
News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Graceland Fruit Selected as Small Business of the Year

FRANKFORT, MI – Graceland Fruit of Frankfort has been selected as the Northwest Michigan APEX Accelerator Best Small Business of the Year. Graceland Fruit is a leading producer and global distributor of premium quality dried fruit ingredients for the food industry. The company is being recognized for working to increase its government sales with assistance from APEX Accelerator.

Graceland first approached the Northwest Michigan APEX Accelerator (then known as PTAC) in 2018 for guidance on how to grow their government sales. Since then, Graceland has been taking advantage of the various services offered by APEX and has received over 200 hours of one-on-one counseling and attended multiple training events. APEX assistance included registration, marketing to the government, researching past USDA purchases, and responding to government bids.

In the fall of 2022, Graceland Fruit received assistance from the APEX Accelerator in submitting a bid for dried cherries. Over the course of 10 months, the APEX Accelerator spent over 70 hours researching, reviewing, and providing support to ensure the bid was successful. In 2023, Graceland Fruit was awarded multiple contracts worth an impressive \$15.4 million, marking their largest one-year sale to the USDA.

“Our partnership with APEX has been extremely valuable to us over the years,” said Kerry Babion, Graceland Fruit’s Customer Sales & Service Manager. “We appreciate their guidance and support, and we are excited to continue working together towards even greater success in the future.”

"APEX clients range from one person shops to very large businesses, selling everything from cherries to weapon components, and from snow plowing services to engineering services," said Cathy Fairbanks, Northwest Michigan APEX Accelerator Regional Director. "Every client is different and it is very rewarding to help a business like Graceland Fruit who bring nutritious food products to the market. Graceland Fruit has been an exceptional client, staying in touch with their counselor, taking advantage of our many services, and following through on all recommendations."



Board Chair: **Nicole Sulak**
Chief Executive Officer: **Janie McNabb**



Graceland Fruit will be formally honored at the Annual Michigan Celebrates Small Business (MCSB) awards gala May 21 in Lansing.

For more information about Graceland Fruit, go to gracelandfruit.com.

The Northwest Michigan APEX Accelerator is a grant-funded organization, supported by federal and state agencies, and offering no-cost marketing, technical consulting, and training to businesses in Northwest Lower Michigan and the Upper Peninsula who wish to pursue government contracts. More information is available at nwm.org/APEX.

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NOTE to Media: Images are oftentimes available upon request by emailing Dan Boss at dan.boss@networksnorthwest.org and stating preferences for resolution, file format, and file size. Or phone (231) 929-5047. Check our online Media Room at: networksnorthwest.org/media

Founded in 1974, Networks Northwest facilitates and manages various programs and services for the 10-county region. These programs include Northwest Michigan Works!, APEX Accelerator (formerly PTAC), various business services, and many different regional planning initiatives in response to our communities' requests and needs. You will see the broad spectrum of workforce, business and community services Networks Northwest offers if you visit our website, networksnorthwest.org. Networks Northwest's member counties are Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, and Wexford.