







# Braswell Family Farms Celebrating God's Gift of 75 Years in Business

Trey Braswell, fourth-generation president of Braswell Family Farms, is full of anticipation for the company's October celebration of its 75th anniversary.

"We're really excited about it," Trey tells *The Shelby Report*. "It's been a real gift from the Lord that we've been able to survive and thrive for that long."

On Oct. 6, the Nashville, North Carolina-based feed and egg supplier will hold a "big event" for employees and family at Boddie Millpond, where the company got its start grinding corn meal in a water-powered grist mill. Boddie Millpond doesn't operate as a grist mill anymore, but it remains a tangible reminder of the company's heritage.

"It'll be really cool to get back to our roots and celebrate outside," Trey said. "We're really looking forward to that."

Guest speakers are expected to be Trey's father Scott, third-generation president, as well as Trey's great-uncle Gene Braswell, a second-generation leader of the company.

A big meal will be served to guests and, fittingly for a company that got its start making corn meal, the celebration will likely feature cornhole games, Trey said. If the weather is cool enough, there could be some firepits and boiled peanuts, too. There might be a raffle, and a band will be on hand to entertain guests.

Braswell Family Farms is promoting its 75th anniversary in feature ads in newspapers as well as mailers and online, according to John Watson, VP of marketing and sales. These communications are "talking about our celebration and promoting the retailers that sell our product."



John Watson

Radio stations are running recipe contests to encourage consumers to come up with "good recipes based on eggs," Watson says.

The contests will run up until the Oct. 6 celebration.

Jacy Barnes, marketing analyst at Braswell, helps the company reach out on social media and "has done great telling our story and getting in touch with consumers," Trey says. "We're in the infancy stages, but I feel like we have a good presence, good branding, on social media."

Trade advertising also is part of the anniversary promotion.

"With each of our retailers, we're doing a 75th anniversary feature ad to let the consumer know who we are and what we're about, because it's unusual for a family business to make it to the fourth generation and to have aspirations, and solid plans, to make sure that it makes it to a fifth and a sixth," Watson says. "A lot of that has to do with our attitude that we're stewards of a business—it belongs to God. And He is blessing us to move through these generations."

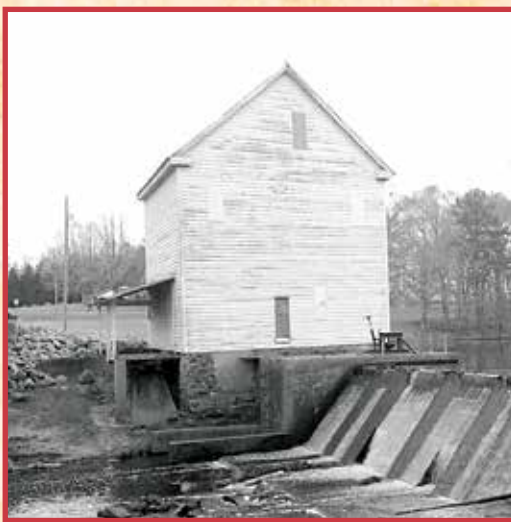
He added that grocery retailers have been great about "strategically partnering with us to talk about the 75th anniversary, so we feel really good about that."

## Celebrating the reasons for the company's success

The Oct. 6 gathering will be a reunion of sorts, with many of those who have retired from Braswell Farms hopefully attending.

"A lot of folks that retire from here were here for 30, 40, 50 years," Trey says.

They certainly played a role in the company's longevity, he



Boddie Mill, Braswell's original mill that produced corn meal.

added, as do the company's current employees.

"I'd say the biggest reason that we've been able to make it this long is by God's grace; He's just had His hand of protection on the company and we've been able to thrive. In the beginning, things were really hard, but we've had dedicated employees that have been here for a long time. They're a big part of our success."

Watson adds that the company's leaders over the years have been key as well, in addition to God's blessing.

"I truly believe the reason Braswell Family Farms has gotten to the 75-year mark is because each leader has held on to the core values of the company since its inception," Watson says. "This is God's business, and we are stewards. We walk with Him regarding what we do in growing the business. I give God all the credit for us getting to the 75th anniversary. And a lot of determination through a lot of tough times, for all the generations. Because each one of the generations struggled in different ways trying to move the business forward. But the overarching element, I think, is that God had a big hand in this."

## Importance of innovation

Another part of the company's success has been innovation.

"We've been early adopters of 'what's next' in our business," Trey says, "which has led us to be a leader in the niche specialty egg market and feed. That's been our bedrock and what's made us so successful."

On the feed side, Braswell has increased the amount of organic feed it produces to sell to other poultry producers.

"We've tried really hard to build a reputation of quality and



The company's current feed mill operation in Nashville, North Carolina.

service, and I think that's what has attracted folks to us on the East Coast that are looking to do organic production," Trey says.

Braswell Family Farms also was an original franchisee of the well-known Eggland's Best (EB) brand of eggs.

"People at that time thought an egg was just a commodity that

you couldn't change; there was no such thing as value-added," he said. "But by God's grace, we made the choice to become an Eggland's Best franchisee, and also dove into organic and cage-free eggs before it was cool."

Today, the company continues to innovate by growing its pasture-raised egg business.

"We just got into pasture-raised egg production; I feel like that's the next thing that's going to take off," Trey says.

Watson noted that the pasture-raised eggs will be sold under the Born Free name. They are being raised on an organic pasture in Virginia by a partner farmer who has built a state-of-the-art facility, Watson says.

The birds have begun to produce eggs, which currently are being sold to Lowes Foods and K-VA-T/Food City stores in the Southeast, with more retailers anticipated to be selling them soon.

"We're looking at two more pasture-raised farms in the near future, as we see that being a trend in category growth," Watson adds. "We think we can get ahead of the needs of the customer and the consumer and be ready when they're ready."

"We're all about consumer choice, offering them a variety of products," Trey notes.

As the health and wellness trend continues to grow in supermarkets, one egg variety that is gaining traction is hard-cooked.



## Fourth-Generation President Trey Braswell Traces Company Roots

The beginnings of our company extend back to the 19th century on the site of Boddie Mill, built in 1834. The mill is just a few miles outside of Nashville, North Carolina, on Boddie Millpond, a historic site that was originally part of the Boddie land grant. At that time, the mill was used to grind corn using a water-powered grist mill.

In 1943, my great-great-uncle J.M. and great-granddad E.G. Braswell purchased Boddie Mill. They laid the foundation of our family's company, providing Boddie Mill corn meal for all to enjoy in their favorite recipes.

In 1956, Ronald (who I called Papa) and my great-uncle Gene Braswell, sons of E.G., returned from military service and began working in the family business.

In 1969, Ronald and Gene decided to



*E.G. Braswell, founder of Braswell Family Farms, then Boddie Milling Co.*



*Gene and Ronald Braswell, second-generation owners of Braswell Family Farms*

purchase and modernize an old mill in Nashville

from the Wayne Feeds franchise. The mill would service the ever-growing needs of our blossoming pullet business and provide feed for local families for their livestock. Back in those days, most folks were closer to a farm and had a couple of chickens, pigs and cows.

In 1979, the company extended into the third generation with the entrance of my dad, Scott Braswell, son of

Ronald. Dad's focus, even early on, was developing innovative pullet and commercial laying hen complexes that produced quality pullets and eggs in the most efficient manner.

Under Scott's leadership as president, and God's grace, our family's business has grown to provide both local and sustainably farmed eggs and feed to customers up and down the East Coast of the United States.

My dad always tells me that one of the best gifts his father gave him before he passed away was taking a chance and becoming a founding partner of Eggland's Best Eggs. Just before my Papa, Ronald, passed away in 1991, he invested in the beginnings of our Eggland's Best franchise. This placed us on the leading edge of marketing innovation and the highest standards of quality and consumer confidence.

Since then, we have worked diligently to glorify God as we become the premier provider of Eggland's Best and other premium private label eggs and feed.

In 2008, I joined the company as the fourth generation. I recognize that those who came before me put in a lot of blood, sweat and tears to get the company to where it is today. My desire is to continue to build on the strong foundation and seek to honor Christ as we build this business to make an eternal impact on folks that we cross paths with. Our company is the Lord's, and we intend to see it flourish as a testimony to His grace.



*Representing Braswell Family Farms' fourth and third generations, respectively: Trey and Scott Braswell.*

*Thankfully,*

Ronald "Trey" Braswell III

"Today, it's about healthy living, it's about protein intake," Watson says. "Eggs are one of the best, simplest, cleanest ways to take in protein. Because people are now healthy-snacking on the go, the snack section is going to be interesting to watch over the next couple of years in terms of sales of hard-cooked eggs."

Braswell sells hard-cooked eggs under the EB name and a couple of others, he adds.

Braswell Family Farms' milestone anniversary comes at a time when the egg industry is doing well.

"It has been a good year for the egg industry overall. And for us," Trey says. "We've seen good egg demand, and we see consumers buying up into the specialty egg category."

Continued growth is anticipated. Braswell is Publix's egg supplier for eastern North Carolina and Virginia, and the Lakeland, Florida-based chain continues to expand northward.

### Rebranding stamped a success

More than a year ago, the Braswell Family Farms name was adopted by the company, previously called Braswell Foods.

The rebranding was a way to convey that the company, which comprises several separate businesses (Braswell Milling Co., Braswell Egg Co., Carolina Egg Co. and Glenwood Foods), is actually a family of companies.

Trey says, "Braswell Family Farms really relates to the consumer and the customer more about who we are and what we value and what we do."

"Bringing all those together brought synergies as an organization," Watson adds. "Now our milling customers understand we have an egg business, and our egg business people understand we have milling. Our customers that we sell to now understand we do both those things. We feed our birds from day one and take care of them until they retire."

There was a change in morale among team members, and at

customer meetings, the company now is referred to as Braswell Family Farms instead of the egg or milling division they formerly referred to.

### Carrying on

Trey sees that challenges lie ahead due to consolidation in the food industry and other factors. The key to meeting those challenges?

"We have to be smarter and more efficient," he says. "We believe the business is the Lord's, and we're here to be good stewards of it, so we're really intentional about how we make choices and teach folks the values by which we run the business."

While finding great employees continues to be a challenge in many industries, especially agriculture, one of the lessons Trey has learned in his five years leading the company is "to trust and empower your leadership and your people."

"I have really focused on hiring people smarter than me and letting them do their jobs and not trying to do it for them, because that typically does not end well," he says. "You really want to surround yourself with folks that will push you to grow. I don't ever want to be the smartest guy in the room in our management meetings."

"Our vision is to better the lives of those we meet as the premier specialty egg and feed provider. We're here to take care of the company and the people, and we really strive to give back to our people and the communities and take care of the families."

"We're Braswell Family Farms, a family-owned business, and family is important here. Not just my family, the Braswell family, but everybody that works with us and their families and the people that are eating our product. We try to be really intentional to really enrich the lives of the families that are committed to working here, and we appreciate them."

"We're thankful, we've been blessed, and we want to do a good job with what we've been blessed with."

**"Our mission every day is to glorify God by providing the safest, highest-quality eggs and feed."**

—Trey Braswell, president, Braswell Family Farms





# Committed Employees Key to Braswell's Success

Trey Braswell, president of corporate stewardship for Braswell Family Farms, says, "We've had dedicated employees that have been here for a long time; we have a lot of longevity in the company. They're hard workers—and committed. God's grace is the main reason for our success, and committed employees are a big part of that."

Here are just three examples of those committed employees.

## Judy Ellis

Judy Ellis retired this summer after more than two decades of service in the Braswell Family Farms offices in Nashville, North Carolina.

"Chances are if you've stopped by our office in the past 21 years, you've had the pleasure of speaking with Mrs. Judy Ellis," the company says.

Ellis began her career at Braswell Family Farms as a temporary hire for a two-week position. But she had found a home.

Ellis says she "loved and still loves" the family atmosphere at Braswell. Someone once told her she had "the best boss in North Carolina, no, the whole country!"

Up until she retired, Ellis worked in the feed division. She helps determine how much feed is needed for each hen house.

Ellis is known for wanting to bring a smile to her co-workers. She used to get the newspaper and read the jokes section to everyone during their morning break.

*How does she like her eggs? Scrambled (and well done).*



## Lisa Lewis

Lisa Lewis, VP of accounting, began her career at Braswell Family Farms 35 years ago as her first job out of college.

Lewis started out transferring the paper ledgers in the accounting department to a computer program on Braswell's first computer.

Over the years, Lewis has helped with various IT and accounting roles, from the automation of the feed mill to transferring the laying hen records to a computer system.

Lewis enjoys the people she has worked with over the years and the family environment that she has so long been a part of, she says.

Interestingly, Lewis drove a school bus in high school, picking up her fellow students to take them to school. She also was an avid participant in 4-H growing up, which she says equipped her with some of the skills she has today. One of those skills is photography—Lewis' favorite hobby now. She takes photos at many company events.

*How does she like her eggs? Scrambled, deviled or baked into a chocolate pie.*



## Willie Jervis

Willie Jervis began his career in the egg industry with Glenwood Foods in 1986. When Braswell Family Farms purchased Glenwood in 1997, Jervis stayed on board and worked diligently through the years to become VP of operations.

Jervis has had 10 different roles throughout his 31 years in the industry, and he says he enjoys the new challenges he

faces with each new step he takes.

Jervis' role is to keep Braswell's three locations working together harmoniously—mill, farms and distribution center.

In his spare time, Jervis rides dirt bikes. A favorite spot for this hobby are the ATV trails near the James River in Virginia. He records some of his adventures with the GoPro on his helmet.

