



ART À LA CARTE

A Q&A with **Ande Manos**
Director of Sales and Marketing, Babé Farms

By Kayla Webb

Imitation may be considered the highest form of flattery, but it's hard to imitate an experience—which is really what Babé Farms is selling.

Specialty vegetables, by default, are an *expérience*—pardon my French. Merely glimpsing any of the items in Babé Farms' rainbow of a collection is enough to elicit an odyssey for the eye. Vegetables like kohlrabi, frisée, ruby ro-minis, purple ninja radishes, and Romanesco are idylls in and of themselves, whether in the produce aisle or a chef's pantry. The variation in psychedelic colors, textures, and forms is evocative of the luxuries of fine dining: opulence, decadence, indulgence—much to the advantage of Babé Farms.

Though you'd think a product lineup as extraordinary as Babé Farms' wouldn't be in need of a novel marketing platform, Ande Manos is quick to assure me otherwise. In fact, as an Instagram-proclaimed trendsetter of gourmet produce, Babé Farms isn't cutting any corners when it comes to serving its

primarily foodservice-focused clientele. And that includes marketing.

I had the privilege of volleying Babé Farms' very own Director of Sales and Marketing a couple of questions on how the grower is capturing a typically under-marketed sector. Like Babé Farms' product lineup, her answers were full of surprises—which Ande explains is the Babé Farms way.

KAYLA WEBB: Babé Farms is truly one of the most unique growers on the supply-side, in part because of what it's growing but also because of how you and the team interact with the market. Can you describe what sets Babé Farms apart and how this has led to the company's success?

ANDE MANOS: We lead from the front. Babé Farms is somewhat the envy of the industry—our biggest compliment is imitation. We set the trends and create the community for other growers to copy. We're always looking for the next "it" vegetable.

KW: How is Babé Farms' marketing strategy different from others, especially in the boutique/specialty categories?

AM: Being well-positioned, our petite and specialty vegetables aren't a fit for every marketplace. We've aligned ourselves with top-end distributors in regions that cater to fine-dining chefs and well-stocked retailers.

In addition, there's a consistent focus on highlighting the uniqueness and beauty of the vegetable—a sort of beauty over practicality mindset. Our end-users are often looking to create "art on the plate," a visual pleasure that delights and intrigues their foodie audience on Instagram or other social media platforms.



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-Ande Manos,
Director of Sales and Marketing,
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KW: I recently took a scroll—get it?—through Babé Farms' Instagram page and this was very much reflected on your company feed. To me, this showcases how much Babé Farms understands its customer base and what foodservice operators and chefs are trying to achieve. But not as many growers are vocal about their marketing work in the foodservice sector. I'm curious, what are some of the key differences between marketing for foodservice versus retail?

AM: Babé Farms is really a chef's brand over a consumer/retail brand. Our product and packs are geared for foodservice. In the earlier days, marketing to our customer base was a challenge. However, now we live in a social media-driven space. Thanks to Matt Hiltner, our Marketing and Social Media Coordinator, we're on every major platform providing real-time photos and information to our customers, chefs, bloggers, and foodie followers.



KW: From your experience, what is the foodservice sector looking for from fresh produce marketing and how has Babé Farms pivoted its strategy to meet these expectations?

AM: Distributors are looking for more engagement from their suppliers, including food show participation, demos, samples, and sales presentations. This means that at industry trade show events, our presentation of our vegetables is key. Artistic arrangements, bright colors—Babé Farms is the peacock of the industry!

We also market directly to chefs via social media. When we do, we're looking through the lens of the chef. They are the culinary experts who can take it to the next level, creating moments and excitement on the plate using decorative gourmet vegetables, and we want to help tap into that imagination.



KW: How do all of these aspects come together to create a program that you and the team describe as marketing “the Babé Farms way?”

AM: We're authentic to our roots, known as the innovators and pioneers of specialty vegetables. Cultivating talent from within, our team is multifaceted. It's often a collaborative culture here—we all contribute to the success of the products we grow and market. We keep our marketing spicy and relevant through real-time photos at all levels.

KW: Though Babé Farms pulls much of its uniqueness from the vegetable varieties it grows, I also can see how having people like you, Ande, on its team help keep the company's marketing spicy. But, was your goal always to work in the produce industry?

AM: Growing up in the Salinas Valley of California, it was a natural progression. All roads led me to a career in the produce industry. At Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, I majored in Ag Business, enabling me to land a sales position with Babé Farms in the state's Santa Maria Valley. I've always enjoyed sales but quickly gravitated toward marketing. I find great inspiration from the natural beauty of our colorful specialty vegetables.

And with a collection as riveting, inimitable, and extravagant as Babé Farms', it's not hard to agree with Ande. After all, many of Babé Farms' vegetable varieties are an invitation for chefs to create palatable paens for the plate. S