



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI - 2022

JAY JOHNSON

CLASS 1979

Born in 1961 to Stan and Skeeter Johnson, Jay was exposed at a young age to small farms and agriculture in Southern Wisconsin. Growing up, he loved spending time at a family friend's farm near Conger, MN. His interest in agriculture and farming continued to grow through involvement in 4-H and FFA. He enjoyed working on farms and showing animals at the Freeborn Co. Fair and at FFA shows all while growing up in Albert Lea.

Jay graduated from Albert Lea High School in 1979 and attended Mankato State University graduating in 1983 with degrees in Business Management, Ag Economics, and Industrial Relations. A college internship with Wilson Foods led to his first job in the meat industry with IBP in Storm Lake, Iowa. This first experience in the food industry taught many lessons including operational efficiency and the importance of delivering a high-quality product.

Following 2 years in Storm Lake, Jay returned to Albert Lea to work in sales for Farmstead Foods who had meat processing plants in Albert Lea and Cedar Rapids, IA. Jay worked at Farmstead for 5 years. During these years in sales, Jay observed a shift in consumer preferences from processed foods (meats) to an increasing demand for fresh produce.

He also began to see the value of developing a quality, recognizable brand and began to dream of owning his own business someday.

In 1990, Jay and fellow ALHS classmate, Dave Peterson, talked often and developed an interest in growing greenhouse tomatoes that could be available year-round. They built a business plan and acquired financing to start a small greenhouse for growing fresh, flavorful tomatoes year-round in Owatonna, MN.

The early years were very difficult and involved a steep learning curve to develop the best growing methods, a flavorful and shelf stable tomato and a model that was profitable. After many challenges, Jay finally found support and advice from a Dutch consultant, Servaas Kamerling, who had many years of greenhouse vegetable growing experience in The Netherlands. This consultant led to the development of many successful partnerships with knowledgeable, experienced

people in the greenhouse industry in The Netherlands. There were always others to learn from!

With help and support from family, employees, and the community, Bushel Boy Farms grew steadily from 1 acre to 20 acres of greenhouse tomatoes from 1990 through 2012. Jay felt lucky that the company was at the very beginning of the local, farm to table food movement and he was able to build strong trusting relationships with the produce buyers in the Twin Cities and Southern Minnesota grocery stores and restaurant distribution companies. Jay believed in providing consistent and flavorful tomatoes and he was able to build a reliable Bushel Boy brand through hard work, forming trusting relationships with produce buyers and working long hours alongside his employees through the years.

In 2012, an investment group purchased Bushel Boy Farms. Due to a noncompete, Jay retired for 5 years and then in 2017 Jay partnered with 4 former greenhouse contacts to develop a business plan and start up Revol Greens in Owatonna. Revol Greens aimed to build on some of what Jay had learned from owning Bushel Boy Farms. The partners wanted to provide consumers with a reliable, quality brand of fresh and local greens grown in a sustainable environment. Revol Greens began with 2.5 acres of greenhouse grown lettuces and is currently 10 acres in Owatonna. With the addition of more investors, Revol Greens now has greenhouses in Tehachapi, CA, Athens, GA and Temple, TX and is the largest indoor lettuce producer in North America. Today, Jay remains on the Revol Greens Board but he is no longer involved in daily operations.

Jay continues to be interested in quality, local food and is now a partner in Feller's Ranch (Conger, MN) providing locally grown and processed Waygu beef to restaurants and consumers throughout the Midwest. He is back in the meat industry and enjoys working with restaurant chefs and customers to provide a reliable brand of high quality, USDA certified beef. Jay continues to build upon lessons learned by putting focus on quality and locally produced food, building honest relationships with customers, and providing a consistent, branded product that customers can count on.

Jay lives in Owatonna, MN and has been married to Tricia Savelkoul Johnson (ALHS Class of '83) for 33 years. Together they have 3 adult children, Erin, Stephanie and Jeffrey.