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Happy Dirt is the best kept secret in the Southeast

Founded in 2004 by Sandi Kronick and a handful of farmers, [Happy Dirt](#) is an organic grower, packer and shipper based in Durham, NC. It's also the best-kept secret in the organic produce industry.

Like all companies, Happy Dirt grew from a mixture of events. The United States Department of Agriculture's Tobacco Transition Payment Program was hot off the presses, and the National Organic Program had been implemented two-years prior. At the time, Kronick was working for a nonprofit that supported organic and regional farmers and saw an opportunity.

"There was a growing market for organic produce all over the country, and North Carolina farmers were equipped to grow and supply organic crops," said Kronick. "They could grow hundreds of acres of organic kale, collards and sweet potatoes. We saw those crops as having the potential to be the next tobacco."

The land for organic vegetable production was plentiful, but what the local, organic food industry really needed in the area was a larger wholesale distribution infrastructure. So, with a grant through the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, Kronick launched what was then called Eastern Carolina Organics to support organic tobacco farmers and general tobacco farmers in converting into organic vegetable production.

Shortly after launching the company, Kronick offered farmers an ownership stake in the company. Farmer ownership was important to Kronick from day one.

"We have 16 farmers who are owners with Sandi and me, and we have farmers on our board," said Randall Diers, president and COO of Happy Dirt. "We bounce ideas off of them so we can really understand what's best for them and what works for them in this environment."

Over the last two decades, the company has celebrated big milestones and positive, robust growth. To name a few of those milestones:

? In 2012, they purchased a 26,000-square-foot warehouse in Durham, NC.

? In 2016, the company became a Certified B Corporation.

? In 2019, the company rebranded from Eastern Carolina Organics to Happy Dirt.

? In 2021, Happy Dirt farmer owner, Randall Watkins, became the first organic sweet potato farmer in the United States to become certified under the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Fair Food Program.

As far as growth, the company continues to rapidly expand. Since its rebrand in 2019 it has seen double-digit growth year-over-year. Collectively, Happy Dirt's farmer owners have increased their organic acreage by almost 500 percent. In addition to working with its farmer owners, the company works with over 100 organic farmers in the Southeast and beyond, allowing them to offer organic produce year-round.

"We're excited to continue to get our message out to the industry and connect our farmer owners to

more customers on the East Coast and beyond,” said Pat Bayor, vice president of sales and purchasing.

Don't let its size or the fact that you are just learning about the Happy Dirt secret fool you. Happy Dirt offers a full line of organic vegetables and seasonal fruits grown on the East Coast, including a year-round supply of organic sweet potatoes and greens. It services the East Coast and beyond with FTL and LTL, and, the company currently works with large and independent retailers, co-ops, buying clubs, restaurants and more.

“When we first got started, a lot of our farmers believed in organics, but it wasn't something they really thought was going to help send a kid to college or buy a new truck. It was an experimental idea,” said Kronick. “Now we buy their organic produce by the truckload and our customers want it by the truckload.”

What Kronick set out to accomplish in 2004 was more than just an organic wholesale distribution infrastructure. The ultimate goal was to build a more sustainable, resilient food system by putting the farmer first and educating customers about the economic, social, and environmental benefits of organic farming. One would say that Happy Dirt has far exceeded her expectations and that it's time that everyone knew about the Southeast's best-kept secret.

To learn more about Happy Dirt, visit www.happydirt.com or contact the team directly at wholesale@happydirt.com. You can also find them on Instagram at [@happydirtproduce](https://www.instagram.com/happydirtproduce).

Photo: Happy Dirt farmer owner Stanley Hughes.

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