



OUTSIDE THE VINES: *INSPIRATION FROM BEYOND THE POTTING BENCH*

King of the Market

An Atlanta popsicle company carefully sources fruits, vegetables and herbs to create a tasty product that's a hit at farmer's markets and around town.

By Lynn Tangorra

Southern popsicle company, King of Pops, was established after CEO and founder Steven Carse traveled to Central America, where he found flavor inspiration from paleta, a Latin American ice pop that is generally made from fresh fruit.

King of Pops prides itself not only on using local fresh ingredients, but also taking part in the community, supporting local farmer's markets and working toward growing and producing its own crops.

Business began with a single popsicle cart that Carse operated himself for the first year.

Currently, there are about 30 carts operating in Atlanta, each with a signature rainbow umbrella that helps consumers spot them from a distance.

Sweet Inspiration That Sticks

King of Pops is not only carts but also wholesale. Consumers can pick up popsicles at Whole Foods stores in the South, restaurants and other markets. Catering is also available for corporate events, weddings and birthday parties.

Farmer's markets, where the company mainly sells its pops, are an important component of the business. This aspect started as the company was buying products for the pops, getting involved with the community and building relationships with vendors.

"It seemed like a natural progression of cart locations, as farmer's markets are usually not only for shopping, but also outdoor family outings," says Neil Ringer, director of operations. "A lot of people go to walk around, have a treat and socialize as well as buy fresh local goods.

"Our community involvement is one of our strongest company values. The people at farmer's markets are our consumers: They care about freshness, quality, local products and produce."

Popsicle ingredients come from local farmers in the Atlanta area, and the same is done in the other cities that produce these treats.

"We deal with a ton of different farms," Carse says. "As far as how we pick which ones, it is a combination of people who we run into organically at a farmer's market or somewhere around the community.

"For example, local farms in Charleston provide

peaches for our South Carolina pops, and we use Georgia peaches for our Atlanta pops."

Buying local and organic is always the goal, but for certain ingredients it's not always possible.

"For the summer, we like to use pineapple as an ingredient, but we are never going to be able to get them in Georgia," Carse says. "[So] we'll be able to get really high-quality pineapples, but they just won't be local."

Inspiration for flavors started out simple with combinations like blueberry lemonade, grape and pineapple, but it eventually progressed to experiments with ideas that were part of other cultures, with a little twist.

"In Latin America, mango chili and pineapple chili are really popular," Carse says. "So instead of using chili powder we use fresh habanero peppers. Traveling is a big part of how we find new flavors."

Farming Flavor

Many of the pops include herbs such as basil, mint and lemongrass. King of Pops purchased a farm last year so that the business could produce its own crops.

Farmers were hired to get the land ready for King of Crops, the ingredient portion of the farm; the nursery portion of the farm is called Turtle Brook.

"The original property was a nursery, so the infrastructure was all there," Carse says. "At the nursery, we are going to focus on native Southern plants instead of just typical landscaping plants."

The plan is to sell some produce to others, but the focus will be on producing crops that can be used for the popsicles.

"We have strawberries planted, all of our herbs, and we are going to get our ginger, habanero peppers and melons there too," Carse says.



PHOTO BY MANOELA MURARO



PHOTO BY JASON TRAVIS

The full-time staff is 26 people but grows to upwards of 100 people once Atlanta hits its busy season, which is April through October.

There are plenty of ways to get tasty summer treats in Atlanta, but Carse feels that King of Pops has a unique way of garnering customers.

"I think the way we go about things is the most unique part of our company," Carse says. "We don't claim to know all of the flavor trends or exactly what people are going to like, so we are able to try everything and that's been awesome."

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