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Sun Sugar Farms is helping growers go green

By

Maggie Hanna

April 30, 2023

Helping consumers and growers waste less through high-quality, low impact, sustainable products is the mission of Verona, KY-based [Sun Sugar Farms](#) — and the company is doing just that through the use of its biodegradable, recyclable boxes created by owner and operator Linda Fritz.

“Ten years ago I was selling cherry tomatoes and had to use plastic containers,” Fritz told *The Produce News*. “When I couldn’t find an alternative that worked, I made one. I thought if anyone else felt the same way I did, I’d have a little business here. And I guess there are! Since my soft launch in 2019, I’ve sold almost 2.5 million of my containers.”

Sun Sugar Farms’ sustainable produce containers are made to replace any size plastic clamshell — from cherries to berries and mushrooms to microgreens — and features a unique venting design that represents all the elements that go in to planting produce — sun, rain, light, water and the moon.

“I have a graphic design background and came up with the look of the box,” Fritz said.

Currently, Fritz works mostly with smaller growers and said her packaging helps them achieve a more professional appearance. One such grower is Michael Richard, owner of Glenmary Farms in the Appalachian area of western Virginia. Richard found Sun Sugar Farms through a good old fashion Google search and the rest, as they say, is history.

“We’ve always centered our business around leaving a positive environmental impact,” Richard said. “When I started talking with Linda about her containers and the service she could provide, it was the type of package and partnership we were looking for. Linda’s company designed the graphics on the box to help us share that message with our customers. She also created a new 1.5-pint size for us to accommodate how big some of our berries ended up growing.”

The product and packaging have proven to be a big success as Richard’s berries are now available in local Food City stores.

“One of the buyers of the Food City stores happened to stop at our produce stand where we sell direct to consumers,” Richard said. “He was blown away by how much better our strawberries looked than what was coming out of California and that he’d never tasted as good of a berry. And, while we were talking, a woman came up and said she really loved that there was no plastic in the boxes.”

In order to be able to serve growers of all sizes, Fritz recently partnered with the University of Cincinnati to create an affordable automation system to help assemble the containers.

“We have a machine to fold the boxes for growers needing millions but that equipment starts at

\$50,000. In order to capture some of the middle markets, we're creating an affordable robot," she said. "I spoke with a professor at the University of Cincinnati and she had a team of four students take on this project. One came up with a design that's incredible that we should be able to sell for under \$2,000. I actually hired the student — he's going to come work for me after he graduates and we're putting it into production."

Fritz is hoping to have the automation system ready by the end of June — just in time for a blueberry client who starts packaging in July.

"These are such cool people that I get to work with," Fritz said. "They grow organic and believe in their product and providing good packaging — they don't want to use plastic."

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About Maggie Hanna |

Maggie Hanna received a bachelors of arts degree in journalism from the University of Arizona in 2010. After graduating, she went to work for Bauer Publishing — first as an intern for TWIST Magazine and later as an online editor for [4TNZ.com](https://www.4tnz.com). In February of 2012, Maggie accepted the position of assistant editor at The Produce News. Over the years her role evolved to include hosting videos for PNTV and handling the company's social media accounts. In February of 2022, Maggie took a step back from her full-time responsibilities at The Produce News to welcome her first child. She now works as a staff writer for the publication. Maggie and her husband, Grant, and son, Griffin, live in Phoenix, AZ.

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