

The man behind the mill

Iconic miller puts his employees and customers first

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

MILWAUKIE — Bob Moore has a question for the George Fox University students visiting his Red Mill. They are business students, MBA candidates, sharp young people. Later, Moore agrees the country will be in good hands. Any time you doubt that, he says, go talk to students.

But now he stands before them like a stern corporate logo come to life. He is ramrod straight and looks exactly, intentionally, like the trademark image on his whole grain products: White beard, glasses, touring cap, bolo tie and bright red company vest.

He's been featured on a Diane Sawyer ABC News segment and written up in The New York Times, among many other publications. His "people before profit" mantra made Bob's Red Mill one of the most admired companies in the United States. On his 81st birthday he began the process of conveying the company to his 400 workers through an Employee Stock Ownership Plan, in which all employees were issued stock certificates. It didn't cost them a cent. The first round six years ago gave employees one-third ownership; transfer of a second third is in the works.

A friend to agriculture

Moore is a friend to Pacific Northwest agriculture, buying immense quantities of grain, nuts, seeds and berries from farmers who meet his quality standards. He is an evangelist for whole grains and healthy eating. He's been known to pound a table and tell his managers, "We have to get this good food to people."

He recommends starting the day with oatmeal made from his steel cut oats. Raises the blood sugar slowly, he says, and keeps you contented, even "euphoric," until lunch. Maybe toss on some fruit and a handful of flax meal. He autographs his biography with the salutation, "To your good health!"

Much of the flour, meal, beans, breads, baking mixes and soup mixes he sells are organic, and the company has a growing line of gluten-free products. Bob's Red Mill won't use GMOs; it tests every shipment of corn and soybeans.

He buys locally and sells internationally. Bob's Red Mill products are on the shelves in 80 countries, from Kenya, Egypt, Australia and Mexico to India, China and throughout Europe, Southeast Asia and South America. Labeling machines at his mill are capable of printing ingredient and nutritional information in languages ranging from French to Farsi.

That's what the George Fox business students have come to ask about, but first he has a question for them.

"Where's all the cookies?" he demands, and breaks the generational ice.

World Headquarters

If Portland's self-reverential foodie movement traced its roots, it might find itself off Highway 224 in the blue-collar suburb of Milwaukie, 8 miles from downtown. Bob's Red Mill was locally sourced and offering organic and gluten-free products before they became hipster buzzwords.

Farmers and co-ops who sell to Bob's Red Mill find the company firm but fair.

"They don't fool around," says Tom Williams, who with his brother, Ray, owns Williams Hudson Bay Farm in Milton-Freewater. They



Bob Moore, founder of Bob's Red Mill in Milwaukie.

Courtesy of Bob's Red Mill

farm about 3,000 acres on the Oregon-Washington border and sell organic wheat and corn to Bob's Red Mill.

Williams says his farm had corn for sale when the mill needed it, and kept sending wheat samples for testing until they finally were accepted. They've been selling to Bob's Red Mill for about 10 years, and it is their biggest customer.

"They test everything, it's very, very complex," Williams says. "If it meets their standards, they want it. If it doesn't, they could care less."

The mill and distribution center cover 320,000 square feet and is self-contained, with lab work, grinding, mixing, bagging, marketing, graphics, sales, construction and maintenance done in-house. The glass doors proclaim it Bob's Red Mill "World Headquarters."

A mile up the highway is a combination retail store and restaurant that is packed six days a week, closed on Sundays. On Fridays during lunchtime, Moore and longtime executive assistant, Nancy Garner, drive over from the World Headquarters and play duets on matching Steinway grand pianos. Bob often sings. "I couldn't live without music," he says.

'People before profit'

Using a red laser pointer to highlight a PowerPoint presentation, Moore reviews his oft-told story for the George Fox students. His first business was a service station. He had a grain mill in Redding, California, then retired and moved to Oregon intending to study Greek and Hebrew

so he could read the Bible in its original languages. He stumbled across a mill for sale and couldn't resist starting up again. He was doing well, then an arsonist burned it down in 1988. Started over, and here he is today.

"I wouldn't recommend failure," he says dryly. "But if you have it, it's not the end of the world."

He lets that sit for a moment.

"The story I'm going to tell is about success." Moore tells the students he quit reading Forbes, Fortune and other business magazines. The end point of every article, he says, was the accumulation of more money.

"That's not the goal of my life," he says. He says it is his responsibility as an entrepreneur to create sustainability and permanence through competitive wages, health-care benefits and profit sharing. Doing so makes the employees vested in the company's success, he says.

Moore shares with the community, as well. Among many gifts, he and his wife gave \$25 million to Oregon Health & Science University to establish the Bob and Charlee Moore Institute for Nutrition and Wellness. They gave \$5 million to Oregon State University for the Moore Family Center for Whole Grain Foods, Nutrition and Preventive Health. They gave \$1.35 million to support programs at the National College of Natural Medicine. They gave \$250,000 to Zenger Farm of Portland, which hosts school tours and trains beginning farmers.

Moore clicks the PowerPoint controller to display what he calls the "crowning Scripture," Matthew 7:12, the Golden Rule.

"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and prophets."

Moore uses the laser pointer to circle the name of the man who said it: Jesus Christ.

"It comes from high authority," he tells the students.

Telling the story

Jan Chernus, vice president of international sales, takes the Bob's Red Mill image overseas. Everything about Bob's appearance, of course, but also the commitment to quality, the story of profit sharing, the Employee Stock Ownership Plan and how to treat employees.

"We tell that story, we definitely tell that story," Chernus says. "You have to get that message out. Without that, it's a bag of flour. It's a really good quality bag of flour, but it's a bag of flour."

It works. Moore has visited many of the countries where his product is sold. He's been recognized on a double-decker bus in London, approached in airports and hailed from passing cars.

The Bob's Red Mill story is one Justine Haigh wants her George Fox students to hear. Haigh, a marketing professor, also directs the university's MBA program. Too often, students are directed to focus only on the bottom line, she says.

"Bob's whole stance of people before profits is a great thing for our students to think about," she says. "For them to hear that firsthand is really meaningful."

Time on his mind

It's Feb. 15, Bob Moore's 87th birthday, and he is celebrating with his customers at the retail store and restaurant. He's hired a band, headed by longtime friend John Bennett, to play for the occasion. Moore estimates he's had four pieces of cake.

Customers line up to greet him and wish him well on his birthday. One of them, Heather Choy, says her message to Bob is simple.

"I want to tell him 'thank you' for revolutionizing the way people eat, and for making healthy food accessible," she says.

Moore rises to thank the crowd and says it's "so nice to be appreciated."

"I hope to make it a couple more," he adds with a chuckle. "Ninety is my goal right now."

During his last trip to South Korea, a woman approached him out of the blue and, through an interpreter, asked to read his palm.

Moore laughs about the encounter. The woman studied his lifeline and declared he would live to be 100.

"I think about that every day," he says. He has long been on top of the business world. He's made millions and given them away. He's admired, respected, even loved. Employees, unbidden, say he's like a father to them. Many have been with him 30 years.

He still comes to work each day. He leads a tour and turns it into a three-hour lesson on milling. He visits his managers and peppers them with questions. He's ordered 22 new automated bagging machines and knows every detail of their installation.

When he hired a woman as the plant operations manager, the first female in the post, he told her to let him know if the men were giving her trouble. He told her he would knock heads if he had to.

"I want to know every little thing that's going on here," he says.

He has no plans to step down. He says Nancy, his executive assistant, will probably come into his office one day and find him on the floor, and that will be it. He laughs about that, too.

"Why would I want to do anything else?"



9-1-WHAT?
THE BEST OF THE WORST CALLS TO ASTORIA 911 DISPATCH

Grandma, take me home

So if your 7-year-old grandson ever refuses to buckle his seat belt, call 911. Seriously, emergency dispatchers are just waiting. They have nothing more important to do.

It's not like there are loose goats wandering around. Or horses. It's been days — days! — since the last reports of name-calling ...

Follow reporter Kyle Spurr on his 9-1-What? Twitter watch, where a few of the sometimes head-scratching calls to area dispatch take center stage. The full feed is at www.twitter.com/9_1_WHAT.

9-1-WHAT?
9_1_WHAT

Following

{3/2 @ 7:23 a.m.} Two horses wandering in the area of the U.S. Coast Guard sector. #Warrenton

10:16 AM - 4 Mar 2016

9-1-WHAT?
9_1_WHAT

Following

{3/2 @ 8:08 a.m.} Man reporting women calling him names. #Seaside

RETWEETS
2

10:16 AM - 4 Mar 2016

9-1-WHAT?
9_1_WHAT

Following

{3/3 @ 10:51 a.m.} Caller requested assistance with 7-year-old grandson, who is refusing to buckle his seat belt. #Astoria

10:20 AM - 4 Mar 2016

9-1-WHAT?
9_1_WHAT

Following

{3/8 @ 8:34 a.m.} Woman received two letters in the mail from an unknown person calling her names. #Astoria

10:29 AM - 11 Mar 2016

9-1-WHAT?
9_1_WHAT

Following

{3/4 @ 5 p.m.} Caller reports continuous issue with a loose goat in the neighborhood that eats their vegetation. #Astoria

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