

the

vineline

Official Newsletter of the NATIONAL WATERMELON ASSOCIATION

Spring 2025



NATIONAL  
Watermelon  
ASSOCIATION





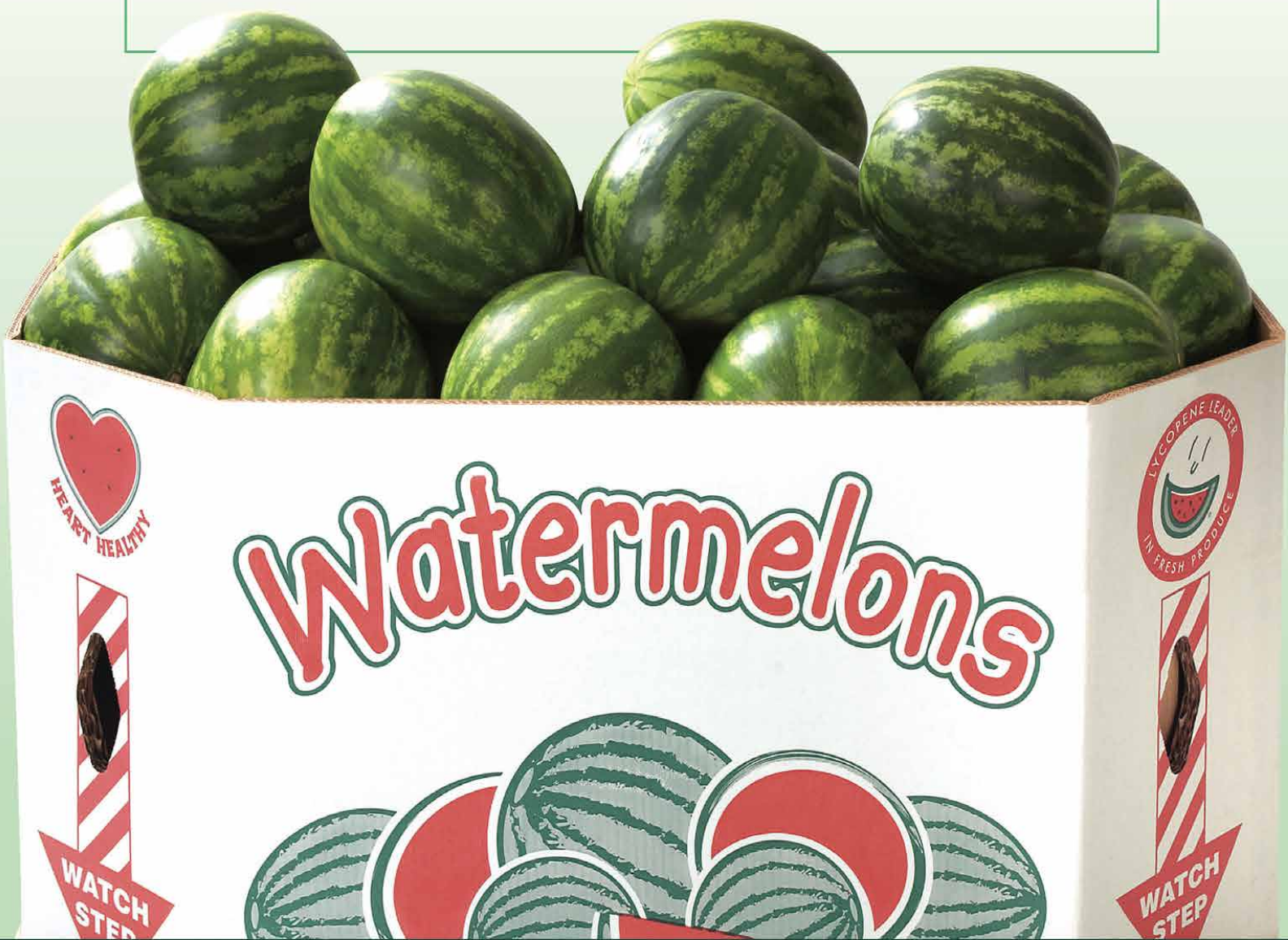


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Spring Greetings from the Vineline!

As the days grow longer and warmer, we welcome the arrival of spring and the start of a new domestic watermelon season. This is a time of renewal and fresh beginnings—both in the fields and within the National Watermelon Association.

We’re entering a new chapter with great excitement and optimism. One big change this season is the transition of NWA to a fully remote workplace. While this move has been in the works for some time, it marks a new era for our team—allowing us to work more flexibly and efficiently while staying deeply connected to the needs of our members across the country.

This season is also about welcoming new faces and new energy. We’re thrilled to introduce our new National Watermelon Queen, Queen Elanie, who brings remarkable experience, skill, and professionalism to her role. Alongside a dedicated group of state queens and ambassadors, Queen Elanie will help champion the watermelon industry across the country with grace and enthusiasm.

As we grow and evolve, we’re proud to announce several new partnerships that will add meaningful value to our members:

- In Washington, D.C., we’ve hired Bob Redding of the Redding Firm to serve as our dedicated lobbyist, working to advocate for our industry’s top priorities—especially long-overdue reforms to agricultural labor policy.
- For our members navigating the complexities of labor compliance, we’ve brought on Shawn Packer of JPH Law Firm, a leading labor attorney who will serve as an on-demand resource throughout the season, particularly for those working with H-2A labor.
- And we’re excited to launch a new content partnership with Pinion, an NWA member and trusted advisor on agricultural economics and business strategy.

This issue of the Vineline features insightful contributions from both JPH and Pinion, offering timely and practical perspectives to help you navigate the season ahead.

As always, our commitment to you remains strong. Whether it’s supporting you in the field, representing your voice in Washington, or creating opportunities for growth and connection, we’re here to serve you and your business.

We wish you a successful and fruitful start to the season. Here’s to fresh beginnings, strong partnerships, and a vibrant year ahead.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink is positioned over the bottom half of the page. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'G. F. Szczepanski'. Below the signature, the text 'George F. Szczepanski', 'Executive Director', and 'National Watermelon Association' is printed in a clean, sans-serif font. The background of the signature area features a decorative border of watermelon slices and green leaves, similar to the one at the top of the page.

George F. Szczepanski  
Executive Director  
National Watermelon Association





# Innovations that really deliver

The team at BASF | Nunhems is constantly looking for ways to make our products better. From improved taste to enhanced disease tolerance, our watermelon offerings are sure to please growers and consumers alike.

## Get To Know Some Of Our New Varieties



**Amazo** is a crimson sweet seedless variety with a dark rind that offers growers high yield potential and disease resistant traits. This early-maturing watermelon serves both the fresh and whole-cut markets.



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# National Report

Hello to everyone from the National Watermelon Association!

Queen Jules wrapped up the 2024 watermelon season with multiple social media posts containing trivia, health benefits of our favorite fruit, and #MeetTheQueen. The Meet the Queen posts consisted of all the state watermelon queens and the chance for all the association members and the social media world to see and hear a brief introduction of each queen.

Immediately following the Christmas holidays, Queen Jules began her “Convention Season” as it is referred to by everyone in the watermelon industry. NWQ Jules attended the 2025 Illiana Watermelon Association Convention. While there she enjoyed her time reacquainting herself with all our watermelon family and had a super successful time at their annual auction, bowling night and their beautiful banquet. Thanks again to Mrs. Lana Brothers and the IWA for their hospitality and to the members that helped sponsor Queen Jules and NWA Promotions Coordinator to make this trip possible! (Pics 1-6)

Georgia Watermelon Convention began with a fun filled weekend spent fellowshiping with our watermelon family at the Chateau Elan! Their convention was an incredible experience, as always! Queen Jules was joined by several state queens to this convention! In between all the events of the convention, NWQ Jules got to join some of the watermelon family on ice! Thanks to Robinson Fresh for sponsoring this unforgettable experience! Congratulations to the new brand ambassador and best of luck in your upcoming year! Thanks, from your watermelon family to Ambassador Maycey Kight and Mrs. Charley Sheffield for a fantastic year of service to the GWA. Lastly, thank you to all the sponsors that made this trip possible for NWQ Jules to be in attendance! (Pics 7-11)

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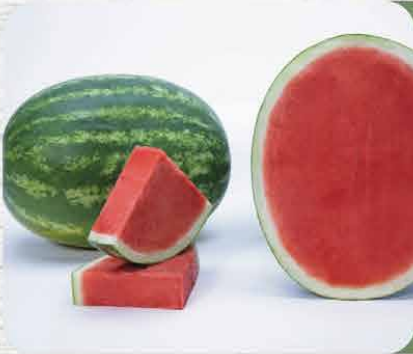
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# National Report

NWQ Jules’ next stop for “Convention Season” was in Biloxi, Mississippi, at the 2025 Gulf Coast Watermelon Association Convention. Their Watermelon Derby themed Presidents Reception was so much fun and enjoyed by everyone! The next day NWQ Jules was joined by TWQ, FWQ and of course, GCWQ Tori to listen to interesting speakers, a delicious lunch, the seed spit, and the annual auction. Everything was a success! At the banquet, the competition ended where a new 2025 Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen was crowned by GCWQ Tori. Congratulations to GCWA Tori Hobbs and Miss Sarah Jane Levine on a super successful year of service for the GCWA and the watermelon industry! Thank you so much to GCWA for their sponsorship to make attending their convention possible! (Pics 12-22)

As National Watermelon Queen Jules’s reign comes to an end, she attended the annual National Watermelon Association Convention 2025 that was held at the Hilton in downtown Austin, Tx. The Presidents Reception was an amazing opportunity to visit with those that make NWQ possible. (Pics 23-27)

Opening Reception and Dinner at the Punch Bowl Social was so much fun for everyone in attendance! Live music, bowling, ping pong, arcade and plenty of socializing with our watermelon family, what a fantastic way to start the festivities! (Pics 28-34)

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National Pictures

On Friday we heard inspiring queen speeches to insightful educational sessions, a lively auction and a fun filled seed spit competition! There was also a 2nd Annual Women’s Leadership Session. The panel consisted of Kerri Lee Wiggins, Megon McDonald, Kristin Story and Michelle Martin. Chad Chastain was also honored by the Dan Thomas family with the Future Farm Leader Award for 2025. Later that evening we enjoyed a wonderful dinner hosted by Mr. Leo Camello of HM Claus. (Pics 35-42)

On Saturday morning the NWA Convention was filled with meaningful moments! We started the day with a heartfelt prayer breakfast led by Pastor Allen Singley, Jules’s dad. Then, it was time for promotion wear, followed by their impromptu questions, interviews- and exciting opportunity to share their passion for the watermelon industry and showcase why they would make the best NWQ! (Pics 43-47)

continued on page11









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National Pictures

After a phenomenal presentation by each contestant, Miss Karli Abbott won the title of Miss Jubilee voted on by her watermelon sisters! Next, 2nd runner-up as National Watermelon Queen 2025 is Miss Kinlyn Hinson, and 1st runner-up is Miss Tori Hobbs! Congratulations to our new National Watermelon Queen 2025 Miss Elanie Mason! Prayers for a safe, successful, and fun year for our NWQ as she promotes our watermelon industry. (Pics 48-58)

*Congratulations to NWA Executive Director, George Szespanski and the NWA entire team and volunteers for such a successful convention!*





# Vineline Research News

## Exploring Biostimulant Efficacy Under Limited Fertilizer and Water in Utah`s Watermelon Production

*Evan Christensen<sup>1</sup>, Milena Oliveira<sup>2</sup>, Prakriti Nepal<sup>1</sup>, and Youping Sun<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> *M.S. Student, Department of Plants, Soils and Climate, Utah State University, UT, USA*  
<sup>2</sup> *Assistant Professor, Vegetable Extension Specialist, Department of Plants, Soils and Climate, Utah State University, UT, USA*  
<sup>3</sup> *Associate Professor, Department of Plants, Soils and Climate, Utah State University, UT, USA*

The western U.S. has recently experienced some of the driest conditions on record, and Utah has been in a multi-year drought (2019-2023) that affected the agricultural sector, including vegetable producers. While vegetables are not a primary agricultural crop in Utah, they are still an important part of the horticultural economy with 763 farms growing 6,138 acres. As the fourth largest acreage vegetable crop in Utah (almost 10% of the acreage) watermelon and related crops in the gourd family Cucurbitaceae (nearly 36% of total vegetable acreage) are important to vegetable growers. Watermelon is a water-intensive crop and requires an adequate supply of water for good yield and fruit quality and is very sensitive to water stress. An additional challenge is that watermelons need access to adequate nutrients for proper growth and high yields, which has become more difficult with the recent rise in fertilizer prices.

To address these challenges, novel solutions must be assessed to increase water and nutrient use efficiency and ensure that watermelon production is sustainable in the state of Utah. An emerging approach to accomplish this is the application of biostimulant products. Biostimulants are any organism or substance applied to a plant to increase abiotic stress tolerance, nutrition efficiency, and/or improve crop quality traits regardless of its nutrient content. Biological (bacteria and fungi) and non-biological products (seaweed extracts and humic substances) alike have shown potential in improving plant growth and yield and mitigating the effects of reduced water and nutrient availability.

Research at Utah State University, initiated in 2023, focused on screening seven locally available biostimulant products (Table 1) on greenhouse-grown watermelon seedlings, using ‘Crimson Sweet’ as the target cultivar. Emergence and growth were recorded. Seedlings treated with Continuum, Spectrum DS, or Mighty Mycorrhizae, tended to have numerically higher growth than the untreated control, and seedlings treated with Tribus Original or MycoApply Endo tended to have numerically lower growth than the untreated control.

Table 1. Biostimulant products applied to greenhouse-grown watermelon seedlings.

Category	Type	Product	Company	State	Country
Biological	Bacterial	Tribus Original	Impello Biosciences	Colorado	U.S.A.
		Continuum	Impello Biosciences	Colorado	U.S.A.
		Spectrum DS	Tainio Biologicals	Washington	U.S.A.
	Arbuscular Mycorrhizal Fungi	MycoApply Endo	Mycorrhizal Applications	Oregon	U.S.A.
		Mighty Mycorrhizae	Wildroot Organics	Texas	U.S.A.
Non-Biological	Humic Acid	Huma Pro 16	Bio Huma Netics	Arizona	U.S.A.
	Seaweed Extract	Kelpak	Kelp Products International	Cape Town	South Africa



Based on these results, the bacterial products Continuum and Spectrum DS and the fungal product Mighty Mycorrhizae were selected for further field trials. The study was conducted in 2023 and 2024 in North Logan, Utah, to evaluate the impact of selected biostimulants on watermelon growth and yield under reduced fertilizer and irrigation conditions. We used the seedless cultivar Fascination and the seeded cultivar Crimson Sweet. Fertilizer application was reduced to 66% of the recommended rate (140-80-60 lb/acre) over the whole growing season. Irrigation scheduling was 75% of crop evapotranspiration (ETc) model, during the final month of production. The control treatment received no biostimulants.

The two-year analysis showed no significant interaction between biostimulant application, fertilizer reduction, and irrigation levels, indicating that their effects on plant growth and yield were independent of each other (Table 2). Due to poor growing conditions in 2023 and a lack of water deficit due to summer precipitation, only results from 2024 will be shown here. The products tested did not impact yield or quality when compared to the control. Spectrum DS and Continuum showed slight yield increases of 7% and 10%, respectively, vs control, while Mighty Mycorrhizae did not differ from the control. Reduced fertility led to a reduction in yield, though an increase in sugar content was noted. ‘Crimson Sweet’ had a higher yield than ‘Fascination’ in both years while a reduction in irrigation for ‘Crimson Sweet’ led to an increase in sugar content compared to ‘Fascination.’ This effect is likely due to the plant’s natural response to water stress, which can enhance carbohydrate concentration as a survival mechanism, in line with traditional knowledge about concentrating sugars before harvest by reducing irrigation.

Though biostimulant products show promise in increasing the growth, yield, and quality of the studied cultivars, there is much more to understand about the mechanisms by which they promote plant growth. Due to the diversity of products, species to which they are applied, and the conditions in which crops are produced results can vary widely. As technologies, techniques, and knowledge progress, more targeted products may emerge that provide more predictable and uniform results. Further investigation will focus on cultivar-specific responses, physiological responses, microbial colonization success and its long-term effects on-field performance under Utah’s challenging conditions.



Table 2. Effects of biostimulants under reduced fertility, irrigation and cultivar on yield and quality of field grown watermelons. Logan, UT, 2024.

Treatment	Biostimulants on Fertility <sup>#</sup>		Biostimulants on Irrigation	
	Yield (lb·acre <sup>-1</sup> )	SSC (°Brix)	Yield (lb·acre <sup>-1</sup> )	SSC (°Brix)
Biostimulant				
Control	64,839 <sup>A</sup>	11.4 <sup>A</sup>	70,973 <sup>A</sup>	11.5 <sup>A</sup>
Continuum	65,444 <sup>A</sup>	11.4 <sup>A</sup>	77,353 <sup>A</sup>	11.3 <sup>A</sup>
Spectrum DS	59,512 <sup>A</sup>	11.2 <sup>A</sup>	70,531 <sup>A</sup>	11.3 <sup>A</sup>
Mighty Mycorrhizae	62,358 <sup>A</sup>	11.3 <sup>A</sup>	73,725 <sup>A</sup>	11.3 <sup>A</sup>
Rate				
Recommended	62,665 <sup>A</sup>	11.2 <sup>B</sup>	78,944 <sup>A</sup>	11.0 <sup>B</sup>
Reduced	63,325 <sup>A</sup>	11.5 <sup>A</sup>	67,680 <sup>B</sup>	11.7 <sup>A</sup>
Cultivar				
Crimson Sweet	71,506 <sup>A</sup>	11.5 <sup>A</sup>	78,472 <sup>A</sup>	11.4 <sup>A</sup>
Fascination	55,496 <sup>B</sup>	11.1 <sup>B</sup>	68,087 <sup>B</sup>	11.2 <sup>A</sup>

<sup>#</sup>Due to poor growing conditions in 2023 and a lack of water deficit due to summer precipitation, only results from 2024 will be shown here.







# Vineline *Tariff Policy*

## Exporting Uncertainty: The Impact of the Trade War on U.S. Watermelon Growers

*By Brad Mohrmann, Pinion government and public affairs advisor*

Please note: The following information is current as of April 10, 2025, at 2 p.m. CT.

Trade is critical to U.S. watermelon growers. About 10% of domestic production is typically exported, almost all going to Canada. In 2024, the volume of fresh watermelons exported by the U.S. rose 6% to 400 million pounds, the second highest volume on record and valued at \$115.9 million. This year, U.S. agriculture has experienced significant trade disruptions. The coming months promise additional uncertainty.



Within hours of taking office, President Trump started proposing new tariffs and the nature of his ever-changing trade policy shows no signs of slowing. Over the last month President Trump announced new tariffs, suspended those tariffs, announced tariffs again, suspended tariffs again, and announced tariff increases on critical trading partners, only to rescind those increases. Shortly after the implementation of “reciprocal tariffs” on April 9, Trump declared a 90-day pause of tariffs on goods from most countries, kept in place a 10% tariff on imports from all countries except Canada and Mexico, and significantly raised tariffs on imports from China.

The stakes are extremely high. U.S. agriculture is dependent on global markets with approximately 20% of U.S. farm products sold to foreign markets. Trade agreements enhance access to markets and, as noted, Canada is particularly critical for U.S. watermelon growers.

President Trump’s comments that Canada should be the 51st state have frayed our relationship. His subsequent 25% tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum, autos, and auto parts caused Canada to announce 25% retaliatory tariffs targeting American agricultural products, including watermelons.

Despite the 90-day pause on reciprocal tariffs on most countries, the watermelon industry is still at risk. Tariffs on imported steel and aluminum and on autos and auto parts and a 10% baseline tariff on all imports are still in effect. The president could reject trade deals. The tit-for-tat trade war with China is accelerating. China raised its tariffs on U.S. products to 84% and Trump boosted the effective rate on Chinese goods to 145%.

The president has threatened “sectoral” tariffs on swaths of goods, including lumber. Canada is a top source of U.S. lumber and watermelons could again be a target of retaliatory measures. During the first Trump administration, trade disruptions led to retaliatory tariffs on \$30.4 billion worth of U.S. agricultural products and U.S. agriculture’s global market share decreased. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) allocated \$28 billion to support impacted farmers. However, these funds are now largely depleted.

Erratic trade policies severely risk increasing the perception of the U.S. as an unreliable source of food and agricultural products. Global competitors are forging trade agreements that exclude the U.S., risking the loss of markets that have developed over decades and threatening the long-term competitiveness of the U.S. watermelon industry.



# Vineline Tax Policy

## Maximizing Profitability Amid Tax Uncertainty

### How Businesses Can Prepare for 2025 Changes

By Tommy Irvine, permanent and specialty crops lead advisor, Pinion

Many key provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), enacted during President Trump’s first term, are set to expire at the end of 2025, potentially impacting the agricultural sector. Lawmakers remain divided on whether to extend, modify, or phase out these tax benefits, creating uncertainty for specialty crop farmers and other ag operations. At the same time, rising operational costs and persistent labor shortages continue to strain profitability. With these challenges in mind, proactive tax planning is essential. Whether through structuring income or leveraging deductions, growers who take strategic action now will be better positioned to maximize savings, navigate uncertainty, and sustain long-term financial success.

#### Preparation is Key Ahead of Change

“As key components of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act are planned to sunset, early preparation is key for Ag operations to effectively manage the unknowns,” said Brian Kuehl, director of government and public affairs at Pinion. “Adjusting your business strategies and consulting with the right professionals can set your business up for future success.” Pinion advisors provide the following steps to prepare you for potential tax changes:



- Get organized: Update your books, gather harvest data, plan income and expenses, and schedule a meeting with your tax advisor.
  - Explore tax strategies: Work with professionals to assess whether deferring or accelerating income best suits your situation.
    - Minimize tax liability – Use farm income averaging, defer crop insurance proceeds, leverage bonus depreciation (60% for 2024, 40% for 2025), utilize deferred payment contracts, prepay expenses, or donate commodities.
    - Plan for rate increases – With individual tax rates set to rise in 2026, accelerating income into 2025 could reduce overall tax burden.
  - Think long-term – Evaluate entity structures and adjust financial strategies to align with long-term goals.
- “From managing seasonal income to leveraging tax incentives for equipment and land, the right tax strategy can make all the difference in staying profitable through times of change,” advised Kuehl.

#### Maintain Flexibility

Tax laws frequently change, often retroactively. Stay adaptable by: • Extending business and personal returns when beneficial, allowing time to assess new legislation and upcoming financial results before finalizing taxes.

#### Define and Communicate Your Objectives

- Outline clear financial goals to navigate policy uncertainties.
- Plan for succession and retirement tax implications to mitigate future risks.
- Seize current growth opportunities before policy shifts eliminate them.

Navigating tax law changes and implementing effective tax strategies are vital to sustaining a thriving operation. By proactively managing tax obligations and consulting with experienced professionals who specialize in permanent and specialty crops, farmers can build financial resilience and focus on delivering high-quality produce to market.

*Pinion is the leading food and agriculture consulting and accounting firm and provides, tax, accounting, and business advisory services to operations throughout the U.S. Visit [pinionglobal.com](http://pinionglobal.com) to learn more or contact a Pinion advisor.*

#### LABOR continued from page 13...

ments when asked. As a best practice, workers should always keep copies or pictures of their documentation on them and ensure their documents are both accurate and current. If a worker is questioned by an ICE agent, it is important they know their rights:

- They have the right to remain silent and are not required by law to answer any questions or provide documentation.
- It is highly advised that they do not lie about their immigration status and are encouraged to reach out to legal counsel immediately before answering any questions, they have a right to do this.

- Just like Law and Order, any information provided to ICE will be used against them.

It cannot be stressed enough if the worker has valid immigration documentation, they should provide that information when prompted. Ensure they are always carrying or have photos/copies of their documentation with them.

#### What does the worker do if ICE comes to their residence?

Advice from around the industry is the worker to not let ICE into their home or go outside unless the agent can show a signed warrant by a federal or state judge. As mentioned, ICE has been known to produce a warrant that has not been signed by a federal or state judge and

is therefore invalid, employers should show workers an example of an actual warrant. Best practices from around the industry are to have them slip the warrant under the door or hold it up to the window. If the warrant is not signed, the worker should respond by informing the ICE officer they do not want to talk at this time.

What does the worker do if ICE comes to their work?

The worker has the right to remain silent and seek legal representation before answering any questions. They should remain polite and calm and in under no circumstances run from the agent. Again, running creates probable cause and allows what would otherwise be an unlawful search and seizure lawful.



# Vineline

*NWPB News*



## NATIONAL WATERMELON PROMOTION BOARD

## SPRING 2025 INDUSTRY UPDATES



Each year the Board strives to increase the demand for watermelon through research, education and promotion. With the Board’s new fiscal year kicking off on April 1st, the new assessment increase will elevate the programs. Find details below and stay up to date with the Watermelon Update by scanning the QR code.



### RESEARCH STRENGTHENS MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Research is the backbone of the programs at the Watermelon Board. Not only does it help measure success, but it guides how marketing and communications build the programs and reach specific audiences. The assessment increase will allow for additional human nutrition studies leading to more watermelon nutrition messages. Increased consumer, retail and foodservice research will help the Board better understand the watermelon consumer. These studies will lead to insights and tools the industry can use in your businesses.



### ENHANCED RETAIL EDUCATION, OUTREACH AND PROMOTIONS

The retail program is expanding its retail outreach with increased marketing support for national, state, and regional association programs, including watermelon queen and promotional ambassador initiatives. Retailers will also benefit from an extended retail merchandising contest running from June through August, tapping into peak watermelon demand throughout the summer.



A new quarterly retail newsletter will highlight the benefits of NWPB resources, keeping key stakeholders informed while serving as a valuable industry tool. To enhance digital engagement, NWPB is strengthening partnerships with Chicory for in-recipe ad placements, Grocery TV for in-store advertising, and exploring new opportunities with DoorDash.

By leveraging these expanded initiatives, NWPB aims to drive watermelon sales, strengthen industry partnerships, and maximize market impact, ensuring a successful 2025/2026 retail season.

### EXPANDED EDUCATION AND INSPIRATION FOR FOODSERVICE

New spring and summer paid placements will highlight education messages since the media covers inspirational watermelon menu items during that time of year. The larger scope for foodservice promotions allows for larger chain engagement – previously chains larger than 200 locations really didn’t benefit as much from the Board’s limited promotional resources.



Tasting is believing watermelon is a must on menus. For that reason, foodservice events are essential and the most cost effective ways to broadly reach foodservice decisionmakers. The elevated program allows for more intimate culinary events and specific beverage menu outreach. The Board will also reach more targets including college and university foodservice, fast casuals, and culinary students. The increase in the foodservice program will elevate watermelon’s brand awareness, lead generation and conversion moving into 2025 and beyond. The goal is for future chefs and consumers to expect watermelon in their kitchens and on their plates in foodservice.



### COMMUNICATIONS CONNECTS CONSUMERS TO WATERMELON BENEFITS

TeamSnap, the leading youth sports app/platform, connects millions of organizations, coaches, and families. From August to March, we’ll promote watermelon as the ultimate hydrating post-game snack.

In-person fitness events offer a prime opportunity to engage active communities. At IDEA World, we’ll reintroduce fitness professionals and enthusiasts to the watermelon workout challenge and provide refreshment for outdoor activities. Run clubs are booming and watermelon is a natural fit to support hydration. To strengthen this connection, we’ll sponsor five run clubs nationwide and collaborate with 5-10 influencers to expand our reach through user generated content and health education.

Building on iHeart’s podcast ad success, the increase will allow for work with new vendor Audacy who offers localized content across major markets, appealing to listeners through news, sports, and music formats. Audacy’s advanced cross-device attribution will track ad-exposed users across TV and audio, integrating streaming TV, radio, and podcast ads.



# Florida Report

Greeting’s from the Sunshine State of Florida!!

As our 2025 year begins Queen Elanie and I attended several conventions throughout the months of January and February 2025. Our first convention in January was at the South Carolina Watermelon Convention held at the Omni Hilton Head Resort in Hilton Head, South Carolina. Congratulations to Miss Grayson Vaughn for being crowned the 2025 South Carolina Watermelon Queen. Thank you to Kinard Farms, Charter Next Generation and Premier Melon Company for sponsoring us to this convention. The following weekend in January, Queen Elanie and I attended the Georgia Watermelon Convention in the beautiful place of Braselton, Georgia. Special thank you to Melon 1, Sun State Produce and Seedway for sponsoring us to attend this year convention. Congratulations to Katelyn Lindsey. for being crowned the 2025 Georgia Watermelon Ambassador. Our last weekend in January, we attended the Gulf Coast Watermelon Convention being held in my home town of Biloxi, Mississippi. Congratulations to Miss Maci Cross for being crowned 2025 Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen. A special thank you to our sponsors Blue Marlin Ag Services, T Smith Farms, International Paper and Clifton Seed Company. Also, during the months of January and February Queen Elanie attended opening day at the Florida State Fair, Literacy Day at Bell Elementary School, and Watermelon Day with Fresh from Florida at the United Rentals 300 Infinity Race in Daytona.

Our last weekend together, Queen Elanie and I headed out to Austin, Texas for the 110th Annual National Watermelon Convention. I’m so proud to announce that our Florida Watermelon Queen Elanie brought home the title of the National Watermelon Queen. CONGRATULATIONS to Elanie!!! Way to go!! On behalf of the Florida Watermelon Association, our board members and FWA members we are all very proud of you, Queen Elanie. Thanks to everyone that attend Nationals in Texas and supported Queen Elanie. Congratulations goes out to Miss Karli Abbott – Mar-Del Watermelon for winning the “Miss Jubilee Award”, Second Runner-up Kinlyn Hinson – South Carolina Watermelon, and First Runner-up Tori Hobbs- Gulf Coast Watermelon Associations. All the States Queen’s this year did an awesome job representing their home state.

Also, a very special congratulations to the following people, Mr. Jesse Wiggins receiving Outstanding Service Award, Mr. Chad Chastain honored with the Future Watermelon Farm Leader Award and Mr. Raymon Land inducted to the National Watermelon Hall of Fame.

Please come and join us for a fun-filled week for our 57th Annual Florida Watermelon Convention being held on October 30 – November 1, 2025 at the Sunseeker Resort in Charlotte Harbor, Florida. Our theme this year is “Haunted Casino”. President Rob Gibson and our first lady Kel Gibson is planning a lot of Halloween Fun Spooky Events. On Saturday we will be crowning our 2026 Florida Watermelon Queen. Registration will be opening soon, be sure and go on our website soon and register for our 57th Annual Florida Watermelon Convention or contact Jenna Brown – at [jbrown@asginfo.net](mailto:jbrown@asginfo.net) make all of your registration that is needed. It going to be lots of Spooky fun!!

Wishing everyone a successful Watermelon season this year..... Until next time!

Debra (Harrison) Watson -  
Florida Watermelon Promotions Coordinator  
Email: [debra@flfwa.com](mailto:debra@flfwa.com)  
Cell: (863) 633-8306



Congratulations to Grayson Vaughn for being crowned the 2025 South Carolina Watermelon Queen.



Congratulations to Katelyn Lindsey for being chosen as the 2025 2nd Annual Georgia Watermelon Ambassador.



Queen Elanie enjoying the day coloring and reading watermelon-themed books at Bell Elementary School during Literacy Week.



Congratulations to Maci Cross for being crowned the 2025 Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen.



Queen Elanie spending the morning at our “Florida State Fair” booth.



It all “Smiles” when you get to see these two handsome young men Ellis and Edison Miller.



Always a pleasure to enjoy the day with Chef Justin and the “Fresh from Florida” crew in Daytona at the United Rentals 300 Infinity Race in Daytona.



Congratulations Mr. Raymon for being inducted into the National Watermelon Hall of Fame.



A honor with “Future Watermelon Farm Leader Award” this year went to Mr. Chad Chastain dedicating this year in the memory of the late Dan Thomas.



Queen Elanie with our 2025 Florida Watermelon Officers in Austin, Texas.



“Congratulations” Elanie for bringing home the National crown. I’m so proud of you!!!



Proud parents of Elanie “Billy and Karen Mason”.



Our 2025 Florida Watermelon Queen Reagan Hudson at the “Edison Light Parade” the largest nighttime parade with Wink News.



Queen Reagan visiting with Fort Myers Mayor Kevin Anderson at the Edison Light Parade.



Queen Reagan educating the students at Chiefland Elementary School on learning from where their food comes from and for the farmers who provide it. Thank you, Murray Tillis for sponsoring this event.



A fun event in Orlando at “Southern Exposure” opening reception with Fresh from Florida and Nascar Driver #1 Ross Chastain. Thank you, Fresh from Florida, for having us.



# Georgia Report

Greetings from Georgia!

The Georgia Watermelon Association is excited to report on a successful 2025 annual convention held at a new location, Chateau Elan in Braselton, Georgia. The weekend was one we will never forget, especially after record snowfall in South Georgia. We are grateful to everyone who was able to attend and contribute to making this year’s event memorable.

The live auction was once again a huge success, raising over \$315,000. A heartfelt THANK YOU to our load donors, buyers, and all auction supporters—your commitment to the industry is invaluable, and your support ensures the continued success of our association and our ability to promote Georgia Watermelon from production to consumption. We also extend our gratitude to all of our sponsors for their generous contributions, which made this event possible.

We are thrilled to announce Katelyn Lindsay from Locust Grove, Georgia, as the 2025 Georgia Watermelon Brand Ambassador! Katelyn is currently studying Agricultural Communication at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. She has already begun promoting watermelon across Georgia by attending events such as Science on the Farm hosted by Georgia Southwestern University, Pelham Elementary Ag Day, and the Georgia Food and Wine Festival. She has also had the opportunity to learn about the upcoming season and meet many of our members at UGA’s Cooperative Extension Watermelon Production Meetings in Crisp and Tift counties. Be sure to follow Katelyn on Instagram @gawatermelonambassador for updates on her travels and upcoming appearances. She is looking forward to many retail and grower visits ahead. If you’re interested in scheduling Katelyn for an event or would like more information on our 2025 tour, please don’t hesitate to contact me at 478-973-9162 or by email at clollis@asginfo.net.

We look forward to an exciting year ahead with many more opportunities to promote our favorite fruit- Georgia Watermelon!

Sincerely,  
Charley Sheffield  
Promotions Coordinator



2025 GWA Ambassador Katelyn Lindsay



Katelyn with GWA sponsor Hunter Slade of Syngenta



Ambassador Katelyn celebrates with visiting queens



Watermelon growers and suppliers gather for UGA production meetings



Thank you to GWA's Load Buyers for their continued support (Not all pictured)



Katelyn and GWA Board Member Rob Greene at the Crisp County production meeting



Thank you to GWA's Load Donors for their continued support (Not all pictured)



Katelyn with young FFA members at Pelham Elementary



GWA conference attendees enjoy a sip and paint hosted at Chateau Elan



Ambassador Katelyn with students at Science on the Farm, holding up the “W”



# Gulf Coast Report

## Happy Planting Season!

The Gulf Coast Watermelon Association just completed our 2025 Annual Convention. Our president, Allen Eubanks, hosted a wonderful convention. It was a weekend filled with all of our watermelon friends and family. We look forward to announcing our 2026 convention date and location in the coming months.

We are extremely proud of our 2024 Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen, Tori Hobbs, placing 1st Runner Up at the National Watermelon Association Convention. She has been a light to our association and made us all proud throughout her reign as the Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen. We wish her many blessings in her future endeavors.

Congratulations to our newly crowned 2025 Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen, Maci Cross, of Rehobeth, Alabama. Maci will be graduating in May from Troy University Dothan where she is studying Global Business - Accounting. After graduating, she plans to obtain her Master's of Accountancy. We are happy to welcome her to our watermelon family!

Looking ahead into the spring, Queen Maci will attend promotions including farm visits, an Earth Day Event, school readings, the queen photoshoot, and much, much, more. She has a busy schedule ahead and is ready to promote the best produce on the market!

Would you like to book the Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen? Please email Sarah Jane at [gulfcoastwatermelonqueen@gmail.com](mailto:gulfcoastwatermelonqueen@gmail.com) to schedule a promotion. Queen Maci can hardly wait for her busy year as the 2025 Gulf Coast Watermelon Queen!

Be sure to check out and keep up with our queen on the Gulf Coast Watermelon Association Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok pages to see all of our watermelon promotions. We wish everyone a successful watermelon season!

Many Blessings,

Sarah Jane Levine  
Gulf Coast Watermelon Association  
Promotion Coordinator  
(337) 348-4465  
[gulfcoastwatermelonqueen@gmail.com](mailto:gulfcoastwatermelonqueen@gmail.com)



Queen Tori collected 390 pounds of canned goods for the Wiregrass Food Bank.



Past Alabama and Gulf Coast Watermelon Association Queens crowning the 2025 Queen.



Sarah Jane and Tori getting to visit the Texas State Capitol while at the NWA Convention.



Visiting Queens and Coordinators at the 2025 GCWA Opening Reception - Derby Theme.



Queen Tori, Queen Jules, and the GCWA members at the NWA Convention.



Queen Tori riding in a local Christmas Parade.



Outgoing 2024 GCWA Queen Tori Hobbs with incoming 2025 GCWA Queen Maci Cross.



Queen Tori competing in evening gown at the NWA Convention. She received 1st RU.



# Illiana Report

## Greetings from Illiana!

As we gear up for what we hope will be a successful and abundant growing season in Indiana and Illinois, we're excited to share some important updates!

First, we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Queen Maya for her outstanding service to the Illiana Watermelon Association over the past year. Maya has represented our industry with passion, dignity, and grace, leaving a lasting impact. Most recently, she showcased her dedication at the National Watermelon Association Convention in Austin, Texas, where she impressed the judges with her poise and enthusiasm. Thank you, Maya, for your hard work and commitment—we know you have a bright future ahead!

Now, we are thrilled to introduce the 2025 Illiana Watermelon Queen, Joceline Wible, of Shelburn, Indiana! Joceline, a 19-year-old Kinesiology major at Purdue University, was crowned at the 35th annual Illiana Watermelon Association Convention in French Lick, Indiana, on January 18, 2025.

Joceline was selected for her exceptional communication skills, deep-rooted dedication to agriculture, and outstanding leadership experience. With over a decade of active involvement in agriculture, she has held leadership roles in 4-H, the National Junior Swine Association, and Indiana Pork Producers, among others. Additionally, she has served on the Sullivan County Junior Leaders of 4-H Board of Directors and participated in the Lads and Lassies 4-H Club.

The Illiana Watermelon Association extends a warm congratulations to Joceline and heartfelt appreciation to all contestants, sponsors, and community members who contributed to the success of this year's convention.

We are also proud to announce that Mind Your Melon will once again be our 2025 charity partner. Back in 2020, Marshall Sewell delivered a powerful message about the importance of mental health in the agriculture community. We are honored to support Marshall and his mission again in 2025!

Of course, none of this would be possible without the generosity of our wonderful sponsors. We are especially grateful to our 2025 Platinum Sponsors: AgroRenew, Greif CorrChoice, Frey Farms, Global Produce Sales, International Paper, Knox County Farm Bureau, Mouzin Brothers Farms, Premier Melon, Seedway, Summertime Produce, Superior Ag, and Valencia Harvesting.

Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to a fantastic growing season ahead!

Kind regards,  
Lana Brothers  
(314) 724-6305  
iwapromocoordinator@gmail.com



Queen Maya and Kelly Tyner presenting Marshal Sewell with a check for Mind Your Melon



Illiana members in Austin, Texas, proud to support Queen Maya



IWA President Rob Beets and Maya at the NWA Convention



2025 Queen Contestants



Welcome to the family, Queen Jocey!



Queen Jocey at her first promotion, a check presentation of \$12,000 for Brown Baggers in Sullivan, IN, sponsored by Carrie



Queen Jocey at Sullivan Ag Day in Sullivan, IN sponsored by Melon Acres



Introducing our 2025 Illiana Watermelon Queen, Miss Joceline Wible



Mar-Del Report

They always say time flies when you are having fun. We can not believe the watermelon season is quickly approaching once again! Our 2024 promotion year was a success! Queen Karli was able to represent the Mar- Del Watermelon Association at a couple end of year promotions. She attended the Maryland Agriculture dinner. It is always rewarding to see the strong presence of the Department of Agriculture in both Maryland and Delaware.

Mar-Del Watermelon Association kicked off their annual convention weekend with a baseball theme,”A Homerun with MarDelicious Watermelon! It was a successful weekend and a good time was had by all! We wished Queen Karli the best of luck at Nationals and thanked her for doing a wonderful job as the 2024 Mar-Del Watermelon Queen. Karli did her last walk as the Mar-Del Queen before crowning our 2025 Mar-Del Watermelon Queen, Miss Caroline Allen.

Queen Caroline jumped right in by attending her first promotion a week after being crowned. Queen Caroline and board members were able to attend the Good Ole Boy Foundation banquet and present our auction load donation check. At the 2025 banquet,we auctioned off a load of watermelons.Growers, brokers, and members joined together and raised \$30,000 to donate to a charity. This year, we chose the Good Ole Boy Foundation. The Good Ole Boy Foundation is a a non-profit organization founded to mobilize the community and assist families facing unforeseen difficulties, with a primary focus on addressing the needs of children.

We are thankful to be growing into a new year and season. Mar-Del looks forward to the opportunities and promotions ahead. We hope to see our watermelon family throughout the upcoming season. We are praying for a safe and successful season for everyone.



Queen Karli enjoying a fun afternoon at the Ice cream museum.



Queen Karli with Mar-Del members at the conclusion of the National Banquet.



Mar-Del Watermelon Convention fun for all.



Crowning of the 2025 Mar-Del Watermelon Queen.



Queen Karli and newly crowned Queen Caroline Allen.



Queen Caroline and Mar-Del members presenting the check at the Good Ole Boy Foundation banquet.



Newly crowned Queen Caroline with former Mar-Del Watermelon Queens.



Queen Karli attending her last promotion at the Taste of Maryland Ag Dinner.



We were able to catch up with some of our members at the National Convention. We always appreciate the support.



# North Carolina Report

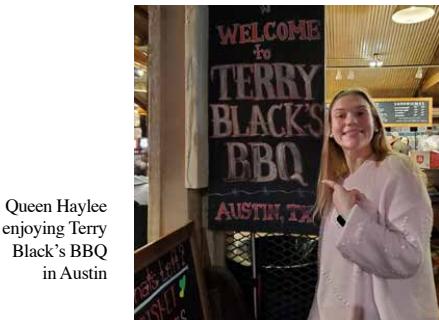
Our 2024 North Carolina Watermelon Queen, Miss Haylee Davis, completed her year of service and we would like to thank her for her contributions as our watermelon ambassador this season.

Before traveling to Austin, Haylee had the opportunity to attend the South Carolina Watermelon Associations convention. Thank you to South Carolina for allowing us to be a part of such a fun weekend. Haylee later, went to Texas for the National Watermelon Association Convention, where she represented the North Carolina Watermelon Association and its members well. During their time in Austin, Haylee and the other state queens visited the Texas state capitol building and the Austin Museum of Ice Cream. The Ice Cream Museum was such a fun spot, especially since they offered unlimited ice cream.

The 42nd Annual North Carolina Watermelon Association Convention recently took place in Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina. Four candidates competed for the title of 2025 North Carolina Watermelon Queen, each presenting their own unique ideas for promoting North Carolina watermelons. At the evening banquet, Miss Elizabeth Steinlage was chosen as the 2025 North Carolina Watermelon Queen. Elle is a student at North Carolina State University majoring in Agriculture Science. She is excited to promote North Carolina watermelons, she is interested in learning more about the industry and all of agriculture in our state. The convention also included events such as our President’s reception featuring a casino night with fun Las Vegas style games, a very competitive seed spit contest, and an extremely successful auction. We want to express our gratitude to all the sponsors who contributed to the success of the convention.

We are busy preparing Elle’s upcoming spring schedule, and we extend our wishes for a successful season to everyone.

Sharon Rogers  
Promotions Coordinator 336-583-9630  
ncwatermelonqueen@gmail.com



Queen Haylee enjoying Terry Black's BBQ in Austin



Our 2025 NC Watermelon Queen contestants found a few minutes to enjoy the beautiful beach weather during the North Carolina convention



Everyone enjoyed the Museum of Ice Cream



Queen Elle participating in her very first seed spit contest



Queen Haylee and friends having a little fun at the Austin Museum of Ice Cream



Our contestants worked really hard during the convention auction



Thursday night opening reception at the NWA Convention



Queen Elle and her family at the North Carolina Watermelon Convention banquet



Queen Haylee excited for the first day of competition at the NWA Convention



NC Watermelon Association 2025 Watermelon Queen Scholarship Pageant winners: Savannah Dennis – 2nd runner up, Elizabeth Steinlage – Queen, and Emily Taylor 1st runner up



What a great job each Queen did decorating their boots for the auction



The tradition continues. We had a wonderful group of past North Carolina Queens to attend our convention



Haylee and her parents at the NWA Convention banquet



Thank you to Seedway's Chuck Elam and Anna Young for helping to support our convention.



Haylee and our Queen contestants are all ready for casino night at our President's Reception



North Carolina Watermelon Association second Vice President Don Small, past Chairman of the Board James Brake, Queen Elle and President Mike Marks



# South Carolina Report

On January 17th-19th, the SC Watermelon Convention was held in Hilton Head, SC. We said goodbye to 2024 Queen, Kinlyn Hinson, and welcomed 2025 Queen, Gracen Vaughn. Gracen is the 20 year old daughter of Seth and Jennifer Vaughn of Simpsonville, SC, and is a Sophomore Nursing Major with a minor in Biology and Honors, at Mars Hill University. She plans to attend the USC School of Medicine with a focus on Maternal Fetal Medicine.

On January 24th-26th, Gracen and Kinlyn attended the Georgia Convention in Braselton, GA. The girls welcomed new Georgia Brand Ambassador, Katelyn Lindsay.

Nationals was held in Austin, Texas on February 11th-16th. South Carolina was very lucky to have Kinlyn Hinson representing them in the competition for 2025 National Watermelon Queen. Kinlyn definitely did an outstanding job for the association, not only at Nationals, but also during her entire year representing our state. We would like to welcome the new 2025 National Queen, Elainie Mason (Florida), First Runner-Up, Tori Hobbs (Gulfcoast), and Second Runner-Up, Kinlyn Hinson (South Carolina). Also, congratulations to Karli Abbott (MarDel) on the Miss Jubilee award.

The Blowfish Baseball team in Lexington, SC, hosted their annual St. Patrick’s Day Parade on Sunday, March 9th, in Lexington. Tori Goldsmith, 2025 First Runner-Up attended the festival and rode in the parade.

Upcoming events for Queen Gracen are the annual Field Day for Southside Christian School on March 21st in Greenville, SC, Queen Training on April 3rd, and the Cooper River Bridge Run and Harris Teeter Expo on April 3rd-5th, in Charleston, SC.

This year is looking to have another packed schedule promoting our favorite commodity – WATERMELON. Gracen and I are looking forward to seeing everyone soon.

Watermelon Wishes,  
Ann Bryant  
SC Promotions Coordinator  
Abryant028@charter.net  
864-303-3995



Queens showing their boots for opening reception in Austin, Texas.



Kinlyn receiving 2nd Runner-Up.



Contestants looking over dinner at the SC Convention.



Contestants and visiting queens getting ready for the start of competition.



Having fun at a very successful auction.



Evening Gown Competition.



Welcoming 2025 SCWQ, Gracen Vaughn.



SC Board Members with new queen, Gracen.



Georgia Convention in Braselton, Georgia.



Gracen and Kinlyn greeting Gilbert Miller from the SCWA.



Talking with Steve VanMeter of Food Lion.



Gracen enjoyed meeting Ross Chastain for the first time.



Visiting Queens in Georgia.



New Georgia Brand Ambassador, Katelyn Lindsay.



# Texas Report

Happy Spring to our watermelon family! We pray everything is going as planned with planting and weather.

Amelia has been busy, and it started with an invitation to the Seminis Growers Summit in McAllen, Texas in January. Also attending was the new 2025 Texas Watermelon Queen, Miss Bethany Boller who welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the industry. Both Amelia and Bethany heard about topics such as viral threats, market development strategies, hollow heart in watermelon crops, watermelon trials and sales data trends. Thank you to all the speakers and Seminis for this extremely informative event.

Next up for Amelia was the Gulf Coast Watermelon Association Convention at the Beau Rivage Resort and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi. From beginning to end we received wonderful southern hospitality from the GCWA folks. The theme of Kentucky Derby had the ladies in their fascinators, some of which were styled with watermelon! Amelia and I enjoyed ourselves immensely. Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Eubanks and Sarah Jane Levine, for having us and showing us a wonderful time.

The most anticipated event for our queen, Amelia, was the National Watermelon Convention in Austin, Texas. The girls began their time together with a visit to the state capitol. The next day the girls enjoyed a trip to the Museum of Ice Cream before the serious business began. In the evening the girls had the judges’ reception, then everyone attended the opening reception and had the chance to catch up with people they may not have seen in a while. On Friday, the girls gave their speeches in the morning, then later they helped with the auction and took part in the seed spit. On Saturday the contestants had the promotion wear, written portion and interviews before the evening gown competition. What an incredible experience for the young women who did an amazing job. I know all the state associations are very proud of their queens. Congratulations to Miss Elaine Mason the new 2025 National Watermelon Queen. May your year be spectacular!

In my next letter I will fill you in on Queen Bethany’s start to her year which has already begun. In the meantime, I pray you have a great season.

Best regards,  
Barbara Duda TWA Coordinator  
bcduda62@gmail.com



Amelia and Bethany at the Seminis Growers Summit



Ready for the National Watermelon Association President's Reception



The girls visited with the folks from Prukop Farms.



A fun outing to the Museum of Ice Cream in Austin



Having a good conversation with Clegg Smith



Cotton Candy... Yes, please!



The ladies showed off their fascinators at the Gulf Coast Watermelon Convention



The girls in their one-of-a-kind boots that represent their state



Amelia had fun at the GCWA auction.



Visiting the Capitol in Austin



Good friends ready to celebrate a birthday



The evening gown competition

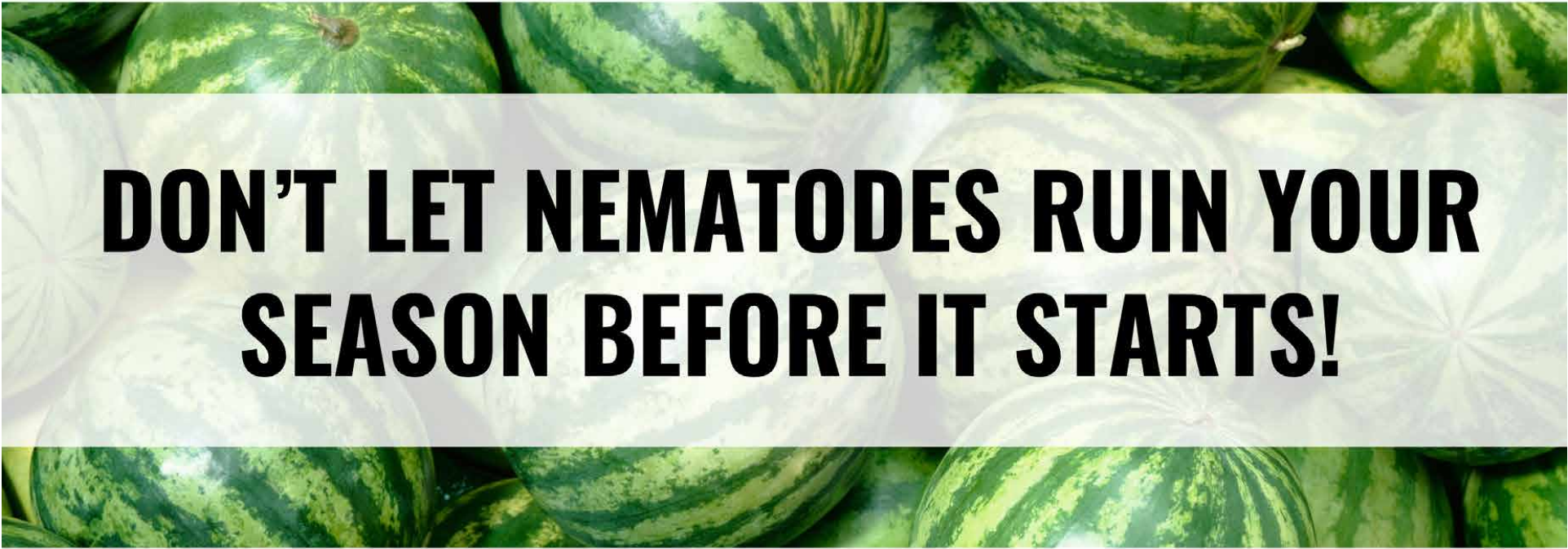


Amelia looked lovely at the GCWA banquet.



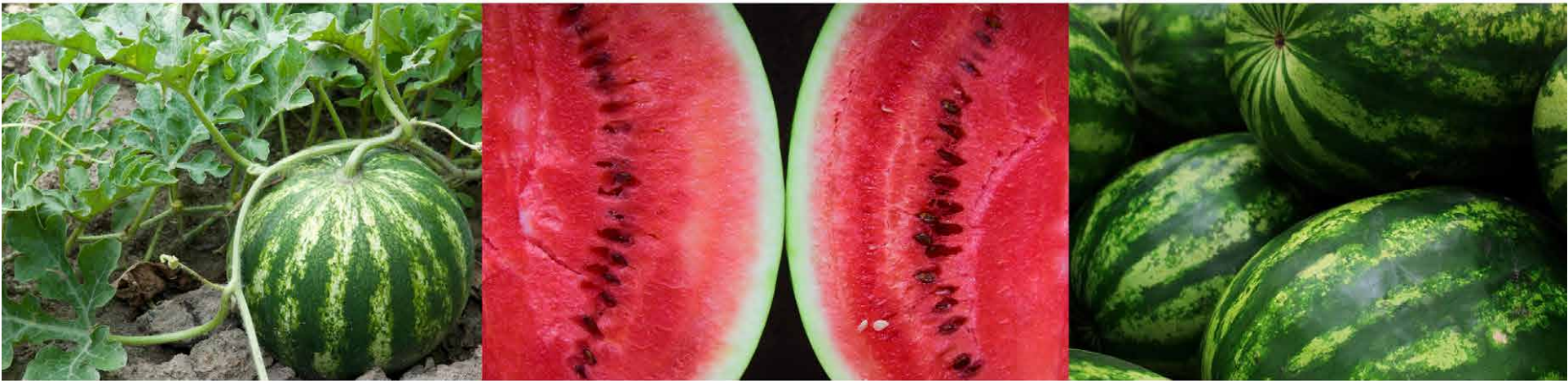
Amelia and her proud parents





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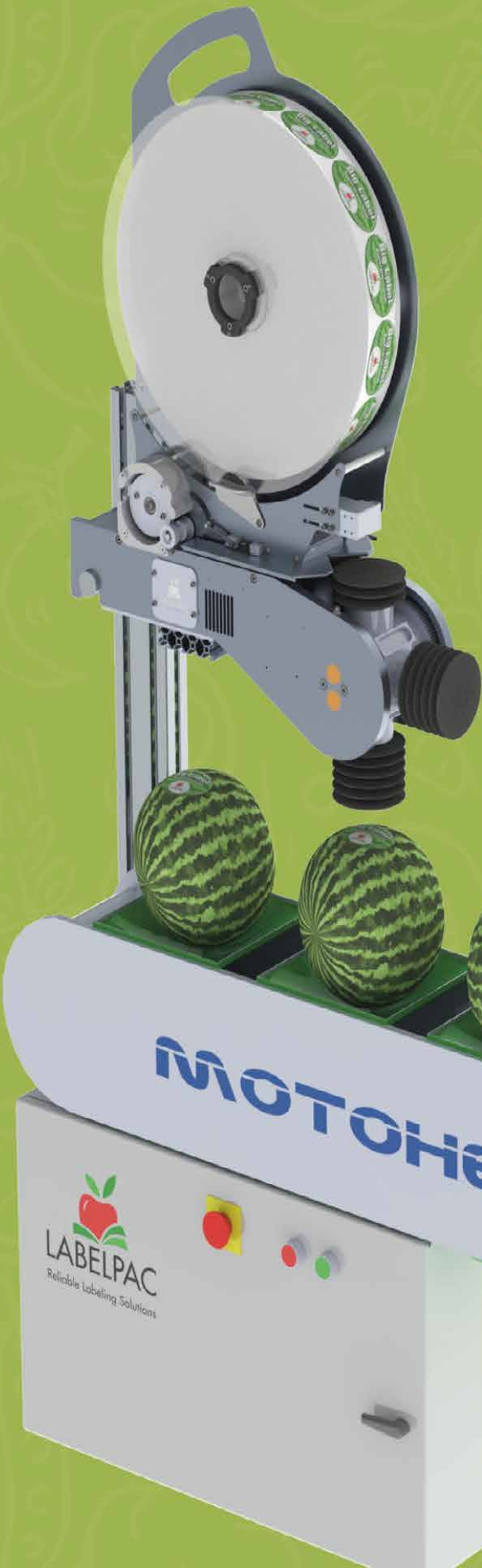




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