Bruce Peterson Asks The Question: 
How Can Today’s Produce Associations Serve The Industry?  
...And Who Will Pay For It? 

Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit, September 14, 2020

We’ve been running a series of pieces discussing what the best options are for the produce industry in terms of the organization, or re-organization, of its national trade associations. We’ve discussed this issue, literally, for more than a quarter century, and you can see some of that discussion here.

Now, as the pandemic started we raised the question in a different way:

Shouldn’t Our Industry Associations Try To Support One Another?  
After Coronavirus, The Time May Be Right To Look At PMA/United Merger Once Again

Then we received a note from a former Chairman of one of the two large national associations, which led to this piece:

Pundit’s Mailbag — Welcome Comments About Possible PMA/United Merger

The situation has moved ahead. Both associations depend heavily on events for income, and with the live versions of United’s convention, the PMA foodservice event and PMA’s annual Fresh Summit, all cancelled this year, there is financial pressure on both associations.

PMA has laid off substantial numbers of long-tenured employees. This is not surprising. When your business disappears, layoffs are to be expected. And, of course, PMA is a very financially strong association with millions in reserves, substantial real estate assets via ownership of its headquarters and other assets. So PMA can handle this type of situation.

Still, revenue lost is revenue lost. And looking ahead, many parts of the industry — say, the foodservice sector — may take years to get back to a situation where they can or will support industry associations in the way they once did.

Now we received a letter from Bruce Peterson, who, of course, built Walmart’s produce program virtually from scratch and made it the largest in the world. He also was always active in industry associations, including becoming chairman of PMA. Bruce shared with us some thoughts:

http://www.perishablepundit.com/index.php?date=09/14/2020  
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With respects to PMA, United, and trade organizations, in general, I think a few questions need to be answered.

Aside from what you mentioned, I would add: What is it that the industry wants (needs) to do, and who is going to pay for it?

In the case of PMA, the mission was always: to bring buyers and sellers together. And the trade show (Fresh Summit) was the pinnacle of that mission. It was also the cash cow that amounted for over 50% of PMA’s operating budget.

But it also did something else. It brought the major industry leaders, especially on the buy side, together on task forces and boards to accomplish broad industry issues.

Industry icons, such as Dick Spezzano, Bob DiPiazza, Dick Mead, Ted Campbell, Tim York, Grant Hunt, Claude Moldenhauer, and a host of others were not only willing to surface and discuss issues, but actually had the clout in their own companies to make things happen. Standardized pallets, PLU’s, computer-based training, RPC’s, PBH, and other initiatives… these all became possible because of industry leadership. And with respect to United, Reggie Griffin was tremendously influential during the Country of Origin discussions.

So two questions beg to be asked: What are the pressing industry issues today? And where is the leadership that has the clout to make things happen?

While I admire the staffs and CEO’s of both PMA and United, they can’t make ANYTHING happen without the support of the major retailers and suppliers. And that was the magic of both of these organizations historically. Yes, it was fun to go to the trade shows and catch up with friends and colleagues (if walls could talk!). But the revenue generated from these events enabled industry dialogue and ACTION to occur.

So it brings us back to the question: What is needed from an association standpoint to serve broad industry initiatives? These can be marketing issues, food safety/traceability issues, trade issues, or regulatory issues. But these issues need to be identified, prioritized, and communicated.

And who pays for it? With so many national and regional shows, funds continue to get fragmented. Does anyone remotely think this can continue? And while the pandemic has forced United and PMA to go virtual, does anyone think this can raise the same revenue as live trade shows? And more importantly, it’s a reflection of how today’s buyer goes about his or her business (a whole other discussion).

The point of strategic dialogue is to keep choices in FRONT of you. If the industry doesn’t have serious discussion of the future of trade organizations and how they are funded, I fear that decisions will be forced upon them. And that is NEVER the best outcome.

Indeed, Bruce is asking many of the questions that need to be asked.

We think it is a very problematic situation for the produce industry and the future of its associations.
What people who don’t study these things often do not realize is that the design of produce industry associations is very unusual. In produce, we have vertical associations that reach down through the supply chain, thus representing the entire produce industry. In contrast, it is common for industry associations in other industries to be horizontal, meaning they represent a particular tranche of the supply chain.

Some may allow outside vendors or customers on the board, but there is no doubt who that association represents. So, at the Food Marketing Institute (FMI), for example, they may put a Coca-Cola representative on the Board. FMI does this so they can get financial resources from vendors; they do this so really powerful and knowledgeable companies such as Coca-Cola can share research and knowledge. They do it for a lot of reasons, but there is no thought that the association is representing Coca-Cola. It represents the supermarket retailers.

Increasingly, though, consolidation among retailers means that the vertical model of produce industry associations is fraying. For years, PMA had a policy that over 50% of its board had to be from the buy-side. That has fallen by the wayside. The fastest growing segments in produce retailing are deep discounters — Aldi, Lidl, the various dollar stores. Not one of these are represented on PMA’s board.

When Bruce Peterson was chairman of PMA, he was the Senior Vice President of Perishables for Walmart. To put that heft in perspective, he was in charge of more sales than Safeway had, in total, of all groceries at that time. Walmart still has a representative on PMA’s board, Laura Himes. By all accounts, she is a great person and a valued contributor to the board, but she is many, many slots down from carrying the internal heft of being in charge of all perishables at Walmart.

After almost disappearing when its trade show shrunk due to the prominence of PMA, we sense United has gained in strength and support over the years. This is mostly because the industry recognizes the importance of government relations. Somewhat ironically, the decline of United’s trade show made industry members think long and hard about what was important and what they were willing to pay for.

The long-term decline of United’s trade show led to a more committed membership, one willing to pay to support United and its important work in government relations. (As an aside, when the Pundit was growing up, the United show was, by far, the largest trade show in the industry, and we would listen to the Pundit parents discussing with excitement their winter trip to the convention; we still remember the Pundit Mom’s excitement when one year they held the convention in...
In this pandemic moment, PMA has done webinars and town hall meetings, and they are mostly very good. But they are nothing the industry needs an association to do. For a long time, PMA’s powerful trade show has distorted what the industry really wants. By offering deep discounts on the show to companies that are PMA members, PMA has obscured the question as to how many people would actually want to pay to support PMA and for how much money.

Bruce Peterson is saying that we shouldn’t be on automatic pilot. What are we, as an industry, trying to accomplish by establishing and maintaining associations?

How are we measuring whether we are achieving these goals?

And is it possible we might achieve our goals better with one consolidated organization?

In our discussions with industry leaders, we are hearing an increasing interest in a merger not only of PMA and United, but also of bringing the Produce for Better Health Foundation into the fold. There is a growing consensus that government relations and consumer-focused efforts to increase consumption are the two most important priorities for produce industry organizations.

PMA did fantastic work starting engagement with overseas produce companies. Back in the day when Jack Pandol was leading PMA’s International Trade Symposium, it was a fantastic thing. But now international trade is half the supply chain.

PMA remains the trade’s primary resource in terms of financial support. The industry needs to pay attention to the questions that Bruce Peterson poses.

If you feel you have thoughts that could help the industry to advance, please let us know here.
CHADWICK BOSEMAN’S UNTOLD STORY
What Hasn’t Been Said About His Extraordinary Family, Community and Personal Effort

Jim Prevor’s Perishable Pundit, September 14, 2020

We have been gradually rolling out our new Perishable Pundit Podcast.

You can listen, watch a video or read the text of our Premier Episode at this link:

Destructive Protests Hurt The Ones Most In Need

The second episode — and a list of industry luminaries who were kind enough to send in praise — is at this link:

Despite COVID-19, Schools Should Not Throw Away A Student's Shot

We continue to get really positive feedback on the launch. For example, what a nice note we received from this industry luminary:

I wanted to reach out and commend you on the excellent PODCAST, and overall direction. The format works great, and I enjoy listening/watching while I prepare for my day. It really simplifies my already time crunched morning.

I have always enjoyed your thorough analysis of all subjects.

Sometimes it is much easier to listen versus read.

—Tim Riley
President
The Giumarra Companies
Los Angeles, California

With the Giumarra Companies busy flying Cessna Aircraft filled with Henry III variety peaches from Reedley to LA to supply Gelson’s, Tim needs every moment he can get!

For our third episode, we thought we would take a look at the passing of Chadwick Boseman, a truly amazing young man. Though he is getting praise from all corners, very few are looking at what really made him a success. It is an important story for all of us as individuals and also as voters.
Chadwick Boseman, the actor who died at only 43 years of age, played many important and iconic roles. There was Jackie Robinson, the baseball player who broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball. He played James Brown, “The Godfather of Soul.” He played Thurgood Marshall, who argued important cases, such as Brown v. Board of Education before the Supreme Court, and ultimately became the first African-American Supreme Court Justice.

These starring roles represented a kind of “Who’s Who” of black culture and history in America.

He was most famous, though, for starring in “Black Panther.” This film, from Disney’s Marvel imprint, earned more than $1.3 billion at the box office and became the first movie of its kind — a mass market superhero movie led by a black cast. Boseman played the role of T’Challa, who would become the King of Wakanda. He was the one known as the Black Panther.

Most of Boseman’s most prominent roles came after he became sick. Upon his death, his family issued a statement:

“Chadwick was diagnosed with stage III colon cancer in 2016, and battled with it these last 4 years as it progressed to stage IV.

A true fighter, Chadwick persevered through it all, and brought you many of the films you have come to love so much. From Marshall to Da 5 Bloods, August Wilson’s Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom and several more, all were filmed during and between countless surgeries and chemotherapy.

It was the honor of his career to bring King T’Challa to life in Black Panther.”

Of course, his death is enormously sad. A man of such talents struck down in his prime. So, it is not surprising that the Internet has been filled with every co-star, colleague and luminary singing his praises.

Black Panther was an enjoyable movie for everyone, but it was especially important for black children. There is value in seeing people like yourself, as a King, as a super hero.

I do not know if it is likely, but it would be very good if, in time, the real example of Boseman’s true life could turn out to be more important than the beyond-reality powers of Black Panther.

The first, and perhaps most important, thing to note about Chadwick Boseman is that his parents, Leroy and Carolyn Boseman, are still married. They raised Chadwick and his brothers in a small city named Anderson in South Carolina. Chadwick acknowledged that he experienced racism, had been called racist names, he even explained that he been run off the road by trucks flying the Confederate flag.

But, growing up, he went home every day to his family. To his brothers, his mother and father. They weren’t rich, but his mom was a nurse, and his father worked at a textile factory and had a side gig managing an upholstery business.

While Chadwick Boseman is honored for being exceptional, it is worth noting how even simple things in one’s
surroundings can make an extraordinary difference.

Family structure has been collapsing in America, especially in the black community. By 2011, fully 72% of black babies born in America were born to unmarried mothers. Consider the fact that many couples divorce after they have children, and one realizes that Chadwick Boseman was born into a superhero black family. One that sustained marriage and a nuclear family when few others did.

This engagement was not just a matter of blood or abstract fact. An article on The Netline pointed to his parent’s deep involvement in Chadwick’s life:

Leroy and Carolyn were both heavily involved in Boseman’s career, as they frequently supported Chadwick when he was on set. As Chadwick prepared to perform a stunt during 42’s filming, Leroy protested because he was scared for his son’s safety.

At the time, Chadwick was 35, but it didn’t prevent his father from showing concern. The film’s director, Bryan Helgeland, stopped filming until the older Boseman felt comfortable about his son’s safety.

Chadwick’s parents were around during Black Panther’s filming, but Chadwick joked that didn’t let them see anything dangerous. He told BET.com:

“We laughed about that too. He definitely came to the set. It’s an experience where if you have your mom and dad with you, you want them to experience this thing. It’s something that connects you to who you are. This is a family experience. It’s a family movie.”

The second important thing to note about Chadwick Boseman is that, beyond his own family, he was supported in his rise by the broader black community.

Chadwick attended Howard University, a historically black college. He studied there under Phylicia Rashad of The Cosby Show. She saw in him talent. Brett Malec, writing for the E!-online website, explained what happened:

“…he was studying directing, not acting, at Howard University. Howard required directing students to take acting classes and one summer, Boseman’s teacher, The Cosby Show star Phylicia Rashad, wanted him to enter a summer course at Oxford. When Boseman couldn’t pay for the summer program abroad, Rashad enlisted a friend to help out with Boseman’s tuition.

The Marshall actor wouldn’t learn until sometime later that it was none other than the Training Day star who generously provided the funds.

"I've basically been holding this secret my whole career. When I came back, I got a beneficiary letter and it said Denzel Washington paid for you," Boseman recounted in 2018 during a Tonight Show interview with Jimmy Fallon. "I was like, 'What?!' I never wanted to say that until I met him."

Boseman and Washington finally met in person at the 2018 NYC premiere of Black Panther, and their exchange was sweet and hilarious. According to Boseman, when he introduced himself and told the story about Oxford, Washington cracked, "Oh so that's why I'm here? You owe me money. I came to collect!"

It reminds us of countless examples of people who have seen potential in their kinsmen and supported them. Alexander Hamilton was sent to America and Kings College (now Columbia University) by a group on the Caribbean island of St. Croix after a hurricane decimated it, and they recognized he had potential that could be realized with education and opportunity. So Phylicia Rashad and Denzel Washington saw in their kinsman potential that could be realized, and they invested to make it happen.
Third, and finally, it is important to note the extraordinary strength of character Chadwick Boseman exhibited. The reference his family made in the post after his death to surgeries and chemotherapy hint at how difficult things were for Chadwick... for years.

The pain, the exhaustion and his insistence that it all be kept secret... he exhibited the kind of quiet dignity that is, in fact, reminiscent of many of the characters he portrayed.

We live now in the time of the “Black Lives Matter” protests. Nobody who is familiar with American history can do anything but hope that these protests succeed, that they lead to less racism and more success for the black community.

Yet, in looking at Chadwick Boseman’s story, one sees elements very similar to those that led to the success of other ethnic groups. Within the lifetime of people still living, six million Jews were thrown into ovens at the hands of the “highly cultured” Germans. Yet the Jews, with strong families and an ethos favoring education and investment, came to prosper. More successful and established German Jews in America invested to help Eastern European Jews as they arrived.

The Japanese were literally placed in camps in America. They lost billions in property due to being unable to operate their businesses and farm their land. Their lives were put on hold while opportunities abated. Again though, with a strong family structure and culture of mutual aid, the Japanese now are more successful than the average American.

I’ve been reading almost every comment written about Chadwick Boseman. They are, virtually without exception, admiring and kind. What I cannot find, however, is any acknowledgement of the crucial ingredients that led to his achievements.

Everything we know tells us that Chadwick Boseman would have been far less likely to make it to Howard University if his parents had never married... or his father ran off after impregnating his girlfriend... or his mother had never gone to school long enough to become a nurse.

Chadwick Boseman would have had much more difficulty making a success out of his life if people of the same heritage, like Phylicia Rashad and Denzel Washington, didn’t work together to help one of their own.

Finally, when confronted with horrible calamities, like disease, Chadwick Boseman could have just quit. But he suffered through great difficulty to achieve so very much.

So, in a world of marches for policy changes and attitude shifts, the example of Chadwick Boseman stands to tell us a different story — that success comes mostly from family and extended family and personal effort.

Marches and riots can do damage to lives and physical property, but, despite their righteous call to improve racial equality, their biggest detriment is that they are a distraction to the real lessons that need to be learned.

They teach children that success is something only outsiders can bestow. Yet the truth is that success has to be earned. Family and community contribute greatly to success because they help determine individual behavior.

The Black Panther story includes a Shakespearian, or maybe Freudian, battle over the throne of Wakanda. Michael B. Jordan plays Killmonger, T’Challa’s cousin who grew up without family in an American housing project. In a piece titled The Power of “Black Panther” Is Black Family, author Kofi Outlaw explains:

*It’s important to remember that Killmonger is never depicted as being less intelligent or strong than his African cousins — quite the opposite, in fact. Killmonger is repeatedly shown in the film to be just as cunning and powerful as T’Challa, but what ultimately determines their respective fates is family: T’Challa is saved and redeemed by his family, while Killmonger has no true family ties, and is consumed by the pain of that emptiness and loss.*
It is useful to remember that family ties cannot be created by government. So if family is key, the protesters in the streets call for policies that cannot meet that primary need. Indeed T’Challa says to Killmonger “Your heart is full of hatred. You are not fit to be king.”

The protesters in the streets are angry. They look for others to solve their problems, or they just look for vengeance. Neither path will bring progress for the next generation.

ABC celebrated the legacy of Chadwick Boseman by showing the Black Panther film followed by an ABC News Special titled, “Chadwick Boseman — A Tribute for a King.” The truth, though — and a spectacular one it is — is that Chadwick Boseman was not a King. He was black kid from the south who could have easily fallen into the underclass. He was saved by the triumvirate that define the opportunity America has always offered: An intact family that cared for, loved him and tried to help him succeed. An extended family of his own community that recognized his talent and potential and invested to see it realized. Finally, by his own discipline and diligence, he quietly applied himself to achieve great things.

Chadwick Boseman’s life points to the importance of family, community and personal effort. If you really want to look below the surface, Chadwick’s life is filled with lessons.

Are we willing to learn? Are we willing to listen? Are we willing to acknowledge the truth?

If you would like to receive notification and a link when each new issue is out, please let us know here.
From The Pages Of PRODUCE BUSINESS:
College Begins For Jr. Pundit Primo

Jim Prevor's Perishable Pundit, September 14, 2020

In our Fruits of Thought column in PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine, we’ve had the opportunity to share many personal things with the industry. Joyous moments such as weddings, births and other accomplishments. We’ve also shared the loss of friends and family and other saddening moments.

Many in the industry have met the Jr. Pundit Primo, aka William, our first born son. We’ve chronicled his birth, his toddler taste buds and much more, including these:

Lessons From My Mother: How We Live Our Lives and The Influence We Exert on Others When We Are Gone … No One Need be an Orphan

Part Of The Industry

School Lunch & The Supermarket Deli

Well, the young man is off to college now, heading to Cornell. Probably many in the industry have loved ones just off to school, and many stuck at home in virtual education. Normally, we would leave the column there but we received this note:

While I always enjoy the PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine for its general info I especially find the "Fruits of Thought" column interesting and thought-provoking….particularly the most recent article.

During these crazy times, it is good to see the reflections and vision with both personal and business perspectives.

Take care and best to you!

—Marty Craner
Owner & President
B&C Fresh Sales
Orange, California

We thought we would share the column we wrote about the Jr. Pundit Primo heading up to Ithaca, New York, to begin his college adventure. To all those with friends or family trying to navigate education in these most challenging times, we wish you every good fortune!

Hope Amidst Challenging Times
Jim Prevor's Fruits of Thought
My wife, Debbie, was pregnant, with my eldest son, William, when she called me. I was in the car, and she said to turn on the radio. The World Trade Center in New York had been hit.

I’ve written many pieces about William over the years. When I launched Jim Prevor’s Perishable Pundit, he received the moniker of the Junior Pundit Primo (his brother is Segundo Pundit), but I still remember the horrible anger and sadness knowing he was being born into a world of such conflict and hatred.

I still feel the bitterness I felt of the lost lives and resources wasted as the buildings in New York collapsed. But I always believed in myself, my family, my friends and my country. And, somehow, some way, I believed in my newborn son.

He has not disappointed. At 18 years of age, he is already one of the world’s leading experts on Disney, amusement parks and animated characters. He has his own websites and a global network of fellow travelers who consult daily. He is honest and honorable; he is dutiful and loving; he has become, very much, his own man.

And his father, whose primary job all these years has been to shield him… to give a chance for William to be William in a world filled with terrorists and, well, as we would be reminded, disease… confesses a little despair at the current moment.

As I write this column, William, with his mother and brother, are working their way up to Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, driving around Pennsylvania, because that is a non-quarantine state, unlike our home state of Florida. So, with the intent to fill my son’s websites with more content, they are visiting Hershey Park, Sesame Place and other amusement parks. In the bizarre world we live in, it was decided by the powers that be that interacting with hundreds of children and staff members in Pennsylvania is safer than staying confined in our home in Florida.

In a moment of weakness, or maybe just love… out of a desire to protect him, out of anger and despair that outside forces would, once again, define his journey… this father thought he would shield him. I urged him to postpone college, take a year off, and we could find work and engagement.

Yet the mature young-man William put his arm around his father, and showing wisdom when his father felt fear and despair, said, “Don’t worry, Dad. This is my time. I must move forward; in the end this will be my great generational experience, and I have to be a part of it and make the most of it.”

Then I shed a tear, for whatever the future might be — what wars, disease or other horror he might confront — I felt I had done my job. For I was wrong, and he was right. The future always lies ahead, and it is pointless to fear it. We must make of it what we can; we must be what we can be.

It is not easy. So many friends in the foodservice arena are losing everything. We started with an idea for the industry’s first magazine, Produce Business, but wound up hosting events around the world. All mostly cancelled or postponed.

But when a disease rolls across the world, you must be grateful if you don’t have it or if you get it and recover.

Of course, it is not only COVID-19 that troubles us these days. There are riots, and there is racial tension. Many my son’s age do not feel free to speak. On the other hand, many speak too much and too quickly, without having done the study necessary to help us move forward. It is easy to be fearful and easy to fall into despair. But what would that get us?

We must trust that the institutions our forefathers built can bear the strain and that young people, as they grow, can gain
the wisdom to build, not destroy.

William was born a month after the Twin Towers fell in New York. My wife had just given birth and was sleeping soundly. I sat holding William in my left arm as I typed with my right. I wrote this:

October 19 seems to be an auspicious date for launching great things. Not only is October 19 my newborn son’s birthday, but it was on October 19, 1985, that we launched PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine.

The creation of both reflected a faith in the possibilities of tomorrow and a determination to be part of doing great things.

We have always worked hard to fully develop PRODUCE BUSINESS magazine, and we are gratified that from that small dream has sprung not merely a worthy industry resource but, indeed, a whole company. Yet, we feel certain the potential is unlimited.

Now, with young William, we have much work to do. But it is joyous work indeed.

Perhaps with bombs dropping in Afghanistan, Anthrax attacks on the home front, economic decline and countless other miseries detailed in the daily papers, these are not the best of times to run a business or have a son.

But both PRODUCE BUSINESS and my son have had the inestimable good fortune to be born here in the United States of America. One does not have to be a great expert in history to realize that there are few burdens indeed that could outweigh the benefits of that blessing.

We are being tested as a nation. The burden feels heavy. Yet, if there are enough young people like William in his generation, then we will endure and prevail. And this father will be proud to have, in a little way, contributed to the solution.
If there is one thing we can learn from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that one never knows where the next big problem is going to come from. Today we have a letter from a key player in transportation who argues that the industry is not doing all it can to make sure that transportation doesn’t detract from the quality and safety of our products. We see all the time how desperate many shippers are to find a truck so they can fulfill an order. Many have no procedures or mechanism to inspect these trucks, much less a willingness to send one away because it is substandard.

Many receivers also have no procedure to make sure what is received has traveled in a truck that meets proper sanitary standards. Our letter-writer is in transportation, but comes from a robust produce industry heritage. We should pay attention:

After nearly three years of preaching “clean the trailer” to people in both the transportation and fresh produce industries, I’m finding that rather than running out of energy to stay on mission, I’m actually feeling greater resolve to keep pushing this education effort ‘uphill.’

I decided to send you a note to let you know that I see and admire your willingness to lead the charge over issues that would probably get ignored because there is either lack of consensus or strong opinions among influential industry leaders.

You really are not afraid to say what needs to be said, to whomever needs to hear it. As my kids say, ‘You’re straight up!’ I find that inspirational!

And on another note, more related to PRODUCE BUSINESS, I read two articles by Don Harris that are particularly relevant to the lack of trailer sanitation.

First, in his recent one about a Time for Unified Action, he offers a rather direct call for members of the fresh produce industry: Provide a unified front to the customer. This caught my attention because of the differing perspectives I hear from industry members about the government’s mandate to use clean trailers. Consumers are scared, concerned and willing to pay for safe food. A COVID response from the fresh produce industry that says, ‘Farm to Fork means exactly that! Your food is safe, even in transit.’ Of course, then they would have to back that claim up with action.

And if a few executives from retail would take Don’s advice — Step Out of the Office and Take a Field Trip and get out into the field (or shipping facilities), they would not only be surprised at the condition of many of these trailers that are transporting the product on its way to be delivered at their stores, but also, they would perhaps feel sick thinking about the trailers that brought their own food to their fork.

Jim, I really don’t know you. My father, of course, thinks much of you, which says a lot. But I do know that I appreciate your unwillingness to settle and accept status quo when things need to change, improve or are just plain wrong.
Keep up the great work... may your voice continue loud and clear!

—Pam Young
Pam Young & Company
Healthy Trailer LLC
Moving Produce with Pam
Salinas, CA

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We’re honored to receive such a thoughtful note from Pam. She has attended The New York Produce Show and Conference, the Foundational Excellence Program we do jointly with Cornell University, and we have always been impressed that someone in trucking would take the time to really understand the industry and the product.

Of course, she is Produce Industry Royalty. Her father, Jim Lugg, was called by Berkeley the “Founder of the Modern Salad”:

In 1963, when Lugg, an agriculture scientist, was hired as director of research by Bruce Church Incorporated—one of the largest U.S. lettuce producers at the time—the company hoped that he could help solve its soil and water problems. But Lugg soon discovered that the company’s difficulties weren’t as much about soil and water as they were about post-harvest issues.

Looking for ways to better preserve crops’ freshness during shipment, Lugg turned to Whirlpool Corporation, which had come up with a new system for storing apples and pears. “It was just about managing carbon dioxide and oxygen,” he explains. “I thought, ‘They do it in warehouses—if we could do it in transportation, it would be a home run.’”

Out of a partnership between Bruce Church and Whirlpool, a corporation named TransFresh was born in 1966, and Lugg became its president. “The mission was to use these different gas mixtures of oxygen and CO2 in transportation vehicles,” Lugg says. Extensive research and experimentation led to modified atmospheres in refrigerated shipping containers and railcars that greatly extended the shelf life of whatever perishables were inside.

“Our refrigerated-shipping business grew into a very large operation, because people wanted a lot of California fruits and vegetables,” Lugg says. Business expanded to Florida, Chile, New Zealand, and Europe, and the company’s atmospheric pallets for fresh produce maintained a grip on the market until competitors appeared around 2000.

But after interviewing retailers’ customers about their experiences with the company’s produce, Lugg discovered that a lot of the lettuce that was being purchased and not used right away was being thrown out. That led to another big idea.

The birth of salad kits

The company decided to cut and wash the lettuce, then package it with the same oxygen-and-CO2 mixture as in the shipping containers. “We were trying to make the bag’s film differentially permeable to oxygen and carbon dioxide so that we’d let enough oxygen in to keep the lettuce alive and let enough CO2 out so that we didn’t spoil the lettuce with an off
flavor," Lugg says.

By the 1980s, Lugg and his team—made up of microbiologists, post-harvest physiologists, nutritionists, and others—had succeeded. In 1989, they introduced the Fresh Express Family Classic garden salad blend, the first retail packaged salad sold nationwide.

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Of course, Pam is a pretty powerful person all in her own right. The Californian told her story:

Often the direction one selects when he or she starts a journey has little to do with the final destination. That is the case with Pam Lugg Young, owner of Pam Young & Co., who took a rather circuitous route to her present position.

With an academic background that includes a B.A. in arts and history, a teaching credential and law degree, the casual observer would never have predicted that Young would today be the owner of a logistics company that specializes in refrigerated transportation services.

The daughter of Jim Lugg, a man who has been involved in the Salinas Valley produce business in several capacities, Young was interested in perhaps getting a law degree when she graduated from Salinas High School.

Although she was familiar with the ag industry because of her father's involvement and many of her friends were also from ag families, Young elected to pursue a liberal arts education. She also decided to get a teaching credential.

While teaching school in Salinas, Young also decided to enroll in the Monterey College of Law to get her law degree as well. It was after passing the bar exam that Young’s career took an unexpected change in direction.

Jack Pardue, a family friend, was a local truck broker who had been in business for a couple of decades. Young had worked briefly for Pardue when she lived in Washington for a short time after college and was familiar with the business.

When Young’s father heard that Pardue was going to close his business, Lugg asked his daughter if she might be interested in stepping in to manage it.

Laughing, Young said, “I am glad I didn’t know all that was ahead of me because I may have decided not to own this company and I would have therefore missed an amazing career choice.”

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Now Pam challenges the industry. It is one thing to act because a law requires it, but how about because it is the right thing to do? How about because we, in the industry, can see things that our consumers never will.

What is right isn’t in doubt. It is our will to act that is in question.

Many thanks to Pam Young for her generous and thoughtful letter.