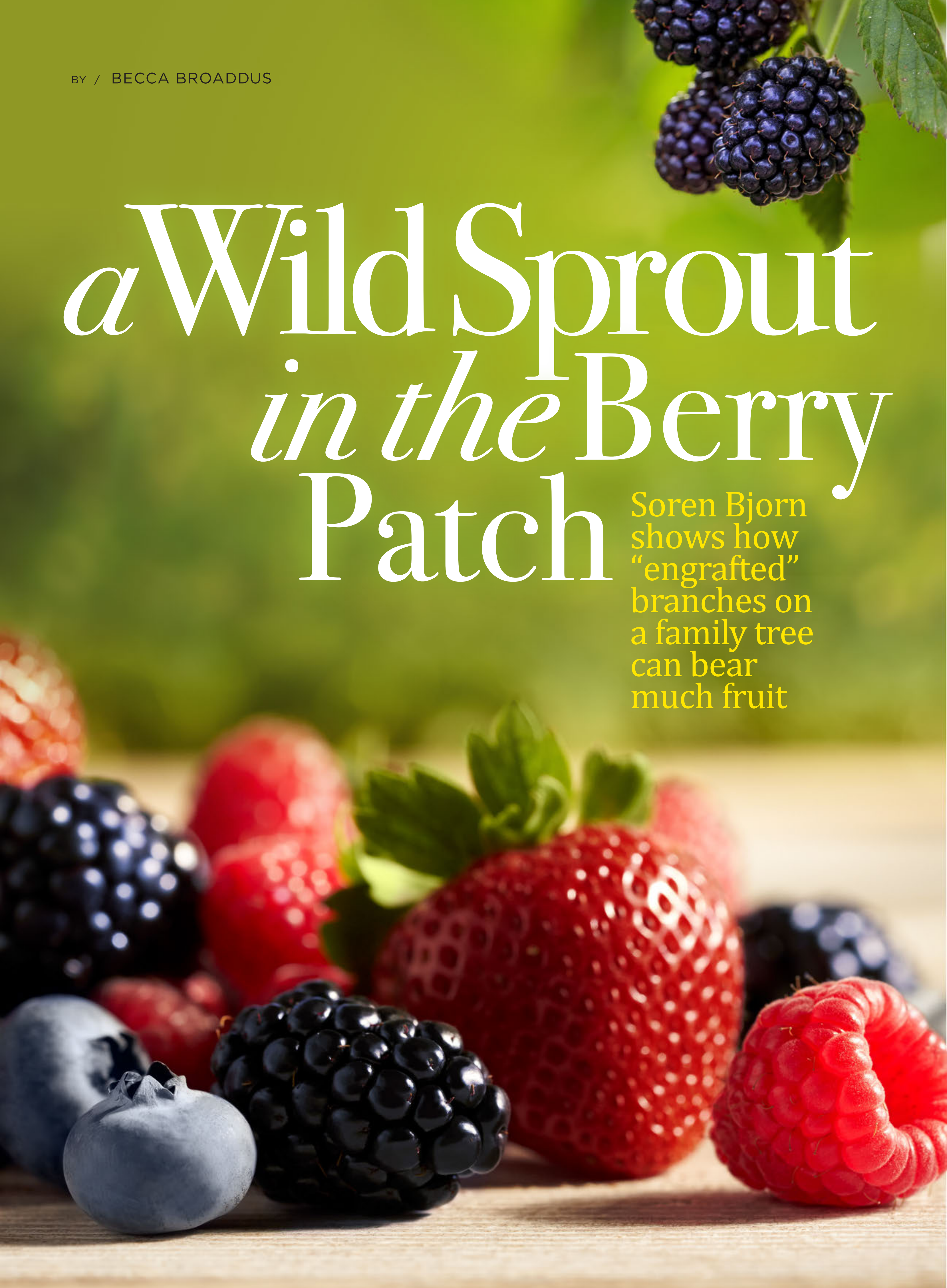
BY / BECCA BROADDUS



a Wild Sprout in the Berry Patch

Soren Bjorn shows how "engrafted" branches on a family tree can bear much fruit

SOREN BJORN

BBA '92
PRESIDENT, DRISCOLL'S OF THE AMERICAS
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At his first job after college, Soren Bjorn drafted a list of ideas to improve the company. When the list was presented to the board, they thought the ideas were so good, they gave him a promotion. A big one. He became chief executive officer at the age of 29.

"That was a good lesson that you need to be careful what you say," Bjorn laughed. "If you have good ideas, you should speak up. But you should also be prepared to follow through on those ideas. I would say I definitely wasn't ready at 29, but it was an experience that shaped my career."

That "follow through" mindset not only secured him an executive position before his 30th birthday, but more recently, it placed him as one of the agriculture industry's leaders in the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) discussions, the new trade agreement proposed to replace NAFTA, and now, U.S. immigration policy reform discussions.

"You've got to speak your mind, but once you do that, you have to get involved," Bjorn, who joined the USMCA discussions as a board member for the Produce Marketing Association, said. "I don't have all the answers, but I can tell a lot about the impact the proposed new immigration policy would have on the U.S. food supply. I feel I have an obligation to share that, but I also have to offer possible solutions."

At Driscoll's, the world's largest berry distributor, Bjorn leads the family-owned company's largest region, the Americas division. He has been at the company for 12 years, with four years in this role, although he is not a member of the Driscoll/Reiter family. Prior to his time at Driscoll's, he worked at Del Monte Foods.

"I've worked for both public and private companies...The advantage of a family business is it's looked at much more long-term," Bjorn said. "We talk a lot in our industry about the next generation impact. Next generation of growers. Next generation of consumers. In our case, we're in the fourth generation of family owners, and they want to build a berry business that's going to last another 25 years, and then another 25."

An immigrant himself, Bjorn's opportunity to move to the U.S. came in the form of a golf scholarship to Baylor University. (Golf is a big part of the Bjorn family. His younger brother Thomas is a professional golfer in Denmark.)

After attending university in Denmark for three years studying Economics and playing on the Danish National Golf Team, he earned an athletics scholarship to Baylor, thanks to the father of one of his teammates who would later help him get his first job too. (Yes, that first job that eventually turned into a CEO position). Bjorn lettered in golf both of his eligible years and captained the team his final year. That year, he also decided he would pursue a business career instead of a golf career.

After he graduated in 1992 and during his first job in the food industry, he went back to school for his MBA at TCU. He's been working in the food industry, and the U.S., since his graduation from Baylor.

"I didn't think I was going to America to live there the rest of my life," Bjorn said. "For me, America was the land of opportunities. There's almost no chance something like this would have happened to me in Denmark. I am incredibly grateful."

bbr.baylor.edu/soren-bjorn