



NATUREFRESH™ FARMS

# Discovering the Future

by JORDAN OKUMURA

(FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) MATT QUIRING,  
EXECUTIVE RETAIL SALES ACCOUNTS  
MANAGER; PETER QUIRING, PRESIDENT AND  
CEO; AND JOHN KETLER, GENERAL MANAGER;  
IN THE LEAMINGTON, ONTARIO, GREENHOUSE









“INNOVATION ISN'T JUST PRODUCTS.  
IT IS YOUR PRINCIPLES, IT'S YOUR  
PHILOSOPHY, IT'S A WAY OF LIFE. IT'S  
WHO WE ARE. WE ADAPT TO ACHIEVE  
THOSE GOALS EVERY DAY.”

**I**n this industry, to change the game you have to be a strategic risk-taker—put new ideas on the line, fine-tune a way to dynamically go to market, and have a strong belief in your product. There is no doubting that the team behind NatureFresh™ Farms does just these things, and boldly.

talk about the evolving program and why change isn't only inevitable, it is necessary.

NatureFresh has been on a growth trajectory that has taken the company to new heights in recent years. From

product innovation and research and development to new marketing strategies and growing practices, the team has put its money where its mouth is and has pivoted its business.

“Innovation, to me, is sometimes just improving what is already existing—integrating things in a different way to make them better or more efficient, and sometimes innovation means anticipating trends five or ten years in the future and building to take advantage of these future movements that are on the horizon,” Peter continues, adding that innovation can even mean creating or using things that you can’t



calculate an ROI for—from employee retention and attraction to production and everything in between.

NatureFresh decided that since the start of its marketing company in 2010, what the operation needed to be was a market leader.

“Coming into an industry filled with competition and long-term relationships, we knew that if we did not establish our company in a way that separated us from the pack, we would be forced to compete on price alone—which obviously wasn’t what we were looking to do,” Matt shares with me. “There are more pieces to the puzzle and more ways to bring value to our customer relationships. And we believe we have found them.”

One of the ways that the company is working to achieve this is by investing in research and internal initiatives, such as the NatureFresh Discovery Center. The team works with 20 to 30 different seed companies and conducts 300-plus variety trials yearly to find new products that boast the best of the best in terms of quality, flavor, and shelf-life.

“By having this R&D center located within the farm, we can bring these newly desired products to the consumer market at a quicker pace,” John tells me of the dynamic model that drives the business. “NatureFresh is committed to sharing this research with our retail partners, which provides our sales team with the opportunity to enhance partnerships with retailers and, ultimately, consumers.”

With innovations like the Discovery Center, the Greenhouse Education Center, merchandising tools that create an environment at retail, and unique product launches, NatureFresh is firing on all cylinders and ready to impress.

So what exactly is this elusive Discovery Center nestled in the company’s Leamington, Ontario, operations—kept behind lock and key? The Discovery Center really allows the company’s Trial and Development team to spot the “hot” varieties and pass on the “nots” a lot quicker than you would see with a traditional form of trialing, Matt shares.



(FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) PETER QUIRING, MATT QUIRING, AND JOHN KETLER TAKING A SELFIE

The concept of the Discovery Center came about after NatureFresh’s management team decided they wanted to elevate the game in regards to flavor. All too often, growers are pushed to grow product for the best possible cost, which results in a negative influence on flavor.

“We knew that this was occurring and saw a need to be different. To be able to charge more money for your product, you need to be able to differentiate it with an exceptional taste experience,” Matt says.

The Discovery Center was the starting point in the company’s pursuit to provide a better tasting product for the consumer. This project aligned perfectly with the quest to be

one of the most flavorful greenhouse produce suppliers in the world.

The main goal and objective with the Discovery Center: to learn how to grow a more consistent and flavorful product.

“We are working with a number of data points to accomplish this, including climate, variety, harvest stage, and plant nutrition,” Matt continues. “We don’t believe any others are working with the data quite like us. A lot of people are doing trials on varieties, but varieties are only a piece of the equation. Beyond that, there are a lot of things a grower can do to positively influence the flavor


levels of a tomato. The Discovery Center is allowing











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*John Keller*  
GENERAL MANAGER  
NATUREFRESH™ FARMS

consumers by implementing the most up-to-date supplemental lighting system technologies. Completion of this project is scheduled for spring 2019.

“Additionally, we strive to introduce new technology that will allow us to be more environmentally-friendly and grow sustainably for our future,” John adds. “Our growing practices are developed by people who have a true passion for our industry and for the land. Our team of growers thrives in the monitoring and adjustment process that is required to ensure our consumers are always provided with produce of top-notch quality and flavor. Because at the end of the day, it is about building a vision and a business that can span generations.”

This idea of legacy is not a new one for an industry like ours, rooted in family and tradition, but for NatureFresh it is also elevated by innovation.

“Family are the people we count on the most, but also the ones we expect the most from,” Peter tells me, reflecting on that family element he often speaks about. “Our vision is to support everyone who works for NatureFresh, however, it is also building something to be left behind for my family: a legacy.”

When the team looks at the next 5 to 10 years, they tell me that they have plans to continue developing the team, which has always led to consistent successful growth.

“I am confident that we will be doubling in size within 10 years because, as you know, growing people and produce is just what we do!” John says with a smile.

“My dad always says we are in the health business,” Matt tells me. “I wholeheartedly agree with this statement. It is very easy to get behind a product

that you know, trust, and believe in. Another thing that makes me so passionate about being involved in the company and industry is the fact that it was built entirely from scratch by my father. He worked extremely hard at building up this company ever since I can remember. I want to be able to carry on his legacy.”

The passion for produce is evident throughout the team at NatureFresh.

“Love what you do and make sure others do, too,” John expresses. “Allowing people and the environment to thrive creates a strong, efficient network of team members who can accomplish the unthinkable.”

Looking at the team guiding the NatureFresh vision into a new era of growth, I would say that the unthinkable is not so far out of reach. 