

HILLTOP™

Issue #16 Spring/Summer 2019



**A 30 Year Journey:
Stemilt's Organic
Expedition**

Augtember

From Goop to Gold

BE

BOLD

Never settle
for anything less
than the best.

Kyle



From the Editor



Hello from Wenatchee, where another beautiful spring is upon us. We're anxiously awaiting the arrival of cherries and expect our California crop to start coming off the tree in early May, which is probably the time that our last-to-harvest cherries

grown at high altitudes will try to start blooming!

This marks the 16th issue of Hilltop magazine and each thoughtful story showcases a few of the many great things happening here at Stemilt. You'll learn about my father's (Kyle Mathison) new process for making World Famous Compost, and what 30 years of farming organically has looked like for Stemilt. We also share how we're building the Rave® apple brand through unique marketing activities and why Rave®, along with other key Stemilt items, will help your stores set new benchmarks for sales success in the months of August and September (or Augtember as we like to call it).

We look forward to making this summer a great season for you at retail and appreciate your continued support of our farms and World Famous Fruits!

Onward,

West Mathison
President
Stemilt Growers

HILLTOP

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Hilltop is a bi-annual publication dedicated to fresh fruit growing, packing, marketing, and merchandising.

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Cover Shot



Kyle on Stemilt Hill in the middle of cherry harvest 2018

BE PURE



Going all organic brought balance to our trees,
and it's a difference you can taste.

Stemilt **ARTISAN**
organics

HILLTOP



22

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AUGTEMBER

August and September are historically a time of steady transition from summer to fall items in produce. But not this year! Stemilt's new Augtember program is ready to spark sales by guiding retailers in planning and closing opportunity gaps that exist on late summer and first-of-the-fall items.

2 Months  

7+ Programs

Lots of \$



A Half Mile Closer to the Moon® cherries. New crop Tosca, Starkrimson, and Bartlett pears. Organic peaches and nectarines. And let's not forget Rave®, the first-to-harvest apple with outrageous juice and infamous Honeycrisp crunch.

These are a few of many unique programs that Stemilt is highlighting as part of their cleverly named and data-inspired Augtember program.

Augtember is the word combination of the months August and September and focuses on increased promotion planning throughout the supply chain to help retailers capture additional sales and close opportunity gaps that currently exist on items like late-season cherries and new crop apples and pears.

According to Stemilt Marketing Director Roger Pepperl, Augtember was born after a review of Nielsen U.S. retail scan data during these two months showed clear opportunities to earn more dollars from apple, pear cherry and summer fruit sales.

"August and September are historically months of transition in produce, as stores move from summer to fall sets. This change often leads to a missed week or two of promotion for an item which translates to slower-than-necessary sales," said Pepperl. "With Augtember, we're advising retailers to take key, high-quality and Stemilt-specialty items that are available this time of year and either continue sales momentum you have on them, or hit the ground running with the season's start to capture more dollars. The volume is there, and we can amplify the produce department with well-planned and well-executed promotions."

“
The seasonality
changes and the
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there.”

One of the reasons Stemilt sees Augtember as such a great opportunity for the produce department is because of how seasonality and availability of fruits – including Stemilt crops – has changed over the past several years. Cherry season runs later, stone fruit is available organically through September, and apple and pear season have premium varieties kicking off their seasons with unbelievable flavors.

"The seasonality changes and the varieties we are growing now have brought incredible opportunities to retail that weren't always there," said Pepperl. "That means we need to shift the promotion strategy in these two months. The brands and programs that fall under our Augtember program are not only set up to have volume to promote, but also the flavors that will delight consumers, and keep them coming back for more."





So, how does data prove that Augtember is a need in the produce department? The new Stemilt-signature apple, Rave[®] is a great example. Honeycrisp is the most sought-after apple in supermarkets today, but there's a gap in supplies from one crop year to the next. The time that Honeycrisp is transitioning from old crop to new crop is the moment for Rave[®] to shine. Rave[®] has Honeycrisp parentage but fully colors and ripens in late July. In Washington State, that's a harvest date that is three weeks ahead of other apples, and nearly six weeks ahead of the earliest Honeycrisp blocks.

"Retail scan data tells us that the gap in Honeycrisp supply from August 4th to September 15th translates to a 100-pound opportunity gap per store per week for a premium apple to fill. For a 200-store chain, not carrying a higher retail priced apple like Rave[®] in place of Honeycrisp is during the supply gap is missing out more than \$400,000 in potential sales dollars," said Pepperl.

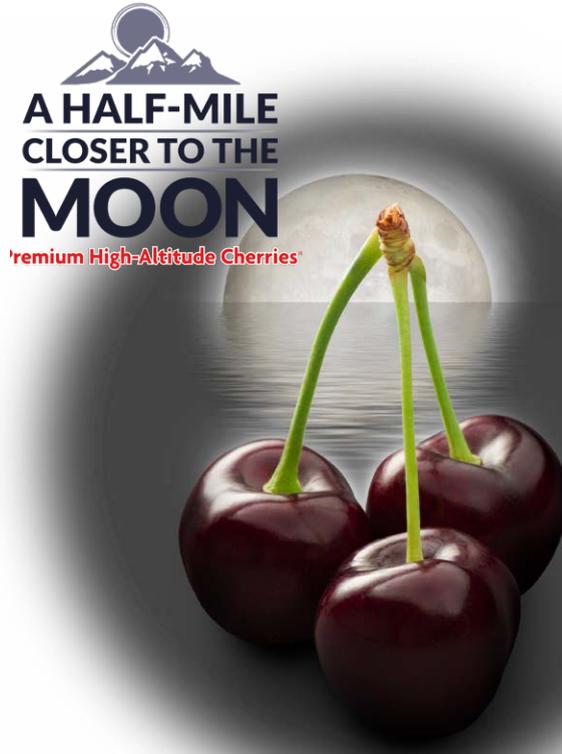


The opportunity gap data trends continue on items like Gala apples, first-of-the-season Rushing Rivers® pears, and Stemilt's A Half Mile Closer to the Moon® cherries. Data shows that retailers sell 38 percent fewer pounds of cherries per store per week in the late season (from August 11 to September 1) than the store does in the July 21 to August 10 timeframe. However, late season sales earn 55 percent of the dollars that retailers make during the July 21 to August 10 timeframe.

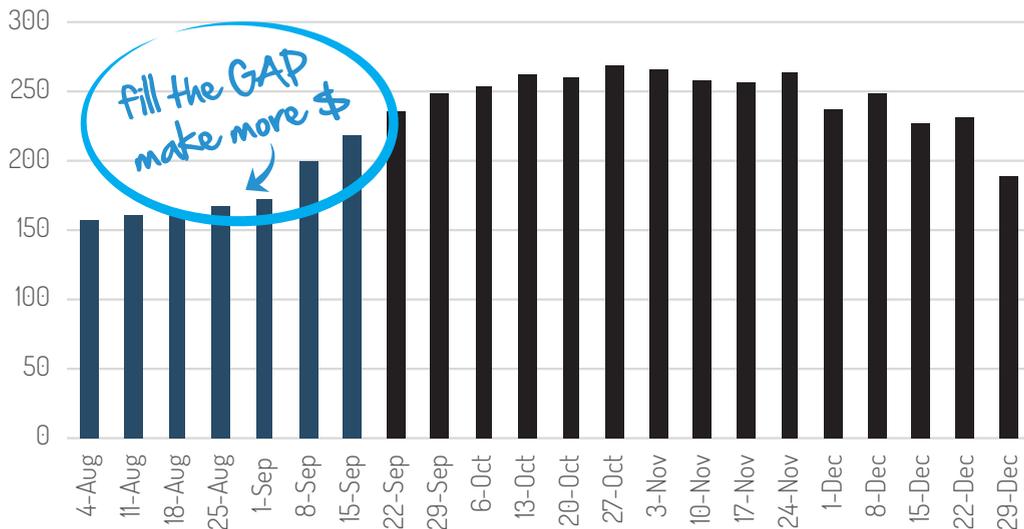
"Moon cherries offer retailers with a high value per pound item. Ending cherry season early, or not promoting fresh and high-quality cherries, can be a real negative to late season performance versus carrying Moon cherries to end cherry season on a high note," said Pepperl.

While the timing of Stemilt's crop won't be clear until trees bloom in April and May, one thing is for certain: retailers that plan now for the summer to fall transition of fruits are not only going to bolster produce sales, but they are going to be part of putting the fictitious month of Augtember on the map.

For more information about Augtember, contact your Stemilt representative.



Apples, Pears & Cherries Combined Total US Avg lbs/week/store 2017/2018



Gluten Free Cherry Oat Bars

These Gluten-Free Cherry Oat Bars are rich and decadent with a crisp, buttery crumb that will have you making seconds in no time.

 9 large or 16 small servings |  25 minutes |  45 minutes |  70 minutes |  Easy

Ingredients

2 cups fresh cherries (stems removed, pitted and halved)
1/4 cup water
1/3 cup sugar
Juice from one lemon
3 tablespoons cornstarch
1 1/4 cups gluten free all-purpose flour
1 1/2 cups gluten free instant oats (sometimes labeled quick oats)
1/2 cup rolled oats
1 cup brown sugar
1 tsp baking powder
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
3/4 cup room temperature butter

Instructions

Make the cherry filling

1. Prepare the cherry filling by adding halved, pitted cherries to a small sauce pan, stir in the water, sugar, lemon juice, and corn starch. Bring the mixture just to a boil over medium heat, as soon as you see the first bubbles form and start to pop, reduce the heat to a low simmer and cook for 10 minutes, stirring frequently. Using the back of the spoon to break up the cherries.
2. Once thickened remove the cherry filling from the heat and let it cool to room temperature. The filling can be made up to 3 days in advance and stored in the refrigerator until you are ready to make the bars.

Make the bars

3. Preheat the oven to 350°F and spray a 9×9-inch square pan with cooking spray. Line the pan with parchment paper being sure to leave enough paper overhanging on each side of the pan so that you can use them as handles later to remove the bars from the baking pan.
4. In a large mixing bowl combine the gluten free all-purpose flour, instant and rolled oats, brown sugar, baking powder, and kosher salt. Use your hands to mix the dry ingredients together. Once completely combined add the softened butter to the bowl then use a pastry blender or your hands work the mixture into crumbs/pea sized pieces. The mixture will become soft and crumbly and will clump together easily when squeezed together in your hand.
5. Add 2/3 of the crumb mixture to the prepared pan and firmly pat down into an even layer. Spread the cherry filling evenly over the top. Sprinkle the remaining crumb mixture evenly over the top of the cherries.
6. Bake for 30-35 minutes or until light golden brown. Then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.
7. Once cooled, remove the bars from the pan by lifting on the parchment paper "handles". Place onto a flat surface and cut the bars into the desired sized squares.
8. Store at room temperature or in the fridge.



By Katie Harmon

The Original Packaging Pioneer

Tom Mathison set the bar for packaging standards across the fruit industry. So, what's next for packaging innovation at Stemilt?

Innovation is key to what? Success? Growth? Sustainability? Development?

The list goes on and on, but the reality is, innovation is the key to everything, including Stemilt's packaging evolution.

Stemilt's founder, Tom Mathison, had an innovative mindset when it came to many aspects of his business, but one thing he truly stood out for was leading the industry to new packaging methods and teaching others how to market fruit effectively. Known for being the first to place a Price Look Up (PLU) sticker on his fruit to bagging cherries before the rest of the industry, Mathison set the standard high for packaging innovations.

When Mathison first began packing his cherries, they were hand-packed in wood cartons. This method of packing was how cherry sizing first began – 10 cherries that could fit in one row would be considered a size 10 Row cherry. This method of packaging his fruit was expensive, turned low volumes and the commute to out-of-state locations could take up to a couple of weeks, leaving the cherries in poor condition by the time of their arrival.

"This original way of packing cherries was meticulous and exhausting," states Roger Pepperl, marketing director for Stemilt. "Tom wanted to be efficient and accurate, so he knew things would need to change if he wanted to elevate the cherry category."

Mathison upgraded his packing equipment and introduced corrugated cardboard boxes to the industry. The newly upgraded packing equipment placed cherries right into the box, eliminating the need for hand-packing. While this method was a step up from the original wood box, Mathison knew he could pack cherries more effectively while getting better returns for growers. This is when he realized the importance of sizing cherries.

"If Tom could figure out how to size cherries on the packing lines, he could help growers get better returns and if the growers could get better returns, they would want to learn how to grow bigger and better cherries," states Pepperl. "This move in Tom's playbook led to the introduction of the Accurow cherry sizer, a piece of technology he designed and used himself to size cherries accurately on the packing line so he could better market them to retailers."



Shipping the original wood box looked sharp, but did not return well.



The Accurow cherry sizer was the first machine Stemilt had that sized cherries with an automated system.

While selling cherries based on size proved better for both the grower and the retailer, Mathison recognized there was still room for improvement. After visiting a candy packing plant that packed pieces of candy quickly into clear plastic bags, Mathison knew that he could apply this same technology to his cherries. “Tom had a real insight into what consumers wanted and knew that cherries would sell better if consumers could actually see what they were buying,” states Pepperl. “This is when Tom realized the power of the bag.”



Mathison began packing his accurately sized cherries into random-weight bags that showed off their high quality, beautiful color and large sizes. However, retailers didn't react to pouch bags as Mathison had hoped and it took him nearly three years to convince them to carry random-weight bags over bulk. But when they did, it transformed the entire industry.

“The pouch bag was a game changer for retailers,” states Pepperl. “Since Tom's introduction, we have been able to evolve the bag into exactly what the consumer wants and are still doing so today.”



Tom had a real insight into what consumers wanted and knew that cherries would sell better if consumers could actually see what they were buying,” states Pepperl.



Transparent, resealable pouch bags have found success with the consumer. Being able to see the product they were buying made the purchase experience better.

Bags have drastically evolved since Mathison introduced them, Stemilt's bags are now a pouch style and resealable with pleated bottoms, so they can stand up in the refrigerator. They have a sleek, shiny appearance with beautifully designed Stemilt branding that turns heads at retail.

Thanks to Mathison laying the groundwork for cherry packaging, Stemilt has been instrumental in introducing new packaging vehicles to the market over the last several years. Among random-weight pouch bags, clamshells also live within retail shelves. Clamshells were once known for being a popular club store item. They were available in larger sizes (3lb. or 4lb. clams), helping eliminate the scale from the equation. There was also a club store UPC that was scannable making it a friendly item at checkout.

Club stores also carry multiple cherry varieties, including dark-sweet, Rainier and organic. Other retailers began to see the advantage of clamshells and wanted to carry the item on their shelves leading to the introduction of the 1lb. and 2lb. clam to consumers.



“Clamshells are a great packaging vehicle for many consumers because they can protect cherries a little better than those carried in pouch bags,” states Pepperl. “Because of this, many retailers, regardless of structure, now use clams for delicate or higher valued items like Rainier, Skylar Rae® or our Artisan Organics™ cherries.”

And just when you think Stemilt has done it all on the packaging front, it only gets better. In 2018, Stemilt released top seal packaging for their World Famous cherries. Top seal is already making an impression on retailers, and Pepperl is optimistic about their future.

“The top seal program is working great for cherries because they are easy to pack on an automated packing line,” states Pepperl. “The cherries are being packed at a high rate of speed making packing extremely efficient, plus they have an easy scan unit with an attractive resealable top seal lid that makes it an eye-catching option for the consumer. They also stand up, making it easy for the retailer to make great displays.”

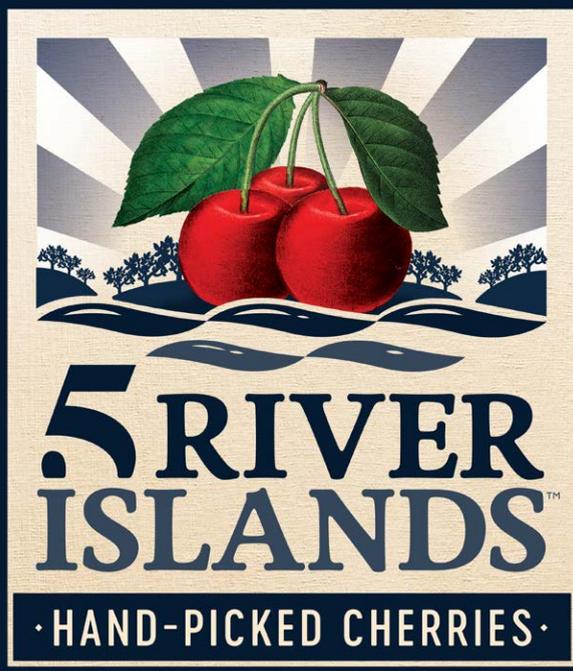
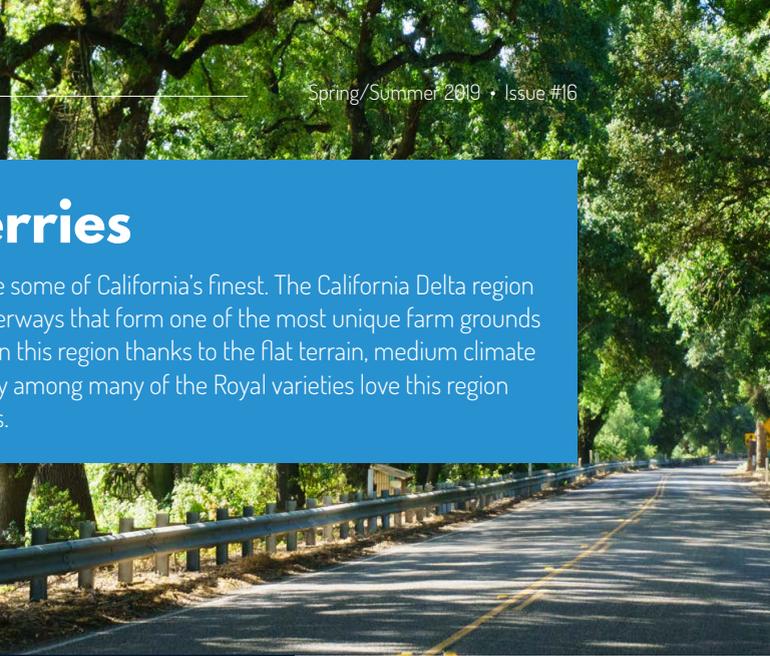
Stemilt's top seals are also environmentally friendly, falling in line with Stemilt's sustainability program, Responsible Choice®. “The top seals are using an average of nearly 35% less plastic than our clamshells, helping us reduce the amount of plastic used, which is important to today's consumer,” says Pepperl.

So what's next for this innovative, environmentally-friendly grower? According to Pepperl, quite a bit. “We are going to continue working on finding environmentally friendly packaging options that not only satisfy the retailer, but also show consumers we are working hard towards reducing waste and achieving the best packaging in the industry – on all fronts.”



5 River Islands® Cherries

Grown in the Delta Region, 5 River Islands® cherries are some of California's finest. The California Delta region has nearly 60 islands and more than 700 miles of waterways that form one of the most unique farm grounds in the country. Stemilt's World Famous cherries thrive in this region thanks to the flat terrain, medium climate and abundance of fresh water. The Lapin cherry variety among many of the Royal varieties love this region and are what we pack under the 5 River Islands® packs.





By Katie Harmon

From Goop To Gold

Your waste is Stemilt's win. Learn how Stemilt uses their own green waste, and turns it into a nutrient-rich power food to feed their trees and help produce World Famous fruit.

This isn't your grandma's compost.

No, this compost isn't even your typical backyard compost. Here at Stemilt, what looks like a pile of dirt to you, looks like a pile of dirty gold to us.

Sustainability is something our Stemilt teams consistently work on. In fact, Stemilt has a program dedicated solely to sustainability and social responsibility called Responsible Choice®. This program has taken shape over the years, including the establishment of Stemilt's Organic Recycling Center.

Back in 2005, Kyle Mathison, fourth generation Stemilt grower, decided to start a compost farm after learning that wine grape growers would use compost for fertilizer to grow grapes with deeper flavors. He felt that he could apply this methodology to his apple, pear and cherry orchards as well. With his mission at hand, Mathison set to out to create a compost that could fit his tree's needs.

Soon after, Mathison began to collect green waste from Stemilt's packing facilities – bins of leaves, rotten fruit, recycled lime from refrigeration along with other resources like horse manure, branches, grass clippings and minerals. Kyle also opened the Stemilt Organic Recycling Center to the entire Wenatchee Valley community as well.

“It's a way we can help protect the valley and our valuable natural resources all while carrying on Tom Mathison's (Stemilt founder) legacy.”

“Our valley is very ag-centric and people enjoy working outside,” states Brianna Shales, communications manager for Stemilt. “This leads to a lot of green waste and the community lacked a place to take it besides the dump. Opening the recycling plant was a great way for Stemilt to help the community protect the environment, and gather the resources needed for his compost.”

After collecting green waste, the process of making compost begins. In the early years of making compost, Stemilt's team used the Windrow method, which required two to three months of time to make a fresh batch. In 2018, Stemilt's World Famous compost teams started to experiment with a newer, more efficient method called Aerated Static Pile.



Previous method of turning windrows.

According to Patrick Jordan, Stemill's Organic Recycling Center operations manager, the Windrow method turns the material periodically with a compost turner – essentially a horizontal auger with blades that chop up green waste material into a finer particle size and provide oxygen into the mixture. The compost piles are organized into long rows where they are kept at temperature levels of 142-145 degrees Fahrenheit to maintain carbon levels and keep microbes happy. They are watered and rotated daily for a three-month period.

The Aerated Static Pile method starts out like the Windrow method but changes later in the process. Stemill's teams still use the horizontal auger to chop up green waste material into a finer particle size and start the process of providing oxygen into the mixture. However, once the material is chopped and mixed, it is laid out over a perforated pipe that is attached to a three-horsepower blower. This pipe-blower system pushes air into the eight foot tall, 16 foot wide, 800 foot long (which is enough material to fill up half of the Goodyear Blimp) active compost pile. These temperatures only need to reach 131 degrees Fahrenheit (instead of the 142-145 degrees Fahrenheit of the Windrow method) for a minimum of three days to help eliminate pathogens. This method also helps provide microbes with more oxygen eliminating the need to turn with a Windrow turner.

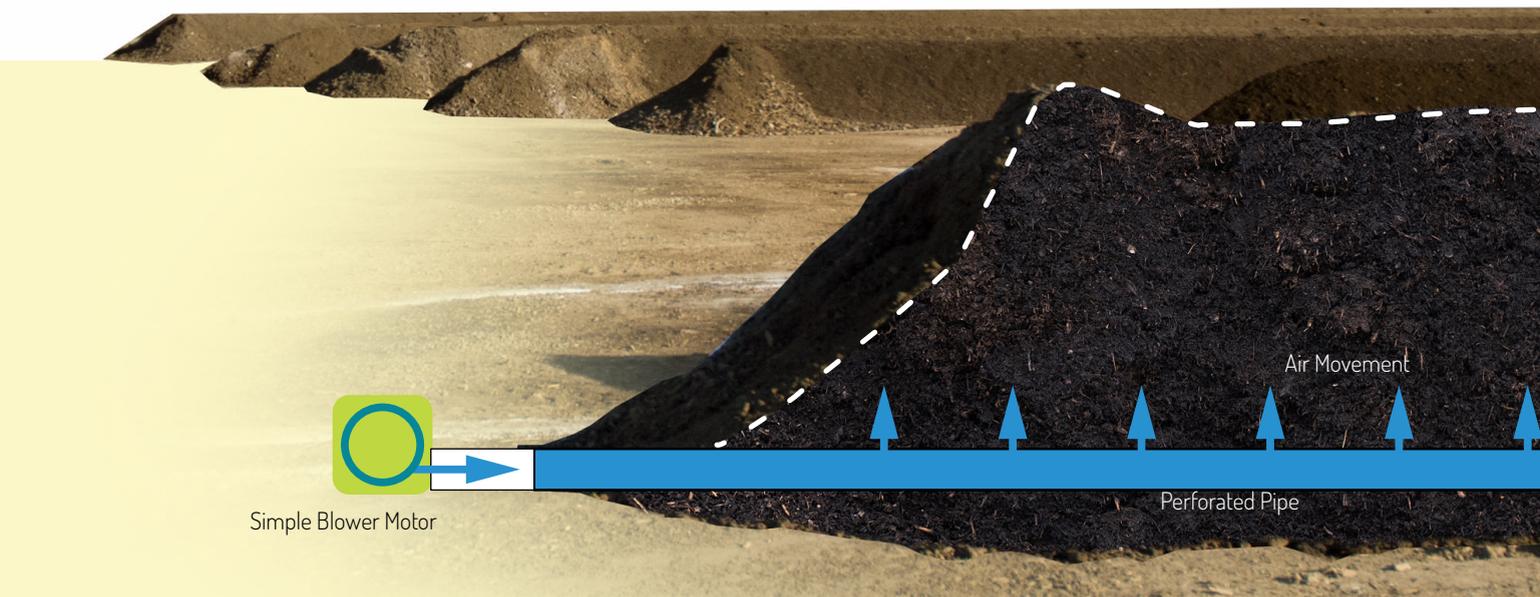
So, what's the catch and why make the change?

"The time," states Jordan. "We go from a 90-day period using the Windrow method to a 20-day period with Aerated Static Pile method, making it a more time- and cost-effective method. We get the same great result in less than a third of the time."

Right now, Stemill's Waste Facility Center receives about 60,000 cubic yards of green waste annually (about 28.5 football fields worth). That 60,000 cubic yards produces about 30,000 cubic yards of finished compost per year.

"With the amount of green waste we are receiving every year, this new method is a great way to turn waste into compost faster," adds Jordan. "We save money, turn waste over quickly and we can still provide an outlet to the community instead of people just dumping their waste into landfills. It's a way we can help protect the valley and our valuable natural resources all while carrying on Tom Mathison's (Stemill founder) legacy."

Tom Mathison, founder of Stemill always preached that "We're only caretakers of the land for a short amount of time, so we must work to leave it as good as we can, or better if can." These words of wisdom are carried throughout Stemill to this day and were responsible for the start of Responsible Choice® thirty years ago.

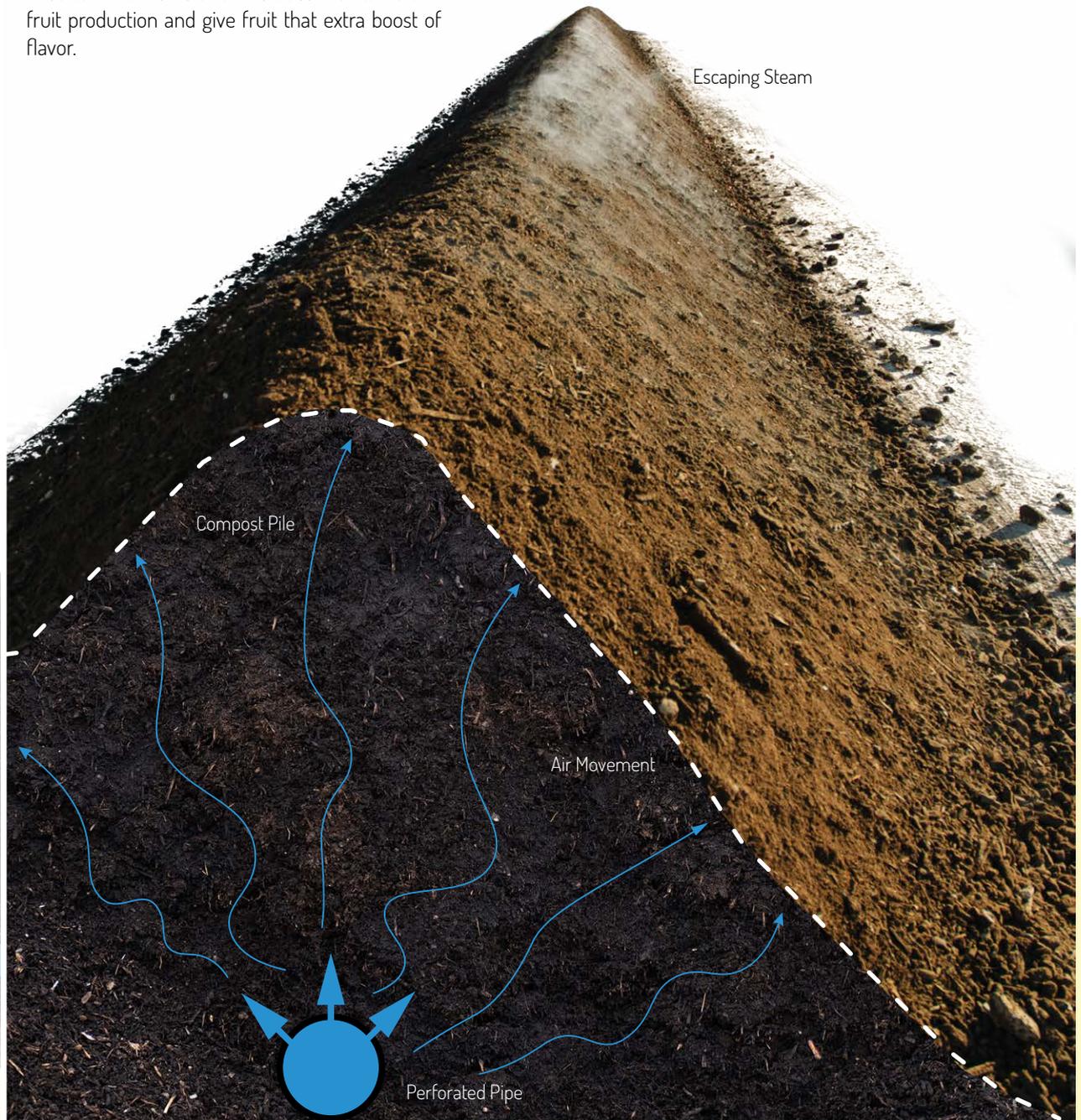


Side Cross Section

“Our sustainability program and the collection of compost displays the conscious effort we are making to give back to the planet,” says Shales. “Stemilt is constantly seeking ways to apply sustainability efforts – whether it’s in the office or out in the field.”

Once compost is made, Kyle spreads it through his orchards every fall before snowfall. Kyle considers this compost as the tree’s “prescription” which is filled with nutrients and microbes that will aid in fruit production and give fruit that extra boost of flavor.

“Not only is it great for the environment, but it also makes our fruit taste great and stay true to its World Famous standards,” states Jordan. “It’s a win-win in our books.”



End Cross Section

By Brianna Shales

Apple Pop-Up Shop August 16-18



Beat the Heat with a Juicy Treat

Rave Reviews

The new Rave® apple is making waves not only because of its outrageously juicy flavor, but also out-of-the-box marketing tactics Stemilt is using to build its brand both in and out of the grocery store.

City dwellers everywhere are familiar with pop-up shops. Like the name implies, empty storefronts are frequently transformed overnight into pop-ups, a place where passersby can try out the latest tech gadget or even directly purchase a hard-to-find fashion label. But only for a day or two before the pop-up vanishes.

As common as they are, the pop-up shop Stemilt opened in Manhattan last August to introduce its newest release, Rave[®], took everyone by surprise. Sleek like an Apple[®] computer store, but with real apple samples inside, the pop-up experience was a bold move that helped put Rave[®] apples on the map with food media and consumers alike.

According to Stemilt marketing director Roger Pepperl, the pop-up shop is just one example of how Stemilt is positioning the Rave[®] brand to consumers and helping amplify retail activities beyond the point-of-sale.

“The Rave[®] name lends itself to fun and social sharing and that’s what has inspired the consumer work we’ve done during its first two seasons,” said Pepperl. “It’s the apple that people rave about and creating rave-worthy moments is how we’ll increase consumer awareness of the apple, and its incredible flavor.”

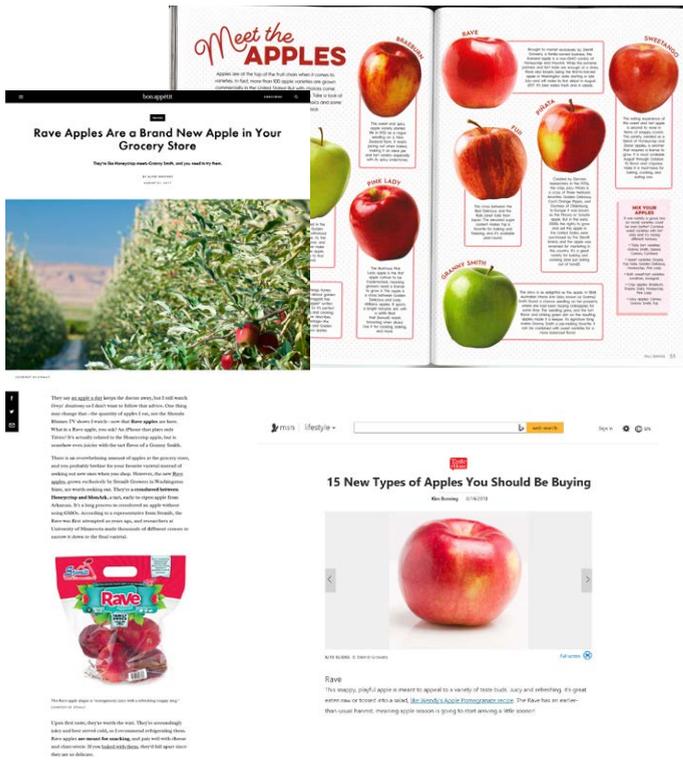
Stemilt has also tapped into the apple’s name to ignite Rave[®] on social media. Last season, the company created a personalized video for people to rave about someone in their life. The video was then shared with that person, and their followers, via social media.

“The apple category is a crowded place today, so we must ensure that our brands, including Rave[®], stand out in consumer’s minds,” said Pepperl. “What better way to have Rave[®] stand out than by tying it into uplifting messages and sharing between friends and family.”

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Tim Harrington, Stemilt Merchandising Manager, at the Rave[®] pop-up shop last summer.



It's not just consumers that Stemilt is reaching with Rave®. The company earned major media coverage during the apple's launch year following a Rave® apple inspired dinner in Manhattan attended by top-tier food media and Yelp Elites (super-reviewers with Yelp reviews that reach the masses). *Bon Appetit*, *Real Simple*, and *Vox* are just a few of the publications that have covered Rave®.

"Earning media and influencer rave reviews has been a great lift for Rave® apples," said Pepperl. "It's another way to introduce and excite consumers so that they are seeking Rave® out when they visit grocery stores."

Rave® is the trademarked name for the MN55 apple cultivar. Born at University of Minnesota, the apple has Honeycrisp parentage along with MonArk, an early ripening cultivar from Arkansas. The combination means Rave® apples are the first of new crop Washington apples to go to market with availability in early August and nearly three weeks before any other apple.



“Rave® has the Honeycrisp crunch that consumers love, but with more juice and zing,” said Pepperl. “It’s refreshing and fills a void in Honeycrisp supplies to help retailers kick off apple season with a premium apple.”

As the new crop of Rave® apples approaches, Stemilt will be looking to shake things up once again with consumers.

“Our volume will grow again in 2019 as more trees come into bearing age,” said Pepperl. “That means more Rave® apples to share and something even bigger for consumers coming. It’s this extra attention to build the Rave® apple brand beyond the store that will help make the apple a huge success in stores this fall and beyond.”





2019



By Katie Harmon

Familiar Face: Scott Driscoll

Known for a steady eddy demeanor and big influence, Stemilt vet Scott Driscoll gears up for his biggest role yet: Director of Farming Operations for Stemilt's Ag Services department. From Quincy to the Fresh Center, learn more about Scott's journey and how he wants to help his department flourish.

Let's start from the beginning: how did you get your start here at Stemilt?

"My parents moved up here from California when I was one because my dad got a job managing an orchard on Stemilt Hill. That was my first exposure to Stemilt, so it is safe to say it has been part of my life for quite some time now. I started working in the orchards when I was 10 where I would help with cherry harvest and continued working on Stemilt Hill each summer until I went off to college."

Where did you go to school and what did you end up majoring in?

"I first started at Wenatchee Valley College. I was paying for school myself, so I decided to get my Commercial Driver's License (CDL) and worked for Pepsi. I earned more money doing that, but it wasn't my calling by any means. After I completed my courses at WVC, I transferred to Washington State University to earn my degree in Horticulture, and that's when I reconnected with Stemilt. During the summers while I was attending WSU, I started working for Stemilt Management in the East Unit."

After you graduated from college, what happened?

"Once I graduated from WSU, I started as a Fieldman Apprentice for Stemilt Management and worked in that position for a year. Then I was promoted to assistant manager for the Quincy area and did that until 2003. In 2003, I actually left Stemilt and began working in ag sales for Wilbur Ellis. I am happy I was able to gain that experience, but it wasn't really for me. After I left Wilbur Ellis, I went to work for Zirkle Fruit in Pasco, Washington where I managed more than 1400 acres until the end of the 2008 season.

I enjoyed my job, but after four years my wife and I wanted to move our young family back to Wenatchee. We missed Wenatchee and its proximity to family and the mountains. That same year, in 2008, I reconnected with Andy Gale (just recently retired VP of Grower Relations) and he offered me a job. Soon enough, I found myself back at Stemilt where I oversaw the Wenatchee North area. A year later, I transferred to Quincy to take over that position. I was in Quincy for 10 years and this year I was promoted to the Director of Farming Operations."



Our field crews are made up of strong individuals, and I hope my position can add communication and support around the great work they do.

Wow! Quite the path to get where you are today. You are only a few months in, but how are you liking Director of Farming Operations so far?

"It's overwhelming! There is a lot to grasp since the transition just happened but I'm getting the hang of it. SAS is a huge operation and there is more work than there is time. But, the group of people I work with are great and we are adjusting quickly."

What challenges are you facing? What are some things you like about it?

"One of the hardest adjustments I've been facing right now is the transition from working with my peers as an area manager to now overseeing and knowing how and what to communicate with them. It is also hard to be behind a desk and get used to the administration side of things.

What I hope to gain from this position is the ability to offer the support that I always wanted when I was in their shoes. Our field crews are made up of strong individuals, and I hope my position can add communication and support around the great work they do. I am also excited about the internship program we do every year and hoping to expand on it. I have only been in this position for a few months, but I am excited to see what the year brings and learn more about supporting our team from the corporate side of farming."



What do you expect an average day to look like when things start to get busier?

“When the season starts, I plan on being out in the field a lot more than I am now. With it being such a long, cold winter, there hasn’t been a lot of activity out in the field so I have been in the office quite a bit. Right now, I usually get into the office between 6:30-7am and I am here until after 5pm. I spend most of my time working with Robin (Graham, Stemilt’s General Manager of SAS). I work on a variety of things like the arrival of the H2A groups, examining our systems and learning the Kaizen approach to help reduce waste, while still focusing on producing high quality fruit with high yields. I also work on planning for the future.

When I do go out to the field, I leave here around 8am and spend the time needed out there, trying to support the team however possible. When cherry harvest begins later this year, I expect to be in the field almost every day, and splitting my time evenly between areas that are in active harvest.”

When you aren’t at the office or in an orchard somewhere, what can we find you doing?

“I have two daughters who keep my wife and I busy. My older daughter plays soccer everywhere – Arizona, California, all over Washington. When we are home, we find ourselves in the mountains. I snow ski during the winter months. The mountains were one of the major reasons why we moved back up to the valley, so we try to enjoy them as much as possible. During the summer months when I have time and am not working in harvest, we paddle board or like to float the river.”

Who have been role models to you?

“West Mathison (Stemilt president) has been a big role model for me. I have known West since high school and I have always admired his calm demeanor and how well he interacts with people. I also really appreciate his views on family and how he has instilled those values within the company.

Andy Gale has also been another longtime role model for me – both professionally and personally. I have always looked up to Andy over the years. He is super charismatic, leads and works well with people while still maintaining his own orchards. He is just a successful guy.

Robin Graham is another role model of mine. He is a super leader for his age. He interacts well with people and is very good at identifying a problem, interacting with it, and then creating an effective solution.”

And last but not least, what is your favorite Stemilt fruit?

“A fresh Honeycrisp apple, by far. When it’s cherry season, it’s hard to not love picking fresh cherries off the trees.”

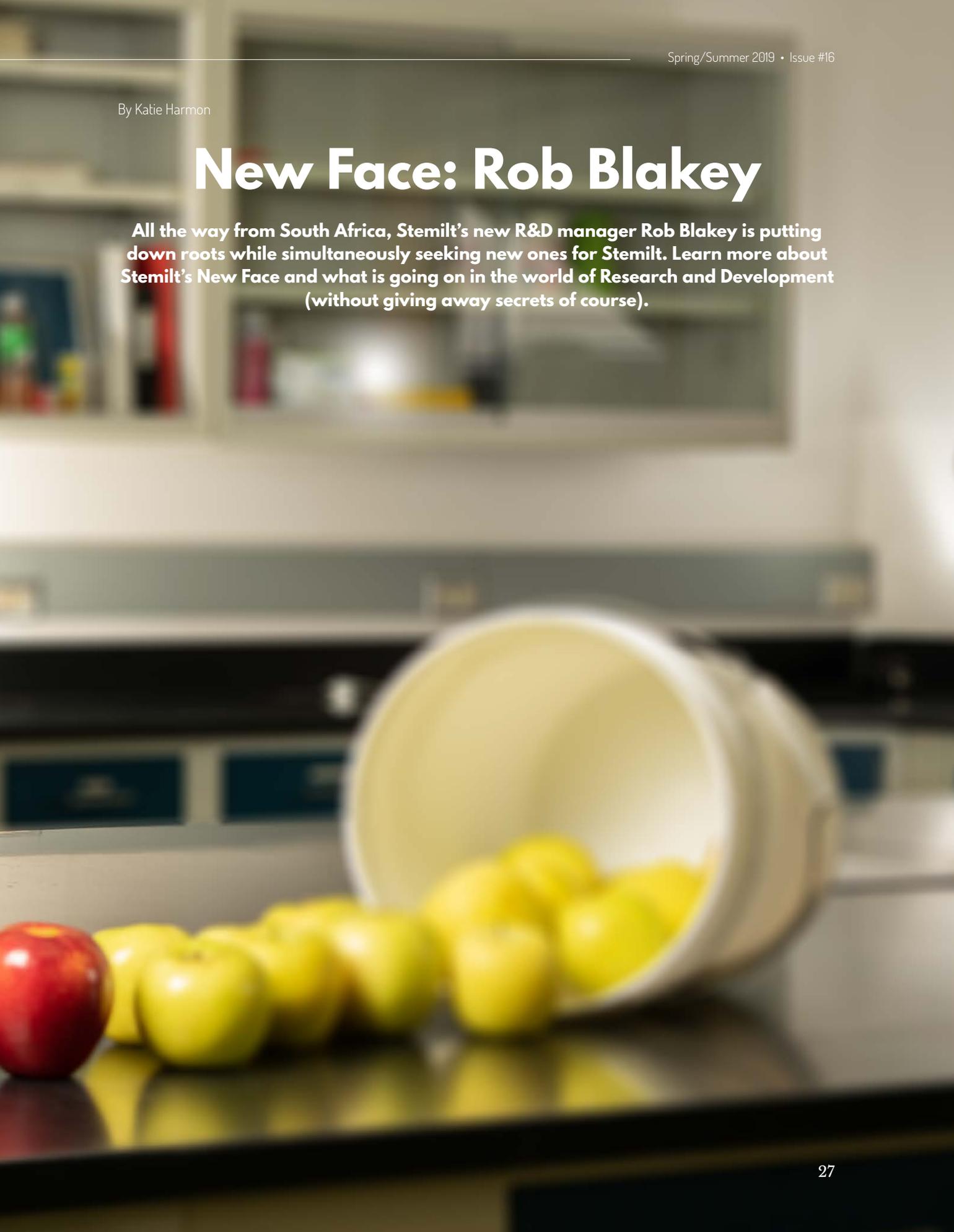




By Katie Harmon

New Face: Rob Blakey

All the way from South Africa, Stemilt's new R&D manager Rob Blakey is putting down roots while simultaneously seeking new ones for Stemilt. Learn more about Stemilt's New Face and what is going on in the world of Research and Development (without giving away secrets of course).



Tell readers more about yourself.

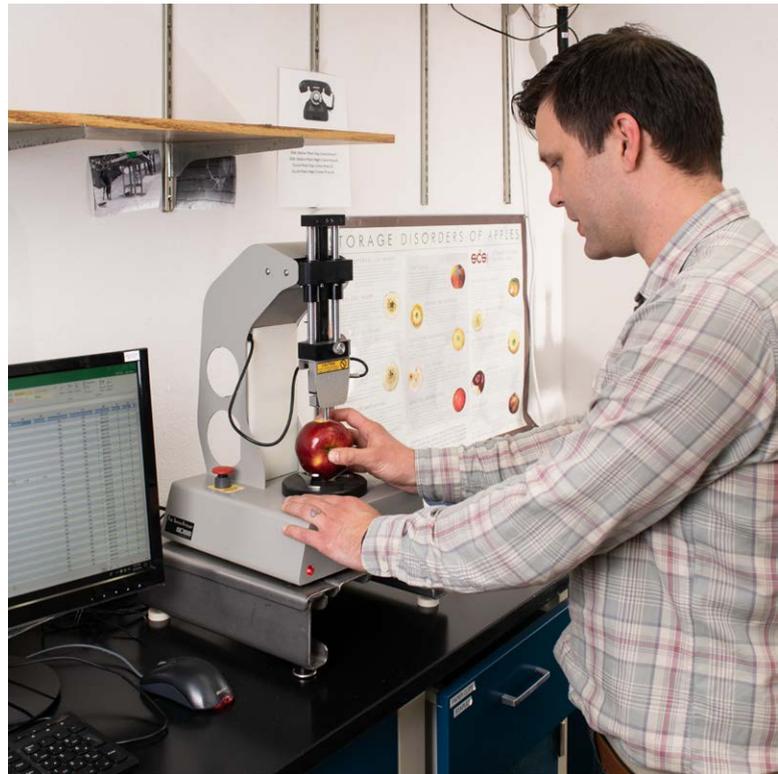
I grew up in South Africa in a city called Pietermaritzburg. I can speak three languages: English, Afrikaans and isiZulu, although my Zulu is pretty bad after leaving home 10 years ago. I attended the University of KwaZulu-Natal where I earned a BScAgric degree and then I followed it up with earning my PhDAgric there as well. I focused my PhD on the post-harvest physiology of avocados, working on the science of exporting avocados to the USA. In 2010, a year before I graduated with my PhD, my wife Emily and I were married. We now have three boys: ages 7, 5 and almost 2.

After you graduated, what was your next move?

After I graduated college, I started working for a multinational company called Westfalia Fruit. They are a fruit grower, packer and shipper of primarily avocados. I started as a research horticulturalist where I worked on avocados and mangoes, and ended up running a research nursery, orchard trials, postharvest trials and training retailers on ripening. My family and I moved to the UK branch seven years into my job and I was involved in compliance as well as some R&D. It was great learning more about the processes, but it wasn't a good fit, so I accepted a job at Washington State University as a Postharvest Extension Specialist. During the interview, I actually visited Stemilt Growers, which was my first exposure of the company. I worked with various warehouses around the state, learning more about the fruit that is grown here in Washington. In November 2017, we made the move to Wenatchee so I could lead Stemilt's R&D team. The last 3 years have been quite eventful!

You literally came across the world to work for Stemilt, how cool! What do you like about your job today (without giving away secrets, of course!)?

My job is rich and varied. I work on a range of projects with a lot of different people. Every day can present a new challenge or project to get started on, which makes things dynamic! We work on a variety of things: bringing in new varieties from around the world and evaluating them at Stemilt, improving food safety, working on fruit



Rob tests the pressures of a new variety in Stemilt's R&D lab.

quality issues, and always talking to experts to see what's on the horizon. Tasting some amazing new varieties of apples, pears and cherries is a plus!

Is there such a thing as an average day in R&D?

Not really, I don't think we even have average years and that's why I love agriculture and R&D. Most of my time spent is working with my R&D team. We need to make sure we're hitting targets for our various projects and also conversing with other teams throughout Stemilt, so we can provide them answers they need. I'm still very new to the industry so with any down time, I'm reading and learning more about tree fruit.

As a "new face" here at Stemilt, what is the biggest challenge you've faced?

The size and complexity of the company. With nearly 1,500 people year-round (and that number doubling during cherry harvest), it can be difficult to know who to speak to when I need something specific answered. R&D doesn't have very many people within it, however, we touch so many

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Professionally, I look forward to taking R&D to the next level.

different aspects of the company that we must know everyone which can be challenging!

What do you look forward to in years to come? Professionally and personally.

Professionally, I look forward to taking R&D to the next level. We are working on improving processes, renovating the lab, and learning how to better our production practices to meet our high flavor and quality standard. I am also looking forward to working more with Stemilt Ag Services (SAS) and our warehouse Production teams.

On a personal level, after a lot of moving around, I am looking forward to getting settled in Wenatchee and seeing more of Washington State. We are also looking forward to doing more DIY projects in our house and establishing our family garden this year.

When you aren't working with fruit, what can people find you doing in your spare time?

Ha! What spare time? When I'm not working with fruit, I am looking after my three boys. Honestly, just trying to survive the tornado that is our 2-year-old takes up a lot of my time! But in between kids, garden, and DIY, we're getting out and making friends in the community.

And of course, last but not least, what is your favorite Stemilt fruit?

Since I can't tell you about the secret ones we're working on, I'll say SweeTango® apples!



Rob, wife Emily & three kids enjoy a day of hiking & exploring.

By Katie Harmon

A 30 Year Journey: Stemilt's Organic Expedition

Peak back at Stemilt's last 30 years of growing fruit organically and how Stemilt founder Tom Mathison's legacy lives on through Stemilt's Artisan Organics™ program today!



10,950 days. That is how long Stemilt has been growing fruit organically.

In 1989, Stemilt founder Tom Mathison made the decision to transition hundreds of acres of his conventional orchards to organic. Today, Mathison's innovative insight helped Stemilt become the leader of the pack in the organic tree fruit industry, with one of the strongest and most recognized organic programs in the market.

"Our Artisan Organics™ brand wouldn't have such a strong foundation without Tom's vision into the organic market," states Roger Pepperl, Stemilt's marketing director. "He knew how strong this market was going to be and was able to capitalize on it before others in the industry, allowing Stemilt to get ahead of the curve."

Mathison started growing organic when he realized shoppers were doubting the food they were buying. Consumers lacked information about where it was grown, how it was grown and who was growing it. Kyle Mathison, Tom's son and fourth generation Stemilt grower, also recognized this mistrust and lack of knowledge. Together, they embarked on an organic journey, believing that organics was a positive steps towards regaining consumer trust.

"Back in the late 80s and early 90s, transparency of the product wasn't as common as it is now, so that left too many unknowns for the consumer," says Pepperl. "Tom's mission was to build trust with the consumer that led to an ever-lasting memory of Stemilt's product. Organic was going to help do that."

Nearly 30 years have passed since Tom Mathison made that first bold move to grow fruits organically, but his legacy lives on thanks to the vision of his grandsons, West and Tate. Consumer-centric like their grandfather, West and Tate have put Stemilt's Artisan Organics™ program on an aggressive growth plan in recent years.

Building off Tom's foundation, West and Tate have been able to evolve Artisan Organics™ into a modern, flavor-driven program that has grows and delivers high quality, flavorful organic varieties that are sought after by today's consumers.

When Tom started growing organics, he laid out the foundation for classic apple varieties, like Golden Delicious, Red Delicious and Granny Smith. As time went on and new varieties were introduced, West, Tate and the team started expanding the program to include varieties like Honeycrisp, Pink Lady®, Pinata®, Rave® and SweeTango®. These conventional varieties were extremely popular with consumers and Stemilt knew they would dominate the organic market.

"West, Tate, Kyle and the rest of the team used Tom's insight to establish a premeditated plan so the decisions they were making were conscious, not just reactive, to the market," states Roger. "Every tree that was planted was planted with a purpose. They were chosen because each variety had a foreseeable future. They're the varieties that are wanted by the consumer, and not just any consumer, but the organic consumer."





Tate & his family enjoy the beautiful weather at their home in Wenatchee. Tate has been a huge driver behind Stemilt's Artisan Organics™ program.



The organic consumer seeks out the same options as the conventional consumer, making it Stemilt's responsibility to expand on varieties, specifically trademarked varieties.

"Organic consumers choose to eat organically as a lifestyle choice so it's our responsibility to give those consumers options," states Pepperl. "And shoppers expect these varieties to carry the same high quality, beautiful coloring and out-of-this-world flavor as conventional varieties. If we can provide both consumer groups both options, then shoppers will be happy and know they can rely on Stemilt to provide."

While it may seem easy to make the switch from conventional to organic, Stemilt's teams are working years in advance to establish a plan for organic production. Once trees are well established and flourishing, growers will begin the three-year transition process, taking it from conventional to organic. After the transition is complete and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) gives the orchard its organic certification, growers can officially harvest the fruit for commercial purpose.

"The transition from conventional to organic can be quite rigorous, so Stemilt works hard in advance to ensure the right varieties are chosen for successful production in the future," says Pepperl.



If it sounds like Stemilt only plans for apples, think again. Cherries, pears and summer fruit all come with a premeditated plan. “Our organic farming plan falls in place for all of our organic tree fruit. We are constantly analyzing, researching and determining our next move for future years,” states Pepperl.

While nearly 30 percent of apples are certified organic, pears at 15 percent and cherries at 12 percent, 100 percent of Stemilt’s peaches and nectarines are grown organically and 65% of Stemilt’s apricots. Stemilt’s summer fruits are grown in south eastern Washington State by the Douglas Family in Pasco, Washington. Summer fruit thrives in this region thanks to hot temperatures, massive amounts of sunshine, cool nights that precede harvest and an abundant source of fresh water.

“Our summer fruit program is hard to compete with,” states Pepperl. “That region, along with our experienced growers, provide excellent summer fruit that is beautifully colored, incredibly juicy and has a flavor profile that will blow you out of the water.”

So, what do the next 30 years look like for Stemilt’s organic plan? According Pepperl, a lot of growth. “Organic is a very popular category, especially among the millennial age group. That trust that was missing years ago has reestablished itself because these generations are asking the questions and growers, like the Mathison’s, are willing to answer them.”



“
 Nearly 30 years have passed since Tom Mathison made that first bold move to grow fruits organically, but his legacy lives on thanks to the vision of his grandsons, West and Tate.”



By Katie Harmon

Sky High with Moon Cherries

We're going sky high with Stemilt's A Half Mile Closer to the Moon® cherries. Learn how elevations make these cherries some of the best of the season.

We've all heard it, and heck you've probably even said it a time or two before: "it's a bird, it's a plane, no, it's 'fill-in-the-blank!'"

While it may sound goofy, it's exactly how I wanted to start writing this article. "It's a bird, it's a plane, no it's Stemilt's mystical moon cherries!"

Yes, I know I just compared our famous A Half Mile Closer to the Moon® premium high-altitude cherries to Superman, but to be honest, it's a fair comparison. These summer gems are super and grown at such high altitudes, it almost feels like they are sky-high.

A Half Mile Closer to the Moon® cherries, also known as "Moon Cherries" are grown at the Amigos Orchards in Wenatchee, WA with elevations of 2,640 feet above sea level to an upwards of 4,000 feet. These high elevation cherries are the last to be harvested and extend the season into the late summer months, allowing Stemilt to have the longest cherry season in the industry (California cherries start in May, ending with Moon cherries in September).

Kyle Mathison, fourth generation Stemilt cherry farmer started planting cherries further up on Stemilt Hill, more than a decade ago. Not only do the cherries harvest later, but they are just as sweet, firm and big as cherries that were harvested at lower elevations.

"Kyle wanted to grow more cherries on Stemilt Hill and the only direction to go was up," says Roger Pepperl, Stemilt marketing director. "The Mathison's have been settled on Stemilt Hill since the late 1800s so they know how altitude and climate affects their fruit."

While altitude does play a role in determining harvest dates, climate is also a critical element. During the winter months, Mathison's grandfather and father always preached "the deeper the snow,



“Not just any variety makes the cut,” says Pepperl.

the better the cherries!" While it may sound a little counter intuitive, this logic is very sound. Higher elevations come with more snow accumulation and that heavy snow accumulation acts as an insulator around the trees. This "snow blanket" protects the tree from harsh, cold temperatures and helps maintain soil temperatures to deliver more nutrients to trees each spring.

Once summer hits, the higher elevations have cooler nights which allow the trees to rest, recuperate and energize for the day ahead. When the sun comes up, the days are warm, not hot, which allow the cherries to retain their full luster and develop beautiful colors.

Cherry variety also plays a role, as certain varieties grow better in certain locations, while others join altitude to extend the season. Sweetheart, Skeena, Staccato®, and Sentennial™ are the varieties grown and harvested at Amigos Orchards. Not only do they produce great sized and dessert flavored fruit, but they also bloom later than other cherries. When coupled with high altitudes, they will always harvest later in the season.

"Not just any variety makes the cut," says Pepperl. "Kyle is strategic in what he plants and grows at Amigos and it shows because these high elevation Moon Cherries are the real deal for end-of-the-year cherries."



BE LOFTY

The power of
the moon helps me
grow cherries that
explode with flavor.
That's the magic of
Moon cherries.

Kyle




A HALF-MILE
CLOSER TO THE
MOON

Premium High-Altitude Cherries





Greek Salad with Apples

This twist on traditional Greek salad adds sweet, crisp Gala apples that complement the salad's savory flavors perfectly.

 4 servings |  20 minutes |  0 minutes |  20 minutes |  Easy

Ingredients

1 head butter lettuce leaves, divided or chopped romaine
6 ounce block feta cheese, sliced
4 - 6 small tomatoes, quartered
1 cucumber, sliced
1/4 red onion, sliced
1/4 cup Kalamata olives
1 medium Gala apple, cored and sliced
1/4 cup red wine vinegar
1/4 tsp salt
1/4 tsp black pepper
1/4 tsp dried oregano
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

Instructions

1. Divide the lettuce greens between 4 dinner plates. Arrange the remaining ingredients over the greens on each plate, saving the apples for last to prevent any change in color.
2. Whisk the dressing ingredients in a small bowl, or give them a shake in a glass jar with a tight fitting lid. Top each salad off with some dressing. Serve immediately.

Nutritional Information

Per Serving

Calories: 316
Protein (g): 8
Fat (g): 27
Carbohydrates (g): 9
Dietary Fiber (g): 2
Sodium (mg): 551
Sugars (g): 5



By Katie Harmon

Summer Holidays: Food Edition

May



May 5
Cinco de Mayo

May 12
Mother's Day

May 13
National Apple Pie Day

July

Fourth of July
Fresh Cherries

July 11
National Rainier Cherry Day

July 17
National Peach Ice Cream Day

July 30
National Cheesecake Day



June

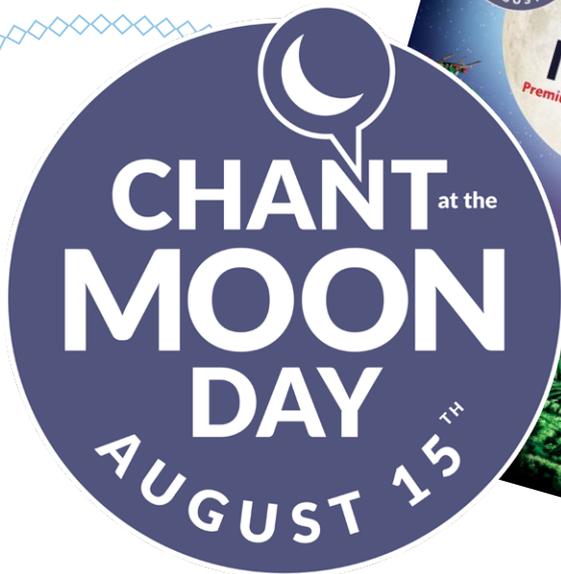
June 5
National Veggie Burger Day

June 16
Father's Day



Welcome to your complete guide to summertime food holidays! Connect with your followers this summer by featuring food holidays on your digital channels. From Cinco de Mayo to Labor Day, there is plenty of opportunity to play up these holidays while folding in fresh produce items you have in store! Turn to Stemilt for the digital assets you need for every food holiday listed here, and then some. Happy eating!

August



August 4
Friendship Day – Rave® Apples

August 15
National Chant at the Moon Day

August 28
National Cherry Turnover Day

September

September 2
Labor Day

September 17
National Apple Dumpling Day



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.

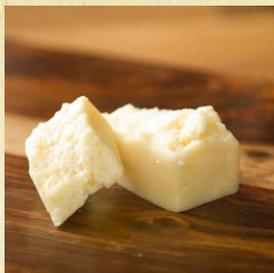




Pink Lady



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.

By Brianna Shales

Podcasts

Have you listened to a podcast lately? If you answered yes, you're not alone. More than half of the U.S. population has listened to a podcast and 70 percent are familiar with the term podcasting. A podcast is essentially Internet-based talk radio, except unlike traditional broadcast radio, podcasts are available on-demand meaning they're ready for you to tune into whenever and wherever you choose.

So, why should the produce department care about podcasts? With more and more listeners every day – and a platform that nearly all demographics are accessing – podcasts are becoming the place where people consume information. That includes information we in produce care about most – the topic of food and how it contributes to a healthy lifestyle.

It's likely that your shoppers are podcast listeners! Approximately 56 percent of monthly podcast listeners are men, while the remaining 44 percent are women. Podcast listeners tend to be affluent and educated with the 18-34 demographic leading the listener base.

Podcasts are also becoming a place to effectively advertise businesses or products, as 80 percent of people listen to all or most of each podcast episode. A 2018 Nielsen study found that 69 percent of podcast listeners surveyed felt podcast ads increased their awareness of new products and services.

As they continue along a steep growth path, podcasts could become an important platform for your grocery store's digital strategy to unfold around. Podcasts are a great way to showcase your brand voice and offer consumers the transparency they seek about your business today. Offering deep information related to produce items or inspiring stories of the farmers you work with through this on-demand platform could become a great way to build loyal shoppers and brand advocates for years to come.

On-demand and covering any topic you wish to hear about, podcasts are making waves with more than 660,000 shows and 28 million episodes. Let's look at what the rise in podcast popularity means for those of us in the food and produce world.



Looking to grow your personal knowledge of the produce and supermarket world? Here are a few of the Stemilt team's favorite podcasts on these specific topics:



Lost in the Supermarket: Expert food industry analyst Phil Lempert and SupermarketGuru.com managing editor Sally Smithwick have candid conversations about food, including how food companies can better serve shoppers and stay ahead of trends. Tune in via: iTunes or Stitcher.



The Produce Moms: This consumer-focused podcast covers a variety of topics that all connect to what we love most – produce! Tune in via: iTunes, Stitcher, or Google Play.



GastroPod: History buffs will love this foodie podcast, which explores the science and history of foods and farming. Tune in via: iTunes, SoundCloud, or Stitcher.

SOMETHING

BIG

IS COMING FOR THE PRODUCE INDUSTRY.

Follow @fruitsandveggies April 23-25, 2019
for live coverage.

Parting Shot

Meet Skylar Rae® the sweetest cherry you'll ever eat. This beautiful, bi-colored cherry is ultra sweet and firm, making it a delectable treat every summer. This variety is different than it's Rainier counterpart, giving retailers an opportunity to carry a third SKU within their cherry category... Trust us when we say this is a cherry you don't want to miss.

BE FAMOUS

We get up
every morning
with a passion
to build memory
& trust.

Kyle



