

J.S. Brown

Summary Points from Meet the CEO Series Meeting held on March 3, 2011

The Meet the CEO Series continued recently with an interesting presentation from J.S. “Si” Brown, President of Bruce Foods Corporation in New Iberia. Mr. Brown discussed the long history of the multi-generational family owned business over their past 83 years of operation. Bruce Foods currently operates four plants in the US (Louisiana, Texas and North Carolina) and 95% of their products are made in America. Brown stated that every grocery store in the US carries at least one of the company’s products. Also, the company was the first in the industry to develop an international distribution chain and today distributes their food products via an extensive retailer network in 100 countries around the world.

During the meeting, Mr. Brown commented on a variety of business topics. Specifically:

Marketing today is dependent on the use of sophisticated data related to consumer buying habits. Brown mentioned that real-time market research data drives business today and successful businesses use the information to make decisions at every level. This hard data related to purchases is important for the company, as well as provides information on the competition. The data is up-to-the-minute and can provide accurate information that can be analyzed by city, zip code, state, and even ethnic group. Brown also stated that it is important for students to be trained in the proper analysis of such data and know how the numbers drive business decision-making.

The most significant development at Bruce Foods in the last 20 years has been innovation through effective use of internal research and development initiatives. Brown commented that population changes, the aging population and the popularity of certain hobbies that include food have impacted the development of new products and new uses for existing products. Brown also added that customers are asking for food with more flavor and taste.

Innovation and the development of new products for Bruce Foods takes place at the company test kitchen/laboratory in New Iberia. The company recently invested \$1 million into research and development by building a state-of-the-art test kitchen staffed by two chefs and a technical advisor.

This investment in people and facilities is important to the long term growth of the company. Brown noted that the company develops new products every year and the new product cycle is much quicker today than in the past. Today, new products are developed in 90 days and are in grocery stores in 120 days.

Brown stated that ordering from the Internet is another business dynamic that has changed the way that Bruce's does business today. WalMart, Amazon and Target all sell products to consumers on-line and this has forced manufacturing companies into more efficient operations.

Finally, Brown said that the company will continue to be family owned as they make room for the fourth generation of family members to join the business. They plan to continue with food being the core business; however, their recent new product called the "Cajun Injector" has allowed them to develop other complimentary products related to fried turkeys (electric fryer, smoker, chicken cookers). Such expansion through hard goods offers the company new opportunities to expand their customer base.

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