

the

vineline

Official Newsletter of the NATIONAL WATERMELON ASSOCIATION

Winter 2025



NATIONAL
Watermelon
ASSOCIATION



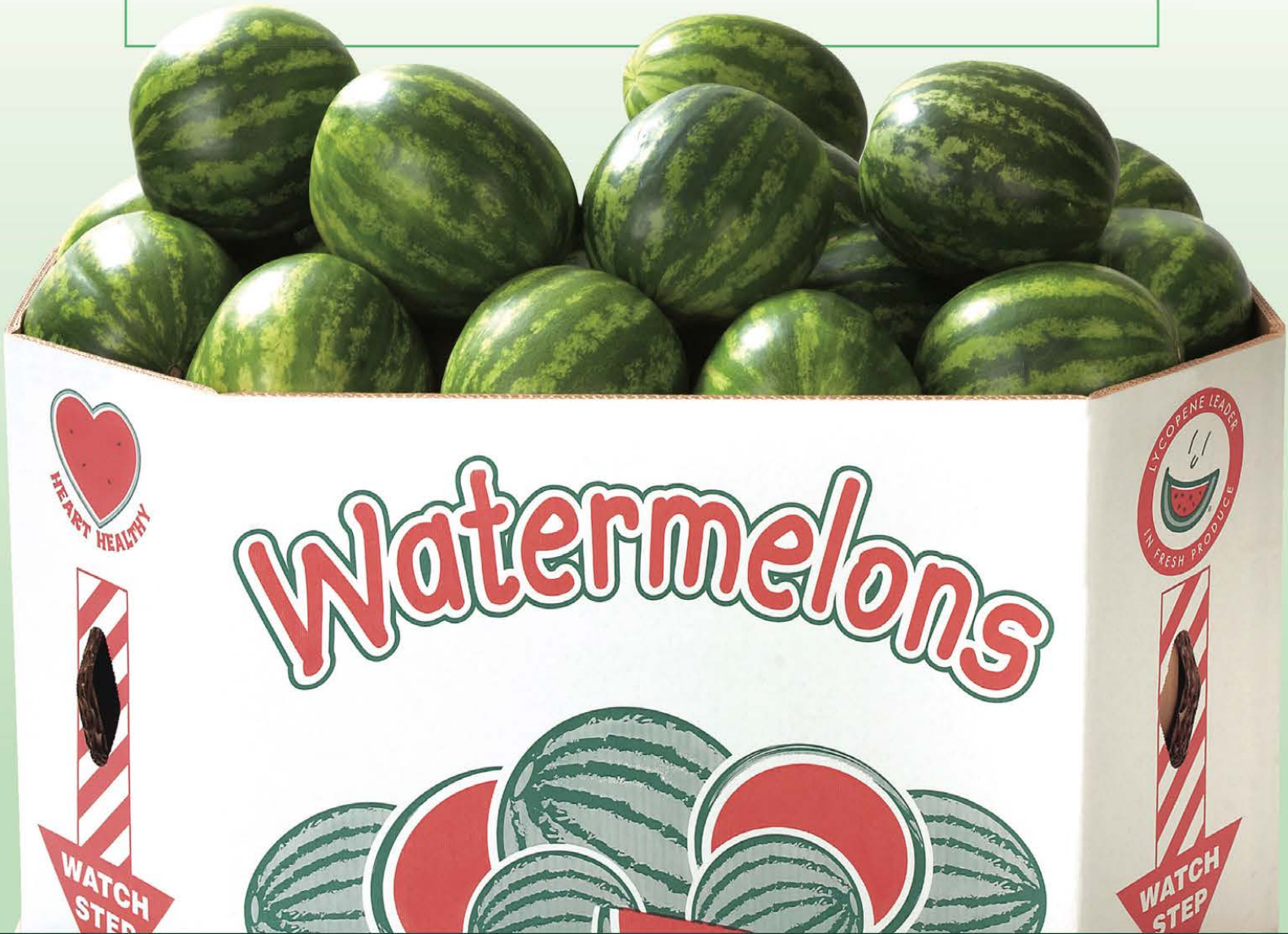


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Season's Greetings from the Vineline!

As the year draws to a close, we want to extend our warmest wishes to you and your families for a joyous Christmas season and a bright New Year. This is a season of reflection and gratitude, and here at the National Watermelon Association, we are truly thankful for the dedication, resilience, and passion that our members bring to the watermelon industry.

Looking back, our October Executive Committee meeting in Atlanta was a remarkable gathering. The conversations and decisions made during that meeting laid the groundwork for an exciting and impactful year ahead. One of the key outcomes was the development of a comprehensive strategy aimed at building even more value for our members. This includes advocating for our industry's priorities with the federal government and acting as a unified voice in the private sector to address emerging challenges. We're energized by the opportunities ahead and remain committed to supporting you in meaningful ways.

This issue of the Vineline highlights some of the essential work happening across our organization and industry. Inside, you'll find insights into the incoming administration and its potential impacts on the watermelon industry, updates on NWA-funded research addressing Vine Decline in Indiana, a critical issue for growers, and news from the National Watermelon Promotion Board and highlights from our Watermelon Queens, who continue to inspire us with their incredible outreach efforts.

As we look toward the new year, the staff (Monica, Tami, Kerri, and Queen Jules) and I remain committed to advocating for your needs, fostering connections, and addressing the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Together, we will continue to grow and strengthen the watermelon industry.

Thank you for being an integral part of this community. We hope this holiday season brings you peace, joy, and cherished moments with loved ones. Here's to a successful and prosperous year ahead!

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink is placed over a decorative background of watermelon slices and whole melons. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'G. F. Szczepanski'.

George F. Szczepanski
Executive Director
National Watermelon Association



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National Report

As we wrap up the 2024 season we reflect over the last few months. In September, Queen Jules visited New York with Mr. Ross Chastain. She participated in the “Protect Your Melon” campaign, reminding everyone to wear their seatbelts. Thank you to Melon 1 for the sponsorship making this promotion possible! **Pics #1, #2**

Next on her agenda was a visit to the IFPA Global Produce and Floral Show that was held in Atlanta, Georgia. Queen Jules was joined by several of her sister queens. Thank you to International Paper for making this visit to the show possible! **Pics #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, #9, #10**



Florida Watermelon Association’s Annual Convention was an incredible time spent with our FWA family! Mrs. Debra Watson and Queen Elanie did a fantastic job, along with Rob and Kel Gibson, making this convention one we

continued on page 7



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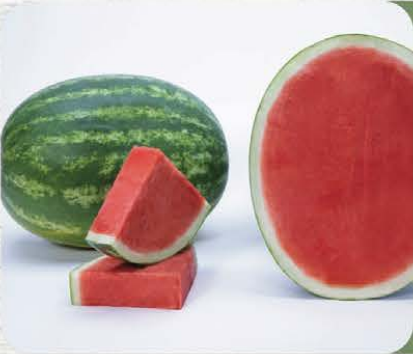
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Deep Red Flesh, Small Pip Size
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Firm, Crisp Flesh



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7197 HQ

Nice Internal Color
Dark Red Flesh, Firm and Tasty
Strong Plant Vigor
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National Report

will never forget! Thanks for the sponsorship and support of the FWA allowing us to attend! **Pics #11, #12, #13, #14, #15, #16, #17, #18, #19**

Flying straight from the FWA Convention to Washington, DC to attend the annual Marine Corp Marathon celebrating their 49th anniversary of this event! Queen Jules was joined by other state watermelon queens along with the National Watermelon Promotion Board team and distributed over 30,000 containers and nearly 10,000 pounds of watermelon to more than 25,000 runners and their enthusiastic spectators. Thanks again to the NWPB for their sponsorship and partnership with the MCM making this another fantastic promotion! **Pics #20, #21, #22, #23, #24, #25**

Now onto the Texas Watermelon Convention that was held in McAllen, Texas this year. Queen

continued on page 9



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National Pictures

Jules kicked off the fun at TWA’s 58th Annual convention with a Denim and Diamonds event and enjoyed McAllen until Saturday evening reconnecting with the TWA watermelon family! She also had an eventful field trip with the visiting queens to The Border Wall and the Rio Grande River that divides the USA and Mexico. A special thanks to Mr. Ben Hill for making this possible. Another “thank you” goes out to Mrs. Barbara Duda and Queen Amelia for being the perfect hosts for this trip! Thanks to Mrs. Kristen Story and the TWA for their sponsorship which made this visit possible!

Pics #26, #27, #28, #29, #30, #31, #32, #33, #34, #35, #36

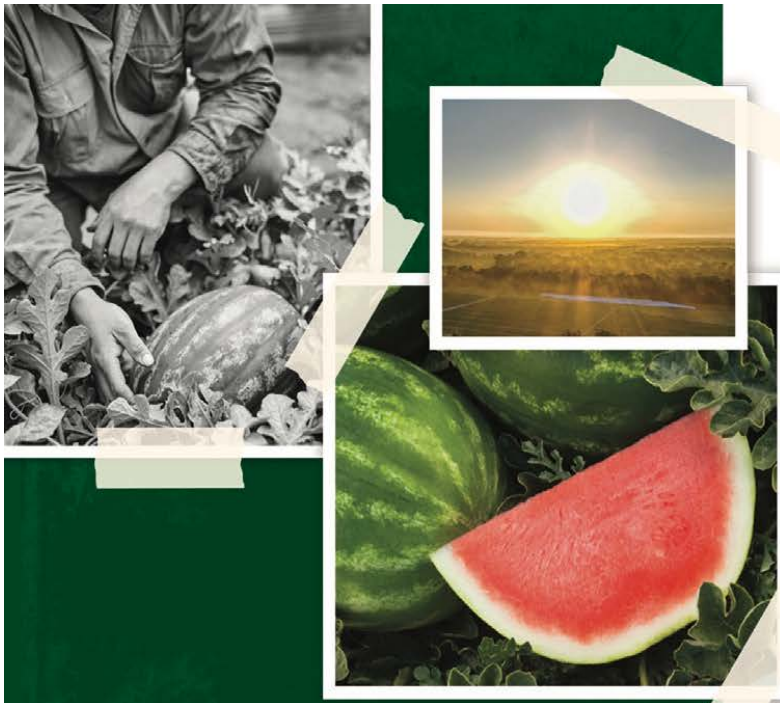




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In the world of agriculture, long-term success is more than a single season’s harvest, or a few good years. It is often measured in lifetimes, with family farms being passed down from one generation to the next. At Syngenta, whether passed down through generations or forged by first-generation farmers blazing new trails, we feel a deep commitment to supporting the growth of family farms. To honor this commitment, we have launched **Grown for Generations**—a campaign inspired by those who have dedicated their lives to growing watermelon for families across the United States.

LEARN HOW SYNGENTA HONORS FAMILY FARMS

Learn more about Syngenta’s “Grown for Generations” watermelon campaign! Scan the QR Code or Visit syngentavegetables.com/en-us



SCAN ME

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Convention Preview

Five Things You Can't Miss at the National Watermelon Convention in Austin: Boots, Buckles, and Watermelons

We can't wait to see you again at this year's National Watermelon Convention in Austin! After more than a decade, we're thrilled to be returning to Texas, and we've got lots in store for you. From networking opportunities to invaluable learning sessions, there's something for everyone. While we could go on and on about everything you'll find at the convention, here are just five things you won't want to miss!



1. Opening Night at Punch Bowl Social

Kick off the convention with a memorable Thursday night at a unique venue—Punch Bowl Social! Enjoy a fantastic night of fun with activities, music, food, and things to do. It's the perfect way to meet fellow industry professionals and immerse yourself in Austin's vibrant atmosphere.

2. Queen Competition

Don't miss the excitement of the Queen Competition! Watch as candidates vie for the crown and represent the watermelon industry with grace and poise. This is always a crowd favorite and a great way to honor the tradition of the National Watermelon Queen. Beyond just the pageantry and excitement, the winner becomes our most visible ambassador, promoting watermelon across the country.

3. The Auction: Back and Better Than Ever

Our auction is back and better than ever! Get your hands on exclusive watermelon items, unique merchandise, and once-in-a-lifetime experiences like hunting trips. Plus, discover local treasures from Austin and, of course, take home loads of watermelons. It's an opportunity to support the industry while scoring fantastic finds!

4. Educational Sessions Focused on Compliance

Staying up-to-date with requirements and compliance is a key focus of this year's educational sessions. Learn about audits, food safety, and the latest updates on regulations like FSMA 204. These sessions will ensure you're prepared to navigate the changing landscape of the watermelon industry.

5. Come Together with Your Watermelon Family

At the heart of the convention is the chance to connect with your watermelon family. Whether you're networking, sharing experiences, or making new friends, the sense of community is what makes this event truly special. Let's come together and strengthen our ties as we work towards a brighter future for the industry!

This year's convention promises to be a fun-filled, educational, and meaningful event you won't want to miss. See you in Austin, where boots, buckles, and watermelons meet!



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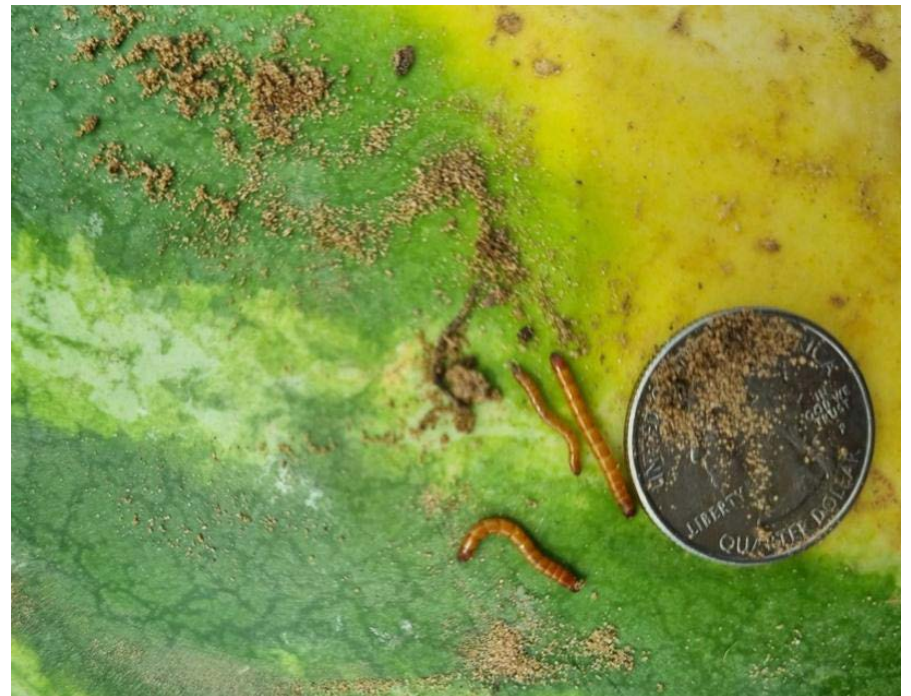


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Vineline Research News

How Do You Manage Rindworm? Investigating a Poorly Understood Pest Complex in Watermelon

by Ian Kaplan



Investigations of insect pests on watermelon have mostly focused on leaf- or root-feeding. Far less research has been directed at the pests responsible for direct feeding to the fruit surface, known to growers as “rindworm”. This lack of information on fruit-damaging pests is problematic for several reasons. One, in most cases, the insects causing the damage are unknown since rindworm is likely caused by a complex of multiple insect species. This makes both diagnosing and controlling rindworm a major challenge. Two, the production chain rewards blemish-free fruits that lack scarring or other rind deformities. Wholesalers and consumers have a low tolerance to the (mostly) cosmetic scarring to watermelon rind and thus small blemishes can lead to entire load rejection of otherwise high quality and edible fruits. Three, there are few rescue treatments available once rind damage has begun, since the pests causing this syndrome are shielded by their protected feeding location at the interface where the fruit is in contact with soil or plastic. Therefore, late-season foliar insecticide applications may not provide adequate coverage to contact and control the focal pest.

Our conversations with large watermelon farms in Indiana identified rindworm as an ongoing and significant economic concern, impacting production in the Midwestern US. Despite their economic importance, rindworm is one of the most poorly studied and least understood pests by entomologists and crop managers. There is virtually no research available on rindworm in US watermelon production with only one scientific study, which was published nearly 50 years ago.

In 2024, with funding by the NWA, we conducted one of the first broad-scale surveys of rindworm infestation on commercial watermelon farms. From May through August, we worked with 8 growers to conduct weekly pest scouting on 16 fields (each ca. 60 acres) in Southern Indiana. During weekly visits we identified and counted all insect pests, focusing on species that are potential contributors to the rindworm complex. Based on field observations and grower conversations, these included striped and spotted cucumber beetles, wireworms, and caterpillars. After fruit set, we also surveyed melons for rind injury. All damaged fruits were photographed in the field, and we later analyzed these images using computer software to precisely measure the area of the lesion.

Altogether, we surveyed >5,000 melons between July and August. Overall rates of insect damaged fruits were 7.5% with most (>75%) of these lesion sizes exceeding the tolerance threshold for marketability. However, this number varied widely by field and week. The maximum observed for a single field and week was 65% of fruits with evidence of insect feeding damage. We found 3-times more damage on the hidden underside than the exposed top portion of the fruit. This likely reflects insect preference for the microclimate where fruits contact the ground. Damage rates were the same for fruits growing at field edges compared to those growing in the field interior. Surprisingly, we found slightly more damage for fruits developing on plastic compared to soil. We assumed that plastic would form a barrier that protected the fruits from soil-dwelling insects. Cucumber beetle densities explained some, but not all, of the variation in rind damage. At densities exceeding their economic threshold (5 beetles per plant), rind damage levels increased rapidly. However, at more typical levels (less than 2 beetles per plant) there was no relationship with beetle abundance, suggesting that other insects are contributing and/or other factors play a role (e.g., insect behavior, soil type, melon variety). We never observed caterpillars but did find wireworms injuring melons at multiple fields. Currently, we are evaluating insecticide regimes that resulted in the lowest injury levels to make management recommendations.



NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD

WINTER 2024 INDUSTRY UPDATES



Each year the Board strives to increase the demand for watermelon through research, education and promotion. In the fall we review new research to help us better understand the watermelon consumer at retail and foodservice. Find the details below and stay up to date with the Watermelon Update by scanning the QR code.



KEY SHOPPER BEHAVIORS DRIVE GROWTH OF WATERMELON CATEGORY

The U.S. watermelon category has experienced strong growth over the last year, with households across the country making an estimated \$2.7 billion in fresh watermelon purchases. According to a recent shopper segmentation study conducted by the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB), an increase in annual watermelon purchases was driven by higher household penetration and spend within key shopper segments.

The shopper segmentation study, which examined shopper behaviors and purchase trends based on consumer panel data, showed that over 3 million new U.S. households purchased watermelon in 2024 boosting U.S. household penetration to 72%. On average, shoppers made five watermelon purchase trips during the year, spending \$5.83 per trip for an estimated annual household spend of \$28.94.

Based on their annual spend, watermelon buyers were divided into three segments: Light, Medium, and Heavy. The Heavy segment represented 25% of watermelon households, and accounted for 63% of total category purchase dollars in 2024. This segment contributed \$97 million of the incremental purchases, highlighting their role as the primary drivers of category growth.

The study identified several actionable opportunities for continued category growth:

- **Increase Shopping Frequency:** Encouraging households to make one additional watermelon purchase trip per year could bring over \$550 million into the watermelon category.
- **Expand Household Penetration:** A 1% increase in household penetration, from 72% to 73%, could generate an additional \$38 million in incremental sales.
- **Target Heavy Shoppers:** Developing marketing strategies focused on engaging with the Heavy watermelon shopper segment could further boost spending and repeat purchases.

These findings, combined with earlier consumer research, offer a comprehensive understanding of watermelon buyer demographics, characteristics, and purchasing behaviors. This enables retailers and producers to effectively target key consumer groups and maximize sales opportunities.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR WATERMELON IN FOODSERVICE MENUS

The National Watermelon Promotion Board conducted a comprehensive 2024 study involving 1,191 nationally representative consumers and interviews with menu development chefs from 15 multi-unit restaurant brands. The research aimed to understand shifting consumer attitudes and uncover potential for watermelon integration into foodservice menus.

Penetration and frequency of watermelon ordering away from home increased but there is still room for growth. More than 70% of consumers agree, “Fresh watermelon is under appreciated, and restaurants should be offering or doing more to use fresh watermelon in new and interesting ways.” Additionally, 70% say foodservice menuing positively impacts their retail purchase. Key insights include:

- Lunch: The Primary Opportunity**
 - Fresh watermelon offers significant potential during the lunch daypart. While lunch stands out, the fruit’s versatility makes it appealing across other meal occasions.
- Appetizers, Sides, and Desserts Shine**
 - Watermelon shows promise as a component in craveable appetizers, sides, and desserts.
 - Main entrees are a greater challenge but could succeed with innovative flavor pairings and a focus on lunch-centric offerings.
- Seasonality and Consumer Engagement**
 - Leveraging summer nostalgia and emotional connections to watermelon can re-engage younger consumers.
 - While year-round usage is the goal, capitalizing on the summer appeal may amplify marketing efforts.
- Chef and Operator Collaboration**
 - Additional collaboration with foodservice operators is essential to refine marketing strategies and encourage innovative menu integration.

This research underscores watermelon’s versatility and untapped potential in foodservice, particularly through innovative menu applications and seasonal marketing strategies.



Vineline *Public Policy*

What the 2024 Election Means for the Watermelon Industry: A Look Ahead

The reelection of Donald Trump as president and a Republican-controlled Senate brings both optimism and uncertainty for the watermelon industry. While the potential for deregulation and tax relief offers opportunities for growers and shippers, challenges such as trade tensions and fiscal concerns could complicate the outlook for this essential sector of U.S. agriculture. We’ve been checking in with some of the experts, and here are a few trends to watch as the new administration in the Executive and Legislative branches settles into the beltway.

Fewer Regulations, Lower Costs

For the watermelon industry, the Trump administration’s commitment to reducing federal regulations presents a significant opportunity. The anticipated rollbacks could simplify compliance with labor, environmental, and transportation rules, ultimately lowering operational costs. Should Republicans maintain control of the House, the Congressional Review Act could be deployed to reverse regulations enacted during the final legislative days of the Biden administration, which may include measures impacting farm labor programs or pesticide use.

On taxes, industry stakeholders are optimistic that key provisions of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will be renewed. The extension of estate tax exemptions and deductions like the 199A benefit for cooperatives would directly impact many family-owned watermelon farms and packing operations. However, the challenge lies in reconciling these extensions with the federal deficit, as the cost to renew them could reach \$4.6 trillion.



Trade Uncertainty Threatens Export Markets

The watermelon industry relies on international trade, particularly with key export and import markets like Canada and Mexico. President Trump’s tougher trade stance, including possible tariff increases on China and other trading partners, could introduce significant disruptions. Although watermelon exports to China are relatively small compared to other crops, any ripple effects in global trade could create competition in alternative markets.

Mexico, a critical partner in the watermelon supply chain, is also at risk. Proposed tariffs tied to immigration issues could impact cross-border trade and logistics, driving up costs and complicating operations for U.S. importers and growers. Generally speaking, the prospect of increased tariffs is more of a threat from the supply chain more than it is to the international movement of our products. It’s the inputs that are truly the risk, as fertilizer, seed and crop protection tools are sourced through global supply chains, and priced to burden small and large growers alike.

Energy Policy and Biofuels

The Trump administration’s energy policies are expected to focus on traditional energy sources, but rural America’s support for the president may preserve some biofuel programs. These initiatives, like the 45Z Clean Fuel Production Credit, align with sustainability efforts that resonate with watermelon growers adopting climate-smart practices.

However, broader climate and renewable energy programs could face cuts, which may limit funding for conservation initiatives that have the potential to benefit watermelon producers. Growers who rely on these programs to reduce costs and adopt sustainable farming practices will need to monitor policy developments closely.

Advocacy in a Changing Congress

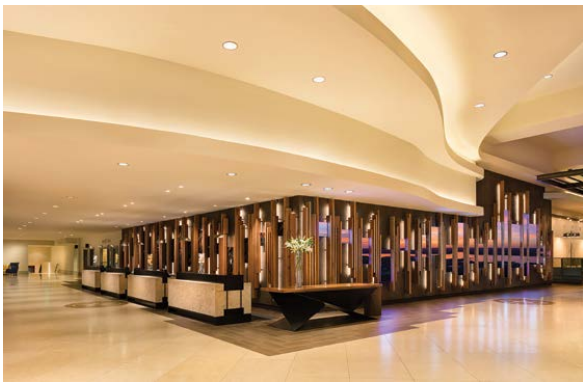
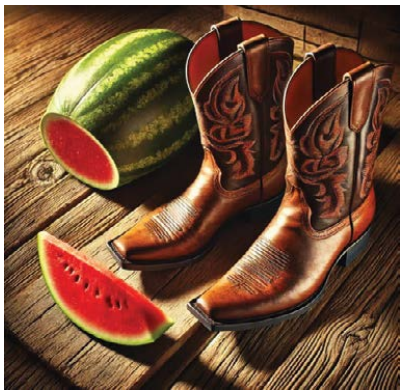
One major election outcome is the addition of 50 to 60 new members of Congress. This turnover presents an opportunity for the National Watermelon Association and other advocacy groups to educate lawmakers about the critical contributions of the Specialty Crop industry to the U.S. economy. Efforts to highlight the unique challenges and priorities of watermelon growers, such as labor reform and input prices, will be essential in shaping future policies.



Navigating the Future

For the watermelon industry, the 2024 election has brought both promise and complexity. Deregulation and tax relief could lower costs and improve profitability, but potential trade conflicts and changes to energy policies introduce risks. Strategic advocacy and planning will be critical as the industry works to seize opportunities and mitigate challenges in the years ahead.

Boots, Buckles & Watermelons in Austin!



Five Things You Can't Miss:

- A night of fun at Punch Bowl Social.
- The excitement of the Queen Competition.
- The high-energy auction filled with treasures and watermelon-themed prizes.
- Educational sessions to keep you ahead in the industry.
- Reconnecting with your watermelon family!

Don't miss out—Austin is calling!

Join us for the National
Watermelon Convention

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Texas Report

Hello to our wonderful watermelon family. These last few months have been filled with some great trips for our queen, Amelia. In September she took a trip to two HEB stores in Austin, Texas. Amelia visited with customers and passed out watermelon samples and activity sheets for the kids. Customers are always so appreciative to have us there.

A short time later we had a great visit to Washington, D.C. for the Marine Corps Marathon. It was Amelia's first trip to the nation's capital, and we got to spend a day sightseeing. We visited some of the monuments, the National Mall, the WWII Memorial, and the American History Museum. On the day of the marathon Amelia and the other queens worked long and hard to pass out watermelon to all the runners and the visitors cheering them on. It is always great to hear the participants in the race say how much they look forward to, and appreciate, the refreshing treat at the end of the race.

Finally, in early November we had the 58th annual Texas Watermelon Convention in McAllen, TX. There were several visiting queens and coordinators that joined us, and it was a truly enjoyable event. On Thursday we saw many of our members come to our president's reception and casino night. Then on Friday we had our speakers and educational sessions. That evening there was the auction, which was a great success. Saturday was the day for the queen contestants' speeches, impromptu questions and interviews. When that was over the contestants, judges and girls went to lunch and Amelia had the opportunity to go with visiting queens and coordinators to Rio Fresh's farm on the border and see the border wall. Finally, in the evening after the evening gown competition and dinner, Amelia crowned the 2025 Texas Watermelon Queen, Miss Bethany Boller.

In February, Amelia and I look forward to the National Watermelon Convention in Austin, Texas. We hope to have many of the TWA family there to cheer her on. Until next time, God bless you all.

Best regards,
Barbara Duda TWA Coordinator
bcduda62@gmail.com



Amelia helps a customer at HEB.



Folks having fun the president's reception casino



A family gets a picture with Amelia



Amelia with Kelton Borders



Amelia's first trip to Washington, D.C.



Amelia with Jimmy and Brandon Henderson



Ready to pass out watermelon to the runners



Ready for the auction!



Busy, but fun, day for the queens



Lovely ladies



Bethany and the Borders family



The queens with the National Watermelon Promotion Board crew



Bethany with Luke, Kendall and Brady Brown

South Carolina Report

We are ending this year with much happiness, but also sadness. Happiness that we had a wonderful record-breaking year with promotions, and sadness that it is all coming to an end. Kinlyn has worked so hard and been such a blessing to the SC Association that her shoes will truly be hard to fill.

The month of September began with the Beaufort Shrimp Festival and 5k race on 10/5. Kinlyn spent hours passing out fresh sliced watermelons to runners and spectators. The International Fresh Produce Show followed in Atlanta, Georgia, on 10/18-10/19. Kinlyn was fortunate enough to get to meet and spend time with the magnificent Joe Poon before his retirement after many years with the watermelon family. We send our love and best wishes to Joe in all of his future endeavors.

The Florida Convention was held on 10/25-10/27, in Ft. Myers, Florida. Kinlyn and I had a great time at the Halloween Party and other functions leading up to the crowning of the new 2025 Florida Watermelon Queen. Many thanks to Rob and Kelly Gibson for going above and beyond to make this event such a special time.

On 11/2, we were back in Beaufort, SC, for the 5k Swing Bridge Run. Again, Kinlyn passed out many slices of fresh watermelon to runners and spectators. The Texas Watermelon Convention is being held on 11/8-11/10, and we are looking forward to joining our friends in McAllen, Texas.

Kinlyn will also be judging a High School Pageant in Great Falls, SC, on 11/16. The Lugoff Christmas Parade and the Kershaw Christmas parade will both have Kinlyn participating on 12/14.

As 2024 draws to an end, we would like to wish all of our watermelon families a very happy and special holiday season. See you all in Austin!

Warmest Watermelon Wishes,

Ann Bryant
SC Promotions Coordinator
Abryant028@charter.net
864-303-3995



Beaufort Shrimps Festival 5K Run, Beaufort, SC.



Florida Convention, Ft. Myers, Florida.



Kinlyn serving melon to large crowds in Beaufort, SC.



Beautiful sunset at Sanibel Resort.



Forest Gump meeting our Watermelon Queen.



Crowning of the new 2025 Florida Queen.



PMA in Atlanta, Georgia.



Another race day in Beaufort, SC.



Melon 1 and Kinlyn at the SC Booth.



Swing Bridge 5k getting ready to start.



Kinlyn with the one and only Joe Poon.



PMA



Kinlyn getting ready for an interview with the DJ.



Fresh Cred Show in Atlanta at PMA.



Congratulating the youngest runner to cross the finish line.

North Carolina Report

Our busy summer season has now lead into fall and Queen Haylee has continued to promote watermelon across our state and nation.

The Winterville Watermelon Festival was our last late summer festival. Haylee hosted four watermelon eating contests, rode in the parade and shared fresh watermelon sample with attendees while working in the Food Lion pavilion at the festival. The State Farmers Market hosted watermelon day and Haylee gave out fresh cut watermelon slices and helped to judge the “biggest” watermelon contest.

This season we also shared NC watermelons with the families at the Ronald McDonald House in eastern North Carolina. It was very gratifying to learn that our watermelons were a perfect way for the families to enjoy fresh fruit!

Queen Haylee attends North Carolina State University and we shared our watermelon message at a few university events this fall. The NCSU football player’s devoured fresh watermelon slices to help them rehydrate after a practice. We attended the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences tailgate festival. At the pregame tailgate, Haylee meet with fellow students, alumni and friends of the college to promote North Carolina agriculture and watermelon.

We always love to educate young people about our wonderful industry. So far this fall we have attended the Chowan University President’s reception, the Southern Nash High School FFA Ag Night and the Bear Grass FFA Career Day.

The 2024 Marine Corp Marathon was awesome! Haylee loved working with her fellow Queen’s to help rehydrate all the runners with tasty watermelon. Thousands of watermelon cups were distributed and it is always a highlight to hear the runner proclaim “watermelon is my favorite part of the marathon”. Thank you to Stephanie Barlow and the NWPB team who work so hard to make this the best watermelon promotion each year.

The convention season is upon us and Queen Haylee is looking forward seeing everyone in Austin! We hope you all have a wonderful holiday!

Sharon Rogers
NCWA Promotions Coordinator
336-583-9630
ncwatermelonqueen@gmail.com



Distinguished judges for the Winterville Festival watermelon eating contest



The Food Lion Pavilion at the Winterville Watermelon Festival



Youth watermelon eating contest winners



All the kids getting ready for the watermelon eating contest



Delivering fresh NC watermelons to the Ronald McDonald House of eastern NC



Chowan University President, Dr. Rosemary Thomas and Haylee enjoyed sharing watermelon with students and faculty at the Chowan University Welcome Reception



North Carolina State University football players and training staff loved our watermelon



Thanks to Kaitlin Glover from Rob’s Fresh Produce for supplying our watermelons and helping us at the NCSU football watermelon day



North Carolina State University College of Ag and Life Sciences Football Tailgate, The Howell Family and Haylee



Queen Haylee and Allyson Farmer our 2013 NC Watermelon Queen having fun at the NCSU CALS tailgate



NC Agriculture Commissioner, Steve Troxler and Haylee at the NCSU CALS tailgate



NCWA board members, James & Courtney Sharp and James Brake, helping staff our booth at the Southern Nash FFA Ag Night



A great group of students at the Southern Nash FFA Ag Night



State Farmers Market Watermelon Day



Queen Haylee getting ready for the runners at the Marine Corp Marathon



Team NWPB & Haylee at the Marine Corp Marathon in Washington, DC

Mar-Del Report

Another Mardelicious year has come and gone. Queen Karli has represented the Mar-Del Watermelon Association through county fairs, state fairs, and produce stands to name a few. Most recently, Karli had the opportunity to pass out watermelon at the Marine Corps Marathon. We can not thank the Watermelon Promotion Board enough for making this opportunity possible. The State Queens and National Queen were able to meet runners at the finish line with watermelon! A hydrating option that every marathon runner should take advantage of!

Queen Karli was able to extend her promotion year further by attending the International Fresh Produce Association Global Produce and Floral show in Atlanta, Georgia. Thank you to the Maryland Department of Agriculture for sponsoring our tickets and welcoming us at their booth. It was a great show to learn more about what goes into the behind the scenes work of the produce industry. The Texas Watermelon Convention ended our promotion season. We are grateful for the hospitality Texas showed us and welcomed us to their state! Queen Karli attended a farm tour led by Benjamin Hill from Rio Fresh. Queen Karli learned a lot about how agriculture is produced in that region of the United States.

We are anxiously awaiting hosting our own Mar-Del Watermelon Convention. It is one of our favorite times of year to reminisce with the watermelon family on the past year and year ahead. We welcome all to the 2025 Mar-Del Watermelon Convention. We will be celebrating a baseball theme! “A home run with Mar-Delicious Watermelon!” 2024 and Queen Karli’s year is coming to an end but we look forward to celebrating all the blessings of the year with our watermelon family!



Queen Karli and Coordinator Terra had a great time at the Texas Watermelon Convention.



Queen Karli welcoming the 2025 TWA Queen and helping her fix the crown.



Queen Karli on the farm tour in Texas beside the Wall.



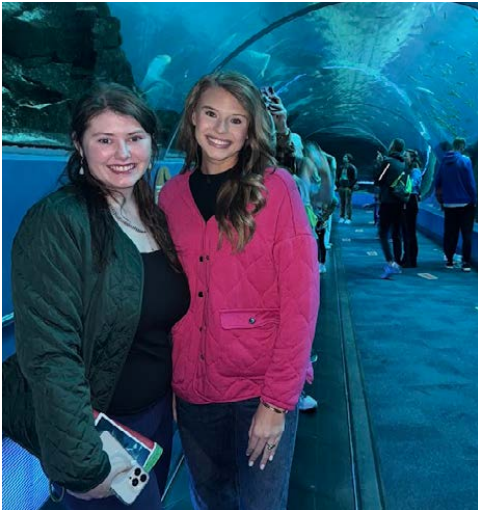
Queen Karli on the farm tour at the Rio Grande.



Thank you to the Texas Watermelon Association on your sponsorship of the state queens at your convention.



Seed Spit time at the TWA Convention.



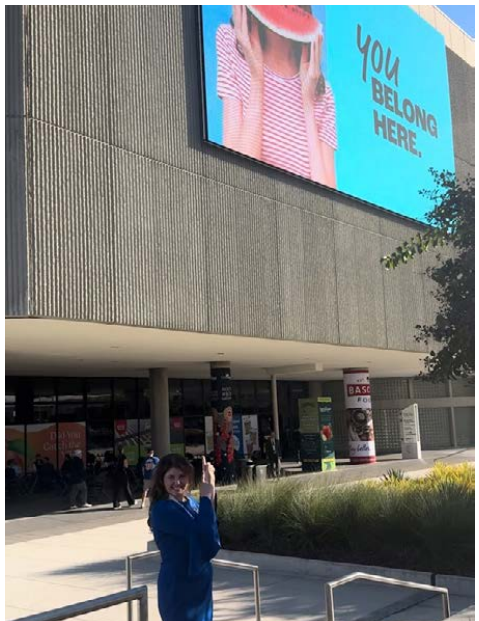
Queen Karli and Queen Jules enjoying the Atlanta Aquarium after the IFPA Show.



The Queens with the National Promotion Board! Always fun to run into this crew!



Wishing a happy retirement to Chef Poon!



Queen Karli ready to take on the IFPA Show!



Thank you to Wiggins farms for sponsoring dinner while at the IFPA show!

Illiana Report

Greetings from Illiana!

Queen Maya has had an exciting and busy few months as our growing season has come to a close and we’ve begun preparations for the year ahead.

In August, Queen Maya had the pleasure of speaking at the Latino Festival in Vincennes, Indiana, where she proudly represented the growers of Indiana and Illinois. She took the time to thank all the hardworking individuals who make our operations possible. To end her speech on a sweet note, she shared some tasty Mouzin Brothers watermelon slices with festivalgoers. Later that month, Maya visited several Needler’s Fresh Market locations in Pendleton, Carmel, New Palestine, and Indianapolis, IN, alongside Mouzin Brothers Farms. A big thank you to Mouzin Brothers for sponsoring these amazing events!

Queen Maya continued her local promotional efforts by attending several events in her hometown of Terre Haute, IN. She participated in the homecoming parade at Indiana State University and promoted watermelon sales at two Rural King locations.

Thanks to the National Watermelon Promotion Board, Maya traveled to Washington, D.C., for the Marine Corps Marathon. There, she joined other state queens and the NWPB team to distribute over 33,000 cups of watermelon to runners crossing the finish line. For many, it was their first marathon, and Maya was honored to share in their celebration. A special thank you to Ms. Stephanie Barlow and Ms. Juliemar Rosado for their dedication in organizing this incredible event every year. It truly is a highlight of her reign!

Maya also had the chance to attend the Texas Watermelon Association convention in McAllen, Texas. We appreciate the hospitality of TWA President Ms. Kristin Story, coordinator Ms. Barbara Duda, and National coordinator/TWA member Ms. Kerri Wiggins. The event included a tour of South Texas, including a visit to the Mexico/USA border and an agriculture tour led by Mr. Ben Hill. It was an unforgettable weekend, offering Maya valuable insight into Texas agriculture and an opportunity to bond with fellow queens.

Looking ahead, we’re preparing for our upcoming convention and the National Convention. Please mark your calendars for the 35th Annual IWA Convention, happening January 16-19, 2025, at the beautiful French Lick Springs Hotel in French Lick, Indiana.

Visit illianawatermelon.com to register today!

We look forward to seeing you there!

Warm Regards,
Lana Brothers
(314)724-6305
iwapromocoordinator@gmail.com



Sharing a slice of southern Indiana



Grocery store fun



Latino Festival fun, thank you Mouzin Brothers Farms



Team Watermelon, thank you NWPB!



Indiana State Homecoming parade



Sash sisters



Parade supporters



The highlight of the finish festival is receiving watermelon from these smiling faces!



Visiting 5 Rural Kings, promoting locally grown



Sightseeing in Washington DC



92% water, 100% delicious



South Texas tour



Thank you Mr. Borders for the beautiful gift



Rural King in Vincennes, IN



Rio Grande River photo op with Mr. Ben



All smiles at the Texas convention



We love watermelon!



Congratulations Queen Bethany!

Gulf Coast Report

Season Greetings to our watermelon family!

Tori was able to attend The Marine Corps Marathon hosted by the National Watermelon Promotion Board. During this event, she assisted in sharing 65,000 pounds of fresh-cut watermelon with runners. Many runners said watermelon is their favorite treat at the race and look forward to seeing the queens at the finish line. Thank you to the NWPB for their efforts in representing the watermelon industry so well. It truly is a wonderful event for all!

Tori has attended the Florida Watermelon Association Convention in Fort Myers, Florida, and the Texas Watermelon Association Convention in McAllen, Texas. This was Tori’s first trip to Texas! During this time Tori was able to visit a farm, the border wall, and see a LaserWeeder in action. It is a blessing to get to visit and support our other Watermelon Associations.

During the holiday season, Tori will continue to greet many watermelon enthusiasts in Enterprise, Alabama, and her hometown of Wicksburg, Alabama during their annual Christmas Parades. Be sure to follow the Gulf Coast Watermelon Association’s social media platforms as Tori has a series of holiday videos that will be posted throughout the holidays.

We hope you join us on January 31st and February 1st, 2025 at the Beau Rivage Resort and Casino in Biloxi Mississippi. Our theme for this year’s convention is Watermelon Derby. With special events like a competition for the “Best Derby Hat”, our annual auction, and a live band, we hope to see members and non-members join us for some sweet fun to support the Gulf Coast watermelon industry! Please visit our website <https://www.gulfcoastwatermelon.org/> to register for our convention.

Queen Tori looks forward to representing the GCWA at the 2025 NWA Convention and competing for the 2025 National Watermelon Association Queen title. Thank you Tori for your hard work and dedication to promoting the Gulf Coast Watermelon Association and the entire watermelon industry. It truly has been a sweet year!

May your holidays be filled with joy, peace, and cherished moments with loved ones. We wish you a wonderful holiday season and a bright, prosperous watermelon new year!

Many Blessings,

Sarah Jane Levine
Gulf Coast Watermelon Association
Promotion Coordinator
(337) 348-4465
gulfcoastwatermelonqueen@gmail.com



1. Tori is in a field checking out the LaserWeeder.



Amelia and Tori at the TWA Convention.



Tori, Elanie, and Jules at the FWA Convention.



Queen Tori with Kendra Kennedy, our 1st Vice President, Intergro, at the IFPA Global Produce Show.



Queen Tori with Coordinator Sarah Jane, Heather Raulerson, and Mitch Mitchell, International Paper, at the IFPA Global Produce Show.



Passing out watermelon to runners at the Marine Corps Marathon.



Participating in the seed spit competition at FWA hosted by Chuck Elam, Seedway.



Queen Tori was a guest on The Fresh Cred Podcast.



Tori preparing to carve a watermelon for our social media platforms for Halloween.



Tori cooking a delicious watermelon cranberry sauce for our social media platforms for Thanksgiving.



Tori posing with the watermelon she shared with runners at the Marine Corps Marathon Race.

Georgia Report

Happy New Year from the Georgia Watermelon Association!

We are excited to invite you to join us for the Georgia Watermelon Association Conference and Annual Meeting, taking place January 24-26, 2025, at the Chateau Elan Winery and Resort in Braselton, GA! This three-day event offers a fantastic lineup of exhibits, networking opportunities, and educational sessions to help growers and industry members plan for the upcoming season and maximize both production and revenue. This year, GWA is thrilled to introduce a new food safety workshop focused on Corporate Social Responsibility Audits, which will be held on Friday morning. To register, call our office at (706) 845-8575 or sign up online via the GWA website.

Our 2024 Ambassador tour continued strong through fall and into early winter with impactful promotions. Maycey had the privilege of joining Ross Chastain as NASCAR’s playoff season kicked off in Atlanta. She participated in a Meet and Greet with Ross, where hundreds of fans lined up to meet the “Melon Man!” A big thank you to Melon 1 for this incredible behind-the-scenes opportunity at the race. Maycey also attended the GWA’s annual grower luncheon, where she shared an update on her busy and exciting year.

October was a whirlwind! Maycey represented GWA at the Global Produce and Floral Show (GPFS) in Atlanta. It was a wonderful experience connecting with industry supporters and other state watermelon associations. Special thanks to International Paper and Jesse Wiggins for treating us to some memorable meals during the event. After GPFS, Maycey had the chance to attend her first Atlanta Falcons game with Jordan Carter and Bailey Leger, where she met state legislators Leesa Hagan, Katie Dempsey, and Beth Camp, educating them on the vital role of the GWA and her work as an ambassador for Georgia Watermelons. Thank you, Leger and Son, for this opportunity.

This fall, Maycey also attended the Sunbelt Ag Expo and rounded out October with a visit to Washington, D.C. for the Marine Corps Marathon. There, she assisted the National Watermelon Promotion Board in handing out over 30,000 containers of watermelon to attendees at the Finish Line Festival!

The GWA is incredibly grateful for Maycey’s hard work and dedication throughout the 2024 promotional year. Her composure and strong work ethic have made her a valuable representative of the association.

Make sure to follow us on social media at @gawatermelons and @gawatermelonambassador to stay updated on all things GWA. We hope you’re planning to join us for the GWA Annual Meeting on January 24-26, 2025, in Braselton, GA!

Wishing everyone a healthy, happy, and prosperous New Year!

Sincerely,
Charley Sheffield, Promotions Coordinator



Maycey giving Ross Chastain some encouragement before he gets on the track



Maycey visiting our members, including Melon 1



Maycey and Chad Chastain on Pit Road



Enjoying time with her fellow watermelon ambassadors and coordinators at the IP event



Cheering on the #1



Working the booth on Day 2 of GPFS



Maycey assisting with door prizes at the GWA Grower Luncheon



Enjoying the Falcons game with Georgia State Representatives



Maycey with door prize winner, Sam Nichols



Up bright and early with our friends from NWPB



Maycey with Georgia Ag Commissioner, Tyler Harper, who visited the GWA Booth



Ready to get these 30,000 containers handed out!

Florida Report

Greeting from the Sunshine State of Florida!!

Starting our months off the end of August and September, we had the opportunity to spend these times at the Darlington Race and being in Bristol, Tennessee doing promotions with Nascar Driver Ross Chastain from being at the track in Darlington to doing school promotions and groceries store in Bristol. Thank you, #1 Nascar Driver Ross Chastain, for everything you do in supporting our watermelon industry through out the country.

Now a little bit about our 56th Annual Florida Watermelon Convention “Beach Spook-Tacular” which was held this year on Oct 24 – 27 at the beautiful Sanibel Harbor Marriott Resort & Spa in Fort Myers, Florida. We had 7 beautiful young ladies this year compete for the 2025 Florida Watermelon Queen Title. Congratulations to Reagan Hudson of Chiefland for being crowned the 2025 Florida Watermelon Queen. Reagan is currently attending the University of Florida College of Agricultural and Life Science. Our First Runner-up was Ashlee Thomas of Bell and second runner-up is Karina Valadez of Wauchula. The “Jubilee Award” went to Kaydan Strickland of Fort Myers. All the contestants did a wonderful job competing for the 2025 Florida Watermelon Queen Title. Also, Congratulations to Mr. Chuck Elam for receiving the “Outstanding Service” Award.

Until next time!
Debra Harrison -
Florida Watermelon Promotions Coordinator

Serving as the Florida Watermelon Queen has been the sweetest year of my life. While reflecting on this journey, I am filled with gratitude and pride for the many memories Mrs. Debra and I have created and the people I had the privilege of meeting. From visiting farms across the state and sharing the hard work of our growers to tabling in grocery stores and bringing the sweetness of Florida watermelons directly to our consumers, each experience has deepened my appreciation for this amazing industry. One of the highlights this year was our new partnership with UF Athletics. Representing the Florida Watermelon Association at basketball, softball, gymnastics, baseball, and football games was an absolute honor, allowing us to connect with thousands of fans and showcase the refreshing, healthy choice that watermelons provide. Our visits to Capitol Hill were also memorable, as I had the opportunity to advocate for our growers, shippers, and packers while sharing the importance of watermelon with leaders across the country. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the support of our amazing sponsors. A heartfelt thank you goes out to each one of you that donated your time, money and resources this year. Your support has made this year sweeter than I could have ever imagines and I am incredibly grateful for each of you.

Sincerely,
Elanie Mason - 2024 Florida Watermelon Queen

Thank you to all of those who attended our convention this past October. While it might not have been the convention, we all envisioned, due to the loss of power, it was a great success. Thank you to everyone who bore with us through the challenges and gave the FWA your unwavering support. Congratulations to our new Queen Miss Reagan Hudson, we know you will represent our industry well.

Thanks,
Rob Gibson – President



Nascar Fans enjoying a slice of “Watermelon” in Darlington, South Carolina.



Queen Elanie and Nascar Infinity Driver #92 Ross Chastain visiting in Darlington, S.C.



A hot “Labor Day Weekend” at the Cookout 500, Queen Elanie and Susan Chastain cutting up and passing out watermelons to all the Nascar fans.



A beautiful morning at the Sullivan East High School in Bristol, Tennessee.



Being at the Food City in Bristol, this little girl waited in line to get a slice of watermelon and to visit and see Queen Elanie and Nascar Driver Ross Chastain.



Queen Elanie having a good time on “Gator Talk” with Coach Napier with Florida Gators.



All ways laughter and smiles, and wonderful watermelon appetizer to eat at the Melon 1 booth!



Queen Elanie enjoying chatting with Heather Raulerson with International Paper in Atlanta.



At the IFPA Global Produce and Floral Show in Atlanta, Georgia.



It was a pleasure to meet and visit with Mrs. Jordan Carter of Leger and Sons at the IFPA Show.



Queen Elanie – Snow White along with her Prince President Rob Gibson and his beautiful family.



Everyone enjoyed dressing up and having fun at the President Reception “Beach Spook-Tacular”. Past Queen Katy Mae Harrison – Scarecrows along with Queen Elanie- Snow White and First Vice-President Carrie Thomas- Princess Belle.



Our 2025 Florida Watermelon Contestant. So proud of these beautiful young ladies.



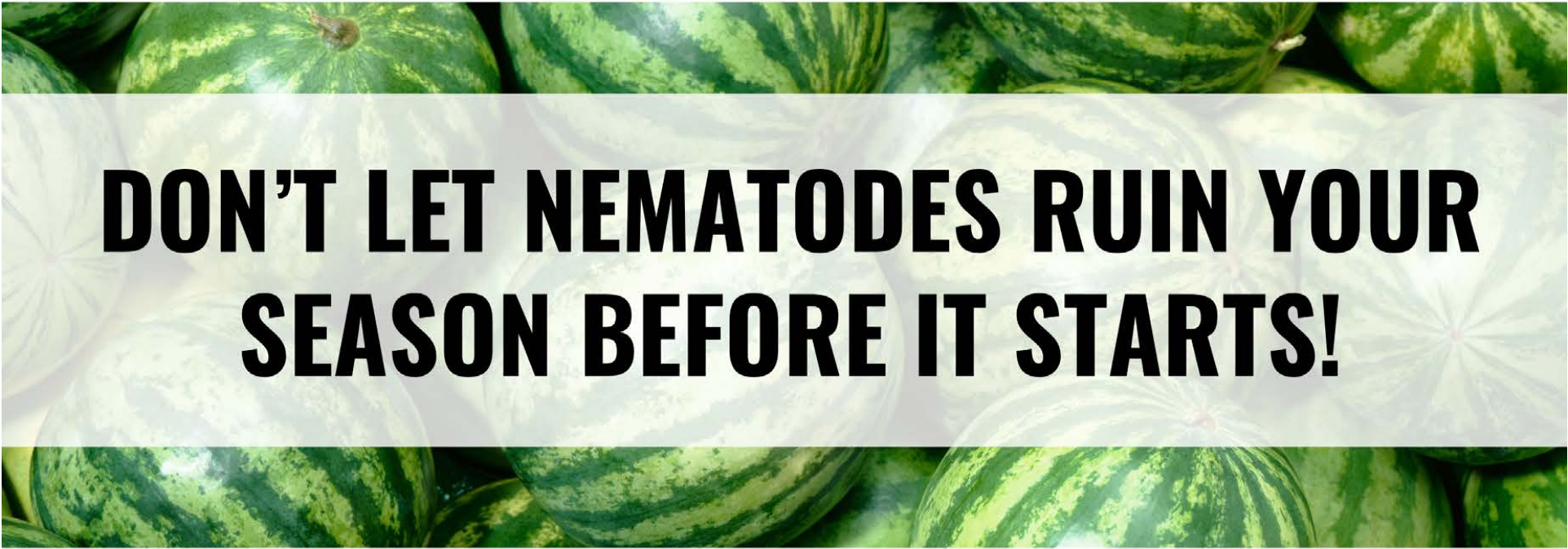
“Congratulations” to Chuck Elam for receiving the Outstanding Service Award!



Our “Dearest Has Been’s” and our 2025 Florida Watermelon Queen Reagan Hudson.



“Congratulations” to Reagan Hudson for being selected our 2025 Florida Watermelon Queen.



TELONE™ II is the world's best defense against destructive plant parasitic nematodes. Applying TELONE™ before planting creates a zone of protection, allowing developing root systems to thrive—leading to healthier plants, higher yields, and improved quality. A custom blend of TELONE™ (to combat nematodes) and chloropicrin (to target soil borne diseases) is an effective one-two punch for all of your watermelon pre-plant needs.

REMEMBER, THERE'S NO COMING BACK FROM A POOR START!



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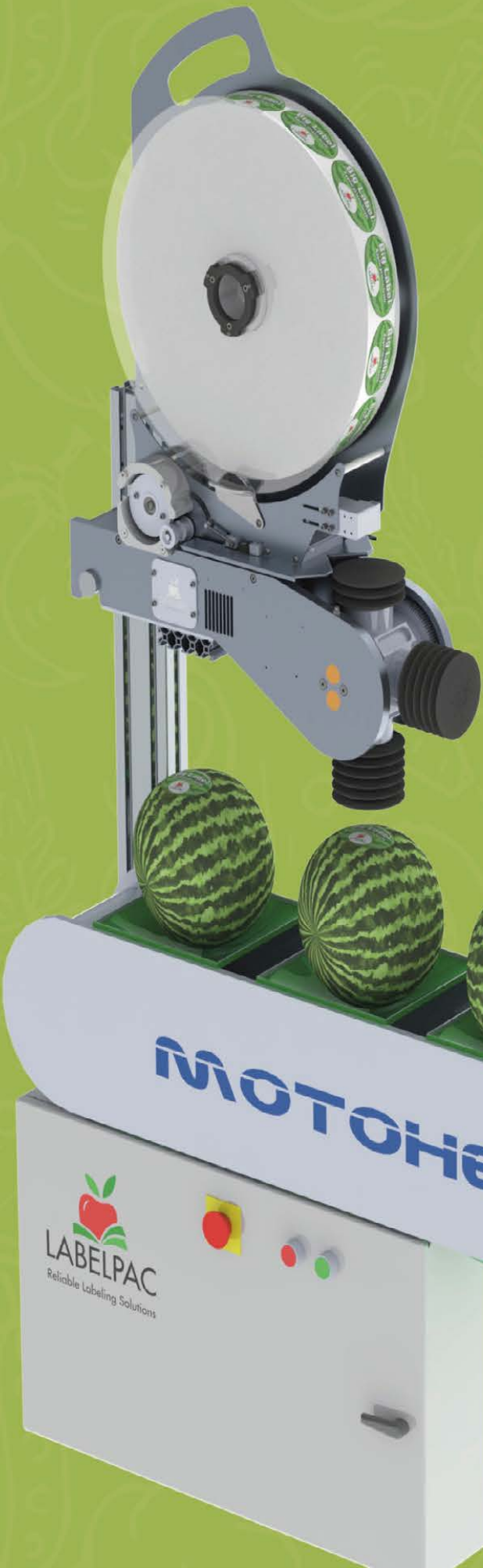




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