

The logo for Pure Flavor, featuring the words "pure" and "flavor" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, with a stylized green leaf icon between the two words. The logo is set against a dark blue circular background.

MAKING ROOTS *in* GEORGIA

by JORDAN OKUMURA

(From left to right) Chief Financial Officer Jeff Moracci, President Jamie Moracci, and Executive Vice President Matt Mastronardi of Pure Flavor® watch over new cucumber plants coming to life

“WE ARE THE NEXT GENERATION OF VEGETABLE GROWERS.”

These are the words of Pure Flavor® President Jamie Moracci as he looks to inspire a new wave of greenhouse leaders with a company positioned to put quality, flavor, and customers first, with farms strategically located throughout North America.

Founded in May 2003, you could consider Pure Flavor® the new kid on the block when it comes to the produce game. But, the company has churned out milestone after milestone during its 15-year tenure, with three leaders at the helm rallying their produce backgrounds to gain ground and build relationships across the retail space: Jamie, along with Chief Financial Officer Jeff Moracci, and Executive Vice President Matt Mastronardi. The three Co-Founders and University of Windsor graduates have been friends since they were kids, bringing not only that wealth of greenhouse-growing ties, but the family element as well.

As the team looks downfield and shapes the vision for their ongoing success, the three execs continue to cultivate their roots while also planting the seeds of a legacy. The natural and logical evolution from a sales company into a vertically integrated, multinational greenhouse vegetable company has not always been an easy road but, then again, where is the satisfaction in “easy”?

“Through significant capital investments in land, growing and production, natural resources, construction, operations and general management, as well as research and development, sales and marketing, and logistics, we have been able to set ourselves apart—and above—much of the competition,” Jeff shares with me. “If you look at our capacity to grow and

evolve to meet the needs of our retail and foodservice partnerships, there is no ceiling to our potential.”

So what has growth looked like for Pure Flavor? In just those short 15 years, the company has moved into larger headquarters in Leamington, Ontario, opened and expanded distribution centers (DC) in Taylor then to Romulus, Michigan; San Antonio, Texas; coupled with a new DC slated for Peach County, Georgia, and expanded its family of growers year-over-year. Not to mention, considerable expansions in its greenhouse facilities in Leamington. But, Georgia is really where the team has been aiming their passion and expertise in recent years.

“Our goal is to continue removing the seasonality aspect from our business. By growing year-round in the Southeast at our Peach County, operation, it will allow us to reduce food miles to our customers while consumers get to enjoy fresher product on the shelves,” Jamie says.





(From left to right) Jeff, Matt, and Jamie meet daily to review the business

The Co-Founders spent nearly two years researching locations across the U.S. for an expansion and strategically chose Peach County. When all is said and done, Pure Flavor will have invested more than \$105 million USD to build the 75-acre, state-of-the-art, high-tech greenhouse facility and distribution center. For perspective, the reach of this latest project will allow the location to distribute across 13 states, including Georgia, Florida, the Carolinas, Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, and Texas. Phase One, the first 25 acres, will be producing greenhouse-grown vegetables in Peach County this year.

“Our expansion in Georgia and the U.S. means a lot for our business model,” Matt says, reflecting on the research and meticulous planning that has gone into the success of the project. “Regional growing operations are key for growth and allow us to continue exploring new markets. The entry into a region that primarily has field-grown operations also helps us differentiate. We will also be able to create locally grown programs, and bring our retail and foodservice partners a competitive advantage.”

The move into Georgia will also allow Pure Flavor to show support for state promoted

programs and connect with consumers who have a buy local/buy USA-first mentality—a Georgia Grown mentality, if you will.

“It can be seen as a game changer for consumers,” Jeff adds. “This opportunity to tailor our programs to the surrounding communities with year-round availability, consistent supply, and fresher product on shelves has really opened our eyes to the vast opportunities of our project.”

The potential reach is incredible, Matt notes.

“We can reach 80 million people in a 24-hour radius,” he says. “No small feat, but that is the challenge we were hoping to address. Georgia is the gateway to the southeastern United States and is a heartland for agriculture. Also, the climate is not as seasonal as what we may experience to the north in Canada and to the south in Mexico.”

A word constantly being kicked around in our business is “innovation,” and companies can tap its fluidity across our industry. But, Pure Flavor means business when it comes to innovation on multiple levels. With a significant build like what Pure Flavor is doing in Peach County, Georgia, with its Peach County operation, innovation is about integrating automation into its process and the use of High Pressure Sodium (HPS) as supplemental lighting to name a few.

“Already rich in agriculture heritage, the use of high-tech greenhouse growing on a mass scale in Georgia is seen as innovation,” Jamie says. “There aren’t thousands of acres of row crops or dozens of tractors and other heavy machinery to work the land. It is about using forward-thinking technology to grow year-round.”



Pure Flavor’s growing strategy in Georgia is twofold. One: expand the company’s growing operations to meet the increased demands from its retail and foodservice partners by responding to increased demand year-over-year for new products, new distribution areas, and quicker to-market response. And two: develop an integrated, USA-grown program that reduces food miles and delivers fresh, flavorful greenhouse-grown tomatoes and cucumbers year-round, while creating consumer awareness for U.S. grown items and increasing confidence in items that are locally grown.

“WE ARE GOING BEYOND THE PACKAGE IN EVERYTHING THAT WE DO IN ORDER TO DIFFERENTIATE AND RESONATE WITH CUSTOMERS.”

— *Jamie Moracci,*
President, Pure Flavor®

well, with literally thousands upon thousands of seed types and varieties available worldwide, and Pure Flavor takes this process very seriously.

“As we grow in a variety of climates and regions throughout North America, we carefully select varieties that will produce the yield and flavor we are looking for,” Jamie tells me, adding that the team travels the world extensively in search of commodity-specific attributes. “Not all peppers are sweet; not all cucumbers are English or seedless; not all tomatoes are red; not all growers do things the same way. Each has their own process and recipe.”

“The Georgia Grown program is one of the strongest state-promoted agricultural programs in the U.S.,” Matt shares with me. “Consumer confidence in greenhouse-grown vegetables is ever-evolving, and we share a transparent story that resonates. Greenhouse-grown vegetables are a new concept in Georgia, where field-grown crops have been the primary staple.”

Jamie adds that ongoing research and development is vital to the company’s business as

It is plain as day that the Pure Flavor team is passionate about their business and everything that it entails; from its employees across all of the company’s sites in Canada, the USA, and Mexico to the specific products it grows.

“We don’t look at our business as just shipping another case; it goes far beyond that,” Jamie articulates. “Our mission and vision are clear: Pure Flavor is committed to supporting healthier lifestyles by providing greenhouse-grown



Matt Mastronardi often walks the greenhouse to sample new varieties to be able to share product updates with his customers

vegetables that meet our exceptional quality standards, and to remain a humble, trusted, and innovative family-owned company that treats our growers, employees, and customers as valued partners in our sustainable growth.”

With a go-to-market strategy based on delivering the best that the company can grow, regardless of the season, you can sense that this type of promise is woven throughout the mentality of Pure Flavor team members.

“Our family of growers understands the need to deliver the best—week in and week out—and our customers expect it, so we work diligently, no matter the team, department, or facility, to make sure this happens,” Jeff shares. “It is that commitment to bringing A Life of Pure Flavor™ to communities everywhere that drives us.”

While the team is keeping competitors on their toes through multiple areas of investments, a large part of that edge has come from a brand revitalization project that Pure Flavor went through over the course of the last year.

“This project has really opened our eyes to being strategic beyond our growing strategies. It requires an integrated plan that is multi-faceted across many channels to connect with customers and consumers,” Jeff mentions, adding that the company’s own sales and marketing teams are strategic in how they look at the business—it is not just about cases moved.

Chris Veillon, Pure Flavor’s Chief Marketing Officer, has had a huge role in this brand evolution, having joined the team in the summer of 2017 and bringing a wealth of greenhouse industry knowledge to the table.

When I ask Chris how he would describe the vision behind this project, he tells me that it is natural. Simple as that—natural.

“The growth was significant year-over-year, and it

was time to take a deep dive into what the brand was all about. We got very granular in analyzing our messaging, packaging, promotions, digital content, and more. It was time for a fresh set of eyes and a somewhat new coat of paint

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Phase 1 of 3 in Peach County completed in September 2018

that would help get the brand the attention that it deserves one tomato, pepper, cucumber, and eggplant at a time,” Chris says with a smile.

The foundation was already there; Pure Flavor as a brand had great products and great people and had been marketing greenhouse grown vegetables for almost 15 years at this point.

“Pure Flavor needed an integrated marketing strategy that was not only relevant but would resonate with those that it touched, no matter where the product would be sold. It wasn’t about taking an eraser and wiping away what had been created, it was adding color, organizing commodities, refining messaging, creating appropriate touch points, and, most importantly, developing a strategy that would differentiate,” Jamie notes. “Shaping a tactical messaging strategy wasn’t just about creating ads, it was making sure that we connected the dots across all that we do. Over the last 15 years, Pure Flavor has grown to be one of the largest vertically integrated greenhouse vegetable companies in the industry. With a vast family of growers across Canada, the U.S., and Mexico, we needed to bring our collective position to the next level.”

Pure Flavor’s messaging with the brand revitalization is true to its focus on

healthy active living, with the goal to fuel healthy lives as a lifestyle-focused company.

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— Jamie Moracci,

“We are going beyond the package in everything that we do in order to differentiate and resonate with customers—customers being two-fold: our retailer and foodservice partner network and the end consumers who enjoy our products year-round. It was important that we presented a united front from a marketing communication standpoint to ensure we are all rowing in the same direction,” Jamie adds.

The Pure Flavor refresh also gave the team the opportunity to create a stronger position when it comes to packaging with a more consistent creative approach across all of the

commodities that it grows.

“We built families of products so that when a consumer sees our products at retail, they clearly know the brand and commodity. For example, all tomato packaging has yellow accents, cucumber packaging has blue accents, pepper packaging has light green accents, eggplant packaging has orange accents, and organic products are purple. We took the same approach when it came to boxes with color-coded panels to make it easier for our production teams as well as the receivers on the retail and foodservice sides,” Chris reflects.

You can sense the wheels turning, if not spinning wildly, towards success in Jamie’s mind. “We are expanding our reach week-over-week, with more product being picked and shipped than ever before; our social networks are booming; website views increase exponentially month-over-month and we are growing in every direction,” he says. “We are becoming more and more relevant in all the conversations that we participate in because we are top of mind—our messaging and products resonate.”

I believe that is what we all wish for—that our vision, our goals, our gift to this world resonates. Because if they do, there is no stopping how far a legacy can reach. 5