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## **Smith's Georgia deal buoyed by partnership with Baker Farms**

By

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[Smith's Farm](#) has been growing broccoli at its flagship location in Presque Isle, ME, since the mid 1980s, providing its prized Stag Brand product to retail clients along the Eastern Seaboard.

But at the conclusion of the Maine season each year, it became more difficult to fill the supply gaps in the east. So, the Smith family established an office in St. Augustine, FL and growing operation in Hastings, FL, in 1999 that enabled it to extend its broccoli supply and keep its customers flush with product through the winter and spring.



Heath Wetherington, director of

operations for Baker Farms, which has a partnership with Smith's Farm in Georgia.

Still, demand was outpacing supply, and so four years ago Smith's Farm forged an alliance with Georgia-based Baker Farms, with the two family-owned companies working together to share resources to the benefit of both.

Tara Smith Vighetti, president of Smith's Farm Sales and a sixth generation family member, said the partnership with Baker has been an ideal match.

"Our ultimate goal is to fill broccoli and cauliflower supply gaps that exist in the eastern program, and this partnership with Baker is a key reason we are able to do that," she said. "The East is so seasonal that sometimes we end up with shorter seasons in certain areas. We used to transition from Maine to Florida, but now we go from Maine to Georgia and then to Florida and back to Georgia again, and the supply is much more consistent."

Smith Vighetti said the partnership with Baker is especially successful because the two families have such similar values.

"When you begin a partnership with another grower, it's important that the two parties have similar philosophies, and that is definitely the case with Smith's Farm and Baker," she said. "We both have well-trained and loyal harvest crews, and we place a great deal of emphasis on food safety and quality assurance, fair labor practices, and responsible farming practices to ensure sustainability and proper land management and conservation. We need to feel confident that everything packed under our Stag Brand meets these criteria, and with Baker Farms we know that is the case."

Heath Wetherington, director of operations at Baker Farms, agrees that the partnership has been a success due to similarly aligned values and practices.

"We also have a stable workforce and harvest crew, many of whom come back to us every year," said Wetherington. "These workers are extremely valuable because they have become so skilled and

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enable us to offer the highest-quality product on a consistent basis, which is important for both Baker and Smith's. We created a culture 20 years ago, whereby we treat our workers well and with respect, and we continue to reap the benefits today."

Similar to the Smith family, Wetherington said Baker is upfront with its customers and "we don't make promises we can't keep just to get business. We follow through on the commitments we make, which is how the Smith family operates as well."

Baker Farms had a small broccoli deal a year or two before it partnered with Smith's, but Wetherington said he never intended to be a big broccoli grower.

"So it really was a great fit with Smith's, as their expertise enabled us to take a hit-or-miss broccoli deal and make it steady and reliable," he said. "And like greens, which are a big item for us, broccoli is ice-heavy, so our facilities are equipped to handle broccoli volume."

Wetherington reiterated that the partnership does not have a competitive component to it, and each company works to the benefit of the other.

"It's truly been a great partnership, and Smith's helps us maximize operations," he said. "It all goes back to trust. We're not looking to gain market share, but rather to help them achieve their market share."

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