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Matt Mandel named FPAA's Member of the Year

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During the annual meeting of the [Fresh Produce Association of the Americas](#), the association's president, Lance Jungmeyer, presented the FPAA Member of the Year Award to Matt Mandel from SunFed. The Member of the Year is nominated by FPAA members and is defined as someone who goes above and beyond in working for the betterment of the industry and its membership.

Mandel is vice president of finance and legal of SunFed. He attended the University of Arizona, and after a few years, he came into the family business, earned his master's degree at Eller and built his own family roots. FPAA said he has a warm and welcoming personality and a great sense of humor, with one member commenting how he is never without "a bit of dry wit."



FPAA President

Lance Jungmeyer and Matt Mandel of SunFed.

"I'd like to dedicate this great honor to my peers at SunFed whose tireless work and flexibility have allowed me to dedicate time to working on behalf of the industry I love," said Mandel. "I am humbled to walk in the shadows of giants and hope I can continue to contribute to making the FPAA stronger for future generations to come."

Mandel has worked in the produce industry for 11 years and has served on the Arizona Governors Rural Business Development Advisory Council. He currently sits on the International Fresh Produce Association's grower-shipper council and the Boys & Girls Club of Santa Cruz County board of directors. His continuous support and participation have managed to further the industry relationships with both state and national political representatives, as well as with FDA, USDA, Homeland Security and Commerce. Mandel has been key to advance the interest of the produce industry.

Mandel is a past chairman of the FPAA. Reflecting on when Mandel was chairman, another FPAA peer really appreciated how he thanked his father, Danny, for his tutoring, mentoring and support. The person who made this nomination said, "This tells me how humble and grateful he is with the people who have helped him." Mandel's efforts have been so consistently strong for so many years. A fellow board member noted his constant engagement, commenting how he prioritizes the FPAA in his schedule.

Recently Mandel has been on the FPAA committee guiding the efforts of the trade fellowship/trade practicum with the Rogers College of Law at U of A. "While we face constant threats, this strategic

initiative informs and guides our legal and trade strategies," said Jungmeyer. "Matt sees trends, and he positions himself to contribute because he wants the best for his business, just like you want the best for your business. He figures, we're all in this together, let's roll up our sleeves."

One FPAA staff member said, "He is someone who always gives of his time and expertise for the industry. He jumps in to lead teams in meetings in DC, he joins committees, he gets involved." Another staff member, who has been on many trips with this year's honoree, said, "He is well regarded. He is a natural leader looking for the best interest of the industry. He has participated in numerous meetings in Mexico City. He was the first FPAA representative at AHIFORES."

"Thinking about it, I would need more fingers to count the number of trips I have been with him to DC," said Jungmeyer. "He is a great communicator who knows FPAA issues through and through, and you can see it in meeting after meeting on the Hill, at FDA, CBP, USDA — you name it."

Some of Mandel's other distinctions include the Rising Star Award awarded by *The Produce News*.

FPAA said Mandel seems to be everywhere, but where he likes to be best is with his beloved family. He is happily married with two feisty children and an even feistier blue heeler.

Each year's honoree is presented with a custom metal sculpture made by Tucson artist Matt Harper. Prior honorees of the FPAA Member of the Year Award include the following:

- 2020-21 – "The Essential Worker"
- 2019-20 – Jose Antonio Martinez of Divine Flavor
- 2018-19 – Jimmy Mungia of Del Campo Supreme
- 2017-18 – Bobby Bennen Jr. and Gerado Ritz
- 2016-17 – Chris Ciruli of Ciruli Bros.
- 2015-16 -Sabrina Hallman of Sierra Seed Co.
- 2014-15 - Scott Vandervoet of Vandervoet & Associates

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