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**Mother Earth sees bigger opportunity in baby bella mushrooms**

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By

Keith Loria

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As a fifth-generation-owned family farm, [Mother Earth](#) has a long legacy in organic mushrooms that has earned the company a great deal of respect.

Today, Mother Earth manages 53 growing houses throughout southern Chester County in West Grove, Oxford and Landenberg, PA, and has built a robust legacy in the organic mushroom industry.

In 2022, the company saw success on many levels and enter 2023 in a good frame of mind.

“All things considered, we came through in pretty good shape,” said Mark Kreiner, outside sales coordinator for the company. “We revised and upgraded our labeling with some additional certification. We got some capital improvements in our production and packaging room and did some upgrades to equipment, so we’re reinvesting into the company to help with throughput production.”

Mother Earth also launched two new items. Those at the company are especially excited about its new powdered 3.5-ounce Lion’s Mane SKUs, as well as the 8-ounce Mother’s Harvest blend, which offers a mix of exotic organic mushrooms. The Mother’s Harvest includes Lion’s Mane, Royal Trumpet, Maitake and Oyster.

“We had some nice response from the trade for these items and we’re building upon that for the new year,” Kreiner said. “We’re looking at adding additional exotic blends this year. We’re also looking at adding some additional exotic mushrooms that we don’t have currently in our portfolio.”

One downside, in 2022 the company saw a decline in retail sales, but conversely, it experienced an increase in foodservice sales. Mother Earth also grows conventional mushrooms, which makes it a full-stop shop for its customers, but its heritage and legacy is in organic mushrooms.

“We always have our eyes to the future in meeting consumer needs,” Kreiner said. “We’re seeing an interest from mainline consumers for more exotic mushrooms. Consumers are not afraid of them anymore — they understand how to cook them and use them and the attributes and benefits health wise for these mushrooms.”

In 2023, Mother Earth is working hard to meet the demand of brown mushrooms.

“The trend over the last 10 years in the mushroom industry has been an increase in purchase intent and consumption of baby bella mushrooms,” Kreiner said. “So, we’re moving our farms over to produce more baby bella mushrooms. We think there’s going to be a time in the future where browns will eclipse whites as the most consumed mushroom out there. We’re doing that strategically so we can meet the demand of consumers.”

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With that in mind, Mother Earth is looking at its promotional calendars with plans to reduce promotions on whites and increase those for baby bellas.

“We feel they will be the driver for the category,” Kreiner said. “They are perceived by the consumer as being more upscale than white, so they are willing to pay a little more for them. That’s a nice opportunity for us to grow our profitability.”

Labor continues to be somewhat of an issue for the company, as it is for many growers in the U.S.

“We’re looking for ways to increase our production and throughput in our plants, bringing in new technology and equipment to pack and ship more efficiently,” Kreiner said.

Higher prices have also meant sales have dropped a bit, though Kreiner noted that’s not true with the heavy users, but those who were more on the fence about organics and moving back to conventional for cost reasons.

“We are hoping the economy stabilizes in 2023,” he said. “We want those users to come back and buy organics again. We plan on promoting more heavily on organics and getting that customer base back. We’re always looking to expand our customer presence.”

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## About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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