helena) and the National Association of the Specialty Food Trade (NASFT) Fancy Food Show.

He creates and writes a significant amount of Melissa’s marketing strategy, including selling tools, presentations, Web site and newsletters. He was a co-creator of the *Melissa’s Great Book of Produce* published in 2006. He is currently working as co-creator on a “produce book No. 2” that will be published in 2010.

He takes an active role in FPFC (subcommittee and past board member), PBH (subcommittee) and PMA (subcommittee).

Food is his inspiration. “I love to eat and cook,” he says. “Who wouldn’t want to work in this industry? I look at the produce industry as the ‘health’ industry. No other segment of the food industry has so many different varieties of items. Almost everyday, something new comes into season and that is what makes it so exciting, too!”

His main challenge is getting America to eat more produce. “Eating different varieties of produce and trying something outside their comfort zone can be difficult for many. Ethnic restaurants and the media play an important role in inspiring and educating America to try all these different varieties of produce available to us.”

He wants to continue to build the Melissa’s brand. “It’s more than just my job — it’s an adventure. I will also continue to introduce new, exciting varieties of produce to the United States. Melissa’s continues to scratch the surface of a whole new world of varieties day after day.”

Schueller also wants to educate the press and consumers. “I will keep the trade and consumer media updated on current issues and trends in the produce and food industry. I will also continue to seek out creative ways to educate America on the world of produce in America today. If America only knew the exciting world of produce, it would look at produce more importantly — it is coming!”

Schueller credits Joe Hernandez, Jimmy Hernandez and Bill Schneider of Melissa’s for mentoring him in marketing, media and public relations and customer service. Bob Brown, Debra Cohen and Peter Steinbrick of Melissa’s were mentors in the areas of produce knowledge, public and customer relations, marketing and team building.



**VALERIE SILL, 31**  
**Strawberry Business Manager**  
**Driscoll Strawberry Associates, Inc.**  
**Watsonville, CA**

Sill has been involved in the produce industry since 1999, when she graduated from UC Davis and joined Driscoll’s marketing department. She helped build its category management program, starting with just a vision and building it into the renowned program it is today. “Finishing my masters of

business management in 2006 has helped me to think about the business both strategically and with an out-of-the-box perspective,” she says.

In 2007, she became Driscoll’s strawberry business manager, a new product business management group that has full P&L responsibility in both the short-term and long-term. Areas of activity include strategic demand and supply planning, operations planning, grower communication and coordination, and sales planning. “I am grateful for the opportunity to take on new assignments within Driscoll’s that continue to challenge me and help us to craft our way into the future.”

She finds the most inspiring part about working in produce to be the personalities and individual skills throughout the industry. “It truly ‘takes a village’ when it comes to produce. For me, it’s both a humbling and inspiring experience to work side-by-side with such a diversity of talent. There’s always something urgent and important going on in produce. Although this can often make us anxious, it’s the inherent challenge the industry presents.”

A common career thread thus far has been her efforts to align the supply chain and she wants to continue this pursuit. “Regardless of my position or title, I will continue my path towards alignment. Although

this is something the produce industry hasn't been generally good at, it is important for all of our futures combined. Understanding each other's business, and creating plans producing positive solutions for all, is the future of produce."

Her most influential mentor is Chuck Sweeney of Driscoll's. "Chuck has taught me the art of perseverance — what he calls being courageous with your conviction. He also helped me learn about the produce trade in general, given his extensive experience in merchandising, retail operations and planning. I am grateful for his continued support and friendship to this day."

She also cites mentorship from Driscoll's customers. "In my role as senior category manager, I had the great fortune to work directly with some of the industry's very best retailers. As our partnership grew, I, too, was able to grow as I discovered more and more about the details of the produce retail strategy. I will carry this knowledge with me as my career path continues and, for this, I am grateful to our partnered customers."



**JONATHAN K. STEFFY, 30**  
**Retail & Foodservice Sales Manager,**  
**Four Seasons Produce, Inc. (FSPI)**  
**Ephrata, PA**

Steffy leads an outstanding team of produce sales professionals (currently 13) with diverse experience and backgrounds. In the last three years, seven of his team members have been promoted, a credit to his management skills. He is responsible for considering new ways to approach old problems and current issues facing grocery stores and foodservice operators, brainstorming with customers and other associates, and forming produce sales programs. He developed the Organic Made Easy program as a turnkey program to help existing and potential customers understand how FSPI can help them successfully introduce fresh-packaged and value-added organic produce.

To add excitement to the retail customer base he put together a 12-month schedule of display contests for the FSPI independent retailer base. His Earth Week event to showcase sustainability initiatives celebrates Earth Day, highlights the new Sustainability and Energy Initiatives page on FSPI'S Web site, and explains that FSPI will donate 25¢ to the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture for each case of organic produce shipped during Earth Week.

He is a member of Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture and has participated in the Harold Lloyd Supermarket SMARTS program, the Penn State Management Development Creating Effective Sales Development Program and the World Innovation Forum in New York City. He has been a church youth group leader and junior high Sunday school teacher.

He gets his inspiration from his love for food. "What better way for me to stay involved with the most dynamic kind of food than to work with fresh produce and its changing seasons, variety, growing conditions, origins, tastes and, best of all, its people," he asks. "I am inspired by great people and great ideas and Four Seasons Produce and the produce industry have so many great ones. Building relationships that make everyone successful is important to me and to Four Seasons."

The perishable nature of fresh produce keeps him on his toes. "The commoditization of so many produce items challenges me to think about better ways to market, sell and merchandise it so price, while important, is not the only piece of the purchase equation. I also care about the environment and am moved to consider what can be done in the produce industry throughout the supply chain to make more positive impacts."

He looks forward to becoming even better in his current role and furthering his career at Four Seasons. "Learning and teaching are part of my personality. I want to continue to gain knowledge from my mentors, customers and vendor partners and to find opportunities to relate my experiences to other produce professionals for their development. I also want to be a part of helping the produce industry address sustainability, labor and consumption issues and find new formats to reach consumers."

He mentions Wendell Hahn and Ron Carkoski of FSPI as two of his mentors. "Wendell, a former Washington D.C. grocery store chain produce executive, has been my supervisor for most of my time at FSPI and has always given me latitude to be creative and the accountability coaching to be successful. Ron has been very involved in the broader produce industry through United and PMA, is a wealth of information and injects humor into the day-to-day. I seek to emulate his strengths in dynamic public speaking, organization and keeping things fun."

Bill Saussaman of Seminole Produce and Nelson Longenecker of FSPI have also influenced Steffy. "Bill trained me on retail and wholesale produce pricing strategy. Nelson introduced me to the wholesale produce business through an operations internship at FSPI. He has shown me how technology and data analysis can help guide strategy and execution."



**JARROD SNIDER, 30**  
**National Accounts Manager**  
**Frontera Produce, LTD**  
**Edinburg TX**

Snider embodies the traits of a young, talented and dedicated leader with his work ethic and passion for excellence. His work on several Frontera initiatives continues to earn him respect as he strives to position his company and team for success.

His challenge has been to restructure and build a department to manage national accounts and he has implemented processes and procedures positioning Frontera's business to grow in excess of 30 percent. He spearheaded the change, allowing Frontera to achieve a level of execution that caused one of its largest customers to recognize Frontera as Vendor of the Quarter in the fourth quarter of 2007. Snider is very involved in promoting industry awareness and opportunities to aspiring college students and teaches classes at Texas A&M University.

He is an active alumnus of the United Fresh Leadership Program and participates annually at the Public Policy Conference in Washington D.C. In his community, he is involved in local civic events, including publishing a local newsletter to promote produce awareness and consumption.

He is motivated by the fast pace and constant challenges facing the produce industry. "I love the opportunity to make a positive impact on a global scale through helping provide solutions and a healthful food supply," he says. "Opportunities for leadership and growth, both within our organization and within the industry as a whole, are very exciting."

He plans to continue taking an active leadership role in the industry through its various boards and committees. "I want to increase the visibility and awareness of the industry and the opportunities available to young talent."

Dan'l Mackey Almy of DMA Solutions and Ken Nabel of Frontera are two of his mentors. "Dan'l's drive and enthusiasm have always motivated me and helped me realize no obstacle is too great. Ken's intensity and willingness to share his knowledge have really helped me expand my overall understanding of the industry and challenged me to always evaluate and improve the way I address issues and/or opportunities."

"I love the opportunity to make a positive impact on a global scale through helping provide solutions and a healthful food supply."

— Jarrod Snider



**JAMIE STRACHAN, 35**  
**President/CEO**  
**Growers Express**  
**Salinas, CA**

Strachan's initial exposure to the Salinas agricultural scene was as a principal with Pacific Risk Management, where he advised the partners of Growers Express on financial matters such as workers' compensation, employee benefits, risk assessment and asset management. His ability to understand the needs of

the owners and develop tools to meet and optimize their needs led to him becoming interim general manager of Growers Express and then to president and CEO of this \$150 million company.

He sponsored a community program called Health Eating Lifestyle Principles (HELP), which was designed to educate school children and adults about eating right and exercising. Jamie has been featured in commercials as a HELP spokesperson to promote healthy recipes and healthy eating within the community. Growers Express worked with HELP to provide weekly health seminars within Growers Express and affiliated company offices for our employees.

Strachan was one of the founding board members of the California LGMA; he is currently vice chairman and serves on the executive committee and communication committee and currently. He has been instrumental in establishing the program guidelines, staffing, budget and direction for the LGMA which has quickly become the standard and model for Food Safety across the produce industry.

Under Jamie's leadership Growers Express has been investing and collaborating with top universities and testing laboratories in science and research relating to food-safety issues.

He believes consolidation in the industry is key to providing better, more efficient and more valuable services to customers long-term. Under his leadership and direction, the Capurro Partners recently joined Growers Express, which has successfully consolidated its customers, products, brands and sales forces with their own. The partners, employees, customers, products and production base have proven to be very complementary and the combination has been a huge success.

Strachan came from the Silicon Valley and was in the technology businesses prior to coming to the Salinas Valley over seven years ago. He brings a vision of how to leverage technology, science and marketing for Growers Express and the produce industry. Under his leadership Growers Express was the first shipper to implement the first fully integrated grower/shipper version of Microsoft Axapta with Hitachi Consulting. He has also led Growers Express to develop a revolutionary new tracking system called TrueTrac.

When he considers his mentors, he notes, "Woody Johnson [of Growers Express] has helped me understand the industry and dynamics. Every one of my employees and each of the owners are my mentors every day."



**MIKE TIPTON, 37**  
**Director of Produce & Floral Operations**  
**K-VAT Food Stores, Inc.**  
**Abingdon, VA**

Tipton started his grocery career in 1987, bagging groceries and thinking he would be a computer technician. Then he caught the produce bug and became a part-time clerk during high school. He was promoted to produce manager six months before graduation and held the position for five years before becoming

district produce supervisor over 11 stores. He served as produce supervisor over three districts for seven years and then applied to be director of produce. Despite his youth, he was given the position, which he has held for six years. He has taken the foundation laid with the help of lots of good people and begun to move Food City produce to the next level in sales, merchandising and training associates.

Tipton is currently serving his first term on the Southeast Produce Council board of directors and has worked with different state departments of agriculture to help build their locally grown programs. He also works with local schools to educate young kids on eating healthfully and the benefits of eating produce. He strives to instill the importance of community education in K-VAT's produce managers. As a result, K-VAT has had a produce manager nominee in the United Fresh Produce Manager of the Year program since its inception and had the first Produce Manager of the Year award winner.

He is most proud of his family. He has been married for 18 years and has two daughters.

Educating people inspires him and the continuous change of the industry challenges him. "We are not just in the produce business but also the people business," he says. "Without investing in properly training and educating your associates and customers, you cannot expect your business to grow. This business is constant change. You have to be able to motivate and have a strong drive since you don't get a chance to reflect back on what you just accomplished before it's time to move on."

His goals relate to consumer education in produce. "I want to drive produce consumption and promote food safety. My goal is for customers to have confidence in the produce they buy."

Larry Harkleroad and Jesse Lewis of K-VAT are among his mentors. "Mr. Harkleroad instilled the importance of operating the freshest produce departments in town, as well as the importance of relationships with suppliers. Mr. Lewis has taught me the people side of the business — how important it is to take the time to listen to people and how you are only as good as the people who work for you."

Other mentors include Brian Gannon of Big Y, Steve Duello of Dierbergs and Paul Kneeland of Kings. "These are just some of the guys who shared their learning and success with me to help make me succeed in this business."



**NICHOLE TOWELL, 32**  
**Marketing Development Manager**  
**Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc.**  
**Oviedo, FL**

Having grown up in the Salinas Valley, the produce industry has always been a part of Towell's life. "My father has always been employed in the Salinas Valley on the growing side of produce. My passion for fresh produce began early in my life," she says.

As sales account manager, she managed the top three accounts (in sales dollar volume) for her division. In less than two years, she helped grow sales to these three customers by 30 percent.

She was instrumental in embracing and bringing third-party Internet trading platforms, such as I-Tradenetwork and Food Link Online, and direct EDI technology to Duda. E-commerce management is still part of her daily duties and tasks; over the past five years Duda's e-commerce sales have grown from 8 percent to over 50 percent of sales revenue. She helped create a business intelligence reporting and planning model and about four years ago helped develop Duda's Sharepoint site, which allows collaboration across the company, supporting open communication among employees across geographic and organizational boundaries.

Towell developed a successful tradeshow program that maximizes Duda's ROI and drives company growth. She is involved in PMA, CPMA, United Fresh, Southeast Produce Council and the New England Produce Council (NEPC). She is a Sigma Alpha Alumna (Professional Women in Agriculture), a member of California Women in Agriculture, a Monterey County Fair volunteer and she participates in the Salinas Chamber of Commerce's Salute to Agriculture Marketing Committee. She is a Food and Culinary Practice Group member of the American Dietetic Association and is involved with the Florida Farm Bureau, National Association of Professional Women and Saint Rita Catholic Church.

The constant change in the industry challenges and inspires her. "There are no two days the same when dealing with Mother Nature and

while daunting at times, the fast pace of the industry piques my interest," she says. "The biggest challenges come from keeping in front of growing consumer trends and aligning our products to meet those needs. Healthful, convenient, safe food products are a given for a market-driven company in our industry. I don't take this lightly and will continue to work diligently, pressing forward to help create consumer-minded convenient, fresh, healthful products easing the public health crisis in our American culture."

She wants to continue educating consumers and driving consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. "American consumers need to understand our industry is working diligently to ensure the safety of fresh produce. Food safety is imperative to the economic viability of this industry and we must convey it is priority No. 1. Continuing to promote teamwork in the industry to find solutions and help create consistent consumer messaging to reassure the public of our industry's pledge to safe food products is a lofty goal but one I will work toward."

Her father, Bill Sullivan, a farmer in the Salinas Valley, has influenced her by imparting the ethics of hard work and determination, the importance of constant education, the virtue of patience and the importance of caring. "Allowing me to follow my dreams and providing solid support throughout my life fostered my self esteem and helped me to develop personally and professionally."

Mark Bassetti of Duda is another mentor. "Mark has taught me a lot about the industry over the past eight years but more importantly has shared an entrepreneurial spirit driving his unvarying commitment to the fresh produce industry. His leadership skills foster cooperation and teamwork and allow all members of the team to grow and prosper while achieving outstanding results."

Towell also mentions Lisa McNeece of Grimmway, Lorrie Koster of Mann Packing, Jen Ju Wilder of Coast Produce, Twila York of Duda and Dan'l Mackey Almy of DMA Solutions as consummate professional women whom she admires as leaders within the industry.

"These three gentlemen played a key role in my involvement in the produce industry at different times. Their quest for innovation on product development, processing ideas and the development of people and talent is what made me admire them."



**DORN WENNINGER, 39**  
**Vice President International**  
**S. Katzman Produce**  
**Bronx, NY**

Wenninger is an international produce veteran who has spent his entire professional life in the produce industry. His work has taken him to 76 countries and six continents; he spent 12 years living abroad in London, England; Medellin, Colombia; San Jose, Costa Rica; Antwerp, Belgium; and Castries,

St. Lucia. He has worked in all functional areas of produce, including farming, logistics, port operations, breeding, sales, category management and general management.

Although he has been at Katzman for only a few months, he has already contributed significantly to the company. He successfully redesigned its Web site and established a new consumer brand, Bloom Fresh, which has just been launched with several direct suppliers. He has established international sales to Istanbul and the United Kingdom, and increased the export business to Bermuda. He secured the exclusive U.S. distribution of Australian finger limes from the only producer with commercial volume in the world, with the result that Katzman now sells to some of the top restaurants in New York City.

Wenninger has already set up direct sourcing from the farm to the supermarket of French beans, sugar snaps and snow peas, as well as fresh herbs from Guatemala, and has traveled and set up business relationships in Germany, Bermuda, Mexico and Guatemala. He was invited to speak to the ownership and senior management team of Stew Leonard's Supermarkets at its annual strategic planning meeting on how to drive consumer confidence in produce.

He was the first management development associate at Chiquita Brands International in 1992. He worked with the human resources department to establish the Global Management Development Program for Chiquita. He climbed the leadership ladder from logistics manager to farm manager to chief administrative officer (CAO) of Chiquita Colombia; as CAO he was responsible for a \$100-million operating budget at Chiquita's low cost producing banana division.

In 2001 he was hired by Driscoll's as vice president of European business to create and execute a European business. He grew its export business by a factor of 10. He established new production in Portugal and was a founding member of Luso Morango, a Portuguese berry producer cooperative. He set up a sales office in Holland and took the lead in negotiating a joint venture in Europe with Driscoll's two European partners (KG in the United Kingdom and Alconera in Spain).

Wenninger sits on the international board of directors of Amigos de las Americas, a non-profit organization that sends more than 800 young U.S. volunteers to work in Central and South America during the summer. Chairman of its business plan committee and strategic growth coordinating council, he was the keynote speaker at this year's New York City fund-raising event.

The dynamic nature of the produce business inspires him. "Being in produce is about as international, complex and competitive as it gets," he says. "It's impressive how leadership, hard work and drive are sufficient to drive success. I'm impressed how new ventures with these characteristics are capable of making quick inroads, even against entrenched incumbents. It's a constant challenge to maintain one's competitive position. At Katzman Produce, we continue to re-invent our competitive advantages as the market changes to maintain our leadership position."

Two industry challenges he cites are the rising costs of inputs and the competitive selling environment. "We are constantly challenged on how to lower the delivered cost to our customers in an environment where production and logistics costs are rising. Through creative solutions and



**MIGUEL USABIAGA, 38**  
**Vice President**  
**Comercializadora GAB SA de CV**  
**Cortazar, Guanajuato, Mexico**

Usabiaga is responsible for developing a fully integrated produce, packing and distribution system for retail and foodservice customers in Mexico and developing a worldwide-recognized label. He has led the restructuring of U.S. sales for his company and led the food-safety initiative in Mexico, develop-

ing standards for the Mexican produce industry. He is also a key player in leading a social responsibility program, helping the communities around farms with infrastructure projects and scholarship programs.

Handling more than 96 agricultural products in both domestic and overseas markets, Usabiaga is known for his dedication and hard work and has earned the accounts of such multinational companies as McDonalds and KFC. Helping to pull his family's company out of turmoil in the mid-1990s, he successfully developed and built the Mr. Lucky brand into a name known now around the world."

He is inspired by the dynamics of this changing industry and being able to make a difference. "You have to innovate all the time to stay ahead," he states. "You have to work with people to make things happen. People and the marketplace are always changing, so working in an ever-changing environment keeps me challenged all the time. The way someone can make a difference in the community inspires me to work in the produce industry."

His goals are to make his company the leader in service and innovation for international fresh produce sales. "I want to be able to trickle success down to the community and my team members. My other goal, as it relates to the industry, is to be able to finalize the standardization for food safety, labeling and packaging worldwide."

Javier Usabiaga of Empacadora GAB, Tom Church of Church Brothers and Don Christopher of Christopher Ranch are three of his mentors.

eliminating non-value-added segments of the supply chain, we're actively building sustainable relationships from the field to the supermarket."

He mentions Stephen Katzman as a true leader and mentor. "He has been responsible for significantly growing his business over the years. He is willing to look at his business in new ways and is forward thinking about what he needs to do to maintain his leadership position."

He also credits Miles Reiter of Driscoll's as a mentor. "Miles has an incredible focus and dedication to the consumer. His relentless pursuit of quality has been a driving force in Driscoll's success and has served me as an example for future endeavors. He's also a real example of leading a large organization but also maintaining a healthy balance of family, friends and life enjoyment. For me, Miles is one of the great produce leaders in America, and I was lucky to have worked for him for six years."

Another mentor is Charles 'Buck' Kaiser at Chiquita. "Buck has spent his entire adult life working internationally. Like me, he got his start doing volunteer work. Buck taught me about the fanatical attention to detail and operations as a means to drive for superior, predictable results. He's not afraid to look at how he and his operations need to improve, and he leads by example."



**JACKSON WOODWARD, 37**  
**CEO/President**  
**Horton Fruit Co.**  
**Louisville, KY**

Woodward is a staunch supporter of local and family farms. He has been active in promoting Kentucky farmers in a way that enables them to have a sustainable business.

He participated in the United Fresh Leadership Program and is active with several inner city schools helping with healthful eating and mentoring. He also has worked with a new private boarding school for at-risk inner city African-American boys.

The business of providing healthful food inspires him. "I find the industry fulfilling because we provide healthful food," he says. "As a business, it is very fast paced and always changing, which certainly provides many challenges. The timing of this business with regards to both service and quality is so crucial that most of my challenges revolve around those issues. Our growers have different issues than our packing plant and than our trucking entity. Keeping these entities in harmony is mandatory."

He would like to get as involved as possible in growing the industry and his business. "I also feel supporting local family farms is important. As land and natural resources become scarcer, farmers will need to have sustainable business models in order to survive or to continue choosing fruits and vegetables as a profitable crop."

Al Horton is his mentor in the produce business. "I came to work for Horton Fruit out of graduate school. I have known Mr. Horton since I was 18 and was best friends with his now deceased son. Mr. Horton has grown up in the produce business and is a man of integrity."



**MISTY DAWN YSASI, 32**  
**Buyer**  
**Kroger Co.**  
**Cincinnati, OH**

Starting her produce career as an inspector, Ysasi toured growing fields and packing facilities. Working from McAllen, TX, and also covering Colorado in certain seasons, she is responsible for making sure all vendors follow Kroger food-safety requirements. Prior to Kroger centralizing transportation,

she was also in charge of logistics in the McAllen office and for transportation of the loads procured out of South America, Mexico, Texas, New Mexico and Colorado. In her current buying position, she is the

category manager of watermelons, pumpkins, Colorado vegetables, Colorado stone fruit, new categories, Hispanic items, organics and local "homegrown" products.

The organic items available from these areas are limited, but several Kroger divisions have benefited from her ability to seek these items out. The local homegrown program not only supports Texas growers but also contributes to Kroger's effort to reduce its carbon footprint. The program helps cut down on freight and puts a fresher product on the shelves. Ysasi has been able to offer a variety of items with lower freight costs, support local growers, contribute to building the organics category and play a part in saving the planet.

She has attended training in Virginia for USDA Produce Inspection and the PMA Leadership Symposium in Dallas in 2007.

For the past five years, she has been involved with the Brown Bag Challenge, a non-profit organization providing hot meals for the homeless of Corpus Christi, TX. It stuffs brown paper sacks with sanitary items and energy foods for the homeless, gives information on where to seek help, shelter and showers, and collects coats, toys, gloves, blankets and socks. She donates mixed produce to the men, women and children the organization serves. She has worked with the Texas A&M Hispanic Alumni group, which mentors high school seniors and parents of students who have been accepted to Texas A&M.

Her main source of inspiration is working for a company celebrating 125 years of servicing and satisfying customers. "Kroger has evolved with the changing demands and standards and has raised the bar when it comes to quality," she relates. "I'm proud to be part of an organization that is as large as it is yet still makes me feel it is behind me every step of the way. The company supports my every effort in growth as a leader and encourages me to continue building my skills. It's extremely inspiring when you feel your company is constantly giving you the thumbs-up."

Her biggest challenge in the produce industry is its unpredictability. "As a buyer, I'm keeping tabs on several commodities coming from several areas at certain times of the year. Weather can be my best friend and my biggest enemy. Other challenges I have faced include logistic issues, consumer concerns over food safety or company environmental responsibility, and availability of new, local or organic products."

She is filled with ideas for environmental sustainability, category growth and grocery retail trends and would love to get involved in all aspects of the industry. "My passion drives me and wherever this roller-coaster ride takes me. Be it Kroger or somewhere else, I'm going to be on top of the industry trends, food safety, customer needs and demands, and moving my company to the top of the leader boards."

Her mentors are her father, who spent 20 years in the grocery retail business, and her current boss, Jerry Kachtik. "My father has been a big influence and inspiration to my produce career. Jerry continually teaches me everyday about the twists and turns to expect from the industry, which will eventually come full circle. From them I have learned how all my hard work pays off in the end and how being a leader doesn't only involve the workplace."

## Call for 2009 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, 2009  
(born after March 1, 1969).**