



The Bean Machine

Vince Hayward, CEO of Camellia Brand Beans

Vince Hayward is deeply steeped in New Orleans culture. His family arrived in the city in the early 1800s and has been making an impact on the community with its locally famous beans ever since.

Now CEO of L.H. Hayward & Company, Vince Hayward had the makings of an entrepreneur at an early age. “I grew up bitten by the bug of business. From the age of ten, I would be out mowing neighborhood lawns, selling snowballs and even working as a bartender.” Now, at the head of the family business for the past five years, Hayward has not only sold more beans than any other distributor in the country but upholds a unique cultural cornerstone that knows no bounds of color, creed or economic class. Camellia Brand is close to reaching a century-mark in 2023.

Hayward represents the fourth generation of L.H. Hayward & Company, established in 1923 by his great-great-grandfather. His childhood memories of the business are mostly of the production side, where his father’s work was focused. “He was all about the machinery and plant operations,” recalls Hayward. “For a long time, I understood the company through that lens, without focusing on the bean itself,” he says. With maturity, he became aware of the numbers-side of the company and went on to major in Business at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette.

He learned the importance of retail sales while working as a manager of the New Orleans K&B drugstore company, before joining the Hayward family business in 1991. His professional introduction to Camellia Brand was as a salesman, driving throughout the region calling on grocery stores and long-term clients. “Camellia has maintained a strong presence in the marketplace, but on the road I learned the most important lesson, the value of relationships and friendships,” he explains.

Hayward’s grandfather had run the business as the owner and his father and uncle led it in partnership. In 2015, with this generation thinking of retirement, it was decided that a more formal corporate leadership was needed; Vince Hayward tossed his hat in the ring and emerged as CEO. His uncle, Ken Hayward, still reports to work every day as senior advisor, and the two have created an intentional corporate entity, which is ready to embrace its second century.

As CEO, Hayward actively promotes the brand, locally, regionally and nationally. Under his lead, Camellia now has a lively, interactive website featuring video-recipes by popular New Orleans chefs and personalities. In 2017, Camellia sponsored the exhibition *New Orleans: A Red Bean City* at The Southern Food & Beverage Museum. In recent years, the company has been behind Bean Madness, an online contest that takes place in the month of March with competition brackets such as ‘Sweet Bean-teen’ and ‘Final Fork’ that has the region in an all-out frenzy.

Vince Hayward has been instrumental in positioning his family history alongside one of the South’s most prominent and iconic dishes. “Red beans and rice are tightly woven into the fabric of the southern United States,” he says, noting that in New Orleans, it’s one dish that speaks profoundly to everyone. “It’s always been what’s for dinner on Monday. From the most modest diner to the *Grande Dame* French Quarter restaurants to your grandmother’s kitchen, any place you’d sit down to eat a meal, the cook will be serving

red beans and rice. The dish itself may have distinct variations, but they all start with Camellia. Our brand is inseparable from the identity of the dish, and the dish is ubiquitous. We're very proud of that, and of the hard work and ingenuity that's built our family legacy."

Over the course of generations, the Haywards have forged deep bonds with the farmers who grow their beans: in many cases, Vince Hayward is working with the grandchildren of growers who supplied his grandfather. This level of trust and understanding cannot be bought, and only develops with time.

Vince Hayward introduced the modern slogan for Camellia Brand, 'Gather 'Round,' because it speaks to the friendly, communal nature of a pot of beans, and the bond it creates with others. Yet the company's beans are at the forefront of more than just the comfort-food trend: "Eating red beans and rice is a tradition, but in recent years, we've been talking more and more about why you actually want to consume more beans in your diet," he says, adding that it's a food that checks all the 'benefit boxes,' as a fat-free plant-based protein that's high in fiber, heart-healthy, gut-healthy and far less taxing on the environment than animal protein. It's more or less perfect.

Another current trend that shines a positive light on Camellia Brand is the growing awareness of food sourcing, especially among young people. Hayward welcomes the powerful momentum of this movement, as his own single-ingredient product can bear any level of scrutiny, and, among growers, commands the highest standard in the industry.

The beloved brand is proud of its heritage, healthfulness and quality, plus the [unofficial] endorsement of Louis Armstrong, who famously signed his correspondence "*Red beans and ricely yours* –"

"We've learned a thing or two about quality in the past hundred years," says Vince Hayward, "My family's name is on every package, and we're not going to do anything to jeopardize the commitment to our consumers who have made Camellia Brand a staple of southern homes."

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