



PEOPLE

Packer 25 — Emily Kohlhas



(The Packer)

By **AMY SOWDER** October 15, 2019
Emily Kohlhas digs diversity: in food and people.

Kohlhas, 32, became the director of marketing at Philadelphia-based John Vena Specialty Produce in a roundabout way. After earning her anthropology degree, she worked for social and food justice at nonprofits such as Fair Food Philly and Vetri Community Partnership.

Yet Kohlhas realized her effect could only go so far with local and regional growers.

Then she discovered the possibilities on a large scale at John Vena's specialty company at the Philadelphia Wholesale Produce Market.

"I really enjoy helping people feel comfortable with the diversity of product available, the limitations of availability, how to navigate that need for consistency with a supply you can't always rely on and how to adapt to that system rapidly — and how to get people excited about it, rather than anxious about it," Kohlhas said.

She wants to prevent the loss of crop diversity that occurs when items are standardized.

"Honestly, those items are less fun and flavorful," Kohlhas said.

The marketer brings new items to sales meetings and training sessions to talk about them and have everyone taste them, said John Vena, president.

At home, her passion continues: she cooks and gardens daily, hosting dinner parties with food from across the globe. She participates in the coming South Philadelphia Food Co-op, joins in the Produce Marketing Association's women's conference, and sits on the marketing committee of Philadelphia wholesale market.



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In her four years with the company, Kohlhas has transformed the marketing program, Vena said.

Kohlhas is leading the company's 100th-anniversary rebranding efforts, including revisiting its mission and values statement and building a new website. She created a social media program and collateral materials and labels. She and other staff attend customer food shows and she organizes staff product training and outreach.

Kohlhas questions the status quo — but in a collaborative way.

"I will really stick my nose into any part of the organization to learn how it works, no matter my role, which can be annoying, but it gives me a holistic perspective, helps me fill my role," Kohlhas said. "It allows me to connect dots and take on projects that I think will really make an impact in the organization."

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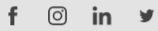
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