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Amy's Kitchen: We Want To Be a Force Toward Healing the Planet

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As a certified B Corporation, Amy's Kitchen takes its role in making a positive impact on the environment seriously. Its packaging? At least 75% compostable or recyclable. The food? Sustainable, organic, and vegetarian.

Co-founder Andy Berliner said that from the very onset, there was a dream that Amy's Kitchen "would become a big enough company to be a force toward healing the planet, not just undoing damage, but actually healing the planet. That we would have scale and influence to really help change things."

And it looks like that dream is coming true.

Amy's Kitchen President Paul Schiefer shared that Amy's is in late-stage trials to get the remaining 25% of its packaging compostable or recyclable. "So we can be at a place where not just the food is sustainable, but the packaging itself is a truly closed loop and can be returned either to the soil as compost or to the recycler as fiberboard that can be used for another generation," Schiefer said.

"We knew we didn't want to put pesticides in the soil, but we didn't understand the grand scale of global warming and all that 33 years ago," Amy's co-founder **Andy Berliner said** on the "Lead With Me" podcast hosted by Simon Mainwaring. "But as the years went on, we became more aware of it and have tried to do better and better."

The eco-savvy entrepreneur admits when B Corp certification was first presented to him, he was resistant. "I said, we were around 20 years before B Corp doing all the same things," Andy Berliner said of the certification given to companies making a significant social and environmental impact. "Why am I going to pay someone else to tell me what I already know who we are? And it was explained that we are setting an example for other companies by telling people this is what you're doing."

Berliner added that even though Amy's Kitchen scored 100% on the first test — businesses typically reach a score of 60% — he acknowledges that there's more to improve to keep the brand fresh and growing.

"One of the things we did was have medical centers at each plant so people get their primary care right at work," Berliner mentioned. "Whole Foods followed us. The Container Store followed us."

So when you set an example of something, it helps other people follow. So the B Corp [certification] gives us an opportunity to be a better example to help other people follow and make a bigger impact.”

Berliner said he continues to be inspired by the brand he and his wife, Rachel Berliner, **started in 1987**. He wants the company to continue to be a guide on sustainability, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Andy Berliner went to farms to meet face-to-face with farmers to better understand the land where the ingredients for his food would be grown. After much research, he realized that organic farming wasn't only better for the environment, but it was beneficial for consumers.

“A lot of the new studies are showing more carbon sequestration in organic farms because of the health of the soil and less reactive nitrogen,” Schiefer said. “It seems to be reducing global warming potential overall.”

How Amy's Kitchen Began

Now, with a workforce of 2,600 employees, it's hard to fathom that Amy's Kitchen started in a home kitchen.

“It started when Rachel was pregnant with Amy,” Andy Berliner recalled. “Late in her pregnancy, she reached a point where she strained a muscle, and the doctor said she should mostly stay in bed, so she asked me to cook dinner — and of course, I didn't know how to cook very well.”

After going to a natural food store and observing the options, the frozen food specialist confessed he was underwhelmed by what he discovered.

“I bought what was there,” Andy Berliner said. “In those days, [it was] one door of frozen [meals] in a big natural food store. The food was horrible, frankly. And we thought, gosh, there has to be other people like us who sometimes would want a convenient meal that's made with organic ingredients, and they don't have time to cook. So that's where the idea sprung from, really: from our need.”

For Rachel Berliner, leaning on the organic garden she grew up with in the '50s eventually laid the foundation for Amy's Kitchen.

“My whole life I lived eating organic, except a brief period where I ate doughnuts and all that kind of fun food, but it's the way we lived,” Rachel Berliner said. “We had an organic garden. We just believed in not using pesticides and that that was the healthiest thing to do. So it was just natural, and we're vegetarian. So it was natural when we decided to start this company that it would be organic and vegetarian.”

While the Berliners launched their line after making multiple vegetarian potpies in their kitchen, Andy Berliner said the reception for the potpie in the organic food industry was stellar from the start.

“We started with one product, a vegetable potpie, organic vegetable potpie,” Andy Berliner shared. “And even though the product wasn't fully developed at our first trade show and we didn't think it tasted right yet, people loved it and they loved the idea. And three months later, it was as if we'd

been in business for years because it moved into all the natural food stores around the country, and people were saying, ‘Come out with more products.’”

Rachel Berliner looks back on the earliest days of Amy’s Kitchen and reveals that when their empire started they had no idea it would eventually be in 11 countries and feature more than 250 products.

“We always felt that if we did the right thing that the business would work rather than trying to have a goal of making this much money, we thought we had a goal of making this much good food and to make it the best we can and the highest quality,” she said. “And that’s always been our approach. It’s not ‘make the money’ first.”

One of the biggest secrets of Amy’s Kitchen’s **success**, according to Rachel Berliner, is approaching business operations with the same organic mindset as its ingredients.

“We will go into a restaurant, we like a meal that maybe was made there. We talk to the chef, say, ‘Hey, could you come to California and work on some meals for us?’” she noted. “I travel around the world and I find a recipe I like.”

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