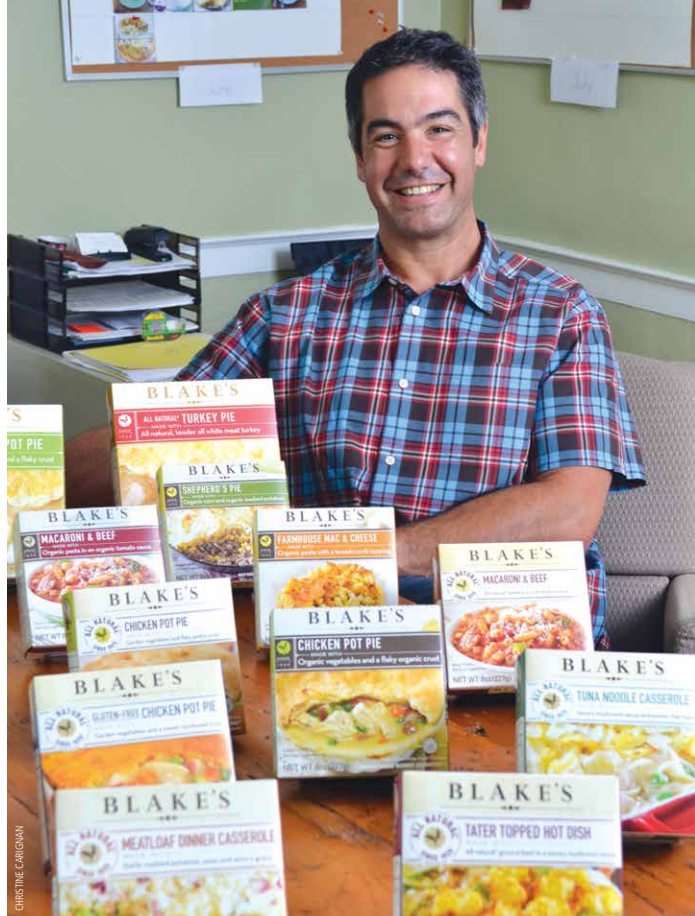


# STRONG TEAMS, GROWING COMPANIES

## BLAKE'S ALL NATURAL FOODS A VESTED FOR GROWTH Business Champion



Twenty years after Clara Blake began farming on a 25-acre farm in Concord in 1929, her son, Roy, set a course for the future by making fresh-dressed turkeys the sole focus of their business. A Blake's turkey became standard holiday fare for thousands of New England families, with many making a tradition of a trip to Blake's to pick theirs up.

Roy's son, Charlie, took over the farm operations in 1970 after attending the Thompson School of Agriculture at the University of New Hampshire. One day, using extra turkey meat in the farm's kitchen, Charlie took his grandmother Clara's recipe for turkey pot pie and baked a dozen. He sold them out of the back of his '67 Chevy van at St. John's Church on Main Street in Concord. When they sold out in 20 minutes, he realized he was onto something.

Fast-forward a few decades and Charlie and Sally Blake's daughter, Amy, and her husband, Chris Licata, joined the business in 2006. Shortly after taking over as president of Blake's, Licata had the production facility converted and approved as "Certified Organic" and created and launched an organic line of meals.

Today, in its fourth generation, Blake's meals, made from great-grandma Clara's recipes, can be found in approximately 6,000 stores nationwide. Even though Blake's has grown from a quintessential New England mom-and-pop business, it still operates with a simple goal: Provide

convenient and nutritious meals to allow people to live healthy lives while making it easier for families to come together at meal time.

Supermarket freezer space is exceedingly competitive, but Licata says Blake's consumers make sure their meals are always on



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store shelves. "Consumers are demanding better-for-you food, and that demand is only increasing," he said. "Consumers now care not only about the quality of food, but also about the companies they're buying from."

The company takes pride not only in its process—all Blake's meals are handmade from scratch in small batches by its employees—but also in its ingredients.

"We've always used kitchen ingredients instead of 'lab' ingredients that you can't

CHRIS LICATA, PRESIDENT

pronounce. Consumers are smart; they are requiring 'kitchen-quality' food," said Licata. "That consumer demand is reinforcing what we believe."

Licata says Blake's sales are nine times what they were just six years ago, and that they have more than doubled in the last two years.

Blake's has become a category leader, achieving the distinction of having the fastest-selling All Natural/Organic items on the frozen shelves, including the #1 (Organic Chicken Pot Pie) and #6 (Organic Shepherd's Pie) items.

Blake's growth is reflected not only in sales, but also in the number of employees: from 12 full-time employees in 2006 to 49 today.

"To say that our employees are important to our success is an enormous understatement," Licata says. "They believe in what we're doing here, and their hard work and dedication is so important to our success."

Having strong belief in your company's mission—in this case, putting healthy food over profit by using quality ingredients—is the lesson Licata shares with other companies.

"Have a mission that extends beyond the bottom line. Weave in a greater good." he said. 🌱