



From Start-Up to Sensation

On December 31, 2009, Jan Peters, President/CEO of the Great Bend Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development, spent her New Year's Eve on the phone with Howard Bloxam and Jeff Baikie, co-owners of Redbarn Pet Products. As the clock wound down towards midnight, she paused and asked, "So it's official?" Jeff and Howard looked at each other and nodded. "It's a deal," Jeff replied, "We're moving to Great Bend."

The Great Bend Packing Plant that Jeff and Howard purchased on December 31st closed in July of 2009 after employing 375 people for 27 years. As manufacturers of premium, natural pet products, Redbarn searched for a human-grade plant for years before finding the gem of Great Bend. As Howard explained, "We were looking for a new home for Redbarn. For us, it wasn't just the facilities at the plant or the fantastic wastewater treatment center; we loved the people. Jeff and I are both from small towns in Canada, and Great Bend felt very familiar to us." He paused, smiling, then added: "Plus, you can't beat the weather."

Redbarn opened operations in April of 2010 with just ten employees who'd relocated from Long Beach, CA. Now, they're a top 10 employer in Great Bend with over 275 employees across a variety of departments. Redbarn manufactures over 200 unique products, with every product checked for quality and safety in Great Bend before shipping to distribution centers or international partners in Canada, Dubai, and Guatemala.

It's not just international growth that helped Redbarn grow, but domestic business as well. Since 2010, the pet industry grew dramatically. Pet ownership in the U.S. stands at 68%, which means that 84.6 million households own a pet. In 2010, the American Pet Products Association estimated that the total spending on pets topped 48 billion. Just six years later, that figure grew to 66 billion for the 2016 annual year. Much of the industry growth is driven by increased consumer desire for natural and premium pet products, like the bully sticks, food and natural chews that Redbarn manufactures. According to Jeff, "it was vital to us to find a home in America's heartland. The proximity of Great Bend and Kansas to the raw materials, like the beef and wheat we need for our products, is a huge reason why we have been so successful since we moved."

In the eight years since Redbarn Pet Products called Great Bend home, the business has signed new contracts with their primary partners like Petco and PetSmart. They're also ardent supporters of independent businesses, supplying products to over 4,500 independent pet stores across the country. Locally, Redbarn Products can be purchased at the Heart of Kansas store in Great Bend.

In the past ten years, Great Bend added 1,300 jobs, totaling a 170 million dollar investment in the community. As a family-owned company, Redbarn is proud to be a part of that growth. Since moving into the plant, they've invested heavily in the facilities. To better keep up with demand, Redbarn added a brand-new 35,000 square foot warehouse to hold finished products.



As Patrick Serna, Plant Superintendent, said, "When we were looking at the plans, I never thought we'd be able to fill it. I walk down the full aisles every day and can't believe how much we've grown." In 2016, Redbarn invested over 4 million dollars into their Great Bend plant, working on projects like the installation of a new roof, ammonia system and new 4000 square foot freezer. Plant Manager, Kevin Corbett remarked that "We always feel that we still have a lot of work to do in our plant, but we are making great progress every day thanks to the team we have assembled here in Great Bend. I'm proud of all that we've invested into our facilities to make them the best in the business." Redbarn also built a new retained sample building and invested in new Neogen in-house lab testing that allowed the Quality Assurance department to reduce test times on things like yeast and mold from 5 days to 24 hours and reduce salmonella testing time from 48 hours to 24 hours. "We've installed, renovated and added these improvements to our plants because we don't cut corners. Jeff and I believe that there is a right way to do business and that involves making safe products in a safe environment for our employees", added Howard.



“ I moved to Great Bend in 2010 for Redbarn. Just like my coworkers, this community is my family and my home. Living in a family-oriented community like Great Bend brought me closer to my daughters and I'm forever grateful for that. ”

The 'right' way to do business extends beyond Redbarn's growth as a company. Employees take being a family-owned company to heart every day. "You're part of a family at Redbarn. We take that seriously", said Patrick. With 25 employees located at the company headquarters in Long Beach, CA, and an additional 15 members of the sales force distributed nationally, the bulk of the Redbarn "family" calls Great Bend and the surrounding area home. As Patrick added, "I moved to Great Bend in 2010 for Redbarn. Just like my coworkers, this community is my family and my home. Living in a family-oriented community like Great Bend brought me closer to my daughters and I'm forever grateful for that."

At the Great Bend plant, there are 275 employees spanning across a variety of departments. Shipping, Purchasing, and Product Development are all headquartered in Great Bend, along with the bulk of the company's production workforce. "We think the diversity of the skillsets and employees at our Great Bend plant enable us to think creatively as a company," remarked Lucy Salerno, Human Resources Manager. She added, "Not many people know that all of the jobs at our plant start above minimum wage. We stay competitive to make sure that we're finding and retaining the best people for our 'family'. Our people are worth the investment." Some Redbarn 'family' traditions span back to the company's founding, twenty years ago. Every Thanksgiving, all Redbarn employees get a gift card redeemable for a holiday Turkey or Ham. They sponsor 4th of July Barbeques, Halloween costume contests and throw a plant-wide Christmas party every year where they give out Chamber of Commerce gift cards. As Jeff remarked, "We are forever grateful to the employees that help us achieve our goals every day. They empower us to grow every day." The 'family' spirit even extends to the relationship Redbarn developed with the Golden Belt Humane Society in Great Bend. Since Redbarn relocated to Great Bend, they've donated treats and food, in addition to helping sponsor community events like the annual Harvest parade with Golden Belt.

As the company looks toward the future, they are excited about the changes coming to Great Bend. They recently announced pet industry veteran, Jeff Sutherland, as the new President of Redbarn. The former President of the Breeder's Choice Pet Food program at Central Pet Supply and Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Animal Supply Company, Jeff has over 30 years of experience helping companies in the pet industry thrive. "I am so excited to work with such a respected company," said Jeff Sutherland, before adding, "Redbarn's position in the marketplace as a leading treat and chew manufacturer is especially exciting, as there are so many opportunities to grow, expand our product offerings and branch out into new categories." With the emphasis on growth and keeping their pipeline full of new and innovative products, Redbarn seems set for a bold future in Great Bend.

