Fit Foodie Denver

Attendees Celebrate National Watermelon Day

On August 3rd, National Watermelon Day, NWPB staff Stephanie Barlow, Summer Walker and Juliemar Rosado hosted the Watermelon Board booth at the Fit Foodie Run 5k and 10k. This is the first of two events taking place this year via the Fit Foodie Run series, with the second coming to San Diego in October. By sponsoring two events, the organizers also have made the finisher medals and the runner bibs WATERMELON for 2019 across all four of the runs nationwide.
In Denver, 2,000 people ran a 5K or 10K course, and approached a finish line decorated in watermelon banners, swoopers, and covers to get their watermelon medal, and then were offered fresh watermelon juice. In the Finish Festival, the Watermelon Board booth sampled watermelon street skewers to highlight flavor pairings, a small step of our Back to Basics campaign. The flavors were: 1) The Classic, a plain watermelon skewer, 2) Mediterranean Caprese with watermelon, mozzarella, balsamic and basil oil, and 3) Mexican Chile with watermelon, jicama and Tajin chile lime seasoning. Chef Dina Paz demonstrated all things watermelon on the culinary stage. We operated a watermelon prize wheel giving away all kinds of wearable, wonderful watermelon goodies in the name of Watermelon Day, and created special signage for the event including a selfie frame and pull up banners. Before we knew it, the crowd had devoured all the watermelon and luckily we had extra whole watermelons for decorating that we were able to slice into nice wedges for the watermelon-hungry crowd.

Due to the National Watermelon Day bonus of the event timing, we received lots of additional press and promotional coverage through the event’s email marketing and social media efforts before and during the Denver event. Watermelon was everywhere, and a huge hit with the celebration of our very own food holiday. Stay tuned in October for results from our first event in San Diego, twice the size and with some surprises in store!
How do Consumers Feel About Watermelon on Menus?

The National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) conducted a consumer omnibus survey to gauge consumer preferences regarding watermelon on menus. The method was an online survey of 1,519 consumers, focusing on 1,291 who did not reject watermelon. Objectives were to assess the opportunity for watermelon on menus, understand consumer preferences for watermelon in foodservice including preferences in applications, preparation, daypart, and seasonality, and determine premium perception of watermelon as it compares to other fruits.

What We Learned:

1. Food and drinks with watermelon are generally accepted by consumers. While they don’t order with regularity, most consumers order food or drinks with watermelon away from home. The primary barrier to ordering is a lack of availability rather than a distaste for watermelon. In fact, many consumers desire more menu items with watermelon.

2. Opportunity to promote watermelon on menus exists, especially in the summer. Watermelon ordering is primarily prohibited by limited availability – if there were more items with watermelon available, consumers indicate they would order them.

3. Away from home, watermelon is most often enjoyed prepared raw, as a snack or with lunch. There is no specific daypart where watermelon is completely rejected. Yet, watermelon items must be appropriate to that time of day. Raw watermelon in beverages and fruit bowls garner the highest interest, and specific preparation methods (grilled, seared, smoked, etc.) are less appealing.

4. Watermelon is believed to be healthy and a good pair with sweet or savory. The belief that watermelon is healthy is near universal. It is also believed to be versatile, pairing well with sweet and savory foods. However, consumers gravitate toward sweet watermelon items like smoothies, juices, and frozen desserts, over savory items like salsa or salads.

5. Watermelon is considered slightly more premium than oranges & other melons. Nearly half of consumers believe that watermelons surpass oranges, honeydew melons, and cantaloupe in premium-ness. Premium perception of pineapples and strawberries is on par with that of watermelons.

For more information or to request the full report, please email mmckenna@watermelon.org.
Commodity Roundtable Meeting

NWPB’s Director of Retail and International Marketing Juliemar Rosado recently attended the Commodity Roundtable meeting in Dana Point, California. The Roundtable, which took place in late July, is comprised mostly of agricultural promotion groups as well as federal marketing orders. The group gathers periodically to discuss and develop best practices in the areas of finance, administration, marketing and research. The meeting also included an avocado grove tour. The Roundtable has no authority to act or speak on behalf of its members or to take positions on issues but it is a great space to network and learn about other agricultural promotion groups and marketing orders in the event there are opportunities to combine research or promotional efforts.

NWPB at PMA Foodservice

The NWPB had multiple activations at PMA Foodservice this year. First, the Buyer Roundtable Meetings on Friday morning gave the Board the chance to meet one-on-one with multiple national chain buyers to discuss watermelon’s usage and opportunities on menus. Meetings included Brinker, Farmer’s Fridge and HelloFresh to show the diversity of the buyers in attendance. To help inspire attendees the NWPB sponsored a tasting station in the lobby of the convention center during the show and highlighted a plant-forward, savory menu application, Watermelon Poke. One version was vegetarian and the other was an 80/20 mix of tuna to watermelon, showcasing a great flavor and cost alternative to poke. The bite led to great conversations with an assortment of foodservice contacts including chains and hotel brands.
In addition to foodservice promotions the Board offers Menu Ideation Support for operators across the country. During the noncommercial FoodOvation event, the executive chef from Google was so intrigued by our “watermelon flavor playground” he invited the Board to present to their culinary team in July. The California campus alone serves more than 40,000 meals a day and are trendsetters in the foodservice industry. We started with a short education presentation to their culinary team before the group tasted their way through three stations - one with fresh watermelon flavor pairings, one featuring culinary techniques and the third featuring ways to reduce food waste by using the rind and scraps.

In August we were invited to an ideation session with Garden Fresh, the parent company of Souplantation and Sweet Tomatoes. They requested salad ideas with watermelon for their buffets as well as operations support to ensure the best watermelon experience for their customers. Attendees included not only culinary, but also supply chain, marketing and nutrition members of the menu development team. They were pleased with many of the concepts presented and the relationship is ongoing, with the shared goal of a limited time watermelon menu item in the future.
Watermelon on the Menu

El Five - a tapas restaurant in downtown Denver, CO - featured a Cyprus Watermelon Salad with griddle halloumi, ouzo, tomato, dukkah, pickled rind, herbs and tzatziki.

The first 10 people to email code word “Slice of Joy” to sbarlow@watermelon.org will receive a $5 Amazon gift card. Good luck!

July Top Social Posts

Where will NWPB be next?

Fall FoodOvation – Sun Valley, ID – September 8 – 11

Brand Media & Editor Immersion – Scottsdale, AZ – September 18 & 19

New England Produce Council Produce Expo – Boston, MA – September 18 & 19

Epcot Food & Wine Festival Culinary Demonstration – Orlando, FL – September 14