

Helms Farms Creates Next Generation Crop

BY MATT HELMS



Our passion for popcorn and a deep family history of farming across seven generations stirred our interest in exploring a new family farming business. While the family's original Helms Farms in Belleville, IL, carries on with corn and soybean crops as generations have done since the 1850s, we wanted to add a new

crop whose harvests could be enjoyed for generations to come. It was especially important for us to create something that would excite our daughter, Lily, and allow her a unique way to connect with the community through the family farm.

Large scale production of traditional grains does not provide the opportunity to interact directly with consumers. In growing popcorn, our goal was to produce something that would allow us to engage with local business owners and the everyday customers who enjoy our product. We eat a lot of popcorn at our house, so the choice was simple - popcorn would become the next generation of our family farming business.

Ella & Ollie Popcorn began with our first crop of 2 acres in 2017. Our name emerged from a desire to connect our past heritage with future generations. Ollie is Matt's grandpa, a fourth generation Helms family farmer, and Ella is our seventh-generation daughter's middle name.

Ella and Ollie has been in business for four years, growing 65 acres for 40 retailers, gourmet popcorn shops, kettle-corn stands, and movie theaters. We work with three of the top popcorn breeders in the U.S. to select specific modern hybrids to grow for the different segments and tastes of our customer base. We have evolved from growing our first, signature-heirloom variety, to now growing five distinct varieties of specialty popcorn.

Our signature popcorn, sold at retailers and online, is an heirloom variety - meaning it has not been crossbred with other popcorn genetics in over 50 years - maintaining more of its nutritional value and offering a higher quality taste. Our other four hybrids include white, butterfly, and two mushroom varieties.

Butterfly is a favorite among movie-theater clients because the popped kernel spreads out to catch all the yummy buttery salty flavor. Our mushroom varieties are grown for gourmet popcorn shops and kettle-corn producers, offering little to no hull and a large, round ball for flavorings to stick to.

We are having fun connecting the farm to other popcorn lovers and small businesses with sustainability as a strong focus. In addition to sustainable farming practices, we use glass packaging instead of plastic and sell other items that encourage reuse and less waste.

Our silicone microwave popcorn popper is an ecofriendly and convenient way to make popcorn quickly with no waste (and higher nutritional value than microwave bag popcorn). We also sell various "jar toppers" for customers to repurpose their glass jars into oil cruets and salt/seasoning shakers.

Matt, Michelle and Lily Ella Helms live in Webster Groves, and our popcorn farm is in Belleville, IL - just 16 miles from the Arch. Our first retailer was Freddie's Market in Webster Groves, and we also work with Roger's Produce and Rolling Ridge in Webster Groves along with various other retailers, shops and businesses in the St. Louis area, as well as our online business.

Check out our website www.EllaOlliePopcorn.com for location of local retailers, gourmet popcorn stores, kettle corn companies, and movie theaters popping with Ella & Ollie.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED
BY MATT HELMS

7 Generation Farm Locally Grown

Enjoy family movie night with Ella & Ollie Popcorn or give as a gift to friends and family.



Quality Fresh Popcorn
Sold locally at:

Roger's Produce

Freddie's Market

Rolling Ridge Nursery

& Other Retailers Throughout
Greater St. Louis

ELLA
OLLIE
popcorn

Online at www.EllaOlliePopcorn.com