Where Business and Farmers ‘Thrive’

Behind a coffee company’s new business model

The cards, photos and paper issued in “Where Business and Farmers Thrive” by Tom Matthesen features a coffee company that gives farmers wider participation in the entire supply chain. Rather than simply writing the beans, farmers are stakeholders in the entire system, receiving more of the profit as coffee moves from the farm to the consumer. Farmers are also better able to sell their beans and make the most of the coffee, meaning they have a fixed income for the coffee and higher earnings. This creates a “halo effect” for communities, who are increasingly seeking out brands committed to social justice.

This approach is disruptive and allows for a stricter adherence to the standard business model of coffee companies, which can be more difficult to control. By giving the farmers more control and visibility, the company is able to provide more transparency and accountability, encouraging them to stay with the company.

Tom Matthesen, who is a member of a Vistage CEO peer group in Atlanta, often finds himself speaking with other CEOs about going beyond traditional corporate social responsibility models and taking “good” into for-profit models. He says: “It’s all about the people.”

The new coffee company places the farmer first, and offers more than $300 per pound in profits, ranking 15th on the 2018 Inc. 500 list of most growing companies. It also offers a 401(k) plan for farmers and supports community initiatives.

“Have a vision,” he says. “It’s all about the people.”

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