

HULLTOP™

Issue #14 Spring/Summer 2018



Stemilt
World Famous Fruit


**THE
FRESH CUBE**

**Face to Face
Wendy Everhart**

Brand Power

SUPREME



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With 4TH generation cherry grower Kyle Mathison's stamp on them, they must be good.



From the Editor



Excitement is buzzing all around Stemilt as our state-of-the-art distribution center, called the Fresh Cube, gets ready to open its doors just in time for a new cherry season to begin. Construction began two years ago and now the blueprints

have turned into a massive space for our post-packing activities.

In this issue of Hilltop, you'll learn all about what's inside the Fresh Cube and how the intelligent technology and main feature of the center – the automated storage and retrieval system – will help us improve our service to each customer through a one-stop-shop for all shipping needs. This building is an important piece to help us continue to fulfill our mission of delighting consumers and you, our customers, with fresh and flavorful fruit.

You can also read up on our latest sustainability addition, which happens to be 100 solar panels on top of the Fresh Cube. In this issue, we're sharing what a decade of all-organic peaches and nectarines look like and why brands are booming in produce and how you can tap into our cherry brands this summer.

On behalf of the entire Stemilt team, I hope that you enjoy this issue of Hilltop. We appreciate your ongoing support of our World Famous Fruits.

Onward,

West Mathison
President
Stemilt Growers

HILLTOP

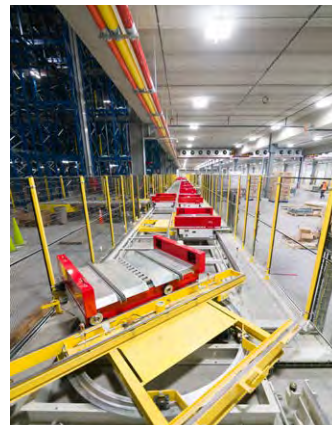
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Cover Shot



ASRS robotics testing

MYSTICAL



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**A HALF-MILE
CLOSER TO THE
MOON**

Premium High-Altitude Cherries

*The grand finale to cherry season comes straight from
2,640 feet above sea level and higher.*



HILLTOP

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By Brianna Shales

Face to Face

with Wendy Everhart

Sales, Disney, and Golden Delicious apples – get to know our long-time sales maven Wendy Everhart in this Q&A session.

Wendy Everhart

Forty years ago at the age of 17, Wendy Everhart joined the Stemilt team in true beginner fashion – working cherries on Stemilt Hill. Since that first summer, Wendy has worn more hats than most could say while working at Stemilt, with the biggest of those hats being her current role as domestic sales team leader. In this Face to Face, I was able to sit down with Wendy and chat more about her successful career so far, how selling fruit has evolved over the years, and what she does when she's not orchestrating fruit orders and deliveries.

Brianna: Forty years of service is quite the accomplishment! Tell our readers more about your long career and the different jobs you've held at Stemilt.

Wendy: I've worked in just about every area one could at Stemilt, and so many roles that I'm not sure I could recall each one! My first season was in 1978 on Stemilt Hill where I folded box lids and hand-weighed cherries. These tasks are done with machines now, but nothing was electronic back then. I was able to continue working, mostly in pear packing, at Stemilt during the weekends, holidays and nights while I attended Wenatchee Valley College for two years. I set out in the nursing program but decided that wasn't for me and studied business instead. Following college, I found an office job outside of Stemilt, but wasn't making enough money to survive, so I went back to Stemilt to pack apples. From there, I worked on the auto-lines and also hand-packed Golden and pears.

Brianna: Tell readers about the day your career made a directional change.

Wendy: One day I was asked to fill in at QC/receiving because they were short-staffed, and that's where I remained from then on. Eventually, there was an opening at the main office for a front desk receptionist that I was given. From there, I moved into clerical roles and did shipping and packout paperwork and coordination at both Olds and Columbia Street (when that was a Stemilt facility). It was in this role that I worked closely with those in sales. One day, Bill Young (who had both export and domestic sales duties) called me to ask if I would be his sales assistant. Twenty-five years later, I've been in sales ever since.

Brianna: How did you evolve from sales assistant to sales person?

Wendy: It was a time of fast growth at Stemilt and because of this, Bill eventually needed to focus solely on export sales. I was given his domestic accounts, which I knew well from working with them over the years. It was exciting.

Brianna: How has the role of salesperson evolved over the years?

Wendy: It's completely different today than it once was. We used to come to work and there would be a big sheet of what was packed and in inventory. This was back when we would pack large runs of one variety. You knew what you had to sell and you had to really push for those sales. Once you had the sale, the order would be taken over the phone, hand-written, and then eventually faxed. Today, many customers are on programs and there is a lot more complexity with pack types. We are very focused on planning and aligning supply against demand. Nearly everything we do is done electronically now and as a salesperson, you use specific software programs to receive and process orders.

Brianna: What does a typical day look like for you now?

Wendy: I spend a good portion of my mornings communicating with customers by phone, email, or whichever method they prefer. I look at new orders and passings, and work with the entire sales team to make sure we are following through on goals. There are a lot of meetings, especially around planning, that I attend and then communicate those to the rest of our domestic sales team.

Brianna: What is the most challenging part of your job? Most fulfilling?

Wendy: For me, it's incredibly fulfilling to make our customers happy. After all these years, they are my friends! It's important to me that I keep them happy and also fulfill my responsibility to our growers to earn good prices for our fruit. Coincidentally, the most challenging part of the job today is filling those orders. It takes a great deal of coordination among different departments within Stemilt to make sure the right fruit gets to the right place at the right time!

Brianna: You've traveled to many places over the years. What are some of your favorites?

Wendy: I love visiting Asheville, NC because it's such a beautiful place with the Blue Mountains and the people are laid back and genuine. A long-time Stemilt customer, Ingles, is there and always has our brand featured in huge displays. I was also able to travel to Hong Kong with Eva Lauve (Stemilt food safety manager). We spent three days on the markets and that is a place I probably never would have gone to if it hadn't been for this career.

Brianna: Who are some of your role models and why?

Wendy: Like many of us who have been around for a long time, Tom Mathison (Stemilt founder) was a huge influence on me. He gave me the chance to move up in the company. I really credit him for opening the doors for people, especially women. Mike Taylor (Vice President of Sales & Marketing) taught me the ropes of sales and how we should treat our customers. He fought hard for his accounts and their business and instilled that in me. He is full of knowledge and I still learn from him every day whether we are in the office, or on the road.

Brianna: What would readers find you doing when you aren't at the office?

Wendy: Probably shopping! I love to shop for anything. They might also find me working in the garden or traveling with my two daughters and extended family. We are big Disney people and have gone every year since my college-aged girls were born. I belong to Junior Service League in Wenatchee and spend a lot of spare time volunteering for our main cause, which is to help the homeless. My two dogs, a lab and a cocker spaniel, also keep me busy. They are my live-in children with my girls off at college.

Brianna: Finally, what is your favorite Stemilt fruit and why?

Wendy: Golden Delicious. Maybe it's a nod to my days on the packing line, but this has always been my favorite. A good Golden has the perfect flavor.



“

We used to come to work and there would be a big sheet of what was packed and in inventory. You knew what you had to sell and you had to really push for those sales.



Wendy on a trip to Italy with her daughters.





THE FRESH CUBE

By Brianna Shales

Introducing the Fresh Cube

Powered by intelligence, Stemilt's latest facility addition is your new one-stop-shop for order fulfillment.



Imagine you are standing in the middle of nine-and-a-half football fields. One field is relatively calm, keeping future players in their ideal environment and preparing to let others loose when they are perfectly warmed up (or maybe cooled down). Another field-and-a-half is busy with players and modern equipment working to ensure everything is humming and that no errors occur on even the most routine plays. And the final seven fields? This is where you'd hear the fans roar. These fields have MVP teammates working together with speed and precision to get their job done, and they are doing it with the best uniforms and equipment around.

Welcome to the Fresh Cube.

Football analogies aside, what is happening inside Stemilt's high-tech distribution center is a new concept for the Washington tree fruit industry. Located at the Olds Station facility in Wenatchee, the Fresh Cube is opening this summer and promises to be a place for one-stop, speedy order fulfillment thanks in large part to the "brains" of the building, the automated storage and retrieval system, or ASRS.

With 12,770 pallet positions over 5 modules, the ASRS is an intelligence system that cares about any information you provide it and can handle the complexity of items (SKUs) within Stemilt's system. It doesn't just put pallets of fruit away, it inducts information about the pack date, variety, size, etc. and places that pallet in a particular spot – and under its ideal temperature conditions – to await shipping. Powered by robots or "aisle carriers", the ASRS works quickly and efficiently to induct and deduct pallets throughout the day to assist in loading trucks, and will work on turning inventory in the quiet of the night.

"It's mind-boggling to watch this system work," said Jay Fulbright, Stemilt's executive vice president who also oversaw the development and construction of the distribution center the past two years. "It knows everything and just like the name of the center implies, it's going to help us continue with our goal of delighting consumers by delivering the freshest fruit possible and doing it timely from our orchards to your stores."

Outside of the Fresh Cube are 31 truck staging lanes and 22 shipping docks. Stemilt worked with a supply chain engineering firm during the design phase of the center. This helped the company better understand its storage and racking capacity needs and provided data into the number of trucks served daily, including peak times.

"Consolidating our shipping operations is going to make life easier for our customers, and our goal is that they will be able to pull into staging areas and get on the road quickly. The Fresh Cube will eventually allow us to ship up to 15 trucks per hour, compared to 6 currently," said Fulbright.

Stemilt designed the Fresh Cube with freight carriers in mind. The center has a dedicated control office for ease in checking in, large overnight parking capacity, a waiting lounge with showers, and access to a lunchroom, where the nearby Stemilt Café will bring in hot meals to sell during business hours. Perhaps the most exciting feature for carriers is the self-serve truck weight scale, which helps drivers monitor their weight and provides a weigh ticket they can use on the road.

"Our carriers are a huge part of the team that helps make Stemilt fruit world famous," said Fulbright. "We wanted to provide them a great atmosphere that they are excited to pick up product from every time."

In addition to storing and shipping pallets out of the Fresh Cube, Stemilt will bring all post-packing activities to this central location. The company is already utilizing 11 new controlled atmosphere rooms (primarily for pear storage), two ThermalTech Tarpless® pear ripening rooms, and two temperature controlled rooms where fruit can either be pulled down (cooled) to 22 degrees, or warmed up to 70 degrees for conditioning. Each of the 16 jet coolers used when pulling fruit down have automated tarping capabilities which will speed up the cooling process cherries must go through before they are shipped.

There are 4,122 pallet positions of single deep storage. These are adjacent to a new heated repack line because the single deep storage will be used primarily for partial pallets and repack or transfer pallets.



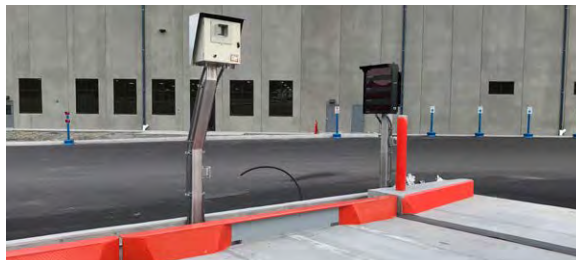
Jet coolers



RipeRite™ pear ripening rooms



Inside view of shipping docks



Automatic truck scale



Outside view of shipping docks

“ The ASRS is an intelligence system and a new concept for the Washington tree fruit industry

Before the ASRS system, there is a dedicated area for palletizing and conveyance. Stemilt will have two palletizers and several conveyance lines that feed into the ASRS or lines that feed to hand segregation areas when that is required. Within this area are three quality control stations to allow Stemilt's QC inspection team to inspect pallets. Each QC station has overhead heaters and heated floor mats to keep the Stemilt team comfortable in the cool environment.

“The palletizing equipment must build precise pallets for it to be able to induct into the ASRS system. It's incredible how technology is being used at every step of the process to get boxes of fruit into and out of the Fresh Cube,” said Fulbright.

Rounding out the Fresh Cube are shipping offices, state and customer inspection rooms, a maintenance shop, and a battery/parts storage room.

Two years since local contractors broke ground, 5.4 million pounds of steel and nearly 32,000 cubic yards of concrete later, Stemilt is readying to officially open the doors of the Fresh Cube. The company expects to be fully operational out of the Fresh Cube in June as the busy Washington cherry season gets underway.

For Stemilt, the Fresh Cube was once a distant dream and is now an exciting reality. The beginning of a season – that aims to take its service level to new heights.



By Katie Harmon

An Organic Decade

The Douglas Family knows stone fruit. In fact, they don't just know it – they live it.



For a family-run business like Douglas Fruit, who has harvested fruit the past 100 years, an 11-year anniversary may seem like a minimal milestone. But for a company who shifted their business model by turning their peach and nectarine crop, and the majority of their apricots, into an organic victory is no small feat.

Even with an economic downturn, stiff California competition and unexpected growing challenges, the Douglas Family has never let an obstacle stand in their way. What can they chalk their success up too? Simple: passion.

"Our family has been passionate about growing fruit for the last 100 years," states Jill Douglas, Co-President of Douglas Fruit. "And that didn't change when we made the switch to organic. In fact, it motivated us even more as we knew organic came with its own set of challenges."

The Douglas family's passion for organic is apparent with the sight and a bite of their flavorful summer fruits that fall under Stemilt's Artisan Organics™ program. With most of the stone fruit volume coming from California, Washington isn't the first thought when it comes to stone fruit production. However, the Douglas family plans on changing that in the years to come.

"Washington's climate sets our program, and our fruit, apart," states Douglas. "We have perfect growing conditions that lower pest pressures, which allows us to not only farm organically but farm high-quality, dessert flavored stone fruit organically that consumers seek out in stores."



Douglas Family

Douglas Fruit is located in south-central Washington State, where growing conditions are pristine. The nutrient-rich volcanic soils provide trees with a solid source of nourishment, while Washington's largest river, the Columbia, and the nearby Snake and Yakima rivers act as fresh water sources. The climate comes with arid days, while the nights cool down significantly providing the trees ample time to rest and reset.

"The day to night shift is what really allows our organics to flourish," states Douglas. "Having such a significant temperature difference gives the trees that extra boost of energy they need to work hard during the warm days. Climate settings like this give us an upper hand."

Washington State also has the upper hand when it comes to having all four seasons. Winter time plays a major role in tree health, providing the necessary chill hours for them to develop buds to blossoms come spring time. This, along with a dry spring, helps with moisture control that can lead to internal issues later in the year.

"Beyond this ideal locale, we grow an array of modern varieties under Artisan Organics™ that allows us to harvest small blocks of fruit in the best harvest window. Couple that with organic certification and our program has evolved to offer retailers with a true story for differentiation," said Douglas.

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...the Douglas Family has never let an obstacle stand in their way. What can they chalk their success up too? Simple: passion.





Douglas said they offer between 10 to 15 varieties for both peaches and nectarines and expect to expand the varieties within the Artisan Organics™ program in the future. Both crops of peaches and nectarines have been certified organic for a decade, while the majority of the apricot crop is also organic.

Organic demand has seen a quite a bump, finding itself in more than 80 percent of U.S. homes according to research conducted by Nielsen. Sales of organic fruits and veggies are also on the rise, totaling \$5.5 billion in 2016 and up 16.4 percent from the year prior.

"Organic is a popular category that continues to grow," states Douglas. "We see strong demand for organic summer fruit, and we can offer a nice late-season complement to California or regional areas by being all-organic."

The Douglas family became a marketing partner of Stemilt back in 2003 and transitioned their crops into organics four years later. The Douglas family plans on continuing to evolve the Artisan Organics™ program over the next decade. "Ten years ago, we took a risk by diving head-first into organics," said Douglas. "It was uncharted waters for us and definitely came with challenges. Looking at it ten years later, I'm pleased at how we've persevered. Today, we're helping drive the organic summer fruit category, diversifying our farming, and still growing for dessert flavors to delight shoppers."



By Katie Harmon

Did You Know

Windscreens

There is a reason why Washington State is one of the best states to grow apples, pears, cherries and more; it's because we have the best growing conditions in the country.

Washington State is lucky to have all four seasons to benefit Stemilt's numerous growing regions. However, with every season, comes specific challenges. During the spring and summer months, our growers must consider the various weather conditions that could affect their crops and factor them into their growing strategies, including inescapable wind. To combat this unpreventable weather pattern, Stemilt takes extra precautions by using windscreens to protect its delicate fruits.

"As a fruit tree moves in the wind, the fruit hanging from its branches can become bruised or skin torn as branches rub and knock against each other," states Robin Graham, assistant general manager of Stemilt Ag Services (SAS). "The goal of windscreens is to slow wind enough to create a calm environment within an orchard."

There are many regions in Eastern Washington that are prone to wind, while some experience very little wind gusts. To protect orchards that are in windy areas, Stemilt's farmers rely on a UV stabilized synthetic polymer which is knitted in a way to give itself strength when wind hits.

"A windscreen is basically a huge sail, so the system holding it in place needs to be strong and well designed," says Graham. "We like to set them up at an angle facing the prevailing wind direction. We use a combination of steel cable, wooden poles, and concrete anchors to build our windscreens systems."

It's not just one fruit variety that needs windscreen protection. All tree fruit is susceptible to wind damage, but location plays a major part in which orchards need windscreens and which do not. For some varieties that are extremely sensitive to any type of damage, Stemilt's teams will take extra precaution and setup windscreens regardless if they are in windy locations or not. Two varieties that need extra protection are Stemilt's world famous Rainier cherries and Skylar Rae® cherries. Graham mentions that most of Stemilt's Rainier cherry and Skylar Rae® blocks have windscreens to prevent damage to the light-colored fruits, including bruises, limb rub and punctures.

While windscreens don't play a major role in when fruit will be harvested, it can create a small micro climate to support fruit growth. Stemilt's team sets this protective material up right after the bees are finished pollinating. They will then keep the windscreens in place until the fruit has been harvested, in some cases through October.

"Windscreens are a tool we utilize almost from the beginning," states Graham. "And while wind is unavoidable, our teams do a great job working with these conditions to grow the qualities we are after to meet our world famous fruit promise."



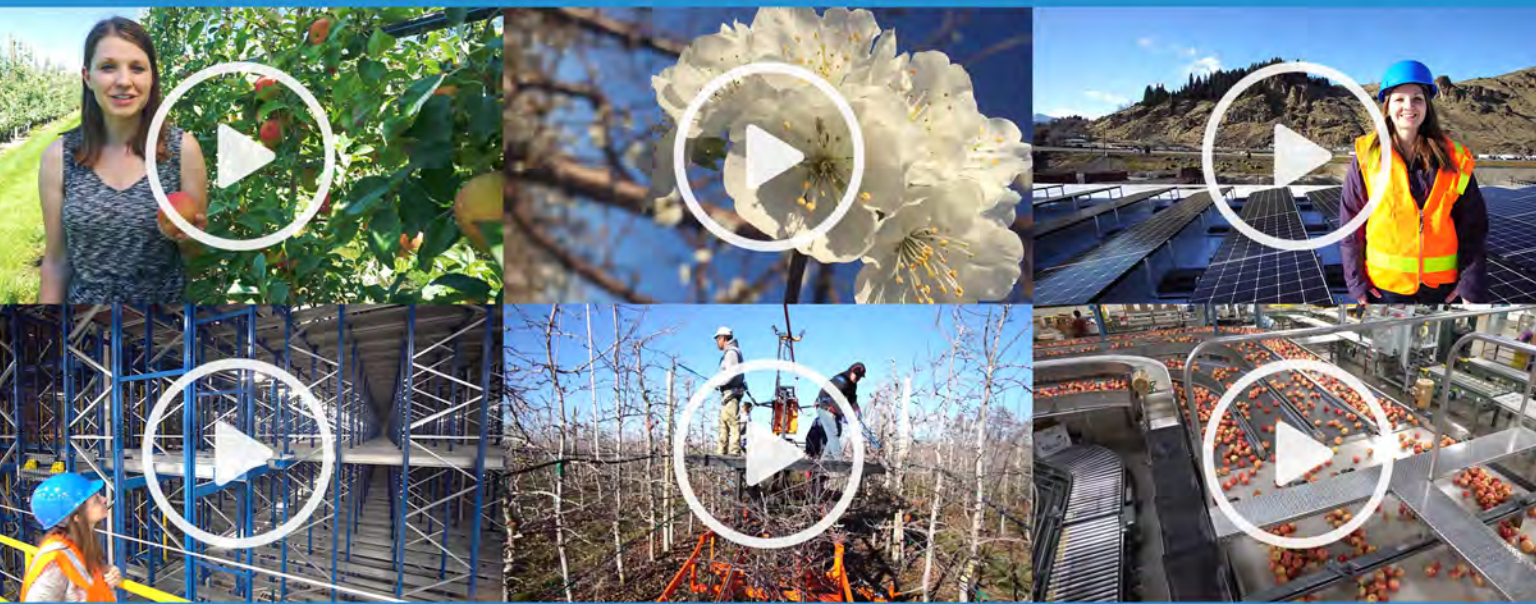


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Stay up-to-date on the latest happenings at Stemilt by subscribing to our 36 Seconds series. One to two times per month, we will email you a short video news update, giving you the first look of harvest, packing fruit, new projects, new products, and much more.

All in just :36 seconds.

stemilt.com/subscribe



That's World Famous!

Fresh Cherry Turnovers

PREP TIME: 15 minutes
COOK TIME: 20-25 minutes
TOTAL TIME: 40 minutes
LEVEL: Easy

Makes 9 turnovers

Cherry turnovers are the perfect dessert or summer brunch recipe.

Ingredients

- 2 cups of Stemilt's dark-sweet cherries, pitted and halved
- 3 tablespoons of granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 pound purchased puff pastry dough, thawed
- All-purpose flour for rolling
- 1 egg yolk mixed with ½ teaspoon water
- Turbinado sugar

Directions

In a medium saucepan, bring the cherries, sugar, lemon juice, cinnamon and cornstarch to a boil over medium-high heat. Continue to boil for 1 to 2 minutes.

Remove from heat and allow to cool to room temperature. Refrigerate to cool completely.

On a heavily floured surface, roll out the puff pastry into a 15 inch square. Using a pastry wheel, pizza cutter or very sharp knife, cut the square into 9 five-inch squares.

Place about 2 tablespoons of the cooled filling just off center of each square. Fold the squares over corner-to-corner to form a triangle. Seal the edges by pressing around the turnover with a fork. Carefully place each turnover onto a parchment lined baking sheet. Refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Preheat your oven to 375°F.

Brush the tops of each turnover with the egg wash and sprinkle with a bit of turbinado sugar. Bake the turnovers for 20 to 25 minutes or until they are puffed and golden.

Remove and cool on a wire rack for at least 15 minutes. Serve warm.

Nutritional Information (1 turnover)

Per Serving: Calories 339; Fat 13g; Protein 5g; Carbohydrates 47g; Sugar 31g; Sodium 188g

For more recipes, visit stemilt.com/recipes



By Brianna Shales

Solar Stamp

The opening of the Fresh Cube will mark Stemilt's first investments into sustainable solar power.





The Fresh Cube, Stemilt's new high-tech distribution center, is set to open this summer and as it does, Stemilt will officially put its first solar energy dot on the map. With 100 solar panels already in place in a stamp-like pattern atop the near 600,000 square foot building, the company will soon begin generating energy with the help of the sun.

The central Washington region where Stemilt calls home is a region where energy is plentiful and inexpensive thanks to the ability to generate hydro power from large rivers, including the Columbia. These facts have limited solar investments and solar energy credits in Washington, especially when compared to states like California. That brings up the important question for Stemilt: why invest in solar in the first place?



Jay Fulbright

According to Jay Fulbright, Stemilt's executive vice president who oversaw the development and construction of the Fresh Cube, Stemilt is stepping into solar for one reason – to preserve renewable resources and give back to the land where it grows, packs, and ships fruit.



“ Stemilt will be the largest solar energy producer in Chelan County as the Fresh Cube opens.”

“We can’t take advantage of our natural resources, even those that are plentiful like water,” said Fulbright. “Stemilt’s investment into solar energy is a natural progression of our Responsible Choice® program, which has developed many sustainability and social responsibility ideas into initiatives since it first started back in 1989.”

Stemilt’s solar panels are expected to generate enough kilowatt hours of energy to power 3.1 homes in Chelan County annually. This is based on an average household energy consumption of 10,766 kilowatt hours per year.

“Stemilt will be the largest solar energy producer in Chelan County as the Fresh Cube opens,” said Fulbright. “We also set these panels up in a way that we can expand our solar production on this building in the future.”

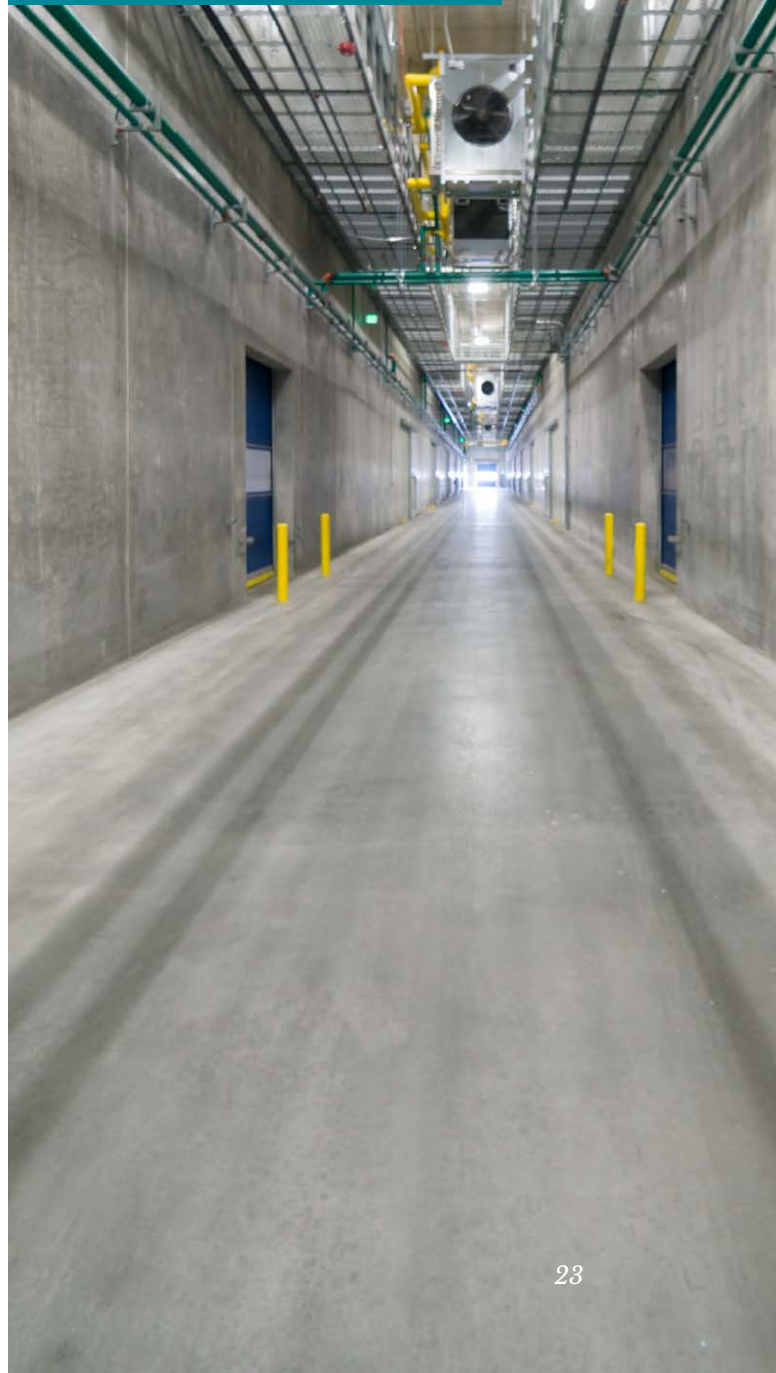
The solar panels came from Ellensburg Solar, an energy company located about 70 miles south of Wenatchee. They manufacture solar panels for both commercial and residential spaces. Stemilt will be able to take advantage of state and local renewable energy credits and over time the payback will cover the initial cost of the solar panels.

“This investment in solar was not about energy credits for us,” said Fulbright. “It was centered around our commitment to making the responsible choice to protect our natural resources so that future generations can grow world famous fruit too.”



There’s More

Solar isn’t the only area where sustainability was factored in at the Fresh Cube. The lights in the building’s 11 new controlled atmosphere rooms are all LED and motion activated so energy is efficient and only used when it is needed.



By Katie Harmon

The Coral Club

*Yesterday, it was a second choice. Today, it's a favorite.
Tomorrow, it's projected to be at the top.*



In the late 1980s, the Coral Champagne variety took a backseat to Brooks at a research facility at UC Davis. Today, the Coral Champagne is finding itself to be one of the most sought-after varieties California can offer with Stemilt leading the pack. Erick Stonebarger, General Manager of Chinchiole Stemilt California (CSC) believes the variety has a big future ahead.

"Even though it took a backseat to the Brooks variety back in the day, a long-time grower for CSC in the Brentwood area, the Maggiore family, saw its potential and planted the variety," states Stonebarger. "Because of their intuition, Chinchiole Fruit Co. was able to see Coral's commercial potential in the early 90s, helping CSC get a head start with the Coral variety."

And that they did. CSC has seen a drastic change in variety volumes, with Coral representing a large portion of CSC's crop. The company is planting the variety at many of its ranches from southern to northern growing districts in California.

"Coral's climb to the top has occurred over a ten-year period, and last season, they represented more than one-fifth of the cherries marketed out of California. It's the number two variety in California, with volume in the ground in all growing districts. At Stemilt, we're proud to be on the forefront of this incredible cherry with more than one-third of our entire California crop in the Coral club."

Stemilt's cherry program is centered on continuous supply and growing the right varieties in the right growing districts. The company farms cherries in both California and Washington for a season that runs non-stop from May until early September. With high-quality varieties like Coral, Stemilt can plant the cherry in multiple sites to ensure quality fruit is harvested fresh daily during the peak California season.

"Quality must always come first, and that starts with choosing the right varieties on the right rootstocks in the right regions to grow," said Stonebarger. "We hope for the best from Mother Nature during the seasons leading up to harvest and then focus on quality every day to produce cherries with 'world famous' flavors."

The world famous mentality led CSC to determine the right combination of districts and varieties in California, and ultimately that meant farming cherries in three districts: South District, Mid-District and Late District. Each district has unique growing conditions, and the Coral variety is a standout that has found success in all three.

"Coral is versatile, and can thrive in a number of different climates," said Stonebarger. "We prefer to plant Coral in desert-like sites and that makes our diverse ranch locales in California great homes for Coral."

Stemilt typically harvests the Coral variety beginning in early-May and continues to harvest and ship it through the end of May. Coral is harvested about 10 days before the Bing variety, which allows for a great transition. Bing has produced the most volume for the last several years, however Stonebarger believes that will change in years to come.

"In five to ten years, Coral will be the top produced cherry in California," states Stonebarger. "It's the ideal commercial variety as it has the growing attributes farmers need and the flavor profile to wow consumers."

Coral has an excellent acid-to-sugar ratio, along with great firmness to allow a fantastic eating experience. True to its name, the color of the cherry is a brighter red, especially when compared to Bing. With Stemilt's rigorous cold chain standards that includes hydrocooling soon after harvest and forced air cooling before shipment, Coral consistently delivers the cherry sweetness and crunch that shoppers enjoy.

As the former forgotten cherry now enjoys MVP status, Stemilt is eagerly looking ahead to continued success with Coral cherries. "We're convinced by Coral and will continue to develop it as the leader in our program. The fact of the matter is, Coral just keeps getting better," said Stonebarger.



By Brianna Shales

Brand Power

The produce department is looking more and more like the cereal aisle with brands booming in every space and category.



Tomatoes, packaged salads, berries, apples, and more – take a walk through a big or small department and you'll notice that it is harder to spot unbranded produce than it is to spot branded produce. And now there is data that supports that observation.

According to Nielsen Fresh Facts data released in late 2017, branded produce items have been the driving force in produce department sales growth over the past five years and far outpaced the growth of private label, while unbranded produce products are declining.

Brands now account for 38.5 percent of total produce department dollar share, a figure that increased by nearly 8 percentage points between 2012-2016. Branded fruit products grew at a faster rate than branded vegetables and branded produce overall, with sales increasing 10.8 percent over five years. They trailed only the produce snack segment in brand growth.

"It's encouraging to see produce brands on the rise, especially in the fruit category," said Stemilt marketing director Roger Pepperl. "This aligns with what we know about today's consumers – they are purposefully enjoying more fresh fruits and vegetables and as they do, they want to know the story about who grew that food."

Brands and storytelling go hand-in-hand and have been a pillar at Stemilt for decades. The company's late founder, Tom Mathison, was the first to apply a branded sticker on apples. This was before PLU (price look-up) codes were used and was done intentionally by Mathison to ensure shoppers knew where their apples came from.

"Tom was a visionary when it came to branding and telling anyone who would listen the stories that made his fruits special," said Pepperl. "That passion now lives on in his grandson, West Mathison, who has brought on proprietary varieties and used branded packaging to continue sharing those stories and the Stemilt difference with shoppers."

Stemilt is now home for three club apple varieties, including: Piñata®, Sweetango®, and Rave™. The company has successful packaged brands like Lil Snappers® kid-size fruits and Fresh Blenders™ apples. And even the cherry category, which Stemilt has been a long-time leader of, is being transformed by Stemilt signature fruits and unique branded opportunities to take retailers through the California and Washington seasons with a story and point of differentiation.





Introduced last summer, 5 River Islands™ is a brand for premium California cherries grown in the Delta region. Stemilt picks and packs large Lapin cherries specifically for this brand and uses branded pouch bags and clamshells with the story on each package passionately explaining the Delta's unique geography and why cherries find it an ideal place to grow.

"Our newest cherry brand is an ode to an incredible locale where five rivers make up unique waterways and a lush soil for cherries to grow and thrive. It's a special story to distinguish California cherries in the market right before the crop transitions to Washington State," said Pepperl.

As Washington's cherry season gets underway, Stemilt begins harvesting Skylar Rae® brand cherries. The bi-colored fruit has unique genetics that have given it status as the third SKU in the cherry category. It's a standout from dark-sweet and Rainier cherries because it boasts the highest firmness levels of any commercially-grown cherries, and also the highest sugars (or Brix). Skylar Rae® is a rarity as these two desired features for cherries don't typically go together.

"Skylar Rae® cherries were discovered growing by chance in nature and Stemilt has adopted this fruit as one of its signature varieties," said Pepperl. "We tout it as the 'sweetest cherry you'll ever eat' and have unique packaging options to help retailers merchandise it as the standout, third SKU to the cherry category. This cherry can build incremental sales at a premium price from mid-June through July."

As July arrives, Stemilt co-owner and 4th generation cherry grower Kyle Mathison begins harvesting cherries at the legendary Stemilt Hill. This is the same spot that his ancestors homesteaded back in 1893 and have farmed cherries on for over 100 years. During the month of July, Stemilt packs its finest cherries into Kyle's Pick™ packs. The company selects key, high-quality varieties (like Skeena), the largest sized fruit, and dessert qualities for this premium cherry program.

“
Brands and
storytelling have been
a pillar at Stemilt for
decades, and power
our cherry program
today.”



“July is a big cherry promotion month and Kyle’s Pick™ has been a merchandising tool for retailers that want to differentiate their program as premium and high-flavor. More than half of cherry purchases are bought on impulse, and with Kyle’s Pick™ being the best-of-the-harvest, we’re able to drive those impulse sales and dollars to the produce category,” said Pepperl.

Stemilt wraps up cherry season with the most mystical brand of them all – A Half Mile Closer to the Moon™ cherries. Grown approximately 2,640 feet above sea level and higher – or literally a half mile closer to the moon – this brand focuses on delivering a grand finale to cherry season unlike any other. Kyle Mathison harvests cherries fresh daily from mid-August until early September from Amigos Orchard in Wenatchee. The high altitudes join late-ripening varieties like Skeena, Staccato®, and new test varieties to extend cherry season and give Stemilt the latest cherries in Washington State. Mathison believes in harvesting in the days leading up to a full moon, as that’s when the gravitational pull from the moon is helping to deliver more energy in the form of carbohydrates (sugars) to his cherries. The locale and Mathison’s innovative farming methods create a special story to help give shoppers a final and incredible taste of cherries before the season ends.

“Moon cherries are available mid-August until the end of the season, which Kyle keeps stretching by planting even higher up Amigos. His dream has always been to extend the season of World Famous Cherries, and this unique locale allows him to do that. Moon cherries are a differentiator, not only because of Kyle’s story and passion, but also because of the flavor explosion they deliver,” said Pepperl.

From 5 River Islands™ to Kyle’s Pick™, Moon Cherries and more, Stemilt is developing brands around its authentic stories to bolster cherry sales. A story always stands the test of time so you can expect Stemilt’s cherry brands to continue to be powerful tools to grow your cherry category for years to come.



Peach & Goat Cheese Salad

PREP TIME: 20 minutes
COOK TIME: 26 minutes
TOTAL TIME: 46 minutes
LEVEL: Easy

Makes 4 servings

This summery salad has the perfect balance of flavors.

Ingredients:

Dressing

1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
1/2 tsp Dijon mustard
1/2 tsp honey
1/4 tsp salt
1/4 tsp black pepper
1 tbsp poppyseed
2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

Candied Pecans

1/4 cup dark brown sugar, packed
1/8 tsp Kosher salt
1 tbsp water
1/2 cup whole pecans

Directions

In a small bowl, or in a jar with a lid, combine the dressing ingredients. Either whisk to combine or cover the jar and shake well. Refrigerate the dressing until ready to serve.

To prepare the candied pecans, combine the brown sugar, salt and water in a small frying pan over medium-high heat. Allow the mixture to come to a bubble. Add the pecans and reduce the heat to medium. Stir to coat the pecans and continue cooking for about 3 minutes or until fragrant. Pour the pecan mixture onto parchment paper and allow them to cool.

Assemble the salad ingredients in individual serving dishes or on one large platter. Break up the candied pecans and scatter them on top. Drizzle on the dressing and serve.

Nutritional Information (per serving)

Calories: 333, Protein: 9g, Fat: 24g, Carbohydrates: 24g, Dietary Fiber: 5g, Sodium: 364mg, Sugars: 18g

For more recipes, visit stemilt.com/recipes



By Katie Harmon

Evolution of CA Storage

Controlled Atmosphere (CA) storage rooms are not a recent invention. In fact, they have been around, in one form or another, for quite some time.



The produce industry would not be what it is today without CA rooms. This technology helps fruit and vegetables stay fresher, longer while still preserving quality. Here at Stemilt, our teams have been working for decades to perfect the art of controlled atmosphere storage to ensure every consumer is getting world famous qualities when they purchase our fruit, regardless of the time of year.



Stemilt's industry-leading research and development and quality control teams work jointly to test and develop storage procedures for a wide array of apple varieties, including classics and new varieties or strains like Royal, Stemilt's latest Honeycrisp strain, and the high-color Aztec Fuji. Their ability to understand the science of apples and how to care for them while in CA storage has enabled Stemilt to supply multiple apple varieties nearly year-round.

Jake Gutzwiler, QC Manager for Stemilt, has been working with CA storage throughout his entire career and today oversees Stemilt's 200-plus CA rooms. "Like any technology, CA storage has evolved greatly over the years," states Gutzwiler. "That evolution and our knowledge of apples has enabled us to extend the season of many favorite varieties so that shoppers can enjoy the fruits they crave year-round."

CA storage rooms were once walk-in cellars that apple growers had on their farms. Today, more than 200 rooms live at Stemilt, all of which have the capabilities to store various varieties from harvest until it is their turn to be packed. At Stemilt, multiple measures must take place to store apples correctly. First, Stemilt selects apples for short, mid, and long-term storage based on the apples starch and sugar levels at harvest. In general, fruit with high starch reserves at harvest will be stored for a longer time in CA. To prepare apples for CA storage, Stemilt cools the fruit down in 33-degree Fahrenheit rooms soon after they are harvested. Once cooled, Stemilt seals CA rooms, which works to adjust the atmosphere and displace oxygen with naturally occurring gases like nitrogen.

As the oxygen levels lower to about one percent, the apple's metabolic and respiration processes slow, keeping the apple in a sleepy, just-alive state. This helps maintain quality and freshness of the apple, and once the CA room is opened and the fruit heads to be packed, each apple will resume its natural process of converting starches to sugars for that world famous flavor experience.



While CA storage appears straightforward, Gutzwiler and his team are working effortlessly behind-the-scenes to ensure the right atmosphere is maintained and that apple quality is consistent through all CA rooms. This means that highly skilled CA storage operators are monitoring rooms day and night. “Our CA storage expertise is constantly improving because experiences guide our process,” says Gutzwiler. “Every year brings its own set of challenges, but we know much more today how a hot summer or cool period during harvest will impact apple quality while it’s in storage. This knowledge is vital, especially when working with a newer varietal in hopes of extending its season.”

Organic apples are another area where the knowledge gained through time and experiences has benefited Stemilt. The company has grown apples organically since 1989, giving its QC team nearly three decades of experience handling organics post-harvest. Stemilt has extended the season of its organic apples both through increased supply and the development of tight storage regimes. Organics are often stored at lower oxygen levels (known as ultra-low oxygen CA or dynamic CA storage) to carry them into the late spring and summer months.

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When it comes to consistently delivering fruit with great quality and flavors, CA storage is only one piece of the puzzle. Growing practices and harvesting apples at the optimum maturity is crucial in the QC team's success, and the horticulture and quality teams work tightly to ensure that vital information about fruit condition is shared prior to placing any apple under CA storage.

West Mathison, Stemilt president, has assisted the horticulture and QC teams greatly by adopting new varieties or strains of varieties that have qualities that both shoppers and growers look for. Royal Honeycrisp, which is packed under the new Honeyhill™ brand, colors and matures simultaneously which allows teams to pick fruit with color and good starch levels to support Gutzwiler's team in its ability to keep the fruit in long-term storage. The same can be said for high-color strains of Piñata®, Gala, and Aztec Fuji. Increased volumes, particularly around these new strains, are helping to take Stemilt's season for varieties longer. For instance, Honeycrisp is now available until mid-summer and Piñata® has near year-round supply through Stemilt and partnerships with high-quality grower/shippers in Chile and Argentina.

The constant stream of new varieties, strains, organics, and more keeps Gutzwiler and team on their toes and always looking towards improving processes to deliver both flavor and consistency to shoppers throughout the year.

"Our job is never done and the need to constantly look ahead and evolve our processes keeps storing and handling apples interesting. We're one of many steps that is working daily to ensure that the Stemilt apples shoppers get to enjoy have the crispness and flavors that delight," said Gutzwiler.





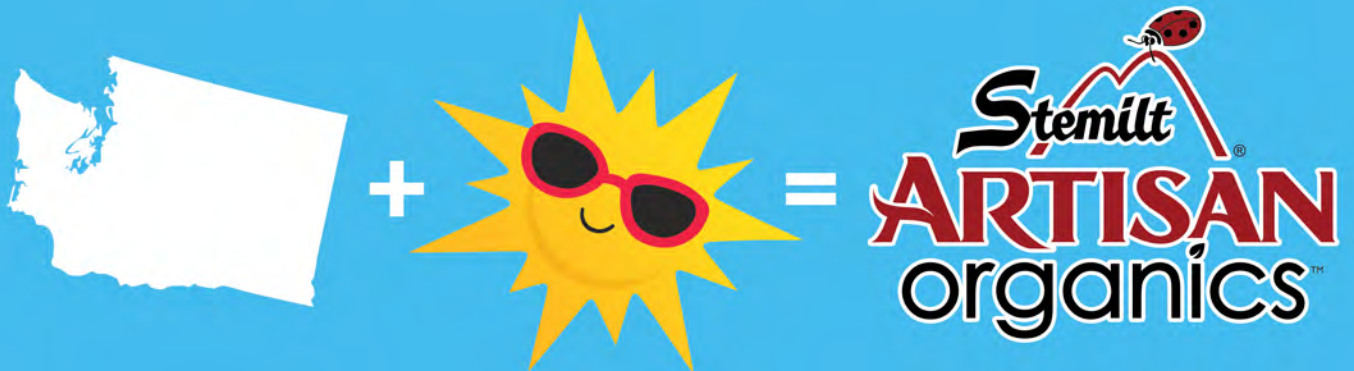
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Recipes, tips, farming, nutrition and more.
Read all about fruit on Stemilt's blog.

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PEACHY KEEN



Grown organically for a decade and tree-ripened for those summer flavors, your shoppers will love our Artisan Organics™ peaches and nectarines.





Stemilt Creek Winery

We love our Wine Club Members!



Wine Club

Jan and Kyle Mathison reserve the very best of their wines and hospitality for the members of Stemilt Creek Winery Wine Club. Join us as a wine club member and celebrate the joy of fine wine, good friends, and passion for life! As a member for our wine club you receive the following:

- A generous 30% Savings on each Wine Club Release
- 6 bottles of wine shipped 2 times per year (Spring and Fall Wine Club Release)
- 20% off case purchases throughout the year
- 10% off wine purchases throughout the year
- Only wine club members can order from our Library Selection Wines
- Wine Club Members get first rights on available new releases
- Monthly Newsletter
- Invitation to Wine Club Party for Fall Release
- To sign up for the Stemilt Creek Winery Wine club contact:

winery@stemiltcreekwinery.com*

*Due to Shipping Laws, not all states are open for shipping wine.

Please contact us at winery@stemiltcreekwinery.com for availability in your state.



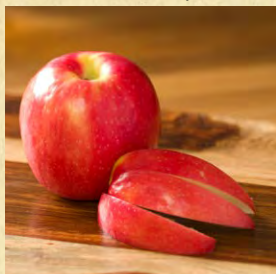
Pioneer Spirit

It is with great pride that we honor the pioneers who came before us through our wines at Stemilt Creek Winery. Our site-specific wines are harvested near the land planted in the late 1800's by homestead pioneer, Thomas Cyle Mathison. Jan Mathison, our winemaker, lovingly crafts the wines using grapes that Kyle Mathison grows on the same land that his family has cultivated for over a century. The winemaking style tends to build the wine with brawny tannins to shoulder earthy flavors evident in the unique terrain of Stemilt Hill, including the use of Kyle's World Famous Compost. Collectively, Stemilt Creek wines exude brawny characteristics consistently in a coherent full-bodied and lasting flavor much like the intriguing story of the Mathison family legacy.

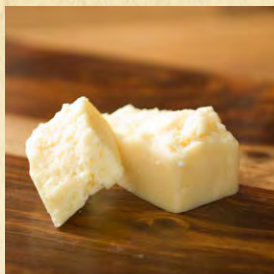




Pink Lady



Kasseri



Pink Lady apples are zippy with a dense skin, tart flavor, and effervescent finish.
Kasseri is slightly tart with subtle sweetness and olive-like flavor.

A Day's Work – Honors Scottish Pioneer, Thomas Cyle Mathison – A Day's Work's flavor, structure, and finish can be summed up in the powerful story behind homestead pioneer, Thomas Cyle Mathison. Seizing opportunity to own land, he declared in a strong Scottish accent, "That I cometh to this land with nothing but a days work in me hans." These mighty hands dug ditches, mined for gold, and ultimately planted the seeds for the one of the largest fruit companies in the world. His robust spirit harmonizes with the boldness of this Bordeaux style blend with sturdy structure and a black cherry finish!



d'Anjou



Brie

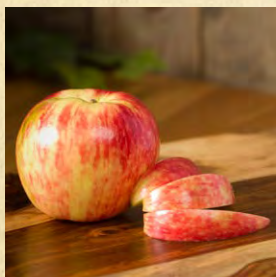


D'Anjou pears are juicy with a sweet brisk flavor and hint of citrus.
Brie is rich and creamy cheese with a slight sweetness that contrasts the earthy flavor of the edible rind.

Boss Lady – AJ Mathison – Spectacular spice balances with a mouthful of black-strap molasses which is held up by a mineral note resembling flint – this wine is dazzling. Full of electricity and pizzazz, it dances across the tongue for a long, satisfying finish sure to leave a lasting impression. Don't let all the fun fool you. AJ Mathison, known as Boss Lady, had a fiery fortitude and passion for family and the land. There is a serious side to this 2nd vintage of "Boss Lady" with sturdy tannins, toasted oak, and full flavor finish. Enjoy a sip and let your taste buds tango.



Honeycrisp



Provolone



Honeycrisp is juicy with a refreshing sweetness similar to fresh apple cider. Just like the name implies, Honeycrisp apples are crisp with a unique skin that fractures cleanly with each bite.
Provolone is a tangy cheese that grows sharper as it ages; occasional smoky taste.

Caring Passion – TK Mathison – Passionate. Caring. Focused. Anyone who ever met TK instantly recognized his genuine personality. He introduced himself with confident honesty and finesse – never hiding a thing – he never had to. He knew who he was. His crew and their families knew he cared about them as much as the work and the land. This 2nd vintage of "Caring Passion" resembles that trait, introducing itself with pure Merlot characteristics: soft tannins, ripe red cherry, coffee bean, and cassis with a hint of vanilla oak backing up the fruit. Just what a Merlot should be – comfortable – just like TK. Sit with it a while and enjoy.

Facebook Messenger

Do you Messenger, WhatsApp or WeChat?

With so many different instant communication apps, it's difficult to keep up let alone decide which one will benefit your company the most. After some research, we're looking at Facebook Messenger to be one great marketing tool to have in your toolbox in 2018 (as long as your core audience is in the U.S. / Canada).

Facebook Messenger found its legs back in 2011, when Facebook felt that the communication tool would be better used on its own platform. Today, Facebook Messenger is the best way to connect to your consumers. Why?

- 1) It's free and easy
- 2) It helps you have two-way conversations anywhere, anytime
- 3) There are more than 1.3 billion users and 60 million businesses using Messenger

Consumers feel that messenger is an easy way to communicate with their favorite brands and stores. Not only can they directly access their favorite brands through the app, they feel like they can have a two-way conversation rather than facing an automated system. Using this app gives them the ability to ask questions, relay concerns, and find a solution to their problem quickly.

For a business, Messenger can act as a communication tool to relay relevant information and offers, remind consumers they still have items left in their shopping cart and provide consumers with the answers they want. In fact, AdWeek's data discovered that people are 3.5 times more likely to open a Messenger message than they are a marketing email. Why? It's short, direct, it's a conversation starter, and it is available to them always.

So, who are these 1.3 billion users? A lot of those users are millennials and those millennials are tomorrow's big buyers. Millennials, ages 22-37, know the digital game. They adapt well to digital change, they are digitally-savvy and prefer to communicate through digital channels to get answers quickly and efficiently. These users look to businesses who are in tune to social networking, make shopping easy and answer questions quickly. Facebook Messenger can help with all of that and more.

The Facebook Messenger platform is a great investment for produce retailers both big and small. The platform is easy to use, is optimized to be mobile friendly, and your team does not need a special skill set to operate the channel. Your business could be set up on Facebook Messenger within just a few clicks, giving you access to a set of tools that can help increase sales, engagement, and provide high customer services to your shoppers.

As digital communication vehicles continue to evolve, it's important to take your marketing messages to where your shoppers are. Facebook Messenger is not only a way for you to get your message out there, but ensure its personalized and targeted so you know that the right people receive it.



facebook Messenger

GOING TO MY HAPPY PLACE

76% of people who eat fruit every day say they are satisfied with their life, compared to only 33% of people who eat no fruit.

SOURCE: Produce for Better Health Foundation. *Novel approaches to measuring and promoting fruit and vegetable consumption, 2017.*

Together we can increase fruit and vegetable consumption.

Learn how at PBHFoundation.org



 @FruitsAndVeggiesMoreMatters

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Parting Shot

First-to-harvest Rave™ apples will come off the tree again in August.

GAME CHANGER!

HOME of the
BIG
CHERRY

+



=



Find out why bigger cherries are always better from your Stemilt Rep.





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