



FIRST CHOICE INGREDIENTS

IN THE MIX

## Celebrating 25 Years of Growth and Innovation

**President Jim Pekar reflects on the wild ride and his keys to success**

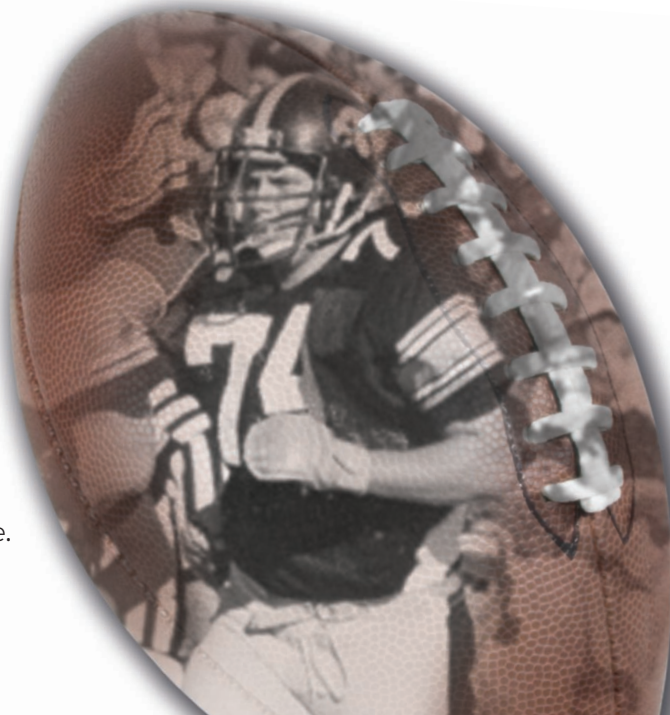
In early April this year, First Choice Ingredients celebrated its 25th anniversary in business. When FCI president Jim Pekar quit his sales job to follow his dream, he had no idea where it would go. But, he knew he could bet on himself. After all, he had done it before. Through his strong will and determination, he evolved from a 135 lb. high school freshman into a starting defensive tackle in the 1982 Rose Bowl for the Big Ten Champion Iowa Hawkeyes.

He learned a lot on the field that translated to success at FCI. "First and foremost, you need to have a great team around you," said Pekar. "You need to surround yourself with the best people available, brilliant minds who will help you raise your game. I've been fortunate enough to be able to do just that."

Pekar noted two such hires that really impacted FCI growth and development in the last 25 years. "Partnering with Roger Mullins in 1998 was critical to achieving our technological advantage, and getting Pam Gribou, an established industry veteran bringing her talents from Givaudan, was a statement to the industry. With these two leading our R&D, customers knew and still know, we can tackle any challenge out there. And the competition began to recognize us as a force to be reckoned with," said Pekar.

Pekar also notes that loyalty and consistency have been huge difference-makers, with over 33% of the entire team being with FCI for over a decade. "I've never really thought of FCI as a company in the traditional sense," said Pekar "I know it might sound cliché, but we're a family. I personally know every employee at each of our facilities. I know this makes a difference. We're invested in each other, and I believe it shows in our work ethic and quality."

Since 1994, FCI has grown from four employees to 120+, adding two major production facilities in Germantown, Wisconsin and one in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin. **(CONTINUED ON BACK)**



**"When a customer meets with us, I can look them straight in the face and say, 'There is no company out there who will outwork us.'"**

**Jim Pekar, President**





# How has FCI and the food business changed since 1994?

## A brief conversation with a few FCI innovators

### Brian Riesterer, Manager of Dairy Innovation:

When it comes to change, an easy answer for me would be options. 25 years ago, there were 4 main cheese flavors: Cheddar, Mozzarella, Monterey Jack and Swiss. Someone experimented with putting peppers in Monterey Jack, and that's how Pepper Jack was created. Now, peppers are in everything.

Today at FCI, we offer hundreds of different flavor profiles. Previously exotic offerings like Halloumi, Gouda, and Oaxaca, for example, are now commonplace. As populations continue to become more diverse, flavor demographics will continue to evolve and grow. We will continue to evolve and grow with them.



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Brian Riesterer, Manager of Dairy Innovation

### Pam Gribou, Director of R&D & Applications:

I agree with Brian that consumer behavior has really evolved both our business and the industry as a whole. I remember the food industry was all about fat-free 25 years ago. It didn't matter if sugar was the first ingredient as long as it was fat-free.



Today, dairy fat is looked at as good for you and authentic because consumers can recognize it in their refrigerators and pantries. This shift in consumer behavior makes our fermentation technology and clean label dairy concentrates more relevant than ever.

### Sally Derse, Quality Program Manager:

The kind of companies we partner with has really evolved too. From day one, Jim Pekar instilled that we need to make every customer feel like they are our only customer, no matter the size of their business. Hyper-focusing on customer service differentiated us. Today, it is pretty rare that a potential customer gives us a shot at their business and they don't become a customer for life.

So to me, one of the biggest changes has been the size and amount of business we do with large, legacy companies. Companies we dreamed of doing business with in 1994 are now our partners. Despite the ever-changing rules and regulations, our investment in talent, technology and expertise is what has kept us relevant and thriving.



### Brian Riesterer:

And with this growth and refinement, we also really expanded our network of partnerships. Collaboration with groups like IFT (Institute of Food Technologists), ADS (Association of Dressings & Sauces), CDR (Center for Dairy Research), RCA (Research Chefs Association) and so many others enable us to share information, resources and innovation like never before. It's an exciting time for FCI and the industry.





# Mind-blowing Buttery Brioche showcases our Butter Concentrates

## Stretch Budget and Maximize Flavor at the same time



Struggling to deliver baking solutions that meet consumer demands for clean labels and unique, authentic flavors at an affordable cost? Consider clean label, Kosher and GMO-Free Butter Concentrates from First Choice Ingredients. Derived naturally through fermentation, our butter concentrates are 5 times more concentrated than commodity butter and they taste A-M-A-Z-I-N-G!

By replacing even a small quantity of commodity butter you can see significant savings. Get all the details in our product replacement postcard series. Schedule a demo to do a side-by-side tasting and see for yourself. Contact Abby Pekar at [PekarA@fcingredients.com](mailto:PekarA@fcingredients.com) or 262.251.4322



## Cave-Aged Blue provides versatile, clean label option

For food companies looking to enhance their next product launch, First Choice Ingredients' new Cave-Aged Blue Cheese Concentrates are now available in powder, paste and liquid varieties. FCI's Cave-Aged Blue Cheese Concentrates are clean label, Kosher and organic, making them the ideal ingredients for today's label-focused consumers.

Through a unique partnership with regional artisan cheesemakers, which is very unique within the industry, FCI maintains strict control over the production process. From acquiring the organic milk to overseeing the cheese-making process, to aging the cheese at ideal humidity levels in Midwestern caves, the blue cheese we naturally ferment into our clean label concentrates is truly farm to table.

Our Organic Cave-Aged Blue Cheese is a versatile clean label ingredient that can

add a rich, creamy texture to mac and cheese entrees or provide a solid backbone to snack and seasoning mixes. The possibilities are endless. The concentrates are also very cost-effective. With raw, organic commodity cheese typically costing 2.5 times more than non-organic, the fact that FCI can create a concentrate that is up to 10 times stronger and doesn't make it proportionally more expensive, creates an opportunity for huge savings.



## 1994 FLASHBACK



**BIGGEST MOVIE -  
Forrest Gump**



**MOST POPULAR TV SHOW -  
Seinfeld**

**SUPER BOWL CHAMPION -  
Dallas Cowboys**



**WORLD SERIES CHAMPION -  
No one. MLB was on strike**

**THINGS LAUNCHED IN 1994 -  
Netscape web browser  
(there was a total of 2,738  
websites)**

**TV show Friends**



**Sony Playstation**

**MINIMUM WAGE -  
\$4.25/hour**



**AVERAGE PRICE OF A  
GALLON OF GAS -  
\$1.11**

**PRIME RATE -  
7.75%**





## UPCOMING TRADE SHOWS

To learn more about FCI, and meet us firsthand, make sure to check us out at the upcoming trade shows. To find out if we are exhibiting or attending, contact Sarah Newbauer at [NewbauerS@fcingredients.com](mailto:NewbauerS@fcingredients.com).

### October 2019

#### Agroprodmas 2019

October 7-11, 2019  
Moscow, Russia

#### Minnesota Section IFT Annual Suppliers' Expo

October 8, 2019  
Minneapolis Convention Center

#### Philadelphia Section IFT Suppliers Expo

October 23, 2019  
Pennsylvania Convention Center - Philadelphia, PA

#### Intermountain Section IFT Symposium

October 23-25, 2019  
Sun Valley Resort - Sun Valley, ID

#### Dogwood IFT Food Industry Expo

October 29, 2019  
Cabarrus Arena - Concord, NC

### November 2019

#### Chicago Section IFT Annual Suppliers' Expo

November 6, 2019  
Donald E. Stephens Center - Rosemont, IL

#### CIFST Ontario Section Suppliers' Night Tabletop Exhibition

November 12, 2019  
The International Centre - Mississauga, ON

#### Longhorn Section IFT Suppliers' Night

November 21, 2019  
Embassy Suites Dallas-Frisco Hotel - Frisco, TX



## Celebrating 25 Years (CONTINUED FROM COVER)

FCI has evolved from a "boutique dairy specialist" into one of the most respected and influential functional dairy ingredient manufacturers in the world. The FCI product line has evolved from six stock products to over 300 pastes, powders and liquids, with the ability to customize any product a customer can dream up.

According to Pekar, buying into the idea of team has not changed since he began FCI in the basement of his South Milwaukee home in 1994. "If everyone is on the same page, with the same goal, I believe you can accomplish anything," said Pekar.

"When a customer meets with us, I can look them straight in the face and say, 'There is no company out there who will outwork us.' You know how awesome it feels to be able to say that with such confidence? That's how much I believe in this team. I know we can do anything. So when I look back at 25 years and see all we have achieved, I think we're in a pretty great place, and I can't wait to see what the next 25 years has in store for us."



### Mihias Joins FCI Compliance Team

With the expansion to three large-scale production facilities, the FCI regulatory compliance team has also grown as Regulatory Compliance Specialist, Matt Mihas, has joined the company. With a food service related background, Matt's responsibilities include technical and regulatory work to ensure compliance with state and federal food laws and regulations. Matt will work with sales managers to provide regulatory information/documents to customers while also assisting First Choice in third-party, vendor and customer audits.

### Customer Service Expands with the Addition of Kim Kott

Problem solving, working directly with clients in the food service industry, and assisting with sales is second nature to new Customer Service Representative Kim Kott. With almost two decades of logistics and export experience, Kim will play a key role in our communication with customers as FCI expands its global reach. From tracking and processing orders to managing customer concerns, Kim will be a valued asset to the FCI team.



FCINGREDIENTS.COM | 262.251.4322  
Germantown, Wisconsin

