

# Hillcrest Foods, Inc

**Chris Barkyoub - Owner**



**Success Magazine:** Hillcrest Foods was originally a poultry farm started by your father, Reginald. When did you become interested in the family business?

Chris Barkyoub: I first became interested at around age fourteen.

**SM:** Why did you decide to evolve into a specialty supplier to the bakery and food service industry?

CB: I was in the egg industry and could see that business was failing due to competition from out-of-state companies. All of the food service companies were selling eggs to the local restaurants. I knew I had to change my company focus or I would be forced out of business. At the time, there were fourteen chicken farms in the state—today there are only three. I had a mortgage on the facility that I had bought from my parents, which was their main source of retirement income. I felt pressure to change the operation. I used the existing egg route to get to the market and started asking customers what they needed help with and we evolved into a bakery supplier.

**SM:** At what point did you take over the family business? Do you have other relatives currently working with you?

CB: I took over the business, then called Hillcrest Poultry Farm, in 1980 and started

Hillcrest Foods Inc. in 1983. My brother, Gary, still works with me as a driver and my wife, Kim, is the sales manager.

**SM:** What were the challenges associated with your change in products/services? How were you able to get the word out, and what happened with your existing customer base?

CB: It was hard to get started, as I had very little volume to purchase properly. It was very difficult to get products delivered to me at a competitive rate due to the size of my orders and the location I was in—Northern Vermont. I got the word out by going on the road and talking to potential customers in person.

**SM:** In 1992 you established Hillcrest Trucking and Storage. Why was this portion of the business created? How has it contributed to your company's overall success?

CB: Because of the difficulties with freight deliveries, I started my own trucking division to better control my needs. I received my operating ICC authority, which enabled me to haul freight for other companies, moving my trucks into Boston, New York and New Jersey to back haul my food items. This was a huge turning point in my business. Without this division I don't feel the company would have survived.

**SM:** What core values have helped your family business succeed through the years?

CB: We run Hillcrest with old-fashioned values. Treat the customers the way you want to be treated. Honesty is our policy. We market our items based on the market conditions and try to protect our customers from some of the huge swings of commodity markets.

**SM:** Why does your company stand out in the industry? What have you done to create such a positive reputation over the years?

CB: We work very hard to provide the level of service that our customers expect. We sell quality products at a fair price and offer great service. My wife and I are at work all the time, we are hands on owners that take a lot of pride in our reputation and how we are perceived in the marketplace.

**SM:** Why is excellent customer service so important to you? How do you ensure that every customer receives the best service possible?

CB: At the end of the day, the only thing different from Hillcrest and our competition is the service. The true value of a company is how they handle their company when there is a problem. At Hillcrest, the customer is left with the knowledge that we did everything we could to resolve the issue. We are on the front lines of the operation and have a pulse on what is going on with our company. If we don't know there is a problem we can't fix it, so we are involved in all aspects.

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