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**A doctor is in the (Progressive Produce) house**

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By

Tim Linden

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Oscar Guzman, director of marketing and sales at [Progressive Produce](#) in Los Angeles, has long been on an educational mission. Now that he has achieved his doctorate, his new goal is to provide others in the produce industry access to the implicit knowledge embedded in the industry — knowledge gained through experiences and on-the-job learning that goes beyond what can be found in textbooks.

Guzman knows of what he speaks as his doctoral research focused on the produce industry, specifically examining knowledge sharing and community building within the Fresh Produce and Floral Council. The title of his 210-page dissertation is “Growing the Future of Agriculture: An Examination of Knowledge Sharing and Community Building in the Fresh Produce and Floral Council.”

He focused on the local produce community and its regional trade association as he has been a member of that community for more than two decades. He started in the business in 2000 as a technician for Perimeter Sales and Merchandising, and stayed with that company until he joined Progressive Produce in the spring of 2017, which is where he has worked ever since.

On May 20, Guzman’s 20-year higher education journey culminated with his graduation from Pepperdine University, receiving a doctorate in education with a specialization in learning technology. That milestone, and the bachelor’s and master’s degrees before it were accomplished while he was a full-time produce industry employee. “That was my day job and I mostly went to school at night,” he said.

He received his bachelor of science in systems and operations management from California State University at Northridge in 2006. That was followed by a master of science, computer and information sciences, from Boston University in 2009. He began his course work for his doctorate eight years ago and has been working on his dissertation for the past four years.

When asked about his motivation for studying the produce industry, Guzman’s passion for the field shines through. He expresses his deep love for the industry and a strong desire to give back, ensuring its sustainability and future. He considers himself fortunate that over the past 23 years he has received invaluable produce education from esteemed industry professionals such as Pat McDowell, Jon Gerondale, Mike Rodriguez, Jack Gyben, Brad Martin, Bob Waldusky and many others. However, he recognizes that not all newcomers will have the same opportunities for mentorship and knowledge sharing that he had. This realization drove him to explore ways to bridge the gap.

“I have always loved education and I love the produce industry,” he said. “My two worlds merged during the pandemic when I started exploring topics for my dissertation.”

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While he appreciates the importance of the apprenticeship programs in the industry, including FPFC's annual effort, Guzman said there is currently a scarcity of such opportunities, as well as a shortage of experts available to teach newcomers. This led him to delve into finding remedies for this situation through his doctoral study.

"The FPFC program is great, but it only reaches 12 apprentices each year," he said. "We need something for all newcomers and the rest of us that are constantly still learning."

Now that Guzman has completed his studies, he is exploring ways to bring what he has learned, apply it to the produce industry and expose more people to the power of knowledge-based learning. "I know a lot of organizations have apprentice programs and are interested in professional development programs," he said. "I don't think I discovered anything new but I do want to help figure out a more accessible, centralized and uniformed body of knowledge for all produce professionals."

He added that it is a critical time in the produce industry as there are many industry experts approaching retirement, and their knowledge will retire with them.

"I plan to collaborate with organizations that share my concern, working together to develop a comprehensive plan that establishes an accessible knowledge base for the implicit knowledge crucial to the industry's future," he said.

He is just beginning this collaborative effort and has reached out to industry leaders for their input and guidance.

While Guzman's doctorate is in education and he is already an adjunct professor at California State University at Los Angeles, he has no intention of leaving his day job to pursue teaching on a full-time basis. "I love teaching but it's not produce," he said. "The produce industry is very dynamic and constantly moving. The more I have been involved in other professions, the more I appreciate the produce industry. My ultimate goal is to see how I can help foster an increased role for education within the produce industry."

He added that Progressive Produce has been very supportive in his pursuit of his education goal and he does plan to use his knowledge to help the company create a better training program.

Guzman noted that his doctorate degree does not become official until his dissertation is published. It is currently going through a peer review and will be published this summer on ProQuest, an online publishing house that focuses on scholarly work.

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## 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.

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