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Liz Myslik / photos Jonathan Castner

## Fresca Foods

by Eric Peterson on November 19, 2013, 01:13 pm MST  
Louisville, Colorado  
[www.frescafoodsinc.com](http://www.frescafoodsinc.com)

Founded: 1993  
Employees: 250  
Privately owned

### **Fresca Foods is helping lift Colorado's food brand to national heights, led by a management team remodeling the industry**

Fresca Foods started as Pasta Fresca in East Boulder, selling pasta, sauces, and soups to retail customers and wholesale accounts.

Wholesale overtook retail, and the company began its evolution into a manufacturer that partners with promising food brands. Today it partners with eight different brands, many of them in Colorado.

The company pivoted to its brand-partner model when Todd Dutkin joined the company in 2003, and Fresca has averaged 45 percent annual growth in the decade since.

"He wanted to build a company that would be a partner to food businesses," says Liz Myslik, CEO of Fresca Brands and Executive VP of Fresca Foods.

Larabar was the company's first partner brand in the early 2000s. It sold to General Mills in 2008, but the maker of raw food bars remains a Fresca brand partner to this day.

Myslik touts that 90 percent of Fresca's partners have gone from local to national brands in five years or less.



Today the company has 250,000 square feet of manufacturing and warehouse facilities in Boulder County and vicinity. Its manufacturing is 100 percent wind-powered.

Current partner brands include White Girl Salsa, 34 Degrees, Rocky Mountain Popcorn, and Love Grown Foods.

34 Degrees, launched in 2003 by Craig Lieberman, makes, Australian-style crisp crackers. It now distributes to small shops, Walmart, and even retailers in Mexico.

Lieberman initially imported crackers, but decided in 2007 to start making them in Colorado. "We wanted more control over the product and make it closer to home," he says. "I needed to find a great partner."

He says Fresca emerged as "the clear choice." Six years later, 34 Degrees has grown by about 800 percent. "It's been a great partnership," says Lieberman. "It's a win-win."

This is because it allows both parties to play to their strengths. "Craig and his team can focus on building their brand and Fresca takes care of building their products," says Myslik. "They do what they do best and we do what we do best. It's a beautiful partnership."

"Fresca's model is to take on products with an established demand," explains Myslik. "We evaluate like a venture capitalist does." She says they look for the "four Ps" -- product, people, profit, and proof of concept. "We're looking for very dynamic, authentic, savvy entrepreneurs."

Such was the case with Love Grown Foods. The company started in Aspen and moved to Denver after landing distribution with Kroger. The company had its granola on the shelves at King Soopers before it was available at Whole Foods, an atypical path for a natural-foods business, and joined forces with Fresca in 2011.

"The reason so many high-growth, early-stage companies fail is they can't keep up with demand," says Myslik. "We invest the cash to make sure the products make it on the shelves. It frees up a tremendous amount of resources for them."

Before joining Fresca, Myslik founded The Zam Group in 2006, which Fresca acquired as a brand-management division in 2011. "The reason we joined forces was to expand and fully integrate Fresca's capabilities," she says of the merger.

Fresca Foods is "our supply-chain and manufacturing business," she explains. "That's the bulk of our business."

Myslik says Fresca Brands will introduce one new, Freca-owned brand a year, give or take.

The first, debuting in late 2013, is Snack Out Loud Foods, a line of crunchy, protein-rich bean snacks.



**Challenges:** "One challenge is continuing to find great people," says Myslik. "We're constantly in a state of hiring." About 200 of the company's 250 employees work in production, and it doesn't help that Boulder County has a high cost of living, she adds.

**Opportunities:** "There is no end," says Myslik. "We feel very fortunate to be at the epicenter of a movement for healthier eating and healthier living."

**Needs:** "One more hour in the day," laughs Myslik. "We're literally a 24/7 operation. There are so many projects."

- See more at: <http://companyweek.com/company-profile/fresca-foods#sthash.Yr3f0zMk.dpuf>