

RICHARD'S WHOLE FOODS

In 1979, John Rorer had no idea he would one day own a chain of whole food marts founded that same year by Richard Downey. Just a few years later, Rorer was managing a natural foods store before he co-founded Rollin' Oats, a natural foods mart based in St. Petersburg. "Once I was involved in the industry, it struck me that, not only did I enjoy running a business, I felt good about what I was doing," Rorer recalls. "I could go home happy because inevitably every day I would help somebody." In 1997, Rorer and his partners took over Richard's Whole Foods, and in 2005, Rorer bought out his partners. He has since grown Richard's from six stores to 11 and a warehouse.

With Richard's, Rorer says he's filling a niche in the natural foods industry. His business model is to have a small footprint in multiple locations with an emphasis on bulk and by-the-case sales. "In most natural foods stores, bulk sales represent a minimal percentage of sales," he explains. "For us, bulk foods represent about 30 percent of sales." And, he adds, bulk requires little to no packaging and lets people buy as much or as little as they need.

By providing the consumer with organic and earth-friendly products and pursuing green alternatives as a business, Richard's is helping people live a more sustainable, green lifestyle. "Sometimes we feel the issue is so big, we say, 'What can we do?'" Rorer explains. He says when you look at the big picture, "the world is small, we're all united, and all of these actions each of us do as individuals—just like pennies add up to dollars—allow us to take control. We can start contributing on an individual level, through our businesses, our communities—and we start to make a change."



JOHN RORER, PROPRIETOR

WHAT MAJOR GREEN TRENDS WILL DEFINE THE FUTURE?

The growth we were seeing in the natural foods industry in the late '80s was tremendous, but I didn't see a comparable awareness in green or sustainable living. In the last five to eight years, there's been another leap. Consumers now are exceptionally aware of their environment and sustainable living, and the children of the boomers are now pushing the agenda even harder.

As we progress technologically, we're starting to see some of the impacts of some of the innovations and technologies we've developed—they might be causing cancers, allergies or chemical sensitivities. You can come to Richard's and find [a cleaning

product] that's largely citrus oils, which do a wonderful job of cleaning and disinfecting. Chemical sensitivities and allergies are just one aspect driving people to natural products.

Natural products, whether foods or household products, are starting to go mass market. I think the trend is going to continue. Trends going beyond this industry, I think we're still searching for the next oil. I don't think ethanol is going to be the long-term solution. Something important to us in Sarasota is water. I think water is still seen as a cheap commodity. We need to figure out a good economical way of rapid desalination or quick, inexpensive reverse osmosis, so that we can recycle water in a better sense.



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Richard's Whole Foods specializes in natural and organic foods, supplements and environmentally-friendly household products. The store's hundred or so bulk products also reduce wasteful product packaging and afford green-minded consumers the convenience of purchasing as much or as little as they need.