



Episode 1

Welcome to the NJFPA Food Forum

Welcome to the first episode of the NJFPA Food Forum. In this episode, [Bill Mandia](#), Partner at [Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young, LLP](#), speaks with Mark Macellaro, Senior Human Resources Manager at Campbell Soup Company and NJFPA Board President, about the [New Jersey Food Processors Association](#), its history and membership, upcoming programming, and the partnership with Stradley Ronon.

Guest Bio

Mark Macellaro is the President of the New Jersey Food Processors Association (NJFPA) and is a Senior Human Resources Manager at Campbell Soup Company. He is a US Army veteran with extensive experience within the HR field to include employee relations, management/ leadership development, coaching, instructional design/ facilitation and employee development at companies such as Lassonde Pappas and Stryker Corporation.

Mark earned his Master's Degree in Human Resources and Employee Relations from Pennsylvania State University and is also a Certified Change Management Practitioner (CCMP), a certified Professional in Human Resources (PHR), and is a certified StrengthsFinder, MBTI, and OAD coach.

Mark is also actively involved in developing the food industry as he's previously served as the employer-lead in the NJ Food Processors Targeted Industry Partnership and as the President of the NJFPA, actively drives the Association's goals through Education, Resource Sharing and Networking.

Listeners will hear:

- The story behind this podcast's creation.
- A little history [about the NJFPA & its membership](#).
- Changes the industry and our members have experienced this year.
- The upcoming NJFPA [April Conference](#).
- NJFPA's [Industry Benchmarking Survey](#).

Edited Interview Transcript

Mark Macellaro [1:58]: Welcome everyone to the kickoff of the Stradley Ronon New Jersey Food Processors Association podcast series, let me introduce myself real quick. My name is Mark Macellaro. I'm the president of the New Jersey Food Processors Association and I'm also a senior HR manager at Campbell Soup Company. I am super excited to be here with Bill Mandia from Stradley Ronon, who is going to be our interview extraordinaire over the next few weeks, the next coming months, as we really kind of dive into this podcast series.

So first of all, Bill, you know, I'll let you introduce yourself. But I wanted to absolutely thank you personally, as well as Stradley Ronon for being such awesome partners to the New Jersey Food Processors Association, and really for helping us put together this podcast series. As I know, I think we started talking about this... We've been talking about this for a year. And the fact that we can get this up and running is just really, really exciting. And I'm happy to be here with you today. So I don't know if you want to introduce yourself. And we'll kind of talk a little bit about how this podcast is going to work and what it's gonna look like.

Bill Mandia [3:05]: Sure, thank you, Mark. I am really excited to be here. And thank you and the New Jersey Food Processors Association. Our firm has had a great relationship with the food processors and we're very excited to start this podcast series. It did take some time to get together; COVID makes things a little bit difficult for everyone, but we're pretty pumped to get going.

So just to give some really quick background for you and our listeners. I'm a partner with the Stradley Ronon law firm; I head up our food and beverage practice group, and do work with a lot of different food industry clients, both here in New Jersey, across the Delaware Valley and across the country. I feel very fortunate to have found my way into this industry. My dad was a longtime food industry employee; he worked at Tasty Baking Company for over 30 years. And so I kind of grew up in the food industry, had a chance myself to work at Tastykake while I was in school. And naturally as part of my law practice, I wanted to work with food companies because I liked the industry and found it interesting. So it's been a great opportunity. We're very excited about the podcast, as I mentioned. So I thought I'd kick it back to you a little bit just to talk about how the Food Processors (NJFPA) are viewing this podcast and some of the stuff we're going to be covering.

Mark [4:22]: Yeah, absolutely. The brainchild behind this podcast is our members have such extraordinary stories to tell. And we have very limited opportunities to actually tell them. And that's where I see the podcast falling in; we see this as a great opportunity for them to tell their stories that we might not have heard. Our listeners can expect to hear from a variety of different corners of the food processing industry. As they share their very unique perspectives, listeners can expect to get some ideas that they can even translate from their own companies. I think

that's what processors are gonna like is hearing who's done it, who's done it well, and what tidbits they can take to put into their own corporations to drive them forward.

Guys, you know what our listeners can expect from this series in general, you're going to hear leaders from across the business, focusing on marketing, branding, mergers and acquisition, sustainability, supply chain, corporate social responsibility. And that's just the first few episodes that you're going to be hearing from. It's a really exciting opportunity for our listeners to just hear these stories. And some of them might be related to Bill, to your common ground COVID, right? Which was, it still continues to be such a huge issue for our industry, and both from a business perspective, as well as from a personal perspective, and how some of these businesses got through that, and how they not only survive, but maybe even thrive and what their plans are going for the future. So I think those are a very unique perspective that I think our listeners will learn a lot from.

Bill [5:57]: Yeah I mean, one of the things I actually was thinking about here, as we were talking, you mentioned the time it took to put this together to get started. I'm actually kind of excited that we're starting now, as opposed to in the middle of COVID or even at the beginning. In the sense that everybody in this industry and others was scrambling, but food in particular, had unique challenges, because it was essential, obviously, and it was open and operating. And so folks were just trying to figure that out. And now, a year into it, I think people really had and we've seen so many interesting trends, like the emergence of mobile food delivery, at a much higher level. You know, a transition from largely eating out to eating in and how people are adjusting to that and the different ways they're going about preparing meals and things of that nature. And then obviously, there's a lot of what comes next. And that's one of the things that I think will be great about this podcast is that it won't be fixed in time. This is going to be hopefully at the beginning of a long running series. And we'll be able to address real time challenges as they come up, especially as we go from where we are now to where we all hope to be in a few months here on the other side of the pandemic.

Mark [7:08]: I completely agree. It's almost like an after action review. I know we're still in the midst of it. And this is still an ongoing challenge, especially now how our members figure out how they implement the vaccine procedures in their facilities and things like that. So the battle has not yet been won, but we've certainly learned a lot over the last year. We're in March. So it's been a year since the World Health Organization called it a pandemic. So it's been a while. I think what the great thing about this is we have a number of different speakers lined up. But this is a community initiative. So we welcome our viewers' ideas for episodes. What do you want to learn about? What isn't necessarily being addressed and you want to hear a leader speak about and if you're one of them; if you have a great story to tell, and you have an idea for an episode.

That's the great thing about this podcast is we want to hear those stories, we want to tell those stories. So let us know. We'll probably be sharing this a number of times. So if you have ideas, we want to hear from you. Feel free to reach out to help@njfoodprocessors.org. That

gets you in touch with our team who would be happy to hear from you and figure out how we can get your story told.

Bill [8:20]: Yeah, absolutely. There's no substitute for folks coming forward who are on the frontlines dealing every day with a lot of the issues that we're going to cover here. That's actually kind of a nice segway into the New Jersey Food Processors Association. Perhaps you could talk a little bit about, for those who aren't familiar with it, what it is that the New Jersey Food Processors Association does?

Mark [8:42]: No, absolutely. So the New Jersey Food Processors Association isn't new. We've been around from the early 1900s. Focusing on the food industry within the state of New Jersey. For those who are in New Jersey. Food is huge here, right? We're between multiple major metropolises, we have major points on the East Coast, and Elizabeth when it comes to shipping and receiving, and we have a huge state population. Now I think one thing that COVID has shown us is that the food industry in New Jersey is absolutely essential, because of just the prevalence of that industry here. So what really the NJFPA does, it's a community of food processors, and everyone else who supports it. So it's not just the processing companies themselves, it's everyone from insurance companies, to pest remediation, to supply and distribution, right? It's all of us that have to come together to make this industry move.

And really, the focus of our association is really threefold. It's how do we share knowledge and share education on what's prevalent in our business? How do we share resources and share best practices of what works and what doesn't? And then thirdly, it's about networking. And that's really what the NJFPA is. And I've shared this with the board and members previously. We are like a family. And I think the experiences over this last year in the way that our association was able to come together and kind of help each other through it speaks volumes for our membership and our association. It's quite interesting. I became president, I think, January of 2020. So I came in at the right time, where only a few months into the presidency, COVID happened. And we had a great annual conference, which is kind of like the marquee of the Food Processors Association, we had a great conference lined up for Atlantic City, at Ocean, where we were going to focus on supply chain; sustainability. We had a great lineup, and a lot of those people, you're going to be hearing actually from in this podcast, were revved up and ready to go. And it was all going to be March 13th.

For those of you who have experienced COVID, I think the World Health Organization declared the pandemic on the 11th. Right, so we had to make the very smart, yet hard, decision to cancel the conference. That made sense for everyone, and was the best interest of our membership in the association. I think we've learned a lot of lessons since then, you know, we've had to go completely remote. You know, we've had to focus a lot of our focus areas, which have been normally focused on improvements in supply chain. And, you know, how do we recruit top talent to - How do we survive, right? How do we make sure our employees are safe? How do we get people set up with the PPP program, right, which was brand new, and we're trying to figure things out back in that March, April, timeframe. So we really had to shift not only the topics, and that knowledge piece, but also how we were delivering it. And I don't know about you, Bill, but it

was very difficult for me and a lot of our members to switch to this remote environment. There's a lot of us who weren't even in the facilities that we oversaw. We've come through that, with a lot of lessons learned, and a good plan for the future.

Bill [11:57]: Yeah, so talking about the conference last year, and just not being prepared to be set up for things... I, at least mentally, if you would have told me that we'd be doing this podcast a year ago, and that I'd be sitting in what was then a spare bedroom in my house, which has now become my fully functional law office, I probably would have told you, you were nuts. I was one of the people that was naively so optimistic that we were looking at maybe 30 days out of the office and not expecting it. But I think one of the things that's been evident to me with both our practice and our clients, and especially the food industry clients, because we had to work with them and walk through them actually having to stay operational, as best they could, as normally as they could, during the early stages, when no one really knew what we were dealing with, really was an opportunity to see both sides of this, you know, the people who were like ourselves that were making a transition to work from home or remote, and those who couldn't; production facilities in the light that had to continue to run and how to get food out. And then the transportation industry and all the other things that go into. And I think one of the things for me that's been interesting is and it hit on this in New Jersey, but I think it's true across the country is, I think for a lot of people, it was the first time they experienced walking into a supermarket and not having all the options available that they wanted. Or being told you can only buy one of this or two of that. It was shocking.

I think for me, one of the first times I realized how real the pandemic was, was when I went food shopping, and I couldn't just walk into the store, there was a line outside and 50 people at a time could go in and it was quite jarring. But back to the Food Processors. You hit on this a little bit. But can you talk about how the Food Processors has had to adapt and change its organization? You talked about doing things remotely, but what are some of the other things that the Food Processors have had to do to try to maintain as best they can normalcy, particularly when their membership is in a tough spot in terms of trying to keep their businesses going and their employees healthy?

Mark [13:51]: It's a very good question. And to your point, we're kind of learning on the fly. It's not how a lot of our businesses were set up. I mean, even when it's reporting first happening, and those who could work remotely went remote, those essential workers who are making our food and those businesses and didn't have that luxury. So we had to figure out like, you think about things like how do we structure our schedules and the way our line operates, so that our employees are not only wearing masks, but are socially distant? What does that look like when it comes to lunch breaks? Right? Those types of things where there's a lot of thinking and adapting to how we approach that to make sure it's safe. How do we institute thermal scans? How do we institute health questionnaires, right? What policies do we put in place to ensure that those employees are safe and secure.

So not only did we have to, our members have to figure out what that looks like. If you think about food just in general too, Bill to your point, just the way that people started shopping in this pandemic. The increased use of Instacart or those types of where you send someone else to shop for you at that grocery store and deliver it to you. So I can speak on my behalf. Even my own family, we predominantly use Instacart, even to this day. Whereas I used to go to a Wegmans or an Acme, right or a Rastelli's and actually pick up the food. And when I'm there, as a consumer, I'm looking at shelves, right? I'm looking at end cap spaces, I'm picking things up. I'm like, "Oh, this looks good, this is a great promotion." I can't do that anymore. So you have to adapt even the way that you think consumers view how they purchase products, because the placement of products and grocery stores early on wasn't as important because you were just getting what you needed and you were getting out. And hopefully you got what you needed. All of us probably were trying to get the toilet paper, the paper towels and the cleaning products early on. And you'll hear, even from, I don't want to steal the spotlight from a guest that's coming up, but even I rely predominantly on selling my product in a live store. Right?

Without people going there, how do I turn my entire model to promote e-commerce and get people to purchase online or partnerships through an Amazon or one of those online distributors that can actually get that product to me. So that mindset is just completely different. And it was very difficult. Hindsight is 2020. But you don't necessarily plan for global pandemic, who's going to completely disrupt your supply chains. Those are the questions that our members really had to face and figure out and it's not over, right? We're still dealing with it. And it's for a lot of consumers, the lessons that they've picked up. And the way that they've approached this last year, it's not necessarily going to revert back to where it was.

Bill [16:36]: Well, it's interesting, because there's so much talk, you know, in the business world, and in the media about what are different things going to look like at the end of the pandemic, we hear a lot about the professional service organizations that traditionally have been based in large metropolitan centers, maybe go into more remote work. And that there'll be less need for financial professionals and others to be in the office and hear a lot of talk about that and the impact it may have on urban environments. There's a lot of talk, you know, in food around restaurants, and will they come back? And what is that going to look like? And things of that nature, but you don't hear quite as much talk about sort of the operations that changed for all the reasons you articulated in terms of safety protocols, but you don't hear as much as what's that gonna look like, you know, the food production line at the end of the pandemic, whatever that may be, or look like, how do you see some of that stuff playing out?

And what do you hear from your members in terms of how they're anticipating whether the workers that they have who do work in a production facility, or in a role where they are working from home is not an option for them. What are some of the challenges or things that people are thinking about that they'll have to deal with? As we come towards the end of the pandemic?

Mark [17:49]: Bill, that's that's a great question. I can even speak from our own board meetings at the NJFPA. We've been having some of these conversations. I think of it like this, we were able to, a lot of our processes were able to be successful during COVID. Right, because they quickly identified what safety protocols were necessary to continue to ensure that we were putting food in the pantries or on the table of our consumers. And I think first and foremost, it was how do we continue the food supply chain moving? And how do we keep our employees safe and healthy? And there were a lot of lessons learned there. And the interesting thing is, as I said a couple of times, we're still in it, right? These same protocols are in place and our employees in a lot of these organizations have adapted very well and have taken it serious, not only the safety precautions, but also their importance in this process.

I think what we're going to take away from this is a lesson learned that our essential workers were called essential because they absolutely are. They are critical to the success of our business. And, God forbid, there's ever another pandemic or something like that, the lessons that we've learned in how to keep these businesses running are going to be paramount. If I just think of it though, in those board calls that we have with NJFPA. We even talked about when we're getting together. So our association has not met live since February of 2020. We've done everything completely virtual, and we even struggle with how do we even get back together to have some type of live interaction again. For our listeners who actively check our website, you'll see that our annual conference that's coming up at the end of April is still remote. Right? Because there are still those concerns out there about coming back together live. That mindset is still there.

We're looking to do a live golf tournament this upcoming summer and have a live, quote unquote mini conference in the fall timeframe to start bringing back some exhibitors and some education. So even when we come, when we start coming back together, live in that golf tournament, and even in that fall conference it's going to look and feel different, right? Because for a lot of us, even if we were essential workers, our personal lives were disrupted by COVID, in terms of socially distancing, keeping to immediate family members, and all of that. So that same learning is gonna apply even within our association. So when we do come together, it's going to look and feel a little bit differently. It's going to take us some time to get used to it. I think that still holds true within the food processing industry, I think it's going to continue to feel and look the way it has over the last year as we slowly get vaccinated and things quote, unquote, returned to normal. I don't think we'll lose the lessons that we've learned and some of the specific elements of those lessons.

Bill [20:39]: So one of the things I've seen in my practice, that's been fascinating as it pertains to the food industry, are clients who serve very narrow niches. That while they are apparent, it was apparent, that's what they did, you never really thought much about the impact of a pandemic on their business, because who would have thought the pandemic was going to happen, right? The fascinating part of it has been watching them pivot their, so many of them pivot their businesses, recognizing that this industry is so essential, and that there were ways to stay busy and profitable, and keep your employees engaged, and working and also keeping their businesses going. I'm curious, have you

seen... Yeah, really a two part question. Have you seen that amongst some of your membership? And do you think some of those businesses will continue maybe in a little more diversified role going forward, recognizing that some of what they were doing was easily adaptable to different types of product lines and such?

Mark [21:38]: Yeah, 100%. You know, I think what this last year did was to show the importance of a business being agile, right? If anything, because you couldn't plan for this, you couldn't foresee it, if you weren't able to adapt your business model to address some of these changes, especially if you're in a niche market. Or, again, the example I used before, which is you only sold in retail or wholesale. And you have to now go e-commerce, right? The ability to adjust, adapt and overcome. You were either successful or you weren't. This environment has just shown the importance of ensuring that you maintain that agility. So that if things not, again, hopefully not like this, if the market or the situation changes, you know that you have the ability, the skill set, and the fortitude, to adapt your business to meet the challenges of the day.

Bill [22:30]: So talking about the New Jersey Food Processors Association. Obviously, the goals that you had for 2020 had to be changed pretty dramatically, as we've already discussed. What do you see as some of the goals... I mean, obviously, getting some of the events you mentioned off and going would be fantastic to start getting people back together, but what are the organization's goals? And really, what path are you trying to chart, you know, again, as we come, hopefully, to the end of the pandemic over the next several months?

Mark [22:59]: Good question, Bill. What we're really doing is focusing on upscaling a lot of our education. So we've had sessions on what are the legal implications of rolling out vaccine programs within your organization. We've had programs on if you are a family business, how to set up your business to manage succession better, or how do you transition, for instance, from a live only environment to a virtual/hybrid environment. So we've adjusted and we're also going to continue that approach on how to listen to the things that you need to know, to set your business up for success. This podcast series is a great opportunity to focus on resource sharing, right? We're bringing great examples, great stories, success stories, to our members and our listeners, on what they can do to make a difference within their business and sharing those best practices that you can implement.

Networking I think it's the thing that has struggled the most. I'm going to be honest, even if you're really good in a virtual environment. And I consider myself a very, like, outgoing and friendly person, I struggle with just existing in a virtual world. I have colleagues that I talk with every single day, I haven't physically seen them in a year. It feels different. And I think everyone will admit that. And that's one of the focuses is how do we get people back together and rekindle some of that networking. And for us as an association, it's baby steps, right? We do a little bit here a little bit there. In the summer, we're going to do our golf tournament, right? They can't do something more socially distanced than a golf tournament, right? So it gets people together, but in a way that is still distant, so people can feel a little bit more comfortable with it.

As we get into the fall and we're bringing back the mini conferences, you know, it's going to be done in a way that's probably still outdoors, you know, as long as you know, weather dependent, but get more people together and feel more comfortable with one another. But that networking is just really important and that is a huge value of your association and where our members get the most value is just connecting with people. It helps everything from the resource sharing and the knowledge, but it also helps build relationships and partnerships and, and things, even, I mean Bill, Stradley Ronon and the NJFPA, right? It's building that connection to help us in our own businesses. So that, I think, is the element that we're trying to really build back that we haven't been able to do this last year.

Bill [25:18]: To sum up a final question, maybe to just wrap things up, does the NJFPA have any new initiatives or programs it's rolling out this year that you're looking to get your membership involved in?

Mark [25:29]: Yeah, no, that's something that we're super excited about, that we're launching, was actually launched in early March, was a round a benchmarking initiative. You know, as we discussed throughout this call, you know, food manufacturing, nationally, globally, but specifically New Jersey, never really going to look the same right after the impact of COVID. From exposing supply chain vulnerabilities, a lot of shifting customer demands as we discussed, and some of the focus on employee safety and well being, it's completely altered our landscapes.

So what we've been doing is working with Grassi Advisors and Accountants who are really putting together and launching the survey with inputs from the Rutgers Food Innovation Centers, as well as the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. We're putting together a benchmarking initiative that we sent out to all of our membership. And what we're really trying to learn is, how are you doing? You know, what did you learn? What has changed? Because ultimately, the results of this are going to help, kind of, not only the New Jersey Food Processors Association kind of alter how we're approaching, but also let our members see how they measure up, give them a viewpoint of how the rest of the industry within the state was impacted as well. That's going to help us better plan for today, as well as put plans together for the future. So we're really excited about that.

I think that's one of the great benefits of being a member is you, if you participate in the survey, you're going to get access to the results. And also, a nice little plug, this is actually going to be a specific topic at our annual conference in April, is the review of some of the results of this benchmarking survey. So it's something I think everyone can look forward to.

Bill [27:08]: That sounds like a great initiative. And Mark, I want to thank you so much for your time today, for the partnership that our firm enjoys with the NJFPA, and the opportunity for this podcast, I'm really, as I said at the outset, excited about it. We've got some great guests coming up to kind of get things started; going to touch on a lot of different aspects, as you mentioned in the food industry. So we have Nolan Lewin who is

the executive director of the Rutgers Food Innovation Center, is one of our early guests, which is going to be a great conversation.

And then we're going to start with some of the great local companies. We're going to have your colleague Roma McCaig from Campbell's on to talk about corporate responsibility and sustainability, which is a timely and great topic. Ray Rastelli, from Rastelli's is going to join us. And then you know, we're going to bring in some folks to talk about some things that are ancillary, but critical to the food service industry. So we're gonna have Fred Kaplan from Stony Hill Advisors on to talk about merger and acquisitions and the market for that activity right now and some other sort of business related things. So we're really excited to have a great rotation of guests and look forward to the series this year.

On behalf of the New Jersey Food Processors Association, we thank you for listening to this episode of The NJFPA Food Forum. For more information, visit us at www.njfoodprocessors.org and if you have an idea for a future podcast, please email us at help@njfoodprocessors.org.

Thank you all for your support of the New Jersey Food Processors Association.