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Leger & Son looking for stability in upcoming watermelon season

By

John Groh

May 9, 2025

[Leger & Son](#), based in Cordele, GA, began harvesting watermelons in northern Florida and Georgia the last week of April with hopes for a stable market this season.

“Harvest just started this week, and it’s been a little stop-and-go with no real rhythm yet,” said Jordan Carter, director of sales and marketing. “But as more production starts coming on, I’m sure we’ll hit out stride.”

Carter said the conditions have been good so far and she is hoping for a strong crop. “The weather has been a little dry, but that’s better than too much rain,” said Carter. “We had some pretty strong winds in Florida throughout the growing process, so there could possibly be a little damage from that. But overall things are looking great.”

She said that Leger expects increased business this year due to additional acreage planted in both Florida and Georgia.

“We try to make a point of upping acreage each year by 50-75 acres in each of the areas where we grow,” she said. “Also, our customer base has been growing and we are seeing more business from existing clientele.”

Carter said she believes the growing customer base is the result of word-of-mouth referrals as well as the company being more visible in the industry. The visibility, she said, comes from company officials being involved in the industry and serving on board and in volunteer leadership capacities.

“We have small team, but we work hard and work together very well,” said Carter.

That small team includes a pair of third-generation members of the Leger family, who are up-and-

comers in the produce industry.

“Bailey and Cole Leger are Greg’s daughter and son, and they are very involved with the family business, which is great for our company,” said Carter.

The duo, both in their mid-20s, recently traveled to Florida to oversee packing operations there, and Carter said it represented a passing-of-the-baton moment for the Leger family.

“Cole has taken over production and quality control and is really doing a great job,” said Carter. “Bailey is taking on our food safety and sustainability efforts and is also doing great. They are both young and eager, and we are so proud of the way they are stepping up into leadership roles at the company.”

Regarding the season ahead, Carter said the main challenges she foresees are related to demand and labor.

“Demand is often tied to weather, so if we have hot, dry days that usually spikes demand, so we’ll be hoping for that during the summer,” said Carter.

With regard to labor, Carter said it has been a tough issue for agriculture in general, but Leger is in a good position this season. “We typically get the same farm labor contractors each year and that was the case again this year. I think it’s a testament to how well we treat them and the relationships we have built with them.”

Carter said this season also is somewhat bittersweet, as it marks the first since the passing of family patriarch Buddy Leger, who died in February.

“Even though he has stepped back and was not as involved in the business as he had been in the past, we still think about him often and miss him,” she said. “It’s tough not having him around, but he left us in good hands.”

[John Groh](#)

About John Groh |

John Groh graduated from the University of San Diego in 1989 with a bachelors of arts degree in English. Following a brief stint as a sportswriter covering the New York Giants football team, he joined The Produce News in 1995 as an assistant editor and worked his way up the ranks, becoming publisher in 2006. He and his wife, Mary Anne, live in northern New Jersey in the suburbs of New York City.

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