

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP | MILLENNIALS - WHAT MAKES THEM TICK?

CONSCIOUS COMPANY

THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS AS USUAL

IDEAS THAT COULD CHANGE EVERYTHING

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THE WEALTH TRANSFER WHO WILL HOLD THE POWER?

SEVENTH GENERATION CEO

JOHN REPLOGLE

ON THE COMPANY'S BOLD NEW PATH

EILEEN FISHER

BUILDING A TIMELESS BRAND

TOP SUSTAINABLE CHEESE PRODUCERS

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NELLO'S SAUCE

In the US, Biodynamic certification has typically been associated with wine, but few people know that other products can also become certified Biodynamic. A few pioneering companies in the US are working to expand into other markets with certified Biodynamic food products. For example, Nello's Sauce, based in Raleigh, NC, has created the first US-grown, US-crafted certified Biodynamic jarred tomato sauce. We had the chance to speak with Neal McTighe about his bold vision to expand the Biodynamic marketplace and the challenges associated with breaking into a new market segment.

THE GOODS

- Invests in Biodynamic agriculture and Biodynamic farmers, which supports the growth of a Biodynamic marketplace.
- Sustainable packaging for Biodynamic Marinara uses 100% post-consumer recycled paper and recyclable glass jars, and manufacturing is carbon neutral through wind power.
- Minimizes the product's carbon footprint by growing, processing, and distributing from a very small geographic area in North Carolina.
- Supports US agriculture and labor, which helps the local economy and neighbors.
- Donates sauce to a local food bank to help those at risk of hunger.



Whitted Bowers Farm, the certified Biodynamic farm in North Carolina that supplies produce for Nello's Sauce



"The thing that's really cool about Nello's is that Neal is so passionate about everything he does and everything Italian. I met him at Expo West a couple of years ago and started telling him about Biodynamic farming. He got so fired up that we ended up introducing him to one of the Biodynamic farmers in North Carolina in his own neck of the woods. They created an agreement to source tomatoes from the Biodynamic farm. Then Neal went to Whole Foods through the Local Producer Loan Program and got Whole Foods to fund him. Now Whole Foods is not only supporting him by putting these products on the shelves, it's actually investing in this brand, so it has an economic incentive to make sure that the products are successful. That is amazing!

I often say that I don't think we can change the dynamics of food without really taking a look at supply chains because a lot of the challenges inherent in creating a sustainable food system here in the United States go back to the supply chains. The more we get all the people involved sitting down at the table, the better it will ultimately be for the consumer, the farmer, and certainly for these companies that bring great products to market."

~ Elizabeth Candelario, Co-director, Demeter International

What inspired you to become the first Biodynamic tomato sauce made in the US from US-grown tomatoes? What is the story behind this transition?

Neal McTighe: There are a couple of Biodynamic tomato sauces that are grown and packaged in Italy and distributed as far as 12,000 miles away. While I admire them, I felt that such a product must limit its carbon footprint in order to really practice what it preaches. Our biodynamic tomatoes, garlic, and basil are grown, harvested, and packaged in the same small geographic area of North Carolina. The product ships this summer from our facility to approximately 140 Whole Foods Markets, from Texas to Ohio, across to New Jersey, and then down to Florida.

What is the difference between being certified organic and certified biodynamic? What extra steps are you having to take?

NM: Biodynamic agriculture uses the NOP [National Organic Program] as a base but adds dimensions to it that are unique, such as viewing the farm as a self-regulating ecosystem, caring for the diverse flora and fauna, managing water runoff, and welcoming animals and insects within the habitat. It is a very comprehensive, holistic, even spiritual approach to agriculture. There is sound science that supports the argument for Biodynamic agriculture, and I believe it will continue to grab hold over the next five to ten years.

What has been the most challenging part of launching your business so far and how have you addressed it?

NM: The most challenging part is production, as we are picking, in numerous harvests, thousands of pounds of tomatoes, washing them, grinding and cooking them, and immediately jarring them, all within a 24-hour period. It is no easy task to bring a fresh tomato to a delicious jarred sauce, but we are up for the challenge. The other challenge is managing supply and demand. There is a great deal of demand for this product, but supply is very limited. It is our responsibility to grow the supply, and we invite farmers to connect with us if they are interested in converting from organic to biodynamic.

What insights do you have for other entrepreneurs who have large goals or want to try something new?

NM: I can't emphasize enough how important it is to play out every scenario in your head and walk it through to its logical conclusion. By mapping out the future, you can prepare yourself in the present to be ready for what lies ahead. Don't leave anything to chance. Entrepreneurship is a gamble enough, so it becomes a game of mitigating risk.

In what ways does operating in a more conscious way benefit your company?

NM: It provides an incredible amount of purpose and meaning for ourselves and for others. Everyone involved in this project since day one has been impacted in some positive way by it. Our friends at Demeter [certifier of Biodynamic farms and products] have been able to see one of their dreams come true: a farmer, a processor, and a retailer working together to bring a Biodynamic product to market. Our farmer enjoys the confidence of knowing his full crop has been purchased, all while pushing forth his passion for Biodynamic agriculture. Our retailer partner is able to carve out its niche in the market. Customers have an opportunity to learn about a form of agriculture they likely had never heard of before. Those who have heard of Biodynamic farming now have access to a product they've likely only dreamed of. And Nello's is able to grow and prosper, all while making great friends and sharing an exciting story. The list is endless, really. And let's not forget, this is arguably the greenest jarred tomato sauce on the market, so Mother Nature wins big.

What's next for Nello's?

NM: We look forward to tripling our production in 2016 and adding a new flavor and perhaps even a pesto! We will continue to dream. 🌱

Photo: Nello's Sauce

