

## Driscoll's, Inc.

### A \$3 billion a year conventional agribusiness behemoth with an outsized influence in the organic marketplace and on USDA regulatory development and enforcement

#### Background

Producer of conventional and organic berries serving retail chains and supermarkets in the United States and Canada. The company provides fresh strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, and much more to its customers.

According to the company's website:

Driscoll's is the global market leader of fresh strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries. With more than 100 years of farming heritage, Driscoll's is a pioneer of berry flavor innovation and the trusted consumer brand of Only the Finest Berries™. With more than 900 independent growers around the world, Driscoll's develops exclusive patented berry varieties using only natural breeding methods that focus on growing great tasting berries. A dedicated team of agronomists, breeders, sensory analysts, plant pathologists and entomologists help grow baby seedlings that are then grown on local family farms. Driscoll's now serves consumers year-round across North America, Australia, Europe and China in over twenty-two countries.<sup>1</sup>

- Annual revenue: ~\$3 billion<sup>2</sup>
- In 2017, Driscoll's controlled roughly one-third of the \$6 billion U.S. berry market (Wikipedia). **Organic** makes up 15-20 percent of *Driscoll's business*<sup>3</sup>
- Jun 30, 2017: Driscoll's is developing and **adopting soilless growing systems** that allow for extremely precise irrigation and nutrient addition and makes the job

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<sup>1</sup> (<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/driscolls-newest-high-flavor-innovation-tropical-bliss-joins-rose-berries-and-sweetest-batch-in-the-grocery-aisle-301553754.html>)

<sup>2</sup> <https://agribusiness.purdue.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/6-driscoll-s-case-study.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> (<https://www.thesnack.net/article/featured/organic-insights-qa-with-driscolls-soren-bjorn/355/vol-21-connecting-the-world/eva-roethler/00351>)

easier for workers by placing fruit at eye level – referred to as Tabletop Strawberry System<sup>4</sup>

Here is a segment from the transcript of a YouTube video in which Rodney Benko, Director of Food Service at Driscoll's, discusses the system:

"...What we're looking at is a tabletop growing system where the plants are no longer in the ground, they're up off the ground. And certainly one of the key benefits of growing this way is it's going to make it so much easier for the harvester. That's one of the outcomes that you're looking for is to get more efficient and potentially to see where you can improve your overall production, because ultimately that could keep costs in check. It's very exciting for us to know that in the next couple years you're going to see a whole transformation of the Northern California, really the Salinas Watsonville districts, to similar types of production models - to be able to address the problem of not having enough hands to be able to pick."

- Driscoll's comments on growing blueberries in pots: **"if you grow in a pot, you can get substrate that is already certified organic. It doesn't depend on the land. You can be certified organic from day one."**<sup>5</sup> *[Note: Rather than waiting the required three-years, since the last use of any agrichemicals, as organic farmers have been legally required to do, it appears the USDA is allowing hydroponic operations to place their containers directly on land that has been treated with herbicides.]*

## Driscoll's and CCOF

From 2019 to 2023, **Driscoll's has donated as much as \$125,000 to CCOF** at the Visionary level (which "starts" at \$25,000 annually) and had ad inserts in the Inside

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qulcxohk4ds>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thesnack.net/article/featured/organic-insights-ga-with-driscolls-soren-bjorn/355/vol-21-connecting-the-world/eva-roethler/00351>

Certified Organic magazine between 2018 and 2022 (when the magazine ceased print publication) with estimated value of \$5,795. The Donor/Advertiser relationship analysis does not include certification fees.

## Press Releases

- **OTA member Driscoll's expands organic nursery plant program**  
Driscoll Strawberry Associates has made a commitment to supply all of its organic berry growers with organic nursery plants. Watsonville, California-based Driscoll's has had an organic nursery program certified by Santa Cruz-based California Certified Organic Farmers for the past seven years, according to a news release. The company currently has the only organic strawberry nursery certified by CCOF.<sup>6</sup>
- May 19, 2017: Making the **Confluences Summit** possible is a major grant from USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, Award # 2016-51300-2573. Other **sponsors include** Organic Valley, Farmers Advocating for Organic, MOM's Organic Market, Organic Farming Research Foundation, **Driscoll's**, Organic India, Annie's, Stonyfield, True Organic Products Inc., and Lehigh Valley Organic Growers Inc.

## OTA Connections — Joining with Agribusinesses and Financially Supporting the Lobby Group

- **October 11, 2012:** more than \$850,000 was raised for OTA In their annual campaign; more than 225 companies pledged funds to support OTA's work. The 20 Top investors, named to the Leadership Circle, include Driscoll's.<sup>7</sup>
- **OTA Member of the Year 2016:** During OTA's Annual Meeting, Carmela Beck of Driscoll's received OTA's 2016 Member of the Year Award. This special recognition, driven by OTA staff and endorsed by OTA's Board, was created to honor a truly

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<sup>6</sup> (<https://www.ota.com/news/industry-news/18242>)

<sup>7</sup> (<https://www.ota.com/news/press-releases/17082>)

engaged member, recognize engaged members who actively serve on member communities, participate in our events, and serve as overall ambassadors for the trade association and the organic community – *and donate considerable amounts of money (editor's note).*

- **2016 OTA Member of the Year- Carmela Beck, Annual Fund Host Committee Volunteer**

“Over the years, Carmela has proven to be a world-class member of the trade association. Each year, she leads Hill Visit teams as part of OTA's Policy Conference and is an enthusiastic supporter of Organic PAC. She has been an Annual Fund volunteer, and a valuable contributor on the international front, joining an OTA mission to Mexico to educate the Mexican government, industry and consumers on the U.S. organic industry and the National Organic Standards Board. She has been an active participant in OTA-led trainings with the Mexican SAGARPA and SENSICIA agencies, and co-presented with OTA at Expo Orgánico, Mexico's largest organic-only event. Moreover, she is an incredible ambassador for OTA and organic, engaging on social channels like Twitter, participating in campaigns, and increasing the reach of our messages.”

"Driscoll's has been a long-term OTA member and I have been an active member since 2010. Driscoll's Organic Program has grown to 15 percent of our business and will only continue to dramatically increase in the coming years. As OTA members we have relied heavily on the OTA for its leadership, expertise, advocacy, education, marketing and messaging capabilities," said Beck. "I am very honored by this recognition, and I look forward to continuing our collaboration and our life's work."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> (<https://www.ota.com/membership/member-year>)

Her award came subsequent to her lobbying of the hydroponic decision-making while a member of the National Organic Standards Board.

- **Sponsors for Organic Week 2023** events included Organic Valley, General Mills, Amy's Kitchen, Danone, Ardent Mills, Applegate, Stonyfield, **Driscoll's**, Oregon Tilth and Mercaris
- **Sponsors for the Organic Center's 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Benefit Dinner in 2018** included New Hope Network, Once Upon a Farm, National Co+op Grocers, UNFI, Nature's Path Foods, Organic Valley, DanoneWave, Annie's, Inc., Stonyfield Organic, Frontier Co-op, Whole Foods Market, Foster Farms, Braga Fresh Family Farms| Josie's Organics, **Driscoll's Inc.**, KeHE, Naturepedic, Clover Sonoma, Aurora Organic Dairy, Garden of Life, Nancy's Probiotic Foods, and Gallant International Inc.
- **Sponsors for the Organic Center's 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Benefit Dinner in 2017** included National Co+op Grocers, Annie's, Inc., Horizon Organic, Josie's Organics and Braga Fresh Family Farms, Nature's Path Foods, Inc, New Hope Network, Organic Valley, Aurora Organic Dairy, Blue Apron, Cal-Organic, Foster Farms, Frontier Co-op, UNFI, BPM LLP, Garden of Life, Luna & Larry's Coconut Bliss, KeHE, **Driscoll's, Inc.**, Stonyfield, and Whole Foods Market.<sup>9</sup>
- **OTA Sustainability Council Member: Driscoll's**
- **OTA Produce Council Member and Officer: Secretary - Emily Musgrave, Driscoll's, Inc.**

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ota.com/news/press-releases/19544>