



# Kai Stark

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Ethical & Sustainable Sourcing | Partnership-Building | Trust Based Leadership | Mutually Beneficial Solutions Architecting | Strategic Commodity Management | Integrity Driven Decision Making | Deep Data Analysis | Building Brand Differentiation and Competitive Advantage Via Sourcing | Organic, Non-GMO and Fair Trade Expertise

## Summary

I have spent the majority of two decades travelling the world, developing premium sources for ethically produced and ecologically sustainable organic spices, herbs, teas, vanilla, essential oils and ingredients. I have worked with cooperatives and marginalized farmers around the globe to help bring their products to market, including the first Fair Trade Certified spices to be sold in the United States. I am passionate about developing long term, sustainable partnerships that benefit producers at origin and brand owners alike.

## Experience

### **Director of Purchasing: Frontier Co-op, Norway, IA**

**Mar 2018 – Feb 2021**

As Director of Purchasing, I led a team of 9 in managing \$78 million (13.2 million lbs, 250+ unique commodities and 896 skus) in annual acquisitions from 194 suppliers in over 40 countries. This covered Frontier's entire breadth of spices, herbs, teas, essential oils, vanillas, and ingredients. Additionally, I oversaw the purchasing of \$14 million of retail products from other leading brands in the natural products industry (298 vendors, 7,500+ skus) for Frontier's direct distribution business.

- Limited Frontier's indexed cost of spices to a 21% increase during the period of 2007-2020 versus an indexed MINTEC industry increase of 66%. This was accomplished by creating a more direct supply chain that cut out "coyotes" and non-value add middlemen, allowing savings to be split between Frontier and long-term grower partners at origin.
- Developed, managed and executed Frontier's vanilla purchasing strategy through the largest vanilla crisis in history. Limited Frontier's peak price increase to only 590% of our FY08 cost basis vs a MINTEC market peak of 1471% by anticipating vanilla's long-term boom/bust crop cycle. This translated to a competitive price advantage at retail that allowed Frontier to capture additional market share and realize a 75% increase in vanilla demand.
- Built a dynamic 5-year commodities roadmap framework to model the impact various decisions would have on Frontier's future supply chain (i.e. Frontier's growth potentially outstripping supplier capacity, annual future spend per supplier, organic %, Well Earth certified %, single source risks, etc.) to validate strategic direction and create tangible goalposts to measure progress YOY.
- Managed a 70% sales volume increase during COVID-19 pandemic without any major gaps in raw material supply while simultaneously implementing a new ERP system.
- Helped expand Frontier's supply chain sustainability program, Well Earth, to encompass 72% of all agricultural purchases (229 raw materials from 54 suppliers) in FY20.
- Designed and implemented purchasing reporting mechanisms for root cause analysis of and reason code tracking for stock outs; this allowed for trend analysis and stock out impacts (lost sales \$ / impacted customer orders) to be attributed to specific suppliers during annual vendor report carding process.
- Assisted in rolling out version 2.0 of Frontier's Well Earth sustainability program, which moved from a binary certification scheme to a good/better/best model to promote continuous improvement of suppliers.
- Worked to help initiate 52 business building and community support projects with Well Earth suppliers between 2007 and 2020; these projects totaled \$2.1 million in total supply chain investment and ranged from farmer training and clean water accessibility projects to supplier optical sortation equipment, grower crop diversification and commercialization, as well as building schools for children in grower communities.
- Helped Frontier to win Whole Food's 2019 Trailblazer award based on the success of Frontier's Well Earth program.
- Traveled extensively to 27 countries, sourcing spices, herbs, teas, ingredients and essential oils, regularly spending 8-12 weeks per year overseas working with grower partners since 2006.

**Purchasing Manager: Frontier Co-op, Norway, IA** **Feb 2010 – Mar 2018**

During my tenure as Purchasing Manager, I led a team of 5 and oversaw all aspects of commodity related procurement for Frontier's Food & Flavors division. This constituted an annual spend of \$49 million, broken into 159 distinct commodities (653 skus – spices/herbs/vanilla/teas/ingredients).

- Optimized safety stocks for raw materials based on supply risk, annual sales \$ impact, production schedule impact and carry cost factors; this resulted in fewer raw material supply gaps without increased inventory \$ levels.
- Helped take Frontier's Well Earth 1.0 program from inception in 2007, to covering 51% of all Food & Flavors agricultural commodities in 2018.
- Initiated and managed the setup of Frontier's co-packing with a key supply partner in Turkey.
- Managed long term contracting against complex crop cycles and unsophisticated supply chains.
- Helped win Whole Food's Supplier of the Year award twice (2013 and 2016) via Frontier's differentiated sourcing model.
- Pushed Frontier's steam sterilization food safety initiative forward to include 89% of all spices and herbs (including garlic).

**Commodity Manager: Frontier Co-op, Norway, IA** **Jan 2006 – Feb 2010**

As Commodity Manager, I worked with 2 direct reports and was responsible for sourcing, contract negotiation and procurement of all organic and conventional spices, ingredients and vanilla related commodities.

- Worked with Transfair USA (now Fair Trade USA) to bring the first Fair Trade spices and vanilla into the United States (2009).
- Managed over \$5.3 million in international purchases annually, \$13.8 million in total (domestic and international).
- Reduced inbound quality non-conformance rate for organic spices by 41% between 2006 and 2010, leading to lower stock out rates to customers.
- Tasked with developing premium sources for ethically produced and ecologically sustainable spices and ingredients via Frontier's Well Earth program.

**Production Planning Manager: Frontier Co-op, Norway, IA** **Aug 2004 – Jan 2006**

While holding the position of Production Planning Manager, I led a team of 4 direct reports and was responsible for the scheduling of nearly 3,000 unique manufactured items across 10 production lines.

- Managed the operational piece of three major product line introductions and was able to maintain a service level of 100%, even when demand exceeded initial forecasts by a factor of 20.
- Coordinated the implementation of best by dates across all Food & Flavors product lines.
- Developed a new and more useable capacity planning report from scratch.
- Participated in inventory reduction teams to reduce excess inventory by \$395,000 in FY 05.

**Production Planner: Frontier Co-op Norway, IA** **Dec 2001 – Aug 2004**

As a Production Planner, I created and maintained schedules for multiple production lines and managed Frontier's contract manufacturing activities from Sept. 2002 - Sept. 2003.

- Instituted scheduling processes for Frontier's seasoning mix category; alleviated shelf life issues and reduced high stock out rates to zero for over 10 consecutive months.
- Effected a new scheduling methodology for a sequence limited machine (due to color, taste profile, allergens) that reduced the number of units missing the sequence (thus running on alternate, more expensive lines) by over 80%.
- Initiated and carried out multiple studies to optimize ERP system planning factors and settings.
- Coordinated the verification and shipment of all raw material inventories during the moving of Frontier's California-based Aura Cacia manufacturing plant back to Iowa, limiting total production shutdown to only 15 days.
- Participated in inventory reduction teams to reduce excess inventory by over \$500,000 in FY 04.

**Buyer: Frontier Co-op, Norway, IA** **May 2001 - Dec 2001**

As a Buyer, I released and managed purchase orders for teas, food ingredients, essential oils and packaging, ensuring that materials arrived in time to meet production schedule demands.

- Held responsibility for tea contracting and MRO items.
- Helped to test purchasing modules during transition to PRMS ERP system.

## **Education**

**University of Iowa, 2009**  
**Master of Business Administration**  
Graduated with Honors

**University of Northern Iowa, 2001**  
**Bachelor of Arts: Management - Supply Chain and Operations**  
Magna Cum Laude

## Certifications

American Production and Inventory Control Society (APICS), 2004  
CPIM: Certified in Production and Inventory Management

## Activities / Awards

- 2019 American Spice Trade Association Annual Conference Speaker and Panel Member
  - *Paving the Path to Organic: Perspectives from Field to Consumer* (Panel)
  - *Organics - More Than Just Paperwork* (Kai Stark)
- University of Northern Iowa College of Business: 2017 Management Alumni in Residence
- Frequent guest speaker for business classes at the University of Iowa (Iowa City, IA), University of Northern Iowa (Cedar Falls, IA) and Mount Mercy University (Cedar Rapids, IA)
- Eagle Scout
- University of Northern Iowa Distinctive Scholar
- Winner of the University of Northern Iowa John Pappajohn New Venture Competition (2000)