

From **Seeds** to **Sauces**

Building a food company from the ground up.

Starting with a focus on taste, Seeds of Change has evolved from a seed business into a fully integrated food company.

By Angela Dansby

SEEDS OF CHANGE began as an organic seed company focused on increasing biodiversity and sustainable agriculture; its owners collected thousands of heirloom produce varieties around the world. Today, Seeds of Change has turned itself into a vertically integrated organic seed and food company. It offers an array of organic products, including salad dressings, rice, grains, pasta, snack bars, frozen entrees, ready-made soup pouches, pasta sauces and chocolate bars.

“Seeds of Change controls its value chain,” says Seed Director Marc Cool. “It is leading the way in what we believe is a fundamental and almost revolutionary shift towards a different way of thinking about food production and looking at the health, taste and enjoyment of food.”

The company has a food division, which contracts directly with domestic organic growers who receive a premium for their crops. Seeds of Change tries to develop seeds that are relatively easy to grow to keep farmers’ input costs down and their profits up. Yet at the same time, the fruits of these farmers’ labors must be able to ship well and stand up to processing.

“It’s tough to create varieties that are easy to process as well as taste good,” Cool says. “Heirloom tomato varieties taste better, for example, but with their soft texture they are tough to store, transport and process. Seeds of Change is working on fresh market food varieties that processors can handle but that also offer the flavor, beauty and nutrition that consumers want.”

Seeds of Change is one of a few 100% certified organic seed companies in the nation. It looks to plant science to create value in its products for farmers, processors and consumers. With its integrated seed breeding and production as well as food processing and marketing activities, it is uniquely staged to pull this value all the way through to the end-user, who ultimately consumes this food.

“Everyone in the food chain has their own needs and sometimes they are contradictory,” Cool says. “We try to balance the needs of all the stakeholders in the chain.” For example, pasta sauce vegetables have been bred for many years with one characteristic in

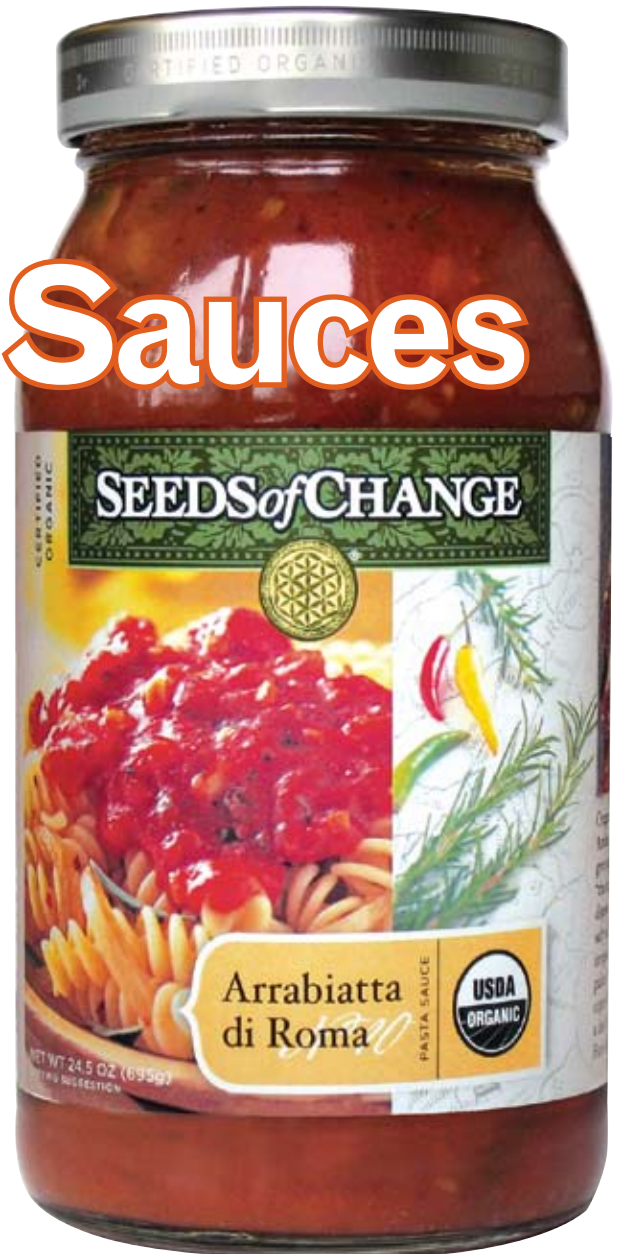


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mind – ease of processing. The flavors of the vegetables, such as tomatoes, get sacrificed as a result. This is what Seeds of Change calls the “dilution effect.”

“Tomato breeders and growers have been historically trained to only benefit processors because flavor via salt and seasonings can be added later,” Cool explains. “Seeds of Change is trying to develop pasta sauce that tastes better and is better for consumers by using more flavorful tomatoes, herbs and other vegetables, without adding sodium and fat.”

In addition to trying to meld flavor and functionality, Seeds of Change is looking to enhance the health value of vegetables through conventional breeding. High antioxidant broccoli and carrots restored to their natural colors of purple, yellow and white are on the company’s radar screen.

Meanwhile, the company is trying to change the way farmers, processors and consumers think. Ultimately, having developed into a food company has given this seed business commercial power at a consumer level. It is striving to show that organic seeds can have good yields and few hassles and that heirloom vegetables can be used in food production without falling apart. It is demonstrating to consumers that high quality vegetables can deliver not only healthfulness, but also great taste. **SW**