



- Advertisement -

SEPC chairman takes part virtually in Southern Exposure 2021

By

Gordon M. Hochberg

April 20, 2021

Harold Paivarinta, senior director of sales and business development at Red Sun Farms in Kingsville, Ontario, and who currently serves as chairman of the Southeast Produce Council's Board of Directors, was unable to attend Southern Exposure in person due to travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; however, he took part virtually in many aspects of the event. During the trade show Thursday, April 8, *The Produce News* was able to interview him via video which was set up at the SEPC booth.

Q: What has been your experience taking part virtually in Southern Exposure?

A. A lot of the shows that happened prior to this one were virtual, but there were a lot of limitations because the technologies were evolving. But for us and the timing of this show, technology got a chance to catch up a little bit. So we've employed a lot of different things. Our systems were very user friendly. There was no problem navigating through the site.

Q. What were the key parts of the show for you?

A. Some of the highlights were the audio and video streaming of the workshops yesterday — the education sessions — plus last night's entertainment and today's keynote. The clarity and quality of the sound, the clarity of the video feeds, were phenomenal. It was literally the next best thing to being there. That didn't disappoint at all. Particularly yesterday's Power of Produce, the amount of people and the breadth of the participants virtually, was quite surprising and very positive. And just the amount of chatting that was happening in the chat rooms, the amount of questions that were being generated in the Q&A virtually. To see that activity, you could tell that people were really engaged. And that was incredibly positive. I didn't think that we'd have that level of engagement, but when I saw it, it was pretty humbling.

Q. So you've been able to watch pretty much everything that's been going on? You mentioned the keynote speaker this morning, who I thought was terrific.

A. Yes. He was phenomenal. The timing of our sessions — we seem to be hitting home runs, as they were quite timely. In just trying to reinvent our approaches, because the pivot has been basically the word of the year, right? Everybody's had to pivot and do something different. It's really opened our minds. Although the pandemic was very unfortunate, I think there's been some learning from it, and some benefits to what we've done. I think we've been fortunate as a society to look at things differently.

Q. Regarding the Lifetime Achievement Award presented posthumously to Martin Eubanks, I think it was wonderful that the family was able to see that.

A. He was such a tremendous influence. You talk to anybody there, and nobody had a bad word to say about him. He wasn't about the accolades, he wasn't about the recognition. He was always about rolling up his sleeves and getting involved and helping wherever he could. He's missed.

Q. And what a surprise for Bobby Creel, who received a Lifetime Membership Award from the council.

A. There's another gentleman right there who's really worked hard. He's not one for the limelight, which was obviously evident by the fact that he elected not to speak. He's got a booming voice but a very quiet voice, too. He's been a pillar of this organization.

Q. What do you miss the most about not being here in person?

A. I think it's just the camaraderie, missing out on the action. Like I said, although the virtual experience has been beneficial, nothing replaces being there, right? Just seeing everybody, knowing that everybody is OK, virtually, has given me some level of comfort, but it's not quite the same as being in the room. But like I said, it's the next best thing.

Q. Any other final thoughts or comments?

A. I have nothing but a positive outlook for the future of this council. I think that the industry having to pause and not connect with the frequency that we have in the past -- I think the industry will view trade shows differently. I think that I'll never look at an SI [Southern Innovations] or an SE [Southern Exposure] and take it for granted ever again. Missing out on it creates that little bit of a hole, and I never want to relive that again.

Q. We all miss you, Harold. We're definitely looking forward to seeing you at Southern Innovations in September, when hopefully things will be more normal at that point.

A. Absolutely. During the keynote, I just got the email from the government that I get my first vaccination on Wednesday [of next week]. I'm incredibly appreciative to the organizations that were able to be there in person, and just as appreciative of the ones that were able to join us virtually. We've got to get started, and this was a great start to get us going again. I truly appreciate everybody's participation.

[Print](#)