

Guiding Principles: Lynn Rundle

By Tanner Ehmke

Lynn Rundle, CEO of J&J Family of Farms, in Loxahatchee, Florida, has a lot on his plate at the farm and multigenerational produce company with 20-25 producers across Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Florida and Mexico. The company has over 500 employees at the peak of the season including seasonal labor to hand-pick the produce; a 1,200-acre farm growing peppers, cucumbers, squash, and eggplant; and a supply chain that stretches across the U.S. Rundle stresses that having a strong foundation of integrity and work ethic is necessary to hold the vast team together on a guided path forward. Lynn, who grew up on a Kansas dairy farm and was founder and CEO of 21st Century Grain Processing prior to leading J&J Family of Farms, points to eight guiding principles that define his leadership.

Have integrity: “I approach integrity on a faith basis. It’s been part of my life since I was in high school. There’s a lot of publicity about farm labor today. Are people taking care of farm labor? Today we call it social responsibility, but really, it’s just doing the right thing, which starts with having a strong moral compass.”

Build the right culture: “I try to build a culture of trust and accountability. You need to trust that your teammates are there for you, and you need to hold people accountable – and that’s for the CEO all the way down to the guy packing the box.”

Find the right people: “Find the people that share the same core values and who are willing to hold people accountable. You start out with that and build it in all of your employees.”

Lead by example: “You can say that you value integrity, collaboration, teamwork and trust. But you have to be it, and live it, because that’s ultimately what people are looking for. It’s something that you can’t mandate. Trust is something you have to earn.”

Plan for growth: “J&J is growing as we assimilate the best growers in the different growing regions into our family of farms. Today’s produce industry is all about supply chain management. Reducing the time between the field and the shelf is what will ultimately make us successful.”

Add value: “In our industry, adding value means more processing and more packaging. Whether you’re slicing or dicing – they don’t want to do it in the grocery store anymore – or enhancing the product through sizing and packaging, we are adding value by making our products more convenient.”

Be transparent: “We want to be transparent with our growers, and right now one of the big areas is food safety and helping our growers to be compliant with the new Food Safety Modernization Act. We’re taking an active role in helping our growers get up to speed on food safety and social responsibility.”

Be consistent: “Your customer values what you’re doing. You don’t let them down because they’re counting on you. They’ve got a store or a restaurant to run, and they’re counting on you to deliver. That’s our job.”