As the Industry Transitions from *The Great Collaboration* to *The Great Acceleration*: Announcing the 2021 Perishable Pundit Thought-Leaders at The New York Produce Show And Conference

*Jim Prevor’s Perishable Pundit, October 27, 2021*

As the industry finally gets a chance to meet face-to-face at this year’s New York Produce Show and Conference, we have been astounded at the outpouring of interest and excitement by both the supply side and the buy side.

We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to this year’s industry luminaries who have volunteered to share their insights with us on stage during our Perishable Pundit Thought-Leader Keynote Breakfast panel discussion, held at the Jacob Javits Center’s Hall 1D on Wednesday, December 15th, starting at 7:30 am.

In addition to our panel discussion, we will be introducing a new Perishable Pundit Thought-Leader Discussion Series taking place on the floor of the Expo Hall during the show day. These discussions will be more on a one-on-one basis, and Michael Muzyk, whose bio is below, has agreed to talk on Wednesday afternoon. We will be making more announcements on additional Thought-Leaders in the weeks to come.

As the industry dealt with this pandemic through a Great Collaboration and now moves into the *Great Acceleration* of our post-pandemic future, we hope you will come to join the discussion as we work together to help the industry advance.

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**JEFF CADY**

*Director of Produce & Floral*

*Tops Markets*

Jeff's retail produce career began in 1986 in Akron, Ohio working for Giant Eagle. In late 1990, he started working for Finast Supermarkets, and in 1996 Tops Friendly Markets & Finast merged and so Jeff began his career at Tops, where he held many positions at retail including produce clerk, Assistant Produce Manager, Produce Manager & Assistant Store Manager.

Jeff's career in corporate Tops began in August of 2002 when he relocated from Akron, Ohio to Rochester, NY, to take on the role of Produce & Floral Field Specialist. In late 2008 he became a Produce Buyer/Merchandiser. In 2011 Jeff was
promoted to Produce & Floral Category Manager and in August of 2014, he became the Director of Produce & Floral.

From an industry perspective, Jeff is currently involved with PMA/United Fresh & SEPC. At United Fresh, he has been on the Board of Directors, held chairperson and vice chairperson of the Retail & Foodservice Board and moderates the quarterly Fresh Facts Webinar. Jeff recently joined the SEPC Board of Directors.

Last year, Jeff participated as a “Thought Leader” for the pandemic virtual edition of The New York Produce Show and Conference. He was also awarded the 2020 Produce Retailer of the Year from PMG along with the Retail Merchant Innovation Award 2020 from the PMA.

Kelly Davis
Director of Produce & Floral
Allegiance Retail Services

A produce industry veteran with over 30 years of experience in procurement and category growth within the supermarket industry, Kelly currently serves as the Director of Produce and Floral for Allegiance Retail Services. Her responsibilities at Allegiance include managing sales, coordinating advertising, merchandising and operations activities, and managing a procurement team and merchandising team.

She began her supermarket career at Wakefern Food Corporation where she served 31 years honing her skills in a variety of departments including Grocery, Commercial Bakery and Produce. In her 18 years in the Produce Division, she was a Category Manager for a multitude of commodities and was instrumental in the yearly growth of sales for the Division.

Kelly was also a Regional Sourcing Category Manager in South America, South Africa, and California where she became a seasoned expert in field agriculture.

Kelly is a graduate of the Kean University, in Union, NJ, where she earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Marketing.
Robin, a seasoned Category Manager for PF Chang’s China Bistro, is a produce industry veteran with more than 27 years’ experience in purchasing, sales and business development. Her current responsibilities include all agriculture purchases for both PF Chang’s and Pei Wei brand. Prior to joining PF Chang’s, Robin worked for Boston Market in Golden, CO, where she held the position of Manager Supply Chain.

She has served on the Board of Directors for the Produce Marketing Association and its Foodservice Committee. She also is involved in a range of organizations, including the National Restaurant Association Supply Chain Expert Exchange.

Robin is a Colorado native and a graduate of the University of Colorado in Boulder.

MARC GOLDMAN
Produce Director
Morton Williams Supermarkets

Marc first joined Morton Williams, the iconic New York supermarket chain, some 25 years ago as a Produce Manager. He brings a unique regional perspective and in-depth knowledge on the retail pulse of the New York produce scene as a celebrated participant at the annual New York Produce Show.

Marc began his produce career at Waldbaums in 1978, rising from a part time produce clerk to a produce manager. Then in 1987 he went to work at Hunts Point Market and opened his own foodservice wholesale business delivering to restaurants for five years. Bringing that broadened experience back to retail, he took a produce manager position with Food Emporium, and from there, in 1996 began his tenure in a similar role at Morton Williams.

In 2006, he left for a stint at Wakefern Food Corp. and one year later rejoined Morton Williams, his beloved stomping ground, as Produce Director, where he runs all aspects of the chain’s specialized produce department targeting the customized needs of the communities it serves.
Jim Hancock
Vice President DMM,
Produce & Floral
Sam's Club

Jim Hancock is a 26-year Sam’s Club associate. During his career, Jim has held various leadership positions in merchandising, operations, planning, and replenishment. Jim has been responsible for the Sam’s Club produce and floral buying team since 2014. Jim has a BS/BA and MBA. He currently lives in Bentonville, AR, with his wife, Bridget, and their 14-year-old twins, Carson and Kelsey.

Chris Keetch
Director, Produce and Floral
The GIANT Company

Chris joined the Ahold Delhaize family of brands in 2010 as a produce merchandiser at Ahold USA, where he also held the positions of produce category manager and director until 2018 when he was appointed to his current role with the GIANT Company.

Chris leads the produce and floral team, responsible for developing and driving strategy for the omni-channel grocer known to customers as GIANT, Martin’s, GIANT Heirloom Market, GIANT Direct and Martin’s Direct. He’s focused on innovating ways to inspire shoppers to discover fresh ingredients and make it easy for today’s families to create healthy meals at home, integrating the omni-channel experience of this mainstay retailer, which has been serving families across Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia since 1923.

With 27 years of produce experience, Chris started his career with Albertsons in Boise, Idaho where he worked his way up from produce clerk to assistant manager and manager. The 14 years Chris spent working at the store level was instrumental in developing a full understanding of merchandising, pricing, and assortment along with the importance of anticipating customer needs, wants and expectations. He holds a degree in business management from Boise State University.
MARY MITCHELL
Vegetable Merchant
FreshDirect

Mary Mitchell is the Vegetable Merchant at FreshDirect, the leader in fresh food delivery on the East Coast. She is responsible for directly sourcing the highest quality produce and bringing it to New Yorker’s tables. Mary has grown FD’s regional sourcing program 250% and designed fair trade and transitional farming programs.

Born into a family of chefs and farmers, Mary was inspired early in life to change the way people think about and experience food. She went on to earn a B.S. in Dietetics, and a Masters degree in Food Systems at NYU.

She has worked as the Sourcing Manager for a mobile farmers market in North Carolina, as an Educator on a rooftop farm, an Associate Producer with Heritage Radio Network, and in sales at the Union Square Greenmarket. Mary spent the last 10 years working on food systems change from soil to table.

TONY MITCHELL
Vice President of Corporate Produce
Associated Wholesale Grocers

Tony is an industry veteran with over 30 years of multifaceted experience in the grocery industry, focusing on produce from different sides of the supply chain. Tony began his career working in his father’s independent grocery business in central Ohio, gaining additional experience as a produce manager for a local supermarket chain. Then he was hired by Caito Foods, where he fostered his career for more than 25 years. He worked his way up to Vice President of Sales, Procurement, and Marketing, leading the end-to-end fresh produce operations. Following the acquisition of Caito Foods in 2017 by Spartan Nash, he assumed Vice President of Produce and Floral Merchandising for Spartan Nash.
In 2019, Tony joined Vision Import Group, LLC as Vice President of Sales and Business Development. Tony had the opportunity to learn the imported produce side to add to his domestic experience, which he brings to his current role with Associated Wholesale Grocers. He is an active member of the United Fresh Produce Association and has been on the United Fresh Wholesaler Board since 2016.

MICHAEL MUZYK
President
Baldor

A native of the Bronx, NY, Michael graduated from the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), and worked as a chef in various businesses, ranging from cruise ships to fine dining restaurants. He also lived abroad, working as a Consulting Chef for a Belgium quick-service conglomerate.

In 1991, Michael made a career change to the sales side of foodservice. Michael joined Baldor as a Sales Representative in 1995 and quickly advanced to Sales Manager and then Vice President, then President. Chefs continue to recognize him as one of their own and instantly trust his advice and expertise. As President, Michael has greatly contributed to Baldor’s exponential growth and rank as a leading food importer and distributor.

In 2015, Michael was nominated to the United Fresh Produce Association Board of Directors and served as Chairman of the Board in 2020-2021. He served on the advisory panel for the Marketing and Branding Subcommittee that convened for former Governor Cuomo’s NYS Certified High Quality Foods Initiative.

Michael is an ongoing survey panelist in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, which tracks business conditions in the New York/Northern New Jersey region and was an advisor to Senator Kirsten Gillibrand in her role as a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee.
Julie started her produce career with Fresh Choice more than 26 years ago. She began with an entry-level position and worked her way into sales. In 1999, she was recruited by Sysco to be a produce buyer. Since then, she has held several roles with Sysco all in the Salinas produce procurement office, including 5 years as Senior Director.

In March of 2019, Julie accepted the role of Vice President of Produce overseeing all produce operations for Sysco, as the largest foodservice distributor in the world. She provided invaluable insight on Sysco’s amazing resiliency as part of the all-star collection of interviews at the virtual edition of the NY Show, in the midst of the pandemic that crushed the foodservice industry.

A recipient of the PRODUCE BUSINESS 40-Under-Forty Award, Julie has served on the Board of Directors for Ag Against Hunger and the Foodservice Committee for PMA. Currently she’s on the Board of Directors for PMA.

Marianne is a prominent leader in the produce industry, with 36 years at Wakefern Food Corporation, rising to her current role as Senior Category Manager for Produce and Floral at the largest retailer-owned cooperative in the United States.

She has been a powerful advocate at the Eastern Produce Council (EPC), now as President of the organization, which partners with Produce Business to run the annual New York Produce Show. Marianne became a Director for the EPC in April of 2013, and then the first Vice President. Her involvement includes Co-Chairing the Women’s Leadership Committee, among various other committees at EPC.
Vice President, Produce and Floral Merchandising
SpartanNash

Vic is responsible for supporting SpartanNash’s corporate retail stores as part of the Marketing and Merchandising Center of Excellence, establishing and maintaining distribution customer and vendor relationships and satisfaction levels, negotiating national vendor contracts and leading the fresh distribution procurement team and their processes.

Vic has more than 40 years of experience in the food, supermarket and produce industries. Most recently Vic served as vice president of produce, floral and gift center for The Fresh Market, based out of Greensboro, NC, where he was responsible for produce operations for 161 stores in 25 states.

Prior to the Fresh Market, Vic held leadership roles and gained category management experience with Allegiance Retail Services/Foodtown Inc. and Wakefern Food Corp in the NY/NJ market.

Vic served as a two-term president of the board of directors of the Eastern Produce Council and Chairman of the New York Produce Show.

JAY SCHNEIDER
Head of Buying/Marketplace US
Gorillas

Jay brings an exciting twist to the distinguished Thought Leaders Panel, as Berlin-based Gorillas new Head of Produce and Buying/Marketplace US. The innovative European grocery delivery startup just kicked off its U.S operations in May, and Jay is all in from the start. Gorillas, making waves for its value proposition of “10-minute delivery or less” through neighborhood micro warehouses, is looking to penetrate the online grocery delivery momentum, beginning in Brooklyn with plans to expand to additional areas of New York City and other major cities.

Jay joins Gorillas with 38 years of grocery experience, primarily at Acme Markets (Albertsons Companies), and previously at American Stores, where he was Produce Field Buyer/Inspector. He built his career at Acme Markets, first as a Produce/Floral Operations Specialist, and advancing to Produce Director, a position he held for more than 10 years, where he was responsible for the chain’s produce sales and merchandising. His subsequent promotion to Director of Merchandising for the MidAtlantic Division took him away from produce, leading to his new opportunity at Gorillas.
CAITLIN TIERNEY
Sr. Director of Produce Innovation
Sprouts Farmers Market

Caitlin Tierney is the new Senior Director of Produce Innovation for Sprouts Farmers Market, in Phoenix, Arizona. Over her 15-year career in the produce industry, Caitlin has gathered a unique perspective of up-and-coming innovations such as CEA growing, seed science, e-commerce, prepared foods, packaged produce, discount retail, private label, and market strategy. Her career path has led her to reinterpret produce to be ingrained in innovation and pour energy into thinking outside the traditional brick and mortar box.

Her retail career started as a category assistant to produce for Michigan-based Spartan Stores, where she spent several years as a buyer before joining New York-based Fresh Direct as a Senior Produce Buyer. She also worked for 99 Cents Only Stores for five years and for Fresh & Easy. Prior to joining Sprouts Farmers Market, she was the West Coast Business Director for Mastronardi Produce, the SUNSET® brand, adding to her pioneering mindset.

Caitlin also serves on the Board of Directors for the Fresh Produce & Floral Council and the Board of PMA’s Center for Growing Talent.

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All of us at PRODUCE BUSINESS and the Eastern Produce Council are deeply appreciative that these important industry executives, whose time is always in such demand, have made The New York Produce Show and Conference a priority.

We hope you will as well.

If you would like some additional information, the event website is here.

Buy-side, sell-side, service providers, media and education attendees, as well as those registering spouses and companions for the spouse/companion program — featuring High-Tea at the Plaza — can all register at this link.

The link also includes registration opportunities for The Global Trade Symposium, The Ideation Fresh Foodservice Forum and the unique Foundational Excellence Program – a kind of MBA in a Box perfect for produce executives.

We have a discounted room block at the Headquarters Hotel in New York. If you tell us of your interest here we will email you a link to discounted rooms in the place where it all happens.

There are still a few exhibiting opportunities left and you can let us know about your interest here.

We will soon be announcing our list of valued sponsors, without whom the event would not be possible. We still have some wonderful opportunities for sponsors to step in and assert their industry leadership and woo this vital market.
you would like to receive more information on how your organization can be part of this great new industry institution, please let us know [here](http://www.perishablepundit.com/index.php?date=10/27/2021).

We look forward to seeing you in New York.