



Success Story: King of Pops

Peaches, Pecans, and... Popsicles

Georgia is known for its strong agricultural heritage and history. Driving down I-75 to South Georgia, it is hard to miss the commemorative World's Largest Peanut monument. Few stop to question, however, how that raw produce becomes the products Georgians purchase at the grocery store and take home for dinner. It's Georgia's food manufacturing or food processing sector that creates that bridge and brings fresh food and produce from the farm to your plate.

In 2010, brothers Nick and Steven Carse, joined the ranks of Georgia food manufacturers when they started King of Pops, a craft popsicle business in Atlanta, Georgia. Drawing inspiration from paletas, roadside frozen treat carts they saw in Mexico, the Carse brothers quit their corporate jobs and began to produce high-quality, handmade popsicles, leveraging their access to the South's fresh local produce to develop unique and interesting flavors.

Within the first few years demand skyrocketed and the brothers – who launched the business with no prior experience working in manufacturing – sought to streamline their system and prepare for sustainable growth.



“We started out thinking of ourselves as producers or makers, but not really as manufacturers,” Nick Carse said. “At some point we realized that really anyone who is making something is a manufacturer and that by utilizing resources for manufacturing companies and connecting with our peers, we could upgrade our process without sacrificing quality.”

In 2016, Carse was visiting another company’s manufacturing plant to observe its layout and process, when he met Bill Ritsch, GaMEP north metro Atlanta region manager, and inquired about the services provided by the GaMEP at Georgia Tech. Ritsch introduced him to Ed Murphy, GaMEP project manager, who spoke with Carse about joining the CEO Roundtable program to introduce him to other manufacturing leaders and provide a forum for advice and discussion. Carse joined and began meeting with Murphy and the CEO group monthly in Columbus, Georgia.

Murphy agreed, adding, “Nick has really been a great addition to the group. He thinks outside of the box and has real insight into marketing, branding, social media, and millennial culture, which has been invaluable to the others in the group looking for a different approach or perspective. They, in turn, share their expertise in manufacturing operations and leadership. It is great to see Georgia companies all working together to help each other improve and grow.”

Beyond popsicle manufacturing, the King of Pops empire now includes several other businesses including King of Pops, Tree Elves, and King of Crops, an organic farm in west Georgia that grows some of the produce used in their popsicles. In 2018, King of Pops plans to move to a new manufacturing facility in Atlanta’s Inman Park neighborhood. The brothers also plan to formalize their food safety management system.

In just eight years, King of Pops has grown from a tiny startup business, into a thriving company of 30 full-time employees distributing its products in eight cities.

When asked what advice Carse would give to other startups and manufacturing companies looking to grow he said, “Get ready to jump in, hustle, and give up your weekends for the next five years. Be willing to take risks, but also ask for help when you need it. And at the end of the day you gotta believe in what you are doing.”



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