

## PRESS RELEASE

After the success of last year's Clean Eating Challenge, Viva Fresh launched its second annual health and wellness campaign on October 1. The challenge will continue until the 2021 Viva Fresh Expo on March 26-27, 2021 at the Gaylord Texan in Dallas.

Last year, what started as an idea for educational and promotional content became a success story of epic proportions. Best-selling author, TV personality and physician, [Dr. Ian Smith](#) led four produce industry professionals - Ed Bertaud (IFCO), Michelle Cortez (Vision Import Group), Jed Murray (Tenaza Organics) and Tommy Wilkins (Grow Farms Texas)- as they dramatically changed their diets in an effort to lead healthier lifestyles. In the end, the group lost more than 160 pounds, reduced the amount of medications taken, lowered cholesterol and regulated blood sugar, all thanks to the power of fresh produce.

Today, the mentees have become the mentors to a new batch of Clean Eating Challenge participants. 40 industry members have stepped up to try their hand at their own journey to wellness and healthier living. Challenge participants span eight states and two Canadian provinces, are between the ages of 30 and 67 and have cited wellness goals that include weight loss, better sleep, improved health and energy, getting off medications, feeling better about themselves and setting a good example for friends, family and peers.

Due to the large turnout of participants, TIPA also recruited two new mentors who took similar paths to wellness - James Bassetti (Little Bear Produce) and TJ Flowers (Lone Star Citrus Growers) - to lead two of the five mentored groups.

Accountability, shared experience and moral support are a big part in changing behavior. As such, twelve of the 40 participants have signed up to be "Featured Participants" and share their progress with the public via blogs and vlogs, which can be found on the newly launched Viva Fresh Clean Eating Challenge [website](#). The website also features workouts, healthy eating tips and recipes.

This year's Clean Eating Challenge Featured Participants are:

Ashley Porter, HEB

Amy Sowder, The Packer

Blake LaGrange, Val Verde Vegetable Co.

Bret Erickson, Little Bear Produce

Chris Diaz, Sunkist Growers

Jen Velasquez, Full Tilt Marketing

John Toner V, United Fresh Produce Association

Kimberly Avendaño

Lance A. Peterson, Super Starr International

Marcia Green, AA Organic

Roxanne Martinez, Frontera Produce

Tim Hodges, Union Standard Insurance Group

“As a past participant, I am truly honored to help lead this great group of people looking to take charge of not just their weight but their overall health and wellness,” said Michelle Cortez, chairwoman of the 2021 Clean Eating Challenge. “A year ago, as we were going through this challenge ourselves, we didn’t truly realize we were changing our lives for the better, day by day, pound by pound, inch by inch. I know I speak for all the mentors when I say this is what we want for this group, but this is also what we want for our entire industry as we learn to value the power of fresh produce to change our health.”

Five weeks into the Challenge, participants have reported more than a cumulative 300 pounds lost, increased mental clarity and energy, a reduction in medications and a decrease in clothing sizes. The group spirit of shared success is evident through group texts and check-in calls. The camaraderie and spirit of sharing wins, rather than a competitive atmosphere has helped many participants make modifications that are about lasting and sustainable lifestyle changes.

The Clean Eating Challenge will culminate on March 27th at the Viva Fresh Produce Expo in Dallas, Texas with final results and remarks from Dr. Smith during the Keynote Luncheon, along with the participants’ big reveals and highlights from their journeys.

The Clean Eating Challenge is sponsored by SunFed, Grow Farms Texas, Coast Tropical, Rio Fresh and Little Bear Produce. For more information on the 2021 Viva Fresh Produce Expo, visit [www.VivaFreshExpo.com](http://www.VivaFreshExpo.com). Registration, airfare and hotel expenses are complimentary for qualifying retail and foodservice companies.