

the

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Fall 2024

Official Newsletter of the NATIONAL WATERMELON ASSOCIATION



NATIONAL
Watermelon
ASSOCIATION

FALL HARVEST



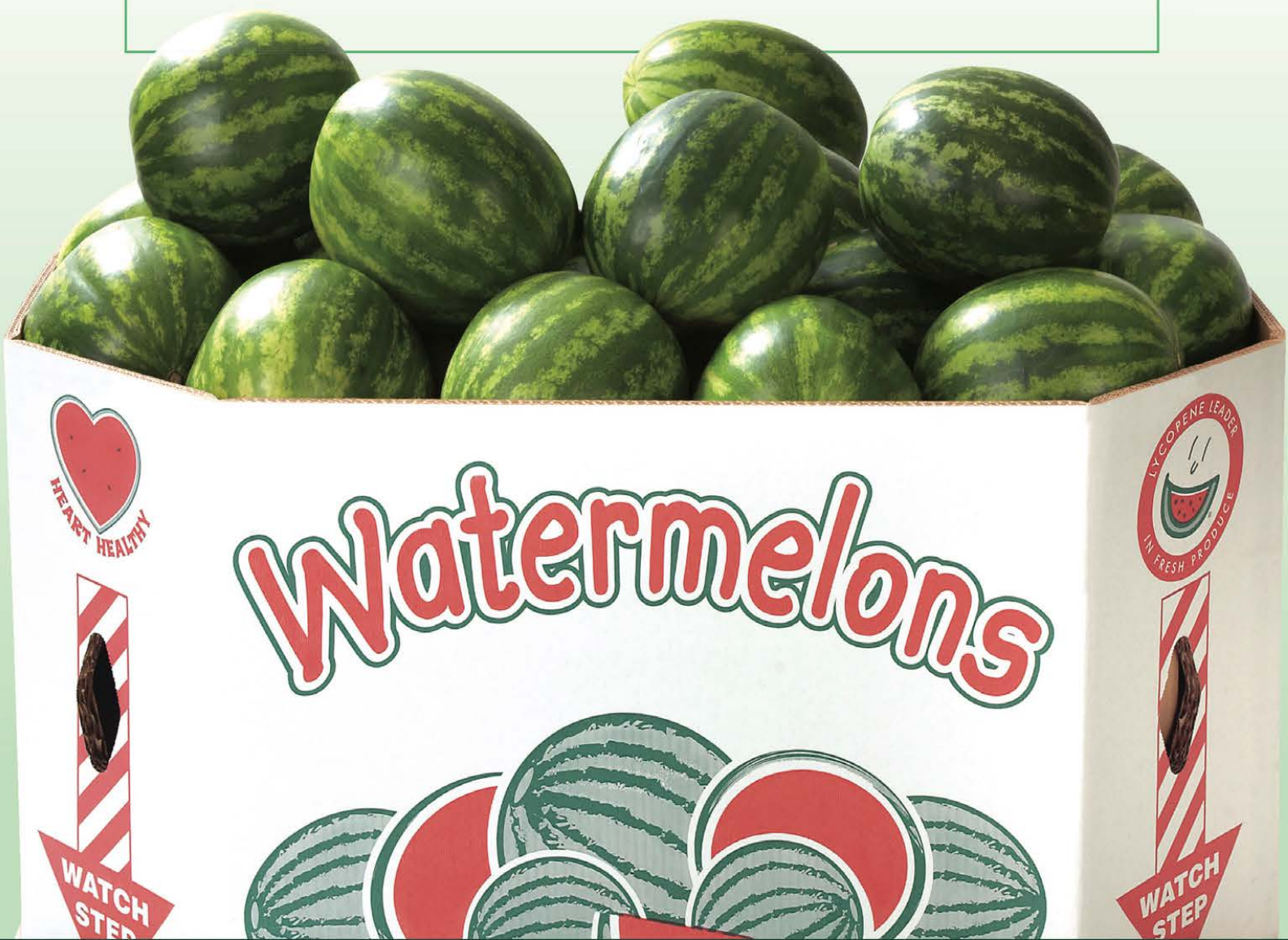


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Welcome to Fall, here on the Vineline!

As the domestic watermelon season comes to a close, we find ourselves looking back on an exceptional period for our growers and consumers alike. The 2024 season has been filled with blessings, a true testament to the hard work and dedication of our members. It has also been a banner year for our Watermelon Queens, who have conducted an incredible number of promotions across the country, spreading the love for watermelon at every opportunity. Their efforts, highlighted in this issue, remind us just how powerful their outreach can be in connecting consumers with our beloved fruit.

This edition of the Vineline is packed with updates that demonstrate how we continue to strive to find new value for our members. One of our most visible additions this year has been the launch of our brand-new website, designed to provide more accessible resources, information, and opportunities to connect with the industry. As you'll see in the features ahead, this new platform allows us to communicate and deliver value more effectively than ever before.

At the same time, we're making new ground on some of the old challenges that have long faced our industry. Labor regulations continue to be a top concern, and we remain deeply engaged in advocacy efforts to find meaningful solutions. In the public policy section of this issue, you'll find updates on how we're working tirelessly to address the challenges posed by evolving labor laws and regulations, a constant focus for our team. We also feature an article in this issue on how we're funding research to look at innovative ways to combat plant pathologies that plague production.

This has been a season full of successes and challenges, and we're proud to showcase our work and industry in this edition of the Vineline. The staff (Monica, Tami, Kerri, and Queen Jules) and I remain dedicated to finding ways to support you, our members, and to ensure the continued growth and success of the watermelon industry.

Thank you for being part of this journey, and we look forward to celebrating our shared accomplishments in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. F. Szczepanski", is placed over a background of watermelon slices and leaves.

George F. Szczepanski
Executive Director
National Watermelon Association



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National Report

“Fall is a Southerner’s Reward for Having Survived Summer!”

The Memorial Day weekend heralded a bustling start to our summer activities, as NWQ, Jules, and GCWQ, Tori, engaged directly with shoppers at the Fort Moore Commissary in Columbus, GA, and Maxwell AFB Commissary in Montgomery, AL. We saw a significant increase in watermelon sales in anticipation of the season’s celebrations. (See Pics #1)

The North Florida Tour 2024 commenced with a delightful dinner at Akins BBQ, graciously hosted by Clifton Seed Company and attended by Mr. Jeff Garrett and Mr. Terry Parrish and their families. FWQ, Elanie, and GCWQ, Tori, joined NWQ, Jules, in subsequent days to visit packing facilities including Beach/83 Farms, Southern Cooperative Packers, Smith Farms, and L & J Farms. A highlight was to visit the Diamond 99 facility, where Queen Jules got to see the action at their packing shed and even got taught an important part of the watermelon growing process: forklift driving! We concluded the day with a delicious meal at T. Smith Farms. The following day began with a farm visit to Trey Smith and continued with participation in the Chiefland Watermelon Parade and Festival! Our next stop included a visit to NWA President Bob Gibson at Tillis Farms, ending with a tour of Etheridge Produce’s packing shed. A special thank you for making this tour possible! (See Pics #2 - #7)

June commenced with the Washington IFPA Conference, where Days 1 and 2 focused on equipping attendees with essential knowledge to effectively communicate our priorities to representatives. We delved into Food Safety issues with the Food Safety Council, covering topics such as Building a More Resilient Food System and Workforce and Packaging & Sustainability at the Crossroads.

Washington Conference Day 3! The day was filled with the State of the Fresh Nation Addresses, speakers that included Strategic Communications, Director of Production and Environmental Policy and the Director of the US Government Relations. After lunch everyone headed out to visit with Representatives and staffers. While on Capitol Hill we advocated on behalf of our members and the agricultural industry. Following our meetings, we had the pleasure of distributing fresh slices of happiness to congressional and administrative staff, IFPA attendees and fellow advocates at the Joy of Fresh Event on Capitol Hill. To conclude our evening, we attended the Fresh PAC Dinner, where we heard from US Senator Debbie Stabenow. A special thank you to Jesse Wiggins from Jesse Wiggins Farms for sponsoring this dinner.

Day 4 of the Washington Conference was dedicated to Capitol Hill, where the queens met with staffers to discuss critical topics such as the H-2A Visa Program, the AEWL freeze, and the importance of the farm bill. Queen Jules left Capitol Hill hopeful that we had effectively raised awareness about the challenges facing our industry, and that those in a position to make changes are now more informed and engaged. We extend a special thank you to our sponsors who made this invaluable and educational conference possible. Supporting NWQ, Jules the opportunity to speak on behalf of our industry in Washington, DC. (See Pics #8-10)

By mid-June, NWQ, Jules, GWQ, Tori, were back in the Birmingham, AL area, promoting watermelon sales at four different grocery locations. The Piggly Wiggly pro-

continued on page 7



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National Report

motions were notably successful, thanks to Mr. Mike for organizing and to the NWPB and Ms. Sarah Jane Levine for their support. (See Pics #11)

South Carolina tours followed, starting with visits to Delk Melon Sales, Goat Hill Farms, Sandifer and Sons Farms, and Melon 1 offices. We enjoyed dinner with SCWA friends, courtesy of Mrs. Kendra Kennedy. Day 2 included visits to Willis Produce Sales, Kinard Farms, and Coosaw Farms, with lunch hosted by Mr. Rusty Kinard. The day continued with a Queen Tea with local watermelon festival queens and laughter and dinner with Ms. Kristi Sease. The Hampton Watermelon Festival provided a memorable evening with fellowship and dancing. The final day included participation in the 82nd Annual Hampton County Watermelon Festival Parade, with SCWQ, Kinlyn, and NWQ, Jules, relishing the experience. As always, none of this would have been possible without the support of the SCWA and all the sponsors. (See Pics #12-18)

Ending the month of June Queen Jules had the incredible opportunity to tour the fields and packing sheds of the dedicated farmers in Georgia. Guided by Mr. Chris Hogg, GWA Brand Ambassador Maycey, they visited eight remarkable locations. The tour included Melon1, MGM Plant Farm, Moore’s Farm, Borders Melon East, Sun Fresh Farms at McHugh Farms, Atlantic Fresh, Super Sweet Farms and Gibson Produce. Each stop offered a unique glimpse into the heart of Georgia’s watermelon process, showcasing the hard work and commitment that goes into each and every watermelon. (See Pics #19-28)

The 2nd Annual Watermelon Festival at Poplar Head featured activities such as watermelon sampling, a recipe contest, an eating contest, and a largest melon contest. Highlights included watermelon lemonade and snow cones, perfect for cooling off.

The combination of soccer and watermelon proved delightful at Farmer Appreciation Night, where watermelons were distributed to Dothan United Soccer Team fans. Watermelon’s hydrating benefits were appreciated by players and fans alike, with a fun watermelon eating contest during halftime. Thanks to Fitch Farms for donating the watermelons and Omni Marketing for the invitation and sponsorship. (Pics #29- 30)

Canada oh Canada, how sweet you were! Our Canadian adventure in Edmonton included four Fresson Bros. Watermelon Fests at Rabbit Hill, Stony Plain, Glenora, and Fort Saskatchewan. Each event featured family-friendly activities such as watermelon bowling and seed spitting competitions. Special thanks to Mrs. Juli Onyshchenko and Mr. Daniel Pazder for their exceptional hospitality, and to the NWPB for their sponsorship. (Pics #31- 32)

continued on page 9



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National Pictures

In North Carolina, Mrs. Sharon Rogers and NCWQ, Haylee, and Mr. Hammy Dicks hosted a delicious meal at Pup’s Steakhouse with friends from the industry in attendance. Thanks! The following morning, we visited packing facilities including TC Smith Produce, Odom Farms, Howell Farming Co., Rob Glover Farming Co., Brantley Farms, and Fresh Pik Produce. Howell Farming Co. provided a wonderful lunch! The day concluded with the Wilson Tobs Baseball Game, where NCWQ, Haylee, and NWQ, Jules, threw out the first pitch. Day 2 included a tour of Clifton Seed Company with Ms. Sue Colucci, and visits to Melon Direct, Fann Farms, Melon 1 in Salemberg, and Jackson Farming Co., concluding with a dinner hosted by Mr. Freddie Ellis, renowned for his BBQ team. (Pics #33 - 45)

Mar-Del Queen Tour Week was a major promotional event featuring radio interviews, seed spit contests, field tours, and retail promotions. Highlights included visits to Gibson Produce, Mr. Greg Long at the Laurel Auction Block, Lakeside Farms, DMC Farms, Jim Rash Inc., Calloway Farms, and the Frozen Farmer with the Evans Family. We also engaged with the community in Rehoboth Beach, sharing watermelon slices and participating in a pizza lunch hosted by Melon 1 and Gibson Produce. Our day ended at the Old Mill Crab House, enjoying Delaware crab and fellowship with the Mar-Del Association.

The journey continued to Baltimore, MD, where we collaborated with Harris Teeter to promote watermelon. We engaged customers with health benefits, selection tips, and recipes. In partnership with the Maryland Department of Agriculture and other regional queens, we distributed over 72 watermelons during a concert in the park, creating a

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Jorgenson and his Enza Zaden team in Gilroy, CA. NWQ Jules witnessed the groundbreaking innovation and dedication that went into producing the finest watermelons. Queen Jules and I ended our evening with a delicious dinner with Mrs. Limor Golan and her team in Davis, California.

Day 2 began with a visit to the wonderful team at Hazera, where we took an inside look at their various trials and varieties of mini watermelons. Our second stop of the day was with the BASF team, where Mrs. Ruhiyyih Young took us around and introduced us to their new and upcoming watermelon varieties. We delved into the process of breeding each seed to meet specific market needs. Our final visit of the day was with the Sakata team. Mr. Jeffrey Watkins offered us the opportunity to taste and discuss new varieties that will soon hit the market, along with the benefits they will bring to consumers. We joined their team for their annual BBQ held at their offices. It was a pleasure to learn more about the Sakata team and meet industry members from across the US and beyond. We ended our evening at the Watermelon Dinner hosted by Syngenta, where we connected with their team and learned more about their upcoming watermelon promotion launch. Thank you to everyone for having us and allowing Queen Jules to share more about her role as the Watermelon Queen and the National Watermelon Association.

Our California trip was concluded with an insightful visit to the team at Syngenta. Queen Jules had the pleasure of speaking with Syngenta’s watermelon breeder, exploring various trials, and sampling both tried-and-true varieties as well as some fascinating new ones. Ending our day enjoying our dinner at Mamma’s Italian Restaurant with the team at HM Clause! (Pics #57 - 68)

continued on page 13





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National Pictures

The Illiana Tour 2024 began with a dinner hosted by Mrs. Jane and Mr. Jeff and continued with a tour of the Greif corrugated cardboard plant. Their exceptional team walked us through the fascinating process of transforming paper into the perfect corrugated watermelon bins you find in the stores. The journey continued to Global Produce, Hackman Farms, J. Halter Farms, and various packing facilities. The day concluded with the National Queen Welcome dinner. There we enjoyed an evening of fellowship with the Illiana Watermelon Association. The following day included visits to Cody @ Freyco Inc., Mouzin Brothers Farms, the History Museum of Vincennes, Charlie's Candy Shop, and several farms and packing facilities, that included Cardinal Farms, Williams Produce, and Melon Acres. On our last day the tour ended in the big city of Chicago with grocery store promotions at Village Fresh Market and Mariano's stores, selling over forty watermelons in just one hour, and enjoying a delightful dinner in downtown Chicago. (Pics #69 - 79)

A heartfelt thank you to all state coordinators, queens, and sponsors for your incredible hospitality and meticulous planning of each event. Your incredible support has made approximately 127 retail store promotions, grower and packing shed tours possible from May through the present, September 10th. We are deeply grateful for your contributions to making this summer of 2024 truly exceptional!





SAVE THE DATE!

February 19-23, 2025



110th National Watermelon Association
Convention & Annual Meeting

Hilton — Austin, Texas

More Details
Coming Soon!

Vineline

NWPB News

NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD

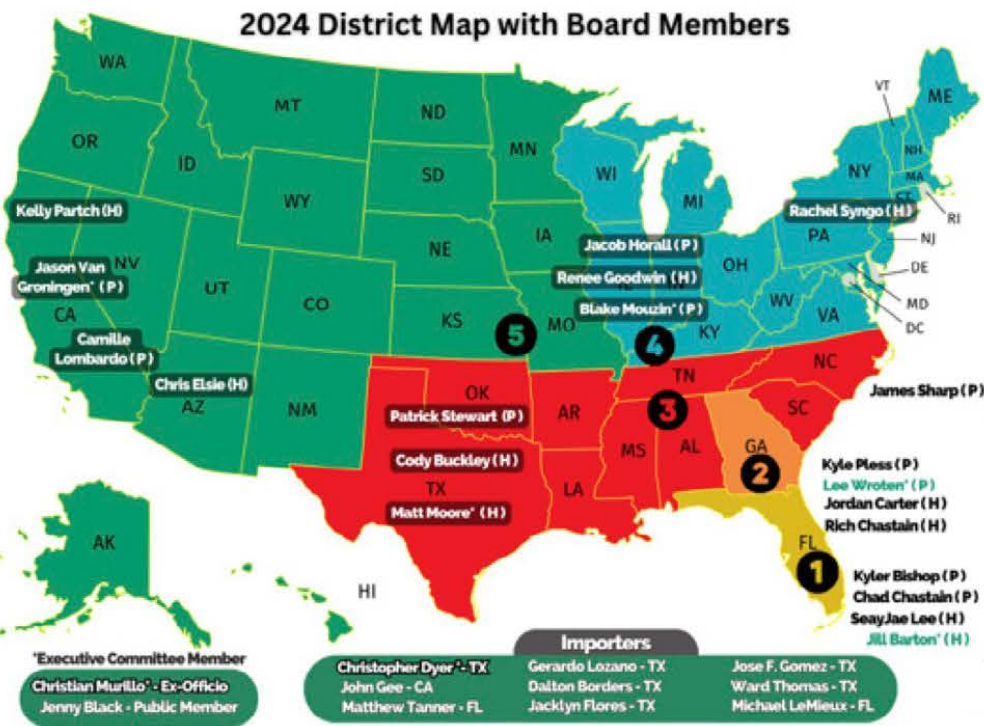
FALL 2024 INDUSTRY UPDATES

Each year the Board strives to increase the demand for watermelon through research, education and promotion. We are currently reviewing our districts and looking for new members to fill upcoming vacancies. Find the details below and stay up to date with the Watermelon Update by scanning the QR code.



Board Districts: What do they mean and how are they created?

The NWPB is composed of producers, handlers, importers, and one public representative appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture. The Board consists of an equal number of producer and handler representatives nominated by watermelon producers and handlers around the nation. Importers participate in the nomination of importer members of the Board. The public representative on the Board is nominated by members of the Board and appointed by the Secretary.



Today, there are five geographic districts in the contiguous states of the United States. Each of these districts is represented by two producer and two handler members on the Board. The number of Importer seats on the Board is proportional to the percentage of assessments paid by importers to the Board, except that at least one representative of importers shall serve on the Board.

Every five years the Board reviews this structure based on watermelon production, shifts and trends in quantities of watermelon produced, and other relevant factors. As a result of this review, the Board may realign the districts subject to the approval of the Secretary. The realignment is recommended by a subcommittee to the Board and then to the Secretary of Agriculture. The Board is currently conducting this review often referred to as Redistricting. More to come once the process moves forward.

Board Nominations

Nominations for Districts 2, 3, and Importers have been submitted to the USDA and are pending appointment. These new members will bring valuable insights and leadership to our organization.

As we approach the end of 2024, we are seeking qualified individuals to fill upcoming vacancies on our Board of Directors. In anticipation of the upcoming year, we're also planning for the expiration of terms for Districts 4 and 5 in 2025. Nominations for these districts will open early next year. This proactive approach ensures a smooth transition and continued effective governance.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the following board members whose terms will conclude on December 31, 2024:

- Rich Chastain

• John Gee

• Cody Buckley

• Dalton Borders

• James Sharp

• Jordan Carter

• Jose Gomez

Their dedication and contributions have been invaluable to our organization.

If you are interested in nominating a candidate or learning more about the board roles, please contact NWPB at info@watermelon.org. Your participation is essential to maintaining strong leadership and advancing our mission.

Proposed Assessment Increase Process Is Under Review

The 30-day comment period for the proposed assessment increase closed on August 8th. There were 33 comments. They can be reviewed here: <https://www.regulations.gov/document/AMS-SC-24-0020-0001/comment>.

The comments and associated documents will be reviewed by the appropriate USDA officials before the Secretary of Agriculture makes the final determination. There is no specific timeline for the Secretary's ruling.

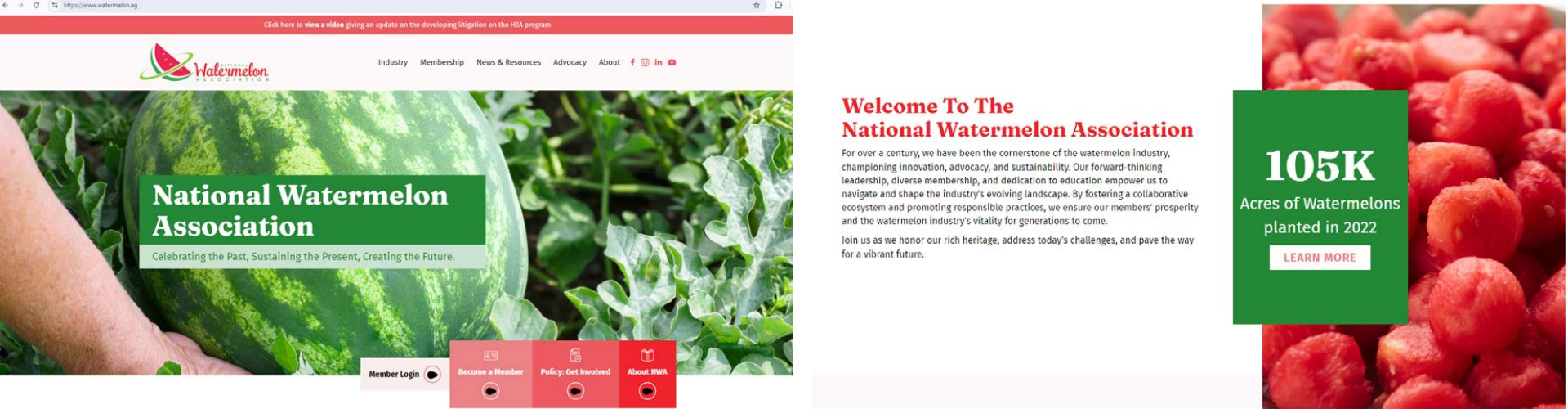


Vineline Member Value

Ten Acre Marketing

September 11, 2024

By Mary Heslep, Senior Vice President, Ten Acre Marketing



This past summer, The National Watermelon Association set out to redesign the association’s website. Under new leadership, the website presented an opportunity to usher in a new era of association value for the watermelon grower membership. A prominent repository of key member resources, it was time for a website redesign. With members in over 30 states, the National Watermelon Association relies on its website to support their grower community with resources and updates accessible publicly with added value behind a members-only login.

The National Watermelon Association performed an internal audit of the site, uncovering areas for improvement. “One of the first opportunities I saw to improve our member experience with the association was to give our website a face lift,” said George Szczepanski, Executive Director, National Watermelon Association. Organizations choose to invest in website redesign projects for many different reasons. Often the internal conversation begins when a single error such as broken links are brought to the attention of leadership, at which point, the layers of the onion are peeled back to reveal greater technology challenges that likely impact the sites’ functionality such as slow load times of the site graphics that are not digitally optimized or complex user experience challenges created by outdated navigation structure.

From a user perspective the objective of the watermelon.ag redesign was to add functionality and improve the member experience, leaving website visitors with a positive encounter, navigating to the resources they are in search of quickly and seamlessly.

From a technical perspective, watermelon.ag needed a back-end reboot to boost site performance, elevate SEO (search engine optimization), improve mobile accessibility with responsive design function, and streamline content management. The complete revamp presented an opportunity to bring everything in line with association branding, showcasing member photography and elevating the saturation of the brand colors, making the site more visually appealing. The association partnered with Ten Acre Marketing, a full-service agency who positions brands to advance agriculture. The collaboration set out to streamline member resources housed on the website, assess and index historic content and to evaluate and streamline the user experience to deliver a member website that is as aesthetically pleasing as the watermelons its members grow. Launched in June of 2024, the redesigned website reflects the association’s forward-thinking leadership, diverse membership, and dedication to education.

“Associations are always hard at work advancing their members’ missions. All too often the face of its industry – the association website – is not prioritized,” shared Mary Heslep, Senior Vice President, Ten Acre Marketing “The redesigned watermelon.ag website positions the organization to best serve its members and to tell the innovation story of the watermelon industry. And we humbly feel it beautifully represents the growers’ delicious labors of love.” Szczepanski adds, “From functionality to ease of navigation, the redesigned website meets all of my expectations for an improved member experience.”

Calendar Of Events

NWA National Convention

Feb 19 - 22, 2025

Austin, Texas

The National Watermelon Association's National Convention is the premier networking and education event dedicated to the watermelon industry. Join us in Austin, TX, for education, networking, an auction, the crowning of our 2025 National Watermelon Queen, and an unbelievable Texas experience!

VISIT CONVENTION SITE

NWA National Convention

Feb 17 - 21, 2026

St. Pete Beach, FL

The National Watermelon Association's National Convention is the premier networking and education event dedicated to the watermelon industry. Join us in St. Pete Beach, FL, for education, networking, an auction, the crowning of our 2026 National Watermelon Queen, and an unbelievable Florida experience!

VISIT CONVENTION SITE

\$1.2

Billion in Annual Sales

468

NWA Active Members

92%

Water Composition of Watermelons

4

Billion Pounds Grown Annually

Click here to view a video giving an update on the developing litigation on the H2A program

Industry Membership News & Resources Advocacy About

Future Watermelon Farm Leaders

The Future Watermelon Farm Leaders (FWFL) program is a cornerstone of our efforts in shaping the future of our industry. The FWFL program is the result of identifying and nurturing the next generation of growers and packers who will lead the industry and our Association into the future. These emerging leaders bring fresh perspectives, energy, and innovative ideas essential for addressing the challenges of a growing global population, sustaining family farms, and providing the nourishing food crucial for feeding the world.

Experienced leadership remains vital in every business, and agriculture is no exception. Our responsibility is to pave a sustainable path forward by fostering a continuous pipeline of new leaders. These leaders contribute fresh perspectives and innovative ideas and inject energy and

Future Watermelon Farm Leaders

Vineline *Research News*

Investigating Mature Watermelon Vine Decline in Indiana: Links to Fusarium Wilt and Waterlogging



Wenjing Guan and Dan Egel

Watermelon production in Indiana has faced recurring challenges from a vine decline known as Mature Watermelon Vine Decline (MWVD). This issue typically arises as plants begin to bear a heavy fruit load, often following periods of heavy rainfall. The wilting of entire plants results in the loss of immature fruit and exposes mature fruit to sun damage, leading to significant economic losses. MWVD has appeared sporadically in both fumigated and non-fumigated fields across southern Indiana for years. Despite ongoing efforts, no single pathogen has been consistently linked to MWVD-affected plants. Pathogens commonly associated with MWVD-affected plants include *Rhizoctonia* spp., *Pythium* spp., and various species of *Fusarium*.

In recent years, MWVD has continued to reoccur in southern Indiana. In 2023, the issue was observed in three fields planted on plastic-covered raised beds with drip irrigation and fertigation systems. In 2024, it appeared in two adjacent fields near the Wabash River, one utilizing drip irrigation and the other using overhead irrigation. A consistent factor across both years was that wilting symptoms were observed near harvest time, and the fields had been irrigated prior to heavy rainfalls.

Vascular discoloration was observed on affected plants, and diagnostic labs consistently isolated *Fusarium oxysporum*. While *Fusarium* wilt is suspected, the symptoms observed differ from typical *Fusarium* wilt. MWVD symptoms are more widespread across the fields, unlike *Fusarium* wilt, which tends to show varying severity between triploid and diploid plants and is often clustered based on the distribution of the causal fungus in the soil. Additionally, typical *Fusarium* wilt initially causes individual vines to wilt, whereas MWVD results in the wilting of entire plants. In 2023, soil moisture sensors installed in affected fields recorded saturated soil conditions at a depth of 12 inches or more for several days following heavy rainfall. Although soil moisture data for 2024 is unavailable, the proximity of the fields to the Wabash River suggests that high water tables may have been a contributing factor. As a result, waterlogging is suspected to play a role in MWVD.

A key question remains: what is the role of *Fusarium* wilt in this scenario? For this NWA grant, pathogenicity tests were conducted using *F. oxysporum* isolates from 2023 MWVD-affected fields on young seedlings of standard watermelon cultivars 'Sugar Baby,' 'Charleston Gray,' and 'Calhoun Gray'. The isolates caused more severe wilt symptoms on 'Sugar Baby,' while 'Charleston Gray' and 'Calhoun Gray'—both reported to have resistance to certain races of the *Fusarium* wilt pathogen—showed less severe symptoms. Overall, the wilt symptoms caused by MWVD isolates were less severe than those from a typical *Fusarium* wilt field on all tested cultivars, indicating varied virulence between *F. oxysporum* isolates from MWVD fields and those from *Fusarium* wilt fields.

When the MWVD isolates were inoculated onto established 'Cracker Jack' watermelon plants, which is listed as having partial resistance to *Fusarium* wilt, no wilting symptoms were observed. This suggests that in MWVD cases, waterlogging stress may weaken watermelon plants, making them more susceptible to *F. oxysporum* and other pathogens previously isolated from MWVD fields. Additional experiments are underway to explore methods of simulating the affect of waterlogged soils on *Fusarium* wilt of watermelon.

This study underscores the urgent need for further research into the pathogenicity of different *F. oxysporum* strains across various watermelon cultivars and growth stages. Such efforts are crucial for distinguishing between *Fusarium* wilt and MWVD in field scenarios where *F. oxysporum* is isolated. This distinction will be key in developing effective management strategies for MWVD.

Vineline *Public Policy*

Addressing Labor Challenges: A Commitment to NWA Members

As we continue engaging with our National Watermelon Association (NWA) members, one issue consistently rises to the top: labor. It is clear from our conversations that labor remains the most pressing challenge for our growers, and we are committed to addressing this head-on.

The watermelon industry is unique. Our growers produce one of the heaviest fruits in the market, requiring significant manual labor to harvest. Watermelons feed communities across the nation, yet the process of getting them from the field to the table is increasingly hindered by labor shortages and regulatory challenges. This creates a significant strain on growers who already face tight margins.



At NWA, we are actively listening to our members and the broader watermelon industry. We hear your concerns, and we're taking action by looking for ways to help ease the burden of labor issues, particularly in the upcoming season. This is a priority for us, and we are pursuing solutions on several fronts:

- Partnering with key groups: We're aligning with organizations that are pushing back on problematic regulations that make it harder for our members to access the workforce they need. By joining forces with these groups, we aim to bring a louder voice to Washington and ensure that our concerns are heard.
- Securing resources: When labor issues arise, we want to ensure our members have the tools and support necessary to address them. We are working on securing resources that can provide timely assistance when challenges emerge, whether it's dealing with regulatory hurdles or unexpected shortages.
- Facilitating direct conversations: NWA is setting up critical discussions between our members and decision-makers in the administration. By bringing growers into direct conversations with those who shape policy, we can better communicate the realities on the ground and push for meaningful changes to the H2A visa program and other labor-related regulations.

We understand that our members need more than just a promise of change—they need actionable support. That's why we are committed to advocating for solutions that will ensure a reliable labor force for the upcoming season and beyond. Watermelons are a symbol of summer, joy, and togetherness, and our growers work tirelessly to bring that tradition to communities across the country. NWA is here to ensure they have the labor force needed to continue that mission.

As we move forward, we will keep listening to our members and staying laser-focused on labor, delivering value to the watermelon industry every step of the way.

Florida Report

Watermelon Greetings from the Sunshine State of Florida

As the summer months are slowing down, Queen Elanie has been busy promoting Florida Watermelons from all over the State of Florida to Washington D.C. The month of June, Queen Elanie was promoting Florida Watermelons at our local Publix Grocery Stores throughout the state of Florida and Detwiler’s Farmers Market in Sarasota and Bradenton. We cut up and handed out different variety of the red and yellow Florida Watermelons. All the consumers enjoyed trying all the different variety of them.

In the month of June, Queen Elanie and I also attended the International Fresh Produce Conference (IFPA) along with other state chapters queens, the National Watermelon Queen Jules, coordinators and many members of the watermelon industry headed to Washington DC for the International Fresh Produce Conference (IFPA). This three-day event included visiting on Capitol Hill with our House of Representatives and State Senators on advocating the topics of the Farm Bill, Workforce Challenges and Nutrition & Growing Consumption for our watermelon industry. A special thank you to Darren and Jesse Wiggins for sponsoring us to the PAC dinner.

The rest of our summer month consist of visiting our north farmers, TV Promotions, State Watermelons Festivals, Flavors of Florida event with Chef Justin and Watermelon 5 K Run and the Mar-Del Watermelon National Queen Tours.

As you can see with our captions, we have had a wonderful summer promoting our Florida Watermelons. Queen Elanie and I appreciate everyone that has helped and sponsored in making this a successful summer in promoting Florida watermelons.

Until next time!
Debra Harrison - Florida Watermelon Promotion Coordinator
Cellular – (863) 633-8306
email: debra@flfwa.com

Get ready for a beachy time at the Florida Watermelon Beach Spooktacular! The Florida Watermelon Convention promises to be a fun time for the whole family!

SAVE THE DATE --- October 24-26, 2024 to come join us at our 56th Annual Florida Watermelon Association Convention held this year in the beautiful Sanibel Harbour Marriott Resort & Spa in Ft Myers, FL. You can check out all details about convention on our website — flfwa.com

This year we plan to have a fun costume contest for our President’s reception! We will be awarding prizes for best costumes and have a live band! It promises to be an amazing time.

Rob Gibson
President - Florida Watermelon Association



Always a pleasure to get to see and visit the crew at “Gibson Produce” in Chiefland, Florida.



Thank you Mr. Terry Parrish with Clifton Seed Company for taking time to take these ladies NWQ Jules, GCWQ Tori and FWQ Elanie to visit with some of our watermelon’s farmers in north Florida.



Which is your favorite variety of Watermelon the Yellow or Red Watermelon!



President Rob Gibson along with his son Bo and Queen Elanie riding in the Chiefland Watermelon Parade at their 70th Annual Chiefland Watermelon Festival.



Queen Elanie with anchor women Summer Smith at ABC News 7 in Sarasota chatting about all the wonderful things about Florida Watermelons.



All smiles with this little girl enjoying a bite of Fresh from Florida Watermelon!



Promoting Florida locally grown Watermelon at Detwiler’s Farmers Market in Sarasota, Fla.



“Advocating for H2A reform with influential leaders at the Capitol to support our nation’s produce growers.”



Lobbying at the Capitol, Queen Elanie along with Rachel Chastain Syngo and Meredith Lapide visiting with the State Senators and Representatives on topics with Farm Bill, Workforce Challenges and Nutrition & Growing Consumption.



Enjoying the beautiful place of Washington, D.C.



Queen Elanie along with the Surles Family being at their 1st Annual Williston Watermelon Festival. Thank you to Hope Surles and your family for all your hard work and donating the watermelons for this awesome festival.



An evening at Disney Springs, Queen Elanie and Chef Justin attending “the Flavors of Florida” at Chef Art Smith Homecoming.



At the Watermelon 5 K Run in Winter Park, Florida.



Queen Elanie cheering on Lincoln, the handsome son of our former Queen Meagan Morgan Griffith and her handsome son Carson at the Watermelon 5 K Run.



Being in Delaware, we got to enjoy and spending some time at Rehoboth Beach with our former Queen Katelyn Kelley Miller and her handsome son Edison Miller.



Spending our morning at “Harris Teeter” handed out delicious watermelon along with Mar-Del Watermelon Queen Carly, National Watermelon Queen Jules, Iliana Watermelon Queen Maya and our beautiful Florida Watermelon Queen Elanie. Thank you to the Mar-Del Watermelon Association for a fun filled week.

Georgia Report

Happy Fall from Georgia!

The GWA has had an amazing summer promoting our favorite fruit. The 2024 Ambassador Tour has been a tremendous success, and we are so fortunate to have had the opportunity to visit so many wonderful places! Our season of promoting watermelons began with farm visits to our growers in South Georgia. Thank you to Jim Rash Inc., Melon 1, Browning and Sons, and Seedway for allowing Maycey to spend time with you and learn more about production and distribution. Maycey even had the chance to shadow a Food Safety Audit at Snap Finger Farms; a big thank you to GFVGA’s Produce Food Safety Services for helping Maycey enhance her knowledge.

In July, Maycey had several retail visits and handed out hundreds of watermelon samples to Kroger customers across Middle and North Georgia. Along with distributing samples, Maycey educated consumers on the nutritional benefits of Georgia Watermelon.

Two other standout promotions that Maycey particularly enjoyed were her farm visit with U.S. Senator Jon Ossoff, where she had the chance to discuss updates on the upcoming Farm Bill, and handing out watermelon to our Georgia Bulldogs. After a hot Saturday scrimmage, the boys were able to rehydrate with some sweet watermelon.

When Maycey wasn’t busy at events, she worked closely with our marketing team to spread our “Taste Like Summertime” message across all platforms. Maycey also helped advertise and push our 100% Georgia Cotton T-Shirt Campaign with Magnolia Loom. Thank you to everyone who purchased and supported GWA in this way.

During the season Maycey was able to be featured on WALB, WSWG TV, and the Field Link Podcast, reminding people that Georgia Watermelons are in stores now. Make sure to follow @gawatermelons and @gawatermelonambassador to stay up to date on all the content!

GWA is excited to invite you to our 2025 GWA Annual Meeting & Conference, this year hosted at Chateau Elan Winery and Resort in Braselton, GA! Mark your calendars for January 24-26, 2025. Registration info coming soon.

If you would like to schedule a date for our Georgia Watermelon Ambassador to visit your location, please call Charley Lollis at 478-973-9162 or email clollis@asginfo.net

Charley Lollis
478-973-9162
Clollis@asginfo.net



Melon1 Grower Visits



Enjoying watermelon samples at Kroger in Bonaire, GA.



Browning and Sons Grower Visits



Maycey with U.S. Senator Jon Ossoff



Jim Rash Inc. Grower Visits



The UGA Players loved the big watermelon slices!



Seedway Grower Visits with Queen Jules



Maycey wearing her Magnolia Loom Tee



Food Safety Visit at Snapfinger Farms



In the test kitchen at WALB



Maycey with Produce Manager for Kroger of Gainesville, GA.



On set at WSWG TV



Demonstrating Look, Life, Turn at Kroger in Athens, GA.



Maycey enjoying a slice of watermelon on her first day back at college!

Gulf Coast Report

Happy Fall!

What an amazing year our Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen continues to have! Tori is an outstanding spokesperson for our industry.

Since our last publication, Tori has visited 12 farms, 6 farmers markets, 5 grocery stores, 2 festivals, a radio interview, a TV interview, The Dothan United Soccer game, Wicksburg Senior Center, The Washington Conference, The International Paper Box Plant, and the Shorthorn Cattle Junior Nationals.

A few highlights from these promotions:

- Bogalusa International Paper Box Plant hosted Queen Tori. She had the opportunity to learn more about packaging in our industry and enjoyed lunch with the plant staff.
- Tori had the opportunity to attend the Washington Conference hosted by IFPA. Here she met with multiple Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi Senators and Representatives to advocate for watermelon in the Farm Bill.
- Tori attended the 54th Water Valley Watermelon Carnival in Water Valley, Mississippi. During this 2 day festival, she assisted in the welcome ceremony, weighing the largest watermelons, and passing out slices from over 100 melons. This was a huge success and the entire town of Water Valley appreciated her attendance! They even advertised her in their local newspaper!
- Todd Shelley Farms donated watermelon for the Shorthorn Cattle Junior Nationals in Timonium, Maryland. Tori was given the opportunity to attend and pass out slices of the donated watermelon.
- We spent the day at Charlie’s U-Pik visiting their farm stand, packing house, and self-picking fields.

Thank you to each person who contributed to the success of these promotions. It sure is making an impact on the industry. Queen Tori hopes you join her for a fun-filled weekend at the Gulf Coast Watermelon Convention. It is being held on January 31 and February 1, 2025, at the Beau Rivage Resort and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Be sure to check out and keep up with our queen on the Gulf Coast Watermelon Association Facebook and Instagram pages to see all of our watermelon promotions.

We hope to see you soon!

Many Blessings,

Sarah Jane Levine
Gulf Coast Watermelon Association Promotion Coordinator
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Illiana Report

Greetings from Illiana!

As the growing season comes to a close, it’s a perfect time to reflect on the incredible experiences Queen Maya enjoyed this summer. The Watermelon Queen program is truly something special, and it’s been wonderful to see Queen Maya embrace it with such natural enthusiasm!

Her summer tour kicked off at the International Fresh Produce Association Washington Conference, where she spent two days in intensive training, followed by meetings on Capitol Hill advocating for the watermelon industry. Queen Maya had the honor of meeting with Senator Todd Young and Representative Larry Bucshon’s offices.

Back in Indiana, Queen Maya attended the AgroRenew groundbreaking, a promising step toward revolutionizing food waste. She also visited grocery stores across Indiana and Illinois, beginning with several Caputo’s Markets in the Chicago area. This was the perfect way to kick off watermelon season by educating shoppers on selecting the best watermelons and spreading the word about the local industry. A special thanks to Matt and Jennifer Jones for organizing such a successful weekend. Their team, along with our own Gabby German-Jones (2022 Illiana Watermelon Queen), brought excitement to Caputo’s with a spinning wheel where customers could win watermelon-themed prizes.

Queen Maya continued her journey at two Baesler’s locations, four Needler’s Grocery stores in the Indianapolis area, and six Rural King stores. It’s safe to say that seeing a Watermelon Queen in the produce aisle always brings a smile to customers’ faces!

In addition to grocery store visits, Queen Maya spent the summer attending numerous community events to promote the Indiana and Illinois watermelon industry. She participated in the Knox County Fair (sponsored by Nowaskie Melons), the Vigo County Fair, the Vincennes Fourth of July Parade, and the Linton Fourth of July Parade. Whether handing out watermelon slices, throwing the first pitch at a baseball game, or passing out candy, Queen Maya always brought a smile. At the Indiana State Fair, she served over 1,300 pounds of diced watermelon, making it our largest community event of the year! People couldn’t stop raving about the delicious watermelons from Wonning Farms, and they were thrilled to learn that Indiana is a top watermelon-producing state.

Maya also had the opportunity to take our Illiana message to the coast by attending the Queen Tour Week with the Mar-Del Watermelon Association! The girls passed out watermelon to thousands at the Rotary Crab Fest, Baltimore Music in the Park, and the Rehoboth Beach boardwalk. Thank you to the Mar-Del association for having us!

Of course, no Watermelon Queen’s summer would be complete without farm tours! Queen Maya had the pleasure of hosting National Watermelon Queen Jules Singley at several farms. Our deepest thanks go to Kent Williams of Williams Produce, Dennis, Brady, and Blake Mouzin of Mouzin Brothers Farms, Kolby Frey and Cody Smith of Freyco Produce, Taylor Vieck of JMR Farms, Toby Smith of Schmieding Produce, Autumn Horrall of Melon Acres, and Jerry, Brandon, and Chelsey Cardinal of Cardinal Farms for sharing their expertise with the queens!

And last but certainly not least, Queen Maya had the incredible opportunity to attend a NASCAR race at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway to cheer on Ross Chastain. A special thanks to Ross and the entire Chastain family for giving Queen Maya such an unforgettable experience! Queen Maya looks forward to more sweet adventures this fall!

Kind Regards,

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



Cheering on Ross Chastain



In-store promotions with Queen Jules in Chicago



A fresh perspective



Advocating on the Hill



Thank you Jones and Jones for arranging the Caputo's promo!



Look, Lift, Turn



Play ball! Throwing out the first pitch at the Terre Haute Rex's game



One of six Southern Indiana Rural Kings visited



State Fair fun!



Mar-Del Queen Tour week



In-store promotions in Delaware



With IWA Founder and former NWA President, Anita Field



Farm tours with Queen Jules



Grateful to spotlight IWA growers



Thank you Greif for sponsoring Queen Jules' visit



Smiles for miles



Thank you Cardinals Family for your support



Passing out watermelons at Indiana State University

Mar-Del Report

This summer was filled with promotions large and small but we loved them all! Queen Karli was busy promoting watermelons throughout Delaware and Maryland. Queen Karli started the summer by attending the Delmarva Chicken Boosters BBQ and Maryland Agriculture Day. An event put on to celebrate the hard work of farmers in our community. The Delaware State Fair is the kick off week to our watermelon season. Queen Karli gave a demonstration, attended the Delaware Governor’s day tour, and a TV interview live at the Delaware State Fair.

We once again were able to attend all Delaware 4-H day camps. Campers made a watermelon themed craft, played a game and of course, ate watermelon!

Mar-Del Watermelon Association took on a different approach to advertising this year and launched the campaign of “Homerun with Mar-Delicious Watermelons.” Queen Karli was hard at work promoting watermelons at the local Shorebirds, Baysox, Frederick Keys, and the Orioles baseball games. She even got to throw out the first pitch at two of the games.

It would not be a Mar-Del summer without hosting the National Watermelon Queen. We had a full week planned promoting Mar-Delicious watermelons. Queen Jules and Karli were able to visit with watermelon growers and learn about their operation. They passed out watermelons at the Rehoboth Beach Boardwalk, and were joined by other state Queens at the Annapolis Rotary Crab feast and WMDT Concert in the Park. The month of August came to a close by hosting the 6th Annual WatermelRUN 5k and walk. Another great year seeing so many come out and support our scholarship program and enjoy all things watermelon. Queen Karli finished off the summer with the Maryland State Fair. One of our proudest accomplishments of the summer was presenting a check to the Ronald McDonald house for \$27,900. The funds were raised during our 2024 auction. We can’t thank the agriculture community enough for coming together and donating to this cause.

The Mar-Del Watermelon Association was blessed with a great season of watermelon promotions. We can’t wait to see our watermelon family throughout the convention season.



Queen Karli at the Delmarva Chicken Boosters BBQ



Queen Karli at the Delaware State Fair. She enjoyed a day with the Governor touring the fair grounds.



Shorebirds game and first pitch!



The Buy Local Cookout was back! A favorite event that kicks off Maryland Buy local week!



Queen Jules and Queen Karli enjoyed visiting our local growers and packing sheds during National Queen Tour Week.



MDWA Sponsorship with Ross Chastain in the Pocomoke Race!



National Queen tour week annual Board Walk promotion.



6th Annual WatermelRUN 5K was a success!



Always one of our favorite events! The Wright’s Market Watermelon festival!



Presenting of the check to the Ronald McDonald house.



Queen Karli enjoyed teaching 4-H day campers all about watermelon.



Orioles game and promoting Mardelicious watermelon!

North Carolina Report

Watermelon promotions and special events kept Queen Haylee very busy this summer! In-store promotions, farmers markets, festivals, farm tours, youth camps, and consumer events gave Haylee the opportunity to share the watermelon message.

Our two favorite retail partners, Ingles and Food Lion in-store promotions allowed Haylee to help customers learn more about selecting the very best watermelon. She traveled from the North Carolina coast to the mountains visiting stores across the state. Each store promotion was a success and we saw lots of watermelons in shopping carts this summer.

One of the most impactful events of the summer was Queen Haylee’s trip to the International Fresh Produce Association - Washington Conference. During the conference, Haylee and the other state Queens met with their Senators and Representatives to discuss issues impacting the watermelon industry in their home states. These young ladies represented each association and shared their knowledge of watermelon with a very influential audience.

Working with the NC Department of Agriculture, Haylee hosted “Summer Fest” and “Watermelon Day” at several farmer markets. She shared watermelon slices, meet market customers and answered all their watermelon questions.

Festivals kept her traveling, the Fair Bluff Watermelon Festival was lots of fun and the 39th Annual NC Watermelon Festival in Murfreesboro, NC was a true celebration of everything watermelon! We made a return to the Kitty Hawk Kites Watermelon Festival this year. Haylee loved the Outer Banks and seeing everyone at the beach. For the July 4th holiday, she had the pleasure to work alongside SC Queen Kinlyn at the Duncan Watermelon Festival. Both Queens were very busy sharing watermelon slices and hosting contests during the event.

Baseball and watermelon are a great combination. Queen Haylee represented the NC Watermelon Association at two baseball games this summer. For the Wilson Tobs and the Burlington Sock Puppets she shared watermelon recipes, fun giveaways and even threw out the first pitch!

We enjoyed a visit from the National Queen Jules Singley and her coordinator Kerri Wiggins. Haylee and Jules toured eight farms and met with several industry representatives to learn all about watermelon production in eastern North Carolina. Thank you to all the sponsors who made this trip possible.

Haylee took part in several youth events this season. Interacting and educating all the young people about the NC watermelon industry was a blast. North Carolina State University “Howling with the Pack” camp, Deans Farm Market Watermelon camp, Star Elementary School and the Alamance County Farm Bureau Ag-travagana were just a few of her outings. Haylee also represented the NCWA at the State FFA Convention where she spoke to FFA students from across the state. She even had a little fun, hosting a seed spit contest for attendees.

We have more events on our calendar, see all the details in the next issue!

Sharon Rogers
Promotions Coordinator
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NC State University “Howling with the Pack” summer camp watermelon celebration



Food Lion in-store promotion in Lake Norman, NC



International Fresh Produce Association – Washington Conference. This is our assembly who meet with North Carolina Representatives.



Ingles Market in-store promotion in Mills River, NC



Queen Haylee at the International Fresh Produce Association – Washington Conference



Melon Direct farm tour with the Hall family



Burlington Sock Puppets baseball game



Haylee and Jules enjoyed their time with the Howell family and industry representatives at the Howell Farming Company tour



Ingles Market in-store promotion in Black Mountain, NC



Fair Bluff Watermelon Festival biggest watermelon contest winner. Grown by little Hampton Worley weighing 230 pounds!



Ingles Market in-store promotion in Asheville, NC



Kitty Hawk Kites Watermelon Festival - Nags Head, NC



Ingles Market in-store promotion in Candler, NC



Seed spit contest winners at the 39th Annual North Carolina Watermelon Festival in Murfreesboro, NC



Food Lion in-store promotion in Greensboro, NC



North Carolina FFA State Convention

South Carolina Report



FFA Camp Cutting, Myrtle Beach, SC.



Coosaw Farms, Fairfax, SC (Bradley and Louise O'Neal).



Pageland Watermelon Festival Parade, Pageland, SC.



Washington Conference, Washington, DC.



Willis Produce, Islandton, SC (Stacy, Will and Morgan Willis).



Queen Kinlyn threw out the first pitch at the Blow Fish Baseball Game in Lexington, SC.



Low Country Live, Mt. Pleasant, SC.



Kinard Farms, Lodge, SC (Rusty Kinard).



Presbyterian Coach, Steve Englehart in Clinton, SC.



WLTX, Columbia, SC.



Watermelon Crawl Festival, Duncan, SC.



Queen Kinlyn having fun with the Clemson Tigers in Clemson, SC.



Jay Delk with Kinlyn and Jules at Delk Produce, Olar, SC.



Ingles, Powdersville, SC (Jim Ray).



University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC.



Scotty and Denver Sandifer of Sandifer & Sons, Blackville, SC.



Gilbert Miller with Kinlyn at the Blackville Field Day, Blackville, SC.



Furman Coach, Clay Hendrix with Kinlyn in Greenville, SC.



Melon 1 visit in Barnwell, SC (Hammy, Hamilton Dicks and Kitt Moore).



Florida Queen (Elanie) and SC Queen (Kinlyn) at the Concert in the Park, Baltimore, MD.



Citadel Coach, Maurice Drayton with Kinlyn in Charleston, SC.

Texas Report

Hello to our watermelon family. I hope this letter finds you and yours well. I know for some of our growers it has been a challenging year, but I’m praying things will get better.

Amelia has had a busy summer. In June she went to the International Fresh Produce Association Washington Conference where she and the other queens visited with their congressmen to advocate for our growers about some important issues. They spoke on the Farm bill, labor, and food safety. She and the other queens learned about the issues beforehand by attending sessions from experts that could educate them on how to best advocate for our farmers. She was also able to attend the Women’s Fresh Perspectives Networking Luncheon, and she took part in the Joy of Fresh event where the queens passed out watermelon to congressional staff. Lastly there was a wonderful PAC dinner where Amelia and the others met Senator Debbie Stabenow. We want to thank the NWA for helping us throughout the time we were there. I’d also like to thank Dante Galeazzi for being a great group leader as we navigated Capitol Hill. Soon after the Washington trip we went to Houston for an HEB store promotion and to Alvin, Texas to the Froberg’s Farm Watermelon Festival. Amelia was able to pass out lots of stickers and recipe cards, and she taught the people how to pick out a watermelon. She also had a great time meeting many wonderful people at the festival and enjoyed all the games and helping with the watermelon eating contest. We want to thank the Froberg family for a fun, memorable time.

In July, Amelia had promotions at two different stores in the Prosper area for Kroger. It was what they called the Freshtival and we were treated to a visit by the mayor and other local celebrities. The next day we were given a tour to the new Grief plant in Dallas, where Kristin Anderson and Mr. Hunt explained the process of making bins. After that we went on to an HEB promotion in Mansfield, Texas at a brand new and very busy store.

We look forward to more promotions along with a visit to Washington, D.C. for the Marine Corps Marathon in October. Then in November we will have our Texas Watermelon Convention in McAllen, Texas on November 7th through the 9th at the Embassy Suites Hotel and Convention Center.

Best regards,
Barbara Duda TWA Coordinator
Bcduda62@gmail.com



Amelia and the other queens with Mr. George Szczepanski of the NWA



Enjoying watermelon with some sweet kids



Ready for Capitol Hill



Amelia and the Froberg family



Amelia and Congressman Ellzey



Helping Kroger customers



The queens got to meet Senator Stabenow.



Kids love the stickers.



Happy to help customers at an HEB in Houston



The tour of GREIF with Mr. Jim Hunt.



At the Froberg’s Farm Festival with some watermelon lovers



Another fun HEB promotion



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