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## **NWPB's sponsorship of MCM an 'honor and privilege'**

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While the runners were undoubtedly the biggest stars at the recent Marine Corps Marathon, racking up the miles while braving rain that was torrential at times, watermelon played a heroic role at the

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well-known national event held in the nation's capital.

For the seventh year, the National Watermelon Promotion Board and Team Watermelon handed out samples of watermelon to runners and their supporters while also educating them on the health and hydration benefits of the delicious fruit.

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Stephanie Barlow, senior director of communications for the NWPB, said this year was even more special for the organization, as many of its board members were in attendance and got to witness the magnitude of the inspirational event.

"It really is an overwhelming and a humbling experience all in one," she said. "The runners are so grateful, so worn down, and then we give them some sweet, juicy watermelon. Every year we're told over and over and over how much it means to them."

Barlow said she even received an email from a thankful runner, who wrote, "Your staff was at the finish line festival of the Marine Corps Marathon yesterday. This was perfect! Yes, bananas and Gatorade are good after a marathon, but the watermelon made the day! Yesterday, the first bite tasted like heaven! Thank you all for braving the crazy weather!"

NWPB first sponsored the marathon in 2013 after the National Watermelon Queen promotion committee and coordinator Eleanor Bullock asked the board to seek out marathon events that are national in scope with which to engage, reasoning that watermelon would be a perfect complement since it is healthy, hydrating, great for families and appropriate for all fitness levels.

"I presented several options," said Barlow, "but the Marine Corps Marathon ticked all the right boxes, as it is the People's Marathon, at the end of October, and being among our nation's Marines makes the event not just a promotion but a true honor and privilege. It's the third-largest marathon in the country, and right in the nation's capital. It's a hard promotion -- a long and tough event from our volunteer side -- but we give our all because these runners give their all."

Barlow said that in addition to the staff and board members of the NWPB, as well as the National Watermelon Queen and the regional watermelon queens, many more people were involved behind the scenes, including the Class Produce Group in Jessup, MD, which supplied a truckload of watermelon, and also the vendors that donated the cardboard boxes and plastic clamshells.

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