

Bite-Size Info for the Produce Industry

# the SNACK

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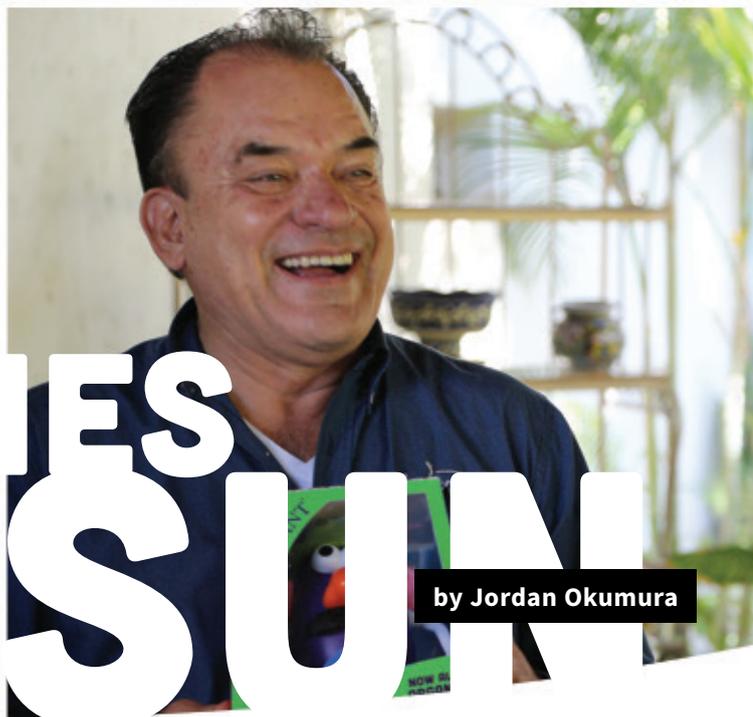
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From the creators of AndNowUKnow



# HERE COMES THE SUN

by Jordan Okumura

“Pioneers get shot, settlers get rich. Yet we’re still alive and well,” Danny Mandel, President and CEO of Nogales, Arizona-based SunFed tells me. “It’s about staying on the cutting edge, or even in front of it.”

SunFed recently celebrated its 20th anniversary during the 2014 season, and as it transitions into this next era

of progressive growth, the company has been building a dream team of the best in the industry, driven by a deep desire to evolve their partnerships and relationships.

“Today, there are so many opportunities to cultivate our business model. SunFed’s grower/members are predominantly young professionals who love growing and being the best at what they do. To ensure that they



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continue to receive the marketing expertise they deserve, requires the same level of professionalism from the marketing team as we interface with our loyal and valued customers,” Danny says.

SunFed offers a growing line of produce that includes squash, eggplant, bell peppers, hot peppers, cucumbers, cantaloupe, honeydew, and watermelon. The company is also Fair Trade Certified on nearly its entire line of conventional and organic produce products under its Perfect Produce® lineup.

Mark Cassius, Chief Innovation Officer and Brett Burdsal, Director of Marketing, are two of the most

recent additions to join the SunFed team, aligning with Matt Mandel, VP of Sales and Marketing, at the helm. Craig Slate, Director/GM Texas Division is another important addition to the team and will be laying the groundwork for SunFed’s Texas operations.

“Mark and Brett arrived at SunFed with a good understanding of the opportunities and challenges that our dynamic industry faces, and they embrace all of the things that SunFed does well, yet have the capacity to push frontiers and expand on SunFed’s heritage,” Danny notes.

Mark Cassius joined the team last year, on the eve of celebrating SunFed’s 20th anniversary. Mark spent the past two decades building a strong background in sales and marketing, bringing a plethora of insights from his different roles in the industry. Most recently, he served as Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing for EuroFresh. Prior to that, he spent 10 years as Vice President of Sales with Del Monte. Now with



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SunFed, Mark focuses on broadening SunFed’s reach with increased category management and innovative packaging ideas.

Brett is also a jack-of-all trades, having worked in hybrid positions in sales and marketing at both EuroFresh with Mark, and most recently with Columbia Marketing International, Inc. In his role with SunFed, Brett brings a repertoire of creative design, marketing, brand management, sales, and new product development to further expand on the SunFed product line.

“This year we are focusing on our core competencies that allow us to further develop our brand with grower/ members by helping them identify new seed varieties resulting in novel products that will consequently expand the products we can offer our customers,” Mark says.

“We have been so successful thus far because of our willingness to evolve, while also remaining faithful to the disciplines that have gotten us here,” Matt tells



me. “Equally important is how we treat our people. It has been a part of our business model since the early days when my dad, Danny, began the company.”

After graduating from college and a brief foray in grad school, Danny worked in a couple of different fields, but nothing that held his interest. At the age of 30, he called his father, who had worked in different areas of the produce business, and asked him if he wanted to teach him his trade. This entailed moving to Pompano Beach, Florida.

Danny had been interested in the changes that were occurring throughout the business world that collectively made up the trend of globalization. Yet walking the Pompano State Farmers Market, asking questions on why there was such variation from box to box of produce,



**“A rising tide raises all boats.”**



only brought about an answer that was invariably a reference in one form or another to Mother Nature. “As though fresh produce got a pass when it came to consistency and standardization compared to other industries,” Danny says.

Something that struck Danny as a “Nirvana moment” occurred when he was reading an article on the front page of USA Today in 1991. It described how Motorola had developed protocols to be applied to its

manufacturing that measured error rates with the idea of bringing errors down to zero. Motorola was sharing this with other tech firms with the idea that “a rising tide raises all boats.” The concept was Six Sigma and it was the perfect vehicle for what was to become SunFed.

Using measurements, and a healthy respect for science, SunFed developed state of the art protocols that took it rapidly to the top of its field. They formed a close relationship with StePac, the Israeli company that created

the modified atmosphere/ modified humidity liner for fresh produce. SunFed became their R&D arm for many years, applying this technology to all of SunFed's lines of produce.

In 1998, SunFed introduced consumer packaging for fresh green beans. Shortly thereafter they introduced ozone in water used in packing houses in Mexico. Even today, ambient ozone eliminates ethylene from the environment in the warehouses located on the SunFed campus in Rio Rico.

So how did Matt find his way into the family business? He started in the business during high school, working in the warehouse after school, repacking hot peppers and trying madly to remember not to wipe his eyes before washing his hands.

After graduating and dabbling in the world of IT, Matt went into the restaurant industry, but couldn't find his calling.

"After a time, my dad came to me and said the business was in a good place and poised for growth and he needed someone with good critical thinking skills," Matt tells me. "Here I am more than eight years later and I can't imagine doing anything else."

As SunFed continues to vie for its share of market penetration, the team is looking to establish a consistent, unique and exciting program for 2015.

"Overall, we are looking to grow the Perfect Produce® concept and achieve a further reach into our consumer base with brand recognition. We are more than just a good trade name. We want to pull back the curtain, and get more granular; talk about our grower/member network and social programs, our equitable food sourcing and the fact that two of our largest farms are Fair Trade Certified," Mark says.

"We are creating opportunities to get closer to our ultimate consumers with a new consumer packaging campaign at retail," Brett tells me.

This new concerted marketing push will not only offer differentiation to the retailer but elevates the marketing and design bar to a whole new level. By way of innovative packaging designs and produce displays, Brett is evolving an already established brand into a vivid and vibrant message that communicates the progressive nature, determination (and needless to say, sense of fun) of the SunFed team.

"There is a unique way that we can speak to consumers, and I think we have found it," Brett says of the Lichtenstein and pop-art inspired artwork, packaging, and message. Inspired by 30's and 40's linear art, this new look for the Perfect Produce® program communicates a fresh, relevant range of merchandising solutions focusing more on what the consumers want with bright packaging and designs, big bold colors, and dynamic shapes and graphics.



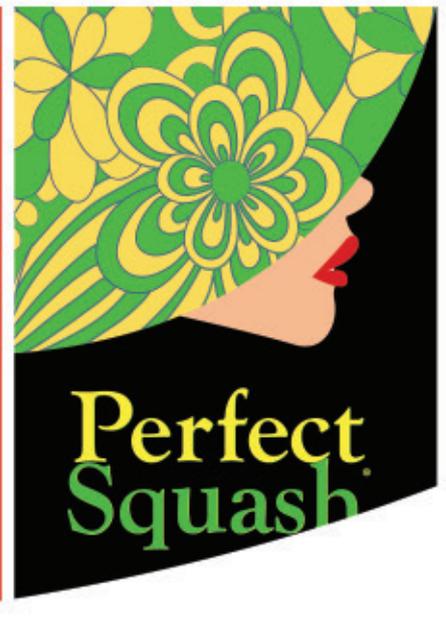
**"We are more than just a good trade name. We want to pull back the curtain and get more granular..."**

"In reality, I am not a true salesman by nature. I need to bring something tangible and creative to the table," Brett says. "I'll say that 75%, if not more, of what I create comes from meeting with the customer, the retailer. You cannot do it in a bubble. I found that if you try and do it that way you will not be as successful. Give people something they don't necessarily expect—then you differentiate your product," he says.

SunFed's passion for excellence keeps the team constantly evaluating their processes from looking at ways to minimize the grower/members' use of resources, to re-engineering their boxes and discovering new technologies and strategies.

"We really want to deliver the whole package to our retail, wholesale, and foodservice partners," Brett says.

"Consumers buy with their eyes a good deal of the time and our program offers the right ratio of color, imagery and text to drive traffic and increase the ring at the register," Matt tells me.



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“I sleep well at night knowing that I am part of a business that provides healthy, safe, and good tasting food to our community and to our nation. It is not easy to compete these days on any level, so we need to cover our bases and provide those core competencies that will differentiate us and our customers,” Mark says.

“We all hold ourselves to a higher standard.”

That’s why Perfect Produce® is on the box. 