HILLTOP™

Issue #23 Fall/Winter 2022/23

Happi Pear®
The Fruit for Every Smile™

P.6 Sustainability the EZ Way

P.24 Cultivation Through Education

Stemilt
World Famous Fruit®

The apple
of
big dreams
COSMIC CRISP®

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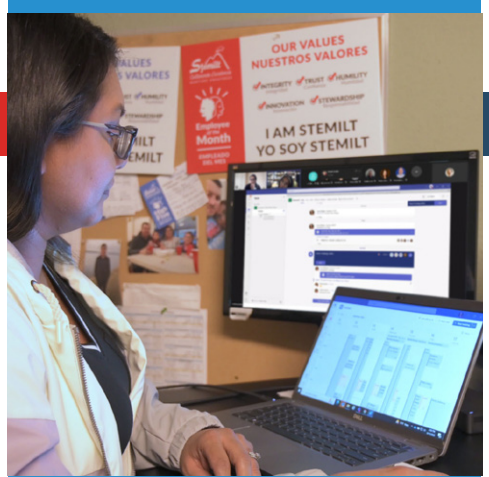

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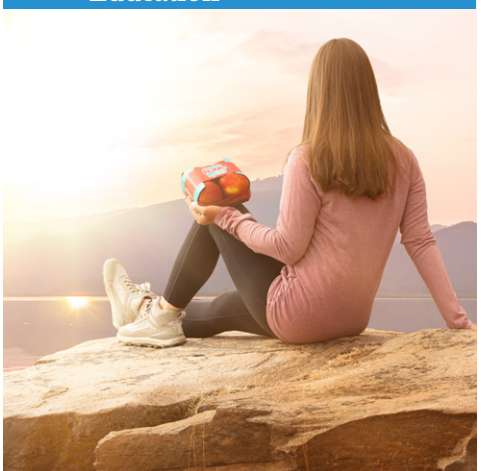

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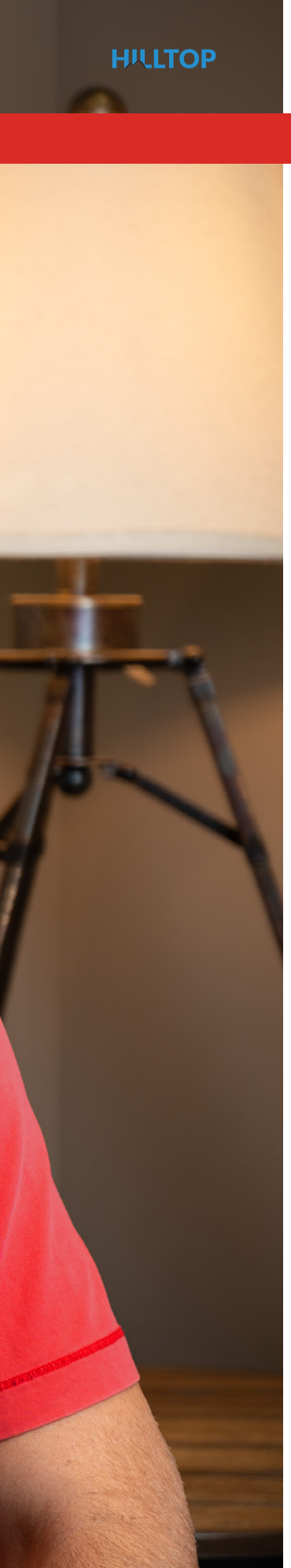


CULTURE

By: West Mathison

Every day, I am fulfilled to know the challenges that come our way will only make us stronger in the future. Boy, was I fulfilled when this year's cherry season presented the coldest spring ever recorded in central Washington State in the last 130 years.

A historical weather event brought 6 inches of snow in mid-April to many of our orchards in the middle of full bloom. I remember it was two days before Good Friday, when many Wenatchee locals looked outside their homes to see the ground covered in a heavy blanket of snow in the middle of spring, which caused a pause in pollination for 7 days. Our high-elevation orchards received over 36 inches of snow, and the trees didn't finish blooming until June 9th.

An unusual frosty bloom time for our fruit trees shaped the crop to be about 50% of last year's crop size, and with that, we'll always remember the 2022 cherry season.

When circumstances outside of our control become so difficult, it boils down to the way we work together to provide the best possible outcome for our growers and customers. It's very important we invest in a culture based on teamwork and collaboration to support our Stemilters and help them be successful in this constantly evolving industry.

Inflationary challenges have presented obstacles for us this year as well. One of our big initiatives is Syndesi, and it's all about "connecting" Stemilters via software programs and automated processes to increase cost and time efficiency in every part of the business. It began with a new transportation system that has helped drive better decision making to lower our costs.

It's brought me great joy to see the personal growth of our Stemilters this year as we continue to implement educational programs that will help them develop long-term careers here. People who couldn't afford an education before can get one now via Stemilt so they can do something they really enjoy. A grant from Wenatchee Valley College has introduced Microsoft Teams training, CDL Certification, and English courses to Stemilters. This fall, a new program to Stemilt, Project SEARCH, will invite high school students with disabilities to gain hands-on experience in our facilities and office departments.

We're battening down the hatches on best practices throughout the company going into this year's apple season to elevate the success of Rave®, Cosmic Crisp®, and SweeTango® apples as they continue to grow in volume. By investing in dynamic CA technology, we can improve the storage of organic Honeycrisp and Cosmic Crisp® to help the varieties deliver on flavor and quality.

Though we were hopeful for a more "normal" cherry season in contrast to the blazing heat waves of last year, we carried on with positive minds and found ourselves with some of the biggest, juiciest cherries ever.

We can't control mother nature, but we can make the best of the cards we're dealt if we work together as a team.

Onward,

FRUIT

By: Elizabeth Price

HOW TO: MERCHANDISE COSMIC CRISP®

Cosmic Crisp® has been on the market for a few years now, but we have yet to reach the pinnacle of its existence to consumers. As the volume of Cosmic Crisp® continues to grow, including organics at Stemilt, it's important to share the many benefits and signature features of this new hit apple. Stemilt Marketing Director, Brianna Shales, encourages retailers to take advantage of the growing volume of Cosmic Crisp® by making it part of the everyday apple mix.

1 Utilize Volume

Retailers can expect more Cosmic Crisp® apples this year and longer availability. Stemilt is going to grow its volume of organic Cosmic Crisp® as apple trees become certified organic. "This is going to boost our volumes and retailers have a new opportunity in the organic category this year," says Shales. "Organics make up 15-20% of apple sales when retailers focus on promotions. Now, we'll be able to feature a new high-flavored apple organically in the New Year."

2 Use the 4 Ps

The 4 Ps of marketing are going to be a retailer's best friend when selling and promoting Cosmic Crisp®. "You'll want to ensure that the apple is priced to move volume at a good pace and that the product you have is high-quality and meets the consumer's expectations," explains Shales. "We have harvest protocols in place now that make sure we get the right flavors before picking fruit every time to maximize the eating experience." Prominent placement of Cosmic Crisp® displays in the produce department will also help draw attention to the variety. "We want to see retailers get Cosmic Crisp® into the regular mix of apple merchandising and start promoting it as one of your core varieties in multi-variety ads," says Shales. "By expanding the availability, people will start to get to know and love it."

3 Talk It Up!

Tap into social media, website, signage, and e-commerce marketing to accentuate the attributes of the apple including its successful parentage, Honeycrisp, and Enterprise. "With all the apple choices out there, people are likely to gravitate towards their favorites," explains Shales. "If we're trying to get them to switch to something new, let's talk about how the apple has an incredible crisp, juicy bite, natural resistance to browning, and a great shelf life. All these things are really important to tell when there's a new item because shoppers need to understand what it tastes like, so they make that purchase decision." Be sure to keep the apple's attributes simple but customize them for what you need. There are many resources out there for the brand to help retailers tell Cosmic Crisp®'s story and Stemilt is always happy to help promote it.

4 Keep It in the Daily Mix

Cosmic Crisp® is creeping into the top 10 apples especially in key promotion months because of its growing volume. "The big thing we want to do is stop treating Cosmic Crisp® like a limited time club apple and switch our minds to making it a part of the regular apple mix," says Shales. "This will be the first time in a long time that the industry has come out with a new apple and got behind it with volume. Cosmic Crisp® is poised to become a core apple because of its volume and storage capabilities."

SUSTAINABILITY: PACKAGING

By: Elizabeth Price

SUSTAINABILITY THE EZ WAY

As Stemilt team members from Sales, Marketing, Procurement, Production and Operations scratched their heads brainstorming a new package for our apples, they knew they had to check off three important boxes: convenience for the customer, functionality for shipping and retailers, and sustainability for the shopper of today. The company's recently launched EZ Band brings large-sized fruit into a 4-pack scannable and recyclable package to easily merchandise its signature apples at retail.

The EZ band was created to offer shoppers and retailers a sustainable option for selling and purchasing large, bulk apples in a way they haven't been able to before. The EZ band will raise the brand profiles of varieties like Rave®, SweeTango®, and Cosmic Crisp® so consumers can differentiate them amongst the crowd. The package also benefits the retailer because it travels through the supply chain easily and instantly displays at retail. According to The Food Industry Association, a recent FMI Sustainability in the Food Industry report indicates grocery shoppers have expressed a desire for sustainable packaging made from recyclable materials.

"Our EZ Band is a two piece 4-pack of apples made of 100% paperboard including the tension band holding it all together," says Stemilt Marketing Director, Brianna Shales. "We knew we wanted to sell apples in a format that drives apple sales and reduces some of the labor involved in selling bulk apples, but also wanted to do it from a sustainable standpoint."

Packaged apples have been in high demand over the past two years. According to Stemilt's Fruit Tracker report that analyzed Nielsen scan data, pre-pandemic apple sales were at 80% bulk and 20% in bags/packaging. After the pandemic, these numbers have skewed to

60% bulk and 40% in other packaging. It's simply impossible to grow fruit for only bags, so the EZ Band was born for bulk fruit that would be easier for retailers to merchandise.

"The EZ Band will be the first of its kind in the U.S. and was created with the consumer in mind and adopted shopping habits throughout the COVID-19 pandemic," explains Shales. "The EZ Band uses as little packaging as possible and ensures as much visibility of the apples as possible while limiting touch by people."

The package concept was gleamed from other sustainable packaging solutions that are widely used in Europe. That means, the EZ Band is the first introduction to a new way of packing and selling apples in the U.S. Inside each pack are large-sized apples (48-64s) which have traditionally been sold by the pound off a PLU sticker. This new pack is a step towards increasing purchase size of large fruit, brand awareness, and opens the door to automation capabilities for fruit packing efficiency.

"The package launched this fall starting with conventional Rave® and SweeTango® apple. We will add Cosmic Crisp® this winter," says Shales. "Selling club apples via the EZ Band offers consumers a great opportunity to get to know the brands in a sustainable package that meets convenience and efficiency needs."

"The EZ Band will be the first of its kind in the U.S. and was created with the consumer in mind and adopted shopping habits throughout the COVID-19 pandemic."

Brianna Shales
Director of Marketing

FRUIT

By: Elizabeth Price

KEEPING UP WITH STEMILT'S EUCLID A APPLE PACKING LINE

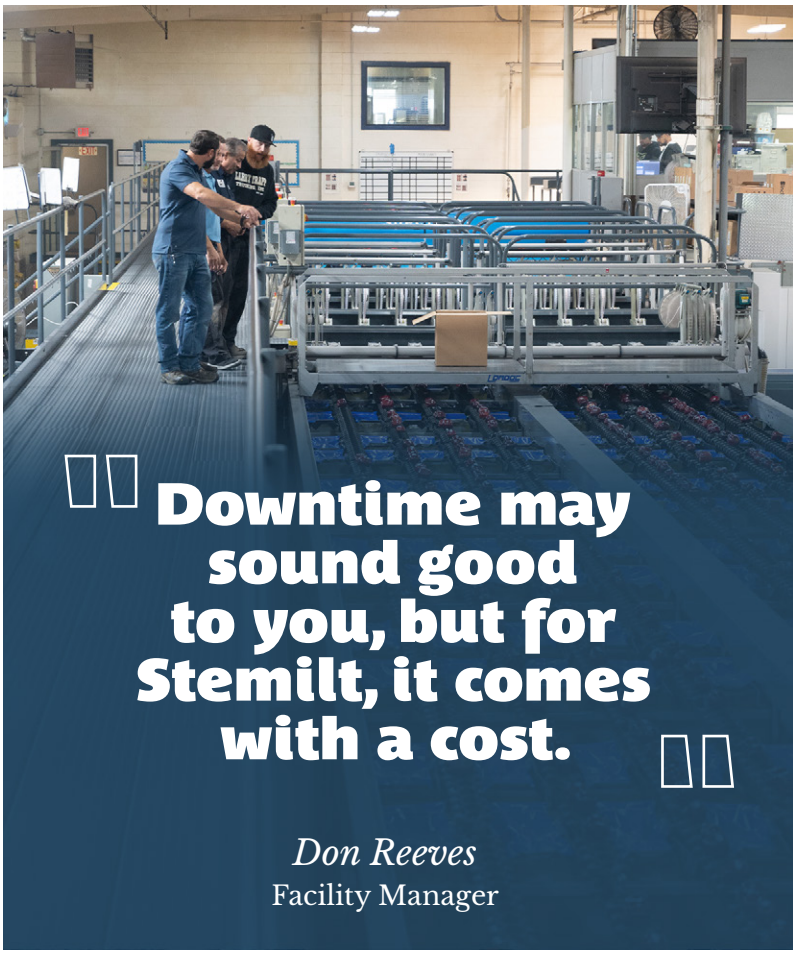
If it ain't broke, we're going to fix it. Facility Manager in Production at Stemilt, Don Reeves, carries this mentality as he oversees warehousing, quality control, production, sanitation, and maintenance at the Euclid A apple packing line. Reeves and his team pay careful attention to routine maintenance of Stemilt's packing line equipment and help prevent a domino effect of complications that could affect production and Stemilt's Famous Fulfillment commitment.

The production team does more than help us produce fruit of World Famous quality. They ensure apple packing lines like Euclid A are functioning properly through daily, weekly, and monthly repairs to maximize production and reduce labor costs. If every piece of machinery on the packing lines aren't well kept, materials can break and create unwanted downtime that slows production.

"We're always looking to explore more ways to increase our throughput and lower costs, that's what we're all about in production." says Reeves. "I remember one day we lost a big bearing on a shaft of the cluster cutter for cherries. We limped along knowing the bearing was bad and had to make it to the end of the shift to fix it in between the shift change. It took longer than we thought, and we couldn't start the next shift for another 45 minutes. What seems like a short amount of time actually adds up and can significantly impact production."

On average, downtime occurs at least once a week per packing line. This can cause a ripple effect of complications that trickle through multiple departments. For this reason, each packing line has about 2 Stemilt employed mechanics and electricians who can report quickly to an issue.

"It's much more efficient to hire our own mechanics and electricians because they can be right there when we need them instead of wasting precious time and money waiting for vendors to come out to the site," explains Reeves. "Our mechanics perform regular maintenance and updates on equipment including building new parts, doors, fixing weight scales, performing roof maintenance, and continuously progressing on projects."



"Downtime may sound good to you, but for Stemilt, it comes with a cost."

Don Reeves
Facility Manager

The biggest project the production team has completed on the Euclid A apple packing line in the last 12 months was the addition of automated bagging systems for pouch and poly bagged apples. Today, the team prepares for the groundbreaking of a new pear line and installing a new machine for Stemilt's sustainable 4-pack packaging for large size apples, the EZ Band.

"The addition of the automated bagging systems has already made a positive difference in our packing capabilities," says Reeves. "People that used to be bagging by hand are now in other packing positions packing different packages that are not yet automated."

As new equipment comes and old equipment goes, Stemilt has come up with creative solutions to repurpose equipment. The company sells line equipment with an industry network and has supplied equipment to over 70 companies in the industry over the past 7 years.

"Finding new homes for equipment benefits Stemilt, but also the industry at large, and it's one way we leverage sustainability in our operations," said Reeves. "By prioritizing regular maintenance and finding new ways to be cost efficient, we can improve Stemilt's production and keep progressing on our goals of Famous Fulfillment."

ORCHARD

View of Saddle Mountain West during harvest at sunrise..

By: Elizabeth Price

WEST BOUND: SADDLE MOUNTAIN WEST OTHELLO

The What:

Saddle Mountain West is Stemilt's western most ranch in the Othello area where we grow conventional and organic apple varieties and cherries. Sitting 12 miles south-west of Othello at 1200 ft elevation, this orchard satisfies the perfect location for color development for apples like Gala and SweeTango®.

The When:

The orchard was established in 2002 and sits next to the Bureau of Reclamation Land on the south side of Saddle Mountain, which it is named after. Harvest begins at Saddle Mountain West in July with Rainier cherries and ends in November with Pink Lady® apples.

Unique features of Saddle Mountain West:

The orchard is on a south-facing slope that allows for good air drainage during spring frost, which reduces the loss of flowers during this cold time of year. The elevation and good air drainage enables apples to be stored long term. Sandy loam soils help water drain down to the roots of trees without drying out too fast. These soils are preferred because they are granular and porous allowing proper air and water movement optimal for fruit trees to absorb nutrients.

Conventional Apple Varieties:

- Gala
- Honeycrisp
- Rave®
- SweeTango®

Organic Apples:

- Fuji
- Gala
- Honeycrisp
- Pink Lady®
- Cosmic Crisp®

Cherries:

- Skeena
- Sweetheart
- Rainier

Fun Facts:

- Roughly 5% of Stemilt's apples are harvested from Saddle Mountain West
- 60% of the orchard is grown certified organic
- During the busy harvest season, 300-350 Stemilters work here
- This orchard spans 460 acres

CULTURE

By: Elizabeth Price

IN THE MIND OF *Cristian Wulf*

With a hand on his chin, Cristian Wulf sits down to share his findings after many years in the workforce as a consultant. As Stemilt's Chief Information Officer and Chief Financial Officer, Cristian accepts each obstacle that comes his way as a learning experience so he can be the best leader possible for his teams.

Leadership:

Leaders need to be connectors. They need to recognize that everyone is on the same team and the leader should be looking in 3 directions: at their own day-to-day jobs, to their supervisors for guidance, and to their team helping them do their jobs successfully. I always try to lead by example and realize that if I can't do it myself, I shouldn't teach it, or if I don't do it, I shouldn't expect others to.

Mentors:

Mentoring is an unofficial role of paying your knowledge forward. Anyone can be a mentor and I still look up to my mentors from my past and current job. I think of a mentor as someone to bounce ideas off of who has similar views of life, and you value their opinion. A mentor will "impart wisdom" with you and share their experiences so you can find the right answer, but it's really up to you to make your own decisions. A couple of my mentors include:

Dean Nichols: My previous boss. I learned a lot from him and his wife sharing work and personal advice since they're about a decade older than my wife and I. Both of us have 3 boys and share similar beliefs.

My Mom: My mom is probably my biggest mentor. My mom and I were close, and her advice helped me grow into the person I am today. While she is no longer with us, she continues to guide our family with her wisdom, care, and thoughtfulness.

Obstacles:

I try not to look at problems as obstacles, but rather areas for improvement. My biggest challenge is not to make fun of this approach because the perfectionist in me wants to jump right in and fix the problem. But sometimes we need to use a crawl, walk, run approach to take a step back, relax, and find out what's triggering the problem. If we slow down and really listen to what others are saying, it helps everyone reach the conclusion together.

Motivation:

After being a consultant for so long, I used to come to work with this 80/20 mindset where I spent 80% of my day doing the job I'm paid to do, and the other 20% thinking "how can I do things better, faster, and cheaper?" Since then, I've shifted my motivations to asking myself "how can I make myself better to make my team and company better?" There's always an opportunity to learn from others. Even the simplest things like learning how we use scanners and how critical they are for internal structure. On my first day at Stemilt, I learned we have a fridge on the third floor that's full of fruit, what do you know?

Do Differently:

I've valued all the teaching, learning, and fun I've had in my role as CIO and CFO, and I wish I had made the jump from consulting to a private industry five years earlier. Not because I hated consulting, but this is where I like to be, and I could have started much sooner.

Advice:

I wish I had learned quicker that the journey that is our lives can't be laid out for us and we can't spend too long predicting the future. We have to keep moving forward with some of those great things we do, and the not-so-good things that happen that we learn from.

Dream Job in Alternate Universe:

I would've loved to be a musician/singer in a classic rock band, ah, I can see it now. In a more realistic world, I would have pursued my tennis career as a professional tennis player. Tennis was my sport growing up, and I was pretty good at it too!

FRUIT

By: Elizabeth Price

HAPPI PEAR®
THE FRUIT FOR EVERY SMILE™

Happi Pear® is all about offering a different pear-eating experience for consumers with its unexpected bite. Stemilt is proud to bring this branded pear to market during the 2022 season and beyond. Learn more about the joy Happi Pear® brings for the pear grower, retailer, and consumer.

Happi Pear® is grown for life's simplest moments with dessert-like flavor and a delightfully pure texture. Before the best fruits grow into Happi Pear®, they grow on the tree as the HW624 pear cultivar. Its development began when Vineland Research and Innovation Centre in Canada combined Harrow Sweet and NY10353 pears. They hoped to create an attractive and delicious pear unique from the others using natural cross pollination methods. In 1995, their hopes were met when HW624 was selected for propagation and later patented for production in 2017.

"Stemilt adopted HW624 as its signature pear three decades after its development and worked with Vineland research to give it the brand name, Happi Pear®," explains Stemilt Marketing Director, Brianna Shales. "Happi Pear® is meant for those special moments in life and shakes up the pear world with its unique bite and dessert-eating qualities. Its green and yellow coloring with a signature red, cheery blush fits well with its name."

The pear comes from top pear orchards in Quincy and Entiat, WA orchards and is grown in nutrient-rich soils to create a sweet pear with a bright and zesty bite. Happi Pear® is ready to eat at different stages, including crisp and juicy when green or when yellow. It's simply a refreshing snack by itself or as part of a grazing table line up. With plenty of sunshine and experienced growers in the field, Happi Pear® is grown to bring a smile to anyone's day.

"Happi Pear® is considered an early season pear and will harvest just a couple weeks after Bartlett pears in late August," says Shales. "You can eat this pear while its green for a crisp, juicy bite or when it's yellow for a soft and sweet eating experience. It really can be The Fruit for Every Smile™."

The future will bring lots of opportunity to promote Happi Pear® at retail as volumes grow and because of its high-graphic, signature purple branding. The pear is currently shipped in display-ready euro boxes, with a balloon shaped PLU sticker or scannable 2 lb. pouch bags. Cheerful POS will also help draw attention to Happi Pear® and help shoppers associate the brand with the fruit in its first years in the market.

"It's been a long time since there was an innovation in the pear category," explains Shales. "There is a lot of excitement ahead for Happi Pear® as volumes grow for Stemilt, and globally. This pear is friendly for growers from a farming and harvest standpoint and offers retailers consistent firmness and eating qualities. Most importantly, it delivers a unique eating experience that will delight today's pears fans to build fans for tomorrow."

"It's been a long time since there was an innovation in the pear category.

It is friendly for growers from a farming and harvest standpoint and offers retailers consistent firmness and eating qualities."

Brianna Shales
Director of Marketing

FAMILIAR FACE

CULTURE

By: Elizabeth Price

All it takes is one familiar face in a sea of strangers to instill confidence and security during times of uncertainty and newness. Affectionately known as the “dad” in the orchard, Luis Cuevas is Stemilt’s H2A Manager and so much more, a husband, father, grandfather, leader, and mentor. Starting his first day at Stemilt on April 1st of 1996, it’s no joke that Luis has changed the lives of many who came from the same place as he. Join me, while Luis reflects on his many years building life-long relationships with Stemilters in the field.

Luis Cuevas

Tell us about yourself

I grew up in Mexico and came to the U.S. in 1978 where I lived in Santa Maria, California for 11 years. This is where I met my wife, Norma, picking strawberries in a field, can you believe that? We dated for 3 years before getting married in 1981 and from there we grew our family. I have 2 daughters and 1 son, all grown up and married with kids of their own. I now have 5 joyous grandchildren who my wife and I adore visiting every chance we get.

One time, my wife and I were visiting my brother, Pedro Cuevas, who is currently an Orchard Manager for Stemilt, and he told me about his manager, Jamie Jamison, who needed someone at the orchards in Mattawa who knew a bit of English and had knowledge in orchard spraying. At the time, I was still living in California working 1 a.m. start times as a sprayer for Broccoli and Cauliflower crops. Pedro convinced me to come work with him, so I went back to California with my wife and sold our house in 2 weeks. We moved to Royal City in March of 1996 and I started at Stemilt on April 1st, seriously!

About 6 months into my new position, I was asked if I'd like to attend WVC's Hispanic Integration program, which provided classes in Quincy. I accepted the opportunity, excited to learn and grow. This meant I would go to work at 4 a.m. in Royal City, then to Mattawa, back to Royal City, and then to Quincy for classes from 5-8 p.m. It was a lot of hard work, but I was learning more English and more about agriculture than I ever would have. I was 3rd in my generation to graduate from the WVC Hispanic Integration program in 1997 and was awarded three awards during my graduation ceremony: Most Improved Student, Perfect Attendance, and Active Class Participation.

Today, my wife and I live in Mattawa where I am acting Manager of Stemilt's H2A program. I've since won the following 7 cherry and Apple Grower of the Year awards from Stemilt: Golden Delicious Award in 1998, Granny Smith Award in 2004, Pink Lady® Award in 2008, Fuji Award in 2009, Granny Smith Award in 2010, Rainier Cherry Award in 2012, and the Red Delicious Award in 2016.

What does a day in your life look like?

The days go by very fast because I get to do my favorite thing every day: listen to the stories of how our field workers were able to accomplish more in Mexico after working at Stemilt. Some people go on to build houses, buy cars, and land with the money they made here. I'm proud to be an H2A Manager and I think it is one of the best programs for families who are struggling in Mexico. They can spend 8-9 months at Stemilt, then go back home to enjoy their family. Being able to help others who came from the same place as me, that's my pay. I know what it's like, I suffered there, but I don't regret the strength it has given me now. The reason I go down to Tijuana, Mexico for H2A orientations is so they get to know me and have someone to recognize when they come to Washington. When they see me around, they hop down from their ladders to greet me, and my heart just soars. I gave them confidence in Mexico, and I gave them confidence here. When they see a familiar face, it's very comforting to them, and I can see it on their faces.

> **"Being able to help others who came from the same place as me, that's my pay."**
>
> *Luis Cuevas*
> Quincy Ranch Manager • Ag Services

What advice would you give your 25-year-old self?

I'm always thinking of the future, so I wish I would have bought more real estate!

What do you do outside of work?

I BBQ almost every day. I really enjoy having family BBQs for holidays or birthdays. I love to BBQ chicken wings and tri-tip the most.

Who is somebody you look up to?

God. My family and I feel so lucky and blessed with what we have and what we've accomplished, there's nothing God hasn't given us. When we have alone time, we dedicate one hour every night praying for peace in the world. After our son went into the air force, we've found much comfort in prayer.

What is your favorite Stemilt fruit?

Tip Top cherries and Rave® apples.

LIGHTNING ROUND

What is your favorite kind of ice cream?

Pistachio, double scoop!

Do you prefer hot or iced coffee?

Hot

If you could pick three words to describe Stemilt, what would they be?

Dedicated, honest, trustworthy

If you could have one superpower, what would it be?

Flight

Where is your favorite vacation spot?

Costa Rica

If you could have dinner with one person, dead or alive, who would it be?

My mom. She taught me to be a good person and my kids adored her.

What are some of your favorite things in life?

Fishing, family, traveling, and visiting our grandchildren.

What is the strangest food you've ever eaten?

Horse radish, I didn't know it was so spicy!

ORCHARD

By: Elizabeth Price

INDUSTRY ADVOCACY IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Stemilt's Manager of Research and Development, Rob Blakey, will be the first to tell you there's more to our R&D department than meets the eye. Read on to learn how the team works hard to extend the fruit season, reduce labor and costs, and increase efficiency in the orchard while also helping others in the industry do the same.

R&D at Stemilt has two main focuses: new varieties and regular research and development. For new varieties, the team travels often to new variety testing blocks in Stemilt's orchards and works very closely with Stemilt Ag Services (SAS) to ensure trials and harvest runs smoothly. The department also works on regular projects like testing technology in the field, working on food safety protocols, studying post-harvest storage/practices, and being industry advocates to connect Stemilt with others in the industry who align with the company's values.

"We're pretty unique to have a department that doesn't work in its own moat but helps other people in the industry be successful too," explains Blakey. "We have a differentiating service that no one else has that helps commercial teams improve their own operations with sound research and innovation."

Since Stemilt's R&D department operates on a large scale, it works with universities like Washington State University and Cornell University that have labs to grow, pack, store, and test fruit. By partnering with universities

> **We're pretty unique to have a department that doesn't work in its own moat but helps other people in the industry be successful too.**
>
> *Rob Blakey*
> R&D Manager

like these, Stemilt can find answers to important questions to improve fruit quality and growing practices. Eventually, these are shared with others in the tree fruit industry.

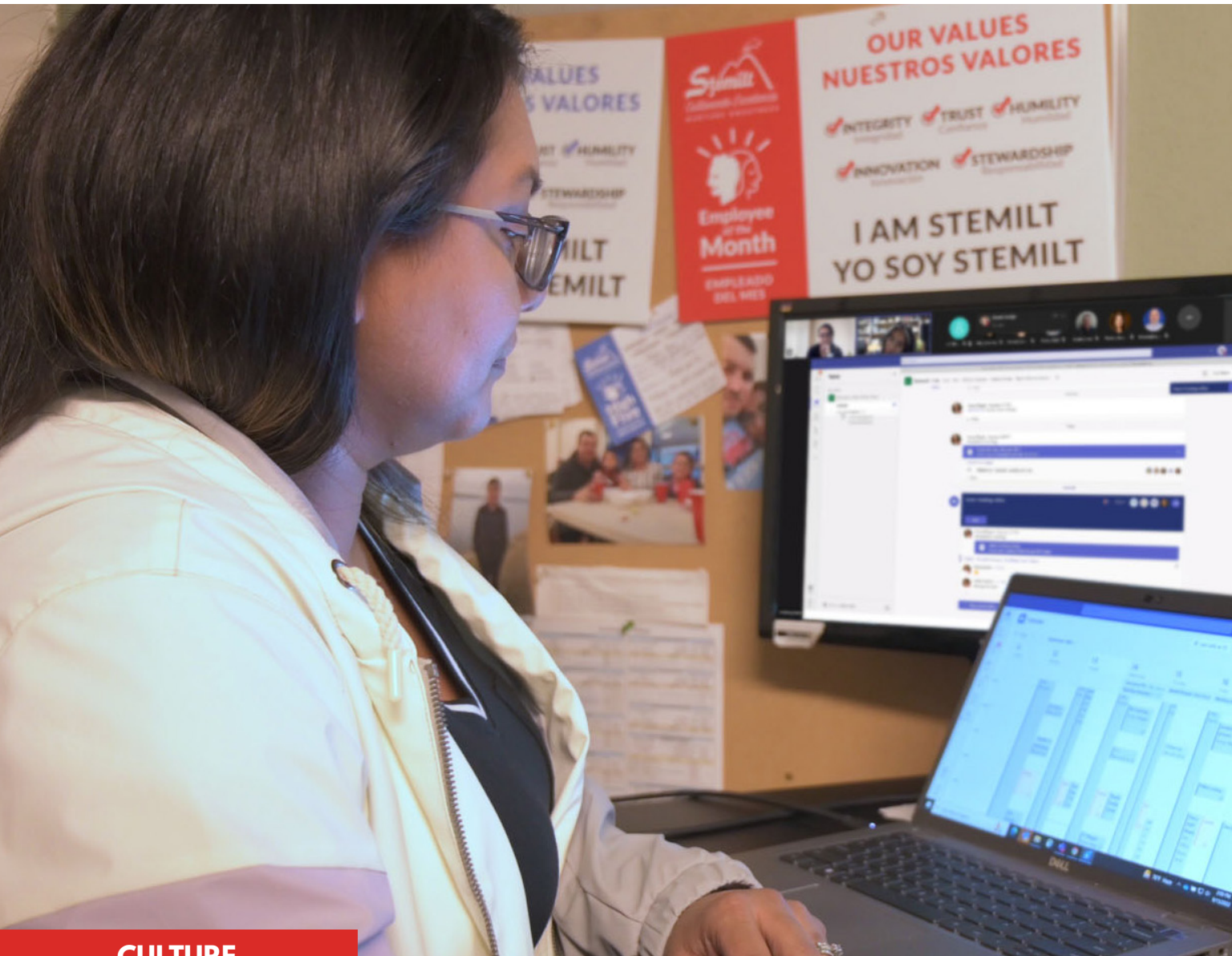
"We need to advocate good science and commercial wisdom with customer advocacy groups in this fairly tight industry," says Blakey. "Much of the work we do is behind the scenes and involves heavy lifting from our partnered universities. We're constantly pointing out limiting factors in growing, harvesting, and storing fruit so we can find solutions that will guide us in our journey to World Famous Fruit."

Blakey manages the R&D department scouting new varieties, importing nursery trees, and getting trees planted. He leads his team working on food safety, fruit quality improvement, and agriculture technology for apples, pears, and cherries. Alongside him, Patricia Bowlby is Stemilt's Commercialization Manager who comes from Australia with over 20 years' experience in fresh produce marketing and business management. Once a variety is commercialized, she works with Blakey, the grower, third parties, and marketers securing contractual compliance on the technical side.

"Working in the field is Hannah Walters, our Orchard Project lead, who also works closely with our new Research Associate, Daisy Arias, covering remote orchard grounds and monitoring variety trials," says Blakey. "Hannah has spent 7 years working on finding solutions for Little Cherry Disease that produces cherries of small size, little flavor, and poor color. She's an industry expert on this existential threat to the cherry industry and Little Cherry Disease is one area we put a lot of our resources in."

The team works every day in the orchard, the lab, and even in foreign countries sometimes to improve the consumer experience with Stemilt fruit. They see the fruit from its first plantings, all the way to harvest and storage. It's important to have a strong presence in new varieties so the company can build relationships for future growth.

"Funding an in-house R&D team helps the company save labor so we're always performing trials to improve our current systems that benefit the grower, market, and consumer," explains Blakey. "There's always pressures in profitability and as labor costs go up, we need to find solutions to maintain our profit margins. It's our team's job to find solutions to increase pack out, extend the season, and leverage technology."

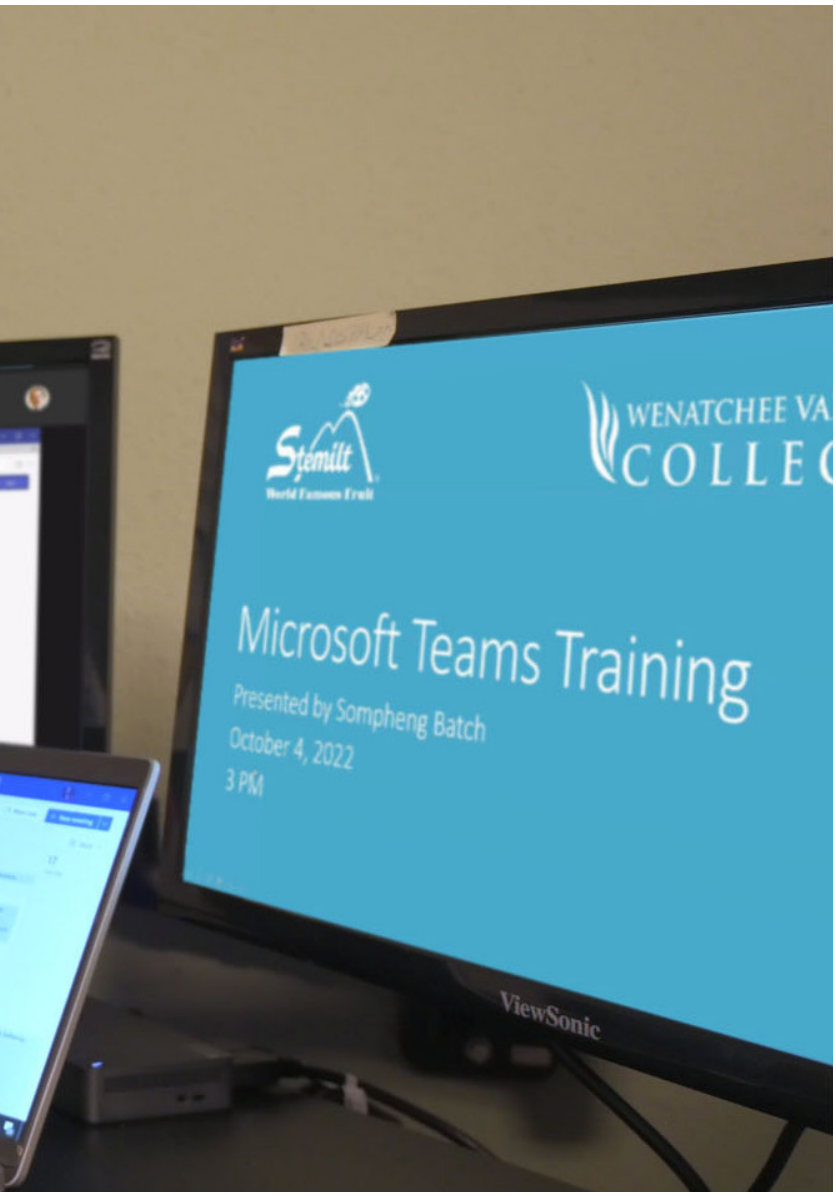


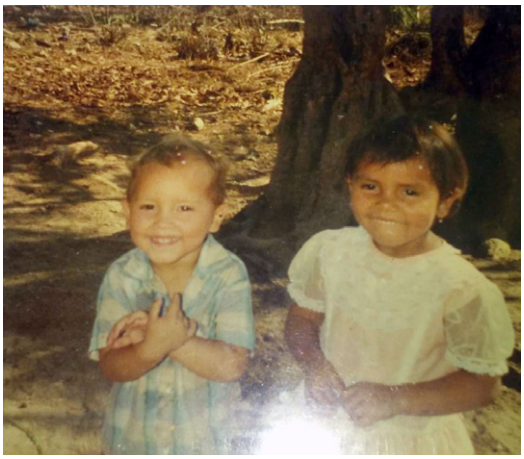
CULTURE

By: Elizabeth Price

CULTIVATION THROUGH EDUCATION

A personal mission to end poverty through agriculture motivates our President, West Mathison, to cultivate people by increasing access to education that will allow Stemilters to grow and succeed in their jobs with integrity and purpose. Learn more as one Stemilter shares her story about pursuing an education to change her future's course and is now helping change the course for all Stemilters.




Maggie immigrates to the US at age 5

Maggie in school

The weight of doubt and uncertainty can be discouraging when people discover their true potential and passions. Stemilt's Manager of Learning and Development, Maggie Torres, hopes her story can be inspiring to others in agriculture who want something different for their life like she did.

"I remember working very long, hot days in the orchards with my family and I remember my parents telling me, 'If you don't pursue anything in life, this will be the rest of your life,'" explains Torres. "I knew at 5 years old I wanted something different, and I had to put my education first for myself. When I finally could, I worked day and night as a full-time student, employee, and mother to be the first of my 11 siblings to graduate high school and college."

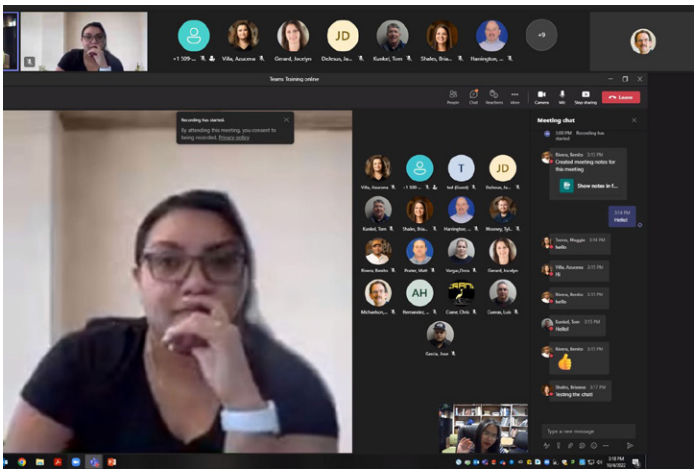
Maggie harvesting fruit in the orchard

"Mi Historia es helping cultivate all Stemilters to find their passions through education and lead them to success."

Maggie Torres
Manager Learning & Development
Sr Business Partner • Ag Services

Torres spends her time now at Stemilt working one-on-one with employees to understand their wants and needs so they can succeed in their roles. She also heads educational opportunities in the company including Microsoft Teams trainings, CDL Certifications, and English classes to allow Stemilters to pursue an education without spending extra time or their own money getting it. Torres's introduction of Microsoft Teams training to the company has allowed her to work remotely allowing more family time and improved internal company communications.

"I think time and money are the two most important assets to Stemilters and they can also be the biggest barriers to growth," says Torres. "I remember one employee wanted to be a truck driver, but he didn't have the certification or time for it. He was going to leave Stemilt to find employment elsewhere, but we paid for his CDL certification courses and now he's driving trucks for us and doing what he really wants to do."



educating a group of employees on Teams

Stemilter getting behind the wheel following CDL certification

Maggie on family vacation

These trainings offer a second chance to people who haven't had access to education before and opens new opportunities to work with purpose. Recognizing the changing workplace and how technology is quickly shaping agriculture, Stemilt has become more strategic about cultivating its greatest asset: its Human Capital, or Stemilters. This focus and Torres' work is bringing the right training to make education at work possible.

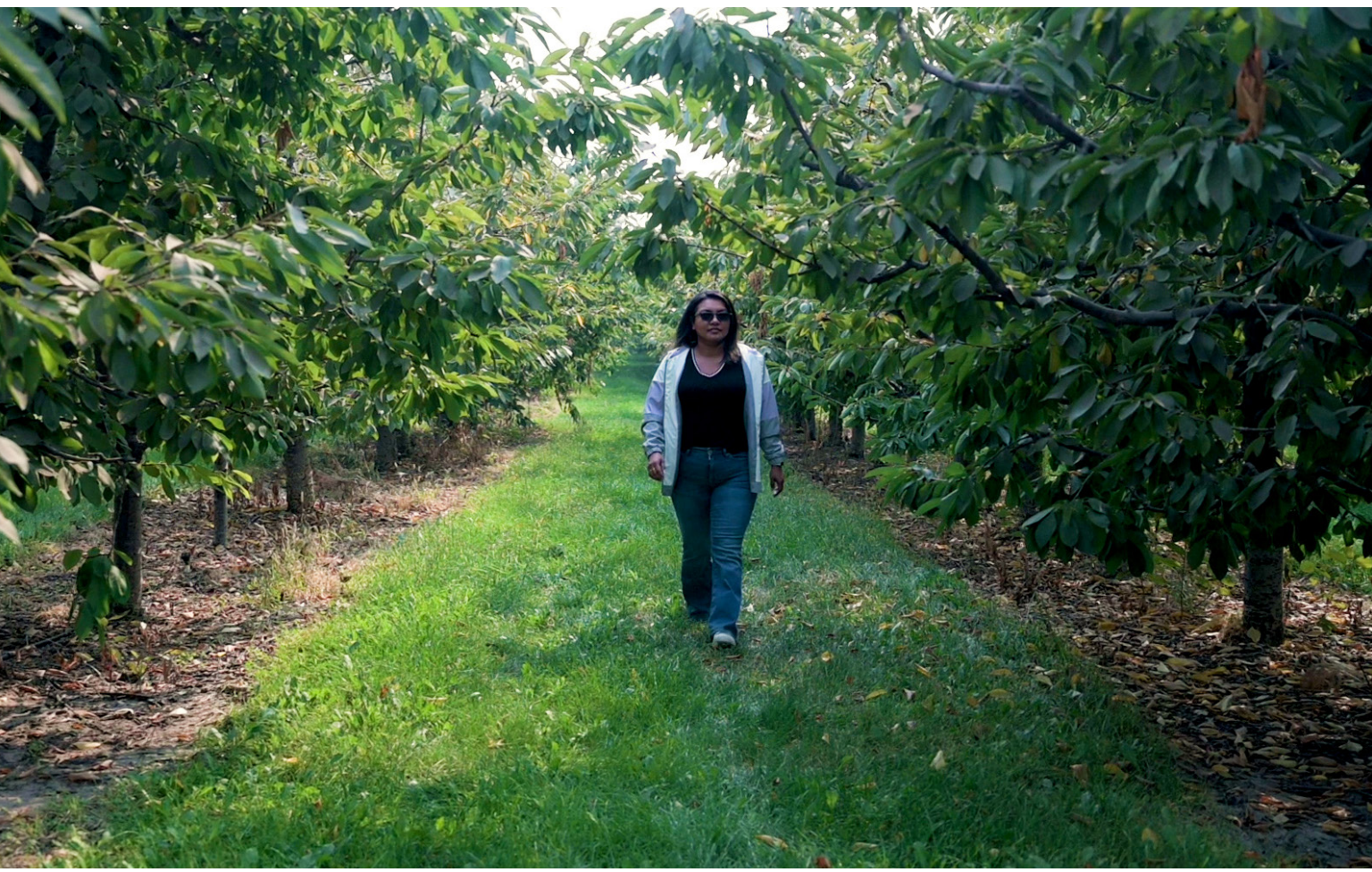
While Torres is helping bring education to the company's current Stemilters, she is also helping welcome 7 interns into Stemilt's admin office and packaging facilities who are participating in the Project SEARCH program. Project SEARCH is a unique, business-led transition-to-work program that provides education and training to young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"Stemilt will be the first in Central Washington and in the tree fruit industry to partner with Project SEARCH and we've already gotten started," says Torres. "The program acts as a stepping stone from high school to work life and we'll be providing technical assistance, program evaluation and development, continuous development, and real-life work experiences to our interns over the next school year. We're very excited to participate in this new opportunity and to be apart of the growth and progression of our interns."

Microsoft Teams training, CDL Certification courses, English classes, and Project SEARCH are just the beginnings of Stemilt's journey to cultivating people through education and ending poverty through agriculture. According to Torres, it's a start that will help people create their own future at Stemilt.

"My education has given me assurance as Manager of Learning and Development that I am capable of anything," says Torres. "Mi Historia es helping cultivate all Stemilters to find their passions through education and lead them to success. I hope my story can be inspiring to others and the beginning of many other stories of Stemilters pushing past their doubts and taking control of their future."

Project SEARCH initial kickoff at Stemilt



Maggie out for a walk near the office

NEW FACE

CULTURE

By: Elizabeth Price

A company can have all the best products and services in the world, but without people standing behind them, what is it worth? This is exactly the question that Ruth Santiago asks herself as she steps into her new role as Stemilt's Human Capital Analyst/Engagement Specialist in Human Resources. From employee communications to sharing community events with the company, Ruth speaks with strong ambition to bring Stemilters together and lead them to success one day at a time.

Ruth Santiago

How did you come to Stemilt?

I grew up as an only child in the small town of Entiat, WA where I lived amongst 40 acres of orchards. Because of this, I always knew I wanted to do something in agriculture before I even went to school. I moved to Wenatchee when I was 10 years old and attended the Wenatchee School District where I graduated in 2013 with plans to obtain my degree at Central Washington University in Ellensburg, WA. In 2018, I moved back to Wenatchee to be with family while I completed my degree off and on online. I graduated in 2020 with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a Specialization in HR. My mother has worked at Stemilt's packing line for over a decade now and encouraged me to keep Stemilt in mind while I was job hunting. In March 2021, a position for an HR Generalist opened up and I was hired for the job as a temporary employee. Later that year, I transitioned to a full-time employee after accepting the role to be a Worker's Comp Specialist.

What does your day-to-day look like?

On April 1st, 2022, I was offered my current position as a Human Capital Analyst. People often ask me, "what does a Human Capital Analyst do?" and I say, it's exactly what it sounds like, I analyze Human Capital! My job is all about people. I start each month looking for engagement opportunities within the community or company and am continuously working to improve current Stemilt activities/events. I work very closely with Stemilters like my mom who speak very little English helping them break down information and treating them like my own family so they can be successful. When your main job is to empower people, you get to witness each individual's skillsets and you start to see their true potential as they grow. Sometimes, it's hard to ask for help, so my job is to bring light and communication to people.

What do you enjoy about the job so far?

I get to converse with all Stemilters and bring people together through these conversations to understand them and their goals. In my previous job as a Worker's Comp Specialist, people only heard from me when there were on-the job injuries, so if you didn't hear from me, it was good! Now, I'm promoting all the good stuff like Stemilter's Day and other annual events.

What are some of the biggest challenges you face?

Measuring success. In Worker's Comp, I could measure my successes with a numerical value because you put in "x" number of hours. Now, I'm planning events that can be a total hit, or sometimes they're not. It's hard to look back on how much I've accomplished in a week's time because I want my work to show, but I'm learning it's more about taking the time to do quality work that engages our people. I get to be an educator, but still have fun at the same time.

What do you do outside of work?

I like to be outside, and the summer sun is my favorite. I love hiking Saddle Rock, swimming, floating the river, and walking my chihuahua, Lulu. I got Lulu in college, and she has been my emotional support animal ever since. Now that she's 8 years old, I take her out in a stroller and treat her like a baby!

> **"You can have the best product and services, but if you don't have people behind it or they're not happy, it doesn't go as far."**
>
> *Ruth Santiago*
> Human Capital Analyst/
> Engagement Specialist

How do you stay motivated?

My mom motivates me every day. My mom migrated to the U.S. from Mexico, and I realize not everyone gets that same opportunity. I feel so lucky. I always remind myself to not get frustrated at work because when I come back from a trip to Mexico, I feel very grateful. My mom came all the way over here from a foreign country not knowing anyone or knowing the language because she wanted a better opportunity for herself, and I want the same thing. I really want to grow my own generational wealth or "my own empire" if you will. Looking back on all the sacrifices my mom has made, that's what motivates me.

Who is your mentor?

My Stepdad. He's currently a foreman for our Public Utility District and since I was younger, I've watched him grow by taking opportunities and speaking up for himself even when he didn't know much. It's given me the confidence to do the same and he's always given me good advice.

What is your favorite Stemilt fruit?

Granny Smith Apples.

LIGHTNING ROUND

Favorite breakfast?

Coffee with almond milk

Which emoji best represents you?

🙃

If you could have any pet in the world, what would it be?

To have my chihuahua, Lulu, forever!

Where is your favorite vacation spot?

Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

Sweet or sour?

Both, Sour Patch Kids are my favorite

One thing you'd take with you to an island

A book

What would be your dream job if you weren't at Stemilt?

A Starbucks barista because I love their coffee

Who is your favorite artist?

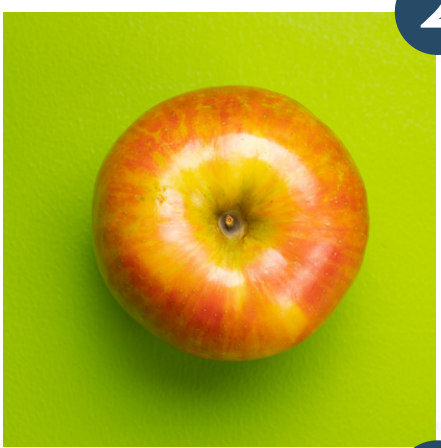
Machine Gun Kelly

FRUIT

By: Elizabeth Price

1

2



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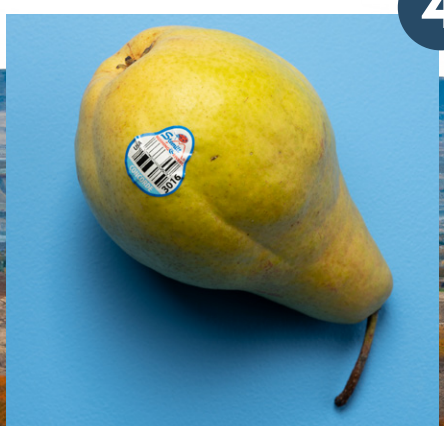


FOUR FALL FAMOUS FINDS

Stemilt's Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Mike Taylor, is here to share 4 famous fruits to increase fall and winter sales.

1

Lil Snappers® Pears

Why They're Famous: It's a big year for small fruit, so focus on red and green promotions for Lil Snappers® in 3 lb. bags. The fruit may be small, but the flavor is big in this convenient, kid-friendly snack. Perfect for after-school snacking and box lunches!

Availability:

Fall, Winter, Spring

2

Organic Honeycrisp Apples

Why They're Famous: A strength of Stemilt and the top dollar driver for organics, Honeycrisp is a necessity in the apple category, so include it in regular mixed-apple promotions. Sweet, big, and juicy flavors that continue to be a fan-favorite are what makes this apple World Famous.

Availability:

Year-round

3

Cosmic Crisp® Apples

Why They're Famous: Cosmic Crisp® is climbing the charts and poised to break into the top 10 apple varieties this year. It makes its grand return December 1st and Stemilt will have increased volume for this variety. Creative use of Cosmic Crisp® merchandising materials make for an eye-catching display helping connect your shoppers with an apple of perfectly balanced sweet to tart flavors.

Availability:

December 1st and year-round after release

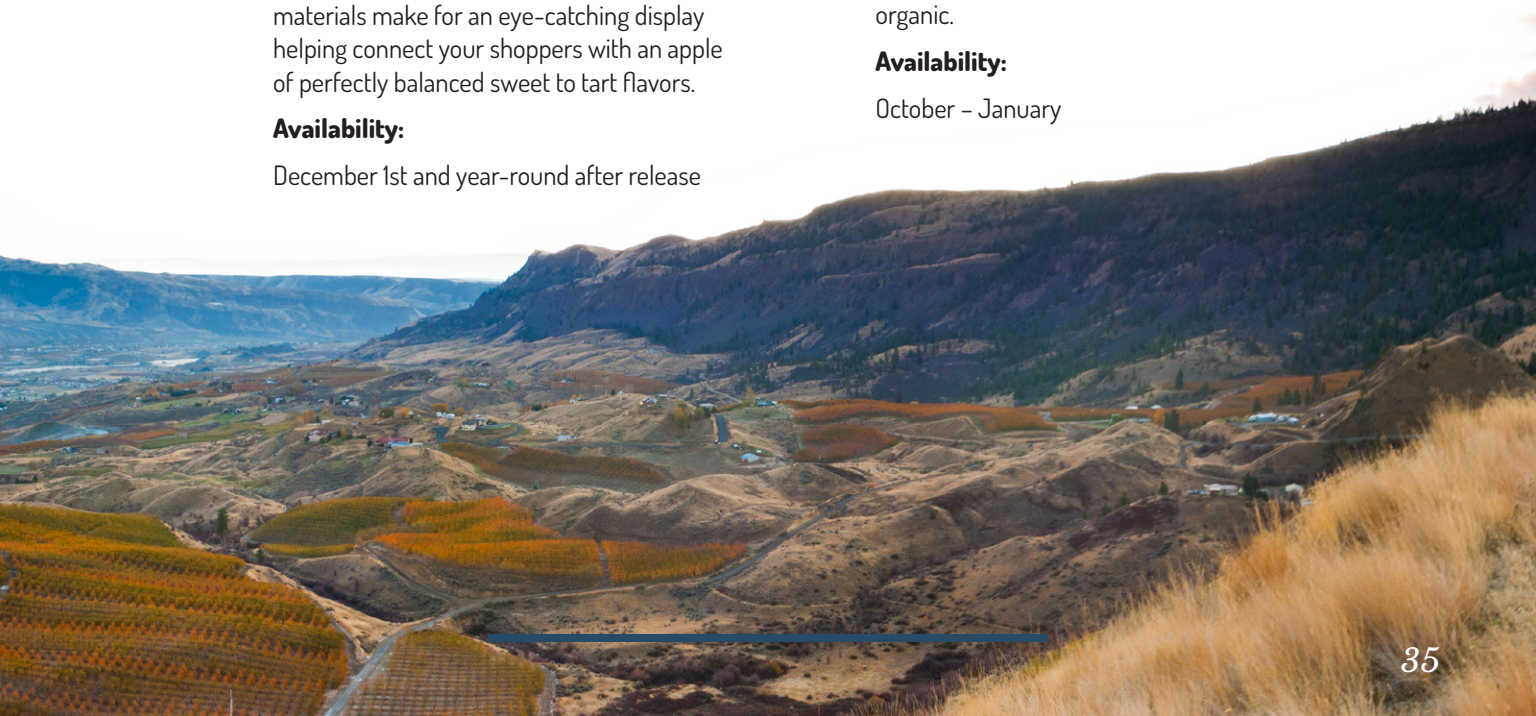
4

Concorde Pears

Why They're Famous: Concorde pears are a seasonal pear that add sweet, vanilla flavors to the holiday timeframe. This pear makes for the perfect addition to any Thanksgiving or Christmas grazing table lineup and will be available from Stemilt in both conventional and organic.

Availability:

October – January



By: Elizabeth Price

THE DREAM APPLE WITH PERFECT FLAVOR: COSMIC CRISP®

Cosmic Crisp® is what some might call "the dream apple" for its balanced flavor and crispy texture. This apple is large in size, juicy to the bite, and red in color. The Cosmic Crisp® or WA38 cv brand apple is the result of 20 years of research done by Washington State University's world-class tree fruit breeding program. It's an apple that's out of this world!

KNOW IT ALL

Captivatingly Cosmic

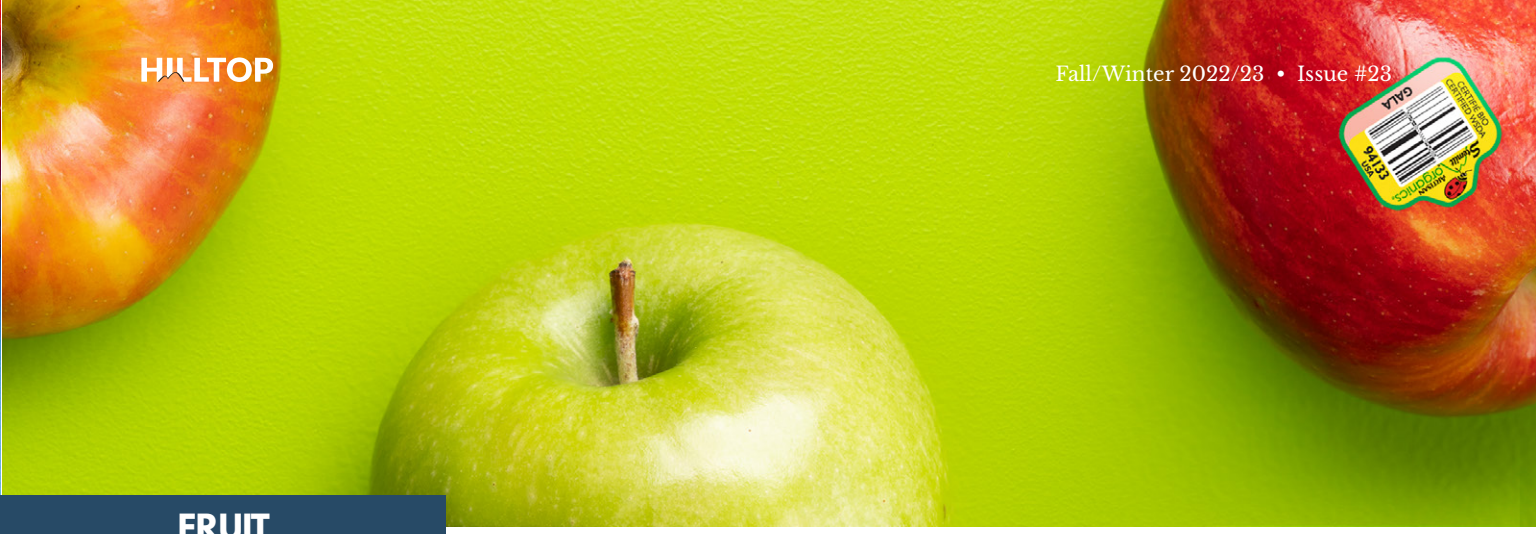
The name "Cosmic" refers to the apple's starburst-like lenticels, while "Crisp" links back to its parent, Honeycrisp.

Washington Exclusive

Currently, Washington State growers are behind the Cosmic Crisp® apples available in North America. Stemilt grows Cosmic Crisp® in the Columbia Basin region, known for its warm days and nutrient-rich soils.

Storage Superpowers

Cosmic Crisp® benefits from controlled atmosphere storage and can store for nearly a year. Its sweet flavor and crisp crunch are consistent all year long!



FRUIT

By: Elizabeth Price

FRUIT Q's

Apeel™

We reserve this space in Hilltop to answer just a few of the many questions consumers write to us throughout the year. In this issue of Fruit Q's, we're going to talk about Apeel, a plant-based protection Stemilt uses on its organic apples to keep them fresh.

Q. What is Apeel?

A. Apeel is a plant-based protection that keeps fruits and vegetables fresh for longer using materials found in the skins, seeds, and pulp of plants. Apeel works in Stemilt's packing facilities to apply this tasteless, odorless, edible coating to slow the rate of water loss and oxidation - the primary causes of spoilage.

Q. Why do we use Apeel?

A. Stemilt uses Apeel on its organic apples to help them stay as fresh as possible, for as long as possible once it leaves the packing facility. In fact, Apeel has been proven to keep organic apples crisper for longer. By maintaining quality for longer, we can deliver crisp, juicy, Artisan Organics™ apples that fulfill our "delight consumers" promise and helps to prevent food waste.

Q. Is Apeel Safe to Eat?

A. Yes! Apeel is composed of only food grade ingredients made from materials that already exist in the peels, seeds and pulp of the fruits and vegetables we eat. The product is non-GMO, includes no animal-derived inputs and does not contain any known allergens (wheat, soybean, peanuts, tree nuts, sesame seeds, mustard, sulfites or inputs from milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, or crustacea).

Q. What Benefits Does Apeel Provide to Retailers?

A. Apeel's protection allows retailers to offer an elevated customer experience by ensuring that shoppers can purchase and consume consistently crisper, longer-lasting organic apples. Apeel locks moisture into apples causing evaporation to slow and weight on shelf to be retained, resulting in measurable savings. Finally, Apeel extends the shelf life of organic apples. A longer lifespan means fewer apples are culled due to spoilage, helping retailers have lower shrink. With Apeel, retailers can create a fresher and more sustainable organic apple category.

Q. Can You Wash Apeel off?

A. We always recommend washing fruit prior to eating. Rinsing with water and a gentle scrub brush works best. You won't be able to fully wash Apeel off the fruit without peeling it, and we certainly don't want people to remove the peel of the fruit. Apeel is safe to eat and works by forming a barrier of edible material on the skin or peel of fruits and veggies. It wouldn't maintain fruit freshness if it could be easily removed.

To learn more about Apeel-Protected Organic Apples, visit us at apeel.com/apples

FRUIT

10 | 10 minutes | 50 minutes | 1 hour | Moderate

ROASTED APPLE & PARSNIP SOUP, TOPPED WITH SAUTÉD GARLICKY KALE AND TURKEY BACON

This Roasted Apple and Parsnip Soup has a subtle caramelized flavor, and is the perfect dish for autumn.

INGREDIENTS:

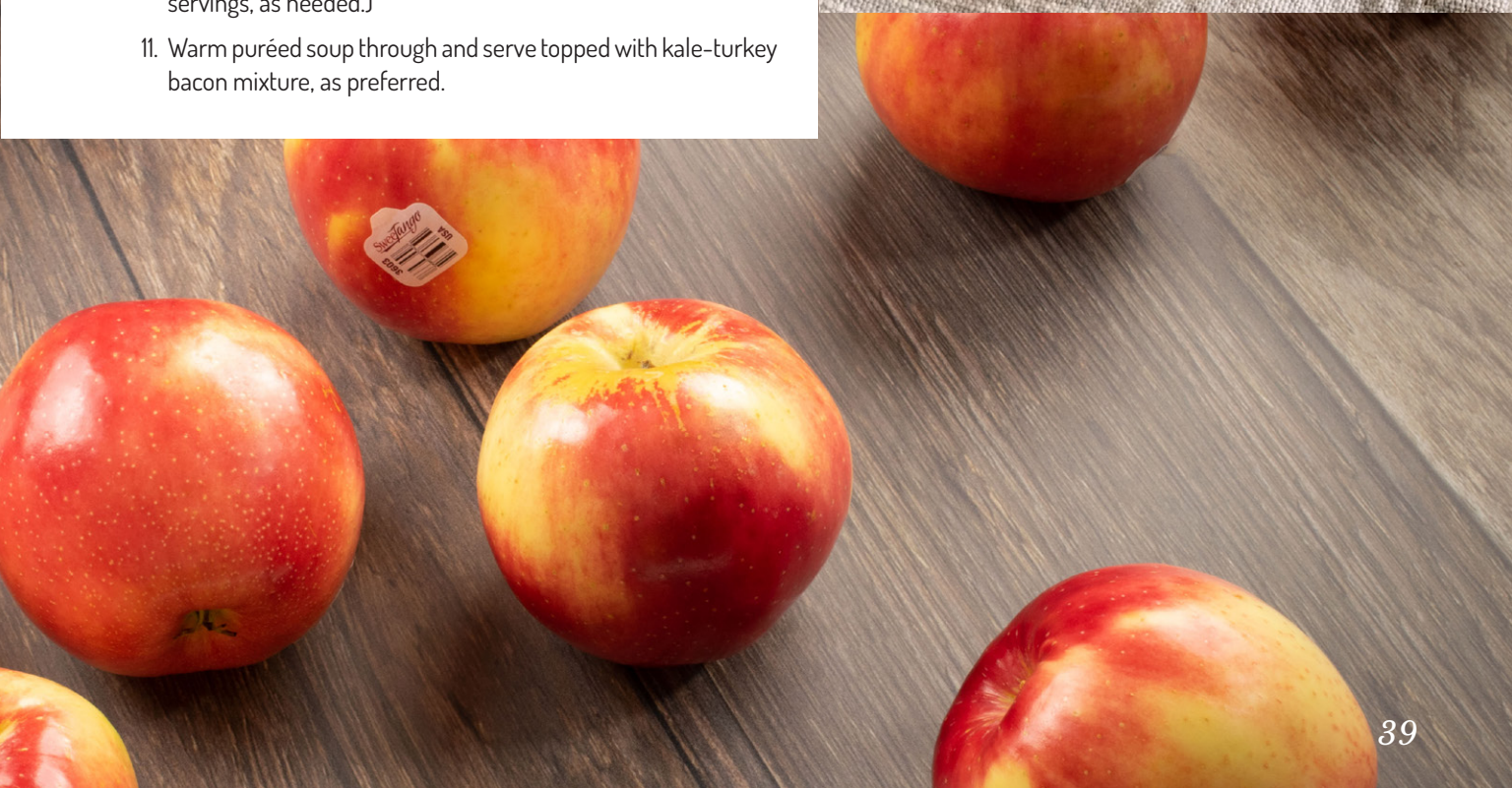
3 Stemilt SweeTango apples, peeled, cored and diced
6 to 7 medium parsnips, trimmed, peeled and diced
1 large yellow onion, chopped
2 tsp kosher salt
1 tsp ground black pepper
2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
6 to 8 cups chicken or vegetable broth
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
5 strips turkey bacon, thinly sliced
6 to 8 large kale leaves, ribs removed, thinly sliced
1/8 tsp garlic powder
pinch kosher salt, to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.
2. Place diced parsnips and onions on a large baking pan. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; drizzle with 2 tablespoons olive oil.
3. Toss to combine, then spread mixture to single layer on pan. Roast in oven for approximately 20 minutes.
4. Then add diced apples to mixture, toss lightly, and return to oven to roast an additional 10 minutes. Remove from oven and cool 10 minutes.
5. Meanwhile, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a large skillet over medium high heat.
6. Add sliced turkey bacon and cook for approximately 5 to 8 minutes, until lightly browned.
7. Add sliced kale to skillet, season with garlic. Toss intermittently until kale is somewhat wilted through, approximately 1 to 2 minutes.
8. Add pinch of kosher salt, to taste (turkey bacon may be enough salt, to taste, so test kale prior to seasoning). Remove from heat and set aside.

TO MAKE THE SOUP

9. Blend broth and cooled, roasted veggies/apples together, in batches, in high speed blender.
10. Transfer each batch to large pot, until all mixture has been puréed. Add additional broth to soup, as necessary, for desired consistency. (Reserve remaining broth to add for future servings, as needed.)
11. Warm puréed soup through and serve topped with kale-turkey bacon mixture, as preferred.



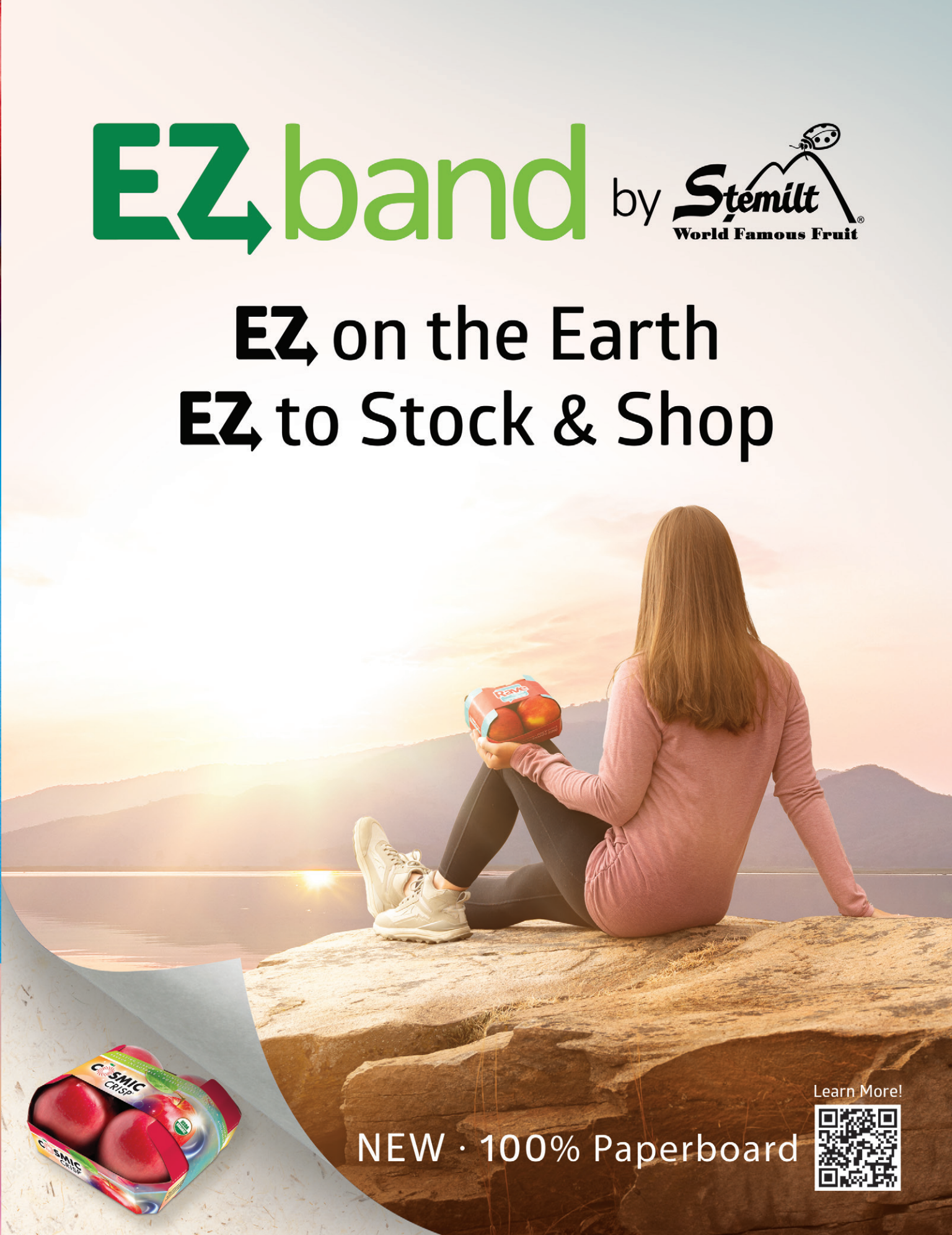
FROM OUR WORLD

Happi Pear® in the orchard during harvest.

EZ band by Stemilt

World Famous Fruit

EZ on the Earth
EZ to Stock & Shop



Stemilt
World Famous Fruit

REDUCE
REUSE
RECYCLE
Recycle Me

THE
STEM
BLOG