



Fruit for Thought

Spring 2025



From Farm to Freezer:
Where Quality Never
Thaws



Wawona Relies on
Dedicated Growers for its
Fresh Fruit



Vendor Spotlights



Wawona Hosts U.S.
Labor Secretary and
Congressman Fong to
Discuss Employment
Opportunities



IQF FRUITS

From Farm to Freezer: Where Quality Never Thaws

At Wawona Frozen Foods, we understand the importance of delivering high-quality, reliable, and nutritious products to our customers year-round. With the rising demand for convenient and cost-effective food solutions, frozen fruit has become a go-to option for businesses seeking to meet the needs of their consumers, reduce waste, and streamline operations. We believe frozen fruit isn't just a convenient option - it's a smarter solution.

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The IQF Process Yields the Freshest Fruits

Individually Quick Frozen or IQF, is a state-of-the-art freezing method that involves rapidly freezing each piece of fruit at extremely low temperatures. This process ensures that the fruit maintains its texture, color, and flavor without clumping together. The key is when the fruit is picked: Fruit heading to IQF matures on the tree or vine for up to a week longer, providing superior quality when thawed. The benefits of Wawona's fresh frozen fruit are clear:

- **Peak Ripeness & Nutritional Value:** The quick-freezing process locks in nutrients, preserving the fruit's natural antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals.
- **Uniformity:** IQF allows for consistent texture, appearance, and flavor across every piece.
- **Portion Control & Reduced Waste:** Frozen fruit can be easily portioned, offering efficient usage and reducing waste – ideal for businesses with high demand and tight margins.

From Farm to Freezer

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A Powerhouse of Nutrition in Every Bite

Frozen fruit retains its nutrients, often better than fresh, as it's frozen at peak ripeness. This process helps preserve antioxidants, vitamin C, potassium, and dietary fiber, allowing businesses to offer a consistent, year-round source of nutrition. With a longer shelf life, frozen fruit eliminates the need for frequent replenishment while meeting the demand for healthy, convenient options.

Cutting Costs and Boosting Convenience

Frozen fruit reduces costs by offering long-term storage and eliminating spoilage risk. This lowers waste, minimizes inventory management, and reduces delivery frequency. Additionally, it cuts labor costs by eliminating prep work such as washing, cutting and peeling, streamlining high-volume production and saving time and resources.

Setting the Standard for Quality and Safety

At Wawona, we prioritize quality and safety. Our products undergo rigorous testing and adhere to the highest food safety protocols, including HACCP, allergen control, and sanitation practices. Our SQF certification ensures every step, from farm to freezer, meets the highest industry safety standards.



How Frozen Fruit Supports a Greener Future

Frozen fruit contributes to sustainability by reducing food waste and minimizing spoilage. Its longer shelf life allows for less waste, and it reduces the carbon footprint associated with transporting perishable goods, streamlining operations and supporting a more sustainable food supply chain.

The Endless Possibilities with Frozen Fruit

Frozen fruit is highly versatile, perfect for a range of applications like smoothies, sauces, fillings, and desserts. With year-round availability and consistent quality, it eliminates concerns over seasonal fluctuations, offering businesses reliable, high-quality ingredients for various needs.

Frozen fruit provides a valuable solution for businesses seeking to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and promote sustainability. With its extended shelf life, consistent quality, and minimal waste, it simplifies operations and meets growing consumer demand for healthy, convenient options. At Wawona Frozen Foods, we are dedicated to delivering top-quality frozen fruit that helps your business thrive while supporting a more sustainable future. Partner with us for reliable, cost-effective frozen fruit products that align with your goals.



GROWERS

Wawona Relies on Dedicated Growers for its Fresh Fruit

Keith Micheli Leads the Effort to Source the Highest Quality Strawberries

Although Wawona Frozen Foods is well-known as the largest frozen peach processor in the country, its reach into fresh fruit has grown significantly in recent years. The third-generation family business has expanded its family of fruit offerings to include strawberries, blueberries, berries (which include blackberries and raspberries), as well as pineapples, mangos and pears.

Overseeing the sourcing of the principal fresh fruits is Keith Micheli, whose career at Wawona spans more than five decades. "I'm going on 53 years at Wawona," he said with a wide smile. "I was a PE major at Fresno State and this is NOT what I planned on doing with my life."



Keith Micheli

Finding His Way at Wawona

"In 1973, I started working as a teenager during the summers for Bill (Smittcamp). Before I knew it, I was over there during Christmas vacation and Easter vacation. At first, I was stacking boxes and sweeping floors in Clovis, and I progressed to being a forklift driver and loading trucks. Then I ran the fresh fruit packing house. In 1999, I moved to the Fresno plant and it was a whole new learning experience. I knew about packing fresh peaches, but not what we did with all our fruit."

Keith explained how he was involved with installing the first Individually Quick Frozen (IQF) processing tunnel in the plant and then became the plant manager. Later he oversaw all the maintenance at the Fresno facility for seven years.

In 2013, Keith was named Fresh Fruit Manager for Wawona, which includes sourcing blueberries, strawberries, blackberries and raspberries from the packers and brokers. He would then coordinate with Wawona's IQF plants, determining how many pounds of fruit to ship over every week for flash freezing.

"I look at some of the same fruit for two weeks, which can cause a backlog. But that's a good thing, as it allows us to get the fruit to the quality levels that we need to make our different products."

The Supreme Strawberry Spot

Unlike with berry fruits where he deals with intermediaries, Keith works directly with about 20-25 growers in California's Santa Maria Valley to source the majority of Wawona's strawberries.

The Golden State is home to 90 percent of the nation's strawberry crop, and Keith said the Santa Maria region in southern California may be one of the best locations in the state for the sweet berries. "It has ideal weather" as the Pacific Ocean provides the cool breezes and fog to keep the temperatures mild. "Because it's not hot, the strawberries grow at a slower pace and don't cook on the plant," he said. Also, the soil in the valley is sandy loam which is well

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The Story of a Wawona Strawberry From Field to Freezer

A behind-the-scenes look at how a strawberry, picked at peak ripeness in California's fertile Santa Maria Valley, goes from the fields to your freezer.

Bloom

Strawberry flowers are how strawberry plants ultimately produce fruit. Strawberry flowers originate in the crowns of strawberry plants.

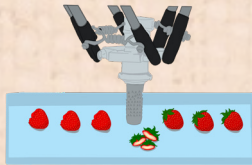


Hand-Picked

When the strawberry reaches the peak ripeness, it is hand-picked to ensure a bright color and tender texture.

Process

After being picked, the strawberry is then trucked to our processing facility, which includes washing and decapping. The capper uses highly accurate vision technology on its multi-armed robots to first identify and position each strawberry.



Grading

This is where the strawberries are sized according to what is needed. Large goes to whole, medium is sliced and diced and small goes to puree. It's all done by machine for the sizing.

Freezing

The strawberry is Individually Quick Frozen, or IQF. Freezing allows us to hit a pause button on Mother Nature and hold in all the fresh flavor and natural nutrients of the strawberry!



Delivery

After being frozen, the strawberries are shipped out to all the markets we serve - foodservice, industrial, schools, retail - for use in ice creams, smoothies, and beyond.

Strawberry Growers

Continued

draining, allowing the roots to aerate and helps to prevent fungus and rot.

Keith visits the growers in Santa Maria 1-2 times a week and even more often during harvest to check on what's getting picked and ensure it's the highest quality fruit. He said every summer the growers start tilling the soil and getting the beds ready in long rows; next, they fumigate the grounds and lay out black plastic sheets to reduce weeds. Keith explained strawberries are grown on raised beds fed by a drip hose – four plants across cut into a plastic cover – this allows the plant to grow up and stay out of the dirt. After about three months, flowers appear; each flower will turn into a small green strawberry, which turns white then red.

Farmers pull out half the strawberry plants every year, since one plant yields only two seasons of fruit. He noted that unlike peaches and apples, strawberries aren't distinguished by different varieties. There are about a dozen different types but "people don't really ask for and don't really care which strawberry variety they're eating."

A Long Fruitful Harvest

Keith said his favorite time of year is harvest, which can last all summer for strawberries. "Depending on the size of their fields, they'll start picking on one end on Monday and finish on Saturday at the other end and start all over again on Monday. The plants always have ripe fruit with fruit just behind it, and more behind that. They'll start in mid-May and keep picking for months ... We've gone into August in some years."

He said Wawona maintains the highest standards for its strawberry crop, checking on the appearance, texture and hardness. "They're all hand-picked, and we expect full color, as long as they're not soft." He explained that this means growers harvest Wawona's fruit a few days later than what they pick for the fresh market. "You go into the grocery store and see a lot of strawberries with the white shoulders and white tips. We prefer they wait three or four days



VENDOR SPOTLIGHT

or whatever in order to get to full red ... it's a better, consistent flavor with more nutrients."

Once the strawberries are flash frozen, they will be packaged and sent to Wawona customers all around the country. They'll be enjoyed in fruit cup and pops in schools, as ingredients in restaurant dishes such as waffles, parfaits and shortcakes, and in smoothies, yogurt and more.

Always More to Do

As busy as he is during the strawberry harvest, Keith returns to the facilities in Clovis and Fresno and often lends a hand throughout Wawona's operation – mainly helping with the summer annual peach harvest and processing. He inspects and grades the fruits, determining when and what needs to go to the IQF lines. He also walks the plant lines "to make sure we're doing what we're supposed to be doing."

Reflecting on his five decades at Wawona Frozen Foods, Keith acknowledged that he really enjoys working with the Smittcamp family. "I could not have worked in corporate America where if there's a problem, you have to send 15 emails in quadruplicate to talk to somebody in a week and a half. Here, if there's a problem, I can go right to Bill or Blake (Smittcamp). With what I do, I need an answer when I walk into the office.

"You know I enjoy it here, to be perfectly honest. They have always treated me right. We've had ups and downs like any old married couple, but they've been good to me."

Also for Keith, there's something about being outside with the growers in the strawberry fields or in the peach orchards. "I start getting antsy every January. I don't like to just sit in an office ... I'm not made for that. Even when it's cold, I'd rather be outside." Obviously, it's no surprise to anyone that the former physical education major likes to be active and is always on the move.



VENDOR:

Landsberg

COMPANY LOCATION:

Fresno, Calif. (Corporate office in Buena Park, Calif.)

YEAR COMPANY

FOUNDED: 1947

YEARS WORKING WITH WAWONA: 39 years

WHAT TYPE OF WORK DO YOU DO FOR WAWONA?

I am a "Packaging Consultant". This entails providing Wawona with packaging material /equipment. Also, we evaluate packing processes and evaluate for increasing operational efficiencies.

WHAT'S IT LIKE WORKING WITH WAWONA

FROZEN FOODS? Working with Wawona has been a great experience. In today's business climate, there is never a shortage of business challenges. Helping them launch new products by providing them structural samples as well as costs is usually the first step in the process.

WHAT IS THE MOST SATISFYING PART OF THE WORK YOU DO FOR WAWONA?

What we do is help Wawona solve problems. Whether it is helping reduce labor costs through automation or assisting them by diversifying into new products, it is all extremely rewarding. Lastly, maintaining a mindset of continuous improvement. "Do better today than you did yesterday."

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE WAWONA FRUIT PRODUCT?

Berry Jewels





EVENTS

Wawona Hosts U.S. Labor Secretary and Congressman Fong to Discuss Employment Opportunities

U.S. Rep. Vince Fong (R-Bakersfield) and the Fresno County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) hosted a “Good Jobs Roundtable” in April with special guest U.S. Secretary of Labor Lori Chavez-DeRemer at Wawona Frozen Foods in Clovis, Calif.

Participating in the meeting were EDC President Will Oliver, San Joaquin Valley Manufacturing Alliance CEO Genelle Taylor Kumpe, Fresno Chamber of Commerce CEO Scott Miller, Fresno EDC Workforce Development Vice President Chris Zeitz, and State Center Community College District Chancellor Carole Goldsmith.

Business leaders in attendance included Wawona Frozen Foods CEO Bill Smittcamp, and Executive Vice President Blake Smittcamp, Precision Civil Engineering CEO Ed Dunkel, who also serves as the Chairman for the Fresno EDC Board of Directors, Trillium Flow Technologies Plant Manager Stephen Avila and PNM Director of Operations Mario Persicone.



“Hosting Secretary Chavez-DeRemer and Congressman Vince Fong at our facility was an honor,” said Bill Smittcamp of Wawona. “Their visit brought meaningful dialogue around the Good Jobs Challenge and gave our local manufacturing leaders an important opportunity to share insights, priorities and the incredible potential of our valley’s workforce.”



VENDOR SPOTLIGHT

VENDOR: International Paper

COMPANY LOCATION: 1000 Muscat Ave, Sanger, Calif. 93657

YEAR COMPANY FOUNDED: 1898

YEARS WORKING WITH WAWONA: 30+ Years

WHAT TYPE OF WORK DO YOU DO FOR WAWONA? Design and manufacture corrugated boxes

WHAT'S IT LIKE WORKING WITH WAWONA FROZEN FOODS? A family business that is both personal and rewarding

WHAT IS THE MOST SATISFYING PART OF THE WORK YOU DO FOR WAWONA? Help them get their product out to the market in a safe, secure and marketable fashion

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE WAWONA FRUIT PRODUCT? The Wawona Jewels and Gems are yummy!!



AFFI Members, including Wawona's Executive VP, Blake Smittcamp, Lead Frozen Food Advocacy at Action Summit in Washington, DC

Hot Dog We Did It!

Wawona celebrated Half a Year (183 days and counting) without a recordable incident! Safety is #1 at Wawona!



Wawona's Sales and Quality Team went to the annual AFFI-CON in Texas!



Fruit for Thought

Thinkin' Peaches Since 1963

(559) 299-2901
Wawona.com

View Wawona's Produce
Brochures, Sell Sheets & More



100 W. Alluvial Ave
Clovis, CA 93611