

The History of Nash Finch Company

The footprints of this innovative, multi-billion dollar Minnesota-based company can be traced back to 1885, and to a small candy and tobacco store in Devils Lake, North Dakota. Founded by oldest of the Nash brothers, Fred, and soon assisted by brothers Edgar and Willis, this tiny enterprise gave rise to Nash Finch and its excellent reputation as a premier food distributor.

The Nash Brothers' approach was simple. They listened to their customers and gave them the products they wanted, efficiently, and at a fair price. Nash Finch has grown to industry leadership by retaining that same philosophy for 120 years.

From 1885 to 1889, the Nash Brothers' business was strictly a retail operation. During that time period, the upper Midwest was fast becoming an important food center with the number of successful farms increasing rapidly. As a result, the brothers had ready access to abundant and varied crops, especially fruits such as cherries and peaches, to sell in their stores. Occasionally at first, and then quite often, the brothers could not sell all of the product volume available to them on a given day.

To correct the problem, in 1889 the brothers began to "job" fruit - gather product in large quantities for others to sell to retailers in the region. Within two years, the Nash Brothers moved entirely into the wholesale fruit business. That same year, the brothers hired the first non-family member of the firm - a fourteen year old named Harry B. Finch. Mr. Finch was to grow in experience and make contributions to the firm in many capacities over his distinguished 50-year business career.

As customer demand increased, the firm kept pace, expanding through the acquisition of several small distributors called "fruit houses." Between the years 1904 and 1912, more than 20 fruit houses were opened or purchased, increasing the Nash Brothers' storage capacity in numerous locations and strengthening the firm's growing reputation for quality, service and efficiency.

During this same period, the Nash Brothers were not just expanding, but also innovating. The Nash Brothers supplied retailers with their own private brand of coffee, the No-Vary brand, until the early 1920's when the name of the coffee was changed to Nash's Coffee (a business Nash Finch owned until 1959). The Nash Brothers also launched the Our Family® brand of products in 1904, a line which remains popular and well known for high quality, consistency and value.

By 1915, Fred and Willis Nash moved their personal offices to Minneapolis to be closer to the financial institutions located in the thriving city. Harry Finch remained in North Dakota to manage general operations. In 1918, when the Company owned 31 fruit houses, the general operating offices were moved to Minneapolis.

In 1921, the various small companies that were part of the Nash Brothers' enterprise were incorporated into two major wholesale companies: the Nash Finch Company in the United States and Nash-Simington Ltd. of Canada (which the Company sold in the 1930's).

Following World War II, modern supermarkets began to anchor new suburban shopping centers. In 1954, Nash Finch took advantage of this opportunity by purchasing a chain of 17 supermarkets in Nebraska, thus entering supermarket retailing.

During the 1960's, Nash Finch pioneered the combination of general merchandise and grocery products in one store with the first Family Thrift Center in Rapid City, South Dakota - a practice quickly adopted by many national chains. Following this, in 1964, the Company opened its first Warehouse Market - a no-frills, low price, self-service format.

By 1978, the Finch family had extended to its third generation of company leadership, as had the Nash family. Finch family involvement in the Company would continue until 1994 when Harold B. Finch, Jr., Chairman of the Board and CEO passed away. The Nash family remained directly involved in the affairs of the business through one of the founder's grandsons, Robert F. Nash, who served on the Board of Directors until 2003.

In 1981, Nash Finch reached a significant milestone – \$1 billion in annual sales. Seven years later, in 1988, Nash Finch doubled its annual sales. In another important step, in 1983, the Company's common shares started trading on the Nasdaq system.

Throughout the 1980's, 1990's and into the present, the Company made several strategic acquisitions. One significant event was the 1985 acquisition of M.H. Mclean Wholesale Grocery Co., Inc. in Lumberton, North Carolina, marking the Company's expansion into the Southeast. Another important set of milestones was the 1992 purchase of Tidewater Wholesale Grocery, the 1993 purchase of B. Green & Company, Inc. and the 1996 acquisition of Military Distributors of Virginia – the platform upon which today's military business is built. The purchase of Super Food Services in 1996 expanded the Company's presence into Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan and Ohio, and catapulted the Company to more than \$3 billion in annual sales. Finally, the 2005 acquisition of the Lima and Westville Distribution Centers, significantly expanded the Company's distribution network in Indiana and Ohio.

Today, more than 120 years after the opening of the Devil's Lake Store, Nash Finch Company is a member of the Fortune 1000 and one of the leading food distribution companies in the United States, with \$4.5 Billion in annual sales and employing approximately 7,500 associates.

Nash Finch has distinguished itself over time through its growth, financial success and industry-leading efficiency in the procurement, storage, handling and transportation of product. Nash Finch takes great pride in this record, as well as in its many loyal customers and dedicated associates, all of whom have contributed to this success.

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