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THE 2024 MEAT AND POULTRY PROCESSORS  
**TOP 100 REPORT**

# THE TOP 100 MAINTAINING GAINS

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### INTERVIEW WITH KATELYN KANEY OF CATTANEO BROS.

National Provisioner Multimedia Specialist Brett Parker sits down with Katelyn Kaney, president of Cattaneo Bros, as she discusses the company's recent acquisition of Bob Tallman's Authentic Cowboy Beef Jerky. In this interview, Kaney explains the inspiration behind the acquisition, what makes Bob Tallman's jerky stand out from similar products on the market, unique methods of marketing and distribution, and unique challenges that are present during the acquisition of a food product.





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## MOST-POPULAR FEATURES:

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# VIEW FROM THE TOP

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One of the bread-and-butter concepts of economics is that a rising tide lifts all boats. For the companies listed among *The National Provisioner's* Top 100 Meat and Poultry Processors, the general trend is the tide is coming in.

Reflecting higher food prices, revenues are up – for some companies significantly.

A March Circana survey suggests 57% of consumers cope with the higher prices by looking for sales specials more often and 36% use coupons more frequently. Close to half (44%) say they cut back on non-essentials, and 34% switch to stores' private-label brands where possible.

Food businesses find themselves in similar situation, with many looking to maximize their spending through incorporating automation and other steps to boost efficiency.

Take a look at 2024's Top 100 listing and see where they rank.



FRED WILKINSON

 EMAIL FRED WILKINSON



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COVER STORY - TOP 100



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THE 2024 MEAT AND POULTRY PROCESSORS

TOP 100 REPORT



MAINTAINING GAINS

THE GENERAL TREND IS COMPANIES' REVENUES ARE UP FROM 2023, SOME SIGNIFICANTLY.

BY FRED WILKINSON  
CHIEF EDITOR

Although retail food price inflation has cooled a bit after three years of steady increases, food prices remain elevated compared with even just a couple of years prior. That pricing reality is evident in 2024's Top 100 Meat and Poultry Processors, with the general trend of companies' revenues being up from 2023, some significantly.

Consumers' ongoing concern regarding their grocery bills is being overshadowed by accelerated foodservice inflation, and the trend of consumers embracing at-home meal occasions continues to drive product development and promotional efforts.

PEOPLE STILL GOTTA EAT, AND MEAT AND POULTRY PRODUCTS DEFINITELY REMAIN ON THE MENU.

Much as consumers are looking for a deal and embracing value where they find it, food marketers are taking a similar tack. Beef supplies remain tight and prices elevated, which in turn has created opportunities for pork and chicken. Similarly, private-label products continue benefiting from consumers looking for a more affordable analog to their usual go-to national brands.

In other words, despite higher prices and consumer apprehension about the overall economic outlook and their personal financial situations, people still gotta eat and meat and poultry products definitely remain on the menu.



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# YOUNG CONSUMERS DRIVE PLANT-BASED CONSUMPTION

TASTE AND TEXTURE CONTINUE TO COMPLICATE THE PLANT-BASED PROTEIN CATEGORY.

BY SAMMY BREDAR  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

We’ve heard it time and time again: plant-based protein is on the decline. Despite this rumor, plant-based protein is here to stay. As consumers increasingly value claims-based, sustainable, “better-for” protein products, plant-based protein positions itself to meet consumer demand. To stay in the loop on all things plant-based, The National Provisioner consulted Corbion, Before the Butcher, Planteneers and Seaton Food Consultants LLC, gaining the freshest insights on plant-based protein.



## CATEGORY COMPLICATIONS

Some of the main issues for the plant-based protein category include taste and texture. Nancy Jo Seaton, president of Seaton Food Consultants LLC, noted the importance of aroma in protein products. Even when a product has a good taste and texture, without an aroma, the eating experience is not complete. Seaton said, aroma prepares our brain for taste, allowing it to interpret the flavor and deepen that experience.

Before the Butcher founder and president Danny O’Malley emphasized the importance of both taste and texture, noting that these attributes can make or break a product. “If these products don’t taste good, people will try them once and they’ll move on,” he said. “Most people are not going to continue to eat a product that they just don’t like.”

O’Malley said texture is essential to the consumer, since it’s what they remember from their eating experience. “When they bite down, if it feels like they’re biting down on something that’s similar to them, which would be an animal-based protein, then they feel like they’re not missing something,” he said. “And really that is the goal here.”

To improve taste and texture attributes in plant-based offerings, Garrett McCoy, senior manager, Research & Development, Corbion, recommended producers utilize consumer research to set goals for these attributes. “Once their goals are set, ingredient suppliers can help producers meet their goals,” he said.

To differentiate themselves in today’s market, Planteneers North America VP of commercial operations Gretchen Moon recommended producers have a processing partner who is well-informed on the product, have quality products that can withstand a variety of process elements, and maintain affordable price points.

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## GROWTH

The 19th annual Power of Meat study indicated that refrigerated plant-based meat alternatives reached \$352 million in sales in 2023, down 16.7% from the year before. Pounds sold also went down to 44 million pounds, dropping by 16.1%. Frozen and refrigerated plant-based protein dropped 13.8% in sales to \$1.1 billion, with pounds sold also dropping by 19.8% to 145 million pounds.

Despite these declines, there is still interest in the plant-based category.

Seaton noted that success for plant-based protein can be attributed to young consumers wanting meat-free protein options. While these consumers are interested in better-for-you products, they are also attentive to every aspect of a product—including ingredients.

“Plant-based products have significantly more ingredients than a regular burger, and that can be a turn-off for some consumers,” Seaton said. “Most plant-based alternatives are soy-based, and some people avoid soy.”

Producers need to remembers that their consumers are very attentive to the ingredients list. “According to research conducted by The Food Industry Association in 2023 ... Products with fewer ingredients and cleaner labels are more appealing to these shoppers,” McCoy said. “In short, consistently meeting consumers’ expectations is what makes producers stand out.”

Seaton predicts plant-based protein will shrink at retail. “I think we are going to see the space devoted to meat-free options at retail continue to shrink until the manufacturers can get the prices in line,” she said.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Despite her predictions for the plant-based category, Seaton sees some optimism in the private-label sector. “Plant-based may move greater volume when it is private label branded and the prices become more in reach of the ‘regular’ consumer,” she said. Seaton sees potential for meal kit services and college and university dining services, as those avenues target younger consumers.

Seaton emphasized the importance of price for the plant-based protein category. She said, “if plant-based can’t come up with a product that is priced at parity, or a small percentage above meat-based, I think the growth in the segment is stunted whether the purchase is at food service, convenience or the grocery store.”

Despite possible declines in the category, German-born Planteneers sees opportunity in the North American market. “While we know North American plant-based product growth has slowed in the recent months, we still believe that plant-based is the future of food and we want to be part of it here in the US and Canada,” Moon said.

Plant-based protein does not have to be an all or nothing. Rather, producers can combine the nutritional benefits of plant-based protein with animal-derived meat to create hybrid products. In fact, Planteneers sees a bright future for hybrid offerings. “Hybrid products are something we believe will become more common,” Moon said.

Though consumers do not primarily eat plant-based meat, consumer interest in nutrition and claims-based products could drive the category forward. In fact, 29% of those surveyed in the most recent edition of the Power of Meat are trying to consume less meat. To meet these consumers where they are at, producers can capitalize on clean-label, better-for-you protein products.

Opening Image: Corbion continually engages in research, exploring synergies between ingredients and introducing new active components. Image courtese of Corbion.

Second Image: Outside of Planteneers facility. Image courtesy Planteneers.





Photo Courtesy of Visit OKC

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**Sharks Don't Swim Backwards**  
*by Rob Sharkey*



**Personal Branding: Maximizing  
Performance in the Workplace**  
*by Paul Davis*



**Less but Better - Meat will Become  
the Luxury Food of the Future**  
*by Lars Hinrichsen, Ph.D.*



**Celebrating Science**  
*by Michele Payn*

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# HOW IS WELFARE-BASED LEGISLATION IMPACTING THE PROTEIN INDUSTRY?

PRACTICING, MAINTAINING AND PROMOTING HUMANE HANDLING AND ANIMAL WELFARE NOT ONLY ENSURES BEST PRACTICES, BUT ALSO REASSURES CONSUMERS THAT THEIR PURCHASES ALIGN WITH THEIR PRIORITIES.

BY SAMMY BREDAR  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Maintaining proper humane handling practices is essential to the success of the protein industry. As the world evolves, the industry must evolve with it, adjusting to new standards and practices. With the implementation of legislation like Prop 12 and Massachusetts Question 3, every worker in the meat supply chain must be properly informed on all best practices for humane handling of livestock and poultry.

The industry was concerned about the potential impact of Prop 12 on the pork industry, especially within California. On the production side, Prop 12 has had a rather small impact on the California pork industry, said the National Pork Producers Council. This is not the case for the rest of California’s pork industry: retail, foodservice and consumers alike have seen negative impacts from the Prop 12 legislation.

The most recent USDA data shows that there is much less pork being sold at retail and that pork prices are showing significant increases from where it was at this time last year, said NPPC.

Despite concern that other states will follow in California’s footsteps, NPPC assured the industry that no states have followed the Prop 12 precedent. “Prior to Prop. 12’s adoption, some states developed rules to regulate hog farms within the state, but other than Massachusetts Question 3, they did not ban the sale of pork or otherwise limited consumer choice,” NPPC said.

While Prop 12 does uphold high standards for animal welfare, it comes at a costly detriment to the pork industry. Prop 12-compliant product prices have increased, and California’s retail share has also declined for national fresh pork consumption – not including bacon, according to USDA researchers.

Though the proposed Massachusetts Question 3 legislation would have a detrimental impact on the pork industry, barring interstate commerce and severely disrupting the supply chain, NPPC said that the legislation has had a small impact on the industry.

“One of the original regulatory provisions in the regulation ... has since been put on hold through a court-ordered consent agreement,” NPPC said. “NPPC and the restaurant industry argued that the provision raised significant constitutional problems for interstate commerce and entered into a consent agreement with the state of Massachusetts that prevents the provision from being enforced.”

To avoid negative impacts from welfare-based legislation like Prop 12 and Massachusetts Question 3, Congress is making efforts to bar more states from passing similar legislation in the Farm Bill, NPPC said.

Though consumers are concerned about animal welfare, their purchases are not driven by welfare practices. Anne-Marie Roerink, principal at 210 Analytics, said, “In total, about one-third of Americans weigh animal welfare into their purchases, but for most the answer lies in claims based meat, such as organic, humanely raised, pasture raised, etc. depending on the animal and the consumers' preference.” Animal welfare itself does not determine shopping choices, but humane and “better-for” practices are driving consumer purchasing behavior.

Luckily for the industry, meat is not going anywhere. Though some consumers choose to avoid animal-based protein, the number of Americans doing so is very small. “About 4% to 7% of Americans choose not to consume animal protein at all and the primary drivers are typically animal welfare and planet,” Roerink said. To regain those consumers who choose to avoid animal-based meat due to welfare concerns, producers can report on their humane handling practices and how they ensure animal welfare.

To track proper welfare and humane handling practices, producers can utilize the Meat Institute’s Protein PACT, which aims to optimize the industry’s sustainability practices for people, animals and environment.

In their 2023 Continuous Improvement Report, the Protein PACT logged progress and goals on various sustainability initiatives. According to the report, “By 2025, 100% of Meat Institute members who handle animals will pass third-party animal transport and handling audits, and 100% of members will require all suppliers to implement mandatory employee training and follow species-specific standards for animal care.”

Practicing, maintaining and promoting humane handling and animal welfare not only utilizes best practices, but also reassures consumers that their purchases align with their priorities.

For smaller processors looking to ensure best practices for humane handling, the Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network’s program manager David Zarling recommended taking ownership of animal welfare practices.

“This especially [goes] for very small establishments because ... many don’t have robust daily audit programs or quality assurance personnel making sure processes work according to spec,” he said. “Having a strong training program with annual retrains and audits is essential, and I’ve seen this work with crews as small as 3 people.”

Zarling recommended reaching out to consulting groups or the Humane Handling Institute at the University of Wisconsin - River Falls for training help. Otherwise, he said processors can consult with educational resources, partner with local producers who have solid reputations for animal welfare and establish customer expectations for hauling and unloading livestock.

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**FSIS NOW MANDATES THAT USDA-REGULATED FOOD PRODUCTS DECLARE SESAME AS AN ALLERGEN ON PACKAGING.**

**BY SHAWN K. STEVENS**  
FOOD INDUSTRY COUNSEL LLC

In 2022, I wrote a piece for the National Provisioner (“Sesame gets called up to the majors”) about the 2021 Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research (FASTER) Act, in which congress amended the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to require the inclusion of sesame among the list of allergens that manufacturers must identify on prepackaged food labels. For FDA-regulated foods, sesame then became one of the “Big 9” allergens.

In that article, however, I was able to report that the new law would apply only to foods regulated by FDA, and that all USDA-regulated foods were exempt – although meat companies were nevertheless permitted to declare sesame as an allergen voluntarily if they elected to do so.

Well, the times have changed. In January 2024, FSIS released a new Directive (FSIS Directive 7230.1 – Revision 3), in which FSIS now mandates that USDA-regulated food products declare sesame as an allergen on food product packaging. Sesame has thus now also become one of the “Big 9” allergens in USDA-regulated products as well.

And, the agency will be enforcing the new rule. So far this year, there have already been two recalls of USDA-regulated food products for the presence of undeclared sesame as an ingredient. FSIS has also issued one Public Health Alert this year for sesame in a product where it was not declared on the product label. Moving forward, we predict that FSIS will continue to ensure compliance by performing “Big 9” Formulation Verification tasks in regulated establishments.

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Sesame allergy symptoms can vary widely from person to person, ranging from relatively mild to potentially severe. Common symptoms include skin reactions, such as hives, redness, and itchiness, and respiratory symptoms, such as coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, nasal congestion, or a runny nose. Anaphylaxis is the most severe reaction and can be life-threatening. Symptoms of anaphylaxis include difficulty breathing, swelling of the throat and tongue, a sharp drop in blood pressure (shock), rapid pulse, dizziness, lightheadedness, or loss of consciousness. Finally, in some individuals, exposure to sesame can also cause gastrointestinal symptoms such as abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and even diarrhea.

So, moving forward, make sure that sesame is added to your hazard analysis and, if needed, added to your product labels. Indeed, FSIS has declared open season on sesame, and no company wants to be caught on the wrong side of a “Big 9” recall or public health alert.

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The 2024 RMC, co-hosted by Oklahoma State University and Lopez-Dorada Foods, will include:

Featured keynote sessions

● **Monday, June 17 — “Sharks Don’t Swim Backwards,” sponsored by Cargill**

Hear Rob Sharkey’s story of grit and determination, coming back from the hog market crash, farming, and how the SharkFarmer was born. SharkFarmer’s compelling message revolves around never giving up on your dreams, embracing challenges and strategically pivoting in the face of adversity. He will share his insight on navigating uncharted waters, challenging yourself with new roles, and carving a path to success in the ever-evolving landscape of agriculture. Be inspired to overcome obstacles, redefine your goals, never let fear hold you back, and embrace conversation with the next generation while not squishing their dreams as they find their place back on the family farm. Rob Sharkey is not your average Illinois grain farmer. Better known by his digital alias, The SharkFarmer, he is a risk taker and out of the box thinker who believes everyone has a story to tell.

● **Tuesday morning, June 18 — “Personal Branding: Maximizing Performance in the Workplace,” sponsored by Kemin**

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● **Tuesday afternoon, June 18 — “Less but Better - Meat as the Luxury Food of the Future,” sponsored by PIC**

Dr. Lars Leopold Hinrichsen, EVP at Danish Technological Institute, DMRI, is the recipient of the 2024 RMC International Lectureship Award. With over 30 years of industry experience, Dr. Hinrichsen brings expertise in innovation and technology. His insights promise to shed light on the evolving dynamics of the meat industry, emphasizing a shift towards value over price competition. Holding an MSc in Food Science, a PhD in Meat Technology from the University of Copenhagen, and an eMBA in Innovation Management from the Technical University of Denmark, Dr. Hinrichsen's contributions extend globally, including advanced automation and food technology solutions.

● **Wednesday, June 19 — “Celebrating Science,” sponsored by JBS Foods/Pilgrim’s**

Are you ready to restore trust in science and improve the public’s understanding about meat? The final session of 2024 RMC will start with a presentation by Michele Payn. This thought-provoking keynote will challenge you to find the power of connecting on a human level and why scientists must engage. You will learn how to better guide discussions in your work, outside of agriculture, and with consumers through translating science in a more meaningful way. Michele Payn, CSP, connects the people and science of food and farming as principal of Cause Matters Corp. She is known for being a community catalyst, a passionate advocate for global agriculture - and touching hearts to move minds.



American Meat Science Association

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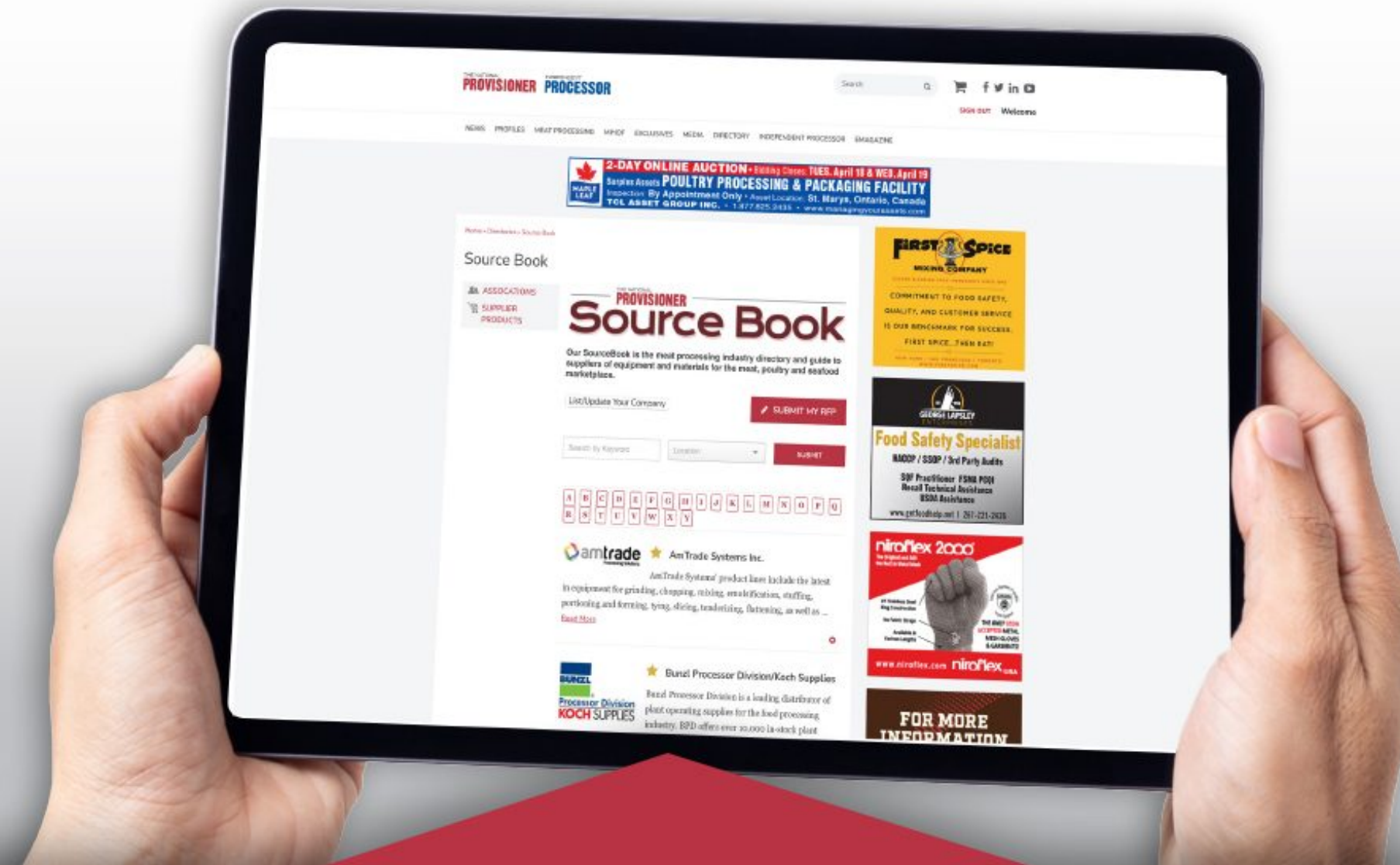


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