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Diggin' it

Cannabis-focused soil could be agricultural gamechanger

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John-Paul Maxfield likes to think big and to create.

The CEO and founder of Waste Farmers and Batch 64 didn't start a company just to make or sell a product. He got into business to change the world, and he wants the company he started to last for generations.

"I want to build one of the great, most responsible companies that's ever been built," Maxfield said. "When we started, I didn't understand what the appeal was of starting a company for other reasons."

"From my perspective, a company is an incredible lever – one of the most powerful levers – for accomplishing systemic change," he said.

What business is Maxfield in? Dirt, mainly.

Maxfield's Denver-based Waste Farmers blends and sells specialty organic soils and amendments with names such as Moonshine, Golden Ratio and Pioneer that are formulated for high yields when growing cannabis. Other products are for indoor food growing too.

Maxfield is a family man: a father to three young kids, and a husband. The 39-year-old Colorado native also makes music in his band, Coaltown Reunion, which just released a new album.

Making music with the band is a lot like business – intriguing in how each person's ideas and talent come together in a whole, he said.

"I love creating, whether it's music or through the company."

Growing up with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, he learned to schedule his entire days – not just business hours – weeks and months in advance, planning out each half hour. He's found being structured about his time allows him to be present.

Maxfield founded Waste Farmers in 2009 after a stint as a data analyst in the private equity industry, losing his job at the outset of the Great Recession.

Waste Farmers gathered food scraps for composting from Denver schools and



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JOHN-PAUL MAXFIELD

Title: CEO, founder

Company:
Waste Farmers
and Batch 64

Website: wastefarmers.com

Craziest moment: Being surrounded by a herd of agitated elephants protecting their young in Botswana, Africa.

restaurants. Snooze and Chipotle were customers. In 2012, it sold its routes and used the proceeds to develop its subsidiary Batch 64.

His company owns a production facility in Delta, which lies in western Colorado between Grand Junction and Montrose, and sells farm products from some of its food customers.

Waste Farmers surpassed \$3 million in annual revenue, and Maxfield expects that to grow as it develops more products for its customers growing cannabis.

That industry has grown 42% in the past five years, and with recreational marijuana legalization spreading to more states that growth is likely to accelerate, Maxfield said.

It's an expanding field attracting people interested in researching new, sustainable ways of growing, he continued, saying he predicts the legalized cannabis industry will help

transform agriculture more broadly.

"Cannabis is a gateway to more farming," he said. "It's got some wisdom, like the Willie Nelson of the plant world, and it's making people wake up."

Maxfield made Waste Farmers a holding company and registered it as a B Corp., meaning it's committed to transparency and balancing profit with a social and environmentally conscious purpose.

Maxfield points to the fact that Waste Farmers employees in Delta have started their own farm and opened a daycare center.

He's more interested in seeing employees leave for such pursuits than building a high-growth business for short-term gain.

Entrepreneurs tend to be idolized in today's culture, Maxfield said, but the image of entrepreneurship being a sexy endeavor for someone single-mindedly focused on a goal doesn't fit reality.

"It's a pretty hard slog with a lot of mistakes," he said. "And if you're among the 4% [of startups] that get above \$1 million in sales, it's a lot of luck and making the most of it."

Entrepreneurship is as much about discovery as anything, he says.

"You want to learn about yourself, the best and the worst parts? Start a company. Try that journey."