Agribusiness: The Return of the Family Farm

Ag+Art: Agritourism Case Study
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South Carolina’s Equine Industry
Titan Farms
Prosperity is the Best Tasting Peach

Prideful South Carolinians have trained their eyes to seek out the brightly embossed black Titan Farms box when shopping for sweet, local peaches at neighborhood grocers. Foodies recognizing that these delicate perishables have endured little since the moment they were plucked off their trees approximately 72 hours ago. Titan Farms, the largest peach farm in South Carolina, is a 19-mile long agribusiness that is best known for its tasty peaches along with bell peppers and tomatoes. In fact, the largest pepper producers in the state as measured by acreage and volume.

After graduating from Clemson University at the age of 22, Titan Farms owner and operator Chalmers Carr bought his first farm in Florida. "I wanted to get back into the peach business, and Florida wasn't the best place to do that at the time."
Our years after his first farm purchase, a young Chalmers and his wife, Lori Anne, packed up the homestead and moved north to be closer to family and friends. Twenty-two years later, Carr's family and his farm have grown together and sustained one another, plus a few hundred more workers and colleagues along the way.

FROM BANGKOK TO RIDGE SPRINGS

Chalmers Carr, III was born in Bangkok, Thailand. His father was a fighter pilot, and later a brigadier general in the Air Force, and was stationed overseas. Carr has lived in Washington, Australia, Alaska and Texas. "I started seventh grade three different times, if you can imagine," he grins. Clemson University is ultimately what brought Carr to South Carolina. But he says his interest in farming operations came at a young age while working summers on his mother's large family farm in North Carolina. Living with his grandmother and subsequently learning firsthand from his uncles, he rose and met the daily challenges of a peach/tobacco/vegetable farm.

"By the time I was 17, I was actually running a packing shed, then I became a farm manager." His family instilled a work ethic in him that allows Carr to thrive and survive in the demands of his current 110-hour work week. Jointly owned by Carr and his wife, Titan Farms is incorporated as a family business with several corporations within it. With an eye to the type of succession planning that will ensure family businesses face, he's quick to point out there's no sense of entitlement for the Carr clan on this family farm. Carr says his two teenage children are not necessarily the heirs to his kingdom, unless, of course, they go out and work somewhere else after school to prove that they're deserving of the family business. "You have to be persistent, knock down doors and not take no for an answer." With the (ag-)onic education he had, I was able to build financial packages and take it to lenders. That is quite a step at 22 years of age to ask a bank to loan money to you."

EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY

When asked what advice he would give the next generation of farmers, Carr had two words of wisdom: embrace technology. "We have soil moisture probes that can tell us what our water levels are in our soils so we can know exactly what to feed our crops. We've got tractors that drive themselves by GPS that do everything from spraying to laying out the land. Any type of technology that can make you work smarter instead of harder, I would embrace it quickly," says Carr.

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A TYPICAL DAY

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GET TO KNOW CHALMERS CARR, III

Favorite App? MyMeasure. It uses satellite technology to measure new fields and do perimeters so you can figure out how to farm that field.

Thing you can’t live without… Being outdoors. Watching things grow.

In your spare time, you can be found… Up until two years ago, I was coaching football at Wardlaw Academy. I did that for 16 years. I’ve retired.

What inspires you? People who will not take no for an answer. When you coach, you see athletes reach down within themselves. You just can’t help but fall in love with those people.

What’s your proudest achievement? Titan Farms. The employees that work here. We’ve only had one employee quit us since we’ve owned the business. But most importantly, the four founders are all still with us.

leaders can help him is in marketing the industry. He feels South Carolina has all the same natural resources (if not in greater abundance) than neighboring states, but North Carolina and Georgia are “the big ag states.” He feels that South Carolina is pro-agribusiness with regard to labor due to its roots in tobacco farming, but that it doesn’t always view agriculture as the future of economic development. “We’re proud to be a business owner in South Carolina,” he adds. “We’ve lived here now for 20 years and couldn’t think of living somewhere else.”

WORKFORCE AND IMMIGRATION REFORM

When you move away from the headquarters and into the fields, you may or may not come into contact with any number of harvesters, who painstakingly pick only the ripest peaches by hand. Carr notes that his workforce is an entirely legal H-2A Visa agricultural workforce. “Immigration has been a very important thing to me,” he says. Titan Farms entered the government work program in 1999 which allows an agribusiness to bring in foreign workers when there are not enough domestic workers to do the job. “This year, we’ll bring in 500 workers, which is a little less than last year (540 workers) due to the peach crop freeze damage,” he explains. “They come back to us every year. That speaks well for my management team and what they do for their team.”

In 2005, Chalmers Carr was invited to the White House to meet with President George W. Bush on immigration. “Since then I’ve testified many times before Congress. I helped negotiate the Senate bill last year. It was a good bill; very comprehensive…for agriculture. We just need the House of Representatives to move [on it].”

When asked what the best advice he ever received was, he quietly adds, “Respect the people around you. And empower people.”

Titan Farms is the largest peach farm in South Carolina.

Penny Delaney Cothran is the multimedia manager at the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce and editor of South Carolina Business.

IT'S A MATTER OF TASTE.

There’s a certain pride in knowing our food comes from a place we love - home. And when you consider all that South Carolina has to offer, you don’t have to go too far to find great tasting food. So the next time you gather around a table, choose Certified SC Grown.

certifiedscgrown.com