

Building a Movement

An Interview with Jim McCann,
Founder and Executive Chairman, 1-800-FLOWERS.COM, Inc.
and Chairman and President, Smile Farms Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE In 1976, Jim McCann bought his first of many retail flower shops in the New York metropolitan area. As his company expanded, McCann focused on innovation and being an early adopter of new technologies that enhanced customer engagement to grow his business. As a result, 1-800-FLOWERS.COM, Inc. was among the first to offer 24-hour service through an 800 phone number and to use the Internet for direct sales to customers, becoming AOL's first merchant partner of any kind in 1994. In 2015, the McCann family started Smile Farms Inc., a nonprofit organization that assists people with developmental disabilities.



Jim McCann

ORGANIZATION BRIEF The McCann family, who always had an innate belief that citizens, neighbors, coworkers, and friends should make a difference in the communities in which they work and live, created Smile Farms Inc. (smilefarms.org), a nonprofit organization. Smile Farms' mission is to partner with other nonprofit and for-profit organizations to create jobs for people with developmental disabilities in agricultural settings within their communities. With five farms based in New York and more on the horizon, Smile Farms is looking to continue building relationships to fund and establish additional "farms" nationwide.



Would you highlight the mission of Smile Farms?

Smile Farms Inc. is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that provides meaningful work in agricultural settings to individuals with developmental disabilities. The organization's mission is to build a movement that fosters a world where people with differing abilities are always fully included.

How did the idea of Smile Farms develop and what was your vision in creating the organization?

In September 2015, my family formally established Smile Farms Inc. Knowing firsthand the difficulties of integrating individuals with developmental disabilities into the community, we funded a year-round greenhouse operation to create much needed jobs for the developmentally disabled residents of Independent Group Home Living (IGHL) in Long Island, New York. Today, Smile Farms at IGHL employs 30 developmentally disabled adults, including my brother Kevin.

How has Smile Farms grown and where do you see additional opportunities for growth for the organization?

Since establishing our first Smile Farms campus in 2015, I'm proud to say we've expanded the organization's footprint by opening four additional locations, enabling us to provide meaningful work for a total of 73 individuals. Through strategic partnerships, these farms are located at organizations that provide educational programs and other valuable resources, including The Viscardi Center in Albertson, New York, Skills Unlimited in Oakdale, New York, League Education & Treatment Center in Brooklyn, New York and Cornell Cooperative in partnership with IGHL and Suffolk County in Yaphank, New York. Each location is unique, from their respective growing techniques to the distinct varieties of plants they grow, allowing employees to learn versatile skill sets through hands-on experience.



Kevin McCann (above) and others (lower left) working at Smile Farms

I absolutely see opportunities for Smile Farms' continued expansion. We have ongoing conversations with organizations to explore new opportunities to further the mission of Smile Farms nationwide.

How critical is it to have metrics in place to track the impact of Smile Farms' efforts?

It is increasingly important for nonprofits to evaluate metrics on operations and results. Donors want to know that they are receiving the best return on their investment. Effective nonprofits generally spend between 60 percent and 80 percent of total expenditures on programming, and we've quickly reached that threshold since opening our first campus in 2015. As we move forward, we'll continue to pay close attention to our organization's metrics in order to ensure we're operating as efficiently as possible.

Smile Farms has developed a talented board to guide its work. How important has it been to attract such an engaged board?

The Board provides the vision and support to help us move the organization forward. My family and I carefully selected Smile Farms' founding board members to contribute their expertise in different areas including law, finance, business development, agriculture, fundraising and more. We chose these individuals not only because they're exceptional at what they do, but because our mission is near and dear to their hearts. Each member has personally volunteered their time to work with our employees and see firsthand the fulfillment they enjoy. This level of engagement has been invaluable to the success of Smile Farms. ●