

Three-piece suits. Two incomes. No kids.
Mark and Lisa Miller, a banker and attorney, respectively, fit in as a young married couple in downtown San Antonio.

Sixteen years later, those two self-proclaimed “yuppies,” probably wouldn’t recognize the man wearing Wranglers and cowboy boots, and the woman wearing jeans and sandals at the office.

But when on April 1, 1999, the couple purchased Fresh from Texas, a value-added produce company based in San Antonio, Texas, more than their work outfits changed.

“I told Lisa we could do it, so basically that’s what happened. It’s the American dream to own your own company and chart your own territory,” Mark said. “We thought the industry was really growing, and there was a tremendous upside with the company. We just took a chance.”

Value-added produce means the fresh produce has been handled. If the fruits and vegetables have been washed, sliced, diced, mixed or packaged, it’s considered value-added produce. That includes pico de gallo, salsa, veggie trays and soup kits you can purchase at grocery stores.

Fresh from Texas’s customers vary from large retail stores like H-E-B, to institutional clients like schools and hospitals, to small restaurants.

“It’s been very interesting to work with your spouse,” Mark said. “We’ve been married 27 years. The first few years there was some crossover in who did what, which created some anxiety from time-to-time, but we’ve transitioned to what we do best.”

Mark handles the operations side of the business, including quality assurance, production and staff management. Lisa, who is a current Hankamer School of Business Advisory Board member, handles legal matters, like human resources, workers compensation, etc. But her favorite job duties are product development, marketing and staying up-to-date with food trends.

“It’s exciting for me to do that part,” Lisa said. “Now, I see something about the benefits of kale, and I get so excited about it. I’m passionate about the foodie side of it.”

Kale is one food trend of many the Millers have noticed in recent years.

“As the market demands quick, healthy items, the product line has grown,” Lisa said. “Kale is really popular right now, so we need to provide value-added kale to the customer. So we come up with packaging ideas, how to educate the customers, etc., then we go to the farmers and brokers. Customers are getting smarter about things and are changing what, and how, they want to buy.”

Organic produce is a broader trend impacting the produce industry.

“Organic is a huge deal,” she said. “People want their food to be fresh, clean and safe, and they want to know the exact guidelines by which it was grown. From shelf to table, people want to eat more and more of what’s healthy.”

The Millers saw the demand for organic produce on the rise years ago and took steps to prepare their business. The company became a certified organic processor.

“Just like growers have restrictions and guidelines, we have restrictions and guidelines,” Lisa said. “We went through the approval process to make sure things were cleaned, processed and packaged, according to organic standards. It’s all about convenience and healthiness for our customers.”

But keeping up with consumer demand can be difficult when dealing with Mother Nature.

“We’re always in contact with suppliers because we have to know things like yield and quality for pricing,” Mark said. **“We’re working with produce from God’s green Earth, so a lot can happen.”**

Fresh from Texas must remain informed on how the weather is affecting crops around the world, not just in the state the company serves.

“We buy produce from around the world,” Lisa said. “Whenever and wherever produce is the freshest, that’s the product we’re buying. For example, we’ll buy watermelon, which late in the season may be from South Texas, and earlier from Mexico, and sometimes we’ll even get it from South America. It wasn’t always that way, but with technological advances, the world is a smaller place now.”

“And it’s all very, very perishable,” Mark added. “The typical shelf life is seven to 12 days, so it’s a challenge to bring produce in, get it processed, out the door and to the shelf as quickly as possible. If you can’t, you won’t be successful.”

Even though they’re in positions they wouldn’t have imagined in their Baylor years, through 16 years of business and 27 years of marriage, the Millers are successful.



MARK & LISA Miller



OWNERS, FRESH FROM TEXAS, INC.
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS
MARK MILLER, BBA '83
LISA MILLER, BBA '85