

Peas of Mind, San Francisco



Finding the niche in healthy kids food

BACKGROUND

Helping a friend feed her toddler something healthier than canned green beans turned into a full time job for Jill Litwin, founder and CEO of Peas of Mind, a healthy frozen-food company for growing kids. Jill found her niche in creating foods for the 1 to 8 year-olds, or “growing child.” Moms had little more than Cheerios and Goldfish for their 1 to 8-year-olds to snack on; Jill soon had a line-up of healthy and tasty Puffets, natural and organic wholesome meals.

CHALLENGES

Jill needed a licensed commercial kitchen in which to prepare her Puffets and found La Cocina, a non-profit kitchen facility. Peas of Mind became their first ‘incubator’ candidate. After a year and a half of making Puffets, she was needed to turn the production over to a contract packaging facility but had difficulty affording available options. Jill was also worn out making deliveries to burgeoning list of markets carrying her products and was looking for a distributor. Jill also needed to hire someone to work in her office to free her up for other projects.

ACTIONS

In 2006 Jill was introduced to SBDC Business Advisor Anni Minuzzo. Anni was a specialty foods specialist who helped Jill through the transition of producing her Puffets out of La Cocina by January 2007. Jill’s marketing savvy resulted in her Nanna’s Banana Puffet being named one of the Top Ten Products of 2008! In 2009 Peas of Mind launched Veggie Wedgies, baked crispy French fries made with real vegetables. The Veggie Wedgies are fat- and allergen-free, again meeting market demands. This is now the #1 product line for Peas of Mind - winning the company the 2009 R & D Team of the Year Award around innovation. In 2010 the company produced a pizza made with broccoli and carrots kneaded into the dough.

RESULTS

Jill’s products are now available in the Target Superstores and Whole Foods nationwide, as well as Sprouts, Gelson’s, Earth Fare, and HEB properties. Peas of Mind products are also exported to Singapore. Her staff has grown from one to four now and Jill feels her team is well positioned to further penetrate the national market landscape. She understands the value of the advice and assistance she has received from La Cocina, Renaissance Center and the San Francisco Small Business Development Center and now serves as a volunteer, teacher, and committee member to assist others with the challenges of launching a packaged consumer goods company.

Since 2007, Peas of Mind sales have increased 157 percent. Jill still meets regularly with SF SBDC’s Anni Minuzzo to chart strategy for continued growth and success.

“(My SBDC advisor has) done it. She’s been there emotionally,” says Litwin. “She gets it in every way.”

Peas of Mind

Jill Litwin