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By Maura Maxwell

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## Produce pioneer Frieda Caplan dies

She is credited for introducing American palates to a range of speciality fruits and vegetables



**F**rieda Caplan, founder of Los Alamitos, CA-based Frieda's Specialty Produce, has died at the age of 96.

Credited for helping to make kiwifruit popular and introducing a raft of other exotic fruits and vegetables to US consumers, Caplan's career in produce began in the late 1950s when she started working as a bookkeeper at a wholesaler owned by her husband's aunt and uncle.

When her bosses went on holiday, she filled in as cashier and immediately became hooked on the produce business.

In 1962, Caplan became the first woman in the US to open a wholesale produce company, Frieda's Specialty Produce, selling speciality products like ginger and spaghetti squash.

Before long, the company had established as an industry leader, supplying stores like Trade Joe's, Whole Foods and Vons.

The Los Angeles Times remembered Caplan as "the marketing genius who galvanised the California farm industry and almost singlehandedly created fruit and vegetable trends".

In 1990 she was listed by The Times as one of a dozen Californians – including Steve Jobs and Jane Fonda – who shaped American businesses in the late 1980s.

By 2018, Frieda's had grown into a US\$50m with 200 employees and customers from across the world.

Announcing the death last weekend, daughters Karen Caplan and Jackie Caplan Wiggins published a statement reading: "It is with a very heavy heart that we share that our mom, Frieda Rapoport Caplan, passed away early this morning.

"She fell and broke her leg in June and had been recuperating at home since then. It was only in the last few weeks that she started declining rapidly.

"She was such a remarkable woman, and was still very mentally sharp until the very end. As you can imagine, she continued to ask us daily 'what good things happened at Frieda's today?' since she couldn't go to the office any longer."

Throughout her career, Caplan received many accolades. In 1972 she was elected vice-president of the Produce Marketing Association and in 1987 she was named an outstanding California Woman in Business. She also received the Professional Achievement Award from UCLA.

In the 1970s she was named The Packer's Produce Man of the Year, which she rejected until the award was renamed Produce Marketer of the Year.

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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