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# Fresh Produce & Artisan Farm Products at Your Fingertips

A year ago PRoduce! inaugurated a delivery service that brings the farmer's market to you

Cynthia López Cabán, The Weekly Journal Sep 4, 2019 Updated Sep 4, 2019  0





*Behind the project -that turned one year old this month- are foodpreneur Crystal Díaz Rojas, entrepreneur Patricio Schames, co-founder of the delivery App Uva Francisco Tirado and chef Martín Louzao. >Courtesy PProduce!*

"We can cultivate everything. We have 11 of the 12 soils for agriculture. Puerto Rico has microclimates within the same farms, in each municipality and neighborhood."

-Crystal Díaz Rojas,  
foodpreneur



A local food movement is germinating. It's an initiative that connects consumers and foodies with the farmers stewarding the land and the history of the food on their tables.

It has a simple name: Puerto Rico Produce or PProduce! and, in general terms, it's a subscription service that delivers fresh locally grown fruits, legumes, vegetables, roots, grains and artisan farm products to your doorstep.

The company's long term goals are vast. PProduce! is forging pathways to sustain and attract new producers to farming. Along the way, a new appreciation for regional agriculture simmers among consumers, who are exposed to a deeper understanding of the food production system and healthier eating habits.

Behind the project -that turned one year old this month- are foodpreneur Crystal Díaz Rojas, chef Martín Louzao and his business partner Patricio Schames, and Francisco Tirado, an entrepreneur and co-founder of the delivery App Uva.



*Each Thursday, between 5:00 pm and 9:00 pm, 13 drivers deploy carrying a cargo of reusable green bags topped with 18 pounds of fresh goodies. >Courtesy PROduce!*

“Our mission is to reconnect communities of farmers, harvesters and artisan producers with consumers throughout Puerto Rico and chip away at that 85 percent of products we import by encouraging the sale and purchase of local produce,” Díaz stated.

Puerto Rico imports 80 to 90 percent of the food it consumes, according to different studies and official data. “Even if we only decrease the number by 1 percent, we are changing our relationship with food and farming,” she insisted.

Following that goal, the founders of PROduce! also seek to increase the variety of products cultivated and harvested on the island. “It ranges from the types of crops to the diversification, multiplicatio, and rescue of ancient fruit seeds that we no longer see,” Díaz explained.

To achieve that transformation, PROduce! started with small steps. First, the project built a network of farmers, producers and loyal customers. “The fact that we have the subscription gives us purchasing power. It gives us that power to forge a relationship with the producer. Now, we can develop plans and order particular fruits or vegetables because the farmer has a purchasing commitment,” the marketing expert and food lover said.



*The home box contains a selection of three to four types of fruits, five to six vegetables, three varieties of legumes, bread, eggs and cheese or yogurt. It all depends on the seasonal products available. >Courtesy PRoduce!*

So far, the delivery service has close to 400 subscribers around the island, with a big chunk of the customers residing in the metropolitan area. The service only provides two types of subscription, a weekly and biweekly delivery. The grocery bag costs \$50.

The service works smoothly. Each Thursday, between 5:00 pm and 9:00 pm, 13 drivers deploy carrying a cargo of reusable green bags topped with 18 pounds of

fresh goodies. Carefully organized inside the home box are a selection of three to four types of fruits, five to six vegetables, three varieties of legumes, bread, eggs and cheese or yogurt. It all depends on the seasonal products available.

Receiving the bag at home is convenient; no doubt. But opening the bag was a joyful experience. It exceeded my expectations. The fruits and vegetables were truly fresh, with soft and naturally shiny skin (no wax). I also tried new products not readily available in traditional grocery stores like the rambutan, a cross between lychee and quenepa (Spanish lime); Felice, a thick and delicious artisan yogurt; and an irresistible loaf of Levain's brioche bread that I devoured that same night.

“We have delivered 75,000 pounds of food 100 percent produced in Puerto Rico,” Díaz indicated with pride during the interview with **THE WEEKLY JOURNAL**.

As part of the strategy to build a new bond with food and create a community of local food lovers, PProduce! uses social media actively and enlisted the help of historian Cruz Miguel Ortiz Cuadra and nutritionist Gabriela Tirado.

“On Instagram, you have the live experience. In the blog, Cruz Miguel Ortiz Cuadra, a historian that specializes in Puerto Rican gastronomy, shares the history of the products in the home box. He gives you that fun fact. Gabriela Tirado writes about the nutritional and health benefits of the products. I visit the farms so you can meet the producers,” Díaz said.





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Next on the agenda, a vegan home box and an option to buy protein, meat or fish. Also on the pipeline is a line of products like jams and “sofrito” (seasoning sauce) made of food surpluses.

While Díaz holds a degree in Marketing, she’s always gravitated towards food, in all senses. Moved by that passion, she spent time studying at the agroecological farm El Josco Bravo and investigated the food industry for her thesis project.

### **El Josco Bravo Leads The Journey Back to Sustainable Agriculture**

Ian Pagán’s organic crops and artisanal juices can be found every Sunday at La Placita Roosevelt in Hato Rey.

“Instead of betting on Tourism, as the only option for economic development, we should be looking at other options, agriculture among them. But first, we need an agrarian reform that includes small and medium producers. Big farmers get the incentives and the land, but the small farmers have an uphill battle, if not an impossible one,” Díaz noted. “We can cultivate everything. We have 11 of the 12 soils for agriculture. Puerto Rico has microclimates within the same farms, in each municipality and neighborhood.”

She knows. PProduce! buys onions from a farm in Guánica, kale and broccoli from farmers in Río Grande, strawberries from Barranquitas, and carrots from farms in Aibonito and Adjuntas.



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## Cynthia López Cabán, The Weekly Journal

Reporter for The Weekly Journal. She is a curious and fearless journalist, equipped with 16-plus years of writing. Cynthia received a bachelor's degree in Spanish and English Literature from Sacred Heart University.



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# The Weekly Journal

**theweeklyjournal.com**

1064 Avenida Ponce De Leon

San Juan, PR 00901

**Phone:** 787-622-2300

**Email:** newsroom@wjournalpr.com

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