

## INDUSTRY VIEWPOINT:

Rising Star, Corey Williams,  
Talks His Career Path to Produce



by Elissa Vallano

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Talk to anyone in fresh produce, and you'll hear a different story about how they ended up in the industry. For Corey Williams, Sales Account Manager at R.S. Hanline & Company, his journey began in 2012 with the Pack Family Career Pathways program.

Created in 2004 by Jay Pack and Produce Marketing Association (PMA), the Pack Family Career Pathways program invites students and faculty members from universities across the country to attend PMA's Fresh Summit for a firsthand introduction to the fresh produce industry. They participate in career panel discussions, field tours, educational workshops, social events - as well as walk the show floor with a Career Ambassador (industry mentor)

Williams was a junior Food Industry Management major at Michigan State University when he was selected by faculty member Larry Zink to participate in the program. Initially set on a career in logistics, he declined the invitation but was eventually persuaded by a classmate who was also selected to participate in the program.

"I never thought I'd deal with fruits and vegetables," Williams said. "But it's mind-boggling how invested in the industry I am now."

That passion took root at the 2012 Fresh Summit in Anaheim, California. Career Ambassador Rich Dachman, Vice President of Produce at Sysco Corporation, served as Williams' industry mentor. With Dachman as his guide, Williams immersed himself in the world of fresh produce and explored the many career possibilities within the industry. Through the industry connections he developed during the program, Williams had his pick of summer internships - and 13 job offers lined up after graduation.



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"Produce is a large industry but a small industry at the same time," Williams said. "Everyone knows everyone. It's important to never break ties, to keep all ends tightened. This is one of the few industries that still thrives off relationships."

Williams spent the summer of 2013 interning at C.H. Robinson's Chicago office. After graduation, he took a step away from fresh produce and accepted a position at PepsiCo. Williams stayed in touch with the people he met during the program - including Tommy Rowlands, vice president of sales at R.S. Hanline, and Cody Granneman, chief operating officer at R.S. Hanline. They remained dedicated mentors during his time at PepsiCo, and that support helped Williams realize where he wanted to focus his career.

In July 2014, Williams joined R.S. Hanline in Shelby, Ohio. It's a move he chalks up to "the personal touch."

"At any time, I can walk into the owner of the company's office and have a sit-down conversation of how things are going, what I need to improve, what I'm doing great at," Williams said. "That personal touch brought me back to the industry. And I firmly believe, once you're in, you're in. There's no going back." "I'm looking to keep growing with our company, to keep evolving, keep using the tools I've been given to succeed," Williams said. "I think the opportunities are endless."

As for current college students thinking - or not thinking - about a career in fresh produce, Williams hopes they keep an open mind and see all of the possibilities the industry has to offer.

"If there's one piece of advice I could give them, it's to take the risk. There's no going back once you get in because of how great this industry is," Williams said.