

A New Chapter for A Making It In Michigan **SUCCESS** STORY

A DECADE OF CREATING OPPORTUNITY AND ACCELERATING INNOVATION



HERKNER FARMS

Three years ago, Bruce Byl was asked by a mutual friend he was serving on a bank board with to consider attending a few meetings of a small, family owned food company located in Traverse City. Having retired from the commercial furniture industry, Bruce agreed and was introduced to three Herkner sisters, daughters of the Herkner Farms founders Ozzie and Etta Herkner. The company was started in 1962 utilizing the fruit the Herknors grew on their two farms in Grand Traverse County and creating topping recipes which their daughters sold at their roadside farm stand on Old Mission Peninsula to family, friends and tourists during the summer growing season.



After tasting their three fruit toppings, Bruce quickly became a fan. During his time serving on their Advisory Board, he learned a great deal about the food industry and where the Herkner products fit and didn't fit. He also realized that to make the company viable, it needed to be recreated with a new name, logo, branding, additional flavors and price points to start. He approached the sisters in the fall of 2015 and on December 23rd of that year, they executed a friendly sale and he became the sole owner. He purchased the company because he loves the products and felt with some business expertise and capital, he could grow it into a regional food company.

Herkner Farms products are sold in all Meijer locations and Busch's Fresh Food Markets in addition to several specialty retailers. The sisters also still attend numerous trade show and farm markets with him when they are able.

Herkner Farms also has a significant presence in the food service industry where the toppings are used as ingredients in recipes for bakeries, food and ice cream manufacturers. Currently, Bruce is using two co-packers to produce the entire product line, now consisting of 26 products. He is also working with a local business partner to market the product line on Amazon.com. This fall, he will attend trade missions to Canada and China in hopes of expanding internationally.

"Since working with the Product Center, we have introduced Cranberry, Peach, Peach Habanero and Strawberry to complement our original flavors of Blueberry, Cherry and Cherry Chipotle. Three of our flavors, Cherry Chipotle, Peach and Blueberry won this year's Store Brands Editors' Picks as best new products in the topping category! These awards provided us with significant visibility, traffic and orders at the NRA Show in Chicago. The Product Center was instrumental in guiding us through the research and introduction of these new flavors. Their experience and knowledge has helped us immeasurably and saved us time and resources. We are very pleased to have their expertise as part of our team!"



Bruce Byl

"One of the best things about working for the MSU Product Center is the ability to work with companies like Herkner Farms in all its stages of growth. I was involved from the very first meeting with the Herkner sisters discussing concept development, to now working with Bruce on strategic planning to scale the business and find new market opportunities. Bruce has been an outstanding example of taking a business from good to great."

Matt Birbeck
Director, FPIC, MSU Product Center



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