

New York Produce Show Will Bring 'Passion' Back to Manhattan in December 2025

By Chris Burt and Louise Kramer

Fresh off one of the most successful expositions in their history, New York Produce Show and Conference organizers said they will carry through the "Where Passion Becomes Action" theme for their 15th Anniversary event, which will take place Dec. 2-4, 2025, in New York City.

Nearly 4,000 guests from more than 1,000 companies took part in this year's three-day event, which wrapped up last week at the Jacob Javits Convention Center and Sheraton New York Times Square Hotel. Next year's event – scheduled a week earlier to better accommodate buyers before the busiest time of the holiday season – is expected to eclipse those numbers, so NYPS officials will be releasing exhibitor information in the coming weeks.

"The energy and enthusiasm this year for our educational sessions, our receptions and our special events were as high as we've ever seen," said Ken Whitacre, chief executive of Phoenix Media Network and publisher of *Produce Business*, one of the show's two signature partners, along with the Eastern Produce Council. "Attendees truly embraced the 'passion' theme, and it showed. We are already preparing for 2025 and what we believe will be our most dynamic show yet."

Whitacre said the most crucial element in the planning for next year will be advancing the "Where Passion Becomes Action" theme. *Produce Business* magazine, which also celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2025, has done scores of interviews with industry leaders and will be retelling their stories in the 12-month run-up to the show, both on its newly redesigned websites and its fresh-foods news site, PerishableNews.com.

"Some of the most influential leaders in fresh produce over the past quarter century have been gracious enough to share how they got their start in the industry and what continues to drive their passion," Whitacre said. "We are honored to have several forums – especially our signature New York conference – to highlight their dedication and commitment to produce."

2024 New York Produce Show Dazzles Attendees

During the three days of networking and ideation, NYPS attendees were treated to an array of showstopping events – including the bustling exhibition at Javits, an uplifting keynote speech from former Disney/Pixar creator Matthew Luhn, and eight dazzling Grazing Board demonstrations on the trade show floor.

Passion was especially evident at two signature events on opening night. At the Rising Star Reception, *Produce Business* and esteemed guests celebrated the magazine's 40-under-Forty award winners with personalized plaques and photo ops on the stage at the Sheraton's posh Metropolitan Ballroom. In addition, EPC called attention to its current Leadership Class and alums. Following the event, the doors swung open for the Opening Cocktail Reception, where nearly 1,000 produce leaders gathered to network, talk business and reminisce.

“It felt like a family reunion – albeit a pretty large one – which is exactly the kind of atmosphere we wanted to recreate from years’ past,” said Chris Burt, Director of Content Strategy for the NYPS. “Seeing the smiles, the laughter, the networking, and of course the revelry, made for one unforgettable evening.”

Earlier in the day, the New York Produce Show hosted a pair of concurrent, daylong education events – the *Global Trade Symposium* and the *Foundational Excellence Future-Leaders-in-Produce* program.

Under the theme “Routes for Success,” the Global Trade Symposium featured than 30 produce industry leaders across eight different panels discussing imports of fresh produce from various regions across the world – Mexico, Central America, Asia, South America, Europe and South Africa. They all took aim at the logistical challenges of bringing imports into the United States and Canada.

Foundational Excellence, a day-long immersion into produce industry trends led by Cornell University for those with less than five years’ experience, was highlighted by two new sessions on artificial intelligence, a robust panel discussion among young leaders, and signature sessions from professors on the nuances of the produce industry, retail and dining trends. The program attracted one of the largest audiences since its inception.

Trade Show and Beyond

Trade show day kicked off at the Javits Center with the Opening Keynote Breakfast and Awards Ceremony, capped by Luhn sharing his experiences on *The Simpsons* and on blockbuster movies *Toy Story*, *Up!*, *Cars*, *Ratatouille* and *Finding Nemo*. A renowned keynote speaker, Luhn talked about the importance of passion and storytelling – critical to those trying to differentiate in all businesses, but especially in fresh produce.

“You want to tell stories to function as the glue that holds information in people’s heads,” Luhn said. “Whether it is produce, whether it is toys, monsters, robots or cars, we are all in the business of telling our story.”

Those stories resonate year-round in produce, and the best at seizing on them in 2024 were honored for their inspiring work, including Angelo Caputo’s Fresh Markets (Most Innovative Independent Retailer) and Brian Dey of Four Seasons Produce (Merchandiser of the Year). Ocean Mist Farms, celebrating its 100th year in business, was presented with the Joe Nucci Award for Best Innovation for its Roastables line of Brussels Sprouts.

After New York State Agriculture and Markets Commissioner Richard Ball and other dignitaries cut the ribbon that opened the trade show floor, 300-plus exhibitors had their chance to show off and talk up their products and services. Thousands poured in to network, to learn about new trends on the Industry Insights Stage (Retail Trends, Artificial Intelligence and FSMA 204 compliance) and to get a glimpse of all the food on display, including the artful grazing boards crafted by top chefs, including Luis Reyes, Will Horowitz, Abbie Gellman, Glenn Rolnick, Denis Williams, Chase Obenchain and Felix Castro.

Other activities included the invitation-only Consumer Media Luncheon, which featured discussions on produce prescriptions; a student-mentorship session with industry experts; and the signature Buyer-Connect program, which put key decision-makers in touch with vendors. When the trade show ended, City Harvest’s 50 volunteers gathered 56 pallets of fresh produce donated by exhibitors to be redistributed to food pantries and into the hands of those in need.

Day 3 showcased five Industry Tours across the New York Metropolitan region and a sizzling all-day Foodservice Forum, featuring an introduction from Gina Zimmer, Vice President of NYC Operations for new cornerstone collaborator, the New York State Restaurant Association. Sandwiched between a demo/showcase with leaders from Salad and Go, highlights of the event included foodservice operators, distributors and produce marketers speaking on industry opportunities and then gathering to guide culinary students from Johnson and Wales for an ideation working lunch.

Sharing their Passion for Produce

Throughout the show, seminar speakers, exhibitors and attendees spoke of their enthusiasm for the industry, whether identifying a new variety of lettuce, creating a new pack size of onions or crafting an innovative marketing theme for citrus. They shared stories about career paths that touched on deep family roots in the business, the pleasure of forming abiding industry friendships and the satisfaction of tackling ever-changing obstacles from climate change to trade tariffs.

“Any of us who work in this industry is passionate about what we do,” said Megan Jacobsen, Vice President of Sales and Marketing at Gills Onions, Oxnard, CA, and one of the Show’s 60 sponsors. “It is what makes our industry unique.”

Personal accounts were bountiful on trade show day. Buyers, suppliers and industry service providers shared stories on how they’re turning “passion to action” as they were making new connections and catching up with old friends.

Manuel Michel, Managing Director, Colombia Avocado Board, said his organization is working to brand avocados from Colombia as “the best fruit out there.” “This next year we are going to start telling that story a lot more,” Michel said. “We’re weaving in a lot of the “passion to action” story. That is a fantastic way to inspire the industry and consumers to consider your product.”

Sarah Matejowsky, Director of Sales, Sunkist Growers, wore a bright pink ensemble that was a perfect match for the grower-cooperative’s new partnership for its pink-fleshed Cara Cara oranges with the National Breast Cancer Foundation. Storytelling is second nature at Sunkist Growers. “[Sunkist] is one of America’s oldest co-ops. We represent the family farmers,” said Matejowsky, who has been at the company since 1990. “The weather could be bad, you may not get your stuff picked, but it gets in your blood. Every day is a new day.”

Ernst van Eeghen, Vice President, Business Development at Church Brothers Farms, says the family-owned and operated vegetable company’s team travels the world to identify “the right varieties with the best potential, the best flavor and the best price,” he said.

Van Eeghen’s produce tale starts with Nucci, beloved president and CEO of Mann Packing who died unexpectedly at age 40 in 2005. Nucci inspired van Eeghen, a native of Holland who had worked in prepared foods and for a large pasta company, during a tour one day in the Salinas Valley. “I had no desire to move into the produce industry, but one day he gave me a tour, and I was sold. He was a fantastic human being. That’s speaking about passion. ... The relationships you make in produce last a lifetime. I can’t imagine doing anything else.”

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About Phoenix Media Network

Headquartered in Boca Raton, Fla., Phoenix Media Network has provided industry-leading insight across the fresh food and perishables industry for nearly four decades. Founded in 1985, Phoenix Media has grown exponentially. It boasts the signature New York Produce Show and Conference as well as supporting publications, Produce Business, ProduceBusinessUK.com, Deli Business, Cheese Connoisseur and PerishableNews.com. Phoenix's mission is to initiate industry improvement; to elevate and modernize the industry; and to help promote and foster discussions on marketing, merchandising, management and procurement.