



Episode 6 “Developing the Next Generation”

Welcome to the sixth episode of the NJFPA Stradley Ronon Food Forum. In this episode, [Bill Mandia](#), Partner at [Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young, LLP](#), speaks with [Kelsey Stockton](#) Commercialization Planner at [Lassonde Pappas and Company](#). Bill and Kelsey talk about younger perspectives on food and packaging trends and how to develop the next generation of food processors.

Guest Bio:



Kelsey Stockton joined Lassonde Pappas as a Commercialization Planner nearly two years ago while graduating from Rutgers University with a Bachelor’s degree in Food Business in May 2019. Past work experiences include working at a local Farmer’s Market in customer service and the Rutgers Food Innovation Center - Bridgeton as an intern then “promoted” to a part-time project management assistant throughout high school/early college. While being a student of her high school agriculture/food science program, Kelsey made it her mission to become a working member of the food industry.

Listeners will hear:

- How an internship at the Rutgers Food Innovation Center and attendance at the NJFPA Spring Conference set her on a path to a career in food processing.
- How the COVID shut down affected her differently as a brand new professional.
- What trends in both food and packaging she has seen at Lassonde over the last year that she thinks will last past the pandemic.
- What younger professionals bring to the food processing industry.

- How the food processing industry can attract more young talent to the field.
- Her forecasts for the role of private label brands.

Edited Interview Transcript

Bill Mandia [0:00]

Hello and welcome to another episode of the Stradley Ronon New Jersey Food Processors Association podcast. I'm Bill Mandia from the Stradley Ronon Law Firm, and today I'm very happy to have as a guest, Kelsey Stockton from Lassonde Pappas. Kelsey is a 2019 Rutgers University graduate and has worked in the food industry before she finished school and went to Lassonde, but she's here today to talk about her experiences as somebody who's relatively new to the industry and to share the perspective of some of the younger members in the Food Processors Association.

Kelsey Stockton [0:37]

Hi, everyone. My name is Kelsey Stockton, as introduced. I've been working at Lassonde for almost two years now as a commercialization planner. My role there is to manage the new packaging, artwork development. Let's say that a customer wants to launch a new food item like an orange juice, my role is to make sure that we review the label on time that the label is released to the printer on time that we get it printed on time, and ultimately get it to be delivered at our production facilities in time so that that new item can be launched. The number one crucial aspect of my job there is to make sure that all those things happen on time, that our timelines are realistic, and that we can launch new products or when customers want to rebrand on time.

Bill Mandia [1:25]

So most of our listeners are probably familiar with Lassonde. But some may not be, so can you talk a little bit about the company, what you do, what your products are, and things of that nature.

Kelsey Stockton [1:36]

Ultimately, Lassonde Pappas is a private label, and branded juice manufacturer. One of our most popular brands is Apple and Eve. We also do a few other products, like enhanced waters.

Bill Mandia [1:49]

And how did you find your way to Lassonde?

Kelsey Stockton [1:51]

That could be a little bit, quite a story. But ultimately, one of the jobs that I had in high school, in college was working at the Food Innovation Center. One of my opportunities there was to actually attend a New Jersey Food Processors Association meeting. And I remember vividly receiving the member list and thinking to myself that when I was graduating from college and ready to secure a job, these are all food processors in New

Jersey that I could look at. And one of them was Lassonde Pappas. So when I was graduating from college and looking for a job, I used that list and Lassonde Pappas stood out to me because it was actually only 25 minutes away from where I grew up.

Bill Mandia [2:30]

So one of our guests on an earlier episode was Nolan Lewin from the Rutgers Food Innovation Centers. Very interesting interview talked a lot about what goes on at the Food Innovation Center. Tell me a little bit about your experience. How did you get started there? What made you want to be in the food industry? It sounds like as a fairly young person, you decided that this was where you wanted to go?

Kelsey Stockton [2:52]

I can think back, really to high school. I tried out a few different programs, and they didn't work out for me. So I ended up in my high school program at the Academy of Agricultural Sciences. At that time, I had an interest in food and nutrition as I was trying to educate myself as a consumer to live a healthier lifestyle. One of the classes that I was able to take my junior year was food science, and that touched on all aspects of the food industry, from food safety, to an intro to product development. They are who introduced me to the Food Innovation Center, because as a class trip, we went and we received our GMP cert. At that time, Donna Schaffner mentioned that they were always looking for interns. So I sat on that opportunity for a few months and decided to reach out to her.

So my senior year, I became an intern for the Food Innovation Center, which ultimately turned into a paid part time position throughout my senior year and part of college. I had an incredible experience there. I've always been an eager student, with my hobby, then I was given the chance of turning it into an actual career. And I had a strong support system that was providing me opportunities to learn, to grow, to develop, and ultimately lead me to the path that I have now.

Bill Mandia [4:15]

So a big topic we've talked about a lot on this podcast is how the past year has impacted folks professionally and I'd be very curious to hear from you, given that you're relatively new to the workforce compared to people like myself and some others that we've had on this show on the podcast. So I'd be curious to hear from your perspective, how it's impacted you, how it's impacted with Lassonde and how you're feeling about things.

Kelsey Stockton [4:41]

Honestly, when COVID-19 hit it was something that I never expected before. In the beginning, it was supposed to be a two week work from home situation, we would all come back and be together again. For me being young, I've never really had anything that felt like it flipped my world upside down in that way. In this case, we can see the long term effects of COVID-19. I'm still working from home, our demand is through the roof at levels that I don't think we've ever seen before, at least, I've never seen at Lassonde and they're very sustained. So for me, it was definitely an adjustment period. Especially in

high school and college, I always had this vision for possibly what my career could look like. And I was imagining myself, sitting in conference rooms, collaborating with people, having my own cubicle, decorating it. Well, I was able to experience that for a year until COVID-19 hit and it forced us to work from home for our own safety. I appreciate that at Lassonde, we've had those resources. So it definitely took some adjustment, I feel like I'm finally now adjusted to it almost a year into it.

For Lassonde, in particular, the demand is something that I've definitely had to adjust to. Being part of the packaging team at Lassonde, part of my job is to make sure that we have enough packaging on hand, whether it's going through a formula conversion or a redesign. And when demand skyrockets the next day, it's very hard to work with suppliers to make sure that we have packaging levels that are at volumes that we've never seen before. So overall, it was definitely a big growth opportunity for me, I think I'm still growing through it. I've learned that even while I would rather be sitting in the conference room, meeting someone new, such as through onboarding, that I really need to take advantage of the opportunities that I have now. This is one of them, the fact that we can do a podcast virtually, or whether it's meeting somebody else new virtually, and training them on some aspects of the job and how we work together.

Bill Mandia [6:53]

You mean you didn't think last year that you'd be sitting here talking to me from your home, and I'd be sitting here in my home office?

Kelsey Stockton [7:03]

Well, to be honest, I never thought I would be doing a podcast right now. It wasn't really part of my vision. But this is such a big opportunity for me. Anything virtual, especially with me, there's something about sitting next to someone else, meeting them in person face to face, being able to give them a high five or to hug them if they're into that. So this whole thing I definitely never expected. But I feel like it definitely hit me a little bit more when it comes to the adjustment, because I've never had some sort of world situation that I was cognitively aware of.

Bill Mandia [7:38]

Of the changes that we've seen over the past year, which ones do you think are going to be longer term, maybe permanent or at least for the foreseeable future.

Kelsey Stockton [7:50]

I believe that products that are rich in vitamins and minerals have been trending over the past year. But COVID-19 really accelerated that trend. So we're seeing even on Lassonde's end putting out immune functional juices, whether that's gut health, whether that's caffeine for an energy boost, or additional vitamins and minerals and juices that we haven't potentially had before.

Bill Mandia [8:17]

As somebody who still, as we've been talking about newer to the industry, how do you think emerging leaders in the food industry are impacting the trends that we've seen resulting from the pandemic?

Kelsey Stockton [8:31]

As a newcomer to the industry? I have seen amongst me and others in similar positions that it's harder for us to take no for an answer. We have this idea, we have this vision that we want to achieve to make a difference. And we're willing to really go to any length, no matter how unconventional it is to see that vision come to life. So I think part of it is a work style. I believe that no matter how many years of service you have in the food industry, it really takes a team effort to accelerate those trends and to meet those trends, especially when they are unexpected.

Bill Mandia [9:10]

So would you say that you think younger members of food industry companies are taking on a larger role in driving the trends given the unique nature of the challenges that the pandemic has brought on us?

Kelsey Stockton [9:25]

I believe that younger members have a role in driving the trends. I believe that we're very much in touch whether it's through social media, through our peers, of what's really going on in the trendy food products or anything of that nature. Once we see that there's potential in something we want to go after it and to make a difference. I believe that goes hand in hand with working with people who have more service in the food industry because of their experience. So again, I think it goes back to a team effort that we're accelerating those trends and giving the consumers what they want. But ultimately, I feel like people like me are a little bit more in touch with the possibilities that are out there and see what the consumers want. And we want to fulfill that need.

Bill Mandia [10:11]

Where do you see most newcomers to the industry getting their start? Is it in any particular part of the business, supply chain, marketing? Working on the front line? Are there any particular areas where you see or is it just there's a variety of different roles available, and people go where there's a need.

Kelsey Stockton [10:31]

I think younger people are getting involved in all aspects of the business, depending on what interests they have personally. For me, I had an interest in the business side of things. So I got a degree in business, and now I'm working in commercialization. But I know of peers of a similar age to me or newcomers that are joining other aspects of the supply chain, such as sourcing, or they're getting involved with R&D, because they have an interest in food science. There's also younger members who work at the plant as well.

So I think it's really an individual's decision of what aspects of the industry they see a fit. But I think a bigger challenge there is that people my age, or newcomers don't exactly aim to go into the food industry.

Bill Mandia [11:16]

You talked about folks who are starting out their careers, possibly looking at things other than the food industry. Are there things that the food industry could do or highlight to generate more interest and to have some folks enter straight out, enter the workforce straight out of college?

Kelsey Stockton [11:37]

For me, I feel like this really comes down to exposure. If I didn't have my internship at the Food Innovation Center, and I wasn't exposed to Lasonde Pappas through the New Jersey Food Processors Association, I'm not really too sure, if I would have known that Lasonde Pappas even existed. For people my age, the way that we're informed about things is through social media advertisements, or the big companies who really have a rep. Most of the time that is automobile companies, that's technology related companies, and so forth, even in finance. So I think, for me, I really benefited from exposure. I have seen that for other people as well.

What I recommend is, companies putting themselves out there more saying: this is who we are, this is what we do, these are roles that could be applicable to you. One part that I am really passionate about is co-ops and internships, because that's how I got my start in the food industry. Also, as a college student graduating, sometimes we look at job descriptions, and they can be a little bit intimidating because of the experience they require. Or maybe we're not all too familiar with those roles. But we know that internships and co-ops are meant for people like us, and we know that that is a great start in the food industry, to learn about different roles, to get some experience and eventually, hopefully stay in the food industry.

Bill Mandia [13:05]

So one of the things that struck me recently about the food industry, in virtually every industry, you hear a lot of talk about environmental and social governance, ESG. So many companies say that they want to be viewed as thought leaders or as ESG compliant, and things of that nature. Food is sort of uniquely positioned in a lot of respects, because sustainability, renewable energy, things of that nature, are critical. The industry, it's ubiquitous, not just that we all eat food every day to live, but that it impacts so many different aspects of commerce. Do you think that the food industry may start to attract from different talent pools and have some more interest from younger folks, as it continues to become more and more active in the ESG space?

Kelsey Stockton [13:59]

I think that social responsibility, or ESG, is one way that could attract younger people. I think the concern for the food industry is how competitive they really are against other industries such as finance and technology. I believe that social responsibility is something that is of passion to people my age, especially since we hear about the

percentage of food that goes to waste or how our landfills are filling up are all the ways that technology is advancing our recycling practices. So I definitely think that that's one focus area that people my age are attracted to. And I believe that that's why there's also a rise in people my age studying business. I believe about 1/5 of students are majoring in Business. So I think bottom line Yes, it's one way we can attract more younger people to the food industry. But it also comes back to how competitive we are against the other industries that are also trying to achieve the same exact thing that we are.

Bill Mandia [15:08]

I think what I was thinking about in terms of my question is that the food industry, I think in some respects is very uniquely positioned to drive those ESG initiatives. Because, as I've mentioned, it's so ubiquitous, both in the fact that everybody is consuming food every day to live. It impacts transportation, retail, you could just go on and on and on. So it seems like something where for people who are very interested in mission driven outcomes and social impact that there may be the potential for a lot of opportunity there in the food industry. Related to that, what are some things you think that food industry companies, executives, and leaders could be doing to further professional development for folks who are just starting their careers in the industry.

Kelsey Stockton [16:08]

One of the aspects of Lassonde Pappas that really attracted me is how willing we are to train and to develop employees. Me, as a recent college grad going into it, I knew that I still had a lot to learn, and I had a lot to apply and I wanted to be given that chance. Every single year, I get to create three goals and one of them is an exposure to another department. So this year, I chose regulatory and our processes for applying for and receiving certs, such as organic and non-GMO.

For me, and I can speak for many other people my age, just having that opportunity to go outside of my comfort zone, to learn something new, to even have opportunities such as participate in New Jersey Food Processors Association events. That's one thing that I really enjoy as a young person and I can see myself continuing in those ways. I know it ultimately comes back to training and development. Any opportunity that I can have, or any other newcomer, my age, is really appreciative. So I would just urge to keep those opportunities coming, to be willing to train, and be willing to work alongside me as I grow and develop.

Bill Mandia [17:24]

So given your role at Lassonde Pappas, you're obviously very in tune to some of the trends that are going on around private labeling and branding. So could you talk about some of those, some of the things you're seeing now, and then how you think those things are going to play out in the future.

Kelsey Stockton [17:39]

As new labels are coming across my desk for review, I see that customers are really trying to provide additional information to the consumers that they want. I know from my

experience that consumers are looking for ease of information, ease of use and ease of disposition. And over the past one or two years, there has been an increasing number of labels that have the 'How to Recycle' logo. I usually see it generally on a lot of my packaging, even grocery bags, and it allows the consumer to easily see what they are supposed to do with that packaging, once they are done using it. I think that this is a trend that will continue, especially again, as a younger member, always wanting to focus on social responsibility and to do the right thing and to reduce waste. I can honestly imagine maybe in the next three or four years, it'll be standard to include that logo.

Another aspect are QR codes, which have been around for some time. I don't think they've really taken off as much as that 'how to recycle' logo. But some consumers really appreciate being able to use their phones, scan the label and receive additional information, whether that's claims from that additional nutritional content that's on the label. And I believe with the recent new bioengineering disclosure statements, if the label is too small, consumers can opt to have a QR code where consumers can scan it. And that disclosure statement would then appear on their phone. I am also one of those consumers who likes to be able to see a label and know exactly what I'm consuming and where it comes from. I think as that trend continues, that companies will be more willing to add the information that consumers want onto the label, because if we're informed about it, it attracts us to it, and therefore we're also more likely to purchase it.

Bill Mandia [19:36]

How do you see the market for private label products being as we go forward? Do you think it's going to get stronger? Do you think it's going to stay about the same and how do you think private labels are going to do against large, nationally recognized brands.

Kelsey Stockton [19:51]

I believe that over time private labels can have as much of a competitive advantage to branded items that we've seen historically. One of the examples that comes to mind is Wakefern's new private label brand 'Bowl & Basket.' I'm sure if any of us have walked into ShopRite recently, we see it all over the place as they're slowly transitioning. I spoke to some of my friends who aren't part of the food industry. And they thought that 'Bowl & Basket' was a branded item. They had no idea that it was really Shop Rite's brand.

Bill Mandia [20:22]

So you see as a possibility that I take it, that's a trend that we may see going forward. That rather than, if I shop at Wegmans, or Shop Rite, or wherever, seeing their name on it, that they may have developed a brand name for their private label. Is that right?

Kelsey Stockton [20:37]

Exactly, exactly. I think that as companies are trying to rebrand themselves, they're thinking about: How can we make this look attractive? How can we have this pop off of the shelf, and have consumers purchase it? And historically, in the past, I feel like sometimes private label can get a bad rep. You look at it, you're like, 'Oh, that's the store

brand, like that's the cheap version, we don't want that.' But instead if it has a stronger brand strategy, and sometimes private label items have just as good a product that matches a branded item. That in a way, it kind of seems like it's tricking consumers into buying the product. But at the same time, I think it just comes back to having a good marketing strategy, and having a brand that really stands out and that consumers are attracted to. Because nowadays, people want to be able to take a picture of something and put it on social media and say, oh, look at how great this looks. You know, I see that all the time when I'm on social media. So I think that as companies are rebranding, which is occurring often right now I see with the labels, that private label can and will likely have an advantage in the marketplace.

Bill Mandia [21:52]

Well, Kelsey, thank you very much for your time today. Best of luck at Lassonde and in the food industry and I look forward to seeing you at some New Jersey Food Processors events in the future.

Kelsey Stockton [22:02]

Thanks Bill for the opportunity today to allow me to come on here and serve as a guest. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to share my thoughts and my experiences as a newcomer and put our voice out there and in hopes of attracting more people just like me to the industry.

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, you can visit us at www.njfoodprocessors.org. And if you have an idea for a future episode, please email us at help@njfoodprocessors.org. We would love to connect with you and make your story and your experience part of this series too.