



# Looking Upward At Howard Marguleas

BY JIM PREVOR, PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**W**hen the Senate Commerce Committee recently passed the Lee/Gardner Amendment to the *FAA Reauthorization Act*, it moved to eliminate a regulation that has banned civil supersonic flight over the United States since 1973. In so doing, it made likely that we will soon see civil supersonic flight — grounded since the Concorde ceased operations — fly again, and that, even more, for the very first time we will see supersonic passenger planes jetting across the American mainland.

In this image of speed and progress of innovation and hope for the future, I thought of the life and passing of Howard Marguleas. For those old enough to remember, there was a time in which Howard defined produce innovation. After founding Sun World, it seemed as if no week passed without another innovative product: DiVine Ripe tomatoes, seedless watermelon, Le Rouge Royale peppers and a cornucopia of grape and tree fruit varieties, just to name a few. Before anyone was talking about proprietary produce or club varieties, he saw the necessity of taking produce beyond a commodity and, in so doing, he set the pattern for innovative marketers who have ever-since strived to emulate and build upon the vision of Howard Marguleas.

It was not just new products that marked his innovative spirit. He took a long-established family business (Howard's father, Joseph, was chairman of United) and sold it to Tenneco, bringing fresh capital, new ideas and management expertise to the produce industry. He was a founding partner in purchasing the Irvine Ranch, along with captains of industry, such as Al Taubman, Henry Ford II, Max Fisher and Herbert Allen. The development of the Irvine Ranch literally transformed Orange County, CA. He was entrepreneurial and innovative in business, selling interests to United Fruit, buying them back, developing innovative growing operations for mangos and much more.

He was civic-minded and philanthropic, and a winner of almost all the accolades the industry had to give. He served on many government boards, was a trustee of numerous educational institutions and devoted time to Jewish and health organizations.

The inspiring thing about Howard though was, however much time passed, and he was 82 when he died, he was always focused on the future. Every few months, I would get an e-mail or a phone call about something I had written and he wanted to discuss the implications for the industry, or he had some tidbit of knowledge he wanted to share with me. Sometimes he passed on what was always a valuable nugget of advice. Though my grandfather bought from Howard's father — and he knew my father well — unlike many others, our conversations didn't dwell on history; he talked about the nexus

between consumer demand and prosperity for production agriculture.

Thirty years ago, he advised me to watch innovations coming out of the Volcani Institute in Israel because it would change the world through its efforts to make it feasible for countries lacking conventional resources to grow crops.

It was not just in the industry or via civic work that Howard inspired. He and his beloved wife, Ardith, were in a terrible accident some years back. She broke her neck, and he was in the hospital for months having many surgeries. When he was out of the hospital, he just moved ahead, handling a situation in which others might have fallen into despair, with grace.

There is a sense in which Howard's passing is of little interest to the trade. Only one of his four children, David, executive vice president at Sun World and president at Sun World Innovations, remains active in the industry.

Yet, the spirit with which Howard interacted with the trade is not a spirit the industry can afford to lose. His ever-upward, ever-onward ethos, in which innovation was prioritized along with the idea of one's name being one's greatest asset, and also that there is a requirement to give back to the community... these are components of character that are not as common today as they once were; and the loss of a man who carried them so intrinsically

is a loss that will not be easily recouped.

I've had the pleasure of being friends with David for many decades. He stood in my wedding, and we have worked on many projects, both personal and professional, through the years. Perhaps he would be embarrassed to know how often, and with such love and admiration, his father would recount to me David's accomplishments in spearheading industry efforts around proprietary produce.

David is the only friend I have ever made as an act of intentional will. An industry consultant named Stan Silverzweig was working for Sun World and with me, and Stan told me that I should reach out and try to become better friends with David. When I asked him why, Stan told me that David and I had something in common, and he thought we would both value the friendship. I asked Stan what, exactly, we had in common and Stan said: "You are both the sons of extraordinary fathers." In time, I came to understand that to be true, and what an incredible blessing it was.

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