



Gary Wishnatzki (third from right) and his family

COURTESY OF WISH FARMS

Sweet success

From a small pushcart business to a berry conglomerate, Wish Farms is making a “berry” big difference

by ERIN SILVER

Gary Wishnatzki is a third-generation berry seller and owner of Wish Farms, a Costco berry supplier. He loves looking back at how his family business has grown over several generations, from a wholesale operation to a farming conglomerate, specializing in selling the most flavourful berries while keeping innovation, sustainability and philanthropy top of mind.

“My grandfather, Harris, or ‘Gershon,’ in Yiddish, was a Russian-Ukrainian immigrant who arrived in New York City in 1904,” says Wishnatzki. “He began as a pushcart peddler of fruits and vegetables.”

From there, Harris expanded into a wholesale company, called Wishnatzki & Nathel, which supplied New York residents with winter strawberries grown in Plant City, Florida. After Harris’ death, Gary’s father, Joe, and his uncle Lester ran the business.

Gary Wishnatzki started at the company in 1974. He modernized operations and also established their first farm, in 1987. Today, Wish Farms has approximately 2,200 acres under management. It’s also the largest contiguous strawberry farm in the world, supplying both organic and conventional berries throughout North America. Additionally, Wish Farms grows the special Pink-a-Boo pineberries, which are paler strawberries with hints of pineapple, pear and apricot.

Solar panels on the warehouse roof in Florida ensure that Wish Farms can generate its own power. The company employs high-tech methods to avoid overwatering, and workers aim to prevent food waste. Since 2020, Wish Farms has donated 424,883 kilograms (936,598 pounds) of fresh berries to local food banks and non-profit organizations. They also avoid food waste by freezing imperfect berries or processing them into purées—between 2.72 million to 4.5 million kilograms (6 million to 10 million pounds) a year—that are sold to food service chains and used in everything from smoothies to ice cream.

The company has also donated money to early childhood education in Florida and established university scholarships for migrant students studying education at the University of South Florida. And Wish Farms employees and their families have donated 3,000 hours of their time to help pack food at local food banks.

“Eat Berries. Feel Good. Make a Difference” is not just a slogan, but the driving purpose at Wish Farms, says Wishnatzki: “It references the health benefits of berries and our company’s culture of giving back.” ■

Erin Silver is an award-winning children’s author and freelance writer in Toronto.

COMPANY INFO

Name Wish Farms

CEO
Gary Wishnatzki

Employees
Approximately 200 year-round and thousands of seasonal workers

Headquarters
Plant City, Florida

Items carried at Costco
Conventional and organic strawberries, conventional blackberries, conventional and organic blueberries, conventional blackberries, conventional and organic raspberries, Pink-a-Boo pineberries

Quote about Costco
“Costco is a marvelous business partner that aligns with our philosophy to provide the best-tasting berries. The value proposition that Costco offers its members on quality and price is very hard to beat.”

—Gary Wishnatzki

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