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2020 Watermelon Queen will reign for second year

By

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When Paige Huntington of the East Texas town of Jefferson and a graduate student at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Tyler, was crowned National Watermelon Queen at the National Watermelon Convention in February 2020 after a year as Texas Watermelon Queen, it was with the expectation that she would, like her predecessors, spend the year making personal appearances across the country promoting watermelons.



Paige Huntington

Then COVID-19 intervened.

“Over the past year, we have had to adapt our roles in the industry to meet the social requirements of today’s society due to the global pandemic,” said Huntington. “We have had to become solution-based thinkers and come up with different ways to promote our favorite fruit since we aren’t able to do things such as in store promotions and marathons.”

Due to the current situation and the necessary cancelation of the 2021 NWA convention, Huntington accepted the invitation to serve as National Watermelon Queen for a second year. She spoke with The Produce News about the creative ways she promoted watermelons nationally with the travel restrictions that were in place. One activity she particularly enjoyed was featuring watermelon growers from all across the country on the National Queen pages on social media.

“I did do some local farm visits,” she said, but just in Texas. She spent a week in South Texas and several days in West Texas as well as visiting some farms near her home. “I got to see everybody I worked with when I was the Texas queen, so that was a positive side for me. I really enjoyed that.”

Then she began calling growers across the United States to talk to them about what they were doing on their farms and asked them to send pictures and videos. “I had some people that were just planting when I interviewed them. Others were watching their crops, making sure that they were healthy and doing good, while others were harvesting,” she said. Through the season, consumers were able to learn about a wide range of things that go on in the industry and got to know the people growing the watermelons they eat.

“One of the things I worked really hard on this year,” Huntington said, “was making people aware of the versatility of watermelons. I did a series of how-to videos making different watermelon recipes. we

also did something that to my knowledge no other queen has been able to do and that was a giving back promotion in which the industry donated watermelons to community food banks and charities. We did a series of these in East Texas and a few in Louisiana as well. I got to meet some really awesome people and heard some really cool stories. We enjoyed getting to help out the communities that way.”

In the year ahead, Huntington will continue the social media work, including more recipe and how-to videos, and she hopes she will also have the opportunity to meet more people in person.

“This industry is like no other,” she said. “It is full of some of the most kind and caring and compassionate individuals that I have ever met, and they work hard every day just to put a smile on people’s faces. I appreciate all the work that they do to make this industry as amazing as it is. I couldn’t be more blessed to represent such an amazing group of people.”

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