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Fresh Summit closes, but the show goes on

By

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On Thursday evening, Oct. 15, the Produce Marketing Association held a Closing Reception for its 2020 virtual Fresh Summit, but in fact that reception did mark the end of this year's show.

"The event isn't over yet," PMA President and CEO Cathy Burns told *The Produce News*. "In fact,

people are still registering. Every registered attendee will have access to the platform, which includes content, messaging tools and the marketplaces until November 13. Traditionally people would be breaking down booths and sweeping the floor, now they have their booths open for four more weeks. And PMA will do what we do best, connect buyers and sellers over the remaining time the platform is open.”

Over the next four weeks, registrants will still be able to engage in networking activities, participate in the Fresh Summit Marketplace, and set up buyer meetings. “Based on feedback from our members and guests, we are beyond pleased with how the first three days of Fresh Summit have met their needs for compelling, differentiated educational content,” Burns said. “While the pandemic prevented us from getting together in person, the Fresh Summit platform extends the event beyond the limits of traditional calendar days to a full month of community and connections. With a high number of retail buyers actively participating on the Marketplace, we will continue to help facilitate connections across the global supply chain in the weeks ahead.”

She said this year’s event was a learning experience but noted that its execution and value followed PMA’s well-worn playbook. “Each event we hold, whether it be in person or virtual is first and foremost about our members and what the industry needs most to drive consumer demand and grow a healthier world. We have done this with our virtual town halls, webinars, Members Helping Members, and all of our digital content. As we’ve moved through the past several months, that need has evolved and changed, and I suspect it will continue to do so. With that in mind, we’ll continue to approach events (virtual and in-person) as we always have: we will partner with our members and our volunteers. I’m grateful that we have over 600 industry volunteers that contribute their time and their ideas to drive our industry forward. And they are adding their perspective from around the world — literally.”

Using a new set of metrics to gauge the success of Fresh Summit, PMA kept track of daily engagement data. As of Friday morning, Oct. 16, more than 77,000 messages had been exchanged, more than 7,660 meetings requested and buyers had initiated more than 4,540 of the meeting requests sent.

PMA’s Director of Communications Siobhan May revealed that attendees participated from 64 different countries with representatives from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Chile, Brazil, South Africa, Australia, Peru and Colombia topping the list. She said buyer participation was at a historic high, and added that attendance at the virtual education sessions “exceeded in person attendance with record-breaking numbers that continue to build each day. More people watched the State of the Industry than ever before.”

The “show floor” included 360 exhibitors spread across four marketplaces — produce, complementary items, floral and solutions.

Though much about the show was different than in previous years, Fresh Summit did include its array of awards to its members. Jin Ju Wilder, director of marketing and business development for Vesta Foodservice, received the Robert L. Carey Award for Excellence in Leadership. The Bryan E. Silbermann Award for Excellence in Collaboration went to Bonnie Fernandez-Fenaroli, executive director, Center for Produce Safety. Debora Steier, vice president of floral for the Albertsons Cos., received the Floral Marketer of the Year Award, while four retailers were honored with Retail Merchant Innovation Awards: Scott Bennett, produce sales manager at Jewel Osco; Mike Tipton, vice president of produce and floral, Schnucks Markets Inc.; Bridget Bennett, supervisory category manager of produce, Defense Commissary Agency; and Jeff Cady, director of produce and floral,

Tops Friendly Markets.

PMA's Center for Growing Talent honored DMA Solutions Inc. President and CEO Dan'l Mackey Almy with its Jay Pack Cultivating Our Future Award, and CGT's Frieda Rapoport Caplan Women's Catalyst Award went to Kristen Reid, executive vice president of the MIXTEC Group.

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