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By Maura Maxwell

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## ***New produce label is a force for good***

Making a difference is more rewarding than making a profit, according to the founders of social impact label Thx!

**N**ew social impact label Thx! is set for significant expansion this year as its founders look to extend their supply window and develop new export markets. "Our goal is to offer a year-round blueberry programme and introduce other berries, as well as to develop a summer cherry programme and expand into Europe and Latin American markets," says co-founder Martin Casanova, who admits to being blown away by the reception the brand has had from his US retail customers.

"Customers love the idea and want to have the brand on their shelves on a regular basis, not just in the offshore season. I'm glad to say that we are very close to making that happen and by next year we expect to be able to offer Thx! blueberries for 52 weeks a year, not only supplying our existing customers but also reaching new ones."

The company has also had many requests to expand into other products, but Casanova is reluctant to bite off more than he can chew at such an early stage.

Thx! was the brainchild of Casanova, president of Florida-based importer and distributor Fudi Food and Raúl Fernandez of perishables consultancy Breakthrough Solutions. Their ambition was to provide financial assistance to farm workers who had hit hard times while at the same time connecting these farmers with shoppers who are looking to make more conscious buying decisions.

The programme works by allowing farmers to accumulate points for every clamshell of produce sold. Once enough points have been collected, Thx! converts these to cash to pay for the particular need, or "dream" of that grower – be it repairing a damaged roof, providing running water inside the home or buying medicine for a sick a family member. It is entirely funded by the participants in the supply chain and requires no extra premium or payment by the retailer. "We want to show that a business can be a powerful force for

good," says Casanova. "It sounds simple, but these small acts validate a person's sense of self-worth, and our experience bears this out – the programme has already been shown to improve worker morale and raise productivity."

The clamshells and labels feature pictures of individual farm workers that have grown and packaged those products. Shoppers can connect with the workers by using a QR code on the label to access videos in which they describe their life and dream. "The first connection is made when the shopper sees the picture on the packaging, and this is reinforced when the watch the video of the farm worker talking about their dream, their lives and their families – that's what enables consumers to see first hand where their contribution is going," Casanova says.

He and Fernandez now plan to scale up the model by licensing the brand globally in order to achieve their aim of improving the lives of 1,000 farm



Co-founders Martin Casanova (second left) and Raúl Fernandez (right) with some of the brand's suppliers

workers. The brand has already signed its first licensed partnership with Buenos Aires-based Patagonia Sunrise, which plans to use it on its dried fruit line before extending it to other fruits. For Casanova, the future appears bright. "This will not only give us the worldwide

reach that we can't achieve by ourselves, but also allow the brand to be rolled out to other fruits and vegetables that we don't cover."

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