

John M. Fox

1912-2003

by Seth Stutman

As one of the founders of Minute Maid and a frozen foods pioneer, John M. Fox helped put Florida on the national radar while revitalizing the ravaged, post World War II economy. He also created a market for frozen food where there previously was none, and became one of the foremost suppliers of frozen products in the United States.

Fox was born in Esher, England, in 1912 and came to the United States in 1914. After spending his youth in Atlantic City, Fox was accepted to Colgate University in the fall of 1930 with little money for tuition. Always a hard worker, Fox made his payments by spending time as a gas station attendant, shoe salesman, waiter and insurance salesman.

After graduation, Fox joined the sales department at International Business Machines (IBM) in Worcester, Mass. This was followed by a position with the National Research Council, where he was soon promoted to the vice president of sales, finance and administration. At the NRC, Fox was introduced to the vacuuming process of dehydrating products for consumption. This is where the story of concentrated orange juice began.

During World War II, the NRC began to develop a process that turned orange juice into powder. The U.S. Army bid out a production contract, and Fox fought hard to make sure it was his. Shortly after, the Army, noting that the war was close to an end, rescinded the contract. Infuriated, Fox flew to Washington and cajoled many hard-nosed officials to reconsider. He emerged successful and, even after the war ended, had secured enough capital to build a plant for his orange experiments. Instead of supplying troops with vitamin C, Fox would be selling the public on his wild idea.

Fox built his first plant in Plymouth, Florida. There, he began working on powdered juice that met with mixed results—the vacuum process made for a mediocre-tasting powder, which Fox knew would not quench the thirst of a public with sophisticated palates. Thus, he created an intermediate step in the vacuuming process that removed the majority of water from the orange. He then froze this portion, which, when combined with water, gave drinkers a more natural orange taste and remained portable and inexpensive.

Now all the juice needed was a name that reflected its ease of preparation. With the help of a Boston-based marketing firm, the Henry Loudon Agency, Fox settled on Minute Maid, a reference to the speedy and reliable Minutemen militia and an indication of the ease with which juice could be made.

With a limited advertising budget, Fox traveled door-to-door in his neighborhood in Hingham, Mass., and gave out samples of the concentrated product from his car's ice-filled trunk. His endeavors were met with satisfied customers, and in 1946, (the first year of operation) sales were more than \$300,000. From there, concentrated juice became a national treat. By 1955, sales at Minute

Maid reached \$106.5 million, and Fox opened plants across Florida. His success revolutionized the state economy and brought prosperity to fruit growers in Florida and California.

In 1948, Fox hired Bing Crosby as Minute Maid's spokesman, who wisely bought stock in the company before his sponsorship hit the airwaves. Crosby's CBS show was sponsored by Minute Maid and he worked with the company for three decades, creating commercials and jingles. Over time, Minute Maid branched out, creating Hi-C products and other juice concentrates.

In 1960, Coca-Cola took notice of the juice giant and purchased the company. Fox left the company, but his infatuation with fruit propelled him to the United Fruit Company, where he was president from 1960 to 1970. During his time at United Fruit, Fox explored the art of branding, and collaborated on ideas such as placing the blue stickers directly on Chiquita Bananas. After a decade at United Fruit, Fox returned to Boston, where he became the chairman at H. P. Hood, a dairy company. In 1978, Fox retired and moved to Winter Park.

In his years in the food industry, John M. Fox revolutionized the juice market, stood up to Washington and explored the power of branding. Minute Maid created many jobs for Floridians and aided the state's fruit farmers. Although Fox passed away in 2003, his spirit lives on in frozen foods sections worldwide. 

