

# Rocky Mount Telegram

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## **Atlantic Natural Foods finds buyers**

By John Henderson

For several years, Atlantic Natural Foods in Nashville has been producing a line of vegetarian foods for a major corporation that sells the products mainly to Seventh Day Adventists.

Due to confidentiality agreements, the company cannot identify its customer.

The company recently embarked upon a new venture, creating its own line of vegetarian foods that it plans to sell either under its own name or to upscale groceries that want to create their own lines.

The company has introduced five all-natural products that are being marketing to large retailers and grocery stores nationwide. Atlantic Natural Foods, which has a plant at 110 Industry Court in Nashville, is trying to convince grocery chains to purchase the products for use in their private brand labels.

The company recently began producing five-bean chili, meatless taco filling, fishless tuna, vegetarian chicken patty and meatless hot dog.

With the growing popularity of “Meatless Mondays” nationwide, it’s a good time to launch the brand, company officials said.

Atlantic Natural had a major plant expansion in 2009. The plant in Nashville is only at 50 percent of its capacity.

The goal of the company is to continue to expand and add employees, officials said. With vegetarian products gaining popularity, now is a good time for Atlantic Natural

Foods to be branching out into mainstream grocery stores with its products, company officials said.

### **Q: What products or services do you provide?**

A: Kelly Krause, chief operating officer: We have a canning facility and we are producing shelf-stable meat analog products

Tim Carper, managing director and operating partner: We produce meatless meat.

Krause: We are expanding out and launching our own brand.

Carper: We can manufacturer for several companies.

Krause: Our primary focus has been a very limited channel, producing (vegetarian products) for Seventh Day Adventists. Obviously, we believe in a meat-free diet. There is a much larger market out there. We call them 'flexitarians.' They are people who choose to incorporate meat-free options.

Carper: It's kind of trend now. Some of the schools like East Carolina University have been talking about having a Meatless Monday for folks who don't care to have meat.

Krause: The point is our products taste great. They are low in fat, free of cholesterol, and they have a comparable protein content (to meat).

**Q: How many employees do you have?**

A: 84.

**Q: Who are your key leaders?**

A: Kelly Krause, chief operating officer, Tim Carper, managing director and operating partner, Steve Morris, vice president of sales and marketing, Michael Duggan, vice president of technical service.

**Q: What is your business philosophy?**

A: Carper: We certainly live by the rule that the customer is king. But at the same time we want to be known as company that supports our employees. We feel they are a viable part of the company.

**Q: What makes business unique?**

A: Carper: We really at this point don't have a serious competitor. There is a need for this product. From a pure protein standpoint, as you probably know, protein itself has gotten to be higher and higher priced. Part of the reason is the feed for pork or fish or anything else is way higher pound for pound. In our case, we get all the protein we want to from soy, so on one-on-one basis, it's much less expensive.

**Q: What kind of growth do you expect in the coming years?**

A: Krause: We're optimists. We believe we'll double business in the next year.

**Q: What kind of growth have you had in recent years?**

A: Krause: For the past three years, it's been stable.

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