

The Real Deal

Embracing Our Future

by Corinne Shindelar, CEO

Fall is one of my favorite times of year, the business of planning for the next year, the budget cycle, and thinking strategically about what's next for INFRA and its members. Add these annual activities to the hectic schedule of tradeshow, Intensives, Board Meetings, along with other industry events, and creativity begins to meet reality quickly. We acknowledge that time is our most valuable asset and we can't do everything we envision is possible, at least not in 2018. We do, however, know where we clearly need to go next.

When the INFRA Board met in August, we began our annual journey of short term strategic planning alongside of looking deeply into the question of "definition of growth", revisiting the INFRA Values Statements and began the process of crafting a Vision Statement that would provide guidance into

the future. Simultaneously, INFRA was on the move with exploring Biodynamic opportunities (introduced at the Annual Conference), keeping up on Synbio (GMOs 2.0) technologies (learn more at www.synbiowatch.org), and seeing so much opportunity for us with the announcement of Amazon acquiring Whole Foods. Additionally, we decided to be one of the first adopters/sponsors and communication catalysts for launching the Climate Collaborative.

Mission

Strengthening our members through collaboration to forge a sustainable future

Core Values

Collaboration
Innovation
Integrity
Transparency
Diversity
Engagement
Inspiration
Compassion

The heavy lifting of all of this really begins with dialing back and asking ourselves, "What is the most important thing for us to focus on in 2018? What can help us support our members experience positive sales growth and profitability? How do we combine the big picture thinking and begin supporting our members into the next generation of business models that we know will be required in the future given customers' expectations of technology integration into our brick and mortar stores?" All of these questions could be a newsletter article on their own; however, the first thing we really need to do is strengthen the "team".

Our "team" is our members, our board, and our staff. It is the power of the whole that will make the difference going forward. It is also a circle that requires commitment with each of the independent individuals agreeing to alignment of similarities across store fronts and banners if we are going to maintain and build on our existing voice in the food movement. We need our members to participate in their purchasing cooperative at a higher level than they are today. Every single product that you carry and is placed on INFRA Deals should be promoted. Every single discount should be passed on to your customers. Members shouldn't even hesitate to join their regional supply agreements, even if you are not seeing an immediate savings, think of this as an "insurance plan" for the future. Competition is not going away, and access to USDA Organic and Non-GMO Verified is not going to get easier. Academy of Retail Training (ART) should be part of every member's staff orientations (Natural Foods 101). The category reviews that we offer, the Intensives, trainings and conference should all have 50-100% more attendance than they have today. Every member should be submitting to CoMetrics and learning from their peers how to make adjustments to their financial models more quickly in order to achieve positive sales growth and profitability.

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Photograph from INFRA's Holiday Brochure Toolkit.
To access this and other Thanksgiving collateral, visit
members.infretailers.com/VendorRecipeProgram

The purchasing activities at INFRA are “what keeps the lights on”. They provide us with 88% of our revenue. They provide us with the ability to facilitate best practice sharing, have a team of experts that can provide members with guidance and recommendations for improving their operations. They keep us in the forefront of today’s organic and natural food space. We are so ready at INFRA, as members, board, and staff to take all that we have built over the past decade to the next level.

There are so many opportunities at our doorstep and we want to move those forward. We want to move forward the ideas that members present to us, whether it be joining together to form a stable employee health insurance pool, creating a shared electronic platform for digital promotions, strengthening first-to-market opportunities, or increasing department level Intensives. Yet we can’t keep adding more without fully engaging in what already exists.

Focusing on member participation, building on opportunities with current business partners (distribution/vendors) and social change partners (NGOs) is where the leadership of INFRA is thinking we need to point our resources towards in 2018. There are a few simple steps that our members could take to help move forward faster:

1. Add “Manage and promote INFRA Deals monthly” in the job descriptions for your purchasing teams.
2. Subscribe to ART and use the education trainings on Natural Foods 101 and Retail Math.
3. Plan to send staff to an Intensive and the INFRA Annual Conference.
4. Pass INFRA negotiated discounts on to your customers and promote these savings!

If every single INFRA member did three of those four steps, we could really rock and roll in this space. We could have resources for *strengthening our members through collaboration to forge a sustainable future*, and we could do more in the area of social change (Climate Collaborative, Biodynamics, NGP, food security, waste, etc.) all while telling our story. Driving our individual and collective missions forward is what will grow our sales and is why people will want to continue to shop at their locally owned independent natural food retailer. Let’s empower our own future through thoroughly embracing the community that we have built together.

Looking forward to seeing what we can accomplish in 2018.
Your humble CEO, Corinne



Boost Your Thanksgiving Sales with Compelling Recipes

INFRA’s Holiday Brochure is ready and waiting for you! Print the whole brochure for customers to use in their cornucopia-planning, or post individual recipes in social media to entice them into the store.

Created specifically for INFRA retailers, the toolkit includes 8 recipes for a Thanksgiving meal, from appetizer to dessert, beautifully photographed (see our festive Autumn Newsletter cover for a taste!). It also has practical and fun articles- a planning timeline, thawing and cooking guidelines for your turkey, and cranberry trivia.

For more information, contact Meggie at msmith@infretailers.com. Get your toolkit and increase your basket size at members.infretailers.com/VendorRecipeProgram.



The Real Deal

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Valuable Business Trainings New in ART

Two new courses to develop your team's business acumen are coming to the Academy of Retail Training (ART) this November. Give your team leaders and aspiring store managers the tools to succeed in our increasingly competitive industry.

Course 307: Strengthening Relationships with Brokers and Reps. You get visits and calls from brokers and reps every week, in some cases, every day. Although they are often trying to sell you on their products, they can also provide you and your store with plenty of unique resources and tools to help your store grow and remain innovative and fresh. Knowing what these partners can offer and how to leverage your relationships will put you in a great position to stay competitive and maintain a successful business.

Course 308: Financial Management. This course will discuss tools for managing the financial aspects of your business including your balance sheet, income statement, and cash flow statement. It will offer suggestions for controlling your cash flow as well as describe important ratios and benchmarks you can use to monitor the health of your business.

Take advantage of the trainings available in ART to strengthen your team. From a new hire's first day to your next Store Manager, ART has courses to develop and educate every member of your team. Take a tour of the program and find out how it can fit into your team development plan. Contact Greg at gnorthrop@infretailers.com for more information.



Bach Flower Remedies Drawing Winner

This summer, Bach Flower Remedies sponsored a drawing for a 40pc Sample Kit with leather case valued at over \$800. Everyone completing the Bach Flower Remedies ART training by October 1st would be entered in the drawing. We are excited to announce the lucky winner:

**Dean McLaskey at Nature's Pantry
Natural Foods in La Grande, OR.**

This promotion was so well-received, Bach has already hinted at holding another drawing in the spring, so if you haven't had the opportunity to check out their ART course, ask your manager to sign you up. Whether you win the sample kit or not, Bach will send you a gift bag in appreciation of your hard work.

Congratulations Dean, and thank you all for investing your time and energy in the Academy of Retail Training!



NOVEMBER FLYER DEAL:
**IT'S YOUR LAST CHANCE
TO BE FIRST.**

The exclusive retail relationship provided by Alive & Well to INFRA members will end on December 1st. With the holidays just around the corner, be sure to stock up on probiotic-rich olives grown in Greece on small family farms and village co-ops where the terroir is ideal for olive cultivation. These certified organic olives are cured using ancient fermentation methods. Unlike nearly every other olive in your store, lye is not used in the process. As a result, the live, active cultures flourish naturally.



Just email orders@aliveandwellolives.com



AliveandWellOlives.com

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CERTIFIED ORGANIC BY BIOHELLAS S.A. • NATURALLY GLUTEN FREE • REFRIGERATE UPON DELIVERY, STOCK IN REFRIGERATOR CASE



Why the OTA Had to Sue the USDA

by Melody Meyer, Vice President of Policy and Industry Relations, UNFI

It's not something that you'd expect to hear—the Organic Trade Association (OTA) is suing the USDA. In fact, it's an extraordinary occasion that hasn't been witnessed before in the organic theater. But these are extraordinary times. Most often the OTA works closely with and is an important resource for the National Organic Program, a division of the USDA. They work hand-in-hand with the USDA's Market Access Program (MAP) to increase organic exports worldwide. Why then would OTA embark upon this seemingly adversarial act?

There was no other recourse to protect the entire organic sector and uphold the integrity of the organic seal.

What's the history of the organic animal welfare standards?

It's a bit of a dirty secret not flaunted by the industry. When the original regulations were promulgated in 2000, there were very few protections for animals written into the standard. To be fair, there were many things, like social justice, intended but not included in the original organic regulations. As consumers happily went on their way purchasing organic meat, dairy, and eggs, they assumed the animals would enjoy good, humane living conditions. The regulations had a ways to go to catch up with that expectation.

After more than a decade of transparent deliberations, not a few consternations, and prodigious public comment, the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) unanimously adopted a final detailed set of Animal Welfare recommendations in 2011. They defined and incorporated humane production practices including healthcare, outdoor access, and livestock living conditions. Since that meeting, there have been economic analysis and years of public input, debate, and deliberation. The final rule was published on January 19, 2017, just a day before the new administration took office. It looked like we finally had our animal welfare standard and we could at last move on to other unfinished business.

On January 20th, when the White House issued a regulatory freeze on all new or pending regulations, we thought we were merely caught up in the transition milieu. Then the USDA delayed the organic animal welfare rule again and on May 10th reopened the comment period, delaying the effective date by an additional six months. At that point, we knew something bigger was afoot.

It is quite likely that the USDA never intends for this rule to see the light of day.

Where is the opposition coming from?

Even if you don't know the difference between free range and cage free, you can smell something foul in the air. All of the opposition is coming from the egg sector. A few of the biggest and most powerful egg producers are producing "organic" eggs outside of the new standard, and they want to continue doing so. These few producers have put up quite a squawk exerting extreme pressure on members of Congress who in turn have placed the burden of defeat on the USDA.

Why is this precedent dangerous for the organic progress?

The organic seal represents a meaningful differentiation from other agricultural practices. It is transparently vetted through a public process that was set forth by Congress in 2000. If these differences are able to be swept aside by the whims of one political sector, what will happen when other new regulations are introduced or considered? If someone wants to be organic but not abide by the regulations, should Congress or the USDA step in and bow to their wishes?

This precedent could affect the future of all organic regulations.

The delay of the Animal Welfare Standards is a portentous moment for organic. The very integrity of the organic process is at stake. If this rule gets an untimely death, it could have long-term deleterious effects on the entire organic industry.

The OTA took the only action they could.

They sued the USDA, alleging:

- That the USDA violated the Administrative Procedure Act because the repeated delays were issued without any public process.
- That the USDA has violated the Administrative Procedure Act and abused its discretion by proposing action to indefinitely delay or kill the rule, in stark contrast to the established public process.
- That the USDA has violated the Organic Foods Production Act and its consultation provisions enacted to apply in just these circumstances for industry and public stakeholders to revise, refine, and advance organic standards via a well-defined process.
- That the Trump Administration Executive Order freezing regulations should not apply to the voluntary industry-driven organic standards that allow for businesses to opt in or out.

The lawsuit also describes the extensive public process and overwhelming record used to develop the standards and details.

What can you do to support the effort?

The OTA is standing up to protect organic integrity, advance animal welfare, and demand fundamental government fairness in organic standards setting. Read the press release for additional details about the lawsuit and supporting organizations, download the complaint, and use the communications kit to talk to your customers, suppliers, and friends.

When consumers purchase organic, they see the USDA label and hold firm to a certain belief that the product has been produced in a certain way. Free of pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics, and when it comes to animals, raised in a humane manner. After nearly 14 years of public debate and rigorous NOSB analysis, the Organic Animal Welfare Standard was released in January. If special interests in Washington obstruct the implementation of this final rule, essentially blocking the industry's ability to control its own standards, the very relevance of the organic seal is in grave danger.

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Links:

www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic-livestock-and-poultry-practices

www.ota.com/news/press-releases/19820

www.ota.com/sites/default/files/indexed_files/ComplaintFiled_OTA.pdf

www.ota.com/sites/default/files/indexed_files/OLPPAction_CommunicationsKit_OTAMembers.pdf

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Retailers and Brands Step Up on Climate Action at EXPO East

by Erin Callahan, Director of Climate Collaborative

We encourage you to join the 130+ fabulous, forward-looking companies that are tackling climate change. Visit www.climatecollaborative.com/take_action to learn more and make a commitment.

Climate action was a standout trend among companies at EXPO East this year.

- Seventh Generation became the 100th company to make a climate action commitment.
- More than 20 other retailers and brands stepped forward to announce that they, too, were committing to climate action through the Climate Collaborative.
- Annie's dedicated their entire booth to soil health – a key solution in sequestering carbon to reverse climate change.
- The Climate Collaborative and INFRA joined forces for a special, climate-focused breakfast briefing that was so popular many attendants were forced to stand. If you missed it, you can catch the video at www.vimeo.com/234538620.

The Climate Collaborative launched in March 2017 to inspire and support action on climate change among retailers, brands, distributors, and manufacturers in the natural products industry. In just 8 months, we've witnessed more than 130 companies commit to climate action through the platform and we hope to see those numbers grow further as we get closer to our second annual Climate Day at EXPO West in March 2018.



There was standing room only at the EXPO East breakfast briefing for INFRA members and Climate Collaborative committed companies.

INFRA was an early, important supporter of the Climate Collaborative's work, and we were thrilled to be able to share updates on our work with members like you at EXPO East. One of the highlights of the breakfast was when INFRA member, Sunflower Natural Foods Market announced its commitments to climate action in energy efficiency, food waste, packaging, renewable energy, and transportation! Sunflower is one of more than 20 retailers who have taken action through the Collaborative to date.

We're especially excited to see more retailers signing on because retailers occupy a unique niche in the value chain, with tremendous opportunity to influence not only their direct emissions and footprint, but also those of their vendors.

To that end, we are developing a toolkit to support retailers in engaging their vendors in climate action—through communications, promotions, and direct engagement.

Companies can join the Climate Collaborative by making one or more commitments to climate action. We keep the barriers to entry intentionally low. There is no fee to join, and the commitments are all forward-looking, so even companies at the very beginning of their climate journey can easily get involved. We also host monthly webinars and convene trainings and communities of practice to support companies in moving from commitment to action.

We hope you will consider stepping forward and making a commitment! Get started by filling out the intake form at www.climatecollaborative.com/commitment_intake_form or email Director Erin Callahan at erin@climatecollaborative.com with any questions.

"Stonyfield has long been working to fight climate change, but one of the key things we've learned over the years is that businesses can't solve this critical problem alone. The Climate Collaborative is bringing us together so we can identify and accelerate the solutions to shared challenges and ultimately reverse the impact we're all having on climate."



BRITT LUNDGREN
DIRECTOR OF ORGANIC &
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE
STONYFIELD



CoMetrics Introduces Brand New Web-Based Tool!

INFRA members have long faced a hurdle in using CoMetrics: accessing the information through the Excel-based Company Cube. It involved downloading a document, installing a recent version of the Excel software, and changing your Excel settings to run. And of course, it would not run on Macs without burdensome workarounds. I'm happy to write today that this is no longer the only way to access INFRA's financial benchmarking platform!

CoMetrics has launched a new browser-based platform with big, friendly-looking buttons when you log in to the CoMetrics website. This update includes new reports that make viewing store trends and benchmarking peers a more pleasurable and educational experience.

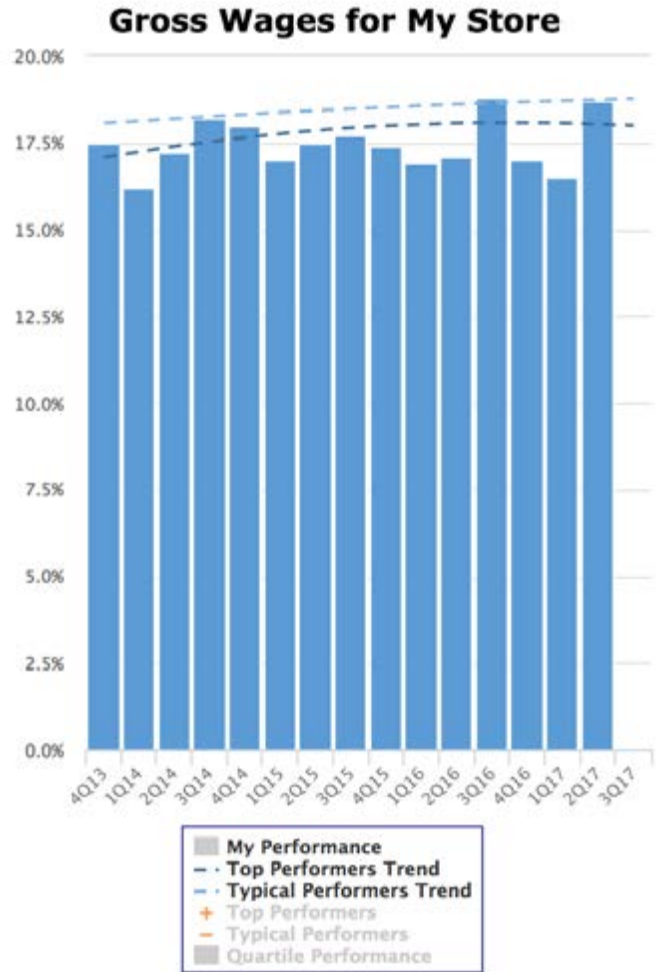
In addition to the easier to use format, the new tool features



charts that generate with just one click. These charts give you a visual into any row's metric, from your margin to your long-term liabilities. This is a welcome addition for those who prefer to see data in an eye-friendly way!

If you prefer the Company Cube legacy tool, you can rest assured that it will be maintained for at least a few more years until the functionality of the web reports meets and exceeds that of the Cube.

The best way to learn about these reports is to log in and see for yourself! If you would like to know more about the new web reports or how to access your own, please contact your Region Manager or Matt Ryan, CoMetrics lead, at mryan@infretailers.com.



INFRA Benchmarking - 2Q2017

CSV PDF

	My performance	Typical performers	Top performers	My potential	Gap
Ratios					
Operating Metrics					
Sales Growth	2.6%	2.2%	6.5%	6.5%	3.9%
Gross Margin	39.3%	38.0%	42.2%	42.2%	2.9%
Gross Wages	18.7%	18.5%	18.0%	18.0%	0.7%
Margin minus Labor before Taxes and Benefits	20.6%	19.4%	24.2%	24.2%	3.7%
Margin Minus Labor plus Sales Growth	23.2%	21.6%	30.7%	30.7%	7.5%
Net Profitability	1.6%	2.7%	6.5%	6.5%	5.0%
Financial Metrics					
Debt to Equity	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.2
Inventory Turns x Earnings	2.8	2.3	2.5	2.5	0.3
Current Ratio	2.4	1.9	3.8	3.8	1.4
Quick Ratio Excluding Inventory	0.8	0.8	2.6	2.6	1.8
Activity Metrics					
Inventory Turns	13.4	11.7	10.3	10.3	3.2

Save the Date for EXPO West Retailer Dinner!



Each year, INFRA hosts a dinner for members and associate retailers attending EXPO West in Anaheim, CA. As you plan your 2018 Calendar, reserve the evening of Thursday, March 8, 2018 for meeting your peers in Ralph Brennan's Jazz Kitchen.

Save the Date for the 2018 INFRA Annual Conference!

July 21-24, 2018 Minneapolis, MN



INFRA Members at 2017 INFRA Annual Conference

This Year's Indie Award Is Bigger & Better Than Ever

Since 2011, Independent We Stand's Indie Award has recognized stellar and beloved small businesses across the country. The Indie Award celebrates the relationship that small businesses have with their customers and their communities. Individuals are encouraged to nominate their favorite small business online and vote each day throughout the nomination and voting periods.

The Indie Award winner will receive an enhanced prize package valued at \$50,000, including \$5,000 cash, a comprehensive marketing makeover, and \$1,000 for a local small business group.

This year, there's even more incentive for communities to get involved. Small businesses are known for their support of community groups like Chambers of Commerce and Main Street Associations. The competition encourages small businesses to give back to the communities that support them. The winner of this year's Indie Award will get the opportunity to donate \$1,000 to the small business group of their choice. That money can go toward valuable community projects like downtown revitalization, a new community event, or more robust online resources for locals.

Additionally, this year's Indie Award winner will receive \$5,000 cash and a package of diverse prizes, including:

- Branding, advertising, and public relations makeover from independent advertising agency, The Meridian Group

- 12-month subscription and three months of free managed marketing services from SnapRetail
- \$1,000 STIHL, Inc. equipment certificate
- Three-day/two-night retreat and branding workshop in Virginia Beach, Va.
- Plaque to display at the winner's business

25 quarterfinalists will receive an Independent We Stand Premium membership for life, including access to customizable marketing materials and more.

Individuals can nominate and vote for their favorite small business online. Nominations and quarterfinalist voting runs through Nov. 12, followed by semifinalist voting from Nov. 21 through Dec. 11. Finally, the Indie Award winner will be announced on Dec. 14.

To nominate, vote and learn more about the Indie Award, visit www.IndieBizAward.com.



Independent We Stand offers compelling graphics for print and social media, to remind your shoppers the importance of shopping locally! Check out brand new graphics at members.infretailers.com/Marketing

Welcome, Emily!

Emily Soejoto (pronounced See-oh-toe) joined INFRA as INFRA's new Wellness Category Lead on September 5. In her position, Emily is responsible for providing wellness-specific promotional and category programs to INFRA member stores.



Emily has over 7 years of wellness experience in purchasing, pricing and promotions, retail management, and leadership. She worked for New Seasons Market in Portland, Oregon as well as in Minnesota at the Wedge Co-op and Valley Natural Foods Co-op.

As Wellness Category Lead, Emily will work closely with the rest of the Purchasing team at INFRA to help contribute to successful partnerships amongst retailers, vendors, and distributors. She supports our Retail Services team with wellness category management projects as we assess current industry trends and growth opportunities to help our members remain competitively positioned in an ever-changing market. She negotiates INFRA Deals and EDLP programs with wellness vendors on behalf of our membership. As part of wellness category reviews, she helps provide our members with educational resources to contribute to store-level success.

Emily is excited to be working alongside a diverse team that shares similar values of health and wellness, sustainability, collaboration, and opportunity for independent businesses.



INFRA Team Updates

Danelle Rydel's title changed in October 2017 to Director of Purchasing. It reflects INFRA's growing Fresh Department coming into our Purchasing Department, as a separate but integral arm, and also her work overseeing both teams. This reflects the teams' continued collaboration and the need for shared resources as Fresh becomes a more and more important part of our stores.

Jessica Armand was promoted to Category Lead from the Purchasing Assistant position. She is now responsible for delivering quality promotional and category programs to our member stores. Jessica will continue to work alongside Kate and Nick A. to manage the grocery brands, and will identify and develop tools that provide competitive positioning for our members in the areas of core cost of goods.



Cascadian Farm Tour with Maggie's Market

At the 2017 INFRA Annual Conference, the wonderful folks from Maggie's Market were the lucky winners of the free trip from Small Planet Foods to visit Cascadian Farm in Skagit Valley, Washington. Cascadian Farm is a bustling, crop-rotating, and composting farm. In fact, the original farm (along with about 30 others) produces the blueberries used in Cascadian Farm products.

Walking through the bountiful fields of blueberries, it became evident that the farm was much more than a simple roadside stand selling delicious ice cream and fresh produce. From the simple flower garden, strategically placed to ensure the survival of all the lovely pollinators, to the investment in different species of wheat in an attempt to reduce soil erosion. These efforts may seem simple when visiting the farm, but the potential is inspiring.

"It was wonderful to see how one person on a small farm in a remote corner of America can transform their passion into a major influencer in the nation's health. This example is an inspiration to us and how being a member of INFRA can, along with all the other members, help in making a meaningful change to the health of our customers and aid in promoting the environment we all share." said Peter and Amilbia Robinson. "We would like to thank INFRA and Cascadian Farms for affording us the opportunity to visit the farm and to learn about all they are doing to promote our passion in providing quality nutritious and healthy foods to consumers."



Organic Blueberries



Peter and Amilbia Robinson at Cascadian Farm



Cascadian Farm's Delicious Ice Cream

Days of Love on the Farms

Each year, the INFRA team is given a Day of Love - a day where we leave the office and get to volunteer, meet others who are striving for a better world, and often, get a little dirty. We love this day. It strengthens our teams, builds relationships, and breaks the patterns we can sometimes get caught in. In fact, we get so much out of our Day of Love, that it almost seems silly when the organizations thank us for our "work."

For the third year in a row, the Marketing and Communications team gathered to spread the love on the farm at the Women's Environmental Institute (WEI) in North Branch, MN, whose mission "brings together agricultural, food, and environmental justice, one community at a time; one farm at a time; one person at a time and all of us together." In the past, MarCom had both planted and harvested in the garlic fields, but this year, they aimed a bit higher: up to the tree tops. The plucky team hit the orchard on a drizzly morning and picked, sorted, and occasionally sampled an ample apple crop. The harvest would be sold as produce, cider, or baked goods to support WEI's efforts to advance their multi-faceted approach to improving environmental justice for all.



Greg, Sarah, Meggie, Erica, and Cole



Debra, Nick R, Emily, Rachel, Jessica, Danelle, and Nick A

The Purchasing team laced up their boots and mucked their way through the Urban Ventures CityKid Farm in Lakeville, MN where neighborhood youth and volunteers grow 45,000 lbs of produce each year on a modest 6-acre plot. Urban Ventures is a wide-ranging organization focused on "educating children, strengthening their families, and building a healthy community," and CityKid is their food-focused social enterprise platform. CityKid businesses create food products that sustainably employ, educate, and nourish the community. Our teams happily helped harvest the last of the jalapenos, as well as up-rooted tomato plants and stakes to clean up before the winter. It's a dirty job - at least it is the way they did it - but well worth it.

Our Day of Love has been heartily embraced as a way to connect beyond our Association, engage with people and communities we don't regularly meet, and, honestly, have a good time with each other. We are grateful for the opportunity and look forward to the next volunteer day.



Save the Date: World Fair Trade Day

Save the date! Fair World Project's annual World Fair Trade Day promotion is returning for May 2018. Check with leading fair trade brands like Dr. Bronner's, Alaffia, Alter Eco, Equal Exchange, and Guayaki Yerba Mate for deals on their top-selling fair trade products.

This year's theme, Fair to Farmers & the Soil, highlights the regenerative agricultural practices of small-scale farmers around the world. Choosing fair trade brands supports healthier farms and farmers, ethical supply chains, and products that consumers can feel good about putting in their shopping carts.

Stay in touch for more on how to:

- Generate sales (brands report up to 200+% lift for May promo period)
Reach consumers seeking authentic, ethical choices
- Access World Fair Trade Day digital marketing assets, including POS, social media, and newsletter content
- Gain access to the campaign Download Resource Center

Sign up at www.FairWorldProject.org/retailer to learn more.



INFRA Across America

Cornucopia Natural Foods and bicycling have been a part of Drew's life for a long time. He grew up about two miles from where the store now stands, biking everywhere. He began his work at Cornucopia as a dishwasher, and moved up through the ranks over the years, and never stopped biking. Drew is now the Store Manager of Cornucopia Natural Foods in Sayville, NY. As an athlete and a vegan, he believed he could achieve his dream of biking across the US only with access to the same kind of nutrition and trust he found in Cornucopia's aisles, and which he believed he would find in INFRA member stores across the country.

Lynne Dougherty opened the store in 1976, and recently passed the business on to her son Jonathan Lien. Jonathan had done some travel in his time, so when Drew approached him requesting a once-in-a-lifetime cross-country bike trip, Jonathan supported him. He loved that Drew would be visiting INFRA stores along the way.

In visiting stores that are members of INFRA as well as stores that aren't on his way across the country, he found that INFRA members upheld a consistently high level of quality where other stores could be hit or miss. INFRA members' product mix was routinely cleaner, at reasonable prices, and customer service was always a priority. He thought that the team members at INFRA stores were well educated and seemed to really be living INFRA's organic, local, and independent values.

"I can think of things that I saw at other stores that were good, but there wasn't anything that someone at INFRA wasn't on top of."

In his biking, Drew recalled going over the Cascade Mountains as incredibly memorable. The breathtaking views and the realization he'd made it that far using his own strength and energy were impressive to him. The beauty of nature in Alaska was considerable, and Drew discovered a foraging culture there that was unique beyond anything he'd seen in the rest of the US. Wild-crafted locally-foraged teas? Juneau's Sentinel Coffee is doing it.

Cornucopia joined INFRA in 2005, and Drew is proud of their store layout, category management, and product selection. He also feels like they excel in operations and systems. Drew comes home with new perspectives, a renewed enthusiasm for the business, and an appreciation for the values INFRA member stores uphold. He is bringing back to Sayville some organizational tactics and workflow for floor staff and also awareness of the importance of supporting businesses doing important environmental work both on local and global levels, including how to reduce the carbon footprint in food systems.

Drew is publishing a blog about his trip at infraacrossamerica.blogspot.com, with lots of descriptions of each INFRA store on his trip across the US. Check out the full stories and all the lush photographs there!



INFRA at EXPO East in Review



A Huge Thank You to KeHE for Hosting INFRA's EXPO East Dinner Cruise



Second Generation Owner Meet-Up (Left to Right) Catherine O'Berry, Summer Auerbach, Marieke Cormier, Emily Kanter, and Rory Eames



New Hope's Retailer of the Year Awards with INFRA member Leg Up Farmers Market. Member Mama Jean's Natural Market also won this award.



INFRA's Team Enjoying a Little Downtime



Whole Foods Magazine's Retailer of the Year, Dean's Natural Food Market

Growth Potential: Mama Jean's

Susie Farbin's mother embraced natural foods to take care of her body, after seeing the toll that arthritis took on Susie's grandmother. For 12-year-old Susie, the drastic diet change became a part of normal life, and she developed a deep and abiding love for real food. When the family moved, to maintain her family's healthy eating habits, Susie's mother opened a co-op in the basement of their home. She ran that home store for seven years before opening a store in town, which she continues to run as an 82-year-old.

Susie discovered customers commuted an hour to get natural and organic foods at her mother's store. That inspired Susie to open her own store in a more populous area. Susie had the deep knowledge of the industry, having helped her mother open and then expand her store several times. This combined with her friend Diana Hicks's knowledge of customer service and their combined years of business acumen, they opened their first store in Springfield in 2002.

The loyalty that flourished from the community was immediate. Within the first six months of Mama Jean's existence, a customer ran an ad for the store in the local shopper. Community became the underlying theme of everything that the store did- rather than spending their marketing budget on ads, the store sponsored 10k runs and set up tables at health fairs. The success of Mama Jean's continued, opening their 2nd location in 2008, and expanding the two stores in 2009 and 2010, respectively. In 2013, they opened their 3rd location, and in 2016, they opened MJ's Market & Deli as a commissary for the other stores.

"People like to support the people that are supporting good causes in their town."

Susie and Diana's dedication back to their community isn't exclusive to what takes place outside of the store's doors- they attribute much of their success to their employees. Some of the stores' staff have been with the store over a decade- a credit to the selfless way the two women run their stores. Their early team had faith that the store would succeed, and Susie and Diana took that very seriously. The owners saw the first time a manager purchased a home as seriously as if he were a member of their own family- the store's success was necessary for the manager to be able pay his mortgage. There was no option but to succeed.

"You pay your employees, you pay your vendors, you pay your taxes, and then you pay yourself last."

To succeed, the owners empowered their employees to do their jobs and gave them every reason to stay with the store. Excellent insurance, 401Ks, discounts on food, pizza parties, gift cards for holidays, but more importantly, trusting them to own their positions and departments. Susie and Diana want and hear their team members' opinions: from every dishwasher to department lead, even when not every good idea can be implemented. The owners know their teams can see things they cannot, and that they're all working towards the same goal, working on the same team.

Staff members are encouraged to spread that same feeling of ownership in the store to customers walking in the door. Each store reflects the neighborhood it exists in, and team members identify and approach new customers with a welcome package, containing menus for their delis with addresses for all the stores, a coupon for their next visit, and a few samples to entice them to come back. Mama Jean's encourages team members to get to know the regulars by name. Customers refer to the original Mama Jean's on Campbell Avenue as "The Hippy Store", and it mirrors a neighborhood with strict ethics and incredibly loyal customers- with a homey, soulful feeling created by the tile Susie and Diana laid themselves. Their second store, Republic Road, occupies 90% of a LEED certified shopping center, which the store slowly took over with expansions in 2010 and 2017. With wells, greywater recycling, a skylight, a living roof, and gardens, its modern industrial feel is a good fit for its neighborhood. Sunshine, the third Mama Jean's store, is next door to a country club, a prime location with lots of traffic and 15,000 feet all in one room.

Susie and Diana won New Hope's Retailer of the Year award this September for MJ's Market and Deli, their newest venture, opened in 2016. (www.newhope.com/retail-and-distribution/mama-jean-s-new-natural-foods-concept-store-appeals-all) Opening MJ's as the centralized kitchen for the other stores meant that they could reduce overhead, food waste, payroll for three separate kitchens, and create consistent recipes from store to store. With the remaining space, rather than create another Mama Jean's grocery store, the newest store focuses on the kitchen, and features restaurant seating, a smaller food-focused storefront, smoothies, coffees, hot and cold bars, deli cases, beer, and wine. The strategic naming allows the store to appeal to more conventional customers, introducing them to the concept of Mama Jean's grocery stores gradually.

How did they decide to do each of these expansions? Some of the confidence to open their third location came from zip code data from their store's rewards program, an in-house program created by their 3-person IT team with some outsourcing to a former employee who went freelance. "Invest in an IT team, you can't spend your money any more wisely." Susie and Diana also spent a lot of time finding the right place for MJ's Market and Deli, and insist on paying attention to what customers are saying and what seems to be working or not working. They believe the trends are pointing towards less cooking, and competition will be from prepared foods and restaurants.

"It's important to not get stuck in what you do. Be willing to shift and change, depending on your customers' needs and trends."



Calendar of Events

November

Nov 5 Daylight Savings Ends
 Nov 7 Election Day
 Nov 7 11am Marketing Sharing Series Webinar:
 Understanding Palm Oil
 Nov 8-10 INFRA Board of Directors Meeting
 Nov 11 Veterans Day
 Nov 14 January Estimates Due
 Nov 23 Thanksgiving (INFRA Office Closed)

December

Dec 12 February Estimates Due
 Dec 12 1pm Grocery Category Review:
 Pasta and Pasta Sauce
 Dec 14 3pm Grocery Category Review:
 Pasta and Pasta Sauce
 Dec 24 Hanukkah / Christmas Eve
 Dec 25 Christmas Day
 Dec 31 New Year's Eve

January

Jan 1 New Year's Day (INFRA Office Closed)
 Jan 9 March Estimates Due
 Jan 9 1pm Grocery Category Review:
 Yogurt and Kefir
 Jan 11 3pm Grocery Category Review:
 Yogurt and Kefir
 Jan 15 Martin Luther King Jr. Day

February

Feb 6 1pm Wellness Category Review
 Feb 8 3pm Wellness Category Review
 Feb 13 April Estimates Due
 Feb 13 1pm Grocery Category Review
 Feb 14 Valentine's Day
 Feb 15 3pm Grocery Category Review
 Feb 19 President's Day
 Feb 26-27 INFRA Board of Directors Meeting



INFRA Staff Anniversaries Quarter 4

Kate Fletcher	Category Lead	8 years
Erica Schulte	Director of Marketing and Communications	5 years
Pat Rector	Region Manager	4 years
Nick Reardon	Promotions Coordinator	2 years
Danelle Rydel	Director of Purchasing	1 year
Jessica Armand	Category Lead	1 year