

OUR FAVORITE FOODS

DUKER'S DILLS TO PARTNER BRAND



THE JOURNEY

IDEATION & PLANNING

A trip to fancy food and bringing grandma's recipe to market

LOCAL FARMERS & SOURCING

Partnering with local growers

PRODUCTION & CO-PACKING

Learning about packaging produce and the time constraints of the harvest

PRODUCTS & FORECASTING

Good Food, Fancy Food, Farmer's Markets, Events and landing the first retail accounts

REASSESSING & TRANSITIONING

Expecting the unexpected

BETSY'S TIPS & RESOURCES

The best ways to prepare for success



IDEATION & PLANNING



BETSY WALTON

Founder

Pickling has always been a part of the Walton family. Every year during peak harvest season, Betsy Walton and her family would come together to can pickles using her Grandmother Rose's recipe.

Betsy and her Husband, Duke, had continued the family tradition of making pickles from the seasonal harvest and gifting them to friends and family, but they had not ever tried to commercialize them.

After retiring from a successful merchandising career at Adidas, Betsy was looking for her next adventure. She and a friend attended the Fancy Food show in San Francisco which sparked her interest in starting a food business.

Armed with her Grandmother Rose's recipe, a talent for pickling, and some gentle nudges from pickle-loving-friends, Betsy decided to try to transform her pickling hobby into a business.

A friend recommended she enroll in the Getting Your Recipe to Market course offered through the Portland Community College SBDC. The course gave her the roadmap she was looking for to start the journey of commercializing her pickle business. She also consulted with the Oregon State University Food Innovation Center receiving helpful information about ingredient sourcing and food science.

There was a lot to learn and Betsy set out to absorb as much information as possible. For starters she would need to get a firm grasp on sourcing and learn how to safely and legally manufacture an acidified food. If she was going to achieve her goal of making it onto retail shelves, her home canning methods would need to adhere to FDA processing guidelines for acidified foods.

What is an acidified food?

Acidified foods are low-acid foods to which acids are added in order to lower pH to 4.6 or less.

This classification is important for food safety, particularly in preventing the growth of harmful microorganisms such as *Clostridium botulinum*.

To achieve shelf-stability, acidified foods must have the appropriate pH and undergo a thermal process determined by a state process authority.

In order to commercially produce an acidified food, manufacturers must complete an accredited acidified foods course.

Common acidified foods include pickles, dressings, sauces, salsas, relishes, canned fruit and vegetables.



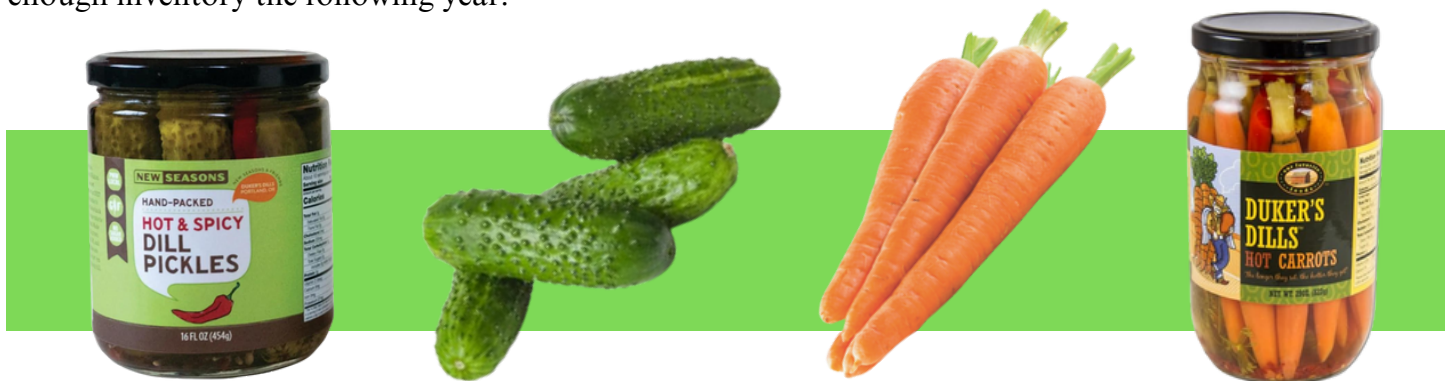
LOCAL FARMERS & SOURCING

The first step in launching a produce based product is to think seriously about sourcing. It was important to Betsy to support local farmers, and to use the freshest produce available. Through a connection at the Food Innovation Center in Portland, she was introduced to a farmer on Sauvie Island, a small agricultural community about 15 minutes outside of Portland.

One of the critical components of pickling is that you only harvest each fresh ingredient once a year, so you only have one chance to generate all of your annual inventory. This requires careful planning and strong relationships with growers. Betsy worked with two local Sauvie Island farmers who grew and supplied ingredients for Betsy's products.



Betsy learned a lot over the years through her relationships with farmers. First, she discovered that communicating with the farmers about the size of her packaging was key to harvesting vegetables at the right time. If they grow too large or have twisty shapes, they won't fit in her jars. She also learned that she needs to keep a consistent and open dialogue with her farmers. One year, Betsy didn't follow up during planting season and one of her farmer's forgot to plant her order, the result is that she didn't have enough inventory the following year.



With the introduction of each new product Betsy learned invaluable information to pass on to her farmer. As her products are hand packed and processed she needs her produce to fit just right, including growing straight green beans that fit and look best in her tall jars.

PRODUCTION & CO-PACKING

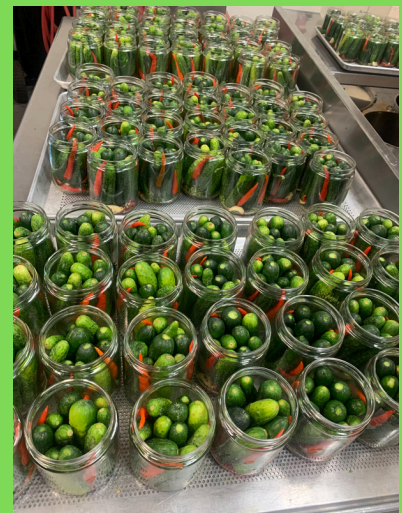
In 2009, Betsy launched Duker's Dills with one pickled product sold at local farmers markets. After one attempt at self-production with friends in a commercial kitchen, Betsy realized that she was in need of a co-packer. With just one production run a year, she needed a larger facility and more hands on deck.

"I wasn't clear on what to look for in a co-packer and ended up selecting someone interested in getting into acidified foods," recalled Betsy. "They were taking a chance on me, what I didn't fully understand was that I was taking a chance on them too."

When she showed up for her first production run, Betsy quickly realized there was an issue as the co-packer only had one staff member there to help with production. Her pickles required each jar to be hand-packed prior to adding brine and moving through the canning line. Betsy immediately called friends to come help. That production run yielded 600 jars which the co-packer agreed to store in their facility.

A week later, Betsy received a call; while walking through the warehouse, the co-packer saw an exploded jar and upon closer inspection discovered that half of the jars had been improperly sealed. Once the faulty jars were discarded, Betsy ended up with an inventory of just 300 jars for her first year in business.

For her second season, Betsy found a new co packer with a larger team and more experience with acidified foods. "Even with an experienced co-packer, my production runs required a lot of people because the produce was all hand washed and hand packed," says Betsy. The first few years, the co-packer hired a team of 25 workers. With the help of this co-packer and their steam tunnel, Betsy could now produce hundred of jars per day. At the height of her business she was producing more than 20,000 jars a season. Her relationship with this co-packer was very solid, but after six years working together, the co-packer decided to sell their facility and the search for a new co-packer began again.



PRODUCTS & FORECASTING

Due to the nature of fresh produce and only producing pickles once a year, Betsy had to weigh risk and growth. She had to carefully forecast annually for current retailers and try to guess how many additional accounts she would add each year. Some years, retailers sold out of all her products and she couldn't replenish their shelves until after the following summer's harvest and production run.

Betsy began developing additional products in order to keep inventory on shelves and provide variety at farmers markets. While this strategy worked well for her customers and local wholesale accounts, as her product line grew to nine SKUs, it made annual forecasting much more challenging and impacted her ability to expand to new retailers.

My Market, My Pickled Veggies



Inspired by her Grandma Rose's penchant for canning and her husband Duke's love of spicy food, Betsy Walton founded **Our Favorite Foods** on family and local goodness.

Made in Portland, Oregon, her pickled veggies get their delicious flavor and exceptional crunch from fresh, locally sourced, Non-GMO produce and gluten-free ingredients, with no sugar added.

Enjoy them in Bloody Marys or on charcuterie plates or antipasto platters. *You'll find them in your Market Cheese Shop.*

Duke's
Hot Carrots
Hot Pickles
Hot Tomatoes

New to Duke's!
Hot Garlic Cloves
Hot Sugar Snap Peas
Garlic Dill Pickles

Not hot

Rose's
Rosemary Lemon Beans
Rosemary Lemon Asparagus



Notice the difference buying locally can make. We support local vendors, so you can too.

Betsy was forced to say no to some large retail opportunities, such as Fred Meyer and Whole Foods. To take on these accounts, Betsy would need to develop new farmer relationships and contract with larger farmers. It would also mean taking on additional risk as upfront ingredient, production, packaging and storage, costs would increase significantly. It would exponentially complicate forecasting.

Additionally, Betsy would need to expand her demo program and reduce her margin to make room for a larger distributor. In the end, Betsy decided the risk would be too great and limited her business to local retailers.

REASSESSING & TRANSITIONING

After seven years working together, Betsy's largest retail account did a big category reset and reduced the shelf space they were offering to Duker's Dills. They cut 4 of Betsy's products from their line-up and each of their 18 store locations were now ordering different quantities of the 5 products selected by the retailer. This change threw a huge curveball into her already complicated forecasting process.

This change coincided with Betsy's search for a new co-packer, and Betsy quickly realized she had some big decisions to make.

Her overall sales were strong in large part because she and her employees were conducting over 200 demos and events a year. While this was great for business, Betsy recognized that it was too much for her personally. After 7 years of making pickle products, Betsy decided it was time to pivot. She began the process of selling through her inventory and did not schedule a production run for the upcoming summer harvest.



After a few years in hiatus, Betsy approached a local chain to produce pickles for their in-house brand. This meant going back in business without the headache of forecasting or the risk and cost of holding inventory throughout the year. The store would provide a purchase order with the exact amount of each product they would purchase for the entire year. Betsy would be able to focus on the part of the business that she loved, working with farmers and pickling with friends and family.

**“INSPECT WHAT YOU EXPECT
AND EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED”**

Private label production has been a great transition for Duker's Dills. While she no longer gets to see her own brand on the shelf, Betsy still produces once a year, with a co packer and her same local farmer enjoying the fact that she has one account committed to purchasing all of her inventory and only doing demos for fun!

Betsy has learned a lot in the pickle business, and while she maintains strong farmer, co-packer, and retailer relationships, Betsy continues to eye retirement. “If the right person comes along, and wanted to take over my operation, I’d be open to it!” says Betsy.

For now she enjoys her annual production and helping other food preservers develop their products. When not pickling, you can find Betsy volunteering at local hospitals with her therapy dog Branson or scuba diving with her husband Duke.

BETSY'S TIPS & RESOURCES



BABY STEPS FORWARD

Put Yourself Out There

In Duker's Dills first year of business a chance encounter at a local beer and wine festival led Betsy to the cheese department buyer at New Seasons Market. The buyer suggested she merchandise at the cheese counter targeting customers looking to enhance their charcuterie boards. This allowed her brand to stand out from other larger pickle brands on the shelf and helped to drive strong early sales.

Educate Yourself

Education played a significant role in Betsy's success. The Getting Your Recipe to Market program and the OSU master food preserver program provided her with essential skills. Betsy has volunteered for the master food preserver program and advised startup food entrepreneurs through the SBDC.

Baby Steps Forward

Betsy's business model of producing once a year limited growth but allowed her to maintain quality. Self-funding the business and reinvesting profits kept her operation debt-free. While she has rarely taken a paycheck from her business she has been able to pay her investment back at the end of every year. All profits were put back into an account for the next production run. She has always been able to be cash positive and not take on any debt.

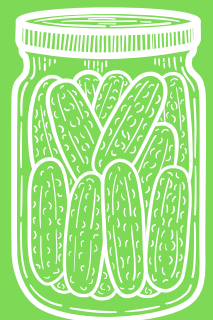
Befriend Your Grocer

People working in the stores are on the front line of food sales and they know what works. Ask questions, be friendly and demo, demo, demo. If you aren't in the store and a customer asks an employee which pickle they recommend, you need to be sure that they've tasted yours. "I demoed my pickles constantly and I left extra samples for the employees. That way, when I wasn't in the store, they could offer customers input and serve as the voice of my brand. It is really a wonderful community and I benefitted from their support and feedback." says Betsy.

RESOURCE CORNER

Some of the key organizations and resources that led to our success!

[FIC](#)
[GYRM](#)
[SBDC](#)
[Farmers Markets](#)
[Paper Moon Creative](#)
[Master Food Preserver](#)
[Three Little Figs, Inc](#)
[New Seasons Market](#)



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PHOTO CREDITS

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