



- Advertisement -

**FPFC Expo informs and excites large crowd**

---

By

Tim Linden, editor at large

May 1, 2023

With a compelling keynote presentation by a woman pioneer, a fascinating retail panel and richly deserving recipients of the produce and floral achievement awards, the 2023 FPFC Expo seemingly met the great expectations of the many people in the crowded exhibit hall.

The [Fresh Produce & Floral Council](#) held its annual event at the Anaheim Convention Center in Southern California on April 27 after an invitation-only event the night before for scores of retailers at the nearby House of Blues. An impressive day-of-the-event registration swelled the attendance to its lofty level of 1,100 registrants.

Keynote speaker Sarah Thomas, who was the first woman referee in the National Football League, delighted the crowd with an entertaining and inspirational talk tracing her path to her NFL debut in 2015, which began after attending a referee conference with her two brothers in 1996. Thomas didn't aspire to be a pioneer, but circumstances and talent led her to the limelight, where she excelled.



FPFC Chairman

Michael Schutt of Raley's with FPFC President Don Gann, keynote breakfast speaker Sarah Thomas, and Ross Johnson and Kent Beesley of the Idaho Potato Commission.

She revealed that she played on the boys' basketball team while in junior high and eventually went to college on a basketball scholarship where she played on the women's team at the University of

---

Mobile in Alabama.

After attending the referee conference, she began working club and high school games, eventually moving on to college football before getting her big break at the professional level. She became the first woman to referee in an NFL playoff game in 2019 and worked the Super Bowl the following year.

Thomas noted that her father taught her never to depend on a man for anything, and she has lived that mantra well as she has raised three kids and continued her career. She told the FPFC audience that there are no road blocks merely speed bumps and said a successful person is self-motivated rather than motivated by outside influences or the desire to be famous. “A successful person is someone who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks that others have thrown at him or her,” she quipped. “Don’t do it to prove anyone wrong. Don’t do it for the recognition. Do it because you love it.”

Todd Linsky, a produce industry veteran who currently is associated with his ag-themed podcast called Todd-versations, was the moderator of a retail panel that featured California produce retailers Daniel Bell of Grocery Outlet, Jon Holder of Superior Grocers and Jacob Cadwallader of Stater Bros. Markets.

Linsky began the conversation discussing California’s new food waste law. The bill was passed in late 2021 with increasingly stricter rules as time goes by. At its core is the goal to significantly reduce landfill waste. Government entities, businesses and individuals are covered by its regulation, but Linsky focused on the rules for grocery stores and foodservice establishments.

The panel agreed that the goal is a good cause but it will impose hardships on retailers. Cadwallader called future compliance “a daunting task” adding that all segments of the supply chain will be impacted. He indicated retailers will be doing an exercise in SKU rationalization with the goal of cutting down on waste.

Holder said Superior already has an aggressive program to reduce shrink by repurposing older product in different ways. For example, produce that can not be displayed in its whole commodity form, often is used in its cut veg program or in the deli as an ingredient in a prepared meal. He also expressed dissatisfaction with another government-mandated program but said the retail industry has a history of reacting quickly and will do so once again. “We will have to get sharper with the pencil,” he said, meaning that the new regulations are costly and food prices will have to rise.

Bell noted that Grocery Outlet’s business model involves most of its 246 stores being individually owned and operated. He said that means there will be 246 different solutions to the issues presented by the new law. He said the costs of compliance will have to be absorbed by the consumer in higher prices. He did call it a “noble idea” but complicated and difficult to achieve.

Linsky called the new law “a game changer for the industry,” indicating that compliance will be very difficult.

Another subject tackled by the group was ag technology, including indoor farming. Holder noted that growers and shippers are searching for ways to cut costs, and innovation in growing and packing is an important element in that goal. As a retail buyer of those products, he embraces technology and welcomes innovations that help the industry feed the world at a lower cost point.

Cadwallader said indoor farming has the added advantage of greatly reducing food recall incidents,

---

which he wholeheartedly endorses. He added that consumers tend to gravitate toward higher-quality product and if ag innovation can deliver on that promise, it is a winner.

The three retailers agreed that increasing produce consumption is a great goal and might best be achieved through education. Bell said social media offers an excellent opportunity to get the healthy eating message to consumers.

Holder said for his team of buyers and in-store personnel, he advocates field tours to get the staff more knowledgeable and excited about fresh produce and flowers. He said a strong floral program and a nice display is a great way to emphasize the advantages of fresh. “Nothing says fresh like a fresh floral bouquet or arrangement,” he said.

Cadwallader said there are three strategies that could work to increase consumption: an educational effort to teach consumers how to pick, choose and prep fresh fruits and vegetables; larger pack sizes, such as 18-ounce blueberries and two-pound clamshells for strawberries, which offer the consumer a better value and encourages them to buy more; and new tastier varieties such as Cotton Candy grapes, which he said convince his young son to eat grapes.

The morning breakfast session of the FPFC Expo kicked off by the awarding of its top two honors to well known industry veterans. Erin Caird of Por La Mar Nursery won the Floral Achievement Award, while Marvin Quebec of Quebec Distributing earned the Norman H. (Buz) Bolstad Award.

Caird pointed out that her mother, Pat Caird, was the fifth recipient of the award when she was so honored in 1992. The younger Caird was clearly thrilled by the honor and dedicated the award to her mother. She also noted that her father was a floral visionary when he started the company with his wife in 1972. She added that the third generation is now well on its way to running the operation.

Quebec was equally moved by his presentation. He revealed that when he told his father he was going into the produce business, his dad approved noting that “everyone has to eat.”

Last year’s winner, Bill Brooks of Westlake Produce Co., presented the award to Quebec, noting that it is his enthusiasm, vision and collaboration that sets him apart. He said Quebec is a tireless supporter of the FPFC and one of the group’s great mentors.

*Top photo: The keynote breakfast retail panel comprising Daniel Bell of Grocery Outlet, Jacob Cadwallader of Stater Bros. Markets and Jon Holder of Superior Grocers was moderated by Todd Linsky of the Todd-Versations Podcast.*

[Tim Linden](#)



---

## About Tim Linden |



Tim Linden grew up in a produce family as both his father and grandfather spent their business careers on the wholesale terminal markets in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Tim graduated from San Diego State University in 1974 with a degree in journalism. Shortly thereafter he began his career at The Packer where he stayed for eight years, leaving in 1983 to join Western Growers as editor of its monthly magazine. In 1986, Tim launched Champ Publishing as an agricultural publishing specialty company.

Today he is a contract publisher for several trade associations and writes extensively on all aspects of the produce business. He began writing for The Produce News in 1997, and currently wears the title of Editor at Large.

[Print](#)